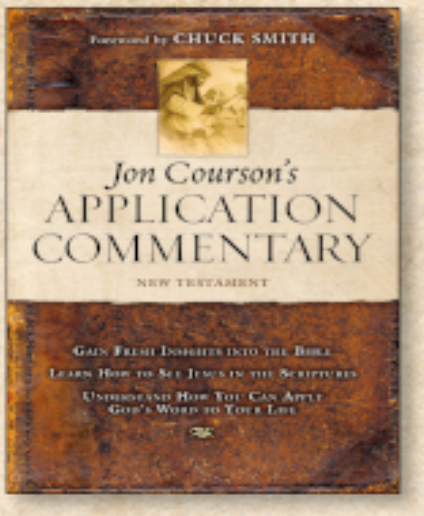
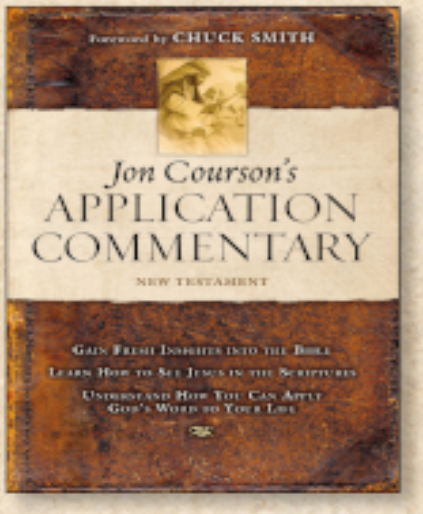
Foreword by CHUCK SMITH



Jon Courson's APPLICATION COMMENTARY





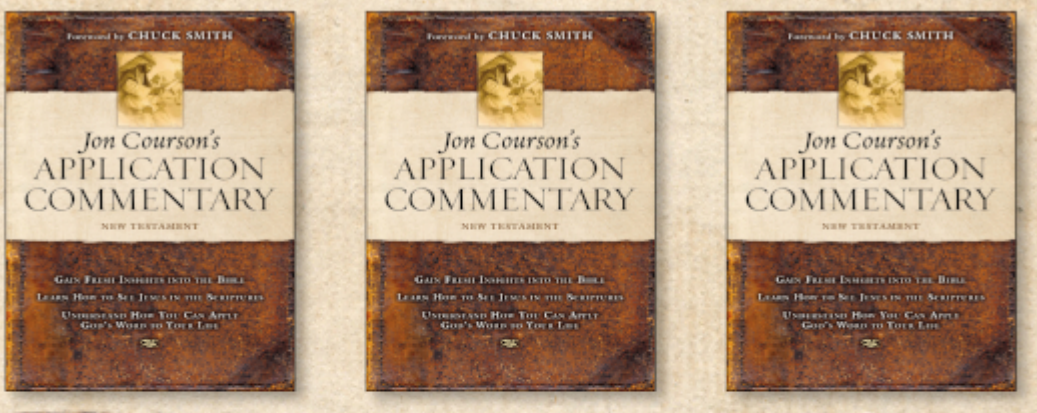


COMPLETE 3-VOLUME SET:
Genesis–Revelation

Foreword by CHUCK SMITH



Jon Courson's APPLICATION COMMENTARY



COMPLETE 3-VOLUME SET:
Genesis–Revelation

Jon Courson's APPLICATION COMMENTARY



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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Old Testament Genesis-Job

Old Testament Psalms-Malachi

New Testament

Jon Courson's APPLICATION COMMENTARY



OLD TESTAMENT

VOLUME 1: Genesis—Job

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FOREWORD

Many commentaries on the Bible are available today. Most are expositional or exegetical; and they often seek to be so exacting with respect to the letter of the law, or the possible meaning of a particular word, that they lack life and inspiration. It is hard to find a good devotional commentary on the Bible—one that brings both understanding and life to the passage, so that you are inspired to worship the Lord as you gain new insights into the truth of His love and grace toward us.

This commentary is one that does just that.

In Nehemiah, chapter eight, we are told that "the people gathered themselves together" and "they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." I find this to perfectly describe what Jon Courson has done in his commentaries. Giving understanding and meaning to the Word is one of the greatest needs in the church today. In Nehemiah's time, this method of commentary brought great conviction upon the people, and a genuine turning to God. The ultimate result was that the people went their way rejoicing, "because they had understood the words that were declared unto them."

I am convinced that you also will go your way rejoicing after reading the insights that the Holy Spirit has given to Jon on the Scriptures.

Pastor Chuck Smith
Senior Pastor, Calvary Chapel
Costa Mesa, California



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Jon Courson's APPLICATION COMMENTARY





GENESIS

Background to Genesis

The word *genesis* means "beginning." Therefore, Genesis is a fitting title for the book before us, for its pages record the beginning of everything—the beginning of creation, man, sin, family, culture, and industry. It deals with the beginning of everything one could possibly imagine—except it does not deal with the beginning of God.

Why?

First, because God has no beginning.

Secondly, the Bible being, in a sense, the autobiography of God, He needs no introduction. Think about it. If you were to write your life story, you would not spend chapters trying to prove that you exist because the very fact that you were writing the book would be verification of your being.

The more I study the Bible, the more I realize it was composed supernaturally. Comprised of sixty-six different books written by forty different authors over a span of 1,600 years in three different languages, there isn't one contradiction. Instead, there is a unified theme that begins here in Genesis, the Book of Beginning, and extends through the Book of Revelation. That theme is the story of God's gracious, glorious work of redemption.



GENESIS

1 Genesis 1:1
In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

Lots of people get hung up on verse 1 of chapter 1. And this presents a problem, for if one doesn't agree with the opening statement of the first sentence, it will be difficult for him to accept what follows.

"You don't *really* believe that God created heaven and earth in six days, do you?" scoffs the cynic. "That might be a nice legend, even a practical parable—but you can't really take this seriously. It's just not scientific!"

Gang, the book in your hand doesn't claim to be a book of science. Yet whenever it touches on issues of science, it is absolutely infallible. There is no proven scientific fact that contradicts a single statement written in the pages of this book.

> Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth . . .
>
> Isaiah 40:21, 22

Every culture, every nation, every people throughout world history believed the earth to be flat as a pancake—until Christopher Columbus proved the validity of Isaiah's words.

> He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.
>
> Job 26:7

God hangs the earth on *nothing?*

Learned scholars in India would have said, "We all know the world is held up on the backs of giant elephants." The Greeks maintained that the earth was held in place by the bulging biceps and massive shoulders of Atlas.

South Sea islanders believed the earth was supported on the backs of giant tortoises.

Sure enough, the more we learn, the more we find the Bible is right all along. I like that!

"Wait a minute," some say. "Genesis 1:1 may address spirituality and theology, but it can't be taken literally—not in this day, when the theory of evolution has been accepted so completely."

Keep in mind that evolution at best is a theory—and a bankrupt one at that. Many men of science who are neither believers in Jesus Christ nor students of the Bible have turned away from the evolutionary hypothesis because it violates the most foundational, fundamental principles and laws of known science. For example, one of the most important laws of science is the Second Law of Thermodynamics. It's not a theory, not a hypothesis, but a basic principle which says everything goes from order to disorder.

If I create the outline of a horse by arranging marbles on a sheet of plywood, place my finished work in the backseat of my VW, drive around town for half an hour, when I stop the car, will the horse be more intricate? Will the horse become even finer in detail, more elaborate artistically? Or will there be a bunch of marbles on the floor?

One of the principles upon which science is predicated is the fact that everything goes from order to disorder. The theory of evolution completely violates this understanding, maintaining as it does, that things go from disorder to greater order, from simplicity to complexity.

"But the great minds embrace the theory of evolution," some insist. Do they?

> *The man* Discover Magazine *rated as the greatest scientific thinker in history is Sir Isaac Newton. Newton was mocked because his contemporaries couldn't understand why he believed there really was a God who created the world in six days. One day, Sir Isaac made an elaborate model of the solar system, which took up the entire front room of his house. Impressed by its details, his colleagues asked him where he got the model.*
>
> *"I didn't get it," Newton said.*
>
> *"Oh. You made it?"*

"No, I didn't buy it. I didn't make it. No one put it here. It just appeared."

And suddenly they got his point.

> The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.
>
> Psalm 19:1–3

The grandeur of the universe undeniably points to the existence of a Creator. But men suppress this truth, not wanting to be accountable to this Creator (Romans 1). That is why you can defend the Genesis account on the basis of science until you're blue in the face—and still fail to convince the skeptic.

You can engage people intellectually, banter with people philosophically, appeal to people rationally only to have them oppose you adamantly. The bottom line isn't biology or philosophy, academics or genetics, Darwin or doctrine. The bottom line is the same as it is for every controversy or concern, debate or dilemma.

The bottom line is Jesus.

"I and My Father are one," He said. And the people listening to Him that day clearly understood the implication. So incensed were they by His claim to deity that they picked up rocks to stone Him on the spot (John 10:30, 31).

"Show us a sign," they said, "to verify You are who You claim to be."

"One sign only will I give you," He said. "Destroy this body and in three days, I will rise again" (John 2:18–21).

Thus, the entire burden of proof for Jesus' claim to deity lies in His empty tomb. And the door of faith to believe everything He ever said swings on the hinge of the Resurrection. His Resurrection, documented by over five-hundred eyewitnesses proves Jesus is God.

As God, Jesus speaks with absolute authority. As God, Jesus fashioned the Garden of Eden creatively (John 1:3). As God, Jesus referred to Adam and Eve specifically (Mark 10:6). Therefore, when talking to a skeptic, take the argument away from all of the scientific debate, and back to the single issue that matters: Who is Jesus Christ? That's the key.

Genesis 1:2 (a)
And the earth was without form, and void . . .

The Hebrew phrase here is *tohuw va bohuw.* Suddenly, the earth was 'tohuw va bohuw.' We see this phrase again in Isaiah 45:18, where we read that God created the heaven and earth *not* in vain—*not* "tohuw va bohuw."

Now, if Isaiah says God did not create the earth without form and void, but Genesis 1 says the earth was without form and void, what's going on?

Along with many Bible scholars, I believe an event took place between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 described in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, wherein an archangel named Lucifer launched a rebellion against God and was kicked out of heaven. Along with one-third of the angels who followed him in his rebellion, he came to earth, where he would become "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). So great was the impact when, in a sense, hell hit earth, that our planet suddenly became "without form and void."

Genesis 1:2 (b)
. . . and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved . . .

God is always coming in on something which has been messed up by the enemy. Here, the world is a mess, without form and void, wiped-out, wasted. And God begins to move.

Genesis 1:2 (c)
. . . upon the face of the waters.

Throughout Scripture, water is a symbol of the Word.

Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

John 15:3

> Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.
>
> Ephesians 5:25, 26

How does the Spirit of God move?

Upon the face of the water—upon the Word.

Suddenly you hear a Bible study, listen to a radio program, watch a crusade on TV, or talk to a buddy and as the water of the Word is shared, the Spirit of God moves.

Genesis 1:3
And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

The Hebrew literally reads: "Light be! And light was." Here we see the recreation of planet earth.

Genesis 1:4
And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth; the earth became wiped out; the Spirit moved on the face of the water; and God said "Let there be light."

That's *your* story. You were created in God's image, but sin wiped you out. The Spirit of God moved in through the Word. You saw the light—and you were born again. Then God separated the darkness from the light, and good things began to happen—not only in creation physically, but in your life personally because of God's sovereign grace and mercy.

Genesis 1:5
And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

Notice the phraseology. “The evening and the morning were the first day.” That’s still the way the Jewish people reckon their days. They begin in the evening and end in the morning. They go from darkness to light. I like that!

Genesis 1:6–8
And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

Scripturally, “heaven” refers not only to the stars above us, and the destiny awaiting us, but to the atmosphere around us. This passage makes it clear that when God recreated earth, there was water above the firmament, or atmosphere—which means that, with a water canopy surrounding its atmosphere, earth would have been a great big greenhouse. It means nothing would get wiped out by ultraviolet rays. It means the whole planet would have shared the same climate. It explains why fossils of tropical vegetation are found in the Arctic Circle. It explains why man could live nine hundred years.

To cause the Flood in Noah’s day, God collapsed the protective canopy, which deluged the earth with water. And as a result, cataclysmic changes took place. The climate was altered radically. And man had to wear SPF40 sunscreen just to live to seventy.

Genesis 1:9–13
And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind,

and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day.

On the first day, light was created. On the second day, the atmosphere was created. On the third day, life is created. Why does life appear on the third day? Because Jesus—the Way, the Truth, *the Life*—rose on the third day.

Genesis 1:14–19
And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

On the fourth day, God made the sun and the moon.

Jesus is the Light of the world (John 8:12). He said we are also to be lights (Matthew 5:14). He is the greater light—the sun. We are the lesser light—the moon—reflecting His light to our dark world.

I recently watched the moon appear smaller and smaller in an eclipse, and was reminded that to whatever extent the world gets between the sun and the moon is the extent to which the light of the sun upon the moon is diminished. The same thing is true with me and you. Jesus is the sun; we're the moon; and to whatever degree we allow the world to come between us, His light in our lives will fade proportionately. If you were to chart your own life tonight, would you be a full moon, a three-quarter moon, half moon, quarter moon, or eclipsed moon? It all depends on how much of the world you allow to creep in between you and the Son.

Genesis 1:20–25

And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day. And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

This passage deals a deathblow to theistic evolution—the idea that God started the process and then let the species evolve one into another. The language in the Hebrew is emphatic: "after their kind," "after his kind," "after its kind." In other words, there could be changes within a species but not changes from one species to another. Scientists have been able to breed fruitflies into millions of generations. And guess what. They're still fruitflies. Not one has become a honeybee.

Genesis 1:26 (a)
And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness . . .

The Hebrew word translated "God" is *Elohim. El* is the singular form. "Elohim" refers to three or more. Thus, the very word "God" in Hebrew speaks of the Trinity.

We, too, are triune beings. We are body, soul, and spirit. The body refers to our physical being. The soul refers to our mind and our emotions, and relates to people. The spirit refers to our eternal being, and relates to God. Animals have bodies and souls. But they do not have spirits because they're not made in God's image. Only man is a spiritual being.

Genesis 1:26 (b)–28 (a)
. . . and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it . . .

Before things go haywire due to the Fall, God gives an assignment to man: Subdue the earth.

Subdue it from what?

From Satan.

From the very beginning, God said, "This little rock called earth is the place where there is to be a cosmic showdown between Me and Satan. So I'm going to use you, mankind, to partner with Me as part of the process to drive out the enemy."

How?

By being fruitful and multiplying.

How are you to subdue your earth, your world, your family which seems to be in the grasp and grip of the enemy?

By being fruitful.

Because the fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22), and because love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8), you'll be fruitful if you don't criticize, gossip, or find fault with things, people, or situations. You'll be fruitful if you speak words of love and peace, patience and gentleness, for such is the fruit of the Spirit.

James talks about the tongue being an instrument of fire (James 3:6). If you find fault with your neighbor, your job, your school, your church, your family—you will hand your world over to the hellish flames of the enemy. But if you speak words of affirmation and encouragement, of faith and joy—you will replace the fires of hell with the fruit of heaven.

I talked to a mom and dad who had opinions about the church and the country, the politicians and the government. All their kids ever heard was

Mom and Dad putting something down. And now Mom and Dad can't figure out why their kids don't want to go to church.

"Could it be that you've poisoned your own well?" I asked.

"But we only complained to our own family," they said.

Ah, but their own family was the very world in which they were to be fruitful, in which they were to multiply.

How do we multiply?

Acts 6 tells us the Word of God increased, and the number of disciples multiplied when the Word was shared.

If you talk to your kids, your classmates, your coworkers about the Word, you will see multiplication of life and love. And suddenly the world in which you live will be subdued, won back from the enemy.

We now know that every solid object retains the imprint of a sound wave. The very principle which allows a CD to be pressed or a tape to be made affects this chair, this microphone, my tennis shoe. Jesus could have been hinting at this when He said, "If I tell My disciples to be quiet, the rocks would cry out" (see Luke 19:40). Thus, I challenge you to live tomorrow as though everything you say to your husband or wife, family or friends is being recorded to be replayed to the whole church. Such is the way to live, for every word you say produces life or death, fruit or fire. Kids who grow up hearing Mom and Dad talk about the Word and how good God is, how much they appreciate fellowship and prayer and praise, plug in and worship God, and walk with Him all of their days.

Subdue your world, gang, by speaking love and by sharing the Word—by being fruitful and multiplying.

Genesis 1:28 (b)–31

. . . and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was

so. And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Our God is awesome. He could have said, "For nourishment, take a pill." Instead He said, "For food, here's a thrill—the colors and textures and tastes of bananas and mangoes and guavas and avocadoes and tomatoes and celery are all yours to enjoy."

- "He satisfies our mouth with good things," David declares (Psalm 103:5).
- "Every good and perfect gift comes from above," James echoes (1:17).
- "He has given us richly all things to enjoy," Paul affirms (1 Timothy 6:17).
- "If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your kids, how much more will the Heavenly Father give good things to them that ask Him?" Jesus says (see Matthew 7:11).
- "Then why haven't I received what I've been asking for?" you wonder.

The answer is, "Because it's not a good gift." If it was good, God would give it to you, for He withholds no good thing from them that walk uprightly (Psalm 84:11).



2 Genesis 2:1–3

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

At the time the Law was given, no culture had ever taken a day off of work. In agrarian societies, this would have been unthinkable. But here in the very beginning of time, we see the institution of the Sabbath.

"But I don't need a Sabbath because I'm not tired," you might be thinking.

Gang, God wasn't saying, "Whew, am I beat! This creating stuff is really draining." No, He was saying to you and me, "I'm your Father, and here's a key to navigate life successfully: Shut it down one day in seven."

"But I can get ahead if I just do a little bit of work on the seventh day."

As an observer, as a Bible teacher, as a pastor, I tell you with surety that if you don't take a Sabbath day, it will catch up with you either mentally, emotionally, physically, or spiritually. Ever wonder how Samson could sleep through the looming of his hair? He was exhausted! I am convinced that many people—men in particular—find themselves sleeping on the lap of Delilah because they haven't kept the Sabbath. I'm convinced many people have physical problems they wouldn't have if they took one day in seven and said, "I'm going to rest and relax, be refreshed and renewed." I'm convinced many people are seeing psychiatrists and taking pills because, failing to take a Sabbath, they're just mentally fried. I'm convinced many people have collapsed spiritually because the weekend finds them revving up their ski boats rather than finding renewal and refreshment in the Lord.

Be renewed, gang. I'm not saying what you should or shouldn't do on the Sabbath day because that's where the Pharisees erred. Instead, I would just remind you that because God rested on the seventh day, we get to as well.

The principle He modeled on the seventh day of creation continues to be a healthy one for us.

Genesis 2:4
These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,

Notice the word "heavens" is plural. Some people say this contradicts Genesis 1:1, which declares "In the beginning God created the *heaven* and the earth." But they fail to understand that Scripture speaks of the heavens in three dimensions . . .

- The first heaven is where the birds fly (Daniel 4).
- The second heaven is where the stars are (Psalm 19).

- The third heaven is the place Paul went when he beheld things too wonderful to articulate (2 Corinthians 12:2)—the place all believers will ultimately be.

These are three dimensions of heaven—and God created all three.

Genesis 2:5, 6
And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

The Lord evidently had a built-in sprinkler system on automatic timer which kept everything watered, for before the days of Noah, there was no rain on the earth, which explains why the sight of him building an ark would have seemed laughable to his contemporaries.

Genesis 2:7 (a)
And the LORD God formed man . . .

Genesis 1 and 2 both deal with the creation story. Chapter 1 uses a wide-angle lens to give us the big picture. Chapter 2 uses a zoom lens to deal specifically with the creation of man.

Genesis 2:7 (b)
. . . of the dust of the ground . . .

Adam's name literally means "man." But the root of his name comes from that from which he was fashioned: dust.

Genesis 2:7 (c)
. . . and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

The words "breath," "wind," and "spirit" are all the same word in Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament: *ruach.* The same is true in Greek, the language of the New Testament, where the words translated "breath," "wind," and "spirit" are all *pneuma.* Formed of dust, man does not become a living soul until God breathes into him.

Genesis 2:8–14
And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone. And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel [Tigris]: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates.

We know where the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers are. But we don't know the location of the other two. Of this much, however, we are certain: "Eden" means "delight." This garden in which the Lord placed man was a delightful place indeed.

Genesis 2:15
And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

Before the Fall, before the advent of thorns and thistles, before the collapse of the water canopy that kept the earth perfectly temperate, gardening was not hard work. Thus, Adam was a gardener not only by vocation, but also for recreation.

Genesis 2:16, 17 (a)

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it . . .

Why would God place in the Garden a tree from which Adam and Eve were not to eat? Because God desires a loving relationship with man. And true love is built on choice. Therefore, in placing the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden, God said to mankind, "If you want to kill our relationship, if you want to turn your back on Me, I must provide this opportunity. All you have to do, Adam, to end our relationship is to eat from that tree."

Genesis 2:17 (b)
. . . for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

The Lord is so good because He made it as scary as possible. He said, "If you eat from that tree, it's going to kill you." What else could the Father have done to provide a choice, but also to say, "Don't do that."?

Notice God does not say, "If you eat of that tree, I'm going to kill you." He says, "If you eat of the tree, *it* will kill you." For many years, I thought that if I did something wrong, God would track me down. No, the Bible says, "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). It is *sin* that tracks us down, our *sin* that wipes us out. In the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, perhaps there was something carcinogenic, something that would cause men to begin to die.

Genesis 2:18 (a)
And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone . . .

Adam's single state was the only thing God created that He declared not good.

Genesis 2:18 (b)–20
. . . I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of

the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

"Mr. and Mrs. Giraffe, Mr. and Mrs. Rhinoceros, Mr. and Mrs. Orangutan, Mr. and Mrs. Hippopotamus"—Adam called out their names as the animals paraded before him. And as he did, there must have come a point when he came to the realization that everyone but him had a counterpart.

"I gotta make something happen," Adam could have said, climbing trees and beating bushes to find a mate. He could have searched the world to find his counterpart—but the closest he would have come would have been an orangutan or a chimpanzee. And that's what happens to a lot of people today. Aware of their single state, they say, "I gotta find somebody." So off they go to Rockin' Rodeo and they come back with an orangutan. "So she's a little hairy? So he's kind of big and overbearing, this is as close as I can get to a perfect match," they say. That is no more God's plan for us than it was for Adam.

Genesis 2:21, 22
And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

When Adam was in a deep, death-like sleep, from out of his side came a bride. Down the tunnel of time, another Bride would come forth from the side of another Adam, the last Adam, Jesus Christ. When a Roman soldier stuck a spear in His side and the birthing fluids of blood and water poured forth, a Bride was born: the church—you and me.

"Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it," Paul instructed the Ephesians (Ephesians 5:25). Husband, you are to love your wife like Christ loved the church. In other words, you're to die—to your needs, your desires, your dreams because that's what Christ did for us.

"Father, if it be possible, let this cup of death pass from Me," He prayed. "Nevertheless not my will, but Thy will, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Wife, you came from the side of man, and you will find fulfillment at the side of your man—neither leading him nor lagging behind him, but standing by him, standing with him, submitting to him. But know this, wives: Your husband will never be all you want or need him to be. A rib was taken from Adam and men have been missing something ever since. There is only One who has it all together. He's not called the Second Adam, which means there might be a third one. He is called the Last Adam because there is no other. And He's not missing a thing. Why? Because He wasn't born the way every man since the first Adam is born. And *He* will be the One who will listen to you by the hour and walk with you in the garden in the cool of the day. *He* will be the One who will hear not only the words of your lips, but also the cry of your heart. *He* will be the One who will truly understand you.

Thus, when we start seeking what we crave from the Last Adam, from Jesus Christ, we take pressure off our husband or wife and are then able to enjoy them without expecting something from them that they cannot give us.

Genesis 2:23 (a)
And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh . . .

"Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh" is a Hebrew idiom meaning, "exact counterpart." God is a triune Being: Father, Son, and Spirit. And because He made us in His image, man is triune as well.

Our body is the physical part of us that relates to the material world around us. Our soul speaks of our mind and emotions and relates to the people around us. Our spirit is the part of us that relates to God and will live forever.

I believe it was a matching of body, soul, and spirit that caused Adam to realize Eve was truly bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. And I believe the same can be true for us.

With regard to the body, there must be a physical attraction between you and the one you marry. Secondly, with regard to the soul, one must be able to communicate on the same wavelength with the one he or she marries. Thirdly,

with regard to the spirit, one's love for the Lord, commitment to the Lord, involvement with the Lord must equal that of the one he or she marries.

Body, soul, spirit—when those three are mirrored in another, it is a match made in heaven.

The problem is, we usually settle for two out of three.

"I feel a spark for her romantically," he says. "And she has that same feeling for me. Spiritually, we both love the Lord, go to Bible study, and pray together. But the soul? She likes malls and I like backpacking. She likes to talk and I don't. But we can make this work." Yes, they can make it work. But it will take a lot of work to make it work.

"With regard to the soul, we're best friends," she says. "We talk by the hour and love just hanging out with each other. And spiritually, we both love the Lord and are committed to the kingdom. But physically? I can't explain it, but he doesn't do much for me." This relationship can work—but, again, it will take a lot of work to make it work because someday, someone will come along who will spark that physical connection, and then there will be problems.

"We've got the romance thing wired," he says. "We're also buddies and best friends. But spiritually? I want to be a missionary, and she's content going to church only on Christmas and Easter." This relationship is destined for hardship because, due to different commitment levels spiritually, each will view life through a different lens.

Body, soul, and spirit. It's amazing to me how many couples connect only in two out of three, or even one out of three. When people settle for one out of three, their marriage almost inevitably ends in divorce. When couples settle for two out of three, they can make it work, but it takes a lot of work. It is those who connect on all three levels who, like Adam, are able to say, "Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. Wow!"

"Marriage and misery go hand in hand," wails the world. Not God. He says, "I want marriage to be a taste of heaven for you. If you'll go My way it

can be just that."

"It's a little late for me to hear this," you might be thinking. "I am one of those who settled for only one match out of three and married the wrong person."

That's what Jacob could have said . . .

After seven years of working and waiting, he woke up to find he had wed Leah instead of Rachel—the older sister instead of the girl of his dreams. But at the end of his life, when deciding near whom he would be buried, Jacob again had to choose between the two women. And this time with eyes wide open, he chose Leah. Why? Because Leah produced a son whose name was Judah, from whom would come Yeshua, Messiah, Jesus.

So, too, as I look over this congregation, I see people who have difficult marriages, but who have developed out of necessity a deep walk with the Lord which never would have been developed if they'd had an easier, simpler marriage. I see people who have hung in there and could now say, "If I could do it all over again, I would choose my husband or wife again because our marriage has brought me to a richness with Jesus I never would have known had our marriage been easier."

If you have gone through a divorce, if you dropped the ball, if you missed the mark, know this: We all have. Every one of us has totally blown it (Romans 3:23). But the good news is that the work of the Cross completely takes care of my failure, my shortcoming, my sin. And it takes care of yours as well. All we have to do is say, "Lord, I've failed. I determine by Your grace and with Your help to walk rightly to the greatest possible degree. And if my hurts or mistakes can help others, use my wounds." If we confess our sin rather than cover it up, excuse it, or justify it, our points of failure can be our point of greatest ministry.

Genesis 2:23 (b)
. . . she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

The Hebrew word for man is *Ish;* the word for woman is *Isha.* In other words, in this first marriage, Eve was given Adam's name.

Genesis 2:24, 25

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

True one-ness, true unity is based on two requirements:

Leaving. Leaving Mom and Dad is not a problem for most of us. The problem lies in leaving the relationship at work, in leaving the man or woman at the office to whom you pour out your heart, with whom you share your dreams.

"But it's nothing sensual whatsoever," you protest.

Really? Jesus said no man can serve two masters, for he will eventually begin to hate one of them. Therefore, if you hold on to any outside relationship, almost imperceptibly at first, your husband or wife will slowly begin to bug you. "I wish she would cut her hair," or "I wish he wasn't such a slob," you'll find yourself thinking. So she cuts her hair and he cleans himself up—but then you'll wish her hair was long or that he wasn't so concerned about his appearance—because no matter what he or she does, it won't be quite right.

It's all too easy to invest time and energy into relationships outside of marriage—and that will be hugely problematic in every instance because Jesus says wherever a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also (Luke 12:34).

That's why Paul says, "If any woman has a question, let her ask her husband" (1 Corinthians 14:35).

Therefore, whenever a wife says, "But my husband doesn't know anything about spiritual matters. Pastor, you're so wonderful. Could I please talk to you?" it is the wise pastor who says, "If he doesn't know the answer, he'll ask me and I'll have the privilege of sharing with him, after which he'll come home and share with you."

I say this tonight because in the past few weeks alone, I've seen five or six good brothers and sisters hit the skids due to this very issue. They did not leave every other. And you can say, "Well, I don't know if I buy this," and you can continue to joke with the woman or laugh with the man at the office —but in so doing, they'll become your treasure and later your heart will be sure to follow. There are no exceptions.

Cleaving. Although the world doesn't understand this, the Bible tells us that physical intimacy is more than simply two bodies coming together. It's two souls being made one (see Proverbs 6:32). That's why we are not to defraud our partner (see 1 Corinthians 7:5).

"Well, I would cleave to him if I felt more love for him," or, "I would cleave to her if I had feelings for her," some say.

But that's backwards. As in every other area of spiritual life, the Lord says, "Step out and I'll part the water."

"Part the water and I'll step out," we say.

"That's not the way it works," the Lord says, "because that's not faith."

Begin to give yourself to your spouse, and the feelings will come because by making him or her your treasure, your heart will follow. In the very first marriage seminar ever given, held in the Garden of Eden, God told Adam and Eve to leave and cleave. The degree to which we do this is the degree to which we'll experience unity and joy in our marriages.



3

Genesis 3:1
Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

"Are you sure you heard God right?" Satan asked Eve. The Fall of mankind began with a question. The same is still true. Even in Christian circles, Satan's strategy is to get believers to doubt their ability to understand the Word. Don't fall prey to his tactics, gang. The Word of God is incredibly profound. But it is also amazingly simple.

Genesis 3:2 (a)
And the woman said unto the serpent . . .

Eve begins to dialogue with the devil—always a dangerous thing to do.

Genesis 3:2 (b), 3
. . . We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

God didn't tell Adam and Eve they were not to touch the forbidden fruit, but Eve added an extra rule, a protective parameter to make sure she didn't violate what God had said. And that is the beginning of legalism.

Adding to the Word always leads to bondage, bitterness, and backsliding. Our intent might be to try and prevent ourselves or others from getting too close to forbidden fruit, but in reality, our rules and barriers only burden people and ultimately cause them to forget the whole thing and walk away from God.



***For topical study of Genesis 3:3 entitled "He Didn't Say That!" turn to page* 14.**

Genesis 3:4, 5
And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

After questioning the *Word* of God, Satan questions the *way* of God as he intimated to Eve that God was holding something back from her that would be good for her. Again, this is the same strategy he uses today. Satan slithers up to our friends, our children, our neighbors, and hisses in their ears saying, "You know why you're not ssssupposed to do that? Because it's really fun. And God doesn't want that for you. He wants you to be ressstricted and missserable."

Not true. As I tell my kids, "If you think sin is fun, if you want to eat from the tree of forbidden fruit, look first at another tree—the tree of Calvary—and you'll see what sin will ultimately do. It will crucify you. And if you think God is holding something back from you, or doesn't want the best for

you, look at that tree again, and you'll see Him with outstretched arms, nails piercing His palms, proving to you unequivocally that He loves you passionately."

Satan's three-pronged old lie is now part of the New Age: "You're not going to die. Your eyes will be opened. You'll be a god."

What's the New Age philosophy? "You don't die; you just reincarnate. By embracing everything, you receive illumination. When you are enlightened, you become a god." Here in the Garden of Eden, at the very outset of time, Satan lays out a strategy he will maintain throughout human history.

Genesis 3:6 (a)
And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her . . .

John tells us all sin falls into one of these three categories: the lust of the flesh—it tastes good; the lust of the eyes—it's nice to look at; the pride of life—it'll make you wise (1 John 2:16). Eve bought and bit into Satan's lie, and invited Adam to do the same.

Genesis 3:6 (b)
. . . and he did eat.

Timothy tells us Eve was deceived (1 Timothy 2:14). Not so with Adam. By eating of the forbidden fruit, he said in essence, "I want to be with Eve more than I want to obey God. I would rather be doomed with the woman than trust God to resolve the situation." If Adam had turned to God, I am convinced God would have somehow reconciled Eve's fallen state. But rather than turn to God, Adam chose to join Eve.

Genesis 3:7 (a)
And the eyes of them both were opened . . .

"In the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened," Satan had said to Eve, "and ye shall know good and evil." Unfortunately, Satan was right. You see, before man ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, he had to ask the Father about every matter, about every situation in order to discern good from evil. God and Adam walked together in the cool of the day in constant communion because Adam had to depend solely upon God for his knowledge. After the Fall, Adam grew independent from God—and knowledge without God is always deadly.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is as deadly for us as it was for Adam. It can squeeze the life out of our relationship with the Lord if we're not oh, so careful. Even Bible knowledge can be deadly to anyone who says, "I've been to Bible school; I've been to seminary; I've been reading the Word for years. I know good from evil."

"Aren't we supposed to know the Bible?" you ask.

Yes. But as we study the Word we are to fellowship with the Lord intimately, talk to Him personally, worship, praise, commune, and listen to Him constantly. You see, as parents our job is to get our kids to become independent. When they take their first steps, we say, "Way to go!" When they learn to tie their shoes, ride a bike, drive a car, move out, we say, "Hooray!" But our Heavenly Father wants just the opposite for you and me. He wants us to be totally dependent upon Him. He wants us to be constantly talking to Him just as Adam used to do before he ate of the forbidden fruit.

Genesis 3:7 (b)
. . . and they knew that they were naked . . .

Before their Fall, it would seem as though Adam and Eve were, like God, clothed with a garment of light (Psalm 104:2). After the Fall, their garments of light were replaced with darkness, and the beauty of their sexuality became an embarrassment, a perversion, a problem.

Genesis 3:7 (c)
. . . and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

The only identifiable tree in the Garden of Eden is this one—the fig tree. The national symbol of Israel, the fig tree speaks of man's attempt to cover the nakedness of his sin with his own effort.

Genesis 3:8
And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

Attired in their scratchy, itchy fig leaves, Adam and Eve hear the voice of the Lord and they hide. That's what sin always does. It causes us to hide from the Lord. Like Adam and Eve, if there's rebellion in my life, I'll run from the voice of the Lord—I'll lose my appetite for Scripture.

Genesis 3:9
And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

Because none seeks God (Romans 3:11), it had to be God who sought Adam. And His question is not, "Why did you?" or, "How could you?" but simply, "Where *are* you?"

Genesis 3:10, 11
And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

Because God knew precisely what Adam had done, He's not after information from Adam, but confession from him. So, too, God wants to get me to a place where I confess to Him—not because He wants to embarrass me or needs information about my sin, but because when I confess sin, it loses its grip on me. That's why confession is so important. Confession doesn't bring forgiveness because forgiveness was already granted to us at the Cross. Confession doesn't forgive us—it simply frees us from the grip of sin on our lives.

Genesis 3:12
And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

Rather than confessing his sin, Adam blames the woman for his sin, and, indirectly, God Himself for giving the woman to him. The same is still true. Anytime I blame someone else—be it a spouse, a parent, a boss, an employee, a neighbor—I am ultimately blaming the One who put that person in my life.

Genesis 3:13, 14 (a)
And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the serpent . . .

You gotta love the Father here. He's not heavy-handed with Adam and Eve. Rather, He just lets them play out their blame game.

Genesis 3:14 (b)
. . . Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:

The lustrous serpent becomes the lowly snake. Interestingly, according to Isaiah 65:25, even in the Millennium, when earth is restored back to her Eden-like condition, everything will return to its pre-Fall state—except the snake. The snake will remain in its cursed condition, crawling on its belly.

Genesis 3:15 (a)
And I will put enmity between thee and the woman . . .

One of the practical outcomes of the Fall was that women and snakes would become enemies. So, too, when people base their relationship on sin, they inevitably become enemies. How many times have we seen people who want nothing to do with each other and won't even acknowledge each other because their relationship was built on sin?

Genesis 3:15 (b)
. . . and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Not only is there the practical outcome of enmity, but there is a prophetic message as well because within this verse lies the Proto Evangelicum—the first mention of the Gospel. The term "her seed" is an apparent impossibility unless One would come from the woman in a way that would be supernatural. And who would that One be? Of course, it's Jesus—the Promised Seed of Galatians 4:4. Christ would come and we are told here that He would bruise, or literally crush the head of the serpent. But the serpent would bruise the heel of the Promised Seed. And therein we see a picture of the Cross, where Christ was bruised for our iniquities (Isaiah 53), and where He cleansed our sin with His own blood, thereby crushing the head of Satan's authority in our lives.

Genesis 3:16 (a)
Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children . . .

"You'll have children, Eve, but it won't be like it was supposed to be—painless, glorious, and easy. It will be difficult."

Genesis 3:16 (b)–19
. . . and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

The desire of the woman would be for her husband. The man, on the other hand, would work by the sweat of his brow. And therein lies a foundational

dilemma in marriage to this day.

> *"Why won't my husband slow down? I want him to take a walk with me, talk to me, listen to me," she cries.*
>
> *"I show my love most clearly by providing for my family," answers the weary husband. "That's why I work three jobs."*
>
> *She wants to talk. He needs to work. She wants to enjoy. He can't wait to get going. It's all part of the curse. When husbands and wives realize what the curse has done and how it works, no longer will they try to change each other. Lowered expectations will replace futile ideas of transformation. Don't raise the bar for your marriage. Lower it. And as you lower your expectations on earth, raise your sights toward heaven.*

This is what Paul meant when he said, "Let those who are married be as though they're not" (1 Corinthians 7:29). In other words, "Life is short. Keep your focus on the kingdom, your eyes on eternity." Set your sights on the Lord and what will that do? It will make you a better husband or a better wife because as His love flows from you, your times with your husband or wife will be sweet and rich.

It's amazing what happens when we do what the Lord tells us to do. When we seek first the kingdom, everything else will be added to us (Matthew 6:33). When a woman and man both deeply love Jesus Christ, they each find their ultimate satisfaction in their walk with Him. The pressure is removed. The bickering stops. They are a joy to be around.

Tammy can only enjoy me if she keeps her expectations real low. If she reads too many books and attends too many seminars, her expectations will increase, disappointment will set in, and frustration will follow. God is so incredibly practical. "Life is short," He says. "There's coming a time when you'll be free, when all will be right, so seek first the kingdom."

> **Genesis 3:20**
> **And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.**

In chapter 2, Adam called Eve *Isha* which means "from the man." Here, he changes her name to "Eve" which means "the giver of life." The implication is astounding. No longer does Adam say, "Woman, you're from me. You're mine. Listen to me," for now he realizes that from her will come his Savior. So, too, husband, there will be a transformation in the mind of any man who understands that in his wife dwells his Lord.

Genesis 3:21
Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

To replace Adam and Eve's itchy fig leaves, a sacrifice was made—illustrative of the fact that mankind's sin and nakedness would never be covered by his own efforts, but by the sacrifice of an innocent One, the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

Will we see Adam in heaven? I believe so. Verse 20 indicates Adam understood that from Eve would come a Savior. Verse 21 says he received the substitutionary death of another to cover his nakedness. And I believe both of these indicate faith at work.



***For topical study of Genesis 3:21 entitled "Go Fig-ure," turn to page* 16.**

Genesis 3:22, 23
And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.

Adam and Eve could no longer stay in the garden lest they ate of the Tree of Life and lived forever in their fallen condition. Can you imagine what you would look like at 30,000 years of age at your present rate of decay? It would be sad. So God in His mercy ruled out that possibility.

Genesis 3:24
So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

A sacrifice had been made to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness. Cherubim and a flame followed. This same picture will be painted again in the tabernacle, for over the mercy seat, sprinkled with sacrificial blood, were cherubim and the bright Shekinah glory of God.

But the place we see this picture painted most powerfully is not in the Garden, nor in the tabernacle, but in an empty tomb where two angels clothed in light sat at either end of a slab stained with the sacrificial blood of the Lamb of God.

Genesis 3 keeps man away from the Tree of Life; but Jesus Christ invites mankind to eat of the Bread of Life (John 6:57). And as we do, we begin to experience power over the curse as well as a sneak preview of coming attractions when the curse will be obliterated in heaven. Oh, glorious day!

HE DIDN'T SAY THAT!
A Topical Study of
GENESIS 3:3

Several years ago, a medical mystery baffled the physicians at Palnomie Hospital in Free State, South Africa, when, for ten consecutive weeks, whichever patient was in Bed #4 of the Intensive Care Unit would be dead on Friday morning. After double checking medical procedures, air-conditioning vents, and room structure surrounding Bed #4, it was discovered that at 3 A.M. every Friday morning, the cleaning lady would unknowingly pull the plug of the life support system of Bed #4 so that she could plug her floor polisher in to the vacant socket.

People look around our world and see disaster, disease, and death. They see problems, pollution, and pain. They scratch their heads and say, "How did the world get this way? Why are there earthquakes and volcanoes and hurricanes and tornadoes? Why are there wars? Why can't people get along with each other? Why is there cancer?"

The answer is that someone pulled the plug of our planet's life support system.

When Adam chose to rebel against God, the whole world was plunged into sin. Nature was impacted. Earth's ecology changed radically. Disease and death entered in, and from that point on, man would be born with the nature of depravity.

Why should we pay the price for Adam's failure?

Because if it was you or I in the Garden, we would have done worse.

If I said, "I will pay you one million dollars to come up here right now and go ten rounds with Mike Tyson. If you survive ten rounds in a small ring with an angry, bitter Tyson, then one million is yours. Or, if you would rather, you can have someone represent you. You can have Evander Holyfield stand in for you"—every one of you with any sense would say, "I'll go with Evander."

Adam was Evander. Hot off the press, freshly made by God, he was a champion. Thus, because even Adam bombed out, we can be assured that if

you or I were in the Garden, we would have surely blown it a whole lot sooner.

With eyes wide open, Adam chose to join Eve in eating of the forbidden fruit; and in so doing, chose creation over Creator. It's a tragedy repeated to this day with the same inevitable results.

Whenever a man or woman says, "I don't care what the cost might be, I know this is wrong, but I'm going to have her anyway; I'm going to be with him no matter what"—a decision is made which will ultimately bring about prolonged, permanent pain. Those who choose creation over Creator say, "Oh, I know there will be repercussions. I know there will be a price to pay, but I'll suck it up and take it because I love him or I've just got to have her. I know it'll be tough for a while, but our love can endure. My baby and I will sail through the seas of adversity together to a port of tranquility and tropical beauty." They have it all figured out. But the price they expect to pay is not what it will cost. That's the trick. That's the catch. And that's the truth.

Inevitably, invariably, eventually, their cry will be, "I didn't know *this* would be the result of my sin. God have mercy. I'm a fool."

When Adam chose to join Eve in eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the fruit of his choice would bring bloodshed, perversion, destruction, sorrow, death, and disease into his family. It would change the earth's topography. And it would plunge all of mankind into depravity. Although he didn't understand the consequences, Adam's choice was a matter of out and out rebellion. Eve, on the other hand, was deceived into making her choice (1 Timothy 2:14).

When did this deception begin?

Some would say it began the moment Eve started dialoguing with the serpent, always a dangerous thing to do.

Others would say, "No, it began when Eve started hanging around the forbidden tree. If she hadn't been there, she wouldn't have entered into conversation with the deceiver."

Others would say, "No, it began when she left Adam's side. The man and woman were to be traveling together, fulfilling each other, and yet here we see the woman alone."

But I suggest the deception began when legalism began . . .

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Genesis 2:17

And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

Genesis 3:2, 3

A phrase was added to complicate the beautiful simplicity God gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. I understand Eve's rationale, don't you? After all, if they weren't to eat of the tree, why should they touch it? That seems like a wise rule.

The only problem is, God didn't tell them not to touch it. Eve could have made that choice for herself, and that would have been fine. But when she ascribed that rule to God, legalism was born. The conception of deception begins with legalism—adding rules, conditions, regulations. Mankind says what we need are some parameters to protect us from sin. It's always been this way.

"Israel, I want you to have what no other nation in the history of humanity has ever had," said God. "I want you to do what no other civilization has ever done. I want you to set aside one day in seven for rest, refreshment, renewal. Take a day off. Enjoy!"

So what did God's people do? They did what we do. They said, "We better add some rules and regulations to make sure we keep this vacation . . ."

Anyone who had a wooden leg had to unscrew it on the Sabbath lest he be guilty of carrying a burden.

Anyone who spat on the ground was in violation of the Sabbath because he would be making clay, which could be used for construction.

Books were written, libraries filled with rules for keeping the Sabbath. But what happened?

All but the Pharisees eventually said, "We can't keep these rules," and they drifted away from their desire to know, love, and walk with God.

The same can still be true. So much of what we see in churches today is nothing more than man saying things God never said . . .

Why do we dress nicely to come to church?
"Because God is there."
And He's not in our homes? He's not with us in our backyards?
"It just shows respect."
Says who?

God never said, "When you seek Me show Me respect by dressing nicely." Others may say that. But not God.

Mom and Dad, we must tell our kids what God said—nothing more, nothing less, nothing else—for, like the Jews, our kids will turn away from a vibrant walk with God, and like Eve, they'll fall prey to deception whenever barriers are erected which come between them and God. If your kids are reeling under the weight of rules and regulations, if they're feeling condemned and confused, don't blame God. He came to share truth. He came to set them free (John 8:32).

Keep it simple, gang. Stay away from the deception that begins with the conception of legalism. Simply do what God tells you to do and you'll do well.

GO FIG-URE

A Topical Study of GENESIS 3:21

1962: It was the best of times; it was the worst of times. It was the year my beloved San Francisco Giants made it to the World Series. And it was the year our school adopted SMSG—Student Mathematic Study Group—into its curriculum. SMSG was the dreaded "new math" in which algebraic theory replaced long division, multiplication tables, and fractions. By the time the program was dumped four years later, we had the theories down, but we couldn't multiply or divide. As a result, math has never been my strongest suit. But even if math came easy to me, sometimes God's math doesn't seem to add up . . .

An owner of a vineyard headed to the marketplace at sunrise to hire harvesters. "I'll pay you a denarius," he told them, which was the day's wage of a top-ranking Roman soldier. A few hours later, in need of more workers, he returned to the town square and hired additional help. He did the same thing at noontime, and again at 3:00 in the afternoon. Finally, at 5:00—an hour before quitting time—the vineyard owner hired his last crew.

At the end of the day, the owner of the vineyard paid the men he'd hired at 5:00 a full day's wage. "This is great!" said those who had been hired at 6:00 in the morning. "If the guys who only worked an hour got a full day's wage, we're going to walk away loaded!" But such was not the case, for the owner of the vineyard gave the guys hired at 3:00 a denarius, the guys hired at noon a denarius, the guys hired at 9:00 a denarius, and the guys hired at 6:00 a denarius (Matthew 20).

One hour's work equals a full day's work? Go figure!

Observing a widow place two mites—less than one penny—in the offering, Jesus told His disciples that she had given more than all those who were contributing much larger sums of money to the temple treasury (Mark 12).

Less than a penny was worth more than hundreds of dollars? Go figure!

When the shepherd discovered one of his flock was missing, he left ninety-nine of his sheep to search for the one that was missing. (Luke 15). Wait a minute. If he leaves ninety-nine sheep unattended, by the time he returns, twenty-five of them could be picked off. Besides, there's no guarantee he'd even find the missing sheep.

Leaving ninety-nine in the hand for one in the bush? Go figure!

As He sat in the home of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus allowed His head to be anointed with perfume which cost the equivalent of a year's salary. No wonder the accountant took offense. Why waste so much money when there were so many poor to feed? (John 12).

Yet Jesus rebuked the practical treasurer and commended the extravagant worshiper. Go figure!

A man had two sons, one of whom wasted his entire inheritance on loose living. The older son made no demands of his father, and remained by his side, working the family farm. When the younger son's inheritance was completely gone, he returned home. Now, if I were telling this story, I would have said, "The father rewarded the faithful older son, while the younger son was happy simply to be offered a position as a hired hand." But that isn't the way Jesus told the story. In His version, who got the ring of authority, a robe, new shoes? The younger son (Luke 15).

What? The son who stayed got a warning, and the son who left got a party? Go figure!

I know these stories well, and so do you. But if we were hearing them for the first time, we would agree that they don't add up. It should have been the older brother who got the party, the big donor who got the attention, the ninety-nine sheep who got the care, and the hard worker who got the pay.

Because that's not the way it worked out, it becomes clear that God's math is entirely different than mine. That is the only way I can explain the text before us, where instead of leaving Adam and Eve to suffer in their scratchy fig leaves, God covers them with fur; where instead of dressing them down for turning their back on Him, He dresses them up. Go figure!

God's computations are based on an entirely different system than ours.

Ours are based on logic, practicality, hard work. His are based solely on grace.

The world says, “There’s no free lunch. Work hard. Make it happen.” But not God.

He says, “My ways are not your ways. My ways are based upon unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor.”

There is nothing you can do to make God love you more. Nothing. There’s nothing I can do to make God love me one ounce more than He loves me right now. If I pray all day today; if I fast for a week or a month; if I worship constantly, He will not love me any more than He loves me right now. Likewise, there is not one thing you could do to make Him love you less.

This amazes me because, like you, I am under the impression that I have to do something to earn God’s favor.

“No,” says God. “Your efforts will be like fig leaves. They will be scratchy. They will crumble. They won’t work. Let Me give you that which you could never provide for yourself: Matchless grace and infinite mercy which will cover you completely and eternally.”

God’s ways are not our ways. Therefore, His math is not ours. His grace and mercy, His goodness and blessings lavished upon sinful people like me just don’t add up.

And I’m so glad.



4 Genesis 4:1

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.

“I have gotten a man from the Lord,” said Eve, or literally, “I have gotten a man, even the Lord.” In naming her firstborn son, Cain, or “acquired,” it is clear Eve believed he was the Seed promised to her in Genesis 3:15, the Promised One, the Messiah.

Genesis 4:2 (a)

And she again bare his brother Abel . . .

It wasn't very long before Eve discovered what every one of us who has kids knows to be true: Kids are born with a sin nature. Therefore, since Cain wasn't who she hoped he'd be, Eve knew her second son wouldn't be either —and named him Abel, which means "vanity" or "empty." The problem with Cain and Abel is that they were born of the seed of man. The promise of Genesis 3:15 would not be fulfilled until One was born of the seed of woman. And that One is Jesus Christ.

Genesis 4:2 (b)–4 (a)
. . . And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof . . .

According to Hebrews 11:4, what Abel did, he did by faith. The fact that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17), means God had spoken to Cain and Abel concerning what an acceptable sacrifice would be. Abel chose to do what the Lord told him to do. Cain, on the other hand, evidently said, "I don't like the idea of bloodshed. It's dreadful."

But that was precisely the point. Sin *is* dreadful. Sin causes death. Sin brings sorrow. God did not institute the sacrificial system because He's gory. He instituted it to pointedly communicate the fact that sin causes blood to be shed, lives to be lost.

"I have a better, neater, cleaner idea," said Cain. "I'll sacrifice fruits and vegetables—the fruit of my own labor."

Genesis 4:4 (b), 5 (a)
. . . And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect . . .

Abel's offering was accepted because it was made by faith, according to God's Word. Cain's was rejected because it was based on his own ideas and efforts.

Genesis 4:5 (b)

. . . And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

His offering rejected, Cain became angry and bitter. The phrase, "his countenance fell," constitutes the first mention of depression in the Bible. Thus, according to the Principle of First Mention which holds that the first place a subject appears in Scripture contains foundational principles regarding said subject—Cain's depression holds truths for us . . .

Genesis 4:6, 7 (a)
And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?

In other words, "If you choose to do well, your countenance will be lifted up as it was previously."

Genesis 4:7 (b)
. . . and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

"If you choose not to do well, Cain, sin lies at the door like a lion ready to attack. You will either be lifted up, or you will be attacked. It's your choice."

Although I feel like a prophet crying in the wilderness as I go against the flow of what our culture says about depression, I remain biblically persuaded that many people today are seeking medical help for depression when in reality it is often a spiritual issue. Interestingly, even the research done by the pharmaceutical companies who manufacture antidepressants corroborate this, for their studies indicate that, due to the reduction of serotonin—a chemical in the brain which governs emotional stability, it is impossible for those who are clinically depressed to simply will themselves out of depression. I believe this is what Scripture has indicated all along, for bitterness and anger, sin and resentment affect the chemistry of one's brain. Thus, the pharmacist and the pastor differ not in the diagnosis of depression, but in the cure. The pharmacist says, "Take a pill."

The pastor says, "Make a choice."

Gang, we can choose to put on the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Isaiah 61:3). We can choose to rejoice in the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:16). We can choose to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We can choose to give thanks in everything (1 Thessalonians 5:18). We can choose to think on whatever is pure and lovely and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8).

"If you choose right," God said to Cain, "you'll be lifted up. But if you don't, the lion of depression will eat you for lunch."

I am not suggesting that we should never use medication. But as a pastor, I am concerned and saddened by how many Christians in our country are popping pills.

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" David asked when he faced depression like ours. What was his prescription? "Hope thou in God" (Psalm 42:11).

"My bones ache. My eyes weep. I feel as though there's gravel in my teeth," cried Jeremiah in his own deep, dark depression. His cure? "I will lift up my heart with my hands unto the heavens" (Lamentations 3:41).

Although I am increasingly convinced that there are people who, because of difficulties in life, can benefit from wise and prudent medical help in this arena, such is not the norm because as you read the Bible from cover to cover, it becomes clear that the issue regarding depression is primarily an issue of choice.

God didn't say, "I know you're sad, Cain. Here, drink this; swallow that; and you'll be better in the morning." No, He said, "Your bitterness is causing your countenance to fall. If you choose to do well—to obey My Word—you'll be lifted up. If you don't choose well, you'll be eaten up."

Genesis 4:8, 9
And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?

Sin says, "I don't care about him. He hurt me. I don't care about her. She offended me. I don't care about them. They wronged me." That explains how,

after killing Abel, Cain could say, "I don't care about him. I'm not his keeper." If there is someone in your life whom you would just as soon disappear, be careful because you're walking in the way of Cain (Jude 11). Your hostility and bitterness towards him or her will alter the course of your life as surely as Cain's did his.

Genesis 4:10 (a)
And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood . . .

If in the margin of your Bible the word "blood" is translated "bloods," it is due to the fact that the Jewish people believe that he who kills one person also kills that person's potential children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and so on. Conversely, he who saves one person saves generations, which is why trees are planted at the Holocaust Museum in Israel in honor of Gentiles who harbored Jews during World War II.

So in this I am reminded that unforgiveness and hate and bitterness have repercussions far bigger than I might think. That is why in the Book of Jude, God specifically says to watch out for the way of Cain, which is bitterness, unforgiveness, hatred. Make sure there's no one you're mad at, upset with, or angry about because it only takes one to affect many. Ask Cain.

Genesis 4:10 (b)
. . . crieth unto me from the ground.

"The blood of your brother cries out to Me." The writer of Hebrews picks up this metaphor when he declares, "Jesus' blood speaks better things than the blood of Abel" (12:24). What does Abel's blood cry? It's a message of condemnation, judgment, accusation. What does Jesus' blood cry? It cries, "Forgiven."

If there is an old boyfriend, ex-spouse, parent, or boss you're mad at, whose name still comes up when you talk to people, God would say, "My Son was slaughtered on the Cross for the very sin that person committed against you. Let it go. Give it up. Put it under the blood that speaks better things. Lay it at the Cross."

Genesis 4:11–13
And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

Cain didn't say, "Father forgive me." He said, "My punishment is not fair." Cain remained in his cursed condition because he chose to be mad rather than to ask for mercy.

Genesis 4:14
Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me.

The language here is most interesting, for notice that Cain doesn't say, "You're going to hide from me," but rather, "I'm going to hide from You." In other words, Cain declares, "Even though everyone will be out to get me, I'm not going to be looking to You anymore," as he shakes his fist at God.

Genesis 4:15
And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.

God looks at this man who continues to be oh, so wrong, and says, "Don't anyone bother him." The grace and mercy of our Father amazes me.

Genesis 4:16
And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

Cain could have pressed in *to* the presence of the Lord. Instead he went out *from* the presence of the Lord—to Nod, or literally, "Wandering."

Genesis 4:17 (a)
And Cain knew his wife . . .

Where did Cain get his wife? This is one of the questions that has been asked of me more than any other single question. The answer? Because Adam lived to be 930 years old, he and Eve had many, many children. Therefore, Cain married one of his own relatives because mankind had not yet gone down the road of depravity long enough chronologically to cause the kinds of problems now present in intermarriage. What I wish people would ask is not where did Cain get his wife, but what the Philippian jailor asked when he said, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16).

Genesis 4:17 (b)
. . . and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch.

Cain wanders away from the Lord, and builds a city which he dedicates not to God, but to his son. He's desiring, determining, attempting to build his own empire. But watch what happens to his family . . .

Genesis 4:18 (a)
And unto Enoch was born Irad . . .

The name *Irad* literally means "Fugitive" or "Wild Ass."

Genesis 4:18 (b)
. . . and Irad begat Mehujael . . .

Mehujael literally means "blot out that Yah is El." In other words, "wipe out the name of God."

Genesis 4:18 (c)
. . . and Mehujael begat Methusael . . .

Methusael literally means "They are dead who are of God."

In other words, "Those who believe in God are dead." It's a skeptical, scornful kind of name.

Genesis 4:18 (d)
. . . and Methusael begat Lamech.

Lamech literally means, "Poor and lowly."

Genesis 4:19 (a)
And Lamech took unto him two wives . . .

Here, in the degenerate line of Cain, we see the first mention of polygamy.

Genesis 4:19 (b)
. . . the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah.

Adah means "ornament." *Zillah* can either mean "seductress" or "shabbiness." Because nothing in the Bible is coincidental, I find this account interesting. You see, it could be that Zillah seduced Lamech. Or, more possibly, it could be that after Lamech took two wives, one became beautiful, the other shabby in his sight.

If you're toying with an affair, an infatuation, a fantasy, a pictorial excursion on the Internet, understand this: the degree to which anyone else becomes attractive to you is the degree to which your spouse will become increasingly unattractive. No man can serve two masters. That's just the way the human soul is made.

Genesis 4:20
And Adah bare Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle.

The word "cattle" is literally "possession," or "production." Before this, people lived in community. From the line of Cain, however, independence is

born, as Jabal became the father of the nomad.

Genesis 4:21
And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ.

From whence comes the entrepreneurial spirit? From whence comes those who developed music? From the line of Cain. In other words, no longer were the harp and organ solely employed in worship around the throne of God as an act of worship and adoration. They now become a means of livelihood.

Genesis 4:22
And Zillah, she also bare Tubal-cain, an instructer of every artificer in brass and iron: and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

Tubalcain was an instructor, or, literally, a "whetter" or developer of cutting instruments—that is, weapons.

Genesis 4:23
And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt.

Like his forefather, Lamech kills a man. This is called the Song of the Sword, as Lamech says arrogantly, "I killed a man who was hassling me."

Genesis 4:24
If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.

The literal rendering of "seventy and sevenfold" is "seventy times seven." Does that ring a bell? Jesus applied the same mathematics to the subject not of vengeance but of forgiveness (Matthew 18:22).

It's sad to realize that arms, music, and an independent, entrepreneurial spirit—these things which our culture esteems highly—have their roots in Cain.

Ah, but there's a ray of sun breaking through . . .

Genesis 4:25, 26
And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew. And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.

From Seth came those who called upon the name of the Lord, or literally those who were called *by* the name of the Lord. In today's terminology, they would be called "Christians." That's us. We're not Jubalites or Jabalites. We're not musicians or entrepreneurs or military men. We're believers. That's our identity. Oh, we might raise cattle or play a harp. But that's not who we are. We find our sole identity not in the line of Cain, but in the line of Seth—as believers in the One who loves us.



5

Genesis 5:1, 2 (a)
This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; Male and female created he them . . .

Before tracing Adam's family tree through the godly line of Seth here in verses 1 and 2, chapter 5 pauses to look back to the day God created Adam and Eve . . .

Genesis 5:2 (b)
. . . and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.

God Himself presided over the first wedding ceremony. God Himself was the One who, in calling Adam and Eve "Adam," called them one.

"Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" the Pharisees asked Jesus, seeking to entrap Him in the raging controversy of the day (Matthew 19:3). Would He side with the school of Shammai, a conservative rabbi who maintained there was virtually no reason for divorce? Or would He side with Hillel, a rabbi who interpreted the Law of Moses so liberally that even a wife who over-salted her husband's eggs, causing him to lose his temper, could be considered "unclean" and therefore a candidate for divorce?

In answering, Jesus referred neither to Shammai nor Hillel, nor even to Moses. Jesus took the issue of divorce all the way back to the verse before us when He simply said, "Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so" (Matthew 19:8).

"*Their* name is Adam," God declared. They are one. There is only one reason for divorce: fornication, or adultery (Matthew 19:9).

"I'm so sorry," she cried. "I shouldn't have jeopardized my marriage. I shouldn't have allowed myself to become vulnerable to that situation. But God forgives me. So why can't my husband?"

"Yes," I told her. "God does indeed forgive you. Instantly, totally, completely. When Jesus hung on the Cross, He took the very sin of your adultery and died for it. And His blood washes it away so completely that it doesn't even enter the mind of the Father. But—the problem is that the same physical union which was powerful enough to bind you and your husband into one flesh initially is also powerful enough to tear you asunder tragically."

You see, gang, this is what our culture doesn't understand; this is where so many miss the boat and end up crashing on the rocks of heartache and despair. Adultery kills. It deals a deathblow to marriage. Contrary to what our culture espouses, the idea of "safe sex" outside of marriage is an absolute lie. When two become one intimately, it is not simply their bodies or emotions which are linked together. It is their very souls (Proverbs 6:32). Thus, Jesus cites fornication or adultery as the only force strong enough to render a marriage irreparable.

"But I thought that if we confess, the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin—from the sin of gossip as well as from the sin of pride; from the sin of anger as well as from the sin of adultery," you might be thinking.

It does (1 John 1:9). All sin is equivalent to God. All sin is equally hideous in the sight of our Father. But not all sins carry the same repercussions. "Don't be deceived," Paul declared. "God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that shall he reap" (Galatians 6:7).

If a man puts a gun to his wife's head and pulls the trigger, he can cry with remorse, saying, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I had a hard day today. I lost my stability. I didn't mean to do that." But none of his remorse will alter the results of his firing a single bullet into her head. As amazing as it sounds, if he confessed even that sin, God would forgive him. But his marriage would nonetheless be over.

Such is the power of adultery. "Well, then, I'll get divorced and move on," you might be thinking.

Yes, you'll move on. But you'll take with you the very problems that caused adultery in the first place. Gang, no one will make you happier than your present spouse. Why? Because even if you married your husband or wife without seeking God's guidance, will, or direction; even if there are 4,999 people who would have been more suited to you, in God's economy, the moment you said "I do" to that person, #5,000 instantly became #1.

You see, knowing our propensity to think the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence, knowing our tendency to want to trade this year's car for next year's model, God made it real simple for us. He ordained marriage for life. And those who understand this find glorious peace and freedom when they look at their spouse because they know there's no one down the line or around the corner who will give them a greater thrill; that there's not another person on earth who will make them happier, more content, or more fulfilled. Such is the amazing mystery of matrimony.

There are couples in our church who weren't perfectly matched body, soul, and spirit—but they stayed together because they understood the way of the Lord. And as I've watched them over the years, as I've seen their hair turn gray and their back bow a bit; as I've seen them blessed with children and grandchildren, I've heard them say, "Wow. It's worth it to go God's way."

There is no greater joy than watching your kids grow and walk in the way of the Lord. But all that is thrown away by the one who says, "If I have an affair, I'll be forgiven." There is nothing, there is no one, worth losing your family. God talks more about the sin of adultery than about any other single sin because adultery uniquely brings long-term, irreversible repercussions.

If you have been one of the fortunate few who have experienced a miraculous resurrection of your marriage following the deathblow of adultery, rejoice. You have been graced. Go your way and sin no more.

Dear people, determine that no matter what you've been through, no matter where you've been, you will do whatever it takes to guard the sanctity of your family.

Genesis 5:3 (a)
And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years . . .

Adam literally means "man."

Genesis 5:3 (b)
. . . and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth:

Seth literally means "appointed."

Genesis 5:4, 5
And the days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years: and he begat sons and daughters: And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died.

Concerning the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, God said, "In the day that ye eat thereof ye shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Adam did indeed eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—and yet he obviously didn't die the day he ate of it. He lived 930 years. Wait a minute. What does God say concerning how He reckons time? With Him, a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as a day (2 Peter 3:8). Therefore, because even Methuselah died thirty-one years short of 1,000—in God's economy, man did indeed die the "day" he ate of the forbidden tree.

Genesis 5:6–8
And Seth lived an hundred and five years, and begat Enos: And Seth lived after he begat Enos eight hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years: and he died.

Enos literally means "subject to death."

Genesis 5:9–11
And Enos lived ninety years, and begat Cainan: And Enos lived after he begat Cainan eight hundred and fifteen years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Enos were nine hundred and five years: and he died.

Cainan literally means "sorrowful."

Genesis 5:12–14
And Cainan lived seventy years, and begat Mahalaleel: And Cainan lived after he begat Mahalaleel eight hundred and forty years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Cainan were nine hundred and ten years: and he died.

Mahalaleel literally means "from the presence of God."

Genesis 5:15–17
And Mahalaleel lived sixty and five years, and begat Jared: And Mahalaleel lived after he begat Jared eight hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Mahalaleel were eight hundred ninety and five years: and he died.

Jared literally means "one comes down."

Genesis 5:18–20
And Jared lived an hundred sixty and two years, and he begat Enoch: And Jared lived after he begat Enoch eight hundred

years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty and two years: and he died.

Enoch literally means "dedicated."

Genesis 5:21
And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah:

Methuselah literally means "dying He shall send." Why? The year Methuselah died, what did God send? The Flood.

Genesis 5:22, 23
And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years:

After his first son was born, Enoch began to walk with God. Having kids will do that to you! Raising kids brings a unique awareness of one's need for the Lord.

Genesis 5:24 (a)
And Enoch walked with God: and he was not . . .

"Who shall I say sent me?" asked Moses of God.

"Say I AM that I AM hath sent you" (Exodus 3:14).

And with this, Moses must have come to the realization that if God is I AM, like Enoch, he was "not."

John the Baptist came to the same conclusion when, asked if he was the Messiah, he emphatically declared, "I am not" (John 1:20). Oh, how we as a culture, as a body, as individuals need to grasp what Enoch, Moses, and John the Baptist understood so clearly: that God is, and we are not. You see, I believe the problem for most of us is that we are constantly trying to figure out who we are, what we should do, how we should minister, where we should go. Yet the more we think about how we're doing, where we're going, what we're thinking; the more we talk about ourselves, make reference to

ourselves, draw attention to ourselves—the more misery we heap upon ourselves.

Do you ever get tired of hearing your own voice, of dealing with your own stuff, of taking your own pulse? I do. That's because we were created not for self-indulgence or self-introspection, but solely to give pleasure to God (Revelation 4:11). It is only logical, then, to join Enoch, Moses, and John the Baptist in decreasing so that He might increase, in losing our lives in the wonder of His glory.

Genesis 5:24 (b)
. . . for God took him.

Because Adam sinned, and because the wages of sin is death—everyone in Adam's family tree ends up the same way: they die. There is, however, one exception. There is one guy who never dies. After walking with Him three hundred years, one day the Lord simply snatches, grabs, raptures Enoch.

The wages of sin is still death. But, like Enoch, there will be people who will not die. Paul put it this way: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17). I believe we are the generation who will see the Rapture of the church. But even before that glorious day, you and I can experience rapture in our hearts presently. You see, the Latin word, *raptus,* speaks of the physical event that will take place when Jesus comes to call His church home. But it also speaks of an emotional event that can take place right now.

"I was enraptured by that music," we say. Or, "The poem she sent me enraptured me." Is your heart enraptured? Maybe you've walked with the Lord for ten years; maybe you've been a believer for twenty years; but maybe you haven't found the Lord to be all that enthralling lately. Instead, maybe you're discouraged, defeated, depressed. Maybe you read that happy is the people whose God is the Lord (Psalm 144:15), and the joy of the Lord is my strength (Nehemiah 8:10), but you're feeling anything *but* happy and joyful.

Why is this?

It is because you're not doing what Enoch did. Look at our text: Enoch pleased God. That is, as he walked *with* God, Enoch brought pleasure *to* God. The closer you walk to God today, the more you'll be enraptured, taken, caught up with Him. The godliest people I know don't talk about themselves. The happiest people I know are not focused on themselves. The folks I truly admire are not those who live to please themselves. The people who are most godly and happy, the people who are just such a joy to be around are those who live for one reason: to simply walk with and please God. May we be such people.

Genesis 5:25–27
And Methuselah lived an hundred eighty and seven years, and begat Lamech: And Methuselah lived after he begat Lamech seven hundred eighty and two years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died.

Lamech literally means "to the poor and lowly."

Genesis 5:28–31
And Lamech lived an hundred eighty and two years, and begat a son: And he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed. And Lamech lived after he begat Noah five hundred ninety and five years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Lamech were seven hundred seventy and seven years: and he died.

Noah literally means "rest" or "comfort."

Perhaps you wonder if it was really necessary to devote an entire chapter of the Word to a list of men who begat and died. But look at the names again: The Man appointed to death, sorrowful. From the presence of God, One comes down, dedicated. Dying, He shall send to the poor and lowly, rest and comfort.

I must have read Genesis 5 a hundred times before I realized that the entire gospel message is embedded in what seems to be a boring genealogy.

Such is the wonder of the Word . . .

Genesis 5:32
And Noah was five hundred years old: and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

We now come to the end of the first section of the Book of Genesis—which deals with creation—and to the beginning of the next section which will deal with the destruction of all that was created—save for one human family and a boatload of fortunate animals.

HOW TO READ YOUR BIBLE

A Topical Study of GENESIS 5

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

Joshua 1:8

Perhaps no one epitomized "good success" more than Job. He, who was the most prosperous and successful man on the face of the earth in his day said this: "I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). In other words, if Job had our Bible, he would have said, "If it's a choice of breakfast or the Bible, I choose the Bible. If it's lunch or Luke, I'll take Luke. If it's dinner, or Daniel, I'll go with Daniel. Nothing will have priority for me over the reading of the Scriptures—not even eating."

Job lived out what Joshua promised. That is, he had genuine prosperity and great success. "Yeah, but that's only part of the story," you might be thinking. "He had a lot of troubles, too."

Yes, he did. But when everything fell apart in a single day—his family destroyed, his health demolished, his material blessings decimated—what did Job say? He said, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Job went through his trial—and came out on the other side twice as blessed (Job 42:12).

So it is that I suggest to you today that if you want prosperity and good success, the best piece of advice you can follow is to be one who, like Job, is committed to reading, studying, meditating upon the Word.

"But I've tried reading through the Bible," you might be thinking, "and I just never seem to get it."

Let me give you four simple yet very significant keys which I believe will help you in your study of God's Word . . .

Read Consistently

The first key is to read the Bible with consistency. From cover to cover, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, read the Bible consistently. Don't worry about those things you don't understand. If you're reading through the Bible, you will come across some things which will confuse you initially—but there will also be a bunch of things that will jump out at you—important things for you to do, essential things for you to know.

Why does the Lord make the Scriptures so difficult in so many ways? Why didn't He simply write a section on marriage, a section on finances, a section on parenting? Why all the stories and rules and ordinances and parables and pictures and types and illustrations? Solomon, another prosperous man shed light on this question when he wrote, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter" (Proverbs 25:2). God purposely conceals some things because even though initially a certain story, passage, or section of Scripture might not make sense to you, as you meditate on it, pray about it, and wrestle with it—a week, or a month, or a year later when a light goes on and you finally understand it, you'll never forget it.

I have often found that the passages with which I wrestle the longest are the passages I learn the deepest. How many wonderful truths I would have missed had I not read the Word consistently—even when I didn't necessarily understand it. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit will "bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). In other words, the Holy Spirit will bring to our minds and make application of that which the Lord has said to us in His Word. He cannot, however, bring to mind that which we haven't read.

The first time I went skiing, I was a junior in high school. My buddy, Bruce, and I went with a couple of girls who were accomplished skiers to Donner Pass in the Sierras. After purchasing our lift tickets, we trekked to the "bunny slope" where the girls promised they'd teach us to ski. Unfortunately, Bruce and I did not learn as quickly as they had hoped. So, after a miserable morning, we told the girls to take the higher lifts and leave us on the bunny slope to practice what they had shown us.

As the 4:00 closing time drew near, still having made no headway, Bruce and I were near the top of the bunny slope when, suddenly, a previous wrestling injury caused Bruce's knee to pop to the side of his leg. "My knee, my knee," he cried, as he tumbled into a snowdrift.

"I'll get help," I said, and, without thinking, I skied all the way down to the bottom of the hill—without falling. So amazed was I by this, that I immediately forgot all about Bruce until my third run down the hill. Thankfully, help had already arrived by the time I remembered him.

When you learn to ski, you find yourself saying, "I don't get this. This is miserable. I'm wet. I'm cold. Why even bother?"—when suddenly it all comes together and you find yourself sailing down the bunny slope. And that's the way it is in reading the Word. "I don't get this," we say. "What does this mean? What's it about?" But then, if you just keep doing it, it begins to click. The pieces begin to fit. The applications are made. The tie-ins are there. That's why it is an honor and a joy to search out what God has concealed.

The armies of Israel and Judah, arrayed in the desert of Edom for battle against the armies of Moab, were desperately in need of water. "Thus saith the Lord," declared the prophet Elisha. "Make this valley full of ditches" (2 Kings 3:16). So ditches were dug and the next morning the ditches were filled with water.

If you want to be full of the water of the Word, you just keep digging—even in the dry times, even in the desert hour. You just say, "I'm going to keep reading. I'm going to keep studying because I know that as I dig ditches consistently, they will be filled with the water of the Word eventually."

Read Expectantly

Wondering why God was doing certain things and why He wasn't doing other things, Habakkuk said, "I will go up into a high tower and I will wait and see what the Lord will say unto me" (Habakkuk 2:1).

The Lord did indeed speak to Habakkuk, saying, "Write the vision" (Habakkuk 2:2)—and Habakkuk didn't have to borrow a pencil.

What does it mean to read with expectancy? I believe it means you come to your devotions, to Bible studies, to church with pencil and paper in hand, ready to take note of that which the Lord would speak to you.

I wonder if, in our morning devotions and study times, we're not speaking volumes through our casual, lethargic approach. "Ho hum, Lord," our actions say, "I don't expect You to say anything to me today. You never do. So let's see, where should I read today . . ." No wonder the Lord doesn't speak to us. No wonder the Word isn't real to us.

I want you to do well, gang. And that comes by approaching the Word with anticipation and expectation, for he that comes to God must believe He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

Read Conversationally

As Daniel read the writings of Jeremiah, he realized the time for Israel's release from Babylon was drawing near. So what did Daniel do? He asked the Lord what his people should do in light of Jeremiah's prophecy (Daniel 9:2, 3). I have found this to be such a key for me. As I read the Word, I pray. I read a sentence or two, and I stop and talk it over with the Lord.

True communication requires two-way conversation. If I said to Tammy, "Listen very carefully. I'm going to talk to you for fifteen minutes. Talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. Now it's your turn." And she talk, talk, talk, talk, talked to me —our conversation would not be very natural or intimate. If, on the other hand, I said a sentence or two, and she said a sentence or two and we responded to each other conversationally, true communication would take place.

I am convinced that's the way it's supposed to be in spiritual life. I used to think it was, "Okay, Lord, You talk to me through the Scriptures." Read, read, read, read, read. "Now I'll talk to You through prayer." Pray, pray, pray, pray, pray. And although we can communicate that way, it's very stilted, and not very intimate. That is why I suggest you read a verse or two or three, and talk to the Lord about what you read. If you do, you will find yourself truly communicating with, and hearing from the Lord.

The same holds true even in a corporate setting, for if you pray as the Word is taught, you will find yourself engaged and growing rather than bored and drifting. If you hear something that convicts you in a sermon or a study, say, "Oh, Father, I hear You on that. Forgive me for the way I treated him today," right where you're sitting. If you hear something comforting say, "Thank You for that promise, Lord."

If you learn to pray as you're studying corporately, if you learn to pray while you're reading the Scriptures personally, the Word will come to life for you in ways that will warm your heart and blow your mind.

Read Obediently

Simply put, our Lord is so awesomely kind that He's not about to load us down with a whole bunch of stuff which causes our spiritual desks to stack up with papers. He won't allow my spiritual "in-box" to fill up to the point where it's overflowing and overwhelming and depressing. Instead, He graciously gives me only one thing to do at a time.

To those who say, "I just don't get anything out of Bible study or morning devotions," my question is: Have you done the last thing God told you to do? After all, why should God give us more information and more instruction and more input if we have not been obedient to what He's already brought to our attention?

In the midst of a huge revival, God told Philip to go to the desert. Philip obeyed, and was able to share the Word with a man who, in turn, so impacted Ethiopia and Africa with the gospel that the effects are still seen today (Acts 8).

God doesn't give me fifteen things to do. He simply gives me one thing to do at a time. And I have found that as I do the one thing the Lord asks of me, He proceeds to tell me the next step. That is why we are to be doers of the Word, not hearers only (James 1:22), for it is when we say, "Lord, You are God, and with Your grace and by Your strength, I desire and determine to do whatever You say," that He will open doors before you and give direction to you.

Read with consistency. Read with expectancy. Don't approach the Word halfheartedly, lethargically, apathetically, or lazily. Read conversationally. Pray while you read; read while you pray. And read obediently. When God speaks to your heart, do what He tells you to do and more revelation will follow.

In the course of my forty-year pilgrimage with the Lord, I have found these elements to be essential to my love for, understanding of, and delight in the Word.



> 6 But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.
>
> Matthew 24:37–39

> Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:
>
> 2 Peter 3:3–6

The last days before Jesus' return will be similar to the days before the Flood. Surely the day of His return is near, for in the text before us, we see striking parallels between Noah's day and ours . . .

> **Genesis 6:1, 2**
> **And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.**

When you read the genealogy of chapter 5, you realize, among other things, that people lived a long time—nine hundred years and more. Now, think with me. If a man has four kids and lives to see his kids have kids, in five generations his family will number ninety-six. In ten generations, the population will jump to 3,070. In twenty generations, the population soars to 3,120,000. And in thirty generations, it skyrockets to 3,220,000,000. If a generation is forty years, with at least forty generations listed in Genesis 5, the population on earth in Noah's day would have conservatively been

billions and billions of people. In other words, Noah lived in a world more densely populated than ours is presently.

We're experiencing a similar population growth in our own last days. You see, from the time Noah got off the ark, it took until 1867 for the world to reach the one billion mark. But it only took from 1867 to 1935—less than one hundred years—for the population to reach two billion. And from 1935, it only took until 1965 to reach over six billion. Due to the 250,000 people added to our planet every twenty-four hours, the earth's population will now double every fifteen years.

Genesis 6:3
And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.

Sociologists have studied the effects of the exponential population growth we are experiencing by placing a group of rats in the same proportional density as New York City. Two things took place: The crowded conditions caused the maternal instinct to be suppressed to the point that mother rats no longer cared for their young; and, secondly, the rats started eating each other even though there was adequate food supplied for them.

Population growth carries with it definite sociological implications. Those who study such things say this explains why inner city life is the way it is today. This makes sense to me because we're sinners. We're a bunch of rats. Pack us close together and you have a whole bunch of sin condensed in one spot. That's why God graciously gave man one hundred-twenty years to turn to Him. Longer than that, he surely would have destroyed himself.

Genesis 6:4
There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

The Hebrew word translated "giants" is *nephalim,* which literally means "fallen ones." These "fallen ones" are the legendary figures spoken of in

many cultures—the giants. Where did these giants come from? There are two schools of thought. Some suggest that the term, "daughters of men," refers to the descendants of Cain. But because a union of the ungodly daughters of Cain and the godly sons of Seth would not inherently produce giants, others —myself included—believe their origin is due to something else.

The phrase "sons of God" is *benai elohim.* Every time "benai elohim" appears in the Old Testament, it is in reference to angels. Angels are divided into two groups: the exalted angels around the throne of God who do the work of the Lord, and fallen angels, or demons. Lucifer was an exalted angel who led a rebellion against the Lord in heaven. When he fell and became the devil, Revelation tells us one-third of the angelic host joined his rebellion and became demons. I believe it is to these demons that Genesis 6:4 refers. Some of these demons, evidently, had sexual relations with human women, resulting in *nephalim*—giants, legendary men, men of renown. That is why every culture contains stories of giants similar to those found in Greek mythology and Roman folklore.

The best explanation for these nephalim, however, isn't found in mythology or folklore, but in the Word. We know that certain demons are held in prison (1 Peter 3:19) because their deeds were so diabolically dark. I believe the demons who "left their own habitation" (Jude 6), are the "benai elohim" through whom Satan futilely attempted to pollute the seed of woman to such a degree that the promise of Genesis 3:15 would be thwarted.

I suggest to you we also live in a day of similar aberrant sexual behavior. We can say, "We're okay. Our culture's doing fine. Our economy's doing well." But underneath the surface, the perversion in our society is unbelievable. The largest industry in America today is not airplanes or automobiles, not even agricultural production. The largest industry in America today is entertainment. And the fastest-growing segment of the entertainment industry is hard-core pornography. We no longer even question things that once would have shocked and scandalized us. As in Noah's day, our society insists everything is fine, when underneath the surface lurks a strong current of horrific sexual behavior that will eventually sink us.

Genesis 6:5–7

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

What are evil imaginations? Break the word down, and you get to the essence of it: images. Throughout the Old Testament, idols were worshiped in groves of trees which were planted to cover up the "shady" activities that took place therein (Judges 3:7). I cannot help but think how this applies to our day, as the images on our television screens are continually evil.

Genesis 6:8–10
But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God. And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

That Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord does not mean that God showed grace to Noah exclusively. Yes, a flood wiped everyone else out eventually, but not before God gave them one hundred years to repent of their wickedness and receive salvation. Yes, the planet was deluged, but every man had opportunity to hear His message as they observed Noah building the huge barge. But the world refused to grab hold of the good news of salvation, and they drowned in their sin. It wasn't that God looked at Noah with grace and everyone else with condemnation. God looked at *everyone* with eyes of grace and mercy. It's just that Noah *found* the grace.

The question I want to ask you today is this: What have *you* found in the eyes of the Lord?

A London traffic jam prevented C. S. Lewis from arriving at a certain religious symposium on time. The panel, comprised of the world's most highly esteemed religious thinkers, began without him, their first question being: What is unique about Christianity?

Although the Buddhist, Muslim, Jew, and Taoist discussed the question they could arrive at no conclusive answer. In the midst of their debate, C. S. Lewis burst into the room.

"Dr. Lewis," said the moderator, "tell us what is unique to Christianity."

"That's easy," Lewis replied. "It's grace."

C. S. Lewis was right. No other religion or philosophy provides unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor. Every other religion, every other philosophy says there are things we must do—devotional exercises, good deeds, or righteous acts—to earn blessings from Allah or to gain favor from Buddha. Only biblical Christianity says, "It's all grace, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else."

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Peter was another who, like Noah, looked in the eyes of the Lord. And what he saw therein caused him to weep. What did Peter see in the Lord's eyes? I believe your answer is a good indication of where you are in your relationship with God. You see, Peter fell asleep when he should have prayed; denied the Lord when questioned by a young maid; and forsook the Lord because he was afraid. Thus, it would be natural to think that it was the look of disappointment in the eyes of the Lord that caused Peter to weep. But such was not the case, for Jesus had already told Peter that Satan sought to sift him like wheat, but that he would eventually make it through regardless of his failure on the way (Luke 22:31, 32). No, Peter didn't find disappointment or discouragement in the Lord's eyes. He found the same thing Noah found. He found grace.

The writer to the Hebrews says, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we shall obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). If you want to experience the blessings of God in a world that's falling apart, if you want to experience the blessings of God no matter your situation, you have the privilege of gazing constantly in the eyes of the Lord. You have an invitation to find grace.

Genesis 6:11–13

The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was

corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

The fourth sign of a culture about to be judged is violence. Violence was celebrated, exalted, and practiced in Noah's day, just as it is in our own. "It used to be when I started my job, the crime on the streets of Brooklyn would follow this pattern: Your money or your life," said William Flack, Brooklyn's District Attorney. "But that's no longer true. Now it's your money *and* your life." It's what he calls "joy killing"—killing for the sake of killing. By the time they graduate from junior high, young people in our country have seen an average of more than 35,000 murders on TV. Add to that the 1.2 million couples who use guns, knives, or other lethal weapons on each other, and it is evident that the home has become a battleground in much of our society.

Wise is the woman, wise the man who has the understanding and discernment to see a world of exploding population, sexual perversion, evil imagination, and rampant violence—and is able to draw the parallel with Noah's day. Wise are all who, knowing the Lord's coming is at hand, say to everyone they can, "Come on board the Good Ship Salvation because we're sailing to heaven."

Genesis 6:14 (a)
Make thee an ark of gopher wood . . .

Not coincidentally, I believe, due to its density and strength, gopher wood was the wood used to make coffins. "If any man come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross," Jesus declared (Matthew 16:24).

Salvation begins with death. It begins when we say, "I'm dying to self. I no longer demand my own way, but rather give myself completely to You."

Genesis 6:14 (b)
. . . rooms shalt thou make in the ark . . .

The Hebrew word translated "rooms" is literally "nests." On the Good Ship Salvation, there is an abundance of rooms, where Episcopalians and Presbyterians, Baptists and Lutherans, Catholics and Applegaters alike can nest. How careful we must be to allow room, to give our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ space to "work out their own salvation" (Philippians 2:12). Each of us thinks we see perfectly clearly. But Paul reminds us that this side of eternity, each of us only sees "through a glass darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Therefore, we need each other. The ark had plenty of room. So does the kingdom.

Genesis 6:14 (c)
. . . and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.

This is the only time in the Old Testament where the Hebrew word *kapher* is translated "pitch." In the seventy other passages this word is used, it is translated "atonement"—a wonderful word that essentially means "at-one-ment." Just as the salvation God provided Noah was surrounded by the pitch of atonement, so God provided us "at-one-ment" with Him by sending His Son to die for our sin.

Genesis 6:15
And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits.

Constructed to float atop the water rather than to navigate through it, the ark Noah built looked more like a covered barge than a boat. If a cubit is eighteen inches, as most people believe, the ark was four hundred and fifty feet long, seventy-five feet wide, and forty-five feet high.

Genesis 6:16 (a)
A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above . . .

As we will see, Noah had no control over the door of the ark. But he did have control over the window. I control how much illumination and

understanding I have in life by how much I allow the Word of God to be in my thinking (Psalm 119:105). I can either remain in the dark, or I can gain light and insight by opening up the window of the Word—just like we're doing right now. Sure, sometimes it would be easier to just watch Jeopardy. Sometimes it would be easier to sleep in and skip morning devotions. Sometimes it would be easier not to take the time to study Scripture—but I will walk in light only to the extent that I choose to open the window and allow the light of the Word to flood my soul and renew my thoughts.

Genesis 6:16 (b)
. . . and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof . . .

There was only one door in the ark. There was no back door, no emergency exit. "Why can't you just be broad-minded? Why can't you just say there are many ways to enter into a relationship with God?" people ask us. The reason is because Jesus said, "No man comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14:6). And I'm real glad about that. You see, if God had five ways to enter in to salvation, five ways to be able to make it to heaven, five ways to cultivate a relationship with Him, Satan would come back with twenty-five counterfeit ways. If God had ten ways, Satan would come back with 10,000. God says, "I don't want anyone to choose the wrong door. I'm going to keep it real simple. There's only one."

Genesis 6:16 (c)
. . . with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it.

Just as there were three levels on the ark, the apostle John makes it clear that there are three segments of the Christian family (1 John 2:13, 14). There are "little children" who know the Father. There are "young men" who have overcome the Wicked One and in whom the Word of God abides. And there are "fathers" who, because they have "known Him from the beginning," have an intimate, deep relationship with God. There are three different levels of maturity on the Good Ship Salvation, but *all* aboard are sailing toward heaven.

Genesis 6:17, 18

And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die. But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.

Eight souls were to enter into the ark. Yes, there would be some bobbing up and down, some noise and confusion, some questions and concerns—but guess what. They would be headed to a fresh start, a new beginning, a new world. And that's what's happening with you and me. The reason we're here tonight, the reason we have morning devotions, the reason we keep plugging away is because we're saved. And when all is said and done, that's all that matters. Let's never lose sight of that. Let's never get so caught up in the esoteric understanding of Scripture that we miss the underlying base of all things—that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Genesis 6:19–21
And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive. And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather it to thee; and it shall be for food for thee, and for them.

Three-storied, the ark contained 97,000 square feet of space. How big is that? It's equivalent to five hundred and twenty boxcars. Would this be enough space to hold all of the animals? Taxonomists tell us that on the earth today there are 3,500 species of mammals, 8,600 species of birds, 5,500 reptiles and amphibians. (Fish, obviously weren't on the ark; and the 25,500 species of worms could fit in the cracks). Added together, there were 17,600 species of animals. Double that to include male and female, and the figure becomes 35,200. The average size of the 17,600 species of animals on the

ark is equivalent to a full-grown sheep. 35,200 sheep would easily fit in only one hundred and twenty boxcars. Even doubling the number to include species which may have become extinct since Noah's day would only require two hundred and forty boxcars—leaving two hundred and eighty boxcars worth of space for Noah's family and food.

"But what about dinosaurs?" you ask. Due to the biblical account in Job 40 and 41, as well as the discovery of fossilized footprints of dinosaurs adjacent to footprints of men, I believe dinosaurs and men lived simultaneously. If that be so, dinosaurs would have to have been on the ark.

Wouldn't they take up the whole ark?

Not if they were babies.

Genesis 6:22
Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.

What if Noah didn't do all that God commanded him to do? What if he completed the sides of the ark, but didn't put the roof on? If Noah gave it a pretty good shot, but then said, "Oh, well, close enough,"—we wouldn't be here. Noah did *all* that God commanded him. He finished the ark. As great an accomplishment as Noah's was, however, it speaks of a far greater accomplishment by another carpenter—the Carpenter from Galilee, Jesus Christ . . .

- Noah held a hammer in his hand.
- Jesus absorbed the blows of a hammer *upon* His hand.
- Noah built with wood.
- Jesus was pinned to wood.
- Noah constructed a door.
- Jesus said, "I am the Door."
- Noah covered the ark with pitch.
- Jesus covers us with His blood.

May God give us the ability to understand and remember that we are of all people most blessed. No matter what's happening in our lives tonight, we're most blessed because we're saved.



7 Genesis 7:1 (a)
And the LORD said unto Noah, Come . . .

"Come." This is the first time this word is spoken in the Bible. But it is not the last, for from cover to cover the Lord says . . .

> *Come* now, let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.
>
> Isaiah 1:18

> *Come* unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
>
> Matthew 11:28

> Whosoever is thirsty, let him *come* and drink of the water of life freely.
>
> Revelation 22:17

Genesis 7:1 (b)
. . . thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.

What a fabulous thing it is to realize that our Lord is interested in saving not only individuals, but entire families.

Genesis 7:2–6
Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male

and his female. Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth. For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth. And Noah did according unto all that the LORD commanded him. And Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth.

Noah was told to take the animals two by two unless they were clean animals. Of the clean animals, he was told to take seven. Why? Clean beasts would be sacrificed to the Lord. Therefore, if there were only two and one was killed, that specie would become extinct.

Genesis 7:7–9
And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the flood. Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creepeth upon the earth, There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah.

"There went in two and two unto Noah." In other words, Noah didn't have to round up the animals. As He did in the Garden of Eden when He brought the animals to be named by Adam (Genesis 2:19), God brought the animals to Noah. How could the wolf and the pig, the fox and the rabbit come together into the ark? Second Corinthians 5 declares that if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. So somehow in preparation for the new creation which would take place after the Flood, the Lord caused the animals to enter the ark by twos and sevens without antagonizing each other. This shouldn't be that hard to understand, however, since similar miracles occur daily in the animal world . . .

Sitting on ice floes, dressed in identical tuxedoes, millions of Emperor penguins are mirror images of each other. And yet, after she lays her egg and dives into the Arctic waters for a three-month eating binge while the father

incubates the egg, Mama Penguin is able to pick her husband out of the look-alike crowd upon her return.

From the North Pole, terns fly to Hawaii for the winter. But they leave their young behind because the young aren't ready to fly. Several months later, having gained enough strength to make the journey, the young terns fly in formation on their own—without a single travel agent or map—straight to their parents in Hawaii.

I can't explain terns or penguins but I do know this: God can do whatever He chooses to do with the animal kingdom, just as He can do whatever He chooses to do with you and me in changing our beastly behavior.

Genesis 7:10 (a)
And it came to pass after seven days . . .

Evidently it took the animals seven days to make their way into the ark. When they got on board, wouldn't they start fighting? Wouldn't the cats start chasing the mice and the dogs start barking at the cats? God did something when He brought all these different kinds of animals on to the Good Ship Salvation—just like what He does with us. People who normally would be biting and barking and devouring each other begin to realize they have a commonality in Christ and something wonderful happens.

Genesis 7:10 (b)–12
. . . that the waters of the flood were upon the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.

Throughout Scripture, the number forty appears again and again with relation to judgment, trials, difficulty. The rain fell forty days. The Israelites wandered forty years. Jesus was tempted forty days.

Genesis 7:13

In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark;

Noah and his family boarded the ark. But notice: Noah went first.



***For topical study of Genesis 7:13 entitled "Get On Board . . . Your Family Will Follow," turn to page* 36.**

Genesis 7:14–16
They, and every beast after his kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort. And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life. And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the LORD shut him in.

Now the door is shut, and Noah and his family are sealed in the ark. There's no way for them to open the door and escape or change their minds. This speaks to me because the One who said, "I am the Door," lets us know we are likewise secure in our salvation. "You are in My hand," Jesus declares, "and no man can pluck you out" (see John 10:28).

Do I believe in eternal security? Yes, I do. I am absolutely secure, because the Lord has "shut me in." You see, it wasn't Noah who shut the door of the ark, hoping he latched it right and that it would stay shut. *God* shut the door of the ark, just as He seals our salvation on our journey to heaven.

"Wait a minute," you say. "I thought there will be some who won't make it into heaven even though they once made a profession of faith."

That's also true. And I believe the story that most clearly explains this dichotomy deals with a ship—like the ark, and a storm—like the Flood . . .

On a ship bound for Rome, Paul advised the captain to winter in port, due to bad weather. Ignoring Paul's advice, they sailed on—right into a storm

which grew so fierce that the sailors feared for their lives. "Be of good cheer," Paul said. "There stood by me this night an angel of God whose I am, whom I serve, saying, Fear not Paul, thou must be brought before Caesar. And lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee" (Acts 27:22–24).

When the storm continued, some of the sailors decided to bail out. But just as they were about to leave, Paul said, "Except these abide in the ship, you cannot be saved." In other words, "If you choose to go overboard, you'll be wiped out. You are secure, safe, sealed only as long as you stay on board."

Gang, no one can pluck us out of God's hand, but that doesn't mean we can't leave on our own. I'm shut in the Good Ship Salvation because I have no intention of going overboard, of sailing off in another direction. Yes, I sin. But I am determined and decided that I will love the Lord all the days of my life. I pray you are, too.

Genesis 7:17, 18
And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth. And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters.

The waters continued to rise even after the rain stopped because the source of the flood was not only from the skies above, but also from the fountains of the deep, from below the surface of the earth (Genesis 7:11).

Genesis 7:19–23
And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man: All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died. And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the

earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark.

The waters rose fifteen cubits—approximately twenty-four feet—above the highest mountain peaks. Some have suggested that this was not a worldwide flood, but rather a local flood in one section of the world. The problem with this viewpoint is that if it was merely a local flood, why didn't God simply tell Noah to leave the area? The waters were above the mountains—which speaks of a *global* flood. That is why virtually every culture on the face of the earth has stories about a flood, and why fossils of sea life have been found underneath ice packs in the Himalayas.

The idea of a local flood doesn't make sense logically, culturally, paleontologically, and certainly not Scripturally. Peter wrote that, just as the world was wiped out by water in Noah's day, it will be destroyed by fire in the last day (2 Peter 3:7). Thus, if the Flood was local, the end-time fire will be local as well. And that's just not so.

Genesis 7:24
And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days.

Although Noah had heard the voice of the Lord telling him to go into the ark, there is no record of God speaking to Noah while he was on the ark. In fact, he would not hear the voice of God again for a total of three hundred and seventy-seven days.

Maybe that's your situation presently. Maybe three hundred and seventy-seven days ago, the Lord made Himself known to you through a very real revelation of some sort and you said, "Okay, Lord. This is awesome!" And you did what you knew you should do. But now, as you are cooped up and bouncing around on rough seas, you wonder why God isn't speaking.

Folks, all of us wish God would speak more frequently than He does. But unlike some people, God isn't a chatterbox. Why doesn't He speak with greater regularity dealing with specific issues? It is not because He is callous. It's not because He doesn't care. It's because there's a bigger issue at stake . . .

> But we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed . . .
>
> Romans 5:3–5

Bobbing around on the ark, sometimes there's nothing to do but learn patience. Then, when I finally settle down, when I finally quit squawking, God says, "Good. Now you're getting it." And it is then I begin to gain some experience . . .

> *There we were at the county hearings, requesting approval for a new sanctuary from a planning commission which was not very open to our plan. Ahead of us on the agenda, were the Buddhists, who were requesting ap proval for a twelve-bed retreat center in Ashland. When their request was denied, their lawyer immediately said, "Well, what about Applegate Christian Fellowship? They have a one hundred and twenty-bed retreat center."*
>
> *"They have what?" said the surprised commissioners.*
>
> *And as the story unfolded, it came to light that when three separate meetings were called to give us clearance for the retreat center, the commissioners failed to attend. So the decision was left to a single county officer—who approved it!*

I was reminded once again that the Lord came through back then in ways I see only now. Tribulation does indeed work patience, and when I finally calm down, I begin to log some experiences. I begin to see how God works. Experience, then, brings hope—the absolute expectation of coming good. And hope "maketh not ashamed." Looking back over the years, I have discovered that the things I've done, the words I've said, the attitudes I've held of which I'm ashamed are all directly linked to a loss of hope.

I suggest the same is true for you. What you are ashamed of today are the times you thought, "What's the use? Why even bother? Why try so hard to follow the Lord?" That's precisely why hard times—times we feel like we're shut up in an ark with no word from God—are vital to our

development. They make us patient, which gives us experience, which leads to hope.

GET ON BOARD . . . YOUR FAMILY WILL FOLLOW

A Topical Study of GENESIS 7:13

How important is it to read the fine print? Ask Richard Lusk. A Florida newspaper recently carried his story . . .

> The large print on the Sweepstakes mailing screamed, "Richard Lusk has won it all and will definitely receive 12 million dollars!" So Mr. Lusk, age 88, traveled 6,000 miles to insure his winning ticket didn't get lost. The trip was in vain. The fine print told the story. The lead-in to the won-it-all pitch on the American Family Publishers entry said in small print *if you have and return the top winning entry.*
>
> "The thing to do was get the ticket back to them and that's what I was trying to do," Lusk said Friday from his home near Victorville—a desert town east of Los Angeles. After all, he said he received six such announcements and returned all of them, but he still wasn't a millionaire. So he assumed that the tickets were getting lost in the mail. This time he decided to fly across country and deal with it personally. For several years, Lusk had been entering sweepstakes, thinking he had to order magazines with the entry. His family estimates he spent $100,000 on magazine subscriptions. One-quarter of his house is filled with periodicals.
>
> Upon his arrival, Richard Lusk found out about the small print. He returned home and yet mailed in his most recent ticket for the next drawing sometime in November. He still hopes to win the twelve million. "But this is the end of it," he said emphatically. "I've got more magazines than I know what to do with."

Sometimes it's the small print that causes big headaches and heartbreaks. But such is not the case with Scripture, for even the small print carries big blessings—as is true of the text before us. There's something in the small

print of our story, which perhaps you've never seen before, and which I believe will warm your heart.

Expectation in Faith

And Noah was five hundred years old: and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Genesis 5:32

And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.

Genesis 6:3

And Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth.

Genesis 7:6

Putting together the "fine print" of Genesis 5:32, Genesis 6:3, and Genesis 7:6, we know that Noah was four hundred and eighty years old when he began building the ark, five hundred years old when his first son was born, and six hundred years old when the Flood began. This means that when God instructed Noah to make a place for his sons in the ark, He did so twenty years before Noah's first son was even born!

Twenty years before his sons were born, God said to Noah, "You, as the leader of the family, you as the patriarch of the clan, you as the father, Noah, are to expect your sons and their wives to be in the ark—the place of salvation—with you and your wife."

- Could this be why blood on the doorposts during Passover spared not only the one who applied it but the entire house? (Exodus 12:13)
- Could this be why the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius *and his house?* (Acts 10)
- Could this be what Paul meant when he said to the Philippian jailer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved *and thy house*"? (Acts 16:31)

- Could this be what the writer of Hebrews referred to when he wrote: By faith, Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the *saving of his house?* (Hebrews 11:7)

I believe so. Am I suggesting a new doctrine? Dad, get saved and everyone else is included? No, I'm not talking about a doctrine, but about a dynamic. By faith, Noah prepared a place for his family on the ark even before his kids were conceived. So you open your heart, Dad, to the Lord Jesus Christ, and by faith say, "I am believing my sons and daughters and their spouses and our grandchildren will be on board the Good Ship Salvation."

Certainly, each man, woman, and child must make his own decision regarding salvation, but they can do so, seeing the reality of faith lived out before them, just as Noah's family observed him pounding away on the ark day after day.

Exemplification of Faith

When it was time for Noah and his family to enter into the ark, Noah went first. He didn't say, "There's the ark, kids. Go ahead. I'll catch up." No, Noah led the way. He was an example—and that's the key. Mom and Dad, what you are personally will be communicated to your kids individually and it will impact them very powerfully.

Think with me. When David was a young man, he killed a giant. The list of David's "mighty men" in 2 Samuel 23 includes those who also killed giants.

This means that even though most of David's men didn't see him kill Goliath, they became giant-killers simply because of their linkage to David.

Contrast this with Saul. Saul was intimidated by Goliath. In Saul's catalogue of mighty men, not one is a giant-killer because Saul wasn't.

Dad, you be a prayer warrior and watch how your kids will be prayer warriors, too. You witness at work, and watch your kids follow your example at school.

Who we are very definitely affects what our kids become. Therefore, if I am a man who loves the Word, is devoted to prayer, is committed to the kingdom, my kids will be impacted very deeply. Your kids will either be spiritual wimps who get wiped out and are intimidated by the enemy, or they will be giant-killers who overcome and are successful in the things of God.

Mom and Dad, lead the way in the things of God—and your family will follow.



8 Genesis 8:1 (a)
And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark . . .

The idea here is not that God momentarily forgot about Noah, but rather that even though Noah was in the dark, bouncing around in the ark, God remembered him constantly. This is the key that will help you and me in times

when we're bobbing around in a barge on the verge of despair. God remembered Noah, and God remembers us.

I remember God remembers me when I do what Jesus asked of me when He said, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). As I kneel at the Table, as I hold the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, I remember what He did for me. Although, like Noah, I might not understand His silence at any given time, I am reminded at the Table that even if I never hear from Him again, He spoke loudly and clearly for all eternity when He laid down His life for me.

Genesis 8:1 (b)
. . . and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters asswaged.

The Hebrew word translated "wind" is *ruach* which is also translated "spirit." In other words, the world was covered with water and the Spirit moved across the water just as He did at creation (Genesis 1:2), and land became visible. Water being a picture, or type of the Word, it is always when the Spirit moves across the pages of Scripture that my world becomes clear again.

Genesis 8:2–4
The fountains also of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained; And the waters returned from off the earth continually: and after the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters were abated. And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat.

What took place on the seventeenth day of the seventh month?
The Resurrection of Jesus Christ.



For topical study of Genesis 8:4 entitled "Resting on the Resurrection," turn to page **41.**

Genesis 8:5, 6 (a)
And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month: in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, were the tops of the mountains seen. And it came to pass . . .

"It came to pass." Don't you love that phrase? I do—because, like Noah, I have found that the storm, the water, the waves *always* pass.

Genesis 8:6 (b)–9 (a)
. . . at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made: And he sent forth a raven, which went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth. Also he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground; But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth . . .

The dove, a picture of the Holy Spirit, found no place to land. So today, the Holy Spirit is looking for people like you and me to land upon, to empower. Is there room in our lives for Him? Second Chronicles 16:9 tells us the eyes of the Lord go throughout the earth, looking for a person in whom He might show Himself strong. Is there a place in this congregation corporately and in our hearts individually wherein that might happen?

Genesis 8:9 (b)
. . . then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark.

A raven and a dove were released from the ark. Noah reached out for the dove.

For topical study of Genesis 8:9 entitled "Reach Out and Touch the One," turn to page **45.**

Genesis 8:10–12
And he stayed yet other seven days; and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf pluckt off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth. And he stayed yet other seven days; and sent forth the dove; which returned not again unto him any more.

The third time the dove was released, it stayed away, signaling to Noah the dawn of a new beginning. In this, I see a powerful prophetic portrait . . .

Due to the fact that in God's economy, one day is as 1,000 years, and 1,000 years is as a day (2 Peter 3:8), Jesus rose again from the dead 2,000 years—or "two days"—ago. In Hosea 6, the nation of Israel cries out collectively, "We've been smitten and torn because we've rejected the Lord. But after two days He will revive us." After being smitten for 2,000 years, the Jews are back in their homeland and they're about to be revived spiritually, for in the third Millennium after Christ's death—or the "third day" of God's calendar—a new beginning will dawn—when the repercussions of sin will be reversed, when the lion will lie down by the lamb, when men will study war no more, when Jesus Christ will rule and reign in Jerusalem.

Genesis 8:13
And it came to pass in the six hundredth and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth: and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry.

Noah saw the new world, the rejuvenated earth, in the first year, in the first month, on the first day of the seventh century of his life. The number seven is significant in Scripture, for it speaks of completion, as portrayed, for example, by the Sabbath rest and by the freeing of slaves every seventh year (Exodus 21:2).

According to the biblical account, Adam was on the scene around the year 4000 B.C., which means there have been 6,000 years of human history, or, in God's economy, "six days" (2 Peter 3:8). This means in the year 2,000, we enter into the 7,000th year, or "seventh day" of human history—the day of rest, the day of freedom from the slavery of sin and depravity, the day of the completion of human history.

Genesis 8:14, 15 (a)
And in the second month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dried. And God spake unto Noah . . .

According to the previous verse, Noah knew the ground was dry when the dove did not return. Why did Noah remain in the ark? After all, he had been cooped up for 377 days with a boatload of seasick animals. Why didn't he climb out the window the first chance he got? I believe it was because Noah experienced the same thing you have experienced when you've been in troubled waters. Noah sensed the unmistakable presence of God; and He wasn't about to leave it until God told him to do so.

Genesis 8:15 (b), 16 (a)
. . . saying, Go . . .

In chapter 7, God had said, "Come." Here in chapter 8, He says, "Go." That's always the way it is. God calls us to come unto Him, (Matthew 11:28). And then He says, "Now that you've been filled, now that you've taken in, there's work for you to do. Go into all the world" (see Matthew 28:19).

Genesis 8:16 (b)–19
. . . forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee. Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth. And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him: Every beast, every creeping thing, and

every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark.

At this point, if I were Noah, I would have thought, "Get the Frisbee, grab the picnic baskets. This is great!" But even though God didn't tell him what to do, that's not what Noah did . . .

Genesis 8:20 (a)
And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD . . .

The first thing Noah did was build an altar. I know Noah had enjoyed the presence of God in the ark because he emerged from the ark an "altared" man.

Genesis 8:20 (b)
. . . and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

"Noah, what are you doing?" the world would say. "There's a whole planet to repopulate, and you're burning up limited, valuable resources. It's a waste, Noah. Be practical."

Whenever I find myself thinking this, I realize I'm in very, very bad company . . .

A woman poured an alabaster box full of perfume upon Jesus. "Wait a minute," said Judas. "That's a waste of resources. The poor could be helped with that money."

"What she has done, she has done unto Me," said Jesus (Matthew 26:12).

And in this I begin to understand that God values worship more than work.

"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve," declared Jesus (Matthew 4:10). Did you notice the order? Worship comes first, service second. You might not be able to be a missionary in Africa, an evangelist in a big stadium, or a singer on the radio—but every single person

can do that which most blesses God, for the highest priority of ministry is not work, but worship.

Some of us will go home tonight and worship God. We'll wake in the morning and worship the Lord. It's the highest, most precious ministry you will ever perform. Worship will bless you the most, and honor God in the greatest way. Worship will "altar" your life—it will change who you are.

Genesis 8:21, 22
And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

> And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.
>
> Genesis 6:5–7

> And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth . . .
>
> Genesis 8:21

There seems to be a contradiction here. Is God being fickle?

No. You see, even though the external flood couldn't deal with the internal depravity of man, the fragrance of Noah's sacrifice—a sweet-smelling savor unto the Lord—overpowered the stench of sin. A burnt offering was made, and that made all the difference.

Every Old Testament sacrifice points to and speaks of Jesus Christ—the ultimate sacrifice, the Lamb of God slaughtered on the Cross for the sin of the world. It's the fragrance of the work of Christ that overrides the stench of my depravity. The Flood didn't clean up culture. The Flood didn't solve the problem. No, it was the sacrifice that caused God to say, "Neither will I again smite every living thing."

You might feel terrible tonight. You might feel like you've blown it badly. But even on your drive home you can worship God and He will smell a sweet savor. He knows our imaginations are evil continually, yet He still finds sacrifice sweet. God doesn't command you to worship Him tonight, but some of you will. He won't command you to worship Him tomorrow, but some of you will. And in so doing, you'll bless Him.

RESTING ON THE RESURRECTION

A Topical Study of GENESIS 8:4

In the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on a mountain named Ararat, the ark came to rest. The seventh month would become the first month in the Hebrew religious calendar when the Jews were delivered from their Egyptian bondage (Exodus 12:1–5). And it was on the fourteenth day of the first month—Passover—when Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God was nailed to a cross.

Maybe now you're beginning to see the significance of the text before us. But wait. The ark rested on the seventeenth day—that's three days *after* Passover. What took place three days after Jesus was crucified? He rose again. Therefore, the ark rested on the mountain the very day Christ would rise from the dead.

The Fact of the Resurrection

Just as the ark rested on Resurrection Day, so too, our faith rests on the fact of the Resurrection. Perhaps you find yourself feeling confused when people come your way, saying, "We love the teachings of Jesus. But you must understand that there are some good people in the Mormon church down the road. And there are some wonderful people in Ashland who follow Tao. You can't just wipe them out and say they're going to burn in hell. And what about Islam? The very word means Submission. Or the Buddhist who is committed to breaking free of his selfish desires? You can't just write them all off."

"Hmm," we say. "These *are* good people," as we begin to bob up and down on the sea of confusion. Our ark comes to rest, however, when we remember one thing: Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14:6).

"We don't believe You," countered the Pharisees. "Show us a sign."

"One sign I will give to you," Jesus said. "Even as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days, so shall the Son of man be in the center of the earth," speaking of His burial and resurrection (Matthew 12:40).

Our faith rests on the fact of the Resurrection. If Christ has not risen, then we are, as Paul said, most miserable (1 Corinthians 15:19). We don't know what to say to the Taoist, to the Mormon, to the Buddhist. If Christ did not rise from the dead, we do not know if we're headed in the right direction. But if, on the other hand, He did rise from the dead, He did something no one else in history has ever done. The Resurrection is conclusive proof that we are on the right track. Our ship of faith rests on the mountain of the Resurrection.

I am in Israel almost every year. Every time I go, I check the tomb. And guess what. It's empty.

"That *sounds* good," says the scoffer, "but maybe it's the wrong tomb."

Believe me, when word started spreading that Christ had risen, the enemies of Jesus would have searched frantically to make sure that the empty tomb was not a case of mistaken identity. You see, the leaders of Judaism desperately desired to see Christianity wiped out. All they would have had to do would be to say to the Christians, "Here's the body of this One who

claimed to be the exclusive Way to heaven. Here's proof He couldn't validate His claim." But they didn't.

"Well, maybe the disciples stole His body to perpetuate the myth of a resurrected Jesus," claims the cynic.

Peter was crucified upside down. Thomas was speared in the back. James was sawn in half. Matthew's brains were beaten out with a club. With the exception of John—who was banished to the isle of Patmos after an unsuccessful attempt to boil him in oil—each of the disciples died a tortuous death. To believe that eleven men would have allowed their wives and children to be martyred, and their own bodies slaughtered to propagate what they knew to be a lie requires an incredible leap of faith.

"It was the Romans who took the body," declares the doubter.

Christianity was such a threat to the Roman Empire that they launched ten waves of persecution in which sixty million Christians were killed. Indeed, Christianity would eventually cause the Empire to split in two—east and west—and ultimately fall. Certainly the Romans didn't have the body, for producing it would have saved their Empire.

"No one stole the body because Jesus didn't really die," muses the mocker. "One of the disciples put some drugs in the vinegar that was lifted up to Jesus as He hung on the Cross, which caused Him to go into a coma. After the cool air of the tomb revived Him, He appeared as though He had resurrected."

The scourging Jesus suffered before His Crucifixion was in itself enough to kill a man. Jesus went on, however, to endure spikes through His hands and feet and a spear thrust in His side. Then He was put in a tomb for three days without food, water, or medical attention. To suggest He then stood up, single-handedly rolled away a two-ton stone, and took on the one hundred Roman soldiers guarding His tomb requires infinitely more faith than I could possible muster.

He who studies the Resurrection honestly and intellectually must rest finally on the mountain of evidence that says, "He is risen."

The Act of the Resurrection

The act of the Resurrection impacts my entire understanding of spirituality and Christianity. Paul put it this way:

> *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*
>
> Galatians 2:20

The Resurrection means that Christ lives *in* you. It's not imitation—trying to be a "good little Christian boy or girl." It's impartation . . .

A film loop I watched constantly as a high-school discus-thrower was the world-record throw of four-time Olympian Al Oerter. Over and over, I'd watch him drive his hip, thrust his shoulder, cock his arm, steady his grip, and make the toss. Then I'd go out to the rink and I'd try to do it all just like Al. But although I knew exactly what to do, did I ever do it like he did? I didn't even come close.

And that's the problem with religion and philosophy. They tell you what to do—but fail to give you the power to do it. Not so with Christianity. If Al Oerter could have squeezed into my body and thrown the discus through me, I could have set world records just like he did. Because Jesus is risen, His Spirit lives *in* me. It's not a matter of me trying to figure out what to do, reading certain books, going to certain seminars, listening to certain tapes. It's a matter of Him living in me, giving me the power to do what the Word tells me to do.

The Pact of the Resurrection

"Because I live, you shall live also," declared Jesus. "It's a pact I'm making with you." If Christ did not rise, we would have no hope of eternal life ourselves. But because He lives, we shall as well.

Jesus is risen, and He is returning. And while that gives me great peace, it also stirs me. You see, Peter tells us that when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, we will receive a crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4). The events in the Middle East indicate to me that Jesus' coming is very near. And even if it's not as soon as I think it's going to be, life goes by oh, so rapidly. Very soon I'm going to face Jesus personally. I will stand before the Chief Shepherd and give an account for what I did with all that He gave me so graciously. So will you.

God has given you money, talents, time, ability, freedom, health, opportunity, calling. He's given you vision, direction, instruction. And, because He lives within you, He's given you power. One day, you will give an account of what you did with the graces and gifts He gave you.

"I hear what you're saying," you might be thinking. "But I'm still young. As soon as I get married, I'll serve Jesus."

So you get married, and then not too much later, you hear yourself saying, "We're really serious about serving Jesus. But right now, we've got a home to build and diapers to change. When our kids are in elementary school, then we'll get busy and serve the Lord."

But with elementary school comes Cub Scouts, piano lessons, and Little League. And church gets shoved down further because, after all, who's going to cheer junior on if you're not there? So he misses Sunday school—he's learning to hit a curve ball!

Then you say, "As soon as our kids are out of the house, we're going to get real serious about serving God."

But then a funny thing happens. I have discovered that right about the time the kids leave is the time people start to remodel their houses.

Gang, there will never be a day easier than this one for you to say, "I will seek first the kingdom."

• May the fact of the Resurrection strengthen your faith.
• May the act of the Resurrection empower your life.
• May the pact of the Resurrection stir your heart.

In Jesus' name.

REACH OUT AND TOUCH THE ONE

A Topical Study of GENESIS 8:9

Most of us need pictures and stories to understand theology. I know I do. The text before us provides just such a picture, for it pointedly and powerfully portrays what it means to be empowered by the Spirit . . .

The first animal to leave the ark was a raven—a black bird that goes "to and fro" eating the carcasses of dead animals.

When Satan came before the Lord one day in heaven, the Lord said, "Where have you been?"

"I've been going to and fro," said Satan—cruising around just like the raven (Job 1:6, 7).

Peter tells us Satan is always on the lookout for those whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). But the good news is that as the raven circled, Noah released a dove—which, throughout Scripture, speaks of the Holy Spirit.

Why?

The dove is the purest of all birds, for not only is it white in color—but it secretes more dirt-repelling oil on its feathers than any other flying bird. The dove is also sensitive because it is one of few animals who mates for life. The dove is also a symbol of peace because, unlike vultures or buzzards, doves vacate places where there is frenzy or fighting.

As Noah saw the dove circling overhead, he could have said, "If the dove wants to land on me, he can. I'm open." But that's not what he did. Noah extended his hand, grabbed the dove, and brought it in.

So often, with regard to the power and presence of the Spirit, people say, "If the Holy Spirit wants to bless me and empower me, I'm open." But that kind of passivity will never bring the potency of the Spirit in its greatest possible degree. If you want to be empowered by the Spirit, you cannot be passive about the work of the Spirit any more than you were passive about the work of salvation.

This is where so many people err. You see, God is looking for those who will partner with Him rather than merely being passive about Him. Noah

didn't simply fold his arms and watch. He stretched forth his hand and reached.

"Wait a minute," you might be saying. "I'm born again, therefore I already have the Spirit" (Romans 8:9).

That's true. The moment you were born again; the Spirit came in you. You've got the Spirit. The question is: Does the Spirit have you? Jesus taught us there are three different relationships a person can have with the Holy Spirit . . .

The Spirit *with* You

> *Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you . . .*
>
> John 14:17 (a)

The first relationship a person has with the Spirit is "with" you. The Greek word translated "with" is *para,* which means "alongside of." You wouldn't be here today, you would never have opened your heart to Jesus had not the Holy Spirit come alongside you and whispered in your heart, "You need to become a Christian. You need to open your heart to Jesus." Every person has the Spirit *with* them at some point in their life.

The Spirit *in* You

. . . and shall be in you.

John 14:17 (b)

Once you become a believer, the Holy Spirit comes *in* you. When did this happen to the disciples? After Jesus had risen from the dead, He breathed on His disciples and said, “Receive ye the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). At that point, they were born again, and the Spirit came *in* them.

The Spirit *upon* You

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you . . .

Acts 1:8 (a)

People refer to the baptism in the Spirit, the fullness of the Spirit, or the empowering of the Spirit. The Bible calls this the "coming upon" of the Spirit. Whenever the Spirit of God came upon a man in both the Old and New Testaments, it was always to empower him for service, to dynamically impact him for ministry.

How does this happen?

By reaching out, just as Noah did . . .

Reach Out in Faith

> *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*
>
> Matthew 5:6

Have you hungered and thirsted for righteousness? Have you hungered and thirsted for the "coming upon" of the Spirit? Jesus said if we being evil know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Ghost to them that ask (Matthew 7:11). If you want to be filled with the Spirit, reach out with a faith that's based upon God's promises.

Reach Out with Hope

> *Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ . . .*
>
> Titus 2:13 (a)

The biblical definition of hope is "the absolute expectation of coming good." What does this mean practically? It means I reach out in faith, with hope, *expecting* the Lord will answer. It might take some time. After all, the disciples sought the Lord for ten days before the mighty rushing wind of the Spirit filled their upper room (Acts 2:2).

Am I saying we have to wait for ten days? No. We no longer have to wait *for* the Spirit, because the Spirit was given on the Day of Pentecost. But we do wait *on* the Spirit. Isaiah said those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength (Isaiah 40:31). Why would He have us wait on Him? I suggest one reason is that although many of us want to be filled, the real issue is that we first must be emptied—of sin.

You see, if the Lord filled me with His Spirit in my sinful condition, it would be detrimental because it would justify my carnality. Consequently, the Lord often says, "I want you to wait on Me and allow Me to search your heart, to show you that which needs to be adjusted. It might take ten days, ten weeks, or ten months. Wait on Me."

People wait for days to get tickets to a Rolling Stones concert, but when it comes to the empowering of the Holy Ghost, we say, "Okay, Lord, I'm going to ask You for it. You've got fifteen seconds, and if it doesn't happen, then I guess it's not for me." How little we know of waiting on the Lord.

Reach Out for Love

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

1 Corinthians 13:1

First Corinthians 12 and 14 deal with the gifts and workings of the Holy Spirit. First Corinthians 13—the definition of love—appears right in the middle of Paul's discussion of the Spirit because love is the center of it all. Love is the key. That's what Jesus meant when He said, "The Spirit is in you. Now go to Jerusalem and wait for the Spirit to come upon you," (see Acts 1:4).

Jerusalem? The collective cry of Jerusalem had been, "Away with Him. Let His blood be upon our heads. Crucify Him." For Jesus to pour out His Spirit at Jerusalem doesn't make sense. For Him to pour out His wrath at Jerusalem—that makes sense. For Him to pour out His judgment at Jerusalem—that's understandable. But to pour out His Spirit in the place that wanted nothing to do with Him, that turned its back on Him, that killed Him? I would have thought the Lord would blast Jerusalem. Instead He blessed Jerusalem.

If you want to be filled with the Holy Ghost, reach out in faith, with hope, for love. Love the person who really messed up, who let you down, who fired you unfairly. Who is your Jerusalem? Who has wronged you, hurt you, offended you? Do good to him, bless her, love them. And as you do, you'll find that the Spirit of God will begin to flow through you. You'll be filled and anointed and empowered whenever you choose to love your Jerusalem. When you choose to love the wife who left you, the child who rejected you, the boss who hurt you, you will be empowered with the Spirit of God. I guarantee it. It all starts in Jerusalem.



9 Genesis 9:1 (a)
And God blessed Noah . . .

God blessed Noah; for, in building an altar, Noah had blessed God. So, if you choose to bless the Lord by sacrificing to Him, like Noah, you will be blessed, for God will be a debtor to no man. You will always get back more than you give.

Genesis 9:1 (b), 2
. . . and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered.

Noah, here, is essentially told to start over. Even as God had initially told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, Noah and his sons and their wives are hearing the same command. This time, however, earth is not paradise, but neither is it perdition. Due to man's perpetual propensity to sin, our planet is not what it was in Adam's day—but neither is it as bad as it could have been.

I say this to remind you that, although you may not think your life is going great, it's going a whole lot better than you deserve. We deserve to be frying in hell. God is so *good* to us. Anything we have, everything we enjoy is due to His mercy and kindness. We're headed for heaven, where all things are right and perfect. Yet even in the meantime, we have so much today for which to be thankful.

The text before us is known as the Noahic covenant. A covenant is a sovereign proclamation from the lips of God that puts Him into a relationship of responsibility with a man, a family, or a nation. Such proclamations are usually—but not always—unconditional. That is, they're God saying, "This is what I'm going to do, regardless of what you do." In one notable exception, the covenant is conditional. A conditional covenant is God saying, "I'm going to do this if you do your part, too."

There are essentially eight covenants in Scripture—each of which further unfolds the drama of the redemption of humanity . . .

- The Edenic Covenant (Genesis 2). This is when God sovereignly said to Adam, "The Garden of Eden is for you to enjoy. Except for the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, eat freely and enjoy completely."
- The Adamic Covenant (Genesis 3). This is the covenant made to Adam after he had fallen into sin. In it, God declares man would work by the sweat of his brow, and woman would give birth in pain. But it also contains great hope in that it promises a Savior.
- The Noahic Covenant (Genesis 9).
- The Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12). This is the covenant wherein God declares that all nations would be blessed through Abraham and his seed—that Seed, of course, being Jesus.
- Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 20) Also known as the Law, the Mosaic covenant is the one covenant that is conditional. Over and over, God says, "You'll be blessed if you do these things, cursed if you don't."
- Palestinian Covenant (Deuteronomy 30) In the Palestinian covenant, God declares that, though they would be driven out of their land, God would re-gather His people and restore to them perpetual ownership of the land of Israel.
- Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7) This is the covenant wherein God promised that from David would come a Ruler who would reign forever and ever—again, pointing to the Son of David, Jesus Christ.
- The New Covenant (Hebrews 8) In the new covenant, God declares, "No longer will My will be external, written on stone—but internal, written in hearts." This is why when He broke bread with His disciples right before His death, Jesus said, "This is the blood of the new covenant. My Spirit shall reside in you, give direction to you, and provide power for you to be the kind of people I want you to be."

The Noahic covenant, as seen in the text before us, is comprised of three basic components: Diet, Discipline, and Declaration . . .

Genesis 9:3, 4
Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life

thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.

Following the Flood, man would no longer be a vegetarian. Why? It wasn't that God said, "You guys have gone without meat long enough." No, there are those who believe that history indicates and Scripture hints that meat was necessary not only for flavor, but to repel the demonic entities and spirits which had interacted with women previously (Genesis 6:2). I'm not saying if you're a vegetarian, you'll be inflicted by demons. I am suggesting, however, that meat has a way of repelling those forces. Presently, cultures that are heavily influenced by demonic religious thought, such as the Hindus in India, embrace vegetarianism. Prophetically, in the last days, there shall be those who fall away from the faith, who fall prey to "seducing spirits" that forbid them from eating meat (1 Timothy 4:1–3).

Scripture does not prioritize nor point to a vegetarian diet as being more spiritual, deeper, better. In fact, after Jesus died for our sins, rose again, and had a glorified body, He appears to the disciples, saying, "Have you any meat?" (Luke 24:41). Don't let anyone tell you that to be a vegetarian is to be more spiritual, for, if anything, Scripture points in the opposite direction.

Genesis 9:5–7
And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man. And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein.

The second element of the Noahic covenant is Discipline. God declares that if a man kills another, humanity is required to deal with it with great severity because, man being made in God's image, the murder of a man is ultimately a strike at God Himself. Thus, the foundation of human government was laid.

There are three institutions God establishes: the family, the church, and government. And the basis of human government is capital punishment—no small controversy in our culture today. Scholars debate it. Philosophers argue it. Politicians waffle back and forth on it. But the average person

intuitively, innately understands that in a world where man's imagination is evil continually, capital punishment does indeed deter chaos. That is why presently the fastest growing religion in Western culture is Islam—with mosques outnumbering churches in the city of London.

Moving away from capital punishment as our country has done has a domino effect on our entire culture. It used to be that if a man committed first-degree murder, he was sent to his eternal destiny. That meant the rapist served fifteen to twenty years in prison, the shoplifter ten years. But now with the first-degree murderer serving fifteen years in prison, the rapist serves five and the shoplifter six months. As the punishment for crime is diminished, society begins to discover that crime *does* pay—and things begin to go terribly awry.

Following the Flood, at the outset of recreated history, God gave man the obligation and responsibility of governing himself, predicated upon the foundational understanding that he who commits murder must himself be put to death.

"But that's an Old Testament principle," you protest.

Turn to the New Testament.

> For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.
>
> Romans 13:3, 4

The phrase, "execute wrath," is understood by Greek scholars and Bible teachers to mean that the law enforcement system is in place to execute capital punishment upon those who deserve it. Thus, capital punishment is a New Testament concept as well as an Old Testament precept.

"Well, Jesus didn't believe in capital punishment," you argue. "After all, He put a stop to those who were trying to stone the woman taken in adultery in John 8."

Wait a minute. The Law of Moses declared that if a person was caught in adultery, both the man and the woman were to be stoned. So Jesus said that day, "Go ahead. But let he who is without sin cast the first stone." Jesus knew these men weren't interested in justice because had they been seeking justice, they would have brought the woman's partner as well as the woman. Nevertheless, even though He knew the mob wasn't interested in justice, Jesus didn't dismiss capital punishment as seen in the Law.

Genesis 9:8–17
And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.

The third and final element of the Noahic covenant is Declaration. God declared that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood, and that He would underscore His commitment with a rainbow. So if you see the rainbow, the covenant still applies.

What is a rainbow? It's a mixture of storm and sunshine. So often you see a rainbow—the emblem of God's grace and glory throughout Scripture—when you're coming out of a storm. The Son breaks through and there's a beauty, a reminder of God's presence even in the remnants of the storm.

The bow is emblematic of the bow used by an archer, without an arrow. The rabbis say the reason the bow is empty is because the arrow has already been shot, never again to be pointed in the direction of humanity. No matter what scientists say about global warming or rising oceans, a flood will not destroy the world because that particular arrow has already been shot.

Genesis 9:18–21
And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham is the father of Canaan. These are the three sons of Noah: and of them was the whole earth overspread. And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.

It's when things are going well that we must be especially careful. When the storms are brewing, when trials are coming, we have a tendency to pray and seek the Lord. But when things are on "automatic pilot" we, like Noah, often fall into trouble.

Genesis 9:22, 23
And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.

Ham exposed his father's nakedness. Shem and Japheth, however, chose a much better way.

For topical study of Genesis 9:23 entitled "A Loving Covering," turn to page **51.**

Genesis 9:24, 25
And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

Ham was the one who exposed his dad's sin. Yet it would be his son, Canaan, who would experience the repercussions. We see the same thing today when the son of an alcoholic grows up to be an alcoholic himself, when the son of a child abuser grows up to, himself, abuse children. This is one of the great tragedies of sin. Toss a pebble into a pond, and the circles will grow ever wider. The same is true of sin. The consequences and ramifications grow to include many more people than we ever guess.

Genesis 9:26 (a)
And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem . . .

Shem's name means "Glory." Shem is the father of the Semitic people—the Jews and Arabs. They settled primarily in the Middle East. Blessed be the Lord God of Shem, indeed, for the God of Shem is the True and Living God.

Genesis 9:26 (b)
. . . and Canaan shall be his servant.

Depending on the lexicon used, Ham's name means either "black" or "hot." The Hamitic people settled in Africa. You may have heard sermons to the effect that the reason the people of Africa have been enslaved is due to Ham's sin and subsequent curse. No. Ham was not cursed. It was his son, Canaan, who was cursed. Canaan was the father of the Canaanites, a people so perverted and polluted that God ordered their annihilation in order to put them out of their misery.

Genesis 9:27–29

God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years: and he died.

The family of Japheth, whose name means "Ruler," settled in Europe. For centuries, the European people were considered uncouth and primitive. But as history unfolded, the sons of Japheth would ultimately become the geo-political rulers of the world. Yet Japheth would nonetheless dwell in the tents of Shem. That is, his covering would come not from his own pagan deities which the Europeans worshiped for centuries—but from the True and Living God of Shem.

A LOVING COVERING

A Topical Study of GENESIS 9:23

The storm had passed. After being a carpenter for one hundred years, pounding away on the ark; after being a preacher, warning the people of judgment; after being a sailor for 377 days, sailing atop the Flood—Noah changes occupations. He becomes a farmer, a "husbandman" or, literally, "a man of the earth." And in so doing, he will indeed become quite earthy . . .

The Reality of Noah's Sins

Evidently, after sampling some of the fruit of his vines, Noah was drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. The original language makes it clear that his nakedness was related to immorality of some sort.

How could this be? After all, Noah was the one who preached for one hundred years to the whole world. Noah was the one who built the ark, and who didn't complain when he was sealed for 377 days within a floating zoo. Noah was the one who built an altar, who blessed God, who found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

When he was going through challenging times, difficult days, thundering storms, Noah walked with God. But when things became normal, he became vulnerable. And the same is true with us. It's when everything is going well, when our vines are growing, when our job is going fine, when life is on automatic pilot, that we are in danger. No longer are we on guard, no longer are we dependent upon the Lord or desperately crying out to Him. Such is what happened to Noah. He got drunk and sinned greatly.

Regardless of your stand on social drinking, this is without controversy for anyone who claims to be a believer: From Genesis through Revelation, drunkenness is absolutely forbidden. "Getting high" or "getting a buzz" is absolutely forbidden. Why? Is it because God is mean? No. It's because when a person gets drunk, like Noah, he is exposed. You see, exposure can happen in all sorts of ways. Drunk people say things they wish they wouldn't have said; they get involved in discussions which never should have started; they do things they wish they never had done. Drunkenness leads to exposure in one way or another.

In the course of twenty years in ministry, I've talked with people whose hearts were broken because they were involved in immoral behavior brought on by drinking. When people drink, their thinking becomes fuzzy and there will be a vulnerability to get involved in stuff they wouldn't have otherwise. Such was the reality of Noah's sin.

The Reaction of Noah's Sons

Ham saw his father's nakedness. That's always the way it is, for whether it's regarding our birth family or our church family, those closest to us are those who will see our weaknesses. Why Ham talked about his father's nakedness, I do not know—just as I don't know why we are so eager to talk about one another's weaknesses. But this I do know: Shem and Japheth wouldn't look at their father's nakedness themselves. Why did they stretch a garment between them? Because they didn't want anyone outside the tent to look in and see their dad's nakedness. They didn't want those outside of the tent to be distracted by their father's condition.

Folks, people are looking for reasons not to believe our message of hope and salvation. And hearing us talk about each other's weaknesses gives them reason not to come in and join us.

But not only did Shem and Japheth keep others from viewing their father's nakedness—they did not look upon it themselves.

Why?

Because even though I know someone may be forgiven, even though I know sin is common to everyone, looking at someone's sin, listening to reports of someone's iniquity taints the way I view him in the future. You see, if you come home from work upset with your boss and you start complaining and exposing his mistakes and weakness to your wife, although you end up feeling much better, your wife stores that information away. And the next time she sees your boss, there are daggers in her eyes, and you wonder why she no longer wants to go to the company picnic. If I listen to reports of the sin or iniquity of another, it will taint the way I view that person. Exposure is damaging, destructive, and divisive.

Shouldn't we talk about problems? If it's *your* problem, yes. But if it's someone else's problem, someone else's sin, someone else's weakness, nakedness, or vulnerability, follow Shem and Japheth's example: Walk in backwards and conceal it from others. Not only will this protect the one who sins, but it will protect you as well, for the person who talks to you about someone else will invariably also talk to someone else about you.

How do I know this?

Because Paul warns, “Take heed that you do not bite and devour one another because you will be consumed one of another. On the other hand,” Paul continues, “the entire law is fulfilled in the one word: love” (Galatians 5:14, 15).

The Reason for Noah's Sayings

When Noah awoke from his drunken state, he knew what Ham had done and cursed Ham's son. No doubt Ham thought, "I've got big shoulders. I can handle the repercussions of my sin." Unbeknownst to him, however, was the fact that the repercussions didn't fall on him. They fell upon his son. How bad were the repercussions? The Canaanites were the worst culture in the history of the world. Totally immoral and completely perverted, they were eventually absolutely annihilated.

Dad and Mom, if we sin we must not think we alone will pay the price. Sin doesn't work that way. The consequences will often come in ways that will break your heart as they relate to your family. The children of parents who expose the weaknesses of bosses and neighbors, sisters and brothers; of parents who are dour and sour and critical, grow up not wanting to go to church, bitter about the things of God, and uninterested in the Bible.

So what are we to do?

We are to say, "I've been forgiven of so much that I will not talk about the weakness of my boss, my neighbor, my pastor, the person sitting next to me, my friends, or my enemies. I will not speak or listen to negativity." Every one of us will fail at some point or another. But if you choose today to be like Shem and Japheth—to cover the nakedness of others—you will be likewise covered when you fail.

> *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*
>
> Luke 6:36–38

Maybe you've heard this passage quoted by a preacher, saying, "Support my ministry financially, and watch and see how goodness will be heaped

upon you in return." However, this verse has nothing to do with giving money, and everything to do with showing mercy. Jesus says we will be recipients of mercy, forgiveness, and compassion to the degree we forgive others. Therefore, may we be like Shem and Japheth. May we cover rather than expose the nakedness of others, for love covers a multitude of sins.



10 The Flood is over. Earth is being repopulated. And in chapter 10, we come to what is known as the Table of Nations—the beginning point of an understanding of world history and anthropology . . .

Genesis 10:1
Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood.

From the following sixty descendants of the three sons of Noah will come all of the world's races and language groups.

Genesis 10:2 (a)
The sons of Japheth; Gomer . . .

Gomer is present-day Germany.

Genesis 10:2 (b)
. . . and Magog . . .

Magog is present-day Russia. According to famed historian, Herodotus, ancient peoples universally recognized Russia as Magog. Even the Great Wall of China, erected to keep out the Russians, is called the Wall of Magog by the Chinese people. Magog will come into play in a key prophetic event—the invasion from the North into Israel (Ezekiel 38, 39).

Genesis 10:2 (c)
. . . and Madai . . .

Madai refers to the Medes and the Persians—present-day Iran. The reason Iraq and Iran are always at odds historically is because Iraq is peopled by Arabs—descendants of Shem, while Iran is peopled by Persians—descendants of Japheth.

Genesis 10:2 (d)
. . . and Javan . . .

Javan is present-day Greece.

Genesis 10:2 (e)
. . . and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras.

Meshech is the ancient name for Moscow.

Genesis 10:3 (a)
And the sons of Gomer; Ashkenaz . . .

Ashkenaz is in the area of present-day Eastern Germany and Eastern Europe. The Jewish people are divided into two groups: the Ashkenazi Jews and the Sephardic Jews. In A.D. 70, when the Romans crushed the nation of Israel, a great number of the Jewish people settled in Germany and Eastern Europe. These are the Ashkenazi Jews. The Sephardic Jews settled in the Mediterranean region. The Ashkenazi Jew has traditionally been the power broker, resulting in ethnic tension between the two groups.

Genesis 10:3 (b)
. . . and Riphath, and Togarmah.

The descendants of Togarmah settle in Turkey and are the descendants of Japheth, which, again, explains the political tension between Turkey and Israel.

Genesis 10:4, 5
And the sons of Javan; Elishah, and Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their

lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations.

Tarshish is the area of either Spain or England. Although there is debate, most scholars believe it refers to present-day Spain. You might recall Tarshish as the intended destination of a certain Hebrew prophet who had a whale of a time getting there.

Genesis 10:6
And the sons of Ham; Cush, and Mizraim, and Phut, and Canaan.

The Hamitic people settled primarily in the region of Africa, with some in the Middle East. Cush settled in the area of the Nile, present-day Ethiopia. Those who descend from Cush in the Bible are talked about as those who have very distinctive skin (Jeremiah 3:23), and being very tall (Isaiah 45:14). Mizraim is the area of Egypt. Phut is present-day Libya. Canaan is present-day Israel. Some of the descendants of Ham, the Canaanites, would settle in that region and would ultimately have to be exterminated because of their perpetual pollution and perversion—but not before God gave them four centuries to repent.

Genesis 10:7
And the sons of Cush; Seba, and Havilah, and Sabtah, and Raamah, and Sabtecha: and the sons of Raamah; Sheba, and Dedan.

Sheba and Dedan is present-day Saudi Arabia. Sheba and Dedan will pop up in Scripture again and again, especially in relation to Ezekiel 38, 39.

Genesis 10:8 (a)
And Cush begat Nimrod . . .

The name, *Nimrod,* literally means "rebel." The quintessential rebel, Nimrod was a prototype of the ultimate rebel—antichrist. Based out of the revived Roman Empire—or the European Union—antichrist will head a one-

world government and seek to establish a one-world religion. He will be powerful, charismatic, and amazingly persuasive.

Genesis 10:8 (b)
. . . he began to be a mighty one in the earth.

Like the rebel of whom he is a prototype, the language here indicates that Nimrod did things that amazed and confounded people.

Genesis 10:9
He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD.

Newer versions properly render this verse, "He was a mighty hunter *against* the Lord." Nimrod was a mighty, powerful rebel who hunted souls and ripped people off.

Genesis 10:10
And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

Originally Babel was *Bab-El,* which means "Gateway to God." As the story unfolds, however, Babel will come to mean "confusion."

Genesis 10:11
Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah.

This verse literally begins, "*He* went out . . ." Who went out? Nimrod.

Nimrod not only founded Babylon, but he also is the founding father of the Assyrian Empire, whose capital was Nineveh. It was the Assyrians who carried away the ten northern tribes of Israel into captivity in 722 B.C. And it was the Babylonians who destroyed Jerusalem one hundred and thirty-six years later in 586. Babylon and Assyria both figure greatly in Bible history—and both were founded by a rebel named Nimrod.

Genesis 10:12–14
And Resen between Nineveh and Calah: the same is a great city. And Mizraim begat Ludim, and Anamim, and Lehabim, and Naphtuhim, And Pathrusim, and Casluhim, (out of whom came Philistim,) and Caphtorim.

"Philistim" brings to mind a certain Philistine named Goliath.

Genesis 10:15–17
And Canaan begat Sidon his firstborn, and Heth, And the Jebusite, and the Amorite, and the Girgasite, And the Hivite, and the Arkite, and the Sinite,

Sino refers to China. The Chinese, Japanese, and Asian people are descendants of Ham.

Genesis 10:18–21
And the Arvadite, and the Zemarite, and the Hamathite: and afterward were the families of the Canaanites spread abroad. And the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon, as thou comest to Gerar, unto Gaza; as thou goest, unto Sodom, and Gomorrah, and Admah, and Zeboim, even unto Lasha. These are the sons of Ham, after their families, after their tongues, in their countries, and in their nations. Unto Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder, even to him were children born.

This is the first mention of the children of Eber, or the Hebrews. *Eber* simply means "crossing over"—a fitting name for a people who, in Abraham would leave Ur and under the leadership of Moses would cross over into the land which God had promised them.

Genesis 10:22–32
The children of Shem; Elam, and Asshur, and Arphaxad, and Lud, and Aram. And the children of Aram; Uz, and Hul, and Gether, and Mash. And Arphaxad begat Salah; and Salah begat Eber. And

unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided; and his brother's name was Joktan. And Joktan begat Almodad, and Sheleph, and Hazarmaveth, and Jerah, And Hadoram, and Uzal, and Diklah, And Obal, and Abimael, and Sheba, And Ophir, and Havilah, and Jobab: all these were the sons of Joktan. And their dwelling was from Mesha, as thou goest unto Sephar a mount of the east. These are the sons of Shem, after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations. These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood.

The Hebrew word translated "earth" in verse 25 is *erets,* which always refers to the geological, physical earth rather than to the people on the earth. The fact that the earth was divided explains how the animals were able to spread from Mount Ararat into all corners of the world.

According to Dr. Dolph Hooker's book, *The Astounding Ice Ages,* the Ice Ages, triggered when the water canopy collapsed at the time of the Flood, did not happen gradually but were cataclysmic moments in time, which explains why fossils of woolly mammoths have been found with fresh vegetation in their mouths. Dr. Hooker goes on to say that the immediate coming of an Ice Age would cause a recession of the oceans due to the fourteen million cubic miles of water needed to form the glaciers in the North and South Poles. This, in turn, would create land bridges which would connect every continent to another at some point, making the journey from Ararat to Australia possible for the kangaroo.

Thus, the cynic who scoffs at the truth of the account of the Flood and of Noah's ark on the grounds that it doesn't explain how animals ended up all over the world—is silenced again.



11 Genesis 11:1, 2 (a)

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it

came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar . . .

The plain of Shinar is located in present-day Iraq.

Genesis 11:2 (b), 3 (a)
. . . and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone . . .

Man builds with brick. Because brick is man-made, it cracks and chips easily. That's why God uses stone.

The massive stones used for the temple were cut to size in a rock quarry a mile away from the temple site so that when the stones arrived at the building site, the Bible says the sound of neither hammer nor chisel was heard (1 Kings 6:7). How close did the stones fit? So close that not even a knife could fit between them. There was no need for cement or mortar, for the stones fit perfectly.

And God still uses stones to build His temple. We are living stones being fit together for a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). This means the world is the rock quarry wherein the chipping is taking place so that when we get to the true temple in heaven, there will not be the sound of a hammer or chisel heard.

Therefore, we should not be surprised when the living stone we're sitting next to or married to rubs us the wrong way. It's all part of God's plan to knock off our rough edges so that when we get to heaven, we'll fit together perfectly.

Genesis 11:3 (b)
. . . and slime had they for morter.

Man's efforts are always held together with slime.

Genesis 11:4 (a)
And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name . . .

The tower was actually a ziggurat, used for the pagan practice of astrological observation. Ancient tradition tells us ziggurats were also communication towers by which people were able to communicate with each other through the use of crystals. How this worked we do not know—which is not surprising since when you look at structures like Stonehenge and the pyramids, we realize ancient civilizations were doing things we still do not know how to do today.

Genesis 11:4 (b)
. . . lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

"Be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth," God said to Noah (Genesis 9:1).

"Let's not spread throughout the earth," countered Nimrod. "Let's all stay here together."

Genesis 11:5, 6
And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

Our generation is the first generation since the tower of Babel where man is speaking one language. What language is that? The language of mathematics. Thanks to the mathematical marvel of the computer, a person can type English in America and it will appear as Japanese in Japan. And as it did in Nimrod's day, the universal language of our day is growing increasingly evil because man's imagination remains "evil continually."

Genesis 11:7
Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

Father to Son to Spirit says, "We're going to go down and undo this one-world technology, one-world government, one-world religion led by

Nimrod"—just as Jesus Christ will come down and undo antiChrist's evil domain.

Is this mean? No, it's merciful. Whether you're talking about brick and slime or microchips and Microsoft, here's the reality: God says, "Now that man is unified, there is nothing to stop him from what he's imagining to do. Unified technology will lead to devastation, destruction, and eternal damnation."

"Without Me, ye can do nothing," Jesus said (John 15:5).

But humanity answers, "Yes we can. We can build whatever we want to with our super computers and brilliant technology. We are the world."

Genesis 11:8
So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

No matter how hard they try, no matter how sincere their attempts might be, people can no longer communicate. So they separate into language groups and begin to form their own cultures. The good news, however, is that the necessary curse of Genesis 11 was reversed in Acts 2 when one hundred and twenty believers in the Upper Room began to praise God in languages they had never learned, causing the people from Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Egypt, Arabia, Galatia, and from all parts of the world on the streets below to hear the gospel in their own language.

And now I begin to understand that the only way for people to truly communicate cross-culturally is to be focused on the Cross of Christ and to be empowered by His Spirit, for apart from Christ, all of our efforts at unity are nothing more than slime and chipped brick. Without Christ, we can try to build a foundation of unity; we can have all kinds of rallies and seminars and marches—but there will be no unity apart from the power and Person of the Holy Spirit coming upon us. It is only in Christ that there is neither male nor female, bond nor free, Jew nor Gentile (Galatians 3:28). It is only in Jesus that division is obliterated.

Genesis 11:9

Therefore is the name of it called Bab-El; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

Bab-El, or "Gateway to God" became "Confusion" when Nimrod's technology led only to chaos. Does the story end here? No. God now shifts the storyline to focus on a single family—the family of Abraham—through whom He will bring the solution for man's sin . . .

Genesis 11:10–26
These are the generations of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood: And Shem lived after he begat Arphaxad five hundred years, and begat sons and daughters. And Arphaxad lived five and thirty years, and begat Salah: And Arphaxad lived after he begat Salah four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters. And Salah lived thirty years, and begat Eber: And Salah lived after he begat Eber four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters. And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begat Peleg: And Eber lived after he begat Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters. And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat Reu: And Peleg lived after he begat Reu two hundred and nine years, and begat sons and daughters. And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begat Serug: And Reu lived after he begat Serug two hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters. And Serug lived thirty years, and begat Nahor: And Serug lived after he begat Nahor two hundred years, and begat sons and daughters. And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat Terah: And Nahor lived after he begat Terah an hundred and nineteen years, and begat sons and daughters. And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

Here we see Abraham's family tree.

Genesis 11:27–30

Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot. And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees. And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah. But Sarai was barren; she had no child.

Whereas in verses 10–26, we see Abraham's family tree, in verses 27–32, we see his family ties—ties that will be germane to the story that unfolds.

Genesis 11:31 (a)
And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan;

As we will see in chapter 12, Abram was supposed to leave his family in Ur and go to a land God would show him. Here, however, we see his father, Terah, leading the way.

Genesis 11:31 (b), 32
. . . and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran.

Located halfway between Ur and Canaan, Haran was the border town of the Babylonian region. The modern-day equivalent of this event would be God saying to us, "I want you to leave Oregon and meet Me in Mexico City," and us stopping in San Diego.

Abram, Sarai, Lot, and Terah traveled to Haran—adjacent to, but not inside the Promised Land—and stayed there until Terah died, which was a minimum of fifteen years later. No wonder *Terah's* name means "Delay."

"Follow Me," Jesus said.

"Let me first go and bury my dad," answered the young man. This didn't mean his dad was awaiting burial. It meant after his

dad died, he'd be free to follow Jesus.

"Let the dead bury the dead," Jesus replied. In other words, "I understand family obligations. But obeying Me has even a higher priority" (Matthew 8:18–22).

When Terah dies, Abram gets going again—and we'll follow his story in chapter 12.



12

Genesis 12:1 (a)
Now the LORD had said unto Abram . . .

"The Lord *had* said unto Abram . . ." When had the Lord said this? Twenty-five years previously, when Abram was approximately fifty years old. By virtue of the fact that he lived in the city of Ur—the "hot spot" of the day where bathtubs were first invented—Abram had done pretty well for himself. In addition to riches, Abram had respect, for he was a leader, with a stunningly beautiful wife. Also, Abram was religious. Joshua tells us he worshiped the moon god. Yet although he was rich, respected, and religious, Abram was also lost. He was headed for hell, until the Lord sovereignly in His mercy and grace reached down to Hot Tub City and made Himself known to Abram.

Genesis 12:1 (b)
. . . Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.

When God said, "Leave your country, leave your family, and follow Me," Abram had a choice. He could either cling to his riches, religiosity, and respectability—or he could respond. Abram chose the latter, and in so doing, became the father of faith.

Genesis 12:2, 3

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Not only did God extend salvation to Abram personally, but He would make of Abram a new nation miraculously. Following are three reasons why . . .

To Be a Witness of God's Ways

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

The Jews were to be a light for the Gentiles. "This one nation will be a light for all other people to see practically what it means to believe in Me and walk with Me," God declared.

To Be a Keeper of God's Word

> What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.
>
> Romans 3:1, 2

To their credit, and to our benefit, the Jews were fierce protectors of the Scriptures.

To Be a Channel for God's Wonder

> For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.
>
> Isaiah 9:6

Messiah would come through the Jewish people. That is why through the Jewish people all people would be blessed.

God said to Abram, "I'm going to give you a name, make you a nation, and protect you. Those who bless you will be blessed; those who curse you will be cursed. In other words, you're going to have primacy, identity, and security."

I find this intriguing because those were the three things man had wanted so desperately at Babel. "Let us build a tower," said man, "whose top may reach unto heaven (primacy); and let us make us a name (identity), lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (security).

The same is still true. We want something meaningful to do in life—primacy. Or we want to discover who we are—identity. Or we need security relationally or financially. Jesus said, "If you seek first the kingdom, all these other things will be added to you" (see Matthew 6:33).

Every one of us is either walking in chapter 11, the Babel mentality—or in chapter 12, simply obeying and seeking first the kingdom.

> **Genesis 12:4**
> **So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.**

Abram was fifty years old when he initially heard God's call. But he didn't leave Haran until he was seventy-five. Obviously, Abram faltered in his obedience. But guess what. God doesn't give up *on* Abram. Rather He waits *for* Abram.

And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you . . .

Isaiah 30:18 (a)

"Lord, why aren't You directing me?" we cry.

"I already did," He answers. "Twenty-five years ago, I told you what to do. And I won't give you more to do until you do what I've already told you."

Many people are confused about God's will because, like Abram, they've delayed doing what He has already asked of them. It might concern intercessory prayer, witnessing, Bible study. I encourage people to keep journals—to write down things God lays upon their hearts because so often we ask, "What's going on?" when, if we just looked back at what God told us previously, we could see what the problem is.

God wasn't mad at Abram—and He's not mad at you. When your kids take their first steps, you don't yell at them when they fall down. You celebrate their steps rather than berate their stumbling. God's the same way. He knows this is how we learn to walk by faith. Take hope, stumbling saint, Abram was in a twenty-five-year slump, and God didn't give up on him. God gives us a second chance and a third and a ninety-ninth. His mercy is new every morning. His grace is limitless.

Genesis 12:5–7 (a)
And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land . . .

Concerning possession of the West Bank, Gaza strip, and Golan Heights, God says, "They are Mine to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 32:13). I am giving the entire land to the Jews."

Genesis 12:7 (b), 8 (a)
. . . and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent . . .

When the astronauts went to the moon, they planted a flag. So, upon entering the Promised Land, Abram leaves a mark. As we will see, wherever Abram goes he builds an altar—which shows he's a worshiper; and he pitches a tent—which shows he's a pilgrim. Abram never builds a house. Why? Because he looked for a city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10). For fifty years he did the big house, hot tub, and Lexus thing in Ur. But he realized that what he really craved was heaven.

Abram, the father of faith, the friend of God, shows us the real way to live. Wherever you go, build the altar of worship. It will altar who you are, how you feel, the way you think. And wherever you go, go with a "tent" mentality. We may think we're looking for a house in the country or a house on the lake, a ski boat or a ski cabin, a dream car, or a dream date. But what we're really craving is heaven. No other city has foundations. Everything else is shaky and wobbly.

Genesis 12:8 (b), 9
. . . having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD. And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.

Abram pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Hai on the east. *Bethel* meaning "House of God," and *Hai,* meaning "heap" or "dump," Abram had the House of God ahead of him, and a dump on the other side of him. That's basically where you and I live. With heaven before us, and the world behind us, we're camped out in the middle, waiting for the culmination.

Genesis 12:10
And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.

Throughout Scripture, whenever people go to Egypt, they always go "*down* to Egypt" because Egypt is a type, or symbol of the world. Abram was doing well, but now he falls again because he didn't remain in the land God showed him. A famine made him think he had to take matters into his own hands—always a dangerous place to be.

Genesis 12:11, 12
And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive.

Here's the father of faith faltering in the arena of faith because man always struggles and stumbles in his area of strength . . .

- Righteous Noah fell when he got drunk in his tent.
- Moses, the meekest man on the face of the earth, struck his rod against a rock and said, "You rebels, must we fetch water for you?"
- Unsheathing his sword, Peter was ready to take on a whole army in order to defend Jesus in Gethsemane. Yet, only hours later, he faltered when a little girl asked him, "Aren't you one of His?"

The area in which you're strongest is the area you'll be most vulnerable because you'll depend on your own strength. At the point you say, "That's not a problem for me; I'll never fall there"—watch out because that's the very area where you'll experience difficulty. Where you know you're weak, you rely on God.

Genesis 12:13
Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.

Sarai and Abram were actually half-brother and sister, but a half-truth is a total lie. "Thou shalt not bear false witness," declared God on Mount Sinai.

What is false witness? We see false witnesses in those who testified against Jesus. "This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days," they said concerning Him (Matthew 26:61). While Jesus did indeed say that, their witness was false because they were giving the right information with the wrong implication. Jesus was talking about the temple of His body.

Thus, as defined in the Bible, bearing false witness is not just lying. It's giving the right information, but with the wrong implication. Sarai was Abram's sister. But she was really his wife.

> **Genesis 12:14–16**
> **And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels.**

Sheep, oxen, camels, and servants were the Rolexes, Infinitis, and fancy stuff of the day. "Take the goods," Pharaoh said to Abram, "and I'll take your sister."

> **Genesis 12:17**
> **And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife.**

Pharaoh was taken ill, as was his whole house, and somehow, he understood why . . .

> And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way. And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.

Sarai, the wife of Abram, is the one woman whom the Bible holds up as a picture of what a Christian wife should be.

> But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.
>
> 1 Peter 3:4–6

Abram was making a big mistake here. He was leading his wife in a way that was not the best—down into Egypt. And then he chickened out and left her in a vulnerable spot, where she was taken into Pharaoh's harem. Nonetheless, Sarai called him lord. She reverenced him. She honored her husband even when he was not walking in wisdom. And God protected her. Wife, submit to your husband even if he's walking in a less than perfect way, and God will protect you just as He protected Sarai.

Not only did God protect Sarai, but He prospered the family. With the flocks and herds and servants they were given, Abram and Sarai were again wealthy. Do you want to enrich your family, wife? Submit to your husband, and God will bless your family.

"That sounds awfully chauvinistic," you say. "After putting his wife in danger to save his own skin, Abram walks away smelling like a rose."

Not quite. Abram doesn't get off scot-free, for one of the maidservants given to Sarai was named Hagar, who will break Abram's heart as well as his family. Be not deceived, gang, God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that shall *he* also reap (Galatians 6:7). If I blow it in my role as leader, there will not only be heartbreaks in my family, but in my life personally.



13 Alexander Whyte was right on when he said, "The Christian life is basically a series of new beginnings." How true that is. We stumble and

fall, but the Lord's grace is sufficient, His mercy matchless. He reaches down to you and me and puts us on our feet again, just as He did to Abram . . .

Genesis 13:1 (a)
And Abram went up out of Egypt . . .

Abram went down to Egypt as a saved man, but he comes up from Egypt a spiritual man. When you fall, be like Abram: Pick something up. Learn from the experience.

Genesis 13:1 (b)–4
. . . he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

There is no record of Abram pitching a tent or building an altar in Egypt. Here, however, we see him return to the place where he had pitched his tent; we see him going to the altar once more.

When you find yourself in Egypt, when you know things aren't the way they're supposed to be, what do you do? "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works . . ." Jesus told the Church of Ephesus—a group of believers who had strayed from their passion for Him (Revelation 2:5). Maybe your relationship with the Lord was great five years ago. Maybe things were really happening spiritually four months ago. Jesus' word to you is the same as it was to the Church of Ephesus. Remember, repent, and repeat: Go back and do what you used to do. Perhaps you were enjoying a season of morning devotions. Maybe you were coming out to worship on Friday nights. Maybe you were memorizing Scripture, or aggressively sharing your faith. What were you doing when you were on fire, when things were really cooking? Do it again.

Abram went back to where it all began—where he had pitched his tent previously, where he had built an altar initially.

Genesis 13:5, 6
And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together.

Abram and Lot had such large flocks and herds that the land couldn't hold them both.

Genesis 13:7, 8 (a)
And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. And Abram said unto Lot . . .

Notice how Abram emerged from Egypt a wiser man, for here he shows *directness*. That is, he goes to Lot and deals with the issue directly. "There's strife between our herdsmen," he says, "and the heathen are watching us fighting. It ought not be." Such is often the case today. Christians fight and bicker while the world watches and wonders. It ought not be.

Genesis 13:8 (b)
. . . Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen . . .

Notice also Abram's *deference*. He doesn't place blame on Lot. He says, "Let there be no strife between *me* and thee, between *my* herdmen and thy herdmen." While he will assume the secondary position when it comes to choosing the land, Abram assumes the primary position when it comes to shouldering responsibility.

Genesis 13:8 (c)
. . . for we be brethren.

Notice Abram's *discernment* when he says, "We be brethren." In other words, "There is more that unites us than divides us. Sure, there are some complications with the cattle, some hassles with the herdmen—but we're brothers."

How we need to realize the truth of this within the Christian community in our country and around the world. Because we all embrace the Person and Work of our Lord Jesus, there is more that unites us than could possibly divide us.

Genesis 13:9
Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

Notice the *dignity* of Abram. Not only does Abram put himself in the equation of the problem, but he says to his younger nephew, "Take your pick. If you go to the right, I'll go to the left. If you want the left, I'll take the right."

George Washington said, "When there is an elder man and a younger man in the same room, the elder man should never mention it, but the younger man should never forget it." I like that! Abram doesn't mention the fact that he is the elder, the leader, but Lot chooses to forget it. Abram nonetheless demonstrates hugeness of heart and dignity of character.

Genesis 13:10 (a)
And Lot . . .

Contrast the wisdom of Abram with the worldliness of Lot. Lot was *weak in devotion,* for we never read of him building an altar. Like Lot, you may possess a "tent mentality" knowing you're headed for heaven; and you may even have a ministry, with herds to take care of—but if you're not an altar-builder, you'll be weak in devotion which will lead to real problems.

Genesis 13:10 (b)
. . . lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed

Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

Lot was *worldly in desires.* He lifted up his eyes, but not high enough. He didn't lift his eyes to heaven and say, "Lord, show me the best place for me and my family." Instead, he lifted up his eyes only high enough to check out the financial possibilities and the greenest pastures. Lot saw a good place to raise cattle, but failed to see that it would be a lousy place to raise kids because he fixed his gaze short of heaven.

Genesis 13:11–13
Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.

Thirdly, Lot was *wrong in decision.* Lot made a series of wrong decisions based on his own reasoning . . .

- In verse 10, he looked toward Sodom.
- In verse 12, he pitched his tent toward Sodom.
- In chapter 19, we'll see him became a leader in Sodom.

Lot left Ur, but he became entrenched in Sodom. A lot of people are like that. They say yes to heaven, but they never say no to the world. And, like Lot, they end up in a terrible predicament.

Genesis 13:14–17
And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth:

so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

Abram didn't demand his own way, and what happened? God promised him the entire land—including Lot's portion.

> Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.
>
> Mark 10:28–30

If my house burned down tonight, I know there are one hundred people or more in this Fellowship who would say, "Stay with us." So, I can travel anywhere in the world and find Christians who would say, "Come on in." The same is true for you. We have brothers and sisters a hundredfold, parents a hundredfold, houses a hundredfold. Even this side of heaven, you just can't outgive God. And Abram finds this out.

Genesis 13:18
Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.

Mamre meaning "Fatness," and *Hebron* meaning "Communion," Abram is saying, in type, "I'm not interested in the people, pleasures, prosperity, politics, or perversity of Sodom. Instead, I'm going to enjoy the fatness, the richness, the satisfaction which comes from Communion."



Genesis 14:1 (a)
14 **And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar . . .**

Amraphel is Hammurabi, author of the ethics system known as the Code of Hammurabi.

Genesis 14:1 (b), 2
. . . Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations; That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar.

Four kings took on five kings in battle and were victorious.

Genesis 14:3
All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea.

The salt sea is the Dead Sea in Southern Israel.

Genesis 14:4 (a)
Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer . . .

Scripturally, twelve is the number of government.

Genesis 14:4 (b)
. . . and in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

Scripturally, thirteen is the number of rebellion.

Genesis 14:5–7
And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaims in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzims in Ham, and the Emims in Shaveh Kiriathaim, And the Horites in their mount Seir, unto El-paran,

which is by the wilderness. And they returned, and came to En-mishpat, which is Kadesh, and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites that dwelt in Hazezon-tamar.

Chedorlaomer and the other three kings wipe out a bunch of smaller nations and then engage in battle against the five kings of verse 2 who are rebelling after twelve years of servitude.

Genesis 14:8–10
And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar;) and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim; With Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and with Tidal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings with five. And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain.

I find it appropriate that the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fell into the slime pit.

Genesis 14:11, 12
And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way. And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

The four kings put down the insurrection and carried goods and hostages —of which Lot was one—back to their home countries.

Genesis 14:13–16
And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram. And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. And he

divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Ho-bah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.

Abram does something amazing. He arms and trains three hundred and eighteen of his servants, and launches a guerilla war against the four victorious kings. Because God was with him, Abram and his company overcame tremendous odds and were victorious. This is important for a number of reasons—but the one I want to consider is this: This is the first mention of war in the Bible.

Is war moral? Is war just? James says the reason there are so many wars in the world today is because of lust: one country wants another country's resources. But there is also a justifiable war, and that is what we see here. The war Abram launches is not about territory, possessions, politics, ideology, economy, or free enterprise. It's about family. Thus, I believe warfare is justified for the reason of liberating family. When people are being carried away, when family is held in captivity, I believe war is justifiable and necessary.

Genesis 14:17
And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale.

Returning from his victorious military raid, Abram is met by the king of Sodom—the prince of perversity—a picture of Satan himself.

Genesis 14:18 (a)
And Melchizedek king of Salem . . .

Abram is also met by a mysterious, marvelous monarch named Melchizedek, King of Salem. *Melchizedek* meaning "King of Righteousness," and *Salem* meaning "Peace," this is most likely a Christophany—an Old Testament appearance of Christ.

Genesis 14:18 (b)
. . . brought forth bread and wine . . .

Two thousand years before Christ came to die for our sin, Melchizedek brings a symbol of His death—bread and wine, the elements of Communion. Just as we are saved by looking *back* to Christ's death on the Cross, Old Testament saints were saved by looking *ahead* to Christ's death on the Cross —of which their sacrifices were a picture. When we partake of Communion it is in *remembrance* of Jesus. Abram partook of Melchizedek's bread and wine in *anticipation* of Jesus.

Genesis 14:18 (c)–20 (a)
. . . and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand . . .

The author of the Book of Hebrews gives further illumination as to Melchizedek's identity when he describes Him as being

> Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.
>
> Hebrews 7:3

As Melchizedek's name means Righteousness, Jesus is our Righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). As Salem means Peace, Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). As Melchizedek had no beginning and no end, Jesus is Alpha and Omega (Revelation 22:12, 13). As Melchizedek was a priest, Jesus is our Great High Priest (Hebrews 7:25, 26).

Genesis 14:20 (b)
. . . And he gave him tithes of all.

It is fitting that in Genesis, the Book of Beginnings, we find the beginning of the tithe—and the beginning of a glorious way of living . . .



For topical study of Genesis 14:20, see "Blest Be the Tithe that Unbinds" below.

Genesis 14:21
And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.

The Hebrew word translated "persons" is literally "souls." As he still does today, the king of Sodom—a picture of Satan—says, "Help yourself to the toys and trinkets. I want the souls."

Genesis 14:22–24
And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich: Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.

From whence comes the ability to say *No* to the temptation of Sodom, the seduction of Satan? By saying *Yes* to the King of Salem, the Lord Jesus.

How do you say *Yes* to Him? Through Communion with Him and tithes to Him—for as you come to His Table and remember all He gave *for* you, it will only be natural to give what He asks *of* you.

BLEST BE THE TITHE THAT UNBINDS

A Topical Study of GENESIS 14:20

"If you don't support this ministry, we're going to go off the air," threatens the radio evangelist. "If you don't support this work, we can't go on," cries the televangelist. "You have an obligation to supply the needs of this ministry. If you don't, we're going to sink," says the traveling evangelist. And so it is that I understand why people dread teachings on tithing. After all, the principle has been misused and abused by so many for so long.

"I have never seen the righteous begging for bread," David declared (Psalm 37:25). Truly, if there is righteousness in a ministry or in a person individually, such a one will never need to beg for bread, for when God guides, God provides. Impassioned fund-raisers to the contrary, God is not broke, gang, for Haggai reminds us that all silver and gold are His (2:8). God doesn't need our money. Therefore, tithing is not His way of raising cash, but His way of raising kids. Tithing is not God's way of getting money, but His way of developing maturity—as we will see in the text before us. Consider with me four reasons why the tithe was instituted here in Genesis, the Book of Beginnings—and why it continues throughout the entire Scripture . . .

Liberation

Tithing is the way to liberation. Our tendency is to be greedy and grabby. And Satan, king of Sodom, knows this. That's why he comes our way day after day, saying, "You deserve that trinket. You've earned that bauble. Keep the goods." But God knows greediness leads only to unhappiness . . .

> A billionaire himself, Andrew Carnegie said this: "I have seldom seen millionaires laugh."
>
> "I am not a happy man," said Donald Trump. "Frankly, my best friends are buildings."

God, on the other hand, says, "I'm totally content. I have infinite peace, and endless joy. I lack nothing. And I want you to be like Me."

God is a Giver—seen most obviously in His giving of His only Son. He wants us to be givers as well, because every time we give to Him, we give away a part of our greediness. Thus, tithing is the way to liberation.

Destination

From cover to cover, the Bible calls us to set our hearts on things above and not on things of this world (Colossians 3:2). Jesus put it this way: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these other things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

How do we practically seek first the kingdom and set our hearts on heaven? Jesus told us how when He said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). If your treasure is on earth, that's where your heart will be. So God in His wisdom, kindness, and love for you and me says, "Lay up your treasure in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys, where thieves don't break in and steal. Put your treasure in heaven because, in so doing, your heart will follow."

> I entered the business world for the first time as a freshman in high school when I bought one share of American Motors stock for twelve dollars. And what happened after that amazed me. You see, normally every morning I would grab the *San Jose Mercury News* and immediately open to the Sports Page to find out, depending on the season, how the Giants, Warriors, or 49'ers were doing. But after investing my treasure in the stock market, I found myself turning first to the Business Section to find out how American Motors was doing.
>
> Then, in my sophomore year, our church youth group planned a big banquet at a fancy restaurant in San Francisco. Wanting to take part, but short of cash, I sold my stock—for eight dollars. The next morning, something interesting happened. I skipped the Business Page altogether, for once my treasure was no longer in American Motors, neither was my heart.

If your treasure is in your house or your IRA or your Mercedes, that's where your heart will be. Knowing this, the Lord demands that the first tenth of whatever we make on any given day, in any given week be given to Him in order that our hearts will be set on our heavenly destination.

Jesus talked more about money than He did about heaven. He talked more about money than He did about hell. In fact, He talked more about money than

He did about heaven and hell combined. Why? Because He knows it's a huge issue for you and me—and that it speaks of larger principles. One of the things Jesus said about money was this:

> *And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon* [*money*] *of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.*
>
> Luke 16:9

In other words, the money you have made friends of—or that you have used rightly—will greet you when you die. Now, the old adage is true: You can't take it with you. But you *can* send it ahead. And what you send ahead—through the tithe that God demands, and through the offering which He deserves—will meet you there.

"But I don't make much money, so there won't be much to greet me," you say. Consider this: When Jesus saw a widow giving two mites—less than a penny—He told His disciples that she had given more than they who, out of their abundance, had given much because she gave all that she had (Mark 12:41–44). Jesus acknowledged even two mites—and that woman will receive a mite-y big welcome in heaven!

Evaluation

How we deal with money determines how we'll do in ministry . . .

If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?

Luke 16:11

If you want to be used by the Lord, you must understand that according to Luke 16, the foundational question is: How do you deal with money? Jesus said, "If you can't be entrusted with money, how can you be entrusted with the true riches of the kingdom?"

"I can tell more about the spirituality of a man by looking at his checkbook than I can by looking at his prayerbook," said D.L. Moody.

It's true. We can sing, "I love You Lord, and I lift my voice . . ." and, "I have decided to follow Jesus . . ." but if we don't put our money where our mouth is, it's all meaningless words and cheap talk.

Liberation, destination, evaluation—they're all wrapped up in the principle of tithing.

"Wait a minute," you say. "Tithing is part of the Law. And aren't we free from the Law?"

Yes, because of the Finished Work of the Cross, we are no longer under the Law—but as seen in the text before us, tithing predates the Law by five hundred years. Not only that, Jesus said tithing should not be left "undone" (Matthew 23:23). In addition, tithing is seen in the early church (1 Corinthians 16:1, 2). Thus, seen before, during, and after the Law, the tithe is timeless.

And so passionate is God about this issue that He says something He never says again in any other place . . .

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

Malachi 3:8

"In not giving Me the tithe, you have robbed Me," God declares. The tithe is God's. It's not an option. The first ten percent is the Lord's. Scripture, I believe, is crystal clear on this issue.

"What if I don't tithe?" you ask.

Malachi goes on . . .

> *Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.*
>
> Malachi 3:9

If you don't tithe, you're cursed. Oh, it's not God Who curses you. Rather, you curse yourself. How? Haggai explains . . .

> *Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.*
>
> Haggai 1:5, 6

By not tithing, we curse ourselves because the money we save disappears through the holes in our pockets, and the money we spend doesn't bring satisfaction.

> *Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house . . .*
>
> Malachi 3:10 (a)

God wants us to bring tithes to His storehouse—to the place where the Word is taught and praise ascends—even though we won't get a plaque for it, be applauded because of it, or have a say in where it goes.

And then God says something He says nowhere else in all of Scripture . . .

> *. . . and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts . . .*

Malachi 3:10 (b)

The only time God says, "Test Me" is with regard to tithing.
Notice three promises God makes to those who take up His challenge . . .

. . . if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

Malachi 3:10 (c)

"I will reward your faith."

Immediately after lending Jesus his fishing boat for use as a floating podium to teach the multitude on the shore, Peter caught so many fish his net broke (Luke 5:2–7).

The little boy who gave his lunch to Jesus was himself "glutted" along with the rest of the 5,000 (John 6:9–12).

If you've ever given anything to God, you know from experience that it's impossible to out give Him.

And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 3:11

"I will rebuke your foe." Some people are perpetually plagued with problems. The money they make goes through their pockets; the labor of their hands never comes to fruition. To them, God says, "If you tithe, I will rebuke the world's hold on you which devours your happiness and eats away at your possessions."

And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 3:12

"I will renew your fruit."

"Put your trust in Me, and I will make you a fruitful land," declares the Lord, for he who tithes will experience renewal and revival.

There is not a subject I would less rather teach than this one. But the Bible has much to say about tithing because it represents where a person's heart is. Therefore, I would be shirking my responsibility to declare to you "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), were I to ignore it. The tithe is the Lord's. It's not yours. Whether it's ten cents or ten thousand dollars, the first tenth is the Lord's—to be brought into the storehouse, the place where the Word is proclaimed and worship ascends.

Heaven is right around the bend, gang. And we will soon regret all the stuff we've accumulated with God's tithe, all the ways we've indulged ourselves with His offerings.

Maybe you have been robbing God. Maybe you have been wasting your time and treasure and talents. The good news is: It's not too late! Today you can say, "As I race towards heaven, I understand the wisdom of God's way, the rightness of His Word. Therefore, I am going to give Him the tithe. And I am going to see, even as He asked me, what He will do in blessing, in rebuking, and in renewing."

Precious people, you'll be blessed all of your days if you go God's way.

Start today.

Then watch and see what God will do.

15 Genesis 15:1 (a)
After these things . . .

After what things? Chapter 14 gives the account of the daring military raid Abram made to rescue his nephew Lot; the subsequent appearance to him of two kings—the king of Sodom and Melchizedek, king of Salem; Abram's worship of Melchizedek; and his refusal to take even a shoelace from the king of Sodom.

Genesis 15:1 (b)
. . . the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram . . .

That God said, "Fear not," to Abram indicates Abram was fearful. This is not surprising. After all, in the wake of his spiritual victory in resisting the material temptation of the riches offered him by the king of Sodom, as well as his military victory in rescuing Lot, Abram hit an emotional slump. This happens. Challenge often follows victory. Think of Jesus. When He was baptized in the Jordan, He heard a voice from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased." Then, the Holy Spirit came upon Him and empowered Him for ministry. (Matthew 3:16, 17). It was a great day. But immediately following this, He was driven into the wilderness to be tempted of Satan, to wrestle against the enemy for forty days (Matthew 4). Therefore, don't be surprised, if, after you experience victory spiritually, like Abram you face a time of discouragement emotionally.

"Fear not." This is the first time this glorious command appears in Scripture. But it is certainly not the last . . .

- "Fear not," the angel said to a flock of frightened shepherds (Luke 2:10).
- "Fear not," Jesus said to a crew of seasick disciples (Mark 4:40).
- "Fear not," the angel said to a disheartened Paul (Acts 27:24).

Genesis 15:1 (c)
. . . I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

Perhaps it suddenly hit Abram that he and his rag-tag army of servants had made enemies of four powerful kings with four huge armies. "*I* am your shield," God told him. "Yes, you came home empty-handed materially, but *I* am your reward."

In this, I am reminded that what every person ultimately desires is not something *from* the Lord, but simply more *of* the Lord.

- "I'm not going to show you the way," Jesus declared, "I *am* the Way" (John 14:6).
- "I'm not going to give you bread; I *am* the Bread" (John 6:35).
- "I'm not going to share with you truth; I *am* the truth" (John 14:6).

Those who come to the Lord not looking for something *from* Him, but simply to cling *to* Him find all kinds of blessing in all sorts of areas they never expected. Are you disappointed with God because you asked Him for something you have yet to receive? Maybe it's because you're looking for some thing. God loves you too much to toss a boxed little package your way. The issue is bigger; and He wants you to discover today that *He* will satisfy your need; that *He* will be your reward.

Genesis 15:2 (a)
And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me . . .

"Fear not; I am your reward," the Lord had declared. Yet, like us, Abram responded by saying, "But what wilt Thou give me?"

Genesis 15:2 (b), 3
. . . seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.

Like me, Abram doesn't get what the Lord is saying. He goes on babbling —just like I do. The custom of the day was such that if a man had no son, his highest-ranking servant would inherit his wealth. And this prospect was bothering Abram.

Genesis 15:4
And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.

"I am your reward," said God.

“But what will you give me?” asked Abram.

“I’ll give you a son,” said God.

The bigness of our Father’s heart absolutely staggers me. He’s so patient with Abram, so patient with you, so patient with me.

Genesis 15:5
And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

With his naked eye, Abram would have been able to see at most 1,200 stars. “I’m going to have a family of *1,200?*!” Abram must have thought. But wait. God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). Abram could see approximately 1,200 stars. But how many stars are there? Far beyond anything Abram could even begin to ask for or imagine in his wildest dreams.

How many stars are there? Scientists tell us that there are as many stars in the sky as there are grains of sand on the seashore of all the beaches in the world. This should not surprise the student of Scripture, for God made the same correlation when He told Abram not only would his family number as the stars, but as the sand (Genesis 22:17).

According to the Psalmist, the only other thing as innumerable as the grains of sand are the thoughts of God towards us (Psalm 139:17, 18). This fascinates me because the Pentium computer chips made of silicon, of sand, perform one trillion calculations per second. Clear back in antiquity, God measured His thoughts with the substance that would come to epitomize our own computer age.

Genesis 15:6
And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

So important is this verse that Paul anchors his definition of salvation upon it (Romans 4; Galatians 5). “I’m going to bless you,” God said to Abram.

And simply because he believed God would do what He promised, God looked at Abram as being righteous.

The Hebrew word translated "righteous" is literally "rightly clothed." When Adam and Eve sinned, they realized they were naked—and man has been naked ever since. But just as God sacrificed an animal to clothe Adam and Eve, He sacrificed His Son to clothe us.

> I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.
>
> Isaiah 61:10

To be righteous means to be rightly clothed. That is what we are when, like Abram, we simply take God at His Word.

- Righteousness:
  God thought it.
  Jesus bought it.
  The Spirit taught it.
  Satan fought it.
  But, gang, we got it!

We're robed in *His* righteousness.

> **Genesis 15:7, 8**
> **And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?**

Like the one who said, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24), Abram says, "I believe, but how will I know the land is mine?"

I would think that at this point, the Lord would tire of Abram. I mean, God told him He would be his reward only to have Abram ask what He

would give him. The Lord promised Abram a grand family and a glorious land only to have Abram ask for proof.

If I were God, I'd say, "So long, Abram." But that's not what our Father does, and I'm oh, so glad because even when giants of the faith like Abram have their struggles and doubts—God continues to walk with them and work through them.

Genesis 15:9, 10
And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not.

In answer to Abram's request for proof that God would give him an inheritance, God instructs Abram to draw up the equivalent of a modern-day contract. You see, in Abram's day, when two people entered in to a legal agreement, they did so by splitting an animal in two, standing in the midst of the carcass, and clasping each other's wrist to show that they were deadly serious about keeping up their end of the bargain.

Genesis 15:11
And when the fowls came down upon the carcases, Abram drove them away.

Throughout Scripture, birds almost always symbolize evil. The picture here is that while Abram waited for God to meet him, he did his best to keep evil at bay, shooing away the birds of doubt and unbelief.

Genesis 15:12
And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.

Exhausted by his own efforts, Abram fell asleep.

Genesis 15:13, 14

And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.

As he slept, God told Abram that although He would indeed give Abram's descendants a grand and glorious land, they would first spend four hundred years as slaves in a foreign land—which, of course, was Egypt.

Genesis 15:15, 16
And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.

"The Amorites"—a generic term for all of the people living in the land of Canaan—refers to a culture so diseased, defiled, and depraved that it was doomed. Nonetheless, God gave them four hundred years—the period in which the Jews were held captive in Egypt—to repent.

While it may be popular to construct the false image of an angry Old Testament God who needed Jesus to come and calm Him down, nothing could be further from the truth. God waited *four hundred* years for the Amorites to turn to Him. It would take four *centuries* before their iniquity demanded that He order their extermination at the hand of Joshua.

Genesis 15:17
And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.

When Abram awoke, he saw that the meat on either side of him was barbequed. God had been there—not meeting Abram halfway as was the custom—but walking the entire length alone.

This is still the way of God. Oh, we try and chase away the birds of evil which threaten our families and our country. We hold rallies and sign pledges; we make vows and make promises. But, because "in our flesh

dwells no good thing" (Romans 7:18), like Abram, we eventually become exhausted in trying.

> *Although numbering over one million in attendance, the recent Promise Keepers rally in Washington, DC was not the biggest Promise Keepers convention in history, for one three times as big took place when three million people heard the voice of God, and witnessed a Divine pyrotechnic display at the foot of Mt. Sinai which so impressed them that they said, "All the words which the Lord hath said, we will do" (Exodus 24:3).*
>
> *Those in attendance at that first Promise Keepers convention weren't playing a game. They were sincere. They truly meant to keep the Ten Commandments. After all, they had heard God speak and had seen a mountain quake. But Moses came down the mountain forty days later to find them worshiping a golden calf.*

Times don't change. People with sincere hearts say, "We will keep our promises." The problem with signing contracts, making vows, keeping promises is that they fail to factor in to the equation a huge component: the flesh.

> For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?
>
> Romans 7:15–19, 24

God's aware of this, gang. That's why He says, "I will wait until you're as tired as Abram was. Then I'll come through on My own. I don't want you to sign a contract or make a promise. I know what you're made of. I know your frailty. So I'm not going to meet you halfway. I'm going to do the whole thing."

For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

2 Corinthians 1:20

There is only one Promise Keeper, only One in Whom all the promises are yea and amen. Jesus came on the scene and did what we were unable to do. He kept the covenant, the promises, the commandments. All of the promises of God are *in* Him and kept *by* Him. They're fulfilled *through* Him and point *to* Him. What, then, is our part? Our part is not to stand in the midst of an animal cut in two—but to kneel at a Table, to hold in our hands a Body that for us was cut in two, and to remember *Him* (Luke 22:19).

Genesis 15:18–21
In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

God promised Abram the land from the Nile to the Euphrates—300,000 square miles. The most Israel has ever possessed of this land was 30,000 square miles under Solomon's reign.

16 Genesis 16:1 (a)
Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children . . .

The promise had been given. God said to Abram, "You're going to have a family as numerous as the stars in the heavens." But time passes, and guess what. Abram starts wondering. Abram is now eighty-six, Sarai seventy-six, and they think, "This is not working."

Always remember this, folks: When God gives a promise, there is often a gap of time between the giving of the promise and the fulfillment of the promise. In Abram's case, there will be a thirteen-year gap.

Is God's delay due to procrastination on His part? No. Is it due to preoccupation—is He just too busy? No. God's delay is due to *preparation,* for He is preparing us in the arena of faith. You see, the gaps between God's promise and the fulfillment of His promise provide opportunities for the muscle of faith to be exercised—for, like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon, if there is no struggle, faith never soars.

Genesis 16:1 (b)–3
. . . and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.

This was not a strange practice, but common in the cultures of Ur and Babylon. Women unable to bear children offered their handmaidens to their husbands, and the child produced was considered the child of the husband and wife.

Genesis 16:4, 5
And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee.

Even though it was her idea to follow the cultural norm, Sarai, whose name means "Contentious" was angry with Abram for impregnating Hagar.

Genesis 16:6

But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.

In trying to give God a hand, in trying to help Him out, Abram and Sarai unwittingly gave birth to the Middle East tension that exists to this day.

Genesis 16:7
And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur.

This is the first time the phrase, "the angel of the Lord," appears in Scripture. The word translated "angel" means "messenger." Throughout Scripture, angels adamantly refuse to be worshiped. Thus, because the angel of the Lord receives worship, we know He is no ordinary angel. The angel of the Lord refers to the Second Person of the Trinity—Jesus Christ.

How like Jesus to appear not to a man, but to a woman; not to one who sought faith, but to one who was running from the family of faith. After all, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who left the ninety-nine to find the single sheep who had gone astray.

So, the person in here who is in the greatest need, who feels as though he's blown it the worst is the person whom the Lord is most interested in this evening. It would seem more logical to stay with the ninety-nine. But that's not the heart of our Shepherd. He goes after the one. He goes after Hagar. He goes after you.

Genesis 16:8–12
And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai. And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands. And the angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction. And he will be a wild man; his hand will be

against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.

Although Sarai's proposal was expedient, it was not obedient. Although it was accepted culturally, and had merit logically, it was wrong spiritually, for Abram and Sarai failed to seek the Lord about it. As a result, to this day, world leaders try to figure out what to do concerning the tension, hatred, animosity, and bloodshed stemming from this singular event.

Genesis 16:13, 14
And she called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me? Wherefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered.

Hagar called the name of the Lord "The God who Sees." Hagar hadn't been looking for God, hadn't seen God, hadn't found God. It was God who saw Hagar.

Genesis 16:15, 16
And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael. And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram.

When the angel of the Lord told Hagar to return to Sarai, she could have said, "No way." Instead, she said, "Okay." Hagar not only made a confession of faith by acknowledging God as Lord, but she was obedient to the Lord in returning to Sarai. Therefore, I firmly expect to see Hagar in heaven. Sarah will be there, too. But gone will be the animosity between them.

17

Genesis 17:1 (a)
And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram . . .

Keep in mind there are great gaps and spans of time between these appearances of the Lord to Abram. This intrigues me. Abraham is called the friend of God (James 2:23). Why, then, would God wait fifteen years between conversations? Perhaps you're wondering the same thing with regard to your own situation: "Why don't I hear more frequently from the Lord? Why do I go through weeks or months or years when I don't seem to hear direct words from Him in my spiritual ears?" Keep in mind that Abraham was not only called the friend of God, but he is also called the father of faith. Consequently, God is making a man of faith out of Abram, and he's making a man or woman of faith out of you. Faith means we walk not by what we see physically, by what we hear audibly or by what we know intellectually. Faith means we hang on to what God said previously. We just hang on.

Think back for a moment to a time in the not too distant past when you thought, "This will never work. Everything's going wrong. I'll never make it." Yet here you are today. Why did God allow those things to happen in that way? To teach you to be a man or woman of faith, to teach you to quietly and confidently believe that God is on the throne, that He is in control, that all things work together for good.

Genesis 17:1 (b)
. . . and said unto him, I am the Almighty God . . .

"I am El Shaddai, the Almighty God." Here is the first mention of this name that appears over and over throughout Scripture. *El* signifies the right arm, and speaks of strength. *Shaddai* speaks of a woman's breast, and speaks of nourishment. Thus, God is the mighty One who sees us through with the right hand of His strength as He nurtures us as tenderly as a mother does her newborn baby.

Genesis 17:1 (c)
. . . walk before me, and be thou perfect.

To a ninety-nine-year-old Abram, God doesn't say, "It's time to retire." He says, "I want you to go higher. I want you to be perfect." How is Abram

to do this? By walking in the strength and drawing upon the nourishment of El Shaddai.

Genesis 17:2
And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

Please note four elements in the following summation of the Abrahamic covenant presented in chapters 12—15 . . .

Genesis 17:3–6
And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

Notice the *principle* of the covenant. The principle is grace. Twenty-four times in the Abrahamic covenant, God says, "I will." In other words, it's all by His grace. To underscore this, the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet is added to Abram's name, changing it from Abram to Abraham because biblically, five is the number of grace—of unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor.

Genesis 17:7 (a)
And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations . . .

Secondly, notice the *people* of the covenant. The covenant is not only between God and Abraham, but also between God and the Jewish people as a whole.

Genesis 17:7 (b), 8 (a)
. . . for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after

thee . . .

Thirdly, notice the *period* of the covenant. Contrary to what the Palestinians maintain, the Abrahamic covenant did not become null and void in A.D. 70 when the Jews were scattered. No, it is an *everlasting* covenant, as reiterated in Ezekiel 11:17.

Genesis 17:8 (b)
. . . the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

Fourthly, notice the *place* of the covenant. God promised the Jews 300,000 square miles. Although at most, they only possessed ten percent under Solomon's reign, a day is coming when they will inherit all of the land God promised them.

Genesis 17:9–14
And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.

The sign of God's covenant with His people would manifest itself in the flesh. That is, there was to be a sensitivity and purity in them that they hadn't known previously. Circumcision was an outward sign, but it would speak of

an inward reality, the same way the ordinances of Baptism and Communion do presently.

Genesis 17:15
And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be.

By adding grace, signified by the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet to her name, Sarai became Sarah; "Contentious" became "Princess."

Genesis 17:16, 17
And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?

Abraham's is not the laugh of mockery or unbelief, but of ecstasy and elation. Abraham's hilarity turns to heaviness, however, his delight to anguish, when he remembers he already has a son . . .

Genesis 17:18
And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!

The Hebrew text makes it clear that this is the passionate cry of a father who says, "I already have a son who I love deeply. Let *him* be the one through whom the covenant and blessings come." In other words, Abraham is saying, "I know I got ahead of You when Ishmael was conceived. I know that was not Your plan. I know I made a mess, but, Lord, bless my mess."

Have you ever done that? Maybe your motives were sincere, your intensions were right. But you didn't wait on God or talk things over with Him. Instead, you just plunged into that relationship, that job opportunity, that ministry. And when it turned out to be a mess, you asked God to bless it anyway.

I used to think prayer was giving God orders: "Bless this, bless that, bless the other," I'd pray, as if I could ring a bell through prayer (the more faith I had, the louder it would ring), and God would grant me my wishes as if He were a genie. I used to think I knew what God should do. Now I know I don't have a clue. I have found that God gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him. Thus, prayer is not giving God orders. Prayer is simply reporting for duty. Prayer is not "Bless my mess." It's, "Lord, have *Your* way."

Genesis 17:19 (a)
And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed . . .

Ishmael was not the child of God's promise, therefore he could not be the channel of God's blessing.

Genesis 17:19 (b)
. . . and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.

Only *Isaac,* or "Laughter," could be the one through whom the covenant would be established, for only Isaac was the product of God's miraculous grace.

Genesis 17:20–22
And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year. And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

"Although the covenant will not be established through Ishmael, I have heard your prayer, Abraham, and he will become a great people," said God. And Ishmael, father of the Arab nation, did just that.

I can't help but wonder what would have happened if instead of saying, "Bless Ishmael," our dear brother Abraham had said, "Lord, I've messed up. What do *You* want to do now?"

Genesis 17:23
And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him.

Notice Abraham's *parental obedience.* Although Ishmael at this point was thirteen years old, Abraham didn't tell him to get circumcised—he circumcised Ishmael himself. I have noticed that it makes all the difference in the world when instead of telling their kids to pray, a mom or dad prays *with* them; that instead of telling them to go to Bible study, a mom or dad goes *with* them. Here, our brother Abraham leads the way.

Genesis 17:24–26
And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son.

Notice Abraham's *personal obedience.* It would have been tempting for Abraham to say, "It's important that these young guys deal with the flesh. But, Lord, I'm ninety-nine. Certainly You don't expect me to deal with the flesh in this way." But that's not what Abraham said. The very day he heard the word, he submitted to it. I like that!

As one advances in age, there can be a tendency to say, "I'm glad the young people are going to Bible study; I'm glad the next generation is sharing their faith. But I'm old. Don't expect me to be stretched or to enter in to a new experience spiritually." Not so with Abraham. Even though he's ninety-nine, he says, "Okay, let's do it."

How I want to be that kind of man. How I want you to be that kind of person. How I want us to be that kind of Fellowship—where we don't say,

"Those were great days back in 1982," but rather, "What do You have for us *now,* Lord?"

Genesis 17:27
And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him.

Notice Abraham's *professional obedience.* Abraham said, "Look boys, if you're working for me, this is the way it's going to be. . . ." I like that! Due to the fear of repercussions legally, or being misunderstood in the business community, Christian employers are reticent to make a stand for God professionally. If you have someone working for you, I encourage you to be like Abraham and say, "This company is run on the principles of God's Word. I know I can't change your heart—but I can set the standard"—and watch God bless you.



18

Genesis 18:1
And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day.

The heat of the day in Scripture is often a picture of the hard times that come our way. So often in my walk, I've seen the Lord in a fresh way in the heat of the day, in fiery trials. You have, too. This is not surprising. After all, it was when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were cast into a fiery furnace that they saw the Lord (Daniel 3:25). Consequently, when I hear of people in the body who are going through fiery trials and hot times, on one hand my heart goes out to them, but on the other hand, in a sense, I'm envious of them because I know the Lord will make Himself known to them in a special way in the heat of the day.

Genesis 18:2 (a)
And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him . . .

As we shall see, the three men are the Lord and two angels.

Genesis 18:2 (b)
. . . and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground,

I like this! Here's a ninety-nine-year-old man who *runs* to meet the Lord. How do you and I greet the Lord when the alarm clock goes off for devotions and prayer, for meditation and worship?

Genesis 18:3–5
And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said.

Abraham realized these were no ordinary visitors.

Genesis 18:6–8 (a)
And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetcht a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them . . .

Prodigal meaning "extremely generous, or lavish," here we see a prodigal Abraham running to meet his Lord and serving Him a tender calf—a parallel to another prodigal whose father would run to greet him and welcome him with a fatted calf (Luke 15).

Genesis 18:8 (b)
. . . and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat.

Fellowship took place under the tree. Such is always the case, for it is only through Christ's death on the tree of Calvary that we have fellowship with Him.

Genesis 18:9–12
And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, after I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?

In chapter 17, Abraham had laughed at this prospect with ecstasy. Here, his wife laughs incredulously.

Genesis 18:13, 14 (a)
And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for the LORD?

Is anything too hard for the Lord? We have a tendency to think of God's ability in relation to degrees of difficulty . . .

If someone comes to me and says, "I'm struggling with a headache. Would you pray for me?" I say, "Sure. Bless Bob, Lord. Take away the tension and allow him to experience a healing touch from Your hand."

But if someone comes to me saying, "I just came back from the doctor's office and he told me I have a malignant tumor. Would you pray for me?"—I act as if it's a whole different deal! "Pastors, brothers, gather round," I say. And I fervently plead with the Lord as though cancer is harder for Him to heal than a headache.

Oh, there's nothing wrong with praying passionately, but not because there are degrees of difficulty or because we need to get God's attention emotionally. The prophets of Baal slashed their bodies and cried loudly to get his attention, all to no avail. Elijah, on the other hand, simply prayed two sentences, and thereby moved the hand of God (1 Kings 18).

Genesis 18:14 (b), 15
. . . At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.

The Lord doesn't condemn Sarah for laughing; but simply reminds her that He knows exactly what's going on in her heart and what she's doing behind closed tent flaps.

Genesis 18:16–19
And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

The Lord would give Abraham information and revelation based not upon the accumulation of his knowledge, but upon the communication to his family. "I will give Abraham understanding of what I'm about to do," said the Lord, "because I know he is a man who will teach his children."

The same is true today. The revelation God wants to give us concerning what He's doing, how He's moving, where He's going is based not upon our journal entries or our Bible Study notes. It's based upon whether or not we will share what He tells us with our children.

People often say to me, "If I could go back and do it all over again, I would not go into the profession I'm in presently. I would go into the ministry." And I understand that, for I have found the ministry to be absolutely delightful. It's a fabulous calling. But here's the fact: If you have children or grandchildren, you *are* in the ministry. No clerical collar or pulpit compares to gathering your family around you, giving a simple Bible lesson, singing songs, sharing with each other, and praying together. *That* is the ministry. And anyone who takes seriously this call will, like Abraham, receive fresh revelation. I know this to be so, for the most wonderful insights and sweetest revelations of God to my heart have not come as I have prepared sermons, but as I have simply shared in worship with my family.

Genesis 18:20, 21 (a)
And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now . . .

It was the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah that caused the Lord to "go down." And in the last days, it will be the cry of man's Sodom-like culture (Luke 17:30) that will cause the Lord to come down again—this time to rapture His church (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Genesis 18:21 (b), 22
. . . and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.

God knows everything. Why, then would He have to come down and see what's going on? God says, "I will come down and see firsthand so that you will know that My judgment will not be uninformed or capricious."

Genesis 18:23
And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?

Knowing his nephew Lot's family lived in Sodom, Abraham enters into a dialogue with God on their behalf . . .

Genesis 18:24, 25
Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

"No man comes to the Father but by Me," Jesus declared (John 14:6).

"There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," Peter preached (Acts 4:12).

If there is no way to heaven other than through Jesus, how shall the Judge of all the earth rightly judge the person in Africa who has never had an opportunity to hear the gospel? In the first two chapters of his epistle to the Romans, Paul maintains that creation round about and conscience deep within all of humanity testifies to the reality of a Creator. Therefore, people will be judged according to the light they had—which is why in Revelation 19:2, we see all of heaven saying, "True and righteous are Your judgments, O Lord. You judged *perfectly.*"

The Judge of all the earth shall do right. He will not, cannot, does not wink at sin. So He left the throne of heaven to come down and pay the price for any who will accept His free gift of salvation.

Genesis 18:26–33
And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will

not do it for forty's sake. And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Per adventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake. And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.

As we will see in chapter 19, Lot had two daughters living in his house (19:8). He also had at least two married daughters (19:14). This means Lot's family, including his sons-in-law, numbered eight at the very least. Perhaps Abraham stopped negotiating with the Lord at ten because he thought there was bound to be two other righteous people in the entire cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

But God didn't stop at ten, for, as we will see, when He saved Lot and his household from destruction, He stooped all the way down to four.



19 Genesis 19:1 (a)
And there came two angels to Sodom at even . . .

Although three men had appeared to Abraham in chapter 18, only two go to Sodom because the Lord Himself does not enter into the city. Why? Psalm 66 tells me that if I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me. That is, if I am purposely, rebelliously, intentionally, arrogantly holding on to sin, when I pray, the Lord won't hear my prayer; He'll not come into my city; He'll not enter in to my situation.

You see, even though the sin to which I so stubbornly cling was paid for completely on the Cross of Calvary, the Lord loves me so much He says, "I

love you too much to let you go on your merry way day after day as though there's nothing wrong because if I did that, you would continue in that sin, and that sin would destroy you. Consequently, you won't feel My hand. You won't sense My presence—not because I'm not there, for I will never leave you, nor forsake you—but because your spirit senses something is not quite right."

When I feel as though my prayers bounce off the ceiling, it's not because the Lord is angry *with* me or mad *at* me, disappointed *in* me or turning away *from* me. Rather, it's an indication He's lovingly giving *to* me that something's not right.

The angels went into Sodom—but not the Lord.

Genesis 19:1 (b)
. . . and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom . . .

Like every other city gate in biblical times, the gate in which Lot sat was a large area at the entrance of the city wherein the city leaders would give advice and render civic decisions. The fact that Lot sat in Sodom's gate indicates he had become a leader of Sodom.

How had Lot arrived at this point?

- In Genesis 13:10, he had looked *at* Sodom.
- Two verses later, he pitched his tent *toward* Sodom.
- In chapter 14, he moved *into* Sodom.

In other words, he arrived there one step at a time.

Genesis 19:1 (c), 2
. . . and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night.

The angels initially turned down Lot's hospitality in order to check out the situation in the streets of Sodom.

Genesis 19:3
And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat.

Knowing what would befall these visitors in the streets of his city, Lot finally persuaded them to stay with him.

Genesis 19:4, 5
But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them.

In this case, to "know" means to have homosexual relations.

Genesis 19:6, 7
And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly.

A man who began on a spiritual pilgrimage years previously now calls a mob of crazed homosexuals brothers. How low can Lot go? He's about to go lower still . . .

Genesis 19:8
Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof.

This story is so unbelievably sordid and shocking that I've researched it thoroughly and carefully in order to find a cultural or historical explanation

for a dad who would offer his daughters in this way. But there is none to be found—other than the fact that Lot was completely desensitized to what was happening. He had been in Sodom so long that he had become accustomed to perversion—just as we have. Things that once shocked and scandalized our community are now totally acceptable, for, like Lot, we as a nation have been so seduced that we have lost our moral compass.

Genesis 19:9 (a)
And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them . . .

"Who are you to judge us?" said the men of Sodom to Lot. "You hang out with us; you've become like us; how do you think you can be a judge over us?"

Genesis 19:9 (b)–11
. . . And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door. But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door. And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door.

What a story. The angels reach out, pull Lot in, and smite the men outside with blindness. Yet even in their blindness, the men of Sodom still try to break into Lot's house in order to fulfill their sexual desires.

Genesis 19:12–14
And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law.

Why didn't Lot's sons-in-law listen to him? Because when he moved his family to Sodom and became a leader of the community, Lot lost his credibility. And the same is still true. A dad loses credibility whenever his kids see glaring inconsistencies between his words and his walk. Poor Lot. His peers told him to "stand back." His family simply scoffed.

Genesis 19:15, 16 (a)
And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered . . .

If some angels came to you and said, "Get out of here as fast as you can," what would you do? The only reason I can think of for Lot's lingering is that he was hoping against hope that his daughters and sons-in-law would show up.

Genesis 19:16 (b)
. . . the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.

"Wilt Thou destroy the righteous with the wicked?" Abraham had asked the Lord (18:23). The answer, as illustrated here, is "No"—for before judgment could be poured out upon Sodom, before fire and brimstone would come down to destroy Gomorrah, God rescued Lot and those of his house; He rescued the righteous.

Lot righteous? A guy who calls perverted people his brothers? A guy who offers his daughters to a homosexual mob? A guy who lingers when angels tell him to leave? Lot *righteous?*

Yes, for that is what Peter calls him (2 Peter 2:7). How can Lot possibly be considered righteous? Because righteousness is imputed solely on the basis of simple faith. I am righteous and so are you if you have confessed with your mouth that Jesus is who He claimed to be, and believed in your heart that God raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9, 10).

I love this chapter because there are a lot of people I care about deeply who, like Lot, made a profession of faith but ended up in Sodom, not living the way they know they should. If you're worried about a friend or a family member, take hope. While we don't want anyone to follow Lot's example because sin brings all kinds of pain and problems presently as well as empty-handedness eternally, know this: If that son of yours confesses with his mouth that Jesus is who He claimed to be, and believes in his heart that God raised Him from the dead, he will go up in the Rapture—of which this account is an illustration.

I don't know how the Lord could have painted any more powerful a picture than this to say, "I'm going to rescue people you may have thought were hopelessly lost."

Genesis 19:17 (a)
And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life . . .

"Escape for thy life," the Lord said to Lot. Of the Tribulation, Jesus said, "Pray that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things" (Luke 21:36).

"The reason you guys at Applegate always talk about the Rapture happening before the Tribulation is because you just want to escape the Tribulation," say our critics. And they're exactly right!

Genesis 19:17 (b)
. . . look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.

In telling Lot to escape to the mountain, the Lord wanted to turn a city-boy into a mountain man. Throughout Scripture, the Lord continually calls His people to the mountains . . .

- With Abraham, who was ready to sacrifice his son in obedience to the Lord's command, He calls us to Mt. Moriah, the Mount of Devotion.

- With the Israelites, who gathered to receive His commandments, the Lord calls us to Mt. Sinai, the Mount of Instruction.
- With Moses, who viewed the Promised Land, He calls us to Mt. Pisgah, the Mount of Vision.
- With Elijah, whose prayer brought down fire from heaven, He calls us to Mt. Carmel, the Mount of Passion.
- With Peter, James, and John, who beheld the glory of the Lord, He calls us to Mt. Hermon, the Mount of Transfiguration.

Genesis 19:18, 19
And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my Lord: Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die:

The most important mountain to which God calls us is to Mt. Calvary, the Mount of Crucifixion, of death to self. As is our tendency, Lot was fearful to make such a journey.

Genesis 19:20
Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.

"I know you're calling me to the mountain, Lord," said Lot, "but let me go to this little city. Things can go wrong on the mountain."

Genesis 19:21, 22
And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

Zoar means "little one." This is just like us. "To the mountain!" says the Lord—"to the mount of passion, instruction, vision, crucifixion."

"No thanks, Lord," we say. "I know You're calling me to a new elevation and a greater revelation, but, Lord, I've got clients to meet, a quiche in the oven, a dripping faucet to fix. Going to the mountain just doesn't fit in my schedule right now."

"The winter has passed; the rain is gone; the flowers appear on the earth. Come away, my beloved," said the bridegroom to His bride.

"You go ahead," answers the bride, "I'm going to snooze" (see Song of Solomon 2).

That's what the bride said. That's what Lot said. That's all too often what we say.

Genesis 19:23–25
The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.

Located near what the people who have lived in the region for centuries call the Sea of Lot—what we know as the Dead Sea—the site where Sodom and Gomorrah once stood looks like the aftermath of an atomic bomb. This area which was once so green that Lot chose it above any other region, is now totally, completely, awesomely arid.

Genesis 19:26
But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

"Remember Lot's wife," Jesus said in a powerful exhortation only three words long (Luke 17:32). Could it be that Lot's wife was thinking of family and friends she had left in Sodom? Whatever the reason, Lot's wife looked back, and became a pillar of salt in the process. What happens to the person who has been saved, but looks back longingly at the life from which he or she was rescued? His or her walk doesn't progress. Like Lot's wife, he or she is paralyzed.

Genesis 19:27–30 (a)
And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the LORD: And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace. And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt. And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he feared to dwell in Zoar . . .

After seeing judgment in the form of fire and brimstone poured out on Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot decides maybe the mountain wasn't such a bad idea after all.

Genesis 19:30 (b)
. . . and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters.

At last Lot is on the mountain—but he's in a cave—and now things are really going to cave in on top of him.

He had called down fire from heaven; he had seen a powerful victory. But now he's on a mountain in a cave of depression.

"What are you doing here?" the Lord asked Elijah.

"I'm the only one who hasn't bowed his knee to Baal," came Elijah's voice from the darkness.

"No you're not," said God. "There are seven thousand more. Get busy. Get going. There's a king to anoint. There's work to do" (see 1 Kings 19).

Like Elijah, following an incredible display of God's power, Lot found himself in the cave of depression.

Genesis 19:31
And the firstborn said unto the younger, Our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the

manner of all the earth:

Among other things, the problem with the cave of depression is that it distorts reality. Just as Elijah thought he was the only believer left on earth, Lot's daughters thought their father was the only man left on earth.

Genesis 19:32 (a)
Come, let us make our father drink wine . . .

The time when things are caving in around you is usually the time a voice will whisper in your ear, "Why don't you have a glass of wine to soothe your nerves? Have a beer. Relax!"

Genesis 19:32 (b)–36
. . . and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father. And they made their father drink wine that night: and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. And it came to pass on the morrow, that the firstborn said unto the younger, Behold, I lay yesternight with my father: let us make him drink wine this night also; and go thou in, and lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our Father. And they made their father drink wine that night also: and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father.

Lot's daughters didn't look to God to solve their problem. They simply came to their own immoral, irrational decisions. But whose fault was that? Certainly Lot must lay the blame squarely upon his own shoulders, for he led his daughters into Sodom, and had educated them in the ways of Sodom.

Genesis 19:37, 38
And the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day. And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Benammi: the same is the father of the children of Ammon unto this day.

As you read through the Old Testament, you see the Moabites and the Ammonites hassling God's people continually. It all started with a believer drinking wine in the cave of depression because he didn't leave the city when he should have.

May God give us wisdom.



20

Genesis 20:1
And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar.

On the move once again, Abraham heads south to Gerar, a Philistine city twelve miles south of the Gaza Strip on the West coast of Israel.

Genesis 20:2
And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah.

In this story, we see Abraham falling into the same sin with which he had become entangled twenty-five years earlier.

Genesis 20:3
But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife.

Finding himself inexplicably exhausted, Philistine King Abimelech, was not interested in meeting the new addition to his harem. Thus, it was in a dream that God told him the truth about Sarah.

Genesis 20:4–6
But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this.

And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.

As was the case with Abimelech, the man, woman, or nation who chooses to live in integrity will be kept from further sins which would wipe them out personally or nationally. The first time the word "integrity" is seen in the Bible is in this story with regard to Abimelech. God help America that once again we would see the importance and value of integrity.



***For topical study of Genesis 20:6 entitled "A Matter of Integrity," turn to page* 86.**

Genesis 20:7 (a)
Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live . . .

Herein is the first time in the Bible where the word "prophet" appears. Now, if there was ever a time God wouldn't want to introduce Abraham as a prophet, I would think it would be right here. I would think God would be embarrassed by, upset with, and ashamed of Abraham. But such is not the case, for God says to Abimelech, "That man who told a lie, who misled you, who jeopardized his wife and your nation—he's My man; he's My spokesman; he's My prophet."

Romans 11:29 tells us that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." This means when God gives a spiritual gift, a calling, a ministry to a man, woman, or church, He doesn't change His mind. He doesn't take it back. If God has given you a gift, be it ministry, music, prophecy, teaching, or evangelism—if He's given you a skill, be it carpentry, mechanic ability, athletic ability, it's yours to keep.

Perhaps you've seen people stumble, fall, drop the ball, and you wonder how God could still use him, her, or them. The answer is that the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. Sin will always bring about its own

sadness, depression, defeat, and despair, for the way of the transgressor is hard (Proverbs 13:15). The fact remains, however, that because the gifts and callings of God are without repentance, God will still use sinners.

I say this because I have found that the thing which hobbles so many people in their service for the Lord is thinking, "God can't use me. God wouldn't use me. God won't use me because I've failed so miserably; I've botched it so badly." That's the voice of the enemy, for the voice of the Lord says, "Because you didn't earn the gifts I gave you or the calling I sovereignly placed upon you, there's no way you can lose them either."

If you've been on the sidelines because you think you've messed up once too often, remember this story and the mercy of our Master, the grace of our God, the kindness of our King. Truly, there's no one like Him.

Genesis 20:7 (b)–11 (a)
. . . and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine. Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done. And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing? And Abraham said, Because I thought . . .

There's the problem. Doesn't that pretty much sum up everything in your situation and mine when we do things that we ought not to do? Abraham didn't say, "I did what I did because I prayed and the Lord led me to lie to you." No, Abraham did what he did because he *thought.*

Genesis 20:11 (b), 12
. . . Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake. And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.

Because Sarah was Abraham's half-sister, Abraham had told a half-truth. But a half-truth is a complete lie. "Thou shalt not bear false witness," thundered God from Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20). What is a false witness? A false witness is the right information with the wrong implication. In other words, it's saying the right thing, but using it in the wrong way. Abraham gave the right information for, technically, Sarah was his half-sister, but he gave it with the wrong implication, because he failed to tell Abimelech that she was also his wife.

Genesis 20:13
And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother.

Abraham wasn't caught off guard by Pharaoh and Abimelech wanting to add Sarah to their harems. No, the verse before us makes it clear that Abraham's lie was part of a predetermined strategy. And in this I am reminded once again that a person doesn't fall into sin, but rather walks into sin one step at a time. If Abraham hatched this plan way back in Ur, we can only wonder how many other kings besides Pharaoh and Abimelech he fooled. It was a pattern that had been going on for years because in this situation, rather than pray, Abraham thought.

Genesis 20:14, 15
And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and womenservants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife. And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee.

Why does Abimelech give Abraham gifts and tell him to live wherever he wants? It isn't because he was impressed with Abraham, but because he was impressed with Abraham's God.

Genesis 20:16 (a)

And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver . . .

Abimelech refers to Abraham the same way Abraham had initially referred to himself—as Sarah's brother.

Genesis 20:16 (b)
. . . behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee . . .

The implication is that Abraham shouldn't have exposed his wife to danger in the way he had. Rather than hiding behind her, he should have been a covering for her.

Genesis 20:16 (c)
. . . and with all other: thus she was reproved.

The meaning of the word translated "reproved" is actually "vindicated." In other words, Abimelech didn't blame Sarah for what had happened.

Genesis 20:17, 18
So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife.

Although Abraham would be used in other arenas and would go on to live a life of blessing before Abimelech, at this point, Abraham couldn't preach to Abimelech because he was a liar and a coward in his eyes. Yet even though Abraham couldn't preach to, or share with Abimelech, he could still pray for him.

Because you have fallen short in their eyes or hurt them badly, there are people to whom you may not be able to preach or with whom you may not be able to share. But this story tells me that although I may not be able to preach to them or share with them, I get to effectively bless them through prayer.

When I pray for my enemies, not only does it release blessing upon them, but it keeps me from getting involved in a cycle of bitterness which will only destroy me. You cannot pray blessing on a person and stay angry with him. It's impossible. That's why Jesus said, "Pray for your enemies" (Matthew 5:44).

I challenge you to pray for the people toward whom you feel bitterness or hostility; for the people you just don't like. Pray that they'll be healed, that they'll prosper, that they'll do well. God will answer your prayer, and you'll be blessed in the process.

A MATTER OF INTEGRITY

A Topical Study of GENESIS 20:6

America has at last "come of age." We have shaken off our Puritanical frontier past, for we have joined Europe in thinking that it doesn't matter what our leaders do in private as long as they are effective in their elected positions. At the state funeral of France's President François Mitterand, his wife stood on one side of his casket, his mistress on the other side—a scene completely acceptable to the French populous. What does it really matter, the Europeans ask, if a person has certain personal inconsistencies as long as he can function effectively in his position governmentally?

It *does* matter. Read your history books . . .

> Joseph Stalin turned a backwater, third-world Russia into a force of great strength militarily and rising power economically. He made Russia a great nation. He got the economy rolling, the military growing—but at what cost? Twenty million Russians were sent to gulags or shot in the back.
>
> Or how about the most efficient leader in European history—Adolf Hitler. "He may hate Jews, and he may have all kinds of quirks, but as long as he can build a Third Reich, he's our man," Germany declared.

Even if you don't believe the Bible, study what's happened in Europe over the last century, and ask if morals matter, if character counts, if integrity is an issue. The dictionary defines integrity as "an unimpaired condition or soundness; an adherence to a code of moral values; the quality or state of being complete or undivided, integrated." What is integrity? It's solidness, soundness, firmness.

Why should we care about integrity?

The Bible gives four reasons . . .

Integrity Protects Us from Sin

> *And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me . . .*
>
> Genesis 20:6 (a)

If we choose to walk in integrity, to value honesty, God will protect us from sins which otherwise would have victory over us.

"What's the big deal about sin?" you might be saying. "I can cover my tracks. I can deal with the repercussions."

"Be sure your sin will find you out," the Word declares (Numbers 32:23). Sin will bring you humiliation, consternation, and real depression. No one gets away with sin.

"But I thought Jesus died for our sin," you say. "I thought our sin was washed away from the Father's memory because of what Christ did on the Cross."

That's absolutely true. "Your sin and iniquity will I remember no more," God declares (Hebrews 10:17). Every confessed sin you've ever done, are doing, or will do is forgiven and forgotten by God. You're forgiven—but your sin itself will track you down, humiliate, and hurt you (Numbers 32:23). That is why integrity is so vital. It protects us from the destructiveness of sin.

Integrity Profits Our Children

> *The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.*
>
> Proverbs 20:7

If you choose integrity, your children will be blessed. That is, they will be prosperous and happy. I know this to be true. My dad was not a powerful, flamboyant person, but he was one of the greatest men I have ever known. And the thing that characterized my dad was this word integrity . . .

> For a season, our family car was a VW beetle. Our family of six traveling in our VW beetle—sometimes accompanied by our German Shepherd named Sam—was a sight to see. Then one day, my bank president dad came home with a brand new company car. I was so excited about the prospect of family trips in that 1966 blue Ford Fairlane—until I heard my dad say, "This car is meant to be used only to go to the bank."
>
> "Let's take the Fairlane out for a spin," I'd say.
>
> "So, you want to go to the bank?" he'd reply.

You see, my dad was a man of real integrity, a man of his word. And his children have been abundantly blessed by his legacy.

Integrity Promotes Stability

A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

James 1:8

A man who lives in integrity is single-minded. His yea is yea, his nay, nay (Matthew 5:37). He is one who is emotionally solid. As a pastor, I'm convinced that many people are emotionally unstable and depressed because they're double-minded. They're like waves being tossed to and fro in the sea.

People who don't have integrity are emotionally distraught, vulnerable to depression, and unstable internally because they don't exactly know what story they told whom. He who lacks integrity forgets what truth is. His story shifts, and pretty soon, all he can say is, "No comment; talk to my lawyer."

Integrity Provides Guidance and Direction

> *The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgres sors shall destroy them.*
>
> Proverbs 11:3

The best guidance system you'll ever have is integrity. The Hebrew word translated "integrity" is *tummah,* from which comes the word "thummim." In Old Testament days, when a person had a question—should he go there, attack them, do this—he would go to the High Priest who would consult the Urim and the Thummim. *Urim* means "lights." *Thummim* means "perfection" or "direction." The Urim and Thummim was part of the High Priest's breastplate. It would seem to refer to the twelve gems on his breastplate—one for each tribe—which would light up in such a way as to spell an answer, each stone representing the first letter of its tribe.

The difference between the Old Testament believer who sought direction from the High Priest and the New Testament believer who seeks direction from a pastor or counselor is a big one, however, for the Old Testament believer had to follow the counsel of the High Priest, or die.

We live in a culture where there's endless counseling and running to this guy and that meeting, trying to find what we want to hear. Integrity, on the other hand, says, "I'm coming to You, Lord. No games, no agenda. Whatever You say, I'll do."

"*That's* integrity," God says. "And I will definitely guide you."

Integrity protects from sin, profits one's children, promotes stability, and provides guidance. How can we incorporate integrity into our own lives? I believe the answer can be seen in the life of Job . . .

> "Do you still retain your integrity?" asked his wife. "Curse God, and die" (Job 2:9).
>
> Although his children, possessions, and health had all been decimated, Job answered, "I will not cave in on the issue of integrity."

His friends came to him, saying, you must be doing *something* wrong, Job.

"Even though you want me to confess to this stuff, even though that might sound humble and seem spiritual, it lacks integrity because what you are saying I have done is just not true. It might sound noble and humble and spiritual—but I must not compromise honesty and integrity," declared Job.

What made Job this way? What made Job a man about whom God would say to Satan, "Here's a man who will hold fast his integrity no matter what you do, no matter what happens"?

"I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" Job declared (Job 31:1). "I made a decision about my life that I would not look at a woman lustfully. I drew a line in the sand, and made my stand." Such was Job's mentality. He wasn't making a deal with his Lord. He was making a decision about his life.

If someone offered me a bunch of heroin, I would have lots of options: I could call the cops, witness to him, or tell him to beat it. But partaking of his heroin would not be an option because somewhere along the way in my life I decided heroin is non-negotiable. When I finally, seriously decide that lying is not an option, that twisting the truth is non-negotiable—I will no longer be tempted to lie; I will walk in integrity. Whenever we make such a decision, God makes the provision which enables us to carry it out. That's what Job had done.

"But he lost everything," you say.

Not true. At the end of the story, Job had twice as much as he had originally.

When you make a decision to start living in integrity and honesty, God will bless you just as He blessed Job, just like He blessed Abimelech. Our culture is so confused on this issue. Let us go out and be salt and light. Let us choose to be people of integrity that we might see blessings in our lives personally, in our families, and in our country.

21

Genesis 21:1, 2
And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

And so at last we see the promise that was given to Abraham twenty-five years previously coming to pass. As we have noted, more often than not, there is a time gap between the promise and performance of God—a period which is invariably longer than we thought it would be, or than we think it should be. Because our implicit trust in the Lord will be a key ingredient in allowing us to function in the coming kingdom, it is essential that we be people of faith. So Abraham, the father of faith, was himself put into a place where his faith was stretched.

Genesis 21:3–7
And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him. And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him. And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age.

Abraham named the child exactly what God said he should be named: Isaac, or Laughter—signifying the amazing miracle of his birth to a ninety-year-old mom and a hundred-year-old dad.

Genesis 21:8
And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned.

Abraham celebrated when Isaac was no longer dependent upon his mother's milk, but was able to take in meat. So, too, there's great joy not only in the heart of the heavenly Father, but in an earthly parent when we see our kids move from milk to meat—when they can sink their teeth into the

Scriptures and extract truth, when they no longer need to be fed by their dad or mom from a spiritual bottle, when they begin to see things in the Word that apply to them personally.

> *I had such a reason to rejoice a few weeks before my daughter, Jessie, went to heaven. We were on the Mountaintop, where I was teaching through the Book of Revelation one weekend. I came to a certain point where I sent the "retreatants" away to contemplate certain sections. During the sharing time which followed, Jessie raised her hand and said, "Dad I don't know if you've ever seen this before, but in my assigned section concerning the seven bowl judgments, it struck me that the seven bowls match up chronologically with the seven last sayings of Christ on the Cross." She made the correlation between God pouring out His wrath and Christ absorbing the wrath that should have been ours. And I was "bowled" over.*

As I rushed out the door last night, Christy said, "Stop, Dad. Could I lay hands on you and pray blessing for you?" Oh, my. Watching your kids grab spiritual principles causes celebration.

How do you become a deeper person in the Word? The writer of Hebrews tells us that strong meat belongs to those who by reason of use have exercised their sense to discern good and evil (Hebrews 5:14). In other words, strong meat is given to those who use what they already have been given. As you put into practice the milk, pabulum, or strained vegetables before you, strong meat will be added to you.

> **Genesis 21:9**
> **And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.**

At this point, Isaac is approximately three years old, Ishmael approximately seventeen. If you wonder how a seventeen-year-old could tease a three-year-old, you haven't had kids yet!

> **Genesis 21:10, 11**

Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son.

"Ishmael and his mother have got to go!" Sarah said. The thought was grievous to Abraham because, as any father would, he deeply loved his son.

Genesis 21:12
And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

It's amazing how often we as husbands quote Ephesians 5:22: Wives, submit to your husbands. We know that verse well! But, dear brothers, understand that Ephesians 5:22 follows Ephesians 5:21: Submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God. The correct picture is husbands submitting to wives, wives submitting to husbands, listening to each other, receiving from each other. So it is that God says, "Abraham, listen to your wife."

Genesis 21:13
And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.

"Ishmael is important to you," God said to Abraham. "And because he is your child, I'm going to make a great nation of him." Ishmael did indeed become a great nation—the Arab people of today. But although Ishmael was made a great nation eventually, this was not the plan of God initially.

I think of D. L. Moody—a powerful evangelist, a wonderful man of God, the Billy Graham of the 1800's. Through him, not only were hundreds of thousands of people converted, but the Moody Memorial Church in Chicago—which is to this day a powerhouse of preaching and a lighthouse of the gospel—and Moody Bible

Institute—which has trained tens of thousands of Christian workers very effectively—came to being under his direction.

Yet there's something else D. L. Moody began, about which at the end of his life he said, "God has blessed this, but it is the blessing of Ishmael." His intention was very sincere. His motives were right.

He truly wanted to begin a ministry that would help young men develop their bodies physically, as well as their souls spiritually. But in putting this into play, he was talked into certain compromises—namely that this particular ministry would be overseen by prominent members of the community. Thus, the YMCA was born—blessed to a certain extent, but far from what it could have been.

Ishmael is also blessed, but he will prove to be a perpetual problem to the people of Israel, the descendants of Isaac.

Genesis 21:14 (a)
And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away . . .

At first this story troubled me greatly. At this point, Abraham was a very wealthy man. In addition to the herds too numerous to share land with Lot's, Abraham had been given riches from both Pharaoh and Abimelech. Why, then, wouldn't he have sent Hagar and Ishmael away with a huge caravan of supplies?

But upon further study, his actions make perfect sense for a man of faith.

Genesis 21:14 (b)
. . . and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

The biblical use of the word "wilderness" refers to the desert, a dry, barren region—whereas the biblical use of the word "desert" refers to a

wilderness, a refreshing, wooded area. This is why Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, yet retreated with His disciples to the desert (Mark 6:31).



***For topical study of Genesis 21:14 entitled "Make No Provision for the Flesh," turn to page* 93.**

Genesis 21:15
And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs.

No doubt Ishmael was beginning to experience dehydration, so Hagar put him under a shrub in an effort to shade him from the sun.

Genesis 21:16, 17 (a)
And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God . . .

Who is the angel of God, or the angel of the Lord? It's Jesus.

Genesis 21:17 (b)
. . . called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.

"What's wrong, Hagar?" asked Jesus—just as centuries later He would say to His disciples, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" (Matthew 8:26). Referring to the Sea of Galilee, "Let us go over to the other side," He had said (Matthew 8:18). He hadn't said, "Let us go under out in the middle," or, "Let us go down in an attempt." No, Jesus had given the Word to His disciples that day that they would indeed make it to the other side. Jesus had already told Hagar Ishmael would be blessed (Genesis 16). Thus, the Lord

here is lovingly rebuking Hagar. “Didn’t I give you My Word, Hagar? Have you already forgotten?”

What Word has God given us? He’s told us all things work together for good (Romans 8:28), that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Matthew 28:20), that He will give us the desires of our heart (Psalm 37:4). He’s told us that our sins are forgiven (1 John 1:9), that His love for us is everlasting (Jeremiah 31:3), that we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37). What aileth *us?*

Genesis 21:18–21
Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

I find it more than coincidental that in the story of Ishmael, we see the entire plan of God for Israel . . .



***For topical study of Genesis 21:14–21 entitled “God’s Faithfulness to the Jew . . . And to You,” turn to page* 96.**

Genesis 21:22, 23
And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest: Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son’s son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned.

This is a very ordinary event—a contractual dispute in the everyday life of this giant of the faith. No wonder Abimelech asked Abraham not to deal falsely with him. This is the same Abimelech who, years previously having been told Sarah was Abraham's sister, took her into his harem until God spoke to him of her true identity.

Genesis 21:24
And Abraham said, I will swear.

Abraham shows a tremendous amount of humility in that he never defends himself. In this regard, I am reminded of a journal entry I made recently during an Alaskan cruise on which I was speaking . . .

So many blessings, so many thoughts cruising the waters of the inland passage of Alaska and seeing the mountains tower above us, the stars shining over us, the unseen but teeming life beneath us, I am deeply impacted. Not only by His majesty, or creativity, or power and glory but especially and surprisingly by His humility, for this majestic, creative-beyond-genius Being tells us that He stretches the heavens out like a curtain, He sits upon the circle of the earth (Isaiah), He measures the heavens with the span of His hand (Isaiah)—yet He did not give us the take-your-breath-away data, facts and figures of the size of other stars, the range of our galaxy, the puniness of our planet in comparison to the billions and trillions of other objects. He simply allows the vastness of space, the mysteries beneath the sea, the power of the atom that He holds together (Colossians) to slowly be discovered. As man's technology and ability increases, he only discovers more wonder. And I wonder at His humility. I would have laid it all out, let it be known what I have done, how great I am with facts and figures and data. But God allowed Himself to be discovered, uncovered, in due season. And that season will fill all eternity. Real power, true genius, creative ingenuity, spiritual authority if indeed real, can wait, indeed should wait to be discovered slowly, quietly. For only what is real can dare to wait. And only what is humble will ultimately be exalted.

God is the Epitome of humility. Only true greatness can be humble. And that's what Abraham is showing us as well. He doesn't try to prove he's a great guy. He just goes about his work, and, after years of observation, Abimelech says, "I can see that God is with you."

Genesis 21:25
And Abraham reproved Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away.

If someone said to me, "I can see you're blessed," I would be quiet about any dispute we may have. Not Abraham. He showed humility, but he also showed honesty.

Genesis 21:26
And Abimelech said, I wot not who hath done this thing: neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it, but to day.

Thirdly, Abraham shows charity in taking what Abimelech said at face value.

Genesis 21:27
And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant.

Fourthly, Abraham shows wisdom in that he makes a covenant with Abimelech to ensure they don't have this problem in the future.

Genesis 21:28–32
And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves? And he said, For these seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well. Wherefore he called that place Beer-sheba; because there they sware both of them. Thus they made a covenant at Beer-sheba: then Abimelech rose

up, and Phichol the chief captain of his host, and they returned into the land of the Philistines.

Finally, Abraham shows generosity in giving Abimelech seven lambs, which would be a living reminder of the agreement they made.

Humility, honesty, charity, wisdom, and generosity—Abraham provides a wonderful model of maturity.

Genesis 21:33, 34
And Abraham planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God. And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days.

As your margin notes may indicate, Abraham planted a tamarisk tree, and in so doing, he finds a creative, spontaneous, innovative way of worshiping.

Three-year-old Benny came out of his room holding a picture attached to a helium balloon.

"What's that, Benny?" I asked.

"It's a picture of me and Jesus," he said, as he went in the backyard and watched as the balloon soared heavenward.

Such is innovative, creative worship from the heart of one who loves God.

When you love God, it's not enough just to sing the same songs as everyone else. It's not enough to go through the motions during worship sessions.

- A lover of God finds a way to plant a tree and say, "Lord, this is for You."
- A lover of God finds a way to break the alabaster box and say, "This is my dowry, and I'm giving it to You," (see Mark 14).
- A lover of God finds a way to dance in his undergarments before the Lord (2 Samuel 6:14).

A lover of God finds ways of fresh, personal, intimate expressions others may never see. As a result, Abraham discovered the "everlasting God"—a new aspect of God's nature—for fresh revelation only follows true worship.

MAKE NO PROVISION FOR THE FLESH

A Topical Study of
GENESIS 21:14

I'm in Abraham's sandals—wealthy like he is—and I must send my son to the desert. What do I do? I call for the mules and donkeys and load them down with water bottles, McDonald's milkshakes, and Gatorade. I call for the camels and load them with tents and umbrellas and ice chests. I do whatever I can to ensure my son's safety. But that's not what Abraham did. All he gave his son was a single water bottle, a bit of bread and a "See ya later."

This initially seemed so odd to me. Why would a dad who had lots of money send his son away into a deathly region with just a little bit of bread and water?

I suggest three reasons . . .

An Indication of His Faith

God made a promise to Abraham and reiterated it several times that Ishmael would become a mighty nation. And here, evidently because he believed God would do what He promised, Abraham wisely decided not to give God a hand in fulfilling what He had promised. After all, that's how Ishmael was conceived in the first place.

Consequently, Abraham shows incredible peace. He gives Ishmael and Hagar a bit of water, a bit of bread, so saying, "I trust the Lord is going to do what He said—not because of my provision, but because of His promise."

Mom and Dad, let this be a comfort to you today. The promises of God toward my children are the same as toward yours: Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6). No matter what desert your child is in, no matter in what dry region he finds himself, even when he is old he won't depart from the way he's been trained.

"For I know whom I have believed," said Paul, "and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him" (2 Timothy 1:12). Have you committed your kids to the Lord? God is able to keep them. This doesn't mean He's merely capable. It means He's *committed* to keeping that which has been entrusted to Him.

Mom, you may be heartbroken. Dad, you may be discouraged. It may seem your kids aren't going the right way. But God isn't through with them, for He who has begun a good work in them will be faithful to complete it (Philippians 1:6).

I hate it when I panic. I get worried. I get uptight. And I run around like a chicken with my head cut off, trying to make something happen. Faith is the opposite of panic. I love it when I'm not panicking, when I'm walking in faith. When I walk in faith, I'm not irritated, anxious, or upset. There's a peace deep within me, and a serenity that overflows from me. I like it when I walk in faith like Abraham.

Abraham said, "I've heard Your voice, Father. Ishmael, Hagar, here's some water and some bread. God be with you." He is maturing, this mighty man of God. He is growing, this giant of faith. He'll miss Ishmael—but he trusts God completely, knowing God will do exactly what He said He would.

An Illustration of Our Flesh

Secondly, looking at this account from an entirely different angle, the story before us is not only an indication of Abraham's faith, but also an illustration of our flesh.

How do I know this?

Paul calls the story of Ishmael and Hagar an allegory (Galatians 4:22–29) in which Ishmael is a type of the flesh, and Isaac a type of the Spirit. You see, the mockery that took place in this story from Ishmael towards Isaac happens in each of our hearts constantly.

> *For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*
>
> Galatians 5:17

There's a constant battle going on, and here's the question: Who are we going to allow to win? The Bible says the solution is to cast out Ishmael, the flesh.

> *For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*
>
> Romans 8:6

If I choose to be carnally minded and allow the stuff of the flesh to have dominion over me, it will lead to death, depression, discouragement, despair, and defeat. If, on the other hand, I say, "Ishmael, you're out of here," and choose to walk in the Spirit, I will have life and peace.

How do we cast Ishmael out?

By doing what Abraham did: by giving him no provision.

Abraham didn't give Ishmael a Visa card and a Ford Explorer. He gave him nothing more than prisoner's rations—a little bread and water. That is why Paul emphatically tells us to "make no provision for the flesh" (Romans 13:14).

I don't care if everyone else is going to the dance. If you know flesh is there, you stay away. I don't care if everyone else is going to see the show. If you know flesh is on the screen, you make no provision.

> *Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*
>
> Galatians 6:7, 8

Every fleshly thing I see or hear is a seed planted in the soil of my soul, and will come up eventually. Likewise, every Godly thing I take in will also come to fruition. Perhaps the best illustration of this is one I shared recently with a group of junior-highers . . .

> It's as if there are two dogs inside of you: one black, one white. The white dog is life, the black dog, death. And at any given point, you're feeding one of the dogs through the type of people with whom you associate, through what you choose to listen to, watch, and take in. If you feed the black dog, he gets bigger and stronger. He bares his fangs and starts ripping on the white dog, as the white dog gets smaller and smaller. Once the black dog decimates the white dog, he turns on you and begins to sink his jaws into your innermost being—leaving you wondering why you're so down, defeated, depressed, and discontent. On the other hand, if you feed the white dog—the Spirit—by doing what's right in God's sight, the white dog grows bigger and stronger, as the black dog grows punier and weaker until he's no bigger than a Chihuahua. At any given moment, you'll feed one of the two dogs. Which will it be?

"Who is that?" Samuel asked.

"That's Agag, king of the Amalekites," Saul answered.

"God told you to destroy every Amalekite," said Samuel.

"Yeah, but I'm keeping him as a trophy," Saul said. "He's no problem. I've got him in chains" (see 1 Samuel 15).

Twenty three years pass. Saul is doing battle with the Philistines on Mt. Gilboa. He takes a shot, falls to the ground, and when he comes to, he's looking into the face of a young man with sword in hand.

"Who are you?" Saul asks.

"I am an Amalekite," answered the young man before killing Saul (2 Samuel 1).

Thus Saul was done in by what he himself was supposed to kill.

So, if you say, "I know God told me to deal with this thing I've got tucked away in the garage or locked in the cabinet, but it's not that big a deal; I've got it under control"—watch out. It's Agag—and it will eventually get you. If you provide for your flesh, your flesh will rise up and give you great pain and difficulty. But if you finally come to the place where you say, "Ishmael's got to go *today,*" God will give you the energy, the will, the power, the strength to send him on his way.

Illumination about My Failure

The story of Hagar provides illumination about my failure, for in the Galatians 4 passage, Paul says not only is Ishmael a type of the flesh and Isaac a type of the Spirit, but Hagar is a type of the Law and Sarah a type of the new covenant. Hagar represents Mt. Sinai, where the Law was given. Sarah represents the heavenly Mt. Zion, from whence grace flows.

My natural tendency is to say, "The best way to deal with the flesh is to lay down the law. I'm going to set up rules and regulations to keep my flesh in check." But whenever I do, I am bound to fail badly because, although the rules and regulations might be wonderful, I cannot keep them. Oh, for a while I might be able to, during which time I'll say, "What's wrong with you? Why is your Ishmael running about wildly? Why can't you deal with the flesh like I have?"

But eventually I will fall under the weight of my own rules, and I will fail miserably. Then I'll say, "I was doing so well for three days, or three months, or three years—but then I blew it. So why even go to Bible study, why even pray? I'm a failure. The Lord will never use me."

This is why the law doesn't work. It makes you either a self-righteous prude or a self-condemned dude. It causes us to say either, "What's wrong with you?" or, "What's wrong with me?"

So what's the answer? Do what Abraham did. Send Hagar away, and embrace Sarah. Don't put yourself or others under regulations or rules. Rather hold fast to the new covenant, and walk in grace.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO THE JEW . . . AND TO YOU

A Topical Study of GENESIS 21:14–21

Although Ishmael is the father of the Arab genetically, he could be considered a type of Israel spiritually, for it is Israel who is under the Law, of which Hagar is a picture (Galatians 4:25). In this light, look with me at the vignette before us, and see how it encapsulates the historic and prophetic plan of God for His people, Israel.

Sent Away Wandering

> *And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.*
>
> Genesis 21:14

Because Ishmael mocked Isaac, he was sent away. This is precisely what happened to Israel. In A.D. 32, in accordance with Zechariah's prophecy (9:9), Jesus presented Himself to the people of Israel when He rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. But they mocked Him when they shook their collective fist at Him, saying, "Away with Him. Crucify Him."

Aware of what the consequence of this would be, Jesus cried, "O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem. I would gather you under My wings as a mother hen gathers her chicks, but you would not, therefore your house shall be left unto desolation. Your nation will be destroyed" (see Matthew 23:37, 38).

Indeed, approximately thirty-eight years after Israel declared, "We will not have this Man rule over us," Roman General Titus destroyed the city of Jerusalem and burned the temple, causing the Jewish people to flee for their lives. Those who stayed tried to launch a revolt against the Roman authorities which so incensed Emperor Hadrian that he ordered them either to be exterminated in the land of Israel or dispersed throughout the world. So it was that the Jews were sent into every continent of the world save Antarctica.

> *If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of*

eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life:

Deuteronomy 28:58, 64–66

"If you reject Me," the Lord told His people, "you'll be scattered into every nation, but you'll find no comfort. You'll be hunted and persecuted everywhere you go." And as one studies history, one sees that is exactly what happened—for every culture the Jews entered attempted to annihilate them. But here's the irony: They were also blessed incredibly. Intellectually, academically, financially, wherever the Jews went, they left their mark. Though they were persecuted, yet they prospered.

One rabbi said it best when, on the eve of the Spanish Inquisition, he stood before King Ferdinand and declared, "You cannot curse us because we are blessed; and you cannot bless us because we are cursed."

Miraculously, the Jews kept their identity—an occurrence unique to the Jewish nation, as no other people in history has ever been robbed of their homeland and survived longer than two generations. The Jews are a people who have been scattered yet preserved, cursed yet blessed, blessed yet cursed. Why? Because God said, "When you reject Me, this will happen." We see Ishmael sent away and wandering. Such is the story of the Jews.

Water Spent

> *And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs.*
>
> Genesis 21:15

After Hagar was sent away, the water she was given dried up very quickly. Scripturally, water is a type of two things: the Spirit (John 7:37), and the Word (John 4). When the Jews rejected Jesus, they became spiritually dry. As a whole, the Jewish people are fascinated by, and committed to the Old Testament. Rabbis today have lots of questions and wonderful interaction, but no conclusions and no answers. An ex-rabbi named Paul who was converted from Judaism to Jesus explained it this way . . .

> *But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 3:14

Without Christ, the eyes of the Jew are blinded because the Spirit has departed, leaving the Scriptures dry.

Weeping

. . . And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept.

Genesis 21:16 (b)

In the minor key foundational to the music of the Jew, one can hear the weeping of Hagar to this day. Although the temple was filled with the sounds of trumpets and cymbals, lyres, horns, and harps, in Jewish Orthodox services today you will hear a cantor, but no musical instruments because when the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, Orthodox Jews said, "We must never play instruments again until we have a temple."

The only part of Solomon's temple that remains today is actually a retaining wall known as the Wailing Wall. Over what do the Jews wail? The loss of their temple, for they know that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22). According to the Law, the only place acceptable for sacrificial atonement being the temple, the Jews cannot be ceremonially forgiven. Thus, like Hagar, the weeping of the Jew continues.

Rise

Arise, lift up the lad . . .

Genesis 21:18 (a)

Responding to her cry, God told Hagar to arise. There is coming a day when God will say to the Jew, "Rise up." When will this be? "Come and let us return unto the Lord," writes Hosea, "for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight" (6:1, 2).

According to 2 Peter 3:8, in God's economy, a day is as a thousand years, a thousand years as a day. In accordance with Hosea's prophecy, for 2,000 years, the Jewish people had indeed been torn. Now they're home again in Israel. In the third day, they'll see the light and be revived. When will this happen? It's been "two days" thus far—2,000 years. We come to the "third day" at the turn of the century in the year 2000. Am I saying the Rapture should have happened in 2000? No. No one knows the day or the hour. But this we do know: We are in the "third day." The Lord's coming is near.

Opened Eyes

And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water . . .

Genesis 21:19 (a)

Hagar didn't see the water that was right before her until God opened her eyes. The same is true of Israel . . .

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

Romans 11:25

A day is coming indeed when Israel's eyes shall be opened—when she, like Hagar will see the well that was before her all along . . .

In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.

Zechariah 13:1

Became an Archer

> *And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.*
>
> Genesis 21:20

In biblical times, leaders were archers (1 Samuel 20). When the Lord comes to rule and reign in His millennial kingdom, He will do so from the city of Jerusalem. The Jews will be His archers—His leaders. As the church, we will rule and reign with Christ. We're spiritual Israel. But physical Israel will provide His base of operations humanly speaking.

Wilderness of Paran

And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran . . .

Genesis 21:21 (a)

The word "wilderness" means "desert." *Paran* means either "beauty" or "glory." Ishmael dwelt in the desert of beauty or glory. We see this happening today, for, as Isaiah prophesied, the Jews have made a desert "blossom like a rose" (35:1)—so much so that Israel has become the number one exporter of flowers and the third largest exporter of fresh fruits in the world today. But this is only a sneak preview of coming attractions, for in the millennial kingdom, Israel will be as glorious as the Garden of Eden (Ezekiel 36).

Wife of Egypt

. . . .and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

Genesis 21:21 (b)

Just as Ishmael married an Egyptian woman, so Israel will be joined with Egypt. "How can this be?" you ask. "The Jews and the Egyptians are perpetual enemies." Truly, there has been no people more difficult for Israel throughout history than the Egyptians—except for the people of Assyria: present day Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.

Isaiah 19:23–25

All we may see is Saddam Hussein shouting, "Death to the great white Satan" and hanging our leaders in effigy. God, however, views the situation entirely differently, for He looks down the tunnel of time and sees the Egyptian and the Assyrian (the Syrian, Iraqi, and Iranian) walking hand in hand to Israel—not for warfare, but for worship. What a day it will be when centuries of enmity will be replaced with unity.

So it is that through Ishmael we see the plan of God for Israel. And in God's plan for Israel redemptively, we glimpse His heart for us personally . . .

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things

we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:35–39

After stating that nothing can separate us from God's love, Paul launches in to Romans 9—11, three chapters which deal with God's faithfulness to the Jewish people.

Thus, Paul's point is clear: We know that nothing shall separate us from God's love for us because we see nothing separated the Jews from His love for them. Even if you've been wandering, stumbling staggering; even if you've been faithless, God is faithful still (2 Timothy 2:13). That's the message of Ishmael's story.

I've walked with the Lord for over forty years, and I tell you, God is faithful. No matter what you go through, God is faithful even when we are faithless. But don't take my word for it. Look at Israel. See both in her history and in her future, God's amazing grace and faithfulness. God's not through with Israel, gang—neither is He through with you.



22 On my desk sits a picture of Tammy taken in Israel at the Garden of Gethsemane. In it, she is sitting on a wall, lifting her hands to the Lord, with her eyes closed in worship. Beside her is an open Bible, and around her neck is her ever-present camera. I like this picture because, to me, it captures the essence of my wife. And because I love her, even though I see this picture every time I'm at my desk, I never tire of it.

I find the same to be true of the chapter before us, for it is a picture of Jesus Christ. And Jesus is One I never grow weary of looking at or looking on. As you will see, the picture in our text is actually a Polaroid—one that develops and becomes more clearly focused as we go along . . .

Genesis 22:1, 2 (a)

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac . . .

Because God does not remember our sin (Hebrews 10:17), He doesn't even acknowledge Ishmael—the fruit of Abraham's impatience.

Genesis 22:2 (b)
. . . whom thou lovest . . .

Isaac is a picture, a type of Christ . . .

- Conceived miraculously when a heretofore-barren Sarah was ninety years old, Isaac was a miracle baby.
- Born of a virgin, Jesus was a miracle Baby.
- Isaac's birth was promised long before he showed up—twenty years before he was born.
- Jesus' birth was promised clear back in Genesis 3:15—approximately 4,000 years before His birth in Bethlehem.
- Abraham and Sarah were told what to name their son.
- Mary and Joseph were told what to name their Son.
- To his father, Isaac was obedient to the point of death.
- To His Father, Jesus was obedient to death.

The parallels are many. Isaac and Jesus are linked together. Isaac is the type; Jesus the fulfillment.

Genesis 22:2 (c)
. . . and get thee into the land of Moriah . . .

Moriah literally means "Foreseen of Jehovah." Therefore, it is as if God is saying, "Take your son, your only son, where you will provide a sneak preview of coming attractions." You see, God would sacrifice His only Son on the same spot to which He called Abraham.

Genesis 22:2 (d)
. . . and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

The Hebrew word translated "offer" is *alaw,* which means "to lift up." Thus, God tells Abraham to lift Isaac up upon Mt. Moriah. "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to Myself," declared Jesus. "And this spake He signifying His death" (John 12:32, 33), as He was lifted up on Calvary's Cross.

Genesis 22:3 (a)
And Abraham rose up early in the morning . . .

This is incredible to me. Here Abraham is told to offer his son as a sacrifice to the Lord—and rather than hesitate, he rises early to obey.

Genesis 22:3 (b)
. . . and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son . . .

Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of this picture, would also travel to the same mountain with two men. Our Lord would be crucified between two thieves—which I find poetically correct, for in my opinion, He is the greatest thief in human history, stealing our hearts through His death on our behalf.

Genesis 22:3 (c)
. . . and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

Abraham and Isaac leave for Mt. Moriah, the place foreseen of the Lord. Mt. Moriah is a ridge that runs from north to south through the city of Jerusalem, peaking right outside of the north wall of the city at a place called Calvary.

For topical study of Genesis 22:3 entitled "The Moriah Moment," turn to page **104.**

Genesis 22:4
Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.

Isaac and Abraham walked side by side for three days on their way to Moriah—just as Jesus and the Father walked together for three years during Jesus' public ministry that would climax at His death on Calvary.

Genesis 22:5 (a)
And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship . . .

The Hebrew word translated "lad" could speak of a man in his thirties—the age Jesus was when He climbed Mt. Calvary.

Genesis 22:5 (b)
. . . and come again to you.

"This is as far as you can go," said Abraham to the young men accompanying him. "But we will come back to you." In other words, Abraham knew Isaac would return with him.

> By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.
>
> Hebrews 11:17–19

Even though it had never happened before, Abraham believed God would resurrect Isaac.

Genesis 22:6 (a)

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son . . .

Isaac carried the wood upon which he would be laid, just as Jesus carried the wooden cross upon which He would be nailed.

> For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counseller, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.
>
> Isaiah 9:6

What was on the shoulder of the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace? The Cross. That's why He has the right to rule over me. That's why He has the right to reign over you. He alone died in our place.

Genesis 22:6 (b)
. . . and he took the fire in his hand . . .

Isaac carried the wood, but Abraham carried the fire. Why? The fire speaks of the holy, righteous indignation that the Father would hurl on His Son as He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf (2 Corinthians 5:21).

As a result, God—who is too pure to look on sin—would turn His back upon His Son. This is what terrified Jesus, for He knew that for the first time in all eternity, He and His Father would be out of fellowship, signified by the darkness that blanketed the earth for three hours the day Jesus died.

We can be terrified by a lot of things—cancer, bankruptcy, broken relationships, death. But those things didn't terrify our Lord. The one and only thing that terrified Him was being out of touch with His Father. Oh, that this may be my heart as well.

Genesis 22:6 (c)
. . . and a knife . . .

The knife Abraham carried speaks of the spear that would pierce Jesus' side as He hung on the Cross in our place.

Genesis 22:6 (d)
. . . and they went both of them together.

Abraham and Isaac traveled together. So, too, the Father and Son travel together. Contrary to what many imagine, it wasn't as though Jesus loved us and died for us in order to appease His angry Father. No, salvation was the Father's heart and plan from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3, 4).

Genesis 22:7, 8 (a)
And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering . . .

"God will provide himself a lamb," Abraham told Isaac—not, "God will provide *for* Himself a lamb"—but, "God will provide *Himself* a lamb. He will *be* the Lamb."

Genesis 22:8 (b), 9
. . . so they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

As He prayed in the Garden the night before He was to be crucified, two hundred Roman soldiers led by Judas Iscariot, came to arrest Jesus.

"Whom seek ye?" He asked.

"Jesus of Nazareth," they answered.

"I AM," Jesus declared, and—boom—the entire regiment fell down backwards (John 18:6).

After regaining their balance, the soldiers bound Jesus with ropes and led Him away. But it certainly wasn't ropes which bound this One who flattened the Roman army with the simplest of statements. It was submission to His Father and love for His brethren that bound Him.

Genesis 22:10, 11 (a)
And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the LORD . . .

Who is the angel of the Lord? It's Jesus Himself. This means Jesus was in heaven watching this drama unfold, knowing it depicted what He would go through centuries later.

Genesis 22:11 (b), 12
. . . called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

"Stop, Abraham," God said. "You've clearly demonstrated to yourself and to all who will read your story that you love Me."

Genesis 22:13
And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

That Abraham saw a ram instead of a lamb caught in the thicket speaks of the fact that this was not the fulfillment of God's promise to provide Himself a lamb (v. 7), for that promise would not be fulfilled until Jesus came as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Genesis 22:14

And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.

As your margin might indicate, *Jehovah-jireh* means "The Lord will provide" or "The Lord will see." Both are true. God provided a ram in place of Isaac. Whatever you want to see about God's provision for you will always be seen on Mt. Moriah. When you doubt God's love for you, provision for you, care for you—go to Mt. Moriah, to Calvary, and lift up your eyes. You will be reminded that God indeed saw your need—and provided perfectly.

Genesis 22:15–18
And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Because Abraham obeyed, the Lord would make of him a great nation. And because Jesus was obedient to death, He became the first of many who would follow (1 Corinthians 15:20–23). In other words, we have been blessed because He obeyed.

Genesis 22:19
So Abraham returned unto his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba.

The two men and Abraham travel back to Beersheba together without Isaac. It must be this way, for it was on the third day that Isaac was set free—just as on the third day after He died, Jesus rose again.

Genesis 22:20–24

And it came to pass after these things, that it was told Abraham, saying, Behold, Milcah, she hath also born children unto thy brother Nahor; Huz his firstborn, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel the father of Aram, And Chesed, and Hazo, and Pildash, and Jidlaph, and Bethuel. And Bethuel begat Rebekah: these eight Milcah did bear to Nahor, Abraham's brother. And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, she bare also Te-bah, and Gaham, and Thahash, and Maachah.

At first reading, I thought this genealogy to be a somewhat odd ending to the glorious story of crucifixion and resurrection. But upon further consideration, this ending makes perfect sense, for in this passage, we are introduced to Rebekah, the bride of Isaac. After a spear was thrust into the side of our Greater than Isaac as He hung on the Cross, blood and water—the fluids of birthing—gushed forth.

What was birthed from His side?

Look again at the first Adam, and you'll see that from his side was taken a rib, from his side came Eve, from his side came a bride. Likewise, from the side of the Last Adam, Jesus Christ, came a Bride—the church, you and me.

And the story continues . . .

THE MORIAH MOMENT

A Topical Study of GENESIS 22:3

It was at 11:30 A.M., May 29th, 1953 that the BBC declared, "No man has, or ever will, climbed higher," as Sir Edmund Hillary's successful ascent of Mt. Everest was announced to the world. While the BBC's statement that May morning was true geographically, I suggest the ascent of the mountain in the passage before us was an infinitely higher climb.

Sitting only a couple hundred feet above the city of Jerusalem, Mt. Moriah is technically only a ridge. But when the Lord said to Abraham, "I want you to take your son, your only son to Mt. Moriah," father and son set off on the greatest mountain-climbing expedition in world history—second only to the one another Father and Son would later make to the very same destination centuries later.

Put yourself in Abraham's sandals and you will see this is an incredible journey, for God had asked him to sacrifice his son—his only son, the promised son, the one of whom he was so proud, the one in whom he saw such potential. How could Abraham have had such a heart to obey such a command? I couldn't have done it. But Abraham did.

How?

The reason Abraham could climb Mt. Moriah is the same reason Sir Edmund Hillary could climb Everest. You see, prior to Hillary's ascent up Mt. Everest, he spent five years acclimating his body to the altitude, five years allowing his lungs to expand to deal with the lack of oxygen he would encounter at that height, five years to get in shape, five years to make preparations and gather gear.

So, too, Abraham would climb his infinitely higher mountain because, like Hillary's team, there had been great preparation.

"It came to pass after these things God did tempt, or test, Abraham" (22:1) After what things? Fifty-seven years of things.

- Leaving his home in Ur for a land God would show him was Step #1 in training for the Moriah moment.
- Saying goodbye to his nephew as Lot headed for Sodom was Step #2.
- Refusing the spoils of battle offered him by the king of Sodom was Step #3.
- Obeying God's command to send his son Ishmael into the desert was Step #4.

Nothing in Scripture is accidental, nor incidental. Thus, when we read, "It came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham," it means that the testing didn't take place until *after these things*—each of which prepared Abraham for this moment.

God will never, ever give you a test He has not thoroughly and painstakingly prepared you to navigate successfully. Never.

We look at Abraham's Moriah moment and think, *"I couldn't do that."* And we're right. We couldn't, because God hasn't prepared us for that—yet.

> *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 10:13

"Wait a minute," you say. "This deals with temptation—but Abraham wasn't being tempted. He was being tested."

The original language does not differentiate between a temptation and a test. Therefore, when it says God did tempt Abraham, it means God did test Abraham. In reality, there is no difference between a temptation and a test, for in any situation that comes our way, Satan means it for a temptation to pull us down—but God intends it as a test to pull us through. Satan means to destroy us, to shake us up. God uses the same event to edify us and show us off.

Upon its completion, Chrysler gives a new Jeep Grand Cherokee to *Car And Driver. Car And Driver,* in turn, takes the jeep out on the

track and through its paces to shake it down, to see if it's going to rattle and fall apart.

"We're not worried about it," Chrysler says. "We've already taken it through tests, and this one is not going to shake it apart. It's going to show it off."

Satan says, "Aha! I'm going to shake you up. I'm going to wipe you out."

But God says, "I'm allowing this because I want to show My strength through you and show you what I can do."

People say to me, "I don't know if I could deal with some of the things you've dealt with. If I lost a spouse or a child, I'm not sure I could pass such a test."

And to them I say, "I have had blessing in my life. I've walked with the Lord for over forty years—and all along the way He has always been faithful to prepare me for every test He's given me. Always."

"Even if God is faithful to prepare us through a series of events, each perhaps more difficult than the one before, what kind of life is that?" you may wonder. "Why would a person choose to walk such a path?"

Following are three reasons . . .

Completion

Paul tells us there are three great virtues: faith, hope, and love (1 Corinthians 13:13). Abraham's faith was developed first when God called him out of Ur . . .

> *By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*
>
> Hebrews 11:8

But God didn't stop there, for He proceeded to build hope into Abraham, as Abraham waited for his promised son . . .

> *Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.*
>
> Romans 4:18

Nor did God stop there, for the greatest of these is love. Our text contains the first use of the word "love" in Scripture. It's as if God is saying, "Let the one you love go in your greater love for Me. Love is a chance for you take a quantum leap in growth."

If you say, "I don't want faith or hope or love. I want to be frazzled and afraid and frustrated"—don't go down the path that leads to Moriah, the path that leads you on a journey of trials and testing. But if you want to be entire and complete, lacking nothing, there's only one way . . .

> *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*
>
> James 1:2–4

There’s no other way to be complete than to say “Okay” to tests, temptations, and trials.

Contemplation

"I've prepared you, Abraham," God says, "to do something seemingly unbelievably difficult because I want to show people a picture of My Son. Even though it will be difficult for you, Abraham, your trial will touch multiplied millions of people throughout history."

Gang, your Christian life will change radically when it finally sinks in that God does not exist for you. Most believers go through a chunk of time believing God does indeed exist for them. "Bless my marriage. Bless my house. Bless my job. Give me abundant life. Give me joyful days," we pray —as if God exists for our pleasure.

> With mountains on either side of them, their backs to the Red Sea, and Pharaoh's army barreling down on them, Moses cried to the Lord.
>
> "Know this, Moses," He answered, "I will get Me honor upon Pharaoh and upon all his hosts. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." In other words, "Moses, this isn't about you or even the people with you. I've got work to do. I want to show the Egyptians who I am. To do that, I'm putting you in a tight spot, a tough place. But word will get back to the Egyptians that there is no God like the God of Israel" (Exodus 14:17, 18).

So, God says to us,

"I've got a big job to do—to let people around you know who I am. That means the doctor may say, "It's cancer." That means the business may go under. That means the relationship may not work out so people can see in your pain, in your difficulty, in your dilemma how I come through not to solve your problem, but to be with you in your problem. I will show Myself in the way that can most effectively reach the people I want to reach through and around your life. That may mean you go through real problems physically, or that things don't work out in the way you thought they would in your family. It may even mean death. But it's not about you. I love you deeply, but there's a bigger thing happening than simply your comfort."

Because we exist for God, gang—not the other way around—our part is to say, "However He wants to direct His drama on the stage of my life, be it

a comedy or a tragedy, so be it.”

Communion

Abraham was the friend of God (James 2:23). Why, then, would God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son? Friends don't let friends have Moriah moments—or do they?

Paul put it this way:

> *That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death . . .*
>
> Philippians 3:10

Most of us attain to the power of Jesus' Resurrection, but know little about the fellowship of His sufferings. Yet the power of His Resurrection doesn't come without the fellowship of His sufferings.

I love to laugh with people. But the people I'm closest to are not the ones I've laughed with. They are the ones with whom I've shed tears. The same is true with you, for there's a closeness that occurs when people navigate deep waters together.

Thus, God the Father says to Abraham, "I want you to experience something of what I will do because when you do, you and I will be bonded together uniquely."

There they were—walking around in the fiery furnace.

"How many men did we throw in?" asked Nebuchadnezzar.

"Three," said one of his aides.

"Then how is it that I see four, and the fourth is like the Son of God?" asked Nebuchadnezzar.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego could have walked out of that oven anytime they wanted and no one would have put them back in. I mean, if you are strolling around in a fire so hot it killed the guys who threw you in, and you decide to leave—no one would say, "Get back in there."

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego could have come out anytime they wanted. But they didn't come out until Nebuchadnezzar commanded them to because it was in the fire that they had fellowship with the Lord, a vision of the Lord, a closeness to the Lord they had never before known (Daniel 3).

You have found this to be true as well. It's when you're in the fire of affliction and adversity that you have real communion.

Don't fear, flock. Don't shy away from the Moriahs that loom over you. God will train you. And when you're there, He'll see you through. You'll come out saying, "I would have it no other way—entire and complete in communion so sweet."

It came to pass *after these things* that God did test Abraham. And Abraham rose up early in the morning because God had fully and faithfully prepared him.



23 In chapter 22, Abraham had been asked to offer his son. Here in chapter 23, I believe he faces an even harder test as he is asked to give up his wife. As the chapter before us unfolds, we see Abraham's grief in verses 1–6, Sarah's grave in verses 7–9 and Ephron's gift in verses 10–20.

Genesis 23:1
And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old: these were the years of the life of Sarah.

I find it interesting that, whereas over and over throughout Scripture, men's ages are given, Sarah is the only woman in the entire Bible whose age is revealed. Why is Sarah's age recorded? It's not to embarrass her or to expose her—but to exalt her, for Sarah was truly an incredible lady. After all, so beautiful was she that even in her eighties, Abimelech, king of Gerar, wanted her for his harem.

Genesis 23:2 (a)

And Sarah died in Kirjath-arba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan . . .

Sarah died in Hebron. This is neither accidental nor coincidental, for *Hebron* means "fellowship." Sarah was in fellowship with her husband. She and Abraham traveled together. Yes, they had some challenges, but they stayed by each other's side, and found themselves in fellowship the day Sarah died. Sarah was also in fellowship with her Lord—a godly woman of whom Peter says, "That's the kind of woman a Christian wife should be" (1 Peter 3:5, 6).

It's wonderful when a person moves into eternity being in fellowship . . .

The Sunday night before the Monday morning that my first wife, Terry, was taken to heaven, she was on stage leading worship. We stayed up late that night, talking about the blessings we were enjoying in the Fellowship and of what God was doing at that time. The next morning, on our way to a day of skiing at Mt. Bachelor, our car hit ice and the Lord took Terry home.

I think of my daughter, Jessie, who, immediately before she was taken to heaven, was here in the Sanctuary having Communion, offering prayer. She walked out the door, and a few minutes later she was in heaven.

I cannot tell you how thrilled I am to know that those who were linked to me intimately died in Hebron, died in fellowship.

Genesis 23:2 (b)
. . . and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.

Even though he was a giant of a man, the friend of God, the father of faith, we see Abraham was also a man who mourned and wept. This being the first mention of weeping or tears in the Bible, God waits until chapter 23 to introduce this concept. It's curious to me that there is no record of tears at the Fall of man, or when the Flood came, or when the people were scattered at Babel. The Holy Spirit purposefully waits to record weeping until the time a giant of a spiritual man was separated from a godly woman.

"Put thou my tears into thy bottle," David wrote. "Are they not in thy book?" (Psalm 56:8). Evidently, God keeps scrapbooks in heaven. Malachi 3 tells us every time one of His children talks to another person about Him, God hearkens to it and writes it in a book. And here, we see Him keeping another book—a book of our tears.

Concerning hard times, God doesn't say, "Deal with it." He says, "I understand what you're going through. It's precious to Me."

In Jesus' day, women wore tear bottles—little vials which fit against their cheek and caught their tears. A very precious possession, a woman would give this bottle of tears to the one she loved most. It could be this practice to which the account of the woman washing Jesus' feet with her tears refers (Luke 7:38).

Tears are unique. Under a microscope, you'll see the saline crystals in a tear are shaped in the form of a cross. It's as though the Lord would say, "I understand. I know. I wept, too" (John 11:35).

Genesis 23:3, 4 (a)
And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you . . .

"I am a stranger and a sojourner." It is after he sees Sarah move on into eternity that Abraham looks at those around him and says, "This world is not my home." When someone dear to you departs, life becomes a whole lot clearer, for what previously may have been theoretical or theological becomes very real and powerful. That is, it becomes very evident that you are only a pilgrim here.

"Wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be also," Jesus declared (Matthew 6:21). And when you begin to see your treasure—family and loved ones—deposited in heaven, your heart follows. That's why the departure of loved ones is an important process in spiritual development. It's a way in which you suddenly wake up and say, "My heart is in heaven. Worldly things don't last." You find yourself truly free when someone close to you moves on into eternity.

Genesis 23:4 (b)

. . . give me a possession of a buryingplace with you . . .

Although he's standing right in the middle of his own property, it doesn't mean a thing to Abraham because he's a pilgrim to such a degree that when his life ends, the only thing he will own is Sarah's grave.

Genesis 23:4 (c)
. . . that I may bury my dead out of my sight.

Abraham didn't want to make a monument to Sarah. He wanted to bury her out of his sight and continue on in the pilgrimage God had ordained for him. This doesn't mean he would forget about her. It means he realized that what would make Sarah most happy would not be his mourning perpetually, but his moving on to the finish line victoriously.

Concerning those who have gone on before us, Hebrews 12 says we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, saying, "Go for the finish line! Go for the gold. It's real!" Therefore, I honestly believe I do a disservice to those who have gone on ahead of me if I have not, like Abraham, made a decision to sprint to the finish line.

Genesis 23:5, 6
And the children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him, Hear us, my lord: thou art a mighty prince among us: in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead.

"You're a mighty prince," said the children of Heth to Abraham. This intrigues me because, although Abraham lived very simply in a tent, he had a huge impact on the heathen. Abraham's nephew, Lot, on the other hand, wanted to be involved in the cultural climate of Sodom. Yet when he tried to correct them, the men of Sodom said, "Who are you?" (Genesis 19:9).

You will hear, "You're so heavenly minded, you're no earthly good." Abraham proves just the opposite—that you're no earthly good until you're heavenly minded. If you want to make a difference on earth, your focal point, priority, and passion in whatever you do should be as one who lives for eternity.

"Master, should we pay taxes to Caesar?" they asked Jesus, seeking to lure Him into the hot political debate of the day.

"Let Me see a coin," Jesus said. "Whose image is this?"

"Caesar's," they answered.

"Then give it to Caesar. But give God that which is His," Jesus responded (Matthew 22)—the implication being that man is made in God's image and therefore should live for Him.

Genesis 23:7–9
And Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth. And he communed with them, saying, If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight; hear me, and intreat for me to Ephron the son of Zohar, That he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he hath, which is in the end of his field; for as much money as it is worth he shall give it me for a possession of a buryingplace amongst you.

"I don't want any of your carved tombs or sepulchres," said Abraham. "I'm interested in the cave owned by Ephron because it's at Machpelah." *Machpelah* means "double doors." In other words, there's a way in and there's a way out.

"Yea," said the psalmist, "though I walk *through* the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" (Psalm 23:4, italics added). There is a door in and a door out because when we die, our last breath on earth becomes our first breath in heaven. We're just passing through.

Genesis 23:10, 11
And Ephron dwelt among the children of Heth: and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the audience of the children of Heth, even of all that went in at the gate of his city, saying, Nay, my lord, hear me: the field give I thee, and the cave that is therein, I give it thee; in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee: bury thy dead.

Three times in one sentence, Ephron says, "I'm giving this to you"—which was simply the beginning of the Middle Eastern bargaining process.

> **Genesis 23:12–15**
> **And Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land. And he spake unto Ephron in the audience of the people of the land, saying, But if thou wilt give it, I pray thee, hear me: I will give thee money for the field; take it of me, and I will bury my dead there. And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him, My lord, hearken unto me: the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver; what is that betwixt me and thee? bury therefore thy dead.**

Was the true price of the land four hundred shekels? Historians say no. Four hundred shekels was meant to be the starting figure. Perhaps Ephron was hoping for one hundred shekels out of the deal.

> **Genesis 23:16**
> **And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant.**

Abraham pays the full price because regardless of what Ephron said, this man who had refused even a shoelace from the king of Sodom realizes nothing in the world is free.

> *Running from the Lord, Jonah goes to the dock where there just happens to be a ship ready to take him away. Scripture says Jonah went down to the boat and paid the fare (Jonah 1:3). And as the story unfolds, we see Jonah paying in more ways than one.*

Don't take Ephron's gift, gang. You will experience a peace that passes understanding if you don't take what the world is trying to sell you. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and His is a peace completely unlike that which the world can only promise.

Genesis 23:17–20
And the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure Unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city. And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre: the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan. And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a buryingplace by the sons of Heth.

As Abraham buried his wife at Machpelah, he did so knowing she had simply passed through one door and out the other into eternity.

I am so glad we're saved. We're sojourners and strangers, yet we have a peace in the meantime that passes understanding as we head for heaven. Life only makes sense in the framework of eternity. If there's no other reason to get saved, surely that is reason enough.



24 It has been said that a picture is worth a thousand words. I have found this to be true. So have you. Every parent knows how important it is to read to his children, and how much more involved they are if there's a picture on the page. We're children, gang. And our Father knows that, as kids, we need pictures—pictures that allow us to understand the principles of the Scriptures.

Pictures not only help one understand the subject—they often reveal the nature of the artist . . .

Legend has it that in painting the Last Supper, Leonardo Da Vinci used a younger version of his own face as a model for the face of Christ—and the face of his worst enemy as a model for the face of Judas Iscariot. Upon completion, Da Vinci was dismayed with the result. The lighting was wrong. The colors weren't what they were

supposed to be. Nothing was right. So he painted over the canvas and began again. This time, however, he painted his enemy's face in the place of Christ, and his own face in the place of Judas Iscariot. The result is the masterpiece we know today.

A painting often reveals the passion and priority of the artist. Such is the nature of the passage before us . . .

Genesis 24:1 (a)
And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age . . .

Abraham was probably one hundred and forty years old at this time.

Genesis 24:1 (b)
. . . and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.

"Seek first the kingdom of God," Jesus said, "and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). Abraham did just that. He left everything he had to follow the leading of the Lord. And here we read he was blessed in all things.

Genesis 24:2 (a)
And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had . . .

In this particular portrait, Abraham represents the Father; Isaac represents the Son; and the servant—who is not named—represents the Holy Spirit. Why is the servant not named? Because the Holy Spirit does not speak of Himself. Rather, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to draw attention to Jesus Christ.

In Paul's epistles, you will read, "Greetings in the name of the Father," or "Blessings upon you in the name of the Father and His Son." But you will never read, "Blessings upon you in the name of the Father and His Son and the Holy Ghost" because the Spirit—He Who inspired Paul to write these salutations and blessings—does not speak of Himself.

Genesis 24:2 (b), 3 (a)
. . . Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth . . .

Putting one's hand under another's thigh sounds strange to us—but in Abraham's day, when a man gave an order to an employee or servant, this was a way of saying, "I want you to give me your full attention. Therefore I am sitting on your hand so you can't scoot away."

Genesis 24:3 (b), 4
. . . that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac.

Abraham sent his servant to find a bride for Isaac, just as it is the Holy Spirit who tugs on our hearts and draws us to Christ as His bride.

Genesis 24:5, 6
And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest? And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again.

Fulfilling the type most wonderfully, just as Abraham's servant was to bring the bride to Isaac rather than bringing Isaac to the bride, we will one day join our Greater than Isaac, our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ in *His* kingdom —in heaven.

Genesis 24:7–9
The LORD God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. And if the woman will not be willing to follow

thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again. And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and sware to him concerning that matter.

"If the woman won't follow you, you'll be free from this responsibility," said Abraham to his servant. As symbolized by the servant, the Holy Spirit will never force anyone to come to Christ, for He is a perfect Gentleman.

Concerning the manifestations of the Spirit, Paul said, "Know this: The spirit of the prophet is subject to that prophet" (1 Corinthians 14:32). In other words, contrary to what many propound, the Holy Spirit is not some bizarre force that overpowers people, making them do things they wouldn't have done otherwise.

"You are to give an invitation to her," said Abraham, "but not force your will upon her."

Genesis 24:10 (a)
And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed . . .

These ten camels are subtle yet significant players in the unfolding drama, as they illustrate how a person is brought from a far-off land into the embrace of the Bridegroom, into the embrace of grace.



***For topical study of Genesis 24:10 entitled "Being Brought to Christ," turn to page* 116.**

Genesis 24:10 (b)–14
. . . for all the goods of his master were in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor. And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water. And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray

thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master.

The task the servant suggested was hardly an easy one. It would take hours for a woman to lower her pitcher into the well enough times to quench the thirst of ten dry camels.

Genesis 24:15, 16
And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder. And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up.

It is interesting but not surprising to me how many men in the Scriptures find their brides by a well, for Isaiah 12:3 speaks of the well of salvation as a place of refreshment. If you want to find someone who's very fair, go to the well. Go to morning worship. Go to the place offering refreshment in the Lord.

Genesis 24:17–20
And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher. And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. And she hasted, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels.

When you see a man or woman going out of his or her way to minister, you have found someone very special.

Genesis 24:21
And the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not.

Rebekah not only watered the camels, but she was also "a virgin fair to look upon."

"Wait a minute," you say. "If Abraham is a picture of God the Father, Isaac a picture of Jesus, the servant a picture of the Spirit, and Rebekah a picture of the Bride of Christ—this is where it breaks down, for, unlike Rebekah, I am not fair to look upon. I drop the ball continually and fail miserably."

So do I. But in the perspective of the Artist of this portrait, we *are* very fair to look upon because, having been cleansed by the blood of the Cross, we are the very righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5).

Genesis 24:22–25
And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold; And said, Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in? And she said unto him, I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor. She said moreover unto him, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in.

The servant—a type of the Spirit—gave Rebekah—a type of the church—beautiful gifts. This is still the way of the Spirit. We see His gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4, given to beautify His bride.

Genesis 24:26–28
And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the LORD. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham,

who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren. And the damsel ran, and told them of her mother's house these things.

Many times, people wonder how God will lead them. "How will I know whether to take that job, get involved in this relationship, or take on a new ministry?" they ask.

The servant says, "Being in the way, the Lord led me." I find his phraseology interesting, for centuries later, Jesus would declare, "I am the Way" (John 14:6); and the early church itself was called "the Way" (Acts 19:23).

If you are walking in the Way, gang, if you're obeying Jesus, you will end up at the right spot. You don't have to waste your time struggling and striving to find God's will. Simply walk day by day in the Way, and, as He did Abraham's servant, the Lord will lead you.

Genesis 24:29–31
And Rebekah had a brother, and his name was Laban: and Laban ran out unto the man, unto the well. And it came to pass, when he saw the earring and bracelets upon his sister's hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, Thus spake the man unto me; that he came unto the man; and, behold, he stood by the camels at the well. And he said, Come in, thou blessed of the LORD; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels.

As we will see, Laban is a very worldly man—yet he welcomed the servant because of the gifts he saw on his sister. We must never diminish or quench the work of the Spirit because the world—the Labans out there—are watching to see the reality of the living Lord through His people as evidenced by the manifestations of His gifts within the church.

Genesis 24:32–36
And the man came into the house: and he ungirded his camels, and gave straw and provender for the camels, and water to wash

his feet, and the men's feet that were with him. And there was set meat before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat, until I have told mine errand. And he said, Speak on. And he said, I am Abraham's servant. And the LORD hath blessed my master greatly; and he is become great: and he hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses. And Sarah my master's wife bare a son to my master when she was old: and unto him hath he given all that he hath.

Just as Abraham had given all things to his son, so God the Father gave all He had to His Son (John 3:35).

Genesis 24:37–49

And my master made me swear, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell: But thou shalt go unto my father's house, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son. And I said unto my master, Peradventure the woman will not follow me. And he said unto me, The LORD, before whom I walk, will send his angel with thee, and prosper thy way; and thou shalt take a wife for my son of my kindred, and of my father's house: Then shalt thou be clear from this my oath, when thou comest to my kindred; and if they give not thee one, thou shalt be clear from my oath. And I came this day unto the well, and said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, if now thou do prosper my way which I go; Behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass, that when the virgin cometh forth to draw water, and I say to her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher to drink; And she say to me, Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy camels: let the same be the woman whom the LORD hath appointed out for my master's son. And before I had done speaking in mine heart, behold, Rebekah came forth with her pitcher on her shoulder; and she went down unto the well, and drew water: and I said unto her, Let me drink, I pray thee. And she made haste, and let down her pitcher from her shoulder, and said, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: so I drank, and she made the camels drink also.

And I asked her, and said, Whose daughter art thou? And she said, The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bare unto him: and I put the earring upon her face, and the bracelets upon her hands. And I bowed down my head, and worshipped the LORD, and blessed the LORD God of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son. And now if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me: and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left.

"You've heard my story. You've seen the miraculous way in which God has led me. It's obvious something special has taken place. Are you willing to let your daughter go?" asked the servant.

Genesis 24:50–53
Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the LORD: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the LORD hath spoken. And it came to pass, that, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped the LORD, bowing himself to the earth. And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things.

Not only did Rebekah receive gifts, but Rebekah's family did as well. Paul says if two people are married and one becomes a Christian while the other remains a pagan, the unbeliever will be blessed simply by being married to a believer (1 Corinthians 7:14). That is what was happening here. Because gifts were heaped upon the bride, some overflowed to her family.

Genesis 24:54, 55
And they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said, Send me away unto my master. And her brother and her mother

said, Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go.

If you have a reference Bible you will see the phrase "at least ten" translated "at least ten months." In other words, Rebekah's family is now saying, "Let's not be fanatic. Let Rebekah stay here for a year—or at least ten months."

This is always what the world says. "Don't get so radical," they insist. "You don't need to go to church on Wednesdays. Sunday is enough. Or better yet—Christmas and Easter, that's all you need. Don't go overboard. Relax. Stay with us."

Genesis 24:56–58
And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing the LORD hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master. And they said, We will call the damsel, and inquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.

I love this! Rebekah said, "I will go." Where? To a man she has never met. To a place she has never seen. Why? Because although she had never seen Isaac, she liked what she had heard about him and what she had seen of him in the gifts.

We have not yet seen our Bridegroom. But we like what we have caught glimpses of, and what we have heard of Him. There is coming a day when we will see Him with our eyes, but, as Peter declared, even though we haven't yet seen Him, we love Him (1 Peter 1:8).

Genesis 24:59, 60
And they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant, and his men. And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them.

At last bidding farewell to Rebekah, her family blessed her saying, "May no one have power over you. May you have victory."

Genesis 24:61, 62
And Rebekah arose, and her damsels, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man: and the servant took Rebekah, and went his way. And Isaac came from the way of the well Lahai-roi; for he dwelt in the south country.

Knowing his father had sent the servant to find a bride for him, Isaac doesn't go and look for her himself. In Jewish tradition, the father would arrange the marriage for his son. Upon agreement of both fathers, the bride and groom-to-be would then be betrothed at a simple ceremony in which cups of wine were exchanged and a dowry given. Then the son would return to his father's house to build a dwelling place for his bride either close to or adjoining the house of his father. When the father deemed all had been properly prepared, he would send his son out to call for his bride—and she would run out to join him.

"In My Father's house are many dwelling places," Jesus, our Bridegroom, said. "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2, 3).

When will this day be? "No man knows the day or the hour—not even Me," Jesus answered (Mark 13:32).

But this much is sure: Like the brides of old, when our Bridegroom calls for us, we will run to meet Him—not, however, in the streets—but in the air (1 Thessalonians 4).

Most of us are watching for the Lord. But there is something more important than that. That is, the Lord—as seen in the person of Isaac, being at the well of *Lahairoi,* or "The Lord sees"—is watching for us. The Lord longs for us more than we long for Him. Why? Because while we can only speculate concerning the wonderful things God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9), He knows all about them and is eager to share them with us.

Genesis 24:63 (a)
And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide . . .

As it might say in your margin, Isaac literally went out to pray. What's Jesus doing right now for you and me? While He's preparing a place for us to dwell with Him eternally, He's praying for us constantly (Hebrews 7:25).

Genesis 24:63 (b)–67
. . . and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel. For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore she took a vail, and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done. And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

This last verse speaks volumes. Notice Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent. Sarah represents Israel. Rebekah represents the Bride of Christ. Rebekah is not Sarah. But Rebekah is brought into the place that Sarah occupied previously. The Bride of Christ moves into that place where Israel once was. When Israel turned her back on the Lord and wouldn't submit to the rule of the Lord, Israel was put away and the church moved into the tent where Sarah once was. The church is not Israel anymore than Rebekah was Sarah, but we move into the place that Israel once enjoyed because Israel is now temporarily put away.

However, before you think this means God is through with the Jews, you must read on to see it's not the end of the story for Israel, not by a long shot . . .

BEING BROUGHT TO CHRIST

A Topical Study of GENESIS 24:10

We all know people to whom we're related, with whom we work, about whom we care, who just don't seem to get it. That is, we've shared with them what we've found in Christ and the blessings of being a believer only to have them look at us with glazed eyes and say, "I'm glad you found something that works for you. But please don't bother me." Over and over again, we have encountered people who seem completely immune to the gospel. It might be a son or daughter, a parent or spouse, a sister, brother, friend, or schoolmate. If someone you personally care about is not saved—this is just the story for you . . .

Setting out to find a bride for his master's son, Abraham's servant loaded ten camels to accompany him on the journey. Biblically, the number ten points to, alludes to, reminds us of the Ten Commandments. In our text, we see the Ten Commandments, the ten camels kneeling at the well. Seeing the thirsty camels, a young woman named Rebekah offered to draw water for them. When does salvation come to the person with the glazed look on his face, the blank look in his eye? It is when he is aware of the ten camels, the Ten Commandments, the Law.

"The Law of the Lord is perfect," the psalmist declared, "converting the soul" (Psalm 19:7). Paul would say the same thing when he wrote:

> *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*
>
> Romans 3:19, 20; Galatians 3:24

"Get saved and you can be happy like me," we say to our friends, our kids, or our parents who don't know the Lord.

"I'm already happy," they say.

"But you can have abundant life," we say.

"I'm fine the way I am," they answer.

People need to understand they are in big trouble. They don't think they are. They basically think they're pretty good because they compare themselves with their friends and neighbors.

> A sheep on a green pasture looks pretty white. But when the snow falls, the same sheep against pure white snow looks pretty dusty. Did his wool change? No. The background did.

The Law provides the only true background, for only the Law shows us God's standard of perfection.

> Once a cruise ship pulls away from its berth, an alarm sounds, calling passengers to a designated spot in order to receive instructions concerning lifejackets and exit procedures in case of an emergency. Research indicates that until recently, forty-two percent of the passengers didn't show up for these meetings. Now, however, virtually every passenger responds to the alarm. Why? A movie called *Titanic* came out that made people aware of potential disaster.

The Law of the Lord shows people one thing: Not that they need abundant life or a peaceful life or a loving life. It shows them they are headed for disaster, that they are headed for hell because James says he who breaks one part of the law breaks the entire law (James 2:10).

Why?

Think of it this way . . .

> You're in a helicopter, and you accidentally fall out the door. On your way down, the pilot quickly throws you a chain made of ten links. "Don't worry," he yells. "This chain is pretty good. Nine of the ten links are strong. Ninety percent isn't bad, is it?"

What does the Law say?

Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. If you have any god before God—that is, if any hobby, relationship, person, or possession occupies your thoughts or energies to a greater degree than does God, you have broken Commandment #1—and the soul that sins shall surely die (Ezekiel 18:20).

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. What is an image? It comes from the imagination. "I can't believe a loving God would send anyone to hell—so my god won't," people say.

God says, "You are not to remake My image to fit your personality. I AM who I AM (Exodus 3:14). I am holy. I am love. I am pure. I am just. I am compassionate. I am a consuming fire." And he who says otherwise has broken Law #2.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. Have you ever taken the Lord's name in vain? Have you ever cheapened or degraded it in any way? If so, you're guilty.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Do you reserve one day to slow everything down and worship God? If you don't, you've broken the law.

Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother. If you have ever been disrespectful either in thought or deed to your parents, you are guilty of breaking the Law of God.

Thou shalt not kill. "At least I don't break this one," you say, breathing a sigh of relief. Really? Jesus said if you're even angry with another, you are guilty of the equivalent of murder (Matthew 5:22).

Thou shalt not commit adultery. "I know I haven't broken this one," you insist. But Jesus said if you even look at someone else with desire adultery has already taken place in your heart (Matthew 5:28).

Thou shalt not steal. Have you ever failed to tithe or to give God that which is His? God calls this stealing (Malachi 3:8).

Thou shalt not bear false witness. Giving the right information with the wrong implication, making a correct statement but in the wrong spirit, "spinning" the truth are all instances of what is known as bearing false witness and will damn a person.

Thou shalt not covet. What is coveting? Simply wanting more of what you already have enough of. If you have ever wanted more, join me in being guilty of the sin of covetousness.

“What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” asked the rich young ruler.

“Keep the Commandments,” Jesus said.

“I have kept them from my youth,” answered the young man.

“What about coveting?” asked Jesus. “Go sell your stuff ” (see Matthew 19).

How was the rich young ruler made aware of his covetousness? Jesus didn’t talk to him about abundant life or love or peace. He said, “Look at the Law.”

When people see they’ve broken ten out of the Ten Commandments, they realize the price paid on their behalf is immense. That is how the Law of the Lord,—the ten camels—converts the soul.

When Rebekah saw Isaac, she stepped down from her camel. Once we come to Christ, the camels have done their job, for just as Isaac and Rebekah were made one, when a man or woman opens their heart to Christ, oneness and intimacy transpires which allows Him to rule in them and live through them.

The law is the divinely-designed artillery to tear down the strongholds, to break down the walls of our imagination (2 Corinthians 10:5). “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal,” Paul declares (2 Corinthians 10:4).

What does “carnal” mean?

It refers to anything I do which is powered by my flesh.

“I thought it was the *goodness* of God which leads men to repentance,” you say. It is (Romans 2:4). But we’ll never know how good God is until we see how bad we are. We’ll never understand God’s goodness until we see our sinfulness.

Grace is for the humble. The Law is for the proud. The humble person will welcome grace because he knows he’s a sinner. The proud man, on the other hand, thinks he’s OK. To the humble person, you share grace. With the proud person, you share the Law.

“Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” asked the lawyer.

“How readest thou the Law?” Jesus answered, knowing the heart of the lawyer (Luke 10:25, 26).

Jesus loved people enough to say, "The issue is the Law. If you have violated any of the Ten Commandments, you're a sinner. You're in trouble. You need forgiveness. You need redemption. You need Me."

Dear parent, brother, sister, child, friend, neighbor—if you really love those with whom you're linked, you'll care more about seeing them saved than about what they think of you. Therefore, you must be totally honest with them and say, "You have broken every Law in the Book. You are headed for disaster. But God wants to save you. He's provided a Lifeboat for you in the Person of Jesus Christ. If you take His hand, you'll be saved. If not, you'll be damned and doomed forever."

Those are strong words for a strong reality. Gang, if we care about one neighbor, friend, or loved one, the time has come to realize that the Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The Law is the schoolmaster that will drive them to the warm embrace of grace.

25 Genesis 25:1

Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah.

After twenty years of being single following the death of Sarah, Abraham marries *Keturah* whose name means "Incense"—perhaps signifying the sweet fragrance she added to Abraham's life.

Genesis 25:2–4

And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim. And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoch, and Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah.

I believe the names of the sons born to Abraham and Keturah parallel the prophetic picture of the people of Israel. You see, when the church is taken up in the Rapture, the veil will be lifted from the eyes of the Jewish people,

and all of Israel will be saved at the end of the Tribulation. Then, she will play a primary role as God rules and reigns from Jerusalem in the millennial kingdom (Revelation 20). What a glorious time that will be! Nature will be restored to what it was originally meant to be: the mountains shall sing; the trees of the field shall clap their hands; the lion will lie down with the lamb. Not only will nature react, but, also, a complete disarmament by all nations and people will result in swords being turned into plowshares and spears into pruninghooks (Isaiah 2).

But wait. There's a dark side—as seen in the sons of Keturah. *Zimram* means "Song." *Jokshan* means "Snare." *Medan* means "Strife." *Midian* means "Man will leave." *Shuah* means "From the pit." What begins with a song ends in the pit.

You see, Scripture tells us man will live to be 1,000 years old in the millennial kingdom. Consequently, the world's population will mushroom to the point that at the end of the millennial kingdom, there will be multiplied generations that, because they have never known anything else, become bored with peace, love, and prosperity. Thus, perfection will be a *Snare* to them. *Strife* and *Contention* will follow. Although many of them will want to do their own thing and *Leave* the way of the Lord, they'll not be able to because righteousness will be enforced in the millennial kingdom. But, because God will not force His will on anyone, He will allow Satan to be released *from the pit* for a short season at the end of the Millennium. Satan will lead a rebellion, before he is cast permanently into the lake of fire along with those who, bored with perfection, choose to follow him.

Although the names of Abraham and Keturah's sons paint a prophetic portrait, they also point to a very practical principle. That is, we too live in the age of the kingdom of God—not where the lion is lying down with the lamb externally—but internally where righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost abound (Romans 14:17). This being the case, like those living in the millennial kingdom, we are at risk of taking the righteousness, peace, and joy of the present kingdom for granted. Dear brother, precious sister, may we never be those who take lightly the work God has done in our hearts, for if we stop singing the sweet song of salvation, we will become ensnared in strife and contention, lured away from the rule of our King by lies from the pit.

Genesis 25:5
And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac.

Here we see Abraham disposing of his wealth to his son, Isaac, even as the Father in heaven gave all things to His Son (John 17).

Because all things will find their ultimate destination in Christ, anything I do which isn't for Him results in hopelessness, while everything I do for and in Jesus positions me in the center of God's will.

How does this work practically?

Suppose you are a UPS driver. God's will for you is that you be a UPS driver for His glory. As you pull up to every stop, pray that God will gift those inside. And suddenly, your job will not be a matter of how many deliveries you can make in a day, but of how many people God can bless through you in a day. To the extent that you do this in any given day is the extent to which you will experience purpose and contentment.

Genesis 25:6
But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.

As a type of the heavenly Father, Abraham sent his other sons away because there's coming a day when every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord singularly (Philippians 2:10, 11).

Genesis 25:7
And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years.

"The days of the years" is a Hebrew phrase which speaks of quality of life because life is made up of days—individual, specific days. In his 64,000 days, Abraham, the friend of God, walked with God. The Christian life is not called the Christian leap, the Christian jump, or the Christian bounce. It's called the Christian walk because it takes place one step, one day at a time.

What am I going to do tomorrow? Will I choose to walk with God—or do I expect somehow to bounce, leap, skip, or hop and end up a spiritual man at age fifty? What I do today will affect how I arrive at the end of my life. One of the greatest misconceptions in spiritual life is that when we're old, we'll automatically be spiritual. I need to know God's Word *today.* I need to know God's ways *today.* If I don't, the end of my life will find me nothing more than an old fool.

Genesis 25:8 (a)
Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years . . .

Abraham was full of years. The words "of years" being in italics, this phrase was added later. Thus, the original text reads Abraham "died full." I want to die full—full of the joy and love of the Lord—don't you?

Genesis 25:8 (b)
. . . and was gathered to his people.

Abraham was gathered to his people. Who are *your* people? Does the church say, "You're one of us"? Do those who populate heaven say, "We know you"? Or do you feel more at home in the world?

Genesis 25:9, 10
And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; The field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.

We see Ishmael and Isaac brought together at the death of their father, Abraham, because true reconciliation can only happen through death.



***For topical study of Genesis 25:9 entitled "Someone's Gotta Die," turn to page* 123.**

Genesis 25:11
And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi.

We come now to Isaac's story. But before we do, we must round out the story of Ishmael . . .

Genesis 25:12–17
Now these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's handmaid, bare unto Abraham: And these are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebajoth; and Kedar, and Adbeel, and Mibsam, And Mishma, and Dumah, and Massa, Hadar, and Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah: These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, by their towns, and by their castles; twelve princes according to their nations. And these are the years of the life of Ishmael, an hundred and thirty and seven years: and he gave up the ghost and died; and was gathered unto his people.

The names of Ishmael's twelve sons portray the history of Islam—the base of which is idolatry and paganism. In Mecca, the most holy site of Islam, stands a silver holder containing a black stone which fell from the sky long before Mohammed was even born. In his desire to unify the region's numerous nomadic tribes, Mohammed designated Allah as the single god over the three-hundred-plus existing deities. Allah is a moon god, a pagan entity, linked to the black meteorite worshiped at Mecca. Thus, to think Islam is one of the great monotheistic religions is unsophisticated intellectually and inaccurate historically. Islam is pagan worship of a moon god.

Genesis 25:18
And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur, that is before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria: and he died in the presence of all his brethren.

If you have a reference Bible, you see the word "died" is "fell." It's a different word for death than Abraham's death. Abraham died full. Ishmael simply fell.

Genesis 25:19–21 (a)
And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham begat Isaac: And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan-aram, the sister to Laban the Syrian. And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren . . .

The daughter of a Syrian, when Rebekah married Isaac she became one of God's chosen. We who once walked in darkness can be linked to our Greater than Isaac—and yet, like Rebekah, remain barren.

Genesis 25:21 (b)
. . . and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

Isaac does for his bride what our Bridegroom does for us. He doesn't pout. He doesn't pity himself. He prays (Hebrews 7:25). The best thing a person can do if he's aware of his own or another's spiritual barrenness is to pray.

Genesis 25:22
And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the LORD.

Rebekah was saved; she was no longer barren. But now there was something troubling within her. So she booked a counseling appointment with the wonderful Counselor (Isaiah 9:6)—the only One who could identify the source of her struggle.

Genesis 25:23
And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the

one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

Like Rebekah, we're no longer barren because we've been prayed for. Why, then, is there a rumbling, an unsettledness inside us? It is because our flesh and spirit wage war within us. What can we do about this? The answer is very simple: We must decide which one we want to be stronger. If we choose to feed our flesh, our flesh will get bigger and stronger, and our spirit will become the runt of the litter. If, on the other hand, we choose to feed our spirit, our spirit will grow stronger and our flesh will grow weaker and weaker.

I recommend the latter, for to be fleshly minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Romans 8:6).

Genesis 25:24, 25
And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.

Esau, whose name means "hairy," is the quintessential outdoorsman.

Genesis 25:26
And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them.

Jacob, whose name means "heel snatcher" is an indoor kind of guy with a propensity to want to be first in everything—as evidenced by his wanting to be firstborn.

Genesis 25:27
And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.

Jacob and Esau represent the two natures warring within us: Jacob represents the spirit. Esau, the older twin brother, represents the flesh. He's

the older brother because each of us walked in the flesh before we were born again and touched by the Spirit.

Genesis 25:28
And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.

While Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed Esau's venison, Rebekah loved Jacob—period. In this, I understand that the flesh tries to give reasons for being loved. But Jacob, a picture of the Spirit, reminds me that God does not love me because I'm lovable or lovely. He loves me because He is love. Period.

Genesis 25:29, 30
And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom.

Not only does *Edom,* or "red," reflect the color of the bean stew Jacob cooked, but it also calls to mind the color of the dust from which Adam's name was derived. Descendants of Esau, the Edomites will cause perpetual problems for the people of Israel.

Genesis 25:31–34
And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.

According to Old Testament law, as owner of the birthright, the oldest son would receive a double inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17). Secondly, he would assume the spiritual leadership of the family—making sure the family was taken care of financially and that they walked with God spiritually. In

other words, as priest of the home, he would have a significant role to play in ministry.

A type of the flesh, Esau couldn't care less about ministry. He simply wanted to satisfy the appetites of his flesh. In Hebrews, he's called a "profane man," "profane" meaning "outside of the temple" (Hebrews 12:16).

Jacob, on the other hand, for all of the faults we shall see he has, had this going for him: he hungered and thirsted after the things of the kingdom. He placed a great importance on the birthright from the very beginning. So he traded Esau a bowl of beans for it. And both his and Esau's lives took a different course as a result of a ten-second exchange . . .

SOMEONE'S GOTTA DIE

A Topical Study of GENESIS 25:9

Genesis is a foundational book, for in it lies every foundational principle of spiritual life. The text before us is no exception, for embedded in it we find the foundation, the basis, the bottom line of reconciliation. From the day Ishmael and his mother were sent away, he and his half-brother, Isaac, would remain estranged from each other—to be reconciled only at the grave of their father.

While it's sad that it took the death of their father to bring them together, I'm glad it took that, for in their story we see that if there is ever to be reconciliation between you and the son or daughter who is estranged from you, between you and the mother or father who doesn't understand you, between you and the friend who betrayed you, between you and the spouse who hurt you—someone has got to die. There is no other way.

We see this principle most powerfully in our relationship with our Father. Because of sin, we were estranged from Him.

> *And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19

God reconciled us to Himself through His own death. Then, once we were reconciled, He gave us the ministry of reconciliation—to reconcile people to God as we share with them the Good News of the gospel—and also to reconcile people to each other.

So big is Jesus on reconciliation that He said something quite shocking when He said, "If, while you are at the altar worshiping the Lord, you become aware that something is not quite right with someone you know or

once knew, leave the altar and reconcile yourself to the one who is offended" (see Matthew 5:24).

The Greek word translated "reconcile" is *diallasso*—a word used by tailors and garment-makers with regard to alteration. Thus, Jesus was saying, "If, at the altar, you realize a relationship doesn't fit right, get it altered." In other words, the ill-fitting garment is not to be discarded, taken to Goodwill, or stuffed in the back of the closet and forgotten. "If a relationship isn't right," Jesus declared, "I want you to deal with that matter before you continue in worship."

How will reconciliation happen practically? There's only one way: Someone has got to die. If there's to be reconciliation with your wife, your husband, your daughter-in-law, your boss, your coach, your neighbor—you have to die.

"I don't want to die," we protest. "How come *she* can't die? It's *his* turn to die. I'm sick and tired of dying. Why does it have to be *me?*"

For several hours last night, Tammy and I talked with two people we think the world of. He's been a pastor for years; she's a godly woman with a passion for Jesus. But they're on their way to divorce. And it's a tragedy. There's no real issue—just irritations that have grown over the years. Both argued their points, yet as the hours passed, all we could say is, "One of you has got to die, or there will be no reconciliation."

Their answer? "Why me? It's his turn. It's her turn."

Many couples drove out to church this morning in virtually the same situation. As the husband sat behind the wheel, his words were few, but his thoughts many. "Why is she so cold?" he wondered. "Why doesn't she see my needs? I've been good to her. I've been faithful. I've provided for her. I've tried to be helpful. But months and years have passed, and I've had enough."

Meanwhile, as she sat on her side of the car, hugging the door handle, she thought, "Why is he so demanding? Why doesn't he understand I'm not a thing to be used. Why can't he see me and love me the way the Bible says he ought to?"

And the silence is deafening—broken only by the sounds of construction on the wall between them which grows higher and higher every day. And they come out to church and lift their hands and worship—when the Lord would say, "If you're bringing your gift to the altar and you remember that he or she

has something against you, don't even continue worshiping until you alter the hurtful situation."

Why should you be the one to die?

Three reasons . . .

Reconciliation Delights our Father

Every parent knows the delight of reconciliation. When I hear one of my kids say to another, "It's *your* turn. *You* go first," all I can say is, "Glory hallelujah! The age of miracles is not over! These kids are working it out. They're dying to self. They're letting the other have his way!"

If you are fortunate enough to have a child who goes out of his way to be a peacemaker, you know the place he has in your heart. Any one of us who says, "I'm going to die so that there can be reconciliation" brings a great deal of joy to the heart of the Father.

Reconciliation Defeats our Foe

Satan has one tactic he's used from the very beginning: division. As the worship leader of the angelic chorus, Lucifer persuaded one-third of the angels to see things his way. They joined his rebellion, and are now demons, destined for eternal damnation. Because Satan's strategy remains the same, he who says, "I will die before I allow separation between me and another" deals a death blow to Satan.

The person who binds Satan is not the one who loudly declares, "I bind you, Satan." The person who binds Satan is the one who dies to self and reconciles with another person. The binding of Satan comes about not through a statement we make verbally—but through a choice we make actively.

Reconciliation Destroys our Flesh

The reason we're depressed, the reason for the gnawing ache within us is found in one word: flesh. We think if we could indulge or pamper our flesh, we'd be happier. The opposite, however, is true. Jesus taught that the one who loses His life will find it (Matthew 10:39); that the one who follows Him must deny himself and take up his cross (Matthew 16:24).

The cross you are to bear is not getting the flu or losing your job. It's not even divorce or death in your family—as tragic as those events are. The cross is not something that comes uninvited. Rather, it's something we choose to do which causes pain and agony to our flesh. The cross is what Jesus endured when He prayed, "Not My will, but Thine be done."

"I'm tired of being married to her," or "I'm tired of my dad treating me this way," or "I'm tired of my in-laws. Nevertheless, Lord, not my will but Thine be done. And Your will is that there be reconciliation, which means I must die"—*that's* the cross.

The Roman soldier knew Jesus had died when he stuck a spear in His side and there was no reaction, other than the blood and water that flowed forth. So, when that person with whom you've had a hard time pokes you yet again and you don't respond, you don't react, you don't retaliate—you'll know you've died to your flesh.

Designed to be the most tortuous death possible, crucified victims often hung on a cross for two or three days before they died. Jesus hung on the cross for six hours. He was in a hurry because He knew the sooner He died and completed the Work of redemption, the sooner Easter Sunday would come. What if He had decided to struggle hour after hour, day after day? Easter couldn't happen until He died. That's why He said, "If you deny yourself, you'll have life. But if you seek to hang on to your life, you'll only prolong your misery."

Precious people, it's not that we *have* to die. It's that we *get* to. Will you be the one today who loves God so much that you will delight Him by dying to your rights, your way, your self?

If so, reconciliation is sure to follow as you race towards resurrection day.

26

Genesis 26:1
And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar.

Abimelech being a family name, this is the son of the king who had an encounter with Abraham regarding Sarah in chapter 20.

Genesis 26:2–5
And the LORD appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.

"Don't go to Egypt," God says to Isaac. "I'll bless you if you remain in the land to which I have called you." Egypt being a type of the world, God says the same thing to us. I know you experience dry times. I do too. I know there can be a famine in your soul. It happens to me as well. But resist the temptation to wander into Egypt in those times because if you do, you'll get burned and miss God's blessing.

Genesis 26:6
And Isaac dwelt in Gerar:

A border town, Gerar is the closest one can get to Egypt without crossing the line. God tells Isaac to stay in the Land, and what does Isaac do? He dwells right on the edge. Do you know anyone who might do this from time to time? How about you? How about me? We see how far we can go, how close

we can get to the education, ethics, or entertainment of Egypt and still remain in the Promised Land to which we are called.

Genesis 26:7
And the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon.

Does any of this ring a bell? Abraham said the same thing at the same exact spot concerning his own wife (Genesis 20:2). Let every father be convicted and challenged. You see, the problem with going to the border is this: Your son will follow you. Camp out in Gerar, and that's where your son will most likely choose to dwell. Walk righteously, on the other hand, and your son will most likely follow in your footsteps to the Land of blessing.

Genesis 26:8, 9
And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife. And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, Behold, of a surety she is thy wife: and how saidst thou, She is my sister? And Isaac said unto him, Because I said, Lest I die for her.

On one hand, Isaac is to be corrected for his cowardice. "I lied about my wife because I didn't want to die for her," he said. Yet the biblical command is the exact opposite: "Husbands love your wives even as Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). In other words, husbands, just as Christ died on the Cross for His Bride, we are to die to our own desires, our own dreams, our own intentions, our own pleasures. On the other hand, Isaac is to be commended for his candor. He didn't try to rationalize, justify, or put a positive spin on his lie. He simply said, "I lied because I was afraid."

Genesis 26:10, 11

And Abimelech said, What is this thou hast done unto us? one of the people might lightly have lien with thy wife, and thou shouldest have brought guiltiness upon us. And Abimelech charged all his people, saying, He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.

Why would Abimelech say this? Just as Isaac followed in Abraham's footsteps, Abimelech had no doubt heard his dad's account of what had happened regarding Sarah—and warned his people accordingly (Genesis 20:6, 7).

Genesis 26:12 (a)
Then Isaac sowed in that land . . .

Humbled at "Border Town," Isaac returns to the Promised Land, where he belongs.

Genesis 26:12 (b)
. . . and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him.

When did Isaac receive a hundredfold? After he said, "I made a mistake, Abimelech. I told you Rebekah was my sister because I'm a chicken. I didn't want to die." That's all confession is, gang—simply admitting the real deal. Isaac's sin was exposed; confession was made; and now he can go on.

Genesis 26:13 (a)
And the man waxed great, and went forward . . .

Yes, Isaac stumbled. Yes, he fell a bit. But he got up and went forward.

Genesis 26:13 (b)
. . . and grew . . .

Isn't this what you would like to be said about you? You might have stumbled, we all have fallen—but you waxed great by God's grace, you went

forward, and you *grew.* That's what I desire my story to be.

Genesis 26:13 (c), 14
. . . until he became very great: For he had possession of flocks, and possessions of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him.

So blessed was Isaac that even the mighty Philistines took notice.

Genesis 26:15
For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth.

As did the Philistines to Isaac, those who don't understand the grace of God will look at you and say, "It's not fair that you're blessed. I know you fell. I knew you back then. I heard about what you did," as they dig up dirt in a futile effort to plug the flow of God's forgiveness.

Genesis 26:16–18
And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we. And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them.

On the move, restoring wells his father had dug, Isaac strikes water again.

Genesis 26:19
And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water.

The term, "springing water," is correctly rendered "living water" in some translations. "If any man thirst," Jesus said, "let him come unto Me and drink, and out of his innermost being shall gush forth torrents of living water. This spake He of the Holy Ghost" (John 7:38). When did Isaac find living water? When he was in the valley. That's often the way it is. At least it was for me . . .

As a twenty-year-old teaching the Book of Jonah at a junior-high retreat, it hit me in the middle of my teaching that I didn't care at all about the kids sitting before me. It was as if the Lord held up a mirror and I saw the ugliness of my soul. I saw that I wanted to teach—but that I didn't care about those I was teach ing. I realized, much to my dismay, that they were just a means for me to do what I wanted to do. Here I was, studying for the ministry, involved in teaching and serving—and yet I knew my heart was calloused and hard. At the end of the weekend, in deep despair, I hopped in my van and drove for a couple of days. I finally pulled in to the parking lot of the church I was attending—Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa. As I did, I saw a pastor I recognized from the Saturday night concerts I had attended there. His name was Tom Stipe.

"I know you're a pastor here," I said to him. "I'm just really sad."

"Oh?" he said. "What's up?"

I told him what was going on.

"That's easy," he said. "You need the Holy Spirit." He laid hands on me and prayed for me—and something happened to me. I felt a warm sensation in my inner being, and I began to worship the Lord in a way I had never done before.

That was a huge watershed for me, for I understood that, although previously I had the Holy Spirit inside of me, I lacked the overflow of the Spirit through me. And so I say to you, if you are in a valley spiritually—you're in the perfect place to find the living water because you realize your own inadequacy. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness—those who realize their need—for they shall be filled," (Matthew 5:6).

When, like Isaac, you say, "I want to be used to water the flock around me"—be it your family, your friends, your neighbors, a Sunday school class—the Lord will truly empower you in a fresh and dynamic way (Acts 1:8).

Genesis 26:20
And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him.

Now that Isaac had found living water in the valley, was everything smooth sailing for him from that point on? No, for *esek* means "contention." It was immediately after Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River—where He was filled with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit—that He was led to the desert to be tempted and challenged by Satan. When we are filled with the living water of the Spirit, we must understand that challenges are sure to follow.

Genesis 26:21
And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah.

Again, Isaac found water, and, again was challenged—thus the name, *Sitnah,* or "Hated."

With the exception of Moses, there is not a man in the Old Testament meeker than Isaac. After all, when Ishmael taunted and teased him, did Isaac fight back? No. When his dad laid him on the altar to sacrifice him, did thirty-year-old Isaac try to escape? No. When his father's servant selected a bride for him, did Isaac question his choice? No. When Abimelech rebuked him, did he rationalize his cowardice? No. When his water rights were challenged, did he stand his ground? No.

"Blessed are the meek," Jesus said, "for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). And here we see that happening. Isaac is a man of remarkable meekness. And he will indeed inherit earthly blessings.

Genesis 26:22

And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the LORD hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.

When I was sixteen years old, a man in our church offered me a summer job washing windows for five dollars an hour—big money in that day. My first assignment was a ten-story building, using a dilapidated scaffolding system that had to be hand-cranked one side at a time. The already terrible situation was made worse by the fact that I hate heights. So there I was—cranking myself up floor after floor, leaning over and washing these windows day after day, coming home sick every night. After about four days of this, a dear brother called me and said, "Is there any way you would consider changing jobs and working at camp for us this summer?"

"You bet!" I said. By God's grace and providence I was delivered!

So I went to work in the Santa Cruz Mountains where I got to work with kids, teach the Word, and play games. I returned summer after summer, eventually working my way up to camp speaker and director.

After I was filled with the Spirit when I was twenty, the brother who had hired me initially called me into his office and said, "There's a rumor going around that you're attending a church that believes in the gifts of the Spirit." So I told him my story. "That's not our denominational position," he said. "I want you to stay here as long as you wish—just don't talk about the baptism of the Spirit." Loving my work there, I agreed.

But not long after this, I was approached by three counselors who said, "We have a problem. We were up late last night talking, and we realized we just don't have compassion for these kids. We prayed about it and felt like we should come to you and ask what we should do."

Oh, no! I thought. *I love working here, yet my boss told me not to talk about the baptism of the Spirit. But here these counselors are feeling as dry as I did when I was in my own spiritual valley previously.*

Finally, I said, "Here's the deal . . ." and went on to share with them my own experience.

They listened eagerly. I laid hands on them, prayed for them, and they were filled with the Spirit that evening in a remarkable way. As a result, I

realized the doors were closing for me at camp. I also realized the doors were closing for the denomination I had planned to work with after graduation. "What should I do?" I wondered. "I guess I'd better let my pastor know."

Having attended Calvary Chapel for over three years, but having never personally met Pastor Chuck Smith, I wrote him a long letter about my situation, including a resume and a big color picture of myself. The following Sunday night found me sitting in the third row, listening to Chuck teaching through Psalms. When he came to Psalm 75:6, where the psalmist declares, "Promotion does not come from the north or the south, the east nor the west; it is the Lord who raises up one and sets down another," Chuck paused and said, "You know, people send me resumes and lists of their accomplishments and rewards. Don't do that. That's the way of the flesh. It's the Lord who will raise up one, who will set down another. You don't need to advertise yourself." And I wanted to melt through the crack in the pew and disappear.

I walked along the beach that evening for a long time thinking, *Lord, I am so dumb.* Ever feel that way? The next day I got a call from Chuck Smith's secretary saying, "Pastor Chuck wants to see you."

Oh, no! I thought, *A personal rebuke! I'm so far out of line he has to call me into his office and deal with me personally.* The problem was, the appointment was for seven weeks later. So for seven weeks, I lived in terror and repented constantly, wondering what I was going to do after graduation.

When my appointment finally arrived, I was so nervous that I just started talking—apologizing for my stupidity, asking forgiveness for my arrogance, explaining my predicament, rationalizing my behavior. All the while, Chuck just looked at me. Finally, when I came up for air, he said, "As a matter of fact, I called you because we're starting a Bible college in the mountains, and I want to hire you as one of our professors." I couldn't believe it! So off I went to Twin Peaks to teach Bible college—staying up late every night in order to get the next day's lesson ready just to keep ahead of my students.

The following year, my brother Dave came to see me and said, "Let's go back to San Jose and start a church." San Jose being our hometown, I was excited about the prospect. Dave, a great guy who I respect immensely and who has since gone on to impact many countries as an effective missionary, was a suit and tie man, while I was a Levis and sandals kind of guy. Thus, we

thought Dave would relate to the IBM group, I'd relate to the hippies, and together we'd relate to everyone. Although we thought we'd have this great coming together, in reality, when I taught, one group would come out; and when Dave taught, an entirely different group attended. Neither group understood each other—and, as was the case with Jacob's wells, strife and contention were the result.

In the meantime, a few couples heard my tapes from San Jose and asked if I could meet with them for a weekend at a place called Applegate. Terry and I met together with about twenty people, and had a glorious time. They asked us back, and we eventually felt the Lord would have us move here. That was twenty years ago.

As I look back, I see my life as a series of digging wells and moving on—until finally I found my Rehoboth, for *rehoboth* means "room." Over the years, I've watched lots of gifted and talented men and women who had anointing, calling, and gifting miss great opportunities because they dug a well and there was strife; and they dug a second one, and there was contention; and instead of digging a third well, they gave up, thinking, *What's the use? I won't be used. Why go on?* God's plan is that we keep digging, keep digging, keep digging until we find our Rehoboth—where there's room.

Every one of you without exception has a Rehoboth awaiting you. But the enemy will try to discourage you through contention and strife. Why does God allow this to happen? Because He has a two-fold task: Not only to prepare a place for you, but to prepare you for the place. That means you'll go through some trying times, some stretching points, some questions—but you must not throw in the towel and give up. You keep digging, move down the road, dig again, move down the road, dig again—and eventually you'll find your Rehoboth. I promise.

Genesis 26:23–33

And he went up from thence to Beer-sheba. And the LORD appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake. And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a

well. Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath one of his friends, and Phichol the chief captain of his army. And Isaac said unto them, Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you? And they said, We saw certainly that the LORD was with thee: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee; That thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace: thou art now the blessed of the LORD. And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink. And they rose up betimes in the morning, and sware one to another: and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace. And it came to pass the same day, that Isaac's servants came, and told him concerning the well which they had digged, and said unto him, We have found water. And he called it Shebah: therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba unto this day.

Here, Isaac's one-time enemies seek him out to make a covenant with him. If you keep on digging, your life will impact the people around you. Oh, Satan will use them to bring strife and contention into your life initially because he doesn't want you to expand the borders of the kingdom. But if you resist him, he will flee from you ultimately (James 4:7), and even the Philistines will be drawn to you eventually.

Genesis 26:34, 35
And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite: Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah.

While Jacob was digging wells, Esau was taking wives. Unfortunately, because the women he chose were pagans, in so doing he broke the hearts of his parents—she who had followed Abraham's servant to a new life (Genesis 24:58), and he who had prayed in the field, waiting for God's best (Genesis 24:63).

27

Genesis 27:1

And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son: and he said unto him, Behold, here am I.

Perhaps because his half-brother Ishmael died at the age of one hundred and thirty-seven, Isaac now being one hundred and thirty-seven years old himself, is keenly aware of his mortality and that his body is beginning to fail him.

Genesis 27:2

And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death:

Although at one hundred and thirty-seven years of age, Isaac was indeed an old man, he was correct in realizing he didn't know the day of his death—for he would live an additional forty-three years.

Genesis 27:3, 4

Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison; And make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die.

In your Sunday school mind's eye, you probably see Esau as being fifteen, eighteen, or twenty-one years old. Esau is, in fact, seventy-seven years old at this point—which makes the story all the more incredible to me.

Genesis 27:5–10

And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it. And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying, Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the LORD

before my death. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee. Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savoury meat for thy father, such as he loveth: And thou shalt bring it to thy father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death.

As we saw earlier, it was clear Jacob was to be the blessed one (Genesis 25:23). Because Rebekah knew this, when she heard Isaac was about to bless Esau, we see her doing what you and I can fall into oh, so subtly: knowing God's Word and doing God's work—but not in God's way. You might have a sincere heart and pure motives in wanting to see God's work done in the ministry or in your family. But God's work must be done God's way. Ask Moses . . .

Wanting to see his Israelite brothers set free from the tyranny of the Egyptians, one day when Moses saw an Egyptian beating one of the Hebrew children, he rescued his Hebrew brother, and killed the Egyptian, thinking he would be a hero in the eyes of the Hebrew people. But because God didn't direct Moses to do this, the end result was rejection by the very people he was trying to help.

God's work must be done God's way. Ask David . . .

He knew the people would be blessed, the glory of God would be experienced if the ark of the covenant was brought into the capital city of Jerusalem. To transport the ark from where it was, six miles outside of Jerusalem, David built a cart and stationed a man named Uzzah, *or "Strong," upon it. In front of the ark, leading the way was a man named* Ahio, *or "Friendly." Talk about a great set-up—Mr. Strong controlling the cart, Mr. Friendly leading the way. It seemed like such a wonderful way to bring in the glory of God. But you know the story: On the way, the cart hit a rut in the road, and the ark began to wobble. Thinking he had better give God a hand, Uzzah reached out to stabilize the ark. But when his hand touched it, God killed him (2 Samuel 6:7).*

Completely disheartened, David pouted for several months. But when he got back in the Word again, he discovered that the ark of the covenant was to be carried on the shoulders of priests rather than on a cart. Why? Because carts are nothing more than boards and big wheels, whereas priests are people who praise and pray. All too often, people call board meetings and bring in big wheels to make God's work happen. But such is Philistine mentality. God's way is to work through people who praise and pray.

> *As the priests carried the ark, they stopped every six steps, built an altar and sacrificed a bull to the Lord. The world would say, "It's not efficient to stop every six steps on a six-mile journey—especially in this age of technology." However, what God is concerned about in spiritual life is not efficiency, but effectiveness. Efficiency is doing things right. Effectiveness is doing the right thing. Why did David stop every six steps? Because six is the number of man and the flesh. It's a reminder that the Mr. Strong and Mr. Friendly mentality won't make it spiritually.*

Only by stopping every six steps to sacrifice did the ark make it to Jerusalem. Only by waiting on, walking with, and looking to God will His presence be evident in our lives.

> **Genesis 27:11, 12 (a)**
> **And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man: My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver . . .**

Jacob doesn't say, "If I do this, I'll *be* a deceiver." He says, "If I do this, I'll *seem like* a deceiver." Isn't this where our culture finds itself? Reputation is what people think I am. Character is what I know I am. And most people today, like Jacob, are concerned about reputation over character. How do you know what your character really is? You'll know by what you do when no one is around.

> **Genesis 27:12 (b)–15**

. . . and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing. And his mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me them. And he went, and fetched, and brought them to his mother: and his mother made savoury meat, such as his father loved. And Rebekah took goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son:

An outdoorsman, Esau had a distinct aroma about him. Realizing this, Rebekah put some of Esau's garments on Jacob.

Genesis 27:16, 17
And she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck: And she gave the savoury meat and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

Rebekah is sharp. She takes the skins of the goats and straps them around the arms and neck of her son, Jacob, so that if Isaac feels his skin, he'll feel like Esau.

Genesis 27:18–23
And he came unto his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I; who art thou, my son? And Jacob said unto his father, I am Esau thy firstborn; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me. And Isaac said unto his son, How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, Because the LORD thy God brought it to me. And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not. And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him.

Although Jacob didn't sound like Esau, he smelled like Esau and felt like Esau. Therefore he must be Esau, thought Isaac, trusting his senses rather than the word that he heard.

Whenever we make decisions based upon what we feel or what we smell or what we see rather than upon what we hear in the Word, we will be deceived. If an experience, trend, or phenomena isn't seen throughout the New Testament record of the life of Christ and of His church—be it barking, laughing, or falling down—it's Jacob parading as Esau, and we will be as deceived as Isaac was if we choose to follow our senses rather than the Word.

Genesis 27:24, 25 (a)
And he said, Art thou my very son Esau? And he said, I am. And he said, Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son's venison, that my soul may bless thee . . .

A key component of Hebrew life, the blessing was pronounced by the patriarch primarily upon the oldest son. A declaration of who one is and a revelation of where one is headed, Orthodox Jewish fathers understand the significance of the blessing and bestow it upon their children to this day. Following, we see the four elements that compromise this blessing . . .

Genesis 27:25 (b), 26
. . . And he brought it near to him, and he did eat: and he brought him wine, and he drank. And his father Isaac said unto him, Come near now, and kiss me, my son.

First, the blessing involves *a tender, meaningful touch.* In a study of girls who had numerous unwanted pregnancies, a common denominator was found: they all had fathers who did not show them affection. Consequently, they sought this missing ingredient in the arms of strangers.

A pure and tender touch upon our kids is so important. That's why Jesus didn't call out a blanket blessing upon the children who were brought to Him. He tenderly and lovingly *touched* them (Mark 10:13).

Genesis 27:27

And he came near, and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD hath blessed:

Secondly, the blessing includes *a spoken message of valued, valuable evaluation.* "You have the fragrance of the field. You are an outdoorsman. This is what I see in you," said Isaac, as he affirmed Esau's strengths through the spoken blessing.

Many kids never hear their parents' perception of them. Many parents never say, "This is what I see in you. This is how I see God made you. This is what is great about you." Speak a word of valuable evaluation today, Dad, for not hearing from you at all hurts far more than hearing a word of correction from you.

Genesis 27:28, 29
Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee.

Thirdly, the blessing gives *a word of destination.* Our kids and grandchildren need to hear not only what we see in them presently, but what we see ahead for them eventually. Here again, the Orthodox Jewish families understand this concept so well. When you go into an Orthodox home, the parents will say, "Here is Joey the doctor, and Benny the lawyer"—even though Joey and Benny are only four and five years old. In so doing, they are giving their kids a special future. And they do indeed grow up becoming doctors and lawyers, scientists and rabbis because that is what is pronounced on them.

What do you see your son or daughter becoming, Dad?

Let them know!

Genesis 27:30–33
And it came to pass, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of

Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. And he also had made savoury meat, and brought it unto his father, and said unto his father, Let my father arise, and eat of his son's venison, that thy soul may bless me. And Isaac his father said unto him, Who art thou? And he said, I am thy son, thy firstborn Esau. And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed.

Realizing that God will ultimately have His way, Isaac conceded that Jacob would indeed be blessed.

Genesis 27:34 (a)
And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry . . .

In the Hebrew language, this is an emphatic expression describing a painful, plaintive wail. Here Esau, this man's man, sobs bitterly.

Genesis 27:34 (b)–37
. . . and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father. And he said, Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing. And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me? And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son?

Finally, the blessing contained *a promise of continued commitment.* Because it was nonnegotiable, the blessing says, "Not only do I see this *in* you, but I am committed to see it through *for* you, and am determined to stand *with* you regardless of reversals, setbacks, or disappointments."

Job, the most righteous man on the face of the earth, rose early every morning and offered a sacrifice for each one of his sons and daughters—a lot of hard, bloody, dirty work. And I can do that as a dad for my kids through intercessory prayer, through doing whatever I can to see God's power upon them and His work flowing through them.

Genesis 27:38
And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept.

Even though the birthright included a double inheritance, Esau regarded it so lightly that he traded it for a bowl of beans. But so desperately did Esau desire the blessing, that even at seventy-seven years of age, he wept passionately over its loss.

Maybe you're saying, "I never had a father or grandfather pronounce a blessing on my life." You can. Your heavenly Father is just waiting to bless you. He will pronounce blessing upon your life, give direction for your life, and place His hand tenderly upon you anytime you choose to come into His presence. Each of us has a Father who's always there, who is as close to us as a simple prayer. May God give us wisdom to bless our own kids as we declare to them who they are and reveal to them what they can be. And may He give us the desire to continually seek His blessing upon our own lives.

Genesis 27:39, 40 (a)
And Isaac his father answered and said unto him, Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother . . .

Isaac says to Esau, "You're not going to be in a place of permanence, but rather you are going to live off the land and by the sword, serving your brother." And then he inserts an interesting clause . . .

Genesis 27:40 (b)

. . . and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.

In other words, "You'll be under your brother's authority, Esau, fighting for your very life. But there will come a season when you will break loose from the yoke of his dominion over you."

I believe what is spoken here has huge prophetic implication. You see, God's anger at the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, appears throughout the Old Testament—seen nowhere more clearly than in the Book of Obadiah, the only book in the Old Testament devoted to an indictment against a single group of people.

Why does God wage war against the Edomites? An Edomite named Haman sheds light on the reason, for in the Book of Esther, we read of his plan to annihilate the Jews.

Then, around the year 300 B.C., a group called the Nabateans took control of the area where the Edomites lived southeast of Israel. Driven out of their homeland, the Edomites settled around Hebron—part of the West Bank today—and became known as Idumeans. Years later, when the Macabbeans rose up and overthrew the Syrians who had taken control of Jerusalem, the Macabbeans said to the people living in Idumea, "We'll let you stay here only if you convert to Judaism." So the Idumeans became Jews religiously, although they remained Edomites ethnically.

Around the year 47 B.C., Julius Caesar appointed Antipater—an Idumean—as governor of the region. Antipater was the father of Herod, and Herod being a family name, all of the Herods who followed were Idumean, including the Herod who ordered the death of every male child under two years of age in an attempt to kill the Babe of Bethlehem. From generation to generation, God declares, "I wage war against the descendants of Esau" (Ezekiel 25:14) because from the very beginning there's a spirit at work. It's the spirit to destroy the Jewish nation and prevent Messiah from surviving. It's the spirit of antichrist.

In the year A.D. 70, the Romans, led by General Titus, were positioned to destroy the city of Jerusalem. Josephus tells us 20,000 Idumeans were let in the city gates by the Jews because they promised to help fight the Romans. But once inside, the Idumeans turned against the Jews and slaughtered them.

The surviving Jews scattered; the Idumeans migrated to Italy, settling around the city of Rome, where their descendants are to this day. Why Rome? Because through Herod, there was a linkage to the Romans.

According to Daniel 9, antichrist shall be of the people who destroyed the city of Jerusalem. Who destroyed Jerusalem? The Romans. Thus, the nationality of antichrist will most likely be Roman, but his ethnic background will be Idumean because prophecies throughout the Old Testament indicate that he will be linked ethnically to Esau. God is not capricious or unfair when He says, "I hate Esau" (Romans 9:13) because there's a spirit which travels through Esau's descendants directly to antichrist.

When is the day Esau will beat the yoke of Jacob from off his neck? I suggest it is the day antichrist rises to power and sets up his image in the temple in Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15).

Genesis 27:41–45
And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob. And these words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah: and she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said unto him, Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee, doth comfort himself, purposing to kill thee. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran; And tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away; Until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget that which thou hast done to him: then I will send, and fetch thee from thence: why should I be deprived also of you both in one day?

"Go to Uncle Laban's house and stay there for a few days until Esau simmers down," Rebekah said to Jacob. But guess what. Those few days would turn into twenty-plus years, and Rebekah would never see her son, Jacob again. Trying to manipulate, trying to pull the strings, trying to make it happen in her own energy, Rebekah will lose her son. Trying to help God out

would prove to be a heartbreaking disaster for this mother who loved her son deeply.

Moms, be careful that you don't try to protect or direct your kids in your own energy because, like Rebekah, you will end up making a mess that will ultimately break your heart. Don't pry. Pray. Fight the right battle, for the Word says we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers (Ephesians 6:12).

Genesis 27:46
And Rebekah said to Isaac, I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?

"If Jacob marries a girl like the girls Esau chose—a girl who doesn't love God—I would just want to die," said Rebekah. That's why she was determined that Jacob, her pride and joy, would not be sucked in to the ways of the world as was his twin brother.



28 The next eight chapters of the Book of Genesis all focus on God's work in and on Jacob. We see the saving of Jacob here in chapter 28, the subduing of Jacob in chapters 29—32, the separating of Jacob in chapters 33—34, and the sanctifying of Jacob in chapter 35.

Genesis 28:1, 2
And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother.

Abraham sent a servant to find a bride for his son, Isaac. Isaac, however, sent his son, Jacob, to find his own bride. Paul would write, "work out your

own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work within you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12, italics added).

Your salvation is going to be worked out, exercised, a little bit differently than the salvation of the person sitting next to you or that of the generation that went before you. Oh, we're all saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. But it's all going to work out a little bit differently in each of us.

This allows me to give freedom to people whose salvation is being worked out a little differently than mine might be. We can give each other lots of space because, within the parameters of grace and faith, God deals with each of us uniquely.

Genesis 28:3–9
And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave to Abraham. And Isaac sent away Jacob: and he went to Padan-aram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother. When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob, and sent him away to Padanaram, to take him a wife from thence; and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan; And that Jacob obeyed his father and his mother, and was gone to Padan-aram; And Esau seeing that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father; Then went Esau unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife.

Realizing his choice of Canaanite wives had upset his father, Esau takes an Ishmaelite wife hoping to rectify the situation. Poor Esau. All he can do at this point is think carnally as he wades deeper into the murky waters of polygamy. It is not only Esau who will get mired in the perils of polygamy, but his brother, Jacob will as well.

The Bible is, in a sense, like a newspaper. It reports the facts—but certainly doesn't condone all of them. The fact that the *San Francisco Chronicle* reports a shooting in Arkansas doesn't mean the *Chronicle* approves of the shooting.

Where there's polygamy or immorality, the Bible will tell it like it is, but that doesn't mean God approves of it. The Law would later put some very real parameters around this issue of polygamy, as it would with divorce. But due to the heartaches and heartbreaks they both cause, neither are God's will.

Genesis 28:10
And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran.

Knowing Esau is planning to kill him, Jacob runs for his life.

Genesis 28:11
And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep.

If it is true that a clear conscience makes a soft pillow, it is appropriate that Jacob slept on a pillow of rocks, for, after cheating Esau out of his birthright and blessing, Jacob's conscience was anything but clear.

Genesis 28:12 (a)
And he dreamed . . .

God is about to appear to Jacob in a most remarkable manner—not when Jacob was trying to be a good guy, but when he was running away. That's because everything God does is solely, completely, and totally by grace.

Genesis 28:12 (b)
. . . and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.

Notice the order: In both this account and the comments Jesus will make in John 1 which refer to this story, the order is that the angels ascend to heaven and come back down—which means that angels hang out here. We tend to think of angels as being only in heaven. But angels hang out on earth as ministering spirits (Hebrews 1:14).

So commonplace was the angelic presence in the early church that when Rhoda told a group of believers that Peter had been released from prison in answer to their prayers and was standing at the door, they thought it was simply his angel and didn't even bother to break up their prayer meeting to check it out (Acts 12).

Later on, Paul would say, "When spiritual gifts are being exercised and prophecy is being spoken keep in mind, women, that the angels are present, so make sure you don't present yourself in a way that is out of order" (see 1 Corinthians 11:10).

The angels are extremely sensitive about people being out of order, about people not living in submission. Why? Because one-third of their company was kicked out of heaven when they moved out from under the authority of God and linked themselves to Lucifer. The angels are also extremely concerned about the issue of submission because they saw what happened in the Garden of Eden when Eve was left uncovered by her husband and thus in a position of vulnerability.

I truly believe there are angels in this room tonight because Peter said, "When you talk about the things of salvation, the angels are diligent to look into those things" (1 Peter 1:12). We are a living laboratory, gang, to help the angels understand the grace, goodness, and lovingkindness of God. You see, angels experience firsthand the holiness of God, the omnipotence of God, the omniscience of God—but the idea of God loving failures and sinners like us is a constant source of amazement to them.

Genesis 28:13 (a)
And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac . . .

Alluding to this story, Jesus told Nathanael he would see angels ascending and descending upon the Son of God. In other words, "The ladder

spanning the gap between earth and heaven is Me. The Ladder bridging the gap between man and God is Me" (see John 1:51).

Genesis 28:13 (b)–15 (a)
. . . the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee . . .

The first thing God promised Jacob was His presence.

Genesis 28:15 (b)
. . . and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest . . .

Secondly, God promised Jacob His protection.

Genesis 28:15 (c)
. . . and will bring thee again into this land . . .

Thirdly, God promised Jacob preservation—that he would return to the Promised Land.

Genesis 28:15 (d)
. . . for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

Finally, God reiterated to Jacob His promise—that He would complete the work which He had begun.

Genesis 28:16
And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not.

"God is here, and I didn't know it." Why wouldn't Jacob know this? Because of his circumstances. He knew he was nothing but a conniver, hiding

out in a seemingly God-forsaken, rocky region.

That may be your story today. You may feel like you're stuck in a rocky situation, a rocky marriage, rocky finances, or on a rocky road. But God would say to you tonight, "I'm with you in this place—even though you may not know it."

What can separate us from the love of God? Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature (Romans 8:38, 39).

Why? Because there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). There is no separation because there is no condemnation. Why is there no condemnation? Because Jesus Christ, our Hero, our Lord took all of the stuff that would separate us from the Father—the stuff we did last year, the stuff we're doing today, the stuff we'll do tomorrow—and paid for it *all*.

If you find yourself in a rocky situation, you have a choice: You can either say, "God is nowhere"—or, like Jacob, you can look at your surroundings with new eyes and say, "God is now here." On what basis? On the basis of grace.

Genesis 28:17, 18
And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it.

In Jacob, we see three characteristics of the person who truly encounters God . . .

First, *true conversion is seen in his worship.* You'll know when a person is converted because he'll want to worship God. Whether it be singing, lifting hands, or building a monument like Jacob did—the heart of a true believer will look for a way to express love and thanksgiving to his Lord.

Genesis 28:19

And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first.

Bethel means "house of God." *Luz* means "separation." *I was separated from God,* thought Jacob, *but now I realize I'm right in the house of God.* The same is true of you. There are people who, if they caught wind that you're at a Bible study, would be shocked. They knew you ten years ago, or two weeks ago. But since then, you've moved from Luz to Bethel. And everything is changed.

Genesis 28:20, 21
And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God:

Jacob isn't saying, "Okay, God, if You do this, then You'll be my God." No, the idea here is, "If You'll have me, God—far out!"

Genesis 28:22
And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.

Secondly, *true conversion is seen in one's work.* Faith without works is dead, and one of the most practical ways a person shows he has faith that works is when he gives the tithe, which is God's. Every Christian should understand that the first tenth of whatever comes his way is God's. If I keep the tenth, I'm robbing God (Malachi 3:8). But if I let it go, God says, "I will open the windows of heaven and bless you" (Malachi 3:10). You see, God has a job to do: to make us less selfish. So He requires the first tenth, knowing that every time we put our tithe in the basket, along with it goes a bit more of our selfishness.

True conversion manifests itself in one's worship and one's work. We'll see a third manifestation in chapter 29 . . .

29

Genesis 29:1

Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east.

If your Bible has margin notes, perhaps you see the phrase "went on his journey" rendered "lifted up his feet." In Hebrew, the literal idea is that of "happy feet." As we saw in chapter 28, Jacob's conversion was seen in his witness and his work. Here we see *true conversion in Jacob's walk.* As he heads to Padanaram, he does so with "happy feet." He does so with enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm, or *en theos,* simply means "full of God." An encounter with God—the Giver of joy, the Source of all true happiness—manifests itself in a changed walk. And such was Jacob's case. But even though Jacob is saved, he's not yet subdued. So in the chapter before us, as well as the three following, we'll see God dealing with Jacob as He moves Jacob along on his spiritual journey.

Genesis 29:2–4

And he looked, and behold a well in the field, and, lo, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks: and a great stone was upon the well's mouth. And thither were all the flocks gathered: and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in his place. And Jacob said unto them, My brethren, whence be ye? And they said, Of Haran are we.

The words, "of Haran are we" must have been music to Jacob's ears, for, after traveling over four hundred miles through rough, rocky regions, he had finally reached his destination.

Genesis 29:5

And he said unto them, Know ye Laban the son of Nahor? And they said, We know him.

A real character, Laban will prove to be the perfect match for Jacob.

Genesis 29:6, 7
And he said unto them, Is he well? And they said, He is well: and, behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep. And he said, Lo, it is yet high day, neither is it time that the cattle should be gathered together: water ye the sheep, and go and feed them.

Spotting Rachel in the distance, Jacob said to the men gathered around the well, "Hey, guys, this is the time of day for you to water these sheep and take them to pasture." Could it be that Jacob was trying to clear the field in order to spend some time with Rachel?

Genesis 29:8
And they said, We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and till they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep.

Could it be that the men gathered around the well were waiting for the shepherdess who was "beautiful and well favored" (29:17)?

Genesis 29:9, 10 (a)
And while he yet spake with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep: for she kept them. And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth . . .

Rachel shows up and suddenly, with Herculean strength, Jacob single-handedly rolls the stone from the well—no doubt hoping to impress her.

Genesis 29:10 (b), 11

. . . and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept.

Rebekah had watered the camels of her future husband (Genesis 24:20). Here, her son waters the flock of his future wife.

Genesis 29:12, 13
And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rebekah's son: and she ran and told her father. And it came to pass, when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. And he told Laban all these things.

Laban didn't know Jacob, but he did know that Jacob came from a wealthy family, as evidenced by the gifts he had received from them prior to his sister Rebekah's marriage to Isaac (Genesis 24:53).

Genesis 29:14 (a)
And Laban said to him, Surely thou art my bone and my flesh . . .

As we will see, Jacob and Laban are two birds of a feather, for they are both quintessential con men.

Genesis 29:14 (b), 15
. . . And he abode with him the space of a month. And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be?

"You've been here for a month," Laban said to Jacob. "I see that you have some real talent. I want you to work for me. What's your price?"

Genesis 29:16, 17
And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured.

Some commentators say “tender eyed” means Leah couldn’t see well. Others say it means she had blue eyes as opposed to the more acceptable brown eyes of that culture. Others say her loving eyes were her best feature. But contrasted with the fact that Rachel was beautiful of face and well-favoured in form, this much is sure: Rachel was the more physically desirable of the two.

Genesis 29:18
And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter.

“I will work for you for seven years for Rachel’s hand,” Jacob said to Laban.

Genesis 29:19, 20
And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me. And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.

Jacob worked seven years and they seemed but a few days because love is patient (1 Corinthians 13).

- Love gives.
- Lust takes.
- Love waits.
- Lust won’t.
- Love is patient.
- Lust is pressure.
- Lust says Now.
- Love says No.

There’s a world of difference between love and lust.

Genesis 29:21
And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her.

"My seven years are complete," Jacob said to Laban. "Now it's time for you to come through with your end of the bargain."

Genesis 29:22–25
And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her. And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah, Zilpah his maid for an handmaid. And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?

Dressed in traditional wedding attire, Leah was veiled from head to toe. Thus, it wasn't until the next day that Jacob realized he had been tricked.

Genesis 29:26
And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.

"In our country, we have rules," said Laban. "And the rules dictate we take care of the firstborn." Firstborn? That would strike a chord in the heart of Jacob, for he knew what he had done to Esau—the firstborn in his own family—had come right back on him. "Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7)—and Jacob discovered this to be true.

Genesis 29:27
Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years.

"Fulfill her *week*. . . . Thou shalt serve *seven years*." Here it is clear that a biblical "week" can refer to seven years—an especially important

understanding with regard to the prophecy concerning the seventy weeks of Daniel (Daniel 9).

Genesis 29:28–30
And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also. And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid. And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years.

Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. But watch what happens in the space of just one verse . . .

Genesis 29:31
And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.

At first the text indicates that Jacob loved Rachel more than he loved Leah. But here we read that he hated Leah. This is the problem with polygamy. Completely contrary to the recent reports that affairs can be healthy for a marriage, the Bible says man cannot serve two masters, for he'll love one and hate the other (Matthew 6:24).

You see, the heart is constructed in such a way that we cannot be in love with two people simultaneously. We might think we can. The world might say we can. But the Bible says it can't be done. We can't serve two masters. And this is the problem with polygamy, or with any relationship with the opposite sex outside of marriage.

If a man is having even an occupational or ministerial relationship with any woman other than his wife, he's headed for trouble because Jesus taught that where a man's treasure is—his thoughts and dreams—there will his heart be also (Matthew 6:21). An innocent relationship with a member of the opposite sex other than your spouse is a subtle, sad, serious situation because as you begin to share even innocently with each other, your heart follows.

That's why when a couple comes in for marital counseling, the first thing I ask is if there's someone else they're involved with, talking to at work, or sharing with in a Bible study.

When Jesus chose His disciples, He didn't choose six men and six women. He chose twelve men. Otherwise, there were sure to be problems among His disciples. Men are to work with men, talk to men, disciple men. Women are to work with women, disciple women, talk to women. This isn't legalism, gang. It's wisdom.

Genesis 29:32
And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the LORD hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me.

Leah made the mistake of thinking a baby would bring her and Jacob together.

Genesis 29:33
And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Because the LORD hath heard that I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon.

The phrase, "the Lord hath heard that I was hated" is more properly rendered, "the Lord has heard that I *am* hated." *Reuben,* whose name means "see a son" didn't bring Jacob and Leah together in the way Leah hoped. So when the Lord gave her *Simeon,* whose name means "the Lord has heard," Leah thought he would be the answer to her prayer.

Genesis 29:34
And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi.

Levi means "join." "This will do it," Leah thought. "Surely after giving him three sons, Jacob's heart will be joined to mine." But it wasn't.

Genesis 29:35
And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the LORD: therefore she called his name Judah; and left

bearing.

This time, there's no mention of her husband. By son number four, Leah realized that no matter how many kids she gave Jacob, he still wouldn't feel toward her the way she wished he would. *Judah* means "praise"—an appropriate name if Leah had indeed drawn closer to the Lord as a result of her failed bid for Jacob's devotion.



30 **Genesis 30:1 (a)**
And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister . . .

Probably for the first time in her life, Rachel envied her older sister because Leah had four sons, while Rachel was barren—a curse in that culture.

Genesis 30:1 (b), 2
. . . and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?

Rachel thought she'd die if she didn't have children. Ironically, it will be childbirth itself that will kill her.



***For topical study of Genesis 30:1 entitled "Give Me Children or I Die," turn to page* 143.**

Genesis 30:3
And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees that I may also have children by her.

As was the custom of the day, the child conceived by Jacob and Rachel's handmaid would be considered Jacob and Rachel's.

Genesis 30:4–6
And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her. And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son. And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son: therefore called she his name Dan.

In naming the baby *Dan,* or "Judge," it was as if Rachel said, "God has seen my situation and has ruled in my favor."

Genesis 30:7, 8
And Bilhah Rachel's maid conceived again, and bare Jacob a second son. And Rachel said, With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed: and she called his name Naphtali.

In naming her second son *Naphtali,* or "My Wrestling," it was as if Rachel said, "I'm catching up with my sister in the child-bearing contest."

Genesis 30:9–11
When Leah saw that she had left bearing, she took Zilpah her maid, and gave her Jacob to wife. And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a son. And Leah said, A troop cometh: and she called his name Gad.

In naming the son conceived by her handmaid, *Gad,* or "Troop," it was as if Leah said, "Reinforcements are here!"

Genesis 30:12, 13
And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a second son. And Leah said, Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed: and she called his name Asher.

In naming Zilpah's second son *Asher,* or "Happy," Leah expressed her joy in having so many children—a cultural sign of sure blessing.

Genesis 30:14, 15 (a)
And Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them unto his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, Give me, I pray thee, of thy son's mandrakes. And she said unto her, Is it a small matter that thou hast taken my husband? and wouldest thou take away my son's mandrakes also?

The *mandrake,* or "love apple," was a rare, small plant of Middle Eastern origin that grew close to the ground much like a strawberry vine. From its white blossoms would come round, red fruit which looked like small apples, believed to be aphrodisiacs. In addition, because eating the carrot-like root was believed to enhance a woman's fertility, mandrakes were highly valued.

Genesis 30:15 (b)
. . . And Rachel said, Therefore he shall lie with thee to night for thy son's mandrakes.

"If you give me the mandrakes your son found," said Rachel to Leah, "I'll let Jacob lie with you tonight."

Genesis 30:16, 17
And Jacob came out of the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, Thou must come in unto me; for surely I have hired thee with my son's mandrakes. And he lay with her that night. And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived, and bare Jacob the fifth son.

Rachel manipulates to get the mandrakes—and Leah gets pregnant. Isn't that the way it often is? We scheme and plan and connive—only to see the opposite of what we intended.

Genesis 30:18
And Leah said, God hath given me my hire, because I have given my maiden to my husband: and she called his name Issachar.

Perhaps Leah named her newest son *Issachar,* or "Hire" because she saw him as payback, or reward, for her having given her handmaid to her husband.

Genesis 30:19, 20
And Leah conceived again, and bare Jacob the sixth son. And Leah said, God hath endued me with a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have born him six sons: and she called his name Zebulun.

Zebulun means "Habitation"—perhaps reflecting Leah's desire to experience security in Jacob's elusive love for her.

Genesis 30:21–24
And afterwards she bare a daughter, and called her name Dinah. And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach: And she called his name Joseph; and said, The LORD shall add to me another son.

At long last Rachel has a baby—and what does she say? In naming him *Joseph,* or "May God Add," she was saying, "I want more."

How reflective of human nature. "I want this job. I want that car. I want that home. I want that position," we say. And when we get them, like Rachel, we find we only want more.

Genesis 30:25–27
And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country. Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee. And Laban said unto him, I pray

thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the LORD hath blessed me for thy sake.

As we'll see in the next chapter, Laban isn't even a believer, yet even he recognizes he has been blessed by God because of Jacob. The number of his herds, flocks, and grandsons had multiplied radically. Everything was going well for Laban. And in a rare moment of honesty, he says to Jacob, "You have brought the Lord's blessing to my household."

No wonder Laban wanted Jacob to stay. In addition to being supernaturally blessed, Jacob was industrious—which isn't surprising since, throughout Scripture, God often called men who were already hard at work . . .

- Moses was watching his father-in-law's sheep (Exodus 3:1).
- Elisha was plowing behind the oxen (1 Kings 19:19).
- Peter was casting his net into the sea (Matthew 4:18).
- Matthew was collecting taxes (Matthew 9:9).

"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17). "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you," Jesus said, "and *ordained you*" (John 15:16, italics added). We're *all* in the ministry, gang. When I stand in the amphitheatre and see sixty, seventy, eighty people come forward to receive Christ and to be baptized Sunday after Sunday, I'm looking at the fruit of all you ministers who pound nails, teach classes, bus tables, and repair pipes all to the glory of God. Christians must be, can be, get to be the very best worker in the company, for then even the Labans will be drawn to the One we serve.

Genesis 30:28
And he said, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it.

"Tell me what you need in order to stick around," said Laban to Jacob.

Genesis 30:29, 30

And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me. For it was little which thou hadst before I came, and it is now increased unto a multitude; and the LORD hath blessed thee since my coming: and now when shall I provide for mine own house also?

"I've served your needs for fourteen years," Jacob answered. "You've become a wealthy man. But now I, too, have a family I must provide for."

Genesis 30:31
And he said, What shall I give thee? And Jacob said, Thou shalt not give me any thing: if thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep thy flock:

And thus a contest between two con men is set up . . .

Genesis 30:32
I will pass through all thy flock to day, removing from thence all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire.

To this day in the Middle East, sheep are primarily white, goats predominantly brown or black. There's an occasional spotted or multicolored sheep or goat—but the solid color gene being dominant, solid-colored sheep and goats are the ones most highly valued. "I will go throughout your flock and pick out the few which aren't solid-colored," said Jacob. "They will be my pay."

Genesis 30:33
So shall my righteousness answer for me in time to come, when it shall come for my hire before thy face: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and brown among the sheep, that shall be counted stolen with me.

In other words, Jacob said, “I will take care of the flocks here. Then, when it’s time for me to leave, I’ll take the spotted ones.”

Genesis 30:34
And Laban said, Behold, I would it might be according to thy word.

Thus, the two con men struck a deal.

Genesis 30:35, 36 (a)
And he removed that day the he goats that were ringstraked and spotted, and all the she goats that were speckled and spotted, and every one that had some white in it, and all the brown among the sheep, and gave them into the hand of his sons. And he set three days’ journey betwixt himself and Jacob . . .

True to his nature, Laban removed all the spotted and speckled goats and sheep—and sent them three days away with his other sons.

Genesis 30:36 (b)
. . . and Jacob fed the rest of Laban’s flocks.

The next day, Jacob goes out to find no speckled or spotted livestock whatsoever. Laban had tricked him again. But Jacob had only just begun to fight . . .

Genesis 30:37, 38
And Jacob took him rods of green poplar, and of the hazel and chesnut tree; and pilled white strakes in them, and made the white appear which was in the rods. And he set the rods which he had pilled before the flocks in the gutters in the watering troughs when the flocks came to drink, that they should conceive when they came to drink.

Jacob strips the bark off poplar, hazel, and chestnut branches in such a way that they appeared striped. Then he placed them in the watering troughs

of Laban's flocks.

> **Genesis 30:39–43**
> **And the flocks conceived before the rods, and brought forth cattle ringstraked, speckled, and spotted. And Jacob did separate the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks toward the ringstraked, and all the brown in the flock of Laban; and he put his own flocks by themselves, and put them not unto Laban's cattle. And it came to pass, whensoever the stronger cattle did conceive, that Jacob laid the rods before the eyes of the cattle in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods. But when the cattle were feeble, he put them not in: so the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. And the man in creased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses.**

Not only did the striped branches cause the herds and flocks to come into heat, but the offspring produced were speckled and spotted. Does this mean the Bible gives validity to the idea of prenatal suggestion? No. As we will see in chapter 31, God spoke to Jacob in a dream, saying, "Ask for the spotted and speckled livestock." Did the striped branches cause the livestock to bear spotted and speckled offspring? I don't think so. Rather, I think God simply put His stamp of approval on a man who showed some initiative and industry.

> *"Daddy, can I help you wash the windows?" asked not-yet-three-year-old Christy.*
>
> *"Sure!" I said.*
>
> *So she toddled into the kitchen and began washing the windows with what she thought was window cleaner, but which was actually furniture polish. What a mess! But you know what? I was so blessed! Christy was doing something from her heart—and it truly touched mine.*

When we get to heaven, we're going to be surprised by the things we thought were helping God, but were, in fact, equivalent to using furniture

polish on glass. Nonetheless, just as He did in the life of Jacob, God will bless even our simplest efforts for His glory.

GIVE ME CHILDREN OR I DIE

A Topical Study of GENESIS 30:1

All her life, she had been the pretty one—the one who was invited to all the parties, the one who received all the attention. But now it was her older sister who seemed to be blessed, for it was her older sister who was bearing children. In her spirit of envy, Rachel said, "I want kids. There's nothing to live for if I don't have kids. Without kids, I just can't go on. Give me children, Jacob, or else I die."

And at last anger was ignited in the heart of her husband who loved her so deeply that the seven years he had to work to secure her as his bride seemed but a few days. "*I'm* not the problem," he said. "I have four kids with Leah. Therefore don't look to me for the solution."

Please note two important points that relate to any of us who find ourselves desperately seeking a solution to our barren condition . . .

Looking to the Wrong Person

Maybe you have been looking to your husband, wife, friend, or pastor to meet the barrenness, emptiness, lack of productivity in your life. "Meet this need," you cry, "or I'll die." But the reality is, they can't.

When asked who he was, John the Baptist identified himself by who he was *not*. "I am not the Christ," he said. "I'm not the answer. I'm not the Savior. I'm not the solution. My whole role is to point to the One who *is* the Christ" (John 1:20).

> *For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope.*
>
> Romans 8:20

- *For the creature—*
  You and me
- *Was made subject to vanity—*
  Or emptiness
- *Not willingly—*
  We don't want to feel empty.
- *But by reason of Him—*
  By God's divine design
- *Who hath subjected the same in hope—*
  In order that we would look to Him.

God says, "I'm going to create in the soul of every man and woman a hole which cannot be satisfied by anything but Me because otherwise they'll look to her, to him, to it, to that—and they will be disillusioned. They will fall into deep despondency and dark depression. On the other hand, if they look to Me to fill the hole in their soul, they'll discover I'll never let them down."

God made you to be totally dependent upon Him. Therefore, the person who finally gives up looking to the wrong person and looks to God

exclusively, like Leah, will be set free and end up praising the Lord (Genesis 29:35).

The only way you'll be truly satisfied is to be extremely close *to* God, totally dependent *on* God, and passionately in love *with* God.

Sunday morning Christianity will never fill the hole in your soul. The hunger in your heart can only be filled through intimacy, dependency, and an ever-deepening relationship with the One who created you for His own pleasure (Revelation 4:11).

Asking in the Wrong Fashion

"Give me children, or else I die. I demand that You give me kids." Such are the prayers of those in the so-called "Faith Movement," the "Name It and Claim It" gang who say, "We need to speak the word and demand from God that we don't want to be barren, that we want to be rich and healthy and successful."

Wait a minute. When Rachel finally had a son, she named him Joseph. Why? Because *Joseph* means, "May God Add." In other words, Joseph wasn't enough. Rachel wanted more.

That's always the way it is. When you're looking to something or someone to meet the need of your soul, it's never enough. And here's the real irony: As a result of having another son, Rachel did, in fact, die.

As she was dying in childbirth, what did she say? Not, "Oh, praise God, another son;" not, "Oh, Lord, You're awesome to give this barren woman two children." No, as she was dying in childbirth, Rachel named her son *Benoni,* or "Son of my Sorrow." The last word on beautiful Rachel's lips was "sorrow" (Genesis 35:18).

Rachel demanded her way and it killed her.

Why did Rachel's life end this way? Because she looked to the wrong person and asked in the wrong fashion. A husband, wife, friend, pastor, or parent cannot fill the hole in your soul because you were created for a deep yet humble relationship with God.

A broken Rachel named her son *Benoni,* "Son of my Sorrow." But a wiser Jacob renamed him *Benjamin,* "Son of my right hand." As the Son of Man, Jesus was called the "Man of sorrows" (Isaiah 53:3), but as the Son of God, He sits at the Father's right hand (Colossians 3:1). And as He does, He prays for us.

Rachel said, "Give me children, or I die."

The Father says, "For My children, I will die."

God says, "I am so in love with you, I'm not demanding something *from* you, but I'm dying *for* you. I love you to death. And the sins and mistakes you've made so foolishly, I will wash away completely in order that you can live with Me eternally."

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

Proverbs 3:5, 6

- *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart;*
  Don't look to anyone else to fill the hole in your soul.
- *And lean not unto thine own understanding.*
  Don't demand God to do things your way.
- *In all thy ways acknowledge Him,*
  Realize God alone is your Satisfaction, your Reason for living.
- *And He shall direct thy paths.*
  He will fill every need.

Precious people, don't trust in your own demands or desires, your own plans or perspective. If you do, you'll die with the word "sorrow" on your lips. Instead, trust in the Lord with all your heart, and He will direct you not to the place of Rachel's sorrow—but to the place Leah found her ultimate satisfaction: He will direct your paths to Himself.



31 Although Jacob was saved in chapter 28, he was not yet subdued. He's converted, but he still has a carnal nature within him that seems to have control of him.

Like Jacob, our flesh can still be in control even though we are born-again believers. It doesn't need to be this way, for we can be, as Paul would go on to say, spiritual men (1 Corinthians 3:1). That is, we can let the Holy Spirit guide us and lead us. And that's where real joy, purpose, and peace are found, as Jacob will begin to discover . . .

Genesis 31:1
And he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our

father's hath he gotten all this glory.

Laban, Jacob's uncle/father-in-law, was a real match for Jacob. In chapter 30, these two con men had set up a con-test to see which of them would end up with the greater number of sheep, goats, and cattle. Here in chapter 31, as Jacob's herds increase, Laban's sons are angry, realizing that Jacob's success would eventually cut into their own inheritance.

Genesis 31:2
And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before.

Many times, we're in a place where we wonder if God is trying to get us to make a move—geographically, professionally, or in ministry? I believe Jacob's story provides key clues to this question.

First, notice that *the situation around Jacob soured.* Jacob could see in his father-in-law's face that Laban was no longer looking kindly upon him.

Genesis 31:3
And the LORD said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.

Secondly, *the Word of the Lord within Jacob sweetened.* As Jacob's situation soured, the Word within him stirred. The same thing happens today. When the Lord wants to move us, the Scriptures we read day after day all seem to point in that direction.

Genesis 31:4
And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flock,

Jacob would now have to convince his wives to make the journey with him hundreds of miles across a rough desert area to a land they had never seen.

Genesis 31:5–7

And said unto them, I see your father's countenance, that it is not toward me as before; but the God of my father hath been with me. And ye know that with all my power I have served your father. And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but God suffered him not to hurt me.

While Jacob was right in his assessment of Laban's deceitful ways, he failed to see the most obvious truth about Laban: That is, Laban was in actuality a full-length mirror, a life-size reflection of Jacob's own flawed character.

I have discovered that the flaws and faults I see most clearly in others are my own. The more flawed a person is, the more he will see other's flaws. Jacob will point out over and over that Laban is a deceiver, because it was Jacob's own tendency to be a deceiver, a conniver, a cheater. My prayer is that, before I die, God will deliver me from a Jacob mentality and will work in me the agape love that doesn't even notice when others do it wrong (1 Corinthians 13:5).

Genesis 31:8–12
If he said thus, The speckled shall be thy wages; then all the cattle bare speckled: and if he said thus, The ringstraked shall be thy hire; then bare all the cattle ringstraked. Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me. And it came to pass at the time that the cattle conceived, that I lifted up mine eyes, and saw in a dream, and, behold, the rams which leaped upon the cattle were ringstraked, speckled, and grisled. And the angel of God spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob: And I said, Here am I. And he said, Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams which leap upon the cattle are ringstraked, speckled, and grisled: for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee.

And now we understand where Jacob got the idea for his seemingly outlandish plan seen in chapter 30. The business plan that proved to be hugely successful came to him in a dream.

But notice gang, when Jacob's name was called, he answered, "Here I am." If you want the dream God has placed on your heart, the dream God has put in your mind to come true—the only way it will happen is if you, like Jacob, get out of bed and let the Lord do His work through you as you partner with Him. Why doesn't God just do it Himself? Because this life is to prepare us for one thing: Heaven. Thus, God wants us to exercise faith and to get involved in the process because such will be key ingredients in the ages to come.

Genesis 31:13–16
I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred. And Rachel and Leah answered and said, Is there yet any portion of inheritance for us in our father's house? Are we not counted of him strangers? for he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money. For all the riches which God hath taken from our father, that is ours, and our children's: now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do.

Thirdly, *the plan proposed by Jacob was seconded.* Not only can we find confirmation from our own family as did Jacob, but within the family of God lies great wisdom, for in the multitude of counselors there is safety (Proverbs 11:14).

Genesis 31:17, 18
Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels; And he carried away all his cattle, and all his goods which he had gotten, the cattle of his getting, which he had gotten in Padan-aram, for to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan.

Jacob, his two wives, eleven sons, one daughter, and his livestock are all ready to embark on their journey.

Genesis 31:19

And Laban went to shear his sheep: and Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's.

Although Laban acknowledged the God of Jacob, he was in reality a worshiper of the idols Rachel stole. "How primitive!" we are prone to say of idol worship. But what about our own culture? We may not have the multi-breasted goddess Ashteroth—but we have the Playboy bunny. We don't have the stocky little god Mammon—but we have square little Visa cards. These people weren't any more primitive or backward than our own culture is today.

Genesis 31:20–24
And Jacob stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled. So he fled with all that he had; and he rose up, and passed over the river, and set his face toward the mount Gilead. And it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob was fled. And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and they overtook him in the mount Gilead. And God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said unto him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad.

As perhaps your margin indicates, a more correct rendering of this last phrase would be "speak not to Jacob from good to bad." In other words, God said to Laban, "Don't greet Jacob warmly only to later turn on him as is your usual custom."

Genesis 31:25–27
Then Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mount: and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mount of Gilead. And Laban said to Jacob, What hast thou done, that thou hast stolen away unawares to me, and carried away my daughters, as captives taken with the sword? Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me; and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret, and with harp?

"If you told me you were planning to leave, I would have sent you off with a big party."

Sure you would, Laban.

Genesis 31:28, 29
And hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters? thou hast now done foolishly in so doing. It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad.

"The only thing keeping me from doing you bodily harm is the warning I received from your God," Laban said to Jacob.

Genesis 31:30–32
And now, though thou wouldest needs be gone, because thou sore longedst after thy father's house, yet wherefore hast thou stolen my gods? And Jacob answered and said to Laban, Because I was afraid: for I said, Peradventure thou wouldest take by force thy daughters from me. With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live: before our brethren discern thou what is thine with me, and take it to thee. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them.

Completely unaware of Rachel's doing, Jacob said, "If someone in my camp has taken your gods, let him die."

Genesis 31:33, 34
And Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the two maidservants' tents; but he found them not. Then went he out of Leah's tent, and entered into Rachel's tent. Now Rachel had taken the images, and put them in the camel's furniture, and sat upon them. And Laban searched all the tent, but found them not.

Rachel hid the idols in her camel's saddle, and then sat upon it.

Genesis 31:35, 36 (a)
And she said to her father, Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise up before thee; for the custom of women is upon me. And he searched, but found not the images. And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban . . .

The word translated *wroth* literally means "to burn to the place of igniting." The word translated *chode* means "to tear into." Consequently, here we see Jacob burning up and lashing out at Laban over the fact that he had been furiously chased, falsely charged, and financially cheated.

Jacob had reason to be ticked off, but not as much as he thought. For while Laban had indeed cheated him on numerous occasions, this time Laban's cry of "Stop! Thief!" was actually warranted, as, unbeknownst to Jacob, the missing idols were in the possession of his own wife.

When, like Jacob, I find myself lashing out, "How could he do that?" or, "How could she say that?" or, "How could they think that?"—I must remember this story. None of us knows as much as we think we do about any given situation, because, at best, we see through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12). There is only One who sees perfectly, and that's our Lord because all things are naked and open before Him (Hebrews 4:13).

Jacob thought his anger was completely justified. The fact is, he was unaware of a key component in the equation.

Genesis 31:36 (b), 37
. . . and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my trespass? what is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me? Whereas thou hast searched all my stuff, what hast thou found of all thy household stuff? set it here before my brethren and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us both.

"If you've found something I shouldn't have taken, bring it here and let the people around us decide who's right or wrong in this matter," Jacob said.

Genesis 31:38–40
This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I

not eaten. That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night. Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes.

Continuing with his defense, Jacob said to Laban, "I have served you faithfully for twenty years—even to the point where if one of your livestock was eaten by wild beasts, I paid for it out of my own pocket. If one was stolen, you held me responsible, and I paid for it. Day and night I protected your investment."

Genesis 31:41, 42
Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight.

"Even though I have been faithful to you," Jacob continued Laban, "if God hadn't spoken to you, you'd be ripping me off even now."

Genesis 31:43
And Laban answered and said unto Jacob, These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle, and all that thou seest is mine: and what can I do this day unto these my daughters, or unto their children which they have born?

"Those are *my* daughters, *my* grandchildren, and *my* livestock," Laban insisted.

Genesis 31:44–47

Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee. And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made an heap: and they did eat there upon the heap. And Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha: but Jacob called it Galeed.

Jegar-sahadutha and *Galeed* simply mean "the heap of witness." Unable to locate his missing idols, a reluctant Laban drops his accusations against his son-in-law.

Genesis 31:48, 49
And Laban said, This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed; And Mizpah; for he said, The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.

"The Lord watch between me and thee when we are absent one from another." Sometimes you'll see this inscribed on a necklace in a romantic context. While that's a sweet sentiment, the fact of the matter is that what's being said here is, "You scoundrel. I don't trust you as far as I can spit. But even though I can't keep my eye on you, God will be watching you."

Genesis 31:50–53
If thou shalt afflict my daughters, or if thou shalt take other wives beside my daughters, no man is with us; see, God is witness betwixt me and thee. And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold this pillar, which I have cast betwixt me and thee; This heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm. The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob sware by the fear of his father Isaac.

"This heap is a line in the sand," declared Jacob and Laban in effect. "You stay on your side. I'll stay on mine."

Genesis 31:54, 55
Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount. And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place.

Laban kisses his daughters and grandchildren, but does he kiss Jacob? No. He wants nothing to do with Jacob. He doesn't even tell him goodbye as he passes out of Jacob's life and out of the Scriptural account on his way back to Padanaram.



32 After twenty years as an exile, Jacob is on his way home—knowing his brother Esau may very well still feel anger and hostility towards him . . .

Genesis 32:1, 2
And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

As he's on his way with his cattle, his servants, his kids, his wives, Jacob looks around and sees a band of angels traveling with him. Amazed, he names the area *Mahanaim* or "Two Hosts"—for he saw the reality of the heavenly escort which would escort him and his family.

Genesis 32:3–5
And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: And I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and

womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.

Initially, we see Jacob *requesting peace.* He sends his servants ahead, saying, "Go find Esau and tell him I'm coming back home. Tell him I'm a rich man, and that I want nothing from him. Tell him there's no more competition, and ask him if I could have his permission to travel through his territory to make my way home."

Genesis 32:6–8
And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; And said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape.

After requesting peace, Jacob *reacts in panic.* Upon hearing that Esau and four hundred of his men were coming to meet him, Jacob divided his company in two so that half could escape in the event of an attack.

Genesis 32:9, 10 (a)
And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant . . .

After requesting peace and reacting in panic, Jacob *resorts to prayer* . . .

Genesis 32:10 (b)
. . . for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.

When Jacob crossed the Jordan initially, he held only a staff in his hand. Here, as he again crosses the Jordan, he acknowledges that, due to the grace and goodness of God, he does so a rich man.

Genesis 32:11, 12
Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.

Here, Jacob is doing something oh, so right: He's praying with insistence. He's taking the promise that God gave him and saying, "Father, You promised . . ." I have found that when I pray the promises of God, my faith begins to soar. And that's when things begin to happen, for "he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Genesis 32:13–20
And he lodged there that same night; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother; Two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes, and twenty rams, Thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals. And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove. And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee? Then thou shalt say, They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, also he is behind us. And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him. And say ye moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that

goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me.

After requesting peace, reacting in panic, and resorting to prayer, Jacob *resumes his plotting,* as he sends wave after wave of gifts ahead of him, hoping to appease Esau.

Genesis 32:21, 22
So went the present over before him: and himself lodged that night in the company. And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok . . .

Knowing he'd face Esau the next day, Jacob couldn't sleep. Yes, he prayed. And it was a good prayer. But, as you and I so often do, he took the burden back again.

Genesis 32:23
And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had.

A second huge event in Jacob's life is about to take place. The first had transpired twenty years earlier at Bethel. Running away from Esau, Jacob found himself in the middle of nowhere at a place called Luz, where God appeared to him in a dream. Realizing God was indeed with him, Jacob changed the name of Luz to Bethel, from "Separation" to "House of God," and became a believer at that point (Genesis 28).

At Bethel, Jacob was saved. But here at Peniel, on the other side of the brook Jabbok, he will be sanctified, for a deep work is about to take place in his heart.

Genesis 32:24
And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

This man was the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

Genesis 32:25 (a)
And when he saw that he prevailed not against him . . .

In Jacob, the Lord found one who put up a good fight, one who didn't give up.

Genesis 32:25 (b)
. . . he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.

Jacob's hip is dislocated—which means he will no longer be able to do something he's relied on for years: He'll no longer be able to run.

Genesis 32:26
And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

Even though he was pinned to the ground in pain, Jacob innately, intuitively understood he deeply, desperately needed to be blessed.



***For topical study of Genesis 32:26 entitled "Prevailing in Prayer," turn to page* 152.**

Genesis 32:27 (a)
And he said unto him, What is thy name? . . .

Does this mean the Lord didn't know who He was wrestling? No. The Lord knew Jacob's name, and now He's giving Jacob an opportunity to be reminded of it as well. You see, years earlier, his dad had asked him, "Who are you?"

"I am Esau," Jacob had answered (Genesis 27:19).

It's as if here, the Lord is saying, "Let's try it again, Jacob. What is your name?"

Perhaps the great majority of people wish they were someone else. Jacob certainly did. "I want to be firstborn. I want the blessing. I want to be Esau," he said. So, too, you can go through life trying to be someone you're not. You can copy the way she dresses, or the way he talks, but it will lead to nothing but frustration until you come to the moment when in total honesty you say, "I've tried to be this guy, tried to do that thing, but now I admit who I am. I'm Jacob."

Genesis 32:27 (b)
. . . And he said, Jacob.

"Jacob. Heel Snatcher. One who trips people up, one who is a conniver, a con man, a scoundrel—that's who I am."

Genesis 32:28 (a)
. . . And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel . . .

No sooner does Jacob confess and come clean regarding his true identity than the Lord changes his name entirely—from Jacob to Israel, from "Heel Snatcher" to "Governed By God."

Genesis 32:28 (b)
. . . for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

"When did I prevail?" Jacob must have wondered.

And God would answer, "It was when you were broken, when you were pinned by Me, when you were weeping, but wouldn't let go of Me, when you said, 'I can't go through another day without You'—*that's* when you prevailed."

Genesis 32:29
And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.

"You know who I AM, Jacob. Unlike you, My name doesn't change—for I am the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

Genesis 32:30, 31
And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.

Twenty years earlier at Bethel, Jacob left with "happy feet." Here at Peniel, he'll leave not with a spring in his step, but with a limp for the rest of his life.

Genesis 32:32
Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.

To this day, the Orthodox Jews don't eat the thigh meat of an animal in honor of their great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandfather Jacob. Thus, down the tunnel of time, Jacob's descendants commemorate not his cleverness, intelligence, or charisma. They commemorate his pain.

A can-do kind of guy, Jacob was clever, charming, skilled, intelligent—a man any smart CEO would want to hire. God, on the other hand, said, "I have big plans for you, Jacob. You are going to have a huge impact on the history of the world—for from you will come an entire nation. And from that nation will come Messiah. I have big plans for you—but you're too smart, too self-confident, too clever. Therefore I'm going to break you."

Dear sister and brother, you must understand that no matter how charming or intelligent or clever you are, or how good you may be in any given area, your skill is puny, your intelligence is nothing, your strength is scrawny in comparison to God's. So God says, "I'm going to allow this pain in your life because then, and only then, will you lean on Me every step of the way, knowing that if you don't, you'll fall flat on your face. And as you lean *on* Me, you'll draw strength *from* Me and you'll be governed *by* Me instead of trying to make things happen in your own energy."

"Okay, Lord," we say. "I understand I have to be broken that I might learn to lean on You. But once I'm broken, can't You heal me? Once I've wrestled with You about a certain issue, can't You make me like new again?"

I am reminded of the story of another man who was lame . . .

He had laid on the deck of a pool in Jerusalem day after day for thirty-eight years, hoping against hope that somehow when, according to tradition, an angel stirred the waters, he would be the first one in the pool and would be healed. Then, one day a young Rabbi came his way and asked him, "Wilt thou be made whole?"

"I can't," he answered, "because I don't have anyone to help me into the water."

And then something amazing happened—for when the Rabbi told him to take up his bed and walk, the once-lame man was able to do just that.

"Whee!" he said. "I can walk! I can run! I can leap!"

"Hold on," said some Pharisees who had observed the scene. "It's the Sabbath Day. You're not supposed to carry your bed on the Sabbath Day. Who told you to do this? Who is this One who healed you?"

"Hmm," said the newly-healed man. "I don't know. I'm just so happy to be walking. I don't know who it was" (John 5:13).

That's the issue, gang. We all would like to be healed, to have the pain go away, to have the hurt be gone. But the fact is, if that were to happen, like the lame man, we would say, "Whee!" And we wouldn't know who healed us. Therefore, the pain stays; the limp continues day after day, year after year that we might lean on Him, talk to Him, and draw strength and insight from Him which we would never have received if we were just saying, "Whee!"

That's why Jacob's descendants would say, "To this day, we honor the fact that our dad was a broken man. He limped through life. He leaned on God. He wasn't Mr. Whee! But there was a richness and a depth of character that we will honor for all our generations throughout our nation's history."

Mom and Dad, Grandma and Grandpa, the degree to which your kids and grandchildren see you limp through life, leaning on God and drawing from

Him strength and character and depth is the degree to which they will value your legacy. They won't remember how successful you were in climbing the corporate ladder, how big your bank account was, how skilled you were mechanically, or how gifted you were musically. What they will remember is what they learned as they watched you limp.

"I know I have to lean on Him," you might be saying. "But sometimes I lose my way. Sometimes I forget. What do I do then?"

"Do this in remembrance of Me," Jesus would say to you. "It wasn't just My hip that was dislocated. My entire body was broken for you."

Thus, it is at the Cross that I am reminded that in light of what Jesus did for me, the pain He's allowing in my life is because He wants the very best for me. Communion is essential because we can get mixed up; we can get confused by pain and sadness and sorrow. But when we come to the Lord's Table and are reminded once again of His inexpressible love for us, we gladly exchange the leap of the lame man for the limp of Jacob because it is in limping that we remain close to Him all the days of our life.

PREVAILING IN PRAYER

A Topical Study of GENESIS 32:26

Many things could be said about Jacob—some good, some bad. But one thing *must* be said about him, and that is this: Jacob was a man who was able to prevail in prayer. Of that there can be no question.

Like you, I want to see my prayer life develop and deepen. I want to see my prayers be more effective and more impacting. I want to be a man of prayer. To that end, I join with the disciples who came to our Master, saying, "Lord, teach us to pray." They didn't say, "Lord teach us to preach." They didn't say, "Lord, teach us to heal the sick." They didn't say, "Lord, teach us to cast out demons." They said, "Lord, teach us to pray"—because they rightly understood that the key to His ministry, indeed the key to His entire life was His communion with His Father. That's why they said, "Lord, teach *us* to pray" (Luke 11:1).

I'm glad the Lord doesn't simply give us theories about prayer or theological treatises on prayer, but that He gives us stories which depict prayer, for I can understand stories much more easily than I can theory or theology. And here in our text is just such a story—one I have found exceedingly helpful to see what it means to prevail in prayer.

Here's the situation: After being gone for twenty years, Jacob is headed back home. With two wives, eleven sons, one daughter, numerous servants, and abundant cattle in tow, his should have been a triumphant return. But there was a difficulty ahead, for Jacob's brother, Esau—the one he had cheated, the one who had vowed to kill him—was on his way to meet Jacob, accompanied by four hundred men.

Once again, fearing for his life, Jacob does a wise thing: He prays. Notice two qualities that are essential for anyone who wants to prevail in prayer . . .

Jacob Was Insistent in Prayer

> *And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the* LORD *which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee:*
>
> Genesis 32:9

> *And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.*
>
> Genesis 32:12

Both at the beginning and at the conclusion of his prayer, Jacob is insistent in that he says, "Lord, You are the One who told me to go back home. You are the One who promised You would save my life." In so doing, Jacob takes the promises given to him and lifts them back to the Lord in prayer.

This is a great, great key to praying effectively. "Concerning the work of my hands, command ye me," the Lord declares (Isaiah 45:11).

"Command Him?" you say. "That sounds an awful lot like the 'Name It and Claim It' mentality."

No, for contextually you will see God is talking about the promises and prophecies He had already made to the people. Listen to what Jesus would say along the same line: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). In other words, "If you're abiding in Me, hanging around Me, clinging to Me, you can ask anything of Me because within you will be My Word."

What word?

"Exceeding great and precious promises!" (2 Peter 1:4).

It has been said that there are between three and five *thousand* promises given to us in the Word. Therefore, it is as if God says, "I want you to take these exceedingly great and precious promises—and I want you to command Me."

George Mueller, the great prayer warrior of the last century, who founded scores of orphanages and funded them solely through prayer said this: "I take the promises of the Word and I argue with the Lord—not in order to convince God, but to convince myself." You see, as we repeat the promises God has so graciously given to us regarding provision, health, peace, salvation, understanding, guidance, direction, we are reminded of them ourselves. That's why we come to Bible study. That's why we take in the Scriptures. The Word is our bank account—and we're far, far richer than we think.

Too often, we live like spiritual paupers. We don't see blessings in our family, for our friends, or throughout our country. Why? We have not because we ask not (James 4:2). Why don't we ask? I'm convinced it's because we don't know what's in the Word. We have time to study the *Wall Street Journal* to figure out how we should invest; we have time to study *Good Housekeeping* to learn how to create a warm home; we have time to study *Parents Magazine* to enhance our parenting skills—but we fail to study the one book that contains promises concerning *all* of these areas. It is only as we pray the promises of God that we are able to withdraw from the inexhaustible resources the Lord has provided. Jacob understood this. That is why he was insistent in prayer.

Jacob Was Persistent in Prayer

> *And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.*
>
> Genesis 32:24–26

From Hosea's commentary on this wrestling match, we gain further insight . . .

> *He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us . . .*
>
> Hosea 12:3, 4

When did Jacob have power and prevail?

When he "wept and made supplication." In other words, although Jacob was the one who said, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me," Jacob was the one who was weeping; Jacob was the one who was pinned. Even though he was weeping, even though he was "losing" the match, even though he was pinned to the ground in pain, nonetheless Jacob didn't give up. He prayed with persistence.

In Prayer Jacob Found Intimacy

Why did God wrestle Jacob?

Why does He want to wrestle with you and me?

For the same reason I like to wrestle with Benny. It's something called intimacy. God likes to wrestle things through with me and you because He enjoys us. It's as if He says to us, "Let's wrestle this thing through hour after hour, day after day, even month after month because not only will you find that I'll come through eventually—but in the process, we will develop a wonderful intimacy."

That's why the original Greek text makes it clear that we are to "*keep* asking, *keep* seeking, *keep* knocking" (Matthew 7:7), for that is how intimacy is developed; that is how prayer is answered.

Through Prayer Jacob Made Discovery

Wrestling provides unique opportunities for discovery. As you measure your strength against that of your opponent, as you assume various positions and are held in numerous holds, you discover things about yourself and your opponent you couldn't have known otherwise.

God also invites us to wrestle with Him in order that we might discover things about Him and ourselves we could learn in no other way. As you wrestle in prayer, you might find that what God gives to you and does for you is entirely different than what you expected. Jacob asked to be blessed, instead he was broken—but the answer was better, because our Father knows best.

This classic prayer was found in the breast pocket of a Civil War soldier shot at Gettysburg:

I asked for strength that I might achieve.
He made me weak that I might obey.

I asked for health that I might do great things.
He gave me grace that I might do better things.

I asked for riches that I might be happy.
He gave me poverty that I might be wise.

I asked for power that I might have the praise of men.
He gave me weakness that I might feel a need for God.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life.
He gave me life that I might enjoy all things.

I received nothing I asked for.
He gave me everything I hoped for.

Keep on wrestling, gang. You'll have intimacy *with* the Lord. You'll make discoveries *about* the Lord. And you'll be changed radically *by* the

Lord in the very process of praying.



33 In wrestling with the angel Jacob had been blessed—but he had also been broken. So it is now, limping on his cane, that Jacob continues on his way back home . . .

Genesis 33:1, 2
And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost.

Jacob positioned the handmaidens and their children in the front of the procession, with Leah and her children following them. He positioned Rachel and Joseph at the back, the safest place, because his heart was with Rachel.

Genesis 33:3, 4
And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept.

Jacob bows to the ground, afraid to look at Esau's face. But Esau rushes towards him and smothers him in a warm embrace.

Genesis 33:5 (a)
And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, Who are those with thee?

"Who are all these kids and women?" Esau asked.

Genesis 33:5 (b)

. . . And he said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant.

"This is the family God has graciously given me," said Jacob.

Genesis 33:6–8 (a)
Then the handmaidens came near, they and their children, and they bowed themselves. And Leah also with her children came near, and bowed themselves: and after came Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed themselves. And he said, What meanest thou by all this drove which I met?

Esau asked the meaning of the waves of camels and goats and sheep Jacob had sent ahead to try and appease him.

Genesis 33:8 (b)
. . . And he said, These are to find grace in the sight of my lord.

"I sent them to you in order that I might find grace in your sight," Jacob answered.

And in Jacob we see an illustration of our tendency to think we have to give something to the Lord in order to receive grace from the Lord. Why is it so difficult for us to receive grace graciously? It's because we've been so convinced that "there's no free lunch." But guess what. There *is* a free lunch —and breakfast and dinner, too! "Come and dine," says the Lord. "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. He that hath no money, come ye buy and eat" (Isaiah 55:1).

Genesis 33:9
And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself.

Now if Esau, who is a type of the flesh, says, "That's not the way it works,"—how much more our Lord, who is the epitome of grace and goodness, would say, "You don't have to do this, do that, or give up the other before you come into My presence." Therefore, let us come *boldly* unto the

throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

If you're in need today, know this: There's nothing keeping you from going boldly to the throne and saying, "Father, I'm stuck," or, "Father, I don't understand," or, "Father, I need help."

This is the genius of true spirituality, the uniqueness of biblical Christianity. Every other philosophy and religion is based upon responsibility—the responsibility of its adherents to fast, to chant, to give, to work. Christianity isn't based on responsibility. It's based on response—the response to unconditional love, unrestrained mercy, undeserved grace.

For many years, I thought my salvation was based on my responsibility to pray, my responsibility to tithe, my responsibility to be at church. But then I began to understand that God blesses, God gives, God avails Himself not on the basis of what I do or don't do—but on the basis of what *He* did in sending His Son to die on the Cross in order to pay the price for my sin. And when that pressure was taken off me, I *wanted* to study the Word. I *wanted* to be in church. I *wanted* to pray—not to earn blessing, but because I had *already* been so blessed.

Genesis 33:10
And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me.

At first, Jacob said, "I gave you gifts in order to find grace." Now he gets it right, for he says, "I'm giving you gifts in response to the grace you've *already* shown me."

Genesis 33:11
Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough. And he urged him, and he took it.

Here, Esau is being gracious. He doesn't need Jacob's gifts.

Genesis 33:12
And he said, Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee.

"Let's travel together," Esau said.

Genesis 33:13
And he said unto him, My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die.

"With all these young ones, I won't be able to keep up with you," said Jacob.

Genesis 33:14
Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure, until I come unto my lord unto Seir.

Seir was Edom, Esau's home, so Jacob says, "You go ahead, and I'll meet you at your place." Does Jacob in fact go to Seir? Evidently not. Even though Jacob is once again less than forthright, perhaps, remembering his relationship with Laban, he knew he shouldn't go to Seir because of the inevitable heartache and heartbreak which come when a believer is yoked with an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Genesis 33:15 (a)
And Esau said, Let me now leave with thee some of the folk that are with me . . .

"I'll leave some of my men to help you on your journey," Esau said.

Genesis 33:15 (b)
. . . And he said, What needeth it? let me find grace in the sight of my lord.

"That's not necessary," Jacob answered.

Genesis 33:16
So Esau returned that day on his way unto Seir.

Even though he had reason to be angry, Esau does not hold a grudge against Jacob. Furthermore, he only accepted Jacob's gift when pressed. Finally, he offered to accompany Jacob on his way as a means of protection for Jacob and his family. Thus, Esau would be considered refined and polished in our society. Yet the Bible says he is an uncouth man spiritually.

> Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.
>
> Hebrews 12:16, 17

Esau is a picture of the flesh—a doomed and damned man for whom there was found no place to repent.

"But my unsaved neighbor, or coworker, or uncle is so nice, so generous, so kind, so giving" we say. They may be. They may be gems, real diamonds. In comparison, the Christian you're sitting next to may be a cabbage. But there's a big difference. A diamond is brilliant, polished, and highly esteemed—but dead. A cabbage is common, lowly, and ugly—but alive.

People get real mixed up about this. They say, "I see Christians and they're rude and mean." The real issue, however, is this: We may be cabbage heads, but we're alive.

> But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.
>
> Ephesians 2:4–6

Diamond-like as we may have been, we were nonetheless dead—but God made us alive. And now, cabbage-like as we may be, we're growing . . . We're not what we should be, but we're not what we used to be, and we're not what we're going to be, for when we see Him, we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2). Oh, glorious day!

Is Esau polished? Yes. Kind? Yes. But there is a basic flaw in Esau that will send him to hell: He doesn't have a heart for God, and therefore has no need of grace. A self-made man, he says, "I have enough" (v. 9).

Jacob, on the other hand, has lots of problems, but beneath them all, he has a heart for God and, therefore embraces grace. A believer, he says, "God hath dealt graciously with me" (v. 11). God is looking for men and women who truly, deeply know they don't deserve His goodness. The reason Jacob goes down in spiritual history as a giant is because he understands grace.

Genesis 33:17 (a)
And Jacob journeyed to Succoth . . .

Situated on the other side of the Jordan River, *Succoth* means "Tent Town."

Genesis 33:17 (b)
. . . and built him an house . . .

Jacob is the first patriarch to build a house. He's backsliding. He was supposed to live in a tent in the Promised Land. Instead, he builds a house on the wrong side of the river.

Genesis 33:17 (c)
. . . and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

Jacob builds a house and booths for his cattle. In other words, he becomes a farmer.

Genesis 33:18 (a)

And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan . . .

Perhaps realizing his dream house wasn't what he thought it would be, Jacob crosses over the Jordan River and goes to Shechem. Located on the right side of the Jordan River, Shechem was technically in the Promised Land, but, as we shall see, it was a carnal, evil place.

Genesis 33:18 (b)
. . . when he came from Padan-aram; and pitched his tent before the city.

Reminiscent of Lot, Jacob didn't go into the city, but pitched his tent toward the city.

Genesis 33:19, 20
And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for an hundred pieces of money. And he erected there an altar, and called it El-elohe-Israel.

El-elohe-Israel literally means, "The God, the God of Israel." Jacob says the right thing—but with his tent facing Carnal City, he's saying it from the wrong place.



34

Genesis 34:1
And Dinah the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land.

Surrounded by twelve brothers, it's understandable why Dinah would want to see her girlfriends!

Genesis 34:2, 3

And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her. And his soul clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel.

This is a mystery to me. After Shechem raped Dinah, he spoke kindly to her. Evidently, in his lustful passion, he developed feelings for her.

Genesis 34:4–7
And Shechem spake unto his father Hamor, saying, Get me this damsel to wife. And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter: now his sons were with his cattle in the field: and Jacob held his peace until they were come. And Hamor the father of Shechem went out unto Jacob to commune with him. And the sons of Jacob came out of the field when they heard it: and the men were grieved, and they were very wroth, because he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter; which thing ought not to be done.

Dinah's brothers were understandably angry. "What's going on here?" they demanded. "Our sister Dinah has been defiled."

Genesis 34:8, 9
And Hamor communed with them, saying, The soul of my son Shechem longeth for your daughter: I pray you give her him to wife. And make ye marriages with us, and give your daughters unto us, and take our daughters unto you.

"Let's merge our families together," Shechem's father suggested.

Genesis 34:10
And ye shall dwell with us: and the land shall be before you; dwell and trade ye therein, and get you possessions therein.

"It'll be good for business," said Shechem.

Genesis 34:11, 12
And Shechem said unto her father and unto her brethren, Let me find grace in your eyes, and what ye shall say unto me I will give. Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me: but give me the damsel to wife.

"Name your price," Shechem said, hoping to close the deal.

Genesis 34:13–17
And the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father deceitfully, and said, because he had defiled Dinah their sister: And they said unto them, We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one that is uncircumcised; for that were a reproach unto us: But in this will we consent unto you: If ye will be as we be, that every male of you be circumcised; Then will we give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. But if ye will not hearken unto us, to be circumcised; then will we take our daughter, and we will be gone.

"We cannot do as you suggest," said the sons of Jacob to the father of Shechem, "because you are not circumcised. However, if your men become circumcised, then we can join our families together."

Genesis 34:18, 19 (a)
And their words pleased Hamor, and Shechem Hamor's son. And the young man deferred not to do the thing, because he had delight in Jacob's daughter:

Hamor and Shechem agreed to the demand of Jacob's sons.

Genesis 34:19 (b)
. . . and he was more honourable than all the house of his father.

In other words, Shechem was making a deal he meant to keep.

Genesis 34:20
And Hamor and Shechem his son came unto the gate of their city, and communed with the men of their city, saying,

Hamor and Shechem now have a big job ahead of them: They have to sell this idea to the men of their city.

Genesis 34:21–23
These men are peaceable with us; therefore let them dwell in the land, and trade therein; for the land, behold, it is large enough for them; let us take their daughters to us for wives, and let us give them our daughters. Only herein will the men consent unto us for to dwell with us, to be one people, if every male among us be circumcised, as they are circumcised. Shall not their cattle and their substance and every beast of theirs be ours? only let us consent unto them, and they will dwell with us.

"We know this will be a little painful," Hamor and Shechem admitted, "but here's the deal: Eventually, we'll take these people over. And all of their stuff will ultimately be ours. We'll have it made."

Genesis 34:24
And unto Hamor and unto Shechem his son hearkened all that went out of the gate of his city; and every male was circumcised, all that went out of the gate of his city.

The men of Shechem bought into Hamor's and Shechem's plan.

Genesis 34:25–29
And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out. The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and spoiled the city, because they had defiled their sister. They took their sheep,

and their oxen, and their asses, and that which was in the city, and that which was in the field, And all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives took they captive, and spoiled even all that was in the house.

Completely incapacitated, the men of Shechem were unable to defend themselves when Simeon and Levi showed up and began chopping away.

Genesis 34:30, 31
And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house. And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?

"When word gets out to the other cities in the area concerning what you've done, we, too, will be annihilated," said a distraught Jacob to his sons.

Why would God take a whole chapter to tell such a sad, sordid story? It is a wise man and a wise woman who says, "Lord, if you're telling us this, we better listen." You see, every time I have failed, every time I have erred, every time I have missed the mark, dropped the ball, stumbled about—God was faithful to warn me ahead of time. The problem was, I didn't listen.

The story we have just read serves as just such a warning to every mom and dad wise enough to understand that he who pitches his tent toward the world must not be surprised when his kids act like the world. The parent who says to his children, "The way you're behaving, the way you're dressing, the way you're living is causing me to stink," is almost invariably the one who has allowed his kids to go places and do things he knew in his heart weren't right—for if we allow our Dinahs and Daniels to interact with the heathen, confusion in our kids and problems in our homes are sure to follow. Heed the warning so clearly given here, dear dad and precious mom. It's not legalism. It's plain old wisdom.



35 His daughter raped, his sons mass murderers, Jacob's family is falling apart. The whole place stinks in his estimation. Things look real grim. And the story continues . . .

Genesis 35:1 (a)
And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up . . .

In light of his situation, what God says to Jacob amazes me. He doesn't say, "Sit down. You're benched," or, "Back off. You're done," or, "That's it. You're through." He says, "Arise. Go up"—because our God is a God of unbelievable grace.

Genesis 35:1 (b)
. . . to Bethel, and dwell there . . .

Bethel—previously called Luz until the night Jacob had an encounter with God—was the place where Jacob was saved. Now the Lord says, "Go back to the place you met Me." How I appreciate our Lord—because that's what He says to you and me. We tend to think God is mad *at* us, is angry *with* us, has had enough *of* us. But our brother Paul would come on the scene and say, "Where sin abounds, grace abounds *more*" (Romans 5:20, italics added). Jacob and his clan are neck-deep in sin. And yet God says, "Rise up. Let's get going again."

Genesis 35:1 (c)
. . . and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.

"I want to 'altar' you once more," God said to Jacob.

Genesis 35:2–4 (a)
Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and

I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears . . .

Evidently, Jacob's family had added pagan gods and trinkets to the idols Rachel had stolen from her father. Here, Jacob says, "We're going to Bethel. We're going to the house of God. So give me all of those earrings and bracelets and stuff you picked up from the heathens."

Notice God didn't say to Jacob, "If you deal with the pagan gods in your family, then I might give you a second chance." No, God said, "Rise and let us go to Bethel."

Perhaps it was because Jacob was so amazed by this that he said, "It's time to clean up—not *so* God will call us, but because He *has* called us."

That's what grace does. When I realize how kind and good and benevolent and merciful God is to me day after day after day, it causes me to want to put away my trinkets and toys that are not of Him. Too often, we think, *I've got to get my life cleaned up and maybe then I can hear God's voice; maybe then He'll lead me again.* No. God is ready to lead us today right where we are—and because of that we say, "Lord, You're so good. I don't want the things of the world any more."

Genesis 35:4 (b)
. . . and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.

The tree in Scripture, of course, speaks of the Cross. In other words, the picture is that Jacob left his sin at Calvary. When Jesus died on the Cross, not only was the penalty of sin paid for completely, but power over sin was provided fully. This is an amazing and potent truth. You can leave here tonight and say, "Lord, truly You are good in allowing me to go to Bethel once more. I'm tired of my sin, and I want to make my way free and unencumbered of the junk which entangles me."

But, practically, how does this happen? You reckon the old man dead. You say, "Lord, on the basis of Your Word, I no longer have to do that, go there, be involved with the other—not because of positive thinking, but

because of what You did on Calvary's tree." Just as by faith you receive forgiveness, so too by faith you gain victory.

Thus, I can truly say to that Double Quarter Pounder with cheese, "I no longer have to submit to the demand you are placing on me. I reckon the old man dead to that sin." And I truly, honestly, absolutely, unequivocally can turn away from that Quarter Pounder and walk free—if I choose to! If you haven't spent time in Romans 6 lately, I encourage you to marvel at it and say, "Thank You, Lord, that because on the Cross You not only removed the penalty of sin, but broke the power of sin, I don't have to give in. I can walk away a free man." Gang, I am simple-minded enough to believe this applies to a heroin addict, to a gossiper, to a person who's hooked on pornography, to a person with a negative attitude. *Whatever* the sin might be, its power was shattered on the Cross.

"Give me that stuff," Jacob said to his family.

"No, it's too strong. No, it can't be done. No, it's too important," they could have said. Instead, they responded to the command given them by Jacob, just as you can respond to the Word given you by the Lord.

Genesis 35:5
And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.

With the old gods and the old stuff buried at the base of the tree, as Jacob's family makes their way to Bethel, the fear of God keeps the people round about from attacking.

Genesis 35:6, 7
So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him. And he built there an altar, and called the place Elbeth-el: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.

Jacob has his problems indeed. Jacob has all kinds of baggage without question. But through it all, he's growing because when he comes to Bethel the second time, he no longer calls it *Bethel,* "the house of God," but *El-*

Bethel or, "The God of the House of God." This shows monumental maturity, for Jacob understands that it's not the house of God that is important, but the God who dwells therein. So, too, it's not worship that's important, but the God whom we worship. It's not the Bible that's important, but the God of the Bible. You see, the Word is not an end in itself. The goal of Bible study is not to try and gain more intellectual or theological understanding. It's much more than that. The Word of God is simply a door I go through many times a day to meet the God of the Word.

"That's obvious," you say.

Not really. A lot of people initially delight in church or Bible study or worship. But eventually they lose interest in church and Bible study and worship because those things are not God.

Genesis 35:8
But Deborah Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak: and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth.

Allon-bachuth means "the oak of weeping." As Jacob enters the Promised Land, he re-connects with Deborah, the woman who raised him, his nanny. Rid of his idols, Jacob is back at Bethel with a deeper understanding. But when Deborah dies, he weeps.

Genesis 35:9, 10
And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padan-aram, and blessed him. And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel.

God speaks to Jacob again, assuring him the promise He had given him was still in place. Changed from "Heel-Snatcher" to "Governed by God," from "Con Man" to "Israel," Jacob was reminded that God had given him a *personal name.*

Genesis 35:11
And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and

kings shall come out of thy loins;

After a personal name comes *promised fame,* as God promised Jacob he would be fruitful and powerful.

Genesis 35:12, 13
And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land. And God went up from him in the place where he talked with him.

Finally, the Land being God's to give, He gives it to Israel as a *perpetual claim.*

Genesis 35:14 (a)
And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, even a pillar of stone . . .

Stone in Scripture speaks of the Rock of Ages, the Chief Cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

Genesis 35:14 (b)
. . . and he poured a drink offering thereon . . .

The wine of the drink offering speaks of the work of the Cross, when Jesus' blood was poured out for us.

Genesis 35:14 (c)
. . . and he poured oil thereon.

The oil speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit. What did the Good Samaritan pour into the wounds of the man who was beaten up? Wine and oil (Luke 10:34). The oil being provision for success, and the blood payment for failure, the Lord says, "The way to be successful is not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit (Zechariah 4:6). But if you fall, My blood will cleanse you." What a wonderful combination!

Genesis 35:15, 16 (a)
And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel. And they journeyed from Bethel . . .

To this man who experienced devastation in his family, God said, "Go to Bethel and dwell there. Go to Bethel and stay put." Jacob went there, found refuge and renewal, revival and refreshment—and then he left! *Why?* Why do people leave Bethel? Why do people leave the House of God? Let me give you the only answer we see in the text: After talking about Jacob's revival in Bethel in verse 7, verse 8 says, "But Rebekah's nurse died." In other words, although he had met God, heard the promises of God, and fellow-shipped with God at Bethel, Jacob evidently couldn't deal with the fact that his nanny was no longer there.

Both Abraham and Jacob would leave the House of God because of changes. Abraham left Bethel because of famine. His grandson leaves Bethel because of family. Abraham left because things were changing financially. Jacob leaves because he can't handle it emotionally.

"Why isn't our church small like it used to be?" people ask. "Why are there different people leading worship? Why isn't my nanny here anymore?"

The answer is singular: Because things change. Why do things change? Because God is not static. Spiritual life will always be in motion. Therefore, it is the unwise man, the foolish woman who says, "If nanny's not here anymore, I'm not coming either." Precious fellow pilgrim, on our spiritual journey, we must build our altar, offer our praise, receive instruction and *remain* in Bethel.

Genesis 35:16 (b)–18 (a)
. . . and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also. And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) . . .

"Give me children or else I'll die," Rachel had demanded (Genesis 30:1). But it was in bearing a child that she did, in fact, die.

Genesis 35:18 (b)
. . . that she called his name Ben-oni: but his father called him Benjamin.

A picture of our Lord Jesus Christ in this story, Benjamin brought sorrow to his mother. A sword would pierce Mary's heart when she saw her Son on the Cross (Luke 2:35). But to Jacob, Benjamin was the "son of my right hand"—just as to the Father, Jesus would bring great delight (Matthew 3:17).

Genesis 35:19
And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.

Rachel died in labor—perhaps unnecessarily as a result of the journey from Bethel.

Genesis 35:20, 21
And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day. And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar.

Notice that Jacob buried Rachel—but Israel journeyed on. Jacob was exceedingly sorrowful, but he will eventually soar higher.

Genesis 35:22 (a)
And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel heard it . . .

If Jacob had heard what Reuben had done, he would have reacted. But Israel heard it. Broken, limping, governed by God, Israel does not react immediately.

Genesis 35:22 (b)–29 (a)
. . . Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: The sons of Leah; Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and

Issachar, and Zebulun: The sons of Rachel; Joseph, and Benjamin: And the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid; Dan, and Naphtali: And the sons of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid; Gad, and Asher: these are the sons of Jacob, which were born to him in Padan-aram. And Jacob came unto Isaac his father unto Mamre, unto the city of Arbah, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned. And the days of Isaac were an hundred and fourscore years. And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days . . .

Once again, sadness enters Jacob's heart, as his father dies.

Genesis 35:29 (b)
. . . and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

As Ishmael and Isaac had done before them, now Jacob and Esau meet at the grave of their father.



36 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness . . .

2 Timothy 3:16 (a)

The word "inspired" literally means "God-breathed." *All* Scripture is given by inspiration. That means God breathed life into each word He spoke. We live in a time when people are saying, "Oh, yes, the Bible is inspired." But they're using the word "inspired" the same way they say Shakespeare was inspired—and that's not what Paul was saying to Timothy. According to Paul, God personally breathed life into and uttered each word specifically. Therefore, the modern theologian who says the Bible contains the Word of God is in grave and, I believe, damnable error. The Bible does not contain the Word of God, gang. The Bible *is* the Word of God.

Am I splitting hairs? No. The implication of those who say the Bible contains the Word of God is that the Bible also contains the words of men.

The problem with that is, even if I say most of the Bible is the Word of God, as I decide which part is inspired and which isn't, I become the judge of the Bible rather than allowing the Bible to judge me. And guess how I'll judge it. Concerning the things I agree with, I'll say, "That's God speaking." Concerning the things that convict me, however, I'll say, "That's man speaking."

Every book in the Bible, every chapter of every book, every verse of every chapter, every word of every verse, every letter of every word is inspired. It's *all* God-breathed. It's *all* important. Even the passage before us . . .

Genesis 36:1 (a)
Now these are the generations of Esau . . .

Chapter 36 is a genealogy of the family of Esau. Esau is the epitome of the flesh, the old nature, the part of you and me that wants its own way, that demands to be satisfied. Whether it concerns an easily identifiable sin, or a much more subtle desire, the flesh is always contrary to the spirit.

Genesis 36:1 (b)
. . . who is Edom.

Esau is also called Edom because he settled across the Jordan River in the southern area directly east of the Promised Land known as Edom. The flesh also lives outside the Promised Land, removed from the blessings and promises of God.

Genesis 36:2 (a)
Esau took his wives of the daughters of Canaan . . .

In Deuteronomy 7:3, God would say, "Do not take Canaanite women to be your wives." Paul would say, "Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Determined to have his way, however, Esau went to the pagan communities and married Canaanite women.

Genesis 36:2 (b)

. . . Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Aholibamah the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite;

When Esau took his wife Adah back home to meet Isaac and Rebekah, there must have been immediate tension, for Adah was the name of the woman married to Lamech in the days preceding the Flood (Genesis 4:19). Lamech being one who rebelled against the Lord, what does Esau do? We know from other genealogies (Genesis 26:34), that Esau changes her name to the name of one of his cousins: *Bashemath,* or "Spice."

Esau changed her name. So, too, the flesh has a tendency to change the name of sin into something more palatable, which makes it easier to swallow. That is why committing adultery is now called "having an affair;" why fornication is now a "fling;" why a Sodomite is now "gay."

The problem is, every time Esau says the name of his wife, he's reminded of his cousin—to such a degree that he ends up marrying her as well.

Genesis 36:3
And Bashemath, Ishmael's daughter, sister of Nebajoth.

Now Esau has two Bashemaths. So we see him change the original Bashemath's name in 28:9 to Mahalath. *Mahalath* literally means "sickness." Why would Esau name her this? Because he's getting ready to take a third wife. The flesh still does the same thing today, evidenced whenever someone says, "I'm going to brand my spouse as one who makes me sick, who is incompatible, who is emotionally abusive, so I can move on to someone else."

Genesis 36:4, 5 (a)
And Adah bare to Esau Eliphaz; and Bashemath bare Reuel; And Aholibamah bare Jeush, and Jaalam, and Korah . . .

Aholibamah, or literally, "Tent of the High Place" was a temple prostitute. At the high places, where pagan gods were worshiped and pagan idols served, there would be a tent close by called "the tent of the high place." The "priestesses" within were nothing more than prostitutes and, like Aholibamah, were known as residents of the tent of the high place.

Realizing his marriage to a temple prostitute would not set very well with his parents, in 26:34, we see Esau change Aholibamah's name to Judith.

As a temple prostitute, Aholibamah would have been very beautiful. But she was also quite powerful, for in verse 41, we see she was actually a duke, or a *sheikh*—as rare for a woman in that day as it is in ours.

In Esau's genealogy, we see many characteristics of the flesh, the first being that the flesh is *pious,* as it changes names to make sin sound acceptable—even at times religious. Gossip can parade as a prayer request and judgment can masquerade as a concern in an effort to make the "Aholibamahs" in our own lives appear righteous.

Genesis 36:5 (b)
. . . these are the sons of Esau, which were born unto him in the land of Canaan.

Secondly, the flesh is *prolific.* As you read this genealogy, you see numerous groups of people whose line goes back to Esau because the flesh is prolific. Yes, when we sin, when we give in to our flesh, our sin past, present, and future is forgiven because Christ paid for it so completely that God says, "Your sin and iniquity will I remember no more" (Hebrews 10:17). However, Paul says, "Be not deceived. If a man sows to the flesh, then of the flesh he shall reap corruption" (Galatians 6:8). If I plant seeds of the flesh, although I'm forgiven, the crop will still come up. There's no way around this. That is why the chapter before us contains such a long list of people who are descendants of Esau.

Genesis 36:6–8
And Esau took his wives, and his sons, and his daughters, and all the persons of his house, and his cattle, and all his beasts, and all his substance, which he had got in the land of Canaan; and went into the country from the face of his brother Jacob. For their riches were more than that they might dwell together; and the land wherein they were strangers could not bear them because of their cattle. Thus dwelt Esau in mount Seir: Esau is Edom.

The flesh is *prosperous.* Esau was prosperous. And herein lies a problem. "How come the fleshly guy at work gets the promotion?" we ask. "Why does the guy who cheats on his taxes get the new ski boat? Why does the girl who cheats on her exam get an A?" These questions are what caused the psalmist to cry, "My feet slipped when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Psalm 73).

If you cheat, you'll get ahead, but only for a season. You might make an A when you should have received a C; you might get money because you beat the system—but it will haunt you. It'll bite you. It'll catch up with you every single time without exception.

Genesis 36:9–13
And these are the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in mount Seir: These are the names of Esau's sons; Eliphaz the son of Adah the wife of Esau, Reuel the son of Bashemath the wife of Esau. And the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, and Gatam, and Kenaz. And Timna was concubine to Eliphaz Esau's son; and she bare to Eliphaz Amalek: these were the sons of Adah Esau's wife. And these are the sons of Reuel; Nahath, and Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah: these were the sons of Bashemath Esau's wife.

The flesh is *persuasive.* It was Eliphaz the Temanite who came to Job, saying, "Look at the jam you're in. Life is not happening the way it's supposed to. It must be that God is mad at you."

The flesh will say to you, "So you've been going to church, walking with God, reading the Bible—where is it getting you? You've got more problems, more trials, more difficulties than ever."

Genesis 36:14–16
And these were the sons of Aholibamah, the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon, Esau's wife: and she bare to Esau Jeush, and Jaalam, and Korah. These were dukes of the sons of Esau: the sons of Eliphaz the firstborn son of Esau; duke Teman, duke Omar, duke Zepho, duke Kenaz, Duke Korah, duke Gatam, and

duke Amalek: these are the dukes that came of Eliphaz in the land of Edom; these were the sons of Adah.

The flesh is *pernicious*. The Amalekites picked on the folks in the back as Moses led the people to the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 25).

The most dangerous place to be in spiritual life is in the back of the pack, for it is there that we get picked off by the flesh. Go for the kingdom with all your might. Stay as close to the things of God as you possibly can. Otherwise, you're an easy target for Amalek.

Genesis 36:17–23
And these are the sons of Reuel Esau's son; duke Nahath, duke Zerah, duke Shammah, duke Mizzah: these are the dukes that came of Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Bashemath Esau's wife. And these are the sons of Aholibamah Esau's wife; duke Jeush, duke Jaalam, duke Korah: these were the dukes that came of Aholibamah the daughter of Anah, Esau's wife. These are the sons of Esau, who is Edom, and these are their dukes. These are the sons of Seir the Horite, who inhabited the land; Lotan, and Shobal, and Zibeon, and Anah, And Dishon, and Ezer, and Dishan: these are the dukes of the Horites, the children of Seir in the land of Edom. And the children of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and Lotan's sister was Timna. And the children of Shobal were these; Alvan, and Manahath, and Ebal, Shepho, and Onam.

The flesh is *powerful*. We know from the Book of Deuteronomy that the Horites were powerful men related to the Anakim, the giants. The descendants of Esau were able to wipe out even the mighty Horites because the flesh is powerful. "I kicked that habit. I dealt with that addiction. I beat that problem," some say as they glory in their flesh, for the flesh can overcome giants.

The problem is, the flesh can also *become* a giant, for when you feed the flesh, it doesn't become calmer, it grows stronger. "I'll just satisfy this fleshly tendency a little bit," we say. But each time we give in, the flesh grows stronger.

Genesis 36:24–31

And these are the children of Zibeon; both Ajah, and Anah: this was that Anah that found the mules in the wilderness, as he fed the asses of Zibeon his father. And the children of Anah were these; Dishon, and Aholibamah the daughter of Anah. And these are the children of Dishon; Hemdan, and Eshban, and Ithran, and Cheran. The children of Ezer are these; Bilhan, and Zaavan, and Akan. The children of Dishan are these: Uz, and Aran. These are the dukes that came of the Horites; duke Lotan, duke Shobal, duke Zibeon, duke Anah, Duke Dishon, duke Ezer, duke Dishan: these are the dukes that came of Hori, among their dukes in the land of Seir. And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel.

The flesh is *proud.* "We, the descendants of Esau, had kings before the children of Israel had a king. We're way ahead of the game. We're on the cutting edge. We know where it's at." The flesh is proud, boasting of what it accomplishes, of what it has achieved, of what it has brought about in its own power.

Genesis 36:32–39

And Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom: and the name of his city was Dinhabah. And Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his stead. And Jobab died, and Husham of the land of Temani reigned in his stead. And Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who smote Midian in the field of Moab, reigned in his stead: and the name of his city was Avith. And Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his stead. And Samlah died, and Saul of Rehoboth by the river reigned in his stead. And Saul died, and Baal-hanan the son of Achbor reigned in his stead. And Baal-hanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar reigned in his stead: and the name of his city was Pau; and his wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mezahab.

The flesh is *persistent.* Concerning the succession of kings, we read "in his stead," "in his stead," "in his stead." So, too, even though one aspect of

the flesh may die, there's always another to take its place.

> **Genesis 36:40–43**
> **And these are the names of the dukes that came of Esau, according to their families, after their places, by their names; duke Timnah, duke Alvah, duke Jetheth, Duke Aholibamah, duke Elah, duke Pinon, Duke Kenaz, duke Teman, duke Mibzar, Duke Magdiel, duke Iram: these be the dukes of Edom, according to their habitations in the land of their possession: he is Esau the father of the Edomites.**

The flesh is pious, prolific, prosperous, persuasive, pernicious, powerful, and proud. But it's something else, as well: It's *pitiful*.

Go to Edom today, and you'll see there's absolutely nothing there. The once-impregnable city of Petra, of which the Edomites were so proud is nothing but a ghost town. Whatever is done through the flesh will ultimately be as empty as Edom. What, then, are we to do? If you don't want to end up a great big zero, turn to the Book of Romans.

> For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.
>
> Romans 8:6–11

The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you—not only to raise you up eternally, but to raise you up presently, away from the flesh which so easily ensnares and seduces and snags us. So what are we to do? We say, "No more flesh"—and the Spirit takes it from there, telling us moment by moment what to do. This doesn't mean there won't be obstacles,

but the Spirit of God is more powerful than any obstacle if we choose to obey, for to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. May God help us make the choice moment by moment to draw from *His* strength to see us through.



37 We come to the account of Joseph—one of the greatest men in the Bible, and along with Daniel, one of only two major characters in the Old Testament of whom there is no mention of sin.

A full one-quarter of the Book of Genesis is devoted to Joseph's story. In Genesis 1:16, God devotes a mere five words to His creation of the universe, while in Genesis 37—50, He spends twelve chapters on a single individual. I would have thought it would be the other way around because stars, space, that which is beyond our world, and how it came to be are what interest us. But those things are not God's priority. He spends His time talking about Joseph—for Joseph is a wonderful picture of Jesus. And Jesus is a subject that interests God greatly.

As we will see, in the story of Joseph, we find insights *about* Jesus, prophecies that point *to* Jesus, and understandings concerning the nature *of* Jesus. In fact, wherever you touch Joseph, you'll find Jesus . . .

Genesis 37:1, 2
And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.

Joseph was not being a tattletale. Rather, because he was in harmony with his father and cared about his father, he was accountable to his father. Jesus is in the same category. "I always do the things that please My Father," He said (John 8:29). "Don't you know I have to be about My Father's business?" He asked (Luke 2:49). "The Son does nothing of Himself, but

what He sees and hears of the Father, that will He do," He declared (John 5:19).

At any given moment, in any given situation, the Bible tells me I will either seek to please God or seek to please man (Galatians 1:10). I'm either going to be concerned about what the Father thinks of the way I'm talking, the things I'm doing, the plans I'm making—or I'll be concerned about the opinion of those around me regarding those things.

The Bible says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10), but the fear of man is a snare (Proverbs 29:25). There is no middle ground. We're either living in the fear of the Lord or in the fear of man.

Joseph realized his brothers wouldn't be happy when he told his father about them, but he cared more about his father than he did about his brothers. It's a beautiful illustration not of a tattletale, but of one living life in harmony with his father.

Genesis 37:3
Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours.

This is a coat of many pieces, actually a coat of big sleeves.

Genesis 37:4
And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

Who else was hated by His brothers because He was in harmony with the Father? Jesus. Of Jesus, John says, He came unto His own, but His own received Him not (John 1:11).

***For topical study of Genesis 37:3, 4 entitled "Big Sleeves . . . Big Problems," turn to page* 170.**

Genesis 37:5–7
And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf.

"I had a dream last night that all of your sheaves bowed down to mine" is a gutsy statement for seventeen-year-old Joseph to make to ten grown men.

Genesis 37:8 (a)
And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us?

Listen closely to Joseph's brothers, and you're sure to hear the nation of Israel say, "We will not have this man rule over us" (John 19:15).

Genesis 37:8 (b)–11
. . . And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words. And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.

The sheaves speak of the world's resources. The stars speak of the world's rulers. In other words, both the world's resources and rulers will bow down to the Greater than Joseph, Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:16–18).

Knowing that his first dream made his brothers hate him, why would Joseph share Dream number two with them? It would have been very easy for Joseph to say, "I already have the big sleeves. Why should I complicate

matters with these dreams about sheaves and stars?" But, like Jesus, Joseph knew that truth had to be shared, let the chips fall where they may.

Genesis 37:12
And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem.

The site their sister was raped, the place where Levi and Simeon had become mass murderers, Shechem was a worldly place.

Genesis 37:13
And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here am I.

"Your brothers are in Shechem—a place of wickedness and depravity," said Jacob to his son. "Will you go help them?"

And Joseph said, "Here am I."

This scene is an insight into the interaction between the Father and the Son. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). God the Father sent His Son to this Shechem. No wonder Jesus would hear the Father's voice thunder from heaven, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17)—signifying that He knew He was to die; that He was willing to go all the way not only to Shechem, but to Calvary.

Genesis 37:14
And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.

Jacob sent Joseph as a messenger. Jesus told the story of the vineyard owner who went on a journey and sent some messengers to pick up the rent from the vineyard—only to have the vineyard workers beat up messenger after messenger. Finally, the owner said, "They're not respecting my

servants. Therefore, I'll send my son. Him they will receive." But what did they do with the son? They killed him (Matthew 21).

Genesis 37:15, 16 (a)
And a certain man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou? And he said, I seek my brethren:

Jesus would then say, "The Son of man came to seek and save those who are lost" (Luke 19:10).

Genesis 37:16 (b)–18
. . . tell me, I pray thee, where they feed their flocks. And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan. And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan. And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him.

Even while he was afar off, Joseph's brothers plotted and planned to kill him. In the same way, before they even knew Him, the Jewish leaders had launched their damnable plot to destroy Jesus (John 5:18).

Genesis 37:19–21
And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams. And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him.

A man who wavers back and forth, oldest brother Reuben doesn't exactly know how to handle this situation. In this, he's a lot like Pontius Pilate (Matthew 27:24).

Genesis 37:22
And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he

might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again.

"Maybe putting Joseph in a pit will satisfy my brothers," Reuben hoped. So, too, hoping to satisfy the cry of the Jew, the brothers of Jesus, Pilate ordered Him scourged (John 19:1).

Genesis 37:23
And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him;

Who else had a coat—a seamless robe—stripped from Him?
Jesus.

Genesis 37:24 (a)
And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty . . .

The empty pit is a picture of the tomb in which Jesus would be buried, for the tomb had never held a body before (Luke 23:53).

Genesis 37:24 (b)–27
. . . there was no water in it. And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt. And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content.

"Let's sell Joseph to these Gentiles," said Judah. "Then we won't be responsible for his blood."

In the same way, the Jews handed Jesus over to a Gentile Pilate because they said it was against Roman law for them to execute Him themselves. Interestingly, however, they were more than ready to execute the woman

taken in adultery (John 8)—and even had been ready to push Jesus over a cliff (Luke 4:29). Why, then, did they bow to Roman law here? To unknowingly fulfill prophecy. You see, crucifixion was a Gentile form of execution, and prophecy was clear that the manner in which Messiah would die was definitely crucifixion.

Genesis 37:28 (a)
Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver . . .

Who else was sold for silver?
Jesus.

Genesis 37:28 (b), 29 (a)
. . . and they brought Joseph into Egypt. And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit . . .

Absent when the sale of Joseph had taken place, Reuben returns to find the empty pit which had previously held his brother—just as Pilate would receive word that the tomb which held Jesus was now empty.

Genesis 37:29 (b)
. . . and he rent his clothes.

There are two strong traditions about Pontius Pilate. The Coptic Church in Egypt holds that years after the Resurrection, Pilate became a born-again believer. Other historical traditions indicate he went insane. Either way, like Reuben, Pilate was deeply impacted.

Genesis 37:30, 31
And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go? And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood;

Here we see Jacob deceived by the blood of a kid, just as he had deceived his own father with the skin of a kid (Genesis 27:16). “Be not deceived,” Paul said, “whatever a man sows, that will he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

Genesis 37:32
And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son’s coat or no.

Joseph’s brothers lied about the disappearance of their brother whom they knew to be alive.

What did the religious leaders of Israel do when they heard the truth about the empty tomb? They paid the Roman soldiers to lie. Had not the religious leaders joined forces with Rome in an attempt to cover up the Resurrection, these Roman soldiers who claimed to have fallen asleep during their watch would have been executed, guarding, as they were, something with the seal of the Emperor upon it. Instead of being executed, however, they were rewarded—which should have been highly suspicious.

Genesis 37:33
And he knew it, and said, It is my son’s coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.

“An evil beast has devoured him,” cried Jacob. Jesus also was devoured by the evil beast of my own sin. But, like Joseph, Jesus would eventually emerge the victor.

Genesis 37:34, 35
And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him.

We're going to see how wrong Jacob was here. Later on, thinking he lost Benjamin, Jacob will cry out in despair, "Everything is against me." He lacked the faith to see that everything was, in fact, working out beautifully. That is why it is Jacob—not Israel—who rent his clothes.

Genesis 37:36
And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard.

Following a break in chapter 38, Joseph's story will continue as his life goes on to illustrate the life of Jesus.

The Father says to us, "You exist to cause people to appreciate My Son, to focus on My Son, to give pleasure to My Son. Therefore, I want you to know Him and to make Him known." As living epistles (2 Corinthians 3:2), may our lives be Joseph-like; may they be pictures of Christ.

BIG SLEEVES . . . BIG PROBLEMS

A Topical Study of GENESIS 37:3, 4

The legend is told of a godly man who lived in a cave in order to give himself to prayer, worship, and contemplation. Wanting to lure him away from his life of piety, Satan sent some demons to tempt him through lust, selfishness, and greed. But demon after demon reported back to Satan, saying, "The man doesn't budge. He doesn't waver. He doesn't give in."

Finally, Satan said, "Let me show you how it's done." He made his way to the hermit's cave, perched on his shoulder, and whispered, "Your brother has just been made Bishop."

And as the spiritual man's expression turned from serenity to a scowl, the demons could see that Satan had succeeded where they had failed, as the hermit's heart filled with envy.

Many times, we are not as vulnerable to the things of earthly materialism or fleshly temptation as we are to spiritual honor or recognition. Satan knows this. That is why envy is one of his favorite tools. In the Book of Acts, Stephen refers to the text before us, saying that Joseph's brothers were moved with envy against him (Acts 7:9). Of what were they envious? Joseph's coat. Although your King James Bible describes this coat as being "of many colors," a better rendering is that it was a coat of "many pieces" or, literally, a coat of "big sleeves."

You see, in Joseph's day, most coats were actually vests because most men were workingmen and sleeves would only hinder their movement. However, those who held the position of boss or foreman would be given garments with sleeves. A coat with sleeves was not only a symbol of authority—but it was also a matter of practicality, for—in those days before briefcases and hand-held computers—documents, writing instruments, and supplies would be kept in the sleeves secured by drawstrings at the wrists. Consequently, a man on the job site with sleeves was equivalent to a man carrying a briefcase, talking on a cell phone, wearing Oakley sunglasses. In other words, the man with sleeves was clearly the boss.

And that's the issue in the story before us. Joseph's ten older brothers said, "Hey, what's the big idea? Why did Dad give the coat with big sleeves to little Joey? Why should *he* be the boss, the big cheese, the big shot? It's not right. It's not fair. It's not acceptable!" And so envious were they that they threw Joseph in a pit and sold him as a slave.

The story continues. Joseph ended up down in Egypt, purchased by a man named Potiphar. Realizing Joseph had a lot on the ball, Potiphar made him his right-hand man. And, as number two man in the Egyptian conglomerate known as Potiphar Inc., Joseph was given another coat with big sleeves. Shortly thereafter, however, Joseph found himself the object of desire when his boss's wife looked at him lustfully. Being a man of integrity, and refusing to succumb to her ways, Joseph wiggled out of his coat and ran for his life. Using his coat as phony evidence of Joseph's advances toward her, however, Mrs. Potiphar managed to get Joseph thrown into prison.

In this, I see something most interesting . . .

"Why can't I be the manager at McDonald's?" we say. "Why do I have to work the drive-thru year after year?"

"Why can't I be the boss at the company? I've been there longer than he has."

"How come I didn't get the contract? My bid was lower; my work is better. I don't understand."

In other words, we are prone to say, "*I* should have the big sleeves."

Whether it's on the job, at school, or in church—there will always be opportunity for you and me to say, "How come I'm not noticed or acknowledged, elevated or rewarded?" Yet I believe the real question is: Are you sure you want to be?

The story is told of a tear traveling down a river, who, seeing another tear, called out, "Who are you?"

"I am the tear that rolled down the face of a fair young maiden whose man left her for another young maiden. And who are you?"

"I am the tear of the young maiden who ended up with the man."

We think we know what we want. But the fact is, the coat of big sleeves caused Joseph big headaches. Therefore, it is the wise person who says, "Lord, I think I want that. I think I deserve that. I think I should be that. But, Lord, I understand that inherent in that position there may be headaches, problems, and pressures of which I am completely unaware."

> There was a man who was known throughout the land—and now throughout history—as a man who was exceedingly godly. Although he worked faithfully in a monastery, he never climbed the ladder to a position of prominence, but remained a dishwasher. Day after day, month after month, Lawrence washed pots and pans in the kitchen of the monastery—and as he did, he talked to the Lord. So intense was his fellowship in that place of simple service that word got out into the community, "There's a revival going on at the monastery."
>
> "Where? In the chapel?"
>
> "No, in the kitchen."
>
> "Which abbot is leading it?"
>
> "There's no abbot—just a dishwasher."
>
> Brother Lawrence eventually wrote a little book about his experience called *Practicing The Presence of God,* which went on to become one of the best-sellers of all time. He was a lowly dishwasher, but while the other monks were busy with administration and sermon preparation, Brother Lawrence was able to simply enjoy God.

Sometimes we complain that we don't have this, lack that, are unacknowledged here, or aren't noticed there. But getting what we think we want, reaching the position we think we deserve, having the recognition we think we're worthy of often turns out to be a distraction and a burden. "The Lord will withhold no good thing from those who fear Him," declares the psalmist (Psalm 84).

Therefore, if I don't get the promotion, the notice, the relationship—I must remember it's because it wouldn't be good for me. "Oh, Lord," I may argue, "it would be great to have those big sleeves. I could use them for ministry."

But the Lord answers, "You would regret them. Otherwise, I wouldn't withhold them from you."

And if I question this, I have only to look at another robe—a robe without seams (John 19:23) . . .

It was the only possession of One who was born in a borrowed manger, preached from a borrowed boat, rode a borrowed donkey, ate in a borrowed room, and was buried in a borrowed grave.

There was something about this One who, while others were trying to climb the ladder materially or religiously, was so free that people flocked around Him, listened to Him, and hung on His every word—until He was stripped of His robe to hang on the Cross and die for their sin.

Because Jesus was disrobed for me, if the robe I have my eye on doesn't come my way, it's because He who loved me enough to give His very life for me knows it wouldn't be best for me.

Thus, it is the wise man or woman who says, "Lord, if You don't give me prestige or honor at work or in ministry, that's okay because You see what I can't. Therefore I will learn to be content because You proved Your love for me at Calvary."



38 Jewelers wisely display diamonds against black velvet, knowing the dark background highlights the beauty of the gems. Such is the case of the chapter before us, for sandwiched between chapter 37—which shows us Joseph's piety at home—and chapter 39—which shows us his position abroad—the sad, sordid story of Judah serves as the dark background which highlights the luster of Joseph's life . . .

Genesis 38:1
And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.

Judah began to associate with a man outside the family of faith—a man named Hirah.

Genesis 38:2, 3
And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shuah; and he took her, and went in unto her. And she conceived, and bare a son; and he called his name Er.

Continuing his linkage to those outside of the believing community, Judah married a Canaanite woman.

Genesis 38:4–6
And she conceived again, and bare a son; and she called his name Onan. And she yet again conceived, and bare a son; and called his name Shelah: and he was at Chezib, when she bare him. And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, whose name was Tamar.

Arranged marriages being the custom of the day, Judah chooses a wife for his oldest son.

Genesis 38:7
And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him.

"And the Lord slew him." Oftentimes, when people read a phrase like this, they say, "How brutal of God to slay a man for being wicked." But they fail to realize that a man can become so wicked it is actually an act of mercy for the Lord to put him out of his misery. When the Bible talks about the sin unto death (Romans 6:16), it is not referring to a single sin, but rather to a life of sin. There comes a time when the Lord will put such a person out of his or her misery, and in so doing, protect others. You see, the problem with wickedness is that it's contagious. Wicked people draw other people into their depravity. So, the Lord in His wisdom and mercy, deals with the problem decisively.

Genesis 38:8
And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother.

This practice of marrying a widow to her brother-in-law is one of thirty-four Old Testament laws which have their beginning in the Book of Genesis (Deuteronomy 25:5–10). Accordingly, if the older brother had not yet had children, it would be up to the next oldest brother to marry the woman and produce children—the first of whom would be considered his dead brother's son, in order to continue the family name.

Genesis 38:9, 10
And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also.

This verse is often misused as a statement against birth control. The issue here, however, isn't about family planning. It's about family plotting—for in his actions, Onan is saying, "I'm going to despise the directive of my father and trample on the casket of my brother." Thus, this scenario has nothing to do with God's opinion about family planning—and everything to do with a man determined to manipulate the situation.

Genesis 38:11 (a)
Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter in law, Remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown: for he said, Lest peradventure he die also, as his brethren did . . .

Fearing for his third son's life, Judah says, "Listen, Tamar, you married my first son. He's dead. You married my second son. He's dead. Why don't you go home to your parents, and I'll let you know when Shelah is ready to marry you." Judah is afraid. He's beginning to suspect that Tamar isn't good for the family.

Genesis 38:11 (b)
. . . And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house.

Tamar obediently did what Judah suggested.

Genesis 38:12 (a)
And in process of time the daughter of Shuah Judah's wife died; and Judah was comforted . . .

Literally, Judah was desiring to be comforted.

Genesis 38:12 (b)
. . . and went up unto his sheepshearers to Timnath . . .

Who else went to Timnath?
Samson.

Genesis 38:12 (c)
. . . he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite.

"I need to recover from my grief," Judah said, "so I'm going to go hang out at Timnath with my pagan pal, Hirah."

Genesis 38:13
And it was told Tamar, saying, Behold thy father in law goeth up to Timnath to shear his sheep.

At some point, it dawned on Tamar that Judah had no intention of giving her his third son in marriage. So she decided to take action herself . . .

Genesis 38:14, 15
And she put her widow's garments off from her, and covered her with a vail, and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place, which is by the way to Timnath; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given unto him to wife. When Judah saw her, he thought her to be an harlot; because she had covered her face.

The Hebrew word translated "harlot" implies Tamar was dressed up like a temple prostitute—a woman employed by the pagan temple system.

Genesis 38:16

And he turned unto her by the way, and said, Go to, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee; (for he knew not that she was his daughter in law.) And she said, What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me? And he said, I will send thee a kid from the flock.

"I don't have any money on me right now," said Judah. "I'll pay you later."

Genesis 38:17
And she said, Wilt thou give me a pledge, till thou send it?

"How will I know that you're going to come through?" asked Tamar.

Genesis 38:18
And he said, What pledge shall I give thee? And she said, Thy signet, and thy bracelets, and thy staff that is in thine hand. And he gave it her, and came in unto her, and she conceived by him.

Notice what Tamar asked for. Used as a seal on business transactions or correspondence, the signet spoke of the person, of identity. The bracelets spoke of possession of wealth. The staff spoke of position—even as it does to this day.

Thus, Tamar, playing the role of a prostitute, is saying, "I want your person, your possessions, your position." And that's exactly what happens to anyone who gives himself or herself to immorality. Person, possessions, position are all lost. "What do I want?" asked Tamar. "I want it all."

Genesis 38:19, 20
And she arose, and went away, and laid by her vail from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood. And Judah sent the kid by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive his pledge from the woman's hand: but he found her not.

So I messed up. So I cashed out. I can get it back. That's what Judah had initially thought.

Genesis 38:21–23
Then he asked the men of that place, saying, Where is the harlot, that was openly by the way side? And they said, There was no harlot in this place. And he returned to Judah, and said, I cannot find her; and also the men of the place said, that there was no harlot in this place. And Judah said, Let her take it to her, lest we be shamed: behold, I sent this kid, and thou hast not found her.

"We've got to get this payment to her," Judah fretted, "or else I'll be accused of not keeping my end of the bargain." Wasn't that what he was already guilty of concerning giving his son to Tamar?

Genesis 38:24 (a)
And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom . . .

"*My* daughter-in-law would be involved in immorality? I can't believe it!" thundered Judah. It's amazing how bad my sin looks on someone else. We are often most angry at, upset with, scandalized by the very sins in others we struggle with ourselves.

Genesis 38:24 (b)
. . . And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.

Leviticus 21:9 will later say that if a woman who is the daughter of a priest is a whore, she is to be burnt in the fire. Consequently, in ordering Tamar to be burned, Judah evidently saw himself as a priest. The priestly line, however, would not come through Judah, but through Levi. Such is often the case. When a person says, "Burn them!" it can be because he thinks of himself more highly than he ought to think.

If anyone is burnt in this story, it's Judah . . .

Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be

innocent. Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house. But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul.

Proverbs 6:27–32

The Father devoted an entire chapter in the middle of Joseph's story as if to say, "You can either be Joseph or Judah. You can be a person of purity—which leads to success, or you can be a person of immorality—which leads to burn-out."

Genesis 38:25
When she was brought forth, she sent to her father in law, saying, By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff.

"Dad," said Tamar to Judah, "do you know who this ring with the great big J on it belongs to?"

Genesis 38:26
And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.

"She is more righteous than I." What a grand statement. Too bad it had to be made in these circumstances, for even though Judah was forced to admit his sin, at this point he virtually disappears from the Scriptural account.

Genesis 38:27–30
And it came to pass in the time of her travail, that, behold, twins were in her womb. And it came to pass, when she travailed, that the one put out his hand: and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first. And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came

out: and she said, How hast thou broken forth? this breach be upon thee: therefore his name was called Pharez. And afterward came out his brother, that had the scarlet thread upon his hand: and his name was called Zarah.

Zarah provides a picture of the death and Resurrection of our Lord . . .

- The scarlet thread on the wrist of Zarah pictures the blood-stained wrist of Jesus Christ.
- Zarah appeared first, just as Jesus is the Firstfruit of the brethren (1 Corinthians 15:20–23).
- Zarah remained in the womb, just as Jesus would be placed in a tomb.
- At last Zarah was seen in totality, just as the resurrected Jesus was seen in His Deity.

Tamar and her two sons are seen again, in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. It's as if the Lord says, "This woman did things that were very questionable and deceptive, and yet she will be connected to My Son."

That's *grace!* We may blow it big-time, gang, but the Lord has a way of saying, "If you look to Me and live for Me, I'll turn even your mistakes around and link you to My Son."

And although the person of Judah is no longer important in Scripture, Jesus chooses to identify Himself as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Including Tamar in His genealogy is grace. But identifying with Judah is *amazing* grace!

39 Genesis 39:1 (a)

And Joseph was brought down to Egypt . . .

Joseph went to Egypt a seventeen-year-old in chains of iron. He'll return a one hundred and ten-year-old in chains of gold.

Genesis 39:1 (b)
. . . and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither.

A man of power and prestige in Pharaoh's court, Potiphar saw something useful in Joseph and purchased him.

Genesis 39:2
And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

Why is Joseph referred to as a "prosperous man" even though he is a slave? I suggest it is because, like Paul, he inherently understood that it is not great gain that brings contentment, but rather contentment that brings great gain (1 Timothy 6:6). Joseph was prosperous because he was *content*.

Genesis 39:3, 4
And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand.

Joseph became Potiphar's right-hand man.

Genesis 39:5 (a)
And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake . . .

"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all to the glory of God," said Paul (Colossians 3:17). If you, like Joseph, bring the Lord into the situation, your workplace will be blessed simply because you're there.

Genesis 39:5 (b), 6 (a)

. . . and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field. And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat . . .

Such trust did Potiphar have in Joseph that he didn't even know the state of his own finances.

Genesis 39:6 (b)
. . . And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured.

If I were in Joseph's sandals, would I give myself wholeheartedly, enthusiastically, energetically to serving an Egyptian taskmaster—or would I say, "Lord, You've given me dreams and talents and abilities. But they're all being wasted because I'm just a slave"? One of the many things that impress me about Joseph is that he didn't focus on what he lacked, but instead threw himself into the task at hand.

One Arizona dad, watching the tears on the faces of the boys who were too slow, too small, and too clumsy to make it on to the roster of one of the five North Phoenix Little League teams asked if he could form a sixth team from the kids who were cut.

"Sure," said the officials, "if you'll coach them and pay for their uniforms."

So the dad did, naming his team the Phoenix Diamondbacks.

Last Friday, the Phoenix Diamondbacks won their last game by a score of 19–0.

It was the League Championship game.

Some say, "I could have really been used if I had made the team," or, "I'll really be used as soon as my situation changes." Others, however, join Joseph in saying, "So what if I'm a slave? It's a great opportunity to work hard for the glory of God and see what He'll do."

Genesis 39:7

And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.

As a young man totally cut off from his family, how easy it would have been for Joseph to justify accepting Mrs. Potiphar's invitation.

Genesis 39:8, 9
But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

Notice Joseph doesn't say to Potiphar's wife, "In light of what he's given me, how can I sin against your husband?" Nor does he say, "How can I sin against you?" He says, "How can I sin against *God?*"

This is what is known throughout Scripture as "the fear of the Lord." Joseph was in constant awareness of the "there-ness" of God—an awareness equally convicting and comforting. Yes, he was severed from his family and his country, but Joseph knew he was never alone.

Genesis 39:10
And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.

Joseph didn't say to Potiphar's wife, "Let's share a cup of coffee and I'll show you why you shouldn't be so seductive," or, "I can see you have an unhappy marriage. Let's just talk things over." No, Joseph avoided her from that point on. Thus, he goes down as a huge hero for all eternity and his family will be blessed to a great degree because of his bedrock integrity.

Genesis 39:11, 12
And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within. And she caught him by his garment, saying,

Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.

"Flee youthful lusts," said a wise Paul to a young Timothy (2 Timothy 2:22)—and that's exactly what Joseph is doing. He doesn't minister to Mrs. Potiphar. He doesn't witness to her. He runs for his life.

Genesis 39:13–19
And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth, That she called unto the men of her house, and spake unto them, saying, See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice: And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled, and got him out. And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home. And she spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me: And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out. And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me; that his wrath was kindled.

Scripture says Potiphar's wrath was kindled, but it doesn't say against whom. In Egypt, attempted rape was a capital offense—so much the more if the crime was committed by a slave against the wife of a government official. So here's the question: If Potiphar's wrath was kindled against Joseph, why didn't he demand immediate execution? I suggest it's because, knowing his wife's history and personality, Potiphar's wrath was kindled not against Joseph but against his wife for concocting a story that forced his hand to send the man who had so blessed his house to prison.

Genesis 39:20
And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.

Just as Joseph went to prison, so, too, did Jesus. In Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 3, we read that before He ascended to heaven, Jesus first descended into the lower parts of the earth and led "captivity captive"—or set the captives free.

You see, according to Jude 6, the very worst of the demons—those who many commentators believe are the demons referred to in Genesis 6:2—are not free to roam about, but are chained. To these hellions, Jesus preached, letting them know that their darkest, most dastardly and demonic power over people had been broken because His blood was potent enough to cleanse even the most depraved sin of mankind.

Genesis 39:21
But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

Joseph will go from pit to Potiphar's house to prison to palace. But everywhere he goes, he knows the Lord is with him.

Genesis 39:22
And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it.

Because of his boundless industry and bedrock integrity, Joseph was blessed immeasurably—even in prison.

Genesis 39:23
The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper.

The keeper of the prison turned the whole operation over to Joseph. Why? Because it was obvious the Lord was with him.

40

Genesis 40:1 (a)
And it came to pass after these things . . .

"Lie with me," Potiphar's wife had repeatedly said to Joseph. Unjustly accused of succumbing to her demand, Joseph was thrown into prison. And we see how his story continues to depict Jesus, for even as Joseph faced this very real temptation, Jesus was driven into the wilderness and tested by Satan for forty days. Like Joseph, Jesus passed His test victoriously, beating back Satan decisively (Matthew 4).

Genesis 40:1 (b)–4
. . . that the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker had offended their lord the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was wroth against two of his officers, against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers. And he put them in ward in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound. And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them: and they continued a season in ward.

Of Jesus, Isaiah says, "And he was numbered with the transgressors and made intercession of them" (Isaiah 53:12)—which speaks ultimately of the two thieves between whom Jesus hung on the Cross.

Likewise, here, we see two criminals with Joseph—one who will hear words of salvation, the other, words of damnation . . .

Genesis 40:5–13
And they dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which were bound in the prison. And Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and looked upon them, and, behold, they were sad. And he asked Pharaoh's officers that were with him in the ward of his lord's house, saying, Wherefore look ye so sadly to day? And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter

of it. And Joseph said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you. And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, In my dream, behold, a vine was before me; And in the vine were three branches: and it was as though it budded, and her blossoms shot forth, and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes: And Pharaoh's cup was in my hand: and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand. And Joseph said unto him, This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days: Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and restore thee unto thy place: and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his butler.

The position of butler, or cupbearer, was a very important office in any administration in Pharaoh's day because, with constant access to the king, cupbearers were often a king's closest advisor.

"If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me," Jesus prayed. What cup? The cup of suffering. But because Jesus drank the cup of suffering, we can drink freely of the cup of salvation and thereby gain access to and fellowship with the King of kings.

Genesis 40:14
But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house:

"Think on me, make mention of me when it shall be well with thee," said Joseph.

"Remember me when You come into Your kingdom," said the thief on the cross (Luke 23:42).

"This do in remembrance of Me," said Jesus (Luke 22:19).

True fellowship is based on *remembrance.*

How do we remember Him?

Through Communion. Communion is the way we most clearly remember what Jesus did when He freed us from the prison of our sin.

Genesis 40:15
For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon.

"I have done nothing that they should put me in the dungeon," said Joseph. "I find no fault in this man," said Pilate of Jesus (Luke 23:4).

Genesis 40:16, 17 (a)
When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said unto Joseph, I also was in my dream, and, behold, I had three white baskets on my head: And in the uppermost basket there was of all manner of bakemeats [breads] . . .

The butler dreamed of a cup. The baker dreamed of bread. What are the two elements of Communion? Bread and wine.

Genesis 40:17 (b)–19
. . . for Pharaoh; and the birds did eat them out of the basket upon my head. And Joseph answered and said, This is the interpretation thereof: The three baskets are three days: Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree; and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee.

If the cup and the bread both speak of Communion, why does the butler's dream end in salvation, while the baker's end in damnation? Because he who understands and accepts what Christ did on the Cross, as signified by the bread and wine of Communion, will be set free. But he who goes to the Lord's Table haphazardly and doesn't embrace what Jesus did on his behalf will remain in the grip of sin.

Genesis 40:20
And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the

head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.

What does the third day speak of? The Resurrection. Those who believe and receive shall be lifted up, and those who don't will miss out.

Genesis 40:21
And he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand: But he hanged the chief baker: as Joseph had interpreted to them. Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgat him.

"Remember me," Joseph said. And the butler forgot him for approximately ten years.

"Remember Me," Jesus says. Yet there are people who haven't had Communion in ten years because they can't expend the energy, can't find the time to do the one thing the Lord asks them to do. It's amazing how we can become so callused, so unappreciative, so forgetful.



41 Genesis 41:1 (a)
And it came to pass . . .

Joseph has been in prison for ten years for a crime he didn't commit. You might be in a place where you feel completely forgotten and in the dark—but, as it will for Joseph—your situation could change radically even in the next hour. Be patient, fellow pilgrim. Look to the One who is the epitome of patience; look to the Greater than Joseph, who, although He could have risen immediately to power and prominence, said instead, "My hour is not yet come" (John 2:4).

Genesis 41:1 (b)–8
. . . at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river. And, behold, there came up out of

the river seven well favoured kine and fatfleshed; and they fed in a meadow. And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill favoured and leanfleshed; and stood by the other kine upon the brink of the river. And the ill favoured and leanfleshed kine did eat up the seven well favoured and fat kine. So Pharaoh awoke. And he slept and dreamed the second time: and, behold, seven ears of corn came up upon one stalk, rank and good. And, behold, seven thin ears and blasted with the east wind sprung up after them. And the seven thin ears devoured the seven rank and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and, behold, it was a dream. And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh.

In Pharaoh's day, Thot was the god called upon to give interpretation. But Thot had nothing to say.

Genesis 41:9–16
Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day: Pharaoh was wroth with his servants, and put me in ward in the captain of the guard's house, both me and the chief baker: And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; we dreamed each man according to the inter pretation of his dream. And there was there with us a young man, an Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret. And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged. Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it. And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.

"Only God can give you an interpretation for your situation," said Joseph.

Like Joseph, Jesus continually drew attention to His Father. "Let your light so shine before men that they will glorify your Father," He said (Matthew 5:16). That is why you'll never read about people glorifying Jesus. You see, Jesus was able to minister in such a way that people would see the light, but glorify the Father.

Those who are successfully used by the Lord are those who cause people to say, "God is good," without taking any credit themselves.

Genesis 41:17–25

And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, In my dream, behold, I stood upon the bank of the river: And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, fatfleshed and well favoured; and they fed in a meadow: And, behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor and very ill favoured and leanfleshed, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for badness: And the lean and the ill favoured kine did eat up the first seven fat kine: And when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that they had eaten them; but they were still ill favoured, as at the beginning. So I awoke. And I saw in my dream, and, behold, seven ears came up in one stalk, full and good: And, behold, seven ears, withered, thin, and blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them: And the thin ears devoured the seven good ears: and I told this unto the magicians; but there was none that could declare it to me. And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do.

The dreams of the cattle and corn contain a single message . . .

Genesis 41:26–31 (a)

The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one. And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine. This is the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh. Behold, there

come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt: And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land; And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following . . .

The plenty of the first seven years will be eaten up by the seven years of famine to follow.

Genesis 41:31 (b)
. . . for it shall be very grievous.

The Hebrew word translated "grievous" literally means "heavy." Seven years of unparalleled prosperity would be followed by seven years of unparalleled problems and heaviness—which speak of the Tribulation. Described in Revelation 6—19, the Tribulation is referred to as "Jacob's Trouble." Just as Jacob and his sons will be so troubled by famine that they will be forced to go to Joseph for grain, one of the purposes of the Tribulation is to force Israel to turn to Jesus.

Never in the history of humanity has the world been as prosperous as it is presently. Are these the years of prosperity preceding the Tribulation?

Perhaps.

Genesis 41:32
And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

In other words, "This is a done deal, and it is about to happen shortly."

Genesis 41:33–36
Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under

the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. And that food shall be for store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land perish not through the famine.

"You dreamed a dream," Joseph said to Pharaoh, "but a nightmare is about to unfold. Reserve twenty percent of the output in the upcoming seven prosperous years in order to be prepared for the upcoming years of difficulty."

Genesis 41:37, 38
And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?

"No one has the spirit of God like Joseph does," said Pharaoh. Oh, but One would come after Joseph in whom dwelled the Spirit fully, for Scripture records that Jesus was given the Spirit without limitation (John 3:34).

Genesis 41:39, 40
And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.

He who had been in the dungeon only an hour earlier is now elevated to the position of Prime Minister.

Genesis 41:41–43 (a)
And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee . . .

"Bow the knee." rang out the command concerning Joseph. In the same way, when Jesus comes, every knee shall bow (Philippians 2:10)—but a command won't be necessary.

Genesis 41:43 (b), 44
. . . and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.

No one could do anything without Joseph's permission.

"Without Me, ye can do nothing," said Jesus, the Greater than Joseph (John 15:5).

Genesis 41:45 (a)
And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-paaneah . . .

It has been suggested that *Zaphnath-paaneah* means "Revealer of Secrets." If so, it would be a fitting name for this one who is a picture, a preview of Jesus—for many mysteries are revealed in Him (Romans 11:25). But there is no consensus regarding the meaning of the name, which is also fitting—for Revelation 19 says that written on Jesus is a name no man knows. In other words, we'll never fully discover the richness of Christ Jesus. We'll be intrigued by Him, fascinated with Him, and explore His nature for eternity —yet never come to the point where we say, "I've got Him all figured out."

If you've been married for a long time, you probably know exactly what your wife will say or your husband will do at any given time. But you'll never be able to say that about Jesus, and you'll never become bored exploring His glory.

Genesis 41:45 (b)
. . . and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Poti-pherah priest of On . . .

Joseph, a picture of Jesus, is given a Gentile bride whose name means "She who is of Nath." Who was Nath? The Egyptian goddess of provision and protection, known in the Greek culture as Helena, and in the Roman

culture as Minerva. Interestingly, this goddess finds her way into our country, for it is her likeness that sits atop the United States Capitol Building.

Not only does Joseph make this Gentile woman his bride, but she also becomes spiritual Israel in a very real way, for she will give birth to Manasseh and Ephraim, two of the tribes of Israel.

The Gentile Bride—the church—has been swept up into the Greater than Joseph's embrace and has been made spiritual Israel. While there is a physical, literal Israel that plays very definitely into God's economy, we, the church, are spiritual Israel.

Genesis 41:45 (c), 46 (a)
. . . And Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt. And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt . . .

How old was Jesus when He began His public ministry?
Thirty.

Genesis 41:46 (b)–49
. . . And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. And in the seven plenteous years the earth brought forth by handfuls. And he gathered up all the food of the seven years, which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the field, which was round about every city, laid he up in the same. And Joseph gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left numbering; for it was without number.

So prosperous was the land that the provision was too great to number.

Genesis 41:50, 51
And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenath the daughter of Poti-pherah priest of On bare unto him. And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house.

Sold into slavery by his own brothers, lied about by his boss's wife, thrown into prison and forgotten—if anyone had a reason to be dysfunctional, it was Joseph. Yet *Manasseh* meaning "Forget," Joseph is saying, "God made me forget the brothers who picked on me unfairly, the pit I was thrown into cruelly, the dungeon I suffered in unjustly."

"This one thing I do," Paul said, "forgetting that which lies behind, I press on toward the high calling" (Philippians 3:13, 14). Those who can't forget about their past walk through life crippled. On the other hand, there is no stopping those who, like Joseph and Paul, forget about that which they can't do anything about.

Genesis 41:52
And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.

Ephraim means "Fruitful." I find the order of Joseph's sons intriguing, for we'll never be fruitful until we quit living in the past.

Genesis 41:53, 54 (a)
And the seven years of plenteousness, that was in the land of Egypt, were ended. And the seven years of dearth began to come, according as Joseph had said: and the dearth was in all lands . . .

Just as the dearth was in all lands, so the seven-year Tribulation will affect the entire planet.

Genesis 41:54 (b)
. . . but in all the land of Egypt there was bread.

Egypt weathered the difficult days because, under Joseph's direction, she had brought grain to the storehouse. In this, I am reminded of another storehouse . . .

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I

will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

Malachi 3:10

Just as the Egyptians were to bring of their plenty to the granary in order that they would later be fed physically, we are to bring our tithe to the place wherein we are fed spiritually.

"Wait a minute," some protest. "We're no longer under the Law. And tithing is the Law."

Not true. Tithing precedes the Law, for we see Abraham give tithes to Melchizedek—or Christ—before the Law was even given (Genesis 14). Not only does tithing precede the Law, but it postdates the Law as well, for Jesus said the tithe was not to be left undone (Luke 11:42). Later, Paul goes on to tell the Church at Corinth to bring to the storehouse of that which the Lord had blessed them (1 Corinthians 16).

It is because the tithe is God's, that he who doesn't give the first ten percent of whatever he makes robs God (Malachi 3:9). But he who tithes will be rewarded to such a degree that there won't be room to contain it. According to a recent study, not only would every church, ministry, and charitable work be free of debt, but every hungry person in the world would be fed—if for two years, Christians would simply not rob God of the tithe.

And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes . . .

Malachi 3:11 (a)

Not only does God reward the one who brings Him the tithe, but He rebukes the forces which seek to devour him. When I have ignored this principle and disobeyed the command to tithe, I have experienced exactly what Haggai said would happen when he wrote, "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes" (Haggai 1:6). Finances get devoured—eaten up needlessly when I fail to tithe.

> And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.
>
> Malachi 3:12

Not only does tithing bring *reward* to us and a *rebuke* to the devourer—it also ushers in *revival* to those around us as they see firsthand the blessings and goodness of God in our lives.

Tithing is not God's way to raise money, gang. It's His way to raise kids. You see, every time the offering basket passes by, it is an opportunity for me to let go of a portion of my earthiness, of my greediness, of my selfishness. Jesus said wherever our treasure is, there will our heart be (Matthew 6:21). God doesn't need our money, but He desires our heart. Therefore, when we seek first the kingdom, and invest our treasure therein, our heart follows.

Genesis 41:55 (a)
And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread . . .

To whom will people cry during the Tribulation? Initially they'll cry to antichrist.

Genesis 41:55 (b)
. . . and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph . . .

Unlike Pharaoh, antichrist will not direct people to the Greater than Joseph. Nonetheless, he will know in his soul that Jesus is their only hope.

Genesis 41:55 (c)
. . . what he saith to you, do.

Concerning a lack of bread, Pharaoh said of Joseph, "What he saith to you, do."

Concerning a lack of wine, Mary said of her Son, "Whatsoever He saith unto thee, do" (John 2:5).

Genesis 41:56, 57

And the famine was over all the face of the earth: and Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold unto the Egyptians; and the famine waxed sore in the land of Egypt. And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands.

"And all countries came . . . to Joseph." This is a key component in understanding what the Tribulation is all about. Without question, the greatest revival in history will take place in the seven-year Tribulation period. And even though you won't be here at that time, your witness to those around you—the books you gave them, the tapes you left them, the words you shared with them—will flood their hearts and minds. And in the famished condition of their soul, they'll begin to realize that the key is not to cry to Pharaoh, but to run to Jesus.



42 Genesis 42:1

Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another?

As the famine continued, word reached Jacob that there was grain in Egypt.

Genesis 42:2
And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die.

Although Jacob's sons will try to buy bread from Joseph, they will be unable to because Joseph is a type of Christ—whose provision of salvation cannot be bought (Isaiah 55:1).

Genesis 42:3
And Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt.

The ten brothers speak of the law. The law always wants to purchase salvation through the expenditure of its own energy. That is why people have a propensity to think they can earn God's favor, to want to work for God's blessing, to try to purchase salvation.

Genesis 42:4
But Benjamin, Joseph's brother, Jacob sent not with his brethren; for he said, Lest peradventure mischief befall him.

Benjamin was the full brother of Joseph. Jacob's refusal to send him with his ten half-brothers indicates that perhaps Jacob had strong suspicions concerning what had happened to Joseph years earlier.

Genesis 42:5, 6 (a)
And the sons of Israel came to buy corn among those that came: for the famine was in the land of Canaan. And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land . . .

Because Joseph had unlimited resources, there was food available for all who came to him. Because His mercy and grace are inexhaustible, Jesus is unlimited in His resources to bless you and me. He will supply all our needs according to His riches (Philippians 4:19)—and His riches are without limitation.

Genesis 42:6 (b)
. . . and Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth.

At the end of the Tribulation period, when the nation of Israel realizes that Jesus is Messiah, she will bow to Him—even as Joseph's brothers are bowing down before him.

Genesis 42:7 (a)
And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them . . .

Joseph knew and felt great love for his brothers, but he didn't make himself known to them. For 2,000 years, Jesus has looked on the nation of Israel with compassion. Yet because blindness has come upon Israel (Romans 11:25), she does not see Jesus. That is why you can open up the Scriptures to the Jews and show them how the prophecies have all been fulfilled in Him, yet, for the most part, a veil will remain over their eyes.

"We don't want You to rule over us, to have any part of us," the Jews said concerning Jesus. And so Jesus has withdrawn from them—just as He withdraws from anyone who says, "I don't want You in my life; I don't want You as my Lord."

Does God still love Israel? Of course. Does He have a plan for Israel? Absolutely. For when her eyes are finally opened, and she asks Him, "Where did You get these wounds?" He won't say, "I got them from a bunch of strangers." He'll say, "I got them in the house of My *friends*" (Zechariah 13:6).

Genesis 42:7 (b)
. . . and spake roughly unto them . . .

In other words, Joseph spoke a different language to them. He spoke the language of the Egyptians. The Jewish people say the New Testament was written in a language they don't understand. Oh, they understand Greek intellectually—but they don't accept it theologically.

Why would Joseph speak a language his brothers didn't understand? For the same reason the Lord does. It's called conviction. You see, a person needs to realize he's a sinner because no one is saved *by* the Lord until he realizes his need *for* the Lord. To that end, the law was given as a "rough" schoolmaster—rapping people on the knuckles, showing them they're sinners, making it clear to them that they don't measure up (Galatians 3:24). "I read the Bible," people say, "and I don't like it because it makes me feel bad." Good! That's the whole point, for in seeing your sin, you will see your need for a Savior.

"The one who is forgiven much loves much" (Luke 7:47). Therefore, I will not love the Lord much until I realize how badly I've blown it and how much I've been forgiven. Those who don't have a passion for the Lord are

those who don't realize what sinners they are. But when they understand the price paid for them on the Cross, the work Jesus did on their behalf, the mercy and grace lavished upon them—their love for Him grows.

Genesis 42:7 (c)–9
. . . and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food. And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him. And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

"You're spies come to check out how weakened we may be in order to plan your military strategy," said Joseph to his brothers.

Genesis 42:10, 11 (a)
And they said unto him, Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come. We are all one man's sons; we are true men . . .

"We are true men," said the brothers. Tilt. What had they done to Joseph? Are they honest? Are they righteous? Are they true men?

In our fleshly condition, in our fallen state, we say, "We're pretty good, we're true." And that is the reason for the ordeal that follows. Joseph must show his brothers that they're *not* true men.

Genesis 42:11 (b)–13
. . . thy servants are no spies. And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come. And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.

"We're not spies," say the brothers to Joseph. "We simply came for food."

Genesis 42:14, 15

And Joseph said unto them, That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies: Hereby ye shall be proved: By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither.

"If you're really telling the truth, have your youngest brother come here," answered Joseph.

Genesis 42:16
Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies.

Why does Joseph want to see Benjamin? I suggest it's because he wants to know if his brothers had done to Benjamin what they had done to him.

I find it interesting that Benjamin was the only one of Joseph's brothers who had no part in selling him into slavery, for from what tribe was the apostle Paul? From the tribe of Benjamin. You see, even though the nation of Israel has, by and large, rejected Him, there is always a remnant, always a Benjamin, always those who do understand and embrace Jesus.

Genesis 42:17
And he put them all together into ward three days.

For three days, Joseph's brothers were held in captivity. So, too, because in God's economy one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Peter 3:8), the Jewish people are entering their "third day" in "captivity," beginning with the time they were driven from their homeland in 1026 B.C.

Genesis 42:18 (a)
And Joseph said unto them the third day . . .

Jesus died 2,000 years—"two days"—ago. And I believe at the breaking of the "third day"—the third Millennium, He will come again and establish

His kingdom on earth.

Genesis 42:18 (b)
. . . This do, and live; for I fear God:

"I fear Elohim," said Joseph—which should have startled his brothers, *Elohim* being a Hebrew rather than an Egyptian God. They should have thought, *There's something about the man standing before us we don't understand.* But they couldn't get past the fact that he was a Gentile.

The same way the Jewish people can't figure us out. "You claim to know our God," they say, "but where are your kosher foods and prayer shawls?"

Genesis 42:19–21
If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison: go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses: But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die. And they did so. And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.

"We're guilty," Joseph's brothers said amongst themselves, not realizing Joseph could understand what they said. "Our brother cried out and we didn't respond. Our brother was in anguish and we didn't care. We are not true men, and now we're paying the price."

Genesis 42:22
And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required.

"His blood is now upon us," said Reuben of Joseph.
"Let His blood be upon us," said Israel of Jesus (Matthew 27).

Genesis 42:23

And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spake unto them by an interpreter.

They didn't know Joseph was taking in this whole conversation—just as Jewish people today don't realize Jesus is listening to their conversation.

Genesis 42:24 (a)
And he turned himself about from them, and wept . . .

Following their final rejection of Him, Jesus looked over the city of Jerusalem and wept (Luke 19:41). Here, Joseph does the same thing.

Genesis 42:24 (b)
. . . and returned to them again, and communed with them, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes.

Simeon means "Hearing." Nine brothers will return to the Promised Land —but they'll go without hearing. Concerning Jesus, Isaiah said of the Jews, "In hearing you shall hear, but not understand; in seeing you shall not perceive," (Isaiah 6:9, 10).

The same remains true today, for, in May, 1948, the Jews returned to Israel—but they returned without Simeon because they still can't hear Jesus.

Genesis 42:25
Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way: and thus did he unto them.

Joseph didn't accept his brother's money. Neither will Jesus accept our efforts to purchase either our own salvation or His continued favor. Grace isn't the starting point of our salvation, gang. It's the *only* point.

Genesis 42:26–28
And they laded their asses with the corn, and departed thence. And as one of them opened his sack to give his ass provender in the inn, he espied his money; for, behold, it was in his sack's

mouth. And he said unto his brethren, My money is restored; and, lo, it is even in my sack: and their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us?

As did Joseph to his brothers, even though they have been scattered, God has faithfully provided silver for His people—to such a degree that one of the reasons the Third Reich rose to power was in reaction to the prosperity of the Jews in Europe.

Genesis 42:29–35
And they came unto Jacob their father unto the land of Canaan, and told him all that befell unto them; saying, The man, who is the lord of the land, spake roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country. And we said unto him, We are true men; we are no spies: We be twelve brethren, sons of our father; one is not, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan. And the man, the lord of the country, said unto us, Hereby shall I know that ye are true men; leave one of your brethren here with me, and take food for the famine of your households, and be gone: And bring your youngest brother unto me: then shall I know that ye are no spies, but that ye are true men: so will I deliver you your brother, and ye shall traffick in the land. And it came to pass as they emptied their sacks, that, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack: and when both they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid.

The hearts of Jacob and his sons must have stopped when they discovered not one piece of incriminating evidence—but *ten.*

Genesis 42:36
And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.

Notice it's not *Israel*—"Governed By God"—who declares, "All these things are against me." It's Jacob. "Everything is against me," he cries. Not true, Jacob. Hang in there for another chapter, and you'll see that all these things are working out gloriously.



For topical study of Genesis 42:36, see "It's All for Good" below.

Genesis 42:37, 38
And Reuben spake unto his father, saying, Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again. And he said, My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

The plot thickens, and the picture becomes more vivid in color and texture in chapter 43 . . .

IT'S ALL FOR GOOD

A Topical Study of GENESIS 42:36

Certain things we *don't* know—like how honeybees fly when, theoretically, their wings are too short and too light to support them when carrying pollen.

Some things we *can't* know—like the day or hour of the Rapture (Matthew 25:13), or who will be in heaven (Matthew 13:24–30).

Several things we *should* know—like the fact that Jesus is coming again (1 Thessalonians 4:13), and the manifestation of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12).

But there is one thing we *do* know . . .

The Promise Given *to* Us

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose," wrote Paul (Romans 8:28).

How do we know this?

Because it's in the Bible.

Alright. But what about the guys in Rome to whom Paul was writing? They had never heard of Romans 8:28. How, then, could Paul assume they knew its truth?

The Price Paid *for* Us

A few verses down, in Romans 8:32, Paul writes, “God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for you and me.” If He loved you enough to send His Son to be slaughtered in your stead, don’t you know God will do what’s good for you continually? When I begin to doubt the love of God, or wonder if things are really working out for good, all I need to do is look to Calvary and see Jesus dying for me.

The Peace *within* Us

God's goodness was known and understood by Old Testament saints long before the Cross of Calvary because deep within their hearts, in the midst of tragedy, in the face of difficulty, all those who love God know that all things are truly working together for good—even though at first they question God's goodness.

Jacob was such a man. In the passage before us, we see how he initially deceived himself by thinking God was not working everything together for good in his own life.

Here's the situation; Jacob had twelve sons. Although he loved them all, Joseph was his favorite. Jealous of his standing with his father, Joseph's brothers threw him into a pit, where they were going to leave him to die until one of them suggested they could make some money if they sold him as a slave. So sell him they did, after which they smeared blood all over his coat, and took it to Jacob, saying, "Bad news, Dad. Joseph was eaten by wild animals."

Meanwhile, through an incredible series of events, Joseph became Prime Minister of Egypt—Number Two to Pharaoh himself. When famine hit Israel, Jacob called his sons together, and said, "I've heard there's a man in Egypt who has food. Go ask him if we can buy some grain."

So his sons, ten in number, appeared before the Prime Minister, whom they didn't recognize as their brother.

"Why are you here?" asked Joseph.

"We're here to buy grain, your Highness," they answered.

"I think you're lying," said Joseph. "I think you've come to spy out the land."

"No," insisted his brothers. "We're brothers. In fact, there were twelve of us originally, but one is dead, and the youngest is at home."

"If that's true," countered Joseph, "go bring your youngest brother to me. That will validate your story. Meanwhile, the oldest of you will stay in prison as security until the youngest one is brought back."

Upon his sons' return, what was Jacob's answer to this demand? "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things

are against me" (Genesis 42:36).

What does Romans 8 say? "All things work for good."

But what does Jacob declare? "Everything is working against me. Simeon is a hostage. Joseph is dead. And my son Benjamin is soon to disappear." Jacob was completely wrong: Simeon would be released; Joseph was in perfect health; Benjamin would return.

Yet even though Jacob said, "Everything is against me," I suggest that deep down inside, he didn't believe it. Why? Because in the next chapter we read that the brothers did indeed return to Egypt—with Benjamin in tow. Knowing Jacob, if he *really* believed Benjamin would die in Egypt, he would not have allowed Benjamin to go. Clever, cunning Jacob would have figured out another way. But his sending Benjamin proves he didn't *truly* believe everything was working against him.

Joseph identified himself to his brothers, and as they fell at his feet, he said, "Don't fear. Although you meant evil against me, God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

Here's the question: How will I react to difficulty? Will I be like Jacob and say, "All things are working against me"—even though I know in my heart such is not the case? Or will I be like Joseph and say, "Man may have meant this for evil, but God meant it for good"?

Unfortunately, all too often, I choose the sniveling of Jacob over the security of Joseph. Why? To elicit sympathy. What is it about our flesh that wants people to think we have it tough? What is in us that wants people to think we have it hard? While this may seem an insignificant quirk, in reality, it borders on blasphemy because, in getting you to feel sorry for me, I get you to question God's goodness, provision, and protection in my life. Thus, your pity for me is at God's expense.

Who will I be? I can be self-indulgent and allow God to be cast in a bad light even though I know in my heart the promise given to me, the price paid for me, the peace available within me. I can deny all of this and say, "I want you to feel sorry for me. Listen to my tragedy."

Or, I can say, "I will not dishonor this good, gracious, loving God, who has been so kind to me, so good for me. He's my Creator and my Father. Therefore, I will not bring shame to His name in seeking sympathy from anyone." That is called the fear of the Lord. It's saying, "Father, I care more

about Your reputation than I do about getting sympathy from the congregation. I don't want them to think questioningly, negatively, or blasphemously of You."

Where are the men and women who say, "We fear God. We will not snivel. God is good and we know deep within our hearts that He is working all things together for good"?

Here's the question: In the name of compassion, are you one who constantly weeps with others? Perhaps what we need in the Christian community during this time of self-centered Christianity are men and women who say, "I fear God. So, dear brother, precious sister, even if you don't understand—even if you think this is cold-hearted or lacking compassion—you *know* that this difficulty or tragedy will work for good. Stand on that knowledge. Cling to it. I will weep for you if you don't get it. But I'm not going to weep with you as you question God. He's too good for that."

May God give us wisdom.
May God give us peace.
May God give us understanding.

All things work together for good to them that love God, to them called according to His purpose. I *know* it.

And so do you.

43 Genesis 43:1–6

And the famine was sore in the land. And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the corn which they had brought out of Egypt, their father said unto them, Go again, buy us a little food. And Judah spake unto him, saying, The man did solemnly protest unto us, saying, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you. If thou wilt send our brother with us, we will go down and buy thee food: But if thou wilt not send him, we will not go down: for the man said unto us, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you. And Israel said, Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?

Out of food again—yet realizing his sons couldn't return to Egypt for replenishment without taking Benjamin with them, Jacob said, "Why did you open your big mouths, boys? Why did you even bring up the fact that you had another brother?"

Genesis 43:7–9
And they said, The man asked us straitly of our state, and of our kindred, saying, Is your father yet alive? have ye another brother? and we told him according to the tenor of these words: could we certainly know that he would say, Bring your brother down? And Judah said unto Israel his father, Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones. I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever:

"I will guarantee with my own life that Benjamin will be brought back safely," Judah promised his father.

Genesis 43:10
For except we had lingered, surely now we had returned this second time.

"We can't delay any longer; we're wasting time; the life of our whole family is in jeopardy," Judah continued.

Genesis 43:11–14
And their father Israel said unto them, If it must be so now, do this; take of the best fruits in the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds: And take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight: Take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man: And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he

may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.

Finally, Jacob gave permission for Benjamin to accompany his brothers to Egypt, nonetheless insisting that if he lost Benjamin, he would live out his life in continual grief.

Genesis 43:15, 16
And the men took that present, and they took double money in their hand, and Benjamin; and rose up, and went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph. And when Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the ruler of his house, Bring these men home, and slay, and make ready; for these men shall dine with me at noon.

In the midst of famine and tribulation, Joseph—a picture of Jesus—made provision for his brothers even though they didn't know who he was. So, too, when Israel as a nation goes through the Tribulation of Revelation 6—19, God will protect them, provide for them, work through them, and work on them, even before they recognize Him.

Genesis 43:17, 18
And the man did as Joseph bade; and the man brought the men into Joseph's house. And the men were afraid, because they were brought into Joseph's house; and they said, Because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time are we brought in; that he may seek occasion against us, and fall upon us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses.

"Oh, no!" said Joseph's brothers. "He's calling us to his table because he wants to send us away as prisoners—and take our donkeys, too."

People still have this view of the Greater than Joseph, Jesus Christ. People still say, "I've blown it so badly; I've erred so greatly; I know the Lord will yell at me, put chains around me, and take my donkey from me if I come to His house."

Not true! Even though these guys had sinned greatly, they will discover incredible grace and unbelievable mercy because Joseph is a picture of

Jesus, and where sin abounds His grace abounds more (Romans 5:20). When you are aware of your failings, your weakness, your inconsistencies, your stubbornness, rebellion, and sin, there's a tendency to say, "I can't go to church because I know Jesus is mad at me. If I go, I'll be bound with rules and regulations; I'll be sent away to the prison of condemnation; and on top of all that, I'll lose my donkey."

> For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.
>
> Isaiah 55:8, 9

Through Isaiah, God says, "When someone offends you, is mean or nasty to you, I know that your ways and your thoughts center on one thing: Revenge. But I don't think like you do. Therefore, I don't work like you do," declares God.

We need to realize how much different the Lord is than we are in our fallen condition, in our depraved nature. God is good, declares the psalmist (Psalm 73:1). He's just flat out, plain old *good*—looking for ways not to blast, but to bless.

Some people are afraid to go to the Lord's Table. On the basis of 1 Corinthians 11:29, they've been wrongly taught that if there's sin in their life and they partake of the elements of Communion, they will do so to their own damnation. But that's like saying to someone who's sick, "Before you go to the doctor, get well. Before you go into the hospital, make sure there are no germs within you." No, we go to the doctor *because* we're sick. We go to the hospital *because* we have a problem. So, too, we go to the Lord's Table *because* we realize we're sinners—for it is at the Lord's Table that we are reminded of the work Jesus did on our behalf when He shed His blood to cleanse us from our sin.

Paul's admonition to the Corinthians regarding Communion speaks volumes about how the early church viewed the Lord's Table. They didn't view it with the somber, heavy, fearful, introspective mentality that has crept

into Protestant theology. They viewed it as a celebration to such a degree that Paul had to caution against drunkenness (1 Corinthians 11:21).

Even though his brothers had blown it incredibly, Joseph says, "Get the meat ready! It's time to feast with my family!"

Genesis 43:19–23
And they came near to the steward of Joseph's house, and they communed with him at the door of the house, And said, O sir, we came indeed down at the first time to buy food: And it came to pass, when we came to the inn, that we opened our sacks, and, behold, every man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight: and we have brought it again in our hand. And other money have we brought down in our hands to buy food: we cannot tell who put our money in our sacks. And he said, Peace be to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: I had your money. And he brought Simeon out unto them.

"I had your money." This is a great picture of the way of our Lord as it relates to money. You see, we give the Lord our tithe—which is already His. And what does He do? He puts it back into our sack. Whatever you give to the Lord will come back in a way that will blow your mind—mysteriously, timely, wonderfully; spiritually, financially, relationally. Whatever the combination, the fact remains: You cannot out give God. Never forget that.

Genesis 43:24, 25
And the man brought the men into Joseph's house, and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their asses provender. And they made ready the present against Joseph came at noon: for they heard that they should eat bread there.

Rather than finding rebuke in Joseph's house as they had feared, the brothers found refreshment. And rather than losing their donkeys, their donkeys were fed.

Genesis 43:26

And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house, and bowed themselves to him to the earth.

In all, we will see Joseph's brothers bow to him on five separate occasions in fulfillment of the dreams which they had so vehemently denied.

Genesis 43:27–30 (a)
And he asked them of their welfare, and said, Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive? And they answered, Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive. And they bowed down their heads, and made obeisance. And he lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me? And he said, God be gracious unto thee, my son. And Joseph made haste; for his bowels did yearn upon his brother . . .

In other words, there were butterflies in Joseph's stomach upon at last seeing his full brother, Benjamin.

Genesis 43:30 (b)
. . . and he sought where to weep . . .

This is the first of two times Joseph will weep concerning his brothers.

Jesus also wept on two occasions: once in a cemetery at the tomb of His friend Lazarus (John 11:35), and the other over His people in the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41).

Genesis 43:30 (c)
. . . and he entered into his chamber, and wept there.

Joseph's heart was pounding, his stomach churning, his eyes were weeping, yet he didn't reveal himself to his brothers. Why? Because there was still work to do. There was still testing to take place.

Just the same way Jesus passionately wants to be with you and me, His Bride. But He hasn't yet come for us because there's still work to do in us. It is true that Jesus is in heaven preparing a place for us (John 14:2). But He's also preparing us for the place. And when we're ready, He'll take us home—either through the Rapture or through death. When the time is right, when the work He wants to do has come to completion, He'll take us home one way or the other. Therefore, if we're still here, it means there's still work to do—not just *through* us, but *in* us.

Genesis 43:31, 32
And he washed his face, and went out, and refrained himself, and said, Set on bread. And they set on for him by himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians, which did eat with him, by themselves: because the Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews; for that is an abomination unto the Egyptians.

In order to maintain his disguise, Joseph would have to sit with the Egyptians rather than with his brothers.

Genesis 43:33
And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth: and the men marvelled one at another.

Beginning with Reuben, Joseph seated his brothers in their birth order.

Genesis 43:34 (a)
And he took and sent messes unto them from before him: but Benjamin's mess was five times so much as any of theirs . . .

Benjamin was given five times as much food as the others. Why did Joseph do this? I suggest it was in order to observe the reaction of his brothers. When Joseph was given the coat with the big sleeves, what was their response? Envy, jealousy, hostility, anger. Therefore, Joseph wanted to see if his brothers would deal with Benjamin the same way they had dealt with him years earlier.

The Lord also measures the changes that have taken place in my life by how I react to my brothers not just when they're hurting, but when they, like Benjamin, succeed. It's easy to weep with those who weep. It's harder to rejoice with those who rejoice. If someone undergoes a tragedy, a catastrophe, a problem, most of us feel a certain amount of sympathy rather easily. But it's a little tougher for us to rejoice with the one who has everything go his way.

You'll know a deep work has taken place in your life when you not only weep with those who weep, but rejoice with those who rejoice, without being jealous or envious, hostile or cynical.

"All men will know you are My disciples," said Jesus, "by your love one for another" (John 13:35). And "one another" includes the happy as well as the hurting.

Genesis 43:34 (b)
. . . And they drank, and were merry with him.

Prior to the time Joseph will reveal himself to his brothers, he communes with them. Prior to the time when the Jews at last recognize Jesus as Messiah, He will commune with them from afar as He walks them through the Tribulation.

People tend to think that until the Jewish people understand who He is, the Lord will have nothing to do with them. But this story proves otherwise. Because Jesus cares passionately about His people, He is blessing and enjoying them even before they know exactly who He is. Even though they don't yet sit at the same table, there is interaction nonetheless.

That is why in talking to the Jewish people, you can't help but sense a real interaction with God even though they do not yet know what they will know in the time of the Tribulation—that Jesus is their Redeemer, their Savior, their Messiah.

44

Genesis 44:1, 2 (a)
And he commanded the steward of his house, saying, Fill the men's

sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put every man's money in his sack's mouth. And put my cup, the silver cup . . .

Egyptian rulers had silver divining cups which spoke not only of their authority, but were used to determine the will of their gods.

Jesus also had a "divining cup" through which he determined God's will —the cup of suffering of which He prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless not My will but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42).

Genesis 44:2 (b)–5
. . . in the sack's mouth of the youngest, and his corn money. And he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken. As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away, they and their asses. And when they were gone out of the city, and not yet far off, Joseph said unto his steward, Up, follow after the men; and when thou dost overtake them, say unto them, Wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good? Is not this it in which my lord drinketh, and whereby indeed he divineth? ye have done evil in so doing.

Putting the cup in Benjamin's sack and then asking why he had taken it was all part of Joseph's plan.

Genesis 44:6–8
And he overtook them, and he spake unto them these same words. And they said unto him, Wherefore saith my lord these words? God forbid that thy servants should do according to this thing: Behold, the money, which we found in our sacks' mouths, we brought again unto thee out of the land of Canaan: how then should we steal out of thy lord's house silver or gold?

"Why would we take your master's cup?" the brothers asked Joseph's steward. "We're not thieves."

Genesis 44:9, 10

With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my lord's bondmen. And he said, Now also let it be according unto your words: he with whom it is found shall be my servant; and ye shall be blameless.

"So sure are we of our innocence that you can kill whoever of us has the cup, and the rest of us will be your slaves," insisted the brothers.

"No," said Joseph's steward, "whoever has the cup will be a slave. The rest of you can go free."

Genesis 44:11, 12
Then they speedily took down every man his sack to the ground, and opened every man his sack. And he searched, and began at the eldest, and left at the youngest: and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.

Like his older brother, Benjamin is also a picture of Jesus. The silver cup was in his sack because it would be Jesus who would hold the cup of redemption, of which silver is a picture.

Genesis 44:13
Then they rent their clothes, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city.

At Joseph's table, the brothers had been tested for envy. Here, they're tested for loyalty. What will they do now? All they have to do is leave Benjamin, and they can go home free men. Will they let him be taken into slavery? Or will they jeopardize their own freedom and stand with him?

Genesis 44:14, 15
And Judah and his brethren came to Joseph's house; for he was yet there: and they fell before him on the ground. And Joseph said unto them, What deed is this that ye have done? wot ye not that such a man as I can certainly divine?

“I knew what you were up to in stealing my silver cup,” Joseph said to his brothers.

Genesis 44:16 (a)
And Judah said, What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we are my lord’s servants . . .

Judah didn’t say, “Sorry, Benny, you’re now a slave.” He said, “We’re to blame,” and continues in marvelous confession . . .

Genesis 44:16 (b)–23
. . . both we, and he also with whom the cup is found. And he said, God forbid that I should do so: but the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant; and as for you, get you up in peace unto your father. Then Judah came near unto him, and said, Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord’s ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant: for thou art even as Pharaoh. My lord asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father, or a brother? And we said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him. And thou saidst unto thy servants, Bring him down unto me, that I may set mine eyes upon him. And we said unto my lord, The lad cannot leave his father: for if he should leave his father, his father would die. And thou saidst unto thy servants, Except your youngest brother come down with you, ye shall see my face no more.

“You won’t see my face unless Benjamin comes with you,” Joseph had said to his brothers. In the same fashion, unless Jesus had died for our sins, we could not see the face of the King of all creation.

Genesis 44:24–31
And it came to pass when we came up unto thy servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. And our father said, Go again,

and buy us a little food. And we said, We cannot go down: if our youngest brother be with us, then will we go down: for we may not see the man's face, except our youngest brother be with us. And thy servant my father said unto us, Ye know that my wife bare me two sons: And the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces; and I saw him not since: And if ye take this also from me, and mischief befall him, ye shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Now therefore when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us; seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life; It shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die: and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave.

"If you don't let Benjamin go, our father will die from sorrow," said Judah.

Genesis 44:32, 33
For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever. Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren.

"I'll be your slave, but let Benjamin go," pleaded Judah.

Genesis 44:34
For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father.

The two underlying themes of Judah's powerful, effectual intercessory "prayer" to Joseph are: "I can't let Dad go through this," and, "I won't let Benjamin remain here in slavery."

And it is to this intercession by Judah on behalf of Jacob and Benjamin that Joseph will respond . . .



45

Genesis 45:1 (a)
Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me . . .

Upon hearing Judah's confession, Joseph dismissed all of his aides.

Genesis 45:1 (b)
. . . And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.

It was Judah's confession combined with intercession that caused Joseph's heart to be moved with compassion and resulted in revelation.

Genesis 45:2
And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard.

If you want to move the heart of your Lord, pray. Confess your sin. Acknowledge your love for the Father. And be loyal to your brothers.

Genesis 45:3
And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence.

What must Joseph's brothers have thought? Terror must have filled their hearts. Confusion must have flooded their minds. Yet following the revelation of his person in verses 1–3, Joseph will go on to reveal his purpose in verses 4–16.

When will Jesus reveal who He is?

I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.

Hosea 5:15

Through Hosea, Jesus said prophetically, "I will return to My place until My people acknowledge their offense." What offense? Their rejection of Him. In their affliction, they will seek Him early. What affliction? The Tribulation, the time of Jacob's trouble, the seven-year period described in Revelation 6—19 in which the world undergoes judgment and the horrific outpouring of God's wrath on a Christ-rejecting world. In their affliction, the nation Israel will seek the Lord. They'll acknowledge their offense. They'll realize Jesus is Messiah. And then He will make Himself known to them.

Genesis 45:4, 5
And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

After revealing his person, Joseph reveals his purpose. The first purpose for Joseph's position was *pardon.* "Don't be upset with yourselves," he said to his brothers. "Your selling me into this foreign land as a slave was all part of God's plan."

I love these words of Joseph because they express the heart of Jesus. "Father, forgive them," He prayed from the Cross, "for they don't know what they're doing" (Luke 23:34). Those who crucified Jesus were indeed forgiven. The price was paid. And Peter would go on to declare that it was all part of a Divine design, a grand plan—that Jesus would die for the sins of every man (Acts 2:22–24). "I know you are aware of your flaws and failings," Jesus would say to us, "but don't be grieved. I've forgiven you."

"I can't believe I did what I did. I can't believe I blew it so badly," someone said to me recently.

And I had to say to him, "Your being down on yourself simply proves you didn't believe what God said about you in the first place —that in your flesh dwells no good thing" (Romans 7:18).

Whenever we say, "How could I have done that?" we show how little we understand the need for Calvary because God clearly tells us that He had to

send His Son to die for us because there is *no* good in us.

"Don't be angry with yourself," He would say to you and me tonight. "Accept the fact that you're a sinner. Remember you are but dust" (Psalm 103).

Christianity is unique because it is not a matter of us cleaning ourselves up and getting our act together. It is a matter of constantly rejoicing in the fact that the blood of Jesus cleanses us continually, that our sin is washed away constantly by what He did for us on the Cross sacrificially. Thus, Christianity is celebration of what He's done, not condemnation for what we have or haven't done.

"Don't be angry with yourselves," Joseph said to his brothers. "God had a plan in all of this."

And God has a plan in all of the stuff *you're* involved in: to make you appreciate what He's done for you—not to boast in your own righteousness, your own purity, your own holiness—but to say, "Lord, Your forgiveness and kindness and goodness and mercy are awesome."

Genesis 45:6–11
For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: And there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty.

The second purpose for Joseph's position was *provision.* I don't think there's anything more powerful than a person who goes through hard times

yet keeps his faith in the Lord intact. That's what Joseph was doing, as he said to his brothers, "It's okay that you sold me into slavery because it was all part of God's plan to keep you guys alive."

Genesis 45:12, 13
And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither.

The third purpose for Joseph's position was *praise*. "Tell Dad what you see in me," he said. Any of you who are fathers know there's nothing more delightful than hearing someone tell you what you already know: that your kids are great. The Father already knows all about His Son, and yet here's what we can do to delight His heart: We can talk to Him about His Son. When I take time to talk to the Father about the blessings of His Son—my Savior, Jesus Christ—it blesses His heart immensely. That is why Joseph says, "Go tell Dad everything you've seen."

Genesis 45:14, 15 (a)
And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them . . .

The fourth purpose of Joseph's position is *proximity.* As Joseph and his brothers weep together and hug each other, intimacy grows. This is what the Lord wants with you, and what He desires of me.

Genesis 45:15 (b)
. . . and after that his brethren talked with him.

"Get out of here, dreamer," his brothers had said to Joseph when he first came to them with visions of what God had shown him (Genesis 37:8). But the second time he appears to them here in our story, they receive, submit to, and have a great appreciation for Joseph. As Stephen pointed out (Acts 7), this has been the tendency of Israel throughout her history . . .

When Moses attempted to rescue a man being beat up by an Egyptian taskmaster, did the Jews welcome him? No. But when he came to them forty years later as their deliverer, they embraced him.

When Joshua first came on the scene and, along with Caleb, gave a good report concerning the Promised Land, the Jews refused to believe his report. Forty years later, however, it was Joshua who they followed into the Promised Land.

When David first came to his brothers as they quivered before Goliath, they said, "Go back home, runt"—only to later crown him king.

The first time Jesus came and dwelt among His people, they said, "We will not have this Man rule over us." But the second time He comes, every knee will bow to Him (Romans 14:11).

Genesis 45:16–20
And the fame thereof was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying, Joseph's brethren are come: and it pleased Pharaoh well, and his servants. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Say unto thy brethren, This do ye; lade your beasts, and go, get you unto the land of Canaan; And take your father and your households, and come unto me: and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the land. Now thou art commanded, this do ye; take you wagons out of the land of Egypt for your little ones, and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. Also regard not your stuff; for the good of all the land of Egypt is yours.

Pharaoh told Joseph to say to his brothers, "Take these U-hauls back to Canaan; get your families and possessions; and come live in my land—the best part of the land of Egypt."

Genesis 45:21, 22
And the children of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the commandment of Pharaoh, and gave them provision for the way. To all of them he gave each man changes of

raiment; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver, and five changes of raiment.

The brothers didn't seem to notice that Benjamin had three hundred more pieces of silver and four more suits than they did. So blown away were they by Joseph's forgiveness that there was no room for envy or jealousy. I am so looking forward to that time when our Greater than Joseph is revealed, when we are living with Jesus, when there is no more competition. What a great day it will be when we don't notice if someone has five times more or three hundred pieces more, for one of the heavenly things about heaven is that everyone will be 1,000% thrilled for everyone else. Our competition-based society places a high premium on getting ahead. But this is not the way of the kingdom . . .

When the water stirred, the first one in to the pool of Siloam would be the one who would be healed. So what did Jesus do? He didn't go to the ones close to the pool. He went to the guy in the back, the one who had been there for thirty-eight years, and said, "Let's split this competitive scene" (see John 5:8).

When you're caught up in the "Joseph moment," everything else fades. The brothers didn't even notice that Benjamin was three hundred pieces of silver richer and four suits ahead of them because those things no longer mattered.

Genesis 45:23, 24
And to his father he sent after this manner; ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten she asses laden with corn and bread and meat for his father by the way. So he sent his brethren away, and they departed: and he said unto them, See that ye fall not out by the way.

Because Jesus identified Himself as the Way, early Christians were known as those who walked in the Way. Here, Joseph says, "I'm giving you everything you need to make the journey from where you are to where I am. Just see to it that you don't fall out by the way."

It's easy to fall out of the Way. It's easy to say, "My body is hurting. My stocks are dropping. My head is spinning. And it's time to kick back a bit." But our Greater than Joseph would say to us, "Don't do it. Don't fall back. Don't give up." In this regard, it's sobering to realize that Jesus told us only one-fourth of the seeds scattered would go on to bear significant fruit . . .

> *In some people, the seed of the Word falls in soil and springs up quickly. But then comes the heat—the tragedies, setbacks, and difficulties—that cause it to shrivel. In others, the cares of this world, the lust for riches, and the desire for other things are like weeds that choke out the Word. In others, the Word doesn't take root at all. But some falls on soil where its roots grow deep and where it goes on to bring forth much fruit (Matthew 13).*

Over the years, I've known those whose roots have gone deep in the soil of the Word, whose lives have borne much fruit, who, despite setbacks and shortcomings, have not fallen out of the Way.

> **Genesis 45:25–28**
> **And they went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father, And told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not. And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived: And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.**

Jacob didn't believe the word he heard, but that didn't stop the wagons from coming in his direction. Even though our faith might falter from time to time, the wagons are on their way to carry us home.

THE WAGONS ARE COMING

A Topical Study of GENESIS 45:27

"Smile first thing in the morning," joked W. C. Fields, "and get it over with."

"If you find anything to laugh about," echoed Groucho Marx, "it's only because you're not paying attention."

People often have reasons why they're so cynical . . .

In the midst of their phone conversation, a lady said to her friend, "Did you wake up grouchy?"

"No," said her friend, "I let him sleep."

Indeed, there can be reasons why people are grouchy or even why they sting people with cynicism . . .

Bees fly 100,000 miles from flower to flower in order to gather enough nectar for just one pound of honey—only to have someone steal it from them. No wonder they sting us!

Perhaps, humanly speaking, Jacob had reason to be pessimistic. When his sons came to him, saying, "Dad, Joseph has been killed," he believed their untrue report. But when the same sons came to him, saying, "Dad, Joseph is alive, and he's governor of Egypt," he couldn't believe their true report. He believed what wasn't true because it was bad; and he didn't believe what was true because it seemed too good.

That's pessimism—the tendency to dismiss the light and embrace the dark.

"I would have fainted had I not believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living," declared the psalmist (Psalm 27:13). Jacob is indeed fainting because of his failure to believe God's goodness. Yet even though he didn't believe his son's words, he couldn't deny the wagons Joseph had sent to carry him and his possessions to the land of Goshen—the

best part of Egypt. And Scripture says, when he saw the wagons his soul revived.

Notice it was the heart of Jacob which fainted (v. 26), but it was the mouth of Israel—the one "Governed by God," that said, "Joseph is alive" (v. 28).

This passage hit me in a way that delighted my heart, for, you see, even though pessimistic Jacob was ready to believe the bad lie, and unwilling to believe the good truth—he was convinced when he saw the wagons. This reminds me of Thomas . . .

> "I won't believe the report you guys are sharing about Jesus being risen from the dead," he said to the other disciples, "unless I can touch the holes in His hands and put my finger in His side." But when Thomas came face to face with Jesus, he became a believer (see John 20:28).

So, Jacob said, "I'm not going to believe the word"—but when he saw the wagons outside, his spirit revived.

Like Jacob, many times we don't believe the Word we heard. But the good news is that Jacob's disbelief did not derail the wagon train Joseph had sent his way to pick him up and bring him to Goshen. You might be going through dry times right now in which you're famished spiritually. But I have good news for you: The wagon has been sent your way.

What wagon?

The Lunch Wagon

> *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without a price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.*
>
> Isaiah 55:1, 2

You might feel like things aren't going your way today, but that doesn't derail the lunch wagon God has sent in your direction. Society says, "There's no free lunch." Scripture, however, says, "Yes there is." You can come and buy and eat even if you don't have any money. The invitation is given you to freely delight your soul in fatness. The lunch wagon is headed in our direction, gang. And the Marriage Feast of the Lamb is right around the bend!

The Station Wagon

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 22:6

Not only is the lunch wagon coming—but the station wagon is headed your way as well. Your kids might have wandered away, but even if you're pessimistic or full of doubt about them God promised that He will keep that which is committed to Him (2 Timothy 1:12), and will finish the work He began (Philippians 1:6).

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and not only you, but your family will eventually be saved as well," declared Paul (see Acts 11:14). The promises of God are intact, gang. And even if you don't believe it, the station wagon is headed in your direction to scoop up you and your family.

The Welcome Wagon

> *But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 2:9

Even if you doubt it, the fact is, if you're a believer, you're on board and you're going to heaven. And when you get there, you're going to see the ultimate Welcome Wagon as you take in all that Jesus has prepared for you during the past 2,000 years.

"I go to prepare a place for you," He said (John 14:2).

And when I see it, I'll say, "Perfect, Lord! This is amazing! It's beyond anything I ever imagined. How did you know this is *exactly* what would make me happy?" He will welcome me into my new home. And He will do the same for you.

The Bandwagon

Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints.

Psalm 149:1

"Can I be in the band? Please let me be in the band. C'mon guys, I wanna be in the band." It's going to happen! The bandwagon is coming—and I'm going to be there—singing in heavenly harmony right along with the best of them!

The Covered Wagon

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Romans 6:14

The wagon coming our way is a covered wagon. Our inadequacy, stupidity, and sin are all covered by the blood of the Lamb. And even if you don't believe the word you've heard, the fact remains that God has everything covered because of the finished work of the Cross.

It has been rightly said that "none lives so pleasantly as he who lives optimistically." How much easier it is to live pleasantly, to live optimistically, when we know for certain that the wagons are coming.

"A little bit of faith will get your soul to heaven, but a lot of faith will bring heaven to your soul," C. H. Spurgeon astutely said. And how right he was! The wagons are on their way. And heaven is just around the bend.



46 Joseph has revealed himself to his brothers, and has invited them—along with Jacob—to live with him in Egypt. And the story continues . . .

Genesis 46:1
And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beer-sheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac.

I admire Jacob here because, although accepting this invitation to live among royalty and to be with his son, Joseph, again seems like the right thing to do, he stops and offers sacrifice to God to ensure that what he is doing is truly acceptable in the Lord's sight.

Appearances can be deceiving. I'm learning that, aren't you? Jacob stops and says, "I want to make sure I'm going to Egypt with God's blessing." Why

would he be so reticent? Perhaps it was because his grandfather had also gone down to Egypt in a time of famine, returned with a servant girl named Hagar, and set in motion a series of events for which the Middle East is paying the price to this day.

> **Genesis 46:2–4**
> **And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I. And he said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.**

God says, "Jacob, I do want you to go to Egypt. I'm not going to hold something from you that would be good for you. Your son will touch your eyes—you'll be in fellowship with him once again."

Romans 12 says this about God's will: It's good and acceptable and perfect. So often we think, "I hate the heat and can't stand snakes. Therefore, I know God will send me as a missionary to Africa." But that's not the way the Father works! His will for you is good, acceptable, and *perfect.* Understand this, precious people: Whatever God tells you to do will be good —*really good* for you.

In a recent newspaper article, I read the following . . .

> *Attending religious services lowers blood pressure more than tuning into religious TV or radio, a new study says. People who attend a religious service once a week and prayed or studied the Bible once a day are forty percent less likely to have high blood pressure than those who don't go to church every week or pray and study the Bible less than once a day. Says David B. Larson, head of the National Institute for Health Care Research, "If they relied on TV or radio for their religious service, it wasn't as beneficial. It shows that church attendance is better for your health than even watching religious TV." The link between religious activity and blood pressure was surprisingly strong. Previous studies showed other health benefits from prayer. A 1988 study found that patients*

who were prayed for needed fewer antibiotics and had fewer complications in surgery. Last year, re searchers found monthly church visits improved the mental health of the elderly. And researchers found earlier this year that adults who attend church once a week were more likely to have high levels of an immune system protein associated with age-related diseases. The new findings, part of a National Institute of Health initiative, came from a study of 2,391 people. They say more research is needed to understand these links, but going to church is healthy.

I like that! The will of the Father is perfect—and Jacob is about to find this out . . .

Genesis 46:5–7
And Jacob rose up from Beer-sheba: and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, and their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. And they took their cattle, and their goods, which they had gotten in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob, and all his seed with him: His sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters, and all his seed brought he with him into Egypt.

The whole family is saved from the famished condition of where they were previously and called to live with Joseph in a land of luxury. I personally believe the Lord wants to save entire families. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," Paul said to the Philippian jailor, "and you will be saved —and your house" (Acts 16:31). This doesn't mean the whole family is automatically saved if the parent is a believer. But it does mean that a believing father or mother can expect the Lord to work in the rest of the family as he or she is obedient to the Word.

I'm simple enough to expect that my kids and grandchildren, should the Lord tarry, will travel with me, to be with the Greater than Joseph—Jesus Christ—in the land He is preparing for us.

This note was left on my windshield yesterday . . .

I was so glad to see your car here, Brother Jon. I have the opportunity to share with you some wonderful news. While visiting my mother a few months ago, I accidentally left a set of tapes at her house. The tapes were of services I had missed from our current Genesis study. Now my mother thought I had left them there with hopes of converting her. But it truly was a mistake. I had really wanted to listen to them myself. But God is so faithful. For whatever reason, Mom started listening to the tapes, and she accepted Jesus as her Savior and is going to be baptized this Sunday in a church in Kennewick, Washington. My mother is saved. She's saved, she's saved! God used this chain of events just for her, and I couldn't be happier.

That's not coincidence. That's providence! Grandpa, believe it. Mom, don't doubt it. Parents, lay hold of it. Believe. Believe that the Lord will work in your family.

Genesis 46:8–13
And these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons: Reuben, Jacob's firstborn. And the sons of Reuben; Hanoch, and Phallu, and Hezron, and Carmi. And the sons of Simeon; Jemuel, and Jamin, and Ohad, and Jachin, and Zohar, and Shaul the son of a Canaanitish woman. And the sons of Levi; Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. And the sons of Judah; Er, and Onan, and Shelah, and Pharez, and Zerah: but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Pharez were Hezron and Hamul. And the sons of Issachar; Tola, and Phuvah, and Job, and Shimron.

Issachar had a son named Job. Many Bible commentators—with whom I'm inclined to agree—believe this is the Job of the Book of Job. If you chart the chronology, you find that Moses—who most scholars believe to be the author of the Book of Job—would have been fifty-five years old at the time when this particular Job was on the scene, making him the right age to have penned the book that uniquely chronicles the patience and power of faith under fire.

Genesis 46:14–20
And the sons of Zebulun; Sered, and Elon, and Jahleel. These be the sons of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob in Padan-aram, with his daughter Dinah: all the souls of his sons and his daughters were thirty and three. And the sons of Gad; Ziphion, and Haggi, Shuni, and Ezbon, Eri, and Arodi, and Areli. And the sons of Asher; Jimnah, and Ishuah, and Isui, and Beriah, and Serah their sister: and the sons of Beriah; Heber, and Malchiel. These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter, and these she bare unto Jacob, even sixteen souls. The sons of Rachel Jacob's wife; Joseph, and Benjamin. And unto Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, which Asenath the daughter of Poti-pherah priest of On bare unto him.

As we noted previously, Joseph's Gentile wife speaks of us, the church, the Bride of Christ, while the nation Israel is the wife of Jehovah (see Hosea 12:12).

Genesis 46:21–26
And the sons of Benjamin were Belah, and Becher, and Ashbel, Gera, and Naaman, Ehi, and Rosh, Muppim, and Huppim, and Ard. These are the sons of Rachel, which were born to Jacob: all the souls were fourteen. And the sons of Dan; Hushim. And the sons of Naphtali; Jahzeel, and Guni, and Jezer, and Shillem. These are the sons of Bilhah, which Laban gave unto Rachel his daughter, and she bare these unto Jacob: all the souls were seven. All the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob's sons' wives, all the souls were threescore and six;

Sixty-six come out of Canaan. Six is the number of man.

Genesis 46:27
And the sons of Joseph, which were born him in Egypt, were two souls: all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were threescore and ten.

Jacob, Joseph's two sons, and Joseph bring the number to seventy. Seven is the number of perfection. This is not surprising, for whenever Jesus—of whom Joseph is a picture—is added to the equation, He makes it perfect.

Genesis 46:28
And he sent Judah before him unto Joseph, to direct his face unto Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen.

Goshen means "To Draw Near." *Judah* means "Praise." Therefore, it is not coincidental that Judah led the way to Goshen, for, as the psalmist declared, we enter the gates of our heavenly Father with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise (Psalm 100).

Praise is the soil that allows the fruit of joy to thrive. Praise draws us in and causes us to be cognizant of the Lord's presence. Thus, it was additionally fitting for Judah to lead the way to Goshen, for from Judah would come Jesus, the Praiseworthy One (see Revelation 5:5).

Genesis 46:29, 30
And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive.

The father who was certain his son was dead now encounters him face to face and says, "Let me die. This is great! My life is complete!" What a reunion! What a picture of the reunion which must have taken place when the heavenly Father and Son met together after Jesus, our Greater than Joseph, had died for our sins, risen from the dead, and returned to heaven.

Genesis 46:31, 32
And Joseph said unto his brethren, and unto his father's house, I will go up, and shew Pharaoh, and say unto him, My brethren, and my father's house, which were in the land of Canaan, are come unto me; And the men are shepherds, for their trade hath been to

feed cattle; and they have brought their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have.

Following the reunion with his father, Joseph becomes a mediator for his family as he goes before Pharaoh on their behalf. After He died for our sins and ascended to heaven, Jesus sat at the right hand of the Father, where He continues to intercede for us (Hebrews 7:25).

Genesis 46:33, 34
And it shall come to pass, when Pharaoh shall call you, and shall say, What is your occupation? That ye shall say, Thy servants' trade hath been about cattle from our youth even until now, both we, and also our fathers: that ye may dwell in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians.

Joseph not only intercedes for his brothers, but he also instructs them, saying, "When you go before Pharaoh, and he asks your occupation, tell him you're shepherds." Why did Joseph instruct his brothers to answer this way? Because Egyptian society at that time was based on a caste system. And guess who was at the bottom of the heap, the lowest rung on the social ladder. Shepherds. Shepherds were untouchable. People didn't interact with them. They weren't allowed in the temples of Egyptian deities. Thus, as shepherds, Joseph's brothers would be marked men—completely separated from the worldly Egyptian system. Joseph knew that were his brothers not marked, they would be assimilated into Egyptian culture.

I have discovered that a Bible in my hand, a bumper sticker on my car, or a Christian logo on my shirt makes me a marked man. Secret, closet Christians get in all kinds of trouble and are susceptible to walk into temptation needlessly. Identify yourself at every opportunity, gang—even if it makes you look like a "shepherd" in the eyes of society. Don't say, "I'm going to a meeting." Say, "I'm going to Bible study. Why don't you come with me?"

Joseph—a picture of Jesus—said, "I want you to be marked in this land in order that you might keep your purity and identity intact." Wise is the one who follows his instruction.



47 Genesis 47:1, 2

Then Joseph came and told Pharaoh, and said, My father and my brethren, and their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have, are come out of the land of Canaan; and, behold, they are in the land of Goshen. And he took some of his brethren, even five men, and presented them unto Pharaoh.

Joseph takes five of his brothers and presents them to Pharaoh. Five in Scripture being the number of grace, the picture is perfect. You see, like Joseph's brothers, we've been fickle in our faith. We've said things we shouldn't have said and done things we shouldn't have done. And yet, like Joseph, Jesus will present us faultless before God with exceeding joy (see Jude 24).

Joseph doesn't bring up his brothers' failures, foibles, and flaws. No, he brings them to Pharaoh and says, "This is my *family*." And that's what the Lord will do with us.

Genesis 47:3–6

And Pharaoh said unto his brethren, What is your occupation? And they said unto Pharaoh, Thy servants are shepherds, both we, and also our fathers. They said moreover unto Pharaoh, For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen. And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: The land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle.

When asked their occupation, Joseph's brothers said they were shepherds —just as Joseph had instructed them. And Pharaoh said if any of them were

so inclined, they could care for his cattle as well.

Genesis 47:7
And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

Jacob blesses Pharaoh because, according to tradition, the greater always blesses the lesser (Hebrews 7)—and, despite the fact that he's an old man from a poverty-stricken land, in God's economy Jacob was the greater indeed.

Genesis 47:8, 9
And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.

"Life has been kind of tough," Jacob said, "but it's not over yet because my dad and grandfather lived longer than this."

Genesis 47:10
And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh.

The next section of our text pictures the Millennium—when Jesus will rule and reign on earth.

- In verses 11 and 12, we see Joseph's grace to Israel.
- In verses 13–22, we see Joseph's government over Egypt.
- In verses 23–26, we see Joseph's goodness for all.



***For topical study of Genesis 47:10 entitled "Being and Bestowing a Blessing," turn to page* 205.**

Genesis 47:11 (a)
And Joseph placed his father and his brethren . . .

After Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers and presented them before Pharaoh, he placed them in the land. Once Jesus comes back and Israel at last understands His true identity, a one-thousand-year period of unparalleled peace and prosperity will follow.

Genesis 47:11 (b)
. . . and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded.

First, we see Joseph showing grace to Israel in their position. He placed them in the best part of the land of Egypt. Just as Egypt is a type of the world, the Millennium takes place on planet earth. And just as Jacob and his sons were placed in the best part, Israel will have the best of the land. Israel will be the head and not the tail (Deuteronomy 28:13). Right now, Israel gets kicked around. A pariah in the international community, she's constantly voted against in the United Nations and put down by virtually every nation. But in the Millennium, that will all change. Israel will have preeminence and predominance as God fulfills the promises made to her throughout Scripture.

Genesis 47:12
And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to their families.

According to Ezekiel 48, in the millennial kingdom, there will be portions of land given each of the Twelve Tribes.

Genesis 47:13, 14
And there was no bread in all the land; for the famine was very sore, so that the land of Egypt and all the land of Canaan fainted by reason of the famine. And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, for the corn which they bought: and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house.

As Prime Minister of a people devastated by famine, Joseph pulls everything to the throne—beginning with their purses. Money is a problem. Those who have it are worried about keeping it; those who don't are concerned about getting it. That's why Joseph does something Jesus will do as well: He brings all of the money to the throne.

Genesis 47:15–17
And when money failed in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said, Give us bread: for why should we die in thy presence? for the money faileth. And Joseph said, Give your cattle; and I will give you for your cattle, if money fail. And they brought their cattle unto Joseph: and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for horses, and for the flocks, and for the cattle of the herds, and for the asses: and he fed them with bread for all their cattle for that year.

Not only did the Egyptians bring Joseph their purses, but they also brought him their possessions. "Bring everything to the throne," Joseph said, "and I'll take care of you."

So, too, in the millennial kingdom, there will be no need for the possessions that so easily possess us because our Greater than Joseph, Jesus Christ, will fully provide for us.

Genesis 47:18–20
When that year was ended, they came unto him the second year, and said unto him, We will not hide it from my lord, how that our money is spent; my lord also hath our herds of cattle; there is not ought left in the sight of my lord, but our bodies, and our lands: Wherefore shall we die before thine eyes, both we and our land? buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants unto Pharaoh: and give us seed, that we may live, and not die, that the land be not desolate. And Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for the Egyptians sold every man his field, because the famine prevailed over them: so the land became Pharaoh's.

After bringing their purses and possessions to Joseph, the Egyptians give him their property. Why does Joseph want property? Because he doesn't want the divided loyalties or human rivalries property so often brings.

Genesis 47:21
And as for the people, he removed them to cities from one end of the borders of Egypt even to the other end thereof.

After calling purses, possessions, and property under his control, Joseph took charge of the people themselves—relocating them throughout the land of Egypt.

"Let's stick together and build a tower which will reach to the heavens," said the inhabitants of Babel.

The Lord, however, scattered them throughout the earth (Genesis 11:9).

It's always been God's intention to have people spread out. That's why Christians were told to fan out throughout the world and preach the gospel (Acts 1:8).

Genesis 47:22
Only the land of the priests bought he not; for the priests had a portion assigned them of Pharaoh, and did eat their portion which Pharaoh gave them: wherefore they sold not their lands.

The pagan priests were allowed to remain where they were. So, in the coming millennial kingdom, there will be people who will do their own thing. Oh, they'll be living under an enforced righteousness, but they will do so with rebellion in their hearts. The Lord will invite all people to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Those who come will be blessed, but those who don't will experience drought (Zechariah 14).

This is a key to understanding what life is about. Paul says God has made known to us the mystery of what life is really about. It's all about Jesus. Everything in heaven and on earth is being gathered together in Him and for Him. As seen in the life of Joseph, the degree to which your purse,

possessions, property, and person are brought to the Throne will be the degree to which you are in the flow of history and destiny, for everything will one day be brought together under the authority and for the pleasure of Jesus (Revelation 4:11).

Everything you are, think about, and do is to be under the authority of Jesus Christ, our Greater than Joseph. In our text, those who did so were blessed, while others were starving, struggling, and dying. Yes, it meant they had to give up purse, possessions, property, and person, but once they did, they could relax and rest. In the same way, we'll choose to either go against God's flow—or we'll say, "I surrender *all*."

Genesis 47:23, 24
Then Joseph said unto the people, Behold, I have bought you this day and your land for Pharaoh: lo, here is seed for you, and ye shall sow the land. And it shall come to pass in the increase, that ye shall give the fifth part unto Pharaoh, and four parts shall be your own, for seed of the field, and for your food, and for them of your households, and for food for your little ones.

Joseph had taken care of them through treacherous times and now says, "Here's seed for you. You keep eighty percent and twenty percent goes to the king."

Genesis 47:25, 26
And they said, Thou hast saved our lives: let us find grace in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants. And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt unto this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth part; except the land of the priests only, which became not Pharaoh's.

The Egyptians gladly gave twenty percent to the king. Zacchaeus gladly gave fifty percent to the Lord (Luke 19:8). The widow with two mites gave one hundred percent to the temple (Mark 12:42–44). And we complain about giving ten percent?

Genesis 47:27

And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions therein, and grew, and multiplied exceedingly.

Jacob and his sons thrived in Goshen. So, too, in the millennial kingdom, Israel will prosper and grow.

Genesis 47:28
And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years: so the whole age of Jacob was an hundred forty and seven years.

Joseph was seventeen years old when he was sold into slavery. Jacob was able to live near him for seventeen years in the land of Goshen. Therefore, I believe the picture is that I will enjoy heaven to the same degree that I have invested time with the Lord on earth. You who have walked with the Lord, invested in your knowledge of the Lord, been close to the Lord for seventeen years will, I believe, have a capacity seventeen times greater to enjoy heaven than will the believer who made only a meager investment into the things of eternity and who followed God at a distance.

Genesis 47:29 (a)
And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me . . .

As seen when Abraham sent his servant to find a bride for Isaac in Genesis 24, the practice of putting one's hand under another's thigh said, "I want your undivided attention. Don't pull away. This is of utmost importance."

Genesis 47:29 (b)–31
. . . bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their buryingplace. And he said, I will do as thou hast said. And he

said, Swear unto me. And he sware unto him. And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head.

"Even though I've been here in Egypt, my heart is in Canaan," said Jacob. "Yes, I've had it easy here, Joseph. And it's been glorious. But my heart is in another land."

Even though we'll be here on earth in the millennial kingdom, our hearts will be drawn to the new heaven and the new earth—the true land of Canaan (Revelation 21:1).

BEING AND BESTOWING A BLESSING

A Topical Study of GENESIS 47:10

The scene would have been unusual, illogical, surreal. Here was Pharaoh at his prime—powerful potentate of Egypt; here was Pharaoh in all of his splendor; here was Pharaoh, ruler of the known world's mightiest empire; here was Pharaoh—being blessed by a travel-weary exile from an impoverished land.

> *And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.*
>
> Hebrews 7:7

The greater blesses the lesser. Jacob blessed Pharaoh because, although Jacob couldn't hold a candle to Pharaoh politically, financially, or militarily —he was unequivocally the greater spiritually because he was linked to the God of the Universe.

The privilege of bestowing blessing—of proclaiming prosperity, happiness, and success—was reserved for patriarchs. Thus, Jacob was perfectly justified in pronouncing blessing, for he was a patriarch.

But guess what. It is equally proper for us to pronounce blessing, for, it was also a privilege for priests and kings—and, according to 1 Peter 2:9, we are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood.

What, then, are we to do?

Instructing the priests, the Lord said,

> *Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The* LORD *bless thee, and keep thee: The* LORD *make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The* LORD *lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.*
>
> Numbers 6:23–27

In other words, God said, “Priests, this is what you’re to do: You’re to fan out among the people and place My name upon them. You’re to speak blessing to them. You’re to pronounce this benediction upon them. And I will work accordingly.”

Whether a person is a friend or a Pharaoh, whether he is a brother or a boss—we get to be the ones to bless him.

How?

Two ways . . .

The Words We Say

Wherever we go, we hear people mock God, dishonor God, trivialize God. But you and I get to be those who say, "The Lord *bless* you." We get to be those who speak the Lord's name upon someone's life, into someone's day.

When you go to work on Monday, you have the opportunity to walk into your Pharaoh's office and say, "The Lord bless you. May His grace be upon your life. May He cause His face to shine upon your day."

It's radical! And it's doable. Every one of us has the opportunity to cause blessing to be bestowed upon someone.

"But I'm old," you say.

So was Jacob.

"But I'm poor," you say.

So was he.

"But I'm nothing," you say.

In the eyes of men, neither was Jacob.

"But I'm not godly," you say.

Neither was Jacob.

Yet he walked into the palace of Pharaoh and blessed him. And that's what you can do. It just takes a moment or two, but in the words you say you can bless people by speaking God's name in their ear, by adding God's presence to their day.

The Way We Pray

Not only can you speak words *of* blessing, but you can also pray *for* blessing . . .

Two nights ago, I had an opportunity to go for a walk through my neighborhood and as I did so, it was a fabulous time to go down the street and pronounce blessing upon each house, to say, "Lord, may Your Spirit be moving in that house this evening. Those people probably don't know You, but You know them, and I pray Your blessing upon them."

Maybe you're wondering why you would want to say to your in-laws,

"May the Lord fill your house with His peace,"

why you would go to your boss and say,

"May the Lord bless your day,"

or why you would walk up to kids on the street and say,

"May the Lord smile upon you."

The reason is because not only will pronouncing blessing change the lives of others, but it will radically change yours as well. You see, I've learned that if I'm mad at people, if I can't believe they did that, if I can't believe they said the other, if I curse people in my heart—my own life will be cursed.

But if I bless people, my own life is blessed. That's why Jesus said, "When you are put down or bugged or unfairly treated, you will be blessed if you bless" (see Matthew 5:10, 11).

In other words, what flows *through* me sticks *to* me. If I murmur and complain, grumble and snivel, I will be a small, bitter person. But if I speak blessing and beauty, peace and prosperity, I will become expansive and delightful.

I challenge you to be like Jacob. No matter what Pharaoh you may face, no matter where you go—pronounce blessing; offer prayer. In so doing, you will open the door for God to work in the lives of those around you.

And in yours as well!

48

Genesis 48:1, 2

And it came to pass after these things, that one told Joseph, Behold, thy father is sick: and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And one told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed.

While it was Jacob who was sick, it was Israel who strengthened himself when he heard his son was coming. We might not be able to do a lot of things, but every one of us can visit someone who's hurting, sick, or in need. Joseph did, and his father felt a surge of strength as a result.

Genesis 48:3–5 (a)

And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, And said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession. And now . . .

As Joseph enters with his sons Ephraim and Manasseh in tow, they who had blessed Jacob in coming are about to be blessed themselves.

Haven't you discovered that when you go to share with someone in need, you might set out, saying, "I don't know if I'll be able to help, say the right thing, or do enough"—only to find that when you get there, *you* are the one who is blessed?

Jesus wants us to minister to each other because He taught that whatever measure a man gives out, it will be given back to Him (see Matthew 7:2). It's in giving that we get. It's in praying for the sick that we become healthier. It's in cheering the discouraged that our own emotions begin to soar. It's in explaining truth to others that we begin to see things more clearly.

Whenever you give, you get back—and Joseph models this.

Genesis 48:5 (b), 6

. . . thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. And thy issue,

which thou begettest after them, shall be thine, and shall be called after the name of their brethren in their inheritance.

At this point, Jacob does something amazing: He claims Joseph's sons as his own—elevating Ephraim and Manasseh to the status of patriarchs. "Wow," Joseph would have thought. "What a blessing. You take my two boys who were born in Egypt and are dressed like Egyptians—and you're bringing them into your family, where they will have a legacy, where their names will be recorded for all eternity, where they will be key players in God's economy. Wow!"

The addition of Ephraim and Manasseh brought the total number of tribes to fourteen. But Ephraim and Manasseh usually take the place of two other tribes in the accounting, one of which is the tribe of Joseph. Although the tribe of Joseph appears in the Book of Revelation, throughout the Bible his two sons usually assume his place. The other tribe taken out of the numeration is the tribe of Levi because, as priests, the Levites would have a high and holy calling, but not a piece of property.

Genesis 48:7, 8
And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; the same is Bethlehem. And Israel beheld Joseph's sons, and said, Who are these?

His eyesight failing, as Ephraim and Manasseh come closer, Jacob says, "Which is which? Who's who?"

Genesis 48:9–11
And Joseph said unto his father, They are my sons, whom God hath given me in this place. And he said, Bring them, I pray thee, unto me, and I will bless them. Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see. And he brought them near unto him; and he kissed them, and embraced them. And Israel said unto Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed.

"I didn't think I would ever see you again, Joseph. I thought you were dead. But now we're living together as a family—and I get to see your children, too!" Jacob is blown away, exceedingly blessed.

Genesis 48:12 (a)
And Joseph brought them out from between his knees . . .

The little guys were clinging to Dad's legs.

Genesis 48:12 (b), 13
. . . and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near unto him.

Joseph positioned Manasseh so that Jacob could put his right hand on him, for as the older son, Manasseh would receive the blessing of the firstborn.

Genesis 48:14
And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn.

Jacob intentionally crosses his arms.

Genesis 48:15, 16 (a)
And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, The Angel which redeemed me from all evil . . .

"Angel" is capitalized because it refers to Jesus Christ.

Genesis 48:16 (b), 17
. . . bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a

multitude in the midst of the earth. And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head.

"Wait a minute, Dad. You're a bit mixed up here," Joseph said as he tried to put Jacob's right hand back on Manasseh's head.

Genesis 48:18, 19
And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head. And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.

"The Spirit of God has revealed to me that the younger son will be the greater," insisted Jacob. "Manasseh will be blessed, too—but there's a greater plan for Ephraim."

And that's exactly what happened. Ephraim became the greater tribe by far. The ten northern tribes of Israel are called Israel—but they're also referred to as Ephraim because Ephraim was the predominant of the ten northern tribes.

Culturally and traditionally, the elder son, the firstborn was to receive all of the benefits and assume the greater position. But the Lord seems to tweak that a lot . . .

- Cain was the firstborn, but Abel was blessed.
- Ishmael was the firstborn, but it was Isaac who was blessed.
- Esau was the firstborn, but it was Jacob who was blessed.
- Reuben was the firstborn, but it was Joseph who was blessed.
- Aaron was the firstborn, but it was Moses who was blessed.

Throughout the Word, the Lord often makes the lesser the greater, and uses the younger to rule the older. Why? I think the basic message is simply

this: What is coming is always better than what has been. We tend to wax eloquent about the good old days. The Lord, however, says, "The best is yet to come. I'm going to take you from glory to *greater* glory" (see 2 Corinthians 3:18).

This gives me real hope, because I truly believe for our churches, for our families, for us personally the best is yet to come. It just seems to be the way of the Lord if we choose to believe on Him and walk with Him.

Genesis 48:20
And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh.

"May God bless you like He's blessed Ephraim" would become a saying throughout the land.

Genesis 48:21, 22
And Israel said unto Joseph, Behold, I die: but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers. Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.

If you want to see how God can work in your family and through your children, read on . . .

BEHOLD I DIE, BUT . . .

A Topical Study of
GENESIS 48:21, 22

There comes a moment in the life of every man when he becomes keenly aware, acutely aware of his mortality. In the text before us, Jacob is at just such a point. In light of this, please notice with me four elements in his words to his son, Joseph . . .

A Sobering Realization

And Israel said unto Joseph, Behold, I die . . .

Genesis 48:21 (a)

At one hundred forty-seven years of age, it was Jacob's body that no doubt let him know the end of his life was near.

> When I was younger, I could eat as much as I wanted. It was wonderful! In college, just about every single night after track practice, we'd all go to Love's Charcoal Broiler and order hot fudge sundaes—not just ordinary ones, but the specialty of the house: Fifteen-gallon sundaes. And they didn't affect me at all. But then something happened when I hit middle age. No longer could I eat like that without consequences. I can't explain it—but you can certainly observe it!

Young people don't understand this, but at some point in every man's life, he realizes his days are numbered. And such was the case for Jacob.

Confident Expectation

. . . but God shall be with you . . .

Genesis 48:21 (b)

"Behold I die," said Jacob, "but God shall be with you."

What a fantastic thing it is for us to be able to say to our children, "Behold, I die, but God will see you through. I guarantee it because He has seen me through."

Because Jacob was one who had lots of failings, tons of shortcomings, all sorts of problems, he was one who knew that God's faithfulness was not dependent upon his own deservedness. Jacob was a man who knew even when he was failing and faltering, that God would be faithful, that God would come through. And he passed that assurance on to his son.

Due to the aging of the baby boomer generation, you may have noticed there seems to be a flood of life insurance advertisements lately. Let me tell you, as important as it might be to have life insurance, it's infinitely more important to have life *assurance,* to be able to say to your son, your daughter, your grandchildren, "You *will* make it through, because even as God has been faithful to me, He will be faithful to you."

Don't settle for a piece of the rock from Prudential, gang. Seek the *peace* of the Rock of Ages. Being in good hands with Allstate doesn't compare to being in the Good Hands of the Almighty. Dad, listen; Grandpa, take heed: Nothing is more important for your family than your confident expectation that the same God who walks with you every step of the way will do the same for them.

Personal Application

. . . and bring you again unto the land of your fathers.

Genesis 48:21 (c)

Jacob had problems just like we do. Jacob had troubles and inconsistencies just like ours. Nonetheless, he was able to say, "Joseph, God's going to bring you to the land of your fathers."

Dad, Grandpa—where's your land? Because that's where your kids and grandchildren will land when you're gone. If your land is the kingdom, if you have a love for the Lord, if you're a student of the Word, if you pray and seek first the kingdom day after day—that's where your kids and grandchildren will land. Conversely, chances are, statistics prove, and experience has shown that if your land is Blockbuster Video, Rockin' Rodeo, or HBO—those are the places your kids will end up.

Ultimately, the land of the fathers is the land of the Father. "In my Father's house are many mansions," Jesus said, "If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). *That's* where I desperately desire my kids land. Therefore, I can no longer goof around. The stakes are too high—not just for me, but for my kids and future grandchildren. Oh, I'm Jacob. I still have struggles and failures and problems. But I'm also Israel—Governed by God because I've committed my heart and life to Him. And that is my desire, and prayer for those who follow me.

Glorious Continuation

> *Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.*
>
> Genesis 48:22

"I'm giving you an extra portion," Jacob says, "a parcel of property I took with my bow and sword from the Amorite." Here's the problem, Bible students: There's no record of Jacob ever doing this. Not only is there no mention in Scripture that Jacob ever took territory of an Amorite, but doing so was not even in his nature. Esau was the hunter, the warrior. But Jacob was a man who dwelt in tents and cooked. So what did Jacob mean when he said he took territory with his bow and sword?

The language indicates this speaks of an event that would take place in the future, an event so certain to happen that Jacob speaks of it as though it had already taken place.

Romans 8 tells us we are glorified. Have we actually, physically been glorified? No. But it's going to happen with such certainty that the Bible speaks as though it has already taken place. Jacob is saying, "The portion of land I took with my bow and sword is yours. The foundation has been laid, and what you do will be a continuation of who I am."

> Last Sunday when I was taken violently ill after first service, I called my son, Peter-John, and said, "PJ, you're on." Listening to him on the radio, I was so blessed. And then Sunday night, so many, many young people opened their hearts to Jesus and were baptized by Peter-John, only twenty-two years old.

God is raising up a generation that will take more territory, see further, do better, claim a bigger portion as they stand on our shoulders and go on to greater victory.

That's why I'm so glad I'm a believer. I know those who come after me will do better than I have done. They'll take territory I was unable to claim.

They'll do things I could never do.

Our kids, precious people, will do better than us because God takes His people from glory to *greater* glory. That's His promise. That's His way.

And I can't wait.



49

Genesis 49:1

And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days.

The phrase, "in the last days" is used fourteen times in the Old Testament —each time dealing with prophecy. Thus, Genesis 49 is one of those incredibly rich passages that deals with future events.

Genesis 49:2
Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father.

On his deathbed, Jacob gathers his twelve sons around him and speaks to them concerning what lies ahead for them. Although he will begin with Reuben, Jacob won't address his sons in their birth order, as would have been customary in such a blessing. Instead, we will see Jacob address his sons in a way that will portray the history and future of the nation of Israel.

Genesis 49:3, 4
Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch.

This is in reference to what Reuben had done forty years previously, when, following Rachel's death, he had relations with her handmaid, Bilhah —through whom Jacob had fathered Dan and Naphtali. Perhaps Reuben thought he had gotten away with this, but here—forty years later—it comes

back to bite him. "You're my firstborn," Jacob said to Reuben. "You had every opportunity, but you're unstable as water. And what you did forty years ago has caused you to be less than what you would have been had you not partaken in that sin."

Reuben speaks of the earliest days of Israel's history, where we see *a disappointing people,* as they committed spiritual fornication while Moses was on the mountain getting the Word of the Lord for them. So disappointed was Moses that he threw down the tablets when he realized that, just like Reuben, Israel was unstable as water.

Genesis 49:5–7
Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

When Dinah, their sister, was raped by Shechem, it was Simeon and Levi who hatched the plan that would result in the destruction of the people of Shechem.

Simeon and Levi speak of the next phase of Israel's history, wherein we see *a dispersed people*—for just as Simeon and Levi depended on their own plan to retaliate against Shechem, the nation of Israel began to depend upon her own ingenuity and alliances with other nations. The result? The Assyrians in 722 B.C., and the Babylonians in 586 would carry the people of Israel into captivity, thereby dispersing them throughout the globe.

Genesis 49:8
Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee.

After becoming a disappointing people and a dispersed people, there is good news for Israel as they become *a delivered people* as seen in Judah—

for from the tribe of Judah, their Deliverer, their Messiah would come. Here, with His enemies at His mercy, the Deliverer is seen as an invincible Leader.

Genesis 49:9
Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?

Here, the Deliverer is seen as an unstoppable lion.

Genesis 49:10
The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

Here, the Deliverer is seen as an unvanquished Lord.

According to historian Josephus, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah until Shiloh come" was the phrase that caused the rabbis to run through the streets of Jerusalem screaming in anguish in the year A.D. 12.

You see, it was in that year that the Romans—who were occupying the land of Israel—withdrew the ability of the Sanhedrin to mete out capital punishment. Having taught that the mark of a nation's sovereignty resided in its ability to execute capital punishment, when this power was taken from them, the Jews thought the scepter had indeed departed from Judah—that God had broken His promise to them. After all, Shiloh, Messiah, had not yet come.

Oh, but He had. For right in their midst sat Shiloh, Messiah, Jesus as a twelve-year-old boy, astounding the teachers and rabbis with His wisdom (Luke 2:46).

Genesis 49:11, 12
Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.

Finally, the Deliverer is seen as an uncontested landowner, as He purchases property with His own blood.

Genesis 49:13
Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon.

In Zebulun we see *an exiled people.* Forty years after Israel rejected Jesus, saying, "We will not have this man rule over us," the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, and burned the temple. The Jewish people were dispersed and scattered once again, and the name "Israel" was replaced by the name of her enemies: "Philistine"—or, "Palestine."

Genesis 49:14, 15
Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burdens: And he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute.

Issachar speaks of *an exploited people,* for although the Jews were exiled, they remained as stubborn and strong as a donkey. Although they were scattered into virtually every corner of the world, the Jews prospered to such a degree that they were persecuted, blamed, and exploited as seen in the pogroms of Russia and the concentration camps of Nazi Germany.

Genesis 49:16, 17
Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.

Dan speaks of *a poisoned people.* After they are exiled, a snake will come on the scene that will poison Israel. This is why to this day the rabbis believe a false Messiah will appear who will come from the tribe of Dan. As Christians, we call this snake the antichrist.

Genesis 49:18
I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD.

This heart-cry of Jacob speaks of the fact that, although ultimately antichrist will seek to destroy Israel, initially she will trust him and pin her hopes to him.

Genesis 49:19
Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last.

In Gad, we see *a persecuted people.* Because his hatred for Israel will be venomous, antichrist will lead a worldwide persecution against the Jews. Antichrist and the forces of Satan will mobilize the world in the Valley of Megiddo in order to destroy Jerusalem. But in the end, they shall be overcome themselves.

Genesis 49:20
Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.

Asher speaks of the fact that even though the Jews will be a poisoned people and a persecuted people, they will also be *a protected people* as they at last recognize their Redeemer, and God tucks them away in a place He has prepared for them in the wilderness—most likely the rock city of Petra—where they will be cared for royally.

Genesis 49:21
Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words.

Naphtali speaks of *a preaching people.* After antichrist appears, 144,000 evangelists—12,000 from each of the twelve tribes—will go throughout the world preaching the "goodly word" of the gospel. The greatest revival in all of history will take place during the Tribulation because it is the destiny of the Jewish people to be a preaching people.

Genesis 49:22
Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall:

Joseph, of course, speaks of Jesus.



***For topical study of Genesis 49:22 entitled "The Secret of a Satisfied Life," turn to page* 215.**

Genesis 49:23–26
The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the bless ings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.

Joseph speaks of the One who was rejected, separated from His brethren, the *Virtuous Ruler*— Jesus Christ.



***For topical study of Genesis 49:24 entitled "Don't Shoot Back," turn to page* 218.**

Genesis 49:27
Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.

Benjamin speaks of a *victorious remnant.* Throughout history, others have castigated and almost annihilated the Jews. But the story is not over yet, for Benjamin will ultimately be as strong as a ravenous wolf.

God is not through with the Jews, gang—not by a long shot. In Romans 8:38, 39, Paul, a Benjamite himself, says we know nothing will separate us from the love of God, and uses the Jewish people as proof, for even when they are fickle, God will continue to prove Himself faithful to them.

Genesis 49:28 (a)
All these are the twelve tribes of Israel:

Interestingly, this is the first time the phrase "the twelve tribes of Israel" is seen in the Bible.

Genesis 49:28 (b)–32
. . . and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them. And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a buryingplace. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah. The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth.

After giving a blessing to his sons, Jacob now gives an admonition to them as he says, "Make sure you bury me at Machpelah, where Abraham and Sarah are buried, where Isaac and Rebekah are buried, and where I buried Leah." This is interesting because for seventeen years, Jacob had been living in the splendor of Egypt. Father of the Prime Minister of the land, had he so desired, he could have ordered a huge monument to be built in his honor—a grand tomb in which he could have been placed like other nobles in Egypt. But that's not what he says. He says he wants to go back to Hebron, back to Machpelah, back to Leah.

For topical study of Genesis 49:31 entitled "Don't Jump Ship!" turn to page **222.**

Genesis 49:33
And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.

Jacob let go of his spirit, and was gathered unto his people. We will all be gathered unto our people. The only question is: Who are your people? Who are the people with whom you're most comfortable? They're the ones with whom you'll spend eternity.

Sometimes people say, "Hell won't be so bad. At least all my friends will be there." But nothing could be further from the truth. No one will be playing poker with his buddies and listening to country music in hell. No, hell is completely dark and totally hot. In hell, everyone is isolated.

Why would a loving God send anyone to a place like that?

He doesn't.

God being Light, he who doesn't want God in his life gets darkness. God being Love, he who doesn't want God in his life gets hate. God being a Father, he who doesn't want God in his life will be an orphan—alone for all eternity. God being the Wellspring of joy and Source of happiness, he who doesn't want God in his life will experience nothing but drought and depression. The person in hell isn't there because God wants to torture him. He's there because he doesn't want God in his life.

"Please reconsider," God says. "If you choose to kick Me, step on Me, and turn your back on Me, I will give you that option. But the only way I'll let you go is over My dead body. You'll have to walk over the body of My Son."

THE SECRET OF A SATISFIED LIFE

A Topical Study of GENESIS 49:22

What is the secret of a satisfied, successful life? Rabbis and ministers, gurus and philosophers throughout history have attempted to answer this question. The Bible, however, gives us the answer very succinctly, for in Revelation 4:11, we read this:

> *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*
>
> Revelation 4:11

That's the key. All things were created to please God—including you and me. That is why the first component of the Westminster Catechism states that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

If we exist to bring pleasure to God, the question then becomes, "How?"

"Herein is My Father glorified:" Jesus said directly, "That you bear much fruit" (John 15:8). Thus, when you bear fruit, you glorify the Father. And when you glorify the Father, you fulfill the very reason for your existence.

And that brings us to our text. At the end of his life, Jacob draws his attention—and ours—to his son, Joseph . . .

The Reality of His Fruitfulness

Joseph is a fruitful bough . . .

Genesis 49:22 (a)

The Bible defines fruit in five specific areas . . .

In Romans 1:13, Paul tells us that the winning of souls is fruit unto God. Did Joseph win souls? Indeed! He saved his whole family from famine and drought. So, when you share with your family, neighbors, or friends the Good News of the gospel, saving them from the drought in their own souls and from the fires of hell, you bear fruit that pleases God.

Romans 6:22 identifies holiness as fruit. Perhaps best epitomized by his flight from the advances of Potiphar's wife, Joseph lived a holy life. In fact, he is one of only two major Old Testament characters of whom there is no recorded sin.

Philippians 4:17 identifies tithes and offerings as fruit. Joseph gave more than money in Egypt. He gave his life.

Colossians 1:10 says good works are a fruit unto God. Did Joseph do good works? Yes. He saved an entire nation from starvation by storing up goods to distribute when there was need.

Hebrews 13:15 names praise as fruit. When Joseph came to Pharaoh with the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream, he directed all praise to God (Genesis 41:16).

These five areas, so evident in Joseph's life, are summed up in a sixth New Testament reference to fruit:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Galatians 5:22, 23

The fruit of the Spirit is love as defined by joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control. The fruit of the Spirit is love. That's why we give of our money. That's why we lift our hands in praise. That's why we share with others.

With all of these qualities flowing through his life, no wonder Jacob said to Joseph, "You are a fruitful bough."

"Good for Joseph," you might be saying. "But why should I be fruitful?" Turn to Mark 11 . . .

> *And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it. And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.*
>
> Mark 11:12–14, 20

Why should we be fruitful? Because if we don't satisfy Jesus, not only will we not satisfy anyone else, but we won't satisfy even ourselves. Jesus went out of His way to teach a powerful lesson in cursing the fig tree, saying, "Whatever doesn't satisfy Me will satisfy no one."

Listen, gang, if you are not living to please God, then your life will dry up from the roots, from below the surface, from deep within—and you will experience emptiness, frustration, depression, and a lack of satisfaction.

The Reason for His Fruitfulness

Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well . . .

Genesis 49:22 (a)

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Psalm 1:1–3

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away . . .

John 15:1, 2 (a)

The Greek word translated "taketh away" is *airo*— the same word John uses when he says "Jesus *lifted up* His eyes at the tomb of Lazarus" (John 11:41). *Airo* is always used in Scripture to mean "lift up." Therefore, in Jesus' analogy, the husbandman would *lift up* the branch which didn't bear fruit because the branches on the grape vine would sometimes grow heavy, fall to the ground, and get stuck in the mud. And that's just what Jesus does with us. When we're in the mud, He lifts us up.

. . . and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

John 15:2 (b), 3

The Greek word translated "purge" is *kathairo,* from which we get our word "catharsis." *Kathairo* means "to wash, to clean." Again, in the analogy, the vine-dresser would come by and wash the mud off the branch that had

fallen to the ground. To amplify this, Jesus says, "You are lifted up, washed off by the water of the Word." The key is the Word.

> *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.*
>
> John 15:7, 8

Like Joseph, whose roots went into the well, if the Word abides in you, you'll bring forth much fruit.

> If I went out to my backyard, cut off a limb from the apple tree and said, "Great news, kids: You no longer need to go outside to pick apples. Here's a branch we're going to keep right in the kitchen"—they would wonder about me!
>
> "You can't cut off a branch and have it bear fruit," they'd say. "It has to be connected to the tree."

It's as if Jesus says, "The sap of the Scriptures must flow from Me to you in order for there to be fruit in your life."

As I observe the apple tree bring forth apples, never once have I seen the branches connected to the trunk struggling to bear fruit. Not once. The branches just hang there. They abide, and the fruit is produced naturally. You might decide to be loving, to do good works or to praise the Lord in your own energy. And you might be able to fake it for an hour or two, for a day or three—but ultimately you'll come up empty. The only way to produce genuine fruit morning by morning and day by day is to hang in there, abide in Christ, and allow the Spirit to flow to you and through you. Fruit cannot be faked for very long. You've got to have the Word in your life.

The Results of His Fruitfulness

Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall . . .

Genesis 49:22 (a)

So fruitful was Joseph that even the next-door neighbors—all of Egypt—were able to glean from his life. When we are fruitful, not only are we fulfilled, but our fruit extends over our own boundaries and spills over to our neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family.

The key to satisfaction is so simple: Be a fruit-bearer. In so doing, your life will be prosperous without question. Let the Word abide in you. Have devotions every morning. Read the Word every evening. Get involved in Bible studies. Let the Word of God fill you up. Plant yourself by the well of the water of the Word.

God will be glorified.
Others will be edified.
And you will be satisfied.

DON'T SHOOT BACK

A Topical Study of GENESIS 49:24

Someone recently handed me this list entitled, "A Few Thoughts to Ponder. . . ."

- Do vegetarians eat animal crackers?
- Why isn't phonetic spelled the way it sounds?
- On a flight from Portland to Chicago, why are there flotation devices under the seats instead of parachutes?
- Why are cigarettes sold at gas stations when smoking is prohibited there?
- How does the guy who drives the snowplow get to work?
- If nothing sticks to Teflon, how does Teflon stick to the pan?
- If you are driving at the speed of light and turn on your headlights, what happens?
- Why are Braille dots on the keypad of the drive-up ATM?
- Why don't sheep shrink in the rain?
- What does Geronimo scream when he jumps out of a plane?
- If con is the opposite of pro, is congress the opposite of progress?
- Why are there interstate highways in Hawaii?

I have one more thought to add to the list . . .

How does one measure the strength of a man?

I'm convinced the strength of a man can be measured by what he doesn't do with the power he possesses. In our text, we see this principle clearly portrayed.

Joseph was a successful man, a strong man, a spiritual man. He was, really, a super man. A man of whom there is no recorded sin, Joseph was one who walked closely to the Lord, and had total confidence in the Lord. But in

our text, we also note that being one with a big calling and a big future made Joseph a big target—for the archers were out to get him.

To me, archery is a coward's way of attacking a person. Archers hide behind a bush and wait. Then, when their victim is a few hundred feet away, they fire from a safe distance. Throughout his life, there was no shortage of such archers who took potshots at Joseph . . .

- He was shot at by his brothers because they were envious.
- He was shot at by Potiphar's wife because he was righteous.
- He was shot at by the butler who was thankless.

Joseph's brothers fired the arrow of envy; Potiphar's wife, the arrow of fury, and the butler, the arrow of apathy. Wherever Joseph went, there would be those who would view him as a target and let their arrows fly.

But what did Joseph do when he was shot at?

When he came into power, he could have nailed them all. He could have pinned his brothers to the wall, put Mrs. Potiphar in her place, and done in the butler. He had the power, the opportunity, the legal right. But he didn't fire back. He didn't defend himself. His bow abode in strength. His bow remained silent.

Why didn't Joseph fire back?

According to our text, Joseph's God kept him from grabbing his bow and letting the arrows fly. Joseph's God kept Joseph's hand in His.

> It was 1968, the "Summer of Love," and our family, along with the Jones family, decided to check out the scene at Haight Ashbury. While there, we discovered that San Francisco wasn't all flowers and peace. There was also lots of violence and danger, long since forgotten these days. As we walked down the street, one of the hippies looked at Anita Jones and made a lewd remark to her. Her brother, my buddy Bill—who was eighteen years old and a tackle on his high school football team—hearing the remark to his sister, immediately clenched his fist and was ready to let it fly right in the guy's face. At that moment, my dad grabbed Bill's fist mid-air and stopped it instantly. The big tackle was stopped mid-punch by a

banker. I saw Bill a few months ago—and to this day, he says, "Your dad was one strong guy!"

So it was with God the Father who prevented Joseph from letting his arrows fly. And that's the key. You see, I can't control the tendency to want to defend myself, to retaliate, to get revenge. When I hear or see things I feel are unfair or untrue, everything within me says, "Fire back. Clear the record. Straighten it out."

Thus, the only way to refrain from this tendency is to say, "Father, I want to stand up for my reputation, my right, my point of view. Restrain me, Lord."

Why shouldn't you clear the air and fire back for what you think is right?

Because those who find fault with you, those who come against you, those who shoot at you from a distance are ultimately instruments of God for your growth and for your good. You see, it was his brothers, Potiphar's wife, and the butler who were used by the Lord to create in Joseph character, strength, and a depth he would not have had if he hadn't been shot at, or if he had fired back.

I'm reminded of another man who was shot at unfairly. His name was David . . .

Jealous of him, Saul grabbed a javelin and threw it at David while David played his harp. David ducked, and the spear lodged in the wall. Young, strong, and athletic, David could have easily grabbed the spear and thrown it right back at Saul. And the people of Israel most likely would have applauded him. But he didn't. Instead, David simply returned the next day and played for Saul once again.

A second time, anger boiling within Saul caused him to throw the spear. David ducked again, and didn't fire back. After this happened a third time, David got the point and left. Later, accompanied by 3,000 soldiers, Saul chased him all the way to the caves of En Gedi.

When David happened upon Saul asleep in one of the caves, his men said, "This is your chance, David! God has delivered Saul into your hand. Chop off his head!" And David did indeed unsheath his sword—but only to cut off a small piece of Saul's robe.

When Saul later awoke, David waved the piece of material, and called to him, saying, "Although I had the chance to lop off your head, I didn't."

But Scripture records that David's heart "smote him." "I shouldn't have done even that," he said. "I shouldn't have touched the Lord's anointed" (1 Samuel 24:5, 10).

David knew something—namely that Saul was the anointed instrument in God's hand to make him into the man God wanted him to be. No wonder David went on to greatness. No wonder David became the sweet psalmist of Israel. No wonder he was a man after God's own heart.

Years later, after his son launched an insurrection against him, we see David again running for his life. As he does, a little pipsqueak of a man throws stones at him, calling him a bloody man because of what David had done to Uriah the Hittite.

"Why should this dead dog curse you?" asked David's general. "Let me chop off his head."

"Leave him alone," David said. "God has allowed him to say these things to do a work in me. Let it be" (2 Samuel 16).

If, like David, you go to work on Monday and when you're put down, misunderstood, or wrongly accused, you say, "God has allowed this to make me humble before Him and totally dependent upon Him,"—like David, you will grow immensely in your understanding of Him.

Unfortunately, there's no way to be humble without being humiliated. I wish there was. I wish I could go to a humble seminar, or take a humble pill. But humility and humiliation go hand in hand. David knew this, and that's why "his bow abode in strength." Don't fire back, gang. Don't defend yourself, for once you do, that's all you'll ever do. Straightening the record, ironing out the falsehoods will become your full-time job.

"Stand still," said the prophet, "and see the salvation of the Lord . . ."

The Amonites and Moabites were attacking the people of Judah.

"You're surrounded by your enemies," God said. "Here's what you're to do: Don't send the soldiers; don't send the chariots; don't send your defenders into battle. Send the choir."

> Jehoshaphat did just that. And so confused were his enemies by seeing a choir instead of an army and hearing praise to the Lord instead of a battle cry that they unsheathed their swords and attacked each other—leaving nothing more for Jehoshaphat and his boys to do but pick up the spoils (2 Chronicles 20).

The secret of strength is to refrain from using the power you have, to keep from trying to outmaneuver your enemy intellectually or retaliating physically, to let the Lord fight for you and do a work within you.

Will you be a more satisfied person if you don't fire back?

Yep.

Will God stand up for you if you don't become your own defense attorney?

Yep.

Will you see good things happen in your character if you let the Shimeis in your life throw stones?

Yep.

How, then, do we do this?

By doing what Jesus did. They shot at Him not just with an ordinary bow, but with a Cross-bow. Jesus was able to go to the Cross and absorb the arrows shot in His direction because the night before He had prayed, "Father, not My will, but Thine be done." And because Jesus had talked to the Father, He was able to say of His enemies, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

If I want to be like Joseph, like David, like Jesus, I first must talk to the Father and surrender to Him my tendency to want to fire back at those who fire at me. After I talk to the Father, I then need to pray for my enemy. If I talk to my Father, and pray for my persecutor, then, like Jesus, like David, like Joseph, I, too, will be "made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob."

DON'T JUMP SHIP!

A Topical Study of GENESIS 49:31

He was young, single, footloose—and looking for a wife. Arriving in Padanaram, he found a group of shepherds milling around a well. Industrious by nature, Jacob couldn't understand this—until he saw a beautiful shepherdess approaching, bringing her flock with her. Immediately, Jacob flexed his muscles, single-handedly removed the stone that covered the well, and gallantly said, "Come and water your flock." She did; he kissed her; and then he cried aloud, for she had smitten his heart.

When Jacob discovered this beautiful maiden was the daughter of his uncle, he went to her father and said, "I want to marry your daughter."

"Okay," said Laban. "Work for me for seven years, and I'll give her to you."

Jacob agreed, and the Bible says it seemed to him but a few days because of the great love he had for her.

The big night finally came. Jacob took his beloved bride—veiled from head to toe according to Jewish tradition—to his tent where they consummated the marriage. The next morning, when Jacob opened his eyes, he couldn't believe what he saw. It wasn't Rachel he had married—it was her older sister, Leah. Jacob stormed out of the tent, found Laban and said, "You tricked me!"

"I'm sorry, Jacob," his uncle said, "but we have a custom that the older daughter must marry before the younger daughter. But I'll tell you what I'll do. Work seven more years, and you can marry Rachel."

Now, if anyone ever had a right to say, "I got tricked—I want out," it was Jacob. "Listen, Leah," he could have said, "I realize we went through the ceremony, but I didn't know who you were. I'm in love with Rachel. So I'm out of here."

But that's not what Jacob did. He agreed to Laban's proposal, and thus ended up with both Leah and Rachel as his wives.

Time passed. Between Leah, Rachel, and their handmaidens, Jacob fathered twelve sons, who became, of course, the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Giving birth to the youngest, Rachel died, and Jacob buried this one about whom he was so passionate in Canaan. Years later, Leah died, and Jacob buried her in the Promised Land, in a place called Machpelah.

In our text, Jacob gathers his twelve sons around him, and, after blessing each one, he says, "I am going the way of my fathers. When I die, bury me in —" Now, I would have thought he would have said, "Canaan. Bury me by the love of my life. Bury me by Rachel."

But that's not what he said.

He said, "Bury me at Machpelah—by Leah."

Why did he say that? I suggest it was because, at the end of his life, Jacob realized that what he thought was a trick, a gyp, unfair, was in reality the biggest blessing in his life because from Leah—not Rachel—came Judah. And from Judah came the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Wife, you might look at the man next to you and say, "I was tricked. He's not the man I thought he would be." Husband, you might look at the woman you married, and say, "She's not the passion of my life. I didn't know she would turn out this way." But if you jump ship, know this—if you bail out, understand this: You will miss the blessing of the birthing of Jesus in a supernatural, incredible, wonderful way because there are no tricks in the life of a child of God.

Employee, you might look at your boss and say, "When I signed that contract, I didn't know he would be such a jerk. I don't care what I signed. I'm going to find a legal loophole. I'm jumping ship." But when you initially put pen to paper and signed your name, your Father was there. And to the child of God, there are no tricks.

Teenager, you might look at your parents and say, "I was tricked. I must have been switched at birth. God couldn't have chosen *these* people to raise me." But know this: You are not only their child—you are a child of the King. He, in wisdom, handpicked them for you, and God makes no mistakes.

I think of our brother Paul . . .

After jumping through legal hoops in Caesarea, he was finally sailing towards Rome to plead his case before Caesar. En route, a storm arose which threatened the lives of the two hundred and seventy-five soldiers,

sailors, and fellow-prisoners on board with him. After the crew readied a lifeboat in order that they alone might escape the inevitable crashing of the ship against the rocks, Paul, the little rabbi who was a tentmaker by trade and a prisoner by decree, said, "Except ye abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 27:31).

"If you jump ship, you'll lose your life," Paul said. And the centurion on board—knowing how tempting it would be for the sailors to bail out, to jump ship, to give up—ordered the soldiers to cut the lines so there would be no possibility of escape.

There are times—maybe you're in one right now—when the wind howls, the waves rise, and you find yourself thinking,

"I can't take this marriage one more day."
"I can't take this job one more hour."
"I can't take my parents one more minute."

Or maybe you're saying, "haven't jumped ship yet. I've only lowered a lifeboat over the side. I'll give it three more weeks, or two more months, or one more year." The problem with that is, if you keep an escape option open in your mind, I guarantee you will end up using it. Think about divorce, and you'll jump ship. Think about changing jobs, and you'll bail out. Think about leaving home, and you'll never see His reality.

Get rid of the lifeboats.

Cut the lines.

"It's easy for you to pontificate," you say. "But you don't know the storm I'm in. You don't know how vehemently the wind is blowing, how violently the waves are pounding. You just don't understand."

You're right. I don't.

But there is One who does . . .

In 1902, a fire broke out which flared up rapidly in the home of an elderly woman. Asleep in the upstairs bedroom was her grandson, who she tried to rescue before she died in the process. Someone outside heard the screams of the five-year-old boy, however, and

found a way to climb hand-over-hand up a drainpipe until he made it to the roof, broke through a window, and pulled the boy to safety.

This story, which appeared in the *St. Louis Globe Herald,* generated quite a bit of interest in the orphaned boy. During the hearings that followed, a schoolteacher came forward and gave reasons why he felt he should be appointed the boy's guardian. So did a wealthy businessman, a minister, and several other upstanding people of the community. The boy, however, looked down and never raised his eyes—until a man came through the back door of the courtroom, walked up to him, and opened his hands. With one look at the badly blistered hands of the stranger, the boy jumped into his arms, saying, "This will be my dad."

I'm asking you to look at the hands of the One who loves you so much that He absorbed the heat of hell to pull you out of eternal destruction. I'm asking you to listen to this One who says, "Trust Me. Don't jump ship, or all will be lost."

Precious people, Jesus will come in a way that will blow your mind if you don't jump ship. Ignore what the sailors of society are saying about breaking commitments, bailing out, giving up. Cut the ropes. Let the lifeboats crash in the sea below. Stay on board, and, like Jacob, you'll look back and see that the blessing was in Leah all along.

50 Genesis 50:1–3

And Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him. And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father: and the physicians embalmed Israel. And forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed: and the Egyptians mourned for him threescore and ten days.

As Prime Minister of Egypt, Joseph orders the Egyptian physicians to embalm his father—a very sophisticated process that took forty days, and which to this day we don't fully understand.

Genesis 50:4–6
And when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spake unto the house of Pharaoh, saying, If now I have found grace in your eyes, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, My father made me swear, saying, Lo, I die: in my grave which I have digged for me in the land of Canaan, there shalt thou bury me. Now therefore let me go up, I pray thee, and bury my father, and I will come again. And Pharaoh said, Go up, and bury thy father, according as he made thee swear.

Joseph expresses his desire to fulfill the request of his father to be buried in Hebron—a request Pharaoh grants.

Genesis 50:7–9
And Joseph went up to bury his father: and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, And all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father's house: only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen. And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen: and it was a very great company.

Consisting of Egyptian dignitaries, chariots, horsemen, and soldiers, along with Jacob's family members, it was a great host which made its way to Canaan.

Genesis 50:10, 11
And they came to the threshingfloor of Atad, which is beyond Jordan, and there they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation: and he made a mourning for his father seven days. And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said, This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians: wherefore the name of it was called Abel-mizraim, which is beyond Jordan.

Observing the week-long funeral given to Jacob, the Canaanites must have thought an important official was being buried in their midst. And in the eyes of the world, Jacob was indeed an important figure. But his importance in their eyes was all predicated upon his relationship to his son, Joseph.

Because Joseph is a picture of Jesus, the same is true of you and me. We are defined solely by our relationship with Him. Thus, whatever happens in our lives presently, and at the end of our lives ultimately will be based not on what we have or haven't done—but on our linkage to God's Son.

Genesis 50:12–15
And his sons did unto him according as he commanded them: For his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a buryingplace of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre. And Joseph returned into Egypt, he, and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father. And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him.

Oh, no! thought Joseph's brothers. *Now that Dad's dead, Joseph will get back at us for throwing him in the pit, for selling him into slavery.*

Genesis 50:16, 17 (a)
And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father . . .

"Before he died, Dad said you'd forgive us if we asked you to," Joseph's brothers said hopefully.

Genesis 50:17 (b)
And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.

Joseph cries. The word translated "wept" isn't the word for sobbing. It's the word for quiet weeping. Tears just rolled down his cheeks. His brothers didn't get it. They thought he was holding a grudge against them. They thought he was simply waiting for the right time to pounce on them. They thought he was angry with them, bitter towards them.

The same way, we often think of our Lord Jesus as keeping a record of our previous failures; that He must be getting tired of us, exhausted by us. But we are told that, like Joseph, Jesus wept . . .

> *"If you had only been here, our brother would not have died," cried Martha and Mary. "We told You he was sick. We sent You word—but You didn't come. And now he's dead." And Jesus wept. He knew what He would do. He knew He would bring Lazarus back to life. So it wasn't for Lazarus He wept. It was for the unbelief of Martha and Mary (John 11).*

Jesus wept a second time when He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I would gather you under My wing and nestle You close to My heart, but you wouldn't let Me" (Matthew 23:37).

If you're thinking, *I've botched it so many times that the Lord must be just about ready to throw in the towel with me*—you don't understand the heart of our Lord. It was for the man most in need, upon the man who couldn't handle things all that well, towards the man with the paralyzed hand that Jesus had compassion (Mark 3). So, if you are struggling tonight, barely able to hold things together—you are the very one for whom Jesus has the most compassion. The person who's not reaching out, not doing well, unable to handle life is the one for whom Jesus has special affection and on whom He has a laser-like focus.

Each of us has come limping into this place in one way or another. Each of us is struggling with something or another. Thus, Jesus would say to all of us, "No matter how withered it might be, stretch out your hand. Grab hold of Me. Receive from Me that which I long to give you."

No matter what pit you've dug, or what brother you've sold, our Greater than Joseph has washed away your sin with His own blood. Therefore, there is now no condemnation to you who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

What can separate you from God's love?
Absolutely nothing (Romans 8:35–39).

Genesis 50:18, 19
And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants. And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?

"I am not God," Joseph declared. What a wonderful day it is when we realize we don't have to judge people because we're not God.

What a great day it was for me when the Lord spoke to me early in my ministry, saying, "Jon, you love them and let Me judge them"—for prior to that time, I had it reversed!

At best, we only see through a glass darkly. That's why our judgments are so often wrong . . .

With spit running down his beard and his nails clawing the gates of a Philistine city, I would have written him off.

"What are you doing, David?" I would have said. "You killed Goliath, and now you're hanging out in his city? You're crazy!" (1 Samuel 21:13)

But when we read the rest of the story, we realize that, although everyone else would have written him off, at that very time, David was composing some of the most potent psalms ever penned.

Man looks on the outward appearance. Only God sees the heart. And Joseph knew this.

Genesis 50:20
But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

"I know you meant evil when you threw me in the pit and sold me into slavery," Joseph said, "but it was all part of God's plan to get me to Egypt to save your lives."

Don't you love Joseph? Don't you desire a heart like his that says, "Whatever happens today, God is at work"?

Our Greater than Joseph would say, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing" (Luke 23:34).

Joseph says, "You meant it for evil, but God had a plan."

Genesis 50:21–23

Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them. And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father's house: and Joseph lived an hundred and ten years. And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation: the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were brought up upon Joseph's knees.

No longer Prime Minister, Joseph brought up his grandchildren on his knees in two ways: He bounced them on his knees, telling them stories of God's work. And he prayed for them on his knees that they would follow God all of their days.

If you are a grandparent, you have an opportunity for ministry like at no other time in your life. Be like Joseph. Scoop up your grandchildren physically and talk to them about God while bouncing them on your knee. And scoop them up spiritually as you pray for them continually.

Genesis 50:24, 25

And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.

All other Egyptian leaders built monuments and pyramids. Joseph had none of that. His one request was that his bones be carried back to the Promised Land. Hundreds of years passed, but finally the day came when Moses lead the Israelites out of Egypt. And as he did, he took the bones of Joseph with him (Exodus 13). The Egyptians must have wondered why. But Moses and the children of Israel knew they were a reminder of the promise

that they would indeed return to the land which the Lord "sware to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," that the Lord would indeed bring them home.

Genesis 50:26
So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Thus ends Genesis. The book that began with creation ends with a coffin. The book that began in glory, ends in a grave. The book that began with the living God, ends with a dead man. The book that began with the brightness of heaven, ends with bones in Egypt.

Why?

It's the Holy Spirit's commentary on the condition of man,
the repercussions of sin,
the need for a Savior.

Joseph is the most Christ-like man in the Bible, and yet we see him in a coffin. Although Satan said otherwise, God had said, "In the day you eat of the forbidden fruit, thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Joseph was a very good man, but the fact is that *all* have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and that the wages of sin is death (Romans 3:23, 6:23).

Is there any way out? Is there any hope? Is there any plan?

Yes! We'll see God's redemptive plan unfold in Exodus. We'll not stay in a coffin in Egypt indefinitely, gang. We're going to heaven. We're on our way Home!



EXODUS

Background to Exodus

The theme of Genesis, the Book of Beginnings, is Creation. But because the apex of God's creation—man—sinned, and although it begins on a high note wherein we read of God declaring everything He created to be good (1:31), the last verse of Genesis ends on a low and tragic note. The book that begins with creation, ends with a coffin (50:26).

But that's not the end of the story, for in the book before us, God sees the condition of man and begins to work in a way that is heart-warming and mind-blowing. The Book of Exodus is the Book of Redemption, wherein we see God's heart is for us and that He has a plan to set us free. Exodus is a picture book of God's redemptive character, of His desire to set at liberty those who were enslaved by sin and stuck in a coffin in Egypt.

Between Genesis 50 and Exodus 1 is a time gap of approximately four hundred years—a time gap during which something quite amazing happens . . .



EXODUS

1

Exodus 1:1–7

Now these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt; every man and his household came with Jacob. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, Dan, and Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls: for Joseph was in Egypt already. And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.

How fruitful were the children of Israel? The seventy souls who originally entered the land of Egypt in Genesis 50 numbered approximately three million in Exodus 1, four hundred years later.

Why were the children of Israel in Egypt?

Two reasons . . .

First, God planted His people in Egypt in order to prepare them for the Land of Promise. Safe and warm, Egypt was an "incubator" for Jacob's growing family.

Secondly, and equally important, God planted His people in Egypt to prepare the Promised Land for them. In Genesis 15, God told Abraham that, although his offspring would eventually number as many as the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on the seashore, they would also spend four generations —or four hundred years—in Egypt until the iniquity of the Amorites was full, until the sin of the Canaanites had risen to the place where He had no other option but to judge them. The sins of the Canaanites were horrific. They were a people who sacrificed their children and tortured each other. Yet in His incredible kindness and mercy, God gave them four hundred years to repent and turn from their sin. But they wouldn't. So, like a rabid dog, they had to be exterminated not only in order that others wouldn't be infected by their debauchery, but also that they might be put out of their own misery.

I camp on this point because the tendency for people who don't know this is to think God is cruel when they read His commands in the Book of Joshua to

wipe out the Canaanites. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. God is exceedingly kind, unspeakably patient. For four hundred years, He waited for the Canaanites to turn from their sin, to turn to Him. And now He's ready to see His people take over their land.

Exodus 1:8–11
Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses.

Seti I, the new king who arose up over Egypt, knew he had a problem: The Hittites to the north threatened his empire. Although in and of themselves they may not have posed a serious threat, Seti understood that were the Israelites living in his land to join forces with them, he would have a huge problem militarily. His solution was to enslave the Israelites, hoping that their enslavement would reduce their population.

Exodus 1:12 (a)
But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew . . .

The historical reason for this affliction was the possibility of a Hittite invasion. But the spiritual reason behind it is the same reason Haman sought to destroy the Jews in the Book of Esther, why Herod sought to destroy them at the time of Jesus' birth, and why Hitler sought to do so in recent history. That is, Satan has always sought to destroy the Jews.

Why?

Because knowing that Messiah would come from the nation of Israel, Satan mistakenly believed that if he could destroy the Jews, he could thwart God's plan of redemption. Even after failing to prevent Jesus' First Coming,

Satan continues to try to prevent Him from coming a second time to rule and reign from Jerusalem. Satan hates the Jewish people. There is no other explanation for history's continuing undercurrent of anti-Semitism.

In addition to a historical and spiritual reason for the affliction of God's people, there's also a practical reason. And it is for this reason that I have this verse underlined in my Bible. God allows His people to be afflicted because He knows the same thing Coach Dominguez knew. Coach Dominguez told us guards and tackles and centers on the Del Mar High School football team that the only way to increase our strength was to break down our muscles. And he was right. The foundational premise of weight training is that hard exercise allows a muscle to break down, eventually repairing itself stronger than it was before.

The same thing holds true spiritually. Because faith is a muscle that needs to be worked, if I am to grow in depth, in strength, in maturity, there's no other way than to go through testing, trial, and affliction. Therefore, when I feel like I'm breaking down, falling apart, caving in, if I listen, I'll hear the voice of the Ultimate Coach, Jesus, saying, "Trust Me. I know what I'm doing. These hard times are necessary to build your strength, to give you victory."

Exodus 1:12 (b)–14
. . . And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in morter, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour.

In other words, the Egyptians cracked the whip on the Israelites.

Exodus 1:15, 16
And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah: And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live.

Any male babies were to be executed immediately.

Exodus 1:17
But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive.

Because those in positions of authority are placed there by God, we are told to obey them (Romans 13:1–5). Shiphrah and Puah, however, refused to obey the command of the king because they feared God. Their example tells me that I'm to obey those in authority over me governmentally, spiritually, in my family—unless I'm told to violate what God has decreed I should do.

After beating Peter and John, the temple soldiers prohibited them from speaking in the name of Jesus. But because Jesus had told them to go into the world and preach the gospel, they said they were to obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29).

The injunction for us is clear. Yes, we are to submit to those in authority over us, realizing it is God who placed them in their position. But when their commands clearly violate the Word of God, like Peter and John, we are to obey God rather than man.

Exodus 1:18, 19
And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive? And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them.

"By the time we show up, the babies are already born," said Puah and Shiphrah.

Exodus 1:20, 21
Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses.

Midwives were midwives because they were barren. But God blessed these midwives and gave them children of their own.

"Wait a minute," you protest. "Hadn't these women lied?"

Yes, but God blessed them anyway. It isn't that God approves of lying. Rather than focusing on the fault of these women, however, He sees that they feared Him, that they disobeyed Pharaoh and risked their own lives to do what was right in His sight.

God the Father has a way—not only with Shiphrah and Puah, but with you and me—of finding what is good, and celebrating that. Aren't you glad that God doesn't focus on our failings and shortcomings, but rather has a way of looking at us and approving the things which are excellent—just as Paul tells us we all should do (Philippians 1:10)? This doesn't mean God doesn't convict us of sin and call us to repent and change direction. But it does mean that our God is exceedingly kind. We might judge these women for lying. God, however, declares, "They did something good in My sight and I'm going to honor them."

Exodus 1:22
And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.

While we do not know the number of people who obeyed Pharaoh's command, in chapter 2, we'll see one woman who didn't.

2

Exodus 2:1–3
And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink.

Jochabed, Moses' mother, was a woman of vision, for she saw that her son was "a goodly child." Not only was she a woman of vision, but she was a woman of the Word—for what else would explain her decision to place her son in the very river in which all other male babies his age were being drowned? My tendency would be to stay as far from the river as possible. But

not Jochabed. Why? I suggest it was because she knew the story of another "goodly" man who was saved in a time of destruction and judgment. I suggest it was because she knew the story of Noah. You see, the Hebrew word translated "ark" in verse 3 is used only one other place in all of Scripture: in reference to Noah. Thus, I believe it was not mere coincidence that prodded Jochabed to fashion an ark and to line it with pitch, just as Noah had done (Genesis 6:14).

How I encourage you who are parents to follow the pattern of Jochabed. Ask God to give you a vision for your child. Even if others think he is ordinary or not all that special, in God's sight that child of yours has a wonderful, huge, important, unique calling. Ask God to show a portion of it to you. Secondly, immerse yourself in the Word. Believe in it, act on it in faith, and don't be surprised if, in so doing, like Jochabed, you raise a hero of the faith.

Exodus 2:4, 5 (a)
And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river . . .

Josephus tells us Pharaoh's daughter, Thermutus, was his only child.

Exodus 2:5 (b), 6
. . . and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.

As Thermutus sees the baby crying, her heart goes out in compassion towards him.

Exodus 2:7–9
Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid

went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it.

Isn't this a great story? I mean, here Jochabed is, nursing her own baby, and getting paid to do it. Not a bad deal! Does it pay to believe the Bible? Does it pay to have vision? Ask Jochabed!

Exodus 2:10
And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

Moses means "drawn out" or "drew."

Exodus 2:11 (a)
And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens . . .

Approximately forty years of age at this point, and most likely next in line to assume the throne of Egypt, Moses looked out on the burdens of his brethren, the Jewish people.

Exodus 2:11 (b)–14
. . . and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known.

At the prime of his life, Moses wanted to do something to help God. So, seeing an Egyptian beating one of his Hebrew brothers, he killed the Egyptian.

But it backfired. Why? Because, although Moses wanted to be involved in service, and although he "looked this way and that way," he didn't look up to hear what God had to say.

Moses made a mistake I often make. That is, he ministered according to need rather than according to obedience. What's the Lord telling you to do? It's not a matter of looking this way and that way. It's a matter of looking up. On any given day, in any given situation, it's a matter of saying, "Lord what would *You* have me do?"

Exodus 2:15
Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well.

Because it was a capital offense for an Egyptian to kill another Egyptian, Pharaoh knew his empire would expect him to deal decisively with Moses' offense. Knowing this as well, Moses fled.

Exodus 2:16–20
Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters: and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. And the shepherds came and drove them away: but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. And when they came to Reuel their father, he said, How is it that ye are come so soon to day? And they said, An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and also drew water enough for us, and watered the flock. And he said unto his daughters, And where is he? why is it that ye have left the man? call him, that he may eat bread.

Perhaps it was as a somewhat weary father that Reuel, (later called Jethro), said, "Ladies, this is your golden opportunity! I've had you seven girls for years—and now a man shows up? Grab him!"

Exodus 2:21 (a)
And Moses was content to dwell with the man . . .

In Acts we read that not only was Moses "mighty in works"—which means he was a military hero—but that he was "full of the wisdom of Egypt." In other words, he was schooled in philosophy and astronomy, in science and history, in language and botany. And yet here he is in a desert with one man and his seven daughters. From Genesis 46:34, we know that in the eyes of the Egyptian, shepherds were an abomination. Therefore, the man who had been most respected was now utterly rejected.

And yet he was content.

According to Paul, contentment is precisely what you and I are to study (Philippians 4:11). "Learn to be content," he tells us, understanding that if we're not content where we are today, we'll not be content wherever we plan on going tomorrow.

If asked whether we're content right here, right now, most of us would answer, "Not yet—but I'm going to be tomorrow, next month, real soon, around the corner, coming up. Any day now, things will be perfect." Moses, however, wouldn't have answered this way, for he had learned the hugely important lesson of contentment.

Exodus 2:21 (b), 22
. . . and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter. And she bare him a son, and he called his name Gershom: for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land.

"I know I'm supposed to learn to be content," people say. "But how?"

I believe verse 21 tells us how: Be a Gershom. You see, *Gershom* means "stranger." Therefore, in naming his son Gershom, Moses, in essence, said, "I'm just passing through. This world is not my home."

Contentment is not hard to learn if you realize what you really long for is heaven. Once I understand that I'm just a stranger here, that I won't ever fit in, that I'm just passing through, I enjoy life because I'm not expecting the job, the car, the house, the relationship, or the bank account to do what those things can never do. If I am truly Gershom, I'll take a whole lot more things a whole lot less seriously, and, as a result, my life will be characterized by relaxation and joy.

Exodus 2:23–25

And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.

When the children of Israel finally reached the point of crying to the Lord, as we'll see in chapter 3, things started happening; things started cooking; things started igniting—literally!



3 Exodus 3:1 (a)

Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert . . .

It seems God often plants His people in the desert before He uses them . . .

Elijah was a man of the desert.

John the Baptist grew up in the desert regions of the Dead Sea in southern Israel.

Paul spent three years following his conversion in the deserts of Arabia.

John the Revelator was banished to the desert isle of Patmos.

Like you, I have gone through desert times, dry seasons when I have wondered, "Lord, where's Your presence and where's Your power?" But, as the years have gone by, I have come to understand that those desert times are imperative if I am to be one who is not dependant upon my feelings or my emotions. Desert seasons are essential for me to come to a place where I can say, "Lord, You promised You would be with me. You promised You would never leave me no matter how dry the times might be or how solitary the setting might seem. The fact of the matter is, Your Word has been given and You're teaching me to stand upon it rather than sinking in my own emotions."

Over the years, I have seen lots of talented people in all sorts of ministries fall away because their emotions, rather than the Word, dictated their walk. Emotions go up and down. Emotions are fickle. Emotions are affected by how

our job is going, how our family is doing, how much pizza we had the previous evening. But because God wants us to be stable and solid, to walk by faith and not by feelings, He will put us into a desert place where we, like Moses, must learn to be content and say, "Lord, You've given me the promise of Your Word. And that is all I need."

Exodus 3:1 (b)
. . . and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb.

Once a most respected man, now a most rejected man, Moses had logged time in the desert. And the work has taken root. Now God is about to move and make Himself known to him in a most amazing way . . .

Exodus 3:2 (a)
And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush . . .

I love the fact that when the Lord wanted to speak to Moses, He didn't use a strong oak tree, a stately pine tree, or a fragrant cedar tree—but a garden variety bush, just like me . . .



***For topical study of Exodus 3:2 entitled "Burning Bushes," turn to page* 235.**

Exodus 3:2 (b), 3
. . . and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

Would Moses have turned aside to study this situation—this interesting phenomenon of a bush burning but not being consumed—if he was in the city, if he was engaged in lots of activity, if he was in the palace of Pharaoh as he was forty years previously? I don't think so.

And now I see that the Lord places me in desert regions because it's only then that I have eyes to see and ears to hear that which He desires to tell me. When things are humming, active, and hectic, I believe I miss many of the key indicators God sends my way. So if you're in a desert place, a desert job, a desert marriage—rejoice, for it will give you opportunity to see the Lord in ways, to sense the Lord in ways that, if you were more active, more engaged, even more fulfilled you would miss.

Exodus 3:4
And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.

"Why don't I hear from the Lord more?" we wonder. It could be because we're buzzing around with too much activity. It could be because things are going too smoothly. It could be that the Lord wants us to log in some desert times quite regularly—times when things seem lonely and dry. It was only when Moses turned to see the burning bush that God called his name. So, there's a bush burning in your desert, dear saint. And when the Lord sees that you're not on automatic pilot, that you're not running here, there, and everywhere, but that you've quieted yourself and you're in a place where you're curious about what He might say to you, He'll call your name as well.

Exodus 3:5
And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

"You are in a special spot, Moses," God said. "You're in My presence."

Exodus 3:6 (a)
Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob . . .

Even in identifying Himself as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the trinity is seen.

Exodus 3:6 (b)
. . . And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

In God's presence, Moses is acutely aware of his inadequacies, his fleshly tendencies, his unworthiness. Centuries later, Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5), and Peter (Luke 5:8) would be two others who would come to the same conclusion.

Exodus 3:7–10
And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

So eager was Moses to be used forty years earlier that he went out in his own strength and killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating one of his Jewish brothers. Now, however, as he has matured and grown in the desert region, in the days of dryness and boredom, humility has replaced impetuosity in the life of Moses.

Exodus 3:11
And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

"Who am I?" asked Moses. Forty years earlier, he would have said, "Here am I," or, "I'm your guy." But no longer. The self-confidence is gone. And in its place is a brokenness, a depth, a richness. Interesting. The most qualified men and women are often those who are the most reluctant to take the

challenge, to respond to the call because they're aware of their own unworthiness and frailty.

Exodus 3:12
And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.

"You're going to see, Moses, that I certainly am with you," said God, "for the time will come when you and the entire congregation will worship Me at this very site." And indeed they would, for Mt. Horeb is also known as Mt. Sinai.

Exodus 3:13, 14
And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

Like "Mr. President" or "Your Highness," "God" is a title. Moses, here, is asking for more then God's title. He's asking for His Name, His Nature. Interestingly, the children of Israel never asked Moses what God's name was. God knew they wouldn't. And yet, honoring Moses' desire to know Him more intimately, He answered his request . . .

***For topical study of Exodus 3:13 entitled "I AM . . . Whatever You Need," turn to page* 238.**

Exodus 3:15, 16
And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me

unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations. Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, the LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt:

"Surely I have visited you," God says. "I'm aware of what you're going through," He declares. "I know the cracking of the whips on your back, the unreasonable demands placed upon your shoulders. I have surely visited you."

God visited us in the Person of Jesus Christ. He continues to visit us—to chat with us, to comfort us, to cheer us, to give direction to us. There is no need for us to feel uncared for, untended, disenfranchised, forgotten, for God is the great Visitor.

Exodus 3:17, 18 (a)
And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. And they shall hearken to thy voice . . .

"When you communicate to My people that I have visited them, that I know their situation and have come to set them free, they'll listen to your voice," God promised Moses.

Exodus 3:18 (b)
. . . and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The LORD God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.

Was it really God's intent to set His people free for only three days? No. But by denying even three days off—a reasonable vacation for people who had been performing slave labor for forty years—Pharaoh's obstinance and hard-heartedness would come to light.

Exodus 3:19–22

And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: But every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians.

"At first, Pharaoh will say No. But when you finally leave, you'll leave enriched," God promised.

I can't help but think of Another who would not only set captives free, but would give gifts freely (Ephesians 4:8). Our Greater than Moses, Jesus Christ, did just that when He delivered us from Satan's dominion and gifted us through His Holy Spirit.

BURNING BUSHES
A Topical Study of
EXODUS 3:2

Apart from Jesus, without a doubt, the greatest leader in world history would have to be the man who led a congregation of three million people for forty years across the desert from Egypt to the borders of the Promised Land. Moses had a task and he did it successfully. He did it remarkably. And when he died at the age of one hundred and twenty, Scripture tells us his sight wasn't dimmed; his strength wasn't diminished (Deuteronomy 34:7).

The life of this remarkable man can be divided into three forty-year segments. In his first forty years, Moses became somebody. Adopted by Rameses II, he was educated by the best scholars of Egypt, was a military hero, and was in line to become the next Pharaoh of the Egyptian empire.

The next forty years, however, Moses was a nobody—for at the age of forty, after killing an Egyptian taskmaster, he fled for his life to the desert.

In the text before us, we see God reaching out to Moses, causing his final forty years to be spent as a model for everybody.

I love the fact that when He wanted to bring Moses to the place of service and ministry, the Lord used a bush just like me . . .

The Lord Can Use Me

To speak to Moses, I would have thought the Lord would use a mighty oak tree strong and sturdy, or a majestic pine tree tall and stately, or a fragrant cedar smelling sweetly. But the Lord didn't use any of those. He used a bush. The Hebrew word translated "bush" is *cenah,* and literally refers to a thorny bush. According to botanists, thorns are basically aborted branches. That is, they should have been branches, but just didn't get that far. So here's this bush. It's common; it's prickly; and even its attempts at growing branches were too weak to amount to anything. In other words, it's just like me.

The Lord loves to use bushes like you and me . . .

> *For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 1:26–29

God chooses those who are bushes, those who are bush-league, those who feel bushed because when He uses a bush, all of the glory goes to Him.

> Paganini, the great violinist of a generation ago, did something amazing when, in a Viennese concert hall one evening, he walked on to the stage, violin in hand, and broke a string. He followed this by breaking a second string, then a third. With only one string remaining, Paganini nestled the violin under his chin and, for the next eighteen minutes, played magnificently. As the crowd rose to its feet in ovation, Paganini said, "One string and Paganini." And, realizing they had heard a true master, the crowd erupted in applause.

I might feel like I only have one string. I might feel strung-out, strung-along, or third-string. But the reality is, the Lord loves to use that which is weak, unimportant, unimpressive because then He, the Master Musician, gets the ovation, the glory, the adoration.

Why does God reserve all glory for Himself? Because He knows that if He shares His glory with you—if people look up to you, lean on me, become impressed with us, every one of us will ultimately disappoint them. Therefore, He says, "I alone will receive glory because I alone will never disappoint anyone who looks to Me, who trusts in Me, who leans on Me." Only God is solid and stable enough to see us through day after year after decade on through eternity. So He uses bushes, one-stringed violins, common people like you and me in order that He alone receives praise.

The Lord Is with Me

Here's Moses on the backside of the desert day after week after month after year. Decades go by. And then something happens. Among the many bushes in the wilderness, one burns brightly without being consumed, causing Moses to eventually realize that the Lord was with him.

Where is God tonight? He's in the bush sitting next to you.

"That prickly person?" you ask.

Yes. God is here in the person sitting next to you, in the person you're married to, in the person you work with.

"Wait a minute," you protest. "The Lord certainly can't speak through my husband, my parents, my boss. They're not on fire."

Oh, but there's what you need to see: the bush was not on fire. The fire was in the bush. You might think people around you aren't on fire. That may be true. But if they're believers, the fire is in them . . .

> Although Jesus did mighty works in Capernaum, there were those who scoffed and said, "We know him. He's the son of the carpenter. Aren't his brothers and sisters among us?" (Matthew 13). They thought He was the son of a carpenter, failing to realize He was the Son of the Creator.
>
> In Mark 6, the disciples are toiling; the waves are mounting; the wind is howling. And in the middle of the night, they see Someone walking towards them. A legend of the day said that right before fishermen drowned, they saw a spirit coming towards them. No wonder their fear was rising. "It's a ghost!" the disciples cried—until Jesus said, "Be of good cheer. It is I."
>
> As two disciples walked towards Emmaus, they were joined by One who asked them why they were so sad. "Are you a stranger here?" they asked incredulously, not recognizing it was Jesus Himself who walked beside them (Luke 24).
>
> Finding the tomb empty that Easter morning, Mary Magdalene wept. Seeing a Man she supposed to be the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have moved the body, tell me where you have taken Him." But

when the "gardener" answered and spoke her name, she recognized Him for who He was (John 20).

Jesus dwells with us in the carpenter's son—in those we think we know. He speaks to us through people that may frighten us as they dare to rattle the bars of our beliefs. He reaches out to us through strangers walking alongside us. He speaks to us through gardeners, through plumbers, through those who work beside and for us. Oh, they might not be on fire. But the fire is in them, and the Lord can use them as easily, as powerfully, as surprisingly as He can use a common, everyday bush like you.

Bushes burning in the desert are common. Lightning bolts strike them and they ignite. Nomads burn them to keep warm at night. Therefore, assuming lightning had struck the bush, or that it was simply the remnant of a campfire, Moses could have easily walked right by. But he didn't. He stopped long enough to notice this bush was different, that it was not being consumed.

The problem with too many of us too much of the time is that we don't stop long enough to ponder the bushes around us. We're usually in such a hurry that we don't take the time to say, "Maybe my dad has the Word of the Lord for me today. Maybe this stranger in my life is being used to speak to me in some way. Maybe my son has a word from the Lord for me this morning. I'd better investigate." I'm convinced we miss many things the Lord would say, many directions He would give, many blessings He would bestow because we hurriedly walk right by.

The Lord wants to guide, direct, and bless if we'll simply take the time to stop and check out the bush sitting right beside us. May we be those who have eyes that see, ears that hear, and feet that stop in order that we might receive illumination and warmth from the bushes surrounding us.

I AM . . . WHATEVER YOU NEED

A Topical Study of EXODUS 3:13

At the ripe old age of eighty, Moses was given a massive, monumental task to do. He was called by God to lead the children of Israel out of bondage and into Egypt to the Land of Promise. For the previous forty years, he had been on the backside of the desert, seemingly forsaken and forgotten. No wonder he said, "Lord, who am I? I'm eighty years old. I've been out of the loop for forty years. I've been out here in the desert for four decades. Lord, who am I?"

"Certainly I will be with thee," God answered. In other words, "The question isn't who are you, but Who's with you. And the answer is I AM."

Like Moses, we might say, "Who are we?"

And, as He said to Moses, the Lord would say to us, "The issue isn't who are you, but Who's with you."

Fifteen hundred years later, Jesus said to His disciples, "Go into the world and preach the gospel. Make disciples and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Jesus commissioned His disciples to see people set free.

"Who are we to do this massive, monumental task?" they must have wondered.

But Jesus went on to say, "And lo, I am with you even to the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). "It's not who are you, but Who's with you. *That's* the key."

After hearing the Lord is with him, Moses asks, "What shall I say Your name is?" Moses asks this question not for the sake of identification. He already knows Who this God is talking to him. God had already identified Himself in verse 6. So it wasn't a matter of identification. Nor was it a matter of conversation. Moses wasn't simply trying to make small talk—not with the lives of three million at stake.

Moses' question was neither for identification nor idle conversation. It was for the purpose of communication . . .

Communication

"I know You are the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I know You are the Supreme Entity. Those are Your titles. But what's your *Name?*" Moses asked God.

When you know someone's name, you can communicate with him very effectively. For example, if you're in the parking lot of Wal-Mart and someone calls your name, your ears perk up in a way they never do when you hear, "Hey, bro," or "Hey dude."

I love it when I'm walking through town and someone calls out, "Pastor Jon!" If we both have time, rich fellowship is sure to take place right there. If, however, I'm walking through Jacksonville, and hear, "Jonny!"—it's even better, for I know it is a family member or long-time friend calling me.

So, too, Moses is asking God's name in order that he can communicate with Him more deeply, more intimately. It's as if he's saying, "Lord, if I'm going to lead three million people across the wilderness, I need to be able to reach You."

Revelation

Secondly, the name deals not only with communication, but, more importantly, with revelation. In Bible days, a person's name was an indication of his nature. That's why we're told to pray in Jesus' name. "If you ask anything in My name," He said, "I will do it" (John 14:14).

"In Jesus' name," is not merely a phrase to tack on to the end of your prayers, like "over and out." No, praying in Jesus' name means praying according to His nature, praying in harmony with His heart, praying as He would pray if He were in our situation. So in asking God's name, Moses in essence is saying, "What's Your nature?" And God, for the first time, here in Exodus 3, identifies His name as literally, I AM THAT I AM.

The *tetragrammaton*—the pronunciation of which we don't know to this day. You see, because the Jewish people felt God's name to be so holy that it should only be spoken by the high priest once each year, they abbreviated in their scrolls to YHWH. Whenever you read the word LORD in the Old Testament, it's the tetragrammaton, YHWH. What is the pronunciation of YHWH? Although the high priest knew, it was eventually lost. For years, people pronounced it Jehovah. In the last few decades, it's been pronounced Yahweh. But no one knows for sure because the vowels were left out. Moses, however, knew. Moses knew God's name. Why? The answer is simple: He asked.

"I AM . . . what?" Moses may have wondered.

"I AM whatever you have need of," God must have intimated. "Moses you're on a journey. The task before you is huge and you want to know who I am. I AM whatever you need. Not I USED TO BE, not I'M GONNA BE, but I AM presently. Immutable. Unchangeable. The same yesterday, today, and forever. Rock-solid. I AM. That's My name I AM whatever you need."

Fifteen hundred years later, Jesus would shed further light on God's name by declaring,

I AM the Bread.
I AM the Way.
I AM the Truth.
I AM the Life.

I AM the Light of the world.
I AM the Good Shepherd.
I AM the Door.
I AM the Vine.

Jesus took the name of God and filled in the blank.

"Show us the Father," said Philip.

"He that has seen Me has seen the Father," Jesus answered (John 14:9). No wonder two hundred armed soldiers seeking to arrest Jesus fell down backwards upon hearing His irrefutable declaration of Deity, upon hearing Him say, "I am He," or, literally, "I AM."

For many years, I didn't fully understand this and thought Jesus was not I AM but I GIVE, as in "I give bread, deliverance, strength, healing." Now I understand that He's infinitely more than that. We think we need bread, healing, deliverance, companionship. In actuality, however, we're craving Jesus. It's not something He gives us, but who He will be for us step by step, day by day.

If you face a monumental task—raising your son, being the wife you're supposed to be, shining for the Lord in a dark jobsite, just physically or financially making it through the week ahead—understand that Jesus is your I AM, that He is the Bread which satisfies and strengthens you, the Shepherd who laid down His life for you. He wants to whisper His name in your ear, to write His nature on your heart in a way that others may not understand or even be able to pronounce. But it will be as personal and powerful to you as it was to Moses.

The issue tonight isn't loneliness or cancer, finances or relationships. The issue is a revelation of the nature and presence of God the Father. He will be all you need and He'll make Himself known to you personally.

All you have to do is ask.



4

Exodus 4:1
And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me,

nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, the LORD hath not appeared unto thee.

In verse 13 of chapter 3, God had told Moses the people would listen to him. Here, Moses tells God the people won't listen to him. It's one thing to be humble. But here Moses crosses the line. And in the upcoming chapters we'll see him argue with God seven times, saying, "This can't be. It's not going to happen. You got the wrong guy."

Exodus 4:2
And the LORD said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, a rod.

To those who say, "I can't be used. If I try to serve in some way, the people won't respond; if I try to be used at work or in Sunday school, in my neighborhood or in my family, no one will listen; if I try to pray with my wife, she won't receive from me; that's for other guys not me," God gives the same three tools He gave to Moses . . .

The first is *ability.*

"What's in your hand?" God asked Moses.
"A shepherd's rod, " Moses answered.
"That's what I'll use," said God.

"What's in your hand, Paul?"
"A pen. I'm a scholar."
"I'll use that," said God. "You will write a great portion of My Word."

"What's in your hand, Peter?"
"A net. I'm a fisherman."

"I'll use that," said God. "You will be a fisher of men and haul people into the kingdom."

If you wonder how you can serve God, how you can be used by Him, take a look at what's in your hand. God gave you gifts when you were born simply

waiting to be activated when you were born again. You're already doing that which He will energize and empower for ministry. What's in your hand? A computer? A hammer? A basketball? That's what He will use for His glory.

Exodus 4:3
And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it.

You may be an accountant, a carpenter, or a surgeon. God says, "Throw down your occupation, your profession and see what it is in and of itself: It's a snake. If you're living for it, if you're all caught up in it, if you're depending on it, you will be bitten by it." The same holds true—maybe *especially* true—with regard to ministry. Moses had been a faithful shepherd for forty years. Here, God makes it clear that nothing could compare to an empty hand lifted and open to Him. It's as if, at the outset of the monumental ministry to which He was calling Moses, God said, "*I* must be your passion—not service for Me, not your talents or abilities, not your spiritual gifts. Nothing must take the place of an open hand, an open heart to embrace Me personally."

Maybe you've been forced to throw down some skill, some calling, some position you were good at, gifted for. Don't despise this, for now you can say, "Lord, now that I don't have that in my hand anymore, I'm rediscovering it's not doing something for You that I crave, but simply You. I'm not looking for an opportunity to exercise my gift or to be used in ministry. I'm just looking for more intimacy with You. No wonder it had to be pried out of my hand. I get it. It's a snake." And once you understand this, you're in a position to pick it up once again . . .

Exodus 4:4, 5
And the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: That they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee.

To avoid getting bitten, the wisest thing to do is to grab a snake by the back of the head. God, however, tells Moses to grab it by the tail as if to say,

"Now that you see that ministry is not the priority, pick it up again, only this time by the tail. It's not going to have priority in your life. It's not going to be the thing that drives you. No longer will it be the head. It will be the tail."

Exodus 4:6–8
And the LORD said furthermore unto him, Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he put his hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous as snow. And he said, Put thine hand into thy bosom again. And he put his hand into his bosom again; and plucked it out of his bosom, and, behold, it was turned again as his other flesh. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign.

The second tool God gave Moses was *a testimony.* Leprosy is a picture of sin in Scripture. Therefore, the illustration of a leprous hand made whole is one of being born again. What God has done in each of our lives is a powerful tool in ministry. Share your story. Share your testimony. It's powerful and cannot be denied.

Exodus 4:9
And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe also these two signs, neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take of the water of the river, and pour it upon the dry land: and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry land.

The third tool God gave Moses was *authority.* He was to pour water from the Nile River—the river that sustained the entire Egyptian Empire—on the ground, where it would become blood. And in so doing, the people would see that no matter how "cool" they might seem, no matter how refreshing their surroundings might be, apart from God, even their best efforts at life were doomed to die.

With regard to ministry, never underestimate the power of telling the truth directly, of saying, "The path you're on will lead to death. But here's what God has done: He died on the Cross that you might live. The water you're

drinking will lead to death. But if you drink of Jesus, the Water of Life, you will never thirst again."

Regarding ministry, a lot of people have gifts, callings, and good intentions. But they never get to the root issue. They never directly address a family member, neighbor, relative, or friend with the message of, "That which you're drinking will kill you. You need to be born again." When is the last time you truly shared the message of the Cross with a non-believer? As good as simply being nice to people, helping them out, making them feel loved, welcomed, or affirmed might be, they can't hold a candle to the power of the Cross. There is nothing as powerful as a clear, simple presentation of the Cross. God told Moses that if the people didn't believe his ability, that if they doubted his testimony, when he showed them the blood, they would understand that what they were drinking was death.

Exodus 4:10
And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.

A "slow tongue" implies Moses may have had some type of speech impediment.

Exodus 4:11, 12
And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.

One of the great evangelists of all time and founder of the YMCA, D. L. Moody was very impacting but not very polished. A woman came to him after one service and said, "Mr. Moody, I noticed in your message that you made eighteen grammatical mistakes."

"Ma'am," Moody replied, "I'm using all the grammar I got for the Lord. What are you doing with yours?"

God loves to use the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. He loves to use those who stutter spiritually, who don't have perhaps the greatest

skills or the most talent because that way, He gets the glory (1 Corinthians 2:1).

Exodus 4:13
And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send.

Forty years earlier, Moses was an eager beaver. But now he's in a whole different place, saying, "I'm not your man. I'm not the guy who can do the job. Send someone more qualified than I am, someone more capable than I am, someone worthier than I am."

Exodus 4:14 (a)
And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses . . .

One of the very few times in Scripture we see God's anger kindled, it was toward Moses, a man who doubted His call. Sometimes people say, "I just feel burnt out. Church has become a drag. I don't have a desire to pray. Spiritual things seem to have gone up in smoke. Why?" It's very likely that, in a sense, the anger of the Lord is kindled against you because, like Moses, you have doubted what He has called you to do.

Exodus 4:14 (b)–16
. . . and he said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart. And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God.

The Lord is angry with Moses, but He doesn't give up on Moses. He simply expands His call to include Aaron as Moses' mouthpiece. I'm so thankful that the gifts and calling of God are without repentance (Romans 11:29). Perhaps you're like me. Perhaps you've waffled and wavered a time

or two. Maybe you've been intimidated by the task you know you ought to do, the opportunity placed before you, the people who live beside you. But the Lord didn't give up on Moses. And He won't give up on you.

Exodus 4:17, 18
And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs. And Moses went and returned to Jethro his father in law, and said unto him, Let me go, I pray thee, and return unto my brethren which are in Egypt, and see whether they be yet alive. And Jethro said to Moses, Go in peace.

Here we see an eighty-year-old Moses asking his father-in-law's permission to move. I like that, for it speaks of a humble heart and a submitted life. Here was this man who at one time was the Number Two power in all of Egypt. Here was the one who had it all together. Here was one who was called by God to lead a mighty move. And yet he still shows incredible humility and submission even at the age of eighty. I admire that tremendously.

Exodus 4:19
And the LORD said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life.

Moses outlived the men who were out to get him. There will be people who are out to get you, some one or some group who doesn't like you, some who might want to destroy you. Here is what to do: Outlive them. "Oh, no," I used to worry, "this person thinks that," or, "the other guy is saying this." But over the years, I've learned that if I just keep doing what God has called me to do, I "outlive" them because they move on.

"By their fruit ye shall know them," Jesus said (Matthew 7:20). The fruit of the Spirit produced in your life, the fruit borne in your ministry, in your family, in your walk personally is undeniable, irrefutable and will outlive any criticism unfairly hurled against you.

Exodus 4:20, 21
And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of

God in his hand. And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.

Although the Lord is sending Moses to demand that Pharaoh let His people go, He makes it clear to Moses that He would harden Pharaoh's heart, knowing the confrontation would eventually prove to the entire Egyptian culture that He alone is the true and living God.

It's a dangerous thing to harden your heart against God because if you persist in that mentality, God will eventually agree with you. "All manner of sin but one is forgiven all men," Jesus said, referring to the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit—when a man hardens his heart against the work of the Spirit drawing him to God (Matthew 12:31). Because God's Spirit won't always strive with us (Genesis 6:3), if you keep saying, "I don't want Jesus in my heart; I won't believe He is who He claimed to be; I absolutely refuse to submit to Him," God will say, "Have your way. I'll no longer speak to you." And at that point a decision to be saved is impossible.

Exodus 4:22, 23
And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn.

God's message to Pharaoh carried the death penalty for disobedience because God is deadly serious about sin. Yet, although we see two sons spoken of in this scenario, there are actually three . . .

Exodus 4:24
And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him.

"Let My Son go," God said to Pharaoh, "or your son will die." Two sons are being talked about, but there are three sons in the story, for Moses had a son as well. And Moses couldn't pronounce judgment on Pharaoh's house

while his own house was in error (1 Peter 4:17). You see, in Genesis 17:11, God instituted circumcision as an outward sign of an inward belief—its counterpart seen in the New Testament ordinance of baptism (Colossians 2:11, 12). Circumcision was given to the Jewish nation as a mark of differentiation between them and every other culture round about them. Yet Moses never circumcised his son. A descendant of Abraham, Moses certainly knew the significance of this act. Why, then, wouldn't he have circumcised Gershom?

It could be that he was preoccupied with his occupation. It could be that he was so into watching sheep that he forgot about the spiritual needs of his son. And before we wonder how watching sheep in the desert could be that consuming, we would do well to ask ourselves why we expend so much time and energy simply to make another sale, to get another client, to climb another step, to make another dollar? When we get to heaven, on the other side of eternity, we will surely say, "What was I thinking? Why did I take my career so seriously? Why wasn't I there for my son, helping him to grow in his walk with the Lord?"

Or perhaps the reason Moses didn't circumcise his son was a little more subtle. Perhaps it was because he was caught up in ministry. Listen carefully, Dad. There is no ministry in which you will ever be engaged that is more important, more fulfilling, more satisfying, gratifying, or thrilling than discipling your own children. God tapping you on the shoulder and saying three million people will listen to you would be incomparable to seeing your son or daughter discipled and trained. And lest you think your family isn't a big enough ministry for a man of your skills and abilities, consider this: Jesus, the perfect Man, the ultimate Minister, chose only twelve disciples into whom to pour His life. Therefore, one, two, or three kids are more than enough for even the best of us. Besides, by the time people come to me for counsel or help, they're already messed up. As a parent, however, you get your kids fresh from the oven, so to speak, as clean pieces of paper. And from day one you get to pray for them, love them, model God to them. It's an incredible opportunity.

Preoccupation with his occupation or a false understanding of ministry could have been factors in Moses' failure to circumcise his son. But I believe there is a third, more likely reason . . .

Exodus 4:25, 26

> **Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.**

Moses' wife, *Zipporah,* whose name means "sparrow" was a Midianite. The language is clear she wasn't into the rite of circumcision. Therefore, I suggest Moses didn't circumcise his son because of pressure from his wife. And his capitulation nearly cost him his life.

"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," Joshua declared (Joshua 24:15). And he didn't ask Mrs. Joshua's permission. Because Moses failed to take a similar stand, in seeking to kill him, it's as if God is essentially saying, "Moses your life will be basically meaningless if you continue to neglect your primary ministry, your family."

Seeing the severity of the situation, Zipporah did something she wouldn't have had to do had Moses taken the leadership earlier. And his life was spared. But his wife walked away bitter.

The lesson for us? Hebrews 4:12 tells us the Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. Therefore, it is the Word that deals with the flesh.

> And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.
>
> Deuteronomy 6:6, 7

Get the Word in your heart and share it with your children constantly. When you're driving together in the car, working together in the yard, playing together at the beach, you have opportunity to pour the Word into your children. It's the Word, the Word, the Word that cuts away the flesh. David put it this way: "How shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed to the Word" (Psalm 119:9).

Satan would whisper in your ears, "It's too late to tend to the flesh of your sons and daughters, your grandchildren, your family." No. It's never too late. Ask Zipporah, the one who saved the life of her husband. From this point on,

take the sword of the Spirit—the Word of God —and apply it regularly, consistently in your family. Carve out time for family devotions, family prayer, and family discussion.

"But my kid's not into it," you say.

That's irrelevant. It's a matter of you saying, "We take time to eat together. We take time to vacation together. And we take time to honor the Lord together. I hope you're into it, but even if you're not, it's still going to happen because God said I am to teach my family constantly."

"But my teenage son is rebellious," you say.

Ah, but God searched throughout all eternity and said, "You're the one who can handle him."

No one who has kids, grandchildren, nephews, or nieces ever need long for a bigger ministry or more opportunity. If you never speak in tongues, do a miracle, or have a big evangelistic ministry, but if you have family devotions, this pastor will go to heaven a happy man because the action is with the church under your roof, the congregation God uniquely chose just for you.

Exodus 4:27–31
And the LORD said to Aaron, Go into the wilderness to meet Moses. And he went, and met him in the mount of God, and kissed him. And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD who had sent him, and all the signs which he had commanded him. And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel: And Aaron spake all the words which the LORD had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed: and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.

The people heard how the Lord had visited them, that He knew and understood their affliction. We, too, have been visited by the Lord, for when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14), God communicated everything He ever wanted to say to us perfectly in the Person of His Son (Hebrews 1:1, 2).



5

Exodus 5:1, 2 (a)
And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness. And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?

Claiming to be a descendant of the sun, Pharaoh claimed Deity. As such, he refused to acknowledge a greater One than he lest he be required to submit to a greater authority.

> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;
>
> Romans 1:18

The Greek word translated "hold" in Romans 1:18 describes what sailors would do in purposefully sailing directly into the wind. That is, those who "hold the truth in unrighteousness" know the truth, but suppress it, determined not to go with the flow of what they know to be true. They feel the wind of the Spirit. They understand something of the truth. But they're determined to set their boat in the opposite direction and sail against what they know to be so. Such a man was Pharaoh.

Exodus 5:2 (b)
. . . I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.

Revelation is directly linked to obedience. Pharaoh knew not the Lord solely because He had no intention of obeying Him.

Do you desire to be obedient to the Lord? If so, He will give revelation to you and will provide direction for you. But so good is our God that He will not give further revelation to us or further direction to us if we have not been obedient to that which He has already told us to do. Oftentimes, people say, "I just don't know what the Lord's plan or will for me is." And oftentimes, it's an issue of whether or not they've obeyed the last thing He told them to do.

The desk in my study is piled high with papers. My in-box is overflowing. The Lord is so good to us that He doesn't keep stacking up our spiritual in-boxes. He gives us one thing to do, one assignment, one memo, one piece of information, one directive. And then He waits until we do it before giving us another. "My burden is easy," He declared. "My load is light" (see Matthew 11:30). He gives us one thing to do. He doesn't overwhelm or overwork us.

Exodus 5:3
And they said, The God of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the LORD our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword.

Although it was God's intent to bring His people out of the land of Egypt and into the Land of Promise, they were first to offer sacrifice to Him. In denying even this simple request, however, the hardness of Pharaoh's heart would become clearly evident.

Exodus 5:4
And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? get you unto your burdens.

"What are you doing, asking for three days off?" Pharaoh said, "Get back to work!"

Exodus 5:5–7
And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now are many, and ye make them rest from their burdens. And Pharaoh commanded the same day the taskmasters of the people, and their officers, saying, Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves.

Straw was an essential ingredient for making bricks. Nevertheless, Pharaoh decided that Moses' request for three days off was the last straw. Thus, the children of Israel would get no more.

Exodus 5:8
And the tale of the bricks, which they did make heretofore, ye shall lay upon them; ye shall not diminish ought thereof: for they be idle; therefore they cry, saying, Let us go and sacrifice to our God.

Although their straw was eliminated, the quota of bricks remained the same. Just how many bricks did the children of Israel make? Historical records indicate they made enough to build a wall ten feet high and five feet thick that would stretch from Seattle to New York City. That's a lot of bricks!

Exodus 5:9
Let there more work be laid upon the men, that they may labour therein; and let them not regard vain words.

Pharaoh referred to Moses' request to worship as "vain words," or a waste of time. And Pharaoh's mentality prevails to this day. "You don't have time for Communion. You don't have time for worship. You don't have time for devotions. There's work to do," our society barks.

Nowhere is this mindset seen more clearly than in Judas, the one who, observing Mary anoint Jesus with ointment which cost a year's salary, said, "That's a waste. That money could have been spent on the poor. That money could have been used to do some good work" (see John 12:4–6). Yet Jesus would later refer to Judas himself as "the son of perdition," or, literally, "the son of waste" because the biggest waste is that of wasting the opportunity to worship.

The moles in my backyard drive me crazy. To rid my yard of them, I've stuck a hose down their holes and flooded them for an hour at a time. I've tossed in little smoke bombs. I've stood vigilantly over their holes with shovel in hand—all to no avail. Then I read that in one night, a single mole will often dig 300 feet of tunnel. And, as my experience proves, the moles' efforts are not in vain—for even though they're digging under the surface where no one can see them —when the smoke bombs are thrown in or the water turned on, they can escape to their network of tunnels and bomb shelters.

That's exactly what the devotional life does for you and me. "What a waste of time staying up later or getting up earlier to study the Word. What a waste of time to go to church on a Thursday night," some might mutter. But that's because they fail to understand that those things are tunnels and bomb shelters that will protect you from the inevitable attacks of the enemy.

"Why couldn't we cast this demon out?" the disciples asked Jesus.

"This kind does not come out but by prayer and fasting," Jesus answered, (Matthew 17:21). In other words, we are to live a life of prayer and fasting, for if we wait to lay the spiritual groundwork until the challenge is before us, it will be too late. We won't be able to do what we could have done, to be who we might have been because there were no tunnels dug under the surface, in the dark, early in the morning and late at night.

Exodus 5:10–19
And the taskmasters of the people went out, and their officers, and they spake to the people, saying, Thus saith Pharaoh, I will not give you straw. Go ye, get you straw where ye can find it: yet not ought of your work shall be diminished. So the people were scattered. And the taskmasters hasted them, saying, Fulfil your works, your daily tasks, as when there was straw. And the officers of the children of Israel, which Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and demanded, Wherefore have ye not fulfilled your task in making brick both yesterday and to day, as heretofore? Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried unto Pharaoh, saying, Wherefore dealest thou thus with thy servants? There is no straw given unto thy servants, and they say to us, Make brick: and, behold, thy servants are beaten; but the fault is in thine own people. But he said, Ye are idle, ye are idle: therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the LORD. Go therefore now, and work; for there shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks. And the officers of the children of Israel did see that they were in evil case, after it was said, Ye shall not minish ought from your bricks of your daily task.

Although we sympathize with the children of Israel, we must make note of their mistake in crying to Pharaoh instead of calling out to God. Are you

having a hard time at work? Is your boss cracking the whip? Is your supervisor loading you down? Are your coworkers demanding more of you than you think reasonable? Don't cry to your boss. Cry to the Lord first. Get direction from Him, for as the old hymn so rightly declares, "Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh, what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."

This is so simple and we know it to be true. But I must be reminded of it over and over again. Maybe you do, too. It's so easy to cry to Pharaoh—to cry to a husband or wife, brother or sister, pastor or elder. It's easy to seek out people, when in reality, God would say, "Woe to the rebellious people who take counsel but not of Me" (Isaiah 30:1). Is the whip cracking? Is your back aching? Cry to the Lord.

Exodus 5:20, 21
And they met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way, as they came forth from Pharaoh: And they said unto them, The LORD look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us.

Because Pharaoh wouldn't help them, the children of Israel lashed out at Moses and Aaron.

Exodus 5:22, 23
And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? Why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all.

This is what made Moses great. We'll see him constantly falling on his face before the Lord. What a mighty man he was. And his secret was that, when people yelled at him, he didn't retaliate, but simply went before the Lord again and again.

6 **Exodus 6:1–5**
Then the LORD said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land. And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the LORD: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them. And I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant.

This past week, I was reading an article describing a great revival which took place in Florida in the 1890s. As thousands of people were brought into the kingdom, reporters covering the story repeated an expression they heard the new believers use. They didn't say people were "born again." Nor did they say many people were saved. Nor did they say many people received Christ. Now, all of those things were true. People were indeed born again and were saved because they received Christ. But the phrase appearing most often in the written record was that people were "seized by a great affection." In other words, people were simply overwhelmed by the goodness and grace of God, swept up in His loving embrace. I like that!

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul tells us it is the *goodness* of God that leads men to repentance, which ushers people into the kingdom of God (2:4). After all, how could we not be "seized by a great affection" when we begin to understand what God has done for us? In the text before us, we'll see exactly what God does for His children not only historically, but presently . . .

Exodus 6:6 (a)
Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians . . .

Salvation. Egypt is always an illustration of the world system, of the lost condition of man. "I will save you," God declares. "I will bring you out from there." And that's exactly what God did for you and me when He brought us out from under the burden of sin. Under the burning, blistering Egyptian sun,

the children of Israel baked bricks that would be used to construct tombs for the Pharaohs. That was us as well—living meaningless lives, burdened by guilt, building our own tombs with our activities. But then God saved us. Great is the mystery, Paul would say, that God became a Man and dwelt among us in order that He might ultimately die for us (1 Timothy 3:16). Man's greatest need is forgiveness. God's greatest deed is salvation.

Exodus 6:6 (b)
. . . and I will rid you out of their bondage . . .

Liberation. God would not only remove His people from Egypt, but would rid them of their bondage. "The thing I have against you Christians is that you live such restricted lives," said a man to me at the YMCA.

"Not true," I said. "I drink as much as I want whenever I want. Not only that, I go to all the parties I want because the Bible says all things are lawful to me (1 Corinthians 6:12). So I get to do whatever I want."

It's true. I drink all I want to. And the amount I want to drink is none. While alcohol of any kind has always been as tempting to me as slug bait, even that which used to pull me no longer does because I'm absolutely free.

I've had many people tell me, "It's been two weeks, three months, or four years since I smoked. It's not that I made a pledge or a promise, but I've just been so into the Lord, so excited about walking with Him, that I forgot to light up." That's what God means when He says, "I will rid you out of their bondage."

Exodus 6:6 (c)
. . . and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments:

Redemption. To the children of Israel, an outstretched arm referred to God's judgment against Pharaoh. To us, it refers to the outstretched arm of Jesus pinned to the Cross of Calvary, for that's what it would take to redeem us.

Exodus 6:7 (a)

And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God . . .

Adoption. "I will claim you as My family," God said to the children of Israel. Christ adoped us into His family, Paul tells us. And what a family it is. Oh, we're not perfect by any stretch. But we are being perfected. And as a result, we find in the family of God an agape love and a reality we find in no other place.

Exodus 6:7 (b)
. . . and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

Revelation. "You will know Who I am. And you'll realize what I've done," God declares.

Exodus 6:8 (a)
And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob . . .

Direction. "I will bring you into the land I told Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob about," God told His people—"the Promised Land, the place I prepared for you."

"I go to prepare a place for you," Jesus told us (John 14:2). If you're not a Christian, this world is the best it's ever going to be for you. But for those who know the Lord, this world is the worst it's ever going to be because it's only going to get better and better when we move into eternity.

Exodus 6:8 (b)
. . . and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD.

Provision. "I will not only bring you into the Land of Promise," God declared, "but I will provide a heritage for your children." I have great news for you, Dad: God has a plan not only to direct you, but to direct your family —your children and grandchildren as well.

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house,” Paul told the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31). In other words, “Your decision to believe will impact and affect your family.”

In verses 4–8 we see seven “I wills,” seven statements of promise made by God. The one thing we don’t see is a single, “If you . . .” because such is the nature of the gospel. The gospel is the expression of God’s furious love toward us. It’s all about what He has done and nothing about what we must do. The gospel is nothing short of the best news the world has ever heard: Our sin is forgiven. The price is paid. The work is done.

About to be beheaded, when Paul wrote to his protegé Timothy, he didn’t say, “Be strong in righteousness” or “Grow in your understanding of theology.” No, as good as those things may be, Paul’s final word to Timothy was, “Grow in *grace*.” The degree to which we understand that grace is not the beginning point but the only point, is the degree to which we’ll find ourselves wanting to study, desiring to pray, eager to worship as grace does its work in our hearts day by day.

Exodus 6:9
And Moses spake so unto the children of Israel: but they hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.

Even though they doubted because of their anguish of spirit, God still did what He said He would do for His people. Exactly as He said He would, He delivered them from Egypt and planted their descendants in the Land of Promise. You’re going to get to heaven. You can either go celebrating or you can go doubting. I recommend being a Tigger instead of an Eeyore. Say, “Oh, Lord, thank You that You’re going to bless me today, not because of what I do but because of Who You are and what You’ve done.”

Exodus 6:10–13
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Go in, speak unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, that he let the children of Israel go out of his land. And Moses spake before the LORD, say ing, Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips? And the LORD

spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, and gave them a charge unto the children of Israel, and unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

Even though Moses is still saying, "Pharaoh's not going to listen to me. I'm not the right guy," God charges him again and says, "I've given you a job to do. You're to go to Pharaoh." And, as God's ambassadors, the genealogy of Moses and Aaron is presented as their credentials . . .

Exodus 6:14
These be the heads of their fathers' houses: The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel; Hanoch, and Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi: these be the families of Reuben.

Reuben was the firstborn son of Jacob. But he wasn't the one from whom Moses and Aaron came.

Exodus 6:15
And the sons of Simeon; Jemuel, and Jamin, and Ohad, and Jachin, and Zohar, and Shaul the son of a Canaanitish woman: these are the families of Simeon.

Simeon was Jacob's second son. But he wasn't the one who would bring forth Moses and Aaron.

Exodus 6:16–19
And these are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations; Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari: and the years of the life of Levi were an hundred thirty and seven years. The sons of Gershon; Libni, and Shimi, according to their families. And the sons of Kohath; Amram, and Izhar, and Hebron, and Uzziel: and the years of the life of Kohath were an hundred thirty and three years. And the sons of Merari; Mahali and Mushi: these are the families of Levi according to their generations.

Levi, Jacob's third son, was the one whose lineage would bear Moses and Aaron.

Exodus 6:20
And Amram took him Jochebed his father's sister to wife; and she bare him Aaron and Moses: and the years of the life of Amram were an hundred and thirty and seven years.

Amram was the father, Jochebed the mother of Aaron and his younger brother, Moses.

Exodus 6:21–23
And the sons of Izhar; Korah, and Nepheg, and Zichri. And the sons of Uzziel; Mishael, and Elzaphan, and Zithri. And Aaron took him Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab, sister of Naashon, to wife; and she bare him Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

These four sons of Aaron will be germane to the story, as we shall see.

Exodus 6:24–27
And the sons of Korah; Assir, and Elkanah, and Abiasaph: these are the families of the Korhites. And Eleazar Aaron's son took him one of the daughters of Putiel to wife; and she bare him Phinehas: these are the heads of the fathers of the Levites according to their families. These are that Aaron and Moses, to whom the LORD said, Bring out the children of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their armies. These are they which spake to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring out the children of Israel from Egypt: these are that Moses and Aaron.

Just as Moses and Aaron were descendants of the third son of Jacob, the one sign the ultimate Ambassador, Jesus Christ, offered as His credential was that He would rise on the third day (John 2:19).

Exodus 6:28–30

And it came to pass on the day when the LORD spake unto Moses in the land of Egypt, That the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, I am the LORD: speak thou unto Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say unto thee. And Moses said before the LORD, Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh hearken unto me?

This is the seventh time Moses protests. Like Moses, we have a tendency to argue. But, again, God didn't give up on Moses. And He won't give up on you.



7 Ever have a day where everything seemed to unravel? Yesterday was like that for me. So when I walked in to my study to prepare for tonight, my mind was full of the disappointments and problems I had faced. But when I opened the Word to the passage before us, I realized my foolishness. Seeing the plagues that these people endured, I had no other choice but to bow my head and say, "Lord, forgive me. What a baby I've been."

Not only did the people in the Exodus account face difficulties that dwarf my own, but the world is headed for an unspeakably trying time called the Tribulation. Described in Revelation 6 through 19, the Tribulation is the seven-year period when God will pour out His wrath upon the world that rejected His Son.

I tie the plagues of Exodus with the Tribulation of Revelation because there is a remarkable correlation between the two . . .

In both the Exodus and the Revelation accounts, the nation Israel is afflicted. In Exodus, they were oppressed by Pharaoh. In the Tribulation period, they will be oppressed by antichrist specifically and by the whole world generally.

In both cases, God's people cry out to God in desperation. And in both cases, God hears their cry (Exodus 2; Jeremiah 31:18–20).

In both accounts, God demands that the oppressor let His people go (Exodus 5; Isaiah 43). Interestingly, we're seeing this begin to happen even now. The population of the state of Israel is presently 5,987,000, which intrigues me because in the Holocaust of World

War II—which created the climate for the nation to come into existence—six million Jews were killed. This present population of Israel is very close to six million, which speaks to me of what God declared when He said, "I will restore to you the years the locust has eaten" (Joel 2:25).

In the Exodus story, Pharaoh didn't want the Jews to go. So, in the Tribulation period, there will be this same tendency. But God will demand that His people be set free, and, again, we have a sneak preview of that happening right now. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, 66,000 Jews returned to the Promised Land. Of that number, 54,600, or 83% came from Russia, from the north. But because nearly 60% of those returning to Israel from Russia are physicians, college professors, academicians, musicians, and artists, there is presently a brain drain from Russia. That is why it is commonly believed that there will be a closing of the door in the north.

In the Exodus story, two witnesses—Moses and Aaron—are raised up to speak to Pharaoh. In Revelation 11, two witnesses—Moses and Elijah—give understanding on the streets of Jerusalem.

In the Exodus story, we see water turn to blood, boils on the people, frogs hopping throughout the land, darkness covering the nation, swarming flies, locusts, and hailstones causing great consternation. So, too, in the Tribulation, we see water turned to blood, locusts swarming, boils upon the people, frogs, and hailstones.

Pharaoh hardened his heart in the Exodus account. The people not killed by the plagues in the Tribulation will harden their hearts as well (Revelation 9:20, 21).

Yet in both cases, Israel is delivered. In Exodus, they eventually arrive in the Promised Land. Romans 11:25–26 tells us that, although Israel will go through the time of Jacob's trouble in the Tribulation, eventually all of Israel shall be saved. And if God keeps His promises to Israel, He will keep the promises He made to you and me as well.

Exodus 7:1–5

And the LORD said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he send the children of Israel out of his land. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, and my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them.

"Go speak to Pharaoh," God instructed Moses. "He won't listen to you, but that will give Me opportunity to stretch out My hand upon the land of Egypt. As a result, the entire nation will know that I am the Lord and that there is none like Me." Yes, there would be problems. Yes there would be tribulation. Yes, there would be difficulty—all of which would affect God's people as well. But it was all part of God's purpose and plan to not only provide liberation for His children, but to give revelation to the Egyptians.

"Lord, liberate me," we cry. "Set me free from the snap of the whips of the Egyptian oppressors. Set me free from the bondage of baking bricks under the desert sun."

"Gladly, for that's my intention," the Lord says. "But I am also doing something else simultaneously. You see, I want the Egyptians, the unsaved, the lost souls to see My power, to understand My reality. And for that to happen, there will be a series of problems which will affect you, too."

"I'm tired of my situation," we say. "My boss is mean. My trials are great. Why don't You set me free, Lord?"

"I will," He says, "in due season. Heaven's around the bend."

"But why do I have to endure this trial, Lord? Why can't You take this cancer away immediately? Don't You have that ability? Why can't You solve the problem today? Why can't You work now?"

And the Lord answers, "I've got two things I'm doing simultaneously. Yes, I'm bringing you into the Land of Promise. But at the same time, there are Egyptians watching carefully to see how you handle the same trials they face. I

want them to see My power. I want them to see what I can do. I want to show them that I can see you through."

Seeing you win the Publisher's Clearinghouse Sweepstakes doesn't cause the Egyptian to scratch his head and say, "Wow." No, the Egyptian scratches his head when he sees you facing problems on the job, difficulties in the family, setbacks financially, difficulties physically—and yet walk through them victoriously. God never promised to protect us *from* problems. He promised to see us *through* them. And as He does, the neighbor, the coworker, brother, sister-in-law, or father say, "There's something about the way you navigate life that I can't do."

And then you can say, "It's the power and reality, the grace and goodness of God. And He's available to you, too."

It is such an obvious truth, but one so easily forgotten: God does not exist for me. It's a shock to remember and a hard thing for me to grasp, but God has a bigger plan than merely my comfort, a greater concern than simply my ease. "I'm taking you to the land of milk and honey," He tells us, "where every tear shall be wiped way, where every problem will be solved. But in the meantime, Egyptians need to see that I am the Lord. And that will happen when they see you make your way through deep waters because I am with you."

Exodus 7:6–12 (a)
And Moses and Aaron did as the LORD commanded them, so did they. And Moses was fourscore years old, and Aaron fourscore and three years old, when they spake unto Pharaoh. And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, Shew a miracle for you: then thou shalt say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a serpent. And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the LORD had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents . . .

Aaron cast down his rod and it became a snake. The magicians cast down their rods and they became snakes as well. Paul identifies these magicians as Jannes and Jambres, "men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith" (2 Timothy 3:8). How were they able to duplicate this miracle? By tapping into demonic, occultist power with which the Egyptian culture was very familiar.

Exodus 7:12 (b)
. . . but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.

I like that, don't you? Aaron's snake just got bigger and bigger as the magicians' snakes were scarfed up. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel," Jesus said, "and if you come across any serpents, they will not hurt you" (see Mark 16:18). As Paul put wood on a fire, when a snake in the sticks felt the heat, it fastened its fangs into his hand. Observing this, the natives decided Paul must be a murderer to deserve such a fate. But when they saw him shake the snake into the fire and feel no harm, they changed their minds about him and he was able to give a grand and powerful witness for Jesus Christ (Acts 28).

As believers, we are not free from attack, but we are immune from its effect. Snakes show up and they strike. But we can eat them up, shake them off, and not be beaten down. Even though the enemy was able to produce snakes, Aaron's rod ate them up.

Joshua and Caleb were among the group of twelve spies who spied out the Land of Promise. "The land is a glorious place," they said to the children of Israel upon their return.

"But there are giants there. And we're like grasshoppers in their sight," argued the other ten.

"No, God's with us and these guys will be bread for us. We can eat them up," countered Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 14:9).

But the people listened to the ten instead of the two and wandered for forty years.

After their entire generation died, Joshua and Caleb were at last allowed to enter the Land of Promise. When they arrived, a now eighty-five-year-old Caleb said, "Joshua, for my inheritance give me the land where the giants are."

Why would Caleb make such a request? Because he knew something about giants. He knew they were bread. And he was hungry. "Give me the challenges which challenge others," he said. "Give me the giants—and pass the butter."

Don't run away from challenges or obstacles, gang. Instead, say, "This is a chance for me, like Aaron's rod, to grow bigger and bigger. It's a way for me, like Caleb, to grow spiritually strong."

Exodus 7:13–21
And he hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said. And the LORD said unto Moses, Pharaoh's heart is hardened, he refuseth to let the people go. Get thee unto Pharaoh in the morning; lo, he goeth out unto the water; and thou shalt stand by the river's brink against he come; and the rod which was turned to a serpent shalt thou take in thine hand. And thou shalt say unto him, The LORD God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness: and, behold, hitherto thou wouldest not hear. Thus saith the LORD, In this thou shalt know that I am the LORD: behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood. And the fish that is in the river shall die, and the river shall stink; and the Egyptians shall lothe to drink of the water of the river. And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and stretch out thine hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and that there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood, and in vessels of stone. And Moses and Aaron did so, as the LORD commanded; and he lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. And the fish that was in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

In rivers and streams, ponds and puddles, in wooden buckets and stone jugs, blood was everywhere. Pop machines and water purifiers, swimming pools and garden hoses were all filled with blood. Pharaoh's magicians turned water into blood as well. But here's the question: Where did they get the water? The answer is, they had to dig for it. Real brilliant. The whole nation is dying of thirst and what do Pharaoh's magicians do? Turn the remaining water supply to blood. Satan, demons, and dark forces can, and do perform powerful feats. But in every case, their actions only make things worse. Satan never does anything, demons never do a single thing which make things better. They do not have that within them. Yes, they can make more snakes, more blood, more frogs—but all they do is multiply the difficulty.

People can truly tap into demonic power through psychic hotlines and astrology, ouija boards and tarot cards. But know this: they only make things worse. Demonic power never, ever under any circumstance, in any way proves to make things better. It only makes a bigger mess.

Exodus 7:22–25
And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, neither did he hearken unto them; as the LORD had said. And Pharaoh turned and went into his house, neither did he set his heart to this also. And all the Egyptians digged round about the river for water to drink; for they could not drink of the water of the river. And seven days were fulfilled, after that the LORD had smitten the river.

For seven days, the land of Egypt was a bloody mess, just as for seven years, the Tribulation will produce a horrific, awful mess. Moses, the Lawgiver, turned water to blood. Jesus, the Lifegiver, turned water to wine. The Law was a schoolmaster to show us that we can't be religious, that even our best efforts at spirituality produce nothing more than death—death of peace, death of freedom, death of hope. But once we realize that, once we embrace Jesus as the One who pulls us out of the quicksand of sin and death, we are free to drink deeply of the wine of great, great joy.



8 **Exodus 8:1–6**

And the LORD spake unto Moses, Go unto Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Let my people go, that they may serve me. And if thou refuse to let them go, behold, I will smite all thy borders with frogs: And the river shall bring forth frogs abundantly, which shall go up and come into thine house, and into thy bedchamber, and upon thy bed, and into the house of thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thine ovens, and into thy kneadingtroughs: And the frogs shall come up both on thee, and upon thy people, and upon all thy servants. And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch forth thine hand with thy rod over the streams, over the rivers, and over the ponds, and cause frogs to come up upon the land of Egypt. And Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up, and covered the land of Egypt.

The Egyptians considered frogs to be sacred, as evidenced by the discovery of frog-shaped amulets in recent archeological digs in the Nile River region. One of their goddesses was Heqt, a fertility goddess whose face was frog-like. Not only did frogs speak of fertility to the Egyptians, but also of productivity, for it was frogs that kept the insect population from destroying the crops in the Nile River region. But that which was once a blessing to the Egyptians is about to become a burden. That which they once honored would become a horror. That which once pleased them is about to plague them.

And that's always the way it is with sin.

Exodus 8:7

And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt.

As when they turned water to blood, Pharaoh's magicians were able to duplicate the miracle of the frogs, but were unable to eradicate the mess. All they did was make the situation worse.

Exodus 8:8, 9

Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, Intreat the LORD, that he may take away the frogs from me, and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may do sacrifice unto

the LORD. And Moses said unto Pharaoh, Glory over me: when shall I intreat for thee, and for thy servants, and for thy people, to destroy the frogs from thee and thy houses, that they may remain in the river only?

"Ask your God to take the frogs away," Pharaoh begged Moses and Aaron. "When do you want this to happen?" asked Moses.

Exodus 8:10 (a)
And he said, To morrow . . .

In what is arguably the most amazing answer ever given in all of Scripture, when Moses asked him when he wanted the frogs to go, Pharaoh didn't say "Immediately!" or, "Right away!" He said, "Tomorrow."



***For topical study of Exodus 8:10 entitled "One More Night with the Frogs," turn to page* 255.**

Exodus 8:10 (b)–13
. . . And he said, Be it according to thy word: that thou mayest know that there is none like unto the LORD our God. And the frogs shall depart from thee, and from thy houses, and from thy servants, and from thy people; they shall remain in the river only. And Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh: and Moses cried unto the LORD because of the frogs which he had brought against Pharaoh. And the LORD did according to the word of Moses; and the frogs died out of the houses, out of the villages, and out of the fields.

Suddenly, in a moment of time, the Word was spoken and the frogs died immediately.

Exodus 8:14
And they gathered them together upon heaps: and the land stank.

Even though the frogs were dealt with by the word that was spoken, a stench remained. That's the problem with sin. It leaves a stench that lingers long after the sin has been dealt with. However, even the stench of a dead frog can serve a great purpose. When my kids see me make a mistake, when there's an undeniable smell of dead frog in the air, I challenge them to learn from my mistakes, to stand on my shoulders and do better when they assume positions of leadership in their families, and in their ministries.

Exodus 8:15
But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.

Pharaoh was given a break. He was freed and released from the frogs. Yet did he glorify God and thank Him for His mercy? No. He hardened his heart.

A farmer was nailing shingles on the peak of his roof when he suddenly lost his footing. Sliding down the roof, headed for destruction, he said, "Lord, if You're there, save me and I'll give you my life." Just then, as he reached the edge of the roof and was about to plunge to his demise, his belt loop caught on a nail and halted his fall—at which point he looked up to heaven and said, "Never mind, Lord. The nail saved me."

Like the farmer, Pharaoh was blind to the goodness of God. On the other hand, seeing God's hand in everything, "coincidence" is not a word in the vocabulary of the believer.

Exodus 8:16–18 (a)
And the LORD said unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch out thy rod, and smite the dust of the land, that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt. And they did so; for Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and smote the dust of the earth, and it became lice in man, and in beast; all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not . . .

Due to their size and availability, producing lice would have been the easiest of all the plagues to duplicate. But Pharaoh's magicians couldn't. Always under the sovereign control of God, they had their day in the sun, but now they will disappear from the account.

Exodus 8:18 (b)
. . . so there were lice upon man, and upon beast.

So terrible a curse did the Egyptian nobles consider lice that they shaved their bodies every other day—which explains their Yul Brynner-like portrayal.

Exodus 8:19
Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.

The last time we will see these magicians, they are saying, "This is the finger of God."

- It was the finger of God that wrote on the tablet of stone, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 31:18).
- It was the finger of God that wrote on Belshazzar's wall, "You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting" (see Daniel 5:5).
- It was the finger of God that wrote in the dust, causing the accusers of the woman taken in adultery to drop the stones they would otherwise have hurled at her (John 8:6).

Thus, the finger of God either points at you in judgment or calls you to forgiveness and salvation. The choice is yours.

Exodus 8:20, 21
And the LORD said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh; lo, he cometh forth to the water; and say unto him, thus saith the LORD, Let my people go, that they may serve me. Else, if thou wilt not let my people go, behold, I will send

swarms of flies upon thee, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thy houses: and the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground whereon they are.

Psalm 78:45 refers to these flies as those which tormented and destroyed the people.

Exodus 8:22
And I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there; to the end thou mayest know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth.

The first "no-fly zone" was over the land of Goshen wherein dwelt the children of Israel.

Exodus 8:23, 24
And I will put a division between my people and thy people: to morrow shall this sign be. And the LORD did so; and there came a grievous swarm of flies into the house of Pharaoh, and into his servants' houses, and into all the land of Egypt: the land was corrupted by reason of the swarm of flies.

When the water turned to blood, when frogs and lice covered the land, Egyptian and Hebrew alike were affected. But when it came to flies, there was a division between Egyptian and Hebrew. In certain areas there remains a division between the believer and the unbeliever. I can tell you categorically tonight that I will never suffer from alcoholism because I don't drink alcohol and never will. Does this mean, however, that I can say I'll never have cancer, a bad back, or heart trouble? No. Certain curses are universal. Others we bring upon ourselves when we live like the world.

Exodus 8:25
And Pharaoh called for Moses and for Aaron, and said, Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land.

Egypt being a picture of the world, Pharaoh was, in essence, saying, "Worship your God—but stay in the world."

Exodus 8:26, 27
And Moses said, It is not meet so to do; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us? We will go three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the LORD our God, as he shall command us.

Shepherds being an abomination to the Egyptians (Genesis 46:34), the sacrifice of lambs would have been so abhorrent to them that they would have stoned the children of Israel. The Egyptians' failure to understand the sacrifice of a lamb prefigured the world's inability to understand the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who had come to take away their sin.

Exodus 8:28
And Pharaoh said, I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only ye shall not go very far away: intreat for me.

Although Pharaoh offered a compromise to Moses, Moses chose to singularly, wholeheartedly follow the Lord. And therein lies a key to success in the walk of faith, for the object is not to see how closely we can walk to the world and still call ourselves Christians, but to see how far we can distance ourselves from the world's mentality.

Exodus 8:29–32
And Moses said, Behold, I go out from thee, and I will intreat the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, to morrow: but let not Pharaoh deal deceitfully any more in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD. And Moses went out from Pharaoh, and intreated the LORD. And the LORD did according to the word of Moses; and he removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and

from his people; there remained not one. And Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go.

From this point on, the plagues will not affect the people of God. Therefore, take heart dear saint, for the effects of the curse which plague our planet will not torment us forever. We're on our way to the Promised Land, to the land flowing with milk and honey where every tear shall be wiped away for once, for all, forever.

ONE MORE NIGHT WITH THE FROGS

A Topical Study of EXODUS 8:10

"No problem," he told me. "So I smoke a little grass now and then? I've got tensions during the day, problems at home. And if I can just get away and smoke a bit, I can relax."

"We only drink socially," they say. "After all, we don't want to be left out of the office parties and civic functions our jobs require us to attend."

"I know he's not a Christian," she says. "But he's getting there. And I know if I keep dating him, one of these days, he'll come to church with me. Sure, he's a bit "froggy" right now. But soon, he'll turn into a prince. I just know he will."

Pharaoh, evidently, came to the same conclusion. The frogs covering his land were troublesome indeed, but nothing he couldn't live with for one more night.

There are twenty-five million alcoholics in America today. Yet I guarantee not one of them opened his first beer or poured her first glass of wine and said, "Today I'm going to become one of the twenty-five million alcoholics." No, everyone said, "I've got it under control. No problem. It's not going to bother me." And we say the same thing concerning everything from a questionable relationship to a hot temper, from a propensity to lie to a curiosity about pornography—until suddenly we wake up one day and realize our houses, ovens, beds, and kneading troughs are filled with frogs; until suddenly we realize that what we once thought we had under control has hopped out of its riverbed and is, instead, controlling us.

Pharaoh came to the stark realization that the frogs which he once encouraged his people to worship, that the frogs he depended on to keep the insect population at bay, were out of control. "They've got to go, Moses," he insisted. Yet when Moses asked him when, he answered, "Tomorrow."

Amazing. I would have thought he would have said, "Get them out of here right now! Today! Immediately! Quickly! I can't stand them another minute." But that's not what Pharaoh said. He said, "Tomorrow." Why? He wanted one

more night with the frogs. Oh, he knew they had to go—but not quite yet. Not right now.

There are activities, people, places in our lives about which the Lord says, "You thought you had that under control, all hemmed in. But now it's hopped its banks and is taking over."

And we say, "You're right, Lord. It is. What I'm doing with my computer is out of control. What I'm watching on TV is out of control. What I'm reading, where I'm going, the way I'm living is out of control." But when the Lord asks us when we want to be set free, all too often our answer is the same as Pharaoh's: "Tomorrow."

The problem is, by saying, "Tomorrow," Pharaoh's heart grew harder and harder still. You see, he could have gotten off relatively easy had he been serious and said, "I want the frogs to go now, right now. I'm repenting of what I've been doing. I'm changing my way of living. Moses, you and your people are free to go." And had he done so, Pharaoh would have spared himself, his family, and his country the unbelievable horror that awaited them.

The Bible says, "Today if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 4:7) "because, although there is pleasure in sin for a season, the end result is always destruction" (see Hebrews 11:25).

So what are we to do concerning the sin that controls and plagues us?

I suggest four things . . .

Remember

Remember that sin is not bad because it's forbidden, but that it's forbidden because it's bad. You see, God doesn't arbitrarily say, "This, this, this, and this are forbidden. Therefore they're sin." No, He says, "This, this, this, and this will hurt you, so I forbid them because I know they'll eventually destroy you."

Every sin I've ever committed, might commit, will commit, is paid for, washed away completely by Jesus' blood shed for me on Calvary. That's the gospel. But because whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap (Galatians 6:7), every sin I plant carries its own inevitable repercussions. Therefore, wise is the man who, understanding this principle, stays as far away from that which he knows will hurt not only himself, but the people around him.

Repent

To repent simply means to change directions. Where you once said, “This is OK,” change your mind. Make a U-turn. Instead of justifying, rationalizing, excusing sin, call it what it is and agree with the Lord that it’s gotta go. Right now.

Reckon

Perhaps the most potent passage of Scripture regarding sin, Romans 6 tells us that when Jesus died on the Cross, not only was the penalty of sin paid for, but the power of sin was broken.

"Oh, but you don't know how strong my addiction is," you say.

Perhaps. But I do know this: The Bible says the power of all sin was dealt a deathblow on the Cross. Therefore, all that remains is for me to reckon it to be true and to quit saying, "My situation is different. I'm too involved. I'm too addicted"—for such statements only diminish the reality and potency of what Jesus did on Calvary in order to set us completely, wholly, totally free.

As believers, we may choose to sin; we may decide to sin; but we never *have to* sin because the power of Christ resides in us. And He who told us to go our way and sin no more, to be holy for He is holy, also gives us the power to carry out His commands.

Refuse

Refuse to go where the frogs are croaking. You know exactly who the people and the places are that you need to avoid to stay free—regardless of whether they're the cool crowd or the hot place to be.

I find it amazing that Pharaoh would say, "Tomorrow"—until I analyze my own life and see the same tendency within me. I can hear a truth and say, "That's right. That's gotta go. That's gotta be corrected, adjusted, changed, repented of. And I'm going to get right on it . . . tomorrow." How I desire to be one who says, "*This* is the time—right here, right now."

You who have heard God's Word, you who have heard His heart, don't be like Pharaoh and wait for your own heart to harden. Instead, say, "I'm going to go Your way, Lord, not tomorrow, not Tuesday, but today."



9 Exodus 9:1–3

Then the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh, and tell him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me. For if thou refuse to let them go, and wilt hold them still, Behold, the hand of the LORD is upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: there shall be a very grievous murrain [fever].

God told Moses to tell Pharaoh that his cattle, sheep, oxen, and donkeys would all come down with a deadly fever. This meant that the Egyptian economy would be affected adversely without livestock to perform the tasks necessary in an agrarian society.

Exodus 9:4–6

And the LORD shall sever between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt: and there shall nothing die of all that is the children's of Israel. And the LORD appointed a set time, saying, To morrow the LORD shall do this thing in the land. And the LORD did

that thing on the morrow, and all the cattle of Egypt died: but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one.

The division between the Egyptians and the children of Israel seen in Exodus 8:23 with regard to the plague of flies continues here in chapter 9 concerning the death of livestock.

Exodus 9:7
And Pharaoh sent, and, behold, there was not one of the cattle of the Israelites dead. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.

Not only is Pharaoh being hit with plague after plague, but he realizes that the Israelites aren't. It's hard enough to go through difficulty, but doubly hard when it seems like others aren't. Yet even this realization was not enough to soften Pharaoh's heart.

Exodus 9:8–12
And the LORD said unto Moses and unto Aaron, Take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it toward the heaven in the sight of Pharaoh. And it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt. And they took ashes of the furnace, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses sprinkled it up toward heaven; and it became a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast. And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boil was upon the magicians, and upon all the Egyptians. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses.

The furnace referred to here is generally believed to be that of the god Typhoon wherein humans were sacrificed in order to stave off boils and sores for the remaining population. The Lord telling Moses to throw the ashes of Typhoon's furnace into the sky was as much a slap in the face of Typhoon as the abundance of frogs was to Heqt. "I require obedience, not sacrifice,"

declared the true and living God. “I don’t want you to burn your people in the fire, Pharaoh. I want you to let My people go.”

> **Exodus 9:13–16**
> **And the LORD said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me. For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth. For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.**

God raised up Pharaoh in order that all people throughout history could know that He is singular, that He is omnipotent, that He is sovereign. And to those who would protest that it was unfair for God to use Pharaoh in such a way, Paul would say, “Who are you to question God? Can the clay say to the potter, “Why did you make me thus?” The potter has the right to do whatever he chooses with the lump of clay. And God has the right to do whatever he wants with us” (see Romans 9:21).

How arrogantly foolish of us to think that we can figure God out. Truly our God is an awesome God. Yes, He’s a loving Father, our Abba, our Papa. But He is also the One who, without any explanation, told His friend to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22:2); the One who struck a king who served him well with leprosy for offering a sacrifice in the temple (1 Chronicles 26:20). I can’t read my Bible without realizing that my Father is loving and kind, compassionate and tender. But He is also awesome and huge, powerful and “other.” Yes, we rejoice in our Father. Yes, we understand His nature as we look at Jesus. But along with that, we must also understand that it is the fear of the Lord that is beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). We think we have God all figured out. But one can’t read the Scriptures without coming to the conclusion that He doesn’t fit into any box very easily.

Stand in awe of God. Be amazed by His greatness, by His size, by His sovereignty. And then marvel that He’s allowed us to be brought into His

family, that He's made Himself known to us through Jesus personally, that He placed us at a time in history where the gospel message surrounds us constantly. Sometimes I lift my hands in love and adoration to the Lord. Other times, I fall on my face on my living room floor, speechless in His presence. He raised up Pharaoh simply to show His power. And He stooped to save us to do the same.

Exodus 9:17–21
As yet exaltest thou thyself against my people, that thou wilt not let them go? Behold, to morrow about this time I will cause it to rain a very grievous hail, such as hath not been in Egypt since the foundation thereof even until now. Send therefore now, and gather thy cattle, and all that thou hast in the field; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die. He that feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses: And he that regarded not the word of the LORD left his servants and his cattle in the field.

It was the responsibility of the masters to care for their servants, to protect them from the storm that would otherwise take their lives. "Come unto Me all ye who are weak and heavy laden and I will give you rest," declares our Master. "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart" (Matthew 11:29). It is only in coming unto Jesus that we are spared from the hailstorm that would otherwise destroy us.

"Why is this happening?" we cry. "Why are these things taking place in my life? Why are these things coming down?" Many times the reason is because we did not take heed to the warning and call of our Master. There are people who are needlessly getting beat up and bruised by storms because they fail to come inside the household of God.

"Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together as is the manner of some," warned the writer of the letter to the Hebrews (10:25). We get needlessly pelted and pounded when we ignore the Lord's Table; when we go it alone rather than joining the company of believers for times of instruction and worship, praise and prayer; when we fail to seek shelter in Jesus.

Exodus 9:22, 23 (a)
And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch forth thine hand toward heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, upon man, and upon beast, and upon every herb of the field, throughout the land of Egypt. And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven: and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground . . .

Evidently, lightning ignited the fields and fire broke out.

Exodus 9:23 (b)–27 (a)
. . . and the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail. And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time . . .

Here we see a pseudo-confession made by Pharaoh. The problem is, he acknowledges his sin only "this time," failing to confess the series of sins that had brought him to this point.

Exodus 9:27 (b)
. . . the LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked.

Secondly, even Pharaoh's weakest of confessions is diluted by his eagerness to falsely implicate his people in the decisions he alone had made.

Exodus 9:28
Intreat the LORD (for it is enough) that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer.

Thirdly, the result of true confession is not reprieve but repentance—not a desire to save face, but a decision to make an about face; not insulation from correction, but a determination to change direction.

Exodus 9:29–32
And Moses said unto him, As soon as I am gone out of the city, I will spread abroad my hands unto the LORD; and the thunder shall cease, neither shall there be any more hail; that thou mayest know how that the earth is the LORD's. But as for thee and thy servants, I know that ye will not yet fear the LORD God. And the flax and the barley was smitten: for the barley was in the ear, and the flax was bolled. But the wheat and the rie were not smitten: for they were not grown up.

The flax and the barley were destroyed, but the wheat and rye would grow. Even in God's judgment there is mercy.

Exodus 9:33–35
And Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and spread abroad his hands unto the LORD: and the thunders and hail ceased, and the rain was not poured upon the earth. And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, neither would he let the children of Israel go; as the LORD had spoken by Moses.

The hail ceased; the lightning dissipated; the thunder stopped. Yet Pharaoh's heart remained hard.



10 **Exodus 10:1, 2**
And the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have hard ened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might shew these my signs before him: And that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of

thy son's son, what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that ye may know how that I am the LORD.

God's intent in baring His arm and raining plagues upon Egypt was not only that the Egyptians would see His power and superiority, but that His own people would know that He was indeed who He claimed to be to such an extent that they could pass this knowledge on to their children and grandchildren. They could learn a portion of this lesson by observing God's dealing with the Egyptians through the hail that fell upon them and the flies which tormented them. But the other part of the lesson could only be learned firsthand as they themselves experienced the effects of water turned to blood, of frogs swarming their houses, and of lice covering their bodies.

There's no testimony without tests. A vibrant, passionate, and authentic walk with the Lord does not come from secondhand theology. It only comes through the things we experience personally.

Exodus 10:3–6
And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me? let my people go, that they may serve me. Else, if thou refuse to let my people go, behold, to morrow will I bring the locusts into thy coast: And they shall cover the face of the earth, that one cannot be able to see the earth: and they shall eat the residue of that which is escaped, which remaineth unto you from the hail, and shall eat every tree which groweth for you out of the field: And they shall fill thy houses, and the houses of all thy servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians; which neither thy fathers, nor thy fathers' fathers have seen, since the day that they were upon the earth unto this day. And he turned himself, and went out from Pharaoh.

You are about to be bugged, Pharaoh. The locusts are going to swarm over the land in a way you have never seen in all of your nation's history. They're going to fill your houses, destroy your crops, devour your trees. If you don't let My people go, God declared to Pharaoh, your land will be destroyed.

Exodus 10:7
And Pharaoh's servants said unto him, How long shall this man be a snare unto us? let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God: knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?

"Let the men go," said Pharaoh's advisers. "Our land is already destroyed because of them." I believe the operative word in their request was the word "go." But, as we will see in verse 9, the operative word for Pharaoh was "men." Different people can indeed hear the same thing different ways. For example, in the sentence, "A woman without her man is nothing," men hear, "A woman, without her man, is nothing," while women hear, "A woman, without her, man is nothing."

Pharaoh's advisers said, "Let the men *go*." But Pharaoh heard, "Let the *men* go."

Exodus 10:8
And Moses and Aaron were brought again unto Pharaoh: and he said unto them, Go, serve the LORD your God: but who are they that shall go?

"I'll be the one who will decide who can go," Pharaoh said.

Exodus 10:9–11 (a)
And Moses said, We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we must hold a feast unto the LORD. And he said unto them, Let the LORD be so with you, as I will let you go, and your little ones: look to it; for evil is before you. Not so: go now ye that are men, and serve the LORD; for that ye did desire . . .

No doubt knowing that by leaving their families in Egypt, the men would return quickly if indeed they went at all, Pharaoh offered to let the men go.

Exodus 10:11 (b)
. . . And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.

Moses would not compromise on this point, for it wasn't merely a matter of men serving the Lord but of entire families serving Him together.

Exodus 10:12–15
And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land, even all that the hail hath left. And Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt, and rested in all the coasts of Egypt: very grievous were they; before them there were no such locusts as they, neither after them shall be such. For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left: and there remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt.

We will see locusts again in Scripture—most notably in the Book of Joel, where God uses them in judgment against His own people—but also in the mouth of one who would prepare the way of the One who would preach not judgment but joy (see Matthew 3:3, 4).

Exodus 10:16, 17
Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you. Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the LORD your God, that he may take away from me this death only.

Pharaoh's arrogance is amazing. Here, he has the audacity not only to think he's playing Moses like a well-tuned violin, but to suggest that, either he would ask Moses to go to God on his behalf only once more, or, more incredibly, that he had sinned only once.

Exodus 10:18
And he went out from Pharaoh, and intreated the LORD.

Because Pharaoh played games time after time with him, Moses would have been justified in answering Pharaoh's request with, "Forget it." Instead, in praying on Pharaoh's behalf, his actions answered "Yes." Moses was a man of incredible patience, of unbelievable humility. No wonder the Lord could use him.

Exodus 10:19–22
And the LORD turned a mighty strong west wind, which took away the locusts, and cast them into the Red sea; there remained not one locust in all the coasts of Egypt. But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go. And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt. And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days:

The land that had been darkened by locusts (10:15) was now made dark with a darkness so dense it could actually be felt.

Exodus 10:23 (a)
They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days . . .

For three days there was total darkness, even as there would be three hours of darkness when Jesus hung on the Cross. The disciples would go on to experience three days of inner darkness between Good Friday and Easter Sunday until they understood that hope was not lost, that death had been conquered, that the Light of the world had indeed risen from the dead.

Exodus 10:23 (b)
. . . but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.

The light flooding the homes of the children of Israel must have been that of the Shekinah, the chabod, the glory of God.

Is there light in your home? Is the presence of the Lord there? Are your kids being taught to walk in His ways? Is your home a place where you love each other and pray together, where things are right? Let us live in the light; let us walk in the light; let us be obedient to that which God has illuminated for you and me.

Exodus 10:24–26

And Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Go ye, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your little ones also go with you. And Moses said, Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the LORD our God. Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the LORD our God; and we know not with what we must serve the LORD, until we come thither.

Moses and Pharaoh had been duking it out, mixing it up, and sparring round after round . . .

Round 1:

After being punched with the plagues of blood, frogs, lice and flies, Pharaoh said to Moses, "I'll let you and your people serve the Lord—but you must remain in Egypt" (see 8:25).

"We'll be stoned if we stay here," said Moses. And both returned to their corners.

Round 2:

"I'll let you leave the country—but don't go very far" (see 8:28).

"We must go where God directs," said Moses.

Round 3:

Having been struck with boils and hail, Pharaoh said, "You and your men can go as far as you want. But your women and children must stay here" (see 10:11).

"We're taking our families," Moses countered. And both returned to their corners.

Round 4:

Here in our text, following the double punch of locusts and darkness, Pharaoh said, "You and your families can go. But your livestock must stay."

"No," said Moses. We're going to take our families and flocks. We're going to take our kids and our cattle. We're going to take the whole kit and kaboodle."

Egypt being a picture of the world, Satan seeks to make the same compromises to people today . . .

"Stay in the world," he says. "Sure, you might have to bake a brick or two, but at least you're familiar with the system. Why take a risk on that which you can't see? Why leave the known for the unknown? Why set your sights on a kingdom which claims to be eternal, yet is presently invisible?"

And when we choose to listen to God instead of to him, Satan changes his tactic to, "Alright, go ahead and believe in Jesus. But don't go too far. Don't get too radical."

And when we ignore him again, Satan says, "Be radical in your faith if you want. But don't rope your kids into it. When they're older, let them make their own decision about whether or not to follow Jesus. Until then, leave them in Egypt where they can play soccer and take ballet lessons."

And when we decide, like Moses, that we will worship as families, Satan comes up with a final compromise: "Go ahead. Throw in your lot with God. You and your family can even be radical in your faith. But don't spend money on it. Don't tithe. Don't give God His due. Don't invest in eternity."

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," Jesus said, (Matthew 6:21). Were Moses to leave the livelihood of his people in Egypt, their hearts would remain there. And to the degree that we sink ours into the soil of this world, ours remain here as well.

Exodus 10:27–29

But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go. And Pharaoh said unto him, Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die. And Moses said, Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more.

Pharaoh's death threats notwithstanding, Moses would go on to lead every one of God's people out of Egypt, while Pharaoh would find himself at the bottom of the Red Sea.



11 Exodus 11:1–3

And the LORD said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether. Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold. And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people.

The Hebrew word translated "borrow" is *sha'al.* It appears 168 times in Scripture—all but six times meaning "request" or "demand." Lest we wonder what right the Israelites had to request gold and silver of the Egyptians, we must bear in mind that they had served the Egyptians for centuries without any compensation whatsoever. The Egyptians owed much to the children of Israel.

Although it doesn't realize this, the world owes much to the community of faith. The building of hospitals and orphanages, the elevation of women, the dismantling of slavery, the institution of public education all find their roots in the church. Imperfect as she may be, as flawed as she is, the church has had a huge influence on world history, for wherever the gospel has gone, great change has followed. And it is the church that is restraining the forces of evil presently. When the church is taken up in the Rapture, although the world will rejoice initially, it will be plunged into such immorality and problems that it will see the difference the church made all along.

Exodus 11:4, 5
And Moses said, Thus saith the LORD, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts.

"Israel is my firstborn," God had declared (Exodus 4:22). Therefore, because Pharaoh had enslaved and ordered the systematic annihilation of Israel, God's firstborn, He was justified in ordering the annihilation of Pharaoh's firstborn.

Exodus 11:6, 7
And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.

Were the children of Israel to be spared the death of their firstborn because they were better than the Egyptians? Hardly, for listen to God's own description of His people . . .

And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up mine hand unto them, saying, I am the LORD your God; In the day that I lifted up mine hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt into a land that I had espied for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands: Then said I unto them, Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I wrought for

my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they were, in whose sight I made myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt.

Ezekiel 20:5–9

The Israelites weren't delivered from the hand of the Egyptians because of their faithfulness, because of their devotion, because of their integrity. They were spared solely because of God's sovereignty.

Why are we here tonight? Certainly not because we're pure and holy, but simply because, by His sovereign will, God chose you and me to be part of His family. He's chosen to call us by His name, to be an example of His grace and mercy. We are just as prone to sin as anyone else. But we, who, because we were dead in trespasses and sins were unable to do anything for ourselves, were rescued and redeemed. God is indeed all-wise. But it wasn't His wisdom that chose you and me. It was simply, purely, completely His grace and mercy.

Exodus 11:8–10
And all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee: and after that I will go out. And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger. And the LORD said unto Moses, Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you; that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt. And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh: and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land.

Keep in mind that in chapter 4, God had warned Pharaoh point-blank, "If you don't let My firstborn, the nation Israel, to go free, then I will deal most harshly with your firstborn." Pharaoh had heard the word of the Lord. But neither hail nor locusts, flies nor lice, boils nor frogs would soften his heart. Therefore, God had no other recourse but to deliver the knock-out punch which would finally force Pharaoh to say, "Go."

12

Exodus 12:1, 2

And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.

Monumental as it was, the Passover would not be the only event which would turn the calendar on its head, for when the Incarnation divided the global calendar into B.C. and A.D.—Before Christ and The Year of our Lord—all of history was impacted. But there is a time yet to come when antichrist will seek to change the calendar again in order to eradicate the name of Jesus altogether (Daniel 7:25). We're seeing a hint of this even today as the terms C.E. or B.C.E.—Common Era and Before Common Era—are increasingly used in Europe as replacements for A.D. and B.C. Has your calendar been changed personally? If so, no doubt you look at your life Before Christ and see yourself as a Neanderthal without Him.

Exodus 12:3

Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house:

The net of salvation grows ever wider in Scripture. In Genesis 4, Abel offered a lamb for a man. Here in Exodus 12, the children of Israel were to offer a lamb for a family. In Exodus 29, the priests were to offer a lamb for a nation. And in John 1, we see a Lamb who came to be offered for the whole world.

Exodus 12:4, 5 (a)

And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb . . .

In *a lamb* (v. 3), *the lamb* (v. 4), and *your lamb* (v. 4), we see progressive revelation. Yes, Jesus is a Lamb. But He's more than a Lamb. He's not just one

of the Great Teachers, the Great Masters. No, He's *the* Lamb. Yet He's more than that, for to be your Savior, He must be *your* Lamb.

Exodus 12:5 (b)
. . . shall be without blemish . . .

"He's done nothing wrong," said the thief crucified next to Jesus (see Luke 23:41).

"Truly this must be the Son of God," said the Roman centurion (Matthew 27:54).

"I find no fault in Him," said Pontius Pilate as he washed his hands nervously (Luke 23:4).

"I've betrayed innocent blood," said Judas desperately (Matthew 27:4).

Jesus was indeed the Lamb without blemish.

Exodus 12:5 (c)
. . . a male of the first year . . .

"Of the first year" can also be translated "firstborn."

Exodus 12:5 (d), 6 (a)
. . . ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month . . .

A lamb was to be selected on the tenth day and slaughtered on the fourteenth day. The four days between the two, serving as a period of inspection to ensure that the lamb was not blemished or diseased. It was on the tenth of the month of Nissan A.D. 32 that Jesus went into Jerusalem during His final week. For the following four days, the Pharisees, Sadducees, and His enemies would try to challenge Him theologically and attempt to trap Him ethically. But they were, to a man, unable to find any flaw in Him, for truly He is the spotless Lamb.

Exodus 12:6 (b)
. . . and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.

One for each household, thousands of lambs would have been slaughtered, yet they are referred to as "it," as one because they point to the singular Lamb, Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Exodus 12:7
And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it.

In verse 22, we read that the blood was to be applied with hyssop, a plant that speaks of humility. A person doesn't get saved until he's humble before God, until he realizes he's a sinner.

Exodus 12:8 (a)
And they shall eat the flesh in that night . . .

Confused by His words, it was after Jesus said, "If you do not eat of My body, you have no life in you," that many followed Him no more (John 6:66). This side of the Resurrection, we understand that we have to absorb, to assimilate Jesus into our lives, to allow Him to rule and reign from within—a principle of which Passover then and Communion now are pictures.

Exodus 12:8 (b)
. . . roast with fire . . .

The lamb was roasted with fire as a picture of the fact that, as Jesus hung on the Cross, God hurled upon His Son the fire of His wrath that He should have hurled upon me.

Exodus 12:8 (c)
. . . and unleavened bread . . .

Not only is leaven a picture of the sin which was completely absent from our Lord—but the unleavened bread eaten at Passover to this day is poked and striped, just as the back of Jesus was striped by the flagellum (Isaiah 53:5) and His side pierced with a spear (John 19:34).

Exodus 12:8 (d), 9 (a)

. . . and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water . . .

Choosing to absorb the full blow of His Father's fury, Jesus refused the vinegar offered to Him as a painkiller on the Cross. Therefore, the bitter herbs of Passover were not to be watered down.

Exodus 12:9 (b)
. . . but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof.

The "purtenance" speaking of the insides, we're to feed on Jesus' mind, walk, and heart. We're to know what He said, to see how He walked practically, to feel His heart. And, in turn, we're to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30).

Exodus 12:10
And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.

The children of Israel were to eat the Passover lamb in one sitting. They weren't to save any for leftovers. So, when Jesus died on the Cross, He didn't say, "To be continued . . ." He said, "It is *finished.*" There is nothing left to be accomplished. The work is *complete.*

Exodus 12:11
And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD's passover.

Just as the children of Israel were to partake of the Passover in a posture of being ready to go, in I Corinthians 11, Paul says in observing Communion, we show the Lord's death *until He comes.* In other words, the Communion Table, like the Passover meal, is not to be simply about absorbing the Lamb and appropriating the blood—but to realize the time is at hand when He will

come back, when we'll move on, when we'll at last partake of the marriage feast of the Lamb with Him in eternity.

Exodus 12:12
For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.

After declaring He would pass through the land and smite the firstborn of man and beast, God gives this reason: "I am the Lord." And that's all the reason He needs.

Exodus 12:13
And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

It wasn't the expense of the house nor the righteousness of the people within the house which mattered. The only issue was the blood applied *to* the house. The shed blood was not enough to save their families. The children of Israel had to *apply* the blood to the doorposts of their own homes.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock," Jesus said. "If any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). As the blood needed to be applied to the doorposts individually, so each man must open the door to his own heart personally.

Exodus 12:14–17
And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever. Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel. And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and

in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you. And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever.

Passover was celebrated on the fourteenth day of the month. The following day, a seven-day celebration began called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In the middle of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a third feast began, which was the Feast of Firstfruits (Leviticus 23). Together, these three feasts paint a perfect prophetic picture. Yes, Jesus died on Passover. But was He truly without blemish, without leaven, without sin? His Resurrection answers that question with a resounding, "Yes!" And not only that, but the fact that He rose on the Feast of Firstfruits means that He is only the first One to do so—that we will follow. Oh, happy day that will be!

Exodus 12:18–20
In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land. Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread.

Psalm 105:37 tells us that after they ate the Passover Meal, the entire nation was in perfect health. Second Chronicles 30:13–20 goes on to say that when the Passover was reinstated by Hezekiah, the Lord healed all the people. What did Paul say about our celebration of Passover—the Table of Communion? Because some don't give it worth, many are sick or weak, and the implication is that some even died unnecessarily (see 1 Corinthians 11:30).

Exodus 12:21, 22

Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning.

The word translated "bason" is actually the Egyptian word *sap,* which speaks of the basin used for washing one's feet that was built into the threshold of the door. With the basin filled with blood on Passover, and the side and upper doorposts marked with blood, the picture of a Cross is unmistakable.

Exodus 12:23–28
For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you. And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped. And the children of Israel went away, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they.

In the Jewish Passover meal to this day, there are four cups of blessing. Between the first and second cups, three matzos stacked on top of each other are removed from a linen pouch, and the one in the middle broken. Half of the broken matzo is then wrapped in a linen napkin and hidden for the children of the family to find. The one who finds it is given a special prize and celebration follows. Ask the Jewish rabbis or read Jewish literature to determine the meaning of this custom and, although you will find lots of

theories, you will find no consensus—for, although the Jews can explain the Passover in terms of their history, they can't explain this particular ceremony, known as *afikomen*. *Afikomen* is the only word in the Passover celebration which is not Hebrew. Rather, it's a Greek word, meaning, "I came."

The body of Jesus, the middle One of the Trinity comprised of Father, Son, and Spirit, was broken, wrapped in linen, hidden away, and discovered amidst great celebration. Why is only half of the matzo broken in the Passover tradition? Because as God-Man, it was only Jesus' humanity that died. Thus, the *afikomen* of the Passover perfectly pictures the Lamb of God Who came to die for the sins of the world.

Interestingly, at the completion of their Passover, Moroccan Jews take a piece of the *afikomen* and carry it with them for the full year until the next Passover celebration because tradition has it that if a storm comes up when they are out at sea, all they need do is toss a piece of the *afikomen* into the water and the sea will be calm—a tradition which finds its roots in the One who came, the One who quieted storms, the One who said, "Peace, be still."

Exodus 12:29, 30
And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharoah that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead.

Hearing the haunting cries of Egyptian parents who realized death had struck their homes, perhaps God's people were afraid. Perhaps they doubted. But guess what. It mattered not whether they were at peace or feeling anxious, whether they were rejoicing or worried greatly. All that mattered was that the blood was on the door. No matter what they felt emotionally, it was all about the blood singularly.

Exodus 12:31, 32
And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of

Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also.

It must have been a broken and brokenhearted Pharaoh who finally admitted that the true and living God was superior to his gods.

Exodus 12:33–36 (a)
And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men. And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneadingtroughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders. And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required . . .

"You can have anything you want," the Egyptians must have said. "Just leave before we all die."

Exodus 12:36 (b), 37 (a)
. . . And they spoiled the Egyptians. And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth . . .

With loins girded—robes cinched around the waist to give mobility to the legs—and shoes on their feet, with walking sticks in hands and kneading troughs on their shoulders, the children of Israel resembled backpackers. And, appropriately, their first stop was Succoth, or "Tent Town."

Exodus 12:37 (b)
. . . about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children.

Six hundred thousand men means approximately three million people, including women and children, set out from Egypt.

Exodus 12:38
And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle.

Although they weren't children of Israel, others wanted to be part of their company.

Exodus 12:39–44
And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual. Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night to be much observed unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations. And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof.

No pagan could eat of the Passover. However, pagan slaves willing to be circumcised were free to partake.

Exodus 12:45, 46
A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof. In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof.

Why was no bone to be broken? I suggest three reasons . . .

Restoration. David—a man who was a shepherd by trade and a sheep by nature—speaks of restoration when he writes, "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice" (Psalm 51:8).

You see, in Bible days, if a lamb continually placed its life in jeopardy by wandering away, the shepherd would break its legs, set the bones, and carry it on his shoulders for the following six to eight weeks until the bones were healed. During that period, the lamb would develop such a deep affection for the shepherd, that when its legs were healed, it would remain by the shepherd's side all the days of its life. Jesus, being the sinless Lamb of God, however, had no need to be broken.

Redemption. "Where sin abounds, grace abounds more," Paul declares (Romans 5:20). What is the basis of grace? The blood of Calvary. Where is blood produced? In the bone. Therefore, in insisting that not a bone be broken, it's as though God is saying, "I don't want any suggestion that there is a limitation to the blood. I want people to understand that where sin abounds, grace always abounds *more*."

Reconciliation. To hasten death, soldiers would break the legs of those being crucified. However, when they came to do this to Jesus, so surprised were they that He had died in only six hours, that they poked a spear in His side to make sure (John 19:34).

If you are estranged from or at odds with someone to whom you were once close, the only way there can be reconciliation is if someone dies. Jesus models that for you and me. He died to reconcile us to the Father—but He died quickly. It was not unusual for victims of crucifixion to prolong their lives eighteen hours or more as they hung on the cross. Not Jesus. The work of reconciliation complete, He released His spirit relatively quickly in order that He might race to Easter—to Resurrection day. That's the key: the sooner we die, the sooner we'll be at Easter Sunday. A lot of people remain at Good Friday, saying, "I'm not going to give up. I'm not going to die. I'm going to stand up for my rights," only to prolong the pain and separation. Jesus showed us the way when He died quickly.

How do you know if you're really dead? They poked Jesus in the side with a spear to find out if He was really dead—and the same will happen to you. If you're dead, you won't react when you get poked. You won't say, "Ouch! Cut that out!" You'll know you're dead if, when you are poked, all that comes out is the blood of forgiveness, the water of refreshment. And that's when there can be reconciliation and resurrection.

Exodus 12:47–51

All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you. Thus did all the children of Israel; as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they. And it came to pass the selfsame day, that the LORD did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies.

Outsiders who wanted to take part in the Passover feast could do so if they were circumcised, if they would deal with their flesh.



13 Although the trip from Egypt to the Promised Land would have been a ten-day journey as the crow flies, it was God's intent that His people spend a full year getting there, stopping at seven specific campsites, learning seven important lessons on the way. Why? Because it was one thing for God to get His people out of Egypt—and quite another to get Egypt out of His people.

Egypt being a picture of the world, when we were saved, the Lord took us out of the world—and now He's taking the world out of us. He is not only preparing a place for us in heaven, but also preparing us for the place. If we fail to understand this, life will be constantly confusing and depressing as we wonder, "What is this about?" "Why is that taking place?" "What on earth is going on?" I will find myself discouraged, disoriented, and defeated unless I understand life is meant to prepare me for Heaven.

After stopping at Succoth, or, "Tent Town"—a perfect picture that this world is not our home—the children of Israel were headed for Campsite number two. But before they packed up, God had something He wanted to tell them . . .

Exodus 13:1, 2
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of

Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine.

"Every firstborn is to be sanctified, consecrated, set apart for Me," God declared. Why? When the Israelites left Egypt, they left behind a nation in agony, mourning the deaths of their firstborn sons. Therefore, in commanding the Israelites to sanctify their firstborn, God was, in effect, saying, "To help you remember you are My firstborn, I am commanding that your firstborn be dedicated to Me."

God's intent was that the firstborn son in every family would be in the priesthood, involved in ministry. The problem was, however, that the people of Israel fell prey to idolatry to such a degree that, at the golden calf, only one tribe responded to the Lord's call to rectify the situation. Thus, the tribe of Levi would be the only men who would be allowed to minister as priests.

Exodus 13:3–10

And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place: there shall no leavened bread be eaten. This day came ye out in the month Abib. And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee, a land flowing with milk and honey, that thou shalt keep this service in this month. Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, and in the sev enth day shall be a feast to the LORD. Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days; and there shall no leavened bread be seen with thee, neither shall there be leaven seen with thee in all thy quarters. And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying, This is done because of that which the LORD did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt. And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the LORD's law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the LORD brought thee out of Egypt. Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in his season from year to year.

The Israelites were not only to remember that they were God's firstborn, but they were to remember the day He delivered them. They were to celebrate Passover annually in order that they would be able to provide a tangible way that their children could understand what God did for His people in bringing them out of Egypt.

Exodus 13:11–16
And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, as he sware unto thee and to thy fathers, and shall give it thee, that thou shalt set apart unto the LORD all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males shall be the LORD's. And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem.

And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, by strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem. And it shall be for a token upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes: for by strength of hand the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt.

The only way a donkey could live was if a lamb was slain for it. I like this analogy. Because we know the lamb speaks of Jesus, it's not too difficult to figure out who the donkey represents . . .

The donkey is mentioned twenty-five times in the Old Testament, among which are the following . . .

In Genesis 22, when Abraham took Isaac up to Mt. Moriah, a donkey was saddled for them, which speaks of a loss of liberty.

Later in the same chapter, the donkey was to be tied up while Abraham and Isaac ascended the mountain, which speaks of an

inability to worship.

As Jacob pronounces blessing on his sons in Genesis 49, he likens Issachar to a donkey that is heavily laden.

In Deuteronomy 22, we read that the ox and donkey were not to plow together, the implication being that the donkey would only slow the ox down.

In 1 Samuel 9, we see Saul trying to locate his father's donkeys that had wandered away.

Jeremiah 22 speaks of a donkey left for dead and tossed outside the city gates.

Taken together, these references speak of you and me—laden down, tied up, lacking an ability to serve or worship the Lord, lost, left for dead, tossed out—not a very flattering picture. But the final mention of a donkey in the Old Testament is a glorious one indeed . . .

> Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.
>
> Zechariah 9:9

A week before He would go to Calvary, Jesus said to His disciples, "Go into the village and you'll see a donkey. Untie it and bring it to Me. And if anyone asks why you are untying it, tell him the Lord has need of it" (see Matthew 21:3).

"I choose a donkey," Jesus said. "Let Alexander the Great ride on the back of his mighty black stallion. Let the Romans ride their dazzling white horses. I'll use a donkey."

Jesus wants to enter your city, your workplace, your family. And He chooses to use you as a means of getting there.

"How can He use me?" you ask. "I'm nothing but a donkey."

That's right. And He loves using donkeys—the foolish things of the world to confound the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27). But before He can use you, you first must be untied, released because you can't be used if you're bound up with guilt and sin and worry. So He sends disciples to untie you—maybe in a Bible study, maybe over the radio, with a word from the Lord just for you.

Before the donkey was ridden, he was released. But before he was released, he had to be redeemed. The donkey would die unless a lamb died in his place. And that's exactly what the Lamb of God did when He died for us.

When fishes flew and forests walked and figs grew upon thorn
When some moment the moon was blood, then surely I was born
With monstrous head and sickening cry and ears like errant wings
The devil's walking parody on all four-footed things
The tattered outlaw of the earth, of ancient, crooked will
Scourge me, starve me, deride me. I am dumb. But I keep my secret still
For I, too, had my hour, one far, fierce hour and sweet
When there were shouts of Hosanna about my ears and palm branches about my feet.

G. K. Chesterton

The donkey had his day. So can we. That's *amazing* grace.

Exodus 13:17
And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt:

"It seems like I'm on a merry-go-round, Lord," we cry. "It seems like I'm on a circuitous route. Why don't You take me straight to the Promised Land?"

"Because I see things you don't, know things you can't," the Lord answers. "If I took you in the way you think you should go, it would be disastrous for you. Trust Me. I'm preparing you for the land as well as preparing the land for you."

Exodus 13:18, 19
But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt. And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will

surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you.

Approximately 360 years earlier, Joseph had said, "I know I'm dying. I also know, as God's people, you will make it to the Promised Land. Therefore, don't leave me here in Egypt. Although I live here, worked here, and will die here, I'm not of Egypt. So take me to the Promised Land."

Our bones will be taken out of this Egypt as well. Even if you die tonight, your bones will not be left here, for the Lord Himself shall descend and the dead in Christ shall rise first—bones and all (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Exodus 13:20
And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness.

When the Israelites left Succoth, they didn't go to the Land of Promise. They went to Etham—a town on the brink of disaster, a town on the edge of the wilderness. In the Bible, the word "wilderness" does not refer to a land of pine trees, mountain streams, rainbow trout, and wildflowers—but to the bleak, brutal, blistering desert.

"You brought us to the desert, Lord? With nothing but nothing before us?" the Israelites must have cried.

Oh, but the place is called *Etham* or literally, "With them."

"I'm with you," the Lord declares. "I know it looks like you're on the brink of disaster, like there's nothing good ahead. But I'm with you to see you through."

How can the Lord teach us He is truly with us except to take us to the desert? When everything is fine, we go on our merry way as if His presence in our life is optional. It's only when we're on the brink of disaster that we realize how much we need Him.

Exodus 13:21 (a)
And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way . . .

How did God lead His people? In the heat of the desert, He led them with a cool, comforting cloud.



For topical study of Exodus 13:20–22, see "The Leading of the Lord" below.

Exodus 13:21 (b), 22
. . . and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

Biblically, fire is a symbol of trials. "Don't think it strange," Peter writes, "concerning the fiery trials that come your way" (1 Peter 4:12). How does God guide you? Not only with a cool, comfortable cloud—but sometimes through the fire of difficulty. Yet, as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego learned, the hotter the trial, the greater the liberty. When the three Hebrews were thrown into Belshazzar's fiery furnace, their skin didn't burn; their hair wasn't singed; their clothes didn't even smell like smoke. The only physical effect of the fire was that the ropes which had once bound them were burned away.

"She dumped me? He fired me? This is terrible!" we cry.

Wait. Hold on. Hang in there. You'll look back and see that, in reality, you were actually set free.

And then, like the children of Israel, you'll be able to go on to Stop Number Three, where it gets even worse—and even more wonderful . . .

THE LEADING OF THE LORD

A Topical Study of EXODUS 13:20–22

Now what? Having been released from their slavery in Egypt, they knew there was a great destiny awaiting them: a land flowing with milk and honey, the Promised Land. The only question was, how would they know the way? How would God guide them day by day? And that is the question people still ask. "I know I've been freed from Egypt—they say, from the slavery of the sins to which I was once bound—and headed for a great destiny, that I'm going to heaven ultimately, but what do I do in the meantime? How will the Lord lead me practically, daily?"

Many people are in a fog about the way the Lord leads. But I believe the passage before us clears things up wonderfully as it replaces the fog around us with a cloud over us. In light of this, I submit three questions for your consideration, three questions to help you determine which way the Lord is leading in any given situation . . .

Is It Cool?

When I read this story in Sunday school, saw it on the flannel graph board, or watched it in the movies, it seems to me that the cloud was always in front of the congregation. That is, the Israelites would see the cloud off in the distance and simply follow wherever it lead. But I don't think this was what was really taking place, for in Psalm 105:39, we read that the cloud wasn't ahead of the congregation, but was above the congregation, a covering of the congregation.

This means that when God wanted His people to move, He got them to move in a very simple, practical way. With daytime temperatures reaching one hundred and twenty-five degrees in the desert, God put a cloud over the entire congregation to shade them. And when He wanted them to move, He would simply move the cloud, knowing His people would move as well, simply to stay in the shade.

And that's the way the Lord still directs us. "My burden is easy, My load light," Jesus declared (see Matthew 11:30)—a New Testament principle pictured in the Old Testament priesthood . . .

> *And it shall come to pass, that when they enter in at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments; and no wool shall come upon them, whiles they minister in the gates of the inner court, and within. They shall have linen bonnets upon their heads, and shall have linen breeches upon their loins; they shall not gird themselves with any thing that causeth sweat.*
>
> Ezekiel 44:17, 18

When you want to know what God's will for you is, the first thing you should do is ask, Is it cool—or is it wool? Will it cause inspiration—or perspiration? "Delight yourself in the Lord," the psalmist declared, "and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). In other words, if you delight in, love, and enjoy the Lord, He will give you that which your heart desires. How can that be? Because He has already written His will on the table of your heart (Jeremiah 31:33), the desire of the heart in fellowship with Him is His desire.

Perhaps Augustine said it best when, asked how to determine God's will, he answered, "Love God—and do what you please."

A few years ago, I talked to some missionaries in the mountainous area of Papua New Guinea where it rains forty-three days a year and where toads spit poison so potent it burns through clothing.

"How can you do this?" I asked in amazement.

"We love it," they answered. "Come and see our bug collections!"

They love the bugs, the people, and even the weather because God fashioned them in such a way that they would fit in to His divine design for them to share His Word with the people of Papua New Guinea.

It has been rightly said that there are lots of cheap imitations of priceless masterpieces in the church today. "Look at him. Look at her. Look at them," we say. "I'm going to be just like him or her or them." But when we try to imitate or duplicate someone else's calling or ministry, the best we can be is only a cheap imitation. You are a masterpiece because the Master has pieced you together to do exactly what He intended you to do since before the world even began (Ephesians 1:4).

"You are His workmanship," Paul wrote to the Ephesians (2:10). *Poema,* the Greek word translated "workmanship," is the word from which we get our word "poem." You are God's poetry. He has created you specifically and uniquely to do that which He knows will satisfy you most completely. Therefore, when you get to heaven, the Lord is not going to say, "Why weren't you more like Moses? Why weren't you more like Abraham? Why weren't you more like Paul or Billy Graham?" No, He's going to say, "Why weren't you more like *you?* Why weren't you simply the person I made you to be—My Masterpiece, My poetry?"

Don't strive, dear saint. Don't sweat, fellow priest. Be who the Lord intended you to be—His unique Masterpiece, His inimitable poetry.

Will It Count?

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

Acts 1:9

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 4:17

Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

Revelation 1:7

Because Jesus is coming back in the clouds, the cloud causes us not only to consider what is cool, but what will count. You see, when we stand before Him, we'll give an account of what we did with our time, talents, and treasures. All that we did on earth will be tried by fire, and whatever remains will be our reward for eternity. And even if you don't think you're the type who cares about rewards, I promise you, you'll care then—for they will determine your capacity to enjoy eternity, your function in the kingdom.

"For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Revelation 7:17).

What could possibly be the reason for tears in heaven?

I believe there will be tears when we stand before the Lord and see the opportunities we lost, the time we wasted, the potential we took for granted. What we do now will affect who we are, how much we enjoy, the way we function forever. And there's no hint in Scripture that in heaven we can compensate for that which we didn't do on earth. So when I'm deciding whether to watch TV or worship the Lord, to focus my energy on my car or on

the kingdom, to pursue pleasure or to love people, if I'm aware of the cloud which speaks of His coming, I'll choose correctly every time.

Does It Conform?

Seeing Jesus shine as He talked with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, no wonder Peter exclaimed, "Lord, it's *good* for us to be here. Let's make three booths, three tents, three monuments—one for You, one for Moses, one for Elijah and camp out right here!"

It was at this point that a cloud appeared, with a voice thundering, "This is My beloved Son. Hear ye *Him*" (Matthew 17:5, italics added).

The cloud of the Transfiguration reminds me that, concerning any crossroad facing me, my decision must conform to the words and example Jesus gave me. The writer to Hebrews clarifies this even further when he says, "Wherefore, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run the race set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). We're surrounded by a cloud of witnesses—heroes of the faith like Abraham, Moses, and David; Noah, Jacob, and Gideon.

If, when you were struggling with a decision, I asked if you'd be interested in a personal appointment with the apostle Paul, followed by a time of worship with David, and a Question and Answer session with Isaiah, you'd no doubt jump at the chance. But such a scenario is presently possible, for you hold in your hand the collective wisdom of the great cloud of witnesses. What an unspeakable privilege is ours to be counseled by forty different authors, each inspired by the Spirit of God. Oh, the wisdom, counsel, and direction I find when I read the Scriptures.

God's will is not hard to figure out. He leads us with a cloud. And when we follow, we have it made in the shade.



14 **Exodus 14:1, 2**

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baal-zephon: before it shall ye encamp by the sea.

Pi-hahiroth literally means "mouth of the gorges." *Migdol* means "tower." Therefore, it would seem that for Stop Number Three, God directed His

people to camp between a cavernous mountain wherein enemy troops might be hidden and a military fortress of some sort, with their backs to the Red Sea.

"That's not strategically wise," Moses' advisors must have said. "If the Egyptians change their minds and pursue us, we would be sitting ducks." But the Lord would go on to explain His strategy to Moses . . .

Exodus 14:3, 4
For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, they are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so.

Surely the Egyptians knew that the true and living God was Lord of all. If the frogs and flies hadn't convinced them of this, blood and boils, hail and lice, and the horror of the death of the firstborn would have done so. But they still had one ace up their sleeve—their awesome, legendary, invincible army. Thus, they needed to see God's preeminence over their military prowess.

Exodus 14:5, 6
And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us? And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him:

Realizing he had lost his work force, Pharaoh made ready to pursue the Israelites.

Exodus 14:7 (a)
And he took six hundred chosen chariots . . .

The Hebrew word translated "chosen" means "choice." In other words, these chariots were the most sophisticated weapons of the day. Inventors of the chariot, the Egyptian army seemed to have left its enemies in the dust technologically.

Exodus 14:7 (b), 8
. . . and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand.

That they "went out with a high hand" means the Israelites went out rejoicing, celebrating, giving each other "high fives," so to speak.

Exodus 14:9, 10 (a)
But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon. And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes . . .

The children of Israel lifted their eyes only high enough to see the problem. They didn't lift their eyes high enough to see their Protector.

Exodus 14:10 (b), 11 (a)
. . . and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness?

Because Egyptian culture gave high priority to the afterlife—as evidenced by the pyramids and mummification—for the Israelites to insinuate there were no graves in Egypt was utter nonsense. I find it's amazing how easily I can get mixed up, how skewed my perspective becomes whenever I stray from the Word.

Exodus 14:11 (b)
. . . wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?

Why did the Lord lead His people out only to seemingly box them in? I suggest three reasons, the first being to show them His power.

"More love, more power, more of You in my life . . ." we sing.

"More love, more power, more of Me in your life?" the Lord says. "Okay. Here's Pi-hahiroth. There's Migdol. I'm going to plant you right between them with your backs to the Red Sea. I'm going to put you in a place that you can't strategize, rationalize, or compromise your way out of in order that I might show you My power to deliver you in ways you would never have imagined."

Exodus 14:12
Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.

"Leave me alone," some people insist. "Leave me in Egypt. I'll just muddle through on my own because even though I've walked with the Lord and followed after Him, look where I am. My back is to the Red Sea; I'm between a mountain of caves and a fortified tower—and here comes Pharaoh's army bearing down on me."

Exodus 14:13
And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.

"Be strong and show thyself a man" a dying David said to his son, Solomon—or literally, "Play the part of a man" (1 Kings 2:2).

"Put on the whole armor of God," Paul tells us, "that ye may resist the devil . . . and having done all, to stand" (see Ephesians 6:11–13).

"Don't give in; don't fall down; don't go back; but stand," Moses said to the people—even as the Word would say to us today.

Exodus 14:14 (a)
The LORD shall fight for you . . .

I believe the second reason the Lord planted His people between Pi-hahiroth and Migdol was that they might experience His presence. Haven't you found that it's when you're between a rock and a hard place that you perceive the Lord's presence in your life most clearly?

Exodus 14:14 (b)
. . . and ye shall hold your peace.

In other words, Moses said to the people, "When you see the Lord fight for you, you'll regret your whining; you'll quiet down; you'll hold your peace."

Exodus 14:15
And the LORD said unto Moses, wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward:

There's a time to pray and a time to proceed; a time to stand and a time to move forward. Now was the time to move forward—and it was up to Moses to set the pace.

Exodus 14:16
But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.

Water is emblematic of the Word. Therefore, Moses' dividing the sea is a picture of what you are to do, Dad, in dividing Scripture (2 Timothy 2:15). Hold out your rod of authority. Say to your son, "Follow me," as you set the pace and lead the way.

Exodus 14:17, 18
And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.

The third reason God boxed His people in between Pi-hahiroth and Migdol was as a demonstration of His Preeminence. Even more fundamental than our experiencing His power and His presence is the world's understanding of His sovereignty. "I'm going to put you in this horrible predicament, this tough spot, this brutal place," He says, "because I want to make Myself known to the Egyptians."

"I'm stuck in this marriage. I'm stuck with that parent. I'm stuck in a financial crunch," we cry—failing to understand that sometimes He can touch people who don't know Him by putting us in uncomfortable, difficult, heartbreaking, challenging situations. God doesn't exist for us. We exist for Him.

So scandalized was the church, that for decades she refused to acknowledge Copernicus' discovery. After all, how could the *sun* be the center of the planetary system? Surely the planets revolved around the earth, around man.

And it remains equally shocking today to discover that it is the Son rather than our own worlds, our own concerns, our own comfort at the center of God's creation. But it is not until we finally understand that we exist for God rather than He for us that the rotation of our worlds, our situations, and our lives makes sense. If the pain doesn't go away, if the business doesn't work out, if the marriage isn't great, God would say, "I love you. But it's not about you. I have a bigger plan. The Egyptians are watching, and when the people you work with see you continue to praise Me, when your neighbors see you worshiping Me, when your family sees you thanking Me, I will be glorified."

You can fight it until the day you die, or you can finally come to the place in your life where you say, "The Son is the center of everything. Come what may, the Son is the center of my universe."

And although life might not seem fair right now, it will eventually. The waters will part and you will be ushered into eternity where you will hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant. I had you boxed in. But you stood still. You didn't fall away. You didn't turn back. You didn't walk out. Enter in to the joy of the Lord" (Matthew 25:21).

Perhaps special teams football players have the best grasp of this idea. "Special teams" is suicide. Special teams charge down the field full steam ahead, throwing their bodies directly at men who are also running full steam

ahead in their direction. They crack heads. They take hits. They endure pain. Why? So that the one carrying the ball can gain yards.

It's such a simple concept, but it sometimes takes decades to understand that we're not the sun, that we're not the ball carrier, but that we exist for the One who is. And the degree to which we allow Him to do what He wants to do through our lives is the degree to which we will be rewarded immensely, immeasurably, eternally.

Exodus 14:19 (a)
And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them . . .

The angel of the Lord is known as a "Christophany"—an appearance of Jesus in the Old Testament before He came as the Babe of Bethlehem. Jesus—He who previously went before them—now went behind them to be a rear guard, to cover their backs. I like that!

Exodus 14:19 (b), 20
. . . and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night.

The cloud that was darkness to the Egyptians was light for God's children. The same is true of the Word. To those who choose to walk in darkness because they love darkness rather than light (John 3:19), the Bible is confusing. But to those who seek to walk in the light (1 John 1:7), it is a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their path (Psalm 119:105).

Exodus 14:21–25
And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand,

and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, and took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians.

With their chariots bogged down in the middle of the Red Sea, the Egyptians knew they were in trouble. But it would prove to be too late.

Exodus 14:26–31
And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea and the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses.

Finally, Pi-hahiroth and Migdol illustrate the plan of God prophetically. As seen in Psalm 65:7, Daniel 7:2, and Revelation 17:15, with regard to future events, the nations are often referred to as a sea. Here in the Exodus account, the sea—the nations—part in order that the Israelites can reach the Promised Land. From this we understand that any nation seeking to destroy Israel will ultimately see its plan parted in order that the people of Israel can

go through on dry land to their destiny. And even as God is faithful to the Jews, He will be faithful to you and me, His family.



15 Exodus 15:1 (a)
Then sang Moses and the children of Israel . . .

The people who were once sighing (Exodus 2:23), are now singing. The first song recorded in Scripture is sung by people who had been set free, redeemed miraculously.

Exodus 15:1 (b)
. . . this song . . .

This song is not only the first song recorded in Scripture, but also the last —for we see it repeated in Revelation 15, sung around the crystal sea by those who have been raptured. Between Exodus and Revelation, portions are also repeated in Psalm 118, when the people of God were set free from Babylonian captivity—and again in Isaiah 12 by those in the millennial kingdom.

Exodus 15:1 (c)
. . . unto the LORD . . .

Moses and the children of Israel weren't merely singing for the Lord or about the Lord. They sang *to* the Lord. And the Lord liked their song so much that He recorded it four times.

Exodus 15:1 (d), 2
. . . and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him.

"I will prepare Him a habitation," says Moses.

"The Lord inhabits"—or literally is enthroned upon—"the praises of His people," David declared (Psalm 22:3). When you sing from your heart to the Lord, you construct a habitation, a home, a throne from which He can rule over you. And because the Father seeks those who worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23), when I feel distanced *from* the Lord, when I don't sense the presence *of* the Lord, when I lack intimacy *with* the Lord, the best thing for me to do is to sing *to* the Lord because then He seeks me. And it's a whole lot easier for Him to find me than it is for me to find Him.

Exodus 15:3–10

The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea. The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone. Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. And in the greatness of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee: thou sentest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble. And with the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.

"God is love," John tells us (1 John 4:8).

"The Lord is a man of war," Moses says.

Is this a contradiction?

No, because, although God is indeed love, there are forces all around us which are anything but lovely or lovable. And God wages war against these forces as surely as He waged war against Pharaoh. That is why, when you study the Old Testament, you'll see violence in virtually every book. And because the Old Testament is a picture book illustrating physically what we're to do spiritually, we're to be violent as well (Matthew 11:12).

How?

We're to do battle violently in prayer against the spiritual forces that seek to deceive, defile, and destroy those around us. Wife, did you do battle in prayer for your husband today? Did you pray passionately that the forces of the enemy would not gain a toehold in his life? Dad, did you do what Job did, who energetically sacrificed for each of his children before the break of day lest they sin against the Lord? (Job 1:5). Did you pray earnestly lest they fall prey to the enemy that seeks to derail and destroy them spiritually?

"The effectual *fervent* prayer of a righteous man avails much," James tells us (5:16). Praying, "Lord, help everyone to be nice," is neither effective nor fervent—and it doesn't make much of an impact. God is a Man of war, but He's a Gentleman nonetheless and, therefore, won't force His way into any situation but will wait for an invitation (Revelation 3:20). The question is, are we actively, fervently, passionately opening the door to Him and bidding Him to come in?

Exodus 15:11–14 (a)
Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them. Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation. The people shall hear, and be afraid . . .

"Other nations will tremble when they hear about what You do and how powerful You are," sang the children of Israel.

Exodus 15:14 (b)–17 (a)
. . . sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased. Thou shalt bring them in . . .

God doesn't simply bring us *out* of Egypt, but He brings us *in* to the Land of Promise. He not only sets us free redemptively—as grand and glorious as that is—but He also brings us into a land flowing with milk and honey, the Spirit-filled life.

Exodus 15:17 (b)–19
. . . and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established. The LORD shall reign for ever and ever. For the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and the LORD brought again the waters of the sea upon them; but the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea.

This is quite a song. I'm anxious to hear it sung in heaven!

Exodus 15:20
And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

After Moses finished his song, his older sister took up where he left off. Notice, however, that she led only women. "I don't allow women to teach," Paul would say, "because it was a woman who was deceived by Satan" (see 1 Timothy 2:12). This isn't chauvinism, but old-fashioned wisdom. Satan didn't tempt Eve by offering her a glass of wine or an R-rated movie. He tempted her by offering her a way to be more spiritual. A clever foe, Satan brought about the Fall of humanity through Eve's desire for spirituality. And to this day, a disproportionate number of cults have been founded by women desiring to be more godly.

Exodus 15:21
And Miriam answered them, sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

As good as this song is, how much better it would have been had it been sung at Pi-hahiroth and Migdol, had it been sung *before* the Red Sea parted, had it been sung by the children of Israel *before* they were rescued.

To you who are boxed in between Pi-hahiroth and Migdol with your back to the Red Sea—*this* is your moment; *now* is your opportunity for greatness. You see, once the Red Sea parts—once the financial crisis is over, the relationship is restored, the disease is healed—you will no longer have before you the opportunity for greatness. Then you can be grateful—but only now you can be *great*.

When the hour was dark, when nothing was externally right, there in the middle of a black, bleak night, what did Paul and Silas do? They sang songs of praise. And so intriguing was this to their fellow-prisoners that when an earthquake caused the prison doors to open, they chose to stay in the dungeon with Paul and Silas rather than to flee, to remain imprisoned physically in order that their souls might be set free (Acts 16).

You who are in a dungeon financially, relationally, physiologically have a unique opportunity to show us greatness. And once this experience is over, you'll never have the same opportunity again.

"I want to be like David," we say. "I'd like to grab some stones and nail Goliath." You can. There's a huge giant before you—a giant headache, a giant heartache, a giant problem. Are you going to be like Saul and his men, murmuring and complaining, depressed and discouraged? Or are you going to praise the Lord in the face of the giant that seems to stomp up and down the valley of your life day after day? Ninety-nine percent of people will choose to be like Saul. This is your chance, however, to be a David.

The difficulties in the lives of any great man or woman in Scripture weren't pleasant, weren't easy. We know how their stories end—Joshua, Deborah and Gideon, Jeremiah, David and Paul—but when they were living out their stories, they were every bit as brutal as your situation. Yet they chose by God's grace to be great, to be heroic. And we are the richer for it.

When there's an ugly giant before you, or prison bars all around you, it's your chance to be great. Don't miss it—because although opportunities for greatness come to everyone, they usually only come once or twice in a lifetime. Will your story be one of mediocrity—or one of greatness? It all depends on what you do this side of the Red Sea.

Exodus 15:22
So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water.

It would have been nice to linger at the seashore, lounging on the beach, playing tambourines and singing songs of praise. But God says, "Yes, the Sea opened before you. But now we must continue on. There's more to learn." So He led them to the wilderness of Shur—and you can be "sure" He'll do the same with you.

Exodus 15:23
And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah.

Feeling as though death was breathing down upon them, the Israelite's need for water was immediate and great when suddenly the report must have filtered through the congregation that water lay ahead. I can see in my mind's eye the people stampeding in the direction of the report, finding a pool, and diving in—only to come up sputtering and spitting out bitter water.

The same thing happens to us. We come to our own Marah—a situation, a relationship, an occupation, or even a ministry we think will be cool and refreshing—only to find it bitter, not what we thought it would be. Why did the Lord choose Marah as Stop Number Four for His people? I believe it was to teach them three lessons, the first being that life is a mixture of sweetness and bitterness—for were it only sweet, we would have no desire for heaven.

Exodus 15:24
And the people murmured against Moses, saying, what shall we drink?

I believe the second lesson God wanted to teach His people at Marah was that trials are the x-rays that allow us to see what's going on in our hearts. You see, although the children of Israel murmured against Moses, in reality, they were murmuring against God for bringing them to Marah in the first place.

And the same is true of us. I will never know what's in my heart until I dive into a pool expectantly and find it isn't what I thought it would be. People do not make us bitter. Situations do not make us bitter. They simply show us what is already within us. I know this because, looking at Jesus, I see that, although He was spat upon, cursed at, and nailed to a cross, He said, "Father forgive them. They don't know what they're doing" (Luke 23:34). No bitterness came out of Him because there was no bitterness within Him.

Exodus 15:25 (a)
And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet . . .

Thirdly, notice that God didn't create this tree on the spot—but that it was there all along. The tree in Scripture being emblematic of the Cross (1 Peter 2:24; Galatians 3), it is the Cross of Calvary which still transforms bitter experiences, bitter people, bitter circumstances. How? By realizing that the wrongs done to us, the offenses against us, the disappointments registered by us have all been paid for, dealt with, washed clean by the blood of Calvary. In temple worship, every sin had to be named individually. On the Cross of Calvary, the Lamb of God paid for each sin specifically. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the little postcard of an epistle located near the end of the New Testament—the Book of Philemon.

A friend of Paul's, Philemon had a slave named Onesimus who evidently ripped him off and ran away. Ending up in prison as a cellmate of the apostle Paul, Onesimus had virtually no choice but to get saved—and when he was released, Paul sent him back to Philemon with a letter in hand which said, "If Onesimus has wronged you or owes you anything charge it to my account" (Philemon 18).

This is the heart of our Lord. "Whatever he, she, or they did to you," He says to us, "charge it to My account, for I died for it specifically."

How does this work out practically?

Read on . . .

Exodus 15:25 (b)

. . . there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them,

It is during the ordinance of Communion that we can say, "As I hold this cup, Lord, I realize that not only are my sins washed away, that I'm robed in Your righteousness, that You live within Me—but that the one who hurt me, who abandoned me, who disappointed me is forgiven as well by the same blood that cleanses me."

How long has it been since, at the Lord's Table, you've embraced the grace that God shed not only on you, but on those who hurt you?

"But what she did to me was awful," you say. "What he said about me was unforgivable," you say. "How they hurt me was incomprehensible," you say.

Ah, but where sin abounds, grace abounds *more* (Romans 5:20). Come to the Lord's Table regularly—not just for yourself, but for the one who hurt you. Cast in the tree of the Cross of Calvary, and drink deeply of sweet water once again.

Exodus 15:26
And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.

"I am *Jehovah-Rapha*"—the Lord who healeth thee. By linking this new revelation with what just took place at Marah, the implication is clear that if we want to be healthy, we are to be those who forgive. Certain types of heart diseases, cancers, and ulcers are medically linked to an unforgiving heart, to bitterness. Paul echoed this same idea when he told the Corinthians that many of them were unnecessarily sick or even dying because of their failure to give worth to the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 11:30).

Exodus 15:27
And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.

Following their time at Marah, God led the children of Israel to Stop Number Five: *Elam,* or "Mighty ones." With twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees, God had led them to a wonderful oasis indeed. I'm so glad that the Lord not only takes us to the bitter water of Marah, but to the cool wells of Elam! The palm tree being the only tree in the world which bears more fruit as it gets older, and the numbers twelve and seventy reminding us of the twelve disciples and the seventy Jesus sent out in ministry, could it be that the Holy Spirit gives us this vignette to say that the place we'll find true refreshment is to be "mighty ones" in ministry?

"Whatever measure you give out will be the measure you'll get back," Jesus told us (see Luke 6:38). At Elam, there's no murmuring, nothing negative, nothing but refreshment in the place of service. Tomorrow, serve someone and bless someone, share your faith, intercede for someone—and be blessed and refreshed yourself in the process.

16 Exodus 16:1

And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt.

Having left the oasis of Elim, the children of Israel find themselves in the wilderness once again—the perfect place for God to show them His power and provision yet once more . . .

Exodus 16:2, 3

And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

Flesh pots? Bread to the full? It's amazing how the mind plays tricks and how the enemy capitalizes on this. These ex-slaves replaced memories of baking bricks under the blistering Egyptian sun with fantasies of croissants and filet mignon. And such is our tendency as well whenever we think of the lives we lived before we left Egypt, the brutal days in bondage before we were rescued, redeemed, and saved.

Exodus 16:4 (a)
Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you . . .

To the murmurers and complainers did God say, "I'm going to rain fire and judgment upon you"? No, He said, "I'll rain bread upon you. I'll pour out blessing upon you." Such is the heart of our Father.

Exodus 16:4 (b)
. . . and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.

What do you do with the bread God rains upon you—with the paycheck you get each week by His grace? God has entrusted it to you and now, as He said to the children of Israel, He says to you, "Let's see what you're going to do with it."

Exodus 16:5
And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.

Providing twice as much as they would need on the sixth day in order that they could rest on the seventh day, here God reiterates what He Himself modeled at creation when He rested on the seventh day.

Exodus 16:6–8
And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the LORD hath brought you out from the

land of Egypt: And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the LORD; for that he heareth your murmurings against the LORD: and what are we, that ye murmur against us? And Moses said, This shall be, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD.

Verse 2 clearly states that it was against Moses and Aaron that the children of Israel murmured. Moses, however, correctly identifies their complaints as being against the Lord as well. And the same is true with us. Anytime we complain about our supervisors, parents, or circumstances, we are actually complaining against God for putting us in the situation in the first place.

Exodus 16:9–12 (a)
And Moses spake unto Aaron, Say unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, Come near before the LORD: for he hath heard your murmurings. And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread . . .

"I've heard your murmuring," God said. "Therefore, I'm going to send you meat tonight and bread tomorrow." Truly, our Father is *amazingly* merciful.

Exodus 16:12 (b)
. . . and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God.

The bread the Lord would send to the children of Israel provides a perfect picture of the bread He sends us in His Word and in His Son, the Word made flesh . . .

Exodus 16:13

And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host.

Numbers 11 tells us that the host, the bread, was covered by dew in order that it not be defiled by the ground. In addition to this practical reason, I believe it was so that we could see a wonderful illustration of both the written Word and the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. You see, water in the Scriptures speaks of the work and Person of the Holy Spirit. No wonder, then, that the bread came in the dew, for it is only as the Spirit gives us understanding that we can read the written Word—and only by the Spirit that Jesus, the Word made flesh, was conceived (Matthew 1:20).

Exodus 16:14, 15 (a)
And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was . . .

Manna being small and round speaks both of humility and eternity. The entire counsel of God—all we need to know to navigate life successfully—is contained in a book easily carried to Sunday school by kindergarteners. Yet so powerful is it that it will outlive our planet (Matthew 5:18). Jesus humbled Himself to come to us not only as a Baby, but as the servant of all (Mark 10:45), as One whose only autobiographical statement was that He was meek and lowly (Matthew 11:29). Yet, like the written Word, Jesus—the Word made flesh—is eternal, the great I AM (John 8:58).

Exodus 16:15 (b), 16
. . . And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat. This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents.

Of the written Word, Jeremiah declared, "Thy words were found, and I ate them. And they were to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (15:16).

"Take, eat. This is My body, broken for you," Jesus declared (Matthew 26:26). Too many people analyze and theorize the Word without eating it, digesting it, allowing it to change their lives. And too many do the same concerning Jesus.

"Lord, Lord," they will call Him in the last day, only to hear Him say, "Depart from Me. I never knew you" (Matthew 7:22, 23) because they had no true intimacy or interaction with Him.

Exodus 16:17, 18
And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating.

An omer was six pints. Therefore, if the children of Israel numbered even two million—a conservative estimate—God would have provided 4,500 tons of bread daily—or enough to fill ten trains with thirty boxcars each. Our God is a God of abundance. In the written Word He gives us *all* that pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3) and in His Son He gives us all that we need to live with Him forever (John 3:16).

Exodus 16:19, 20
And Moses said, Let no man leave of it till the morning. Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank: and Moses was wroth with them.

That which was gathered but not eaten began to stink. The same is true of the Word—for whenever we gather teaching or truth without applying it, whenever we take in without giving out, we'll begin to tire of it. When we are chewing on, digesting, and applying the Word, we will always be hungry for more. Therefore, when people say, "I'm not being spiritually fed," it's because they're simply taking in information without making application. When I'm not sharing with others that which I've learned, when I'm not incorporating into my life truth I've been given, I get critical. But when I'm sharing and incorporating, I'm always hungry for more. If Bible study "stinks,"

if your walk with Jesus seems stale, I encourage you to start serving once again. And not only will you find that your appetite returns, but you'll find yourself in Elim, the place of rest and refreshment.

Exodus 16:21
And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating: and when the sun waxed hot, it melted.

Once the sun arose, the day began, the manna disappeared—and I have found the same thing to be true still. Oh, I may have great intentions of personal Bible study in the afternoon or an evening time of devotion—but after walking with the Lord for over forty years, I am more convinced than ever that spending time in the Word, time in fellowship with Jesus in the morning hours is the key. This should come as no surprise, for Jesus Himself "rose a great while before morning" in order to spend time with His Father (Mark 1:35), in order to receive a word to speak to those who are weary (Isaiah 50:4).

Exodus 16:22–27
And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said unto them, This is that which the LORD hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses said, Eat that to day; for to day is a sabbath unto the LORD: to day ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none. And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none.

If we can gather this much in six days, thought some, *imagine how much we could get if we worked Sunday, too.* But they came back empty-handed

because God's way is that His people take a day to rest and honor Him, a day to make Him our priority and to be renewed in our faith.

"Oh, but I work seven days a week," some might say, "and I don't come home empty-handed. My paycheck proves it."

To them, Haggai would say, "Watch and see what happens over the long haul—when you discover that regardless of all your labor, you are still empty" (see Haggai 1:9).

Exodus 16:28–31 (a)
And the LORD said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws? See, for that the LORD hath given you the sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day. And the house of Israel called the name thereof Manna: and it was like coriander seed, white . . .

The color white speaks of purity, of holiness. "How shall a young man cleanse his way?" the psalmist asked. "By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word," he answered (Psalm 119:9). In Jesus, the Word made flesh, we see nothing but purity. When we look at one another, we see flaws, gaps, and holes. When we look at Him, we see only holiness.

Exodus 16:31 (b)
. . . and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.

The psalmist found the law to be sweeter than honey and the honeycomb (Psalm 19:10). And haven't we found Jesus to be just that? Jesus is never grumpy, never moody, never touchy. He never has a bad day. He's powerful, awesome, holy—and yet He's also sweeter than honey.

Exodus 16:32–34
And Moses said, This is the thing which the LORD commandeth, fill an omer of it to be kept for your generations; that they may see the bread wherewith I have fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you forth from the land of Egypt. And Moses said unto

Aaron, Take a pot, and put an omer full of manna therein, and lay it up before the LORD, to be kept for your generations. As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept.

This pot would be kept in the ark of the covenant along with Aaron's rod and the Ten Commandments (Hebrews 9:4)—as a reminder of God's provision, power, and plan for His people.

Exodus 16:35, 36
And the children of Israel did eat manna forty years, until they came to a land inhabited; they did eat manna, until they came unto the borders of the land of Canaan. Now an omer is the tenth part of an ephah.

It was in the wilderness that God gave manna to His people. And it is in our wilderness here on earth that He daily provides the Bread of His Word, the Bread of Himself. If I don't feast on the Scriptures daily, I become disillusioned, disoriented, confused. I get mixed up on the days I don't get away with the Lord in a quiet spot at a quiet time and enjoy the truths and promises of His Word. I think about fleshpots and the bread of Egypt; I become restless and troubled. But when I take in the Word, I find what Jeremiah said to be oh, so true. I find it to indeed be the very joy and rejoicing of my heart (Jeremiah 15:16).

Like manna, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, came to this wilderness—to murmurers, sinners, and complainers—and dwelt among us (John 1:14). God didn't wait for the children of Israel in the Promised Land. He joined them in the wilderness. And He does the same for us. You don't have to climb a mountain or clean up your act to find Him. You don't have to ascend into heaven or descend into the depths of hell and depression. He's already as close as the word in your mouth, as close as your confession (Romans 10:8–10).

It was hunger that inevitably drove the prodigal son home (Luke 15:17). And it is hunger—a hole in your heart, a longing in your soul—that will drive you home as well. All you must do is humble yourself, bow your knee, and

stoop to pick up the manna of the Word, the manna of the Son, which God has provided so lavishly and lovingly, so freely and faithfully.



17 Exodus 17:1

And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink.

Stop Number Seven was at *Rephidim,* or "Rest Stop." If you've ever pulled into a rest stop along the highway, feeling so thirsty you thought you'd die if you had to drive a mile more—only to find the drinking fountain out of order, you know how the children of Israel must have felt when they arrived at Rephidim.

Exodus 17:2–4

Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? Wherefore do ye tempt the LORD? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? They be almost ready to stone me.

What a hard job it must have been for Moses to pastor this congregation. Every time there's a problem, they're ready to nail him.

Exodus 17:5–7

And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may

drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?

Massah and M*eribah* mean "chiding" and "temptation." It was hot. The people were thirsty. And God said to Moses, "Here's what to do: Take the rod which had become a snake before Pharaoh, smite the rock, and out will come water." Paul gives the interpretation of this account in 1 Corinthians 10:4, where he tells us the Rock was Jesus Christ. This means that Jesus, the Rock of our salvation, was smitten by the "serpent" of Moses' rod—perfectly portraying the prophecy given in the Garden of Eden when God said to Satan, "You shall bruise His heel, but He will crush your head" (see Genesis 3:15). Was the heel of Jesus bruised? Yes. A spike was driven through it on the Cross of Calvary. But Satan was crushed—for the power he held over us was obliterated, washed away by the blood Jesus shed that day. What happened when Jesus was pierced with the spear? Blood and water flowed from His side (John 19:34). So, too, here at Rephidim, the Rock, smitten by the rod that was once a serpent pours forth water. The analogy is perfect. This passage points to Jesus.

Why would God lead His people from a place where they were being satisfied with manna to a rest stop where the drinking fountain was out of order? You might leave a Bible study or a retreat where you've been feasting on the manna of the Word only to find yourself in a place of dryness. "I don't understand," you say. "I was doing so well—but now there is a drought in my soul. Why am I so dry? Is there sin in my life?" Not necessarily. God led His people to Rephidim in order to do something very important. You see, after they ate of the manna, to make them aware of their need for a fresh drenching of water, God brought them to Rephidim to create in them a thirst for more of Him. Why would He do this? Because He knew what was about to happen . . .

Exodus 17:8 (a)
Then came Amalek . . .

Every time the Amalekites are mentioned in the Bible, they speak of the ongoing war we wage with our flesh. Here, it's as if God says, "I know you

feasted on the bread. You've taken in the manna. But right around the bend, right up ahead, war is about to break out. And if you try and defeat Amalek in your own strength, you'll be trounced." Therefore, He took His people—as He does us—to a place where they were aware of their dryness in order that, after crying out to Him, they would be empowered afresh with the water of His Spirit.

If you are going through a desert season, God has led you there. For what purpose? To create within you a craving for more of Him. "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness," Jesus said, "for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). Who is filled? The one who hungers. The one who thirsts. The one who's at Rephidim, longing for water.

Exodus 17:8 (b)
. . . and fought with Israel in Rephidim.

Amalek was the descendant of Esau, Jacob's twin brother. Jacob was the one who, although he made mistakes as we all do, had a heart for God. Esau, on the other hand, was carnal, not interested in spiritual things, one who sold his birthright for a bowl of stew. Amalek, Esau's grandson, fathered a people who, like their forefather, Esau, were people epitomized by carnality. The Amalekites were a brutal people, intimidated by no one, who sought to wipe out the children of Israel as easily as they did other nations . . .

> Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God.
>
> Deuteronomy 25:17, 18

When the Israelites were set free from Egypt, headed for the Land of Promise, Amalek would ambush those in the back of the pack. And that's still the tactic of the flesh. That is, when a person is no longer front and center, no longer fully engaged like he once was, Amalek is sure to strike. Whenever we say, "I've been on this journey a long time. I've gone to tons of Bible studies. I've been to countless prayer meetings. I've had my share of Communion"—that is when the flesh rises up, when the flesh takes control, when Amalek

launches an ambush. Front and center, fully engaged is the best place, the safest place, the only place to be.

Exodus 17:9
And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand.

Moses told a young general named Joshua to engage in battle while he would take his position on the top of the hill, rod in hand.

Exodus 17:10, 11
So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

The lifting up of hands speaks of prayer (1 Timothy 2:8). As long as Moses reached out to the Lord on the mountain of intercession, there was victory below in the valley of interaction.

Exodus 17:12
But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

"Men ought always to pray and not to faint," Jesus said (Luke 18:1). And as long as Moses was doing just that, there was victory. But once his hands got heavy—which can happen so easily—victory was in jeopardy. I have experienced this. You have, too. We know we should pray with passion. We know we should pray with greater fervency, greater frequency, greater intensity. But we get weary. The solution? Do what Moses did. Cultivate an Aaron and a Hur. Everyone needs a couple of people you can count on—that when your soul sags, when you know Amalek is on the attack, when you feel your flesh rising up within you, you can say, "Pray for me."

Exodus 17:13–16

And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a me morial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi: For he said, Because the LORD hath sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.

When the battle was finally won, God instructed Moses to record what had transpired in a book—in order that future generations would know that the battle was won not with the sword in the valley of interaction, but through prayer on the mount of intercession.

Oftentimes, we think that if we were more skilled with the sword of Scripture, if we were better able to dialogue and counsel, if we could love more and do more, we'd see the salvation of our parents or grandchildren, our neighbors or friends. But this story tells us that is not where the battle is won. It's won through prayer.

Why is prayer so important? Because the old adage that prayer changes things is only partly true. I think it's more accurate to say, "Faith changes things. Prayer changes *me*."

Yes, God wanted the children of Israel to win the battle. But He also wanted to win the heart of Moses in a deeper way. And He wants to do the same with us. We may think that our situation needs to change. God, however, knows that even if it did, we'd still be unhappy, sleepwalking through life unless our hearts were changed. Therefore He says, "Because I want to fill your heart, enflame your soul, satisfy that ache within you which can be satisfied only by Me, you're going to have to come to Me time after time because when you do, you'll get to know Me in the process. And when you get to know Me, that is when, and only when you'll be content and fulfilled, blessed and happy." That's what prayer is about. It's not about seeing things change, but about seeing ourselves change; not about a change of circumstance, but about engagement of spirit and expansion of heart.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock," Jesus says. "If any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him and he with Me." Addressed to the church, Revelation 3:20 tells us Jesus knocks at the

door of the church, at the heart of believers. Therefore, when we pray, we are acting as doormen, opening the door and inviting Him in. He doesn't beat the door down. He doesn't bust His way in. He doesn't force His presence or force the issue. But whoever hears the knocking and is wise enough to open the door in prayer will enjoy His presence and company. Prayer opens the door.

By praying, I open the door. That doesn't mean Jesus is obligated to do what I ask or desire. That's up to Him. I have learned, however, that if He doesn't do what I suggest, He'll do something infinitely better. But if I don't open the door, if I don't pray, I'm left on my own with my kids, with my marriage, with my ministry—not a good place to be. "You have not because you ask not," James tells us (4:2). It's all about prayer.

Before leaving Rephidim, I draw your attention to one more consideration . . .

In the middle of the battle, were Joshua to look over his shoulder, he would have seen three men on a hill—the one in the middle holding a wooden rod. This makes us think of another Man on a hill, flanked by two others, arms outstretched, holding not a wooden rod, but pinned to a wooden beam. But His arms didn't sag; His soul didn't sag; His spirit didn't sag. No, Jesus our Savior hung in there for you and me. And the Man in the middle not only bled and died for me, but He rose again, where He lives to make intercession for me (Hebrews 7:25). Aaron might get busy sometimes. Hur might not always be available. But Jesus ever lives to make intercession for me. He lives to pray for me. Amazing.

"If that's the case," you say, "then why should we pray at all? Why not just let Him do the heavy lifting?" Because, although the victory is won, there are still mop-up operations going on. Do you want to be fruitful, successful, blessed in the daily skirmishes of life? Do you want to see your kids do well, the church blessed, the country changed? Jesus won the victory completely at Calvary. All the rest is mop-up stuff. And we have the privilege of taking part. "Seek Me," the Lord says. "Talk to Me. Call on Me with uplifted hands. And watch and see what I will do as you open the door for Me to work."



18 His was a high and holy calling indeed. He had been called into ministry—and what a ministry it was: to lead between two and three million people out of slavery into the land of their destiny. But on his way to do the bidding of the Lord, on his way to tell Pharaoh to let God's people go, Moses was pinned to the ground by the Lord Himself for his failure to minister to his own family, for his failure to circumcise his own son personally. Looking on the scene and understanding the severity of the situation, Moses' wife, Zipporah, circumcised their son immediately. As a result, Moses' life was spared and he would go on to incredible ministry. But, because his wife was forced to assume a role never intended to be hers, Moses' neglect cost him his family for a season when Zipporah took Gershom and left.

Months passed, and here at the outset of chapter 18, we pick up the story. Our God is the God of the second chance. And I'm so glad. I've dropped the ball, haven't you? I've messed up once or twice, maybe three times in my life—how about you? But look what happens. Moses' family is about to be reunited and restored . . .

Exodus 18:1, 2
When Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father in law, heard of all that God had done for Moses, and for Israel his people, and that the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt; then Jethro, Moses' father in law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back,

This story is not only one of the restoration of a family, but is rich as it relates to prophecy. You see, the manna of chapter 16 spoke of the Incarnation. Rephidim spoke of the Crucifixion. Moses' ministry on the mount of intercession during the battle with the Amalekites spoke of the Resurrection. And that brings us to this story that speaks of the next event on the prophetic timetable: Christ's return to establish His kingdom.

In this story, although Zipporah is a Gentile, she is a type of Israel. In Scriptures like Jeremiah 31:32 and Isaiah 54:6, Israel is called the wife of Jehovah. And Zipporah is a precursor to another who would represent Israel's relationship to God, a precursor to Gomer, the adulterous wife seen in the Book of Hosea. Calling Moses a "bloody husband," Zipporah fled from Moses because she was offended.

Paul would declare that Christ crucified was a stumbling block to the Jew (1 Corinthians 1:23). What offended the Jewish people? A bloody Messiah. After all, they were looking for Messiah to come with power and majesty—not some bloody Carpenter pinned to a Roman tree. And the idea of a meek and lowly, bloody and battered Messiah remains offensive to the Jewish people to this day.

Exodus 18:3 (a)
And her two sons . . .

Moses' two sons speak of the fact that Israel would be divided into two kingdoms.

Exodus 18:3 (b)
. . . of which the name of the one was Gershom; for he said, I have been an alien in a strange land:

Within forty years after the Jews rejected Jesus as Messiah, they became strangers in a strange land, scattered throughout every corner of the world. For 2,000 years they didn't have a home—yet they kept their identity. How? Read on . . .

Exodus 18:4
And the name of the other was Eliezer; for the God of my father, said he, was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh:

Even though the Jews were scattered, God would be their help. And just as *Eliezer*—whose name means God is my help—was not known until this section, so, too, the Jews will not know how much God has been their help until the time the kingdom is established. Presently they know they've been strangers in a strange land, but there is coming a day when they will see how God was with them.

Exodus 18:5 (a)

And Jethro, Moses' father in law, came with his sons and his wife unto Moses into the wilderness . . .

It was Jethro, the priest of Midian, the Gentile priest, who brought Zipporah back into unity with Moses. Paul declares that God will use the Gentiles, the church, us, to provoke His people to jealousy (Romans 11:11).

Exodus 18:5 (b)
. . . where he encamped at the mount of God:

Where will the reunion take place in which the wife of Jehovah, Israel, at last understands her history, her destiny? When Jesus Christ stands on the Mount of Olives and goes into the Holy City, Mount Zion, Jerusalem. Zechariah tells us that when the Jewish people see Jesus coming as their nation is about to be destroyed in the campaign of Armageddon, they'll ask Him where He got His wounds. "In the house of My friends," Jesus will answer (Zechariah 13:6). And they'll understand that it was by their own hand. Zechariah goes on to tell us that there will be a fountain that will be available to the Jewish people as a fountain of cleansing (Zechariah 13:1). And at that moment all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26).

Exodus 18:6–12
And he said unto Moses, I thy father in law Jethro am come unto thee, and thy wife, and her two sons with her. And Moses went out to meet his father in law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare; and they came into the tent. And Moses told his father in law all that the LORD had done unto Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, and all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the LORD delivered them. And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, whom he had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. And Jethro said, Blessed be the LORD, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh, who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them.

And Jethro, Moses' father in law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God: and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father in law before God.

In the Millennium, a new temple will be built and sacrifices will be offered—not to atone for sin, for that work was finished completely on the Cross of Calvary, but to serve as visual aids in order to help the Tribulation saints understand the price Jesus paid as the sacrificial Lamb of God (Zechariah 14:16). It is only fitting, then, that here we would see sacrifice being made at the reunion of Moses' family.

Last night I took my dog, Sam, for a walk. It was one of those nights that was so clear it seemed as though I could see a zillion stars—one of which shot across the Milky Way in an almost magical display. Yet Sam missed the whole thing because he was sniffing the ground for traces of other dogs. Here was this grand and glorious scene—and he had his nose in the bushes. I'm convinced Sam misses ninety percent of what life is about because his understanding, his interests are oh, so small.

I'm convinced such is the case with a lot of us. We're sniffing around in small stuff, so caught up on the ground that we miss what's going on overhead. I become restricted, small-minded, and petty when I don't keep before me the big picture of eternity—of what God is up to, where we're going, what lies ahead. As I read my Bible, I understand that page after page is trying to get my nose out of the bushes and to look up and see the grand design of God's plan for eternity and how I fit in. When I was a younger believer, I wished there were books in the Bible devoted to practical stuff—how to have a better marriage, how to raise kids, how to handle money. But the older I get, the more I realize the practical stuff leads only to disappointment and legalism. I realize that Jesus was right when He said, "Seek first the kingdom and all these other things will take care of themselves" (Matthew 6:33). I realize His wisdom in saying "Look beyond. Understand My grand plan. Lift your eyes to the skies."

Exodus 18:13–18
And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening. And when Moses' father in law saw all that he did to the

people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? Why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even? And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to inquire of God: When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws. And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone.

Jethro told Moses that if he continued to try and tend to the needs of all of the people, he himself would burn out and the people would wear out trying to get the counsel they needed. And then he went on to offer a solution . . .

Exodus 18:19, 20
Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: be thou for the people to Godward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do.

Moses was to continue to pray for and teach the people. But he was also to do something else . . .

Exodus 18:21–27
Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: and let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee. If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace. So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and

did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves. And Moses let his father in law depart; and he went his way into his own land.

Here we see the establishing of eldership. Moses was to appoint a group of men with different responsibilities—some to oversee hundreds, some to oversee fifties, some to oversee tens—who would judge and counsel the people. Numbers 11:17 tells us that God would take the same spirit that was upon Moses and place it upon them. Thus, their leadership would be at one with his.

Jesus picks up this same model in appointing twelve to be with Him. In the Book of Acts, it is seen in the establishing of elders. Paul reiterates this principle in the epistles. And it crescendos and climaxes in the Book of Revelation, where we see twenty-four elders ministering in heaven, bowing before the throne, sitting quietly before the Lord, pointing to Jesus Christ, saying, "Righteous and true are Thy judgments, O Lord" (Revelation 19:9). God's plan from Exodus through Revelation is that of plurality and collegiality —to work through groups of men who stand together and care for His flock, brothers who fear God, who are committed to truth, who aren't in it for themselves. And mature is the church, wise is the believer who takes advantage of this wisdom.



19 In chapter 19, we arrive at the Israelite's final "campsite" on their pilgrimage from Egypt to the Promised Land. As with the previous six stops, this was a place God ordained them to be in order that He might prepare them for their land of destiny. But this stop would be different. The scene at Mt. Sinai is one of the most significant in the history of the world, for it was there that God spoke audibly.

Exodus 19:1

In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai.

Comparing this verse with Numbers 10:11, we see that the children of Israel would camp here for eleven months. Why so long? Because it was here that they would be given the entire Law of God and the instructions for the construction of the tabernacle.

Exodus 19:2
For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount.

Here at Mt. Sinai, God will audibly speak to His people in a way unparalleled in human history. It seems only natural that God would choose Mt. Sinai to speak to this congregation of two to three million. After all, rectangular in shape, Mt. Sinai not only looks like a huge pulpit, but its name means "thorny"—an apt description of the Law God would give to Moses, a Law perfect and glorious but one which pricks mankind because of our inability to keep it.

Mt. Sinai is also called Mt. Horeb in Scripture. *Horeb* means "to kill or destroy." That's what the Law does—it destroys my concept of my own goodness and brings me to the realization that I'm a sinner in desperate need of a Savior.

Exodus 19:3, 4 (a)
And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians . . .

The first thing the children of Israel were to do in preparation to receive the Law was to remember—to remember how God had set them free from their bondage in Egypt. How important it is that I always remember what the Lord has done for me, how good He has been to me—for as I read the Word, I

realize that what He asks of me is not because He's a mean ogre trying to make me miserable, but because He is a loving Father who truly wants the best for me. That's why Communion is so very important. Every time I come to the Lord's Table, I'm reminded again that He loves me to death.

Exodus 19:4 (b)
. . . and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.

With eagles soaring over their heads and eagles' nests perched on the ledges of the Sinai mountain range, this image would be very clear to the children of Israel.

> As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.
>
> Deuteronomy 32:11, 12

After selecting a site on a high precipice, the mother eagle builds her nest. And as her newly hatched eaglet grows, he's comfy and cozy—until one day the mother eagle overturns the nest and the young eagle is sent tumbling downward, squawking all the way. Just before he hits the rocks below, however, the mother eagle swoops down and rescues him, bearing him upon her wings. She returns him to the nest—only to overturn it a few days later and bear him on her wings yet again. This process is repeated six or seven times —until one time, the eaglet catches a thermal and starts flying. Higher and higher he goes, set free to experience life in an entirely different dimension with a higher perspective than he ever had previously.

Because faith cannot grow in comfort and security, we'll all be knocked out of our nests of cozy complacency from time to time. What do we do at such times? "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength," Isaiah declares. "They shall mount up with wings as eagles" (40:31). To wait upon the Lord doesn't mean to passively wait, but to wait on Him like a skilled waiter would wait on the guest of honor. To wait upon the Lord means to lavish praise, to minister, to fellowship day by day, moment by moment. And those who do, mount up with wings as eagles.

God delivers His people on the wings of an eagle. Don't be a squawker. Say, "Okay, Lord. You're allowing this to happen in order to teach me to soar higher than I've ever flown before."

Exodus 19:5, 6
Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

Peter picks up the same analogy when he calls us a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). But the Jewish people made the same mistake that we so often make. That is, they turned inward to such a degree that if a Jewish person accidentally brushed against a Gentile, he would burn his clothes and ceremonially cleanse himself in order to rid himself of the pollution caused by the Gentile. We do virtually the same thing whenever we lose our passion for the lost, whenever we fail to share the gospel to a world so desperately in need.

Exodus 19:7, 8
And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD.

A model of the priestly ministry, Moses told the people the words of the Lord and then told the Lord the words of the people.

Exodus 19:9
And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD.

To those of us who desire to hear the voice of the Lord more clearly, Moses would say we are to do the same three things the children of Israel were instructed to do . . .

Exodus 19:10, 11
And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai.

The people were to wash their clothes as an outward sign of inward expectancy. And to be those who truly and clearly hear the voice of God personally and powerfully, we must wash our clothes as well.

How?

- "How shall a young man cleanse his way?" David asked. "By taking heed according to the Word" (Psalm 119:9).
- "We are washed by the water of the Word" Paul said (Ephesians 5:26).
- "You are clean through the Word I have spoken" Jesus declared (John 15:3).

A much better way than rolling out of bed and dashing to church is to say, "Before I come to church this evening or this morning, Lord, I'm going to spend some time in Your Word that my mind might be purified, my heart sensitized; that I might be in a place to experience Your grace, a place to recognize Your voice."

Exodus 19:12, 13
And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: there shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount.

Not only were the people to wash their clothes, but they were to watch their step. They were to stay away from the mountain, for, if they got too close to God's "pulpit," they would die.

"That doesn't sound very loving," you say.

Oh, but any dad who has wrestled with his two-year-old knows that it is.

Dad, when you wrestle with your toddler, you place restrictions upon yourself. You want the contact with your kids, but you place limits on yourself because otherwise they'd be wiped out. The same is true of God. His beauty, His glory, His splendor, majesty and holiness would be so powerful that were the children of Israel to get too close to Him, their hearts would simply stop beating in awe.

So often we trivialize God. Yes, through the Person of Jesus Christ, He is our Friend—but His grandeur and glory are undiminished nonetheless. Therefore, the fear of the Lord—the fear of doing anything that would grieve Him—should cause us to fall at His feet in speechless humility.

Exodus 19:14, 15
And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes. And he said unto the people, Be ready against the third day: come not at your wives.

Finally, in preparation to hear the voice of God, the children of Israel were to wake their soul. Paul would say just the opposite when he said, "Don't defraud your spouse unless there is mutual consent for the purpose of prayer and fasting" (see 1 Corinthians 7:5). Therefore, I believe God is declaring that for this particular moment, this prescribed day, He didn't want anything to distract His people or to lull them into a place of insensitivity towards Him.

There come times when a mature believer says, "I need to put away for a season any fleshly inclinations which normally preoccupy me in order that I might get a specific word from the Lord."

Exodus 19:16
And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount,

and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.

Does the sound of a trumpet ring a bell? Paul tells us that the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout and with the trumpet of God before we're raptured not to the top of Mt. Sinai, but to the top of the clouds where we'll meet Jesus in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Exodus 19:17
And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount.

At the base of the rectangular Mt. Sinai is a vast plain whereupon there would have been room for the entire congregation.

Exodus 19:18
And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.

Not only was this a monumental moment in Israel's history, but it was a picture of what would happen in Acts 2, when the events of Exodus 19 were fulfilled prophetically—when suddenly on the Day of Pentecost, God the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples gathered together in the Upper Room and tongues of fire sat upon each of them (Acts 2:3).

Exodus 19:19
And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.

On the Day of Pentecost, not only was fire seen, but God's voice was heard in the tongues that those on the street below the Upper Room heard, each in their own language (Acts 2:6).

Exodus 19:20–25
And the LORD came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the LORD called Moses up to the top of the mount; and

Moses went up. And the LORD said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish. And let the priests also, which come near to the LORD, sanctify themselves, lest the LORD break forth upon them. And Moses said unto the LORD, The people cannot come up to mount Sinai: for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it. And the LORD said unto him, Away, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee: but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the LORD, lest he break forth upon them. So Moses went down unto the people, and spake unto them.

Just as God came down and Moses went up, Jesus will come down and the church will go up to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

May we be those who see and embrace the three-fold illustration of Exodus 19: of God the Father coming down to give the Word, of God the Spirit coming down to empower His people, of God the Son coming down to take us Home.



20 As we come to the study of the Law, there can be a great deal of confusion, because throughout Paul's epistles, we are told that we are free from the Law because we live under grace. This confusion can be cleared up, however, by the understanding that there is a differentiation between the Law of God and the Law of Moses . . .

- The Law of God is given in Exodus 20.
- The Law of Moses is given in Exodus 21—23 and in the Book of Leviticus.
- The Law of God is referred to by Paul in Romans 7.
- The Law of Moses is referred to by Jesus in John 7.
- The Law of God was given to two to three million people audibly.
- The Law of Moses was given to Moses privately.
- The Law of God was written by God directly (Exodus 31:18).

• The Law of Moses was recorded by Moses.
• The Law of God was preserved in an ark.
• The Law of Moses was not.
• The Law of God is for all people at all times inclusively.
• The Law of Moses is for the Jews exclusively.

If, as Acts 15:5 tells us, we as believers are not under the Law of Moses, why study it at all? I suggest two reasons . . .

Why study the Law? Because in it we see interesting illustrations and awesome applications. When we read about the festivals and study the sacrifices, when we look at the regulations and ordinances, we gain great insight about Jesus, for they all point to, and picture, Him.

Secondly, we study the Law because it drives and directs us. Seeing our inability to keep its requirements, the Law drives us to our Savior (Galatians 3:24), and once there, it directs us in how we are to live (Matthew 5:17–19).

Exodus 20:1, 2 (a)
And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God . . .

God doesn't say, "I am the Lord God." He says, "I am the Lord *thy* God"—as if to say, "I made you; I created you; I know what will make you happy." Thus, because of the incredible tenderness embedded in the little word "thy," the Ten Commandments could be called the "Ten-der" Commandments.

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments . . .

1 John 5:3 (a)

John doesn't say we'll *earn* God's love by keeping His commandments. No, he says keeping His commandments *is* the love of God.

"I'm not experiencing God's love," you say.

Are you keeping His commandments?

"I don't have to. I'm under grace."

Yes, you are. But you'll experience God's love when you keep His commandments because He alone knows how you are made, how you tick—

and His commandments constitute His personal instruction book for you, straight from your Manufacturer.

. . . and his commandments are not grievous.

1 John 5:3 (b)

God's commandments are not grievous because rules provide liberty.

There is a rule I keep every single day. That is, in the morning—every morning—I brush my teeth. You might call this legalism. But I find it to be exceedingly refreshing. Not only that, it also releases me from philosophical questioning. I never once ask, "To brush, or not to brush? Do I have time? Is this the right day? Does brushing apply to me?" I could waste a great deal of energy debating and wondering if I should brush my teeth, but because brushing my teeth is a non-negotiable rule for me, I am released from all kinds of mental turmoil. And not only does brushing my teeth refresh and release me, but it relieves those around me. Thus, it's a win-win-win situation. The same is true of God's Law. It is the way I experience His love personally and express my love practically.

Exodus 20:2 (b)
. . . which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Commandments are vitally important for us not only because of who God is—our Creator—but because of where we were. Like the children of Israel, we grew up as slaves in Egypt, in bondage to sin. With whips cracking over us, orders shouted at us, burdens placed upon us, we didn't even know how to think. But our Creator, Redeemer, Liberator rescued us and brought us out of bondage—and teaches us to think rightly in order that we might live successfully in the Land of Promise.

Exodus 20:3
Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

In this simple phrase, we see a premise and a promise. The premise is that there are indeed other gods . . .

Baal was the god who supposedly hurled lightning down from heaven (1 Kings 18:24). Baal was the god of power. Munching on power bars, listening to power tapes, thinking they're powerful and in control, lots of people still unknowingly worship Baal today.

Ashteroth was the goddess of sensuality, of pleasure—a goddess worshiped extensively in our society by those with the "if it feels good, do it" mentality.

Mammon was the god of money, the god of prosperity. Because it is the love of money, rather than money itself, which is evil (1 Timothy 6:10), it is not only the wealthy who are prone to worship mammon. Anyone who places a priority on money, worries about money, strives for money is vulnerable.

Molloch was the god of practicality. To earn Molloch's blessing upon his new business, the Molloch worshiper would place his firstborn in an earthen jar and build the walls of his shop around it, believing that the baby entombed within the wall wasn't really dead, but would reappear in his next child. Many a parent does virtually the same thing today when, in the name of practicality, they ignore their children in the name of advancing their career, mistakenly thinking that once their business is successful, their place in the company secure, they can reconnect with their kids. The problem, however, is that kids grow up; time is lost; and opportunity dies on the altar of practicality.

In addition to the premise that there are indeed other gods, this first commandment carries a promise that other gods will not pull on God's people indefinitely.

Having captured the ark of the covenant, the gold-covered box which held the Ten Commandments—the Philistines placed it in the temple of their god, Dagon, a being which was half man and half fish. The next day, when the priests of Dagon went into the temple, they found Dagon knocked down before the ark. The priests returned Dagon to his original position—only to come in the following day to find him on the floor once again, his head and hands severed in the fall (1 Samuel 5).

The same thing happens today. "Let Me into the temple of your heart," God says, "and I'll knock Dagon down; I'll knock Baal out. I'll take care of Mammon. I'll deal with Ashteroth."

The Ten Commandments is the only law of antiquity that forbids the worship of other gods. All other codes and cultures allowed, even encouraged, the worship of other deities. Why? Because all other gods work as a team to bring hell into peoples' lives and to damn them eternally. There will be no other gods before the true and living God because those gods will not come through ultimately. In the last day, every knee shall bow, every tongue confess that Jesus alone is Lord (Philippians 2:10, 11). And what a day that will be.

Exodus 20:4
Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:

To understand what God must look like, man has looked to nature for clues . . .

- Looking to the sky, the Native American saw the eagle soaring majestically overhead and decided God must be an eagle.
- Looking at the grassy plain, the Indian saw the powerful yet peaceful cow and decided God must be a cow.
- Looking down to the sea, the Pacific Islander saw the massive sea turtle with its impenetrable shell and decided God must be a sea turtle.

Although we know better than this, we as believers can fall prey to the same tendency. You see, there are those who say, "When I get to heaven, I'm going to sit on God's lap and feel His embrace." While I understand their sentiment, their image is faulty, for in the Book of Revelation, God is not described as having a long white beard, flowing hair, bulging biceps, and muscular calves, reaching out His finger to touch man as, Michelangelo portrayed Him in the Sistine Chapel. He's described primarily by color—the flame of His eyes; the red of His garment (Revelation 19). Jesus simply said,

"God is Spirit" (John 4:24). Therefore, I don't believe we're going to see the Father as having arms, hands, and legs.

"But doesn't Scripture say He spans the universe with His hand?" you ask.

Yes, but it also says He covers us with His wings. Therefore, I believe it is as much a mistake to think that God the Father has two eyes, a nose, and ears as it is to think He has wings or feathers.

God cannot be contained by a body no matter how great. He's Spirit. He's everywhere. When we get to heaven, with our new bodies, we'll be able to bask in His glory—just as the high priest did in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. But I don't believe we will "sit on His lap," as we would with our earthly fathers. God is everywhere—all *around* us. The Holy Spirit dwells *within* us. Jesus relates *to* us.

> God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;
>
> Hebrews 1:1–3

Christianity is not about making an image of God, no matter how noble or grand. It's about looking at Jesus, and allowing Him to conform us to His image.

> **Exodus 20:5 (a)**
> **Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God . . .**

God is not jealous *of* other gods. Rather, He's jealous *for* us. He wants the best for us. He wants us to be conformed to the image of His Son.

> **Exodus 20:5 (b)–6**
> **. . . visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing**

mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Your lifestyle—the priorities you have, the philosophy you embrace—will impact your kids, your grandchildren, your great-grandchildren. If you live for Jesus, if you're a person of prayer, if you spend time in the Word and in fellowship, these qualities will be passed on to future generations.

Exodus 20:7
Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Because virtually everyone would agree that societies and families work best when there is no murder, stealing, or lying, people have an easy time understanding the commandments that prohibit those activities. But in the minds of most people, the third commandment is a different story. After all, they reason, everyone takes the Lord's name in vain occasionally. God, however, does not agree. And to underscore this, although He prohibited stealing, coveting, killing, lying, committing adultery with a simple "Thou shalt not," He amplified the prohibition to take His name in vain as if to say "This is exceptionally serious."

Why?

I suggest three reasons . . .

First, when the Lord's name is used in vain, in a manner devoid of meaning, the result is desensitization. Satan is behind blasphemy and profanity because they trivialize both salvation and damnation. This commandment is not about God being offended, but about people being lost, desensitized to the reality of the name that will save them and the reality of where they will be if they don't receive Him.

In addition to desensitization, when the Lord's name is taken in vain, there are real ramifications. The man who accidentally hits his thumb while pounding a nail and says, "God damn it," is actually saying, "May this project be doomed to destruction." And because life and death are indeed in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21), his words will, in one way or another, have a definite impact. The worst thing a person can do when he's frustrated is

to take the Lord's name in vain, to use profanity—for in doing so, he only compounds the problem.

Mock Buddha and you'll hear from the ACLU. Make fun of an Indian religion and you'll be politically incorrect. But use the name of Jesus Christ in any manner whatsoever and no one will even raise an eyebrow. While we may not be able to keep this from happening outside of our homes, we can use it as an opportunity to talk about Jesus to the one who uses His name so freely, but does so blasphemously. And in sharing His reality, we can turn the situation around for His glory.

Dear brother, precious sister, child of God, do not take the name of the Lord in vain. Do not allow it to be profaned through your television, blasphemed through your radio. His name must be respected and protected because the stakes are too high to do anything less.

Exodus 20:8–11
Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Having worked four hundred years as slaves in Egypt, the concept of a day off would have sounded radical indeed to the children of Israel. And not to them only, but to the surrounding civilizations as well, for no other society of antiquity entertained the idea of a day of sabbath, a day of rest.

With the Assyrians bearing down on them, the children of Israel set up an alliance with the Egyptians, failing to realize that it was only in God that their help would be found. Ever feel like financial, relational, physical problems are waging war against you? Ever feel like you can't get ahead or even catch up? Listen to what God says . . .

For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your

strength: and ye would not. And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

Isaiah 30:15, 21

The bills are mounting; the pressures are building; the Assyrians are coming. What am I to do? It's only in returning to God and resting in Him that I'll know. If I consistently take one day of every seven and say, "This is Yours, Lord," I am saying, "Lord, I acknowledge that what I have and enjoy is not because of my work ethic, my creativity, my business acumen, my energy. It's all from You. And I'm going to prove that to myself and to my family by stopping one day in seven. In so doing, I am acknowledging that You are the Giver of every good gift, the Provider of the bread I enjoy, that You are the One who truly holds my life together."

If I keep the Sabbath, I'll know which way to go as I hear a voice in my ear telling me how to walk. I'll experience a fullness in my heart, a richness in my soul. And so will you.

Spend time in worship. Take a break. Kick back. Chill out. Pray. Read. Talk. Enjoy. Fly a kite. Take a nap. Listen to your kids. When a day is set apart, conversations begin to flow; people begin to open up. But it takes a chunk of time—an entire day set aside. One day should be so free, so refreshing, so relaxing that dynamics take place that would not in any lesser amount of time. The Sabbath is a gift. Make it a time when your family, your health, your soul can be restored.

Exodus 20:12
Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

The Fifth Commandment is unique indeed, for, as Paul reminds us, it is the only one with a promise attached to it (Ephesians 6:1–3). As evidenced by the fact that many saints die at a young age, while many sinners seem to live indefinitely, the long days promised to those who keep this commandment refer not necessarily to quantity but to quality—to a life full of rich and meaningful days. Living until the age of 930, the first Adam lived thirty times longer than the Last Adam, Jesus Christ, who died at the age of thirty-three.

Yet no one would argue that the first Adam honored his heavenly Father thirty times more than did the Last Adam, for Jesus honored His Father perfectly. And the way He related to His heavenly Father provides a picture, a pattern, an example for how I am to relate to my earthly mother and father . . .

> *Jesus was a reflection of His Father (John 5:19). Because you are a reflection of your parents, if you're down on them, you'll be down on yourself. Therefore, the way to be well emotionally and relationally is to honor your father and mother.*
>
> *Jesus was dependent on His Father (John 5:26), just as we are dependent upon our earthly parents. Given the fact that the chemical components that comprise our bodies are the same as those of a slug, we should be eternally grateful we were born as humans rather than slugs. Therefore, if there's no other reason to honor them, we should honor them because they gave us life, sustained our lives, and saved our lives probably many more times than we could even imagine.*
>
> *Jesus was submitted to His Father (John 5:30). The two key qualities that will bring fulfillment and success to anyone's life are those of humility and submission. And those qualities are born only in the context of family. You see, if I don't like my job, I can quit; if I don't like my friends, I can avoid them; if I don't like my neighbors, I can move; if I don't like my school, I can drop out. But my relationship to my parents is the one relationship I can't change. And it is precisely when I don't agree with them or understand them that submission and humility are worked into my soul. At the peak of His maturity, Jesus said, "I am in submission to My Father." And so must I be.*
>
> *Finally, Jesus was validated by His Father (John 5:37). Jesus said the only honor that matters is that which comes from the Father. The same is true with us. True validation comes when one's own parents or in-laws are able to say, "There's a great man."*

"It was easy for Jesus to submit to His Father," some might say. "After all, His Father was God. My father, on the other hand, walked out on me or beat me, failed to provide for me or ignored me. How can I honor a man like that?"

In response, I would ask them to consider the following . . .

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Jesus cried from the Cross (Matthew 27:46). Jesus knows better than anyone what it is like to have a Parent turn His back.

Marred more than any other man, Jesus knows what it is like to be smitten by a Father (Isaiah 52, 53).

"If You're the Son of God, why are You hungry? Turn these stones to bread," Satan taunted—the implication being that Jesus' Father wasn't providing for Him (Matthew 4:3).

"If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me," Jesus prayed so intensely that He sweat blood (Luke 22:44). But the cup of suffering did not pass from Him—meaning that Jesus knows better than anyone what it's like for a Parent to seemingly ignore a request.

Jesus has experienced more of what has embittered you or angered me than we'll ever understand this side of eternity. And because this same Jesus who honored His Father and who knows what it's like to be beaten, forsaken, and ignored lives in you, trust Him to enable you to honor your father and mother—regardless of how difficult that may seem to be.

Exodus 20:13
Thou shalt not kill.

While working on a roof, two men stumbled and fell down the chimney. The first one down absorbed all the soot. When they got to the bottom, the first man down looked at his partner and assumed his own face was clean. The second man looked at his partner and assumed his own face was dirty. And both were wrong. Concerning the commandment before us, some who think they're clean may not be, while some who think they aren't may not be as dirty as they think.

I talked to a man who has recently become a believer. Years ago as a Marine in Vietnam, he killed a number of North Vietnamese soldiers. Now he wonders if he violated the command not to kill. In Matthew 19:18, we see that in commanding us not to kill, God is commanding us not to murder. The question, then, becomes, Is war murder? I believe the answer is *No* . . .

In the Old Testament, we see God ordering the destruction of the Canaanite culture after giving them four hundred years to repent from unspeakable evil (Acts 7:6).

Jesus Himself chose a man of war in Simon the zealot. Zealots were guerilla fighters who were trying to overthrow the Romans controlling Israel at that time. Far from castigating Simon for being a warrior, Jesus chose him to be one of His inner circle.

In Romans 13, Paul makes it clear that God raises up powers to bear the sword in order to keep evil in check.

Therefore, I believe Scripture clearly indicates that fighting in an army does not make one a murderer. Is capital punishment murder? Again, I believe the answer is *No.* Read Genesis 6 through 8 and see what happens when there is no capital punishment. And then you will understand God's mandate in Genesis 9 that those who murder must be put to death.

Who has the "dirty face"?

Not the soldier, not the executioner, but someone much closer to home . . .

> Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.
>
> Matthew 5:21, 22

There are two Greek words translated "anger" in the New Testament. The first is *thumos,* and refers to the anger one feels that causes his veins to bulge and his face to get red. The word used here, however, is *orgizo*—a word that refers to the anger that smolders internally day after week after month after year. The person who harbors this kind of anger without a cause is the one with the black face, the one who is a murderer.

"Oh, but I have a cause. I have a reason to be angry," you say.

Do you?

In Matthew 18, we read the story of the master who forgave his slave's debt of ten million dollars only to discover that the slave threatened to kill a

fellow slave over a debt of two thousand dollars. In telling this story, Jesus' point was that, as real as the $2,000 debt was, it was nothing in comparison to the debt of which he had been forgiven. In other words, if all of our mixed motives, evil intentions, and sinful imaginations were brought to light, we would see that we owe a debt far greater than any owed us, that we are worse than the worst offense committed against us.

> Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.
>
> Matthew 5:23–26

The only way to keep from murdering others is to be reconciled. And the only way to be reconciled is to agree with your enemy. Even if his facts are wrong, you're a bigger sinner than he can even imagine. So you are to go to him and say, "I'm wrong. I'm sorry. Please forgive me." If you don't, you'll end up in court. What court? The court that exists in your mind. You practice law daily. You gather new witnesses and new evidence systematically. You build an airtight case, and every time court convenes, you win. The other guy never wins. Consequently, your relationships dwindle and your life grows smaller. Families divide. Hell breaks out. And although you may be technically, judicially, legally right, you're oh, so wrong when you fail to reconcile with your adversary.

I know this because Jesus absorbed the blame for us totally. On the Cross, He absorbed the full punishment for our sin, paid the entire price for you and me. Even on the Cross, He said, "Father forgive them." And as a result, Jesus is free from the chains of death and the grave—just as you will be if you choose to absorb the blame wholly, completely, and unconditionally.

Exodus 20:14
Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Because the Seventh Commandment is the least understood, it is the most argued.

> But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul.
>
> Proverbs 6:32

The world thinks sex is about procreation and recreation, failing to understand that it's primarily about unification—about two souls being mystically and miraculously merged into one. The issue is not unwanted pregnancy, disease, AIDS. God says the issue of intimacy is the soul. That is why, after presiding over the first marriage ceremony, He looked at the couple and called their name Adam singularly (Genesis 5:2). Sex outside of marriage destroys one's soul irreparably, inevitably. Every time people are involved in sexual activity outside of marriage, there will be destruction as the soul is destroyed a piece, a layer, a step at a time. That is why Jesus was so emphatic when He dealt with the subject of adultery (Matthew 5:27–30). Knowing its danger, He told us to deal with it radically, brutally, severely—to do whatever it takes to keep it from our lives.

If there was a sign which read:

> Please proceed with great caution because behind these doors there are experiments taking place with chemical components which may be used one day to cause an explosive reaction at some future point.

I'd probably ignore it.

But if the sign said:

Danger! Explosives!

I would stay away.

"Thou shalt not commit adultery." If you want to read the fine print, you can explore the Scriptures and find the reason why. But here, it is as if God is simply, clearly, undeniably saying, "Take My Word for it: Adultery is explosive. It is dangerous. It will destroy you."

Exodus 20:15
Thou shalt not steal.

Although the Eighth Commandment is straightforward and simple, it is even more so in Hebrew, where it reads simply, "Steal not." As a society, we know that stealing is wrong, so we teach our kids from the earliest age not to take what isn't theirs. And yet, according to the IRS, if no one cheated on his taxes, our national debt would be retired in one year. Perhaps the pervasiveness of stealing is seen even more clearly in the story of the New York City man who was able to get rid of his garbage every day during a two-week garbage strike by putting it in a wrapped package and leaving it on the front seat of his car every day while he was at work. But make no mistake—stealing is not limited to money or material goods. We can rob our employers through two-hour lunches or leaving early from work.

Following are four prescriptions for the epidemic of thievery that pervades our culture . . .

"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good . . ." (Ephesians 4:28). We are to work with our hands. When man fell in the Garden of Eden, God told Adam that he was to work by the sweat of his brow. This wasn't punishment but protection—for in his sinful state, man needed to work or else he would be vulnerable to stealing, taking shortcuts, cheating. One of the greatest ways to be free from thievery is to work hard. Why? If you're not working hard, you're a candidate for depression. You'll be down on yourself, disillusioned with yourself, sad about your situation. I believe depression can be linked to people who no longer work hard.

Jesus said if someone compels you to go a mile, go two (Matthew 5:41). Go twice as far, twice as hard as your boss expects. Satan will tell you that you deserve a break, but Jesus tells us to go twice as far because, His burden being easy, His load light, He knows it's for our benefit.

". . . that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Ephesians 4:28). We are to reach out our hands. If we're going the second mile, working harder than others, we'll inevitably experience a certain degree of success—not to accumulate more for ourselves, but to reach out our hands and give to others. In so doing, a dynamic takes place which leads to joy and liberty, happiness and freedom (Luke 19:8).

"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings" (Malachi 3:8). We are to open up our hands. God indicted His people of robbery when they failed to tithe. The whole earth is the Lord's (Psalm 24:1)—and we acknowledge that fact by tithing. He who robs God, also robs everyone around him in sneaky, subtle ways.

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). We are to look at His hands. The holes in Jesus' hands tell me that God loves me, that He cares about me, that He'll do what's best for me—which obliterates the need for thievery. I look at His hands, and in them I rest.

Exodus 20:16
Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

The biblical viewpoint of bearing false witness is not confined to the telling of bold-faced lies, but also includes being tricky with the truth. In the one account where the phrase "false witness" is used in Scripture, we see individuals falsely accusing Jesus of threatening to destroy the temple when, in fact, He was speaking of His own death (Matthew 26:59).

Because he is the father of lies, Satan is the ultimate false witness, accusing us day and night before God's throne as he points out our failings, our shortcomings, our sins (Revelation 12:10). Jesus, on the other hand, is the faithful and true Witness (Revelation 1:5, 3:14), our Advocate, our Defense Lawyer.

Are you a true witness or a false witness? If the person sitting next to you is a believer, he or she is righteously robed, heaven-bound, Spirit-filled, positionally pure. Speaking anything less of them is bearing false witness. Oh, you might give the right information—but in so doing do you convey the wrong implication? You might say lots of nice things about them, but do you add a "but . . .," a "however . . .," an "I don't know if I should share this, but . . ."? If so, you're a false witness because, although you might be telling the truth, you're not telling the whole truth. You're failing to factor in God's estimation of them.

If you're prone to bearing false witness, consider the following remedies . . .

Say less—for as Solomon so insightfully declared, "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise" (Proverbs 10:19).

Pray more. "Remove from me the way of lying" David prayed (Psalm 119:29).

Think again. Before you say anything about anyone else, THINK:

T: Is what you are about to say the whole truth?

H: Is it helpful? Will people be edified?

I: Is it inspirational? Will God be praised as a result?

N: Is it necessary?

K: Is it kind?

The best way to keep from bearing false witness is to simply say less, pray more, and think again.

Exodus 20:17
Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

Of all the commandments, the last one is probably taken the least seriously. If a person breaks the Sixth Commandment, he might be executed. If he breaks the Eighth, he might end up in jail. If he breaks the Ninth, he might be sued. But if he breaks the Tenth Commandment, not only is he forgiven, but applauded—for coveting is a key component of our culture.

Essentially, to covet is simply to want more of that of which one already has enough. And our economy is based upon this. Society screams at us that the way to have real life is to have this car or that toy. But the Giver of life, the Author of life, the One who declared, "*I* am the Life," said, "That's not true. A man's life does not consist of the stuff he has materially." And to illustrate His point, He went on to give a parable of a man who had so many material goods that it was necessary for him to construct bigger barns to hold it all. Yet although the financial planners would consider him wise, although

his culture might consider him blessed, God considered him a fool for failing to lay up treasure in the only place that matters: heaven (Luke 12:20).

If God blesses you materially—wonderful! God gives us richly all things to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17). I find it interesting that in Jesus' parable, the rich man was planning to enjoy his wealth in the future (Luke 12:19). In other words, up to that point, he never truly enjoyed what he had. And such is all too often the case. The man living for things, wanting more things, focused on things will never, ever be satisfied, for he will always think he needs just a few more things to make him happy.

The solution? Not only are we to enjoy material blessings, but we are to employ them—not to make more money for ourselves, but to help others, to extend the gospel to others.

A wealthy man in Ur, Abraham left his comfortable life behind to seek a city whose Builder and Maker was God (Hebrews 11:10). He saw the big picture. He saw the kingdom. And so must we.

Jesus said it is the deceitfulness of riches that crowd out the Word in our lives (Matthew 13:22). No wonder, then, that God's last commandment, His final audible word to His people was, "Don't covet."

Exodus 20:18, 19
And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.

So powerfully did God's power and potency, His glory and grandeur convict the people that they said, "You speak to us, Moses, because if God speaks to us, we'll die." And that's the way it's supposed to be.

The Word of God is powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces. It divides. It kills our pride, our self-centeredness, our flesh (Hebrews 4:12). And because it does, the person who wants to pamper his flesh, the person caught up in sins of the flesh will often be one who doesn't want to hear from God anymore. If I choose to indulge my flesh day after day, week after week, I won't be at Bible study six months down the road.

If you're at a place where lately it's been hard to get into the Word, I have great news for you: God wants to do something special in you. Satan sees what God desires to do and is trying to keep you from that blessing. It's a big one, a great one. So pick up the Word; let God speak—and I guarantee you'll feel exhilarated in your spirit.

Exodus 20:20
And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.

Like the BMW engineer eager to take his car on a test drive to rev up the RPM's and fine tune it, God wants to "fine tune" us in order that we won't go careening off course.

Exodus 20:21–24
And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was. And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.

After the Law is heeded, an altar is always needed. When we really hear the Law of God, we realize we're sinners in need of a sacrifice to take away our lawlessness, our iniquity, our failure, our sin.

Exodus 20:25
And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.

The altar was not to be ornate or artistic but rather very simple, made of dirt or uncarved stone. Why? So that the focus would be not on the altar but on the sacrifice. The sacrifice speaks of Jesus, the Lamb of God. Generally speaking, the farther a people stray away from a real relationship with God, the greater the tendency will be toward grandeur and glory in altar-building. When the Spirit of God is not moving, the artisans and architects try to figure out how to create a feeling to mask the lack. But the heart of the Father is that the focus always be on the Son.

Exodus 20:26
Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.

Not only was there to be simplicity in worship, but there was to be humility as well. Clothed in robes, the higher the priests climbed, the more exposed they would be to the people below. To rectify this, the Lord ordered the priests to keep grounded.

"God be merciful to me a sinner," cried the publican, eyes downcast (Luke 18:13). The worship God honors is not a set of twelve steps whereby one climbs higher and higher. It is one step—the simple step to the Savior. Therefore, from the very beginning, as God gives the Law to His people, He says, "keep it simple. Focus on the sacrifice, not on the structure. And stay humble."



21 After seeing the Law of God presented in chapter 20, we come to the Law of Moses here in chapter 21. Although the Law of Moses is not directly applicable *to* us, it is definitely helpful *for* us because in studying the Law of Moses, we gain insight into the mind and heart of God, and into the Person and Nature of His Son—for the sacrifices, ordinances, and regulations which follow all ultimately point to Him.

Exodus 21:1–6 (a)
Now these are the judgments which thou shalt set before them. If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the

seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul;

At various times in history, this passage has been a hotbed of controversy, for it deals with slavery. Is God instituting slavery? No. Slavery was already deeply embedded into the fabric of Hebrew culture. Therefore, God was not introducing or instituting slavery, but rather regulating it. The same principle is seen concerning divorce. In Matthew 19, Jesus makes it clear that divorce was not God's intent. But because of the hardness of men's hearts, God regulated it.

That said, the parameters God places on slavery are telling indeed. Male slaves were required to serve a maximum of six years. After that, if he wanted to remain in the service of his master, he would be taken to a doorpost, where his ear would be pierced, signifying that he was a slave by choice.

> Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:
>
> Philippians 2:5–7

Jesus is the ultimate Servant, the perfect Servant . . .

Just as the six years the Old Testament slave was to serve speaks of the number of man, so Jesus left His throne in heaven to become a Man.

Just as the seventh year speaks of the number of completion, so Jesus completed the work He came to do to reconcile us to the Father (John 17:21).

Just as the Old Testament slave could choose to remain a slave for love of family and master, so Jesus chose to become a slave for the love of His Bride (Ephesians 5:25–27), His children (John 1:12), and His Father (John 8:29).

Just as the ear of the Old Testament slave would be pierced to show that he was a slave by choice, Jesus would be pierced—not through His ear, but through His hands and feet, His brow and side.

Why would the Old Testament piercing take place at a doorpost? Because it would bring to mind the posts which the children of Israel had recently marked at the top, bottom, and sides—in the shape of a cross—with the blood of the Passover Lamb. The picture is perfect. It all points to Jesus.

Exodus 21:6 (b)
. . . and he shall serve him for ever.

Although He finished the work, Jesus chose to be a servant forever. That is why He girded Himself with a towel and washed His disciples' feet (John 13). And that is why He will gird Himself again and serve all those who are watching for His coming (Luke 12:37). And as I accept this, I must then reflect it. What am I to be? A servant. Jesus sets the pace. Jesus shows the way. Ever wonder why you're not thanked, why you're not appreciated? It's a golden opportunity for you to see if you're a servant or not, if you're reflecting Jesus, if you're becoming more like Him.

Exodus 21:7
And if a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant, she shall not go out as the menservants do.

Although it initially seems unfair that male slaves could go free after six years, but female slaves couldn't, this was actually a blessing for the women. You see, when families were under extreme financial pressure, they would often sell their children into slavery. While a father might think his daughter could handle being a slave for six years, God says she would serve not for six years, but for life. Therefore, I believe this differentiation was God's intent

that parents give serious and sober consideration to their actions concerning their daughters.

Exodus 21:8, 9
If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed: to sell her unto a strange nation he shall have no power, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her. And if he have betrothed her unto his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters.

If after making preparation to marry one of his slaves, a man changes his mind, he can't sell the woman he intended to marry to someone else but must return her to her family. And if a man buys a slave to be the bride of his son, he must treat her not as a slave, but as a daughter-in-law.

Exodus 21:10, 11
If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish. And if he do not these three unto her, then shall she go out free without money.

Again, God is not endorsing polygamy, but regulating it. As you go through the Word and see God's unfolding revelation, there will be clarification on this matter. But at this point, the requirement to care for wives equitably and to treat slaves fairly would alone be a shock in the ears of the people. Other cultures knew nothing of this.

Exodus 21:12, 13
He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.

He who committed second-degree murder would not be held to the same standard as the one who committed first-degree, or premeditated, intentional murder.

Exodus 21:14

But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.

If a man intentionally killed someone, he couldn't take refuge at the altar. Peter warned us that we are not to use our liberty for a "cloak of maliciousness" (1 Peter 2:16). Some people say, "I've come to the altar or to the Table of Communion, so now I can do whatever I want." But Peter says such a one doesn't understand that liberty and grace are not to be a cloak, a cover-up for sin.

Exodus 21:15
And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death.

There are no exceptions for this deadly serious sin.

Exodus 21:16
And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.

Kidnapping merits death as well.

Exodus 21:17
And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.

Some of the most vicious murders are committed with the mouth. You might have lots of reasons to be angry or to feel bitter towards your parents, but when you speak against them, it is a capital offense in God's economy.

Exodus 21:18, 19
And if men strive together, and one smite another with a stone, or with his fist, and he die not, but keepeth his bed: If he rise again, and walk abroad upon his staff, then shall he that smote him be quit: only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed.

The man who strikes another must pay for the time lost and the expenses of the healing.

Exodus 21:20, 21
And if a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished. Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished: for he is his money.

God declares that if a servant is hurt permanently, there's a price to pay. But if the servant is only bruised, there is no price to pay—an interesting word indeed for our litigious society.

Exodus 21:22, 23
If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life,

Imagine a barroom brawl in which one man hurls a chair at another. The intended target ducks, however, and a pregnant woman is hit. If she miscarries or gives birth prematurely, the perpetrator shall be punished. But if the woman dies, the perpetrator will be killed. Again, God is elevating the status of women, for, although her death was an accident, it was to be treated as first-degree murder.

Exodus 21:24, 25
Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

This idea of life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth seems at first glance to be harsh—but in reality, it is an expression of God's mercy . . .

When Peter-John was in first grade, he came home from school one day with his shirt rumpled and tear stains on his cheek.

"What happened?" I asked.

"The biggest guy in my class beat me up," he answered.

The next morning, he came out of his room carrying his baseball bat. When I asked him why, he answered, "Today is show and tell."

But, having a pretty good idea to whom he was going to show his bat, I made him take a baseball card instead.

The tendency of people is to say, "If you push me down, I'm coming at you with my baseball bat. If you poke my eye, I'm going for both of yours. If you knock out one of my teeth, I'll give you a knuckle sandwich which will take out all of yours." Our flesh says, "Hit me once, I'll hit you twice."

The Lord, however, says, "No. It's *one* eye for an eye, *one* tooth for a tooth."

Later on, in Matthew 5, Jesus will say, "If someone smites your right cheek, offer him your left cheek as well" (see Matthew 5:39). Did God change His mind? No. As a Parent, He does the same thing we do when we have an entirely different set of standards for our eighteen-year-old than we do for our three-year-old. You see, here in Exodus, God's family was fresh from slavery in Egypt, surrounded by paganism. So that's where He begins with them. But as the centuries pass, His heart and His plan become increasingly clear to His people through progressive revelation—until His Final Word, His full heart was revealed in His Son (Hebrews 1:1, 2).

Exodus 21:26, 27

And if a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish; he shall let him go free for his eye's sake. And if he smite out his manservant's tooth, or his maidservant's tooth; he shall let him go free for his tooth's sake.

If a man struck his servant in such a way that a tooth or an eye was lost, the servant was to go free.

Exodus 21:28–30

If an ox gore a man or a woman, that they die: then the ox shall be surely stoned, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be quit. But if the ox were wont to push with his horn in

time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death. If there be laid on him a sum of money, then he shall give for the ransom of his life whatsoever is laid upon him.

The first time an ox gored someone, it would be considered an accident. But if the ox demonstrated a propensity towards this behavior and wasn't properly restricted, the ox must die and the owner must either die or settle monetarily. We live in a day of animal rights activism. God, however, makes it clear here that people are more important than animals.

Exodus 21:31, 32
Whether he have gored a son, or have gored a daughter, according to this judgment shall it be done unto him. If the ox shall push a manservant or a maidservant; he shall give unto their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

If it was a servant who was gored, the owner of the ox was to pay thirty shekels of silver. And in this, a picture is being painted of One whose life, because He was a Servant, would be bought for a mere thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15).

Exodus 21:33, 34
And if a man shall open a pit, or if a man shall dig a pit, and not cover it, and an ox or an ass fall therein; the owner of the pit shall make it good, and give money unto the owner of them; and the dead beast shall be his.

If an ox or ass fell into an open pit, the man who dug it and failed to cover it would be responsible to pay for the animal.

Exodus 21:35, 36
And if one man's ox hurt another's, that he die; then they shall sell the live ox, and divide the money of it; and the dead ox also they shall divide. Or if it be known that the ox hath used to push in time

past, and his owner hath not kept him in; he shall surely pay ox for ox; and the dead shall be his own.

If an ox killed another ox, the owner of the dead ox would receive half the value of the live ox. But if the live ox was prone to aggressive behavior, the owner of the live ox would pay full price.

Commonplace and common sense as these laws may seem, in light of what other cultures were doing at this time, they were revolutionary. And through them, the Jewish people understood that their God not only was exceedingly fair, but that He cared about every aspect of their lives.



22 Exodus 22:1

If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.

If I steal your ox or lamb to either eat or sell, I am to restore the ox fivefold and the sheep fourfold. As God addresses such legal matters, He bases His justice on the very important principle of restitution. As a result, the Jewish people knew nothing of incarceration. Ours is the most jailed people in the world. With 1.8 million in prison, for every 1,000 people, sixty-six are incarcerated. But here in God's economy, justice was based not on incarceration, but on restitution.

Here, we see the penalty for stealing an ox was five oxen; the penalty for a sheep, four sheep. If a man was so poor he had to steal the ox or sheep in the first place, how was he to pay four or five times what he stole? The answer is that the whole family was responsible. Thus, there would be tremendous pressure within a family to obey the law because if one of their number failed to do so, the rest would pay.

Exodus 22:2, 3

If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.

If a thief broke in at night and was killed in the process, the one who killed him was justified. But this was not the case if the crime occurred in broad daylight. It was not allowable to kill a thief if the crime occurred in the day. Why? Perhaps because in the dark, it would be confusing and hard to determine whether a man was out to kill or merely to steal. But in the daytime, there would be no confusion. In other words, with increased light comes increased responsibility. And in the broadest sense, he who has light must live up to it.

Exodus 22:4
If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double.

If a thief was caught red-handed with whatever he had taken, he was to pay it back twofold. An exception found in Numbers 5:6, 7 says if a thief 's conscience bothered him and he confessed without being apprehended, he was to pay back only twenty percent above that which he took.

Exodus 22:5
If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, and shall put in his beast, and shall feed in another man's field; of the best of his own field, and of the best of his own vineyard, shall he make restitution.

If I allow my animal to graze in your field or your vineyard, I am to pay you back with the best of my field.

Exodus 22:6
If fire break out, and catch in thorns, so that the stacks of corn, or the standing corn, or the field, be consumed therewith; he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.

If I'm where I ought not be, I'm to pay for the damage done. The Book of James says the tongue is like a fire (James 3:6). Truly, a great deal of good fruit is burned by activities of the tongue. When we poke around in someone else's business and fire results, we have to make restitution. How? By

replacing the fruit that was lost. How are we to do this? By saying to the people we talked to, "What I said was unfair and untrue and I was very wrong." We are to do whatever we can do to replace that which was lost due to the fire we set when we meddled in a field in which we ought not to have been.

Exodus 22:7, 8
If a man shall deliver unto his neighbour money or stuff to keep, and it be stolen out of the man's house; if the thief be found, let him pay double. If the thief be not found, then the master of the house shall be brought unto the judges, to see whether he have put his hand unto his neighbour's goods.

If you're watching your neighbor's goods while he's on vacation and they be stolen, the thief must pay double. But if no thief is found, it is up to the judges—the spiritual leaders of the community—to decide whether you actually were the thief.

Exodus 22:9
For all manner of trespass, whether it be for ox, for ass, for sheep, for raiment, or for any manner of lost thing, which another challengeth to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whom the judges shall condemn, he shall pay double unto his neighbour.

Paul picks up this same principle in 1 Corinthians 6, when he says, "If something is wrong between you and a brother, you are to go to the church rather than to court because the world cares more about tricky legal maneuverings than it does about truth."

Exodus 22:10–13
If a man deliver unto his neighbour an ass, or an ox, or a sheep, or any beast, to keep; and it die, or be hurt, or driven away, no man seeing it: then shall an oath of the LORD be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbour's goods; and the owner of it shall accept thereof, and he shall not make it good. And

if it be stolen from him, he shall make restitution unto the owner thereof. If it be torn in pieces, then let him bring it for witness, and he shall not make good that which was torn.

God declares in this economy that a man's word was to be accepted at face value. "All things are naked and open before Him with whom we must deal" (Hebrews 4:13). Therefore, if a man gives his word, we're to accept it. If he's lying, God will deal with him.

Exodus 22:14, 15
And if a man borrow ought of his neighbour, and it be hurt, or die, the owner thereof being not with it, he shall surely make it good. But if the owner thereof be with it, he shall not make it good: if it be an hired thing, it came for his hire.

The one who borrowed something from his neighbor was responsible to maintain it. But if there was payment involved, if it was "rented," he would not be responsible to replace it.

Exodus 22:16, 17
And if a man entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuse to give her unto him, he shall pay money according to the dowry of virgins.

In God's economy, the point at which a man seduced a woman was the point at which he essentially said, "I do." Once there was sexual involvement, he was married. If, however, the woman's father didn't want the man in his family, he could refuse to give him her hand—yet the man would still be required to pay the dowry, which was a significant portion of one's income.

Exodus 22:18
Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.

In the occult, in witchcraft there is a darkness that, because it dooms and damns, must be taken with deadly seriousness.

Exodus 22:19
Whosoever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death.

This is an absolute command that bestiality is not to be countenanced.

Exodus 22:20, 21
He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed. Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Although sacrifice to any strange god was punishable by death, merely being a stranger was not grounds for oppression.

Exodus 22:22–24
Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

It seems as though our Father in heaven has a special place in His heart for fatherless children and for women who don't have a covering.

Exodus 22:25
If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.

God's people were not to charge one another interest.

Exodus 22:26, 27
If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? And it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious.

If a man put down his coat as collateral on a loan, his coat was to be returned at the time he would have need of it. In this we see the graciousness of God—not only to us, but also to those who have to part with their coats to make ends meet, towards those who have made bad choices, towards those who we might deem lazy. Certainly, they have made errors. Certainly they have problems. But so have we all. And in this God says, "I'm gracious toward you. Be gracious toward others. If you can keep someone else warm, do so."

Exodus 22:28
Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people.

In newer translations, the word "gods" is correctly rendered "judges" or "leaders."

Exodus 22:29 (a)
Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors . . .

We are not to delay the tithe. "Concerning the collection for the saints . . . upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store," Paul declared (see 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2). It's not up to us when to give the tithe or to dictate how it will be used.

Exodus 22:29 (b)
. . . the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me.

At this time, the firstborn son in every family would be serving as priest, for initially, God desired that every family participate in this glorious calling (Exodus 13:2).

Exodus 22:30
Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen, and with thy sheep: seven days it shall be with his dam; on the eighth day thou shalt give it me.

The tendency might be to extend the time a lamb or ox was to remain with its mother. Knowing this, God set a clear parameter at seven days.

Exodus 22:31
And ye shall be holy men unto me: neither shall ye eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; ye shall cast it to the dogs.

A mark of one's holiness is his diet. In New Testament economy, this speaks of what we allow our minds to feed upon. All too often, we take in that which has been "torn," that which is violent. But because we're to be holy, we're not to partake of that which is either hurtful to us or to others—be it in the form of that which we read, which we watch, or which we talk about.



23 Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Matthew 5:38, 39

Many people are under the false impression that the God of the Old Testament is angry and uptight, while Jesus is kind and forgiving—that Jesus has to "calm God down" and remind Him that He loves us. Nothing, however, could be farther from the truth. The seeming disparity is because Jesus addresses the individual. God addresses the culture. For a culture to work, there must be boundaries and regulations. Without them, people would not survive. Thus, it is the love of God that declares the need for parameters.

Exodus 23:1
Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.

Our judicial system allows for the buying of "expert" witnesses—a practice prohibited in God's economy.

Exodus 23:2 (a)
Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil . . .

We must be those who tell the truth even if everyone else is moving in the opposite direction.

Exodus 23:2 (b)
. . . neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment:

Don't decline to testify—even if it seems unpopular.

Exodus 23:3
Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause.

In the judicial context of which God is speaking, poor people are not to be favored simply because of their poverty. Three verses later, God will say, "Don't rule against the poor simply because they're poor." Taken together, God is saying, "Treat people with integrity regardless of their social status." Our nation's understanding of blind justice is based upon this biblical precept.

Exodus 23:4
If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again.

Today's parallel would read, "If you see your enemy's car beginning to roll down a hill, give him a brake."

Exodus 23:5
If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him.

I believe this speaks not only of the rescue of an animal, but of restoration between people. If you know your enemy is burdened or troubled by a marriage on the rocks or a business under stress, you can help them through prayer. I have found this to be exceedingly practical. Years ago, an older brother in the Lord taught me to see that the way to keep from having any

bitterness in my heart was to pray for people with whom I might otherwise be upset or disappointed.

"Don't curse those who persecute you," Jesus would say. "Pray for them" (see Matthew 5:44). Lift the burden off your enemy through prayer and you'll be set free yourself of the burden of hostility or bitterness.

Exodus 23:6
Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause.

This is the counterpart to verse 3.

Exodus 23:7
Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.

Speaking of society as a whole, God says He will not justify the wicked. But when it comes to individual sinners, Romans 4 tells us that God is the One who justifies the ungodly. What good news!

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

Those whose job it is to sort through judicial matters are not to take gifts in order that their judgment be not clouded.

Exodus 23:9
Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

"Oppress not the stranger," God had said in the previous chapter (v. 21). And here, He repeats the injunction. When God repeats a matter, it's because He wants us to understand how important it is to Him. Prejudice can lurk in the farthest corners of a man's heart without him even being aware it's there. That is why we have to ask the Lord, as the psalmist did, to search our heart, to see if there be any wicked way in us (Psalm 139:23). Because we were all

strangers and aliens, cut off from the blessings of God before He adopted us into His family, there is no room for oppression or prejudice in the heart of any believer (Ephesians 2:12).

Exodus 23:10–12
And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard. Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed.

Those who think the Law is demanding have not read it, for passages such as this speak of God's tender heart toward us. God wants us to succeed, but not at the expense of our health or the well-being of others.

"Come unto Me," Jesus would say, "and I will give you rest. Yoke with Me. Take some time to be with Me. Learn of Me and you'll find rest in your soul" (see Matthew 11:29). In Exodus 20:10, God mandated one day off in seven so that one's sons and daughters could rest. Here, the circle is widened to include animals and servants.

Exodus 23:13
And in all things that I have said unto you be circumspect: and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth.

Paul said we should be ignorant concerning evil (Romans 16:19)—completely unfamiliar with the idols that dominate the heart of our culture.

Exodus 23:14–16
Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty). And the feast of harvest, the

firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field.

The people of God were to gather three times a year: for the feast of Passover in the spring; for the Feast of Harvest, or Pentecost, fifty days after Passover; and for the Feast of Ingathering or Tabernacles in the fall. And when they gathered, none were to come empty-handed. Rather, they were to come ready to give. There are people today who come to the assembly not looking for something to get, but something to give. They come prayed up, prepared to worship, eager to tithe, ready to reach out to someone. And in so doing, they enrich the Fellowship greatly.

Exodus 23:17, 18
Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD. Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread; neither shall the fat of my sacrifice remain until the morning.

Leaven being a type of sin, this is a reiteration of verses 8 and 10 of chapter 12.

Exodus 23:19 (a)
The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God . . .

The priority the Lord has in our lives is seen by what we do with the "firstfruits"—the first tenth of all He gives us.

Exodus 23:19 (b)
. . . Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.

Although observant Jews are very careful to never eat meat products with dairy products (e.g. no cheeseburgers), I don't believe such was the intent of this regulation. You see, this verse being connected with the topic of the Passover, I believe it refers to the fertility rites practiced by the heathen at the

time of Passover, wherein they partook of the milk of a goat or cow along with the meat of a kid or calf in order that their gods might bless them with children. Writings dating from 1300 B.C. that record such practices have been recently discovered. Therefore, I believe God gives this regulation in order that His people stay completely clear of anything resembling pagan practices.

Exodus 23:20, 21
Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him.

The word "Angel" is capitalized because it unquestionably refers to Jesus —a Christophany, or an appearance of Jesus before He came to earth as the Babe of Bethlehem. This is the only explanation for why this Angel had the power to pardon sin.

Exodus 23:22, 23
But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off.

The heart of God is that we obey the voice of His Angel in order that He might bless us, in order that we might have victory over those things that weigh us down, those things which hold us in bondage, those things which eat at our soul.

Exodus 23:24
Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images.

The ultimate image in our day is the one beamed into our homes constantly on the screens of our televisions.

Exodus 23:25
And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee.

Aren't you tired of living in a sick society? God says, "If you obey what I say, if you break down those altars and do in these images, I'll heal your land."

Exodus 23:26, 27
There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil. I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee.

I love this! Oh, may the enemies that wage war against our souls, the forces which seek to do us harm have no place in our lives. This is what I want for myself and my family, for the church and for our country. "Trust Me," says the Lord. "I will drive out your enemies—but I will do it in a way you would never have imagined. . . ."

Exodus 23:28
And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee.

God says, "I'm going to take care of all these problem people with hornets." *Hornets?* Some have suggested that the term "hornets" refers to the Assyrians. That may be, but I don't think so. I think the Lord is saying, "I have ways you can't comprehend to take care of the depression, the addiction, the sadness which plague you. My ways are not your ways. I'm going to send hornets."

Exodus 23:29, 30

I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land.

"I've gone to Bible study for six weeks," some say, "and I'm still depressed, still defeated." Or, "I've been praying for three months and my situation still hasn't changed."

The Lord, however, says, "I'll not drive out your enemies as quickly as you might think because there's something else in play. If I drove them out in one year, the wild beasts would multiply. Therefore, until you're increased, until you're ready to occupy the land, I'm keeping them there in order to keep the fields tilled and the wild beasts at bay."

This is hard for me because patience is hard for me. I like things to happen immediately. But that's not the way God works. "Count it all joy," He says, "when you go through trials in order that patience might have her perfect work" (see James 1:2–4). I want to get ahead of God, but He says, "If the project was completed, if the answer was given on your schedule, you wouldn't be ready for it. My timing is perfect—any earlier and it would be disastrous. In the meantime, you'll be increased by talking the situation over with Me, by waiting on Me, by spending time with Me."

"I want this kind of ministry," we say, or, "that kind of girl to marry," or, "this type of family."

"Great!" the Lord says, "but I've got a lot of work to do to make you the kind of person who can handle that responsibility. It's not going to happen quickly. Little by little I'll drive out the obstacles. In the meantime, stay close to Me."

Exodus 23:31–33
And I will set thy bounds from the Red sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee. Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee.

"I'm going to do something big," the Lord says. "I'm going to bring you into a land that stretches from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean to the Euphrates. And when you get there, don't become involved with the gods you'll find, but keep your eyes on Me."



24 Exodus 24 is the Old Testament counterpart to the account of the Transfiguration in Matthew 17. In both we see a mountain. In both we see Moses. And in both we see Jesus . . .

Exodus 24:1 (a)
And he said unto Moses, Come up unto the LORD, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel . . .

Aaron was Moses' older brother, his spokesman. Nadab and Abihu were Aaron's sons. Along with his brother and nephews, Moses was to bring the seventy leaders he had appointed in response to his father-in-law's suggestion (18:13–27).

Exodus 24:1 (b)
. . . and worship ye afar off.

"Draw nigh to Me and I will draw nigh to you," God says to us (James 4:8). Yet to this group, God says, "Come and worship ye afar off." They were told to worship even though they were to worship from afar. Although I know that because of the work of Christ on the Cross, I can come boldly unto the throne of grace; I can draw nigh to God; I can call Him Abba, or Papa—the fact is, sometimes I don't feel that way emotionally. I feel like I'm worshiping Him from afar off. Ever feel that way? Take heart. I have learned that it's okay because God is worthy of worship whether I am emotionally engaged or not. Worship is not about how I feel. It's all about who God is. And He is worthy to receive glory and honor and power, for He has created all things and for His pleasure they are and were created—whether I feel this or not (Revelation 4).

Exodus 24:2, 3
And Moses alone shall come near the LORD: but they shall not come nigh; neither shall the people go up with him. And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do.

Although the people of Israel were determined to do right, the Word says there is none righteous, no not one (Romans 3:10). Therefore, it would have been better for them to say, "We want to do Your will, Lord. Now help us, for without You, we can do nothing."

Exodus 24:4 (a)
And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning . . .

I suggest Moses rose up early in the morning because, after hearing the claims of the people, yet knowing full well their frailty, he didn't sleep very well the night before.

Exodus 24:4 (b)–7
. . . and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient.

Knowing that without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin (Hebrews 9:22), Moses built an altar. The altar speaks of the Ultimate Altar—the place where our sins would be cleansed forever, the Cross of Calvary where the Lamb of God was slain for you and me.

Exodus 24:8

And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.

While the sprinkling of the blood on the altar speaks of salvation, the sprinkling of the blood over the people speaks of sanctification—of being set apart. So, too, the blood was shed *for* us on the altar of Calvary. But it's sprinkled *on* us as we apply it presently. That is why Communion is oh, so important. We're saved, born again, heaven-bound—but how we need the blood sprinkled on us, to be sanctified, to be set apart, to be reminded that we can't get through a single day without the Lord living in us.

Exodus 24:9, 10 (a)
Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: and they saw the God of Israel . . .

In talking about the grandeur of God, Paul writes, "No man can approach unto Him whom no man hath seen nor can see" (1 Timothy 6:16). John says the same thing when he writes, "No man hath seen God at any time" (John 1:18). It's not that man will be punished for seeing God, but rather, the sight of the glory and grandeur of the First Person of the Trinity would simply cause a man's heart to stop beating. Yet here we read that Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders all saw God. To understand this seeming contradiction turn to the Book of Isaiah . . .

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

Isaiah 6:1

Now turn to John's Gospel . . .

Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake,

> Lord, who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.
>
> John 12:35, 37, 38, 41

John identifies the Person Isaiah called the Lord as Jesus. Therefore, who did Moses and Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders see? They saw Jesus.

> **Exodus 24:10 (b)**
> **. . . and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.**

Under Jesus' feet was transparent blue pavement. Ever feel like you're over your head? Whatever is over your head is under His feet. And it's beautiful. Peter experienced this. Looking around and seeing the waves over his head, he took his eyes off Jesus and sank. Like Peter, some people seem to always be in a state of panic because they take their eyes off Jesus, not understanding that the waves that were over Peter's head were under Jesus' feet as He walked upon them (Matthew 14:25).

> **Exodus 24:11**
> **And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink.**

The word "nobles" does not mean noble by birth, but literally "rooted ones." Who is noble in God's economy? Those who are rooted and grounded in Christ, rooted and grounded in their faith, rooted and grounded in love (Ephesians 3:17).

> **Exodus 24:12 (a)**
> **And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there . . .**

"Be there." Ever go to church or to a Bible study and you're not there? The Word is being taught, worship is being offered, and you're there—but

you're not there. God says, "Come and be there"—not just physically, but wholly.

Exodus 24:12 (b)
. . . and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them.

It was because God knew Abraham would "command his children and his household after him" in the way of the Lord that He told Abraham about the impending destruction of Sodom (Genesis 18:17–19). Who does God give His Word to? Those who He knows will teach or share with others.

Exodus 24:13
And Moses rose up, and his minister Joshua: and Moses went up into the mount of God.

The name "Joshua" being the Old Testament form of the name "Jesus," Moses took Jesus, if you would, with him. And it had to be this way, for without Joshua, Moses' ministry would be incomplete. You see, it was Joshua who would eventually lead the people into the Promised Land. Moses represents the Law. And although the Law can take us to the edge of the Promised Land as it shows us how things ought to be, we can't enter in to the Promises of God through the Law because we are unable to keep it.

"*I* am the Way," Jesus declared (John 14:6). The Law was given by Moses, but grace came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17). And it is only by grace that we are saved, that we enter the Promised Land.

Exodus 24:14
And he said unto the elders, Tarry ye here for us, until we come again unto you: and, behold, Aaron and Hur are with you: if any man have any matters to do, let him come unto them.

Although Aaron will fail miserably, Hur evidently didn't for he is not mentioned in the account of the golden calf debacle. God declares He will not tempt us above that which we are able, but will provide a way of escape (1

Corinthians 10:13). Hur evidently found the way of escape while Aaron chose not to.

Exodus 24:15, 16
And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount. And the glory of the LORD abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud.

Prophetically, the Lord Himself shall descend in the clouds and we'll hear His voice (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The picture portrayed here on Mt. Sinai is one seen throughout Scripture and one we'll see again.

Exodus 24:17, 18
And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights.

Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights, and in chapter 25, we'll see what God told him there . . .



25 The world is familiar with the pyramids of Egypt, the pagodas of Japan, and the cathedrals of Europe, but the greatest, most awesome place of worship ever constructed is largely unknown—that being the tabernacle, painstakingly and powerfully described in the chapter before us and the fifteen which follow . . .

Exodus 25:1, 2 (a)
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering . . .

Although the design of the tabernacle would be God's alone, He gave the people a definite part to play in the construction.

Exodus 25:2 (b)–7
. . . of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering. And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair, and rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins, and shittim wood, oil for the light, spices for anointing oil, and for sweet incense, onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate.

In Exodus 36, we see that when this offering was actually collected, so generously did the people give that Moses had to say, "Enough! We have too much!" How often have you heard a preacher say that?! Keep in mind that, although the tabernacle would be outwardly simple, the interior would cost millions of dollars in today's standards—all provided by the hand of God's people.

In 2 Corinthians 9:7, Paul says we are not to give reluctantly or out of compulsion but according to that which is stirred in our hearts. We're to give cheerfully or, literally, hilariously. In other words, we're to be those who say, "Hooray! It's offering time. I've been looking forward to this all week!" If you give sparingly, you'll reap sparingly. If you give hilariously and generously, you'll get back with great blessing and liberality. It's an absolute principle of God (2 Corinthians 9:6, 7).

Exodus 25:8
And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.

The sanctuary the children of Israel were to construct was a tabernacle. Consider the following similarities between the tabernacle and the Word made flesh who dwelt, or literally *tabernacled* among us (John 1:14) . . .

The tabernacle was a temporary appointment. It served a specific purpose for a specific time until the temple was erected in Jerusalem, just as Jesus dwelt among us temporarily for thirty-three years until He ascended into heaven.

The tabernacle was erected in the wilderness. So, too, Jesus dwelt in the wilderness, for, although foxes have holes and the birds

of the air have nests, the Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head (Matthew 8:20).

The tabernacle was humble in outward appearance. Covered with animal skins, it resembled the Bedouin tents of the day. So common was Jesus in appearance that Judas had to identify Him with a kiss (Matthew 26:48).

Although it was humble outwardly, the interior of the tabernacle was unbelievably beautiful—for not only was it filled with gold, silver, and fine tapestries—but, infinitely more importantly, it was filled with the Shekinah glory of God. Although Jesus resembled other men of His day in outward appearance, there was such a beauty within Him that people were drawn to Him like moths to a flame (Mark 12:37).

The tabernacle was not only God's dwelling place (verse 8), but His meeting place (verse 22). Just as Jesus not only dwells among us, but He is the only way we have oneness, fellowship communion with the Father (1 Timothy 2:5).

Exodus 25:9
According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.

"Make sure you build exactly according to the pattern," God said to Moses. Why? Because Hebrews 8:5 tells us that the tabernacle is a shadow or a picture of that which is in Heaven presently.

Exodus 25:10 (a)
And they shall make an ark . . .

After giving Moses the list of building materials, if I were God, at this point, I would have given him the blueprint, the plans for the tabernacle. Not until after the tabernacle itself was complete would I have moved on to give instruction for the furnishings within. But that's not what God does. Directly following the list of building materials, He gives Moses the plans for the ark of the covenant—a box that was to be placed inside the Holy of Holies, inside

the tabernacle. And in so doing, it's as if God is saying, "I know your tendency will be to think you have to work your way in to My presence. Therefore, I'm going to begin at that very point to show you there's nothing you can or must do to deserve a relationship with Me. It's all based on grace."

Exodus 25:10 (b)
. . . of shittim wood . . .

Shittim wood, or acacia wood, speaks of humanity. Acacia trees grow in desert regions, in dry ground, just as Isaiah declared that Jesus would be a "root out of dry ground" (Isaiah 53:2). Acacia wood has a unique property that Bedouins use to this day. That is, when pierced, it pours forth a gum resin that contains healing properties for cuts, sores, and abrasions. In the same way, Jesus was pierced with the flagellum, and by His stripes we are healed —spiritually, emotionally, physically.

Exodus 25:10 (c)
. . . two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof.

A cubit being the distance from one's fingertip to his elbow, the ark was to be a box four feet by two feet by two feet.

Exodus 25:11 (a)
And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it . . .

Although Jesus became a Man, He was also God. Thus, to portray Jesus correctly, the acacia wood of humanity was covered with the gold of Deity.

Exodus 25:11 (b)
. . . and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about.

Acacia wood is the only thorn-bearing tree which grows in the desert. Jesus would indeed be crowned with a crown of thorns—but He'll also be crowned with a crown of gold (Revelation 14:14).

Exodus 25:12–15
And thou shalt cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in the four corners thereof; and two rings shall be in the one side of it, and two rings in the other side of it. And thou shalt make staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold. And thou shalt put the staves into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be borne with them. The staves shall be in the rings of the ark: they shall not be taken from it.

The ark was to have a ring on each corner to hold the wooden poles by which the priests would carry it—for, like everything else in the tabernacle, the ark was to be portable, traveling with the people wherever they went.

Exodus 25:16
And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee.

The testimony is the Ten Commandments, the two tables of stone written by the finger of God (Exodus 31:18).

"Come boldly before the throne of grace and find mercy and grace to help in time of need," God says to us (Hebrews 4:16).

"But I can't," we say. "I haven't prayed in days. I haven't been to church in weeks. I haven't witnessed in months. I haven't kept the commandments."

Where were the commandments kept?
In the ark.
Who kept the commandments?
Jesus. "I always do the things that please the Father," He said (John 8:29).

Jesus kept the commandments perfectly. And, as believers, we are in Him positionally (2 Corinthians 5:17). Therefore, the Father looks at us and doesn't see our sin. He looks at us and sees His Son (Romans 3:22).

Exodus 25:17–21 (a)

And thou shalt make a mercy seat of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof. And thou shalt make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: even of the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof. And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be. And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark . . .

Most Christians try to meet God at the ark by keeping the commandments, by going to this meeting, by doing those things, by not sinning, by living purely. God, however, says He'll meet us not at the ark, but at that which covers it—the mercy seat.

How do we walk with the Lord practically? Not by anything we do, how long our devotions are, how many chapters of the Bible we've read, how many prayers we offer—but simply and solely by the unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor of God. This is where so many people miss it. Although they know they're saved by grace, they think they're sanctified through works. Big mistake. True relationship with God is not about our witnessing, ministry or devotional life. It's all about what He did in and through Christ.

On that first Easter Sunday morning, had you looked into the empty tomb, you would have seen two angels sitting—one at the head, one at the foot of the blood-stained slab where the body of Jesus had lain (John 20:12). Leviticus 16:14 tells us that the mercy seat would be sprinkled with blood. Thus, the mercy seat paints a perfect picture of the only way we can have fellowship with God—that being through the finished work of the Son.

Exodus 25:21 (b), 22
. . . and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.

It was at the mercy seat that God would meet with man. And we err greatly whenever we forget this . . .

> *After capturing the ark, Philistines eventually put it in the temple of their god, Dagon—only to find Dagon face down before it the following day. Setting Dagon aright, they returned the next day to find him toppled over once again—this time with his head and hands severed (1 Samuel 5). While it would seem obvious that they needed a more powerful god to protect them, they instead decided to protect their god by sending the ark back to Israel. Seeing the ark on its way back to their border, the people of God were understandably excited. But their excitement soon turned to terror when God smote 50,070 of their number because they had looked inside the ark, perhaps for no other reason than to see if the commandments were still inside (1 Samuel 6).*

"I will meet you at the mercy seat," God says. But sometimes we make a deadly mistake when we set aside mercy to get to the bottom of an issue, to lay down the law on someone. I have done this—and it always leads to death in relationships, in families, in friendships, in ministry.

"The letter of the law kills," Paul would write, "but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). Once we set aside mercy—even temporarily—to get to the bottom of an issue, to find out who's right and who's wrong, to get to the letter of the Law, the end result will always be death. Always. Friendships will die. Families will divide. Ministry will shut down. No good comes from removing the mercy seat. Be merciful. To whom? To the person you're angry with. Be gracious. To whom? To the person you feel has wronged you. *Blessed* are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy (Matthew 5:7).

Whenever you feel far from God, a practical way you can be brought back into His presence is by building a mercy seat. That is, find people to whom you can show mercy. I have discovered over and over again in my own life that there are two uniquely practical ways I truly experience the presence of the Lord. The first is by praising Him, for Psalm 22 declares that He inhabits the praises of His people. The second is by showing mercy to people, for it was at the mercy seat that God chose to dwell.

Exodus 25:23 (a)
Thou shalt also make a table of shittim wood . . .

The only time the word "also" is seen in describing the tabernacle, its use here speaks of a connection with verse 22. Verse 22 speaking of the presence of God at the mercy seat, the implication is that we also experience the presence of God when we come to the table of showbread, described here. "Showbread" refers to the twelve loaves of bread—two rows of six each—which were set before the Lord each Sabbath (Leviticus 24:5–8). Showbread speaks of the Bread of Life, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ.

Sometimes people come to me and say, "I don't feel God's presence."

And my question to them is always the same: "How long has it been since you've been to the Lord's Table?"

"Take, eat. This is My body given for you," Jesus said (Luke 22:19). Therefore, it always amazes me that people will wonder why they don't feel His presence, yet refuse to come to the place of His presence—the Table of Communion.

Exodus 25:23 (b)
. . . two cubits shall be the length thereof . . .

Why was the table of showbread to be two cubits long? Two is the number of union, communion, agreement (Amos 3:3). True communion with God takes place when we agree with Him and confess our sins. The Greek word translated "confession" is *homoligeo,* which means "to speak the same."

Thus, confession in the biblical sense is not a matter of promising not to sin again, but rather of simply agreeing with God and saying of any given sin, "This sin is depressing and defeating me, Lord. And it's detrimental to others."

Surely God knows our sins. Why, then, does He want us to confess them? Because every sin I specifically confess loses its grip on me to an ever greater degree. In addition, when I also confess that a specific sin is blotted out by the blood of Calvary, there is a dynamic which takes place in the Spirit that sets me free. Confession is not promising never to sin again, but simply to call it like it is. That's two cubits. That's union.

Exodus 25:23 (c)
. . . and a cubit the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof.

Whereas two is the number of union, one is the number of unity. Unity in the body of Christ does not usually come about through corporate Bible studies or times of worship because Christians don't always agree on the interpretation of any given passage or the style of any given type of music. But there is a place where people do agree—be they Episcopalian or Lutheran, Presbyterian, Catholic, or Baptist. At the Lord's Table, a unity takes place unlike during any other thing we do as Christians. The act of remembering the Lord through a piece of bread and the fruit of the vine has united believers of every culture, of every language for the past two thousand years.

Exodus 25:24, 25
And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, and make thereto a crown of gold round about. And thou shalt make unto it a border of an hand breadth round about, and thou shalt make a golden crown to the border thereof round about.

There was to be a crown of molding around the outside edge of the table of showbread and a smaller crown inside. Why two crowns? Because Christ will be crowned twice: the first time He was crowned with a crown of thorns (Matthew 27:29). The second time it will be with a crown of glory and honor (Hebrews 2:9).

The smaller crown on the table of showbread was to keep the bread from falling off the table. The bread speaking of the body, no wonder this crown was measured by the hand breadth, for of His followers Jesus said, "I give them eternal life and no man shall pluck them out of My hand" (John 10:28). We think we're holding His hand, when, in reality, He's holding us. And in this we can rest. In this regard, I do not believe a person can lose his salvation. I do believe, however, if a person really wants to, he can leave it. But he's got to really want to jump off the table of showbread, over the crown of protection, past the boundary of God's love to finally fall to the ground.

Exodus 25:26–30

And thou shalt make for it four rings of gold, and put the rings in the four corners that are on the four feet thereof. Over against the border shall the rings be for places of the staves to bear the table. And thou shalt make the staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold, that the table may be borne with them. And thou shalt make the dishes thereof, and spoons thereof, and covers thereof, and bowls thereof, to cover withal: of pure gold shalt thou make them. And thou shalt set upon the table shewbread before me alway.

Just as the table of showbread was to be wherever the people were—to be carried, to be available—the Lord would say to us tonight, "I'm available. I'm the Bread of Life. Eat of Me."

Concerning Communion, in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul says, "Because you eat unworthily, you eat to your own damnation." This doesn't mean that if a person partakes of Communion with unconfessed sin in his life, he'll be damned. Rather, it means that he who doesn't assign a great worth to Communion, he who doesn't value it, he who ignores it, will be spiritually—and sometimes even physically—weak. The Table is portable. Take advantage of it. Be renewed and revived. Be healthy and strengthened as you remember God's mercy and His unspeakable love for you.

Exodus 25:31 (a)
And thou shalt make a candlestick . . .

The word translated "candlestick" is the Hebrew word *menorah*—which held oil lamps rather than wax candles.

Exodus 25:31 (b)
. . . of pure gold . . .

The lampstand was not made of wood covered with gold as was the ark and the table of showbread—but of pure gold.

Exodus 25:31 (c)

. . . of beaten work shall the candlestick be made: his shaft, and his branches, his bowls, his knops, and his flowers, shall be of the same.

A few chapters from now, we will see how Aaron made a golden calf from molten gold. Unlike that false god, this lampstand, which speaks of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, was made of beaten gold. Many people say, "You Christians claim that Jesus is the single answer, the only Way, the one true Light. But how do you know what you're declaring is right?" The answer is that, like the gold of the candlestick, He was beaten—yet He rose again from the dead.

"What sign showest thou us?" the Jews asked Jesus.

"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up," Jesus answered, speaking of the temple of His body (John 2:18–21).

Truly, the door of our faith swings on the hinge of the Resurrection.

Exodus 25:32
And six branches shall come out of the sides of it; three branches of the candlestick out of the one side, and three branches of the candlestick out of the other side:

There were to be seven lamps on the lampstand—a main stem and six branches. Six is the number of man; seven the number of completion or perfection. This brings to mind Jesus' words in John 15 when He said, "I am the Vine and you are the branches."

From Adam's side a rib was taken and fashioned into his bride (Genesis 2:21–25). Jesus is the Last Adam, and He, too, has a bride: the church. As He was pinned to the Cross, as He died for you and me, a soldier thrust a spear into His side, and out came blood and water, the fluids of birthing. From whence came we? Out of His side—for it was His death that gave birth to the church.

Exodus 25:33

Three bowls made like unto almonds, with a knop and a flower in one branch; and three bowls made like almonds in the other branch, with a knop and a flower: so in the six branches that come out of the candlestick.

Each of these six branches had three bowls, or flares, each of which contained a bud and a knop, or blossom, resembling those of an almond. An almond blossom is pure white and, even today, the almond tree is the first in Israel to blossom and the first to bear fruit. This speaks of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, for He is the Firstfruit (1 Corinthians 15:20). That is, He is the first One risen from the dead.

Exodus 25:34, 35
And in the candlestick shall be four bowls made like unto almonds, with their knops and their flowers. And there shall be a knop under two branches of the same, and a knop under two branches of the same, and a knop under two branches of the same, according to the six branches that proceed out of the candlestick.

The side branches had three units consisting of a flare, a bud, and a flare. The middle shaft, however, was to have four such units. This meant it would be higher than the other six—just as Jesus Christ is preeminent. There is *none* like Him.

Exodus 25:36
Their knops and their branches shall be of the same: all it shall be one beaten work of pure gold.

The branches were to be of the same material as the main stem, the Vine. This means that, like Jesus, we shall be beaten. “I am the Light of the world,” Jesus declared (John 8:12). But He also said we are the lights of the world (Matthew 5:14). When does the world see our light? When we are beaten. It’s not when things are going well, when all is peaches and cream that the skeptic is converted. No, people are convinced of the reality of the Son when they see us beaten by problems, by hard times, by tragedy—and yet reflecting the light of the Son nonetheless.

Exodus 25:37
And thou shalt make the seven lamps thereof: and they shall light the lamps thereof, that they may give light over against it.

The Hebrew rendering of the last phrase is literally, "that they may light the face of it." In other words, although the lights on these branches were to illuminate the holy place, their primary purpose was to show the face of the main shaft. Truly, it's when you are beaten and yet continue to burn bright that the beauty, the reality of the Vine, Jesus, is seen. This means that the point at which you choose to embrace the difficulty that seems to beat upon you is the point where you will see Jesus in ways you've never seen Him before. It is when you're being beaten, when you're in the fiery trial that Jesus is clearer to you than you ever dreamed possible.

Ask Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. As they were in the furnace, Who did they see? The Son of God in their midst. How real was He? So real they didn't want to leave the furnace (Daniel 3:25–26). A lot of people try to get out of the fire—when in reality, it is the fire itself which causes the Lord to be seen most clearly.

Exodus 25:38
And the tongs thereof, and the snuffdishes thereof, shall be of pure gold.

The instruments used to trim the wicks and snuff out the candles were to be pure gold. Just as there will be people in our lives who are there morning and evening, "snipping" and "snuffing." And, although my tendency is to belittle them, I am in error when I do because they provide golden opportunities for me to burn brighter.

Exodus 25:39
Of a talent of pure gold shall he make it, with all these vessels.

The only time the word "he" appears in conjunction with the making of an instrument for the tabernacle, the man spoken of is Bezaleel, as we will see in chapter 31—a picture or type of the Holy Spirit. I find it interesting that although the weight is given of the lampstand (132 lbs.), unlike the ark and the

table of showbread, the dimensions aren't given. Could this be because there is no limit to how brightly we can shine, to how clearly we can reflect the Vine?

Exodus 25:40
And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount.

Moses was to make everything according to the pattern given him on the mount. We, too, are to do everything according to the pattern given us on the mount—not Mt. Sinai, but Mt. Calvary, when, for the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the Cross, knowing that on the other side there would be a bud, a blossom, fruit—you (Hebrews 12:2).



26

Exodus 26:1 (a)
Moreover thou shalt make the tabernacle with ten curtains . . .

Ten is the number of human responsibility, as seen in the Ten Commandments and the ten plagues on Pharaoh's nation due to his failure to respond to God's command to let His people go.

Exodus 26:1 (b)
. . . of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet . . .

The curtains, which would serve as walls of the tabernacle, were to be made of four colors: white, blue, purple, and scarlet. The number four draws one's mind to the four Gospels which, not surprisingly, correspond perfectly to the four colors of the tabernacle. Luke speaks of the righteous humanity of Jesus, which would be typified by the fine white linen. John portrays Jesus as Deity, which would be typified by blue, the color of heaven. Matthew writes of Jesus as King of the Jews—as seen in purple, the color of royalty. Mark speaks of Jesus as the Suffering Servant—seen in the color scarlet . . .

The Hebrew word, *tola'ath,* can be translated either of two ways: "scarlet" or "worm." Why? Because in Old Testament times when people

wanted to dye something scarlet, they would dip the material in ground-up worms and the material would take on a scarlet color.

"I am a worm and not a man," cried the psalmist, prophetically speaking of Jesus on the Cross (Psalm 22:6). And the word he used was *tola'ath,*— a most fitting word. You see, to reproduce, the *tola'ath* or worm, would fasten itself on the limb of a tree and die in the process of giving birth. As it died, it left a red spot that, according to the New International Bible Encyclopedia, turned white after three days and flaked off like snow. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow," Isaiah declares (1:18). The picture is perfect. Jesus fastened Himself to a tree that we might be born into His family. He sacrificed His life that we might live. Three days later, He rose again, and our sin that was scarlet was washed white as snow. Is it any wonder that scarlet was one of the colors in the tabernacle and in the vestures of the priest?

Exodus 26:1 (c)
. . . with cherubims of cunning work shalt thou make them.

When the priests went into the holy place, they would be aware that angels were in their midst. The same is true of us, for Paul tells us that angels are in our company, learning about God's grace and mercy by observing how good He is to you and me (1 Corinthians 11:10). The tabernacle being a picture of Jesus, it is no wonder that angels would have been embroidered within its fabric, for angels were present at Jesus' birth (Luke 2), present during His life (Matthew 4), and present at the end of His life (Luke 22:43).

Exodus 26:2, 3
The length of one curtain shall be eight and twenty cubits, and the breadth of one curtain four cubits: and every one of the curtains shall have one measure. The five curtains shall be coupled together one to another; and other five curtains shall be coupled one to another.

The fabric of the ten curtains joined into two sections was beautiful, but it was still in two separate pieces—just as the Ten Commandments were written on two tablets of stone. There was still a gap between the curtains because,

although the Law of the Lord is perfect, it is impossible to live up to, leaving an impassable gap for any who have tried.

Exodus 26:4–6
And thou shalt make loops of blue upon the edge of the one curtain from the selvedge in the coupling; and likewise shalt thou make in the uttermost edge of another curtain, in the coupling of the second. Fifty loops shalt thou make in the one curtain, and fifty loops shalt thou make in the edge of the curtain that is in the coupling of the second; that the loops may take hold one of another. And thou shalt make fifty taches of gold, and couple the curtains together with the taches: and it shall be one tabernacle.

Fifty is the number of salvation, as seen in the year of Jubilee which occurred every fifty years when all debts were cancelled (Leviticus 25:10), and in Noah's ark which was fifty cubits wide (Genesis 6:15). The curtains were brought together not with fasteners of wood covered with gold, but by pure gold—just as our lives come together and make sense not through a mixture of our efforts at keeping God's Law, but solely by His salvation, by His grace.

Exodus 26:7, 8
And thou shalt make curtains of goats' hair to be a covering upon the tabernacle: eleven curtains shalt thou make. The length of one curtain shall be thirty cubits, and the breadth of one curtain four cubits: and the eleven curtains shall be all of one measure.

There would be a total of four coverings over the tabernacle. This is the second—consisting of eleven curtains instead of ten, thirty cubits instead of twenty-eight. Middle Eastern goats being primarily black, this would be a black covering.

Exodus 26:9 (a)
And thou shalt couple five curtains by themselves . . .

Biblically, six is the number of man or the flesh; five the number of grace; eleven the number of disorder.

Exodus 26:9 (b), 10
. . . and six curtains by themselves, and shalt double the sixth curtain in the forefront of the tabernacle. And thou shalt make fifty loops on the edge of the one curtain that is outmost in the coupling, and fifty loops in the edge of the curtain which coupleth the second.

The eleventh curtain was to cover the opening of the tabernacle. Folded back, the only part of the curtain one would see upon entering the tabernacle would be the black curtain.

Exodus 26:11
And thou shalt make fifty taches of brass, and put the taches into the loops, and couple the tent together, that it may be one.

Brass is the metal of judgment . . .

It was when they looked at the brass snake upon a pole, signifying the judgment Christ would bear on the Cross as He was made sin for us that the children of Israel were saved from the deadly snakebites in the wilderness (Numbers 21). They were brass fetters which bound Samson after the Holy Spirit had departed from him (Judges 16:21). It was a brass helmet Goliath wore when David slew him (1 Samuel 17:5).

Seen in conjunction with the "disorder" of the eleventh curtain made of the blackness of the goats' skin, the brass tacks underscored the price Jesus would pay to become sin for us.

Exodus 26:12, 13
And the remnant that remaineth of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remaineth, shall hang over the backside of the tabernacle. And a cubit on the one side, and a cubit on the other

side of that which remaineth in the length of the curtains of the tent, it shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle on this side and on that side, to cover it.

On the inside of the tabernacle was beautiful, embroidered tapestry. Yet it was covered with the black curtain of goat's hair. This speaks of Jesus, who, although He was righteous and beautiful bore the black ugliness of our sin. I find it interesting that 1/11th of this second covering would be seen—the remainder covered by the third layer—because Jesus' public ministry was three years, or 1/11th of His life.

Exodus 26:14 (a)
And thou shalt make a covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red . . .

Made of ram's skins, the third covering speaks of the Genesis 22 account where we read that, in obedience to God's command, Abraham took his son, Isaac, up Mt. Moriah—the very place Jesus would be crucified centuries later—to sacrifice him. Ready to plunge a knife into the chest of his son, Abraham was interrupted by God and told to sacrifice the ram caught in a nearby thicket instead. To this day, it is a ram's horn, or *shofar,* which is blown at the year of Jubilee because the ram's horn is a picture of grace.

Exodus 26:14 (b)
. . . and a covering above of badgers' skins.

In the Middle East, badger skins are considered even today to be common and ugly. Therefore, with a badger skin covering—atop the beautiful tapestry and goats' and rams' skin coverings—to the Moabites, Ammonites, and all the surrounding peoples, the tabernacle would appear ugly and common. It would be as if you had a wonderful house and you covered it with black trash bags. So, too, of Jesus, Isaiah said that there is no form or comeliness that when we see Him we should desire Him (53:2). And yet the beauty within Him broke through on the day He was on Mt. Hermon, when He was transfigured, when the glory of His Deity burst through His humanity.

Exodus 26:15
And thou shalt make boards for the tabernacle of shittim wood standing up.

Acacia wood grows in the desert, is gnarled, and speaks of us. “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?” Paul would ask (1 Corinthians 3:16)—for gnarled and human as we are, the Spirit nonetheless dwells within us.

Exodus 26:16
Ten cubits shall be the length of a board, and a cubit and a half shall be the breadth of one board.

Just as the acacia wood had to be cut down and cut to size before it could be used, it is the humble man God uses (1 Peter 5:6).

Exodus 26:17, 18
Two tenons shall there be in one board, set in order one against another: thus shalt thou make for all the boards of the tabernacle. And thou shalt make the boards for the tabernacle, twenty boards on the south side southward.

Each board was to be one and one-half cubits. One and one-half being an unstable number, it would only be when two boards were linked together that they could stand, for three is the number of godliness, as seen in the Trinity. By ourselves, we’ll be unbalanced. We must be linked to another brother or sister, for without accountability, we’ll be unstable.

Exodus 26:19–21
And thou shalt make forty sockets of silver under the twenty boards; two sockets under one board for his two tenons, and two sockets under another board for his two tenons. And for the second side of the tabernacle on the north side there shall be twenty boards: And their forty sockets of silver; two sockets under one board, and two sockets under another board.

Each board was placed in silver sockets because silver is the metal of redemption. We who once had our roots in the dirt and dust of the world were chopped down—and now we stand because we've been redeemed. Held up by sockets of silver, we're still in the world—but not of the world (John 17:16–18). Why were there to be two sockets per board? Because we're redeemed both in this life and forever in Heaven.

Exodus 26:22–24
And for the sides of the tabernacle westward thou shalt make six boards. And two boards shalt thou make for the corners of the tabernacle in the two sides. And they shall be coupled together beneath, and they shall be coupled together above the head of it unto one ring: thus shall it be for them both; they shall be for the two corners.

There were to be twenty boards on the north, twenty boards on the south, six boards on the west, and two corner boards to tie the three walls together—leaving the east side open. When Christ comes, from what direction will He come? The east. Through which gate will He enter Jerusalem? The Eastern Gate. It all points to His coming.

Exodus 26:25–28
And they shall be eight boards, and their sockets of silver, sixteen sockets; two sockets under one board, and two sockets under another board. And thou shalt make bars of shittim wood; five for the boards of the one side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the boards of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the boards of the side of the tabernacle, for the two sides westward. And the middle bar in the midst of the boards shall reach from end to end.

Because we are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21), believers can have a tendency to think they don't need the church. "We'll just meet for coffee," two can say. "That will be our church." But those two can fall into error without even being aware of what's happening. Two boards are more stable than one—but what keeps the two boards from falling?

The five bars God gave to the church to stabilize her: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Ephesians 4). Each of these ministries is needed to keep the boards straight, to keep the church standing strong. Apostles govern the church. Prophets guide the church. Evangelists gather the lost. Pastors guard against wolves. Teachers ground believers in the Word.

Exodus 26:29
And thou shalt overlay the boards with gold, and make their rings of gold for places for the bars: and thou shalt overlay the bars with gold.

The bars were held in place by golden rings. Rings are emblems of love. If you have the tongue of men and angels but have not love, you're nothing. If you give your body to be burned, but have not love, your sacrifice is worthless. If you have faith to move mountains, but have not love, your faith is meaningless. First Corinthians 13 tells us that love is more important than having faith, being a prophet, doing miracles, speaking in tongues—more important than anything else in ministry, for love is what holds everything together. Do you love God? Do you love people? Love is the essence of true ministry.

Exodus 26:30
And thou shalt rear up the tabernacle according to the fashion thereof which was shewed thee in the mount.

And now, the tent was to be raised.

Exodus 26:31 (a)
And thou shalt make a vail of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work . . .

Everything in the tabernacle points to Jesus—and we need not speculate on what the veil signifies because the author of the Book of Hebrews makes it clear . . .

> Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh . . .
>
> Hebrews 10:19, 20

The veil represented Jesus' flesh. Therefore, the colors are, again, fitting. Blue is the color of heaven. As a Man, Jesus was heavenly minded. Purple speaks of royalty. "My kingdom is not of this world," Jesus said in response to the crowd's clamor to make Him King (John 18:36). Blue and purple were linked together because Jesus never lost sight of the fact that His kingdom was a heavenly one.

Although we're concerned about our present comfort, our King is more concerned about our eternal state—who we'll be and how we'll function in the next billion years to come. Therefore, if things don't work out the way we think they should, the scarlet which speaks of sacrifice reminds us that the One who laid down His life for us will continue to do what's best for us. Finally, the white linen speaks of righteousness. Our flesh is depraved, infected by sin. Jesus, on the other hand, lived such a righteous life that Pilate could find no fault in Him (Luke 23:4), and even Judas had to admit, "I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matthew 27:4).

Exodus 26:31 (b)
. . . with cherubims shall it be made:

As with the curtains, cherubims, or angels, were to be embroidered into the veil, speaking of the angelic presence throughout Jesus' life.

Exodus 26:32, 33 (a)
And thou shalt hang it upon four pillars of shittim wood overlaid with gold: their hooks shall be of gold, upon the four sockets of silver. And thou shalt hang up the vail under the taches, that thou mayest bring in thither within the vail the ark of the testimony . . .

The veil was hung on four pillars because there are four Gospels which portray the Word made flesh, which reveal to us who Jesus is. And just as the

veil was to be hung on four wooden pillars, the One whose flesh it speaks of would be hung on a wooden Cross.

Exodus 26:33 (b)
. . . and the vail shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy.

Just as the beautiful veil which portrayed Jesus so perfectly separated the priests from the Holy of Holies wherein dwelt the Shekinah glory of God, it is the very loveliness and beauty of Jesus which keeps people from experiencing the glory of God because, compared to Him, even our most noble attempts at righteousness are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).

Exodus 26:34, 35
And thou shalt put the mercy seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place. And thou shalt set the table without the vail, and the candlestick over against the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south: and thou shalt put the table on the north side.

The only way anyone but the high priest—and he only one day a year—could enter the Holy of Holies to fellowship with God at the mercy seat was if the veil was somehow opened to them. And that is precisely what happened. At the moment Jesus died on the Cross, the veil was ripped in two, God, in effect, saying, "Open House! Enter in! Come boldly to the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16). Thus, the perfection of Jesus' flesh that was previously a barrier to us became the bridge for us because it was ripped apart when He bore our sin.

Exodus 26:36
And thou shalt make an hanging for the door of the tent, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, wrought with needlework.

The tabernacle had only one door—for Jesus is the single Door (John 10:9), the only Way to the Father (Acts 4:12). If there were ten ways to

heaven, Satan would counter with one hundred false ways and we would have to figure out which were true. So the Lord said, "I'm going to keep it real simple, real basic. There's only one Way to heaven. There's just one Door. It's My Son."

Exodus 26:37
And thou shalt make for the hanging five pillars of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold, and their hooks shall be of gold: and thou shalt cast five sockets of brass for them.

The door was to be held up by five pillars because five is the number of grace—and it is only by grace that we are saved (Ephesians 2:8). But notice that the five pillars were to be held with sockets of brass. Brass being the metal of judgment, the door would point to the fact that, although grace is free, it's not cheap. It cost Jesus everything. Jesus absorbed the judgment that should have been ours when He gave His life that we might live.



27

Exodus 27:1
And thou shalt make an altar of shittim wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be foursquare: and the height thereof shall be three cubits.

At seven and one-half by seven and one-half by four and one-half feet, this is not only the first object one would see when entering the tabernacle, but the largest. The place where sacrifices would be made, where blood would be shed, it speaks of the Cross.

Exodus 27:2
And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof: his horns shall be of the same: and thou shalt overlay it with brass.

The horns were used to tie the sacrifice to the altar. Jesus Christ was tied to the altar of the Cross—not by the spikes that pierced His hands and feet, but by the bands of His love for you and me. "He saved others, let Him save

Himself," the crowd mocked (Mark 15:31)—failing to understand, unable to comprehend, blind to the fact that if He saved Himself, He couldn't save them.

Exodus 27:3–8
And thou shalt make his pans to receive his ashes, and his shovels, and his basons, and his fleshhooks, and his firepans: all the vessels thereof thou shalt make of brass. And thou shalt make for it a grate of network of brass; and upon the net shalt thou make four brasen rings in the four corners thereof. And thou shalt put it under the compass of the altar beneath, that the net may be even to the midst of the altar. And thou shalt make staves for the altar, staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with brass. And the staves shall be put into the rings, and the staves shall be upon the two sides of the altar, to bear it. Hollow with boards shalt thou make it: as it was shewed thee in the mount, so shall they make it.

The altar would be carried by staves, or poles, slipped through the rings upon it. I like this because the Communion Table ought to be portable. That is, wherever we are, we are to remember and receive the work Christ did for us on the brass altar of Calvary.

The altar was the only piece of tabernacle furniture covered with purple (Numbers 4:13, 14). Purple is the color of royalty. Why is Jesus Christ our King? Not because of what He does for me, but because what He already did on the Cross. He's not our King so that we'll have a happy day or have our bills paid, so that we'll get a newer car or have better relationships. The purple cloth was over the brass altar exclusively because that is the basis of His kingly authority over our lives. He saved us from hell—and if He never answers another prayer or sends another blessing our way, that is reason enough to praise Him all the days of our lives.

Over the purple was a second covering—of badger skin. Royal purple and common badger skin covered the same altar because people look at the Cross in two different ways. One thief mocked and "badgered" Jesus; the other said, "Remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Two thieves—equally needy, equal in proximity to Jesus. One saw the badger skin of His humanity and was lost, the other, the purple of His royalty and was saved.

Because Jesus paid the price for our sin, our lives have been permanently, eternally "altared." We're going to heaven because of the work He did on the brass altar of Calvary.

Exodus 27:9–15
And thou shalt make the court of the tabernacle: for the south side southward there shall be hangings for the court of fine twined linen of an hundred cubits long for one side: and the twenty pillars thereof and their twenty sockets shall be of brass; the hooks of the pillars and their fillets shall be of silver. And likewise for the north side in length there shall be hangings of an hundred cubits long, and his twenty pillars and their twenty sockets of brass; the hooks of the pillars and their fillets of silver. And for the breadth of the court on the west side shall be hangings of fifty cubits: their pillars ten, and their sockets ten. And the breadth of the court on the east side eastward shall be fifty cubits. The hangings of one side of the gate shall be fifteen cubits: their pillars three, and their sockets three. And on the other side shall be hangings fifteen cubits: their pillars three, and their sockets three.

We come to the description of the linen fence which formed the courtyard surrounding the tabernacle. At one hundred cubits long by fifty cubits wide, or one hundred and fifty feet by seventy-five feet, this area was not very big considering that it was for a congregation of possibly three million people. But perhaps in it the Lord was saying, "At a given time, I know not many people will seek Me."

Sixty pillars—twenty each on the north and south sides, ten on the east and west sides—kept the linen fence in place and kept out people who didn't belong inside, those who weren't part of the family. "Who says I can't go to heaven?" people say. "I'm a pretty good guy"—failing to understand that their righteousness is as filthy rags in comparison to the fine white linen of God's righteousness (Isaiah 64:6).

Exodus 27:16 (a)
And for the gate of the court shall be an hanging of twenty cubits, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, wrought

with needlework . . .

The door into the outer courtyard was made of the same fabric as the veil and the door into the tabernacle itself because whether one is talking about the door into the courtyard—the place of salvation, the door into the holy place—the place of service, or the door into the Holy of Holies—the place of worship, it's all the same Door. It's all through Jesus.

You see, just as the tabernacle was comprised of three sections—the outer courtyard, the holy place, and the Holy of Holies—I believe there are three stages in our life in Christ . . .

There are those who are inside the courtyard. They're in Christ, part of the kingdom. They realize Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God was slain for their sins. They receive His salvation, they embrace His grace.

But there are others who say, "Because God has been so good to me, I want to serve Him." So they go into the holy place and serve the showbread, which speaks of the Word of God. They teach Sunday school, lead family devotions, share the Word with someone at work. They see the golden lampstand and desire to let their light shine through good works (Matthew 5:16)—through helping in the nursery, through visiting shut-ins, through helping those in need. They smell the incense burning and are reminded that it speaks of intercession. So they pray consistently for the lost and for their brothers and sisters, for their families and the country.

But there are still others who, like the high priest himself, enter in to the Holy of Holies in order to simply spend time in the Lord's presence—to consider His character, ponder His nature, give Him praise, express their love, bring Him pleasure. All too often, we don't understand this. We think if we could lead worship, preach a sermon, or be a missionary, we'd be amazing. But those things don't hold a candle to the highest level—to coming in to the Presence of the Lord and worshiping Him intimately. And here's the irony: the highest form of ministry, the most satisfying aspect of ministry is available to every single person right now.

Jesus went to the home of His close friends in Bethany—the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Lazarus is not mentioned in the Luke 10 account. He was outside, in the outer courtyard, if you would. He was a friend of the Lord to be sure. But he was outside. Martha was in the kitchen, or the holy place, if you would—serving. She was baking bread, doing good works, and

even praying, "Lord, tell my sister to get in here and help me!" Mary, however, was sitting at the feet of Jesus. She was in the Holy of Holies. And, of her, Jesus said, "Mary has chosen the better part" (Luke 10:42). Nothing compares to being in the Holy of Holies, to being in the Lord's presence. It's the highest calling, the most important aspect of ministry. And it's available to every one of us.

Salvation, service, and intimacy are all entered through the same door—through Jesus' finished work on the Cross. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). That's the door into the courtyard. "If any man come after Me, let him take up His cross and follow Me" (Mark 8:34). That's the door into the holy place, into service. "Take, eat. This is My body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). That's the door into the deepest place of ministry.

The longer we walk with the Lord, the deeper we go in the Lord, the more we return to the Cross—to that which first touched our hearts when we were born again. Paul put it this way: "It's the love of Christ that constrains me, motivates me to be a servant of His" (2 Corinthians 5:14). And, "Even as you received Christ Jesus, so walk ye in Him" (Colossians 2:6).

Exodus 27:16 (b)–20

. . . and their pillars shall be four, and their sockets four. All the pillars round about the court shall be filleted with silver; their hooks shall be of silver, and their sockets of brass. The length of the court shall be an hundred cubits, and the breadth fifty every where, and the height five cubits of fine twined linen, and their sockets of brass. All the vessels of the tabernacle in all the service thereof, and all the pins thereof, and all the pins of the court, shall be of brass. And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always.

The people were not to come into the tabernacle empty-handed, but to bring the oil for the lamp—not just to be blessed, but to be a blessing. The priests were to make sure the lampstand was trimmed and in good order. But the people were to bring the oil—an unbeatable combination.

Exodus 27:21
In the tabernacle of the congregation without the vail, which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall order it from evening to morning before the LORD: it shall be a statute for ever unto their generations on the behalf of the children of Israel.

Aaron and his sons were to keep the light burning bright from evening to morning. Since the beginning of time, the Lord has reckoned a day to be from evening to morning (Genesis 1:5). Our days begin bright and move towards night. In God's economy, things always go from dark to light. I like that!



28 "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Hebrews 3:1). Here, we get to do just that—for, after considering the construction and configuration of the tabernacle, we now switch gears and focus our attention on the high priest, a picture of our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ . . .

Exodus 28:1 (a)
And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, . . .

Here, we see the *priority of ministry.* The priority of ministry is not primarily to minister *for* the Lord, but to minister *to* the Lord. And that can be done in a back pew in morning worship. It can be done on a park bench with the Word open before you on your lunch hour. It can be done on your knees late at night as you lavish praise upon the Lord.

Exodus 28:1 (b)
. . . even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons.

Here, we see the *family in ministry.* Jesus is our Great High Priest and, because we are linked to Him by His grace, we are a royal priesthood (1

Peter 2:9). Therefore, each of us has a role to play in ministry.

Exodus 28:2–5
And thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty. And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. And these are the garments which they shall make; a breastplate, and an ephod, and a robe, and a broidered coat, a mitre, and a girdle: and they shall make holy garments for Aaron thy brother, and his sons, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. And they shall take gold, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen.

The high priest's garments were of the same materials as the tabernacle because there is a direct linkage between the high priest and the tabernacle, the place of worship. Sometimes people will say, "I love Jesus, but the church is so full of problems that I have no use for it."

In Hebrews, we see Jesus singing praises to His Father in the midst of His church. Yes, we're flawed. Yes, we have failed. But of us, Jesus says, "I'm in the midst of them; I'm not ashamed of them; I'm one with them. I'm proud of them" (Hebrews 2:11, 12). Therefore, never let the enemy whisper in your ear that you can separate Jesus, the Great High Priest from His church.

Exodus 28:6
And they shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, and of purple, of scarlet, and fine twined linen, with cunning work.

The *ephod* was an apron which extended to the knees—a most fitting garment for one involved in the work of preparing animals for sacrifice. The ephod speaks of Christ, the Authoritative One, because in Old Testament culture, the ephod spoke of authority. After Gideon led the people of Israel to victory over their enemies, the Midianites, the people asked him to be their king. Gideon refused, saying it was the Lord who would rule them. (Judges 8:23).

Not many people would turn down an opportunity for power or privilege or prestige. Gideon did. There are many wonderful lessons to be learned from the life of Gideon—and this is one of the great ones. He did not take advantage of an opportunity to put himself in a place of prominence. But then he made a critical mistake when he melted the golden earrings the men had collected as the spoils of war into a golden ephod. Evidently, he thought a golden ephod would help the people remember they were to get instruction and council from God through the high priest. But his plan backfired when the people began worshiping the ephod instead of worshiping God (Judges 8:27).

You and I have a Great High Priest who is the Authoritative One. Therefore, how careful we must be that we don't begin to say, "I've got some pretty good things to say, some very enlightening counsel to give, my own golden ephod to share with you."

"Woe to the rebellious people who take counsel but not of Me," the Lord declares. "In returning to Me and resting in Me you will be saved. And then you'll hear a voice in your ear, saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it' " (Isaiah 30:1, 15, 21). Jesus alone wears the ephod. Jesus alone is the Anointed One.

Exodus 28:7, 8
It shall have the two shoulderpieces thereof joined at the two edges thereof; and so it shall be joined together. And the curious girdle of the ephod, which is upon it, shall be of the same, according to the work thereof; even of gold, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen.

The "curious" or "embroidered" girdle was the sash worn around the waist. In John 13, Jesus in the Upper Room girded Himself with a towel in order that He could wash the disciples' feet. Thus, the girdle speaks of Christ, the Serving One. Just as the ephod and girdle were made of the same material, true authority is always linked to a servant mentality.

"Don't be like the Gentiles who seek to lord it over others," Jesus said. "If you want to be great in the kingdom, you must be the servant of all" (see Matthew 20:25, 26). Notice that Jesus didn't say, "If you want to be great, repent," but rather, "If you want to be great, here's how: Be the servant of all." Do you serve your wife, husband? Do you serve your kids—not spoiling them,

but being sensitive to them, hearing their hearts, meeting their needs? Jesus shows us how this works. The Lord of all was the Servant to all; the Master of all was the Minister to all. I'm so glad we serve a Lord like that. Our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, wears the ephod of authority. At His name, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess He's Lord (Philippians 2:10). But linked to the ephod He wears is a girdle—with which He girds Himself to wash the feet of sinners like you and me.

Exodus 28:9–11
And thou shalt take two onyx stones, and grave on them the names of the children of Israel: six of their names on one stone, and the other six names of the rest on the other stone, according to their birth. With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, shalt thou engrave the two stones with the names of the children of Israel: thou shalt make them to be set in ouches [settings] of gold.

As we will see, each tribe will have its own gem, its own color, its own nature. Their names inscribed on these two onyx stones, however, speak not of their diversity but of their commonality. So, while we each have a unique flavor, we're all founded on the single Rock of Ages, Jesus Christ.

Exodus 28:12
And thou shalt put the two stones upon the shoulders of the ephod for stones of memorial unto the children of Israel: and Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD upon his two shoulders for a memorial.

As we will see, the twelve stones representing the Twelve Tribes were over the heart of the high priest. Here, however, we see their names on his shoulders, the place of burden-bearing. Are you willing to take some risks, to carry some weight? Will you lift others to the Lord as you intercede for them on your knees? Will you do some heavy lifting on behalf of others? Jesus did. He bore the heaviest thing in the world when He bore the weight of my sin.

Exodus 28:13–16

And thou shalt make ouches [settings] of gold; And two chains of pure gold at the ends; of wreathen work shalt thou make them, and fasten the wreathen chains to the ouches. And thou shalt make the breastplate of judgment with cunning work; after the work of the ephod thou shalt make it; of gold, of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, and of fine twined linen, shalt thou make it. Foursquare it shall be being doubled; a span shall be the length thereof, and a span shall be the breadth thereof.

The breastplate was attached to the ephod with chains.

Exodus 28:17–20 (a)
And thou shalt set in it settings of stones, even four rows of stones: the first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and a carbuncle: this shall be the first row. And the second row shall be an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond. And the third row a ligure, an agate, and an amethyst. And the fourth row a beryl, and an onyx, and a jasper . . .

Each one of the twelve stones representing the Twelve Tribes was a different gem—each with its own distinct color. Wise, therefore, is the person who can learn to see everyone in the body as a gem of infinite worth. You will find a person in Scripture whom God honors and blesses and uses who is very similar to the people around you. Maybe you know someone who's always wrestling with issues. He's your Habakkuk. Maybe you know someone who is prone to tears. There's your Jeremiah. Each gem was distinctive and different, but all were valued, all beautiful. How I need to look at the whole family, the whole body, the whole kingdom and realize that each part of the body of Christ refracts the light uniquely, giving a different coloring, a distinct beauty —and all are gems to Him.

Exodus 28:20 (b), 21
. . . they shall be set in gold in their inclosings. And the stones shall be with the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names, like the engravings of a signet; every one with his name shall they be according to the twelve tribes.

“Can a mother forget her nursing child?” God asks. “Neither will I forget you because you are engraved in the palms of My hands” (Isaiah 49:15, 16). Indeed, the nail that pierced my Savior’s palms had my name on it, for it should have been mine. Our names are on the Lord’s heart. They’re not penciled in—they’re indelibly, unalterably, permanently *engraved.*

Exodus 28:22–29
And thou shalt make upon the breastplate chains at the ends of wreathen work of pure gold. And thou shalt make upon the breastplate two rings of gold, and shalt put the two rings on the two ends of the breastplate. And thou shalt put the two wreathen chains of gold in the two rings which are on the ends of the breastplate. And the other two ends of the two wreathen chains thou shalt fasten in the two ouches [settings], and put them on the shoulderpieces of the ephod before it. And thou shalt make two rings of gold, and thou shalt put them upon the two ends of the breastplate in the border thereof, which is in the side of the ephod inward. And two other rings of gold thou shalt make, and shalt put them on the two sides of the ephod underneath, toward the forepart thereof, over against the other coupling thereof, above the curious girdle of the ephod. And they shall bind the breastplate by the rings thereof unto the rings of the ephod with a lace of blue, that it may be above the curious girdle of the ephod, and that the breastplate be not loosed from the ephod. And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually.

Here we see Christ the Loving One. Where does He carry His people, His children? On His heart. He sees everyone as a priceless gem. And there is not one person that Jesus Christ loves on the face of the earth or in all of history more than He loves you.

Exodus 28:30
And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron’s heart, when he goeth in

before the LORD: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the LORD continually.

Judgment refers to the decision-making process. The word *urim* means "light" or "lights." The word *thummim* means "perfection." The Greek translation of the Hebrew text renders them "truth" and "manifestation." Either way, the *urim* and the *thummim* speak of seeing true light in a perfect way.



***For topical study of Exodus 28:30 entitled "Divine Direction," turn to page* 328.**

Exodus 28:31, 32
And thou shalt make the robe of the ephod all of blue. And there shall be an hole in the top of it, in the midst thereof: it shall have a binding of woven work round about the hole of it, as it were the hole of an habergeon, that it be not rent.

Here we see Christ the heavenly One. John tells us it was because He knew from whence He came and where He was going that He washed His disciples' feet (John 13:3–5). Some people say, "You're so heavenly minded, you're no earthly good." Jesus, however, would show us we can be no earthly good *until* we're heavenly minded. Why? Because if I'm not heavenly minded, I'll get bogged down taking care of my toys, my trinkets, my trivial world. But as I choose to be heavenly minded, living for the big picture of eternity, I enjoy this life immensely because I don't take this life so seriously.

Exodus 28:33 (a)
And beneath upon the hem of it thou shalt make pomegranates of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, round about the hem thereof . . .

Of all the fruits in the world, none has more seeds than the blood-red interior of a pomegranate. On the Cross, Jesus shed His blood in order that His Spirit might bear much fruit through seeds like you and me.

Exodus 28:33 (b)
. . . and bells of gold between them round about:

If pomegranates speak of the fruit of the Spirit, bells speak of the gifts of the Spirit.

Exodus 28:34
A golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe round about.

The bells were made to have a beautiful sound in and of themselves. But if they hit each other, they would sound like nothing more than a "clanging gong or a crashing cymbal." But if they were separated by pomegranates, by the fruit of the Spirit, they would ring in harmony. That is why in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul talks about the gifts of the Spirit. In chapter 14, he talks about the gifts of the Spirit. But in between the two is a pomegranate, for in chapter 13, he talks about the fruit of the Spirit, which is love.

Exodus 28:35
And it shall be upon Aaron to minister: and his sound shall be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place before the LORD, and when he cometh out, that he die not.

Here, we see Christ the Living One. When the high priest went into the tabernacle to minister to the Lord, to trim the candles, to burn the incense, to take care of the showbread—and on the Day of Atonement, to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat within the Holy of Holies—he would disappear from the sight of the people. But as long as they heard the beautiful sound of the bells on the hem of his robe, they would know he was ministering to the Lord on their behalf.

How do we know Jesus is living? We hear the bells, the sounding of the gifts of His Spirit. Ten days after He disappeared from sight and ascended into heaven, the sound of a mighty rushing wind and tongues of every language filled the Upper Room—and everyone knew Jesus was alive indeed, ministering on their behalf in the true tabernacle, the holiest of all, in heaven.

Exodus 28:36–38
And thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, HOLINESS TO THE LORD. And thou shalt put it on a blue lace, that it may be upon the mitre; upon the forefront of the mitre it shall be. And it shall be upon Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD.

Here, we see Christ the Holy One. Just as the words, "Holiness To The Lord" were on the mitre that covered the head of the high priest, Jesus our Great High Priest, has holiness on His mind. The word "holy" simply means to be whole. Sin robs. Sin erodes. Sin destroys. Holiness adds. Holiness completes. Holiness leads to happiness. Jesus lived life in such a way that fishermen would leave their nets, radical zealots their politics, tax collectors their money to follow Him. There was a quality, a vitality, a vibrancy about Him—all because He was holy. Holiness is not prudishness. Quite the opposite, because true holiness makes one's life whole, it is a quality which others find magnetic.

Exodus 28:39
And thou shalt embroider the coat of fine linen, and thou shalt make the mitre of fine linen, and thou shalt make the girdle of needlework.

Here, we see Christ the Perfect One. We know from the Talmud that the fine linen of this coat was woven with five hundred and forty threads per square inch. While linen speaks of righteousness, such fine linen speaks of perfection. And it had to be so, for Jesus, the spotless Lamb, the One in whom even Pilate could find no fault, is Perfection personified.

Exodus 28:40 (a)
And for Aaron's sons thou shalt make coats . . .

Just as we are a royal priesthood because we are linked to our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, Aaron's sons were priests based on their linkage to Aaron. Made of linen, the coats they wore speak of salvation and righteousness (Psalm 132:9, 16). We are also robed in the righteousness of Christ (Isaiah 61:10). This means that when God looks at us, He doesn't see the stained Levis of our sin, but the fine linen of His Son.

Exodus 28:40 (b)
. . . and thou shalt make for them girdles . . .

In light of the fact that we're robed in the righteousness of God, we're to gird up our minds and bring into submission any stray thought which would exalt itself against Christ in order that nothing would trip us up, in order that we might minister effectively (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Exodus 28:40 (c), 41
. . . and bonnets shalt thou make for them, for glory and for beauty. And thou shalt put them upon Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him; and shalt anoint them, and consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office.

The third thing the sons of Aaron were to wear were bonnets, or turbans which symbolize submission. To this day, Jews wear yarmulkes as outward signs of submission to God's authority. We would do well to be mindful of the same. And one of the best places to cultivate this awareness is in prayer. Prayer is not giving orders, but reporting for duty. Prayer is saying, "Lord, I come before You to talk things over with You, but I know You see things I don't and know things I can't. Therefore, I submit to Your will."

Exodus 28:42
And thou shalt make them linen breeches to cover their nakedness; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach:

Even underneath the robe, out of the sight of people, there was to be righteousness. How important it is that we understand this. So often, we are concerned about our reputation. God isn't. He's concerned about our

character. Reputation is what others think I am. Character is what I truly am. There are those who have a great reputation in the sight of others—but their character is sadly lacking. Conversely, there are those who may have been accused unjustly, but whose character is pure. Paul tells us Jesus made Himself of no reputation (Philippians 2:7). But never a man had more character.

Exodus 28:43
And they shall be upon Aaron, and upon his sons, when they come in unto the tabernacle of the congregation, or when they come near unto the altar to minister in the holy place; that they bear not iniquity, and die: it shall be a statute for ever unto him and his seed after him.

If the priests were not willing to wear the breeches or the turban, the girdle or the robe, they would die. They wouldn't survive the ministry. There are people now with great potential who end up on the sidelines because they fail to clothe themselves with the garments of righteousness and submission freely provided by the Father. Others, however, gird up their minds, concern themselves with their character rather than their reputation, and submit to the Father in all things. And they are those who continually move on to ever-widening spheres of authority, greater opportunity for ministry.

DIVINE DIRECTION
A Topical Study of
EXODUS 28:30

Sometimes it seems to me that the children of Israel had it made in the shade because when they had questions or needed direction, they could go to the high priest who, after consulting the Urim and the Thummim, would give them the answer they sought. How did this work? Evidently, the Lord would make known the answer in some wonderful, miraculous, mysterious way through lights that would shine through the stones on the breastplate of the high priest. But, although this initially sounds like a perfect solution to our questions, there were two problems associated with this particular method of receiving direction. The first was proximity, the second priority.

The high priest would only be able to be in one place at any time. Therefore, if you were in Galilee, one hundred miles from the temple in Jerusalem, and had a question, you couldn't fax the high priest. You couldn't call him on your cell phone. You couldn't even get in a car and drive to Jerusalem. To get direction, it was necessary to leave family, livestock, and crops in order to make a long and difficult journey. But an even greater problem was priority, for the Urim and the Thummim could be consulted only concerning matters of grave consequence. Consequently, people would be very reluctant to bring their questions to the high priest.

Fifteen hundred years later, when Jesus came on the scene, it was a grand and glorious declaration He made when He said, "I am the Light of the world" (John 8:12). And "I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20).

And concerning the issue of priority, Peter doesn't say, "Don't bother God with the small stuff." No, he says, "Cast *all* your cares on Him for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). Anytime, any place we need direction, all we have to do is ask.

How does this work out practically? I believe God directs us in three ways . . .

Impressions of the Heart

In the Old Testament, where were the stones that would give direction? Over the heart of the high priest. Now, however, the Lord gives direction not by a breastplate worn *over* the heart but by the branding He does *upon* our hearts.

> *But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the* LORD*, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.*
>
> Jeremiah 31:33

This is fantastic. Here, God declares we'll know what we ought to do not by some external stone but by impressions and desires within our hearts. That is why David could say, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). What are we to do to find God's will? Augustine nailed it when he said, "Love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength—and do whatever you want."

Why do I live in Oregon? Because I want to. Why do I teach the Bible? Because I enjoy it. You see, I am simple enough to believe God's promise that if I delight in Him, He will put desires in my heart which conform to His perfect plan for me. If you're not delighting in the Lord, don't follow the desires of your heart because they will lead you on a dangerous path. But if you say, "Although I know I have problems and flaws, but I do love the Lord and I want to delight in Him." He'll give you light and direction, the Urim and the Thummim in your heart.

Interaction with the Church

Because my heart can, at times, be a little hard and things can get a bit fuzzy, I need to understand that, just as God made His will known through the gems which represented the Twelve Tribes, He continues to make His will known through the living stones of His church (1 Peter 2:5). You may have an impression on your heart, a desire stirring within. That's great, for that's the way the Lord works in giving direction. Now get it confirmed through the gems, the living stones, the children of God's family.

It was as they were worshiping and praising the Lord that He said to the church in Antioch, "Separate Paul and Barnabas for the ministry" (Acts 13). Why would the Lord choose to work through the church? Because He's into this thing called family.

We have a tendency to think, *I don't need my sisters and brothers. I get irritated with them. I see all kinds of flaws in them. I'll just figure out my own life—just me and God.* But that's not the heart of the Father, for He said, "Whenever two or three meet together in My name, I will be in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). He wants His children to come together. Why? Any parent knows why. There's nothing more delightful than seeing the family discussing issues, working out problems, wrestling through dilemmas together. There's nothing better than seeing your kids talking and sharing, interacting and caring. It's as if our Father says, "You're going to be together for a billion years. Therefore, I want you to get to know each other and appreciate one another this side of eternity."

"Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as is the manner of some," the author of the Book of Hebrews warns (Hebrews 10:25). Don't miss the opportunity to dialogue and to learn from your brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Instruction from the Word

People sometimes say to me, “I don’t know what to do.”

“What’s the Lord been showing you in your Bible reading?” I ask.

“My what?”

“Your morning devotions.”

“Ummmm. . . .”

The impressions of your heart might be fuzzy. Interaction with others may be flawed. But the Word of God is infallible and practical—the perfect lamp for our feet, the ideal light for our path (Psalm 119:105). We are so blessed to have this book in our hands, available night and day. More than any other way, this is how God speaks to me. Yes, He puts impressions and desires on my heart. Yes, He speaks through brothers and sisters in the family. But above all, He speaks through His Word.

When there is harmony between the impressions on my heart, interaction with the body, and instruction from the Word, I can be sure it is direction from the Lord as I cast all my cares and concerns upon Him. Are there any stipulations? Yes . . .

A Heart of Expectancy

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God Who gives to all men liberally," James writes. "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for the man who doubts is like the waves of the sea and let not that man expect to receive anything" (James 1:5–7). Why does God want us to trust Him? Why is faith a prerequisite to answered prayer? Because faith is the language of eternity. Thus, this life is Language School—where we learn to speak the language we'll be speaking for the next billion years to come, where we learn to speak the language of faith.

A Spirit of Integrity

"The integrity of the upright shall guide them" (Proverbs 11:3). The Hebrew word translated "integrity" is *tummah,* which comes from the word *thummim.* Like its root word, *tummah,* or integrity, speaks of perfection, of an absence of double-mindedness. Many times, people say, "Lord, what's Your opinion on this? What would You see as being best for me?" But they want nothing more than to take His direction into account when they make their own decision regarding whether they are to marry that girl, take this job, make that move. And theirs are the prayers God doesn't answer, for He doesn't direct people who aren't committed to obeying Him.

Why? Because He is a God of love. You see, God isn't saying, "If you don't come with integrity, I'm not talking." No, He's saying, "If you choose not to do what I tell you, the result will be disobedience. Therefore, I will remain lovingly silent, for you can't disobey what I don't tell you."

> *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*
>
> Romans 12:1, 2

Because He's in love with us, God wants the best for us. Therefore, He says, "You'll know My good and acceptable and perfect will when you sacrifice your right to make your own decisions."

And when at last we come to the place where we say, "Lord, I'm tired of calling the shots. Please tell me what to do, for I intend to obey You fully, gladly, joyfully with integrity," He says "I'll be happy to."

29 **Exodus 29:1 (a)**

And this is the thing that thou shalt do unto them to hallow them, to

min ister unto me in the priest's office . . .

In 1 Timothy 1:12, Paul says, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who hath enabled me in that he counteth me faithful putting me into the ministry." Like Paul, I am amazed at the goodness and grace of God that He would include me in this glorious privilege called ministry.

Ministry is a privilege because of the *present blessings.* "With what measure ye mete out, it shall be measured to you," Jesus said (Mark 4:24). That is, what we give out, we'll get back. And I have found that to be oh, so true. When I pray for others, *I* get blessed. When I share with others, *I* am confirmed in the truth of the Scriptures. When I witness to others, my *own* faith grows deeper, stronger, more powerful.

This should not be surprising. After all, Jesus promised we would receive power to become His witnesses (Acts 1:8). And the word He used for power was translated *dunamis,* from which we get our word "dynamite." This dynamic experience, this power is like an electrical charge. Therefore, like electricity, it will only enter that from which it can exit. The power, the electricity, the anointing of the Spirit is given to you that it might flow through you to others. The one who wants to be used by the Lord in the lives of others is the one who will experience the electric, dynamic power of the Spirit. That's why I love being in the ministry.

Secondly, I enjoy being in the ministry because of *future rewards.* What we do in ministry—even as simple as giving a cup of cold water in Jesus' name—will be rewarded by the Lord and will impact us eternally (Matthew 10). When we choose to do something no matter how simple in the name of the Lord, for His glory, in order that people will be drawn to Him, impressed with Him, refreshed by Him, we'll have rewards in heaven. You might think you don't care about rewards. But you will then. When we get to heaven and rewards are given, you'll say, "I wish I would have taken more seriously the admonitions to strive to run the race, to win the prize, to gain the crown" (Philippians 3:14).

Thirdly, I love the ministry because of *real needs.* People all around us are lost. Wandering around like sheep without a shepherd, they don't know what to do. They're depressed, discouraged, and, worst of all, without Jesus, they're headed for hell. They don't know that God sent His Son not to condemn them, but to save them, to die in place of them that they might be

forgiven of their sins and might spend eternity in heaven (John 3:17). So I say, "Lord, thank You for allowing me to be in the ministry because I see people all around me who are confused and You've given such simple and significant answers for me to share with them."

And He's given the same opportunity to you—for, although you might earn a living as a schoolteacher, a carpenter, or an electrician, you are in the ministry every bit as much as I am. The division between the clergy and the laity is a man-made distinction completely without biblical basis, for Jesus said, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain . . ." (John 15:16).

"But I don't know if I'm properly prepared for ministry," you say.

Read on . . .

Exodus 29:1 (b)–4 (a)
. . . Take one young bullock, and two rams without blemish, and unleavened bread, and cakes unleavened tempered with oil, and wafers unleavened anointed with oil: of wheaten flour shalt thou make them. And thou shalt put them into one basket, and bring them in the basket, with the bullock and the two rams. And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation . . .

Aaron and his sons were brought to the door. So were we. The Spirit of God directed someone to bring us to a church service, to witness to us, to talk to us and we were brought to the Door that leads to life eternal. We were brought to Jesus (John 10:7).

Exodus 29:4 (b)
. . . and shalt wash them with water.

Aaron and his sons didn't wash themselves. They were washed—which speaks of baptism.

Exodus 29:5, 6

And thou shalt take the garments, and put upon Aaron the coat, and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the curious girdle of the ephod: And thou shalt put the mitre upon his head, and put the holy crown upon the mitre.

After coming to the door of salvation and being plunged into the water of baptism, we see Aaron robed in garments he didn't make, buy, or even put on. He just stood there and the robes were put on him in this ordination ceremony.

Exodus 29:7
Then shalt thou take the anointing oil, and pour it upon his head, and anoint him.

Again, Aaron did not anoint himself. He simply stood still and the anointing oil was poured upon his head.

Exodus 29:8, 9
And thou shalt bring his sons, and put coats upon them. And thou shalt gird them with girdles, Aaron and his sons, and put the bonnets on them: and the priest's office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute: and thou shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons.

Just as Aaron was given priestly garments, so were his sons—through no effort of their own, but simply due to their linkage to Aaron, the high priest. Because we are a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), we, too, are robed with the garments of salvation, the robes of righteousness (Psalm 132:9, 16). Our part is simply to receive the righteousness He wants to give to you and me as a free gift.

Exodus 29:10–14
And thou shalt cause a bullock to be brought before the tabernacle of the congregation: and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands upon the head of the bullock. And thou shalt kill the bullock before the LORD, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And thou shalt take of the blood of the bullock, and put it upon the horns of the altar with thy finger, and pour all the blood beside the

bottom of the altar. And thou shalt take all the fat that covereth the inwards, and the caul that is above the liver, and the two kidneys, and the fat that is upon them, and burn them upon the altar. But the flesh of the bullock, and his skin, and his dung, shalt thou burn with fire without the camp: it is a sin offering.

Here we see the first of three sacrifices as part of the ordination ceremony, for there can be no true ministry without sacrifice (Matthew 16:24). The sacrifice of the bullock was for a sin offering. The hands of Aaron and his sons placed upon the bullock signified that they acknowledged their sin and that they understood to deal with it required nothing less than shed blood.

Exodus 29:15–18
Thou shalt also take one ram; and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands upon the head of the ram. And thou shalt slay the ram, and thou shalt take his blood, and sprinkle it round about upon the altar. And thou shalt cut the ram in pieces, and wash the inwards of him, and his legs, and put them unto his pieces, and unto his head. And thou shalt burn the whole ram upon the altar: it is a burnt offering unto the LORD: it is a sweet savour, an offering made by fire unto the LORD.

Following the sin offering was the burnt offering—signifying entire devotion to God. The first offering dealt with sin; this one deals with service. The third offering, the peace offering, will deal with sanctification . . .

Exodus 29:19–21
And thou shalt take the other ram; and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands upon the head of the ram. Then shalt thou kill the ram, and take of his blood, and put it upon the tip of the right ear of Aaron, and upon the tip of the right ear of his sons, and upon the thumb of their right hand, and upon the great toe of their right foot, and sprinkle the blood upon the altar round about. And thou shalt take of the blood that is upon the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it upon Aaron, and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon the garments of his sons with him: and he shall

be hallowed, and his garments, and his sons, and his sons' garments with him.

As Aaron and his sons stood in this ordination ceremony, blood was put on their right ears, their right thumbs, their right big toes. Why? People often feel as though they've heard things they shouldn't have listened to, done things they shouldn't have been involved in, walked in places they ought not to have gone. Therefore, the blood was applied to the ear, to the thumb, to the toe to signify that our shortcomings in what we've heard, what we've done, where we've walked are all covered, cleansed, forgiven because of the blood.

Aaron and his sons were allowed to be in the ministry solely because they were a chosen family. Not one of the sons was left out. And the same is true of us—for we are in the family of the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ (John 1:12). Nothing was done *by* Aaron and his sons in this ordination ceremony. Rather, everything was done *for* them. They were amazingly passive. We tend to think, *I better do this,* or, *I must do that*—but this illustration shows us very clearly that it's not what we do that matters, but what Jesus has done *for* us.

Exodus 29:22–28

Also thou shalt take of the ram the fat and the rump, and the fat that covereth the inwards, and the caul above the liver, and the two kidneys, and the fat that is upon them, and the right shoulder; for it is a ram of consecration: And one loaf of bread, and one cake of oiled bread, and one wafer out of the basket of the unleavened bread that is before the LORD: And thou shalt put all in the hands of Aaron, and in the hands of his sons; and shalt wave them for a wave offering before the LORD. And thou shalt receive them of their hands, and burn them upon the altar for a burnt offering, for a sweet savour before the LORD: it is an offering made by fire unto the LORD. And thou shalt take the breast of the ram of Aaron's consecration, and wave it for a wave offering before the LORD: and it shall be thy part. And thou shalt sanctify the breast of the wave offering, and the shoulder of the heave offering, which is waved, and which is heaved up, of the ram of the consecration, even of that which is for Aaron, and of that which is for his sons:

and it shall be Aaron's and his sons' by a statute for ever from the children of Israel: for it is an heave offering: and it shall be an heave offering from the children of Israel of the sacrifice of their peace offerings, even their heave offering unto the LORD.

The hands of Aaron and his sons—once empty enough to place on the head of the sin offering—are now filled.

On one mountain ridge stood the people of Israel. On the other were the Philistines. And in the valley between them, Goliath taunted the people of Israel day after day, challenging them to send someone to do battle with him. The Israelites were understandably terrified. After all, Goliath was at least 9'9" and possibly as tall as 11'6". So heavy was his spear that the tip alone weighed thirty pounds. To put that in perspective, shot-putters throw a ball weighing a "mere" sixteen pounds. The armor he wore to protect his chest was itself two hundred pounds. Goliath was indeed massive. When the young shepherd boy from Bethlehem arrived on the scene, hearing Goliath's jeers, he said, "Give me a chance. Let me take him on." You see, while everyone else thought Goliath was too big to hit, David thought he was too big to miss. Turning down the offer of armor too big for him, David went into the valley of Elah with the only thing he was accustomed to using: his sling. But it was empty until, there in the very valley in which he would do battle, he found five stones—one of which would slay Goliath (1 Samuel 17:40).

Just as it wasn't until David had already committed himself to the battle that he found the stones, just as it wasn't until Aaron and his sons were to make an offering to the Lord that they were given bread and meat, it won't be until you start sharing your faith and reaching out to people that you will be given exactly what you need for ministry (Matthew 10:19). Preparing to minister is not nearly as necessary as daring to minister—for it's when we are in the valley of confrontation that we'll look down and see five smooth stones waiting to be put to God's use.

Exodus 29:29, 30

And the holy garments of Aaron shall be his sons' after him, to be anointed therein, and to be consecrated in them. And that son that is priest in his stead shall put them on seven days, when he cometh into the tabernacle of the congregation to minister in the holy place.

Just as Aaron's garments would be passed on to his sons, your character, Dad, will be passed on to your children as well. If I want Peter-John to be a man of prayer, I must be a man who prays. If I want Benjamin to be a man who loves the Word, I must be one given to studying the Scriptures. If I want my kids to be honest, I must cultivate honesty and integrity because the garments I wear, for better or worse, will be passed on to my kids. Oh, our kids will make their own choices—but the most important thing we can do to help our kids choose to be godly is to cultivate our own private, personal walk with the Lord. Love God. Walk with Him and it will be passed on from generation to generation.

Not only is this a precept, but it's a promise—for when we see our One greater than Aaron, our Great High Priest, our Savior, we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2). "I cannot be satisfied until I awake in Thy likeness," David declared (Psalm 17:15). Oh, happy day that will be!

Exodus 29:31–37

And thou shalt take the ram of the consecration, and seethe his flesh in the holy place. And Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram, and the bread that is in the basket, by the door of the tabernacle of the con gregation. And they shall eat those things wherewith the atonement was made, to consecrate and to sanctify them: but a stranger shall not eat thereof, because they are holy. And if ought of the flesh of the consecrations, or of the bread, remain unto the morning, then thou shalt burn the remainder with fire: it shall not be eaten, because it is holy. And thus shalt thou do unto Aaron, and to his sons, according to all things which I have commanded thee: seven days shalt thou consecrate them. And thou shalt offer every day a bullock for a sin offering for atonement: and thou shalt cleanse the altar, when thou hast made an atonement for it, and thou shalt anoint it, to sanctify it. Seven

days thou shalt make an atonement for the altar, and sanctify it; and it shall be an altar most holy: whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy.

For seven days, Aaron and his sons were to seek the Lord, offer sacrifices, consecrate, or dedicate the altar because it wasn't only the priest who needed to be consecrated, but the process; not only the minister, but the manner in which he was to serve. It is the wise person who prays, "Lord, I know I need to be consecrated. I need to be cleansed, anointed, empowered—and not me only, but also the things I do. May the process, the work, be "altared" by You, even as the altar was consecrated to You."

How does this happen?

Read on . . .

Exodus 29:38–43

Now this is that which thou shalt offer upon the altar; two lambs of the first year day by day continually. The one lamb thou shalt offer in the morning; and the other lamb thou shalt offer at even: and with the one lamb a tenth deal of flour mingled with the fourth part of an hin of beaten oil; and the fourth part of an hin of wine for a drink offering. And the other lamb thou shalt offer at even, and shalt do thereto according to the meat offering of the morning, and according to the drink offering thereof, for a sweet savour, an offering made by fire unto the LORD. This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD: where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee. And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory.

A lamb was to be sacrificed every morning and every evening. And there seems to be a wonderful principle for which the Lord is laying the groundwork here—that we are to start our day with the sacrifice of prayer and praise and end it in the same way. Prayer in the morning opens the door to blessing. Prayer at night locks it and makes us safe and secure. You see, the enemy doesn't snooze. Therefore, if you wake up feeling blue and wondering

why, it could very well be that you've been a target of his. But you can shield yourself to a large degree from his attacks by turning off the TV and praying before you end your day.

I talk to the Lord all day long, you might be thinking. *Why do I need to have a specified time of prayer in the morning and evening?*

Think of it this way: If I came home from a week at camp and said, "Tammy, we don't need to sit down and talk. You can just follow me around and we'll talk on the go," what kind of relationship would we have? There needs to be a constant flow of conversation, true. But for a marriage to be strong, there must be not only a quantity of time, but quality of time—where both people are completely focused on each other.

And I suggest that same thing is true in our relationship with the Lord. While we are to indeed pray without ceasing all through the day, there also must be times where we say, "Lord, I'm here to talk to You, to hear from You, to offer You the sacrifice of thoughtful, articulate, emotional, intelligent praise. I'm here to press in to Your presence, to pour out my heart, to focus exclusively on You." It's not a "got to." It's a "get to."

Exodus 29:44–46
And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the LORD their God.

While it was Moses who would consecrate Aaron and his sons, the garments and the altar—it was God alone who could sanctify them for His service. All that Moses could do was to portray through biblical typology that which only God could do in reality. And so it remains today, for the point at which communion or baptism, Bible study or worship become the end in themselves rather than pointing to Jesus is the point at which the Lord's presence will be tragically missing from our lives.

"And they shall know that I am the Lord their God," God declared.

"That I may know *Him,*" Paul prayed.

And may his prayer be ours.

30 Exodus 30:1, 2

And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: of shittim wood shalt thou make it. A cubit shall be the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof; foursquare shall it be: and two cubits shall be the height thereof: the horns thereof shall be of the same.

Every part of the tabernacle both pictures and points to Jesus Christ. And the altar of incense is no exception. The brass altar of chapter 27 portrays Jesus in His First Coming. The golden altar of incense speaks of His present work and His Second Coming. At one cubit by one cubit, or 18″x18″, the altar of incense is much smaller than the imposing brass altar of sacrifice because Jesus doesn't need to go to great lengths, wrestling and pleading with the Father through His intercessory prayer on our behalf. No, He's constantly, continually, consistently bringing us up before the Father in a comfortable confidence.

Sometimes our prayers don't get answered the way we hope because the Lord is answering previous prayers we forgot about. For example, we pray, "Lord, make me a godly man. Give me patience. Give me depth. Bring me into holiness."

"Okay," the Lord says. So a challenge comes our way, and what do we say?

"Get me out of here, Lord! Why am I in this predicament? What's going on? Have You forgotten about me? Don't You care?"

That's why we need an Intercessor, a High Priest who loves us, who sees the big picture, who knows what we asked for and what's coming down the road . . .

"Simon, Simon," Jesus said, "Satan desires to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not. And when you are converted, when you get through this ordeal, strengthen the brethren" (Luke 22:32).

"But Peter's faith failed," you say.

No it didn't. His hope failed. "Hope maketh not ashamed" (Romans 5:5). That's why when Peter's hope failed, he was ashamed of his linkage to Jesus (John 18:17). Later on, after He rose again, Peter was unable to tell Jesus he

loved Him because Peter knew Jesus' definition of love was by keeping His commandments (John 14:21). Peter's hope failed. Peter's love failed. But his faith never failed. He always believed.

Tonight Jesus says to us, "I know your Simon-like tendencies. I know you get shaken and that you are unstable. But I'm praying for you that your faith doesn't fail. I'm holding you up. So when you get through—and you *will* get through this—strengthen others."

Exodus 30:3 (a)
And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, the top thereof, and the sides thereof round about, and the horns thereof; . . .

The altar of chapter 27—the altar in the courtyard of the tabernacle—was to be made of brass. Brass being the metal of judgment, Jesus was judged on the Cross when He bore our sins. The altar here in chapter 30, however, was not to be covered with brass, but with gold—the metal of Deity—because Jesus is now at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us. And when He comes back, He will come not as the Suffering Servant, but as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Exodus 30:3 (b)–5
. . . and thou shalt make unto it a crown of gold round about. And two golden rings shalt thou make to it under the crown of it, by the two corners thereof, upon the two sides of it shalt thou make it; and they shall be for places for the staves to bear it withal. And thou shalt make the staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold.

There was to be a crown, a molding of gold around the altar because when Jesus comes back, He'll not be wearing a crown of thorns but a crown of gold (Revelation 14:14). The crown, the molding around the altar of incense, served a practical purpose as well, in that it kept the incense from falling off.

Exodus 30:6
And thou shalt put it before the vail that is by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the testimony, where

I will meet with thee.

Upon the golden altar of heaven seen in Revelation 8, the incense speaks not only of the prayers of the Savior on our behalf, but also of our intercessory ministry on behalf of others. Incense was burned on an altar because prayer requires sacrifice. There is nothing harder to do in spiritual life than pray. Why? I believe it's because Satan opposes it so vehemently. Why? He knows that's where the power is. Just as the altar of incense was the piece of furniture closest to the mercy seat, we are never closer to the Father than when we're in prayer.

> *"Son of David, have mercy on me," cried the Syro-Phoenician woman. Yet Luke tells us Jesus walked by as though He heard her not. "Son of David, have mercy," she cried again. But Jesus kept going. The phrase, "Son of David" was a Jewish term used by Jewish people to address the Jewish Messiah. This woman, however, was a Gentile. She had heard stories about what had taken place in Israel, about Jewish people who were blind or leprous crying out to the Son of David who healed them. So she used the formula. But it didn't apply to her. It was religion. It wasn't real. It wasn't until she said, "Lord help me," that Jesus stopped in His tracks and healed her daughter (Matthew 15:25).*

Keep your prayer simple. Don't think you have to copy how someone else prays or the phrases someone else uses. The altar of incense was small. It's not the length of your prayers, but their strength, their sincerity that matters (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

Exodus 30:7 (a)
And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning . . .

Just as the altar of incense was a sweet-smelling place, there is a sweetness about people who pray. "Pray for your enemies," Jesus said—the implication that we would pray for everyone because if we're praying for our enemies, it's assumed we'll pray for our friends and family. And, because it's

impossible to be angry with those for whom one prays, a sweet-smelling fragrance will replace the stench of bitterness in our lives.

Exodus 30:7 (b), 8
. . . when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.

"Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice," David prayed (Psalm 141:2). Incense in Scripture is always a picture of prayer. Jesus, our Faithful Friend and Great High Priest, is praying for us at this very moment (Hebrews 7:25). And not one of His prayers will "fall off." They are all heard—which is why He intercedes for us with exceeding joy (Jude 24).

Exodus 30:9
Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon.

Unlike the brass altar, blood was not to be shed on the altar of incense because it was by *one* offering that our salvation was secured (Hebrews 10:14). Jesus' offering on the Cross was *complete.*

Exodus 30:10
And Aaron shall make an atonement upon the horns of it once in a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonements: once in the year shall he make atonement upon it throughout your generations: it is most holy unto the LORD.

Horns in Scripture always speak of power. The horns on the four corners of the altar of incense remind us of the incredible power of prayer. More than anything else you do in spiritual life, Satan will try to keep you from praying.

Exodus 30:11–14

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them. This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is twenty gerahs) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD. Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the LORD.

Most of the offerings we have seen thus far and will see later on were to be voluntary offerings. The offering called "the ransom of souls," however, was mandatory—to be collected whenever a census was taken. In 1 Chronicles 21:1, we read that it was Satan who tempted David to number the people of Israel—something which God here forbids—in order to see how strong the nation was militarily. The result? Just as verse 12 warns of the plague that would be the result of numbering the people, 70,000 died of the plague that followed in 1 Chronicles.

Numbering the people was not to be done for reasons of pride, but for service and ministry. And the way this was to be done was by collecting half a shekel from every person twenty years of age and older. In this way, it was the money rather than the people that was counted.

Is it wrong for a church to number its members? It all depends on the reason for doing so. If it's done out of pride, it's wrong. If, on the other hand, it's done out of concern, it's necessary. After all, it was after counting his sheep that the shepherd realized one was missing and sent out to find it (Luke 15).

This offering came to be known as the temple tax in the New Testament, and was the one to which Jesus referred when He told Peter to "fish" their portion out of the sea (Matthew 17:27).

Exodus 30:15, 16
The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when they give an offering unto the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls. And thou shalt take the atonement

money of the children of Israel, and shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; that it may be a memorial unto the children of Israel before the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls.

There have been groups throughout history who, on the basis of this verse, have said atonement for souls can be made by paying money. Can atonement be purchased? Can man be "at one" with God for a price? No. The whole Bible argues against that. We can't purchase salvation. Yet salvation must indeed be purchased. And it was. Peter tells us we were redeemed not with corruptible things like silver and gold, but by the precious blood of the Lamb (1 Peter 1:18, 19).

Great is the day when we realize our lives are not our own, when we say, "If the Lord wants to take me through tragedy or difficulty, if He chooses to make me a pauper, send me to Africa, give me kids or give me none—I'm not my own. And because I've been bought with a price, I, who was once headed for hell, am destined for heaven."

"Why am I still single?"

You're not your own.

"Why am I stuck in this job?"

You were bought with a price.

"How come I'm going through this?"

God has your number and purchased you with something infinitely greater than silver when He bought you with the blood of His own Son.

Exodus 30:17, 18
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Thou shalt also make a laver of brass, and his foot also of brass, to wash withal: and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein.

The first thing one would see upon entering the courtyard of the tabernacle was the brass altar. The second thing would be the brass laver, or basin, filled with water. The water was to provide restoration, refreshment, renewal, revival. The water was the Word (John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26).

Exodus 30:19–21
For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat: When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the LORD: So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever to them, even to him and to his seed throughout their generations.

Aaron and his sons were to wash their hands and feet *at,* rather than *in* the laver by drawing water from it in order that the water within would remain pure. Cultists have drawn all sorts of wrong conclusions from the Word—but they cannot spoil a drop of the truth within it. The water of the Word remains one hundred percent pure—the only agent pure enough to give us clear perspective, to cleanse our hands and feet, our work and walk.



***For topical study of Exodus 30:17–21 entitled "I'm the Leper," turn to page* 340.**

Exodus 30:22–25
Moreover the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take thou also unto thee principal spices, of pure myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty shekels, and of sweet calamus two hundred and fifty shekels, And of cassia five hundred shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, and of oil olive an hin: and thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary: it shall be an holy anointing oil.

Here we see the "recipe" for the anointing oil which would be used throughout Israel's history to anoint three groups of people: prophets, priests, and kings. Oil in Scripture always being emblematic of the Spirit, the anointing of oil is a picture of the work of the Spirit. As the Prophet "like unto Me" of Deuteronomy 18:15, as our Great High Priest who ever lives to make

intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25), as King of kings and Lord of lords at whose name every knee will one day bow (Romans 14:11), Jesus is the Anointed One. No wonder, then, that, comprised of the sweet-smelling spices of myrrh, cinnamon, and calamus, this oil was first of all sweet, for Jesus, the Anointed One is nothing but sweet. He is never grouchy, discouraged, or depressed. He never is out of sorts, under the weather, or in a bad mood. He is the sweetest Person you'll ever encounter day after day after day.

"Didn't He call the Pharisees blind guides, hypocrites, and white-washed sepulchres? That's not very sweet," you may say.

Actually, it was. Knowing it would take that kind of language to break through their thick skulls, hard hearts, and closed minds, Jesus used language intended to jar them into listening. And even though He called them white-washed tombs, hypocrites, and blind guides, some of their number sensed that He loved them—as seen in their desire to spend time with Him (Luke 11:37; John 3:1).

Exodus 30:26–30
And thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith, and the ark of the testimony, and the table and all his vessels, and the candlestick and his vessels, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all his vessels, and the laver and his foot. And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy: whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy. And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office.

This anointing oil was not to be used sparingly, but was to be placed upon the tabernacle, all of the furniture, and the priests themselves. Because everything in the tabernacle was to picture Christ, everything in the tabernacle was to radiate His sweetness—just as we are to do (2 Corinthians 2:15; Ephesians 5:2).

Exodus 30:31, 32
And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, This shall be an holy anointing oil unto me throughout your generations. Upon man's flesh shall it not be poured, neither shall ye make any

other like it, after the composition of it: it is holy, and it shall be holy unto you.

In addition to being sweet, the anointing oil was not to be placed upon the flesh. The flesh being a picture of the sin nature, Jesus the Anointed One, never spent a moment living by the power or pull of sin. Therefore, the anointing oil was to have no contact with that which symbolizes sin.

Exodus 30:33
Whosoever compoundeth any like it, or whosoever putteth any of it upon a stranger, shall even be cut off from his people.

Thirdly, the anointing oil was inimitable. There was to be no imitation of it. Jesus, the Anointed One, our Savior, is one of a kind. There is no other like Him. All others are thieves and robbers indeed (John 10:1). Because Jesus was anointed with this oil of holiness—because He loved righteousness, because He hated sin—God anointed Him with the oil of gladness "above thy fellows," (Hebrews 1:9). If you have an image of Jesus like the icons in an old musty church where He looks mean, mystical, or upset, change your image —for Jesus was the "gladdest" Man who ever lived. No wonder He was always invited to parties (Matthew 11:19). Tax collectors and prostitutes, newlyweds and Pharisees understood He was the true Life of the party.

Exodus 30:34
And the LORD said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; these sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like weight:

In addition to the holy anointing oil, Moses was to make perfume made of stacte, onycha, and galbanum. These three spices are all sweet-smelling—yet none were indigenous to Israel. They were all imported from a far away place. So, if there is to be any sweetness in you or me, it must be imported from a far country. We must allow the work of the Holy Spirit to be sent from heaven to indwell our lives. If you desire to be pleasing to the Father, you must realize it will not be by your own efforts.

In Leviticus 2:11, we read that sacrifices were not to be offered with honey, the sweetest substance known in antiquity. Why? Because honey loses its sweetness when it gets hot. And the same is true of us. We might think we're sweet—but when the temperature goes up, when the heat's turned on, when the trials come, suddenly we find our natural sweetness breaking down. Not so with the sweetness of the Spirit. It just becomes sweeter under pressure (James 1:2–4).

Exodus 30:35
And thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy:

Secondly, this perfume was to be salted. The Hebrew word translated "tempered" is actually "salted," as some Bibles correctly render it. We don't need to wonder what this means, for Colossians 4:6 says specifically, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt that you may know how to answer every man." When we think of salty speech, we think of cursing or swearing. But salty speech in the biblical sense refers to speech that is gracious. Grace being unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor, our speech should always show unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor to whomever we talk to, for that is how we are to "answer every man." I don't know the answer to everyone's questions, but I know how the answer is to be given—it's to be given with grace.

Do you speak words of grace to those who raise questions, accusations, innuendoes? We must, for that is the only aroma that pleases our Father.

Exodus 30:36–38
And thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee: it shall be unto you most holy. And as for the perfume which thou shalt make, ye shall not make to yourselves according to the composition thereof: it shall be unto thee holy for the LORD. Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people.

Thirdly, the perfume was to be sacred—for in addition to being gracious, we must remain holy. The winning combination is to be as gracious to other people as you possibly can be by importing the sweetness of the Spirit from heaven, and to seek to be pure and holy in your own life. All too often, we reverse this. We want others to be holy, but we want grace to be poured out upon us. Jesus, of course, is the perfect example of how grace and holiness are to function . . .

While in Samaria—a place Jews didn't usually visit—to whom does Jesus talk? In a day when rabbis didn't even speak to their own wives in public, Jesus talks to a woman. And when she told Him she didn't have a husband, rather than condemn her for her lie, He commends her for the part of her statement that was true (John 4:17). As a result, her heart was touched, and her city impacted (John 4:30). Although I would have thought Jesus would have addressed the issue of her living situation, that's not what Jesus did. Why? Divorced five times, the chances of this woman getting married again were nil. Therefore, leaving the man with whom she was living would have given her no other recourse than prostitution to support herself. Jesus knew this—and no doubt also knew that in due season she would grow in her understanding of who He was and what new life in Him would entail.

Do Samaritans and pagans love to be around you? They loved to be around Jesus. How we need to be like Him—in our own lives to be holy, to be pure, and in the lives of others to be sweet, to show grace, to share love.

I'M THE LEPER

A Topical Study of EXODUS 30:17–21

Some teachers say the brass laver in the courtyard of the tabernacle speaks of being born again, of regeneration. I do not believe that is what it depicts, however, for regeneration is pictured by the brass altar, the place of sacrifice. I believe the laver—where the priests were to wash their hands and feet—speaks not of regeneration but of reinvigoration, not of rebirth but of refreshment.

As Abraham sat in his tent, he saw three men in the distance. Somehow realizing that these men were unique—for indeed it was God Himself accompanied by two angels—he ran to meet them, saying, "Let a little water be fetched and wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree, and I will fetch a morsel of bread and comfort your hearts" (Genesis 18:4, 5). The washing of feet, the sharing of bread, the image of a tree—it all speaks of what Jesus would do in the Upper Room the night before His Crucifixion (John 13).

Where are we to be refreshed in the priestly ministry to which we've been called? At the brass laver filled with water—at the place of renewal, restoration, and revival—in the pages of the Word.

Two elements appear to be missing in the description of the brass laver. The first is its dimensions. Concerning every other piece of furniture, every other aspect of the tabernacle, the dimensions are given. But of the brass laver, no dimensions are given. Why? I suggest the Lord is saying, "The refreshment and reinvigoration you'll receive from being in My Word is limitless, beyond measure, inexhaustible."

Secondly, there was no covering for the laver. Every other piece of furniture—the ark of the covenant, the golden candlestick, the table of showbread—were to have coverings made to protect them when they were moved. But for the brass laver there was no covering. I believe this is as if the Lord is saying that His Word is always available, never concealed, never closed off to you or me.

Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible deals with one single issue: the benefits and blessings of being in the Word. Verse 1 of this Psalm declares that the person who obeys the Word will be blessed, or happy. Verse 7 tells us that the person who is in the Word will be a person who worships. Verse 9 says that the person who takes heed to the Word will be clean. Verse 24 tells us the Word is a delight; verse 50 that it is a comfort. Verse 72 declares the Word to be more precious than gold and silver; verse 99 that it brings understanding; verse 105 that it sheds light.

Most of us know these things. Most of us agree that when we study the Word countless blessings are ours. Here, then, is the mystery: If we know that being in the Word is a good place to be, why aren't we in the Word a whole lot more than we are? Why aren't we diving in the laver continually? I suggest it's because the laver is made of brass.

In the Bible, brass is the metal of judgment. Where did the children of Israel get the brass to make this laver? Exodus 38 tells the story. When construction of the tabernacle actually began, the women donated the brass looking glasses they had been given in Egypt. I find this more than coincidental because James likens the Word to a mirror (1:23–25). And therein lies the problem. You see, when we open the Word, we see our reflection—and it's not what it should be. We see our failures and flaws, our sins and shortcomings. And although we understand that the Word brings benefits to those who study it, sometimes we become exhausted by trying to live up to its standard.

The laver was made of brass. And it is the brass which judges us so decisively that, although we know what we see in the Word is true, right, good, and the way it ought to be—we don't know if we can take another sermon, another lesson, another study because we're so far from it.

But wait. The brass laver was filled with water. Without water, all one would see would be the reflection of his flaws and failures. But the addition of water made the laver refreshing, renewing, reinvigorating. "All you who thirst, come unto Me," Jesus said, "and out of your innermost being shall gush forth torrents of living water" (John 7:37, 38).

I was at a point some years ago where I was reading through the Gospels as I love to do. But I was weary. I came to the portion where Jesus touched a leper and the leper was cleansed. And I heard myself saying, "I need to be helping people physically just like Jesus did."

Then I turned the page and saw how Jesus touched the ears and tongue of a man unable to hear and speak. And I found myself thinking, *"I need to find some dumb guys and help them just like Jesus did."*

Then I turned the page and read how Jesus had compassion on the multitudes and fed five thousand hungry men. And I said, "That's the way it ought to be. I need to get involved in World Vision or Compassion International and help feed hungry people."

Then I saw Jesus blessing kids and thought, *"I need to work with kids."*

Then I saw how Jesus calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee, and was reminded of those I knew whose marriages were on the rocks, whose lives were in turmoil, and decided I should do what I could to see those storms stilled.

Then I read how Jesus defended the woman caught in adultery, and felt that I should stand up for those who are socially or politically oppressed.

And at the end, I was exhausted. Finally, I said, "I just can't read another chapter. I can't do it. Jesus, I'm impressed with You. I see the rightness of what You do. But I can't do all the things You did."

And it was at that moment that the Lord whispered in my heart, "Exactly. You have yourself in the wrong position. *I'm* the One who touches the leper. *I'm* the One who blesses the children. *I'm* the One who feeds the hungry. *I'm* the One who makes the dumb to speak. *I'm* the One who stands up for the woman. *I'm* the One who calms the storms. It's not you. It's *Me*."

"I get it," I said. "You're the Christ. I'm not. That makes me the leper. I'm being eaten away every day by my sin and carnality. Yet every day You come my way and touch and restore my life. I'm the dumb guy. I say things I shouldn't say. I put my foot in my mouth. Yet You're there to forgive me and straighten me out. I'm the deaf man. But You never give up on me. You open my ears, you renew my thoughts. I'm the little child who needs a touch from You. I'm the hungry one and only You can meet the need within me. I'm the one caught in adultery and You're there to forgive me. I'm the one caught in the storm and You're the One who walks out to rescue me. I've been reading my Bible all wrong. No wonder I've been so weary, so reluctant to keep reading. I've placed myself in the wrong role. You're the Christ; I'm the leper. Thank You for Your mercy. Thank You for Your patience. Where would I be without You?"

And when the Lord adjusted my thinking, Scripture reading became a total joy once again.

Where did the water for the laver come from as the children of Israel wandered through the wilderness? It came from the Rock that traveled with them, the Rock that was smitten, the Rock 1 Corinthians 10:4 identifies as Jesus. What happened to Christ when He was smitten on the Cross with a spear? Out of His side flowed blood and water—redemption and refreshment.

If we dive into the laver of the Word without the water of the Spirit, the water of the Word made flesh, we'll crash into the brass of judgment. No wonder Jesus said, "Learn of Me and you will find rest in your soul" (Matthew 11:29).

Get back to the laver, gang, and dive in. Just make sure there's water there. Make sure it's filled with the water of the Spirit, the water of the Word, the water of the Rock of Ages.



31 Exodus 31:1–5

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship.

In chapter 30, we saw the anointing oil for priestly ministry. Here, in chapter 31, we move from priestly ministry to practical ministry and, again, we see an anointing, a gifting of the Holy Spirit. Bezaleel was anointed, filled with the Spirit of God in order that he might accomplish practical work in the tabernacle. As "foreman" of the project, Bezaleel was to oversee the actual construction of the tabernacle and its furnishings, as well as the making of the garments the priests would wear.

I love this because the anointing for practical ministry is every bit as necessary as the anointing for priestly ministry. What gifts, ability has God given you? Ask God to anoint them, and He will use you just as surely as He used Bezaleel. Finding ministry is a lot easier than people think. It's whatever

comes supernaturally natural to you. Bezaleel was, no doubt, already one who was skilled with his hands. But now he's empowered to do it for God's glory.

> **Exodus 31:6–11**
> **And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan: and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee; the tabernacle of the congregation, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is thereupon, and all the furniture of the tabernacle, and the table and his furniture, and the pure candlestick with all his furniture, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all his furniture, and the laver and his foot, and the cloths of service, and the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, to minister in the priest's office, and the anointing oil, and sweet incense for the holy place: according to all that I have commanded thee shall they do.**

God empowered, energized, anointed carpenters, tailors, perfumers to do this work. Bezaleel was the foreman, but Aholiab was the assistant, along with others who served by his side.

> *When asked what was the hardest position in the orchestra to fill, a famous conductor said, "First chair, second violin. I can find all kinds of people who want to play first violin. But it's hard to find someone who wants to be excellent at second violin, who wants to play harmony."*

Human tendency is to want to be mediocre at first violin rather than to excel at second. Not so with Aholiab. He was told he would be assistant to Bezaleel. And he was successful in that position. Thus, he is an example for all of history of the way God uniquely and powerfully uses "second fiddles" for His glory.

As chronicled in a 1970s bestseller entitled *The Peter Principle,* all too often the problem in corporate America is that people are promoted to the level of incompetence. That is, a man who does well in his position is promoted to the next level. After doing well there, he is moved to Level three.

Succeeding there, he is moved to Level four. And he keeps being promoted until, towards the top, he's over his head. He was good going up the ladder, but he went one step too far. And when the corporation downsizes, guess who gets the ax. God doesn't want that for us. He wants us to fit into the place He's custom-designed for us. Am I saying we are not to take steps of faith? No, I'm saying that we must avoid the folly of taking one step too many. If God puts you in a number one spot, He will give you the grace and ability to handle it. But if you're in a number two position, rejoice and excel at that. Whether on the job or in ministry, if you're wanting to climb one more rung, be careful. If you're a Bezaleel, great. If you're an Aholiab, wonderful. Just be content and shine in the position the Lord places you.

Exodus 31:12–17
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.

God here, after assigning the team that was to do the work in constructing the tabernacle and the furniture and the garments, now reiterates the Sabbath day command. This might seem out of place initially. But He did this because there is a tendency in our lives in times of construction, of building to say, "Okay, we've got the plan, the team, let's roll up our sleeves and let's get going."

"Wait a minute," the Lord says. "Let not the time of construction become a time of distraction—where you forget to rest in Me, worship Me, spend time with Me."

Exodus 31:18
And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.

Here, Moses is given the Ten Commandments written with the finger of God's own hand. We see the fingers of God at work in creation—when He created the heavens (Psalm 8:3). We see the finger of God evident in condemnation—when even Pharaoh's magicians at last recognized the power of His judgment (Exodus 8:19). But nowhere do the fingers of God appear more wonderful than when we see them employed in compassion—when placed into the ears of a deaf man about to hear (Mark 7:33) and writing on the ground before a woman about to be set free (John 8:6).



32 Here in chapter 32, we will see Moses as a mediator. In chapter 33, we'll see him as an intercessor. In chapter 34, we'll see him as a worshiper. And I believe these qualities abounded in Moses because he was a man of the mountain, a man who spent time in the presence of God . . .

Exodus 32:1 (a)
And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount . . .

Moses stayed on Mt. Sinai for forty days and forty nights and didn't come down until he had the Word of the Lord. That's so unlike me. I'll be on the mountain in the presence of the Lord—but if I sense something going wrong down below, I'll scurry to the situation and try to solve the problem in my own energy. Moses didn't. He stayed on the mountain until the Lord "made an end of communing with him" (31:18), until he had the Word of the Lord in hand.

Exodus 32:1 (b)
. . . the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

"We wot not what is become of him," the people said of Moses—Moses, one of only a handful of men in Scripture referred to as a man of God; Moses, author of both the first and last hymn in the Bible (Exodus 15; Revelation 15), Moses, perhaps the greatest leader who ever walked the earth other than our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Where *is* he?" the people fret. "What are we paying him for, anyway? We don't know what's happened to him. So now, Aaron, you're our man."

Exodus 32:2–6
And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

Moses' older brother, Aaron was a great man, too. But he was flawed particularly in that he was afraid of what people thought. The Bible says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, while the fear of man is a snare (Proverbs 1:7; 29:25). At any given moment I will either be living in the fear of man—concerned about what people think, or living in the fear of God—concerned about what my Father thinks.

"We're going to offer burnt offerings and sacrifices to the Lord," said Aaron. "But if you want some help visualizing God, I'll make a golden calf

like the ones they had in Egypt."

> **Exodus 32:7–10**
> **And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.**

His anger against the people already kindled, God said, "I'm going to wipe them out and make of *you,* Moses, a brand new nation."

> **Exodus 32:11–13**
> **And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever.**

The heart of Moses, this giant of a man, is revealed when he petitions God on the basis of His people in verse 11, His prestige in verse 12, and His promise in verse 13. "If You wipe out these people, what will the Egyptians think?" Moses said to God. "They will say You're unable to do what You promised, to finish what You began." His was honest prayer, selfless prayer, biblical prayer, prayer that would indeed move the hand of God . . .

Exodus 32:14
And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

The question becomes obvious. If God repented, does that mean He sinned when His anger waxed hot, when He planned on destroying the people? No, for who put the heart in Moses to stand up for the people, to plead on their behalf, to care so passionately about them? God Himself. Later, He will say, "I looked for a man to stand in the gap, but found none" (see Ezekiel 22:30). Here, however, in Moses, God found a man to be the recipient of a heart like His own.

Exodus 32:15–19
And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables. And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp. And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear. And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.

The breaking of the tablets was a reflection of the true breaking of the Law that occurred with the fashioning of the golden calf.

Exodus 32:20
And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it.

In Moses, we see a leader who doesn't walk in the fear of man. His goal is not popularity but godliness.

Exodus 32:21–24
And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them? And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief. For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.

Because verse 4 clearly says that Aaron fashioned the gold with a graving tool, he's lying when he says he cast the gold in the fire and out came a calf. This is not surprising, for if we live in the fear of man, there will always be the temptation to alter the truth.

Exodus 32:25, 26
And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies). Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD's side? Let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.

In Genesis 34, we read how Levi had become enmeshed in immorality, treachery, and butcherly activity. Perhaps having suffered the consequences, they were now ready to stand for integrity.

Exodus 32:27
And he said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.

The Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). Sometimes, like Levi, in obedience to the prompting of the Spirit, we must draw the sword of the Word when speaking to those we care about most. Even though it might cause pain initially, cleansing and healing will be the result eventually if we speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Exodus 32:28
And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.

The day the Law came down in the hand of Moses, three thousand died. The day the Spirit came down in Acts 2, three thousand were saved. The Law brings death; the Spirit brings life (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Exodus 32:29
For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves to day to the LORD, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day.

God's original intent was that the firstborn son in every family would serve in the priesthood. But because only the Levites were willing to stand strong and do what needed to be done, they now become the sole tribe involved in priestly ministry.

Exodus 32:30
And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin.

Our New Testament understanding of atonement is that of washing clean. But prior to the work of the Cross, the Old Testament meaning of atonement was not of washing away, but only of covering up.

Exodus 32:31

And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold.

Notice the specific nature of Moses' confession. When we confess our sin, we need to identify the sin. We need to say, "Forgive me, Lord, I lied to him when I said this . . ." or, "I was wrong when I got angry with her about that. . . ." Be specific—and be equally specific in declaring that your sins are forgiven, cleansed, atoned by the blood of the Lamb.

Exodus 32:32
Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.

"If you don't forgive these people, Lord, blot my name out of Your book of life as well," Moses said.

Who gave Moses that kind of heart?

The same One who gave Paul a heart that said, "I would be accursed for the sake of my kinsmen according to the flesh. If they could be saved, I would go to hell" (see Romans 9:3). Who worked that in Paul? Who worked that in Moses? God. For God Himself so loves people that He gave His only Son (John 3:16). How I want that heart worked in me.

Exodus 32:33, 34 (a)
And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee . . .

God's directive to Moses to lead the people implies that Moses' request was granted, that the people would live, that they were forgiven.

Exodus 32:34 (b), 35
. . . behold, mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them. And the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made.

Not only were the people forgiven, but God's Angel—His Son—would lead them. Nevertheless, there would still be repercussion for their sin. And that's the way it always is (Galatians 6:7).



33 After seeing Moses as a mediator in chapter 32, we'll see him as an intercessor here in chapter 33 . . .

Exodus 33:1–3
And the LORD said unto Moses, Depart, and go up hence, thou and the people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt, unto the land which I sware unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, Unto thy seed will I give it: and I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite: unto a land flowing with milk and honey: for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiffnecked people: lest I consume thee in the way.

A Fire Department recently spent a great deal of money on fire helmets which included built-in microphones and other high-tech capabilities—only to discover to their dismay that the helmets melted in high heat. That's what God is saying here. It's not that He would kill the people for being in His presence —but that they would simply melt in the heat of His glory and grandeur.

Exodus 33:4–6
And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned: and no man did put on him his ornaments. For the LORD had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, Ye are a stiffnecked people: I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee. And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by the mount Horeb.

If God told us He would send an angel to lead us into the Promised Land —into the fulfillment of prophecy and the actualization of promises, I think our tendency would be to say, "Terrific!"

But to the credit of the children of Israel, even though they were in a state of carnality, they mourned when they heard this. They didn't care about an angel. And they were no longer excited about the promise without God's presence. "This is terrible," they said. "We need God."

> **Exodus 33:7**
> **And Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass, that every one which sought the LORD went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp.**

The Hebrew word *ohel* translated "tabernacle" in this passage, the tabernacle spoken of here is not the tabernacle Moses had been given instruction to build, for that is defined by the Hebrew word, *mishken.* Rather, the tabernacle spoken of here is the meeting tent for the congregation. Moses packs up the meeting tent and re-pitches it outside the camp. Having heard the Lord declare that He would not be in the midst of the camp, it's as if Moses was saying, "If God's not there, I don't want to be there either."

You and I desperately need times of pitching our tent outside the camp of busyness in order that we might be made aware of God's presence once again. And sometimes this takes some effort . . .

> *A number of years ago, when my three kids were little, I took them camping at Indian Mary campground. As a single dad in those days, I was delighted that my college roommate, Rick, and his family joined us. But about five hours after we pitched our tents, a massive storm arose. Although we weathered it for a couple of days, staying in the tents and hanging out under whatever coverings we could find, finally it got so wet we packed up everything and all headed home. On my way back to Jacksonville, the kids and I stopped at McDonald's. And as they played on the play-land equipment, the sun popped through. It was at that moment that I realized that, although*

we'd been camping for a couple of days, I missed my objective totally—which was to focus on my kids. We adults were playing games and enjoying fellowship, but I didn't accomplish what I had initially set out to do. So I loaded the kids back in the car, we went back to Indian Mary, re-pitched the tent, hung out all the wet stuff—and shared some of the best four days we ever spent together.

The same is true in your walk with the Lord. Sometimes you'll have devotions or Bible study—only to realize at the end that a storm blew through, that you were distracted by this, caught up in that, and lost focus. But if you don't give up, if you re-pitch your tent, if you change location and say, "Lord, I really need to be in Your presence"—just as we'll see Him do with Moses—God will meet you there.

Exodus 33:8–10
And it came to pass, when Moses went out unto the tabernacle, that all the people rose up, and stood every man at his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he was gone into the tabernacle. And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the LORD talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door.

The people watched as Moses re-pitched the tent of meeting and as the cloudy pillar which symbolized God's presence descended upon the door. They watched the cloud. They were intrigued by the Presence of God. They bowed down. But they remained in their own tents. Just as people can be intrigued by spiritual life, read books about spiritual life, dialogue and write in their journals about spiritual life—they still do not budge from their own tents. Such were the children of Israel—all, that is, except one . . .

Exodus 33:11
And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant

Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle.

Although anyone could have accompanied Moses to the tent of meeting pitched outside the camp, evidently only Joshua chose to go. And once he got there, he couldn't pull himself away. No wonder he would be the man God would use to bring His people into the Land of Promise.

Every one of us is as close to God as we want to be. God will gladly and readily take you and me as far as we want to go. But He won't take us one step further than we desire.

Exodus 33:12–14
And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.

Was it because of the holiness, devotion, or piety of the people that God promised His Presence would go with them and give them rest? Obviously not, for just one chapter earlier, they were caught up in idolatry and immorality as they danced around the golden calf. No, God declared His presence would go with them and give rest to them not because they were worthy but because they had a mediator named Moses who stood between their sin and God's holiness. Sin requires judgment, but in Moses God found a way to bless His people rather than judge them.

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

1 Timothy 2:5, 6

Like the children of Israel, we drop the ball; we fall short; we mess up constantly. But, like them, we experience the presence of God because we, too, have a Mediator, a Greater than Moses—Jesus Christ.

As a result, like the children of Israel, we are given direction by a God who will go "in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your tents" (Deuteronomy 1:33).

> *As the people were preparing to enter the Promised Land, they were to follow the ark of the covenant—and yet there was to be 2,000 cubits—over half a mile—between them and the ark. In commanding this, it's as if God was saying, "Give Me space. I'm going ahead of you to prepare the place for you and to prepare you for the place to which I'm leading you" (Joshua 3:3, 4).*

The Lord has promised direction for us. Our part is to give Him space to work.

Not only are we given direction, but, like the children of Israel, we are given protection by a God Who not only goes before us, but behind us . . .

> And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night.
>
> Exodus 14:19, 20

There are times when I feel I made a bad decision, that I didn't hear God's voice clearly or discern His will properly. But even if that be so, our God not only goes before us, but places Himself between us and the enemies so eager to pursue us. He's got our backs covered. I like that!

Thirdly, in addition to receiving direction and protection, we are given satisfaction by God. We are told Moses fasted two, and perhaps three times for forty days on Mt. Sinai. I suggest it wasn't so much that he fasted in order to seek the Lord, as it was that, having already seen something of the Lord, Moses was so satisfied, so fulfilled, so satiated that he simply forgot to eat.

Truly, when we're in the presence of the Lord, we find such satisfaction that we, too, begin to lose our appetite for the fleshly stuff which otherwise is attractive to us.

Direction, protection, satisfaction—all blessings of the Lord's presence.

Exodus 33:15
And he said unto him, If thy presence go not *with me,* carry us not up hence.

The words "with me" are in italics. Therefore, they are not present in the original text. Thus, Moses is saying, "Lord, it's not about Your presence being with me. It's about Your presence being with *us*." The result of Moses spending time with the Lord on the mountain and in the tent of meeting outside the camp was that he not only had a passionate heart for God, but an incredible passion for God's people.

Exodus 33:16, 17
For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name.

I can see a smile on the face of God as He says, "Okay, Moses, I'll do what you ask. I'll not only go with you personally, but with the whole nation corporately." And if He responded to Moses' intercession on behalf of the children of Israel, how much more will He give ear to His Son's intercession on our behalf.

Exodus 33:18
And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.

The Hebrew word translated "glory" is *chabod,* which speaks of weight and substance. The chabod is what clothed Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. But when they sinned, the chabod departed and they became aware of

their emptiness. And man has been aware of the weightlessness, shallowness, nakedness in his soul ever since.

Exodus 33:19 (a)
And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee . . .

"Let me see Your glory," Moses said.

"I'll make My goodness pass before you," God answered. God's goodness and His glory are linked because the glory of God is good. It's just plain good.

Exodus 33:19 (b)
. . . and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee . . .

Keep in mind—the name of the Lord is always equivalent to His nature, His essence.

Exodus 33:19 (c), 20
. . . and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.

"My goodness will pass before you and My name will be proclaimed to you," God declared. "But My face? No man can see Me and live."

No man hath seen God at any time . . .

John 1:18 (a)

Truly the greatness of God is overwhelming, overpowering—but, praise the Lord, John goes on . . .

. . . the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

John 1:18 (b)

When people in Scripture had an encounter with God—as did Abraham in Genesis 18 and Isaiah in Isaiah 6—they were seeing Jesus. And truly no man

can see Him and live, for every time we catch a glimpse of our Savior, something of our flesh dies.

Exodus 33:21–23
And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.

"Back parts" does not mean backside physically, but literally "afterglow." In other words, God says to Moses, "You can't see Me and live, but you can sense and experience My afterglow." The only way Moses could see God's afterglow was if he was in the cleft of the rock. Who is the Rock? Jesus. When was He cleft? On the Cross.

For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

Colossians 3:3

The only way we'll ever see anything of God's glow or glory is to be hidden in Jesus.



34

Exodus 34:1–3
And the LORD said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest. And be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto mount Sinai, and present thyself there to me in the top of the mount. And no man shall come up with thee, neither let any man be seen throughout all the mount; neither let the flocks nor herds feed before that mount.

The first tablets had been broken because the Law had been broken (Exodus 32:19)—which isn't surprising since Paul said the reason the Law

was given was to show that we couldn't keep it, that we're sinners in desperate need of a Savior (Galatians 3:24).

Exodus 34:4–6 (a)
And he hewed two tables of stone like unto the first; and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone. And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, . . .

Because God's name was to be spoken only one day each year by the high priest, His name was written without vowels in the Old Testament as YHWH. Some say this name was pronounced "Jehovah." Some say it was pronounced "Yahweh." Others have made other suggestions. While we can't be sure of the pronunciation of this holy name, we do know its meaning . . .

Exodus 34:6 (b)
. . . merciful and gracious . . .

For their own safety, in verse 1, God told Moses to keep the people and even the livestock away from the mount where His power and presence would be. Therefore, in defining His name and nature, God could have said, "I'm powerful and holy, awesome and mighty." Instead, He said, "I'm gracious; I show mercy." Mercy is not getting what one deserves. Grace is getting what one doesn't deserve. We deserve torment, but because our God is merciful, we get blessing. We deserve hell, but because He is gracious, we're destined for heaven.

Exodus 34:6 (c)
. . . longsuffering . . .

Although I give the Lord plenty of reason to be exasperated with me, He doesn't get uptight. He doesn't drink coffee. He's not wired. He has no ax to

grind. He's not wounded. He's not trying to prove His point. He's beyond patient. He's longsuffering.

Exodus 34:6 (d), 7 (a)
. . . and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin . . .

The picture in the Hebrew text is one of overflowing. Think of the broken automatic sprinkler in your front lawn. No matter what you do, it just keeps dispensing water. That's the way God is with goodness and truth, forgiveness and mercy.

Exodus 34:7 (b)
. . . and that will by no means clear *the guilty* . . .

The words "the guilty" are in italics. This means they were added by the translators. Thus, in the original text, God is saying He would not clear or erase that which He had spoken.

Exodus 34:7 (c)
. . . visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

This verse seems to be jarringly out of place if taken to mean that if I sin it will affect my son, my grandson, my great-grandson and my great-great-grandson. However, linguistically, contextually, or theologically I do not believe that's what is being said. Ezekiel sheds further light on this . . .

> What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.
>
> Ezekiel 18:2–4

"All souls are mine," God declares. "I make every person individually. And it is the soul that sins who will die." The question arises: If this passage doesn't mean God will punish future generations for the sins of the fathers, what does it mean? Taken in context, this passage speaks of God's grace and mercy. You see, if I sin, the Lord is going to visit me. He's going to deal with me, convict me, chasten me. If Peter-John sins, the Father will do the same with him. And if Peter-John's son sins, God will deal with him as well. In other words, God is saying, "I'm going to knock on the door of each generation; I'm going to deal with each person. I'm going to visit, correct and chasten—all for the purpose of restoration. I will not give up."

Exodus 34:8, 9 (a)
And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped. And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiffnecked people . . .

A realization of the incredible grace and mercy causes Moses first to worship and then to intercede on behalf of a stiff-necked and hard-hearted people.

Exodus 34:9 (b)
. . . and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance.

"Pardon *our* iniquity and *our* sin." Called to lead a rebellious people, Moses nonetheless identified with them. Is it any wonder God used him?

Exodus 34:10
And he said, Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the LORD: for it is a terrible thing that I will do with thee.

"If you ask anything in My name, I will do it," Jesus said (John 14:14). For many years, I thought this meant I was to simply add the phrase "In Jesus'

name" to the end of my prayers, sort of like "Over and out." But when I understood that praying in Jesus' name means to pray according to His nature, I found I couldn't pray a lot of prayers I had been praying—prayers like, "Lord deal with that guy who just cut me off on the highway," prayers like, "I want this to happen *now*."

"Am I unmerciful, impatient, short-fused?" the Lord asked me. "Or am I longsuffering, merciful, slow to anger? I only work in ways that reflect who I am."

It was because Moses knew the name, the nature, the character of God that he was able to ask for His presence, His pardon, His eternal promise. Meditate on God's nature as seen in the Person of Jesus. Get a strong, firm grip on this, understand—and your prayers will become those God can answer.

Exodus 34:11 (a)
Observe thou that which I command thee this day . . .

After proclaiming His glory, His nature, God will reiterate certain aspects of the Law lest His goodness and grace not be experienced by the people.

Ninety-three million miles away, the sun is huge in size, awesome in power. And yet I can block it from my vision with only my thumb. I can let my flesh come between me and the sun and suddenly, I see it no longer. The sun doesn't leave—my flesh just gets in the way. So, too, the degree to which we allow our flesh to come between us and the Son is the degree to which we'll walk in darkness. And because God doesn't want this for His children, He reminds Moses to deal decisively with that which would cloud the people's perception of His nature.

"All things are lawful for me," Paul declared. As children of God, we are the freest people in the whole world, for who but the believer can say all things are lawful for him? Yet Paul went on to say that even though all things are lawful, not all things are expedient, profitable, wise (1 Corinthians 6:12). In this regard, the remainder of chapter 34 was given to Moses in order that the people would be wise, that they might experience all God wanted to do for them.

Exodus 34:11 (b)–16

. . . behold, I drive out before thee the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite. Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee: But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves: For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods.

"Be careful you don't get sucked in to the images of the world," God warns. God is jealous for us. He wants the very best for us. And He says images, altars, and worship in shady groves will destroy our lives by destroying our vision of Him.

Exodus 34:17
Thou shalt make thee no molten gods.

The ark of the covenant which represented the presence of the Lord was to be made of beaten gold whereas the gods of the Canaanites were made of molten gold. Molten gold is melted and poured into a mold—which is exactly what we see in the melt-down of spirituality where people mold God into what they think He should be in order to excuse their own sin. God chose to represent Himself through *beaten* gold. Why do I serve the True and Living God? Why am I committed to Jesus Christ? Because He was beaten for me and nailed to the Cross of Calvary.

Exodus 34:18
The feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep. Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, as I commanded thee, in the time of the month Abib: for in the month Abib thou camest out from Egypt.

"Remember and celebrate what I did for you when I delivered you from Egypt," God says. "This do in remembrance of Me," Jesus would echo, inviting us to the celebration of His Table (Luke 22:19).

Exodus 34:19
All that openeth the matrix is mine; and every firstling among thy cattle, whether ox or sheep, that is male.

The children of Israel being an agrarian people, cattle represented livelihood. The proof of one's dedication is seen in what he does with his livelihood. Yet giving to God materially is not only the proof *of* dedication, but the path *to* dedication. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," Jesus said (Matthew 6:21). Therefore, giving God the first of our livelihood, of our cattle, "steers" our hearts toward heaven.

Exodus 34:20 (a)
But the firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb: and if thou redeem him not, then shalt thou break his neck . . .

A donkey could be redeemed through the death of a lamb. If the Lamb speaks of Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain, guess what that makes us.

Exodus 34:20 (b)
. . . All the firstborn of thy sons thou shalt redeem. And none shall appear before me empty.

What a delight it is to see people come to church not empty-handed but looking for opportunities to give to the Lord and to encourage their brothers and sisters.

Exodus 34:21
Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest: in earing time and in harvest thou shalt rest.

We'll experience the goodness of God to the degree that we take one day out of seven to put aside our normal activities in order to rest and refocus, in order to be revived, refreshed, and renewed in our vision of Him.

Exodus 34:22, 23
And thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's end. Thrice in the year shall all your men children appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel.

God called His people to come away three times each year for the Feast of Passover in the spring, the Feast of Pentecost fifty days later, and the Feast of Ingathering or Tabernacles in the fall.

Exodus 34:24
For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year.

"I can't afford to get away," we say. "If I take time off, my competitors will eat me alive. My bank account will dwindle. Our family will suffer." That's what the children of Israel could have said as well, knowing that traveling to the feasts would leave their land vulnerable to the enemies surrounding them.

God, however, says, "If you obey Me, *I* will cast out the nations; *I* will enlarge your borders; *I* will be your protection."

If you're trying to defend your family yourself, watch out. God may say, "If you want to do that, you're on your own. Good luck." I would much rather have the Lord take care of my family, wouldn't you?

Exodus 34:25
Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven; neither shall the sacrifice of the feast of the passover be left unto the morning.

Leaven being a picture of sin, it was not to be offered with the sacrifice.

Exodus 34:26 (a)
The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring unto the house of the LORD thy God . . .

The firstfruits were not to be distributed by the children of Israel to whomever they deemed worthy or needy, but were to be brought to the house of the Lord. The same is true today. We are to bring the firstfruits, the tithe into the house of the Lord—into the place we're being spiritually fed—to be distributed as the Lord sees fit. That way, we have no control over it and receive no credit for it—which is as it should be (Matthew 6:3). If you want to give money to those people or ministries you deem needy or worthy, God bless you—but do so with your money, not God's, for the tithe belongs to *Him* (Malachi 3:8).

Exodus 34:26 (b)
. . . Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.

So careful are Orthodox Jews to keep the letter of this law that they have separate plates, utensils, cookware for meat and dairy products lest the two inadvertently come into contact with each other. But the children of Israel would have readily understood that the reference was to the Canaanite fertility practices of which they were to have no part.

Exodus 34:27, 28
And the LORD said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel. And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.

Because Moses had seen something of the glory of God, he was to remind the people that in order to keep an understanding of His glory fresh, they were to keep His commands—commandments that would define His nature, commandments which would point to and be fulfilled in His Son.

Exodus 34:29–35
And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the

children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him. And Moses called unto them; and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him: and Moses talked with them. And afterward all the children of Israel came nigh: and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him in mount Sinai. And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a vail on his face. But when Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he took the vail off, until he came out. And he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded. And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the vail upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

If we had only this account, we would think Moses covered his face in order that the people not be blown away with its brightness. But in 2 Corinthians, Paul gives us the real reason . . .

> Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: and not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:
>
> 2 Corinthians 3:12, 13

Moses put a veil over his face because he didn't want the people to see that the glow was decreasing. And we do the same thing. As "mature" Christians, we don't want people to see that we're not shining as brightly as we once did or think we should. So we put a veil on ourselves. We learn the lingo; we learn how to appear pious; we learn to cover up. And we become exhausted as our lives become fake, phony, façades. But when we realize we don't have to pretend to be spiritual giants, prayer warriors, or heroes of faith —when we are free to be the dim bulbs we know we are, suddenly the burden lifts and our Christian experience becomes vibrant and alive once more as we simply reflect *His* light, *His* beauty, *His* grace and goodness and glory.

It's not about us and who we pretend to be, but about Jesus and His reality. Look at *Him.* Point others to *Him.* And you'll do well.

LET "GLOW" OF YOUR ISSUES

A Topical Study of EXODUS 34:29–35

Going without food for forty days does not usually help one's appearance—especially if one is eighty years old. But this was not true in the case before us, where, after spending forty days in the presence of the Lord on Mt. Sinai, Moses' face actually glowed.

Reflecting the glory he had experienced on the mountain, Moses didn't initially realize his face was glowing. That's always the way it is. When we spend time in the presence of the Lord—when we are at His feet, when we take time to pray, when we worship Him and spend time in the Word—our gloom is replaced by a glow.

"I don't feel like I glow," you say—but Moses didn't know he was glowing either.

When the Holy Spirit fell on the one hundred and twenty disciples in the Upper Room, a flame burned above each of their heads (Acts 2:3). This means that if you were one of the one hundred and twenty, you would look around and see one hundred and nineteen other people ignited, on fire, illuminated with the power of the Spirit. But you would not see the flame on top of your own head. And such is our tendency—to think everyone but us is aflame. Actually, it's the goodness and grace of God that doesn't allow us to see our own flame . . .

> "Come and see the zeal I have for the Lord," boasted Israel's King Jehu. In reality, however, Jehu was a hypocrite—as evidenced by his statement two verses later that "Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much" (2 Kings 10:16, 18).

Unlike Jehu, Moses was a man of integrity, of humility. And it was a good thing there was a glow on his face, for he held the Law of the Lord in his hands. The children of Israel needed to hear the commands, the exhortations, the instructions of the Lord. But you know how kids are. They're not always

receptive to commandments, instructions, or exhortations. We all tend to be rebellious by nature.

Yet when Moses came down from the mountain and talked to the children of Israel, what could they say? After all, his face was glowing.

Mom and Dad, if your kids aren't being very receptive to your instructions, it might be because there's a glare instead of a glow on your face. Moses glowed—and it made the Word he shared acceptable, the things he said palatable.

Why did Moses glow? Having been in the presence of the Lord, he was simply reflecting the glory inherent in the Lord. In other words, just by hanging out with the Lord, Moses' face glowed. Spending time in the presence of the Lord will impact you in a very real and special way even today. But here's the problem: Moses' glow began to diminish, decrease, decline. It wasn't until he spent time with the Lord that he began to glow once again.

And that's what needs to happen in our lives. We need to realize that we need to be renewed and recharged constantly. Oh, we can do well for a while, but then our glow turns to a glower or a glare. And we find ourselves dull. But when we return to the presence of the Lord, we get recharged, refueled constantly and consistently through prayer, through worship, through His Word.

Sometimes we forget this and instead of seeking renewal from the Lord, we seek it from other people. In this, I am reminded of an account in Luke's Gospel . . .

> *And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, came behind him, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanched.*
>
> Luke 8:43, 44

She had been hemorrhaging for twelve years, going from clinic to clinic, spending everything she had to stop the blood from seeping from her body. According to the rabbis, her condition was the result of immorality. Consequently, she would be ostracized from her community, divorced from her husband, treated as a leper, unclean, a sinner. For twelve years, she had an issue bothering her greatly, hurting her deeply, draining her year after year.

How about you? Perhaps there's an issue with which you struggle, an issue causing pain deep within you, an issue constantly gnawing on you, nagging at you—a past hurt, a previous slight, a prior betrayal. You go to this person and that group trying to get help for the issue. But the more you try to get help, the more people pull away, feeling overwhelmed by your pain, your problem, your issue. Relationships are spent, friendships are spent, emotions are spent because of the ever-present issue that drains you.

Such was the case with the woman in Luke 8. Then her life changed. After twelve years of trying to get help from people, she finally heard about Someone who could deal with the issue of her situation. She heard about Jesus. And hearing that He was able to do what no other man ever could or would, she touched the border of His garment. And immediately, her issue was gone.

In Bible times, strings hanging from the hems of garments would be tied in certain knots that would identify lineage, family, vocation, heritage. That is why, in cutting the hem of Saul's robe in 1 Samuel 24, David was actually cutting off the symbol of his authority—an act of which David later repented.

Thus, in touching the hem of Jesus' garment, the woman in Luke 8 was actually submitting to His authority over her condition, her pain, her sadness, her issue. So, if you have an issue about the way you were brought up, about your ex-wife, former boss, or high school coach which causes your blood to boil, you can be set free right here, right now by simply touching the hem of Jesus' garment, by saying, "Lord, You are in authority and You are on the throne. You always have been and always will be. Therefore, nothing could have happened to me or come my way unless You allowed it. Therefore, I submit to your sovereignty. I'm not going to bleed on other people any longer. I won't camp on the issue of my lousy marriage, my deprived childhood, my financial setbacks another day. I'll submit it to You as I touch the hem of Your garment."

What garment? The garment for which the Roman soldiers rolled dice as Jesus hung on the Cross for me and for you (Matthew 27:35).

What will happen? Like Moses, you'll have a glow on your face and in your heart. You'll experience a newfound wholeness, healthiness, and beauty by spending time with Jesus. Don't bleed on others, gang. Instead, go to the One who shed His blood for you.

35 Exodus 35:1–3

And Moses gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together, and said unto them, These are the words which the LORD hath commanded, that ye should do them. Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the LORD: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death. Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day.

The penalty for violating the Sabbath command was death. And how true that is. Whenever I don't take advantage of the opportunity to be in the Lord's presence, to be refreshed and renewed, something within me dies.

Exodus 35:4–19

And Moses spake unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which the LORD commanded, saying, Take ye from among you an offering unto the LORD: whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, an offering of the LORD; gold, and silver, and brass, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair, and rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins, and shittim wood, and oil for the light, and spices for anointing oil, and for the sweet incense, and onyx stones, and stones to be set for the ephod, and for the breastplate. And every wise hearted among you shall come, and make all that the LORD hath commanded; the tabernacle, his tent, and his covering, his taches, and his boards, his bars, his pillars, and his sockets, the ark, and the staves thereof, with the mercy seat, and the vail of the covering, The table, and his staves, and all his vessels, and the shewbread, the candlestick also for the light, and his furniture, and his lamps, with the oil for the light, and the incense altar, and his staves, and the anointing oil, and the sweet incense, and the hanging for the door at the entering in of the tabernacle, the altar of burnt offering, with his brasen grate, his staves, and all his vessels, the laver and his foot, the hangings of the court, his pillars, and their sockets, and the hanging for the door of the court, the

pins of the tabernacle, and the pins of the court, and their cords, the cloths of service, to do service in the holy place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, to minister in the priest's office.

"Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring an offering to the Lord." I like that. I sometimes hear preachers say, "Give until it hurts"—but that's not the Lord. If it hurts to give, don't do it because Paul tells us the Lord loves a *cheerful,* or literally a *hilarious* giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).

As Jesus sat against the wall in the temple, we are told He watched not what people gave, but *how* they gave (Mark 12:41). The Lord loves a cheerful giver because when I give cheerfully, I am freed from my fleshly, selfish, small tendencies and I become more like Him in the process. That is why Moses asked only for those with *willing* hearts to give.

How much would those with willing hearts give? By today's standards, approximately one billion dollars worth of gold and silver alone. That's a big offering!

Exodus 35:20
And all the congregation of the children of Israel departed from the presence of Moses.

I like this! They heard the invitation; they had a project before them; and they departed. In other words, Moses didn't pass the basket right then. He didn't pressure the people. He didn't try to manipulate the situation. He simply said, "Go home and think about this."

Exodus 35:21–26
And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the LORD's offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation, and for all his service, and for the holy garments. And they came, both men and women, as many as were willing hearted, and brought bracelets, and earrings, and rings, and tablets, all jewels of gold: and every man that offered offered an offering of gold unto the LORD. And every man, with whom was found blue, and purple, and

scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair, and red skins of rams, and badgers' skins, brought them. Every one that did offer an offering of silver and brass brought the LORD's offering: and every man, with whom was found shittim wood for any work of the service, brought it. And all the women that were wise hearted did spin with their hands, and brought that which they had spun, both of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, and of fine linen. And all the women whose heart stirred them up in wisdom spun goats' hair.

Not only goods, but talents were offered to the Lord.

Exodus 35:27–29
And the rulers brought onyx stones, and stones to be set, for the ephod, and for the breastplate; and spice, and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the sweet incense. The children of Israel brought a willing offering unto the LORD, every man and woman, whose heart made them willing to bring for all manner of work, which the LORD had commanded to be made by the hand of Moses.

The leaders didn't merely say, "I'm glad the people are giving." No, the leaders gave the most. And that's the way it ought to be. Any elder, deacon, preacher, or pastor should be one who leads the way when it comes to giving.

Exodus 35:30–33
And Moses said unto the children of Israel, See, the LORD hath called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and he hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship; and to devise curious works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in the cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of wood, to make any manner of cunning work.

Bezaleel was given wisdom, anointed, and gifted by the Holy Ghost to do practical construction. Maybe the Spirit has done the same in you. Because

every good and perfect gift comes from above (James 1:17), if you can fix an engine or construct a building, yours is a good and perfect gift indeed.

Exodus 35:34, 35
And he hath put in his heart that he may teach, both he, and Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. Them hath he filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work.

Bezaleel and his coworker Aholiab were not only to do the work themselves, but to teach others as well. Paul was one who worked with his hands as a tentmaker, even as he taught others the Word (Acts 18:3). Sod, Bezaleel and Aholiab were able to work and to teach—an unbeatable combination.



36–40

Exodus 36:1
Then wrought Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man, in whom the LORD put wisdom and understanding to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, according to all that the LORD had commanded.

Given both a calling and an anointing, Bezaleel and Aholiab put their hands to the plow and began working.

Exodus 36:2
And Moses called Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man, in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it:

Bezaleel and Aholiab were given ability to do the work that needed to be done practically. But we also read that they came. If you want your life to be

impacting, the key is to have both ability and availability. There are people who have great abilities, but they're never available. When there is work to do, when opportunities open, when needs are presented, they're just not around. Bezaleel and Aholiab go down in history as models, their names recorded for eternity, as men who used the practical gifts God had given them for His glory. How we need men who will say, "I can't preach or sing, but I can fix an engine. I can't evangelize, but I can pour cement." We need you! Make yourself available—and your name will be added to the roster of Bezaleel and Aholiab.

Exodus 36:3–7
And they received of Moses all the offering, which the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of the sanctuary, to make it withal. And they brought yet unto him free offerings every morning. And all the wise men, that wrought all the work of the sanctuary, came every man from his work which they made; and they spake unto Moses, saying, The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which the LORD commanded to make. And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much.

So much did the people bring that Moses finally had to say, "We have too much!"

Amazing.

Exodus 36:8
And every wise hearted man among them that wrought the work of the tabernacle made ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet: with cherubims of cunning work made he them.

And so began the construction of the tabernacle which would take approximately six months (40:2) as chronicled in the remaining four chapters.

In verses 33 and 34 of chapter 40, we read the following . . .

Exodus 40:33, 34
And he reared up the court round about the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the hanging of the court gate. So Moses finished the work. Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

The pathways of Bible studies, conferences, and camps are strewn with the good intentions of people who began to do something but never finished. How I pray we would be those who say, "Lord, by Your grace, help me to finish what You've called and gifted me to do"—for it was only after Moses *finished* the work that the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

FINISHING THE WORK
A Topical Study of
EXODUS 40:33

The project was immense, but Moses finished the work. And because of this, the writer to the Book of Hebrews declares Moses was faithful in all his house (Hebrews 3:5). In other words, he was faithful in all that he did.

Even though it took him one hundred years, Noah was another one who finished the work—and I'm so glad he did, for if he hadn't we'd be all wet! Nehemiah was another Old Testament hero who was faithful to finish the task to which God had called him. Following the Babylonian captivity, Nehemiah was the man sent by God back to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. But when he arrived, he found no shortage of opposition . . .

> "Even if you do finish the wall," mocked two men named Tobiah and Sanballat, "if a fox walks along the top of it, the whole thing will topple," (Nehemiah 4:3).
>
> In addition, Nehemiah's own helpers, the tribe of Judah, came to him and said, "This job is too difficult." But the Word says Nehemiah set his mind to the work and continued on (Nehemiah 4:6).
>
> Realizing the wall was indeed going up, Tobiah and Sanballat changed their tactic and sent messengers to Nehemiah, saying, "Meet us in the valley of the plain of Ono and let us talk together."
>
> "I'll not leave the task the Lord has called me to complete," answered Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:3).
>
> A short time later, a man in the temple sent a message to Nehemiah, saying, "Come into the temple and let us seek God together."
>
> But perceiving something was wrong, Nehemiah said, "I'm not going to the temple even though it's seemingly spiritual because the Lord has set before me a task and I will not leave" (Nehemiah 6:11).

Within fifty-two days, the wall was completed because God honored Nehemiah's tenacity and anointed his perseverance.

Moses finished the work. Noah finished the work. Nehemiah finished the work. And in his last letter penned before his pending execution, the apostle Paul said, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course" (2 Timothy 4:7).

But no one had a greater task, no one a grander finish than the One who would say, "Father, I have glorified Thee and finished the Work Thou hast given Me to do" (John 17:4). Oh, there were still thousands who needed to be healed, thousands who needed to be taught, thousands who needed deliverance from demons. There was still much to be done. But Jesus always ministered according to the direction of His Father rather than according to the needs of those around Him.

That is why when His mother hinted that He should do something miraculous at the wedding in Cana, and when His brothers told Him He should go to the feast in Jerusalem, He was able to say, "Mine hour is not yet come," with confidence and serenity.

"Come quickly," said Mary and Martha. "The one whom Thou lovest is sick." Jesus didn't come immediately. Their brother died. And the Father worked a miracle when He resurrected Lazarus from the dead (John 11). Jesus always moved in obedience to the Father's directing. And thus, although there was much to be done in the eyes of men, He was able to say He had finished the work His Father had given Him to do.

How about you? Do you know the work God is calling you to do? If not, here are three principles for you to consider . . .

Receive Direction from God Daily

In the first chapter of Marks' Gospel, we see Jesus ministering all day long. He taught the Word, healed the sick, delivered the oppressed—so much so that the whole city came and gathered outside the door where He was preaching. Yet Mark records that the next morning, a great while before the sun rose, He went into a solitary place and prayed. If there was ever a time Jesus would have been justified in sleeping in, that would have been the day. But the One who was able to say, "I have finished the work Thou hast called Me to do," was One who received daily instruction from His Father.

This is such an important, foundational principle—for if we don't capture the day in the morning, we'll be held captive by the day as it unfolds. We'll find ourselves influenced by events, confused by opportunities, pressured by demands. Therefore, I believe the Lord would have us, morning by morning with pencil and paper in hand, say, "Father, what do *You* want me to do today?"

And His answer might be something as simple as, "Write a letter to your mother." Or the task might be something as complicated as purchasing a Greek Lexicon in preparation for further ministry. The Lord will lay on your heart specific things He wants you to accomplish. And at the end of the day, you will know if you finished the work. If this step is omitted, you'll wander and squander your years away, always under the deluded deception that next year you'll get it together, that next year your life will count, that next year you'll accomplish something of eternal value. But next year will never come.

Allow Reflection upon God Weekly

Our Maker and Master, Designer, and Creator said we should have a day of Sabbath, a day of reflection, a day of meditation. It doesn't matter which day it is, but, as His created beings, we need to follow His instructions.

"Man wasn't made for the Sabbath," Jesus said, "but the Sabbath for man" (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath is for man's benefit, for our well-being. If you set apart one day to concentrate on the things of God, to meditate on the Word of God, to reflect on where you've been that week and where you're going the next, you will find your other six days much more productive than if you sought to squeeze in some extra hours of work. The Sabbath provides perfect opportunity to slow down physically, to tune in spiritually, to be refreshed mentally.

Seek Specific Vision from God Periodically

Moses was able to finish the work of the tabernacle because he knew precisely how to build it. How did he know? As he spent forty days on Mt. Sinai in fasting and prayer, God laid out a perfect pattern for him to follow.

"I wish God would give me a blueprint," we say. "If He would give a plan to me, I would follow it." But do we take forty days to seek Him for it? How about four days—or even four hours? Paul spent three years in the deserts of Arabia getting the divine pattern for His life. Jesus spent thirty years tuned in to the Father before He ministered publicly for three years. So, too, we need times where we seek God fervently and expectantly.

For an example of how this happens, turn to the Book of Habakkuk . . .

Habakkuk's name means "Wrestler"—an appropriate name for this one who wrestled with why God wasn't doing more to combat the evil in the world around him. And in his life, we see three characteristics of those who seriously seek specific vision from God.

> *I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved. And the* LORD *answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.*
>
> Habakkuk 2:1, 2

The first characteristic is *determination.* Habakkuk didn't say, "I should stand upon my watch," or, "I think I'll stand upon my watch," but, "I *will* stand upon my watch."

"You will find Me when you search for Me with all your heart," God declared (Jeremiah 29:13). As it did for Habakkuk, there must come a point in our lives when we are *determined* to seek the Lord if we truly expect to hear from Him.

Secondly, we see the *importance of isolation.* I have found that when I'm in desperate need of vision and direction, I must get away from the telephone, radio, television, away from the clamor and clutter of the world. Wherever your "high tower" might be, find a place where you won't be distracted by the

needs that incessantly pull at you if you want to hear what it is God would have you do.

Finally, we see Habakkuk's *expectation.* He didn't say, "I'll watch to see *if* God will speak to me," but, "I'll watch to see what God *will* say to me."

"He that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him," declares the writer of the Book of Hebrews (11:6). James echoes this when he writes,

> *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.*
>
> James 1:5–7

If I approach God but don't expect to receive from Him, I won't.

Determination, isolation, expectation—as these three components become part of my life, I'll find direction. And if I've dropped the ball, missed opportunities, failed miserably?

I simply go to the Cross, where the One who finished the Work died to cleanse me completely—and I begin again.

Oh, that we might be a people who find freedom in the Finished Work of the Cross, that we might finish the work God has called us to do, that we might hear Him say, "Well *done,* good and faithful servants."

In Jesus' name.



LEVITICUS

Background to Leviticus

If the Book of Genesis shows us depravity and condemnation, and the Book of Exodus illustrates redemption and salvation, then surely the book before us speaks of separation and consecration. *Leviticus* literally means "pertaining to the Levites." Therefore, the Book of Leviticus was a handbook for the tribe of Levi, those who were to serve the Lord in the tabernacle and later in the temple.

Because the people of God were to be holy, we'll see the word "holy" or "holiness" over eighty times in the Book of Leviticus. And because without blood, there can be no holiness, no remission of sin (Hebrews 9:22), we'll see the word "blood" over eighty-eight times. That is why this book is offensive to some. But it ought not be, for it speaks of the solution to the death of happiness, the death of joy, the death of a relationship with God sin brings to you and me. You see, not only does Leviticus speak of the severity of sin, but of the grace of God. That is why over and over again, we'll come across the phrase, "I will forgive your sin and iniquity." Forgiveness is a recurring theme in the Book of Leviticus. But it comes at a price.

Thirdly, and most importantly, in addition to the severity of sin and the grace of God, the Book of Leviticus portrays the sacrifice of Christ. Every offering and sacrifice give us understanding of the unspeakable price the Lamb of God paid that we might be forgiven, consecrated, separated.

The book before us instructs us concerning the sacrifices *to* the Lord and the festivals *of* the Lord. Through the sacrifices, we see the *way* to God; through the festivals we see our *walk* with God. And thus, it is a glorious book not only for the sons of Levi—but for each of us, the sons of God.



LEVITICUS

Leviticus 1:1, 2
And the LORD called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, if any man of you bring an offering unto the LORD, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock.

Chapter 1 opens with the first of five offerings—in each of which we will see a purpose, procedure, picture, price, and point . . .

Leviticus 1:3
If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD.

The purpose of the first offering—the burnt offering—was to consecrate or dedicate one's self. It was a voluntary offering, and had to be so, for true dedication can only be made from a heart filled with desire, true consecration comes not from responsibility, but from response.

Leviticus 1:4
And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.

The procedure of the burnt offering was one of consecration through identification . . .



***For topical study of Leviticus 1:1–4 entitled "A Hands-On Experience," turn to page* 366.**

Leviticus 1:5

And he shall kill the bullock before the LORD: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

The picture of Jesus as seen through the burnt offering is of tremendous significance. Just as the burnt offering was offered voluntarily, Jesus laid down His life willingly. When He prayed "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me," He used a phrase translated into Greek as a first class conditional clause. This means it was indeed possible that He could bypass the cup of suffering and death. "*Nevertheless,*" He prayed, "not My will but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42). Had Jesus demanded to be released from suffering, He would not have had to go to Calvary—but we would be doomed and damned eternally.

Leviticus 1:6, 7
And he shall flay the burnt offering, and cut it into his pieces. And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire:

Wood was laid on the fire of the altar in preparation for the sacrifice—just as a wooden cross was prepared for Jesus upon which He would absorb the fire of God's righteous wrath on our behalf.

Leviticus 1:8 (a)
And the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head . . .

The head speaks of the mind. And Jesus' mind was perfect. "Should we pay taxes to Rome?" His enemies asked in a futile attempt to entangle Him in political controversy. A "yes" answer would incense the Jews who abhorred the Roman government. A "no" answer would provide the Romans grounds to arrest Him for anarchy.

"Whose image is on the coin?" Jesus asked in response. "Give to Caesar that which belongs to Caesar, and to God that which belongs to God." In other words, "The coin bears Caesar's image. Therefore, give the coin to

Caesar. But man bears God's image. Therefore, give your life to God" (see Matthew 22:21).

Leviticus 1:8 (b)
. . . and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar:

Fat speaks of excess. Even the perjured testimony of hired witnesses could not blind Pilate to the fact that there was no excess, no fault in Jesus (Luke 23:4). And even the fire of ambition could not silence Judas' admission that he had indeed betrayed innocent, flawless blood (Matthew 27:3, 4).

Leviticus 1:9 (a)
But his inwards . . .

The "inwards" speak of inward purity. When were the inwards of Jesus revealed? When, on the Mount of Transfiguration, the pure brilliance of His glory shone through His outward humanity (Matthew 17:2).

Leviticus 1:9 (b)
. . . and his legs shall he wash in water . . .

The legs speak of one's walk, of one's lifestyle. No wonder, then, that it was as Jesus walked that John said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Leviticus 1:9 (c)
. . . and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.

"What must I do to obtain eternal life?" the rich young ruler asked. If there are three qualities the world seeks, they are riches, youth, and power. This man had all three—but inwardly he knew he was lacking.

"Keep the commandments," Jesus answered.

"I have," he replied.

"This one thing you lack," Jesus said—which, in itself, is further proof of the young ruler's dedication, for if the Lord were speaking to me, He would surely say there are countless things I lack. "Go and sell your goods and come and follow Me."

Knowing he was dominated by money, Jesus put His finger on the rich young ruler's singular point of weakness. Hearing this, the young man walked away from Jesus, unwilling to consecrate his entire being (Matthew 19:22).

The burnt offering speaks of giving *all* that we are to the Lord—and he who does will never be disappointed because man simply cannot out give God.

Leviticus 1:10
And if his offering be of the flocks, namely, of the sheep, or of the goats, for a burnt sacrifice; he shall bring it a male without blemish.

The price of the offering differed according to one's possessions—yet their illustration was singular: The ox spoke of Jesus Christ the Strong One able to bear our burdens, *to pull us out* of sin. The lamb portrayed Jesus as the Perfect One who came *to take away* our sin. The goat represented Jesus as the Rejected One who, for us, *became* sin.

Leviticus 1:11–13
And he shall kill it on the side of the altar northward before the LORD: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall sprinkle his blood round about upon the altar. And he shall cut it into his pieces, with his head and his fat: and the priest shall lay them in order on the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar: But he shall wash the inwards and the legs with water: and the priest shall bring it all, and burn it upon the altar: it is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.

The lamb or goat was to be killed on the altar northward, which speaks of the ultimate altar—the Cross of Calvary—located north of the city of Jerusalem.

Leviticus 1:14
And if the burnt sacrifice for his offering to the LORD be of fowls, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves, or of young pigeons.

In the ox, we see Jesus as the Burden-Bearer. In the lamb, we see Him as the One who takes away our sin. In the goat, we see Him rejected in our place. And in the birds, we see Him as One who left His home in heaven to lodge in a tree called Calvary in order that we might one day soar with Him in the heavenlies.

Leviticus 1:15
And the priest shall bring it unto the altar, and wring off his head, and burn it on the altar; and the blood thereof shall be wrung out at the side of the altar:

When the bird was brought to the altar, the priest was to wring off its head. Ringing Jesus' head was a crown of thorns piercing His skull. And as it did, I was on His mind. So were you.

Leviticus 1:16, 17 (a)
And he shall pluck away his crop with his feathers, and cast it beside the altar on the east part, by the place of the ashes: And he shall cleave it with the wings thereof, but shall not divide it asunder: and the priest shall burn it upon the altar, upon the wood that is upon the fire:

Jesus felt the pain and humiliation as His beard was plucked. And the arms outstretched on the Cross were the same wings under which He had longed to gather the entire city of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37).

Leviticus 1:17 (b)
. . . it is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.

Jesus was completely consumed as He hung on the wood of the Cross, as He felt the fire of God's holy, righteous indignation. That is why when He was baptized at the age of thirty, the Father said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Baptism being a picture of death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus knew what He was doing. He had come to die. As the prophet declared, He had set His face like flint towards Jerusalem on what would be a three-year journey to Calvary. And He did so voluntarily. Therefore, as I look at Jesus and see Him as the Ox, the Lamb, the Goat, the Dove who gave Himself willingly for me, I cannot help but join Paul in concluding that it is only reasonable that I present myself to Him (Romans 12:1, 2).

A HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

A Topical Study of
LEVITICUS 1:1–4

Composed of twenty muscles, fifteen tendons, and twenty-seven bones, the human hand is a most amazing instrument—at one moment able to precisely place a single thread through the eye of a needle, the next, able to form a fist to use as a powerful weapon. Yet the Word teaches that, in addition to its important role in our physical well-being, the hand is an instrument of spiritual importance . . .

Expression

In the first minute of the upcoming San Francisco/Miami game, without a doubt Forty-Niner Quarterback, Joe Montana will drop back seven yards into a perfectly formed pocket and fire an accurate strike to Dwight Clark for a huge gainer—the beginning of what will undoubtedly be a tremendous Forty-Niner victory over the Miami Dolphins. And when Joe completes that first pass, the fans will voice their expression of approval with hands raised in the air and thunderous applause.

If Joe Montana is worthy of applause, certainly our Lord Jesus is imminently more so. Therefore, Psalm 47 instructs all people to clap their hands. The clapping of hands in Scripture is more than a spiritual exercise we go through to get things warmed up. Rather, it is a way the Lord has chosen by which we can show appreciation for Him.

Yet not only is clapping a form of approval—it is also a form of warfare . . .

> *And the priest shall bring it unto the altar, and wring off his head, and burn it on the altar; and the blood thereof shall be wrung out at the side of the altar:*
>
> Leviticus 1:15

Here we see the enemies of the people of Jerusalem rebuking them by gnashing their teeth, by hissing, by clapping the hands. The clapping of hands in confrontation is also seen in Job 23, Ezekiel 25, and Nahum 3. I don't mean to be dogmatic, but during those times when it seems all the hordes of hell have gathered around me to hurl depression, discouragement, or temptation at me, I have found that as I use the name of Jesus Christ and rebuke them with the clapping of hands, something begins to happen miraculously. Years ago, the Lord gave me a practical illustration of why this might be so . . .

> Christy, my three-year-old was in one of her giggly moods. Working on a school project at the kitchen table, Peter-John, my seven-year-old was in a sober mood. When Christy began to tickle him, he

> endured it for a while. But when she continued plaguing and oppressing him, I said, "Christy, leave Peter-John alone." But when she was unable to do so, I finally clapped my hands once and said, "Christy, stop." And she immediately returned to her side of the table.

If you're a parent, you know the power of the clap! And it seems as though spiritually, the same thing is true. When we're being plagued and harassed by the enemy, there's something that happens mystically and spiritually when we use the name of Jesus and clap. Try it and see if you don't experience freedom as you begin to use this form of confrontation.

In addition to using our hands to express appreciation and confrontation, we also use them to express affection. When we lift our hands to the Lord, we are, in a sense reaching out to His hand. That is why Jeremiah calls us to lift up our hearts with our hands unto the heavens (Lamentations 3). When your heart is defeated or discouraged, heavy or hardened, that is the very time you need to lift your hands in an act of worship, for in doing so you actually lift up your emotions, your spirit, and your heart with your hands into the heavens.

In lifting our hands, we also express surrender—surrendering all that we are to God for Him to use as He chooses.

Impartation

Throughout Scripture, we see examples of the blessing and power of God flowing through the hands of His people . . .

- In Exodus 17, it was when Moses lifted his hands that the army of Israel prevailed.
- In Leviticus 9, it was through Moses' lifted hands that God blessed the people.
- In Mark 16, Jesus said it was as hands were laid on the sick that they would recover.
- In Acts 6, it was when hands were laid upon the deacons that they were empowered for service.
- In Acts 8, it was as Peter and John laid hands on the Samaritan believers that they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

No wonder Paul said he would that men everywhere would lift up holy hands in prayer (1 Timothy 2:8)—for truly there is power imparted through the lifting up of hands.

Identification

In the text before us, we see a man coming to the courtyard of the tabernacle. He stands before the priest and next to him is his bull or lamb—an innocent, docile, harmless animal. The man would then lay his hand—the Hebrew language implies that he would press it—upon the animal's head. Then he would watch the priest slit the animal's throat, the animal slumping to the ground. If the man had any kind of compassion, he would be moved as he realized that, in a very real sense, he was transferring his sin to the animal, and that the animal was literally dying in his place.

> Short of men in his campaign through Europe, Napoleon began to draft heavily in France. However, when approached, one man answered, "I can't go. My father is very ill and my mother cannot manage the farm alone." So he was allowed to pay someone else to go in his place—a common practice of the time. The first day the substitute reported for duty, he was killed in battle and subsequently buried. A few months later, there was a knock on the door of the man who had hired the substitute. Once again, it was a recruiting officer who said, "Your number is up."
>
> "You can't take me," said the young man. "I'm already dead and buried."
>
> Baffled, the officer hauled him off to a military tribunal. The tribunal heard the case and sent it all the way to Napoleon himself, who, when he heard about the situation, agreed with the would-be soldier and said, "You're right. You're already dead. Go home."

The man was free because someone died in his place. I, too, I am free because the Lamb of God was butchered in my place. It is my sin He bore—the sin of being short with my kids today, the sin of being annoyed with the driver in front of me yesterday, the sin of saying things which shouldn't be said, the sin of thinking things that shouldn't be thought, the sin of doing things which shouldn't be done. My sin was transferred to Jesus—and He died in my place.

Suppose the man came with his bull to the tabernacle, but when the priest told him to put his hand upon the bull, the man said, "Let me teach you the significance of this particular sacrifice."

"I care not how knowledgeable you are theologically or how certain you are doctrinally," the priest would answer. "Put your hand on the bull and press in, for if you don't become involved, the sacrifice will be to no avail."

Many Christians have no shortage of understanding and theological insights about the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ. They have the teaching down, but there's no touching. That is why there will be those who say, "Lord, my theology is impeccable. I can explain to You the whole plan of salvation," only to hear Him say, "Depart from Me. I never knew you. Your teaching was correct, but your touching was nonexistent. You were not touching Me, nor were you touched by Me. Your heart was calloused and cold. Even when the gospel was preached, you slumbered. When the Cross was considered, your mind wandered. No longer were you touched by the sacrifice. No longer did you press in."

There are those who never weep, whose heart is never broken, whose sins are never confessed, who never press in and touch. "I don't delight in burnt offerings, the Lord says. "A broken and contrite spirit is what is acceptable to Me" (see Psalm 51:17).

David was an adulterer, a murderer, and a liar. But after spending one year refusing to acknowledge his sin, David fell down in humility and brokenness. David's was a heart of tenderness, a heart that laid its hand on the sacrifice. No wonder he could say, "Happy is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity" (Psalm 32).

Press in to the Sacrifice offered on your behalf, dear saint.

How?

The best place I know is at the Lord's Table. Confess your sins and transfer them to the Son, saying, "Father, I realize it was my sin that sent Jesus to the Cross."

Your hands can be used for any number of activities—but it is at the Lord's Table, as you use them to hold the broken body and the shed blood of the Lamb of God, that they reach their highest purpose.

2 The burnt offering of chapter 1 spoke of Christ's total dedication. The meal offering here in chapter 2 speaks of Christ's absolute perfection. The burnt offering was for the consecration of self. As we will see, the meal offering was for the consecration of service.

Leviticus 2:1 (a)
And when any will offer a meat offering unto the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour . . .

In King James' day, meat referred to grain. Thus, this offering is actually a meal offering. Notice it was to be of fine, or sifted, flour—for after Jesus offered His life symbolically in the water of baptism, He was led to the wilderness, where He was tempted—sifted—for forty days, emerging as the perfect meal Offering.

Leviticus 2:1 (b)
. . . and he shall pour oil upon it . . .

Oil in Scripture is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Any attempt I make to serve God in my own energy is doomed to fail. Therefore, everything I offer to God must be anointed with the oil of the Holy Ghost.

Leviticus 2:1 (c)
. . . and put frankincense thereon:

Incense speaks of prayer.

"Without Me," Jesus said, "you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

"You have not because you ask not," James tells us (4:2).

Oh, that we might be like Epaphras—one who "laboured fervently" in prayer (Colossians 4:12)—for prayer is an essential ingredient in an acceptable meal offering to the Lord.

Leviticus 2:2

And he shall bring it to Aaron's sons the priests: and he shall take thereout his handful of the flour thereof, and of the oil thereof, with all the frankincense thereof; and the priest shall burn the memorial of it upon the altar, to be an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD:

The meal offering was to be roasted with fire. So, if you want to be a servant of God, to be used by God, you can be sure you will go through fire. "Think it not strange," Peter warned, "concerning the fiery trials which beset you" (1 Peter 4:12). The Lord will take you through difficulty and trials because a man cannot relate to others until he has experienced the baptism of fire in his own life (2 Corinthians 1:4). Because the people who are most effective in ministering to us are those who have experienced the very trials we face, I believe God walks His most trusted servants through the fire of difficulty, the flames of tragedy.

Leviticus 2:3
And the remnant of the meat offering shall be Aaron's and his sons': it is a thing most holy of the offerings of the LORD made by fire.

A handful of the meal offering was burnt upon the altar, the rest given to the priests. Yet even though the priests benefited directly, the sacrifice was nonetheless credited to the eternal account of the one who brought the offering, for it was indeed the Lord's. And the same is true of any offering we give today—for while the "priest and his sons" may be the visible beneficiaries, the Lord is the ultimate Receiver and will credit and bless accordingly.

Leviticus 2:4–6
And if thou bring an oblation of a meat offering baken in the oven, it shall be unleavened cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, or unleavened wafers anointed with oil. And if thy oblation be a meat offering baken in a pan, it shall be of fine flour unleavened, mingled with oil. Thou shalt part it in pieces, and pour oil thereon: it is a meat offering.

The cakes were to be mingled with oil, the wafers to be anointed with oil. Oil being a type of the Spirit, conceived by the Spirit, Jesus was "mingled with oil" at the moment of conception (Matthew 1:20). And He was anointed with oil when the Spirit came upon Him, empowering Him for service following His baptism (Matthew 3:16). We are mingled with oil when we are born again (John 14:17). We are anointed with oil when we come to the point where we say, "I want to be used by You, Lord" and the Spirit comes upon us, empowering us for service (Acts 1:5).

Leviticus 2:7–10
And if thy oblation be a meat offering baken in the fryingpan, it shall be made of fine flour with oil. And thou shalt bring the meat offering that is made of these things unto the LORD: and when it is presented unto the priest, he shall bring it unto the altar. And the priest shall take from the meat offering a memorial thereof, and shall burn it upon the altar: it is an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. And that which is left of the meat offering shall be Aaron's and his sons': it is a thing most holy of the offerings of the LORD made by fire.

As was the case with the burnt offering, the price of the meal offering varied according to possession. If a person had an oven, his meal was to be baked. If he had a covered pan, it was to be baked in the pan. If all he had was a frying pan, it was to be fried. Again, this tells us we are accountable to God according to how He has blessed us. God will use whatever you have—be it an oven, a covered dish, or a simple frying pan. When Jesus taught the parable of the talents, the indictment was not given to the man with ten talents or even five—but with the man who buried his single talent (Matthew 25:28–30). If you only have one talent, if you possess nothing more than a frying pan, offer that one talent as a meal offering to God—and watch Him be glorified through it.

Leviticus 2:11 (a)
No meat offering, which ye shall bring unto the LORD, shall be made with leaven . . .

Leaven is a picture of sin. Meal offerings were not to contain leaven. So we must beware of using the ways of the world to expand the ministry to which we're called.

Leviticus 2:11 (b)
. . . for ye shall burn no leaven, nor any honey, in any offering of the LORD made by fire.

Because honey breaks down when the temperature rises, the Lord wanted nothing to do with that which would break down under pressure, which would lose its sweetness in the fire. Many people have learned how to be sweet—but the problem is, when the temperature goes up, they break down. Therefore, it's not about becoming sweeter people by our own will power. It's about the work of the Holy Spirit producing in us the sweet fruit of love —joy and peace, longsuffering and gentleness, faith, meekness, and self-control which will remain no matter how high the mercury rises.

Leviticus 2:12, 13
As for the oblation of the firstfruits, ye shall offer them unto the LORD: but they shall not be burnt on the altar for a sweet savour. And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt.

Why was salt to be offered with the meal offering? Because salt speaks of grace (Colossians 4:6). Thus, in this picture of Christ, the perfect One, it is only fitting that salt be incorporated, for there is none more gracious than Him (Luke 4:22).

Leviticus 2:14
And if thou offer a meat offering of thy firstfruits unto the LORD, thou shalt offer for the meat offering of thy firstfruits green ears of corn dried by the fire, even corn beaten out of full ears.

If you jump ahead 1,500 years, you will see Jesus, the perfect One of whom this meal offering speaks, allowing His disciples to partake of the corn in the field, even while He—the Corn which would be beaten for their sins and ours—was in their midst (Matthew 12:1).

Leviticus 2:15, 16
And thou shalt put oil upon it, and lay frankincense thereon: it is a meat offering. And the priest shall burn the memorial of it, part of the beaten corn thereof, and part of the oil thereof, with all the frankincense thereof: it is an offering made by fire unto the LORD.

Why did God choose burnt offerings and meal offerings to illustrate His Son? What would you have chosen? Sports? Technology? Anything we choose would not be understood by other cultures or by those living in other times in history. Like the tabernacle itself, every culture at any time in history can relate to barbequed beef and lamb, cakes and bread, roasted ears of corn. God chose to use things common not just to Americans in the twenty-first century, but to everyone around the globe throughout history. Such is the genius of our Father.



3 If the burnt offering spoke of Christ's total dedication and the meal offering of His absolute perfection, the peace offering before us speaks of Christ our Peace and Satisfaction . . .

Leviticus 3:1, 2
And if his oblation be a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offer it of the herd; whether it be a male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the LORD. And he shall lay his hand upon the head of his offering, and kill it at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and Aaron's sons the priests shall sprinkle the blood upon the altar round about.

Just as the man bringing the burnt offering was to lay his hand upon the head of the animal as a sign of identification, so the one bringing an animal as a peace offering was to personally claim the peace and satisfaction only God can bring—ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, the One who would Himself be our peace (Ephesians 2:14).

Leviticus 3:3–15
And he shall offer of the sacrifice of the peace offering an offering made by fire unto the LORD; the fat that covereth the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards, and the two kidneys, and the fat that is on them, which is by the flanks, and the caul above the liver, with the kidneys, it shall he take away. And Aaron's sons shall burn it on the altar upon the burnt sacrifice, which is upon the wood that is on the fire: it is an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. And if his offering for a sacrifice of peace offering unto the LORD be of the flock; male or female, he shall offer it without blemish. If he offer a lamb for his offering, then shall he offer it before the LORD. And he shall lay his hand upon the head of his offering, and kill it before the tabernacle of the congregation: and Aaron's sons shall sprinkle the blood thereof round about upon the altar. And he shall offer of the sacrifice of the peace offering an offering made by fire unto the LORD; the fat thereof, and the whole rump, it shall he take off hard by the backbone; and the fat that covereth the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards, and the two kidneys, and the fat that is upon them, which is by the flanks, and the caul above the liver, with the kidneys, it shall he take away. And the priest shall burn it upon the altar: it is the food of the offering made by fire unto the LORD. And if his offering be a goat, then he shall offer it before the LORD. And he shall lay his hand upon the head of it, and kill it before the tabernacle of the congregation: and the sons of Aaron shall sprinkle the blood thereof upon the altar round about. And he shall offer thereof his offering, even an offering made by fire unto the LORD; the fat that covereth the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards, and the two kidneys, and the fat that is upon them, which is by the

flanks, and the caul above the liver, with the kidneys, it shall he take away.

As we will see in chapter 7, the peace offering was the one offering in which three parties partook: the man who brought the offering, the priest, and the Lord Himself. Thus, the peace offering uniquely speaks of fellowship, and relationship.

Again, I believe this is highly emblematic of Communion, for at the Lord's Table, we experience a unique time of fellowship not only with the Lord, but with our "fellow priests" (1 Peter 2:9) as we eat of His body and drink of His blood. How I would encourage you to establish this practice in your life. You truly have peace with God through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). All that remains is for you to believe and receive it. The argument of the enemy will always be that God is upset with you, that you haven't been doing this or that, that you've missed the mark here or there. But it's all a lie. If you have received Jesus' gift of salvation, if you have embraced His finished work on the Cross on your behalf, you have peace with God tonight. The work is complete. Nothing more can be added to it. So celebrate what He's done.

Nothing smells better than a barbeque. As this peace offering was being prepared, surely the aroma would make everyone's mouth water. Spiritually, there is nothing more pleasant than the Lord's Table. And it makes my spiritual mouth water as I realize Jesus is my peace Offering.

Leviticus 3:16, 17
And the priest shall burn them upon the altar: it is the food of the offering made by fire for a sweet savour: all the fat is the LORD's. It shall be a perpetual statute for your generations throughout all your dwellings, that ye eat neither fat nor blood.

In ancient cultures, the fat was considered to be the best part of the animal. Therefore, think of all the people throughout the centuries who read this and thought that the Lord was taking the best part for Himself—when, in reality, He was keeping men from the one part of the animal that causes clogged arteries and heart attacks.

"Why must we have only one partner sexually?" we say.

"I'm saving you from heartbreak, disease, and misery," God answers.

"Why must I give the tithe to You?" we say.

"Because I'm protecting you from the disease of greediness," God answers.

"Why do You get the fat?" we ask.

"So you won't be," God says. "As time goes on—and ultimately when you get to heaven, you'll see everything I did was for your good."

Precious people, everything God does is based on love, for He is love itself. We might not understand this right now, but as time goes on, we'll see a reason for everything He did in our lives, the reason that He kept the fat for Himself.



4 While the burnt offering, the meal offering, and the peace offering were voluntary offerings, the sin offering here in chapter 4 and the trespass offering seen in chapter 5 were mandatory.

Leviticus 4:1–3

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which ought not to be done, and shall do against any of them: If the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people; then let him bring for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the LORD for a sin offering.

"If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar," John declares (1 John 1:10). We may indeed sin through ignorance. But we cannot claim ignorance of the sin nature inherent within each of us,

Leviticus 4:4–11

And he shall bring the bullock unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD; and shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head, and kill the bullock before the LORD. And the priest that is anointed shall take of the bullock's blood, and bring it to the tabernacle of the congregation: And the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the LORD, before the vail of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the LORD, which is in the tabernacle of the congregation: and shall pour all the blood of the bullock at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he shall take off from it all the fat of the bullock for the sin offering; the fat that covereth the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards, and the two kidneys, and the fat that is upon them, which is by the flanks, and the caul above the liver, with the kidneys, it shall he take away, as it was taken off from the bullock of the sacrifice of peace offerings: and the priest shall burn them upon the altar of the burnt offering. And the skin of the bullock, and all his flesh, with his head, and with his legs, and his inwards, and his dung,

Again, as with the burnt offering and peace offering, we see the laying of a hand upon the sacrifice as a sign of identification with the deadly consequence of sin. Sin kills physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually. The stench of death surrounds everything sin touches. Thus, it was literally our sin placed upon the Lamb of God that killed Him.

Leviticus 4:12

Even the whole bullock shall he carry forth without the camp unto a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn him on the wood with fire: where the ashes are poured out shall he be burnt.

The sin offering was to be taken out of the camp because when Christ, the One who knew no sin, was made sin for us, He was offered outside

Jerusalem on the hill of Calvary.

Leviticus 4:13, 14
And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done somewhat against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which should not be done, and are guilty; when the sin, which they have sinned against it, is known, then the congregation shall offer a young bullock for the sin, and bring him before the tabernacle of the congregation.

The price for the sin of a priest was the same as the price for an entire nation. And because we are a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), if we drop the ball, if we fail in our calling, the whole nation is affected. We might bemoan the condition of our country, but the reality is, Jesus told us we are the salt of the earth. And if the salt loses its savor, there will not be the seasoning, the preservation, the healing there ought to be (Matthew 5:13).

Leviticus 4:15–21
And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands upon the head of the head of the bullock before the LORD: and the bullock shall be killed before the LORD. And the priest that is anointed shall bring of the bullock's blood to the tabernacle of the congregation: And the priest shall dip his finger in some of the blood, and sprinkle it seven times before the LORD, even before the vail. And he shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar which is before the LORD, that is in the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall pour out all the blood at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he shall take all his fat from him, and burn it upon the altar. And he shall do with the bullock as he did with the bullock for a sin offering, so shall he do with this: and the priest shall make an atonement for them, and it shall be forgiven them. And he shall carry forth the bullock without the camp, and burn him as he burned the first bullock: it is a sin offering for the congregation.

When the congregation sinned, the elders were to lay hands on the sacrifice, thereby accepting responsibility for the sin of the entire congregation. No wonder James warns, "Let not many of you desire to be teachers, knowing you have the greater judgment" (3:1).

Leviticus 4:22–30

When a ruler hath sinned, and done somewhat through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD his God concerning things which should not be done, and is guilty; or if his sin, wherein he hath sinned, come to his knowledge; he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a male without blemish: And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the goat, and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the LORD: it is a sin offering. And the priest shall take of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, and put it upon the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and shall pour out his blood at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering. And he shall burn all his fat upon the altar, as the fat of the sacrifice of peace offerings: and the priest shall make an atonement for him as concerning his sin, and it shall be forgiven him. And if any one of the common people sin through ignorance, while he doeth somewhat against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which ought not to be done, and be guilty; Or if his sin, which he hath sinned, come to his knowledge: then he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he hath sinned. And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the sin offering, and slay the sin offering in the place of the burnt offering. And the priest shall take of the blood thereof with his finger, and put it upon the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and shall pour out all the blood thereof at the bottom of the altar.

Although a ruler was required to offer a male goat for his sin and a common person a female goat, the sacrifice of a priest was the same as the sacrifice of the entire nation. Such is the enormity of the responsibility for those in positions of leadership in God's economy.

Leviticus 4:31–35

And he shall take away all the fat thereof, as the fat is taken away from off the sacrifice of peace offerings; and the priest shall burn it upon the altar for a sweet savour unto the LORD; and the priest shall make an atonement for him, and it shall be forgiven him. And if he bring a lamb for a sin offering, he shall bring it a female without blemish. And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the sin offering, and slay it for a sin offering in the place where they kill the burnt offering. And the priest shall take of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, and put it upon the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and shall pour out all the blood thereof at the bottom of the altar: And he shall take away all the fat thereof, as the fat of the lamb is taken away from the sacrifice of the peace offerings; and the priest shall burn them upon the altar, according to the offerings made by fire unto the LORD: and the priest shall make an atonement for his sin that he hath committed, and it shall be forgiven him.

The purpose of the sin offering was atonement. The word translated "atonement" here in Leviticus is the Hebrew word *kaphar,* whose root meaning is "to cover." We see the first use of this word in Genesis 6:14, where Noah was instructed to pitch—or cover—the ark within and without with pitch. The Greek word translated "atonement" in the New Testament, however, is *katallage,* which means not "to cover," but "to reconcile."

> For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.
>
> Romans 5:10, 11

Oh, how great is our privilege as New Testament believers of having our sins not only covered, but *cleansed* by the blood of the Lamb (1 John 1:7).



5 The offering before us in chapter 5 is the trespass offering, different from the sin offering in that it deals with specific sins rather than the sin nature, with the acts of sin rather than the fact of sin. When Christ died, He died for the sin nature of mankind. But even as He hung on the Cross, He said, "Father forgive them," referring to the specific sin of those crucifying Him (Luke 23:34).

Leviticus 5:1
And if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of it; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity.

To "hear the voice of swearing" meaning to be under oath, the first sin on the list of trespasses is lying under oath, playing games with the truth.

Leviticus 5:2–4
Or if a soul touch any unclean thing, whether it be a carcase of an unclean beast, or a carcase of unclean cattle, or the carcase of unclean creeping things, and if it be hidden from him; he also shall be unclean, and guilty. Or if he touch the uncleanness of man, whatsoever uncleanness it be that a man shall be defiled withal, and it be hid from him; when he knoweth of it, then he shall be guilty. Or if a soul swear, pronouncing with his lips to do evil, or to do good, whatsoever it be that a man shall pronounce with an oath, and it be hid from him; when he knoweth of it, then he shall be guilty in one of these.

If I were God and were singling out trespasses, lying under oath or finding loopholes in contracts would not be at the top of my list. But because God sees differently than we do, it seems as though He is saying that compromise in our speech opens the door to a whole series of problems in our lives.

Leviticus 5:5
And it shall be, when he shall be guilty in one of these things, that he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing:

Because God's demand for forgiveness was met fully and completely when Jesus died for our sins, confession is not for God's sake but for ours—that we might be free from the burden of guilt and condemnation which would otherwise plague us.



***For topical study of Leviticus 5:1–5 entitled "True Confession," turn to page* 375.**

Leviticus 5:6–10
And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the LORD for his sin which he hath sinned, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats, for a sin offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sin. And if he be not able to bring a lamb, then he shall bring for his trespass, which he hath committed, two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, unto the LORD; one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering. And he shall bring them unto the priest, who shall offer that which is for the sin offering first, and wring off his head from his neck, but shall not divide it asunder: And he shall sprinkle of the blood of the sin offering upon the side of the altar; and the rest of the blood shall be wrung out at the bottom of the altar: it is a sin offering. And he shall offer the second for a burnt offering, according to the manner: and the priest shall make an atonement for him for his sin which he hath sinned, and it shall be forgiven him.

"I'm poor," people say. "Poor me. I can't pay my bills. I can't afford a lamb." But God says no one gets off the hook, for if someone was too poor to bring a lamb or a goat, two pigeons would suffice.

Leviticus 5:11–13
But if he be not able to bring two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, then he that sinned shall bring for his offering the tenth

part of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering; he shall put no oil upon it, neither shall he put any frankincense thereon: for it is a sin offering. Then shall he bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take his handful of it, even a memorial thereof, and burn it on the altar, according to the offerings made by fire unto the LORD: it is a sin offering. And the priest shall make an atonement for him as touching his sin that he hath sinned in one of these, and it shall be forgiven him: and the remnant shall be the priest's, as a meat offering.

He who couldn't afford two pigeons was simply to bring some flour. God provided a way for even the poorest person to offer a trespass offering.

Leviticus 5:14–19
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, If a soul commit a trespass, and sin through ignorance, in the holy things of the LORD; then he shall bring for his trespass unto the LORD a ram without blemish out of the flocks, with thy estimation by shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for a trespass offering: And he shall make amends for the harm that he hath done in the holy thing, and shall add the fifth part thereto, and give it unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him. And if a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the LORD; though he wist it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity. And he shall bring a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass offering, unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his ignorance wherein he erred and wist it not, and it shall be forgiven him. It is a trespass offering: he hath certainly trespassed against the LORD.

Because man can never make restitution to God for his sin nature, no restitution was required with the sin offering. The trespass offering, however, offered for specific acts of sin, carried with it a penalty of twenty percent to

be paid to the person wronged. This wasn't given to punish God's people, but to liberate them from the guilt we needlessly bear whenever we fail to deal openly and candidly with those we have wronged. That is why Jesus said if we even know our brother has something against us, we're to make it right before continuing in worship (Matthew 5:23, 24). It is a loving Father who tells us that restitution is required in order that relationship might be restored.

TRUE CONFESSION
A Topical Study of
LEVITICUS 5:1–5

The Church of Jesus Christ is the only organization whose members describe themselves as wretches. And while some say we as Christians have an obsession with sin, in reality, we simply have a proper assessment of self. We realize that man is intrinsically, hopelessly, fundamentally selfish. But praise be to God, He has provided a solution for our sinfulness and selfishness in Jesus Christ—for as we see in the Book of Leviticus, He is the fulfillment of the sacrifices, His is the blood which not only covers our sin temporarily but cleanses it completely.

Yet, although I understand theologically that my sin is forgiven, sometimes I don't feel it personally. Realizing this would happen, the Father graciously provided a very practical tool to help alleviate the weight of guilt and condemnation we can sometimes feel. The name of this tool is confession.

Confession is an important element of forgiveness not because God needs us to confess, but because we need to confess. And nowhere do we see confession more powerfully, practically, or personally portrayed than in the life of the man after God's own heart, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, David.

In 2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12, we read that, after choosing to remain in Jerusalem rather than join his men in battle, after having an affair with another man's wife, after killing her husband to cover his tracks, David was finally brought to the point where he said, "I have sinned against the Lord." And in Psalm 51, as David pours his heart out to the Lord, we see what true confession really is . . .

A Right View of Sin

> *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*
>
> Psalm 51:1–5

A right view of sin begins with the understanding that sin deserves judgment because sin always brings about heartache and hurt, death and destruction. David's sin began with a seemingly harmless peek at Bathsheba —but it ended in murder. God hates even so-called innocent, victimless sins because He knows where those sins will lead. And because He knows they will destroy us, He refuses to allow sin to go unchecked in the lives of His children.

Secondly, a right view of sin declares guilt. When we sin, there is a tendency to want to pass the proverbial buck. "The woman You gave me gave me of the tree," Adam said, blaming Eve and ultimately blaming God (Genesis 3:12). Adam's attitude has permeated every one of us. We all have a tendency to want to blame someone else—or, if need be, God—for our sin.

Thirdly, a right view of sin descends from Adam. The psychologist is wrong: babies are not born with a blank page that becomes polluted by his surroundings. The Word says we are born in sin. We're not sinners because we sin. We sin because we're sinners. And David understood this.

A Right View of God

> *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.*
>
> Psalm 51:6–12

David had a right view of God's purity. God desires purity in the inward parts, not the outward actions. A person can have all sorts of outward purity while remaining inwardly defiled. Blessed are the pure *in heart* Jesus said, for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8). A right view of God begins with purity.

Secondly, David had a right view of God's power. God is so incredibly powerful that He not only says, "forgive you and cleanse you," but also, "I will remember your sins no more." He has chosen to remove my sin from His memory bank. No other being in this universe has the power to do this.

Thirdly, David had a right view of God's punishment. "Make me hear joy and gladness," he says, "that the bones You have broken may rejoice." The metaphor is one with which David, being a shepherd, was familiar. You see, if a lamb displayed a propensity to endanger himself by wandering away from the flock, the shepherd would break its legs, put splints upon them, and carry the lamb on his shoulders until the bones were healed. As a result, so closely would the lamb bond with the shepherd during the period of recovery that when its legs were healed, it remained close to the shepherd all the days of his life.

Sometimes our Good Shepherd will break us. "Ouch!" we say. "What are You doing?" But in our brokenness and pain, we find ourselves drawing closer to Jesus than we ever would have otherwise.

A Right View of Self

> *Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.*
>
> Psalm 51:13–19

David understood he must confess his sin for sinner's sake—for it was only when his sin was confessed and his joy restored that he could teach transgressors God's ways, that sinners would be converted. If we harbor unconfessed sin, the result will undoubtedly be spiritual lockjaw. We won't witness; we won't share God's Word with people; we won't be bold because to do so would be hypocritical. But when sin is confessed, joy overflows and we can't help but share the goodness of God with others.

David knew he must confess his sins for God's sake. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats" (Isaiah 1:11). It's an abomination to the Lord for me to worship, praise, pray if there is unconfessed sin in my life.

Finally, David knew he must confess sin for the saints' sake. "Do good in thy good pleasure to Zion," he prayed. "Build thou the walls of Jerusalem." If I harbor unconfessed sin in my life, the walls will not be established, God's people will not be fortified, my prayers will not be answered.

In light of the necessity of confession, consider with me the following six ways we can make it practical . . .

Confess immediately. Don't wait until the end of the day, the end of the week, the end of the month. Not only will that keep you out of the flow of God's fullness, but you'll forget what it is you want to confess. Keep your accounts current. When you sin, confess immediately.

Confess specifically. Even as an individual's hand had to be placed upon the ram, so sin must be dealt with specifically.

Confess with sensitivity. I need to realize that it was *my* sin that brought about the death of the Lamb of God on Calvary. In this regard, Communion is essential because it keeps us sensitive.

Confess realistically. Concerning any specific sin, God never tells us to promise never to do it again. Because in us dwells no good thing (Romans 7:18), to promise not to commit a particular sin is unrealistic. The Greek word translated "confess" is *homologeo,* which simply means "to say the same." Thus, confession means that, rather than call lying "stretching the truth," we call it sin. It means rather than call gossiping "sharing a prayer request," we call it sin. It means rather than calling losing our temper "having a short fuse," we call it sin—just as God does.

Finally, sometimes confession needs to be made openly. James 5 says we are to confess our faults one to another. If you know you're forgiven, but can't get victory over a certain sin, share it with another believer—for not only will he be able to remind you that, on the basis of God's Word, your sin is forgiven, but as you become linked to him through honest accountability, you will be less likely to continue on in secret sins.

Confession is indeed good for the soul—a tremendous tool, a purifying power, a gracious gift from a loving Father.



6

Chapter 6 continues with the subject of the trespass offering . . .

Leviticus 6:1–7
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the LORD, and lie unto his neighbour in that which was delivered him to keep, or in fellowship, or in a thing

taken away by violence, or hath deceived his neighbour; or have found that which was lost, and lieth concerning it, and sweareth falsely; in any of all these that a man doeth, sinning therein: Then it shall be, because he hath sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he hath deceitfully gotten, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he found, Or all that about which he hath sworn falsely; he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth, in the day of his trespass offering. And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the LORD, a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass offering, unto the priest: And the priest shall make an atonement for him before the LORD: and it shall be forgiven him for any thing of all that he hath done in trespassing therein.

On the Cross, Jesus paid the price for the time we cheated on our income tax or short-changed a business partner. But because God chastens those He loves (Hebrews 12:6), He requires we pay an additional twenty percent to those we have wronged in order that we would learn not to do it again.

Leviticus 6:8–12 (a)
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the burnt offering: It is the burnt offering, because of the burning upon the altar all night unto the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be burning in it. And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen breeches shall he put upon his flesh, and take up the ashes which the fire hath consumed with the burnt offering on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar. And he shall put off his garments, and put on other garments, and carry forth the ashes without the camp unto a clean place. And the fire upon the altar shall be burning in it; it shall not be put out:

The fire on the altar was never to go out. Has the fire that once blazed in your heart and radiated from your life concerning the things of God been

somewhat quenched? If so, go back to the Lord and offer Him your body as a burnt offering morning and evening. Dedicate yourself anew to Him and once again He will ignite your soul. Go for it in your witness, in your worship, in your work for Him. And light the darkness once again.

Leviticus 6:12 (b), 13
. . . and the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order upon it; and he shall burn thereon the fat of the peace offerings. The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out.

We will burn for the Lord through the burnt offering of sacrifice only to the degree that we share with Him the peace offering of fellowship. I can't help but wonder how many of the children of Israel took the Lord up on His invitation to celebrate and commune with Him over the peace offering. But then, I wonder how many of us accept His invitation to dine with Him at the Table of Communion . . .

Leviticus 6:14–23
And this is the law of the meat offering: the sons of Aaron shall offer it before the LORD, before the altar. And he shall take of it his handful, of the flour of the meat offering, and of the oil thereof, and all the frankincense which is upon the meat offering, and shall burn it upon the altar for a sweet savour, even the memorial of it, unto the LORD. And the remainder thereof shall Aaron and his sons eat: with unleavened bread shall it be eaten in the holy place; in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation they shall eat it. It shall not be baken with leaven. I have given it unto them for their portion of my offerings made by fire; it is most holy, as is the sin offering, and as the trespass offering. All the males among the children of Aaron shall eat of it. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations concerning the offerings of the LORD made by fire: every one that toucheth them shall be holy. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, This is the offering of Aaron and of his sons, which they shall offer unto the LORD in the day when he is anointed; the tenth part of an ephah of fine

flour for a meat offering perpetual, half of it in the morning, and half thereof at night. In a pan it shall be made with oil; and when it is baken, thou shalt bring it in: and the baken pieces of the meat offering shalt thou offer for a sweet savour unto the LORD. And the priest of his sons that is anointed in his stead shall offer it: it is a statute for ever unto the LORD, it shall be wholly burnt. For every meat offering for the priest shall be wholly burnt: it shall not be eaten.

As with the sin and trespass offerings, the meal offering, in addition to providing a sweet-smelling savor to God, would help support those in His service.

Leviticus 6:24–30
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and to his sons, saying, This is the law of the sin offering: In the place where the burnt offering is killed shall the sin offering be killed before the LORD: it is most holy. The priest that offereth it for sin shall eat it: in the holy place shall it be eaten, in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation. Whatsoever shall touch the flesh thereof shall be holy: and when there is sprinkled of the blood thereof upon any garment, thou shalt wash that whereon it was sprinkled in the holy place. But the earthen vessel wherein it is sodden shall be broken: and if it be sodden in a brasen pot, it shall be both scoured, and rinsed in water. All the males among the priests shall eat thereof: it is most holy. And no sin offering, whereof any of the blood is brought into the tabernacle of the congregation to reconcile withal in the holy place, shall be eaten: it shall be burnt in the fire.

Because we are earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7), brokenness occurs when sin is dealt with. “Godly sorrow works repentance,” Paul declares (2 Corinthians 7:10). Therefore, if there is not brokenness or repentance, the issue of sin hasn’t really been dealt with. A lot of times, people are sad only because they get caught sinning. But to truly turn *away* from sin requires nothing less than brokenness.



7 **Leviticus 7:1–10**

Likewise this is the law of the trespass offering: it is most holy. In the place where they kill the burnt offering shall they kill the trespass offering: and the blood thereof shall he sprinkle round about upon the altar. And he shall offer of it all the fat thereof; the rump, and the fat that covereth the inwards, And the two kidneys, and the fat that is on them, which is by the flanks, and the caul that is above the liver, with the kidneys, it shall he take away: And the priest shall burn them upon the altar for an offering made by fire unto the LORD: it is a trespass offering. Every male among the priests shall eat thereof: it shall be eaten in the holy place: it is most holy. As the sin offering is, so is the trespass offering: there is one law for them: the priest that maketh atonement therewith shall have it. And the priest that offereth any man's burnt offering, even the priest shall have to himself the skin of the burnt offering which he hath offered. And all the meat offering that is baken in the oven, and all that is dressed in the fryingpan, and in the pan, shall be the priest's that offereth it. And every meat offering, mingled with oil, and dry, shall all the sons of Aaron have, one as much as another.

Here we see further instructions concerning the trespass, burnt, and meal offerings—particularly the portion of which was to be given to the priests.

Leviticus 7:11–12

And this is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings, which he shall offer unto the LORD. If he offer it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the sacrifice of thanksgiving unleavened cakes mingled with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and cakes mingled with oil, of fine flour, fried.

The invitation is to come and express thanks to the Lord, to be unleavened—without sin, and to be mingled with oil—to come in the Spirit.

Leviticus 7:13

Besides the cakes, he shall offer for his offering leavened bread with the sacrifice of thanksgiving of his peace offerings.

Is the leavened bread seen here in verse 13 a contradiction of the unleavened bread spoken of in verse 12? No, leaven being a picture of sin, what's being said here is that, although we're not to justify our sin, neither are we to hold back because of it. In other words, we're not to say, "I can't offer the sacrifice of praise because I've been grouchy today," or, "I can't bring my tithe to the Lord because, as a cashier, I earned some of it by selling alcohol." No, bring your sacrifice anyway. We'll see a sacrifice which will consist of two loaves of leavened bread waved before the Lord (Leviticus 23:17) as a picture of Jews and Gentiles—sinful as each group was—being brought together into a new entity: the forgiven church.

Leviticus 7:14–18
And of it he shall offer one out of the whole oblation for an heave offering unto the LORD, and it shall be the priest's that sprinkleth the blood of the peace offerings. And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten the same day that it is offered; he shall not leave any of it until the morning. But if the sacrifice of his offering be a vow, or a voluntary offering, it shall be eaten the same day that he offereth his sacrifice: and on the morrow also the remainder of it shall be eaten: But the remainder of the flesh of the sacrifice on the third day shall be burnt with fire. And if any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings be eaten at all on the third day, it shall not be accepted, neither shall it be imputed unto him that offereth it: it shall be an abomination, and the soul that eateth of it shall bear his iniquity.

When the peace offering was brought before the Lord, it was to be eaten immediately. "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good," the psalmist proclaimed (Psalm 34:8).

"Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the water. He that hath no money come buy and eat," the prophet declared (Isaiah 55:1).

"Come and dine," Jesus invited.

Leviticus 7:19–27

And the flesh that toucheth any unclean thing shall not be eaten; it shall be burnt with fire: and as for the flesh, all that be clean shall eat thereof. But the soul that eateth of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, that pertain unto the LORD, having his uncleanness upon him, even that soul shall be cut off from his people. Moreover the soul that shall touch any unclean thing, as the uncleanness of man, or any unclean beast, or any abominable unclean thing, and eat of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, which pertain unto the LORD, even that soul shall be cut off from his people. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Ye shall eat no manner of fat, of ox, or of sheep, or of goat. And the fat of the beast that dieth of itself, and the fat of that which is torn with beasts, may be used in any other use: but ye shall in no wise eat of it. For whosoever eateth the fat of the beast, of which men offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD, even the soul that eateth it shall be cut off from his people. Moreover ye shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or of beast, in any of your dwellings. Whatsoever soul it be that eateth any manner of blood, even that soul shall be cut off from his people.

Aaron and his sons were to be given the shoulder and the breast of the peace offering because, as priests, they were to shoulder the burdens of, and have a heart for God's people.

Leviticus 7:28–38

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, He that offereth the sacrifice of his peace offerings unto the LORD shall bring his oblation unto the LORD of the sacrifice of his peace offerings. His own hands shall bring the offerings of the LORD made by fire, the fat with the breast, it shall he bring, that the breast may be waved for a wave offering before the LORD. And the priest shall burn the fat upon the altar: but the breast shall be Aaron's and his sons.' And the right shoulder shall ye give unto the priest for an heave offering of the

sacrifices of your peace offerings. He among the sons of Aaron, that offereth the blood of the peace offerings, and the fat, shall have the right shoulder for his part. For the wave breast and the heave shoulder have I taken of the children of Israel from off the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and have given them unto Aaron the priest and unto his sons by a statute for ever from among the children of Israel. This is the portion of the anointing of Aaron, and of the anointing of his sons, out of the offerings of the LORD made by fire, in the day when he presented them to minister unto the LORD in the priest's office; which the LORD commanded to be given them of the children of Israel, in the day that he anointed them, by a statute for ever throughout their generations. This is the law of the burnt offering, of the meat offering, and of the sin offering, and of the trespass offering, and of the consecrations, and of the sacrifice of the peace offerings; Which the LORD commanded Moses in mount Sinai, in the day that he commanded the children of Israel to offer their oblations unto the LORD, in the wilderness of Sinai.

At the end of this review of the five sacrifices, notice the portrayal of the life of Christ from His baptism to His Crucifixion . . .

In the burnt offering, we see Christ's baptism, for both speak of total dedication. In the meal offering, we see Jesus being tempted, for both show an absence of leaven, an absence of sin. In the peace offering, we see Jesus embarking on public ministry, for both proclaim speak of the good tidings of the gospel. At the Cross, we see the sin and trespass offerings, as Jesus died not only for our sin nature, but also for our specific acts of sin.

I find it interesting, however, that in the life of the believer, the sacrifices are illustrated in reverse order . . .

A person gets saved when he realizes he has trespassed. Then he discovers he sins because he's a sinner, because he has a sin nature. He confesses his sin, asks the Lord into His life, and

communes with God through the peace offering—at the Lord's Table. Then he says, "Refine me, Lord. Take out the lumps and the leaven in my life." And finally, he says, "Don't only sift me, but consume me, Lord. I'm laying my life down as a burnt offering. I want to be consumed by You."

Where are you in this process? The further you choose to go, the happier you'll be. I can guarantee this because Jesus did when He told us it's when we lose our life that we truly find it (Matthew 10:39).



8 The first seven chapters of the Book of Leviticus deal with sacrifices. Chapter 8 deals with Aaron and his sons, the priests. As sinners, we need a Sacrifice; as believers, a High Priest. And we have both in Jesus, the Lamb of God and our great High Priest . . .

Leviticus 8:1–4
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments, and the anointing oil, and a bullock for the sin offering, and two rams, and a basket of unleavened bread; and gather thou all the congregation together unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Moses did as the LORD commanded him; and the assembly was gathered together unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

There is about to be a presentation of the priests. But before there can be presentation, there must first be preparation. That's always the way it is . . .

- God prepared Moses for eighty years—forty years as a prince in the courts of Pharaoh, forty years as a shepherd on the backside of the desert—before calling him to lead His people away from Pharaoh and to shepherd them across the wilderness.
- God prepared Paul for three years in the desert of Arabia before calling Him to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

- God prepared Jesus for thirty years through submission to His earthly parents. As a result, He grew in favor with both God and man (Luke 2:52).

To you, who, like me, want to be used by God, I would say as did Zechariah, "Don't despise the day of small things" (4:10). You may be on the backside of the desert, going through boring times or difficult situations, but know this: It's all part of God's preparation.

Leviticus 8:5, 6
And Moses said unto the congregation, This is the thing which the LORD commanded to be done. And Moses brought Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water.

How does the Lord prepare us for service? The first thing that happens is we must be washed with water. Ephesians 5 identifies water as the Word of God. "Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you," Jesus declared (John 15:3). "Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee," David proclaimed (Psalm 119:11). The washing of the water of the Word cleanses our souls, purifies our spirits. That's why a person just can't get too much of Bible study. Even if you don't understand it all completely, even if you don't think it's making an impact, it is.

"When the Spirit comes, He shall bring to your remembrance all things I have spoken to you," Jesus promised (John 14:26). The work of the Holy Spirit is to remind us of the Word. He will not, however, be able to bring to our remembrance what we have not put in our memory. That's why we must read Leviticus, Ezekiel, and Haggai.

"But I don't get those books," you might protest. "They're boring."

Read them anyway because you're putting the Word in your soul, and in due season, at the right time, the Holy Spirit will put the pieces together in such a way that it will blow your mind.

Leviticus 8:7 (a)
And he put upon him the coat . . .

After being washed, Aaron was robed. According to Ezekiel (44:17, 18), God's servants were to wear linen rather than wool—garments which allowed them to be cool rather than those which caused them to sweat. That is why we don't see our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, panicked, frenzied, or crying in the streets (Isaiah 42:2). There was a wonderful peace about Him because, although His ministry would cost Him His life, it was nonetheless linen to Him.

Leviticus 8:7 (b)
. . . and girded him with the girdle . . .

The girdle, or belt, speaks of service. Worn underneath the robe that was to follow, this girdle speaks of unseen service, of a heart simply willing to serve.

Leviticus 8:7 (c)
. . . and clothed him with the robe . . .

Along the hem of the robe of the high priest were alternating pomegranates and bells attached to a border of blue (Numbers 15:38). Blue speaks of heaven; the pomegranates of the fruit of the Spirit, the bells of the gifts of the Spirit. Our great High Priest is the Way to heaven, personifies the fruit of the Spirit, and ministers the gifts of the Spirit.

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek . . ." (Isaiah 61:1 (a)). This was the text of Jesus' first sermon. In the tenth verse of Isaiah 61, we read, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the robe of righteousness." Surely, above all others, our great High Priest was clothed with the robe of righteousness—and yet He willingly laid aside this robe in exchange for the robe of scarlet placed upon Him by His enemies before they led Him to the Cross to die for my sin (Matthew 27:28).

Leviticus 8:7 (d)
. . . and put the ephod upon him . . .

The ephod speaks of authority. In Judges 8:24–27, we see a misuse of the ephod as it became a snare rather than a blessing to the people of Israel. Authority rightly used never draws people closer to a person or a program no matter how right or justified it might initially seem. Godly authority always draws people closer to God alone. That is why whenever Jesus ministered, the result was always singular: men glorified the Father (Luke 7:16).

Leviticus 8:7 (e)
. . . and he girded him with the curious girdle of the ephod, and bound it unto him therewith.

A "curious girdle" or belt, this time visible from the outside, held the ephod together because true authority always walks hand in hand with servanthood—seen nowhere more clearly than in the life of Jesus as He fed multitudes, touched lepers, washed feet.

Leviticus 8:8
And he put the breastplate upon him: also he put in the breastplate the Urim and the Thummim.

The breastplate contained the Urim and the Thummim which were used to determine the will of God. It also contained the gems that represented the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Not only does our great High Priest ever live to make intercession for us in order that we might know the way wherein we should walk, He also carries us as gems upon His heart

Leviticus 8:9
And he put the mitre upon his head; also upon the mitre, even upon his forefront, did he put the golden plate, the holy crown; as the LORD commanded Moses.

The golden plate and mitre speak of covering, of submission, of Jesus who was submitted completely to His Father (John 8:29).

Leviticus 8:10–12

And Moses took the anointing oil, and anointed the tabernacle and all that was therein, and sanctified them. And he sprinkled thereof upon the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all his vessels, both the laver and his foot, to sanctify them. And he poured of the anointing oil upon Aaron's head, and anointed him, to sanctify him.

Not only was our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, anointed to preach good tidings unto the meek (Isaiah 61:1), But He was anointed with the oil of gladness above all His fellows (Hebrews 1:9). No wonder, then, that tax collectors and publicans loved to be with Him, that the common people heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37).

Leviticus 8:13 (a)
And Moses brought Aaron's sons . . .

As high priest, Aaron is a picture of our great High Priest, Jesus Christ. Aaron's sons, however, are a picture of you and me—a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), and, by His grace, sons of God (John 1:12). While Aaron wore pomegranates and bells, gems and a gold plate, his sons were attired much more simply in only three items . . .

Leviticus 8:13 (b)
. . . and put coats upon them . . .

The coat, or linen garment, speaks of salvation. In Zechariah 3, we see a priest who stood before the Lord whose garments were filthy. "I will clothe them with change of raiment," the Lord declared.

- Which robe was placed on the prodigal upon his return?
  The best robe.
- Whose robe was the best?
  The father's.

When you accepted Jesus Christ, you were robed with the Father's best robe, for He robed you with His Son (Isaiah 61:10).

Leviticus 8:13 (c)
. . . and girded them with girdles . . .

The girdle, or belt, worn around the waist allowed the robes to be tucked in, freeing the legs for service.

Leviticus 8:13 (d)
. . . and put bonnets upon them; as the LORD commanded Moses.

Thirdly, we see the bonnets, or turbans, which speak of submission (1 Corinthians 11). In our priestly service, we're to be robed in Christ's righteousness. We're to be doing the work of service. And we're to be submitted to those who are over us. There is no room in the body of Christ for lone rangers or independent agents. There is to be linkage and submission, accountability and humility. You'll never be *in* authority unless you are *under* authority. And while it is easy to submit to those with whom I agree, it is when I submit to a decision with which I don't necessarily agree that a true spirit of submission and humility are worked within me.

Leviticus 8:14–24
And he brought the bullock for the sin offering: and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the bullock for the sin offering. And he slew it; and Moses took the blood, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about with his finger, and purified the altar, and poured the blood at the bottom of the altar, and sanctified it, to make reconciliation upon it. And he took all the fat that was upon the inwards, and caul above the liver, and the two kidneys, and their fat, and Moses burned it upon the altar. But the bullock, and his hide, his flesh, and his dung, he burnt with fire without the camp; as the LORD commanded Moses. And he brought the ram for the burnt offering: and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the ram. And he killed it; and Moses sprinkled the blood upon the altar round about. And he cut

the ram into pieces; and Moses burnt the head, and the pieces, and the fat. And he washed the inwards and the legs in water; and Moses burnt the whole ram upon the altar: it was a burnt sacrifice for a sweet savour, and an offering made by fire unto the LORD; as the LORD commanded Moses. And he brought the other ram, the ram of consecration: and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the ram. And he slew it; and Moses took of the blood of it, and put it upon the tip of Aaron's right ear, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot. And he brought Aaron's sons, and Moses put of the blood upon the tip of their right ear, and upon the thumbs of their right hands, and upon the great toes of their right feet: and Moses sprinkled the blood upon the altar round about.

After being washed in water, robed in righteousness, anointed with oil, the fourth step of preparation for Aaron and his sons was to be symbolically covered with blood as blood was literally applied to the ear, the thumb, and the big toe. Because the things we hear, the things we do, the places we go can pollute us, we need the blood applied to us, the blood to cleanse us, the blood to protect us from future sin.

As time goes on, these priests would apply the blood not only when they entered the tabernacle, but when they exited as well—a principle I have found to be a real key in ministry. Before I teach or share, counsel or serve, I need to say, "Lord, I know I am a sinner. I know I am frail. I plead the blood to cleanse me in order that Your Spirit might flow through me." And when I finish teaching, sharing, counseling, or serving, I plead the blood as well because when I'm done ministering, one of two things invariably happens: either I am totally discouraged about how badly I did, or I'm proud of how well I did—and that's even more dangerous, for pride goes before destruction.

Pleading the blood takes care of both of these tendencies as I realize that, because I am a sinner through and through, it's only by God's grace that I am allowed to minister at all.

Leviticus 8:25–27 (a)

And he took the fat, and the rump, and all the fat that was upon the inwards, and the caul above the liver, and the two kidneys, and their fat, and the right shoulder: And out of the basket of unleavened bread, that was before the LORD, he took one unleavened cake, and a cake of oiled bread, and one wafer, and put them on the fat, and upon the right shoulder: And he put all upon Aaron's hands, and upon his sons' hands . . .

In this offering of consecration, Aaron's and his son's hands were initially empty. The Hebrew word translated "consecration" means "to fill the hands." We usually think of consecration in terms of what we can bring to the Lord, what we can give Him, what we can do for Him—when in reality consecration means we come before the Lord with empty hands and let Him fill them as He chooses.

Leviticus 8:27 (b)–32
. . . and waved them for a wave offering before the LORD. And Moses took them from off their hands, and burnt them on the altar upon the burnt offering: they were consecrations for a sweet savour: it is an offering made by fire unto the LORD. And Moses took the breast, and waved it for a wave offering before the LORD: for of the ram of consecration it was Moses' part; as the LORD commanded Moses. And Moses took of the anointing oil, and of the blood which was upon the altar, and sprinkled it upon Aaron, and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon his sons' garments with him; and sanctified Aaron, and his garments, and his sons, and his sons' garments with him. And Moses said unto Aaron and to his sons, boil the flesh at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and there eat it with the bread that is in the basket of consecrations, as I commanded, saying, Aaron and his sons shall eat it. And that which remaineth of the flesh and of the bread shall ye burn with fire.

Aaron and his sons were to wave certain portions of the meat and bread before the Lord in an act of worship, presenting them to Him before placing them upon the altar.

Leviticus 8:33–36
And ye shall not go out of the door of the tabernacle of the congregation in seven days, until the days of your consecration be at an end: for seven days shall he consecrate you. As he hath done this day, so the LORD hath commanded to do, to make an atonement for you. Therefore shall ye abide at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation day and night seven days, and keep the charge of the LORD, that ye die not: for so I am commanded. So Aaron and his sons did all things which the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.

The last step of preparation was one of isolation. Seven being the number of completion, Aaron and his sons were to remain in the tabernacle for seven days.

Ministry is like the measles. You can't give it unless you've got it. You can't give blessing unless you are blessed. And you won't be blessed until you're locked in, tucked away, set aside—for how long? Until God's preparatory work in you is complete.

Aaron and his sons were no doubt eager to begin, but they were to wait in order that they die not. Many ministries die because people don't know the meaning of a personal devotional life, of spending chunks of time locked away in the presence of God.



9

Leviticus 9:1
And it came to pass on the eighth day, that Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel;

The preparation complete, what day were the priests presented? The eighth day. Sabbath being the eighth day, the eighth day would have been the first day of the week, Sunday. The picture is perfect—for not only is eight the number of new beginnings, but Jesus, our great High Priest, rose on Sunday.

Leviticus 9:2–4

And he said unto Aaron, Take thee a young calf for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering, without blemish, and offer them before the LORD. And unto the children of Israel thou shalt speak, saying, Take ye a kid of the goats for a sin offering; and a calf and a lamb, both of the first year, without blemish, for a burnt offering; also a bullock and a ram for peace offerings, to sacrifice before the LORD; and a meat offering mingled with oil: for to day the LORD will appear unto you.

As part of their presentation, Aaron and his sons were to bring three offerings to the Lord: a sin offering, a burnt offering, a meal offering. But notice which one was to be offered first. Before the burnt offering came the sin offering. This is a principle that applies to us as well. You see, before we can be used by the Lord in service, we must be right with the Lord in regard to sin, for the sins of God's people will hinder the flow of His power through them.

Leviticus 9:5–22
And they brought that which Moses commanded before the tabernacle of the congregation: and all the congregation drew near and stood before the LORD. And Moses said, This is the thing which the LORD commanded that ye should do: and the glory of the LORD shall appear unto you. And Moses said unto Aaron, Go unto the altar, and offer thy sin offering, and thy burnt offering, and make an atonement for thyself, and for the people: and offer the offering of the people, and make an atonement for them; as the LORD commanded. Aaron therefore went unto the altar, and slew the calf of the sin offering, which was for himself. And the sons of Aaron brought the blood unto him: and he dipped his finger in the blood, and put it upon the horns of the altar, and poured out the blood at the bottom of the altar: But the fat, and the kidneys, and the caul above the liver of the sin offering, he burnt upon the altar; as the LORD commanded Moses. And the flesh and the hide he burnt with fire without the camp. And he slew the burnt offering; and Aaron's sons presented unto him the blood, which he sprinkled round about upon the altar. And they

presented the burnt offering unto him, with the pieces thereof, and the head: and he burnt them upon the altar. And he did wash the inwards and the legs, and burnt them upon the burnt offering on the altar. And he brought the people's offering, and took the goat, which was the sin offering for the people, and slew it, and offered it for sin, as the first. And he brought the burnt offering, and offered it according to the manner. And he brought the meat offering, and took an handful thereof, and burnt it upon the altar, beside the burnt sacrifice of the morning. He slew also the bullock and the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings, which was for the people: and Aaron's sons presented unto him the blood, which he sprinkled upon the altar round about, and the fat of the bullock and of the ram, the rump, and that which covereth the inwards, and the kidneys, and the caul above the liver: and they put the fat upon the breasts, and he burnt the fat upon the altar: and the breasts and the right shoulder Aaron waved for a wave offering before the LORD; as Moses commanded. And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them, and came down from offering of the sin offering, and the burnt offering, and peace offerings.

This description of the sacrifice is studied by Jewish scholars at great length because it's the only time the procedure of a sacrifice is seen. Why does the Lord go into such detail? Why does He take virtually an entire chapter to describe this procedure? Because He cares about the details of how He is to be worshiped just as He cares about the details of how we are to live. Our God is a God of incredible order. Not only does the Book of Leviticus attest to this, but His fingerprint can be seen on even the most minute aspect of nature, His concern over each sparrow His awareness of each hair (Matthew 10:29, 30).

A lady approached G. Campbell Morgan with a particular question.

"Why don't you ask the Lord about that?" he asked.

"Oh, it's too small a detail for the Lord," she replied.

"Tell me, madam," he countered, "what in your life is big to the Lord?"

G. Campbell Morgan was right. Because nothing is big to God, nothing is too small for Him.

Leviticus 9:23 (a)
And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation, and came out, and blessed the people . . .

After going into the tabernacle, Moses and Aaron came out and blessed the people. That's what we're doing here tonight. We are coming into the tabernacle of the True and Living God in order to be refueled and refilled, in order that we might go out and be a blessing to others.

Leviticus 9:23 (b), 24 (a)
. . . and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the people. And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted . . .

After a time of consecration and presentation, after a time of going in before the Lord and coming out to bless the people, suddenly fire from heaven came down and consumed the offerings upon the altar. The glory of God was seen and people shouted—an understandable reaction for the Hebrew word for worship implies a shout of joy.

Leviticus 9:24 (b)
. . . and fell on their faces.

We see the highest joy in a shout and the deepest reverence in a falling on one's face. So awed and amazed were they by the presence of God, the people's first reaction was to shout, but it was followed by a very quiet reverence before the Lord. "The Lord is in His temple," Habakkuk declared. "Let all the earth keep silent" (Habakkuk 2:20). Sometimes the truest sign of an intense move of the Lord is not necessarily a shout, a clap, or even a word, but an awesome, quiet reverence.

10 **Leviticus 10:1, 2**

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his cen ser, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His Son" (John 3:16). In Old Testament times, to reveal to the world how much He cared for them and the way people were to walk with Him, God called a nation—the people of Israel—and separated them from other nations in order that He might bless them and that they, in turn, might be a witness, an example, a lighthouse to the dark, dying world around them. God raised up a priesthood, priests, who were to give instruction to His people, provide direction for them, and be an example to them. That is why, when Nadab and Abihu chose their own way instead of God's, He dealt directly and severely with them lest the people follow suit and the nation no longer be an example to the world.



For topical study of Leviticus 10:1 entitled "Burnout!" turn to page **388.**

Leviticus 10:3

Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.

Although the foundational sin of Nadab and Abihu was that of offering strange fire, evidently a second problem was that they were ministering in such a way as to draw attention to themselves, for it was in response to their sin that God said, "I alone will be glorified."

Is God saying He doesn't want any competition because He's insecure? No, it's because He knows if people depend on a person, a church, a ministry, they're sure to be disappointed ultimately. God is the only One without flaw. That's why He won't share His glory with any man or ministry.

Leviticus 10:4–7
And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp. So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp; as Moses had said. And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the LORD hath kindled. And ye shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you. And they did according to the word of Moses.

Neither father nor brother were to mourn the deaths of Nadab and Abihu because the implication would be that God was unfair.

Ezekiel was another who was told not to mourn when, as an illustration to the people, God took his wife (Ezekiel 24). "Righteous and true are thy judgments, O, Lord," say the multitudes in heaven (Revelation 19:2), seeing the full picture, understanding that God's ways are absolutely perfect without fail.

This side of eternity, our vision is so very limited. Yet even that which appears to be a tragedy to us is all part of a bigger plan. After all, do you think Ezekiel and his wife are in heaven right now feeling cheated that her life on earth was cut short—or do you think they're blown away by the goodness of God in allowing her to partake of the unspeakable splendor of heaven early? When you go through a hard time, a setback, a tragedy, it is oh, so easy to suck sympathy from people—but you always do so at the expense of God's reputation. This is why Aaron was not to mourn.

Leviticus 10:8, 9 (a)
And the LORD spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die . . .

Thirdly, from the text and context, it appears that Nadab and Abihu were drunk—which might partially explain the poor judgment which did indeed lead to their deaths.

Leviticus 10:9 (b)–11
. . . it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations: And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; and that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.

The injunction against drinking wine is repeated in Ezekiel 44:21 and is explained in Proverbs 31:4, 5.

Leviticus 10:12–18
And Moses spake unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons that were left, Take the meat offering that remaineth of the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and eat it without leaven beside the altar: for it is most holy: and ye shall eat it in the holy place, because it is thy due, and thy sons' due, of the sacrifices of the LORD made by fire: for so I am commanded. And the wave breast and heave shoulder shall ye eat in a clean place; thou, and thy sons, and thy daughters with thee: for they be thy due, and thy sons' due, which are given out of the sacrifices of peace offerings of the children of Israel. The heave shoulder and the wave breast shall they bring with the offerings made by fire of the fat, to wave it for a wave offering before the LORD; and it shall be thine, and thy sons' with thee, by a statute for ever; as the LORD hath commanded. And Moses diligently sought the goat of the sin offering, and, behold, it was burnt: and he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron which were left alive, saying, Wherefore have ye not eaten the sin offering in the holy place, seeing it is most holy, and God hath given it you to bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD? Behold, the blood of it was

not brought in within the holy place: ye should indeed have eaten it in the holy place, as I commanded.

Having just witnessed the deaths of Nadab and Abihu due to disobedience, Moses was angry with his remaining nephews for their disobedience in failing to eat the sin offering.

"If you do not eat of My body and drink of My blood, you have no part with Me," Jesus would declare (see John 6:53). Therefore, if the priests failed to eat the sin offering, the prophetic picture it was given to portray would not be realized.

Leviticus 10:19
And Aaron said unto Moses, Behold, this day have they offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD; and such things have befallen me: and if I had eaten the sin offering to day, should it have been accepted in the sight of the LORD?

"We did as much as we could," Aaron said. "but I can't eat. My two boys were just killed and we have no appetite."

Leviticus 10:20
And when Moses heard that, he was content.

Nadab and Abihu's sin was wickedness. They lit strange fire; they drew attention to themselves; their judgment was clouded with drink. Ithamar and Eleazar sinned as well, but theirs was a sin of weakness. God was severe with Nadab and Abihu's wickedness and iniquity. He was merciful with Ithamar and Eleazar's weakness and inability.

If you're committing the sin of Nadab and Abihu, the fear of our God as a consuming fire must come upon you. However, if yours is the sin of Ithamar and Eleazar, be free in the grace and forgiveness, the mercy and patience of our Father.

BURNOUT !
A Topical Study of
LEVITICUS 10:1

"Come unto Me," Jesus said, "all ye who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me and you shall find rest in your souls" (Matthew 11:29). Why, then, are so many "mature" Christians burned out in their ministry to Him, their service for Him?

I believe Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu give us the answer. *Nadab* means "willing one." *Abihu* means "father of him"—perhaps in reference to his famous father, Moses' brother Aaron, the high priest of the nation of Israel.

Having been eyewitnesses to the glory of God filling the tabernacle, having seen the flames, having smelled the smoke of the fire from heaven mystically and miraculously igniting the sacrifice upon the altar, it is understandable why Nadab and Abihu would indeed be willing to join their famous father in ministry, to play a pivotal part in the "holy happening" unfolding before their eyes. After all, they had gone through the process of preparation—they had been washed, robed, anointed with both oil and blood —as well as that of isolation, having been shut up in the tabernacle for seven days. Surely now was the time to begin, their time to shine. So they lit their censers and set out to take part in the celebration.

The problem, however, was that Nadab and Abihu lit their censers with strange fire. Strange fire was fire that came from any source other than the altar which burned continually and which speaks of the place where the Lamb of God absorbed the fire of God's wrath that should have been poured out on you and me. The fire speaks of Calvary.

> *For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15

What Christ did on the altar of Calvary was that which motivated Paul day after day, year after year—for the love of Christ is a fire that never burns out.

Some people involve themselves in ministry simply because they want to be part of the action. But when the action shifts somewhere else, they shift along with it, leaving ministry behind. Others have a need to be used, so they serve the Lord to fulfill their own need. But when they're needed somewhere else, ministry takes a back seat. Still others serve the Lord out of concern for the lost. But when the lost don't respond as quickly as hoped, they eventually give up ministering altogether.

Ministry for ministry's sake, ministry for fulfillment's sake, ministry for others' sake is all strange fire which will eventually burn people out.

The only fire which will never burn one out or burn one up is the fire from the altar of Calvary. Those who, like Paul, are constrained, motivated, propelled by the love Christ demonstrated on Calvary will still be serving Him with passion, with effectiveness, with intensity until they draw their last breath their last breath this side of eternity.

How can one keep from the Nadab and Abihu mentality? The simplest way is to go to the altar over and over again, to go to the Lord's Table over and over again and remember what Christ Jesus did for us. When we bow our knee and commune with the Lord, when we handle His broken body and drink of His shed blood, all the dials are set back to zero as we remember the price He paid for us.

Jesus died for me so that I wouldn't have to go to hell. He died for me so I could go to heaven. He died for me so that my sins would be washed away. How can I *not* serve Him? True ministry has nothing to do with a need to be involved, a need to be fulfilled, or even a desire to help people. True ministry is all about what Christ did for us when He laid down His life for us at Calvary.



11 As seen in the sacrifices, chapters 1 through 10 dealt with worshiping the Lord. Here in chapter 11, and on through chapter 17, the subject matter is walking with the Lord.

Leviticus 11:1, 2
And the LORD spake unto Moses and to Aaron, saying unto them, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, These are the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth.

The first topic God addresses in how He wanted His people to walk concerns dietary issues. And in so doing, He provided protection for the Israelites from the diseases that ravaged the cultures surrounding them.

When the Bubonic Plague killed one out of four Europeans, the Jewish community was remarkably immune. Because they followed the sanitary regulations of the Old Testament, not knowing the reason for them but simply being obedient to them, the Jews were protected to a remarkable degree.

Secondly, the dietary laws in this section would provide distinction or separation to God's people, setting them apart for His purposes.

Finally, in addition to providing protection and distinction to the Israelites, the dietary regulations of Leviticus 11—17 provide illustration to us as believers . . .

Leviticus 11:3
Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat.

The Jews were allowed to eat those animals that had a divided hoof and chewed its cud. In other words, cleanliness was determined by how an animal walked and how it ate.

The principle for us is obvious. Is there a "dividedness" in our walk? Are we separated from the world or do we walk like everyone around us? We are new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Is there a difference in our walk? There needs to be.

Secondly, do we chew the spiritual "cud"? Just as a cow constantly chews and rechews its food, we are to be those who chew and rechew the Word, who think it through, pray it in, extract from it every nutrient to feed

their inner man. No wonder the Hebrew word for chewing the cud is essentially the same word translated "meditation."

> This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.
>
> Joshua 1:8

We get to meditate on the Word. We get to look in the book. We get to think it through once more. And as we do, we'll have good success; we'll be healthy; we'll be clean.

> **Leviticus 11:4**
> **Nevertheless these shall ye not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the hoof: as the camel, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you.**

History makes note of the intestinal diseases that afflicted the ethnic groups which ate the meat of camels. Jesus would later indict the Pharisees for spiritually doing just that—for straining out gnats that would have done them no harm, yet swallowing camels that were forbidden, for analyzing minute details yet missing the big picture.

> **Leviticus 11:5, 6**
> **And the coney, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you. And the hare, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you.**

A coney is like a rabbit without ears. He chews the cud, but his hoof is not divided. Before we point a finger at the Pharisees for swallowing camels, we need to consider whether we deceive ourselves by acting like coneys or hares. You see, Joshua was instructed to meditate on God's Word in order to *do* all that was commanded therein. The cud must be chewed and the hoof divided, for we are to both chew on the Word and walk in it.

Leviticus 11:7, 8
And the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be cloven-footed, yet he cheweth not the cud; he is unclean to you. Of their flesh shall ye not eat, and their carcass shall ye not touch; they are unclean to you.

The swine represents those who live moral lives, but who don't open the Word.

Leviticus 11:9–12
These shall ye eat of all that are in the waters: whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye eat. And all that have not fins and scales in the seas, and in the rivers, of all that move in the waters, and of any living thing which is in the waters, they shall be an abomination unto you: They shall be even an abomination unto you; ye shall not eat of their flesh, but ye shall have their carcases in abomination. Whatsoever hath no fins nor scales in the waters, that shall be an abomination unto you.

Fins and scales being necessary for movement in the water, fish are determined to be clean or unclean based on how they move. In other words, the Jews were not to eat bottom feeders. So, too, water being emblematic of Scripture, we are clean or unclean based on how we move through the water of the Word. Do we seek to justify sin? Do we try to rationalize carnality? Is there a bottom feeding mentality? The scales speak of a sense of purity, the fins of the ability to navigate successfully. It's a wonderful analogy.

Leviticus 11:13–20
And these are they which ye shall have in abomination among the fowls; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, and the ossifrage, and the ospray, And the vulture, and the kite after his kind; every raven after his kind; and the owl, and the night hawk, and the cuckow, and the hawk after his kind, And the little owl, and the cormorant, and the great owl, and the swan, and the pelican, and the gier eagle, and the stork, the heron after

her kind, and the lapwing, and the bat. All fowls that creep, going upon all four, shall be an abomination unto you.

Ravens are an unclean bird and a symbol of evil in the Bible. Why, then, did God use them to miraculously deliver food to Elijah in the wilderness (1 Kings 17:6)? I suggest it was to show us that He can use anyone or anything to minister to us. Sometimes, we have a tendency to think we can't be instructed by him, or corrected by her because they're "unclean birds." In reality, however, we can learn from anyone God sends our way even if he or she might appear to be "unclean."

"I'm not going to listen to my parents because they're not as spiritual as I am," some might say. Big mistake. God can use all sorts of interesting creatures and situations to bring food to us, to minister to us, to admonish, nourish, and correct us.

Therefore, wise is the man who will say, "Lord give me eyes to see and ears to hear whatever You want to tell me, through whatever messenger You choose."

Leviticus 11:21–23
Yet these may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that goeth upon all four, which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth; even these of them ye may eat; the locust after his kind, and the bald locust after his kind, and the beetle after his kind, and the grasshopper after his kind. But all other flying creeping things, which have four feet, shall be an abomination unto you.

Certain kinds of beetles, locusts, and grasshoppers met the criterion for cleanness. And, no doubt, John the Baptist, for one, was glad they did (Matthew 3:4).

Leviticus 11:24–28
And for these ye shall be unclean: whosoever toucheth the carcase of them shall be unclean until the even. And whosoever beareth ought of the carcase of them shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even. The carcases of every beast which

divideth the hoof, and is not clovenfooted, nor cheweth the cud, are unclean unto you: every one that toucheth them shall be unclean. And whatsoever goeth upon his paws, among all manner of beasts that go on all four, those are unclean unto you: whoso toucheth their carcase shall be unclean until the even. And he that beareth the carcase of them shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: they are unclean unto you.

The principle here is one the prophet Haggai will develop more fully (2:12). That is, while that which is clean cannot make holy that which is unholy, that which is unclean can make unholy that which is holy. Think of it this way: If I put a drop of clean water into a mud puddle, the drop of clean water becomes muddy. But if I put a drop of muddy water into a jar of clean water, the clean water is no longer clean. You might think you can enter an unclean situation and make it clean because you're holy—but more often than not, the situation will remain unclean and you'll be tainted in the process.

Leviticus 11:29 (a)
These also shall be unclean unto you among the creeping things that creep upon the earth; the weasel, and the mouse . . .

The carcass of a mouse is as unclean as the carcass of an elephant because neither part the hoof. This deals a death-blow to the concept of venial and mortal sin. This is no ranking of sin. Sin is sin, whether it be a mouse or an elephant. "It's just a white lie," we say, "a slight compromise," a "quirk." No, it's a mouse. It's sin.

Leviticus 11:29 (b)–33
. . . and the tortoise after his kind, And the ferret, and the chameleon, and the lizard, and the snail, and the mole. These are unclean to you among all that creep: whosoever doth touch them, when they be dead, shall be unclean until the even. And upon whatsoever any of them, when they are dead, doth fall, it shall be unclean; whether it be any vessel of wood, or raiment, or skin, or sack, whatsoever vessel it be, wherein any work is done, it must be put into water, and it shall be unclean until the even; so it shall

be cleansed. And every earthen vessel, whereinto any of them falleth, whatsoever is in it shall be unclean; and ye shall break it.

Because we are earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7), God in His love must break us when there is uncleanness found in us—not to punish us, for Christ bore all of our punishment on the Cross, but to purify us. Therefore, when I come into contact with uncleanness, I can expect breaking in my life.

Leviticus 11:34–36
Of all meat which may be eaten, that on which such water cometh shall be unclean: and all drink that may be drunk in every such vessel shall be unclean. And every thing whereupon any part of their carcase falleth shall be unclean; whether it be oven, or ranges for pots, they shall be broken down: for they are unclean, and shall be unclean unto you. Nevertheless a fountain or pit, wherein there is plenty of water, shall be clean: but that which toucheth their carcase shall be unclean.

If an unclean animal fell into an earthen vessel, the vessel had to be broken—but if an unclean animal fell into a fountain or pit that had an abundance of water, the water would not be affected. Jesus Christ is the Living Water (John 4; 7). You might feel like a mole, a chameleon, a lizard—but when you come to the fountain of Living Water, the Living Water can handle your uncleanness. That is why Jesus could call Judas "friend" even at the moment of betrayal (Matthew 26:50)—and why He is not ashamed to call unclean sinners like us brethren (Hebrews 2:11).

Leviticus 11:37–40
And if any part of their carcase fall upon any sowing seed which is to be sown, it shall be clean. But if any water be put upon the seed, and any part of their carcase fall thereon, it shall be unclean unto you. And if any beast, of which ye may eat, die; he that toucheth the carcase thereof shall be unclean until the even. And he that eateth of the carcase of it shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: he also that beareth the carcase of it shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even.

If a bat or lizard falls in a bag of seed, if the seed is still in its shell, it's okay. But if the shell of the seed is no longer there because water has softened it, that seed is to be thrown out because the seed itself will have become polluted. The seed being a picture of the Word (1 Peter 1:23), if the seed is not encased by the armor of faith, rats of unbelief will gnaw at it, causing us to question if it truly is infallible, immutable, applicable. Can the Word become unclean? Yes—to people who no longer read it in faith, but find fault with it rather than allowing it to find and change the faults within them.

Leviticus 11:41–47
And every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth shall be an abomination; it shall not be eaten. Whatsoever goeth upon the belly, and whatsoever goeth upon all four, or whatsoever hath more feet among all creeping things that creep upon the earth, them ye shall not eat; for they are an abomination. Ye shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creepeth, neither shall ye make yourselves unclean with them, that ye should be defiled thereby. For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy. This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moveth in the waters, and of every creature that creepeth upon the earth: to make a difference between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten.

"Ye shall be holy, for I am holy." This is an exhortation—but it is also an expectation, as if God is saying, "If you choose to walk with Me and to walk in My ways, because I am holy, you will be holy, too."



12 It has been rightly said that the Bible is a book no man could write even if he would, and no man would write even if he could. You see, even if a man wanted to write the Bible, he would be unable to do so for this book was not authored by human ingenuity. It is unlike any other book in that it wasn't written by mortal men but by God, who inspired man specifically and exactingly concerning every word written. One example of the uniqueness of the book before you is that a full third of it deals with prophecy, with predicting events before they take place. Although no other religious writing dares to deal in the realm of prophecy, over three hundred prophecies were given concerning the coming of Christ in the Old Testament—each fulfilled to the letter.

> Produce your cause, saith the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen: let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods: yea, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together.
>
> Isaiah 41:21–23

> Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them.
>
> Isaiah 44:6, 7

> Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:
>
> Isaiah 46:9, 10

God challenges other gods to set things in order, to predict what is to be. Yet no other religion has dared accept the challenge lest their fraudulence come to light.

No man could write this book, even if he would. But also, no man would write this book even if he could. If someone were able to write a seemingly divinely inspired book in his own energy, he wouldn't write a book like this one. Why? Because of chapters like the one before us—a chapter that if I were writing the Bible, I wouldn't necessarily include . . .

Leviticus 12:1, 2
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean.

After giving birth to a baby boy, a woman was considered ceremonially unclean, unable to take part in tabernacle worship for seven days.

Leviticus 12:3
And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

The baby boy was to be circumcised on the eighth day because not only is eight the number of new beginnings, but, physiologically, the day when the blood coagulates. The rite of circumcision, a specific mark placed upon the Jewish male alone, spoke of dealing with the flesh. The fact that it was to take place as soon as it was physiologically possible speaks of the fact that sin is to be dealt with from the earliest of days.

Leviticus 12:4
And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled.

Following the circumcision of her baby, the mother was considered to be ceremonially unclean for an additional thirty-three days.

Leviticus 12:5
But if she bear a maid child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her separation: and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying threescore and six days.

If she gave birth to a boy, a mother was ceremonially unclean for a total of forty-one days. If she gave birth to a girl, she was ceremonially unclean for a total of eighty days. Why was she unclean twice as long if she gave birth to a girl? Because, through circumcision, the sin of the baby boy was addressed, but the sin of a baby girl could not be addressed in that way, leaving the mother alone to deal with the issue of sin.

Why would either mother or baby have to deal with sin? Why would the birth of either son or daughter be considered unclean? When we have babies, people send flowers, buy balloons, and celebrate. What, then, is the meaning of this chapter? Is the birth process something that is unclean? No, for it was God Himself who said, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28).

In this passage, God is illustrating something that is difficult for people today to comprehend or embrace. He is declaring that when a baby is born—as glorious and wonderful an event as that is—it causes uncleanness because another sinner is added to the world.

In Psalm 51, under inspiration of the Spirit, David declares, "In sin did my mother conceive me" (51:5). At the moment of conception, there was sin—not in the act of procreation, but at the moment of conception a sin nature began. This is the doctrine of the depravity of man—politically incorrect, but true nonetheless. Contrary to current psychological thought, babies don't arrive with a "clean slate." Man is not a sinner because he sins. He sins because he is a sinner. And when I understand this, the implications and applications are profound.

First, an understanding of the depravity of man affects me parentally—how I view my kids and the way I raise my family. To understand that a baby comes into the world as a sinner and not an innocent little person who is bruised by culture or infected by civilization makes me realize that as great as he is and as much joy as she brings, they're sinners just like me.

> Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.
>
> Proverbs 22:15

Foolishness, rebelliousness, and sin are built into the heart of a child. If you have kids, you know this to be so. Not one parent has ever had to teach his child how to have a temper tantrum when he didn't get his way. Not one had to teach his child how to lie, how to be sneaky, how to be deceptive. Not one says, "Today I'm going to teach my kids how to sin."

> He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.
>
> Proverbs 13:24

God knows exactly what He's doing when He says that the way to deal with the sin in our kids is to do so lovingly with the rod of correction. Tears flow, guilt is released, hugs follow. And they can go on free from the baggage of guilt and sin.

Secondly, an understanding of the depravity of man affects me politically. Communism made great strides as Karl Marx insisted there should be a comradeship, a brotherhood between all men because men are basically, intrinsically good. The Bible says men are basically, intrinsically bad. That is why Communism ultimately collapsed. Capitalism survived because it is actually based on the depravity of man—that man is greedy and will, therefore work to the degree that he is personally rewarded.

Thirdly, an understanding of the depravity of man affects how I see myself personally. In Romans 7, Paul declared, "In my flesh dwells no good thing." Therefore, I don't have to be shocked or down on myself when I am aware of sin within me. Instead, I can say, "Lord have mercy on me. Lord, take it from me. Lord, deal with me because I know the sin deep within me will destroy me and my family."

> But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
>
> Romans 5:8

An understanding of my own depravity actually gives me a great deal of security because I realize who I am and the extent of God's love for me.

Finally, an understanding of the depravity of man affects me relationally. Because we're all sinners, I never need to be disappointed by someone else's sin. All we like sheep have gone astray (Isaiah 53:6). We have *all* rebelled against God. That is why Paul determined to know no man after the flesh (2 Corinthians 5:16). Paul didn't focus on the flesh. Instead, he chose to see people in the Spirit—to see what the Lord was doing in their lives.

Leviticus 12:6–8
And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest: who shall offer it before the LORD, and make an atonement for her; and she shall be cleansed from the issue of her blood. This is the law for her that hath born a male or a female. And if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean.

Just as the woman would bring an offering, God says, "I have an Offering to cleanse you, to purify you, to wash away the sin you've done today, yesterday, or tomorrow." The lamb being the most costly offering required, it speaks of the Lamb of God, whose blood was shed that we might be a forgiven people. A lamb was brought by the woman who brought a sinner into the world—and a Lamb was brought by the Father who brought salvation to the world.

13 Chapters 13 and 14 both deal with the issue of leprosy, which, in the Word, is a picture of sin.

Like sin, leprosy began underneath the surface of the skin, out of sight initially, no big deal seemingly. But then it spread insidiously as it moved throughout the body, eventually causing the bones to soften and the fingernails to disappear, the teeth to recede into the gums and the nose to fall off.

Secondly, like sin, leprosy destroyed sensitivity. Most of the time, a person who contracted leprosy would not be aware anything was wrong until he spilled hot water on his hand or dropped something on his foot without feeling any pain. Concerning sin, Ephesians 4:17–19 says Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind, being past feeling. Tragically, sin destroys sensitivity to the point that we are no longer bothered by that which at one time made us recoil.

Thirdly, like sin, leprosy was incurable. Although the Law contained regulations concerning the cleansing of leprosy, they were never utilized because, with the exception of Naaman, no one was ever cleansed. It wasn't until 1,500 years later, when an itinerant Rabbi from Nazareth appeared on the scene and told the lepers He healed to show themselves to the priests that the priests were able to put into practice the unused laws that had been on their books for centuries.

Fourthly, like sin, leprosy caused separation between people and their loved ones. When a person was infected with leprosy, he would be sent away from the community to live in isolation or at best in a leper colony. That's what sin does. It destroys relationships, splits families, breaks hearts.

Leviticus 13:1, 2 (a)
And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, saying, When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh a rising . . .

What is sin? It is the flesh rising, the flesh demanding its own way. Lucifer launched a rebellion in heaven, was cast out, and became known as Satan all because of pride, all because he wanted his own way. Pride goes before destruction; a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18)—and Lucifer's fall was great indeed.

Leviticus 13:2 (b)
. . . a scab . . .

Like a scab, sin covers that which needs to be healed.

Leviticus 13:2 (c)
. . . or a bright spot, and it be in the skin of his flesh like the plague of leprosy; then he shall be brought unto Aaron the priest, or unto one of his sons the priests:

Like a bright spot on the skin, sin masquerades as a harmless "bright spot" in our day—be it from TV, books, music, or any other avenue of "innocent" pleasure.

Leviticus 13:3
And the priest shall look on the plague in the skin of the flesh: and when the hair in the plague is turned white, and the plague in sight be deeper than the skin of his flesh, it is a plague of leprosy: and the priest shall look on him, and pronounce him unclean.

Just as the priest would suspect leprosy if a blemish was deeper than the skin, the root problem of sin is deeper than the flesh. It's the heart. "The heart is desperately wicked," Jeremiah declares (17:9). The phrase "desperately wicked" in Hebrew means "gravely ill." Therefore, the flesh cannot be rehabilitated. Instead, the heart must be regenerated. We must be born again.

Leviticus 13:4–8
If the bright spot be white in the skin of his flesh, and in sight be not deeper than the skin, and the hair thereof be not turned white; then the priest shall shut up him that hath the plague seven days: and the priest shall look on him the seventh day: and, behold, if the plague in his sight be at a stay, and the plague spread not in the skin; then the priest shall shut him up seven days more: and the priest shall look on him again the seventh day: and, behold, if the plague be somewhat dark, and the plague spread not in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean: it is

but a scab: and he shall wash his clothes, and be clean. But if the scab spread much abroad in the skin, after that he hath been seen of the priest for his cleansing, he shall be seen of the priest again: and if the priest see that, behold, the scab spreadeth in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it is a leprosy.

When a man was suspected of having contracted leprosy, he was put in isolation for two seven-day periods in order that the priest would have sufficient time to observe him and make a correct diagnosis. Mankind, too, has been under observation for six of seven "days" or dispensations as God has, throughout human history, given man opportunity to turn to Him: Innocence (Genesis 1:28), Conscience or Moral Responsibility (Genesis 3:7), Human Government (Genesis 8:5), Promise (Genesis 12:1), Law (Exodus 9:1), and the Church (Acts 2:1). And what, according to our great High Priest, is the diagnosis?

> There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes.
>
> Romans 3:11–18

The diagnosis is not good; the prognosis is death. But Romans goes on to tell of God's plan to cleanse us of our leprosy, to pay the price for our sin.

Leviticus 13:9–11
When the plague of leprosy is in a man, then he shall be brought unto the priest; And the priest shall see him: and, behold, if the rising be white in the skin, and it have turned the hair white, and there be quick raw flesh in the rising; it is an old leprosy in the skin of his flesh, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean, and shall not shut him up: for he is unclean.

When someone lovingly shows us that which needs changing in our lives, if we say, "Who are you to tell me what to do?," our response indicates a "quick raw rising" of our flesh.

> **Leviticus 13:12, 13**
> **And if a leprosy break out abroad in the skin, and the leprosy cover all the skin of him that hath the plague from his head even to his foot, wheresoever the priest looketh; then the priest shall consider: and, behold, if the leprosy have covered all his flesh, he shall pronounce him clean that hath the plague: it is all turned white: he is clean.**

Because leprosy that covered a person from head to foot was not active, such a one was pronounced clean. So it is, when I realize I am a sinner from head to toe, from top to bottom—that I can't cover my sin, defend myself, explain away my behavior, or justify my actions—that I am on my way to being pronounced clean.

> *After taking in a haul of fish so big it almost sank his boat, Peter realized Jesus was God. "Depart from me," he said in response, "for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5). And he was on his way to being converted.*

Confession is a real key to salvation . . .

- "I was conceived in sin," David said (Psalm 51:5).
- "Woe is me," Isaiah cried, "for I am undone" (Isaiah 6:5).
- "I have sinned," the prodigal confessed (Luke 15:18).

Confession alone, however, does not guarantee salvation . . .

- "I have sinned against God," Pharaoh declared (Exodus 10:16).
- "I have sinned," Saul admitted (1 Samuel 15:24).
- "I have betrayed innocent blood," Judas confessed (Matthew 27:4).

Yet none of these confessions resulted in salvation. You see, while confession is indeed a key to salvation, the motive for confession is important as well. The second group of men were confessing because they knew they had been caught; the first group because godly sorrow had worked in them a true heart of repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Leviticus 13:14–17
But when raw flesh appeareth in him, he shall be unclean. And the priest shall see the raw flesh, and pronounce him to be unclean: for the raw flesh is unclean: it is a leprosy. Or if the raw flesh turn again, and be changed unto white, he shall come unto the priest; and the priest shall see him: and, behold, if the plague be turned into white; then the priest shall pronounce him clean that hath the plague: he is clean.

The word "but" ties verse 14 to verse 13. Regarding the man covered from head to toe with leprosy, fresh eruptions were a problem because that would mean he wasn't clean after all. So, too, the person who is truly born again does not habitually, continually practice sin (1 John 3:6).

Peter writes about those who seemingly once followed the Lord, but are like pigs returning to the mud (2 Peter 2:22). There is a difference between a sheep and a pig. Both can fall in the mud—but while the pig loves it, the sheep hates it. We who are in God's flock can indeed end up in a mud puddle from time to time. But we don't feel comfortable there indefinitely.

The uncleanness here in verse 14 speaks not of the person who struggles with or, or even succumbs to sin, but of the person who practices sin as devotedly as a man practices his golf swing.

Leviticus 13:18–23
The flesh also, in which, even in the skin thereof, was a boil, and is healed, And in the place of the boil there be a white rising, or a bright spot, white, and somewhat reddish, and it be shewed to the priest; and if, when the priest seeth it, behold, it be in sight lower than the skin, and the hair thereof be turned white; the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it is a plague of leprosy broken out of the boil. But if the priest look on it, and, behold, there be no

white hairs therein, and if it be not lower than the skin, but be somewhat dark; then the priest shall shut him up seven days: and if it spread much abroad in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it is a plague. But if the bright spot stay in his place, and spread not, it is a burning boil; and the priest shall pronounce him clean.

This passage speaks of boils or blemishes that had once appeared to be healed but that proved leprous in the end. Peter would allude to the same danger spiritually . . .

> For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.
>
> 2 Peter 2:20, 21

Leviticus 13:24–37
Or if there be any flesh, in the skin whereof there is a hot burning, and the quick flesh that burneth have a white bright spot, somewhat reddish, or white; then the priest shall look upon it: and, behold, if the hair in the bright spot be turned white, and it be in sight deeper than the skin; it is a leprosy broken out of the burning: wherefore the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it is the plague of leprosy. But if the priest look on it, and, behold, there be no white hair in the bright spot, and it be no lower than the other skin, but be somewhat dark; then the priest shall shut him up seven days: And the priest shall look upon him the seventh day: and if it be spread much abroad in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it is the plague of leprosy. And if the bright spot stay in his place, and spread not in the skin, but it be somewhat dark; it is a rising of the burning, and the priest shall pronounce him clean: for it is an inflammation of the burning. If a man or woman have a plague upon the head or the beard; then

the priest shall see the plague: and, behold, if it be in sight deeper than the skin; and there be in it a yellow thin hair; then the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it is a dry scall, even a leprosy upon the head or beard. And if the priest look on the plague of the scall, and, behold, it be not in sight deeper than the skin, and that there is no black hair in it; then the priest shall shut up him that hath the plague of the scall seven days: and in the seventh day the priest shall look on the plague: and, behold, if the scall spread not, and there be in it no yellow hair, and the scall be not in sight deeper than the skin; he shall be shaven, but the scall shall he not shave; and the priest shall shut up him that hath the scall seven days more: and in the seventh day the priest shall look on the scall: and, behold, if the scall be not spread in the skin, nor be in sight deeper than the skin; then the priest shall pronounce him clean: and he shall wash his clothes, and be clean. But if the scall spread much in the skin after his cleansing; then the priest shall look on him: and, behold, if the scall be spread in the skin, the priest shall not seek for yellow hair; he is unclean. But if the scall be in his sight at a stay, and that there is black hair grown up therein; the scall is healed, he is clean: and the priest shall pronounce him clean.

The physical burning spoken of in verses 24–28 puts one in mind of the burning of contention or strife which causes confusion in the body of Christ (James 3:14–16).

Leviticus 13:38–44

If a man also or a woman have in the skin of their flesh bright spots, even white bright spots; Then the priest shall look: and, behold, if the bright spots in the skin of their flesh be darkish white; it is a freckled spot that groweth in the skin; he is clean. And the man whose hair is fallen off his head, he is bald; yet is he clean. And he that hath his hair fallen off from the part of his head toward his face, he is forehead bald: yet is he clean. And if there be in the bald head, or bald forehead, a white reddish sore; it is a leprosy sprung up in his bald head, or his bald forehead.

Then the priest shall look upon it: and, behold, if the rising of the sore be white reddish in his bald head, or in his bald forehead, as the leprosy appeareth in the skin of the flesh; he is a leprous man, he is unclean: the priest shall pronounce him utterly unclean; his plague is in his head.

Many people will not come to Christ due to the plague of pride in their head.

> But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, that were valiant men: and they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, it appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God. Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the LORD had smitten him.
>
> 2 Chronicles 26:16–20

Uzziah was a very good king—and yet it went to his head. He began to think, "Why is it just the priests who can burn incense? That doesn't make sense to me. My reasoning argues against the necessity of that kind of legalism. My mind tells me it would be alright if I also burn incense." So Uzziah did what he was not ordained to do, called to do, anointed to do—and as a result, he contracted leprosy. Such is the result of being ruled by one's intellect rather than according to what God proclaims in His Word.

Leviticus 13:45, 46

And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, unclean, unclean. All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be.

"He shall dwell alone." I was talking to an unbeliever today about hell. "I'm going to hell," he said, "because that's where all my buddies will be."

"You need to understand something," I said. "If the Bible is true, hell is not a place where you'll be playing poker with your buddies. It's outer darkness. You won't see one other soul. It's pitch black and yet the burning goes on for eternity."

Leviticus 13:47–49
The garment also that the plague of leprosy is in, whether it be a woollen garment, or a linen garment; whether it be in the warp, or woof; of linen, or of woollen; whether in a skin, or in any thing made of skin; and if the plague be greenish or reddish in the garment, or in the skin, either in the warp, or in the woof, or in any thing of skin; it is a plague of leprosy, and shall be shewed unto the priest:

In verses 47–59, we see a description of leprosy in the garments, a fungus which would evidently cause leprosy in the skin. While we don't have to battle this particular fungus today, wise is the mom or dad who does not allow leprosy or sin to enter their homes by way of questionable music, clothing, posters, or TV.

God takes a chunk of Scripture to instruct His people on the subject of purity and the dangers of seemingly small sin because the wages of sin is death. There will be a toll, a price paid for that to which we turn a blind eye. If you want to have kids who will warm your heart rather than break it, make sure they really have a grasp of the understanding that sin leads to sorrow, while holiness leads to happiness.

Leviticus 13:50–59

And the priest shall look upon the plague, and shut up it that hath the plague seven days: and he shall look on the plague on the seventh day: if the plague be spread in the garment, either in the warp, or in the woof, or in a skin, or in any work that is made of skin; the plague is a fretting leprosy; it is unclean. He shall therefore burn that garment, whether warp or woof, in woollen or in linen, or any thing of skin, wherein the plague is: for it is a fretting leprosy; it shall be burnt in the fire. And if the priest shall look, and, behold, the plague be not spread in the garment, either in the warp, or in the woof, or in any thing of skin; then the priest shall command that they wash the thing wherein the plague is, and he shall shut it up seven days more: and the priest shall look on the plague, after that it is washed: and, behold, if the plague have not changed his colour, and the plague be not spread; it is unclean; thou shalt burn it in the fire; it is fret inward, whether it be bare within or without. And if the priest look, and, behold, the plague be somewhat dark after the washing of it; then he shall rend it out of the garment, or out of the skin, or out of the warp, or out of the woof: and if it appear still in the garment, either in the warp, or in the woof, or in any thing of skin; it is a spreading plague: thou shalt burn that wherein the plague is with fire. And the garment, either warp, or woof, or whatsoever thing of skin it be, which thou shalt wash, if the plague be departed from them, then it shall be washed the second time, and shall be clean. This is the law of the plague of leprosy in a garment of woollen or linen, either in the warp, or woof, or any thing of skins, to pronounce it clean, or to pronounce it unclean.

"If You will, cleanse me," said the leper to Jesus.

And Jesus looked on him with compassion and said, "Of course I will. Be thou clean" (see Matthew 8:3).

Jesus wants to clean us, our houses, and our clothing. "Be thou clean," is His word to us, to our families, to our congregation.



14 Where chapter 13 dealt with the characteristics of leprosy, chapter 14 addresses the cleansing of leprosy . . .

Leviticus 14:1, 2 (a)
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing:

Verses 1 through 7 paint a perfect picture of the death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ 1,500 years before the event took place . . .

Leviticus 14:2 (b), 3 (a)
. . . He shall be brought unto the priest: and the priest shall go forth out of the camp . . .

The leper was to be brought to the priest outside of the camp. So, too, when we were out of it—when we were in isolation, left for dead, when there was no hope—Jesus met us where we were, outside the camp.

Leviticus 14:3 (b), 4 (a)
. . . and the priest shall look, and, behold, if the plague of leprosy be healed in the leper; then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds alive and clean . . .

There is no more insignificant a bird than a sparrow. Yet when even a sparrow falls to the ground, the Father takes notice (Matthew 10:29). In their insignificance, these sparrows speak of Jesus, who humbled Himself and assumed the frailty of humanity. Yet the Father's care and awareness of their every move speaks of the depth of His love for His only begotten Son.

Leviticus 14:4 (b)
. . . and cedar wood, and scarlet, and hyssop:

Wood in Scripture speaks of the wood of the Cross, and scarlet of blood. Hyssop was the little bush with which the Israelites applied blood on the doorposts of their homes during Passover. It was also the stalk to which a

sponge was attached containing a drink refused by Jesus on the Cross (John 19:29). Thus, hyssop speaks of sacrifice.

Leviticus 14:5 (a)
And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel . . .

Jesus would become an earthen vessel just like us (2 Corinthians 4:7). He would die an earthen vessel as well.

Leviticus 14:5 (b)
. . . over running water:

Scripturally, water speaks not only of the Word, but of the Spirit. Thus, the bird was to be killed in the earthen vessel over running water because Jesus would die according to the prophecies of the Scripture that were inspired by the Spirit. When the Sparrow of our salvation died, it was neither accident nor random tragedy. Rather, it was all part of prophecy, a preordained plan of God which the Spirit inspired the writers of Scripture to record over a century before it would take place.

Leviticus 14:6, 7
As for the living bird, he shall take it, and the cedar wood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water: and he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose into the open field.

The remaining bird would be dipped in the blood, the first blood shed. Why? One bird would depict the death of our Savior, our Redeemer. But the story doesn't end there. He ascended to heaven. He rose again. So a second bird was needed to complete the illustration. After being dipped in the blood of the first bird, the second bird was allowed to fly away free. After Jesus died on the Cross, the Book of Hebrews tells us He took His blood into

heaven and sprinkled it in the sanctuary of heaven (Hebrews 9). Thus, the analogy is perfect.

The Resurrection is the hinge on which the door of our faith swings for if there was no Resurrection, Paul was right: we are of all men most miserable (1 Corinthians 15:19).

The Resurrection is essential because it provides proof *to* us. "Show us a sign to validate Your claims," Jesus' contemporaries demanded.

"Destroy this body and in three days, I'll rise again," Jesus answered. And indeed that continues to be the sign that sets Him apart from all others.

Secondly, the Resurrection tells us He's present *with* us. On that first Easter Sunday, His followers weren't rejoicing in theological implications or dispensational ramifications but simply in the fact that their Friend—the One who had calmed the storm and fed them, the One who had healed and loved them—was with them once again. And the same is true for every believer. What storm is raging around you tonight? What leprosy is nibbling at you? What problem is pressing down heavily on your soul? You can cast all those cares upon Jesus, for He's with you even now.

Finally, the Resurrection reminds us that He's praying *for* us. Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). Therefore, if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). How does He win His case? Revelation 12:11 tells us the accuser of our souls is overcome by the blood. That's why, in our text, the leper was sprinkled seven times, for seven is the number of perfection, of completion.

The Sparrow of our salvation left His nest in heaven to lodge in a tree called Calvary, to die in place of you and me. But the story doesn't end there. Because He took His blood into heaven to cleanse each of us, we can come boldly before God no matter how inadequate, how unworthy, how leprous we feel (Hebrews 4:16).

Leviticus 14:8, 9

And he that is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he may be clean: and after that he shall come into the camp, and shall tarry abroad out of his tent seven days. But it shall be on the seventh day, that he shall shave all his hair off his head and his beard and his

eyebrows, even all his hair he shall shave off: and he shall wash his clothes, also he shall wash his flesh in water, and he shall be clean.

After washing his clothes, shaving his hair, and waiting seven days, the leper was to repeat the process.

Just as the leper was to be washed and shaved twice, thereby taking on the appearance of a newborn babe, Peter says, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word" (1 Peter 2:2). He didn't say *if* you're a newborn babe, a new Christian, a new believer, but *as* newborn babes we should continually return to the place where our so-called maturity doesn't come into play, but where we are as eager and hungry to learn as when we were first born again. We all need to shave off our false sense of maturity and wisdom, our puffed-up estimation of our spirituality. The key is to come in humility, to say, "Lord, I need to hear these simple truths over and over again that I might continue to grow."

Leviticus 14:10
And on the eighth day he shall take two he lambs without blemish, and one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, and three tenth deals of fine flour for a meat offering, mingled with oil, and one log of oil.

Eight is the number of new beginnings. A "log" is about three-fifths of a pint.

Leviticus 14:11
And the priest that maketh him clean shall present the man that is to be made clean, and those things, before the LORD, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation:

Who is the Priest who makes us clean and presents us before the door of the heavenly tabernacle, the throne of God? Jesus. He can keep us from falling (Jude 24). But even when I do fail, even when I do fall, He can present me faultless before God because He has cleansed me with His blood.

Leviticus 14:12, 13
And the priest shall take one he lamb, and offer him for a trespass offering, and the log of oil, and wave them for a wave offering before the LORD: and he shall slay the lamb in the place where he shall kill the sin offering and the burnt offering, in the holy place: for as the sin offering is the priest's, so is the trespass offering: it is most holy:

The leper was to make a sin offering and a trespass offering to atone for both the sin nature inherent within him as is in every man, as well as for the specific acts of sin committed by him as are committed by every man.

Leviticus 14:14
And the priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering, and the priest shall put it upon the tip of the right ear of him that is to be cleansed, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot:

What we've heard, what we've done, where we've been is all covered by the blood. It must be—for we've heard stuff we shouldn't have, done stuff and gone places we're ashamed of.

Leviticus 14:15–17
And the priest shall take some of the log of oil, and pour it into the palm of his own left hand: and the priest shall dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand, and shall sprinkle of the oil with his finger seven times before the LORD: and of the rest of the oil that is in his hand shall the priest put upon the tip of the right ear of him that is to be cleansed, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot, upon the blood of the trespass offering:

The blood applied to the ear, thumb, and toe was followed by oil, the symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can only be applied where the blood has been. Some people try to be filled with the Holy Spirit, failing to understand that the real issue is not to be filled with the Spirit as much as it is

to be emptied of sin. Too often we seek the anointing of oil—the power and presence of the Spirit—when in reality, we first need to repent of sin.

Leviticus 14:18
And the remnant of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall pour upon the head of him that is to be cleansed: and the priest shall make an atonement for him before the LORD.

Only four groups of people were anointed with oil upon the head: kings, prophets, priests—and lepers. Isn't that just like the Lord?

Every day, she made her way to the stream from which she would draw water enough to fill the two large pots she would carry half a mile back to the manor. One of the pots being cracked, by the time she arrived, only a pot and a half were full. After a few years, the cracked pot said, "I'm not worthy. I try to be. I want to be. I mean to be. But I never come through. I only make it half way. Why didn't you discard me long ago?"

"I want to show you something," the servant girl replied. And she took the pots on the walk again. "What do you see?"

"All kinds of flowers," the pot answered.

"That's right," the girl said. "They're there because every day, without you even knowing it, you watered the ground so they could grow."

I think we all feel like cracked pots. We want to do good, but it seems although we never do. But here's what we need to know: lepers were anointed to be the bouquet of grace. Lepers like us are producing something in which our Master delights. Sure, there's an anointing on the king and the prophet and the priest. But there's an anointing on the cleansed leper as well—if for no other reason than to be a trophy of God's grace.

Leviticus 14:19–21 (a)
And the priest shall offer the sin offering, and make an atonement for him that is to be cleansed from his uncleanness; and afterward he shall kill the burnt offering: and the priest shall

offer the burnt offering and the meat offering upon the altar: and the priest shall make an atonement for him, and he shall be clean. And if he be poor, and cannot get so much; then he shall take one lamb for a trespass offering to be waved, to make an atonement for him . . .

If the leper was poor, one lamb would suffice. For us, one Lamb was indeed sufficient not only to take away our sin, but the sins of the whole word (John 1:29).

Leviticus 14:21 (b), 22 (a)
. . . and one tenth deal of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering, and a log of oil; and two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, such as he is able to get. . . .

Such as he is able to get. "I don't get a lot of this," you might be thinking. That's okay. All the Lord requires is that you apply what you are able to get.

Leviticus 14:22 (b)–31
. . . and the one shall be a sin offering, and the other a burnt offering. And he shall bring them on the eighth day for his cleansing unto the priest, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, before the LORD. And the priest shall take the lamb of the trespass offering, and the log of oil, and the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the LORD: and he shall kill the lamb of the trespass offering, and the priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering, and put it upon the tip of the right ear of him that is to be cleansed, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot: and the priest shall pour of the oil into the palm of his own left hand: and the priest shall sprinkle with his right finger some of the oil that is in his left hand seven times before the LORD: and the priest shall put of the oil that is in his hand upon the tip of the right ear of him that is to be cleansed, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot, upon the place of the blood of the trespass offering: and the rest of the oil that is

in the priest's hand he shall put upon the head of him that is to be cleansed, to make an atonement for him before the LORD. And he shall offer the one of the turtledoves, or of the young pigeons, such as he can get; even such as he is able to get, the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, with the meat offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for him that is to be cleansed before the LORD. This is the law of him in whom is the plague of leprosy, whose hand is not able to get that which pertaineth to his cleansing.

The requirement for those who couldn't afford a lamb was less fine flour and two birds, but the procedure was the same.

Leviticus 14:32–40
And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, When ye be come into the land of Canaan, which I give to you for a possession, and I put the plague of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession; and he that owneth the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, It seemeth to me there is as it were a plague in the house: then the priest shall command that they empty the house, before the priest go into it to see the plague, that all that is in the house be not made unclean: and afterward the priest shall go in to see the house: and he shall look on the plague, and, behold, if the plague be in the walls of the house with hollow strakes, greenish or reddish, which in sight are lower than the wall; then the priest shall go out of the house to the door of the house, and shut up the house seven days: and the priest shall come again the seventh day, and shall look: and, behold, if the plague be spread in the walls of the house; then the priest shall command that they take away the stones in which the plague is, and they shall cast them into an unclean place without the city:

Some translations render this plague as a stain, or mildew. How could leprosy exist in a house? Evidently, this was the manifestation of some kind of infectious disease—to be taken seriously and inspected carefully.

Leviticus 14:41–44
And he shall cause the house to be scraped within round about, and they shall pour out the dust that they scrape off without the city into an unclean place: and they shall take other stones, and put them in the place of those stones; and he shall take other morter, and shall plaister the house. And if the plague come again, and break out in the house, after that he hath taken away the stones, and after he hath scraped the house, and after it is plaistered; then the priest shall come and look, and, behold, if the plague be spread in the house, it is a fretting leprosy in the house: it is unclean.

After replacing the plagued stones with new stones, if the plague reappeared, it was chronic and couldn't be dealt with simply by removing a few stones.

A house with leprosy speaks of the heart. In Ephesians 3, Paul prayed that Christ might dwell in our hearts, or literally be at home in our hearts. Is Christ at home in your heart—in every room of the home of your heart? Or are there closets and attics that are leprous? You can't simply lock the door or seal them off. No, the stones are to be ripped out and carried away. Otherwise, the leprosy will spread. We think if we've given the Lord five out of eight rooms, we're doing pretty well, when, in actuality, if there's even one room with leprosy, the entire house will ultimately be affected.

Secondly, leprosy in a house speaks of the family. As priest of the home, Dad, it is your responsibility not only to clean your homes continually, but to teach your kids what is clean and what is unclean. Some moms and dads take stuff off the wall, off the bookshelf, or out of the music collection, but the kids never understand why. If there's no other reason to immerse yourself in the Word, being able to show your kids or grandchildren what leprosy does, how it works, and what to do about it is reason enough.

Thirdly, leprosy in a house relates not only to our hearts or families, but also to the church. Because we are living stones, the household of God, we're connected (1 Peter 2:5). Therefore, if you see leprosy in another stone, it is your responsibility not to murmur or gossip, not to judge or complain, but to deal with it straightforwardly and biblically. In Matthew 18, Jesus

declares that if there is a problem, an offense, a difficulty between you and a brother, you are to talk with him privately. If he won't listen, you're to take another brother to help explain the issue. And if he still won't listen, you are to go to the church leadership and the church will step in. Because we're one household, if we sweep any given problem under the rug, we'll find what they found in Joshua's day—that the whole country was defeated by the sin under Achan's rug (Joshua 7:21). Therefore, let's clean house, gang.

Leviticus 14:45–53
And he shall break down the house, the stones of it, and the timber thereof, and all the morter of the house; and he shall carry them forth out of the city into an unclean place. Moreover he that goeth into the house all the while that it is shut up shall be un clean until the even. And he that lieth in the house shall wash his clothes; and he that eateth in the house shall wash his clothes. And if the priest shall come in, and look upon it, and, behold, the plague hath not spread in the house, after the house was plaistered: then the priest shall pronounce the house clean, because the plague is healed. And he shall take to cleanse the house two birds, and cedar wood, and scarlet, and hyssop: and he shall kill the one of the birds in an earthen vessel over running water: and he shall take the cedar wood, and the hyssop, and the scarlet, and the living bird, and dip them in the blood of the slain bird, and in the running water, and sprinkle the house seven times: and he shall cleanse the house with the blood of the bird, and with the running water, and with the living bird, and with the cedar wood, and with the hyssop, and with the scarlet: but he shall let go the living bird out of the city into the open fields, and make an atonement for the house: and it shall be clean.

Here we see the same procedure as seen in verses 1 through 7. This time, however, it relates to the house.

Leviticus 14:54
This is the law for all manner of plague of leprosy, and scall,

As defined in 13:30 “scall” is a dry leprosy.

Leviticus 14:55–57
And for the leprosy of a garment, and of a house, and for a rising, and for a scab, and for a bright spot: to teach when it is unclean, and when it is clean: this is the law of leprosy.

This chapter ends with an admonition that God’s people are to be able to determine themselves and to teach others what is clean and unclean as it relates to leprosy—whether it be on the flesh, in a garment, or within a house.



15 There are certain chapters in the Bible from which one would not necessarily choose to preach or teach. This is one of those. It deals with issues that are rather personal and can be a bit embarrassing, at least initially. But every part of God’s Word has an amazing way of being applicable to our daily lives. So bear with me as we work through the text and discover applications I believe you will find to be helpful.

Chapters 13 and 14 deal with the law of the leper. Leprosy is an obvious uncleanness. The law presented in the chapter before us, however, addresses hidden uncleanness and speaks of the sins we are able to camouflage or hide from others but which are just as insidious and sometimes even more dangerous than those which are obvious.

David understood this. “Cleanse me from secret faults,” and, “Thou desirest truth in the inward parts,” he prayed (Psalm 19:12, 51:6). David understood that regardless of what people thought of him or how he presented himself outwardly, God desired truth integrity and rightness internally. And such is the matter before us . . .

Leviticus 15:1, 2
And the LORD spake unto Moses and to Aaron, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, when any man hath a running issue out of his flesh, because of his issue he is unclean.

Although some commentators debate it, most believe the running issue spoken of here refers to a venereal disease. And before we condemn those who contract such an illness, let us remember Jesus' words in Matthew 5 when He said, "You have heard it said that you're not to commit adultery. But I say unto you, whoever looks at a woman with lust in his heart has already committed adultery," for suddenly none of us escape indictment.

"In me," Paul would declare, "dwells no good thing" (Romans 7:18). Even David, the man after God's own heart cried out, "Cleanse me and purge me" (see Psalm 51:7). No matter how spiritual we think we are, no matter how mature, we have all contracted uncleanness of one sort or another.

Leviticus 15:3–11
And this shall be his uncleanness in his issue: whether his flesh run with his issue, or his flesh be stopped from his issue, it is his uncleanness. Every bed, whereon he lieth that hath the issue, is unclean: and every thing, whereon he sitteth, shall be unclean. And whosoever toucheth his bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. And he that sitteth on any thing whereon he sat that hath the issue shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. And he that toucheth the flesh of him that hath the issue shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. And if he that hath the issue spit upon him that is clean; then he shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. And what saddle soever he rideth upon that hath the issue shall be unclean. And whosoever toucheth any thing that was under him shall be unclean until the even: and he that beareth any of those things shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. And whomsoever he toucheth that hath the issue, and hath not rinsed his hands in water, he shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even.

In dealing with this chronic discharge of this disease, the key phrase is, there is to be a washing, a scrubbing, a cleansing with water. This predated medical knowledge by thousands of years, for it wasn't until the nineteenth

century that doctors understood the importance of cleanliness. Prior to that time, a clean doctor was considered to be about as effective as a clean football player. They wore blood on their clothes and hands as a sign of success. But in the 1800s, one particular doctor made a correlation between the number of autopsies performed and the number of patients who, treated by the same doctors who performed the autopsies hours earlier, died from infectious disease. When he realized it was the doctors themselves who were spreading disease, he came to the revolutionary conclusion that doctors should wash after every operation.

"How shall a young man cleanse his way?" David asked. "By taking heed to the Word" (Psalm 119:9).

"We are washed by the water which is the Word" Paul said (Ephesians 5).

"Now ye are clean by the Word I have spoken unto you," Jesus declared (John 15:3).

There is indeed a washing, a cleansing from spiritual disease as we drink of the Scriptures. Like the doctors in the dark ages of medicine, we mistakenly think we don't have to wash ourselves spiritually all that often. But yet we wonder why we remain in an infected condition. God's way is that His Word would be the cleansing agent which would purify and protect us from the infection of lustful thoughts, bad attitudes, cynical spirits, and the host of other diseases which we think no one sees.

It's amazing how much better those who take time to be in the Word personally and fellowship with the Lord intimately do than those who think they don't need to wash. What we're doing here tonight is not just filling up an hour or two, but we're saying, "Lord, I'm trusting something is happening miraculously, supernaturally even now, that Your Word is doing a cleansing work in me."

Leviticus 15:12
And the vessel of earth, that he toucheth which hath the issue, shall be broken: and every vessel of wood shall be rinsed in water.

Throughout Scripture, the earthen vessel speaks of you and me (2 Corinthians 4:7). And this passage is no exception, for just as any ceramic

plate or piece of pottery the diseased man touched was to be destroyed, so too, there is a price to pay for promiscuity—not the least of which is that everyone touched by such a one gets shattered and broken in the process.

Leviticus 15:13
And when he that hath an issue is cleansed of his issue; then he shall number to himself seven days for his cleansing, and wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in running water, and shall be clean.

In John 13, Jesus said to Peter, "If I don't wash you, you can have no part with Me." In other words, "If you don't allow washing, there won't be intimacy between you and Me, fellowship the way there ought to be." That is why immersing ourselves in the water of the Word is absolutely essential and nonnegotiable.

Leviticus 15:14, 15
And on the eighth day he shall take to him two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, and come before the LORD unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and give them unto the priest: and the priest shall offer them, the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for him before the LORD for his issue.

When free of the infection, the man was to bring two sacrifices: the burnt offering that spoke of consecration, and the sin offering which spoke of confession. The fact that a sin offering was required is the reason this affliction, more than likely, was the result of this man's own sin.

Leviticus 15:16
And if any man's seed of copulation go out from him, then he shall wash all his flesh in water, and be unclean until the even.

Verses 16 through 19 deal not with the chronic discharge of venereal disease, but the sporadic discharge of a man's seed.

Leviticus 15:17, 18

And every garment, and every skin, whereon is the seed of copulation, shall be washed with water, and be unclean until the even. The woman also with whom man shall lie with seed of copulation, they shall both bathe themselves in water, and be unclean until the even.

Because sporadic discharge is natural and right in the context of marriage, there is no need for a sin offering. But even the most natural and beautiful things are unclean because everything is polluted and tainted by sin. That is why Romans 8 says all of nature groans, waiting for the day of redemption (8:22). All of nature is in a fallen condition. And as wonderful as it is to watch the sun set into the ocean, to be in the mountains on a beautiful winter day, or to experience the love of husband or wife, even the most beautiful aspects of nature are not what they once were. When Adam sinned, all of nature crashed. And what we see around us, as beautiful as it may be, is not what it was before the Fall and not what it will be when Christ comes back and restores the earth (Revelation 21:1).

Leviticus 15:19–24
And if a woman have an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be put apart seven days: and whosoever toucheth her shall be unclean until the even. And every thing that she lieth upon in her separation shall be unclean: every thing also that she sitteth upon shall be unclean. And whosoever toucheth her bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. And whosoever toucheth any thing that she sat upon shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. And if it be on her bed, or on any thing whereon she sitteth, when he toucheth it, he shall be unclean until the even. And if any man lie with her at all, and her flowers be upon him, he shall be unclean seven days; and all the bed whereon he lieth shall be unclean.

This speaks of the periodic uncleanness of a woman. And, again, because no sin is involved, the sacrifice of an animal is not required. What God declares here, reinforced in Leviticus 18:19 and 20:18, is that during this

period of time, a man is to be careful with his wife, that he is to make allowances for her condition. If understood correctly, rather than having a restrictive effect on marriage, this can have a renewing effect, as is God's intent.

Leviticus 15:25
And if a woman have an issue of her blood many days out of the time of her separation, or if it run beyond the time of her separation; all the days of the issue of her uncleanness shall be as the days of her separation: she shall be unclean.

Verses 25 through 30 deal not with the monthy cycle of women, but with a chronic uncleanness which, due to the sin offering required in verse 30, appears to be linked to a sexually transmitted disease.

Leviticus 15:26–28
Every bed whereon she lieth all the days of her issue shall be unto her as the bed of her separation: and whatsoever she sitteth upon shall be unclean, as the uncleanness of her separation. And whosoever toucheth those things shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. But if she be cleansed of her issue, then she shall number to herself seven days, and after that she shall be clean.

While this disorder would have been uncomfortable for any woman, it would have been unbearable for a Jewish woman because as long as the problem persisted, she would be ceremonially unclean—unable to go into the tabernacle or temple, restricted in what she could do publicly and socially. Once seven days passed in which she had no issue, however, she would be declared clean.

Leviticus 15:29, 30
And on the eighth day she shall take unto her two turtles, or two young pigeons, and bring them unto the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And the priest shall offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering; and the

priest shall make an atonement for her before the LORD for the issue of her uncleanness.

As concerning the man in verses 2 through 15, the burnt offering would speak of consecration—of rededication, renewal, recommitment—while the sin offering would speak of confession.

Leviticus 15:31
Thus shall ye separate the children of Israel from their uncleanness; that they die not in their uncleanness, when they defile my tabernacle that is among them.

Although physical hygiene is a primary factor in this discussion, it's not the only one, for God says that which comes form from a man or woman can cause a defiling in the tabernacle or in the congregation which can result in the death of fellowship, of unity, of victory . . .

Leviticus 15:32, 33
This is the law of him that hath an issue, and of him whose seed goeth from him, and is defiled therewith; and of her that is sick of her flowers, and of him that hath an issue, of the man, and of the woman, and of him that lieth with her that is unclean.

Some people come to a congregation, a community of believers with an ax to grind, a bone to pick, a fish to fry. While an occasional issue is understandable, the chronic issue is sin. And death is the result. Marriages die. Personalities shrivel. Congregations are sapped of their vitality, robbed of the joy that once was or the power that could have been.

What is the solution? It's found in Luke 8 . . .

"Someone touched Me," Jesus said—not brushed against Him, not bumped into Him, but really touched Him. And indeed someone had. A woman who had been unclean for twelve years had touched the border of His garment. Why? The border of the garment spoke of one's position. Therefore, in so doing, she was submitting to Jesus' authority.

Through prayer, we can do exactly as she did. We can say, "Lord, You have me married to this man or that woman. You have me working for that

boss. You are in control. I'm touching the hem of Your garment and will submit to Your authority through them."

In addition to authority, the hem spoke of destiny, for in Numbers 15, God told the children of Israel to place upon it a ribbon of blue. Blue being the color of heaven, they would be reminded of their heavenly destiny with every step they took. "I go to prepare a place for you," Jesus told us (John 14:2). In the meantime, He's preparing us for the place through people around us who might rub us the wrong way in order to get us to be looking forward to heaven.

Finally, the garment spoke of intimacy, for just as Ruth, a pagan woman, said to Boaz, a godly man, "Put your garment over me," we can draw near to our Greater than Boaz, Jesus Christ, by placing ourselves under His authority and realizing He is our destiny.



16 We come to the section of Scripture that deals with the most holy day of the Jewish calendar—Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. *Kaphar,* the Hebrew word for "atonement," actually means "to cover." The Day of Atonement signified not a cleansing of sin, but a covering because sin could not be cleansed through the offering of a bull or a ram, a goat or a lamb. It could only be cleansed by the blood of a perfect Man. The Book of Hebrews argues that, because the Day of Atonement had to take place annually, it spoke of something better to come. And that was God's only Son.

Chapter 16 is divided into three sections. Verses 1 through 6 deal with the preparation of the priest, 7 through 19 with the preparation of the place, and 20 through 34 with the preparation of the people—all to be performed exactingly and painstakingly for they prefigured what Jesus would do as both our great High Priest and the Lamb of God.

Leviticus 16:1, 2

And the LORD spake unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered before the LORD, and died; and the LORD said unto Moses, speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the

mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.

Linked to chapter 10, these opening verses of chapter 16 hint that, in addition to burning strange fire, Nadab and Abihu violated God's Law by going in to the Holy of Holies.

Suppose you are an Amorite, Amonite, or a Jebusite watching the Israelites fervently engaged in pitching a huge tent. An Israelite happens across your path and you ask him what they're doing. "Erecting the tabernacle," he would answer, "the tent where God meets with His people."

"I want to go there and meet Him, too." you would say.

"Sorry, it's just for Israelites," he would answer.

"Then I wish I were an Israelite," you would say.

"It's not enough to simply be an Israelite," he would answer. "You have to be of the tribe of Levi. They're the only ones who get to put up the tabernacle."

"Then I wish I were a Levite," you would say.

"It's not that simple," he would say. "To go into the tabernacle, you must be a priest, which means you must be of the family of Aaron."

"Then I wish I were of the family of Aaron," you would say.

"It's not that simple," he would say. "Only the oldest member of the family can serve as the high priest. And only the high priest can actually meet with God."

"Then I wish I were the oldest member of the family of Aaron so I could meet with God whenever I wished," you would say.

"It's not that simple," he would say. "The high priest can only meet with God one day each year on Yom Kippur. And if he's not properly prepared, he'll die. See ya later."

We can have the tendency to read the Old Testament and think it would be wonderful to live in days when people saw firsthand the parting of the Red Sea, the drowning of Pharaoh's army, manna falling from heaven. Yet, in reality, we live in much better days because we experience every day that

which only one of them could experience on only one day each year: the *chabod,* the glory of God. It's an unbelievable privilege God has given to you and me. Thus, these days are better indeed.

Leviticus 16:3
Thus shall Aaron come into the holy *place:* with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering.

The word "place" is in italics. Therefore, the phrase should read, "Thus shall Aaron come into the Holy of Holies." The tabernacle was divided into two rooms. The first room was the holy place in which was the table of showbread, the altar of incense, and the golden candlestick. It was the room from into which the priests would go daily. But there was a second room—a smaller room, separated from the first room by a veil—called the Holy of Holies into which only the high priest could enter one day each year to experience the glory of God.

Leviticus 16:4
He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on.

Normally, the high priest would wear glorious garments—colorful robes bordered by pomegranates and bells, a jeweled breastplate, a golden plate across his forehead. But on Yom Kippur, he would lay aside his regal robes and wear only the simple linen garments worn by the priests. And that is what Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, did for us when He laid aside the attributes of His Divinity and clothed Himself with humanity in order to offer Himself a sacrifice for you and me.



***For topical study of Leviticus 16:4 entitled "Humility," turn to page* 410.**

Leviticus 16:5, 6
And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house.

The first offering was for the high priest himself because, unlike our great High Priest, Aaron was a sinner, and he had to deal with his own sin before he could deal with anyone else's.

Leviticus 16:7–10
And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD's lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness.

Because the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), one goat would be killed. But, because if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sin (1 John 1:9), one goat would be spared.

Leviticus 16:11, 12
And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself: and he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail:

After offering a burnt offering for himself, Aaron was to take the coals from the altar of incense into the Holy of Holies.

Leviticus 16:13
And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not:

Just as the Holy of Holies would be filled with the incense of prayer and intercession, the man or woman who experiences God's presence to the fullest degree is the man or woman who prays.

Leviticus 16:14
And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.

Seven is not only the number of perfection, but when Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, was sacrificed, He bled from seven points: There was a crown of thorns around His head. His back was whipped with the flagellum. His left and His right hands were pierced through with spikes driven into the wood of the Cross, as were His left and right feet. And finally, His side bled from the thrust of a spear. Thus, prophetically, the blood was to be sprinkled seven times prefiguring what Christ would do perfectly, completely.

Leviticus 16:15
Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat:

Easter Sunday was in reality a depiction, a fulfillment of Yom Kippur, for when the disciples looked in the empty tomb that morning, what would they have seen? A blood-splattered slab where the body of Christ had lain with an angel sitting on either end—a perfect picture of the mercy seat and the ark of the covenant.

Leviticus 16:16–19

And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness. And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel. And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the LORD, and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about. And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

As Aaron sprinkled the blood of the bull and goat to cleanse the Holy of Holies, he did so alone because Christ Jesus alone would do the work of atonement, of bringing us into oneness with the Father. That is why on the Cross of Calvary, He cried, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46) He was utterly, completely, totally alone, for He alone could pay the price. No one else would, no one else could.

Leviticus 16:20–22
And when he hath made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat: and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.

One goat had been sacrificed because the wages of sin is death. But the other goat was brought before Aaron in order that he might lay his hands on its head and verbally, articulately, carefully confess the sins of the nation and,

in a sense, transfer the sin to the goat. Symbolically bearing the sins of the whole nation, the goat was lead to the wilderness, where it symbolically carried the sins of the congregation out of sight.

The scapegoat is an illustration of God's declaration that He will remember our sins and iniquities no more (Jeremiah 31:34). When this understanding finally drops from one's head to his heart, it is so exhilarating, so liberating because most of us believe that God, like Santa Claus, is making a list and checking it twice, that God is keeping score. He's not. We remember each other's sin. But God has chosen to erase from His memory bank the sins we confess.

Most people know this doctrinally, but because they don't believe it in the deepest part of their soul, they believe God is disappointed in them because of what happened ten years ago or ten weeks ago or ten minutes ago. In Psalm 103, God says, "As far as the east is from the west, so I have put your iniquities from Me." In Isaiah 38:17, He says, "I have cast your sins behind My back." Isaiah 44:22 tells us He has blotted out our sins like a thick cloud; Job 14:17 that He puts our sins in a bag and sews it up; and Micah 7:19 that our sins are cast into the depth of the sea.

What the scapegoat pictured symbolically and temporarily, the Lamb of God achieved practically and eternally when He died on the Cross of Calvary for each and every sin of all of humanity.

Leviticus 16:23, 24
And Aaron shall come into the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall put off the linen garments, which he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there: and he shall wash his flesh with water in the holy place, and put on his garments, and come forth, and offer his burnt offering, and the burnt offering of the people, and make an atonement for himself, and for the people.

We who are involved in service plead the blood before we give a Bible study, witness to someone, lead in worship—but here is a key principle in ministry. It is not only when Aaron went into the Holy of Holies that he was to make a sacrifice and wash himself, but he did so again when his service

therein was complete. So, when you're through singing your song or teaching a study, or witnessing to someone at work, you need to plead the blood again because you will be vulnerable to sin when you come out of ministry even more than you were going in because one of two things will happen. You will either feel inadequate and depressed, saying, "I forgot to share that," or, "I didn't hit those notes," or, "I am a miserable failure,"—or, if your witnessing is impacting, your music note-perfect, you'll be proud of your accomplishment. Either way, Satan has you right where he wants you. That is why when you're through ministering, you need to again plead the blood, to be cleansed and empowered once again.

Leviticus 16:25–34

And the fat of the sin offering shall he burn upon the altar. And he that let go the goat for the scapegoat shall wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water, and afterward come into the camp. And the bullock for the sin offering, and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall one carry forth without the camp; and they shall burn in the fire their skins, and their flesh, and their dung. And he that burneth them shall wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp. And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you: for on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute for ever. And the priest, whom he shall anoint, and whom he shall consecrate to minister in the priest's office in his father's stead, shall make the atonement, and shall put on the linen clothes, even the holy garments: and he shall make an atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make an atonement for the tabernacle of the congregation, and for the altar, and he shall make an atonement for the priests, and for all the people of the congregation. And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to

make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year. And he did as the LORD commanded Moses.

The Day of Atonement took place in the seventh month, on the tenth day. Seven is the number of perfection, ten the number of the Law. Do we keep the law perfectly? No. And that is the reason for the Day of Atonement.

On the Day of Atonement, how would the children of Israel know if the offering was sufficient? They would know their sins were covered if the high priest emerged from the tabernacle—for if he was not properly prepared, if his offering was unacceptable, he would die in the Holy of Holies, in the presence of a Holy, Almighty God.

In the same way, I know with certainty that I am forgiven because our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, came out of the tomb. Therefore, the Book of Hebrews declares, "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace that we might find grace and mercy to help in time of need" (4:16). Because the work of atonement has been accomplished completely and perfectly, God invites us specifically and personally to come in to the Holy of Holies, to come before His throne. The question is, Will we take advantage of the invitation?

The story is told of a telegraph company in the 1800s seeking to hire a telegraph operator. The salary offered being quite substantial, only the most qualified were encouraged to apply. On the day of the invitation, seven men showed up. As they sat outside the boss' office waiting for their interview, listening to the telegraph operators working in the background, suddenly, the last one to arrive stood up and went into the boss' office without being asked. The boss emerged a few minutes later and said, "Gentlemen, thank you for coming. But there will be no need for an interview. I've hired this man for the position."

"Wait a minute," one of the remaining six protested, "that's not fair. This man was the last to arrive. We should have had our chance to be interviewed for this position."

"You did," the boss said. "While you were sitting here, one of the operators was tapping out a message saying, 'If you receive this message, come into my office immediately. The job is yours." '

All of the men were trained. All were qualified. All had knowledge of Morse Code—but only one of the seven was tuned in to the message being tapped out right then.

I can't help but wonder today if there is one in seven who has really heard the message being tapped out which says, "Come boldly to My throne. Talk with Me. Cast your care upon Me. Receive from Me help, strength, instruction."

Have you heard the message, Mom—the tap, tap, tap of the Morse Code of the Master saying, "Come and talk to Me about your son or daughter. This is the moment"?

Have you heard the message, husband? Do you hear the tapping of the Master, saying, "Come boldly to the throne of grace that you might find help for your marriage which is presently unraveling"?

If you're wondering if you should go to college, take the job, move away; if you're struggling with physical affliction or fighting depression, I wonder if there is one in seven who hears the Lord saying, "The stone is rolled away. The veil is rent. The way is open. Come on in!"

HUMILITY
A Topical Study of
LEVITICUS 16:4

No wonder Yom Kippur held such significance for the people of God, for it was the day in which all unconfessed sins, all unknown sins, all unrecognized sins were covered.

As significant as Yom Kippur was for the nation, it was a day especially significant for the high priest, for it was the one day each year that he would enter the Holy of Holies and experience the physical, tangible glory of God. Thus, for the high priest especially, Yom Kippur was a glorious day of exaltation.

But before exaltation came humiliation. Before ministry came humility. You see, normally the high priest would be decked out in garments of glory—with a breastplate full of jewels, onyx stones on his shoulders, a golden mitre upon his head, robes of blue with pomegranates and bells circling the hem, a colorful belt around his waist. On Yom Kippur, however, he took off these garments of glory and exchanged them for the common linen garments worn by his brethren.

And in both his humiliation and exaltation, Aaron as high priest, paints a picture of our great High Priest, Jesus Christ.

Jesus will also have a day of exaltation . . .

> *Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*
>
> Philippians 2:9–11

But before exaltation came humiliation . . .

> *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but*

made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Philippians 2:5–8

Jesus stripped Himself of the royal robes of His divine attributes in exchange for the common linen robe of humanity.

Jesus was humbled at His birth when He, the Creator of the universe was born in a manger, surrounded by hay. He was humbled before His brethren when He girded Himself with a towel and washed their feet (John 13:4). He was humbled during His betrayal yet called His betrayer, "Friend" (Matthew 26:50). No wonder, then, that in the only autobiographical statement He ever made, He said, "I am meek and lowly of heart" (Matthew 11:29).

The mindset of Jesus Christ is to be ours as well. How does this happen? The text in Philippians offers important clues as to how humility can be woven into the very fabric of our personality . . .

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

Philippians 2:3

In his wonderful work on New Testament word studies, Dr. Kenneth Wuest points out that the idea of esteeming others better than oneself as seen in Philippians 2:3 does not necessarily mean looking at everyone as better than you, but rather looking on others as excelling themselves. Approving someone else is the very essence of humility.

Secondly, the truly humble person will look at himself honestly.

In 2 Samuel 16, we see David's son rebelling against him to the point where David and his men flee Jerusalem. Upon their departure, a man named Shimei called out to David, "You're a bloody man and you're getting what you deserve," while throwing rocks and dust in his direction.

"Let me lop off this guy's head," one of David's men said.

But David forbade it, saying, "He's right. I am a bloody man. The Lord is allowing this to happen."

Shimei would eventually lose his head as God dealt with him. But in the meantime, David accepted his words as being from the Lord. The Lord sometimes allows Shimeis to come into our lives to reveal to us our weaknesses that we might look at others compassionately and sympathetically rather than haughtily and hardheartedly, that we might not be those who find fault or put down, but rather those who embrace and forgive.

"Woe unto the Edomites. Woe unto the Amonites. Woe unto the Moabites. Woe unto the Perizzites," Daniel declared in the first five chapters of his Book. But in chapter 6, he saw the Lord and cried, "Woe is *me*."

Why should we be humble? Because humility brings about unity. There will be unity in the body of Christ to the degree that there is humility. Secondly, humility brings about liberty. The humble person is the freest person of all because he is completely free from protecting his rights, promoting himself, or polishing his image.

- The world says, "Promote yourself."
  The Lord says, "Humble yourself."
- The world says, "Watch out for Number One."
  The Lord says, "Esteem others better than yourself."
- The world says, "Claw your way to the top."
  The Lord says, "The way up is down."

May God begin to work humility into our lives that we might be those who are like our linen-clad great High Priest, Jesus.



17 Leviticus 17:1–9

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron, and unto his sons, and unto all the children of Israel, and say unto them; This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, saying, What man soever there be of the house of Israel, that killeth an ox, or lamb, or goat, in the

camp, or that killeth it out of the camp, And bringeth it not unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, to offer an offering unto the LORD before the tabernacle of the LORD; blood shall be imputed unto that man; he hath shed blood; and that man shall be cut off from among his people: to the end that the children of Israel may bring their sacrifices, which they offer in the open field, even that they may bring them unto the LORD, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest, and offer them for peace offerings unto the LORD. And the priest shall sprinkle the blood upon the altar of the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and burn the fat for a sweet savour unto the LORD. And they shall no more offer their sacrifices unto devils, after whom they have gone a whoring. This shall be a statute for ever unto them throughout their generations. And thou shalt say unto them, Whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers which sojourn among you, that offereth a burnt offering or sacrifice, And bringeth it not unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, to offer it unto the LORD; even that man shall be cut off from among his people.

Ezekiel 20 tells us that when the Israelites were in Egypt for four hundred years, they were involved in idolatry. Therefore, because God the Father was very concerned about the tendency of His people to fall into heresy which would lead to idolatry, He said, "I want all sacrifices to be made at the tabernacle."

"We don't like the tabernacle. It's too confining," some might have protested. "Can't five of us just get together and sacrifice in the woods?"

"No," God said.

"Who needs priests?" others might have asked. "Aren't we all spiritual? Can't we all offer sacrifices?"

"No," God said.

There are those today who think they can worship God without going to church. "My church is on the golf course," they say. Or, "at the lake." Or, "on the beach" "Why go into a stuffy building?" they ask. "Isn't God the God of creation?"

This passage reveals God's heart concerning the way He wants to be worshiped—not because He is stuffy and contrary, but because He knows what will happen practically. You see, over the years, I have noticed that the people who choose to seek the Lord at their lake house rather than in the sanctuary with the congregation never do well over the long haul. There can be a tendency—especially for older Christians—to say, "Church was great for our first ten years, but now we just need some space on Sundays," failing to realize that it's when we're with our brothers and sisters—living stones being fit together for a holy habitation (1 Peter 2:5)—that sometimes we're rubbed the wrong way by necessity. That is, it is the interaction, the fellowship, the seeking God together that not only smoothes our rough edges, but also gives us stability.

Leviticus 17:10, 11
And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.

When Peter Marshall, Chaplain of the United States Senate in the 1940s, first arrived in Washington DC to pastor the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, an elderly lady greeted him, saying, "I do so hope you won't talk too much about the blood as our previous pastor did."

"I promise I won't talk too much about the blood," the young Scotsman assured her, "because it is impossible to talk too much about the blood."

Peter Marshall nailed it perfectly. It is impossible to talk too much about the blood of Jesus Christ. Why? Because this book is soaked in blood, saturated with blood. Ours is a bloody religion indeed. And there's a reason for that. The Book of Hebrews tells us that without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sin (Hebrews 9:22). Therefore, man's greatest need being forgiveness, it only stands to reason that blood would be spoken of freely and consistently throughout the Word.

Why is blood the key to forgiveness? Because, as seen in our text, the life of the flesh is in the blood. That is why it was blood that cried out when the first murder was committed (Genesis 4:10). There is indeed a potency, a mystery, a power in blood for it is the essence of life. And in Leviticus, God uses these powerful properties of blood to not only show us the seriousness of our sin, but to point to the sacrifice of His Son.

Leviticus 17:12–14 (a)
Therefore I said unto the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood. And whatsoever man there be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, which hunteth and catcheth any beast or fowl that may be eaten; he shall even pour out the blood thereof, and cover it with dust. For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof . . .

Because the blood is sacred, orthodox Jews, as they do to this day, were exceedingly careful not to eat any meat not thoroughly drained of every drop of blood. And then an itinerant Rabbi from Galilee came along one day and had the audacity to proclaim, "Except you drink My blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). No wonder it was at that point that many walked away to follow Him no more (John 6:66).

I know what Jesus was saying. So do you. He wasn't talking about cannibalism, about drinking His blood literally in violation of Leviticus 17. He was talking about intimacy—how we are to devour the Word, how we are to open our hearts, how we are to embrace the Work He did when He shed His blood for our sin. Yet, when His followers turned away, Jesus didn't say, "Wait a minute. Let Me explain what I meant. It's not what you think." Why didn't He do that? Why didn't He clarify the issue? I believe it was for three basic reasons . . .

He knew what the Holy Spirit would do. That is, He knew that which He shared could only be made real when the Holy Spirit made it alive. And because it is the work of the Spirit to bring all things to remembrance (John 14:26), Jesus knew the Spirit would bring this occasion to their minds and make application in due season.

Secondly, Jesus knew what the Father alone could do. Only the Father can cause a person to come to Jesus (John 6:44). The Spirit gives revelation —but it is the Father who determines who will come to His Son.

Thirdly, Jesus knew what the true disciples should do. When asked if he was about to leave with the rest, Peter answered, "Where else would we go? You alone have the words of eternal life" (John 6:67, 68). Jesus didn't hurry to explain His words to those who left because He knew that they must learn to do what you and I must do—walk by faith. Why? Because only faith is strong enough to weather the storms ahead.

When we don't understand what's going on, when we're troubled by a teaching we've heard or a passage we've read, when we're going through a tragedy or a heartbreak, if we're not careful, we will be like those in John 6:66, failing to understand that the only way our faith becomes strong is when, like Peter, we believe in spite of that which we don't initially understand.

Jesus knew what the Holy Spirit would do. He knew what the Father alone could do. He knew what His true disciples should do. And knowing these things, Jesus ministered in a way that was wonderfully relaxed, incredibly peaceful.

Leviticus 17:14 (b)–16
. . . therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off. And every soul that eateth that which died of itself, or that which was torn with beasts, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger, he shall both wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even: then shall he be clean. But if he wash them not, nor bathe his flesh; then he shall bear his iniquity.

Here, verse 11 is repeated: The life of the flesh is in the blood. Physiologically, this understanding preceded medicine by thousands of years, for it wasn't until 1628 that an anatomist named Dr. Harvey identified the importance of the red fluid circulating within us. Spiritually, we know that

just as our own blood keeps us alive temporarily, the shed blood of the Lamb of God gives us life eternally.

> Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.
>
> 1 Peter 1:18–21

When Jesus died on the Cross, He paid for each one of our sins specifically. How could He have accomplished this in only six hours two thousand years ago on Calvary? Peter tells us He was slain before the foundation of the world. And John tells us that when we see Him, we'll see Him as a Lamb having just been slain (Revelation 5:6). Therefore, from the perspective of the time/ space continuum, the work of salvation was indeed complete in six hours on the Cross. But from the eternal perspective—where there is no future and no past (Ecclesiastes 3:15)—Jesus' suffering was infinitely greater than anything we can even begin to comprehend. This being the case, how can I lightly say, "It doesn't matter if I harbor an unforgiving spirit, have a lousy attitude, or engage in a questionable activity. It's all forgiven because of Calvary"?

The work of salvation is complete, finished, done. Yet as true as that is, it is also true that the price Jesus paid for each of our sins individually is unspeakably more than we can understand this side of eternity.

Because the life of the flesh is in the blood, Jesus gave His blood so that we could have life.



18

Chapter 18 deals with personal sanctity and moral propriety. It also paints a very humiliating picture of the depths of depravity of which

man is capable. As we observe human nature and study the Scripture with regard to what God has to say concerning our fallen state, I am totally amazed that our Father could love us—a people who have wandered away from Him, taken advantage of Him, rebelled against Him. The Word paints a picture of the depravity of human nature, and yet, through it all, God says, "I love you anyway."

Leviticus 18:1–5
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the LORD your God. After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD.

Here in chapter 18, God declares, "I am the Lord your God. You are to behave in a way unlike that which you saw in Egypt." During the four hundred-year period the children of Israel were in Egypt, the Egyptians were the most advanced culture in world history. Impressive in many ways, it was also an immoral culture. The Canaanites being even more immoral than the Egyptians, God said, "You are to be neither like those in the land from which you came nor like those in the land to which you're going. I am the Lord your God. I know how you were created. I know what will bring you lasting joy, true peace. If you do what I say, you'll experience the way life was meant to be."

Leviticus 18:6–20
None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him, to uncover their nakedness: I am the LORD. The nakedness of thy father, or the nakedness of thy mother, shalt thou not uncover: she is thy mother; thou shalt not uncover her nakedness. The nakedness of thy father's wife shalt thou not uncover: it is thy father's nakedness. The nakedness of thy sister, the daughter of

thy father, or daughter of thy mother, whether she be born at home, or born abroad, even their nakedness thou shalt not uncover. The nakedness of thy son's daughter, or of thy daughter's daughter, even their nakedness thou shalt not uncover: for theirs is thine own nakedness. The nakedness of thy father's wife's daughter, begotten of thy father, she is thy sister, thou shalt not uncover her nakedness. Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy father's sister: she is thy father's near kinswoman. Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy mother's sister: for she is thy mother's near kinswoman. Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy father's brother, thou shalt not approach to his wife: she is thine aunt. Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy daughter in law: she is thy son's wife; thou shalt not uncover her nakedness. Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife: it is thy brother's nakedness.Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, neither shalt thou take her son's daughter, or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nakedness; for they are her near kinswomen: it is wickedness. Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister, to vex her, to uncover her nakedness, beside the other in her life time. Also thou shalt not approach unto a woman to uncover her nakedness, as long as she is put apart for her uncleanness. Moreover thou shalt not lie carnally with thy neighbour's wife, to defile thyself with her.

In the context of this passage, "to uncover the nakedness," "to take," "to approach," and "to lie with" are all phrases which speak of incest—forbidden in every form. Seen in verses 18 and 19, marrying sisters simultaneously was also forbidden, as was adultery.

God addresses issues that seem to be common sense because the Canaanite culture was caught up in these very practices. And so, I fear, will ours be. Should the Lord tarry, I believe we will be shocked by the widespread acceptance of once-taboo issues like incest and pedophilia within the next twenty years. Should the Lord tarry, they will be destined to join the rank of homosexuality—once abhorred, but now embraced.

God is not wasting His words here. As His people are poised to enter a new land, He warns them very straightforwardly of the pressures and temptations that will pull them into perversion. "I am the Lord your God," He says. "You're not to do these things. They are unacceptable, unallowable. If you do what I say, you'll live. If you compromise you'll die." God covers every possibility because He knows what people will do, where they will go if they allow themselves to set foot on the path to perversity.

Leviticus 18:21
And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

Molech was the god of prosperity. The Canaanites made idols of Molech —five feet high with a hollow stomach—out of cast iron. They built fires in the bellies of these idols, heated them to the point of incandescence, and placed their babies as sacrifices on their red-hot arms.

How could this happen? Because those involved in Molech worship thought the babies weren't real people. Sound familiar? Babies are burned in our culture not on the arms of Molech, but with a saline solution in the name of prosperity. "I can't afford a baby right now," we say. "I don't have the resources to raise this child. I'll be better off next time around." It's a lie as old as Molech.

Leviticus 18:22
Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.

"We're not really sure how God feels about homosexuality," people say. Really? He calls it an abomination. How clear does He need to be?

Leviticus 18:23
Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: it is confusion.

"Confusion" speaks of insanity.

Leviticus 18:24, 25
Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants.

God declares the land itself will vomit out the cultures involved in homosexuality and incest, pedophilia and bestiality. And history has shown that cultures who have embraced these behaviors have collapsed.

Leviticus 18:26–30
Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: (For all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled). That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you. For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people. Therefore shall ye keep mine ordinance, that ye commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I am the LORD your God.

Chapter 18 deals with physical purity—but I believe, as the family of God, we need to hear and heed what God would say to us on a spiritual level. That is, are we guilty of exposing the nakedness of a brother or sister in God's family?

In Genesis 9, Noah, a godly man, was exposed in a way that spoke of moral compromise. Ham told his brothers. But Shem and Japheth stretched a blanket between them, walked in backwards, and covered their father's nakedness. Realizing what had happened,

Noah cursed Ham's son. Shem and Japheth, on the other hand, were blessed because love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

When someone else stumbles, do you, like Ham, talk about it? Or, like Shem and Japheth, do you walk in backwards not wanting to look at the nakedness of those in your family?

As they entered the Promised Land, the children of Israel were told not to touch anything from the city of Jericho. But Achan saw a wedge of gold, a bar of silver, and a Babylonian garment he couldn't resist. No one will know, *he thought. So he took them and hid them under the floor of his tent. When the men of Israel went to their next battle in Ai, what should have been a walk in the park was a crushing defeat to God's people. When he asked God the reason, Joshua was told there was sin in the family. Thus, the congregation was defeated because a man and his family covered the problem.*

In Genesis 9, Shem and Japheth were blessed for covering Noah's sin. In Joshua 7, Achan's family was stoned for doing that very thing. The stories seem to be contradictory. Which are we to do? The solution, as always, is seen in Jesus . . .

There sat the disciples, arguing over who was the greatest. Not only did their pride fill the room, but so did the smell of their dirty feet. John 13 tells us that Jesus neither covered their sin nor exposed it, but dealt with it by washing their feet.

The Genesis and Joshua accounts come together in Jesus. So, I have no right to point out the dirt of any sister or brother unless I am willing to get on my knees and deal with it. When we're open and honest with people concerning our own flaws and failings, they can receive the work we see needs to be done in their lives. We must be careful not to uncover the nakedness of another. And yet we must realize the responsibility and privilege that is ours to deal with issues in order to see people do better. The

only way I'll find a balance between the two is to be like Jesus, to cover and cleanse sin by uncovering myself on my knees.



19 I love the Law of God, for the Law of God reveals the love of God. God is a God of love. And He desires His people to live lives that reflect this attribute. He desires us to be a people who love each other. Consequently, when God established the nation of Israel, He laid down regulations for their society that would provide an atmosphere conducive to love. The first half of Leviticus 19 in particular deals with the regulations to establish a society that would move and grow in love . . .

Leviticus 19:1, 2
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.

Chapter 19 is a continued call to holiness. Holiness is related to wholeness. And God wants us to be a whole people. When you understand this, the commands of God are no longer burdensome, but you'll find yourself wanting to embrace them, eager to learn them, ready to practice them. The Father wants us to be a blessed people—blessed in our families and our marriages, in our relationships and our occupations. He just wants us to be happy. Satan, the deceiver and liar, says holiness leads to strangeness. "You'll be miserable," he hisses. "You'll misssss out on all the fun." Not so.

God doesn't look in the mirror and say, "I'm not really pleased with this aspect of Myself," or, "I wish I was a bit different in this area of My personality." No, because He is holy, God is totally, completely, absolutely happy with every part of His being. You see, in essence, the world "holy" simply means "whole." And because He's whole, because He lacks nothing, God is supremely happy with who He is. That's why He wants us to be happy, too.

Holiness leads to happiness. That's an absolute, nonnegotiable, irrefutable spiritual principle. God wants us to be holy for He is holy. He

commands us to be holy, for He wants us to be happy.

Leviticus 19:3 (a)
Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father . . .

Holiness begins at home. On Mt. Sinai, the children of Israel were commanded to honor their father and mother. Honor speaks of action. Here, they are commanded to fear—or revere—them. Reverence speaks of attitude. Notice there's no qualifier in either command. How we treat and feel about our parents has nothing to do with our perception of whether or not they were good parents. The fact is, none of us would be alive without our parents, so that in itself is reason enough to honor and revere them.

Leviticus 19:3 (b)
. . . and keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.

To be whole people, we need to set aside one day in seven to rest our bodies, stretch our spirits, and consider spiritual things.

Leviticus 19:4
Turn ye not unto idols, nor make to yourselves molten gods: I am the LORD your God.

The problem with molten gods is that they can be molded according to whatever it is one wants them to be. People still do this today whenever they attempt to mold God into their image in order to justify their own behavior.

Leviticus 19:5–8
And if ye offer a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the LORD, ye shall offer it at your own will. It shall be eaten the same day ye offer it, and on the morrow: and if ought remain until the third day, it shall be burnt in the fire. And if it be eaten at all on the third day, it is abominable; it shall not be accepted. Therefore every one that eateth it shall bear his iniquity, because he hath profaned the hallowed thing of the LORD: and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

Unlike the sin offering or the trespass offering, the burnt offering or the meal offering, the peace offering was unique in that it was offered simply to say, "Lord, I'm enjoying my relationship with You. You have forgiven me and been good to me. There's peace between You and me because of Your goodness and grace and mercy."

Also, unlike any other offering, the one offering it would eat of the meat of the peace offering. It was to be eaten on the day it was offered, or at the latest, leftovers could be eaten on the second day. In this, it's as if God is saying, "Don't nibble of My presence. Dive in! Eat until you're full, satiated, completely satisfied."

Leviticus 19:9, 10
And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God.

When they harvested their fields, the Israelites were to leave whatever was on the edges for those who were poor. Rabbinical scholars tell us that this would amount to approximately fifteen percent of one's crop. This was a wonderful welfare program because food was made available to anyone willing to roll up his sleeves and work for it. Cars and houses just keep getting bigger and bigger. But in time of prosperity, we are to make sure we care about those less fortunate than us. It's God's heart that we do so, an element of holiness, a part of the way we will become whole people.

Leviticus 19:11 (a)
Ye shall not steal . . .

While verses 9 and 10 would have spoken to the rich, verse 11, speaks to the poor.

Leviticus 19:11 (b), 12
. . . neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another. And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the

name of thy God: I am the LORD.

We usually think of profaning the Lord's name in conjunction with using it as a curse word. But the word "profane" actually means "to make common." Therefore, in addition to those who use the Lord's name in cursing, believers can be guilty of profaning His name by speaking of it lightly, by saying, "The Lord told me . . ." or, "The Lord showed me . . ." so often that they actually make it seem common.

Leviticus 19:13
Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.

Do whatever it takes to pay whatever you owe. Don't say, "I'll pay you in the morning, when my financial situation looks brighter." No, God says, "Pay now." This is God's way—and it's one of the ways in which the rubber of holiness meets the road.

Leviticus 19:14
Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD.

In addition to the obvious injunction not to be hardened to those who are physically inflicted, blindness and deafness are pictures throughout Scripture of the spiritual insensitivity of a world that's lost.

Cursing the deaf is subtle. Do we have an attitude of cursing those who bother us, toward those who act worldly because their ears are closed to an awareness of God? How did Jesus deal with the deaf? Turn to the gospel of Mark . . .

> And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And

> straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.
>
> Mark 7:32–35

Jesus not only took the deaf man aside from the crowd and gave him individual attention, but He put His fingers in the deaf man's ears and gave him an individual touch. Jesus didn't have to touch him. He could have spoken the word and that would have sufficed—but had He done so, the deaf man wouldn't have heard it. So He related to that man where he was. Then Jesus looked to heaven, showing the man from whence his healing would come. That's the pattern—touching people and relating to them where they're at concerning their knowledge and understanding. When Jesus spoke, the man's ears were opened. And it is as you and I speak the Word of God that spiritually deaf ears are opened as well.

Secondly, we're not to trip the blind. The concept of being a stumbling block is also seen in 1 Corinthians 8, where a controversy had arisen concerning meat that had been offered to idols before it was sold in discount markets. Looking for a good buy and knowing that idols were powerless to affect meat, some Christians would purchase the meat at discount prices. Others, however, said the meat was defiled and not to be eaten. Paul's answer was that while believers are the freest of men, we're not to use our freedom in a way that causes others to stumble. In any given situation, each of us will either be a stumbling block or a stepping stone. People will either be hindered in coming to Jesus or we'll be stepping stones on their path to Him.

Sometimes I feel we're the ones with blinded eyes, who don't see people properly; that we're the ones with deaf ears, unable to hear the cries of lost humanity. How can the Lord make us more like Himself? Turn again to Mark's Gospel . . .

> And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again

upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.

Mark 8:22–25

Sometimes I think we who have been touched by the hand of Jesus Christ, we who have received divine enlightenment, still see men as trees, trees that are in our way, trees that are to be cut down and used for our own purposes. How did Jesus solve this problem? He touched the blind man a second time and made him look up. And then the man saw every man clearly.

You and I also need to look up, for when we fix our eyes on Jesus, we become like Him (1 John 3:2). When I don't look up to the Lord, I'll look down on men. I'll see them as trees. But when I focus on Jesus, I see people as He sees them.

Leviticus 19:15
Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.

We must be careful not to view poverty as a sign of spirituality or riches as a sign of carnality. God blessed Abraham to the point his wealth was incredible and blessed Solomon with unsurpassed wealth (1 Kings 3:13). And yet Amos was a poor farmer and Jesus had nowhere to even lay His head. Therefore, because wealth or the lack thereof is a matter of what God chooses to do in each individual life, rich and poor are to be treated as equals.

Leviticus 19:16
Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD.

A talebearer hurts three people: the person he talks about, the person he talks to, and himself.

In a very real sense, people are who we say they are—regardless of whether what we say is true. People will either be lifted up or put down in the estimation of others by what we say about them. Jesus draws a direct parallel between murder and the tongue because we have the power to kill another's reputation with our words (Matthew 5:21). Secondly, telling tales, or gossiping, hurts the person who listens because it affects the way he or she will view the person being talked about. Finally, gossip hurts the talebearer himself because every time we gossip, we become smaller and smaller. As has been wisely said, great minds talk about ideas or ideals; good minds about events; small minds about people. In which company are you?

Leviticus 19:17
Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.

If you see a problem in the life of a sister or brother that needs to be addressed, don't gossip about it, but go directly to the one in error. Love him or her enough in the Lord to share your concern.

Leviticus 19:18
Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," was identified as the second greatest commandment by the One who would live it out completely (Matthew 22:37–40).

Leviticus 19:19 (a)
Ye shall keep my statutes. Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind:

In 2 Corinthians 6, Paul refers to this idea when he says, "Be not unequally yoked with an unbeliever." You might think you're an exception, but you are playing a risky game if you're entertaining the idea of marrying an

unbeliever. For every marriage of a believer to an unbeliever that makes it, there are one hundred that end up in disaster.

Leviticus 19:19 (b)
. . . thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed . . .

As seen in Matthew 13, seed is a picture of the Word. There are those who say, "I appreciate this Bible study stuff, but I also want to explore other forms of theology which don't view the Bible as God's Word. I want to combine the best parts of all religions." God, however, forbids this.

Leviticus 19:19 (c)
. . . neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woollen come upon thee.

Linen breathes; wool causes sweat. That is why the priests were to wear linen rather than wool. So, we must be oh, so careful lest we say, "Grace is okay, but there needs to be some wool, some things we can do to earn God's favor, to merit His blessing." No. God's priests were to wear no wool, for grace isn't merely the starting point—it's the only point.

Leviticus 19:20–22
And whosoever lieth carnally with a woman, that is a bondmaid, betrothed to an husband, and not at all redeemed, nor freedom given her; she shall be scourged; they shall not be put to death, because she was not free. And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the LORD, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, even a ram for a trespass offering. And the priest shall make an atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering before the LORD for his sin which he hath done: and the sin which he hath done shall be forgiven him.

Although the man was to offer a trespass offering who had sexual relations with one of his servant girls, as seen in your margin, both he and the women were to be scourged. Why was the woman scourged? I believe that God is declaring that when men take advantage of women, the woman will

pay a price even though she ought not to, for such is the tragic yet inevitable repercussion of sexual sin.

Leviticus 19:23–25
And when ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as uncircumcised: three years shall it be as uncircumcised unto you: it shall not be eaten of. But in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy to praise the LORD withal. And in the fifth year shall ye eat of the fruit thereof, that it may yield unto you the increase thereof: I am the LORD your God.

Upon entering the Promised Land, for three years, the children of Israel were not to eat of the trees they planted. Horticulturists tell us that trees not allowed to bear fruit for their first three years are incredibly productive in the fourth year. Spiritually, I believe God is saying that when it comes to the bearing of spiritual fruit through ministry, before there is ordination there must be observation. Paul would put it this way: Be careful that you don't lay hands on any man too quickly (1 Timothy 5:22).

Leviticus 19:26
Ye shall not eat any thing with the blood: neither shall ye use enchantment, nor observe times.

Astrology and psychic matters are completely forbidden.

Leviticus 19:27, 28
Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard. Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD.

Tattooing and body piercing were commonly done for the dead in Egypt as part of their religion.

Leviticus 19:29

Do not prostitute thy daughter, to cause her to be a whore; lest the land fall to whoredom, and the land become full of wickedness.

While it would seem "Do not prostitute thy daughter" goes without saying, we need to be aware we don't allow our daughters' attire or appearance to cast them in a questionable light.

Leviticus 19:30–32
Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD. Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God. Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD.

Ours is a youth-obsessed culture. But God's heart, God's way, God's Word is to honor older people.

Leviticus 19:33, 34
And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

"Be careful," God says to His people newly released from Egypt, "that when you're in the land, you don't treat the stranger differently than you treat each other for you know what it's like to be a stranger."

Leviticus 19:35, 36
Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.

God's people are to be those who deal justly.

Leviticus 19:37
Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the LORD.

The chapter ends with, "I am the Lord," a statement repeated fifteen times in this chapter of only thirty-seven verses, a statement through which we are reminded that as Lord, God not only had the wisdom to establish laws He knew would lead to the happiness of holiness, but that He had the power to enforce them as well.



20 Leviticus 20:1–5

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel, Whosoever he be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth any of his seed unto Molech; he shall surely be put to death: the people of the land shall stone him with stones. And I will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people; because he hath given of his seed unto Molech, to defile my sanctuary, and to profane my holy name. And if the people of the land do any ways hide their eyes from the man, when he giveth of his seed unto Molech, and kill him not: then I will set my face against that man, and against his family, and will cut him off, and all that go a whoring after him, to commit whoredom with Molech, from among their people.

Nothing was more abhorrent in the eyes of God than the worship of the Amonite deity, Molech. *Molech* means "king" because he was the main god in the Amonite pantheon of false gods. Molech promised pleasure and prosperity to those who placed their babies on the red-hot arms of the idols representing him. So abhorrent was Molech worship to God that not only were those directly involved to be stoned, but those who hid knowledge of them were to be cut off as well.

Stoning was God's prescribed form of execution and, because those who made the accusations were those who threw the stones, it would be a very

sobering experience for the entire community. Not only would this cause people to be very careful about the testimony they gave, but, public as it was, it would be an unforgettable illustration of the horrendous price of sin.

Leviticus 20:6
And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people.

Those who became involved with psychic hotlines, tarot cards, fortune-telling, astrology were to be cut off from the believing community.

Leviticus 20:7
Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God.

"Sanctify," or *qadash* in Hebrew, means "to set apart"—set apart *to* God and set apart *from* sin. Can we really be set apart from sin? Can we truly be sanctified?

John Wesley and his brother, Charles, godly men both, believed that if people lived a disciplined life before God, they could achieve a state of sanctity in which they would never sin again. Determined to see this understanding come to fruition, they developed a method to do this—and the Methodist movement was born. On the other hand, John Calvin and others said it was impossible to be completely and totally sanctified in this life. And these two views remain in the church to this day.

When Jesus died on the Cross, He didn't say, "To be continued," or, "This will do for now." He said, "It is *finished*" (John 19:30). That is why Paul could address the Corinthian believers as those who have been sanctified (1 Corinthians 1:2). Practically, the Corinthian congregation was full of problems. So are we. But positionally, the Corinthians were sanctified. And so are we.

Leviticus 20:8
And ye shall keep my statutes, and do them: I am the LORD which sanctify you.

Verse 7 begins with "Sanctify yourselves." Verse 8 ends with, "I am the Lord which sanctify you." Is sanctification something we do, or is it something God does for us? It's both. God sanctifies us—yet He won't do it without our participation. We see this illustrated perfectly in 2 Kings 5.

> *Plagued by leprosy, a Syrian general named Naaman heard there was a prophet in Israel doing miracles. He traveled there and was told by Elisha to dip in the Jordan River 7 times.*
>
> *Naaman was offended. "That dirty river? We have bigger, cleaner rivers in Syria," he protested.*
>
> *But when his advisors said, "What do you have to lose?," he followed Elisha's instructions, and after his seventh dip, his leprosy was gone.*

If we want to be free from the leprosy eating away at our marriages, our families, our joy, we have a part to play. Seven being the number of completion, and water being emblematic of the Word, we are to dip into the Word over and over and over again. And as we do, God meets us and we begin to see we are indeed sanctified. As we fellowship with Him, listen to Him, and obey Him, we experience the unmistakable sanctifying process. "Sanctify yourselves," God says, "and as you do, I will sanctify you." Without Him, we can't. Without us, He won't.

> **Leviticus 20:9**
> **For every one that curseth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death: he hath cursed his father or his mother; his blood shall be upon him.**

In the Fifth Commandment, God said, "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land" (Exodus 20:12). So important is this command in God's economy, that He strengthens it here by saying, "Honor your father and mother—lest you die."

> **Leviticus 20:10**
> **And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the**

adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

Adultery causes death. Families split apart. Hearts break. Tragedy follows.

Leviticus 20:11, 12
And the man that lieth with his father's wife hath uncovered his father's nakedness: both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them. And if a man lie with his daughter in law, both of them shall surely be put to death: they have wrought confusion; their blood shall be upon them.

Verses 10 through 21 deal with the issue of sexual purity—the same issues as seen in chapter 18 as God underscores the necessity for His people to walk in purity.

Leviticus 20:13
If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

God again declares homosexuality to be an abomination.

Leviticus 20:14–16
And if a man take a wife and her mother, it is wickedness: they shall be burnt with fire, both he and they; that there be no wickedness among you. And if a man lie with a beast, he shall surely be put to death: and ye shall slay the beast. And if a woman approach unto any beast, and lie down thereto, thou shalt kill the woman, and the beast: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

That God goes into detail in this section concerning the sins already addressed in chapter 18 speaks of the prevalence of such sins in the surrounding nations as well as the tendency of the Israelites to follow culture —a warning no less necessary for us.

Leviticus 20:17–21

And if a man shall take his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter, and see her nakedness, and she see his nakedness; it is a wicked thing; and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people: he hath uncovered his sister's nakedness; he shall bear his iniquity. And if a man shall lie with a woman having her sickness, and shall uncover her nakedness; he hath discovered her fountain, and she hath uncovered the fountain of her blood: and both of them shall be cut off from among their people. And thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy mother's sister, nor of thy father's sister: for he uncovereth his near kin: they shall bear their iniquity. And if a man shall lie with his uncle's wife, he hath uncovered his uncle's nakedness: they shall bear their sin; they shall die childless. And if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless.

The primarily application here is to incestuous matters. But the secondary issue, as addressed in the Talmud, is, an injunction against nakedness among family members—for such liberty leads to confusion. This matter is not one of prudishness, but of propriety.

Leviticus 20:22–27

Ye shall therefore keep all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: that the land, whither I bring you to dwell therein, spue you not out. And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them. But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people. Ye shall therefore put difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean: and ye shall not make your souls abominable by beast, or by fowl, or by any manner of living thing that creepeth on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy,

and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine. A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them.

The children of Israel were to walk in the ways of the Lord lest the land "spew them out." In other words, built into creation are certain laws which, if violated, bring repercussions as inviolable as the law of gravity . . .

If I jumped off a ten-story building, saying, "I'm not sure the law of gravity still applies. Times have changed. It was okay in Newton's day, but we live in an enlightened age, in a day of greater understanding, education, tolerance, and freedom," I would end up splattered on the ground—not as a result of God punishing me, but simply as the result of thinking I could break the law of gravity.

So, any culture which chooses to walk deeper and deeper into perversion will experience natural, inevitable repercussions and will eventually collapse as God's laws of nature take effect and purge the land of their presence.



21 Because Jesus didn't rapture you when you asked Him into your heart, because we have been saved to serve, because we're to be priests standing before God on behalf of people and standing before people on behalf of God, the chapter before us, dealing with rules and regulations for priestly ministry, is applicable to each of us . . .

Leviticus 21:1–4
And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto the priests the sons of Aaron, and say unto them, There shall none be defiled for the dead among his people: but for his kin, that is near unto him, that is, for his mother, and for his father, and for his son, and for his daughter, and for his brother, And for his sister a virgin, that is

nigh unto him, which hath had no husband; for her may he be defiled. But he shall not defile himself, being a chief man among his people, to profane himself.

The Old Testament paints material pictures of New Testament spiritual principles. And this passage is no exception. Barring their own families, Old Testament priests were to have no contact with dead people. As New Testament priests, we are to have no contact with those who are spiritually dead unless it is to bring them into the family of God. If you spend time with those who are spiritually dead solely because you enjoy their activities and like their company, you're compromising your calling as a priest. But if your purpose for hanging out with the spiritually dead is to share your faith with them, you're doing what our great High Priest did, who was the Friend of sinners because He had a desire to see them brought into the kingdom.

Leviticus 21:5
They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh.

The shaving of the head, cutting of the beard, cutting of the flesh were all practices of the Egyptian death cult. Those who have been born again ought not bear the marks of death on their bodies or clothing.

Leviticus 21:6–8
They shall be holy unto their God, and not profane the name of their God: for the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and the bread of their God, they do offer: therefore they shall be holy. They shall not take a wife that is a whore, or profane; neither shall they take a woman put away from her husband: for he is holy unto his God. Thou shalt sanctify him therefore; for he offereth the bread of thy God: he shall be holy unto thee: for I the LORD, which sanctify you, am holy.

Marriage being foundational to ministry and providing credibility to ministry, the priests were to marry godly women.

Leviticus 21:9
And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father: she shall be burnt with fire.

In this, it's as if God is saying, "I want this lesson burned into the fabric of your culture—that men, you're responsible to care for your daughters, to pray for them, to give training to them. And daughters, you're to realize that you will burn your parents and the ministry if you walk in compromise."

People read passages like this and say they are patently, grossly unfair and unkind—as if those of whom such passages speak are surely in hell. But such is not the case. For example, it could be that the most important ministry Achan and his family could ever do was to impress on people the importance of purity. Thus, even the punishment of death takes on a different perspective in light eternity.

Leviticus 21:10–12
And he that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes; Neither shall he go in to any dead body, nor defile himself for his father, or for his mother; neither shall he go out of the sanctuary, nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the crown of the anointing oil of his God is upon him: I am the LORD.

In times of difficulty and tragedy, we ought not to rend our clothes, but rather to keep on ministering and thereby experience the healing and help which come from serving others.

***For topical study of Leviticus 21:10–12 entitled "God's Solution to Sadness," turn to page* 426.**

Leviticus 21:13–15

And he shall take a wife in her virginity. A widow, or a divorced woman, or profane, or an harlot, these shall he not take: but he shall take a virgin of his own people to wife. Neither shall he profane his seed among his people: for I the LORD do sanctify him.

If the priests were to marry godly women (v. 7), how much more was the high priest to marry a godly woman. In ourselves, we are neither godly nor pure. Yet our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, has made us so in order that we might be His Bride.

Leviticus 21:16, 17
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron, saying, Whosoever he be of thy seed in their generations that hath any blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God.

He that had a blemish was not to serve in priestly ministry. In our day, these blemishes speak of spiritual principles, eternal truths, internal matters . . .

Leviticus 21:18 (a)
For whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach: a blind man . . .

Blindness speaks of a lack of vision. The man or woman lacking vision won't be used in ministry successfully, for without vision, people perish (Proverbs 29:18).

Leviticus 21:18 (b)
. . . or a lame . . .

A priest must be able to walk—not leap in emotion, nor run in fervor, but simply walk in steadiness and consistency.

Leviticus 21:18 (c)
. . . or he that hath a flat nose . . .

Priests must have a good sense of smell in order to discern whether something is true or false, in order to sniff out and identify the strange winds of doctrine which can so easily cloud and confuse the church.

Leviticus 21:18 (d)
. . . or any thing superfluous,

Like six-legged frogs, some believers carry with them superfluous stuff—be it Far East philosophy or mystical spirituality. As priests, we are to keep ministry simple, focused on the Person of Jesus Christ.

Leviticus 21:19 (a)
Or a man that is brokenfooted . . .

Some people can't stand up. They keep getting blown away by emotions, knocked down by problems. Priests are to have the ability to stand firm no matter the obstacles or difficulties.

Leviticus 21:19 (b)
. . . or brokenhanded,

Unlike the priest of Luke 10, true priests must have the ability to reach out to those who are beaten and bruised.

Leviticus 21:20 (a)
Or crookbackt . . .

A priest must have backbone. I think of Pilate. He knew Jesus was innocent of the accusations levied against Him. He knew Jesus was not guilty of the crimes reported by those who lied about Him. But under political pressure, Pilate gave in.

Leviticus 21:20 (b)
. . . or a dwarf . . .

A person who isn't growing or expanding in his knowledge of the Word and of the Lord is not qualified for service because, like those to whom the Book of Hebrews was written, although they ought to be teachers, they still have need to be taught (Hebrews 5:12).

Leviticus 21:20 (c)
. . . or that hath a blemish in his eye . . .

This infection of the eye speaks of one unable to see clearly. Jesus spoke of such a one—a rich man who, because he didn't see things from an eternal perspective, was impoverished in the things of God (Luke 12:13–21).

Leviticus 21:20 (d)
. . . or be scurvy, or scabbed . . .

In ministry, a man cannot have thin skin because he who does is sure to become irritated and eventually give up.

Leviticus 21:20 (e)
. . . or hath his stones broken;

Priests must have the ability to reproduce. We must share our faith, for if we don't evangelize, we fossilize. It is no wonder that when one sinner comes to repentance, heaven rejoices (Luke 15:7, 10), for when we see sinners respond to the Lord, enthusiasm and joy are rekindled in our own hearts.

Leviticus 21:21–24
No man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the LORD made by fire: he hath a blemish; he shall not come nigh to offer the bread of his God. He shall eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy, and of the holy. Only he shall not go in unto the vail, nor come nigh

unto the altar, because he hath a blemish; that he profane not my sanctuaries: for I the LORD do sanctify them. And Moses told it unto Aaron, and to his sons, and unto all the children of Israel.

Looking at this list, you might feel disqualified by a point or two or three or ten. The answer is, *Yes,* you are disqualified. That's why in Hebrews 3, we are told to consider, or literally focus on, the High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, for He is indeed the flawless One, the Perfect One . . .

Jesus had vision. "Master," they said to Him, "look at the magnificence of the temple," (Mark 13:1).

"I tell you the truth," He said in response, "not one of those stones will remain upon the other."

And a mere forty years later, in A.D. 70, the Roman Army burned the temple and toppled every stone into the Kidron Valley below. Jesus had vision concerning the big picture of what was to come.

Jesus wasn't lame. In John 1, we read that it was as Jesus walked that John the Baptist looked on Him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world." Watching Jesus walk, John could see that Jesus walked in righteousness.

Jesus had perfect discernment. "Master, what must I do to have eternal life?" asked the rich, young ruler.

"Sell your goods and follow Me," Jesus answered, putting His finger on the very thing which stood in the young man's way (see Luke 18:22).

Was there anything superfluous about Jesus? No, He simplified everything, reducing the entire law to two commands (hang).

Concerning surefootedness, no one stands stronger than Jesus. "Who seek ye?" He asked the Roman soldiers in the Garden of Gethsemane.

"Jesus of Nazareth," they answered.

"I AM," Jesus replied—and they fell backwards, leaving Him the only one still on His feet (John 18:6).

And whose hands reached out to others more than those of Jesus? Whether He was blessing little children or touching lepers, washing feet or touching the eyes of the blind, Jesus' hands were wonder-working hands indeed.

Did Jesus lack spine? No. He called the Pharisees whitewashed sepulchers full of dead men's bones—a heavy thing to say to the respected religious leaders of the day (Matthew 23:27).

As for His eyesight, Jesus not only appraised situations perfectly, but He looked on people compassionately (Matthew 9:36).

So far from being thin-skinned was Jesus that He not only called Judas "friend" even at the moment of his betrayal (Matthew 26:50), but He prayed forgiveness for the very soldiers who crucified Him, for the very crowd which mocked Him (Luke 23:34).

Concerning reproduction, shortly following His death, Jesus' followers would become those who filled Jerusalem with His doctrine (Acts 5:28) before going on to "turn the whole world upside down" (Acts 17:6)—all because they were indeed born again (John 3:3).

As a picture of what true ministry looks like, Jesus is flawless. And yet, as Isaiah tells us, He was marred—or blemished—more than any other man . . .

He was blinded when the temple guards put a blindfold on Him in the courtyard of Caiaphas. His nose would be flattened as they pummeled Him in the face. He was lame as He carried the Cross and fell to the ground. His hands and feet were broken when they were pierced through with spikes, His back made crooked when He was beat with the flagellum, His skin scarred and scabbed as a crown of thorns was mashed into His skull. He was dwarfed as the crowd taunted and belittled Him.

In other words, He who knew no sin became sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

GOD'S SOLUTION TO SADNESS

A Topical Study of LEVITICUS 21:10–12

And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no. And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.

Genesis 37:31–34

Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him: and they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword.

2 Samuel 1:11, 12

Following the custom of the day, Jacob and David tore their garments in an expression of intense grief. In our text, however, we read that the high priest was not to rend his garments—even if it was his mother or father who died.

Is God being callous and cold, hard-hearted and harsh?

No.

You see, this passage gives priests an essential key about how they were to navigate tragedy and difficulty. And because we are all priests and because every single one of us will deal with heartbreak and sorrow, this word is essential for us as well.

When my first wife was taken to heaven, I was loved and cared for by a group of people who, wanting the best for me, said, "You need to get away,

to be healed, to work through this emotionally." Theirs was a tender, caring suggestion—but as much as I appreciated their hearts of concern, I knew what they were telling me to do was exactly what I ought not to do, for God's Word to Aaron, even following the death of his own sons (Leviticus 10:6), was that he was not to rend his garments and not to leave the tabernacle or he, too, would die. He was to stay in the place of ministry, to remain in the place where he was serving others, where praise was ascending, where prayer was offered.

Knowing this principle, three days later I was back preaching—and it was the best thing for me. Thirteen years later, when my daughter, Jessie, was taken to heaven, well-meaning, good-hearted people again told me to take six months or a year off. And again, while I appreciated their intent, I knew that was precisely what I ought not do lest I die.

> After parking his car, a man set out for a day-hike in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Three miles into what was to be a relaxing afternoon outing, he noticed ominous storm clouds forming as the temperature dropped precipitously. Realizing a freak snowstorm was headed his way, the man began backtracking towards his car. He had a mile or so to go, when the storm became so intense that he couldn't see his hand in front of his face. Losing his way, he walked for two hours until he realized he was freezing. Feeling a deadly lethargy come over him, he knew if he sat down, he would never get up, so he fought it off for as long as he could. But finally, the desire to rest was just too overpowering, so he sat down at the base of a tree, the snow still falling intensely. As he sat down, he felt something next to him. Brushing away the snow, his suspicions were confirmed when he discovered the body of a man who had evidently stopped to rest only a few moments earlier. Finding a pulse, the young man stood to his feet and, with a burst of new-found energy, picked up the man who had almost frozen to death, put him on his shoulders, and began walking feverishly. After walking fifty hours or so, he bumped into the side of a cabin. Feeling his way to the front, he banged on the door that was opened by a man who welcomed the pair inside to warm themselves by his roaring fire.

The application is obvious. In attempting to save someone else, the young man was himself saved. In caring for someone else, he himself was cared for. And that's what Jesus said would happen when He said, "The measure you give out will be measured back to you" (see Luke 6:38).

When tragedy strikes, when trials come, we'll either say, "This ought not to be. Poor me"—or we'll say, "This can be used for Your glory, so pour me, Lord. Pour me out to the people in need all around me."

What did our great High Priest do in His time of tragedy, in His time of pain? Even as He hung on the Cross in agony, He ministered to a man beside Him, to a woman below Him, to the crowd around Him . . .

> "This day you shall be with Me in paradise," He said to the needy thief beside Him (Luke 23:43).
>
> "Woman, behold your son," He said to his grieving mother standing at the foot of the Cross below Him (John 19:26).
>
> "Father, forgive them," He prayed concerning the jeering crowd surrounding Him (Luke 23:34).

No wonder Caiaphas rent his garments that day (Matthew 26:65)—for he was disqualified from priestly ministry at that moment, superceded by the great High Priest whose garment was not rent (John 19:24).

The garment of Caiaphas was torn. Not so the garment of Jesus—for Jesus will never lose control emotionally or grieve hysterically. Therefore, neither must we. I'm not talking about "keeping a stiff upper lip," having a "positive mental attitude" or a "Don't worry, be happy" mentality. I'm talking about the reality of our great High Priest living in you and me through both good days and bad.

Stay in the place of ministry, gang. Follow the example of Jesus. The best thing you can do when difficulties come your way is to go for it more than you ever have previously in giving out, in sharing with, in caring for those beside you and all around you.



22 Leviticus 22:1–3

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and to his sons, that they separate themselves from the holy things of the children of Israel, and that they profane not my holy name in those things which they hallow unto me: I am the LORD. Say unto them, Whosoever he be of all your seed among your generations, that goeth unto the holy things, which the chil dren of Israel hallow unto the LORD, having his uncleanness upon him, that soul shall be cut off from my presence: I am the LORD.

Because he handles holy things, a defiled priest was to be discharged, put aside, let go, shown the door. As a royal priesthood, this applies directly to us as well, for we, too, handle holy things. We've been given the Word. We've been given the privilege of prayer. We've been linked to God's children. We are a priestly company indeed.

Leviticus 22:4 (a)
What man soever of the seed of Aaron is a leper, or hath a running issue; he shall not eat of the holy things, until he be clean . . .

As we have seen, leprosy is a picture of sin. The tendency for us is to say, "Sin is not a big deal. Everyone bends the rules; everyone does that; everyone goes there." Passages like the one before us, however, say just the opposite. Sin brings about separation from service and ministry.

Knowing this, God goes on record saying, "No matter how seemingly insignificant, regardless of how society winks at it, sin is leprous. It will destroy you."

A priest's inability to eat of his prescribed portion of the sacrifices is equivalent to our inability to draw nourishment from the Word. The believer who compromises with sin will open the Bible only to find it as dry as a desert. Eventually, his appetite for it will disappear altogether. And spiritual weakness will be the result. There is no balance, strength, or stamina in the life of the one who doesn't eat of the holy things of the Word of God. Life can be exhausting if we don't eat. We *must* eat.

Leviticus 22:4 (b)–7

. . . And whoso toucheth any thing that is unclean by the dead, or a man whose seed goeth from him; or whosoever toucheth any creeping thing, whereby he may be made unclean, or a man of whom he may take uncleanness, whatsoever uncleanness he hath; the soul which hath touched any such shall be unclean until even, and shall not eat of the holy things, unless he wash his flesh with water. And when the sun is down, he shall be clean, and shall afterward eat of the holy things; because it is his food.

The remedy for uncleanness is first waiting then washing. The unclean person was to wait until evening time. Why evening? Because in Jewish economy, the setting of the sun signaled a new day . . .

> It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.
>
> Lamentations 3:22, 23

Paul put it this way:

> Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.
>
> Philippians 3:13, 14

The Lord ordered our lives in such a way that every day after about sixteen or eighteen hours, we go to bed and basically die. To me, His plan is ingenious because I find that after about sixteen hours of living, I've pretty much messed it up. I've dropped the ball once too often, fumbled one time too many. I need to die and start over in a fresh way. So I think it's wonderful that God lets us die every eighteen hours.

How I love the morning hours. Whether I spend them at church, in my prayer place at home, or walking the streets of town on a spring or summer

morning, I love the morning when it's quiet, when I can receive a piping hot batch of mercy fresh from the oven of God's grace.

Secondly, the priest who was unclean—whether by his own flesh or through contact with the dead things of the world—was to wash. As New Testament priests, the washing refers to the water of the Word (John 15:3). Did you wash today in the water of the Word? We're bombarded every day by creeping things and dead carcasses, by that which would defile us and render us unable to serve or eat of that which would satisfy our soul. God would say, "The solution is simple, the remedy real: Wait on Me in this new day and wash in the water of My Word."

Leviticus 22:8
That which dieth of itself, or is torn with beasts, he shall not eat to defile himself therewith: I am the LORD.

Strict instruction was given to stay away from those animals that had died either as prey or by disease.

Leviticus 22:9–13
They shall therefore keep mine ordinance, lest they bear sin for it, and die therefore, if they profane it: I the LORD do sanctify them. There shall no stranger eat of the holy thing: a sojourner of the priest, or an hired servant, shall not eat of the holy thing. But if the priest buy any soul with his money, he shall eat of it, and he that is born in his house: they shall eat of his meat. If the priest's daughter also be married unto a stranger, she may not eat of an offering of the holy things. But if the priest's daughter be a widow, or divorced, and have no child, and is returned unto her father's house, as in her youth, she shall eat of her father's meat: but there shall no stranger eat thereof.

Not only does this speak of the familial relationship of slave to master, but of the fact that so separate, so sanctified was the sacrificial system to be, that only the priests and their families were to eat of the sacrificial meat.

Leviticus 22:14–16

And if a man eat of the holy thing unwittingly, then he shall put the fifth part thereof unto it, and shall give it unto the priest with the holy thing. And they shall not profane the holy things of the children of Israel, which they offer unto the LORD; Or suffer them to bear the iniquity of trespass, when they eat their holy things: for I the LORD do sanctify them.

If a priest found himself accidentally eating of the holy things when he was disqualified from doing so, he would have to pay back twenty percent above and beyond that which he took. In this, we see restitution that speaks of responsibility. One of the problems in society is that people sin without accepting responsibility or making restitution. To counteract this, the Lord wove into the fabric of the priesthood an understanding that even if a priest's sin was unknown to him at the time he partook of the offering, he was to acknowledge responsibility through the discipline of restitution.

Leviticus 22:17–25
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron, and to his sons, and unto all the children of Israel, and say unto them, whatsoever he be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers in Israel, that will offer his oblation for all his vows, and for all his freewill offerings, which they will offer unto the LORD for a burnt offering; ye shall offer at your own will a male without blemish, of the beeves, of the sheep, or of the goats. But whatsoever hath a blemish, that shall ye not offer: for it shall not be acceptable for you. And whosoever offereth a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the LORD to accomplish his vow, or a freewill offering in beeves or sheep, it shall be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no blemish therein. Blind, or broken, or maimed, or having a wen, or scurvy, or scabbed, ye shall not offer these unto the LORD, nor make an offering by fire of them upon the altar unto the LORD. Either a bullock or a lamb that hath any thing superfluous or lacking in his parts, that mayest thou offer for a freewill offering; but for a vow it shall not be accepted. Ye shall not offer unto the LORD that which is bruised, or crushed, or broken, or cut; neither shall ye make any offering thereof in your land. Nei ther from a

stranger's hand shall ye offer the bread of your God of any of these; because their corruption is in them, and blemishes be in them: they shall not be accepted for you.

We are not to give to the Lord blemished or blind or maimed sheep—leftover money, energy or time. The Lord deserves the best, the first, the finest of everything in our lives—not because He's a greedy God but because we're greedy people who, to be like Him, need to learn how to give.

Leviticus 22:26–33
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, When a bullock, or a sheep, or a goat, is brought forth, then it shall be seven days under the dam; and from the eighth day and thenceforth it shall be accepted for an offering made by fire unto the LORD. And whether it be cow or ewe, ye shall not kill it and her young both in one day. And when ye will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving unto the LORD, offer it at your own will. On the same day it shall be eaten up; ye shall leave none of it until the morrow: I am the LORD. Therefore shall ye keep my commandments, and do them: I am the LORD. Neither shall ye profane my holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel: I am the LORD which hallow you, that brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD.

When an Israelite willingly offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving, it was to be completely eaten on the same day it was offered. Why? Physically, it was to protect against pollution, against the food becoming spoiled for lack of refrigeration. Spiritually, I believe our thanksgiving can also become spoiled unless offered consistently. Over time, our minds have a way of explaining away God's miraculous hand in any given situation, of attributing His goodness in our lives to our own efforts, to luck, to coincidence. And thus, our thanksgiving becomes spoiled if not offered immediately, consistently, wholeheartedly.

Secondly, I believe this word was given to us to provide satiation. It is as if the Lord is saying, "When you bring Me the sacrifice of thanksgiving, I

want you to leave with a full belly. I want you to be deeply satisfied, totally satiated, completely happy."

> By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.
>
> Hebrews 13:15

God wants us to offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving not because He needs to be thanked but because we need to be thankful. Why? Thanksgiving is the antidote to depression, the remedy for a cynical spirit. Yes, there are very real battles facing each of us. We are not to pretend they don't exist. But neither are we to indulge in doubt and self-pity. Rather, we're to do what Jehoshaphat did . . .

> *With a confederation of Edomite, Ammonite, and Moabite troops arrayed against him, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, called unto God for help. God responded through a prophet, saying, "Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude for the battle is not yours but God's. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them: for the Lord will be with you."*
>
> *Jehoshaphat could have said, "What kind of battle plan is that?" Instead, he bowed his head and worshipped. Although all he had was a promise, the next morning, rather than sending his troops to battle, Jehoshaphat sent a choir to praise. And although this made no sense militarily, it disoriented the enemy to the point where they drew their swords in confusion and annihilated one another (2 Chronicles 20).*

The same thing is true in the Spirit. We have an enemy that surrounds us constantly, an Adversary who wants to intimidate and depress us daily, whose goal is to rob us of the riches of our joy and peace. This enemy is beaten back, confused, overwhelmed through the power of praise and thanksgiving. Why? I believe it's because of who he once was. Before he rebelled against God, Satan was Lucifer, the worship leader of heaven. So

when he hears praise, I believe it triggers something within him that reminds him of what he used to do, where he once was, how far he has fallen. Consequently, in his ears, the sound of praise is like the sound of a dentist's drill, or of fingernails on a chalkboard. He just wants to get as far away from it as possible.

Finally, I believe the thanksgiving offering was to be consumed the day it was offered in order to prevent procrastination. There can be a tendency for us to say, "Lord, I'm offering You this sacrifice of thanksgiving. But right now, there are demands on my time. My family's calling me. I've got to water my lawn. We'll finish this meal tomorrow. I'll put it in a Ziploc bag and we'll have leftovers."

But the Lord says, "No. I want you to take the time to consume as much as you can in this moment, at this time, right here, right now. Don't put it off, for there will never be an opportunity exactly like this one."

To protect against pollution, to provide satiation, to prevent procrastination—three reasons the Old Testament Jews were to consume the thanksgiving offering, and three reasons we as New Testament believers are to be ourselves consumed with thanksgiving.



23 The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?

Matthew 16:1–3

The Pharisees and Sadducees should have known the times in which they lived were prophetically significant. Had they been students of Bible prophecy, they would have known the time Messiah was to come. But they didn't. And as a result, they missed the moment. My prayer is that, unlike the Pharisees and Sadducees, we will be those who understand the significance of the days in which we're living. Throughout Scripture, there are very clear

indicators of God's plan for that which is to be. And the chapter before us is such a passage . . .

Leviticus 23:1, 2
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts.

In Leviticus 23, we see the seven major feasts the nation of Israel was to celebrate annually. These feasts had a two-fold purpose: commemoration and expectation. Like our Fourth of July celebrations, the feasts were to commemorate and celebrate what God had done for them as a nation historically. But they also served as prophetic illustrations in that they spoke of that which was to come.

Four of the feasts took place in the springtime and early summer. The remaining three took place in the fall. From our perspective, the events prophesied by the feasts which took place in the spring and summer have already taken place in the first coming of Christ. The events prophesied by the three feasts that took place in the fall have yet to take place, to be fulfilled when Jesus comes again.

Leviticus 23:3, 4
Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings. These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons.

After an initial reminder that the Sabbath day is to be honored on a weekly basis, the Lord begins His discourse on the feasts. Why are they called feasts? Because, with one exception, they were times of celebration and elation.

Leviticus 23:5

In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD's passover.

The Passover feast was to commemorate the freeing of the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt. After being enslaved for four hundred years, they cried out to the Lord and a deliverer was raised up. Moses went to Pharaoh and said, "Thus saith the Lord, Let My people go." But because Pharaoh refused, a series of plagues descended upon the Egyptians—the last of which was the death of the firstborn in any house not marked with the blood of a lamb on the doorposts (Exodus 12:29).

In looking ahead prophetically, however, Passover illustrated what Christ would do as the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

Leviticus 23:6–8
And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD seven days: in the seventh day is an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.

The day after Passover—on the fifteenth day of the first month of the religious year—there was to be the Feast of Unleavened Bread, commemorating the night the Israelites left Egypt with such haste that their bread didn't have time to rise.

Prophetically, the Feast of Unleavened Bread would speak to the Jews of the unleavened One, the sinless One, who would say, "Take, eat. This is My body, given for you" (Luke 22:19).

Leviticus 23:9–14
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, when ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you:

on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. And ye shall offer that day when ye wave the sheaf an he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering unto the LORD. And the meat offering thereof shall be two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the LORD for a sweet savour: and the drink offering thereof shall be of wine, the fourth part of an hin. And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

The Feast of Firstfruits took place on the first day of the week following Passover and commemorated the fact that, having been released from Egypt, the children of Israel were headed to a Promised Land wherein there would be plentiful harvests in the land which "flowed with milk and honey."

Of what expectation did the Feast of Firstfruits speak? Christ was killed on Passover. On the Feast of Unleavened Bread, His body was put in the tomb. Yet on the very day of the Feast of Firstfruits, He rose from the dead—the Firstfruit of all who would follow Him (1 Corinthians 15:20). The Firstfruit, Jesus Christ, finished the work. And because He rose, we, too, shall rise.

Leviticus 23:15, 16
And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD.

Following the week in which the Feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits were celebrated in Jerusalem, those in attendance returned to their homes. Fifty days later, they reconvened for the Feast of Weeks, or, as the New Testament calls it, the Feast of Pentecost.

Leviticus 23:17

Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baken with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the LORD.

The firstfruits spoken of here were not those of the barley harvest, but of the wheat harvest. At Pentecost, two loaves made of wheat and leaven were to be waved before the Lord. What does this commemorate? According to the rabbis, the two loaves represent the two tablets of stone on which the Law was given when Israel became a nation.

Leaven, however, is a picture of sin. Therefore, the Law being perfect (Psalm 19:7), I believe the fullest explanation for the meaning of the two loaves lies not in what Pentecost commemorated, but what it anticipated, for it would be on the very Day of Pentecost that the church was born (Acts 2).

Prior to Acts 2, the world was divided into only two groups of people: Jews and Gentiles. But after the Spirit came down, after three thousand were born again in a single day, a third group came into being: the church, comprised of former Jews and former Gentiles. Thus, there was leaven in the bread—for, comprised of sinners, the church is far from sinless.

Leviticus 23:18–22

And ye shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams: they shall be for a burnt offering unto the LORD, with their meat offering, and their drink offerings, even an offering made by fire, of sweet savour unto the LORD. Then ye shall sacrifice one kid of the goats for a sin offering, and two lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of peace offerings. And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits for a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs: they shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. And ye shall proclaim on the selfsame day, that it may be an holy convocation unto you: ye shall do no servile work therein: it shall be a statute for ever in all your dwellings throughout your generations. And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither

shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the LORD your God.

The Book of Ruth, the story of a Jewish woman and her Gentile daughter-in-law, illustrates both the historical and prophetic application of the passage. You see, in this passage, God wisely and compassionately ordained that the edges and corners of any given field were not to be harvested, but were to be left for those who were poor. Ruth and Naomi being poor, Ruth gleaned in the field of a man named Boaz—a man she would eventually marry and by whom she would bear a son named Obed who, in turn, would become the father of Jesse. Jesse would become the father of David—who would ultimately be the father of the Son of David, Jesus Christ.

Thus, the Gentile, Ruth, learns about God from the Jew, Naomi. But Naomi does not receive the baby who would ultimately be the Babe of Bethlehem until Ruth conceived. And just as Ruth would eventually fade from the story, the church will leave the scene at the time of the Rapture. But in this, the Jewish nation will be awakened to the point that eventually those who remain will be saved (Romans 11) when they at last recognize Jesus as their Greater than Boaz, their longed-for Messiah.

Leviticus 23:23–25
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, in the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation. Ye shall do no servile work therein: but ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD.

The Feast of Passover was immediately followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread which was immediately followed by the Feast of Firstfruits. Fifty days later, people reconvened for the Feast of Pentecost—after which they returned home for approximately four months until the first day of the seventh month. Thus, the final three feasts—all of which took place in the fall—deal with the Second Coming of Christ, an event to which we are still looking forward.

Historically, the Feast of Trumpets commemorated the silver trumpets which were sounded for three reasons: to gather the people as they traveled through the wilderness on their way to the Land of Promise, to move to a new destination, and as a battle alarm.

Prophetically, the trumpets should "ring a bell" in the minds of students of prophecy, for in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Paul writes that it is at the sound of the trumpet of God that the dead in Christ shall rise.

Why did God instruct Moses to make *two* trumpets (Numbers 10:2)? Because there are two times the trumpet of God is sounded: once when the Law was given (Exodus 19), and once when the Rapture takes place (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Why did the Feast of Trumpets take place in the seventh month? Because seven is the biblical number of completion, and it is not until the "fullness of the Gentiles" is come (Romans 11:25), not until the number of Gentiles to be saved is complete, that the Rapture will occur. So if you're not saved, do us all a favor and open up your heart to Jesus. Then we can all move out together to our heavenly Promised Land!

Leviticus 23:26–32

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD. And ye shall do no work in that same day: for it is a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before the LORD your God. For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people. And whatsoever soul it be that doeth any work in that same day, the same soul will I destroy from among his people. Ye shall do no manner of work: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath.

Following the Feast of Trumpets, Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement, was unlike every other festival in that it was a time of somber reflection, the day the high priest would remove his priestly outer garments and sprinkle blood on the mercy seat to atone for the sins of the nation.

What does this speak of prophetically? Once the Rapture takes place, Israel will experience a time of soul-searching and affliction in the Tribulation, a time Jeremiah refers to as "Jacob's trouble," (30:7). During this time, in addition to the 144,000 Jewish evangelists who will be raised up to spread the gospel (Revelation 7), two witnesses—most likely Elijah and Moses—will come on the scene, preaching powerfully (Revelation 11). As a result, Zechariah tells us the remaining third of the nation of Israel will realize the wounds in the hands and feet of their Messiah were wounds they themselves inflicted when they said, "We will not have this Man rule over us" (Zechariah 13).

The understanding that God has not forsaken Israel is as important for the church to understand as it is for the Jews—for just as God is not through with the Jew, neither will He be through with us when we stumble and fall. The promises of Romans 1 through 8 are glorious—among them that we are justified by faith, that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, that all things work together for good for those who love God. And it is no coincidence that Romans 1 through 8 is followed by Romans 9 through 11—a passage which recounts God's faithfulness to the Jews—as verification that God's promises remain true, that He remains faithful even when we prove to be faithless (2 Timothy 2:13).

Leviticus 23:33–44

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days unto the LORD. On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein. These are the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be

holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day: Beside the sabbaths of the LORD, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the LORD. Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. And Moses declared unto the children of Israel the feasts of the LORD.

The final festival, the one mentioned in Scripture more than any other, was the Feast of Tabernacles—a festival of joy and happiness. Historically, the Feast of Tabernacles commemorated God's provision for the nation of Israel when they dwelled in tabernacles, or tents, during their wilderness wanderings. To celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, the Jews were to construct small booths, little lean-tos, within a Sabbath day's journey, or half a mile, from the temple. Consequently, if one was to travel to Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles, he would see hundreds of thousands of these little booths, constructed in such a way that the families within would be shaded from the heat of the day, but able to look out and see the stars at night —a reminder of God's fulfillment of His promise to Abraham (Genesis 15:5) —of which they themselves were a part.

Prophetically, the Feast of Tabernacles speaks of Jesus' Second Coming —when it will be reinstated and celebrated throughout the Millennium.

Practically, the Feast of Tabernacles speaks to me of the connection between repentance and restoration. Taking place five days after the somber Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles speaks of the restoration of joy, which would be linked to a timely petition. You see, the fall months being the season of "early rains," if rain didn't fall, Israel's agrarian society would be in trouble. So at the Feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites came together not only to say, "Lord, You have been so good to us," but, "Lord, remember the season ahead. Pour out Your rain upon us."

Are you dry tonight? Is there a drought in your soul? It could be the result of unconfessed sin, of a neglect of a personal "day of atonement."

> Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.
>
> Psalm 32:1–5

On the Day of Atonement, the nation confessed their sin and afflicted their souls. The result? A party five days later at the Feast of Tabernacles, five being the number of grace. Every morning during the Feast of Tabernacles, the priests would divide into two processionals. One group would go directly to the east, the valley of Kidron, and gather willow, palm, myrtle, and citrus branches to pass out to the people and to lay in the courtyard of the temple where sacrifices were made. The second group of priests would go south to the pool of Siloam, carrying a golden pitcher, which they would dip into the water. Both companies of priests—those carrying the branches and those carrying the water—would meet at the temple, where the water was poured out from the pitcher before the altar as a reminder of God's provision of water for them during their wilderness wandering. On the eighth day, the great day of the feast, although the priests would go to the pool of Siloam, they would return with an empty pitcher,

acknowledging the fact that, because they were now in the Promised Land, there was no longer need for supernatural provision of water. And as they did, the priest would say this prayer . . .

> Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.
>
> Isaiah 44:2–4

Why would they read this passage?

Because they understand that Isaiah 44 was a prophecy of the pouring out of the Spirit that could transpire only when Messiah came to their land.

The year is approximately A.D. 32. On the great day of the feast, as everyone watched, as the processional returned from the pool of Siloam, poured out the empty pitcher and prayed for Messiah to come, a young thirty-three-year-old Rabbi from Galilee shouts out, "If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink. And out of his innermost being shall gush forth torrents of living water" (John 7:37, 38), thereby presenting Himself as Messiah and offering the living water, the rain of the Holy Spirit.

But Jesus' declaration was not yet complete . . .

Every night during the Feast of Tabernacles the celebration of illumination took place wherein four huge menorahs on the temple mount, with wicks made of priest's robes which had been worn out, were lit—causing a light to shine so brightly it could be seen one hundred miles away. At the end of the feast, the menorahs would be extinguished, not to be relit until the following year. John tells us that it was on the day after the Feast of Tabernacles, the day after the menorahs were extinguished that Jesus declared, 'I am the light of the world,' (John 8:12)—the true Light which would never be extinguished.

What a perfect picture was painted at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Don't lose sight of the fact that the Lord's coming is near, gang. In the meantime, drink deeply of the water of His Spirit and illuminate your life not

with a pillar of fire or a huge menorah which were used and then extinguished, but by the Presence and promises of the One who will never leave you or forsake you as you walk daily with Him.



24 Leviticus 23 deals with special days of rejoicing. Leviticus 25 deals with special years of refreshing. But between chapters 23 and 25 comes chapter 24, a chapter of responsibilities, wherein God assigns the responsibilities to His people of preparing holy oil, providing holy bread, and protecting His holy name . . .

Leviticus 24:1–4
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn continually. Without the vail of the testimony, in the tabernacle of the congregation, shall Aaron order it from the evening unto the morning before the LORD continually: it shall be a statute for ever in your generations. He shall order the lamps upon the pure candlestick before the LORD continually.

As high priest, it was Aaron's responsibility to keep the lamp burning brightly in the holy place of the tabernacle. But it was the peoples' responsibility to bring the oil. As pastor I have the opportunity in this congregation to make sure that the light of the Word is opened and allowed to shine brightly. But what I do is dependent to a very great degree upon you. Do you pray for the anointing of the Spirit that there might be illumination? C.H. Spurgeon was oh, so right when he said, "Great preachers do not make great congregations, but rather great congregations make great preachers." Truly, illumination is directly related to the faithfulness of the congregation.

Leviticus 24:5–9
And thou shalt take fine flour, and bake twelve cakes thereof: two tenth deals shall be in one cake. And thou shalt set them in

two rows, six on a row, upon the pure table before the LORD. And thou shalt put pure frankincense upon each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, even an offering made by fire unto the LORD. Every sabbath he shall set it in order before the LORD continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant. And it shall be Aaron's and his sons'; and they shall eat it in the holy place: for it is most holy unto him of the offerings of the LORD made by fire by a perpetual statute.

The people were to provide the holy bread in order that Aaron and his sons might be fed on the Sabbath day in the sanctuary. How thankful I am that people understand the importance of bringing the bread in order that there might be a feeding of the ministry, an expanding of the work here congregationally. If people didn't tithe, this ministry would not be fed in the way it is. God has blessed us because of your faithfulness in bringing the bread into the sanctuary.

Leviticus 24:10–12
And the son of an Israelitish woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel: and this son of the Israelitish woman and a man of Israel strove together in the camp; and the Israelitish woman's son blasphemed the name of the LORD, and cursed. And they brought him unto Moses: (and his mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan). And they put him in ward, that the mind of the LORD might be shewed them.

Here we see the responsibility of the people to protect God's holy name. When, during a fight, the son of an Israelite woman and an Egyptian man blasphemed the name of the Lord, the people of God weren't sure whether he was to be held to the same standards as they were. So they put him in ward, in custody, and sought the mind of the Lord—always a wise thing to do.

Had Moses come to me asking what I thought he should do with a man who was half-Egyptian and half-Jew who blasphemed the Lord's name during a fight?" my tendency would have been to say, "Let's discuss this. He didn't have the background the rest of us have had. Here's a chance for us to

be merciful, to show grace, to demonstrate to the Egyptian people how kind, bighearted, and loving we are. Let's not rush into this matter. Let's give him a warning, explain why we don't say those things around here, and let him go. After all, he's half-Egyptian."

But the following verse shows me just how far my thoughts are from God's, that I'm not nearly as wise as I think I am. Maybe you're like me. Maybe you think you know what's right and what's wise—but on the basis of this passage, I encourage you even as I remind myself, rather than making a decision based upon dialogue, discussion, and debate, to seek the Lord in prayer and see what *He* says concerning any given matter.

God speaks to those on their knees who seek Him sincerely, admitting they lack wisdom. God's will is not a mystery. The issue is, will we do what He tells us to do?

Leviticus 24:13, 14
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him.

In His answer, the Lord declares that, regardless of background or family history, genetics or individual tendencies, there was to be only one law for all of the people.

"But isn't stoning an extreme sentence for blasphemy?" we ask.

How do we know?

Maybe we'll see this man in heaven and hear him say, "My life was basically going nowhere, but God used me mightily to get people to think very seriously about the issue of blasphemy." It could very well be that it was His love and grace which caused God to take the lives of this man and others like Achan, seeing that, if left on earth, their lives would be meaningless. Of this much we can be sure: because God is good, loving, and just, all that He does will prove to be right when we finally get to heaven and see all parts of the equation.

Leviticus 24:15–18

And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death. And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death. And he that killeth a beast shall make it good; beast for beast.

The reason the discussion of murder comes on the heels of God's edict concerning blasphemy is because blasphemy is indeed a form of murder. You see, whenever the name of our God who is transcendent, holy, perfect, full of mercy, gracious, benevolent, kind, and good is profaned, blasphemed, trivialized, His reputation is slaughtered. And God takes issue with that, knowing that, because the people who listen to blasphemy day after day won't believe in Him or have an understanding of Him, they won't call out to Him in the time of their need, in the day of their difficulty. God cares about His name not because He's proud but because He wants people to understand who He is.

Leviticus 24:19–23
And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again. And he that killeth a beast, he shall restore it: and he that killeth a man, he shall be put to death. Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: for I am the LORD your God. And Moses spake to the children of Israel, that they should bring forth him that had cursed out of the camp, and stone him with stones. And the children of Israel did as the LORD commanded Moses.

Although people think this sounds like revenge, it's actually restraint. You see, if someone punches me in the eye, every part of me will be determined not to punch him in the eye, but to go for both of his eyes. If someone knocks

out my tooth, I'll try to knock out his mouthful. Knowing this, God sets the price at only one eye for an eye, at only one tooth for a tooth.

Today's sociologist and psychologist would most likely say such things do not deter people from criminal behavior. God's Word, however, declares that equitable justice does in fact prove to be a deterrent to behavior that is the inevitable result of our depraved condition. Therefore, although we might not understand it initially, this passage pulsates with mercy.



25 Following a discussion on rejoicing in chapter 23 and responsibility in chapter 24 comes refreshment here in chapter 25 . . .

Leviticus 25:1–7
And the LORD spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the LORD. Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; but in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land. And the sabbath of the land shall be meat for you; for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee, And for thy cattle, and for the beast that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat.

Every seventh year, the Israelites were to take a break. During this sabbath, or sabbatical year, the land wasn't worked and bills weren't paid (Deuteronomy 15). Agriculturally, we now know the wisdom of letting the land rest. And the same is true sociologically.

During this seventh year, the Book of Deuteronomy would be read (Deuteronomy 31:9–13) and people would be refreshed and renewed through

the study of the Word. The people, however, deciding they needed to get ahead more than they needed to rest went four hundred and ninety years without observing a sabbath year. As a result, because they robbed God of seventy sabbaths, the children of Israel would spend seventy years held captive in Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:21).

Leviticus 25:8, 9
And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land.

Every fiftieth year, the Year of Jubilee was to be observed—a year characterized by release, rest, and restoration . . .

Leviticus 25:10
And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.

In the Year of Jubilee, there was to be a release of slaves and debt. That is, all slaves were to be set free and the slate of mortgages, car payments, and credit card debt was to be wiped clean.

Leviticus 25:11, 12
A jubile shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed. For it is the jubile; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field.

Secondly, during the Year of Jubilee—as in the sabbath year—there was to be rest for man as well as for the land.

Leviticus 25:13
In the year of this jubile ye shall return every man unto his possession.

Thirdly, in the Year of Jubilee, any land which had been sold was to be returned to its original owner. That is, if a piece of property was sold to cover a debt or to rescue a household financially, it would be restored to the family of the one who had sold it initially.

With release of debt, rest from labor, restoration of property, the Year of Jubilee seems like a golden opportunity. And yet neither the Bible nor extra-biblical writers give any indication it was ever observed.

Yet before we chide the Israelites for failing to take advantage of the glorious Year of Jubilee, we would do well to look in the mirror. If you want to experience jubilee in your own life presently, it begins with releasing people from the captivity in which you hold them because you think they let you down, disappointed, or hurt you. "For if ye forgive men their trespasses," Jesus said, "your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14, 15). It is the one who doesn't set the debtor free who remains bound in misery. Even though you don't feel it emotionally, you can decide today to do that which Israel never did: to cancel all debts and experience jubilee in your soul.

Secondly, I will experience jubilation only to the degree that I quit trying to earn blessings from God. When the trumpet was to have sounded signaling the beginning of the Year of Jubilee, it would have applied to everyone equally. Every person could have reaped the benefits of the blessings of Jubilee. All they had to do was receive it. So, too, because it is by grace that we're saved, the Year of Jubilee will dawn in your soul if you'll just relax and receive.

Thirdly, the Year of Jubilee was to be a year of restoring property. And therein most likely lies the reason as to why the Year of Jubilee was never celebrated. People didn't want to give back their land. However, had they done so, they would have received blessings far greater than anything they gave up.

Leviticus 25:14–17

And if thou sell ought unto thy neighbour, or buyest ought of thy neighbour's hand, ye shall not oppress one another: according to the number of years after the jubile thou shalt buy of thy neighbour, and according unto the number of years of the fruits he shall sell unto thee: according to the multitude of years thou shalt increase the price thereof, and according to the fewness of years thou shalt diminish the price of it: for according to the number of the years of the fruits doth he sell unto thee. Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am the LORD your God.

If you were to buy a piece of property three months before the Year of Jubilee, knowing it would be restored to its owner in three months, you would pay only a fraction of its price. If the Year of Jubilee was three years away, you'd pay a little more. And if it was forty-nine years away, you'd pay full price.

In other words, the further away one was from the jubilee, the more valuable the property was. The same is true concerning the ultimate Jubilee that will take place in the kingdom, for the closer the kingdom seems to us, the less valuable our material possessions become to us. Conversely, my being caught up in my possessions, my hobbies, my agenda, is an indication that I'm not living for the kingdom the way I could be.

What are we to do? Let it all go. Jesus said, "Wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). The Lord wants to put His kingdom in your heart to a greater degree. May this be the day.

Leviticus 25:18–22

Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety. And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? Behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years. And ye shall sow the eighth year, and

eat yet of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat of the old store.

"Wait a minute," people could have said. "If we're not to work on the seventh year and the next year is Jubilee,—with two years of no sowing or reaping—what will we eat?"

In response, God says, "In the sixth year, I'll give you enough for both the seventh year and the Jubilee year. I'll give you enough to see you through."

And He says the same thing to you and me when He says, "Bring the tithe into the storehouse. Trust Me and test Me to see if I don't provide for you" (Malachi 3:10).

Leviticus 25:23, 24
The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land.

For forty-nine years men could buy and sell and build their own estates. The fiftieth year, the land was to be returned to its original owner. In other words, free enterprise for forty-nine years and compassion in the fiftieth year would have prevented monopolization and exploitation. It was a brilliant plan.

Leviticus 25:25
If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold.

Here we are introduced to the concept of the kinsman redeemer, perfectly illustrated in the person of Boaz (Ruth 2—4), and perfectly fulfilled in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Leviticus 25:26–28
And if the man have none to redeem it, and himself be able to redeem it; then let him count the years of the sale thereof, and restore the overplus unto the man to whom he sold it; that he may

return unto his possession. But if he be not able to restore it to him, then that which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that hath bought it until the year of jubile: and in the jubile it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession.

If, after having sold his property, a man is later able to buy it back, he has the right to do so. Otherwise, he must wait until the Year of Jubilee for it to be returned to him.

Leviticus 25:29–31
And if a man sell a dwelling house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; within a full year may he redeem it. And if it be not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house that is in the walled city shall be es tablished for ever to him that bought it throughout his generations: it shall not go out in the jubile. But the houses of the villages which have no wall round about them shall be counted as the fields of the country: they may be redeemed, and they shall go out in the jubile.

If I sell my house in a walled city but later decide I want it back, either I or a kinsman of mine can buy it back within a year. But if I don't buy it back within a year, the house is to become the buyer's forever. If my house was not in the city, however, I could buy it back at any point—or wait until the Year of Jubilee, at which time it would be returned to me. The rabbis teach that, in this, God is encouraging people not to live in cities. Whether or not such be the case, the fact remains that with a higher density of people comes greater opportunity to sin. A higher density of believers in any given area can result in a greater degree of lethargy. That is why, as salt and light, we are most effective when we are spread out.

Leviticus 25:32–34
Notwithstanding the cities of the Levites, and the houses of the cities of their possession, may the Levites redeem at any time. And if a man purchase of the Levites, then the house that was sold, and the city of his possession, shall go out in the year of

jubile: for the houses of the cities of the Levites are their possession among the children of Israel. But the field of the suburbs of their cities may not be sold; for it is their perpetual possession.

Having been given no land of their own (Numbers 18:20), the tribe of Levi was given cities in which to live and a surrounding area as pasture land for their livestock. While a Levite could sell his house, which would be returned to him in the Year of Jubilee, he could not sell his land.

Leviticus 25:35–38
And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase. I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God.

Although Deuteronomy 23:20 allows for interest from a stranger having themselves been rescued by God when they were slaves in Egypt, the Israelites were to rescue their brothers from financial bondage with no-interest loans. In other words, they were not to take advantage of a brother in need.

Leviticus 25:39–46
And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant: but as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubile: and then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return. For they are my servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen. Thou shalt not rule over him with rigour; but shalt fear

thy God. Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land: and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever: but over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule one over another with rigour.

If an Israelite had to become a servant, his master was to treat him not as a slave, but as an employee until he was released in the Year of Jubilee. We were all slaves of sin, but because Jesus is our Jubilee, we have been set free.

Leviticus 25:47–55
And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: after that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him: either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself. And he shall reckon with him that bought him from the year that he was sold to him unto the year of jubile: and the price of his sale shall be according unto the number of years, according to the time of an hired servant shall it be with him. If there be yet many years behind, according unto them he shall give again the price of his redemption out of the money that he was bought for. And if there remain but few years unto the year of jubile, then he shall count with him, and according unto his years shall he give him again the price of his redemption. And as a yearly hired servant shall he be with him: and the other shall not rule with rigour over him in thy sight. And if he be not redeemed in these years, then he shall go out in the year of jubile, both he, and his children with him. For

unto me the children of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Is God instituting slavery in these laws regarding the price of a slave's redemption prior to the Year of Jubilee? No, He's regulating what was already taking place. Why didn't God forbid slavery? Because God's way is to change people. Changed people, in turn—people like England's abolitionist William Wilberforce, an outspoken believer—will then change politics.



26 After carefully and thoroughly giving His Law to His people, here at the end of the Book of Leviticus, God will declare to them, "If you walk in My Law, you will be beautifully blessed. If you wander from My Law, you will be unbelievably burdened. The choice is yours."

We live in a universe regulated by physical laws. Therefore, if I start poking around in an electrical socket or jump off a ten-story building, I can't be shocked to find myself fried or to wake up broken and battered. The penalties for breaking the laws of electricity and gravity are consistent. There will always be a price to pay.

So, too, there are spiritual laws which are irrefutable, undeniable, absolute. And those who violate them suffer consequences as surely as if they violated physical laws. If they keep them, however, their lives will be illuminated as surely as is the one who obeys the law of electricity; their lives will be as grounded as those who choose to live by the law of gravity.

Leviticus 26:1
Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the LORD your God.

The children of Israel were not to make standing images because, in reality, no image, no idol, no false god can ever stand.



For topical study of Leviticus 26:1 entitled "Overcoming Idolatry," turn to page **444.**

Leviticus 26:2
Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.

The Israelites were to keep the holy day and come to the Holy Place.

Leviticus 26:3, 4
If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.

"If you do what I say, your land will be productive," the Lord promises.

Leviticus 26:5
And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.

"If you walk in My ways, you will experience prosperity," God declares.

Leviticus 26:6
And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land.

"Follow Me," God says, "and you will receive peace and protection."

Leviticus 26:7, 8
And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an

hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.

Power would be given to God's people if they kept His commands. Their enemies would be able to make no impact upon them.

Leviticus 26:9
For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you.

"My promises will be fulfilled in those who walk in My statutes," God declares.

Leviticus 26:10
And ye shall eat old store, and bring forth the old because of the new.

Provision will be made for those who walk God's way through an understanding of both the old and the new—in our case, the Old Testament truths and New Testament revelations.

Leviticus 26:11–13
And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people. I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright.

Productivity and prosperity, peace and protection, power, promise, and provision were topped off by the promise of God's presence to those who chose to obey Him. Jesus reiterated this same truth in the context of material blessings when He said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

"How can I walk in His ways if I can't remember what they are?" you ask.

Jesus reduced the entire Old Testament Law and prophets to two sentences when He said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind, and strength. And thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself ” (Mark 12:30, 31).

Leviticus 26:14 (a)
But . . .

Here is the three-letter pivotal word on which this chapter—if not the entire book—rests.

Leviticus 26:14 (b)–19
. . . if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass:

Do you ever feel like heaven is iron, like your prayers bounce off the ceiling? God says, “If you don’t do what I tell you to do, heaven will be as iron, and earth as brass, the metal of judgment.”

Leviticus 26:20–24
And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits. And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to

your sins. I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your highways shall be desolate. And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins.

Disobedience to God affects one's health, one's family, one's livelihood. Why are *seven* plagues sent to those who choose to disobey God? Why *seven* punishments? Because God wants us to know we have two choices: a real good one and a real rotten one. It's not like choosing between the Toyota or the Nissan. It's, "Do you want prosperity, peace, and power—or do you want anger, curses and problems?"

"Do what I tell you and you'll be blessed," God says. "Don't, and you'll be distressed. It's just that simple."

Leviticus 26:25–31
And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied. And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat. And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcases upon the carcases of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you. And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation, and I will not smell the savour of your sweet odours.

The choice to walk contrary to God's ways would not only result in all of creation being at war with them through horrendous disease and famine, but,

worse, because God would no longer "smell the savour of their sweet odours," their sacrifices would not be accepted.

Leviticus 26:32–35
And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it.

Israel was given a command that would be an indicator of their obedience to God and their affection for God. The command concerned the sabbath year—the seventh year to be set aside during which there was to be no sowing of seed, no reaping of the harvest, no work done by man or beast. And when the people used the seventh year to work instead of to rest, God waited for them to repent. Because our Father is patient, slow to anger, full of mercy (Nehemiah 9:17), He waited year after year, for a change of heart. But after four hundred and ninety years passed, He said, "Enough." And His people were carried to captivity in Babylon for seventy sabbaths, or seventy years.

The laws of God are absolute. When violated, the consequences are inevitable. Thus, the captivity of His people was proof of the surety of God's Word. If I walk in it, I'm blessed. If I wander from it, I'm taken captive.

Leviticus 26:36–39
And upon them that are left alive of you I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth. And they shall fall one upon another, as it were before a sword, when none pursueth: and ye shall have no power to stand before your enemies. And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. And they that are left of you shall

pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them.

The prosperity and power, peace, protection, and provision of verses 3 through 10 would be replaced by the powerlessness, perishing, and pining of verses 36 through 39.

Leviticus 26:40–46
If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; and that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes. And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the LORD their God. But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the LORD. These are the statutes and judgments and laws, which the LORD made between him and the children of Israel in mount Sinai by the hand of Moses.

Even in the time of captivity, even in the place of bondage which was due to their own disobedience, of His people, God declares, "I won't forget them. I won't forsake them." And that is the Word of the Lord to you and me today. God is saying, "If you walk in My Law, you'll be blessed. If you wander from My Law, you'll be burned. But even if you're in captivity, know

this: I have not forsaken you, for lo, I am with you always" (see Matthew 28:20).

Every broken commandment, every ignored precept can be forgiven because of what Jesus did for us on Calvary. Therefore, even if we're in the land of the enemy, God still cares about us. If we'll confess our sin to Him, if we'll call upon His name, He'll restore us once again. "If you wander from My ways, terror will come," God says. "If you walk in My ways, I'll bless you. It's your choice. The ball is in your court."

OVERCOMING IDOLATRY

A Topical Study of LEVITICUS 26:1

Throughout the Old Testament, the warning is sounded concerning the seduction of idolatry. Over and over again God's people are commanded to avoid idolatry and any type of imagery. Why? Is it because God is jealous of or threatened by idols? Is it because idols make Him feel insecure about who He is? Why does God over and over again warn against idolatry?

Turn to Psalm 115, where we see God's view of idols . . .

> *Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.*
>
> Psalm 115:4–7

Throughout the Word, God's view of idolatry is always linked with stupidity and ignorance. And yet, although idols are powerless in the material realm, there is a reality behind them in the spiritual arena . . .

> *What say I then? That the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 10:19, 20

The material idol in and of itself is nothing. It's simply a piece of wood or a carved stone. It has no life. It's blind, deaf, and dumb. However, there are spiritual powers, entities, personalities which flow through those idols. Although our tendency can be to think of the Canaanites and Old Testament Israelites as cavemen walking around worshiping idols because they were stupid, nothing could be further from the truth. In the fields of philosophy and

science, medicine and architecture, ancient cultures were so advanced that to this day, we have no idea how they did some of the things they did. Likewise, their religion was highly developed—with parallels still seen today . . .

Mammon was the god of material prosperity. Although worship of mammon centered around an idol, no one believed the idol in and of itself possessed power. Rather, it merely represented a way to get to the idea of mammon, a way to reach material prosperity. We do the same thing today through financial seminars, publications, and investment clubs. Are these things wrong? Only if they become a higher priority than loving God or loving each other.

Baal was the god of the intellect. Those who wanted answers for natural phenomena worshiped Baal because Baal worship offered a rational explanation for everything from earthquakes and rain to lightning and famine. And because they had no God to answer to personally, they felt they had the freedom to plunge into moral laxity. The same holds true today. People are agnostics because they want to do their own thing. And if they don't have to give answer to a holy or just God, they can do whatever they want.

Molech and Ashteroth were the god and goddess of physical, sensual pleasure. Those who worshiped these gods were totally consumed with and motivated by the latest hedonistic thrill. Worshipers of Molech would place their children as sacrifices on the incandescent arms of his idol, believing they would thereby gain greater pleasure for themselves. "How cruel!," we say. And yet there isn't a day that goes by in our own culture when people don't sacrifice their children through adultery and immorality in pursuit of their own physical pleasure.

Fifty other gods are recorded in Scripture—each with a demonic entity behind it, each still present today. That's what Paul is driving at. There are the same spiritual entities, the same hordes of hell here today. And there are Christians who, perhaps unknowingly, bow the knee to mammon or Baal, submitting to those forces of evil that seek to destroy us and disrupt our walk with Jesus Christ.

> *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds), casting down imaginations,*

and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

2 Corinthians 10:3–5

We're in a war. And the war we're fighting deals with the idols of imagination—illustrated perhaps most vividly in the Book of Ezekiel . . .

And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall. Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door. And he said unto me, Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here. So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, pourtrayed upon the wall round about. And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up. Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? For they say, the LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth.

Ezekiel 8:7–12

A shocking vision was given to Ezekiel of the temple walls covered with abominable pictures. "This is what is happening in the chambers of imagery, in the imaginations of men of maturity." In the minds of these outwardly religious men who would never have an idol in their homes, Ashteroth and Baal have taken up residence.

We are involved in warfare, the warfare of the mind. I don't know which god is most effective in your life, which entity most pervasively preys on your chamber of imagery, but I do know Satan is sure to release his emissaries to launch an attack against you and me.

Why?

He attacks us first of all because of *perversion.* At the point Lucifer rebelled against God and fell from heaven, his wisdom became perversion. And one of his perverted desires is to destroy (John 10:10). That is why the ultimate manifestation of one given over to Satan is a suicidal tendency (Matthew 27:5).

A second reason Satan attacks is for *ransom.* It would seem as though Satan is going to use the host which he has caused to come into his kingdom of darkness as a bargaining chip against God in the last day.

Thirdly, Satan attacks God's people because he's desperate. When, standing near a swimming pool, I see the all-too-familiar sight of a group of guys headed my way, my reaction is always the same. I realize I'm going in —but my attitude is, if I'm going in, I'm taking as many of them with me as I can. So I grab arms, legs, and shirts of any within my reach. That's the way Satan is. He's seeking to pull as many as he can into the lake of fire with him.

If you're a believer in Jesus, Satan knows he's lost your soul. But he'll seek to neutralize and nullify your witness by attacking you, by sending out his demons to cause destruction and deception. What do we do with these images, these powers that plague and haunt us? Consider the following four suggestions . . .

In dealing with these entities, these spiritual realities which war against your soul, there must first of all be *realization.* We are at war. And because we're at war, there will be casualties. When a person sins, the reaction can be, "He has blown it. Shame on him." But we need to realize that he has been attacked and therefore look at him not as vicious but as a victim of the attack of the enemy.

Secondly, there must be *preparation.* When the disciples were unable to cast out a demon from a boy who was possessed, Jesus told them to do so required prayer and fasting (Matthew 17). Therefore, we must be prepared *before* the attack comes. How? Before running a marathon, runners stock up on carbohydrates. To prepare spiritually, we are to do just the opposite because something happens when we say "No" to our stomachs. Saying "No" to our appetites physically strengthens the inner man spiritually.

Thirdly, there must be *confrontation* against these entities. We can't run from them. We must move in authority, fervency, and intensity in dealing with them. And yet all too often when we sense a spiritual attack headed our way,

we just give up and get depressed. It took a shout to bring down the walls of Jericho (Joshua 6:20). It took a spoken, authoritative command to cast out demons (Mark 5:8). Thus, if we are to wage war against the demonic entities that plague us we must confront them with authority—at times even vocally.

Finally, we move in *expectation,* for without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). We can expect to be victorious knowing that our enemy and his hordes of hell are doomed to one day be thrown into the bottomless pit forever (Revelation 12).

The victory is ours, gang. All we have to do is take it and act upon it. May we be those who keep ourselves from idols as we recognize them, be prepared for them, and confront them in the name of Jesus.



27 Leviticus 27:1–8

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, when a man shall make a singular vow, the persons shall be for the LORD by thy estimation. And thy estimation shall be of the male from twenty years old even unto sixty years old, even thy estimation shall be fifty shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary. And if it be a female, then thy estimation shall be thirty shekels. And if it be from five years old even unto twenty years old, then thy estimation shall be of the male twenty shekels, and for the female ten shekels. And if it be from a month old even unto five years old, then thy estimation shall be of the male five shekels of silver, and for the female thy estimation shall be three shekels of silver. And if it be from sixty years old and above; if it be a male, then thy estimation shall be fifteen shekels, and for the female ten shekels. But if he be poorer than thy estimation, then he shall present himself before the priest, and the priest shall value him; according to his ability that vowed shall the priest value him.

Anyone who vowed to devote himself to service to the Lord, but was unable to keep his vow due to a change of heart, a physical disqualification, or because he was not needed, he was to pay a price of redemption based not

upon the value he held in God's eyes, but upon how much work he was able to do.

Sometimes people say, "I really wanted to go to the mission field," or, "I really desired to be a youth pastor"—but if they prove to be unable, unwilling, or unneeded, they can still redeem the situation by supporting those who are called, those who are able and truly willing.

Leviticus 27:9, 10
And if it be a beast, whereof men bring an offering unto the LORD, all that any man giveth of such unto the LORD shall be holy. He shall not alter it, nor change it, a good for a bad, or a bad for a good: and if he shall at all change beast for beast, then it and the exchange thereof shall be holy.

If someone tried to trick God by switching an inferior animal with a spotless one to sacrifice, God was to get both animals—a reminder that playing games with God is always a lose/lose situation.

Leviticus 27:11–13
And if it be any unclean beast, of which they do not offer a sacrifice unto the LORD, then he shall present the beast before the priest: and the priest shall value it, whether it be good or bad: as thou valuest it, who art the priest, so shall it be. But if he will at all redeem it, then he shall add a fifth part thereof unto thy estimation.

If a worshiper changed his mind and wanted his sacrificial animal back, he was to buy it back at full price plus twenty percent.

Leviticus 27:14–25
And when a man shall sanctify his house to be holy unto the LORD, then the priest shall estimate it, whether it be good or bad: as the priest shall estimate it, so shall it stand. And if he that sanctified it will redeem his house, then he shall add the fifth part of the money of thy estimation unto it, and it shall be his. And if a man shall sanctify unto the LORD some part of a field of his

possession, then thy estimation shall be according to the seed thereof: an homer of barley seed shall be valued at fifty shekels of silver. If he sanctify his field from the year of jubile, according to thy estimation it shall stand. But if he sanctify his field after the jubile, then the priest shall reckon unto him the money according to the years that remain, even unto the year of the jubile, and it shall be abated from thy estimation. And if he that sanctified the field will in any wise redeem it, then he shall add the fifth part of the money of thy estimation unto it, and it shall be assured to him. And if he will not redeem the field, or if he have sold the field to another man, it shall not be redeemed any more. But the field, when it goeth out in the jubile, shall be holy unto the LORD, as a field devoted; the possession thereof shall be the priest's. And if a man sanctify unto the LORD a field which he hath bought, which is not of the fields of his possession; then the priest shall reckon unto him the worth of thy estimation, even unto the year of the jubile: and he shall give thine estimation in that day, as a holy thing unto the LORD. In the year of the jubile the field shall return unto him of whom it was bought, even to him to whom the possession of the land did belong. And all thy estimations shall be according to the shekel of the sanctuary: twenty gerahs shall be the shekel.

"We need a 15,000 square foot house, Lord, because we're going to use it for ministry. We'll have people over constantly as well as hosting Bible studies consistently." But if this turns out to be a promise we're unwilling or unable to keep, we're to redeem the house—buy it back—at full price plus twenty percent. The same principle was to be followed with regard to property.

Leviticus 27:26
Only the firstling of the beasts, which should be the LORD's firstling, no man shall sanctify it; whether it be ox, or sheep: it is the LORD's.

A man could not dedicate to the Lord the first ox or the first sheep in his herd or flock because it was already God's. So, too, because the tithe is already the Lord's, why do we think we're doing something special when we give Him what is His already?

Leviticus 27:27
And if it be of an unclean beast, then he shall redeem it according to thine estimation, and shall add a fifth part of it thereto: or if it be not redeemed, then it shall be sold according to thy estimation.

Unclean animals were to be bought back for full price plus twenty percent.

Leviticus 27:28
Notwithstanding no devoted thing, that a man shall devote unto the LORD of all that he hath, both of man and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy unto the LORD.

Jericho was an example of that which was to be devoted to the Lord. That is why the Israelites were forbidden to take anything from it, and why Achan was punished so severely for doing so (Joshua 7:25).

Leviticus 27:29
None devoted, which shall be devoted of men, shall be redeemed; but shall surely be put to death.

Under Old Testament Law, a person sentenced to die could not be redeemed, could not be "bought back." Praise be to God, however, because of the Cross of Calvary, we who were sentenced to death through the penalty of sin were indeed redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

Leviticus 27:30, 31
And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's: it is holy unto the LORD. And

if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof.

If a man needed to withhold a portion of his tithe, he was to add twenty percent to it when he was able to offer it to the Lord.

Leviticus 27:32, 33
And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD. He shall not search whether it be good or bad, neither shall he change it: and if he change it at all, then both it and the change thereof shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed.

"Passing under the rod" referred to the way a shepherd would hold forth his shepherd's rod in order to count his sheep as they passed under it. Thus, God was saying, "After you've counted it, tithe ten percent of your flock."

Leviticus 27:34
These are the commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses for the children of Israel in mount Sinai.

The Book of Leviticus ends with a teaching on tithing as if to say that holiness is proved by how one responds and reacts to that which costs him something. We can talk about holiness, sing songs about holiness, even pray about holiness—but holiness becomes real in our lives to the extent that we give the Lord His due, no matter the cost. And, as New Testament believers, His due is our all . . .

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Romans 12:1



NUMBERS

Background to Numbers

The Book of Numbers gets its name from the numbering of the people—the first time seen in chapter 1, the second approximately thirty-nine years later in chapter 26. In the Hebrew Bible, the Torah, this book is titled "In The Wilderness" due to where it takes place. It is also known as "The Book of Murmurings" for reasons that will become clear as we read through it.

The five books penned by Moses—the five Books of the Pentateuch—of which Numbers is the fourth, chronicle the development of God's people . . .

- In Genesis, we see in the person of Abraham God's people waiting—waiting for the son promised to him, the first of a nation that was to number as the stars in the heavens, the sand on the seashore.
- In Exodus, we see God's people watching—as God raised up a deliverer named Moses and sent plagues upon the land of Egypt in order to set them free.
- In Leviticus, we see God's people worshiping—in response to what He had done for them so graciously.
- Here in Numbers, we see God's people warring—as they are organized in camps to do battle against the enemies they will encounter on their way towards the Promised Land.

The same sequence plays out in the life of the believer—for, after waiting for the Lord to work, after seeing what He does and worshiping in response, we are told to storm the gates of hell (Matthew 16:18), to roll up our sleeves, strap on our swords and take by force the territory promised to us—to be those who say, "God said all things work together for good, therefore I'm going to rejoice in the Lord always," to be those whose hearts are not troubled because we know Jesus is preparing a place for us.

You see, gang, although it's inevitable that we come to wilderness times in our walk, we don't need to live in the wilderness year after year, decade after decade. It's not God's intention that we wander endlessly in the wilderness of depression and defeat, discouragement and despair. Such is the lesson of the Book of Numbers.

There will be a majority of teachers, speakers, and preachers who say such teaching is simplistic—that what we now know about the human psyche, about chemical reactions in the brain, about the pressures of culture render Scripture unrealistic. And we have a choice whether to believe the majority report that doesn't subscribe to the profound simplicity of the promises of God—or to believe God and determine we're not going to spend thirty-nine years, thirty-nine weeks or even thirty-nine days wandering in the wilderness of despair.

The book divides itself into three basic sections. Chapters 1 through 12 deal with the old generation—organized in chapters 1 through 4 and sanctified in chapters 5 through 12. In chapters 13 through 20, we see the failing of the old generation—their failure to believe, their murmuring, their disobedience. In chapters 21 through 36, a new generation is raised up that will take the Promised Land simply by taking God at His Word.



NUMBERS

1

Numbers 1:1 (a)
And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai . . .

It was in the wilderness that Moses heard the Word of the Lord. I point this out because sometimes when we go through a wilderness experience, although we try to extract things from the Word, although we spend time in prayer, we don't hear the voice of the Lord. All of us go through such times. But notice exactly where Moses was in the wilderness when the Lord spoke to him . . .

Numbers 1:1 (b)
. . . in the tabernacle of the congregation . . .

Moses was in the tabernacle of the congregation when he heard the voice of the Lord. And I believe the best place to hear the Lord speak is still the tabernacle of the congregation—in church. So many times in my walk when I have been dry, when I haven't heard the heart of the Lord, no sooner would I go into a church service and plop down on a back pew somewhere than I would begin to listen and wonder, *Who told this preacher what I'm going through?,* as he seemed to speak directly, specifically to my situation. I say this because sometimes we fail to remember when we talk about Bible study that the way to study the Bible most effectively is to consistently, faithfully come to church and travel through the Word with our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Numbers 1:1 (c)
. . . on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt . . .

After leaving Egypt, the children of Israel camped at the base of Mt. Sinai for one year during which time they received the Ten Commandments, the Law, and instruction concerning worship. Here in Numbers, the tabernacle has been constructed, the people have received instruction for worship, and they are

beginning the second month of the second year of their journey through the wilderness.

Numbers 1:1 (d)–3
. . . saying, Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of their names, every male by their polls; from twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies.

"Mobilize the congregation," the Lord commanded Moses. "Count the people and see who will be able to fight in Israel's army." Following are four possible reasons Moses was told to number the people . . .

Verification. God promised Abraham that he would one day be the father of a great nation (Genesis 12:2). This numbering would verify that God does what He promises. Even at this early point of their history, Israel was a big nation, an impressive group of people.

Identification. In referring to Himself as the Good Shepherd, Jesus said He calls His sheep by name (John 10:3). God cares about each and every individual. That is why He instructs Moses to number the people. Some people say, "I'm not into numbers with regard to church life." While I understand that we are not to be puffed up about numbers, I also know that we are to care about individuals, and sometimes that cannot happen without a numbering of the flock. After all, it was only after the Good Shepherd numbered the ninety-nine that He knew one was missing (Matthew 18:12). In the Book of Acts, we see that 3,000 were saved (Acts 2:41), which later grew to 5,000 (Acts 4:4). Admittedly, there can be a danger, a downside. David erred greatly when he numbered the people (2 Samuel 24:10). Is this a contradiction? No. David numbered the people not out of concern for them but in order to see how strong he had become. Numbering the people out of pride is wrong. But refusing to number them out of a reverse pride is also wrong, for it shows a lack of care.

Separation. There were those traveling with the Israelites who were not children of Israel. As we will see in verse 18, those not sure of their pedigree couldn't be used in the army. And the same thing is true for you and me. We must know our pedigree. We must know if we're part of the family. We must know whether or not we've been born again. If you're not sure of this, don't even think about going to war, about mobilizing for ministry. Romans 8:16 tells us

that God's Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are the sons of God. On this basis, I don't generally try to talk people into assurance of salvation. Instead, I'll say to them, "If you're not sure where you stand, wait on the Lord until you have the witness from His Spirit in your spirit that you are indeed His child."

Organization. We've been called to be soldiers in an army. We're involved in a war. Thus, there must be order. Anyone serious about serving God who is not part of any local church, who is not in submission to anyone, not linked with anyone, not accountable to anyone will sooner or later be a casualty. God is not into a lone ranger mentality.

Numbers 1:4
And with you there shall be a man of every tribe; every one head of the house of his fathers.

As seen in verses 5–15, each of the Twelve Tribes had a leader.

Numbers 1:16–18
These were the renowned of the congregation, princes of the tribes of their fathers, heads of thousands in Israel. And Moses and Aaron took these men which are expressed by their names: and they assembled all the congregation together on the first day of the second month, and they declared their pedigrees after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, by their polls.

As seen in verses 18 through 43, Reuben's tribe numbered 46,500. Simeon's 59,300. Gad 45,650. Judah 74,600. Issachar 54,400. Zebulun 57,400. Joseph was represented by his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh who numbered 40,500 and 32,200 respectively. Benjamin numbered 35,400, Dan 62,700, Asher 41,500, and Naphtali 53,400.

Numbers 1:44–46
These are those that were numbered, which Moses and Aaron numbered, and the princes of Israel, being twelve men: each one was for the house of his fathers. So were all those that were numbered of the children of Israel, by the house of their fathers,

from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war in Israel; even all they that were numbered were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty.

The census which will be taken of the new generation in chapter 26, will be amazingly close in number at 601,730.

Numbers 1:47–49
But the Levites after the tribe of their fathers were not numbered among them. For the LORD had spoken unto Moses, saying, Only thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel:

The above figures representing only the men of the congregation and excluding the tribe of Levi, the Israelites would have numbered between two and three million in totality.

Numbers 1:50–54
But thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it: they shall bear the tabernacle, and all the vessels thereof; and they shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle. And when the tabernacle setteth forward, the Levites shall take it down: and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death. And the children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard, throughout their hosts. But the Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel: and the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony. And the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did they.

The tabernacle was the place wherein dwelt the *chabod,* the glory of God—that which every person, whether he knows it or not, craves. You might think you're craving a bigger house, a faster car, a new boyfriend. But in reality, what you're truly craving is the *chabod,* the glory of God. And the degree to which

you experience the glory of God is the degree to which you will be satisfied in this life presently. Otherwise, you'll fall into the trap of thinking, *I'm not content now, but I will be—as soon as I get the next promotion*—failing to understand that it is only the weight, the substance, the glory of God which will satisfy your soul.

Here we see that the Levites—those who served in the tabernacle—were those who had the privilege of camping closest to the place where the chabod resided. The same is true today. The way to experience the presence of God is to serve—be it teaching a Sunday school class, coaching a Little League team in a way that you are an example of what it means to be a lover of God, raising your kids in the ways of God, serving as a missionary, or being involved in intercessory prayer. Jesus said whatever measure we give out will be given back to us (Matthew 7:2). And I have found it to be oh, so true—that the key to be experiencing the glory of God is to be involved in service, for if we only take in, we become bloated and groggy, but if we share with others that which we're learning, that which we've been given, that which we've experienced, we will receive a continuous supply.



2 "If the Bible seems a bit dry, moisten it with sweat," someone once said. I like that because some passages, perhaps like the one before us, can seem a bit dry to us. And yet studying the entire Bible is a life-long project because even then, we'll only scratch the surface—even of passages like this one.

In our text, we see an entire chapter devoted to a repetition of the leaders and census of the tribes, along with the position in which they were to camp. I would think there should be chapter after chapter dealing with raising kids or marriage, and only a verse or two about this Numbers thing. And yet in His Word, God seems to reiterate certain principles, knowing that if the principles are properly understood, the practical stuff will take care of itself. We want the practical. God, however, places a great priority on principles. The practical—different trends—comes and goes, but principles are eternal. And the passage before us is no exception, for in it, God painstakingly paints a picture that, once seen, is extremely practical.

Numbers 2:1–9

And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard, with the ensign of their father's house: far off about the tabernacle of the congregation shall they pitch. And on the east side toward the rising of the sun shall they of the standard of the camp of Judah pitch throughout their armies: and Nahshon the son of Amminadab shall be captain of the children of Judah. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were threescore and fourteen thousand and six hundred. And those that do pitch next unto him shall be the tribe of Issachar: and Nethaneel the son of Zuar shall be captain of the children of Issachar. And his host, and those that were numbered thereof, were fifty and four thousand and four hundred. Then the tribe of Zebulun: and Eliab the son of Helon shall be captain of the children of Zebulun. And his host, and those that were numbered thereof, were fifty and seven thousand and four hundred. All that were numbered in the camp of Judah were an hundred thousand and fourscore thousand and six thousand and four hundred, throughout their armies. These shall first set forth.

The tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, numbering 186,400 in totality, were to camp to the east of the tabernacle.

Numbers 2:10–16

On the south side shall be the standard of the camp of Reuben according to their armies: and the captain of the children of Reuben shall be Elizur the son of Shedeur. And his host, and those that were numbered thereof, were forty and six thousand and five hundred. And those which pitch by him shall be the tribe of Simeon: and the captain of the children of Simeon shall be Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were fifty and nine thousand and three hundred. Then the tribe of Gad: and the captain of the sons of Gad shall be Eliasaph the son of Reuel. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were forty and five thousand and six hundred and fifty. All that were numbered in the camp of Reuben were an hundred thousand and fifty and one thousand and four hundred and fifty, throughout their armies. And they shall set forth in the second rank.

The tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad, numbering 151,450 in totality were to camp to the south of the tabernacle.

Numbers 2:17
Then the tabernacle of the congregation shall set forward with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camp: as they encamp, so shall they set forward, every man in his place by their standards.

The Levites—those who served God—were those who camped closest to the tabernacle, closest to the ark of the covenant, closest to His Shekinah glory, closest to His presence. That's always the way it is. Those who serve God cannot help but experience His presence.

Numbers 2:18–24
On the west side shall be the standard of the camp of Ephraim according to their armies: and the captain of the sons of Ephraim shall be Elishama the son of Ammihud. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were forty thousand and five hundred. And by him shall be the tribe of Manasseh: and the captain of the children of Manasseh shall be Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were thirty and two thousand and two hundred. Then the tribe of Benjamin: and the captain of the sons of Benjamin shall be Abidan the son of Gideoni. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were thirty and five thousand and four hundred. All that were numbered of the camp of Ephraim were an hundred thousand and eight thousand and an hundred, throughout their armies. And they shall go forward in the third rank.

The tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, numbering 108,100 in totality were to camp to the west of the tabernacle.

Numbers 2:25–31
The standard of the camp of Dan shall be on the north side by their armies: and the captain of the children of Dan shall be Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were threescore and two thousand and seven hundred. And

those that encamp by him shall be the tribe of Asher: and the captain of the children of Asher shall be Pagiel the son of Ocran. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were forty and one thousand and five hundred. Then the tribe of Naphtali: and the captain of the children of Naphtali shall be Ahira the son of Enan. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were fifty and three thousand and four hundred. All they that were numbered in the camp of Dan were an hundred thousand and fifty and seven thousand and six hundred. They shall go hindmost with their standards.

The tribes of Dan, Asher, and Naphtali, numbering 157,600 in totality, were to camp to the north of the tabernacle.

Numbers 2:32–34
These are those which were numbered of the children of Israel by the house of their fathers: all those that were numbered of the camps throughout their hosts were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty. But the Levites were not numbered among the children of Israel; as the LORD commanded Moses. And the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses: so they pitched by their standards, and so they set forward, every one after their families, according to the house of their fathers.

To understand the significance of the camping assignments of the twelve tribes, turn to Numbers 22.

On their way to the Promised Land, the children of Israel pitched their tents in the plain of Moab. This caused consternation in the heart of Balak, the king of Moab, for he had heard of the Israelite's victory over the Amonites. So, in addition to forming an alliance with the Midianites, Balak persuaded Balaam, a prophet of the Lord, to curse the Israelites.

Accompanied by Balak to the top of a mountain from which he could see the entire Israelite camp, Balaam looked down to see the tabernacle in the midst with a contingent of 108,100 to the west, 186,400 to the east, 157,600 to the north, and 151,450 to the south. In other words, he would have seen the configuration of a Cross. No wonder he was unable to curse the Israelites. You

see, Balaam thought the Israelites were to be cursed because they were a bunch of complainers and idolaters. God, however, saw no iniquity in them because they were encamped in the Cross.

And the same is true for us. Because we're encamped in the Cross, because we're in Christ, we can go boldly before the throne of God today and receive that which we need (Hebrews 4:16). For whatever battle you're fighting or issue you're facing, the solution is found at the throne of grace simply because you're encamped in, cleansed by, forgiven through the Cross of Calvary.



3 Chapter 2 dealt with the position of the tribes. Chapter 3 deals with the organization of the Levites . . .

Numbers 3:1
These also are the generations of Aaron and Moses in the day that the LORD spake with Moses in mount Sinai.

A year after Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, he climbs the mountain again to get God's mind, His heart, His plan. If your life feels disorganized or confused, don't look to a self-help book to solve it for you. The best thing we can do individually, as families or as a church is to go to the mountain. Although the temptation is to reverse the order, we need to agonize in prayer before we organize a plan. When you feel scattered or out of focus, when your family is frayed by all of its activities, follow the example of Moses. Find a place where you can hear from the Lord.

Numbers 3:2–10
And these are the names of the sons of Aaron; Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the priests which were anointed, whom he consecrated to minister in the priest's office. And Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD, when they offered strange fire before the LORD, in the wilderness of Sinai, and they had no children: and Eleazar and Ithamar ministered in the priest's office in the sight of Aaron their father. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Bring the tribe of

Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him. And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle. And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle.And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they are wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel. And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall wait on their priest's office: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.

In Leviticus 10, Nadab and Abihu were killed when, as a result of their disobedience, a fire came down from heaven and consumed them. Aaron and his remaining sons were to serve as priests. All of the priests throughout the history of the nation were to be descendants of Aaron. Aaron being a descendant of Levi, every priest was a Levite but not every Levite was a priest because only Aaron's family would serve in the priestly service. The other Levites would assist Aaron and his descendants.

I find it interesting that, although our culture is touchy about nepotism, Scripture indicates that it's good and right that families be involved together in service.

Numbers 3:11–13
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine; Because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the LORD.

Due to the fact that He not only created them but spared them at Passover, God owned the firstborn. In other words, they were His not only by creative right, but also by redemptive right. It was the Lord's original intent that the firstborn of every family of every tribe be priests. But when only the Levites came forward as those who were on the Lord's side, they became the exclusive tribe God chose to minister to Him. The men of Reuben, Gad, and Naphtali

backed away, knowing they would have to deal with their friends and neighbors. The men of Judah, Benjamin, and Zebulun knew that they would have to inflict pain in order to save the nation. In the end, only one tribe was willing to say, "It's not a pleasant task, not an easy thing to do, but we're on the Lord's side and this needs to be done. So we will do it." And, as a result, they were blessed (Exodus 32:29).

In this, I understand why oftentimes we are not used to the degree we would like to be or think we ought to be. Hebrews 4:12 tells us the Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword. Am I willing to unsheathe the sword of the Word and deal with situations which are detrimental, dangerous, or diseased in the lives of friends, neighbors, or family members? Or will I be like Simeon, Issachar, and Asher and shy away?

It's one thing to say, "I'll take the sword and deal with the Jebusites, the Philistines, the Canaanites." But will you deal with your own family, your own friends, your own coworkers? Proverbs 29:25 says the fear of man is a snare. It will trip me up. At any given moment, I am living in fear. So are you. The question is, who do I fear? I will either be walking in the fear of God—not wanting to disappoint Him or disobey Him—or I will be walking in the fear of man—concerned about what others think of me.

The fear of man says, "I care more about you liking me than I do about you doing well." The fear of God, on the other hand, says, "You might not like this, but I'm going to tell you the truth because I care more about you doing well than I do about you liking me."

Knowing the story of Levi, I would have thought it would be any tribe but his that would step up to the task. After all, it was Levi who, along with Simeon, decided to avenge the rape of their sister, Dinah, by unsheathing the sword and butchering all the men of Shechem (Genesis 34)—an offense of such magnitude that Simeon and Levi were cursed and denied an inheritance in the Promised Land (Genesis 49:5–7). Therefore, when Moses asked who would unsheathe the sword and mete out judgment upon Israel, I would have thought Levi would have said, "Not us. We've been down this road before. We're cursed to this day. Let Reuben do it." But that's not what happened—for even though they failed previously, Levi said, "We will do what's necessary." Amazing.

"How can I correct him?" we say. "I failed in the past the same way he's failing now." Or, "I have no right to confront her. I made the very same mistakes she's making." That's what Levi could have said. Instead, he did what Paul

teaches us to do—he forgot that which was behind, pressed ahead, and did what had to be done (Philippians 3:13). And, as a result, although the curse remained, because the Levites chose to stand for the Lord, not only would they be used in ministry, but God Himself would be their inheritance ultimately (Joshua 13:33).

Does this mean we're to be those who unsheathe our swords and go sin-sniffing and faultfinding? No. It does mean, however, that we are to be those who love the Lord and love the family enough to say, "It's more important that you do well than that you like me."

> *There they were in the Garden, where Jesus had been praying. And now He and His disciples could hear the sound of soldiers approaching. After Judas' betrayal, as Jesus was being led away, Peter unsheathed his sword and severed the ear of a servant of the high priest. Thus, the last miracle Jesus did was to heal someone unnecessarily wounded by one of His disciples (Matthew 26).*

Will we be like Peter, or will we be like Levi? Peter drew his sword out of frustration; Levi drew his for redemption. Whenever I feel the hair stand up on the back of my neck or my blood begin to boil, I must put away my sword. Otherwise, like Peter, I'll wound people unnecessarily for the wrath of man never works the righteousness of God (James 1:20). But there are other times when, like the Levites, the only way I can be involved in ministry is to be willing to unsheathe the sword, to speak the truth, to deal with the problems in the camp.

> **Numbers 3:14–20**
> **And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying, Number the children of Levi after the house of their fathers, by their families: every male from a month old and upward shalt thou number them. And Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, as he was commanded. And these were the sons of Levi by their names; Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari. And these are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families; Libni, and Shimei. And the sons of Kohath by their families; Amram, and Izehar, Hebron, and Uzziel. And the sons of Merari by their families; Mahli, and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to the house of their fathers.**

The Levites were divided into three major family groups.

Numbers 3:21–26
Of Gershon was the family of the Libnites, and the family of the Shimites: these are the families of the Gershonites. Those that were numbered of them, according to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, even those that were numbered of them were seven thousand and five hundred. The families of the Gershonites shall pitch behind the tabernacle westward. And the chief of the house of the father of the Gershonites shall be Eliasaph the son of Lael. And the charge of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of the congregation shall be the tabernacle, and the tent, the covering thereof, and the hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, And the hangings of the court, and the curtain for the door of the court, which is by the tabernacle, and by the altar round about, and the cords of it for all the service thereof.

The Gershonites numbered 7,500 and were given the responsibility of caring for the woven material and animal skins which covered the tabernacle. The Gershonites weren't priests, but they fulfilled an important role nonetheless in that they provided the covering for worship.

Numbers 3:27–32
And of Kohath was the family of the Amramites, and the family of the Izeharites, and the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites: these are the families of the Kohathites. In the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, were eight thousand and six hundred, keeping the charge of the sanctuary. The families of the sons of Kohath shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle southward. And the chief of the house of the father of the families of the Kohathites shall be Elizaphan the son of Uzziel. And their charge shall be the ark, and the table, and the candlestick, and the altars, and the vessels of the sanctuary wherewith they minister, and the hanging, and all the service thereof. And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest shall be chief over the chief of the Levites, and have the oversight of them that keep the charge of the sanctuary.

The Kohathites numbered 8,600 and were in charge of the furniture of the tabernacle—the altars, the table of showbread, the candlestick, the ark.

Numbers 3:33–37
Of Merari was the family of the Mahlites, and the family of the Mushites: these are the families of Merari. And those that were numbered of them, according to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, were six thousand and two hundred. And the chief of the house of the father of the families of Merari was Zuriel the son of Abihail: these shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle northward. And under the custody and charge of the sons of Merari shall be the boards of the tabernacle, and the bars thereof, and the pillars thereof, and the sockets thereof, and all the vessels thereof, and all that serveth thereto, And the pillars of the court round about, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords.

The family of Merari numbered 6,200 and was responsible for the framework of the tabernacle—its boards and bars, pillars and sockets.

Numbers 3:38
But those that encamp before the tabernacle toward the east, even before the tabernacle of the congregation eastward, shall be Moses, and Aaron and his sons, keeping the charge of the sanctuary for the charge of the children of Israel; and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.

The significance of the east is seen throughout Scripture. Jesus will come through the eastern gate into the city of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 43). Thus, the east speaks of the coming of the Lord.

Numbers 3:39–43
All that were numbered of the Levites, which Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the LORD, throughout their families, all the males from a month old and upward, were twenty and two thousand. And the LORD said unto Moses, Number all the firstborn of the males of the children of Israel from a month old and upward, and take the number of their names. And thou shalt take

the Levites for me (I am the LORD) instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel; and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstlings among the cattle of the children of Israel. And Moses numbered, as the LORD commanded him, all the firstborn among the children of Israel. And all the firstborn males by the number of names, from a month old and upward, of those that were numbered of them, were twenty and two thousand two hundred and threescore and thirteen.

The total number of Levites was 22,000—a number remarkably close to the 22,273 firstborn males whose place they were to take.

Numbers 3:44–51
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle; and the Levites shall be mine: I am the LORD. And for those that are to be redeemed of the two hundred and threescore and thirteen of the firstborn of the children of Israel, which are more than the Levites; thou shalt even take five shekels apiece by the poll, after the shekel of the sanctuary shalt thou take them: (the shekel is twenty gerahs), and thou shalt give the money, wherewith the odd number of them is to be redeemed, unto Aaron and to his sons. And Moses took the redemption money of them that were over and above them that were redeemed by the Levites: of the firstborn of the children of Israel took he the money; a thousand three hundred and threescore and five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary: and Moses gave the money of them that were redeemed unto Aaron and to his sons, according to the word of the LORD, as the LORD commanded Moses.

The principle of redemption was to be a life for a life. In place of a life, that which most closely touched a man's life was to be offered—namely, money. Because one's work is where one invests the bulk of his time and energy, that which reveals most about someone's priorities is the way he uses his money. Talk is cheap. The proof of the pudding is not in the song I sing, but what I do when the basket goes by.

Does this mean we can purchase our salvation? No. Our salvation was indeed purchased—not by our own efforts or money but by the blood of Christ on the Cross of Calvary. (1 Peter 1:3). Therefore, the way we spend money—as well as the way we spend our time, talents, and every other resource given to us—should reflect that which was so freely and sacrificially spent for us when our Lord gave His life to set us free.



4

Numbers 4:1–3 (a)
And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Take the sum of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, after their families, by the house of their fathers, from thirty years old . . .

The Levites were to serve from the age of thirty. David was thirty when he became king of Israel. Jesus was thirty when He began His public ministry. Although we are often in a rush to jump into ministry, the Bible cautions against doing so (1 Timothy 5:22). Moses was in the wilderness forty years before God used him to deliver His people. And Paul spent years in the deserts of Arabia before being used in ministry.

Numbers 4:3 (b), 4
. . . and upward even until fifty years old, all that enter into the host, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation. This shall be the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation, about the most holy things:

Why were the priests to retire at the age of fifty? In chapter 8, we'll see that the Levites entered priestly service at twenty-five years of age. Therefore, from age twenty-five to thirty, the priests were to be trained. By whom? I suggest it was by those who had retired from priestly service at fifty. In other words, when a priest reached fifty years of age, he would step aside and pour his life and experiences into the next generation of priests. I think it's a wonderful model.

Numbers 4:5, 6 (a)

And when the camp setteth forward, Aaron shall come, and his sons, and they shall take down the covering vail, and cover the ark of testimony with it: and shall put thereon the covering of badgers' skins . . .

Although the badger skins covering the furnishings and ark were durable, they were ugly. Underneath the badger skins, however, were coverings of blue —the color of heaven. Therefore, although the Canaanites and others looking on would see the badger skin, they would miss altogether the blue underneath. And the same is true today. The world doesn't understand why we meet together, why we study the Word. They don't understand that we're learning about heaven.

Numbers 4:6 (b)–8 (a)
. . . and shall spread over it a cloth wholly of blue, and shall put in the staves thereof. And upon the table of shewbread they shall spread a cloth of blue, and put thereon the dishes, and the spoons, and the bowls, and covers to cover withal: and the continual bread shall be thereon: And they shall spread upon them a cloth of scarlet . . .

The table of showbread was the only item in the tabernacle covered by a scarlet cloth as well as a blue cloth. Why? Because it spoke of Communion.

Numbers 4:8 (b)–13
. . . and cover the same with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put in the staves thereof. And they shall take a cloth of blue, and cover the candlestick of the light, and his lamps, and his tongs, and his snuffdishes, and all the oil vessels thereof, wherewith they minister unto it: and they shall put it and all the vessels thereof within a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put it upon a bar. And upon the golden altar they shall spread a cloth of blue, and cover it with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put to the staves thereof: and they shall take all the instruments of ministry, wherewith they minister in the sanctuary, and put them in a cloth of blue, and cover them with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put them on a bar: and they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth thereon:

Why was purple to cover the altar where sacrifices were made, where blood was shed? Because the altar speaks of Jesus Christ. And what was placed on Jesus before He offered Himself as a sacrifice on the Cross of Calvary? A purple robe.

Numbers 4:14, 15 (a)
And they shall put upon it all the vessels thereof, wherewith they minister about it, even the censers, the fleshhooks, and the shovels, and the basons, all the vessels of the altar; and they shall spread upon it a covering of badgers' skins, and put to the staves of it. And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die . . .

Aaron and his sons were to cover the instruments of sacrifice and worship before the Kohathites came to bear them.

Numbers 4:15 (b), 16
. . . These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation. And to the office of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest pertaineth the oil for the light, and the sweet incense, and the daily meat offering, and the anointing oil, and the oversight of all the tabernacle, and of all that therein is, in the sanctuary, and in the vessels thereof.

Eleazar was to be the priest who would oversee the ministry of the Kohathites.

Numbers 4:17–20
And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Cut ye not off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites: but thus do unto them, that they may live, and not die, when they approach unto the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in, and appoint them every one to his service and to his burden: but they shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die.

How could the Kohathites be cut off, how could they die? By looking at the holy things of the tabernacle. And in this lies a warning . . .

> *The Israelites were understandably elated to see the ark of the covenant returned to them after it had been captured by the Philistines. Wanting to make sure that the contents were still intact, they removed the mercy seat to look inside. But in so doing, 50,000 men died (1 Samuel 6).*

So, whenever we remove mercy in the name of investigation, something in us dies. This doesn't mean we're not to have discernment and accountability. However, those who always think they have to get to the bottom of a matter, those who forsake mercy, become impotent spiritually and ineffective in ministry.

> **Numbers 4:21–28**
> **And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take also the sum of the sons of Gershon, throughout the houses of their fathers, by their families; from thirty years old and upward until fifty years old shalt thou number them; all that enter in to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation. This is the service of the families of the Gershonites, to serve, and for burdens: and they shall bear the curtains of the tabernacle, and the tabernacle of the congregation, his covering, and the covering of the badgers' skins that is above upon it, and the hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the hangings of the court, and the hanging for the door of the gate of the court, which is by the tabernacle and by the altar round about, and their cords, and all the instruments of their service, and all that is made for them: so shall they serve. At the appointment of Aaron and his sons shall be all the service of the sons of the Gershonites, in all their burdens, and in all their service: and ye shall appoint unto them in charge all their burdens. This is the service of the families of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of the congregation: and their charge shall be under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.**

Eleazar was to oversee the Kohathites, while the Gershonites were to be overseen by Ithamar, the brother of Eleazar.

Numbers 4:29–33
As for the sons of Merari, thou shalt number them after their families, by the house of their fathers; from thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old shalt thou number them, every one that entereth into the service, to do the work of the tabernacle of the congregation. And this is the charge of their burden, according to all their service in the tabernacle of the congregation; the boards of the tabernacle, and the bars thereof, and the pillars thereof, and sockets thereof, And the pillars of the court round about, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords, with all their instruments, and with all their service: and by name ye shall reckon the instruments of the charge of their burden. This is the service of the families of the sons of Merari, according to all their service, in the tabernacle of the congregation, under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.

In addition to overseeing the Gershonites, Ithamar was to oversee the family of Merari. In other words, Ithamar does double-duty. Why? Because how many sons did Aaron have initially? Four—one for each of these three families, with an extra in reserve. But when Nadab and Abihu lit strange fire (Leviticus 10:1), only two sons were left, leaving Ithamar with a double assignment.

When someone gets burned out on ministry—be it teaching Sunday school, giving financially, or covering the fellowship in prayer—and gives up or cuts back, others are left to fill in the gap, to do double and sometimes triple-duty in their absence.

Numbers 4:34–49
And Moses and Aaron and the chief of the congregation numbered the sons of the Kohathites after their families, and after the house of their fathers, from thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that entereth into the service, for the work in the tabernacle of the congregation: and those that were numbered of them by their families were two thousand seven hundred and fifty. These were they that were numbered of the families of the

Kohathites, all that might do service in the tabernacle of the congregation, which Moses and Aaron did number according to the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses. And those that were numbered of the sons of Gershon, throughout their families, and by the house of their fathers, from thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that entereth into the service, for the work in the tabernacle of the congregation, Even those that were numbered of them, throughout their families, by the house of their fathers, were two thousand and six hundred and thirty. These are they that were numbered of the families of the sons of Gershon, of all that might do service in the tabernacle of the congregation, whom Moses and Aaron did number according to the commandment of the LORD. And those that were numbered of the families of the sons of Merari, throughout their families, by the house of their fathers, From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that entereth into the service, for the work in the tabernacle of the congregation, Even those that were numbered of them after their families, were three thousand and two hundred. These be those that were numbered of the families of the sons of Merari, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses. All those that were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron and the chief of Israel numbered, after their families, and after the house of their fathers, From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that came to do the service of the ministry, and the service of the burden in the tabernacle of the congregation, Even those that were numbered of them, were eight thousand and five hundred and fourscore. According to the commandment of the LORD they were numbered by the hand of Moses, every one according to his service, and according to his burden: thus were they numbered of him, as the LORD commanded Moses.

The metal alone in the tabernacle weighed over ten tons. Therefore, God's wisdom is seen in placing the Merarites—the largest group—in charge of the transporting of the structure of the tabernacle. And yet, taken as a whole, the tribe of Levi numbered only one-fourth of the least of the other tribes, for those wholly devoted to the service of God are always few in number.

Oh, that we might number ourselves among them.



5

Having seen the people organized in chapters 3 and 4, we will see them purified here in chapter 5 . . .

Numbers 5:1–4
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by the dead: both male and female shall ye put out, without the camp shall ye put them; that they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I dwell. And the children of Israel did so, and put them out without the camp: as the LORD spake unto Moses, so did the children of Israel.

Those with leprosy, those with a running issue, those defiled by contact with the dead were to be removed from the camp. Why? Not because leprosy was contagious nor because running issues and dead bodies lead to all kinds of disease. The singular reason God gave for ridding the camp of this kind of impurity was because He dwelt therein.

The trend today in churches is that of being "seeker sensitive." To this end, we're not to sing too many songs, carry our Bibles, or talk about sin and repentance. I wholeheartedly disagree with this trend—for while we are indeed to be seeker-sensitive, it is not the sinner who is the seeker, but the Father who seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," Jesus declares (Revelation 3:20). And here, God says, "Honor Me. Deal with the leprosy, the issues, the defilement not only because those things will destroy you, but more importantly because I'm in the camp."

Numbers 5:5–7
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that person be guilty; then they shall confess their sin which they have done: and he shall

recompense his trespass with the principal thereof, and add unto it the fifth part thereof, and give it unto him against whom he hath trespassed.

If an Israelite hurt or cheated someone, he wasn't simply to say, "I'm sorry," but was to make up for that which he did—with an additional twenty percent. Such is God's heart. Why? Because restitution leads to restoration.

Numbers 5:8–10
But if the man have no kinsman to recompense the trespass unto, let the trespass be recompensed unto the LORD, even to the priest; beside the ram of the atonement, whereby an atonement shall be made for him. And every offering of all the holy things of the children of Israel, which they bring unto the priest, shall be his. And every man's hallowed things shall be his: whatsoever any man giveth the priest, it shall be his.

If the person sinned against moved or was otherwise unable to be located, the offender was to bring the restitution to the tabernacle. And the same is true today. You see, the Lord knows our tendency to weasel out of responsibility, to find a way to conveniently put off dealing with the restitution we know needs to be made. That's why He says, "It's never too late. Regardless of whether you know the location of the person you wronged, regardless of whether you know how to reach the company you cheated, you know the damage that was done, so pay what you owe plus twenty percent to Me." And in so doing, God teaches His people about growing up, about responsibility, about maturity.

Numbers 5:11–14
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, if any man's wife go aside, and commit a trespass against him, and a man lie with her carnally, and it be hid from the eyes of her husband, and be kept close, and she be defiled, and there be no witness against her, neither she be taken with the manner; and the spirit of jealousy come upon him, and he be jealous of his wife, and she be defiled: or if the spirit of jealousy come upon him, and he be jealous of his wife, and she be not defiled:

Whereas in Leviticus 13, we see God's instruction concerning the purification of leprosy, here we see His heart concerning the purification of immorality.

Numbers 5:15 (a)
Then shall the man bring his wife unto the priest . . .

If a husband suspected that his wife had been unfaithful to him, he was not to launch his own investigation. He was to bring her to the priest.

Numbers 5:15 (b)
. . . and he shall bring her offering for her, the tenth part of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil upon it, nor put frankincense thereon; for it is an offering of jealousy, an offering of memorial, bringing iniquity to remembrance.

The suspicious husband was also to bring a meal offering—devoid of the oil which speaks of the Spirit and of the sweet smell of frankincense.

Numbers 5:16–24
And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the LORD: and the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel; and of the dust that is in the floor of the tabernacle the priest shall take, and put it into the water: And the priest shall set the woman before the LORD, and uncover the woman's head, and put the offering of memorial in her hands, which is the jealousy offering: and the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that causeth the curse: and the priest shall charge her by an oath, and say unto the woman, if no man have lain with thee, and if thou hast not gone aside to uncleanness with another instead of thy husband, be thou free from this bitter water that causeth the curse: but if thou hast gone aside to another instead of thy husband, and if thou be defiled, and some man have lain with thee beside thine husband: then the priest shall charge the woman with an oath of cursing, and the priest shall say unto the woman, the LORD make thee a curse and an oath among thy people, when the LORD doth make thy thigh to rot, and thy belly to swell; and this water that causeth the curse shall go into thy

bowels, to make thy belly to swell, and thy thigh to rot: and the woman shall say, amen, amen. And the priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall blot them out with the bitter water: and he shall cause the woman to drink the bitter water that causeth the curse: and the water that causeth the curse shall enter into her, and become bitter.

Of what does this illustration speak? With regard to the woman, a swollen belly speaks of turmoil internally, a rotten thigh of an inability to walk spiritually. But in a larger sense, the illustration points to Jesus.

Jesus Christ came to earth as an earthen vessel when He became like you and me. He was filled with the water of the Word and absorbed the curse that should have been ours.

It was at the Feast of Tabernacles that they brought Jesus a woman caught in the act of adultery. When His teaching, His pouring forth of the water of the Word was interrupted, He stooped down and wrote in the dust on the floor of the temple compound, eventually freeing the woman to go and sin no more (John 8).

Thus, all the components of the purification of immorality come together in Jesus. Truly, Jesus came to free us from the curse that causes our walk to be rotten and our bellies bloated. We are the woman. But Jesus came to absorb our sin, to set us free—and I'm so glad.

Numbers 5:25–31
Then the priest shall take the jealousy offering out of the woman's hand, and shall wave the offering before the LORD, and offer it upon the altar: and the priest shall take an handful of the offering, even the memorial thereof, and burn it upon the altar, and afterward shall cause the woman to drink the water. And when he hath made her to drink the water, then it shall come to pass, that, if she be defiled, and have done trespass against her husband, that the water that causeth the curse shall enter into her, and become bitter, and her belly shall swell, and her thigh shall rot: and the woman shall be a curse among her people. And if the woman be not defiled, but be clean; then she shall be free, and shall conceive seed. This is the law of jealousies,

when a wife goeth aside to another instead of her husband, and is defiled; or when the spirit of jealousy cometh upon him, and he be jealous over his wife, and shall set the woman before the LORD, and the priest shall execute upon her all this law. Then shall the man be guiltless from iniquity, and this woman shall bear her iniquity.

Why was the woman and not the man singled out as an illustration? Because the woman is a picture of you and me, for we're the ones who have been unfaithful, even though our Bridegroom, our Lord, our Savior remains faithful still (2 Timothy 2:13).



6 Whereas chapter 5 dealt with suspicion and conviction, chapter 6 deals with consecration and purification. And that's the way it always is, for there must be a dealing with the issue of moral purity before there can be the possibility of ministry.

Numbers 6:1, 2
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, when either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD:

The Hebrew word, *zar,* means "to separate." Therefore, a Na*zar*ite vow spoke of one who separated himself or herself for a period of time in order to totally focus on the Lord. According to rabbinical tradition, the length of a Nazarite vow was usually a month, but could last for a year, or even longer. Although priestly ministry was given to the Levites exclusively, through the Nazarite vow, every man and woman from every tribe was given opportunity to seek the Lord radically. But there were three demands God made of anyone choosing to do so . . .

Numbers 6:3, 4
He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the

days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk.

Determination. In order that their minds remain clear, their vision unobstructed, Nazarites were to stay away from anything that would intoxicate them. Knowing our tendency to figure out a way to get intoxicated even on grapes or raisins, the Lord instructed the Nazarites to stay away from them as well.

> And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites. Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel?, saith the Lord. But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying, prophesy not. Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves.
>
> Amos 2:11–13

> It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts.
>
> Proverbs 31:4–6

This is not legalism. Rather, God is declaring, "This doesn't apply to everyone. But if you want to be a leader in ministry, a leader in your family, if you want to be on the cutting edge of being used by Me, if you want to be a Nazarite, stay away from that which would cause you to forget the law and pervert judgment."

Numbers 6:5
All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no rasor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.

Identification. In Old Testament days, long hair on a man was such a rarity that his hair would make him readily identifiable. Today, being easily identified

as a believer, letting everyone know you are a child of God, will keep you on course and out of trouble.

Numbers 6:6, 7
All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body. He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die: because the consecration of his God is upon his head.

Separation. The Nazarite was to separate himself from death. You see, if I enjoy hanging around places where those who are spiritually dead congregate, I need to take a second look at my commitment to the One who came to give me life. Because our love for God should be so passionate and real that our love for any other person seems like hatred in comparison, Jesus said, "Unless you hate father, mother, sister, or brother, you can't follow Me" (Luke 14:26). Therefore, even if a family member wants you to join them in places which are spiritually dead, you're to honor the Lord rather than cater to your family. On the other hand, if, like Jesus, you frequent such places for the purpose of ministry, that's an entirely different story (Matthew 9:10–13).

Numbers 6:8
All the days of his separation he is holy unto the LORD.

Because the Nazarite vow speaks of a single-minded devotion, a single-hearted passion, it is a wonderful picture for single people. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul says, "If you can handle it, there are advantages to being single because it allows you to focus solely on the Lord."

Numbers 6:9–12 (a)
And if any man die very suddenly by him, and he hath defiled the head of his consecration; then he shall shave his head in the day of his cleansing, on the seventh day shall he shave it. And on the eighth day he shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons, to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the priest shall offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, and make an atonement for him, for that he sinned by the dead, and shall hallow his head that same day. And he shall consecrate unto the

LORD the days of his separation, and shall bring a lamb of the first year for a trespass offering . . .

If someone broke a Nazarite vow, he was to shave his head and bring two turtledoves or pigeons for a sin offering and burnt offering, as well as a lamb for a trespass offering. The lamb, of course, speaks of Jesus, who cleanses us from all broken vows, all failure.

Numbers 6:12 (b)
. . . but the days that were before shall be lost, because his separation was defiled.

If someone took a Nazarite vow for sixty days but on the fifty-ninth day came into contact with a dead body, he or she was to start all over again at Day One. While this may seem unfair initially, it actually speaks of the second chance, the new beginning God is willing to give us continually.

Numbers 6:13–21
And this is the law of the Nazarite, when the days of his separation are fulfilled: he shall be brought unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and he shall offer his offering unto the LORD, one he lamb of the first year without blemish for a burnt offering, and one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin offering, and one ram without blemish for peace offerings, and a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, and wafers of unleavened bread anointed with oil, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings. And the priest shall bring them before the LORD, and shall offer his sin offering, and his burnt offering: and he shall offer the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the LORD, with the basket of unleavened bread: the priest shall offer also his meat offering, and his drink offering. And the Nazarite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and put it in the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offerings. And the priest shall take the sodden shoulder of the ram, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them upon the hands of the Nazarite, after the

hair of his separation is shaven: and the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the LORD: this is holy for the priest, with the wave breast and heave shoulder: and after that the Nazarite may drink wine. This is the law of the Nazarite who hath vowed, and of his offering unto the LORD for his separation, beside that that his hand shall get: according to the vow which he vowed, so he must do after the law of his separation.

After addressing the subject of contamination in verses 9–11, God addresses the subject of completion in verses 13–21. Except for rare instances, the Nazarite vow was only taken for a season. Therefore, if, as a single person, after a season of seeking the Lord with determination, dedication, and separation, He puts a desire in your heart to be married, understand that He will indeed fulfill that desire.

Before Adam even knew he had a need, God declared it was not good for man to dwell alone (Genesis 2:18). So He gave Adam the task of naming the animals (Genesis 2:19), and somewhere along the line, as he named Mr. and Mrs. Rhino, Mr. and Mrs. Giraffe, Mr. and Mrs. Hippo, it must have dawned on Adam that, although there was a male and female of every creature, there was no counterpart for him. "Go to sleep," God said to Adam. And it was when Adam was asleep, at rest, that God fashioned a woman for him so perfect for him that he declared her bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh (Genesis 2:23).

If you sense the single season is drawing to a close, I encourage you to follow Adam's example: Rest in the Lord and let Him provide the perfect counterpart for you.

Numbers 6:22, 23 (a)
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, on this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel . . .

Most people today think God is angry with them. But, as seen here, it was never God's intention that His ministers blast people. God's intent was that His ministers *bless* people . . .

Numbers 6:23 (b), 24 (a)
. . . saying unto them, The LORD bless thee . . .

The Hebrew word translated "bless" here meant to transfer prosperity primarily in the realm of the financial, physical, and material. The heart of the Father is that you would be blessed physically, financially, and materially. Jesus put it this way:

> If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?
>
> Matthew 7:11

Every parent or grandparent knows the joy, the thrill of blessing your kids or grandchildren with gifts. Jesus said, "You're evil and you love to do that. How much more, then, does your Father love to give good gifts to His children?" David declares in Psalm 84 that the Father will hold back no good thing from His children. James says every good gift you have—whether it's the house you live in, the car you drive, the health you enjoy, the clothes you wear—every single gift is from the Father (James 1:17).

Numbers 6:24 (c)
. . . and keep thee:

The priests were not only to say, "The Lord bless thee"—but, also, "the Lord *keep* thee." The Hebrew word translated "keep" means "guard." Why do we ask God first to bless us and then to keep, or guard us? Because if He does give us material blessings, we need to be protected from the evil prosperity may bring.

I like that. We all know people God has graciously and marvelously blessed —and yet sometimes those very blessings can become dangerous distractions to them. No longer are they studying the Word like they once did. No longer are they engaged in service like they once were. Therefore, it is the wise man who says, "May the Lord keep you lest you get distracted from that which is of eternal significance."

Numbers 6:25 (a)
The LORD make his face shine upon thee . . .

Even as the Father is the Giver, the Son is the Revealer. May you see His face. May you be enlightened in knowing who God is.

> For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
>
> 2 Corinthians 4:6

Anything you want to know about God, you'll discover, you'll be enlightened by looking at Jesus.

Numbers 6:25 (b)
. . . and be gracious unto thee:

As you look at Jesus, as you learn of Him and focus on Him, you'll discover what the crowds who gathered around Him discovered. You'll discover what the woman caught in adultery discovered. You'll discover what the tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners discovered. You'll discover His tenderhearted, compassionate grace.

Numbers 6:26
The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

To "lift up the countenance" simply means to smile. Here the priests were to say to the people, "May the Lord smile upon you and give you peace." In the blessing of verses 24–26, we see the name of the Lord repeated three times. In this, there is a suggestion of the Trinity—for in verse 24, the reference is to God the Father, in verse 25, to God the Son, and in verse 26, to God the Holy Spirit.

- In verse 24, we see God the Father as the Giver.
- In verse 25, we see God the Son as the Revealer.
- In verse 26, we see God the Holy Spirit as the Soother.

These three characteristics correspond to our needs. God is a Trinity and in a sense, made in His image, we are as well, for while God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are body, soul, and spirit. The body relates to the material—the realm wherein the Father blesses us physically. The soul is the mind and the

emotions—that which we think and feel. Sometimes we get confused. Sometimes we have questions. Sometimes we're disturbed. That's where God the Son comes in. Any issue with which I'm wrestling, any struggle with which I'm dealing will ultimately find its answer in Jesus Christ. The spirit is the deepest part of my being, the part of me that will live forever. And because the spirit within me can lack peace, it's the Holy Spirit who inhabits my spirit, who indwells my spirit, who communes with me in the deepest part of my being and gives me peace.

Numbers 6:27
And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." This was not a prayer, but a proclamation—upon every single person in the congregation. Because we who believe are also the children of Abraham (Galatians 3:29), this proclamation applies to us. And because we are a royal priesthood, we can offer it as a blessing to others.



7 Numbers 7 is the second longest chapter in the Bible. It seems to be rather redundant, causing the reader to wonder why so much space is devoted to this event. But, although it sounds like a broken record to us, it's a beautiful record to God of those who gave gifts to Him.

The longest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119, a psalm in which virtually every verse deals with the same subject: God's Word. Over and over again in Psalm 119, we read about the benefits and blessings of being in the Word. So the longest chapter in the Bible deals with the Word. The second longest chapter deals with giving. Is this coincidental? I don't think so. James tells us we are to be doers of the Word and not hearers only (James 1:22). It's easy to be a hearer of the Word. But it's something else to be a doer. And one of the greatest indicators of whether I'm a doer of the word is what I do with money. It's easy for me to talk about spiritual life. But it's another matter when I need to put my money where my mouth is. Consequently, the chapter before us is a detailed account of what the leaders of Israel gave day by day over a twelve-day period.

If I want to be a leader in my family, in the Fellowship, or in the workplace, the proof of maturity is in giving.

> He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.
>
> Luke 16:10

Jesus said, "If you want to be entrusted with impact in ministry, prove yourself in that which is least—mammon." In other words, the one who is faithful in money matters will be the one entrusted with that which is truly important both now and eternally.

Not only is giving the proof *of* maturity, but it is also the pathway *to* maturity. Each time I give, I become a little more like my heavenly Father, for He is a Giver (1 Timothy 6:17). Conversely, when I hold back, when I don't give, I become more like the enemy, Satan, who is a thief and a robber (John 10:1).

Numbers 7 may be long to us, but to God it is of vital importance.

> For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.
>
> Hebrews 6:10

Anything we give to the Lord, any act of ministry we do in the name of the Lord, any kindness we show on behalf of the Lord is noted by the Lord. Jesus said that even a cup of cold water being given in His name reaps a reward (Mark 9:41).

> Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.
>
> Matthew 6:19–21

If I'm putting my treasure in the things of eternity, my heart will be set on things above. That's why God wants us to be givers. And that is why Numbers 7

is here: to show us that God cares a great deal about everything we do for Him, every gift we bring to Him.

Numbers 7:1–9
And it came to pass on the day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle, and had anointed it, and sanctified it, and all the instruments thereof, both the altar and all the vessels thereof, and had anointed them, and sanctified them; that the princes of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers, who were the princes of the tribes, and were over them that were numbered, offered: and they brought their offering before the LORD, six covered wagons, and twelve oxen; a wagon for two of the princes, and for each one an ox: and they brought them before the tabernacle. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, take it of them, that they may be to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; and thou shalt give them unto the Levites, to every man according to his service. And Moses took the wagons and the oxen, and gave them unto the Levites. Two wagons and four oxen he gave unto the sons of Gershon, according to their service: And four wagons and eight oxen he gave unto the sons of Merari, according unto their service, under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none: because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders.

As seen in chapter 4, the tribe of Levi was divided into three groups: the Gershonites, Merarites, and Kohathites. Of the six covered wagons and twelve oxen brought as an offering, the Gershonites were given two wagons and four oxen. The Merarites were given four wagons and eight oxen. The Kohathites were given zero wagons and zero oxen.

"That's not fair!" we protest. But in reality it was . . .



***For topical study of Numbers 7:1–9 entitled "It's Not Fair . . . Or Is It?" turn to page* 467.**

Numbers 7:10–12

And the princes offered for dedicating of the altar in the day that it was anointed, even the princes offered their offering before the altar. And the LORD said unto Moses, they shall offer their offering, each prince on his day, for the dedicating of the altar. And he that offered his offering the first day was Nahshon the son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah:

On the first day of this dedication of the altar at the tabernacle, Nahshon, representing the tribe of Judah made his offering.

Numbers 7:13–17
And his offering was one silver charger, the weight thereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them were full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering: one spoon of ten shekels of gold, full of incense: one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering: one kid of the goats for a sin offering: and for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year: this was the offering of Nahshon the son of Amminadab.

On the day Nahshon made his offering, the Lord recorded every single item he gave.

The next day, Nethaneel of the tribe of Issachar gave exactly what Nahshon gave. On Day Three, Eliab from the tribe of Zebulun gave his offering and guess what. It was exactly the same as Nahshon's and Nethaneel's. The fourth day, Elizur of the tribe of Reuben gave nothing more, nothing less than that which the first three gave.

And on it goes to the twelfth day—each man giving exactly what the man before him gave.

Numbers 7:84–89
This was the dedication of the altar, in the day when it was anointed, by the princes of Israel: twelve chargers of silver, twelve silver bowls, twelve spoons of gold: each charger of silver weighing an hundred and thirty shekels, each bowl seventy: all the silver vessels weighed two thousand and four hundred shekels, after the shekel of

the sanctuary: the golden spoons were twelve, full of incense, weighing ten shekels apiece, after the shekel of the sanctuary: all the gold of the spoons was an hundred and twenty shekels. All the oxen for the burnt offering were twelve bullocks, the rams twelve, the lambs of the first year twelve, with their meat offering: and the kids of the goats for sin offering twelve. And all the oxen for the sacrifice of the peace offerings were twenty and four bullocks, the rams sixty, the he goats sixty, the lambs of the first year sixty. This was the dedication of the altar, after that it was anointed. And when Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with him, then he heard the voice of one speaking unto him from off the mercy seat that was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubims: and he spake unto him.

This is the combination of all of their giving—twelve times what each gave individually. These leaders, princes, men that were used, men who had impact all gave the same. What does that say to us? If we are to be men and woman who are impacting, we all give exactly the same as it relates to the tithe. We all give ten percent.

"I don't like regulations like that," people say. "They're too legalistic, too restrictive, too confining." But in the twenty-three years I've been in ministry, I have yet to talk to one person who said, "Tithing is too regulated. I want to give forty percent," or, "I think tithing is restrictive because I want to give sixty percent." No, people argue against tithing not because they find it truly legalistic but because they simply don't want to do it.

On the other hand, those who tithe, discover that God's Word is true—that He opens the windows of heaven and blesses them both now and eternally (Malachi 3:10).

IT'S NOT FAIR . . . OR IS IT?

A Topical Study of NUMBERS 7:1–9

In our society, we place a high premium on fairness and equality. With that in mind, look at our text . . .

On the day the tabernacle was dedicated and anointed, the leaders of the tribes of Israel brought twelve oxen and six wagons as an offering to the Lord. The wagons and oxen were divided between the three groups of Levites. The first group, the Gershonites, were given two wagons and four oxen. So far so good. But when the next group, the sons of Merari, was given four wagons and eight oxen, the Gershonites must have said, "Wait a minute. This isn't fair. We only got four oxen and two wagons." But if the Gershonites didn't like this, imagine how the third group—the Kohathites felt when there was nothing left for them. "Unfair!" they must have cried. And we do the same.

"Wait a minute," we say. "We're all called to serve God, aren't we? Why, then, does he have four wagons and eight oxen and I have none? Look at the position he holds, the prosperity she enjoys, the prominence they have. Why don't I?" And then we fall into the subtle mindset that God is not truly fair, that He plays favorites. And we're not one of them.

Why were the wagons distributed the way they were? Does God indeed have favorites? The answer is found in a significant phrase in our text where it says the wagons were given according to their service. Earlier, we read that the sons of Gershon were in charge of the fabric and coverings of the tabernacle—to take them up and down and pack them along. But the Merarites had an even heavier load, for they were in charge of the boards, silver sockets, and bars which made up the walls of the tabernacle. In fact, those who study these things say the weight the sons of Merari carried would have been approximately twice as great as that which the sons of Gershon carried. Consequently, called to bear twice as great a burden, it makes sense the Merarites would have twice as many oxen and twice as many wagons.

Of those who appear to be more blessed than we are, we say, "Look at the wagons they have. Look at their oxen." Yes, they may have more oxen and more wagons. But they also have heavier burdens. They have obligations that you and

I don't understand. God is fair. With those wagons come added responsibilities and burdens because to whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48).

The Kohathites were to carry the furniture of the tabernacle—including the ark of the covenant—upon their shoulders, which speaks of intimacy, of close proximity. And now I begin to understand. Maybe I don't have four wagons or eight oxen. Maybe I don't even have two wagons and four oxen. Maybe I'm on foot. But maybe that's because the Lord knows that not having the position or possessions others have will result in a deeper intimacy than if there were oxen and wagons rumbling around.

Jesus opted for this when He said, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20). The priests and Pharisees had an abundance of oxen and wagons. But Jesus chose a different direction. Yet He was so happy and so full of joy that even those with lots of oxen and wagons, so to speak, left everything to follow Him.

He was able to focus on that which mattered. And as a result, there was a sparkle in His eye, a smile on His face, and a winsome quality to His personality which caused multitudes—of which we are a part—to want to be around Him.

If God has given you four carts and eight oxen, rejoice. But be on guard lest these blessings distract you from walking with Jesus in simplicity. Carts and oxen aren't always as good as they look. Carts lose their wheels; oxen make messes; and life becomes complicated. Thus, it is the wise man who says, "Lord, *You* set the agenda. You give me what You know is best for me."

My tendency is to say, "I don't think things are fair. We're going to have a fund-raising campaign to raise money to buy carts for the Kohathites." But would that truly be best for the Kohathites?

To those with no wagons, no oxen, God says, "You have Me. And I'm all you need."

On a related note, sometimes I look at people and wonder how they bear the burden they carry, how God could allow certain events to happen in their lives. "I could never go through that trial, never carry that weight," I say. But then I realize it's because I haven't been given the necessary carts or oxen to do so, that if I were to go through that trial, my Father would give me the oxen and carts necessary to bear the burden.

We have a fantastic privilege, to say to people who are self-absorbed, self-focused, self-centered, "God has you in the place best for you. He's a fair

Father who treats us all with passionate love, doing what's best for each of us. God is oh, so good. And He knows what's best."



8 Numbers 8:1, 2
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron, and say unto him, when thou lightest the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light over against the candlestick.

This speaks of the lighting of the menorah—the lamp stand comprised of seven oil lamps.

> **Numbers 8:3, 4**
> **And Aaron did so; he lighted the lamps thereof over against the candlestick, as the LORD commanded Moses. And this work of the candlestick was of beaten gold, unto the shaft thereof, unto the flowers thereof, was beaten work: according unto the pattern which the LORD had shewed Moses, so he made the candlestick.**

Following this brief interlude about the candlestick being lit, we will spend the rest of chapter 8 in a discussion about the dedication of the Levites. Chapter 7 dealt with the presentation of gifts, chapter 8 with the dedication of Levites; chapter 7 with offering, chapter 8 with service. And I believe this insertion of the lamp stand between the presentation of gifts and the dedication of servants is as though the Lord is saying, "It all needs to be exposed to the light."

"When you give, do not sound the trumpet in order to be noticed by men," Jesus said. "When you give, don't let your right hand know what your left hand is doing. If you give in secret, your Father who sees will reward you openly" (Matthew 6). Do I give for tax purposes? Do I serve to be noticed of men? That's what the hypocrites did in Jesus' day. But Jesus sees not only what we do, but why we do what we do, not simply what we give, but *how* we give . . .

> *As He sat against the wall of the temple, He saw rich people giving with much fanfare. Then He saw a poor woman who gave less than a penny. And she was the one He commended because she gave in simplicity and sincerity (Mark 12:41–44).*

That's why it's important for us to say, "Lord, search my heart."

Numbers 8:5–7 (a)
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them . . .

This passage speaks of positional truth. That is, according to the original Greek text of 1 John 1:7, the blood of Jesus Christ *continually* cleanses us from all sin. We can come boldly to our Father and fellowship with Him because we're constantly being cleansed.

Numbers 8:7 (b)
. . . and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean.

This passage speaks of practical truth. That is, although Moses sprinkled water on the priests, they were to shave themselves. The first part of their cleansing was passive, the second part required their participation. Although I am clean positionally, I must participate in my cleansing practically. "How shall a young man cleanse his ways?" David asked. "By taking heed to the Word (Psalm 119:9). Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11).

Positionally, I'm being cleansed every day by the blood of Jesus Christ. But practically, there's a bunch of sin in my life and the only way it will be worked out is by the working in of the Word. I've got to wash myself in the water of the Word, take in the Scriptures, meditate on the Word, listen to the Word, learn the Word. That's why studying the Word together is so important.

Numbers 8:8–11
Then let them take a young bullock with his meat offering, even fine flour mingled with oil, and another young bullock shalt thou take for a sin offering. And thou shalt bring the Levites before the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt gather the whole assembly of the children of Israel together: and thou shalt bring the Levites before the LORD: and the children of Israel shall put their

hands upon the Levites: and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD for an offering of the children of Israel, that they may execute the service of the LORD.

Hands were laid upon the Levites and they were presented to the Lord.

Numbers 8:12–18
And the Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks: and thou shalt offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, unto the LORD, to make an atonement for the Levites. And thou shalt set the Levites before Aaron, and before his sons, and offer them for an offering unto the LORD. Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites shall be mine. And after that shall the Levites go in to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt cleanse them, and offer them for an offering. For they are wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel; instead of such as open every womb, even instead of the firstborn of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto me. For all the firstborn of the children of Israel are mine, both man and beast: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself. And I have taken the Levites for all the firstborn of the children of Israel.

This passage describes how the Levites would take the place of the firstborn of every family for priestly service, such being God's original intent prior to the idolatry participated in by every tribe other than Levi (Exodus 34).

Numbers 8:19–22
And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, and to make an atonement for the children of Israel: that there be no plague among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come nigh unto the sanctuary. And Moses, and Aaron, and all the congregation of the children of Israel, did to the Levites according unto all that the LORD commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so did the children of Israel unto them. And the Levites were purified, and they washed

their clothes; and Aaron offered them as an offering before the LORD; and Aaron made an atonement for them to cleanse them. And after that went the Levites in to do their service in the tabernacle of the congregation before Aaron, and before his sons: as the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so did they unto them.

In verse 11, we saw Aaron offering the Levites to God. In verse 19, we see God giving them back to Aaron. And that's always the way it is, for God is a debtor to no man. More is always given back to us than we could possibly ever give Him (Matthew 7:2).

Numbers 8:23–26
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, This is it that belongeth unto the Levites: from twenty and five years old and upward they shall go in to wait upon the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: and from the age of fifty years they shall cease waiting upon the service thereof, and shall serve no more: but shall minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of the congregation, to keep the charge, and shall do no service. Thus shalt thou do unto the Levites touching their charge.

The original meaning of the phrase "wait upon the service" implied warfare. That's what ministry is. There's a war going on against principalities and powers and spiritual forces that want to defeat and distract, destroy and depress (Ephesians 6:12). But because greater is He that is in me is than he that is in the world, (1 John 4:4), we like the Levites, can do that which He requires of us.



9

Numbers 9:1–5
And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, Let the children of Israel also keep the passover at his appointed season. In the fourteenth day of this month, at even, ye shall keep it in his appointed season: according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof, shall ye keep it. And Moses spake unto the children of

Israel, that they should keep the passover. And they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month at even in the wilderness of Sinai: according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel.

The Passover was to take place once each year to commemorate how the Lord delivered His people from Egypt. A year having passed, the children of Israel were to celebrate Passover.

Numbers 9:6, 7
And there were certain men, who were defiled by the dead body of a man, that they could not keep the passover on that day: and they came before Moses and before Aaron on that day: And those men said unto him, We are defiled by the dead body of a man: wherefore are we kept back, that we may not offer an offering of the LORD in his appointed season among the children of Israel?

After touching a dead body, a group of men asked Moses if they were still able to celebrate Passover.

For us, Passover is synonymous with Communion, for Jesus instituted Communion at the Passover meal He shared with His disciples (Luke 22:15–20). One of the aspects of Communion that people often fail to grasp is to do what these men did: realizing we're defiled, that we've taken part in activities which cause death spiritually, that we harbor deadly attitudes internally.

Numbers 9:8
And Moses said unto them, Stand still, and I will hear what the LORD will command concerning you.

"I need to ask the Lord," Moses said. I like that! Too often I'm too ready to give my own opinion. How I want to be more like Moses. How I want to be one whose first inclination is to pray.

Numbers 9:9–12
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, if any man of you or of your posterity shall be unclean by reason of a dead body, or be in a journey afar off, yet he shall

keep the passover unto the LORD. The fourteenth day of the second month at even they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They shall leave none of it unto the morning, nor break any bone of it: according to all the ordinances of the passover they shall keep it.

If someone touched a dead body, or was away on a journey, they were to celebrate Passover thirty days later—on the fourteenth day of the *second* month. In other words, a period of time was to pass between the defilement and the celebration.

So, too, Communion is not only a time of celebration, but of communication as we ask the Father to show us that of which we might not even be aware that is rotten, that is deadly within us. Communion is not simply a matter of eating a little cracker and gulping some grace juice, but of saying, "Search my heart, Lord. Show me where my attitudes are wrong. Show me where I've been on a journey, going down a dead-end road." Only in confession is there true liberty. Therefore, don't rush through Communion. Instead, spend the time it takes to hear from your Father.

Numbers 9:13, 14
But the man that is clean, and is not in a journey, and forbeareth to keep the passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the LORD in his appointed season, that man shall bear his sin. And if a stranger shall sojourn among you, and will keep the passover unto the LORD; according to the ordinance of the passover, and according to the manner thereof, so shall he do: ye shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger, and for him that was born in the land.

If someone was not on a journey or not defiled by a dead body and didn't celebrate Passover, he was to be cut off from the rest of the congregation and was to bear his sin.

Those who don't come to Communion will inevitably begin to be isolated from God's people because as we all eat of the same loaf, we experience intimacy and unity uniquely. Truly, it is His broken body that brings His living body into oneness. Thus, those who don't participate eventually find themselves increasingly isolated. And they not only carry their sin with them, but find sin in

those around them. That's why Paul said that, because some in the Corinthian congregation hadn't given worth to Communion, some were sick and weak and had even died unnecessarily (1 Corinthians 11:30).

Numbers 9:15–23
And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony: and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning. So it was alway: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed: and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents. At the commandment of the LORD the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the LORD they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents. And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD, and journeyed not. And so it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the LORD they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the LORD they journeyed. And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed. Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up, they journeyed. At the commandment of the LORD they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the LORD they journeyed: they kept the charge of the LORD, at the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

Isaiah 63 tells us the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night was the Holy Spirit. Thus, it was the Spirit of God that told the children of Israel where to stop and settle in, when to pack up and move out. Yet although we think it would be wonderful to have a visible, tangible cloud leading us, the children of

Israel murmured and complained. And this shows me there's a better way to be led than by the external, the visible, the tangible.

"I'm going to do something new," God told Jeremiah. "I'm going to write My will on the tables of the hearts of My people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

I'm so thankful for the New Covenant—for God directing us by placing impressions on our hearts. And I have found the most satisfying, adventurous, fulfilling life there can possible be is to be led by the Spirit as He writes His will upon my heart.



10 **Numbers 10:1, 2 (a)**

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them:

In the days before megaphones, telephones, cell phones, one of the ways to communicate would be through the sounding of trumpets. Two trumpets were to be made of silver to be sounded for four specific reasons . . .

Numbers 10:2 (b)–4

. . . that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps. And when they shall blow with them, all the assembly shall assemble themselves to thee at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And if they blow but with one trumpet, then the princes, which are heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather themselves unto thee.

The first reason the trumpets sounded was for the *purpose of convocation*—when the people were to assemble together at the door of the tabernacle.

Numbers 10:5–8

When ye blow an alarm, then the camps that lie on the east parts shall go forward. When ye blow an alarm the second time, then the camps that lie on the south side shall take their journey: they shall blow an alarm for their journeys. But when the congregation is to be gathered together, ye shall blow, but ye shall not sound an alarm. And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow with the trumpets; and

they shall be to you for an ordinance for ever throughout your generations.

The second reason the trumpets sounded was for the *purpose of mobilization*—to tell the people it was time to pull up stakes, pack up their tents, and move ahead.

Numbers 10:9
And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the LORD your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies.

The third reason the trumpets sounded was for the *purpose of confrontation* —to do battle against the enemies which the children of Israel would encounter in the Promised Land.

Numbers 10:10
Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; that they may be to you for a memorial before your God: I am the LORD your God.

The fourth and final reason the trumpets were to sound was for the *purpose of celebration*—to signal the feasts and festivals as well as the solemn days.

Everything in the Old Testament is an illustration of New Testament truth—and the trumpets made of silver, the metal of redemption, are no exception, for they give us understanding about that which Paul called a mystery . . .

Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

1 Corinthians 15:51, 52

The idea of being changed is that of being metamorphosed—like caterpillars changed miraculously into butterflies. Paul says the same thing is true concerning people. We're not all going to die. But we're all going to be metamorphosed. When? At the last trumpet.

Here in Numbers 10, we see two trumpets. Although the Bible is filled with trumpets, there are only two trumpets of God: the first trump and the last trump. The first trump was sounded in Exodus 19 when God gathered His people at the base of Mt. Sinai and gave them the Ten Commandments. It was during that convocation that Israel became a nation.

But there is a second trumpet, called the last trump. And it has not yet been heard. When it is, even as Numbers 10 illustrates, it will signal a grand convocation as the dead in Christ shall rise—and as we who are alive will be caught up—or raptured—to meet the Lord in the air.

This leads us to mobilization—the second reason the trumpets were sounded here in Numbers 10. When the last trumpet sounds, we'll leave the snares and entanglements of this world behind as we pull up stakes, pack up our tents, and move on to heaven. Oh, glorious day that will be!

This leads us to the third reason the trumpets were sounded, for war also is part of the equation. After we are reunited and taken on our journey to our new home in heaven, Revelation 6—19 describes the war that will break out on earth during the horrendous seven-year period of the Tribulation.

But this leads to celebration—the last reason the trumpet was to sound. At the end of seven years, when Jesus comes back to the earth and we come back with Him, the earth enters into a new day, a day of unparalleled peace and prosperity.

As I read Numbers 10, I realize that these folks in the wilderness were instructed to keep their ears tuned towards the sound of the trumpet. And I need to do the same in the wilderness I'm in. So do you. And we need to remind others to do the same, to keep focused on eternity, to keep their ears tuned for the final trumpet which will sound on a day I believe is not far away.

Numbers 10:11–13

And it came to pass on the twentieth day of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from off the tabernacle of the testimony. And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of

Paran. And they first took their journey according to the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

After being redeemed from bondage and slavery, after being instructed in worship and the sacrificial system, after being organized in the order in which they were to march and camp, the children of Israel took their first steps towards the Promised Land.

That's always the way of the Lord. He redeems us from sin and sets us free from the Egyptian mentality of the world. He instructs us about worshiping Him and wants us to be a people who are ordered, linked together on our journey towards heaven.

Numbers 10:14–28

In the first place went the standard of the camp of the children of Judah according to their armies: and over his host was Nahshon the son of Amminadab. And over the host of the tribe of the children of Issachar was Nethaneel the son of Zuar. And over the host of the tribe of the children of Zebulun was Eliab the son of Helon. And the tabernacle was taken down; and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari set forward, bearing the tabernacle. And the standard of the camp of Reuben set forward according to their armies: and over his host was Elizur the son of Shedeur. And over the host of the tribe of the children of Simeon was Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai. And over the host of the tribe of the children of Gad was Eliasaph the son of Deuel. And the Kohathites set forward, bearing the sanctuary: and the other did set up the tabernacle against they came. And the standard of the camp of the children of Ephraim set forward according to their armies: and over his host was Elishama the son of Ammihud. And over the host of the tribe of the children of Manasseh was Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. And over the host of the tribe of the children of Benjamin was Abidan the son of Gideoni. And the standard of the camp of the children of Dan set forward, which was the rereward of all the camps throughout their hosts: and over his host was Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai. And over the host of the tribe of the children of Asher was Pagiel the son of Ocran. And over the host of the tribe of the children of Naphtali was

Ahira the son of Enan. Thus were the journeyings of the children of Israel according to their armies, when they set forward.

Judah leads the procession. It's interesting to me that, as Scripture unfolds, we see it will be Judah at the front of the parade, at the head of the nation. The tribe of Judah would always be leading the way as the Lord led them. Why? Here are a couple of suggestions:

Jesus, our Leader, would come from the tribe of Judah. Therefore, Judah would always be in a place of priority. Secondly, the name *Judah* literally means "praise." Praise is always to lead the way, for it is through praise that we can enter into Jesus' courts (Psalm 100:4). Practically, to start the parade of your own day personally with praise; to begin any project, any undertaking with an attitude of worship makes all the difference.

Numbers 10:29–32
And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father in law, We are journeying unto the place of which the LORD said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel. And he said unto him, I will not go; but I will depart to mine own land, and to my kindred. And he said, Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes. And it shall be, if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the LORD shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee.

Before leaving for the Land of Promise, Moses invited his father-in-law to accompany them on their journey.



***For topical study of Numbers 10:29–32 entitled "You Gotta Come," turn to page* 475.**

Numbers 10:33–35
And they departed from the mount of the LORD three days' journey: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them

in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them. And the cloud of the LORD was upon them by day, when they went out of the camp. And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee.

As the cloud moved out, "Rise up, O Lord," Moses says. "Let the enemies be scattered." What a great way to start the day, praying, "Lord, go before us and clear the way. Let the enemies before me be scattered today, as well as the enemies of my fleshly tendencies within me."

Numbers 10:36
And when it rested, he said, Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel.

When the cloud stopped, so did the company of Israel. And as they did, Moses asked that the Lord return. And is not that the cry of our own hearts? Even so, come, Lord Jesus (Revelation 22:20).

YOU GOTTA COME

A Topical Study of NUMBERS 10:29–32

A number of newspapers carried the story concerning the discoveries indicating that perhaps ninety percent of the universe is black matter. In fact, when one paper referred to it as "outer darkness," I couldn't help but remember that Jesus used that very phrase to describe the place wherein those not a part of the kingdom would be cast (Matthew 22:13).

Although people think the darkness, pain, and isolation of hell is unfair, Jesus said specifically that hell was not created for man, but for the devil and his demons (Matthew 25:41). However, if a person doesn't want God—who is Light—the only other alternative is darkness. If a person doesn't want God—who is Love—the only other alternative is hate. If a person doesn't want God—who is health—the only other alternative is pain and suffering. Hell is the absence of the attributes of God. And if a person says, "I don't want God in my life," the only alternative is to be where God is not—a place of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, a place of outer darkness and eternal fire (Jude 7).

I believe it was because, to a certain degree, Moses had an intrinsic understanding of this that he said to Hobab, "Come with us. You gotta be part of this company because if you're not, you're headed for destruction."

And although Hobab at first refused, Moses didn't give up. "We're going into the desert," he said. "You understand the terrain. You know the region. You can be eyes for us, a guide to us. Hobab, we need you."

To those who say they're not interested in church and don't care much about heaven, we need to follow the example of Moses and say, "We need you. I've seen the way you can hit a softball and our church team is in desperate need of a first baseman. You can help us. You can enrich us." Or, "I've seen the way you work with people, and we could use your abilities." Or, "I've seen your artwork. Could you paint a mural in our Sunday school wing?"

Such is the course Moses took and Hobab responded, for in the Book of Judges (4:11), his family appears again. Thus, Hobab did indeed choose to travel to the Promised Land. When? When he was told, "You're valuable. You can enrich us. We need you."

Are we really to tell unbelievers they are needed?

Jesus did.

He needed the woman at the well to give Him water to drink (John 4:7). He needed the owner of the colt He would ride into Jerusalem to release it to Him (Mark 11:3).

How long has it been since you took someone by the hand, looked him in the eye, and said, "You need to be saved. We're going to heaven. If you don't come with us, the alternative is awful. And on the way, we'll do you good. It will be good for you to travel with us. I know you feel more comfortable in the world, but we need you in the kingdom. Would you pray with me right now?"

Maybe you've invited your unsaved brother-in-law or your nephew to church five Christmases in a row, only to have them decline every time—but do you fully comprehend that they are going to hell unless they understand that God has prepared a land for them, that God places great value upon them, that they can be helpful to the believing community, and that we'll be good to them? We can't let go. We can't give up. We can't stop. The stakes are too high.

C. S. Lewis was right when he said, "If heaven and hell are true, nothing else matters. If heaven and hell aren't true, then nothing matters at all."

I have found that the most effective way to bring people to Jesus is not by discussing doctrine endlessly, debating evolution passionately, or even inviting them to church repeatedly but to share with them the way of salvation clearly and to pray with them immediately. I begin by opening my Bible and showing them Romans 3:23 . . .

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

"You, me, and everyone have fallen short of the glory, the standard, the requirement of God," I say. Then I turn a few pages to Romans 5:6 . . .

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

"When we were pulled down, wiped out, done in by sin, Christ died for us," I say. "It was when we were hopelessly lost that Christ died for you and me." Then I turn the page and show them Romans 6:23 . . .

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

"The wages of sin is certain death," I say. "You'll be dead in your heart internally. Your marriage will fall short of what it was supposed to be. Your family will be dead relationally. And most importantly, sin brings death eternally. But the gift of God is eternal life—which begins now and lasts through eternity." From there, I take them to Romans 8:1 . . .

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

"Once we change direction and follow Jesus," I explain, "we experience a resurrection of relationships and emotions as the sentence of death is removed from our lives." Finally, we turn to Romans 10:8 (b)–10 . . .

. . . The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

"If you confess that Jesus is Lord, you'll be saved," I tell them. "And you'll never regret it."

Known as the "Romans Road," I have found this to be a most effective way to share the gospel.

"What if they don't believe the Bible is God's Word?" you ask. "Don't you have to convince them?"

Not necessarily. When asked how to defend the Bible, C.H. Spurgeon, the "Prince of Preachers," answered, "How does one defend the Bible? The same way he defends a lion. He just opens the door and it will defend itself!"

The greatest blessing on earth is to lead someone into eternal life. The Bible says that when one soul is saved, all of heaven breaks out in cosmic celebration (Luke 15:10). And the same thing will happen in your heart. The issues, problems, concerns facing you will suddenly matter no longer when you've seen someone take their first step towards heaven.

Don't let this week go by without walking with someone down the Romans Road. Because it's the most important thing you'll ever do, how I encourage you to share your faith with the Hobabs around you, to invite them to journey with you, even to tell them they will be helpful to you on your way to heaven.

And if they accept the invitation, they will, like Hobab of old, be amazed by the glorious treasures and experiences awaiting them in the land of milk and honey, in the land of God's promise both presently and eternally.



11

Numbers 11:1 (a)

And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it . . .

The Lord has given instruction to them, appeared unto them, been patient with them. And now at last, the trumpets are sounding. Moses says, "Rise up, O Lord, and go before us," the children of Israel are on their way—and the first thing they do is complain about something evidently so insignificant that Scripture doesn't even bother to record the reason. Oh, it must have seemed important to the Israelites at the time, but from God's perspective, it was not even worth wasting the ink to write it on parchment.

Numbers 11:1 (b)–3

. . . and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp. And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched. And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them.

After hearing their complaints, it's as if the Lord gave His people something to complain about through the fire which broke out in their midst. The lesson is a good one for me because through it I understand that complaining causes confusion. If I'm complaining about something in one part of my life, a fire is sure to flare up in another part.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul tells us that if we bite and devour one another, we ourselves will be consumed (5:15). And here at the outset of the

Israelites' journey, God reminds us that we'll get burned if we're a people given to complaining.

Numbers 11:4
And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?

The problem of complaining was followed by that of lusting. The children of Israel had been given manna miraculously which sustained them wonderfully —and yet they wanted flesh. Oh, how easily this can happen to me. God has given me all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3)—and yet my flesh still demands its own way.

Numbers 11:5, 6
We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: but now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.

Memory can indeed be a mirage, for the Israelites never had these things in Egypt. They were slaves baking bricks under the blistering sun while their sons drowned in the Nile. But somehow in their journeying, their memories got all mixed up. And the same thing can happen to us, for while Satan will exaggerate the kicks we used to have, he'll never remind us of the kickbacks, or the reality of the situation.

Numbers 11:7–9
And the manna was as coriander seed, and the colour thereof as the colour of bdellium. And the people went about, and gathered it, and ground it in mills, or beat it in a mortar, and baked it in pans, and made cakes of it: and the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil. And when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it.

Regardless of the fact that the manna was miraculous, healthy, and right, the children of Israel tired of that which God sent their way day after day.

Numbers 11:10
Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased.

Can you imagine the sound of the weeping of three million people—with the men leading the way?

Numbers 11:11
And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?

The people were complaining and Moses was complaining about their complaining.

Numbers 11:12–15 (a)
Have I conceived all this people? Have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers? Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? For they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat. I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight . . .

"Just kill me, God," Moses cried. "I've had it. I can't do this any more. This job is too hard."

Numbers 11:15 (b)
. . . and let me not see my wretchedness.

So meek a man was Moses, that in confessing his own wretchedness, He saw himself as no better than the people about whom he complained.

Numbers 11:16

And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee.

God's solution to the burden of a people so prone to complain and criticism was to enlist them to help shoulder the burden.

Numbers 11:17
And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.

Here we see the formation of a plurality of elders—a group of men to stand together and bear the burden shoulder to shoulder, with the same spirit upon each of them. In this, we see the foundation for the way the Lord wants His people organized even today. There are to be elders who stand together to bear the burden as they move in unanimity—a model seen clearly in Acts 15 . . .

As debate raged over whether new Gentile believers should become circumcised according to Jewish tradition, the early church didn't take a vote, form a committee, or hold a seminar. They talked and they prayed. And they talked and they prayed until finally James, one of the elders, stood up and gave a word that "seemed good to all and to the Holy Ghost," (Acts 15:28). Thus, there was unanimity, oneness, total agreement.

Numbers 11:18–20
And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow, and ye shall eat flesh: for ye have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Egypt: therefore the LORD will give you flesh, and ye shall eat. Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; but even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have

despised the LORD which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?

When Moses heard that the Lord would give them meat for a month, he did some calculating . . .

Numbers 11:21, 22
And Moses said, The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them?

"How are You going to feed three million people, Lord?" Moses asked. "Do You want us to kill all the herds and flocks we planned to bring in to the Promised Land—or do You want us to fish all of the fish out of the Red Sea? You have two choices here, Lord: fish or meat. Which will it be?"

Numbers 11:23
And the LORD said unto Moses, Is the LORD's hand waxed short? Thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not.

God didn't tell Moses what He was going to do. He doesn't usually do that to us, either. As He did to Moses, He simply says, "Wait and see."

Numbers 11:24–26 (a)
And Moses went out, and told the people the words of the LORD, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them round about the tabernacle. And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease. But there remained two of the men in the camp . . .

Sixty-eight of the seventy elders were at the tabernacle, which was pitched outside of the camp. But two were in the camp. They weren't at the meeting.

They weren't with the others.

Numbers 11:26 (b)–28
. . . the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the spirit rested upon them; and they were of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp. And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them.

"Because Eldad and Medad are not in our midst," protested one of the seventy, "forbid them from prophesying at all." The protestor's name? Joshua.

Numbers 11:29, 30
And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them! And Moses gat him into the camp, he and the elders of Israel.

"Even though Eldad and Medad are not in our midst, God is still working through them," Moses answered. And his answer reminds me of the answer Jesus gave to a similar protest when He said, "He that is not against us is for us" (Mark 9:40). Thus, Jesus, like Moses, showed that we ought to be as magnanimous as we possibly can be even if someone is not in our camp theologically, or at our church geographically. The fact is, if someone is prophesying, casting out demons, or being used by the Lord in another way, even if they don't do it exactly "our way," that's okay.

Paul picked up the same theme when he said, "I would that all speak in tongues," (1 Corinthians 14:5). Therefore, we need to be careful that we don't quench the Spirit by limiting people. Paul, Moses, and Jesus Himself were all in agreement concerning the necessity of being inclusive and big-hearted.

Numbers 11:31 (a)
And there went forth a wind from the LORD, and brought quails from the sea . . .

Although Moses had limited His choice to "Surf or Turf,"—to fish or livestock—God caused a wind to blow that not only blew in millions of quail, but also must have blown Moses' mind!

Numbers 11:31 (b)
. . . and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth.

So abundant was God's provision, that if you were to walk in the same direction for an entire day, you would still be knee-deep in quail.

Numbers 11:32
And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp.

He that gathered least gathered ten homers. That's how I know these quail flew right in the spring zone. The weakest hitter on the team had ten homers! Ten homers would have been about fifty bushels of quail—or the equivalent of two hundred family-size buckets of Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Numbers 11:33–35
And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague. And he called the name of that place Kibroth-hattaavah: because there they buried the people that lusted. And the people journeyed from Kibroth-hattaavah unto Hazeroth; and abode at Hazeroth.

Many speculate that it was actually the overindulgence of the people that brought about the plague. And they could be right . . .

They soon forgat his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.

Psalm 106:13–15

The Lord sent the children of Israel that which they desired—but it killed them. That's important for me to understand. I think I know what I want. But only God sees what is truly best for me. And He promises to withhold nothing from us that would be good for us (Psalm 84:11). Therefore, we can be the most peaceful people on the planet because, while everyone else is trying to figure out how to get ahead and how to make it happen, we get to say, "Father, You know my situation. You know what's best for me. I trust You."

I'm so glad we don't have to figure out what's best and make our demands accordingly—but rather we can simply say, "Lord, Your will be done today"—fully confident that He will do what's best for you and me.



12 The passage before us deals with Miriam, Aaron, and the subtle sin of envy. Envy gets neither the publicity that murder does, nor the press that adultery can. Yet, although it's unnoticed by many, envy can be just as damaging, just as dangerous, and just as deadly as murder or adultery.

Envy is the whimpering whisper within me which says, "Why him and not me? It's not fair what he has, where he's at, what he enjoys." Envy is different than jealousy, for while jealousy fears that I'll lose what I have, envy wants what someone else has—be it a personality trait or skill, a gift or position.

Envy not only begins at the earliest of ages—most frequently with sibling rivalry—but at the beginning of time itself when envy led Cain to kill Abel.

Numbers 12:1 (a)
And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses . . .

The fact that Miriam is listed first, as well as that the Hebrew word translated "spake" is in the feminine form, indicates Miriam was the ringleader of the two. Miriam was quite a lady, for she was charismatic, had a powerful personality, and, according to Exodus 15, was a prophetess. As high priest, Aaron had an undeniably important role to play in the congregation. Thus, Miriam and Aaron were important players in the life of the young nation of Israel.

Numbers 12:1 (b)
. . . because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman.

Evidently, after Moses' wife, Zipporah died, he married an Ethiopian woman. Yet as valid as Miriam's and Aaron's concern was that he didn't marry a Jewish woman, it was actually only a smokescreen to cover the real reason for their words against him—which, as seen in verse 2, was envy . . .

Numbers 12:2
And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it.

"Why is Moses in charge?" Miriam asked Aaron. "He's our little brother. Why him and not us? It's not fair!"

Numbers 12:3
(Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)

This verse shows me this book must have been inspired by God, for Moses wouldn't have included it if it was up to his own human imagination. I bet he was a bit red-faced when he penned these words. In Deuteronomy 34, we'll read about Moses' death, and he wrote those words as well. How can a man write about his own death—unless it is actually God speaking to him?

Numbers 12:4–8
And the LORD spake suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation. And they three came out. And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth. And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold:

wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

"Unlike to a prophet or a prophetess, I speak to Moses directly," said God.

Numbers 12:9, 10
And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed. And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.

Although our tendency is to think that the dreaded disease of leprosy is too severe a punishment for simply questioning Moses' choice of a bride, it is actually a picture in which we see how God views envy . . .

First, envy grieves God. When I say, "Why him and not me?" I am actually saying, "You goofed, Lord." And so offensive is this to Him that His response to Miriam was not only to smite her with leprosy, but to depart.

Numbers 12:11–13
And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned. Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb. And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee.

Secondly, envy not only grieves God, but it will eat at me. Miriam was smitten with leprosy—the disease that eats away at one's skin and causes a great stench to emanate from him. Envy does that too. When envy takes root in the soil of my soul, the fruit is stinky. James nails it when he says, "For where envy is, there is confusion and every evil work" (3:16).

Numbers 12:14, 15 (a)
And the LORD said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? Let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again. And Miriam was shut out from the camp seven days . . .

Thirdly, envy pulls me away. Miriam was isolated in her leprous condition for a full week. Envy does that. It causes me to close the door, to pull the shades, to isolate myself from those of whom I am envious.

Numbers 12:15 (b), 16
. . . and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again. And afterward the people removed from Hazeroth, and pitched in the wilderness of Paran.

Finally, envy holds others back. The entire congregation was stuck for seven days, waiting for Miriam to be healed of her leprous, envious condition.

The Book of Romans says we are to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (12:15). Moses modeled this as he rejoiced for Eldad and Medad and wept for Miriam. We, on the other hand, know we're guilty of envy if there is anyone we know to whom, if they came to us and said, "I got promoted," or, "I made the team," we would outwardly say, "Great!" but inwardly say, "Why him and not me?"

Do I rejoice with those who rejoice? Moses did. Envy weeps over those who rejoice and rejoices over those who weep. Moses did just the opposite.

Numbers 12 is not only a practical chapter, but a prophetic chapter as well, as it points to, and is a picture of, Jesus and His older brothers, the Jews. You see, in Deuteronomy 18:18, the prophecy was given that a Prophet would be raised up, greater than Moses, but similar to Moses. Deuteronomy 18:18 is recognized by all as a Messianic prophecy. Thus, Moses is a type of Jesus.

"Moses was the meekest man in all the earth," Moses wrote.

"I am meek and lowly," Jesus declared in Matthew 11:29.

Just as Miriam and Aaron were older siblings to Moses, Jesus had a group of older brothers—the scribes and Pharisees of the religious establishment—who were filled with envy (Matthew 27:18).

Both Moses and Jesus took Gentile brides, for we Gentiles are the Bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2).

When Miriam was struck with leprosy, Moses interceded for the very one who was envying him, accusing him, trying to take him down a peg or two. When Jesus was on the Cross, He asked forgiveness for the very men who were crucifying Him (Luke 23:34).

Miriam being a picture of the Jews, it is only logical that, due to the plague of leprosy, she would have been isolated for seven days—for Israel will be shut away not for seven days, but for seven years during the time of the Tribulation when horrendous plagues will fall upon her. Yet, just as Miriam did indeed rejoin the company of Israel on their way to the Promised Land, so after seven years of Tribulation, Israel will be shaken to the core, and, saved and restored, she, too, will journey to her eternal destiny (Romans 11:26).

The more I study the Word, the more amazed I am at how it lets us see the ultimate plan of the Father—that all things were created for, center around, and point to His Son.

The clearer I understand this prophetically, the more I realize practically that my life will make sense and my days will have meaning to the degree that I center them around Jesus.



13

Numbers 13:1–3

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them. And Moses by the commandment of the LORD sent them from the wilderness of Paran: all those men were heads of the children of Israel.

The heads of the twelve tribes were to go in and check out the Promised Land.

Numbers 13:4–15

And these were their names: of the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur. Of the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori. Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh. Of the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph. Of the tribe of Ephraim, Oshea the son of Nun. Of the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu. Of the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi. Of the tribe of Joseph, namely, of the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi. Of the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli. Of the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael. Of the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi. Of the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Machi.

These men are the twelve spies who will cross the border into the Promised Land.

Numbers 13:16
These are the names of the men which Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Oshea the son of Nun Jehoshua.

Oshea means "to save." *Jehoshua* means "Jehovah saves." *Joshua,* the contracted form, means "The Lord who saves."

Numbers 13:17–20
And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain: and see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds; and what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the first ripe grapes.

Watch out, Moses. Don't send in the spies. Just step out in faith and follow the command of the Lord who promised to give you the land of destiny.

I believe Moses is making a mistake at this moment when he sent in the spies.

"Wait," you say. "Wasn't it the Lord who told Moses to send men in to search out the land?"

Turn to the Book of Deuteronomy to see what really happened that day . . .

> And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come. And the saying pleased me well: and I took twelve men of you, one of a tribe: and they turned and went up into the mountain, and came unto the valley of Eshcol, and searched it out.
>
> Deuteronomy 1:22–24

The people said, “Send spies to scope out the land to which we’re headed.”

“Sounds good to me,” Moses said of the plan which originated in the hearts of the people.

So finally, God said, “If that’s what you want to do, then that’s the plan.”

The same thing can happen to you and me. If we set our own agenda, if we demand our own way, God very likely will say, “Okay. If that’s your plan, go ahead.”

That’s why it’s the wise man or woman who increasingly prays, “Not my will but *Your* will be done. Here’s how I see the situation, Lord, but I lay it before You. Please adjust it, modify it, correct it.”

Numbers 13:21, 22 (a)
So they went up, and searched the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob, as men come to Hamath. And they ascended by the south, and came unto Hebron; where Ahi man, Sheshai, and Talmai, the children of Anak, were . . .

The children of Anak, or Anakim, were giants, as we shall see, the size of Goliath. Most likely, they were at least 9′6″ and perhaps as tall as 11′2″.

Numbers 13:22 (b)
. . . (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.)

Although this phrase is in parentheses, it is wonderfully significant, for it obliterates the theories of the skeptics who question the veracity of the Scripture. You see, Zoan being the secret resort of the Pharaohs, the only people who knew about it were Pharaoh, his family, and his innermost circle of advisers. For many centuries, people read this and said, “Because there is no such place as Zoan, we cannot believe everything in Scripture”—until Zoan was uncovered by the archaeological spade.

Whoever wrote the Book of Numbers had to have inside information, had to be in the inner circle to know about Zoan. Moses grew up as the son of Pharaoh. No other Hebrew writer would have known this.

Numbers 13:23
And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two

upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs.

The grapes, pomegranates, and figs in the Promised Land were so big that two men were required to carry a single bunch of grapes back to the congregation.

Numbers 13:24, 25
The place was called the brook Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence. And they returned from searching of the land after forty days.

Forty is the number of judgment.

Numbers 13:26–29
And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan.

The spies saw big grapes, but they also saw big men, and walled cities, and many nations with great military ability.

Numbers 13:30–33
And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is

a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

Ten spies had an evil report. Two believed God. People can't name one of the ten spies—but all of us know the names of Joshua and Caleb. Here's a key to being forgotten in history, by your family, in the work of the kingdom: Murmur, be cynical, be a doubter, be skeptical, be a critic. Sit back and say, "This isn't right and that will never happen." On the other hand, the men, women, and congregations who leave an imprint on history are those who say, "We believe God will do great things."

- The ten spies saw the foes.
  Joshua and Caleb saw the fruit.
- The ten spies saw the giants.
  Joshua and Caleb saw God.
- The ten spies saw the walls and their faith crumbled.
  Joshua and Caleb had faith and knew the walls would crumble.

It's all a matter of perspective. We will have faith in that which we fear. The ten spies had faith in the giants because they feared them. But Joshua and Caleb feared God, and, therefore, had faith in Him.

I saw a nature movie years ago in which, seeing a mountain lion headed his way, a little bear cub stood on its back legs, raised its little paws, and let forth a high-pitched growl. The mountain lion immediately stopped in his tracks, turned around, and ran away, leaving the little bear cub thinking, This is great! Look what I did! *And then the camera panned back to show that standing behind the little bear was his Mama—a huge grizzly.*

We have a great big God standing with us who makes any giant seem like a grasshopper in comparison. The spies lifted up their eyes to the giants. Joshua and Caleb lifted them higher and saw the Father.



14

Numbers 14:1–3

And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

"We're going to die in the wilderness. We're going to get wiped out. These giants, these problems, these fortified cities, these various cultures are all too much for us to take on," cried the children of Israel. But the faithlessness of their plea was surpassed by the foolishness of their plan . . .

Numbers 14:4
And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

"Let's overthrow Moses and find someone to lead us back into captivity."

Numbers 14:5
Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.

After hearing the murmuring, the criticism, the doubts, fears, and frustration of the people, Moses and Aaron did what you and I need to do: They fell on their faces. That was one of the secrets of Moses' greatness. Three million people wanted to overthrow him. And what did He do? He prayed.

Numbers 14:6–8
And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good

land. If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.

Don't you love Joshua and Caleb? "I don't care what the lawyers say, the statistics say, the doctors say," they said. "God has said that we're to go into the land."

Numbers 14:9
Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.

What builds a body—a Fellowship, a marriage, a family? The bread of affliction. Joshua and Caleb knew this. "These giants are good for us," they said. "This is a great opportunity for us to grow."

Every once in a while you meet people like Joshua and Caleb. "This is great!" they say in tough times. "A wonderful opportunity!" What a radical perspective. What a wonderful way to live.

Numbers 14:10
But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.

"You gotta face facts," the congregation protested. "We're outgunned, outmanned, outnumbered." And they wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb.

Numbers 14:11, 12
And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.

"That's it," God said to Moses. "I'm going to destroy these people. Justice demands it. They murmur against Me continually. They have no faith in Me. I'll make a great nation of you instead."

Numbers 14:13–16
And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them). And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness.

"If You don't bring Your people into the Land of Promise," Moses said to God, "the Egyptians and other nations will accuse You of being unable to do what You promised, incapable of seeing them through."

Numbers 14:17–19
And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.

"You visit every generation," Moses continued, "giving them a chance to repent and change their ways. That's where Your greatness is."

Numbers 14:20
And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word:

Although on first reading, it appears that God was upset until Moses said, "Calm down. Think it through, Lord,"—in reality, Moses was simply reflecting God's heart all along. You see, justice demanded that the people be punished for

their rebelliousness and their lack of faith. Intercession, however, could bring about mercy.

That's why later on we'll see God saying, "I sought for an intercessor, a man to stand in the gap" (Ezekiel 22:30). God is looking for people who will intercede. Justice demands punishment. But intercession ushers in mercy. This makes me wonder how much more could be done in seeing people blessed who don't deserve to be if I would be a man like Moses, a man of intercession.

Who put this heart of intercession in Moses? God. God's justice and holiness demanded judgment. But God's compassion and grace put a heart of intercession into Moses to release mercy. God did the whole thing. And He continues to do so today. For example, when you're watching the news and a story comes on which tugs at your heart, it's the Spirit of God saying, "I want you to be an intercessor through which I can minister mercy."

Numbers 14:21–24 (a)
But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD. Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; Surely they shall not see the land which I sware unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it: But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him . . .

"God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind," Paul declared, (2 Timothy 1:7). The ten spies had the spirit of fear. Caleb, on the other hand, had the unbeatable combination of power, love, and a sound mind.

Numbers 14:24 (b), 25
. . . and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it. (Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwelt in the valley.) To morrow turn you, and get you into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea.

Caleb and Joshua will go in to the Promised Land. But not one other person of their generation would be allowed entrance.

Numbers 14:26–28

And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you:

"Would to God that we die in the wilderness," the children of Israel had repeatedly said (Numbers 14:2).

And, because life and death are in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21), God said, "Okay. As you have spoken, so shall it be."

Faith and words go hand in hand, for out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). That is why to be saved, we must believe in our heart as well as confess with our mouth (Romans 10:9, 10).

The longer I live, the more I realize that what I say has huge impact on the unseen world around me. I'm beginning to understand more and more that if I speak critically and cynically even only to my wife, the impact is sure to boomerang back on me. Conversely, if I speak words of faith, I open the door for the Lord to work miraculously.

Numbers 14:29–31

Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised.

"If we go into the land, our wives and children will be destroyed," the Israelites had said (v. 3). Here we see that the ones they thought would be wiped out are the very ones God would bring in.

Numbers 14:32–34

But as for you, your carcases, they shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcases be wasted in the wilderness.

After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.

The spies were in the land forty days. Therefore, for every day of fear, there was a year of wandering. This is what the Bible refers to as the law of sowing and reaping. In this regard, we have discovered that, although, when a person confesses his sin, he is pardoned immediately, the repercussions are nonetheless felt very definitely.

Some people say, "I have a hard time with a God who sentenced an entire generation to death simply because they demonstrated a lack of faith one day." But that's because they don't understand that God was justified not because they made one mistake on one day, but, according to Amos 5:25 and Acts 7, over a forty-year period of time, God's people didn't offer sacrifices to Him, nor keep the Passover commemoration. They took the tabernacle with them, but all the while they were intrigued by and involved with pagan gods.

Thus, God declared, "This generation must die in the wilderness and a new one will be raised up that will believe in Me, worship Me, have a heart for Me."

Numbers 14:35–38
I the LORD have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die. And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land, even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the LORD. But Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of the men that went to search the land, lived still.

Caleb and Joshua lived because holiness brings life whereas the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

Numbers 14:39, 40
And Moses told these sayings unto all the children of Israel: and the people mourned greatly. And they rose up early in the morning, and

gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the LORD hath promised: for we have sinned.

"Here we go," the people said. "We realize we sinned. But now we're going to step out in faith and take the land."

Numbers 14:41–45
And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the LORD? but it shall not prosper. Go not up, for the LORD is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you. But they presumed to go up unto the hill top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, departed not out of the camp. Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah.

When God said, "Go," they wouldn't. And now they're saying, "We've learned our lesson. We're going to do it now." But God had already spoken. He had already told them they would wander forty years in the wilderness until the entire generation died.

There can be a presumption that looks like faith but in reality is folly. What's the difference between faith and presumption? Simply this: God's Word. Are you launching out because you're trying to prove your spiritual prowess, or because of some fantastic fantasy—or do you have God's Word on the matter? Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Therefore, it is the promise of God found in the Word of God upon which we are to stand.



15 In chapters 15 through 25, we see the sad saga of God's people wandering in the wilderness instead of marching into the Land of Promise. It's a sad section of Scripture in one way, but a tremendous warning to you and me today

—for we must be people who choose to believe that God will do what He promised to do.

> **Numbers 15:1, 2 (a)**
> **And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land of your habitations . . .**

Even after God said in chapter 14 that the whole generation was to die, even though He knew they wouldn't be obedient to Him, He reiterates His intention to bring His people into the Land when He doesn't say, "*If* you come into the land . . ." but "*when* you come into the land . . . ." And to the nineteen-year-olds, sixteen-year-olds, and eight-year-olds hearing this, it would be just as God declared—for although His people could delay His blessings, they could not destroy His purpose.

I can delay God's blessings in my life for forty minutes or forty hours, forty days, forty weeks, or even forty years. But I cannot delay His purpose . . .

> Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him . . .
>
> Ephesians 1:9, 10

God's ultimate plan is that in the fullness of time, everything and everyone will be brought into unity in Christ, intimacy with Christ, and conformed to Christ. That is where life is going. Therefore, because God created everything to be brought together in Christ, focused on Christ, united by Christ, the degree to which I do that tomorrow will be the degree to which I will move in the same direction as all of creation. Conversely, the degree to which I do anything other than that is the degree to which I'll go against the flow of that which God has predetermined for all of creation.

> *It's so wonderful to relax in your inner tube in the center of the river. As you cruise along in the sun, it's refreshing and wonderful with some thrills along the way. If, on the other hand, you're trying to go*

upstream against the flow, it's miserable. You get tired and go nowhere.

Go with the flow of what God determined all of history to do. Be one with Christ; focus on Christ; live for Christ.

Numbers 15:2 (b)–13
. . . which I give unto you, And will make an offering by fire unto the LORD, a burnt offering, or a sacrifice in performing a vow, or in a freewill offering, or in your solemn feasts, to make a sweet savour unto the LORD, of the herd, or of the flock: Then shall he that offereth his offering unto the LORD bring a meat offering of a tenth deal of flour mingled with the fourth part of an hin of oil. And the fourth part of an hin of wine for a drink offering shalt thou prepare with the burnt offering or sacrifice, for one lamb. Or for a ram, thou shalt prepare for a meat offering two tenth deals of flour mingled with the third part of an hin of oil. And for a drink offering thou shalt offer the third part of an hin of wine, for a sweet savour unto the LORD. And when thou preparest a bullock for a burnt offering, or for a sacrifice in performing a vow, or peace offerings unto the LORD: Then shall he bring with a bullock a meat offering of three tenth deals of flour mingled with half an hin of oil. And thou shalt bring for a drink offering half an hin of wine, for an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. Thus shall it be done for one bullock, or for one ram, or for a lamb, or a kid. According to the number that ye shall prepare, so shall ye do to every one according to their number. All that are born of the country shall do these things after this manner, in offering an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.

Not only did God reestablish His intention, but He reiterated His instruction, adding specific details not previously given in Leviticus 2 when He first gave the instructions about this particular offering. This amazes me. I would think at this point, God would say, "Why should I give you further instruction about these offerings when you're only going to disobey Me anyway?" God, however, gives yet more details to His people, added

instruction, further information, expanded understanding. He still treats them with dignity and respect.

And He does the same thing with you and me. Even when we are disobedient, out to lunch, off the wall, God still has a way of treating us with dignity. He'll still give information to me, understanding for me. Through conversations I have, books I read, radio broadcasts I hear, I still get input from Him. That's our God.

Numbers 15:14–16
And if a stranger sojourn with you, or whosoever be among you in your generations, and will offer an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD; as ye do, so he shall do. One ordinance shall be both for you of the congregation, and also for the stranger that sojourneth with you, an ordinance for ever in your generations: as ye are, so shall the stranger be before the LORD. One law and one manner shall be for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth with you.

Egyptians, Moabites, Edomites, or any other strangers were welcome to accompany the Israelites to the Promised Land. But there was to be one ordinance, one law for everyone, regardless of culture or nationality. And that one law was to be God's. Everyone was welcome, but everyone was to travel under God's authority.

Numbers 15:17–19
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land whither I bring you, then it shall be, that, when ye eat of the bread of the land, ye shall offer up an heave offering unto the LORD.

Heave offerings were tossed into the air as a way of saying, "God, this is for You."

Numbers 15:20, 21
Ye shall offer up a cake of the first of your dough for an heave offering: as ye do the heave offering of the threshingfloor, so shall

ye heave it. Of the first of your dough ye shall give unto the LORD an heave offering in your generations.

When they reached the Land of Promise, the children of Israel were to offer to their Lord the first of their dough.

"Give us this day our daily bread," we pray—as we ought. "Lord, You know I need bread. Bills are piling up."

"I'll make you some bread," the Lord answers. "Just give Me the dough."

Why does your money disappear through the holes in your pockets? "Because you've ignored My house," the Lord answers (Haggai 1:6). "You can pray all you want, but if you do what I tell you, then you can watch and see how I bless you" (Malachi 3:10).

Numbers 15:22–28

And if ye have erred, and not observed all these commandments, which the LORD hath spoken unto Moses, even all that the LORD hath commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day that the LORD commanded Moses, and henceforward among your generations; then it shall be, if ought be committed by ignorance without the knowledge of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one young bullock for a burnt offering, for a sweet savour unto the LORD, with his meat offering, and his drink offering, according to the manner, and one kid of the goats for a sin offering. And the priest shall make an atonement for all the congregation of the children of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them; for it is ignorance: and they shall bring their offering, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD, and their sin offering before the LORD, for their ignorance: And it shall be forgiven all the congregation of the children of Israel, and the stranger that sojourneth among them; seeing all the people were in ignorance. And if any soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin offering. And the priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the LORD, to make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him.

Through the offering of a bull as a burnt offering and a goat as a sin offering, provision was made for mistakes, for failing to keep the commandments God

had so carefully, so painstakingly given His people. And the same holds true for us. The sins we commit ignorantly or in stupidity are paid for, washed away completely by the sacrifice of the Burnt Offering who took the heat on the altar of Calvary, by the Sin Offering who shed His blood for you and me.

Numbers 15:29
Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them.

Regardless of one's background, psychological make-up, or culture, there are no excuses for sin. Although this flies in the face of today's conventional wisdom, sin always requires an offering.

Numbers 15:30
But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

Be they Moabite or Israelite, whoever presumptuously, intentionally sinned was to be cut off, excommunicated, isolated. Why? Read on . . .

Numbers 15:31
Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.

The Hebrew word translated "presumptuously" implies that done with a high hand. What does it mean to sin with a high hand? Turn to Exodus 14 . . .

The Israelites had just been set free from bondage in Egypt. And when they left, verse 8 tells us they left with a high hand, as if to say, "So long, Pharaoh. We're outta here!"

The sin which is unforgivable, unpardonable is not committed by the person struggling with an issue, but by the one who with a "high hand" shakes his fist at God, saying, "I want nothing to do with You. I don't care what You say. Goodbye." And if a person shakes his fist at God day after week after month

after year, God won't force him to stay in His kingdom. If a person wants to sin with a high hand, God eventually lets him go (Matthew 12:31).

Numbers 15:32–36
And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. And they put him in ward, be cause it was not declared what should be done to him. And the LORD said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the LORD commanded Moses.

We come to the story of a man who was eventually stoned for thinking he could add to what God said He would do.



For topical study of Numbers 15:32–36, see "Stick with Grace" below.

Numbers 15:37–41
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God. I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God.

Any Israelite over the age of twenty would not enter the Promised Land because, although there is forgiveness of sin, there are also repercussions; although God forgives and forgets, the scars remain. Such is the message of Numbers 15, the first of ten chapters which will chronicle God's dealings with

a group of people who had not only failed miserably, but who would continue to do so over the next fifty years.

And yet at the end of this chapter, God says this: "Here's what will make the wilderness wandering which you've brought upon yourselves bearable: Around your garments make a border of blue." Blue in Scripture is the color of heaven. Therefore, God was essentially saying, "Never forget that you're on your way to heaven."

"Let not your heart be troubled," Jesus would echo centuries later, "Believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:1, 2). My heart can be troubled. So can yours. But because Jesus will never ask us to do that which He doesn't empower us to do, I don't have to let my heart be troubled. What's the key? heaven—to think about heaven, to be focused on heaven, to be constantly aware that heaven is close at hand. The children of Israel were to have borders of blue on their hems so that when they looked down at their feet as they trudged through the wilderness, they would see a dusty border of blue, reminding them of their higher calling, their grand destination.

The same is true today. When I get dressed each morning until the time I undress each night, I am to see the border of blue. That is, I'm to remember that I'm headed for heaven—where all those things I wish I could redo, where all the opportunities I missed and mistakes I made, will be set right.

If you remove the border of blue from your garments, if you remove heaven from the equation, you'll be depressed in the wilderness, for the key to being happy and joyful on earth is to live for heaven.

STICK WITH GRACE

A Topical Study of NUMBERS 15:32–36

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." While it's true that names can't do physical damage, it's equally true that sticks can get one stoned—as seen in the passage before us . . .

When the elders of the congregation asked the Lord what should be done with a man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath, the Lord said, "Kill him."

"What?" we say. "Isn't that a bit harsh? What's going on?"

I believe the passage before us shows us that God is deadly serious about the sanctity of the Sabbath for some very important reasons . . .

Physical Consideration

As our Creator and Designer, God knows the way we will function most successfully and effectively, most efficiently and fruitfully. That is why He said we are to remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy (Exodus 20:8)—that one day in seven is set aside for relaxation, refreshment, and renewal. Because we are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14), our Manufacturer, our Father, our Lord gave us some instructions about the way life works. Therefore, it should be no surprise that doctors have recently discovered that, at rest, our heart beats faster in the evening than it does in the morning for six consecutive days. But on the seventh day, it beats faster in the morning than it does in the evening—suggesting that our bodies are energized for six days and run on a different cycle on the seventh. In his excellent book, *Fearfully And Wonderfully Made,* Dr. Paul Brand elucidates the physiological ways the human body operates on a cycle which requires one day in seven to be refreshed and renewed.

It makes sense to follow the Manufacturer's instructions. The owner of a new car who says, "Those guys at the dealership don't know what they're talking about. I know better. I'll just let my car run and wait until 300,000 miles to change the oil," will have problems. Friction will build up in the engine; the viscosity of the oil will break down—and eventually there will be a blow-up. The same thing will happen to those who say, "I don't need to change pace every seven days. Other people might, but not me. I'm a can-do kind of guy."

I believe stress, nervous conditions, depression, and ulcers can be the result of violating the simple, practical instruction of our Manufacturer to kick back, slow down, and refocus one day in seven.

Prophetic Illustration

The Sabbath Day was not to be violated even by an activity as simple as picking up sticks because, as with all Old Testament regulations, ordinances, and holy days, it is a prophetic picture, a portrait, an illustration of One who was to come (Colossians 2:16, 17). Jesus Christ is our Sabbath (Matthew 11:28). Because the work He accomplished on the Cross is complete, Jesus is our rest.

> *There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.*
>
> Hebrews 4:9–11

Everything in me wants to work to earn God's favor, to merit God's blessings, to curry something from Him through passion in prayer, discipline in Bible study, faithfulness in giving. But the author of the Book of Hebrews says, "Don't do that." Rather, we are to labor simply to rest.

> "What must we do to do the works of God?" they asked Jesus, no doubt expecting Him to give them a list concerning the keeping of holy days, the giving of offerings.
>
> "This is the singular work of God," He said instead, "that you believe on Him whom the Father hath sent" (John 6:29).

We look for lists of dos and don'ts. Jesus, however, simply draws our attention to Himself.

Practical Application

> *Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the Lord: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death. Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day.*
>
> Exodus 35:2, 3

For gathering sticks to kindle a fire, the man in our text was put to death. Working on the Sabbath killed him physically just as it will kill us spiritually. You see, I can say, "I realize Jesus died for my sins, that He paid the price, that He is my Rest. But you know what? I can stoke things up a bit. I can get things hotter by my own efforts. So I'm going to gather sticks. I'm going to pray four minutes every day. I'm going to read my Bible at least once a month." And if I do that, I can think I'm pretty hot. But, like any fire, the fire I've kindled demands more. So I find myself saying, "I better read a chapter a week and pray an hour a day," which then becomes, "a chapter and two hours of prayer every day," and pretty soon, "fifteen chapters and six hours of prayer a day"—until finally, I say, "I can't do this anymore. I can't follow through with these obligations and commitments. And now I'm so burned out, I'm going to forget the whole thing."

That's what legalism does. That's what this man in our text was doing. He should have been resting, enjoying the Sabbath, but instead he gathered wood to stoke the fire. And he died in the process because legalism always kills (2 Corinthians 3:6). That's why the Christian life is all about grace. It's not about the sticks I gather or the fire I ignite. It's all about what Jesus did not with sticks but on two beams of wood which formed the Cross of Calvary.

"It is finished," He said.

And so it is.

The person who finally gets it and says, "I'm going to learn to receive grace graciously. I'm going to rest. Instead of trying to impress God, I'm going to enjoy Him," is the one who is truly blessed. Our enemy would have us believe that our Father is a stern God who overreacts in rage to a man innocently picking up sticks—when, in fact, He is a Father who wants us to rest in Him because He is a God of immeasurable grace.

16 Numbers 16:1 (a)
Now Korah, the son of Izhar . . .

Izhar was the brother of Amram. This means Korah and Moses were cousins.

Numbers 16:1 (b), 2
. . . the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown:

Accompanied by 250 of the most prominent men of the congregation, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram sought an audience with Moses.

Numbers 16:3 (a)
And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them . . .

The flavor of this passage in Hebrew is as follows: "You have ruled too much, too long. You've had your turn, your time. We're all holy. We all have something to offer. Who do you think you are?"

Numbers 16:3 (b)
. . . wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?

Accusing Moses of lifting himself above the congregation is groundless particularly in light of his reluctance to accept the role of leader in the first place (Exodus 3:11). As was the case in chapter 12, the real, though unspoken,

issue was envy—this time, however directed *toward* Aaron instead of raised *by* him.

Numbers 16:4
And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face:

Man of humility that he was, instead of getting in Korah's face, Moses fell on his own.

Numbers 16:5 (a)
And he spake unto Korah . . .

Moses spoke unto Korah *after* he fell on his face before the Lord. This is the way a leader, a parent, a boss ought to move—falling on his face before the Lord before confronting people.

Numbers 16:5 (b)–7
. . . and unto all his company, saying, Even to morrow the LORD will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him. This do; Take you censers, Korah, and all his company; And put fire therein, and put incense in them before the LORD to morrow: and it shall be that the man whom the LORD doth choose, he shall be holy: ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi.

After falling on his face before the Lord, Moses spoke with utmost humility and yet with the clarity of honesty when he said, "Tomorrow we'll bring our censers before the Lord and see who He chooses."

Numbers 16:8–10
And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi: Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them? And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also?

"Why can't you just enjoy and celebrate where God has placed you?" Moses asked Korah. "Why must there be something else, something more? Why can't you be content with the kindness and grace God has shown to you? You men have a role to play—to stand before the congregation and minister to them. Why do you want to take on more?"

Numbers 16:11 (a)
For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the LORD . . .

"In not accepting where He's placed you, you're actually coming against the Lord," Moses continued.

Numbers 16:11 (b)
. . . and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?

Here, Moses magnanimously defends Aaron not very many days after Aaron himself had challenged his authority.

Numbers 16:12, 13
And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up: Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us?

Rebellion never has its root in principle. Rebellion has its root in pride. And because of this, the rebellious person doesn't see things right. His perspective is entirely wrong—as seen in Dathan's and Abiram's reference to the land in which they had been beaten for four hundred years as a land of milk and honey.

Numbers 16:14, 15 (a)
Moreover thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards: wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up. And Moses was very wroth . . .

When God said He would make of Moses a new nation, Moses stood in the gap and interceded for the very people whose accusations were so farfetched and off-base that they would drive even the meekest man on the face of the earth to become "very wroth."

Numbers 16:15 (b)–17
. . . and said unto the LORD, Respect not thou their offering: I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them. And Moses said unto Korah, Be thou and all thy company before the LORD, thou, and they, and Aaron, to morrow: And take every man his censer, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the LORD every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also, and Aaron, each of you his censer.

In addition to being the meekest man on the face of the earth, Moses surely must have been one of the wisest—for rather than dealing in anger with this rebellion, he left it in the hands of the Lord.

Numbers 16:18–22
And they took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron. And Korah gathered all the congregation against them unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the congregation. And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment. And they fell upon their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?

That Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and two hundred and fifty leaders came to the tabernacle with censers in hand indicates that they thought they had a case, that they thought they would be vindicated, that they thought God would justify their rebellion.

As I look back over my life, I am amazed by the times I thought I was right only to find out how wrong I was. "We all see through a glass darkly," Paul said (1 Corinthians 13:12)—no doubt understanding this better than anyone. "I know

this is the right thing to do," he no doubt said as he dragged Christians from their homes believing they were ruining Judaism and polluting the people of God. What a shock it must have been when, on his way to Damascus one day to imprison more believers, he was knocked to the ground and in that moment realized he of the giant intellect and the spiritual passion had been absolutely, completely, one hundred percent wrong (Acts 9).

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram thought they were right, but what they failed to factor in to the equation was God's sovereignty. God's on the throne. God's in control. Therefore, it's not up to us to pull people down or prop people up. Sometimes I mistakenly think, "I need to straighten this guy out or pull that group down because if it's gonna be, it's up to me."

God, however, says, "Promotion does not come from the east, the west, or the south. *I* am the Lord who raises up one and puts down the other" (Psalm 75:6, 7).

It's a great day when a person finally realizes that because God is on the throne and is in control, he can simply say, "Lord, You're the One who will raise up one and put down another—be it the boss of my company or the leaders of our country. Therefore, I'm going to be submitted to You as I submit to those in authority over me."

We can't learn to be humble without being humiliated, to be forgiving without being wronged, to be sweet without bitter experiences. Therefore God uses people and situations in our lives to allow us to experience these things personally rather than just to propound them intellectually.

Numbers 16:23–26

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the congregation, saying, Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him. And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins.

A warning was issued for people to keep distance from those with the spirit of rebellion—an equally important message today.

Numbers 16:27–29

So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children. And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me.

"If Korah, Dathan, and Abiram live to a ripe old age and die of natural causes, God has not sent me," Moses declared.

Numbers 16:30
But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD.

"But if the earth swallows them," Moses continued, "you'll know they were wrong."

When I try to make a case against those in positions of authority over me, like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, I always end up in the pit of despair and despondency.

Numbers 16:31–34
And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation. And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also.

The earth opened up—and the rebellious men, along with their possessions were all wiped out. But it would get even worse . . .

Numbers 16:35
And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.

God "fired" these men who were once men of renown, who once had a prominent role to play. But it would get worse still . . .

Numbers 16:36–38
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, that he take up the censers out of the burning, and scatter thou the fire yonder; for they are hallowed. The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates for a covering of the altar: for they offered them before the LORD, therefore they are hallowed: and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel.

Moses was to make a brass covering for the altar from the censers of the rebellious company as a reminder to future generations of the cost of rebellion.

Numbers 16:39, 40
And Eleazar the priest took the brasen censers, wherewith they that were burnt had offered; and they were made broad plates for a covering of the altar: To be a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the LORD; that he be not as Korah, and as his company: as the LORD said to him by the hand of Moses.

According to Exodus 25:38, the censers used by the priests were to be made of gold. Why, then, were the censers seen here made of brass? Evidently because they didn't have any gold. Why? Most likely because the gold which should have been used for the censers had instead been used to make the golden calf (Exodus 32:4).

Numbers 16:41
But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD.

Isn't this amazing? After seeing the earth open up and fire come down, the people have the audacity to murmur.

Numbers 16:42–45 (a)
And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation: and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. And Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment . . .

"That's it," the Lord said to Moses. "I've had it with these people."

Numbers 16:45 (b)
. . . And they fell upon their faces.

Yet again we see Moses and Aaron on their faces before the Lord. We're sure to recognize Moses in heaven—he'll be the one with the flat nose!

Numbers 16:46, 47 (a)
And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague is begun. And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation . . .

Could it be that Aaron ran because he knew what it was like to get mixed up, to become rebellious, to be full of envy? Could it be that Aaron has the heart of an intercessor because of his own weaknesses, his own history?

Numbers 16:47 (b), 48
. . . and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed.

Aaron, the high priest, is a picture of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, who stands between the dead and the living, who intercedes for you and me, who stops the plague of sin which would consume us and ultimately bring us into the hell fire of damnation. We are rebellious. We are those who murmur. We are those who have constantly strayed away—and yet day after day, Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us, to be an Advocate on behalf of us (Hebrews 7:25).

Numbers 16:49
Now they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, beside them that died about the matter of Korah.

Who were these 14,700? They were the ones who were hanging around. They're the ones who paid the price in this plague. And their fate causes me to say, "I don't want to even be in the neighborhood, to be an observer of rebellion. Rebelliousness causes people to get burned up, to lose what they once had or what they could have been. It causes people to fade into oblivion. And I want nothing to do with that."

Numbers 16:50
And Aaron returned unto Moses unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the plague was stayed.

Like Korah and company, we think we know who should be in power. In reality, however, we know oh, so little—as verified by the following newspaper article . . .

Suppose tomorrow is election day. It's time to elect a new world leader—and your vote counts. Here are the choices: Candidate A consults with astrologers. He's had two mistresses, chain smokes and drinks eight to ten martinis a day. Candidate B was kicked out of office twice, sleeps until noon, used opium in college, and drinks a quart of brandy every evening. Candidate C is a decorated war hero, a vegetarian, is monogamous, doesn't smoke, and drinks only an occasional beer. Candidate A was FDR, Candidate B was Winston Churchill. Candidate C was Adolf Hitler.

If you're not happy with your boss, your spouse, or your parents, you'll not be happy with anyone because God in His sovereignty allowed the very situation in which you find yourself presently.

May we learn from the example of Korah.

May we walk humbly.



17 Following the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, here in chapter 17, we see God give a tool to His people by which they might be protected from future deception . . .

Numbers 17:1–5
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod according to the house of their fathers, of all their princes according to the house of their fathers twelve rods: write thou every man's name upon his rod. And thou shalt write Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi: for one rod shall be for the head of the house of their fathers. And thou shalt lay them up in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, where I will meet with you. And it shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you.

That God would use the rod as a validation for true ministry is only fitting, for in Isaiah 11:1, 2, we see a rod come forth from the stem of Jesse, from the lineage of David, upon whom the Spirit of the Lord would rest, and in whom would be the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. The rod, of course, speaks of Jesus.

Numbers 17:6–8 (a)
And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, and every one of their princes gave him a rod apiece, for each prince one, according to their fathers' houses, even twelve rods: and the rod of Aaron was among their rods. And Moses laid up the rods before the LORD in

the tabernacle of witness. And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms . . .

How were the children of Israel to know which leader spoke with true authority? By the blossoming of the rod.

How do we know Jesus is the One to whom we should be linked, after whom we should follow? By His blossoming, by His life . . .

"Give us a sign," they said to Jesus.

"One sign I'll give you," He answered. "The sign of Jonah. As Jonah was in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of Man be in the grave" (Matthew 12:40).

The one sign that proves Jesus is the One who has all authority is His resurrection from the grave, His "blossoming" back to life.

Numbers 17:8 (b)–10

. . . and yielded almonds. And Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD unto all the children of Israel: and they looked, and took every man his rod. And the LORD said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not.

Not only did Aaron's rod blossom, but it yielded fruit. No one before Jesus, no one since Him has borne the fruit of the Spirit—of love characterized by joy, peace, and longsuffering, by gentleness, goodness, and faith, by meekness and temperance like He did.

Secondarily, we can recognize those to whom we are to be linked, those to whom we are to listen, those to whom we are to submit by the presence of the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

Mom and Dad, if you're wishing you had more impact on your teenage daughter or junior-high grandson, the key is not to beat them with the rod, but to let them see your passion for God, to let them see the fruit of the Spirit in your

life. Kids and adults alike can sense if a person is walking with the Lord and full of the Spirit because such a life manifests itself in love.

When you have decisions to make about people who claim to have authority, remember Numbers 17 and look for the budding, the blossoming, the fruit.

> **Numbers 17:11–13**
> **And Moses did so: as the LORD commanded him, so did he. And the children of Israel spake unto Moses, saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the LORD shall die: shall we be consumed with dying?**

The children of Israel had reason to say this. After all, in chapter 16, they saw the earth swallow Korah, Dathan, and Abiram as well as their families, followed by a fire which consumed two hundred and fifty of their leaders, and a plague which killed an additional 14,700—all in the vicinity of the tabernacle (vv. 19 and 42). No wonder they felt the tabernacle was a dangerous place to be.

We sometimes think church is a dangerous place to be. We can feel like we're "swallowed up" in the pit of depression as we're made aware of our rebellious natures. We can find ourselves on the "hot seat" as we hear the Word speak to specific struggles in our lives. Or we can feel "plagued" as the sin is addressed which seems to dominate us. As a result, all too often, we hear ourselves say, "Life is tough enough. Every time I come to church, it seems I'm cut up or cut down. I don't need this."

This wouldn't surprise us if we understood that opening the Scriptures is very dangerous. Why? Because Hebrews 4:12 says the Word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword. No wonder, then, that we feel cut up. The Word divides the soul and the spirit—my intellect and emotions from my true self that will live forever. It divides my joints and marrow—an act that, if done physically, would immobilize and kill me. It divides the thoughts and intents of my heart, as it gets to the true heart of any given matter.

No wonder when I hear or read the Word I can feel pierced and poked, sliced and diced. That's what the Word does, not only to those who hear it, but those who speak it . . .

> *Mistakenly thinking Jeremiah was yelling at them, was coming down on them, lacked understanding of them, the people captured him and*

threw him into a pit. "That's it," Jeremiah said. "I quit. I'm tired of the pit. Enough is enough. I will speak no more in the name of the Lord"—until the Word was like fire in his bones and he couldn't keep quiet (Jeremiah 20:9).

We've all felt that way. When you share the Word, you can be convicted by the very things you share. Because the Word is a *two*-edged sword, it cuts both ways. Yes, it comforts, inspires, delights. But because it's a two-edged sword, it also pierces and penetrates, prods and provokes.

"Shall we be consumed in dying?" the children of Israel asked.

The answer is "Yes."

Jesus said, "If any man come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, die daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

"I die daily," said Paul (1 Corinthians 15:31).

In other words, there is no real Spirit-filled living without there being a radical flesh-dying. The flesh must die before the Spirit can live. And because my flesh seems to reawaken every day, like Paul, I must die daily.

How?

The only way I know to deal with the flesh is with the sword of the Spirit. That's why I need to allow the Word to kill my flesh day after day. And as it does, like the resurrected Jesus, I find I am able to walk through walls and locked doors (John 20:26).

"My son won't talk to me," a father sighs.

"My daughter has shut me out," a mother cries.

"My wife has locked the door," says a weary husband.

"He's built a wall," says the devastated wife.

I suggest that when I allow my flesh to be sliced and diced by the piercing and poking of the Word every day, although it's painful in some ways, humbling and difficult in others, the end result is that I have entry into places I would never have had otherwise. High walls, locked doors, pulled shades begin to open as my critical, cynical, harsh nature softens, giving me access into places which were previously closed.

I'm convinced it's our own flesh that keeps us out of places we long to enter. There's no resurrection and life without crucifixion and death. There's no Easter Sunday without Good Friday. There's no way to enter in without first being broken down. It's a process that must happen daily, continually. And the way it

happens is through the Word of God very simply, very powerfully, very definitely.

Thomas was a doubter; others were cynical; many were skeptics. But when they saw Jesus—His flesh broken, beaten, buried, and resurrected—they realized something incredible had transpired.

Die daily, gang. It's the way you'll be free. Let the Word do its work in your life and you will see doors open for you and people impacted by you.

"Shall we all utterly die?"

I hope so!



18 Numbers 18:1

And the LORD said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood.

The word "and" connects this passage to the previous chapter. God's words in one of only two times He would speak directly to Aaron must have stunned him, for after having his authority validated by God through the miraculous blossoming and budding of his rod, God essentially says to Aaron, "I am now holding you responsible for the iniquity which happens in the ministry which I've entrusted to your care."

The Lord would say to you, "If there is any person in your life who, like Korah, is in the pits, you have no reason to feel smug, for you are responsible to a certain degree. You must bear responsibility. Is there something else you could have done? Could you have prayed more effectively? Could you have shown more compassion?"

Am I my brother's keeper? If, like Aaron, I am involved in ministry to any degree, the answer is "Yes."

Numbers 18:2 (a)

And thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee, that they may be joined unto thee and minister unto thee . . .

After a word of caution, comes a word of encouragement. The tribe of Levi were the ones who were to practically serve, assist, and support Aaron and his sons. Thus, God gave Aaron an entire tribe to assist him in the work he was called to do.

Numbers 18:2 (b)
. . . but thou and thy sons with thee shall minister before the tabernacle of witness.

Although the tribe of Levi would assist him, only Aaron and his sons were to perform the sacred duties.

Numbers 18:3
And they shall keep thy charge, and the charge of all the tabernacle: only they shall not come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar, that neither they, nor ye also, die.

Aaron was to make sure the Levites understood and remained in their calling—for if they went beyond it, they would die. It is important for us not to arrogantly attempt to go beyond the gifts and calling the Lord has given us—to do everything we're called to do, yet not step ahead of the Lord. Many people die in ministry. That is, they just burn out or give up because they step into areas they aren't called to step into, take on responsibilities they aren't called to fulfill. And ministry becomes a burden rather than a blessing.

Numbers 18:4
And they shall be joined unto thee, and keep the charge of the tabernacle of the congregation, for all the service of the tabernacle: and a stranger shall not come nigh unto you.

Sometimes in the name of quality or excellence we use people who aren't necessarily even walking with the Lord. "Be careful," God would say to us. "None outside the family is to assist you in the ministry to which I've called you."

Numbers 18:5

And ye shall keep the charge of the sanctuary, and the charge of the altar: that there be no wrath any more upon the children of Israel.

In King James English, the word "ye" is plural. Thus, it wasn't only Aaron, but all of the priests collectively who would ensure that there would be no more plagues, no more fires, no more earthquakes, no more wrath of God poured out upon them.

Likewise, although our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, has finished the work, as a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), we get to partner in the process to see people spared from the wrath of hell, to see people saved. And whether this happens here in the sanctuary, in a corporate prayer meeting, or in private times of devotion, ours is a huge responsibility.

Numbers 18:6
And I, behold, I have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel: to you they are given as a gift for the LORD, to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.

If you have people working for you or under you, the godly perspective is to see them as gifts.

Numbers 18:7 (a)
Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest's office for every thing of the altar, and within the vail; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest's office unto you as a service of gift . . .

It is not only the people who serve under us who are gifts—but the very job or ministry itself is a gift. Once we think we deserve to be used in ministry because of our spirituality or our intensity, we are in big trouble.

Numbers 18:7 (b)
. . . and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.

Far from limiting people, God here is loving them by saving them from that which would wipe them out. Because God knows where each of us will function best, it's a wise man who trusts God to place him where he will be most productive, where he will be most at peace.

Numbers 18:8, 9
And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Behold, I also have given thee the charge of mine heave offerings of all the hallowed things of the children of Israel; unto thee have I given them by reason of the anointing, and to thy sons, by an ordinance for ever. This shall be thine of the most holy things, reserved from the fire: every oblation of theirs, every meat offering of theirs, and every sin offering of theirs, and every trespass offering of theirs, which they shall render unto me, shall be most holy for thee and for thy sons.

Concerning the offerings given to the Lord, He said to those who were serving Him, "This has been offered to Me, but now I'm giving it to you." That is, when a heave offering was made, God didn't receive it physically, but rather gave it to the priests. And when a sin offering or trespass offering was made, although a portion of it went up in smoke to the Lord, the majority of meat remained and was given to the priests.

Numbers 18:10
In the most holy place shalt thou eat it; every male shall eat it: it shall be holy unto thee.

In offering meat to the Lord on behalf of the people, the priests themselves would be fed. That's always the way it is. If you feel like you're not being fed, teach Sunday school; start a Bible study at work; disciple someone; have family devotions. The priests would be fed to the degree they fed others. And the principle is still true.

Numbers 18:11
And this is thine; the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel: I have given them unto thee, and to thy sons and to thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: every one that is clean in thy house shall eat of it.

Not only would the priests be fed, but their families would be fed as well.

Numbers 18:12

All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the LORD, them have I given thee.

Those who served God would be blessed with His best. And haven't each of us found this to be so? When we're serving Him, He meets our needs and satisfies our souls in the most wonderful ways.

Numbers 18:13
And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the LORD, shall be thine; every one that is clean in thine house shall eat of it.

So often, people give the Lord leftovers. If they have money left over, they'll tithe. If they have a surplus, they'll give it to the Lord's work or to His people. But over and over again, the Lord lovingly challenges us in the Word, saying, "Give Me your best and watch and see how I will give back to you and your family in amazing ways."

Numbers 18:14–19 (a)
Every thing devoted in Israel shall be thine. Every thing that openeth the matrix in all flesh, which they bring unto the LORD, whether it be of men or beasts, shall be thine: nevertheless the firstborn of man shalt thou surely redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shalt thou redeem. And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem, according to thine estimation, for the money of five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. But the firstling of a cow, or the firstling of a sheep, or the firstling of a goat, thou shalt not redeem; they are holy: thou shalt sprinkle their blood upon the altar, and shalt burn their fat for an offering made by fire, for a sweet savour unto the Lord. And the flesh of them shall be thine, as the wave breast and as the right shoulder are thine. All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the LORD, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever:

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you," Jesus said (Matthew 6:33). If you're making excuses now as to why you can't do what you've been called to do, there will be a whole new set of obstacles five years from now. Therefore, it's foolish for a person to think that down the road, it will be easier to serve the Lord. We are to seek the Lord *now,* believe the Lord *now,* trust Him *now*—and watch Him bless us as He has promised (Malachi 3:10).

Numbers 18:19 (b)
. . . it is a covenant of salt for ever before the LORD unto thee and to thy seed with thee.

Because salt doesn't break down under heat, it shouldn't be surprising that the word "salary" comes from the same root word—for the employee who earns a salary is guaranteed a certain wage no matter how much heat the company takes in any given month. So, too, through the covenant of salt, God declares, "Aaron, do what I've called you to do and I will take care of your sons and daughters. Regardless of what comes up or what goes down, I will see you through."

Numbers 18:20
And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel.

The Levites would have no less than God Himself for their inheritance.

Numbers 18:21–24
And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die. But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance. But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer

as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.

The priests would eventually receive the tithe that was given to the Lord.

Numbers 18:25, 26
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up an heave offering of it for the LORD, even a tenth part of the tithe.

Pastors, leaders, Christian workers, take note: The Levites were to tithe of that which came to them. In other words, God's mind and God's heart is that none are exempt from the tithe.

Numbers 18:27, 28
And this your heave offering shall be reckoned unto you, as though it were the corn of the threshingfloor, and as the fulness of the winepress. Thus ye also shall offer an heave offering unto the LORD of all your tithes, which ye receive of the children of Israel; and ye shall give thereof the LORD's heave offering to Aaron the priest.

Without exception, every Christian worker needs to understand God's heart and not exempt themselves from giving to our great High Priest, Jesus Christ.

Numbers 18:29
Out of all your gifts ye shall offer every heave offering of the LORD, of all the best thereof, even the hallowed part thereof out of it.

Again, this verse directed to the servants of the Lord, they're to take the best of what they get and give it back to the Lord, to the high priest.

Numbers 18:30–32
Therefore thou shalt say unto them, When ye have heaved the best thereof from it, then it shall be counted unto the Levites as the

increase of the threshingfloor, and as the increase of the winepress. And ye shall eat it in every place, ye and your households: for it is your reward for your service in the tabernacle of the congregation. And ye shall bear no sin by reason of it, when ye have heaved from it the best of it: neither shall ye pollute the holy things of the children of Israel, lest ye die.

Our hearts lifted to God in prayer and praise constitute a present-day heave offering.



19 In chapter 19, we come to the very interesting section of Scripture which deals with the sacrifice of the red heifer—a sacrifice unique in that it was introduced decades after all of the other sacrifices; unique in that it has an entire chapter devoted to it; and unique in that it was to be offered outside the camp rather than in the tabernacle . . .

Numbers 19:1, 2
And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke:

Who is the only One without spot or blemish, the only One who was never yoked by the plans or demands of men (John 10:18)? Jesus Christ.

Numbers 19:3 (a)
And ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring her forth without the camp . . .

Where was Jesus crucified? Outside the camp, outside Jerusalem.

Numbers 19:3 (b), 4
. . . and one shall slay her before his face: And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood

directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times:

Unlike any other sacrifice, the priest would not slaughter the red heifer but would stand by as someone else did. Why? Because although Caiaphas, the high priest, ordered that Jesus be put to death, it was actually the Romans who carried out the sentence.

Numbers 19:5
And one shall burn the heifer in his sight; her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn:

The heifer was to be burned even as Jesus would be burned by the fire of God's wrath poured out upon Him.

Numbers 19:6
And the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the midst of the burning of the heifer.

The priest was to cast cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet into the fire with the red heifer—just as Jesus was nailed to a Cross very likely made of cedar, was offered vinegar to deaden the pain on a pole of hyssop, and shed scarlet blood for you and me.

Numbers 19:7–9
Then the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp, and the priest shall be unclean until the even. And he that burneth her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean until the even. And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin.

After the entire heifer was consumed by fire outside the camp, the ashes were scooped up and put aside for the purpose of separation and purification.

Numbers 19:10–13

And he that gathereth the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: and it shall be unto the children of Israel, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among them, for a statute for ever. He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean: but if he purify not himself the third day, then the seventh day he shall not be clean. Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel: because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet upon him.

The one who came into contact with a dead body was to wash on the third and seventh days with water into which the ashes from the red heifer had been sprinkled. If the red heifer pictures Jesus, why was it a red heifer rather than a red bull? I suggest it was for the same reason that Jesus was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver—the price a woman paid for dedication rather than for fifty pieces, the price for a man (Leviticus 27), and for the same reason Aceldama, the name of the field purchased with the thirty pieces of silver is in the feminine form (Acts 1:19). That is, Jesus is not only the Son of Man, the perfect Man, but He also has qualities of the woman that make Him so complete.

You see, Adam was at one time complete as well, but when God took a rib from his side and from it fashioned a woman, he not only lost a rib, but the tenderness, the ability to communicate, the sensitivity, the intuition which went to the woman. That's why when man and woman come together, there is oneness, unity, dependency, and completion. Enter the second Adam, the Last Adam, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:45). He's not only the bull of the burnt offering—the epitome of strength, but He is also the red heifer—the essence of sensitivity. When a wife realizes her husband will always be missing something, and when a husband realizes his wife has qualities he will always lack, they no longer put pressure on each other to be what they're not, but instead log in time with the One who is altogether lovely, the One who is perfectly complete, and find their deepest needs met.

Numbers 19:14

This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days.

Even if a man hadn't physically come into contact with a dead body, if he even went into the tent of one who had died, he was considered unclean. Even though we might not be directly involved with the dark and deadly stuff of this world, even being around it renders us needful of the forgiveness and cleansing only our red heifer, Jesus Christ, can give.

Numbers 19:15–22
And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, is unclean. And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days. And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin, and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel: And a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave: And the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day: and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even. But the man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the LORD: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean. And it shall be a perpetual statute unto them, that he that sprinkleth the water of separation shall wash his clothes; and he that toucheth the water of separation shall be unclean until even. And whatsoever the unclean person toucheth shall be unclean; and the soul that toucheth it shall be unclean until even.

The careful attention given to those who came in contact with death addressed two issues. First, the issue of health. This side of the discovery of bacteria and infection, it seems only common sense to stay away from disease and death. But in Numbers, only God knew these things. Thus, His instructions were vital for His people. In addition to the issue of health, however, was the

issue of holiness. By distancing His people from death, God was also distancing them from the Egyptian practices and superstitions of keeping the mummified remains of ancestors in one's home.

Health and holiness belong to any today who choose to keep a distance from the death sin brings, from the disease and decay the superstitions of the world inflict upon those who dabble with them.



20 In Numbers 20, we come to the end of an era. That is, we come to the end of the wilderness wanderings. For thirty-eight-plus years, the people of Israel have been wandering in the wilderness, a story told in chapters 14 through 19. It should not be surprising that thirty-eight years are chronicled in only six chapters, for when we wander around in the wilderness because we didn't step up and go in to the place God called us, not a whole lot happens. Consequently, not a whole lot is recorded for posterity in God's economy. On the other hand, do that which He's told you to do and it will be noteworthy eternally.

Numbers 20:1–5
Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there. And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink.

Listen to what the children of Israel said when they were here at Kadesh thirty-eight years earlier . . .

> And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt?
>
> Numbers 14:2, 3

This sobers me because I realize it is possible for a man or congregation to murmur or complain in the same way we murmured or complained a generation earlier. When we're younger, we think we'll outgrow certain tendencies. "When I'm seventy, I'm going to be a patriarch," we tell ourselves. "My family will highly esteem me. People will want to listen to me. Sure, I'm busy now at age thirty-five or forty. But when I'm seventy, I'll have made a mark spiritually."

Time itself does not make one mature. The only way we will be wise at age seventy is to make wise decisions at age forty. You're making that choice by studying the Word right now, for God has determined that people grow in wisdom by taking heed to His Word chapter by chapter, verse by verse. How I pray that if the Lord tarries, I will not be as foolish at age seventy as I am at age forty-seven. "Lord," I pray, "deepen me." How does that happen? By spending time in, and obeying the Word.

> **Numbers 20:6**
> **And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them.**

Just as the people murmured the same way they had murmured thirty-eight years earlier, Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before God as they had done all along. They have stayed true to the course that is right in God's sight. When the pressure mounted, when the people complained, these men did what we get to do. They fell on their faces before the Lord and in so doing experienced His presence.

> **Numbers 20:7–13**
> **And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak**

ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them.

Without question, Moses was one of the greatest men in history. He had an awesome responsibility. He led three million people out of slavery on a journey towards the land of their destiny. He also had a glorious opportunity, for he heard from the Lord directly (Numbers 12:8). Moses was a uniquely blessed and godly man—but he was still a man. And here we see the humanity of Moses in what would be his greatest sin.

If you were to ask Moses' contemporaries what his great sin was, some would point to his murdering the Egyptian in Exodus 2. Others might point to his failure to tend his own children in Exodus 4. Others might point to his marriage to the Ethiopian woman in Numbers 12. But none of those things disqualified Moses in the way this sin does.

The people were thirsty. They were murmuring. They wanted water to drink. In response, God told Moses to take the rod that had blossomed and budded three chapters earlier and speak to the rock. Moses took the rod but then looked at the people and called them rebels. In the Greek Septuagint, the word translated "rebels" is *moros*—from which we get the word "moron." "You morons, must we fetch you water?" Moses cried as he smote the rock twice.

And although God provided water, He said, "Because of this, Moses, you will not be allowed to go into the Promised Land."

Moses had been leading this congregation for decades. He had put up with the murmuring, the complaining, the sins of three million people. How, then, can it be that God would disqualify him when he's so close to the finish line? What

was the sin Moses committed that disqualified him, that marred his record? The sin was obviously related to anger. We know this not only from the context, but from the Psalms . . .

> They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.
>
> Psalm 106:32, 33

As I read the Bible, I understand that the point of a man's greatest strength is more often than not the point of his greatest failure. Known for his meekness—which the Greeks defined as strength under control—Moses failed when he lost control and lost his temper. Peter was a man known for his courage—as one who walked on water in the midst of a storm, as one who chopped off Malchus' ear. But where did he fail? He failed when he became a coward before a servant girl (Matthew 26:69). Job was a man who was abundantly patient—and yet he was rebuked by the Lord for a lack of patience (Job 40). David was a man after God's heart, a lover of God—and yet he fell because he lusted after a woman (2 Samuel 11). Unlike the others around him, Noah was a righteous man—yet he failed when he got drunk in his tent (Genesis 9:21).

The same is true of us. Where we think we are strongest will be the point of our greatest vulnerability. If you think your marriage is so strong that you will never be in danger, be careful. If you think you have so much integrity that you would never cheat on your taxes, wait a minute. If you think you're so honest you would never tell a lie, beware. Where I'm weak, I'm aware of my vulnerability. I know I've got to pray about it. I know I've got to keep my guard up. But where I think I'm together, I fail to pray and I don't watch as carefully as I ought to. I rely on my own strength, not realizing that my own strength is very limited.

Secondly, Moses' sin included taking credit for what God alone could do. "Must *we* fetch you water?" he said—implying that he was the one meeting the needs of the people. "When you do good works," Jesus said, "let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify *your Father*" (Matthew 5:16).

Thirdly and most importantly, Moses misrepresented the nature and character of the Father. In blowing his top, Moses signaled to the people that God must be angry with them. But He wasn't. Psalm 103 says our Father has

compassion on us, remembering our frames, knowing that we are dust. Our God is a God of incredible mercy, a Father of intense compassion. And because Moses misrepresented Him, he would not be able to lead the congregation into the Land of Promise.

> Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.
>
> 1 Corinthians 10:1–4

> *When the children of Israel began their journey, God told Moses to smite the rock. And out of the rock came water (Exodus 17:6). The Rock is Christ. Christ was smitten once, never to be smitten again. Yes, our sin demanded the Rock be smitten. But He died once for all—for all sin, for all time, for all men. The price has been paid and now Moses was to speak to the rock. The rock was only to be smitten once because Christ's sacrifice was sufficient. But Moses ruined the picture by striking the rock again.*

It's not our job to beat people up or straighten them out. Yes, we are to share the truth with them in love, but anger or bitterness will disqualify us from true leadership, for the wrath of man never works the righteousness of God (James 1:20). Moses no doubt thought, "This is it. It's been almost forty years and these people never stop complaining. Certainly, God, You must have had it up to here with Your people." God's mercy, however, is inexhaustible. It extends all the way to the heavens (Psalm 36:5).

"Your mercies are new every morning," the prophet proclaimed (Lamentations 3:22, 23). Like Moses, we think God surely must be exhausted, upset, angry with us and the rest of the sinners surrounding us. But He's not. His mercy is new every morning, and where sin abounds grace abounds *more* (Romans 5:20).

For the above reasons, Moses could not enter the Promised Land. But God is so merciful and gracious that 1,500 years later, who stands on the Mount of

Transfiguration in the Promised Land? Moses himself (Matthew 17:3). God snuck him in! Oh, the grace and goodness of our God.

Numbers 20:14 (a)
And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom,

Marching towards the Promised Land, the children of Israel come to a point where they must pass through the land of the Edomites.

Numbers 20:14 (b)–17
. . . Thus saith thy brother Israel, Thou knowest all the travail that hath befallen us: How our fathers went down into Egypt, and we have dwelt in Egypt a long time; and the Egyptians vexed us, and our fathers: And when we cried unto the LORD, he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt: and, behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border: Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy country: we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells: we will go by the king's high way, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders.

"We're related to you," Moses said to the king of Edom "—cousins, in a sense. Can we pass through your land?"

Numbers 20:18
And Edom said unto him, Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword.

Moses' request was denied.

Numbers 20:19
And the children of Israel said unto him, We will go by the high way: and if I and my cattle drink of thy water, then I will pay for it: I will only, without doing any thing else, go through on my feet.

"We'll just take the highway," the Israelites said. "We'll stick to the outskirts. And we'll pay for any water we consume."

Numbers 20:20, 21
And he said, Thou shalt not go through. And Edom came out against him with much people, and with a strong hand. Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border: wherefore Israel turned away from him.

The Edomites were the descendants of Esau. If you want to know how evil they were, read the Book of Obadiah. God was justified in saying, "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated" (Romans 9:13), because as you read their history, you realize the Edomites were a hateful, cruel people.

Numbers 20:22
And the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh, and came unto mount Hor.

How were the children of Israel led? By day, it was a cloud. By night, it was a pillar of fire that guided them. Here, however, it seems as though Moses takes his cue not from the direction of God but from the threat of the Edomites. The same thing can happen to us. People can say, "No. You can't do that"—even though you know in your heart that God has told you to do it. And, as it was for Moses, the question at that time is singular: Am I going to obey God—or fear man?

Numbers 20:23, 24 (a)
And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, Aaron shall be gathered unto his people . . .

Aaron was going to die; he was going to be gathered unto his people. So, unless we're raptured first, we will be gathered to our people. The question is, who are our people? Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples: By your love one to another" (John 13:35). John said we would know if we were truly born again by our love for the brethren (1 John 3:14). Therefore if a person says he can't stand Christians, that he has no use for the

church, he must take another look at his salvation because he won't be gathered into the company of believers when he dies.

Numbers 20:24 (b)–29
. . . for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto mount Hor: And strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there. And Moses did as the LORD commanded: and they went up into mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there in the top of the mount: and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount. And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel.

The Lord takes Aaron home, and His work goes on through Eleazar.

I'm so glad our High Priest never changes (Hebrews 13:8). Jesus is our Rock. He doesn't change from generation to generation. Therefore, I know the same Lord who has been so good to me will be good to my children and their children. Unlike Aaron, our great High Priest *ever liveth* to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25).



21 Numbers 21:1, 2

And when king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south, heard tell that Israel came by the way of the spies; then he fought against Israel, and took some of them prisoners. And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities.

With the Promised Land in sight, the children of Israel are attacked. And when some of their number are taken captive, they make a vow to the Lord, saying, "If You will give us victory over those who captured our people, we'll destroy the pagan cities."

Numbers 21:3
And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah.

Hormah means "Complete destruction." The Lord did indeed give victory to the Israelites. I suggest to you that whenever we say, "That which is pagan in my life—be it blatant sin or subtle attitudes—is going to be destroyed because I want to see my daughter, my neighbor, or my coworker set free from the captivity of sin," the Lord hearkens unto us as well.

Numbers 21:4
And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.

I suggest that it was when the people circled around Edom rather than facing the king of Edom and saying, "This is the direction God is guiding us; this is the way He's leading us; this is what we're going to do," that they became discouraged. I'm discovering in my own walk that when I make concessions to the king of Edom rather than following the Lord's leading, when I say, "I don't want to hassle this," or, "I don't want to confront that situation," discouragement is the end result.

Numbers 21:5
And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.

Deuteronomy 8:4 tells us that in all the years of the wilderness wandering, the feet of the Israelites didn't swell—which is one indication of a well-balanced diet. Thus, they were tired of the very food that was perfect for them.

Numbers 21:6 (a)
And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people . . .

Some say the snakes were called fiery snakes because of their brilliant colors. Much more likely, however, they were called fiery because of the burning sensation caused by their deadly poison.

Numbers 21:6 (b)
. . . and much people of Israel died.

Why would it be here—only weeks away from their entering the Promised Land—that God would have poisonous serpents bite His people? Because if they're not taught in the wilderness, they will be distraught in the Land of Promise. God is willing to go to great extremes to get us to understand that if we're not happy today, we'll not be happy tomorrow regardless of what comes our way or where we might be. Happiness is an inside job.

God allows His children to feel a lot of pain and even to die in order that they might see and understand that He is with them, that He is enough for them, that He will take care of them. If they don't learn to quit their complaining here, they'll not experience it even in the Land of Promise.

How about you? Has it been a week of complaining? Have you heard yourself say, "This is hard right now, but as soon as I get the job or as soon as I retire, as soon as she marries me or as soon as my wife leaves me, as soon as we have kids or as soon as the kids move out, I'll be happy."

If you're not happy today, you'll not be happy tomorrow unless you get to the root issue. We get so deceived about this. We think we're going to be happy "just as soon as"—but "just as soon as" never comes.

Numbers 21:7, 8 (a)
Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole . . .

When the people repented and asked Moses to pray that the Lord would remove the fiery snakes, God told him to make a snake and fasten it to a pole. The Hebrew word translated "pole" is *nec* and refers to what a flag would fly from—or the cross-shaped mast to which a sail on a ship would be attached.

Numbers 21:8 (b), 9
. . . and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

What does this mean? Jesus explained it perfectly . . .

"Master, I know no man can do the works You do except God be with Him," Nicodemus said to Him.

"Truly, I say unto you, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," Jesus answered as if to say, "Let's not talk about miracles, Nicodemus. I want to get to the root: You must be born again."

"Born again?" Nicodemus asked. "Can a man enter into his mother's womb a second time?"

"That which is born of flesh is flesh, but that which is born of spirit is spirit," Jesus said. And then He reached back to this story in Numbers 21 when He said, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3).

Jesus likens Himself to the serpent—the very creature that caused Eve to question God's goodness in the Garden of Eden and thereby plunged all mankind into sin, because He who knew no sin was made sin that we might be made the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Here in Numbers 21, there were no doubt those who said, "You're telling me all I have to do to be healed is look at a pole and see a brass snake? What good will that do? I need some anti-venom." Or, "If I can get the right prescription, I can get over this infection." And, because of their stubbornness, they would die unnecessarily.

There are people today who will not look to the One who hung on the pole of the Cross. "All I need is some Prozac," they say, "or a beer," or "a hot fudge sundae. All I need is something to fill up the hole in my soul."

God said the only thing we must do is to realize we've been bitten and look to the Serpent on the Cross. The one who does so will be made whole. It's just that simple.

> Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.
>
> Isaiah 45:22

We don't have to climb the pole and hang there with Him. We don't have to do something for Him. We just have to look to Him. "Even as ye have received Christ, so walk in Him," Paul would write (Colossians 2:6). We looked to Him when we were saved. And that's what we get to do each and every day.

> **Numbers 21:10–14**
> **And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in Oboth. And they journeyed from Oboth, and pitched at Ijeabarim, in the wilderness which is before Moab, toward the sunrising. From thence they removed, and pitched in the valley of Zared. From thence they removed, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, which is in the wilderness that cometh out of the coasts of the Amorites: for Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the LORD, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon,**

Because God evidently did not think it necessary that we have the book of the wars of the Lord, it was not preserved in the same way as were the other books of our Bible.

> **Numbers 21:15–18**
> **And at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar, and lieth upon the border of Moab. And from thence they went to Beer: that is the well whereof the LORD spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water. Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it: The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by the direction of the lawgiver, with their staves. And from the wilderness they went to Mattanah:**

The children of Israel sang and water gushed forth. That's always the way it is. When we come to dry times and difficult days in our pilgrimage, we can either choose to murmur or to make music.

> Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD.
>
> Isaiah 54:1

"Are you barren?" the Lord asks you and me. "I don't want you to grumble about your situation. I want you to sing out." An overriding principle seen throughout the Word is that when people are in barren conditions, dry times, or locked in jail cells, power and blessing are released when they choose not to murmur but to praise the Lord. The children of Israel did this. Water gushed forth. And they moved on.

> **Numbers 21:19–26**
> **And from Mattanah to Nahaliel: and from Nahaliel to Bamoth: And from Bamoth in the valley, that is in the country of Moab, to the top of Pisgah, which looketh toward Jeshimon. And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, Let me pass through thy land: we will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well: but we will go along by the king's high way, until we be past thy borders. And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his border: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness: and he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel. And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon unto Jabbok, even unto the children of Ammon: for the border of the children of Ammon was strong. And Israel took all these cities: and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all the villages thereof. For Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and taken all his land out of his hand, even unto Arnon.**

Rather than giving in to the king of the Amorites as they had done to the king of Edom, Moses said, "No more backing away. No more compromise. No more trying to appease people. We're going to stay true to the Word of God." And in so doing, they possessed the land.

Numbers 21:27–30
Wherefore they that speak in proverbs say, Come into Heshbon, let the city of Sihon be built and prepared: For there is a fire gone out of Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon: it hath consumed Ar of Moab, and the lords of the high places of Arnon. Woe to thee, Moab! thou art undone, O people of Chemosh: he hath given his sons that escaped, and his daughters, into captivity unto Sihon king of the Amorites. We have shot at them; Heshbon is perished even unto Dibon, and we have laid them waste even unto Nophah, which reacheth unto Medeba.

Sung previously by the Amorites when they beat the Moabites in battle, this was the Amorite victory song, their number one hit. And when the Israelites beat the Amorites, they used it to taunt the Amorites themselves. In other words, they gave the world's song a whole new meaning. I believe this is what we are to do as well. We're to take the stuff the world has used and turn it around for God's glory.

Numbers 21:31–34 (a)
Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites. And Moses sent to spy out Jaazer, and they took the villages thereof, and drove out the Amorites that were there. And they turned and went up by the way of Bashan: and Og the king of Bashan went out against them, he, and all his people, to the battle at Edrei. And the LORD said unto Moses, Fear him not . . .

Even though Og was a man of gigantic stature who ruled over sixty separate communities, God said, "Fear him not."

Numbers 21:34 (b), 35
. . . for I have delivered him into thy hand, and all his people, and his land; and thou shalt do to him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon. So they smote him, and his sons, and all his people, until there was none left him alive: and they possessed his land.

Why were the Israelites victorious? Because the sword was used (v. 24), the song was sung (v. 27), and the Spirit was heard (v. 34). That is, backing down no more, they obeyed God's Word, hijacked the world's song for God's glory, listened to the Spirit saying, "Fear not"—and continued on . . .



22 We meet a man in this chapter who I can't figure out. His name is Balaam, and he's talked about in the Books of Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Nehemiah, Micah, Peter, Jude, and Revelation. In fact, he's talked about much more than is Mary, the mother of Jesus—and yet he remains a mystery . . .

Numbers 22:1–4
And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan by Jericho. And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel. And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time.

Having heard reports of what the Israelites did to the Amorites, Balak, king of Moab, was filled with fear as he saw the children of Israel camped in his backyard.

Numbers 22:5 (a)
He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor . . .

Also having heard that the people whom a prophet named Balaam blessed were blessed, and those he cursed were cursed, Balak sent messengers to talk with him.

Numbers 22:5 (b), 6
. . . to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, say ing, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over

against me: Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.

Balaam was a prophet of the Lord. He heard from the Lord—and yet he didn't live with the people of the Lord.

Numbers 22:7 (a)
And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand . . .

To better his odds against Israel, Balak forms an alliance with the Midianites.

Numbers 22:7 (b)
. . . and they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak.

"Come and curse the Israelites," the elders of Moab and Midian say to Balaam.

Numbers 22:8
And he said unto them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the LORD shall speak unto me: and the princes of Moab abode with Balaam.

"Stay here tonight," Balaam said, "and I'll ask the Lord if I can go with you."

Numbers 22:9–12
And God came unto Balaam, and said, What men are these with thee? And Balaam said unto God, Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, hath sent unto me, saying, Behold, there is a people come out of Egypt, which covereth the face of the earth: come now, curse me them; peradventure I shall be able to overcome them, and drive

them out. And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.

God's word to Balaam was singular. It was simple and definitive. It was "No."

Numbers 22:13–17
And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, Get you into your land: for the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you. And the princes of Moab rose up, and they went unto Balak, and said, Balaam refuseth to come with us. And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable than they. And they came to Balaam, and said to him, Thus saith Balak the son of Zippor, Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me: For I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people.

Refusing to take "No" for an answer, Balak sent a group of emissaries to Balaam more impressive than the first, who told Balaam he would be promoted if he cursed the Israelites.

Numbers 22:18, 19
And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, if Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more. Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more.

"Even if Balak gave me a house full of silver and gold, I can't go with you," said Balaam. "But stay here tonight and I'll see what the Lord says." Balaam already knew the heart of the Lord, for His word had already been given. But this prophet saw a profit and wanted to see if God would change His mind.

"Honey," said the preacher, "we just got an invitation to go to a bigger church in a bigger city with a bigger salary. So I'm going to go upstairs to pray about it."

"Do you want me to pray with you?" asked his wife.

"No," the preacher answered. "You stay down here and start packing."

Such a man was Balaam.

Numbers 22:20–22 (a)
And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do. And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. And God's anger was kindled because he went . . .

Why was God's anger kindled? Hadn't He told Balaam to go? When, like Balaam, we beg and insist on our own way, God might say, "Okay." But it's not necessarily His plan or His will.

If you're a parent, you will sometimes let your kids go the way they insist on going—even though you know there will be needless pain and heartache down the road. Sometimes God will do the same with His children. That's why the "Name It and Claim It" movement is so frightening to me. I don't want to name and claim anything God knows isn't best for me. I want to pray like Jesus: "Father, not My will but Thine be done."

Numbers 22:22 (b)
. . . and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him.

The "angel of the Lord" refers to a *Christophany*—an appearance of Jesus before He came as the Babe of Bethlehem.

Numbers 22:22 (c), 23 (a)
. . . Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field . . .

Sometimes donkeys see what prophets miss. Maybe you look at your husband or wife, your mom or dad, your coach or boss as a donkey. But sometimes that "donkey" sees things you never would.

Numbers 22:23 (b)–25
. . . and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. But the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again.

More concerned about his foot than about his soul, Balaam hits the donkey a second time.

Numbers 22:26–30
And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff. And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee. And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? Was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay.

To me, more surprising than the donkey speaking to Balaam is Balaam answering the donkey as if it were a normal occurrence.

Numbers 22:31–35
Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face. And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? Behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me: And the ass saw me, and turned from me

these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive. And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again. And the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam, Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

At last, Balaam sees what his donkey saw all along. He sees the Lord.

Numbers 22:36–41
And when Balak heard that Balaam was come, he went out to meet him unto a city of Moab, which is in the border of Arnon, which is in the utmost coast. And Balak said unto Balaam, Did I not earnestly send unto thee to call thee? wherefore camest thou not unto me? Am I not able indeed to promote thee to honour? And Balaam said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say any thing? The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak. And Balaam went with Balak, and they came unto Kirjath-huzoth. And Balak offered oxen and sheep, and sent to Balaam, and to the princes that were with him. And it came to pass on the morrow, that Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into the high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost part of the people.

Giving Balaam a bird's eye view of the children of Israel would prove to be a big mistake for Balak . . .



23

Numbers 23:1–5
And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven oxen and seven rams. And Balak did as Balaam had spoken; and Balak and Balaam offered on every altar a bullock and a ram. And Balaam said unto Balak, Stand by thy burnt offering, and I will go: peradventure the LORD will come to meet me: and whatsoever he sheweth me I will tell thee. And he went to an high place. And God met Balaam: and

he said unto him, I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered upon every altar a bullock and a ram. And the LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, Return unto Balak, and thus thou shalt speak.

As outlined in Numbers 2, the children of Israel camped in the configuration of a cross.

> **Numbers 23:6–10**
> **And he returned unto him, and, lo, he stood by his burnt sacrifice, he, and all the princes of Moab. And he took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel. How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!**

Instead of a curse upon the children of Israel, a blessing comes out of Balaam's mouth.

> **Numbers 23:11–15**
> **And Balak said unto Balaam, What hast thou done unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast blessed them altogether. And he answered and said, Must I not take heed to speak that which the LORD hath put in my mouth? And Balak said unto him, Come, I pray thee, with me unto another place, from whence thou mayest see them: thou shalt see but the utmost part of them, and shalt not see them all: and curse me them from thence. And he brought him into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar. And he said unto Balak, Stand here by thy burnt offering, while I meet the LORD yonder.**

Infuriated, Balak takes Balaam to another vantage point. And yet it is still the shape of a cross Balaam sees as he looks down upon the children of Israel.

Numbers 23:16–24
And the LORD met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, Go again unto Balak, and say thus. And when he came to him, behold, he stood by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab with him. And Balak said unto him, What hath the LORD spoken? And he took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn. Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought! Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain.

Once again, Balaam could do nothing other than bless Israel.

Numbers 23:25–30
And Balak said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all. But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, Told not I thee, saying, All that the LORD speaketh, that I must do? And Balak said unto Balaam, Come, I pray thee, I will bring thee unto another place; peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence. And Balak brought Balaam unto the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon. And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven bullocks and seven rams. And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar.

With the count two to zero, Balak takes Balaam up yet another mountain . . .



24 Numbers 24:1–9

And when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him. And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the LORD hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows. He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee.

Balaam opens his mouth a third time to curse the children of Israel, and, again, all that comes out is a blessing—a blessing uniquely and specifically fulfilled 1,500 years later in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Numbers 24:10, 11 (a)
And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together: and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times. Therefore now flee thou to thy place:

The third time he blessed the children of Israel, in Balak's scorebook, Balaam struck out.

Numbers 24:11 (b)–17 (a)

. . . I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the LORD hath kept thee back from honour. And Balaam said unto Balak, Spake I not also to thy messengers which thou sentest unto me, saying, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the LORD, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the LORD saith, that will I speak? And now, behold, I go unto my people: come therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days. And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: He hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel . . .

This reference to the Star of Jacob was no doubt the verse that caused the wise men to recognize the star in the East and to follow it to the stable in Bethlehem wherein they indeed found the King of kings.

Numbers 24:17 (b), 18

. . . and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly.

Balaam goes on to talk about how Israel will overcome both Edom and Moab (Psalm 108:9).

Numbers 24:19, 20

Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city. And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable, and said, Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever.

Amalek, the oldest and most powerful nation in Balaam's time, was exterminated in the days of Hezekiah (1 Chronicles 4:41–43).

Numbers 24:21, 22
And he looked on the Kenites, and took up his parable, and said, Strong is thy dwellingplace, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock. Nevertheless the Kenite shall be wasted, until Asshur shall carry thee away captive.

Although they thought they were invincible in the cliffs of En-gedi, the Kenites would be carried away captive by the Assyrians (1 Chronicles 2:55).

Numbers 24:23, 24
And he took up his parable, and said, Alas, who shall live when God doeth this! And ships shall come from the coast of Chittim, and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber, and he also shall perish for ever.

The Assyrians would be overthrown by both the Greeks and the Romans.

Numbers 24:25
And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place: and Balak also went his way.

Three times Balaam is used in Scripture as an example of what not to be. In 2 Peter 2:15, he's mentioned as one who loved the wages of unrighteousness. That is, he was a man given to coveting. In Jude 11, we read of the error of Balaam—his misunderstanding, because he failed to factor the Cross into the equation, that God wanted to curse His people for their rebelliousness. The third time he is mentioned is with regard to the doctrine of Balaam, which is compromise. In Revelation 2, Jesus brings up his name in connection with the stumbling block he placed in Israel's path. Numbers 31 tells us that, knowing he couldn't curse God's people, Balaam told Balak he could get them to bring a curse on themselves by having his women seduce the Jewish men, incorporating idol worship in their seduction.

Did Balak take Balaam up on his advice? Read on . . .



25

Numbers 25:1
And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit

whoredom with the daughters of Moab.

Evidently, Balaam's advice to Balak to have his women seduce the Israelite men was indeed followed.

Numbers 25:2, 3 (a)
And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor . . .

Baal worship—which included sexual perversion—was practiced at Mt. Peor.

Numbers 25:3 (b)
. . . and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.

The Hebrew word translated "anger" literally refers to the reddening of the nose. And it implies not only that the Lord was angry to the point that His face was red, but also that His face was red because of crying, because of a broken heart. Thus, while the Lord's face was flushed, so to speak, with anger, it's equally true that His heart was broken as He saw what His children were doing.

Numbers 25:4
And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel.

"Take the leaders—those who should know better, those who should have stopped this from happening, but didn't do so, those who went along with it, who didn't stand against it—and hang them in the sun as a spectacle, as a lesson for everyone."

Numbers 25:5
And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baal-peor.

Moses ordered the judges of Israel to slay every man caught up in immorality, every man seduced by the Moabite and Midianite women.

Numbers 25:6
And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

The anger of the Lord is kindled, His heart broken. The leaders are hung. The sinners are slain. Blood is flowing. People are weeping—and in the midst of it all, one man has the audacity to bring a Midianite woman to the very door of the tabernacle.

Numbers 25:7, 8
And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand; And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel.

Phineas, the grandson of Aaron, thrusts a javelin through both the Israelite man and the Midianite woman.

Numbers 25:9–13
And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: And he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel.

Phineas and his children would be blessed because he dealt with the sin which was sweeping through the congregation—a promise so sure, it would be repeated in Psalm 106:30, 31.

Numbers 25:14, 15
Now the name of the Israelite that was slain, even that was slain with the Midianitish woman, was Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a chief house among the Simeonites. And the name of the Midianitish woman that was slain was Cozbi, the daughter of Zur; he was head over a people, and of a chief house in Midian.

Zimri, whose name means "Remember him," who came from an upstanding family, walked into sin with *Cozbi,* whose name means "Deception."

Numbers 25:16–18
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Vex the Midianites, and smite them: For they vex you with their wiles, wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a prince of Midian, their sister, which was slain in the day of the plague for Peor's sake.

Although this account is graphic and gory, it's necessary for in Numbers 22—24, encamped in the cross, the children of Israel couldn't be cursed. Because of Jesus' finished work on the Cross of Calvary, we can't be cursed because there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

And yet we see the very people who were blessed in chapters 22 through 24 cursed in chapter 25 because of the sin they brought upon themselves.

When I first moved to Oregon, we lived out in the country. And every summer, the ditches which surrounded our property would be filled with water to flood-irrigate the fields. But before the ditches could be filled with water, our landlady would hire a crew of guys to clean them—knowing that the blackberry bushes, old pieces of timber, and rusted car parts which accumulated in them every winter would restrict the flow of water. It wasn't the water master who said, "I'm going to inspect your ditches and see how clean they are for that will

determine how much water I'll send." No, the water master opened the spigot fully. But if the ditches were full of debris, the debris itself would restrict the flow of water to the fields.

God is not saying, "Your righteousness will determine how much I bless you." No, God opens the spigot and says, "You're in the Cross. Here comes the blessing." The problem is, if there are blackberry bushes, old tires, and timber in my pipeline, the flow through me and to me is restricted. It's not God. It's my own carnality that clogs the pipe.

What do I have to do to get God to bless my family, my marriage? God has already released blessings for generations to come. The only question is, do I get the point? Will I, like Phinehas, grab the spear? Will I clean my ditch?

Of Jesus it was said, "And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for there went virtue out of Him" (Luke 6:19). Virtue speaks of both purity and power. Because Jesus was pure, because He had an "open ditch," power flowed from Him in such a way that people who even touched the hem of His robe were helped, healed, set free (Matthew 14:36).

If those around you aren't interested in spiritual things, maybe it's because virtue is not flowing from you. And maybe virtue isn't flowing from you because your ditch is clogged by the timber of compromise, the blackberry vine of carnality. Whatever Midianite God is drawing your attention to right now, pierce it through. Kill it. Whether it be an attitude or an activity, a habit or a tendency, deal it a death blow and let God's blessings flow. He's already opened the spigot. The blessings have already been sent. The only question is, Will you clear the ditch and let the blessings of God flood you and bless your family?



26 Numbers 26:1–4

And it came to pass after the plague, that the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying, Take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, throughout their father's house, all that are able to go to war in Israel. And Moses and Eleazar the priest spake with them in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho, saying, Take the sum of the people, from

twenty years old and upward; as the LORD commanded Moses and the children of Israel, which went forth out of the land of Egypt.

In Numbers 1, verses 1 through 3, the Lord commanded Moses to number all the males in the congregation twenty years and older. Here, twenty-five chapters and nearly forty years later, he's told to number them again for the two-fold purpose of warfare and welfare. On the brink of entering the Promised Land, it was necessary that the Israelites know the size of their army for the inevitable battles facing them. It was also vital to know the size of each tribe in order that the Land be divided equitably among them.

In the result of the census that comprises the next forty-six verses, I draw your attention to the following insertion. . . .

Numbers 26:9, 10
And the sons of Eliab; Nemuel, and Dathan, and Abiram. This is that Dathan and Abiram, which were famous in the congregation, who strove against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korah, when they strove against the LORD: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up together with Korah, when that company died, what time the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men: and they became a sign.

The names of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram appear as if to underscore and to remind the people of the tragic results of rebellion.

Numbers 26:11
Notwithstanding the children of Korah died not.

Korah's kids didn't die in the plague. They were not destined to be dysfunctional because their dad was a rebel. They were not burned up or wiped out. Instead, they went on to become worship leaders in the congregation, appearing no less than eleven times in the Psalms.

Numbers 26:51
These were the numbered of the children of Israel, six hundred thousand and a thousand seven hundred and thirty.

Forty years earlier, Jewish males twenty years and older had numbered 605,550. Here, their number is 601,730—a difference of 1,820. Manasseh gained 20,500. Simeon, however lost 37,000. Why did Simeon lose so many men? According to Jewish scholars, it was because the man who took the Midianite woman to the door of the tabernacle was from the tribe of Simeon (Numbers 25), his sin cost his entire tribe.

Numbers 26:52–54
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Unto these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names. To many thou shalt give the more inheritance, and to few thou shalt give the less inheritance: to every one shall his inheritance be given according to those that were numbered of him.

The bigger tribes would get the bigger piece of property. Jesus talked about this when He said, "To those who have, more shall be given. To those who have not, what they have shall be taken from them" (Luke 19:26). In other words, we will be given more if we do well with that which God has entrusted to us. And we will lose what He gives us if we fail to tend it properly.

Numbers 26:55, 56
Notwithstanding the land shall be divided by lot: according to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit. According to the lot shall the possession thereof be divided between many and few.

Although the size of the tribe would determine the size of the property given them, the location of the property would be determined by lot, by "drawing straws."

I find the combination of verses 53 to 54, and 55 to 56 fascinating because in the former we see Jesus' parable of the pounds (Luke 19) in which servants were rewarded according to what they did with an equal number of pounds given to each of them, while in the latter, we see Jesus' parable of the talents (Matthew 25), in which the servants were rewarded according to what they did with differing amounts given sovereignly to them. Thus, man's free will and God's sovereignty both enter into the equation.

Numbers 26:57 (a)
And these are they that were numbered of the Levites . . .

The Levites were not mentioned previously because they were in a different category completely. They did not have a portion of the land given to them because they were to serve in the tabernacle.

Numbers 26:60, 61
And unto Aaron was born Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. And Nadab and Abihu died, when they offered strange fire before the LORD.

After Dathan and Abiram, as well as Korah, were mentioned earlier, now we see Nadab and Abihu. In fact, their story is seen four times in the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers—not because God forgot He already told it, but because He wants us to learn well the lesson that the only fire which will keep us burning brightly for Him is the fire which comes from the altar, the finished work of the Cross of Calvary.

Numbers 26:63, 64
These are they that were numbered by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who numbered the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho. But among these there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest numbered, when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai.

Six hundred one thousand, seven hundred and twenty eight of the original 601,730 had died in the wilderness, leaving only two to enter the Promised Land . . .

Numbers 26:65
For the LORD had said of them, They shall surely die in the wilderness. And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

In addition to Nadab and Abihu, and Dathan and Abiram, we see a third pair here in Numbers 26: Joshua and Caleb. Whereas the first two men presumed

upon God and the second two rebelled against God, the third two simply believed God—and in so doing were able to enter the Promised Land.



27 **Numbers 27:1, 2 (a)**

Then came the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph: and these are the names of his daughters; Mahlah, Noah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah. And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation . . .

Where did the daughters of Zelophehad go with their problem? To the place where sacrifices were being offered, where incense was ascending, where spiritual life was happening—to the door of the tabernacle. When we face challenges, have questions, need prayer, if we come to the place where the Lord is honored and where His people are gathered, we'll receive counsel vastly different than that which we would receive in a clinical setting apart from Him. Through the body of Christ, we'll receive living, vibrant counsel from our living, vibrant Lord.

Numbers 27:2 (b)–4

. . . saying, Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not in the company of them that gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah; but died in his own sin, and had no sons. Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father.

Because their father had died without a son, Zelophehad's five daughters asked for the possession which would have been given to the male in their family had there been one.

Numbers 27:5

And Moses brought their cause before the LORD.

After forty years, you'd think Moses would have all the answers. He doesn't. Moses says Instead, "That's a tough one. I need to pray." I like this a whole lot because it shows me that it's not what we know that counts. It's who we know. And Moses knew the Lord.

Numbers 27:6, 7 (a)
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, The daughters of Zelophehad speak right . . .

In saying that the daughters of Zelophehad were right, is the Lord implying that He neglected to address the question of a lack of a male inheritor, that He simply forgot to put it in the Law? Obviously not. I believe the Lord purposely leaves some things unsaid in the Word in order that we might go to Him for further instruction.

When I was younger, I basically had as my trinity God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Bible. I didn't understand that the real key to vibrant Christianity, to a radical faith, lies in the New Covenant—where the Lord says, "I will write My will upon the table of your heart" (Jeremiah 31).

Why was it that the whole known world was impacted, turned upside down by a group of believers who didn't have a single page of the New Testament? It was because, although they didn't have the Gospel of Luke or the epistle to the Romans, they knew how to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. And, as a result, miracles happened and blessings flowed.

We will be the most radical group of the believers in the world to the degree that, we say, "Lord, lead me today. Write Your will upon my heart; confirm it by Your Word. And what You tell me, I will do."

Numbers 27:7 (b)–11
. . . thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them. And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter. And if he have no daughter, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his brethren. And if he have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his father's brethren. And if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he

shall possess it: and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the LORD commanded Moses.

If a man didn't have a son, the inheritance was to go to his daughters. Such was the Word of the Lord to Moses. This would have been shocking in the ears of any person at that time in history, unbelievable in an age in which women had no more rights than cattle. As Galatians 3:28 says, in Christ there is neither male nor female. He's an "Equal Opportunity" Savior. He deals with us all equally. Without question, Jesus Christ is women's greatest Friend, for wherever the gospel has gone, women's rights have flourished, while in every culture which has rejected Christianity, women are still treated as second-class citizens.

Numbers 27:12
And the LORD said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel.

Mount Abarim is actually a mountain range fifty miles in length, the highest point being Mount Nebo, also called Mount Pisgah.

Numbers 27:13, 14
And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered. For ye rebelled against my commandment in the desert of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify me at the water before their eyes: that is the water of Meribah in Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.

"Your time is about up," God says to His friend, Moses. "It is time for you to be gathered to your people, to be taken to heaven. But first I want you to climb Mt. Nebo, where I will show you the Promised Land."

In this, we see both the grace and the discipline of God. God's grace allowed Moses to view the entire Promised Land. But because he had sinned in misrepresenting God to the people as he struck the rock at Meribah (Numbers 20:11), he would not be able to enter the Land.

The older I get, the more I realize that, although God is indeed gracious and full of mercy, a Father who is inexpressibly patient and kind, there are definite, absolute repercussions of sin. This is why the Bible says the fear of the Lord is

the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). We ought to walk in the fear of God —not afraid of Him, but afraid of the repercussions of our sin.

Numbers 27:15–17
And Moses spake unto the LORD, saying, Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd.

Rather than arguing about the Lord's decision, Moses is concerned about his congregation. He doesn't want the people to be as a sheep without a shepherd—a phrase used by both Matthew and Mark to describe how Jesus felt when He saw the multitudes and was moved with compassion (Matthew 9:36; Mark 6:34).

Numbers 27:18–23
And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the chil dren of Israel with him, even all the congregation. And Moses did as the LORD commanded him: and he took Joshua, and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation: And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.

Called a minister, or servant, of Moses (Joshua 1:1), Joshua played second fiddle to Moses. For forty years, he simply served as number two, faithful in whatever he was to do. "Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful," Paul declared (1 Corinthians 4:2). Many want to be men of faith. But rarer and perhaps more important is to be a faithful man. Joshua was just that.

And in due season, after forty years of faithfulness, God tapped him on the shoulder.

God does that with us, too. It might take forty years, but if we faithfully plug away at what God has called us to do—big or small, noticed or unnoticed—He will tap us on the shoulder one day and say, "You've served faithfully. Now is the time for greater ministry."



28 Chapters 28 and 29 are basically a reiteration of what we saw in the Book of Leviticus, dealing with the sacrifices, holy days, and festivals. Why are these laws repeated here? Because this is a new generation. And every generation must be instructed and reminded.

> **Numbers 28:1, 2**
> **And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, My offering, and my bread for my sacrifices made by fire, for a sweet savour unto me, shall ye observe to offer unto me in their due season.**

It's interesting that the Lord calls the savor of the sacrifices sweet because if you have ever smelled a burning bull or cow—the hide, the hair, the entire animal, as would be the case in the burnt offering—the odor is anything but sweet. Yet whenever the flesh is placed upon the altar, it's always sweet to the Father. The flesh speaks of our inclination towards self. Thus, there is nothing sweeter to God than when I lay my flesh on the altar and let it burn. It's sweet to Him for two reasons . . .

First, because it sets me free. God knows that sin is only pleasurable for a season (Hebrews 11:25). Consequently, whenever He smells the burning of the flesh it's sweet to Him because He knows the one making such an offering is set free. "To be carnally, or fleshly, minded is death," Paul writes. "But to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (see Romans 8:6). Do you want to really live, to have abundant peace? Then put your flesh on the altar and be set free.

Putting my flesh on the altar not only sets me free, but it lets me see. It lets me see God. Moses was one who desperately desired to see God. "If Your Presence doesn't go with me," he said, "I don't want to go on this journey" (see

Exodus 33:15). In other words, "I don't want Your hand. I want Your face. I don't want something from You, Lord. I just want You."

Whether or not you are aware of it, what we all crave is the face of God. We often think, however, that we want His hand, as is evidenced by our prayers. "Give me this, Lord. Touch that. Anoint the other. Open this door. Make it happen. My business is in trouble. My kids need Your touch. I'm not feeling very well," we pray. We seek what God gives rather than who He is. And the problem is, once we get whatever is in His hand, it's not enough. It doesn't do what we thought it would do—be it in ministry, family, or any other arena. There's something even more important than anointing. It's called the presence of God.

Second Chronicles 7 says that when the presence of God filled the temple, the priests couldn't even stand in ministry because of it. "Lord," we say, "we want Your presence, Your chabod in our congregation and in our families."

"Are you sure?" asks God, "because no one can see My face and live. You've got to die" (see Exodus 33:20).

Therefore, to the degree we die to ourselves is the degree to which we will experience God's glory and presence, the degree to which we will see His face.

Numbers 28:3–8

And thou shalt say unto them, This is the offering made by fire which ye shall offer unto the LORD; two lambs of the first year without spot day by day, for a continual burnt offering. The one lamb shalt thou offer in the morning, and the other lamb shalt thou offer at even; and a tenth part of an ephah of flour for a meat offering, mingled with the fourth part of an hin of beaten oil. It is a continual burnt offering, which was ordained in mount Sinai for a sweet savour, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD. And the drink offering thereof shall be the fourth part of an hin for the one lamb: in the holy place shalt thou cause the strong wine to be poured unto the LORD for a drink offering. And the other lamb shalt thou offer at even: as the meat offering of the morning, and as the drink offering thereof, thou shalt offer it, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.

Every day, a lamb was to be offered both morning and evening. Note the word "continual"—a word that appears seventeen times in the Book of

Numbers, a word speaks of consistency.

Numbers 28:9, 10
And on the sabbath day two lambs of the first year without spot, and two tenth deals of flour for a meat offering, mingled with oil, and the drink offering thereof: This is the burnt offering of every sabbath, beside the continual burnt offering, and his drink offering.

On the Sabbath, the sacrifice doubled to two lambs.

Numbers 28:11–15
And in the beginnings of your months ye shall offer a burnt offering unto the LORD; two young bullocks, and one ram, seven lambs of the first year without spot; and three tenth deals of flour for a meat offering, mingled with oil, for one bullock; and two tenth deals of flour for a meat offering, mingled with oil, for one ram; and a several tenth deal of flour mingled with oil for a meat offering unto one lamb; for a burnt offering of a sweet savour, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD. And their drink offerings shall be half an hin of wine unto a bullock, and the third part of an hin unto a ram, and a fourth part of an hin unto a lamb: this is the burnt offering of every month throughout the months of the year. And one kid of the goats for a sin offering unto the LORD shall be offered, beside the continual burnt offering, and his drink offering.

At the beginning of each month, the sacrifice increased to two bullocks, one ram, and seven lambs.

Numbers 28:16
And in the fourteenth day of the first month is the passover of the LORD.

Passover was to be commemorated annually with the sacrifice of a lamb for each household.

Numbers 28:17–25

And in the fifteenth day of this month is the feast: seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten. In the first day shall be an holy convocation; ye shall do no manner of servile work therein: But ye shall offer a sacrifice made by fire for a burnt offering unto the LORD; two young bullocks, and one ram, and seven lambs of the first year: they shall be unto you without blemish: And their meat offering shall be of flour mingled with oil: three tenth deals shall ye offer for a bullock, and two tenth deals for a ram; a several tenth deal shalt thou offer for every lamb, throughout the seven lambs: And one goat for a sin offering, to make an atonement for you. Ye shall offer these beside the burnt offering in the morning, which is for a continual burnt offering. After this manner ye shall offer daily, throughout the seven days, the meat of the sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD: it shall be offered beside the continual burnt offering, and his drink offering. And on the seventh day ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work.

As seen in Leviticus 23, the Feast of Unleavened Bread speaks of the burial of Christ.

Numbers 28:26–31
Also in the day of the firstfruits, when ye bring a new meat offering unto the LORD, after your weeks be out, ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work: But ye shall offer the burnt offering for a sweet savour unto the LORD; two young bullocks, one ram, seven lambs of the first year; And their meat offering of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals unto one bullock, two tenth deals unto one ram, A several tenth deal unto one lamb, throughout the seven lambs; And one kid of the goats, to make an atonement for you. Ye shall offer them beside the continual burnt offering, and his meat offering, (they shall be unto you without blemish) and their drink offerings.

Again, as seen in Leviticus 23, I believe the Feast of Firstfruits speaks of Jesus' Resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20).



29 **Numbers 29:1–6**

And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work: it is a day of blowing the trumpets unto you. And ye shall offer a burnt offering for a sweet savour unto the LORD; one young bullock, one ram, and seven lambs of the first year without blemish: And their meat offering shall be of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals for a bullock, and two tenth deals for a ram, And one tenth deal for one lamb, throughout the seven lambs: And one kid of the goats for a sin offering, to make an atonement for you: Beside the burnt offering of the month, and his meat offering, and the daily burnt offering, and his meat offering, and their drink offerings, according unto their manner, for a sweet savour, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD.

Following the Feast of Firstfruits, I believe the Feast of Trumpets speaks of the rapture of the church (1 Corinthians 15:52).

Numbers 29:7–11

And ye shall have on the tenth day of this seventh month an holy convocation; and ye shall afflict your souls: ye shall not do any work therein: But ye shall offer a burnt offering unto the LORD for a sweet savour; one young bullock, one ram, and seven lambs of the first year; they shall be unto you without blemish: And their meat offering shall be of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals to a bullock, and two tenth deals to one ram, a several tenth deal for one lamb, throughout the seven lambs: One kid of the goats for a sin offering; beside the sin offering of atonement, and the continual burnt offering, and the meat offering of it, and their drink offerings.

I believe this feast—the Day of Atonement—speaks of the Tribulation.

Numbers 29:12

And on the fifteenth day of the seventh month ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work, and ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days . . .

I believe this Feast of Tabernacles speaks of the Millennium—the joyous 1,000-year period when Jesus will rule the earth with righteousness.

Numbers 29:13
And ye shall offer a burnt offering, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD; thirteen young bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year; they shall be without blemish:

From the sacrifice of a single lamb in the morning and in the evening of Numbers 28:4, as seen in verses 13 through 39, the sacrifice has now multiplied to a total of over a ton of flour, 1,000 gallons of wine and oil, 13,000 oxen, and 60,000 sheep given annually.

"That's an awful lot of giving," you say, "a huge sacrifice."

Wait a minute. Father's Day is coming up. Suppose my nine-year-old son, Benjamin, says to me, "Daddy, can I have ten dollars to get you a Father's Day gift?"

"Sure," I say, and give him a crisp ten-dollar bill.

Father's Day morning, sure enough, I get a homemade card from Benny and inside the card is the crisp ten-dollar bill.

"Thanks Ben!" I would say excitedly—even though it was I who gave him the money to give to me.

That the Israelites gave thousands of livestock, a ton of flour, and thousands of gallons of wine and oil meant that God had blessed them with these things in the first place. As I did to Benny, God gave them everything they would give back to Him.

God gave us all that we have, all that we are. If we lay down our lives for God, it's only because He gave them to us in the first place.

Numbers 29:40
And Moses told the children of Israel according to all that the LORD commanded Moses.

As God is getting His people organized, developing them for their destiny, the sacrificial system is recorded. That is, a lamb was to be sacrificed every morning, every evening, every day. Weekly, an additional lamb was to be sacrificed. Monthly, a greater sacrifice was to be made at the beginning of each month. Annually, there were feasts with accompanying sacrifices that God's people were to celebrate.

In this, I understand that there is a rhythm to spiritual life. Many people have a hard time with this because they view spiritual life as being random. But as we look at God's calendar, it's impossible to deny the rhythm therein. Therefore, wise is the man, woman, or family who understands God's heart is for us to begin and end our days focused on the Lamb—unlocking the blessings for the day in the morning, closing up the blessings securely in the evening.

In addition, one day a week should be set aside to make twice the expenditure—to be focused on God singularly, offering to Him the day in praise, worship, and fellowship.

In addition, at the beginning of the month, we have opportunity to get away and say, "What's on Your heart for me for the coming month, Lord?" as we carve out time for refreshment and review, for vision and correction.

In addition, the children of Israel observed seven feasts that drew their hearts and minds back to God's goodness to them, His faithful provision for them. When the people of Israel followed this pattern, they did well. They deviated from it, they stumbled. God is not wasting pages in His Word to go over arcane, meaningless sacrifices. No, He's teaching us, reminding us that this is the way our lives will count.

Is there a pattern, a rhythm to your spiritual life? Or are you one who is haphazard and inconsistent? As much as we may not like to hear it, God designed us to be disciplined. Therefore, if you want to be prosperous and productive in claiming the promises of the Spirit-filled life, listen to what God told His people on the eve of their setting forth into the Promised Land and follow the pattern, the rhythm of spiritual life as seen here in the book which tells us how to make our lives count, the Book of Numbers.



30 To prepare the children of Israel for the battles that faced them in the Promised Land, in the chapter before us, God deals with the subject of accountability and integrity. After all, if you're headed into battle, it's imperative that the guy next to you means what he says when he says, "Go one hundred yards ahead and I'll cover you." You've got to be sure that he's not going to change his mind, that he'll come through.

Numbers 30:1, 2

And Moses spake unto the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded. If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.

God is serious about vows, promises, and commitments. And that makes me happy because God doesn't hold us to a higher standard than that to which He holds Himself. Therefore, the fact that God tells us we are to keep our word means He keeps His. This book is packed with promises—at the very least, three hundred in number. God makes promise after promise to you and me. And what He says, He will do. He told us, for example, that if we believe on Him, we'll not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). That's a promise He makes and a promise He'll keep.

Numbers 30:3 (a)
If a woman also vow a vow unto the LORD . . .

After talking about the importance of keeping one's vows, the Lord goes on to give some exceptions—all dealing with women . . .

Numbers 30:3 (b)–5
. . . and bind herself by a bond, being in her father's house in her youth; and her father hear her vow, and her bond wherewith she hath bound her soul, and her father shall hold his peace at her: then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she hath bound her soul shall stand. But if her father disallow her in the day that he heareth; not any of her vows, or of her bonds wherewith she hath bound her soul, shall stand: and the LORD shall forgive her, because her father disallowed her.

If the father of a woman living at home vows a vow (i.e., a book or record club commitment), her vow will be of none effect if he steps in and says, "She means well, but she's unable to fulfill her obligation."

Numbers 30:6–8

And if she had at all an husband, when she vowed, or uttered ought out of her lips, wherewith she bound her soul; and her husband heard it, and held his peace at her in the day that he heard it: then her vows shall stand, and her bonds wherewith she bound her soul shall stand. But if her husband disallowed her on the day that he heard it; then he shall make her vow which she vowed, and that which she uttered with her lips, wherewith she bound her soul, of none effect: and the LORD shall forgive her.

Secondly, a husband could disavow his wife's vow if he knew she couldn't keep it.

Numbers 30:9
But every vow of a widow, and of her that is divorced, wherewith they have bound their souls, shall stand against her.

The vow of a woman disconnected from her husband either by divorce or widowhood was to stand.

Numbers 30:10, 11
And if she vowed in her husband's house, or bound her soul by a bond with an oath; And her husband heard it, and held his peace at her, and disallowed her not: then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she bound her soul shall stand.

If the husband of a woman making a vow was silent, her vow would stand.

Numbers 30:12–14
But if her husband hath utterly made them void on the day he heard them; then whatsoever proceeded out of her lips concerning her vows, or concerning the bond of her soul, shall not stand: her husband hath made them void; and the LORD shall forgive her. Every vow, and every binding oath to afflict the soul, her husband may establish it, or her husband may make it void. But if her husband altogether hold his peace at her from day to day; then he establisheth all her vows, or all her bonds, which are upon her: he

confirmeth them, because he held his peace at her in the day that he heard them.

In other words, if a husband heard his wife make a vow and didn't step in immediately, the vow she made was to stand.

Numbers 30:15, 16
But if he shall any ways make them void after that he hath heard them; then he shall bear her iniquity. These are the statutes, which the LORD commanded Moses, between a man and his wife, between the father and his daughter, being yet in her youth in her father's house.

If, four days after his wife made a vow, her husband said, "I'm not comfortable with that contract you signed, with that commitment you made," it would be too late to back out, leaving him responsible for fulfilling the obligation.

In this chapter, we see God holding men to their word, but making exceptions for women. Is this chauvinistic discrimination? No. It's a wonderful illustration. You see, on one hand, God wants me to be a man of integrity. On the other hand, as the Bride of Christ, we are all women. And we have a Husband who ever lives to make intercession for us, who steps up, steps in, who's at the right hand of the Father as an Advocate for us (1 John 2:1).

Tempted in all points like us (Hebrews 4:15), He understands our pressures, our frailties, our infirmities, our desire to keep promises, but our inability to do so. So He steps in, intercedes, intervenes on our behalf. It's a wonderful picture and illustration.

This is exactly what happened in Luke 22 . . .

Only hours before He was to be crucified, Jesus told Peter he would deny Him.

"Not me," Peter argued. "Lord, even if everyone else denies You, I won't. I'll die alongside of You if it comes to that. You can count on me."

Hearing Peter's heart but also knowing he couldn't do what he promised, Jesus said, "Satan has desired to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith fail not. And when you make it through, strengthen the brothers."

From there, Peter would eventually find himself at Jerusalem, preaching at the service in which 3,000 were saved (Acts 2:41). Because Jesus prayed for the man who made a vow he couldn't keep, thousands were saved.

You have a Friend in Jesus Christ. You have a Bridegroom who knows all about your fickleness. You have One who steps up and steps in on your behalf, Who ever lives to make intercession for you (Hebrews 7:25). No matter what vows you made at any given time, Jesus will see you through. He promised to, and He keeps every promise perfectly. If, however, if you are a divorcee or a widow—if you turn your back on Him, walk away from Him, are no longer covered by Him, you're on your own.

Numbers 30 has much to say about integrity, but also about our security as the Bride of Christ.



31 Numbers 31:1, 2

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites: afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people.

Moses had already been told he was about to die (Numbers 27:12, 13). Here, however, the Lord gives him another assignment—to do battle with the Midianites, the people who, following the counsel of Balaam, caused the Israelites to fall.

Hope deferred makes the heart sick (Proverbs 13:12). Therefore, God is a good Father who doesn't want us to be under the illusion that somehow, someday everything will be hunky dory. It doesn't work that way. There are battles until the day we go to heaven. "Moses," God said, "you're going to heaven, but before you do, there's a battle to fight."

So, too, we battle against our flesh, against the world system, against our enemy every day until the day we die. This is a key to spiritual maturity, for once we understand this, we'll not be disappointed or depressed by hope deferred.

Numbers 31:3–8

And Moses spake unto the people, saying, Arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and avenge the

LORD of Midian. Of every tribe a thousand, throughout all the tribes of Israel, shall ye send to the war. So there were delivered out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand of every tribe, twelve thousand armed for war. And Moses sent them to the war, a thousand of every tribe, them and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war, with the holy instruments, and the trumpets to blow in his hand. And they warred against the Midianites, as the LORD commanded Moses; and they slew all the males. And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.

Balaam—he who said, "Let me die the death of the righteous" (Numbers 23:10)—died in the midst of the unrighteous, killed by the very people he had caused to stumble.

Numbers 31:9–12
And the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods. And they burnt all their cities wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles, with fire. And they took all the spoil, and all the prey, both of men and of beasts. And they brought the captives, and the prey, and the spoil, unto Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and unto the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the camp at the plains of Moab, which are by Jordan near Jericho.

The troops return to Moses, bringing the women of Midian with them.

Numbers 31:13–16
And Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and all the princes of the congregation, went forth to meet them without the camp. And Moses was wroth with the officers of the host, with the captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, which came from the battle. And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the

matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.

"What are you guys doing bringing the women as captives?" Moses said, "They're the very ones who brought the plague upon us. What are you thinking?"

They were probably thinking what we think. "Yes, we got seduced by these women, and yes, it took a toll on our nation, but that's not a problem any more. Don't worry, Moses. We've learned our lesson." Oh, but let he who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Numbers 31:17
Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him.

This is very harsh, we think. But, while He kept His own people at bay in Egypt, God had given the people of Canaan four hundred years to repent, to turn from their sin, to come to Him. Instead, they only became more perverted. So finally God said, "Put them out of their misery. Annihilate them."

Numbers 31:18
But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves.

The young men would grow up to war against them, the women had already brought death to them, but the young girls had done neither, so they would live.

Numbers 31:19, 20
And do ye abide without the camp seven days: whosoever hath killed any person, and whosoever hath touched any slain, purify both yourselves and your captives on the third day, and on the seventh day. And purify all your raiment, and all that is made of skins, and all work of goats' hair, and all things made of wood.

Following the principle of Numbers 19, those who dealt with the death of the Midianites were to be purified with the ashes of the red heifer.

Numbers 31:21–24

And Eleazar the priest said unto the men of war which went to the battle, This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD commanded Moses; Only the gold, and the silver, the brass, the iron, the tin, and the lead, Every thing that may abide the fire, ye shall make it go through the fire, and it shall be clean: nevertheless it shall be purified with the water of separation: and all that abideth not the fire ye shall make go through the water. And ye shall wash your clothes on the seventh day, and ye shall be clean, and afterward ye shall come into the camp.

The spoils the Israelites had taken from the Midiantes—the gold, silver, brass, and iron—were to be purified by fire and water. In the war we wage daily, everything we have, everything we are must be purified by the trials of fire and by the truth of the water of the Word.

I will not know what is gold, silver, and precious stones versus what is wood, hay, and stubble in my life until I go through trials—for they alone reveal to me where I'm really at.

"Abraham, take your son, your only son who you love, and offer him as a sacrifice to Me," God said. Abraham obeyed, took Isaac to Mt. Moriah, put him on the altar, ready to plunge the knife in his hand into the chest of his son.

"Lay not thine hand upon the lad," God then said, "neither do thou anything unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me" (Genesis 22:12).

The result of this incredible trial was that Abraham knew that God knew that he loved God more than he loved his son.

How are we purified? By the water of the Word (Psalm 119:9). And we'll see the results by how we react in the trials we face.

Numbers 31:25–27
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the sum of the prey that was taken, both of man and of beast, thou, and Eleazar the priest, and the chief fathers of the congregation: And divide the

prey into two parts; between them that took the war upon them, who went out to battle, and between all the congregation:

The entire nation of Israel benefited from the 12,000 who engaged themselves on the front lines of battle. All the spoils were split in two—half went to the 12,000, half to the remaining three million.

That's always the way it is in spiritual life. Yes, we're blessed because others have paid the price, paved the way by waging war in prayer and getting laboring in ministry—but when we choose to be one of the 12,000, we discover we're a whole lot richer in the things of God than had we remained on the sidelines.

Numbers 31:28–30
And levy a tribute unto the LORD of the men of war which went out to battle: one soul of five hundred, both of the persons, and of the beeves, and of the asses, and of the sheep: Take it of their half, and give it unto Eleazar the priest, for an heave offering of the LORD. And of the children of Israel's half, thou shalt take one portion of fifty, of the persons, of the beeves, of the asses, and of the flocks, of all manner of beasts, and give them unto the Levites, which keep the charge of the tabernacle of the LORD.

As if to underscore the principle of the previous passage, the men who did battle were to give 1/500th of their reward to the work of the ministry while those who didn't were to give 1/50th.

Numbers 31:31–34
And Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the LORD commanded Moses. And the booty, being the rest of the prey which the men of war had caught, was six hundred thousand and seventy thousand and five thousand sheep, And threescore and twelve thousand beeves, And threescore and one thousand asses,

Of the 61,000 donkeys taken from Midian, one of them must have been able to talk (Numbers 22:28).

Numbers 31:35–41

And thirty and two thousand persons in all, of woman that had not known man by lying with him. And the half, which was the portion of them that went out to war, was in number three hundred thousand and seven and thirty thousand and five hundred sheep: And the LORD's tribute of the sheep was six hundred and threescore and fifteen. The beeves were thirty and six thousand; of which the LORD's tribute was threescore and twelve. And the asses were thirty thousand and five hundred; of which the LORD's tribute was threescore and one. And the persons were sixteen thousand; of which the LORD's tribute was thirty and two persons. And Moses gave the tribute, which was the LORD's heave offering, unto Eleazar the priest, as the LORD commanded Moses.

This is the portion that went to the army, including the portion they gave to the Lord.

Numbers 31:42–47
And of the children of Israel's half, which Moses divided from the men that warred, (Now the half that pertained unto the congregation was three hundred thousand and thirty thousand and seven thousand and five hundred sheep, And thirty and six thousand beeves, And thirty thousand asses and five hundred, And sixteen thousand persons;) Even of the children of Israel's half, Moses took one portion of fifty, both of man and of beast, and gave them unto the Levites, which kept the charge of the tabernacle of the LORD; as the LORD commanded Moses.

This was the portion given to the congregation, including the portion they gave to the Lord.

Numbers 31:48–50
And the officers which were over thousands of the host, the captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds, came near unto Moses: And they said unto Moses, Thy servants have taken the sum of the men of war which are under our charge, and there lacketh not one man of us. We have therefore brought an oblation for the LORD, what every man hath gotten, of jewels of gold, chains, and bracelets,

rings, earrings, and tablets, to make an atonement for our souls before the LORD.

Something amazing happened in the war with the Midianites, for 12,000 Israelites went out to battle and 12,000 came back. They didn't lose a single man. So blown away by the goodness of God were these experienced men of war that they brought an offering to the Lord of that which they had plundered. The Lord didn't ask for this, but these leaders had an eye to see the grace and goodness of God at work. And they said, "God has been so good to us. How can we not go above and beyond the call of duty?"

Numbers 31:51–54
And Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold of them, even all wrought jewels. And all the gold of the offering that they offered up to the LORD, of the captains of thousands, and of the captains of hundreds, was sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty shekels. (For the men of war had taken spoil, every man for himself.) And Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold of the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and brought it into the tabernacle of the congregation, for a memorial for the children of Israel before the LORD.

The men of war brought four hundred and twenty pounds of gold to the tabernacle as a memorial to the Lord. We talk a lot about making memories with our kids and our families. But these men made a memory for God. "You've been so good to us," they said. "Let this be a memory for You."

I read this and I say, "Make me that kind of man, Lord—a man who makes memories for I'm so calloused and cold. Circumcise my heart. Let me see what You've done for me and my family."

I miss my daughter, Jessie. Oh, I'm so glad she's in heaven. And I'm glad for the memories we have. But I miss her a lot. If you have a daughter you're able to tuck in tonight, who's still with you, you need to be thankful. I don't care how bad your day, the hard times you might be going through, if you can tuck your daughter in, it's time for you to make a memory for the Lord, a memorial unto Him. It's time for you to bring Him the jewels and gold of thanksgiving and praise for His abundant goodness to us all.



32 Jesus and His disciples had just gone through a storm so terrifying to the disciples that these experienced fishermen thought they were going to die. On the other side of the Sea of Galilee they found themselves in another difficult place—at a cemetery surrounded by pigs. It was not only unclean due to the pigs, but it was unsafe because in it was a man demon-possessed by a legion of hellions. "What do you want?" screamed the demons. Jesus wanted what He always wants—He wanted the man back.

"Don't send us away from here," the demons said. "Just send us into the swine," a pig being as good as a man, a man as good as a pig in their view. The demons entered into the swine and the pigs ran into the Sea of Galilee. Hearing this report, people in the city came out to see what had been done to their cash crop. They saw the man sitting, clothed, and in his right mind. And it was at this point that the people in Gadera were afraid.

"Leave Gadera," they said to Jesus. But the man spread the news in Decapolis concerning the great things Jesus had done for him (Mark 5).

Why, there on the edge of the Sea of Galilee, was there a thriving pig industry? After all, pigs were forbidden by the Law of God. And why does this man go to Decapolis—a Greek city? Of the ten Greek cities comprising Decapolis, why were nine were on the Eastern side, the Gadarene side of the Jordan? Why did the people of Gadera tell Jesus to go back to the west side of the Jordan from whence He came?

For the answers to these questions, turn to our text, Numbers 32 . . .

Numbers 32:1–5

Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle: and when they saw the land of Jazer, and the land of Gilead, that, behold, the place was a place for cattle; The children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spake unto Moses, and to Eleazar the priest, and unto the princes of the congregation, saying, Ataroth, and Dibon, and Jazer, and Nimrah, and Heshbon, and Elealeh, and Shebam, and Nebo, and Beon, Even the country which the LORD smote before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle, and thy servants have cattle: Wherefore,

said they, if we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan.

Here were the children of Israel—poised to at last cross the Jordan River into the Land of Promise. But wait. Reuben and Gad say, "Moses, we don't want to cross over the Jordan. We like it here on the east side. We've got cattle and there's lots of grass here. This is a great place for business, for economic prosperity, for us. We don't want to press in further or go deeper. We want to stay here on the edge, on the east side." Who wanted to stay on the east side? The tribe of Reuben and the tribe of Gad—from which came the word Gad-era.

Numbers 32:6, 7
And Moses said unto the children of Gad and to the children of Reuben, Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here? And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the LORD hath given them?

"It's not just about you," Moses said. "If you stay here, you'll discourage the others."

How sad it is when people say, "I don't see him or her pressing in to the things of God, so I guess it's okay for me to kick back. After all, they've been around longer than I have. And if they don't want to go further, why should I?"

Numbers 32:8, 9
Thus did your fathers, when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. For when they went up unto the valley of Eshcol, and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, that they should not go into the land which the LORD had given them.

Moses knew all too well the effects of discouragement—for when the ten spies discouraged the hearts of the people by saying, "It's scary in there. There are giants to fight, a price to pay," an entire generation was lost.

Numbers 32:10–15
And the LORD's anger was kindled the same time, and he sware, saying, Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I sware unto

Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob; because they have not wholly followed me: Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite, and Joshua the son of Nun: for they have wholly followed the LORD. And the LORD's anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of the LORD, was consumed. And, behold, ye are risen up in your fathers' stead, an increase of sinful men, to augment yet the fierce anger of the LORD toward Israel. For if ye turn away from after him, he will yet again leave them in the wilderness; and ye shall destroy all this people.

Moses likened Gad and Reuben to the generation before them, men who were afraid to enter the Land the Lord had promised them.

Numbers 32:16–19
And they came near unto him, and said, We will build sheepfolds here for our cattle, and cities for our little ones: But we ourselves will go ready armed before the children of Israel, until we have brought them unto their place: and our little ones shall dwell in the fenced cities because of the inhabitants of the land. We will not return unto our houses, until the children of Israel have inherited every man his inheritance. For we will not inherit with them on yonder side Jordan, or forward; because our inheritance is fallen to us on this side Jordan eastward.

"We'll leave our wives and kids here on this side," said the men of Reuben and Gad. "But we'll cross over and fight the battles. And once the battles are won in the Promised Land, we'll come back and live here on the east side of the Jordan, on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, in Gadera."

This is a lot like those today who say, "If there's something to do, I'll step in and do my best to help those who want to press in and move on. But don't expect me to actually *live* in the territory that requires faith or commitment. After all, my home is in Gadera."

Numbers 32:20–24
And Moses said unto them, If ye will do this thing, if ye will go armed before the LORD to war, and will go all of you armed over

Jordan before the LORD, until he hath driven out his enemies from before him, and the land be subdued before the LORD: then afterward ye shall return, and be guiltless before the LORD, and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the LORD. But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out. Build you cities for your little ones, and folds for your sheep; and do that which hath proceeded out of your mouth.

Because God will never take us one step further in spiritual life than we want to go, Moses agreed to Reuben's and Gad's proposal—but warned them that if they didn't live up to their agreement, their sin would find them out.

This is a pivotal, foundational principle. Notice Moses didn't say it was God who would track them down, do them in, find them out. No, should Reuben and Gad fail to keep their end of the bargain, it was their sin which would find them out. And the same is true with us.

Due to the finished work of the Cross, God not only forgives our sin, but buries it in the sea of His forgetfulness (Hebrews 10:17). Yet I must understand that, as Galatians 6 declares, whatever I sow, I'll reap. It isn't God who says, "Aha! I'm going to expose that sin to embarrass you." That's not the nature of our Father. No, it is the sin itself that will come to fruition. I am firmly persuaded and deeply convinced that there is no exception to this. Every time I sin, that sin will sooner or later track me down, find me out, and humiliate me. But it's not God doing so. Rather, it's the work of the enemy to not only seduce us into sin, but to expose and humiliate us through it.

Numbers 32:25–33
And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben spake unto Moses, saying, Thy servants will do as my lord commandeth. Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, and all our cattle, shall be there in the cities of Gilead: But thy servants will pass over, every man armed for war, before the LORD to battle, as my lord saith. So concerning them Moses commanded Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the chief fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel: And Moses said unto them, If the children of Gad and the children of Reuben will pass with you over Jordan, every man armed to battle, before the LORD, and the land shall be subdued before

you; then ye shall give them the land of Gilead for a possession: But if they will not pass over with you armed, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan. And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben answered, saying, As the LORD hath said unto thy servants, so will we do. We will pass over armed before the LORD into the land of Canaan, that the possession of our inheritance on this side Jordan may be ours. And Moses gave unto them, even to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, and unto half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land, with the cities thereof in the coasts, even the cities of the country round about.

Joined by half of the tribe of Manasseh, the tribes of Reuben and Gad did indeed remain on the east side of the Jordan. Oh, they went into the Promised Land occasionally, but they didn't live there. And, as we'll see in Joshua 22, when they built an altar on their side of the Jordan, the other tribes said, "What are you doing building an altar? There is only to be one altar—at the tabernacle."

"Wait a minute," said the men of Gad. "We're not building an altar to offer sacrifices, but so that in the coming days you won't disavow us. It's not a working altar, but simply a monument so that future generations will know we're linked with you." Yet, although they made peace that day, the problems had begun—leading to suspicion and division in the nation between those who wanted to stay and those who wanted to go on.

Although they established cities, as evidenced by the remainder of the chapter, it would eventually be these who didn't go in, who didn't go on who were picked off first by the Syrians and the Assyrians. And it would be they who would become corrupted—for when Jesus came on the scene, the prized property of Reuben and Gad, the land of the Gadarenes, was filled with pigs, demons, and pagan Greek culture.

Why?

Because we either move further and deeper into the presence of the Lord—or we move in the other direction and become more and more interested in the things of the world. Right now, you are either deeper than you were five years ago, or you are more shallow. But you are not the same. Either my knowledge of the Lord is deeper, my walk stronger, my faith larger—or it is less. It's a great

misconception to think we can put our spiritual lives on cruise control, to think that because we know the plan of salvation and basic biblical principles that we can coast from here on out. We can't.

Reuben and Gad made a monumental mistake choosing a place of comfort rather than one of commitment, by opting for affluence rather than obedience. "This land is good for our cattle and for our families," they said. And yet by the time Jesus walked their land, there was not a cow in sight. If you want your cattle to do well, take them into the Promised Land, otherwise they'll turn into pigs. And if you want your kids to do well, take them with you, otherwise they'll be the ones who prefer that Jesus depart from their coasts.

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

Is your praise more fervent, your prayer more intense, your commitment to the kingdom greater, your time in the Word longer, your knowledge of God larger, your love for the Lord deeper than it was two years ago? Press in. Go on. Don't stop.

Numbers 32:34 (a)
And the children of Gad built Dibon . . .

Verse 34 to the end of the chapter lists the cities either built or conquered by the children of Israel.

33 Numbers 33:1–49

These are the journeys of the children of Israel, which went forth out of the land of Egypt with their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron. And Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the LORD: and these are their journeys according to their goings out. And they departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the morrow after the passover the

children of Israel went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians. For the Egyptians buried all their firstborn, which the LORD had smitten among them: upon their gods also the LORD executed judgments. And the children of Israel removed from Rameses, and pitched in Succoth. And they departed from Succoth, and pitched in Etham, which is in the edge of the wilderness. And they removed from Etham, and turned again unto Pi-hahiroth, which is before Baal-zephon: and they pitched before Migdol. And they departed from before Pi-hahiroth, and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, and went three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham, and pitched in Marah. And they removed from Marah, and came unto Elim: and in Elim were twelve fountains of water, and threescore and ten palm trees; and they pitched there. And they removed from Elim, and encamped by the Red sea. And they removed from the Red sea, and encamped in the wilderness of Sin. And they took their journey out of the wilderness of Sin, and encamped in Dophkah. And they departed from Dophkah, and encamped in Alush. And they removed from Alush, and encamped at Rephidim, where was no water for the people to drink. And they departed from Rephidim, and pitched in the wilderness of Sinai. And they removed from the desert of Sinai, and pitched at Kibroth-hattaavah. And they departed from Kibroth-hattaavah, and encamped at Hazeroth. And they departed from Hazeroth, and pitched in Rithmah. And they departed from Rithmah, and pitched at Rimmon-parez. And they departed from Rimmon-parez, and pitched in Libnah. And they removed from Libnah, and pitched at Rissah. And they journeyed from Rissah, and pitched in Kehelathah. And they went from Kehelathah, and pitched in mount Shapher. And they removed from mount Shapher, and encamped in Haradah. And they removed from Haradah, and pitched in Makheloth. And they removed from Makheloth, and encamped at Tahath. And they departed from Tahath, and pitched at Tarah. And they removed from Tarah, and pitched in Mithcah. And they went from Mithcah, and pitched in Hashmonah. And they departed from Hashmonah, and encamped at Moseroth. And they departed from Moseroth, and pitched in Bene-jaakan. And they removed from Bene-jaakan, and encamped at Hor-hagidgad. And they went from Hor-hagidgad, and pitched in Jotbathah. And they removed from Jotbathah, and encamped at Ebronah. And they departed from Ebronah, and encamped at Ezion-gaber. And they removed from Ezion-gaber, and pitched in the wilderness of Zin, which is Kadesh. And they

removed from Kadesh, and pitched in mount Hor, in the edge of the land of Edom. And Aaron the priest went up into mount Hor at the commandment of the LORD, and died there, in the fortieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the first day of the fifth month. And Aaron was an hundred and twenty and three years old when he died in mount Hor. And king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the children of Israel. And they departed from mount Hor, and pitched in Zalmonah. And they departed from Zalmonah, and pitched in Punon. And they departed from Punon, and pitched in Oboth. And they departed from Oboth, and pitched in Ijeabarim, in the border of Moab. And they departed from Iim, and pitched in Dibon-gad. And they removed from Dibon-gad, and encamped in Almon-diblathaim. And they removed from Almon-diblathaim, and pitched in the mountains of Abarim, before Nebo. And they departed from the mountains of Abarim, and pitched in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho. And they pitched by Jordan, from Beth-jesimoth even unto Abel-shittim in the plains of Moab.

I know what you're thinking—that that is the most boring passage of Scripture you've ever read. Why, you might ask, did God command Moses to record every place the children of Israel pitched their tents?

I suggest it was because this is God's scrapbook, His slide show, His video, His journal. You see, He was traveling with His children for forty years, and these places are memorable to Him. They might seem boring to you or insignificant to us, but this should not be surprising. After all, we've all had the experience of being at a friend's house only to see him proudly bring out the video, the slide projector, or the scrapbook of his summer vacation. And although he's really into it, we find ourselves somewhat bored by it. It's important to him—but not necessarily important to us.

On the other hand, when we're showing our own slides of our family vacation it's fascinating. Our kids find themselves in every picture and we relive our trip together. That's essentially what's happening here. At the end of this forty-year camping trip, God says, "I want our journey recorded in perfect order. Make a record of all the places we went together."

"Okay," you say. "This record might have brought back some memories to those who were on that journey—but what's the point of it for us today?"

I believe there are a couple of important principles this passage teaches us, for the God of the children of Israel is our Father as well. He's made us a holy nation, adopted us into His family, and He's taking us on our own journey, a journey toward the Promised Land of heaven . . .

Our Father Remembers Where We've Been

Every stop along the way, every place we've pitched our tent, every time we've pulled up stakes to move on, He remembers. I wish that could be said of me. My kids will say, "Dad, remember when we did that?" But I don't. I forget the places we stopped and some of the things we've done. Not so our Father. He remembers it all. In Hebrews 6:10, we read that God is not unrighteous to forget your work and your labor of love. God never forgets anything we've done. Whenever we've done what He's led us to do, He records it, remembers it, and eventually rewards it (Matthew 10:42). He never forgets—not a single work.

God has led you from stop to stop, from place to place that you have long since forgotten about—like the time your coworker was bogged down with a bunch to do and you chose to stay an extra twenty minutes to help him, the time you helped in the nursery when it wasn't even your turn, the time you stood by the one in your seventh-grade class who everyone else was picking on. "I remember when you chose to do what I led you to do, when you pitched your tent where I told you to pitch," God says. "It's in My scrapbook. It might be boring to others, forgotten by you—but it's important to Me."

Which of us as parents doesn't have a box or a trunk filled with pictures and paintings, birthday cards and drawings from our kids? I have a painting matted and framed on my wall made by Peter-John when he was two years old—some green and blue brush strokes slapped on a piece of paper. You would look at it and say, "What's that?" But what would be unimportant and insignificant to you is treasured by me. That's the idea here.

Each one of these names stands for a place where God said to His people, "I want you to pitch your tent here." And they did. Thus, their obedience was treasured by Him.

Our Father Forgets about Our Sin

In verses 3 and 4, we see the children of Israel leaving Egypt. In verses 5 through 8, they go to and through the Red Sea. In verses 9 through 15, they go from Marah to Mt. Sinai, where they received the Law and instructions for building the tabernacle and the sacrificial system. In verses 16 through 36, they go from Mt. Sinai to Kadesh-barnea. And in verses 37 through 49, they go from Kadesh-barnea to the Jordan River, into the Land of Promise.

In this account, there is something huge missing, a glaring omission—namely, the thirty-eight years the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness due to their unbelief. In other words, the Father records exactingly and carefully every single spot where they pitched their tents in obedience to His leading. But when they were in sin, there's no mention, no record, no memory as far as He is concerned.

How I like that! He remembers where we've been, but He forgets about our sin. He edits it out of the video, throws away the slide, erases it from His journal. That's the kind of God we serve.

Why doesn't He remember our sin? Because He sent His Son to die on the Cross in our place and shed His blood in order that it could be cleansed. What a price the Father paid to eradicate that memory, to clean up my story.

Our Father Will Take Us In

Listen to what God declares a few pages later in the Book of Deuteronomy . . .

> The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes; And in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the LORD thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place.
>
> Deuteronomy 1:30, 31

"I went before you," God says. "Each of your stops was scouted out by Me. I was leading the way." That's the nature of our Father. And that's what He does for you and me. God became a Man and walked through life ahead of us. He knows where we're camping. He knows how we're struggling. And yet He's going to take us in.

Where?

To the Promised Land of the Spirit-filled life.

But it doesn't stop there. He not only will see us through this life, but He's preparing a place for us in heaven, our ultimate destiny (John 14:2).

> **Numbers 33:50, 51**
> **And the LORD spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan;**

God didn't say, "*If* you pass over," He said, "*when* you pass over. . . ." He promised to bring them in—and He would. He who began a good work in us will continue to perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

> **Numbers 33:52, 53**
> **Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places: And ye shall**

dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it.

"When I cause you to cross over the Jordan—and I will do that for you—" God said to His people, "you're to rid the land of the reminders of the false gods which have dominated it for the last four hundred years."

Numbers 33:54–56
And ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families: and to the more ye shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer ye shall give the less inheritance: every man's inheritance shall be in the place where his lot falleth; according to the tribes of your fathers ye shall inherit. But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell. Moreover it shall come to pass, that I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them.

Just as the children of Israel were to drive out the Canaanites, my flesh and my spirit cannot coexist. There can be no peace treaty between them. The only peace there can be is the peace of God through the One who travels every step with us on our journey to heaven (Romans 5:1).



34

Numbers 34:1, 2
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Is rael, and say unto them, When ye come into the land of Canaan; (this is the land that shall fall unto you for an inheritance, even the land of Canaan with the coasts thereof).

Verses 2 through 15 describe the borders of the land given to the Jews.

Numbers 34:16–18
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, These are the names of the men which shall divide the land unto you: Eleazar the priest, and

Joshua the son of Nun. And ye shall take one prince of every tribe, to divide the land by inheritance.

Verses 19 through 28 list the names of the representative of each tribe for the purpose of dividing the Land.

Numbers 34:29
These are they whom the LORD commanded to divide the inheritance unto the children of Israel in the land of Canaan.

The Israelites never came close to taking all of the territory God had given them. God had so much for them. He had given so much to them. He had such grand plans for them. Yet they never took advantage of them. And as I read this, I can't help but wonder, *Lord, how much more do You have in mind for me, for my family, for the congregation?* As I do, I realize I can get very comfortable on this side of Jordan and miss out on what God wants to do through me and in me. I also realize that if I don't deal decisively with the carnal tendencies of my heart, like the children of Israel, I'll possess only a fraction of what the Lord had for me.



35 In these final two chapters of the Book of Numbers, we come to the end of a journey that entails thirty-nine years in totality—years in which the children of Israel wandered through the wilderness. We have heard their murmuring, seen their rebellion, observed their sinning. It's been an amazing story . . .

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, the people sat

down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

1 Corinthians 10:1–10

Over and over, Paul reaches back to the Book of Numbers and brings to remembrance the stories we've been studying, summing up the whole discussion by saying, "All these things happened unto them for examples." As has been rightly said, experience is the best teacher—if you can afford to pay the tuition. Therefore, wise is the man or woman who learns from the experience of others.

Numbers 35:1 (a)
And the LORD spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho . . .

Still on the east side of the Jordan River, directly across from the city of Jericho, three million people are gathered, ready to cross over into the Promised Land, wandering around in the wilderness no longer, but ready to enter into the land of milk and honey, the land of prosperity. And that's what the Lord wants for you and me spiritually.

Numbers 35:1 (b)–5
. . . saying, Command the children of Israel, that they give unto the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and ye shall give also unto the Levites suburbs for the cities round about them. And the cities shall they have to dwell in; and the suburbs of them shall be for their cattle, and for their goods, and for all their beasts. And the suburbs of the cities, which ye shall give unto the Levites, shall reach from the wall of the city and outward a thousand cubits round about. And ye shall measure from without the city on the east side two thousand cubits, and on the south side two thousand cubits, and on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits and the city shall be in the midst: this shall be to them the suburbs of the cities.

Serving as ministers in the tabernacle, the tribe of Levi was not given any portion of the Promised Land. Instead, the Levites were to be scattered throughout the entire country. The rest of the tribes were told to give certain cities to the Levites as places in which they could dwell. As we shall see, these cities would number forty-eight.

If the Levites were only in one tribal region, people who weren't close to them wouldn't get the proper ministry. So they were scattered throughout the entire country. And that's what the Lord does with us. The Lord has snuck His servants into the most amazing places. He sneaks Christian teachers into high schools to be subversive, secret agents, Levites, reflections of Jesus Christ. He sneaks Christian salesmen, secretaries, and accountants into the workplace to be examples of what it means to be a believer. He sneaks Christian doctors into hospital rooms as ministers of the gospel.

This is such a key. Each of us who is serious about Jesus is in ministry. We are a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). And He's stationed you in that work place, that neighborhood, that family to be a servant of His. It's a great day indeed when a believer looks at his work as his ministry and says, "I'm surrounded by people professional pastors would never have an opportunity to reach. I'm here on campus, at the store, in the neighborhood not just to work for a paycheck or to raise my family, but to be a minister. So I'm going to keep my eyes open and my antennae up in order to determine the part I am to play in this place for God's glory."

Numbers 35:6–8
And among the cities which ye shall give unto the Levites there shall be six cities for refuge, which ye shall appoint for the manslayer, that he may flee thither: and to them ye shall add forty and two cities. So all the cities which ye shall give to the Levites shall be forty and eight cities: them shall ye give with their suburbs. And the cities which ye shall give shall be of the possession of the children of Israel: from them that have many ye shall give many; but from them that have few ye shall give few: every one shall give of his cities unto the Levites according to his inheritance which he inheriteth.

Of the forty-eight Levitical cities, six were designated to be cities of refuge —places to which those who unintentionally killed someone could flee.

Numbers 35:9–12
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come over Jordan into the land of Canaan; Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares. And they shall be unto you cities for refuge from the avenger; that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation in judgment.

In Bible days, there was no such thing as a police force. There was no constable, no sheriff, no deputy, and no patrolman. It was up to the family to keep law and order. Therefore, the way it worked was as follows: If my brother Jimmy was crossing the street and you accidentally hit and killed him, as his brother, it would be up to me to avenge his death, to track you down and kill you. No matter how long it might take, culture required that I kill you.

The idea of the avenger was neither created nor condoned by God. God here is simply controlling the reality of the day—similar to when He gave rules and regulations concerning practices such as divorce and slavery. Why didn't He simply do away with these practices altogether? Because He's treating His people as a family.

When Ben and Mary were little, I didn't have the same requirements, the same expectations for them that I do now that they're twelve and thirteen. And they'll have still greater obligations when they're seventeen and eighteen. As our kids grow older, we expect more out of them. But we don't burden them immediately. We let them grow. That's what our Father does with His family. Here in the very early stages of their nationhood, because these customs were already deeply imbedded in their culture, God placed boundaries around customs like that of the avenger, dealing with them more fully as they grew (Luke 6:29).

To this end, He singled out six cities in which people who accidentally killed someone would be safe until a trial could be held.

Numbers 35:13, 14
And of these cities which ye shall give six cities shall ye have for refuge. Ye shall give three cities on this side Jordan, and three cities shall ye give in the land of Canaan, which shall be cities of refuge.

Although nine and one-half tribes were on the west side of the Jordan and only two and one-half tribes on the east side, three of the cities of refuge were on each side of the Jordan evidently because the two and one-half eastern tribes would commit as much sin as the nine and one-half western tribes. Because they didn't push on, the eastern tribes would experience more sin, more sorrow, more sadness. And the same is true of us.

Numbers 35:15
These six cities shall be a refuge, both for the children of Israel, and for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them: that every one that killeth any person unawares may flee thither.

When you look at these six cities, you realize that no one would have to cross a river or climb a mountain range to reach one of them. Jesus said that if we've been angry with anyone, bitter towards anyone, upset with anyone, cynical about anyone, we're guilty of murder (Matthew 5:21, 22). But Jesus is our Refuge (Hebrews 6:18). And, like the cities of refuge, He's easily available . . .

> Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart:
>
> Romans 10:6 (b)–8 (a)

Some people say that to find enlightenment, we must either ascend into heaven with the third eye of mystical wisdom, or explore the deep, deep understandings of the Christ consciousness. Paul, however, says, we neither have to climb up nor dig deep, but rather, the Word of salvation is as near as our own heart and mouth. Thus, Jesus is a Refuge easily accessible to all.

Numbers 35:16–21
And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death. And if he smite him with throwing a stone, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death. Or if he smite him with an hand weapon of wood, wherewith he may die, and he

die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death. The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him. But if he thrust him of hatred, or hurl at him by laying of wait, that he die; Or in enmity smite him with his hand, that he die: he that smote him shall surely be put to death; for he is a murderer: the revenger of blood shall slay the murderer, when he meeteth him.

If a man beat someone with iron, a rock, a wooden club, or if he was angry with another man—even if he made it to a city of refuge, he was to be brought out the city, for his crime was neither accidental nor unintentional.

Numbers 35:22–25
But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity, or have cast upon him any thing without laying of wait, Or with any stone, wherewith a man may die, seeing him not, and cast it upon him, that he die, and was not his enemy, neither sought his harm: Then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood according to these judgments: And the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of the hand of the revenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled: and he shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with the holy oil.

He who committed murder unintentionally was to stay in the city of refuge until the high priest died—be that a year, a decade or longer.

Numbers 35:26–29
But if the slayer shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, whither he was fled; And the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill the slayer; he shall not be guilty of blood: Because he should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest: but after the death of the high priest the slayer shall return into the land of his possession. So these things shall be for a statute of judgment unto you throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

If the unintentional murderer left the city of refuge before the high priest died, he was open game. The avenger of blood would not be found guilty of his death.

The person who was guilty—as we all are—was kept safe in the city by the life of the high priest. But he was declared not guilty by the death of the high priest. The picture should be obvious. We are kept safe by the life of our great High Priest, Jesus Christ. He is the One who intercedes for us, the One who gives instruction to us, the One who lives through us. But while we are kept safe by His life, we are saved by His death, for our sins have been washed away by His blood.

For New Testament confirmation of this Old Testament illustration, turn to Acts 27 . . .

> *The storm is raging. The boat is bobbing up and down. The soldiers are panicked and the sailors are frightened. "We're going down!" they cry.*
>
> *But as they fight for their lives on the furious sea, Paul says, "Be of good cheer. There shall be no loss of life."*
>
> *As the storm continued, however, the sailors let down a lifeboat to escape the impending crash. "Except the sailors abide in the ship," Paul said, "you can't be saved." So the ropes were cut, the lifeboats fell empty into the sea, and all on board the ship were saved.*

As long as we're on board the Good Ship Salvation, we'll be saved. As long as we're in Jesus, our Refuge, we're OK. But if we choose to wander off, to bail out, to back away and live a life of drunkenness and fornication, of adultery and bitterness, the Bible says we'll not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Galatians 5:19–21; Ephesians 5:5).

Am I teaching contrary to the doctrine of eternal security? No. I believe in eternal security. I know I'm eternally secure because I have no intention of going anywhere other than staying on board the ship of faith. I know I need the Lord. I know I can't make it without Him. He is my city of refuge, my ship of salvation. And I have no intention of leaving.

"You'll be saved," Paul says, "if you stay on board."

What board?

The board of the Cross of Jesus—following Him, loving Him, living for Him.

"Make your calling and election sure," Peter writes (2 Peter 1:10). How? It's so simple, as easily accessible as a city of refuge. You don't have to climb a mountain or swim an ocean. You simply confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that He died for your sin and rose from the dead (Romans 10:9).

When I lead people in the sinners' prayer, I pray right along with them. Is it because I doubt my own salvation? No, I know I'm saved—but what does it hurt? Why not make sure? Why not take every opportunity to say, "Lord I love You and I understand my great need for You. And rather than be doctrinally arrogant, I want to make sure You're in my heart and that You hear from me again. Lord, I confess You as Lord and am so thankful that You died for me, that You live in heaven, interceding for me."

I say this time and time again—not because I'm insecure and worried about losing my salvation, but simply because in the city of Refuge I have reason for great celebration.

Numbers 35:30–34
Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die. Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death. And ye shall take no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest. So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it. Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel.

If a man was found guilty of intentional, purposeful, premeditated murder, he was to be executed. This system which incorporated both cities of refuge and capital punishment was one in which the requirements of both humanity and justice were met.



36

Numbers 36:1

And the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near, and spake before Moses, and before the princes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel:

Here we see the leaders from the tribe of Manasseh approaching Moses and the other elders of the congregation with a problem . . .

Numbers 36:2

And they said, The LORD commanded my lord to give the land for an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel: and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother unto his daughters.

In chapter 27, the daughters of Zelophehad had come to Moses saying, "Our father died in the wilderness. It's not fair that his name and property should be lost simply because he had no sons." After seeking counsel from the Lord, Moses concurred with Zelophehad's daughters that if there were no sons in a family, the inheritance was to go to the daughters in order to perpetuate the father's name.

Numbers 36:3, 4

And if they be married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then shall their inheritance be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and shall be put to the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall it be taken from the lot of our inheritance. And when the jubile of the children of Israel shall be, then shall their inheritance be put unto the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall their inheritance be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers.

"Wait a minute," said the leader of Manasseh. "If these daughters marry men from other tribes, the property will belong to their husbands and we'll lose territory that is rightly ours."

Numbers 36:5–9

And Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of the LORD, saying, The tribe of the sons of Joseph hath said well. This is the thing which the LORD doth command concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, Let them marry to whom they think best; only to the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry. So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. And every daughter, that possesseth an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel, shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel may enjoy every man the inheritance of his fathers. Neither shall the inheritance remove from one tribe to another tribe; but every one of the tribes of the children of Israel shall keep himself to his own inheritance.

"You've raised a valid point," Moses said to the leaders of Manasseh. "And here is what the Lord says: If a woman receives the inheritance of her father, she can marry whoever she wants as long as she marries within her tribe."

This is an important principle, for as we come to the final chapter of the Book of Numbers, the final word is simply this: Marry within your tribe or you'll lose ground.

Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

Amos 3:3

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?

2 Corinthians 6:14

As parents, make sure your kids know that it's non-negotiable, not open for discussion, not even a consideration that they marry outside of the tribe of those who believe in God.

Even more, the daughters of Zelophehad weren't only to have no dealings with pagan men—but they were to marry within their own tribe.

The night before my daughter was taken to heaven, my final word to her was this word from Numbers 36. "You must not marry a person who is spiritually weaker than you," I told her. "You must marry someone with whom you can yoke, who has the same heart for God that you do, who can lead you in the things of the kingdom. Marry within the tribe of your fathers. Marry someone who can lead you in the ways of the Lord."

Numbers 36:10–12
Even as the LORD commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Zelophehad: For Mahlal, Tirzah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married unto their father's brothers' sons: And they were married into the families of the sons of Manasseh the son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in the tribe of the family of their father.

I love the fact that the daughters of Zelophehad not only heard the Word of the Lord, but that they obeyed it—for the blessing lies not in simply hearing or agreeing with the Word, but in obeying it (James 1:22–25).

Numbers 36:13
These are the commandments and the judgments, which the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses unto the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho.

And so ends the Book of Numbers, the book that instructs us how to make our lives count, the book that deals with the importance of order and organization, discipline and direction, responsibility and accountability in the lives of those who, rather than wandering aimlessly, seek to claim the Promised Land of God as their own.



DEUTERONOMY

Background to Deuteronomy

We come to the fifth and final book of Moses—the final book of the Pentateuch, the final book of the Torah—and the final address to the people he had led for forty years. It's a lengthy address, but oh, so impacting, for in it Moses reviews and reminds the people of their history—how their fathers failed miserably but how God saw them through mercifully. Then he reiterates and repeats the Law of God—the Word given to the children of Israel in the first year of their journey. That's where this Book gets its name, for *deutero* is the Greek word meaning "second," and *nomos* the Greek word for "law." Thus, in the book before us we see the Law reviewed and repeated.

Your initial reaction might be, "I spent a long time already going through the Law and studying the peoples' history in the wilderness in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Why would I need to go through it *again?*" Yet it was the Book of Deuteronomy that God commanded the people read audibly, publicly every sabbatical year at the Feast of Tabernacles—the joyous festival wherein the people of Israel celebrated how God faithfully brought them through the wilderness and to the Promised Land.

It's so important to be in the Word—not just to learn practical principles, but, far more importantly, to gain an understanding of, an appreciation for the nature and character of God—for when you learn about the ways and the heart of God, you can't help but lift your hands, bow your knee, and sing His praise.

Without Bible study, worship loses its luster. Without worship, Bible study becomes academic. We need both sides of this equation. We need to be students of the Word and worshipers of the Lord. If I'm only a student and not a worshiper, I will become an intellectual Christian who lacks passion. I might have my theology down and my doctrine right, but my heart will be cold. If, on the other hand, I am involved in worship without grounding myself in the Word, my worship will be shallow, fuzzy, and will eventually fade away completely. Jesus said the Father seeks those who will worship Him in both spirit and truth (John 4:23), for that's the winning combination.

“Do we have to go through the history and the Law again?” we ask.

“Yes,” God answers, “because it will inspire you to worship with both passion and intelligence.”

Evidently, the New Testament writers understood the importance of the Book of Deuteronomy, for they quote it over one hundred times. But it’s importance is seen even more clearly in the fact that Jesus quotes it more than He does Genesis, Psalms, or Isaiah. In fact, He quotes it more than He does any other Old Testament book. That He used it to silence Satan three times in the wilderness speaks not only of His familiarity with it, but of the power within it (Matthew 4:4–10).

If you’re like me, you might have a tendency to say, “Oh, no. Not the Law again.” But because God commanded it to be read audibly, because the New Testament writers quoted it repeatedly, and because Jesus valued it greatly, wise is the believer who allows the Book of Deuteronomy to be woven into the fabric of his soul.



DEUTERONOMY

1

Deuteronomy 1:1
These be the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain over against the Red sea, between Paran, and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Dizahab.

As Moses begins his "farewell address," the children of Israel are camped on the east side of the Jordan River, poised to enter the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 1:2
(There are eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of mount Seir unto Kadesh-barnea.)

This parenthetical statement must have been particularly painful for Moses to write. After all, how long would it take a man to walk from Mt. Sinai to Kadesh-barnea, the border of the Promised Land? Eleven days. How long did it take the children of Israel? Forty years.

The number forty being the number of a biblical generation, an entire generation was lost simply for lack of faith. When God brought them to Kadesh-barnea, they were supposed to go from there and take the territory, move in to the Promised Land. But they lacked faith and were fearful of the giants about which they'd heard.

I wonder how many tears will roll down our cheeks in heaven.

"Tears in Heaven?" you say. "I thought there would be no tears in heaven."

Ah, but because Revelation 7:17 says Jesus will wipe away every tear, there must be tears to wipe away—possibly shed as we see how much He would have done for us and through us, in us and with us if only we had believed and claimed the territory of the Spirit-filled life rather than wandering around for a lifetime.

Quoting from this very story, Paul says, "Learn the lesson" (1 Corinthians 10:11). When God puts something on your heart, do it immediately lest you

wander around needlessly and waste your days in a desert experience.

Deuteronomy 1:3–6
And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spake unto the children of Israel, according unto all that the LORD had given him in commandment unto them; after he had slain Sihon the king of the Amorites, which dwelt in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, which dwelt at Astaroth in Edrei: On this side Jordan, in the land of Moab, began Moses to declare this law, saying, The LORD our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount:

After forty years, the children of Israel are back at Point A, the place they began, Mount Horeb, or Mt. Sinai, the place where the Ten Commandments were given, the place they began . . .

Deuteronomy 1:7, 8
Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the sea side, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates. Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them.

Even at the height of her power, Israel only possessed a fraction of the land promised to them. That's a lot like us. So many promises are given to us, yet we only possess a fraction of them.

Deuteronomy 1:9–18
And I spake unto you at that time, saying, I am not able to bear you myself alone: The LORD your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude. (The LORD God of your fathers make you a thousand times so many

more as ye are, and bless you, as he hath promised you!) How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance, and your burden, and your strife? Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you. And ye answered me, and said, The thing which thou hast spoken is good for us to do. So I took the chief of your tribes, wise men, and known, and made them heads over you, captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens, and officers among your tribes. And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it. And I commanded you at that time all the things which ye should do.

Here we see the beginning of eldership, where God's people weren't ruled by one man dictatorially but through a plurality of leaders who cared for the flock lest the flock be frustrated by not getting the help they need and lest one man get burned out, trying to do what cannot be done. And the principle still works today if the men chosen are those already doing the work, as was the case here. You'll always find a true shepherd among the sheep. Where was David when Samuel came to Bethlehem looking for the next king? He was out with his father's sheep. Where was Moses when he was called? He, too, was with the sheep.

"Take wise and understanding men who are already known among your tribes," Moses instructed the Israelites. It's a principle that applies to every aspect of ministry and service.

Deuteronomy 1:19–21
And when we departed from Horeb, we went through all that great and terrible wilderness, which ye saw by the way of the mountain of the Amorites, as the LORD our God commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea. And I said unto you, Ye are come

unto the mountain of the Amorites, which the LORD our God doth give unto us. Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged.

After establishing the leadership structure, Moses told the children of Israel not to be afraid to step out, not to be discouraged. I have found when I get discouraged or depressed it's always due to a lack of courage in my life. Whether it be witnessing to the friend at work, beginning family devotions, worshiping with passion—or any other new opportunity the Lord has provided, we must not be discouraged by the size or scope of the task, for "faithful is He who called you who also will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

Deuteronomy 1:22–24
And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come. And the saying pleased me well: and I took twelve men of you, one of a tribe: And they turned and went up into the mountain, and came unto the valley of Eshcol, and searched it out.

"Let's check out the land first," said the people. So Moses sent in twelve spies—one man from each tribe. The problem is, there's no record, no hint that he prayed about doing so.

Deuteronomy 1:25, 26
And they took of the fruit of the land in their hands, and brought it down unto us, and brought us word again, and said, It is a good land which the LORD our God doth give us. Notwithstanding ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God:

God said, "Go take the land." The people said, "Let's send spies to check it out." Big mistake. It's always a mistake when I spy out the land because it shifts me from the place of obedience to the place of evaluation. And

evaluation leads more often than not to trepidation. The Bible says we're to walk by faith, not by sight. When we spy out the land, we want sight and insight. But the point where I'm evaluating what I'm seeing is the point faith becomes nonexistent.

Deuteronomy 1:27, 28
And ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there.

"And ye murmured in your tents." I'm convinced that the enemy enters most frequently through a conversation between a husband and a wife. Although we mistakenly think we can "let our hair down" with our husband or wife, in reality, if there's any place we should be people of faith, it should be in our tents. Otherwise, doubts creep in, cynicism rises up, and discouragement takes up residence.

Deuteronomy 1:29–31
Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them. The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes; And in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the LORD thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place.

"God brought you out of Egypt, didn't He?" Moses said. "Certainly He won't let you down now that you're moving out, wanting to go deeper, desiring to be used more impactingly for Him."

Deuteronomy 1:32, 33 (a)
Yet in this thing ye did not believe the LORD your God, Who went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your

tents in . . .

The reason there was no need to send spies into the Land was because God had already spied it out.

Deuteronomy 1:33 (b)
. . . in fire by night, to shew you by what way ye should go, and in a cloud by day.

God led by both a cloud that shielded the children of Israel from the heat of the sun and by a pillar of fire that illuminated their darkness. And He does the same today. When our path leads through darkness, the temptation is to bemoan the fiery trials that come our way not realizing that God uses the fire itself to lead us. He leads by fire in the darkness, by the comforting cloud in the light. He leads both ways.

Deuteronomy 1:34, 35
And the LORD heard the voice of your words, and was wroth, and sware, saying, Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I sware to give unto your fathers,

When we speak words of faith, God hears, and, as a result, we're saved (Romans 10:9). When we speak words of unbelief, He hears as well, and, as a result, we spend time unnecessarily lost in the wilderness of doubt and despair.

Deuteronomy 1:36
Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him will I give the land that he hath trodden upon, and to his children, because he hath wholly followed the LORD.

Caleb was one of the twelve spies who, along with Joshua said, "Don't back down."

Deuteronomy 1:37, 38

Also the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, saying, Thou also shalt not go in thither. But Joshua the son of Nun, which standeth before thee, he shall go in thither: encourage him: for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.

Moses was not allowed to go in—and yet he was to encourage the one who would. How do you feel when someone younger than you gets the promotion, when someone newer than you gets the tap on the shoulder, when someone less qualified, less experienced than you seems to be raised up? Something wonderful happens in the lives of those who say, "I want to encourage people who are elevated above me, who are promoted ahead of me, who get recognition instead of me." Moses had such a heart. He couldn't go into the Promised Land, but we'll see him encourage Joshua nonetheless.

Deuteronomy 1:39
Moreover your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it.

The very children the Israelites had been worried about would be the ones to possess the Land (Numbers 14:3).

Deuteronomy 1:40–46
But as for you, turn you, and take your journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea. Then ye answered and said unto me, we have sinned against the LORD, we will go up and fight, according to all that the LORD our God commanded us. And when ye had girded on every man his weapons of war, ye were ready to go up into the hill. And the LORD said unto me, Say unto them, Go not up, neither fight; for I am not among you; lest ye be smitten before your enemies. So I spake unto you; and ye would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD, and went presumptuously up into the hill. And the Amorites, which dwelt in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you, as bees do, and destroyed you in Seir, even unto Hormah. And ye

returned and wept before the LORD; but the LORD would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear unto you. So ye abode in Kadesh many days, according unto the days that ye abode there.

The children of Israel didn't do what God had told them to do when He told them to take the Land. Then they did what God had told them not to do when they attacked the Amorites. Why? Because they followed their own counsel rather than God's.

What has God told you to do? What has He put on your heart? I can make a strong case against doing what God told me to do. I can murmur and blame others. But each time I do, I end up wandering and missing the promised land of whatever area the Lord wanted me to possess. Life is either a fantastic adventure or it is an endless detour. And the only difference between the two is faith.



2 **Deuteronomy 2:1, 3**
Then we turned, and took our journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea, as the LORD spake unto me: and we compassed mount Seir many days. And the LORD spake unto me, saying, Ye have com passed this mountain long enough: turn you northward.

"Ye have compassed this mountain long enough." And indeed they had. After spending one year at Mt. Sinai and thirty-eight years in the wilderness, it was time for the children of Israel to go north, time to get back to where they were supposed to be thirty-eight years earlier, time to go back to Kadesh-barnea and into the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 2:4, 5
And command thou the people, saying, Ye are to pass through the coast of your brethren the children of Esau, which dwell in Seir; and they shall be afraid of you: take ye good heed unto yourselves therefore: Meddle not with them; for I will not give

you of their land, no, not so much as a foot breadth; because I have given mount Seir unto Esau for a possession.

On their way toward the Promised Land, when the children of Israel passed through the region of Mt. Seir, they were not to engage in battle because God had given that particular piece of property to the Edomites, the descendants of Esau.

Deuteronomy 2:6
Ye shall buy meat of them for money, that ye may eat; and ye shall also buy water of them for money, that ye may drink.

That the Israelites were to buy meat and water signals a shift in God's provision for them. In their wilderness wandering, God had fed them manna from the sky and water from the rock. Now that they're ready to enter the Promised Land, however, although manna would fall seemingly sporadically (Joshua 5:12), after they celebrated their first Passover in the Promised Land, the manna would stop completely.

The point is simple. God expects us to grow up, to move on. Concerning that which was once given to us, God will say, "You need to participate in the process not because I'm being mean to you or holding back from you but because I want to see maturity in you." As we do with our own kids, God expected His children to participate in their own care.

Deuteronomy 2:7
For the LORD thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the LORD thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing.

Each of us who has logged time in with the Lord must, in retrospect, join Moses in saying, "God has seen me through faithfully." For me personally, yes, there were times of doubt and fear and tears, but as I look back over forty years, I have no other honest choice but to say, "God has been nothing but faithful to me."

Deuteronomy 2:8, 9
And when we passed by from our brethren the children of Esau, which dwelt in Seir, through the way of the plain from Elath, and from Ezion-gaber, we turned and passed by the way of the wilderness of Moab. And the LORD said unto me, Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle: for I will not give thee of their land for a possession; because I have given Ar unto the children of Lot for a possession.

The Edomites were descendants of Esau; the Moabites along with the Ammonites, descendants of Lot and his incestuous relationship with his daughters following the destruction of Sodom.

Deuteronomy 2:10–12
The Emims dwelt therein in times past, a people great, and many, and tall, as the Anakims; Which also were accounted giants, as the Anakims; but the Moabites call them Emims. The Horims also dwelt in Seir beforetime; but the children of Esau succeeded them, when they had destroyed them from before them, and dwelt in their stead; as Israel did unto the land of his possession, which the LORD gave unto them.

Like the Anakims, the Emims and Horims were giant people, fearful, and terrible. Yet here Moses says that the Horims were beaten back by the descendants of Esau. In other words, because the Edomites wiped out the very giants of which God's people were afraid (Numbers 13:31–33), the Edomites possessed the land that should have been the Israelites'.

Sometimes we as believers can be real wimpy. "I'm going through this trial, this persecution, this difficulty," we whine—failing to realize that the unbeliever has just as many trials, just as many problems, just as many difficulties (Matthew 5:45). If you think being a Christian is hard, try being an unbeliever. They have the same problems as you and me, but they don't have the opportunity to approach the throne of grace boldly, to pour out their heart to the Father, to open the Word for inspiration and instruction. The world has the same kinds of problems we do, but without access to the Problem-Solver.

Deuteronomy 2:13–15
Now rise up, said I, and get you over the brook Zered. And we went over the brook Zered. And the space in which we came from Kadesh-barnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the LORD sware unto them. For indeed the hand of the LORD was against them, to destroy them from among the host, until they were consumed.

Because God held only those who were twenty years old and older responsible for their unbelief (Numbers 14:29), I believe the age of accountability—the age at which a person's eternal destiny is decided—is higher than we tend to think. God's grace is great and His mercy amazing, for even if the eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds were murmuring, God gave them the opportunity to go into the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 2:16–21 (a)
So it came to pass, when all the men of war were consumed and dead from among the people, That the LORD spake unto me, saying, Thou art to pass over through Ar, the coast of Moab, this day: And when thou comest nigh over against the children of Ammon, distress them not, nor meddle with them: for I will not give thee of the land of the children of Ammon any possession; because I have given it unto the children of Lot for a possession. (That also was accounted a land of giants: giants dwelt therein in old time; and the Ammonites call them Zamzummims; A people great, and many, and tall, as the Anakims . . .

"No temptation has taken you but that which is common to all men," Paul writes (1 Corinthians 10:13). Therefore, I firmly believe everyone has it equally hard. You see, while I've gone through some hard experiences, I've also had great blessings in my life. On the other hand, others might not go through hard times, but neither do they have the blessings. It all equals out. May we not be a people who pout about the Horims and Zamzummims in our lives. Rather, may we be those who say, "On this journey, every step of the way, God has been with us. And how *good* He has been to us."

Deuteronomy 2:21 (b), 22
. . . but the LORD destroyed them before them; and they succeeded them, and dwelt in their stead: As he did to the children of Esau, which dwelt in Seir, when he destroyed the Horims from before them; and they succeeded them, and dwelt in their stead even unto this day:

In verse 12, we read that the descendants of Esau destroyed the Horims, but here in verse 22, we see that, in reality, it was God who destroyed them. Those who say, "I'm a self-made man. I don't need Jesus or the Bible. I fight my own battles. I take on my own giants," fail to understand that it is God who gave them the ability to succeed in business, to hit a baseball, to think technologically. *Every* good and perfect gift comes from God, James tells us (1:17). Therefore, foolish is the man who takes credit for his success.

Deuteronomy 2:23, 24
And the Avims which dwelt in Hazerim, even unto Azzah, the Caphtorims, which came forth out of Caphtor, destroyed them, and dwelt in their stead.) Rise ye up, take your journey, and pass over the river Arnon: behold, I have given into thine hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land: begin to possess it, and contend with him in battle.

Although the Israelites were forbidden from fighting the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites because of their relation to them, they were free to do battle against the Amorites.

Deuteronomy 2:25
This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee.

In waging war against the Amorites, God would bless Israel with such decisive victory that all of the surrounding nations would be in awe of them.

Deuteronomy 2:26–29
And I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemoth unto Sihon king of Heshbon with words of peace, saying, Let me pass through thy land: I will go along by the high way, I will neither turn unto the right hand nor to the left. Thou shalt sell me meat for money, that I may eat; and give me water for money, that I may drink: only I will pass through on my feet; (As the children of Esau which dwell in Seir, and the Moabites which dwell in Ar, did unto me) until I shall pass over Jordan into the land which the LORD our God giveth us.

Even though they were permitted to do battle with the Amorites, the Israelites first asked permission of Sihon to pass through his land.

Deuteronomy 2:30, 31
But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have begun to give Sihon and his land before thee: begin to possess, that thou mayest inherit his land.

Sihon's refusal to give safe passage to Israel set the stage for a battle he was unknowingly destined to lose. Maybe today you have a broken heart because of someone else's obstinate heart. Most of us know what it's like to be rejected by someone we care about. Yet happy is the man or woman who remembers God's sovereignty. We can be happy if we don't lose sight of the fact that God is in control. When someone has a hard heart toward me, I must remember that God is the One who causes all things to work out for His perfect, divine plan. A truly radical way to live is to realize that everything that happens is part of God's plan to allow me to possess more of my possession, to be a bigger person, to gain new territory, to experience great victory.

Deuteronomy 2:32–37

Then Sihon came out against us, he and all his people, to fight at Jahaz. And the LORD our God delivered him before us; and we smote him, and his sons, and all his people. And we took all his cities at that time, and utterly destroyed the men, and the women, and the little ones, of every city, we left none to remain: Only the cattle we took for a prey unto ourselves, and the spoil of the cities which we took. From Aroer, which is by the brink of the river of Arnon, and from the city that is by the river, even unto Gilead, there was not one city too strong for us: the LORD our God delivered all unto us: Only unto the land of the children of Ammon thou camest not, nor unto any place of the river Jabbok, nor unto the cities in the mountains, nor unto whatsoever the LORD our God forbad us.

Because of Sihon's obstinate heart, war did indeed break out. But the result was great victory for the children of Israel, just as God had promised. And through it, they gained their first foothold in the Land—the region east of the Jordan where Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh would eventually settle.



Deuteronomy 3:1

3 Then we turned, and went up the way to Bashan: and Og the king of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei.

Having heard what happened to Sihon, king of the Amorites, Og, king of Bashan, set out to do battle with Israel.

Deuteronomy 3:2–11

And the LORD said unto me, Fear him not: for I will deliver him, and all his people, and his land, into thy hand; and thou shalt do unto him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon. So the LORD our God delivered into our hands Og also, the king of Bashan, and all his people: and we smote him until none was left to him remaining. And we took all his cities at

that time, there was not a city which we took not from them, threescore cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. All these cities were fenced with high walls, gates, and bars; beside unwalled towns a great many. And we utterly destroyed them, as we did unto Sihon king of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men, women, and children, of every city. But all the cattle, and the spoil of the cities, we took for a prey to ourselves. And we took at that time out of the hand of the two kings of the Amorites the land that was on this side Jordan, from the river of Arnon unto mount Hermon; (Which Hermon the Sidonians call Sirion; and the Amorites call it Shenir;) All the cities of the plain, and all Gilead, and all Bashan, unto Salchah and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan. For only Og king of Bashan remained of the remnant of giants; behold, his bedstead was a bedstead of iron; is it not in Rabbath of the children of Ammon? nine cubits was the length thereof, and four cubits the breadth of it, after the cubit of a man.

Israel's victory over Og was no small one—for not only did he rule over sixty cities, but he himself was so big that his "bedstead," or, more likely, his casket measured thirteen by six feet.

Deuteronomy 3:12–17
And this land, which we possessed at that time, from Aroer, which is by the river Arnon, and half mount Gilead, and the cities thereof, gave I unto the Reubenites and to the Gadites. And the rest of Gilead, and all Bashan, being the kingdom of Og, gave I unto the half tribe of Manasseh; all the region of Argob, with all Bashan, which was called the land of giants. Jair the son of Manasseh took all the country of Argob unto the coasts of Geshuri and Maachathi; and called them after his own name, Bashan-havoth-jair, unto this day. And I gave Gilead unto Machir. And unto the Reubenites and unto the Gadites I gave from Gilead even unto the river Arnon half the valley, and the border even unto the river Jabbok, which is the border of the children of Ammon; The plain also, and Jordan, and the coast thereof, from

Chinnereth even unto the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, under Ashdoth-pisgah eastward.

The victory over both Og and Sihon left the territory east of the Jordan available to the Israelites. And, as seen in Numbers 32, the tribes of Gad and Reuben and half of the tribe of Manasseh asked Moses that it be given to them.

Deuteronomy 3:18–20
And I commanded you at that time, saying, The LORD your God hath given you this land to possess it: ye shall pass over armed before your brethren the children of Israel, all that are meet for the war. But your wives, and your little ones, and your cattle, (for I know that ye have much cattle,) shall abide in your cities which I have given you; until the LORD have given rest unto your brethren, as well as unto you, and until they also possess the land which the LORD your God hath given them beyond Jordan: and then shall ye return every man unto his possession, which I have given you.

Although Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh didn't have to go with the rest of the children of Israel, they nonetheless had to assist their brethren in battle. If you have a heart for missions or a desire to serve in ministry but feel unable to do so at this time, God would have you support those who do step up, who do claim territory, who do take their place on the front lines in the battle for men's souls. Pray for those in ministry; give financially to missionaries; do your part to help others be victorious. Don't miss the opportunity to fight alongside your brothers.

Deuteronomy 3:21, 22
And I commanded Joshua at that time, saying, Thine eyes have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto these two kings: so shall the LORD do unto all the kingdoms whither thou passest. Ye shall not fear them: for the LORD your God he shall fight for you.

The children of Israel had seen miraculous victory over Sihon and Og—but that would be only a sneak preview of coming attractions, just a hint of how God would prove to be faithful to them in the Land of Promise.

Deuteronomy 3:23–26
And I besought the LORD at that time, saying, O Lord GOD, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might? I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter.

Because Moses had misrepresented the Lord when he smote the rock at Meribah (Numbers 20), he was not allowed to go into the Land of Promise, until 1,500 years later when we see him talking with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. I love our Lord! It's amazing to me how He has ways of making things happen that we could never imagine. And I believe Moses will be in the Promised Land again—one of the two witnesses of the Tribulation Period in Jerusalem (Revelation 11:3).

Deuteronomy 3:27
Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan.

Even though Moses couldn't go into the Land, the Lord gave him a supernatural sneak preview of it in its entirety.



For topical study of Deuteronomy 3:23–28, see "The Mountain of Vision" below.

Deuteronomy 3:28, 29
But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see. So we abode in the valley over against Beth-peor.

The name *Joshua* in the Old Testament is *Jesus* in the New Testament. Moses couldn't go in to the Promised Land. Joshua would be the one to lead the people in. And Jesus does just that. Jesus is the One who leads us into the Promised Land, the place of salvation, the Spirit-filled life. Even as the Law prepares the way for us to see our need to receive Jesus (Galatians 3:24), Moses was to encourage Joshua to do that which Joshua alone could do then, which Jesus alone can do now.

THE MOUNTAIN OF VISION

A Topical Study of
DEUTERONOMY 3:23–28

After leading the congregation through the wilderness for forty years, Moses desperately desired to see the Land of Promise. But he couldn't go in because of the sin he committed at Meribah when he implied that God was upset with His people (Numbers 20:10). Consequently, because he misrepresented the nature and character, the goodness and grace of the Father, Moses was unable to accompany the congregation into the Promised Land.

Maybe today in your journey through life, you're a bit discouraged, confused by what you cannot do. You're not sure where to go from here. It seems like plans you once had have been altered, that doors have been shut. Maybe things haven't worked out for you in the way you thought they should or the way you hoped they would. Moses can relate to you. And he has good news: The solution to your confusion, the prescription for your pain is found at the top of Mt. Pisgah . . .

The Mountain of Vision

Although Moses could not accompany the children of Israel in to the Promised Land, the Lord told Moses to climb Mt. Pisgah, or Mt. Nebo—where he would be given a supernatural view of the entire land.

Where there is no vision, the people perish (Proverbs 29:18). The Hebrew word translated "perish" is *pahrah,* which simply means "naked." Without vision, people feel naked, unsure, exposed, undone. Without vision, people want to hole up and hide away. Without vision, people perish. Yesterday, I went to the mountaintop and was reminded that it's in getting away to a quiet place at a quiet time with a quiet heart that we hear what God would say to us, that we receive fresh vision.

From this point on, Pisgah in Scripture is known as the mount of vision. And it was at this point that Moses knew what he was to do. He was to encourage Joshua, for as a representative of the Law, Moses could not be the one to lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land, but as a picture of Jesus, Joshua could and would.

How about you? Is it clear to you what you're to do? Is it clear what those who follow after you are to be? If not, could I encourage you to get to a quiet place, away from distractions and interruptions, and say, "Lord, I need vision. I'm perishing. I'm confused. I'm in the dark."

Get away, brothers and sisters, and seek the Lord. Find your Nebo, your Pisgah, and go there regularly.

The Mountain of Seduction

Jesus was also taken to a high mountain. “Look at all the kingdoms of the world,” Satan said to Him. “They’re all Yours if you just bow down to me.” What a vision. “You can rule over all these people. You can bring peace to the earth, prosperity to the nations. You can solve the problems in the world. Just bow down to me and Your kingdom can come.”

But Jesus said, “No.” Why? Because it wasn’t a vision from God, but a seduction of Satan (Matthew 4:8–10).

You see, although Jesus could have ruled and reigned over the earth, people would still have ended up in hell. He had to die for the sins of humanity, not just rule over people governmentally. Sure, it would have been a good thing for Jesus to rule and reign temporally—but terrible in light of eternity. So what if people have peace and prosperity on earth if they spend eternity in hell? What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world but lose his soul (Mark 8:36)? It seemed to be a good, noble vision Satan suggested seductively. But it ended up with people being doomed and damned eternally.

So as we’re on the mountain, how do we know if the vision is from God or a temptation from Satan? The third mountain is the key . . .

Mount Moriah

The ridge that runs right through Jerusalem and out of the north side of the Old City peaks and crests at Mt. Moriah—a place we know more commonly as Golgotha, or Calvary. Rather than buy into the seduction of Satan, Jesus went to Mt. Moriah and laid down His life to save people like you and me.

If I told you about some of the thoughts and dreams I've had, they would sound noble and exciting. But I know in my soul they were to make my own life more interesting, more fulfilled, more exciting, more comfortable—not about laying down my life for the redemptive purposes of God, not about giving up my life in order that others might do better. You will know if any given vision truly is of God or if it's a subtle seduction of Satan by asking yourself if it is about making your life more comfortable—or if it's about dying to yourself, laying down your life, doing whatever it takes to help people do better. Redemption is the nature of a true vision of God.

Is the vision you're considering all about you? Or is it about getting butchered, slaughtered, kicked around, beat up, crucified in order that others might live? Because Jesus chose the latter, He would find Himself on yet another mountain . . .

The Mount of Olives

Forty days after shedding His blood for you and me on Mt. Calvary, Jesus stood on the Mount of Olives before ascending to heaven triumphantly. And since whatever goes up must come down, guess who is coming back to the Mount of Olives. The Bible says that when He does, He will walk through the Kidron Valley, through the Eastern Gate, and into Jerusalem as the Prince of Peace to rule over all the kingdoms of the world for 1,000 years (Zechariah 14:4). In other words, by opting to go to Mt. Moriah, by doing what was best for the greatest number, Jesus is not only rewarded in heaven and exalted eternally, but He gets the very thing Satan was offering previously. It's a win/win situation. It all works out perfectly.

When we choose to take up the cross and say, "It's not about what's easiest for me. It's about what's best for the most people I can possibly touch and reach and help—be it Applegate or Africa, be it on the East Coast or Alaska—it's about whatever You would have me do, Lord, even if it kills me," we'll get whatever Satan may have tried to seduce us with because Jesus said that if we seek first the kingdom, everything we need would be thrown in (Matthew 6:33).

On Tuesday, I spent some time with a bunch of pastors going through the Book of Ezra and dealing with some pastoral issues. When I was done, I had a couple meetings and then did a radio show. On my way home, I felt really fatigued and weary of soul. Yet the Lord, I believe, gave me a very simple vision, a simple stirring, a simple directive to go and see our brother Jeff, who, at thirty-five years of age, was dying of brain cancer. But after getting lost twice trying to find his house and having been up since before four in the morning, knowing that my kids weren't home that night and that Tammy had a nice dinner planned, I thought, *I'm tired. I'll go home and pick it up tomorrow.* Yet even as I made my way home, I knew that it wasn't right. I knew it wasn't the way of the Cross for me at that moment at that time. So I made a U-turn and, by God's grace, I found the house.

Jeff 's three sons were there with a few pastors, worshiping the Lord, praying, and sharing. And I talked to him and read Scriptures because I believe that even though the mind may not be working, the spirit still

perceives and receives prayer, praise, and the Word. So we were sharing together, talking to him about heaven, even though he was unable to comprehend mentally. Then, after an hour or so, something happened I'll never forget. As I sat by his bed, suddenly Jeff looked at me. His eyes were crystal clear, his focus laser-sharp. He grabbed my hand and held it for forty-five seconds as our eyes met. And I found myself weeping as he gripped my hand with the strongest grip I've felt in a long time. Then he let go and returned to his previous state.

He went to heaven the next day.

"I'm going to go and do this," I had said. "It's the way of the Cross." What I didn't know was Mt. Calvary turned into the Mount of Olives. I was caught up in heavenly places. That's the way it always is. I was the one who was blessed. Jeff ministered to me in that forty-five-second window of opportunity. I can't explain it, but I went home with tears in my eyes because I was so deeply touched. And to think I almost missed it because I almost opted for what was more comfortable for me. I almost missed the supernatural blessing God had flowing through Jeff into my heart at that moment.

Discouraged today? You need a fresh vision. How do you get that? Go to the mountain. How will you know the vision is from God? It will not be what's easiest for you, what's most comfortable for you. Mount Moriah will mean death to yourself. But Mount Moriah will turn into the Mount of Olives very quickly.

Are you doing that which is most helpful to the most people, or are you making your choices based on what's easiest for you?

I need to go to the mountain constantly and say, "Father, give me Your vision even though it leads to my death because it will ultimately mean resurrection and ecstasy not only for others, but for me."



4 "Tell Pharaoh to let My people go," the Lord said to Moses.

"I can't," said Moses. "I'm slow of speech. You're asking me to do something I'm not cut out to do" (see Exodus 4:10).

Yet here in Deuteronomy, we see Moses going on and on and on, chapter after chapter—the antithesis of a man "slow of speech." When did Moses become such an orator, such a speaker? The rabbis have an interesting perspective on this. They say when Moses was initially called to speak to Pharaoh, the issue was political. And when it came to politics, Moses was indeed slow of speech when it came to speaking diplomatic jargon. But here in Deuteronomy, he's not talking politics. He's talking morality and theology —and, because of that, he can go on and on and on—a preacher after my own heart!

Deuteronomy 4:1, 2
Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

Contrary to the warm, fuzzy family commercials inviting you to call an 800 number to learn about "another gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ," there *is* no other gospel. The Mormon church claims they have another gospel which came from an angel Moroni. But if Joseph Smith had read his Bible, he would know that Paul said that "if we or an angel preach any other gospel, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8, 9).

Jesus reiterated this when He told the Pharisees and scribes that they had made the Word of God powerless because they had taught for doctrines the commandments of men (Mark 7:7). In other words, they had added layers of complicated meanings to the simplicity of the Scriptures.

Therefore, I say, "Lord, show me where we have added traditions to Your Word. Are there things we are teaching or doing simply out of habit rather than out of a biblical base for such actions?" It's a question we need to ask ourselves personally as well as corporately.

Deuteronomy 4:3

Your eyes have seen what the LORD did because of Baal-peor: for all the men that followed Baal-peor, the LORD thy God hath destroyed them from among you.

Unable to curse God's people, Balaam told the king of the Midianites that the Israelites could bring a curse upon themselves through immorality. And Balaam proved to be tragically right when 24,000 men were killed as a result of immorality with Midianite women (Numbers 25:9). As he reminds the Israelites of this event in their recent history, Moses says, "Remember what happened when you didn't listen, when you thought the Word of God didn't apply to you."

Deuteronomy 4:4
But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day.

Those who didn't listen were dead. Those who did were alive. How true that still is. When I don't listen to the Lord, I experience deadness, dearth, and drought in my soul. On the other hand, there is a liveliness and vitality about those who do indeed listen to the Lord.

Deuteronomy 4:5–8
Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?

Not only were the Israelites to obey God's Word that they might live—but that they might be a light in order that other nations might see the way life was meant to be lived (Isaiah 49:6).

I'm so glad we have God's Word. It's so right. We're so blessed.

> Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ . . .
>
> Ephesians 2:2–5 (a)

In times past, we didn't have a clue Someone was going to come to save souls and save the world from its dark, depraved, sinful state. We didn't have a clue. We didn't have the promises. We didn't have hope. It's good for us to reflect on this from time to time. Paul says, "Remember where you once were and rejoice in where you are now."

We have God. We have Christ. We have the promises of the Word. We have the hope of heaven. I'm so thankful, so grateful, so glad I'm saved. We're so blessed—every one of us.

> **Deuteronomy 4:9 (a)**
> **Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life . . .**

You've been blessed, but be careful because you can become so familiar with the Word that you no longer take heed to it. You've been given such a wonderful treasure in the Scriptures, but watch out lest it no longer be a priority for you, a passion within you to know the heart of God, the Word of the Lord.

> **Deuteronomy 4:9 (b), 10**
> **. . . but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons; Specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will**

make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children.

Take heed to yourself because it's not just about you, but about your kids and grandchildren as well. Here is your job: to be familiar with the Word, to be constantly learning more about the Word so that you can teach your children and grandchildren.

"Your mother and brothers are calling for You," the disciples said to Jesus.

"My mother and brothers are those who hear and do the Word," Jesus said (see Matthew 12:48–50).

Jesus' disciples were His family, but your family is your disciples. This is such an important understanding. "What's my ministry?" people often ask. And my question to them is, "Do you have kids or grandchildren? Pray for them, share the things you're learning about the Lord with them day by day. And in so doing, you will be in ministry."

If you raise godly kids or are involved in seeing godly grandchildren raised up, yours is a fruitful, successful, rewarding, fulfilling, thrilling, eternity-impacting ministry indeed. There can be no greater blessing. That's why my personal favorite ministry time is the time I get to spend with my family in family devotions.

Deuteronomy 4:11–13
And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness. And the LORD spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone.

When the Law was given, Mt. Sinai was on fire. The earth quaked. Thunder rolled. God's voice was heard. And He wrote the commandments

not on an Etch-a-Sketch but in stone because they're not suggestions. They're nonnegotiable, irrevocable, everlasting commands.

Deuteronomy 4:14–20
And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it. Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, The likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth: And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven. But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day.

When the Law was given, the children of Israel heard the Word, but saw nothing physical or tangible of God's Person. Therefore, they were not to make any images to represent Him. And because of this, of all cultures of antiquity, the Jewish people are the only culture without artistic treasures or monuments. Instead, they directed their energies elsewhere, which partially explains the fact that, although they constitute less than one-half of one percent of the world's population, the Jewish people as an ethnic group have won almost twenty-five percent of all Nobel prizes.

Deuteronomy 4:21–24
Furthermore the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, and sware that I should not go over Jordan, and that I should not go in unto that good land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance: But I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan:

but ye shall go over, and possess that good land. Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, which the LORD thy God hath forbidden thee. For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.

For we who know Him, the fact that our God is a consuming fire should be anything but frightening, for anything fire touches soon becomes fire, too. Aren't you kind of sick of yourself? I'm so tired of me. Consequently, I find myself praying, "Consume me, Lord. Set me free from my fleshly inclinations. Make me burn bright and pure, holy and hot for You."

Deuteronomy 4:25–28
When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God, to provoke him to anger: I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And the LORD shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the LORD shall lead you. And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.

The Jewish people would turn away from the true and living God and become immersed in idolatry and materialism. Consequently, in 586 B.C., God allowed the Babylonians to besiege and destroy Jerusalem, to burn the temple, and to carry His people to Babylon, where they were held captive for seventy years. After seventy years, the Spirit began to stir in the hearts of a remnant of Jews who would rebuild the city of Jerusalem and, eventually, the temple. But as time passed, so radically did the nation again turn its back on God that of His Son they would cry, "Away with Him! Crucify Him! We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). Consequently, within forty years, in

the year A.D. 70, the Romans besieged the city, destroyed the temple and killed one million Jews. When Hadrian became emperor of Rome, the persecution of the Jews intensified further. And, of course, in World War II, the Jewish population was nearly obliterated by Hitler.

". . . and ye shall be left few in number . . ."

Indeed.

Deuteronomy 4:29, 30 (a)
But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation . . .

"When thou art in tribulation. . . ." The Jews will indeed be present in the Tribulation—the seven-year period described in Revelation 6 through 19. But because God is faithful to His promise to Israel, 144,000 Jewish evangelists will be sent throughout the world preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ; Elijah and Moses will come back and preach on the streets of Jerusalem; and angels will proclaim the message of salvation. As a result, Romans 11 tells us that all Israel will be saved.

Deuteronomy 4:30 (b), 31
. . . and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the LORD thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; (For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them.

Perhaps you are enduring your own personal tribulation even now. Maybe you feel scattered, unsure of what is going on. This promise is not only for the Jew. It's for you.

When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer. This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD. For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the LORD

behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death; to declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem;

Psalm 102:16–21

We have seen Zion built up in our generation. The Lord is coming. We're going to heaven. And things will be at last what you thought and hoped and dreamed they would be.

Deuteronomy 4:32–34
For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?

As proof of God's faithfulness, Moses asks, "Have you ever heard of God rescuing a people from the grip of another nation as He did when He rescued you from bondage in Egypt?"

Deuteronomy 4:35–40
Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him. Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire; and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire. And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt; To drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day. Know

therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else. Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, for ever.

"Which I command thee this day"—the phrase implies that God must be rediscovered each day. Every day, we get to rediscover the nature and beauty of our Father. Every day, there ought to be a rediscovery of the grace and glory and grandeur of our God.

"Take heed to My Word," God says. "Rediscover Me each day. Listen to what I have to say once more. Go over the Scriptures; pray them in; think them through; act them out and it will go well for you and for your family."

A story is told in the Mishnah, the collection of Jewish teaching and writings, of a certain Persian king named Arteban who sent to Judah, the prince in Jerusalem, the largest diamond known in existence at that time. Upon receiving this gift, Judah sent back to Arteban a copy of the Book of Deuteronomy with the accompanying note: What you sent me requires guards to protect it. What I have sent you will guard and protect you.

I'm so thankful for God's Word. I really am—because I know, as you do, that it works. When we take heed and do what we're told to, it is well with us and with our families, too.

Deuteronomy 4:41–43
Then Moses severed three cities on this side Jordan toward the sunrising; That the slayer might flee thither, which should kill his neighbour unawares, and hated him not in times past; and that fleeing unto one of these cities he might live: Namely, Bezer in the wilderness, in the plain country, of the Reubenites; and Ramoth in Gilead, of the Gadites; and Golan in Bashan, of the Manassites.

Here we see the three cities of refuge located east of the Jordan wherein a person who committed second-degree murder could flee, as first seen in Numbers 35.

Deuteronomy 4:44–49
And this is the law which Moses set before the children of Israel: These are the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which Moses spake unto the children of Israel, after they came forth out of Egypt, On this side Jordan, in the valley over against Beth-peor, in the land of Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon, whom Moses and the children of Israel smote, after they were come forth out of Egypt: And they possessed his land, and the land of Og king of Bashan, two kings of the Amorites, which were on this side Jordan toward the sunrising; From Aroer, which is by the bank of the river Arnon, even unto mount Sion, which is Hermon, And all the plain on this side Jordan eastward, even unto the sea of the plain, under the springs of Pisgah.

The once-invincible kingdoms of Og and Sihon are toppled—replaced by three million Jews, listening to Moses, ready to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land.



5

Deuteronomy 5:1
And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them.

Moses' command to the children of Israel is a vital one for us: to learn the Word of God, as we're doing now; to keep it not only on the pages of a notebook or a journal but in our hearts; and, finally, to do it.

Deuteronomy 5:2, 3
The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who

are all of us here alive this day.

"The Lord made a contract not with our ancestors but with us. How blessed we are," Moses would say, "that God made a covenant with us by which we might experience success."

Deuteronomy 5:4, 5
The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire, (I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to shew you the word of the LORD: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount;) saying,

And now Moses will remind the people what the Lord said on the mountain when He gave them the commandments.

Deuteronomy 5:6
I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

The commandments were based upon the love God demonstrated when He freed them from bondage in Egypt. We, too, were in bondage to our own sin, headed for eternal damnation. And God purchased us with the blood of His Son, rescued us from our sinful condition. Because of that, we ought to give earnest heed to what He says to you and me, knowing it springs from a heart of love toward us.

Deuteronomy 5:7, 8
Thou shalt have none other gods before me. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth:

Any image a person tries to conjure up in their mind about the Lord is going to be, at best, very inadequate for God is bigger than anything we can imagine. Therefore, God says, "Don't try to represent Me with some image because it's going to fail terribly in capturing My essence and My greatness."

Even crucifixes fail unspeakably short not only in depicting the suffering Jesus went through when, according to Isaiah 52 and 53 He was marred more than any other human being has ever been, but in failing to represent the fact that, although He was mangled in a way we can't depict or understand, three days later He left the Cross behind and rose again.

Deuteronomy 5:9, 10
Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

What God is declaring here is that if a dad sins and his son sins, God will keep on visiting them, that He'll neither change His mind about their sin nor give up on showing the way of deliverance to them.

Deuteronomy 5:11
Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

The word "vain" means "empty." Therefore, the reference here is to much more than simply cursing. We can also take God's name in vain, make it empty, by saying, "The Lord told me to tell you . . ." or, "The Lord wants you to know . . ." without any basis to do so. On the other hand, we also take the name of the Lord in vain if we ignore it—as seen in the present attempts by our legal system to remove it whenever possible.

Deuteronomy 5:12–14
Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy

gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.

Keep in mind that the concept of a Sabbath was a new concept. No other culture in history up to this point had the concept that people could take a day off. Here God makes it not only a possibility but a requirement. And yet this is the only one of the Ten Commandments not repeated in the New Testament. Why? Because, although the Sabbath is an important covenantal point to and for the Jew (Exodus 31:12–17; Nehemiah 9:13–15; Ezekiel 20:12, 20), the church does not seem to be held under the same legal mandate. Why? Because we don't have a Sabbath day. We have a Sabbath life in Christ Jesus. Because of the work He did on the Cross, we can rest every day in Him. Therefore, as New Testament believers, keeping the Sabbath is a wise thing for us to do, but not a legalistic requirement.

Deuteronomy 5:15
And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.

"I want you to have a different lifestyle than you had in Egypt with your nose to the grindstone perpetually," God said. It's amazing that this was a commandment reiterated repeatedly in the Old Testament. Here God wanted to bless His people with rest. And yet they would continually break this wonderful commandment.

Deuteronomy 5:16
Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be elongated, or enriched—that you might stay a long time in the Land. Conversely, failure to honor the family structure leads to shortened days in the land, a destruction of

the culture. Any serious student of history knows that within one generation after the family structure breaks down, the culture is destroyed. God said we are to honor mother and father. And unless we do, we'll not be long in the land.

Deuteronomy 5:17
Thou shalt not kill.

There are those who say that, on the basis of this command, Christians shouldn't go to war. Yet the God who gave this commandment to the Jews would tell them to go to war against all kinds of people. Jesus explains this seeming contradiction when He said, "Thou shalt not murder"—making a distinction between murdering and killing. God allowed His own Son to be killed that we might be saved. There are men who have shed their blood that we might be set free as a nation. Thus, risking one's life in order that others might be free can actually be very Jesus-like.

Deuteronomy 5:18–20
Neither shalt thou commit adultery. Neither shalt thou steal. Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour.

Bearing false witness is not only about telling whoppers. It can also refer to giving the right information with a wrong implication.

"Destroy this temple and in three days, I will build it up," Jesus said. Yet the Bible calls those who quoted Him false witnesses (Matthew 26:60, 61), for although they quoted Him accurately, they missed the point of what He was saying entirely.

We can be guilty of this as well. "That's what she said," we say. Yes, but what did she say before that and after that? What was the context? Christians are vulnerable to telling what they heard—but not the whole story. That's what false witnessing is. Be oh, so careful that you don't quote people out of context. It really hurts them.

Anytime you're talking about someone, imagine him or her being there. Would you say the same things in the same way—with the same tone of voice and the same look in your eye? This will serve you well because somehow, as Christians, we have learned to be adept liars. "That's what she said." But

that's not all she said. "That's what he did." But that's not all he did. Help us, Lord, to be people who are rich in integrity and lovers of people.

Deuteronomy 5:21, 22 (a)
Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is thy neighbour's. These words the LORD spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more . . .

". . . and He added no more." I like that. God gave us ten succinct, simple, and profound commandments that give us the key to living life successfully. And He added no more.

Deuteronomy 5:22 (b)–28
. . . And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me. And it came to pass, when ye heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, (for the mountain did burn with fire,) that ye came near unto me, even all the heads of your tribes, and your elders; and ye said, Behold, the LORD our God hath shewed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth. Now therefore why should we die? For this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? Go thou near, and hear all that the LORD our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it. And the LORD heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the LORD said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken.

If I were God and heard the people say, "Moses, you go talk to Him and tell us what He says, and everything He says we'll do," I'd sarcastically say, "Yeah, right. Sure they're going to do everything I say." But our Father is so wonderful that even though He knows the frailty and fickleness of His family, He still approves of what they said. This is precious to me because I wouldn't have shown anywhere near this kind of grace.

Deuteronomy 5:29–33
O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever! Go say to them, Get you into your tents again. But as for thee, stand thou here by me, and I will speak unto thee all the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which thou shalt teach them, that they may do them in the land which I give them to possess it. Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess.

If the children of Israel had only done all that the Lord commanded, it would have been well with them and their children forever.



6 **Deuteronomy 6:1–3**
Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase

mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.

Milk is a staple. Honey is a luxury. Milk gives you strength. Honey is sweet. God says, "I want to bring you into the land of milk and honey—the place of strength and sweetness. How does that happen? Listen to Me and it will go well with you."

Deuteronomy 6:4 (a)
Hear, O Israel:

So begins the great *Shema,* which means "Listen"—recited throughout the world by every observant Jew every morning and every evening . . .

Deuteronomy 6:4 (b)
. . . The LORD our God is one LORD:

The Hebrew word translated "one" is *echod,* which refers to a compound unity. *Echod* is used in Genesis 2:24 with regard to Adam and Eve as well as in Exodus 26 to describe the curtains and coverings in the tabernacle. The Hebrew word translated "God" is *Elohim,* also a compound unity. *El* is singular. *Elo* is used for two. *Elohim* refers to three or more. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, *Elohim,* is one compound unity." Listen carefully to the Shema, and you'll hear the Trinity.

Deuteronomy 6:5, 6
And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

Can love be commanded? If you think of love only as a noun, the answer is no. But love in the Bible is not a noun. It's a verb—something you do rather than something you feel. Divorce is rampant today because we have lost our understanding of what love is.

"Why do you have so many songs about rain?" an anthropologist asked the Hopi Indians he was studying.

"We live in the desert," they answered. "We sing about rain because it is so rare."

I wonder if that's why so many of our songs are about love. Love is a fantasy in the way it's being hyped today.

Jesus taught us wherever our treasure is, there will our heart be also (Matthew 6:21). In other words, choose to love and then the feeling will follow. So God here commands love. He doesn't say, "I hope you feel love for Me." He says, "I'm commanding you to show love to Me."

Deuteronomy 6:7
And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

When you get up in the morning, when you go to bed at night, when you're walking, when you're relaxing, talk to your kids about loving God. My brother, Dave, modeled this wonderfully. Every time he would go anywhere —to the post office, to 7–11, to the hardware store—he would take one of his boys, knowing he could spend time with him.

If you haven't been teaching your kids, consider the Chinese proverb which says, "The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago. The second best time is today." We should have done things twenty years ago. All of us know that. But the second best time to do it is now. And if your kids have grown up and moved out of the house—there's always grandchildren, nieces, nephews, or neighbor kids with whom you can share the Lord.

Deuteronomy 6:8
And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

The Jews literally had boxes, or phylacteries, which were worn on their head or on their wrists containing the Shema.

Deuteronomy 6:9
And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

Like the phylacteries worn on one's person, a *mezuzah* is a box containing the Shema, attached near the front door of one's house. God's intent was not for His people to have mezuzahs and phylacteries, but that His Word be written in the fabric of their homes and minds.

Deuteronomy 6:10 (a)
And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob . . .

Moses didn't say, "If the Lord brings you into the Land," or, "Should the Lord bring you in," or, "Perhaps the Lord will bring you in." He said, "*When* the Lord brings you in." In other words, "You're going to make it. God will see you through. God will bring you in. Of that there is no doubt."

The same thing is true for you and me, for He who has begun a good work in us will be faithful to complete it (Philippians 1:6). The message of Moses to that congregation is the message the Master gives to us today as well. He's going to bring us in. He's going to see us through. It's as good as done.

Deuteronomy 6:10 (b)–19
. . . to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth. Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah.

Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee. And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the LORD: that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, To cast out all thine enemies from before thee, as the LORD hath spoken.

"When you take possession of houses you didn't build, vineyards and olive trees you didn't plant, and wells you didn't dig, beware," Moses warned, "lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of bondage."

There is a peril in prosperity. When things are going well, when things come our way which bless and amaze us, there is an insidious danger, for it is in those days that we can forget the Lord and think that it's our energy, our effort, our creativity, ingenuity, or hard work which got us where we are.

In Deuteronomy 8, God will remind the people that it was He who gave them everything they had. And it is He who does the same for us, for truly, the foundational essence of our Father is that He is a Giver . . .

I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.

Psalm 81:10

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

Matthew 7:7

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son . . .

John 3:16 (a)

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Romans 8:32

> Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,
>
> Ephesians 3:20

> Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.
>
> James 1:17

"You're in for a treat," Moses said. "God is going to give you cities and houses you didn't build; olive trees, vineyards, and wells you neither had to plant nor dig." And yet he would also have to warn the people that whenever there is prosperity, God is forgotten.

Can prosperity be navigated successfully? I believe so. Turn to Matthew's Gospel to see how.

> When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple:
>
> Matthew 27:57

Joseph of Arimathaea was a mover and shaker, a rich man, a powerful person. He was also a secret disciple of Jesus. But when Jesus was crucified, Joseph no longer cared about what others thought of him and came out of the spiritual closet.

> He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.
>
> Matthew 27:58

Joseph went to Pontius Pilate—the most powerful political person in the region, the one who had ordered the execution of Jesus—and begged the body of Jesus. Mark says he craved the body of Jesus (15:43). When Pilate commanded the body be given him, Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb. Only very wealthy men in

those days were able to have their own tombs prepared ahead of time. And Joseph was one of them.

There's nothing inherently wrong with being wealthy or prosperous, as long as you don't forget the Lord. "This is My body broken for you," Jesus said. "Do this in remembrance of Me." When a person truly understands how good the Lord has been to him, he craves to remember the Lord's body at Communion. Secondly, he desires to minister to the body of believers. Joseph used what he had for the body of Christ. And what a great thing it is to see a person's wealth or possessions used for the body of Christ. That's the way it's supposed to be. That's what God wants to do in us and through us. He wants to give us good things and bless us for the purpose of taking care of His body.

I believe Joseph of Arimathaea provides a pattern for successfully navigating prosperity. May we be those who, like him, crave the body of Jesus both mystically and practically.

Deuteronomy 6:20–23
And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you? Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand: And the LORD shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: And he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers.

"Son, let me tell you something" we can say. "The reason I go to Bible study week after week and listen to this pastor as he goes on and on and on is because I was in bondage and the Lord miraculously, wonderfully, lovingly set me free." Do your kids know your story? They need to. They need to know why you do what you do, where you once were, what God saved you from and how good He's been to you. That makes great dinnertime conversation. Instead of complaining about your job situation or murmuring

about other people, talk about what God has done for you today or in your past.

Moses didn't say, "*If* thy son asketh thee . . ." He said, "*When* he asketh thee . . ." because every kid is curious about his parents. Your kids will ask about your story in one way or another. When they do, seize the opportunity and let them hear your heart. Let them know why you're so committed to Christ, why you're so radical for Jesus.

Deuteronomy 6:24
And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.

Do you fear the Lord? I believe there is a huge lack in the body of Christ in our day because people don't fear God. "It's a fearful thing," the writer of Hebrews said, "to fall into the hands of the living God" (10:31). God's hands are loving and tender to be sure—but He will also chasten and discipline His wayward children. And the repercussions and scars of sin go on and on and on.

Deuteronomy 6:25
And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us.

In twenty-five years of ministry, I have yet to talk to one person who said, "I'm glad I sinned. Oh, it was a little rough for awhile, but it paid big dividends in the long run."

Moses here is saying, "This is for your *good*."

Maybe these commandments, statutes, and judgments seem confining and restricting, but these words are given that it might be well with us now and eternally.



7 **Deuteronomy 7:1, 2**

When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to pos sess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them:

"When you go into the Land," Moses instructs the people, "God will deliver seven formidable foes into your hand. And you shall smite them."

The same is true for us . . .

> There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.
>
> 1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation will ever come our way without the Lord providing a way for victory at that time. But we need to participate. In other words, the Lord will deliver us, but we have a role to play as well. At the moment of temptation, when the battle is raging, when the enemy is looming, the Lord will give me victory if I choose to participate. There will always be a way of escape, a way of victory.

> Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.
>
> Romans 6:6

Because the word translated "crucified" literally means "rendered inactive," we can say, "I'm not going to get beaten up by the enemy of temptation or of depression or of seduction because not only has the Lord promised that there is a way of escape, but that the sin of anger or hostility or lust can't dominate me any more. When Christ Jesus died on the Cross, anything contrary to Christ was crucified, paralyzed. Therefore, all the old

nature can do is yell at me, scream at me, and try to intimidate me. But it cannot touch me unless I choose to listen."

Some people say, "I just can't seem to get over this. I can't deal with that. Where's the Lord?" The answer is that the Lord has done His part. Now He's waiting for you to do yours and smite the enemy.

Deuteronomy 7:3, 4
Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.

"Mixed marriages will be disastrous because they'll pull your sons and daughters away from the Lord," Moses says. And, again, the same is still true, for compromised relationships slow us down, hold us back, pull us away from where we ought to be.

Deuteronomy 7:5
But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire.

Can't you hear the heart of Pastor Moses here as he pleads with his people? They know this. They've heard it before. But here is a shepherd, a man of God, saying, "Please listen again. Understand that these things are important: Smite both the enemy and their idols."

Deuteronomy 7:6
For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

The children of Israel were not to be eroded, lessened, diminished by the worship of false gods but were to be a uniquely whole and holy people.

Deuteronomy 7:7, 8 (a)
The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you . . .

I love this Scripture. Moses says I want you to know the Lord didn't select you to be His, to be holy, to be different, because you were mightier than others. No, He chose you simply because He loved you. God loves you and me not because we are mighty or together or have something awesome to offer. Quite the opposite, He loves us just because He loves us. Period. His love is not based upon how good I'm doing or how much you're doing, how poorly I'm faring or how much you're erring. God's love for us is honestly, truly, absolutely unconditional. And once we grasp this, we can go through our day expecting the Lord to bless us, to shower grace upon us—not because of who we are or what we've done but simply and solely because of who He is.

Deuteronomy 7:8 (b)
. . . and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

"God made a promise to your fathers," Moses reminded the children of Israel. "And He's will keep His Word."

Deuteronomy 7:9, 10
Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face.

Those who arrogantly shake their fist at God, turn their back on God, or make fun of God, will feel the wrath of God.

Deuteronomy 7:11–13
Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them. Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the LORD thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he sware unto thy fathers: And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee.

In verse 7, Moses told the people the Lord loved them unconditionally. Here, he tells them the Lord would love and bless them if they obeyed His Words. Is this contradictory? No.

I love my kids whether they're good or bad. I love them simply because they're my kids. But if they say, "We're not going to be here for breakfast, lunch, or dinner, for Christmas, Thanksgiving, or Easter"—although I'll still love them, they'll not enjoy the blessings which would have come their way if they remained close to me.

That's what Jude meant when he said, "Keep yourselves in the love of God" (v. 21). He didn't mean to try to earn or work for or merit God's love. He meant we are to just "keep ourselves under the spout where God's blessings come out."

Here in Deuteronomy, God says, "You'll experience all kinds of blessings if you hearken to the judgments, if you take heed to the Word, if you let Me love you."

Deuteronomy 7:14, 15
Thou shalt be blessed above all people: there shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle. And the LORD will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil

diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee; but will lay them upon all them that hate thee.

Having lived in Egypt 400 years, the children of Israel were all too familiar with the diseases of Egypt. Egypt being a type of the world, we, too, see the sickness of the world in which we live.

Keep in mind that everything in the Old Testament is a physical picture of a New Testament spiritual truth . . .

- The children of Israel were delivered from the bondage of Egypt and brought to the Promised Land.
  We've been delivered from the world system and ushered into the Spirit-filled life.
- Their citizenship was in a land.
  Ours is in heaven.
- They fought with swords and spears.
  The weapons of our warfare are spiritual.
- They were to smite their enemies.
  We are to reckon dead the enemy of our soul.

If you don't understand this, the Old Testament will be troubling and impractical to you. There are those who say if we walk with the Lord, we'll have no diseases, that we'll never be sick. Yet Paul had a thorn in his flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7). He left Trophimus sick (2 Timothy 4:20). He told Timothy to take wine for his stomach problems (1 Timothy 5:23). The diseases the Old Testament talks about which were physical for them are spiritual for us. The Lord wants to make us a peculiar, special people, different from the Egyptians that surround us. And He says that will happen if we do what He tells us to do.

Deuteronomy 7:16–18 (a)
And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee. If

thou shalt say in thine heart, These nations are more than I; how can I dispossess them? Thou shalt not be afraid of them . . .

Moses says, "When you come to the place where you're tempted to say in your heart, deep within you, that there's no solution, no victory, no way out, you must remember not to succumb to fear."

Deuteronomy 7:18 (b), 19
. . . but shalt well remember what the LORD thy God did unto Pharaoh, and unto all Egypt; The great temptations which thine eyes saw, and the signs, and the wonders, and the mighty hand, and the stretched out arm, whereby the LORD thy God brought thee out: so shall the LORD thy God do unto all the people of whom thou art afraid.

Fear is more a loss of memory than it is a lack of faith. That is why Moses says, "When you begin to feel afraid, remember what the Lord did for you in setting you free from the bondage of Egypt."

"Do this in remembrance of Me," Jesus said (Luke 22:19). As I go the Lord's Table and am reminded that He gave everything to save my soul, I know He'll see me through whatever it is that's frightening me presently. The Bible says there is one thing that casts out fear. It isn't faith. It's perfect love (1 John 4:18). When I realize how much the Lord has already loved me, I won't be afraid of anything or anyone. What he'll say, what she'll think, how they will respond will no longer be the issue.

Are you fearful? Are you saying, "I'd like to do this, but what will my boss, husband, friends, kids, wife think?" Don't let fear dominate you. Choose to do what's right. How? Remember what Jesus has already done on your behalf and trust Him to see you through.

Deuteronomy 7:20
Moreover the LORD thy God will send the hornet among them, until they that are left, and hide themselves from thee, be destroyed.

In Isaiah 7, the Assyrians are called bees. Thus, it could be that the Lord is saying, "I will use other nations to come down to Canaan to deal with your enemies." But my personal opinion is that the reference here is to literal hornets. The Lord has amazing ways at His disposal to drive out His enemies so that His people can be all they can "bee."

Deuteronomy 7:21 (a)
Thou shalt not be affrighted at them . . .

What do you fear? At any given moment I am living in fear and so are you —either the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom and success (Psalm 111:10), or the fear of man, which is a snare (Proverbs 29:25).

"What are your goals for the coming school year?" I asked my two youngest kids.

About to start seventh grade, Ben looked at me and said, "I have two goals, Dad. The first is to remember where my locker is, the second is to be able to open it."

Ben was kidding—sort of. But remember seventh grade? Lockers and combinations and PE? Remember all those fears? Well, guess what. You made it! You're here. You got through those junior high years. The exhortation of Moses to the congregation at Jordan was, "Remember how much God has done for you already. He's not going to let you down now."

God loves you, gang. He proved it to us on the Cross. So do what He's called you to do and don't fear. Don't listen to the whisper of the enemy. Instead, say, "Lord, You've loved me so passionately, I'm going to do what You direct me to, let the chips fall where they may."

"Good," He'll say. "I'll surprise you with an army of hornets going before you—the ultimate sting operation."

Jesus put it this way: "Fear not, little flock. It is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). Fear not and watch and see how God will bless you.

Deuteronomy 7:21 (b)

. . . for the LORD thy God is among you, a mighty God and terrible.

Preaching from this text, at the Westminster Chapel in London, G. Campbell Morgan ended his sermon by saying, "Is this not a most wonderful promise for you and me?"

Following his sermon, however, he was greeted at the door by two sisters who said to him, "Pastor Morgan, that is not a promise. It's reality."

And G. Campbell Morgan said, "How true."

A promise tends to imply that which is to be. But the reality is that God is with us presently.

Deuteronomy 7:22, 23
And the LORD thy God will put out those nations before thee by little and little: thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee. But the LORD thy God shall deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed.

Had God driven the enemy out of the land quickly, wild beasts would eat the crops which would otherwise have nourished God's people. So He drove the enemies out a little at a time until the children of Israel were ready to take on more territory.

God is working in you and on me. "But it's going so slowly," you say. "I thought I would be a lot further along by now." I know. I thought I would be, too.

But God would say to you and me, "Be patient and trust Me. I'm not going to drive out your enemies immediately, but little by little, I'll give you more territory, more possibilities, more responsibilities."

Deuteronomy 7:24
And he shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven: there shall no man be able to stand before thee, until thou have destroyed them.

In other words, God says, "No one will be able to stop you from doing what I've called you to do."

Deuteronomy 7:25, 26
The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire: thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein: for it is an abomination to the LORD thy God. Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it: but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it; for it is a cursed thing.

At the last junior high camp, after I shared with the kids around the campfire about what Christians went through in days of old—stories of martyrdom and persecution and the blessings of taking a stand for the Lord, an eighth grader reached in his sweatshirt, pulled out some CDs and chucked them into the fire. It was a very powerful moment when this young man did precisely what the Word says ought to be done.

"Fear not. The Lord is in your midst. He will drive out your enemies little by little. But you have a part to play as well." The exhortation of Moses here in Deuteronomy 7 is one I need to hear constantly.



8 Deuteronomy 8:1, 2
All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

"Do what you know is right in God's sight," Moses instructed the children of Israel. "Remember how the Lord took you through the wilderness for forty years to humble you, to prove you, to test you, that you might know where you're truly at, what's really taking place within your hearts."

It's easy to say, "I'm going to keep the commandments of the Lord. I'm going to do what He tells me." The proof, however, is in the wilderness. It's when the days are dry and difficult and when the heat is rising that we get to see if we are truly those who obey what the Lord tells us to do.

Maybe you are in a wilderness season, in the desert of difficulty. If so, this is such an important time for you to realize it's an opportunity to see what's going on deep within your heart. Just as we don't know what's in a sponge until it's squeezed, I can't know what's taking place deep within me until I'm squeezed. Oh, I can quote the verses, sing the songs, say the phrases —but the fact is, I won't know what's truly going on until and unless I'm squeezed by days of difficulty and times of trouble.

Deuteronomy 8:3
And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.

The Israelites welcomed God's provision of manna because they were in a place of hunger. That's always the way it is. We get hungry in the wilderness, in the day of difficulty. And it is then that we long for God's provision for us. Jesus put it this way: "Blessed are you when you hunger and thirst for righteousness, for then you'll be filled" (Matthew 5:6). Too often, we don't crave the Bread of the Word or the Bread of Life because we're not hungry. There's a progression seen here: My reaction in the wilderness makes me hungry for righteousness. So I go to church once again, have devotions once more, exchange *Newsweek* for the Word, turn off talk radio and listen to teaching tapes. But this doesn't happen until I'm hungry. And I don't know I'm hungry until I'm in the wilderness. It's all part of the program.

Jesus quoted this verse in His own wilderness experience. He was tested for forty days as Satan came and said, "If you're the Son of God, turn those stones into bread. Take care of yourself. Find a way to satisfy your own needs."

"No," Jesus said, and quoted this verse. In fact, all three times He dealt with Satan in Matthew 4, Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy. That is why I suggest Deuteronomy was where He was having devotions at that time. As a result, He was empowered to withstand the temptation and to obey His Father—the same opportunity each of us has who eats freely of the Bread of Life, who partakes consistently of the manna of the Word.

Deuteronomy 8:4
Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.

One commentator suggests that, because deficiency in diet causes feet to swell, this text proves that the manna that came from heaven every morning was perfectly suited for the Israelites' needs in the wilderness.

Deuteronomy 8:5, 6
Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee. Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him.

Are we aware of the fact that God will chasten us because He cares passionately about our well being and will discipline us when we're out of line? I fear that we don't fear the Lord these days. Somehow, we think we can hide our carnality. But our Father loves us so much He won't let us go on a path that will be destructive to us. He'll discipline and chasten us when we're out of line.

Deuteronomy 8:7–9
For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.

All of this testing and proving and chastening was for a purpose: to bring the children of Israel into a land of honey and olive oil, of pomegranates and blessing. And such is the Lord's desire for you: to bring you into the wonderful land of the Spirit-filled life that He has planned and prepared for you personally.

Deuteronomy 8:10
When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.

When you've eaten until you're full, make sure you give thanks to the One who has taken such good care of you.

Deuteronomy 8:11–18
Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

"The time to engage in worship, to be a man or woman of prayer, to be a student of the Scriptures, to remember how good God has been is when you're in the Promised Land," Moses reminds the people.

And yet the irony is, it is when people prosper that they often drift away. They don't have time for the Lord. Their passion diminishes. Their devotion decreases. They begin to say, "It is my hard work which has allowed me to have that ski boat or this vacation home. And I've got to maintain it, so I don't have time to serve the Lord."

Deuteronomy 8:19, 20
And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God.

Was there ever a time when you were serving the Lord more diligently and more consistently than you are today? If your answer is yes, I plead with you to take this passage to heart, for if you do not, you'll perish. Oh, maybe not physically—but your marriage will diminish; your family will diminish; your joy will diminish. Your life will get smaller and smaller. On the other hand, when you say, "God's been good to me. Therefore, I'm going to learn His ways, give Him praise, and serve Him with all of my heart and soul, mind and strength"—you'll find yourself truly blessed in every way.



9 Deuteronomy 9:1–3
Hear, O Israel: Thou art to pass over Jordan this day, to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself, cities great and fenced up to heaven, A people great and tall, the children of the Anakims, whom thou knowest, and of whom thou hast heard say, Who can stand before the children of Anak! Understand therefore this day, that the LORD thy God is he which goeth over before thee; as a consuming fire he shall destroy them, and he shall bring them down before thy face: so shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them quickly, as the LORD hath said unto thee.

“Don’t fear,” Moses tells the people. “Don’t panic. God is going to blaze a trail before you. As a consuming fire, He’s going to take care of those seemingly insurmountable problems, the Anakims.”

Deuteronomy 9:4–7
Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the LORD thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD doth drive them out from before thee. Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people. Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the LORD thy God to wrath in the wilderness: from the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the LORD.

“Don’t think that the blessings you enjoy are because of your power or your ability,” Moses continues. “And don’t think when the enemy is driven out it’s because of your righteousness. It’s not about your righteousness, but about God’s divine purpose.”

This comforts me because I realize what happens in this ministry, in my family, in my life personally is not dependent upon my righteousness but upon God’s purpose. Therefore, because He wants to do certain things in this community, in this fellowship, in my family, I can expect Him to go before me as a flaming fire. And that way, He gets all the glory.

Deuteronomy 9:8–14
Also in Horeb ye provoked the LORD to wrath, so that the LORD was angry with you to have destroyed you. When I was gone up into the mount to receive the tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant which the LORD made with you, then I abode in the

mount forty days and forty nights, I neither did eat bread nor drink water: And the LORD delivered unto me two tables of stone written with the finger of God; and on them was written according to all the words, which the LORD spake with you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly. And it came to pass at the end of forty days and forty nights, that the LORD gave me the two tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant. And the LORD said unto me, Arise, get thee down quickly from hence; for thy people which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt have corrupted themselves; they are quickly turned aside out of the way which I commanded them; they have made them a molten image. Furthermore the LORD spake unto me, saying, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Let me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven: and I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than they.

While Moses was on the mountain alone with God for forty days, the people were sinning down below. "I'm going to destroy these people and make of you a new nation," God said to him. Would Moses accept the offer? Wait a minute. This sounds strangely familiar to another test after a forty-day fast . . .

"Bow down to me," Satan said to Jesus, "and the entire world will be yours" (see Matthew 4:8, 9). The similarities are neither coincidental nor accidental. Rather, they show us that what God uses to test us, Satan uses to tempt us. God tests us to work good in us, to show Himself strong through us. Satan, on the other hand, tempts us in order to destroy us.

Whenever you're tempted, realize that God uses what Satan means as a temptation for a test. Conversely, whenever you're going through a test from God, Satan will jump on it and make it a temptation.

James makes it clear that God does not tempt any man to do evil (1:13). Like a car manufacturer who puts his car through rigorous tests in order to showcase its capabilities, when God tests you, He's not saying, "I hope you don't fall apart." No, He says, "I know what I've built into you. And I will not allow you to be tested above what you're able" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

The test He sends our way is not Him saying, "I wonder what's going to happen." It's Him saying, "Look what I've done."

This makes murmuring or complaining or whining a sin. "Pipe down," God would say to us. "It's only a test. I know what I've built into you. I know the work I've done deep within you." God knew Moses would pass this test. He wasn't tempting him to sin. Rather, He was testing him, knowing he would come through with flying colors.

If you're tempted by Satan, God intends it as a test to see you through. If you're tested by the Father, Satan will jump on it to tempt you. That's why the Greek word for "test" and "temptation" is the same word. Moses would pass the test. Jesus would beat back the temptation. So when that temptation comes strolling up to you tomorrow, know it's a test from God and He won't test you above that which you are able.

Deuteronomy 9:15–21
So I turned and came down from the mount, and the mount burned with fire: and the two tables of the covenant were in my two hands. And I looked, and, behold, ye had sinned against the LORD your God, and had made you a molten calf: ye had turned aside quickly out of the way which the LORD had commanded you. And I took the two tables, and cast them out of my two hands, and brake them before your eyes. And I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and forty nights: I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sins which ye sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure, wherewith the LORD was wroth against you to destroy you. But the LORD hearkened unto me at that time also. And the LORD was very angry with Aaron to have destroyed him: and I prayed for Aaron also the same time. And I took your sin, the calf which ye had made, and burnt it with fire, and stamped it, and ground it very small, even until it was as small as dust: and I cast the dust thereof into the brook that descended out of the mount.

As he recounts his time on Mount Sinai, Moses say, "The first forty days, I was worshiping. The second forty, I was warring. The first time, my heart was touched and I came down with God's Word. The second time, I fought for you in intercession lest you be destroyed because of your sin and rebellion." Anyone who wants to minister must be both a worshiper and a warrior, battling in prayer on behalf of people.

Yet lest we think were it not for Moses' intercession, the people would have been destroyed, that Moses had to "calm God down," who put a heart of intercession in Moses in the first place? Justice demanded judgment, but, looking for a reason to show mercy, God put it in the heart of Moses to be an intercessor. God did it all.

Deuteronomy 9:22 (a)
And at Taberah . . .

The account of what happened at Taberah is found in Numbers 11. The people complained; the Lord heard them; and a fire was kindled which consumed them. What were they complaining about? Evidently it was something so insignificant that Scripture doesn't even record it.

Deuteronomy 9:22 (b)
. . . and at Massah . . .

At Massah the people complained about a lack of water (Exodus 17).

Deuteronomy 9:22 (c)
. . . and at Kibroth-hattaavah, ye provoked the LORD to wrath.

"We want meat to eat," the people had said. "We're tired of this manna." So God sent them so much quail to eat that it came out of their nostrils. And many of the people were killed by their own lust (Numbers 11:33).

Deuteronomy 9:23
Likewise when the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, Go up and possess the land which I have given you; then ye

rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God, and ye believed him not, nor hearkened to his voice.

When they came to the boundary of the Promised Land, the Lord said, "Take it." The people, however, refused. Why? There were giants in the land.

"Why should we go in there? Our children might die," the fathers might have said.

"I know it's a land that flows with milk and honey," the wives might have said, "but the wilderness isn't such a bad place. We're together as a family. We home-school our kids. God is in our midst. The tabernacle is close by. The Shekinah glory is seen. Manna comes down every day. This is a fine place to be."

"But it's not the Promised Land," God would say. "There aren't grapes the size of basketballs. There's no milk and honey. There's no destiny."

"Yes," the people would say, "but there's also no risk."

"Trust and Obey," we sing. But what we often declare is, "I like it here. Why should I take my kids out of school and make that move? Why should I jeopardize the convenience? I really kind of like the wilderness." Yet, all the while, there's territory to take, work to do, blessings ahead.

I have observed that when people don't step out and step up and move in to the Promised Land—whatever that may be for them—they end up slowly dying in the wilderness. Oh, it's imperceptible at first, but after wandering around for years, they realize they're going in circles. At a certain point, a man says, "Stop this carousel. There's a call upon my life. I know what the Lord wants me to do."

I'm afraid we can be vulnerable to saying, "I'm blessed here. I like this." But in our hearts, we know that God has said, "Step up. Step out. And go where you're needed. There are jobs to do, battles to fight, people to touch."

I don't know what that means for you personally, but I'll tell you this: We cannot stay the same in our spiritual walk day after month after year. I am either getting more radical for Jesus, taking steps of faith, launching out in service, plunging ahead—or I'm falling back and wandering in circles. Sure, my family might be safe. But something is missing in my soul.

Go in. Possess the land God has told you to take. Yes, you'll take some blows. Certainly there will be challenges and difficulties. But it's only in the Promised Land where the fruit will blow your mind, where the blessings will cause your soul to expand, where life will no longer be routine. "There's got to be something more to life," you say. There is—the Land God called you to, the Land God told me to press into. Especially in the time of prosperity, it's easy to say, "I just bought my house," or, "I just got that promotion. The wilderness is fine."

Who will dare to say to the Father, "I want to do what You want me to do, to go where You have told me to go, to give what You have commanded me to give. I don't want to settle for just playing it safe. I don't want to die in the wilderness of missed opportunity."?

The saddest thing of all is to see people who were once big in stature spiritually, who cut a wide swath for the kingdom of God, who accomplished great things for eternity, but are now shrinking in obscurity. There are people who used to be giants of faith but aren't anymore because when God spoke to their hearts and told them to start a Bible study, to share with their neighbor, to go to the mission field, they opted out in the name of convenience or comfort.

"Remember what you saw in the generation that died off in the wilderness," Moses said. "They didn't go in. And they ended up complaining and murmuring, wandering and dying. Learn the lesson," Moses said to the children of Israel—and to us. Do what God has called you to do. Go where God has told you to go. Don't say, "Later." Don't say, "As soon as . . . ." Don't say, "But I like it here." Instead, say, "Lord, what You tell me to do, I'm going to do by Your grace."

Let's be those who don't shrink before the eyes of each other. Let's be those who grow and are stretched, who get bigger in the Lord, who grow stronger for the Lord and step out on behalf of the Lord as we leave the wilderness behind and claim the Land of Promise.

Deuteronomy 9:24
Ye have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you.

“Don’t you see where you’ve been as a people?” Moses says lovingly but honestly to the congregation, for in rebelling against the Lord, they lost the Promised Land.

Are you happy tonight? When I’m not happy, I know it’s because I’ve not done what the Lord told me to do. I have not gone where He commanded me to go.

Deuteronomy 9:25–29
Thus I fell down before the LORD forty days and forty nights, as I fell down at the first; because the LORD had said he would destroy you. I prayed therefore unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, destroy not thy people and thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; look not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor to their wickedness, nor to their sin: Lest the land whence thou broughtest us out say, Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land which he promised them, and because he hated them, he hath brought them out to slay them in the wilderness. Yet they are thy people and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest out by thy mighty power and by thy stretched out arm.

“For forty days I fought on behalf of you, I prayed for you,” Moses reminds the people. I’m so glad God raised up an even Greater than Moses for me—my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ who ever lives to intercede for me (Hebrews 7:25).

THE PERIL OF PRIDE

A Topical Study of DEUTERONOMY 8—9

In chapter 8, Moses began giving a warning to the congregation of Israel concerning the peril of pride, the danger of arrogance . . .

The Possessions We Have

> *Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;*
>
> Deuteronomy 8:11–14

When the bull market is roaring and the economy is soaring, the tendency is to forget the Lord rather than to thank Him. "I've been a clever entrepreneur, a careful businessman, I've handled my money well—and look what I've accomplished. My business is going great; my bank account is growing; my car is new; my house is grand." Oh, we're too wise, too sophisticated to say this with our lips, but in our hearts, we say, "I've done alright."

"Beware," Moses would say. The possessions we have—the gold, the silver, the portfolio, house, and car are all due to God's grace exclusively. What you have, what I enjoy, what we possess is a gift from God to you and me not because of who we are but in spite of us!

"But I've worked hard" you may say.

Wait a minute. Who gave you the energy to work hard? Who gave you the ability to be wise? Sometimes we forget. Sometimes we say in our heart, "I'm pretty sharp." But it's nothing more than arrogance. Pride creeps in during times of prosperity. And pride is the only disease known to man that makes everyone sick except the one who has it. Everything we have and all that we enjoy is solely because of God's grace—His unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor.

While most of us would agree with that, the next point is more subtle—even jarring and somewhat shocking . . .

The Position We're In

> *Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the LORD thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD doth drive them out from before thee.*
>
> Deuteronomy 9:4

Why did God bring you and me into the Promised Land of His kingdom? Because He saw we would want to be righteous? No. Like the children of Israel, we were stiff-necked and rebellious from the beginning (Deuteronomy 9:7). He did so because of the wickedness of our enemy.

We have an enemy who, from before time began, has questioned the goodness and kindness, mercy and grace of God. "Can't you eat of that tree, Eve?" Satan hissed. "God knows that in the day you eat of it, you'll become godly. In other words, God is not as good as He purports to be. He's holding something back from you, Eve. He knows that if you eat of that tree that it would be wonderful for you. And He doesn't want you to have good things" (see Genesis 3:1–5).

Satan not only challenged the goodness of the Father in the garden, but in heaven. "Of course Job serves You," he said to God. "You've blessed him. But if those blessings weren't there, he would turn his back on You" (see Job 1:9–11).

Psalm 73:1 says God is good.

Satan says, "No He's not."

So God says, "I will prove My goodness and grace by bringing stiffnecked people like those at Applegate into My kingdom, by showering rebellious people like Jon Courson with blessing."

> *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by*

Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

Ephesians 1:3–6

Paul says we were elected and redeemed not because God saw we were a good, sincere people who wanted to be spiritual, but in order that angels and demons alike would marvel, saying, "Look how *gracious* God is to bless a guy like Jon!"

Whether you're prospering materially or moving into the Promised Land of the kingdom and enjoying blessings spiritually, don't think it's because of your righteousness. The greatest danger to the children of Israel would not be the persecution or the battles in the Promised Land. The greatest danger would occur when things were going well because it would be then that they would forget the Lord.

How do you know when you've forgotten the Lord? It's quite simple: You no longer have time for Him. After all, there are ski boats to use, vacations to take, money to spend. In times of persecution people don't forget God. They gather together. They pray with passion. Their roots sink deep into the soil of the Scriptures. But in times of prosperity, people have toys to play with, places to go, hobbies to pursue. And, although they don't admit it, they forget about God.

Statistics confirm that people forget the Lord in time of prosperity not only by withdrawing from the body, but by failing to give sacrificially. Ironically, people give much more generously in times of difficulty than in times of prosperity. In times of prosperity, they say, "I can't tithe because I bought the second house, the newer car, and I'm overextended"—failing to remember that it was God who gave them the ability to do what they do, to bless them with every single thing they have.

If we truly believe that God has blessed us, we'll say, "This is not my wealth. It's God's. Therefore, in giving my tithe I recognize that what came my way this week is not because of my cleverness or ability but because of Him."

The Posture We Take

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:16

I can come boldly before the throne of grace because God loves to help sinners like me. And as I do, I bow my knee in humility, humbled by how good God has been to me. And even though I'm stiff-necked and rebellious, I raise my hands in appreciation and raise my head in expectation not because of my worthiness, but solely because of His grace.

"When you have eaten and are full, bless the Lord and beware of pride," Moses cautioned the people. And he would say the same to us.

God wants us to be those who come before His throne of grace and expect to be blessed—not because of who we are, but because of who He is.



10 **Deuteronomy 10:1, 2**

At that time the LORD said unto me, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first, and come up unto me into the mount, and make thee an ark of wood. And I will write on the tables the words that were in the first tables which thou brakest, and thou shalt put them in the ark.

"Carve two more stone tablets and come back to the mountain," the Lord had said to Moses after Moses had broken the original tablets when he saw the children of Israel worshiping the golden calf (Exodus 32). "Bring the ark, and I will write the commandments again."

Notice that God didn't change His mind and say, "I gave you ten commandments before, but the people didn't seem to be too good at keeping them, so let's just try five this time." No, God doesn't do that. God's Word is immutable. It doesn't change. Whether people succeed at keeping it or whether they fail in it, God's Word remains written in stone.

Deuteronomy 10:3–5
And I made an ark of shittim wood, and hewed two tables of stone like unto the first, and went up into the mount, having the two tables in mine hand. And he wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the ten commandments, which the LORD spake unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly: and the LORD gave them unto me. And I turned myself and came down from the mount, and put the tables in the ark which I had made; and there they be, as the LORD commanded me.

As Moses continues to remind the people of their history, he says, "This time I didn't carry the commandments in my hand as I had done previously, for God instructed me to put them in the ark."

The lid on top of the ark was called the mercy seat. And it was at the mercy seat that God would meet with His people (Exodus 25:22). In this, I find a wonderful balance. You see, because the Law of the Lord is perfect, I must bow my knee and say to Him constantly, "What You say is true, Lord. And by Your grace, I will do what You tell me to do." And I also realize that because the Law is perfect, it points out my failings and shortcomings. But God doesn't meet us in the ark, where the Law is kept. He meets us at the mercy seat—where the blood is sprinkled. And I'm so glad about that.

Deuteronomy 10:6–9
And the children of Israel took their journey from Beeroth of the children of Jaakan to Mosera: there Aaron died, and there he was buried; and Eleazar his son ministered in the priest's office in his stead. From thence they journeyed unto Gudgodah; and from Gudgodah to Jotbath, a land of rivers of waters. At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister unto him, and to bless in his name, unto this day. Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the LORD is his inheritance, according as the LORD thy God promised him.

The tribe of Levi was to be those to minister to the Lord. Why? The story is told in Exodus 32—when Moses came down the mountain the first time, seeing the children of Israel worshiping the golden calf, he said, "Who is on the Lord's side? Who will deal with this situation?" Only one tribe stepped up: the tribe of Levi. From that point on, Levi would be the tribe of ministry because they took the sword in the fear of the Lord. The other tribes said, "We don't want to get involved." And that can all too often be our tendency as well. Yet if we're not willing to wield the sword of Scripture in love and say, "This cannot go on. This needs to be thought through and cut away," we cannot be servants of the Lord.

Paul said, "If we seek to please men, we cannot be the servants of God" (Galatians 1:10). We need to be those who are merciful and loving enough to say to the people we care about those who are involved in sin, "I care about you and am committed to you. Therefore, I'm not going to hold back the truth from you." This is not anger and hostility, judgment and condemnation. It's love and compassion, kindness and mercy. Only Levi was willing to unsheathe the sword and deal with the cancer that would corrupt the whole congregation. Thus, only Levi would qualify for ministry.

Deuteronomy 10:10
And I stayed in the mount, according to the first time, forty days and forty nights; and the LORD hearkened unto me at that time also, and the LORD would not destroy thee.

God had offered Moses a very interesting opportunity when He said He would destroy the people and make of Moses a new nation. Moses said, "No, Lord, don't do that. The Egyptians will say that You slaughtered Your own people, that You were unable to keep the promises You made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their seed would inherit the land. You can't go back on Your Word."

And I'm sure Moses' answer brought a smile to the heart of God, showing as it did, that he cared more about God's reputation than his own opportunity to be the head of a mighty nation.

Deuteronomy 10:11–13

And the LORD said unto me, Arise, take thy journey before the people, that they may go in and possess the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give unto them. And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?

"God spared you," Moses said to the congregation. "And now what does He require of you? Simply that you love Him with all your heart and do what His Word tells you for your own *good*."

Deuteronomy 10:14, 15
Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day.

"Everything is God's, but He chose *you* to be His children."

Deuteronomy 10:16
Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.

As He did with Israel, God chose us. He has shown great mercy to us. Therefore, let's be tenderhearted towards our Father, thankful to Him for all He's done.

Deuteronomy 10:17–19
For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

"Love God and love the stranger, too, because you were once strangers yourselves," Moses said. Sometimes we forget that, like Israel, we were strangers, sinners in bondage to the world of which Egypt is a picture.

Jesus both loved and was loved by strangers—by lepers, prostitutes, and tax collectors. He confronted the self-righteous yet loved the sinner. All too often, we have this reversed. Jesus was embraced by the masses, but the religious establishment was uncomfortable around Him. All too often, the religious establishment is comfortable with me, while the sinner is uncomfortable. And this ought not be.

Deuteronomy 10:20–22
Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen. Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons; and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude.

"Look how you've grown," Moses said. "Look what God has done. Seventy people became three million."

And so I say to you. Look how you've grown. Look what God has done. You're bigger people, deeper in your understanding of the Lord, more passionate in your love for the Lord. God has multiplied you. He's done great and glorious things in you—all because of His mercy, His goodness, His grace.

11 Deuteronomy 11:1 (a)
Therefore . . .

"Because God has blessed you, multiplied you, prospered you, taken care of you . . ." Moses continues in his farewell address to Israel . . .

Deuteronomy 11:1 (b)–9

. . . thou shalt love the LORD thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, alway. And know ye this day: for I speak not with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the LORD your God, his greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched out arm, And his miracles, and his acts, which he did in the midst of Egypt unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land; And what he did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses, and to their chariots; how he made the water of the Red sea to overflow them as they pursued after you, and how the LORD hath destroyed them unto this day; And what he did unto you in the wilderness, until ye came into this place; And what he did unto Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben: how the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and their tents, and all the substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel: But your eyes have seen all the great acts of the LORD which he did. Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that ye may be strong, and go in and possess the land, whither ye go to possess it; And that ye may prolong your days in the land, which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give unto them and to their seed, a land that floweth with milk and honey.

"I'm not talking to your children, I'm talking to you who have seen the mighty hand of God, the outstretched arm of the Lord," Moses says. "You were the ones who saw what He did when He parted the Red Sea and drowned the armies of Pharaoh miraculously. You are the ones who saw how He took care of the rebellions in the wilderness, how He conquered your enemies, how He was there every step of the way day by day. You know, you saw what the Lord has done. I'm talking to you who have been blessed, you who know the truth, you who have seen the work of the Lord."

I find it interesting that Moses would address this to the adults, to those who had seen so much, who know a lot because, as adults, we have a tendency to say, "I hope my kids heard that sermon," or, "I hope my kids got

that lesson," or, "I'm going to send the tape to my son-in-law or my granddaughter." There's nothing wrong with that, but our kids want *us* to be godly, to live lives that are exemplary, to have integrity, to be holy, to be godly. It's not about learning something to pass on to our kids, but about applying it to our own lives.

Deuteronomy 11:10–12
For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: A land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.

"Be strong," Moses said. "Keep the commandments that you may take the land God has laid before you. And, unlike Egypt, the land is a great land." Although the Egyptians were a sophisticated and mighty civilization, the land itself gets less than one inch of rain per year. The only way Egypt could prosper was by taking water out of the Nile and irrigating sections around the river that would provide the agricultural base for their civilization. How did they do this? Verse 10 tells us. They would use foot pumps. Day after day, perpetually, exhaustingly, continually they would have to pump water out of the Nile into the fields in order that their crops might grow. It was hard work.

Moses said, "The land you're going to is not like that. The Lord keeps His eye upon this land and sends rain. You don't have to sweat to see the water flow."

Deuteronomy 11:13–15
And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full.

The mention of "latter rain" also appears in Jeremiah 5, Hosea 6, Joel 2, and James 5—where it speaks of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. "There's coming a time," the Lord says, "when I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy. Your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams." (Joel 2:28)

We are already seeing the beginning of a wonderful last day's outpouring, where people are being filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. But it's only the beginning. The Lord wants to save souls and bring in a huge harvest in these last days. And He's going to empower us to an even greater degree.

How will this happen? It's not going to come through the Egyptian methodology—where we pump it up. I've been to meetings where there is an attempt to get people worked up, pumped up through fervor and emotion. But sometimes such meetings remind me of the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel who jumped up and down and slashed their bodies with knives to try and get the attention of their gods. After a full day of futility, Elijah said, "My turn," and prayed a simple ten-second prayer so powerful it brought fire down from heaven (1 Kings 18:36–38). Therefore, I'm always cautious about situations where the Egyptian mentality is used to try and get the fire to come down, the latter rain to fall, the Spirit to move.

The latter rain is not something we pump up emotionally, but that which the Lord pours out upon those who simply love Him and give themselves in service to Him. "You shall receive power when the Holy Ghost comes upon you to be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth," Jesus said (Acts 1:8).

Power is given for the purpose of service. Therefore, it is to any of us who say, "Lord, I love You. That's why I'm here. And I want to serve You. Use me," that the Lord will pour out His Spirit in order that we might be His witnesses.

Deuteronomy 11:16, 17
Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the LORD's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and

lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you.

Although the Lord pours out His Spirit to those who give themselves to serve Him, the outpouring will cease if we turn aside and serve the gods of our hobbies, our desires, our flesh. Once I start serving these gods, the heavens are shut up and my soul gets dry.

Elijah—he who called down fire from heaven—stormed into wicked King Ahab's court and said, "Be it known unto you, it shall not rain these years but according to my word." And indeed it didn't rain for over three years (1 Kings 17:1). James tells us that although Elijah was a man just like you and me, he knew how to pray (James 5:17). Therefore, he evidently knew this text, for Jesus said if His words abide in us our prayers will be answered (John 15:7).

That is why we come out on a night like this. That's why we attend Bible studies year after year after year. That's why I read the Word. I want to know what this book has to say that I might pray effectively. Elijah models this. The Word of the Lord was evidently in his heart, enabling him to pray effectively. The more Bible study you take in, the more Scripture you know, the more effectively you can pray. And the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails, or accomplishes, *much* (James 5:16).

Deuteronomy 11:18
Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes.

Although the Jews took this literally by wearing phylacteries, or boxes, on their wrists or foreheads containing the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4), that's not what Moses meant. The idea is to keep the Word close at hand and between your eyes, in your mind.

Deuteronomy 11:19
And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

When Peter-John was in fourth or fifth grade, we were on our way to a Giants game. As we left the Rogue Valley on our way to Candlestick Park, the sky became cloudy and looked rather threatening. "Let's pray it doesn't rain," Peter said.

Aha! I thought. *This is an opportunity to teach.* So I said, "Peter, what you have to remember is that we're in a drought and there's a whole bunch of farmers, prayer warriors, who have been praying for rain."

"Okay, Dad," he said, "Their prayer warriors are praying for rain. You and me are going to pray that it won't rain. Let the strongest army win!"

We might think our kids aren't aware of what we're telling them. But your son, daughter, or grandchild is taking in a lot more than you know. So use every opportunity to expand their knowledge of the Word, of God's kingdom, of the ways of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 11:20
And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates:

The Word of God should be woven into the very fabric of your home. People should sense that your house is a sanctified spot.

Deuteronomy 11:21–23 (a)
That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth. For if ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him; Then will the LORD drive out all these nations from before you . . .

"But there are so many problems in our house," you might say.

The Lord says, "If you love Me and do what I tell you to, I will drive out the forces causing those problems."

When you love the Lord and keep His Word at the front door, close at hand, and between your eyes; when you teach your kids what God will do,

He promises to drive out the enemy that would otherwise drive you crazy.

Deuteronomy 11:23 (b), 24
. . . and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves. Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be.

Although the children of Israel would take control of only approximately one tenth of what God intended for them, this description is of a huge amount of territory—all the way to present-day Iraq and Iran.

God is able to do "exceedingly abundantly above all we can ask or even think," Paul tells us (Ephesians 3:20). So take a step of faith. Believe the Lord. Obey His commands. Claim the territory He's already declared would be yours—for your kids, your family, your service for Him. God wants to do so much for us. Let's go for it.

Deuteronomy 11:25–32
There shall no man be able to stand before you: for the LORD your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you. Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known. And it shall come to pass, when the LORD thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon mount Gerizim, and the curse upon mount Ebal. Are they not on the other side Jordan, by the way where the sun goeth down, in the land of the Canaanites, which dwell in the champaign over against Gilgal, beside the plains of Moreh? For ye shall pass over Jordan to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God giveth you, and ye

shall possess it, and dwell therein. And ye shall observe to do all the statutes and judgments which I set before you this day.

In Joshua 8, we'll see half of the tribes of the children of Israel on Mount Gerizim, the other half on Mount Ebal with Joshua and the priests and Levites in the valley between. Joshua will say a certain commandment to which was attached a blessing, and all the tribes on Mt. Gerizim will say, "Amen!" Then he will give a command with a curse—something which they're not to do—and those on Mt. Ebal will also say, "Amen!" In so doing, the nation of Israel will acknowledge that if they obey God, they shall put the blessing on Gerizim. It was on Mt. Ebal that sacrifice was to be made. I love this because where there are curses, an altar is made to make provision. I'm so glad about that because I've been on both sides of the valley. I've experienced the blessings of Gerizim. But I've also wandered over to Ebal. Thus, I am so grateful for the altar, the provision for my sin and stupidity.

Joshua is, of course, a picture of Jesus. Where is Jesus right now? Between two mountains. He's already been on the mountain of cursing, where He who knew no sin was made sin for us as He hung on the Cross of Calvary (2 Corinthians 5:21). But He's coming back to another mountain—the Mount of Olives, which will split in two when He returns as the Prince of Peace (Zechariah 14:4).

"I've heard you talk about being blessed if we obey the commandments," you might say. "I've done my best, tried my hardest. But I'm not being blessed like I thought I would be. You talk about taking territory, but it hasn't happened for me."

Wait. You're in the valley. Wait until Jesus gets back. Oh, we're blessed right now without question, but the Mount of Olives tells me the best is yet to come. When you read these blessings and promises, realize that, although they apply to you, to your marriage, to your family, to your ministry—the best is yet to come. And I'm so looking forward to that. Obey the Lord. Keep His commandments. Bind His Word before your eyes. Keep it close at hand. Teach your children. And God will bless you, yes in this life—but especially, most importantly, most fully in the age of the kingdom, throughout eternity, in heaven.

12 Deuteronomy 12:1–3

These are the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which the LORD God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth. Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place.

As we watched the painful situation in Jerusalem, we could see the wisdom of this command from God to His people. The command was simply this: "When you go into the Land I give to you, make sure you utterly destroy the places where the Canaanites worshiped their false gods."

This might sound harsh. It's certainly not politically correct, but it's right and it's practical, for you see, God knew that if they didn't destroy those groves and tear down those altars, that there would be a tendency for problems down the road to crop up, where the people of Israel's curiosity about those false gods would grow, where the Canaanites and pagans in the area would still have a foothold. Consequently, God ordered the absolute eradication of those holy spots. And I can't help but think of the events of the past twelve days. For in Jerusalem, we see a pagan spot—the shrine known as the Dome of the Rock—built in A.D. 690 by the followers of Mohammed, is proving to be a problem even now, centuries later.

Allah is not a name for the True and Living God, but the name of the moon god Mohammed chose to be his god. Allah is not the same God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Furthermore, the Dome of the Rock was erected under false pretenses as a result of a battle within the Islamic Empire.

The Israelis had an opportunity to destroy it completely in 1967. When they captured the city of Jerusalem in the six-Day War of 1967, the Israeli Defense Forces made its way immediately to the Temple Mount and were ready to blow up the Dome of the Rock monument. You might have seen the

famous footage of what took place in Germany during World War II when our troops went into Berlin and blew up the huge Nazi insignia that stood above the coliseum. That's what soldiers do. That's the way war works. The victor has the right to eradicate the emblems of the enemy. In 1967, the Israelis had the opportunity to do this, but General Moshe Dayan stopped the commanders from giving that particular order and instead turned over the day-to-day control of the Temple Mount to the Islamic authorities. Thus, although Israel is still sovereign over the Temple Mount, the daily operation has been overseen by the Islamic police and has proven to be a huge mistake. Compromise always is.

No doubt the Israelis were thinking at the time that if they did indeed touch the mosque, it would have been tantamount to a declaration of war against all of Islam. But I believe the real reason they stopped is because there was a higher Force at work—the hand of God—knowing that there are certain events that must take place to fulfill prophecy, to cause Jerusalem to become the troubled spot it is presently.

But God's initial plan, His intention for His people—whether Jews in ancient times, Israelis today, or believers like you and me—is that we deal a death blow to the enemy. We don't compromise. We totally eradicate the strongholds of Satan. Ephesians 4 tells us we are to give no place to the devil. And whether it's in my life personally or the Temple Mount geographically, unnecessary pain, problems, and difficulty are always the result of compromise. When Jesus said the kingdom of God is taken by violence, or by force (Matthew 11:12), He wasn't talking about physically taking a sword or shouldering an M16 but about the fact that if we want to experience the kingdom to the greatest degree, we've got to deal violently with the enemy.

If there is something in your home where shady things take place via cable TV or the Internet, get rid of it. Don't make any compromises with it. Deal violently in the area of the Spirit and say, "That's got to go. I can't afford to have that grove, that altar, that high place in my home or in my heart."

Deuteronomy 12:4–12

Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God. But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come: And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks: And there ye shall eat before the LORD your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the LORD thy God hath blessed thee. Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes. For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God giveth you. But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and when he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the LORD: And ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God, ye, and your sons, and your daughters, and your menservants, and your maidservants, and the Levite that is within your gates; forasmuch as he hath no part nor inheritance with you. Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: But in the place which the LORD shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee.

"Tear down their altars. Cut down their groves. Destroy their high places," God declares. "Instead, go to the place I tell you of and there you shall worship Me. There you shall bring your tithes and offerings to Me. There you shall make your vows to Me. There you shall seek Me."

Where was "there"?

Jerusalem.

"Why do we have to tithe? Who says we have to go to church on Sunday? I'm going to do what I want to do," some people say. But theirs is a wilderness mentality. They might be sincere, but God says once we have crossed into the Promised Land—which speaks of the Spirit-filled life, the deeper life, the productive life, the fruitful life—it's not up to us what to do.

"Our fathers say we are to worship on Mt. Gerizim, yet you Jews say we are to worship in Jerusalem," the woman at the well said to Jesus.

"In reality," Jesus answered, "the Father is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23).

Why do we get together and worship the Lord with uplifted hands, on our knees, at His Table? Because we're worshiping the Lord in spirit. Why do we go through the Bible month after month, year after year, decade after decade? Because we're worshiping Him in truth.

Deuteronomy 12:15 (a)
Notwithstanding thou mayest kill and eat flesh in all thy gates, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after . . .

The only place to offer the sacrifice is in the place God chooses—which would ultimately be Jerusalem. If the children of Israel wanted to have a BBQ for themselves or their friends, they could kill the bull anywhere, but if it was for a spiritual purpose, they had to go to the place God chose. They had to go to Jerusalem.

Deuteronomy 12:15 (b), 16
. . . according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee: the unclean and the clean may eat thereof, as of the roebuck, and as of the hart. Only ye shall not eat the blood; ye shall pour it upon the earth as water.

"You can kill the animal where you wish, you can have him when you want, but make sure you remember the sanctity of the blood," Moses said, "for the life of the flesh is in the blood" (Leviticus 17:11). The blood was to be drained from the animal because it is symbolic of life—pointing ultimately to the blood that would be poured out from the veins of our Lord

Jesus Christ, even as the blood of the sacrifice was to be poured out upon the ground.

Deuteronomy 12:17–19
Thou mayest not eat within thy gates the tithe of thy corn, or of thy wine, or of thy oil, or the firstlings of thy herds or of thy flock, nor any of thy vows which thou vowest, nor thy freewill offerings, or heave offering of thine hand: But thou must eat them before the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD thy God shall choose, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates: and thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God in all that thou puttest thine hands unto. Take heed to thyself that thou forsake not the Levite as long as thou livest upon the earth.

There are those who say "I'll figure out what to do with my tithe. I'll have my own little account and I'll put it where I think it ought to go." No. God says the tithe is to be brought to the place *He* chooses.

Deuteronomy 12:20–22
When the LORD thy God shall enlarge thy border, as he hath promised thee, and thou shalt say, I will eat flesh, because thy soul longeth to eat flesh; thou mayest eat flesh, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after. If the place which the LORD thy God hath chosen to put his name there be too far from thee, then thou shalt kill of thy herd and of thy flock, which the LORD hath given thee, as I have commanded thee, and thou shalt eat in thy gates whatsoever thy soul lusteth after. Even as the roebuck and the hart is eaten, so thou shalt eat them: the unclean and the clean shall eat of them alike.

Verses 20–24 repeat that a man was allowed to eat meat in his home or town. But if it was a sacrifice, he was to go to Jerusalem.

Deuteronomy 12:23–28

Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh. Thou shalt not eat it; thou shalt pour it upon the earth as water. Thou shalt not eat it; that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the LORD. Only thy holy things which thou hast, and thy vows, thou shalt take, and go unto the place which the LORD shall choose: And thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, the flesh and the blood, upon the altar of the LORD thy God: and the blood of thy sacrifices shall be poured out upon the altar of the LORD thy God, and thou shalt eat the flesh. Observe and hear all these words which I command thee, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee for ever, when thou doest that which is good and right in the sight of the LORD thy God.

When Cain killed Abel, God said, "The blood of your brother cries out" (Genesis 4:10). Today, with the sophistication of DNA testing, in murder cases, for example we hear blood literally crying out. Ultimately, of course, this doesn't speak of the blood that cries out, "Guilty," but of the blood that cries out "Forgiven!"—the blood of Jesus Christ. How grateful I am that I can come to Communion, that I can take of the cup, drink of the blood, and know that my sins are washed away.

Deuteronomy 12:29, 30
When the LORD thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou go est to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land; Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou inquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? Even so will I do likewise.

Moses tells the Israelites that if they became entangled in the worship of the gods of the people God destroyed, they themselves would be destroyed.

Deuteronomy 12:31, 32

Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.

It is a dangerous thing for people to study and inquire after false gods. I know people who are now caught up in a cult because they became interested in it initially so they could argue against it.

> But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:
>
> 1 Peter 3:15

There are those who use this verse to say we should be able to defend our faith to those who are involved in cults. The context of 1 Peter 3:15, however, deals not with false doctrine but with suffering. In other words, we should be able to tell people who see us go through trials, heartbreaks, and difficulty the reason for our hope. But Paul tells us clearly that if someone knocks on the door who's a heretic, we're to send them on their way without even saying, "God bless you" (2 John 10). The best way to study cults is to stay in the Word because then you will recognize that which doesn't ring true.



13 Deuteronomy 13:1–9 (a)

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye

shall serve him, and cleave unto him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee. If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him . . .

So we're to kill the Mormon missionary? Of course not! But we're to put to death the relationship where we're giving time and listening to what he says. Even if he's a friend or a brother, we're not to give ear to those who would entice us by saying, "There's a god you don't know about, something you're not aware of, something more. The Bible is fine. But there's more." Put that relationship to death because there are demonic powers in false religious systems.

Wise is the person who says, "I'm going to keep my eyes on Jesus Christ all the days of my life. Nothing less, nothing more, nothing else."

Deuteronomy 13:9 (b)–11
. . . thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you.

The Israelites were to physically stone the person who tried to pull them away from God—for that is the way they would put an end not only to that

person, but also to the problem. And in this, God declares that capital punishment is indeed a deterrent to crime.

Notice that the first stone was to be thrown by the accuser—which would, in itself, be a deterrent to false accusation or accusation made lightly. Notice, too, that the entire community was to take part in the stoning, for one person's sin will indeed affect an entire community.

In Joshua 7, Achan hid that which he stole from Jericho, and the whole nation was defeated at Ai. I wish we could understand more fully that when someone sins in our fellowship, it directly affects us all. We're one body, one community, one church, one family. Therefore, the whole community must be involved in the purging process. That is why Paul would write to Timothy, "Openly rebuke those who openly sin in order that *all* may hear" (see 1 Timothy 5:20).

Deuteronomy 13:12–18

If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, which the LORD thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying, Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known; Then shalt thou inquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you; Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword. And thou shalt gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit, for the LORD thy God: and it shall be an heap for ever; it shall not be built again. And there shall cleave nought of the cursed thing to thine hand: that the LORD may turn from the fierceness of his anger, and shew thee mercy, and have compassion upon thee, and multiply thee, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers; When thou shalt hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep all his commandments which I command thee

this day, to do that which is right in the eyes of the LORD thy God.

"Even if this might seem to hurt your nation economically or militarily," Moses said, "the city that causes you to rebel against God is to be destroyed and never rebuilt."

CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTS

A Topical Study of DEUTERONOMY 12—13

A few weeks ago, I talked with a man who has become quite confused and very troubled because he began to inquire about a false god. When he went to the open house of the Mormon Temple recently dedicated in the Rogue Valley, he was intrigued by what he saw and began to buy into certain things he heard, impressed by the closeness of the Mormon community. And now he doesn't know what to think—all because he did what our text tells us we ought to be on guard against.

As a shepherd, Moses knew there would be a temptation for the flock of God to be intrigued by the gods of the Canaanites. So he warned the people about inquiring after them. In the New Testament, another shepherd of God's flock gave the same warning in his own farewell address to the elders at Ephesus. "You know that after my departing, ravenous wolves will rise up from your midst" Paul said in Acts 20:29, 30.

As an under-shepherd, it is my joy, privilege, and responsibility to feed the flock of God. We need to be fed. And we do that as we graze in the Word. But if I feed the flock and never warn the flock, I might simply be fattening the flock for the kill. There must be feeding, but there must also be warning. That is why I want to draw your attention to five characteristics common to all cults as seen in our text . . .

Cults Distance the Father

> *Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.*
>
> Deuteronomy 12:31, 32

"It's not that simple," the cultist says to the believer. "You can't come boldly before the throne of grace. You've got to prove your sincerity."

In Moses' day, the Canaanites proved they were sincere seekers of their gods by literally burning their sons and daughters. Five-foot high iron idols dedicated to Moloch were constructed with a hole in them in which a fire would burn, causing the idol to become incandescent. Sincere worshipers would place their firstborn child on the red-hot arms of these idols in the valley of Tophet, also known as the valley of Gehenna, which is another name for Hell.

I talked to a young lady after first service who said, "I just came out of Mormonism, a belief full of barriers. You have to wear holy underwear; you can't drink Coke. It's not enough to believe—you've got to prove it." People might be able to do this for a little while, but they can't do it forever, and ultimately they get burned out. She tried to be a "good Mormon," to earn the blessings that would come her way if she did this and didn't do the other, but eventually she rebelled against the Lord completely. Legalism does that. That's where Mormonism is wrong. That's why Jehovah's Witnesses are wrong. They say it's not enough simply to believe in Jesus Christ. And that is what separates biblical Christianity from all other cults, every other religion.

Every cult and false religion is based upon man working his way up the ladder of sincerity, good works, obedience to a system. Christianity alone is not based upon man working up to God, but God reaching down to man. "For by grace are ye saved," Paul declares. And what is grace? It is unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor. It is a gift of God, *not* of works (Ephesians 2:8, 9 italics added).

What must a man do to be saved? Simply believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Period. (Acts 16:30, 31). “It is *finished,*” Jesus said (John 19:30). My standing with God is not about what I do to prove my sincerity, but about what He’s already done to prove His love and mercy. And all that’s left is for me to respond to His free gift of salvation.

Cults Diminish the Son

> *If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the* LORD *your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the* LORD *your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*
>
> Deuteronomy 13:1–3

In 1820, a fifteen-year-old boy named Joseph Smith claimed he had a vision and a dream. He also claimed he was a prophet from God. The so-called angel, Moroni, came to Joseph Smith to give him "another gospel," the "full truth." Four years later, he would supposedly find golden tablets with hieroglyphics inscribed on them that would reveal the truth completely. Joseph went to the spot pointed out by Moroni. He saw the golden tablets, which were indecipherable until he put on magic glasses called the Urim and the Thummim. With them, he could make sense of the golden tablets that, incidentally, were written in King James English. And this is what this so-called prophet had to say about Jesus Christ. Jesus is not the Creator of all things, but a created being, the brother of Lucifer. Jehovah's Witnesses say He is the archangel, Michael.

All cults diminish the Person of Jesus. They make Him less than He is. Who is He? He is God. And if you don't believe that, according to Romans 10:9, 10, you can't be saved.

You're splitting hairs, you might be thinking. *So the Mormons believe Jesus was a created being, so the Jehovah's Witnesses believe he's an angel, don't they both believe that He died, that His blood was shed?*

It's far more than splitting hairs. The cults have staked out a horrible position in saying that God didn't die for us, but that He created a Being to take the hit, to pay the price, to shed His blood.

If a house suddenly erupted in flames and I knew there were people inside, if, instead of going in myself, I grabbed Benjamin and tossed him in to rescue the people, what kind of person would I be?

The Bible says that God was in Christ reconciling the world (2 Corinthians 5:19). He didn't create a Being other than Himself to pay the price, to go into the fire, to take the heat of the Cross. His name, Isaiah tells us, shall be both Everlasting Father *and* Prince of Peace (9:6). God didn't create Someone to do the work of salvation. God Himself became a Man. God was in the Son. That's why a man can't be saved if he doesn't believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, that Jesus Christ is God.

Let's say I do storm into the burning house. And I pull a ten-year-old boy to safety. But it costs me greatly. My eyesight is lost. My skin is scorched. And the boy I rescued comes to see me in the hospital. As he enters my room, the nurse says, "Here's the man who saved you."

"No, he didn't," the boy says. "He didn't really save me. It was just an image of him, an emanation of him."

Hearing this, I would say, "You little rat. How dare you deny what I did for you. I stormed into a burning house, took the heat, paid the price, and became permanently scarred to save you—yet you won't even acknowledge me?"

There are those in the cults today who have the audacity to say God merely created Someone to die on the Cross in His place. "I have a problem with that," God would say. "*I* paid the price. And if you don't believe that, you can't be saved."

Cults Demand Allegiance

> *Ye shall walk after the* LORD *your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.*
>
> Deuteronomy 13:4

"We do not seek to have dominion over you," Paul declared. "Rather, we are helpers of your joy, for by faith you stand" (2 Corinthians 1:24).

Cults, on the other hand, say, "We'll tell you how to believe and how to act. If you don't give us your total allegiance, then you'll not make it to heaven."

Cults Defy the Spirit

> *And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the* LORD *your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the* LORD *thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.*
>
> Deuteronomy 13:5

You've seen the Mormon commercials on TV. They invite you to call for the Book of Mormon they call another gospel. Yet the Spirit of God inspired Paul to write specifically that any person or angel who preached another gospel was to be damned (Galatians 1:6–8).

"Put to death those who would want to lure you away from God," Moses says.

And Paul would add, "Even if it's an angel named Moroni."

Cults Divide the Body

> *If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him . . .*
>
> Deuteronomy 13:6–9 (a)

The body of Christ is huge. But the cults say, "Everyone but our group is wrong." Joseph Smith was told by Moroni that every Christian group was in absolute heresy. Whenever any group suggests that they alone know the truth about Jesus Christ and that every other Christian is wrong, it's the sign of a cult dividing the body, coming between brothers and sisters, ripping apart the church.

Because no Scripture is of private interpretation (2 Peter 1:20), when someone comes your way saying, "This is the truth and everyone else is wrong," I would encourage you to stick with the vast majority of believers throughout history who, although they have different flavors, different strengths, different emphases, stand shoulder to shoulder behind the simplicity of the gospel and the finished work of the Cross.

I need to hear this warning and share it with you. I am not going to be one who inquires after other gods. I'm not going to be interested in them or seduced by them because Jesus Christ has delivered me from Egypt, from the house of bondage. He's changed my life; He saved my soul. And it's so freeing, so exhilarating, so wonderful to know that I don't have to jump through hoops or work my way into the presence of God, but that I can simply receive what He's done for me and worship Him passionately.

And not only can I come boldly before the throne of grace, but I can go to a person on his deathbed with only moments to live and say, "You can be

born again. You can live forever. Just open your heart to Jesus," rather than, "Sorry, you don't have time to put on your holy underwear or distribute *Watchtower* magazine. Therefore, you won't make it to Heaven." I'm so thankful that I'm not part of a group that makes it impossible to share the Good News of the gospel so simple a three-year-old can understand it. I was three when I opened my heart to Jesus. I know how simple it is. It's profoundly simple and simply profound.

Dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the profound simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ and make no other inquiry. Stay focused on the Author and Perfector of faith, Jesus Christ. And I guarantee you will find that He is all you'll ever need to give you a life of freedom, of love, of peace. Don't become ensnared by the gods around you. Don't inquire of them or be intrigued by them lest you be burnt by the worship of a false god.

"I alone am the door," Jesus said. "All others are thieves and robbers" (John 10:7–9). Sorry, Joseph and Brigham, I have no doubt that Jesus is exactly who He claimed to be: God in the flesh, who died for our sins and rose again that we might be set free.

14 Deuteronomy 14:1, 2

Ye are the children of the LORD your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead. For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth.

When someone died in the Canaanite culture, the mourners would mark their bodies and shave the middle of their heads. "You are not to do that," God said to His people, as if to say, "Rather than mutilate yourselves, you're to celebrate the fact that those who die in your midst are with Me."

The teenage delivery boy dropped the first order of flowers off and proceeded to the second delivery spot, the grand opening of a new

store. The owner took the flowers, opened the card, and read, "Our deepest sympathy on this most sad day."

"Oh, no!" said the delivery boy. "I gave you the wrong bouquet!"

"That's okay," the owner said. "The flowers will do fine."

"It's not that," the delivery boy said. "The problem is, I sent your flowers to a funeral with a card that read: Congratulations on your new location."

For a believer, such a card would be entirely appropriate. Sure, we passionately and deeply miss those who die, but we don't cut our flesh or tear ourselves apart emotionally because we know he or she is in the best place possible.

Deuteronomy 14:3
Thou shalt not eat any abominable thing.

In this section, Moses reiterates the dietary laws for the people of Israel —which meats were considered to be clean, which unclean. These kosher laws served the people of Israel well not only in Moses' generation, but for centuries to come . . .

In the Middle Ages, when plagues and disease devastated the continent of Europe, the Jewish people were singularly protected from many of them. Mistakenly thinking their protection came from magic or witchcraft, the Jews were persecuted. As time has passed, however, we now know that the reason the Jewish people in Europe were protected was because of their adherence to the sanitary and dietary regulations found here in the Book of Deuteronomy.

The wisdom of God's Word becomes all the more clear in light of the contemporary writings of other cultures. For example, an Egyptian scroll written at approximately the same time Moses wrote Deuteronomy propagated the following: To prevent gray hair, take blood from a black cat, mix it with the fat of a rattlesnake and eat it twice daily. Or to reverse baldness, take fat from a cat, a horse, a crocodile, a hippo, a snake, and an

ibex and mix it together and eat it. If you have a severe case of baldness, add to it a tooth of a donkey that has been cooked in honey.

When we read these things, we chuckle because of its absurdity. But when we study the Scriptures, written at the same time as this papyrus, we see them proving to be medically correct and profound and healthy. They are not dated, not absurd—and should the Lord tarry, I have a sneaking suspicion that as we learn more, we'll discover even more how God's dietary regulations are the best possible plan for the human condition.

When Jesus came on the scene, He said, "The issue is not what you eat physically, but what goes on in your heart" (see Mark 7:15). With this in mind, we can understand that these laws are not only to be followed by the Jewish people of Moses' day, but that they're applicable for you and me spiritually—that we might be careful what we take in, what we put in our soul.

Deuteronomy 14:4–21

These are the beasts which ye shall eat: the ox, the sheep, and the goat, The hart, and the roebuck, and the fallow deer, and the wild goat, and the pygarg, and the wild ox, and the chamois. And every beast that parteth the hoof, and cleaveth the cleft into two claws, and cheweth the cud among the beasts, that ye shall eat. Nevertheless these ye shall not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the cloven hoof; as the camel, and the hare, and the coney: for they chew the cud, but divide not the hoof; therefore they are unclean unto you. And the swine, because it divideth the hoof, yet cheweth not the cud, it is unclean unto you: ye shall not eat of their flesh, nor touch their dead carcase. These ye shall eat of all that are in the waters: all that have fins and scales shall ye eat: And whatsoever hath not fins and scales ye may not eat; it is unclean unto you. Of all clean birds ye shall eat. But these are they of which ye shall not eat: the eagle, and ossifrage, and the ospray, And the glede, and the kite, and the vulture after his kind, And every raven after his kind, And the owl, and the night hawk, and the cuckow, and the hawk after his kind, The little owl, and the great owl, and the swan, And the

pelican, and the gier eagle, and the cormorant, And the stork, and the heron after her kind, and the lapwing, and the bat. And every creeping thing that flieth is unclean unto you: they shall not be eaten. But of all clean fowls ye may eat. Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself: thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien: for thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.

Two characteristics would determine whether an animal was clean, kosher, or unclean: how he walked and what he ate. In other words, is there a division in the way the animal walks? And does it chew the cud, or does it simply spew out stuff half-digested?

When I'm reading a book, watching a TV show, or reading a magazine, I must ask, "Is it clean or unclean?" And I can determine this by looking at those who wrote the book or directed the show. How do they walk? Is there a division? Do they know right from wrong, bad from good, dark from light? Do they understand that there is a division in life—a high way and a low way? Has he or she really chewed on the issues and produced something refined—or is it just a bunch of half-thoughts being spewed out?

"Be careful," Jesus said. "It's more important what you put into your soul than what you put into your body."

Deuteronomy 14:22, 23
Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year. And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always.

How does a man learn to fear the Lord—to be in awe of Him, to be amazed by Him, to have respect for Him? One of the ways is by tithing because when a person tithes, they begin to see miracles take place.

"Test Me," God says, "and see if I will not open up the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing so big your barns can't contain it" (see Malachi 3:10). It's the only place in all of Scripture where God says, "Test Me."

More than once, people have said to me, "When you talked on tithing, I resented it—until I began to tithe. And then I began to see just how awesome God is, what He does, and the blessings He sends to us when we tithe."

Deuteronomy 14:24, 25
And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the LORD thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD thy God hath blessed thee: Then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose:

If the temple was too far for the people to take their tithe—their corn or ox—they could convert it to money and bring the money to the temple, the place God chose to place His name—in Jerusalem.

Deuteronomy 14:26
And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household,

When the children of Israel brought their tithe, it was to be with rejoicing. "The Lord loves a cheerful giver," Paul would write to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 9:7). The Greek word translated "cheerful" is *hilaros*—from which we get the word "hilarious." God loves a person who gives hilariously, cheerfully, gladly. Therefore, I think it's a mistake to feel obligated to give. It's a privilege to be able to say, "Lord, I'm honoring You in the way You've asked me." If it's not a privilege for you, don't do it. You'll find, however, that things don't work for you in your budgeting and your own financial situation. Over and over I've watched people miss out on

blessings all because of a failure to understand that they couldn't possibly out give God.

Deuteronomy 14:27
And the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee.

Separated for service, unlike the other tribes, the Levites had no land. Thus, they were to be cared for by the other tribes.

Deuteronomy 14:28, 29
At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.

Every third year a second tithe was taken to take care of people who were poor—the fatherless, the widow, the stranger. And that money was to be used for their well being and welfare. If you add together the tithes of Deuteronomy 14, Deuteronomy 16, and Numbers 18, they come to an average of twenty-three percent annually. While it may be that even in our Godless society we are contributing a portion of this through taxes, this we do know for certain: God's ways are right. His heart is *for* us. Therefore, when He asks us to give to Him, it's not only for His glory, but for our good.



15

Deuteronomy 15:1, 2
At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD's release.

Every seventh year was to be a sabbatical year. The land was to rest. No crops were to be planted or harvested. The people were to rest. No work was to be done. And the debts were to be released every seventh year. Were they cancelled in totality or just for that year? I believe the latter because in the year of Jubilee that occurred every fifty years, debts were cancelled completely.

Deuteronomy 15:3
Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release;

An outsider living in the land still had to make his payment.

Deuteronomy 15:4 (a)
Save when there shall be no poor among you . . .

If Israel tithed for the poor every third year as seen in chapter 14, if they released debts every seven years and cancelled them completely every fifty, if they followed God's economic plan for them, poverty would be entirely eradicated from their nation.

Deuteronomy 15:4 (b)
. . . for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it:

Canceling debts for a year, canceling debts entirely, and giving money to the poor doesn't make sense financially. But God said, "If you trust Me and be obedient to Me, you'll be blessed. Poverty will be nonexistent in your culture. How? By being generous, by being merciful, by giving with a rejoicing heart." But guess what. It didn't work out that way for Israel, for as far as we know, never once in their history did they celebrate the year of Jubilee. It didn't make sense to them. After all, there were bills to pay, budgets to keep. Consequently, the nation never did experience a release from poverty because it just didn't make sense to them—just like God's principles don't make sense to us. And we are the poorer for it.

Deuteronomy 15:5, 6
Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee.

"If you do what the Lord commands, you'll be the financiers—the lenders rather than the borrowers," Moses told the people of Israel. The Jewish people did indeed become the great financiers of world economy when, during the Middle Ages, a papal edict forbade Christians from lending money. Thus, the Jews became the bankers of Europe. And if you poke around very closely in Wall Street, you'll see the great brokerage firms are almost invariably founded by or led by people of Jewish origin.

Deuteronomy 15:7–10
If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto.

Here is a great piece of business advice, a very important principle that doesn't make sense to us rationally. God says, "Be careful when the sixth year is coming that you don't refuse to lend money because it won't be paid back in the seventh year. Rather, share and open your hand wide to the people who need help from you at any time no matter what year it might be. If you do

this, if you don't close your heart and close your hand, I will bless you in whatever you do."

If you're a businessman, be as generous as you can. Find people to whom you can give your treasure, your energy, your talent, your abilities. "I'm having a tough time making ends meet as it is," we protest.

But God says, "If you will have a generous heart and an open hand, watch and see how I will bless you."

Deuteronomy 15:11–18

For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land. And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day. And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee; because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee; Then thou shalt take an aul, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever. And also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise. It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee; for he hath been worth a double hired servant to thee, in serving thee six years: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest.

The reference here is to the slave serving as an indentured servant to pay his bills. On the seventh year he was to be released and set free. But if he so chose, he could remain in his master's service for the rest of his days, signified by the hole that would be pierced in his ear.



For topical study of Deuteronomy 15:12–17, see "Bondservants: Give It Your 'Awl" ' below.

Deuteronomy 15:19–23
All the firstling males that come of thy herd and of thy flock thou shalt sanctify unto the LORD thy God: thou shalt do no work with the firstling of thy bullock, nor shear the first ling of thy sheep. Thou shalt eat it before the LORD thy God year by year in the place which the LORD shall choose, thou and thy household. And if there be any blemish therein, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the LORD thy God. Thou shalt eat it within thy gates: the unclean and the clean person shall eat it alike, as the roebuck, and as the hart. Only thou shalt not eat the blood thereof; thou shalt pour it upon the ground as water.

Only sacrifices without blemish were to be offered to God. Yet we who are blind, lame, and full of blemishes are accepted as sacrifices (Romans 12:1, 2) because we are covered by the blood of the perfect, spotless Lamb of God.

BONDSERVANTS: GIVE IT YOUR "AWL"

A Topical Study of
DEUTERONOMY 15:12–17

This past week, I had one of those weeks that we all have from time to time, where I found myself feeling physically fatigued and weary. You know the feeling. We've all been there.

Last weekend, I was in the San Bernardino Mountains speaking at a men's conference. Coming back late Saturday night, I enjoyed teaching the Word here Sunday. The leadership meeting following Sunday night's service was interesting and challenging. Then I headed over to the coast to speak at Lake Bradley, and from there, went south again to speak at a single's retreat. When I was done teaching Friday night, I plopped in a pew completely exhausted. But when a bunch of guys approached me with questions about raising kids as single dads, we ended up talking past midnight. When I finally got back to my room, I sat down on the bed no longer feeling exhausted but now elated and energized.

I share that story with you because it's the basis of our text. You see, Moses is reiterating, repeating the Law to the people of Israel. And in so doing, he reminds them of the Law of the bondslave. Simply put, this text says if a Jew found himself in debt from which he was unable to extricate himself, he could sell himself into slavery—a form of bankruptcy, but one which made people think twice before filing!

Such an indentured servant could only serve for six years before being set free in the seventh. There was an exception, however. If a slave wanted to remain in his owner's service, his owner was to pierce his ear with an awl. And the ring that would hang from it would signify he was a slave by choice. Paul the apostle refers to himself as such a bondslave, using the Greek word *doulos* (Romans 1:1).

But in Psalm 40, we read of the ultimate Bondslave . . .

> *Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of*

me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.

Psalm 40:6–8

The ear of Jesus Christ was opened, pierced not with an awl but by the wood of the Cross of Calvary. Jesus is the perfect Bondslave who came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45), Who came not to do His own will, but His Father's (Matthew 26:39). For the joy set before Him, He endured the Cross, despising the shame (Hebrews 12:2). He knew there would be suffering and bleeding, but He also knew that on the other side, there would be joy which would far outweigh and supercede even the pain.

And such can be the same for you and me . . .

Doulos, the Greek word for servant, refers to an under rower. Think of a ship sailing across the Mediterranean Sea. While the passengers on the deck are enjoying the view, below them were men expending great energy, toiling at the oars. That's what it means to be a servant. You slave away hour after hour, day after day in order to get the people above you to their destination. The true servant says, "I want to get you to where you're supposed to be—out of the slough of despondency, out of the place where you're discouraged, confused, or damned eternally. I want to do whatever I can to get you to your destination."

"That sounds awful," you say, "rowing day after day under the deck just to get someone else to his or her destination."

But here's what you must remember: If the people on deck are headed to Maui, guess where you will end up. It's true. If I'm helping someone else to have a better day, I arrive at the same port. If I'm helping someone overcome discouragement, I myself end up overcoming my own discouragement. If I'm helping someone else with their marriage, my own marriage grows stronger, richer, deeper. If I'm helping someone else who is confused about the nature of the Father, as I row for them, my own understanding of the Father becomes so much clearer.

This should not be as surprising as it is to us. After all, Jesus said, "Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom, For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38).

Next time you have a week where you feel physically, emotionally, spiritually, or mentally fatigued, here's the key: Serve others. Talk to others. Pray with others. And maybe people will notice your labor of love on their behalf.

But it may be that your work will take place under the deck where, out of sight, unnoticed by others, as a bondslave, you row faithfully to get them to their destination.

Choose today to say, "Lord, I want to be a bondslave. Open my ear. Pierce my flesh." Give Him your "awl"—and set sail for islands of joy and fulfillment never before imagined.



16

Chapter 16 reviews the three major feasts of Israel . . .

Deuteronomy 16:1–8

Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover unto the LORD thy God: for in the month of Abib the LORD thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night. Thou shalt therefore sacrifice the passover unto the LORD thy God, of the flock and the herd, in the place which the LORD shall choose to place his name there. Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it; seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread therewith, even the bread of affliction; for thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt in haste: that thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life. And there shall be no leavened bread seen with thee in all thy coast seven days; neither shall there anything of the flesh, which thou sacrificedst the first day at even, remain all night until the morning. Thou mayest not sacrifice the passover within any of thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee: But at the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt. And thou shalt roast and eat it in

the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: and thou shalt turn in the morning, and go unto thy tents. Six days thou shalt eat unleavened bread: and on the seventh day shall be a solemn assembly to the LORD thy God: thou shalt do no work therein.

Passover took place in the spring and commemorated the way the children of Israel were released from Egypt.

Deuteronomy 16:9–12
Seven weeks shalt thou number unto thee: begin to number the seven weeks from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn. And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the LORD thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the LORD thy God, according as the LORD thy God hath blessed thee: And thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the LORD thy God hath chosen to place his name there. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt: and thou shalt observe and do these statutes.

Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks took place fifty days after Passover in anticipation of God's provision as His people waved the first harvest of the summer season before Him.

Deuteronomy 16:13–15
Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine: And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates. Seven days shalt thou keep a solemn feast unto the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD shall choose: because the LORD

thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice.

The Feast of Tabernacles took place in the fall as the Jews dwelt in lean-to's in celebration of the way God brought the children of Israel through the wilderness.

Deuteronomy 16:16, 17
Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty: Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee.

Although the women and children were invited to attend these three feasts, the men were required to do so. And they were not to come empty-handed. The same is true today. When we come before the Lord, when we meet together, we're to come ready to give. We're to come, saying, "Who can I pray for? Who can I encourage? Who can I help?" The brother or sister who understands this is the one who leaves times of fellowship and corporate worship with a heart full, excited for the Lord.

Deuteronomy 16:18
Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment.

The gates referred to here were actually more like a room through which the people entered and exited the city and in which disputes were settled—more like a city hall.

Deuteronomy 16:19–21
Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just

shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near unto the altar of the LORD thy God, which thou shalt make thee.

This is a reference to the groves and high places of pagan worship. "Do not make any provision for the flesh," we are told in Romans 13:14. Don't allow any groves in your home. Don't allow yourselves to be in a position where you can veer off into "shady" areas—be they books, magazines, movies, music, Internet sites, or anything else which obstructs your view of the true and living God.

Deuteronomy 16:22
Neither shalt thou set thee up any image; which the LORD thy God hateth.

If you want a clear image of Jesus, read the description found in Revelation 1:11–16. Anything less limits our understanding of the King of kings.



17

Deuteronomy 17:1
Thou shalt not sacrifice unto the LORD thy God any bullock, or sheep, wherein is blemish, or any evilfavouredness: for that is an abomination unto the LORD thy God.

While the Lord freely accepts the sacrifice of our lives—blemished as we are—we are not to bring Him our castoffs. It's amazing what people bring to the Helps Ministry: one shoe, a single glove. There's a tendency for us to say, "I don't need that anymore, I'll just give it to the Lord." Such ought not be.

Deuteronomy 17:2–7 (a)
If there be found among you, within any of thy gates which the LORD thy God giveth thee, man or woman, that hath wrought

wickedness in the sight of the LORD thy God, in transgressing his covenant, And hath gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded; And it be told thee, and thou hast heard of it, and inquired diligently, and, behold, it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel: Then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman, which have committed that wicked thing, unto thy gates, even that man or that woman, and shalt stone them with stones, till they die. At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people . . .

If, after careful investigation, a person was found guilty of worshiping false gods, his accusers were to be his executioners and were to be joined by the entire community base, as seen in the sad story of Achan (Joshua 7), one man's sin affects everyone to whom he is linked.

Deuteronomy 17:7 (b)
. . . So thou shalt put the evil away from among you.

In God's economy, capital punishment is a definite deterrent to sin.

Deuteronomy 17:8, 9
If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the LORD thy God shall choose; And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and inquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment:

The person at odds with someone was to go to the temple for resolution. The same is true today. I firmly believe that the best place for arbitration between believers is at the church. "Don't you know you will one day judge

angels?" Paul asks the Corinthians. "Why, then, can't you handle your own disputes and squabbles presently?" (1 Corinthians 6:1–4).

Deuteronomy 17:10, 11
And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the LORD shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee: According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left.

He who went to the temple to resolve a dispute was to abide by the decision made.

Deuteronomy 17:12, 13
And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously.

He who came to the temple for arbitration but refused to abide by the decision made therein was to be put to death.

People who come to the church for counsel must come submitted to what the Lord instructs and what the Word declares rather than going to other people, lawyers, or clinics until they find someone who agrees with them or feels sorry for them. Knowing our tendency to travel around until we hear what we want to hear, God says, "If you don't do what you're told, you'll die." And that's exactly what happens. When I don't do what God tells me to do, joy dies. Relationships die. Ministry dies.

Deuteronomy 17:14, 15
When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about

me; Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother.

God knew His people would want a king once they were in the Land. But that was not His original intent for them. His heart was that Israel be a theocracy. But as a Father, He knew the nature of His kids. And He knew that when they went into the Land, they would eventually desire to be like the nations round about them. The other nations had kings, so His people would want a king, too.

And that's precisely what happened. In 1 Samuel 8, we read that the people came to Samuel the prophet and said, "Make us a king that we might be like the other nations." Their request broke Samuel's heart, for he knew that their request was a step down, a step back from what God intended for them. But God instructed him to grant their request.

How did other nations select their kings? They would appoint the tallest, best-looking, most charismatic man they could find. Therefore, in instructing Samuel to anoint Saul king, it's as if God was saying, "If My people want to be like other nations, I'll give them a king like those of other nations."

Way back in Genesis 49:10, God had declared that the scepter—the symbol of kingly authority—would not depart from Judah. Saul, however, was from the tribe of Benjamin. Thus, we know that God allowed Saul to be king because He wanted His people to feel the full force of their foolishness. But after Saul was killed in battle, God's mercy kicked in, His grace broke through, and He did indeed give Israel a king from Judah, a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22).

God instructed Samuel to anoint David. And from David's line would come the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the King of kings, Jesus Christ.

Deuteronomy 17:16, 17
But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to

himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.

God instituted three prohibitions to those who would rule His people. Kings were not to be power-hungry, signified by the number of horses they amassed. Neither were they to be woman-crazy, signified by multiple wives. Nor were they to be money-mad.

What drives politics in our country today? Power, women, and money. And while none of us is likely to rule a country, this passage is nonetheless vital for anyone who wants to exert authority in family, ministry, or vocation. What's to keep the king from falling prey to the lure of power, women, and wealth? David said, "Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee" (Psalm 119:11)—which is exactly what Moses said . . .

Deuteronomy 17:18
And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites:

The first act the king was to perform upon taking the throne was not to go to an inaugural ball, throw a party for his donors, or watch a parade in his honor. God declared the first thing a king was to do was to make a copy of the Law. Why? Because in writing down every line, every word, the Law would be embedded in the king's mind.

I have found that if I have pencil and paper in hand when I have devotions or go to a Bible study, I never come away empty-handed. And even if I never refer to those notes again, taking notes forces me to be engaged in the process of listening.

Deuteronomy 17:19 (a)
And it shall be with him . . .

Not only are we to write the Word down, but we're to pack it around. I have several pocket Bibles I carry, not because I'm trying to be a holy Joe or some kind of Pharisee, but because I've found I can redeem a bunch of time —be it waiting for a stoplight, waiting for an appointment, or standing in line

at the grocery store. You will be amazed at how much Scripture you can absorb in a single year simply by keeping the Word close at hand.

Deuteronomy 17:19 (b)
. . . and he shall read therein all the days of his life . . .

In other words, the king was to read the Word every day. Sometimes I hear people say, "I don't have devotions because I've already read the Bible through three times." But that's not the point. God says if you want to be effective, you need to read it over and over and over again.

Deuteronomy 17:19 (c)
. . . that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them:

In addition to writing it down and packing it around, the king was not only to read the Word consistently, but to take it seriously. When I read the Bible, I fear the Lord. Why? Not because I'm condemned, but because I'm convicted. I realize the Word is right and I'm not, that it is good and I'm not, that it is true and I'm not. In other words, when I read the Word, I realize that I need Jesus every single day.

Deuteronomy 17:20 (a)
That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren . . .

When do I find fault with others? When do I come down on others? When is my heart lifted up above others? When I'm not in the Word. When I'm in the Word, however, I realize how far I have yet to go. In reading the Word, the king would be reminded of his own need for mercy and forgiveness and would thereby be merciful and forgiving towards those he ruled.

Deuteronomy 17:20 (b)
. . . and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel.

If, like Israel's kings were instructed to do, I read the Word consistently and take it seriously, not only will I walk in the ways of the Lord, but also my children will follow. What a simple premise. What a glorious promise.



18

Deuteronomy 18:1

The priests the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel: they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and his inheritance.

With the exception of the Levites, every tribe had been assigned a portion of the Promised Land. As ministers to the Lord, the Levites were to be scattered throughout Israel.

Deuteronomy 18:2–5

Therefore shall they have no inheritance among their brethren: the LORD is their inheritance, as he hath said unto them. And this shall be the priest's due from the people, from them that offer a sacrifice, whether it be ox or sheep; and they shall give unto the priest the shoulder, and the two cheeks, and the maw. The firstfruit also of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the first of the fleece of thy sheep, shalt thou give him. For the LORD thy God hath chosen him out of all thy tribes, to stand to minister in the name of the LORD, him and his sons for ever.

In other words, those who ministered to the people of God were to be cared for by the people of God.

Deuteronomy 18:6–8 (a)

And if a Levite come from any of thy gates out of all Israel, where he sojourned, and come with all the desire of his mind unto the place which the LORD shall choose; Then he shall minister in the name of the LORD his God, as all his brethren the Levites do, which stand there before the LORD. They shall have like portions to eat . . .

The Levites would serve for two weeks at a time in the temple. But if a Levite wanted to serve longer, he could, in which case he was to be supported through the tithes, offerings, and sacrifices, as were the other Levites.

Deuteronomy 18:8 (b)
. . . beside that which cometh of the sale of his patrimony.

Although the Levites had no land deeded to them, they were permitted to buy houses, goods, and cattle.

Deuteronomy 18:9, 10 (a)
When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire . . .

This refers to the worship of Molech in which parents placed their babies on the incandescent arms of his statue in hopes that in so doing they would prosper as a family. We do the same thing in our culture. We burn our unborn children with saline solution because we think we can't afford them. Prosperity rules either way. And it's an abomination to God.

Deuteronomy 18:10 (b), 11
. . . or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.

Anything having to do with divination—be it psychic hot lines or astrology, ouija boards or tarot cards—is to be scrupulously avoided.

Deuteronomy 18:12
For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee.

The Canaanites were driven out of the land because of their involvement in the very activities God forbade His people from doing.

> **Deuteronomy 18:13, 14**
> **Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the LORD thy God hath not suffered thee so to do.**

If we can't read our horoscopes or get our palms read, what are we to do?

> **Deuteronomy 18:15–19**
> **The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.**

As word reached Herod that there was One in Israel who was casting out demons and healing people, he thought it was John the Baptist—whom he himself had beheaded—risen from the dead. Others, however, told him it was Elijah or possibly the Prophet, referring to the Prophet spoken of here in Deuteronomy 18 (Mark 6:14, 15).

> God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

God doesn't want to give us knowledge about the future. He wants to give us strength for today. And for that, we're not to look to the stars, but to the Son.

Deuteronomy 18:20
But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.

The prophet who spoke in the name of a false god was to be put to death.

Deuteronomy 18:21, 22
And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

The people were not to be afraid of—or literally, not to respect—he who gave a prophecy that failed to come to pass.

It's knowing the Word, it's meditating on the Word, it's living in the Word that keeps us from pursuing the dead-end paths of those who promise things that don't come to pass, of those who predict things that never happen. Stay in the Word, precious people.



19 Deuteronomy 19:1–7

When the LORD thy God hath cut off the nations, whose land the LORD thy God giveth thee, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their cities, and in their houses; Thou shalt separate three cities for thee in the midst of thy land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it. Thou shalt prepare thee a way, and divide the coasts of thy land, which

the LORD thy God giveth thee to inherit, into three parts, that every slayer may flee thither. And this is the case of the slayer, which shall flee thither, that he may live: Whoso killeth his neighbour ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past; As when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live: Lest the avenger of the blood pursue the slayer, while his heart is hot, and overtake him, because the way is long, and slay him; whereas he was not worthy of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past. Wherefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt separate three cities for thee.

Upon entering the Promised Land, the children of Israel were to establish three cities as cities of refuge for the person who committed second-degree murder. As outlined in Numbers 35, a man who unintentionally killed another would be safe from revenge as long as he remained in a city of refuge.

"He who is angry with his brother is guilty of murder," Jesus said (see Matthew 5:22). And who among us has not been angry with our brother? We're all guilty. We're all murderers. We all need Jesus as our Refuge (Hebrews 6:18).

Deuteronomy 19:8–10

And if the LORD thy God enlarge thy coast, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, and give thee all the land which he promised to give unto thy fathers; If thou shalt keep all these commandments to do them, which I command thee this day, to love the LORD thy God, and to walk ever in his ways; then shalt thou add three cities more for thee, beside these three: That innocent blood be not shed in thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and so blood be upon thee.

If the children of Israel obeyed the Lord and claimed more land, they were to add three additional cities of refuge.

Deuteronomy 19:11–13

But if any man hate his neighbour, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally that he die, and fleeth into one of these cities: Then the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee.

He who committed first-degree murder, he who intentionally killed another had no place in the city of refuge. The Bible is full of warnings to those who try to use the grace of God as a cloak to cover their own sin. Those who are truly born of God do not commit sin (1 John 3:9). Does this mean believers lead sinless lives? No. The Greek word translated "commit" refers to one who habitually, continually practices sin the way others practice golf or the piano. We all struggle with sin, but there is a difference between a person who struggles with or even succumbs to sin, and one who practices sin in order to get better at sinning.

Deuteronomy 19:14
Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it.

Turning his attention from the cities of refuge to cities in general, Moses told the children of Israel they were not to remove the old boundaries. And the same is true today. In the Promised Land of the Spirit-filled life, we're not to remove the old boundaries because they're there for a reason. For example, those who say homosexuality ought to be allowed and celebrated in the Christian community are wrong because such teaching has never been acknowledged or embraced at any time in church history. Although there is pressure to change the boundaries, God's Word says the boundaries are to remain.

Deuteronomy 19:15–18 (a)
One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses,

or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established. If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong; Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days; And the judges shall make diligent inquisition . . .

Accusation must be followed by confirmation. That is, a second witness must be found before judgment could be made. If, however, there was no second witness, accuser and accused were to come before the priest, where diligent inquisition would be made.

Deuteronomy 19:18 (b)–20
. . . and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you. And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.

If the witness proved to be a false witness, his punishment would be that which would have otherwise been given to the accused. That is why Haman, falsely accusing the Jews, was hung on the very gallows he had built for them (Esther 7:9).

Deuteronomy 19:21
And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

While at the outset, this may sound harsh, it is, in fact, merciful considering our propensity for "one-upmanship." You see, if you blacken my eye, my fleshly tendency is to want to blacken both of yours. God, however, calls for an equitable, measured response: only one eye for an eye, only one tooth for a tooth. Jesus, however, would reinstitute the idea of "one-upmanship" by telling us to offer two cheeks when struck on one, to give two coats when asked for one (Matthew 5:38–42).



20 Deuteronomy 20:1

When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

To the children of Israel, Moses didn't say, "*If* you see the enemy more numerous than you . . ." He said, "*When* you see the enemy . . ." In other words, battles were inevitable. Every one of us will have encounters when we feel outgunned and outmaneuvered, when we feel under-prepared and overwhelmed. At such times, we are not to be afraid. Why? Because they provide invaluable opportunities for us to see how God will come through for us.

Deuteronomy 20:2–4
And it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people, And shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them; For the LORD your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.

There is no way to know how great God is until you are in a situation you can't handle, until you don't know what to do, until it is seemingly impossible to solve the problem. The only way we'll know how great God is, how loving our Lord is, is to be over our heads, completely at a loss. I've been there. So have you. Maybe you're there tonight. The priest is to say, "Don't freak out. The Lord is with you. He brought you out of Egypt, out of the world, out of hell. He's not going to let you go now."

Deuteronomy 20:5–7
And the officers shall speak unto the people, saying, What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? Let

him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man dedicate it. And what man is he that hath planted a vineyard, and hath not yet eaten of it? Let him also go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man eat of it. And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? Let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her.

Three groups of men were exempt from battle: those who hadn't finished building their houses, those who hadn't yet eaten of their vineyards, and those who were engaged, but not yet married. In this, we see God's desire that people delight in His blessings before they devote themselves to battle.

> For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.
>
> 2 Corinthians 8:9

Jesus left the blessings of heaven in order to bless us. And, while there is definitely a time for battle, there is also a time to delight in the blessings that are ours through the grace of the One Who became poor that we might be rich.

Deuteronomy 20:8
And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart.

A fourth group deferred from battle was comprised of those who were afraid. When people lack faith, they often begin to speak negatively to justify their own fears. Cynicism and criticism are often a cowardly covering for fear. And they're contagious. That's why those who were afraid were to go home.

Deuteronomy 20:9

And it shall be, when the officers have made an end of speaking unto the people, that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people.

If you want to be used by the Lord, go back over the preceding four verses and ask yourself if your household is stable, if the work of your hands is thriving, if your marriage is healthy, if your heart is full of faith. If a man doesn't have a home for his family, he ought to tend that first. If a man doesn't have a job and wants to be supported by others, he should get a job and succeed at that. If a man has a lousy marriage, he shouldn't be taking on further ministry. If a man is full of fear, he shouldn't try to hide behind ministry or missions. This passage is an important checklist for anyone who wants to be used by the Lord, to be engaged in His work.

Deuteronomy 20:10–15
When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it: And when the LORD thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword: But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the LORD thy God hath given thee. Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee, which are not of the cities of these nations.

The pagan cities the children of Israel would encounter upon entry into the Promised Land were to be destroyed. This passage, however, speaks of cities outside the boundaries of the Promised Land. Before engaging in battle with such cities, the Israelites were to first offer to be at peace with them if they would surrender. At this time in history, the offer of peace and surrender were completely foreign concepts.

Deuteronomy 20:16–18
But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee: That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the LORD your God.

No offer of peace was to be made to the cities within the Promised Land and lest this sounds cruel, remember that in Genesis 15, God told Abraham that his descendants would go to Egypt a full four hundred years while God gave the Canaanites opportunity to repent of their sin and turn to Him. When they refused to do so, He used the Israelites to put them out of their misery lest they inflect others with their wickedness and perversion.

Deuteronomy 20:19, 20
When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege: Only the trees which thou knowest that they be not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down; and thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it be subdued.

When the Israelites went to battle, their axes were not to fly indiscriminately. That is, they were not to cut down any fruit-bearing tree. This is a good word for us because in our battle against principalities and powers, against the devil, our Adversary, if we're not careful, we can cut down trees that bear fruit, other believers, denominations, or churches who might have an entirely different flavor than ours, but from which we can be nourished. Wise is the believer who says, "Lord, help me to see what I can glean from that group, what I can learn from those people."

So much of what I've learned has been from trees that, in my own fleshly tendency, I would have chopped down. Wouldn't it be something if all the energy we expend analyzing ministry and criticizing Christians was harnessed against the real enemy? Yes, there's a war to wage, a battle to fight. And some trees are apostate indeed. But others have fruit that we can glean, through which we can grow, from which we can gain strength for the battle against the enemy of our souls.



21 Before they charge on to the field for the opening game, a good coach will review with his team the game plan they worked on all summer long. So, too, "Coach Moses," knowing that his team is about to charge into the Promised Land, reminds the children of Israel of certain truths, underscores certain principles in order that they might be successful in the Land of Promise . . .

Deuteronomy 21:1–9
If one be found slain in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it, lying in the field, and it be not known who hath slain him: Then thy elders and thy judges shall come forth, and they shall measure unto the cities which are round about him that is slain: And it shall be, that the city which is next unto the slain man, even the elders of that city shall take an heifer, which hath not been wrought with, and which hath not drawn in the yoke; And the elders of that city shall bring down the heifer unto a rough valley, which is neither eared nor sown, and shall strike off the heifer's neck there in the valley: And the priests the sons of Levi shall come near; for them the LORD thy God hath chosen to minister unto him, and to bless in the name of the LORD; and by their word shall every controversy and every stroke be tried: And all the elders of that city, that are next unto the slain man, shall wash their hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley: And they shall answer and say, Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it. Be merciful, O LORD,

unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel's charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them. So shalt thou put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the LORD.

Concerning the unsolved murders that would take place even in the Promised Land, rather than shrugging their shoulders and ignoring them, the children of Israel were to investigate and make atonement for them.

The elders closest to the scene of the crime were to offer sacrifices and intercession in order that the people of the region could be protected.

During a staff meeting at Lake Bradley one afternoon, hail began to fall. The roof overhead took the pounding and absorbed the beating, thereby allowing us to remain dry and protected. Every organization, every community needs people of maturity who will act as a covering to absorb the inevitable poundings in order that those beneath them can grow and function in safety.

There comes a point in the life of a mature person when he or she says, "Even though this isn't my problem personally, it's time I take some responsibility." This is what was to be modeled by the elders of Israel—and by any who want to be used by the Lord to a greater capacity.

Deuteronomy 21:10, 11
When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and the LORD thy God hath delivered them into thine hands, and thou hast taken them captive, And seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldest have her to thy wife;

Keep in mind, in every culture at this time in history, and even until relatively recently, when there was a war, invading soldiers would wreak havoc upon the populace—especially upon the women. The Lord, however, instituted something shockingly new when He said, "If you see a woman who interests you, you are to treat her honorably in the following manner. . . ."

Deuteronomy 21:12
Then thou shalt bring her home to thine house; and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails;

If an Israelite soldier wanted to marry a woman of a conquered city, he was to take her to his house, where she would shave her head and "pare" or, as perhaps your margin might more correctly render this word, let her nails grow, which, in Old Testament times, would have been considered an oddity.

Deuteronomy 21:13 (a)
And she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month . . .

The bride-to-be was to put on mourning clothes, most likely sackcloth, and mourn for her mother and father, who were either killed in battle or left behind.

Deuteronomy 21:13 (b), 14
. . . and after that thou shalt go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife. And it shall be, if thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she will; but thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not make merchandise of her, because thou hast humbled her.

If the Israelite still wanted to marry her after hearing her mourn for a month, he was free to do so. If, however, he later changed his mind, he was to let her go and she would be free. Again, while this scenario sounds odd to us, the month-long waiting period, the commitment to marry, and the freedom granted should the marriage not work elevated women in a day when the women in surrounding nations had no more rights than did livestock.

Deuteronomy 21:15–17
If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when

he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.

As the Word unfolds, God will move His family from this practice of polygamy. But at this time, He's putting restrictions around it before He will eventually wean them from it. The reality of multiple wives is that one is loved, the others hated. And the same is true today. Part of the reason God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) is that there is no final decree in divorce. There are always repercussions and difficulties and problems, most often having to do with children. If you've gone through the heartache of divorce, this is not a word of condemnation, but rather one of evaluation: Don't forget your firstborn. Don't forget your children from your previous marriage. Divorce happens. But we are not to complicate an already complicated situation by ignoring the firstborn.

Deuteronomy 21:18–20
If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; and they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard.

According to this passage, it was not an option but an obligation for the parents of a son determined to live a life of rebelliousness to bring him to the elders of the city.

Deuteronomy 21:21
And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall

hear, and fear.

All the men of the city were to stone the rebellious son. Why? I suggest three reasons . . .

- *Motivation.* Communities being small in Bible times, the men of the city would know the son in question. They would know his family. Therefore, so difficult would it be to stone him, they would go home resolved to do whatever it took to make sure their own sons didn't follow the same path of rebellion.
- *Evaluation.* Participating in the stoning would cause the men in the community to ask themselves if there was something they could have done to turn him from his rebellious ways. If one of our kids in the Fellowship is out of line, all of us have to take a certain degree of responsibility; all of us must ask ourselves, *Could I have prayed more? Is there something I could have said?*
- *Proclamation.* The stoning proclaimed to the community that rebellion was neither a "stage" nor an inevitable part of growing up. It was simply not to be tolerated.

If you've either been or raised a rebellious child, I call your attention to another rebellious son—the prodigal son of Luke 15. When this rebellious son returned, his father ran out to meet him not with rocks in his hand, but with a robe for his son. Why? Did God change His mind somewhere between Deuteronomy and Luke about the severity of rebellion?

No. The punishment for rebellion is always death (Romans 6:23). But because a third Son—not the rebellious son, not the prodigal son, but the perfect Son—became sin and took my place on the Cross, rebellious son that I am, I am forgiven completely.

Deuteronomy 21:22, 23
And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land

be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

Deuteronomy 21:23 is quoted in Galatians 3:13 and was fulfilled by the One who took our curse and our sin, by the One who died in our place. I deserve to be put to death and stoned for my stubbornness and rebellion. But my Father sent His only begotten Son, the One who never rebelled (John 8:29), in order that I might be robed in His righteousness (Isaiah 61:10).



22 Deuteronomy 22:1–4

Thou shalt not see the brother's ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thy self from them: thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother. And if thy brother be not nigh unto thee, or if thou know him not, then thou shalt bring it unto thine own house, and it shall be with thee until thy brother seek after it, and thou shalt restore it to him again. In like manner shalt thou do with his ass; and so shalt thou do with his raiment; and with all lost thing of thy brother's, which he hath lost, and thou hast found, shalt thou do likewise: thou mayest not hide thyself. Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again.

This passage addresses sins of omission rather than sins of commission —failing to do what's right rather than overtly doing wrong, missed deeds rather than misdeeds. Seeing their brother's runaway sheep or fallen cow, the children of Israel were not to ignore the problem, but to make it right. And we are to do the same (James 4:17).

Deuteronomy 22:5

The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God.

Knowing that confusion about identity can lead to all manner of perversion, the Lord clearly prohibits anything which would blur the lines

between men and women.

Deuteronomy 22:6, 7
If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, whether they be young ones, or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young: But thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, and take the young to thee; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days.

If I saw a bird's nest on the ground, I would think, *Lucky day! Fried bird and scrambled eggs!* But God says, "No. You can take the eggs if you choose, but let the mother bird go." And in this I begin to understand that many of the present-day bureaucratic regulations that admittedly irritate me have their origins in God's Word, in God's heart. Like many of you, I have very real political stands, but I must measure them against what the Father declares in His Word and follow His wisdom rather than my opinion on any given matter.

Deuteronomy 22:8
When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.

Rooftops being used as patios, railings would be necessary to keep people from falling off. As in the previous passage, we see God instituting ordinances that, to me, seem bureaucratic and unnecessary. After all, if someone was on my roof, my fleshly tendency would be to think that his safety was his own responsibility. "That might be your tendency, but it's not My heart," God would say. "I want you to be concerned about the welfare of others. I want you to be like Me."

Deuteronomy 22:9–12
Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard be defiled. Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together. Thou

shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together. Thou shalt make thee fringes upon the four quarters of thy vesture, wherewith thou coverest thyself.

Planting a variety of seeds, plowing with an ox and an ass, wearing wool and linen all speak of mixture. "Either be hot or cold," Jesus said, "but not lukewarm" (see Revelation 3:15). Why? Because lukewarm is a mixture of hot and cold. I like hot tea and iced tea, but I don't like room-temperature tea. And the same is true with the Lord. If we're hot, He can use us. If we're cold, He can break us. But if we're neither hot nor cold, not only will He "spew us out of His mouth," but we'll be miserable as well because we'll have too much of the Lord in us to enjoy the world and too much of the world in us to seek the Lord. That's why He wants us to be hot or cold, linen or wool, yea or nay (Matthew 5:37), all or nothing.

Deuteronomy 22:13–19
If any man take a wife, and go in unto her, and hate her, And give occasions of speech against her, and bring up an evil name upon her, and say, I took this woman, and when I came to her, I found her not a maid: Then shall the father of the damsel, and her mother, take and bring forth the tokens of the damsel's virginity unto the elders of the city in the gate: And the damsel's father shall say unto the elders, I gave my daughter unto this man to wife, and he hateth her; And, lo, he hath given occasions of speech against her, saying, I found not thy daughter a maid; and yet these are the tokens of my daughter's virginity. And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city. And the elders of that city shall take that man and chastise him; And they shall amerce him in an hundred shekels of silver, and give them unto the father of the damsel, because he hath brought up an evil name upon a virgin of Israel: and she shall be his wife; he may not put her away all his days.

He who wrongly accused a woman concerning her virginity was to be fined one hundred shekels—a considerable sum of money.

Deuteronomy 22:20, 21
But if this thing be true, and the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel: Then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you.

Although we think stoning for promiscuity is an awfully harsh sentence, when we see the entire continent being devastated by AIDS, suddenly purity doesn't seem like such a bad idea. When we look and see what happens to a culture that ignores this standard or calls it archaic, we see a culture contaminated and dying.

Deuteronomy 22:22
If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.

In an adulterous situation, both the man and woman were to be put to death. "Unfair!" we cry, thinking death to be the worst thing that could happen to someone. But such is not the way God views death. To those headed for heaven, it is, in fact, the best thing that could happen. With the moral purity, the physical safety, and the emotional stability of His people at stake, God constructed a very strong fence around the marriage relationship.

Deuteronomy 22:23, 24
If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her; Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you.

Why was the woman to be stoned if the man took advantage of her? Because if the act took place in the city, her failure to cry out meant she

didn't do all she could to stop it. As parents, we need to insist that our daughters be in places where they can "cry out," where they're not putting themselves in situations which will lead to unnecessary problems.

Deuteronomy 22:25–27
But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die: But unto the damsel thou shalt do nothing; there is in the damsel no sin worthy of death: for as when a man riseth against his neighbour, and slayeth him, even so is this matter: For he found her in the field, and the betrothed damsel cried, and there was none to save her.

As seen in the Book of Ruth, women worked in the fields harvesting wheat or barley. If such a woman was taken advantage of physically, unlike the woman in the city, she was to be exonerated because even her cry would not have saved her.

Deuteronomy 22:28, 29
If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found; Then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days.

In God's sight, marriage is not defined by a man in a tuxedo and a woman in a beautiful gown saying, "I do," but rather by two people becoming one flesh. An understanding of this would curb the promiscuous mindset presently pervading our culture.

Deuteronomy 22:30
A man shall not take his father's wife, nor discover his father's skirt.

The reference here is most likely to the case of a stepmother, and was a law acted upon by Solomon in 1 Kings 2:13–25.



23 Deuteronomy 23:1

He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD.

This passage is here to say, among other things, that in the congregation, God expects His people to reproduce. I like that. A healthy congregation witnesses, shares, and talks to others about Jesus.

Deuteronomy 23:2

A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the LORD.

God doesn't have stepsons, foster kids, or illegitimate children. It is only to as many as receive Him personally that He gives the power, the authority to become His sons (John 1:12). The fact that your great-grandfather was a minister doesn't make you part of the kingdom of God. Each man must believe and receive for himself.

Deuteronomy 23:3–6

An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever: Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee. Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee. Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever.

Due to Balaam's sin which eventually resulted in the deaths of 24,000 Israelites (Numbers 25:9), and also to their mean-spiritedness in refusing to share food and water with the people of God during their wilderness

wandering, the Ammonite and Moabite were not allowed into the congregation.

> **Deuteronomy 23:7, 8**
> **Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother: thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian; because thou wast a stranger in his land. The children that are begotten of them shall enter into the congregation of the LORD in their third generation.**

As opposed to their dealing with the Moabites and Ammonites, the children of Israel were not to exclude the Edomites because, as sons of Esau, they were related to Israel. Neither were they to exclude the Egyptians due to their early care of Israel on Joseph's behalf and because of the kindness shown to Israel by individual Egyptians (Exodus 1:17, 12:36).

> **Deuteronomy 23:9–14**
> **When the host goeth forth against thine enemies, then keep thee from every wicked thing. If there be among you any man, that is not clean by reason of uncleanness that chanceth him by night, then shall he go abroad out of the camp, he shall not come within the camp: But it shall be, when evening cometh on, he shall wash himself with water: and when the sun is down, he shall come into the camp again. Thou shalt have a place also without the camp, whither thou shalt go forth abroad: And thou shalt have a paddle upon thy weapon; and it shall be, when thou wilt ease thyself abroad, thou shalt dig therewith, and shalt turn back and cover that which cometh from thee: For the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee.**

At this time in history, such a command was revolutionary. Keep in mind, the camp was large. Yet the Israelites were to leave the camp to "go to the restroom."

"This is legalistic," they could have protested. Yet, rather than explaining the connection between bacteria and disease, God simply told them they

were to do this because He was in the camp and He was holy.

God doesn't always give us understanding or reasons. Sometimes He wants us to obey Him even if it doesn't make sense at the time. And if we do, in due season, we'll see the wisdom of His Word as science catches up to what He knew all along.

Deuteronomy 23:15, 16
Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee: He shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which he shall choose in one of thy gates, where it liketh him best: thou shalt not oppress him.

Apart from indentured service for financial reasons, Israelites were not allowed to enslave fellow Israelites. Therefore, this passage speaks of slaves of other nations being given refuge in Israel.

Deuteronomy 23:17, 18
There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel. Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the LORD thy God.

As we will see in the context of this passage, pagan religions of the Canaanite culture included temple prostitution—a practice obviously forbidden by God.

Deuteronomy 23:19, 20
Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it.

When the children of Israel loaned money, they were not to charge each other interest.

Deuteronomy 23:21, 22
When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee.

The children of Israel weren't required to make a vow to the Lord, but those who did were required to keep the vow they made.

Deuteronomy 23:23
That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the LORD thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth.

In verse 19, the Israelites were told not to charge their brothers interest, to be generous. Yet here, it appears God is saying, "If you make a financial vow to Me, be sure to pay Me." Was God asking the Israelites to be more generous than He Himself was? Of course not. It's not that God wants His children to pay up—but rather that He wants them to grow up. It's not a matter of money, but of integrity.

Deuteronomy 23:24, 25
When thou comest into thy neighbour's vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel. When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour's standing corn.

In the days before mini-marts, travelers were allowed to eat of the crops along the way. It was a law generated by the kindness of the Father and put into practice by the disciples of the Son (Matthew 12:1).



24 Deuteronomy 24:1, 2

When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife.

For centuries, this was a controversial passage in the life and history of Israel. In fact, when Jesus came on the scene there was a red-hot debate taking place in the culture concerning the definition of "uncleanness." One opinion was voiced by a famous scholar named Hillel. Liberal in his perspective, Hillel said a woman was to be considered unclean—and, therefore, a candidate for divorce—if she caused uncleanness in her home. For example, if she over-salted her husband's eggs, thereby causing him to be angry, the resulting "unclean" atmosphere of the home would be her fault. Hillel went on to say that if a man saw a woman who was "cleaner" than his wife, his wife would become "unclean" by comparison. The other opinion was voiced by a scholar named Shammai, who insisted that uncleanness applied exclusively to immorality.

When asked His opinion on the matter, Jesus answered, "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder."

"Why, then, did Moses give permission to divorce?" the Pharisees asked Him.

"Because of the hardness of your hearts," Jesus explained (Matthew 19:3–9). As evidenced by Jesus' answer, the answer to the question of divorce doesn't lie in loopholes.

"I want a divorce because I'm being abused," says a wife.

"How are you being abused?" I ask.

"Verbally," she answers.

"I want a divorce because my wife is hindering my spiritual growth," a husband says.

"No," Jesus says. "Go back to the Garden of Eden and see that God's plan is that one woman and one man stay together until death separates them."

Does this mean the divorced person has committed the unpardonable sin? Not at all. It means they've committed a sin—just like we all have. But divorce being something God hates (Malachi 2:16), it must be an absolute last resort, not a first option. And there must be the admission that it is only the hardness of one's own heart that makes it even a possibility.

Deuteronomy 24:3, 4
And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

Divorce is so painful and brutal, so heartbreaking and gut-wrenching with scars so deep and hurts so real that God essentially declares that the marriage severed by divorce ought to be buried. Upon occasion, there are miracles where God brings about resurrection. But such is not the norm and it takes nothing short of a miracle.

Deuteronomy 24:5
When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business: but he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken.

Upon getting married, a man was to spend the first year at home with his wife in order to cheer her up—the implication being she would need cheering up after marrying him!

"Wherever a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also," Jesus said (see Luke 12:34). Therefore, if a man took one year off to make his wife his treasure, he would inevitably lose interest in everything else that would otherwise vie for his attention. He would find himself wanting to be with her more than wanting anything else.

Deuteronomy 24:6

No man shall take the nether or the upper millstone to pledge: for he taketh a man's life to pledge.

Millstones could not be used as collateral because they were necessary for cooking. In other words, lenders were not to be hard-hearted, not to take from the poor anything necessary for their survival.

Deuteronomy 24:7
If a man be found stealing any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and maketh merchandise of him, or selleth him; then that thief shall die; and thou shalt put evil away from among you.

Kidnapping was to be a capital offense.

Deuteronomy 24:8, 9
Take heed in the plague of leprosy, that thou observe diligently, and do according to all that the priests the Levites shall teach you: as I commanded them, so ye shall observe to do. Remember what the LORD thy God did unto Miriam by the way, after that ye were come forth out of Egypt.

In Numbers 12, we read how Moses' sister, Miriam, was struck with leprosy for finding fault with Moses. After Moses interceded on her behalf, she was healed—but not before she was quarantined for seven days. Leprosy was, in Miriam's case, a picture of the sin of jealousy. So, too, we are to intercede for those in our midst who are jealous. And, just as Miriam was quarantined, we are to keep a watchful eye lest their jealousy, contagious disease that it is, infect others in the congregation.

Deuteronomy 24:10, 11
When thou dost lend thy brother any thing, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge. Thou shalt stand abroad, and the man to whom thou dost lend shall bring out the pledge abroad unto thee.

Here is a second admonition for the lender to be respectful of the borrower.

Deuteronomy 24:12, 13
And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge: In any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee: and it shall be righteousness unto thee before the LORD thy God.

If one's blanket or cloak was used as collateral, the lender was not to be cold-hearted, but was to return it at night lest the borrower be cold.

Deuteronomy 24:14, 15
Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee.

Continuing with the theme of respect for those who were prone to be disrespected, employers were to pay those who worked for them daily rather than to string them along with promises.

Deuteronomy 24:16
The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

If convicted of a capital offense, I can't say, "Take Peter-John instead." If I have committed a crime, my sons aren't to pay the price in my place. This is why the cults are so damnable, implying as they do, that, rather than dying for the sin of the world, God created Jesus to do it. In stripping Jesus of His deity, they make God the Father a violator of His own Law.

Deuteronomy 24:17–22

Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge: But thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing. When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing.

When harvesting their crops, God's people were to leave a remnant for the poor. In this chapter particularly, God's heart and passion for the poor is impossible to miss. Therefore, He commanded His people to think differently, to be as kind as they could be, to see how much they could give away.

And the same is true for us. We're to be as generous as we can be towards as many as we can be. And then we'll see how God, a debtor to no man, blesses in return.



25 Deuteronomy 25:1–3

If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked. And it shall be, if the wicked man be worthy to be beaten, that the judge shall cause him to lie down, and to be beaten before his face, according to his fault, by a certain number. Forty stripes he may give him, and not exceed: lest, if he should exceed, and

beat him above these with many stripes, then thy brother should seem vile unto thee.

Although we might initially recoil at the thought of public beatings, we must also admit that our penal system doesn't work—which is why we must continue to build prisons and why it costs more to keep a man in prison for a year than it does to send him to Yale for the same period. God's Law makes no mention of prisons. If a man was found guilty of committing a capital crime, he was to be stoned by the community. If his was a minor infraction, he was to be beaten before the community.

Deuteronomy 25:4
Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.

An ox grinding corn was to be able to eat that which he treaded. In 1 Corinthians 9:9, Paul used this verse to justify providing for those in ministry.

Deuteronomy 25:5, 6
If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel.

If a man died, his brother was to marry his widow. Their firstborn would bear the dead husband's name in order that his lineage would continue.

"Am I my brother's keeper?" Cain asked impudently.

Here, God answers, "Yes."

Deuteronomy 25:7–10
And if the man like not to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in

Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother. Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her; Then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house. And his name shall be called in Israel, The house of him that hath his shoe loosed.

If a man refused to marry his deceased brother's wife, his brother's widow was to take off his shoe and spit in his face. As do verses 1 through 3 of this chapter, this passage points prophetically to Jesus—for it was by His stripes that we are healed (Isaiah 53:5), and it was He whose shoe was removed, whose face was spit upon as He hung on the Cross of Calvary in our place.

Deuteronomy 25:11, 12
When men strive together one with another, and the wife of the one draweth near for to deliver her husband out of the hand of him that smiteth him, and putteth forth her hand, and taketh him by the secrets: Then thou shalt cut off her hand, thine eye shall not pity her.

The scenario here is of two men fighting and a wife unfairly intervening. The same thing happens still. Two guys will be at odds because of a bad business deal. And, although they eventually work it out, their wives remain hostile towards each other because each has heard only her husband's side of the story. Wise, therefore, is the wife who doesn't get involved in her husband's battles, lest she only muddy the waters and get hurt in the process.

Deuteronomy 25:13–16
Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. For all that do such

things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the LORD thy God.

Once again, God tells His people that they are to be people of integrity and honesty.

Deuteronomy 25:17–19
Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; How he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God. Therefore it shall be, when the LORD thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it.

God's people were not to lag behind, but to be front and center in their walk with Him, in their commitment to Him, because it is those at the back who get attacked . . .

THE ATTACK IS AT THE BACK

A Topical Study of DEUTERONOMY 25:17–19

C. S. Lewis said that the primary task of teaching is not so much to reveal as it is to remind. And evidently Moses would agree, for, as we have seen, the entire Book of Deuteronomy is a reminder to the children of Israel of what God had done for them, of what He had taught them, of what He expects of them.

The passage before us is no exception, beginning as it does with the word "Remember" and ending with the words, "You shall not forget."

What were the children of Israel not to forget? They were not to forget how, during their wilderness wandering, the Amalekites attacked them not man-to-man, not face-to-face, but from the back. The Israelites were to remember how the Amalekites would wait in hiding until they passed by, how they would attack those who were weary and feeble.

We, too, have an enemy who attacks us constantly. "Be sober," Peter said. "Be vigilant because your adversary goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (see 1 Peter 5:8). It is said that in the jungle, the lion wakes up each day knowing that he simply must outrun the slowest prey. And the same is true spiritually, for, like the lion, Satan attacks the weariest or feeblest among us; and like Amalek, he finds them at the back of the pack.

This is a word I need to remember, a word of which we need to be reminded constantly because we can say, "I've been walking with the Lord for a number of years. I've been involved in a lot of battles. I need to kick back a bit, to cruise awhile"—not realizing that those who think they deserve a break are the very ones most vulnerable to an attack . . .

He was a great man, a godly man. Year after year he had led his troops into battle. He was their commander, their king. But at the age of fifty, he said, "I've fought long enough. I'm going to kick back awhile." So he sent another to lead the troops while he stayed behind. On the roof of his palace one night, enjoying the view of the golden city of Jerusalem, his eye came across a woman taking a bath. Intrigued with her, he had an affair with her and tried to cover it up by murdering her husband. He should have been fully

engaged. He should have been front and center in battle. Instead, he thought he deserved a break. And as a result, life was never the same for David, for his family, for his kingdom.

The same thing can happen to you and me. "Hey," we say, "I've been walking with the Lord for forty years. Who says I have to have devotions and go to Bible study? Why not let someone else teach Sunday school? Why not let someone else work in the nursery? Why not let someone else go to prayer meeting? I'm tired."

We are currently seeing a rash of middle-aged men in our own community falling into immorality. The number of people who have been sucked into sin at this point in life is astonishing to me. And the common thread among them seems to be their misconception that they were justified in pulling away from fellowship, in drifting away from worship because they thought they had paid their dues, because they thought that spending time with the Lord or with His people no longer needed to be a priority.

Precious people, be oh, so careful that you don't grow weary somewhere in middle life, saying, "I've fought the fight. Now it's time to cruise." Amalek attacks the back of the pack. He'll be waiting for you.

At only thirty years of age, he wasn't weary. But he was feeble. He hadn't always been that way. "Smite the shepherd and the sheep will scatter," the Lord had said.

"Not me," he had boldly answered. "My name is Peter. I'm solid as a rock. You can count on me" (see Matthew 26:31–35).

But when, hours later, Jesus was led away to the trial that would ultimately lead to His crucifixion, Peter did what he said he would never do: He ran. And then, feeling feeble, he followed Jesus afar off. He still followed Jesus, but no longer at His side. Now there was a distance between them (Matthew 26:58).

> The enemies of Jesus lit fires that night to take the chill away. And Peter was chilled indeed—not only outwardly, but his soul was chilled. He knew he was not where he was supposed to be, where he said he would be, where he used to be. Instead, he stood by the fires of the enemy.

"We know you," one of those who stood by said to him. "You're one of His followers."

"No, I'm not," Peter answered.

"Weren't you with Jesus?" asked a young girl.

"No," Peter insisted.

"I'm sure you're a Galilean," said another.

And at this point Peter swore, the original text indicating that he took an oath as if to say, "My soul be damned if I know that Man" (Matthew 26:74).

Be careful when you feel feeble that you don't say, "I'm not what I should be or not what I used to be so I'm going to follow Jesus afar off." When you follow Jesus from afar, there's a chill in your soul that will drive you to the fires of the enemy in search of warmth. You'll visit web sites you know you ought not to look at. You'll turn to movies or to alcohol, to drugs or to fantasies, hoping they'll warm your soul. You'll fall prey to the attack of the enemy when you allow former sins or tendencies to needlessly drive you to the back of the pack.

What are you supposed to do when you're weary or feeble?

Don't go to the back. Go to the front. Become more engaged than ever, more involved than you ever were before in your spiritual work and devotional life, more committed to service and ministry, to worship and Bible study.

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

Isaiah 40:31

Why should we remain front and center in the things of the Lord even when we're tired, even if we're feeble? Because in so doing, our strength is not diminished. It's renewed, replenished, restored.

I am amazed by the number of times over my forty-plus years of walking with the Lord that He has met me just because I simply chose to press in and

step up rather than following my fleshly inclination to go to the back of the pack. And I guarantee He'll do the same for you.

We're involved in a battle to be sure. But the last verse of our text reminds us that this won't always be so, for there's coming a day when even the memory of Amalek will be blotted out when Satan is cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10).

Isaiah tells us that we're going to "narrowly look" on Satan (14:16, 17). That is, with furrowed brow, we'll scratch our heads and say, "Is *this* the one who kept people captive, who shook kingdoms, who brought destruction? We were tricked by *him?*"

And then we'll see how greatly the lion seeking whom he may devour pales in comparison to the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

Until then, remain fully engaged in your devotional life, in your personal walk, in your service for the King. In so doing, not only will you please Him greatly, not only will your strength be renewed daily, but the arrows of Amalek will never reach you way up there at the front.

26 Deuteronomy 26:1–3

And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein; That thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name there. And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the LORD thy God, that I am come unto the country which the LORD sware unto our fathers for to give us.

When the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, they were to place the firstfruits of the land in a basket and bring them to the tabernacle—ultimately the temple—where they were to audibly testify of the Lord's goodness in bringing them to the land He had promised to give their fathers.

Deuteronomy 26:4–9
And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the LORD thy God. And thou shalt speak and say before the LORD thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous: And the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage: And when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression: And the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders: And he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey.

Not only were the children of Israel to confess and profess that the Lord had brought them in to the Promised Land, but also that He had brought them out of Egypt.

The Lord wants to do the same thing for us. All of us who are born again have been brought out of Egypt—set free from the sin that once held us captive. But it doesn't end there. He also wants to take us from that point into the Land of Promise—the Spirit-filled, abundant life. In other words, just as He did with the children of Israel, God brought us out in order to bring us in.

Deuteronomy 26:10, 11
And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O LORD, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the LORD thy God, and worship before the LORD thy God: And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the LORD thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you.

For you and me, the firstfruits are the tithe. We're to say, "Lord, You've blessed us. You've done so much for us. You've been so patient with us. You've been so good to us. And now we bring You the firstfruit of what You

gave us." Notice that this is to be done with rejoicing. Tithing is not a time of tears, but a time for cheers (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Deuteronomy 26:12, 13
When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, which is the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled; Then thou shalt say before the LORD thy God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house, and also have given them unto the Levite, and unto the stranger, to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all thy commandments which thou hast commanded me: I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them:

The year of tithing seen in verse 12 was addressed previously in chapter 14. Every third year an extra tithe was given for the purpose of helping those in need—the widow, the fatherless, the stranger.

Deuteronomy 26:14, 15
I have not eaten thereof in my mourning, neither have I taken away ought thereof for any unclean use, nor given ought thereof for the dead: but I have hearkened to the voice of the LORD my God, and have done according to all that thou hast commanded me. Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel, and the land which thou hast given us, as thou swarest unto our fathers, a land that floweth with milk and honey.

The children of Israel were to say, "Lord, we've done what You told us to do. We've brought You the firstfruits. We've given You the tithe. We've honored You in this way. Now, Lord, we ask that You bless our land."

Deuteronomy 26:16–18 (a)
This day the LORD thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments: thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. Thou hast avouched the

LORD this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice: And the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people . . .

Peculiar doesn't mean bizarre. It means blessed. Peter would use this same term to describe the church (1 Peter 2:9). Of Jesus, Scripture says He did not cry in the streets (Matthew 12:19). And when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, so ordinary looking was He that Judas had to identify Him with a kiss (Luke 22:47). Jesus was not One to make a public spectacle. Therefore, neither should His church. That which makes us identifiable is not to be bizarre behavior but love (John 13:35). And in these days, it's peculiar indeed for people to love each other, to enjoy being together, to be kind and merciful towards each other.

Deuteronomy 26:18 (b), 19
. . . as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments; And to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the LORD thy God, as he hath spoken.

Those who keep the Lord's commands will be holy. The word "holy" essentially means "whole"—not eroded by sin, not fragmented, not missing something. That is the way God wants to bless His people.



27 Deuteronomy 27:1, 2

And Moses with the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, Keep all the commandments which I command you this day. And it shall be on the day when ye shall pass over Jordan unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, that thou shalt set thee up great stones, and plaister them with plaister:

When the children of Israel crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, they were to construct a monument of stones which they were to cover with plaster, and upon which they would write the Law.

Deuteronomy 27:3–5
And thou shalt write upon them all the words of this law, when thou art passed over, that thou mayest go in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, a land that floweth with milk and honey; as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee. Therefore it shall be when ye be gone over Jordan, that ye shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaister them with plaister. And there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them.

At Mount Ebal, the children of Israel were to build a simple altar of stones. Throughout His Law, God declares that when an altar was made, it was to be made only of stone or earth. It was to be common and uncarved because otherwise the tendency would be for people to focus on the altar rather than on the sacrifice.

Deuteronomy 27:6, 7
Thou shalt build the altar of the LORD thy God of whole stones: and thou shalt offer burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD thy God: And thou shalt offer peace offerings, and shalt eat there, and rejoice before the LORD thy God.

As outlined in Leviticus 1, the burnt offering spoke of sober dedication. As seen in Leviticus 3, the peace offering spoke of joyful celebration, as the one bringing it celebrated his peace with God through a “barbeque” with the Lord. Both offerings were necessary, and both dedication and celebration are still vital to the life of faith.

Deuteronomy 27:8
And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly.

When do we get to the place of soberly dedicating our lives to the Lord and joyfully celebrating what He's done for us? When we read the Word and see therein the rightness of God's ways, the Sacrifice He made.

Deuteronomy 27:9–13
And Moses and the priests the Levites spake unto all Israel, saying, Take heed, and hearken, O Israel; this day thou art become the people of the LORD thy God. Thou shalt therefore obey the voice of the LORD thy God, and do his commandments and his statutes, which I command thee this day. And Moses charged the people the same day, saying, These shall stand upon mount Geri zim to bless the people, when ye are come over Jordan; Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin: And these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse; Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.

Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal are each about 2,000 feet high. Between them is a valley that served as a natural "amphitheater." With six tribes on each mountain and the priests and leaders in between, the stage was set for an illustrated sermon the children of Israel would not soon forget . . .

Deuteronomy 27:14–26
And the Levites shall speak, and say unto all the men of Israel with a loud voice, Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place. And all the people shall answer and say, Amen. Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife; because he uncovereth his father's skirt. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with any manner of beast. And all the

people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with his sister, the daughter of his father, or the daughter of his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with his mother in law. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbour secretly. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.

As the Law was read, the tribes on Mount Ebal would say, "Amen" to the curses, while those on Mount Gerizim would affirm the blessings. And lest you think you would rather be on Mount Gerizim affirming the blessings, don't forget that the altar—the place where blood is shed, where forgiveness is made—was on Mount Ebal.

You might be aware of failings and shortcomings in your life—of times you've dropped the ball and cursed yourself or others because of stupidity and sin. But where sin abounds, grace abounds more (Romans 5:20). Therefore, the greater awareness I have of my sin, the more thankful I am for the grace of God. It is not surprising that the one who is forgiven much loves much (Luke 7:47), making Mount Ebal—the place where blood is shed—the place where there is, ultimately, peace and joy.

28 Deuteronomy 28:1, 2

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.

As he continues to prepare the people of Israel to enter the Promised Land, Moses tells them that if they do what the Lord tells them to do, they

won't have to search for His blessings. On the contrary, His blessings will find them and will overwhelm them in most wonderful ways.

Deuteronomy 28:3
Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field.

The first blessing given here is that of location. Those who obey God's commandments will be blessed, or happy, wherever they are.

Deuteronomy 28:4 (a)
Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body . . .

Not only the location, but future generations of those who follow the way of the Lord will be blessed.

Deuteronomy 28:4 (b)
. . . and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep.

To those who follow Him, God extends His blessing to their vocation.

Deuteronomy 28:5
Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store.

The provisions of those who follow the Lord will be blessed.

Deuteronomy 28:6
Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out.

The daily routine of those who put God first will not be mundane but magnificent.

Deuteronomy 28:7

The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways.

Victory in battle belongs to those who follow God.

Deuteronomy 28:8
The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

The Lord promises a secure future to those who follow Him.

Deuteronomy 28:9
The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways.

Saving the best for last, the Lord promises spiritual intimacy and stability to those who follow Him.



***For topical study of Deuteronomy 28:1–9 entitled "Be Blessed!" turn to page* 614.**

Deuteronomy 28:10
And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee.

God's divine design was that Israel would be an example to the pagan nations surrounding her of what a people looked like who followed the true and living God.

Deuteronomy 28:11–14

And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them: And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

If the Israelites walked in God's ways, they would be the head, not the tail; they would be above, not beneath. In other words, they would set the standard other nations would strive to follow.

Deuteronomy 28:15 (a)
But . . .

Blessing, security, prosperity were Israel's for the taking if she followed the Law God so carefully and painstakingly spelled out to her. If, however, she chose not to walk in His ways, an entirely different scenario would unfold . . .

Deuteronomy 28:15 (b), 16
. . . it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field.

If Israel chose not to follow the Lord, wherever God's people went—city or country—it wouldn't be quite right.

Deuteronomy 28:17, 18 (a)
Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body . . .

If Israel chose not to walk in God's ways, the children would feel the unmistakable effects of the curse.

Deuteronomy 28:18 (b)–20
. . . and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The LORD shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me.

God won't allow you to continue on in a path of rebellion or sin any more than He would allow the children of Israel to do the same because He knows doing so will affect your eternal state. And He's more concerned about your eternal state than He is about your present comfort. Yes, there is pleasure in sin for a season (Hebrews 11:25), but sin will come crashing down on you eventually, leaving heartache and pain in its wake.

Deuteronomy 28:21, 22
The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it. The LORD shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish.

Although we've all tried at one time or another, no one beats the rap. If you choose to go your own way, the curse will catch up with you. Guaranteed.

Deuteronomy 28:23–29

And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed. The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. And thy carcase shall be meat unto all fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth, and no man shall fray them away. The LORD will smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed. The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart: And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee.

If the children of Israel forsook the Lord, their land would turn to dust, their physical health would disappear, their emotional stability would crumble. A grimmer picture could not be imagined—and yet it gets worse . . .

Deuteronomy 28:30
Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof.

In chapter 20, those men who were engaged but not yet married, those who had built a house but hadn't yet moved in, those who had planted a vineyard but hadn't yet harvested the fruit were all excused from battle. Here in chapter 28, however, rather than being protected, those same groups were singled out for their failure to walk in the way of the Lord. Their marriages would fall apart; their houses would be abandoned; their vineyards would fail. This is powerful stuff. This is God declaring to people the way it will be for those who turn their back on Him.

Deuteronomy 28:31, 32

Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof: thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face, and shall not be restored to thee: thy sheep shall be given unto thine enemies, and thou shalt have none to rescue them. Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail with longing for them all the day long: and there shall be no might in thine hand.

If Israel turned her back on God, her sons and daughters would be carried away into captivity. And indeed they were. The nation underwent unspeakable devastation at the hands of the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and finally under the iron foot of the Romans.

Deuteronomy 28:33–37
The fruit of thy land, and all thy labours, shall a nation which thou knowest not eat up; and thou shalt be only oppressed and crushed alway: So that thou shalt be mad for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see. The LORD shall smite thee in the knees, and in the legs, with a sore botch that cannot be healed, from the sole of thy foot unto the top of thy head. The LORD shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone. And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the LORD shall lead thee.

God told the Israelite congregation that they would be a high and holy nation, the head and not the tail, the most blessed of all people if they walked with Him. But if they chose to go their own way, their name would be a byword, or something contemptible, on the lips of the nations.

Deuteronomy 28:38–41
Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shalt gather but little in; for the locust shall consume it. Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them. Thou shalt have

olive trees throughout all thy coasts, but thou shalt not anoint thyself with the oil; for thine olive shall cast his fruit. Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity.

Even today, there are parents who don't enjoy their kids because their kids are held captive by the enemy.

Deuteronomy 28:42–47
All thy trees and fruit of thy land shall the locust consume. The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail. Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee: And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever. Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things;

The Bible says we are to rejoice evermore (1 Thessalonians 5:16). The Bible says we are to give thanks in everything (1 Thessalonians 5:18). The Bible says happy is the people whose God is the Lord (Psalm 144:15). Therefore, I believe we are to be those who put aside the tendency to be heavy, those who forego the tendency to want to be pitied, those who abandon the thought that it's hard to serve the Lord. Instead, we're to be those who lift up those around us; to be those who serve the Lord from a heart overflowing with joy and gladness.

Deuteronomy 28:48
Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee.

Serve the Lord with gladness (Psalm 100:2)—or serve the enemy with sadness. That is the choice we make each day.

Deuteronomy 28:49–52
The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young: and he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee. And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land: and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all thy land, which the LORD thy God hath given thee.

First the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, but ultimately this speaks of the Romans, the eagle being the imperial emblem of the Roman Empire.

Deuteronomy 28:53–55 (a)
And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee: So that the man that is tender among you, and very delicate, his eye shall be evil toward his brother, and toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the remnant of his children which he shall leave: So that he will not give to any of them of the flesh of his children whom he shall eat: because he hath nothing left him in the siege . . .

In the year A.D. 70, when the Romans came into Jerusalem, burned the temple, and destroyed the city, 600,000 Jews were slaughtered in the first wave. Starvation ensued and cannibalism followed. That was only the beginning, for in A.D. 135, Emperor Hadrian came back to Jerusalem with his

troops in answer to a Jewish revolt. And unbelievable atrocities ensued unlike anything in history.

Deuteronomy 28:55 (b)–64

. . . and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee in all thy gates. The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, And toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates. If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; Then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance. Moreover he will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt, which thou wast afraid of; and they shall cleave unto thee. Also every sickness, and every plague, which is not written in the book of this law, them will the LORD bring upon thee, until thou be destroyed. And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God. And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone.

As the Jews were scattered throughout the world, they would get caught up in the gods of the age: the gods of materialism, intellectualism, and social position.

Deuteronomy 28:65, 66
And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life:

If they forsook God, wherever the Israelites went their security would be doubtful. And, of course, this is exactly what happened, as evidenced most notably, though far from exclusively, in the Holocaust. Read the history of the Jewish people and you will find that—for reasons that don't make sense at all other than for the fulfillment of prophecy and the intent of Satan to destroy God's people—wherever they went, they would ultimately be persecuted, put down, kicked out.

Deuteronomy 28:67, 68
In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see. And the LORD shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you.

Following the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, the Jews were deported to Egypt, where they were sold as slaves. Although Moses' words to them would go on to include hope and promise, perhaps it's good that this particular chapter ends here—for through it, we see the lengths to which the Lord went in order to warn His people about the effects of apostasy.

May we be those who earnestly take heed to these warnings, and may God's Word be written clearly on the plaster of our hearts.

BE BLESSED!
A Topical Study of
DEUTERONOMY 28:1–9

When I see the blessings in Deuteronomy 28, I can't help but say, "That's exactly what I want. I want to see my family blessed. I want my location to be satisfying to me. I want to see my cupboards full. I want to experience stability and spiritual intimacy. I want to see the work of my hands blessed, to have a daily routine that's fulfilling, to know my future is secure."

But this is hardly surprising, for who of us doesn't want these blessings?

So when I hear Moses saying, "If you hearken diligently to the Lord, if you obey all of His commandments, these blessings will be yours," I say, "Wonderful!"—until I try, but inevitably and consistently fail.

You see, the key to success and blessing lies in obeying *all* of the commandments. It can't be ninety percent or even ninety-nine percent. To get the victory that brings the blessings, one must do it *all* (James 2:10) because the Ten Commandments are interwoven in such a way that to break one is ultimately to break all ten . . .

> You're out at sea, two miles from shore, when you notice that, although nine of the floorboards in your boat are shipshape, one is rotting away in the salt water. Therefore, even though only one in ten is faulty, even though nine are in perfect order, you're sunk.

Moses said if you want these blessings, you've got to obey *all* the commandments. And therein lies the problem. I want to. I try. But I can't.

There is One, however, who came to earth and walked among people like me, who did indeed keep *all* the commandments. In fact, so perfectly did He keep them that even His enemies could find no fault in Him (Luke 23:4). And because Jesus kept all the commandments, because He fulfilled every expectation and requirement of the Law, He gets all of the blessings. In other words, every Old Testament blessing, every glorious promise made to those who would walk in God's ways, who would obey God's Word, who would

seek God's heart is His because He did all of those things (2 Corinthians 1:19, 20).

And here's the amazing news: When you became a Christian, not only did Christ come in you, but you were placed in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17). Therefore, all the promises are yours as well.

How?

Think of it this way . . .

My phone rings. I pick up the receiver and hear a voice saying, "Hello, Jon. This is Coach Erickson from Oregon State University. We've got a big game today. Our Quarterback is a good athlete and a great guy. But he's small. So I want some back-up insurance and you're the man."

"I haven't played football for . . . five years," I say.

"That's okay," he says. "Come and join us."

So I go to Corvallis and put on the uniform as the rest of the team says, "Who's *he?*"

At the end of four quarters, Oregon State wins. And when the game is over, the photographers come. The reporters are there. The parties begin. And guess what. Even though I never got off the bench, I'm part of it all. Why? Because of who I am? No. Because of what I did? No. I'm part of the celebration simply because I'm wearing the uniform, simply because I'm on the team.

You are in Christ, "uniformed" in His righteousness (Isaiah 61:10). You don't deserve to be. Neither do I. But the Coach called us to come and we accepted His invitation. It just so happens that the team we're on is championed by Jesus Christ, who wins the game single-handedly, who executes the plays perfectly. And because we're on His team, His victory is undeservedly and unbelievably ours as well.

This means we who are in Christ, we who are on His team, we who wear His uniform can expect to be blessed in our going out and our coming in. We can expect to be blessed in our profession. We can expect our kids will be fruitful and successful. We can expect to be blessed in everything we do—not because of what we do, not because of who we are, but because God has chosen to use foolish and weak things to confound the wise and the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27).

That all sounds good, you might be thinking. *But why don't I see those blessings in my life?*

Maybe God has blessed you more than you realize. Maybe you haven't taken the time to think through the way He's blessed you in the city and in the country, blessed the fruit of your body, blessed you in the storehouse, blessed you in your basket, blessed you with victory over the enemy that threatened to crush and destroy you. Maybe He's blessed you more than you think. And maybe part of the issue is to stop and review what He's done for you and rejoice in that. But secondly, and perhaps more importantly, maybe you don't see God's blessings in your life because you're working too hard to even notice them . . .

After wasting his father's money in the far country, the prodigal son returned—not to punishment, but to a party. "Unfair!" said his older brother to their father. "I've been with you every day, working faithfully. But you never threw a party on my behalf."

"Son," the father answered. "All that I have is yours" (see Luke 15:31). In other words, "Any time you wanted, you could have had anything and everything you desired. But you were too busy being self-righteous, working in the field trying to impress me, trying to earn something from me to come out of the field and into the party."

Many of us also have said, "I'm going to pray more. I'm going to work harder. I'm going to worship with greater intensity. I'm going to give more money. I'm going to teach Sunday school or work in the nursery so that I will be blessed"—only to find that it never works.

Then why be obedient at all? Why pray or study or worship or give or serve at all? Why not, like the prodigal son, waste our time and our Father's resources in the "far country" of sin?

For the answer, go back to Oregon State . . .

If Coach Erickson said, "Courson, I want you to come back next season and play for us again," I would undergo rigorous and radical preparation. I would study the playbook. I would throw passes. I would go to the Y. Why? Not so that I might make the team, but because I'm already on the team. You see, it's great to be on a winning team, even if you're on the bench. But it's a whole lot better to be on a winning team and also on the field.

We're blessed, gang, no matter what we do or don't do simply because we're on the team. But now God wants to use us. Isn't it amazing that God would want to use *us?*

> *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*
>
> Galatians 2:20

Because Christ lives in us, we can go out on the field and expect to complete passes, to make blocks, to throw tackles in a way we never dreamed possible. And the more we allow Him to work in and through us, the more He taps us on the shoulder, saying, "I've already blessed you. Now I want to use you. Go out there and play for My glory."



29 In chapter 28, we saw how the Lord warned His people that if they turned their backs on Him and walked away from Him that they would experience some very dire repercussions. In chapters 29 and 30, however, God declares what will happen to the Jewish nation when they turn away from their rebelliousness and back towards Him. In so doing, He makes a covenant, an agreement with His people. The covenant He makes, seen here in chapters 29 and 30, is known as the Palestinian Covenant because it relates to the land we know as Israel, but which, before 1948, was known only as Palestine.

> **Deuteronomy 29:1**
> **These are the words of the covenant, which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb.**

Mt. Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai. The covenant God made there was the Mosaic Covenant.

Deuteronomy 29:2, 3
And Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, Ye have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land; The great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles:

Newer translations properly render the word "temptations" as "plagues"—referring to the plagues which descended upon Pharaoh and the people of Egypt before Pharaoh finally let God's people go.

Deuteronomy 29:4
Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.

"God has shown you miracles, signs and wonders," Moses said to the children of Israel. "But what you saw with your eyes made no impact on your hearts."

Deuteronomy 29:5, 6
And I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot. Ye have not eaten bread, neither have ye drunk wine or strong drink: that ye might know that I am the LORD your God.

As the children of Israel were so prone to do, how easy it is for us to murmur and complain. Instead of being thankful that our shoes last for forty years, we complain that they're out of style. God's been so good to us. But oh, how easily we lose sight of it.

Deuteronomy 29:7
And when ye came unto this place, Sihon the king of Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, came out against us unto battle, and we smote them:

Think back to the times in your own life when it felt as though the problems, like Sihon and Og, were too big and too heavy to bear, that you were sure to be crushed and wiped out under their weight. Yet here you are tonight. God saw you through.

Deuteronomy 29:8, 9
And we took their land, and gave it for an inheritance unto the Reubenites, and to the Gadites, and to the half tribe of Manasseh. Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do.

God's heart is that His people prosper. Thus, His commandments are given to that end.

Deuteronomy 29:10–15
Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day: That he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; But with him that standeth here with us this day before the LORD our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day:

This covenant was not only for those in attendance the day it was made, but for future generations.

Deuteronomy 29:16–18
(For ye know how we have dwelt in the land of Egypt; and how we came through the nations which ye passed by; And ye have seen their abominations, and their idols, wood and stone, silver

and gold, which were among them:) Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood;

"You'll be bitter. You'll be unhappy. You won't be prosperous if you follow the gods of other nations. Materialism, seeking your own ease, serving yourselves will leave a bad taste in your mouth," Moses warned the people.

Deuteronomy 29:19, 20
And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven.

In this introduction to the Palestinian Covenant, God is speaking through Moses, saying to His people, "I took care of you in the wilderness. Now do what I'm telling you to do that you might prosper in the Promised Land." Yet even as He gave this warning, God knew there would be those who mistakenly thought they could walk in the imagination of their own hearts, that the commands didn't apply to them, that they could do whatever they wanted.

Deuteronomy 29:21–23
And the LORD shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this book of the law: So that the generation to come of your children that shall rise up after you, and the stranger that shall come from a far land, shall say, when they see the plagues of that land, and the sicknesses which the LORD hath laid upon it; And that the whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning,

that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath:

The Jews did indeed turn their back on the Lord not only individually, but as a nation. And so the land of honey would become, as it was even one hundred years ago, a land of brimstone and salt, a land where even grass wouldn't grow.

Deuteronomy 29:24–29
Even all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this land? what meaneth the heat of this great anger? Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt: For they went and served other gods, and worshiped them, gods whom they knew not, and whom he had not given unto them: And the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book: And the LORD rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day. The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

The Land itself became a testimony of the state of the hearts of God's people. When a people walks with God, there is a blessing on him or them, a fruitfulness in them, a beauty of holiness about them. On the other hand, there is a barrenness, an emptiness, a dryness in the lives of those who walk in the imagination of their own hearts. God will use our lives one way or the other —either as an illustration of the effects of rebellion or to show what happens when people walk in obedience to the commandments God writes both on their hearts and in His Word, to the word He whispers in their ears (Isaiah 30:21).



30 Here in chapter 30, we come to the heart of the Palestinian Covenant, made with the people of Israel prior to their entry into the Promised Land . . .

Deuteronomy 30:1–5
And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers.

"When your land has been destroyed, when bitterness has filled your heart, when things have fallen apart and the situation looks grim, if you turn to Me, I will bring you back to this land again," God tells His people.

Deuteronomy 30:6
And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

Not only will the children of Israel be returned to their land, but their hearts will one day be tender toward God.

Deuteronomy 30:7

And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee.

In their land once again, with hearts tender toward God, the children of Israel will themselves be blessed even as their enemies experience God's curse.

Deuteronomy 30:8–10
And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day. And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers: If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.

All of this has yet to happen. Many of the Jews of the world are back in the land of Israel—but certainly not the majority. There is coming a time, however, when the Lord shall gather His elect from every corner of the world and bring them back. When? Matthew 24:32 tells us it will happen when Jesus comes back.

Deuteronomy 30:11–20
For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, nei ther is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his

commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

The Palestinian Covenant reminds me that God has a plan for the Jew, that He's not through with the Jew. And this is important because it means He's not through with you or me. God will be faithful to every covenant He makes, to every promise He proclaims.

God made promises to you that everything is working together for good (Romans 8:28), that there's no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1), that nothing shall separate you from the love of God (Romans 8:38, 39). Can you count on these promises? "Look at the Jew," Paul would answer in Romans 9 through 11, "for just as God will be faithful to the Jew, He'll be faithful to you."

The Palestinian Covenant is in play. God's going to do exactly what He said He would do—for the Jew, for me, and for you.

THE PROXIMITY OF HIS PRECEPTS AND PRESENCE

A Topical Study of DEUTERONOMY 30:11–20

As we come to chapter 30, nearing the end of Moses' farewell sermon to the children of Israel, I can almost hear Moses pause, sigh, and look the congregation in the eye as he begins to share with them from his soul.

He's been going on and on, repeating the commandments of the Lord. And now he says God's commandment is not secret, mystical, abstract, or hard to reach. It's not in the heavens, but is very near to them. How near? As close as it can be. It's embedded in their hearts and on the tip of their tongues.

After twenty-nine chapters of preaching, Moses pauses and essentially says, "You know what to do. And you know that it's true." People do know. They might not want to admit it, but deep within, they know that the best way to live is to love God and keep His commandments. After all, who does even the unsaved person want to move in to the vacant house next to them—a person who loves God and honors the Ten Commandments, or one who hates God and believes that murder and adultery, stealing, lying, and killing are acceptable?

Or think of it this way . . .

You run out of gas in the middle of a big city just before midnight. You leave your car by the side of a poorly lit street and begin walking to the nearest gas station. After a block or two, sensing you're not alone, you look over your shoulder and see four big guys following you. Would it make a difference if you know they were coming out of an evening Bible study and prayer meeting rather than out of a bar?

In our hearts, we know the right way to live is to love God and obey the commands He's given us. "So choose life," Moses says. "Don't violate what you know is true, what you know you ought to do, what you know is best for you."

Jesus said all of the commandments are summed up in a single word: love. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength,"

He said. “And love your neighbor as yourself ” (Matthew 22:37–40). We’re to love God passionately and to love our neighbor compassionately. It’s just that simple.

“I know what to do,” you might be saying, “I know God’s ways are true, that they’re best for me and you. But here’s the problem: I don’t come through. There are times when I don’t do what I know is the right thing to do. And there are times when I do things I ought not to do. I understand what is right and good and true. But I fail to do so in so many ways, on so many days.”

Wait. There’s hope because this very passage pops up again in the New Testament. Paul reaches back to Deuteronomy 30 and look what he says concerning these very things . . .

> *But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)*
>
> Romans 10:6, 7

Inspired by the Spirit, Paul says, “There’s another way. Not the word of the Law, but the word of faith . . .”

> *But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*
>
> Romans 10:8–10

There’s no need to try to attain a spiritual high or dig into the depths of your soul. There’s no need to come forward, go to the prayer room, meet with a pastor, or even be baptized, for salvation is in none of those places. Where is it? It’s on the tip of your tongue, if you’ll simply confess that you want Jesus to be your Lord.

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Romans 10:13

Salvation lies in saying, "Jesus, I believe in my heart that You died for me and rose again."

Then why come forward or be baptized? Why go to the prayer room or meet with a pastor?

Because these are wonderful expressions of faith, and invaluable opportunities for growth. But they're not prerequisites to salvation.

I recently talked to a lady who became a Christian last year during one of our services. She was eighty-four years old and her life has been absolutely, radically changed. I'm so glad I didn't have to say to her, "If you want spiritual reality, you need to sit in the lotus position and concentrate on the candle flickering before you. And perhaps if you give yourself to this and work hard at that, maybe you'll come into divine illumination."

No! What a joy it is to be able to say to someone who's eighty-four, "It's so simple. You already know it's true. Jesus died and rose again and wants to live in you by His Spirit. All you have to do is believe in your heart and say with your mouth that Jesus is your Lord." It's shockingly and scandalously simple.

And the same thing is true for you. Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved—not just from past sin, but from present problems. If you believe in your heart that Jesus is risen from the dead and call upon His name, you'll be saved even in your present struggle.

Here's the problem. We'll go across town to get medication to help us out of depression; we'll scour the country to find a retreat center to help us with our addiction; we'll search the phone book to find a psychiatrist to help us cope with problems in our childhood—all while ignoring the power of salvation which lies on the very tip of our tongue.

Unlimited power is ours for the asking. Inexhaustible grace is ours for the believing. The question is, Will we?

It's such a glorious promise found here in Deuteronomy 30 that Paul repeated it centuries later. May we be those who take it to heart. And may we remind others to do the same.

31 "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path," the Psalmist wrote (Psalm 119:105). Knowing this to be true, Moses wanted the people to whom he had faithfully ministered for forty years to enter the new season, the new phase of their history, the new Land having enlightenment from the Word . . .

Deuteronomy 31:1–5
And Moses went and spake these words unto all Israel. And he said unto them, I am an hundred and twenty years old this day; I can no more go out and come in: also the LORD hath said unto me, Thou shalt not go over this Jordan. The LORD thy God, he will go over before thee, and he will destroy these nations from before thee, and thou shalt possess them: and Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the LORD hath said. And the LORD shall do unto them as he did to Sihon and to Og, kings of the Amorites, and unto the land of them, whom he destroyed. And the LORD shall give them up before your face, that ye may do unto them according unto all the commandments which I have commanded you.

"Even though I will not be accompanying you into the Promised Land, in the same way you have seen the Lord come through for you previously, He will come through for you when you cross over the Jordan and face a whole new set of enemies," Moses declared. In other words, "God has shown you His faithfulness in the past, that you might have peace about the future."

Deuteronomy 31:6
Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

Fear is to the devil what faith is to the Lord. That is, Satan responds to, takes advantage of, and delights in fear the same way our Lord responds to, works through, and delights in faith. When I don't know how the bills will

get paid or if the relationship will be restored, the devil will try to get me to become full of anxiety and fear. God, however, "has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:7).

The disciples were on the Sea of Galilee, toiling at the oars. The wind was howling; the waves were rolling; and the disciples, many of whom were seasoned fishermen were afraid of the ferocity of the storm. Suddenly they saw Someone walking on the waves, headed in their direction. "It's a ghost!" they shouted, perhaps alluding to the legend that said when a boat was about to go down, a ghost would come to deliver the message that the lives of the men on board were over.

But then they heard the words, "Be of good cheer. It is I. Be not afraid" (Matthew 14:27).

Faith is like a muscle. It doesn't grow unless it's exercised. And we need to exercise faith in a most practical way. We need to choose in the midst of the storm, when it seems as though our boat is sunk, to be of good cheer. I have discovered over and over that when I make the decision to be strong, to be of good cheer, to not give in to tears and fears, that the Lord is truly near.

Romans 10:17 says faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. We take faith in as we hear the promises of God's Word, the preaching of the Scripture. Faith is worked in by the hearing of the Word—but it's worked out by the speaking of the Word. That's why Romans 10 also says we must confess with our mouth (vv. 9, 10). Faith comes in through the ear, but is worked out through the mouth.

A lot of times we take in a Scripture, but then have a tendency to complain or murmur—and wonder why faith isn't impacting our situation. Jesus said, "*Say* to the mountain be removed . . ." (Matthew 21:21, italics added). This is such a key, but is forgotten so easily. Faith that works is not only a matter of having devotions in the morning or going to Bible study in the evening, but it's a matter of speaking out that which we have taken in.

If I hear the Word in a Bible study and go my way saying, "I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know how things are going to work," my faith is short-circuited by my words of fear and frustration. Proverbs 18:21 tells us that the power of life and death is in the tongue. How often we kill our faith either by the words we say or fail to say.

> . . . for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.
>
> Hebrews 13:5 (b), 6

"He hath said . . . that we may boldly say . . ." Next time you are fearful about the future, boldly speak out what He has already said—and watch your faith grow.

> **Deuteronomy 31:7**
> **And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it.**

Moses couldn't take the people into the Promised Land not only because He misrepresented the Lord at Meribah (Numbers 20:10, 11), but because He was the Law-giver—and the Law never leads to the fruitful, Spirit-filled life of which the Promised Land is a picture. On the other hand, "Joshua" is the Old Testament name for "Jesus." Therefore, Joshua was the one who would lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land, just as Jesus is the way into the Spirit-filled life for us.

> **Deuteronomy 31:8**
> **And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.**

With a promise like this, how can we fear?

> **Deuteronomy 31:9**
> **And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel.**

There always seems to be a debate among scholars concerning the authorship of Deuteronomy. If they would just read it, however, they would find the answer right here!

Deuteronomy 31:10 (a)
And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release . . .

As outlined in Exodus 23, Leviticus 25, and Deuteronomy 15, the year of release was the Sabbatical year, when debts were forgiven, when slaves were released, when both land and people were to rest.

Deuteronomy 31:10 (b)
. . . in the feast of tabernacles,

The Feast of Tabernacles was the week-long celebration in the fall that was the happiest time of the year for the people of Israel as they camped out in pup tents to commemorate God's faithfulness in bringing them through the wilderness.

Deuteronomy 31:11, 12
When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law:

In the time of release, refreshment, and rejoicing, the people of God were to read the Word. Why? Because there's a link between reading the Word and experiencing release and refreshment. In the reading of the Word, there will be refreshment in my soul, release in my spirit, rejoicing in my heart.

Deuteronomy 31:13–18
And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as ye live in

the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it. And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thy days approach that thou must die: call Joshua, and present yourselves in the tabernacle of the congregation, that I may give him a charge. And Moses and Joshua went, and presented themselves in the tabernacle of the congregation. And the LORD appeared in the tabernacle in a pillar of a cloud: and the pillar of the cloud stood over the door of the tabernacle. And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them. Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day. Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods.

Here, God tells Moses that all of the people he'd been leading would turn away from Him to serve false gods. What a heartbreak—not only for Moses, but for God. Because there's nothing hidden from the Lord (Hebrews 4:13), all the while He had been patient with His people, all the while He had led them, provided for them, protected them, He knew they would eventually walk away from Him.

Deuteronomy 31:19–21
Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel. For when I shall have brought them into the land which I sware unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant. And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are

befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I sware.

God told Moses about the future rebellion of His people because He wanted Moses to write a song for them. It's as if God said, "Moses, you've preached thirty chapters. But the people won't remember your sermon. What they will remember is a song."

Deuteronomy 31:22
Moses therefore wrote this song the same day, and taught it the children of Israel.

Moses wrote the song and taught it to the people that very day. Oh for men like Moses, men who don't say, "That's a great idea. I'll get to it when I have a moment of inspiration. I'll get to it when I can clear my schedule," but who say, "I'll do it right now."

Deuteronomy 31:23–26
And he gave Joshua the son of Nun a charge, and said, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I sware unto them: and I will be with thee. And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.

In 2 Kings 22, we read that when King Josiah remodeled the temple, the only copy of the Law to be found in all Israel was discovered therein—placed there because of this Scripture.

Deuteronomy 31:27–29 (a)

For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the LORD; and how much more after my death? Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them. For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days;

I believe this is a reference to the time of Jacob's trouble, the great Tribulation of Revelation 6—19. Because they would turn their back on the Lord, Israel will be cast into the Tribulation in order that, in the process, she will at last realize that Jesus is Messiah, her Savior.

Deuteronomy 31:29 (b), 30
. . . because ye will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands. And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended.

In chapter 32, we'll see Moses' song—one that is sure to put a melody in your own heart.



32 The congregation Moses had been leading would, after his departure, rebel against the Lord and turn their back on the Lord. In light of this, the Lord said to Moses, "There's one more thing I want you to do before I take you to heaven. I want you to write a song and teach it to the people so that when they go through times of tribulation and days of difficulty, they will turn back to Me."

And here is the song Moses wrote . . .

Deuteronomy 32:1–3

Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God.

Throughout Scripture, the Word is likened to water. And here Moses declares the Word will come down not like a fire hydrant, blasting people, but like a gentle spring rain, blessing those who heard it.

Deuteronomy 32:4
He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.

Everything God does is good.

Deuteronomy 32:5, 6
They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation. Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? Is not he thy father that hath bought thee? Hath he not made thee, and established thee?

Remember, this song was composed to remind the children of Israel who God is and why they would be going through tribulation.

Deuteronomy 32:7, 8
Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee. When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.

"Ask the elders if you don't know your history," Moses said, "about how God divided humanity." Seventy nations are listed in Genesis 10 following

the Flood. Later, in Genesis 46, we see seventy who went to Egypt. Thus, seventy represents all of humanity. And God is sovereign over all.

Deuteronomy 32:9
For the LORD's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.

Of all humanity, God claimed Israel for Himself in a unique way. But He also claimed us, for Paul tells us we are His inheritance as well (Ephesians 1). How can we understand this? Paul said God proved His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). The value of an object is known by how much a person is willing to pay for it. What was God willing to pay for you? His very life. Thus, it is the Cross of Calvary that shows me how much He loves me.

Deuteronomy 32:10 (a)
He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness . . .

God's people were found in a desert land. It was when we felt deserted —unloved, uncared for, unimportant, dry, thirsty—that the Lord found us. He found us in the "waste howling wilderness"—where we were wasting our lives, talent, time, and energy in stupidity.

Deuteronomy 32:10 (b)
. . . he led him about . . .

The Hebrew word translated "led" means "encompassed." In other words, God says, "When My people were in the desert, wasting away, howling in emptiness, I encompassed them. I threw My arms around them. I enveloped them in Myself."

Deuteronomy 32:10 (c)
. . . he instructed him . . .

God not only found and enveloped us, rescued and saved us, but He instructs us by His Word, a Word that converts our soul, rejoices our heart, enlightens our eyes, and makes us wise (Psalm 19:7, 8).

Deuteronomy 32:10 (d)
. . . he kept him as the apple of his eye.

The "apple of the eye" refers to the pupil. Those who study such things tell us the fastest reflex in our bodies is that of the eyelid covering the eyeball. If there is an object coming towards your eye, instinctively, intuitively, immediately your eye closes in 1/1000th of a second. So in calling us the apple of His eye, God is saying, "When danger is headed your way, I am there to close you in, to take care of you. I treasure and protect you as you would treasure and protect your own eye."

Deuteronomy 32:11, 12
As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.

In using a mother eagle as an analogy for the Father-love of God, Moses drew on a subject with which the children of Israel, trudging through the wilderness, would have been very familiar . . .



***For topical study of Deuteronomy 32:7–12 entitled "Singing and Soaring," turn to page* 629.**

Deuteronomy 32:13
He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock;

In Israel, bees make their honeycombs and olive trees take root in crevasses or fissures in the rocks. Therefore, what would seem to be an unproductive place actually produces sweetness and sustenance.

"I'm on the rocks," we cry. "This is it. I'm through."

And yet God would say, "There's honey and oil in those rocks, for in them you will discover sweetness you never knew about, empowering and anointing you never would have experienced."

If you're between a rock and a hard place, realize that it is there that you will find honey and oil you never knew existed.

Deuteronomy 32:14 (a)
Butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat . . .

All of this describes richness and fullness.

Deuteronomy 32:14 (b)
. . . and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape.

I like this because it brings to mind, of course, the imagery of redemption, of Communion.

Deuteronomy 32:15 (a)
But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness . . .

Jeshurun literally means "upright ones," and is another name for Israel.

Deuteronomy 32:15 (b)
. . . then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.

This is such a sad story, yet one we've all experienced. When we're fat and happy, when everything is hunky dory, we forget about God.

Deuteronomy 32:16, 17
They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not.

In 1 Corinthians 10:20, Paul says that idols were not simply stone carvings or brass objects, but that demons were actually linked to them. And the same is still true.

Deuteronomy 32:18, 19
Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. And when the LORD saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters.

God gave His people honey and oil, livestock and vineyards—and yet in their prosperity they forget Him and became interested in other gods, passions, and ideologies.

Deuteronomy 32:20, 21
And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith. They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.

Paul alludes to this verse in Romans 10:19, when he says that the Lord will provoke His people to jealousy by bringing the gospel to the Gentiles and allowing them to be the Bride of Christ. "I will provoke My people to anger with a foolish nation," God says. Guess who the foolish nation is. It's us.

Deuteronomy 32:22–24

For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them. They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction: I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust.

I believe this is a very accurate description of the horror of the Holocaust—a result of Israel turning away from the Lord and walking in rebellion against the Lord.

Deuteronomy 32:25–27
The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of gray hairs. I said, I would scatter them into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men: Were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the LORD hath not done all this.

While conquering nations would erroneously think it was their own strength that defeated Israel, Israel's defeat would have nothing to do with the strength of other nations and everything to do with the chastening hand of God.

Deuteronomy 32:28, 29
For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them. O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!

"I wish the people were wise," Moses says. "Instead, they're intrigued by their idols, seduced by paganism. I wish they would consider the end of that path." That's what the Bible does for us. That's why it is so important. It lets us see where the road of sin leads.

Deuteronomy 32:30
How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up?

The Jewish people are heroic fighters. Look at David and Joshua, at Moshe Dayan and David Ben Gurion, at Old Testament stories and present-day heroes. How, then, could it be that they would go through periods in their history where a single enemy soldier could chase 1,000 of them? There's only one explanation: the Lord's hand against them.

Deuteronomy 32:31 (a)
For their rock is not as our Rock . . .

The rock of the Third Reich, the rock of any nation is incomparable to the Rock of Israel.

Deuteronomy 32:31 (b)–35
. . . even our enemies themselves being judges. For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter: Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps. Is not this laid up in store with me, and sealed up among my treasures? To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.

This was the text of the most famous sermon preached in American history. A man named Jonathan Edwards ushered in the Great Awakening with his message entitled, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Drawing from this text, Edwards said men are walking over a fiery pit on an icy plank, dangling by a thread over the fires of hell. An unassuming man with a high voice and poor eyesight, it was hardly Edwards' demeanor that caused revival. Rather, it was the power of the Word and the anointing of the Spirit that caused people to pour down the aisles of his church.

People came to this country and worshiped God. But they had forgotten about Him, falsely secure in their theology and caught up in material prosperity even in the earliest days of our country's history. So God used Edwards and others to do what we so often fail to do today—to call a nation to repentance.

Deuteronomy 32:36–40
For the LORD shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left. And he shall say, Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted, Which did eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offerings? let them rise up and help you, and be your protection. See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever.

We like to think of God as One who heals. And He does. But, as seen in verse 39, He also wounds. When I read about God and study His Word, I realize that He is much bigger than my ability to package Him neatly. He is, after all, God.

"I'm thirsty," Lucy said to Aslan.

"Drink of the water, Lucy," Aslan replied.

She looked at the big lion with the bushy mane, powerful claws, and sharp teeth. "If I drink of that water, will you promise not to eat me?" she asked.

"No," Aslan answered. "I devour humans and destroy nations. I do what I choose. And there is none that can stop me. I make no promise to you."

Lucy looked at him, "If you won't promise not to eat me," she said, "I'm not going to drink of the water."

"Then you'll thirst to death, Lucy," Aslan answered.

In his classic series, *The Chronicles of Narnia,* C. S. Lewis drove home a very real point. That is, God doesn't make deals with me or you. He's God.

And He can wound, heal, kill, and resurrect whenever He wants. Our God is indeed an awesome God, a fearful and terrible God. He loves us. He proved it in sending His Son to die for us. But never forget this song. The people who forget this do so to their own destruction.

Deuteronomy 32:41–43
If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy. Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.

I'm glad the song ends this way—with vengeance for God's enemies and mercy for His people.

Deuteronomy 32:44–47
And Moses came and spake all the words of this song in the ears of the people, he, and Hoshea the son of Nun. And Moses made an end of speaking all these words to all Israel: And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land, whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.

Mom and Dad, lots of things we do with our kids are vain or empty. But teaching them the Word, talking to them about the Lord, sharing with them where we're at in our own walk with Him does not fall into that category. I have yet to regret any time I've spent teaching my kids the ways and the Word of God. I've yet to look back once and wish that we'd gone bowling instead.

Deuteronomy 32:48, 49

And the LORD spake unto Moses that selfsame day, saying, Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession:

"Go up into the mountain," the Lord said to Moses, "and you can see the Promised Land. You'll not be able to cross over the Jordan with the people, but I'll give you a sneak preview of coming attractions."

Deuteronomy 32:50, 51
And die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people; as Aaron thy brother died in mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people: Because ye trespassed against me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah-kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin; because ye sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel.

"Speak to the rock," the Lord had told Moses when the people cried for water. Instead, Moses struck the rock (Numbers 20:11). There had been a time previously when he was to strike the rock (Exodus 17:6)—but this time he was simply to speak to it. The first time speaks of the first coming of the Rock of Ages, when Jesus was smitten on the Cross. The second time, however, speaks of the Second Coming, when He will come not as the smitten Servant but as the conquering King.

It's a dangerous thing to misrepresent the nature of God to people. God help us to properly represent our Lord rather than to imply that He's upset or angry.

Deuteronomy 32:52
Yet thou shalt see the land before thee; but thou shalt not go thither unto the land which I give the children of Israel.

While Moses didn't get to enter the Promised Land with the children of Israel, he did, in fact, make it there—for in Matthew 17, as Jesus was

transfigured on Mount Hermon, Moses was right there with Him. God snuck him in!

SINGING AND SOARING
A Topical Study of
DEUTERONOMY 32:7–12

Eagles can be found on every continent of the world except Antarctica. Eagles fly higher than any other bird and uniquely, among all of the animals of the animal kingdom, can look directly into the sun because of the "built-in sunglasses" which protect their eyes.

The eagle is not only the symbol of America, but was, in Czarist days, the symbol of Russia and was, in Bible times, the symbol of the Roman Empire.

The African eagle, with which the children of Israel would have been familiar, makes its home in the Middle East and has a wingspan of up to ten feet.

Once a year, the female eagle lays an egg in a nest high over a bluff or ravine, inaccessible to predators. For the six weeks following its hatching, the eaglet has it made in the shade. He can see lots of things from his vantage point. He's fed hourly by his mother. And he grows fat and plump.

By week five, he has grown quite large. And then something begins to happen. Unbeknownst to him, his mother designed the nest in such a way that sticks point inward. So as he gets fatter, the sticks begin to poke him. And no doubt Ernie Eaglet wonders why his parents didn't make a more comfortable nest—never realizing that its design was all part of the plan to get him to do something he never would have done otherwise: to get him to fly.

The same thing can happen to you and me. We're comfy. We're cozy. We're chubby. But all of a sudden, something begins to happen that agitates us, that pokes at us. "My boss shouldn't treat me this way," we squawk. "My friend shouldn't ignore me that way," we screech.

Wait a minute. It's all part of a divine design, a grand plan. Therefore, wise is the man or woman who doesn't blame the sticks, but realizes they're part of the plan of the Father.

At about this time, Mom returns to the nest one day and, with her ten-foot wings, stirs it and bumps it. And Ernie is thrown out, causing him to fall hundreds of feet towards the ravine below. Feathers fly. Ernie squawks. The

ground gets closer, the rocks bigger—when Mama swoops underneath Ernie and carries him on her back to the nest once again.

Whew! Ernie thinks. *That was close! I hope Mom learned a lesson about being clumsy.* But three days later, Mama stirs the nest once again, sending Ernie screeching and tumbling once more. And once again, she swoops underneath him at seemingly the last minute, returning him to the nest at last.

The same process is repeated over and over again. But somewhere after the sixth or seventh time, Ernie catches air. No longer sore at his mother, he soars with her. And he can't believe it. He didn't have any idea that he could fly—until he was dumped out of the nest.

"What are You doing, God?" we cry. "If I'm Your inheritance, if You keep me as the apple of Your eye, then why am I headed for the rocks?" But right before we crash—maybe only a moment or so before we crash—He swoops in, bears us on His back, and returns us to the nest. Then, days later, He stirs the nest and begins the process all over again.

You see, God loves you and me too much to allow us to settle in the comfort of mediocrity. So He makes our nest uncomfortable as He gets us ready to do something new. He's not going to let us settle for a perch on a cliff when He knows we could soar in the heavenlies.

Maybe you feel like you're freefalling right now. Maybe you've been squawking a bit. Know this: You'll not hit bottom. You might get real close, but the Lord is going to bear you on His wings and take you back up to the nest again to catch your breath for a day or two. And then you'll get knocked around once more. It's all for a reason: To teach you how to fly, how to soar.

"If it's true that the Lord is going to turn over my nest of mediocrity, what should I do?" you ask. "Is there anything I can do to speed up the process? Is there any way I can learn to fly more quickly?"

Yes.

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

To learn to fly, wait on the Lord.

- "But I'm about to hit the rocks," you say.
  Wait.
- "But you don't understand my situation," you cry.
  Wait.
- "You don't realize the seriousness and the sadness, the pain and the problems," you squawk.
  Wait.

Waiting on the Lord does not mean passively doing nothing. Waiting on the Lord means doing what a waiter in an upscale restaurant does. "How can I help you?" he asks. "Is everything alright? Can I get you some more coffee? Can I bring you dessert?"

That's what it means to wait on the Lord. To wait on the Lord is to say, "Enough about me and my problems. I'm here to serve You, Lord, to honor You with thanksgiving, to give You a feast of praise."

Wait on the Lord. Reestablish your morning devotional time. Praise Him throughout the day. He is teaching you how to fly, taking you to a new dimension. I guarantee that if you wait on Him, you'll soar a whole lot quicker than if you just keep squawking.

"There was no strange god with him," Moses declared. That is not surprising, for when you're soaring in the heavenlies, the "strange gods," the things of this world grow strangely dim. When you're soaring high, the things of the world become unimportant and unappealing. When people go through tough times, they often lose weight. Why? Because in tough times, the flesh just isn't important. And the same principle is true spiritually. In hard times, when we seem to be headed for disaster, God frees us from the strange gods that so easily capture our attention. And in their place, like the eagle, we find ourselves looking at the Son.

That's what the Lord will do for you and me when He teaches us to soar higher and to fly in new dimensions. You watch. You wait. You'll see.

33

Deuteronomy 33:1
And this is the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death.

Chapter 32 ended with a reiteration of God's refusal to allow Moses to enter the Promised Land with the children of Israel. Chapter 33 begins with Moses blessing the people. And this, among other things, is what qualifies Moses to be called "a man of God," a phrase seen here in Scripture for the first time. When God denied Moses' requests to accompany the people into the Promised Land, Moses could have said, "If, after forty years, this is the thanks I get; if, after I've given my life for these people and lead them through the wilderness to the best of my ability, I'm disqualified because of one mistake, I'm outta here." But he didn't. Rather than running away and licking his wounds, Moses blessed the people.

Greatness is found in what a man does within the boundaries placed around him. Many people say, "If I can't do this, if I can't be that, I won't do anything." Not Moses. He shows us the way to greatness, to being a man of God, is not by pulling back, but by being a blessing.

Deuteronomy 33:2
And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them.

Moses begins his blessing by reminding the people how the Lord came from Mt. Sinai with 10,000 saints, or literally, angels, to give them the Law.

Deuteronomy 33:3 (a)
Yea, he loved the people . . .

The Lord gave the Law to His people for one reason: Because He loved them. As parents, we should be able to understand this. "Put your seat-belts on," we say to our kids.

"Oh, but we just want to move around and do what we want," they say.

"I don't care. Put them on," we say. Why? Because we love them.

Deuteronomy 33:3 (b)–5
. . . all his saints are in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words. Moses commanded us a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob. And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together.

After reflecting on God's love in entrusting to them His Law, Moses begins to bless the Twelve Tribes.

Deuteronomy 33:6, 7
Let Reuben live, and not die; and let not his men be few. And this is the blessing of Judah: and he said, Hear, LORD, the voice of Judah, and bring him unto his people: let his hands be sufficient for him; and be thou an help to him from his enemies.

"Lord," Moses said, "Cause Reuben to prosper. May his tribe increase. Help him when he encounters the enemy." As the people of Israel marched through the wilderness and, again, as they will march into the Land of Promise, which tribe lead the way? Judah. *Judah* means "Praise." We enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise (Psalm 100:4). Praise is always the key.

All of these requests for Judah were indeed answered in the Lion of the tribe of Judah, in the Person of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:2).

Deuteronomy 33:8 (a)
And of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one . . .

"I don't know what to do. I don't know which way to go," we are prone to say. Even in these New Testament times, the Urim and the Thummim give us real understanding about finding God's will and getting His direction, for in whose care were the Urim and the Thummim? They were in the charge of the high priest (Numbers 27:21).

"I am the Way," said Jesus, our great High Priest. He didn't say, "I'll tell you the way," or, "I'll point you to the way." He said, "I *am* the Way" (John

14:6).

One of my tasks as a pastor and teacher is to remind people of this constantly. People come seeking an answer, asking for direction. But what they need to do is simply cling to Jesus every hour, every minute. And then, because He *is* the way, they'll end up in the right place.

At six months old, my granddaughter, Bailey, doesn't say, "Mommy, how do I get to the mall?" She just stays close to Amanda, and, believe me, she'll get there! Like Bailey, we can say to the Lord, "I'm not going to be anxious about what I should do tomorrow. I'm just going to abide in You, cling to You today, close to Your heart, right by Your side. And I know I'll end up exactly where I'm supposed to be."

Deuteronomy 33:8 (b)–11
. . . whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar. Bless, LORD, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again.

Those who tried to keep the Levites from their priestly duties were to be smitten.

Deuteronomy 33:12
And of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the LORD shall dwell in safety by him; and the LORD shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders.

The location of the tribe of Benjamin in the southern part of the nation was shaped like two shoulders—between which was the city of Jerusalem. This, then, is the first hint that, as dwelling place of the Lord, Jerusalem would be His Holy City.

Deuteronomy 33:13–17
And of Joseph he said, Blessed of the LORD be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, And for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, And for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills, And for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof, and for the good will of him that dwelt in the bush: let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren. His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh.

"May Joseph have glorious blessings from the land and from the fruit ripened by the sun."

Deuteronomy 33:18, 19
And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and, Issachar, in thy tents. They shall call the people unto the mountain; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness: for they shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand.

The land of the tribe of Zebulun extends to the coast at Haifa. Interestingly, it is said that after reading of tar in the Old Testament, J. D. Rockefeller chose to construct a massive pipeline from Iraq to Haifa, 1,000 miles away. When his Standard Oil Company struck oil, tankers would pump the oil, "the treasures hid in the sand," right to the seacoast of Zebulun—just as Moses prophesied.

Deuteronomy 33:20
And of Gad he said, Blessed be he that enlargeth Gad: he dwelleth as a lion, and teareth the arm with the crown of the head.

In 1 Chronicles 12:8, the men of Gad are likened unto lions because of their ferocity in battle.

Deuteronomy 33:21
And he provided the first part for himself, because there, in a portion of the lawgiver, was he seated; and he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the LORD, and his judgments with Israel.

Gad got the best piece of property because he was willing to deal with problems. He executed justice. There's a real lesson in that for us. You see, under the inspiration of God's Spirit, Moses said that because lion-like Gad was willing to do what was necessary, he would get the best of the land. And the same is true for us. If, for example, as parents we choose to parent our kids rather than to be liked by them, in so doing, we will procure for our families a strong, stable, spiritual place for them to dwell.

Deuteronomy 33:22
And of Dan he said, Dan is a lion's whelp: he shall leap from Bashan.

Whereas Zebulun was a lion, Dan was a cub. Dan found the portion of land he was given too difficult, so he headed north, and inadvertently ended up in the worst place he could have chosen, in the place where all the invading armies came through and where paganism took root.

Deuteronomy 33:23
And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the LORD: possess thou the west and the south.

The Hebrew term "satisfied with favor" means "content." Naphtali was a tribe that was content—which is also the kind of tribe we are to be.

Deuteronomy 33:24, 25

And of Asher he said, Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.

The land given to Asher was shaped like a leg, with the "toe" located near Zebulun at Mt. Carmel. Although the reference to oil could very well be that of olive oil, due to the phrase "let him dip his foot in oil," this area is being explored as a potential oil field.

Deuteronomy 33:26, 27 (a)
There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms . . .

Having finished the pronunciation of blessing upon the congregation of Israel, this great man of God reminds them again who their God is. If the sun, moon, and stars are the work of God's fingers (Psalm 8:3), what must be the power of His everlasting arms?

I can recall as a three-year-old in Portland when my dad would drive in to our driveway after work at the bank, I would scramble to the top of the wood box on the side of our house. After parking the car, he would walk to the wood box and, with outstretched arms, say, "Okay, Jon. Jump." And, although I was scared, I'd jump. He always caught me. Every time.

Moses is hoping the children of Israel will come to understand the same thing—that their Father has strong arms and that He will never let them fall.

Deuteronomy 33:27 (b)–29
. . . and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew. Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.

"You will be victorious," Moses said to the people, "because of the strength of your God."



34 Deuteronomy 34:1–5

And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the LORD shewed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, And all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea, And the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar. And the LORD said unto him, This is the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither. So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD.

Although Moses couldn't go into the Land, God gave Moses a supernatural sneak preview—to be added to centuries later when he would view it from atop the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17).

Deuteronomy 34:6
And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.

Jude 9 tells us that when Moses was buried, the devil fought for his body. Why would the devil want the body of Moses? I believe it's because Moses will be one of the two witnesses of Revelation 11, calling down fire, preaching the truth, telling people about antichrist, sharing the gospel.

Deuteronomy 34:7–9
And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days: so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended. And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom;

for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses.

That we know the events regarding the death of Moses means Moses was writing his own obituary. Some believe Joshua wrote this section. But I believe it was, in fact, Moses.

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

Stuck in prison, John sent messengers to ask Jesus if He was indeed the Messiah. If not, he would look for another. Jesus' answer to the messengers was for them to tell John how He had healed the blind, made the lame to walk, cleansed the leper, raised the dead. Then Jesus added, "And blessed is he who is not offended in Me." When John received this message, I wonder if he beat himself for his lack of faith. He had been so bold up to that point, I wonder if he felt his ministry was, after all, a failure.

Certainly Moses would be able to understand. Faithful for forty years, his obedience had faltered at a moment of frustration. Yet Moses knew the end of his story. John didn't. You see, right after his messengers left, Jesus called John the greatest man ever born (Matthew 11:11). But, unlike Moses, John never heard this.

So if you feel like a failure, like you've let the Lord down once too often, like He will never again be able to use you, remember that He sees you as perfect, robed in the righteousness of His Son (Isaiah 61:10). That makes we who are "least in the kingdom" greater even than John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11). Messengers may not tell you this, your prison walls may not confirm it, failure at Meribah may say otherwise—but you, dear saint are God's prize and His inheritance. And, as seen in the lives of Moses and John the Baptist, those God uses to the greatest degree are often the very ones who question their own effectiveness.

Press on, precious brother; be strong, dear sister. The Promised Land of the Spirit-filled life is yours for the taking. And the Promised Land of heaven is just around the bend.



JOSHUA

Background to Joshua

"I have come that you might have life and that you might have it more abundantly," Jesus declared (John 10:10). We who have been born again have life. We have eternal life—but do we have abundant life? It's wonderful and important to be saved. But there's more to the life of faith than simply being saved, for as He did His people, God not only takes us out of Egypt, which is a picture of the world. He desires to bring us into the Land of Promise.

Perhaps you've heard sermons on, or sung hymns about the Promised Land in reference to heaven. But as we make our way through the Book of Joshua, we will see that, although there is abundant fruit in the Promised Land, there are also battles to fight and wars to wage. Therefore, the Promised Land cannot speak of heaven, for in heaven, we will "learn war no more" (Isaiah 2:4).

> *Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 10:1–4, 11

"Don't be ignorant of the fact that these Old Testament pictures were painted for our benefit," says Paul. "The Rock speaks of Christ. The manna speaks of spiritual nourishment. The parting of the Red Sea speaks of baptism." Here in the Book of Joshua, God's chosen people have been set free from the brutal bondage of Egypt just as we have been set free from our own sin and carnality. They have been baptized in the Red Sea just as we have been baptized in water. They have wandered for forty years in the dusty,

dreary wilderness just as we have wondered and wandered through dry days in our own spiritual experience.

But now we see the people about to undergo a second baptism not in the Red Sea, but in the Jordan River. The parting of the Red Sea speaks of the water baptism of salvation. But the parting of the Jordan speaks of the baptism of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised in Luke 24.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit can happen simultaneously with water baptism. It can happen simultaneously with salvation. But for most of us, although it can happen that way, it didn't happen that way. Most of us were born again and saved and thankful for that. But we found ourselves wandering in circles and confusion in the wilderness. At least that's what happened to me.

I was born again at a very young age and had devoted my life to the Lord. But in my late teens and early twenties, I began to realize that I was not experiencing the abundant life I was reading about in the Word. I knew something was missing. Then one day, when I was twenty-one, I was teaching the story of Jonah to about three hundred high-school kids. And in a watershed moment, during our last session together, the Lord seemed to hold up a mirror to me to let me see the condition of my own soul. And as He did, I realized I didn't care at all about the kids I was teaching. This realization was so devastating to me that after the conference was over, I got in my 1964 Ford Econoline van and drove all night up and down the coast. I loved the Lord. I was studying for the ministry. I had already been a youth pastor and a camp speaker. But I knew in my soul that there was a lack of power and a lack of love.

In the morning, I found myself driving into the parking lot of Calvary Chapel, the church I attended. "I've been involved in ministry," I said to a young pastor there. "But there's a sadness in my soul, a dryness in my spirit. Something's not right."

"You need the baptism of the Holy Spirit," he said. "Let me pray for you." So he laid hands on me and prayed in the Spirit. And as he did, I didn't go into some kind of a trance—but something happened in the deepest part of my soul and spirit. I began to pray just a few simple phrases in tongues and felt my spirit touched and warmed. I then went into the sanctuary, where I

knelt and prayed for a few hours before I got into my van and drove back to my apartment a changed man.

Everything changed for me that day. From the way I understood grace and the way I looked at Romans to the way I worshiped and witnessed, everything was affected. I had told the Lord I felt called to the ministry, but couldn't go on with the dryness that was in my soul. "Either meet me or I'll take it as though You're guiding me in some other direction," I had said. And He met me because I was desperate. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness," Jesus said, "for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6).

There comes a moment when a man realizes that, although he's born again, he's tired of the wilderness. In the Book of Joshua, the people of Israel are at that very place. That's why I believe this study will be very enlightening and very exciting. The Book of Joshua deals with what it means to step into the Jordan after already being baptized in the Red Sea. The Book of Joshua deals with what it means to move into the Promised Land of the Spirit-filled life.



JOSHUA

Joshua 1:1 (a)

Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun . . .

Moses was dead. A representative, a picture, a type of the Law, Moses brought the people to the edge of the Promised Land, but it would be Joshua, whose name is the Old Testament name for *Jesus,* who would actually bring them in to the Promised Land.

In Numbers 13:8, we read that Joshua's name was originally Hoshea. *Hoshea* means "salvation." Joshua was indeed saved when the blood was applied to the house of Nun during the Passover. As firstborn, he would have died otherwise. So his name, "Salvation," was an appropriate one. But Moses changed his name from *Hoshea* to *Joshua,* from "Salvation" to "Jehovah is Salvation," signifying that Jehovah alone brings salvation.

Joshua 1:1 (b)

. . . Moses' minister . . .

The word *minister* means "servant." We see Joshua serving Moses in Exodus 17 when Moses ordered him to lead the Israelites in battle against the Amalekites. We see Joshua serving Moses in Exodus 24 as he accompanied Moses part way up Mount Sinai. We see Joshua serving Moses in Numbers 13 as one of the twelve Moses sent to spy out the Land. As seen in the life of Joshua, to minister means to serve. Somehow, the passage of time has made the ministry an exalted position when in fact it is simply one of service, exemplified no more clearly than in the life of Jesus, the One who came to be the servant of all (John 13).

Joshua 1:1 (c)–3

. . . saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that

the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.

God didn't say, "I *will* give you the land upon which you walk." He said, "I *have* given it to you." The same is true today. Concerning the things of God, whenever you choose to step out and engage your "sole," that land is already yours. It's a matter of possessing your possession. It's a matter of appropriation. Where do you want to put your soul? Where do you want to plant your foot and say, "I believe You for this, Lord. I'm stepping out in this. I'm going after this"?

I read about a man who was arrested in a futile attempt to rob a convenience store. The amazing part of the story is that the gun he used was actually a Civil War-era pistol worth $23,000. He had robbed the store for $125 when all the time, right there in his hand, he held a $23,000 treasure.

Isn't that like us? We strive for peanuts when the Lord has grapes for us the size of bowling balls. The Lord says, "I've already given you the land. It's already a done deal. It's just a matter of how much of it you want. I won't take you any farther than you choose. But I'll take you as far as you want to go." How far did the Israelites go? The Promised Land covers 30,000 square miles. At the height of their power, in Solomon's reign, the Israelites claimed 3,000 square miles. They took one-tenth of what God had already given them. And I can't help but wonder if we have even done that.

Concerning the Spirit-filled life and the appropriation of the power of the Holy Ghost, many people say, "If the Lord wants to empower me and baptize me, I'm open." But in Genesis 8, we see Noah on the ark, with the dove—a symbol of the Holy Spirit—circling overhead. Noah stretched out his hand and brought the dove in unto him. I believe the Spirit of God is looking for a person, a people, a congregation to land upon. But this will not happen through passivity. Rather, like Noah, He responds to those who see the opportunity and extend their hand to pull Him in unto them.

Here in Joshua 1:3, the Lord says, "The land is already yours. It's up to you how far you want to go, how deep you want to be."

Joshua 1:4, 5 (a)
From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life . . .

God goes on to tell Joshua that no one would be able to stop him, that there would be no limitation as he led the congregation.

Joshua 1:5 (b)–7 (a)
. . . as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous . . .

Joshua could only be strong and very courageous "not by might, nor by power, but by God's spirit" (Zechariah 4:6). Jesus, our Greater than Joshua, was Himself baptized in the Spirit when, following His baptism in the Jordan, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:16). The powerful works He did were done in obedience to the Father's direction and through the power of the Spirit upon Him. This means that what Jesus did is a model for you and me.

I didn't know this for many years. "Of course Jesus fed thousands, healed lepers, and walked on water," I thought. "He's Jesus." But my entire understanding of the ministry of my Master changed when I understood that, according to Philippians 2, Jesus laid aside His power when He became a Man and instead relied on the same Spirit available to me.

Joshua 1:7 (b), 8 (a)
. . . that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth . . .

God didn't tell Joshua that His Word was not to depart out of his hand or out of his back pocket, but that it was not to depart out of his *mouth.*

Joshua 1:8 (b)
. . . but thou shalt meditate therein day and night . . .

The word *meditate* simply means "to mutter." Thus, biblical meditation consists of speaking the Scriptures over and over. It is not a matter of thinking about the Scriptures because merely thinking about them allows our minds to wander. Meditation means to speak verbally, quoting Scriptures audibly, talking to others about them constantly.

Joshua 1:8 (c)
. . . that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

Prosperity, success, and the abundant life are hallmarks of the Spirit-filled life. And the Spirit is inextricably linked to the Word . . .

> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God.
>
> Colossians 3:16–22

The result of letting the Word of Christ dwell in us will be that we'll speak to ourselves and to each other with psalms and hymns. We'll be

submitted to each other. We'll be the kind of husband, wife, or child we ought to be and the kind of worker that honors God.

> And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord . . . Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it . . . Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right . . . And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.
>
> Ephesians 5:18–22, 25; 6:1, 4–6

The result of being filled with the Spirit is that we'll speak to ourselves with psalms and hymns. We'll be submitted to each other. We'll be the kind of husband, wife, or child we ought to be and the kind of worker that honors God. In other words, being filled with the Spirit and being filled with the Word are linked together.

Spirit-filled people or congregations are those who meditate in the Word, devote themselves to the study of the Word, and gain more understanding about the Word. And as that happens, they are continually filled with the Spirit in fresh ways. I used to think a believer was either a Spirit-filled person or a student of the Word. Not so. Jesus said the Father seeks those who will worship Him in Spirit *and* in truth (John 4:23, 24).

At the very beginning of his ministry, Joshua is told to meditate in the Word day and night because that is the key to appropriating the power of the Spirit he would need to accomplish that which God had called him to do.



For topical study of Joshua 1:8, see "Meditation: The Key to Prosperity," turn to page 640.

Joshua 1:9–11
Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God giveth you to possess it.

"Three days from now, we're crossing over the Jordan," Joshua told the people.

For me, it wasn't three days before I crossed the Jordan, but three years. For three years, I wrestled with the question of whether baptism in the Holy Spirit was theologically correct. But I'm glad I went through those three years because I know the arguments of those who don't believe in the baptism of the Spirit, of those who don't believe the gifts of the Spirit are for today. If you're going through a time of questioning presently, don't despair. The Lord will use it to prepare you just as He did the children of Israel.

Joshua 1:12–15
And to the Reubenites, and to the Gadites, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, spake Joshua, saying, Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, The LORD your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land. Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle, shall remain in the land which Moses gave you on this side Jordan; but ye shall pass before your brethren armed, all the mighty men of valour, and help them; Until the LORD have given your brethren rest, as he hath given you, and they also have possessed the land which the LORD your God giveth them: then ye shall return unto the land of your possession, and enjoy it, which Moses the LORD's servant gave you on this side Jordan toward the sunrising.

As seen in Numbers 32, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh said, “We don’t want to go into the Promised Land. We like it here on the east side of the Jordan. It’s a great place for our families and cattle, a great place to retire.”

“If you want to stay where it’s seemingly comfortable, that’s okay,” Moses said. “But when the rest go into the Promised Land, your soldiers must help fight the battle.”

Tragically, the place that seemed safe proved to be unsafe, for in Luke 8, we see that it was the Gadarenes, those of the tribe of Gad, whose land was filled with pigs and demons and who asked Jesus to leave.

Joshua 1:16–18
And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go. According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the LORD thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses. Whosoever he be that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death: only be strong and of a good courage.

“We’re with you, Joshua,” the people of Israel said. “We’ll go where you send us. We’ll do what you tell us. But we have one requirement of you. That is, you must be strong and courageous.”

Our Greater than Joshua, Jesus Christ, is strong and courageous. Indeed. Let’s go with Him into the Promised Land of the Spirit-filled life. The choice is yours and mine to step out and move in to the promise of the Father to an even greater degree.

MEDITATION: THE KEY TO PROSPERITY

A Topical Study of JOSHUA 1:8

Poised to enter the Promised Land, the people of Israel were about to turn a new page in their history. And a new man had been raised up to lead them. In Joshua 1, we see God say to this man, "This book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth. But thou shalt meditate therein day and night that thou mayest observe, or literally, in order that you'll be able to observe, to do all that is commanded therein."

God promises to Joshua—and to all those who choose to follow in his footsteps—prosperity and success if he meditated in His Word. Most people have the mistaken idea that meditation is silent contemplation. The problem with silent meditation, however, is that our minds wander very easily. We start thinking about a verse or a spiritual principle, but before we know it, we're thinking about what we're going to have for lunch. Audibly speaking the Word, however, keeps our minds on track.

For example, Joshua 1:7 says, "Be strong and very courageous." Therefore, if I want to have good success, if I want to prosper, I am to go throughout my day, muttering, "Lord, You want me to be strong. You want me to have courage. Thank You for the strength and courage You give." That's what biblical meditation is. Biblical meditation is simply taking a phrase, a verse, or a small portion of Scripture and muttering it over and over.

People might look at you and say, "What's the mutter with you, anyway?" That's okay! Let them think what they may. When I'm driving in my car, walking down the road, or lying on my bed, I'm to be speaking Scripture. God's Word is not to depart out of my mouth.

Most Christians look at their Bibles like a fax machine through which God sends faxes to them one after another. The Bible is not a fax machine, gang. It's a cell phone. It allows us to converse with our Father. I'm to speak Scripture back to God and to my own heart. If you don't talk to your Bible, your Bible won't talk to you. A lot of believers don't know this. They read their Bibles—and there's a place for reading. They study their Bibles—and that's also commanded. But there's more than reading and studying. It's

called meditation—where you're talking to the Lord, where day and night a chunk of the Word is in your mind and on your lips, flowing from you and taking root deep within you.

In addition to being like a cell phone, the Word is like a telescope. The telescope is not to look at. It's to look through. Look through a telescope and a whole new world opens up. This is the way a lot of people look at their Bibles. They read them for doctrine and history. Yet while that's all well and good, the Word was given to us in order that we might look through it to see our Father in heaven.

The second Hebrew word for meditation literally means "to chew the cud." This means you come to a Bible study on Sunday or Wednesday night and you don't just go your way, but you take that which the Lord put on your heart and whispered in your ear and chew on it as you drive in the car, walk down the road, lay in your bed. You take what you hear and extract every bit of nutrition available. Meditation is different from reading the Bible. Reading produces information. Meditation produces transformation.

Why does God want us to meditate? In Proverbs 23, we read, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." In other words, what you mutter to yourself, what you think on, is what you become. Therefore, God says, "I want you to mutter My Word. I want you to think about Scripture because you'll become like Me.' "

"That sounds good," you might be thinking. "But I'm too busy to meditate."

Are you busier than Joshua? He had to lead three million people into a land they would have to fight their way through. If there was ever a man who didn't have time to meditate night and day, it was Joshua. Yet God said to the busiest man on the planet at that time, "Take time to meditate on Scripture day and night. If you do, you will be prosperous and you will have good success."

Maybe you think you can't meditate because you're busy looking for a husband or wife. But what was Isaac doing when God brought him his bride? He was meditating in the field in the evening (Genesis 24:63).

Maybe you think you can't meditate because you're busy raising a family. Certainly Mary could have said she was too busy. But she was one who pondered and meditated upon what she heard from the Lord (Luke 2:19).

Maybe you're a pastor, busy taking care of the stuff of the church. Yet Paul said to Timothy, a pastor, "I know you have many responsibilities. But don't neglect the importance of meditation" (1 Timothy 4:15).

David, the one the Bible calls a man after God's own heart, prospered and had good success to an incredible degree. Therefore, it shouldn't be surprising that he talks about meditation more than anyone else in Scripture . . .

- "Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly," David wrote (Psalm 1). This means you can forget about all the books, tapes, and seminars given by people who don't know God.
- "The happy man's delight is in the law of the Lord. And in His law he meditates day and night." In other words, the Word is integrated into his soul.
- "He shall be like a tree planted by the river of water that brings forth fruit in its season. And its leaf shall not wither." When others dry up because of the drought that inevitably comes, when others shrivel and fade away as the years go by, the one who meditates is more engaged than ever in the things of God.
- "And whatsoever he does shall prosper." The one who chews on the Word and speaks it out will prosper in whatever he does.

In the seasons when I have meditated on the Word, my leaf doesn't wither. Fruit inevitably abounds. I'm successful and prosper. In the seasons when I mistakenly thought I was too busy to meditate, I have found myself withering, being blown about, fruitless. In other words, I have found what David said to be absolutely true.

"Let not My Word depart from your mouth," God said to Joshua. And He says the same thing to us. Meditate on the Word. And as you do, you will prosper and have good success. Keep in the Word more than ever before. Stay in the Word. Learn from the Word. Be involved in Bible study. But don't stop there. As you take it in, speak it out. Chew on it. Meditate on the Word as you drive in traffic and as you walk down the road, as you mow the lawn and as you make dinner. Mutter it over and over so that your mind stays focused. And prosperity and success will be the result. Guaranteed!

2

Joshua 2:1 (a)
And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly . . .

Joshua, a picture of Jesus, is about to take the Israelites across the Jordan River into the Land of Promise. But before he does, he does something that reminds me of what Jesus did. That is, he sends two men to go before him into the Land. In Luke 10, we read that Jesus sent seventy men out in groups of two to go before Him, to be His witnesses. The two men Joshua sends think they're going to spy. But in reality, they'll be witnesses. The same is true of you and me as well. We think we're schoolteachers, insurance salesmen, or stockbrokers. But we're not. We're undercover agents for the kingdom. God has planted us in those positions to be His witnesses. The two men Joshua sent out were the first of the Israelites to experience the Promised Land. And it is as we witness that we will experience it as well.

Joshua 2:1 (b)
. . . saying, Go view the land, even Jericho . . .

Surrounded by at least one massive wall—and very possibly two according to recent archaeological findings—Jericho was a seemingly impenetrable city.

Joshua 2:1 (c)
. . . And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there.

Although the Hebrew word translated "harlot" can also refer to a female innkeeper, each time Rahab's name appears in the New Testament, it is in conjunction with a word in Greek that can only be translated "harlot." Why did these men go into a harlot's house? Most likely it was because, as enemies in the gated city of Jericho, Rahab's house was the only place they could hide in anonymity.

Joshua 2:2
And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither to night of the children of Israel to search out the country.

While Rahab's house was the safest place for the men of Israel to be, it wasn't safe enough. Word leaked out anyway.

Joshua 2:3–6
And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country. And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were: And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them. But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof.

Flax was commonly laid on the flat roofs to dry. So Rahab hid the two men under the flax.

Joshua 2:7–11
And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan unto the fords: and as soon as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate. And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof; And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you:

for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

As a harlot, Rahab was in a degenerate position. But then she had a dramatic conversion. She had faith in God, as evidenced by her belief that God had given the land to the Israelites (v. 9). She knew the facts about God, as evidenced by her knowledge of what He had done for His people (v. 10). And she feared God, as evidenced by the condition of her heart (v. 11).

Rahab's dramatic conversion was proved by a definite confession. In letting down the scarlet cord, she was essentially confessing to God that she was wholly and completely dependent upon His blood for her salvation. Secondly, Rahab confessed not only to God but before men when she said to the spies, "for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above and in earth beneath" (v. 11). Romans 10:9 tells us that in order to be saved, a man must believe in his heart and confess with his mouth. And Rahab did just that.

In addition to Rahab's degenerate position, dramatic conversion, and definite confession, notice her dynamic commendation. In Hebrews 11, a small number of people are singled out as heroes in God's "hall of faith." Isaiah didn't make it. Jeremiah didn't make it. Daniel didn't make it. Elisha didn't make it. But one who did make it into the hall of faith was Rahab the prostitute. Rahab's name appears again in James 2 as an example of what it means to have faith that is real. But the most important place Rahab's name appears is in Matthew 1, as she takes her place with only three other women in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

Rahab is honored by James as an example of faith. She's inducted into the hall of faith of Hebrews. She's in the lineage of Jesus. But there's a problem —for not only is she a harlot, but she's a liar. The Bible says we are to honor the king. She lied to his face. The Bible says we are not to bear false witness. She certainly did. How, then, could Rahab be so exalted?

In 2 Corinthians 5, we read that every believer will stand before the judgment seat of Christ—not to be judged for our sin because our sin was washed away by the blood Jesus shed on the Cross of Calvary—but to be rewarded for what we've done. In 1 Corinthians 3, we read that all of our works will be tried by fire wherein the wood, hay, and stubble—that which was done with mixed motives and carnality—will burn away, leaving only

gold, silver, and precious stones. Revelation 1 describes Jesus as One whose eyes are like a burning fire. Therefore, I believe it is as He looks on us that all the stuff that's polluted and defiled by mixed motives and carnality will evaporate and disappear.

What will be left? Based on the story of Rahab, I suggest what's left will be a lot more than you think. You see, in Jeremiah 15, the Lord said, "Jeremiah, you will be My spokesman if you can extract the valuable from the vile." We tend to notice only the vile. Not so the Lord. He does the opposite. He pokes around in the pile of our rubble and stubble and finds the jewels. We would call Rahab a harlot and a liar. Not God. Simply because she believed in Him, He calls her a hero.

We have a tendency to listen to Satan who perches on our shoulder, saying, "You're not going to be rewarded for that. Your motive wasn't pure. Your thoughts weren't right. Your attitude was amiss."

But God would say, "I specialize in extracting the precious from the vile. Oh, I know there's all kinds of weakness even in your best deeds and ministry. But I will find the gold, silver, and precious stones others don't see even in your simply giving a cup of cold water in My name" (Matthew 10:42).

Joshua 2:12, 13
Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token: And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

"Save us," said Rahab. "We don't want to be destroyed. We believe in your God. We know He's given you our land."

Joshua 2:14–16
And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee. Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon

the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall. And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way.

The mountains to which Rahab refers were to the west. The Jordan River was to the east. So as Rahab sent the king's men east, she sent the two spies west to hide for three days before they would eventually travel east to return to the camp of Israel.

Joshua 2:17
And the men said unto her, We will be blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear.

The spies told Rahab she would indeed be spared.

Joshua 2:18, 19
Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee. And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand be upon him.

Rahab was to keep her family in the house and hang a scarlet cord from her window. In this way, her family would be saved in the day Israel conquered Jericho.

Joshua 2:20, 21 (a)
And if thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear. And she said, According unto your words, so be it. And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet line . . .

In Rahab's day, ropes were made not of hemp like our ropes but of flax. Flax also was the material from which linen was made. This means that the Israelites on the roof, the priests wearing their priestly garments, and Rahab the harlot were all covered with the same material. They were all covered with flax. The same is still true today. The blood of Jesus Christ covers believing saints and sinners alike. We are saved, covered, and hidden by the righteousness of Christ so freely given to us (Colossians 3:3).

Joshua 2:21 (b)
. . . in the window.

Rahab would be saved by letting down a scarlet cord. In these days, prostitutes would paint their windowsills bright red. Therefore, by hanging a scarlet cord over her red windowsill, Rahab would be forming a cross. The same image that saved the people of Israel in the Passover when they applied blood to the top, sides, and bottom of their doors, would save the pagans in Jericho. Whether to a Jew or a Gentile, the message is the same. It is the Cross that saves from destruction.

Joshua 2:22–24
And they went, and came unto the mountain, and abode there three days, until the pursuers were returned: and the pursuers sought them throughout all the way, but found them not. So the two men returned, and descended from the mountain, and passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all things that befell them: And they said unto Joshua, Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us.

Even as the seventy apostles returned to Jesus amazed, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name" (Luke 10:17), so Joshua's witnessing spies returned amazed by what they had seen. That's always the way it is. Whenever we set out to witness to someone else, we are witnessed to by God's power and provision. Conversely, in failing to witness, we miss out on so much.

There are people on my street I have never talked to directly about Jesus Christ because I've listened to Satan's lie that says they don't want to hear, that they're not ready, or that they're too busy. The story of Rahab says just the opposite. "Where have you been?" she asked the spies. "We've heard about what your god has done."

Isaiah 14:16 says that when we see Satan, we're going to look at him narrowly—or squint at him—saying, "Is this the one that terrorized the world? *This* is the one who intimidated us? *This* is the one we believed when he told us our friends, family, and neighbors didn't want to hear about Jesus?"

The power of the Holy Spirit is like electricity. It won't enter something from which it can't exit. We want the power of the Holy Spirit. The question is, will there be a place for it to go? When we witness, the power of the Spirit surges through us. There is unbelievable joy in sharing the gospel. A lot of believers go from meeting to meeting looking for some "Holy Ghost high" because they're not witnessing. They go to this convention and that seminar—and the high lasts for a week or two. But after that, they're back in the wilderness because the Holy Ghost was given for the sole purpose of empowering us to share with the Rahabs around us the Good News of the gospel.

When we say, "Lord, I'm tired of wandering in the wilderness," He baptizes us in the Jordan and empowers us to be His witnesses. When we say, "I want to share the plan of salvation with my secretary. Empower me," or, "I want to talk to my buddy about You, Lord. Make me bold," we'll be empowered in ways we never could have imagined.

How long has it been since you've shared the gospel, the plan of salvation, the scarlet cord with someone who's not a believer? By faith, receive the power to be a witness. Awaiting you is a land of milk and honey, fruit and abundance. And you get there by going in as a witness. It's time to cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land of the Spirit-filled life. Come join us on our journey.



3

There was excitement in the air and anticipation in their hearts. At long last, they were about to enter the land of their destiny, the Land of Promise. The congregation of three million could smell the fruit and see the greenery. But first they had to go through a second baptism as they crossed the Jordan.

Joshua 3:1 (a)
And Joshua rose early in the morning . . .

Here, Joshua arises early in the day just as our Greater than Joshua did (Mark 1:35). Isaiah prophesied that Messiah would rise morning by morning that He might hear from the Father concerning what He was to do, what He was to say, where He was to go (Isaiah 50:4).

Joshua 3:1 (b), 2
. . . and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host.

Following three days of preparation, it was time for the people of Israel to move off the banks of the Jordan and into the Land of Promise. Time spent in preparation for the baptism of the Holy Spirit—of which the crossing of the Jordan speaks—is time well spent.

Of the believers worshiping the Lord and speaking in tongues, some said, "Those guys must be drunk."

"They're not drunk," Peter answered. "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:15). Peter then quoted Joel who said, "In the last days, I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh. And your sons and daughters shall prophesy. Your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams" (Joel 2:28–32).

It's not a waste of time to wait for three days, three months, or even three years on the bank of the Jordan if, like Peter, you can say, "I'm not simply caught up in an emotion or seeking an experience, but I understand the biblical foundation and base for the direction into which I'm moving."

Joshua 3:3
And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it.

"When you see the presence of God move, go after it," the officers of the congregation said. I like that! Our God is on the move. And we must be those who go after Him.

Joshua 3:4
Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore.

When they saw the ark move, the Israelites were to follow it. Yet they were to follow at a distance of approximately half a mile. In this, it's as if God was saying, "Follow Me, but don't push Me."

People say, "I'm going to have the same experience that he or she or they had." God, however, wants to take us where we've never been before. Therefore, it's the wise man or woman who says, "Lord, I want Your anointing. And I'm going to give You space to work it out any way you choose."

Joshua 3:5
And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves for to morrow the LORD will do wonders among you.

The word "sanctify" is *quodosh* in Hebrew. It means "to set apart" or "to prepare." If you filled a glass full of rocks and then attempted to pour a pitcher of water into it, the amount of water that could be poured in would be limited by the rocks in the glass. If you really wanted more water in the glass, the key wouldn't be to keep pouring more water because it would just spill out. The key would be to remove the rocks.

The same thing is true spiritually. A lot of people are trying to be filled with the Spirit when in reality they need to be emptied of sin. They need to

say, “Search my heart, Lord. Show me the things that are restricting the flow of Your Spirit. Show me the rocks.”

Joshua 3:6, 7
And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people. And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.

Joshua was magnified in the sight of Israel the day he crossed the Jordan. So it was when our Greater than Joshua, Jesus Christ, was baptized in the Jordan that God said, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Empowered with the Spirit, Jesus’ public ministry began at that point.

Joshua 3:8
And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan.

Historically, the Jordan River was usually one hundred feet wide except during the fall when it would be one mile wide. The story before us taking place in the fall, it was a formidable river the Israelites were commanded to cross.

Joshua 3:9, 10
And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the LORD your God. And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites.

The Canaanites, Hittities, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites would be overcome by God's might through the Israelites.

Josh 3:11–14 (a)
Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap . . .

When the priests and representatives from each tribe put their feet into the river, the water would divide. Forty years previously, when the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, the water parted before they stepped in (Exodus 14). But not this time. When it comes to the issues of the Spirit, we're to step in by faith.

"But what if hands are laid upon me and I seek the Lord's power aggressively, yet nothing happens? I'll feel like a big drip," we say. So we stay on the bank where it's safe and dry—real dry, dusty dry, wilderness dry.

Why doesn't God part the water first? I'm convinced it's because the language of eternity is faith. This life is only eighty years long at best. So God uses every opportunity to teach us to see and hear with the eyes and ears of faith. "Step out. Step in. Step up in faith," He says. "And watch and see what I'll do."

Joshua 3:14 (b), 15
. . . And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people; And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest).

The Israelites weren't commanded to step into a trickling stream but into a raging river. But how could it have been otherwise? In reference to the Holy Ghost, Jesus said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. And out of his innermost being shall gush forth torrents of living water" (see John 7:37, 38). Thus, it's appropriate that, as a symbol of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, the Jordan would have been a roaring river.

Joshua 3:16
That the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho.

For the Jordan to part at the point the priests stepped in, God actually built a supernatural dam nineteen miles upriver. This means that because Joshua and the people of Israel couldn't see that far, God was working out of sight. And He still works that way today. That's why He says, "Trust Me. Don't walk by sight. Walk by faith. I'm doing things nineteen miles upriver that you can't see."

Joshua 3:17
And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.

The priests stepped in and said, "We're not leaving until all have passed over." And they stood firm while three million people passed through the Jordan. They stood until the work was done.

Evangelist D. L. Moody locked himself in a hotel room in New York City for three and a half days, saying, "I'm not coming out of this room until I know the power of the Spirit has come upon me." On the fourth day, God overwhelmed and overpowered Him to such a

degree that he knew without a doubt that he was empowered to do the work God had called him to do.

As I read the Book of Joshua, I say, "Lord, I don't want to miss out on anything You have ordained for me."

Has there been a moment, a time when you stepped in and stood firm until you knew the Holy Spirit had come upon you? If you're not sure, don't miss chapter 4.



4 The apostle Paul proclaimed that the three greatest and most important components of life are faith, hope, and love. In the Book of Joshua, we see the people had hearts of hope in chapter 2 when the spies came back and said, "Truly the Lord has delivered the Land into our hands." In chapter 3, they took steps of faith as they put the soles of their feet into the Jordan River, believing God would meet them in the process. And here in chapter 4, we see the third component—a picture of love . . .

Joshua 4:1
And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over Jordan, that the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying,

The Israelites had passed over the Jordan River. The illustration is that they had been "baptized" in the Spirit. How do we know if we're truly Spirit-filled? Is speaking in tongues the sign? Although speaking in tongues is a wonderful tool in the toolbox of the believer, I don't believe speaking in tongues is proof one has been filled with the Spirit. Rather, I believe the proof is seen in the chapter before us . . .

Joshua 4:2–7
Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man, And command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave

them in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night. Then Joshua called the twelve men, whom he had prepared of the children of Israel, out of every tribe a man: And Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of Jordan, and take ye up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel: That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever.

Twelve men were to place twelve stones from the bed of the Jordan River on the west bank of the Jordan. Of them, they were to make a monument, a memorial. In our country, sites like the Vietnam Memorial and Lincoln Memorial help us to remember and to reflect just as the twelve stones would enable the Israelite fathers to tell their children how God miraculously stopped the Jordan for His people.

I like the fact that it was the fathers who would talk to their children about God. When children were brought to Jesus for blessing, the pronoun Mark uses makes it clear that it was the fathers who brought them (10:14). Obviously, when a father is unable or unwilling to talk to his kids about spiritual things, the mother is to take that role. But how much better it is for both Mom and Dad to teach their kids the ways of God.

Joshua 4:8–10
And the children of Israel did so as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones out of the midst of Jordan, as the LORD spake unto Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over with them unto the place where they lodged, and laid them down there. And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests which bare the ark of the covenant stood: and they are there unto this day. For the priests which bare the ark stood in

the midst of Jordan, until everything was fin ished that the LORD commanded Joshua to speak unto the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua: and the people hasted and passed over.

In addition to the twelve stones placed on the "Spirit-filled" side of the Jordan, Joshua was instructed to place twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan itself. This means that when the water came rushing in after everyone had passed over, Joshua's monument would not be seen by any man—only by God. There were two monuments. One was visible. One was out of sight. And that's the way it is with any work of the Spirit. The outward manifestations are only as valid as the inward, hidden work in one's heart.

Joshua 4:11–13
And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over, that the ark of the LORD passed over, and the priests, in the presence of the people. And the children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, passed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses spake unto them: About forty thousand prepared for war passed over before the LORD unto battle, to the plains of Jericho.

The two and one-half tribes that chose to settle on the east side of the Jordan weren't forced to go with the rest of the children of Israel into the Promised Land. God won't force you or me to cross over and reside in the Spirit-filled life. He'll take us as far as we want to go—but not one step further.

Joshua 4:14
On that day the LORD magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life.

According to John 1:28, Jesus was baptized in the Jordan at Bethabara. *Bethabara* means "house of passage." Therefore, Jesus was baptized in the same place Joshua was as he passed over into the Promised Land. To the Pharisees and Sadducees who cynically watched him baptize, John said,

"And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that god is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matthew 3:9). And no doubt he would have been pointing to the stones that would still be there in his day, the twelve stones placed as a memorial in Joshua's day.

Joshua 4:15–18
And the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying, Command the priests that bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan. Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan. And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before.

Again, in the overflowing of its banks, the Jordan River is a fitting picture of the power of the Spirit (John 7:38, 39).

Joshua 4:19–24
And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever.

Twelve stones stacked together in one monument, twelve stones representing the Twelve Tribes, fit together in unity would be the sign that the

Israelites had crossed over the Jordan, that they had been "baptized" a second time. Peter says that, as believers, we are living stones fit together in unity (1 Peter 2:5). When you come to church not out of obligation but because you want to be linked together with fellow blockheads and stones, your love for them is a sure sign of your being touched deeply by the Spirit. "All men shall know you are My disciples," said Jesus. "By your speaking in tongues? No. By your gift of healing? No. They'll know you are My disciples by your love" (see John 13:35).

In 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, Paul discusses spiritual gifts and their manifestations. But packed between them is chapter 13, a chapter that deals exclusively with love because love is the defining characteristic of one who has had an encounter with the Spirit.

"Father, let them be one," Jesus prayed in John 17, "that the world might know that I am in You and that You are in Me." In other words, love within the body of Christ is proof positive to a world that is skeptical that Jesus is risen and real, alive and well.



5

Joshua 5:1 (a)

And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites, which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites, which were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, that their heart melted . . .

As seen in Joshua 2:9–11, the inhabitants of the Land west of the Jordan had heard what God had done for His people forty years earlier when He parted the Red Sea. But here in chapter 5, we see they also heard what He had done presently when He parted the Jordan.

Some people rejoice over that which the Lord did forty years ago. That's okay. But the Lord wants to do even greater things today.

Joshua 5:1 (b)

. . . neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel.

The enemy was demoralized, intimidated, and afraid. This would have been the perfect time to attack. But God chose otherwise . . .

Joshua 5:2
At that time the LORD said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time.

General Joshua must have said, "What? Make sharp knives? Surely, Lord, You mean we are to make sharp swords to take into battle. If we circumcise all of our men, we'll be left vulnerable in enemy territory."

Joshua 5:3–5
And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise: All the people that came out of Egypt, that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt. Now all the people that came out were circumcised: but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised.

Despite any misgivings, Joshua obeyed the Lord—which is precisely why he would be used so mightily.

Joshua 5:6–9
For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: unto whom the LORD sware that he would not shew them the land, which the LORD sware unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey. And their children, whom he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised: for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them

by the way. And it came to pass, when they had done circumcising all the people, that they abode in their places in the camp, till they were whole. And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day.

Gilgal, or literally, "the place of rolling," was the place where the reproach of Egypt was rolled away, or literally cut away as the Israelites reinstituted the practice of circumcision that had been abandoned in their wilderness wanderings. The Israelites had been "baptized" in the Jordan River. And Gilgal is a picture, an illustration of what happens next in the Spirit-filled life. You see, after we put our foot in the Jordan River and say, "Lord, fill me, flood me, and use me," how do we get things "rolling"? I believe the key is circumcision. I personally believe that, among other things circumcision illustrates, it correlates to speaking in tongues. Here's why . . .

In Genesis 17, God said to Abraham, "I want to give you a token of the covenant I've made with you."

"Wonderful," Abraham must have thought. *"I get to have a badge that I can pin on my robe. Or maybe a crown I can wear on my head so people will know that I'm in a covenant relationship with the Almighty God."*

But then God told him the token would be circumcision.

"What?!" Abraham must have thought. *"That's the token? That's the sign? That's the seal? Circumcision? I'd rather have a badge."*

In circumcision, the flesh is dealt with literally. Circumcision sensitizes and purifies a man in a way he otherwise wouldn't be. Circumcision is a mark known only privately, but of which a man is reminded daily. Circumcision being ridiculed and mocked by the surrounding nations, in ordering His people to be circumcised, God said to them, "I want you to be marked. It will be ridiculed by those who don't understand. But it will make you more sensitive. It will bring you a degree of purity. It will remind you of our covenant constantly."

Reproduction and sensitivity, a private mark, a sign and seal are all aspects of speaking in tongues. How do we get things rolling? My flesh hates speaking in tongues because it doesn't seem to me to be intellectually acceptable. But that's the point. In 1 Corinthians 14:13, Paul said, "My mind

is unfruitful, but my spirit is edified when I pray in tongues." Speaking in tongues marks me. I'm in a new relationship with the Lord. The people around me might make fun of it, but it provides in me a new sensitivity to the work and reality of the Holy Ghost."

In 1 Corinthians 14, we see the "Gilgal" of Spirit-filled living . . .

> Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.
>
> 1 Corinthians 14:1, 2

Oftentimes, my mind either doesn't know how to pray or is limited in expressions of thanksgiving, love, and appreciation. But when my spirit prays, I'm set free from the limitations of my own mental abilities.

> He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself . . .
>
> 1 Corinthians 14:4 (a)

Speaking in tongues is the least of the gifts because it doesn't edify others. But it's an important gift because it edifies the one speaking. When I pray in the spirit, I'm built up because I'm free from my own mental limitations of trying to come up with logical phrases and expressions.

> For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.
>
> 1 Corinthians 14:14

When I pray in the Spirit, my flesh doesn't get it. My mind doesn't comprehend it. But my spirit—the real me—is released as the flesh is rolled away.

> What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also:
>
> 1 Corinthians 14:15

Notice Paul says, “I will pray.” Praying in the Spirit is not done in some kind of a mysterious trance. Rather, it’s something one chooses to do. And when I do, Satan is right there to challenge me. But that should not be surprising, for it’s what he does with every spiritual experience from the moment we’re born again.

In the Book of Romans, we are given further light on this illustration . . .

> For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.
>
> Romans 2:28, 29

> And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised:
>
> Romans 4:11

In Acts 2, we read that when the Holy Spirit moved on the Day of Pentecost, the disciples in the Upper Room spoke with other tongues. In Acts 8, the next time the Holy Spirit came upon a group of people, we don’t know if they spoke in tongues, but something happened that was noticed because a magician named Simon offered to buy the “trick.” In Acts 9, when Ananias laid hands on Paul and prayed, Paul was empowered. Did Paul speak in tongues? Scripture doesn’t say whether he did right then. But later on, he would say, “I speak in tongues more than you all” (1 Corinthians 14:18). In Acts 10, as Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit fell upon the listeners and they began to speak in tongues. In Acts 19, Paul laid his hands on those in Ephesus and they spoke in tongues.

There seems to be a pattern that indicates that speaking in tongues is the norm in relation to the empowering of the Spirit.

> For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.
>
> Philippians 3:3

Who is the true circumcision? Those who worship God in the Spirit. I take this to, at least partially, allude to worshiping God in the Spirit rather than solely with one's understanding.

> I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding,
>
> 1 Corinthians 14:18, 19

Paul is encouraging the private devotional usage of tongues and discouraging the public outbursts. I pray often in tongues. It's an important part of my prayer life because I need to be built up, because I get discouraged, because I don't know how to pray, because I'm limited in my expression. As I pray in the Spirit, I am free to pray from my innermost being. Joshua was instructed to make sharp knives to cut away the flesh. Sharper than any two-edged sword, the Word of God is the sharpest knife I know (Hebrews 4:12). Therefore, I encourage you to unsheathe the sharp knife of the Word and, with an open mind and heart, study the Word and see if the Lord confirms these things in your heart.

> **Joshua 5:10, 11**
> **And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho. And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day.**

The first time the Israelites celebrated Passover was forty years earlier. Here, after the flesh had been dealt with through circumcision, they celebrate it again. I have noticed that the person who is moving in the Spirit finds himself drawn to the New Testament Passover—the Lord's Table of Communion. I have also noticed that when I'm in the wilderness, I just don't seem to find the time or expend the energy to come to Communion. But when I'm walking in the Spirit, I find myself at the Table once again.

When is the last time you sought the Lord, saying, "I need to eat and drink of You"? If you make your way to the Lord's Table, even though you, like the

children of Israel, might be surrounded by enemies, trials, and problems, you'll find yourself participating in the Spirit-filled life once again.

Joshua 5:12
And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

It is interesting to me that it was in the Promised Land, a picture of the Spirit-filled life, that the miracle of manna ceased. If there was ever going to be manna from heaven, I would think it would be when we're Spirit-filled, when we're moving in the arena of the miraculous, when we have the anointing of the Holy Ghost. But this passage tells me differently, for when the Israelites were in the wilderness—which speaks of carnality and dryness—miracles abounded. But now that they're in the Promised Land, the manna stops.

In the Azusa Street Revival of the early 1900s, during which there was a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the leader of the movement prophesied that three things would cause the movement of the Spirit to be quenched: more attention given to the Holy Spirit than to Jesus Christ, more attention given to praise than to prayer, and more attention given to the gifts of the Spirit than the fruit of the Spirit.

When they were released from Egypt and as they wandered in the wilderness, the children of Israel saw more signs and wonders than any other group of people in history. Yet it was unbelief that kept them from entering the Promised Land (Hebrews 3:19) because faith doesn't come through seeing miracles. It comes from hearing the Word. Therefore, the new generation would eat the formidable fruit produced in the land of God's promise rather than the manna of the miraculous.

Joshua 5:13 (a)

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes . . .

Throughout the Word, when men find themselves at a crossroads, we see them lifting up their eyes (Genesis 13:10, 18:2, 24:63; Numbers 24:2; 1 Chronicles 21:16; Daniel 10:5). In this case, Jericho is looming over Joshua. It's a formidable problem, a massive, walled city. Yet he didn't look down, hide out, or hole up. He lifted his eyes.

Joshua 5:13 (b)
. . . and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand . . .

As we will see, this Man is none other than a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. Because Joshua was on the verge of battle, the Lord appeared to him as a man of war. On the plains of Mamre, the Lord appeared to Abraham as a traveler because Abraham was a pilgrim (Genesis 18). So we need to watch for the Lord to appear to us through the circumstances and people around us.

Joshua 5:13 (c), 14 (a)
. . . and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come . . .

"Are you for us or against us?" Joshua asked. But the Lord simply answered, "No," for the issue wasn't whose side the Lord was on. It was whose side Joshua was on.

Joshua 5:14 (b)
. . . And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship . . .

We know from this verse that the man of war was not an angel because angels do not accept worship (Revelation 19:10; 22:8)

Joshua 5:14 (c), 15

. . . and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the LORD's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.

When the Lord appeared to Moses, He said, "Take off your shoes. The ground you're standing on is holy" (see Exodus 3:5). Therefore, in telling Joshua to loose his shoe, the Lord was essentially saying, "As I was with Moses, so I am with you. Even though there's a giant difficulty called Jericho looming over you, I'm with you as your Captain."



Joshua 6:1–4 (a)

6 **Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in. And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour. And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests . . .**

As the Captain of the Lord's host, Jesus Himself, outlined the strategy of how the Israelites were to conquer the city of Jericho, Joshua must have grown more confused with each step. Here we see the priests were to take part in the operation. Yet according to the law, the priests were exempt from all military duty in order to devote themselves to serving in the tabernacle and, later on, in the temple.

Joshua 6:4 (b)

. . . shall bear before the ark. . . .

The ark of the covenant was never to be taken into battle. In fact, the one time the Israelites tried it, not only were they defeated, but the ark was captured (1 Samuel 4—5).

Joshua 6:4 (c)
. . . seven trumpets of rams' horns . . .

Numbers 10 states specifically that it wasn't rams' horns that were to be used in battle but two silver trumpets.

Joshua 6:4 (d)
. . . and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets.

According to the Law, there was to be no traveling on the Sabbath. But the Israelites were here commanded to travel around the city of Jericho seven times more, seven times farther than they had on any of the previous six days.

Joshua 6:5
And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.

The actual confrontation with Jericho was to take place on the seventh day, the day of rest, the Sabbath. So devoted to keeping the Sabbath were the Jews that throughout history, many atrocities were committed against Jewish soldiers on the Sabbath because their enemies knew they wouldn't fight back.

At Moses' side when the Law was given, Joshua was now being to told to violate it. Why? I believe the answer lies in the Book of Zechariah . . .

> Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.
>
> Zechariah 14:3

In this prophecy concerning Jesus' Second Coming and the battle of Armageddon, Zechariah says Jesus will fight like He did before. The question is, when did Jesus fight before? Read the Gospels and you'll never see Jesus fighting. You never see Him with a drawn sword. You'll never see

Him leading the charge. He's the Prince of peace. So when did He fight? Here in Joshua 5. You see, as Captain of the host of the Lord, Jesus was the One who led the Israelites around the walls of Jericho once each day for six days. Jesus was the One who compassed the city with them seven times on the Sabbath. Jesus was the One who told Joshua to shout and the walls would come down. Joshua was along for the ride. Jesus was the One who led the way.

And because Jesus was in the midst of His people physically, the rules and regulations of the Law were no longer necessary.

> Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.
>
> Colossians 2:16, 17

The priests, the ark, and the rams' horns that were all part of the procession around the walls of Jericho all point to Jesus. Even the Sabbath on which the Israelites marched points to Jesus, for He is our Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4).

> *It's Valentines Day. You walk in your house and see your wife hugging and kissing your picture. "Surprise!" you say as you hold out candy and roses, expecting her to run towards you. But if she remains more infatuated with your picture than with you, you would say, "Why are you so wrapped up with the picture, when the one it portrays is right here?"*

When Jesus was on the scene, of Joshua's day He would say, "I am the fulfillment of the Sabbath and of the silver trumpets. I am the fulfillment of the priesthood and of the ark of the covenant. They're just pictures. Focus on Me."

I wonder how many of us are focused on rules, regulations and religion even in the Promised Land of the Spirit-filled life. I wonder how many of us subconsciously say, "It's Sunday. That's a holy day. I'm off to church. It's morning. I'm disciplined. It's time for devotions."

To us, Jesus would say, "Rules, regulations, and rituals are only necessary if I'm not present. But if I'm present, those things are replaced by relationship with Me."

Gang, we know more than the early church knew about typology and illustrations. The question is, Do we know who they knew? They knew Jesus. And they responded to His leading moment by moment. We, too, will be free from religion and predictability, from legalism and traditions, from habits, ruts, and routines to the degree that we realize that the Captain of the host of the Lord, the Captain of our salvation, Jesus Himself is in our midst.



***For topical study of Joshua 5:13—6:5 entitled "The Wall Will Fall!" turn to page* 656.**

Joshua 6:6–15

And Joshua the son of Nun called the priests, and said unto them, Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD. And he said unto the people, Pass on, and compass the city, and let him that is armed pass on before the ark of the LORD. And it came to pass, when Joshua had spoken unto the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns passed on before the LORD, and blew with the trumpets: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD followed them. And the armed men went before the priests that blew with the trumpets, and the rereward came after the ark, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets. And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout. So the ark of the LORD compassed the city, going about it once: and they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp. And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. And seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD went on continually, and blew

with the trumpets: and the armed men went before them; but the rereward came after the ark of the LORD, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets. And the second day they compassed the city once, and returned into the camp: so they did six days. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner seven times: only on that day they compassed the city seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.

As His people marched around the walls of Jericho, God prepared them in several ways. First, He gave them a realization of the impossibility of their situation. The first time the Israelites circled the city, the walls must have looked huge. And they must have looked bigger and more foreboding with each successive trip. Thus, in their repeated journeys around the Jericho, the Lord was showing His people that victory would not come through their might nor through their power, but only by His Spirit (Zechariah 4:6).

Right now there might be a huge wall between you and a family member, neighbor or fellow believer. God will have you go around it again and again until you finally say, "I can't manipulate the situation. I can't solve the problem. I can't do a thing about this, Lord. Only You can solve this." And when at last you come to this realization, I promise you that in due season, He will do something earth-shattering. Oh, it might take six months or even six years—but there will come a time when you'll say, "It was the Lord who brought that wall down. It wasn't my cleverness or my ingenuity because as I went in circles day after week after month, it just got thicker and higher."

Secondly, as His people circled the walls of Jericho, God taught them the importance of patience. Hebrews 6:12 says that it is through faith and patience that His promises are obtained. Do you have faith? Great. God wants you to have patience, too. You see, His agenda is bigger than just knocking down walls. His purpose is to develop patience in us in order that we might be perfect, lacking nothing (James 1:4).

Thirdly, as His people circled the walls of Jericho, God taught them discipline. His job was to work, theirs to be absolutely silent. If I can't control my tongue, I won't conquer the enemy. My tongue will get me in big trouble. So will yours (James 3:5, 6). Therefore, it is the wise man or woman who silently—without complaint or opinion—gives God time and room to work.

God's strategy for conquering Jericho served not only to prepare the children of Israel but to provide a witness to the people of Jericho. I believe that the people walking in quietness and tranquility, the ark of the covenant, the trumpets playing were all to be a witness to the inhabitants of Jericho. According to Rahab, their hearts were already melted. Thus, I believe God was giving them one last opportunity to come to Him. While His people were in Egypt, God gave the inhabitants of Canaan four hundred years to repent. Then He gave them forty more years while His people wandered in the wilderness. Here, He gives them six more days as they watched His children walk in devotion and order.

What will impress around you? Seeing you walk patiently and quietly, neither panicking nor complaining, but simply walking under the authority of your Captain. Seeing the way your homes, marriages, and lives are ordered in this march towards heaven is a witness to the people of our own Jerichos.

Joshua 6:17–25

And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD. So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. And they

utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword. But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her. And the young men that were spies went in, and brought Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel. And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD. And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

Because it was the wall of Jericho that fell, the wall would have been the most dangerous place to live—unless you knew God. Rahab's house was part of the wall of Jericho (Joshua 2:15). Yet because she knew God, the most dangerous place in the city was, for her, the safest place to be. When the wall fell, the scarlet cord hanging from Rahab's window was hardly necessary to identify Rahab's house, for evidently hers was the only part of the wall left standing. But the scarlet cord was an outward sign of an inward belief. It wasn't necessary for salvation, but was an indication of what was taking place in Rahab's heart. The same is true of baptism. We don't need to be baptized to be saved. But it is an outward sign to others of our faith in the One who died and rose for us, in the One who rescued us from the walls of sin surrounding us.

Joshua 6:26, 27
And Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the LORD, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it. So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country.

He who tried to rebuild the walls of Jericho would pay a steep price. His oldest and youngest son would die. In 1 Kings 16, we read of a man named Hiel who did this. He rebuilt Jericho—but his oldest and youngest son died in the process.

If God knocks down a wall between you and another and you say, "Maybe I shouldn't be so forgiving. Maybe I'm being taken advantage of," there will be no shortage of people to hand you all the bricks and mortar you need to rebuild the wall. But you'll pay a terrible price. Don't undo what God has done. Don't harden your heart. Don't let your soul become like concrete. Instead, with the wall flat on the ground, enter into fresh fellowship with the One from whom, by God's grace and mercy, you are no longer estranged.

THE WALL WILL FALL!

A Topical Study of JOSHUA 5:13—6:5

At long last the children of Israel had entered the Land of Promise, the Land that flowed with milk and honey, the Land that speaks to you and me of the Spirit-filled abundant life. To enter into the heart of the Land, however, they would have to conquer Jericho. And with Jericho's walls seemingly absolutely impregnable, the situation looked humanly impossible.

Maybe you can relate to Joshua and the people of Israel. You've been set free from Egypt and baptized in the Spirit. But looking before you is a wall, a fortress, a barrier between you and someone else that is keeping you from going all the way into the heart of the Land of Promise. As a father, it might be between you and your junior high son. As a mother, it might be between you and your teenage daughter. As a husband or wife, it might be between you and your spouse. As a believer, it might be between you and a brother or sister in the Lord.

In the life of Joshua, I believe we see three elements that deal directly with the walls of separation that can keep us from the heart of the Promised Land . . .

Submission to the Lord

As Joshua scoped out the city of Jericho, a Man with a sword in His hand appeared to him. “Are You for us or for our enemies?” Joshua asked. “Which side are You on?”

But as Captain of the host of the Lord, the issue wasn’t whose side He was on. It was whose side Joshua was on.

If we’re to see walls flattened, the first thing we have to realize is that it’s not “us against them.” When there are walls or barriers in a marriage, a family, or a church, the issue will inevitably become one of us against them, the good guys vs. the bad guys.

“Whose side are You on, Lord?” we ask, sure that He will answer that He is on ours.

But when He simply answers, “No,” wise is the man or woman who does what Joshua did, who bows the knee and changes the question to, “What saith my Lord to His servant?”

Before he understood who he was talking to, perhaps it was rather gruffly that General Joshua asked, “Whose side are you on?” But once he realized who it was, he no longer gave orders. He simply reported for duty. And that’s the way prayer ought always to be. We’re re-learning that God always gives His best to those who leave the choice to Him.

I used to think that prayer in faith meant I was to give the plan to the Lord, stand on it in faith, and expect it to come about. I’ve since learned, however, that because we all see through a glass only darkly at best (1 Corinthians 13:12), I would be a fool to order the Lord around. The Bible says to have faith in God. He sees things we don’t see. So we ask in faith. We share our thoughts with the Lord in humility and transparence. But we leave the choice and results with the One who sees the end from the beginning, who sees all things clearly.

Waiting for the Lord

For six days, the congregation of Israel marched around the walls of the city of Jericho. God has you and me go round and round in circles until finally we get dizzy and realize the wall is too high, the breach too great, the estrangement too severe. Although we do everything we know how to do, the wall only gets higher. Before there can be a moment of the miraculous, there must be a lengthy season of helplessness.

Perhaps in wanting to see a relationship restored or a wall removed, you've tried everything. But finally you get to a place where you say, "I can't go around this circle again. I've tried everything but nothing's working. Lord, it will have to be You who brings this wall down." Some may say it's ludicrous to just wait. But the truth is, there's nothing we can do until God moves in and does what only He can.

Believing in the Lord

When their circling was complete, the Israelites were not to point, not to doubt, but to shout. While I'm waiting for God to flatten the walls in my life, I'm not to wring my hands in anxiety. I'm to clap them in expectancy (Psalm 47:1).

Notice that the Israelites were commanded to shout before the walls fell. Not when they fell, not after they fell, the children of Israel shorted *before* they fell. Thus, theirs was an expression of anticipation, a proclamation of faith.

Let's join their ranks. Let's be those who have free access to the heart of all that God has for us as we believe in Him, wait for Him and submit to Him —for that's where the walls begin to fall.



7

Joshua 7:1 (a)
But . . .

As a picture of the Spirit-filled life, it should not surprise us to find the word "but" in our text—for just as the children of Israel are about to experience defeat following their glorious victory at Jericho, we can experience defeat even in the Spirit-filled life. How? By grieving or quenching the Spirit.

You see, just as there are three relationships a person can have with the Spirit, there are three negative responses a person can make towards the Spirit. Every person who has ever lived has had the experience of the Holy Spirit being *with* him as He comes to every man and whispers the truth in his ear about his need for God. If a person continues to resist the Spirit, however, He will eventually go His way, leaving that individual stuck in his lost condition. This is called the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31).

But when a man says yes to the Spirit and asks Jesus to be his Savior, he moves into the second relationship with the Spirit. That is, the Spirit comes

in him (John 20:22). However, even though a believer has the Spirit within him, he can grieve the Spirit by allowing sin, malice and evil speaking to creep into his life (Ephesians 4:30, 31).

The third relationship with the Spirit is the "coming upon" of the Spirit to empower a person for service (Acts 1:8). Yet in this relationship the Spirit can be quenched. That is, a person can say, "I'm uncomfortable with prophecy, speaking in tongues, or gifts of healing. Give me a good solid Bible study and a hymn or two, and that will be fine for me." And while the Spirit will still be in him, the empowering will be greatly diminished (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

Here in Joshua 7, we will see both the grieving of the Spirit and the quenching of the Spirit. And because the same can be true of us, this chapter has much to say to us . . .

Joshua 7:1 (b)
. . . the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing . . .

In chapter 6, we saw how God miraculously gave the city of Jericho to the people of Israel. But, although they would be able to keep the spoil of the subsequent cities they would conquer, they were to take nothing from Jericho because the first of everything belongs to the Lord.

Joshua 7:1 (c)
. . . for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the an ger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel.

The entire nation felt the consequences of one man's sin because, in the Spirit, we are one body (1 Corinthians 12:20). If I shoplift, my whole body goes to jail—not just my hand. When one person in our fellowship family strays, it affects the whole body of believers. Thus, because Achan sinned, God was grieved with the entire congregation.

Joshua 7:2

And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth-aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai.

Its name literally meaning "heap," *Ai* was a little town that appeared to be no problem for the people of Israel in their conquest of the Promised Land.

Joshua 7:3, 4 (a)
And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few. So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men . . .

Although it was Achan's sin that grieved the Spirit, it was Joshua's failure to seek the Lord before going into battle that quenched the Spirit.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.

Numbers 27:18–21

Instruction for crossing the Jordan had been given to Joshua by divine revelation (Joshua 3). Instruction for dealing with the flesh once they were in the Promised Land had been given to Joshua by divine revelation (Joshua 5). Instruction for taking Jericho had been given to Joshua by divine revelation (Joshua 6). In other words, all along the way, Joshua had been seeking the Lord. But when he thought he could handle Ai by himself, the Spirit was quenched.

Paul put it this way when he asked the Galatians, "Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3) And the same can be true of us.

Although we were once open to the mystery and intimacy of God's Word specifically and personally given to us, a "Joshua chapter 7" mentality can kick in which causes us to say, "I can handle this little problem with my own energy, insight and ability. After all, it's just Ai." And as a result, the Spirit is quenched.

Joshua 7:4 (b)–6
. . . and they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water. And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads.

The combination of Joshua's sin which quenched the Spirit and Achan's sin which grieved the Spirit led to the defeat of a nation that was previously invincible. And the same will be the result in our lives.

Joshua 7:7–9
And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?

Just as Joshua questioned God, our Greater than Joshua, Jesus Himself, questioned His Father when He who knew no sin became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Jesus cried as the Father turned His back on the Son in the only time in eternity that

there was estrangement between them (Matthew 27:46). The only time Jesus ever addressed His Father as "my God" was when there was distance and separation because of our sin.

Joshua 7:10
And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?

"Don't lay with your face down," the Lord said to Joshua. "Instead, face up to some issues."

Joshua 7:11, 12
Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.

Sin results in a loss of God's power and the sense of His presence. It strangles and stifles the abundant life. It paralyzes and immobilizes ministry and service. It pulls us down, tears us up, wipes us out.

Joshua 7:13
Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow: for thus saith the LORD God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you.

"Why aren't things working out? Why aren't things opening up? Why aren't things coming to pass?," we cry. And the Lord would say, "It is because I love you too much to let you continue on in your sin which will destroy you. Therefore, I'm holding back My provision and presence, My

power and blessing not because I'm mad at you, but because I grieve for you."

Joshua 7:14, 15
In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, that the tribe which the LORD taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which the LORD shall take shall come by households; and the household which the LORD shall take shall come man by man. And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel.

Sometimes I get confused when I hear conflicting stories about a single situation. And sometimes, even after a great length of time passes, I just can't get to the bottom of it. But God does. Whether it's here in Joshua 7 or in Acts 5 concerning Ananias and Sapphira, God works.

There can be a tendency for us to think that, like Achan, we have our sin covered. God, however says otherwise. "Be sure your sin will find you out," He declares (Numbers 32:23). Therefore, we would be a wise group of people to make right those situations we think we have hidden. For if we choose to do that, we will diminish what the repercussions would otherwise have been when God brings about full disclosure. Conversely, if you've been lied about or accused wrongly, know that God is on the throne and in control. And in due season, by divine revelation, He will bring to light the truth of the situation.

Joshua 7:16–19
So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken: And he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken: And he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I

pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me.

Joshua, a picture of Jesus, didn't call Achan an idiot. He called him his son. And such is the picture of the grieving of the Spirit.

Joshua 7:20, 21 (a)
And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils. . . .

In referring to the garment and the silver as spoils, Achan is subtly justifying his sin. After all, spoils were the rightful property of conquering armies. The problem is, Achan didn't take spoils. He took that which was devoted to God. And whenever we refer to adultery as an affair, drunkenness as alcoholism, or murmuring as melancholy, we do the same thing.

Joshua 7:21 (b)
. . . a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.

Achan's sin began when he saw. Then he coveted. Then he took. Then he hid. The longer I observe spiritual life, the more I'm convinced that the eye is the portal of the devil (Psalm 101:3) and the ear is the portal of the Spirit (Romans 10:17). Our culture is increasingly enamored with and drawn to the things of the eyes. As a result, we can't sit very long for the teaching of the Word. We don't want to just hear a message. We want a dramatic presentation. But because faith is the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1), we need to be people who learn to listen.

Joshua 7:22–25
So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it. And they

took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD. And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? The LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones.

Whenever we sin and cover it up, other people are made to ache as well.

Joshua 7:26
And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, the valley of Achor, unto this day.

Although *Achor* means "Trouble," Hosea tells us the valley of Achor shall be a door of hope (2:15). The trouble that Achan brought upon himself, his family, and his nation would only truly be dealt with by what Jesus, the Door of John 10:7, would do in being burned with the fire of God's wrath on the Cross and "stoned" as the great stone was placed in front of His tomb. Isaiah 65 tells us the flock shall lie down in the valley of Achor. That's what God can do.

If we come clean and say, "Lord, I've erred. But You took the blame and the heat and the pain on my behalf," although we'll still feel the repercussions of our sin, will be at peace in hope.

In referring to the Tribulation as the time of Jacob's trouble, Jeremiah uses the word *achor* (Jeremiah 30:7). It's a fitting word indeed for in the Tribulation, Israel will be stoned with one hundred-pound hailstones and burned in the fire of persecution. But even this will be a door of hope because in the midst of their difficulty, the people of Israel will be singled out and shown the truth. All of Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26). And what a grand and glorious day that will be.



8 Joshua 8:1
And the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the peo ple of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land:

Whereas chapter 7 began with a big "but," chapter 8 begins with a grand "and." We can grieve the Spirit by sin. We can quench the Spirit when we fail to wait on the Lord to receive direction. But the Lord doesn't give up. There's always an "and." Once Achan's sin was exposed, the Lord said, "Don't be dismayed. I'm giving you the victory."

The successful person in life is the one who gets up one more time than he or she is knocked down. Too many Christians, when they are dealt a blow, lay in the dust day after day and don't get up. "Forgetting the things which lie behind, I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" Paul declared (Philippians 3:13, 14). How could Paul accomplish what he did? By forgetting that which was behind and looking ahead instead.

Joshua 8:2 (a)
And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves . . .

In Jericho, the first city conquered, the Israelites weren't to take anything. But here they were to spoil the city of Ai. Therefore, if Achan had been just a little more patient, the spoils of Ai would have been his. If we'll just wait, God will bless us exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

Josh 8: 2 (b), 3 (a)
. . . lay thee an ambush for the city behind it. So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai: and Joshua chose out

thirty thousand mighty men of valour . . .

Two or three thousand men went out to fight Ai the first time. This time, 30,000 are going. And they are only the ambush team.

Joshua 8:3 (b)–6
. . . and sent them away by night. And he commanded them, saying, Behold, ye shall lie in wait against the city, even behind the city: go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready: And I, and all the people that are with me, will approach unto the city: and it shall come to pass, when they come out against us, as at the first, that we will flee before them, (For they will come out after us) till we have drawn them from the city; for they will say, They flee before us, as at the first: therefore we will flee before them.

Not realizing the Israelites had moved from chapter 7 to chapter 8, the men of Ai would chase them with confidence.

Joshua 8:7, 8 (a)
Then ye shall rise up from the ambush, and seize upon the city: for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand. And it shall be, when ye have taken the city, that ye shall set the city on fire . . .

May this be true of us. May our cities be taken and set on fire for Jesus Christ.

Joshua 8:8 (b)
. . . according to the commandment of the LORD shall ye do. See, I have commanded you.

With 30,000 valiant men lying in wait, the rest of the army would attack with a frontal assault. Then they would turn around and seemingly run for their lives. The men of Ai would pour out and the ambush team would rush in, take the city, and burn it to the ground. This being a cowardly way to fight, it's as if God said, "You were so proud and sure of yourselves last time

around. This time, you'll win through a coward's strategy so that you won't be so arrogant and sure of yourselves."

Jericho was taken by day. Ai was to be taken at night. At Jericho, the Israelites were united. At Ai, they were divided into two companies. The battle of Jericho was a marvelous miracle. Ai was a military maneuver. At Jericho, the Israelites simply had to watch. At Ai, they were to work. With regard to the Spirit-filled life, we cannot box in what God desires to do in our lives concerning the battles that come to us. The Spirit-filled life means I walk in the Spirit hour by hour, day by day, saying, "Lord what do You want to do today?" rather than expecting Him to repeat that which He did yesterday.

Joshua 8:9–12
Joshua therefore sent them forth: and they went to lie in ambush, and abode between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai: but Joshua lodged that night among the people. And Joshua rose up early in the morning, and numbered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. And all the people, even the people of war that were with him, went up, and drew nigh, and came before the city, and pitched on the north side of Ai: now there was a valley between them and Ai. And he took about five thousand men, and set them to lie in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city.

The job of the 5,000 men positioned between Ai and Bethel five miles away was to cut off the escape route from Ai.

Joshua 8:13–17
And when they had set the people, even all the host that was on the north of the city, and their liers in wait on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley. And it came to pass, when the king of Ai saw it, that they hasted and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at a time appointed, before the plain; but he wist not that there were liers in ambush against him behind the city. And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten

before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. And all the people that were in Ai were called together to pursue after them: and they pursued after Joshua, and were drawn away from the city. And there was not a man left in Ai or Bethel, that went not out after Israel: and they left the city open, and pursued after Israel.

Running outside the city, the men of Ai thought they had won because Joshua and the men of Israel seemed to be beaten. Satan also thought he was victorious when Jesus was beaten and nailed to the Cross outside the city. I believe every demon from hell was at the foot of the Cross hissing, "He's beaten! We won!"

Joshua 8:18–20 (a)
And the LORD said unto Joshua, Stretch out the spear that is in thy hand toward Ai; for I will give it into thine hand. And Joshua stretched out the spear that he had in his hand toward the city. And the ambush arose quickly out of their place, and they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand: and they entered into the city, and took it, and hasted and set the city on fire. And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and, behold, the smoke of the city ascended up to heaven, and they had no power . . .

Although a spear was thrust seemingly victoriously into Jesus' side, what a shock it must have been to Satan and the hordes of hell when, three days later, they realized their plan had backfired.

Joshua 8:20 (b), 21
. . . to flee this way or that way: and the people that fled to the wilderness turned back upon the pursuers. And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city, and that the smoke of the city ascended, then they turned again, and slew the men of Ai.

When the men of Ai turned around to see 30,000 Israelites behind them, they knew they were in big trouble. Satan knows that, too. That's why he

causes all the problems he can for you and me.

> *When you're standing by the edge of a pool, eating a hamburger, and you see a group of guys walking ominously towards you, you know you're going for a swim. But you also know you're going to take as many as you can with you. To that end, you grab arms and legs and shirts and whatever else you can.*

That's what Satan is doing. He knows he's doomed. He knows he's headed for the lake of fire. And, determined to take as many as he can with him, he seeks to neutralize God's saints.

> **Joshua 8:22–26**
> **And the other issued out of the city against them; so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side: and they smote them, so that they let none of them remain or escape. And the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua. And it came to pass, when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness wherein they chased them, and when they were all fallen on the edge of the sword, until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned unto Ai, and smote it with the edge of the sword. And so it was, that all that fell that day, both of men and women, were twelve thousand, even all the men of Ai. For Joshua drew not his hand back, wherewith he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.**

Here, Joshua follows the example Moses set at Rephidim when he held up his staff until Joshua, a young man at that time, was victorious against the Amalekites (Exodus 17).



***For topical study of Joshua 8:18–26 entitled "The Point Is Passion," turn to page* 664.**

Joshua 8:27, 28
Only the cattle and the spoil of that city Israel took for a prey unto themselves, according unto the word of the LORD which he commanded Joshua. And Joshua burnt Ai, and made it an heap for ever, even a desolation unto this day.

Satan will be cast into the lake of fire with his henchmen where they will burn forever.

Joshua 8:29
And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until eventide: and as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his carcase down from the tree, and cast it at the entering of the gate of the city, and raise thereon a great heap of stones, that remaineth unto this day.

Deuteronomy 21:22, 23 says everyone that hangs on a tree is cursed. In Galatians 3:13, Paul says this speaks of Jesus, who hung on a tree as He who knew no sin was made sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). Thus, we see in this snapshot that it is not only Joshua who pictures Jesus, but the king of Ai does as well because only Jesus loved us so much that He would become cursed for us and placed in a tomb even as the king of Ai was placed under a heap of stones.

Joshua 8:30 (a)
Then . . .

The Israelites lost the battle at Ai the first time. But now the city is theirs because our God is the God of the second chance.

Joshua 8:30 (b)
. . . Joshua built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel in mount Ebal,

Located in the present-day west bank of Israel, Mt. Ebal is the mountain on which the cursings of Deuteronomy 27 were repeated by half of the nation

of Israel while the other half repeated the blessings five hundred yards away on Mt. Gerazim. Why was it Mt. Ebal upon which Joshua built an altar? Because the only way our lives can be "altared" is through the Cross of Calvary upon which Jesus sacrificed His life to pay for the curse of our sin.

Joshua 8:31
As Moses the servant of the LORD commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings.

This altar was to be very simple because the focus was not to be on man's artistic ability, skill, or craftsmanship but upon the sacrifice on the altar.

Joshua 8:32
And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel.

Along with the altar on the mount of cursing, there was to be a big monument upon which the Law of Moses was written. The Book of Joshua portraying the Spirit-filled life, the picture here says that the key to living in the Spirit successfully is to heed the Law of God seriously.

Joshua 8:33, 34
And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, as well the stranger, as he that was born among them; half of them over against mount Gerizim, and half of them over against mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel. And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law.

The key to having a continued successful run against the enemy is to hear and heed the Word. How shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed to the Word (Psalm 119:9).

Joshua 8:35
There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them.

At the beginning of their conquest of the Promised Land, all of Israel and those in their company stopped to hear the Word. Have your kids heard the Word? The tremendous task before us is to read and discuss the Word of God with our kids over and over, day after day. "We don't have time," you might say. "There are battles to fight, wars to win, Little League games to play, staff meetings to attend." Joshua could have easily said the same thing. But he realized that if we're not talking to our kids about the Word of God, then we're missing the mark completely.

And the stakes are getting higher because we're living in the last days. Dark will get darker and the dangers will become greater. Mom and Dad, if you care about your son or daughter, you will take this responsibility seriously. It is a big mistake to assume our kids know the Word. That's why Joshua said, "I know you're anxious to conquer the land. I know you can't wait to drive out the enemy so you can settle in, grow your crops, and enjoy your family. But we're stopping here and now to go over the Word again."

The Word will be plastered on the wall of your soul and imprinted in your mind if you will take the time to review it time after time after time.

THE POINT IS PASSION

A Topical Study of JOSHUA 8:18–26

"The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," James declared (5:16). God is not interested in mindless chatter, religious repetition, or lazy liturgy. What our Father is after is people who pray passionately, thoughtfully, and expectantly.

I think of Abraham. When God told him that Sodom was about to be destroyed, Abraham engaged in a passionate conversation with God. "Will not the judge of all the earth do righteously? Surely You'll not destroy the city if there are fifty righteous people in the city," he said.

And God said, "If there are fifty righteous people, I won't."

Abraham came back and said, "If there are forty-five righteous people in the city, surely You'll not destroy it, will You?"

"No," said God.

"What about forty?" countered Abraham. "Thirty, twenty, ten?"

"Even if there are ten righteous men, I won't destroy the city," God replied.

Oh, the audacity, the boldness of Abraham to bargain with God. There was dialogue and desperation, intensity and sincerity. Abraham's relationship with God wasn't based on religion, morning devotions, or a church session. It was based on passion. And as a result, God called him His friend (James 2:23).

I think of Abraham's grandson, Jacob. In his own hour of need, Jacob grabbed God and said, "I'm not going to let You go until You bless me." And there they were, rolling in the dirt by the brook Jabok, wrestling all night long. When morning broke, Jacob was broken as well. But the Lord said, "You've prevailed. And My blessing is upon you" (Genesis 32).

I think of Elijah. When a drought gripped the land and drained life from crop, cattle, and man, Elijah put his head between his knees and prayed not once, twice, or three times but seven times. In assuming the birthing position

of the day, Elijah prayed and prayed until he birthed what God desired to do (1 Kings 18).

I think of Elisha. "The Syrians are threatening you and your kingdom," he said to Joash. "Take these arrows out of the quiver and smite them on the ground. They are symbolic of the Lord's deliverance and your victory over Syria." Joash took the arrows and tapped them three times. After all, how could smiting arrows bring about victory? But Elisha said, "Joash, because you only tapped the arrow three times and didn't smite it, your victory over the Syrians will only be partial rather than the total victory God intended for you" (2 Kings 13).

We can think of story after story concerning people of passion who pray with passion—friends of God like Abraham or prophets who birth answers like Elijah. And Joshua is in their company. "I've given Ai into your hands. Now take the spear and hold it up in the air," the Lord said to Joshua. And Joshua held the spear in the air and kept it there until he utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. He prevailed in prayer and held up the spear not only at the beginning of the battle but all the way through to the end.

Where did he get this idea? I suggest it was forty years earlier at Rephidim. The Amalekites were fighting the Israelites. And Moses said to Joshua, "You lead the troops in the valley. I'll go to the mountain and pray." Moses held high the rod of God. And as he held it up, Joshua and the troops were victorious. But when his hands grew weary and the rod began to fall, the Amalekites gained the upper hand. Moses lifted his hands once again, and Israel took the lead. The battle seesawed back and forth until Aaron and Hur held up Moses' hands until the victory was completely secure for the Israelites.

"Write this scene in a book," God said to Moses. "And rehearse it in the ears of Joshua so that he will know that the reason for his victory in the valley was not due to his strategy or ability but rather because there was intercession and prayer on the mountain."

A lot of us have lost our passion for God. Devotions have become drowsy. Prayer, if we bother, is routine and repetitious chatter. But here's the good news: God cares so passionately about you and me that He will not allow us to remain in a state of passionless religiosity.

C. S. Lewis nailed it when he said that God whispers to us in our pleasure, but shouts to us in our pain. Pain and passion walk hand in hand. If you're married, you understand this. Things get routine, mundane, boring. But when she says something she ought not to, or when he does something he ought not to, there's pain. Feelings are released. Frustrations are vented. Tears flow. But it all leads to passion as the couple is engaged once again.

"I want you either hot or cold," says the Lord (see Revelation 3:16). Yes, you have morning devotions and evening prayer. But there's no smiting of the arrow, no holding up of the spear throughout the whole day, no putting your head between your knees until there's death, drought, or the specter of a Syrian attack. God will not let you reside in a passionless state with Him indefinitely. He will send you pain.

The reason Joshua held up his spear is because he was tired of seeing his friends dead and defeated. *I can't afford this any more,* he must have thought. *The stakes are high, so I will stand here. I will prevail.* And he did.

G. Campbell Morgan said that faith answers questions and is, therefore, out of business when no question is asked. If there are no questions, there is no need for faith. And when do questions arise? When I'm going through difficulty and pain. As Christians, we can have a unique outlook on pain and setbacks if we see them as the fuel of passion.

Why does God desire passion? Because He knows that from passion comes intimacy. And intimacy brings transformation as we are changed from Jacob to Israel, from one who is self-sufficient to one governed by God.

If there has been an absence of passion in your life, expect pain. And when it comes, realize it's not punishment, but a loving Father saying, "I miss you. And you're missing out on being one with Me."

"I'm not going to let go," Joshua said. "I've seen pain. I've seen the death of my comrades in battle. I won't put the spear down. I won't pull it back until the victory is won." That's passion. That's the effectual, fervent prayer that births God's work in our lives.



9 Joshua 9:1–3

And it came to pass, when all the kings which were on this side

Jordan, in the hills, and in the valleys, and in all the coasts of the great sea over against Lebanon, the Hittite, and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, heard thereof; That they gathered themselves together, to fight with Joshua and with Israel, with one accord. And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai,

In their conquest of the Promised Land, the Israelites took no prisoners because God declared to Joshua that all of the inhabitants of the land of the Canaanites were to be killed—every woman, man, boy, and girl.

"What kind of God would order the extermination of an entire group of people?" many say. "That sounds terribly cruel and brutal." But actually, it's quite merciful. You see, God had given the Canaanites four hundred years to repent from their terrible debauchery and depravity. Theirs was a very evil civilization. Yet God was patient with them and gave them four centuries to repent and get right. But they wouldn't. Therefore, God was as justified in doing what He did as I would be in killing a rabid dog in my house—for in killing him, not only would I spare him further pain, but would save my own kids in the process. As a father, I have no other choice than to protect my children. So, too, in killing people who were already dying in their own sin, God was putting them out of their misery and protecting His own children in the process.

Joshua 9:4 (a)
They did work wilily . . .

The base of the word "wilily" appears in Ephesians 6:11, where Paul instructs the Ephesians to put on the whole armor of God that they would be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. In the war he wages against us, Satan is wily indeed, employing trickery and deception at every turn.

Joshua 9:4 (b)–13
. . . and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up; And old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry

and mouldy. And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country: now therefore make ye a league with us. And the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make a league with you? And they said unto Joshua, We are thy servants. And Joshua said unto them, Who are ye? and from whence come ye? And they said unto him, From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the LORD thy God: for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt, And all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites, that were beyond Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, which was at Ashtaroth. Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spake to us, saying, Take victuals with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say unto them, We are your servants: therefore now make ye a league with us. This our bread we took hot for our provision out of our houses on the day we came forth to go unto you; but now, behold, it is dry, and it is mouldy: And these bottles of wine, which we filled, were new; and, behold, they be rent: and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the very long journey.

"We are from a far country," said the men of Gibeon. "Our wineskins are torn and our bread is moldy even though they were fresh when we began our journey. We're no threat to you. So let's make a treaty."

Joshua 9:14, 15
And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD. And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them.

Rather than taking this matter to the Lord, Joshua was taken in by the deception of the Gibeonites.

Joshua 9:16–20

And it came to pass at the end of three days after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they were their neighbours, and that they dwelt among them. And the children of Israel journeyed, and came unto their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, and Chephirah, and Beeroth, and Kirjath-jearim. And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation murmured against the princes. But all the princes said unto all the congregation, We have sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them. This we will do to them; we will even let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we sware unto them.

Three days after signing the treaty, the men of Israel discovered that the men of Gibeon lived only a stone's throw away. Why was Israel deceived? For the same reason we are.

"Don't be so uptight about this sin or that compromise. Don't worry about who we are," the hellish ambassadors whisper in our ears. "We'll give you space. We're no threat to you. We want to be friends. Don't worry about being grouchy. Don't worry about losing your temper. Don't worry about seeing that movie. Just be at peace." And whenever I fail to partake of the wine of the blood of Christ and the bread of His broken body, I am deceived by the empty wineskin and the moldy bread of the world.

When I don't go to the Lord's Table—when the wineskin is empty and the bread moldy—I lose sight of the reality of what sin does. But when I come and eat of the fresh bread of the broken body and the shed blood of my Savior, I realize once again that sin slaughters and destroys, that there's no such thing as a small one, a friendly one, an allowable one.

Concerning the sin we think is no big deal, Jesus says, "Eat of My body and drink of My blood. This is what that sin did to Me."

"Wait a minute," you say. "When Jesus died on the Cross, He died for the sins of the whole world—not just for my sin of grumpiness."

That is true. But we need to understand that in the Old Testament, when a man or woman sinned, they had to place their hand on lamb, ox, bull, or goat

and confess each sin singularly. Their confession wasn't generic because each sin had to be paid for individually. Therefore, as the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system, when Jesus died on the Cross, He was paying for each individual sin.

"How could that be?" you ask. "How could He die for the sins of all humanity in just six hours one spring day in A.D. 32"?

Revelation 13:8 tells us that Jesus Christ is the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. Go back in your mind before the creation of the world. Then go back further before time began. Then go back further still until there's nothing in your mind. And in the middle of that nothingness, if you look carefully, you'll see the Lamb hanging on the Cross.

When we see the Lord, Revelation 5 says there will be an outpouring of praise, an explosion of adoration not because some worship leader on the stage is saying, "Let's all praise the Lord," but because we're going to understand only then what Jesus did for us. Seeing the Lamb slain will cause everyone to fall down with tears running down our faces, casing everything we have and are at His feet, saying, "Thou art worthy."

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that many of them were sick, weak, and even dying unnecessarily because they had not given worth the Lord's body and blood (1 Corinthians 11:29, 30). He also wrote that in coming to Communion, they showed the Lord's death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:26). In other words, the way we will understand what sin does and what Christ did for us is not to go to another Bible study or praise gathering. The way to preach the reality of the Lord's death is at Communion.

And yet Christians today will flock to sermons, Christian concerts, or even praise gatherings. But Communion is, at best, optional. Perhaps it is because the Catholic community centers the Mass around Communion, that Protestants err in going too far in the other direction. How many Bible studies, sermons, or praise gatherings have you attended in the past year compared to how many times you've come to the Lord's Table? It's an important question for each person. Communion is the most powerful sermon, the most important teaching that could ever be given.

When I come to the Lord's Table, I see through the deception and treachery of the enemy. Unlike the wine of the world, the wine of the Lord's blood has a sobering effect.

Joshua 9:21–23
And the princes said unto them, Let them live; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation; as the princes had promised them. And Joshua called for them, and he spake unto them, saying, Wherefore have ye beguiled us, saying, We are very far from you; when ye dwell among us? Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.

If you've been deceived like the Israelites were, if you haven't taken seriously the wine and the bread, do what Joshua did. Make your mistakes work for you. "You've tricked us," he said to the Gibeonites. "We can't kill you because we make an oath. But we're putting you to work. You will chop down trees and carry water. With wood on your shoulders and water in buckets at your side, you're to haul them to the temple for refreshment and redemption."

Joshua 9:24–27
And they answered Joshua, and said, Because it was certainly told thy servants, how that the LORD thy God commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you, therefore we were sore afraid of our lives because of you, and have done this thing. And now, behold, we are in thine hand: as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do. And so did he unto them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, that they slew them not. And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose.

Centuries later, in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, we see the Gibeonites, called Nethinims, still serving in the temple. The word *nethinim* means "sent ones" or "given ones." They were given to the task. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son who bore the wood of the Cross on His shoulders and from Whose side water was poured out (John 19:34).

He who knew no sin was made sin for us. He is the ultimate sent One, the ultimate given One. And even though I stray from His Table and forget what sin did to Him, He yet invites me to come and dine and to eat of Him, my daily Bread.



10 Joshua 10:1–4

Now it came to pass, when Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem had heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it; as he had done to Jericho and her king, so he had done to Ai and her king; and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel, and were among them; That they feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all the men thereof were mighty. Wherefore Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem sent unto Hoham king of Hebron, and unto Pi-ram king of Jarmuth, and unto Japhia king of Lachish, and unto Debir king of Eglon, saying, Come up unto me, and help me, that we may smite Gibeon: for it hath made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel.

When Adoni-zedek, king of then-Canaanite Jerusalem, heard that the Gibeonites were in league with the people who had already conquered Jericho and Ai, he and a confederation of four other kinds decided to launch a war against the Gibeonites in order to discourage other nations from following their example and joining forces with Israel.

Joshua 10:5, 6

Therefore the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, the king of Eglon, gathered themselves together, and went up, they and all their hosts, and encamped before Gibeon, and made war against it. And the men of Gibeon sent unto Joshua to the camp to Gilgal, saying, Slack not thy hand from thy servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us: for all the kings of the

Amorites that dwell in the mountains are gathered together against us.

If I were Joshua, I would have simply refused to answer the Gibeonites' cry for help. After all, there had been no agreement that Israel would provide protection for Gibeon. And besides that, located twenty-five miles away from Gilgal and four thousand feet higher, it would have been an arduous and dangerous undertaking for the Israelites. But Joshua wasn't like me. He was, in fact, a picture of Jesus.

Joshua 10:7, 8
So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he, and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valour. And the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee.

As a picture of Jesus, Joshua set out to rescue the very people who had lied to him and were now far from him. Jesus comes to our rescue when we are undeserving and unworthy because, even though we are faithless, He is faithful still (2 Timothy 2:13).

Joshua 10:9
Joshua therefore came unto them suddenly, and went up from Gilgal all night.

Traveling all night, Joshua moved his troops double-time twenty-five miles and 4,000 feet in elevation.

Joshua 10:10
And the LORD discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them along the way that goeth up to Beth-horon, and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makkedah.

Why did God allow five powerful kings to attack the Gibeonites? Because in this single battle, Israel would be able to wipe out all five of

them. Yes, it was a big mistake for Joshua to have relied on his own wisdom. Yes, it was a big mistake for Joshua to have signed a treaty with the Gibeonites. But the God he served was able to turn his blunder into a blessing. And He does the same for us.

Joshua 10:11
And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Beth-horon, that the LORD cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword.

Why were these men stoned? Because that was the Old Testament punishment for blasphemy (Leviticus 24:14, 15). In the New Testament, the one unpardonable sin is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12). The one unpardonable, unforgivable sin is saying No to the Holy Spirit as He speaks to us of our need to be saved.

Joshua 10:12, 13 (a)
Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher?

Jasher was a book known to the people of the time, but is unavailable to us. The divine Editor knows what to preserve and what to delete.

Joshua 10:13 (b)
. . . So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day.

"We know that the sun doesn't really move. We know it is the earth that revolves around the sun. So this is wrong," scoffs the cynic. People

sometimes get all upset about this verse, failing to realize that sunrises and sunsets are figures of speech we use to this day.

Joshua 10:14
And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel.

In this vignette, we see Joshua doing four things that not only elongated his day but that also ensured his victory. First, we see Joshua believing God's Word. In verse 8, God told Joshua that He would give him victory. And Joshua acted on that promise. We can do the same concerning the three thousand-plus promises given to us in the Word.

Secondly, Joshua did his best. He traveled quickly all night to reach the Gibeonites. Because faith without works is dead (James 2:20), the Lord expects me to partner with Him in getting the job done. A lot of people believe a Scripture, but never stay up all night and march out to see it come to pass.

Thirdly, in verse 12, Joshua called on God. "Without Me," Jesus said, "you can do nothing" (John 15:5). And James echoes that we have not because we ask not (James 4:2).

Finally, Joshua spoke in faith. It was in the midst of all the congregation that he said, "Sun, stand still. And moon, stay."

This is where the rubber meets the road for me. You see, it's one thing to believe the Word, to do my best, and to pray. It's another to go on record before my family or the congregation and say, "The victory is won." That is why the Bible says it's not enough to believe in your heart to be saved. It's not enough to raise your hand. It's not enough to come forward. Salvation comes to the one who believes in his heart and confesses with his mouth (Romans 10:9, 10). We have to go on record in the sight of heaven and in the ears of hell not only concerning our salvation, but concerning anything over which we want victory.

Why don't we go on record? Because we're afraid of failure. And fear is the opposite of faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Therefore, there comes a moment, a day when we must go on record

and exercise our faith verbally. That's when we're saved. That's when things happen.



***For topical study of Joshua 10:12–14 entitled "Speak to the Son," turn to page* 672.**

Joshua 10:15, 16
And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp to Gilgal. But these five kings fled, and hid themselves in a cave at Makkedah.

Monarchs of cultures that worshiped the moon and the sun, it is no wonder that the five defeated kings went into hiding when the sun and moon stood still at Joshua's command.

Joshua 10:17–20
And it was told Joshua, saying, The five kings are found hid in a cave at Makkedah. And Joshua said, Roll great stones upon the mouth of the cave, and set men by it for to keep them: And stay ye not, but pursue after your enemies, and smite the hindmost of them; suffer them not to enter into their cities: for the LORD your God hath delivered them into your hand. And it came to pass, when Joshua and the children of Israel had made an end of slaying them with a very great slaughter, till they were consumed, that the rest which remained of them entered into fenced cities.

With the kings held prisoner, Joshua sent his troops on a mop-up operation to complete the victory.

Joshua 10:21–25
And all the people returned to the camp to Joshua at Makkedah in peace: none moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel. Then said Joshua, Open the mouth of the cave, and bring

out those five kings unto me out of the cave. And they did so, and brought forth those five kings unto him out of the cave, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon. And it came to pass, when they brought out those kings unto Joshua, that Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said unto the captains of the men of war which went with him, Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings. And they came near, and put their feet upon the necks of them. And Joshua said unto them, Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage: for thus shall the LORD do to all your enemies against whom ye fight.

In chapter 1, God said to Joshua, "Fear not, but be strong and of good courage." And now, as time goes on, Joshua, who has lived this out, is now telling those with him not to be afraid. Because Joshua had seen God do exactly what He promised, he could teach with authority that which he had experienced personally. The best things to teach your kids are the things you've found to be true in your own life. The best thing to share in Sunday school or in a Bible study are the things you yourself have experienced. What have you lived out? What have you been through? What's real to you personally? That's where the power is because that's where the Word becomes incarnational, tangible, touchable.

Joshua 10:26, 27
And afterward Joshua smote them, and slew them, and hanged them on five trees: and they were hanging upon the trees until the evening. And it came to pass at the time of the going down of the sun, that Joshua commanded, and they took them down off the trees, and cast them into the cave wherein they had been hid, and laid great stones in the cave's mouth, which remain until this very day.

Five kings were hung on five trees, put in a cave, and covered by stones. Our King, the King of kings was also hung on a tree and put in a cave covered by a stone. But guess what. He didn't stay there. When the stone was rolled away, it was evident that He had risen.

Joshua 10:28–30
And that day Joshua took Makkedah, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and the king thereof he utterly destroyed, them, and all the souls that were therein; he let none remain: and he did to the king of Makkedah as he did unto the king of Jericho. Then Joshua passed from Makkedah, and all Israel with him, unto Libnah, and fought against Libnah: And the LORD delivered it also, and the king thereof, into the hand of Israel; and he smote it with the edge of the sword, and all the souls that were therein; he let none remain in it; but did unto the king thereof as he did unto the king of Jericho.

Joshua is doing exactly what he was commanded to do. He's not leaving any of the enemy in the land.

Joshua 10:31–40
And Joshua passed from Libnah, and all Israel with him, unto Lachish, and encamped against it, and fought against it: And the LORD delivered Lachish into the hand of Israel, which took it on the second day, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and all the souls that were therein, according to all that he had done to Libnah. Then Horam king of Gezer came up to help Lachish; and Joshua smote him and his people, until he had left him none remaining. And from Lachish Joshua passed unto Eglon, and all Israel with him; and they encamped against it, and fought against it: And they took it on that day, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and all the souls that were therein he utterly destroyed that day, according to all that he had done to Lachish. And Joshua went up from Eglon, and all Israel with him, unto Hebron; and they fought against it: And they took it, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and the king thereof, and all the cities thereof, and all the souls that were therein; he left none remaining, according to all that he had done to Eglon; but destroyed it utterly, and all the souls that were therein. And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to Debir; and fought against it: And he took it, and the king thereof, and all the cities thereof; and they

smote them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed all the souls that were therein; he left none remaining: as he had done to Hebron, so he did to Debir, and to the king thereof; as he had done also to Libnah, and to her king. So Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded.

With the conquest of Jericho, Ai, and the five kings confederated against Gibeon, the country had been split in two in this northern campaign. After dividing the land, Joshua went south, smiting the cities there with the edge of the sword. Joshua smote his enemies with a single-edged sword. We, however, have the double-edged sword of the Word with which to wage war against the sin that so easily besets us (Hebrews 4:12).

Joshua 10:41 (a)
And Joshua smote them from Kadesh-barnea . . .

It was at Kadesh-barnea that the children of Israel had lost heart and lacked faith forty years earlier. Now they're at Kadesh-barnea again—this time experiencing victory.

Joshua 10:41 (b)–43
. . . even unto Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, even unto Gibeon. And all these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel. And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp to Gilgal.

The same year Galileo invented the telescope, he discovered there were four moons orbiting the planet Jupiter—a surprising discovery considering the fact that prior to this, there was no knowledge of any moon other than our own. In the 1780s, a mathematician/astronomer named William Herschel discovered two more moons around Saturn and two moons around Uranus. In 1846, Asaph Hall discovered Mars had two moons that rose in the west and set in the east. The reason they were not discovered for 250 years after

Galileo invented the telescope is because, with only three percent of the ability to reflect light, they were the darkest objects in the solar system.

In 1726, one hundred and fifty years before Asaph Hall discovered the two moons of Mars, there was an Irish satirist named Jonathan Swift. In his political satire, *Gulliver's Travels,* Swift gave the precise dimensions of the two moons of Mars, including the fact that they traveled from west to east and were dark. How could it be that Swift would be able to nail with such precision the two moons of Mars one hundred and fifty years before they were discovered? There has been much speculation that Swift would base his stories upon ancient legends of history.

As evidenced by England's Stonehenge and Egypt's pyramids, the ancients of every culture were very knowledgeable about the planets. And every culture contains a story of either a long night or a long day. In 1950, Emmanuel Belakowski authored a best-selling book entitled *Worlds in Collision* in which he contends that, due to the universal understanding of a long day on one half of the world and a long night on the other, a planet must have suddenly moved out of its normal orb. He suggests that when Venus was introduced into the solar system after breaking off from a larger planet, the result was cataclysmic repercussions—including the slowing down of the rotation of our earth.

Since 1950, there have been numerous studies suggesting that Mars fits Belakowski's theory better than does Venus. What appears to have happened is that, due to some cosmic disturbance, Mars made a pass by earth. This would explain not only how Jonathan Swift could have known about the two moons of Mars, but also how there could be a five-day increase in the calendar year—from the 360-day calendar of the Aztecs, Mayas, Incas, and Egyptians to our present 365-day calendar year.

Joshua's longest day could very possibly have been brought about by Mars sweeping close to earth. Yet there is still the unmistakable element of the miraculous in this story—for God would have had to set this plan in motion one hundred and eighty years in advance in order for the longest day to be the very one on which Joshua prayed. In Jeremiah 32, we hear the Lord say, "I am the Lord. Is there anything too hard for Me?" The Psalmist declares, "The day is Thine and the night is Thine also" (Psalm 74:16). Day and night are God's. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Maintainer. He can do

whatever He wants with any given day—seen nowhere more clearly than in Joshua 10.

Although it does so begrudgingly and reluctantly, science has to admit that there is nothing in the Bible that ultimately won't prove to be absolutely true. You can bank on it. What I learned in my high school science class has changed many times since I was there. But what I learned in my kindergarten Sunday school class has not changed a bit. And I'm so thankful.

SPEAK TO THE SON

A Topical Study of JOSHUA 10:12–14

Do you ever come to the end of a day feeling frustrated, tense, or anxious because the day slipped away before you could accomplish even half of the things you intended to do? Does it ever seem to you like there's just not enough "day" in your day? There are so many obligations and responsibilities, opportunities and activities that the day seems to dissipate. And sometimes that can fill us with a great degree of frustration.

If you feel that way, the story before us is custom-made for you. In this story, as Joshua fought the enemy in the Promised Land, the sun began to set and the moon began to appear. Running out of time to do what he was supposed to do, Joshua did something radical. Before all of the congregation of Israel, he looked up at the sun and said, "Sun, stand still." And he looked at the moon and said, "Stay." And the sun and moon both stopped.

With the day elongated, Joshua was able to do what the Lord commanded him to do. He finished the work—which reminds me of Another who was able to come through at the end of the day successfully and finish the work perfectly. "Father, I have glorified You and finished the work You gave Me to do," Jesus said (John 17:4). What did Jesus do that enabled Him to say at the end of the day, "I have finished the work"? I believe the answer can be found in Mark's Gospel . . .

Mark tells us that all those who were diseased and demon-possessed were brought to Jesus after He had spent the day teaching the Word and blessing the people in Capernaum (1:32). After preaching all day and ministering to the people personally through the night, verse 33 leaps out at me because it says Jesus rose a great while before daybreak the next morning to pray. If there was ever a time when Jesus would have been justified in kicking back and sleeping in, it would have been here. But He didn't. He rose early for prayer because it was His habit to do so. How do I know? In Isaiah 50, a messianic passage, we read the following:

The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.

Isaiah 50:4

In other words, morning by morning the Father educated, inspired, and directed the Son concerning what to say and how to say it to those who were weary. Jesus always knew not only what to say, but how to say what needed to be said because a great while before the day broke, He sought His Father. And in Mark 1, we see how this worked out practically in His life . . .

And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee.

Mark 1:36, 37

Jesus' disciples were elated to learn that their Master was in great demand. But watch what Jesus said . . .

And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth.

Mark 1:38

The Greek word translated "towns" is seen only here in all of the New Testament. It doesn't speak of a typical town but rather of an unwalled village. In other words, the towns to which Jesus wanted to go were not even big enough to have a wall. Why? "For this reason came I forth," He said—not, I suggest, from heaven, but from His time of prayer. It was as if He said, "I already have instruction for the day. I already know what I'm to do."

This was why Jesus was able to move with such serenity and such tranquility. This is why, at the end of the day, He was able to say, "I've finished the work You've given Me to do." He didn't live according to the obligations, expectations, or even the needs of others. Rather, a great while before the sun rose, this Son had risen and was in the posture and place of prayer. I believe this is the reason that, although He was accused of being a glutton and a winebibber, of being demonized, illegitimate, and crazy, He

was never accused of being busy. He moved in such order, such peace, and such tranquility that such an accusation was never hurled at Him.

In our world, to be busy is to be important. But such is not the case in God's economy. To Him, busyness is more of a curse than an asset. That is why Jesus says, "My burden is easy and My load is light. Come unto Me all that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Learn of Me and you will find rest in your soul" (Matthew 11:28–30).

If, like Joshua, you and I speak to the Son, things will stand still because He'll whisper in our ear, "Now that you've spent a bit of time with Me, talked things over, made confession of sin, read some Scripture, here's a couple things I want you to do today. . . ."

When I get up before the beginning of the day to find a quiet place with a quiet heart for a quiet time, I find the Lord instructs me about what I should do with my discretionary time. We waste so much time trying to figure out what we should do next. And when we don't get to it, we feel condemned about it. In reality, the decision ought to have been made early in the day. I'm not saying there's no room for flexibility, but for the most part, I have discovered that the real key is to say early in the day, "Lord, what do You want me to do? By Your grace and with Your help, that's what I'll do."

And as I do those things, as I come to the end of the day, I realize the sun has indeed stood still. Therefore, like Jesus, I'm able to say, "Father, I've finished the work You gave me to do." The tensions disappear; the burdens dissipate; and I find myself living a life of serenity and tranquility to a much greater degree.

What God gives us to do is doable. Do what our Greater than Joshua did day by day. Before the day begins, find a quiet place and have a quiet time with a quiet heart. Let God direct your day. You will have fewer decisions to make and you'll be victorious in a whole new way.



11 Utilizing the foundational military strategy still used today of "divide and conquer," chapter 10 dealt with Joshua's southern campaign. Here in chapter 11, we see the northern campaign.

Joshua's strategy was essentially based upon three elements: stealth, speed, and knowledge of the terrain. But the real secret of Joshua's success was that he "wholly followed after the Lord his God" (Joshua 14:8). Joshua was one who had a passion for God and followed hard after God.

Sometimes in the Spirit-filled life, people say, "Strategy and organization are not necessary. We're just going to go with the flow." But when I read Joshua, I see in his Spirit-filled model a great emphasis on strategy. Yet although organization is a very good servant, it's a very bad master. It must not be what determines what we do. We know if organization is our master by how we start our day. Do we begin it on our knees in prayer—or with our Daytimer?

If I begin my day on my knees saying, "Lord, by Your Spirit, inspire my thoughts, write upon the table of my heart what You would have me to do," then organization is in its proper place.

Joshua 11:1, 2 (a)
And it came to pass, when Jabin king of Hazor had heard those things, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph, And to the kings that were on the north of the mountains, and of the plains south of Chinneroth . . .

Meaning "harp" *Chinneroth* appears in Scripture again and again. It's another name for the harp-shaped Sea of Galilee, the Sea of Tiberius.

Joshua 11:2 (b)–4
. . . and in the valley, and in the borders of Dor on the west, And to the Canaanite on the east and on the west, and to the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Jebusite in the mountains, and to the Hivite under Hermon in the land of Mizpeh. And they went out, they and all their hosts with them, much people, even as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many.

Led by Jabin, king of Hazor, a massive coalition was formed among the kings of the northern region. The historian Josephus tells us this coalition

numbered 300,000 infantrymen, 10,000 cavalrymen, and 20,000 chariots. Chariots being like tanks in those days, this was a formidable army indeed.

Joshua 11:5
And when all these kings were met together, they came and pitched together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel.

The waters of Merom being in the valley of Megiddo, we see how this event pictures the prophecies of Revelation. This massive army gathers in the valley of Megiddo to come against Joshua just as they will one day come together to fight our Greater than Joshua, Jesus Christ.

Joshua 11:6, 7
And the LORD said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them: for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel: thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire. So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly; and they fell upon them.

According to Deuteronomy 17, kings were not to multiply horses for themselves. Why? Second Kings 23:11 links horses to the worship of the sun. As you read the history of the Jewish people, you see they did very well without horses . . .

- At the Red Sea, the children lived while the Egyptians on horseback drowned (Exodus 14).
- Deborah and Barak were victorious while Sisera's chariots got stuck in the mud (Judges 4).
- David was given victory over Hadadezer and his thousand horses (2 Samuel 8).

We are not to trust in horses (Psalm 20:7). In this day of incredible technology, we must never think it is technology that will win the world or make an impact evangelistically.

Joshua 11:8–18

And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephoth-maim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining. And Joshua did unto them as the LORD bade him: he houghed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire. And Joshua at that time turned back, and took Hazor, and smote the king thereof with the sword: for Hazor beforetime was the head of all those kingdoms. And they smote all the souls that were therein with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them: there was not any left to breathe: and he burnt Hazor with fire. And all the cities of those kings, and all the kings of them, did Joshua take, and smote them with the edge of the sword, and he utterly destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the LORD commanded. But as for the cities that stood still in their strength, Israel burned none of them, save Hazor only; that did Joshua burn. And all the spoil of these cities, and the cattle, the children of Israel took for a prey unto themselves; but every man they smote with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them, neither left they any to breathe. As the LORD commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded Moses. So Joshua took all that land, the hills, and all the south country, and all the land of Goshen, and the valley, and the plain, and the mountain of Israel, and the valley of the same; Even from the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir, even unto Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew them. Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.

In this description of the northern campaign, we see the war continue. Given Caleb's age, we know it would be a seven-year operation. That is, Joshua would spend seven years clearing out the enemy and taking control of the territory. This rings a bell prophetically, for this is exactly what our Greater than Joshua will do during the seven years of the Tribulation.

Joshua 11:19
There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle.

The Gibeonites had a peace treaty with Israel. But every other nation came against her. They thought they could challenge Joshua even as the armies of the world will think they can challenge Jesus in the last days.

Joshua 11:20
For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

After giving them four hundred years to repent, God was at last determined to destroy the Canaanites. And so defiled, perverted, and polluted were they that God was actually merciful in putting them out of their misery.

Joshua 11:21, 22
And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities. There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained.

In 1 Samuel we'll read of Goliath, who stood at least 9′9″ tall and possibly even 12′6″. Goliath fought for Gath. But Gath, Gaza, and Ashdod were Philistine cities and the Philistines were not a people of large stature. Those of large stature were the Anakim, first seen in Genesis 6:4. Thus, Goliath must have been a hired soldier.

So too, strange things take place in Spirit-filled living. When you say, "Lord, baptize me in the Spirit. Use me," all hell breaks loose against you as you enter into an intensity of spiritual warfare perhaps previously unknown

to you. Suddenly, you're aware of an entirely different dimension. You're cognizant of the fact that you wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers in high places (Ephesians 6:12). You no longer blame people but instead see the forces manipulating and dominating them.

Yet although we fight against seeming giants, there's great news . . .

Joshua 11:23 (a)
So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes . . .

Because He who is in us is greater than he who comes against us (1 John 4:4), we, like Joshua, can take the whole land as we wield the sword of the Word, don the helmet of salvation, and employ the shield of faith (Ephesians 6:14–17).

Joshua 11:23 (b)
. . . And the land rested from war.

Jesus won the victory for you and me when He cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30). The work is done. The war is won. And we have rest because of what our Greater than Joshua did for us.



12 Joshua 12:1

Now these are the kings of the land, which the children of Israel smote, and possessed their land on the other side Jordan toward the rising of the sun, from the river Arnon unto mount Hermon, and all the plain on the east:

Chapter 12 is review of the battles the Israelites won on the east side of the Jordan, before they crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

Joshua 12:2, 3

Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon and ruled from Aroer, which is upon the bank of the river Arnon, and from the middle of the river, and from half Gilead, even unto the river Jabbok, which is the border of the children of Ammon; And from the plain to the sea of Chinneroth on the east, and unto the sea of the plain, even the salt sea on the east, the way to Beth-jeshimoth; and from the south, under Ashdoth-pisgah:

The Israelites conquered Sihon under the leadership of Moses.

Joshua 12:4–6
And the coast of Og king of Bashan, which was of the remnant of the giants, that dwelt at Ashtaroth and at Edrei, And reigned in mount Hermon, and in Salcah, and in all Bashan, unto the border of the Geshurites and the Maachathites, and half Gilead, the border of Sihon king of Heshbon. Them did Moses the servant of the LORD and the children of Israel smite: and Moses the servant of the LORD gave it for a possession unto the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh.

Og was a powerful king, a giant of a man. Along with Sihon, however, he was destroyed by the Israelites under the leadership of Moses.

Joshua 12:7, 8
And these are the kings of the country which Joshua and the children of Israel smote on this side Jordan on the west from Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon even unto the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir; which Joshua gave unto the tribes of Israel for a possession according to their divisions; In the mountains, and in the valleys, and in the plains, and in the springs, and in the wilderness, and in the south country; the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites:

Verses 7 through 24 comprise the list of kings over which Joshua and Israel were victorious on the west side of the Jordan.

Joshua 12:9–24

The king of Jericho, one; the king of Ai, which is beside Bethel, one; The king of Jerusalem, one; the king of Hebron, one; The king of Jarmuth, one; the king of Lachish, one; The king of Eglon, one; the king of Gezer, one; The king of Debir, one; the king of Geder, one; The king of Hormah, one; the king of Arad, one; The king of Libnah, one; the king of Adullam, one; The king of Makkedah, one; the king of Bethel, one; The king of Tappuah, one; the king of Hepher, one; The king of Aphek, one; the king of Lasharon, one; The king of Madon, one; the king of Hazor, one; The king of Shimron-meron, one; the king of Achshaph, one; The king of Taanach, one; the king of Megiddo, one; The king of Kedesh, one; the king of Jokneam of Carmel, one; The king of Dor in the coast of Dor, one; the king of the nations of Gilgal, one; The king of Tirzah, one: all the kings thirty and one.

In their day, these kings would have been well known throughout the region. They were the famous people, the ones on the cover of *People* magazine. Yet, although the kings are listed, their names aren't given because today, we don't even know who they were.

In the paper today, I read that to hire Jennifer Lopez to sing at an event costs $750,000 per hour. Elton John, *NSYNC, and the Backstreet Boys charge one million dollars an hour. Former President George Bush, Al Gore, or Jay Leno charge $100,000 per lecture. But 1,000 years from now, people will say, "Jennifer who? Backstreet what?" Like the kings of verses 9–24, the people in the world's *Who's Who* today will be in *Who Cares* tomorrow. Heaven. That's what counts. The names written in the Lamb's Book of Life are recorded *eternally.*



13

Joshua 13:1–6

Now Joshua was old and stricken in years; and the LORD said unto him, Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed. This is the land that yet remaineth: all the

borders of the Philistines, and all Geshuri, From Sihor, which is before Egypt, even unto the borders of Ekron northward, which is counted to the Canaanite: five lords of the Philistines; the Gazathites, and the Ashdothites, the Eshkalonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites; also the Avites: From the south, all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that is beside the Sidonians, unto Aphek, to the borders of the Amorites: And the land of the Giblites, and all Lebanon, toward the sunrising, from Baal-gad under mount Hermon unto the entering into Hamath. All the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon unto Misrephoth-maim, and all the Sidonians, them will I drive out from before the children of Israel: only divide thou it by lot unto the Israelites for an inheritance, as I have commanded thee.

In Joshua 11:23, we read that Joshua took the whole land and that the land rested from war. Here, we read that very much land remained to be possessed. Is this a contradiction? No, for although the victory was secure, there were still "mop-up operations" to complete in pockets of resistance where the enemy was holed up.

In our soul, there are pockets of resistance as well. However, in the Spirit-filled life we don't fight for victory because Jesus already was victorious on our behalf when He died on the Cross. The roaring lion has had his teeth kicked in. We don't fight *for* victory, but *from* victory. Positionally, we're the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21), but practically, there are still enemies lurking around my soul that need to be rooted out.



***For topical study of Joshua 11:23; 13:1 entitled "Take Your Position," turn to page* 678.**

Joshua 13:7–13
Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance unto the nine tribes, and the half tribe of Manasseh, With whom the Reubenites and the Gadites have received their inheritance, which Moses

gave them, beyond Jordan eastward, even as Moses the servant of the LORD gave them; From Aroer, that is upon the bank of the river Arnon, and the city that is in the midst of the river, and all the plain of Medeba unto Dibon; And all the cities of Sihon king of the Amorites, which reigned in Heshbon, unto the border of the children of Ammon; And Gilead, and the border of the Geshurites and Maachathites, and all mount Hermon, and all Bashan unto Salcah; All the kingdom of Og in Bashan, which reigned in Ashtaroth and in Edrei, who remained of the remnant of the giants: for these did Moses smite, and cast them out. Nevertheless the children of Israel expelled not the Geshurites, nor the Maachathites: but the Geshurites and the Maachathites dwell among the Israelites until this day.

Gad, Reuben, and half of the tribe of Manasseh were the ones who chose to remain on the east side of the Jordan rather than crossing with the rest of the tribes into the Promised Land. Their decision wasn't based upon God's best for their families but seemingly upon what was best for their cattle and bank accounts. History shows, however, that Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh were the first ones to be carried away when the enemies of Israel attacked the nation.

The same thing happens to you and me. If you say, "I'm just going to hang out in the back," watch out. That is sure to be the most dangerous, most depressing place ultimately. God will not make me go in and go on in my walk with Him. The choice is up to me. He will take me as deep as I want to go—but He won't take me one step further than I want to go.

Joshua 13:14
Only unto the tribe of Levi he gave none inheritance; the sacrifices of the LORD God of Israel made by fire are their inheritance, as he said unto them.

Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, had twelve sons, which comprised the Twelve Tribes of Israel. The tribe of Joseph, however, was represented by Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, which, technically, meant there were thirteen tribes. Yet the fact that the Levites, the priestly

tribe, was given no territory in order that they could minister throughout the nation, meant that the tribes inheriting land remained twelve in number.

Joshua 13:15–23
And Moses gave unto the tribe of the children of Reuben inheritance according to their families. And their coast was from Aroer, that is on the bank of the river Arnon, and the city that is in the midst of the river, and all the plain by Medeba; Heshbon, and all her cities that are in the plain; Dibon, and Bamoth-baal, and Beth-baal-meon, And Jahazah, and Kedemoth, and Mephaath, And Kirjathaim, and Sibmah, and Zareth-shahar in the mount of the valley, And Beth-peor, and Ashdoth-pisgah, and Beth-jeshimoth, And all the cities of the plain, and all the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, which reigned in Heshbon, whom Moses smote with the princes of Midian, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, which were dukes of Sihon, dwelling in the country. Balaam also the son of Beor, the soothsayer, did the children of Israel slay with the sword among them that were slain by them. And the border of the children of Reuben was Jordan, and the border thereof. This was the inheritance of the children of Reuben after their families, the cities and the villages thereof.

Verses 24–33 describe the region given to Gad, Reuben, and the half tribe of Manasseh—for although they chose not to step into the Jordan River and press on to deeper waters in kingdom life, they were still part of the family, still part of the congregation of God.

TAKE YOUR POSITION

A Topical Study of JOSHUA 11:23; 13:1

So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD *said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war.* Joshua 11:23 *Now Joshua was old and stricken in years; and the* LORD *said unto him, Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.*

Joshua 13:1

Although skeptics cry, "Contradiction!" concerning these two passages, there is no contraction whatsoever. You see, the first passage refers to the fact that, after seven years of battle, under God's providence and Joshua's leadership, the Israelites were successful in their conquest of the Promised Land. And yet there were pockets where the Canaanites were holed up and hiding out. So in chapter 13, the Lord told Joshua that there were many places where the property had not yet been possessed, that there was a mop-up operation to do.

We see the same thing in our history. In WWII, we convincingly defeated the Japanese Imperial Army. They lost the war. But there were pockets of Imperial soldiers on islands and atolls throughout the South Seas that remained on for many years after the war was over. That's the idea here. The war was over, but the Israelites had yet to "mop up" and take control.

What does this have to do with us?

Lots.

The Old Testament is a grand picture book. It illustrates truths for you and me in the stories it tells, in the portraits it paints. For every New Testament truth or principle, there's an Old Testament picture. I need that. In this Book of Joshua, there are many glorious pictures painted. One such picture is that of the difference between positional and practical truth.

Positional Truth

Joshua won the war. The inheritance was given out. The land had rest. This pictures exactly what our Joshua, Jesus, did when He won the victory on the Cross. "Te telestai," He cried. "It is finished." His wasn't the whimpering cry of a quitter. No, it was the victorious shout of a warrior. "It is finished. The price is paid. The work is done." We have rest because of what Jesus did for you and me on the Cross of Calvary. Because He fought the war and won, we get the inheritance of eternal life—just like the Israelites got the inheritance.

Before Jesus died on the Cross, only the high priest could enter the Holy Place of the Lord's presence—and then only one day each year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. After Jesus died, however, the veil separating the Holy Place from the rest of the temple was rent from top to bottom, as if God said, "Open House! Everyone, anyone, any time can come into My presence." Because Jesus won the victory, we get the inheritance and we rest in that fact.

Because of what Jesus did, we are righteous. The war is over. Second Corinthians 5:21 tells us we are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. That is, when the Father looks at us, He doesn't see our frailties and foibles, flaws and foolishness. No, He sees us surrounded by, cloaked with, hidden in Christ. There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). That's our position.

Think of it this way . . .

Midway into spring training, Dusty Baker, manager of the San Francisco Giants, calls and says, "Jon, we're a little weak on our shortstop position. Can you come and give us a hand?"

"Sure, Dusty. I'll be right there," I say.

As I begin to train with the Giants, however, it suddenly becomes clear that I can't play baseball. *This guy can't play baseball,* thinks Dusty. *He can't handle a grounder, can't make the pivot at second, can't throw accurately to first. He can't hit a curve ball, fastball, slowball, or even a softball.*

But because I signed a no-cut contract, I remain on the team. The Giants go on to win the divisional championships, the playoffs, and the World Series. I don't take the field or get up to bat a single time because I'm awful. But I'm on the team. And when the ticker tape parade takes place, when all the fans are waving, I'm in the parade because I'm on the team. I'm in the team picture. I have the World Series ring on my finger, and the World Series bonus in my wallet. I'm still lousy—but, because I'm on the team, I get the benefits.

That's positional truth. That's the standing I have. It's not based on what I do, but on what God's done. It's not based on who I am, but on where He's placed me—in His Son. And the same thing is true for each of us. Great is the day when a man or woman finally sees that, positionally, they're in Christ, righteous, forgiven, free. They can come boldly before His throne and expect to find mercy and help whenever they need it. I wake up every day expecting to be blessed—not because of who I am, but because of what Jesus has done.

Practical Truth

Now suppose Dusty Baker says, "Jon, you've got the ring and the bonus. You were in the picture and parade. But I've got plans for you. Next season, I don't want you to be on the bench every inning of every game. I want to get you in occasionally. I want you to be a real contributing part of the team. So this winter, I'm going to work with you. Every single day, I'm going to knock you grounders. I'm going to put a plastic ball on a plastic tee and you're going to hit it with a big plastic bat. I'm going to work with you day after day, week after week, and we're going to get you to where you're not only positionally on the team, but practically you're on the field, in the game. I'm going to train and teach you and help you to be successful not just in theory but practically."

That's what chapter 13 is talking about. The war is over. The land is at rest. The inheritance has been given. However, there are still Canaanites to be rooted out, to be dealt with practically. The Canaanites of carnality in our lives need to be rooted out and taken away so that we can be productive.

Maybe at this point you're thinking you would rather sit on the bench with your World Series ring and World Series bonus. Why should we want to be out there in the war mopping up? If the victory is won, why should we want to mop up?

Three reasons . . .

For Your Own Sake

The Israelites allowed the Canaanites to remain. Consequently, as the years went on, the Canaanites increased in number and began to launch guerilla warfare against the people of Israel. The Israelites watched their kids being attacked and the land destroyed because they didn't deal with the Canaanites when they had opportunity. The same thing is true of you and me.

I can say, "Positionally I'm the righteousness of God in Christ. Positionally, I can come before His throne of grace. Positionally, I'm on the winning team eternally." That's all true. But if I say, "So I'm not going to worry about what I say when my temper flares. I'm not going to worry about the lust in my heart, or the drink I must have to calm my nerves. I'm not going to worry about what's on TV because I'm forgiven. I'm going to just let those things slide," I will be attacked without question. Positionally, we are righteous. But practically, any Canaanites we allow in our lives will gain ground and bring great harm to us and to those around us.

I have yet to talk to a man who says, "I'm glad I kept swearing year after year," or, "I'm so thankful I had one adulterous affair after another. It made my life successful and made my family happy." No one has said to me in all my years of ministry, "I'm really glad I've been a gossip." What people say is, "The thing I regret is the alcohol I was in bondage to, the pornography I was caught up in, the adulterous relationships I pursued. I once had opportunity to see them rooted out. Instead, I let the Canaanites have control of pockets in my soul. Now they're causing misery and destroying my family."

The Canaanites of carnality will make you miserable. Drive them out. Don't let them take root because they'll grow and bring about incalculable pain and misery. For your own sake, drive them out.

For Heaven's Sake

I recently attended a memorial service for Peter-John's great-grandmother who was one hundred and two years old. Alice Elder impacted people. She loved the Lord and raised her three sons in the ways of God. As I listened to people talk about how she had influenced them, I wondered what people would say about us. What will be your lasting legacy? If you were to die today, what would the people you live and work with say about you? What would they truly think and feel about you?

Here is a key to living life successfully: Live it backwards. Live as though you're going to die by Saturday. How would you treat your husband, wife, or kids? How would you treat people at work if you knew you were going to die before this week is over? Jesus lived His entire life backwards. He came to earth, knowing He had come to die. The Cross was ever before Him. Everything pointed to that moment. Even as a babe in Bethlehem, He was born in a cave, which pictures a tomb, and was wrapped in swaddling cloths, which picture grave clothes. Jesus lived an abundant life because He knew He had come to die.

When I see Jesus face to face, will I hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You accepted My positional gift of salvation and you worked it out practically in your daily life. You rooted out the Canaanite. You didn't tolerate that, you got rid of the other. Well done!"? That's what I want to hear.

For Christ's Sake

Joshua was "old and stricken in years." Praise the Lord, our Joshua, our Jesus, never gets old. Jesus is the same today, yesterday, and forever. What do the people around your house, at your job, or in your family think about Christ? Is He old and stricken, or is He virile, vital, and real?

Most of the people you work with or live near will never read their Bible seriously. Most of them won't come to Bible study. Therefore, you are the Bible to them. They will get their impression about who Jesus is by looking at you day after day. What will they see? Is Christ old and stricken, powerless and impotent?

"I heard stories in Sunday school where Jesus fed 5,000 miraculously, calmed the stormy sea incredibly, turned water into wine amazingly. So where is this same Jesus today? I don't see that kind of power," people say. And they get this impression of Jesus by what they see in our lives day to day.

A skeptic stood up in a church service and said, "I don't believe in the Jesus you talk about because the Jesus in the Bible was powerful and did miracles."

A man in the back raised his hand and said, "Sir, Jesus is still doing miracles today, only in an even greater way. You talked about Jesus turning water into wine. In my life, He turned beer into furniture. I used to be an alcoholic. My family was falling apart, my money was spent on alcohol. Then I met Jesus and He changed my life. I don't drink any more. The money I used to spend on beer, I spend on my family."

Based upon what you do practically, the cynic will either view Christ as old and stricken or powerful and virile. He will draw his conclusions about Christ based not on positional truth but on the truth he sees you live out before him.

I want people to see that Jesus still changes lives, sees people through, and brings abundance and blessing.

How do I root out the enemy? Here's the great news. Positionally, I enjoy the riches and inheritance because of Christ's *death.* Practically, I have victory over that which would make me miserable, ruin my testimony, and

rob me eternally through Christ's resurrected *life*. You see, Jesus not only died to wash our sins away positionally, but He rose again on the third day to live within us practically. So when the Canaanites rise up, when the temptation threatens, the good news is that Christ is right there with you. The good news is that God will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able, but will provide a way of escape, a way of victory—every single time (1 Corinthians 10:13).

The Lord not only tells us what to do, but He sets up residence inside of us. Positionally, we're cleansed by His death. Practically, we're set free by His life.



14 Joshua 14:1

And these are the countries which the children of Israel inherited in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel, distributed for inheritance to them.

With Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh remaining on the east side of the Jordan, the rest of the nine and one-half tribes claimed their territory on the west side, in the Promised Land. Each tribe was given a certain region, described in chapters 13 through 21. These descriptions might seem tedious to us, but they were important and wonderful to the Israelites. Why? Because the descriptions were of their own inheritance.

God has a wonderful plan for you. It might be boring to others, but for you, it's of utmost importance to know what territory God has given to you, where your place is in the body of Christ, what God wants you to do. If your heart desires to know His will, be sure He will give the parameters to you. As time goes on, what you're to do will become clear to you.

"I am careful that I do not stretch myself beyond measure," Paul declared (2 Corinthians 10:14–16). In other words, "I realize what God has called me to do and I want to take it all. But I'm not going to stretch myself beyond what He's called me to do and to be."

God has exacting boundaries for you. And it's our privilege and responsibility to explore, to pursue, to pray, to seek the Lord, study, to wait on Him and say, "Lord, what territory have You mapped out as mine? Help me to stick to it and be faithful in it that I might take all the territory you have for me."

Joshua 14:2
By lot was their inheritance, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses, for the nine tribes, and for the half tribe.

The word "lot" in Hebrew is actually *gowral,* which means "pebble." "To cast lots" in Greek is *lanchano,* which literally means "to launch." In other words, "lot" here speaks of the rolling of some sort of dice—a practice seen throughout the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 34, Moses declared that the land was to be divided by lot. It was by lot that the sailors determined it was Jonah who caused the storm that threatened their lives (Jonah 1:7). In Proverbs 16:33, we read, "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." In other words, "You can cast lots, but in reality, the whole thing is determined by the Lord."

"If people cast dice in Deuteronomy and Joshua, shouldn't we do this as well?" some might ask. Casting lots was indeed prescribed and utilized in Old Testament times, but in the New Testament, we see a better way.

After Judas hung himself, there was a vacancy in the apostolic company. The remaining eleven disciples placed stipulations upon who could fulfill the office, saying, "It must be a man who's been with us and who has seen Jesus." Two men met the criterion, so they cast lots and Matthias was chosen. But Acts 1 comes before Acts 2, and Acts 2 was when the disciples were empowered by the Holy Ghost. As the Book of Acts unfolds, we meet a man who was uniquely raised up by the Spirit, a man named Paul. We never hear of Matthias again, but Paul's impact was huge. Therefore, I believe had the disciples waited until after the Spirit was poured out upon them, they would have chosen Paul to fill Judas' vacancy.

In Old Testament times, it was allowable to cast lots. But in New Testament days, we have an entirely different way to discern direction. We don't cast lots or roll dice to find God's will, get rich, or get ahead. Rather,

we wait on the Spirit. I think rolling dice, choosing straws, or playing the lottery grieves the Lord and short-circuits what He wants to do with us, through us, and for us. An infinitely better way is to be guided by the Spirit day by day.

Joshua 14:3–6
For Moses had given the inheritance of two tribes and an half tribe on the other side Jordan: but unto the Levites he gave none inheritance among them. For the children of Joseph were two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim: therefore they gave no part unto the Levites in the land, save cities to dwell in, with their suburbs for their cattle and for their substance. As the LORD commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did, and they divided the land. Then the children of Judah came unto Joshua in Gilgal: and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite said unto him, Thou knowest the thing that the LORD said unto Moses the man of God concerning me and thee in Kadesh-barnea.

Joshua and Caleb were two of the twelve spies who went into the Promised Land at Kadesh-barnea. They were the two who believed in God, who had faith that He would give the people of Israel the land. The congregation, however, chose to believe the ten who didn't believe God. Here, Caleb reminds Joshua of their story.

Joshua 14:7–12
Forty years old was I when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh-barnea to espy out the land; and I brought him word again as it was in mine heart. Nevertheless my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt: but I wholly followed the LORD my God. And Moses sware on that day, saying, Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the LORD my God. And now, behold, the LORD hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the LORD spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and now, lo, I am this day

fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in. Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the LORD spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the LORD will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said.

Caleb didn't claim a beachfront condo on the Mediterranean, a cabin on the Sea of Galilee, or a loft apartment in Jerusalem for his inheritance. Rather, he said, "Give me the area where the giants are." Oh, may the Lord make us like Caleb—people who don't back away from challenges or problems, but who instead understand that they're actually good for us.

Joshua 14:13–15
And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance. Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite unto this day, because that he wholly followed the LORD God of Israel. And the name of Hebron before was Kirjath-arba; which Arba was a great man among the Anakims. And the land had rest from war.

Arba means "large and loud." *Kirjath* means "city." *Hebron* means "fellowship." The city of the big and loud became the city of fellowship. That's always the way it is. Big loud problems cause us to call out to the Lord, to depend on the Lord, and to fellowship with the Lord in ways we never would have otherwise.

"I thought the Spirit-filled life was supposed to be the abundant life. So why do I have these big headaches and problems?," we cry. It is because they bring us to Hebron. Without them, we would become complacent and lazy.

It was an eighty-five-year-old Caleb who said, "I'm as strong as I've ever been, so give me the place where the giants are." Don't let old age creep in spiritually. Stay vibrant and youthful by taking on new challenges, by

not shrinking away from problems. It's the giants who will keep you in Hebron, the difficulties that will keep you in fellowship.

WONDER BREAD!

A Topical Study of JOSHUA 14:6–15

"A man ripens until the age of thirty. After thirty, he rots," said philosopher Henry David Thoreau. Yet here in our text is a man who, at the age of eighty-five, said, "I am as vibrant and as vigorous as I've ever been." His name is Caleb, and his story is an amazing one.

At this point in the Book of Joshua, Joshua is dividing the Promised Land among the tribes of Israel. As he does, his friend, Caleb came to him, telling him what he wanted for his inheritance. Now, one would think that, at eighty-five, Caleb would say, "What I want is a condo on the beach on the Mediterranean seashore." Or perhaps, "Give me a cabin on the shore of the Sea of Galilee." But that's not what Caleb said.

He said, "What I want is the high country, the mountainous territory where the Anakims—the giants—are."

Joshua and Caleb knew about giants. Years earlier, they were two of the twelve spies sent in to check out the Promised Land. In Caleb's story, we see a very practical and important lesson that will help us to remain vigorous spiritually even as we age physically. You see, God does not want us to fade away, to retire, or to pull back. Rather, the Bible says He wants to take you and me from glory to *greater* glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). He wants us to become stronger and deeper, richer and better, year after year until the day He takes us to heaven. That's God's intention.

I question that, you might be thinking. *My grandmother loves the Lord—but she's been in a hospital, a rest home, or even a coma for many years. How do you explain that?*

Even though a person has Alzheimers or does not think clearly, it doesn't mean there's not a lot going on in his spirit. As he lays in bed day after day, year after year, people might say, "Why is God keeping him here?" Yet God is putting His finishing touches on him and using him in ways we can't understand. "When I pray in the Spirit, my mind is unfruitful," Paul said (1 Corinthians 14:14). In other words, a person can pray in the Spirit even though his mind isn't tracking.

Caleb is an example for you, a model for me of how to stay spiritually vibrant. In Numbers 13, we see his story . . .

Forty-five years before the account in Joshua 14, God had lead His people to a place called Kadesh-barnea. Poised to go into the Promised Land, the people of Israel sent one man from each of the twelve tribes to check it out. The tribe of Ephraim was represented by Joshua, the tribe of Judah by Caleb. Ten of the spies returned, saying, "We can't go up against the people because they're stronger than us. Compared to them, we're just grasshoppers."

Joshua and Caleb, however, ripped their clothes in grief and said, "The land is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delight in us, He will bring us into this land and give it to us. Do not fear the people of the land. For they are bread for us."

When others said, "We're going to get crunched and stomped on," Caleb said. "No, God's with us. And those giants are bread for us. We're going to eat them up" (Numbers 14:9). When he was eighty-five years old, this same Caleb said, "I want the Anakims. I want food. I don't want to kick back. I don't want an easier load. I don't want to retire. What I want, what's keeping me strong and vigorous is giants. I thrive on them."

Why would Caleb say this? Because he understood that what God's people need is not comfort but challenges because it is the giant difficulty, the giant heartbreak, the giant heartache that brings them to Hebron. Hebron, the place Abraham first built an altar, means "Fellowship." That's what giant problems do—they bring me to the place where I cry out to the Lord, call on the Lord, and look to the Lord. They bring me to fellowship. When things are comfy and cozy, I can find myself pulling away from fellowship. I can find myself spiritually putting my feet up, kicking back, retiring.

And that makes me old, grumpy, cranky, diminished. Why? Because it's in the place where I'm battling heartbreak and heartache, where I'm doing battle in the spiritual realm that I am forced to be on my knees, forced to say, "Lord, I can't make it without You."

And the Lord says, "That's why I've allowed these Anakims to come to you. They're bread for you. They actually make you stronger because they bring you into Hebron."

"Give us this day our daily bread," Jesus taught us to pray. When I think of bread, I think of sourdough with butter and strawberry jelly. While the Lord does indeed give us bread to sustain us physically, He also gives us the bread of giant problems to make us strong and energetic spiritually.

I want to be like Caleb. I want to say I'm strong like I was at my peak.

The Lord says, "OK, then I'm going to send bread your way—Anakims that will force you to come to Hebron."

That's what Jesus did. Such an abundance of bread did He provide for the multitude that there were twelve baskets left over. If this meant each disciple was given his own basket, I can picture them enjoying their "leftovers" on the grassy hillside, overlooking the Sea of Galilee. That very evening, they were on the Sea of Galilee facing giant problems. "We're dying!" they cried, as they fought the storm hour after hour. Yet it was then—in the midst of a giant storm—that Jesus, the Bread of Life, came to them, walking on the water (Matthew 14:27).

When we're eating bread on the grassy hillside, we don't understand who Jesus is. But when the seas are angry and the wind is howling, when there are giants around us and everything seems to be going down, it's then we hear His voice and see His face. It is then we understand that He is our Bread.

As believers, we're the luckiest people in the world because we are the only ones who can count it all joy when various trials come our way (James 1:2). We're the only ones who know that all things are working together for good (Romans 8:28). We're the only ones who can say, "There's a giant of a problem in my life—and I know it's bread for me."

How do I know that every storm the Lord sends my way will ultimately be good for me? Because the Bread of Life was broken on the Cross of Calvary to pay for my sins. Our Lord, our Joshua, our Jesus says to us, "I care about you deeply. I love you passionately. And anything that comes your way is Wonder Bread. It will build your body, keep you young, and bring you into fellowship with Me."

15 Joshua 15:1 (a)

This then was the lot of the tribe of the children of Judah . . .

In chapter 15, we see a description of the land given to Judah. Again, while this may be tedious to us, it was as important to the people of Judah as discovering our own unique place and function in the body of Christ is to us.

Joshua 15:13–19
And unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh he gave a part among the children of Judah, according to the commandment of the LORD to Joshua, even the city of Arba the father of Anak, which city is Hebron. And Caleb drove thence the three sons of Anak, Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai, the children of Anak. And he went up thence to the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before was Kirjath-sepher. And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. And Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife. And it came to pass, as she came unto him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wouldest thou? Who answered, Give me a blessing; for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And he gave her the upper springs, and the nether springs.

As a member of the tribe of Judah, we again see Caleb. And in this vignette concerning him, I believe a most interesting parallel can be drawn. That is, I believe Caleb is a picture of the Holy Spirit . . .

First, I believe Caleb pictures the Holy Spirit because, of the twelve spies, he alone traveled into the Promised Land with Joshua, who is himself a picture of our Lord Jesus. Likewise, the ministry of the Spirit is to point people not to Himself, but to Jesus (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Secondly, Caleb was victorious over giants—just as the Spirit gives us victory over our adversary (Ephesians 6:17).

Third, here we see Caleb giving a bride away. What is the ministry of the Holy Spirit? To form a church, a Bride for Jesus.

Fourth, Caleb provided both the upper and lower springs. Springs are a picture of the work of the Spirit. “If any man thirst,” Jesus said, “let him

come to Me and out of his innermost being shall gush forth torrents of living water. This spake He of the Holy Spirit (John 7:38).

"I don't want only the lower springs," Achsah said. And guess what. Because she asked, she got just what she asked for. You see, there are two baptisms that deal with the Holy Spirit. The first, seen in 1 Corinthians 12, took place when you became a believer, when you were baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ. But there's a second baptism—when you are baptized not by the Spirit into the body, but by Jesus into the Spirit. Every Christian is baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ. But there's a difference between that and being baptized by Jesus into the Spirit. Achsah wanted both.

I believe most of us would say, "I do, too."

Finally, *Caleb's* name literally means "dog." And I can't help but think of the "Hound of heaven,"—the Holy Spirit—who tracks people down to let them know they're loved by God.

Joshua 15:20
This is the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Judah according to their families.

The remainder of chapter 15 continues to describe the boundaries of the tribe of Judah.



16 Joshua 16:1–5 (a)

And the lot of the children of Joseph fell from Jordan by Jericho, unto the water of Jericho on the east, to the wilderness that goeth up from Jericho throughout mount Bethel, And goeth out from Bethel to Luz, and passeth along unto the borders of Archi to Ataroth, And goeth down westward to the coast of Japhleti, unto the coast of Beth-horon the nether, and to Gezer: and the goings out thereof are at the sea. So the children of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, took their inheritance. And the border of the children of Ephraim according to their families was thus:

Chapters 16 and 17 describe the inheritance given to Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Although Manasseh was the older brother, Ephraim is mentioned first. And therein lies a story . . .

Hearing that his father was sick, Joseph brought his two sons to be blessed by their grandfather, carefully positioning them so that Manasseh was on Jacob's right side and Ephraim on his left. After pronouncing blessing upon Joseph, Jacob prepared to bless Joseph's sons by placing his right hand —the hand of priority—on Ephraim and his left on Manasseh. "Wait a minute, Dad," Joseph said. "You're confused. Manasseh is the firstborn. Therefore, your right hand should be on *his* head."

"I know what I'm doing," Jacob insisted. "Manasseh will be a great people—but Ephraim shall indeed be greater" (Genesis 48:19).

This is often the way of God . . .

It was Abel and not Cain who was blessed, even though Cain was the firstborn. Jacob and Esau were twins, but Esau was older. Jacob, however, was the blessed one. Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn. Isaac, however, was the child of promise. Aaron was the elder son of Amram and Jochebed, yet it was their second-born son, Moses, who was called to deliver God's people. David was the youngest of Jesse's sons, yet it was he, a man after God's own heart, who was anointed king.

This pattern is seen throughout Scripture.

Why?

I suggest it shows you and me that God forgets about our firstborn and blesses our second born. Kids? No, our lives. That is, our first life is forgotten about. Our new life is what God focuses on and blesses.

"You must be born again," Jesus told Nicodemus (John 3).

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new," Paul told the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 5:17).

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin," he told the Romans (Romans 6:6).

Ours is the God of the second-born and the second chance.

And for that, I'm oh, so grateful.



17 Joshua 17:1, 2

There was also a lot for the tribe of Manasseh; for he was the firstborn of Joseph; to wit, for Machir the firstborn of Manasseh, the father of Gilead: because he was a man of war, therefore he had Gilead and Bashan. There was also a lot for the rest of the children of Manasseh by their families; for the children of Abiezer, and for the children of Helek, and for the children of Asriel, and for the children of Shechem, and for the children of Hepher, and for the children of Shemida: these were the male children of Manasseh the son of Joseph by their families.

Chapter 16 detailed the inheritance given to Joseph's second son, Ephraim. Here in chapter 17, we see the inheritance given to Manasseh, his firstborn son.

The Book of Joshua illustrates what it means to move into and live out the Spirit-filled life. The people of Israel were set free from bondage in Egypt the night the blood was placed on the doorposts of their homes. We were also set free from bondage to the world by the blood of the Lamb on the doorposts of our hearts.

After they were set free, the people of Israel made their way to the Red Sea, where they were baptized when the waters parted (1 Corinthians 10:2) just as the baptism of believers signifies death and resurrection to a whole new way of living.

When their faith faltered shortly thereafter, the Israelites found themselves wandering in the wilderness for an entire generation—approximately forty years.

That can happen to you and me as well. We're born again, baptized in water, but then we get distracted. Oh, we're still Christians, but we're wandering in the wilderness, swatting flies, and eating dust. Things are dry, not like they used to be, not like they're supposed to be. We wander and we

wonder sometimes year after year until, like the Israelites, we come to a second baptism—the Jordan River, which speaks of the baptism in the Spirit.

A new generation came to those waters, and as they obeyed the command of the Lord to put the soles of their feet into the water, they entered into the Promised Land. When you and I engage our souls and say, "Lord, I want to step out. I want to press in. I want to take hold of all You have for me," a new dimension of spiritual life begins. The baptism in the Spirit transforms those who were wandering and weak into those who are dynamic and fruitful.

We're coming to the point where we're saying, "Lord, I love You, but I'm tired of the dryness of my soul. I'm tired of wandering around aimlessly. I want You to take control. I want to see Your Spirit come upon me and flow through me. I'm going to do whatever You tell me to do. I'm going to step out. I'm going to take a risk and begin to press in to what You say is available for me this very day."

As we receive by faith the empowering of the Spirit, we enter into the Promised Land—a land filled with milk, honey, and grapes the size of bowling balls. That's where the people of Israel are at this point in the Book of Joshua. Oh, there are battles to fight and wars to wage—but it's a place of fruitfulness and abundance.

We continue on with the land being divided because the Spirit-filled life is not only about moving in and enjoying the fruit, but about responsibilities as well. There is work for us to do because the Holy Spirit is given for the purpose of impacting the world around us.

Joshua 17:3–6
But Zelophehad, the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, had no sons, but daughters: and these are the names of his daughters, Mahlah, and Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. And they came near before Eleazar the priest, and before Joshua the son of Nun, and before the princes, saying, The LORD commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our brethren. Therefore according to the commandment of the LORD he gave them an inheritance among the brethren of their father. And there fell ten portions to Manasseh, beside the land of Gilead and Bashan, which were on the other side Jordan;

Because the daughters of Manasseh had an inheritance among his sons: and the rest of Manasseh's sons had the land of Gilead.

Because the inheritance was passed to the firstborn son in every family, when Zelophehad died, his daughters came to Moses in Numbers 27 and said, "Just because our father had no sons, does that mean we don't get any inheritance? Are we left out of the equation?" When he sought the Lord, the Lord told Moses that the daughters were to indeed receive the inheritance. However, in Numbers 36, further information was given when the stipulation was made that they had to marry within their tribe lest their inheritance be transferred to another tribe, causing the boundaries to change.

The implications of this seemingly obscure incident were so far-reaching that they affected Jesus' role as King of the Jews. You see, the genealogy of Matthew 1 traces Jesus' lineage from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to Jesse to David to Solomon to Reheboam. But there's a problem in verse 11, were we read that Josiah begat Jeconiah, or Coniah, as he was also known. Jeconiah was such a wicked king that Jeremiah declared none of his seed would sit on the throne of David (Jeremiah 22:28–30).

This means that, although Joseph was a legal heir to the throne of David, due to the curse of Coniah, he was not a spiritual heir. In Luke's genealogy, however, we see not Joseph's lineage, but Mary's. While Joseph's genealogy goes from David through Solomon ultimately to Coniah, Mary's genealogy goes from David to another of David's sons named Nathan, avoiding Coniah altogether. If this little obscure ruling about the daughters of Zelophehad had not kicked in, the inheritance could never have been claimed through His mother. Yet, because His mother had no brothers, the inheritance passed to Mary—giving Jesus not only the legal right to the throne, but the spiritual right as well.

What an amazing and awesome God we serve. His ways are absolutely letter-perfect.

Joshua 17:11–13
And Manasseh had in Issachar and in Asher Beth-shean and her towns, and Ibleam and her towns, and the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, and the inhabitants of Endor and her towns, and the

inhabitants of Taanach and her towns, and the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns, even three countries. Yet the children of Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of those cities; but the Canaanites would dwell in that land. Yet it came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute; but did not utterly drive them out.

Although they taxed them, the tribe of Manasseh was unable to drive out the Canaanites hiding out in their land.

Joshua 17:14
And the children of Joseph spake unto Joshua, saying, Why hast thou given me but one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I am a great people, forasmuch as the LORD hath blessed me hitherto?

"Why were we given only one portion?" asked the children of Manasseh. "We have lots of people in our tribe." Puffed up with pride, the children of Manasseh wanted more land, yet they failed to destroy the Canaanites from the land they already had.

People sometimes say, "I should have more responsibility. I should have greater authority. I should have a bigger role to play in ministry, in my family, or on the job. I'm a great guy. I'm a great person. I've got great talent, great ability."

I like Joshua's answer . . .

Joshua 17:15
And Joshua answered them, If thou be a great people, then get thee up to the wood country, and cut down for thyself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the giants, if mount Ephraim be too narrow for thee.

"Don't tell me what you think you deserve," Joshua said. "Go to the wooded area. Go to the mountains. Cut down the timber. Drive out the giants."

"I think I should have a larger role in the ministry. In my job, I should have more responsibility. I think I should be more appreciated by my family

because I'm a great guy," some say.

"Don't expect people to see how great you are," Joshua would say. "Go to the mountain. Go where the wood is."

Upon which mountain was there wood? On a mountain called Calvary stood a wooden cross. Come to Communion. There's no higher place than that. There's no greater ministry than bowing at the Lord's Table and pouring out praise to the Lord, giving honor to the Lord, spending time with the Lord. Many people want roles other than that, but there's no more important ministry.

Joshua's exhortation is a powerful one. One Sunday, as he was away from his congregation, a well-known preacher visited a church in a different city. At the end of the service, he asked the pastor how long it took him to prepare his sermon.

"Four hours," the young preacher answered.

And the older preacher said, "That's funny. It took me twenty hours to prepare the same one."

When the younger preacher realized to whom he was talking, he was embarrassed because he realized he did not do what the older preacher had done. He hadn't gone to the mountain, chopped down the timber, or wrestled with the Lord in order to hear His heart and receive His Word. Instead, he found an easier way.

"If you want to be great," the older preacher wisely said, "you'll have to learn how to chop your own timber."

This doesn't apply only to preachers or teachers—but to every area of spirituality. We've got to go to the mountain. There's no shortcut. There's no other way.

Joshua 17:16
And the children of Joseph said, The hill is not enough for us: and all the Canaanites that dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron, both they who are of Beth- shean and her towns, and they who are of the valley of Jezreel.

"The hill is not enough," the children of Manasseh insisted. "Yet the valleys have chariots of iron"—the Abrams tanks of the day.

Joshua 17:17, 18

And Joshua spake unto the house of Joseph, even to Ephraim and to Manasseh, saying, Thou art a great people, and hast great power: thou shalt not have one lot only: But the mountain shall be thine; for it is a wood, and thou shalt cut it down: and the outgoings of it shall be thine: for thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, and though they be strong.

This is leadership at its best. This is "Jesus stuff." "If you're so great," Joshua had said, "go up to the mountain. Drive out the giants. Carve out territory."

"But we're afraid," the children of Manasseh, in essence, answered.

First, Joshua acted with the necessary toughness of a father telling his children to grow up. Here, however, he answers with the tenderness of a mother saying, "You really are great. And you will indeed chop down those trees and drive out those giants. You will indeed overcome the chariots that strike terror in your hearts presently."

This is a paradigm of powerful leadership—and, more importantly, of the ultimate Leader, Jesus Christ. He exhorts us, yes. But He also shows great and glorious tenderness to us.



18 Joshua 18:1

And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled to gether at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there. And the land was subdued before them.

The entire congregation set up the tabernacle at Shiloh, a central location, where it would remain for hundreds of years until King David would move it to Jerusalem.

Joshua 18:2–7

And there remained among the children of Israel seven tribes, which had not yet received their inheritance. And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, How long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the LORD God of your fathers hath given you? Give out from among you three men for each tribe: and I will send them, and they shall rise, and go through the land, and describe it according to the inheritance of them; and they shall come again to me. And they shall divide it into seven parts: Judah shall abide in their coast on the south, and the house of Joseph shall abide in their coasts on the north. Ye shall therefore describe the land into seven parts, and bring the description hither to me, that I may cast lots for you here before the LORD our God. But the Levites have no part among you; for the priesthood of the LORD is their inheritance: and Gad, and Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh, have received their inheritance beyond Jordan on the east, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave them.

It was evidently up to the leaders of the tribes to approach Joshua and say, "We're here to receive our lot, our inheritance." Yet at this point, seven of the twelve tribes had not yet done so. Why? I suggest it was that, without a specific region appropriated to them, they would have no battles to fight. They could be on the coast for a while and then go into the valley of Jezreel or on to Jerusalem. Whenever difficulties arose, they could simply pack up and move. And there are Christians who are just like them.

There are people who have left the wilderness of carnality and who have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They've entered the Promised Land of the Spirit-filled life, and are experiencing something of abundance—yet they don't want to be locked in to a specific territory, a specific congregation. "I want to attend this meeting over here and that church over there," they say—until the pastor makes them angry and they head in a different direction. "When the building project is complete, I'll be back," they say. Although people with this mindset might think they're being led by the Spirit, in reality, they're simply neither accountable to nor responsible for

anyone. They're involved as is comfortable for them, but if they're asked to do something that stretches them, they'll leave.

The majority of the tribes failed to claim their inheritance. And, sadly, Joshua's question still needs to be asked in our generation: "When are you going to quit floating around, sink some roots, put your hand to the plow, and claim territory for the kingdom?"

Joshua 18:8–10
And the men arose, and went away: and Joshua charged them that went to describe the land, saying, Go and walk through the land, and describe it, and come again to me, that I may here cast lots for you before the LORD in Shiloh. And the men went and passed through the land, and described it by cities into seven parts in a book, and came again to Joshua to the host at Shiloh. And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the LORD: and there Joshua divided the land unto the children of Israel according to their divisions.

The word "describe" seen here in verse 9 and previously in verse 4, literally means "to survey." Three men from each of the seven tribes who hadn't claimed their inheritance were sent to survey the land. Here's the question: Where did they learn how to survey? Did they learn while wandering in the wilderness? I don't think so. Did they learn while fighting in the Promised Land? Not likely. I suggest they learned the art of surveying while in Egypt. Those who were twenty years of age when they left Egypt, would have been involved in all kinds of construction projects requiring surveying skills.

Sometimes, young people say, "I want to be a missionary. I want to start a church. Why do I need to know math, history, or science?" They ask because they don't yet realize that because the Lord doesn't waste a thing, the skills and understandings gained and gleaned in school will be extremely beneficial and important in days to come. Therefore, I think we ought to remind our kids that learning is important because God will use it for His purposes in ways we don't yet see.

Joshua 18:11

And the lot of the tribe of the children of Benjamin came up according to their families: and the coast of their lot came forth between the children of Judah and the children of Joseph.

In the history of Israel, Judah and Ephraim were often rivals. Located in between them, Benjamin played the role of peacemaker. Benjamin was the smallest of the tribes territorially—but what a wonderful inheritance he was given, for in his borders were Shiloh, Jericho, Hebron, Gibeon—and Jerusalem.

The remainder of the chapter describes the inheritance given to Benjamin. And just as the borders were carefully given, never forget that God has an exacting plan, custom-designed for you and me. Therefore, part of Spirit-filled living is to say, "Lord, what do You want me to do? What's *Your* plan for me this day?"



19 Joshua 19:1

And the second lot came forth to Simeon, even for the tribe of the children of Simeon according to their families: and their inheritance was within the inheritance of the children of Judah.

The land given to Simeon was surrounded by the land given to the tribe of Judah. Judah being a powerful tribe, Simeon essentially disappears. As you read the history of Israel, it is evident that Simeon is essentially swallowed up. Oh, there would still be Simeonites in Israel, but their territory would become fuzzy and indefinable, as prophesied in Genesis 49 . . .

As Jacob pronounced a final blessing on his sons, he declared that, because they were instruments of cruelty, Simeon and Levi would have no inheritance in the land. This was in reference to the account in Genesis 30, when Dinah, the sister of the twelve brothers who became the twelve tribes, was raped by Shechem. Jacob didn't seem to do anything about this initially, so two of his sons—Simeon and Levi—took matters into their own hands. After he raped Dinah, Shechem wanted to marry her, so Simeon and Levi

said, “We’ll let you marry our sister if all your men become like us—if they all are circumcised.”

So the men of Shechem were indeed circumcised. While they were recovering, Simeon and Levi unsheathed their swords and killed all of the Shechemites. When Jacob realized what his sons had done, he said, “You’ve caused me to stink in this land.” On his deathbed, his appraisal of Simeon and Levi was evident.

Joshua 19:10
And the third lot came up for the children of Zebulun according to their families: and the border of their inheritance was unto Sarid:

Zebulun was given an area north between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean. This was also a fulfillment of prophecy because in Genesis 49, Jacob had said to Zebulun, “You will be a haven for ships.” Indeed he became just that with his land stretching to the Mediterranean on one side and the fresh-water Sea of Galilee on the other.

Joshua 19:17
And the fourth lot came out to Issachar, for the children of Issachar according to their families.

Issachar’s was the region south of the Sea of Galilee, where there is a magnificent valley called the Valley of Jezreel, more commonly known as Megiddo.

Joshua 19:24
And the fifth lot came out for the tribe of the children of Asher according to their families.

Although Asher does not go down in history as a very prominent or important tribe, there is one specific mention of Asher that stands out. It relates to the story of Jesus. When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to be dedicated, a woman in the temple recognized Him immediately as Messiah. Luke identifies her as Anna. I find it interesting that it wasn’t the strength of its army or the mighty deeds of its people that caused the tribe of

Asher to be uniquely known. Rather, it was the spiritual sensitivity of an eighty-four-year-old widow who brought notoriety to the tribe of Asher.

Joshua 19:32
The sixth lot came out to the children of Naphtali, even for the children of Naphtali according to their families.

The inheritance of Zebulun and Naphtali is called "the Galilee of the Gentiles" in Matthew 4. Throughout Israel's history, Zebulun and Naphtali were always being beat up because the enemies of Israel—the Babylonians, Assyrians, Greeks, Persians, and Romans came from the north. Consequently, Zebulun and Naphtali resided in "the Galilee of the Gentiles" because Gentiles resided there ultimately.

Isaiah prophesied that the land of Zebulun and Naphtali would see a great light (Isaiah 9:1, 2). Indeed, those who were depressed, in bondage, and under attack were those who saw a great light because where did Jesus base His ministry? Where did He spend virtually all of His time except when He traveled to Jerusalem? Galilee. You might be in the dark today—depressed and beat up. If so, you're just the person the Lord wants especially to visit. If you're in a place of being wiped out, understand that it was the people who sat in great darkness who saw a great, great Light (Matthew 4:13–16).

Joshua 19:35
And the fenced cities are Ziddim, Zer, and Hammath, Rakkath, and Chinnereth,

Chinnereth means "harp" and refers to the Sea of Galilee because the Sea of Galilee is harp-shaped.

Joshua 19:40
And the seventh lot came out for the tribe of the children of Dan according to their families.

Although the children of Dan were to settle near Joppa—the place of Simon the tanner's house, a part of present-day Tel Aviv on the coast of Southern Israel, they went north instead . . .

Joshua 19:47
And the coast of the children of Dan went out too little for them: therefore the children of Dan went up to fight against Leshem, and took it, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and possessed it, and dwelt therein, and called Leshem, Dan, after the name of Dan their father.

Why did Dan go north? Because the southern region was too hard for them to control. They left the region to which they were assigned and went north because it was easier—or so they thought. In reality, they fell into idolatry, made a golden calf eventually, and were attacked constantly. Thus, by trying to avoid struggle, they found themselves in an infinitely worse situation They were under attack to a greater degree and had a tough time throughout history because they didn't stay in the place the Lord knew would be best for them. And oh, how often we have found the same to be true in our lives.

Joshua 19:49, 50
When they had made an end of dividing the land for inheritance by their coasts, the children of Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua the son of Nun among them: According to the word of the LORD they gave him the city which he asked, even Timnath-serah in mount Ephraim: and he built the city, and dwelt therein.

It was only after everyone else had an assigned section that Joshua claimed his territory. Timnath-serah was hill country. It was similar to Caleb's territory—a tough assignment.

Philippians 2 tells us we're to have the same mind as Jesus, Who came in humility and gave up His rights to die on the Cross in order to provide redemption for lost sinners like you and me.

Timnath-serah literally means "abundant portion" because abundance is always found when we lay down our rights. It's the hard stuff that brings abundance. It's when you have to roll up your sleeves and put your hand to the plow, it's when you get involved and engaged that you find abundant life. The abundant life is found in walking in the Spirit, seeking first the kingdom, taking on the territory you've been assigned, and not giving up. Joshua

claimed Timnath-serah as his own. Yet Jesus took on an infinitely tougher assignment when He took on my salvation.



20 Joshua 20:1, 2

The Lord also spake unto Joshua, saying, Speak to the children of Is rael, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses:

Chapter 20 lists the cities of refuge, first seen in Numbers 35.

Joshua 20:3–6

That the slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood. And when he that doth flee unto one of those cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver the slayer up into his hand; because he smote his neighbour unwittingly, and hated him not beforetime. And he shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the high priest that shall be in those days: then shall the slayer return, and come unto his own city, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled.

Simply put, because there was neither a police force nor a penal system in Israel, it was up to the families to make sure that law and order prevailed. Therefore, the relatives of a man who was killed would track down the murderer and avenge the death of their slain relative. Such a system was not unique to Israel, for the practice of revenge and retaliation is seen in virtually every society of antiquity. But the Lord provided a refuge for His people. That is, a man who killed another by accident could run to one of six cities—three on each side of the Jordan River—and there be protected from

retaliation. The elders of the city would then call for witnesses and if his offense was found to be accidental, or second-degree murder, he could remain in the city of refuge and be safe there until the death of the high priest—at which time he would be free to leave the city without fear of retribution.

This speaks beautifully of our salvation—for not only do we have refuge in Christ, but we're also free because our High Priest died for us on the Cross of Calvary.

Joshua 20:7–9
And they appointed Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. These were the cities appinted for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person at unawares might flee thither, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation.

With three cities on each side of the Jordan, no one would have to cross water or a mountain range to reach one. The cities of refuge were strategically located, available, and accessible—just like Jesus is available and accessible to each person who says, "I'm guilty. I need protection. I need refuge. I need salvation."

21

Joshua 21:1–3
Then came near the heads of the fathers of the Levites unto Eleazar the priest, and unto Joshua the son of Nun, and unto the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel; And they spake unto them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, The LORD commanded by the hand of Moses to give us cities to dwell in, with the suburbs thereof for our cattle. And the children of Israel gave unto the Levites out of

their inheritance, at the commandment of the LORD, these cities and their suburbs.

Although the Levites were not given territory, as were the other tribes, they were given cities within the territories of the other tribes. The Levites were those who worked in the tabernacle, those who cared for the spiritual life of the people of Israel. The priests all came from the tribe of Levi, but not all Levites were priests. To be a priest, one had to be a descendant of Aaron. The Levites were spread out over forty-eight cities. This meant that every Israelite was near to a Levitical community, near to men who knew the Scriptures and were dedicated to serving the Lord.

As we have seen, Levi, along with Simeon, was to have no inheritance due to his dealing with Shechem (Genesis 32, 49). Yet the curse on Levi was reversed and transformed into a major blessing when the Lord said, "Levi, I will be your inheritance. You'll be scattered everywhere in order to serve Me, and your cities will be protected by the rest of the nation." Simeon and Levi were both cursed, but God reversed the curse upon Levi. Why? I believe the answer lies in Exodus 32:28.

The day Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments in hand, the people were dancing around a golden calf. "Who is on the Lord's side?" Moses said. "Who will deal with this sin?" Only one tribe volunteered—the tribe of Levi. The Levites unsheathed their swords and went throughout the congregation dealing with their friends and relatives. It was painful, but they had to do it because the tribe of Levi knew, perhaps better than anyone, that sin cannot go unchecked.

God can take our sin and turn it around for good. He can reverse the curse even today. Wherever you've been, whatever you've done, if you repent and say, "Lord, from here on out, I'm going Your way," He'll turn the mistakes you've made around for good. Oh, the scars will still be there. But God will open new doors and do wonderful things in your life. You'll be more blessed than you could have ever imagined if—and only if—you repent. Simeon didn't. Evidently the men of Simeon didn't want to offend their friends or family, so they stood on the sidelines. As a result, centuries later, the land Simeon was given was eventually swallowed up.

Say, "I know I shouldn't be doing that anymore, but I don't want to be different. My teammates, my roommates, everyone is going there and doing that and I don't want to stand out. I don't want to be too radical, so I'll just go to church when I can, fit in there as much as I can, and then when I'm with the guys, I'll fit in with them," and you'll end up like Simeon. You'll disappear into nothingness. Oh, you'll still go to heaven, but your life and impact will be tragically diminished. You'll look in the mirror at age fifty, sixty, or seventy, and say, "I'm basically nothing because I wanted to fit in."

On the other hand, say, "I was wrong. I messed up badly. Lord, I repent"—and God will use even your mistakes. You'll minister to Him, make an impact for Him, and be blessed by Him. I know you've dropped the ball. I know you've messed up. We all have because *all* we like sheep have gone astray (Isaiah 53:6). But the curse can be reversed. God can give you a dynamic life and a dynamic ministry if you, like Levi, unsheathe the sword and say, "Enough is enough. I'm going on record. I'm standing for the Lord from here on out." It's all a matter of repentance, of changing directions. Simeon didn't and he's in the middle of Judah, swallowed up by a greater tribe. Levi did, and they're involved in ministry throughout forty-eight cities, serving in the temple. Two men committed the same sin. One chose to repent, the other didn't, and the difference in their lives is unmistakable.

Joshua 21:43–45
And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he sware unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.

Following the list of the forty-eight cities given to the Levites, chapter 21 closes with one of my favorite verses in all of Scripture: "There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; *all* came to pass." And because *Israel* means "governed by God," if your house or your life is governed by God, this applies to you, too.

IT *ALL* CAME TO PASS
A Topical Study of
JOSHUA 21:43–45

An eerie discovery was made when the contents of a leather suitcase salvaged from the *Titanic* were dry enough to make an ironic letter legible. The suitcase belonged to a seventeen-year-old young man named Edgar Samuel Andrew. Andrew, a citizen of Argentina, boarded the *Titanic* in Southampton, England, not far from where he was attending school. He had initially purchased a ticket to board the steamship, *Oceanic,* but, due to a coal strike, he was forced to change his ticket and boarded the *Titanic* instead. In the letter addressed to his girlfriend, Josie, he wrote: "You figure, Josie. I had to leave on the seventeenth this month aboard the *Oceanic,* but due to the coal strike that steamer cannot depart. So I have to go one week earlier aboard the *Titanic*. It really seems unbelievable that I have to leave a few days before your arrival here. There's no help for it. I've got to go. You figure, Josie. I'm boarding the greatest steamship in the world, but I don't really feel proud of it at all. Right now, I wish the *Titanic* were laying at the bottom of the ocean."

Likewise, this past week, I've "salvaged" some Scriptures I have known very well and have taught on before. Yet as I looked at them again, I was most touched by the passage before us. It was a discovery that impacted me, a rediscovery that encouraged me. You see, the last time I taught on this passage, I was twenty-three years old. And, as a twenty-three-year-old, concerning Joshua 21:45, I said, "I know this is true. God said it. Let's believe it, and see what He'll do." Twenty-five years later, I know this is true not only because it's in Scripture—which would be reason enough—but because, over the past twenty-five years, God has kept every promise He has ever made to me. Without exception, He has done everything He said He would do.

"I have come that you might have life and life more abundantly," Jesus said (John 10:10). And I have that. I have an abundant, full life. If I were to die today, I would die a very happy man. Even if in theory there was no heaven—which there is—if I could go back and live my life again, I would

give my heart to the Lord, offer my life in service for the Lord, and daily walk with the Lord because I have had an absolutely abundant life—just like He promised.

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid," Jesus said (John 14:27). I have peace. Even yesterday, which would have been my daughter Jessie's twenty-third birthday, as I spent time at her grave, I realized that the Lord has done precisely what He said He would do. I have peace in my heart. I'm happy for my daughter. I'm delighted that she is in the arms of her Love, and that she's having a better time than she could ever have with us here on earth.

"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus," Paul declared (Philippians 4:19). Guess what. God has done exactly that. Oh, there were times in those early years and even sometimes presently when I wonder how everything will work practically—but it always does. "I have been young and now I am old, but I have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging for bread," David wrote (Psalm 37:25). God will do exactly as He said. He will supply your needs. He will fulfill your desires.

Flipping through my journals yesterday, I was amazed to see entries I made when I was twenty-three, twenty-four, and twenty-five years old concerning questions I had, dilemmas I was in, problems I was wrestling through. As I turned the now-yellowing pages of those journals, I had no other choice but to say, "Lord, You came through in every instance, in every way, point by point. The stuff I thought would never work out has worked out marvelously. The battles I thought would never end have given way to peace presently. You've done everything You said You would do. It has *all* come to pass."

As an older brother, I'm telling you that you will discover the same thing. As the years unfold, and as you begin to look back and read through old prayer logs or journals, you, too, will say, "The Lord has come through in every way He promised."

Is this true for everyone? It can be. God wants it to be. That's His intention for you and me. There is one issue, however, that will stand in His

way. In the Book of Hebrews, we see what will keep us from experiencing all of the blessings God wants to bestow upon us . . .

> *So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.*
>
> Hebrews 3:19

The parents and grandparents of those who reaped the blessings of the Promised Land also had an opportunity to do so. They were at the border. They could see it. They could smell it. They could even taste it in the grapes brought to them by the twelve spies. They were oh, so close. But they couldn't go in. Why? It wasn't because they had danced around the golden calf in sin and rebellion. It wasn't their complaining and murmuring that kept them from entering the land of their destiny. It wasn't their carnality that popped up time and time again that kept them out of the Promised Land. It wasn't any of the issues we would think would be a barrier to experiencing the abundance and blessings of God. It was a very simple, singular issue. The previous generation wasted away in the wilderness due entirely and exclusively to unbelief. They just didn't believe God would do what He promised.

Their kids, however, learned the lesson. Their kids said, "We're going to believe what God says, and if He says we can go in and be blessed and have victory and enjoy prosperity, then we are going to step up and step in and believe that the Lord will take us through.

> *Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.*
>
> Hebrews 4:1, 2

The previous generation heard the Word. The promises were proclaimed to them. The invitation was extended to them. But they didn't mix them with faith. That is why the writer of Hebrews says to you and me, "Be careful. The Good News has come to you, but it will profit you nothing if you don't

mix it with faith." Unbelief is the only thing that will keep us from experiencing the promises God has so freely given to us.

> *And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*
>
> Hebrews 6:11, 12

God gives a promise and then keeps it—but there is often a period of time between when the promise is given and the fulfillment of it is seen. God says, "Hear the Word. Mix it with faith. Don't be slothful. Don't be cynical. Don't give up. Instead, keep to the course to which God has called you. Believe the promises He's given to you in the Word. And, with faith and patience, you'll inherit them." I wonder how many people give up a month, a day, or an hour too soon and just miss God's blessing.

> *For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.*
>
> Hebrews 6:13–15

Abraham goes down in history and is celebrated throughout eternity as a man of faith. He heard the Word. He mixed it with faith. He patiently endured, and it came to pass.

Perhaps you're thinking, *Believing might have been simple for Abraham, but me? I don't have faith that God will bless my marriage, my kids, or my job. I can't believe because my faith is so weak.* Are you sure? I suggest that your faith is huge, colossal, titanic in size. After all, you're in the hall of faith, in the company of Moses, Abraham, Sarah, Gideon, and Samson.

> *Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*

Hebrews 11:3

Your belief that God created all things is itself an indication of the colossal size and strength of your faith. Believing God created the world out of nothing is the hardest thing to believe. Everything else is a piece of cake by comparison. The second biggest issue deals with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ . . .

"I won't believe Jesus is alive unless I can put my fingers in the holes in His side and touch His wounds with my hands," Thomas said.

After allowing Thomas to touch His wounds, Jesus said, "You have seen and believed. But blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe," Jesus said (John 20:29).

That's us.

Do you believe Jesus rose from the dead? If so, I suggest with a sparkle in His eye and a grin on His face, Jesus would say, "Awesome! You have not seen Me physically, but you believe in Me. You are a blessed person."

Therefore, when the enemy whispers in your ear, "You're not going to see that happen. You're never going to see that work out because your faith is too weak," you need to say, "I believe creation was accomplished by my Father. I also believe Jesus rose from the dead. I couldn't believe either one of those things had not the Father given me huge, colossal-sized faith. He has given me faith for the big issues, and everything else—health, finances, relationships—are miniscule by comparison."

Mix the Word with faith, gang. Patiently endure, and in the coming days and years, you'll have no choice but to say, "There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto me. It *all* came to pass."

22 Joshua 22:1 (a)
Then . . .

After wandering in the wilderness for forty years, the Israelites were camped by the Jordan River, poised to enter the Promised Land, the land of

their destiny. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, however, chose to remain on the east side of the Jordan because the lush land seemed like an ideal place to raise cattle. Moses gave them permission to do so—with the stipulation that they were to join the other nine and one-half tribes in warfare. Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh agreed and fought for seven years on the west side of the Jordan until the Promised Land was conquered.

Joshua 22:1 (b)–9

. . . Joshua called the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, And said unto them, Ye have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you: Ye have not left your brethren these many days unto this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God. And now the LORD your God hath given rest unto your brethren, as he promised them: therefore now return ye, and get you unto your tents, and unto the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side Jordan. But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the LORD charged you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul. So Joshua blessed them, and sent them away: and they went unto their tents. Now to the one half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given possession in Bashan: but unto the other half thereof gave Joshua among their brethren on this side Jordan westward. And when Joshua sent them away also unto their tents, then he blessed them, And he spake unto them, saying, Return with much riches unto your tents, and with very much cattle, with silver, and with gold, and with brass, and with iron, and with very much raiment: divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren. And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel out of Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go unto the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession, whereof they

were possessed, according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

Joshua said to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh, "Return to your wives, children, and cattle." And we see them going back over the Jordan to the east side of the river.

Joshua 22:10
And when they came unto the borders of Jordan, that are in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by Jordan, a great altar to see to.

As we will see in verses 27 and 28, the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan built an altar not for sacrifice or worship, but, rather, as a symbol of their solidarity with their brothers on the west side of the Jordan. So incensed by this were their brothers on the west side, however, that civil war nearly ensued.

The nine and one-half tribes were in the Promised Land, but the enemy sought to divide them from their brothers on the other side of the Jordan. Satan's strategy is still the same: divide and conquer. His goal is always to get believers to separate, to distance, to analyze. In this passage, we see four ways the nine and one-half tribes fell prey to the destructive division that almost led to civil war . . .

Joshua 22:11, 12
And the children of Israel heard say, Behold, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh have built an altar over against the land of Canaan, in the borders of Jordan, at the passage of the children of Israel. And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them.

The first step towards division was taken when the nine and one-half tribes acted on hearsay. They didn't see the altar the two and one-half tribes

had built—they only heard about it. That's always how Satan begins to bring people into division and opposition. So often, divisions in families or churches are based simply on what is heard. Rumors take on a life of their own and fires are fanned when people act on hearsay.

Joshua 22:13, 14
And the children of Israel sent unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, into the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, And with him ten princes, of each chief house a prince throughout all the tribes of Israel; and each one was an head of the house of their fathers among the thousands of Israel.

The second mistake of the nine and one-half tribes was that they got worked up before they checked the situation out. That is, they sharpened their swords and grabbed their shields before they established the facts. "He that answers a matter before he hears it, it is a folly and a shame unto him" (Proverbs 18:13). Making a decision without learning the whole story leads to folly and shame ultimately.

Joshua 22:15–18
And they came unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, unto the land of Gilead, and they spake with them, saying, Thus saith the whole congregation of the LORD, What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the LORD, in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the LORD? Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the LORD, But that ye must turn away this day from following the LORD? and it will be, seeing ye rebel to day against the LORD, that to morrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation of Israel.

The third misstep the nine and one-half tribes made was using the Lord's name loosely. That can happen to Spirit-filled believers as well. We hear

something. Our righteous indignation flares up. And then we use the name of the Lord quite liberally when we say, "The Lord showed me this," or, "The Lord wants you to know that." But we must be careful. Are we sure it's the Lord? It might simply be our own opinion or perspective.

> **Joshua 22:19, 20**
> **Notwithstanding, if the land of your possession be unclean, then pass ye over unto the land of the possession of the LORD, wherein the LORD's tabernacle dwelleth, and take possession among us: but rebel not against the LORD, nor rebel against us, in building you an altar beside the altar of the LORD our God. Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? and that man perished not alone in his iniquity.**

The fourth mistake the nine and one-half tribes made was when they bore false witness in accusing their brothers of rebelling against God. We usually think of bearing false witness as telling a whopper of a lie. While it can be that, it's not limited to that. Bearing false witness means giving the right information, but with the wrong implication.

When Jesus was being tried, false witnesses pointed to Him and said, "He said to destroy the temple and in three days, He would raise it up" (Matthew 26:60, 61). While Jesus did, in fact, utter those words, He wasn't referring to the temple in Jerusalem, but to His own body (John 2:19–21).

Although the two and one-half tribes did indeed build an altar, it was not a sign of rebellion. That said, however, Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh were also responsible for the division that nearly led to civil war. Why? They were on the wrong side of the Jordan River. God wanted His people on the west side of the Jordan. But the two and one-half tribes said, "No. We have business interests and family obligations, so we'll just stay here on the east side."

In reality, the east side of the Jordan was a place of carnality. You see, the word, *carnal,* simply means "fleshly." As seen in 1 Corinthians 3, it refers to those who are interested in the seen rather than in the unseen, in the material rather than in the spiritual, in the temporal rather than in the eternal.

How do you know when you're carnal? How do you know that, although you're part of God's family and part of the kingdom, you're on the wrong side of the Jordan? In the response of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh, we see three indications of the state of the heart of one who is carnal . . .

Joshua 22:21–24
Then the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh answered, and said unto the heads of the thousands of Israel, The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know; if it be in rebellion, or if in transgression against the LORD, (save us not this day,) That we have built us an altar to turn from following the LORD, or if to offer thereon burnt offering or meat offering, or if to offer peace offerings thereon, let the LORD himself require it; And if we have not rather done it for fear of this thing, saying, In time to come your children might speak unto our children, saying, What have ye to do with the LORD God of Israel?

When they were accused and challenged by the nine and one-half tribes for building an altar, the two and one-half tribes said, "The Lord knows." This is what carnal people often say.

"Don't judge me," says the carnal believer. "God knows my heart." Yes, God does know our hearts. The problem is, we don't. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Jeremiah asks. (Jeremiah 17:9). We can't know our own heart—but the Word of God can because it is a "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Therefore, it doesn't matter what your heart tells you. It matters what God's Word declares.

Joshua 22:25 (a)
For the LORD hath made Jordan a border between us and you, ye children of Reuben and children of Gad; ye have no part in the LORD . . .

Secondly, carnal people blame the Lord either directly or indirectly for any given problem. Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh blamed the Lord for the

division. Carnal people blame the Lord—and sometimes others—for their own sins and shortcomings. "It was because of the woman *You* gave me that I sinned," Adam said to God as an excuse for his own rebellion (Genesis 3:12).

Joshua 22:25 (b)
. . . so shall your children make our children cease from fearing the LORD.

Thirdly, carnal people blame their family problems on churches or other believers. Blaming the church is always an indication of carnality. "If your kids were better behaved, our kids wouldn't be rebellious," say the carnal parents. It is the mature believer who understands that it's not up to the church, Boy Scouts, or the school system to raise his kids. It's up to him. When his kids struggle, it's the mature believer who says, "Lord, *I* have dropped the ball. Show me what I need to do."

Joshua 22:26–28
Therefore we said, Let us now prepare to build us an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice: But that it may be a witness between us, and you, and our generations after us, that we might do the service of the LORD before him with our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings; that your children may not say to our children in time to come, Ye have no part in the LORD. Therefore said we, that it shall be, when they should so say to us or to our generations in time to come, that we may say again, Behold the pattern of the altar of the LORD, which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifices; but it is a witness between us and you.

Finally, carnal believers say, "I'm going to worship how I want to worship, where I want to worship, in the way I want to worship." God never told the two and one-half tribes to build an altar. He wanted His people to gather around the single altar of the tabernacle. But the two and one-half tribes did it their way.

The same is still true today. Carnal Christians say, "I can worship just as well out on the golf course as I can in church." The Word, however, clearly says, "Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together" (Hebrews 10:25) and "Behold, how good, and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133:1).

The nine and one-half tribes were in error because, in righteous indignation, they wanted to correct their brothers before they understood the problem. However, the two and one-half tribes were also in error because, by remaining on the east side of the Jordan, they placed themselves in a position to be misunderstood.

The lesson for us is clear. You who are spiritual, you who love the Lord and are walking with Him, be careful that in your Spirit-filled desire for rightness, you don't judge and criticize those on the other side of the river. The enemy would love to see you at odds with your brothers and sisters, waging war against them, critical of them, losing patience with them. In Galatians 6:1, we read, "Brethren, if any of you be overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual"—which means Spirit-filled people—"restore such a one in the spirit of meekness." The word, "restore," is a medical term referring to the way a doctor would carefully reset a broken bone. He who is spiritual must deal with people gently and meekly in order that the bones of others might mend, in order that their walk might be restored. If you're spiritual, be careful.

If you're carnal, be cautioned. If you say, "I like being on the fringe. I don't want to get too radical," be cautioned because Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh were the first people to be led hundreds of miles across the desert when the Assyrians attacked the nation of Israel and led them into captivity. If you're a carnal believer, understand that, although you'll go to heaven ultimately, you'll experience unnecessary heartbreak and agony before then because the wages of sin is still and always death (Romans 6:23).

Joshua 22:32–34
And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and the princes, returned from the children of Reuben, and from the children of Gad, out of the land of Gilead, unto the land of Canaan, to the children of Israel, and brought them word again. And the thing

pleased the children of Israel; and the children of Israel blessed God, and did not intend to go up against them in battle, to destroy the land wherein the children of Reuben and Gad dwelt. And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar Ed: for it shall be a witness between us that the LORD is God.

Ed means "witness." This altar was meant to be a witness to the unity of the twelve tribes. Jesus said that our *ed*—the witness of our unity as the body of Christ—is love. The world will know we're believers not by our bumper stickers or the size of the Bible we carry. "They'll know you are My disciples," Jesus said, "by your love" (John 13:35).

"Father, let them be one that the world might know that I am in You and You are in Me," Jesus prayed (John 17:21).

Gang, we get to love people and love each other. Love is the key. Love is our witness. Where is unity found? At the altar of the Cross of Calvary. It is neither our eschatology nor our pneumatology—neither how we view the end times nor how we view the manifestations of the Holy Spirit—that make us one. We are one because we all believe in the same Lord. We eat of His body. We drink of His blood. Unity is found at the foot of the Cross, at the altar called Calvary. Whether regarding division among family members, churches, or brothers and sisters in the congregation, unity is found only at the altar where the Lamb was slain for you and me.

The enemy wants to cause believers to wage war with each other. Be warned. Be wise. And just love people in Jesus' name.

23 Joshua 23:1

And it came to pass a long time after that the LORD had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua waxed old and stricken in age.

Many years had passed since Joshua and the children of Israel crossed over the Jordan River and entered into the land of destiny. It took them seven years to defeat the enemies inhabiting the land of Canaan. Then thirteen years

passed before the land was divided among the tribes. After tackling the remnants of their enemies hiding in the hills and valleys, the land had been given rest. So when we read that Joshua was old and stricken in age, this is no exaggeration. At one hundred and ten years of age, however, he was still going strong, still encouraging, exhorting, instructing, and inspiring.

Roman philosopher, Cato, wrote commentaries on the Greek language. Yet he didn't learn Greek until he was eighty-one. Tennyson wrote *Crossing the Bar* at eighty-three years of age. John Wesley, the circuit-riding preacher who traveled 250,000 miles on horseback going from town to town preaching the gospel wrote four hundred books, preached 40,000 messages, traveled 250,000 miles and became a self-taught scholar in ten different languages. When he got to be eighty-one, he wrote in his journal that he was angry because he could only read for five hours at one sitting before his eyes began to bother him. At the age of eighty-six, he wrote that he was upset because he had to cut back to two sermons a day. At eighty-eight, he complained that he had a tendency to occasionally sleep in until 5:30 A.M. John Wesley had a passion in his heart because he had a calling on his life to share the Good News, to tell people about Jesus, to see people make it to heaven, to watch people do better in their walk with the Lord. It burned in his soul like fire, and he kept going and going in an amazing way.

Joshua was that kind of man. Moses didn't even begin his public ministry until he was eighty. And yet today we have a tendency to say, "I'm thirty-six. I'm just about through." Or, "I'm forty-one. There's not much left for me to do." Be careful. I believe God wants you to finish the race with a burst of energy. I believe God wants to use us until the day He calls us home. I believe there are things for you to do today no matter how old you are or how late a start you had. The Scriptures indicate over and over that God has a grand plan even for men and women who are in the winter season of their lives.

Joshua 23:2
And Joshua called for all Israel, and for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and said unto them, I am old and stricken in age.

The first use of the word, "and," being in italics, it doesn't appear in the original text. Therefore, the idea here is that Joshua gathered the leaders of the nation to give them a final word of exhortation. In chapter 24, he'll call for the congregation in its entirety.

Joshua 23:3
And ye have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the LORD your God is he that hath fought for you.

When people get old, they can have a tendency to want applause or approval, credit or recognition. Joshua is bigger than that. He says, "It wasn't my military strategy, my great ability, or my ingenuity that gave you victory. It was the Lord exclusively." In this, Joshua is, again, a wonderful picture of Jesus—for every time Jesus did a miracle, without exception, Scripture records that people glorified God. Jesus was able to minister in such a way that no matter how spectacular His acts, the attention, honor, and glory always went to His Father.

Joshua 23:4, 5
Behold, I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward. And the LORD your God, he shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the LORD your God hath promised unto you.

I like this. Joshua says, "Consider what the Lord has done, and know there's more He's going to do. He'll expel your enemies, and you'll possess their land." The Lord will expel—but we're to possess. That's the key. God will do His part, but we've got to do our part.

An example of this principle can be seen in the practice of speaking in tongues. In Acts 2:4, we read that those in the Upper Room spoke "with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The Spirit prompted. They spoke. You can sit hour after hour, day after day, saying, "I'm open. If God wants me to speak in tongues, He'll move my tongue." But that won't work any more

than if you said, "I'm open to praying in English. If God wants me to pray in English, He'll move my tongue." No, when I begin to pray in English, then the Lord begins to meet me and inspire me to continue. The same is true of the prayer language.

In all areas of spiritual life, God will do—but we must cooperate, too. That's what Joshua meant when he said, "God will expel—but you must possess." God will do His part, but we've got to do ours. There is so much God wants to do for me and with me, through me, and in me. But I've got to do my part. I can't just sit passively.

Joshua 23:6
Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left . . .

The first responsibility Joshua gave to the leaders of the nation was to be obedient to the Word. Keep in the Word, gang. Satan will tell you you're too old, too tired. He'll tell you that you don't have to meet with us for Bible study because the music is too loud, the seats too hard, or the pastor talks too long! Don't listen to him. Make study of the Word the priority of your life.

Joshua 23:7
That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them:

Joshua told the elders that, in addition to being obedient to the Word, they were to be separate from the world. They were not to be experts on the gods of the nations surrounding them. According to Romans 16:19, we are to be simple, or naive, concerning evil.

Joshua 23:8–11
But cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day. For the LORD hath driven out from before you great nations and strong: but as for you, no man hath been able to stand before

you unto this day. One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you. Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God.

The leaders of Israel were to be obedient to the Word, separate from the world, and affectionate towards the Lord. How can we love God? By spending time with Him. It's real simple. If you spend time with the Lord tomorrow morning, you will become intrigued by Him and experience intimacy with Him. It's all about time. After all, if you spend five minutes every third day with your wife, what kind of marriage will you have? If you spend ten minutes every fifth day with your girlfriend or boyfriend, what kind of relationship will you have? Friendships are formed over time. I'm not talking about a legalistic, pharisaical schedule. I'm talking about saying, "I have a half hour open here, or twenty minutes there. I don't need to watch that show or read that magazine. Maybe I'll just go for a walk with my Bible and talk to the Lover of my soul." Do this and you'll be amazed by the things He'll whisper in your ear, the things He'll speak to your heart, the way the Word will come alive.

I absolutely know this to be so. The way to love God is to spend time with Him because the more time you spend with Him, the more you can't help but love the One who is altogether lovely (Song of Solomon 5:16).

Joshua 23:12
Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you:

How could it be that people who had seen the blessings of God and who had been given a grand and glorious land would be in danger of going back, of pulling away from God? We're involved in a very real war, attacked constantly by a very real adversary—a roaring lion who prowls about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). It can happen at any time. You might be twenty-eight, forty-eight, sixty-eight, or eighty-eight—but you're not home free until you get to heaven.

No matter how long you've walked with the Lord, how deep your love is for Him, or how broad your knowledge is of Him, there's a war going on. It's a real war, and we're all vulnerable. So Joshua warns these leaders, these men of maturity, of very real danger. They had seen God bless them. They knew how good He had been to them. But if they chose to go back, they would experience tragic consequences . . .

Joshua 23:13 (a)
Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you . . .

If the Israelites joined themselves with heathen gods, the True and Living God would no longer fight for them, and their defeat would be certain.

Joshua 23:13 (b)
. . . but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you.

Not only would the Israelites be defeated if they failed to cleave to the Lord, but they would be discomforted. Their enemies would be scourges in their sides and thorns in their eyes. In this, I can't help but think of the One who, although He knew no sin, became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). Thorns were in His eyes when a crown of thorns was placed upon His forehead. A scourge ripped open His back; a spear cut through His side. That's what sin does—not His sin, but mine.

If you're toying with the idea of backsliding, know this: what happened to Jesus will happen to you. Sooner or later, it will kill you because the wages of sin is still, and always, death (Romans 6:23).

Joshua 23:14–16
And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof. Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all

good things are come upon you, which the LORD your God promised you; so shall the LORD bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you. When ye have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them; then shall the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you.

In addition to defeat and discomfort, God's people are sure to experience disgrace whenever they turn from Him. In 722 B.C., after Israel turned away from the Lord and worshiped other gods, the Assyrians invaded their land and marched them across the desert with fishhooks in their mouths to Assyria, where they were held captive. But that was only the beginning of their disgrace. In 586 B.C., the Babylonians came into Jerusalem, burned the temple, destroyed the city, and carried the Jews into captivity. In 165 B.C., a madman named Antiochus Epiphanes humiliated the Jews when he slaughtered a pig in the temple. In A.D. 70, the Romans destroyed the second temple and burned the city of Jerusalem. In A.D. 130, Roman Emperor Hadrian decreed that if any two Jews were seen talking together in Jerusalem, they would be executed. During the Spanish Inquisition, tens of thousands of Jews were tortured and killed. In our own twentieth century, the Jews faced the horror of Auschwitz and Treblinka.

Joshua said, "If you choose to go back and serve other gods, this is what you can count on: defeat, discomfort, and disgrace." The same applies to us —which is why obedience to the Lord (v. 6), separation from the world (v. 7), and affection for the Lord (v. 11) are all of utmost importance.

24 Joshua 24:1

And Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God.

After addressing the leaders of Israel in chapter 23, here in chapter 24, he addresses the entire nation.

Joshua 24:2
And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods.

"The Flood" speaks of the Euphrates River. God called Abraham from the land of Ur, where false gods were worshiped to a new land, to become a new nation—comprised of the people to whom Joshua spoke.

Joshua 24:3–12
And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac. And I gave unto Isaac Jacob and Esau: and I gave unto Esau mount Seir, to possess it; but Jacob and his children went down into Egypt. I sent Moses also and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to that which I did among them: and afterward I brought you out. And I brought your fathers out of Egypt: and ye came unto the sea; and the Egyptians pursued after your fathers with chariots and horsemen unto the Red sea. And when they cried unto the LORD, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and brought the sea upon them, and covered them; and your eyes have seen what I have done in Egypt: and ye dwelt in the wilderness a long season. I brought you into the land of the Amorites, which dwelt on the other side Jordan; and they fought with you: and I gave them into your hand, that ye might possess their land; and I destroyed them from before you. Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and warred against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you: But I would not hearken unto Balaam; therefore he blessed you still: so I delivered you out of his hand. And ye went over Jordan, and came unto Jericho: and the men of Jericho fought against you, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and

the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I delivered them into your hand. And I sent the hornet before you, which drave them out from before you, even the two kings of the Amorites; but not with thy sword, nor with thy bow.

Through His servant, Joshua, God reminds the nation of Israel of His care for them throughout their history. Notice God's active involvement in the lives of His people: "I took. I gave. I sent. I brought. I destroyed. I delivered," He says.

Joshua 24:13
And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat.

Speaking at a retreat in the Hamptons, I was walking along a small boardwalk, looking up at homes bigger than anything I've ever seen. "Lord," I said, "You are so awesome. You have given these people so much—and most of them don't even know You. Truly, every good and perfect gift comes from Your hand. You just bless everyone."

The generosity of our God is amazing, as seen in His undeserved goodness to the Israelites—and to us.

Joshua 24:14, 15
Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

At one hundred and ten years of age, Joshua was still saying, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

For topical study of Joshua 24:14, 15 entitled "As for Me and My House," turn to page **707.**

Joshua 24:16–19
And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods; For the LORD our God, he it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed: And the LORD drave out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land: therefore will we also serve the LORD; for he is our God. And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.

"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," Joshua declared with certainty.

"We want to serve the Lord, too," the people said.

"You can't," Joshua said.

Why? Because he knew it was "idle" talk. As we shall see, Joshua knew the people had idols in their tents and in their homes. He knew they were talking the talk but not prepared to walk the walk. He knew they would say, "Hip, hip, hooray for the Lord" in the midst of the congregation. But in reality, their idols would be at home waiting for them.

The Israelites had already begun to worship idols—the multi-breasted Ashteroth that spoke of sensuality, Baal that spoke of the intellect, Mammon that spoke of money. They had already begun to collect these idols—symbols of hedonism, intellectualism, materialism. Joshua knew this.

Concerning idols, the Lord said to Ezekiel,

> Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be

inquired of at all by them? Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols.

Ezekiel 14:3, 4

I've often been baffled by people who say, "God has given me peace about having an affair," or, "I've prayed about leaving my husband," or, "I have peace about having this cable channel in my house." How could it be that a person could look us in the eye and say, "God has told me . . ." something that is exactly contrary to the Word? Ezekiel says if there's an idol in your heart and you seek the Lord, you'll hear the voice of your idol and think it's the voice of God.

Stay away from idols, gang. I'm not talking about statues. I'm talking about passions, compromises, flirting with stuff you know is not right. They will lie to you and tell you you're in God's will. But you'll be deceived, disgraced, and carried away captive into a foreign country—into a place or a situation in which you don't want to be—just like the Israelites would be.

Joshua 24:20
If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good.

"God has blessed you," Joshua said to Israel. "But if you turn to other gods, you'll be badly hurt."

Joshua 24:21–23
And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the LORD. And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses. Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel.

“If you’re serious about following God, put away your idols,” Joshua said.

Joshua 24:24, 25
And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey. So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

“Okay,” Joshua said. “You’ve been heard. You’ve promised to put away the strange gods—not just talk the talk in the congregation, but walk the walk in your own situations.”

Joshua 24:26, 27
And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the LORD which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God.

How could a stone be a witness? “If the disciples pipe down, even the rocks will cry out and be a witness of Me,” Jesus said (Luke 19:40). The ultimate witness was the stone that was rolled away from the tomb when Jesus conquered death and rose on Easter morning.

Joshua 24:28, 29
So Joshua let the people depart, every man unto his inheritance. And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old.

Joshua kept going strong until the day he went home. How did he do it? Isaiah declared that they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31). The older and more tired you

are is the time to wait on the Lord, to learn about Him, to spend time with Him. And as you do, you'll mount up with wings as eagles. You'll run and not be weary. You'll walk and not faint. When fatigue sets in to the soul of a man, it's indicative of a failure to wait on the Lord—because the promise of God's Word is that if we wait on Him, He'll renew our strength.

Joshua 24:30–33
And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathserah, which is in mount Ephraim, on the north side of the hill of Gaash. And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel. And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for an hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph. And Eleazar the son of Aaron died; and they buried him in a hill that pertained to Phinehas his son, which was given him in mount Ephraim.

The last chapter of the Book of Joshua—the book that pictures the Spirit-filled life—includes a strong exhortation for a reason. You see, whenever God gives us a warning, it's because we need to be warned. God never gives warnings just because. He always warns for a reason. Therefore, it would do us well to heed them. Just like the people of Israel heard the word of Joshua and responded, so too, may we hear the word of our Joshua, our Jesus, and respond—to put away any and every idol in our homes or hearts and say, "No more. That's it. I've been warned."

May the Lord give us wisdom.



***For topical study of Joshua 1—24 entitled "A Prophetic Overview of Joshua," turn to page* 711.**

AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE

A Topical Study of
JOSHUA 24:14, 15

Great historical figures are often remembered for their powerful quotations . . .

- "Give me liberty or give me death," Patrick Henry thundered in the days of the American Revolution.
- "We have nothing to fear but fear itself," said Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the dark days of the Great Depression.
- "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country," said John F. Kennedy in his first inaugural address.
- "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind," were the words of Neil Armstrong, the first man to put his foot on the surface of the moon.
- "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," Joshua declared on the plains of Shechem.

An Important Realization

"As for me *and my house, we will serve the Lord."*

If I say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," I must realize it begins with me. I lead the way. Where I am will set the stage for where my kids will end up. What am I doing? Who am I privately? If I watch questionable stuff on TV late at night and sneak off to the movies, I cannot expect my kids not to do the same.

"Oh, but my kids don't know," you might protest.

Jesus declares that what you do in secret the Father sees and will reward openly (Matthew 6). Therefore, if you want your sons and daughters to be Bible lovers, love the Bible yourself. Develop a deep devotional life personally and privately. If you want your kids to be pure, then live in purity in your secret life because what you do in secret will inevitably impact what your children and grandchildren end up doing in their own lives.

I think of David. When he was just a teenager, he killed Goliath. The years went by and we see him on his deathbed, surrounded by the group known as David's "mighty men." Scripture records that they were giant-killers as well (2 Samuel 23). They never saw David kill Goliath. Yet fearlessly waging war against evil was part of David's character, and it was transferred to the men who spent time with him. On the other hand, in the list of men who surrounded Saul, we find not one giantkiller because Saul, who was afraid to do battle with Goliath, never killed a giant himself.

Dad, your kids or grandchildren will take on aspects not of what they see you do, but of who you *are.* When Achan sinned, his whole family paid the price because what he did in secret in due time affected his entire family (Joshua 7).

A man shared his testimony, saying he was a born-again Christian who enjoyed alcohol. One Thanksgiving, the snow was falling, and, after the family feast was over, he wanted something to drink. Finding his liquor cabinet empty, he put on his hat, coat, and boots, and went outside to walk three blocks away to the liquor store. Halfway to his destination, he sensed that someone was following him. Turning around, he saw his four-year-old

son with his hat, coat, and galoshes on, taking giant steps, putting his feet in the newly fallen snow where his father had left his own footprints.

Hey, buddy, what are you doing?" the father asked.

"Daddy, I'm just walking in your footsteps," his son proudly answered.

"He's walking in my footsteps," thought the man, "and I'm going to the liquor store. Is that what I want for my boy?"

Immediately, he turned around, went home with his son, and never drank again.

"I can have beer and wine," you might be thinking.

Sure, you can. But do you want your kids to go there?

No?

Then don't lead them there.

What are my kids and grandchildren seeing? For better or worse, they're following in my footsteps.

A Grand Celebration

"As for me and my house, *we will serve the Lord."*

The Book of Joshua illustrates not only the Spirit-filled life, but also our Joshua, our Leader, Jesus. "Who are My sisters and brothers?" He asked. "They who do the will of God," He answered (Matthew 12:48–50). That's us. We're His family. We're His house. Jesus served His Father perfectly. That gives me great hope because I realize that even when I drop the ball, mess up, and miss the mark, I'm in the house of One who never fails. Even if I'm faithless, He will be faithful still (2 Timothy 2:13).

"Lord, even though everyone else forsakes You, I won't," Peter boasted. "I'll die beside you." By the time the rooster crowed, however, Peter had denied Jesus three times (John 18). After Jesus rose from the dead, He found Peter and said, "Do you love Me?" Three times, Peter had denied Him. Now Jesus gave him the opportunity to say three times, "I love You."

"Feed My lambs," Jesus said, as if to say, "You're not disqualified. It's a new day. Your sin is forgiven" (John 21:15).

You might have been more concerned about your kids liking you than about parenting them properly. But it's not too late. It's a new day. Starting here and now, God will see you through if you let Him. And if your kids are grown, you can still be involved with grandchildren or kids in the congregation. They're lambs for you to feed.

A Strong Declaration

"As for me and my house, we *will serve the Lord."*

We need men today who will not turn to their wives and say, "What do you think, honey? Should we serve the Lord?" We need men like Joshua who will declare directly, powerfully and boldly that they will indeed serve the Lord. Joshua, however, was not evidently always a strong leader. After Moses died, God told Joshua three times in chapter 1 to be strong and very courageous. Even the people said, "We'll follow you, Joshua. Only be strong and very courageous" (1:18). Evidently, Joshua needed this exhortation from the Lord and this encouragement from the congregation.

We live in a day when men "wimp-out" all too frequently. We want to be tender, sensitive, and politically correct. The Bible example, however, is that we ought to be men who say with strength and certainty, "We're not going to back away. This is the way it's got to be. This is the way it will be. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." We need strong men once again.

I'm not talking about arrogance or brutality. I'm talking about men who will say with firmness and love, "Son, I don't care if everyone else has those posters on their walls, you're not going to. I don't care if everyone else is listening to those songs, they won't be played in this house. I don't care if everyone else watches every movie, you're not going to. Why? Because as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. As long as you're under my roof, I'm responsible for you, and I care about you. I want the best to come your way, and I know those things will pollute and destroy you. Although you might be angry with me, I care more about you than what you think of me."

Much of today's parenting is rooted in sinful selfishness. Parents want their kids to like them—but that is not what parenting is about. Oh, it's wonderful if and when our kids like us, but that's not the goal. The goal is to raise your kids in the way that will be beneficial to them in the days to come and on into eternity. Children are like cassette tapes. They're always running and always recording. The question is, what do you want to be on the tape of your child's soul and mind?

The congregation of Israel said to Joshua, "We'll follow you, only be strong and of good courage." Dad, your wife, kids, and grandchildren are saying the same thing. Whether it's articulated or not, your family wants you to be strong and courageous. They want you to hold the line spiritually.

If you're a single mom or married to a man who won't take leadership, you need to step up and step in yourself. You need to do what Deborah did in Old Testament days. When Barak, the general of Israel's fighting forces, wouldn't take the lead, Deborah said, "If you won't lead, then I will." And she did just that. As a result, she goes down in history as an example of what a woman ought to do if a man won't do the things he's called to do. If there is no man to lead, the woman needs to step up and step in because the kids are too important. It is essential that they are trained properly by a loving parent who will say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

A Wonderful Expectation

"As for me and my house, we will *serve the Lord."*

"We *will* serve the Lord," said Joshua. "I expect this to be reality. My kids will serve the Lord right beside me."

The Bible says that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Therefore, dad, husband, or grandpa, you need to say, "I have faith that God will do what He's promised." What has God promised? He has promised that He who has begun a good work will be faithful to perform it (Philippians 1:6); that He is able to keep that which is committed to Him (2 Timothy 1:12); that if you train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old, he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6).

"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved—and thy house," Paul told the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31). In other words, "If you believe, not only will you be saved, but in due time, your family will be saved, too." That's God's heart.

For one hundred and twenty years, Noah pounded away on the ark, preparing it not only for the animals, but for his wife, three sons, and their wives, too. What amazes me is that he prepared these rooms twenty years before his sons were even born. *That's* faith!

You can do the same thing, Dad and Grandpa. In faith say, "I believe my family will indeed serve the Lord. I believe my kids won't be wiped out and washed away, but that they'll be on the ark of salvation." Have faith. Believe. It's important because without faith, it's impossible to please Him.

"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Declare this for your own family.

Expect it to be so.

Realize it begins with you.

And then break out in celebration as you remember heaven, where we will serve the Lord perfectly and eternally.

A PROPHETIC OVERVIEW OF JOSHUA

A Topical Study of JOSHUA 1—24

Let there be no question about it. Jesus Christ is coming back! The Bible speaks of the return of Jesus Christ clearly and constantly. In fact, almost one-third of the Bible deals with prophetic themes or issues. This is not surprising, for looking and longing for the coming of our Lord is such a key in navigating the Christian life successfully. The apostle John said, "Whoever has this hope purifies himself, even as He Himself is pure" (1 John 3:3). Looking for the coming of the Lord has a purifying effect on our lives because it keeps us focused on heaven.

Not only does looking for Jesus' coming purify our lives, but it produces peace in our hearts. "Don't let your heart be troubled," Jesus said. "You believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:1, 2). So often, people lack peace because they've lost the air of expectancy.

The Bible talks about prophecy in principles, precepts—and also in pictures. One of the pictures I have found to be absolutely intriguing is the picture portrayed in the Book of Joshua. Following are a few of the parallels, portraits, "sneak previews" of the end times presented in the Book of Joshua . . .

Joshua and Jesus

The Book of Joshua is a wonderful illustration of what it means to live the Spirit-filled life. But there's another dimension of the Book of Joshua. That is, it relates to the coming of the kingdom.

It all begins with Joshua himself. Joshua pictures and portrays Jesus. The names, "Joshua," and "Jesus" are the same name. *Yeshua* is the Hebrew rendering; "Joshua, the Greek rendering; and "Jesus" the English pronunciation of the Greek.

Driving Out the Usurpers

We see Joshua driving out the usurpers in the land of Canaan. You see, different countries had taken up residence in the land God had given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob while their descendants were in Egypt for four hundred years. As Joshua returns to the Land, he was to drive out these usurpers.

This parallels the situation we're in today, for this world has been usurped by Satan. War, famine, disease, and rape are all due to his hand. Satan has been given temporary control of this planet. That's why Jesus called him the prince of this world (John 12:31), and why Paul called him the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). Yet although Satan was handed the title deed to this planet when they sinned in the Garden of Eden, when Jesus died on the Cross, He paid for the sins of all humanity—including Adam's rebellion. Consequently, the sin has been paid for. And there's coming a day —not too far away—when Jesus will come back to the earth to take control.

The Canaanites, hellions, demons, and Satan are presently having their way on this planet. But there's coming a day when the Lord will take control. The Book of Joshua pictures this fact, as we see Joshua driving out the usurpers, sending them packing, wiping them out.

It took Joshua seven years to drive out the usurpers. We know this by comparing Deuteronomy 2:14 with Joshua 14:7–10. In Joshua 14, Caleb declares he was forty years of age when he went in to spy out the Promised Land, and that he was eighty-five years old when it was time to claim his inheritance. If he was eighty-five in Joshua 14 when the Land was conquered, and forty when he spied out the Land, forty-five years had passed. Deuteronomy 2:14 says the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for thirty-eight years. That makes a seven-year difference, which is interesting because a seven-year theme appears in prophecy, as well. The Tribulation period described in Revelation 6—19 is a seven-year period in which God pours out His wrath on a Christ-rejecting world. The Tribulation deals with the usurping of Satan and the rising of antichrist, culminating in a final confrontation in the battle of Armageddon.

It took seven years for Joshua to conquer the Promised Land—just as it will take seven years after we are raptured to set the stage for the Second Coming of Christ when He will be Ruler and reign in Jerusalem.

The Seven Nations

In Joshua 3:10, we read of seven nations that would be driven out. But there's a problem because in Genesis 15, when God told first told Abraham about the Promised Land, He named ten nations—the seven nations of Joshua 3:10, plus three more. This means something as it relates to what antichrist will do. In Daniel 7, we are told that antichrist—the usurper, the coming world figure who will bring the world under his thumb during the Tribulation—will rule over an empire of ten nations, three of which are uprooted—just as portrayed in Genesis 15 and Joshua 3.

Adoni-zedek and Antichrist

Antichrist is a world leader who will be extremely charismatic and powerful—an amalgamation of every quality the world admires. There is an antichrist picture in the Book of Joshua painted with uncanny accuracy. In Joshua 10, we see a man named Adoni-zedek. He is the king of Jerusalem, whose name means "The lord of righteousness." He's the "lord of righteousness" and he rules from Jerusalem, which is the city of peace. Antichrist will also appear to be righteous and a man of peace.

There was another figure who was king of Salem, but was not a false entity. Appearing in the Genesis account in the days of Abraham, his name was not Adoni-zedek, but Melchi-zedek, and his name meant "king of righteousness." The Book of Hebrews tells us Melchi-zedek was either an incredible picture of Jesus Christ, or, as I believe personally, an incarnate appearance of Christ. Abraham tithed to Mel-chi-zedek and worshiped him. Melchi-zedek, in turn, gave to Abraham bread and wine, the symbols of Communion.

Adoni-zedek apppears to be like Melchi-zedek, but he's a false Christ. Defeated in battle, he hid in a cave (Joshua 10). In Revelation 6, we read that the kings of the earth shall hide themselves in the mountains during the time of the Tribulation, where they will ask the rocks to fall upon them. What happened in Joshua 10? Stones did indeed fall from the sky—either hailstones or a meteor shower. Joshua then told the sun to stand still. According to Zechariah 14:8, during the coming of our Lord, the evening shall be light. In other words, the sun will stand still once again.

The Gibeonites and the Tribulation Believers

In Joshua 10, we read that Adoni-zedek organized a coalition of nations to wage war against Gibeon. Why? Because the Gibeonites had made peace with Joshua. You remember the story . . .

Having heard about Joshua's victories, the men of Gibeon wanted to be on the winning side so they tricked Joshua by sending emissaries from their number with ragged clothes, dry wineskins, and crusty bread, saying they came from a far country. When Joshua discovered they were not from a far country at all, he would not destroy them because he honored his treaty with them (Joshua 9).

In the Tribulation period, when the wrath of the Lamb is poured out, many people will be like the Gibeonites. Seeing the destruction round about them, they'll choose to be on the winning side and will become believers. Antichrist will wage war against them, just like Adoni-zedek waged war against the Gibeonites.

What happened to the Gibeonites? They become known as the Nethinims, those whose job was to carry water and hew wood for the temple. The people who get saved in the Tribulation will be in heaven, but, unlike us, they won't be the Bride of Christ. They'll serve in the temple—not a bad place to be! The Tribulation believers will have a different position in heaven than we will have because they waited until they saw angels flying across the sky and prophets speaking in Jerusalem before they believed.

"Thomas," Jesus said, "you've seen and believed. But blessed is the one who hasn't seen and yet has believed" (John 20:29).

The Two Spies and the Two Witnesses

In Joshua 2, at the very beginning of the unfolding of the seven-year battles, two spies were sent in as witnesses because there was a woman named Rahab who needed to hear. “You and your family can be saved,” they told her. “Hang a scarlet cord out your window”—picturing the bloodline of the blood of the Lamb that runs from cover to cover through the Scriptures.

As seen in Revelation 11, two witnesses will appear—probably Elijah and Moses—to share the truth of the gospel on the streets of Jerusalem. Like the two witnesses in Joshua, they will bring hope and understanding.

When the king of Jericho heard about these two men, Rahab eventually sent them away to hide in the mountains for three days. In Revelation 11, the two witnesses will be killed and lie in the streets of Jerusalem for three days. After three days, just as the two spies were seen again, the two witnesses will appear again, for all the world to see. For many years, people wondered how it could possibly be that the whole world would be able to see them. Then came CNN.

Ruling and Reigning

When the Land had been conquered, Joshua charged the people to rule the territory they had been given, taking care to deal with any remaining opposition. At the end of the Tribulation, Jesus will come back—and we will come with Him (Jude 14). Just as the Promised Land was divided among the Twelve Tribes of Israel in Joshua's day, each of us will have a role to play in the millennial kingdom, ruling over a certain area, having specific responsibilities (Ezekiel 45—48).

Making a Choice and Taking a Stand

After the Promised Land was divided, Joshua told the people to choose whom they would serve (Joshua 24:15). At the end of the Millennium, a choice must be made. You see, as believers, we will rule and reign with Christ during the Millennium in our glorified bodies. But those who become believers during the Tribulation will be ushered into the Millennium and will have families. As a result, those born during the Millennium will know nothing but peace, prosperity, and righteousness. Therefore, Satan—who will have been in the pit for 1,000 years—will be let loose for a little while to give them an opportunity to choose whom they will follow. Tragically, many will choose to follow Satan, and there will be one last massive conflict, after which Satan and his followers will be cast into outer darkness (Matthew 25).

Jesus may come tonight. If not, then tomorrow we'll lift up our heads and say, "It could be today." That's the way the Lord wants you to live. Of that, I have no doubt. I know the Lord wants me to live every day, saying, "No matter what pressures might come upon me or what problems might plague me, the fact is, I'm going to heaven."

For those who don't believe, life on earth is the best it will ever be. On the other hand, for believers, life on earth is the worst it will ever be. Don't lose sight of heaven. If you're not heavenly minded, you'll get bogged down, depressed, and discouraged. But if you're heavenly minded, your heart is not troubled (John 14:1, 2). Sure, there are challenges and difficulties—but there is also an overarching optimism, peace, happiness, and freedom that transpires when men and women seek first the kingdom (Matthew 6:33).

May the Lord bless you as you do just that. Talk about heaven. Look for the coming of the Lord. You're one day closer than you were yesterday, that's for sure! Lift up your head. Things are going to be glorious. The best is yet to come.



JUDGES

Background to Judges

Entitled *Shopethaim* in Hebrew, the Book of Judges speaks of judges not in a judicial sense, but rather in a heroic sense. That is, Old Testament judges didn't wear black robes, sit on a high bench, or hold gavels. They were deliverers—which is what *shopethaim* means. The twelve men and one woman whose stories are told in this book were the instruments through which God judged those who had wandered away from Him, and through which He delivered those who were held captive, yet sought Him.

These thirteen judges lived between the time of Joshua and Samuel—during a span of four hundred years. The author of the Book of Judges is believed to be Samuel. Tradition seems to indicate that he indeed was the writer, although of this we cannot be dogmatic.

Throughout this book, we will see a cycle that is repeated seven times, a cycle very similar to the one in which we so often find ourselves:

- First, we see the people of Israel serving God.
- Next, we see them succumbing to sin.
- Then they are enslaved by sin.
- Fourthly, they are sorry about their sin.
- And finally, they are saved from their sin.

If there's one message to be found in the Book of Judges, it's that sin doesn't pay. Sin will wipe you out and trip you up.

The story is told of a man who walked into a butcher shop and decided to steal a hot dog. Hot dog in hand, he started to run out of the store—completely unaware that his frank was only one on a string forty feet long. As he stumbled over the doorjamb, the butcher called the police, and the man was eventually arrested—ensnared by a string of hot dogs.

That's just the way it is with sin. "It's insignificant," we say at the outset. "I'm just doing something small." But when we grab on, there's a whole string of sins following that will entangle us, trouble us, and trip us up.

The good news, however, in the Book of Judges is that, although the people of Israel stumbled into sin and became enslaved by sin, they were also delivered from sin when they called upon the Lord. And, praise God, that is true of us as well.



JUDGES

1

Judges 1:1 (a)
Now after the death of Joshua . . .

In contrast to the Book of Joshua, which talks about entering into the Promised Land by faith, the Book of Judges deals with enjoying the Land by faithfulness. The application for us is that we have entered into the land of our heavenly inheritance apart from anything we've done or haven't done. We've received salvation as a free gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). Yet, if we are going to be a people who *enjoy* our salvation, we must be a people who walk in faithfulness to the Lord. While we enter the kingdom simply by faith, we enjoy our presence in the kingdom by our obedience and faithfulness to the Lord and to His Word.

If you're miserable today, if you feel as though life is a great big disappointment, it could very well be due to an area in your life where you are being disobedient, where you are not being faithful to the things God has shown you and to which He has called you. Take heart, dear saint—you're at the right place, for the Book of Judges is built on the premise that faithfulness and obedience are not only necessary for victory in the land, but for enjoyment of the kingdom.

Judges 1:1 (b)
. . . it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?

Although the Israelites were in the Promised Land, there were pockets of Canaanites there as well. Consequently, there was still much guerilla activity throughout the land of Israel.

The same is true of us. Our salvation is secure. Jesus won the war when He hung on the Cross and cried victoriously, "It is finished." But there's still work for us to do, still pockets of resistance in our flesh.

Judges 1:2
And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand.

"Where do we begin? What should we do first?" asked the children of Israel concerning the mop-up operation before them.

"Start with Judah," the Lord said.

Judah means "praise." Praise always has priority in warfare. On the Day of Pentecost, before Peter stood up to deliver the message in which three thousand would be saved, we first see the Holy Spirit inspiring the people of God to worship Him, magnify Him, and glorify Him as they spoke praise in other tongues (Acts 2:11). Something unique happens when we praise the Lord. Praise prepares the way, clears the air, sets the stage. Praise is powerful.

I need to be reminded of this a lot. Praise paves the way to victory. When you're discouraged and don't know what to do, call for Judah. Lift up your hands, bow your knee, express your heart energetically and watch and see how the enemy is beaten back.

Judges 1:3
And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him.

Simeon and Judah were blood brothers. In addition to this, the tribe of Simeon was small and was surrounded by the much larger tribe of Judah. So it made sense both relationally and geographically that the tribe of Judah would say to the tribe of Simeon, "If you help us, we'll help you." But was it right?

Some commentators believe this shows cooperation. And that may be. But I suggest to you it's not so much an illustration of cooperation as it is an indication of cowardice. Judah's response to the command and promise of God in verse 1 was, "I don't feel adequate. I don't feel able. I need help."

The old adage is true: You and God are a majority. You don't need anyone else to do what God has called you to do. He may tell you to include

others—but don't pull back or pull away because you feel inadequate and alone. If God calls you, He will also empower you (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

Judges 1:4–6
And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men. And they found Adoni-bezek in Bezek: and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites. But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes.

It was fairly common practice to cut off the thumbs and big toes of one's captives because without a thumb, it's impossible to hold a sword, and without a big toe, it's impossible to run.

Judges 1:7
And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

In Leviticus 8, we read that when a priest was ordained for service, blood was placed upon his thumbs and his big toes, illustration that sacrifice had to be made for what he did with his hands and where he walked with his feet. Evidence exists for the suggestion by some that placing blood on thumbs and toes was not unique to Israel, but was practiced throughout the land of Canaan by people in pagan religions as well. The king of a city would often be its priest. This being the case, the cutting off of thumbs and toes disabled them not only from escape and warfare, but from serving their false gods.

"I cut off the thumbs and toes of seventy kings," Adoni-bezek said. "I made them eat the crumbs that fell on the floor under my table. I not only incapacitated them, but I humiliated them. Therefore, as I have done, so God hath required me. I did this to others, and now it's coming back to me."

In Galatians 6:7, we read, "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap." It's a law of God. And

Adonibezek innately understood it. God would have us to understand that this is an absolutely irrevocable principle of life.

"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom," Jesus said. "For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38). You may have heard this verse used to encourage people to give financially. But Jesus wasn't talking about financial giving. The context of the verse deals with mercy and forgiveness. The context says, "Give mercy and forgiveness, kindness and love—and they will come back to you. Men will show mercy and kindness to you. But if you are critical, judgmental, grumpy, and cynical, others will analyze you in the same way" (Luke 6:27–37).

This is elementary, but a pagan Adoni-bezek understood it in a way we have yet to. Sooner or later, I will reap what I have sown. Knowing this makes me a whole lot more understanding when people are critical of me or angry with me because I know I deserve their criticism and anger. I've sowed some seeds of anger and criticism somewhere along the way—maybe yesterday, maybe last year—and now I'm reaping the harvest. It's a great day when a man or woman realizes that they deserve the things they're going through or the attack upon them. "Lord, I deserve this," the mature believer says. "I ruined that relationship, so no wonder my relationship is not what it should be. I ripped them off, so no wonder I'm getting ripped off today. Truly, I deserve whatever comes my way."

And if you've sown a whole lot of seed that haven't come up yet, I have great news for you. Second Corinthians 5 says that if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away. All things are become new. Why? Because the thumbs and toes, the hands and feet of our Lord were pierced with a nail. Our sin has been paid for by One who didn't simply give His thumbs and toes, but His hands and His feet, His back and His side, His very life. He died on the Cross that we might be forgiven, that we might be free. "Come and eat," He says—"not crumbs under My table, but bread and wine at My table. Come and dine. I know you've sinned, but My body is broken and My blood is shed, making available a grand meal constantly."

We all have sinned. What we have done in killing others with comments and murdering others in our hearts will come back on us. But the gift of God

is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:23). Therefore, we can have a fresh start when we go to His Table and say, "Lord, I deserve nothing but judgment. What's come down on me is not even a tenth of what ought to come down on me. I've lopped off thumbs and toes. I've ripped out hearts. I'm a sinner. But, I eat of You and drink again, thanking You that I'm forgiven, thanking You that You paid the price for me now, tomorrow, and into eternity. I will take the repercussions that come my way. But I thank You that, I can come to You with my cares and receive from You new and wonderful mercies each and every day."

Gang, today is the day of salvation, of new life, of a fresh start. You can be "toe-tally" forgiven. You can have "toe-tal" peace. You can have abundant life if you open your hearts to Jesus.

Judges 1:8
Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire.

How is a city "set on fire"? By the edge of the sword. You get the Word out. You talk about the things of the Word. You give teachings from the Word. You talk about the truths found in the Word, and they begin to ignite in the hearts of people—just like they ignite in you.

Judges 1:9–11
And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites, that dwelt in the mountain, and in the south, and in the valley. And Judah went against the Canaanites that dwelt in Hebron: (now the name of Hebron before was Kirjath-arba:) and they slew Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai. And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before was Kirjath-sepher:

Debir means "sanctuary." *Kirjath-sepher* means "city of books"—which means it most likely was a scholastic center.

Judges 1:12

And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife.

Caleb evidently wanted to turn the city of learning into a sanctuary.

Judges 1:13
And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife.

This story reminds me of a similar situation in the life of David, when, desiring to conquer Jerusalem, he said to his men, "The first one of you guys who finds a way to break into the city shall be general of my army" (see 1 Chronicles 11:6).

Here, Caleb says, "The first one who takes the city of Debir gets to marry my daughter"—who must have been quite a prize. As it so happened, Caleb's nephew was the first one to make it inside the city, and thus he was rewarded.

The principle in both the story of David and Caleb is that God blesses and honors the individual who is an initiator. Too often, people hold back and wait, thinking, "I really can't start a home Bible study," or, "I can't disciple some junior high kids. Nobody has asked me." That's not the point. Perhaps no one will ask you to do anything, but the Holy Spirit will lay upon your heart certain things *He* desires you to do, and God will bless you as you initiate, instigate, and move out in those specific areas and visions.

This week, ask the Lord what Debir He has for you to conquer. If God is calling you to assemble an intercession group, don't call the church office and ask permission—just do it! If He is calling you to China, God bless you! I encourage and exhort you in the name of Jesus to respond to the varied, creative, needful avenues of ministry He will open before you via the promptings of the Holy Ghost.

Judges 1:14, 15
And it came to pass, when she came to him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou? And she said unto him, Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land; give me also

springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs.

Throughout Scripture, in addition to being a picture of the Word, water is a type, or picture, of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in Achsah's request for a second blessing—for the springs of water in addition to the land given her—we see a picture of what we are to do as well. If you haven't yet asked the Father for the second blessing, for the Holy Spirit, do what Achsah did. Jesus said, "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke 11:13). The "upper springs and the nether springs"—water in abundance, the power of the Spirit—are available to you. All you need to do is ask.

Judges 1:16–18
And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father in law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people. And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. And the name of the city was called Hormah. Also Judah took Gaza with the coast thereof, and Askelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof.

Jericho is the city of palm trees. Gaza is in the southwest part of Israel, on the Mediterranean shore. Ashkelon and Ekron were Philistine cities, even as today they are controlled by the Palestinians.

Judges 1:19
And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.

Why couldn't Judah drive out the inhabitants of the valley? Because their eyes were fixed on the iron chariots rather than on Almighty God. If your eyes are fixed on the Lord, I care not how formidable your foe might be, it

can be overcome. But if your eyes are on the obstacle—if you're focused on the problem, if you're in bondage to your past—you will not drive it out. You've got to lift your eyes higher, and fix them on the Father. Yes, the enemies of Judah had chariots of iron, but if Judah had lifted their eyes higher and focused upon the One who has twenty thousand chariots at His command (Psalm 68:17), they would have been victorious.

Judah was successful in the mountains. But he was discouraged and defeated in the valley. We sometimes tend to live in our past. We think that, because we've had problems with iron chariots previously, we need always be fearful whenever we see them on the horizon. Not true. We need to be a people who put the past behind us—past defeats, past discouragements, past wounds, past failures, past sins. "This one thing I do," said our brother, Paul, "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13, 14). We need to put the past away, and lift our eyes higher—to the high calling of God.

Judges 1:20
And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses said: and he expelled thence the three sons of Anak.

Eighty-five years old at this point, not only had Caleb been given the mountains country wherein the giants lived, but he was successful in driving them out.

Judges 1:21
And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.

The Jebusites would remain in Jerusalem until David took control of the city and drove them out completely.

Judges 1:22–25
And the house of Joseph, they also went up against Bethel: and the LORD was with them. And the house of Joseph sent to descry

Bethel. (Now the name of the city before was Luz.) And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city, and they said unto him, Shew us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will shew thee mercy. And when he shewed them the entrance into the city, they smote the city with the edge of the sword; but they let go the man and all his family.

Surrounded by walls, the city of Bethel, formerly called Luz, was a city with no visible entrance. Thus, the men of Israel were confused about how to enter—until they happened to see a man walking outside. Knowing he had somehow exited the city, they said, "Show us the way into the city, and we'll spare you." Evidently understanding that the Lord was with the people of Israel, the man showed them the entry into the city, perhaps an underground passage, and his life was spared.

Judges 1:26
And the man went into the land of the Hittites, and built a city, and called the name thereof Luz: which is the name thereof unto this day.

This man was spared and saved—but what did he do? Did he join the people of God? No. After experiencing deliverance, he went into an area of present-day northern Syria, and built another city called Luz—just like the city that had been destroyed.

The same thing happens today. When people go through hard times, they receive the blessing, mercy, and forgiveness of God. But then they soon find themselves going back to the old areas, rebuilding the old cities, and doing the old things once again. If the Lord has touched your life, if He has called you into His kingdom, if He has brought you into His family, when things start getting easier, don't give in to the temptation of saying, "I don't have to be as intense anymore. I can sort of kick back. I can go back up to northern Syria where I came from and kind of rebuild old ways."

Don't do it! That's what this man did. What happened to him? The Bible doesn't say. His name isn't mentioned; his deeds are not recorded from this point on. Thus, it seems his life didn't count for much in the economy of God.

How about your life? How about mine? Oh, we've been saved. God has shown us mercy. But when all is said and done, will the Lord be able to say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant?"

Judges 1:27, 28
Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and her towns, nor Ta anach and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns: but the Canaanites would dwell in that land. And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out.

In verse 19, we saw the men of Judah were too mired in the valley of despair to do the work they could have done, that they should have done. They put their eyes on the problems, on the iron chariots and could not drive them out. Here, however, in verse 28, we see Manasseh has a different problem. It's not that Manasseh *could* not drive out their enemies. It's that they *would* not drive them out because they saw an opportunity to make money by taxing them.

This is always a fatal mistake, a grave error, and one we often make. "I don't really have to drive that sin out of my life," we say smugly. "I can control it. I can harness it." But, as we will see, the Canaanites Manasseh failed to drive out would soon plague them and eventually control them.

Judges 1:29–36
Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them. Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became tributaries. Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho, nor the inhabitants of Zidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aphik, nor of Rehob: But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: for they did not drive them out. Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, nor the inhabitants of

Bethanath; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became tributaries unto them. And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley: But the Amorites would dwell in mount Heres in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim: yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became tributaries. And the coast of the Amorites was from the going up to Akrabbim, from the rock, and upward.

What's keeping us from inheriting the blessings of God? Is it that we *cannot* drive our enemies out because, like Judah, our eyes are fixed on past problems? Is it that, like Manasseh, we *will not* drive them out because we think we can control them ourselves? Or is it due to any one of a number of the other unnamed reasons Ephraim and Zebulon, Asher and Naphtali failed to drive the Canaanites from the land God had given them? While the reasons for our failure may vary, the root cause is the same. The failure to obey what God commands is always the result of failure to believe what He has promised. Grab hold of the promises of God, gang, and through them drive out the enemies that keep you from enjoying His presence.

2 Judges 2:1 (a)
And an angel of the LORD . . .

Angel means "messenger." The messenger of the Lord is Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Jesus would appear from time to time in Old Testament days before He came as Jesus of Nazareth.

Judges 2:1 (b), 2
. . . came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I sware unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this

land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?

"Drive out your enemies," the Lord commanded. "Just as I brought you out of Egypt, I will give you victory in this land." But the people of Bochim botched it by allowing their enemies to remain in their midst.

Judges 2:3–5 (a)
Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim . . .

Bochim means "weeping"—which is fitting because sin always causes sorrow. You see, gang, Satan *never* has a good day. He never says, "I feel pretty nice today. I think I'll let up a bit and kind of bless people as they sin." No. He is a murderer and a destroyer. He is out to rip you off and wipe you out. Refusal to do battle with the sin in our lives always leads to Bochim—to the place of sorrow and weeping.

Judges 2:5 (b)
. . . and they sacrificed there unto the LORD.

They sacrificed to the Lord, but, as we shall see, theirs wasn't godly sorrow that resulted in repentance for their sin. It was emotional sorrow regarding the consequences of their sin. Godly sorrow works repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). And repentance results in a change of direction. The Bible says Esau wept—or, in Hebrew, "cried profusely"—when he realized he had lost his blessing (Genesis 27:38). But there is no mention of Esau repenting. The same is true of the people of Bochim, as we shall see.

Judges 2:6–10
And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land. And the

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

Following the death of Joshua, under whose leadership the Israelites served the Lord, here we see them poised to take the second step in the cycle of sin repeated throughout the Book of Judges.

Judges 2:11
And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

Step two: Here we see Israel succumbing to sin by serving Baal. Baal was the rain god, the god of the intellect. Because the people of the region were dependent on rain, and because weather was a mystery to them, Baal was their explanation for everything they couldn't understand. Later on, it would be the prophets of Baal Elijah would challenge to send forth rain upon a drought-stricken land (1 Kings 18).

Judges 2:12, 13
And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

Ashtaroth, also known as the Babylonian god, Ishtar, and in Rome as "Easter," was the goddess of fertility, whose signs were, interestingly, the rabbit and the egg. Baal and Ashtaroth—the god of the intellect and the

goddess of the senses—are two gods our own society still serves. Truly, behind every *Penthouse* and *Playboy* magazine looms the goddess Ashtaroth. And on every college campus where men flaunt their intellect and think themselves too wise to bow the knee to the God who reigns in heaven, there lurks Baal.

Judges 2:14
And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

Step 3: After succumbing to sin, the people of Israel are enslaved by sin.

Judges 2:15
Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

Step 4: Feeling the hand of the Lord heavy against them, Israel is made to feel sorry for sin.

Judges 2:16
Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

Step 5: Compassionate toward His people, the Lord saves them from their sin. But notice verse 17 . . .

Judges 2:17, 18
And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so. And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all

the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.

Here we see Steps 1 through 5, as the people of Israel go from serving God to being saved by Him after becoming ensnared by their own sin. Yes, God cares. Yes, He's merciful. Yes, He hears the groaning of people and responds compassionately. Yet—the repercussions of sin are unavoidable (Galatians 6:7).

Judges 2:19
And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.

Here the Israelites are, back at Step 2 all over again.

Judges 2:20–23
And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice; I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not. Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua.

Because the Israelites continually disobeyed Him, the Lord said, "I'm going to allow their enemies to remain." Thus, the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Gergashites, Ammonites, and the Amorites served as instruments whereby the Lord could test His people.

First Corinthians talks about the testing we face. You see, many of the problems we go through are the results of our own stupidity. Many of the

difficulties we encounter are the direct result of our own disobedience. Yet the Lord will use those very difficulties and problems in order to test us, to prove us, to show us where we stand.

You will be tested, gang, and it is during the time of testing—when fire sweeps through your life, your marriage, your family—that you will discover whether you have been building with wood, hay, and stubble, or with gold, silver, and precious stones. If everything burns in the time of testing, then you need to deal with it, saying, "Father, I have been building with the wrong material. Correct me."

Whenever fire sweeps through your life, don't try and put the fire out. You'll only get burned. Instead, let the fire go. Let it burn. And then when it's over, come back and poke around. See in the midst of the ashes if there's any gold, silver, or precious stones—and rebuild with them.

I believe it is crucial for us not to be those who try and put out fires in our church, in our marriages, at our jobs. Don't be one who puts out fires. It won't work. Oh, you might delay the fire a bit. Or you might diffuse it somewhat—but only for a while. Instead, let the fire burn because you will never know what you're building with in life, in ministry, in your occupation until the day of trial comes and the fire is unleashed.

That's why, as Christians, we must never be defensive. We must never answer accusations or protect ourselves in any area. We must welcome the fires that sweep through our lives, our families, our ministries, our jobs in order that in the light of the flames, we might see clearly the true nature of our building materials.

Let the fire rage. Let the Canaanites—those who might be attacking you, misunderstanding you, or accusing you—stand, for through them, you'll be able to see exactly where you're at, how you're developing, how you're maturing.

That's what Jesus did.

If there was ever justification for someone to get tough and take a stand, it would have been Him. If there was ever a time for someone to say, "This isn't right, and it must not happen," it was when His enemies accused and cursed Him. But He didn't. He submitted. He went to the Cross.

How can you stop a Man who doesn't fight back? How can you stop a church who will embrace difficult times? How can you stop a family or a

marriage that actually welcomes fires? How can you stop people like that?

You can't.



3 Spiritual collapse in the life of the believer is rarely the result of a blowout, but almost always the result of a slow leak. Compromises are made. Devotional life is ignored. And slowly but surely, spiritual strength we once enjoyed is dissipated until finally we find ourselves unable to go on.

As we continue in the Book of Judges, we see the spiritual collapse of the people of God. The reason is not so much that they were blown away *by* their enemies, but rather that they compromised *with* their enemies. It was a slow leak that dissipated their spiritual stamina and destroyed their potential potency.

That's always the way it is. As a Christian, you will not be vulnerable to the big blowout as much as to the slow, subtle leak.

Judges 3:1–4

Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan; Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof; Namely, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baal-hermon unto the entering in of Hamath. And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

As seen in chapter 2, the Israelites were supposed to destroy their enemies. When they failed to do so, however, the Lord used their enemies to reveal their heart.

Judges 3:5

And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites.

First, the children of Israel dwelt with their enemies. This is the beginning of the slow leak that led to their collapse.

Judges 3:6 (a)
And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons . . .

Secondly, the children of Israel had relations with their enemies.

Judges 3:6 (b)
. . . and served their gods.

Finally, the children of Israel worshiped with their enemies.

In this, we see a pattern repeated in our own lives if we're not oh, so careful. We dwell with the world. We start relating to the world. We end up worshiping with the world. Let me remind you once again that none of us falls into sin. We walk into it one step at a time. All along the way, the Lord is saying, "Wait. Stop."

"Oh, Lord, this is okay," we say. "I just won't do *that*." But when we end up doing *that,* we say, "Well, Lord, that's okay, but I sure won't do the next"—until we end up doing the next.

Sin is not fallen into—it's walked into one step at a time—which is why we are to make no provision for the flesh (Romans 13:14). When we fail to do this, the slow leak of compromise is bound to take its toll.

Judges 3:7
And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgat the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves.

The groves were dedicated to pagan deities—places trees were planted for the purpose of idolatry and immorality.

Judges 3:8 (a)

Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel . . .

The anger of the Lord was a holy indignation, a righteous anger because He knew His people were headed for disaster.

Judges 3:8 (b)
. . . and he sold them into the hand of Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushan-rishathaim eight years.

Chushan-rishathaim means "double darkness." And that's what the king Mesopotamia was—a very evil, wicked ruler. The Lord used Chushan-rishathaim as an instrument of chastening, that through him the Israelites might come to their senses and realize they couldn't give their sons and daughters. We're given over to double darkness when we don't destroy those things we know must go. Depression sets in. Confusion fills our thinking. We're in the dark about what we're supposed to do, where we should go, who we are. It's a double darkness. It's the reality of sin.

Judges 3:9 (a)
And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD . . .

No doubt the Israelites prayed all the while they were in bondage to Chushan-rishathaim. But it evidently took eight years for them to cry to the Lord, to reach a place of desperation and intensity in their prayer.

"Dear God," we pray, "It's really been (ho hum) a long day, so I don't have much energy to talk to You tonight (yawn), but I really need help with my car payment (zzzz)."

If the Lord responded to us in the same degree of intensity and passion that we talk to Him, He would say, "(Yawn) Really? It has been a long day (stretch). And maybe I can get to it, but I can't promise . . ." Then He would nod off.

This was not the way Elijah prayed. When he prayed for rain, Scripture says he put his head between his knees and prayed seven times (1 Kings 18:42, 43). I suggest this was because this was the position of birthing in that culture. There was something being birthed by Elijah that day as he labored

in prayer—once, again, a third time, four, five, six, seven times. And in answering his prayer, it is as if the Lord said, "I like that. In a world plagued by mediocrity, apathy, and laziness, it's good to see a man who knows it's dry in his soul or in his land and prays passionately and fervently for rain."

Judges 3:9 (b)
. . . the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel . . .

I love this verse—one that is repeated over and over again throughout Judges. Do you find yourself in bondage today? Do you find yourself in bondage presently? Do you find yourself ensnared today? Let me tell you what the answer is: Cry out to the Lord. I'm convinced that we as Christians do too much talking *about* the Lord, and not enough talking *to* Him. We are very ready, very eager to receive counsel, but very reluctant to cry out. The reason counseling offices are filled in Christendom today is because people do not bow their knee and call out to the Lord in fervency. Throughout Scripture, God is consistently seen responding to His people when they cry out. Truly, the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth *much* (James 5:16).

Judges 3:9 (c), 10 (a)
. . . who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel . . .

The first of the named judges was a man named Othniel. What was his secret? The Spirit of the Lord came upon him. There is no substitute for the Spirit of God. Jesus said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Ghost comes upon you and you shall be My witnesses: (Acts 1:8). We must be those who seek the fullness, the power, the anointing of the Spirit if we are to be used effectively for the kingdom, for while the Spirit indwells every believer at the moment of conversion, His "coming upon" ministry uniquely empowers every believer for service. Every believer has the Holy Spirit. The question is, Does the Holy Spirit have every believer?

How does the Spirit come upon us? When, like the Israelites, we cry out and say, "Father I need the power of the Spirit. I'm tired of being in bondage.

I'm tired of the drought within. I want to be filled with You and used by You for Your glory. Jesus said, "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Ghost to them that ask" (Luke 11:13).

Judges 3:10 (b), 11
. . . and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushan-rishathaim. And the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

Othniel had the singular job of seeing his generation set free from oppression. After the Spirit of God came upon him, he accomplished this task —and the land rested for forty years. I want to see the Spirit of God come upon us so that those in our generation might be set free, might experience rest.

Judges 3:12
And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.

Eglon was aptly named in that he looked like an egg. The only man in the Bible called "a very fat man" (Judges 3:17), Eglon was a great big, tubby oppressor. His story provides a perfect illustration of how to deal with the heavyweight, heavy-duty oppressors that threaten us.

Judges 3:13 (a)
And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek . . .

After leaving Sodom, Lot's daughters were worried that they would never have children. So they seduced their father and gave birth to two sons —Moab and Ammon. This explains why Eglon, a Moabite, would join forces with the Ammonites and a third group—the Amalekites, the descendants of Esau. All three of these nations had their roots in carnality, sin, and iniquity.

Judges 3:13 (b)
. . . and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees.

The city of palm trees is Jericho. Jericho was where fruits and vegetables grew prolifically. The region's "Food 4 Less," Eglon, a very fat man, looked at Jericho and knew that was the city for him!

Judges 3:14, 15 (a)
So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years. But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD the LORD raised them up a deliverer . . .

During the eighteen years they served Eglon, I'm sure the children of Israel prayed and talked to each other about somehow getting free from Eglon. But they weren't in a place of desperation. It was only when they cried to the Lord—when there was energy expended, when lethargy was shaken off—that the Lord hearkened to them.

Judges 3:15 (b)
. . . Ehud, the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded . . .

Benjamin means "son of my right hand." The right hand speaks of authority, prowess, and ability. In this culture, the left hand spoke of shortcoming, and was considered a curse. Therefore, as Ehud grew up, he probably wondered, "Lord, why am I, a Benjamite, *left*-handed?" It could be simply that Ehud was born left-handed. Or, as the text could indicate, his right hand may have been handicapped in some way.

Judges 3:15 (c)
. . . and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab.

I suggest the present the Israelites sent to King Eglon was a gift of food in hopes it would appease him. We also are prone to appease and feed the Eglons, the temptations in our lives. But it never works because temptation is

just like fire: the more you feed it, the more it demands. It's always a bad idea to try and appease that which is oppressing you. It will only make the enemy bigger, fatter, and heavier.

Judges 3:16 (a)
But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length . . .

While others sent food to appease Eglon, Ehud went to his workshop and made an eighteen inch, two-edged sword.

Judges 3:16 (b)
. . . and he did gird it under his raiment . . .

Notice Ehud put his sword under his clothes. Of the two-edged sword of the Word (Hebrews 4:12), the psalmist writes, "Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee" (Psalm 119:11).

Judges 3:16 (c)
. . . upon his right thigh.

Because daggers were drawn across one's body, being left-handed, Ehud strapped his dagger to his right thigh.

Judges 3:17, 18
And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon was a very fat man. And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present.

Any time you try to appease the enemy, you'll always be sent away. The Lord won't be able to use you. It's not condemnation, but simply the reality of the situation. Compromise is never the answer.

Judges 3:19
But he himself turned again from the quarries that were by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who

said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him.

Having already been presented with a gift from the Israelites, Eglon must have been eager to hear Ehud's message. Ehud, however, returned to Eglon not with a gift, but with a sword.

Judges 3:20 (a)
And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour which he had for himself alone . . .

Eglon was in the *aleah*—the rooftop sitting room that provided a cool retreat from the heat of the day on palaces and well-to-do homes.

Judges 3:20 (b), 21
. . . And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat. And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly.

Like our modern-day monarchs and presidents, Eglon would have been surrounded by "Secret Service" agents. But historians tell us these bodyguards would become careless and only frisk men on their left side—the side where weapons were carried. That's how Ehud made it in with his sword. *That's* why he was left-handed.

God never makes mistakes. You may wonder why you are the way you are. There's a reason. Psalm 139 declares that when you were in your mother's womb, God was fitting you together and ordaining your days. Everything about you is the way God desires it to be—from your personality to your physical appearance. It's all by Divine design. Ask Ehud. I'm sure as he drew his sword, he said, "Thank You, Lord, for making me lefthanded. It's not a curse after all."

Judges 3:22 (a)
And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly . . .

According to historical records, the handle of Ehud's knife would have been twelve to fifteen inches; the blade itself, eighteen inches. I can see Ehud's eyes getting big as saucers as the knife kept going in a full thirty inches!

When Jesus was attacked in the wilderness by Satan, the heavyweight from hell, He quoted Scripture three times—once for each temptation (Matthew 4). Jesus unsheathed the sword of the Word hidden in His heart and beat back the enemy.

Judges 3:22 (b)
. . . and the dirt came out.

Some translators have translated the word, "dirt," as "intestines" or "entrails." Others have left it as literal dirt. I don't know if this means Eglon was chewing on dirt clods, or if he just didn't wash his food. But I do know that the illustration is appropriate. "How shall a young man cleanse his way?" asked the psalmist. "By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word" (Psalm 119:9). When the Word goes in, the dirt comes out.

That's why what you're doing right now is so important. You see, it's not so much going through the Bible that makes a difference as it is the Bible going through us. When the Word goes in, something miraculous and mystical happens. Every time you are in the Word—studying, meditating, reading—a cleansing process takes place.

"Well, then, why aren't all Christians spotless?" you ask. Or, "Why isn't the person sitting next to me perfect? After all, he's been coming to Bible study for eight years."

Listen—instead of looking at other believers and wondering why they're not better, we should realize how much worse we'd all be if not for the Lord. I hate to even think what I would be if not for the Word of God going through me. To be sure, it's a long, hard process. But step by step, day by day, month by month, year by year, decade by decade, we're being changed as the Word goes in and the dirt comes out. If you want to be Spirit-filled and experience abundant life, be one who is committed to the Word—studying the Word, meditating in the Word, memorizing chunks of the Word.



For topical study of Judges 3:12–22 entitled "The Word Goes In and the Dirt Comes Out," turn to page **728.**

Judges 3:23, 24
Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlour upon him, and locked them. When he was gone out, his servants came; and when they saw that, behold, the doors of the parlour were locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber.

"He covereth his feet" was a polite way of saying, "He's in the bathroom."

Judges 3:25–28
And they tarried till they were ashamed: and, behold, he opened not the doors of the parlour; therefore they took a key, and opened them: and, behold, their lord was fallen down dead on the earth. And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirath. And it came to pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them. And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over.

"Follow me," said this one who wielded his sword so effectively. If you want to be a leader in your family, be one who has a handle on the sword of the Word and who knows how to use it effectively. It makes a huge difference, Mom and Dad, when you speak from authority other than your own, when you can say, "This is what God says concerning this issue . . ."

If you aspire to any kind of leadership, be like Ehud. "Follow me," he said because he was a man who knew the power of the Sword and used it

effectively.

Judges 3:29, 30
And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years.

Through Ehud's effective use of the sword, the oppressor was destroyed and the land had rest. The same thing can be true in our lives. "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth," Jesus prayed (John 17:17). "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," He declared (John 8:32). If you are facing heavy problems, dark days, tough times, get in the Word. Spend more time than ever with the sword of the Scriptures in your hand, talking to the Lord about what you're reading, crying out with passion, hearing His voice through meditation. No matter how heavy, how Ehud-like the problem, you *will* be set free. Jesus promised this, and I've found this to be true in my own life over and over again.

Judges 3:31
And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel.

The third judge, Shamgar, used an ordinary instrument to do an extraordinary work for God. It's true. God will use whatever's in your hand for His glory if you allow Him—even something as unlikely as an ox goad. What's in your hand? Don't just make a living—make a life by using what God has put in your hand for His glory.

In the three judges of chapter 3, I see the power of the Spirit in Othniel, the power of the sword in Ehud, and the power of service in Shamgar. These three elements—the Spirit of God upon you, the Word of the Lord within you, and service for the Lord through you—will lead you into much fruitfulness as you do battle in the land to which God has brought you.



***For topical study of Judges 3:31 entitled "The Ox Goad Incident," turn to page* 730.**

THE WORD GOES IN AND THE DIRT COMES OUT

A Topical Study of JUDGES 3:12–22

Sin is not bad because it's forbidden. Sin is forbidden because it's bad. Most people think God capriciously declares what is good and bad. That's not the way it is. God sees what will be a blessing and what will be a curse. And because certain things will defile, destroy, and damage because certain things bring headaches and heartaches, sadness and sorrow, pain and problems, He says, "Stay away from those things." It's not that God is mad at me when I sin, but rather He's grieved for me, knowing I'm headed down a path that will bring me unnecessary pain and sorrow.

When Peter-John was a baby, we lived in a cabin on the edge of a pasture. When he learned to walk, I thought PJ would immediately go outside and pet Bessie and Daisy, the cows. But that's not what he did. He made his way out the door and headed straight for the nearest "pasture patty."

"No!" I said. "No, no, no."

Looking at me rather defiantly, he made his way to the next "meadow muffin" he saw and put both hands in it.

"No, Peter-John," I said, as I spanked, then washed, his hands.

With tears filling his eyes, he looked up at me. If he could have talked, I know he would have said, "You great big bully. You don't understand the ecstasy and the pleasure of a pasture patty. Why are you so mean?"

As Peter-John has grown up, he agrees that pasture patties are disgusting. And the same thing happens spiritually. "Why can't I go here, do this, or have that?" we wonder, sure that God is robbing us of some wonderful pleasure.

But our loving Father says, "It's a pasture patty, a meadow muffin. And as a spiritual toddler, you might think it's fun and pleasurable—but in reality, it will cause you pain and problems. That's why I can't allow you to plunge in, grab hold, or get involved with that thing."

Most of us have pasture patties and meadow muffins in our lives—sins that fascinate us, oppress us, dominate us, and dictate to us; issues, habits, or

tendencies we might conceal quite well from those around us, but which secretly, and repeatedly control us.

Are you tired of the dirt within your soul—the bad attitude, anger, or addiction; the bitterness, bigotry, or hostility that seems to hold you captive? If you want to be free from the Eglon you know is leading you down a path of heartache and heartbreak, realize God has already given you the weapon you need—the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

Are you saturating your soul in the Word of God? If I'm not in the Word, Eglon is sure to rear up and take control. But as I give priority to the Scriptures—as Ehud discovered—the sword goes in and the dirt comes out.

Read Consistently

Read your Bible every day. Get involved in Bible study. Learn the Word. Hide it in your heart.

"But my mind is like a sieve," you say. "I can't even remember what I read yesterday."

That's OK. The Word is like water. So even if your mind is like a sieve —if you read the Word, at least it will be clean!

Read your Bible consistently. Find a Bible study that will take you through the Word, chapter by chapter, verse by verse so that you can get the full counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

"But it's so dry," you say.

I know. It can be dry for me, too.

After marching their troops and livestock seven days in the wilderness without water, the kings of Judah and Israel went to Elisha for help. "Thus saith the Lord," Elijah said. "Make this valley full of ditches." For thus saith the Lord, "You shall not see wind, nor shall you see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, so that your cattle and your animals may drink."

The kings obeyed. And the next day, the ditches were filled with water (2 Kings 3).

Sometimes Bible study may feel dry. You can't remember what you've read—and even if you could, it doesn't make sense to you. That's OK. You're digging ditches that the Lord will fill the next day, week, month, or year. The best advice I can give anyone is to learn the Scriptures. A young man cleanses his way—an old man, too—by taking heed to the Word, by hiding it in his heart, by making it part of the fabric of his being so that he thinks biblically.

Read Expectantly

When you read the Word, read it with a spirit of expectation. Come to the Word prepared to hear from God. For me, that means having pencil and paper in hand.

Wrestling through some issues, Habakkuk said, "I will go to the tower and wait upon the Lord to see what He shall say to me."

"Write the vision," the Lord answered, "and make it plain" (see Habakkuk 2:1, 2). I doubt Habakkuk had to ask to borrow a pencil.

For me, a pencil and paper in hand shows I expect God is going to say something worth noting. If you want to have victory, become a student of the Word. Read it with the spirit of expectation, saying, "Lord, I need to hear from You today, and I know I will."

Read Conversationally

Read the Word consistently. Come with expectancy. Read conversationally. That is, allow the Lord to talk with you as you read a verse. Then talk to Him about that verse through prayer. Read a verse or two more, think them through, and talk to God once again. It's a dialogue. It's not Bible study *then* prayer. It's Bible study *with* prayer. It's a conversation.

Read Obediently

If I'm not going to do what the Lord tells me to do through His Word on any given morning, I can't expect to receive more instruction from Him that evening. You see, God doesn't pile our spiritual "in-boxes" higher and higher with "To Do" lists. He simply gives us one thing to do at a time. Therefore, as you open the Word, purpose in your heart to do what He tells you to do that day.

The only way to be free from the Eglons that bring oppression and depression to you is to allow the Word of God to do its work within you. The key to Ehud's victory was a hidden, two-edged sword, rightly used.

And the key to our victory is the same.

THE OX GOAD INCIDENT

A Topical Study of JUDGES 3:31

Bigfoot, King Kong, Superman, the Incredible Hulk—there is something within people, something within every generation, searching for heroes—for people who are larger than life, people who accomplish extraordinary feats. The Book of Judges chronicles the lives of seven individuals—six men and one woman—who were used by God to mete out judgment to the enemies of Israel. What impresses me about these judges, these heroes, is the fact that they were, by and large, extraordinarily ordinary. They didn't have a lot going for them; they didn't have an abundance of abilities. Yet every one of them had the most important ability necessary to be used by God. They had availability.

As we look at these judges, I pray we will gain insight as to how we, too, might be used by the Lord to accomplish great things for Him. The particular judge in the passage before us is an unlikely, unknown, unsung hero named Shamgar . . .

Shamgar was an unlikely hero indeed. His name gives us insight into his personality, for in the Hebrew culture, names carried great significance and were given according to one's personality or prophecy concerning him. Shamgar's father was named *Anath,* or "Afflicted." Shamgar's own name means "The Desolate Dragged Away One"—not a very likely name for a hero.

Shamgar is also an unknown hero, for there is no mention of him anywhere in Scripture except for this single verse. Consequently, we don't know about his past, nor do we know what happened to him after this incident took place.

Unlikely, unknown, and unsung—that's Shamgar. After all, how many of you proclaim the heroics of Shamgar? How many name him as one of their favorite Bible heroes? And yet Shamgar was utilized in God's work and recorded in God's Word as one whom the Lord used mightily.

What did Shamgar do? This man—unknown, unlikely, and unsung—accomplished an incredible feat. He took on six hundred Philistines and

whipped them singlehandedly—six hundred Philistines who so oppressed the people of Israel that men were afraid to travel on the highways, six hundred Philistines who virtually brought village life to a standstill. The Philistines were brutal oppressors, yet Shamgar killed six hundred of them with only an ox goad.

Why did he use an ox goad? I believe it was because Shamgar was one who worked with oxen—a rancher, a herdsman. You see, the ox goad—a stick used to prod cattle—was a common instrument, easily accessible to anyone who worked with livestock.

I point this out to remind you that the Lord delights in using whatever is in your hand in order to bring about His purposes through your life. God has gifted you with talents, given you abilities, placed within you certain desires and interests—and those are the very components He desires to utilize for the work of His kingdom through you. Truly, He will use whatever is in your hand.

When God called Moses to go before Pharaoh, Moses balked, fearing no one would listen to him.

"What is that in your hand?" asked the Lord.

"A rod," answered Moses.

"Throw it down," said God.

As Moses threw the rod to the ground, it miraculously became a snake. And when he picked it up, it became a rod once again.

God used a common, ordinary, everyday shepherd's rod to accomplish His plan through Moses (Exodus 4).

David grew up slinging stones against trees, fence posts, and any other target he could find as he watched his father's flocks. So what did the Lord utilize in David's life to slay a giant? A simple sling and a few stones (1 Samuel 17:49).

I think of Peter and Andrew. What was in their hands when the Lord called them for service? They were casting fishing nets into the sea. Thus, Jesus said, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19).

> Among five thousand hungry people on the hillside was a little boy. What did he have in his hand? Five loaves and two fish—which the Lord used to feed the entire crowd (John 6:9).

I am reminded of the apostle Paul. What was in his hand when he was converted? A pen, for he was a scholar whose command of the Greek language exceeded every other scholar in history. So what did God use most powerfully in Paul's life? A pen, as Paul authored one epistle after another.

Gang, the Lord can use whatever skills, interests, or abilities you have. He will use whatever is in your hand for His glory. He will give you insights and open doors. Great things will take place through you. The kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of selfishness, the kingdom of greed will be beaten back as you take whatever ox goad is in your life and say, "Lord, use it for *Your* glory."

"But I have nothing in my hand," you say. "I can't do anything."

Oh, yes you can. Can you babysit? Can you sew clothes or chop wood? Can you fix cars? There are a number of people in this body, in this community, who would welcome your skills. Make them available. God will use them powerfully if you simply say, "Lord, show me."

Why am I stressing serve so strongly?

For two reasons . . .

One is because I am totally, absolutely convinced it is in serving the Lord that we find ourselves fulfilled. If you just take in and never give out, you'll find yourself feeling grumpy and discouraged, depressed and defeated. Before long, you will notice you have no appetite to take in any more, and your walk will grow stale and stagnant. Jesus said, "Whatever measure with which you give out will be the measure with which it will be given back to you" (Matthew 7:2). Thus, for fulfillment in this life, it is essential that I be used in the things of God. We are not saved to set, soak, and sour. We're saved to serve.

Secondly, service has eternal ramifications. In Matthew 24, we see some enlightening insights on the eternal nature of service. We find ourselves at the center of the Olivet Discourse—the teaching Jesus gave dealing with end times and events. In verse 32, Jesus says, "When you see the budding of the fig tree, know My coming is nigh." Scripturally, the fig tree speaks of the

nation of Israel. The budding or blossoming of the nation of Israel came to pass May 14, 1948, when Israel was declared a nation. We have seen the fig tree blossom. We have seen this very prophecy fulfilled. Therefore, the return of Jesus Christ is nigh—even at the very door.

We are living in the final hours of the last days. In light of this, consider two illustrations Jesus gave . . .

The Scenario of the Season

> *Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*
>
> Matthew 24:45–51

I believe this heavy-duty passage has wonderful application to us as believers. The Greek word translated "evil" in verse 48 is *kakos*. Kakos doesn't mean evil in the sense of being wicked, unregenerate, or lost. It refers to one who was once good but has gone bad. Specifically, it was used to describe an apple that had become rotten, or a musical instrument that had fallen out of tune. Thus, the Lord is speaking of one who once served, but has gone bad, has gotten out of tune. It's not that he has walked away from his master—he just stopped serving.

What does Jesus say concerning such a one? When the master returns and finds him living for his own pleasures and beating his fellow servants, he will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. What is a hypocrite? A hypocrite is simply one who is two-faced.

After careful study of this passage, I am convinced that Jesus is speaking to believers. You see, when our Master comes back, suddenly our lives will be divided. That which we have done for ourselves, that which we have done hypocritically, will suddenly be cut asunder—causing weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. We will weep not because God will punish us, but because, at His appearance, we will see our lives cut in two: That which has been done for ourselves in our own energy, for our own glory vs.

what we did out of a heart of love for God. And we will cry out, “Father, why did I waste my time and energy, money and ability on things which have no lasting value? All those hours I spent on that project, all the money I spent on that hobby are gone.” And we will fall before God, saying, “I was a fool. I wasted my life, my skills, my talents.”

“Be careful,” Jesus says. “When the master comes, there will be a dividing asunder whereby you will be made aware of the mission and ministry you could have enjoyed in eternity had you not wasted your earthly life on trivial pursuits.”

The Sobering of the Saints

> *Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.*
>
> Matthew 25:1–13

In this second illustration, Jesus likens the community of believers to a wedding party. Again, due to the fact that all ten virgins were part of the wedding party, I believe this passage refers to believers.

According to the custom of the day, the bridegroom would come unexpectedly to the house of his bride, at which time the wedding procession would begin. In this case, the five foolish virgins said to the five others, “Oh, no! The bridegroom is here, but we don’t have any oil for our lamps. Give us some of yours so we can join the procession.”

“No,” said the wise virgins. “There’s not enough. You can’t rely upon our oil. Go buy your own.”

Maybe you’re relying on the oil of your husband, your wife, or your parents. Maybe you’re thinking you will be rewarded or blessed on the basis

of those around you. Not so. It doesn't work that way. You cannot gain anything eternally from the experience of others.

The story continues, and I find it very intriguing. The five who were watching and ready were allowed into the wedding feast. When the other five realized what had taken place, they knocked on the door, saying, "Lord, let us in."

"I don't know you," the Lord replied.

This Greek phrase doesn't mean, "I don't know who you are," but rather, "I don't know you personally." Could this mean that, although the entire body of Christ will be present in heaven, not everyone will be ushered in to that time of intimacy, into that time of special relationship with Jesus at the marriage feast? It seems to solve some problems in my own understanding of Revelation 7, where you'll find there are those who are seated with Christ, but there are also those who are serving—standing on the outside, removed from the inner circle.

I believe the possibility exists that those who are burning brightly, serving the Lord fervently, living their lives daily for Him will be ushered into the marriage feast when Jesus Christ comes back. But those who are playing the foolish virgin—they're born-again, but not living for the Lord, working for the Lord, or looking for the Lord—although they will be in heaven, they will hold a different position due to their distant relationship with Him here on earth.

I am increasingly convinced that this life is significant because it reflects our capacity to enjoy eternity. If I'm living for puny, petty pursuits here on earth, my ability to enjoy eternity will be equally small.

> Four-year-old Christy carries around her purple Care Bear. She talks to it, kisses it, hugs it. Her Care Bear makes her happy. Now, I could hug the same Care Bear, but it wouldn't do a whole lot for me because my capacity for satisfaction and enjoyment is past the Care Bear stage.

The same is true in heaven. There will be those who will be happy to hold little Care Bears. But there will also be those who will be involved in the cosmic purposes of God. That's what I want. I want to be all I can be for

Him in eternity. Gang, what we're doing today affects what we will be doing for the next billion years.

That's why Jesus says, "Be ready. Don't be out of tune. Don't be an evil servant, lest when I return and your life is divided, you will see the majority of it dissipate into nothingness." That's why Jesus says, "Don't be a foolish virgin. Be ready, lest you find yourself excluded from real intimacy with Me."

Saint, whatever ox goad is in your hand, whatever little lunch you're clutching, whatever sling you are swinging, whatever pen you're holding—dedicate it to God, and I promise you will not be disappointed.

You will never say, "Oh, I really wish I hadn't given that skill to God's service. I wish I had made more money for myself. I wish I had spent more time on myself. No, the only weeping, the only regret in eternity will be that we didn't give *more,* didn't do *more,* didn't serve *more.*

Shamgar was not a man of great abilities—just a prodder of oxen, a guy who poked cattle. But his life is recorded in Scripture because he gave his ability to God and accomplished great things for God.

Life is short, gang, and eternity long. I plead with you, even as I plead with myself, don't fall out of tune. Don't run out of oil. Take whatever is in your hand and say, "Lord, it's Yours. Show me how this can be used for Your glory."

Amen.



4

In chapter 4, we come to the fourth judge—a woman . . .

Judges 4:1
And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead.

From before the turn of the century into the days of the Great Depression, a colorful evangelist named Billy Sunday preached with an intensity unrivaled to this day. A professional baseball player before his conversion,

Sunday caroused continually, partied frequently, and experienced the effects of sin most definitely. No doubt that is why he said, "I am against sin. I will kick it as long as I've got a foot. I'll fight it as long as I've got a fist. I'll butt it as long as I've got a head. I'll bite it as long as I've got a tooth. And when I'm old and fistless and footless and toothless, I'll gum it till I go home to glory and it goes to perdition."

The wages of sin is death, as the children of Israel would discover. And even in our day of inflation, sin's wages remain the same.

Judges 4:2 (a)
And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor . . .

Evidently the king of a confederation of Canaanite nations, Jabin ruled from Hazor, fifteen miles north of the Sea of Galilee.

Judges 4:2 (b), 3
. . . the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles. And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

With nine hundred chariots of iron, Sisera had a seemingly invincible military machine at his disposal.

Judges 4:4, 5
And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

I find it fitting that Deborah's name means "bee" . . .

The wax with which beehives are constructed is the most heat-resistant wax known to man and can withstand temperatures up to 140 degrees. However, at 141 degrees, the wax begins to melt. So

when the hive nears the 141 degree mark, the bees begin to cluster around their hive and fan it by fluttering their wings 190 times per second, or 11,400 times per minute. No wonder bees are called industrious! They are also very discerning, with antennae containing between 2,000 and 3,000 plates through which they identify the proper flower from which to draw their nectar. Finally, bees are known for the sweetness of the honey they produce.

In Deborah, I see these same three characteristics: She was very industrious, very discerning, and very sweet. But she also packed a wallop of a sting, as we will see.

Judges 4:6–8
And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand. And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.

Although God found someone He could use mightily in Deborah, it is an indictment against the men of Israel that God's people lacked male leadership at this time.

Judges 4:9 (a)
And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman . . .

Deborah's prophecy did indeed come to pass. Barak would not be given credit for Sisera's demise. Instead, as we will see, the honor would go to a woman named Jael.

Judges 4:9 (b), 10
. . . And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh. And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.

Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali—the two tribes in the region—to join him.

Judges 4:11
Now Heber the Kenite, which was of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which is by Kedesh.

Heber means "crossed over"—just as *Hebrew* means "crossing over." The Kenites lived in Israel, but were not Israelites. They were descendants of Moses' father-in-law, Hobab (Numbers 10:29). Although they had settled in Israel, the Kenites were in alliance with Jabin. But Heber left this group and began to dwell with the people of Israel. He "crossed over" and joined the Israelites.

Judges 4:12
And they shewed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor.

Why did Heber alert Sisera? Evidently, it was because he was setting Sisera up for defeat.

Judges 4:13
And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, even nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that were with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon.

This second mention of Sisera's nine hundred chariots speaks of their importance. At this point in history, without iron weapons of any kind, Israel had not even entered the Iron Age. Thus, the odds were heavily stacked against Barak and his men.

Judges 4:14
And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him.

Mount Tabor is a hill in the middle of the valley of Jezreel, also known as the valley of Megiddo, or Armageddon.

Judges 4:15
And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet.

I like this! The one who trusted in his arms is now relying on his feet.

Judges 4:16, 17
But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; and there was not a man left. Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

Jabin and Sisera controlled the Kenites. Therefore, thinking Heber and Jael were still under their dominion, Sisera headed to their house for protection.

A court jester served in the court of Henry VIII, a man known for his fits of rage. After a certain performance that displeased him, the king said to the jester, "Sir, you will die for that particular act." Thinking himself a bit rash, however, the king said, "Die you must. The decree has been given. But I will allow you to die in the manner you choose."

The clever jester replied, "Very well, sire. I choose to die by old age."

That's just the way it is with our old sin nature, our old man (Colossians 3:9). He doesn't die easily. He's always showing up on the scene.

Judges 4:18
And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle.

No longer afraid of Sisera, Jael sets out to engage in aggressive battle against him as she invites him in to her tent and covers him with a blanket.

Judges 4:19 (a)
And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty . . .

This, too, is just like our old man, our old sin nature. He orders us around, beginning in small ways. "Give me a little water to drink," he says. "Give me a little space. Give me a little room. Give me a little satisfaction."

Sin is tricky. Little sins don't stay little. Little compromises don't remain little compromises. Give in a little, and you'll find yourself in big trouble.

Judges 4:19 (b)
. . . And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him.

After running for his life, it is no wonder Sisera's body cried for water. But what did Jael give him? Unrefrigerated, room-temperature milk, which, due to the climate, most likely resembled a cottage cheese/yogurt mixture, and which would have been the last thing Sisera wanted.

We are to overcome our sin nature, our old man who seeks to order us around, by giving him the milk of the Word (1 Peter 2:2). Saints—especially you older Christians—be careful you read 1 Peter 2:2 correctly. It doesn't say newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the Word. It says that *as* newborn babes, we are *all* to crave the milk of the Word. Never think you're beyond milk. We need to be continually refreshed by, renewed in, and reminded of the milk truths of the Word of God, for it's when we no longer

receive and enjoy the milk that we begin to lose our appetite for the meat of the Word as well.

Judges 4:20
Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and inquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No.

At first, Sisera cruised in and said, "Can I have a little drink of water?" Now, he's saying, "Go stand at the door and lie for me. Don't acknowledge that I'm here. Don't let anyone know you're struggling with this." That's what the old man of our sin nature always does. Open the door a crack, and he'll come in and attempt to totally control and dominate every part of your life.

Judges 4:21
Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.

After giving Sisera milk instead of water, after ignoring his command to stand in the door and lie for him, Jael pinned him to the ground with a tent stake. In the Bedouin society of which Jael was a part, it was the women who pitched the tents and set up camp. Thus, as a shepherd boy named David would do after her, she used what was in her hand to slay the giant that held the people of God in the grip of fear.

Judges 4:22
And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.

In chapter 3, we saw Ehud thrusting the sword of the Word into Eglon (Hebrews 4:12). Here in chapter 4, we see Jael pounding the hammer of the Word into Sisera (Jeremiah 23:29).

Judges 4:23, 24
So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel. And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

If Sisera represents the old man of our sin nature, Jabin represents Satan. Satan, the one whose goal it is to oppress and suppress you and me, works through our old sin nature just as surely as Jabin kept Israel in bondage through Sisera. Consequently, once we apply the hammer of the Word and the nail of the Cross to our old sin nature in any given area of our life, like Jabin, Satan capitulates in that area as well.

NAILING THE OLD MAN

A Topical Study of JUDGES 4:17–21

The guy was tough. My eighth grade Pop Warner football coach, Dennis Bennett, was always yelling, always rapping our helmets, always kicking us. That's why we quaked whenever he was around. After the season was over, I remember being in a store and seeing Coach Bennett walk by. My initial reaction was to hide. But then I thought, "Wait a minute. The season's over. I'm not on his team anymore. He can yell at me if he wants to, he can threaten me if he likes, but the point is, he no longer is my coach. I've been delivered, set free, released!"

Now, if Coach Bennett wanted to, he could have come over and ordered me to do fifty push-ups and thirty laps around the store—but I wouldn't have had to do them. If I did give in to his demands, it would have been because I didn't know a very simple fact: Coach Bennett's authority over me had been rendered inactive because I was no longer on his team.

In Romans 6 we find one of the most powerful passages to be found in all of Scripture. If you begin to understand it and apply it, it will be extremely helpful to you in overcoming the sin that can so easily entangle you and set you free from the Coach Bennetts who threaten and intimidate you.

All of us wrestle with sin. *All* of us fight sin. The story is told that playwright Noel Coward, quite a practical joker, one day sent a letter to twenty of his friends that simply read: "All is discovered. Flee while you can ." Two days later, he called all twenty, only to discover that, without exception, all had left town.

All have sinned, declared Paul, and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Sin is something with which each of us wrestles. I pray the Holy Spirit might bring to your mind even now some particular sin to which you are vulnerable, with which you wrestle, over which you want victory.

In Romans 5, Paul tells us the penalty of sin has been removed. Jesus Christ died for all of our sin—past, present, and future. On the Cross, He cried, "It is finished"—and, dear friend, it is. There is no sin that is not

forgiven except one. That is the blasphemy of the Holy Ghost, which is one's failure to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior (Matthew 12:31).

The penalty of sin is gone. But in Romans 6, Paul goes further and says that we are not only free from the penalty of sin, but from the power of sin as well (Romans 6:2, 3). When we were baptized, we were buried in the waters of baptism, signifying our identification with Jesus and our death to sin. At Calvary, Jesus died *for* sin. In baptism, we die *to* sin. The old is buried, freeing us to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4).

"Well that *sounds* nice," you say, "but it doesn't always work that way. I know theologically I was buried with Christ, and I know I'm to be walking in newness of life—but in this particular area of my life, it doesn't seem to work. I'm struggling. I'm succumbing. What hope is there for me?"

As Paul continues in Romans 6, he gives three steps to experiencing victory over the sin that grips us . . .

Know

> *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.*
>
> Romans 6:6, 7

Step 1 is to know. What we are told to know is the mystery, the miracle, the marvel that our old man, our old nature, the sin within us that seeks to dictate to us and have power over us was crucified with Christ Jesus on the Cross of Calvary. Before you were a Christian, the old man of your sin nature controlled you. But once you became a Christian, you tapped in and have access to an entirely different power. When Christ died on the Cross, His blood was shed to wash away your sin. But His body was broken to break the power of sin. That is why there are two elements in Communion: The broken body and the shed blood.

The word translated "destroyed" in Romans 6:6 is *catargao* in Greek, and it means "rendered inactive," or "paralyzed." It does not mean that my old man is done away with. He's still there. But he has been rendered inactive. "*Know* this," said Paul, "something miraculous took place at Calvary. Your sin nature, although still present, was completely paralyzed."

Reckon

> *Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*
>
> Romans 6:11

Step 2 is to reckon. The word translated "reckon" is an accounting term, meaning "add it up; figure it out." The old man is crucified. Reckon it to be so. Add it up. Figure it out. Respond accordingly.

If your boss deposited $10,000 in your bank account because of your faithful service on the job, you would have a choice to make: Whether to make purchases and pay bills—or whether to say, "Nah, he told me that, but I don't believe it." Now, even if you didn't believe it, the fact would remain that he made the deposit and you would be the poorer because you didn't reckon it to be so.

The "knowing" of verse 6 refers to the mind. The "reckoning" of verse 11 refers to the soul, the part of you that puts your knowledge into practice.

Yield

> *Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.*
>
> Romans 6:13

Step 3 is to yield. In Genesis 1:26, man was given dominion over the earth. Instead, man became dominated by sin, for whoever commits sin is the servant of sin (John 8:34). But for the believer, the dominion was broken when Jesus died on the Cross not only to free us from the penalty of sin, but from its power.

Know this factually. Reckon it spiritually. Respond to it physically. How?

Just like Jael did—by nailing the old man.

Jeremiah 23:29 likens the Word of God to a hammer. Therefore, the hammer we are to use is the Word of God. And the nail we are to use is the same one that pierced the hands and feet of Christ on the Cross of Calvary.

When Jesus died—when nails pierced His hands and feet—my old man was there being paralyzed, rendered inactive, broken, done away with as well. Thus, in the moment of temptation, I have a choice to make. I can either succumb to sin; I can give in a little and then find myself dominated completely and destroyed ultimately. Or, like Jael, I can take the hammer of the Word, the nail of the Cross, and say, "I do not have to succumb. Right now, I yield my body as an instrument of righteousness instead of sin."

If you do the latter, you can be absolutely free. You will never again have to sin. You will never again have to succumb. You can choose to give in if you want. When the Coach Bennett of your life barks, "Give me fifty," you can hit the floor and do fifty push-ups. But you don't have to. You can look the old man in the eye and say, "On the basis of the Word of God and the work of Christ on Calvary, I am free. You no longer have dominion over me. I will not succumb." And you can walk away free.

There are those who say, "Your sin is particularly powerful and problematic. You're going to need lots of counseling and lots of work to walk your way out of your sinful condition."

Yet the Bible teaches nothing of this. Romans 6 is shocking because in it Paul declares, "If you can believe this to be true, you don't have to give in to that sin ever again." Whatever sin hounds you has been rendered inactive—gossip, murder, homosexuality, a lousy attitude, drunkenness, lying—have all been paralyzed by Jesus' death on the Cross.

> With the fudge cascading down the sides, the whipped cream piled high, and the cherry perched proudly on top, the hot fudge sundae calls out to me. I can listen to the voice inside that says, "Jon, you have to give in. The only way you'll not succumb is to ease off slowly over many months. You'll have to attend hot fudge sundae group meetings and listen to special speakers. This sin is too big for you."
>
> Or—I can say, "The Bible says that sin was paralyzed. I do not have to give in." And right then and there, I experience victory. The next time a hot fudge sundae screams out to me, I do the same thing again. And I am free once more.

All we have to do is believe, receive, and respond to the finished work of the Cross. In the moment of temptation, gang, take the hammer of the Word and the nail of the Cross of Calvary and nail the old man.

In Jesus' name.



5 **Judges 5:1–3**

Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying, Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves. Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel.

Although Barak and Deborah were perhaps not as gifted in the area of singing as they were in the arena of battle, they said, "I even I will sing." If you have a lousy voice, claim this verse as you worship! Even *I* will sing to the Lord.

Judges 5:4, 5
LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. The mountains melted from before the LORD, even that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel.

Here we see what happened in the battle with Sisera. History verifies that the Lord sent a rainstorm and all of Sisera's nine hundred chariots got stuck in the mud. In other words, the highest technology of the day was rendered useless by rain.

The largest expenditure in our country's Department of Defense is spent trying to disable our enemy's technology. With every nation of the world depending increasingly upon technology, if any nation is successful in messing up the computerized systems of its enemy, enemy forces are rendered useless. Therefore, my personal suspicion is that when the armies converge for the battle of Armageddon, technology will at some point be rendered absolutely useless, ushering in the scenario in the Battle of Armageddon in which men will resort to hand-to-hand combat in the most primitive ways.

"We have iron chariots," boasted Sisera. Yes, but what happened when it rained?

Judges 5:6, 7 (a)
In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways. The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose . . .

The highways were unoccupied because people lived in fear of their enemies.

Judges 5:7 (b)
. . . that I arose a mother in Israel.

Notice it does not say Deborah is the mother of Israel. It says she is *a* mother in Israel. Here was a woman who was a poet, a prophetess, a judge, a genuine hero in the history of God's people—and yet what does she take pride in? The fact that she's a mother. There is no higher calling than motherhood because mothers have the unique opportunity to shape lives and affect the future.

Judges 5:8 (a)
They chose new gods . . .

Israel chose apostasy; she chose to worship other gods. Reading the Old Testament, you might wonder how Israel could be so foolish as to worship other gods. But in our society, we're even more foolish. We worship ourselves. To me, polytheism is not nearly as foolish as atheism. And yet atheism is accepted, respected, even protected in our society.

Judges 5:8 (b)
. . . then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?

Because the people of Israel found themselves new gods, they also found themselves wiped out—with war in their gates and with no defense.

Judges 5:9, 10
My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD. Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way.

Those who gave godly counsel to others rode on white donkeys. Jesus, of course, rode into Jerusalem on a donkey (Matthew 21). And it wouldn't surprise me if it was a white one.

Judges 5:11
They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates.

Those who got involved and engaged in the battle with Sisera, those who stood up and gave wise counsel, were singled out.

Judges 5:12
Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam.

Certain men did rise up and were willing to be used. Barak is even graciously included in this company.

Judges 5:13
Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty.

The Canaanites were brought under the dominion of Israel. The tables were turned. The good guys were in control.

Judges 5:14, 15 (a)
Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer. And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley . . .

Benjamin, Ephraim, Manasseh, Zebulun, and Issachar were commended as those who entered the battle against Sisera and Jabin. But Deborah and Barak's song continues . . .

Judges 5:15 (b), 16
. . . For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.

Reuben didn't get involved. He stayed in the sheepfold, stayed where it was safe. Why? Because he gave it a lot of thought.

The "paralysis of analysis" is a dangerous, yet common problem today. "Should I witness to him, or not?," we ask. "Should I go there, or not? Should I be kind to that person, or not?" And we find ourselves becoming introspective to the place where, like Reuben, we do nothing. Reuben debated so long that he missed the entire battle.

Could that happen to you or me? Absolutely. God says, "I want you to do this, to experience that, to have victory here, to gain spoil there." But we sit back and analyze—and thereby miss what He has for us. Be like Ephraim, Benjamin, Manasseh, Zebulun, and Issachar. Get involved. Get engaged. Be part of what the Lord is doing as He wages war against sin and does battle for the souls of men.

Judges 5:17 (a)
Gilead abode beyond Jordan . . .

Gilead opted not to fight, saying, "It's not our turf, not our area. We're beyond the Jordan." The same is still true. A need arises, and it is the Gilead within us that says, "That's not my area of expertise. I don't feel comfortable doing that." And in so doing, we miss the battle.

Judges 5:17 (b)
. . . and why did Dan remain in ships?

Rather than entering the battle, Dan went sailing and missed it altogether.

Judges 5:17 (c)
. . . Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches.

Asher remained at the beach. And, along with Gilead and Dan, missed the opportunity to join the battle and share the victory.

Judges 5:18
Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field.

Unlike Gilead, Dan, and Asher, Zebulun and Napthali risked their lives. They took steps of faith. They engaged in battle and took on the enemy.

We see the nation of Israel divided into two groups: Those who responded to the call to arms and those who remained with their flocks, in their ships, or on the shore. And we see the same division today. Some are rushing into battle, saying, "God use me," while others are content to stay with their flocks, take a cruise, or hang out at the beach.

Judges 5:19–22
The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money. They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength. Then were the horse-hoofs broken by the means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones.

Of all those who entered the battle, it was the Lord of hosts who secured the victory.

Judges 5:23
Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.

Although we don't know its exact location, Meroz was a city of Israel in the region of the battle. But its inhabitants were cursed for their failure to get involved in the battle.

The same is still true. Cursed will be the man or woman who does not get involved in the battle, who does not get involved in service. Where will he or she be cursed? In heaven.

You see, when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, those who didn't get involved—who sat back day after week after month after year after decade, missing opportunities in their own communities to be part of God's plan for the area—will weep. "Why did I waste my life?" they will cry. "What was I thinking? Why did I have time for this and that—but not to get involved in what God called me to do, in what He gave me the ability to do?"

There will be cursing in eternity—not from God, but from people who will curse themselves.

It was the unrighteous servant who said, "The Lord delays His coming. I've got lots of time. No worry, no hurry." But when the master comes unexpectedly, he's cut asunder (Matthew 24:51).

We might die tonight. And once we're dead, it will be too late to say, "I'm going to use the abilities You gave me, Lord—the money you entrusted to me, the doors you opened before me." And in that day, we, too, could be cut asunder as we realize the capacity of our spiritual life is forever diminished, that we'll be spiritual midgets for eternity, that we'll not rule over ten cities, five cities, or even one city (Luke 19).

God has things in store for us that are mind-blowing, gang, but this is the only opportunity we have to be able to be at the top or middle level—ruling ten or five cities. There will be many in heaven who make it, "yet so as by fire" (1 Corinthians 3:15). They will be there, but they'll have no rewards because they buried the personality, intellectual ability, musical skill or finances God entrusted to them. As a result, they'll curse themselves.

The way to be sad today is to not serve the Lord—to focus on your problems, your situation, your hurts, your needs, your life. Everything is discouraging when we live for ourselves. Instead of worrying about what shape you're in emotionally, financially, or physically, forget about yourself and start serving others. Jesus said, "The measure you give out will be the measure returned to you" (Matthew 7:2). Start serving others and I guarantee you'll find yourself free from the curse of self-absorption today, and free from cursing yourself in the days to come.

Judges 5:24–27
Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent. He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead.

No one was more fully engaged in the battle than Jael. She was one tough lady!

Judges 5:28–30
The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots? Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself, Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?

A mother herself, Deborah writes of Sisera's mother, speculating why her son is late in returning home.

Judges 5:31
So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.

Over and over throughout Judges, we read that the land had rest for forty years. Forty years is a generation. It seems as though every generation has its own deliverance, its own revival, its own encounter with the Lord. How I thank the Lord that we are seeing the outpouring of His Spirit in *this*

generation. What a joy it is to be part of a people who love the Lord, love the Word, and love each other.



6

Judges 6:1 (a)
And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD . . .

It was the year 1256 B.C. Approximately two hundred years had passed since Joshua had led the children of Israel on their famous march around the walled city of Jericho. Under the guidance of God, the people of Israel had stormed not only through the walls of Jericho, but through the entire region of Canaan, conquering the Amorites and the Ammonites, the Hittites and the Jebusites.

But because they failed to obey the Lord fully, because they failed to totally drive out the pagan people of Palestine, because they allowed pockets of Canaanites to remain in the land—like a disease in seeming remission, two hundred years later the Canaanites regained strength and began to dominate and regulate the lives of the people of Israel.

Judges 6:1 (b)
. . . and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.

After Sarah died, Abraham married a woman named Keturah, with whom he had six sons—one of whom was a boy named Midian. To keep Isaac, the son of promise, from being hassled by the sons of Keturah, Abraham sent Keturah's sons away, and, over the years, the Midianites became enemies of Israel. Throughout Scripture, we see the sons of Midian constantly attacking the people of Israel.

Judges 6:2 (a)
And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel . . .

An arrogant, brutal, nomadic people, the Midianites were the first people in history to domesticate the camel. This gave them a huge military

advantage. If you've ever stood next to a camel, you know their size can be terrifying—yet they are very maneuverable in battle.

Judges 6:2 (b)
. . . and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds.

We talk about men becoming mice—but the Israelites had actually descended lower than mice. They became moles, hiding in underground caves, holing up in dens, terrified of the Midianites, humiliated by their enemies.

Judges 6:3
And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them;

The Amalekites were the descendants of Esau. It is fairly well established that the Bedouin people of today are of this same line.

Judges 6:4, 5 (a)
And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude . . .

The Midianites and Amalekites would wait until the Israelites had harvested their crops. Then they would sweep into the area and take all of the grain. This equivalent today would be if someone robbed you every payday. It would be frustrating, to say the least!

Judges 6:5 (b), 6 (a)
. . . for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly

impoverished because of the Midianites . . .

The speed of the camels allowed the Midianites to conduct guerilla warfare because they could ride into an area and attack quickly.

Judges 6:6 (b)
. . . and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.

After seven long years of being ripped off by the Midianites, of being dominated by the Midianites, of being intimidated by the Midianites, Israel finally cried to the Lord.

What is it in our nature that is so stubborn? Why is it that we so desperately desire to work things out in our own strength? Why does it take us sometimes years to find ourselves in a position of brokenness before God?

If you're as old as I am, you remember the series of commercials Bayer aspirin ran in which a daughter would say to her well-meaning mother, "Mother, I'd rather do it myself." And that long-running series of commercials struck a chord within the heart of everyone because there's something within each of us that says, "I want to do it myself. I can work it out." Meanwhile, the Lord watches and waits for us to cry out to Him.

Judges 6:7–10
And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites, That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that op pressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land; And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.

Psalm 34:6 declares that when we cry out to the Lord, He hearkens to our cry, answers our prayers. When we get to the place of total desperation and brokenness, He always responds. The question is, when was the last time you

really cried out to the Lord? How long has it been since there have been tears streaming down your cheeks before Him?

If you wonder why you are dominated, why you are struggling, could it be because you have failed to cry out to God with intensity and sincerity? For seven years, the children of Israel lived in caves. But when at last they cried to the Lord, He answered by first sending a prophet, and then coming Himself . . .

Judges 6:11
And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abi-ezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.

The threshing of wheat was usually done at a higher elevation in order to allow the wind to blow the chaff away. Gideon, however, realized that every time he threshed wheat, the Midianites would sweep in and rip him off. So he threshed wheat not on a mountaintop but in a winepress, a lower spot, a hidden area.

Judges 6:12 (a)
And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him . . .

The "angel of the Lord" in the Old Testament is a Christophany—an appearance of Jesus Christ before He came as Jesus of Nazareth.

Judges 6:12 (b)
. . . the LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

I love this! Here's Gideon, hiding from the Midianites, knees knocking, shaking with fright—yet the Lord calls him a mighty man of valor. Why? Because He sees His own not in their present problems, but as finished products. How do I know? Turn to Romans 8 . . .

> And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.
>
> And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.
>
> Romans 8:28–30

Please hang on to this. God is saying that you who are part of the elect were predestined by Him, called by Him, made just by Him, and glorified by Him. It doesn't say you *will be* glorified. It says you *are* glorified. That is why in Ephesians 5:27, Paul talks about the church as being a glorious church without spot or wrinkle. When we look at each other, we see lots of wrinkles and a whole bunch of spots. But God transcends the time/space dimension and views us in our eternal state. Yes, He's aware of our present struggles, but He also sees us as glorified.

This is fabulous, folks, because I am one of the few who, throughout the history of humanity, have been selected, elected, chosen by God to be part of His eternal family. So are you.

> **Judges 6:13**
> **And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.**

With Gideon, we cry, "If God has chosen me, if God is with me, I have two questions: Why is everything crashing all around me? And where are all the miracles I read about in the Bible and hear about in the lives of others?"

Watch Jesus' response . . .

Judges 6:14
And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

Jesus doesn't answer Gideon's question. Instead, He gives Gideon a commission. This is so important for us to understand, as well. "Why is this happening?" we cry. "How will this ever work out?" we ask.

"I'm not going to answer that," the Lord answers. "I have things for you to do today—people to share with, people to witness to, people to pray for, people to love."

If you are prone to asking about the whys and hows, to hiding away in the winepress day after day until you get answers, God would tell you the same thing He told Gideon: "Here's what you're to do . . ." as He uses you to set people free.

Judges 6:15, 16
And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.

"Who am I?" Gideon asked in verse 15.

"That's not the issue," the Lord says in verse 16. "The question is: Who am *I,* for *I* will be with you. And that is all you need."

The key to service, to ministry, to being used by the Lord and being an instrument of the Lord is to say, "It's not who I am. It's who You are, Lord. And if You choose to use the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, if You choose the weak things to show Your strength, then I qualify. And if You choose to use me, You'll get all the glory because it's obvious I can do nothing on my own."

What has God called you to do? What's on your agenda this week? Is there something you know you should be engaged in, but don't feel capable to do? Through this story, God would say to you, "It's not about you. It's about Me. I'm with you."

Judges 6:17
And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me.

"If You want to use me as an instrument to free your people from the Midianites, give me a sign," Gideon said.

I think it's a good thing when people say, "Lord, if I'm hearing You correctly, if this really is of You, give me confirmation." I think too many people have an impression, a thought, an idea—and sometimes they'll launch out in a way that ultimately proves to be foolhardy because, unlike Gideon, they didn't seek confirmation. I don't think a person should ever sell his house, quit his job, and leave the country, thinking he's heard the Lord, without first getting confirmation. God responds to honest doubt.

Judges 6:18, 19
Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again. And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it.

In these days of famine—when bread was worth more than silver, and meat was more valuable than gold—Gideon prepares both as an offering, as an act of worship to the Lord.

"That's a waste," some might say.

No, that's worship. People who worship the Lord are often accused of being wasteful. Do you recall the story of Mary? When she took ointment out of an alabaster box and poured it upon Jesus, one of the disciples said, "That is wasteful. The money could have been used much more wisely in caring for the poor" (John 12:5).

Who was the disciple?

Judas Iscariot.

Those who don't understand worship will always call it wasteful.

Judges 6:20, 21
And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.

Where was confirmation found in Gideon's story? At the Table of the Lord—the unleavened bread, the flesh. Where will we find confirmation? I can't tell you how frequently I have found confirmation at the Table of the Lord, the Table of Communion. It's where I'm re-ignited. Remembering the fire Jesus absorbed when He hung on the Cross for me, I pray, "Lord, ignite my soul that I might leave this Table on fire for You, doing what You want me to do."

When you're going through struggles, wondering what the Lord would have you do, oftentimes, you'll find your answer at His Table. You'll find your answer as you reflect on what Jesus did for you.

Judges 6:22
And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.

In verse 13, Gideon was afraid because he didn't see the hand of the Lord. Here in verse 22, he's terrified because he does. After all, hadn't God clearly said, "There shall no man see Me and live"? (Exodus 33:20)

Gideon did indeed look at God face to face—not upon God the Father, but upon God the Son, the One who would eventually come to dwell with man (John 1:14). And in looking upon Him, the sweat of fear is replaced by the sweetness of fellowship.

Judges 6:23, 24
And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die.

Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites.

After seeing the Lord, Gideon was an altered man. Therefore, it is only logical that he would build an altar. *Jehovah-shalom* means "The Lord is peace." About to face the fight of his life, Gideon didn't feel particularly courageous. Rather, he felt unqualified, uncertain, unsure, knowing he had been called to do something out of the realm of human possibility. Yet, in meeting with the Lord at the table, he had peace.

When the disciples were afraid because Jesus told them He would be betrayed, He said, "Don't let your heart be troubled. In My Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you" (see John 14:1, 2). What's the key to not being troubled? I believe, as this story portrays, it's to go to the Lord's Table and realize there will be peace beyond this present day, beyond this present problem. I can let my heart be troubled, or I can let my heart not be troubled. It's up to me. And I make that choice every day. By focusing on eternity—on Jehovah-shalom—Gideon left with peace in his heart and a new perspective on his mind . . . at least for now.

Judges 6:25, 26
And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: And build an altar unto the LORD thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down.

After revelation comes consecration. After the Lord revealed Himself to Gideon, He said, "There's a problem in your family, Gideon. Your dad had an altar to Baal that must be torn down. Before you deal with the men of Midian, I want you to deal with your own family."

This reminds me of Moses. On his way to lead the people of Israel from captivity in Egypt to the Land of Promise, the Lord actually pinned him to the ground because he hadn't circumcised his own son. You see, there was no

point in Moses leading a nation if he wouldn't lead his own family (Exodus 4).

Family is top priority. Ministry begins at home. The highest pleasure and priority you'll have in ministry is to your own family.

Judges 6:27 (a)
Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him . . .

Gideon is now becoming what God said he would be: A mighty man of valor. He's willing to stand up to his father and to society, willing to become an iconoclast as he tears down his father's altar.

Judges 6:27 (b)
. . . and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night.

Afraid to face his father, Gideon still has a way to go—but he's progressing!

Judges 6:28–31
And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built. And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they inquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing. Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it. And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar.

When Joash saw the boldness of his son, something stirred within his heart. Once a worshiper of God, he had been sucked into worshiping Baal. But the action of his son inspired him once again as he realized the stupidity of serving a god who couldn't defend himself.

Judges 6:32–34 (a)
Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar. Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel. But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon . . .

Throughout the entire Old Testament and into the pages of the New Testament, we read of the Spirit of God coming upon people to empower them for service. That's what the baptism of the Spirit is all about. That's what the fullness of the Holy Ghost really is. It is the power of the Spirit to enable people for service. God not only called Gideon to serve, but empowered Him to do so.

Judges 6:34 (b), 35
. . . and he blew a trumpet; and Abi-ezer was gathered after him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.

The bugle blast was heard throughout the land, and the effect was electrifying. Suddenly, men from throughout Israel rallied around this common farm boy. Why?

- It was not because of Gideon, but because of God.
- It was not a program of Gideon's doing, but the power of the Spirit moving.
- It was not indoctrination, but inspiration.

Apart from a moving of the Spirit of God, there's no way men would have rallied around Gideon. He had no reputation upon which to stand, no credentials with which to impress. But God was moving, and when Gideon blew the trumpet, issuing a sound that hadn't been heard in seven years, people immediately joined him, ready to do battle.

Judges 6:36, 37
And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.

Gideon is doubting once again. He's seen amazing things happen. He's had an encounter with the angel of the Lord. He's seen his dad's altar pulled down and his dad coming around. He's seen a lot, but he still has doubts and questions. I can relate to Gideon, can't you?

Judges 6:38–40
And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water. And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

Gideon had worshiped God intensely, and stood up to his entire society unashamedly. Now, as he is about to lead his countrymen in a battle in which the odds are heavily against them, he pauses to make sure he is hearing God right. All too often, believers look only at Gideon setting a fleece and ignore the worship and the tearing down of the altars that preceded it. Isolated in such a way, this passage loses all perspective and this practice becomes nothing more than an option for any who are too lazy to really seek God.

Having said that, however, we come to an interesting illustration that raises some practical questions about finding God's will. Is it right to put a "fleece" before God?

Some people believe that to test is not to trust—that if you put a test before the Lord, it proves you don't have trust in the Lord. I, however, do not believe this to be so . . .

In Genesis 24, Abraham sent his servant, Eliezer to find a bride for his son, Isaac. To complete this assignment, Eliezer told the Lord that if a woman came to the well and offered to draw water for him and for his camels, he would know she was the chosen one.

In 1 Samuel 14, in order to determine whether it was God's will that he and his armor-bearer take on the entire Philistine army, Jonathan said, "We'll shout. If the Philistines threaten to come to us, we'll know God's not with us and we'll split. But if they challenge us to come to them, we'll know God is with us." So Jonathan and his armor-bearer made their way to the periphery of the Philistine camp, let out a yell, and were immediately ordered into the camp to do battle.

"Alright!" said Jonathan. "God is with us. Let's go get 'em!"
And the entire Philistine army was defeated.

In Isaiah 7, God Himself instructed Ahaz to ask for a sign from Him.

Thus, there are many accounts throughout Scripture wherein we see the reality and rightness of "setting a fleece" before the Lord. However, I want to qualify this with a couple of very important principles . . .

1. A fleece before the Lord is valid only if the Word of God has not already spoken. As ludicrous as it would be for us to say, "Lord, when I hand the teller this note, if she puts money in the bag I give her, I'll know You want me to rob the bank. But if she pushes the buzzer, I'll know You don't" it was for Satan to say to Jesus, "If You're the Son of God, then turn these stones into bread" (Matthew 4).
2. When you "lay a fleece" before the Lord, make sure you are not limiting Him. "Lord, if You want me to purchase this car," we say,

"then allow five thousand dollars to come in the mail by noon on Monday"—when, in fact, He might have a package due to arrive on our doorstep at eight o'clock on Tuesday.

3. God will only honor the practice of laying out a fleece if I am serious and not merely curious. "Jump off the cliff, and see if Your angels will really catch You," Satan taunted Jesus (Matthew 4). Sadly, in my own life, I have set all kinds of fleeces out of curiosity. Not so Gideon. He was dead serious about what he was doing.

Finally, in addition to the practical aspect of setting a fleece before God, there is a spiritual understanding as well. You see, throughout the Old Testament, dew was likened to the power of the Spirit of God coming upon His people (e.g., Hosea 14:5). Thus, I see Gideon praying,

"Before I lead any attempt at conquering the Midianites, I must be filled with Your Spirit, Lord. I lay out my life as a fleece before You. Saturate me. Drench me. Flood me with Your Spirit, or I cannot go."

And indeed the fleece was saturated. But then it's as if Gideon took it a step further when he prayed,

"Lord, I want a second understanding of this situation. Even should my own life become dry, I want the ground round about me, the lives next to me, the work connected to me to go on in the anointing and power of Your Spirit. Even if I should dry out, dry up, or fail, Lord, I want Your name to be glorified and Your work to be done."

And I believe God honored Gideon's request by saying, "Yes, Gideon, even if you fail, My work shall go on."



7 God loves to work in the realm of the impossible. Therefore, He puts you and me in impossible situations in order that we can see that *He* is

the One who comes through and works things out. Surely this is the reason for the story before us . . .

Judges 7:1, 2
Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.

Thirty-two thousand men responded to Gideon's trumpet call to arms. Facing a Midianite army of 135,000, the odds were 4:1 against the Israelites. Yet what does God say?

"The odds are too heavily stacked in your favor, Gideon."

Gideon must have thought, *You're kidding. We're outnumbered 4 to 1!* But God knows the tendency within the heart of man to take the credit for what He alone does.

Judges 7:3
Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.

When God told Gideon to send home the men who were fearful, twenty-two thousand men said, "We're out of here!" This made the odds 14:1 in favor of the Midianites.

Judges 7:4–7
And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. So he

brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place.

Why were these three hundred chosen? Possibly for the following reasons . . .

First, they were free from fear. Twenty-two thousand were sent home because fear and faith are mutually exclusive. Only ten thousand men were free from fear. Why did they have no fear? I suggest it was because they had an understanding of eternity. As Christians, we know the reality of eternity. Therefore, we must not fear the difficulties or dangers of this life. Those with eternity's values in view are those who serve the Lord with abandon.

Secondly, the three hundred were chosen because they were men of humility. You see, in Israeli culture, the dog was despicable. To be called a dog, to look like a dog, to be associated with a dog was to be avoided. Yet here, the men who were chosen scooped up water with their hands and lapped it like dogs.

Thirdly, the three hundred were men of priority. That is, they didn't spend unnecessary time doing necessary things. Yes, they needed to drink, but they never lost sight of the possibility of attack from the Midianites. There are things in this life to which we must tend. There are chores and responsibilities to which each of us is obligated. But the man or woman used by God will not devote unnecessary time to doing necessary things. They will streamline their life as much as possible because they realize the battle is raging, the time is short, the calling is great.

Eternity, humility, priority—these were all characteristics held by the three hundred chosen men. Yet an equally possible scenario was that these three hundred guys were not necessarily depicting noble qualities at all. It

could be that these were broken-down, fat guys who simply couldn't get into the water. It could be that their knees were bad and their backs were out. It could be that in choosing the men who couldn't put their faces in the water, God was saying, "I want to use the old fat guys—guys the world would laugh at, ignore, or discard."

The three hundred may have lacked the ability to lay down and drink from the stream, but the one thing they had was availability—and that's the one ability that matters most.

Judges 7:8
So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men: and the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley.

The odds went from 4:1 to 14:1 to 450:1 as only three hundred men were allowed to move with Gideon into battle against the Midianites. We read of those same odds in 1 Kings 18, where Elijah alone was victorious against four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal.

Maybe today you feel as though the odds are stacked terribly against you, that your circumstances look impossible. Rejoice! Be glad! God has set you up to bring you through and to show Himself strong. That's His intention, that's His purpose for you—to put you in an impossible situation so He can show you and those around you just how strong, how wonderful, how glorious He is.

Judges 7:9–12
And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand. But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: And thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host. And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the

valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude.

Fear had once again fastened itself to the heart of Gideon. Knowing this, God doesn't condemn Gideon. Instead, He commissions him . . .

Judges 7:13, 14
And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host.

As Gideon and his servant spied on the Midianites, they overheard a conversation through which, much to his surprise, Gideon was made aware of the fact that the Midianites were afraid of him. Amazing! This man, who, just a few days previous, was hiding in a winepress, frightened, worried, intimidated, now had a reputation throughout the whole host of Midian as being a fearless warrior. Why? No doubt the Midianites heard how he had pulled down the altar of Baal, effect challenging Baal face to face. Even though only a few people saw Gideon do this, even though only a few people were initially aware of it, word spread that he was a man of power.

The same is true today. Many times we are afraid of the demons of the enemy—but in reality, the enemy knows we who name the name of Jesus Christ can utilize His name, stand in His authority, and be unstoppable. If you have been moving out for Jesus Christ—even if it's not widely known by those around you—your name is known in hell. If you're being attacked, persecuted, hassled, bombarded—rejoice. It means they're talking about you a lot down there. If you're never persecuted, never attacked, never hassled—*that's* when you need to worry.

"Yea all those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," Paul told Timothy (2 Timothy 3:12). He didn't say all Christians shall suffer

persecution, because not all Christians will. But all who live godly—who make a mark, who impact this world—*will* suffer persecution.

Judges 7:15 (a)
And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped . . .

Notice that Gideon was likened not to a huge boulder rumbling down the mountain and destroying the camp of Midian. No, he was likened to a barley loaf. In that culture, barley was the food of slaves and animals. It was the lowest type of grain used in that society. Yet what does Gideon do? Does he say, "Barley loaf? That's what You think of me? Thanks a lot, Lord"? No, he worships.

Judges 7:15 (b)–18
. . . and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian. And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do. When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.

"Look on me and do likewise," said Gideon.

"Follow me as I follow Christ," echoed Paul (2 Thessalonians 3:9).

Gideon was a man of action. He was a doer, not simply a talker. He sought the Lord, selected three hundred troops out of 32,000, risked his life by sneaking into the Midianite camp, surveyed the situation, overheard a conversation, came back, developed a strategy, supplied his troops, and then did battle. No committees, no dialogues, no discussions. He was a doer. He made things happen. And that's the kind of men God is looking for today—men who see the need and fill it, men who go for it. Gideon was a man who

understood that leadership was not about lecturing, but simply about leading; not saying, "You go," but saying, "*Let's* go."

> **Judges 7:19–23**
> **So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands. And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon. And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Beth-shittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abel-meholah, unto Tabbath. And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites.**

This was a brilliant strategy because, although the Midianites were brutal, powerful, arrogant warriors, due to the fact that they were steeped in superstition and occultist practices, nighttime terrorized them. A second factor to keep in mind in understanding this strategy is that the Midianites were very suspicious of each other due to the skirmishes fought between tribes within their ranks.

So here they are. It's the middle of the night. They're all tucked in. Suddenly, there's a loud crash and a shout from the hills surrounding the valley. They stumble out of their tents to find three hundred torches surrounding them. Because it was normal military practice in that day for a company of 1,000 soldiers to march behind a single torch, the Midianites assumed they were encompassed not by three hundred men, but by 300,000. When they heard the crashing of the broken pitchers, saw the torches light up the night sky, and heard the cry of the trumpets, they thought they were doomed. And in the chaos and confusion, in their suspicion and superstition, they began to butcher each other.

What application does this have for us today? Earthen vessels that we are (2 Corinthians 4:7), whenever we are broken, the light shines forth from our lives, causing Satan to be as confused and defeated as the host of Midian . . .



For topical study of Judges 7:19–21, see "The Blessedness of Brokenness" below.

Judges 7:24, 25 (a)
And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, Come down against the Midianites, and take before them the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan. Then all the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and took the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan. And they took two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb . . .

Oreb means "Raven"; *Zeeb* means "Wolf." These two were formidable leaders.

Judges 7:25 (b)
. . . and they slew Oreb upon the rock Oreb, and Zeeb they slew at the winepress of Zeeb, and pursued Midian, and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side Jordan.

Here come the men of Ephraim, carrying the bloody heads of Oreb and Zeeb. But, as we will see in Chapter 8, rather than rejoicing in the victory, they complained about the strategy.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF BROKENNESS

A Topical Study of JUDGES 7:19–21

The odds were absolutely brutal, yet the strategy was incredibly brilliant, as Gideon gathered three hundred select soldiers and marched into battle against 135,000 Midianite men of war. Statistically, Gideon was outnumbered 450 to 1. Yet, miraculously, incredibly, the Lord gave victory to Gideon and his band of three hundred.

Here's what happened: While the Midianites snoozed in their tents in the valley below him, Gideon gave each of his men a trumpet and an earthenware pitcher with a smoldering torch inside. Then he ordered his men to quietly surround the Midianite camp. On signal, Gideon had his men shout, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," as they smashed the pitchers, causing air to rush into the broken vessels and the smoldering embers to burst into flame.

Hearing the crashing and clanging sound of broken glass, and the shouts coming from the hills around them, the Midianites came stumbling out of their tents to see torches encircling them. Since it was customary for companies of 1,000 soldiers to be led by a single torch, the Midianites assumed that behind every one of the three hundred torches, marched a division of men. Thus, in their panic, they grabbed their swords, and, still in a sleepy stupor, began to fight one another.

An incredible story—a brilliant, God-given, inspired strategy, as three hundred Israeli soldiers overcame unbelievable odds, destroying 135,000 Midianites. I would like to focus on one particular segment of this story. I would like to use stop-action instant replay and freeze one frame. I would like us to look at a seemingly minor detail which actually is hugely significant.

We live in a world oppressed by Midianites, dominated by Midianites, controlled by Midianites. I'm not speaking of an external race of people, but of an internal struggle within people. The dominion of Satan, the control of self, the oppression of sin is within the heart of every human being, for, like David, we are all born into sin (Psalm 51:5). We have all been tainted by

sin; we have all succumbed to sin. But praise be to God, we can be liberated. We can be rescued. We can be free. God has called us into His glorious gospel—the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins, paid the price for all of our iniquity, rose from the dead, and wants to set up residence within our hearts, to free us, to liberate us, to lead us into life that is both abundant and eternal. That's the gospel.

And we who have come into this saving knowledge of Jesus are to trumpet this gospel to all who are still dominated, controlled, oppressed by the Midianites of sin, Satan, and self. We have the answer. The Light of the world, Jesus Christ, dwells within us. His light is inside of us—but it is also to be radiating from us. And there's the rub.

You see, most of us understand that Jesus is the Light because most of us have walked in His light—and yet all too often His light remains inside, all bottled up. The Lord wants to release the light of Jesus which He has placed in you. He wants His light to shine out from you in order that others can be saved and freed and satisfied. How does this happen? Only by breaking—for just as the light of the torch was hidden within the earthen vessel until the pitcher was broken, so, too, if our lives are going to be a blessing, there must first be a breaking.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 4, where Paul capitalizes on this particular illustration . . .

> *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 4:6, 7

The light is *in* the earthen vessel. But the light cannot shine forth *from* the vessel until there is a breaking *of* the vessel.

> *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord*

> *Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 4:8–12

This is the breaking of the vessel. What's happening in us, says Paul, is difficult on us, but necessary for you.

Gang, you cannot be a blessing until you first go through breaking. Why? Because we live in a broken world.

We live in a broken world indeed. The baby in his playpen cries over a broken toy. The little boy is upset because of his broken bike. The junior higher is in agony over a broken arm. The high school Sophomore is in pain because of a broken heart. The young wife is crying because of broken marriage vows. The businessman is in despair because of broken hopes. The middle-aged man is hurting because of broken health. Wherever you look, wherever you observe people you see hurts. People are broken. People are in tough situations. And we who have the Light and Life of Jesus Christ can only touch them to the degree that we are able to relate to them.

> I shared breakfast with a fellow yesterday who has gone through tough times. His wife left him, and took his two boys with her. As we were sharing, he related how certain people came to him with certain ideas and understandings, and very kindly, yet very emphatically he said, "You know, they just don't understand. They mean well, but they don't understand. They haven't suffered. They haven't felt it. They can't relate to it."

During the times of breaking in my own life, I have observed that basically all of the people who have approached me fall into one of two categories: those who help, and those who hinder. In thinking about people who have helped me, I have noticed a common denominator which can be summed up in one word: brokenness. The people who were a hindrance to me with their advice, exhortations, and prophetic utterances had not really been broken themselves. But without exception, at some point in their lives,

in some area of their lives, each of those who have helped me have themselves experienced breaking. Indeed, there's something about a broken heart, a broken spirit, a broken man which blesses unbelievably.

Brokenness. There is no other way to be effective in touching others' lives. Job knew this. He went through more breaking than any of us could possibly imagine. He lost it all, and yet it was Job's suffering which silenced Satan.

You see, Satan cruised by God and said, "Sure Job serves You. Sure he worships You. Look how You've blessed him. Look what You've given him. No wonder he walks with You. Big deal. But if those things were taken away, he would curse You. He would walk away from You" (Job 1:9–11).

But when everything was taken away from Job, listen to how he responded:

> *Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him.*
>
> Job 23:8

Ever feel like that? Wherever you go, you can't feel or sense the Lord.

> *On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*
>
> Job 23:9, 10

"I don't know the way He's taking, I don't know what He's doing," says Job, "but *He* knows the way I take. *He* knows where I'm at. *He* knows what He's doing."

And with that, Satan's accusations went up in smoke.

Not only does suffering silence Satan, but suffering is necessary for service.

> A five-dollar iron bar can be pounded into a couple of ten-dollar horseshoes. Or, that same iron bar can be pounded further into $350

worth of needles. Or, that same iron bar can be pounded even further to produce $250,000 worth of fine watch springs. It all depends on how much pounding is done.

Maybe you feel as though you have been pounded on, worked on, broken this week. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for it means God is making you into something fine, something useful, something valuable for His glory.

"I don't know about this teaching," you say. "I think I would rather control my own destiny than submit to the breaking of God. Thanks, but no thanks. I'll go it alone." Those of you who, so saying, want to captain your own ship, turn with me to Acts 27 . . .

En route to Rome, where he was to stand trial before Caesar, Paul advised his shipmates they were headed for treacherous waters. Ignoring his warning, the captain sailed on—right into a storm so fierce the ship was tossed to and fro on the waves, eventually running aground, where it was broken into pieces. All on board were saved, however, by clinging to the broken remains of the very boat of which they were previously so proud and confident. It was the broken pieces which saved them.

Storms will come into your life, gang. There is not a man or woman who is exempt from this. And when they do, each of us will have a choice to make: Either to flail about in our own efforts, or to grab on to the splinters and say, "I don't have much to offer, Lord—just a bunch of shattered pieces of my life. But take control and bring me to dry land."

If you choose the latter, guess what. The Lord will take the breakings, the hurts, the heartaches of your life, and He will bring you not only safely to shore, but He will use the remnants of your ship to bring others as well. You will touch, pray, and relate to people in an entirely different way—for you will have been broken.

Christian, if you're going through a time of breaking right now, know this: The process keeps going. It just keeps on. You might be a horseshoe, and He's making you into a needle—or you might be a needle which He's shaping into a watchspring. Wherever you are, He's working on you, breaking you in order that the light of Jesus Christ may shine from you. The world is impressed and blessed, moved and touched when they see people who not only rejoice and praise the Lord in times of prosperity, but who worship God

and hang tough when the times are difficult, for it is then that the light of the gospel shines forth. It is then that the trumpet of Jesus Christ is heard throughout the land. It is then that the Midianites which oppress and depress people are defeated.

Hang in there, gang. Don't give up. Don't question, wonder, or fret about what God is doing. "I don't know His ways," said Job. "But He knows mine —and that's all that matters."



8 Judges 8:1
And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply.

Carrying the bloody, blackened heads of Oreb and Zeeb, the men of Ephraim came down on Gideon. "Why didn't you involve us in the initial battle plans? How come you called us in at the tail end?" Instead of saying, "Wow! God is good!" they said, "How come we only got the mop up operation?"

Throughout the Old Testament, Ephraim was the most negative of the Twelve Tribes—always complaining about something.

> *A few months ago, a large department store was being picketed not only by picketers protesting store policy but by picketers protesting the anti-department store signs which had been printed in a non-union shop. Incredible: Picketers picketing picketers.*

Yet that's just like Christians. We ignore the decisive victory of the Cross, the great mercy with which we are all forgiven, and instead like Ephraim, find the smallest things about which to disagree.

The trumpet had sounded throughout the land. Anyone who could come was invited to join the battle. Thirty-two thousand men showed up. The men of Ephraim, however, stayed home. But now they're upset because a great

victory had been won. Spoils were divided. And rather than rejoicing in the victory, they criticized the strategy.

Judges 8:2, 3
And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abi-ezer? God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that.

I like this! If there were a Nobel Peace Prize in 1256 B.C., Gideon would have won it hands down. He demonstrated diplomacy, tact, and love when he said, "You guys won a far greater victory than we did. What we've done is inconsequential compared to the work you've done in capturing Oreb and Zeeb."

Ronald Reagan wisely said, "There's no limit to what a man can accomplish if he doesn't care who gets the credit." There's no limit to what the body of Christ can accomplish if we don't care who gets the credit—just that Jesus gets the glory.

Judges 8:4
And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them.

One hundred twenty thousand Midianites had been killed, but fifteen thousand were still left, and Gideon and his three hundred available—though possibly not very agile—men were in pursuit of them.

Judges 8:5–7
And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they be faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian. And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army? And Gideon said, Therefore when the LORD hath delivered Zebah

and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers.

Arriving in Succoth, Gideon said, "My men are hungry. Give us some bread so we can continue on."

"Not so fast," said the men of Succoth. "Is the victory totally secure? If not, we don't want to get involved."

Judges 8:8, 9
And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered him. And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower.

Lest you think Gideon sounds like anything but a man of humility, you need to understand that, although Israel had obtained victory in this battle, Gideon intuitively understood that the real key is not obtaining victory but maintaining it. Whether in a church, in a family, or on the jobsite, obtaining victory in battle is exciting. The real trick, however, is maintaining it in the days that follow. Gideon understood this.

Judges 8:10–16
Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword. And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was secure. And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host. And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun was up, And caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and inquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, even threescore and seventeen men. And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, Are

the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thy men that are weary? And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth.

The ancient practice of "teaching" men with briers and thorns was such that the "pupil" would lay face down on the ground while his body was beaten with thorns and briers. Following this, he would be drug through the dirt until he was near death. It was a relatively common method of teaching a lesson in a most severe manner.

The seventy-seven men of Succoth who didn't want to help Gideon because they didn't want to risk their standing with Zebah and his men ended up losing on all sides. That's always the way it is. When you try and straddle both worlds, you'll fall and miss out on both—which is why Jesus said to be hot or cold but not lukewarm (Revelation 3:16).

Judges 8:17
And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city.

"That's pretty harsh," you might say, "beating and whipping the elders of Succoth, and killing the men of Penuel. Why was Gideon so brutal?"

I believe there's an important principle embedded here. That is, to attain success is not as difficult as it is to maintain success. The Israelites were successful—they had just beaten the Midianites against incredible odds. On the heels of their success, no doubt, the temptation would have been to think, *What's the big deal? We beat the Midianites! We're scoring big victories. So what if the men of Succoth kind of blew it?* But Gideon knew he had to discipline these men in order to maintain success under his administration.

Parents, take note of this. There may be times when everything's running fairly smoothly at home. Sure, your kids are way out of line, but you think, *I don't want to discipline them. Things are going pretty well, and I don't want to upset the cart.* But listen: Success can only be maintained through loving discipline and correction when necessary. Gideon knew this, and so instead of just sitting back and enjoying the plaudits and applause of his

people, he said, “I must discipline for the sake of the whole country.” Yes it was brutal, but it was necessary.

Judges 8:18, 19 (a)
Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king. And he said, They were my brethren, even the sons of my mother . . .

“The men we killed looked just like you.” In other words, these guys were the reason Gideon was hiding in the winepress. It was these two princes, with their murdering marauders, who had swept through the area and killed his family.

Judges 8:19 (b)–21
. . . as the LORD liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you. And he said unto Jether his firstborn, Up, and slay them. But the youth drew not his sword: for he feared, because he was yet a youth. Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and fall upon us: for as the man is, so is his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took away the ornaments that were on their camels’ necks.

Gideon thought he was giving a blessing to his eldest son by saying, “Avenge the death of your uncles.” But Gideon’s son was afraid. So it was left up to Gideon to slay the men of whom he himself was once afraid.

Judges 8:22, 23
Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you.

Amen! I love it! The people came to Gideon and said, “You’re a hero. Rule over us.”

"No way," said Gideon. "I will not rule over you; my son will not rule over you. The Lord is the One who will rule over you."

Please let that sink in, precious people. You see, the Lord is the One who is to rule over you—not men, not elders, not pastors, not apostles, not people. People who are in ministry are to serve and to assist not to rule (2 Corinthians 1:24). Why do I say this? Because there's a tendency in the heart of each of us to want to look to a man to give us direction. Why? Because it's easier to go to someone and say, "Tell me what I should do," rather than to seek the Lord and say, "Father, what is Your desire and intention for me in this matter?"

How important it is that we learn to seek the Lord and to seek His face.

Judges 8:24–27 (a)
And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey. And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold; beside ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian, and beside the chains that were about their camels' necks. And Gideon made an ephod thereof . . .

An ephod was the vest-like garment worn by the high priest. Upon the ephod were the Urim and the Thumim, which were used to determine the will of God. Gideon made a golden ephod, possibly with the intention of keeping people focused on the priestly ministry and not upon him as a person.

Judges 8:27 (b)
. . . and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house.

Gideon made an ephod, and guess what happened. The people began to worship it. I suggest to you a real danger here: Gideon wisely and correctly

said, "I will not rule over you"—but perhaps he thought, *Neither do I want to be forgotten by you. So I'll make an ephod from the gold we plundered which will point to God, but which will also remind you of the victory we experienced together.* Thus, in becoming a monument to his own ministry, the ephod became a snare.

As you study church history, you will see an interesting pattern unfold. That is, revival often starts with a man who is gifted by God, whose ministry grows and blossoms into a movement. So far, so good. God is moving. God is blessing. But then the movement begins to construct a monument and the monument becomes a mausoleum. Man, ministry, movement, monument, mausoleum. It happens over and over and over again. The great church buildings, the great cathedrals in Europe and in the major cities of America at one time where thriving, bustling, pulsating, energetic centers of revival. But monuments built to glorify men are destined to become mausoleums.

Here's what happens: God blesses, and as He blesses facilities begin to be constructed—and that's good and right. But the tragedy occurs when the machine which was originally set up to serve and bless the people becomes so ingrained and established that the people exist to serve the machine. And it happens in church after church. May that not be so with us.

Judges 8:28–31
Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon. And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house. And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives. And his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech.

In the time of battle and difficulty, Gideon did well and excelled. The real danger, however, lay in the time of peace and prosperity, for it was then that Gideon pulled away. Oh, he didn't become a king—but he began to live like one, as seen, for example, in the number of women he married. In chapter 9, we will see the tragic result of Gideon's multiple marriages.

Throughout the Old Testament, when you see men who had more than one wife, their lives are invariably marked with tragedy and heartache.

In today's society, we are seeing another move towards multiple marriages as people discard wives and husbands and move into marriage after marriage. And the resulting heartache and tragedy are the same as they were in Gideon's day.

Judges 8:32
And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites.

Gideon—this one who needed sign after sign when God had made it so clear from the very beginning that He was calling him; this one who vacillated, whose heart was filled with doubts, whose mind was flooded with confusion—is one of only a handful of men who made it into God's "Hall of Faith," found in Hebrews 11. Moses isn't there. David isn't there. Elisha, Elijah, and Ezekiel aren't there. Why is *Gideon* there?

I suggest it's because when you read the story of Gideon or the accounts of Barak and Samson, also seen in Hebrews 11, all you can say is, "Lord, for these guys to be in Your hall of faith is truly an indication of Your grace, Your kindness, Your generosity, Your incredible mercy." As I read the life of Gideon, the conclusion I come to is not that Gideon is a great guy—but that God used an ordinary guy in an extraordinary way.

It's pure grace that Gideon was used like he was. It's pure grace that he is listed in the hall of faith. And it's even greater grace that God chooses to call and to use people like us.

Judges 8:33–35
And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god. And the children of Israel remembered not the LORD their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: Neither shewed

they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shewed unto Israel.

Yet again, Israel takes the first step on the downward cycle of sin. Oh, the forgetfulness and fickleness of God's people.

Our God takes us from glory to greater glory. Therefore, we must be those who allow the Lord to keep us current. There ought to be so much going on in our hearts and lives presently that we're caught up in rejoicing for what He's doing *today.* Oh, that God would keep us fresh and vibrant for His glory.



9 It has been wisely said that no man's life is completely worthless, for anyone can serve as a horrible example. In chapter 9, we have a man who fits that description. His name is Abimelech . . .

Judges 9:1 (a)
And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal . . .

Jerubbaal being another name for Gideon, Abimelech was Gideon's son, the fruit of his relations with one of his concubines (8:30).

Abimelech literally means "My father is king." This is interesting because, when the people in Israel wanted to make Gideon king, he said, "I will not be king over you—neither I nor my sons nor my son's sons. Your king is to be God exclusively." Perhaps Gideon, so adamant about not being a king, was having second thoughts. Or perhaps the concubine who bore Abimelech named him in order to gain recognition. Whatever the case, Abimelech was one who desired to be king, a man of ambition.

Judges 9:1 (b)
. . . went to Shechem unto his mother's brethren, and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's father . . .

In Gideon's day, when a man took a concubine, he did not bring her into his own house. She remained in her father's house, and was visited on occasion by the man who had taken her as his concubine. That is why we see Abimelech's mother still residing in her father's house.

Judges 9:1 (c), 2
. . . saying, Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? remember also that I am your bone and your flesh.

Abimelech goes to his mother's family, saying, "Allow me instead of all seventy of my brothers to rule and reign over this territory." Because Gideon had made it clear that neither Abimelech nor any of his sons were to rule the people (8:23), Abimelech is operating on a completely erroneous presupposition as he seeks to wrest power for himself.

Judges 9:3, 4
And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for they said, He is our brother. And they gave him threescore and ten pieces of silver out of the house of Baal-berith, wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him.

Abimelech's uncles went to the temple of Baal and gave him seventy pieces of silver, with which he hired some hit men.

Judges 9:5 (a)
And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being threescore and ten persons, upon one stone . . .

Abimelech had the ruffians he hired place the heads of his brothers on a single stone and lop them off.

Judges 9:5 (b), 6
. . . notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself. And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Millo, and went, and made Abimelech king, by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem.

Abimelech wasn't king of Israel, but simply a local ruler, ruling over the Shechemites.

Judges 9:7 (a)
And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim . . .

About eight hundred feet in elevation, Mount Gerizim was the mountain on which the people of Israel spoke blessing when they entered the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 27:12). Mount Gerizim overlooks the city of Shechem. Jotham made his way up to the top of that mountain.

Judges 9:7 (b)
. . . and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you.

Standing atop Mount Gerizim, Jotham—Gideon's one remaining son—had a huge pulpit from which to preach. Now, he's going to share a parable—the first in the Bible—with the people below. It's a parable that gives us great insight concerning God's heart toward leadership.

Judges 9:8–14
The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us. And

the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us.

The bramble is a thorn bush, the most worthless plant in the Middle East. It produces no fruit and is too low to the ground to produce any shade. Its wood cannot be used for any kind of construction because it splits too easily. All it can do is burn.

Judges 9:15 (a)
And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow . . .

Remember, a bramble is too low to the ground to produce any usable shade.

Judges 9:15 (b)
. . . and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.

The olive tree, fig tree, and vine were all of great value. Not so the bramble. Thus, in this parable, the trees that deserved leadership the most desired it the least because they knew ruling the other trees meant they would have to cease fruit-bearing. Only the bramble—the worthless tree—grasped at leadership.

There are still brambles who love to rule other people—not to minister to people—but simply to rule. Be wary of them.

As Jesus walked through the crowd, a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years reached out and touched Him.

"Who touched me?" Jesus asked. "I perceive virtue has gone forth from Me" (Luke 8:46).

Jesus Himself was aware of the draining that takes place in ministry. Therefore, before you seek leadership, understand it will be draining. It will

be demanding. I'm often suspicious of those who want to thrust themselves into any kind of position of leadership before they've counted the cost.

Judges 9:16–21
Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands; (For my father fought for you, and adventured his life far, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian: And ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons, upon one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother;) If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you: But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech. And Jotham ran away, and fled, and went to Beer, and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

After likening Abimelech to a worthless bramble who deserved nothing more than to be burned, Jotham wisely ran for his life.

Parables always speak a simple truth, and Jotham's is no exception. "Fruitful trees wouldn't do this," he said. "Only a bramble. And that's who Abimelech is."

Judges 9:22, 23 (a)
When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel, Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem . . .

Notice that it was God who sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem. We see the same thing in 1 Samuel 11:6, when God sent a spirit of jealousy upon Saul, and again in Isaiah 19:14, when God sent a spirit of perverseness upon the people.

Mark it well: Demons, evil spirits, even Satan himself cannot function outside of God's permissive will (Job 1). But why would God want tools like demons or Satan? In order to provide mankind an alternative. You see, man must have an alternative in order for him to *choose* a relationship with God. "I will give mankind a choice," says God. "He can either choose Satan and his hellish henchmen, or he can walk with Me. The choice is that simple."

Demons and Satan himself are actually tools of the Lord and cannot move apart from His permission. Therefore, when there is a spirit of ill will, a spirit of jealousy, a spirit of perverseness moving in people, my attitude towards them must not be one of condemnation. Rather, my attitude must be one of compassion. Instead of looking at people as vicious, I must look at them as victims.

Nothing can happen to us without the Lord allowing it. Take comfort in that. God actually uses the enemy to accomplish His purpose. "I'm being attacked," we cry.

Yet the Lord would say, "I've allowed it for important reasons. Trust Me, seek Me, and you'll see why I've allowed this to be."

Judges 9:23 (b)—25
. . . and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech: That the cruelty done to the threescore and ten sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them; and upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in the killing of his brethren. And the men of Shechem set liers in wait for him in the top of the mountains and they robbed all that came along that way by them: and it was told Abimelech.

After three years, bad blood developed between the men who were ruled by the bramble, and Abimelech himself. No longer enamored with Abimelech, the men of Shechem decided to raid caravans passing through their area in order to deal a financial blow to Abimelech's kingdom.

Judges 9:26–29

And Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brethren, and went over to Shechem: and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him. And they went out into the fields, and gathered their vineyards, and trode the grapes, and made merry, and went into the house of their god, and did eat and drink, and cursed Abimelech. And Gaal the son of Ebed said, Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? is not he the son of Jerubbaal? and Zebul his officer? serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem: for why should we serve him? And would to God this people were under my hand! then would I remove Abimelech. And he said to Abimelech, Increase thine army, and come out.

Abimelech wasn't even present, yet Gaal cursed and challenged him. Why? I believe it was because Gaal had been drinking. Let me suggest to you if there's no other reason (and there are many) to stay away from alcohol, this should be valid in and of itself: People say things they wish they had never said when they are under the influence of alcohol.

Judges 9:30–36 (a)
And when Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled. And he sent messengers unto Abimelech privily, saying, Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brethren be come to Shechem; and, behold, they fortify the city against thee. Now therefore up by night, thou and the people that is with thee, and lie in wait in the field: And it shall be, that in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, thou shalt rise early, and set upon the city: and, behold, when he and the people that is with him come out against thee, then mayest thou do to them as thou shalt find occasion. And Abimelech rose up, and all the people that were with him, by night, and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies. And Gaal the son of Ebed went out, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and Abimelech rose up, and the people that were with him, from lying in wait. And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, Behold, there come people down from the top of the mountains . . .

Gaal didn't realize Zebul was a double agent.

Judges 9:36 (b)
. . . And Zebul said unto him, Thou seest the shadow of the mountains as if they were men.

"You're just seeing things," Zebul assured Gaal.

Judges 9:37, 38
And Gaal spake again and said, See there come people down by the middle of the land, and another company come along by the plain of Meonenim. Then said Zebul unto him, Where is now thy mouth, wherewith thou saidst, Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him? is not this the people that thou hast despised? go out, I pray now, and fight with them.

Able to deceive Gaal no longer, Zebul changes tactics and says to Gaal, "Put your money where your mouth is. You wanted to fight Abimelech. Here's your chance."

Judges 9:39–45
And Gaal went out before the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech. And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him, and many were overthrown and wounded, even unto the entering of the gate. And Abimelech dwelt at Arumah: and Zebul thrust out Gaal and his brethren, that they should not dwell in Shechem. And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people went out into the field; and they told Abimelech. And he took the people, and divided them into three companies, and laid wait in the field, and looked, and, behold, the people were come forth out of the city; and he rose up against them, and smote them. And Abimelech, and the company that was with him, rushed forward, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and the two other companies ran upon all the people that were in the fields, and slew them. And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took

the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt.

What had Jotham said in his parable? He said, "If you guys aren't right in this, Abimelech will burn you." And now Abimelech is doing just that as he unleashes his fury towards Gaal on the men of Shechem. Abimelech not only destroyed all of the people in his own hometown, but he also put salt in the land so nothing would ever grow there again.

Judges 9:46, 47
And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard that, they entered into an hold of the house of the god Berith. And it was told Abimelech, that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.

All of the men who were supposed to be guarding the city ran into the temple of their god, Berith.

Judges 9:48, 49
And Abimelech gat him up to mount Zalmon, he and all the people that were with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand, and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it, and laid it on his shoulder, and said unto the people that were with him, What ye have seen me do, make haste, and do as I have done. And all the people likewise cut down every man his bough, and followed Abimelech, and put them to the hold, and set the hold on fire upon them; so that all the men of the tower of Shechem died also, about a thousand men and women.

"Abimelech will burn you," Jotham had warned. And that is exactly what's happening here.

Judges 9:50
Then went Abimelech to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it.

A city ten miles away, Thebez was evidently in alliance with Shechem.

Judges 9:51–53
But there was a strong tower within the city, and thither fled all the men and women, and all they of the city, and shut it to them, and gat them up to the top of the tower. And Abimelech came unto the tower, and fought against it, and went hard unto the door of the tower to burn it with fire. And a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull.

Reminiscent of Jael before her, a woman in the tower of Thebez took the upper part of a millstone—eighteen or twenty inches in diameter, and two or three inches thick—and threw it right on Abimelech's head. Talk about a splitting headache!

Judges 9:54
Then he called hastily unto the young man his armourbearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died.

The unnamed woman of Thebez joins Deborah and Jael as women God used to overcome seemingly invincible warriors.

Judges 9:55–57
And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed every man unto his place. Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren: And all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

Please note two things about this story . . .

First, the peril of ambition. Abimelech's problem was ambition. The Word says God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (see James

4:6)—which is why we are to humble ourselves under His mighty hand in order that *He* will exalt us in due time (see 1 Peter 5:6).

We live in a very caustic society that says, "Watch out for Number One."

Jesus says, however, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).

Secondly, notice the principle of sowing and reaping. Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap (Galatians 6:7). Abimelech sowed a seed when he put the heads of his seventy brothers upon the chopping block. He shouldn't have been surprised, then, when a stone fell upon his own head. He wanted to be crowned, and was indeed crowned—with a millstone.

The peril of ambition, the principle of sowing and reaping. May God deliver us from walking in the steps of Abimelech.

10 Judges 10:1, 2

And after Abimelech there arose to defend Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim. And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir.

I frequently find myself gleaning lessons from the more obscure characters in the Bible. This shouldn't be surprising because Jesus said the last shall be first (Matthew 19:30), and that the Father, who sees in secret will reward openly (Matthew 6:4). Therefore, because it won't necessarily be the guys up front or in the limelight who will be rewarded, I suspect it might be that we will see Tola rewarded greatly in eternity.

Who is Tola? In this Book of Judges, it is uniquely said of him that he was one who arose to defend Israel. The Hebrew word translated "to defend" can mean "to save" or "to deliver." The King James translators chose to translate the word "to defend" because, as far as we know, Tola didn't deliver Israel from an invading army, nor did he save them from a foreign power.

For topical study of Judges 10:1, 2 entitled "Defender of God's People," turn to page **767.**

Judges 10:3–5
And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years. And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts, and they had thirty cities, which are called Havoth-jair unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead. And Jair died, and was buried in Camon.

The donkey was the police car of the day. Therefore, the fact that Jair's sons each had one meant they held positions of authority. Jair was the main judge, but his thirty boys were his "deputy judges" as they followed in their father's footsteps.

Dad, you might say, "I wish I could be a missionary to Asia." However, the most important, the most satisfying ministry you'll ever have is with your own children. There is no more thrilling or fulfilling ministry than that of raising your kids, teaching them everything you know, leading them in the Word and ways of God, pouring out your heart with them in prayer. Whether as a parent, grandparent, aunt, or uncle, you'll always have opportunity to share the Lord with your family. And that's the best legacy there is.

Judges 10:6
And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him.

Under Tola and Jair, Israel had experienced forty-five years of peace and prosperity. You'd think the result would be that the people of Israel would seek God, glory in God, and draw close to God. But that's not what happened. Instead, we read that, after those two judges were off the scene, after forty-five years of peace and prosperity, the people did evil in the sight of the Lord. This, however, came as no surprise to God . . .

> When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.
>
> Deuteronomy 8:10–14

Israel had experienced prosperity and peace for forty-five years—but instead of drawing close to the Lord and being built up in Him, they got caught up in the gods, toys, trinkets, and baubles of the world.

The same thing can happen to me. When things go smoothly, if I'm not careful, I can find I'm not praying with the same passion, that I'm not as disciplined in my devotion as I was when times were harder. Many people can quote sticker prices and consumer guide information, but they don't have a basic understanding of the Book of Judges. Why? Because things are going pretty well for them. God has blessed them. As a result, they're interested in the things of the world—in Baal, the god of the intellect; in Ashtaroth, the god of sensuality; in Mammon, the god of money—the same gods that intrigued and seduced the children of Israel.

> **Judges 10:7**
> **And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon.**

Because the children of Israel were interested in the world, they became controlled by the world. Because they were intrigued by the gods of the Ammonites, they found themselves in bondage to the Ammonites.

> **Judges 10:8, 9**
> **And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were on the other**

side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed.

Whenever you see the word "oppressed" in the Old Testament, you can put the word "depressed" in its place because external oppression speaks of internal depression.

"Why am I so depressed?" people ask. "I've got a nice car. I've got a nice home. Why should I be depressed?" Maybe it's because they have given themselves to those things.

Judges 10:10 (a)
And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD . . .

After eighteen years, the children of Israel cried to the Lord. How long does it take before you and I cry to the Lord? How much time passes before we say, "Lord, I am oppressed, distressed, and depressed. I became intrigued with and seduced by my job, my hobby, or that person." How long before we say, "I've been living for my career and it's been unfulfilling," or, "I've been living for my children and I'm miserable. I've strayed away from a real, vital, intimate relationship with You, and now I'm distressed."

Don't wait eighteen years to cry to the Lord, gang. Because of His finished work on the Cross, we can come before His throne of grace *whenever* we have need (Hebrews 4:16).

Judges 10:10 (b)
. . . saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim.

What is a god? The master passion of one's life. What is the master passion of your life? Where do you spend your time and energy on any given day? What is the driving force within you? That's your god.

Judges 10:11–13

And the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines? The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand. Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: Wherefore I will deliver you no more.

The worst thing that can happen to us is not for the Father to raise His voice or lift His hand to discipline us, but for Him to turn His back and say, "I've blessed you with so much. I've seen you through time and time again. But if you persist in going there or pursuing that, I'll let you."

Judges 10:14
Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.

Please know this, folks: The day of distress will come into your life. I guarantee it. I say this not as a prophet of doom, but as a pastor who knows and cares. The day of distress *will* come into your life. It does unto every man, for rain falls on the just and the unjust alike (Matthew 5:45). In that day, cry out to the god you have chosen. If you are living for materialism, cry out to your things and see how much satisfaction and help you get. If you're living for pleasure, cry out to pleasure, and see what help it offers. But if you choose the true and living God, if you walk with the Lord, He will be real to you. He will deliver you. He will strengthen you, comfort you, and help you in the day of your distress.

We don't know what tomorrow holds. Someday you will have to call out to the god you've chosen—and I hope it's the true and living God, for there's no help anywhere else.

Judges 10:15, 16 (a)
And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day. And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD . . .

This is really important. Forty-five years of peace and prosperity under two judges. One defended them, the other sent out his sons to keep the peace and allow prosperity to take root in the land. But they ignored the Lord. And now, seduced by other gods, God said, "Let your gods deliver you." What did they do? The Word says they first of all confessed. Secondly, they submitted. They didn't explain their sin or justify it. They simply said, We have sinned. That is where it begins. We have sinned. Period. Not we have sinned because, or we have sinned, however. Just we've sinned. We've missed the mark. Confession.

Submission. So now, Lord, do whatever You want to do to me. I realize I've been out of line, missed the mark, dropped the ball. If you want me to run laps or do push-ups, if You want to send me to my room for a day or a year or two, do unto me what You see is good. Have Your way. I want to be changed and chastened. I want to be disciplined and developed.

Thirdly, destruction. They put away the foreign gods. Put away sounds like they put them in their drawer. A lot of folks do that. I know I shouldn't have alcohol in my house, so I'll put it in the basement. No. The word "put away" in Hebrew means they utterly destroyed it. When something's got to go, you don't say, I'm going to lock it up and put it in the closet because that thing will call out to you at some point. We will not allow these gods to be in our homes or in our land, the Israelites said.

Confession, submission, destruction—anything less is not true biblical repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Judges 10:16 (b)
. . . and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.

God saw that they were sincere. They confessed, they submitted, they destroyed. God hurt for them, and would once again deliver His children from oppression.

Judges 10:17 (a)
Then the children of Ammon were gathered together, and encamped in Gilead.

Gilead is in the northern part, on the east side of the Jordan River, out of the country proper. You might remember that Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh said they wanted to stay on the east side of the Jordan.

Judges 10:17 (b)
. . . And the children of Israel assembled themselves together, and encamped in Mizpeh.

Mizpeh is a city in the region of Gilead.

Judges 10:18
And the people and princes of Gilead said one to another, What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

The children of Israel had confessed. They had submitted. They had destroyed their gods. But there was not a capable leader found among them initially because a country will only get the leaders it deserves. Following confession, submission, and destruction, Israel was ready for action. But, because, they had been living in idolatry, when they tried to rally the troops, they couldn't find a man to lead them—until chapter 11 . . .

DEFENDER OF GOD'S PEOPLE

A Topical Study of JUDGES 10:1, 2

When Jesus "expounded in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27), the Book of Judges must have been part of the discourse, for the judges therein do indeed portray definite aspects of the One who was "ordained by God to be the Judge of the living and dead" (Acts 10:42) . . .

- Othniel fought to win Caleb's daughter as a bride.
  Jesus fought the ultimate battle on the Cross of Calvary to win you and me as His bride.
- Shamgar used that which was in his hand—an ox goad—to do battle against the Philistines.
  After using His hands to heal, bless, and feed multitudes, Jesus allowed His hand to be nailed to a Cross, and the "ox goad" of a spear to pierce His side in order to pay for our sins.
- Ehud drove a sword into the oppressor Eglon.
  Jesus used the sword of the Word to beat back Satan (Matthew 4).
- Deborah, a mother in Israel, sought deliverance for the people of Israel.
  Jesus wept for Jerusalem, desiring to gather His people under His wings as a mother hen gathers her chicks (Matthew 23:37).
- Samson pushed apart the pillars of the temple of Dagon with his outstretched arms and brought the temple down.
  Jesus stretched out His arms on the Cross and brought down the house of hell.
- Gideon was a man of humility who allowed light to shine from broken jars.
  Jesus, One who was meek and lowly (Matthew 11:29), allowed the light of God's love to shine forth when He was broken on the Cross.

Truly, one can see aspects of the personality of the true Judge, Jesus Christ, in the judges, and Tola is no exception . . .

Celebrate

Tola's dad's name, *Puah,* means "splendid." His grandfather's name, *Dodo,* means "beloved one." *Tola's* name, however, meant neither "splendid" nor "beloved," but "worm." This being the case, Tola was probably as obscure in his own time as he is today. He was a man of Issachar who dwelt in Ephraim. That is, he wasn't dwelling among his own people.

Jesus is depicted here. Not only did He leave His home in heaven to dwell among people who wouldn't receive Him (John 1:11), but in Psalm 22:6, He says, prophetically, "I am a worm and not a man."

The Hebrew word, *tola*—the plural of which is *tolaith*—is translated two ways in the Bible: as either "scarlet" or "worm." Why would the same word be used for both "scarlet" and "worm"? Because in Bible days, when people needed scarlet cloth, they would grind worms into a pasty, blood-red substance that would be used as a dye.

Why would Jesus say, "I am a worm?" Because, to reproduce, the tola would climb the trunk of a tree and fasten on a limb. Then the worm would lay the larva and cover the eggs with its body. Although the eggs would hatch, the worm wouldn't budge. So the larva would begin to feed on the body of the one who had given them life. As the tola gave its life for its young, its blood would leave a scarlet mark on the tree. After the dead worm fell, the bloody spot left on the limb of the tree would dry after three days, becoming a white, flaky substance that would fall to the ground like snow.

"Though your sins be as scarlet—*tola*—they shall be white as snow," Isaiah declares (1:18). Fastened to the tree of the Cross of Calvary, Jesus wouldn't budge until the work was finished. What work? The work that would allow you and me to be "hatched," to be born again. "Eat of My Body," He says. "Drink of My blood. I give My life for you" (Mark 14:22–24).

By His blood, Jesus not only saved us, but, like Tola in the text before us, He is the Judge who defends us. You see, Revelation 12:10 tells us that Satan accuses us day and night, going before the throne of the Father, saying, "Look at him. Look at her. They've blown it here. They've messed up there." But

the Bible says the accuser was overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of testimony.

"If any man sin, we have an Advocate, a Defender with the Father—that is, Jesus Christ the righteous," John declares (see 1 John 2:1). This means that when we sin, although Satan will be at the throne of God pointing out our failures and shortcomings, we have a Defender—the Tola, the scarlet Worm, Jesus—who says, "Father, she has eaten of My body. He has tasted of My blood. They are clean."

Hearing the accusations of the prosecuting attorney, and listening to the defense of His Son, the Father hits the gavel in the courtroom of heaven and says, "Case dismissed for lack of evidence."

And celebration breaks forth.

Imitate

Unlike Samson, you might not be able to take down the temple of Dagon. Unlike Gideon, you might not be able to attack a massive army of 135,000 men. You may not be like any of the judges or heroes of the Old Testament. But you *can* be like Tola. Every single believer can go down in history as a "tola," as a defender of God's people simply by saying, "I refuse to be part of the accusatory nature and tactics of Satan. I will not listen to or talk about anything that is negative concerning any of God's people. I will not listen to 'prayer requests' that are mixed with gossip. I will not get involved in discussions about any of the sins or problems of believers. I will deal with the person directly, but I will not deal with gossip."

The Bible says that where there is no wood, the fire goes out (Proverbs 26:20). In other words, if we refuse to give ear to gossip, the mean-spirited fire of gossip and backbiting dies. When someone approaches me with information they feel is important for me to know regarding someone else in the Fellowship, I say, "Before you begin speaking, know that I will quote you on everything you say." And nine times out of ten, people change their minds about talking to me about someone else. I am not saying we are to ignore problems. I am, however, saying that we are to defend God's people rather than listen to gossip.

May we be those who take every opportunity to defend God's people even as we celebrate the fact that we are defended by our Tola, our Hero, Jesus Christ. May we be those who celebrate and imitate in His name.



11 Judges 11:1

Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah.

Talk about an unlikely hero! Jephthah was the result of his father's relations with a harlot. In Jephthah's time and culture, being born illegitimately carried a terrible social stigma. Wherever he went, he would be the butt of jokes, teased, and taunted. Yet in Hebrews 11, Jephthah's name

is recorded for all eternity as one of the giants of faith, one of the heroes of God's people.

Dear brother, precious sister—regardless of your past, no matter your reputation, if God used Jephthah, He can use you—for God loves to use the most unlikely, unqualified people.

"Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug," declares the Lord (see Isaiah 51:1). In other words, "Consider where you've come from. And upon the basis of what I have already done in your life, look forward to how I will bless you and make your life fruitful in the future."

Every one of us was brought out of the pit, gang. There are no exceptions. Just look at the pit out of which we were brought . . .

- Look at Abraham. Even after he was called by God, even after he was ordained to be the father of faith, he still wavered, foundered, and fell. Fearing Pharaoh, he lied not once, but twice about his wife in order to save his own skin.
- Look at Moses. After he was called into ministry, he murdered a man, buried him in the sand, and ran for his life to the desert.
- Look at Jonah. He was called by God to usher in the world's greatest revival. But when the Ninevites began to acknowledge God and repent, Jonah was totally discouraged, wishing the Ninevites would have been blasted instead of blessed.
- Look at Peter. After spending three years with Jesus, watching His miracles, hearing His teaching, sharing meals with Him, conversing constantly with Him, he stood by the fire of the enemy and denied ever knowing Him.
- Look at Paul. He was a man so cruel and callous, so barbaric and brutal that when he finally did get saved, the early church initially refused to believe it.
- Look at John Mark. After receiving a call to the mission field, he got homesick and hightailed it back home.

No matter where you look in the Word, you will find individuals who were in the pit, brought out of the pit by the One who had no fault whatsoever —Jesus Christ Himself.

Knowing this allows me to move on. I can say, "Lord, in spite of my failures, I'm still moving on in You according to Your grace, mercy, and love." Secondly, it allows me to reach out. When other people fail and fall, instead of coming down on them, talking about them, or finding fault with them, I'm free to reach out in love to them.

Folks, that tough guy who seems so hopeless and so out of it to you might be the next Jephthah in a future move of God. That fellow you think is bizarre, raunchy, or rude just might be the man God is tapping on the shoulder to lead the next revival.

Judges 11:2
And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman.

Growing up unwanted and unloved, Jephthah compensated by becoming the toughest kid on the block. How do I know? Read what happened after he left home . . .

Judges 11:3 (a)
Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob . . .

Jephthah headed for Tob—an area known for its marauders and murderers, its raiders and robbers.

Judges 11:3 (b)
. . . and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him.

I can see Jephthah and his men now: The Tob Mob, dressed in black leather jackets, riding loud, unmuffled donkeys from party to party.

Judges 11:4–7
And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel. And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob: And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon. And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?

Threatened by the Ammonites, the Israelites turned to the toughest man they knew—Jephthah. "Fight for us," they begged. Now, asking Jephthah to fight would be like asking Mario Andretti for a ride to the grocery store, like asking Michael Jordan if he could help out the church basketball team. Jephthah fight? This was something he could do!

Judges 11:8–11
And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead. And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head? And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words. Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh.

This tough guy from Tob was made head of the entire Israelite army. And the story goes on . . .

Judges 11:12, 13
And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land? And the king of the children of

Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably.

Before engaging in battle, Jephthah sought to bring about peace through diplomatic channels.

Judges 11:14–19
And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon: And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon: But when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh; Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would not hearken thereto. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not consent: and Israel abode in Kadesh. Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon was the border of Moab. And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place.

Jephthah recounts Israel's history in the land by reminding the king of Arnon that three hundred years earlier, as the Israelites came out of Egypt on their way to the Promised Land, they asked Sihon, who was king of the area, if they could pass through to go into Canaan.

Judges 11:20
But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

Not only did Sihon refuse passage, but he rallied his army and launched an offensive attack against Israel.

Judges 11:21, 22
And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country. And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan.

God was with Israel, and when Sihon's men went down in defeat, the land became Israel's—a fact that has great bearing upon the Middle East situation to this day.

Judges 11:23, 24
So now the LORD God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess it? Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the LORD our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess.

Jephthah continues his argument by saying, "You take whatever Chemosh brings to you. Let us take what our God, Jehovah, has given us."

Judges 11:25–27
And now art thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them, While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? why therefore did ye not recover them within that time? Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: the LORD the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon.

Jephthah's third diplomatic argument is as follows: "We've been here three hundred years. Why are you choosing to raise this question *now?* No other country has."

Judges 11:28, 29
Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him. Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon.

Jephthah was an illegitimate son, a hoodlum, a marauder—yet God said to him, "You're My man, Jephthah. You're the one for the job."

Judges 11:30, 31
And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

"If You give me victory over the Ammonites," Jephthah prayed, "I'll give You whatever is in the front yard of my house upon my return," no doubt thinking it would be a bull, a sheep, or a goat.

Judges 11:32, 33
So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands. And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

The Lord heard Jephthah's prayer and honored his vow.

Judges 11:34, 35
And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back.

It would seem as though Jephthah did not expect his daughter to be home when he returned. Maybe she was away at college. Maybe she had moved out of the house. I don't know the specifics. But I'm certain that Jephthah was completely shocked when upon his arrival, the first one through his door was his daughter, his only child.

Judges 11:36
And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon.

In this verse, I hear Jephthah's daughter saying, "Dad, you're a man of integrity. Don't back down now." Parents, our kids want us to be godly. Our kids want us to be people of integrity. Our kids want us to excel in the things of God.

I'm sure at this point, all kinds of feelings and thoughts flooded Jephthah's mind . . .

"Nobody really heard me say that vow, so maybe I don't really need to keep it," or, *"Lord, You know I was under a lot of stress . . ."* or, *"Carrying out that vow will contradict my love for my daughter, so I can't keep it."*

How easy it would have been for Jephthah to rationalize this vow away. But watch what happens . . .

Judges 11:37–40

And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows. And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel, That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

Did Jephthah really kill his daughter? Many scholars throughout history have said he indeed offered her to the Lord as a burnt offering. Others, however, have asked how that could be when God abhors such offerings. No, they insist, Jephthah didn't kill her—he simply set her aside to live a cloistered nun-like existence in the mountains, worshiping and serving God all the days of her life.

The second argument has real credence, for many translators have used the word "or" in place of "and" in verse 31, thus rendering the verse: "Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's dedicated to Him, *or* I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering." Even the King James Version gives the word "or" as an option.

Another translator's choice appears in verse 40, where, in the newer translations, the word "lament" is rendered "commemorate" or "communicate"—implying that for four days each year, Jephthah's daughter had interaction with other women.

So which is it? Did Jephthah's daughter die—or did she live out her days in seclusion?

I don't know. As I've studied both arguments, I find each very convincing. But this I do know: Whether Jephthah killed his daughter, or whether he sent her away, either way it was a tremendous sacrifice.

Was Jephthah right in either killing her or sending her away? For many years, I believed Jephthah's story was recorded simply as an illustration of

what we *shouldn't* do, that he is an illustration of the kind of people we *shouldn't* be—making rash vows and then keeping them no matter the cost to others. But then I read Hebrews 11:32, where Jephthah is listed as one of the heroes of faith.

What does this mean?

Turn to Psalm 15 . . .

> LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that back-biteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.
>
> Psalm 15

God says we can be immovable, solid in our relationship with Him, when we swear to our own hurt and do not change. Gang, I believe the reason we are spiritually impotent both personally and corporately is because we do not keep our commitments. We make vows to the Lord and then when they start to hurt a little, we drop them . . .

- "It's January first, Lord. *This* is the year I'm going to read through the Bible. *This* is the year I'm going to seriously study Your Word. And I'm going to begin just as soon as the Rose Bowl is over. . . ."
- "I know I said I'd be at Bible study every Wednesday, but I didn't know *Law and Order* would be on. . . ."
- "Lord, I know I promised at the start of my marriage that not a day would go by that we wouldn't pray together—but that was before I knew he'd be such a doof . . ."

As a young lawyer, Attorney Black was invited to deliver the welcome address to the Governor of Georgia on a Monday night. With great care, he

prepared his address—until a telegram arrived saying that the Governor's visit would be moved to Wednesday night. Mr. Black immediately wrote the committee that a previous engagement would prevent his being present on Wednesday night, saying, "No service to man or state could ever make me swerve from my commitment." Besides the pastor of his church, few people knew that the previous engagement to which Mr. Black referred was the regular Wednesday night prayer meeting which the young lawyer had committed to the Lord.

Why did Judge Black become a well-known judge in Georgia?

I believe it was because God responds to sacrificial commitments . . .

- I think of Hannah as she prayed, "Lord, I have no children. But if You bless me with a child, he shall be Yours." You know the story. After this sacrificial commitment, Hannah gave birth to Samuel—one of the greatest prophets of antiquity (1 Samuel 1).
- I think of Shammah. When the Philistines attacked and his companions fled in fear, Shammah said, "I'm not leaving." We read that the Spirit of God came upon him and he singlehandedly whipped the entire Philistine army (2 Samuel 23).
- I think of the widow who placed her last two mites in the temple treasury, little knowing that across the way, Jesus was sitting, watching, observing her sacrificial commitment (Mark 12).
- I think of Mary as she broke open her alabaster box and poured the ointment it contained over Jesus. So important was her commitment to Him, He said, "Wherever the gospel is preached, this deed will be talked about" (Matthew 26).

Sacrificial commitment moves the heart of God. And God not only responds to it, but He requires it. "I'll follow You anywhere," said the young man. "But first let me go home and have a goodbye party."

"After putting his hand to the plow, no man who turns back is worthy of the kingdom of God," Jesus answered (see Luke 9:62).

Why does the Lord require commitment? Is He some kind of ogre who takes pleasure in burdening His children?

Quite the opposite. There are three reasons why commitment is necessary. Mark them well . . .

First, *commitment cures complacency.* Think about it. When were you most in love with Jesus Christ? It might have been ten months ago or ten years ago, but I suggest it was when you were keeping your commitment to Him. You were up in the morning, seeking His face. Bible study was a priority. Carrying out the tasks He gave you was of highest importance. You were committed.

I have found that when I grow lazy in my commitment, my love begins to grow cold. I can't explain it, but I have certainly experienced it. If I don't keep my commitments to the Lord, I begin to lose my love for Him. That is why in Revelation 2, Jesus said to the church at Ephesus, "I have something against you. You have left your first love." He didn't say, "You have lost it." He said "You *left* it. Remember from whence thou art fallen. Repent and do thy first works again."

Church, please hear this. Remember how it was when you were doing well, and do those works again. What works? Were you reading the Word in the morning? Get up tomorrow morning and read it again. Were you going to worship on Sunday night? Go again. Were you taking time with your husband or wife to pray together every day? Do it again. The formula is so practical and so powerful: Go back and do the things you were doing when you were radically following and deeply in love with Jesus Christ. Do them again, and you'll find your love rekindled. Commitment cures complacency.

"That sounds legalistic," you say. And well it can . . .

> *When I stand on the bathroom scale and realize I've put on a few pounds, my tendency is to put on jogging shorts and shoes and run nine miles. Then I come back and say, "I will never do that again. And I don't run for about two months. Then I think,* I gotta get in shape. *So out come my shoes and shorts once again.*

We do the same thing spiritually. "Okay," we say. "Commitment. I hear it. I see it. I'm going for it. Starting at three A.M. I'm going to spend four hours a day in prayer." We set the alarm for three o'clock and we're out of bed. But after a few days, we realize we'll never be able to keep it up.

Listen, folks—when you make your commitments, count the cost and make them practical and doable. Don't go for nine miles—start with nine yards and work your way up. Wouldn't it be wonderful if every one of us said, "Lord, I'm committing myself right now to spending five minutes in prayer every morning, where I will talk to You, worship You, and meet with You." Five minutes may sound like nothing—but if the truth were known, it's probably a lot more than most of us have been doing. Start with five minutes and ten verses every day. If you don't know where to start, start with the Gospel of John, and I promise you, you'll tap into a reality in your relationship with Jesus Christ that will whet your appetite for more as you begin to feel your first love rekindled and revived.

Secondly, *commitment rewards eternally*. Whatever you commit to Jesus Christ will be kept for you and given back to you in eternity (2 Timothy 1:12). When we get to heaven, no one will say, "Wow, I wish I would have slept in more on earth. I really wish I wouldn't have given so much to the church. I wish I would have spent more on toys for myself." No, every one of us will fall before the Lord, saying, "Thank You, Lord, for allowing us the opportunity to commit to You"—for even the smallest commitment of energy, money, time, talents, abilities, or gifts will impact our capacity to enjoy eternity.

Thirdly, *commitment is a response to Calvary.* "I beseech you, brethren, present your bodies to God, which is your reasonable service," said Paul (see Romans 12:1). Why is it reasonable to commit ourselves to developing a walk with Jesus? Because of what He's done for us. Great is the mystery of godliness that God was manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16)—that God became a Man and hung on the Cross of Calvary. Jesus' suffering is far deeper than we'll ever understand this side of heaven, for the fact remains that when He set aside His godly attributes and became a Man, He locked Himself into humanity forever. Why did He take such a huge step down? Because He loves me, and knew I desperately need a Savior. That is why Communion is so important, for as I consider the Cross, I cannot help but say, "Lord, I need to be committed to You."

Keep your commitments, precious people, and you will find yourself walking in the footsteps of that hero of faith, Jephthah. Oh, it will cost you. Yes, there will be some pain, some hurt, some sacrifice. But you'll find them

far outweighed by the life and love of Jesus Christ burning in your heart, the anointing of the Spirit upon your life, and the blessing of God upon your service.

Jephthah pictures Jesus . . .

> *Jesus was born seemingly illegitimately, shunned by brothers who didn't believe in Him, and surrounded by some rough, tough Galilean fishermen. "Save us," Israel said to Jephthah. And one day, Jesus will do just that. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah as he crossed the Jordan. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jesus when He was baptized in the Jordan. Jephthah sacrificed to the Lord. Jesus became a sacrifice to the Lord. Jesus kept His commitment—*
>
> *And yet even when we are faithless, our Greater than Jephthah is faithful still, for He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13). That means, even if we choose not to keep our commitments, He remains faithful.*
>
> If Jesus remains faithful, I can be apathetic, *you might be thinking. Yes, you can—but you'll miss out on blessings that otherwise would have been yours both in this life and eternally. On the other hand, if you follow through on the commitments you made in the desperate times and rough days when you were on your knees with tears streaming down your cheeks, watch and see how momentum builds and your faith grows stronger than ever before.*
>
> *And even if you can't remember what you promised to do, ask the Lord, and He'll remind you. Say, "What have I committed to You in past days or years? What vows did I make? What promises did I give?"*

Watch and hear Him say, "You promised this. You committed to that. You have your word about this. You heard My heart on that." And do it. Remember from whence you're fallen. Repent, and do your first works again. Keep your commitments and watch and see how God will bless. He'll pick you up, take you on, and see you through if you give Him the opportunity today.



12 When you feel dog-tired at the end of a day, make sure it's not because you've been biting and barking, for nothing will wear you out or tear you down faster than being one who bites, devours, and complains. Paul warns us in Galatians 5 that if we bite and devour one another, we are to beware lest we be consumed by one another. Truly, biting and devouring, murmuring and complaining will cause one to feel dog-tired.

Here in chapter 12, we come across a group of people who were chronic complainers: the men of Ephraim. In chapter 8, when Gideon led the Israelites into battle against the Midianites, the men of Ephraim said, "How come we weren't part of the first wave of the attack? Why did we only get to take part in the mop-up operation?" Instead of rejoicing in the victory, they complained about the strategy. And here in chapter 12, on the heels of Jephthah's victory, we see the men of Ephraim complaining once again . . .

Judges 12:1
And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire.

In other words, the men of Ephraim not only wanted to fire Jephthah as judge—they wanted to burn him out completely.

Judges 12:2–4 (a)
And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon; and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands. And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the LORD delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me? Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim . . .

The tact and diplomacy that Gideon used so masterfully in chapter 8 to talk these men out of their jealousy didn't get very far in this situation. So here the tactic is changed as Jephthah, the tough fighter from Tob, said, "If that's the way you want to play, let's fight."

Judges 12:4 (b)
. . . and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites.

When the Israelites first entered the Promised Land, Gad, Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh chose to remain on the east side of the Jordan (Numbers 32). Because of this, they were often discriminated against by the other nine and a half tribes. So, when the men of Ephraim implied that the Gileadites were wimps, Gilead took Ephraim on in battle and whipped them.

Judges 12:5 (a)
And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites . . .

Heading home in defeat, the Ephraimites were met by the Gileadites, who had reached the Jordan before them.

Judges 12:5 (b), 6 (a)
. . . and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right . . .

As is the case in our own country, different dialects began to develop throughout Israel, Using this to their advantage, the Gileadites required everyone waiting to cross the Jordan to say, *shibboleth,* which means "crossing" or "flowing stream." You see, the closest the Ephraimites could come to "shibboleth" was *sibboleth*—and their pronunciation was a dead

giveaway. One word would cost them their lives. One word would make the difference between living and dying. Their destiny hinged on a single word.

Judges 12:6 (b), 7
. . . Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand. And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

Forty-two thousand men were killed because their speech betrayed them.

"I don't know Him. I have never had contact with Him," declared Peter.

"Ah, but your speech betrays you," said a little girl. "You are from Galilee" (see Mark 14:70).

Jesus said our words will either justify or betray us (Matthew 12:37). Truly, our speech condemns us over and over again. But there is a word, a single word that will allow us to cross Jordan into the Promise of heaven. And that word is *kuriat,* or "Lord."

Romans 10 says that, to be saved, we must believe in our heart and confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord. Those who think Jesus is anything less than God—that He is a moral teacher or a good man—are not pronouncing His name correctly. To confess Him as Lord means to submit to His authority rather than to simply live life according to how one thinks it should be lived.

Because Satan has blinded men's eyes (2 Corinthians 4:4), no man can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Ghost (1 Corinthians 12:3). Therefore, if you have made the proclamation that Jesus is Lord, it was through the miraculous, marvelous work of the Holy Spirit, who gave you the ability to see the truth.

"No man can come to me except the Father draws Him," Jesus declared (see John 6:44). You weren't "talked into" becoming a Christian because the Bible says there is none that seeks after God (Romans 3:11).

Do you realize how blessed you are? Satan blinded you—but God saved you. How wonderful it is that we are able to say "Jesus is Lord" on this side of the Jordan, on this side of eternity.

Judges 12:8–10
And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters, whom he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years. Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Bethlehem.

This verse doesn't say the Spirit of God came upon Ibzan, or that he did anything particularly noteworthy. Evidently, he had his hands full with his thirty sons, especially considering the Jews taught that every father owed his sons three things: to teach him the Law, to teach him a trade, and to find him a wife.

Bible commentator J. Vernon McGee called Ibzan a picture of mediocrity because Ibzan seemed to place all of his emphasis on his family. Contrary to the present flow of teaching today in the body of Christ, it's an observation worth considering—for although Ibzan had the position, he didn't move in power because his priority was his family.

Mom and Dad, we must spend time with our children—nurturing them, disciplining them, helping them. But they must not be the priority of our lives. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, Jesus said. I think a lot of times if we would spend more time seeking God and less time seeking how to be a better parent or husband or wife, we would find ourselves being better parents, better husbands, better wives (Matthew 6:33).

Judges 12:11–15
And after him Elon, a Zebulonite, judged Israel; and he judged Israel ten years. And Elon the Zebulonite died, and was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun. And after him Abdon the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, judged Israel. And he had forty sons and thirty nephews, that rode on threescore and ten ass colts: and he judged Israel eight years. And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mount of the Amalekites.

Elon means "plain"—and that is what Elon was. Like Ibzan, Elon and Abdon held the position of judge, but didn't take advantage of it. They had opportunity, but evidently did nothing with it.



13 In chapter 13, we come to one of the all-time interesting and instructive stories: the story of Samson . . .

Judges 13:1
And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.

The Philistines were a strong, sea-faring people who originally came from the island of Crete. Settling in the southern coastal region of Israel, they built five cities and dominated the area for several hundred years. Proficient in smelting iron, they had weapons the Israelites and Canaanites had never even seen.

Judges 13:2–5
And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no rasor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

The Hebrew word, *Nazar,* means "separated one." *Nazarites* were men who took a vow to separate themselves from the world in order to be fully

consecrated to God for a given period of time—usually six months to a year. Samson, however, was unique in that he was to be a Nazarite all the days of his life.

From Numbers 6, we know that a Nazarite was one who was consecrated to serve God in three specific ways: He was to touch no wine—not even grapes. He was to let his hair grow. And he was to stay away from anything that had died.

Why were these three things the mark of a Nazarite?

Wine is a symbol of earthly joy. "Be not drunk with wine, but rather be filled with the Spirit," Paul declares (Ephesians 5:18). The long hair of a Nazarite was to serve as an identifiable outward sign of his consecration—just as we are to be identified by the outward signs of love (John 13:35). To keep himself pure, the Nazarite was to keep away from decay and death. We are also to be very careful we don't become involved with the dead things of this world, unequally yoked with unbelievers lest we find ourselves becoming defiled, dried up, dead.

Judges 13:6–8
Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name: But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death. Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.

I like this! When his wife told him she had seen the angel of the Lord, Manoah didn't say, "You flipped out, lady." No, realizing his wife had some sort of very special dynamic spiritual revelation and understanding, he wisely said, "Lord, please confirm it."

Listen carefully, guys: The nature of women is such that they will often be more spiritually perceptive than you are. So when they share with you a

revelation or an understanding, don't reject it. Be like Manoah, and ask the Lord to confirm it.

Judges 13:9
And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband was not with her.

God heard the prayer of Manoah, but then sent an angel to his wife. Why? Perhaps it was because she was sitting in the field. More than likely, as provider for his family, Manoah was plowing the field. His wife, on the other hand, was sitting in the field, in a place of receptivity.

Your wife can be a tremendous help to you, brother, because she may have even more time to sit in the presence of the Lord than you do. Don't chafe against or feel threatened by this—take advantage of it! The angel came again to the woman, but it was in response to the prayer of her husband.

Judges 13:10, 11 (a)
And the woman made haste, and ran, and shewed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day. And Manoah arose, and went after his wife . . .

Guys, there is a time to follow your wife—and here is a perfect example. Manoah's wife was the one through whom the Lord dealt with this matter—and Manoah was wise, secure, and strong enough to follow her.

Judges 13:11 (b), 12
. . . and came to the man, and said unto him, Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, I am. And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?

Manoah was right on when he asked, "How are we supposed to raise this child?"

The Bible says, “Train up a child in the way he should go” (Proverbs 22:6).

Judges 13:13, 14
And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware. She may not eat of any thing that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing: all that I commanded her let her observe.

Although Manoah had asked God how He wanted Samson to be raised, the angel immediately speaks of the behavior of Samson’s mother, for unbeknownst to Manoah, the issue wasn’t the child. The issue was the parent.

The same is still true. We might be tempted to think, *My kids can’t do that, but I can. My kids can’t go there, but I can. My kids can’t watch that, but I can because I have the maturity to handle it.* Wait a minute. It’s not what you say, but rather who you are that will affect your kids. It’s not a matter of laying down rules for them to follow, but rather of providing an example they can follow. It’s who you are personally—even when they’re not around or when you think they can’t see you—that will most greatly impact who they will become ultimately. That is why the best thing you can do for your kids is to maintain your own walk with the Lord.

Judges 13:15–18
And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee. And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the LORD. And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour? And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?

The word translated “secret” is literally “wonderful.” Whose name is Wonderful? Isaiah 9:6 says His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Almighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. It’s Jesus.

Judges 13:19–22
So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground. But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the LORD. And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.

"Show us the Father," said Philip, "and it will suffice us."

"Have I been with you so long, Philip? Don't you know that he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father?," answered Jesus (John 14:9).

Exodus 33:20 says no man can see God and live. Manoah and his wife saw God—but because it was the second Person of the Godhead, Jesus Christ, they did not die.

Judges 13:23, 24
But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these. And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.

Samson literally means, "Shining as the sun." No doubt it was the prayer of his parents that their miracle son would be a light to his people in the dark days of the judges.

Judges 13:25
And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

"The Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him." The secret of Samson's strength was not in his arms, although with his arms he would take the jawbone of an ass and kill 1,000 Philistines. The secret of his strength was not in his back, although upon his back he would carry a city gate thirty-eight miles. The secret of his strength was not in his hair, although his hair would be thick enough to weave upon a loom. No, the secret of Samson's strength was the Spirit of God alone.

When you think about Samson, erase the mental image of a huge Charles Atlas strolling down the streets of Gaza. You see, as we read his story, we'll see Samson move throughout the Philistine cities rather unknown. If he was a huge individual with bulging muscles and unbelievable size, he would have been spotted and recognized by all. That is why I suggest that Samson was probably very average, very ordinary—corroborated by the fact that the Philistines told Delilah to figure out the secret of his strength. Surely, they thought, he had some magical charm on his body, or some sort of idol in his pocket.

When the Spirit of God didn't move in his life, you could probably have kicked sand in Samson's face. But when the Spirit of God moved upon him—watch out!



14

Judges 14:1 (a)
And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman . . .

Here lies the summation of Samson's life: He went down. He saw a woman. As has been rightly said, "Samson was a he-man with a she-weakness."

Judges 14:1 (b), 2 (a)
. . . in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman . . .

These, Samson's first recorded words, are telling indeed.

Judges 14:2 (b), 3
. . . in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife. Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well.

Samson is already showing chinks in his armor. Not only is he seeking to link himself to the world, but he's not respecting his parents.

Judges 14:4
But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.

What Satan means for evil, God uses for good (Genesis 50:20). Even though Samson is rebellious, God will still use the situation to accomplish His purposes.

Judges 14:5 (a)
Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath:

A Nazarite was to stay away from grapes. Watch out, Samson.

Judges 14:5 (b)
. . . and, behold, a young lion roared against him.

First Peter 5:8 says Satan is a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Here, in a place where he shouldn't have been, Samson comes face to face with just such a lion.

Judges 14:6 (a)
And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand . .

.

Truly, this is the only way to deal with the Adversary. Satan is a roaring lion who cannot be dealt with in our own strength.

Satan tempted Jesus three times in the wilderness with heavy-duty temptations (Matthew 4). But Jesus was victorious because the Spirit of God had already descended upon Him (Matthew 3:16). Apart from the Spirit, you and I will get eaten up, munched on, and wiped out. Satan is sneaky, subtle, and strong. Don't underestimate him. But the Spirit of God upon your life will give you victory as you seek His anointing daily, as you call upon Him in the morning hours. And when Satan comes later on in the day, even if, like Samson, you're by a vineyard where you shouldn't be, God's Spirit will give you power to do battle against him.

Judges 14:6 (b)–9
. . . but he told not his father or his mother what he had done. And he went down, and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well. And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion: and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion. And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion.

Why didn't Samson tell his parents? Because the lion was dead, and he was a Nazarite. He knows he's in error here—but it seemed so sweet; it seemed so right.

Judges 14:10
So his father went down unto the woman: and Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do.

First, Samson walked through the vineyard (v. 5). Then he reached into the carcass (v. 9). Here, he's throwing a party—a drunken brawl, really—as was the Philistine custom.

Judges 14:11
And it came to pass, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him.

This being a "bachelor party," since Samson didn't bring his own groomsmen, the Philistines supplied thirty men to serve in that capacity.

Judges 14:12–14
And Samson said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle unto you: if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty sheets and thirty change of garments: But if ye cannot declare it me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it. And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days expound the riddle.

The custom remains today wherein the groom gives the groomsmen in his wedding party small gifts as tokens of his appreciation. With so many guys to buy for, Samson devised a way where he wouldn't be out the money for thirty gifts.

Judges 14:15 (a)
And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson's wife . . .

When these guys realized they weren't going to get any wedding prizes, they appealed to Samson's bride . . .

Judges 14:15 (b), 16 (a)
. . . Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire: have ye called us to take that we have? is it not so? And Samson's wife wept before him . . .

"If you don't find the answer to that riddle," the Philistines threatened, "we're going to burn you and your father's house." So Samson's wife cried to her husband . . .

Judges 14:16 (b)–18 (a)
. . . and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told it my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee? And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him: and she told the riddle to the children of her people. And the men of the city said unto him on the seventh day before the sun went down, What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion?

This, of course, was the answer to the riddle.

Judges 14:18 (b), 19 (a)
. . . And he said unto them, If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle. And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle . . .

Samson's groomsmen got the clothes they were promised—but Ashkelon being a Philistine city, the garments were stained with the blood of their Philistine brothers.

Judges 14:19 (b), 20
. . . And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house. But Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he had used as his friend.

With Samson in a furious rage, his wife was given to his best man.

15

Judges 15:1–3

But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber. But her father would not suffer him to go in. And her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her; therefore I gave her to thy companion: is not her younger sister fairer than she? take her, I pray thee, instead of her. And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure.

Now Samson is really burned up. Watch what he does in the heat of anger.

Judges 15:4 (a)
And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes . . .

The Hebrew word translated "foxes," can either mean foxes or jackals. Since jackals travel in packs, this reference is probably to jackals.

Judges 15:4 (b), 5
. . . and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails. And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives.

Interestingly enough, Samson's wife was initially fearful of getting burned (14:15). Yet when she betrayed her husband, she set into motion events that would cause the entire area to erupt in flames.

Judges 15:6
Then the Philistines said, Who hath done this? And they answered, Samson, the son in law of the Timnite, because he had

taken his wife, and given her to his companion. And the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire.

It's never right to do wrong to do right. Samson's wife may have thought she was protecting her father by betraying her husband—but her plan "backfired" completely.

Judges 15:7, 8 (a)
And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease. And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter . . .

The idiom, "hip and thigh" means "top to bottom." In other words, Samson walloped the Philistines.

Judges 15:8 (b)
. . . and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam.

After walloping the Philistines, Samson heads for the hills to wait and see what would happen next.

Judges 15:9–11
Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi. And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, To bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath done to us. Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what is this that thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them.

This is Samson's Golden Rule. As they did to me, I'm doing to them.

"They burned me, so I burned them," Samson said.

Jesus, however, said, "As you want others to do to you, do to them" (Luke 6:31).

Judges 15:12, 13
And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves. And they spake unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock.

In this account, the only time we see the Israelites mustering an army was to capture one of their own. That's the way it can be with us sometimes. All too often, we seek to capture our own men when we fight other believers who don't look at doctrine precisely the same way we do.

Judges 15:14, 15
And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith.

Here's Samson—tied up by the men of Judah, turned over to the Philistines—when suddenly, the Spirit of God comes upon him. He pops the ropes and starts swinging the jawbone of a donkey. When he's done, one thousand Philistines lay dead.

This cracks me up. I mean, the Philistines had the most advanced weapon system of their day. But in Judges 3, Shamgar killed six hundred of them with an ox goad. And here, twelve chapters later, one thousand more are beaten with the jawbone of a donkey. Later on, Goliath—the greatest Philistine of them all—will be beaten with a stone and a sling. Isn't that just like the Lord to use the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, the weak to show up the strong? Look at us—ox goads, jawbones, stones and all. We're perfect examples of the foolish things of the world confounding the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27).

In your own personal battles, God can use whatever is in your hand. "That's nothing," the world will scoff. But with the Spirit of God—it becomes something mighty.

Judges 15:16, 17
And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men. And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand, and called that place Ramath-lehi.

Ramath-lehi means "The place of the lifting up of the jawbone," or, "Jawbone Heights." Samson names this area after his great exploit.

Judges 15:18
And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?

Wait a minute. Hadn't Samson just said, "With the jaw of an ass *I* have slain a thousand men"? (v. 16) But as his throat gets drier, realizing how helpless he really is, he calls out to the Lord. God has ways of tempering our triumphs with trial because otherwise triumphs become points of pride.

Judges 15:19 (a)
But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived:

This is truly the goodness and matchless grace of God.

Judges 15:19 (b)
. . . wherefore he called the name thereof En-hakkore, which is in Lehi unto this day.

Enhakkore means "The well of him who cried." Before, Samson christened the area "Jawbone Heights." But now it's "The well of him who cried." Let's be careful, folks. If the Lord uses us, let's always remember it's *Him.* Without Him, we couldn't last a moment.

Judges 15:20
And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

It was a time of peace, a time of prosperity. For twenty years, Samson did real well. When you think of Samson, please don't only remember his sins. He was a man who was mightily used by God, who had a real love for God, and who is singled out in the New Testament as one of the giants of faith (Hebrews 11:32).



16 For twenty years, Samson did well—and then he went to Gaza . . .

Judges 16:1–3
Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her. And it was told the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither. And they compassed him in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him. And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron.

Seeing Samson in the lodging of a harlot, the Gazites said, "We got him! We'll wait by the gate, and when he leaves in the morning, we'll kill him." But in the middle of the night, Samson strode past the Gazites, uprooted the gates, and carried them to a hill outside Hebron. The hill could either be one

four and one-half miles or thirty-eight miles from Gaza. Carrying the massive city gates on his shoulders, Samson's feat was amazing.

Judges 16:4 (a)
And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek . . .

Sorek means "Valley of the choice vine." Sorek was a border town with the reputation of a border town. Again, Samson was to stay away from grapes, but he keeps toying with the things that he is supposed to avoid. He keeps lingering on the border, straddling the fence.

Judges 16:4 (b)
. . . whose name was Delilah.

Oh, Samson, her name should have tipped you off, for the Hebrew word *delal* means "to weaken or impoverish."

Judges 16:5
And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him: and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver.

The source of Samson's strength wasn't bulging biceps, massive muscles, terrific triceps, or powerful thighs. These would have been obvious to his enemies and they wouldn't have had to bribe Delilah to discover the source of his strength. No, the source of Samson's strength was singular: it was the Holy Spirit.

Judges 16:6–10
And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee. And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withs [bowstrings] that were never dried, then shall I be

weak, and be as another man. Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withs which had not been dried, and she bound him with them. Now there were men lying in wait, abiding with her in the chamber. And she said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he brake the withs, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire. So his strength was not known. And Delilah said unto Samson, Behold, thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: now tell me, I pray thee, wherewith thou mightest be bound.

Isn't this an amazing story?

Judges 16:11–13
And he said unto her, If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be as another man. Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And there were liers in wait abiding in the chamber. And he brake them from off his arms like a thread. And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web.

Watch out, Samson. Now you're speaking of your hair, a sign of your vow as a Nazarite, a symbol of your consecration.

Judges 16:14
And she fastened it with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web.

Samson must have thought he was doing pretty well in not letting Delilah get to him. That can happen to us, too. We say, "I haven't really been honest with those who ask me the reason I am the way I am. I've kind of hinted at it, but I haven't come out and said, 'The reason I'm not going to the party you're inviting me to is because I'm a believer. Jesus Christ has changed my life. I

want to keep my life focused on Him. I want to be filled with Him. I want to be used by Him. I'm a Christian.' " The problem is, if you're not being honest, like Samson, you'll be invited again and again. Don't play games. Say, "This is who I am. This is why I am the way I am," and you'll save yourself lots of heartache and heartbreak.

Judges 16:15, 16
And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth. And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death;

So constantly did Delilah pester him, Samson wanted to die—which, ironically, was the end result of her pestering.

Judges 16:17
That he told her all his heart, and said unto her. There hath not come a rasor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man.

Rather than keeping his vow of consecration, Samson gives in to Delilah, doubtless knowing he was in for a haircut.

Judges 16:18
And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand.

This time, the Philistines brought money because they must have heard in Delilah's voice that she had finally discovered the source of Samson's strength. Indeed she had.

If you want to be strong in the things of God, the source of strength is the Holy Spirit, and the secret of that strength lies in consecration, in choosing to say, "I'm not going to weaken or impoverish my spirit in Gaza, in Sorek, or with Delilah."

Judges 16:19 (a)
And she made him sleep upon her knees . . .

Every time Samson is tied up, he's sleeping. Therefore, I can't help but wonder if Samson wasn't unusually vulnerable to this kind of stupidity because he was tired. Even for those who love God and serve Him, there is a danger in becoming fatigued, weary, tired. Be warned and be wise because that's when Delilah's voice suddenly sounds reasonable.

"Come unto Me, and you'll find rest for your souls," Jesus says. This story could have ended so differently. This giant of faith could have come out, could have kept on going—but he was lulled to sleep on Delilah's knees, rather than praying on his.

Judges 16:19 (b), 20 (a)
. . . and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself . . .

The source of Samson's strength was the Holy Spirit. The secret of his strength was his consecration. Some people are consecrated—disciplined and dedicated. But they are not recipients of the power of the Spirit. Although they understand the secret of strength, they don't have the source of power. Others have received the power of the Spirit—they move in the arena of the miraculous—but there's no consecration, dedication, or discipline. The winning combination is the source *and* the secret, inward filling *and* outward, noticeable consecration.

Judges 16:20 (b)
. . . And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.

This verse is the most tragic in the entire book. *How could Samson be so stupid?* we wonder. I suggest he knew Delilah was no good, that he knew Delilah was setting him up. I mean, he had already seen that three times previously. He wasn't dumb. But I believe what was happening in his mind was the same thing that happens in ours. You see, God had told him that, as a Nazarite, he must not touch grapes, must not touch carcasses, must not cut his hair. He touched grapes—and nothing happened. He touched a carcass—and nothing happened. So, he must have thought that if he cut his hair nothing would happen.

We may also think *Maybe the Bible isn't really as strict as it sounds. Maybe it doesn't really matter if I compromise a little here and a little there. Maybe I can get away with it. Maybe it's OK.* But it's not, and we won't, for it doesn't work that way.

What a shock it must have been to Samson when he suddenly found himself weak, helpless, and wiped out.

Judges 16:21 (a)
But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes . . .

This verse perfectly portrays the progression of sin. First, sin blinds. Long before his eyes were put out, Samson was blinded because he thought there would be no repercussions of his sin. Dear saint, if you are persisting in sin right now, I'll tell you what will happen: A blinding will take place, and you'll think your sin doesn't really matter. But notice what happened to Samson, for there is a second step . . .

Judges 16:21 (b)
. . . and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass . . .

Secondly, sin binds. Just as Samson's arms were bound with fetters, sin in our lives holds us captive. We no longer move in the same way we once moved. We no longer experience the same joy we once experienced, the same power we once knew. But there's a third step . . .

Judges 16:21 (c)
. . . and he did grind in the prison house.

Sin grinds. Around and around and around Samson went, grinding at a wheel like an ox grinding grain. His life literally was spent going round and round in circles. "Why is my life such a grind?" we ask. "Why do I feel like I'm going in circles?" It's the result of sin.

Judges 16:22 (a)
Howbeit . . .

How I love this word! This giant of a man who had giant problems with sin would yet experience the goodness and grace of God upon his life.

Judges 16:22 (b)
. . . the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.

Our God is the God of the second chance—and the third chance, and the thirty-third chance. Samson was about to be given a second chance, but mark it well: It took time. Yet, although Samson had to go through a season of pain, slowly but surely, his hair began to grow.

Samson's hair grew—but his eyesight never returned. Certain things are lost forever because of sin. The longer you live, the more you see the grace of God. He restores the years the locust has eaten (Joel 2:25). He gives beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Isaiah 61:3). But it is also true that there are permanent repercussions when we sin. Be not deceived. God is not mocked. As seen in Samson's life, whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap (Galatians 6:7).

Judges 16:23 (a)
Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god . . .

The Philistines borrowed Dagon, the fish god, from the Assyrians. That's why when Jonah was sent to the Assyrians, God delivered him to them in a fish.

Judges 16:23 (b), 24
. . . and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand. And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us.

One of the greatest tragedies of sin is that it gives the enemies of God a reason to rejoice.

Judges 16:25–28
And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars. And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them. Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport. And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.

In these three relatively short verses, we see a reversal of the events of the previous three chapters. You see, although as a Nazarite, Samson exhibited a certain degree of dedication, he previously had no devotion. Yes, he was dedicated to his work. Yes, he took on the Philistines—but, as far as we know, he never offered sacrifice to the Lord. He never expressed worship to the Lord. He was a man dedicated to service, but he had no devotional life. Here, however, we see Samson offering his life to God rather than making demands from God.

Secondly, although Samson had authority, he previously thought he had no accountability. He thought he had no accountability to his countrymen, to his parents, or to God—as seen in his breaking of all three of his Nazarite vows.

Yet here we see him led to the temple by a mere lad because he couldn't get there alone. Accountability is linked to humility, and humility to humiliation. I wish it didn't work that way—but it does.

Finally, although Samson had great power, he previously had no purity. Jesus said, "If your right eye offend you pluck it out" (Matthew 5:29). Here, with both of his eyes plucked out, Samson was able to see past the realm of the physical world that had dominated his life.

Judges 16:29, 30 (a)
And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines . . .

Samson had experienced great success and great failure. And at this point, he's saying, "Lord, just one more exploit, then get me out. I want to die. I want to go home." I point this out because it's my personal belief that, had Samson prayed differently and desired differently, he could have gone on to be used of God yet again. I know some of you feel that, because you have failed in the past, you can never be used in the future. Not so. The Lord could have used Samson again, but instead answered Samson's prayer and called him home.

Judges 16:30 (b)
. . . And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.

Samson's greatest moment was not twenty years of beating back the Philistines in his life, but at the moment of his death.



For topical study of Judges 16:27–30, see "Dying to Greatness" below.

Judges 16:31
Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the burying place of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.

Although Samson flirted with sin throughout his life, God used him powerfully and remained faithful even in his death.

DYING TO GREATNESS

A Topical Study of JUDGES 16:27–30

Samson was a man with unparalleled potential. He was born into a godly home. He was dedicated and consecrated to God from the day of his birth. He was called to significant ministry even before he was born. He could have and should have done so much. But in the end, his life has been summarized by some as a life of mediocrity.

Yet, although Samson missed fantastic opportunity, we read in Hebrews 11 that he is one of the few men who were inducted into God's "Hall of Faith." This means that, although in our estimation, Samson might be described up as mediocre, God saw something in Samson that placed him in a very select group that made him a giant in God's economy.

I suggest to you that Samson plays a monumental role in God's economy because he portrays the Person of Jesus Christ in a most wonderful way.

"How can this be?" you ask. "Samson ignored the counsel of his godly parents. He was ensnared with Philistine women. He was proud and arrogant. How can it be that he is a picture of Jesus?"

In Matthew 12:40, Jesus reached back to the story of a mediocre man named Jonah and said, "As Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and nights, so will the Son of Man be in the center of the earth, buried. And even as Jonah was spewed out, so will I rise again." In other words, Jesus was able to reach back to Jonah and say, "This guy pictures My Resurrection." And I suggest He could do the same with Samson.

I suggest He could say, "Samson pictures Me—not My Resurrection, but My death. As he stood with his hands outstretched, pushing against the pillars, saying, 'Let me die that the enemies of Israel might perish,' so, too, with arms outstretched, I died that the hordes of hell might be beaten back."

To me, this is very liberating . . .

Liberating

I know that I am a man of mediocrity. I have blessing, potential, and opportunity that God graciously entrusted to me. You do, too. But we have messed up. We haven't followed through. We haven't been good stewards. Like Samson, every one of us has dropped the ball. Like Samson, every one of us has missed the mark. Like Samson, every one of us has messed up. As a result, we hear the voices of the Philistines as they make fun, boo, and make sport, saying, "You're supposed to be a Christian? You're supposed to be a godly woman? You're supposed to be a leader, a servant? How can that be? Look how you've dropped the ball."

Then Jesus comes on the scene. When He cried triumphantly on the Cross, "It is finished," He brought the house down and silenced our enemies. When He toppled Satan's house of cards, He paid the price for all of our sins and all of our mediocrity.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). "Their sin and iniquity I will remember no more" (Hebrews 8:12). You're forgiven. I'm forgiven. We're free.

Illuminating

I might not be able to kill Philistines or to judge Israel. I may not be able to be a conqueror or a mighty man. But I can do what Samson did. You see, Samson's moment of greatness came not in the life he lived, but in the death he chose. The enemy was dealt a devastating blow on the day he said, "Let me die."

You might not be able to kill Goliaths. You might not be able to take on Philistines. You might not be able to call down fire like the heroes of old. But this you can do: You can die. Jesus said, "If any man come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). You will do more damage to the kingdom of hell; you will have a greater impact for God; you will be rewarded by the Lord to the extent that you die.

Any of us can choose to die. Any of us can say, "Lord, what they're saying about me isn't right. What's happening to me isn't fair. But I'm choosing to let go of my rights, of my reputation, of what I think. I'm choosing to die."

You see, there can be no reconciliation apart from death (Hebrews 9:22). If a man and wife are at odds, there can be no reconciliation until one of them chooses to die. If a child and parent are at odds, there can be no reconciliation until one of them chooses to die. If two neighbors or brothers are at odds, there is only one way to reconciliation: death. Someone must say, "I'm not going to defend myself. I'm not going to stand up for my rights. I'm not going to do what I think ought to be done. I'm going to follow Jesus, who, when He was wronged said, 'Father, forgive them.' I'm going to follow the One who didn't deserve to be crucified, but who chose to die for me that I might be reconciled to the Father."

What about this, husband? You can't understand why your wife isn't as submissive as Scripture commands her to be. Die.

What about this, wife? You can't believe your husband wants to go there, do this, or lead you in that way. Die.

What about this, teenager? You think your dad's an idiot or that your mom is unfair. You might not be able to lead a Bible study on your campus, but the greatest thing you can do is to give up your own point of view and die.

When the Roman soldiers came to break the legs of Jesus, they found that He was already dead. Why did He die so quickly? I suggest it is because He knew that the sooner He died, the sooner would come His resurrection. If He had hung on the Cross, insisting on His rights, His way, His turn to defend Himself, He would have struggled hour after hour, day after day. But the sooner He died, the sooner He let go, the sooner there was Resurrection and glory. The same is true for us.

Let go. Give up. Die. And watch what will happen. The sooner you die, the sooner there will be resurrection. Right now you can let go of the axe you've been grinding, of the battle you've been fighting, of the grudge you've been holding. Right now you can say, "Let me die that the demons might be brought down, that Satan might be beaten back, that God's kingdom might be brought about in my heart and in my home."

When a man takes up the cross, it means he's choosing something that might be painful for him, but that will be redemptive to others round about him. Therefore, I challenge you as I challenge myself to move from mediocrity to greatness not by what we do in life, but in how we let go and choose to die. If we do, the temple of Dagon will collapse, and we'll go down in God's economy as men and women of greatness.



17 The final five chapters of the Book of Judges are fairly well summed up in verse 6 of chapter 17, where we read: "In those days, there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Such was the case in the house of Micah—a man who wanted riches, religion, and respectability. But, playing by his own rules and doing what was right in his own eyes, we'll see how he ends up losing all three . . .

Judges 17:1, 2 (a)
And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah. And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it . . .

In the days of the judges, the average annual wage would be ten shekels of silver. This being the case, no wonder Micah's mother was upset when she discovered 1,100 shekels of silver were missing. This would have been her life's savings, her retirement fund. No wonder she pronounced a curse on the one who stole her money. Knowing his mother had placed a curse on the person who had taken her money, Micah owned up to his actions and confessed to the theft.

Judges 17:2 (b)
. . . And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son.

A blessing came from the same mouth that had uttered a curse. This ought not to have been (James 3:10). Our speech should always be seasoned with grace (Colossians 4:6). Our words should always be gracious, redemptive, restorative, healing, and helpful.

Judges 17:3, 4
And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee. Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah.

"Because this money is dedicated to the Lord," said Micah's mother, "I'm going to use it to make you two images." So she paid a silversmith two hundred shekels to make a couple of idols for her boy. Some commentators believe the graven image was a replica of the ark of the covenant.

What could possibly have been Micah's mother's rationale? I suggest she sincerely believed she would be helping her son to worship the Lord by giving him some statues to assist him in focusing on the Lord's presence. The Second Commandment is: "Thou shalt make no graven image" (Exodus 20:4) —but Micah's mother was doing right in her own eyes.

Judges 17:5 (a)
And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim . . .

An ephod was worn by the high priest. Teraphim were small statues or figurines that served as family gods.

Judges 17: 5 (b), 6
. . . and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

By making his son a priest, Micah completes his collection. Now he has his own private gods, his own private priest, his own private interpretation of what should be done in worship.

"Know this," Peter warns. "No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

Judges 17:7–10
And there was a young man out of Bethlehem Judah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. And the man departed out of the city from Bethlehem Judah to sojourn where he could find a place: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed. And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, I am a Levite of Bethlehem Judah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a place. And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten shekels of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in.

Although Micah had already appointed his son as priest, his private religion was evidently not working like he had hoped. So when a genuine Levite came by, Micah offered him a new suit, ten shekels of silver, and free room and board to be his private priest. The Levite, also doing what was

right in his own eyes, and perhaps thinking he could steer Micah away from idolatry, thought, *Why not?*

> **Judges 17:11–13**
> **And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons. And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.**

Does every Levite qualify to be a priest? No. Only the sons of Aaron. Levites who were not direct descendants of Aaron were simply to assist in the tabernacle and the temple. So, once again, we see Micah's theology amiss, his understanding skewed. Nonetheless, he feels like he's headed for tremendous blessing.

- "I did it my way," crooned Frank Sinatra.
- "Have it your way," says Burger King.
- "It's your thing, do what you want to do; born free, as free as the wind blows; I gotta be me," everyone sang in the 60s.

That's what was happening in the days of the judges. "Don't put restrictions on me," the people of Israel said. "I'll determine what's best for me." And in our generation, the same thing is happening. Existential philosophy planted in the 50s bore fruit in the 60s, causing people to say today, "The only absolute is that there are no absolutes."

What has been the fruit of this?

Oppression and depression.

We think we see what's best for our lives. But the Bible says we only see through a glass darkly at best (1 Corinthians 13:12). If you do what's right in your own sight you might experience a little bit of pleasure now, but a lifetime of pain will follow. On the other hand, if you do what's right in God's sight, you might experience a little pain now, but you'll experience pleasure for eternity (Psalm 16:11).

18

Judges 18:1

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

The portion of land given to the tribe of Dan was in the south, near that given to the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. But we read in chapter 1 how the Danites were unable to defeat the Canaanites dwelling in their territory. With Philistines to the west of them, Amonites to the east of them, and Judah to the south of them, the tribe of Dan is about to make a mass migration to the very northernmost part of Israel in search of an easier place to live.

Maybe, like the Danites, you're looking for an easier place to live. Maybe you're tired of your situation, your surroundings, your circumstances. But let me tell you, the Danites are about to embark on a huge mistake because when they go north, they will meet all sorts of problems that will plague them throughout their history. In the north, they will become a weakened, idolatrous tribe. They should have stuck it out where God had sent them. They should have fought the fight and become the people God intended them to be. But they wanted out. And they're jumping out of the proverbial frying pan into the fire as they migrate north.

Judges 18:2–4

And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coasts, men of valour, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it; and they said unto them, Go, search the land: who when they came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, they lodged there. When they were by the house of Micah, they knew the voice of the young man the Levite: and they turned in thither, and said unto him, Who brought thee hither? and what makest thou in this place? and what hast thou here? And he said unto them, Thus and thus dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest.

Jesus warned about hirelings—ministers or servants whose only interest is in wages and earnings (John 10:12, 13). Micah's priest is the quintessential hireling.

Judges 18:5, 6
And they said unto him, Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God, that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous. And the priest said unto them, Go in peace: before the LORD is your way wherein ye go.

Micah's "priest" couldn't have been more mistaken. How could the tribe of Dan go in peace when they were running away from the very place God told them to be?

Judges 18:7–10
Then the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people that were therein, how they dwelt careless, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure; and there was no magistrate in the land, that might put them to shame in any thing; and they were far from the Zidonians, and had no business with any man. And they came unto their brethren to Zorah and Eshtaol: and their brethren said unto them, What say ye? And they said, Arise, that we may go up against them: for we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good: and are ye still? be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land. When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure, and to a large land: for God hath given it into your hands; a place where there is no want of any thing that is in the earth.

Sidonians were Phoenicians living in the region of present-day Lebanon. A quiet people, they looked like easy pickings. Besides, the land was fruitful and productive. So, doing right in their own eyes, the Danites prepared for war.

Judges 18:11–13

And there went from thence of the family of the Danites, out of Zorah and out of Eshtaol, six hundred men appointed with weapons of war. And they went up, and pitched in Kirjath-jearim, in Judah: wherefore they called that place Mahaneh-dan unto this day: behold, it is behind Kirjath-jearim. And they passed thence unto mount Ephraim, and came unto the house of Micah.

Micah's house was a busy place—everyone seemed to drop by!

Judges 18:14
Then answered the five men that went to spy out the country of Laish, and said unto their brethren, Do ye know that there is in these houses an ephod, and teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image? now therefore consider what ye have to do.

In other words, "You know what to do."

Judges 18:15, 16
And they turned thitherward, and came to the house of the young man the Levite, even unto the house of Micah, and saluted him. And the six hundred men appointed with their weapons of war, which were of the children of Dan, stood by the entering of the gate.

Imagine you're Micah. You open your door to find the five men who had been in your house earlier—and behind them are six hundred men armed to the teeth.

Judges 18:17–19
And the five men that went to spy out the land went up, and came in thither, and took the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image: and the priest stood in the entering of the gate with the six hundred men that were appointed with weapons of war. And these went into Micah's house, and fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image. Then said the priest unto them,

What do ye? And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?

"Come with us," said the Danites to the Levite, after raiding Micah's shrine. "Now you're priest for only one man. We'll let you be priest of our entire tribe."

Judges 18:20 (a)
And the priest's heart was glad . . .

"Far out! A promotion! God is honoring me," the priest thought mistakenly.

Judges 18:20 (b)–22
. . . and he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people. So they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the cattle and the carriage before them. And when they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men that were in the houses near to Micah's house were gathered together, and overtook the children of Dan.

Micah and his neighbors caught up with the tribe of Dan.

Judges 18:23, 24 (a)
And they cried unto the children of Dan. And they turned their faces, and said unto Micah, What aileth thee, that thou comest with such a company? And he said, Ye have taken away my gods which I made . . .

How impressive could gods be that not only had to be made, but that could be stolen?

Judges 18:24 (b)–27

. . . and the priest, and ye are gone away: and what have I more? And what is this that ye say unto me, What aileth thee? And the children of Dan said unto him, Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows run upon thee, and thou lose thy life, with the lives of thy household. And the children of Dan went their way: and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back unto his house. And they took the things which Micah had made, and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish . . .

Micah wanted riches, religion, respectability—but he lost all three. He lost his silver idols that were worth a lot of money; he lost his gods; he lost his respectability when he had to back down in front of his neighbors. He lost it all.

Why?

Because he was doing what was right in his own eyes—and it was so very wrong. We have to be careful not to move upon what we think is right in any given situation. How we must be a people who seek the Lord in all things great and small. We must not trust our own wisdom or our own understanding. We must seek wisdom, guidance, and direction from God about *every* matter.

Judges 18:27 (b), 28
. . . unto a people that were at quiet and secure: and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire. And there was no deliverer, because it was far from Zidon, and they had no business with any man; and it was in the valley that lieth by Beth-rehob. And they built a city, and dwelt therein.

The Sidonians should not have been smitten because they were not Canaanites. On the contrary, Deuteronomy 13:12–15 declares that if any Jewish city was involved in idolatry, that city was to be burned. Therefore, the guys from Dan were the ones who should have been burned. Instead, they burned the Sidonians.

The same is still true. I've often noticed that when we burn someone in our heart, it's often indicative of our own sin.

Judges 18:29–31
And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born unto Israel: howbeit the name of the city was Laish at the first. And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

The "designer faith" Micah developed had several things going for it . . .

First, it had practical convenience. With a "priest" in his own house, Micah didn't have to go far to get to church. He didn't have to fight traffic. He didn't get stuck in the parking lot. And there are people today who don't come to church for those very reasons.

Secondly, Micah's religion had family involvement. With his son as a priest and money coming in from his mom, it was a real family endeavor.

Thirdly, it could boast cultural tolerance. Everyone in his day had teraphim—family idols—and Micah was no exception.

Fourth, it had a positive message. "Go in peace. God is with you," Micah's "priest" said—even though the people were headed in the wrong direction.

We see the same tendencies today. Yet practical convenience, family involvement, cultural tolerance, and a positive message notwithstanding, Micah's religion was tragically impotent. Whether it's national events or personal crises, the fact is, only the true and living God can see us through. That's the problem with boutique religions, designer faith, and stay-at-home spirituality. In the day of trouble—and trouble will come—it doesn't work. That's what Micah discovered.

Not only was Micah's religion tragically impotent, but it was also truly unnecessary. Micah was a man looking for riches, religion, respectability—spending all of his energy and all of his time developing his own religious

system. Yet right over the hill from where he lived was the house of God, the ark of the covenant, the place where he could have received true guidance, fulfillment, and help. Shiloh, the house of God, was right over the hill.

Precious people—right over the hill from where you are, lies that which you truly seek. Tonight, you can be on your knees before the Lord—talking to Him, worshiping Him, receiving from Him, being blessed by Him. The choice is yours: You can continue to play religious games, doing what you think is right, going through religious motions—or you can be in the presence of the true and living God intimately, personally, in reality.

How long has it been since you've really been in the presence of God? I'm not asking how long it has been since you've been to a Bible study, or to church. I'm asking how long it's been since you've really been in the presence of God. God's tabernacle was at Shiloh—where the true ark sat, where real priests served, where the Shekinah glory of God abode. All that Micah longed for was right there all the time. Granted, it was eighty miles away. Granted, it would take effort to get there. But if he had only gone to Shiloh, he would have been blessed.

What does *Shiloh* mean? "The sent one." Who is the ultimate sent One? Jesus. Where is Jesus? He said He would be wherever two or three are gathered in His name. Don't fall for designer religiosity, gang. Instead, say, "All of my days, I'm going to be where Jesus is. I'm going to be at Shiloh, where people gather in His name."

Our privileged responsibility is to tell people, "You need to be in the presence of Jesus. There is a special awareness of His 'there-ness' when people gather together at Shiloh, when people meet together in His name. Don't fall into the error of Micah because someday you'll need to be strong. And when that day comes, it will be too late to gain strength. You need to be in the place where you're seeking His face and experiencing His grace *now.* You need to be at Shiloh."



19 Judges 19, 20, and 21 dramatically depict the depravity and darkness of the people of Israel at this point in their history. These are grim and

gruesome chapters, but they are important, for I believe there are lessons for us both personally and nationally . . .

Judges 19:1 (a)
And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel . . .

"There was no king in Israel." We've heard this phrase before, but here it appears again as a summary statement of the people of Israel. They had no king; they were not submitted to authority; and every man did right in his own sight.

We hear this yet today. "Every person must determine what is right for him personally," our culture declares. "What's right for me may not be right for you. There are no absolutes." This thinking is absolutely wrong. There *are* absolutes. The entire universe is governed by absolute laws—one of which is gravity. If you defy it and try to bend the rules, you'll find yourself bruised, battered, and bloody. And that's precisely what happened to the people of Israel.

Judges 19:1 (b)
. . . that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Bethlehem Judah.

Although the practice of taking a concubine was allowable in the Old Testament Law, it wasn't ordained or approved by the Lord. Yet, because the people were already practicing this, there is regulation in the Old Testament. However, as you move through the redemptive history of God's people, you see that He makes it clear it was not His divine design. Of all people, a Levite ought not to have been involved in this practice.

Judges 19:2
And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father's house to Bethlehem Judah, and was there four whole months.

When his concubine was unfaithful to him, the Levite tasted the bitter fruit of the choice he made.

Judges 19:3
And her husband arose, and went after her, to speak friendly unto her, and to bring her again, having his servant with him, and a couple of asses: and she brought him into her father's house: and when the father of the damsel saw him, he rejoiced to meet him.

It is no wonder that the concubine's father rejoiced to meet the Levite. After all, the Levite was a seemingly religious man who was evidently willing to try to tame his wild, flirtatious daughter.

Judges 19:4–8
And his father in law, the damsel's father, retained him; and he abode with him three days: so they did eat and drink, and lodged there. And it came to pass on the fourth day, when they arose early in the morning, that he rose up to depart: and the damsel's father said unto his son in law, Comfort thine heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way. And they sat down, and did eat and drink both of them together: for the damsel's father had said unto the man, Be content, I pray thee, and tarry all night, and let thine heart be merry. And when the man rose up to depart, his father in law urged him: therefore he lodged there again. And he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart: and the damsel's father said, Comfort thine heart, I pray thee. And they tarried until afternoon, and they did eat both of them.

So persuasive was the concubine's father that one night's lodging for the Levite turned into five.

Judges 19:9
And when the man rose up to depart, he, and his concubine, and his servant, his father in law, the damsel's father, said unto him, Behold, now the day draweth toward evening, I pray you tarry all night: behold, the day groweth to an end, lodge here, that thine

heart may be merry; and to morrow get you early on your way, that thou mayest go home.

It seems this father-in-law is doing what was right in his own eyes because when the Levite came for his wife, he was detained by her father. Why? I suggest it's because the father thought he could be part of the redeeming, healing process. But such is not the case. Dear dad, precious mom—the best thing you can do for your married children is to make them seek the Lord and spend time with their mates. Don't try to be a mediator. Don't try to be part of the solution. Don't try to keep them dependent on you.

And kids—if you're married, don't go running home to mom and dad every time you have a fight or a difficulty because, even though you will eventually make up with your mate, your parents will have a hard time forgetting the problem. Resentment will be inevitable, which is probably why the third leading cause of divorce is in-law problems.

Judges 19:10 (a)
But the man would not tarry that night, but he rose up and departed . . .

On the evening of the fifth day, the Levite could be persuaded to stay no longer.

Judges 19:10 (b)–12
. . . and came over against Jebus, which is Jerusalem; and there were with him two asses saddled, his concubine also was with him. And when they were by Jebus, the day was far spent; and the servant said unto his master, Come, I pray thee, and let us turn in into this city of the Jebusites, and lodge in it. And his master said unto him, We will not turn aside hither into the city of a stranger, that is not of the children of Israel; we will pass over to Gibeah.

Gibeah was about four miles from Jerusalem. Although the Levite thought he would be safer with his own people, we'll see that this will prove to be disastrous. Some believers think they must isolate and insulate themselves from the world—even to the point of patronizing only dentists, mechanics, or

carpet cleaners that display the sign of the fish on their business cards. This was evidently the mindset of the Levite. When my car is broken, however, I'm not primarily concerned if the guy's a Christian. I just want him to fix my car.

Judges 19:13–15
And he said unto his servant, Come, and let us draw near to one of these places to lodge all night, in Gibeah, or in Ramah. And they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down upon them when they were by Gibeah, which belongeth to Benjamin. And they turned aside thither, to go in and to lodge in Gibeah: and when he went in, he sat him down in a street of the city: for there was no man that took them into his house to lodging.

Night having fallen, the Levite sits in the town square, where, according to custom, someone would offer him lodging. It was supposed to be the city's responsibility to take in those who were passing through in need of a place to stay. But none offered him lodging.

Judges 19:16–20
And, behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field at even, which was also of mount Ephraim; and he sojourned in Gibeah: but the men of the place were Benjamites. And when he had lifted up his eyes, he saw a wayfaring man in the street of the city: and the old man said, Whither goest thou? and whence comest thou? And he said unto him, We are passing from Bethlehem Judah toward the side of mount Ephraim; from thence am I: and I went to Bethlehem Judah, but I am now going to the house of the LORD; and there is no man that receiveth me to house. Yet there is both straw and provender for our asses; and there is bread and wine also for me, and for thy handmaid, and for the young man which is with thy servants: there is no want of any thing. And the old man said, Peace be with thee; howsoever let all thy wants lie upon me; only lodge not in the street.

Finally, a man of Ephraim—from the same region as the Levite—offered lodging in his home.

Judges 19:21–22
So he brought him into his house, and gave provender unto the asses: and they washed their feet, and did eat and drink. Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him.

This, of course, brings to mind the story of Lot in Genesis 19. Keep in mind, these are Israelites. The Bible says homosexuality was not to be allowed in any city of God's people. But they were doing what was right in their own sight—just like we do today. The problem is, God is our Creator, Designer. And, as Creator, He is all-wise. He says, "I made you. I know how you work individually and as a society. If you take the path of homosexuality, it will lead to disaster." But the Benjamites thought otherwise.

Judges 19:23
And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly; seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this folly.

To this day in the Middle East, there is an understanding that if someone comes into your home, even if he is your worst enemy, you are obligated to give him lodging and protection for three days. That's not what the Bible said. It's what the culture decreed.

Judges 19:24
Behold, here is my daughter a maiden, and his concubine; them I will bring out now, and humble ye them, and do with them what seemeth good unto you: but unto this man do not so vile a thing.

Here, the old man, the master of the house, is doing right in his own eyes. You see, in that culture, when a man entered a home, it was imperative that the host go to every means possible to insulate his guest from any difficulty. So, culturally, the old man is doing right by saying, "Take my daughter and the concubine—just don't bother my guest." But Scripturally, morally, even logically, what he's doing is an abomination.

How could this be? We wonder. And yet it's the result of a culture doing what's right in their sight. Women, be thankful for Jesus Christ because He is the true Liberator of women. Wherever the gospel has gone, women have been elevated, for in Christ, there is neither male nor female. In Christ, we are co-heirs (Galatians 3:28).

Judges 19:25
But the men would not hearken to him: so the man took his concubine, and brought her forth unto them; and they knew her, and abused her all the night until the morning: and when the day began to spring, they let her go.

This was a cowardly act indeed with horrific repercussions.

Judges 19:26–28 (a)
Then came the woman in the dawning of the day, and fell down at the door of the man's house where her lord was, till it was light. And her lord rose up in the morning, and opened the doors of the house, and went out to go his way: and, behold, the woman his concubine was fallen down at the door of the house, and her hands were upon the threshold. And he said unto her, Up, and let us be going. But none answered . . .

The concubine was dead.

Judges 19:28 (b)–30
. . . Then the man took her up upon an ass, and the man rose up, and gat him unto his place. And when he was come into his house, he took a knife, and laid hold on his concubine, and divided her, together with her bones, into twelve pieces, and sent her into all

the coasts of Israel. And it was so, that all that saw it said, There was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day: consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds.

The Levite chops his concubine into twelve pieces, and sends a piece of her body to each one of the Twelve Tribes. It was a telegram they would never forget. When the people of Israel received this very graphic message, they had a right to be outraged. But, as the story goes on, it is clear they did not seek the Lord in response.

Thus, we've seen a man who as doing right in his own eyes in protecting his guest, even though it cost the life of a woman. We've seen a Levite who did right in his own eyes by seeking retaliation. And we're about to see an entire nation doing right in their own eyes in response to this tragedy—each scene darker than the one before as the glory of God is shunned.



20 Judges 20:1, 2

Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was gath ered together as one man, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, with the land of Gilead, unto the LORD in Mizpeh. And the chief of all the people, even of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword.

After receiving a piece of the corpse of the concubine, the Twelve Tribes of Israel mustered an army of 400,000.

Judges 20:3–6

(Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel were gone up to Mizpeh.) Then said the children of Israel, Tell us, how was this wickedness? And the Levite, the husband of the woman that was slain, answered and said, I came into Gibeah that belongeth to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to lodge. And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and beset the house round about

upon me by night, and thought to have slain me: and my concubine have they forced, that she is dead. And I took my concubine, and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel: for they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel.

The Levite recounts the tragedy.

Judges 20:7
Behold, ye are all children of Israel; give here your advice and counsel.

Notice he's not saying, "Let's seek God; let's pray; let's wait on the Lord"—but rather, "What are *we* going to do with these evil Benjamites?"

Judges 20:8, 9
And all the people arose as one man, saying, We will not any of us go to his tent, neither will we any of us turn into his house. But now this shall be the thing which we will do to Gibeah; we will go up by lot against it;

Israel decided to launch a civil war and wipe out the Benjamite city of Gibeah.

Judges 20:10
And we will take ten men of an hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and an hundred of a thousand, and a thousand out of ten thousand, to fetch victual for the people, that they may do, when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, according to all the folly that they have wrought in Israel.

Ten percent of the men of Israel were to be drafted to go to war against the brutal butchers of Benjamin.

Judges 20:11

So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one man.

The children of Israel were incensed and united because of a treacherous terrorist act. The nation had been sinning, with every man doing right in his own eyes. But tragedy aroused the nation and forced it to look at its own spiritual condition. Tragedy brought about mobilization and unification.

Does this ring a bell as to our own situation? September eleventh shook us. We mobilized our men. We became united. But watch where the story goes . . .

Judges 20:12
And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness is this that is done among you?

Israel dispatched diplomats.

Judges 20:13
Now therefore deliver us the men, the children of Belial, which are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel. But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren the children of Israel:

An outraged nation said, "Turn over those butchers to us." But the men of Benjamin refused.

Judges 20:14, 15
But the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel. And the children of Benjamin were numbered at that time out of the cities twenty and six thousand men that drew sword, beside the inhabitants of Gibeah, which were numbered seven hundred chosen men.

This small group of 26,700 consisted of amazing fighters.

Judges 20:16, 17
Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss. And the men of Israel, beside Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword: all these were men of war.

The battle lines were drawn: 400,000 Israelites *vs.* 26,700 Benjamites. The fact that seven hundred Benjamites were left-handed puts one in mind of perhaps one of the bravest left-handed Benjamites of all time: Ehud (Judges 3). The fact that they could sling stones to within an hair breadth of their target calls to mind a crack-shot shepherd boy named David.

Judges 20:18 (a)
And the children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God, and asked counsel of God . . .

At last, the Israelites asked counsel of God—but wait . . .

Judges 20:18 (b)
. . . said, Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin?

The Israelites didn't pray, "Should we attack?" but "Which of us should attack first?" That's the way we often pray.

We don't open our hearts to the Lord and say, "Lord, what do You want?" No, we say, "Here's Your choice, Lord: A or B." We give Him one or two options when there's an entire set of alternatives about which we know nothing. It's a dangerous way to pray, folks. When we pray, we must seek the Lord's heart in quietness and humility, saying, "Lord what do *You* want?"

Judges 20:18 (c)
. . . And the LORD said, Judah shall go up first.

As He did with Hezekiah (2 Kings 20), the Lord answered Israel's prayer according to His permissive will rather than His perfect will. "If

that's what You want to do," He said, "send Judah first."

Judges 20:19–23
And the children of Israel rose up in the morning, and encamped against Gibeah. And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah. And the children of Benjamin came forth out of Gibeah, and destroyed down to the ground of the Israelites that day twenty and two thousand men. And the people the men of Israel encouraged themselves, and set their battle again in array in the place where they put themselves in array the first day. (And the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until even, and asked counsel of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother? And the LORD said, Go up against him.)

It was an amazing military upset when the tribe of Benjamin, the rock-throwers, mowed down 22,000 Israelites. *How could this be?* Israel wondered. *Didn't we pray?* So Israel prayed again.

Judges 20:24, 25
And the children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day. And Benjamin went forth against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed down to the ground of the children of Israel again eighteen thousand men; all these drew the sword.

In their second defeat, 18,000 Israelites were slain. How could this be? Here, the good guys have their prayer meeting and seek God's blessing. Their numbers are far greater. It should have been a cakewalk. But they were mowed down—22,000 on the first day, 18,000 the next.

Judges 20:26–31
Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings

and peace offerings before the LORD. And the children of Israel inquired of the LORD, (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days,) saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the LORD said, Go up; for to morrow I will deliver them into thine hand. And Israel set liers in wait round about Gibeah. And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times. And the children of Benjamin went out against the people, and were drawn away from the city; and they began to smite of the people, and kill, as at other times, in the highways, of which one goeth up to the house of God, and the other to Gibeah in the field, about thirty men of Israel.

This was the strategy Israel had used successfully in the battle against Ai. Why, then, did Israel lose men this time? I suggest it was because they committed themselves to a course of confrontation rather than to attempt reconciliation. You see, the Lord could have chastened the people of Benjamin apart from the Israelites marching against them. He could have sent hailstones down on the men of Benjamin. He could have opened the earth under their feet to swallow them. But, because the men of Israel were eager to be the instrument of chastisement against their brother, they suffered as well.

I believe there's an important principle here. "That person needs to be corrected," we declare, "and *I'm* going to do it." If that is your attitude, the Lord will allow you to go, but I firmly believe you will find yourself in Israel's shoes—bloodied and unnecessarily beaten down.

It's interesting to me that the last miracle Jesus did, the very final miracle of His earthly ministry, took place when He healed an ear one of His own disciples had chopped off (Luke 22:51). We Christians still do this today. We take the Sword of the Spirit and use it as a weapon to brutalize and beat people. And it's wrong, the Sword of the Spirit is not meant to chop people down—it's meant to do battle against the enemy, the forces of darkness.

The pressure's off, gang! We don't have to go to every Christian in error and straighten them out, beating them over the head with the Word of God as we point out their flaws and failures. There's a better way: praying, "Lord, here's the situation. You know what to do. I don't."

The men of Israel chose confrontation rather than intercession. Yes, the Lord will use them, but it will cost them dearly.

Judges 20:32–48

And the children of Benjamin said, They are smitten down before us, as at the first. But the children of Israel said, Let us flee, and draw them from the city unto the highways. And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and put themselves in array at Baal-tamar: and the liers in wait of Israel came forth out of their places, even out of the meadows of Gibeah. And there came against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was sore: but they knew not that evil was near them. And the LORD smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day twenty and five thousand and an hundred men: all these drew the sword. So the children of Benjamin saw that they were smitten: for the men of Israel gave place to the Benjamites, because they trusted unto the liers in wait which they had set beside Gibeah. And the liers in wait hasted, and rushed upon Gibeah; and the liers in wait drew themselves along, and smote all the city with the edge of the sword. Now there was an appointed sign between the men of Israel and the liers in wait, that they should make a great flame with smoke rise up out of the city. And when the men of Israel retired in the battle, Benjamin began to smite and kill of the men of Israel about thirty persons: for they said, Surely they are smitten down before us, as in the first battle. But when the flame began to arise up out of the city with a pillar of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and, behold, the flame of the city ascended up to heaven. And when the men of Israel turned again, the men of Benjamin were amazed: for they saw that evil was come upon them. Therefore they turned their backs before the

men of Israel unto the way of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them; and them which came out of the cities they destroyed in the midst of them. Thus they inclosed the Benjamites round about, and chased them, and trode them down with ease over against Gibeah toward the sunrising. And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these were men of valour. And they turned and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock of Rimmon: and they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men; and pursued hard after them unto Gidom, and slew two thousand men of them. So that all which fell that day of Benjamin were twenty and five thousand men that drew the sword; all these were men of valour. But six hundred men turned and fled to the wilderness unto the rock Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months. And the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword, as well the men of every city, as the beast, and all that came to hand: also they set on fire all the cities that they came to.

All that remained of the tribe of Benjamin were six hundred men. The rock of Rimmon was a fortress in the rocks. So these six hundred survivors hung out there for four months.

What's going on here? Why did God allow 22,000 of the "good guys" to die on Day 1, and 18,000 to die on Day 2? It should have been an easy battle. But when you read the story carefully, you see something happen. "Which of us do You want to go first?" Israel prayed in the beginning. The second day, they prayed, "Are You sure You want us to go at all?" But after that, something happened that was different from the two previous occasions of prayer and inquiry. The third time, they wept, fasted, offered burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings. In other words, they repented. They didn't unfurl their flags. They didn't print bumper stickers that proclaimed "United We Stand." They didn't sing, "God Bless Israel." They repented. They said, "Lord, we have sinned." And after they fasted, cried, and sacrificed, after they recognized the sin in their own country, they had victory.

Yes, it was God's intention that the enemy would be dealt with. But first there needed to be a realization of sin in their own tribes. They had to acknowledge the need for the blood of sacrifice before the need for the blood of revenge.

My prayer is that the Lord would work in us personally, corporately, and nationally a spirit of true repentance and brokenness before Him. This will be brought about and evidenced not by the offering of burnt offerings, but by partaking of the Lamb of God, who Himself became the only Sacrifice potent enough to deal with our sin.



21 Judges 21:1

Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpeh, saying, There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife.

Before they attacked Benjamin, in a moment of passion and emotional upheaval, the 400,000 Israelites vowed none of their daughters would marry a Benjamite. The Bible warns about taking vows or making oaths because the implication of taking a vow is often, "I can pull this off. I can see this through." Therefore, for the most part, making a vow is a foolish thing to do.

Judges 21:2, 3

And the people came to the house of God, and abode there till even before God, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore; And said, O LORD God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to day one tribe lacking in Israel?

If it weren't so tragic, this would be almost humorous. After all, Benjamin had outrageously rebelled by standing up for sexual perverts, causing the rest of Israel to overwhelmingly react. Thus, although there was rebellion and reaction on the part of the people, they held God responsible as they cried, "Lord, one of our tribes is about to become extinct. Why did You let this happen?"

Isn't that just like us? We violate the precepts of God; we ignore the statutes of God; we don't listen to the leading of God; we either rebel or overreact—and then we say, "Thanks a lot, Lord. My life is a mess."

Gang, the Lord is so perfect and merciful, loving and pure. He is genuinely *good.* Therefore, if things are going wrong, I have no right in shaking my fist at Him. It's not His fault. He did everything He possibly could to make my life prosperous and wonderful, fulfilled and right. He gave me the Word, gave me His Spirit, and saved my soul.

Judges 21:4
And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people rose early, and built there an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

The people seem to be worshiping, but they're not waiting on the Lord, for they're about to push every panic button in sight, trying to figure out what they can do to rescue the tribe of Benjamin on their own.

Judges 21:5–7
And the children of Israel said, Who is there among all the tribes of Israel that came not up with the congregation unto the LORD? For they had made a great oath concerning him that came not up to the LORD to Mizpeh, saying, He shall surely be put to death. And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day. How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them of our daughters to wives?

After having their time of worship, their obligatory "morning devotions" so to speak, the Israelites immediately set about to come up with their own plan to rescue Benjamin, expecting God to bless it.

Judges 21:8–11
And they said, What one is there of the tribes of Israel that came not up to Mizpeh to the LORD? And, behold, there came none to

the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly. For the people were numbered, and, behold, there were none of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead there. And the congregation sent thither twelve thousand men of the valiantest, and commanded them, saying, Go and smite the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the children. And this is the thing that ye shall do, Ye shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman that hath lain by man.

"What are we going to do?" asked the Israelites. "Our poor brethren don't have wives. Hey, what about that oath we made? We said whoever didn't join our crusade against the Benjamites would be put to death. Well, the men of Jabeshgilead didn't join us, so let's kill them, and give their virgins to the Benjamites."

Now, it's entirely possible that the men of Jabesh-gilead never even received the message concerning the attack on Gibeah. But that didn't matter to the Israelites. There was no attempt to seek the truth, to help, or to heal. They just wanted to patch up the Benjamite problem—and it seemed right in their own eyes to use Jabeshgilead to do it.

Judges 21:12
And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred young virgins, that had known no man by lying with any male: and they brought them unto the camp to Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

The Israelites found four hundred virgins—but they were still two hundred short. Do they seek God at this point? No. Do they wait on the Lord? No. They keep going with their own plan and program.

Judges 21:13–18
And the whole congregation sent some to speak to the children of Benjamin that were in the rock Rimmon, and to call peaceably unto them. And Benjamin came again at that time; and they gave them wives which they had saved alive of the women of Jabeshgilead: and yet so they sufficed them not. And the people

repented them for Benjamin, because that the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel. Then the elders of the congregation said, How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing the women are destroyed out of Benjamin? And they said, There must be an inheritance for them that be escaped of Benjamin, that a tribe be not destroyed out of Israel. Howbeit we may not give them wives of our daughters: for the children of Israel have sworn, saying, Cursed be he that giveth a wife to Benjamin.

On to Plan Two . . .

Judges 21:19–22
Then they said, Behold, there is a feast of the LORD in Shiloh yearly in a place which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah. Therefore they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, Go and lie in wait in the vineyards; And see, and, behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. And it shall be, when their fathers or their brethren come unto us to complain, that we will say unto them, Be favourable unto them for our sakes: because we reserved not to each man his wife in the war: for ye did not give unto them at this time, that ye should be guilty.

The two hundred Benjamites without wives were instructed to kidnap the daughters of Shiloh. This way, the Israelites would not be technically breaking their oath because they weren't really giving their daughters to the Benjamites. They were simply allowing them to be "kidnapped."

Judges 21:23–25
And the children of Benjamin did so, and took them wives, according to their number, of them that danced, whom they caught: and they went and returned unto their inheritance, and repaired the cities, and dwelt in them. And the children of Israel

departed thence at that time, every man to his tribe and to his family, and they went out from thence every man to his inheritance. In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

The land is confused and chaotic, bloodied and beaten.

Why?

Because there was no king, and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Just as my life becomes chaotic and confused, your life will become bruised and battered unless you acknowledge Jesus as King, and say, "Lord, it doesn't matter what is right in my eyes. It only matters what is right according to Your Word."

And so ends the Book of Judges—with God's people greatly in need of a righteous King, a true Judge, the only Hero who will not only deliver them from their oppressors, but who will save them from the cycle of sin which does "so easily beset them."

And Who will that be?

Good News: He is pictured on the very next page as our Kinsman Redeemer in the person of Boaz—for even in the dark days of the judges, Jesus, the Light of the world, remains close at hand.

May He be your King, your Hero, your Redeemer this day and forever.



RUTH

Background to Ruth

The story is told that, when Benjamin Franklin was Ambassador to France, he spoke to a group of intellectuals who continually scoffed at his belief in the Bible. Unconvinced that these men were familiar with the book they mocked, Franklin said, "By the way, gentlemen, I have come across a most intriguing love story that I would like to read for you tonight. I think you'll find it interesting." He then proceeded to read a handwritten copy of the Book of Ruth.

After he finished the four short chapters, his audience was ecstatic. "That is the greatest love story we have ever heard," they exclaimed. "You must publish it at once."

Franklin answered, "It has already been published. It's in the Bible."

And the scoffers were silenced.

The Book of Ruth is divided into four chapters, each taking place in a different setting—a four-act drama, if you will:

- Chapter One takes place in the country of Moab.
- Chapter Two—in the fields of Boaz in Bethlehem.
- Chapter Three—on the threshingfloor of Boaz.
- Chapter Four—at the city gate of Bethlehem.

The main character, of course, is *Ruth*. Her name means "Friendship," and she is the great-grandmother of King David. She is a picture or a representative of us—the Bride of Christ.

The hero of this drama is Boaz, who is a picture or type of our Hero, our Kinsman Redeemer, our *Goel*—Jesus Christ.

The three themes of the Book of Ruth are: Redemption, revival, and restoration.

This powerful little love story shows us clearly how the Lord can breathe life into a situation that appears lifeless. Our Lord is a Restorer; He is a Rebuilder; He is a Reviver—and the Book of Ruth ministers the message of hope to any who feel wiped-out, hurting, or hopeless.



RUTH

1 Ruth 1:1, 2 (a)
Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem Judah.

In chapter 1, we are introduced to a happy Hebrew family residing in the country of Judah, in the city of Bethlehem.

How do I know they were happy?

Check out their names. *Elimelech* means, "God is my King;" *Naomi* means "Pleasant;" and, according to *Our Nearest Kinsman* by Roy Hession, *Mahlon* means "Song;" while *Chilion* means "Satisfaction."

This family was one where God was King; where there was pleasantness, song, and satisfaction.Why? Because they resided in the city of Bethlehem.

Bethlehem means, "House of Bread," and it is the city where Jesus, the Bread of Life would be born centuries later. No wonder there was satisfaction and pleasantness in Elimelech's family. No wonder there were songs and happiness. God was their King and they were living in the House of Bread.

Gang, we will always be a happy, blessed, successful people if we dwell in the House of Bread, which is the Word of God. When we eat of heavenly manna, we will experience earthly happiness.

How do I know this?

Psalm 1 declares that the man who meditates in the Word, and who delights in the Law of the Lord will be like a tree whose leaf does not wither, a tree which prospers in whatever it does. Picture, if you would, a strong oak tree. What is an oak tree? An oak tree is simply a little nut that refused to give ground. I like that! Because that's what we are. We're all little nuts, and

all a little nutty. But if we refuse to give ground and plant our roots in the Word of God—if we study it, meditate on it, devour it, and make it top priority in our lives—we will find ourselves growing in strength and stability. We will find ourselves experiencing God's blessing.

Notice also that Elimelech's family not only resided in the city of Bethlehem, but in the tribe of Judah. Throughout the Book of Ruth, Bethlehem is always hyphenated with Judah. *Judah* means, "Praise."

I find the connection more than coincidental, for there is an intimate, intricate correlation between the House of Bread—which is the Word of God—and Praise—which ascends toward God. David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, declared this in Psalm 119: "I will praise thee O Lord, when I have learned thy statutes." A person who is learning about the ways of God and the character of God through the Word of God cannot help but overflow in praise to God.

As I was meditating on Genesis 1:2, the phrase, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," jumped off the page and spoke to my heart. The Spirit of God *moved.* Peter said the same thing when he wrote: "Holy men spake as they were *moved* by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21).

Suddenly I realized our God is on the move. And everything in creation, everything which He has touched is also perpetually and continually moving. The chair on which you're sitting right now is vibrating and moving millions of times per second. Why? Because the atoms which make up the chair are in constant motion. In fact, any individual atom is continually, perpetually in motion, for the electron which spins around the nucleus of the atom is moving at a tremendous rate of speed in an unpredictable path.

This amazes me!

Because the electron is spinning around in an unpredictable path at an unbelievable speed, in 1936, a scientist named Dr. Heisenberg said, "Since all matter is in motion, nothing is predictable." His statement came to be known as the Principle of Uncertainty. And unbeknownst to Dr. Heisenberg, his Principle of Uncertainty threw the door wide open to the practicality of miracles.

Is it scientifically possible that a man can walk on water? Yes. The Principle of Uncertainty allows for that possibility. The chances are very remote, but the possibility exists.

Is it possible for a man to feed 5,000 people with a single loaf of bread? Yes. The Principle of Uncertainty allows for that possibility. The chances are very remote, but the possibility exists.

I thank the Lord for Dr. Heisenberg. As far as I know, he didn't know the Lord, but he certainly opened a can of worms for the scientist who denies the miraculous. Miracles are possible because everything is in motion.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). And so in a world where everything appears uncertain and unpredictable—guess what. We have a solid Rock in Jesus Christ. Our God is on the move. And yet He remains a sure foundation (Isaiah 28:16).

If you're having a difficult time praising and worshiping, if you feel far removed from Judah, the Place of Praise—it could be because you're not dwelling in Bethlehem, the House of Bread, the Word of God. Once you're dwelling in the Word, you can't help but become a worshiper.

Ruth 1:2 (b)
. . . And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.

Elimelech and his family left Bethlehem-judah when famine came to the land. "I don't get it." you say. "How could a famine inflict the House of Bread, the Place of Praise?"

In 2 Chronicles 7, God told His people that if they turned from Him and began to serve other gods, He would send famine to their land. Evidently that is what happened here. Oh, it might have been subtle, even imperceptible at first, but there was nonetheless a turning away from the Lord. The result? Dry times.

Amos wrote about a famine not of food, but of hearing the Word of the Lord (Amos 8:11). Maybe you can relate to that. Perhaps you no longer feel like you're hearing from God or in communion with God. There was a time when every time you opened the Word, God seemed to speak to you. There was a time when coming to Bible study was the most exciting thing for you. But not now. There is famine in your land. The days are dry, dreary, and difficult.

Precious people, I don't care who you are or how close to God you might be. You can bet your bottom dollar that there will come into your walk seasons of dryness and times of difficulty. The question is not whether times of famine will come. The question is: "Where will you go when they do?"

Second Chronicles 7 teaches that the cure for famine is to remain where you are and call upon God. But Elimelech and his family went to Moab instead.

This is a fundamental mistake we often make. In the Book of Isaiah, the Lord declared that He would go with us *through* the fire (Isaiah 43:2). But so often we want to *avoid* the fire. We want to change our circumstances. We want to run from the difficulties.

So, when famine came, Elimelech, upon the prodding of his wife Naomi, decided that instead of praying it through and remaining in the land until God graciously blessed again, they would make a move, a short sojourn in Moab, where they heard there was plenty of food and an abundance of water. It seemed to be the chance of a lifetime. In reality, however, it was a death march toward the grave.

Moab had its beginning in a cave. Maybe you recall the story found in Genesis 19 . . .

Lot and his family had left Sodom just as God's judgment fell. Lot's wife, of course, was turned into a pillar of salt as she looked back on Sodom with the intent of going back. So it was, that following the destruction of Sodom, Lot and his two daughters took refuge in a cave overlooking the city. While living in this cave, Lot's two daughters got their father drunk and seduced him.

The children born from that incestuous relationship were Moab and Benammi, progenitors of the Moabites and the Ammonites—two peoples who would continually haunt the children of Israel. Thus, Moab had its beginning in a cave and, according to Zephaniah, its ending in a grave (Zephaniah 2:8–11).

In Psalm 108, God refers to Moab as His wash-pot. A more correct literal translation would be, "Moab is My toilet bowl." So, in taking a trip to Moab, Elimelech and Naomi were saying, "It's getting tough here in the House of Bread, the Place of Praise. Let's go swim in the toilet for awhile."

Isn't that just like you and me? "Where's the Lord? My devotions are dry. Times are tough. Wonder what I can find on cable TV to swim around in for a while," we say as we head to Moab. "Don't worry, Lord, I'm not moving out permanently. I'm just taking a little break from the intensity of the House of Bread and the Place of Praise. I'll be back."

Don't be fooled, folks. Moab is like a black hole—easy to get sucked in, but extremely difficult to get back out. Ask Naomi. She'll spend ten years there.

Ruth 1:3
And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons.

In Moab, Elimelech died. "God is King" always dies in Moab. If I'm swimming in the toilet bowl of the world, I can no longer say, "God is my King." Once I leave Bethlehem-judah—the House of Bread and the Place of Praise—the rule and reign of God in my life will dissipate and die.

Ruth 1:4 (a)
And they took them wives of the women of Moab . . .

Following Elimelech's death, and against Old Testament Law, Mahlon and Chilion married Moabite women.

Dad and Mom, listen carefully. When we journey into Moab—when we kick back, pull away, and pursue worldly things—do you know who pays the price? Our kids. Kids end up marrying Moabitish women when parents choose Moab over Bethlehem.

Ruth 1:4 (b)
. . . the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.

Orpah's name means "Youthful" or "Immature." We will see her exhibit those qualities as the story progresses.

Ruth's name means "Friendship." The Midrach—the Hebrew commentary respected by all biblical historians—declares that Ruth was

none other than the daughter of Eglon.

Think back to the Book of Judges—Eglon was the king of Moab who oppressed the Israelites for eighteen years. The only man in the Bible referred to as a "very fat man" (Judges 3:17), Eglon met his death when the Lord raised up Ehud to kill him with a double-edged dagger.

Ruth 1:5
And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

When God is no longer my King, it is only a matter of time before the song on my lips ceases to exist. Whereas at one time, there was a beautiful flow of praise and adoration to the Lord—there is now cynicism and sourness, murmuring and complaining because Mahlon is dead.

Chilion was the next to die. Have you ever thought, *What's wrong with me? Why has the satisfaction which was once so sweet to me departed?* Could it be that you left the House of Bread and the Place of Praise?

You see, Naomi's experience is a perfect picture of exactly what takes place when we leave the House of Bread and the Place of Praise: First, God is no longer our King; then the song departs from our heart; finally, satisfaction leaves our soul. It's an order that is absolute and irrefutable. And we have all experienced it to some degree.

Ruth 1:6 (a)
Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab . . .

"God is my King" is dead. "Song" is dead. "Satisfaction" is dead. And now Naomi finally realizes that allowing her family to go to Moab was an unmitigated disaster. At last she longed for Bethlehem.

Ruth 1:6 (b)
. . . for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread.

While Naomi was in Moab, in misery and in rebellion, she heard reports of how God was blessing Bethlehem. It's always that way, folks. Those who waited it out in Bethlehem were indeed blessed. Those who wait upon the Lord *will* renew their strength (Isaiah 40:31). Meat *will* come in due season to those who faint not (Psalm 145:15).

Second Chronicles 6 declares that if God's people turn away from Him, He will stop the rain and curse the land. But the next chapter goes on to say that if His people humble themselves and pray, He will hear from heaven and heal their land.

Therefore, while many were playing, there must have been someone praying. As a result, a prophet must have come on the scene, calling the people to forsake their heathen idols and turn once again to the True and Living God. When they did, God revived and rebuilt the land which had become so fruitless and dry. And Naomi heard the report of God's blessing.

This intrigues me because it was Naomi's loss that led her to listen. Please keep this in mind: This story is not to show God punishing Naomi for wandering off into Moab. Her loss was not punitive—it was corrective. Its purpose was to get her back on track—back to Bethlehem, the House of Bread; back to Judah, the Place of Praise.

In your life and in mine, when there is loss, it is not for punishment. Why? Because the punishment for our sin could never be severe enough. I know you; you're like me. We all deserve to be totally consumed. Whatever God could send our way could never be punishment enough for our sin. The punishment which should have come upon us was poured out upon Jesus Christ, who died in our place. Therefore, His work in our lives is not punitive. It's corrective.

If you have been in a place of loss—materially or internally, vocationally or relationally—know this: You are experiencing loss not because God is mad *at* you, angry *with* you, or disappointed *in* you—but because He wants to speak *to* you. And He knows that sometimes the only time we will listen is when we are at a place of loss where we can do nothing else.

Ruth 1:7
Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to

return unto the land of Judah.

Naomi, the Prodigal Daughter, goes back home. And I am reminded of Luke 15 . . .

When the prodigal son—after leaving his father's house, going to a far country, and spending his father's fortune on wine, women, and song—finally came to his senses, he realized he was sitting in a pigpen eating pig slop.

The difference between a prodigal and a pig is that although the prodigal might spend some time in the pigpen, he doesn't make it his home. If the pigpen is your home today, you need to seriously evaluate your relationship to your Father. But if you find yourself in the pigpen today, wanting desperately to get out—take hope. Take the first step back home towards your Father, and, like the prodigal son, you will see Him running to meet you.

The only time in the Bible when God is seen to be in a hurry is in the person of the prodigal son's father, who hitched up his robes and ran down the road with abandon to meet his son. What a beautiful picture of restoration and redemption, renewal and revival. That's our Father.

Ruth 1:8, 9
And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.

As Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah are on their way to Bethlehem, Naomi turns to her daughters-in-law and says, "Why are you traveling with me? I'm going back *with* nothing and I'm going back *to* nothing. I lost everything in Moab, but you have been good to me. May the Lord bless you. Now go back to your people."

Ruth 1:10–13 (a)
And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people. And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I

am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons; Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters . . .

Naomi is referring to the practice outlined in Deuteronomy 25, whereby if a woman lost her husband, it was the responsibility of his younger unmarried brother to marry his sister-in-law. Their children would then bear the name of the deceased brother.

In reference to this, Naomi is saying, "Even if I married right now and bore sons, it would be ridiculous for you to wait until they were old enough to assume the responsibility of marrying you."

Ruth 1:13 (b)
. . . for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.

Not true, Naomi. Yes, you've felt the brutal, bitter repercussions of being in Moab. But God is not against you. He has a good plan for you, a divine design. He's at work. He takes even our backsliding blunders and is able to transform them into beautiful blossoms. It's an amazing thing. It's called redemption.

Ruth 1:14
And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.

In this verse we see Naomi grieving, Orpah leaving, and Ruth cleaving.

Orpah, whose name means "Youthful" or "Immature," shows the reaction of an immature believer—much emotion, but no devotion; conviction, but no commitment. Jesus talked about this in the parable of the sower (Mark 4) . . .

Some hear the Word and spring up quickly, but when the hot sun comes out, they dry up and wither away because they have no roots.

Some believers get totally excited when they hear a sermon, or a testimony, or a concert—but their roots are not grounded in the

Word of God. There is no devotional life, simply an emotional hype. And when the hard times come—when there's a price to pay to follow Jesus—like Orpah, they turn away.

Ruth, on the other hand, cleaves to Naomi.

The same remains true today, for, there are those who kiss with emotion—but others who cleave with devotion. The Bible indicates that God isn't impressed with how high we jump, but how straight we walk. Ruth stayed with Naomi. She walked the walk.

Ruth 1:15 (a)
And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods . . .

This doesn't mean Oprah is a bad person. It does mean she is no longer in the narrrative of this drama. Her name never appears again.

There are times when you have to let people go. Far too often, people cling to some past experience or relationship. Let them go. They're not part of your story any more.

Ruth 1:15 (b)–17
. . . return thou after thy sister in law. And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

"Even if God's hand is against you, Naomi," Ruth said, "the worst God gives is better than the best the world offers." What a sentiment expressed by Ruth! This intrigues me because it means that Ruth saw in a broken embittered Naomi a spiritual reality that superseded anything she had seen in Moab.

I say this to encourage you who perhaps have been in Moab recently. You may be like Naomi—coming back *to* nothing, and coming back *with* nothing.

But, like Ruth, there will be those who will see your brokenness and repentance and follow you right into the kingdom.

Why?

Because "good people" usually do not draw sinners. Naomi realized she herself needed to get back to the Lord—and that is the person with whom the sinner feels most inclined to travel.

If you have been in a place where you know you haven't been what you should be, or doing what you should do—you still have the opportunity, like Naomi, to bring someone back with you.

Ruth 1:18, 19 (a)
When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her. So they two went until they came to Bethlehem . . .

Here we see the backslider returning home and the outsider coming home. Naomi and Ruth—Jew and Moabite—traveled together to the House of Bread.

Ruth 1:19 (b)
. . . And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?

"Is this Pleasant?" asked Naomi's neighbors incredulously. "Look at the lines in her face and the sadness in her eyes." Naomi came back—but without "God is my King," without "Satisfaction," without "Song." The effects of sin were bitter upon her.

Ruth 1:20
And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.

The woman who was once called "Pleasant" says, "That's not my name anymore. Call me *Mara.* Call me "Bitter," for the Lord has dealt severely with me. To get my attention, heavy things have happened to me." Naomi was

not complaining. She was confessing—acknowledging the chastening hand of God upon her life (Hebrews 12:6).

Ruth 1:21 (a)
I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty:

Would you please underline this verse in your Bible and underscore it in your mind? This is the reason backsliding is so ridiculous. When you leave Bethlehem-judah—the House of Bread, the Place of Praise—and wander off to sojourn in Moab, you will always leave full, but come back empty. Sin always brings sorrow and sadness. Be not deceived, God is not mocked—whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap (Galatians 6:7).

Naomi went through ten years of proverbial hell on earth and would carry scars for the rest of her life because she left the land of the true and living God.

Gang, the mathematics of sin are always the same, for sin adds to your sorrows, subtracts from your energy, multiplies your troubles, and divides your loyalty.

Naomi went out full, but returned empty. But praise be to our Lord—the remaining three chapters of the Book of Ruth will chronicle Naomi's refilling and recharging as the Lord renews and revives her. Naomi's story is truly one of the interesting subplots of this magnificent little book.

Ruth 1:21 (b)
. . . why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?

Naomi has it wrong. God is not against her. He's for her—even in the ramifications and repercussions of her own choices.

Ruth 1:22 (a)
So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab . . .

Often, when you and I backslide, the tragedy is that we take others with us.

"I'm going fishing," Peter said. "I'm not good enough. I'm not worthy enough to follow Jesus Christ any longer" (see John 21:3).

What did the other disciples say?

"We'll go with you," they said, as they boarded the boat of backsliding together.

But here is Naomi coming back, returning to the place of blessing and look—she is bringing Ruth with her—Ruth who will be so instrumental in the very genealogy of Jesus Christ; Ruth, who is herself an illustration of the body of Christ. Ruth is brought into the Land of Promise by a broken Naomi.

When was Ruth brought into the place of blessing? It wasn't when she was impressed with Naomi's pleasantness and perfectness. It was when she saw Naomi's brokenness and bitterness.

Precious people, I am convinced that very often our friends, family, colleagues, and neighbors are not getting saved and not responding to the gospel because they look at us and see the life we are presenting to them as being totally together and they say, "God is the God of the together person, the perfect person—which is fine for you because you're together and you're perfect. But I'm not. Therefore He could not be my God."

Why is it we try so hard to present ourselves as perfect? We know we're not. Who are we kidding? We all know we have problems and weaknesses, temptations and difficulties. And yet we carefully cultivate an impeccable image to present to the world. I suggest to you that people are touched and moved not when you and I preach from the pulpit of perfection, but rather when we share from the place of brokenness and humility—not pointing to our togetherness, but to God's graciousness.

Marrying into Naomi's happy Hebrew family did not convert Ruth. You see, it was not until Naomi—Miss Pleasant—became humble and confessed freely that the Lord had dealt bitterly with her that Ruth said, "Your God shall be my God because I can relate to a God like that."

When the sinner can see that you and I are real—that we have weaknesses and vulnerabilities which the Lord is slowly but surely working out—they will be drawn to follow Him with us. I'm firmly persuaded of this.

Paul said it this way: "But we have this treasure [Jesus Christ] in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Why is it, folks, that we attempt to cover up the

"earthenness" of our vessels by painting them, glazing them, shining them, polishing them—and then wonder why nobody's getting saved? When the attention is on the earthen vessel and not on the Treasure within, we are doomed to failure in our efforts to draw people to Christ.

The Treasure is to be exalted. The Treasure is to be lifted up. And there is only one Treasure—the Person of Jesus Christ. It's not "churchianity;" it's not intellectual study; it's not pious spirituality. The Treasure is *Jesus.* We applaud *Jesus.* We praise *Him.* We point to *Him* and to Him alone—not to our doctrines, or theologies, or lifestyles, for *He* is the One who has rescued us, who has redeemed us, who has been so good to us.

When we can say with transparency to those around us, I am earthen. I am flawed. I have difficulties and struggles and weaknesses and scars and hurts —but there is One who is redemptive. There is One who is perfect. There is One who is all-loving, always available. And I'm going back to Bethlehem to be with Him," those around us will want to come with us.

It is time for reality, saints. It is time to applaud the Person of Jesus Christ, not our own religious lifestyles. Oh, that we might be like John the Baptist who said, "He must increase and I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Even if you have sojourned in Moab for a long season, even though you left full and are now coming back empty, know this: First of all, God can and will refill and revive you. Secondly, if you will extol His grace and His goodness, He will actually use you to bring a whole lot of Ruths back with you.

Am I suggesting that we should sin in order to be relatable? In the words of the apostle Paul, "God forbid!" (Romans 6:2) If you do, you're a fool. I know Scripturally and experientially that, although God will still love you and receive you and bless you, you will carry scars and hurts and pains which are totally unnecessary.

I am not suggesting we sin in order to be relatable. I am saying we need to be very careful that we are not trying to lift up a lifestyle and present ourselves only in the best possible light. We need to be real. We need to share with people our setbacks and the hard knocks we've had to go through to learn lessons. Above all, we need to share the grace and glory of God through it all.

And if we do—many a Moabitess, many a worldling, many a lost soul will say, "I want your God to be my God."

Ruth 1:22 (b)
. . . and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

Naomi and Ruth came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest—which is the time of Passover.

When do the backslider and the baby Christian, so to speak, come into Bethlehem, the House of Bread—and Judah, the Place of Praise? During Passover—through the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's always where it starts—when we recognize and realize that Jesus Christ is the One who died for our sin.

Fifty days later—during Pentecost—we will see Boaz marry Ruth. The experience of Pentecost is the culmination of our salvation—when we allow Jesus Christ to fill us and overflow us with His Holy Spirit.



2 Ruth 2:1

And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz.

Boaz, whose name means "Standing in Strength," was an impressive fellow indeed. Look at his pedigree—he came from the tribe of Judah. Look at his posterity—from him came David, Israel's greatest king prior to the reign of the King of kings, Jesus Christ.

David's son, Solomon, so impressed with his great-great grandfather Boaz, named one of the two main pillars of the temple after him (1 Kings 7:21). After all, "Standing in Strength" would be a good name for a pillar.

Truly Boaz was a man who stood in strength. He lived during the days of the Judges, when the Bible says that every man did right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25). The country was corrupt and bankrupt as a result. Yet Boaz stood strong in the days of famine and stayed true in the days of darkness.

Boaz was of good pedigree, good posterity, and above all—was a picture of our Kinsman Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

The word translated "kinsman" is *goel* in Hebrew. *Goel* means "Redeemer" and has its roots in the twenty-fifth chapters of Numbers and Leviticus wherein God outlined a plan to prevent capitalism from getting out of hand. Every fifty years, in the Year of Jubilee, all properties purchased by corporations or wealthy individuals due to bankruptcy were to revert back to the original owner. In the Year of Jubilee, all debts were canceled. It was the Father's safeguard against the greed which causes such disparity between rich and poor.

As gracious as the Year of Jubilee was, however, fifty years is a long time to be without your land—especially if you're a farmer. So the Lord made another provision: The closest kinsman had the right at any time to buy back property which had been lost through bankruptcy, poor business practices, or mismanagement. That is why the word, *goel* is translated both "kinsman" and "redeemer."

This is an important concept because Jesus Christ is our *Goel*. We're bankrupt. We're out of it. Like Ruth and Naomi, we have nothing. But there is One who is wealthy. There is One who stands in strength. He is our Kinsman Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Boaz is about to redeem Ruth and bring her under his covering—even as Jesus Christ has redeemed us, the church, and brought us under His covering.

Ruth 2:2
And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

In Deuteronomy 24:18–20, the Father provided another compassionate law which stated that a poor person could go into the fields during the time of harvest and gather whatever was left behind by the reapers—a "work-fare" system. Familiar with Old Testament Law perhaps through conversations with Naomi, Ruth said "Let me go glean for us. It's better than starving."

Ruth 2:3

And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.

Her "hap" was to end up in the field of Boaz. I like that! Although Ruth certainly didn't know that this wealthy, strong landowner was a kinsman of Elimelech, the Lord had directed her steps. Nothing just happens. God is at work. There's a grand plan coming into play.

Ruth is a picture of you and me, as we shall see. We're the Bride of Christ. But we were lost, impoverished, hungry—and it just so "happened" that we found ourselves in His field. One day, someone invited us to church, to Bible study. It is all part of God's grand plan to send people your way, allowing you to come into contact with our Boaz—Jesus Christ.

Ruth 2:4
And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The LORD be with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee.

I love this! Boaz walked among his reapers, saying, "The Lord be *with* you," even as our Greater than Boaz is called *Emmanuel,* or "God *with* us."

God has always chosen to walk among men . . .

- In the Garden of Eden, He walked with man in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8). But then man fell, was expelled from the Garden, and the world became corrupted.
- God walked among man in the nation of Israel. His glory was in the midst of the camp (Deuteronomy 23:14). But Israel rebelled and rejected the True and Living God.
- Then God came and walked among man in the Person of Jesus Christ. John 1 says He tabernacled, or dwelt, among us. But the world rejected Jesus and nailed Him to a cross.
- Today, God walks among man in the church of Jesus Christ. But the church is experiencing rejection, persecution, and difficulty because wherever God has walked among man, He has been rejected by the

world.

The day is coming, however, when Jesus Christ will come back and suddenly Eden will bloom again. The world will be what it was supposed to be all along. The whole earth will burst forth into blooming and blossoming. Israel will be the head of all nations, as she was intended to be in the first place. Jesus Christ will reign forever as King of kings. Today, men resent the Lord walking among them—but soon that will all change. There will be no more arguments, no more strife, no more tension, because Emmanuel will be with us—and we shall be with Him. What a fabulous hope that is.

Ruth 2:5
Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this?

I want you to take note of this unnamed servant. Who is he? He is the same unnamed servant—not physically, but spiritually—who was sent to find a bride for Isaac in Genesis 24. He is the Holy Ghost—the One who seeks a bride for Jesus Christ; the One who moves in secrecy, never speaking of Himself, always pointing to Jesus—the One who drew you and me into a relationship with Jesus.



***For topical study of Ruth 2:1–5 entitled "Nothing Just Happens," turn to page* 816.**

Ruth 2:6, 7
And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab: And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.

The unnamed servant was set over the reapers, even as the Holy Spirit is set over us (Ephesians 1:13).

Ruth 2:8
Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens:

"Go not to glean in another field." This is what our Greater than Boaz would say to you today. Do not look for some deeper theological truth, some exciting esoteric experience, some new slant on doctrine.

Stay in the field of redemption. Simply say, "I will spend all of my days marvelling that I've been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb."

Ruth 2:9 (a)
Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee?

"The young man shall not touch thee." Boaz realized that the reapers serving in his field would be vulnerable and susceptible to involvement with Ruth. In this glorious task to which we are called—serving in the field of our Greater than Boaz—we must be so careful that as we touch the things of God together, we do not touch the men or the maidens the Lord has lined up alongside of us.

Why is there such a problem in the church today with the issue of morality?

I am convinced it's because there is an enjoyment and a realization of the love of God. It's a beautiful thing to enjoy the Lord together, to worship together, to laugh together; but Satan seeks to exploit this by turning agape love into emotional or even physical love. Boaz here acknowledges the danger and the reality. He says, "I have warned the young men not to touch you."

In 1 Corinthians 7:1, Paul writes that it is good for a man not to touch a woman. There is wisdom in that. I think it's wonderful and appropriate and

Scriptural to be a people who are affectionate—but you and I know when holy affection becomes carnal inclination. When that happens, back off. People might think you're cold and you're weird. Let them think what they want. You be one who listens to the words of Boaz and "touch not the maiden."

Ruth 2:9 (b)
. . . and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.

Ruth didn't even have to draw her own water. It was provided for her, the same way our Greater than Boaz invites us to drink *freely* from the wells of salvation (Isaiah 12:3).

Ruth 2:10
Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?

Not only a stranger, Ruth was a Moabitess. God had cursed the Moabites and proclaimed they could not come near the tabernacle for ten generations (Deuteronomy 23:3). This meant if your great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandmother had Moabite blood in her, you could not come into the Sanctuary, even though you were an Israelite. Indeed the Moabites were a cursed people—and Ruth knew it. That is why she was blown away by Boaz. The "big man in Bethlehem" was so good to her. "Why have *I*— a Moabitess —found grace?" she asked.

That's exactly how I feel. How could it be that *I* have found grace in God's sight?

Ruth 2:11, 12
And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The LORD recompense thy

work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

Boaz said, "I know you, Ruth. I've heard about you."

The same is true of us. We fall before our Greater than Boaz and say, "Why have *I* found grace in Your sight?"

And He answers, "I know you."

Romans 8 declares that, "whom He did foreknow He predestined; whom He predestined, He called; whom He called, He justified; whom He justified, He glorified." It all begins with the foreknowledge of God. He says,"'I know you guys. I see your hearts. And I'm choosing you. I'm electing you. I've chosen to be gracious unto you."

I can't help but think of Nathanel—

When Philip came to him in John 1, saying he had found the Messiah, Nathanael cynically said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

"Come and see," Philip said.

When Jesus later saw Nathanael coming, He said, "Behold an Israelite in whom there is no guile—one who is not easily tricked."

I like that! Jesus could have condemned Nathanael for his cynicism. Instead, he commended him for his caution.

"How do you know me?" asked Nathanael.

"Before Philip came to you, I saw you sitting under the fig tree," Jesus answered (John 1:48).

The Lord sees us. The Lord knows us. And the Lord has chosen to show grace unto us. I don't understand it. I don't deserve it. But I am so grateful for it.

Good news, gang. The Lord does not condemn you. He commends you. He doesn't focus on your sin. He hears your sigh. He hears your heart saying,"I want more of You, Lord. Even though I am a Moabite, even though I have problems, I want to be right in your sight." And He responds with grace.

Ruth 2:13, 14

Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly

unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens. And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left.

Here is an interesting and beautiful analogy for you students of the Word. Boaz invites Ruth, his bride-to-be, to come and eat bread and vinegar, or wine. Bread and wine—a picture of Communion.

Ruth 2:15, 16
And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not: And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.

In other words, "Let her glean in the best places and don't bother her. In fact, spill some of the good grain you're harvesting right in her path."

The workers could have protested that this wasn't fair. But grace is never fair. Grace is unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor. Grace is God dropping buckets and truckloads of good things upon us.

Ruth 2:17–19 (a)
So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned: and it was about an epah of barley. And she took it up, and went into the city: and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed. And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to day?

In the previous generation, this was a question frequently asked among Christians: "Where has thou gleaned today?" I propose we revive it. I think it's a good greeting for those who love the Word of God.

Where have you gleaned today? We're so busy with the menus of Moab, we often find it difficult to answer this question.

Can you talk more readily about the latest movie you've seen than about the latest spiritual understanding you've received?

Is it easier to talk about the TV show you watched last night than about the truths of the Word you missed this morning?

Where are you eating? Where are you gleaning?

It might be a little unnerving, but I believe it would be healthy and right for us to greet each other saying, "Where have you gleaned today?"

Ruth 2:19 (b), 20
. . . and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz. And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.

The word *goel* is used sixty-four times in the Old Testament, translated either as "redeemer" or "kinsman." Here, Naomi said, "Boaz! He's related to Elimelech. He can be our goel, our redeemer. He can rescue us from our poverty."

Ruth 2:21
And Ruth the Moabitess said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest.

Wait a minute, Ruth. You're showing your Moab-ness. What did Boaz say in verse 8? He said, "Abide here fast by my *maidens*." Why? Harvest time was a time of tremendous celebration for youth. It was a time of partying in the best sense of the word. Being a young woman, Ruth probably would have just as soon been by the young men, and so perhaps she took liberty in reporting the words of Boaz to Naomi.

But Naomi smelled a skunk . . .

Ruth 2:22

And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter in law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field.

Notice that Naomi underscored Boaz's instructions when she told Ruth to "Go out with his *maidens*."

Ruth 2:23
So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother in law.

Ruth listened to the counsel of her elders. Boaz, an older man said, "Stay with the maidens." Naomi, her mother-in-law, said the same thing. And Ruth was wise enough to listen.

As I read the Scriptures more and more, I see a linkage of elders and youth, of young and old. Young people have zeal, but it is often without knowledge. Older people have wisdom, but often lack vision. The two are needed together. Thus, we see Moses with Joshua, Elijah with Elisha, Eli with Samuel.

There's a need for young and old—for vision and wisdom; for energy and experience—to work together.

We need each other!



3

Ruth 3:1, 2 (a)
Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee? And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast?

When Naomi realized Ruth had found grace in the eyes of Boaz, a near kinsman, the plot thickened!

Ruth 3:2 (b)

. . . Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshingfloor.

Taking advantage of the night breezes, the men would harvest in the daytime and winnow the harvest at night. That is, they would throw the grain into the air and the chaff—the waste—would be blown away, leaving the barley to fall to the ground to be gathered. When their work was done, they would sleep on the threshingfloor to protect the harvest.

Ruth 3:3 (a)
Wash thyself therefore . . .

A new day was dawning. Naomi told Ruth she was to prepare for something good. If Boaz is a picture of Jesus, Ruth is a picture of His bride, the church—you and me. Paul says we are washed by the water of the Word (Ephesians 5). Therefore, there is nothing more important than keeping in the Word day after week after month after year.

Ruth 3:3 (b)
. . . and anoint thee . . .

Anointing is always a picture of the work of the Spirit. Jesus said we are to ask the Father for the gift of the Holy Ghost (Luke 11:13). We ought to do this continually. A new day is coming your way. If you want to really grab hold of it, to extract everything from it, wash yourself in the Word and anoint yourself in the Spirit.

Ruth 3:3 (c)
. . . and put thy raiment upon thee . . .

Thirdly, Ruth was to change her raiment. As we are commanded to do, she was to put away the garment of heaviness and don instead the garment of praise (Isaiah 61). The psalmist said that praise from the upright is comely (Psalm 33:1). I can make a choice on any given day to be blessed in a big way if I wash myself in the water of the Word, anoint myself in the Spirit, and praise the Lord.

Ruth 3:3 (d)–5

. . . and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking. And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do. And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do.

Ruth was to go to the place where Boaz lay. I cannot help but think of the angel's words to the women at the tomb: "Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matthew 28:6).

Ruth 3:6

And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her.

Why was Boaz at the threshingfloor?

It was at the threshingfloor that the reapers would take the grain and throw it into the air, allowing the nighttime breeze to sift out the wheat from the chaff.

Listen, gang—in the field, Ruth gleaned for herself. At the threshingfloor, Ruth gave of herself. What a difference this is. Are you one who is still in the field, simply taking all you can get? Or have you moved on to greater maturity at the threshingfloor?

Throughout Scripture, the threshingfloor speaks of separation and sacrifice.

- In 2 Samuel, we read how David purchased the threshingfloor of Ornan. After plague had swept the country for three days and thousands had died, David approached Ornan and said, "I want to buy this spot to build a place of sacrifice to Jehovah."
- Ornan offered to give it to David, but David replied, "I will not give to the Lord of that which costs me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24) and he paid full price.

- It was at the threshingfloor, where Gideon hid from the Midianites, that God commissioned him for service (Judges 6).
- Jesus used the analogy of the threshingfloor when He told Peter that Satan sought to sift him like wheat on the eve of His betrayal (Luke 22:31).

The threshingfloor speaks of sacrifice. Have you come to the place where you are not simply in the field gleaning *for* yourself, but at the threshingfloor giving *of* yourself? See the place where He lay. Go to the tomb and see what Christ has done for you.

"I beseech you therefore brethren," wrote Paul, "by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto Him, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). When we see the place where He lay, it becomes very reasonable to go to the threshingfloor and offer ourselves to Him—just as Ruth did.

Perhaps you're in a "threshingfloor" season, where you feel up in the air, separated, and blown away. Whenever you come to a time like this, you have the opportunity to be great. It's an opportunity that comes your way only very infrequently—to do something for the Lord, to give yourself to Him, to say, "Lord, do what You want to do; be glorified in this; and have Your way this day."

Ruth 3:7
And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.

Ruth laid at the *feet* of Boaz. Look at the feet of our Greater than Boaz. John's Gospel declares it was when John the Baptist saw Jesus *walking* that he said, "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1:36).

Look at the feet of Jesus. He is the Lord of the calm as He walks along the seashore. He is the Lord of the storm as He walks upon the water. Look at His feet—feet that were pierced, feet that not only walked in the temple, but walked up Mount Calvary.

Sculptor Thors Walden chiseled a glorious statue of Jesus Christ. Due to the position of His body, however, it is impossible to see His face. A sign next to the statue says this: If you desire to see His face, you must first sit at His feet. And as you sit at the feet of that sculpture and look up, it is then and only then that you see His face.

Eve sought to be at Adam's head, and she fell. Ruth sought to be at Boaz's feet, and she's about to be redeemed.

Ruth 3:8
And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet.

There is nothing immodest or immoral about this. By her actions, Ruth was declaring to Boaz that she desired him to be a spiritual covering for her.

Ruth 3:9
And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.

"You are a near kinsman," said Ruth—"my redeemer, my goel, my only hope. Please cover me."

Here's the question, gang: Would Boaz do it? Would this wealthy, strong individual stretch his robe to cover a Moabitish woman, a new kid on the block, one who had no credibility, no credentials, nothing to offer him? What would he do? Would he be a *goel?* Would his garment stretch that far?

That's the question many of us wrestle with right now. "I'm bankrupt," we say, "I'm Moabitish in my nature. Would the Lord spread His covering over *me?*"

Understand this, dear friend: Redeemer is a word that indicates a *continual* work of redemption. When the Lord says, "I'm a Redeemer," it means He's continually redeeming—not only in relation to your salvation ten years ago. He remains continually and constantly willing to cloak you, to redeem you, to claim you no matter where you've been, no matter how far Moab has drawn you.

Ruth 3:10

And he said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich.

"You have showed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning." This is what our Greater than Boaz says to you.

"When you came into My field, that was a blessing. When you showed up at church, when you had morning devotions, when you came into the field to glean the wheat of My Word—you blessed Me. I know you could have gone water skiing. I know you could have stayed home. I know you could have slept in—but you came into My field and you blessed Me.

And now you're blessing Me even more by wanting Me to cover you, to redeem you, to rescue you. It's not an obligation *to* Me—it's an elation *for* Me. You could have sought some young man, some new fad, some exciting trip—but you sought Me, the Ancient of Days. You put aside other alluring pursuits and you sought Me to cover you. You've blessed Me."

Boaz had strength and wealth, pedigree and prosperity. He had everything—except one upon which to pour out his love.

Jesus Christ is the Creator of all things. He, too, has it all. But what He desires is a Bride. And guess what we are! Anyone who will fall before His nail-pierced feet and say, "Cover me"—He will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).

Ruth 3:11

And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.

Ruth knew she was a Gentile, and a stranger. Boaz, however, saw her as a virtuous woman. One translator renders his statement, "Thou art a bride worth winning."

This is honestly the Lord's heart toward us. We think He's stuck with us, when in actuality He's in love with us because He sees us as a bride worth

winning.

Ruth 3:12, 13
And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I. Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the LORD liveth: lie down until the morning.

It is true that Jesus is my Kinsman, my near Kinsman—that He, God Himself, became flesh, became like me, and was tempted in all points like I am. Hebrews 2 teaches the incredible concept of the Incarnation—how Jesus is a High Priest who relates to you and me because He became just like us.

But there's a problem. There's a *nearer* kinsman—one who came before the Incarnation of Jesus, one who has prior claim to us.

Who is this?

Watch and see . . .

Ruth 3:14 (a)
And she lay at his feet until the morning: and she rose up before one could know another . . .

Ruth was at Boaz's feet, then rose up before the break of day. The best place for us to be is at the feet of the Lord before we rise up to start our day.

Ruth 3:14 (b), 15
. . . And he said, Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor. Also he said, Bring the vail that thou hast upon thee, and hold it. And when she held it, he measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her: and she went into the city.

Why did Boaz give Ruth *six* measures of barley?

I suggest it was because God worked six days in creation. He didn't rest until the seventh day—when His work was complete. Boaz is sending a

message through Ruth to Naomi, saying: “I’m going to work and not rest until my work is complete—until she’s my wife.”

It was a tricky message which passed right over the head of Ruth, a young convert. But Naomi understood, as evidenced by her response in verse 18.

Ruth 3:16
And when she came to her mother in law, she said, Who art thou, my daughter? And she told her all that the man had done to her.

“Who art thou?” doesn’t mean, “Who are you?”—but, “Who are you becoming?” In other words, “How did it go?”

Ruth 3:17, 18
And she said, These six measures of barley gave he me; for he said to me, Go not empty unto thy mother in law. Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.

“The man will not rest.”
Naomi understood Boaz’s message.
“Sit still, Ruth. Rest, and watch, and see what he’ll do.”



4

Ruth 4:1 (a)
Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there . . .

The next day, Boaz went to the city gate, where business transactions took place. No doubt amazed that Ruth would see him as her kinsman redeemer, he was eager to complete the process of redemption.

Ruth 4:1 (b)

. . . and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down.

This was the nearer kinsman of whom Boaz spoke in chapter 3. Who was he? Read on!

Ruth 4:2–4
And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down. And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's: And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my peo ple. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it.

The *ten* elders of the city are an illustration of who our nearer kinsman is. It's the Law. The Law came first. Before Jesus came to earth to redeem us, the Law was already in place. With its do's and don'ts it was an unmerciful nearer kinsman which laid claim to you and me.

Ruth 4:5
Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.

According to Deuteronomy 25, the *goel*—the nearer kinsman—not only had the right to redeem the property, but an obligation to take care of the family. If the nearer kinsman refused to meet his responsibility to the family—in this case, if he refused to marry Ruth—the Law said he was to be spat upon. Then his shoe was to be removed from his foot, signifying that he was walking away from his responsibility—that he was a "heel," that he had no "sole."

Ruth 4:6
And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it.

"I already have a family," said the nearer kinsman. "I cannot take on the responsibility of another one. I cannot redeem."

Although we initially think the Law can save us through our good works, we realize in the end that it cannot redeem. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul writes that the strength of sin is in the Law. The more you read the Law, study the Law, and know the Law—the more you realize that the Law is not your redeemer. It's your condemner. The Law points out your weaknesses, your failings, and your flaws.

It is only when you stop trying to earn your salvation and merit brownie points with God in your Christian walk that you are free. Once you realize your rules and regulations—joining the right clubs, working on the right committees, and being nice to your dog and cat—will not redeem you, you look to your Greater than Boaz. You look to Jesus Christ. You see, it's not what we're doing that counts—it's what *He* has done that matters.

Ruth 4:7, 8
Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel. Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe.

Biblically, the shoe always refers to possession.

In Joshua 1:3, the Lord said to Joshua, "Wherever you put the soles of your foot, *that shall be your inheritance."*

When the Israelites came to the Jordan River, it was when the priests put the soles of their feet *into the water that it parted (Joshua 3:13).*

Now, think with me: The true Kinsman Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who came to redeem the nation Israel, had His heel bared as He was nailed to a Cross, and received spittle in His face when the nation rejected Him. Thus, although they didn't know it consciously, Scripturally what Israel said was, "You will not be our *goel.* We spit in Your face. We take off Your shoe. We will not have You rule over us."

Today, if you have not acknowledged Jesus as your Redeemer, you, too, have taken off His shoe. You have spat in the face of the One who died for you and wants to live inside you. Your rejection of Him is the greatest insult that could ever take place. It's called the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, and it is the one sin which is eternally unforgivable (Matthew 12:31).

Ruth 4:9, 10
And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day.

Boaz stepped up and said, "Since the nearer kinsman cannot redeem, I will!" And that is exactly what our Greater than Boaz says concerning us.

- Jesus alone has the *right to redemption.* Rules and regulations do not, will not, and cannot.
- Jesus alone has the *resource for redemption.* He purchased us with the richness of the blood that flowed through His veins and onto the ground at Calvary.
- Jesus alone has a *reason for redemption.* It is His grace, his undeserved, unmerited, unearned favor which brings us into His family.

Finally, Jesus alone gives us *rest in redemption.* Like Boaz, He says, "Glean not in another man's field. Stay in the field of My redemption and you

will find the ultimate satisfaction."

Ruth 4:11 (a)
And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses . . .

Acts 10:39–43 says that the Law and the prophets are a witness *of* Him. And we are witnesses *for* Him as the Holy Spirit enables us.

Ruth 4:11 (b), 12
. . . The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem: And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.

Ephratah is an old name for Bethlehem. No longer is Ruth a stranger. Never again is she called a Moabitess because now she has been absorbed in the covering of Boaz, her kinsman redeemer.

Ruth 4:13–16
So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son. And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.

You left full, Naomi. You came back empty. And now God is blessing you once again. The women told Naomi that Ruth was better than seven sons, seven being the number of perfection. Their words were prophetic indeed for

out of Ruth's line would come forth not only King David, but the Perfect One —Jesus Christ.

Naomi, this prodigal daughter of the Old Testament, came back to Bethlehem, where God rebuilt, rebirthed, restored, and renewed her.

And that's what He'll do with us—if we'll just come back to Him.

Ruth 4:17–22

And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David. Now these are the generations of Pharez: Pharez begat Hezron, And Hezron begat Ram, and Ram begat Amminadab, And Amminadab begat Nahshon, and Nahshon begat Salmon, And Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed, And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David.

According to Deuteronomy 23:2, 3, no descendant of an illegitimate child could enter the tabernacle until ten generations had passed. Judah's son, Pharaz, was illegitimite—the result of Judah's union with Tamar (Genesis 38). That is why we see ten generations between Pharez and David—ten generations between the illegitimate son and the rightful king.

Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz now fade from the scene. David will take center stage as he points to the Son of David, our Greater than Boaz—Jesus Christ.



***For topical study of Ruth 1—4 entitled "A Prophetic Overview of Ruth," turn to page* 818.**

NOTHING JUST HAPPENS

A Topical Study of RUTH 2:1–5

Three tenacious women tied together by the common thread of suffering and sorrow, pain and death. A gracious man named Boaz—a man of incredible wealth and sterling character. This book does more to explain God's grand plan for the nation Israel and the church and how they come together in the end times.

Something is taking place in chapter 2 that appeared to be circumstantial, accidental, coincidental. That is, we read that Ruth's hap was to light on a part of the field that belonged to Boaz. It "just so happened" that she made her way to the part of the field that Boaz was gleaning in that day. "It just so happened," I suggest that was written with a twinkle in the eye and a smile on the face because nothing just happens. It was all part of a grand plan, all part of a Divine Design.

"I went out full . . ." That strikes me. I went out full? When she left ten years earlier, she thought she was empty then. We don't have enough food. We don't have enough money. We've got to do something. So they went to Moab. But now, looking back, ten years later, she says I was full. Oh, I might not have had money or bread physically. But I had my husband and I had my two sons. I had family. Even though I thought I was poor, I realize I was rich. Listen—the thing you are anxious about today, worried about—the financial pressure, the rejection by that person you cared for, the job situation, the retirement plan—whatever it might be that has caused you to feel anxious and worried, and as though you don't have much is nothing in comparison to what you have with you tonight—that wife or husband sitting next to you, those kids with you, being able to share with brothers and sisters in the congregation, your health. Whatever you're anxious or worried about—making the team, paying the mortgage—is nothing in comparison to what you have. You are full right now even though you might not think so. You never know what you have until you lose it. And when you lose it, like Naomi, you say, "What was I thinking? I was full in the time of famine because I had my husband, my family. Now I realize I went out full and tried to make stuff

happen financially, physically, and I come back empty. I realize what I had, even though I didn't realize it when I had it."

Count your blessings, folks. Realize that whatever anxieties or worry you might have pales in comparison to the blessings you've already been given, which you're surrounded with even today. Naomi realized this ten years too late.

Even though Naomi was late in realizing this, she made her way back to Bethlehem, back to where she belonged. Satan will whisper in your ear, "It's too late for you. It's been ten years. Your time to be involved in serving the Lord or your time to draw close to the Lord or your time to receive blessing has passed. You've been in Moab too long." Naomi didn't buy into this lie. She said. "This is it. Time to quit. Gonna split. Moab don't fit. I'm going back to where I belong." And as we'll see, it wasn't too late at all. It's never too late.

Your people shall be my people: Ruth and Naomi, the Moabitess and the Jew didn't have a lot in common. But they did share a common thread—the common thread of suffering. The Bible talks about the fellowship of suffering. Both women had lost their husbands, both had gone through pain and heartache. It's true. The people you're closest to are not the ones you laugh with but the ones you cry with because of the fellowship of suffering. Nothing just happens. All of these things are being put into play to cause God's story to unfold perfectly.

Nothing just happens. God is in control of every step you take, every move you make. His plan is being unfolded. No matter where you are, what you've done, God is in control. He's sovereign. He's a Father who cares about you. What if you're in rebellion? Naomi and Elimelech were in rebellion, but God used their story as an illustration of His Son, Israel, and the church. Even Jonah. God said, Go to Nineveh. No way, he said. But God has His way. Jonah was in the belly of a great fish for three days before he was barfed up on the beach. And Jesus would say "Even as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, even so the Son of Man will be in the center of the earth for three days and three nights. Jonah is a picture of Me—that I might receive glory. Just as Jonah disappeared and reappeared, so, too, will I."

You might be going through a whale of a problem, you might have all kinds of storms swirling about, you might be going in the opposite direction of where God wants you—but God can use even that. Think of your greatest joy—when she said, "yes!" When the doctor said, "It's a boy." When the boss said, "Here's your bonus."—those things didn't just happen. God brought them about. Every good and perfect gift comes from above. God has given you every thing that you enjoy. Think of your worst times—your greatest miseries, your heartache, your heartbreak didn't just happen either. Psalm 139 declares, "If I'm in hell, You're there, too. You're always with me." Nothing just happens. If it's a wonderful experience or a difficult time, a season of sadness or even rebellion, God is on the throne. God is in control.

Therefore, whatever comes my way—good or bad—I can be happy because I know ultimately all things work together for good—not some things, not lots of things, not the majority of things but ALL things work together for good. God is doing something. A story is being written. Bethelehem is unfolding.

A PROPHETIC OVERVIEW OF RUTH

A Topical Study of RUTH 1—4

In the historic Hebrew Bible, this book is placed with the prophets because, as we shall see, it really is a book that deals with prophecy. In Hebrew tradition historically and presently, the Book of Ruth is read during the Feast or the Celebration of Pentecost. Pentecost was that annual celebration that took place fifty days after the Passover. It was celebrating the harvesting of the wheat which was so crucial to the Israelite economy. So the wheat would be harvested and there would be a celebration as it would be offered up in thanksgiving to the Lord. It was not only celebrating, but comemorating an event that took place historically.

That is, it commemorated the giving of the Law. The rabbis and scholars came to the conclusion that the giving of the Law—when God spoke audibly on Mt. Sinai and gave Moses the two tables of stone—was during this time. It celebrated the wheat harvest, and commemorated the giving of the Law. Both of these are aspects of the feast of Pentecost.

Why would Ruth be read during Pentecost?

First, the wheat harvest is mentioned (2:23). The barley harvest was during Passover, the wheat harvest during Pentecost. Passover was in the springtime, Pentecost was fifty days later, in early summer.

But an even more important reason is due to what took place in the church on the Day of Pentecost, as seen in Acts 2. Fifty days after Jesus had died and risen from the dead. The disciples were in the Upper Room, numbering one hundred and twenty, praying, wondering what would happen next. They had been told to go to that place and wait for the promise of the Father. Jesus said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Ghost comes upon you." And there on the very day of Pentecost, as the disciples were in the Upper Room—waiting on the Lord, talking to the Lord, there was sent from the Lord an anointing and empowering of the Holy Spirit. A rushing mighty wind blew through the room and there were tongues of fire on each of the disciples' heads and they began to speak with other tongues and on that

day, Pentecost, was the birthday of the church. The Holy Spirit was given to them. And the church was born.

It's interesting because Pentecost is the birthday of the church on one hand, but also the birthday of Judaism because it was on that same day 2,000 years earlier when the Law was given. So Judaism and Christianity have the same birthday—the day of Pentecost. This explains why they would take two loaves of wheat bread in OT times and wave them before the Lord, celebrating the harvest, it's true. But there's something unusual about those loaves of bread that was exclusive to that particular day. Those loaves were made with leaven. Leaven is a picture of sin. So when you ask the Jews today what do those two loaves stand for, they will say—We're celebrating the giving of the Law, and the Law was given on two tablets. So the waving of the two loaves speak of the Law being given, which sustains and nourishes our soul like bread sustains and nourishes the body. The problem with that is, leaven is in those loaves—the only time leaven is allowed in any offering to the Lord. Is the Law leavened? Does the Law have sin? No, the Law is perfect. Therefore, it's not primarily speaking of the Law, but something pictured here in the Book of Ruth. That is, the church.

Why two loaves? Jew and Gentile—sinners, both—coming together into a new entity called the church. No longer am I a Gentile. Now I'm in a new entity—the church. You see, in OT times, the world was divided into two groups: Jews and Gentiles. But something happened on the Day of Pentecost. Those two groups became one—a new entity called the church. Does the church have sin? If you've been around church very much, you know it's true. We're righteous positionally, but we're all dealing with leaven practically. And that's what's going on. Jew and Gentile walk together—just like those two loaves would be held together by the priest who would wave them before the Lord, two coming together.

But on the birthday of Judaism something happened. On the day the Law was given, when Moses comes down, what happened? The people were already sinning, dancing around the golden calf—which led to punishment and 3,000 were killed that day. On the birthday of the church, 3,000 were not killed, but saved because, as Paul would say, the Law kills, but the Spirit gives life.

So we see Jew and Gentile coming together into a third entity, called the church—comprised of former Jews and former Gentiles. We are now Christians. And that's what this book talks about. We have a Jew and a Gentile being brought together in this prophetic portrait. They come together and something marvelous happens.

Boaz is a portrait of Jesus Christ. The lord of the harvest, the owner of the field, a wealthy man, a gracious man, a good man, a generous man. His name literally means Standing in Strength.

Ruth is a picture of the church because she was a Moabite. In Deuteronomy 23, a Moabite was cursed for ten generations. In other words, the Law would shut you out. You moved in from Moab, and the Law would say, "Sorry. Even though you've come to Israel, even though you've left Moab, in your lifetime, you're never going to make it into the house of God." Ten generations is a long time. The Law shut the Moabite out. And the Law shut us out, too. There's no way we can go in to the house of the Lord, stand in the presence of God if it's by the Law. But what the Law shuts out, grace finds a way. And that's what blew Ruth's mind and warmed her heart. She said, "How could it be that I a Moabite (2:10) would find grace in thine eyes?" She can't believe Boaz would be so kind to her. But what the Law shuts out, grace finds a way.

Ruth was washed, anointed, and clothed with new raiment just like we have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, anointed by the Holy Spirit, and robed in His righteousness. She's washed. She's anointed. She's robed. She's amazed.

Notice that she finds herself at the feet of her goel, her groom at the threshingfloor. The threshingfloor in OT Scriptures is a picture of the time prophetically when the world will go through a threshing. It's called the Tribulation. It will be brutal. It will be a time of separation—the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25), the wheat from the chaff, when a Christ-rejecting sinful world will be dealt with. Now people have closed ears and hard hearts. But in that day, there will be a great awakening and there will be the greatest revival in world history during the seven-year Tribulation (Revelation 6—19). When the world is being tossed up and the winds of difficulty are blowing about, the harvest has already been brought in. We are the harvest. We are Ruth. And where is Ruth? She's at his feet. Where will

we be when the world is being threshed? We will be at Jesus' feet—just like Ruth. In the place of intimacy, safety, security.

Boaz spotted her before she spotted him. Boaz was interested in her. Boaz cared about her. Boaz wanted to be a blessing to her. But—it was up to her. Boaz didn't force himself. He waited to see if she would respond to the goodness he was showing her, but he left it up to her to make the first move. He didn't force her into a relationship.

Thirdly, we see the servant. When Boaz is in his field. The unnamed servant is the one who identifies the bride-to-be. It's the unnamed servant who's involved in the linking of the bride, Ruth, with the bridegroom, Boaz. The unnamed servant, of course, is an illustration of the Holy Spirit. Why is he unnamed? Because in John 16, Jesus said concerning the Spirit, that when He comes, he will not speak of Himself, but will speak all things concerning Me.

Boaz wanted to be a goel for Ruth, but there was a nearer relative that had first dibs. The nearer kinsman was offered Naomi's property. Great! Said the kinsman. But if you choose to exercise the option, you need to take Ruth as well. With her you need to have a child that will not count as yours. Oh, no, this will mess up my inheritance for my own kids. The nearer kinsman represents the Law. The Law is indeed interested in property and principles and procedures, but not in people. The nearer kinsman is a picture of the Law. While the nearer kinsman wasn't interested in Ruth, Ruth is exactly who Boaz was interested in. He had enough property. He wanted people. Not so the Law. The Law can't deal with you and me. It's perfect. We're not. We mar its inheritance. Which came first, the Law or the coming of Jesus Christ? The Law came first.

Naomi is a picture of Israel. First, it was necessary for her to be in exile until the bride, Ruth, was ready to be brought into union with the bridegroom. Israel was in exile from A.D. 70, when the temple was destroyed until a miracle took place in May, 1948, when Israel became a nation. That's why when Israel became a nation, the stage was set for the return of Christ. In Matthew 24, Jesus said the generation that sees the fig tree blossom—always a picture of Israel in Scripture—will not pass away. In Romans 11, Paul says Let their eyes be darkened, through their fall, salvation is come unto the Gentile. The Jewish people were cut off, or sent away, but God has a plan.

They're going to be brought back in. Israel is in exile, out of her homeland until the bride is ready—just like Naomi. She was from Israel—out in Moab until Ruth was ready to be brought in to meet the Bridegroom during the threshing season. God is at work with the Gentiles. He was primarily working through the Jew, but the Jews rejected His Son. Consequently, they would be exiled while the Bride—you and me, the Gentiles—were brought in. But once Naomi goes back home, the marriage feast of Boaz and Ruth is at hand.

While she was exiled, Naomi changed her name from Pleasant to Bitter. When Israel was in her land, was enjoying the blessings of the Lord, it was pleasant. In fact, Israel is called just that—the pleasant land. But when she was kicked out, driven away, there was bitterness. The Jewish people were hunted, haunted, and hounded everywhere they went. Persecution and execution followed them.

While Naomi was gone, the land was being destroyed. While the Jewish people were gone from A.D. 70 until 1948, the land was destroyed.

Boaz and Naomi never meet until the marriage feast. When will Israel meet Jesus? When the church is raptured. It is at that time that the veil will be lifted. Her eyes will be opened. There are a remnant now who are part of the kingdom. But the majority don't get it because Paul says there is a veil over their eyes. But when the marriage happens, guess who's going to meet Boaz —Naomi. Naomi learns of Boaz' whereabouts through Ruth. She knows there is a man named Boaz, but she doesn't know if he's dead or alive until Ruth comes home and says, Guess who I met. Israel does not know if Messiah is dead or alive. The only way she'll hear about her Messiah is through the church.

Israel learns of the whereabouts of Boaz through the church, but equally true is that Ruth learns the ways of Boaz through Naomi. That's why this book is such a key. It's a Jew and a Gentile walking together. Together something happens. Ruth and Boaz have a baby named *Obed,* which means "Worshiped one." And guess what happens to this worshiped one. The baby is then given to Naomi. We, the Bride of Christ, have been impregnated by the Spirit and the Lord is birthed in and through us. Then, as we are caught up and taken away, the baby is handed to Naomi. When you share with Jewish people, when you're on your honeymoon, the baby will be nursed and

nurtured by Naomi. Ruth does not take the place of Naomi. Naomi is not displaced by Ruth. Rather, Ruth creates a family for Naomi. Gentile and Jew, dependent on each other, gleaning from each other, gaining because of each other. And the two travel together in this glorious story. God doesn't give up on His people. Ever.



1 SAMUEL

Background to 1 & 2 Samuel

Approximately 1,100 years before Christ, the books before us were written. Their title notwithstanding, the identity of their human author is uncertain, for Samuel dies six chapters before the end of 1 Samuel. While the identity of this author remains a mystery, it is clear that the true Author not only of 2 Samuel, but also of the entire Bible, is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit Himself inspired these books, and you'll be inspired as well by the lessons within—lessons gleaned from the lives of Samuel and David, Jonathan and Saul.

Samuel was a transitional figure in that he was the last of the judges. However, although the Philistines were plaguing the land and the people of Israel, Samuel didn't deliver the people of God physically, as the other judges were wont to do. Instead, he delivered them spiritually. He didn't lead armies, but he was a spiritual deliverer. He was a godly man who ministered to the people in the difficult days of transition between the time of the judges and the rule of kings.



1 SAMUEL

1 Samuel 1:1, 2 (a)
Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite: And he had two wives . . .

When reading verses like this, some people mistakenly think that the Bible condones polygamy. Polygamy is not condoned by the Bible, but simply reported as what was taking place. When a newspaper reports a crime, it is not condoning it, but simply reporting the story. It is true that the Law of God contains regulations concerning a man having more than one wife. This, however, is not an indication of God's approval. Rather, God is simply regulating an always-difficult situation. As you go through the Word, you see the practice of polygamy increasingly prohibited. Without exception, wherever you see polygamy in Scripture, it always results in problems.

1 Samuel 1:2 (b)
. . . the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

Hannah means "Favored." *Peninnah* means "Ruby." Yet, although she's stone cold and rock hard, as we shall see, Peninnah is no gem.

1 Samuel 1:3 (a)
And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh . . .

Shiloh was the worship center of Israel—where the tabernacle was pitched and where sacrifices were offered. I like the fact that both the words "worship" and "sacrifice" are used because worship and sacrifice truly walk hand in hand. "Let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God," the

writer to Hebrews declares (13:15). Worship is often just that—a sacrifice of one's time, finances, or energy.

1 Samuel 1:3 (b)–5 (a)
. . . And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there. And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah . . .

The person offering a peace offering was not only to offer it to the Lord but would eat of it himself (Leviticus 7:11–36). The fact that Elkanah gave Hannah a "worthy" or double portion spoke of his heart for her.

1 Samuel 1:5 (b)
. . . but the LORD had shut up her womb.

God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:22). Therefore, the rabbis considered barrenness to be a curse from God—an indication of sin or something wrong spiritually in one's life. As a result, Hannah's barren condition would have weighed on her greatly.

1 Samuel 1:6
And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb.

Peninnah had sons and daughters, Hannah had none. Here, we see Peninnah badgering Hannah over this fact.

1 Samuel 1:7
And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat.

Like Hannah, we have an Adversary who often seems to provoke us on our way to the house of the Lord. Don't be surprised that Satan will do

whatever he can to keep you from coming to church. Hannah was about to be greatly blessed. And so will be the believer who makes coming to the house of the Lord a priority. The fact that Satan continually tries to keep us from fellowship with other believers means something grand and glorious must be waiting there for us.

1 Samuel 1:8
Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?

Elkanah must surely have known the reason for Hannah's tears. That must be why she didn't answer him.

1 Samuel 1:9, 10
So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.

Although Elkanah knows what the problem is, he can't solve it. Only God could. The same is true for us. So often, we look to our spouse to solve the problem of the depression in our heart, the discouragement in our mind, the barrenness in our soul. And while they may lend a listening ear or give helpful advice, God alone can solve the problem—most often in ways we could never imagine.

1 Samuel 1:11
And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no rasor come upon his head.

"Lord, if You give me a son," Hannah prays, "he'll be Yours." No doubt Hannah had prayed countless times about her situation. But now her prayer

would be answered. This doesn't mean God didn't hear her before, for every time she prayed she was heard (Psalm 34:17, 69:33; Proverbs 15:29; Jeremiah 33:3; John 9:31).

God can say, "Yes" to our requests. He can say, "No." Or He can say, "Wait." If He says, "No," that's just as much an answer as if He said, "Yes." If He says, "Wait," that's okay because that is exactly what was happening to Hannah. Here, she prayed "Lord give me a son, and I'll give him to You." And that's what God was waiting for. Previously, she wanted a son to give to her husband. God, however, wanted a prophet to give to a nation. God had something much bigger and bolder, greater and grander in mind than Hannah did.

If you've prayed about your barren condition, if you're weeping bitterly, that is okay. It might be that God is simply waiting to get you into harmony with His heart, which means He wants to do something larger than your prayer. This is really encouraging to me because I've discovered that my "unanswered' prayers grow larger for those people or situations I'm forced to bring before the Lord over a long period of time. And I'm reminded once again that prayer is not about getting God to do *my* will, but about getting me in line with what *He* wants to do in and through me.

1 Samuel 1:12–16
And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee. And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.

As he watched her pray, Eli thought Hannah must have been drinking. The same thing happened centuries later when, on the Day of Pentecost, the disciples were thought to be drunk because they spoke in other tongues after

the Spirit came upon them (Acts 2). Notice that Hannah was immediately able to explain what she was doing. So was Peter on the Day of Pentecost. If you're in a place where the Spirit is at work, be wary of people who say, "We can't explain what's going on. We're just all caught up in this ecstatic experience." As seen in both Hannah's and Peter's situations, where the Spirit of the Lord is, all things are done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40).

1 Samuel 1:17, 18
Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him. And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.

When Hannah was told her prayer was answered, although she had no tangible evidence of this, she chose to believe. Are you discouraged or depressed? The cure lies not in seeing your situation change, but in hearing the Word and choosing to believe it. What has God whispered in your ear? Hang on to it. Believe it. Don't despair. Live a life of rejoicing, for in so doing, you will prevent Satan from aborting that which God wants to conceive in you and birth through you.

1 Samuel 1:19, 20
And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her. Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD.

Samuel means "Asked of God." In naming her baby, Hannah remembered that his delivery was in response to her prayer made nine months earlier. I'm convinced the biggest problem in our prayer lives is forgetting what we prayed for. When the answer to our prayer comes nine days, months, or years after we asked, we say, "Wonderful!" but forget it is in answer to what we were praying for previously.

Forgetting what I prayed for previously causes me to think God is not responding to my prayers presently. For example, in a moment of honesty before the Lord, I pray, "Lord, there are things in me that need to be changed. Make me a man who is broken before You and totally dependent on You. Lord, change me." And He begins that process. But then, three weeks later, I pray, "Lord, I need a raise desperately." But the raise doesn't come. Why? Because God is still answering my prayer that I be dependent on Him. Since we don't remember what we pray for, we often end up offering contradictory prayers.

When I look back over my journals, inevitably I hear myself saying, "No wonder I'm going through this now. I prayed for it way back then." Forgetting what we pray for is a problem most of us have that keeps us from being men and women of prayer. Such was not the case with Hannah.

1 Samuel 1:21–24

And the man Elkanah, and all his house, went up to offer unto the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and his vow. But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide for ever. And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the LORD establish his word. So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him. And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh: and the child was young.

Samuel is believed to be about three years old here. I like what Hannah packed when she took him to the tabernacle, for meat speaks of the strong meat of the Word (Hebrews 5:12–14), and flour and wine speak of the bread and wine of Communion.

1 Samuel 1:25–27

And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the LORD. For this child I

prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him:

"Remember me, Eli?" Hannah said. "I'm the lady who was praying for a child. And here he is!" A number of times over the years, I've prayed for couples that want to have a child. And nothing could be better than being given the opportunity to dedicate the child the Lord gives them.

1 Samuel 1:28 (a)
Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD . . .

The Hebrew word translated "lent" literally means "returned." Hannah vowed she would give her child to the Lord—and here she honors her vow.

1 Samuel 1:28 (b)
. . . And he worshipped the LORD there.

In the presentation of little Samuel to the Lord, we see the model for baby dedication. Although it's not commanded specifically in the Word, we see Jesus Himself brought to the temple to be dedicated (Luke 2). Does a parent have to do this? No. But God will take any territory we give Him. And if you present your child, the house you're building, or the relationship you're in to the Lord, He'll surely use it for His glory.



2 In chapter 1, we heard the prayer of a barren woman. Here in chapter 2, we hear the praise of a blessed woman . . .

1 Samuel 2:1 (a)
And Hannah prayed . . .

Hannah's prayer is interesting because it's remarkably similar to the Magnificat in Luke 1—the prayer Mary offered after learning she would bear

a Son. This means Mary was familiar with the prayer of Hannah, that she was a student of the Word. Although only a teenage girl, Mary would have heard the Word in the synagogue and evidently she absorbed and embraced it, treasured and memorized it.

The language of Hannah's prayer is heavenly—but don't miss the earthy accent in the not-so-subtle references to her rival, Peninnah. Sometimes our prayers are so lofty that they hide our true emotions. To such prayers, I believe the Lord would say, "Tell Me what you're really feeling. I can handle it. After all, I already know all about it" (Hebrews 4:13).

1 Samuel 2:1 (b)
. . . and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies . . .

"Mine horn is exalted," or "I'm lifted up," Hannah prayed. "My mouth is enlarged, for now I have something to say. I don't have to bite my tongue any longer."

1 Samuel 2:1 (c)–4
. . . because I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength.

"Let not arrogancy come out of your mouth." Here, we hear an earthy accent because to whom is Hannah referring? Peninnah.

1 Samuel 2:5
They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble.

Hannah had borne one child at this point. As we'll see, she'll have five more.

1 Samuel 2:6, 7
The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up.

The Lord makes things right; He brings things about in an equitable way.

1 Samuel 2:8
He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and he hath set the world upon them.

The Lord is in control. He's the One who holds everything together, the One who works everything out.

1 Samuel 2:9 (a)
He will keep the feet of his saints . . .

The Lord will walk with His saints. He'll see them through. He'll keep their steps from slipping.

1 Samuel 2:9 (b), 10
. . . and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.

Thus ends the prayer of Hannah—full of lofty praise and exaltation, but revealing the humanness of her soul as well. Hannah's prayer encourages me. The fact that God includes it in His Word gives me great freedom to be honest and open before Him.

1 Samuel 2:11
And Elkanah went to Ramah to his house. And the child did minister unto the LORD before Eli the priest.

Just as she promised, Hannah brought Samuel to the temple and left him there to be trained for ministry. And as a young boy, he's left there to be trained up in the ministry and to minister to the Lord personally from a young age.

1 Samuel 2:12
Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD.

In other words, Eli's sons were worthless and wicked.

1 Samuel 2:13, 14
And the priests' custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand; And he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the flesh hook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither.

According to Old Testament Law, with the exception of burnt offerings, priests would be allowed portions of the sacrifices after they were offered to the Lord. Hophni and Phinehas, however, didn't wait for the Lord. They took their portion *before* it was offered to the Lord.

1 Samuel 2:15, 16
Also before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force.

In Leviticus 3 through 9, God declared that the fat of the sacrifice was to be completely burned on the altar, signifying the offering of it to Him. In Old Testament times, the fat was considered to be the best part of the meat. Therefore, God could have been accused of keeping the best part for Himself. We now know that the fat is actually the worst part of the meat. Therefore, God was protecting His people from that which would have harmed them.

That's always the way it is with God. We say, "Why can't I have that? Why can't I go there? Why can't I do that? God must be keeping something good from me."

But the Lord would say, "I'm not going to explain what I'm doing because I want you to trust Me. But as time goes on, you'll see that the things, people, or places I withheld from you would have been harmful to you."

1 Samuel 2:17
Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.

What a sad situation. Some ministers have a wealth of thought; others have only thoughts of wealth. Eli's sons were of the latter type.

1 Samuel 2:18
But Samuel ministered before the LORD, being a child, girded with a linen ephod.

Even though he was young, Samuel didn't let Eli and his sons discourage, distract, or deter him from what he knew he should do. Samuel would become the greatest of all judges because he ministered to the Lord even though others were messing up. The way to greatness is simply to say, "Regardless of what others do, I'm going to do what I know is pleasing to You, Lord."

1 Samuel 2:19
Moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

Once a year, Hannah would bring Samuel a new garment because he would grow over a year's time and need new clothes.

1 Samuel 2:20, 21
And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The LORD give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the LORD. And they went unto their own home. And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD.

Hannah gave one child to the Lord and received five in return. It's a great illustration of the glorious fact that you can't out give God. Many believers never really understand God's math. They don't understand His ways or His economy. They go through a lifetime never understanding that they can't out give God. Give God what is His, and you'll get back much more than you could ever imagine. Ask Hannah.

1 Samuel 2:22
Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

"Laying with women" obviously speaks of immorality, fornication, and adultery. There are two schools of thought on this. It may be that Hophni and Phinehas forced themselves upon the women who came to worship the Lord. Or it could mean that they put together a troop—as the original language suggests—of temple prostitutes, as did the pagans of the region. They're introducing to the people of Israel temple prostitution. Either way, it's a deplorable situation that came to Eli's attention.

1 Samuel 2:23–25 (a)
And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the LORD's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him?

"If you sin against a man, you go to court. But if you sin against God, you have no defense," Eli said.

1 Samuel 2:25 (b)
. . . Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them.

The Lord already intended that it was time for Eli's sons to be taken out of the ministry permanently. Hophni and Phinehas were destined to die. They had crossed the line. They had gone too far.

1 Samuel 2:26
And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the LORD, and also with men.

Hophni and Phinehas were bad guys who would die prematurely. Samuel, on the other hand, kept growing in God. And what happened? He not only found favor in the eyes of the Lord, but also in the eyes of men. Our kids sometimes have the mistaken idea that if they stand for the Lord and walk with Him, they'll be put down or left out. Not true. Yes, there will be a certain degree of persecution in the Christian walk, but notice what happened to Samuel. He found favor in the eyes of God and of men, too.

Blessed is the man who doesn't walk with the ungodly and sit in the seat of the scornful, but whose delight is in the Law of the Lord. Whatever he does will prosper (Psalm 1). As parents, we need to remind our kids that the real key to having a prosperous, exciting life, the key to finding favor in the eyes of both God and men is to do what Samuel did. He walked with the Lord, and God blessed him indeed.

1 Samuel 2:27
And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house?

The reference, of course, is to Aaron, the first high priest.

1 Samuel 2:28–30

And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have com manded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

Here, through a prophet, God says to Eli, "You and your family have a heritage reaching all the way back to Aaron in the days of the Exodus. You were given the privilege to walk with Me and stand before Me day after day. But you despised it by allowing your sons to sin. You honored your sons above Me. You cared more about them liking you than about what I thought of the situation."

Mom and Dad, take note. If your primary goal as a parent is to have your kids like you, you will not like what your kids become. Your primary goal should be to want your kids to know what's right in God's sight. If that means discipline, so be it. If they hate you in the process, so be it. But you must honor God more than you honor your kids. Eli wanted to be cool in the eyes of his boys. And it would lead to their downfall.

1 Samuel 2:31–34

Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that

shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them.

In other words, not only would Eli's family disintegrate, but the enemy would eventually enter the house of God.

1 Samuel 2:35, 36
And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever. And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left in thine house shall come and crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread.

Who is the faithful priest? It could be Samuel. Although Samuel was not a priest but a prophet because he was not of the tribe of Levi, we will see him minister like a priest in the offering of sacrifices.

Others suggest the faithful priest refers to Zadok because this verse is alluded to in 1 Kings 2:27 and 35 when Zadok takes over the priesthood from a man named Abiezar. Abiezar was the last descendant of Eli. When Abiezar is moved off the scene, the whole family disappears from Israel's history. The problem with this suggestion is that Zadok didn't "walk before mine anointed forever." Therefore, some suggest the reference is to the sons of Zadok, who continue all the way through the Millennium (Ezekiel 40:46).

Obviously, this prophecy is most completely fulfilled in the One who would come and be the perfect High Priest forever. People will let you down —but there is One who will walk in perfection for all eternity. That One is our great High Priest, Jesus Christ.



3 1 Samuel 3:1
And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.

The word of the Lord was precious—or rare. Speaking to believers in Revelation 3:20, Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in and sup with him and he with Me." In other words, the question isn't whether Jesus is speaking. The question is: Are we listening?

There's no question God speaks. Psalm 29 tells us His voice is so powerful that it moves mountains and clears forests. The question is, are God's people tuning in? Are they able to perceive and receive the word He speaks constantly? There are numerous voices speaking via radio and television waves traveling through any given location. The fact that we don't hear them is not because those voices aren't present, but because we're not tuned in to them. Our antenna isn't up, our TV sets aren't on. The same thing is true spiritually (John 10:27). Our Shepherd speaks constantly. The question is, are we tuned in to His frequency? Am I picking up and receiving what He's saying?

I see four questions answered in the passage before us . . .

To Whom Does God Speak?

1 Samuel 3:2
And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see;

In the temple, there was an experienced, professional priest named Eli. He may have had all his seminary degrees, but he didn't hear God's voice. God bypassed him and spoke to a child instead. Jesus said, "Unless you become as a little child, you cannot enter the kingdom" (Luke 18:17).

Children have an amazing receptivity and expectancy. As people get older and more knowledgeable, they begin to look down on hearing the voice of the Lord. "God doesn't speak to us in that way today," they say. Eli represents the old order and what can happen when one loses his sense of wonder and expectancy.

Have you become an old professional? Are you saying in your soul, "I've heard all this. I know all that"? If so, you'll not hear the voice of the Lord. It's when you retain a childlike excitement about the things of God that He will speak to you.

When Did God Speak?

1 Samuel 3:3, 4 (a)
And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; That the LORD called Samuel . . .

Samuel was ministering to the Lord when God spoke to him. Ministering *to* the Lord is different from ministering *for* Him. Ministering *for* the Lord is teaching a lesson, giving a sermon, helping someone in His name. Ministering *to* the Lord, on the other hand, is drawing near to Him personally and privately. Ministry *to* the Lord takes place not on stage, but in the pew. Ministry *to* the Lord is not about what others see us do, but what the Lord alone enjoys as we spend time with Him. Ministering *to* the Lord is the highest calling in life, and every single one of us can do it.

I love it when my wife makes a meal for me or irons my shirt. But those things can't begin to compare to the love I feel when she's ministering *to* me —being by my side, sharing with me, loving me. The same is true of the Lord. When you minister *to* Him, it's a far higher calling than ministering *for* Him (Ezekiel 44).

1 Samuel 3:4 (b)–7
. . . and he answered, Here am I. And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down. And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again. Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him.

Notice at this point, Samuel didn't know the Lord personally. He hadn't yet heard from the Lord audibly. But he knew about the Lord. Samuel knew that, as God, He deserved worship and affection. Samuel didn't yet know the Lord, but here he is, year after year, ministering to the Lord.

Ministering *to* the Lord before ministering *for* Him is also seen in the Book of Acts . . .

> As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.
>
> Acts 13:2

This verse should be noted by anyone who wants to be a servant of Jesus Christ, for it was as Paul and Barnabas ministered *to* the Lord that He separated them for ministry. Find ways you can minister to the Lord, where no one else sees what you're doing, but where you are pleasing the Lord simply because He's worthy.

Where Did the Lord Speak?

1 Samuel 3:8–10
And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.

Samuel was in the temple. Growing up, I heard the voice of the Lord most clearly at church, youth group meetings, and Sunday school classes. And as the years go by, I still hear His voice most clearly and most frequently in the temple—at church.

If you want the Lord to speak to you and give guidance to you, be in the temple. As the days go by, you'll discover that it's the place He'll speak to you most frequently. I can't tell you the number of times I've stood at the door after a service and heard people tell me things in my message that morning that ministered to them—things I never even said! Why did they hear them? Because, as He did to Samuel, it was God speaking to them in the temple.

Why Did God Speak to Samuel?

1 Samuel 3:11–14
And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

God didn't speak to Eli. He spoke to Samuel. Why? I suggest it was because Samuel got out of bed. God talks to us in the middle of the night as well. But we think it's the pizza or our husband's snoring or the caffeine from the double latte we ordered earlier that keeps us up. I am convinced, however, the Lord speaks to our souls at night because it's the only time our hearts are quiet enough to hear Him. The question is, "Will I respond?"

When I do, I hear Him say, "There's something I want to talk over with you. I have direction to give you. I have a word of correction for you." If you want your dreams to come true, gang, you've got to get out of bed! Four times in one night, Samuel got out of bed to check out what was going on. On the fourth time, he discovered it was the Lord all along. God interrupts your sleep or your life, your plans and your schedule, because He wants you to hear from Him.

1 Samuel 3:15–21
And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision. Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I. And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all

the things that he said unto thee. And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good. And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD. And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

God not only spoke to Samuel because of his responsiveness, but because of his tenderness. Samuel didn't want to say to Eli, "Eli, you're in trouble. You haven't disciplined your sons. Now judgment is coming to you and your family. And it's too late for any sacrifices to make up for what you've done."

Living in the temple, Samuel no doubt observed Eli's sons and was aware of their immorality and problems. Therefore, he could have said, "Aha! At last these guys are getting what they deserve." But that wasn't the heart of Samuel. Nor was it the heart of Daniel.

Before Daniel gave Nebuchadnezzar the interpretation of his dream, he said, "I wish this dream applied to your worst enemy rather than to you, for you're going to go insane like an animal for seven years and eat grass like a cow in the fields." Daniel could have said, "Great! It's about time God brings Nebuchadnezzar down a notch or two." But that wasn't the heart of Daniel, nor is it the heart of anyone who is in tune with God.

Whatever God speaks to you must be enveloped in tenderness and love. Even if the message is a difficult one, it's always to be delivered in humility and kindness.



4 1 Samuel 4:1 (a)
And the word of Samuel came to all Israel . . .

Samuel is now a prophet, doing what he was called to do—giving the word of the Lord to the people of God.

1 Samuel 4:1 (b)
. . . Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek.

The armies of the Israelites and the armies of the Philistines are facing off.

1 Samuel 4:2, 3
And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men. And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies.

With four thousand casualties, Israel had taken a beating. They called for the ark of the covenant, certain it would deliver them. But God doesn't work that way because He wants His people to look to Him. He wants us to give all glory and honor to Him—not to our "box" of religious practices or customs. All too often, Christian books and seminars present four steps to deliverance, six steps to victory, twelve principles of success. Many of us have walked with the Lord long enough to have jumped through countless hoops, or checked off numerous "boxes"—the latest fad, the hottest trend in spiritual life—only to find they don't work. God wants us to be Spirit-led day by day. He wants to show us what *He* has for us to do, rather than what some program will do for us.

The Israelites were in error, sure that God-in-a-box would give them victory.

1 Samuel 4:4 (a)
So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims . . .

The ark of the covenant was the most important object in the Israelites' possession. Yet here, it's importance was tragically misapplied.

1 Samuel 4:4 (b)
. . . and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

It's not surprising that Hophni and Phinehas accompanied the ark. They were carnal indeed, and carnality always relies on programs or formulas.

1 Samuel 4:5
And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again.

The old adage is true: God does not care about how high we jump, but about how straight we walk. I've been in meetings where there was lots of sky-high jumping, but not straight walking in the lives of those who attend because they haven't been taught the Word of God. They've been given clever sayings and admonitions, but nothing of substance to help them walk straight the next day. God's Word is the key.

Here, the Israelites weren't interested in hearing the Word of the Lord. They were simply whooping and hollering because the ark was there.

1 Samuel 4:6, 7
And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the LORD was come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore.

"God is in their camp!" the Philistines said. Yes, the symbol of His presence was there, but the context was all wrong because His people were more taken up with the symbol than with Him.

1 Samuel 4:8–10
Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? these are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight. And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen.

Thirty thousand men died. This was a horrible defeat; a brutal, bloody battle in which the Philistines butchered the people of Israel.

The same thing can happen to me. I bring the "ark" into my camp. My boxes are all checked off on my spiritual To Do list. Therefore, it's sure to be a great day. But I've discovered that sometimes when my boxes are all checked off, the day goes horribly. "Lord," I cry, "I checked my boxes. I read my Bible, prayed, and went to church. I even tithed eleven percent last week! Why don't I have victory?"

And the Lord would say to me, "It's not about bringing a box into your camp or checking a box off on a list. Only a relationship with Me will bring victory as I guide you step by step, day by day."

Reading two chapters a day or attending church two times a week won't guarantee victory any more than bringing the box into the camp brought victory to the Israelites. God doesn't work that way. If, however, reading two chapters a day or attending church two times a week is done for the purpose of meeting *Him,* of learning more about *Him,* of spending time with *Him*—He has promised to meet us there (James 4:8).

1 Samuel 4:11–13 (a)
And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain. And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head. And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God . . .

Eli's heart didn't tremble for his sons; he knew they were deserving of death. Eli was worried about the ark. For he knew taking the ark into battle was a travesty.

1 Samuel 4:13 (b)–18 (a)
. . . And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out. And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli. Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see. And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son? And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken. And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy . . .

Hearing the ark had been taken, Eli died just as the prophet said he would —on the same day as his sons.

1 Samuel 4:18 (b)–22
. . . And he had judged Israel forty years. And his daughter in law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her. And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it. And she named the child I-chabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.

It is in the Book of Exodus that we first see the Hebrew word, *chabod,* meaning "weight" or "splendor" used in reference to God's presence. It was the *chabod* that was present on Mt Sinai (Exodus 24:16), the *chabod* that appeared to Moses (Exodus 33:22), the *chabod* that filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34). Now, with the ark gone and the people of God defeated, *I-chabod's* name, meaning, "Where is the glory?" was fitting, for it seemed the glory of God had departed. Yet even though God's people are faithless toward Him, He remains faithful to them (2 Timothy 2:13), for not too far down the road, His glory, His splendor, His presence will fill the temple (1 Kings 8). God never gave up on Israel—and He'll never give up on you. Aren't you glad?



5 1 Samuel 5:1
And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Eben-ezer unto Ash dod.

Ashdod was one of the five Philistine cities on the Mediterranean seacoast of Southern Israel.

1 Samuel 5:2
When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon.

Half fish and half man, Dagon was the god of the Philistines. Also worshiped by the Assyrians, he was considered by the people in the region of Canaan to be the father of Baal.

1 Samuel 5:3
And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.

I once talked to a man who desperately wanted to be free from a certain addiction. Although he had tried numerous programs and counseling sessions,

nothing worked. This story of Dagon proved to be a key for him. Dagon could not stand in the presence of the Lord. Therefore, I told this man that if he tried to get victory over the "Dagon" of his addiction in his own power, he would only become obsessed with it all the more. "Forget about Dagon," I said. "Instead, bring in the ark. Bring in the presence of the Lord. Spend time in His Word, in prayer, in fellowship with Him—and Dagon will fall." And that's exactly what happened.

The key to overcoming darkness is not to curse, cajole, or karate chop the darkness. The key is simply to turn on the light. Bring the ark into any situation and watch Dagon go down because darkness and light are mutually exclusive. Light always eventually wins (1 John 1:5).

1 Samuel 5:4
And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him.

When the statue of Dagon fell, its head and hands fell off and rolled to the door of the temple. Now, if you walked into the temple of your god and discovered his head cut off and his hands missing, wouldn't you think something was "fishy"?

1 Samuel 5:5
Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.

One would think that having to step over Dagon's head as they walked in the door of the temple would prove to the people that Dagon was no god at all. Instead, however, the people honored the threshold as holy ground. The only explanation for this is the fact that pagan religions—including the worship of Dagon—required many bizarre practices and immoral procedures. The Philistines knew Dagon wasn't a real god. But they justified his false religious system because it gave them license to indulge their flesh.

1 Samuel 5:6
But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof.

The Philistines were smitten with hemorrhoids. If they wouldn't stand before God, they wouldn't be able to sit before Dagon, either.

1 Samuel 5:7
And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god.

Instead of saying, "Lord, we're going to seek You, call upon You, turn to You, and believe in You, the Philistines said, "We'll go with the fishy one, the headless god, Dagon." Amazing.

1 Samuel 5:8
They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines unto them, and said, What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? And they answered, Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried about unto Gath. And they carried the ark of the God of Israel about thither.

Gath was a Philistine city twelve miles southeast of Ashdod. "Let's send the ark to Gath, our sister city," said the city fathers of Ashdod. Misery must surely love company.

1 Samuel 5:9
And it was so, that, after they had carried it about, the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction: and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts.

The people of Gath were also smitten with hemorrhoids.

1 Samuel 5:10
Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people.

The people of Gath sent the ark to Ekron, the next Philistine city on the map.

1 Samuel 5:11, 12
So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people: for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. And the men that died not were smitten with the emerods: and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

Evidently, it was some type of plague that killed many in Ekron. Instead of turning to the Lord when His hand was upon them, however, the people of Ekron said, "We have to get rid of this ark."



6 **1 Samuel 6:1, 2**
And the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, What shall we do to the ark of the LORD? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place.

Having had their fill of the plagues associated with the ark, the Philistines were ready to send it back to Israel.

1 Samuel 6:3–5
And they said, If ye send away the ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty; but in any wise return him a trespass offering: then

ye shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you. Then said they, What shall be the trespass offering which we shall return to him? They answered, Five golden emerods, and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines: for one plague was on you all, and on your lords. Wherefore ye shall make images of your emerods, and images of your mice that mar the land; and ye shall give glory unto the God of Israel: peradventure he will lighten his hand from off you, and from off your gods, and from off your land.

The Philistine priests and wise men decided that the ark could not be returned empty. So they made replicas of five mice and hemorrhoids out of gold to accompany it. Five represented the five Philistine cities. Mice evidently represented those who died in the plague, and hemorrhoids evidently represented those who, although they felt the hand of God, survived.

1 Samuel 6:6
Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharoah hardened their hearts? when he had wrought wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go, and they departed?

"Learn a lesson from the Egyptians," the Philistine priests said. "When Pharaoh hardened his heart, the result was deadly. Let the ark go."

1 Samuel 6:7–9
Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them: And take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Beth-shemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us.

“Fasten the cart to these two mother cows and send them on their way,” the Philistine priests said. “If the cows go towards Beth-shemesh, we’ll know that it is God who has smitten us. If the cows don’t go, it means it just so happened that these plagues came our way.” The Philistines were correct in thinking only God could cause cows to willingly leave their young.

1 Samuel 6:10–12
And the men did so; and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home: And they laid the ark of the LORD upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the images of their emerods. And the kine took the straight way to the way of Beth-shemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Beth-shemesh.

Leaving their calves behind and going against all natural instincts, it was obvious the cows were supernaturally led by the Lord.

1 Samuel 6:13–15
And they of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley: and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it. And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Beth-shemite, and stood there, where there was a great stone: and they clave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt offering unto the LORD. And the Levites took down the ark of the LORD, and the coffer that was with it, wherein the jewels of gold were, and put them on the great stone: and the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices the same day unto the LORD.

The ark had been missing for seven months. So it was with hearts of thanksgiving and rejoicing that the Israelites offered sacrifices to the Lord upon its return.

1 Samuel 6:16–20

And when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it, they returned to Ekron the same day. And these are the golden emerods which the Philistines returned for a trespass offering unto the LORD; for Ashdod one, for Gaza one, for Askelon one, for Gath one, for Ekron one; And the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both of fenced cities, and of country villages, even unto the great stone of Abel, whereon they set down the ark of the LORD: which stone remaineth unto this day in the field of Joshua, the Beth-shemite. And he smote the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because the LORD had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter. And the men of Bethshemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? and to whom shall he go up from us?

On this day of celebration, rejoicing, and thanksgiving, 50,070 Israelites died. Many scholars say the number 50,070 is not accurate—that a scribe mistakenly wrote 50,070 instead of 70, or that it refers to 70 men who died out of a city of 50,000. While these suggestions are indeed possible, I believe 50,070 died because verse 19 tells us it was a great slaughter. In this story of the ark, we saw 4,000 slain in 1 Samuel 4:2, and 30,000 slain in 1 Samuel 4:10. In comparison to those figures, the deaths of seventy men would hardly constitute a "great slaughter." It seems to me that it was a horrific price that was paid for removing the mercy seat . . .

1 Samuel 6:21
And they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim, saying, The Philistines have brought again the ark of the LORD; come ye down, and fetch it up to you.

Kirjath-jearim was ten miles north east of Beth-shemesh. In the wake of devastation associated with it, the men of Beth-shemesh sent word to the men of Kirjath-jearim, saying, "Come and get this ark."

PUT A LID ON IT

A Topical Study of 1 SAMUEL 6:13–20

They were out in the field harvesting when they saw an oxcart coming, pulled by two cows. As the cart drew nearer, the men of Beth-shemesh saw that on the back of the cart was their stolen, most precious ark. The ark of the covenant was a box approximately three feet long, two feet wide, and two feet high inside of which were the Ten Commandments, the Law. On top of it was a lid called the mercy seat. It was at the mercy seat that God declared He would meet with His people (Exodus 25:22).

One day each year—Yom Kippur—the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies, wherein stood the ark, and sprinkle blood seven times on the mercy seat. Then he would make his way out of the Holy of Holies to the congregation waiting outside and announce that they were forgiven. The people would then know that their sins were covered, and great celebration would follow.

No wonder, then, that the men of Bethshemesh rejoiced to see the ark making its way across Joshua's field. What happened next, however, is shocking—for the Lord smote the men of Beth-shemesh simply because they looked into the ark.

Two questions come to mind. The first is: Why did the men of Beth-shemesh look into the ark? I suggest it was because they wanted to see if the Philistines had stolen the Ten Commandments from within. The second question is: Why was this so wrong in God's sight?

In the Book of Numbers, God specifically declared that no man was to look into the holy things that were covered (4:20). In the case of the ark, this meant that the Law was not to be looked upon without the covering of mercy. I know about this. Maybe you do, too. "I need to look into this situation," I'll say. "There seems to be a violation. I need to get to the bottom of this matter." So I'll lay aside mercy and look into the Law to try to get to the bottom of the issue. But every time I do, something in me dies. Whenever mercy is removed—even for a moment—whenever mercy is set aside, something in me will always die.

One day, the prophet Nathan, came to David and said, "A rich man in the kingdom wanted to fix a dinner for his friend. So, instead of taking one of his own numerous sheep, he took his neighbor's only lamb—a family pet—and served it to his friend.

"What?!" David said. "That man must surely die!"

Nathan looked at him and said, "David, that man is you. You have everything you could want. But you took another man's little lamb when you stole Bathsheba from Uriah the Hittite" (2 Samuel 12:1–9).

"Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation," David later prayed (Psalm 51). Why? Because when he removed the mercy seat to deal with the matter of the hypothetical rich man who took another man's lamb, joy died within his own soul.

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, the only part of His prayer He made additional comment on dealt with mercy. "If you forgive men their trespasses," He said, "your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14). Notice that Jesus said, "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive *you,* but if you don't forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father won't forgive your *trespasses*." In other words, if you choose not to forgive someone, you'll still be forgiven, but your trespass won't. It will remain in your heart, pulling you down, holding you back, killing your joy. The joy of your salvation will depart whenever the mercy seat is removed.

> *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*
>
> Luke 6:36–38

Luke 6:38 is probably most often heard in reference to money. But that's not the context. It's about showing mercy. Jesus said to the degree that you

forgive others is the degree that you will receive forgiveness from others in your own hour of need.

Every one of us without exception will come to a day when we need mercy, when tears will run down our face and our soul will ache, when we'll know we missed the mark and dropped the ball. And in that day, we'll receive mercy to the exact degree that we've given it. Remove the mercy seat, and the joy of your salvation will die. But if you choose to keep a lid on it—to cover the Law with mercy—kindness, forgiveness, and grace will be shown to you when you need it most.

I understand what you're saying theoretically, you might be thinking. *But he hurt me* or *she crushed me. How do you expect me to keep a lid on this and forgive him, to go my way and forgive her?*

Jesus would say, "I provided justice the day I hung on the Cross. The sin that hurts you so badly, that bruises you so deeply killed Me. My body was broken for that specific sin. Therefore, you don't need to look into it. Put a lid on it. And look instead to the hill where stands the Cross. The price for the sin of the one who is hurting you was paid for with My very life so that the mercy seat could be sprinkled with My own blood."

The mother of a nine-year-old boy received a phone call in the middle of the afternoon. It was her son's teacher. "Mrs. Walden, something unusual happened today. Your son did something that surprised me so much I thought you should know about it immediately."

The mother began to worry.

The teacher continued, "Nothing like this has happened in all my years of teaching. This morning I was teaching a lesson on creative writing. And as I always do, I told the story of the ant and the grasshopper. The ant works hard all summer and stores plenty of food. But the grasshopper plays all summer and does no work at all. Then winter comes. The grasshopper begins to starve because he has no food. So he says, 'Please Mr. Ant. You have so much food. Let me eat, too.' " Then I said, "Boys and girls, it's your job to write the ending to the story."

"Your son raised his hand. 'Teacher, may I draw a picture?' "

" 'Yes, but first you must write the ending to the story,' I said."

She continued, "As in all past years, most of the students wrote: 'The ant shares his food in the winter, and both the ant and the grasshopper lived.' A

few children wrote, 'No, Mr. Grasshopper, you should have worked in the summer. Now I have just enough food for myself. Sorry.' So the ant lives and the grasshopper dies."

"But your son ended the story in a different way from any child I've ever taught. He wrote: 'So the ant gave all of his food to the grasshopper. The grasshopper lived through the winter. The ant died.' And the picture? At the bottom of the page, he had drawn a cross."

Who's bugging you? A boss? A spouse? A child? Someone who turned his back and walked away? Someone who said she loved you and you never heard from her again? Maybe you've forgiven just about everyone—but who is it you're still angry with?

"I took care of the matter," Jesus says. "I paid the price. Justice has been done. Now you get to be free from the weight on your soul that comes when there's a lack of mercy. You get to be free simply to love people."

Every sin was individually paid for. Every sin was individually dealt with. Every sin was absorbed by our Lord. He felt the heat. He took the hit. He plunged into the damnation that sin would bring. How can we then say, "I'm still going to poke around. I'm not going to forgive her because someone needs to bring this to justice." If that's what you're feeling, bitterness, depression, sadness, and a judgmental heart will be the result. And it will kill you. Put a lid on the matter. Cover it with mercy. And you'll be free.



7 1 Samuel 7:1, 2

And the men of Kirjath-jearim came, and fetched up the ark of the LORD, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD. And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

After hearing what happened to the Philistines and the men of Beth-shemesh, the Israelites were understandably cautious. It is true that God is loving, gracious, and merciful. But He's also an awesome God who must be

respected and deeply reverenced. The Israelites, it seems, were at a place where they understood this.

1 Samuel 7:3
And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

If there's ever a Scripture appropriate for us today, surely it's this one. If we want to be free from the terror of our enemies, we are to serve the Lord only.

"How could God be so narrow?" some ask. "How could it be that God would provide only one way to Heaven, only one way to know Him?"

The answer is, "Because He is good."

You see, if there were five ways to heaven, five ways to know Him, Satan would provide five hundred counterfeits. So God keeps it real simple. "There's only one way, "He says. "The one Way is My Son."

1 Samuel 7:4, 5
Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only. And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD.

Notice that before the convocation, before the prayer of blessing, there was a turning away from false gods. The sin of Israel was not that they turned their back on the Lord. It was that they added other gods to the land. "We're not rejecting the Lord," the Israelites could have said. "We're simply being open-minded."

1 Samuel 7:6 (a)
And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD . . .

Because water was a precious commodity in the Middle East, this act signified the pouring out of their hearts before the Lord.

1 Samuel 7:6 (b)
. . . and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.

Samuel judged—or gave wisdom—to Israel.

1 Samuel 7:7–9
And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines. And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD: and Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him.

A lamb was offered. A prayer was made. And God heard.

The same is true for our country in this day. The Lamb has been offered. Prayers need to be made. And God will hear (2 Chronicles 7:14).

1 Samuel 7:10
And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.

The people of this region believed that Baal, the son of Dagon, was the thunder god. Here, the true and living God thunders on this people who honored Baal.

1 Samuel 7:11, 12

And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Beth-car. Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.

Ebenezer means "stone of help." In setting up this stone, Samuel was saying, "Up to this point, the Lord has helped us."

Why is this important to do? Because sometimes we think, *Oh, no. Things will never work out. My marriage is on the rocks. My finances are down the drain. Everything looks grim."* What we need in times like this is an "Ebenezer stone" that reminds us that God has never failed us, that what we fear doesn't come to pass. Yes, there are definite challenges that come our way—but in those challenges, God always shows Himself strong. He's always there for us.

I have found journaling to be a wonderful "Ebenezer stone." Reading through my journals, I am reminded again and again that God has never let me down in the past, which gives me confidence that He won't let me down in the future. Whether through journaling or songwriting, letters or pictures, I encourage you to put your own "Ebenzer stone" in place, where you can be reminded of God's faithfulness in the past, draw strength for the present, and hope for the future.

1 Samuel 7:13–16
So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gath; and the coasts thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places.

These cities were in a fourteen-mile radius. Samuel, a "circuit-riding" judge, visited each one, counseling the inhabitants in the ways and wisdom of

God.

1 Samuel 7:17
And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house; and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto the LORD.

Samuel built an altar where he lived. This principle remains of utmost importance. If you want to minister, it all begins at home (Deuteronomy 6:7).



8 In chapter 8, we see that Samuel was on this circuit, preaching from town to town, place to place. The circuit evidently took a toll on his family . . .

1 Samuel 8:1–3
And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: they were judges in Beer-sheba. And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.

Samuel's sons succumbed to the seduction of money, taking bribes from God's people. How could it be that Samuel, who saw the sons of Eli succumb to lust, allowed his own sons to give themselves to money? What happened? Chapter 7 ended with Samuel traveling from town to town. It could be that this took a toll on his own family. Although we read that he built an altar at his house, it would seem that he was gone a lot. Yes, he was serving the Lord, caring for God's people, but his top priority—his family—was not being instructed and tended.

This can happen so easily in the ministry, in serving the Lord. It takes time to parent properly—not only the structured devotional times which are imperative, or the planned activities which are wonderful, but also the unstructured, unplanned, occasions to share with our kids. Looking back, I see that two of the most important conversations I've had with my kids were

spontaneous occasions, times when I was just there. If you're involved in any type of ministry, the example of Samuel tells us we must be those who constantly pray for our kids.

What a heartbreak it must have been for Samuel, as it must have been for Eli before him, to realize his own sons were not walking in the ways of the Lord. Samuel had a heart for God, a passion to serve God. He was a good man, a great man, a godly man—but he was evidently gone too much to be cognizant of what was really going on in the souls of his kids as they grew up. The apostle John was right when he said he had no greater joy than to hear that his children walked in truth (3 John 4). This requires constant evaluation, saying, "Lord, am I really on Your circuit—or am I just going around in circles?"

Samuel failed to learn the lesson of Eli. May God help us as parents to be those who don't go in circles, mistakenly thinking we're serving Him, when in reality, we're ignoring our primary ministry—spending not only quality, but a quantity of time with our kids.

1 Samuel 8:4, 5
Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.

Israel had prophets, priests, and judges—but God was their King. Now they wanted a man for a king.

1 Samuel 8:6
But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD.

Instead of lashing out at the people, Samuel looked up to the Lord—a wise thing to do because the wrath of man never works the righteousness of God (James 1:20). Instead of coming down on the people, Samuel simply prayed.

When you feel frustration churn in your stomach, it's always a good thing to slip away to a quiet spot and talk it over with the Lord. When you return,

you'll have an entirely different perspective, countenance, and attitude—and the outcome will be entirely different. When I don't do this—when I blow my top, let off steam, or give someone a piece of my mind—I never fail to regret it.

1 Samuel 8:7, 8
And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee.

Evidently, Samuel felt personally rejected. But as he prays, he hears God say, "It's not about you, Samuel. It's all about Me."

1 Samuel 8:9
Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.

Samuel was to let the people know the repercussions of their request.

1 Samuel 8:10–12
And Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king. And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots.

"Are you sure you want a king?" Samuel asked the people. "He will draft your sons into his army and into his service."

1 Samuel 8:13
And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers.

"Are you sure you want a king?" Samuel asked the people. "He'll draft your daughters into his kitchens."

1 Samuel 8:14
And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants.

"Are you sure you want a king?" Samuel asked the people. "He'll take the fruit of your own labor. You're going to be paying a big price for this monarchy you want to establish."

Government is expensive indeed. In our country, one of every fourteen people works for the government. To pay them, the wages we earn from January first to May sixteenth go to pay our taxes. Israel wanted to be like the nations around them—but it would cost them greatly.

1 Samuel 8:15–17
And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants.

The Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians, and other ancient empires demanded that ten percent of all that was produced was to be turned over to the king. Now, if those pagan kings received ten percent, how much more should the King of kings, our God, receive the tithe from us.

1 Samuel 8:18
And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day.

"You will have cast your vote," Samuel warns. "You will have made your decision. There will be no higher courts to appeal to. When you have a king, you will need to live with the decision you've made. You'll cry out. You'll protest. You'll be upset—but the choice will have been yours."

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

At this point, the people still had an opportunity to admit they had made a mistake in asking for a king. But that's not what they did.

1 Samuel 8:21
And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the LORD.

I so admire Samuel because he goes back to the Lord once more. He talks to God about the issue. God knows all things. He wasn't in need of information from Samuel. But Samuel was in need of spending time with Him.

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

Although it was not His plan for them, God gave His people what they wanted.

O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help. I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath.

Hosea 13:9–11

God can give us what we ask for. This is one of the real dangers of the "Name it and claim it" school of thought. God is the King. He knows what's best for me. He knows what will make me happy. I think I do—but I'm almost always wrong. I believe this is where the radical faith movement is in grave error. The assumption there is, "God, I know this thing, that person, or that career is perfect for me, so I claim it in faith." In so doing, people become their own king, using God to bring about their own demands.

I have discovered that it is infinitely wiser to say, "Lord, here's the way I see it. Here are my thoughts about this. But, Lord, You see what I don't. You know what I can't. So I gladly, happily defer to Your perfect plan for me."

The old adage remains true: God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him. Always.



9 Up until this time, Israel had been a theocracy. God was the leader of the nation. Wanting to be like the countries surrounding them, however, Israel called for a king. And here in chapter 9, they will get what they thought they wanted . . .

1 Samuel 9:1
Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power.

"A mighty man of power" means Kish was wealthy.

1 Samuel 9:2 (a)
And he had a son, whose name was Saul . . .

Saul was appropriately named, for *Saul* means "Requested," and the people had requested a king to lead them.

1 Samuel 9:2 (b)

. . . a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people.

Saul was not only "goodly," or handsome, but he was tall. Certainly height would be an asset, for the Philistines were the primary enemies of Israel at this time. The Philistines were known to have a few big guys in their midst—like Goliath and his brothers. So Saul, the tallest guy in the land of Israel, would seem to be a perfect choice to lead them. The problem is, man looks only on the outward appearance, while God looks on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

1 Samuel 9:3 (a)
And the asses of Kish Saul's father were lost . . .

The pick-up trucks of the day, donkeys, or asses, were valuable—to a certain degree, a measure of one's wealth.

1 Samuel 9:3 (b)–5
. . . And Kish said to Saul his son, Take now one of the servants with thee, and arise, go seek the asses. And he passed through mount Ephraim, and passed through the land of Shalisha, but they found them not: then they passed through the land of Shalim, and there they were not: and he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they found them not. And when they were come to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant that was with him, Come, and let us return; lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought for us.

"Even though we haven't found the donkeys, I don't want my father worrying about us, so let's return home," said Saul.

1 Samuel 9:6
And he said unto him, Behold now, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honourable man; all that he saith cometh surely

to pass: now let us go thither; peradventure he can shew us our way that we should go.

"Wait a minute," Saul's servant said. "We're at a place where there is a prophet. Let's ask him if he knows anything about the missing donkeys."

1 Samuel 9:7–9
Then said Saul to his servant, But, behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man? for the bread is spent in our vessels, and there is not a present to bring to the man of God: what have we? And the servant answered Saul again, and said, Behold, I have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver: that will I give to the man of God, to tell us our way. (Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer.)

In these days, prophets were known as seers because they could see things others couldn't.

1 Samuel 9:10–16
Then said Saul to his servant, Well said; come, let us go. So they went unto the city where the man of God was. And as they went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water, and said unto them, Is the seer here? And they answered them, and said, He is; behold, he is before you: make haste now, for he came to day to the city; for there is a sacrifice of the people to day in the high place: As soon as ye be come into the city, ye shall straightway find him, before he go up to the high place to eat: for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice; and afterwards they eat that be bidden. Now therefore get you up; for about this time ye shall find him. And they went up into the city: and when they were come into the city, behold, Samuel came out against them, for to go up to the high place. Now the LORD had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying, To morrow about this time I will send thee a

man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me.

The day previously, Samuel heard the Lord say, "Tomorrow a man is going to come—the one I have chosen to be the captain, the king of the nation." I find it interesting that the Lord whispered in Samuel's ear the day before this event took place—to let him know what was ahead. In 1 Samuel 8:21, we read that Samuel heard all the words of the people and he rehearsed them in the ears of the Lord. Those who whisper in the ears of the Lord will hear the Word whispered in their ear as well. I'm convinced that many times I don't hear what the Lord wants to say in my ear because I haven't first spoken in His ear. Samuel was a man who understood what it meant to pray without ceasing. As a result, the Lord whispered in his ear, telling him the man who would be king was on his way.

1 Samuel 9:17–19
And when Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over my people. Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is. And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer: go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me to day, and to morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart.

"I'm the man you're looking for," Samuel said to Saul and his servant. "Today, let's eat together. Tomorrow, I'll tell you all you want to know."

1 Samuel 9:20
And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house?

"Don't worry about the donkeys," said Samuel. "You have a far greater purpose for being here."

1 Samuel 9:21
And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?

"I'm from the smallest tribe," Saul protested. "And my family is the smallest family in the tribe."

1 Samuel 9:22, 23
And Samuel took Saul and his servant, and brought them into the parlour, and made them sit in the chiefest place among them that were bidden, which were about thirty persons. And Samuel said unto the cook, Bring the portion which I gave thee, of which I said unto thee, Set it by thee.

"Bring that special chunk of meat I ordered set aside," Samuel said to the cook.

1 Samuel 9:24
And the cook took up the shoulder, and that which was upon it, and set it before Saul. And Samuel said, Behold that which is left! set it before thee, and eat: for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people. So Saul did eat with Samuel that day.

The shoulder was considered to be one of the prime pieces of meat. There is a second piece of meat that was considered to be a special delicacy. That was the breast. Saul was given the shoulder, but not the breast because Saul was a man known to be head and shoulders above others. He was a man who showed real strength—but he didn't have a heart for God. Because of this, it's appropriate he was given the shoulder.

1 Samuel 9:25
And when they were come down from the high place into the city, Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house.

Keep in mind that houses in that region were flat-roofed, providing a place where people could sit in the evening and enjoy the cool breezes.

1 Samuel 9:26, 27
And they arose early: and it came to pass about the spring of the day, that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house, saying, Up, that I may send thee away. And Saul arose, and they went out both of them, he and Samuel, abroad. And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us, (and he passed on,) but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God.

"Send your servant away," Samuel said to Saul, "but you stand still because there's something I must tell you. There's something more the Lord wants to do through me for you. Stand still. I know you're anxious to get back. I know you're worried about your dad and the donkeys. But stand still. Slow down. Listen up because there's a word from the Lord for you."



10 1 Samuel 10:1

Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?

Here we see the anointing of Saul as king of Israel. The idea of anointing a king was not unique to Israel. The nations surrounding Israel also anointed their kings and leaders. But they used animal fat to anoint because they believed that by pouring on the fat of a bull or an ox and rubbing it into a man's head, somehow the individual would be infused with the strength and power of the bull or ox. When God gave anointing to His people, it wasn't from the fat of an animal, but from oil of the olive tree mixed with spices. God's anointing wasn't to make men like animals, but to show that they were to be rooted and grounded in the things of God in order to bring fruit to the glory of God.

1 Samuel 10:2
When thou art departed from me to day, then thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulchre in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say unto thee, The asses which thou wentest to seek are found: and, lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son?

I like what Samuel says because there are times when we, too, lose our donkeys—when we feel very real burdens, tensions, and anxieties. And as He did to Saul, God says, "I want to help you with that."

As a seer, Samuel is a type of the Holy Spirit, who searches out the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:10). "You've come to the right place," Samuel said. "But before I give you information about your lost donkeys, I want you to sit at the table with me."

Saul could have said, "My dad is worried. I have a job to do. Thanks, but no thanks. I can't take time to sit at the table." But Saul didn't do that. To his credit, he heard what the seer said, and sat down. I suggest that a practical picture is painted in this vignette. That is, like Saul, we're worried about stuff that is ultimately not all that important. God will take care of it—but there's a bigger calling, a grander picture. There's a big plan for us. There's a divine design for our lives. Therefore, when you feel overwhelmed by problems and tensions, burdens and frustrations, slow down. Come to the Table. Come to Communion. Come and dine. Wait on the Lord. It's not about your problem. It's not about the donkeys. It's about your being anointed as royalty to be used by God eternally.

If Saul had said, "Sorry, I don't have time. I've got to get home," I suggest he would never have been king. I wonder who of us has missed out because we were worried about our donkeys, failing to realize the Lord was simply using them to call us away to commune with Him. When you're uptight or upset, come to the Lord's Table and dine with Him. Go to the top of the house—get above the situation—and say, "Lord, what do You want to say to me?" As it was to Saul, His answer will most likely be different than you thought, and bigger than what you could imagine.

1 Samuel 10:3–6

Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine: And they will salute thee, and give thee two loaves of bread; which thou shalt receive of their hands. After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy: And the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man.

"You'll see that what I'm telling you is true," Samuel said to Saul, "because you're going to meet a group of men who will tell you your father is concerned about you. Then you'll see another group who will offer you bread and wine. Another group will be prophets, who will play music and speak the things of the Lord. Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you, too, and you'll prophesy right along with them.

In this passage, I see three experiences a man or woman must have in order to be effective in ministry: the care of the Father, communion with the Son, and a heart changed by the Spirit.

The message of the first group of men Saul would meet was that his father missed him. So, too, before anyone can impact others for the Lord, he or she must know the Father's love in his or her own heart. Secondly, just as Saul met a group carrying bread and wine—the elements of Communion—there must be fellowship with the Son. Finally, Saul became a changed man and prophesied with the prophets, just as anyone who truly wants to communicate God's Word today must be changed by, and filled with the Spirit.

If you don't have a firm understanding that the Father cares for you, that He is on your side, that He cares about everything you're going through and dealing with, you'll never be a minister of grace. You'll be one who talks about principles and procedures, but you'll never have the tender, gracious, compassionate kind of ministry that God desires. It's when a person realizes

the nature of the Father, has communion with the Son, and is changed by the Spirit that he becomes a true minister.

1 Samuel 10:7–12
And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee; for God is with thee. And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do. And it was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart: and all those signs came to pass that day. And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them. And it came to pass, when all that knew him beforetime saw that, behold, he prophesied among the prophets, then the people said one to another, What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets? And one of the same place answered and said, But who is their father? Therefore it became a proverb, Is Saul also among the prophets?

Concerning something incredible or outrageous, we say, "That will happen when pigs fly."

"Is Saul among the prophets?" became a similar statement of unlikelihood.

1 Samuel 10:13–16
And when he had made an end of prophesying, he came to the high place. And Saul's uncle said unto him and to his servant, Whither went ye? And he said, To seek the asses: and when we saw that they were no where, we came to Samuel. And Saul's uncle said, Tell me, I pray thee, what Samuel said unto you. And Saul said unto his uncle, He told us plainly that the asses were found. But of the matter of the kingdom, whereof Samuel spake, he told him not.

Saul didn't tell his uncle that he would one day be king. Instead, as Mary would later do, he simply heard the Word of the Lord and pondered it in his heart (Luke 2:19, 51).

I believe this is a great word for us as well. There should be more pondered in our heart than we ever speak about. Some people speak about everything they hear. On the other hand, deep people seem to know a lot more than they talk about. Deep people have experiences they don't share, intimate secrets between them and the Lord. Saul begins this way. Something very special happened to him, but he kept it to himself.

1 Samuel 10:17–19
And Samuel called the people together unto the LORD to Mizpeh; And said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you: And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your trib ulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands.

"You wanted a king. You're going to get a king," Samuel told the people.

1 Samuel 10:20–22
And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken. When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found. Therefore they inquired of the LORD further, if the man should yet come thither. And the LORD answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff.

Saul began so well. Rather than heralding himself, he humbly hid.

1 Samuel 10:23–26

And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward. And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king. Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the LORD. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house. And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched.

Saul had been anointed king, and had been revealed to the people as the one God had chosen, yet he makes his way home again to farm.

1 Samuel 10:27 (a)
But the children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents . . .

Belial means "foolishness." Of Saul, the foolish men said, "He's just a farm boy. How can he save us?" In bringing him no presents, they rejected him.



***For topical study of 1 Samuel 10:27 entitled "Wise Men Bring Gifts," turn to page* 847.**

1 Samuel 10:27 (b)
. . . But he held his peace.

Again, we see Saul acting with great wisdom. Moses—the man who would lead the nation of Israel not as a king but as a fellow pilgrim—told the people that, because the Lord would fight for them, they could hold their peace (Exodus 14:14). Here, Saul walks in the wisdom of Moses. Rather than giving the sons of Belial a piece of his mind, he wisely held his peace.

WISE MEN BRING GIFTS

A Topical Study of 1 SAMUEL 10:27

After He had died and risen again, Jesus opened the Scriptures to two travelers on the road to Emmaus. Beginning with Moses and going through all the prophets, Luke tells us He explained all things concerning Himself (24:27). The key to good Bible study is to understand that all Scripture points to Jesus—and 1 Samuel is no exception, for in the anointing of Saul as king, we see a Polaroid picture develop before our eyes of our King, Jesus Christ . . .

Even as Saul was anointed king, Jesus is the *Christos,* or "Anointed One." He is the King of kings, for that is the name written on His thigh and across His vest in Revelation 19.

After Saul was anointed king, the Holy Spirit came upon him and he began to prophesy. When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, not only did the Holy Spirit come upon Him, but the Father spoke from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

Saul was announced by a prophet—just as Jesus would be announced by the greatest of prophets, John the Baptist who said, "Prepare the way. The King is coming" (see Matthew 3:3).

Even as a group of men whose hearts God had touched traveled with Saul, the disciples traveled with Jesus. Saul traveled to *Gibeah,* which means "Hill." Jesus would also travel to a hill called Calvary where He would be crucified.

After Saul made his way to Gibeah, some rejoiced, but the foolish men said, "How shall this man save us?" When the King of kings was sent to this planet, the angels sang with joy in the Bethlehem skies; the shepherds were filled with awe; the wise men made their way from the east, bringing gifts. But the religious leaders of the day brought no gifts (Matthew 2).

The same story is being told in our world today. There are those who are children of Belial—fools who say, "How can Jesus save us?"

On the other hand, there are wise men who come from a long way to bring gifts to Him. And we are invited to join their company. What gifts can we bring?

The wise men from the east brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh—three gifts which correspond to the three offices of Christ. Gold is the metal of monarchy. Jesus is the King of kings. Frankincense, burned in the tabernacle and temple speaks of the priestly ministry. Jesus is our great High Priest. Myrrh, used in the burial process, speaks of the martyrdom of a prophet. Jesus is the incomparable Prophet.

We, too, can bring gold to Jesus. We can bring the gold of our tithes and offerings. We can bring the gold of our faith (1 Peter 1:7). We can bring the gold of the words we speak one to another (Proverbs 25:11, 12).

We, too, can bring frankincense to Jesus. The word *frankincense* means "whitened," most likely due to the fact that when it was burned, the smoke would ascend in white puffs. Frankincense comes from a small tree that requires very little soil to grow, but rather roots itself in rocks. That's like us. We're small indeed—but we can root ourselves in the Rock of our salvation, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). Revelation 5 tells us that the frankincense burned by the priests speaks of prayer. As we bring our gift of prayer and our sacrifice of praise to the Lord, not only are they a sweet-smelling savor to Him, but we are "whitened"—purified—in the process.

We, too, can bring myrrh to Jesus. He didn't ask us to build a monument or erect an impressive tower in His honor. He simply asks us to remember what He has done by coming to His Table (Luke 22:19). As we partake of His body and blood at the Communion Table, we remember His work on the Cross on our behalf. And our doing so is myrrh to Him.

The sons of Belial—the foolish men—brought no gifts to Saul. And it is the foolish man today who brings no gifts to Jesus. But wise is the man, wise the woman, who brings gifts to the King of kings, our great High Priest, our martyred Prophet.

God chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27). By His grace and mercy, He has reached out to fools like us, and all that remains for us to do is respond.

11

1 Samuel 11:1 (a)
Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabesh gilead . . .

Nahash means "serpent." Jabesh-gilead was an Israelite town on the east side of the Jordan River in the territory given to Manasseh.

1 Samuel 11:1 (b)
. . . and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee.

Fearing for their lives, the men of Jabeshgilead offered to sign a peace treaty with Nahash. "We'll serve you if you don't destroy us," they said.

1 Samuel 11:2
And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel.

"I won't destroy you if you poke out the right eyes of all your men," Nahash said. This, of course, would not only disable the troops, but also would distress and dishearten all of the people of Jabesh-gilead.

1 Samuel 11:3
And the elders of Jabesh said unto him, Give us seven days' respite, that we may send messengers unto all the coasts of Israel: and then, if there be no man to save us, we will come out to thee.

Why would Nahash agree to give Jabeshgilead a week to find reinforcements? I suggest it was because they knew the story of Judges 21. You see, when civil war broke out in Israel between Benjamin and the other eleven tribes, the only men who didn't fight were the men of Jabesh-gilead. Perhaps knowing this, Nahash was sure no one would come to their aid.

In this, we see a lesson for us. That is, just as Nahash, "the serpent," based his plan of attack on past performance, the devil continually whispers in our ears today that past failures prevent future rescues; that past failures mean there won't be future blessings. But just as Nahash would prove to be wrong, in God's economy, there's always a second chance.

1 Samuel 11:4–6
Then came the messengers to Gibeah of Saul, and told the tidings in the ears of the people: and all the people lifted up their voices, and wept. And, behold, Saul came after the herd out of the field; and Saul said, What aileth the people that they weep? And they told him the tidings of the men of Jabesh. And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly.

While the results of the Spirit of God coming upon a person can indeed be peace and harmony, anger and righteous indignation can also be the result. Here, Saul was upset because his brothers were in trouble. Even though they had chosen to remain on the other side of the Jordan River, when the Spirit of God came upon him, he felt compassion for them and was grieved on their behalf.

1 Samuel 11:7 (a)
And he took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen . . .

In butchering an ox—the "tractor" of this agrarian society—the message Saul sent was: You're going to go bankrupt if you don't join me in helping our brothers who are in jeopardy.

1 Samuel 11:7 (b)–9
. . . And the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent. And when he numbered them in Bezek, the children of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of

Judah thirty thousand. And they said unto the messengers that came, Thus shall ye say unto the men of Jabesh-gilead, To morrow, by that time the sun be hot, ye shall have help. And the messengers came and shewed it to the men of Jabesh; and they were glad.

A message was sent to the men of Jabeshgilead that help was on the way.

1 Samuel 11:10, 11
Therefore the men of Jabesh said, To morrow we will come out unto you, and ye shall do with us all that seemeth good unto you. And it was so on the morrow, that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the host in the morning watch, and slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day: and it came to pass, that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together.

Saul marched all night long, gathering 300,000 men along the way. Saul was not a soldier. He was a farmer. But when the Holy Spirit comes upon a man, he is given a sense of exactly what to do. Don't ever underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit to give you abilities or insights you never had before.

1 Samuel 11:12, 13
And the people said unto Samuel, Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men, that we may put them to death. And Saul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day: for to day the LORD hath wrought salvation in Israel.

Saul wisely attributed the Israelite victory to God alone.

1 Samuel 11:14, 15
Then said Samuel to the people, Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there. And all the people went to Gilgal; and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal; and

there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

What was it that finally unified Israel? Love. When the Israelites saw Saul take the reins and march the troops to rescue men about to be blinded by the serpent, the nation said, "He's our man." It wasn't when Saul prophesied or even when he was presented by Samuel that the nation supported him. It was not until they saw that Saul was a man who cared about all of his countrymen that they rallied behind him.

If I speak with the tongues of men and angels, if I know all things, if I prophesy, if I give my body to be burned, if I have faith to move mountains but have not love, I am nothing (1 Corinthians 13). The point at which people sense that you'd march all night to be there for them is the point they say, "We want you to have input and impact in our lives." Love is the key. It's not prophecy, tongues, or knowledge. If you pray for one thing, ask the Lord to make you a man or woman of love.



12 All prayer is basically divided into two categories: "Thy will be done" and "my will be done." I am learning that when I pray the latter, when I insist on my way, I never fail to eventually regret it. The people of Israel insisted upon having a king like the nations surrounding them. God heard their heart and let them have their way. Israel wanted a king, and God gave Israel Saul.

At first, it seemed to be exciting. Head and shoulders above everyone else, Saul was a man they could be proud of, a man they could look up to. But, as we shall see in the chapters before us, he was terribly flawed and would be a heartbreak to the nation . . .

1 Samuel 12:1, 2
And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old

and grayheaded; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day.

There seems to be an assumption that, even if only for a brief period, all kids inevitably stray from their faith. Parents seem to almost expect that their kids will rebel before ultimately coming around again. I suggest, however, that we would do better by praying, believing, trusting, and assuming that, like Samuel, our kids will walk with the Lord all of their days.

1 Samuel 12:3–12
Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand. And he said unto them, The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness. And Samuel said unto the people, It is the LORD that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD of all the righteous acts of the LORD, which he did to you and to your fathers. When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the LORD, then the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, which brought forth your fathers out of Egypt, and made them dwell in this place. And when they forgat the LORD their God, he sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the host of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. And they cried unto the LORD, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee. And the LORD sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelled safe And when ye saw that Nahash the

king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the LORD your God was your king.

"I have done nothing bad, and God has done nothing but good," Samuel says. "Why, then, did you turn your back on Him and demand a king?"

1 Samuel 12:13
Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the LORD hath set a king over you.

"You wanted a king. You got a king," Samuel said.

At this point, if I were God, I would say, "So long. Good luck." But watch what God declares through Samuel . . .

1 Samuel 12:14
If ye will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the LORD your God:

"Even though you've messed up and basically rejected God's reign over you, if you'll serve Him, He promises to reign over both you and your king," Samuel declares.

1 Samuel 12:15
But if ye will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be against you, as it was against your fathers.

God is unbelievably gracious. He says, "If you choose to obey Me, I'll reign over you. But if you rebel, My hand will be against you."

The Bible says whom the Lord loves, He chastens (Hebrews 12:6). Therefore, God's chastening hand is a sign of His love. In one way or another, all of us have rebelled. But the great news is that, on the basis of this text, God says, "Even though you've rebelled against Me or ignored Me, if

you'll obey what I say and fear again today, I'll be with you. If you don't, I'll chasten you because I am still your Father, and I still love you."

Many people who know they married the wrong person, made a wrong move, or took a wrong turn feel that there's no hope from that point on. God, however, says otherwise. "You wanted him. You got him. You wanted that job. It's yours. But I'm still here, and I always will be. If you choose to turn to Me today, and if you choose to once again obey, I'll reign over you."

That's grace, gang. God doesn't give up on Israel—and He won't give up on you.

1 Samuel 12:16–18
Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the LORD will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest to day? I will call unto the LORD, and he shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking you a king. So Samuel called unto the LORD; and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.

Harvest took place during the dry season. Therefore, the thunderstorm that arose as a result of Samuel's prayer validated his words to the people.

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

It is no surprise that the people asked Samuel to pray. His name literally means "Asked for," because he was the result of answered prayer (1 Samuel 2). Not only was he the result of answered prayer, but Samuel grew up in the temple—the house of prayer. Throughout his life, Samuel was a man of prayer. Prayer was the secret to his effectiveness in ministry.

1 Samuel 12:20–22
And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but

serve the LORD with all your heart; And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people.

"Because His name is on you, the Lord will not forsake you," Samuel declared. As Christians, the name of Christ is on us. This means the Lord won't give up on, or turn away from us. No matter where we've been or how stupid we've been, the Lord won't give up on us because we carry His name. It pleased God to make us His people. Why would it please the Lord to have a person like me carry His name? Beats me! That God would entrust *us* with the name of His precious Son is indeed a mystery to me.

1 Samuel 12:23–25
Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.

When the people asked him to pray for them, Samuel said, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." Prayerlessness is the epitome of selfishness because my failure to intercede for others means I am withholding that which would so greatly bless them. That is why Samuel was shocked at the suggestion that he wouldn't pray.

Prayer is the proof of love, and love is the product of prayer. If I love someone, I will pray for him. And if I pray for him, I will love him. That's why Jesus told us to pray for our enemies. If you pray for someone—even someone you don't like—something happens within you. You find your heart knit to those for whom you pray.

Intercession is the common denominator of all godly men and women. Whether it's in the Bible or in biographies, you'll notice that, without exception, the people who have really left a mark for the Lord and have made

a difference in this world are men and women given to intercession . . .

- Abraham was a friend of God, but he interceded for Sodom—a sick and sinful city.
- Elijah was a man who moved in the arena of the miraculous, but he prayed passionately for the people of Israel.
- Esther was the bride of the king, yet she risked her own life to intercede for the people.

"My heart's prayer and desire for Israel is that they should be saved," Paul said. "In fact, I would be accursed for the sake of my kinsman" (see Romans 9:3). Where did Paul get this kind of love? I suggest it was through passionate and consistent prayer for the people who were out to do him in. Because he prayed passionately for Israel, he loved Israel even above his own life.

The best gauge I know to measure my humility or lack thereof is to monitor my prayer life. A person who doesn't pray is proud because he is, in essence, saying, "I can provide for my kids. I can excel in my career. I can fix this difficulty. I can get through this day." A person who is given to prayer, however, is humble because he knows that without the Lord he can't do anything.

Prayer is not only the gauge of humility, but is the priority of true ministry. Note that Samuel said he would pray before he said he would teach (v. 23). If you're one who aspires to be used in Christian service, understand that it is not teaching, counseling, discipling, or even witnessing that is the priority of true ministry. It's prayer. The apostles who were setting the pace, leading the way in ministry, said, "It is not reasonable that we should leave the ministry of prayer and the Word to tend to the practical needs in the church in Jerusalem" (Acts 6). What came first? Prayer.

Most Christian leaders know this theoretically, but they don't understand it practically. May we be the exception. Greatness awaits the man or woman who will make prayer a priority. Therefore, let us be people given to prayer.



13

1 Samuel 13:1–4

Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul chose him three thousand men of Israel; whereof two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in mount Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin: and the rest of the people he sent every man to his tent. And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear. And all Israel heard say that Saul had smitten a garrison of the Philistines, and that Israel also was had in abomination with the Philistines. And the people were called together after Saul to Gilgal.

It was Jonathan who slew the Philistines but Saul who blew the trumpet, trying to make it appear as though the victory was his own. Gifts had been given to Saul. Grace had been poured out upon him. But now we see the cracks in his character that will lead to his tragic downfall.

The limb that bears the most fruit always hangs the lowest. If we're truly fruitful, there won't be a lifting up, but a bending down. This was not the case with Saul.

1 Samuel 13:5–9

And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude: and they came up, and pitched in Michmash, eastward from Beth-aven. When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, (for the people were distressed,) then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits. And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering.

Samuel had told Saul to wait seven days before engaging in battle against the Philistines. When seven days had come and almost gone and Samuel hadn't shown up, Saul said, "My troops are leaving. I've got to do something." So he assumed the role of priest and offered a sacrifice himself rather than waiting for Samuel so that he could engage in battle.

1 Samuel 13:10–14
And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him. And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering. And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee.

No sooner had Saul finished offering the sacrifice than Samuel showed up. This is so often the way of God. So often the Lord waits until the last moment to step in. Why? It's not to tease us, but to test us. He takes us right down to the wire not to taunt but to train us in order that we might have endurance (see James 1:3). You see, the race we run as believers isn't a sprint. It's a marathon. And God knows how desperately we need endurance. The only way to get endurance is to go through testing that will force us to wait on Him in order that we might not panic, not run off the track, not throw in the towel. C.H. Spurgeon said the snails made it safely to the ark because they had endurance. You might be a snail. I might be a slug. We might move very, very slowly—but we will make it to the ark if we simply endure.

"Time is running out!" we cry. "We've got to do something!"

Do we? I can give you all kinds of advice and recommendations, but it's only when God steps in that there will be a real solution. The sage was right when he said that the brave man is not braver than any other, but simply braver for ten minutes longer. Who is the brave man? Who is the mature brother, the wise sister, the deep Christian among us? It's not one who is necessarily super-spiritual. It's simply one who has learned to wait and not panic.

Has God promised to show up? Has God promised you that He is going to work all things for good? Has God promised you that He will take the cares you cast on Him? Has God promised you that He will give a peace deep within? Has God promised that the desires deep within your heart will come to pass? If He has, wait for Him. Don't panic, dear people. Be brave. Saul thought he waited seven days—but seven days hadn't completely passed. He didn't wait the full course.

"Lord make me a man of God," we pray. "Produce in me depth of character and wisdom."

"Okay," God says. "I'm going to take you through some experiences in which you will have the choice either to panic and try to solve the problem by sacrificing this or looking to them—or to trust Me."

1 Samuel 13:15
And Samuel arose, and gat him up from Gilgal unto Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people that were present with him, about six hundred men.

Samuel walked away heartbroken. Saul, on the other hand, continued with his activities.

1 Samuel 13:16–18
And Saul, and Jonathan his son, and the people that were present with them, abode in Gibeah of Benjamin: but the Philistines encamped in Michmash. And the spoilers came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies: one company turned unto the way that leadeth to Ophrah, unto the land of Shual: And another

company turned the way to Beth-horon: and another company turned to the way of the border that looketh to the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.

The Philistines dominated the countryside. They were in control of the territory.

1 Samuel 13:19–21
Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears: But all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock. Yet they had a file for the mattocks, and for the coulters, and for the forks, and for the axes, and to sharpen the goads.

When the Philistines controlled the country, they would not allow the men of Israel to have swords. So to sharpen their plows and other implements of farming, the Israelites had to go to the Philistines.

It is always the way of the enemy to take away your sword. "You can still farm. You can still do your work. I'll give you tools," Satan says. "I'll help you financially or educationally. I'll give you the instruments you need to succeed. But I don't want you to have the sword." Self-help and advice books fill the shelves of many who won't open the sword of the Word because Satan has tricked them into thinking they don't need it. I suggest, however, that the sixty-six-book library you hold in your hand contains enough material to keep you busy studying for the rest of your life.

I truly thought that by this point in my life I would have a much better handle on this book than I do. I know the Word not nearly like I ought to, not nearly like I want to. I don't have Zephaniah down like I ought to. I don't have passages in Romans memorized like I wanted to. I'm still sketchy on the flow of certain sections of Revelation. Time is running out. My memory is fading and I need to give myself to the Sword. I am more and more convinced that everything I need to know is in this book—about parenting and grandparenting, about finances and family, about faith and the future. It's all right here. Satan will try to give us other tools—but it is the Sword we need.

1 Samuel 13:22, 23
So it came to pass in the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan: but with Saul and with Jonathan his son was there found. And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the passage of Michmash.

The swords were stripped away, but God was still at work, as we'll see in chapter 14 . . .



14

1 Samuel 14:1
Now it came to pass upon a day, that Jonathan the son of Saul said unto the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over to the Philistines' garrison, that is on the other side. But he told not his father.

We saw in chapter 13 that there was a garrison of Philistines near Michmash ready to do battle with the people of Israel.

1 Samuel 14:2
And Saul tarried in the uttermost part of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which is in Migron: and the people that were with him were about six hundred men;

Many of the soldiers were garrisoned with Jonathan. Saul, however, was at home with six hundred of his personal bodyguards.

1 Samuel 14:3–5
And Ahiah, the son of Ahitub, I-chabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the LORD's priest in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people knew not that Jonathan was gone. And between the passages, by which Jonathan sought to go over unto the Philistines' garrison, there was a sharp rock on the one side and a sharp rock on the other side: and the name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. The forefront of the one

was situate northward over against Michmash, and the other southward over against Gibeah.

Bozez or "glistening" and *Seneh* or "thorny" were two rocks that stood between Jonathan and the enemy. That's the way it is for us as well. There are all kinds of glistening rewards and riches if we'll engage in battle. But there is also no shortage of thorny challenges and difficulties.

1 Samuel 14:6
And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few.

Deuteronomy 32:30 tells us that one with the Lord will put to flight 1,000 and two with the Lord will put to flight 10,000. I like the Lord's mathematics because if one would put to flight 1,000, you would think that two would put to flight 2,000. But God's economy is exponential and explosive, allowing two to have victory over ten times as many as one would.

Daniel 11:32 says that those who know their God shall do great exploits. In other words, the more I know about the Lord, the more faith I'll have to do great things for Him. William Carey, famous missionary of generations past said, "Attempt great things for God and expect great things from God." Every believer ought to be involved in something so big that, unless God is in it, it's doomed to fail. Go in over your head. Do something that is so much bigger than you are, that unless God is in it, it can't work. Jonathan models this mindset.

1 Samuel 14:7
And his armour-bearer said unto him, Do all that is in thine heart: turn thee; behold, I am with thee according to thy heart.

It's easy to be negative. It's easy to say, "What are you thinking? We don't have a chance!" Instead, Jonathan's armor-bearer said to him, "If it's on your heart, I'm with you."

1 Samuel 14:8–10
Then said Jonathan, Behold, we will pass over unto these men, and we will discover ourselves unto them. If they say thus unto us, Tarry until we come to you; then we will stand still in our place, and will not go up unto them. But if they say thus, Come up unto us; then we will go up: for the LORD hath delivered them into our hand: and this shall be a sign unto us.

Although Jonathan and his armor-bearer said, "Let's step out and see what the Lord might want to do," they weren't being presumptuous because they said, "If the Lord doesn't want us to go, we're not going to plunge ahead." In this, I see a wonderful balance.

A lot of people wait for something to happen—but they wait at a great distance. They say, "Lord if You want to do something with me, you have my number." I think a better way is to do what Jonathan did. He stood on the edge. He was at the door. He wasn't going to force it, but he was in place to storm through it.

Perhaps you're in a place vocationally, relationally, or in ministry where the Lord is telling you to step up, move out, and get ready.

"But what if it doesn't work out?" you ask.

The Lord has promised to close doors no man can open and to open doors no man can shut (Revelation 3:7), but you can't see the door from a long distance. You've got to be there. That's what Jonathan did.

1 Samuel 14:11
And both of them discovered themselves unto the garrison of the Philistines: and the Philistines said, Behold, the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves.

Afraid of the Philistines, the Israelites had taken to hiding in caves.

1 Samuel 14:12
And the men of the garrison answered Jonathan and his armour-bearer, and said, Come up to us, and we will shew you a thing.

And Jonathan said unto his armour-bearer, Come up after me: for the LORD hath delivered them into the hand of Israel.

In Matthew 16, Jesus told us that He would build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. For many years, I thought that verse meant Satan would not conquer us. But that's obviously not what Jesus was saying because gates don't attack. No, Jesus was saying, "You will storm through the gates of hell. You'll go on the offense and take territory previously held by the enemy." If Jonathan were put in a defensive position, his plan was to split. But the enemy egged him on to an offensive position, and in taking the offense, he and his armor-bearer were able to conquer that which was previously held by the enemy. We are to do the same thing. We get to go on the offense and see Jesus free people previously held by the enemy.

1 Samuel 14:13–15
And Jonathan climbed up upon his hands and upon his feet, and his armour-bearer after him: and they fell before Jonathan; and his armour-bearer slew after him. And that first slaughter, which Jonathan and his armour-bearer made, was about twenty men, within as it were an half acre of land, which a yoke of oxen might plow. And there was trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people: the garrison, and the spoilers, they also trembled, and the earth quaked: so it was a very great trembling.

The Philistines were blown away. They couldn't believe that only two men were wiping out their army. And as if that weren't bad enough, the earth began to quake.

1 Samuel 14:16
And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked; and, behold, the multitude melted away, and they went on beating down one another.

Evidently, they were disoriented and confused, the Philistines began to attack each other.

1 Samuel 14:17–19
Then said Saul unto the people that were with him, Number now, and see who is gone from us. And when they had numbered, behold, Jonathan and his armour-bearer were not there. And Saul said unto Ahiah, Bring hither the ark of God. For the ark of God was at that time with the children of Israel. And it came to pass, while Saul talked unto the priest, that the noise that was in the host of the Philistines went on and increased: and Saul said unto the priest, Withdraw thine hand.

Hearing the noise from the Philistine camp grow louder, and still not understanding the need to slow down and wait on the Lord, Saul called for the ark and told the priest there wasn't time to seek the Lord.

1 Samuel 14:20–22
And Saul and all the people that were with him assembled themselves, and they came to the battle: and, behold, every man's sword was against his fellow, and there was a very great discomfiture. Moreover the Hebrews that were with the Philistines before that time, which went up with them into the camp from the country round about, even they also turned to be with the Israelites that were with Saul and Jonathan. Likewise all the men of Israel which had hid themselves in mount Ephraim, when they heard that the Philistines fled, even they also followed hard after them in the battle.

As this amazing victory unfolded, the Israelites who previously sided with the enemy suddenly found courage to change alliances. Others, hiding away because they were intimidated left their caves and began to move in glorious unity. It took only two young men who were willing to say, "Let's go see what the Lord might want to do" to cause fearful men to surface and join the battle.

I wonder who is young of heart tonight. I wonder who is tired of the mundane and predictable, tired of that which is easy to do in your own energy. Maybe the Lord is saying to you, "There's something I want to do that

will be ground-shaking, something that will cause other people to get fired up and to get right." I wonder who God is speaking to even now.

1 Samuel 14:23, 24
So the LORD saved Israel that day: and the battle passed over unto Beth-aven. And the men of Israel were distressed that day: for Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted any food.

As the Philistines fought each other and fled in their confusion, Saul suddenly got involved and said, "No one is to eat anything all day long. I want you to be focused like a laser on chasing down the enemy."

1 Samuel 14:25, 26
And all they of the land came to a wood; and there was honey upon the ground. And when the people were come into the wood, behold, the honey dropped; but no man put his hand to his mouth: for the people feared the oath.

The Israelites had been working, fighting, running. They were hungry—and honey was there for the taking.

We are told that the Law of the Lord is sweeter than honey (Psalm 19:10). But it is the Saul mentality that says, "You don't have time for honey. You don't have time for devotions. You don't have time to go to Bible study. There's work to do. The business needs attention. The lawn needs mowing. You don't have time to stop, to eat, to grow."

The Lord, however, would say, "You need to slow down and take time to eat the honey of the Word if you're going to overcome and overtake the enemy."

1 Samuel 14:27
But Jonathan heard not when his father charged the people with the oath: wherefore he put forth the end of the rod that was in his hand, and dipped it in an honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes were enlightened.

Jonathan's eyes were enlightened, meaning he was energized. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes (Psalm 19:8).

1 Samuel 14:28, 29
Then answered one of the people, and said, Thy father straitly charged the people with an oath, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food this day. And the people were faint. Then said Jonathan, My father hath troubled the land: see, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey.

Jonathan realized the command of his father was foolish because he was more effective after he had tasted the honey.

1 Samuel 14:30, 31
How much more, if haply the people had eaten freely to day of the spoil of their enemies which they found? for had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines? And they smote the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon: and the people were very faint.

Aijalon is fourteen miles northwest of Jerusalem.

1 Samuel 14:32
And the people flew upon the spoil, and took sheep, and oxen, and calves, and slew them on the ground: and the people did eat them with the blood.

So hungry were the people from the battle that they ate the food before them—the food of the enemy. It was unclean. It wasn't kosher. It wasn't prepared properly.

The same thing happens to me. If I don't partake of the meat of the Word, I'll end up eating the unclean meat of the world. If I've worked hard, focused like a laser, done battle—but haven't taken time to dip into the honey of the Word, when the day is over, I'll dive into a scoop of ice cream—or two—or a gallon. Then I'll turn on TV and watch a political debate where political

analysts scream at each other for two hours. By that time, I'll think I need a bowl of cereal. And before I know it, it's two in the morning and I'm still hungry. But when I open the Bible, the most amazing thing happens. My eyes are enlightened. My soul is satiated. Suddenly I'm talking with the Lord and hearing from Him. And it's wonderful—for it's what I wanted all along.

Eat the honey before you get so discouraged and weary that you dive into carnal stuff. The best thing you can do to remain healthy and happy is to eat of the honey regularly. It will keep you from eating the unclean meat of the world. Pack a pocket New Testament instead of a calorie counter in your purse or pocket. Always keep at least a section of Scripture close at hand.

1 Samuel 14:33–35
Then they told Saul, saying, Behold, the people sin against the LORD, in that they eat with the blood. And he said, Ye have transgressed: roll a great stone unto me this day. And Saul said, Disperse yourselves among the people, and say unto them, Bring me hither every man his ox, and every man his sheep, and slay them here, and eat; and sin not against the LORD in eating with the blood. And all the people brought every man his ox with him that night, and slew them there. And Saul built an altar unto the LORD: the same was the first altar that he built unto the LORD.

It was Saul who kept the honey from the people—but now not only is he blaming the people for his sin, but he's once again assuming the role of priest and trying to correct the situation in a way he wasn't called to do. This is all so symptomatic of what happens when we try to fix things in the strength of our flesh.

1 Samuel 14:36
And Saul said, Let us go down after the Philistines by night, and spoil them until the morning light, and let us not leave a man of them. And they said, Do whatsoever seemeth good unto thee. Then said the priest, Let us draw near hither unto God.

As Saul barks order, the priest says, "Could we pray first?"

1 Samuel 14:37
And Saul asked counsel of God, Shall I go down after the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into the hand of Israel? But he answered him not that day.

In Psalm 66, David declared, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." When our prayers aren't answered, it is God's way of saying, "Something is not right. Something is out of order. There's an issue that needs to be adjusted." God didn't answer Saul a word because Saul was caught up in himself.

1 Samuel 14:38
And Saul said, Draw ye near hither, all the chief of the people: and know and see wherein this sin hath been this day.

Saul knew something was wrong, but he failed to understand that he was the problem.

1 Samuel 14:39
For, as the LORD liveth, which saveth Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die. But there was not a man among all the people that answered him.

Saul came to the irrational conclusion that the reason God didn't answer his prayer was because someone ate some honey. That he singled out Jonathan suggests to me that he realized that, as a man of faith and a courageous warrior, his son was a threat to him.

1 Samuel 14:40, 41
Then said he unto all Israel, Be ye on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side. And the people said unto Saul, Do what seemeth good unto thee. Therefore Saul said unto the LORD God of Israel, Give a perfect lot. And Saul and Jonathan were taken: but the people escaped.

Saul and Jonathan stood on one side; the people stood on the other. They drew straws to discover who had sinned—and Saul and Jonathan drew the short one.

1 Samuel 14:42, 43
And Saul said, Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son. And Jonathan was taken. Then Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what thou hast done. And Jonathan told him, and said, I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and, lo, I must die.

Rather than defending himself or blaming his father, Jonathan said, "I must die." Jonathan's conclusion is correct for anyone involved in conflict with another, for the only way peace can be attained is through someone dying to his point of view, his opinion, his rights.

1 Samuel 14:44
And Saul answered, God do so and more also: for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan.

Saul was a failure as a father, as a leader, as a king.

1 Samuel 14:45
And the people said unto Saul, Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: as the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not.

The people stepped in and stood up for Jonathan.

1 Samuel 14:46, 47
Then Saul went up from following the Philistines: and the Philistines went to their own place. So Saul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against

Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines: and whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed them.

Saul turned his attention to fighting the enemies of Israel.

1 Samuel 14:48, 49
And he gathered an host, and smote the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them. Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, and Ishui, and Melchishua: and the names of his two daughters were these; the name of the firstborn Merab, and the name of the younger Michal:

Jonathan means "Gift from God." *Ishui* means "Just like me." Saul is regressing. At the birth of his firstborn son, he acknowledged God. Here, he simply boasts in himself.

1 Samuel 14:50
And the name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaaz: and the name of the captain of his host was Abner, the son of Ner, Saul's uncle.

Ner means "light" or "lamp." *Ab* means "son." Thus, *Abner* means "son of light."

1 Samuel 14:51, 52
And Kish was the father of Saul; and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel. And there was sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul: and when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he took him unto him.

The young, strong men were drafted into Saul's army—just as Samuel had prophesied.



15

In the chapter before us, the cracks we have seen in Saul's character become crevices into which he will fall. Here, we see the sad story of the downward spiral of a man who began well, who had the anointing of the Spirit, who had the call of God, but whose flaws will ultimately destroy him.

1 Samuel 15:1
Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD.

Although Saul had already dropped the ball, the Lord sends Samuel to give him yet another opportunity to do something right.

That's what the Lord always does to His children. He sends messenger after messenger, gives us opportunity after opportunity to walk wisely, to live successfully. But there does come an end to those opportunities to do right. Ultimately, as we shall see, Saul just doesn't get it, and his poor decisions destroy him. Therefore, as we look at the story before us and see Saul's plight, God would say to us what He said to Saul: "Hearken"—take heed, give ear, listen up—"to My Word."

1 Samuel 15:2, 3
Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

In the Bible, Amalek is a picture of the flesh. In Deuteronomy 25, we are told that the Amalekites would attack the back of the pack as the people of Israel marched through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. In other words, the Amalekites would pick off those who were sick, feeble, or elderly.

That's exactly how the flesh works. It exploits the areas of our lives where we are weak, feeble, or holding back. Concerning the Amalekites who

harassed the people of Israel, God said, “It’s time to deal a death blow to these people.”

To some who read this story that may sound mean or cruel. “How could God call for the destruction of an entire civilization?” they ask. But the Amalekites were so corrupt and so polluted that they were actually destroying themselves in their perversity and sin. Throughout the Old Testament, we see God ordering the annihilation of certain civilizations because they were so corrupt and polluted that it was actually an act of mercy for Him to take them out of their misery.

1 Samuel 15:4–6
And Saul gathered the people together, and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of Judah. And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and laid wait in the valley. And Saul said unto the Kenites, Go, depart, get you down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them: for ye shewed kindness to all the children of Israel, when they came up out of Egypt. So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites.

Although the Kenites were neighbors of the Amalekites, they had shown kindness to Israel—perhaps because Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, was a Kenite. “We don’t want you to get caught in the middle of this war with the Amalekites,” Saul warned them. They wisely heeded Saul’s warning and left.

1 Samuel 15:7–9
And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.

Agag's name literally means "I will overcome." What a great name for the king of the flesh: "I will overcome. I will succeed. I will not be wiped out or done in or removed easily." Agag, the king of the flesh, was spared by Saul, which will prove to be a costly error. You see, because Saul didn't utterly destroy the Amalekites, years later, when he is wounded on Mt. Gilboa in a battle against the Philistines, it will be an Amalekite who will ultimately run a sword through him (2 Samuel 1:6–8).

What a great illustration. If I don't kill the flesh, the flesh will kill me. Ask Saul. He thought he could control Agag, but found that Agag's descendants eventually destroyed him. If you think that, because you've destroyed certain aspects of your flesh and have Agag in chains, you don't have to worry—watch out. Agag will prove to be one that gives birth to another fleshly tendency that will do you in. Ask Saul. It happened to him.

A couple hundred years after this, we come to the story of Esther. The Book of Esther deals with a villain named Haman who was determined to destroy the Jews. Haman was an Agagite (Esther 3:1). Thus, two hundred-plus years after Saul, the nation feels the ramifications of his failure to deal with the flesh.

Sometimes we fall into the folly of Saul, thinking we have our flesh under control. But we fail to realize that our failure to deal with it completely will have ramifications on our kids and grandchildren, our friends, neighbors, and the church family—perhaps even years later.

1 Samuel 15:10, 11
Then came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night.

How I like Samuel's heart. He wasn't ticked off. He didn't stomp around the room or put his fist through the wall. He was simply heartbroken. He hurt for Saul.

1 Samuel 15:12–15

And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal. And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.

"Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. Glory to God! I've had victory!" Saul said. But his spiritual jargon could barely be heard above the bleating of the very sheep he was supposed to have destroyed (v. 3).

1 Samuel 15:16, 17
Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on. And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?

"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time," James declares (4:10). It's when Saul was small in his own sight that God tapped him to be king. Humility brings about productivity. But humility was no longer part of Saul's character.

1 Samuel 15:18–21
And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD? And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep

and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal.

"Don't blame me," Saul insisted. "It's the peoples' fault, not mine."

People still say this. "My parents, my grandparents, or my kindergarten teacher are the reason I have these fleshly problems and evil tendencies," they insist.

1 Samuel 15:22
And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

Many people give to a charity or ministry in order to assuage a guilty conscience or to appear more selfless than they are. Obeying is infinitely more important than giving because obedience isn't self-serving.

1 Samuel 15:23
For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

The margin of your Bible most likely renders the word "witchcraft" as "divination." Rebellion is as witchcraft because when I rebel, I'm basically saying, "Lord, I will divine, I will determine what's best for me." According to this text, rebellion against the Lord is equal to involvement with the occult. Because of this, Saul lost the kingdom.

1 Samuel 15:24
And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.

Even in his confession, Saul made excuses. He should have simply said, "I've sinned. I'm wrong. Period." Instead, he added "because." If I begin to

justify why I have a sinful tendency, I'm in trouble. I need to simply say, "I sinned. Period."

1 Samuel 15:25–28
Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD. And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel. And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent. And Samuel said unto him, The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou.

The kingdom would be taken from Saul and given to a neighbor. That neighbor would, of course, be David.

1 Samuel 15:29
And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent.

God doesn't repent. That is, He doesn't change His mind. God never says, "Oops. I'm going the wrong way. I'd better change direction." Because God never makes a mistake, He has no need to repent.

1 Samuel 15:30, 31
Then he said, I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD thy God. So Samuel turned again after Saul; and Saul worshipped the LORD.

"Come with me to worship thy God," Saul said to Samuel—referring to God as Samuel's God, but evidently no longer his own.

1 Samuel 15:32, 33
Then said Samuel, Bring ye hither to me Agag the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said,

Surely the bitterness of death is past. And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

Can't we all get along? Agag asked—just as the flesh always tries to strike a bargain with us. But Samuel dealt a deathblow to this representative of the flesh. And so must we.

1 Samuel 15:34, 35
Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house to Gibeah of Saul. And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul: and the LORD repented that he had made Saul king over Israel.

In verse 29, we read that the Lord is not a man that he should repent. The word "repent" can mean "to change direction"—or it can mean, as it does forty-one times in the Old Testament—"to regret." God is simply regretting that the people demanded a king. In Deuteronomy 17:15, provision is made for a king. But the people got ahead of God because the king He intended for them was David.

Perhaps that's a word for some of us. "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart," Psalm 37:4 tells us. We cling to and claim this verse, as well we should—but not apart from its context, for three verses later, David tells us to wait patiently for God. God has a plan for our lives—and no small part of it requires patience. If we get ahead of God, we end up with Ishmael instead of Isaac, with Saul instead of David. It's a recurring lesson throughout Scripture (Psalm 27:14; Proverbs 20:22; Isaiah 40:31; Jeremiah 14:22; Lamentations 3:26; Hosea 12:6; Micah 7:7; Habakkuk 2:3; Zephaniah 3:8; Acts 1:4; Romans 8:25; 1 Thessalonians 1:10). Wait, wait, wait on the Lord.

16

1 Samuel 16:1

And the LORD said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons.

"Quit your mourning and moaning, Samuel, there's work to do," God said.

"But I have reason to mourn. My heart is broken," Samuel could have said.

"I regret it, too, but I've moved on," God might have answered.

We need to move on, gang. Yes, there are incidents in our lives that are hurtful, even regrettable—sad things, hard times, raw deals; pain, problems, and disappointments. But we must move on. Why? Because we serve a God who is on the move (Genesis 1:2). If I remain in the past problem or the past disappointment, I will miss the present move of God.

1 Samuel 16:2 (a)

And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me . . .

So bad had Saul become that Samuel, a man of God, now feared for his life.

1 Samuel 16:2 (b)–4

. . . And the LORD said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will shew thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto me him whom I name unto thee. And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably?

I've known a few men who have truly been called into prophetic ministry. They speak God's heart and share God's Word in a way that is so impacting that when they knock on my door, like the elders of Bethlehem, I tremble a bit!

1 Samuel 16:5–7
And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice. And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD's anointed is before him. But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

In this life, we most often judge people by how they look, behave, dress, talk, or carry themselves. But God sees through all of that. He looks straight at the heart.

1 Samuel 16:8–11 (a)
Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD hath not chosen these. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep . . .

With the sheep—what a great place to find a shepherd for the nation.

1 Samuel 16:11 (b), 12
. . . And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he.

David is anointed as king—but Saul is still on the throne. Jesus is the Christ, or, literally, "Anointed One." Jesus will rule and reign on this planet

someday. In the meantime, a usurper is on the throne. Jesus calls the devil the prince of this world (John 14:30). Paul calls him the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4).

"If Jesus is King of kings, why is this world so crazy? Why are there so many problems?" people ask. The answer is that, according to God's perfect plan, Jesus is anointed, but not yet enthroned.

1 Samuel 16:13 (a)
Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him . . .

When Saul was anointed, it was with a vial of oil (1 Samuel 10:1). David, on the other hand, was anointed with a big flask. Why? Because oil in the Word is a symbol of the Holy Spirit and David is a picture of the true Anointed One, the Christos, Jesus, who would be anointed with the oil of gladness more than any of His brethren (Hebrews 1:9).

1 Samuel 16:13 (b)
. . . in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward . . .

Notice that Samuel anoints David in the midst of his brethren. David will eventually be anointed three times. The first time is here. The second time is in 2 Samuel 2:4, when he is anointed over the tribe of Judah. The third time is in 2 Samuel 5, when he is anointed as king over all Israel.

Sometimes a man will think he's anointed for ministry. His mom might agree. A few others might even recognize his anointing—and he'll wonder why everyone else doesn't see it. Most likely it's because it's not time. There is an unfolding of God's plan for a man or woman in service or ministry. You cannot rush it. Anointing is recognized by others in stages. It doesn't happen quickly. As it did with David, it comes when you fight battles on behalf of others, when you gain victory for others by caring for them, standing by them, helping them. David was an incredible man—a man after God's own heart, unlike anyone the world had ever seen—yet it took many years before his anointing was recognized. Saul was impatient. David, on the other hand, patiently waited. So must we.

1 Samuel 16:13 (c), 14

. . . So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah. But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.

How could an evil spirit be sent from the Lord? Evil spirits and Satan himself can do nothing without the Lord's permission. As such, demons actually serve the purpose of God. How? By providing people a choice. If there were no Satan, people would have no choice. Thus, we would never know if our love for God was genuine. In this area, God is pro-choice. He says, "If you don't want to love Me, walk with Me, or believe in Me, you have another option. You can be deceived by the devil."

If I tell my son, Ben, I want him to stay home this afternoon—and then I lock him in his room, bolt his door, and board up his windows, it would be meaningless for me to come home later and tell him how proud I was of him for staying home. Unless there was an open door for Ben to make a decision, my praise of him would be pointless. That is why God leaves the door open and uses Satan as a tool to give people a choice.

1 Samuel 16:15–18

And Saul's servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee. Let our lord now command thy servants, which are before thee, to seek out a man, who is a cunning player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well. And Saul said unto his servants, Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me. Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the LORD is with him.

What a resume! David had confidence, courage, and charisma. He was a conqueror, yet was careful. On top of it all, the Lord was with him.

1 Samuel 16:19–21

Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep. And Jesse took an ass laden with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a kid, and sent them by David his son unto Saul. And David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly; and he became his armour-bearer.

David never was bitter, never felt anger, never allowed hatred to rule his heart. He was always an admirer of Saul, even though Saul was out to kill him. Amazing.

1 Samuel 16:22, 23
And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, Let David, I pray thee, stand before me; for he hath found favour in my sight. And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.

When music was played by this godly man, the demons fled. That is not surprising, for there is power in praise. Worship works wonders. When I'm depressed or blue, when I feel attacked by the enemy, when I feel the demons harassing me, I have found that one of the best things I can do is worship the Lord.



17 The chapter before us tells one of the best-known and best-loved stories in all of Scripture: the story of David and Goliath. While it is a story filled with lessons of God's faithfulness even in the most seemingly impossible situations, I would like us to look at this account as yet another picture of our Champion, Jesus Christ, and His victory over Satan, a giant of an enemy.

1 Samuel 17:1–3

Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and were gathered together at Shochoh, which belongeth to Judah, and pitched between Shochoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines. And the Philistines stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side: and there was a valley between them.

The Philistines were encamped in Judah, the place of praise, where they ought not be.

1 Samuel 17:4
And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.

Goliath means "strip"—which is exactly what our Adversary does as he strips us of our joy, happiness, purpose, and peace.

1 Samuel 17:5
And he had an helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass.

Five thousand shekels of brass would be approximately two hundred pounds.

1 Samuel 17:6, 7
And he had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam; and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him.

Six hundred shekels would be approximately twenty-five pounds—an amazing weight for a spear, considering a shot-put weighs only sixteen pounds.

1 Samuel 17:8
And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me.

"Send a man down to me," Goliath roared. I like that phrase because there would indeed be a Man—the Son of Man—who would come down from heaven to do battle with the enemy that seeks to devour us.

1 Samuel 17:9–11
If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together. When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid.

It's no wonder Saul was dismayed. After all, being the tallest man in Israel made him the logical choice to face Goliath.

1 Samuel 17:12–14
Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah, whose name was Jesse; and he had eight sons: and the man went among men for an old man in the days of Saul. And the three eldest sons of Jesse went and followed Saul to the battle: and the names of his three sons that went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next unto him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. And David was the youngest: and the three eldest followed Saul.

David was the eighth son. Eight is the biblical number of sanctification and new beginnings. The other brothers were thought to be more qualified, but God said to Samuel, "This is the one. This is the man. I've set him apart. I've sanctified him."

1 Samuel 17:15

But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

David had been in Saul's presence earlier when he played the harp for Saul. Here, having left Saul's court, he's back home in Bethlehem, taking care of his father's sheep—a picture of the One who would one day not only take care of His Father's sheep, but lay down His life for them (John 10:11).

1 Samuel 17:16
And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days.

Forty, in the Bible, is the number of testing and trial . . .

- Rain pelted Noah's ark for forty days.
- The children of Israel wandered forty years.
- Jesus was tested in the wilderness for forty days.

1 Samuel 17:17–19
And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren; And carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge. Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.

David and Jesus were both sent by their fathers—David to bring his brothers bread, Jesus to be Bread for His brothers (John 6:48; Hebrews 2:11).

1 Samuel 17:20–25
And David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him; and he came to the trench, as the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle. For Israel and the Philistines had put the

battle in array, army against army. And David left his carriage in the hand of the keeper of the carriage, and ran into the army, and came and saluted his brethren. And as he talked with them, behold, there came up the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, out of the armies of the Philistines, and spake according to the same words: and David heard them. And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid. And the men of Israel said, Have ye seen this man that is come up? surely to defy Israel is he come up: and it shall be, that the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel.

The reward promised to the one who slew Goliath was great riches, a bride, and freedom for his family. What did the Son of David, Jesus Christ, gain by defeating Satan? We are His inheritance (Ephesians 1), His treasure (Matthew 13:44), His pearl of great price (Matthew 13:46). We are also His bride (Revelation 21:9). And we are the ones who have been set free (John 8:36).

1 Samuel 17:26–29
And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God? And the people answered him after this manner, saying, So shall it be done to the man that killeth him. And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle. And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause?

Sanctified by the Spirit, sent by the Father, seeking a treasure, like David, Jesus was scorned by His brothers without cause (Luke 23:21, 22).

1 Samuel 17:30–33

And he turned from him toward another, and spake after the same manner: and the people answered him again after the former manner. And when the words were heard which David spake, they rehearsed them before Saul: and he sent for him. And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine. And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.

"I'll take Goliath on," David said.

"You don't have a chance," Saul said. "You're just a kid and he's a giant who's been a warrior from his youth."

1 Samuel 17:34–37

And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee.

David and Jesus were both strengthened by experience. David was strengthened as he battled the lion in the field. When He overcame the temptation of Satan, the roaring lion, in the wilderness, Jesus was strengthened for the battle not in the valley of Elah, but on the mountain of Calvary.

1 Samuel 17:38, 39

And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail. And

David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him.

Perhaps feeling guilty about sending a boy into battle, Saul gave David his armor. But David laid aside this armor, just as Jesus laid aside His godly powers and abilities to become a Man like us (Philippians 2).

1 Samuel 17:40
And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine.

Why did David grab five stones? It could be because Goliath had four brothers. But it could also be because five in the Bible is the number of grace and David knew that the victory would come not because of who he was or what he had done, but solely because of God's grace.

1 Samuel 17:41–46
And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield went before him. And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field. Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

Both David and Jesus were strong in faith.

"This day will the Lord deliver you into my hands," David said in the ears of Goliath as well as in the hearing of his countrymen.

"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up," Jesus declared in the ears of the Jews as well as His disciples (John 2:19–22).

Faith abides in the heart and is released through the mouth (Romans 10:10). It's one thing to believe in your heart silently. It's something else to make a statement publicly.

1 Samuel 17:47–49

And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hands. And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth.

Recent discoveries indicate that Philistine armor was made in such a way that the helmets had visors. But David was so little that when Goliath lifted his visor to see him, David used the "window of opportunity" to sink a stone in his forehead.

1 Samuel 17:50–53

So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled. And the men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines, until thou come to the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell down by the way to Shaaraim, even unto Gath, and unto Ekron. And the children of

Israel returned from chasing after the Philistines, and they spoiled their tents.

Both David and Jesus snatched the enemy's weapons and used them against them. David lopped off Goliath's head with Goliath's own sword—just as Jesus set the captives free by way of the Cross (Ephesians 4:8).

1 Samuel 17:54
And David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armour in his tent.

Both David and Jesus singularly secured the victory. According to Goliath's own rules, one man would win the victory for the entire army (1 Samuel 17:9). And according to the Word, Jesus won the battle for all mankind (John 12:32). All the Israelites had to do was pick up the spoils—and the same is true with us. We can expect our lives to be blessed, our kids to do well, our prayers to be answered—all because of what Jesus did on our behalf.

1 Samuel 17:55–58
And when Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, he said unto Abner, the captain of the host, Abner, whose son is this youth? And Abner said, As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell. And the king said, Inquire thou whose son the stripling is. And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. And Saul said to him, Whose son art thou, thou young man? And David answered, I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.

David having grown up since the time he played the harp for Saul, Saul no longer recognizes him. So David introduces himself as the son of Jesse, a resident of Bethlehem, little knowing he was a precursor of the Son who would leave His Father to be born in Bethlehem in order to save us from the Goliath of an enemy out to destroy us.

18 When David reported to Saul, Saul said, "Who are you?" When he finished telling Saul who he was, the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David . . .

1 Samuel 18:1–4
And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

Jonathan—the crown prince, the next in line to the throne—looks at this unlikely hero, stripped himself of the robe he was wearing and the weapons he was carrying, and gave them to David. Jonathan was a hero in his own right. He could have looked at David as competition. But he didn't. Instead, he gave up his power and prestige to ally himself with this one-time shepherd boy from Bethlehem.

You might have a program, a plan, a passion. But the Lord would say to you today, "Let go. Give Me your robe and your weapons. Knit your soul with Mine, and what you'll find is freedom and fulfillment like you've never known."

Saul was determined to remain on the throne and in control. Jonathan does just the opposite. Saul goes down in infamy; Jonathan is exalted eternally. When you talk to people at work, on the campus, or in the neighborhood, the issue is always the same: Are you willing to get off the throne of your life? Are you willing to give control to the God who loves you so much that He became the Good Shepherd who gave His life for you?

This is a daily issue for those of us who know the Lord, as well. Who will be on the throne today? Will I give up my abilities and appearance to follow the One who gave up the throne of heaven to die for me?

1 Samuel 18:5
And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

This man after God's own heart behaved himself wisely. Even though he had outshone Saul in the valley of Elah, even though he had been anointed with the horn of oil, he went wherever Saul sent him. He realized God had a perfect plan unfolding and he trusted the sovereign ability of God to work things out at the right time.

1 Samuel 18:6–9
And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward.

Saul loved the first verse of this number one song on the charts. But the second verse enraged him.

1 Samuel 18:10, 11
And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's hand. And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice.

In David's hand was a harp—an instrument of worship. In Saul's hand was a javelin—an instrument of war. In Saul's hand was an instrument of hurting. In David's hand was an instrument of healing. What is in your hand—worship or war, healing or hurting? Saul and David are both leaders. Both have been anointed. But one is on his way down, while the other is on his way up. You can always tell if you're on the way up or on the way down by what instrument is in your hand. A person who is losing the anointing, who is diminishing in calling, will be throwing spears, cutting people down with harsh words. Have you thrown a spear today? Have you made your "point"? When Saul threw the spear at David, this one who slew a giant didn't throw it back.

1 Samuel 18:12, 13
And Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him, and was departed from Saul. Therefore Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people.

Saul sent David to war, perhaps hoping he'd die in battle.

1 Samuel 18:14–16
And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him. Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them.

One with the people, David led them in battle, and they loved him.

1 Samuel 18:17
And Saul said to David, Behold my elder daughter Merab, her will I give thee to wife: only be thou valiant for me, and fight the LORD's battles. For Saul said, Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him.

In Chapter 17, the reward promised to the victor over Goliath was Saul's daughter. Here, the list of requirements for her hand in marriage grows as

Saul continues to try to remove David from the scene.

1 Samuel 18:18–21
And David said unto Saul, Who am I? and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son in law to the king? But it came to pass at the time when Merab Saul's daughter should have been given to David, that she was given unto Adriel the Meholathite to wife. And Michal Saul's daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him. Wherefore Saul said to David, Thou shalt this day be my son in law in the one of the twain.

Hoping his daughter, Michal, would trip David up, Saul gave him her hand.

1 Samuel 18:22–25
And Saul commanded his servants, saying, Commune with David secretly, and say, Behold, the king hath delight in thee, and all his servants love thee: now therefore be the king's son in law. And Saul's servants spake those words in the ears of David. And David said, Seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king's son in law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed? And the servants of Saul told him, saying, On this manner spake David. And Saul said, Thus shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies. But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.

The Philistines constantly made fun of the Israelites because they were circumcised.

1 Samuel 18:26, 27
And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son in law: and the days were not expired. Wherefore David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the

Philistines two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full tale to the king, that he might be the king's son in law. And Saul gave him Michal his daughter to wife.

Saul thought David would die in this attempt. But David came through, slaying twice as many of the enemy as Saul requested.

1 Samuel 18:28–30
And Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal Saul's daughter loved him. And Saul was yet the more afraid of David; and Saul became David's enemy continually. Then the princes of the Philistines went forth: and it came to pass, after they went forth, that David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul; so that his name was much set by.

The more David was exalted, the more jealous Saul became. Jonathan, however, had an even greater right to be jealous of David because they were of the same generation. But Jonathan is free from jealousy because he decided to help David accomplish his goal rather than to stand against him. Thus, in helping David, Jonathan is free from jealousy, goes down in history as a great man, and is rewarded eternally.

I guarantee there has been or will be a situation in your life similar to this. You'll have a choice to feel threatened and to throw spears—or to rejoice and help others excel. If you try to keep someone else down, you will spiral downward yourself. But if you help someone else go higher, you will inevitably be on an upward path as well. On a daily basis, let go of the spear, and pick up the harp.



19 **1 Samuel 19:1**
And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David.

Jealous of, and threatened by David, Saul is determined to kill him. We, too, have an enemy who, targets us as believers because he does not want us to influence others to leave his kingdom of death, darkness, and damnation for God's kingdom of love, light, and salvation. As real and as powerful as our Adversary is, however, this chapter shows that God will protect us in the same four ways He protected David . . .

1 Samuel 19:2–7
But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself: And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where thou art, and I will commune with my father of thee; and what I see, that I will tell thee. And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good: For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the LORD wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause? And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As the LORD liveth, he shall not be slain. And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan shewed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past.

The first way God protected David was through a prince who pled his case. An advocate for David, Jonathan talked to his father about David's situation. This all points to a far greater prince than Jonathan—the Prince of peace, our Savior, Jesus Christ—who pleads our case to the King of kings (1 John 2:1). Jonathan pled for David on the basis of David's works—that he slew Goliath. Jesus, on the other hand, pleads our case not on the basis of our works, but on the basis of His work for us.

1 Samuel 19:8–10

And there was war again: and David went out, and fought with the Philistines, and slew them with a great slaughter; and they fled from him. And the evil spirit from the LORD was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand: and David played with his hand. And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin; but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, and he smote the javelin into the wall: and David fled, and escaped that night.

When David returned victorious from battle, the spirit of jealousy rose up again within the heart of Saul, causing him to go back on his word that he wouldn't kill David. When Saul threw a spear at him a third time, David realized it was time for him to leave.

1 Samuel 19:11–17
Saul also sent messengers unto David's house, to watch him, and to slay him in the morning: and Michal David's wife told him, saying, If thou save not thy life to night, to morrow thou shalt be slain. So Michal let David down through a window: and he went, and fled, and escaped. And Michal took an image, and laid it in the bed, and put a pillow of goats' hair for his bolster, and covered it with a cloth. And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, He is sick. And Saul sent the messengers again to see David, saying, Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may slay him. And when the messengers were come in, behold, there was an image in the bed, with a pillow of goats' hair for his bolster. And Saul said unto Michal, Why hast thou deceived me so, and sent away mine enemy, that he is escaped? And Michal answered Saul, He said unto me, Let me go; why should I kill thee?

God protected David through a bride who saved his life. "There are men who will ambush you," Michal told her husband. "Go out the back window and I'll cover for you."

It was David's bride who saved his life. The people in the body of Christ are the Bride of Christ—and they are the ones who will save your life. You might think people in the church are liars. That's okay, so was Michal. You

might think the people in the church are idolators. That's okay, so was Michal. On a practical level, we are a blemished Bride indeed. But in God's eyes, because we have been washed in the blood of the Lamb and robed in the righteousness of our Lord, we are a glorious church without spot or wrinkle, a holy priesthood, a spotless Bride (Revelation 19:8; Ephesians 5:27; 1 Peter 2:5).

I have discovered that when I go through valleys, difficulties, and tragedies, it's the body of Christ I'm most thankful for. When the enemy is out to destroy you, it's the blemished Bride of Christ who will rescue you.

1 Samuel 19:18
So David fled, and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and dwelt in Naioth.

Realizing Saul was determined to destroy him, David made his way to the prophet, Samuel. Samuel not only talked to David, but walked with him to the next town. How this must have strengthened David's heart.

I have a Prince who pleads my case. I am part of a Bride who saves my life. And I, too, know prophets who not only tell me what to do, but walk with me every step of the way. In this book, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel walk with me. When I walk down the street, you wouldn't believe the company that travels with me. This book saves my life when the enemy is in hot pursuit.

1 Samuel 19:19, 20
And it was told Saul, saying, Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah. And Saul sent messengers to take David: and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as appointed over them, the Spirit of God was upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied.

Saul's men came to apprehend David, but the Spirit of God came upon them and they began to prophesy.

1 Samuel 19:21

And when it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they prophesied likewise. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they prophesied also.

In John 7, we read that the Pharisees and scribes sent soldiers to arrest Jesus. When the soldiers returned empty-handed, the leaders asked why. "Something happened," the soldiers answered. "No man spoke like this Man."

1 Samuel 19:22, 23
Then went he also to Ramah, and came to a great well that is in Sechu: and he asked and said, Where are Samuel and David? And one said, Behold, they be at Naioth in Ramah. And he went thither to Naioth in Ramah: and the Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on, and prophesied, until he came to Naioth in Ramah.

"Is Saul also among the prophets?" This question was asked earlier when Saul was a humble man (1 Samuel 10:11). In that case, it was a confirmation that he was the one being raised up by the Lord. At this point, however, nine chapters later, he's in an entirely different situation. It's not confirmation—but conviction.

1 Samuel 19:24
And he stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, Is Saul also among the prophets?

The Spirit of God comforts and confirms. But, as seen here, He will also convict and strip when necessary. The same Saul who at one time prophesied in the power of the Spirit in chapter 10 is prophesying again—but no longer a confirmation of his ministry, it's an indication that he is in deep trouble.



1 Samuel 20:1

20 **And David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?**

"What have I done?" we hear David ask. Like David, oftentimes we think trouble comes our way because of something we've done. Perhaps God is indeed disciplining, chastening, correcting us. But hard times are not always about punishment. Sometimes they're about preparation. As we see the story unfold, we see God knocking some rough edges off David as He prepares him for the calling on his life.

The same thing is true for you and me. Tribulation brings about patience and patience brings about perfection (Romans 5:3; James 1:4).

1 Samuel 20:2

And he said unto him, God forbid; thou shalt not die: behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will shew it me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? it is not so.

In insisting that David wouldn't die and that Saul wasn't out to get him, Jonathan is both right and wrong. He was wrong because Saul was indeed out to get David. But he was right because David wouldn't die by Saul's hand. God's plan would not be thwarted. And the same is true for you. God has a plan and nothing can cause that plan to come undone. As long as you're walking with Him, nothing will derail you.

1 Samuel 20:3

And David sware moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death.

"There is but a step between me and death." What a great truth. Because we are truly but one step away from eternity, I believe one of the wisest ways

to live life is to live every day as if it was our last opportunity to get things right, to straighten things out.

1 Samuel 20:4
Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee.

"In light of the fact that you feel you're only one step away from death, what do you want me to do?" Jonathan asks.

1 Samuel 20:5–7
And David said unto Jonathan, Behold, to morrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat: but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even. If thy father at all miss me, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Bethlehem his city: for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family. If he say thus, It is well; thy servant shall have peace: but if he be very wroth, then be sure that evil is determined by him.

As a member of Saul's court, David would be expected to be at the feast of the new moon. David's plan was not to attend—and then to gauge Saul's feelings for him by Saul's response to his absence. If Saul became upset, David would know Saul was scheming to do him in.

1 Samuel 20:8, 9
Therefore thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant; for thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of the LORD with thee: notwithstanding, if there be in me iniquity, slay me thyself; for why shouldest thou bring me to thy father? And Jonathan said, Far be it from thee: for if I knew certainly that evil were determined by my father to come upon thee, then would not I tell it thee?

If Jonathan felt that David was worthy of death, David told him he was to kill him on the spot. Stress sires suspicions; pressure produces paranoia.

When you're under stress—as David was—you can begin to get suspicious. Always take lightly the emotions you feel when you're under pressure because even David sounds paranoid here.

1 Samuel 20:10–13
Then said David to Jonathan, Who shall tell me? or what if thy father answer thee roughly? And Jonathan said unto David, Come, and let us go out into the field. And they went out both of them into the field. And Jonathan said unto David, O LORD God of Israel, when I have sounded my father about to morrow any time, or the third day, and, behold, if there be good toward David, and I then send not unto thee, and shew it thee; The LORD do so and much more to Jonathan: but if it please my father to do thee evil, then I will shew it thee, and send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace: and the LORD be with thee, as he hath been with my father.

Jonathan promised he would show David of his father's intent to do David harm.

1 Samuel 20:14, 15
And thou shalt not only while yet I live shew me the kindness of the LORD, that I die not: But also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever: no, not when the LORD hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth.

A famous conductor identified the greatest quality of a concert violinist not as the ability to play first violin, but the willingness to play second. Such was the heart of Jonathan.

1 Samuel 20:16, 17
So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, Let the LORD even require it at the hand of David's enemies. And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

To make a covenant, or, literally to "cut covenant" meant the two parties would divide an animal, stand in the middle of the carcass, and state their commitment to each other. In doing this, they were saying, "I'm deadly serious about this. If I don't follow through on my end of the bargain, let me be as the dead animal that surrounds us."

1 Samuel 20:18, 19
Then Jonathan said to David, To morrow is the new moon: and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty. And when thou hast stayed three days, then thou shalt go down quickly, and come to the place where thou didst hide thyself when the business was in hand, and shalt remain by the stone Ezel.

Ezel means "the rock that shows the way." Therefore, David was to stay by the rock that shows the way. Like David, you might be at a crossroads, worried you won't figure out where you're supposed to go. I have great news for you: God will direct you. All you have to do is stay close to "the Rock that shows the way." That is, all you have to do is stay in touch with Jesus day by day by day. Even if your devotional life isn't what it should be, even if there are struggles with which you wrestle continually, even if you feel like you missed the boat previously, God is faithful. God blesses us in spite of ourselves if we simply plop ourselves by the Rock that shows the way.

As a father of five, I don't direct my kids on the basis of how they're doing. That is, I don't say to one, "Since you're being good, I'm going to give you lots of direction," and to another, "I can't direct you because you're struggling with this or dealing with that." No, I direct my kids wherever they're at. I want to give them as much direction, help, and assistance as they'll allow me to give them. The same is true of our heavenly Father. He sees our needs and is aware of our frailty. Yet even when we are faithless, He is faithful still (2 Timothy 2:13).

1 Samuel 20:20–23
And I will shoot three arrows on the side thereof, as though I shot at a mark. And, behold, I will send a lad, saying, Go, find out the arrows. If I expressly say unto the lad, Behold, the arrows are on this side of thee, take them; then come thou: for there is peace to

thee, and no hurt; as the LORD liveth. But if I say thus unto the young man, Behold, the arrows are beyond thee; go thy way: for the LORD hath sent thee away. And as touching the matter which thou and I have spoken of, behold, the LORD be between thee and me for ever.

Jonathan instructed David to hide in a certain field. After three days, Jonathan and his servant would come to this field under the pretense of target practice. As his servant set out to retrieve the arrows, Jonathan would either say, "Keep going; the arrows are further," or, "You're too far; come on in." If he said the former, David would know he had to flee. If he said the latter, David would know it was safe to return.

1 Samuel 20:24–26
So David hid himself in the field: and when the new moon was come, the king sat him down to eat meat. And the king sat upon his seat, as at other times, even upon a seat by the wall: and Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul's side, and David's place was empty. Nevertheless Saul spake not any thing that day: for he thought, Something hath befallen him, he is not clean; surely he is not clean.

When Saul noticed David's absence, he assumed either something had happened to David or he was ceremonially unclean.

1 Samuel 20:27–31
And it came to pass on the morrow, which was the second day of the month, that David's place was empty: and Saul said unto Jonathan his son, Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday, nor to day? And Jonathan answered Saul, David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem: And he said, Let me go, I pray thee; for our family hath a sacrifice in the city; and my brother, he hath commanded me to be there: and now, if I have found favour in thine eyes, let me get away, I pray thee, and see my brethren. Therefore he cometh not unto the king's table. Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and

he said unto him, Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom. Wherefore now send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die.

When David was absent the second day of the feast, Saul asked Jonathan the reason. When Jonathan said David had asked him for permission to go to Jerusalem, Saul said, "I know what you're up to. You're siding with David. But don't you understand that as long as David is on the scene, you'll never be king?"

1 Samuel 20:32, 33
And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done? And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him: whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David.

Jesus told us to love our enemies because if I don't love my enemies, like Saul, I'll find myself out to get even with my own family. You see, we think we can confine hatred toward this person or control it toward that group—not realizing that hatred or judgment of someone will ultimately spill over into the lives of everyone around us.



***For a topical study of 1 Samuel 20:32, 33 entitled "Saul's Sin-Drome," turn to page* 873.**

1 Samuel 20:34–37
So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day of the month: for he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame. And it came to pass in the morning, that Jonathan went out into the field at the time

appointed with David, and a little lad with him. And he said unto his lad, Run, find out now the arrows which I shoot. And as the lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. And when the lad was come to the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan cried after the lad, and said, Is not the arrow beyond thee?

This was the sign that David was to flee.

1 Samuel 20:38–42
And Jonathan cried after the lad, Make speed, haste, stay not. And Jonathan's lad gathered up the arrows, and came to his master. But the lad knew not any thing: only Jonathan and David knew the matter. And Jonathan gave his artillery unto his lad, and said unto him, Go, carry them to the city. And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place toward the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded. And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, foras much as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city.

What a hero Jonathan is. I pray everyone of us at some point might have a Jonathan linked to us. Even more, may we be a Jonathan—perhaps having the ability to play first chair, but providing harmony in second chair.

SAUL'S SIN-DROME

A Topical Study of
1 SAMUEL 20:32, 33

In the text before us, we see King Saul throwing a javelin at his own son. And Saul's "sin-drome" can affect us as well. But God is faithful to let us know when we are being afflicted by it. We get warning signs—like I did a couple of days ago . . .

I like my 1974 VW, but it's old. And when things get old, they fall apart. So, driving down the road a couple of days ago, the glove box door fell open. Because my glove box is full of everything but gloves, I slammed it shut. About twenty seconds later, I hit another bump and it flipped open again. I shut it once more. About a minute later, it fell open again. I then pulled over and saw that the latch that secures the door had been worn away. I slammed the door shut and continued on my way. It flopped open again. I shut it again. It flopped open again. I shut it again. I knew the latch was broken. I knew it couldn't stay shut. But that didn't stop me from slamming it shut every ten seconds, saying, "Stay shut!"

When I reached my destination, I found myself in a conversation with a close friend. Feeling irritated, I fired away at him in a quiet voice, thinking I was "on target" about this, that I needed to make "a point" about that. When I was done, I knew something was really wrong. I got back in my car, talked it over with the Lord, and realized that He had shown me on the way to the meeting that something was wrong not with my glove box but with my soul.

We think we feel hostility or anger because we've been wronged. In reality, however, the irritation, the frustration, the bump in our path doesn't produce the hostility, anger, or frustration within us, but simply reveals the anger, hostility, or frustration already within us.

I see a sponge in my kitchen sink. I can see it's wet—but I don't know what's in it. It could be apple juice. It could be milk. It could be water. The only way I'll know what's in it is to squeeze it. Then, what's already in it will flow out. My squeeze won't put the liquid there—it will simply reveal what was already there. So, when you're squeezed, when I'm bumped, when

we feel under the gun or under pressure, the way we respond will reveal what's already in our soul.

You see, Saul was already in a state of insanity before he realized his son was befriending his enemy. After all, he had already thrown a spear two times previously (18:10, 19:10). Thus, it wasn't that Jonathan provoked his father to anger. Anger was already within him.

Was David the problem? No, because when we read about Saul chucking spears at David, 1 Samuel 19:9 tells us an evil spirit was upon Saul. Yet it wasn't even the evil spirit's fault because the evil spirit came upon Saul only because Saul was already a man of rebellion and disobedience. In other words, because Saul was disobedient, he became vulnerable to an evil spirit plaguing him that caused him to throw spears not only at David but also at his own son.

The same can be true of us. If we don't understand this, we will lash out at him or her, at our boss or neighbor, at our sister or brother—never understanding the real issue is within our own heart. What are we to do if we realize we're throwing spears? How can we know if we're right or wrong? The answer is very simple: At any given moment, we will either be Spirit-led, or we'll "spear it dead." If I'm Spirit-led, there will be compassion. If I'm "spearing it dead," there will be confusion—for it was because Saul was terribly confused himself that he accused Jonathan of confusion (v. 30).

I see another King who was put down and attacked brutally. Pinned to a Cross, what did He pray? He said, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they do" (Luke 23:34). That's compassion. When He was offered a sponge filled with vinegar and myrrh to deaden the pain, He refused it. Sometimes when we're hurt, we might think we're justified in numbing the pain through gossip or through making our "points." But Jesus wouldn't take the vinegar. He wouldn't take that which was bitter. Consequently, when a spear was thrust into His side, what came out? Not vinegar, but blood and water; not bitterness, but redemption and refreshment (John 19:34). What comes out of me? Is it redemptive and refreshing—or is it bitter?

Confusion is transformed into compassion through Communion and confession because Jesus said the one who is forgiven much loves much (Luke 7:47). It is at the Lord's Table that I see the irony of trying to take a

speck out of your eye when there is a beam in my own. It is at the Lord's Table that I lose my appetite to make my point or hit my target.

When I throw spears, it's indicative of the fact that I don't realize my own miserable, sinful condition. That's why we are to confess our sins specifically. Bitterness becomes redemption and refreshment when I say, "*I'm* the sinner, Lord. *I* broke Your body. *I* break Your heart." Then I take the cup and say, "Lord, thank You for the fresh start that is mine because my sin is washed by Your blood."

And as I do, I no longer desire to make my point, throw a spear—or even slam a glove box door, for I understand the problem isn't with you or with my VW. The problem is with me, and the solution is the Cross.



21

1 Samuel 21:1 (a)
Then came David to Nob . . .

Envious of and threatened by David, Saul is out to kill him. So, running for his life, David comes to Nob, a city of priests, in the southern part of Israel, approximately three miles north of Jerusalem.

1 Samuel 21:1 (b)
. . . to Ahimelech the priest: and Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David, and said unto him, Why art thou alone, and no man with thee?

David was Saul's son-in-law, a member of his court. Therefore, Ahimelech wondered why an official retinue of men wasn't traveling with David.

1 Samuel 21:2
And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know any thing of the business whereabout I send thee, and what

I have commanded thee: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place.

David lied that he was traveling undercover in the service of Saul.

1 Samuel 21:3, 4
Now therefore what is under thine hand? give me five loaves of bread in mine hand, or what there is present. And the priest answered David, and said, There is no common bread under mine hand, but there is hallowed bread; if the young men have kept themselves at least from women.

The only bread on hand was the holy bread, or shewbread, which was to be consumed only by the priests.

1 Samuel 21:5, 6
And David answered the priest, and said unto him, Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days, since I came out, and the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in a manner common, yea, though it were sanctified this day in the vessel. So the priest gave him hallowed bread: for there was no bread there but the shewbread, that was taken from before the LORD, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away.

Jesus, our Greater than David, reaches back to this story in Luke 6:3, 4 and commends Ahimelech for what he does here. Why? Because Jesus uses it as an illustration in His teaching that there is something more important than the Law—that is love. Human need always has a higher priority than religious traditions or regulations. More important than anything else is that we love people.

1 Samuel 21:7
Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD; and his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chiefest of the herdmen that belonged to Saul.

Doeg literally means "Fearful," which means he struck fear in the hearts of those around him. Why? He was Saul's one-man "CIA."

1 Samuel 21:8
And David said unto Ahimelech, And is there not here under thine hand spear or sword? for I have neither brought my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste.

After asking for bread, David asks Ahimelech for weapons, lying that he couldn't bring his own due to the urgency of his mission.

1 Samuel 21:9
And the priest said, The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom thou slewest in the valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod: if thou wilt take that, take it: for there is no other save that here. And David said, There is none like that; give it me.

David is on a downward spiral. He's a lover of God, but now he's trusting in his lies and in Goliath's sword. Before, when he was in the Spirit, he refused to take Saul's weapons, choosing instead to rely on the God who had given him victory over the bear and the lion (1 Samuel 17:36). But now he seeks material weapons. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual (2 Corinthians 10:4). But when we're in a carnal place, we start depending on carnal weapons.

1 Samuel 21:10
And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath.

Gath is a Philistine city, Achish a Philistine king. David walks into Gath carrying the sword of Gath's most famous citizen—not the smartest thing to do. Why did David go to Gath? Perhaps he thought that, because Saul was so intent on hunting him down, there was no sanctuary for him anywhere in Israel.

1 Samuel 21:11, 12
And the servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David the king of the land? did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands? And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath.

David realized Gath wasn't a safe place for him to be. That's always the way it is. When we wander into the world to find safety, security, or satisfaction, we're spotted a mile away. If you're tempted to return to the world, you'll be a colossal failure because you have too much of the Lord in you to fit into the world like you once did.

1 Samuel 21:13–15
And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard. Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, ye see the man is mad: wherefore then have ye brought him unto me? Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? shall this fellow come into my house?

Clawing at the gates and drooling, David pretended to be insane. Yet, even though he's spiraling downward, even though he appears to be out of control, the psalms he pens at this period reveal that, although outwardly he was a mess, he still had a heart for God.

DAVID IN GATH

A Topical Study of
1 SAMUEL 21:10–15

I will bless the LORD *at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the* LORD*: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the* LORD *with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the* LORD*, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the* LORD *heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the* LORD *encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. O taste and see that the* LORD *is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him. O fear the* LORD*, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the* LORD *shall not want any good thing.*

Psalm 34:1–10

As we read this Psalm of David, this tribute to the faithfulness of God, it would be easy to assume he composed it at the tabernacle—the place where sacrifices were offered, where incense filled the air, where praise ascended to heaven. No wonder he would write, "I will bless the Lord at all times."

Or perhaps it would be easy to assume David composed it on the hills overlooking Bethlehem. It's easy to imagine that, as his flock was grazing, David's mind would begin working—meditating on the goodness and greatness of God. No wonder he would write, "The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."

Or perhaps it would be easy to assume David composed it while he was in the grand and glorious city of Jerusalem. No wonder he would write, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."

As plausible as any of these scenarios might be, however, they're not possible, for the heading of Psalm 34 tells us exactly where David was when

he wrote it: *A Psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour before A-bim'-e-lech; who drove him away, and he departed.*

What if you lived in David's day? What if you watched this story unfold? What would you think? I'm afraid I know all too well what I would say. "Remember David—the one who showed such courage in killing Goliath, the one Samuel anointed? I hate to tell you this, but he has become insane. He's gone over to the side of the enemy. It's so sad. He had such potential."

That's what I would have said. But God would say otherwise. "That's not the way it really is. You might write David off, but you don't see him the way I do. Oh, it's true he's in Gath. It's true he's acting crazy. It's true he lied. All of that is true. But what you don't see is his heart."

God's acceptance and forgiveness is indeed conditional. But it's conditioned only upon what a person desires in his or her heart. If a person says, "I want nothing to do with God; I care nothing about God; I'm not interested in God," he will not be forgiven or accepted by God because God sees the heart. Our forgiveness toward others, on the other hand, must be unconditional because we don't see anyone's heart. From outward appearances, David is lost, hopeless. But God saw his heart.

What heart did God see? In addition to Psalm 34, penned when he was let out of the city gate, David wrote Psalm 56 when he was still in the city, clawing at the gates . . .

> *Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book? When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me. In God will I praise his word: in the* Lord *will I praise his word. In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?*
>
> Psalm 56:8–13

We would have written David off. God, however, knew what he would write.

I wonder how many people I have written off because they're in Gath, because they have withdrawn from fellowship, because they're acting crazy.

> *Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering . . .*
>
> Colossians 3:12

David's story tells me I must not write anyone off, count anyone out, turn anyone away. Paul's words tell me the deepest part of me is to be nothing but merciful, meek, and kind, knowing that only God sees the longing of the soul and the heart of the matter.



22 1 Samuel 22:1 (a)

David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam . . .

A cave is not an easy place to be. It's dark and discouraging. But Psalms 57 and 142, written while David was in the cave at Adullam, show a deep work going on in his soul . . .

> Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth. They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. Selah. My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations. For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: let thy glory be above all the earth.
>
> Psalm 57:5–11

> When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.
>
> Psalm 142:3–7

We want to be comfortable—but God knows that our souls do not grow in times of comfort (Romans 5:3–5). Therefore, He puts us in places where His work can be done, where His Word takes root. If you're in a cave today, you're in good company because God does deep work in hard places.

> **1 Samuel 22:1 (b), 2**
> **. . . and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him. And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men.**

The group of four hundred men who were in debt, distressed, and discontented will eventually become David's mighty men, an elite fighting unit. David was flawed indeed, yet more is written of him than any other man in Scripture because he was a man after God's heart—a man who pursued God. And as these four hundred men spent time with him, they became like him.

Like David's men, we, too, are in debt, distressed, and often discontented. But as we hang around the Son of David, Jesus Christ, an amazing thing happens: we become like Him (2 Corinthians 3:18). The key to greatness is to hang around Jesus constantly. Choose to make Jesus your identity and your passion and slowly but surely you'll be conformed into the image of the One captivating your heart.

1 Samuel 22:3, 4
And David went thence to Mizpeh of Moab: and he said unto the king of Moab, Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth, and be with you, till I know what God will do for me. And he brought them before the king of Moab: and they dwelt with him all the while that David was in the hold.

Although David is in a better place than he was in chapter 21, why would he choose to hide his family in Moab? I suggest it was because he was related to the Moabites. Ruth was the grandmother of David's dad (Matthew 1:5, 6).

1 Samuel 22:5
And the prophet Gad said unto David, Abide not in the hold; depart, and get thee into the land of Judah. Then David departed, and came into the forest of Hareth.

"Leave this stronghold. Leave this fortress in the wilderness and get back to Judah, back to the place of praise," God said to David. Still today, this is a word for any who have put walls up, for any who have pulled away, for any who have battles to fight. Let the songs of deliverance flow from your lips. Let the songs of praise fill your car, your house, and your heart—and, like David, you'll hear from the Lord once again.

1 Samuel 22:6
When Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men that were with him, (now Saul abode in Gibeah under a tree in Ramah, having his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him;)

With spear in hand, as always, Saul was in Ramah, approximately five miles from Jerusalem.

1 Samuel 22:7, 8
Then Saul said unto his servants that stood about him, Hear now, ye Benjamites; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields

and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds; That all of you have conspired against me, and there is none that sheweth me that my son hath made a league with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you that is sorry for me, or sheweth unto me that my son hath stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?

"Doesn't anyone feel bad for me?" Saul asked his servants. "You knew my son was in a league with David, yet you didn't tell me." Why does Saul refer to his servants as Benjamites? I suggest his implication is that, because Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin and David was from Judah, they would do better having one of their own tribesman on the throne.

When David does indeed come to power, where does he make his capital? Jerusalem—which straddles the two tribes of Benjamin and Judah. David was a shrewd politician as well as a deeply spiritual leader.

1 Samuel 22:9, 10
Then answered Doeg the Edomite, which was set over the servants of Saul, and said, I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. And he inquired of the LORD for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.

Falsely implying that David inquired of the Lord so he could do battle against Saul, Doeg takes advantage of Saul's growing paranoia.

1 Samuel 22:11–15
Then the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests that were in Nob: and they came all of them to the king. And Saul said, Hear now, thou son of Ahitub. And he answered, Here I am, my lord. And Saul said unto him, Why have ye conspired against me, thou and the son of Jesse, in that thou hast given him bread, and a sword, and hast inquired of God for him, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as at this day? Then Ahimelech answered the king, and said, And who is so faithful among all thy servants as David, which is

the king's son in law, and goeth at thy bidding, and is honourable in thine house? Did I then begin to inquire of God for him? be it far from me: let not the king impute any thing unto his servant, nor to all the house of my father: for thy servant knew nothing of all this, less or more.

Ahimelech pleads his case, saying he knew nothing of what was going on. He thought David was simply on an errand for Saul.

1 Samuel 22:16, 17
And the king said, Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou, and all thy father's house. And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the LORD; because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not shew it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the LORD.

Consumed with paranoia and jealousy, Saul ordered his servants to kill the priests because they had assisted David. To their eternal credit, Saul's servants wisely and courageously refused his order.

1 Samuel 22:18
And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod.

Doeg stepped in to commit this horrendous act of cruelty as the blood of eighty-five priests was shed. As wrong as Doeg is in doing this, he is fulfilling what God told Samuel would happen as a result of Eli's failure to correct his sons (1 Samuel 3:11–14).

1 Samuel 22:19
And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword.

Doeg's murderous rampage was a direct result of David's lie. David thought he was simply protecting himself—but when you twist the truth, the repercussions are most often much more severe than you can imagine.

1 Samuel 22:20, 21
And one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped, and fled after David. And Abiathar shewed David that Saul had slain the Lord's priests.

One of Ahimelech's sons escapes and follows David. Now, I would think the last guy he would want to see would be David. After all, it was David's lie that set in motion the events that would kill his family. But God's hand is seen because Abiathar will go on to become priest in David's kingdom (2 Samuel 8:17). And in this, it's as if God is putting together something that humanly would have been impossible.

Maybe the same is true in your situation. Maybe a relationship has been cut off to such a degree that it makes no sense to even think it could be put back together. But what you haven't factored into the equation is God. God can do things men can't.

1 Samuel 22:22, 23
And David said unto Abiathar, I knew it that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul: I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house. Abide thou with me, fear not: for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life: but with me thou shalt be in safeguard.

"It's my fault," David said. "I brought about the tragedy that killed your family. But I will stand by you. You'll be safe with me. Stick around, Abiathar." And we'll see Abiathar do just that.

23

1 Samuel 23:1
Then they told David, saying, Behold, the Philistines fight against

Keilah, and they rob the threshingfloors.

An Israelite city in the lowlands of Judah, Keilah was northwest of the city of Hebron. Perpetual enemies of the people of Israel, the Philistines were robbing the food supply of the people of Keilah.

1 Samuel 23:2
Therefore David inquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go and smite these Philistines? And the LORD said unto David, Go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah.

I like David. He does what we get to do. He asked the Lord if he should go to battle on behalf of his countrymen. And the Lord said, "Go."

1 Samuel 23:3
And David's men said unto him, Behold, we be afraid here in Judah: how much more then if we come to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?

Numbering six hundred at this time, David's men said. "We're being chased by Saul and his army. We've got big problems of our own. We can't take on the burden or responsibility of fighting for the men of Keilah because we're under attack ourselves."

1 Samuel 23:4
Then David inquired of the LORD yet again. And the LORD answered him and said, Arise, go down to Keilah; for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand.

David didn't berate his men for their lack of faith or compassion. He simply inquired of the Lord once again, and the Lord reaffirmed that He wanted David to fight for the men of Keilah.

1 Samuel 23:5
So David and his men went to Keilah, and fought with the Philistines, and brought away their cattle, and smote them with a

great slaughter. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah.

David did what the Lord commanded him to do and God gave him victory.

1 Samuel 23:6
And it came to pass, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David to Keilah, that he came down with an ephod in his hand.

An ephod was the vest worn by the high priest. Attached to it were twelve stones representing the Twelve Tribes of Israel. This comprised the Urim and the Thummim, used by the high priest to determine God's will.

1 Samuel 23:7
And it was told Saul that David was come to Keilah. And Saul said, God hath delivered him into mine hand; for he is shut in, by entering into a town that hath gates and bars.

Because David was trapped in the city, Saul mistakenly assumed God was handing David over to him.

1 Samuel 23:8
And Saul called all the people together to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men.

As Saul gathered his troops to go to Keilah, ostensibly the men would think they were headed to war against the Philistines. But that wasn't Saul's plan.

1 Samuel 23:9
And David knew that Saul secretly practised mischief against him; and he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod.

David called for the ephod in order to determine God's will.

1 Samuel 23:10–12

Then said David, O LORD God of Israel, thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O LORD God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And the LORD said, He will come down. Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the LORD said, They will deliver thee up.

When David got word that Saul knew his location, he once again prayed, "Lord, are the men of Keilah going to betray me and turn me over to Saul?"

The Lord said, "Yes, that's precisely what will happen. The very ones you helped, that you set free, that you risked your lives for are going to turn you over to your enemy."

Here, David had risked his own life and the lives of his men to liberate the people of Keilah. Yet the men of Keilah were the very ones who were going to hand him over to Saul. I wish I could tell you that the men of Keilah were an anomaly, that no one will betray you, that the people you help will be appreciative all your days. But that would be untrue. The reality is, it's often the people you care most about who will let you down the greatest.

Why, then, help people at all?

I suggest three reasons . . .

The first is *present satisfaction.* When people don't appreciate what you've done, or when you've been betrayed, don't have a cow. Don't say, "This is an "udder" disgrace. Don't "milk it" for all it's worth. Don't have a cow. Instead, have a steak. You see, as we read the story of David's men, we see they were often hungry. On the run, supplies were often scant. But on this day, because they fought for the men of Keilah, they walked away with steaks (v. 5). Even though the men of Keilah threatened to do them in, David's men had steaks.

Jesus told us whatever measure we give out will be given back to us (Luke 6:38). Haven't you found this to be true? When I share with someone else, my own faith grows. When I pray for someone else, my own prayers become passionate and real again.

Jesus modeled this principle in John 4 . . .

Tired and hungry, He sat at the edge of a well while His disciples went into the city to get food for themselves and for Him. While they were gone, a woman came to the well. Jesus began to talk to her. She listened to Him and was so excited that she left her water pots to go to the city to tell everyone about Him. Meanwhile, the disciples returned with food, but Jesus didn't eat it.

"Aren't You hungry?" they asked.

I can see a big smile on His face as He answered, "I have food you know not of. My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me. I was hungry. But then I had the opportunity to share with someone else—and I'm hungry no more."

The second reason to help people who might betray us is *eternal remuneration* . . .

> Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.
>
> Matthew 5:11, 12

In other words, if you're put down or betrayed for doing right, Jesus would say, "You're going to have a great reward some day. You're in good company. People did the same thing to the prophets."

The third reason to help people is our own *personal situations.* I suggest the reason there is no mention in our text of David being angry at, disappointed in, or upset with the men of Keilah is because in the verses preceding this story, David had dropped the ball himself when he lied to Ahimelech. It is easy for us to forget about all the people we have betrayed, all the people we've let down. Therefore, because we ourselves are in need of mercy, the only logical choice we have is to extend mercy to others.

> **1 Samuel 23:13, 14 (a)**
> **Then David and his men, which were about six hundred, arose and departed out of Kei lah, and went whithersoever they could go. And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah; and he forbare to go forth. And David abode in the wilderness in strong**

holds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day . . .

Ziph literally means "refining place." What a great place for David to go —to a place where God will refine him. In the refining process, a smelter would heat ore to the point that it became liquid, with all of the impurities burned away. The smelter would know the process was complete when he could look in the pot of liquid ore and see his own face. The Lord says, "I'm going to allow the heat to be turned up a bit, to burn out the impurities so that people might see something of Me in your life."

C. H. Spurgeon said that affliction is the tuner of the harp and the sanctifier of the son. I like that. How did David have such intimacy with the Lord, such passion for the Lord, such understanding of the Lord that He could write the psalms he wrote? His passion, wisdom, and understanding came from places like Ziph and Keilah—where people were chasing him down, where he was betrayed by people he had helped, where he would feel forsaken and alone—where God could deal with Him.

How long does the process of affliction or refining go on? Longer than you might think. It takes a while for the impurities to be burnt off, for the reflection of His face to be seen from my life or yours.

1 Samuel 23:14 (b)
. . . but God delivered him not into his hand.

"But God . . ." How I love this phrase that appears throughout Scripture. Saul is after David. But God was there for him. And the same thing is true for you. Satan seeks to devour you as a roaring lion, but God is with you. And greater is He that is in you than the one who comes against you (1 John 4:4).

1 Samuel 23:15, 16
And David saw that Saul was come out to seek his life: and David was in the wilderness of Ziph in a wood. And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God.

Jonathan doesn't wring his hands in anxiety, but strengthens David's hand in God. Lots of people will worry with you. But those aren't the people you need. You need people who will strengthen your hand in God, who will say to you, "Trust in the Lord. Put away your sorrow. Put away your fear because God is here. The Lord will see you through." We look for sympathy—at least I do. But the Lord knows that's not what I need ultimately. But what I need is for someone to come my way and strengthen my hand in God. That's what we all need. Jonathan was that kind of man.

1 Samuel 23:17–20
And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth. And they two made a covenant before the LORD: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house. Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself with us in strong holds in the wood, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of thy soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand.

Not only was David nearly betrayed by the men of Keilah, but here he is in jeopardy of being betrayed by the men of Ziph.

1 Samuel 23:21
And Saul said, Blessed be ye of the LORD; for ye have compassion on me.

Saul knows how to speak the language of piety and spirituality—but it's not based in reality. Rather than walking with the Lord, Saul simply knows how to talk about Him.

1 Samuel 23:22
Go, I pray you, prepare yet, and know and see his place where his haunt is, and who hath seen him there: for it is told me that he dealeth very subtilly.

“Go track David down,” Saul said. “And don’t take your eye off him because he’s very sneaky.”

1 Samuel 23:23–26
See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hideth himself, and come ye again to me with the certainty, and I will go with you: and it shall come to pass, if he be in the land, that I will search him out throughout all the thousands of Judah. And they arose, and went to Ziph before Saul: but David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the plain on the south of Jeshimon. Saul also and his men went to seek him. And they told David: wherefore he came down into a rock, and abode in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. And Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them.

Backed up against a mountain range and surrounded on both sides, the situation doesn’t look good for David.

1 Samuel 23:27
But there came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land.

“Saul! Get back home! The Philistines are mounting an attack against us!” cried a messenger. God has a way of moving in and protecting us even—or especially—when there seems to be no way out.

1 Samuel 23:28
Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines: therefore they called that place Sela-hammahlekoth.

Sela-hammahlekoth means "rock of protection." David had no place to go. He was hemmed in, surrounded by the enemy. But there was a rock of protection between him and Saul. Likewise, our Rock, the Rock of Ages, Jesus Christ, has never let me down, never dropped the ball. So many times I've thought, "I just can't figure this out. I don't know how this is going to work," but the Lord has always come through for me. And He'll always come through for you. Even when we are faithless, He is faithful still because He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13).

Without striking a blow, shooting an arrow, or hurling a spear, David was delivered. Sometimes when we try to take things into our hands, we only make matters worse. God would say, "Let the Rock be your protection. Watch and see what I'll do as you trust in Me."

1 Samuel 23:29
And David went up from thence, and dwelt in strong holds at En-gedi.

En-gedi means "the mount of the kid" because, as it is even today, it was a place where mountain goats hung out. This isn't surprising, for En-gedi remains a beautiful spot in the desert area surrounding the Dead Sea, an oasis in an otherwise barren region.



24 After dealing with the Philistines, Saul makes his way south near the Dead Sea to resume his hunt for David . . .

1 Samuel 24:1–3
And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, Behold, David is in the wilderness of En-gedi. Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats. And he came to the sheep-cotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave.

With temperatures soaring to one hundred and twenty degrees in this region, Saul chose to take a nap in a cave to escape the heat. But it just so happened that the cave he chose was the same cave in which David and his men were hiding.

1 Samuel 24:4 (a)
And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee . . .

David's advisors thought this was a God-given opportunity for him to lop off Saul's head. David, however, knew otherwise.

Those who trust in the Lord will not make haste, Isaiah 28:16 tells us. One of the hardest lessons for me is to wait, to slow down. David's men thought this opportunity to kill Saul was God's blessing when, in reality, it was God's testing. God will often test us with what seems to be a blessing that's ours for the taking. But unless we wait on and for God, that which we thought would be a delight will always prove to be a disaster.

1 Samuel 24:4 (b)
. . . Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily.

David snipped the hem of Saul's robe. In those days, the border of a garment was highly significant. Called the *zitsiot,* you can still see them today on clothing in Israel. In Numbers 15, God commanded Moses to tell the people of Israel to make blue borders on their garments (15:37–39). Why blue? Because blue is the color of heaven, when the people of Israel looked at the hems of their garments, they would be reminded that they were a heavenly people, that they were not to be enamored with the world.

According to the Numbers 15 passage, the blue hems were to remind the people not only that they were destined for heaven, but of the commandments their God in heaven had given them. So the people tied the fringes of their hems in six hundred and thirteen knots—one for each commandment the Rabbis declared were in the Scriptures.

The dye to make the blue borders came from a certain kind of sea snail. Extracting the dye was a costly and lengthy process. Perhaps this is why Jesus would indict the scribes and Pharisees for having large borders as a sign of their wealth (Matthew 23:5).

In Bible days, one could determine another's wealth and family history by the size of the border and the tying of knots on the hem of his garment. Thus, when Ruth said to Boaz, "Cover me," she was essentially saying, "I want to come under the covering of your family pedigree" (Ruth 3:9).

In Revelation 19, we read that when Jesus returns, the title "King of kings and Lord of lords" will be written on His thigh. These words are not tattooed on His thigh—but would be evident by the border of His garment, which would be pulled up to his thigh as he sits astride the horse that will carry Him.

In cutting the fringe of Saul's garment, David was saying in essence that Saul's pedigree, position, power, and authority were to be given to him. And that is precisely why David's heart smote him. He was grabbing Saul's position, questioning Saul's authority—and he knew he ought not to have done this.

1 Samuel 24:5, 6
And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.

The Lord's anointed? Wasn't David the Lord's anointed? David would say, "Yes, I am anointed to be king, but Saul is the instrument God is using to work in my life to bring me to the place I need to be. And by my nicking him, I am in error."

What's being said here is incredible. You see, it wasn't just kings who were anointed with oil. Nor was it only prophets and priests who were anointed with oil. The altar and instruments used in the tabernacle were anointed with oil as well. In other words, David recognized that anointing did not have to imply deserving. That is why he could say, "I shouldn't have

done this. I shouldn't have touched the Lord's anointed, for Saul is the anointed instrument of God to stretch me, to change me, to make me the man I'm supposed to be."

1 Samuel 24:7–15
So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way. David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, My lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself. And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt? Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the LORD had delivered thee to day into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the LORD's anointed. Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it. The LORD judge between me and thee, and the LORD avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea. The LORD therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand.

David's insights into the Lord, his dependence upon the Lord, his passion for the Lord are revealed in the psalms he wrote during the time he was fleeing from Saul because the man who had nothing but anger towards him was God's instrument to make him into the man he desired to be.

The same is true with us. "Lord, change me," I pray. "I'm tired of the smallness of my soul, the hardness of my heart. Make me different than I am."

"Okay," the Lord says. "I'll send you an anointed instrument to help accomplish this change."

"Good!" I say, thinking it will be an anointed teacher, a Christian book, a close friend.

But He sends a Saul or two throwing spears at me.

Who has the Lord allowed to be in your life who throws spears at you, who brings grief to you? That person is the anointed instrument of God to work in you the love, kindness, and tenderness you long for. There's no other way for the Lord to change you but to send a Saul or two your way. The question is, what will you do? Will you cut the fringe?

I doubt that the blind man in John 9 would have washed in the pool of Siloam—or literally "sent one"—had there not been mud in his eyes. Why does God allow people we think are mud to get in our face? The reason is to cause us to go to the true Sent One and wash again. When everything is going well, I have a tendency to cruise on automatic pilot. But when there's mud thrown at me, I make my way to the Lord in desperation. I pour out my heart to the Lord and get into the water of the Word once again.

David said to Saul, "the Lord will judge between you and me. The Lord will work things out. The Lord will deal with you eventually. But I'm not to touch you because you are God's anointed instrument in my life."

What about that person who breaks your heart? Are you going to take them down a peg or two—or, like David, will you wisely choose not to touch the Lord's anointed?

1 Samuel 24:16–22

And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul, that Saul said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil. And thou hast shewed this day how that thou hast dealt well with me: forasmuch as when the LORD had delivered me into thine hand, thou killedst me not. For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away? wherefore the LORD reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day. And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt

surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand. Swear now therefore unto me by the LORD, that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father's house. And David sware unto Saul. And Saul went home; but David and his men gat them up unto the hold.

Saul may have been sincere. He may have had great intentions. The problem, however, is the flesh. Lots of people make promises of reformation. They attend twelve-step programs, make appointments at counseling clinics, or write inspiring words on note cards to tape to their mirror. But the reality is that, although the spirit might be willing, the flesh is weak (Mark 14:38). Therefore, the issue isn't reformation. The issue is regeneration. We've got to be born again.

"Without Me, you can do nothing," Jesus said (John 15:5). No matter how good the program is, no matter how sincere the people might be, no matter how hard one tries, the flesh ultimately wells up again. Saul may have been sincere—but he lacked the ability to keep his word. He was no longer walking with the Lord and, therefore, no longer drawing strength from the Lord. Thus, even if Saul had been sincere, he was unable to control his flesh.

25 1 Samuel 25:1, 2

And Samuel died; and all the Israelites were gathered together, and la mented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah. And David arose, and went down to the wilderness of Paran. And there was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; and the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats: and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel.

Maon is a city of Judah, eight miles south of Hebron. There are two Carmels in Israel—one north by Haifa, and this smaller Carmel, located near Maon in the southern part of Judah.

1 Samuel 25:3
Now the name of the man was Nabal; and the name of his wife Abigail: and she was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance: but the man was churlish and evil in his doings; and he was of the house of Caleb.

With 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats, *Nabal* was a wealthy man. His name, however, literally means "Fool." *Abigail* means "Joy of the Father" What a combination. Abigail is a real jewel, in God's economy. Nabal came from good stock in Caleb, but he's a fool, as we shall see . . .

1 Samuel 25:4–9
And David heard in the wilderness that Nabal did shear his sheep. And David sent out ten young men, and David said unto the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name: And thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast. And now I have heard that thou hast shearers: now thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there ought missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel. Ask thy young men, and they will shew thee. Wherefore let the young men find favour in thine eyes: for we come in a good day: give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David. And when David's young men came, they spake to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David, and ceased.

David sent ten of his men with the following message to where Nabal was shearing his sheep: "This is a great day for you. You've been blessed. You have all this profit coming in. And not one of your sheep has been taken because we protected your property from sheep rustlers. Therefore, help us out. We're short on supplies."

This was customary in those days. If you were protected, you would pay accordingly. Therefore, this wasn't a matter of extortion but of protection.

1 Samuel 25:10, 11

And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?

"Who do you think you are?" Nabal thundered. "Your leader, David, is nothing more than a fugitive from Saul."

1 Samuel 25:12
So David's young men turned their way, and went again, and came and told him all those sayings.

David's men informed him that Nabal was not about to help them.

1 Samuel 25:13
And David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; and David also girded on his sword: and there went up after David about four hundred men; and two hundred abode by the stuff.

David had just shown incredible wisdom and restraint in not lopping off Saul's head. But the truth of spiritual life is that when you have a victory over a great temptation, you are vulnerable to a smaller one. As the Song of Solomon declares, it is the little foxes that destroy (2:15). I think of Peter. Such courage did he show in the Garden of Gethsemane that he drew his sword and was ready to take on the entire company of soldiers that came to arrest Jesus. Yet a few hours later, when a little servant girl accused him of being a follower of Jesus, he crumbled in fear.

That's the way it is. It's not the big battles that will get you. It's not the big temptations or the big challenges. It's the little problems, the little foxes.

1 Samuel 25:14–17
But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master; and he railed on them. But the men were very good unto

us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we any thing, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields: They were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household: for he is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him.

It was common practice that, if you had a group of men in your region who were a wall around you, providing protection for you, you were obligated to help the men with their needs.

1 Samuel 25:18
Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses.

Abigail goes out to intercede on behalf of her foolish husband. I would think this would be an opportunity for her to say, "This is my chance to be set free. If my husband gets his head lopped off, so be it." But that's not what she does. When she hears this report, she determines to intercede on Nabal's behalf.

1 Samuel 25:19
And she said unto her servants, Go on before me; behold, I come after you. But she told not her husband Nabal.

Abigail goes behind Nabal's back not to be sneaky or treacherous, but to protect him from his own stupidity.

1 Samuel 25:20–24
And it was so, as she rode on the ass, that she came down by the covert of the hill, and, behold, David and his men came down against her; and she met them. Now David had said, Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness, so that

nothing was missed of all that pertained unto him: and he hath requited me evil for good. So and more also do God unto the enemies of David, if I leave of all that pertain to him by the morning light any that pisseth against the wall. And when Abigail saw David, she hasted, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, And fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid.

"It's my fault," Abigail said. "Let this sin that has understandably angered you be accounted to me."

1 Samuel 25:25–27
Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the LORD hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal. And now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord.

"I have come to prevent you from shedding blood," Abigail declared. "This food is for you and your young men to enjoy."

1 Samuel 25:28
I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the LORD, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days.

"You have great days ahead, David," Abigail said. "Your destiny is certain."

1 Samuel 25:29
Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the LORD thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling.

Abigail's reference to a sling indicates that, as well as knowing David's destiny, she was aware of David's history.

1 Samuel 25:30, 31
And it shall come to pass, when the LORD shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel; That this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself: but when the LORD shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid.

"Don't do anything today that you will regret when you come into a position of power," Abigail told David.

1 Samuel 25:32–35
And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand. For in very deed, as the LORD God of Israel liveth, which hath kept me back from hurting thee, except thou hadst hasted and come to meet me, surely there had not been left unto Nabal by the morning light any that pisseth against the wall. So David received of her hand that which she had brought him, and said unto her, Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person.

Like Deborah before her and Esther after her, Abigail altered the course of history simply by being obedient to the Lord.

1 Samuel 25:36
And Abigail came to Nabal; and, behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken: wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light.

Here, Nabal was about to be wiped out, yet he's having a party. His very life was in peril, yet he doesn't even realize it.

1 Samuel 25:37
But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone.

After Nabal sobered up a bit, hearing how close he had come to losing his head, he had a stroke.

1 Samuel 25:38, 39 (a)
And it came to pass about ten days after, that the LORD smote Nabal, that he died. And when David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, Blessed be the LORD, that hath pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and hath kept his servant from evil: for the LORD hath returned the wickedness of Nabal upon his own head . . .

Nabal got what he deserved—but not because David took matters into his own hands. What a lesson for us. I want to fix things. I want to take stuff into my own hands. I want to make things happen. David did, too. But he was refrained by Abigail and was wise enough to listen.

1 Samuel 25:39 (b)
. . . And David sent and communed with Abigail, to take her to him to wife.

No doubt David was impressed not only with Abigail's beautiful countenance, but also by her humility and spiritual sensitivity.

1 Samuel 25:40–42
And when the servants of David were come to Abigail to Carmel, they spake unto her, saying, David sent us unto thee to take thee to him to wife. And she arose, and bowed herself on her face to the earth, and said, Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord. And Abigail hasted, and arose, and rode upon an ass, with five damsels of hers that went after her; and she went after the messengers of David, and became his wife.

Let this be a word of encouragement to any of you who are married to "Nabals." You might say, "I can't believe I'm stuck with him or her. How can I get out of this?" Abigail provides a real key in helping anyone in such a relationship. That is, regardless of whether or not your spouse is the person he or she is supposed to be, if you are the person you're supposed to be, God will work in amazing ways. Abigail did what was right even though her husband was a fool. She stood up for him, took responsibility for him, and tried to do everything she could to protect him. Had she not done so, she would never have been the bride of the king.

One day, a Greater than David will whisk you away to His kingdom—where you'll be free from the Nabal to whom you're married. You'll be His Bride. And may He say to you in that day, "Well done. You did what you were supposed to do." Life is so short in comparison to eternity. You'll never regret doing what is right.

Abigail is a picture of you and me . . .

- Like Abigail, we have good understanding and are of a beautiful countenance. God has given us good understanding from His Word, and we're robed in the beauty of His holiness.
- Abigail was yoked to Nabal. We, too, are yoked to fools—the fools of our sin and self and Satan. She was stuck with an idiot. So are we. We're stuck with ourselves.
- Abigail was barren. She had no children with Nabal. We, too, were barren. Without the Lord there was no fruit in our lives of eternal importance.

- Abigail heard the word of impending doom (v. 17). So did we. Jesus, our Greater than David, talked more about hell than about heaven.
- Abigail humbled herself before David (v. 24). That's what happened to you and me, as well. We heard the word of doom and realized our need for a Savior.
- Abigail sought forgiveness (v. 28). Some people think they don't need to be forgiven, that they have no need of salvation. Like Abigail, however, we know otherwise.
- Abigail was persuaded of David's goodness (v. 28). So, too, we say, "Lord, Thou art worthy."
- Abigail's request was granted (v. 35). The real issue of salvation is not that we accept the Lord, but that the Lord accepts us. And because He does, we are no longer at war with Him, but have peace with God through Jesus Christ.

1 Samuel 25:43, 44
David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel; and they were also both of them his wives. But Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Phalti the son of Laish, which was of Gallim.

David's first wife, Michal, having been given to another man, David now has two wives: Abigail and Ahinoam. Although not ordained or condoned by God (Deuteronomy 17:17), this was a common practice in this day. But it was a practice that, throughout Scripture, never failed to end in disaster. And Ahinoam being the mother of Amnon, who would later rape his sister and destroy David's family, this marriage would prove to be no exception.

26

1 Samuel 26:1, 2
And the Ziphites came unto Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself in the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon? Then Saul arose, and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph.

David had already been in Ziph. The men of Ziph had betrayed him once before (chapter 23). So why would he go back to Ziph? Our text gives us no answer as to what David was thinking. But we do have revelation about the state of his heart at this time . . .

> To the chief Musician on Neg'-i-noth, Mas'-chil, A Psalm of David, when the Ziph'ims came and said to Saul, Doth not David hide himself with us?
>
> Save me, O God, by thy name, and judge me by thy strength. Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers are risen up against me, and oppressors seek after my soul: they have not set God before them. Selah. Behold, God is mine helper: the Lord is with them that uphold my soul. He shall reward evil unto mine enemies: cut them off in thy truth. I will freely sacrifice unto thee: I will praise thy name, O LORD; for it is good. For he hath delivered me out of all trouble: and mine eye hath seen his desire upon mine enemies.
>
> Psalm 54

Men are curious about thoughts. God, however, is more interested in our hearts. Here, David was writing poetry to the Lord, inspired by the Lord, and praising the Lord passionately even while he was doing something that didn't make sense logically.

> **1 Samuel 26:3, 4**
> **And Saul pitched in the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon, by the way. But David abode in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness. David therefore sent out spies, and understood that Saul was come in very deed.**

The last time David encountered Saul, he heard Saul say, "David, I've done wrong in chasing you. You're a greater man, a better man than I am" (24:16–22). Our text indicates that, although David knew Saul's army was coming, he didn't believe Saul himself was leading the charge. Evidently, David believed Saul meant what he said at En-gedi—until his spies confirmed the worst.

Although Saul chucked spears at him, caused problems for him, and showed hatred toward him, David still wanted to believe the best about Saul. Yet David was wise enough to find out the facts so as not to jeopardize the lives of his men. I like this balance in David, a wise leader indeed.

1 Samuel 26:5
And David arose, and came to the place where Saul had pitched: and David beheld the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the captain of his host: and Saul lay in the trench, and the people pitched round about him.

Saul was in the center of the camp, with 3,000 of his special forces protecting him.

1 Samuel 26:6 (a)
Then answered David and said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother to Joab, saying, Who will go down with me to Saul to the camp?

A dictator says, "Go." A leader says, "*Let's* go." David is a true leader. Jesus, our Greater than David, neither asks us to go where He hasn't gone before (Hebrews 4:15), nor where He won't go with us (Matthew 28:20).

1 Samuel 26:6 (b)–8
. . . And Abishai said, I will go down with thee. So David and Abishai came to the people by night: and, behold, Saul lay sleeping within the trench, and his spear stuck in the ground at his bolster: but Abner and the people lay round about him. Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time.

A second time, it would seem God had given David an opportunity to get rid of his enemy. But it wasn't an opportunity. It was a test for David to

prove whether he would take things into his own hands or wait upon the Lord.

1 Samuel 26:9–11
And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD's anointed, and be guiltless? David said furthermore, As the LORD liveth, the LORD shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish. The LORD forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the LORD's anointed: but, I pray thee, take thou now the spear that is at his bolster, and the cruse of water, and let us go.

Sometimes danger comes to us not only from unspiritual enemies like Saul, but from overzealous friends like Abishai. David knew Saul was still the anointed instrument in God's hand to work in his own life. Therefore, he wisely refused Abishai's offer to kill Saul.

1 Samuel 26:12–14
So David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's bolster; and they gat them away, and no man saw it, nor knew it, neither awaked: for they were all asleep; because a deep sleep from the LORD was fallen upon them. Then David went over to the other side, and stood on the top of an hill afar off; a great space being between them: And David cried to the people, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, Answerest thou not, Abner? Then Abner answered and said, Who art thou that criest to the king?

As day was breaking, David and Abishai made their way to a hill across from Saul's camp and called out to Abner, "Rise and shine!"

1 Samuel 26:15, 16
And David said to Abner, Art not thou a valiant man? and who is like to thee in Israel? wherefore then hast thou not kept thy lord the king? for there came one of the people in to destroy the king thy lord. This thing is not good that thou hast done. As the LORD liveth, ye are worthy to die, because ye have not kept your

master, the LORD's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is, and the cruse of water that was at his bolster.

Here, we see David modeling the truth that the righteous are as bold as a lion (Proverbs 28:1). Not only did he sneak into Saul's camp, but he challenges Abner's authority. This reminds me of Paul before Agrippa at the amphitheater at Caesarea, of Martin Luther before the Diet of Worms, of John Knox before Queen Mary.

I will not tremble in the presence of man if I have trembled in the presence of God. When I find myself afraid of people, it's always indicative that I haven't been in the presence of the Lord because when I spend time with Him, I have boldness, peace, and confidence.

1 Samuel 26:17–19 (a)
And Saul knew David's voice, and said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And David said, It is my voice, my lord, O king. And he said, Wherefore doth my lord thus pursue after his servant? for what have I done? or what evil is in mine hand? Now therefore, I pray thee, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If the LORD have stirred thee up against me, let him accept an offering . . .

"If the Lord has stirred your heart to punish me because I've been wrong, if you are the instrument of chastening because I'm out of line, I need to bring an offering of sacrifice to the Lord," David said. "My heart is to be right with the Lord."

1 Samuel 26:19 (b)
. . . but if they be the children of men, cursed be they before the LORD . . .

"On the other hand," David continued, "if men have been lying to you about me or stoking the fires within you to feel animosity toward me, let those men be cursed." . . .

1 Samuel 26:19 (c)

. . . for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the LORD, saying, Go, serve other gods.

Notice that David's primary complaint against his enemies was not that they had forced him into exile, but that they had prevented him access to worshiping with His people.

1 Samuel 26:20, 21
Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth before the face of the LORD: for the king of Israel is come out to seek a flea, as when one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains. Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly.

Although Saul doesn't know it, he's about to die. Therefore, this is his epitaph.

I wonder what it must feel like to be seventy, eighty, or ninety—headed toward your eternal destiny—and say, "I've been a fool. I've pursued things I shouldn't have pursued." I believe one of the primary messages of the Bible is to teach us to live as though this is our last day. That's the beauty of watching for the Lord's coming every day.

1 Samuel 26:22–25
And David answered and said, Behold the king's spear! and let one of the young men come over and fetch it. The LORD render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness: for the LORD delivered thee into my hand to day, but I would not stretch forth mine hand against the LORD's anointed. And, behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the LORD, and let him deliver me out of all tribulation. Then Saul said to David, Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail. So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.

Saul goes back to his palace and never sees David again. He slinks off the pages of Scripture with the summary conclusion: I have played the fool. I have erred greatly.

The first time David had a chance to deal with Saul, he touched the hem of his garment, and later was convicted. Now, David's heart does not smite him because he doesn't touch Saul at all.

I guarantee before the week is over, you'll have an opportunity to lop off a head, to snip a garment, or to make a comment. But perhaps the Lord would say to you, "There's a better way." I pray that the power of the Word being heard and received will change us from glory to glory—from a Saul to a David.



27 Jealous of David, threatened by David, Saul was determined to kill David. But God had spared David time and time again—not only from the attacks of Saul, but also from David's fleshly temptation to attack Saul. Yet although his enemy had verified the fact that David would emerge victorious (26:25), depression descended upon the soul of David . . .

1 Samuel 27:1 (a)
And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul . . .

David was a lover of God who talked to the Lord constantly and wrote psalms about the Lord very expressively. In this situation, however, we see him not talking to the Lord, but talking to his heart. The Hebrew phrase translated "in his heart" literally means David talked to himself. And in so doing, he got mixed up. He came to wrong conclusions. He fell into depression. He ends up living in enemy territory for almost a year and a half because he talked to himself rather than talking to the Lord.

I can do the same thing oh, so easily. I talk to myself and convince myself of all kinds of things that are completely untrue. As I drive home from church, I overhear myself saying,

"Now, Jon, what do you think about that?"

"I think what he said was unfair."

"I do, too!"

"I think she could have been a little kinder. What do you think, Jon?"

"I completely agree. I don't know what's gotten into her."

"I've been wondering the same thing! It seems like they used to be so nice and so pleasant, but something's wrong with them now."

"I concur! You need to do something about them. You need to yell at them."

"You're right, Jon. Excellent advice!"

I think a lot of us talk to ourselves from time to time. Driving to church, walking the dog, mowing the lawn, we convince ourselves that we're right, as we make our way to Gath, as we defect, as we rebel.

You will persuade yourself. You'll build up a case that's airtight. You will be your own best ally. You'll feel more justified with each passing moment as you talk to yourself. But here's the danger with talking to yourself, with talking to your heart: According to Jeremiah 17:9, the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. This means that when you're having a good "heart to heart" talk with yourself, you're getting counsel that is desperately wicked. When I talk to myself, I am being deceived and I am becoming wicked. And the end result is that you'll take a detour—be it sixteen seconds, sixteen months, or sixteen years—into Gath.

What are we to do? Philippians 4 says, "Be anxious for nothing. But in everything with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known"—not to yourself, not to your pastor, not to your spouse—"unto God. And the peace of God will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Imagine two stopwatches in your hands. One starts every time you talk to yourself or to others about a situation. The other starts every time you talk to your Father about the matter, communicating in articulate, intelligent, understandable prayer. After three days, what would these clocks look like? How much time would have been spent talking to yourself? How much time would have been spent talking to your Father?

There are some people with whom spending time is a joy. Why? Because their hearts and minds are at peace. Why? Because they're people of prayer. They have no fish to fry, no axes to grind, no battles to fight, no points to prove because they have learned to say, "Father, I don't know what to do about this. I'm tired of mulling it over in my mind or talking to people round about me. I'm just going to talk to You."

The only way to have this peace is to pray. If you talk to yourself more than you talk to your Father, you'll make big mistakes. But if you choose to talk to the Father, there will be a genuine peace about you that is winsome and attractive, pleasant and contagious. Bend your knee, open your heart, and wait on Him. The end result will be a peace that will keep your heart and mind in Christ, and will keep you out of Gath.

1 Samuel 27:1 (b), 2
. . . There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand. And David arose, and he passed over with the six hundred men that were with him unto Achish, the son of Maoch, king of Gath.

When he was first running from Saul, David went to Gath to find refuge. Why does he now return to Gath? Perhaps it is because when he was there previously, the people of Gath thought he was a madman (1 Samuel 21:13, 14). Returning with a band of six hundred soldiers would prove to them otherwise.

1 Samuel 27:3–5
And David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's wife. And it was told Saul that David was fled to Gath: and he sought no more again for him. And David said unto Achish, If I have now found grace in thine eyes, let them give me a place in some town in the country, that I may dwell there: for why should thy servant dwell in the royal city with thee?

I don't want to crowd you," David said to Achish. "I have six hundred men with me—along with their families. So we'll just live in one of your other cities."

1 Samuel 27:6
Then Achish gave him Ziklag that day: wherefore Ziklag pertaineth unto the kings of Judah unto this day.

No doubt hearing reports that Saul and David were at war, Achish would welcome an enemy of Saul. Ziklag was originally given to Judah (Joshua 15:31). The problem was, the people of Judah never possessed it, so the Philistines gained control of it. Here, David makes Ziklag his base of operation—and the city would remain in the hands of the Jews until the time this book was written.

1 Samuel 27:7
And the time that David dwelt in the country of the Philistines was a full year and four months.

David must have thought, *Saul isn't chasing me. The enemy isn't hounding me. I've got it made here in Philistine country.*

This can happen to you and me as well. We can say, "I'm tired of struggling with the people of God, so I'll just hang out with the world in Philistine country." And for awhile, it will seem good because the enemy will no longer chase you. If you stop going to church, if you pull away from fellowship, if you isolate yourself from Christians, Satan won't bug you. But what will eventually happen to David is highly instructive because, although his situation will be easier initially, it will be disastrous ultimately.

I find it interesting that Psalms 8, 81, and 84 are to be played on an instrument called a *gittih,* an instrument evidently invented in Gath. You see, when David was in Gath for sixteen months, he must have heard instruments that were new to him and ultimately employed them in the praise of God. Thus, even though David was where he ought not to have been, God eventually brought glory to Himself through it.

1 Samuel 27:8

And David and his men went up, and invaded the Geshurites, and the Gezrites, and the Amalekites: for those nations were of old the inhabitants of the land, as thou goest to Shur, even unto the land of Egypt.

The Geshurites, Gezrites, and Amalekites were groups living in the southern regions of Judah and northern regions of Philistine country. David and his men launched guerrilla raids on these Canaanite tribes—tribes that were never rooted out by the Jews as they were supposed to have been when they first took possession of the land.

1 Samuel 27:9
And David smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel, and returned, and came to Achish.

This shows me that energetic activity is not a sign of true spirituality. David is attacking the enemy because, no doubt, he has a guilty conscience about living in Philistine country. We can do the same thing. We can pull away from fellowship with other believers, but make up for it by becoming active in a myriad of service organizations. Thus, oftentimes when a person is the most active, it's not because he's the most spiritual. It might be because he's trying to overcome his own awareness of carnality.

Secondly, this shows me that success is not necessarily an indication of true spirituality. Here, David was highly successful. After all, he won every battle. Nonetheless, he wasn't doing what was right in God's sight.

1 Samuel 27:10
And Achish said, Whither have ye made a road to day? And David said, Against the south of Judah, and against the south of the Jerahmeelites, and against the south of the Kenites.

By saying he was in the area of Judah, David falsely implied that he was waging war against his fellow Israelites.

1 Samuel 27:11, 12

And David saved neither man nor woman alive, to bring tidings to Gath, saying, Lest they should tell on us, saying, So did David, and so will be his manner all the while he dwelleth in the country of the Philistines. And Achish believed David, saying, He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore he shall be my servant for ever.

Thinking David was killing his own countrymen, Achisch was delighted. Surely David would be loyal to him, he thought. But Achish didn't know of David's propensity to lie. At Saul's table, we see David telling Jonathan to lie for him (1 Samuel 20:6). David lied to Ahimelech that he was on a secret mission for Saul (1 Samuel 21:2). He will lie to Uriah to cover his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11).

How could a man after God's own heart lie?

Because God uses imperfect people—aren't you glad?

Others might say, "How could God use him, or her, or them?" But God sees the heart. This doesn't justify David's lying—for it not only will get him in all kinds of trouble, but others died as a result. Therefore, this is not a justification for lying, but rather an indication that God sees man's heart.

God doesn't give up on David—and David will eventually come to the point where he will cry, "Remove me from the way of lying lips" (Psalm 120:2).

28 1 Samuel 28:1, 2

And it came to pass in those days, that the Philistines gathered their armies together for warfare, to fight with Israel. And Achish said unto David, Know thou assuredly, that thou shalt go out with me to battle, thou and thy men. And David said to Achish, Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do. And Achish said to David, Therefore will I make thee keeper of mine head for ever.

"I've been watching you, David," Achish said. "You've been fighting your own people. I trust you. Now we're going to go to war against the

Israelites, and I want you and your men to join us."

Uh-oh. Were you counting on this, David, when you backslid? Were you counting on this when you cut yourself off from your people, when you went into Philistine country? Sure, the pressure was off when you were in Philistine country. But now there's a bigger problem. Now you're going to have to come against the people of God. There's a price to pay for your sixteen-month vacation.

There's always a price to pay. Every temptation the devil sends our way is gift-wrapped as a present. Yes, David was given Ziklag. But sixteen months later, the bill comes due.

1 Samuel 28:3–5

Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him, and buried him in Ramah, even in his own city. And Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land. And the Philistines gathered themselves together, and came and pitched in Shunem: and Saul gathered all Israel together, and they pitched in Gilboa. And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled.

That the war between the Philistines and Saul was to take place in the northern city of Gilboa meant that the Philistines had penetrated deeply into Israel and that Saul was boxed in. No wonder his heart greatly trembled.

How did this happen? How did Saul lose control of the land of Israel? There's a very simple reason: He was spending his time fighting the wrong enemy. He was chasing David. So now when there is a genuine war to fight, he is completely, totally unprepared.

The same thing can happen to us. If we get all tangled up in the little problems that arise among Christians, when it comes time to do battle against our true enemy, we'll be powerless.

1 Samuel 28:6

And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams nor by Urim, nor by prophets.

God wasn't speaking to Saul through dreams, through the priests, or through prophecy. Even Samuel was now dead. Here, Saul is in for the battle of his life—and God's not talking to him.

1 Samuel 28:7, 8
Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor. And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment, and he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night: and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee.

Although Saul had ordered the deportation of wizards and fortune tellers, his heart was still inclined toward their practice. So, under the cover of night, he seeks help from a "psychic."

I think of another man who sought counsel at night: Nicodemus. Unlike Saul, however, Nicodemus would not remain in the dark, for he sought counsel from the Light of the world (John 3).

1 Samuel 28:9–12
And the woman said unto him, Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?

And Saul sware to her by the LORD, saying, As the LORD liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing. Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel. And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul.

How low are you going to go, Saul? God is not speaking to you—and instead of repenting before Him, confessing your need of Him, and turning away from your sin, you're going to a psychic. This is not innocent because

the Bible specifically tells us we are to have nothing to do with activities involving necromancy. Are these things bad simply because God forbids them? No. Like all sin, God forbids them because they're bad. They open doors to demonic deception.

Although in this case, Saul would hear the truth from Samuel rather than the lie of a demon, how better off he would have been had he humbled himself and sought the Lord.

1 Samuel 28:13–19

And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth. And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself. And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do. Then said Samuel, Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the LORD is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy? And the LORD hath done to him, as he spake by me: for the LORD hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbour, even to David: Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the LORD, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the LORD done this thing unto thee this day. Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the LORD also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.

"What should I do?" Saul said to Samuel in desperation. Samuel never tells Saul what he should do. Instead he says, "Here's what's going to happen: Because you disobeyed when the Lord asked you to destroy the Amalekites, the kingdom has been taken from you and given to David. Furthermore, you and your sons will die tomorrow.

1 Samuel 28:20–22
Then Saul fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel: and there was no strength in him; for he had eaten no bread all the day, nor all the night. And the woman came unto Saul, and saw that he was sore troubled, and said unto him, Behold, thine handmaid hath obeyed thy voice, and I have put my life in my hand, and have hearkened unto thy words which thou spakest unto me. Now therefore, I pray thee, hearken thou also unto the voice of thine handmaid, and let me set a morsel of bread before thee; and eat, that thou mayest have strength, when thou goest on thy way.

This woman's apparent kindness to Saul may have been due to the fact that if he had died in her house, she would have been in big trouble since witches were outlawed (v. 3).

1 Samuel 28:23–25
But he refused, and said, I will not eat. But his servants, together with the woman, compelled him; and he hearkened unto their voice. So he arose from the earth, and sat upon the bed. And the woman had a fat calf in the house; and she hasted, and killed it, and took flour, and kneaded it, and did bake unleavened bread thereof: And she brought it before Saul, and before his servants; and they did eat. Then they rose up, and went away that night.

Saul slips away into the night. The next time we read of him, he'll be in the battle that will take his life.



29

1 Samuel 29:1, 2
Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek: and the Israelites pitched by a fountain which is in Jezreel. And the lords of the Philistines passed on by hundreds, and by thousands: but David and his men passed on in the rereward with Achish.

In Achish's army, David is actually poised to begin fighting for the Philistines against his own people.

1 Samuel 29:3–5
Then said the princes of the Philistines, What do these Hebrews here? And Achish said unto the princes of the Philistines, Is not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, which hath been with me these days, or these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell unto me unto this day? And the princes of the Philistines were wroth with him; and the princes of the Philistines said unto him, Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us: for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? should it not be with the heads of these men? Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands?

The song that aroused Saul's anger toward David initially (1 Samuel 18:7, 8), is the same song that would rescue him presently. God is the great Orchestrator, the Master Composer of the symphony of our lives. At times, we might think, we're hearing a song that's off-key, flat, out of tune. *This is awful,* we think. *Why is this happening to me? Why are people saying those things about me? I don't understand.* But in reality, the song that seems to be sour often proves down the road to be the very song God uses to rescue us from the disaster that would have been ours.

1 Samuel 29:6–11
Then Achish called David, and said unto him, Surely, as the LORD liveth, thou hast been upright, and thy going out and thy coming in with me in the host is good in my sight: for I have not found evil in thee since the day of thy coming unto me unto this day: nevertheless the lords favour thee not. Wherefore now return, and go in peace, that thou displease not the lords of the Philistines. And David said unto Achish, But what have I done? and what hast thou found in thy servant so long as I have been

with thee unto this day, that I may not go fight against the enemies of my lord the king? And Achish answered and said to David, I know that thou art good in my sight, as an angel of God: notwithstanding the princes of the Philistines have said, He shall not go up with us to the battle. Wherefore now rise up early in the morning with thy master's servants that are come with thee: and as soon as ye be up early in the morning, and have light, depart. So David and his men rose up early to depart in the morning, to return into the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel.

The Lord kept David from doing something he would have regretted all the days of his life, something that would have changed not only his personal history, but that of the entire nation. God stepped in. Even though David had failed, even though he's in enemy territory, God steps in and rescues him. I get myself in all sorts of predicaments, in all kinds of jams. But even when I make a mess of things, God doesn't walk away or turn from me. He steps up. He moves in. He saves me because He is faithful even when I am faithless (2 Timothy 2:13).

I trust God not because I have my act together or because I know lots of Bible verses. I trust Him for one reason: He's proven Himself to be trustworthy. The greatest thing we can give God is trust, where say,

"It's not about how worthy or worthless I am. It's not about how bad or how good I might be. It's all about You, Lord. No matter whether I'm faithful or faithless, good or bad, glad or sad, You do exactly what You promise to do. You never leave or forsake me. You cause all things to work together for good in my life. You draw near to me when I draw near to You. You answer me when I call. Surely, You have proven Yourself to be nothing but trustworthy."

We often say, "Lord, I love You." But I wonder if it isn't more meaningful to say, "Lord, I trust You." I think it thrills the heart of the Father to be trusted.

May the Lord cause you to be one who trusts in Him. Whether or not you're where you should be, ought to be, or want to be—there is one thing I

promise you: He is trustworthy. He's faithful. I'm so grateful. Aren't you?



30 Having been delivered from the near-disaster of fighting his own countrymen, David and his men return to Ziklag. But when they arrive, their hearts break . . .

1 Samuel 30:1, 2
And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire; And had taken the women captives, that were therein: they slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way.

Ziklag means "winding road." Life is like that. You think you have things all straightened out, all your ducks in the proverbial row, with nothing but smooth sailing ahead—until you come to a curve you weren't counting on, a pothole you didn't see. That's the way it will always be this side of heaven. But one day, when we're called away, the streets will be straight (Isaiah 40:4) and paved with gold (Revelation 21:21)—no more winding roads, no more potholes.

David finds a curve he wasn't counting on. He and his boys make it back to Ziklag to reunite with their families only to discover that the Amalekites had invaded the town, burned down their homes, and carried their families away. It was a brutal, devastating, heartbreaking situation.

Amalekite means "dweller in the valley." Each time the Amalekites are seen in Scripture, they're an illustration of the flesh, warring against the people of God. That is why God said to Moses, "You shall war against Amalek from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16).

Whether it's due to the fleshly tendencies within us or to external enemies that seek to pull us down, you can count on a fight from Amalek. Right when you think you have things all figured out, another generation of Amalekites will rise up and war against you. Knowing this, aren't you thankful that He

who is within you is greater than any Amalekite who comes against you? (1 John 4:4).

1 Samuel 30:3–5
So David and his men came to the city, and, behold, it was burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives. Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep. And David's two wives were taken captives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite.

Their city had been burned. Their families had been taken away. David understood why his men were grieving. His house had been burned, too. His family had been carried off as well. Thus, the captain of this rag-tag group of renegades was feeling exactly what his men were feeling.

The Captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10) relates to whatever trials and difficulties we face because He was tested in the very same areas (Hebrews 4:15). He knows what you're going through. He knows why you feel the way you do because He, too, has felt the heat of the attack of the enemy.

1 Samuel 30:6 (a)
And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters . . .

Not only did David lose his house and his family, but his own men turned against him, ready to stone him. No doubt, they felt that David had dropped the ball and let them down. Already grieving over his own loss, yet seeing rocks in the hands of his men, he had reason to be distressed.

Maybe you were fired. Maybe your household is under attack. Maybe your spouse has drifted away. Maybe your kids have been carried away by the enemy. This is a story for you because there are four things I want you to see that allowed David to eventually recover all that he had lost . . .

1 Samuel 30:6 (b)

. . . but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.

David encouraged himself in the Lord. This is where it starts. This is what we must do to get back all that's been ripped off by the enemy. David couldn't depend on his men. They were angry with him. There was no one to pat him on the back and say, "It'll be okay." There was no one to wipe away his tears. But that's the way it usually is. Don't wait for a pastor to come, a friend to show up, a neighbor to drop by when you're depressed. If you do, you might have a long wait. David knew what he had to do. Everything looked grim. But he chose to encourage himself in the Lord.

How?

We see the answer in Psalm 42 . . .

> Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.
>
> Psalm 42:5

I can be depressed, discouraged, despairing continually—or I can say, "Why are you this way, soul? Hope in God. Give praise to Him. Offer thanks to Him."

When I receive news that my city has been burned down, the first thing I must do is encourage myself in the Lord by thanking Him for the ways He has been so faithful time and time again. I reflect and remember—and begin to talk to the Lord audibly giving Him thanks for what He has done.

> *Little Tommy didn't understand this. When his mommy said, "You're going to have a baby brother or a baby sister," he was so thrilled that he told his kindergarten teacher. He told her again the next day. In fact, every day without fail he told her that he was going to have a baby brother or a baby sister.*
>
> *One day, his mother said, "Tommy, come here." As she placed his hand on her stomach, she said, "Feel that? That's your baby brother or sister kicking!"*
>
> *Tommy smiled faintly and walked away.*

The next day when he went to school he didn't tell his teacher he was going to have a baby brother or a baby sister. He didn't bring it up the second, third, or fifth day, either. Finally, after a couple of weeks, his teacher said, "Tommy, you haven't talked about the baby that's coming."

Tommy burst into tears. "The baby's not coming," he cried. "My mommy ate it!"

Like Tommy, we don't understand things very well. *Oh, this is awful,* we think—failing to realize that God is up to something wonderful.

1 Samuel 30:7, 8
And David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod. And Abiathar brought thither the ephod to David. And David inquired at the LORD, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all.

After encouraging himself in the Lord, *David inquired of the Lord.* "What do You want me to do, Lord?" The Lord answered him directly and quickly. And God will do the same with you.

It doesn't take as much as you think. Satan will say, "So you want to hear from the Lord? That's going to require three hours of constant prayer, three days of fasting, three weeks of getting away. You only have thirty minutes? God's not going to hear you. Ten minutes? Forget about it. Three minutes? You've got to be kidding. God's not going to give you direction in a three-minute prayer."

I challenge that. Ask Peter. He was on the Sea of Galilee. He had been walking on the water, but now he's sinking quickly. He didn't pray for three days, three months, three hours, or even three minutes. He prayed three words: "Lord, save me." And the Lord grabbed him by the hand and pulled him out of the water (Matthew 14:30, 31).

Satan will say, "It takes a lot more. That's not enough."

But Jesus said, “Do not think you’re going to be heard because of your much speaking, your long praying. That’s a heathen concept. When you pray, be simple” (see Matthew 6:7, 8).

1 Samuel 30:9, 10 (a)
So David went, he and the six hundred men that were with him, and came to the brook Besor, where those that were left behind stayed. But David pursued, he and four hundred men . . .

Thirdly, *David was engaged with the Lord.* Following praise and prayer, we see pursuit. Many times, people sit back and say, “Lord, if You want good things to come my way, bring them to me.”

The Lord, however, says, “Take a step of faith. I’ll be with you. I’ll fight for you. But I want you to be engaged with Me. I don’t want you passive because I want to prepare you for eternity.”

To Elijah—another man who was depressed and holed up in a cave—God said, “Why are you in this cave of depression? You know better than this. I want you to go to Syria. I want you to anoint a new king. I want you to go to Israel and raise up a leader. I want you to find a young man named Elisha and mentor him. I have work for you to do” (1 Kings 19).

The Lord says the same thing to us. “Why are you in this cave? You know better than that. Do what you know, and you’ll know what to do.”

Having been encouraged, having inquired, now being engaged, the story goes on . . .

1 Samuel 30:10 (b)–15 (a)
. . . for two hundred abode behind, which were so faint that they could not go over the brook Besor. And they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David, and gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water; And they gave him a piece of a cake of figs, and two clusters of raisins: and when he had eaten, his spirit came again to him: for he had eaten no bread, nor drunk any water, three days and three nights. And David said unto him, To whom belongest thou? and whence art thou? And he said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an

Amalekite; and my master left me, because three days agone I fell sick. We made an invasion upon the south of the Cherethites, and upon the coast which belongeth to Judah, and upon the south of Caleb; and we burned Ziklag with fire. And David said to him, Canst thou bring me down to this company?

Finding a servant of an Amalekite left in the wilderness to die, David said, "Do you know where the Amalekites are? Can you take me to them?"

1 Samuel 30:15 (b)
. . . And he said, Swear unto me by God, that thou wilt neither kill me, nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring thee down to this company.

David gave his word that the Amalekite would be spared.

1 Samuel 30:16, 17
And when he had brought him down, behold, they were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah. And David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day: and there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men, which rode upon camels, and fled.

Four hundred seems like a large number of escapees—unless there were thousands of Amalekites killed. Because David encouraged himself in the Lord, inquired of the Lord, and became engaged for the Lord, he was used mightily by the Lord.

1 Samuel 30:18, 19
And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away: and David rescued his two wives. And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor any thing that they had taken to them: David recovered all.

David recovered all that the Amalekites carried away—not some, not a lot, not a good percentage—but *all.* This is the Lord's will for you and His heart for me. He wants us to recover all that has been ripped off by sin, our flesh, and the enemy.

1 Samuel 30:20–22
And David took all the flocks and the herds, which they drave before those other cattle, and said, This is David's spoil. And David came to the two hundred men, which were so faint that they could not follow David, whom they had made also to abide at the brook Besor: and they went forth to meet David, and to meet the people that were with him: and when David came near to the people, he saluted them. Then answered all the wicked men and men of Belial, of those that went with David, and said, Because they went not with us, we will not give them ought of the spoil that we have recovered, save to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away, and depart.

Some of the four hundred men who accompanied David into battle insisted that the two hundred men who stayed behind to guard the supplies were not entitled to any of the spoil.

1 Samuel 30:23–25
Then said David, Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the LORD hath given us, who hath preserved us, and delivered the company that came against us into our hand. For who will hearken unto you in this matter? but as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike. And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day.

David encouraged himself in the Lord. David inquired of the Lord. David engaged himself for the Lord. Here, *David is inspired by the Lord* when he insisted that the men who guarded the supplies were as important as those on the front line.

You might not be a warrior. You might not be front and center. But if you're keeping the supply lines going by praying faithfully, giving financially, serving humbly, our Captain will insist that you get equal share of the reward. That's God's economy.

1 Samuel 30:26–31

And when David came to Ziklag, he sent of the spoil unto the elders of Judah, even to his friends, saying, Behold a present for you of the spoil of the enemies of the LORD; To them which were in Bethel, and to them which were in south Ramoth, and to them which were in Jattir, And to them which were in Aroer, and to them which were in Siphmoth, and to them which were in Eshtemoa, And to them which were in Rachal, and to them which were in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, and to them which were in the cities of the Kenites, And to them which were in Hormah, and to them which were in Chor-ashan, and to them which were in Athach, And to them which were in Hebron, and to all the places where David himself and his men were wont to haunt.

The story ends gloriously. David and his men got back more than they had lost—enough to share with the entire nation—"good measure, pressed down, and running over" (Luke 6:38). And that's God's heart for us, as well.



31 We come to the end of the sad, sorry saga of Saul. The first king of Israel had tragically hardened his heart against the Lord, turned his back on the Lord, and now will be judged by the Lord . . .

1 Samuel 31:1–7

Now the Philistines fought against Israel: and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa. And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Malchi-shua, Saul's sons. And the battle went sore against Saul,

and the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers. Then said Saul unto his armour-bearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. And when his armour-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armour-bearer, and all his men, that same day together. And when the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley, and they that were on the other side Jordan, saw that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities, and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them.

Battling the Philistines, Saul saw his soldiers—including his own sons—fall round about him before he himself felt the piercing pain of a Philistine arrow.

> So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it; And inquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse.
>
> 1 Chronicles 10:13, 14

As his life drained from him, he told his armor-bearer to kill him. When the armor-bearer refused, Saul did that which was unethical, immoral, and sinful. Once again, taking matters into his own hands, he killed himself in an attempt to keep himself from being abused by the Philistines.

1 Samuel 31:8–10
And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people. And

they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan.

Saul's suicide did not accomplish that which he intended, for his head was lopped off and passed around from city to city, and his naked corpse was nailed to the wall of a Philistine city as a spectacle for all to see.

1 Samuel 31:11–13
And when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul; All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

When the men of Jabesh-gilead received word that Saul's corpse was pinned to the wall of a Philistine city, their hearts were stirred with compassion. Marching all night, the men of Jabeshgilead risked their lives to recover the bodies of Saul and his sons. The bodies were so mutilated that they eventually had to burn them. But they buried their bones under a tree in their own city.

What moved these men? Why would they risk their lives outnumbered and out manned to recover the headless corpse of a judged king?

I suggest it's because of something that happened forty years previously, when Saul was presented to Israel as her king. Certain people applauded. "Long live the king," they said. But others said, "We're not going to have this farmer from the tribe of Benjamin rule over us." And Saul realized that the opinion about him was divided. So he went back to his farm and plowed away—until word reached him that the men of Jabesh-gilead were in trouble.

When Nahash the Ammonite threatened to wage war against the men of Jabesh-gilead, Saul was moved with compassion and rallied the men of Israel. With the 330,000 men who answered his call, Saul marched all night to rescue the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead. And the men of Jabeshgilead never forgot it. And forty years later, when he was naked and humiliated, the men to whom Saul and shown mercy returned the favor.

In Luke 6:38, when Jesus said, "Whatever is measured out will be measured back to you," he was talking about mercy. If we are those who learn mercy (Matthew 9:13), if we are those who love mercy (Micah 6:8), mercy will be shown to us. It might not happen for forty years—but when we need it most, it will be there (Matthew 5:7).

There was another King whose body was pinned—not to a wall, but to a Cross. The agony was unbelievable; the humiliation, unspeakable. He was spiritually decapitated as well, for He was the Head—but where was His body. Except for John, all of His disciples had fled. He was burned in the fire of God's righteous indignation poured out upon Him. Yet, even as we see in our text, His bones were not broken.

And so we come to His Table day after day to say, "I remember what You did for me. We were about to be done in by the enemy, but You came from heaven to rescue us. Others might not remember. Others might not care. But we of Jabeshgilead remember what You did when You marched all night and came to this world to save us."



2 SAMUEL

1 At the end of First Samuel, we saw Saul and his army fighting a losing battle against the Philistines on Mount Gilboa. Saul's soldiers were falling. Even his sons died near him. Finally, an arrow from a Philistine soldier pierced his own body. As his life was draining from him, he ordered his armor-bearer to kill him lest the Philistines torture him. When the armor-bearer refused, Saul fell on his own sword and died on Mount Gilboa.

Here, In 2 Samuel 1, we are given some additional information regarding this account . . .

2 Samuel 1:1, 2
Now it came to pass after the death of Saul, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites, and David had abode two days in Ziklag; It came even to pass on the third day, that, behold, a man came out of the camp from Saul with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head: and so it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the earth, and did obeisance.

Running from Saul, David and his band of renegades were holed up in Philistine country when a survivor of the battle on Mount Gilboa appeared before him.

2 Samuel 1:3, 4 (a)
And David said unto him, From whence comest thou? And he said unto him, Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped. And David said unto him, How went the matter? I pray thee, tell me . . .

Eager to hear of the outcome of the battle, David asks this man for information.

2 Samuel 1:4 (b)–7
. . . And he answered, That the people are fled from the battle, and many of the people also are fallen and dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also. And David said unto the young

man that told him, How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan his son be dead? And the young man that told him said, As I happened by chance upon mount Gilboa, behold, Saul leaned upon his spear; and, lo, the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called unto me. And I answered, Here am I.

It would seem as though Saul had attempted suicide, but was unsuccessful.

2 Samuel 1:8–10 (a)
And he said unto me, Who art thou? And I answered him, I am an Amalekite. And he said unto me again, Stand, I pray thee, upon me, and slay me: for anguish is come upon me, because my life is yet whole in me. So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen:

Twenty-five years earlier, God said to Saul, "I want you to kill every Amalekite." Why? The Amalekites were a constant problem for the people of Israel. As the Israelites made their way to the Promised Land, the Amalekites would attack the back of the pack—where the older folks, mothers with babies, and the sick and feeble would walk. Therefore, because they showed no mercy, God declared to Moses that he would war against the Amalekites from generation to generation (Exodus 17).

In 1 Samuel, God reiterated his charge against the Amalekites when he told Saul to destroy them—every man, woman, child, and all that they owned. Saul dutifully led the Israelite army in war against the Amalekites. When the battle was over, he said to Samuel, "Blessed be the Lord. We have obeyed what the Lord told us to do. We have been victorious over the Amalekites."

"If that's true," said Samuel, "what's the bleating I hear in my ear?"

"Oh," said Saul, "we saved a few of the sheep to sacrifice to the Lord."

"Who's that?" Samuel asked.

"Him? Oh, that's Agag, king of the Amalekites," Saul answered. "I brought him back here as a trophy."

Samuel then said to Saul, "Because you have not obeyed the Lord, the kingdom has been taken from you. You have lost your authority, opportunity, and ministry. You were supposed to kill every Amalekite, but because you compromised, because you did things your way, you're in trouble."

At the end of Saul's life, who finally does him in? Ironically, it was an Amalekite.

2 Samuel 1:10 (b)
. . . and I took the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them hither unto my lord.

With Saul's crown and bracelet in hand, I'm sure this Amalekite was as pleased as punch. After all, knowing Saul had been chasing David, he would assume David would be delighted to hear that Saul was no longer on the scene. No doubt the Amalekite expected to be rewarded by David for killing his enemy.

2 Samuel 1:11–14
Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him: And they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword. And David said unto the young man that told him, Whence art thou? And he answered, I am the son of a stranger, an Amalekite. And David said unto him, How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?

"Who do you think you are?" David said to the Amalekite. "How dare you stretch forth your hand and take the life of one anointed by the Lord." Even though Saul had hardened his heart against God, David recognized that Saul was king because the Lord allowed him to be. That is why, when he himself had opportunity to kill Saul on two separate occasions, he didn't do so. We're not to take matters into our own hands. David understood this.

2 Samuel 1:15, 16

And David called one of the young men, and said, Go near, and fall upon him. And he smote him that he died. And David said unto him, Thy blood be upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the LORD's anointed.

The Amalekite thought he deserved a reward. Instead, he is killed. Throughout Scripture Amalek is an illustration of the flesh. We are to mortify —or kill—the flesh because if we don't annihilate and eradicate it, it will kill us (Romans 8:13). This Amalekite would have never existed had Saul obeyed God in the first place.

"Who are you?" asked Saul.

"I am an Amalekite—one of the guys you should have killed."

Saul lost the monarchy because he didn't understand that Amalek had to be dealt with. There are no excuses for sin, only a cure. And the cure is repentance. We aren't to explore, explain, or excuse sin. We're simply to acknowledge, confess, repent, and go our way free (John 8:11).

2 Samuel 1:17, 18
And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son: (Also he bade them teach the children of Judah the use of the bow: behold, it is written in the book of Jasher.)

During this period of lamentation and mourning, David says, "We need to teach the young people to be archers." Why would he say this at that time? First Samuel 13 tells us that the Philistines had taken away all weapons and instruments of iron from the Israelites to ensure their own military advantage as they ruled the region. It would seem that it was Jonathan and Saul who introduced the bow and arrow to the people of Israel. The arrows would be tipped with stone, thus eliminating the need for iron.

The lesson for us is simple and practical. That is, if there's been a loss in your life, a hurt in your heart, an ache in your soul—here's the key: Get back in the battle. Wage war against the enemy. Serve the Lord with new intensity. Give Him more than you have ever given previously. If you don't you will remain in a state of depression and heaviness.

David showed great insight here. His call to arms would provide both a fitting commemoration of Saul and Jonathan, and needed restoration to the nation.

The chapter ends with the song David penned to honor his friend, Jonathan . . .

2 Samuel 1:19–21

The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philis tines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil.

To this day, Mount Gilboa is completely barren because here, David cursed it as the place where Saul and Jonathan fell.

2 Samuel 1:22–27

From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty. Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou was slain in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

This is the sincere expression of a broken heart—not only for Jonathan, his close friend and brother—but also for Saul, the man who relentlessly chased him.

Maybe there's someone after you—throwing verbal spears in your direction, chasing you mercilessly. Would you write a song like this for him? In verse 19, David writes of Saul's and Jonathan's glory. In verse 21, he speaks of their strength and dignity. Verse 23 refers to their military prowess. In verse 24 is a tribute to Saul's economic leadership. In this, we see David's wonderful ability to approve the things that were excellent in Saul. This is what Paul said we are all to do (Philippians 1:10).

In fact, Paul goes on to say that we are to esteem others as better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). Why? Because it's true. Every person you meet is better than you at something. He might pray with more intensity. He might be more artistic. He might have a greater understanding of certain spiritual principles. He might be able to fix a car.

All men are created in the image of God. The rabbis teach that the reason for the billions of people that inhabit the earth is that it takes billions of people to portray God properly. Every one of us has a little piece to contribute. Our job, therefore, is to look for the piece that speaks of God in the life of another.

"But I don't see anything good in him," you might say.

To you, I say, "Explore deeper. Watch and see what the Lord will do."



2

2 Samuel 2:1 (a)
And it came to pass after this . . .

"It came to pass after this"—after what? After Saul died. As David first comes into power, notice what he does . . .

2 Samuel 2:1 (b)
. . . that David inquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the LORD said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron.

Here we see a real secret of David's success—why it was that he was used so effectively, why his life had so great an impact that we study him to this day. David was a man who inquired of the Lord.

"Is this the right time to go into the cities of Judah?" David asked.

"Yes," the Lord answered.

"Where should I go?" David asked.

"Go to Hebron," the Lord answered.

When David asked if it was time for him to go into the cities of Judah, God could have said, "Yes. Go to Hebron first." But He didn't do that. He gave David the specific information David asked for and waited until David asked for more.

The Lord does the same with us. He isn't reluctant to give guidance, but there's something more important than guidance. It's called intimacy. If you've prayed repeatedly for direction concerning a given situation but still aren't sure what the Lord would have you do, perhaps it's because He loves you so much that He wants to keep hearing from you. He wants you to come into His presence time and again. He wants you to feel the embrace of His grace.

Corrie Ten Boom asked this pointed question: "Is prayer your steering wheel, or is it your spare tire?" Many of us pull prayer out of the trunk when we're feeling flat or when there's a blowout. However, prayer ought to be the steering wheel guiding us through the day, keeping us out of the ruts and ditches of life. Some days I act like I can get through my day without prayer. How dumb of me. Prayer is the highest, most important calling of any believer. It will keep you out of the ditches of depression, the ruts of predictability, the snares of seduction. At the outset of his reign, David models the absolute necessity of prayer.

2 Samuel 2:2, 3

So David went up thither, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail Nabal's wife the Carmelite. And his men that were with him did David bring up, every man with his household: and they dwelt in the cities of Hebron.

David asked the Lord what to do—and then did exactly what the Lord told him, bringing his rag-tag band of renegades along with him.

2 Samuel 2:4
And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. And they told David, saying, That the men of Jabesh-gilead were they that buried Saul.

I strongly suspect that the intention of the men of Judah was, "Now that you're in power, David, you should nail the men of Jabesh-gilead for showing compassion to your enemy."

2 Samuel 2:5–7
And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabesh-gilead, and said unto them, Blessed be ye of the LORD, that ye have shewed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him. And now the LORD shew kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness, because ye have done this thing. Therefore now let your hands be strengthened, and be ye valiant: for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them.

"I'm proud of you," David said to the men of Jabesh-gilead. "Yes, I'm king. But I'm not out to get you."

2 Samuel 2:8–11
But Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim; And made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashur-ites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel. Ishbosheth Saul's son was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David. And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.

Wanting to retain power for Saul's family and for himself personally, Saul's cousin, Abner, grabs Saul's one remaining son and makes him king over all the tribes of Israel except Judah.

2 Samuel 2:12, 13
And Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out, and met together by the pool of Gibeon: and they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool.

David's nephew, Joab, called for a meeting with Abner, Saul's cousin.

2 Samuel 2:14, 15
And Abner said to Joab, Let the young men now arise, and play before us. And Joab said, Let them arise. Then there arose and went over by number twelve of Benjamin, which pertained to Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David.

"Why should we involve our entire armies?" Abner said. "I'll pick twelve of my best men, you do the same, and we'll let them battle it out. The winner will take all."

2 Samuel 2:16
And they caught every one his fellow by the head, and thrust his sword in his fellow's side; so they fell down together: wherefore that place was called Helkath-hazzurim, which is in Gibeon.

Abner's and Joab's experiment ended in a tie—with all twenty-four men dead.

2 Samuel 2:17 (a)
And there was a very sore battle that day; and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel, before the servants of David . . .

When at last the armies got involved, Abner and his men were beaten by the men of Judah.

2 Samuel 2:17 (b)–19
. . . And there were three sons of Zeruiah there, Joab, and Abishai, and Asahel: and Asahel was as light of foot as a wild roe. And Asahel pursued after Abner; and in going he turned not to right hand nor to the left from following Abner.

As the battle drew to a close, Joab's brothers pursued Abner.

2 Samuel 2:20, 21
Then Abner looked behind him, and said, Art thou Asahel? And he answered, I am. And Abner said to him, Turn thee aside to thy right hand or to thy left, and lay thee hold on one of the young men, and take thee his armour.

"You're just a young man," Abner warned Asahel. "I'm an experienced warrior. You don't know what you're getting into. Go find someone else to chase."

2 Samuel 2:22, 23
And Abner said again to Asahel, Turn thee aside from following me: wherefore should I smite thee to the ground? how then should I hold up my face to Joab thy brother? Howbeit he refused to turn aside: wherefore Abner with the hinder end of the spear smote him under the fifth rib, that the spear came out behind him; and he fell down there, and died in the same place: and it came to pass, that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still.

After twice warning Asahel, Abner poked him with the blunt end of his spear in an apparent attempt to stop him without killing him.

2 Samuel 2:24, 25

Joab also and Abishai pursued after Abner: and the sun went down when they were come to the hill of Ammah, that lieth before Giah by the way of the wilderness of Gibeon. And the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together after Abner, and became one troop, and stood on the top of an hill.

Asahel's brothers, Joab and Abishai, take off after Abner. The Benjamites—Saul's tribe—show up on the scene with fresh reinforcements.

2 Samuel 2:26
Then Abner called to Joab, and said, Shall the sword devour for ever? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? how long shall it be then

"This will go on and on," Abner called to Joab. "It will be a feud that will never be resolved. Let's stop now before it becomes a bitter burden to both of us and to our nation."

2 Samuel 2:27, 28
And Joab said, As God liveth, unless thou hadst spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone up every one from following his brother. So Joab blew a trumpet, and all the people stood still, and pursued after Israel no more, neither fought they any more.

Joab heeded Abner's words. The men of Judah stopped chasing the men of Israel.

2 Samuel 2:29–31
And Abner and his men walked all that night through the plain, and passed over Jordan, and went through all Bithron, and they came to Mahanaim. And Joab returned from following Abner: and when he had gathered all the people together, there lacked of David's servants nineteen men and Asahel. But the servants of David had smitten of Benjamin, and of Abner's men, so that three hundred and threescore men died.

A census of Joab's troops showed that nineteen of his men had died. However, three hundred and sixty men of Benjamin had died. Therefore, Abner's call for a cease-fire was a wise move on his part.

2 Samuel 2:32
And they took up Asahel, and buried him in the sepulchre of his father, which was in Bethlehem. And Joab and his men went all night, and they came to Hebron at break of day.

After beating Abner's army, Joab and his men return to Hebron.



3 2 Samuel 3:1
Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker.

At this time, David is ruling over Judah. At war against Abner and the household of Saul, there are battles raging, but Saul's forces are growing weaker and weaker. David, on the other hand, grows stronger.

Spiritually, Saul is a symbol of sin and self; David, a symbol of our Savior. There's a war going on in my soul that will last for a lifetime. But the house of Saul, the house of self, the house of sin grows weaker and weaker, while the kingdom of God grows stronger. Sure, there are setbacks along the way. There are defeats we have on certain days. But as I look back and chart the course, I can see that He who has begun a good work in me is indeed being faithful to complete it (Philippians 1:6). And because the One who resides in you is greater than the one who comes against you (1 John 4:4), even though you might have discouraging days, you can be sure that David becomes stronger as Saul grows weaker.

2 Samuel 3:2, 3
And unto David were sons born in Hebron: and his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; And his second, Chileab, of

Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur;

David marries a pagan woman, the daughter of a Canaanite king. The product of that relationship will be a man named Absalom, who will cause David's heart to be broken and division in his kingdom.

"Be not unequally yoked," Paul warns (2 Corinthians 6:14). If you choose to be yoked with an unbeliever, it will break your heart down the road—guaranteed.

2 Samuel 3:4, 5
And the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; And the sixth, Ithream, by Eglah David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron.

David already had three wives, but as he adds more and more, the story gets worse and worse. According to Deuteronomy 17:17, kings were not to multiply horses, store gold, or multiply wives. Knowing the Word, David knows this.

David is very flawed. He has a propensity to lie. He's tempted by women. He has an ego that we'll see in the next part of the chapter. And yet overarching, he had a passion for God. We can have a tendency to say, "Sure, I sin. But I don't sin nearly to the degree David did." But that's the wrong perspective entirely. Don't measure your sins against David's. Instead, measure your virtues against his. David killed a giant. David danced before the Lord with passion. David wrote psalms. David was a lover of God. David was given to prayer. David praised God continually.

Am I a giant killer? Am I laying down everything for my Lord? Am I a poet and a prophet, a singer, dancer, and warrior for God? Are you? How strong is my passion for God? Can I truly say, "Only one thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after—to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple"?

Where did David get this passion for God? It was developed in the pastures as he watched his sheep and in the caves as he fled from Saul. It was developed through prayer, through spending time with God.

Maybe the Lord is whispering in your ear, "I see in you the same potential."

"How can this be?" you ask.

"Because I put David in that place," He answers. "I gave David that kind of grace. All He did was respond to My tugging and whispering."

The path to passion is not mysterious or even mystical. It's very simple and practical. When the Lord says, "Get up and pray," you say, "okay." When He tells you to take on that giant and share your faith, say, "Yes." When He inspires you to write a love letter to Him, grab your pen. It is not up to us to generate the fire of passion. Our job is simply to stir the coals (2 Timothy 1:6) through faithfulness and obedience.

2 Samuel 3:6
And it came to pass, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, that Abner made himself strong for the house of Saul.

David has already been acknowledged as king by Samuel the prophet. But the people are waiting to see whether David can step up and take control. Consequently, there will be a seven and one-half-year battle to see who will ultimately gain control of the throne. During this time, Abner sees that Saul's son, *Ish-bosheth,* is a man who is not particularly gifted, strong, or capable. In fact, his name means, "man of shame." Abner realizes that if Saul's dynasty is to continue, it will be up to him. So he begins to consolidate an even greater degree of power.

2 Samuel 3:7
And Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah: and Ishbosheth said to Abner, Wherefore hast thou gone in unto my father's concubine?

At this time, when a man took another man's concubine he was, in essence, saying, "I'm stepping in to his shoes." That's why, a few chapters from now, when Absalom rebels against his dad, he is advised to take his dad's concubines as a sign to the nation that he is in control.

2 Samuel 3:8
Then was Abner very wroth for the words of Ish-bosheth, and said, Am I a dog's head, which against Judah do shew kindness this day unto the house of Saul thy father, to his brethren, and to his friends, and have not delivered thee into the hand of David, that thou chargest me to day with a fault concerning this woman?

"I have stood by you, Ish-bosheth," Abner said, defending his action. "the only reason you're still in power is because of me. How dare you treat me like a dog in this way."

2 Samuel 3:9–11
So do God to Abner, and more also, except, as the LORD hath sworn to David, even so I do to him; To translate the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beer-sheba. And he could not answer Abner a word again, because he feared him.

Abner was so upset at Ish-bosheth for challenging him concerning the concubine that he said, "I'm going to see to it that God's promise to David comes to pass. I'm going to see to it that the kingdom is translated from Saul to David."

Paul uses the same word in Colossians 1 when he says, "We give thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (see Colossians 1:12, 13). We have been translated. Once in the kingdom of darkness, we are now in the kingdom of light. Like Abner, once we were fighting against the Son of David, but now we follow after Him.

2 Samuel 3:12
And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, Whose is the land? saying also, Make thy league with me, and, behold, my hand shall be with thee, to bring about all Israel unto thee.

"I'm here to negotiate with you, David," Abner said.

2 Samuel 3:13
And he said, Well; I will make a league with thee: but one thing I require of thee, that is, Thou shalt not see my face, except thou first bring Michal Saul's daughter, when thou comest to see my face.

Saul promised his daughter, Michal, to the man who could kill one hundred Philistines (1 Samuel 18:25). When David killed two hundred, Michal became his wife. But when David fled for his life, Saul gave Michal to another man. Here, David says, "I'll negotiate with you, Abner if you bring my wife back."

What's David doing? One thing he doesn't need is another wife. He already has six, and will add more as the story continues. It's an ego thing, no doubt. But perhaps it was also political. That is, if he could get Saul's daughter back, it would broaden his base of power.

2 Samuel 3:14–18
And David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth Saul's son, saying, Deliver me my wife Michal, which I espoused to me for an hundred foreskins of the Philistines. And Ishbosheth sent, and took her from her husband, even from Phaltiel the son of Laish. And her husband went with her along weeping behind her to Bahurim. Then said Abner unto him, Go, return. And he returned. And Abner had communication with the elders of Israel, saying, Ye sought for David in times past to be king over you: Now then do it: for the LORD hath spoken of David, saying, By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies.

After switching his allegiance to David, Abner tells everyone to switch. "You delighted in David and wanted to follow him," he said. "Now do it."

Gang, that's the message I bring to you today: In the past, you've heard the gospel preached; you've understood something of the loveliness of Jesus Christ; you've desired to walk with Him; you've desired to devote your life to Him in service. Now is the time to do it. Not tomorrow, not next week, but *now* is the time to go for it (2 Corinthians 6:2).

2 Samuel 3:19, 20
And Abner also spake in the ears of Benjamin: and Abner went also to speak in the ears of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel, and that seemed good to the whole house of Benjamin. So Abner came to David to Hebron, and twenty men with him. And David made Abner and the men that were with him a feast.

Abner comes to Hebron to deliver Israel into David's hand.

2 Samuel 3:21
And Abner said unto David, I will arise and go, and will gather all Israel unto my lord the king, that they may make a league with thee, and that thou mayest reign over all that thine heart desireth. And David sent Abner away; and he went in peace.

Abner left to gather the people in order to anoint David as king of the entire nation.

2 Samuel 3:22–24
And, Behold, the servants of David and Joab came from pursuing a troop, and brought in a great spoil with them: but Abner was not with David in Hebron; for he had sent him away, and he was gone in peace. When Joab and all the host that was with him were come, they told Joab, saying, Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he hath sent him away, and he is gone in peace. Then Joab came to the king, and said, What hast thou done? behold, Abner came unto thee; why is it that thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone?

When Joab learned that David had made a treaty with Abner, he was upset. After all, Joab had no use for Abner because Abner had killed his brother.

2 Samuel 3:25
Thou knowest Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to know

all that thou doest.

"Abner is spying out the situation so he can ultimately defeat you," Joab said.

2 Samuel 3:26
And when Joab was come out from David, he sent messengers after Abner, which brought him again from the well of Sirah: but David knew it not.

Unbeknownst to David, Joab sent messengers telling Abner to come back.

2 Samuel 3:27
And when Abner was returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him quietly, and smote him there under the fifth rib, that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother.

Tragically, Joab avenged the blood of his brother when he killed Abner under his fifth rib—just as Abner had done to Asahel (2:23).

2 Samuel 3:28, 29
And afterward when David heard it, he said, I and my kingdom are guiltless before the LORD for ever from the blood of Abner the son of Ner: Let it rest on the head of Joab, and on all his father's house; and let there not fail from the house of Joab one that hath an issue, or that is a leper, or that leaneth on a staff, or that falleth on the sword, or that lacketh bread.

"May Joab's family and all his descendants be cursed perpetually with leprosy, starvation, disease, and war," David said. "May what Joab has done come crashing down upon his head and upon his family as well."

I point this out because, as we'll see in the next chapter, Joab becomes David's chief of staff and will hold this post throughout David's entire forty-year reign. Like Joab, we are flawed. Yet, just as David used Joab, the Son of David will use us if we make ourselves available to Him.

2 Samuel 3:30, 31
So Joab and Abishai his brother slew Abner, because he had slain their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle. And David said to Joab, and to all the people that were with him, Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and mourn before Abner. And king David himself followed the bier.

David walked behind Abner's coffin in the funeral procession.

2 Samuel 3:32–34
And they buried Abner in Hebron: and the king lifted up his voice, and wept at the grave of Abner; and all the people wept. And the king lamented over Abner, and said, Died Abner as a fool dieth? Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou. And all the people wept again over him.

"What happened to Abner is not right," David said at Abner's funeral service. "He didn't deserve to die like he did. He wasn't imprisoned because of some wrong he had committed. He died foolishly because he was seduced, tricked, and lured out of the city."

You see, in Old Testament times, if a man killed someone unintentionally —as Abner had done—he could find protection from his victim's avengers by running to one of six cities of refuge located throughout Israel. If, however, he stepped outside of the gate of the city, he would no longer be protected. Hebron was a city of refuge. That is why Joab had to meet with Abner at the gate (v. 27) in order to kill him.

Jesus Christ is our refuge. Don't be lured away from Him, gang, or else you'll lose the safety, security, satisfaction, and protection He offers to you. Abner was a great warrior, a true leader, loyal to a fault, a wise man—but he died as a fool because he stepped away from the city of refuge. Don't let this happen to you. Stay within the city of refuge, under the shadow of the wings of Jesus (Luke 13:34).

2 Samuel 3:35, 36

And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down. And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them: as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people.

"This is good," the people said. "David isn't rejoicing that the man who fought against him is now dead. David is a man of compassion and forgiveness, grace and mercy. This is the kind of man we can follow."

2 Samuel 3:37–39
For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it was not of the king to slay Abner the son of Ner. And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel? And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me: the LORD shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness.

Abner means "enlightening." Abner was a man who spent most of his life fighting against David. But there came a time when he turned around and joined with David. As such, he is a wonderful illustration, an important picture of people who spend much of their lives fighting against the Son of David, Jesus Christ. But finally, they become enlightened and follow Him.

In preaching a simple message, telling his people to follow David, little did Abner know that 18,000 fighting men would transfer their allegiance from the household of Ish-bosheth to become part of the kingdom of David. The same can be true of you. The one simple message you preach as you change allegiance can make all the difference in the world. Therefore, I call upon lukewarm Christians to consider if the Lord is allowing unhappiness and uneasiness to take place in your life because your allegiance is not solid, your commitment not sincere. Who are you fighting for? What side are you really on? Turn to Him today. He will abundantly pardon.

4 2 Samuel 4:1–4
And when Saul's son heard that Abner was dead in Hebron, his hands were fee ble, and all the Israelites were troubled. And Saul's son had two men that were captains of bands: the name of the one was Baanah, and the name of the other Rechab, the sons of Rimmon a Beerothite, of the children of Benjamin: (for Beeroth also was reckoned to Benjamin: And the Beerothites fled to Gittaim, and were sojourners there until this day.) And Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son that was lame of his feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.

The death of Saul would mean there would be a new king. The custom of the day was that, when a new king ascended to power, everyone in the previous king's family would be killed. Therefore, hearing that Saul and Jonathan had died, Jonathan's son's nurse grabbed him and ran to protect him from what she knew would otherwise come his way.

2 Samuel 4:5, 6
And the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, went, and came about the heat of the day to the house of Ish-bosheth, who lay on a bed at noon. And they came thither into the midst of the house, as though they would have fetched wheat; and they smote him under the fifth rib: and Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped.

Pretending to be delivering wheat, Ishbosheth's captains killed him in his sleep.

2 Samuel 4:7, 8
For when they came into the house, he lay on his bed in his bedchamber, and they smote him, and slew him, and beheaded him, and took his head, and gat them away through the plain all night. And they brought the head of Ish-bosheth unto David to Hebron, and said to the king, Behold the head of Ish-bosheth the

son of Saul thine enemy, which sought thy life; and the LORD hath avenged my lord the king this day of Saul, and of his seed.

Ish-bosheth's captains brought his head to David, no doubt thinking he would reward them for killing the one man who stood between him and the throne.

2 Samuel 4:9, 10
And David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said unto them, As the LORD liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity, When one told me, saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold of him, and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings:

In response, David told the two captains about another who thought he would be rewarded for the death of David's enemy (2 Samuel 1).

2 Samuel 4:11, 12
How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed? shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth? And David commanded his young men, and they slew them, and cut off their hands and their feet, and hanged them up over the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth, and buried it in the sepulchre of Abner in Hebron.

The repugnance of the punishment of this crime was matched only by David's abhorrence of the murder of an innocent man upon his bed.



5 2 Samuel 5:1–3
Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Be hold, we are thy bone and thy flesh. Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in

Israel: and the LORD said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel. So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the LORD: and they anointed David king over Israel.

Anointing speaks of the empowering, the authority, the ability to do that which God has called one to do. The first time David was anointed was in 1 Samuel 16 when he was anointed before his family. This is always where the first anointing comes. If it doesn't work at home, it doesn't work at all. If you're interested in some ministry, but it isn't manifested at home in the eyes of your family, forget about it. David's brothers looked at their younger sibling and saw Samuel pour out the oil from the horn upon his head. They couldn't figure it out—but they knew it was real.

That's not the way it works, they may have thought. *It's supposed to be the oldest, the strongest, or the most handsome one who is anointed—not David, the shepherd boy.* His brothers questioned him, even chastised him (1 Samuel 17:28)—until they saw him kill Goliath.

Your calling begins at the point your brothers, your family, your husband, wife, or kids say, "There is an anointing on you. I can't figure out why. It seems like I should be the one. But I have to admit that giants are falling; things are getting done; you are truly communing with the Lord." As his brothers castigated, questioned, and doubted him, David learned to say, "I know that even if my brothers don't fully understand, even if it doesn't seem I'm the most likely candidate, I know God has called me. So I'm going to trust the Lord will do what He's called me to do. I'll watch my father's sheep. I'll take my brothers' taunts. I'll do the menial jobs and let them go off to war. If I stay home and don't go to the battlefield—or the mission field—that's okay. I'm going to live my life in hope and humility."

David was anointed again in 2 Samuel 2:4 before his tribe, the men of Judah. Why? For seven and one-half years, he didn't take things into his own hands. He didn't kill Saul when he had an opportunity. He didn't kill Ish-bosheth. He didn't even want to see Abner killed. Instead, he had faith in God and plugged away day after month after year. I'm sure his advisors were saying, "Take control of the situation, David." But David wouldn't do it. He

simply faithfully served his tribe and had faith that God would do what was right in due season.

Likewise, not only your family, but also your peers will sense that the Lord is doing something in and through you as you are faithful in whatever task God puts before you. "Despise not the day of small beginnings," Zechariah declares (4:10). You might not be at the full orb of what you desire to be or to do. But if you are faithful to do what is before you—regardless of how big or small it might be—your "tribe" will confirm that God's hand is upon you.

The third time David is anointed is here in chapter 5, when he is anointed before the entire nation. Before his family, David exhibited humility and hope. Before his tribe, he was faithful. Before the nation, David proved his love. How? We read in verse 1 "*Then* came all the tribes of Israel to David . . ." When did the tribes come? After Saul had died, after Abner had died, after his enemies were removed from the scene, and after David had mourned for them all. David was anointed when the people saw him as a man of grace, of mercy, of love.

The three great attributes identified in 1 Corinthians 13 are faith, hope, and love. David embodies all three. He shows hope and humility as he serves his family, faith and faithfulness as he leads his tribe, and love as he rules the nation. What qualities do you desire as a person, as a parent, as a preacher? As seen in the three-fold anointing of David, they will take longer to develop than you think. But they will come to full fruition when, like David, you show you truly care about people because the greatest of qualities is indeed love (1 Corinthians 13:13).

2 Samuel 5:4, 5
David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. In He bron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah.

Throughout Scripture, the age of thirty seems to be significant. Joseph began his reign as prime minister of Egypt when he was thirty. The priests

began their ministry in Israel when they reached the age of thirty. And, of course, our Lord Jesus began His public ministry when He was thirty.

2 Samuel 5:6 (a)
And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land . . .

David knew the city of Jerusalem was strategic. It was geographically strategic because it was surrounded on three sides by a valley, making it a hard place to attack. It was also politically strategic because it straddled the boundary line between Judah and Benjamin, making it impossible for any one tribe to claim it. It was also historically significant, dating back to the days of the patriarchs.

2 Samuel 5:6 (b)
. . . which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither.

This was not only a taunt, but also a tactic, for the Jebusites would place their blind and lame on top of the city walls as an alarm system. You see, if an enemy attempted to enter the city, the finely tuned ears of the blind would hear them. The lame, unable to run to safety, would simply holler for help, thereby alerting the city.

2 Samuel 5:7 (a)
Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion . . .

This is the first time Zion is mentioned in the Bible. Zion is another name for Jerusalem, and it eventually refers to the Temple Mount area. I find it appropriate that the word *Zion* can be translated either "parched place" or "sunny spot." It all depends on one's perspective. Either way, it was a "hot spot"—just as it is to this day.

2 Samuel 5:7 (b)
. . . the same is the city of David.

There are two places referred to as the city of David. One is Jerusalem. The other is the place he was born—the city of Bethlehem.

2 Samuel 5:8
And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain. Wherefore they said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.

David wanted the city of Jerusalem for both spiritual and strategic reasons. So he said to his men, "The first guy who can find a way into the walled city of Zion will be my general." The fact that Jerusalem was surrounded by valleys on three sides and a mountain on the fourth made David's challenge seem impossible. Yet, with no water source on the inside, David knew that, because the Jebusites couldn't survive without water, there had to be a camouflaged shaft descending seventy-five feet to the Kidron River below.

First Chronicles 11 tells us the name of the man who found the shaft was Joab. As we have seen, Joab was not the most upstanding man. But one thing he did do: He found a way to get into the city. Joab's example is vital for us. You see, we serve a Greater than David—the Son of David—Jesus Christ. Like David, Jesus desires to take cities. But He also desires to take countries, families, and individuals. He wants to beat back the spiritual Jebusites who keep people in bondage. So what does He do? He comes to people like you and me and says, "I want to talk to him; I want to see her saved; I want to touch them. And the first person who will shimmy up the shaft will be My man." Like Joab, we might not be the greatest, the most worthy, or the most spiritual. But if we are simply willing to shimmy up the shaft, He'll use us mightily.

There are desires the Lord places on your heart, thoughts He puts in your mind, things you know the Lord would want to do—to talk to your neighbor, to teach a Bible study, to reach your coworkers. But as sure as you feel that tug on the strings of your soul, you hear the taunting of the enemy, saying, "You're blind. You're lame. There's no way you can make an impact." If

that's the way you see yourself, you are in a perfect position to be blessed, for it was especially the blind and lame whom Jesus healed (Matthew 21).

William Carey, the great missionary who opened the continent of India for the gospel, said, "Attempt great things for God and expect great things from God." In other words—"Shimmy up the shaft."

The Jebusites will say you don't have a prayer. Jesus, however, says, "I've healed your blind eyes and lame feet. Now look to Me and step out because there are people, families, and cities I want to claim through you."

2 Samuel 5:9
So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Millo and inward.

Millo refers to the northern, vulnerable side of Jerusalem. David built terraces on the northern side, thus making any who attacked from the north easy targets and virtual sitting ducks.

2 Samuel 5:10
And David went on, and grew great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him.

David went on and grew great, or, literally in the Hebrew text, "David went going and growing." I like that. "Lord, let that be me. Help me to keep going and help me to keep growing." The Lord will take you as far as you want to go—but not one step further.

David was a man after God's heart. He wanted more of Him, wanted to be closer to Him, wanted to gain more knowledge about Him. What about you? Was there ever a time in your walk when you were closer to the Lord than you are now, when you felt His presence to a greater degree, when you were drawn to Him in greater intimacy? If so, I have great news for you. Right here, right now, you can say, "Lord, I'm here. I've been bogged down. But here I am. Take me deeper. Take me further. I want to keep going and I want to keep growing." And I guarantee He'll hear your prayer.

2 Samuel 5:11

And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons: and they built David an house.

Hiram was in Tyre—or present-day Lebanon, thirty-five miles north of Haifa. Although Hiram was not a Jew, he was wise enough to recognize that David's God was blessing Israel mightily and that it would be wise for him to assist David and to ally himself with Israel. To this end, he sent supplies and workers to construct a palace for David.

2 Samuel 5:12
And David perceived that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake.

David understood that God was blessing his kingdom for His people's sake. In other words David said, "God has blessed me to be a blessing." What a key understanding this is. I'm convinced God is looking for people to bless who want to be blessed for one purpose: that they might be a blessing to others.

"Lord, make me a servant," we say. But the true test of servanthood is very simple: How do we respond when people treat us like servants—when they order us around, never say thanks, and don't even notice what we do? If we get offended and upset, we're not yet servants. May we be those who, like David, understand that blessing is bestowed upon us in order that we might be a blessing to others.

2 Samuel 5:13–16
And David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron: and there were yet sons and daughters born to David. And these be the names of those that were born unto him in Jerusalem; Shammua, and Shobab, and Nathan, and Solomon, Ibhar also, and Elishua, and Nepheg, and Japhia, And Elishama, and Eliada, and Eliphalet.

David is a godly man, but he has real flaws. Not only does he struggle with lying, but with a tendency to be attracted to many women. Here, he does

what is forbidden in Deuteronomy 17 by gathering numerous wives and concubines. Although God will continue to use David, the consequences of these concubines and multiple wives will be difficulty and heartbreak, as we will see.

David has problems to be sure—but he also has a passion for God like no other. Oh, that we would long for that as well.

2 Samuel 5:17 (a)
But when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines came up to seek David . . .

The five Philistine cities joined forces and attacked David. When? Right after he had gained a great victory in conquering Jerusalem. This is often what happens. It was after Abraham built an altar to the Lord that there was strife among his and Lot's herdsmen. It was after Joseph had a dream and God gave him revelation that his brothers turned against him. It was after Elijah called down fire from heaven and there was a great victory on Mount Carmel that Jezebel threatened to take his life.

Note and remember that, following victory, there will usually come an attack from the enemy. Count that there will come an attack from the enemy. Whenever you take Jerusalem, capture new territory, step out in ministry, the enemy will hear about it and show up.

2 Samuel 5:17 (b)
. . . and David heard of it, and went down to the hold.

I like this. David didn't go *up* to fight. He didn't go *out* to battle. He went *down* to the hold. This speaks to me of humility. He didn't stand up to the Philistines that day. Instead, he went down before God to pray.

2 Samuel 5:18, 19 (a)
The Philistines also came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim. And David inquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into mine hand?

Rephaim means "Valley of the Giants." Although David was a giant-killer, he didn't say, "I've already killed the biggest giant of them all. This will be no problem." No, he said, "Lord what do You want me to do?"

2 Samuel 5:19 (b)
. . . And the LORD said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand.

You might be a giant-killer. You might think, *I can handle this problem. I know how to deal with those things—I've done it before.* But David didn't think that way. This man who has a heart for God stops and prays. "Is this what *You* want, Lord?"

2 Samuel 5:20
And David came to Baal-perazim, and David smote them there, and said, The LORD hath broken forth upon mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters. Therefore he called the name of that place Baal-perazim.

Baal-perazim means "breach of waters," or "breakthrough."

"The Lord has given me this breakthrough," David declared. "It wasn't my strategy. It wasn't my ability. It wasn't my energy. I prayed to the Lord, and *He* secured the victory."

2 Samuel 5:21
And there they left their images, and David and his men burned them.

In Deuteronomy 7, God declared that the images of the enemies were to be burned. In Deuteronomy 17, God declared that kings were not to gather to themselves multiple wives. Although David had a hard time with Deuteronomy 17, he nails Deuteronomy 7. We must do the same. Any images that are of the enemy—be they books, magazines, music, or videos—must be destroyed—not controlled, not saved, not sold—but destroyed.

2 Samuel 5:22, 23 (a)

And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim. And when David inquired of the LORD . . .

David had already beaten the same people in the same place. But David was a man who sought a fresh word from the Lord for each and every situation. He didn't assume anything. How I want to be more like him.

2 Samuel 5:23 (b)
. . . he said, Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees.

Earlier, David went right into the valley and confronted the enemy head to head. Here, he's in the same valley, facing the same enemy, but the Lord gave him a different strategy. And in this, it's as if God says to us, "Forget about yesterday's strategy. It was good for then, but not for today. Stay in constant touch with Me."

2 Samuel 5:24, 25
And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the LORD go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines. And David did so, as the LORD had commanded him; and smote the Philistines from Geba until thou come to Gazer.

The leaves of the mulberry trees in Israel are so light that even the slightest breeze will cause them to move. In fact, even an army would provide sufficient breeze to cause the mulberry leaves to move. If this massive Philistine army suddenly began to mobilize and move toward Jerusalem, that would indeed generate a large enough breeze to move the leaves—which would be a signal to David as to which direction they were marching.

In John 3:8, Jesus likened the Spirit to the wind. In Acts 2, the Spirit came with the sound of a mighty rushing wind. In other words, the work of the Spirit is supernaturally natural. "That's just soldiers on the move," the world says. But the believer who chooses to have eyes to see will see God's hand behind everything.

Driving home today, I saw beautiful poppies blossoming beside the road. "Lord, this is so wonderful," I said. "Thank You for these bouquets."

And it was as if the Lord said, "These are for everyone and anyone who has eyes to see that I love them."

"What do you mean?" the cynic scoffs. "Those poppies are simply the result of seeds that fell or were blown there."

If that's how you choose to look at them, you can. But I chose to look at them as bouquets from God because *every* good and perfect gift is from above (James 1:17). If you cultivate this kind of mindset, you will see the work of the Spirit constantly. To live in the Spirit means you see everything as from God's hand—no matter what means He uses to bring it about.



6 David has just become king of the entire nation of Israel. And in the chapter before us, we see one of his first acts as king. David desired that his people experience what he experienced. He had experienced the glory of God, and he wanted everyone in the nation to experience God's glory.

When Adam and Eve walked with God in the cool of the day in the Garden of Eden, they were surrounded by the *chabod,* the glory of God. When they sinned, when they ate of the forbidden fruit, the chabod departed and suddenly they sought to cover their nakedness, their emptiness with fig leaves. Ever since that time, people have been on a quest to cover themselves—to experience the weight, the substance of God's glory.

In Old Testament times, the glory of God, the *chabod,* was directly linked to the ark of the covenant because it was at the mercy seat that He chose to meet with His people (Leviticus 16:2). Therefore, David wanted the ark of the covenant to be brought to Jerusalem so that the people in the nation could experience the glory, the *chabod,* the presence of God. The problem was, the ark wasn't in Jerusalem. It was thirteen miles away at a place called Kirjath-jearim (1 Samuel 6:21).

2 Samuel 6:1, 2
Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose, and went with all the people

that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims.

Baale is another name for Kirjath-jearim because years previously, Baal was worshiped there. A huge parade accompanied the return of the ark from Kirjath-jearim. That's often what people still try today. "How can we see the glory of God in this church or in our family?" they ask. "We'll have a big parade and gather a stadium full of people."

2 Samuel 6:3 (a)
And they set the ark of God upon a new cart . . .

What is a cart? It's nothing more than boards and big wheels. I like the analogy because all too often when we want to see God's glory in the church we think the answer begins with a board meeting and some big wheels.

2 Samuel 6:3 (b), 4
. . . and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark.

The man steering the car was *Uzzah,* whose name means "Strength." The man in front, leading the way, was *Ahio,* whose name means "Friendly." Catch the scene: Mr. Friendly was out in front slapping backs, passing out bulletins, giving high fives. Mr. Strong was driving the cart. And a parade of people followed behind.

2 Samuel 6:5
And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals.

The word “cornets” is better translated “castanets.” All of these instruments were played with the hand. It was a “hands-on” experience because the people mistakenly thought they could “handle” the situation themselves.

2 Samuel 6:6
And when they came to Nachon’s threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it.

The cart is rolling along. Mr. Friendly is out in front. Mr. Strong is at the wheel. The people are playing their guitars—when suddenly they hit a bump and the ark begins to teeter. “No problem,” Mr. Strong must have thought as he reached back to stabilize the ark, to give God a hand.

I’ve been here. Perhaps you have, too. We have our parades, our programs, our big ideas, our grand plans. And even if we hit a bump, we think we can solve the problem by our own efforts. I find it more than coincidental that the problem occurred at a threshingfloor. You see, when a farmer harvested his wheat, he would bring it to the threshingfloor, throw it up in the air, and let the wind blow away the chaff, leaving the grain itself to fall to the ground. The threshingfloor was the place where the grain was separated from the chaff, where the substantial was separated from the trivial.

2 Samuel 6:7
And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.

Suddenly, the parade stopped. Everyone was at a standstill.

2 Samuel 6:8 (a)
And David was displeased, because the LORD had made a breach upon Uzzah . . .

David thought he was doing something for God—but now realizes it wasn't accepted by God.

2 Samuel 6:8 (b)
. . . and he called the name of the place Perez-uzzah to this day.

Perez-uzzah literally means "the falling of Uzzah."

2 Samuel 6:9
And David was afraid of the LORD that day, and said, How shall the ark of the LORD come to me?

"How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?" This is the key question for every parent, church, and ministry. How will God's glory fill my house, my family, my church?

2 Samuel 6:10, 11 (a)
So David would not remove the ark of the LORD unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. And the ark of the LORD continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months . . .

For three months, the ark was kept in the house of a man named Obed-edom.

2 Samuel 6:11 (b), 12 (a)
. . . and the LORD blessed Obed-edom, and all his household. And it was told king David, saying, The LORD hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God . . .

When David received reports that Obed-edom had been blessed, he realized the ark needed to be in Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 6:12 (b)

. . . So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness.

In verse 8, David was displeased. In verse 9, he was afraid. Here in verse 12, he's glad. Why? Because evidently during the three months the ark was in the house of Obed-edom, David searched the Scriptures and found how the ark was to be carried (Exodus 25:14).

2 Samuel 6:13 (a)
And it was so, that when they that bare the ark of the LORD . . .

This time, there are no boards or big wheels. This time, there are no parades or tambourines. This time, the ark was carried in simplicity and humility on the shoulders of four priests.

2 Samuel 6:13 (b)
. . . had gone six paces, he sacrificed oxen and fatlings.

To sacrifice an animal required great energy and effort—yet David expended this energy and effort every six steps. The world places great value on efficiency. Moving the ark on a cart would have been vastly more efficient than carrying it and stopping every six steps. God, however, values effectiveness. Efficiency is doing things right. Effectiveness is doing the right thing. What's the right thing? Stopping every six steps.

You see, throughout Scripture, six is the number of man and the flesh. Therefore, offering sacrifice every six steps says, "Because I'm a man who deals with my flesh, I've got to stop every six steps, build an altar, and lay my dreams, my objectives, and my life down." Stopping every six steps says, "Lord, it's not about what I want to do. It's about what You want me to do. Therefore, I'm going to offer You the sacrifice of praise. I'm going to confess my fleshly tendencies every six steps throughout the day."

It's in stopping throughout the day to be "altared" that the *chabod,* the presence of God will enter your city, your ministry, your family, your soul.

2 Samuel 6:14

And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod.

As the new king, David could have been adorned in regal robes. David, however, cared more about how he worshiped than about what he wore. So he danced before the Lord in his undergarments.

2 Samuel 6:15
So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

On the ark's ill-fated first journey, it was accompanied by music played with the hands: castanets, harps, lyres. Here, it's accompanied by wind instruments—the mouth and trumpets—because breath is symbolic of the Spirit, and it is not by might nor by power but by the Spirit that anything of significance is ever accomplished (Zechariah 4:6).

2 Samuel 6:16
And as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

Because the Lord inhabits the praise of His people (Psalm 22:3), the ark of the Lord was accompanied by those who praised. Because Michal was one who despised praise, we will see barrenness enter her life.

2 Samuel 6:17, 18
And they brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it: and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts.

Notice that David offered sacrifice to the Lord before he blessed the people. Dear brother, precious sister, follow David's example and bless the Lord first. Offer the sacrifice of praise. Be a worshiper—and then you can go out and bless those around you. It is only after you spend time blessing the Lord that you can be a true blessing to others.

2 Samuel 6:19
And he dealt among all the people, even among the whole multitude of Israel, as well to the women as men, to every one a cake of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine. So all the people departed every one to his house.

"To every one a cake of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine." Bread and wine are the symbols of Communion. Hebrews 5 tells us that meat is a symbol of the substance of the Word. When we're "altared" every six steps, when we're worshiping the Lord with simplicity and sincerity, when we're waiting on Him, there is Communion and substance for everyone.

2 Samuel 6:20
Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!

Michal greeted David by berating him.

2 Samuel 6:21, 22
And David said unto Michal, It was before the LORD, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel: therefore will I play before the LORD. And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight: and of the maidservants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour.

David responded by telling Michal that God chose him over her father, Saul. Therefore, it was to God he owed his allegiance and his praise, regardless of how he appeared in her eyes or the eyes of anyone else.

2 Samuel 6:23
Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death.

Because Michal despised passionate worship and simple expressions of praise, she would have no children. She would bear no fruit. So, too, the person, family, or church that doesn't praise will be fruitless. God doesn't desire big parades or flashy drama. Rather, He desires simplicity, sincerity, and passion. I pray the Lord would help us be people who would be expanded not only in our forms of worship, but in our desire to worship.

Perhaps you're at the threshingfloor today. Maybe you've hit a bump at work. Maybe things are a bit shaky in your marriage. Maybe you've thought you can straighten things out in your own strength. I can't tell you how many parades I've organized in my day—only to see them end in disaster. Initially, I would say, "Why didn't You bless that, Lord? You missed a great opportunity."

Time and time again, God would say, "I want you to draw close to Me and to experience My glory. But you've got to get back to simplicity. You've got to get back to humility."

It's not about the parade, gang. It's about the Person. We must humble ourselves before God. We must confess our sins before Him and offer worship to Him. And as we do, we'll experience the *chabod*—His presence—in our lives from glory to greater glory day by day.



7 2 Samuel 7:1
And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the LORD had given him rest round about from all his enemies;

Here, we see David in a rare season of rest. With no one attacking her, Israel was experiencing peace and tranquility.

2 Samuel 7:2 (a)
That the king said unto Nathan the prophet . . .

David is an interesting man because, during this season of rest, notice what he's doing. He's mulling over godly matters in the presence of a godly man. The way a man spends his leisure time says a great deal about him. In Psalm 119:63, David declared that his friends were those who feared God. That is not surprising, for in Proverbs 13:20 we read that he who walks with the wise shall also be wise. So, here's David spending time with God's prophet, Nathan, thinking about what he could do for the God who had been so gracious to him.

2 Samuel 7:2 (b)
. . . See now, I dwell in an house of cedar . . .

In conquering his enemies round about him and receiving gifts and tribute, David would eventually possess the equivalent of over one billion dollars. No wonder that, according to the historian, Josephus, his palace was magnificent in size and splendor.

2 Samuel 7:2 (c)
. . . but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.

David could have been like Nebuchadnezzar. He could have taken credit for what he had accomplished. That's usually what happens. Statistically, the wealthier a person becomes, the smaller percentage of his income will he give to the work of the Lord. David, however, was different. Here, he's saying, "I want to do more for the Lord than I've done before."

2 Samuel 7:3
And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee.

David's desire to build God a house was biblical, for in Deuteronomy 12, God declared that there would come a time when He Himself would choose a spot in the Land of Promise wherein people could seek Him continually.

Like David, we can have visions, ideas, and dreams that are biblical, spiritual, and noble—but that are not right. And, like Nathan, we can say to others, "That's a great idea! Go for it!" without seeking the Lord.

How important it is that we be those who say, "Lord, I've got lots of ideas, plans, and dreams. I've got all kinds of ways to accomplish big things for Your glory—but only if they're part of *Your* plan. That is why we are told in 1 John 4:1 to "try the spirits." Prophets are fallible. So are pastors. This doesn't mean Nathan is a false prophet. It simply means there needs to be evaluation and confirmation regarding any prophecy.

2 Samuel 7:4–8

And it came to pass that night, that the word of the LORD came unto Nathan, saying, Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar? Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel:

"You're a shepherd, David," God said through Nathan. "That's why I called you. That's what I saw in you. That's what I like about you. You're not a builder of buildings, you're a herder of sheep. You cared for them, you went after them, you had a heart for them. That's who you are. That's where I found you. That's why I called you."

2 Samuel 7:9

And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth.

"I fought the enemies that came against you, and I brought honor and glory to you," God reminds David.

2 Samuel 7:10
Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime,

"I have a plan to establish a center of worship—but not now, and not by you," God continued.

2 Samuel 7:11
And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house.

When God says no, He always tempers our disappointments with wonderful blessings—greater than any we could have anticipated or expected. "Tell David he can't build Me a house," God said to Nathan. "Instead, tell him I'm going to build him a house."

2 Samuel 7:12
And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.

"From your seed will come the true King."

2 Samuel 7:13

He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

Who is this? It's the Seed of David, the Son of David, Jesus Christ. "David," God said through Nathan, "there will come one long after you're dead who will build a house for My name, and I will establish His kingdom forever."

2 Samuel 7:14 (a)
I will be his father, and he shall be my son . . .

The author of Hebrews applies this verse to Jesus (1:5).

2 Samuel 7:14 (b)
. . . If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men:

Newer translations correctly render this verse, "When he carries the iniquity, he shall be beaten." And indeed, Jesus was beaten when He bore our sin.

2 Samuel 7:15–17
But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.

"You can't do what you want to do, David. But God's going to build a house that you won't believe. From your seed will come One whose kingdom will be established forever." Somehow, David understood this. Somehow, by the Spirit, David got it. He knew somehow that Nathan was talking to him about something that was bigger than anything he dreamed of or could have imagined.

2 Samuel 7:18

Then went king David in, and sat before the LORD, and he said, Who am I, O Lord GOD? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?

"Why would You allow me to be a part of this grand plan?" David said, as he sat in the presence of the Lord.

2 Samuel 7:19, 20
And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord GOD; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord GOD? And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord GOD, knowest thy servant.

A poet and a songwriter, David was a very verbal man. But here he was tongue-tied, silenced by God's grace and kindness.

2 Samuel 7:21, 22
For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them. Wherefore thou art great, O LORD God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears.

Able to keep quiet no longer, praise begins to flow from David's heart . . .

2 Samuel 7:23–29
And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods? For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, LORD, art become their God. And now, O LORD God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast

said. And let thy name be magnified for ever, saying, The LORD of hosts is the God over Israel: and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee. For thou, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee. And now, O Lord GOD, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant: Therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee: for thou, O Lord GOD, hast spoken it: and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever.

Here, we see David receiving grace graciously. First, he gives praise *for* the promise—then he prays *in* the promise. That's a winning combination. When you read the Scriptures, give praise for what you're reading, then pray it in.

My prayer is that you would marvel that God has built you a house, that He lives in your heart, and that He'll build your house to the glory of His Son.



2 Samuel 8:1 (a)

And after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them . . .

In chapter 7, David was given rest *by* the Lord and then communed *with* the Lord. Here, in chapter 8, he's on the attack *for* the Lord as he takes territory—which is exactly what the church is called to do (Matthew 16:18).

2 Samuel 8:1 (b)

. . . and David took Metheg-ammah out of the hand of the Philistines.

Metheg-ammah, or "the bridle of Ammah"—the chief city of the Philistines—most likely refers to the city of Gath.

2 Samuel 8:2
And he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive. And so the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts.

In dealing with the enemy, David had to decide who would be a threat to his kingdom. In this case, the big guys would. The smaller men were allowed to be servants. The bigger men were put to death.

David made a decision. And Jesus told you and me to do the same thing. "Don't cast your pearls before swine," He said (Matthew 7:6). This means we are to determine where people are spiritually. Some people have no interest in the gospel, but only want to argue. We need discernment regarding where we should most wisely spend our time. How do we get discernment? Pray. "Lord, show me what I should do with my day, with my time. Give me wisdom. Help me, like David, to measure correctly, to assess the situation as You would."

2 Samuel 8:3, 4 (a)
David smote also Hadadezer, the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to recover his border at the river Euphrates. David took from him a thousand chariots, and seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen . . .

These are big battles. David is fully engaged, completely committed.

2 Samuel 8:4 (b)
. . . and David houghed all the chariot horses, but reserved of them for an hundred chariots.

David disabled all the horses of the enemy. I find this interesting because in Deuteronomy 17, God declared that when a man became a king, he was not

to multiply to himself horses or wives. David chose to follow the first injunction.

That's like us. We specialize in certain things. Tithing? Got it down. Witnessing? You bet. Gossiping? Ouch. All of us are specialists in certain areas, and we tend to talk about those areas. The real issue, however, is not what we talk about, but what we're silent about. Oftentimes, our silence indicates where the correction needs to be.

2 Samuel 8:5, 6 (a)
And when the Syrians of Damascus came to succour Hadadezer king of Zobah, David slew of the Syrians two and twenty thousand men. Then David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus: and the Syrians became servants to David, and brought gifts . . .

David is taking territory and making these areas tributaries of his kingdom.

2 Samuel 8:6 (b)
. . . And the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went.

God knew about David's weaknesses and vulnerabilities. God knew David thoroughly. Yet He preserved him still. Even though we struggle, God is faithful. I'm so glad about that.

2 Samuel 8:7–10
And David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadadezer, and brought them to Jerusalem. And from Betah, and from Berothai, cities of Hadadezer, king David took exceeding much brass. When Toi king of Hamath heard that David had smitten all the host of Hadadezer, Then Toi sent Joram his son unto king David, to salute him, and to bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer, and smitten him: for Hadadezer had wars with Toi. And Joram brought with him vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass:

Toi was an enemy of Hadadezer, so he thanked David for getting rid of his enemy.

2 Samuel 8:11, 12
Which also king David did dedicate unto the LORD, with the silver and gold that he had dedicated of all nations which he subdued; Of Syria, and of Moab, and of the children of Ammon, and of the Philistines, and of Amalek, and of the spoil of Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

Here, David brought the spoil to Jerusalem and dedicated it to the Lord in order that it might eventually be used in the building of the temple. You see, even though David could not build the temple himself, he didn't pout. He didn't quit. He didn't get angry. He simply set to work, gathering all the necessary supplies for Solomon.

I point this out because sometimes people say, "If I can't be on the worship team, I'm not going to sing at all. If I can't be recognized or utilized in the way I think I ought to be, I won't do anything." David was used mightily because, even with all of his faults and failures, he served the Lord every way he could.

You might never be an evangelist, write a book, go to the mission field, or preach a sermon—but you can do what David did. You can work behind the scenes, providing the supplies through intercession and prayer. The temple is known commonly as Solomon's temple, but in reality, it was the heart of David behind it. And he will be credited eternally.

2 Samuel 8:13–15
And David gat him a name when he returned from smiting of the Syrians in the valley of salt, being eighteen thousand men. And he put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all they of Edom became David's servants. And the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went. And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people.

David gave good counsel and was equitable to all his people.

2 Samuel 8:16
And Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the host; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder;

Joab was in charge of the army. Jehoshaphat kept the journals, remembering and recording the goodness of God. I encourage you to follow Jehoshaphat's lead. I suppose one of the things that causes me to praise the Lord as much as anything else is reading through my own journals and seeing the things that once bothered me—but that God worked out perfectly.

2 Samuel 8:17, 18
And Zadok the son of Ahitub, and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, were the priests; and Seraiah was the scribe; And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over both the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons were chief rulers.

This was the organization of David's kingdom. At this point, he has taken on the enemy and ordered the goods for the temple. Now his thoughts turn toward the house of Saul . . .



2 Samuel 9:1
And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?

At this point in the story, David has been on the throne for approximately fifteen years. I don't know what jarred David's memory—but, in reflecting on the past, his thoughts turned toward his dear friend, Jonathan. "Are there any survivors from Saul's family to whom I can show kindness?" he asked.

2 Samuel 9:2–6 (a)
And there was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he. And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew

the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet. And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar. Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar. Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence . . .

In Old Testament times, if a king from a different family than the previous one came to power, he would kill all of the relatives of the previous king in order to eliminate any rival. *Lo-debar* means "pasture less place." Consisting of only rocks and sand, Lo-debar would have been a terrible place to live. Why did Mephibosheth live in such a desolate place? Because he no doubt feared the new king.

Mephibosheth means "shameful breath." This more than likely means that he had asthma, or some other breathing ailment. On top of that, he was lame. Second Samuel 4 tells us that when Saul and Jonathan died on Mount Gilboa, Mephibosheth was five years old. His nanny scooped him up to rush him to safety, but in her haste, she tripped. Mephibosheth fell to the ground, evidently injuring his spinal cord.

Here was Mephibosheth—hiding in a dry place, unable to breathe easily, and unable to walk at all. Perhaps that describes you or someone you know. Maybe you feel suffocated spiritually, in a dry place, unable to make any progress because you, too, were dropped . . .

- "He told me he was going to marry me, and I gave myself to him completely. Then he dropped me. My heart is broken and now I'm crippled."
- "My mom left my dad. She was a Christian, but she left and never came back. So here I am, hiding out in a desolate place."
- "I thought I was the best baseball player on the team. But my coach cut me. That might not seem important to some, but to me, it's had a crippling effect."

- "I was a good worker. I deserved better, but my boss dropped me to cut back on the budget."

There are countless stories of people who are crippled. I'm convinced that if we knew the secret stories of even our worst enemies, we would have nothing but compassion for them, nothing but love toward them.

There is One who does know their stories. And He knows yours, as well. He's the King, the Son of David, calling out to those who are in pastureless places, to those with crippled feet. If you feel lame or crippled a bit, listen, and you'll hear the King calling—sending a messenger to you. Just as David sent messengers to the pastureless place, the King calls still.

2 Samuel 9:6 (b)
. . . And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant!

David spoke one word that changes the entire scene. He said Mephibosheth's name. And something in the way David spoke his name ministered to Mephibosheth's heart. I cannot help but think of Jesus at the Garden tomb. Mary was there weeping over the fact that His body was no longer in the tomb. In her turmoil she was conversing with a man she thought to be the gardener. But when He said, "Mary," suddenly, in the very way He spoke her name, she identified Him as her Master.

John 10 declares that Jesus knows the names of His sheep. He knows your name, and He calls you individually. Do you hear His voice calling you today?

2 Samuel 9:7 (a)
And David said unto him, Fear not . . .

"It's okay," David said to Mephibosheth. "Don't be afraid. It's not what you think."

A lot of times it's not what we think. We think, "I'm so lame. I've been far from His pasture. And if the King is calling for me today, it's probably because He wants to lop off my head, or at least shake me up." But the next verse shows us that things are not always what we think . . .

2 Samuel 9:7 (b)
. . . for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father . . .

Because Mephibosheth was linked to Jonathan, David would show him kindness in two ways. First, he would restore his land. You see, although Mephibosheth lived in a barren, desolate place, he was heir to the best land in all of the nation. Here, David promises to restore that inheritance to Mephibosheth. And He promises to do the same for us . . .

> And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpiller, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.
>
> Joel 2:25

What an amazing God we serve. He not only seeks and saves those who are lost, but makes up for their lost time as well.

2 Samuel 9:7 (c)
. . . and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.

In addition to restoring Mephibosheth's land, David promised to reserve his place—at the king's table. Historian Josephus tells us that a meal on King Solomon's table consisted of 22,000 oxen, 20,000 sheep and fowl beyond description. In other words, there was plenty for everyone at the king's table.

The same is still true, for it is at the Table of our King that mercy abounds. The Lord would say to you today, "I've prepared a Table before you. Take. Eat. This is My body, broken for you. If any man hear My voice and open his heart, I will come in and sup with him. Come to the Table."

If your soul has been dry, it is to you especially that the Lord says, "Come and dine. And let Me restore all you've lost."

2 Samuel 9:8
And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?

"Why would you show such kindness to me?" Mephibosheth asked. And his question is mine. "Lord, why would You be so good to *me?* I ran from You and did my own thing. Yet You offer to make up that which I lost and to dine with me continually? *Amazing.*"

2 Samuel 9:9–11
Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread alway at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons.

David's servants were to provide food for Mephibosheth's entire family, but Mephibosheth himself was to eat with David as if he were a son of David.

> But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.
>
> John 1:12

We crippled people, we lame-brains, we who have spent so much time in a pastureless place, running from His face have been invited to dine as His sons at the King's table. The only question is, will we?

2 Samuel 9:12, 13 (a)
And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha. And all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth. So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table . . .

Hearing the generous, gracious offer of the king, Mephibosheth didn't say, "Thanks, king. I'll see if I can drop in occasionally to have a bite with you now and then." No, he said, "King, I can't believe you would do this for a man like me. I will eat at your table continually."

2 Samuel 9:13 (b)
. . . and was lame on both his feet.

When he came to David's table, did Mephibosheth walk straight? No. He was still lame in both his feet. He was still affected by the sin of the fall. So why is it that, when Jesus says "Come and dine," we say, "I can't. I'm too lame"? The Lord calls us just as we are to come and dine with Him. He calls you in the state you're in to receive the grace and abundance He has for you. The Table is set. And the Table is the only place where lame, twisted, crippled feet can't be seen.

Are you burdened because you're always looking at your flaws and your shortcomings—or are you blessed as you partake of the abundance of grace and mercy at the King's Table? I understand that many of us have been dropped brutally. But you must understand that you don't have to remain in your lame condition day after year after decade. Jesus was broken that you might be healed. And his blood was shed to wash away the sin and the memory of that which haunts you. Come and dine, and you'll find yourself back in the land where you perhaps once were or where you long to be. Mephibosheth accepted the king's invitation. May we do the same.



10

2 Samuel 10:1, 2
And it came to pass after this, that the king of the children of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his stead. Then said David, I will shew kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father shewed kindness unto me. And David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants for his father. And David's servants came into the land of the children of Ammon.

When Nahash, king of Ammon—present-day Jordan—died, David sent servants to express condolence and comfort to Hanun, his son.

2 Samuel 10:3
And the princes of the children of Ammon said unto Hanun their lord, Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? hath not David rather sent his servants unto thee, to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?

"This is a trick," Hanun's advisors said. "You can't trust David. These men are only here to spy out our land so that they can wage war against us."

2 Samuel 10:4
Wherefore Hanun took David's servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks, and sent them away.

According to Torah and Jewish tradition, the beard was a symbol of masculinity. Thus, this was an act of incredible humiliation.

As messengers of the King of kings, we're to share the best and prepare for the worst. That is, we're to say to people, "I've got great news for you: God loves you. Your sins—past, present, and future—are all forgiven."

Yet, even though we're sharing the best, people like Hanun will cut us and expose us. "All those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," Paul told Timothy (2 Timothy 3:12).

> Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.
>
> Matthew 5:11, 12

Share the best. Prepare for the worst. And watch and see how the Lord will bless as the enemy is driven back.

2 Samuel 10:5 (a)
When they told it unto David, he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed: and the king said, Tarry at Jericho . . .

The messengers were told to stay in Jericho rather than to avenge themselves. David defended his servants. And the Son of David will defend you.

2 Samuel 10:5 (b)
. . . until your beards be grown, and then return.

Jesus had His beard plucked out. And it wasn't just the back side of His robe that was cut off, but His entire robe was stripped as He hung on the Cross. But when He arose on Easter Sunday, He did so with a new robe and a full-grown beard.

Maybe today you feel ashamed or embarrassed. Take hope, for as a messenger of the Son of David, your beard will grow back and you will be given a new robe. Sometimes, it just takes time.

2 Samuel 10:6
And when the children of Ammon saw that they stank before David, the children of Ammon sent and hired the Syrians of Beth-rehob, and the Syrians of Zoba, twenty thousand footmen, and of king Maacah a thousand men, and of Ish-tob twelve thousand men.

Thirty-three thousand men were mustered as an army to fight against David when the Ammonites saw how much their treatment of his men offended him.

2 Samuel 10:7
And when David heard of it, he sent Joab, and all the host of the mighty men.

Joab would lead the troops of Israel against Ammon and their hired guns, the Syrians.

2 Samuel 10:8–12
And the children of Ammon came out, and put the battle in array at the entering in of the gate: and the Syrians of Zoba, and of Re hob, and Ish-tob, and Maacah, were by themselves in the field. When Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him before and behind, he chose of all the choice men of Israel, and put them in array against the Syrians: And the rest of the people he delivered into the hand of Abishai his brother, that he might put them in array against the children of Ammon. And he said, If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me: but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will come and help thee. Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the LORD do that which seemeth him good.

David divided his troops into two companies. Joab led one contingency, Abishai the other. "We have our work cut out for us," Joab said to Abishai. "If I can't get victory over these Syrians before me, come and help me. If you get in trouble fighting the men of Ammon, I'll help you. We'll trust in the Lord and see what He will do."

Joab's plan was a good one—and remains so today. The battle is great. Others might have a different flavor in their fellowship or denomination. But the fact is, we need *every* brother.

2 Samuel 10:13–17
And Joab drew nigh, and the people that were with him, unto the battle against the Syrians: and they fled before him. And when the children of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fled, then fled they also before Abishai, and entered into the city. And when the Syrians saw that they were smitten before Israel, they gathered themselves together. And Hadarezer sent, and brought out the Syrians that were beyond the river: and they came to Helam; and Shobach the captain of the host of Hadarezer went before them.

And when it was told David, he gathered all Israel together, and passed over Jordan, and came to Helam. And the Syrians set themselves in array against David, and fought with him.

The second phase of the war is underway. With their reinforcements, their fresh troops, the Syrians are now battling against David directly.

2 Samuel 10:18, 19
And the Syrians fled before Israel; and David slew the men of seven hundred chariots of the Syrians, and forty thousand horsemen, and smote Shobach the captain of their host, who died there. And when all the kings that were servants to Hadarezer saw that they were smitten before Israel, they made peace with Israel, and served them. So the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more.

When was peace made with Israel? When the enemy was smitten. There has never been a successful peace treaty without a victory over the enemy—without a winner and a loser. David's dealing with the Ammonites began in kindness. But when his kindness was rejected, he became engaged in the battle and brought about a destruction of the enemy so complete that, rather than fighting him, they served him.

Our King, the Son of David, has commissioned you and me as servants to be communicators of kindness, messengers of mercy. It's so important to see that Mephibosheth received David's kindness. Hanun didn't. Mephibosheth was poor, broken, lame, weak. Hanun was rich, proud, self-centered, and arrogant. As a servant of the King, I understand that those who are poor in spirit and meek, that those who mourn their own sin will receive the kind word I bring about the kindness of the King. But there will also be those who, like Hanun, who will not receive the word we bring. Therefore, if you want to be fruitful in ministry, hang out with the people who are lame, the Mephibosheths. Spend your time with people who are weak, broken, and needy. Don't make your priority the millionaire athlete, the movie star, the political leader. It's not that they can't be saved—but that's not where the abundant harvest will be. David sent his servants to both Mephibosheth and Hanun. We're to exclude no one, but we're to realize that the most fruit will

be found not with the beautiful people, but with those who are crippled, with those who can't breathe right, with Mephibosheth.



11 After speaking at a men's conference in Georgia years ago, Peter-John and I stopped at a place called Stone Mountain, home of the world's biggest boulder. We took a tram to the top and it was really quite impressive. It is huge and smooth and rounded—but it drops off almost imperceptibly. Our guide said that years earlier—before it was fenced off—a couple of guys were walking down the boulder, when they found themselves slowly sliding down with nothing to grab. It wasn't as if they were falling off a cliff. They were just slowly sliding down—all the way to their deaths.

The same is true of sin. "I know what I'm doing. I'm in control. I can get back up again," we tell ourselves. But when the weight, the gravity of carnality kicks in, we find ourselves sliding to destruction. And that's what happened to David . . .

2 Samuel 11:1
And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.

Instead of baseball, basketball, or football season, Old Testament cultures had war season. Wars were generally fought in the springtime—when the mud wouldn't cause chariots to get stuck. In this particular season of war, David remained in Jerusalem.

This is Step 1 in David's downfall. He was supposed to be leading his troops, engaged in battle, confronting the enemy. But at fifty years of age, he evidently decided to take a break and let the younger men go without him.

2 Samuel 11:2 (a)

And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house . . .

On this warm spring evening, David went out to his flat rooftop to take advantage of the cooling evening breezes.

2 Samuel 11:2 (b)–4
. . . and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house.

There are those who believe that, knowing her house was in view of the king's rooftop, Bathsheba was an active participant in this drama. The Bible, however, doesn't say this. And even though Proverbs 11 says a woman without discretion is like a jewel in the snout of a pig, the Bible lays the responsibility for this sin exclusively at the feet of David. In other words, Bathsheba's possible lack of discretion provides no justification for David's actions.

2 Samuel 11:5–8
And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child. And David sent to Joab, saying, Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David. And when Uriah was come unto him, David demanded of him how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered. And David said to Uriah, Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet. And Uriah departed out of the king's house, and there followed him a mess of meat from the king.

David's intention was to have Uriah spend the night with his wife and her pregnancy would be the assumed result.

2 Samuel 11:9, 10
But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house. And when they had told David, saying, Uriah went not down unto his house, David said unto Uriah, Camest thou not from thy journey? why then didst thou not go down unto thine house?

"Why didn't you take advantage of this opportunity, Uriah?" David asks.

2 Samuel 11:11
And Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? as thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing.

"I'm not going to have a night of luxury when my fellow soldiers are in a place of danger," said this man of integrity.

2 Samuel 11:12, 13
And David said to Uriah, Tarry here to day also, and to morrow I will let thee depart. So Uriah abode in Jerusalem that day, and the morrow. And when David had called him, he did eat and drink before him; and he made him drunk: and at even he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but went not down to his house.

David sought to get Uriah drunk because he knew, as the devil does, that alcohol lowers the resistance of moral fortitude. I could tell you story after story of godly men and women who began toying with alcohol and found their spiritual lives eroding. You are a wise person if you realize the danger of alcohol and say, "I have a hard enough time thinking right when I'm sober. I don't need to make it harder on myself."

Bathsheba, Solomon's mother would say, "It is not for kings to drink wine or princes to drink strong drink. Let drink be given to those who are perishing and those that be of a depressed spirit" (Proverbs 31:4–7).

Therefore, if you want to be a king or a prince, if you've discovered there's power in prayer and liberty in praise, you won't need the crutch of alcohol to get through a day or a situation.

2 Samuel 11:14
And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah.

Realizing Uriah still didn't take the bait, David came up with Plan B . . .

2 Samuel 11:15
And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die.

Here we see David not only committing adultery, but murder. Remember, David was a man after God's own heart, a man who was singularly held up in the Old Testament as one of the greatest men of faith who ever lived. What's going on? It all started seemingly so simple. He neglected his duty to go to battle. Then his eyes wandered. His curiosity was aroused. He committed adultery, and now murder. David is stumbling badly. But that's the way sin is. Sin has a sneaky way of compounding itself. Before you know it, you're more deeply involved in it than you ever thought you would be. That is why it is absolutely essential to not give in at that first point of temptation. You cannot control the course of your destiny once you allow yourself to begin to flirt with sin. It will capture you. It will ensnare you. And ultimately it will destroy you. David once killed giants. Now this giant is killing him.

2 Samuel 11:16, 17
And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were. And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab: and there fell some of the people of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also.

The plan went exactly as David desired. Uriah was positioned in the most dangerous place of the battle, and died as a result.

2 Samuel 11:18–21
Then Joab sent and told David all the things concerning the war; And charged the messenger, saying, When thou hast made an end of telling the matters of the war unto the king, And if so be that the king's wrath arise, and he say unto thee, Wherefore approached ye so nigh unto the city when ye did fight? knew ye not that they would shoot from the wall? Who smote Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? did not a woman cast a piece of a millstone upon him from the wall, that he died in Thebez? why went ye nigh the wall? then say thou, Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.

A messenger was dispatched to relay the result of the battle to David. If David asked him why his army fought so close to the wall of the city, the messenger was instructed to tell him that Uriah was dead—thereby justifying this otherwise foolish strategy.

2 Samuel 11:22–25
So the messenger went, and came and shewed David all that Joab had sent him for. And the messenger said unto David, Surely the men prevailed against us, and came out unto us into the field, and we were upon them even unto the entering of the gate. And the shooters shot from off the wall upon thy servants; and some of the king's servants be dead, and thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also. Then David said unto the messenger, Thus shalt thou say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another: make thy battle more strong against the city, and overthrow it: and encourage thou him.

"Don't worry, Joab. You win some and you lose some." David said, understanding that the reason Joab lost the battle was because Uriah had to die.

2 Samuel 11:26, 27
And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.

David no doubt thought he got away with his sin by cleverly covering his tracks. But God knew otherwise.

"Be sure your sins will find you out," we are warned (Numbers 32:23). No matter how well I think I've covered my tracks, the reality is that the sin will track me down. That's Satan's strategy. He sucks you into sin, and then he makes sure that the sin surfaces to expose you, to humiliate and condemn you. After nine or ten months of thinking he got away with this sin, David will have to face up to its repercussions.

I pray that the Lord might remind us again that the most dangerous place to be in spiritual life is kicking back, pulling away, saying, "I taught Sunday school for years. I paid my dues. It's time for me to let someone else fight the battles and do the work." When that mentality creeps in, you're being set up to be taken down. The safest place to be is on the front lines, fully engaged in serving the Lord, in battling against the enemy. May God help us to truly learn the lessons we read about in His Word.

Through all of this, David goes down in history as one of the greatest of the greats because he had a heart for God. Yes, he failed miserably, but there was something about his heart that God loved. The Son of David said that the one who is forgiven much loves much (Luke 7:47). It is when we realize how sinful we are that we realize how merciful God is. And such realization causes us to love Him all the more.

God sees the heart. May He see in you a heart that is amazed by His mercy, grateful for His grace, a heart that loves Him passionately and loves to seek His face. If the choice is between a congregation that errs constantly but loves God passionately and a congregation of self-righteous Pharisees, I'll take the former. And, according to Jesus, so would God.

12

2 Samuel 12:1 (a)
And the LORD sent Nathan unto David . . .

God didn't send an enemy of David to talk to him about his sin. He sent a friend. This is most often the way of the Lord. When He has a word of correction to bring us, inevitably it will be by someone who has a heart for us. Conversely, unless your heart is filled with compassion for the person you are about to correct, it is probably not your responsibility to correct him.

As Jesus arrived at the Upper Room, He found His disciples arguing with each other concerning who was the greatest among them. He also noticed that their feet were dirty. Instead of chastising them for arguing, He girded Himself with a towel and washed their feet. Therefore, I have no right to point out the dirt on other peoples' feet unless I'm willing to wash them myself—time and again. Nathan, evidently, was such a man.

2 Samuel 12:1 (b)–4
. . . And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

Nathan told David of a rich man who killed his neighbor's one and only lamb in order to feed his friend.

2 Samuel 12:5, 6
And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this

thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

Upset that a rich man would steal from a poor man, David was right in saying the rich man should give four lambs to the poor man, for that was the restitution decreed in the Law (Exodus 22:1). The problem was that David didn't stop there. He went on to issue the death sentence upon the rich man. This was neither God's Word nor His heart. In David's awareness of his own sin, he was judging another harshly.

That's always the way it is. We will be harshest with the people who commit the same sin with which we struggle. My sins look terrible on someone else. The Master of mercy, the Model of grace was Jesus Christ. He stood up for the woman taken in adultery; He was tender with the woman living in sin. Why? Because He Himself was free of sin.

2 Samuel 12:7
And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.

Suddenly David understood. Whenever there's a finger pointing at another, three are pointing back. This sobers me. We're all guilty. The Old Testament as well as the Sermon on the Mount drive us to the place where we say, "I'm a sinner. I need grace."

2 Samuel 12:7, 8
Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.

"David, I've given you everything. But if that wasn't enough, I would give you more still," the Lord said. With all of his flaws and shortcomings, God's heart was for David because David's heart was after God.

2 Samuel 12:9, 10 (a)

Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house . . .

"David, because you have brought adultery, lies, deception, and murder into your home, your family will be plagued with problems."

2 Samuel 12:10 (b), 11
. . . because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun.

"You're going to be humiliated, David. Your wives will be taken."

2 Samuel 12:12
For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.

"What you did in the darkness will be made known in the light."

2 Samuel 12:13 (a)
And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD . . .

David didn't defend himself or try to blame Bathsheba. He simply and succinctly said, "I've sinned against the Lord. Period." No amplification, no raw emotion, just a simple declaration and honest confession.

"After murdering a man, stealing his wife, deceiving the country? All he can say is one sentence? That's not enough," we might protest. But that's a dangerous stance to take because we do not see a man's heart. A person can be crying on national TV and go out and do the same thing again and again. Someone else might not have a tear in his eye, but he can be sincere to the

point where he never sins in that particular way again. David made a single statement. And that was enough.

In Psalm 51, we are given additional information concerning what was going on in David's heart . . .

> To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bath-she′-ba . . .
>
> Psalm 51:1 (a)

Psalm 51 deals with this exact moment in time, as recorded by David in his "journal" . . .

> . . . Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.
>
> Psalm 51:1 (b)–3

David thought about his sin constantly.

> Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight . . .
>
> Psalm 51:4 (a)

"Wait a minute, David," we might say. "What about Bathsheba? What about Uriah? What about the men who died in battle? Surely you sinned against them." But what David is acknowledging, under the inspiration of the Spirit, is that whatever happens to anyone—as sad as it might seem, as tragic as it may be—is nothing compared to what they deserve. You see, there is none righteous, no not one (Romans 3:10). This is a shock to our culture, but it's true. What David is saying here is true because the Lord is the only One who ought not to be treated that way.

> . . . that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.
>
> Psalm 51:4 (b), 5

People aren't sinners because they sin. People sin because they're sinners—from the very moment of conception.

> Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.
>
> Psalm 51:6–8

As a former shepherd, David refers to a certain practice of Middle Eastern shepherds. That is, if a lamb continually wandered away, jeopardizing its own life by going into areas containing poisonous plants or wolves and foxes, the shepherd had no other recourse but to break its legs. Then he would reset the bones, splint them, and carry the lamb on his shoulders until the bone was healed. When the splint was taken off, the lamb would never leave the shepherd's side, so closely had it bonded with the shepherd.

God declares that He will do whatever it takes to draw His children to be close to Him, that they might understand how much His heart is for them, that they might not wander away and get beaten up or poisoned unnecessarily.

> Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.
>
> Psalm 51:9–13

"Lord, I'll share what I found in You with others You send my way," David prays.

> Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.
>
> Psalm 51:14–17

That which was happening in David's soul was real. We don't see a person's heart. Only God sees the heart. David said one simple sentence in verse 13. Psalm 51, however, speaks volumes.

2 Samuel 12:13 (b)
. . . And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

"David, your sin is forgiven," the Lord declared through Nathan. "Because you murdered a man you should die, but God is showing great mercy to you."

2 Samuel 12:14 (a)
Howbeit . . .

There's always a "howbeit." Please note two things here. David was fully forgiven. But there would still be repercussions. The Bible says, "Don't be deceived. God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that shall he reap" (Galatians 6:7). Over the years, I've noticed that there is often a year cycle that takes place from the planting to the harvesting of sin. David will go through heartbreak and heartache that will last much longer than a year. But this first year is especially difficult for him.

2 Samuel 12:14 (b)

. . . because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme . . .

Who points out, discusses, and focuses on sin? The enemy. Therefore, if I'm talking about someone else's sin, it means I'm acting as an enemy.

2 Samuel 12:14 (c)
. . . the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.

When we're being seduced by sin, we think, *I know there will be a price to pay, but I've calculated the cost. I've added the columns, and I can handle it.* The problem is, the cost is never what you think. It's never what you calculated. It's never what you thought. The cost is always infinitely higher than what we thought when we took the first step into sin. That's why God hates sin so much.

2 Samuel 12:15–23 (a)
And Nathan departed unto his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick. David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead? But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead. Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it

was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again?

There is divine healing. There is also divine sickness. No matter how fervently David fasted and prayed, it was not God's will that his child recover.

2 Samuel 12:23 (b)
. . . I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

I believe this tells us something concerning the death of children. That is, when a child dies before the age of accountability or understanding, he goes to be in the presence of the Lord.

2 Samuel 12:24, 25
And David comforted Bath-sheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him. And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD.

Solomon had two names. *Solomon* means "peaceful," which specifically speaks of the fact that David is at peace with God and with himself. *Jedediah,* on the other hand, means "Beloved of God." This encourages me because the Lord could have said, "I'm not going to honor your relationship with Bathsheba. You've blown it and nothing good is going to come out of that." But our God is the God of the second chance. Our God is the God who exchanges beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning (Isaiah 61:3). Our God turns that which is hurtful into something beautiful. David repented. He's been chastened. He's been forgiven. And now God would bless his relationship, for from this union would come Solomon.

Take hope, dear friend. There is hope. Confess your sin. Turn to the Lord. He can turn a dark night into a bright morning if you'll simply come to Him.

2 Samuel 12:26
And Joab fought against Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and took the royal city.

When David sinned with Bath-sheba, Joab was fighting against the Ammonites. Verses 26–31 pick up the story and recount what happened immediately after David committed adultery with Bathsheba and sentenced Uriah to death.

2 Samuel 12:27, 28
And Joab sent messengers to David, and said, I have fought against Rabbah, and have taken the city of waters. Now therefore gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it: lest I take the city, and it be called after my name.

"David," said Joab, "we've won the battle. Leave Jerusalem and come down here. We're ready to take the city and we want you to come in and lead the way.

2 Samuel 12:29
And David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it, and took it.

At this point, David was living in sin. He had not confessed his sin. He had not been broken by sin. He thought he had covered his sin. Here, he claimed outward victory, but in his soul, there was disharmony.

2 Samuel 12:30
And he took their king's crown from off his head, the weight whereof was a talent of gold with the precious stones: and it was set on David's head.

Earlier, whenever David reaped gold and silver, he presented it to the Lord. This time, however, he takes the crown for his own head.

2 Samuel 12:30, 31 (a)
And he brought forth the spoil of the city in great abundance. And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brickkiln . . .

David is sentencing the Ammonites to incredibly cruel deaths. Due to the disharmony in his own heart and spirit, this was not the same David.

2 Samuel 12:31 (b)
. . . and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon. So David and all the people returned unto Jerusalem.

Nine or ten months later, Nathan the prophet would confront him.



13

2 Samuel 13:1 (a)
And it came to pass after this . . .

It has been rightly said that experience is the best teacher—if you can afford the tuition. It's expensive to learn the hard way! Therefore, I would rather learn from accounts like the one before us than to pay the high price of learning on my own.

2 Samuel 13:1 (b)
. . . that Absalom the son of David had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her.

Amnon was David's oldest son—a half brother to Absalom and Tamar. In our day, for Amnon to love his half-sister would be scandalous. This was not the case in Bible times, for there was no direct prohibition against a man marrying his half-sister.

2 Samuel 13:2

And Amnon was so vexed, that he fell sick for his sister Tamar; for she was a virgin; and Amnon thought it hard for him to do any thing to her.

Amnon was lovesick, or, more accurately, "lust-sick." But he couldn't act on this because in these days, all of a king's sons would live on one side of the palace, and all of his daughters on the opposite side.

2 Samuel 13:3, 4 (a)
But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David's brother: and Jonadab was a very subtil man. And he said unto him, Why art thou, being the king's son, lean from day to day? wilt thou not tell me?

Jonadab was a subtle, tricky guy. "What's wrong?" he asked his cousin.

2 Samuel 13:4 (b)
. . . And Amnon said unto him, I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister.

As we will see, Amnon wasn't in love. He was in lust. There's a big difference. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not seek its own. Lust, on the other hand, is impatient. Lust wants its own way immediately.

2 Samuel 13:5
And Jonadab said unto him, Lay thee down on thy bed, and make thyself sick: and when thy father cometh to see thee, say unto him, I pray thee, let my sister Tamar come, and give me meat, and dress the meat in my sight, that I may see it, and eat it at her hand.

"Pretend you're sick," Jonadab said. "Then ask your dad to send Tamar to bring you some chicken soup."

2 Samuel 13:6–9

So Amnon lay down, and made himself sick: and when the king was come to see him, Amnon said unto the king, I pray thee, let Tamar my sister come, and make me a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat at her hand. Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, Go now to thy brother Amnon's house, and dress him meat. So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house; and he was laid down. And she took flour, and kneaded it, and made cakes in his sight, and did bake the cakes. And she took a pan, and poured them out before him; but he refused to eat. And Amnon said, Have out all men from me. And they went out every man from him.

Amnon ordered all of the palace guards to leave.

2 Samuel 13:10–13 (a)
And Amnon said unto Tamar, Bring the meat into the chamber, that I may eat of thine hand. And Tamar took the cakes which she had made, and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother. And when she had brought them unto him to eat, he took hold of her, and said unto her, Come lie with me, my sister. And she answered him, Nay, my brother, do not force me; for no such thing ought to be done in Israel: do not thou this folly. And I, whither shall I cause my shame to go?

"Don't do this," Tamar pleaded.

2 Samuel 13:13 (b), 14
. . . and as for thee, thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, I pray thee, speak unto the king; for he will not withhold me from thee. Howbeit he would not hearken unto her voice: but, being stronger than she, forced her, and lay with her.

What a sad story. Tamar tries to appeal to Amnon's logic, but he doesn't listen. He ignores the warnings given to him. That's what lust does. It doesn't listen to the warnings. It blocks out what's being said by a concerned parent, friend, or pastor.

2 Samuel 13:15
Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her. And Amnon said unto her, Arise, be gone.

Rapists often kill their victims because when they've done what they do, they hate themselves. And not knowing what to do with that hate, they transfer their hatred, frustration, and guilt to their victims.

Once Amnon has Tamar, he hates her. It's a story we hear over and over and over again.

2 Samuel 13:16, 17
And she said unto him, There is no cause: this evil in sending me away is greater than the other that thou didst unto me. But he would not hearken unto her. Then he called his servant that ministered unto him, and said, Put now this woman out from me, and bolt the door after her.

Young lady, are you listening to this story? Dear sister, this is reality. Once Amnon gets what he wants, he kicks Tamar out and locks the door behind her, leaving her to go her way, crying.

2 Samuel 13:18, 19
And she had a garment of divers colours upon her: for with such robes were the king's daughters that were virgins apparelled. Then his servant brought her out, and bolted the door after her. And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colours that was on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying.

How could he do this to me? Tamar wondered. *He claimed he had this deep love for me.* Oh, precious people, may the Holy Spirit give you understanding that this is what happens when lust is the main ingredient, when lust dominates a relationship. It always ends up in sorrow—ultimately in death . . .

2 Samuel 13:20
And Absalom her brother said unto her, Hath Amnon thy brother been with thee? but hold now thy peace, my sister: he is thy brother; regard not this thing. So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house.

"I'll take care of this," Absalom told his sister. Although his statement sounds noble, Absalom will use this situation to destroy Amnon—one of the heirs to the throne.

2 Samuel 13:21
But when king David heard of all these things, he was very wroth.

David is angry. His eldest son raped his daughter, and he's understandably upset. Yet, although David is very upset, he does nothing. How could this be? The answer, I believe, is very simple. He succumbed to what we can succumb to as well. You see, a few years earlier, David himself gave in to his own lust with Bathsheba and actually murdered her husband to cover his tracks. Therefore, he felt as though he didn't have any right to address Amnon's sin.

Mom, Dad, listen carefully. This is Satan's favorite tactic to get you to allow your kids to see movies they ought not see, to listen to music they ought not hear. "Who are you to tell your kids what to do? Think of all the sins you commit every day," he hisses. But he's wrong because truth is truth regardless of who speaks it. If you're doing well, you will have great authority. But even if you didn't do well or aren't doing as well presently as you could or should, you are to still share the truth and say, "This is the way it works. This is what you must do."

David was crippled by the condemnation of Satan. And there are men and women who will not tell their sons and daughters what to do and what to avoid because they've given in to the "David syndrome." We need men and women who have courage to speak the truth. Mom and Dad, be wise. Young person, understand that God records this story for a reason—to tell you and me that lust kills.

2 Samuel 13:22, 23

And Absalom spake unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar. And it came to pass after two full years, that Absalom had sheepshearers in Baalhazor, which is beside Ephraim: and Absalom invited all the king's sons.

Two years later, Absalom throws a traditional "sheep-shearing party."

2 Samuel 13:24, 25
And Absalom came to the king, and said, Behold now, thy servant hath sheepshearers; let the king, I beseech thee, and his servants go with thy servant. And the king said to Absalom, Nay, my son, let us not all now go, lest we be chargeable unto thee. And he pressed him: howbeit he would not go, but blessed him.

David declined Absalom's invitation to the party but allowed his sons to go.

2 Samuel 13:26–29 (a)
Then said Absalom, If not, I pray thee, let my brother Amnon go with us. And the king said unto him, Why should he go with thee? But Absalom pressed him, that he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him. Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous and be valiant . . .

We need to realize that sin has serious consequences. The older I get, the longer I live, the more I've gone through, the greater I hate sin because I see what it does. Sin brings about destruction and death, hurts and heartache. Learn the lesson carefully. May God help us to listen to His Word and follow His way lest we, too, find ourselves reaping the results of sin—for it's an ugly crop.

2 Samuel 13:29 (b)

. . . And the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons arose, and every man gat him up upon his mule, and fled.

This is the story of lust. It ends in death. Now you have a dead man, a broken-hearted dad, a depressed sister—and it's all because of lust.

Girls, if you allow lust to be a part of a relationship, death will follow. Your reputation will be slaughtered. Your joy will wither. One of two marriages ends in divorce. A huge percentage is due to sexual dissatisfaction, which is based on premarital activities and pornography. Lust brings forth sin; and sin brings forth death—the death of marriage, the death of joy, the death of what could have been.

What can we do to overcome the power of lust? Listen to what Peter says:

> Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.
>
> 1 Peter 2:11

The battleground is the same for everyone: It's the soul. The soul consists of the mind and emotions. The soul relates to people. The body is material and relates to the physical world. The spirit is the deepest part of a person and relates to God. It is the spirit that will live eternally.

In Genesis 2, we read that God formed a body out of dust, but man was not alive until God breathed a spirit into him and he became a soul. It was the common stuff of earth combined with the highest stuff of heaven that resulted in the soul. In the Garden of Eden, it was the spirit that controlled man. The soul was in subjection to the spirit, the body in subjection to the soul—until man rebelled against God. At that point, the spirit died. The soul is always in the middle. The question is, will your soul be controlled by your spirit, or by the stuff of the world? The battle is always for the soul.

The body controls the soul until a man is born again. At that point, the spirit is in control once again. Then, a battle begins that will be fought in every believer until he dies: Will the spirit dominate the soul, or will the body call the shots. Back and forth the battle goes. The Bible says if your

body is controlling your mind and emotions, your soul, you're in trouble because the flesh always leads to death.

> Flee also youthful lusts . . .
>
> 2 Timothy 2:22 (a)

This is not mystical. It's so simple. "Youthful lusts" refers to the fact that the same lust that bugged you when you were young will plague you all of your days. The appetites of the flesh are always there. However old you are, this word applies to you. David, after all, was fifty years old when he sinned with Bathsheba.

> . . . but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.
>
> 2 Timothy 2:22 (b)

Flee youthful lusts, and follow righteousness with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. In other words, run from the sin and to the saints. Spend time with fellow believers. The way to overcome lust is to flee and follow.

I have noticed in my own walk that God never wastes His warnings, be they through Scripture, through a sermon, or through a conversation. Whenever there is a word shared, it is intended for me personally. And this word is no exception. Make a decision today to abstain from those things that war against your soul. If you give in to lust, you'll have a little pleasure followed by a lifetime of pain. If you flee lust, you'll have a little pain followed by a lifetime of pleasure. It's your choice. Make the right one.

> **2 Samuel 13:30, 31**
> **And it came to pass, while they were in the way, that tidings came to David, saying, Absalom hath slain all the king's sons, and there is not one of them left. Then the king arose, and tare his garments, and lay on the earth; and all his servants stood by with their clothes rent.**

How many of David's sons died? One.

2 Samuel 13:32, 33
And Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David's brother, answered and said, Let not my lord suppose that they have slain all the young men the king's sons; for Amnon only is dead: for by the appointment of Absalom this hath been determined from the day that he forced his sister Tamar. Now therefore let not my lord the king take the thing to his heart, to think that all the king's sons are dead: for Amnon only is dead.

Jonadab set the record straight.

2 Samuel 13:34–37
But Absalom fled. And the young man that kept the watch lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came much people by the way of the hill side behind him. And Jonadab said unto the king, Behold, the king's sons come: as thy servant said, so it is. And it came to pass, as soon as he had made an end of speaking, that, behold, the king's sons came, and lifted up their voice and wept: and the king also and all his servants wept very sore. But Absalom fled, and went to Talmai, the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son every day.

Running for his life, Absalom fled to Geshur most likely because his mother was from Geshur.

2 Samuel 13:38, 39
So Absalom fled, and went to Geshur, and was there three years. And the soul of king David longed to go forth unto Absalom: for he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead.

After three years, David longed to see Absalom . . .



14

2 Samuel 14:1–3

Now Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that the king's heart was toward Absalom. And Joab sent to Tekoah, and fetched thence a wise woman, and said unto her, I pray thee, feign thyself to be a mourner, and put on now mourning apparel, and anoint not thyself with oil, but be as a woman that had a long time mourned for the dead: And come to the king, and speak on this manner unto him. So Joab put the words in her mouth.

Two chapters earlier, David was convicted when Nathan told the story of a man with a lamb. Here, he will be trapped by a tale once again.

2 Samuel 14:4–7

And when the woman of Tekoah spake to the king, she fell on her face to the ground, and did obeisance, and said, Help, O king. the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, I am indeed a widow woman, and mine husband is dead. And thy handmaid had two sons, and they two strove together in the field, and there was none to part them, but the one smote the other, and slew him. And, behold, the whole family is risen against thine handmaid, and they said, Deliver him that smote his brother, that we may kill him, for the life of his brother whom he slew; and we will destroy the heir also: and so they shall quench my coal which is left, and shall not leave to my husband neither name nor remainder upon the earth.

In this story inspired by Joab, the woman of Tekoah said, "My husband is dead. My two sons got in a fight in which one was killed. Now the rest of the family wants to kill my only remaining son."

2 Samuel 14:8

And the king said unto the woman, Go to thine house, and I will give charge concerning thee.

"I'll take care of it," David said.

2 Samuel 14:9

And the woman of Tekoah said unto the king, My lord, O king, the iniquity be on me, and on my father's house: and the king and his throne be guiltless.

"I know you're bending the rules on this matter," the woman said. "But I'll take responsibility."

2 Samuel 14:10
And the king said, Whosoever saith ought unto thee, bring him to me, and he shall not touch thee any more.

"If anyone bothers you, bring him to me and he won't bother you again," David promised.

2 Samuel 14:11–18
Then said she, I pray thee, let the king remember the LORD thy God, that thou wouldest not suffer the revengers of blood to destroy any more, lest they destroy my son. And he said, As the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth. Then the woman said, Let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak one word unto my lord the king. And he said, Say on. And the woman said, Wherefore then hast thou thought such a thing against the people of God? for the king doth speak this thing as one which is faulty, in that the king doth not fetch home again his banished. For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him. Now therefore that I am come to speak of this thing unto my lord the king, it is because the people have made me afraid: and thy handmaid said, I will now speak unto the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his handmaid. For the king will hear, to deliver his handmaid out of the hand of the man that would destroy me and my son together out of the inheritance of God. Then thine handmaid said, The word of my lord the king shall now be comfortable: for as an angel of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and bad: therefore the LORD

thy God will be with thee. Then the king answered and said unto the woman, Hide not from me, I pray thee, the thing that I shall ask thee. And the woman said, Let my lord the king now speak.

"You're a hypocrite," said the woman to David, "for you have allowed mercy to be extended to my son, but have withheld it from your own son."

This is faulty logic because the cases were entirely dissimilar. In her story, the death was not intentional. Nonetheless, David is trapped because he gave advice according to his own reasoning instead of according to the Word of God.

2 Samuel 14:19, 20
And the king said, Is not the hand of Joab with thee in all this? And the woman answered and said, As thy soul liveth, my lord the king, none can turn to the right hand or to the left from ought that my lord the king hath spoken: for thy servant Joab, he bade me, and he put all these words in the mouth of thine handmaid: To fetch about this form of speech hath thy servant Joab done this thing: and my lord is wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth.

David realized he had been set up.

2 Samuel 14:21, 22
And the king said unto Joab, Behold now, I have done this thing: go therefore, bring the young man Absalom again. And Joab fell to the ground on his face, and bowed himself, and thanked the king: and Joab said, To day thy servant knoweth that I have found grace in thy sight, my lord, O king, in that the king hath fulfilled the request of his servant.

Why is Joab so committed to restoring Absalom to David? I suggest it is because he wanted to make his future secure. After all, following the murder of Abner, David said to Joab, "Cursed be you and your house. Leprosy be upon thee forevermore" (2 Samuel 3:29). Therefore, perhaps Joab was trying to butter up Absalom, the heir apparent, by bringing him out of exile.

2 Samuel 14:23, 24
So Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. And the king said, Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king's face.

"Absalom can come home, but I don't want to see him," David said.

2 Samuel 14:25, 26
But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he polled his head, (for it was at every year's end that he polled it: because the hair was heavy on him, therefore he polled it:) he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels after the king's weight.

Absalom was extolled for his physical appearance. His hair weighed four pounds.

2 Samuel 14:27, 28
And unto Absalom there were born three sons, and one daughter, whose name was Tamar: she was a woman of a fair countenance. So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face.

For three years, Absalom was exiled in Geshur. For two years in Jerusalem, he still didn't see his father's face.

2 Samuel 14:29–31
Therefore Absalom sent for Joab, to have sent him to the king; but he would not come to him: and when he sent again the second time, he would not come. Therefore he said unto his servants, See, Joab's field is near mine, and he hath barley there; go and set it on fire. And Absalom's servants set the field on fire. Then Joab arose, and came to Absalom unto his house, and said unto him, Wherefore have thy servants set my field on fire?

When even Joab refused to see him, Absalom ordered his field to be set on fire in order to get his attention.

2 Samuel 14:32
And Absalom answered Joab, Behold, I sent unto thee, saying, Come hither, that I may send thee to the king, to say, Wherefore am I come from Geshur? it had been good for me to have been there still: now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me.

"I can't reach my dad," Absalom said to Joab. "If he wants to kill me, let him do it. If not, let me see him."

2 Samuel 14:33
So Joab came to the king, and told him: and when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom.

Reconciliation is made—but it's too late. For five years, bitterness had been growing in the heart of Absalom. David was a man who sinned greatly, yet he was forgiven completely. Now he cannot completely forgive his son. He loves him, but he can't forgive him. He puts conditions upon his forgiveness.

God forgives you unconditionally. As far as the east is from the west, that's how far away your sins and iniquities are (Psalm 103:12). Once you have confessed, your sin is forgiven and forgotten. Yes, due to an irrevocable, absolute law of nature—the law of sowing and reaping—the results of your sin will crop up indeed. But your Father has forgotten them completely (Hebrews 10:17).

This is fabulous to me. When I go to the Lord and say, "Father, I've blown it again," He says, "Again? I don't recall what you're talking about." God forgave David that way. The problem is, he doesn't forgive his own son with that same unconditional gracious forgiveness. This created in Absalom a spirit of bitterness that festered within him for five years.

Dad, do you have a son that feels alienated from you. Embrace him and say, "I forgive you even as I have been forgiven time and time again." You

might need to discipline and chasten him, even as our heavenly Father disciplines us. But you must forgive him unconditionally. If you don't, you will find rebellion brewing within his heart.



15

2 Samuel 15:1, 2 (a)

And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate . . .

Here, we see the beginning of Absalom's insurrection.

2 Samuel 15:2 (b), 3

. . . and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee.

The gate of the city was where legal transactions took place and where counsel was given. Absalom began his revolution by sitting at the gate and saying to the people, "I sympathize with you. I wish I could help you. The king is obviously too busy. Now, if *I* were king, I would take care of your concern."

2 Samuel 15:4–6

Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

As Absalom undermined his dad's authority, he stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

2 Samuel 15:7 (a)
And it came to pass after forty years . . .

This could only refer to the time that had passed since David's anointing.

2 Samuel 15:7 (b)–10
. . . that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the LORD, in Hebron. For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the LORD shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD. And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron. But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron.

Why did Absalom set up his kingdom in Hebron? Hebron was his hometown. But more importantly, Hebron was the capital city of Israel before David moved it to Jerusalem. When David moved the capital to Jerusalem, the men of Hebron were obviously upset. Absalom capitalized on their dissatisfaction with David.

2 Samuel 15:11, 12
And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing. And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counseller, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom.

David greatly valued Ahithophel's wise counsel. Why, then, did Absalom think Ahithophel would transfer allegiance and defect to his cause? I suggest the reason may have been that Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather. No doubt Ahithophel was aware of the fact that David had done injustice to his

family in killing Bathsheba's husband. If that was in fact the case, Absalom could have exploited this weakness for his own purposes.

I point this out to show you the danger of allowing bitterness to take root within your soul. It will lead to your destruction. Ahithophel obviously never dealt with this matter of David. So he defected from David and we'll see him siding with Absalom and ultimately dying, so upset was he by the situation.

May the Lord keep us from any type of unforgiveness or bitterness. Like Absalom, we'll find ourselves hung up, if we don't deal with it directly.

2 Samuel 15:13
And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom.

"You are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," the men of Israel said to David in chapter 5, begging him to be their king. Here, they reject David's leadership and side with this one who had stolen their hearts.

"I urge you brethren," Paul would write to the church at Rome, "to avoid those who cause divisions and offenses" (see Romans 16:17). Absalom is the quintessential example of one who should have been avoided.

2 Samuel 15:14–16
And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not else escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword. And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint. And the king went forth, and all his household after him. And the king left ten women, which were concubines, to keep the house.

With the forces of Absalom gathered outside the city, David desires to spare Jerusalem from destruction. So He gathers his household and splits—leaving ten of his concubines behind to keep his house while he was gone.

2 Samuel 15:17, 18

And the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off. And all his servants passed on beside him; and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath, passed on before the king.

The six hundred men with David were part of the group we read about in 1 Samuel 22. When David was fleeing from Saul in the wilderness, men who were discontent, in debt, and distressed gathered around David. David used these ragtag renegades as the base of his army. And this group is a perfect picture of us. We are in debt, distressed, and discontent, yet we find ourselves gathering around a Greater than David, the Son of David, Jesus Christ. These men were transformed into a crack unit of excellent troops. Because they were around David, they became like him. And because they endured real difficulties and tribulations with David, they formed into a tight group of loyal, capable soldiers.

We, too, gathering around our Greater than David, Jesus Christ, endure trials. But those very trials produce in us abilities and capabilities for service.

> Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.
>
> 1 Peter 1:6, 7

In Bible times, gold was purified by melting it to a liquid state. The smelter knew the purification process was complete when he looked into the liquid gold and saw his face. But until he could see his face, he kept the heat on. What's the Lord doing in our lives? He's keeping the heat on until we become a reflection of Him, until we are formed in the image of His likeness.

You might wonder why you've had some fiery, heavy trials. Know this: You're precious. You're gold. And the Lord says, "I'm going to purify you so

that My reflection might be seen in you, so that when people see you, they'll see Me."

2 Samuel 15:19–21
Then said the king to Ittai the Gittite, Wherefore goest thou also with us? return to thy place, and abide with the king: for thou art a stranger, and also an exile. Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren: mercy and truth be with thee. And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the LORD liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.

Ittai the Gittite—what a guy! He stood by David even though doing so might have meant death. Are you an Ittai? Do you say, "Lord, wherever You lead and whatever it means, I'm with You"?

2 Samuel 15:22, 23
And David said to Ittai, Go and pass over. And Ittai the Gittite passed over, and all his men, and all the little ones that were with him. And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness.

Outside the Eastern Gate of Jerusalem, there is a small valley. In Bible days, the Brook Kidron flowed through this valley. The word *Kidron* means "dark." The reason it's called "Dark" is because the Brook Kidron was where much of the waste and sewage of Jerusalem was poured. The temple wastes also poured into the Kidron—which meant that, at the time of Passover when upwards of 1,000 lambs were sacrificed, the brook would take on a red color.

In John 18 we see the Son of David, Jesus Christ, also leaving Jerusalem, also having the masses against Him, also experiencing rebellion and betrayal by one He cared about—Judas Iscariot. He left and crossed the same brook David crosses here. However, when Jesus crossed the Brook Kidron on the

night of the Last Supper, it was at the time of the Passover. Thus, He crossed over a blood-red river, emblematic and symbolic of what He was to endure on the Cross.

2 Samuel 15:24–26
And lo Zadok also, and all the Levites were with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God: and they set down the ark of God; and Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city. And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation: But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.

"Take the ark back to Jerusalem," David said to Zadok. "If God wants me to survive, He'll bring me back to the city in due time, and I'll see the ark again. But if He wants to destroy me in the wilderness, so be it."

This heart is sadly lacking in Christians today. It seems we are always trying to tell God what to do and trying to manipulate Him through the exercise of our faith. Oh, for a heart that says, "Not my will, but *Thine* be done."

2 Samuel 15:27–30
The king said also unto Zadok the priest, Art not thou a seer? return into the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz thy son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. See, I will tarry in the plain of the wilderness, until there come word from you to certify me. Zadok therefore and Abiathar carried the ark of God again to Jerusalem: and they tarried there. And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up.

Even as Jesus crossed over the Kidron and went up the Mount of Olives to the Garden of Gethsemane, we see David preceding Him to the Mount of

Olives, weeping as he went.

2 Samuel 15:31
And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.

Ahithophel, David's trusted counselor, had betrayed him very possibly due to the fact that he was Bathsheba's grandfather. The root of bitterness deep within his heart surfaced as he sided with Absalom in rebellion.

2 Samuel 15:32
And it came to pass, that when David was come to the top of the mount, where he worshipped God,

David was weeping, but his weeping did not deter his worship. Perhaps you, too, are weeping or brokenhearted. Isaiah 61:3 says God gives us beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Therefore, in times of weeping, worship. Fight against the tendency to hole up, to pull back, to feel sorry for yourself. It is especially when you feel depressed, discouraged, unloved, or upset that you need to extol the Lord.

2 Samuel 15:32–37
behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat rent, and earth upon his head: Unto whom David said, If thou passest on with me, then thou shalt be a burden unto me: But if thou return to the city, and say unto Absalom, I will be thy servant, O king; as I have been thy father's servant hitherto, so will I now also be thy servant: then mayest thou for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. And hast thou not there with thee Zadok and Abiathar the priests? therefore it shall be, that what thing soever thou shalt hear out of the king's house, thou shalt tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. Behold, they have there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz Zadok's son, and Jonathan Abiathar's son; and by them ye shall send unto me every thing that ye can hear.

So Hushai David's friend came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem.

David sent Hushai to Jerusalem as a "double agent," both to send word of Absalom's plans and to counter the wise advice Absalom was sure to receive from Ahithophel.



16 2 Samuel 16:1–3

And when David was a little past the top of the hill, behold, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine. And the king said unto Ziba, What meanest thou by these? And Ziba said, The asses be for the king's household to ride on; and the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat; and the wine, that such as be faint in the wilderness may drink. And the king said, And where is thy master's son? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he abideth at Jerusalem: for he said, To day shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father.

As seen in chapter 9, Saul's sole surviving relative was Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son. Ziba, who had been Jonathan's servant, was Mephibosheth's servant. Here, Ziba appears to David and lies that Mephibosheth was rebelling against him.

2 Samuel 16:4

Then said the king to Ziba, Behold, thine are all that pertained unto Mephibosheth. And Ziba said, I humbly beseech thee that I may find grace in thy sight, my lord, O king.

David was fooled. His rash decision to give Ziba Saul and Jonathan's vast inheritance reminds me of Joshua's decision to sign a peace treaty with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9). Whether regarding a business deal or a marriage proposal, be careful you don't make decisions in the time of trial and heat.

During those times, your thinking isn't as clear as it would be otherwise. Instead, slow down and seek the Lord.

2 Samuel 16:5, 6
And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came. And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left.

This self-proclaimed prophet has the audacity to hurl stones and curses at one of the greatest men of God who ever lived. "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone," Jesus said (John 8:7). Thus, Jesus alone had the right to throw stones. But He never did. Instead, He carried a Cross.

2 Samuel 16:7, 8
And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial: The LORD hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the LORD hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man.

"You're paying the price for overthrowing Saul," Shimei said. This is interesting because Shimei's assessment of the situation is totally wrong. David did not overthrow Saul. In fact, time and time again, when he had the opportunity to annihilate Saul, David spared his life.

2 Samuel 16:9
Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head.

"Let me chop this pipsqueak down to size," said Abishai. Did he have the right to say this? In a sense, yes, for in Exodus 22:28, the Law specifically

says, “Curse not the ruler of thy people.” Ecclesiastes 10:20 goes on to say that we are not to curse rulers in word or even in thought. Abishai had a right to make this statement. But watch David’s response . . .

2 Samuel 16:10 (a)
And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah?

“What am I going to do with you, Abishai?” Abishai was with David in the wilderness of Ziph, hiding from Saul who sought David’s life. One day, David and Abishai came upon Saul sleeping in a cave. “Let me pin him to the ground. The Lord has delivered him into our hands,” Abishai said.

“No,” David answered. “The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth my hand against the Lord’s anointed” (1 Samuel 26:11).

As Peter would do centuries later in the Garden of Gethsemane, Abishai seemed determined to defend his king with a sword. But David knew better.

2 Samuel 16:10 (b)
. . . so let him curse, because the LORD hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?

How I appreciate David’s attitude here. Notice how he handled this criticism . . .

First, he looked up. At this point in his life, David understood that God was in all things. Earlier, he didn’t have such understanding. Earlier, he was pugnacious, a fighter. Earlier, it was only the kindness of Abigail that kept him from destroying Nabal (1 Samuel 25). But now David understood that this attack upon him could not come forth without the Lord allowing it. Oh, that we might have this same understanding.

Dear saint, the Lord has allowed that person to criticize you not to destroy you, but to develop you. Norman Vincent Peale said, “I am concerned that Christians are more willing to be destroyed by praise than to be saved by criticism.” It’s true. We are more willing to march off to battle with the applause of men ringing in our ears than to hear a valid criticism—one the Lord has allowed to surface.

Several years ago, the manager of New York's Grand Union Hotel was addressing a group of hotel managers. Asked to give a seminar on how to be successful, he said, "You don't need to know anything about running a hotel to run a hotel. Just open the doors and your customers will tell you exactly how it should be run." Wise counsel indeed!

2 Samuel 16:11
And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse; for the LORD hath bidden him.

Secondly, David looked about. "If you think Shimei's words are harsh, they're nothing in comparison to what Absalom is trying to do," David said. "I've erred greatly. My own family is in utter disorder."

When someone puts you down, do what David did. Look around. See the mistakes you've made, the blunders on your record. However brutal the put-down is, it's not even a fraction of what you deserve.

"In my flesh dwells no good thing," Paul declared (Romans 7:18). It's a pivotal day when you finally realize that there's nothing good in your flesh, for at that point, you no longer seek to defend, extol, or protect yourself, and you're free.

2 Samuel 16:12
It may be that the LORD will look on mine affliction, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day.

Thirdly, David looked ahead. "God's hearing these words of Shimei," he said. "And maybe He will be kind and merciful to me because of Shimei's cursing."

When my kids are put down, even though they might deserve it, my heart is grieved. We love our kids. We know what they are, but we love them anyway! Now, if we, being evil, care about our kids, how much more does our heavenly Father care about His (see Matthew 7:11). "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against

you falsely for My sake," Jesus said (Matthew 5:11). Look ahead. God knows what you're going through. And He promises blessing.

2 Samuel 16:13
And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust.

Shimei first hurled rocks and then he cast dust. In this culture, this was equivalent to saying, "I wish you were buried." This is almost always what happens. Start throwing stones at someone and you will eventually wish he were dead. That's why we're not to give place to unforgiveness, bitterness, or a critical spirit. Those things will destroy us.

What happened to Shimei? On his deathbed, David's final word to Solomon was to kill Shimei (1 Kings 2:8). I believe this was because David realized that, although he had the maturity and experience to handle Shimei, his young son, Solomon, would be tripped up by him.

2 Samuel 16:14
And the king, and all the people that were with him, came weary, and refreshed themselves there.

David looked up, looked about, and looked ahead. We have a privilege he didn't yet have. That is, we can look afresh at Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:21). Jesus was reviled, insulted, mocked, and killed. Yet He never defended Himself, never put down those who were putting Him down.

Greek philosopher Publius said, "I have often regretted my speech, but never my silence."

Solomon said, "In the multitude of words, there wanteth not sin" (Proverbs 10:19).

James said, "Let every man be swift to hear and slow to speak" (James 1:19).

Jesus died without defending Himself, without standing up for His rights, His reputation, or His ministry. And we are to follow in His steps. The secret of life is death. When you finally die, the pressure is off. When you truly

realize you are crucified with Christ, you won't exalt yourself, protect yourself, or be concerned about yourself. The secret of the Christian life is to die to self, to get your eyes off yourself and to quit wondering why you're discouraged, why you're depressed, why you're not happy.

The way to abundant life is not to seek to be blessed, but to seek to be a blessing to others; not to seek to be understood, but to seek to understand others; not to seek to receive, but to seek to reach out to others. We look for anything and everything but death. But there is no other way. David recognized this.

2 Samuel 16:15–21
And Absalom, and all the people the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him. And it came to pass, when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, was come unto Absalom, that Hushai said unto Absalom, God save the king, God save the king. And Absalom said to Hushai, Is this thy kindness to thy friend? why wentest thou not with thy friend? And Hushai said unto Absalom, Nay; but whom the LORD, and this people, and all the men of Israel, choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide. And again, whom should I serve? should I not serve in the presence of his son? as I have served in thy father's presence, so will I be in thy presence. Then said Absalom to Ahithophel, Give counsel among you what we shall do. And Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Go in unto thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house; and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father: then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong.

Ahithophel said, "Absalom, now that you're in the city, have physical relations with David's concubines. In so doing, you will show all of the people that you despise your father. Knowing you are completely committed to a course of rebellion and that reconciliation with your father is out of the question, they won't be afraid to follow you wholeheartedly."

2 Samuel 16:22, 23
So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house; and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all

Israel. And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.

Here we see the fulfillment of 2 Samuel 12:11, 12 when Nathan the prophet said, "Because you have taken the wife of your neighbor, your wives shall be taken in the sight of your countrymen."

Was Ahithophel's counsel righteous and holy? No. But it was clever, cunning, and pragmatic.

17 **2 Samuel 17:1–3**

Moreover Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night: And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only: And I will bring back all the people unto thee: the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned: so all the people shall be in peace.

"Now is the time to strike," Ahithophel said. "David's on the run. He's tired. He's weary. We can crush him with a small force of 12,000 men."

2 Samuel 17:4

And the saying pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel.

Strategically, this again was excellent counsel.

2 Samuel 17:5–13

Then said Absalom, Call now Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear likewise what he saith. And when Hushai was come to Absalom, Absalom spake unto him, saying, Ahithophel hath spoken after this manner: shall we do after his saying? if not; speak thou. And Hushai said unto Absalom, The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at this time. For, said Hushai, thou knowest thy father and his men, that they be mighty men,

and they be chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field: and thy father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people. Behold, he is hid now in some pit, or in some other place: and it will come to pass, when some of them be overthrown at the first, that whosoever heareth it will say, There is a slaughter among the people that follow Absalom. And he also that is valiant, whose heart is as the heart of a lion, shall utterly melt: for all Israel knoweth that thy father is a mighty man, and they which be with him are valiant men. Therefore I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered unto thee, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude; and that thou go to battle in thine own person. So shall we come upon him in some place where he shall be found, and we will light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground: and of him and of all the men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one. Moreover, if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river, until there be not one small stone found there.

Double Agent Hushai said, "David is as angry as a mother bear robbed of her cubs. Therefore, let's wait. Let's gather troops from Dan to Beer-sheba, from north to south, and pursue him when his passion has cooled."

2 Samuel 17:14
And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom.

In 2 Samuel 15:31, David prayed that Ahithophel would give foolish counsel. Ahithophel's counsel, however, was brilliant.

God does not need our advice, gang. He doesn't need us to figure out the situation. I can't tell you how thankful I am that Jesus Christ ever lives to make intercession for the saints (Hebrews 7:25). This means that right now, at the right hand of the Father, my Lord Jesus is saying, "Father, what Jon means is . . ." The older I get in the Lord, the more I understand the

foolishness of presumption—of dictating to the Lord what He must do or how He must work—and the wisdom of saying, "Father, You know what's right in this situation. Here's what I think, but only You know what's right. Therefore, *Thy* kingdom come, Lord. *Thy* will be done."

2 Samuel 17:15, 16
Then said Hushai unto Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, Thus and thus did Ahithophel counsel Absalom and the elders of Israel; and thus and thus have I counselled. Now therefore send quickly, and tell David, saying, Lodge not this night in the plains of the wilderness, but speedily pass over; lest the king be swallowed up, and all the people that are with him.

Hushai sent a message to David, saying, "I've bought you some time, David. Now split."

2 Samuel 17:17–22
Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz stayed by Enrogel; for they might not be seen to come into the city: and a wench went and told them; and they went and told king David. Nevertheless a lad saw them, and told Absalom: but they went both of them away quickly, and came to a man's house in Bahurim, which had a well in his court; whither they went down. And the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground corn thereon; and the thing was not known. And when Absalom's servants came to the woman to the house, they said, Where is Ahimaaz and Jonathan? And the woman said unto them, They be gone over the brook of water. And when they had sought and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem. And it came to pass, after they were departed, that they came up out of the well, and went and told king David, and said unto David, Arise, and pass quickly over the water: for thus hath Ahithophel counselled against you. Then David arose, and all the people that were with him, and they passed over Jordan: by the morning light there lacked not one of them that was not gone over Jordan.

I am reminded of Rahab, another brave woman who hid two spies, and saved her own life in the process (Joshua 2).

2 Samuel 17:23
And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father.

When Ahithophel realized Absalom was not going to take his counsel, he knew David would eventually return to power, and that he would be hung as a traitor.

Why was Ahithophel so intent on bringing David down? In 2 Samuel 23:34, we read that Ahithophel had a son named Eliam. In 2 Samuel 11:3, we read that Eliam had a daughter named Bathsheba. This means Ahithophel was the grandfather of Bathsheba—the same Bathsheba whose husband David ordered to be killed in battle (2 Samuel 11:15). Now, it's eleven years later and evidently feelings of bitterness had been festering in Ahithophel's soul.

If I allow bitterness to be under the surface of the soil of my soul, it will eventually bear murderous fruit. It might take a month, a year, or eleven years to surface, but surface it will.

> Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.
>
> Ephesians 4:31, 32

Was Ahithophel's anger justified? Yes. But although he had a reason to be angry, he couldn't afford the price, for his anger cost him his life.

"How many times shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him," asked Peter. "Seven times?" I'm sure Peter felt smug about this, for, based on Amos 1:3, the rabbis taught one was required to forgive someone only three times. Jesus, however, told Peter he was to forgive not seven times, but 490 times—more times than a person was able to keep track of (Matthew 18).

It has been said that bitterness is like swallowing a bottle of poison, and waiting for the other person to die. David doesn't die in this story. Ahithophel does.

Like Ahithophel, Jesus came to us with wise counsel. But, as collective humanity, we rejected His counsel. Ahithophel saddled an ass. So did Jesus. Ahithophel rode into the city. So did Jesus. Ahithophel put his household in order. Jesus went to the Upper Room and gave instructions to His disciples. Ahithophel hanged himself. Jesus went willingly to the Cross, where He, too, hung for you and me. Ahithophel was buried in a sepulchre. Jesus was placed in a sepulchre. But, unlike Ahithophel, Jesus rose again.

I might have reason to be upset or bitter. But I can either be hung up by my bitterness, or I can see that Jesus took the reason for my bitterness upon Himself. We need not be bitter with anyone because Jesus understands our hurt, and it killed Him. Happy indeed is the man whose sins are forgiven (Romans 4:7), not only the sins he's committed, but also the sins committed toward him. The gospel frees us not only from our own sin, but also from the sin round about us. And I'm so glad.

2 Samuel 17:24–26
Then David came to Mahanaim. And Absalom passed over Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him. And Absalom made Amasa captain of the host instead of Joab: which Amasa was a man's son, whose name was Ithra an Israelite, that went in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister to Zeruiah Joab's mother. So Israel and Absalom pitched in the land of Gilead.

David and Absalom both readied for battle. But God sent three special men uniquely to David . . .

2 Samuel 17:27–29
And it came to pass, when David was come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim, Brought beds, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse, And honey, and butter, and sheep, and

cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat: for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness.

Shobi was the son of Nahash. His brother was Hanun, who shaved the beards and cut the garments of David's servants (2 Samuel 10). David, in turn, waged war against him. Therefore, Shobi could have easily said, "Me help David? No way. He killed my family." But he didn't.

Machir was the man who hid and cared for Mephibosheth for many years. Therefore, he could have said, "Me help David? I've been taking care of a crippled guy for years. It's someone else's turn to help." But he didn't.

Barzillai, as we'll see two chapters from now, was eighty years old at this time. He could have said, "Me haul beds and earthen vessels, grain and honey, sheep and cheese? I'm too old." But he didn't.

These are the same three excuses I hear and can give all too easily. "I'm hurt because Brother so and so ignored me." Or, "I helped last time. It's someone else's turn." Or, "I've done my time. I've paid my dues. I deserve a rest."

Shobi, Machir, and Barzillai realized now wasn't the time to back out but to press on. Time is short, precious people. "Feed My sheep," Jesus said (John 21). Therefore, if you love Jesus Christ, be like Shobi, Machir, and Barzillai. Go where people are hungry and weary. Go to the wilderness and give.



18 2 Samuel 18:1, 2 (a)

And David numbered the people that were with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them. And David sent forth a third part of the people under the hand of Joab, and a third part under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and a third part under the hand of Ittai the Gittite . . .

Because Ittai was willing to simply walk *with* David, he was given the honor of working *for* David.

2 Samuel 18:2 (b)
. . . And the king said unto the people, I will surely go forth with you myself also.

"I will surely go forth with you myself," David said.

"Lo, I am with you always," says our Greater than David (Matthew 28:20).

2 Samuel 18:3, 4
But the people answered, Thou shalt not go forth: for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us: but now thou art worth ten thousand of us: therefore now it is better that thou succour us out of the city. And the king said unto them, What seemeth you best I will do. And the king stood by the gate side, and all the people came out by hundreds and by thousands.

"What seemeth you best I will do." David—a man who had been given more authority than anyone in the known world—was also a man of true submission.

2 Samuel 18:5–8
And the king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom. And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom. So the people went out into the field against Israel: and the battle was in the wood of Ephraim; Where the people of Israel were slain before the servants of David, and there was there a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand men. For the battle was there scattered over the face of all the country: and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.

The battle between Absalom's and David's forces took place in a heavily wooded area. In the hubbub and fury of battle, more men were wounded by the trees and brush than by the sword.

2 Samuel 18:9

And Absalom met the servants of David. And Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth; and the mule that was under him went away.

Astride a mule, Absalom's hair got caught in the bough of a tree. Absalom's hair was his source of pride. Thus, it was his point of pride that brought him down.

2 Samuel 18:10–13

And a certain man saw it, and told Joab, and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak. And Joab said unto the man that told him, And, behold, thou sawest him, and why didst thou not smite him there to the ground? and I would have given thee ten shekels of silver, and a girdle. And the man said unto Joab, Though I should receive a thousand shekels of silver in mine hand, yet would I not put forth mine hand against the king's son: for in our hearing the king charged thee and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Beware that none touch the young man Absalom. Otherwise I should have wrought falsehood against mine own life: for there is no matter hid from the king, and thou thyself wouldest have set thyself against me.

"Why didn't you kill Absalom when you saw him stuck in the tree?" Joab asked one of the men.

"Had I killed him, you would have come down on me," the man wisely answered, "for the wish of the king was that Absalom live."

2 Samuel 18:14

Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak.

Joab shot three arrows in Absalom's heart. Thus, the man who once stole hearts was now stilled in his heart (2 Samuel 15:6).

2 Samuel 18:15–17
And ten young men that bare Joab's armour compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him. And Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing after Israel: for Joab held back the people. And they took Absalom, and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him: and all Israel fled every one to his tent.

Absalom ends up in a pit. And whenever you or I attempt to rebel or manipulate, whenever we seek our own kingdom rather than the kingdom of God, the result will always be the same. We'll always end up in a pit. Always. David was a man who learned this lesson. "I will not touch the Lord's anointed," he said, "be it Saul or Shimei." Oh, that we would learn the lesson of letting *God* work.

2 Samuel 18:18
Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king's dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place.

During his life, Absalom erected to himself a huge monument of stones. In his death, a pile of stones was heaped over his body. We read in Deuteronomy 21:18–21 that rebellious sons were to be stoned to death. After Absalom was thrown into a pit, stones were thrown upon him, a fulfillment of the regulation given in Deuteronomy.

2 Samuel 18:19, 20
Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, Let me now run, and bear the king tidings, how that the LORD hath avenged him of his enemies. And Joab said unto him, Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings another day: but this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the king's son is dead.

Zadok was the priest. His son, Ahimaaz, was eager to tell David the news that Absalom was dead. David's general, Joab, however, didn't want Ahimaaz to carry the message to David. Why? When David got the message concerning Saul's death, the messenger was killed (2 Samuel 1:13–15). The same thing happened when Ishbosheth was murdered (2 Samuel 4:12). Therefore, knowing the stakes were high, Joab denied the request of Ahimaaz.

2 Samuel 18:21–23 (a)
Then said Joab to Cushi, Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And Cushi bowed himself unto Joab, and ran. Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab, But howsoever, let me, I pray thee, also run after Cushi. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready? But howsoever, said he, let me run. And he said unto him, Run . . .

Instead of Ahimaaz, Joab appointed a man named Cushi to carry news to David of his son's death. Ahimaaz, however, wouldn't let up. So Joab finally gave him permission.

2 Samuel 18:23 (b)–26
. . . Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and overran Cushi. And David sat between the two gates: and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold a man running alone. And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king said, If he be alone, there is tidings in his mouth. And he came apace, and drew near. And the watchman saw another man running: and the watchman called unto the porter, and said, Behold another man running alone. And the king said, He also bringeth tidings.

Had there been a host of men running, David would have known his troops had been defeated and were running for their lives. Two men, however, signaled not defeat but news.

2 Samuel 18:27–32

And the watchman said, Me thinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings. And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king, and said, Blessed be the LORD thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king. And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was. And the king said unto him, Turn aside, and stand here. And he turned aside, and stood still. And, behold, Cushi came; and Cushi said, Tidings, my lord the king: for the LORD hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee. And the king said unto Cushi, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cushi answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is.

Two runners set out. Ahimaaz arrived first and David said, "Tell me, is Absalom alright?"

"I saw some commotion—but I don't really know," said Ahimaaz.

"Stand aside," David said. And he waited until Cushi showed up with the full story.

Are you an Ahimaaz, or are you a Cushi? Are you one who is zealous and eager, but lacking the full message? The Bible warns against zeal without knowledge (Romans 10:2), about people who are zealous to serve the Lord but who lack maturity in Him. That is why it's important that we study to show ourselves approved unto God, workmen that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15), so that when we get to the scene, we have something to say.

What is the message the Lord has given you? If you are doubtful, I encourage you to ask Him for clarity of vision so that you would know precisely what He's calling you to do. "Write the vision," the Lord told Habakkuk, "and make it so plain that even those running by can understand it" (Habakkuk 2:2). Habakkuk was given a very clear vision, but it came only

after he sought the Lord with fervency and expectancy (Habakkuk 2:2). There is no way to receive vision or understanding apart from seeking the Lord.

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

David was greatly grieved, deeply distressed. Why? When David's child borne by Bathsheba died after seven days, David didn't weep. He simply said, "He cannot be with me, but I will one day be with him (see 2 Samuel 12:23). I believe David had a different understanding here. That is, he knew Absalom was a rebellious, unregenerate son. I believe he sensed Absalom was lost for eternity. And it broke his heart.



19 **2 Samuel 19:1–7**
And it was told Joab, Behold, the king weepeth and mourneth for Ab salom. And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son. And the people gat them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle. But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son! And Joab came into the house to the king, and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines; In that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well. Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by the LORD, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night:

and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until now.

"Snap out of it," Joab said to David. "Don't you understand that your people placed their lives on the line for you, yet all they see is that you're moaning and groaning. If you don't wipe the tears from your eyes and wash your face, they will desert you by nightfall.

Our outlook affects others. Therefore, if you are a servant of Jesus Christ, if you are committed to the King, you must not allow yourself the pampered privilege of being discouraged.

When Aaron's sons were killed, the Lord said to him, "Others may mourn, but you cannot for you are anointed (Leviticus 10:6). You have a job to do." And Aaron continued on in ministry.

If the anointing is on your life, you don't have the "right" to pout and whimper. Discouragement, depression, and defeat are instruments the enemy will seek to use to affect your family, friends, and community. It is the mature saint who says, "It's time for me to grow up and to cast my care not upon those around me, but upon the Lord solely" (1 Peter 5:7).

"I have *learned* in whatever state I am to be content," Paul said (Philippians 4:11, italics added). Contentment is the result of a decision you make with your mind rather than a feeling you have in your heart. God intervened on David's behalf. The rebels were defeated. The kingdom was spared. Yet all David could see was that his son was dead.

2 Samuel 19:8
Then the king arose, and sat in the gate. And they told unto all the people, saying, Behold, the king doth sit in the gate. And all the people came before the king: for Israel had fled every man to his tent.

Eventually, David changed his mind and his outlook. We must do the same. Every one of us is blessed beyond words. Every day we awake, we choose either to see burdens or blessings, gaffes or gifts, Absalom or the kingdom. And the choice we make affects everyone around us.

2 Samuel 19:9–13

And all the people were at strife throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, The king saved us out of the hand of our enemies, and he delivered us out of the hand of the Philistines; and now he is fled out of the land for Absalom. And Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back? And king David sent to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, saying, Speak unto the elders of Judah, saying, Why are ye the last to bring the king back to his house? seeing the speech of all Israel is come to the king, even to his house. Ye are my brethren, ye are my bones and my flesh: wherefore then are ye the last to bring back the king? And say ye to Amasa, Art thou not of my bone, and of my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if thou be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Joab.

"The rebellion is over! Bring back the king!" said the people of Israel. And David extends grace by naming Amasa as his general, for Amasa, David's nephew, had been Absalom's general.

2 Samuel 19:14–20

And he bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, even as the heart of one man; so that they sent this word unto the king, Return thou, and all thy servants. So the king returned, and came to Jordan. And Judah came to Gilgal, to go to meet the king, to conduct the king over Jordan. And Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite, which was of Bahurim, hasted and came down with the men of Judah to meet king David. And there were a thousand men of Benjamin with him, and Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him; and they went over Jordan before the king. And there went over a ferry boat to carry over the king's household, and to do what he thought good. And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was come over Jordan; And said unto the king, Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his

heart. For thy servant doth know that I have sinned: therefore, behold, I am come the first this day of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king.

As David returned to Jerusalem, Shimei was one of the first to greet him, saying, "I'm sorry I threw rocks at you and cursed you and mocked you. No hard feelings, I hope."

2 Samuel 19:21–23 (a)
But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD's anointed? And David said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me? shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel?

Once again, Abishai asked permission to kill Shimei. And once again, David denied his request (2 Samuel 16:10).

2 Samuel 19:23 (b)
. . . for do not I know that I am this day king over Israel? Therefore the king said unto Shimei, Thou shalt not die. And the king sware unto him.

"I know who I am," David said. "I know what God has called me to do. I don't need to defend my position." Over the years, I have noticed that the most secure individuals, like David, are those least likely to cut down others.

2 Samuel 19:24
And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace.

All the while David was gone, Mephibosheth was sad. I think I know how he felt, for I, too, am looking forward to the King coming back—when

all arguments will be settled, all relationships will be right. I miss Jesus and long for His return.

2 Samuel 19:25–28
And it came to pass, when he was come to Jerusalem to meet the king, that the king said unto him, Wherefore wentest not thou with me, Mephibosheth? And he answered, My lord, O king, my servant deceived me: for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass, that I may ride thereon, and go to the king; because thy servant is lame. And he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king; but my lord the king is as an angel of God: do therefore what is good in thine eyes. For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king: yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table. What right therefore have I yet to cry any more unto the king?

When David asked why Mephibosheth didn't join him in exile, Mephibosheth said, "I wanted to go with you. I saddled a donkey so that I could go with you. Ziba lied when he told you I wanted to rebel against you. Nothing could be further from the truth, for I owe my very life to you."

2 Samuel 19:29
And the king said unto him, Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land.

In telling Mephibosheth to share his inheritance with Ziba, was David saying, "Yes, Ziba slandered you. But split the land anyway and let bygones be bygones"? No. David is showing wisdom in the same way his son, Solomon, would show wisdom. When two women came before Solomon with one living baby, both claiming the baby as their own, Solomon said, "Divide the baby. You may each have half." It was the real mother who said, "No! Let her have it. I give up my rights so that my baby might live" (1 Kings 3).

2 Samuel 19:30

And Mephibosheth said unto the king, Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house.

When Mephibosheth said to David, "I don't care about the land. I'm just glad you're back," David knew it was Mephibosheth who had been telling the truth all along. It was the fact that Mephibosheth desired the giver more than the gifts that showed his true allegiance.

What about us? Do we say to our King, "I don't care about gifts. I just want You"?

2 Samuel 19:31, 32
And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim, and went over Jordan with the king, to conduct him over Jordan. Now Barzillai was a very aged man, even fourscore years old: and he had provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim; for he was a very great man.

Barzillai, who had brought goods to David when he was fleeing, now comes to meet David upon his return to Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 19:33
And the king said unto Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem.

"Come with me and you can dine in my palace," a grateful David said to Barzillai.

2 Samuel 19:34–39
And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old: and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why

should the king recompense it me with such a reward? Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother. But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee. And the king answered, Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which shall seem good unto thee: and whatsoever thou shalt require of me, that will I do for thee. And all the people went over Jordan. And when the king was come over, the king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned unto his own place.

2 Samuel 19:40–43
Then the king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him: and all the people of Judah conducted the king, and also half the people of Israel. And, behold, all the men of Israel came to the king, and said unto the king, Why have our brethren the men of Judah stolen thee away, and have brought the king, and his household, and all David's men with him, over Jordan? And all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, Because the king is near of kin to us: wherefore then be ye angry for this matter? have we eaten at all of the king's cost? or hath he given us any gift? And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more right in David than ye: why then did ye despise us, that our advice should not be first had in bringing back our king? And the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

"Why do you get to escort David across the Jordan?" the ten northern tribes asked the tribe of Judah.

"Because he's our relative," Judah answered.

"Well, we were the first to want him back," countered the ten northern tribes.

This cracks me up because only a few weeks earlier, they were fighting *against* David and here, they're fighting *over* him.

When you're serving Jesus and ministering to people, know this: The same people who one week cried, "Hosanna!" the next week cried, "Crucify Him!" Unfortunately, we all have these tendencies because the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). That is why Paul said it was the love of Christ that constrained, or motivated him (2 Corinthians 5:14). If you're in ministry for the love of people, you won't last because people change their minds. If you're in ministry for the love of the lost, what will happen is, like Jeremiah, you preach and teach and witness for thirty years to your friends and neighbors, and not one person gets saved? The only true motivation for ministry must be your love for Jesus, regardless of peoples' response and reaction.



20 It has been rightly said that there is no furlough from the fight of faith. There are no breaks in the battle in which we are engaged. It is good for us to realize that there is no real resting place until we are taken home to be with Jesus. In our story, David has put down a rebellion led by his son and has put up with a squabble between the ten northern tribes and the southern tribe of Judah. Now he is about to be put through yet another rebellion. Therefore, we should not be surprised when we find ourselves going through multiple difficulties. Not very much time passes before you, like David, will be rudely reminded that this world is not your home . . .

2 Samuel 20:1, 2
And there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite: and he blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel. So every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri: but the men of Judah clave unto their king, from Jordan even to Jerusalem.

When the ten northern tribes of Israel were offended because Judah alone escorted David back into power, Sheba sought to exploit the situation.

"David doesn't care about us," he said, "so let's rebel against him."

2 Samuel 20:3
And David came to his house at Jerusalem; and the king took the ten women his concubines, whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in ward, and fed them, but went not in unto them. So they were shut up unto the day of their death, living in widowhood.

From this point on, David will gather to himself no more wives or concubines. The heartache in his home and the turmoil in his kingdom seem to cause him to settle down. At over fifty years of age, it's about time.

2 Samuel 20:4–6
Then said the king to Amasa, Assemble me the men of Judah within three days, and be thou here present. So Amasa went to assemble the men of Judah: but he tarried longer than the set time which he had appointed him. And David said to Abishai, Now shall Sheba the son of Bichri do us more harm than did Absalom: take thou thy lord's servants, and pursue after him, lest he get him fenced cities, and escape us.

Amasa had been Absalom's general. After Absalom died, David graciously offered Amasa the position of general of his army. Here, Amasa raises suspicions by seemingly going "AWOL." So David sends Abishai to put down Sheba's uprising.

2 Samuel 20:7–10
And there went out after him Joab's men, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men: and they went out of Jerusalem, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri. When they were at the great stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa went before them. And Joab's garment that he had put on was girded unto him, and upon it a girdle with a sword fastened upon his loins in the sheath thereof; and as he went forth it fell out. And Joab said to Amasa, Art thou in health, my brother? And Joab took Amasa

by the beard with the right hand to kiss him. But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand: so he smote him therewith in the fifth rib, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again; and he died. So Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Bichri.

Joab goes to seemingly join forces with Amasa. Remember, it was Joab's position as general that Amasa took. And it was Joab's intent to assassinate his replacement.

Like Joab's sword, the Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). But let us remember the sword is not to be used in battle against other brothers. Rather, it is to be used in battle against the enemy. I think we should be increasingly cautious against allowing our sword just to happen to fall out and our spiritual prowess to be seen in proving a point, in cutting down, or bringing hurt to a brother. I am tired of Christians using the Bible against one another.

2 Samuel 20:11
And one of Joab's men stood by him, and said, He that favoureth Joab, and he that is for David, let him go after Joab.

"If you're for David, follow Joab." This still happens today. "Whoever is for Jesus Christ and the MX Missile, stand up!" Or, "Whoever is for Jesus Christ and the Republican Party, stand up!" People have a tendency to link Jesus with political or social issues. I think we need to be extremely wary of this kind of linkage.

2 Samuel 20:12–15
And Amasa wallowed in blood in the midst of the highway. And when the man saw that all the people stood still, he removed Amasa out of the highway into the field, and cast a cloth upon him, when he saw that every one that came by him stood still. When he was removed out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri. And he went through all the tribes of Israel unto Abel, and to Beth-maachah, and all the Berites: and they were gathered together, and went

also after him. And they came and besieged him in Abel of Beth-maachah, and they cast up a bank against the city, and it stood in the trench: and all the people that were with Joab battered the wall, to throw it down.

Sheba takes his rebellion to a city called Abel. The men of Joab surround the city and begin to batter down the walls.

2 Samuel 20:16
Then cried a wise woman out of the city, Hear, hear; say, I pray you, unto Joab, Come near hither, that I may speak with thee.

The city was about to be destroyed when a wise woman appeared. Praise the Lord for wise women!

2 Samuel 20:17–19
And when he was come near unto her, the woman said, Art thou Joab? And he answered, I am he. Then she said unto him, Hear the words of thine handmaid. And he answered, I do hear. Then she spake, saying, They were wont to speak in old time, saying, They shall surely ask counsel at Abel: and so they ended the matter. I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel: thou seekest to destroy a city and a mother in Israel: why wilt thou swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?

"Our city is a peaceful city, " said the woman. "We're known for our abilities to negotiate rather than fight."

2 Samuel 20:20–22
And Joab answered and said, Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy. The matter is not so: but a man of mount Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, hath lifted up his hand against the king, even against David: deliver him only, and I will depart from the city. And the woman said unto Joab, Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee over the wall. Then the woman went unto all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off

the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and cast it out to Joab. And he blew a trumpet, and they retired from the city, every man to his tent. And Joab returned to Jerusalem unto the king.

Sheba wanted to get ahead, but he ended up losing his head. In our attempts to get ahead, we can end up totally missing the boat. Seek to serve, not to be served. Seek to understand, not to be understood. Seek to give, not to receive.

2 Samuel 20:23–26
Now Joab was over all the host of Israel: and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and over the Pelethites: And Adoram was over the tribute: and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder: And Sheva was scribe: and Zadok and Abiathar were the priests: And Ira also the Jairite was a chief ruler about David.

The chapter ends with a record of the organization of David's government.



21

2 Samuel 21:1 (a)
Then there was a famine in the days of David . . .

Scientists tell us famine is usually the result of changes in climate, from planetary disturbances to sunspot storms. But the simplest believer has a huge advantage over the scientific scholar, for he knows that nothing can happen apart from the Lord allowing it to happen. Climatic changes are all secondary. Primary is the fact that God is in control.

2 Samuel 21:1 (b)
. . . three years, year after year; and David inquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered . . .

It's interesting to me that David waited for three years before inquiring of the Lord. I wonder how many difficulties we go through, how many dry spells we endure all because we do not diligently inquire of the Lord. The Lord was waiting for David to ask, and when he asked, the Lord answered.

2 Samuel 21:1 (c)
. . . It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.

When the Israelites first entered the Promised Land, they wiped out all of the Canaanites, according to the plan of God. One group, however, the Gibeonites tricked Joshua into signing a peace treaty with them. The result was that the Gibeonites became servants to the Israelites. When Saul became king, he attempted to break the treaty, and God took note. Forty years later, the effects of that sin were felt in Israel. Time does not lessen the effects of sin. Our God is incredibly patient. After all, He gave the Canaanites four hundred years to repent. But don't mistake the patience of God for impotence or apathy. He doesn't judge quickly, but He does judge thoroughly.

2 Samuel 21:2–9
And the king called the Gibeonites, and said unto them; (now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the children of Israel had sworn unto them: and Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah.) Wherefore David said unto the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the LORD? And the Gibeonites said unto him, We will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of his house; neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel. And he said, What ye shall say, that will I do for you. And they answered the king, The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel, Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, whom the LORD did choose. And the king said, I will give them. But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of

Saul, because of the LORD's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. But the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bare unto Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite: And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the LORD: and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest.

To right the wrong Saul had perpetrated upon the Gibeonites, seven of Saul's grandsons were given to the Gibeonites, who hung them on a tree. Seven represents the number of completion. In this, we see the household of Saul being judged because of Saul's sin. Sin will catch up with us sooner or later. It will come to completion. It's unavoidable.

2 Samuel 21:10–14
And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night. And it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done. And David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabesh-gilead, which had stolen them from the street of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa: And he brought up from thence the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the bones of them that were hanged. And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish his father: and they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God was intreated for the land.

The bodies of Saul's grandsons were left hanging on the tree. One of the mothers stood by for six months, watching the decay take place, fighting off the birds, chasing away the animals of prey. When David heard about this, he ordered the bodies cut down and the bones taken, along with Saul's and Jonathan's, to be buried.

If we or anyone we know is in a time of difficulty, we must seek the Lord because there is very likely sin involved, sin that brings dryness, drought, and famine . . .

> There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the dis-quietness of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee. My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me. My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off. Forsake me not, O LORD: O my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation.
>
> Psalm 38:3–11, 21, 22

When was this Psalm penned? At a time when David himself was living in unconfessed sin. It took a year for David to say, "Father, I have sinned against You." Before he confessed, his heart was heavy, his sparkle was gone, his bones were weary. Life was a drag. When he confessed, his spirit was restored.

It's so simple. Why do we go month after month or even day after day wondering why we're so dry without saying, like David did, "Lord, search my heart"? It is when we do this that we will see the joy of our salvation restored, the rains of revival falling upon our soul.

2 Samuel 21:15, 16

Moreover the Philistines had yet war again with Israel; and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines: and David waxed faint. And Ishbi-benob, which was of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of brass in weight, he being girded with a new sword, thought to have slain David.

Here's David, fighting against a guy who carried a spear weighing thirty pounds. A college shot-put weighs sixteen pounds. Therefore, I can't fathom throwing a thirty-pound spear. This guy was powerful!

2 Samuel 21:17–22
But Abishai the son of Zeruiah succoured him, and smote the Philistine, and killed him. Then the men of David sware unto him, saying, Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel. And it came to pass after this, that there was again a battle with the Philistines at Gob: then Sibbechai the Hushathite slew Saph, which was of the sons of the giant. And there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, a Bethlehemite, slew the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. And there was yet a battle in Gath, where was a man of great stature, that had on every hand six fingers, and on every foot six toes, four and twenty in number; and he also was born to the giant. And when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea the brother of David slew him. These four were born to the giant in Gath, and fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants.

Even at the end of his life, David was still fighting giants. Make no mistake, dear brother and sister—the Christian walk does not necessarily get easier. There are giants all the way to the end.



2 Samuel 22:1

22 And David spake unto the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul:

In Psalm 18, recorded here in chapter 22, we feel the spiritual pulse of a man who is called a man after God's heart . . .

Paul reaches back to this Psalm himself in Romans and applies it to Jesus Christ.

2 Samuel 22:2–4

And he said, The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence. I will call on the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.

At the end of his life, David thinks back about how God has given him victory over his enemies

2 Samuel 22:5–20

When the waves of death compassed me, the floods of ungodly men made me afraid; The sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me; In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God: and he did hear my voice out of his temple, and my cry did enter into his ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of heaven moved and shook, because he was wroth. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down; and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: and he was seen upon the wings of the wind. And he made darkness pavilions round about him, dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies. Through the brightness before him were coals of fire kindled. The LORD thundered from heaven, and the most High uttered his

voice. And he sent out arrows, and scattered them; lightning, and discomfited them. And the channels of the sea appeared, the foundations of the world were discovered, at the rebuking of the LORD, at the blast of the breath of his nostrils. He sent from above, he took me; he drew me out of many waters; He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them that hated me: for they were too strong for me. They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place: he delivered me, because he delighted in me.

Why is this Psalm repeated in two places? I suggest one is for the purpose of history, the other for the purpose of prophecy. The 2 Samuel rendering recounts the history of king David. The Psalm 18 rendering speaks of the life and work of our Greater than David, Jesus Christ.

2 Samuel 22:21, 22
The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness: according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God.

In this Psalm, David says, "The Lord has rewarded me because I have not violated his way." What? As I read the life of David, I see lies, adultery, and murder. What, then, is going on? In Psalm 38 and Psalm 51, we hear David acknowledge what a wretch he is, how he has failed the Lord. Before the Lord, he admits his sin. But here, in the presence of his enemies, he says he is righteous.

This is the way it must be. You see, the closer I get to God, the more I am aware of how far I am from Him, of attitudes that are amiss, of activities that are wrong. In the presence of my enemy, however, the accuser of the brethren who accuses me day and night, I say, "Back off. The Word of God says I am the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus" (2 Corinthians 5:21; Revelation 12:10).

You'll never be used by the Lord; you'll never develop a deep relationship with Him until you learn that you are righteous in Christ Jesus. When He died on the Cross and said, "It is finished," it was finished indeed.

The price for every sin you have ever committed or will commit has been paid.

Satan's favorite weapon is condemnation. Therefore, he will tell you that you can't be used, that you can't go on, but you can overcome him by the Word.

2 Samuel 22:23–51

For all his judgments were before me: and as for his statutes, I did not depart from them. I was also upright before him, and have kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore the LORD hath recompensed me according to my righteousness; according to my cleanness in his eye sight. With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful, and with the upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself unsavoury. And the afflicted people thou wilt save: but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayest bring them down. With the pure thou wilt shew For thou art my lamp, O LORD: and the LORD will lighten my darkness. For by thee I have run through a troop: by my God have I leaped over a wall. As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him. For who is God, save the LORD? and who is a rock, save our God? God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hinds' feet: and setteth me upon my high places. He teacheth my hands to war; so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms. Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy gentleness hath made me great. Thou hast enlarged my steps under me; so that my feet did not slip. I have pursued mine enemies, and destroyed them; and turned not again until I had consumed them. And I have consumed them, and wounded them, that they could not arise: yea, they are fallen under my feet. For thou hast girded me with strength to battle: them that rose up against me hast thou subdued under me. Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies, that I might destroy them that hate me. They looked, but there was none to save; even unto the LORD, but he answered them not. Then did I

beat them as small as the dust of the earth, I did stamp them as the mire of the street, and did spread them abroad. Thou also hast delivered me from the strivings of my people, thou hast kept me to be head of the heathen: a people which I knew not shall serve me. Strangers shall submit themselves unto me: as soon as they hear, they shall be obedient unto me. Strangers shall fade away, and they shall be afraid out of their close places. The LORD liveth; and blessed be my rock; and exalted be the God of the rock of my And that bringeth me forth from mine enemies: thou also hast lifted me up on high above them that rose up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man. Therefore I will give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and I will sing praises unto thy name. He is the tower of salvation for his king: and sheweth mercy to his anointed, unto David, and to his seed for evermore.

These are the last words of David. His last words glorified God and edified people. May our words do the same.



23 **2 Samuel 23:1–8**

Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow. But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands: But the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff

of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place. These be the names of the mighty men whom David had: The Tachmonite that sat in the seat, chief among the captains; the same was Adino the Eznite: he lift up his spear against eight hundred, whom he slew at one time.

Three of David's mighty men are singled out. The first is Adino. He lifted up his spear eight hundred times and killed eight hundred. That's a lot of lifting!

If you desire to be mighty for God, the first prerequisite is that you be a person of prayer—lifting up your hands eight hundred times if necessary until the enemy is defeated. On the mountain, Moses lifted up his hands in prayer as Joshua fought the enemy in the valley below (Exodus 17).

To be a mighty man of god, you must be a man of prayer. This is a problem for many believers. "Why should I have to keep praying?" they say. "Why doesn't the Lord hear my prayer the first time and answer immediately?" I suggest the reason is because it is only as I pray repeatedly about a situation that I find my request wasn't the issue at all, that spending time with the Lord was the need of my soul.

2 Samuel 23:9, 10
And after him was Eleazar the son of Dodo the Ahohite, one of the three mighty men with David, when they defied the Philistines that were there gathered together to battle, and the men of Israel were gone away: He arose, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword: and the LORD wrought a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to spoil.

The second prerequisite for those who wish to be mighty men and women of God is to be one whose hand cleaves to the sword. Eleazar held on so tightly that his hand molded around the sword.

Are you wearing your Bibles out? I hope so. You must be in the Word consistently and continuously. You cannot grow unless you're taking in consistent Bible teaching and Bible study. Faith comes by hearing and

hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Your faith grows stronger as you take in the nutrients and spiritual calories of the meat of the Word.

2 Samuel 23:11, 12
And after him was Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered together into a troop, where was a piece of ground full of lentiles: and the people fled from the Philistines. But he stood in the midst of the ground, and defended it, and slew the Philistines: and the LORD wrought a great victory.

The third prerequisite to be used by God, as seen in Shammah's life, is faithfulness in service. Shammah's job was to guard the beans. When the Philistines attacked, everyone else ran for their lives. Not Shammah. He said, "I have a job to do. Even if I die, I'm going to guard the beans." And because he was faithful in service, he became a mighty man of God.

What has the Lord given you to do? Maybe your job is to change diapers in the nursery, to serve in the rest home, or to teach third grade Sunday school. Stand your ground even when everyone else splits. Be like Shammah —until the King releases you, stick with your job.

Paul says it is required of stewards that they be found faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2). Jesus said the one who is faithful in small things shall be made ruler over great things (Matthew 25:21). God is testing us today. Have we stood our ground? Have we kept our commitment?

2 Samuel 23:13–15
And three of the thirty chief went down, and came to David in the harvest time unto the cave of Adullam: and the troop of the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim. And David was then in an hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem. And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!

During a particular battle, holed up in a hot, stuffy, cave overlooking his hometown, David saw a well, which, no doubt, he drank from frequently as a boy. He could taste the water in his mind. "It would be so nice if I had a

drink of water from that well," he said. But there was a problem. His hometown of Bethlehem was surrounded by the enemy.

David wasn't giving an order. But his mighty men heard what their king was thinking. Do you hear what your King is thinking? It's one thing to obey the commands of Christ. It's something else to hear His heartbeat.

2 Samuel 23:16 (a)
And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem . . .

It was hard to obtain the water from Bethlehem because Bethlehem was surrounded by Philistines.

"The words that I speak to you are spirit and life," Jesus said (John 6:63). The Word of God is where you will draw from the well of the water of the Spirit. I guarantee that when you were most refreshed and doing the very best in the Lord was when you were spending time in the Word. But, like Bethlehem, the Word is surrounded by the enemy. I know the water of the Spirit is in it. But the Philistine of fatigue keeps me away. The Philistines of the phone, of chores, and of lethargy encamp around the Word.

How did the three mighty men break through to get water? The Bible doesn't say because breaking through the Philistines that plague you is something that cannot be programmed or preached. It is up to each one of us to seek the Lord and say, "Father, how do I break through? Show me my schedule, my priorities, my obligations that stand between us." I guarantee that if you ask the Lord to show you how to rearrange your schedule in order to break through the Philistines, He will.

2 Samuel 23:16 (b), 17
. . . that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the LORD. And he said, Be it far from me, O LORD, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it. These things did these three mighty men.

The fourth and final prerequisite is seen in the life of David—that is, worship. David poured out that which was most precious to him. What a creative act of worship. My prayer is that I would sincerely and creatively learn to worship like David.

2 Samuel 23:18, 19
And Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief among three. And he lifted up his spear against three hundred, and slew them, and had the name among three. Was he not most honourable of three? therefore he was their captain: howbeit he attained not unto the first three.

Abishai, the brother of Joab, is noted in this list of mighty men. Is Joab? No. In his day, Joab was more prominent, but in God's economy, Abishai, his younger brother, is noted instead. Things are not always what they seem. That is why I'm convinced that in eternity, there will be glorious surprises.

2 Samuel 23:20 (a)
And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man, of Kabzeel, who had done many acts, he slew two lionlike men of Moab . . .

First, Benaiah killed two lion-like men of Moab. This gave him confidence to do subsequent battle with a real lion. Do you know why you've faced lion-like men today, people who are roaring at you, seeking to devour you? They're preparing you to do battle against the real lion—Satan, who seeks to devour your witness, your faith, and your joy.

2 Samuel 23:20 (b)
. . . he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow:

Benaiah went down into a pit on a snowy day and slew a lion. If you feel like your walk is cold, your surroundings are snow, and you're trapped in a pit, don't throw a "pit-y" party. Get down on your knees and do battle in prayer. That's what Benaiah did.

2 Samuel 23:21, 22

And he slew an Egyptian, a goodly man: and the Egyptian had a spear in his hand; but he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear. These things did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and had the name among three mighty men.

After Benaiah slew lions—symbols of Satan—he slew a man from Egypt, symbolic of the world. How did Benaiah overcome the Egyptian? With the Egyptian's own staff. The staff in Scripture is symbolic of a pilgrim. How do we overcome the world? By being a pilgrim.

The world will have no pull over you if you keep your heart set on things above (Colossians 3:2). When I have blown it, it is invariably because I lost sight of the reality of eternity and was locked in to the immediate situation around me. As long as you have a staff in your hand, the world will lose its pull and power over you. Be a pilgrim—one who is just passing through, one who is headed *home*.

2 Samuel 23:23–39

He was more honourable than the thirty, but he attained not to the first three. And David set him over his guard. Asahel the brother of Joab Shammah the Harodite, Elika the Harodite, Helez the Paltite, Ira the son of Ikkesh the Tekoite, Abiezer the Anethothite, Mebunnai the Hushathite, Zalmon the Ahohite, Maharai the Netophathite, Heleb the son of Baanah, a Netophathite, Ittai the son of Ribai out of Gibeah of the children of Benjamin, Benaiah the Pirathonite, Hiddai of the brooks of Gaash, Abi-albon the Arbathite, Azmaveth the Barhumite, Eliahba the Shaalbonite, of the sons of Jashen, Jonathan, Shammah the Hararite, Ahiam the son of Sharar the Hararite, Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maachathite, Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite, Hezrai the Carmelite, Paarai the Arbite, Igal the son of Nathan of Zobah, Bani the Gadite, Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai the Beerothite, armourbearer to Joab the son of Zeruiah, Ira an Ithrite, Gareb an Ithrite, Uriah the Hittite: thirty and seven in all.

Our King, our Greater than David, Jesus Christ, also has a list of mighty men, men "of whom the world was not worthy"—who, like Uriah, gave their lives in the service of their King (Hebrews 11).



24

2 Samuel 24:1

And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.

If you have a newer translation, it's possible that "he" in this verse is capitalized. That is unfortunate. In the original languages, there are no capital letters. Here, translators added one where it doesn't belong, for in 1 Chronicles 21—the parallel passage to this one—we are told that it wasn't God but Satan who inspired David to number the people.

2 Samuel 24:2, 3

For the king said to Joab the captain of the host, which was with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, and number ye the people, that I may know the number of the people. Joab said unto the king, Now the LORD thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it: but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?

"What are you doing?" asked Joab. "May the Lord increase His people, but why are you numbering them?" Here, David is bowing to the dreaded scourge of statistics, counting the people rather than counting on God for strength.

2 Samuel 24:4–9

Notwithstanding the king's word prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the host. And Joab and the captains of the host went out from the presence of the king, to number the people of Israel. And they passed over Jordan, and pitched in Aroer, on the right side of the city that lieth in the midst of the

river of Gad, and toward Jazer: Then they came to Gilead, and to the land of Tahtimhodshi; and they came to Dan-jaan, and about to Zidon, And came to the strong hold of Tyre, and to all the cities of the Hibites, and of the Canaanites: and they went out to the south of Judah, even to Beer-sheba. So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. And Joab gave up the sum of the number of the people unto the king: and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men that drew the sword; and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men.

The census showed there were 1.3 million fighting men at David's disposal.

2 Samuel 24:10
And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.

In Genesis 22:17, God had promised that His people would be as innumerable as the stars of the heaven, as the sand upon the seashore. Realizing he should have taken God at His Word, David confessed his sin of submitting to the prompting of Satan to get statistics that would swell his pride and make him independent of God.

2 Samuel 24:11, 12
For when David was up in the morning, the word of the LORD came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, Go and say unto David, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee.

The Father will scourge, chasten, punish His children. Why? Because He loves us. When Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, even though he was forgiven by the Lord, he was not allowed to enter back into the Garden of Innocence. When Moses sinned against the Lord in smiting the rock, thereby depicting

the Father as being angry when He wasn't, the Lord prevented him from entering the Promised Land. God forgives His people. He gives peace to His people, but He doesn't pamper them.

> My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.
>
> Hebrews 12:5–8

> **2 Samuel 24:13**
> **So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me.**

For his punishment, David was to choose between seven years of famine, seven months of being chased by his enemies, or three days of plague upon the land.

> **2 Samuel 24:14**
> **And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man.**

The only choice David ruled out was being pursued by his enemies—choosing to place himself in the merciful hands of God rather than in the harsh and cruel hands of man.

> **2 Samuel 24:15–17**
> **So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beer-sheba seventy thousand men. And when the angel**

stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite. And David spake unto the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house.

For the second time in this chapter, David is given another statistic. Hearing that 70,000 people died from the plague, he fell before the Lord and said, "Lord, I have sinned. But what have these people done? I have erred. Why are they bearing the brunt of my punishment?"

Dad, when you take your eyes off the Lord, your family will feel the shock waves and bear the brunt of your sin. Student, when you sin, the kids who are watching you will be hurt. Take heed. When one sins, many are affected.

2 Samuel 24:18–25

And Gad came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite. And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up as the LORD commanded. And Araunah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming on toward him: and Araunah went out, and bowed himself before the king on his face upon the ground. And Araunah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant? And David said, To buy the threshingfloor of thee, to build an altar unto the LORD, that the plague may be stayed from the people. And Araunah said unto David, Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him: behold, here be oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen for wood. All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king. And Araunah said unto the king, The LORD thy God accept thee. And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me

nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the LORD was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.

In this passage, I think we are given understanding and insight into what made David so great. Why was he alone called a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14)? It certainly wasn't because he was sinless, for he had a series of failures that I daresay match or exceed any of ours. In fact, if he were on trial before the Christian community, I suggest the Christian community would have had a tendency to write him off long ago. Saul, on the other hand, would be applauded and approved. Saul, too, made mistakes. But not as seemingly blatant as David's. Therefore, I suggest that, in the eyes of human understanding, Saul would be exalted, and David would be dismissed as one who wasted his potential.

But that wasn't God's verdict. Why? Because God looks at the heart, and David had a heart for God.

"Take the property," Araunah said. "Make your sacrifice so the plague might be stopped. It's free. It's yours."

"I will not give the Lord that which costs me nothing," David said.

Hear the heart of David. "I won't skimp," he said. "I won't cheat God. Yes, I failed Him in the past. But my heart is devoted to Him."

If you want to know the heart of David, read the Psalms. Saul never wrote a single psalm because Saul didn't have a heart for the Lord. Saul was outwardly impressive, but he used the things of God to exalt himself. David, on the other hand, used himself to exalt the things of God. When David penned the Psalms, he didn't know they would be preserved and studied for centuries. He was simply writing love letters. He just loved God.

What would you have done had Araunah come to you and said, "Take the property. Here's the wood for the sacrifice. Here's the oxen. Just take it"?

Would you have said, "Great! I can save a few shekels"? Or do you have a heart like David's, a heart that says, "I will give everything I have, everything I am to the One who gave His all for me"?

Many of us are skimpy and small. We give the Lord the leftovers of our time, of our energy. You might not be committing any moral sin. But God sees

the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). He's looking for men and women who say, "I'm devoted to worshiping the Lord. I'm devoted to extolling and praising Him. I'm devoted to paying the full price."

Although severely chastened again, even at the end of his life, David is still to be exalted by the Lord and acknowledged throughout history as one of the very greatest of all men who ever lived. Why? Because he had a heart after God.

Do you?



1 KINGS

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles are a running commentary on the history of the nation of Israel. Most Bible scholars believe Jeremiah was the one inspired by the Holy Spirit to pen the book before us.

First Kings opens at the end of David's life—with one last difficulty for him to face . . .

1 Kings 1:1
Now king David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat.

At seventy years of age, David is exhausted. He had lived a very full, demanding life.

1 Kings 1:2–4
Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat. So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. And the damsel was very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him: but the king knew her not.

To keep David warm, a virgin was brought in to lie with him. Although this was a common custom of the day, my personal belief is that David knew this was not right in the sight of the Lord, for in the next verse, we see the chastening hand of the Lord upon his life . . .

1 Kings 1:5, 6
Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. And his father had not displeased him at

any time in saying, Why hast thou done so? and he also was a very goodly man; and his mother bare him after Absalom.

Knowing his father was dying, David's son, Adonijah, makes a move to usurp the throne.

1 Kings 1:7
And he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah, and with Abiathar the priest: and they following Adonijah helped him.

Why did Joab and Abiathar side with Adonijah in this rebellion? I suggest it's because Joab and Abiathar were both hurt by David . . .

Following Absalom's rebellion, David appointed Amasa general in Joab's place (2 Samuel 19:13). When Joab killed Amasa, he returned to a position of power, but he knew he was not David's first choice.

Likewise, Abiathar, the priest, was aware of the fact that David had exalted and approved of Zadok above him—as perhaps hinted at by the fact that whenever Abiathar and Zadok's names appear together, Zadok's is always first.

Because Joab and Abiathar had their feelings hurt, they chose to rebel. That is why we must be oh, so careful that we do not allow the "root of bitterness" (Hebrews 12:15) to spring up in the soil of our souls.

"Be ye kind one to another," Paul declared, "tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). No matter who has wronged you, no matter how they have wronged you, forgive them. If you don't forgive them totally and unconditionally, you will sooner or later find yourself in the shoes of Joab or Abiathar, waging war in a needless and costly battle.

1 Kings 1:8–10
But Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and Nathan the prophet, and Shimei, and Rei, and the mighty men which belonged to David, were not with Adonijah. Adonijah slew sheep and oxen and fat cattle by the stone of Zoheleth, which is by Enrogel, and called all his brethren the king's sons, and all the

men of Judah the king's ser vants: But Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, and the mighty men, and Solomon his brother, he called not.

In his attempt to usurp the throne, Adonijah threw a party for everyone but those loyal to David.

1 Kings 1:11–14
Wherefore Nathan spake unto Bath-sheba the mother of Solomon, saying, Hast thou not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith doth reign, and David our lord knoweth it not? Now therefore come, let me, I pray thee, give thee counsel, that thou mayest save thine own life, and the life of thy son Solomon. Go and get thee in unto king David, and say unto him, Didst not thou, my lord, O king, swear unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne? why then doth Adonijah reign? Behold, while thou yet talkest there with the king, I also will come in after thee, and confirm thy words.

Nathan told Solomon's mother, Bath-sheba, that Adonijah had taken Solomon's place as king.

1 Kings 1:15
And Bath-sheba went in unto the king into the chamber: and the king was very old; and Abishag the Shunammite ministered unto the king.

Here comes Bath-sheba, David's favorite wife, Solomon's mother.

1 Kings 1:16–21
And Bath-sheba bowed, and did obeisance unto the king. And the king said, What wouldest thou? And she said unto him, My lord, thou swarest by the LORD thy God unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne. And now, behold, Adonijah reigneth; and now,

my lord the king, thou knowest it not: And he hath slain oxen and fat cattle and sheep in abundance, and hath called all the sons of the king, and Abiathar the priest, and Joab the captain of the host: but Solomon thy servant hath he not called. And thou, my lord, O king, the eyes of all Israel are upon thee, that thou shouldest tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. Otherwise it shall come to pass, when my lord the king shall sleep with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon shall be counted offenders.

Bath-sheba told David that, although he had promised Solomon would reign after him, Adonijah had claimed the throne instead.

1 Kings 1:22–27
And, lo, while she yet talked with the king, Nathan the prophet also came in. And they told the king, saying, Behold Nathan the prophet. And when he was come in before the king, he bowed himself before the king with his face to the ground. And Nathan said, My lord, O king, hast thou said, Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne? For he is gone down this day, and hath slain oxen and fat cattle and sheep in abundance, and hath called all the king's sons, and the captains of the host, and Abiathar the priest; and, behold, they eat and drink before him, and say, God save king Adonijah. But me, even me thy servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and thy servant Solomon, hath he not called. Is this thing done by my lord the king, and thou hast not shewed it unto thy servant, who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?

No sooner had Bath-sheba given her report to David than, as they had planned, Nathan the prophet came in and confirmed her words. Deuteronomy 19:15 says that it is in the mouth of two witnesses that every word shall be established. That is why Nathan came in to corroborate Bathsheba's account.

Jesus reiterated this concept in Matthew 18 where He stressed the importance of two people dealing with problems within the Christian

community. In 2 Corinthians 13:1 and 1 Timothy 5:19, Paul declares that no accusation is to be received apart from the confirmation of two witnesses.

This Old Testament principle, given in Deuteronomy, seen in the story before us, and woven into the fabric of Scripture all the way to the end of the New Testament is an important one for us to embrace. Often, people come to me with accusations against another brother or sister. I immediately stop that person and say, "May I quote you on that?" I immediately ask. "I need confirmation and I will quote you as a source of this report." And 99 times out of 100, the accusation is dropped.

Whenever you hear accusations, gossip, or innuendo, I would encourage you to try this approach.

1 Kings 1:28–32
Then king David answered and said, Call me Bath-sheba. And she came into the king's presence, and stood before the king. And the king sware, and said, As the LORD liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, Even as I sware unto thee by the LORD God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead; even so will I certainly do this day. Then Bath-sheba bowed with her face to the earth, and did reverence to the king, and said, Let my lord king David live for ever. And king David said, Call me Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. And they came before the king.

The very men who weren't called by Adonijah in verses 8–10 are now called by David in verse 35. They missed Adonijah's party, but they will be used, and therefore honored, by the king.

1 Kings 1:33–35
The king also said unto them, Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to Gihon: And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel: and blow ye with the trumpet, and say, God save king Solomon. Then ye shall come up after him, that he may come and sit upon my throne; for he

shall be king in my stead: and I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah.

Solomon was to ride David's mule. Why wouldn't he ride David's horse? The reason is that the mule was the animal of peace, the horse the animal of conquest. That is why, when Jesus presented Himself as Messiah, He rode upon a mule, offering Himself as the Prince of peace. But the people did not receive Him. "Away with Him!" they cried. "We will not have this Man rule over us." So the next time Jesus comes, Revelation 19:11 tells us He will ride on a horse, not as the Prince of peace, but as the conquering King.

1 Kings 1:36–40

And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king, and said, Amen: the LORD God of my lord the king say so too. As the LORD hath been with my lord the king, even so be he with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord king David. So Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, went down, and caused Solomon to ride upon king David's mule, and brought him to Gihon. And Zadok the priest took an horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon. And they blew the trumpet; and all the people said, God save king Solomon. And all the people came up after him, and the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them.

Solomon was anointed king and the earth reverberated with the joy of the people.

1 Kings 1:41–49

And Adonijah and all the guests that were with him heard it as they had made an end of eating. And when Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, he said, Wherefore is this noise of the city being in an uproar? And while he yet spake, behold, Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest came: and Adonijah said unto him, Come in;

for thou art a valiant man, and bringest good tidings. And Jonathan answered and said to Adonijah, Verily our lord king David hath made Solomon king. And the king hath sent with him Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, and they have caused him to ride upon the king's mule: And Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king in Gihon: and they are come up from thence rejoicing, so that the city rang again. This is the noise that ye have heard. And also Solomon sitteth on the throne of the kingdom. And moreover the king's servants came to bless our lord king David, saying, God make the name of Solomon better than thy name, and make his throne greater than thy throne. And the king bowed himself upon the bed. And also thus said the king, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which hath given one to sit on my throne this day, mine eyes even seeing it. And all the guests that were with Adonijah were afraid, and rose up, and went every man his way.

Upon hearing that Solomon had been anointed king, everyone who had once dined with Adonijah deserted him. That's always the way it is. When people bond around a rebellion, their connection doesn't last very long. Therefore, may the Lord always allow us to be bonded not around a cause, organization, or doctrinal persuasion, but simply around the person of Jesus.

1 Kings 1:50
And Adonijah feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar.

The altar in the tabernacle had horns on its corner that were used to tie down the sacrifices that were placed upon the altar. When a man was afraid or in trouble, he would run into the tabernacle, grab hold of the horns of the altar, and plead for mercy.

1 Kings 1:51–53
And it was told Solomon, saying, Behold, Adonijah feareth king Solomon: for, lo, he hath caught hold on the horns of the altar,

saying, Let king Solomon swear unto me to day that he will not slay his servant with the sword. And Solomon said, If he will shew himself a worthy man, there shall not an hair of him fall to the earth: but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die. So king Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and bowed himself to king Solomon: and Solomon said unto him, Go to thine house.

When Adonijah appeared before him, Solomon didn't rant; Solomon didn't rave. With the authority of the kingdom behind him, he simply said, "Go to your room." I like that!



2 1 Kings 2:1, 2

Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man;

David was a man who spent time in the wilderness doing battle, killing giants, leaping over walls, risking his life. Solomon, on the other hand, grew up in a palace, never knowing what it meant to be chased by enemies or to be face to face with giants. Therefore, I don't think Solomon was David's favorite son. David mourned Absalom's death perhaps because he sensed in Absalom a manliness that matched his own. So, as he's dying, he exhorts his sixteen-year-old son to get tough and be a man.

1 Kings 2:3, 4

And keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself: That the LORD may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all

their soul, there shall not fail thee (said he) a man on the throne of Israel.

"Walk in God's ways, Solomon," David continued. "Keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, His testimonies. Study the Word, follow the Word, and you'll do well."

1 Kings 2:5 (a)
Moreover . . .

After giving general instructions to be strong in the Lord and in His Word, David goes on to give Solomon specific instructions . . .

1 Kings 2:5 (b), 6
. . . thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins, and in his shoes that were on his feet. Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace.

"Joab wronged me. He killed Absalom. He killed Amasa. He killed Abner. See that he pays for this," David said to Solomon.

1 Kings 2:7 (a)
But shew kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite . . .

Barzillai was the man who brought supplies to David as he fled from Jerusalem during Absalom's attempted coup (2 Samuel 17:27–29).

1 Kings 2:7 (b)–10
. . . and let them be of those that eat at thy table: for so they came to me when I fled because of Absalom thy brother. And, behold, thou hast with thee Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite of Bahurim, which cursed me with a grievous curse in the day

when I went to Mahanaim: but he came down to meet me at Jordan, and I sware to him by the LORD, saying, I will not put thee to death with the sword. Now therefore hold him not guiltless: for thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him; but his hoar head bring thou down to the grave with blood. So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David.

Shimei was the man who flung curses, rocks, and dust at David (2 Samuel 16:6, 7). "All of this is happening to you because you're a wretch." And during that time of real difficulty and personal tragedy, at that time when he was already heavy and heartbroken, Shimei was the last straw. "Let me lop that guy's head off," one of his men said. "No, David said, God's allowed it. Let him curse."

Then, when Absalom's rebellion was put down and David was returning to Jerusalem, Shimei met him at the River Jordan saying, "No hard feelings I hope." And David forgave him.

But here, at the end of his life, David's last words were, "You need to take care of Joab and Shimei." Is David being cruel here? I don't think so. I think David looked at his sixteen-year-old son, remembered the cunning and craftiness of Joab and Shimei, and said to himself, *I can handle these guys, but my son doesn't stand a chance.*

1 Kings 2:11
And the days that David reigned over Israel were forty years: seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem.

Second Samuel 5:4 tells us David was thirty years old when he began his reign. Thirty is a significant number in Scripture. At thirty, the Levites assumed their ministry. At thirty, Joseph became prime minister of Egypt. At thirty, Ezekiel began making his powerful prophetic proclamations. At thirty, John the Baptist began to go throughout the countryside preaching preparation for the kingdom. At thirty, Jesus began His public ministry. Thus, there seems to be something significant about the age of thirty. In God's economy, it

would seem as though the years up to thirty are years of training and preparation.

David reigned over Israel for forty years and died at the age of seventy. Interestingly, Psalm 90, penned by Moses, says that the years of a man are seventy years. In other words, seventy years is a normal lifespan.

If you're under thirty, use the time to prepare wisely as you seek the Lord for what He has ahead for you. If you're over thirty, serve Him with maturity and wisdom. If you're under thirty, glean from your elders. If you're over thirty, set the pace for those looking to you. It has been said that the difference between a politician and a statesman is that a politician has his eyes on the next election, while a statesman has his eyes on the next generation. May God make us spiritual statesmen who have a heart for generations to follow.

1 Kings 2:12, 13
Then sat Solomon upon the throne of David his father; and his kingdom was established greatly. And Adonijah the son of Haggith came to Bath-sheba the mother of Solomon. And she said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably.

After his attempted coup, it's no wonder Bathsheba questioned Adonijah.

1 Kings 2:14–17
He said moreover, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And she said, Say on. And he said, Thou knowest that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel set their faces on me, that I should reign: howbeit the kingdom is turned about, and is become my brother's: for it was his from the LORD. And now I ask one petition of thee, deny me not. And she said unto him, Say on. And he said, Speak, I pray thee, unto Solomon the king, (for he will not say thee nay,) that he give me Abishag the Shunammite to wife.

Adonijah's words were as smooth as butter, but his heart was as cold as steel. "I've lost the kingdom," he said. "But let me at least have the lady." Why did Adonijah want Abishag? It wasn't because he loved her but because it was customary that if a man took a former leader's concubine or wife, he

was assuming the leader's position. That is why, when Absalom went into Jerusalem, the first thing he did was have relations with the ten concubines of David, signifying to the entire nation that he was on the throne (2 Samuel 16:22).

1 Kings 2:18, 19
And Bath-sheba said, Well; I will speak for thee unto the king. Bath-sheba therefore went unto king Solomon, to speak unto him for Adonijah. And the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king's mother; and she sat on his right hand.

I like this. Solomon the king sees his mother walk in, gets up, and bows down, paying respect and reverence to her. It's a virtue that is very becoming to any child of God, when they show honor to their parents. Here's Solomon, the king, bowing down before his mother.

1 Kings 2:20–25
Then she said, I desire one small petition of thee; I pray thee, say me not nay. And the king said unto her, Ask on, my mother: for I will not say thee nay. And she said, Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to Adonijah thy brother to wife. And king Solomon answered and said unto his mother, And why dost thou ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? ask for him the kingdom also; for he is mine elder brother; even for him, and for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son of Zeruiah. Then king Solomon sware by the LORD, saying, God do so to me, and more also, if Adonijah have not spoken this word against his own life. Now therefore, as the LORD liveth, which hath established me, and set me on the throne of David my father, and who hath made me an house, as he promised, Adonijah shall be put to death this day. And king Solomon sent by the hand of Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; and he fell upon him that he died.

Why did Bath-sheba ask Solomon to give Abishag to Adonijah? I believe it was because she knew precisely what Solomon's reaction would be. I

believe she knew all along that Adonijah was a threat and seized the opportunity to put an end to it.

1 Kings 2:26
And unto Abiathar the priest said the king, Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields; for thou art worthy of death: but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the Lord GOD before David my father, and because thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted.

Like Joab, Abiathar deserved death for his part in Adonijah's attempted coup. (v. 7). He was spared, however, because of his service as priest and because of his history with David.

1 Kings 2:27
So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the LORD; that he might fulfil the word of the LORD, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh.

In 1 Samuel 2, a word was given to Eli that his family would be cut off from the priesthood forever. Here, we see the fulfillment of this prophecy as Abiathar, who was of the house of Eli, is removed from the priesthood.

1 Kings 2:28–35
Then tidings came to Joab: for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom. And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. And it was told king Solomon that Joab was fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD; and, behold, he is by the altar. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go, fall upon him. And Benaiah came to the tabernacle of the LORD, and said unto him, Thus saith the king, Come forth. And he said, Nay; but I will die here. And Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me. And the king said unto him, Do as he hath said, and fall upon him, and bury him; that thou mayest take away the innocent blood, which Joab shed, from me,

and from the house of my father. And the LORD shall return his blood upon his own head, who fell upon two men more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword, my father David not knowing thereof, to wit, Abner the son of Ner, captain of the host of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, captain of the host of Judah. Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab, and upon the head of his seed for ever: but upon David, and upon his seed, and upon his house, and upon his throne, shall there be peace for ever from the LORD. So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up, and fell upon him, and slew him: and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness. And the king put Benaiah the son of Jehoiada in his room over the host: and Zadok the priest did the king put in the room of Abiathar.

Joab was a man who was never ashamed of his sin and never afraid of punishment all the while he served David. He did whatever he wanted, feeling as though he would experience no repercussions. I suggest the reason for this is that Joab was the only one beside David, Bath-sheba, and Nathan the prophet, who knew that David ordered the execution of Uriah the Hittite (2 Samuel 11:15). Because he knew this secret, he did as he pleased. Once David died, however, the secret no longer mattered. So Joab tried to seek sanctuary in the temple, but was killed at Solomon's command nonetheless.

First Peter 2:16 says we are not to use our liberty as a cloak for sin. Therefore, just because you might be one who clings to the altar of the Cross of Calvary, just because you might recognize the atoning work of Jesus Christ, do not be deceived in thinking you can do whatever you want and not suffer repercussions. Joab was deceived. Here, he finds himself at the very altar, saying, "Surely, they're not going to take me away." But he was wrong.

The Word of God has very strong things to say concerning those who name the name of Jesus but continually, habitually persist in sin—refusing to respond to the chastening of the Lord, refusing to submit to the correction of the Lord—using their "liberty in Jesus" as a covering for sin. The Word of God warns that such people will not inherit the kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). Joab being dragged away from the altar should sober us to the point where we say, "Lord, have I been clinging to the altar, thinking I'm home free

when in reality I've been disobeying Your commands, not learning lessons, not allowing You to speak to me and deal with me?"

Be not deceived, there will be those who will truly be surprised when the Lord says, "Depart from Me. I never knew you" (Matthew 7:21–23).

"But I was holding on to the altar," they'll say.

Perhaps, but did you obey the command of the King or did you think you knew a secret, that no matter what you did, it wouldn't matter.

My prayer is that none of us who minister to others in any capacity will allow people to be lulled into eternal destruction, but would cause every person with whom we deal to carefully consider if they are truly in the kingdom of God. I would rather see us as His people come before His altar with fear and trepidation, weeping and saying, "Lord, I pray that Your mercy will suffice, that Your grace will cover, that my heart will be right with You." I would rather see us come to the altar too often and commit ourselves too frequently than be lulled by some theology into thinking we were saved, only to find out we weren't.

1 Kings 2:36–46

And the king sent and called for Shimei, and said unto him, Build thee an house in Jerusalem, and dwell there, and go not forth thence any whither. For it shall be, that on the day thou goest out, and passest over the brook Kidron, thou shalt know for certain that thou shalt surely die: thy blood shall be upon thine own head. And Shimei said unto the king, The saying is good: as my lord the king hath said, so will thy servant do. And Shimei dwelt in Jerusalem many days. And it came to pass at the end of three years, that two of the servants of Shimei ran away unto Achish son of Maachah king of Gath. And they told Shimei, saying, Behold, thy servants be in Gath. And Shimei arose, and saddled his ass, and went to Gath to Achish to seek his servants: and Shimei went, and brought his servants from Gath. And it was told Solomon that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath, and was come again. And the king sent and called for Shimei, and said unto him, Did I not make thee to swear by the LORD, and protested unto thee, saying, Know for a certain, on the day thou

goest out, and walkest abroad any wither, that thou shalt surely die? and thou saidst unto me, The word that I have heard is good. Why then hast thou not kept the oath of the LORD, and the commandment that I have charged thee with? The king said moreover to Shimei, Thou knowest all the wickedness which thine heart is privy to, that thou didst to David my father: therefore the LORD shall return thy wickedness upon thine own head; And king Solomon shall be blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before the LORD for ever. So the king commanded Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; which went out, and fell upon him, that he died. And the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.

Like Joab, Shimei was not to die in peace (vv. 5–9). Graciously put under "house arrest" by Solomon, Shimei was free to move about the entire city of Jerusalem. But, assuming Solomon either wouldn't notice or wouldn't care, Shimei crossed the boundary of Jerusalem in pursuit of two escaped servants. Thus, it was not only his cursing of David but his disregard for Solomon's grace that brought about Shimei's death.

The same is true of us. Born in sin, we were at enmity with God. But we were offered pardon through His amazing grace. No wonder the writer to the Hebrews asks, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" (2:3). Our Savior, our Hero crossed the brook Kidron in our place on His way to the Cross. Therefore, let us not be like Shimei. Let us remain in Jerusalem; let us not stray from His grace.



3 Kings 3:1

And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall of Jerusalem round about.

In the Middle Eastern culture of Solomon's day, marriage was often used to cement treaties and to seal alliances between nations. Here, we see Solomon doing this. According to the letter of the law, his action was not wrong for the only women the Israelites were forbidden to marry were Canaanite women. However, Solomon violated the spirit of the law, for in gathering wives from other countries and cultures, he would soon find his own heart entangled in their religious system.

1 Kings 3:2, 3
Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days. And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places.

Throughout the land of Israel were high places, or groves, planted by the Canaanites for the purpose of worshiping their deities. The Jews would use these same groves to offer sacrifice and incense to Jehovah.

> These are the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which the LORD God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth. Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place. Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God. But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come.
>
> Deuteronomy 12:1–5

The law specifies that God's people were to worship Him only in the place He assigned. Because the ark of the covenant was in Jerusalem at this time, Solomon would have been so much wiser and the people so much safer had they offered their sacrifices and incense in Jerusalem, or in Gibeon where the tabernacle was pitched at this time.

What does this have to do with us? Some people say, "I can worship the Lord anywhere I want. I don't need to be in church on Sunday. I can go to a lake and worship the Lord. After all, didn't Jesus preach by the lake? In fact, didn't Jesus preach from a boat? Wouldn't it, then, be understandable to go boating on Sunday?"

"Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together," the writer of the Book of Hebrews clearly tells us (10:25). Those who don't assemble together become vulnerable to all sorts of needless pain and problems. In His infinite wisdom, the Lord set up His church as a body because we find our true calling as we remain linked to each other.

1 Kings 3:4, 5 (a)
And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar. In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night . . .

The Lord appeared to Solomon in Gibeon because that was where the tabernacle was. It was at the place that Solomon abandoned his own ideas about worship and submitted to the Word of the Lord that the Lord appeared to him.

Secondly, notice *when* the Lord spoke to Solomon. It was after he had been busy working for the Lord all day that he was blessed to hear from the Lord at night. When we offer the sacrifice of praise or the sacrifice of service, whenever we find ourselves in the place of giving *to* the Lord, we are in a position to hear from Him.

Finally, notice *how* the message from the Lord came to Solomon. It came in a dream. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, the Lord speaks through dreams. This doesn't mean every dream you have is significant. But it's not a bad idea before your head hits the pillow to say, "Lord, if You want to minister a truth or understanding to me tonight, I would love that." God doesn't just tuck you in and tune you out. Rather, I believe it's often His desire to minister to us in the night hours because, for most of us, it's the only time we're quiet enough to hear Him!

1 Kings 3:5 (b)
. . . and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.

This is amazing. What if the Lord came to you tonight and said, "Whatever you want, I'll do." How would you answer?

1 Kings 3:6 (a)
And Solomon said . . .

Although the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream, Solomon answered verbally. In this, I'm reminded of the account in Acts 12, where the angel of the Lord came to Peter in prison, saying, "Follow me." Luke writes that Peter "went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision." In other words, had Peter dismissed the Lord's words as having only ethereal, philosophical meaning, he would have eventually woken up on the hard floor of his prison cell. But, because He took the Lord at His word and obeyed Him physically, He walked out of prison a free man. Solomon could have taken the Lord's appearance as nothing more than an encouraging thought, but he didn't. He opened his mouth and spoke audible words that would result in incredible blessing.

Perhaps the Lord has been speaking to your heart about a certain matter, but you have written it off as little more than a good idea. I encourage you to put feet to your faith, to do whatever it is He is asking of you, and see if your physical action doesn't result in a physical response from Him.

1 Kings 3:6 (b)–10
. . . Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to

judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.

"Ask of Me anything," the Lord said. And Solomon asked for wisdom that he might be able to wisely lead the people God had placed under his leadership. The beginning of wisdom is truly to recognize the need for wisdom. You'll know you are becoming wiser when you say to the Lord, "I don't know as much as I used to think I knew."

> If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.
>
> James 1:5

The word "upbraideth" means that the Lord won't come down on, or get angry with those who ask for wisdom. On the contrary, as seen in the next verse, God is pleased with such a request.

1 Kings 3:11–13
And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.

Jesus taught us that if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, everything else we need will be added to us (Matthew 6:33). Solomon is proof of this. Consider the prayers you prayed today or this week. How many were for the good of the kingdom? How many of your prayers were, "Lord, allow Your kingdom to be expanded. Allow Your name to be exalted,"

versus “Lord, I need this . . . please help me with that”? Solomon didn’t ask for himself. He asked for the kingdom. And the Lord was pleased.

1 Kings 3:14, 15
And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days. And Solomon awoke; and, behold, it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings, and made a feast to all his servants.

Solomon woke from his dream and immediately sacrificed to the Lord in Jerusalem. Again, Solomon is responding physically to a promise he would soon see fulfilled physically. At this point, however, his response is based solely on faith. The combination reminds me of how we were saved . . .

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Romans 10:9, 10

It is through the unseen belief of the heart coupled with the spoken word of the mouth that salvation is brought to the sinner. True inward faith is invariably linked to an outward manifestation.

1 Kings 3:16–23
Then came there two women, that were harlots, unto the king, and stood before him. And the one woman said, O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house; and I was delivered of a child with her in the house. And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also: and we were together; there was no stranger with us in the house, save we two in the house. And this woman’s child died in the night; because she overlaid it. And she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while thine handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom,

and laid her dead child in my bosom. And when I rose in the morning to give my child suck, behold, it was dead: but when I had considered it in the morning, behold, it was not my son, which I did bear. And the other woman said, Nay; but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son. And this said, No; but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son. Thus they spake before the king. Then said the king, The one saith, This is my son that liveth, and thy son is the dead: and the other saith, Nay; but thy son is the dead, and my son is the living.

Two women who were harlots were living together and gave birth within three days of each other. When one child died in the night, the babies were switched, and suddenly, as one woman looked at the dead baby next to her, she realized it wasn't her baby at all. They came to Solomon to settle their dispute. There were no eyewitnesses to the crime and, because these women were harlots, the baby's fathers would not surface. But in Solomon's amazing answer to them, we see the fruit of the answer to his own prayer, for in it we see unfathomable wisdom . . .

1 Kings 3:24
And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king.

The Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). Dear friend, if you're involved in counseling, sharing with friends or neighbors, or giving advice to people in need, the first words out of your mouth should be those of Solomon: "Bring me a sword. Let's look in the Word." If you want to be effective in ministering to people, let these words be on your lips and may the Word be in your hand.

1 Kings 3:25–28
And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other. Then spake the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine,

but divide it. Then the king answered and said, Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof. And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.

Solomon's answer was absolutely brilliant for it unequivocally determined the rightful mother. You see, a true mother will never tolerate division. A true mother would sooner never see her baby again than to have it divided in any way. Thus, the true mother was immediately and undisputedly identified.

Be it in a marriage, a family, or a church body, division leads either quickly or eventually to one thing: death. May we be as committed to unity as this mother was.



4 1 Kings 4:1–6

So king Solomon was king over all Israel. And these were the princes which he had; Azariah the son of Zadok the priest, Elihoreph and Ahiah, the sons of Shisha, scribes; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud, the recorder. And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the host: and Zadok and Abiathar were the priests: And Azariah the son of Nathan was over the officers: and Zabud the son of Nathan was principal officer, and the king's friend: And Ahishar was over the household: and Adoniram the son of Abda was over the tribute.

In verses 1 through 19, we see a picture of church leadership. First, we see one king. In the body of Christ, there is only one King—Jesus Christ. He is the chief Cornerstone, the Alpha and Omega, the Head of the church. Underneath the king, we see a small group of men who are princes, overseers who carried out the work of the king. In this, we see a picture of New Testament elders. The Church of Jesus Christ is not a dictatorship, where only one earthly man rules. Neither is it a democracy, where everyone has a

say. It's an oligarchy. There is plurality and collegiality as a group of men seek the face of God together and carry out the commands of their King.

1 Kings 4:7–19
And Solomon had twelve officers over all Israel, which provided victuals for the king and his household: each man his month in a year made provision. And these are their names: The son of Hur, in mount Ephraim: The son of Dekar, in Makaz, and in Shaalbim, and Beth-shemesh, and Elon-beth-hanan: The son of Hesed, in Aruboth; to him pertained Sochoh, and all the land of Hepher: The son of Abinadab, in all the region of Dor; which had Taphath the daughter of Solomon to wife: Baana the son of Ahilud; to him pertained Taanach and Megiddo, and all Beth-shean, which is by Zartanah beneath Jezreel, from Beth-shean to Abel-meholah, even unto the place that is beyond Jokneam: The son of Geber, in Ramoth-gilead; to him pertained the towns of Jair the son of Manasseh, which are in Gilead; to him also pertained the region of Argob, which is in Bashan, threescore great cities with walls and brasen bars: Ahinadab the son of Iddo had Mahanaim: Ahimaaz was in Naphtali; he also took Basmath the daughter of Solomon to wife: Baanah the son of Hushai was in Asher and in Aloth: Jehoshaphat the son of Paruah, in Issachar: Shimei the son of Elah, in Benjamin: Geber the son of Uri was in the country of Gilead, in the country of Sihon king of the Amorites, and of Og king of Bashan; and he was the only officer which was in the land.

Twelve men supplied food for the table. This ministry foreshadows the ministry in Acts 6, whereby the widows were fed, and points to the New Testament office of deacon.

1 Kings 4:20–24
Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry. And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life. And Solomon's

provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meal, Ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and an hundred sheep, beside harts, and roebucks, and fallowdeer, and fatted fowl. For he had dominion over all the region on this side the river, from Tiphsah even to Azzah, over all the kings on this side the river: and he had peace on all sides round about him.

Here, we see peace and incredible prosperity in Solomon's kingdom. Yet the peace and prosperity that Solomon and his people experienced was based upon the war and bloodshed of David, the man who preceded him.

As we gather at His Table, as we feast from His Word, as we come into His presence, we enjoy peace and prosperity because the Son of David, Jesus Christ, went to war on our behalf and shed His blood in our place.

1 Kings 4:25–28
And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon. And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen. And those officers provided victual for king Solomon, and for all that came unto king Solomon's table, every man in his month: they lacked nothing. Barley also and straw for the horses and dromedaries brought they unto the place where the officers were, every man according to his charge.

This is a prophetic peek into the Millennium. Micah prophesied that, when Jesus Christ comes back, every man shall dwell under his vine and under his fig tree (4:4). In other words, when Jesus comes back, things are going to be right. There will be peace and prosperity, not only internally, but also materially and physically as well.

1 Kings 4:29
And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore.

In 1 Corinthians 8:1, we are reminded that knowledge puffs up. Oftentimes, the more we know, the colder we can become. The more we know, the more cynical we find ourselves. Not so with Solomon. He grew exceedingly great in understanding, but he also had a correlating largeness of heart.

When we gather together to study the Word, I think we should pray, "Lord, allow me to not become cold or puffed up with knowledge. Give me the largeness of heart you gave Solomon"—for even if you know all things, if you don't have love, you have nothing at all.

1 Kings 4:30–34
And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about. And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.

This guy was incredible. Try making up one proverb worth writing down and passing on. Solomon wrote 3,000. In addition, he wrote 1,005 songs. He was also a dendrologist, a botanist, a zoologist, an ornithologist, an entomologist, and an ichthyologist. Solomon asked for wisdom and God answered "above all he could ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20).

"Call unto Me," the Lord declares, "and I will show you great and mighty things which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33:3). His invitation still stands. May we, like Solomon, be wise enough to simply ask.



1 Kings 5:1–5

5 And Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants unto Solomon; for he had heard that they had anointed him king in the room of his father: for Hiram was ever a lover of David. And Solomon sent to Hiram, saying, Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the LORD his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. But now the LORD my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent. And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name.

Anything you do of significance in life begins when you get to the place of purposing in your heart. Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself (Daniel 1:8). Solomon purposed to build a house unto the Lord. What have *you* purposed?

> **1 Kings 5:6**
> **Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon; and my servants shall be with thy servants: and unto thee will I give hire for thy servants according to all that thou shalt appoint: for thou knowest that there is not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians.**

Solomon realized the Sidonians were better woodcutters than were his own men. So he took advantage of their expertise and abilities. Before him, Moses invited his father-in-law, an unbeliever, to join the Israelites on their journey to the Promised Land, knowing Hobab's knowledge of the wilderness would be invaluable (Numbers 10:31). Some believers choose to do business only with other believers. Moses, however, gives us an example of something more practical on both sides of eternity. That is, not only were the Israelites blessed by the presence of a wise guide in Hobab, but in Judges 4:11, we see Hobab's relatives living in the Promised Land. This means Hobab not only accompanied Moses, but very likely became a believer.

While I certainly encourage the body supporting one another, there is a place to seek practical help and expertise from nonbelievers, and in so doing, to introduce them to the Lord.

1 Kings 5:7–12
And it came to pass, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly, and said, Blessed be the LORD this day, which hath given unto David a wise son over this great people. And Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, I have considered the things which thou sentest to me for: and I will do all thy desire concerning timber of cedar, and concerning timber of fir. My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon unto the sea: and I will convey them by sea in floats unto the place that thou shalt appoint me, and will cause them to be discharged there, and thou shalt receive them: and thou shalt accomplish my desire, in giving food for my household. So Hiram gave Solomon cedar trees and fir trees according to all his desire. And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat for food to his household, and twenty measures of pure oil: thus gave Solomon to Hiram year by year. And the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him: and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and they two made a league together.

Jews and Gentiles worked together on the temple. Why? Because in Ephesians 2, we read that, although we as Gentiles were once strangers and far off from the covenants and people of God, God destroyed the middle wall of partition, bringing Jews and Gentiles together.

1 Kings 5:13, 14
And king Solomon raised a levy out of all Israel; and the levy was thirty thousand men. And he sent them to Lebanon ten thousand a month by courses: a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home: and Adoniram was over the levy.

Here we see the levy—or work crew—that built the temple. Solomon's wisdom was again seen in requiring that his crew spent only one month in

three away from home.

1 Kings 5:15 (a)
And Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bare burdens . . .

Seventy thousand bore burdens. They were intercessors, so to speak, bearing burdens on their backs and shoulders. Oh that the Lord would raise up more intercessors, more people who say, "Lord, I give You permission to wake me at five in the morning, or to cause me in the middle of my lunch break to be pulled away to intercede on behalf of my brothers and sisters."

Prayer is the most important ministry anyone can undertake, and yet it is one of the most neglected. Only heaven can reward those who make the commitment to be a burden-bearer in prayer.

1 Kings 5:15 (b)
. . . and fourscore thousand hewers in the mountains;

Eighty thousand men were stone cutters. Jeremiah likens the Word of God to a hammer (23:29). In this, we see a picture of 80,000 men chipping away, cutting away with the hammer of the Word of God—discipling and teaching. May God continue to raise up those who are willing to hew stone, to teach Sunday school, to lead Bible studies, or to disciple coworkers.

1 Kings 5:16
Beside the chief of Solomon's officers which were over the work, three thousand and three hundred, which ruled over the people that wrought in the work.

The 33,000 who oversaw this vast project speak to me of church leadership, seen nowhere more perfectly than in the One who washed the feet and gave His life for those He led (John 13:5).

1 Kings 5:17 (a)
And the king commanded, and they brought great stones . . .

The king commanded and the workers commenced. There was no hesitation, no reservation, no argument. Gang, that's the way it's always to be. When our King speaks, we're to obey.

I think of Mary. "They're out of wine," she said to her Son at the marriage feast in Cana. Then she went to the servants and said, "Whatsoever He saith unto you do it" (John 2:5). The same word applies to us today. Whatever He says, let's do. Whatever the King commands, let's begin.

1 Kings 5:17 (b), 18
. . . costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house. And Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders did hew them, and the stonesquarers: so they prepared timber and stones to build the house.

I understand that the stones would need to be large and would need to be hewn. But who of us in building a house would make a foundation from precious, costly stones? We have a tendency to think, *Out of sight, out of mind. If it doesn't show, it doesn't matter.* Perhaps Solomon, however, understood that all things are open and exposed before the Lord (Hebrews 4:13), that nothing is hidden from His sight. Maybe that is why he chose costly stones, for although man wouldn't notice them, he knew they would please the Lord.



6 1 Kings 6:1
And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD.

In 1 Kings 5:5, we saw Solomon purpose to build the temple. Here, we see him actually beginning the work. It has been rightly said that the pathway of Bible studies and conferences is strewn with the intentions of those who

purposed but never began. We must both purpose and begin if we are going to complete the work God has called us to do.

> *When asked how he began his conquest of the world, Alexander the Great is reported to have answered, "By not delaying."*

What has the Lord shown you today? *Now* is the time to begin.

> **1 Kings 6:2, 3**
> **And the house which king Solomon built for the LORD, the length thereof was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof twenty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits. And the porch before the temple of the house, twenty cubits was the length thereof, according to the breadth of the house; and ten cubits was the breadth thereof before the house.**

At ninety feet by thirty feet by forty-five feet, the temple was twice as big as the tabernacle. Although the temple provides a picture of the church, it doesn't hold the same significance as the tabernacle. As seen in the Book of Hebrews, especially as it portrays Jesus, the tabernacle rather than the temple is the model.

Why?

The tabernacle was simple; the temple was complex. For example, while there was one candlestick in the tabernacle, there will be ten candlesticks in the temple (1 Chronicles 28). Man prizes the ornate. God, however, values simplicity. The beautiful truths the tabernacle portrayed were somewhat masked by the complication and ornamentation of the temple.

> **1 Kings 6:4**
> **And for the house he made windows of narrow lights.**

The tabernacle had no windows because the Shekinah glory of the Lord provided the light for the Holy of Holies. Here, however, windows were built in the temple evidently because the plans provided for failure—in case the glory of God would not be present.

1 Kings 6:5
And against the wall of the house he built chambers round about, against the walls of the house round about, both of the temple and of the oracle: and he made chambers round about:

The tabernacle was mobile, built for a journeying nation. The temple, on the other hand, was stable, built for a people who had arrived at their destination.

1 Kings 6:6, 7
The nethermost chamber was five cubits broad, and the middle was six cubits broad, and the third was seven cubits broad: for without in the wall of the house he made narrowed rests round about, that the beams should not be fastened in the walls of the house. And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.

All of the cutting and carving, all of the chipping and grinding was done in the quarry so that when the massive stones arrived at the temple site, they fit together perfectly. What an amazing sight it must have been to watch the temple going up silently.

We are living stones, gang (1 Peter 2:5). That makes this world the rock quarry. It's the place where we are chipped and cut, polished and ground so that when we get to heaven, the clamor will cease, the work will be complete.



***For a topical study of 1 Kings 6:7 entitled "Foundation Work," turn to page* 973.**

1 Kings 6:8–10

The door for the middle chamber was in the right side of the house: and they went up with winding stairs into the middle chamber, and out of the middle into the third. So he built the house, and finished it; and covered the house with beams and boards of cedar. And then he built chambers against all the house, five cubits high: and they rested on the house with timber of cedar.

As we will see, the temple took seven years to complete.

1 Kings 6:11–13
And the word of the LORD came to Solomon, saying, Concerning this house which thou art in building, if thou wilt walk in my statutes, and execute my judgments, and keep all my commandments to walk in them; then will I perform my word with thee, which I spake unto David thy father: And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel.

Even while construction is going on, the Lord calls Solomon back to a very important reality. In the midst of this building project, He says, "Walk in My statutes. Execute My judgments. Keep My commandments, and I will perform My word." In other words, the Lord was saying, "I'm not so concerned about building a building as I am about building you."

Dear friend, don't ever mistake activity and ministry for what is happening spiritually internally. You could be buzzing around doing all kinds of things for the Lord, but that doesn't necessarily mean you're doing well. How are you and the Lord doing? That's the issue. That's always the issue.

1 Kings 6:14–19
So Solomon built the house, and finished it. And he built the walls of the house within with boards of cedar, both the floor of the house, and the walls of the cieling: and he covered them on the inside with wood, and covered the floor of the house with planks of fir. And he built twenty cubits on the sides of the house, both the floor and the walls with boards of cedar: he even built them for it within, even for the oracle, even for the most holy place.

And the house, that is, the temple before it, was forty cubits long. And the cedar of the house within was carved with knops and open flowers: all was cedar; there was no stone seen. And the oracle he prepared in the house within, to set there the ark of the covenant of the LORD.

The ark of the covenant was the only part of the tabernacle we see in the temple. This is as it should be, for the ark represented the presence of God, and God in Christ Jesus is the same—yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

1 Kings 6:20–22
And the oracle in the forepart was twenty cubits in length, and twenty cubits in breadth, and twenty cubits in the height thereof: and he overlaid it with pure gold; and so covered the altar which was of cedar. So Solomon overlaid the house within with pure gold: and he made a partition by the chains of gold before the oracle; and he overlaid it with gold. And the whole house he overlaid with gold, until he had finished all the house: also the whole altar that was by the oracle he overlaid with gold.

The Holy of Holies is here called the oracle, because that is where God would speak to the high priest.

1 Kings 6:23–28
And within the oracle he made two cherubims of olive tree, each ten cubits high. And five cubits was the one wing of the cherub, and five cubits the other wing of the cherub: from the uttermost part of the one wing unto the uttermost part of the other were ten cubits. And the other cherub was ten cubits: both the cherubims were of one measure and one size. The height of the one cherub was ten cubits, and so was it of the other cherub. And he set the cherubims within the inner house: and they stretched forth the wings of the cherubims, so that the wing of the one touched the one wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched

the other wall; and their wings touched one another in the midst of the house. And he overlaid the cherubims with gold.

Although the cherubim were much larger than those in the tabernacle, unlike their predecessors, they were not solid gold, but rather gold-plated.

1 Kings 6:29–38
And he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, within and without. And the floor of the house he overlaid with gold, within and without. And for the entering of the oracle he made doors of olive tree: the lintel and side posts were a fifth part of the wall. The two doors also were of olive tree; and he carved upon them carvings of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold, and spread gold upon the cherubims, and upon the palm trees. So also made he for the door of the temple posts of olive tree, a fourth part of the wall. And the two doors were of fir tree: the two leaves of the one door were folding, and the two leaves of the other door were folding. And he carved thereon cherubims and palm trees and open flowers: and covered them with gold fitted upon the carved work. And he built the inner court with three rows of hewed stone, and a row of cedar beams. In the fourth year was the foundation of the house of the LORD laid, in the month Zif: And in the eleventh year, in the month Bul, which is the eighth month, was the house finished throughout all the parts thereof, and according to all the fashion of it. So was he seven years in building it.

Again, the reason we're not looking at the temple in depth is because, although the temple is referred to as a picture of the church (Ephesians 2:21), the tabernacle portrays Jesus.

The tabernacle was simple. The temple was complex. Secondly, the windows of the temple signified a provision for failure because the people wouldn't have to rely solely on the light of the Shekinah glory of God. Thirdly, because the cherubim were not solid gold, as they had been in the tabernacle, the genuineness of the temple was second to that of the

tabernacle. They were just covered with gold. There was not the genuineness through and through of the articles that there was in the tabernacle. Finally, as we'll see in chapter 7, Hiram, a son of a man of Tyre, was brought in to complete the work—unlike Aholiab and Bezaliel, the two Jewish men who were filled by the Spirit to produce wonderful work for the tabernacle (Exodus 38:22, 23). In all of this we see that the temple was incomparable to the tabernacle.

FOUNDATION WORK

A Topical Study of
1 KINGS 6:7

In 1 Kings 6, we see the wisest man who ever lived undertaking one of the greatest projects ever attempted as Solomon begins to build a temple unto the Lord. He begins by quarrying large, costly stones to be used in the temple's foundation—always a good place to begin.

The temple constructed by Solomon was not simply a place for the Old Testament saints to worship the Lord, but also a picture of us, as New Testament saints, being built by the Lord . . .

> *Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:*
>
> Ephesians 2:19–21

We are the temple of God, being built for the glory and pleasure of God. Like the temple of old, we are being built on a hewn foundation, a costly foundation. Paul gives us three elements that comprise the foundation upon which we are built. This is where it all begins. This is foundational understanding. If you miss this, your entire Christian walk will be vulnerable to instability and insecurity. If you grab hold of it, however, you'll stand firm.

Sound Schooling

And ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets

. . .

When thousands came to the temple to radically worship the Lord or fervently pray to Him, Solomon never worried that the building would collapse, for he knew the foundation was strong. He knew the foundation was secure. He was confident that even intense worship and prayer would not cause the temple to wobble or waver.

As the temple of the true and living God, we can feel confident in intense and fervent worship, praise, and prayer as long as we stand upon a solid and strong yet costly foundation. And that strong foundation is solid doctrine. It is costly to become familiar with the Word of God. It will cost you time, energy, and perspiration in order for you to receive inspiration from the Word. But it is worth it, for a fellowship that is built solidly on exegetical, strong teaching and instruction can move into worship fervently and into praise with intensity without worrying it will become unstable.

There was a lovely shade tree growing on a hillside. One day, as the clouds overhead grew dark and the wind began to blow, the shade tree was rocked back and forth, creaking and groaning under the intense pressure of the wind. When the storm passed, the shade tree wisely said to itself, "I've got to become stronger. I must ready myself in the event that another storm should arise." So the shade tree began to branch out, extending itself, producing more leaves. It looked even more beautiful. But no sooner had it begun to branch out than the winds blew once again—this time harder than before. And the tree began to creak and groan as the winds blew against it. Suddenly, it felt itself being pushed over, headed for a terrible crash—when it lodged against a neighboring oak tree. When the storm passed, the shade tree said to the oak tree, "How did you survive the storm? How were you strong enough to not only survive yourself, but to support me when I was falling?"

The oak tree looked at the shade tree and said, "While you were branching out, I was digging in. While you were spreading your leaves above

the surface for everyone to see, I was digging in below the surface where real strength is found."

Are you a shade tree or an oak tree? Are you sinking your roots deeper and deeper into the Word of God, understanding and tackling the doctrine written in its pages, or do you say, "That's dry. That's costly. That's too much work. I want to bud, and branch out." Dear saint, before you branch out, dig deep. Then, when your root system is strong in the Word of God, you will be able to be effective for the work of God. Dig deep. Study the Word daily. Come into an understanding of the great doctrines of justification, sanctification, and redemption. Come into the understandings of election and sovereignty, of propitiation and inspiration. And as you grow in the knowledge of God, you will be safe.

A Suffering Savior

. . . Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone

Paul tells us that the temple of the Lord is built not only on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, but on the foundation of the chief Cornerstone, Jesus Christ. This means that, as we study the Word, we do so not simply to gain an intellectual apprehension of appreciation, but rather a mystical touch with the Lord. The written Word leads me into contact with the Living Word, Jesus Christ.

Before this world was ever spoken into existence, our Lord was suffering for us (Revelation 13:8). God proved His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). When did Jesus die for you? Not when you were coming to church, but when you were completely indifferent toward Him. If the Lord loved you when you were a sinner, be assured that He loves you today, now that you desire to walk with Him.

"Jesus loves me, this I know," we sang as children. And this basic premise must remain foundational. Others can challenge or accuse me, but I stand on the Person of Jesus Christ. He is my strong foundation.

Squirming Saints

In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple . . .

What kind of a foundation grows? What kind of stones expand? Only one kind: living stones (1 Peter 2:5). We're living stones, gang, built together in this foundation. We are living, squirming stones. This explains why sometimes we have difficulties with each other.

The huge, costly stones for the temple were chipped, carved, and fit together in the quarry so that when they were brought to the temple site, they fit perfectly. This world is the quarry—the place where we, as living stones, are being chiseled and pounded. Why? So that when we get to heaven, we'll fit perfectly.

That means I'm going to be challenged by certain people I'd rather not be challenged by. God says, "They are the living stones next to you, so you better hang in there because they're My instruments to work on you, to shape you, to prepare you for what you're going to be throughout eternity. I'm building a temple for My habitation, and I've got to pound on you for awhile. It's foundational."

Don't fight it, saint. Flow with it. Say, "Okay, Lord. If this is the boss You want me to work under, so be it. If this is the situation You want me to be stretched by, I submit to it." Thank the Lord for one another. Receive from each other, knowing God is building you for His glory.

May the Lord make you solid below the surface. May your foundation be firm where the eyes of people do not notice. May it be strong and rooted in the knowledge of Him, so that as the years go by, you might be steadfast in your knowledge of God and in your love for the Lord.

> *I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season;*
>
> 2 Timothy 4:1, 2

That means, take the opportunity or make the opportunity. Sometimes, it's right before you, go for it. Other times, it's difficult, make it happen.



7 1 Kings 7:1
But Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house.

First Kings 6:38 tells us that Solomon spent seven years building the temple, Here, we read he spent thirteen years building his own house. As we read through the chapter, we can gain some understanding of the immensity and expense of the house he constructed for himself. But I ask you to note something. Although Scripture does record the expense of the project, it took him thirteen years to complete it. In contrast, Solomon completed construction of the temple in only seven years. The temple was a much more difficult project. Yet his own house took him nearly twice as long to build. Why? I suggest it was because Solomon here is at the height of his personal piety, walking with the Lord more closely than he ever would. Thus, when it came to the temple, he had a sense of urgency to complete the project, leaving the construction of his own house much farther towards the bottom of his list of priorities.

Later in Israel's history, the prophet Haggai will indict the people of Judah for being so concerned about building their own homes that they had neglected building the temple of the Lord (1:6–8, 2:15–18). At this point, Solomon's priorities were correct. How about us? Are we like Solomon? As we look at ourselves and allow the Holy Spirit to shine the searchlight of His Word within our hearts, can we say, "Yes, Lord, I'm truly seeking Your kingdom first"? Or are we building our own houses, tending our own needs? If you are doing the latter, you'll find yourself frustrated—for, as the Lord said through Haggai, your pockets will have holes and your stomach will be empty (1:6). Seek first the kingdom, gang, and everything else you need will be added to you (Matthew 6:33).

1 Kings 7:2 (a)

He built also the house of the forest of Lebanon . . .

The Hebrew text here is unclear. This house could either be an extension of the palace, called the house of the forest of Lebanon because of the way it was paneled, or it could be that Solomon constructed a summer cottage in Lebanon.

1 Kings 7:2 (b)–8
. . . the length thereof was an hundred cubits, and the breadth thereof fifty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits, upon four rows of cedar pillars, with cedar beams upon the pillars. And it was covered with cedar above upon the beams, that lay on forty five pillars, fifteen in a row. And there were windows in three rows, and light was against light in three ranks. And all the doors and posts were square, with the windows: and light was against light in three ranks. And he made a porch of pillars; the length thereof was fifty cubits, and the breadth thereof thirty cubits: and the porch was before them: and the other pillars and the thick beam were before them. Then he made a porch for the throne where he might judge, even the porch of judgment: and it was covered with cedar from one side of the floor to the other. And his house where he dwelt had another court within the porch, which was of the like work. Solomon made also an house for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had taken to wife, like unto this porch.

After constructing his own house, Solomon made a house for his wife and several government buildings relating to his position as king.

1 Kings 7:9, 10
All these were of costly stones, according to the measures of hewed stones, sawed with saws, within and without, even from the foundation unto the coping, and so on the outside toward the great court. And the foundation was of costly stones, even great stones, stones of ten cubits, and stones of eight cubits.

Again, I remind you that it is what is unseen that provides the foundation for that which takes place in our lives, our ministries, our families. The times no one else sees you are up in the morning seeking the Lord or praying in the evening hours that build your foundation. Costly? Yes. Necessary? Absolutely.

1 Kings 7:11–13
And above were costly stones, after the measures of hewed stones, and cedars. And the great court round about was with three rows of hewed stones, and a row of cedar beams, both for the inner court of the house of the LORD, and for the porch of the house. And king Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre.

This is not Hiram, king of Tyre, but another Hiram.

1 Kings 7:14, 15
He was a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass: and he was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass. And he came to king Solomon, and wrought all his work. For he cast two pillars of brass, of eighteen cubits high apiece: and a line of twelve cubits did compass either of them about.

Hiram was a skilled craftsman who was greatly involved in the construction of the buildings Solomon erected. Here, he made two huge pillars of brass, twenty-seven feet high.

1 Kings 7:16–22
And he made two chapiters of molten brass, to set upon the tops of the pillars: the height of the one chapiter was five cubits, and the height of the other chapiter was five cubits: And nets of checker work, and wreaths of chain work, for the chapiters which were upon the top of the pillars; seven for the one chapiter, and seven for the other chapiter. And he made the pillars, and two rows round about upon the one network, to cover the chapiters that were upon the top, with pomegranates: and so did he for the

other chapiter. And the chapiters that were upon the top of the pillars were of lily work in the porch, four cubits. And the chapiters upon the two pillars had pomegranates also above, over against the belly which was by the network: and the pomegranates were two hundred in rows round about upon the other chapiter. And he set up the pillars in the porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin: and he set up the left pillar, and he called the name thereof Boaz. And upon the top of the pillars was lily work: so was the work of the pillars finished.

Jachin means "He shall establish." *Boaz* means "In it is strength." Jachin speaks of stability. Boaz speaks of strength. I like that. As you came into the temple, you would see these two huge brass pillars named Stability and Strength. And yet on the top was lily work, beautiful, ornate carvings that were not seen except by someone looking down on them from above. This intrigues me because this beauty wasn't seen by the average person, not by those who would go in and out of the temple. But as God, from His heavenly perspective, looked down on these pillars—strength and stability—there was something beautiful for Him to behold.

As the temple of God, we, too, have some pillars in our midst, some men of strength, some women of stability, who are behind the scenes prayer warriors, burden-bearers, Sunday school teachers, and sacrificial givers. Some people receive honor right now. Others are pillars who may not be noticed by men, but whose lives are full of "lily work," beautiful to the Father, who will one day be rewarded by Him.

1 Kings 7:23
And he made a molten sea, ten cubits from the one brim to the other: it was round all about, and his height was five cubits: and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about.

This bronze tank, seven and one-half feet high, fifteen feet across, forty-five feet in circumference was used by the priests to wash their hands and feet before they ministered before the Lord.

1 Kings 7:24–26

And under the brim of it round about there were knops compassing it, ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about: the knops were cast in two rows, when it was cast. It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east: and the sea was set above upon them, and all their hinder parts were inward. And it was an hand breadth thick, and the brim thereof was wrought like the brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies: it contained two thousand baths.

Twelve brass oxen supported the huge "wash basin" that held 2,000 baths, or 14,000 gallons of water. Who changed the water in this huge bronze tank? You might recall how the Gibeonites had tricked Joshua into thinking they were from a far country and signing a peace treaty with them (Joshua 9). When Joshua discovered they were his neighbors, rather than killing them, he conscripted them to serve in the tabernacle. They became known as Nethinim and it would have been their jobs to tend to the water in this huge brass laver.

1 Kings 7:27–39

And he made ten bases of brass; four cubits was the length of one base, and four cubits the breadth thereof, and three cubits the height of it. And the work of the bases was on this manner: they had borders, and the borders were between the ledges: And on the borders that were between the ledges were lions, oxen, and cherubims: and upon the ledges there was a base above: and beneath the lions and oxen were certain additions made of thin work. And every base had four brasen wheels, and plates of brass: and the four corners thereof had undersetters: under the laver were undersetters molten, at the side of every addition. And the mouth of it within the chapiter and above was a cubit: but the mouth thereof was round after the work of the base, a cubit and an half: and also upon the mouth of it were gravings with their borders, foursquare, not round. And under the borders were four wheels; and the axletrees of the wheels were joined to the base: and the height of a wheel was a cubit and a half a cubit.

And the work of the wheels was like the work of a chariot wheel: their axletrees, and their naves, and their felloes, and their spokes, were all molten. And there were four undersetters to the four corners of one base: and the undersetters were of the very base itself. And in the top of the base was there a round compass of half a cubit high: and on the top of the base the ledges thereof and the borders thereof were of the same. For on the plates of the ledges thereof, and on the borders thereof, he graved cherubims, lions, and palm trees, according to the proportion of every one, and additions round about. After this manner he made the ten bases: all of them had one casting, one measure, and one size. Then made he ten lavers of brass: one laver contained forty baths: and every laver was four cubits: and upon every one of the ten bases one laver. And he put five bases on the right side of the house, and five on the left side of the house: and he set the sea on the right side of the house eastward over against the south.

Not only was a huge bronze tank that contained 14,000 gallons of water, but there were ten portable tanks, six square feet, that held about two hundred and fifty gallons of water. They had wheels on them, so that wherever there was a need for a priest to wash, they could be wheeled to him.

The brass laver in the tabernacle that preceded the lavers in the temple was made of the mirrors the Israelite women carried out of Egypt (Exodus 38:8). The image is perfect because we are cleansed by the water of the Word (John 15:3), which is also likened to a mirror (James 1:23).

I suggest that the laver containing 14,000 gallons speaks of the full counsel of God (Acts 20:27), the Word in its entirety, while the smaller "portable lavers" speak of the smaller portions of the Word we carry in our hearts upon which we are to meditate throughout the day (Psalm 1:2, 119:105).

1 Kings 7:40–47

And Hiram made the lavers, and the shovels, and the basons. So Hiram made an end of doing all the work that he made king Solomon for the house of the LORD: The two pillars, and the two

bowls of the chapiters that were on the top of the two pillars; and the two networks, to cover the two bowls of the chapiters which were upon the top of the pillars; And four hundred pomegranates for the two networks, even two rows of pomegranates for one network, to cover the two bowls of the chapiters that were upon the pillars; And the ten bases, and ten lavers on the bases; And one sea, and twelve oxen under the sea; And the pots, and the shovels, and the basons: and all these vessels, which Hiram made to king Solomon for the house of the LORD, were of bright brass. In the plain of Jordan did the king cast them, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zarthan. And Solomon left all the vessels unweighed, because they were exceeding many: neither was the weight of the brass found out.

So many vessels and utensils did Hiram make that Solomon said, "Don't even weigh them."

There was one candlestick in the tabernacle. Here in the temple, however, things became more complicated and complex.

1 Kings 7:48–51

And Solomon made all the vessels that pertained unto the house of the LORD: the altar of gold, and the table of gold, whereupon the shewbread was, And the candlesticks of pure gold, five on the right side, and five on the left, before the oracle, with the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs of gold, And the bowls, and the snuffers, and the basons, and the spoons, and the censers of pure gold; and the hinges of gold, both for the doors of the inner house, the most holy place, and for the doors of the house, to wit, of the temple. So was ended all the work that king Solomon made for the house of the LORD. And Solomon brought in the things which David his father had dedicated; even the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, did he put among the treasures of the house of the LORD.

In 1 Chronicles 29:2, we read that David not only gathered gold, silver, and brass for the temple, but also iron. Yet in the record of the construction of

the temple and its utensils, there is no mention of iron whatsoever. There are times in our lives when we will go to a great effort to do something as unto the Lord. But for one reason or another, it will not be used. That's okay. Our job is simply to do the best we can and present it to the Lord. The way He wants to use it is completely, totally up to Him. Our part is to rejoice in His wisdom, His timing, His plan, and in so doing, we will be wonderfully free.



8 1 Kings 8:1–8

Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. And they brought up the ark of the LORD, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, even those did the priests and the Levites bring up. And king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled unto him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that could not be told nor numbered for multitude. And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims. For the cherubims spread forth their two wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark and the staves thereof above. And they drew out the staves, that the ends of the staves were seen out in the holy place before the oracle, and they were not seen without: and there they are unto this day.

When the temple was complete, the ark was brought in. Years previously, David had brought the ark to the city of Jerusalem, a convenient place. Here, Solomon takes the baton and brings the ark into a magnificent place.

1 Kings 8:9

There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.

Hebrews 9:4 tells us that the ark contained the Ten Commandments, a pot of manna, and Aaron's rod. Here, however, we see only the Ten Commandments within the ark. I believe the Holy Spirit included this information to help us to come to a very important understanding. That is, signs and wonders—budding rods and manna—as wonderful as they are, are not lasting. What lasts, what endures, what is absolutely essential is the Word of God.

According to Jesus, the greatest prophet who ever lived was neither Elijah, who called down fire from heaven, nor Moses, who parted the Red Sea. The greatest prophet who ever lived was a man who did no miracles whatsoever. And yet all the things he spoke of Jesus were true. The greatest prophet who ever lived said, "I must decrease, but He must increase." The greatest prophet who ever lived was a man who simply pointed people to Jesus (Matthew 11:11). Like John the Baptist, you might not be one to perform signs, wonders, and miracles. But, like him, you can tell people about Jesus.

1 Kings 8:10–13
And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD. Then spake Solomon, The LORD said that he would dwell in thick darkness. I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever.

Have you ever experienced times in fellowship when, the presence of the Lord is so perceivable that you can hardly stand up? That's what's happening here.

1 Kings 8:14–21

And the king turned his face about, and blessed all the congregation of Israel: (and all the congregation of Israel stood;) And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which spake with his mouth unto David my father, and hath with his hand fulfilled it, saying, Since the day that I brought forth my people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build an house, that my name might be therein; but I chose David to be over my people Israel. And it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. And the LORD said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart. Nevertheless thou shalt not build the house; but thy son that shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house unto my name. And the LORD hath performed his word that he spake, and I am risen up in the room of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. And I have set there a place for the ark, wherein is the covenant of the LORD, which he made with our fathers, when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.

When David was forbidden to build the temple, did he pout? Did he pull back? Did he give up? No. This man after God's heart said, "If I can't build the Lord's house, I'll make preparations for it." Although David didn't have the opportunity to participate in the actual construction of the temple, I believe that in eternity, Solomon's temple will be referred to as David's temple because it was in his heart to build it.

1 Kings 8:22–25
And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven: And he said, LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart: Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and

hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day. Therefore now, LORD God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit on the throne of Israel; so that thy children take heed to their way, that they walk before me as thou hast walked before me.

When God told David he couldn't build Him a house, He tempered his message by saying, "But I'm going to build you a house. There will always be someone from your lineage upon the throne of Israel." Of course, this promise finds its culmination and fulfillment in the Son of David, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns forever.

1 Kings 8:26–29
And now, O God of Israel, let thy word, I pray thee, be verified, which thou spakest unto thy servant David my father. But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded? Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer, which thy servant prayeth before thee to day: That thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place.

Solomon was right on when he said, "I realize this house I have built cannot possibly contain You, God." How big is God? The Milky Way galaxy we see overhead is 100,000 light-years long and 10,000 light-years wide. This means that, cruising at the speed of light, it would take you 100,000 years to travel from one end of it to the other. And yet Isaiah tells us God holds the heavens in the palm of His hand (40:12).

No wonder David asked, "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" (Psalm 8:4). We're so puny. And yet this God who is so huge has chosen to relate to us in the Person of Jesus Christ. I understand the heart of the Father,

the grace, longsuffering, mercy, and tenderness of God because Jesus is the express image, the exact reflection of Him (Hebrews 1:3).

1 Kings 8:30
And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive.

Here, Solomon's prayer shifts from asking God to bless the temple to asking God to forgive the people. In it, he lists seven situations in which only God's intervention would avert either individual or national disaster . . .

1 Kings 8:31, 32
If any man trespass against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to cause him to swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house: Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his head; and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness.

Doubt. If a man was accused of a crime but there was no evidence against him, only God could rightly judge.

1 Kings 8:33, 34
When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee, and shall turn again to thee, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto thee in this house: Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest unto their fathers.

Defeat. If the nation was defeated in battle, only God could bring them home.

1 Kings 8:35, 36

When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them: Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance.

Drought. Only God could send rain to replenish land that had dried up as a result of the rebellion of His people.

1 Kings 8:37–40
If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpiller; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be; What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;) That they may fear thee all the days that they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers.

Destruction. "When the people sin and experience pestilence, when they sin and experience drought, when they sin and are smitten by their enemies, when they call upon You, forgive them," Solomon prayed, "for You know the hearts of men." Only God knows the hearts of men. Only God sees the heart that turns to Him. This means when I forgive people, I must forgive them absolutely unconditionally because I don't know their heart. I have found this to be wonderfully freeing because it means I don't have to judge, analyze, or figure things out. Rather, I'm simply to love and forgive, confident that God will deal with the "heart" of the matter.

1 Kings 8:41–43

Moreover concerning a stranger, that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name's sake; (For they shall hear of thy great name, and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched out arm;) when he shall come and pray toward this house; Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as do thy people Israel; and that they may know that this house, which I have builded, is called by thy name.

Denunciation. "When people of other nations come to the temple and turn their back on their heathen gods after hearing about the great things You're doing, hear their prayers as well," Solomon prayed.

We see Jesus righteously angry in John 2 for there, in the temple, in the court of the Gentiles—which was as far into the temple a Gentile could go—merchants had set up tables to exchange money and to sell animals to sacrifice at exorbitant prices. As evidenced by Solomon's prayer, the court of the Gentiles was to be a place Gentiles could be drawn to the true and living God. No wonder, then, that Jesus was incensed that what was to be a place of outreach and evangelism was nothing more than a business.

We also are called to be salt and light. When we start turning inward, when we start losing our vision for reaching the lost and bringing the lost into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, it's over. The church that turns inward will soon grow frustrated. A person who looks inward will soon grow discontent. We must commit ourselves before the Lord to reaching out to the world continually, that when people see us they will sense a loving community whose desire is to lead them into a fuller knowledge of God through Jesus Christ.

Are you concerned about the lost? Solomon was. "Lord, when a stranger joins us, may You hear his prayer, and meet him in his place of need," he prayed.

1 Kings 8:44, 45
If thy people go out to battle against their enemy, whithersoever thou shalt send them, and shall pray unto the LORD toward the

city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house that I have built for thy name: Then hear thou in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.

Deployment. If the nation went to battle in obedience to God's instruction, only He could truly fight for them.

1 Kings 8:46–53
If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near; Yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness; And so return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name: Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause, And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee and all their transgressions wherein they have transgressed against thee, and give them compassion before them who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them: For they be thy people, and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest forth out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron: That thine eyes may be open unto the supplication of thy servant, and unto the supplication of thy people Israel, to hearken unto them in all that they call for unto thee. For thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, to be thine inheritance, as thou spakest by the hand of Moses thy servant, when thou broughtest our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God.

Defection. If the nation turned from truth to false worship that leads to captivity, only God could turn their hearts back to Him.

1 Kings 8:54
And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven.

This is the first time in Scripture we see someone kneeling in prayer. While it is certainly the posture of the heart rather than the posture of the body that matters, I believe it is also true that the posture of the body often reflects the posture of the heart. Haven't you found that when you're really pressed, you naturally find yourself on your knees or face before the Lord? Solomon was so intense in the Spirit, so concerned about the petitions he was raising to the Lord that, although the normal posture of prayer at this time was to stand, he found himself inevitably on his knees with his hand's lifted up, a telling insight regarding the posture of his heart.

Second Chronicles 7 tells us that, after he prayed this prayer, fire was sent from heaven to consume the sacrifices on the altar. This means Solomon literally prayed down fire from heaven. I believe one of the reasons for this was that there was an intensity, a burning within his own heart as he prayed. Oh, that God would give us the ability to pray down fire, that He would give us understanding so that we might be potent and powerful in our prayer lives as well.

1 Kings 8:55, 56
And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying, Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant.

After spending time with the Lord, Solomon now stands before the people and begins to bless them, reminding them that God had kept His promises completely.

The same is still true. Can you remember what you were anxious about a year ago? How about three years ago? Yet during those times, you no doubt thought, "God's promise that all things work together for good, His guarantee

of blessing and provision are not going to work for me, I just know it." My fears for last year never came to pass. So why should I lose sleep over any situation before me when the Lord keeps His promises without exception?

1 Kings 8:57–61
The LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us: That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers. And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the LORD, be nigh unto the LORD our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: That all the people of the earth may know that the LORD is God, and that there is none else. Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day.

Solomon pronounces blessing, and yet he was a king, not a priest. The Hebrew word translated "bless" literally means to confer prosperity or happiness upon another. As a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), we have the same opportunity as Solomon to speak God's goodness into peoples' lives.



***For topical study of 1 Kings 8:57–61 entitled "The Building Blocks of Blessing," turn to page* 984.**

1 Kings 8:62, 63
And the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice before the LORD. And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the LORD, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the LORD.

Twenty-two thousand oxen and 120,000 sheep were sacrificed. Not only was this expensive, but it required an incredible amount of effort and energy. But it was a delight to the Lord. As a New Testament priesthood, we are to offer the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name (Hebrews 13:15). What if the praises you offered to the Lord were recorded in Scripture. Would it be an impressive figure like this or would it be embarrassingly small?

I have recently reenrolled in the school of praise, working through the Book of Psalms, and learning the language of thanksgiving as I personalize the Psalms in my morning devotions. If you're finding it hard to verbalize praise, I would encourage you to enroll in this school as well. Work through the Psalms and make them yours. Put them in the first person. It's a wonderful tool and it will help you in becoming more expressive in offering praise and thanksgiving to our Lord.

1 Kings 8:64–66
The same day did the king hallow the middle of the court that was before the house of the LORD: for there he offered burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings: because the brasen altar that was before the LORD was too little to receive the burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings. And at that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt, before the LORD our God, seven days and seven days, even fourteen days. On the eighth day he sent the people away: and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the LORD had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people.

After spending time dedicating the temple to the Lord and offering sacrifices unto Him, the people went away joyful and glad. This is not surprising, for whenever we truly have an experience *with* the Lord, we experience the joy *of* the Lord.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF BLESSING

A topical Study of
1 KINGS 8:57–61

Upset about the service he received, a man called the small business and said, "I want to talk to someone with a little authority around there."

The clerk on the other end of the line said, "You can talk to me. I've got about as little authority as anyone."

That's the way we often view ourselves. "Who am I to bless others?" we say. "I'm not a priest or a preacher."

That may be, but in Matthew 5, Jesus specifically told us to bless those who curse us and in Luke 10, we are told to pronounce blessing upon homes we enter. Therefore, because all of us are called to bless others, please note with me five characteristics of true biblical blessing as seen in the blessing of Solomon . . .

Preparation

> *And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven.*
>
> 1 Kings 8:54

Solomon did not stand up on the spur of the moment and speak whatever came to his mind. No, Solomon prayed to the Lord before he stood and blessed. It is prayer that produces power. It is prayer that prepares the heart to speak forth blessing to others. Solomon had spent significant time praying on his knees, with his hands stretched toward heaven.

Blessing begins at the point where I am in the posture of prayer. It starts in the place of prayer. Beginning your day in prayer on your knees before the Lord with hands lifted to Him puts you in a position where blessing can flow through you throughout the day.

Expectation

And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel . . .

1 Kings 8:55 (a)

Solomon stood up, expecting something to happen. When you speak blessing into someone's life, stand up. That is, mix your blessing with faith and *expect* the Lord to respond.

Articulation

> *. . . with a loud voice, saying, Blessed be the* LORD*, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant. The* LORD *our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us: That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers. And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the* LORD*, be nigh unto the* LORD *our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require . . .*
>
> 1 Kings 8:55–59

Solomon didn't just think about blessing the people or even silently pray about blessing the people. He vocalized it. And it's no wonder that he did, for there is amazing power in the spoken word . . .

> As Joshua chased his enemies, the sun began to set and he knew he could not pursue them after dark. So in faith, Joshua said, "Sun, stand thou still," as the entire camp of Israel listened (Joshua 10).

Would you have been bold enough to make a statement like that? Joshua did, and the Word declares that the Lord hearkened to his voice and the sun did indeed stand still.

Paul said it is not only when we believe in our heart, but it is when we also confess Jesus with our mouth that we are saved (Romans 10:10). There is power in the spoken word. Start blessing people articulately and expectantly and they *will* be blessed. Good things will happen in their lives.

Motivation

> *That all the people of the earth may know that the LORD is God, and that there is none else.*
>
> 1 Kings 8:60

Solomon sought God's blessing not in order that people would know he was a spiritual heavyweight, but in order that all the earth would know the true and living God. Did that come to pass? Check out what happens two chapters later . . .

> *And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions.*
>
> 1 Kings 10:1

Sheba, a Queen from Africa, heard what was happening in Solomon's realm and came, not to glorify Solomon, but to seek the Lord.

If you want to be one who speaks blessing into the lives of others, your motivation must be to see people drawn to the Lord, not that they will be excited about you. If indeed your motivation is to want people to prosper in the Lord, you can expect the Lord to bless them through you.

Exhortation

> *Let your heart therefore be perfect with the* LORD *our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day.*
>
> 1 Kings 8:61

As part of his blessing, Solomon exhorts the people. This is not simply an injunction to them, but it's an infusion. It's not a condemnation, but rather a proclamation of what *will* happen. That is, it's an exhortation based and built on faith. After Solomon rallied the people to believe that they would indeed do well in the Lord, they left that place blessed.

I firmly believe that our country and our world can be affected if we begin to move in the authority and possibility of being a blessing to hurting, diseased people all around us. The man that pumps your gas needs to be blessed. Instead of complaining about the price of oil, instead of listening to the radio, look him in the eye and say, "May the Lord bless you today. As you fill cars, may your heart be filled with God's love."

When you go through the grocery line, instead of making small talk about the headlines of the tabloids, say, "May the Lord bless you, encourage you, and build you in the areas you need to be built up today."

As believers, we are far too often far too concerned about far too many things. Let's change our mindset so that instead of burdening others, we cast our concerns upon the Lord and bless others with a word of faith, a word of encouragement. I challenge us all to stop burdening and start blessing. Why are we so prone to complaining instead of praising? Instead of griping about the price of eggs, why don't we say, "It's so good to see the price of groceries going up. Just think, those farmers that are hit hard will now get a little more help. Maybe the truck drivers will make a little more money to put groceries on their own tables. Praise the Lord!"

Do that, and I guarantee you'll be salt and light. I guarantee you'll be a blessing.

Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus lifted His hands and blessed the people (Luke 24). I encourage us in His name to follow His example as well

as the example of Solomon and to speak blessing into the lives of those around us for God's glory.

> *The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.*
>
> Numbers 6:24–26

Amen!



9 1 Kings 9:1, 2

And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished the building of the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire which he was pleased to do, That the LORD appeared to Solomon the second time, as he had appeared unto him at Gibeon.

Twenty years earlier, the Lord appeared to Solomon the first time. Here, the Lord appears to him again. This reminds me that there can be great spans of time between the Lord's dealings with us. Therefore, I think it's dangerous to think we need to have a revelation from God or a miraculous experience every day or every week. Abraham went through years where he didn't hear from the Lord, and yet he is called the friend of God (James 2:23). Reading the Book of Acts, it's easy to assume that the early church witnessed miracles daily if not hourly, until you remember that the Book of Acts covers a time span of thirty-eight *years*.

God is interested in developing us for eternity. To this end, He teaches us to walk by faith and not by sight. He wants us to develop discipline, to praise Him when we might not feel His presence, to study His Word even though we might not experience fresh revelation. God wants to develop and deepen you for what He has in store for you.

1 Kings 9:3–5

> **And the LORD said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually. And if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes and my judgments: Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel.**

The Lord promised to establish Solomon's kingdom if he walked before Him with as much integrity as David had. The Hebrew word for integrity speaks of singleness. He fell time after time. David had flaws and failures. But one thing he had was integrity of heart. That is, he never left the Lord to follow false gods. He sinned. He strayed. He erred to be sure. But his heart was always for the Lord, and it is the heart that matters (1 Samuel 16:7). That is why the Lord uses David as a standard by which all other kings in Israel and Judah would be measured.

Regardless of your failing, folly, and faults, God looks at your heart. Therefore, be encouraged in the fact that, if your heart is toward Him and you're not leaving Him to serve other gods, He takes note.

In talking about Jesus, Isaiah was inspired by the Father to write:

> Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.
>
> Isaiah 42:1–3

In my garden, if plants aren't looking good, out they go. If a campfire isn't providing heat, out it goes. Not so with the Lord. He's tender, compassionate, and exceedingly gracious. Therefore, I am increasingly convinced that, as

Christians, we often expect more from each other than the Lord does. As Christians, we often expect more from ourselves than the Lord does. We picture the Lord as an angry God who is out to quench the smoking flax and break the bruised reed. But that's not the way He is.

As I was thinking about a brother in the Lord, I prayed, "Lord, intensify his devotional life. Make him more fervent in his witness. Shake him out of his apathy. Wake him out of his lethargy." And the Lord impressed my heart at that moment, quietly saying, "Be quiet. I'm happy with him. I've chosen him from eternity past. I saved his soul. I've embedded in his life a moral fabric that would have never been there apart from Me. I have a plan for him in eternity. He's doing just fine." And more and more, I'm beginning to see a different perspective. All too often, we punish ourselves and others, but that's not the heart of God. Allow the Lord to minister to you *His* thoughts concerning you. The Lord truly loves you. And if you simply walk in uprightness of heart, like David, you'll be established.

1 Kings 9:6–9
But if ye shall at all turn from following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments and my statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods, and worship them: Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all people: And at this house, which is high, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss; and they shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and to this house? And they shall answer, Because they forsook the LORD their God, who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath the LORD brought upon them all this evil.

As they prepared to enter the Promised Land, Moses told the Israelites that "if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth"

(Deuteronomy 28:1). The newly completed temple was indeed set on high, both due to its location and size. Here, however, God promises not only to desert His temple, but His own people should they forsake Him and follow other gods.

1 Kings 9:10–14

And it came to pass at the end of twenty years, when Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the LORD, and the king's house, (Now Hiram the king of Tyre had furnished Solomon with cedar trees and fir trees, and with gold, according to all his desire,) that then king Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee. And Hiram came out from Tyre to see the cities which Solomon had given him; and they pleased him not. And he said, What cities are these which thou hast given me, my brother? And he called them the land of Cabul unto this day. And Hiram sent to the king sixscore talents of gold.

Verse 14 should read, "Hiram *had sent* to the king threescore talents of gold." During the construction of the temple, Solomon needed some additional funds. So he sent word to his friend Hiram, king of Tyre, and Hiram graciously loaned Solomon one hundred and twenty talents of gold. When it was time to pay back the loan, Solomon gave him twenty cities in the Galilee area. But when Hiram checked them out, he thought they were dumps and called them *Cabul,* or "Dirty."

Why is this incident recorded in Scripture? I suggest two reasons . . .

First, I believe it is tempering. There are those who would say that borrowing money is never right. There are those who say it is never biblical or appropriate to borrow money. But here, Solomon borrowed a significant amount of money to complete the task to which God had called him. Therefore, I believe to be absolutely dogmatic about not borrowing is an unnecessary bondage placed on believers. Is it a good principle? Absolutely. Is it a good warning? You bet.

Yet, in addition to tempering, I believe this incident serves as a warning because this loan caused friction between Solomon and Hiram. If you have to make an error, make it on the side of being too conservative and too safe in

order to avoid the problems that borrowing and going into debt can bring about.

1 Kings 9:15–19
And this is the reason of the levy which king Solomon raised; for to build the house of the LORD, and his own house, and Millo, and the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, and Megiddo, and Gezer. For Pharaoh king of Egypt had gone up, and taken Gezer, and burnt it with fire, and slain the Canaanites that dwelt in the city, and given it for a present unto his daughter, Solomon's wife. And Solomon built Gezer, and Beth-horon the nether, and Baalath, and Tadmor in the wilderness, in the land, And all the cities of store that Solomon had, and cities for his chariots, and cities for his horsemen, and that which Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion.

In addition to building the temple, the levy Solomon raised in chapter 5—both of men and of money—was required to finance the vast building projects he undertook. Many kings levied money for war. This wasn't the case with Solomon. He concentrated his efforts on construction and fortification, beginning with the temple, then his own house, a house for his wife, and various cities throughout Israel that were either border towns, such as Hazor, or cities on trade routes such as Megiddo.

1 Kings 9:20–23
And all the people that were left of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, which were not of the children of Israel, Their children that were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel also were not able utterly to destroy, upon those did Solomon levy a tribute of bondservice unto this day. But of the children of Israel did Solomon make no bondmen: but they were men of war, and his servants, and his princes, and his captains, and rulers of his chariots, and his horsemen. These were the chief of the officers that were over Solomon's work, five hundred and fifty, which bare rule over the people that wrought in the work.

The people that Israel had conquered provided the workforce of Solomon's construction. The Israelites themselves held more noble positions.

1 Kings 9:24, 25
But Pharaoh's daughter came up out of the city of David unto her house which Solomon had built for her: then did he build Millo. And three times in a year did Solomon offer burnt offerings and peace offerings upon the altar which he built unto the LORD, and he burnt incense upon the altar that was before the LORD. So he finished the house.

The three times a year Solomon offered offerings would have been at Passover, the Feast of Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

1 Kings 9:26
And king Solomon made a navy of ships in Ezion-geber, which is beside Eloth, on the shore of the Red sea, in the land of Edom.

Although the Jews fished on the Sea of Galilee, when it came to the open ocean, they shied away from any kind of seafaring activity. Here, and only here in the Bible, do we see a Navy being assembled.

1 Kings 9:27, 28
And Hiram sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought it to king Solomon.

It took approximately three years for Solomon to get four hundred and twenty talents of gold through his naval venture into India. However, according to figures recorded in Scripture, David gathered over 100,000 talents of gold in a three-year period. In other words, conquest under David far exceeded commerce under Solomon.

I suggest that the riches in the Lord are not uncovered or discovered in the boardroom, but on the battlefield. In Old Testament days, faith had to be exercised by God's people in battles against real live Philistines and

Canaanites. We don't fight Philistines and Canaanites. We fight finances and cash flow. But the battle is just as real. And just as the Philistines and Canaanites were overcome by faith, so finances and cash flow must be dealt with by faith. While I'm not suggesting we have a careless or reckless attitude, I do know that as we step out in faith, God will mature us in the battle.



10 As we come to chapter 10, we find Solomon at the height of both his piety and his prosperity. . . .

1 Kings 10:1
And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions.

Scholars are divided between two possible locations for Sheba. One is Yemen, the other is Ethiopia. Even if we take the more conservative approach and assume it was Yemen, the 1,500-mile trip from Yemen to Jerusalem would have required a seventy-five-day ride on the back of a camel across the desert. That she came to "prove him with hard question," doesn't mean the queen of Sheba was a skeptic, but that she was a seeker. She went to great lengths to find the truth, and she will not be disappointed.

1 Kings 10:2–9
And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon told her all her questions: there was not any thing hid from the king, which he told her not. And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built, And the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and

their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the LORD; there was no more spirit in her. And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice.

The queen of Sheba was amazed by everything she saw: Solomon's palace, his furniture, the food at his table, his servants but, because it is mentioned first, above all else, she was amazed by Solomon's wisdom. Wise herself, she praised the God who had given Solomon the wisdom, and thereby the ability, to accomplish all he had.

1 Kings 10:10–13
And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon. And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir great plenty of almug trees, and precious stones. And the king made of the almug trees pillars for the house of the LORD, and for the king's house, harps also and psalteries for singers: there came no such almug trees, nor were seen unto this day. And king Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty. So she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants.

The queen of Sheba came, saw, and was saved. How do I know? Because Jesus said she will rise up in judgment against those who don't believe (Matthew 12:42). Because the queen of Sheba was a seeker of truth

and sought out Solomon, ultimately she found the Greater than Solomon, Jesus Christ.

- Solomon had the wisdom of God.
  Jesus is *the wisdom of God.*
- Solomon was a great king.
  Jesus is the King of kings.
- Solomon had great wealth.
  Jesus has unsearchable riches.
- Solomon spoke practically in proverbs.
  Jesus spoke significantly in the Sermon on the Mount.
- Solomon answered the queen of Sheba's questions.
  Jesus is the answer to all *questions.*
- Solomon revealed his riches to the queen of Sheba.
  Jesus reveals His riches to any who seek His face.
- Solomon loaded the queen of Sheba with a bounty.
  Jesus does exceedingly abundantly above all we can ask or think.

How thankful I am for Jesus Christ, for the wisdom and perfection He embodies, for the riches and blessings He bestows.

1 Kings 10:14, 15
Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold. Beside that he had of the merchantmen, and of the traffick of the spice merchants, and of all the kings of Arabia, and of the governors of the country.

In today's economy, six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold would be equivalent to one billion dollars, a rather hefty sum. How hefty? If a billionaire gave a million dollars to his wife and said, "Go out and spend $1,000 every day and don't come back until you've spent the entire million, his wife wouldn't come back for three years. But if he gave his wife a billion dollars and told her to spend $1,000 a day until it was gone, his wife

wouldn't come back for 3,000 *years.* In other words, a billion dollars is a lot of money!

1 Kings 10:16
And king Solomon made two hundred targets of beaten gold: six hundred shekels of gold went to one target.

A target was a shield that covered a soldier's entire body. Solomon was so rich that the shields for his army were solid gold.

1 Kings 10:17
And he made three hundred shields of beaten gold; three pound of gold went to one shield: and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon.

The house of the forest of Lebanon was perhaps Solomon's vacation home.

1 Kings 10:18–20
Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the best gold. The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne was round behind: and there were stays on either side on the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the stays. And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps: there was not the like made in any kingdom.

A throne of ivory would have been impressive enough, but so much gold was at Solomon's disposal that he gold-plated the ivory.

1 Kings 10:21
And all king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon.

Due to the abundance of gold in Solomon's empire, silver was virtually worthless.

1 Kings 10:22, 23
For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom.

Solomon was known both for riches and for wisdom. In reality, his riches were the result of his wisdom. "Ask of Me anything," the Lord had said. Solomon asked for wisdom in order that he might rule the people correctly. So pleased was the Lord with his request that, in addition to wisdom beyond comprehension, Solomon received riches beyond measure.

1 Kings 10:24–29
And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart. And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments, and armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year. And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem. And the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as the sycomore trees that are in the vale, for abundance. And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn: the king's merchants received the linen yarn at a price. And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, did they bring them out by their means.

In Deuteronomy 17:16, the Lord specifically said that the king of Israel was not to multiply to himself horses, gold, or wives. Is this because the Lord is miserly? No, it's because He knows the tendency of our heart—that we'll trust in horses and rely on gold rather than seek Him every step of the

way. Solomon multiplied to himself both horses and gold, as well as something else, which we'll see in chapter 11 . . .



11 1 Kings 11:1–3

But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammon ites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart.

Solomon gathered seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. Why? One reason is that it was politically prudent for him to do so. You see, in the Middle East culture of the day, alliances were ratified by the king of one country taking the daughter of the king of the other country into his harem. Intermarriage was a way of cementing alliances, and Solomon made many such alliances.

A second reason is obvious. A vast number of wives and concubines would have been sensually satisfying. Both the Book of Proverbs and the Song of Solomon show us that Solomon knew a great deal about women. In Ecclesiastes, we read that Solomon took wives, hoping to find fulfillment in them. Perhaps in search of the perfect woman he thought, *It'll be the next one*—until finally when he came to the thousandth one, he said, "It's all vanity."

There is a misconception in today's society on the part of both men and women that says, "If I just had someone else, I'd be happier. If I was with someone else, I know I'd be more fulfilled." It's a subtle lie of Satan that he whispers in our ears and it was whispered in the ears of Solomon, as well. He thought that happiness was right around the corner—the next relationship, the next concubine, the next marriage—surely then he would be fulfilled. But he wasn't.

Keep Solomon in mind next time you're tempted to think you'd be happier with someone else. Solomon had the opportunity to experiment greatly in that area. It didn't work for him, and it won't for you.

1 Kings 11:4–10
For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the chil dren of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods. And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded.

The issue is always the heart. Solomon's heart left the Lord and pursued other gods. The Lord makes mention of the fact that He appeared to Solomon twice. The Lord never appeared unto David. Yet Solomon heard from Him twice. This tells us that miraculous manifestations do not produce spiritual maturation. It's not miracles that produce maturity, it's the Word. David heard the Word of the Lord, responded to the Word of the Lord, and kept the Word of the Lord. David loved God deeply. If you're a lover of God, you're on good ground. If you love the Lord and appreciate Him and are thankful for what He's done in your life and who He is to you, you're on good ground. But if your heart is not toward the Lord, you're on dangerous ground indeed.

Saul had no heart for the Lord. David had a whole heart for the Lord. Solomon had half a heart for the Lord. He began well but ended poorly, for his heart was turned.

1 Kings 11:11–13

Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen.

The remaining tribe would, of course, be Judah, from whom Messiah would one day come.

1 Kings 11:14–22

And the LORD stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite: he was of the king's seed in Edom. For it came to pass, when David was in Edom, and Joab the captain of the host was gone up to bury the slain, after he had smitten every male in Edom; (For six months did Joab remain there with all Israel, until he had cut off every male in Edom:) That Hadad fled, he and certain Edomites of his father's servants with him, to go into Egypt; Hadad being yet a little child. And they arose out of Midian, and came to Paran: and they took men with them out of Paran, and they came to Egypt, unto Pharaoh king of Egypt; which gave him an house, and appointed him victuals, and gave him land. And Hadad found great favour in the sight of Pharaoh, so that he gave him to wife the sister of his own wife, the sister of Tahpenes the queen. And the sister of Tahpenes bare him Genubath his son, whom Tahpenes weaned in Pharaoh's house: and Genubath was in Pharaoh's household among the sons of Pharaoh. And when Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers, and that Joab the captain of the host was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, Let me depart, that I may go to mine own country. Then Pharaoh said unto him, But what hast thou lacked with me, that, behold, thou seekest to go to thine own country? And he answered, Nothing: howbeit let me go in any wise.

When David conquered the Edomites, Hadad, as a little boy, was taken to Egypt in order that his life be spared. As he grew up, he found favor in the eyes of Pharaoh. But one day, he felt a stirring in his heart to leave the comfort of Pharaoh's palace and return to Israel. God caused this stirring because He was raising Hadad to be an adversary against Israel.

1 Kings 11:23–25
And God stirred him up another adversary, Rezon the son of Eliadah, which fled from his lord Hadadezer king of Zobah: And he gathered men unto him, and became captain over a band, when David slew them of Zobah: and they went to Damascus, and dwelt therein, and reigned in Damascus. And he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon, beside the mischief that Hadad did: and he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria.

Why did the Lord bring Hadad back into the land? Because He loved Solomon too much to allow him to continue in iniquity and apathy. Hadad and Rezon were used by the Lord to get Solomon off his high horse and back down on his knees.

1 Kings 11:26–28
And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up his hand against the king. And this was the cause that he lifted up his hand against the king: Solomon built Millo, and repaired the breaches of the city of David his father. And the man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valour: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph.

Here, we are introduced to a man who would become a third thorn in Solomon's flesh: Jeroboam. Not only was Jeroboam industrious, but he was also extremely gifted. Yet, although he had ability, he had no history with God. Although he had talent, he wasn't yet tempered. Although he was an incredibly blessed man, he wasn't a broken man.

1 Kings 11:29–39

And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two were alone in the field: And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces: And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee: (But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel:) Because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments, as did David his father. Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes: But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes. And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there. And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee. And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever.

Ahijah the prophet came to Jeroboam and said, "Although Solomon's house will keep one tribe, you will be king over ten."

1 Kings 11:40

Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. And Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon.

Solomon sought to deter God's judgment by killing Jeroboam. But God's will prevailed and Jeroboam was kept safe.

1 Kings 11:41–43
And the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon? And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead.

Solomon reigned as many years as David, his father, had reigned. However, while David left a unified kingdom, the kingdom Solomon left was soon to be divided. I suggest both are the inevitable result of the state of their hearts. David's heart was singularly God's. Solomon's was divided between the God of his father and the manifold gods of the world.



12

1 Kings 12:1–4
And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king. And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was yet in Egypt, heard of it, (for he was fled from the presence of king Solomon, and Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt;) That they sent and called him. And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam, saying, Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee.

To complete his massive building projects (1 Kings 9), Solomon had taxed the peoples' wealth and strength. Here, at the outset of a new administration, the people asked that their burden be made lighter.

1 Kings 12:5
And he said unto them, Depart yet for three days, then come again to me. And the people departed.

"Give me three days to consider your request," Rehoboam said.

1 Kings 12:6, 7
And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How do ye advise that I may answer this people? And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever.

Before making his decision, Rehoboam first consulted with his father's advisors. "If you will serve, encourage, and bless the people, you won't have a problem," they said. They were right because, truly, the key to authority is humility. The greatest Leader the world will ever know said, "Come unto Me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for My burden is easy. My yoke is light" (see Matthew 11:29, 30).

The night before He was crucified, with the disciples arguing over who was the greatest, Jesus simply began to wash their dusty feet (John 13:5). How I love Jesus. There is no One like Him. Who else would tend and care for us even as we bicker and fight over who is the greatest? How we need to be more like Him.

1 Kings 12:8–11
But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him: And he said unto them, What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter? And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but

make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

Rejecting the wise counsel of his father's advisors, Rehoboam sought the counsel of his own peers, who told him to lead not in humility but with force.

1 Kings 12:12–15
So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day. And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD, that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

Although the decision to rule with an iron fist was entirely Rehoboam's, it coincided perfectly with God's preordained judgment (1 Kings 11:31).

1 Kings 12:16–20
So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents. But as for the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was over the tribute; and all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. Therefore king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem. So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day. And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam

was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only.

The year was 920 B.C. The ten northern tribes said, "We are not going to serve Rehoboam. We will follow Jeroboam instead."

Judah, the southern tribe, along with the tiny tribe of Benjamin, said, "We'll stick with Rehoboam."

In the year 722 B.C., the ten northern tribes were carried away into captivity by the Assyrians and were eventually lost. The southern tribe of Judah, along with Benjamin, lasted a bit longer. They lasted until the year 586 when they were carried away by the Babylonians. Out of nineteen kings, they had eight good ones, eleven bad ones. The ten northern tribes, on the other hand, had not a single good king, not a single king who sought the Lord. The Jews that were carried away into Babylon later on were brought back by Ezra, Nehemiah, Zechariah, and Zerubbabel. They rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple and remained there until A.D. 70 when the Roman Empire came crashing down, destroying the Jews, and dispersing them throughout the entire known world.

But the story's not over yet, gang, for in Ezekiel 37, we find a promise that the Jews will come back once again. "Take two sticks," the Lord said to Ezekiel—"one representing Israel, the other representing Judah—and hold them together, for they shall no longer be two but one." We have already seen this happen when the nation of Israel was rebirthed in 1948.

1 Kings 12:21–24
And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah, with the tribe of Benjamin, an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. But the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying, Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the

children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the LORD, and returned to depart, according to the word of the LORD.

Rehoboam chose not to do battle against his brothers in an effort to hold the country together. Instead, he realized that what was happening was from the Lord.

1 Kings 12:25–27
Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Penuel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.

Jeroboam is making a bad blunder here. "Oh, no," he said. "If my people go down to Jerusalem to sacrifice there, their heart will turn towards Judah and Rehoboam." Notice Jeroboam didn't talk to the Lord. He talked to himself. Whenever I talk to myself, I get mixed up. And the same thing will happen to Jeroboam . . .

1 Kings 12:28
Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

To keep people from going to Jerusalem to sacrifice, Jeroboam made two golden calves and said, "These gods brought you out of Egypt." That should ring a bell, for when Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, Aaron made a golden calf and the people said, "This is your god that brought you out of Egypt (see Exodus 32:4). The implication in both cases was not that the golden calves replaced God but that they simply

represented Him. "It's hard for you to go to Jerusalem. Therefore, let's make a golden calf and it can represent God right here," Jeroboam said.

But such representation always leads to pollution, to idolatry. Jeroboam here is making a huge mistake.

1 Kings 12:29–33

And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense.

Jeroboam went on to assign holy days and to appoint priests in an attempt to hold on to his kingdom. May Jeroboam's sin be a warning to us, for how many concessions are we ready to make in an attempt to hold our own little kingdom or agenda together? What problems are you facing today? Don't be like Jeroboam. Don't talk to yourself. Talk to the Lord. Seek *His* kingdom, not your own.

13 In chapter 13, we come to one of the most interesting stories in the entire Book of First Kings . . .

1 Kings 13:1–3

And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee. And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out.

As Jeroboam was there sacrificing beside the altar he created, an unnamed man of God prophesied that the Lord would raise up a king named Josiah who would destroy the entire system of false worship. This prophecy was fulfilled over 350 years later when Josiah destroyed the high places and burned the bones of the false prophets (2 Kings 23).

1 Kings 13:4
And it came to pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Bethel, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him.

"Take this prophet away," Jeroboam commanded. And right then, his arm shriveled.

1 Kings 13:5, 6
The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Intreat now the face of the LORD thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again. And the man of God besought the LORD, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before.

Rather than holding a grudge, this man of God sought restoration and revitalization for Jeroboam. I like that. It's called love.

1 Kings 13:7–9
And the king said unto the man of God, Come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward. And the man of God said unto the king, If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: For so was it charged me by the word of the LORD, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest.

No doubt grateful for the restoration of his arm, Jeroboam invited the prophet to his home. But the prophet refused, due to the command of the Lord. Why did the Lord forbid the prophet any type of reward? I suggest it was to protect him from the compromise that seems to inevitably accompany reward or adulation. In this, I am reminded of Abraham when he said to the king of Sodom, "I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich" (Genesis 14:23).

1 Kings 13:10–19
So he went another way, and returned not by the way that he came to Bethel. Now there dwelt an old prophet in Bethel; and his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Bethel: the words which he had spoken unto the king, them they told also to their father. And their father said unto them, What way went he? For his sons had seen what way the man of God went, which came from Judah. And he said unto his sons, Saddle me the ass. So they saddled him the ass: and he rode thereon, And went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak: and he said unto him, Art thou the man of God that camest from Judah? And he said, I am. Then he said unto him, Come home with me, and eat bread. And he said, I may not return with thee, nor go in with thee: neither will I eat bread nor drink water with thee in this place: For it was said to me by

the word of the LORD, Thou shalt eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest. He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him. So he went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water.

When an old prophet heard reports of a young prophet doing marvelous things, he found the young prophet and said, "Come to my house and eat bread."

"I can't," the young prophet said. "The word of God to me said I must not."

"But I'm a prophet, too," argued the old man. "An angel came to me and told me you're to come with me and eat and drink."

Why did the old prophet say this? I suggest two possible reasons . . .

It could be that he was hungry for fellowship with someone moving in the anointing of the Spirit and was willing to lie in order to have this kind of fellowship. Or, it could be that he was jealous of the young prophet and wanted him off the scene. Either way, he was wrong. Nonetheless, evidently deferring to the age and experience of the old prophet, the young prophet accepted his invitation.

1 Kings 13:20–22

And it came to pass, as they sat at the table, that the word of the LORD came unto the prophet that brought him back: And he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the LORD, and hast not kept the commandment which the LORD thy God commanded thee, But camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place, of the which the LORD did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers.

Midway through the meal, the old prophet said, "Because you disobeyed the word of the Lord, you'll not die a normal death."

1 Kings 13:23–32
And it came to pass, after he had eaten bread, and after he had drunk, that he saddled for him the ass, to wit, for the prophet whom he had brought back. And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him: and his carcase was cast in the way, and the ass stood by it, the lion also stood by the carcase. And, behold, men passed by, and saw the carcase cast in the way, and the lion standing by the carcase: and they came and told it in the city where the old prophet dwelt. And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard thereof, he said, It is the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the LORD: therefore the LORD hath deliv ered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake unto him. And he spake to his sons, saying, Saddle me the ass. And they saddled him. And he went and found his carcase cast in the way, and the ass and the lion standing by the carcase: the lion had not eaten the carcase, nor torn the ass. And the prophet took up the carcase of the man of God, and laid it upon the ass, and brought it back: and the old prophet came to the city, to mourn and to bury him. And he laid his carcase in his own grave; and they mourned over him, saying, Alas, my brother! And it came to pass, after he had buried him, that he spake to his sons, saying, When I am dead, then bury me in the sepulchre wherein the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones: For the saying which he cried by the word of the LORD against the altar in Bethel, and against all the houses of the high places which are in the cities of Samaria, shall surely come to pass.

What in the world is this story about? In Galatians 1, Paul says, "If we or an angel from heaven preach unto you any other gospel, let that angel be accursed." I don't care who comes to you and says, "An angel spoke to me or a vision has been given to me," if that angel or vision is in contradiction to

the Word of God, reject it. If not, you will find yourself being torn up by the lion that Peter identifies as Satan (1 Peter 5:8).

Stick with the Word, gang, and you'll be safe. If you deviate from it, you're lion-bait. Study the Word. Hunger and desire to know the Word of God. Be committed to it. My prayer is that you might know it from cover to cover lest any mixed-up prophet says "The Lord told me to tell you . . ." and you find yourself being ripped up. May God give you a heart for it and the ability to carry out its instructions, not half-heartedly like Solomon, but wholeheartedly and fervently like David.

1 Kings 13:33, 34
After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth.

Even after God's word was confirmed before his eyes at the beginning of the chapter, Jeroboam continued in false worship—thereby bringing destruction upon the head of his own house, as seen in the next chapter . . .



14

1 Kings 14:1–3
At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick. And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam; and get thee to Shiloh: behold, there is Ahijah the prophet, which told me that I should be king over this people. And take with thee ten loaves, and cracknels, and a cruse of honey, and go to him: he shall tell thee what shall become of the child.

When Jeroboam's son became ill, Jeroboam told his wife to disguise herself and seek out a prophet of God—not for intercession, not for counsel, not for repentance—but simply to find out the future. I find it humorous that

Jeroboam told his wife to disguise herself. After all, why trust the word of a prophet who could be that easily fooled?

1 Kings 14:4
And Jeroboam's wife did so, and arose, and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah. But Ahijah could not see; for his eyes were set by reason of his age.

Ahijah's eyes were closed, but his ears were open. That is, although he was blind physically, he was tuned-in spiritually.

1 Kings 14:5–10
And the LORD said unto Ahijah, Behold, the wife of Jeroboam cometh to ask a thing of thee for her son; for he is sick: thus and thus shalt thou say unto her: for it shall be, when she cometh in, that she shall feign herself to be another woman. And it was so, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another? for I am sent to thee with heavy tidings. Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, And rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee: and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes; But hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back: Therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone.

Ahijah's word to Jeroboam's wife—whose disguise proved to be worthless—was that because Jeroboam worshiped false gods, his family

would be destroyed.

> **1 Kings 14:11–13**
> **Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat: for the LORD hath spoken it. Arise thou therefore, get thee to thine own house: and when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die. And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam.**

Jeroboam's child who was ill would die upon his wife's return. And, as if that wasn't bad enough, everyone else in the family would die a violent death.

> **1 Kings 14:14–20**
> **Moreover the LORD shall raise him up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam that day: but what? even now. For the LORD shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the LORD to anger. And he shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin. And Jeroboam's wife arose, and departed, and came to Tirzah: and when she came to the threshold of the door, the child died; And they buried him; and all Israel mourned for him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by the hand of his servant Ahijah the prophet. And the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred, and how he reigned, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. And the days which Jeroboam reigned were two and twenty years: and he slept with this fathers, and Nadab his son reigned in his stead.**

Within two years, Ahijah's prophecy would fully come to pass when a man named Baasha would slay not only Nadab, but also the entire house of

Jeroboam (1 Kings 15:28–30). In the meantime, we go back to the south, where Rehoboam was ruling over Judah . . .

1 Kings 14:21

And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD did choose out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess.

In Jewish genealogies the mother's name is usually never mentioned, but in the Books of Kings and Chronicles, the mother's name often appears. I suggest this is because the Lord is showing us that the mother has a great deal to do with the character of the child.

Moms, your primary ministry is to realize that you are responsible for the discipling and molding of your children. "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression," Paul wrote to Timothy. "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety" (1 Timothy 2:14, 15). The word "saved" doesn't mean you'll be saved concerning your eternal state. Rather, the Greek word implies being made whole, fulfilled in every area and dimension of your life.

As I understand the Word of God, the ministry of a woman is primarily to minister, mold, develop, and disciple her children. In so doing, she will be saved, fulfilled, content. In the Lord's economy, He has left the ministry of the church primarily to men. But He left the foundation of the church, the home, in the hands of women. There is nothing in my life I value more than my Christian heritage. Sisters, take seriously this glorious responsibility. In so doing, not only will you be fulfilled, but the church will be strong.

1 Kings 14:22–28

And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done. For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree. And there were also sodomites in the land: and

they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem: And he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all: and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made. And king Rehoboam made in their stead brasen shields, and committed them unto the hands of the chief of the guard, which kept the door of the king's house. And it was so, when the king went into the house of the LORD, that the guard bare them, and brought them back into the guard chamber.

When Shishak, king of Egypt, came to do battle against Jerusalem, he plundered the gold shields that Solomon had made. What did Rehoboam do? He didn't have the resources to make gold shields because the wealth and prosperity of the kingdom was falling rapidly. But he wanted to keep up appearances, so he made brass shields to take their place.

Is that happening in your life? Is the gold gone? Have the riches disappeared, yet you find yourself wanting to maintain the outer front? Rather than do that, the Lord would give back to you the gold and silver you once had spiritually if you'll just say, "Lord, I'm tired of playing games. I'm tired of putting up a front. I want to drink of You right now, Lord. I want to return my heart to You right now. I want to start walking with You once again." If you'll do that right now, the riches and joy of the Lord will be restored to you this very moment.

1 Kings 14:29–31
Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days. And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess. And Abijam his son reigned in his stead.

Although Rehoboam had been forbidden to wage war against the ten tribes, he would defend Judah against border attacks, thus resulting in constant strife, a far cry from the peace experienced during Solomon's reign (1 Kings 5:4).



15 1 Kings 15:1

Now in the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam the son of Nebat reigned Abijam over Judah.

As Jeroboam reigned in the north, Abijam came to the throne in the south and reigned over Judah.

1 Kings 15:2–5

Three years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom. And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father. Nevertheless for David's sake did the LORD his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem: Because David did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.

It's interesting how often David's name appears in the record of Kings and Chronicles. F.B. Meyer said this: "How long after David's sun had set did the light of his life glimmer over his house." Because David shone so brightly, loved God so intensely, worshiped God so fervently, the glow of his life remained upon his family for many generations.

What we enjoy as Christians is because there have been those before us who have prayed on our behalf, who have given of themselves, who have passed a heritage on down the line. Oh, how important it is that we see that our lives have long-term effects years down the road as did David's.

1 Kings 15:6–13
And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life. Now the rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And there was war between Abijam and Jeroboam. And Abijam slept with his fathers; and they buried him in the city of David: and Asa his son reigned in his stead. And in the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel reigned Asa over Judah. And forty and one years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom. And Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, as did David his father. And he took away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made. And also Maachah his mother, even her he removed from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove; and Asa destroyed her idol, and burnt it by the brook Kidron.

Asa is one of the great kings that we'll see more in depth in Chronicles. He was dedicated to the Lord, broke down the idols that competed against the Lord, and even dealt with his own mother. That might sound brutal, but Jesus said, our love for Him must be so intense that our love for our parents or for any other person seems to be hatred in comparison (Luke 14:26). If it comes down to choosing Mom or choosing the Lord, you've got to choose the Lord. And that's what Asa did.

1 Kings 15:14, 15
But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa's heart was perfect with the LORD all his days. And he brought in the things which his father had dedicated, and the things which himself had dedicated, into the house of the LORD, silver, and gold, and vessels.

Although he didn't complete the task, Asa's heart was right, and that's what the Lord looks at (1 Samuel 16:7).

1 Kings 15:16–24

And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. And Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, that he might not suffer any to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. Then Asa took all the silver and the gold that were left in the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and delivered them into the hand of his servants: and king Asa sent them to Ben-hadad, the son of Tabrimon, the son of Hezion, king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying, There is a league between me and thee, and between my father and thy father: behold, I have sent unto thee a present of silver and gold; come and break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me. So Ben-hadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of the hosts which he had against the cities of Israel, and smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abel-beth-maachah, and all Cinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali. And it came to pass, when Baasha heard thereof, that he left off building of Ramah, and dwelt in Tirzah. Then king Asa made a proclamation throughout all Judah; none was exempted: and they took away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha had builded; and king Asa built with them Geba of Benjamin, and Mizpah. The rest of all the acts of Asa, and all his might, and all that he did, and the cities which he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? Nevertheless in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet. And Asa slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead.

Asa was a godly man, a great leader, a wonderful king, and yet when he contracted a disease in his feet, 2 Chronicles 16:12 tells us he sought the physicians and not the Lord. Doctors are a gift of God, but I am wrong if I place faith in doctors above placing my hope and faith in the God who heals. The implication in Chronicles is that, had Asa sought the Lord before he sought the physicians, the outcome could have been entirely different. Our faith must never be in human ability or technology, but always in God's

sovereignty. Cast *all* your care upon Him—physical, mental, spiritual, financial—and let Him direct from there (1 Peter 5:7).

1 Kings 15:25, 26
And Nadab the son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned over Israel two years. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin.

Amazing. One would think the judgment of God that resulted in the death of his brother would have given Nadab pause in so blindly following the false worship instituted by his father, but such was not the case.

1 Kings 15:27–30
And Baasha the son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him; and Baasha smote him at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines; for Nadab and all Israel laid siege to Gibbethon. Even in the third year of Asa king of Judah did Baasha slay him, and reigned in his stead. And it came to pass, when he reigned, that he smote all the house of Jeroboam; he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed, until he had destroyed him, according unto the saying of the LORD, which he spake by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite: Because of the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and which he made Israel sin, by his provocation wherewith he provoked the LORD God of Israel to anger.

In the north, in fulfillment of the prophecy given in chapter 14, the house of Jeroboam is wiped out by assassination and murder.

1 Kings 15:31–34
Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. In the third year of Asa king of Judah began Baasha the son of Ahijah to reign over all Israel in Tirzah, twenty and four years. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in

the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin.

Again, I find it astounding that, even though he was a tool in the hand of the Lord to mete out judgment upon the house of Jeroboam, specifically upon Nadab, Baasha nonetheless followed in the footsteps of the king who was destined for destruction.



16 1 Kings 16:1–4

Then the word of the LORD came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baa sha, saying, Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel; and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins;, I will take away the posterity of Baasha, and the posterity of his house; and will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Him that dieth of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth of his in the fields shall the fowls of the air eat.

Just as the Lord didn't turn a blind eye to the sins of Jeroboam and Nadab, neither would He allow Baasha to escape judgment for the false worship system that continued under his reign.

1 Kings 16:5–10

Now the rest of the acts of Baasha, and what he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? So Baasha slept with his fathers, and was buried in Tirzah: and Elah his son reigned in his stead. And also by the hand of the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani came the word of the LORD against Baasha, and against his house, even for all the evil that he did in the sight of the LORD, in provoking him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam; and because he killed him. In the twenty and sixth year of Asa king of Judah began Elah the son of Baasha to reign over Israel in

Tirzah, two years. And his servant Zimri, captain of half his chariots, conspired against him, as he was in Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza steward of his house in Tirzah. And Zimri went in and smote him, and killed him, in the twenty and seventh year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his stead.

Elah was killed by Zimri. When? When he was "drinking himself drunk." General Pershing, a man who knew something about war, said, "Drunkenness has killed more men than all of the wars in human history."

President Taft said, "He who drinks is deliberately disqualifying himself for advancement in any field."

By the age of twenty, Alexander the Great was king of the Grecian Empire and conquered the entire known world by the age of thirty-three. At that point, he threw a party, became drunk, fell into a coma, and died three days later. Thus, alcohol conquered the man who conquered the world.

I point this out because I'm tired of dealing with couples whose marriages have been ruined, whose lives have been shipwrecked because of alcohol. It happens more than you know.

1 Kings 16:11–18

And it came to pass, when he began to reign, as soon as he sat on his throne, that he slew all the house of Baasha: he left him not one that pisseth against a wall, neither of his kinsfolks, nor of his friends. Thus did Zimri destroy all the house of Baasha, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake against Baasha by Jehu the prophet, For all the sins of Baasha, and the sins of Elah his son, by which they sinned, and by which they made Israel to sin, in provoking the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities. Now the rest of the acts of Elah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? In the twenty and seventh year of Asa king of Judah did Zimri reign seven days in Tirzah. And the people were encamped against Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines. And the people that were encamped heard say, Zimri hath conspired, and hath also slain the king: wherefore all Israel made Omri, the captain of the

host, king over Israel that day in the camp. And Omri went up from Gibbethon, and all Israel with him, and they besieged Tirzah. And it came to pass, when Zimri saw that the city was taken, that he went into the palace of the king's house, and burnt the king's house over him with fire, and died,

When word got out that Zimri had come into power by killing the king, the people turned to Omri and said, "We don't want Zimri. We want *you* to be our king." When Zimri heard that the people were rebelling against him, he lit his palace on fire and took his own life after reigning only seven days.

1 Kings 16:19–24
For his sins which he sinned in doing evil in the sight of the LORD, in walking in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin which he did, to make Israel to sin. Now the rest of the acts of Zimri, and his treason that he wrought, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? Then were the people of Israel divided into two parts: half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king; and half followed Omri. But the people that followed Omri prevailed against the people that followed Tibni the son of Ginath: so Tibni died, and Omri reigned. In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign over Israel, twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah. And he bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria.

With the palace burned by Zimri's hand, Omri found a new city from which he would reign: Samaria. Thus, Samaria became the capital city of the ten northern tribes.

1 Kings 16:25, 26
But Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that were before him. For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made

Israel to sin, to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities.

Omri was a man who, like every other king of Israel, followed the foolish example of Jeroboam, idolatry, immorality, and tragedy. He died, and in his place came the most wicked king of all, one with a particular penchant for perversity, one addicted to evil . . .

1 Kings 16:27–31
Now the rest of the acts of Omri which he did, and his might that he shewed, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? So Omri slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria: and Ahab his son reigned in his stead. And in the thirty and eighth year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty and two years. And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him.

Ahab, the most wicked of kings, married Jezebel, the most wicked women in known history, and introduced the worship of her god, Baal, to Israel. The god of rain, Baal was the god people worshiped in order to bring rain from heaven that the crops might be productive. Baal worship was intellectually intriguing. It also appealed to the physical senses, as immorality was part of Baal worship.

1 Kings 16:32–34
And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him. In his days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub,

according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun.

In Joshua 6:26, the Lord cursed the man who would attempt to rebuild Jericho. Here, a man named Hiel does just that, which shows either the ignorance or the contempt the people had at this time for the Word of God. In these dark, disgusting, despicable days, where king to king to king is causing greater pollution and darkness in the land of Israel, a backdrop is being painted, a stage being set, a scene is prepared for someone to burst upon the scene as a bright, shining light. And that someone is Elijah . . .



17 1 Kings 17:1

And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

Elijah means "Jehovah is my God." *Tishbite* means "stranger." Gilead is a rocky, rugged region that reaches heat of one hundred and twenty degrees. This man of God from the rugged desert bursts on the scene and goes into the court of Ahab, saying, "The Lord God of Israel lives." Why did he say this? Because the kings of Israel thought God had died. That's why they turned to Baal, Ashteroth, and Mammon.

Proverbs 28:1 tells us that the righteous shall be as bold as a lion. Elijah was a lion-like man. In fact, all of the bold men of Scripture spent time in the desert. Paul spent three years. Moses spent forty years. David spent numerous years in the wilderness running from Saul. Are you in desert experience tonight? Has it been four years or even forty years? Take heart, saint. You're being prepared and molded to be bold for the kingdom.

Here were Ahab and Jezebel, worshiping Baal, the god of rain, when Elijah burst in, saying, "The Lord lives and there won't be any rain."

As far as we know, Elijah wasn't commanded to do this. What gave him the audacity to make such a statement? First, he had a heart for God. He knew God's name was being blasphemed, or, at best, ignored. Secondly, he knew

the history of God. Deuteronomy 11 says if the people turned away from God and served idols, God would shut up the heavens. Thirdly, Elijah was heard by God, for James tells us he prayed (5:17). If we have a heart *for* God, know the history *of* God, and are being heard *by* God in prayer, we can move in great faith, and things will happen in our lives.

1 Kings 17:2 (a)
And the word of the LORD came unto him . . .

I like this phrase because so often we talk about seeking or searching for the word of the Lord. In John 10, however, Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice and they know Me." If you are part of His flock, if you love the Lord, I assure you that the word of the Lord will come to you. Something will be said or a Scripture will be seen that will pierce your heart or provoke your thoughts. And you'll know it's for you.

1 Kings 17:2 (b), 3
. . . saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.

I don't think this was easy for Elijah. Elijah was pumped, ready for the big confrontation, ready to lose his life if necessary, to pay the price right then. He was pumped up for the big game, only to find himself temporarily benched. *Cherith* means "the cutting place." That's interesting because here was a man who was beginning to move in power and prominence and authority, and now he's being hidden away in obscurity as God "cuts him out of the picture."

Why was Elijah put in a place of isolation? I suggest one reason was for preparation. You see, there must be a Cherith before there can be a Carmel. Before the crown, there must be the Cross. Therefore, if you're in Cherith today, a place where you're not in the limelight, perhaps it's because, like Elijah, you're being prepared for something greater ahead.

1 Kings 17:4
And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.

Leviticus 11:15 declares that ravens were unclean birds and were to be avoided at all costs. In the Middle East, even today, ravens are always associated with doom and death. As if Elijah wasn't already dealing with enough, here, he's bombed with bread from birds that signified doom and death, all part of God's preparation process.

1 Kings 17:5–7
So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

There Elijah sat, day after week after month. And even when the brook began to dry up, he didn't move.



***For topical study of 1 Kings 17:1–7 entitled "Drying Brooks," turn to page* 1006.**

1 Kings 17:8, 9 (a)
And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there . . .

Zarephath means "refining place." Zarephath wasn't in Israel, but in the hometown of Jezebel, the center of Baal worship.

1 Kings 17:9 (b)
. . . behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.

This would have been incredibly humiliating. First of all, for a Jew to go into Zidon would be humiliating due to the fact that the Jews considered the Gentile nations—the Zidonians, Phoenicians, and all the groups surrounding

Israel—to be dogs at best. As if that weren't bad enough, Elijah was to be supported by a woman, and a widow at that.

So here is Elijah, going to the hometown of Jezebel, the center of Baal worship, outside of Israel, in Gentile country, to a woman's home, a widow's home, and there she was going to sustain him. Talk about refining!

1 Kings 17:10
So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.

This widow was a wonderful woman. I like her because she was industrious. She was down to a handful of meal and a little bit of oil. Yet she wasn't simply waiting for fate to run its course. She was working out in the field, gathering sticks, doing her best. As she gathered, she lifted her eyes and saw a man walking across her property in a dusty robe and sunburned face. "Give me some water," he said. And she did a wonderful thing—she went and got it for him. Water was scarce in that time. And yet she did something I would encourage us to learn from—in the time of her trouble, trial, and difficulty, she gave what she could to someone else.

That's always the secret of life. Haven't you found that to be true? Get your eyes off your own little problems and see someone else crossing the property of this world who is hurting, thirsty, and dry. When you're feeling down yourself, look across the property of your life and you'll see someone with parched lips and sunburned face who is in greater need than you, and reach out to them.

1 Kings 17:11
And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

"Wait a minute," this woman could have said. "It's difficult enough for me to share water. But now you're asking me to give you bread on top of that?" Isn't that just like life? You give out to somebody and think you're

really doing something nice when, no sooner do you finish, than the person says, "Wait a minute, I want more . . ."

1 Kings 17:12–14
And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.

"Don't worry," Elijah said. "Make me the cake first, and afterwards, there will be a continual supply of meal and oil for you and your son."

I can almost see the widow's wheels turning. *Wait a minute,* she must have thought, *why don't you fill the barrel and the oil jar first—then I'll be happy to give you a cake or two or three.* But the Lord doesn't work that way.

True sacrifice is always out of survival, never out of surplus. We have a tendency to say, "Lord, if You bless me, then I'll give. If You bless us, then we'll move out." That's exactly backwards. You give first, then the blessing is released. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness—and *then* all these things shall be added unto you (Matthew 6:33).That's a hard one for us.

"Have the priests put their feet in the water," the Lord said to Joshua, "and the river will part."

Joshua could have said, "Lord, part the water first, then we'll be happy to step in." But he didn't. He obeyed, and the river parted (Joshua 3).

The Father is determined to make us men and women of faith. And He'll put us in situation after situation where faith must be exercised. It takes no faith to give out of surplus. It takes tremendous faith to give out of survival—when you just don't have it—whether it's time, finances, or love.

1 Kings 17:15, 16
And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

The widow believed. She stepped out in faith, and God blessed. Her needs were met. The Lord will not be a debtor to any man. If you are giving, sharing, sacrificing, He will never be in your debt. He'll more than make it up.

1 Kings 17:17, 18
And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him. And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?

Even though the widow experienced a miracle, she was not insulated from further difficulties and problems. Although the meal was always available and the oil was flowing, still sickness came upon her son. And in her frustration, this woman lashed out at Elijah.

1 Kings 17:19
And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed.

Elijah didn't retaliate. He didn't fight back. He simply took the widow's son out of sight. Sometimes people who move in the arena of the miraculous take ads out in papers that read: Miracle Meeting Tonight. Don't Miss It. Elijah doesn't do that. He takes this child away from the eyes of people and begins to minister in private.

1 Kings 17:20

And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?

Elijah is not accusing God but inquiring of God. "What is going on here, Lord?" he asks.

1 Kings 17:21, 22
And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again. And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.

A dead body was brought back to life. How? In two ways. First there was prayer *for* the dead. Secondly, there was contact *with* the dead as Elijah stretched himself on the dead boy's body, not just once or twice, but three times.

Dear parent, is your child spiritually dead? Dear sister, is your husband spiritually dead, walking in the way of God? Are your parents far from the Lord? Is a friend lost and headed for eternal damnation? If there's a dead corpse in your life, the solution is rather simple: pray for them and establish loving contact with them. Pray and love, and it will surprise you what the Lord will do when we lay down our lives for the lost, when we pray fervently and love practically.

1 Kings 17:23
And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth.

This woman who was once depressed is now delighted. This woman who was once jaded is now joyful. This woman who was once frustrated is now free because her son had been revived. Look around and you'll see a world that's jaded, frustrated, and sad because they're not walking with

Jesus Christ. What a privilege is ours to be able to tell them that because the Son lives, they can live, too.

1 Kings 17:24
And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth.

It wasn't the miracle of the meal and oil that persuaded the widow of Zarephath that Elijah's God was real. It was resurrection. The same is still true. What is going to convince your world of the reality of your God? Resurrection changed lives.

DRYING BROOKS

A Topical Study of 1 KINGS 17:1–7

They were dark days indeed. Fifty-eight years earlier, king Solomon had passed off the scene. And after he died, the kingdom of Israel was split in two. The south was ruled by a cruel and callous king named Rehoboam. The north was ruled by a gifted but godless king named Jeroboam. After Jeroboam died, there was a series of brutal and bloody revolutions in the northern kingdom. Increasingly sinful and sinister rulers rose to power. And the evil and wickedness reached a crescendo under the reign of King Ahab.

Meanwhile, in the rough and rugged region of Gilead, God was preparing a powerful prophet, a man who would stand in the presence of the Lord, a man who would speak with the power of the Lord, a man who was familiar with the Holy Scriptures, a man who was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Elijah bursts on the scene, confronts wicked king Ahab and proclaims, "It shall not rain according to my word." Our text does not tell us that God told Elijah to do this. Elijah, a man of faith, went into the presence of Ahab and said, It's not going to rain according to my word. What, then, gave him such faith? How could he be so certain?

I suggest three reasons. First, *Elijah had a heart for God.* He wasn't doing this to make history or headlines. In fact, he could have very well lost his head. But he loved God so much that he was willing to risk his neck to go into the presence of Ahab and make this incredible, prophetic prediction. Elijah had a heart for God and God honored that.

Secondly, *Elijah knew the history of God,* for he was a man familiar with the Scriptures. He knew the prophecy of Deuteronomy 11:16, 17 that if the people turned away from God, the heavens would dry up. He must also have known the story of Joshua 10—when the sun stood still at Joshua's command.

Thirdly, *Elijah was heard by God.* James 5 says Elijah was a man of like passions—a man just like us—and yet he prayed and the heavens were shut up. In other words, he was heard by God. James goes on to say that the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. The reason Elijah

was so powerful in public was because he was prayerful in private. If you have a heart for God, if you learn the history of God, and if you are being heard by God, you, too, will affect your situation radically. Things will happen all around you. God's power will flow through you if your heart is for Him, if you're familiar with His Word, if you're being heard by Him.

The Lord called Elijah away in order to both protect and provide for him. Ahab would doubtless grow increasingly angry as the drought wore on. So the Lord temporarily placed Elijah out of his reach.

In addition to protection, provision would be made for Elijah as the Lord sent ravens to fly over his head and bomb him with bread. I'm sure Elijah thought, *That idea is for the birds! It'll never work. The birds themselves will be hungry. They'll eat the bread.* Why did the Lord do this? Because if men would have brought bread to Elijah, they would have the tendency to betray him and to blow his cover. If animals had brought the bread to Elijah, they could have been tracked. But birds? Who would ever think of birds! God provided miraculously, but also naturally. For, although the ravens brought bread, Elijah was to draw his own water. In this, I believe we see the perfect balance of the methods and heart of God, on one hand, working miraculously, on the other, working naturally. He still works this way. We do what we can do, and He comes alongside and does what we can't, stretching us, growing us, maturing us, and yet showing us all the while that it is He who is in control.

When the brook began to dry up, Elijah found himself in an interesting situation. As he sat there, day after month after year, he saw the flow slow down. He saw the depth decrease and finally disappear altogether. But Elijah didn't panic.

Are you beside a drying, dying brook? Is there a relationship that is drying up? Are your finances drying up? Is your physical strength drying up? If you're wondering why the brook to which you thought the Lord led you is drying up, I want you to see three possible reasons . . .

Getting Ahead of God

First, the Lord would restrain us from getting ahead of Him. You see, had Elijah panicked and moved prematurely, he would have missed a miracle in the making. It was on the day that a widow in Zarephath was to use her very last bit of meal that Elijah was led by the Lord to show up on the scene and do a miracle. And such an important miracle was it that Jesus Himself later referred to it (Luke 4:26).

Feeling the call of God on his life, Moses went out on his own ahead of God and killed an Egyptian who was beating up an Israelite. When his crime was discovered and the Israelites themselves turned on him, he ran for his life and spent forty years in the desert—all because he got ahead of God.

In order to restrain us from getting ahead of Him, God sometimes restricts us, and that gives me peace. I can say, "Thank You, Lord. Even though the brook is drying up, You're using this to slow me down, to keep me from getting ahead of You."

Getting to Know God

Secondly, the drying brook allows us the opportunity to get to know God. You see, even while the brook was drying up in Cherith, the bread was coming down. And every day, Elijah was no doubt reminded of the incredible power and provision of God. When your brook is drying up, when relationships are going amok, when finances are absent and problems are present, it forces you to look into the Bread of the Word and receive manna from the Father.

It was not in the days of prosperity and ease that you grew closest to the Lord. It was in the days of difficulty and trial that you found yourself searching the Scriptures. In the day of prosperity it's easy for us to set the dial to "cruise." But in the day of adversity, we find ourselves searching the Scriptures and we are renewed in the knowledge of God.

Getting Away from God

In John 4, Jesus said to the woman at the well, "Give Me to drink."

"How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan to give You drink?" the woman said.

"If you knew the water I had, you would ask Me to give you living water," Jesus said, "for whoever drinks of the water I give shall never thirst again."

Physical, temporal water will never bring satisfaction. If you are thirsty today, I ask you, where are you drawing your water from? If you are feeling drought in your soul, where are you drawing water from? Have you gone back to the old watering hole? If so, it is sure you will thirst again. If you are looking to your job to bring you satisfaction of soul, you are barking up the wrong tree. If you are looking to your husband or wife to satisfy your soul, you are amiss. If you are looking to your ministry to bring you fulfillment, you are in for frustration. Jesus said, "Whoever drinks of that water shall thirst again."

Ministry is for one purpose, to point you to Jesus Christ, where you'll drink of Him. Relationships are for one purpose, to draw you together to Jesus Christ. If you are drinking of any other water, even though it might seem good, it will not satisfy.

"If any man thirst, let him come unto *Me* and drink." That is the invitation of our Lord Jesus. Beside the drying brooks of relationships, of finances, of health, of popularity I am continually reminded that it is only Jesus that can satisfy. With Him, we never thirst again. The brook dries up to remind you that there is no other way, that there is no one else, that there is no other thing that can fulfill you apart from your personal love relationship with Jesus Christ. That is all that will satisfy you. If you love Jesus and walk with Him, you will be filled with His joy. If you are looking to anything else, you will thirst.

My prayer is that when you're beside the drying brook, you might rejoice, knowing God is restraining you from getting ahead of Him, renewing you in your knowledge of Him, or reminding you that no one else can but Him.

Don't panic. May God grant you understanding as you sit there and wait until you hear Him say, "Arise."



18 1 Kings 18:1–4

And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria. And Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly: For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.)

Obadiah is an interesting character. His name means "servant of God," and yet he was working for a very wicked king—Ahab. Although some scholars question Obadiah's integrity, I'm not so sure we can judge him so easily. After all, in Philippians 4:22, rather than condemning the believers who were in Caesar's household, Paul greets them. Sometimes God plants believers in ungodly situations to be a light. Even though Obadiah was working under Ahab, even though he was not powerful like Elijah, even though he wasn't a prophet, he certainly was profitable to the prophets, for he hid them from murderous Jezebel.

You might not be powerful like Elijah. But you can be profitable like Obadiah. When asked the secret of his spiritual strength, Spurgeon said, "I have a people who pray for me." You might not be able to preach, but you can pray for those who do. You might not be able to cross the seas as a missionary, but you can pray for them. You might not be able to go door to door, witnessing, but you can pray. I believe that those who are Obadiahs—faithfully working behind the scenes—are not only profitable now, but will be greatly rewarded in heaven.

1 Kings 18:5, 6

And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.

Ahab sought relief from the famine, but he failed to seek the reason for the famine. That's so often true of us. We seek relief from a problem, but we don't get to the root of the problem, asking the Lord what He wants to show us in it.

1 Kings 18:7–12 (a)
And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah? And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? As the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the LORD shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me . . .

Knowing how desperately Ahab wanted to find Elijah, Obadiah was afraid that no sooner would he tell Ahab of Elijah's whereabouts than the Lord would hide Elijah once again, leaving Obadiah holding the bag in the face of a furious king.

1 Kings 18:12 (b), 13
. . . but I thy servant fear the LORD from my youth. Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the

LORD, how I hid an hundred men of the LORD's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water?

Obadiah feared the Lord from his youth, which indicates he had believing parents. In our glorious age of grace, we emphasize the love of the Lord, as well we should. Obadiah, on the other hand, was taught to fear the Lord. Along with the love of the Lord, we need to teach our kids the fear of the Lord, for it is the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). To fear the Lord doesn't mean to be afraid of Him. Rather, it means to realize the power, righteousness, and holiness of God, and the foolishness and fallacy of disobeying Him.

1 Kings 18:14–17
And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me. And Elijah said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah. And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?

When things go bad, God or God's people always seem to get blamed, as evidenced not only by Ahab's question but also by the fact that insurance companies have referred to earthquakes, tornadoes, and hurricanes as "acts of God."

1 Kings 18:18
And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim.

"You're the problem, Ahab," Elijah said. And then he set out to prove it . . .

1 Kings 18:19–21
Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the

prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table. So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel. And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

The word "halt" speaks of first standing on one leg, then shifting weight to the other. In other words, the Israelites worshiped the Lord one minute and Baal the next. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways, James tells us (1:8). "Because you're neither hot nor cold but lukewarm, I'll spew you out of My mouth," Jesus said to the church of Laodicea (see Revelation 3:16). The Lord doesn't want His people "halting" between two opinions, serving Him one day and serving the god of pleasure or prosperity the next.

1 Kings 18:22
Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men.

As we will see in chapter 19, it was not true that Elijah was the only prophet of the Lord.

1 Kings 18:23, 24
Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.

Elijah calls for a bullock because Leviticus 16 says before any minister could enter into the holy place; he first had to offer a bullock for his own sin. Elijah was aware of his own sinfulness. He knew he couldn't call down fire from heaven on his own merit or according to his own righteousness.

Elijah offered a bullock as a sacrifice for his own sin. This is a key to understanding this story because we can think, "Why can't *I* call down fire from heaven? Why don't *I* see miracles happen?" The answer is that we're not worthy of seeing anything happen in the spiritual realm. Why? Because we're sinners. Our appeal to the Lord can never be made on the basis of our spirituality, but only on the basis of His mercy and grace.

1 Kings 18:25, 26
And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under. And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made.

These prophets were leaping and screaming and trying to get the attention of their god because they knew he would not otherwise answer. Faith, on the other hand, is quiet. Even in our own day, commotion and emotion all too often indicate a lack of devotion.

1 Kings 18:27–30
And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down.

After Baal ignored even the blood of his own prophets, it was Elijah's turn. He began by repairing the altar of the Lord.

1 Kings 18:31, 32 (a)
And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD . . .

Twelve stones—one for each tribe—signified that Jehovah was God of the entire nation of Israel. In Exodus 20, God said very specifically that His altar was to be made of rough stones, stones without carving or engraving. This is because, from the very outset, the simple stone altar was to point to a rock called Golgotha, where the Lamb of God would be sacrificed not only for the sins of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, but for the sins of the whole world.

1 Kings 18:32 (b)–35
. . . and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water.

Four barrels of water filled three times, twelve barrels, one for each tribe. In a time of drought, where did Elijah get twelve barrels of water? Mt. Carmel overlooks the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, the water could have been taken from the sea. If so, it would have been salt water. According to Leviticus 2, no sacrifice was to be made without salt. And here's salt water being poured upon the sacrifice. In Middle Eastern culture, in addition to flavoring, salt was used as a medicine to heal wounds and as a preservative to keep meat from putrefying.

"You are the salt of the earth," Jesus said (Matthew 5:13). As believers, we are to be agents of healing and preserving in addition to creating a thirst within people for the living water Jesus offers. The sacrifice Elijah offered ultimately pointed to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, the sacrificial

Lamb. The salt spoke of the reality of salvation seen through the evidence of a life of faith. "Faith without works is dead," James declares (2:26) because sacrifice without salt is invalid. You may say you believe in Jesus, but if there's no salt in your life—no preserving, no healing, no impact—you have reason to question whether you're really saved.

1 Kings 18:36–38
And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

When did the fire fall? After Elijah prayed, during the time of the evening sacrifice. The evening and morning sacrifice speak of a consistent devotional life. I call your attention to three characteristics of Elijah's prayer . . .

First, it was abbreviated. Our prayers needn't be lengthy, but they must be constant. Elijah's prayer took less than twelve seconds to pray. Secondly, notice Elijah's attitude. "I am Thy servant," he said. "I'm not here to dictate to You. I'm not here to try and press my point. I am simply Your servant." Finally, notice Elijah's authority. "I have done these things at Thy Word," he said. In John 15, Jesus said that if we abide in Him and His words abide in us, we will ask what we will and it will be done. The one who is effective in prayer and successful in seeking the power of the Lord isn't the one who prays lofty and lengthy prayers. It's the one who has the heart of a servant and who stands on the Word.

1 Kings 18:39
And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God.

Tragically, although the people acknowledged the Lord as God, they didn't acknowledge Him as *their* God.

1 Kings 18:40
And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.

The prophets of Baal, finally seen as idolaters, were sentenced to die not by the word of Elijah, but by the Word of God (Deuteronomy 18:20).

1 Kings 18:41
And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.

We often speak of "eyes of faith." Here, Elijah had "ears of faith," hearing the sound of rain before a drop had fallen.

1 Kings 18:42–44
So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.

According to James 5:17, Elijah's secret was prayer. In public, his prayer was short. But here we see him praying in private, and his prayer takes on an entirely different dimension. He puts his head between his knees and prays. In Middle Eastern cultures, this was the birthing position. Here we see a man of prayer who prayed quickly in public, but in private prayed with intensity and travail.

Do you know what it means to birth something in prayer? Have you experienced what it means to press in and pray through? Do you pray once or twice or three times and give up if nothing happens? That's too often my attitude. Not so with Elijah. He prayed until something was birthed. How I love to be around people who love to pray. It's hard work. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane with such birthing intensity that His face sweat blood. Do we even know what it means to keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking? Elijah prayed and didn't give up.

Is your marriage a burden tonight? Have you prayed to the place of sweat? Are you experiencing tension over some situation? Have you prayed time and time again? Somehow, dear friend, the Lord teaching us to press in and pray is preparing us for the billions of years that lie beyond. He's not teasing you or making it hard on you. He's developing you and strengthening you. The reason the Lord is stretching us in faith and teaching us in prayer and forcing us to mature is because He's training us for eternity.

Elijah saw a little cloud and said, "Tell Ahab to get moving. A storm's coming!"

"Wait a minute," we say. "A little cloud doesn't mean anything." Oh, but it does to a man of faith.

1 Kings 18:45, 46
And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel. And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

Here is Elijah, breaking the world's record, arriving at Jezreel ahead of Ahab's chariot. But I think this was a huge mistake. You see, Elijah had gone from Cherith, the place of cutting, to Zarephath, the place of refining, to Carmel, the place of victory and confrontation. Now he's running, but this time, he's not being directed by the Lord. Up to this point, Elijah had obeyed the Lord to the letter. But the Lord didn't tell him to run to Jezreel.

The same thing can happen in our own lives. When we experience an element of power or blessing in our lives, if we're not careful, we can begin

to move on the basis of our own desires or vision. Things can still happen, but as Elijah will discover, the side effects can be devastating . . .



19 1 Kings 19:1, 2

And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.

Having witnessed a whole series of miracles, Ahab still does not give credit to God. Instead, he tells Jezebel all the things *Elijah* had done. Jezebel's response was to vow to destroy Elijah.

1 Kings 19:3, 4

And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.

Elijah, the Iron Man of God, was derailed by a woman. This prophet who took on the nation, was afraid by a woman. Consequently, he ran for his life because he was not in the place the Spirit directed.

1 Kings 19:5–8

And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink,

and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.

Mount Horeb—or Mount Sinai—is the place where Moses saw the burning bush. It is the place the Law of the Lord was given. It is the place where the sky thundered and the earth shook. It was the place where things happened.

1 Kings 19:9
And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?

"Why are you in a cave?" the Lord asks Elijah. "Why are you hiding out, holding back? Why are you in this place of discouragement and depression?"

Such a question is one the Lord would ask of many of us: what are you doing holed-up in the cave of self-pity? F. B. Meyer, renowned Bible scholar, said that self-pity is the most grievous of all sins. Self-pity says to the Lord, "I don't like what You're doing in my life."

Self-pity is nothing more than rebellion, for if I feel sorry for myself, I am actually saying, "God, although Your Word says You are love, I don't buy it. Although Your Word says You are good, I don't believe it. Although Your Word says You are light, I don't see it. Although the Word says You are my Father, I don't relate to it."

1 Kings 19:10–13
And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after

the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?

Elijah was on the same mount upon which God had spoken to Moses through a burning bush and where He had given him the Law. Therefore, perhaps Elijah expected the Lord to work in big ways in his situation, as well. Surely the Lord would do something to stop Ahab and Jezebel, he thought. Maybe He would zap Jezebel with lightning and swallow Ahab with an earthquake.

One of the reasons we get depressed is because the Lord doesn't seem to be doing something big. He's not shaking us up with experiences. He's not firing us up with the miraculous. "Lord, where are You?" we cry. "Why aren't You doing anything?"

As He did to Elijah, the Lord says to us, "I'm not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire. I'm in the still, small voice, just whispering My will and My Word in your heart, leading you one step at a time, one day at a time, causing the circumstances in your life to work on you and direct you and guide you." Elijah had to learn that God was not necessarily going to work in the way, at the time, in the manner he recommended. And so must we.

I am increasingly aware of the Lord working in still, small ways, that He's not panicking, that He's not frustrated, that He's not trying to bomb and blast, but that He just works in spite of me. Listen. God will speak to you, as well. He will direct you through His still, small voice.

1 Kings 19:14
And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

This is word for word what Elijah said in verse 10. He had his argument down pat.

1 Kings 19:15–18

And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.

"Crawl out of your cave, Elijah," the Lord said. "Get going again. There's work to be done."



For topical study of 1 Kings 19:1–18, see "Dealing with Depression" below.

1 Kings 19:19–21 (a)
So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee? And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat . . .

Leaving his pity party behind, Elijah was told to disciple a young man named Elisha. Elisha was evidently a rich man based on the number of oxen he had. But he was also humble, as evidenced by the fact that he took the position at the back of the pack. In addition to being rich and humble, Elisha

was also determined. When he knew that Elijah wanted to disciple him, he took the very instruments of his livelihood, his oxen, and sacrificed them.

"No man, after putting his hand to the plow, who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God," Jesus said (see Luke 9:62). Accepting Jesus' call to be His disciple is a commitment with no turning back. You burn your bridges, sacrifice the oxen, burn the yokes, and keep going. The road becomes rough and bumpy; there are tests, trials, and challenges to be sure, but the man or woman who makes an impact for the kingdom is the one who says, "My hand is on the plow. I'm not turning back."

1 Kings 19:21 (b)
. . . Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.

Elisha would spend the next six years serving Elijah. In 2 Kings 3, he was called one who simply poured water on the hands of Elijah. Why was the Lord able to use this man so greatly? Because his heart was so right. Every single person I have known who has been used by the Lord has been more than willing to go through great seasons of "pouring water" on someone else's hands, willing to be a servant. Then, as they were faithful in the small things, the Lord allowed them to minister over more things. How I pray that we might be willing to go through seasons of simply serving, saying, "Lord, it's unto You that I do this task." Elisha was such a man.

DEALING WITH DEPRESSION

A Topical Study of
1 KINGS 19:1–18

E*lijah:* The name is synonymous with strength. Throughout the ages, he has been called the prophet of power, the Iron Man of God. The days of Elijah were dark, disgusting, despicable days. Carnal king Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel led the nation of Israel into the folly of idolatry. The people plummeted into pollution beyond belief. The altars of God were replaced by the idols to Baal and Ashteroth, gods of the intellect and sensuality.

In those dark days, Elijah the prophet appeared and stormed into the court of Ahab, saying, "It's not going to rain until I say so." This powerful prophet proclaimed that a judgment was coming upon the nation, that Israel would be afflicted with drought. And for three years, the burning, blistering sun ravaged the crops of Canaan. The people grew hungry. Many, many died.

Elijah was hid away first by a brook at Cherith, and later on he was sent to Zarephath where he lived with a widow. At the end of that three-year period, he sought Ahab and confronted him face to face. There was an authority in his voice, a power in his countenance that caused Ahab to back down. Then Elijah threw out the challenge: Gather the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. Let us both offer sacrifice, one to Baal and one to God. And let the true and living God respond by sending fire from heaven. Four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal built their altar on Mt. Carmel and began to call upon Baal, asking him to prove he was indeed the real god. But Baal didn't answer. So they began to cry louder, to shred their skin, to cut themselves, and to beat themselves with rocks. The hours went by, but still there was no fire.

At the end of the day, Elijah said, "It's my turn." And he prayed a simple prayer to the Lord, a prayer that took only a few seconds to utter. No sooner did he say, "Amen," than fire came down from heaven that not only consumed the bullock, but burned the altar as well. And the people knew then that Jehovah was the true and living God. Elijah then called for the capture of the prophets of Baal. And Elijah slew all four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal.

Then Elijah assumed a posture of prayer and prayed for rain. Seven times he prayed with fervency. First, only a cloud appeared in the sky. But then the rain came down.

Elijah was truly a man of strength, a prophet of power. But in our text, we see this Iron Man of God, this incredibly strong individual, at a place of severe depression. James says Elijah was a man "subject to like passions as we are" (5:17). In other words, he was just like us. That is, he experienced weaknesses even as we do. Here was a man who stopped the skies from raining, called down fire from heaven, prayed and it flooded, and yet suddenly we see him in a cave.

The Lord came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah? Why are you in a cave?" And I believe the Lord would say that same word to some of us. "Why are you in a cave, the slough of despondency, the cave of discouragement?"

Like Elijah, we all deal with depression from time to time. I believe our text gives us an important insight on how we might do so victoriously . . .

Symptoms of Depression

First, what are the symptoms of depression? In our text, we see the first symptom is the exaggeration of problems. You know you are moving in a place of depression when you find yourself exaggerating your problems. Elijah had stormed into the courts of Ahab, telling him it wouldn't rain. Elijah confronted four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. He had faced problems before. But when one woman said, "I'm going to get you," he panicked. "I want to die," he said. "Lord, just take me home. She's after me." And that is what happens when we find ourselves moving into depression. Problems that previously would have been no sweat loom large over us. In the time of discouragement, things that are rather minor can take on huge dimensions.

Secondly, there was an evaluation of his person. First, he put himself down. "I am not better than my fathers," he said. Yet his fathers were idolaters. He was looking inward, and whenever you look inward, you'll put yourself down. No sooner had he said this, however, than he puffed himself up, boasting that he was the only one who had not bowed the knee to Baal. That's what introspection does. It causes us to either put ourselves down, or to pump ourselves up. If you want to be depressed, just start analyzing yourself. That's why we are to fix our eyes on Jesus.

Thirdly, there was an isolation from people. When we sink into times of discouragement, there is always the tendency to pull back, to pull out, to pull away. "I'm tired of struggling and serving. I'm just going to hole up and feel sorry for myself for awhile." When you hear yourself say this, be assured that discouragement is hovering nearby. God came to Elijah and said, "What are you doing here? You know better than that. You've come farther than this."

Reasons for Depression

First, there is a vulnerability after victory. Whenever your life is being blessed, your ministry is prospering, relationships are growing, or finances are increasing, watch out because you are vulnerable to attack. Noah sailed through problems on the ark, as well as the one hundred years preceding it when people thought he was crazy. It was when he got *out* of the ark that he was vulnerable and drank himself into sin. David took on Goliath and beat him, but it was after that victory that he feigned madness in the city of Gath (1 Samuel 21).

A second factor for Elijah was the factor of fatigue. After he prayed for the Lord to send rain, he outran Ahab's chariot to the city of Jezreel. At this point, he's had huge spiritual confrontation. He's had physical exertion. He's just plain tired. And when you're tired, you're particularly susceptible to depression. There is a close linkage between body, soul, and spirit. If your body is tired, your soul, which is your mind and emotions, will often be affected, as well.

A third factor was disappointed expectations. I'm sure Elijah expected God to immediately deal with Ahab and Jezebel. I'm sure he expected the entire nation to be shook by an earthquake, purged by fire, or blown clean by the wind of the Holy Ghost. But nothing happened. Ahab still remained in power. Jezebel still sat beside him. And God didn't seem to be doing anything. So Elijah was disappointed. If we expect God to do something and He doesn't, we become vulnerable to depression.

God works at an entirely different pace than we think He should. We are so incredibly pushy and impatient and demanding. And then when the wind doesn't blow and the earth doesn't shake and the fire doesn't appear, we say, "What's going on?" But, as God said to Elijah, He says, "I am not in the earthquake. I am not in the wind. I am not in the fire. I am in the still, small voice."

The Cure for Depression

First, we see the Lord dealing with Elijah by giving him rest. The Lord doesn't rebuke him or find fault with him, but simply says, "Elijah, what are you doing? Here's some food. Go to sleep." Rest is so important. I believe much of the reason we get depressed needlessly is because we have failed to follow the principle of God that tells us we need rest.

In Isaiah 58:13, 14, the Lord says that those who honor His Sabbath will ride on high places. In other words, they won't end up in the valley of depression. God wants us to take a Sabbath. After all, He did. He created for six days and rested on the seventh. He didn't rest because He was tired. He didn't say, "Whew! This creation is really rough. I'm beat." Nor did He rest because He was totally finished with all the possibilities of creation. He could have kept on creating until there would be no room on this planet for us. No, He rested on the seventh day in order to teach us that we, too, must stop, even if we're not tired, even if we're not finished. You might have the capacity to go seven days a week. But it will catch up with you. At some point, you'll burn out and you'll go into a cave.

Interestingly, the Old Testament Sabbath principle was never linked with worship. That only happened in the time period between the Old and New Testaments when synagogue worship was established. I'm not talking about a day of worship. I'm talking about a day of rest. You'll find your marriages strengthened, your attitude changed, your body refreshed.

Secondly, as God spoke to him in the still, small, voice, Elijah realized that God's ways were not his ways. You will move out of depression when you realize that God is on the throne and that nothing happens without His permission. Dear friend, I think it is impossible for a person who believes in the sovereignty of God, in the power of God, in the love of God, to get depressed over circumstances. It's only when I no longer believe God is sovereign or powerful or love that I begin to doubt. That's why God came to Elijah in the still, small voice, in the way he least expected.

Thirdly, God prescribed not only rest and realization, but for Elijah to reach out. After God refreshed Elijah with rest and spoke to him in the still, small voice, He said, "Reach out. You've got work to do. You need to anoint

two kings. Then I want you to anoint and disciple Elisha. Get busy. Start serving. There are lives to be touched, work to be done, ministry to move into. Get out of the cave and get going."

I know of no more practical truth than this one. When you're discouraged and despairing, the tendency will be to hide in a cave and feel sorry for yourself. But the cure for that is just the opposite, to find people to disciple, to find folks to pray with, to find situations in which you can be a blessing. Jesus said whatever measure you give out will be given back to you (Matthew 7:2). I have found this to be true over and over again, haven't you? When I talk to others, my own discouragement disappears. When I open the Word to share a truth with someone else, my own questions are answered. When I'm feeling unappreciated or neglected, if I reach out to someone else, my own selfishness dissipates. It's the secret of happiness: Get your eyes off yourself. Quit feeling sorry for yourself and start reaching out for Jesus' sake.

In so doing, you'll feel the presence of the Lord flowing through you, you'll feel a smile on your face, a spring in your step, a fervency of prayer, a joy in your heart. The choice is ours. We can either be a caveman or a man of power and effectiveness, a woman of strength and love. Rest, Realize, and Reach out—it's the cure prescribed by the Great Physician for a man just like us. And it's the same prescription that works for us today.



20

As Elijah and Elisha fade from the scene for six years, we read of their archrival Ben-hadad, king of Syria . . .

1 Kings 20:1
And Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together: and there were thirty and two kings with him, and horses, and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it.

Samaria, of course, was part of Israel.

1 Kings 20:2, 3
And he sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Ben-hadad, Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children, even the goodliest, are mine.

"Ahab, your wife and kids and goods and silver are as good as gone. I'm laying claim to them right now," Ben-hadad boasted.

1 Kings 20:4
And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have.

"Take them," said Ahab.

1 Kings 20:5, 6
And the messengers came again, and said, Thus speaketh Ben-hadad, saying, Although I have sent unto thee, saying, Thou shalt deliver me thy silver, and thy gold, and thy wives, and thy children; Yet I will send my servants unto thee to morrow about this time, and they shall search thine house, and the houses of thy servants; and it shall be, that whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put it in their hand, and take it away.

The messengers of Ben-hadad said, "It's not enough for you just to send us your goods; we're coming down and taking what we think is good."

1 Kings 20:7, 8
Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, Mark, I pray you, and see how this man seeketh mischief: for he sent unto me for my wives, and for my children, and for my silver, and for my gold; and I denied him not. And all the elders and all the people said unto him, Hearken not unto him, nor consent.

"Don't give in," said the elders and the people of Israel.

1 Kings 20:9, 10
Wherefore he said unto the messengers of Ben-hadad, Tell my lord the king, All that thou didst send for to thy servant at the first I will do: but this thing I may not do. And the messengers departed, and brought him word again. And Ben-hadad sent unto him, and said, The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me.

Ben-hadad's response to Ahab was, "If you don't let us come down and take what we want, we're going to come and annihilate you all."

1 Kings 20:11
And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.

In other words, Ahab said, "Don't count your chickens before they hatch" or, "Just because you get all suited up for the game doesn't mean you're going to win the game."

1 Kings 20:12, 13
And it came to pass, when Ben-hadad heard this message, as he was drinking, he and the kings in the pavilions, that he said unto his servants, Set yourselves in array. And they set themselves in array against the city. And, behold, there came a prophet unto Ahab king of Israel, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it in to thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD.

"Ahab, do you see all the armies lined up against you? God will deliver them this day into your hand," said a prophet of God.

Ahab was extremely wicked, and yet God is determined to win his heart. That's why I believe Elijah was depressed in the last chapter. Elijah wanted to see Ahab annihilated. But God still had a purpose and a plan for Ahab. So He says, "I'm going to give you victory so that you will truly know that I am

the Lord." The heart of our Lord, the grace of our God, is absolutely incredible.

1 Kings 20:14 (a)
And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Even by the young men of the princes of the provinces . . .

"I want you to use the young men to lead these troops into battle," said the Lord through His prophet.

1 Kings 20:14 (b)
. . . Then he said, Who shall order the battle? And he answered, Thou.

"Who shall attack first?" Ahab asked.
"You," the Lord answered.

1 Kings 20:15–18
Then he numbered the young men of the princes of the provinces, and they were two hundred and thirty two: and after them he numbered all the people, even all the children of Israel, being seven thousand. And they went out at noon. But Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him. And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Ben-hadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out of Samaria. And he said, Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be come out for war, take them alive.

In his drunken state, Ben-hadad said, "Just round them up and bring them in." But the men would not come that easily . . .

1 Kings 20:19–22
So these young men of the princes of the provinces came out of the city, and the army which followed them. And they slew every one his man: and the Syrians fled; and Israel pursued them: and

Ben-hadad the king of Syria escaped on an horse with the horsemen. And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter. And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thy self, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee.

God gave Ahab victory, but not without warning Ahab that Syria would attack again. If you have experienced victory in the past weeks or months, be warned that in the very area in which you have experienced the Lord's victory, you can expect another attempt of the enemy to destroy you. Be strong in the Lord. Syria will come again.

1 Kings 20:23
And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.

"The reason we lost," the Syrians said, "is because we fought in the hills and Jehovah is the God of the hills. Move the battle to the valley, and we'll be victorious."

1 Kings 20:24–26
And do this thing, Take the kings away, every man out of his place, and put captains in their rooms: And number thee an army, like the army that thou hast lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot: and we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. And he hearkened unto their voice, and did so. And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Ben-hadad numbered the Syrians, and went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel.

With a new battle plan, Ben-hadad again attacked Israel, this time in the valley.

1 Kings 20:27
And the children of Israel were numbered, and were all present, and went against them: and the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids; but the Syrians filled the country.

The Israelites were vastly outnumbered. The odds looked grim.

1 Kings 20:28, 29
And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the LORD. And they pitched one over against the other seven days. And so it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined: and the children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day.

Even though the battle took place in the valley, the Israelites slew 100,000 Syrians in a single day. Why? Because the Syrians had said that the God of Israel was God only of the mountains. Satan said the same thing when he accused Job of only serving God because God had blessed him (Job 1:9, 10). And he says the same thing today. "Christians are happy as long as their spirits are high. Sure, they can sing and clap and enjoy the Lord as long as they're on the mountaintop. But put them in the valley and, once things don't go well at home or at work or with their finances, they'll be defeated and discouraged just like anyone else." So God lets His people go through valleys to show the world that He is not the God of the mountaintops only, but also of the valley; that even in difficult days, dark times, and deep waters there will be a smile on the faces and a song in the hearts of His people. And that is when the world takes note.

Is your God the God of the valley? Or are you a Christian who only knows God as the God of the mountain, only rejoicing when things go the way you think they should? If God has privileged you to be in the valley, it's to show a watching world that you are not a mercenary, one who serves God

only for your own prosperity, but that you are a lover of the Lord regardless of whether you're in the mountain or in the valley.

1 Kings 20:30 (a)
But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and there a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men that were left . . .

As they went to hide out in the city, a wall came down and 27,000 Syrians died.

1 Kings 20:30 (b)–32
. . . And Ben-hadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber. And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life. So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and put ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Ben-hadad saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, Is he yet alive? he is my brother.

As Ben-hadad's servants surrendered to Ahab, Ahab asked about Ben-hadad. "He's my brother," Ahab said. Why would Ahab say this? Ben-hadad certainly wasn't his brother racially because he was a Syrian, not an Israelite. He wasn't his brother religiously because he didn't serve or acknowledge Jehovah in any way. But he was his brother in the monarchy. That is, they were both kings. And in this we see the true priority of Ahab's life. More than being an Israelite, more than being a follower of Jehovah, he prided himself and found his identity in his position as king.

1 Kings 20:33, 34
Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it: and they said, Thy brother Ben-hadad. Then he said, Go ye, bring him. Then Ben-hadad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot. And Ben-hadad said unto him, The cities, which my father

took from thy father, I will restore; and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then said Ahab, I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away.

In other words, Ben-hadad said to Ahab, "I'll give you back all the stuff we took."

1 Kings 20:35–40
And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the word of the LORD, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man refused to smite him. Then said he unto him, Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of the LORD, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, a lion shall slay thee. And as soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him, and slew him. Then he found another man, and said, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man smote him, so that in smiting he wounded him. So the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with ashes upon his face. And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it.

As part of an elaborate object lesson, a prophet of God eventually convinced another man to hit him. He then added ashes to his wound to disguise himself and waited for Ahab to pass by. When Ahab drew near, the prophet approached him, saying, "When I was in battle, I was put in charge of a prisoner and was told that if the prisoner escaped, I would either pay with my life or with a talent of silver (today's equivalent of $3,000). But I got busy, and the prisoner escaped.

"The case is simple," Ahab said. "You must pay."

1 Kings 20:41–43
And he hasted, and took the ashes away from his face; and the king of Israel discerned him that he was of the prophets. And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people. And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria.

The prophet answered Ahab by saying, "The word of the Lord is that, because you didn't complete the task I called you to do, because you followed your own logic rather than My direction, you're headed for destruction."

Dear brother, precious sister, if the Lord has been speaking to you about a sin you constantly battle, don't be like Ahab. Don't make excuses for it. Don't compromise with it as Ahab did with Ben-hadad. Destroy it. Otherwise, it will one day destroy you. God has given us the ability to do so because He has made us more than conquerors (Romans 8:37). The only question is, do we have the desire to deal a deathblow to that which continually trips us up and causes others to stumble? Think back, and maybe you'll see that, like the prophet in our text, people in your life have been willing to take a beating in order to warn you about the path you're on. Be wise, dear saint, and heed their warning.



21 If you doubt that the grace of God is available or applicable to you, the text before us is especially for you because in it we see that the grace of God is available to *everyone.* Ahab was the most wicked king in the history of Israel. His idolatry and immorality exceeded that of all before him. And yet the Lord chased hard after him to restore him and minister grace to him. The Lord invested ten years in working with Ahab to bring him to a place of brokenness and repentance.

But at this point, he's not there yet . . .

1 Kings 21:1–3
And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.

King Ahab wanted Naboth's garden. But Naboth refused on the grounds that he had inherited it. You see, in Old Testament days, the Lord was determined that His people be treated equally and equitably. To this end, he said that it was only if the family came under dire straits and desperate need that they could sell their land, and even then, it was to be returned in the Year of Jubilee.

1 Kings 21:4
And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread.

Here, Ahab has an entire kingdom and he pouts because he can't have a little garden. In this, we see the fallacy of the materialistic mindset that pervades even our own culture. It doesn't really matter how much you have, if you're materially minded, you always want just a little more.

1 Kings 21:5–7
But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread? And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard. And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou

now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.

After first chiding her husband for being spineless, Jezebel took matters into her own hands . . .

1 Kings 21:8–10
So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth. And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die.

Jezebel sent letters to the leaders of the city, instructing them to bring in false witnesses to accuse Naboth of blasphemy, and then to stone him.

1 Kings 21:11–16
And the men of his city, even the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, and as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them. They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people. And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial witnessed against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is stoned, and is dead. And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead. And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go

down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

Sadly, Jezebel's plan was carried out without a hitch, opening a way for Ahab to seize Naboth's garden.

1 Kings 21:17 (a)
And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite . . .

Naboth is dead. The vineyard is now in possession of Ahab. And the word of the Lord comes to Elijah. It had been six years since Elijah had been on the scene. This man of miracles had been through a season of silence. Maybe you're going through a season of silence even presently. Maybe you're wondering why the Lord hasn't spoken to you, or why He isn't using you as He once did or as you hoped. The Lord takes His people through different seasons. It is your responsibility to simply stay filled and be available, filled with the Word and the Holy Spirit, and available to the command of the King. That's all. Should the Lord choose to call upon me once every six years or once every sixty years, that's His prerogative. Elijah was a mighty man of God, a powerful prophet, yet he was off the scene—until now.

1 Kings 21:17 (b)–19
. . . saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.

"You are in a real mess because of what you did to Naboth," Elijah said to Ahab. Notice that the Lord holds Ahab accountable for Jezebel's actions. Why? First, because he burdened her with his pouting (v. 4). The Word tells us that wives are weaker vessels (1 Peter 3:7), not in the sense of less spiritual, but in the sense of more vulnerable. This means that wives are

more likely to carry their husband's concerns even more deeply than their husbands do. Therefore, I believe it is very important for me, as a husband, to protect my wife from unnecessary burdens. I believe I do her a disservice if I unload on her everything I'm going through.

Secondly, Ahab misled her with his whining. Naboth said, "God forbid that I should do this. It's not right that I should do this from God's perspective." But Ahab made it seem like Naboth was just being obstinate. We can all be vulnerable to not quite accurately portraying a given situation. It's natural, but it's not right.

Husbands, let us take note tonight that we need to be careful that our wives don't move in a direction because we have cried to them or because we have failed to give them the whole story.

1 Kings 21:20 (a)
And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?

Wait a minute, Ahab. Elijah's not your enemy at all. Elijah is a great friend of yours because he's speaking the truth to you. Sometimes we see people as enemies who, in reality, are precious friends because they care enough to speak the truth.

1 Kings 21:20 (b)–29
. . . And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin. And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat. But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did

the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly. And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.

There are two things that move God: faith and humility. The Lord responds to humility time and time again throughout Scripture. Here, the most wicked, rotten king in Israel's history humbled himself, and the Lord is excited about it. No one is more wicked than Ahab. Not even you. Therefore, if you humble yourself and repent you, too, can receive the joy of the Lord, the matchless grace of God.



22 1 Kings 22:1–4

And they continued three years without war between Syria and Is rael. And it came to pass in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel. And the king of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria? And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth-gilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses.

Ahab asked Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, to join him in battle against Syria in order to reclaim a portion of land belonging to Israel.

1 Kings 22:5
And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to day.

"I'll go with you, but check it out with the Lord first," Jehoshaphat said.

1 Kings 22:6–9

Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD be sides, that we might inquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so. Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, Hasten hither Micaiah the son of Imlah.

Four hundred prophets prophesied victory. Jehoshaphat, however, sensed something was not quite right. So Ahab begrudgingly called for Micaiah, the one prophet who didn't only tell him what he wanted to hear.

1 Kings 22:10–14

And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them. And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron: and he said, Thus saith the LORD, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the king's hand. And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good. And Micaiah said, As the LORD liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak.

"Everybody's for going to war," the messenger said to Micaiah. "Just this once, join the crowd."

"I can only say what the Lord tells me to say," Micaiah answered.

1 Kings 22:15, 16
So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the LORD?

Sensing that Micaiah was mocking him, Ahab said, "Tell me the truth."

1 Kings 22:17
And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace.

"The sheep are going to be scattered and the leader will be lost," Micaiah finally said.

1 Kings 22:18–23
And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil? And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee.

Although Ahab had repented, he began veering back into carnality. So the Lord determined to take him home. "How shall this be done?" the Lord said.

There were many suggestions, and then a lying spirit said, "I'll persuade him. I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." How could a lying spirit have this kind of communication in heaven? Satan has access to heaven, but he can do nothing without the Lord's permission (Job 1).

1 Kings 22:24
But Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near, and smote Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee?

" When did the Spirit of God leave me and speak to you?" This alone should witness to the fact that the Spirit of God had already long since left Zedekiah. Why? The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace (Galatians 5:22). James goes on to say that we'll know that wisdom is from above if it is full of mercy, easy to be entreated, and peaceable (3:17). In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul says prophecy without love is nothing.

1 Kings 22:25–30
And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself. And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; And say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace. And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and enter into the battle; but put thou on thy robes. And the king of Israel disguised himself, and went into the battle.

Ahab was no dummy. When he heard Micaiah say that the sheep would be scattered and the leader lost, he decided to enter the battle incognito and suggested Jehoshaphat wear his royal robes instead.

1 Kings 22:31
But the king of Syria commanded his thirty and two captains that had rule over his chariots, saying, Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel.

The sole mission of the Syrians was to kill the king of Israel.

1 Kings 22:32–34
And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, Surely it is the king of Israel. And they turned aside to fight against him: and Jehoshaphat cried out. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him. And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded.

Man can't outsmart God. The Syrians chased Jehoshaphat because he was wearing Ahab's clothes. But they ceased when Jehoshaphat identified himself. Then, an unknown, unnamed man shot an arrow at random and it struck right in the place of vulnerability in Ahab's armor.

1 Kings 22:35, 36
And the battle increased that day: and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot. And there went a proclamation throughout the host about the going down of the sun, saying, Every man to his city, and every man to his own country.

When Israel got word of Ahab's death, they fled. In other words, the shepherd died and the sheep scattered, just as Micaiah had prophesied.

1 Kings 22:37, 38

So the king died, and was brought to Samaria; and they buried the king in Samaria. And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour; according unto the word of the LORD which he spake.

Thus, Elijah's prophecy was fulfilled (21:19).

1 Kings 22:39, 40
Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house which he made, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? So Ahab slept with his fathers; and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead.

There is no remaining record of the ivory house or the cities Ahab built. What does remain is the account of his life here in 1 Kings that shows him to be a wicked king who God nonetheless pursued.

1 Kings 22:41–45
And Jehoshaphat the son of Asa began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel. Jehoshaphat was thirty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. And he walked in all the ways of Asa his father; he turned not aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of the LORD: nevertheless the high places were not taken away; for the people offered and burnt incense yet in the high places. And Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, and his might that he shewed, and how he warred, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

The antithesis of Ahab, Jehoshaphat is one of the greatest kings in Judah's history, as seen in 2 Chronicles.

1 Kings 22:46–49

And the remnant of the sodomites, which remained in the days of his father Asa, he took out of the land. There was then no king in Edom: a deputy was king. Jehoshaphat made ships of Tharshish to go to Ophir for gold: but they went not; for the ships were broken at Ezion-geber. Then said Ahaziah the son of Ahab unto Jehoshaphat, Let my servants go with thy servants in the ships. But Jehoshaphat would not.

Second Chronicles 20:35–37 tells us about this incident. Jehoshaphat took part in a venture to send ships for gold. But because it was a joint venture with a wicked king, Jehoshaphat's ships went down on the rocks. Why does the Lord record this? I believe it is as a reminder that if we are unequally yoked with unbelievers—be it in marriage, business, or any other venture—we're headed for the rocks, as well.

1 Kings 22:50–53
And Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of Da vid his father: and Jehoram his son reigned in his stead. Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned two years over Israel. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin: For he served Baal, and worshipped him, and provoked to anger the LORD God of Israel, according to all that his father had done.

The book that began with a man after God's own heart sitting on the throne of a united Israel ends with two godless kings on the thrones of a divided nation. "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations," the people had demanded (1 Samuel 8:5). And, in the words of the psalmist, God "gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul" (106:15).



2 KINGS

2 Kings 1:1, 2 (a)
Then Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab. And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick . . .

Rather than going to battle, Ahaziah thought he would play it safe and stay home. But because he was a sinner, nowhere was safe. We're all only a step away from death no matter where we are, gang. Life is short. Tomorrow is uncertain. Wise is the man or woman who realizes the uncertainty of tomorrow.

2 Kings 1:2 (b), 3
. . . and he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease. But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron?

"Why are you going to inquire of the Philistine god? Aren't I the true and living God?" the Lord said through Elijah. Before we come down on Ahaziah, we would do well to search our own hearts. For example, when you are hurt, do you first call the doctor or do you call upon the Lord? We are just as guilty as Ahaziah if, when we're hurt or diseased, defeated or wounded, we don't first seek the Lord.

2 Kings 1:4–8
Now therefore thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. And Elijah departed. And when the messengers turned back unto him, he said unto them, Why are ye now turned back? And they said unto him, There came a man up to meet us, and said unto us, Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, Thus

saith the LORD, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. And he said unto them, What manner of man was he which came up to meet you, and told you these words? And they answered him, He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite.

A brief description was all Ahaziah needed to recognize Elijah.

2 Kings 1:9
Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and, behold, he sat on the top of an hill. And he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down.

Satan, the king of this world, utters the same phrase: "Come down," for he would have us leave the heights of fellowship with God to come down to his level.

2 Kings 1:10
And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

"Lord, they didn't receive You in Samaria. Shall we call down fire and consume them like Elijah did?" thundered James and John, the sons of thunder (Luke 9:54).

"You don't know what spirit you're of," Jesus said. And He rebuked them.

The true proof of a man of God lies in his ability to call down fire from heaven, not to consume other souls, but to consume his own spirit. People asked John Wesley how he drew such great crowds to hear him preach. "I ignite myself in the fire of the Holy Ghost," he is reported to have said, "and

people come to watch me burn." I like that! If you are a man or woman of God, you will be able to call down fire, not to blast others, but to ignite your own heart.

"Did not our heart *burn* within us?" asked the travelers to Emmaus after spending time with Jesus (Luke 24:32, italics added). How do you call down fire from heaven? Do what those on the road to Emmaus did: Spend time with Jesus.

2 Kings 1:11
Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly.

This time, Ahaziah commanded Elijah to come down quickly.

2 Kings 1:12–15
And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. And he sent again a captain of the third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight. Behold, there came fire down from heaven, and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties with their fifties: therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight. And the angel of the LORD said unto Elijah, Go down with him: be not afraid of him. And he arose, and went down with him unto the king.

The third captain approached Elijah differently than the first two. He came with humility. And, as a result, his life was spared.

2 Kings 1:16
And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron,

is it not because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word? therefore thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.

If Ahaziah hoped Elijah would reverse the curse, he was sorely disappointed, for Elijah didn't back down.

2 Kings 1:17, 18
So he died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken. And Jehoram reigned in his stead in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah; because he had no son. Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

Elijah's prophecy came to pass. God's Word was, as always, true. Ahaziah died, leaving his brother, Jehoram, to succeed him.



2 Kings 2:1
And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

At the close of Jesus' earthly ministry, He gathered His disciples to Him and said, "It is expedient that I go, for if I go, I will send you another Comforter" (John 16:7). Jesus Himself was quite a Comforter. If you were sailing and a storm suddenly began to beat and batter your boat, it would be a comfort to have Jesus with you because He could simply speak the word and the storm would stop. If you were having a party and ran out of food or drink, Jesus would be a comfort to have with you, for He was able to feed thousands with a few loaves of bread and to turn ordinary water into wine. If you were sick, what a comfort it would be to be in the presence of Jesus, for He could simply speak a word of healing and the sickness would depart. Why, then, would we need *another* Comforter?

The answer is that, while Jesus was on earth, He was physically limited to being in one place at a time. Knowing His church would grow, that His kingdom would expand, He said, "I must depart so I can send you another Comforter, one just like Me, but without the limitations of a physical body." That is why Jesus Christ, by His Holy Spirit is in our midst right now. But He is also in Beijing and Bombay, Alaska and Africa. He is limitless. He is allowed to move in churches and hearts simultaneously all across the globe.

After Jesus died on the Cross and then rose from the dead, validating His claim to be Messiah, He appeared to His disciples again. "Peace," He said. "It is I. Be of good cheer." And then He breathed on them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit" (John 20). The word "spirit" is *pneuma* in Greek and can also be translated "breath" or "wind." The Hebrew word, *ruach,* can also be translated as "breath," "wind," or "spirit." At that point, the disciples had the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit did not have them, for Jesus told those same men to go to Jerusalem and wait until they were empowered with the Spirit from on high. They had the Holy Spirit *in* them, but now they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came *upon* them.

Ten days after Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit came upon the group of disciples. These men who were timid and fearful suddenly became bold and powerful. The reason the early church turned the world upside down is because they were plugged in to the power of the Holy Spirit.

Saints throughout all ages have understood that the source and secret of power is the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, we read about the Holy Spirit coming upon Moses and upon the seventy elders who ministered alongside him. We read how Othniel was empowered for service, how Samson was supernaturally strengthened, how Gideon stepped out in faith, how David sang songs of praise when the Holy Spirit came upon their lives.

In our text, we see another example of the Holy Spirit coming upon a man. His name was Elisha. For six years as Elisha ministered to Elijah, he observed that the power of the Holy Spirit was the secret to Elijah's ministry. As Elijah was ready to be taken up, he turned to his young protegé and said, "What do you want?"

"I want a double portion of the same Spirit that is upon you," Elisha answered

"You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you keep your eyes on me, and if you see me depart, it shall be granted to you," Elijah said.

But first, Elijah will take him to four cities. In them, we see the four points of preparation necessary for empowerment to take place.

The first stop was Gilgal, *the place of purification.* When, after forty years of wandering, the children of Israel crossed into the Promised Land, the first place they came to was Gilgal. When they got there, the Lord said, "Stop. Before you fight any battle, you must circumcise the entire generation." Circumcision speaks of radically dealing with the flesh.

The first point of preparation for empowerment is purification. You see, if I am going to be filled with the Holy Spirit, I must first be emptied of the flesh. Too often, too many people are trying to get filled, when in reality they need to be emptied. That is, there is sin in their lives. Their flesh has grown over areas that were once tender and sensitive to the Lord. That is why Gilgal—the place of purification—is still the first step.

2 Kings 2:2 (a)
And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Bethel. And Elisha said unto him, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.

At each of the four stops, Elijah says to Elisha, "Stay here. I've got to go on. You hang back." And each time he does, Elisha says, "No way. I'm not leaving. I'm going to follow you wherever you go. I'm going to stick to you like glue."

2 Kings 2:2 (b), 3
So they went down to Bethel. And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.

Bethel is *the place of realization.* In Genesis 28, we read how Jacob tricked his dad into giving him the birthright and blessing. After he got them, he knew his older brother would be angry, so he ran for his life, stopping the first night at a place in the wilderness that seemed Godforsaken. He pulled

up a rock for a pillow and went to sleep. That night, God appeared to Jacob. When Jacob awoke, he said, "Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not." Why didn't Jacob know God was there? Because his surroundings were barren and dry. Secondly, he didn't know God was in that place because of his circumstances. He was running from his sin. But when he awoke, he marveled that God was indeed in that place. That is why he called it *Bethel,* or "house of God."

Maybe you look at your circumstances or surroundings and think, "The Lord might want to bless the people around me, but not me. I'm a conniver like Jacob. My surroundings are dry. I'm in a wasted place. I've wasted time, energy, and my whole life." The Lord wants to bless you today. Regardless of where you've been previously or what your circumstances are presently, if you will come to Him, He will bless you abundantly. Jesus said, "If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask" (Matthew 7:11).

2 Kings 2:4
And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho.

The third city was Jericho, *the place of confrontation.* After they were purified at Gilgal, standing before them was the unbelievably difficult task of conquering Jericho. Its walls loomed high. It was thought to be impregnable. The Lord commanded the people to march around the city for six days. On the seventh day, they were to march around it six times and on the seventh time, they were to shout and the walls would come down. It was a fabulous victory, indeed. It was a place of confrontation.

The Holy Spirit is given not to make us feel good, not to make us happy, not to give us a "holy high." The Holy Spirit is given for the purpose of service, to take on Jerichos, to reach out to people who are walled off, and to change lives and situations.

Jesus said, “You shall receive power when the Holy Ghost comes upon you and then you shall be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8). Do you really want to be filled with the Holy Spirit, because that means you’re going to be a witness.

2 Kings 2:5
And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.

Not only was Elijah testing Elisha by suggesting he hang back, but the guys in the school of prophecy—the seminarians of the day—tried to dissuade him from following a prophet who was destined to die. Yet still, Elisha followed.

2 Kings 2:6
And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the LORD hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on.

Jordan was *the place of expectation.* When the Israelites crossed into the Promised Land, it was as the priests put their feet in the water that the waters parted (Joshua 3:15). They didn’t stand on the edge of the bank, saying, “Lord, part the waters and we’ll step in.” No, they stepped in first, and as they did, a miracle took place.

We will read how Naaman was told by Elisha to dip seven times in the Jordan in order to be cleansed of leprosy. As he did, as he took the step of faith, even though he was at first reluctant, he was healed (2 Kings 5:14).

If you desire to be filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, you must come to the place of expectation, where you say, “Lord, I’m putting my foot in the water. Lord, I’m dipping seven times if necessary,” for without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

2 Kings 2:7

And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan.

Elisha passed all four tests. He kept going even though at every juncture Elijah said, "Are you sure you want to keep going?"

Your heart will say the same thing. "Are you sure you want to go deeper and deeper in the things of God?"

In Acts 4, the same group of disciples who were baptized, filled, and empowered with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was retouched, refilled and renewed. Likewise, I believe there are many who have had a Holy Spirit experience, but need to be renewed. If you want a double measure, if you want more of the Lord, I would encourage you to follow in Elisha's footsteps: Confess sin. Then confess God is in your situation and expect Him to meet you, to fill you, to empower you.

2 Kings 2:8–10
And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground. And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.

"Give me a double portion of the Spirit that is upon you," Elisha said. Interestingly, we'll see that Elisha did exactly twice as many miracles as Elijah. In other words, his request was granted. Why? Because he kept his eyes on his master and had been prepared for the Spirit.

2 Kings 2:11
And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

At the time of his departure, Elijah was walking with and talking with a disciple. I like that. If you are mature in the things of God, do you have an Elisha, someone you're leading closer to the Lord? How I pray that when the Lord comes for me, I might be walking with and talking about the things of the Lord to someone who is growing in Him.

2 Kings 2:12, 13
And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horse men thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan;

The mantle has fallen upon Elisha. And now the biblical narrative deals with the ministry of Elisha . . . who said, "Give me a double portion." He was granted his request. He was walking with and learning from a powerful prophet. And now he'll carry on.

2 Kings 2:14, 15
And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.

Elisha struck the Jordan with Elijah's mantle, and the water parted. This interests me because the last miracle Elijah did was the same as the first miracle Elisha does.

Elisha watched what his master did, then duplicated it. What was the last miracle our Master did? He healed Malchus' ear after Peter lopped it off with his sword (Luke 22:51). What is the miracle we should be doing? Healing those who have been hurt unnecessarily even by Christians who are wielding the sword upon each other. We must be people who heal, not people who hurt. "Be ye kind one to another," Paul would write, "tenderhearted,

forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). May the Lord help us to be healing, forgiving, redemptive people.

2 Kings 2:16–18
And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the LORD hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send. And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not. And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?

Fifty men who were devoted to studying the Scriptures said, "We can't believe Elijah really got raptured. Maybe he's stuck on some mountain somewhere. We'd better go find him." The same thing still happens. There are many seminaries who do not believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible. And when the Rapture happens, they'll be searching high and low, wondering where all of those "radical Christians" went!

2 Kings 2:19–22
And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water is naught, and the ground barren. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.

Jesus said that we are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). Paul said, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt" (see Colossians 4:6). What are your words like? Are they salt? Do they create in others a

thirst for Jesus? Let us commit to be people who, in the power of the Spirit and by the grace of God, speak words seasoned with the salt of grace.

The area around Jericho looked beautiful, but the water was poisoned. Jewish commentators tell us that so poisonous was the water, it was actually causing women to miscarry and the trees to lose their leaves. Outwardly, things looked good, but it was fruitless. Elisha healed the waters by prophesying in the spirit and by pouring in salt.

2 Kings 2:23
And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.

The Hebrew word translated "little children" is *nahar. Nahar* is used to speak of little children, but also of younger men. For example, Isaac, at the age of twenty-eight, and Joseph, at the age of thirty-nine, are both called nahar. In this case, the implication of what these young men were saying was, "Elijah went up, why don't you? We don't want you around."

2 Kings 2:24, 25
And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them. And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.

In his second epistle, Peter said that there will come scoffers saying, "Why hasn't the Lord come back yet? Where is the promise of His coming?" (3:4). But, like the young men in our text, they will find themselves in an "unbearable" situation, in a time of tremendous tribulation when God pours out His wrath on a Christ-rejecting sinful world during the Tribulation. Those who mock and scoff will find themselves in tough times.

3 **2 Kings 3:1–3**
Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eigh teenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years. And he wrought evil in the sight of the LORD; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made. Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom.

Jehoram, the son of Ahab and Jezebel, was a little better than his mom and dad by virtue of the fact that he didn't worship Baal, but he did continue to worship the calves that Jeroboam had made.

2 Kings 3:4, 5
And Mesha king of Moab was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool. But it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.

Mesha was tired of paying tribute. When Ahab died, he felt now was the time to get out from under the heavy taxation that Ahab and Israel had put on him. So he launched a rebellion.

2 Kings 3:6, 7
And king Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time, and numbered all Israel. And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab hath rebelled against me: wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle? And he said, I will go up: I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses.

Jehoshaphat was a great man, but he was a gullible man. This is the exact phrase he said when Ahab, Jehoram's father, asked him to help battle the Syrians. At that time, Jehoshaphat barely escaped with his life (1 Kings 22). It seemed like he would have learned his lesson. But here he makes the same mistake again.

2 Kings 3:8–11
And he said, Which way shall we go up? And he answered, The way through the wilderness of Edom. So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days' journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them. And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab! But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD, that we may inquire of the LORD by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.

Elisha was known as the man who served Elijah. And because he was faithful in little things, he was given greater responsibility (Luke 19:17). Are you willing to serve others? It's an important step in your spiritual development.

2 Kings 3:12, 13
And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the LORD is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him. And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab.

Elisha's first response was, "Go seek your false gods."

But Jehoram said, "We're in trouble. We need to have a word from the Lord."

In days of old, sailors would chart their course by the stars. As we sail through life, it is often only during the dark times that we take the time to look up to heaven and get direction. Why does the Lord cause what St. John of the Cross called "the dark night of the soul" to descend upon our lives? It is because only then are we driven to our knees, only then do we look up and get direction.

2 Kings 3:14
And Elisha said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.

Jehoshaphat was in the wrong place, but his heart was right. So Elisha said, "Because Jehoshaphat's here, I'll seek the Lord on your behalf." This encourages me because we can find ourselves in the wrong place from time to time. But if our hearts are right, the Lord will not forsake us. He'll still give guidance and direction to us.

2 Kings 3:15
But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him.

As the praise music ascended, Elisha tuned in to the voice of the Lord. Isaiah says, "Break forth into song, you who are barren" (see Isaiah 54:1). If you feel barren, unfruitful, cold, break forth into songs of praise. In Job 38, we read that, when the Lord was creating the heavens and the earth, the angels were singing. The Lord works best to background music. It is in the presence of worship and praise that the Holy Spirit is able to work most creatively and most powerfully.

2 Kings 3:16–20
And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts. And this is but a light thing in the sight of the LORD: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand. And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones. And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water.

In this dry and desert area, the word of the Lord was for the Israelites and Edomites to dig ditches. Only God could give the water, but it was up to them to trench the ground. This is such an important principle. You've got to dig the ditches in the dry times, in the hard times. You've got to daily dig the ditches and the Lord will fill them with water in His time. You might feel like your morning devotions are a rut, as dry as a desert. Dig the ditch anyway. And in the morning, in the Lord's timing, He will fill it with water. It is a principle of God that is irrevocable and absolute. God will fill the ditch, but you must dig it. If the Israelites had only scratched the ground, that's all the water they would have received. The more you dig, the more you'll get. Sometimes it's just plain hard work, but whether it's Bible study, ministry, or prayer, you've got to dig the ditch first. Then the Lord will fill it in due time. May God help us to be those who dig in and prepare for mighty miracles.

2 Kings 3:21–23
And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them, they gathered all that were able to put on armour, and upward, and stood in the border. And they rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood: And they said, This is blood: the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another: now therefore, Moab, to the spoil.

When the Moabites woke up, the sun hit the water in the trenches in such a way as to look to them like it was blood. Therefore, they assumed the Israelite and Edomite kings had all attacked each other. So they went in, thinking they had the victory in hand.

Throughout Scripture, water is a picture of the Word. Some people view the Word as repulsive, a book of blood. But to those of us who have not only viewed it, but also tasted it, it is not repulsive, it is refreshing. If the Moabites had tasted the water, they would have known it was not blood at all. I have never met a man or woman who studied the Word of God who does not love it. The critics of the Word are those who view it from a distance but never taste it.

2 Kings 3:24, 25

And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them: but they went forward smiting the Moabites, even in their country. And they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees: only in Kir-haraseth left they the stones thereof; howbeit the slingers went about it, and smote it.

Not only were the Israelites able to defeat the Moabites on the battlefield, but they were also able to defeat them in their own cities.

2 Kings 3:26, 27
And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through even unto the king of Edom: but they could not. Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to their own land.

After failing to make a dent in even the Edomite forces, the king of Moab resorted to the unimaginable act of sacrificing his own son, perhaps to obtain the help and favor of Chemosh, his god. No doubt horrified by this act, Israel departed. The battle was over.

What did it take to end the attack of Satan for the conquest of your soul? The death of the Son of the King of the universe. Jesus' death on the Cross, however, was not a frenzied last resort. No, it was planned before the world was even formed (1 Peter 1:20), so much did God love you.



4 2 Kings 4:1–7
Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Eli sha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou

knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen. And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil. Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed. Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.

This lady struck oil! She was in debt. Her sons about to be carried away into slavery, she cried to Elisha. Elisha asked what she had. She told him she had but a little bit of oil. "Gather all the vessels you can find, and start pouring," the prophet said. The lady did this, and a miracle took place, for as long as she kept pouring, the oil kept flowing.

Oil, of course, is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The illustration here is an obvious one. The Lord will continue to flow through you as long as you are giving out to others. Maybe the Holy Spirit isn't flowing in your life. Could it be because there is no empty vessel in your house or in your life? Could it be because you haven't yet said, "I'm determined to minister to this person. I'm going to pour my life out for that person. I'm going to witness radically. I'm going to minister consistently"? Be like this woman. Gather around you empty vessels, empty people in need of the Lord. If you do, the Holy Spirit will fill you and flow from you perpetually. You, too, will strike oil.

2 Kings 4:8 (a)
And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman . . .

The Hebrew word for "great" is *gadol* and is used in the Bible to refer to spiritual greatness, moral greatness, material greatness, and mental greatness.

This is the only woman in Scripture who is called a "great woman."

2 Kings 4:8 (b)
. . . and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread.

What makes a great woman in the eyes of God? First, she is a woman of hospitality. This woman opened her home to a stranger. Hospitality is spoken of often in Scripture . . .

> He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward . . .
>
> Matthew 10:41 (a)

> Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.
>
> Hebrews 13:2

> Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love . . . Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.
>
> Romans 12:10, 13

> . . . When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.
>
> Luke 14:12 (b)–14

2 Kings 4:9–11
And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it

shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there.

Secondly, a great woman in the eyes of God is a woman of spirituality. Here, the woman perceived that the unknown stranger was a man of God. What did she do with that discernment? Spirituality was translated into practicality when she and her husband built a room for Elisha. She simply provided a quiet place of rest for God's minister.

2 Kings 4:12
And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him.

Thirdly, a great woman in the eyes of God is a woman of respectability. The dialogue with Elisha passed through Gehazi, the servant. In the name of propriety and wisdom, she refrained from speaking to Elisha directly. Many problems arise due to a lack of propriety. Paul said that even in church matters, if a woman has a question, she is to ask her husband (1 Corinthians 14:35). This isn't chauvinistic. It's for protection, lest people find themselves emotionally involved, unknowingly walking a path that leads to disaster.

2 Kings 4:13–16
And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people. And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid.

Fourthly, a great woman in the eyes of God is a woman of contentment. Only Gehazi spoke of her need.

The story is told of a king who was terribly discontent. He had everything he wanted, but he was still unsatisfied. A sorcerer was called who said, "The solution to your discontentment is simple: Find a man in your realm who is genuinely content. Order the shirt off his back and wear his shirt for two weeks. At the end of two weeks, you'll be totally content." So he sent his soldiers throughout the realm. They searched high and low and finally found a man who was totally content. "Where is his shirt?" the eager king asked.

"He doesn't own one," his soldiers replied.

How true that is. The man or woman who is content is not the one who has the most, but the one who needs the least. "I have *learned* to be content," said Paul (see Philippians 4:11). Contentment is something that comes naturally to no one. It must be learned.

2 Kings 4:17
And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.

Because she was a great woman, this woman was greatly blessed. She bore a son.

2 Kings 4:18–21
And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out.

The woman wasn't preparing a burial. She was preparing for a miracle. Hebrews 11:35 tells us there were women in the Old Testament who, by faith, saw their dead raised again to life. This Shunammite woman is one of two women who saw their sons rise from the dead. The other was the widow in 1 Kings 17. No doubt this woman had heard about that incident. With the

same spirit on Elisha that was upon Elijah, she expected a miracle. So she laid her son's body in Elisha's chamber.

2 Kings 4:22, 23
And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again. And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to day? it is neither new moon, nor sabbath. And she said, It shall be well.

"Why are you going to see Elisha?" her husband asked. "It's not the new moon or sabbath." In other words, "Why are you going to church? It's not Sunday."

2 Kings 4:24, 25 (a)
Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee. So she went and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel . . .

The Shunammite woman found Elisha on Mt. Carmel. That's always where you find men of God, Moses on Mt. Sinai, Elijah on Mt. Carmel, Jesus and the disciples on Mt. Hermon, the Mount of Transfiguration. Are you a mountain man? If you desire to be a man or woman of God, you must learn the secret of the mountain, the place of isolation and elevation.

2 Kings 4:25 (b), 26
. . . And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite. Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well.

Here, this great woman makes a powerful proclamation of faith when she says, "It is well."

2 Kings 4:27, 28

And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid it from me, and hath not told me. Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?

Her spirit is strong, but we're seeing her flesh begin to fail. Can you relate to this? At one moment, you make a powerful proclamation of faith. Then, a few moments later, your faith falters. When that happens, understand that you're not alone. In fact, as I read the Scriptures, virtually every man or woman of faith went through times when their faith faltered.

2 Kings 4:29–32
Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her. And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed.

Elisha sent Gehazi with his staff. Straight and strong, the staff was symbolic of authority and integrity. Elisha felt as though the staff would somehow be instrumental in seeing a miracle happen. But that symbol of authority and integrity was absolutely powerless.

In this picture I see an important principle. That is, sometimes we try and approach people who are dead with a "straight and authoritative" Scripture, with the law or theology. And we wonder why it doesn't move them. Elisha then did something else, and so must we . . .

2 Kings 4:33–35 (a)

He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him . . .

Authority did nothing. Theology was lifeless. So Elisha made personal contact by laying on the child. It was an act of identification. He identified with him personally. After he laid himself out, throwing himself into the ministry, throwing himself wholeheartedly into this situation, he paced the floor. Why? I believe it was because he was praying intensely. And this is greatly needed in our lives. We must first make personal contact with the dying world around us. And then we must pray for them fervently and faithfully.

2 Kings 4:35 (b)
. . . and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.

When regeneration begins to happen, it doesn't always come with a big splash. Sometimes, it begins with just a little sneeze. We need to listen for those sneezes, even the faint beginning of something happening, and take hope. May they cause us to be even more fervent in prayer and more expectant in faith.

2 Kings 4:36, 37
And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out.

What a marvelous story of resurrection. May the Lord help us to be like Elisha, to make contact personally, to listen for sneezes carefully, to pray expectantly, and to see life in those who were dead spiritually.

2 Kings 4:38 (a)
And Elisha came again to Gilgal: and there was a dearth in the land . . .

A dearth in the land means there was famine.

2 Kings 4:38 (b)
. . . and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him: and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets.

Elisha told his servants to make pottage, vegetable stew, for his students.

2 Kings 4:39–41
And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage: for they knew them not. So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof. But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot.

The pottage was poisoned. The solution was to dilute the poison by pouring in the meal.

Like Elisha's students, we live in a time of drought—not geologically, but spiritually—due to the fact that so few churches teach the Word of God. In addition to the drought, however, there are all kinds of poisonous winds of doctrine being put in the pot, new fads and Christian trends. Our job is not to try and pick out the poison in the pot. Our job is to pour in the meal. Stay in the Scriptures, gang. Study the Word faithfully, consistently, daily. And as you study the Word of God the poison dissipates. Pour in the good stuff, and the bad stuff is naturally flushed out.

2 Kings 4:42

And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat.

During this time of drought and famine, a man came from the center of Baal worship bringing food to Elisha. A true shepherd, Elisha, in turn, ordered that the food be given to the flock. The Lord loves to do this yet today. He'll bless you through an unexpected person who will come with just the bread you need.

2 Kings 4:43 (a)
And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men?

"Twenty loaves is not going to be enough to feed one hundred men," said Gehazi. Sound familiar?

2 Kings 4:43 (b), 44
. . . He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the LORD, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the LORD.

There was indeed enough, plus leftovers. Of course, this is a preview of a greater Prophet and a mightier miracle that was to take place in John 6, when Jesus would feed 5,000 with only five loaves.

The firstfruits were given and they went far. Do you give the firstfruits of your finances, time, talents, and energy? The firstfruits belong to the Lord. And because this one unknown man gave his firstfruits, one hundred men were fed. Great things will be done whenever the people of God give Him their firstfruits rather than their leftovers.

2 Kings 5:1 (a)

5 Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but . . .

Naaman was a man who was well known, a man who was well favored, a man who was mightily used by the Lord, but . . . No matter how good our situation, this side of eternity, there always seems to be a "but."

2 Kings 5:1 (b)

. . . he was a leper.

Leprosy is a picture of sin. It begins small but spreads quickly. Sin is the same way. "This is so small. It's no big deal," we think. But it eats at us, erodes us, and eventually destroys us.

2 Kings 5:2, 3

And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.

This young girl serving in the house of Naaman had been carried from Israel as a captive. She could have been bitter. Instead, she chose to be a blessing. As a result, she was the instrument the Lord would use to tell Naaman that there was hope.

Do you feel like you've been ripped off, like you've been stuck in a bad position or a bad place? You're there for a purpose! Like this servant girl, all you have to do is choose to be used.

2 Kings 5:4–7

And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand

pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.

"Oh, no!" said the king of Israel. "The king of Syria has sent a leper for me to cure. How can I do that? I'm not God!"

2 Kings 5:8–11
And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.

"Behold, I thought," said Naaman, and that's the mistake of every sinner. Instead of praying, instead of repenting, instead of crying out to God, he thinks.

2 Kings 5:12–14 (a)
Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much

rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God . . .

Here we see a vivid illustration of the work of salvation . . .

First, leprosy is a picture of sin.

Second, the message of hope was given to a little girl. Paul tells us that the Lord loves to use the weak things of the world to confound the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27). If you feel weak, if you don't consider yourself to be very knowledgeable in the things of God, you are an ideal candidate for God to use because you won't take any glory.

Third, the message was more important than the messenger. Naaman thought Elisha would do something spectacular. Instead, he gave a simple word. Why was Naaman to dip in the Jordan River? The word *Jordan* means "judgment." The number seven speaks of completion. Thus, Naaman was to immerse himself completely in the river of judgment. How are we to be cleansed of our leprosy, of our sin? By immersing ourselves fully in the judgment that Jesus bore for us on the Cross of Calvary.

2 Kings 5:14 (b)
. . . and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

"You must become as a little child if you are to be born again," Jesus said (Mark 10:15). And Naaman did just that.

2 Kings 5:15–17
And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. But he said, As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused. And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD.

After Elisha refused his offer of payment, Naaman asked the prophet for permission to take dirt from Israel back to Syria. Why would he want to do this? In the pagan culture of the day, it was thought that deities were localized, that they only had power over specific countries or regions. Thus, by bringing dirt from Israel home with him, Naaman thought he would be bringing home a "base" from which the Israelite God could work.

2 Kings 5:18
In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing.

"As the king's right-hand man, I will have to accompany him into the temple of Rimmon and bow down to this false god," Naaman said. "May the Lord pardon me for this."

2 Kings 5:19
And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way.

"Go in *peace?*" you say. "Why doesn't Elisha correct Naaman? Why doesn't he tell him he doesn't need dirt from Israel to worship the God of Israel? Why doesn't he forbid him from bowing to the false god, Rimmon?"

I suggest it's because, realizing he was talking to a baby believer, Elisha didn't want to burden him with too many corrections or expectations. Of Jesus, it was said, "A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench" (Isaiah 42:3). In other words, Jesus responds to even the faintest glimmer of faith.

As we walk with the Lord, He slowly but surely refines us, convicts us, changes us to be sure. But it's over a period of time. The tendency in some Christians is to lay on a brand new believer the convictions and understandings they have acquired over twenty years of walking with the Lord. That's wrong. The Holy Spirit is quite capable of convicting. He doesn't need our help. *Gospel* means "good news." We are to preach the

gospel, glad tidings, the message of peace to all people, knowing that the Holy Spirit will tend to the matter of Rimmon in due time.

2 Kings 5:20–23
But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him. So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well? And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him.

Taking advantage of the situation, Gehazi caught up with Naaman and said, "Elisha changed his mind. Two prophets' sons came into town and he wants to bless them. So he wants some silver and some clothes after all."

2 Kings 5:24, 25
And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed. But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither.

"Where have you been?" Elisha asked Gehazi.
"Nowhere," Gehazi answered.

2 Kings 5:26, 27
And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and

vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.

Here, we see the tragic downfall of *Gehazi*. His name means "denier." Many scholars see in him a picture, or type, of Judas Iscariot. Following are four warning signs for any servant of the Lord . . .

From his life, we can see that Gehazi was com-passionless. When the woman whose son died grabbed the feet of Elisha, he wanted to push her away (4:27), even as Judas was offended when Mary poured oil on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair. "This is a waste," Judas said. "That money could have been used for something better" (John 12:1–6).

Secondly, Gehazi was powerless. He was sent to raise up a woman's son, but he was impotent (4:31). You know you are losing your effectiveness as a servant when you are no longer able to be used in reviving the spiritually dead, when your witness is ineffective, or absent altogether.

Thirdly, Gehazi was faithless. When the man brought the firstfruits, it was he who said, "There's no way this food will feed all these people" (4:42).

Lastly, Gehazi was covetous. He wanted the silver and the garments, just as Judas sold Jesus Christ for a few pieces of silver. Judas was a follower of Jesus. And yet something happened. Compassionless, powerless, faithless, and overcome with covetousness, he ended up denying the Lord. So did Gehazi.

Every one of us is vulnerable. That's why it's imperative that we say, "Lord, search *my* heart. See if there be any wicked way in *me*."



6 **2 Kings 6:1, 2**

And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye.

These men were dedicated to God. They were sons of the prophets, studying the Scriptures, practicing prophecy, and being discipled by Elisha. As the Word went into these men, they began to increase numerically, and it was time for a building project. So they went out to build a bigger place, to expand the ministry, to become more effective.

2 Kings 6:3, 4 (a)
And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go. So he went with them . . .

The request of even one person can constitute a call from God. Let us never succumb to the scourge of statistics, where we analyze what we will do and where we will go according to numbers. In Acts 8, Philip was involved in a huge revival in Samaria. Yet the Spirit called him away to minister to just one man in the desert.

2 Kings 6:4 (b), 5 (a)
. . . And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water . . .

One of the men found himself in a predicament. While he was doing the work of the ministry, the axe head he was using fell in the Jordan River. The axe head in this story is a symbol, a picture of the cutting edge of power, of effectiveness. It speaks of the Holy Spirit.

The only way we'll ever build anything—be it ministry or marriage, families or friendships—is if we build in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Psalmist declares that those who build apart from the Lord labor in vain (127:1). You can follow every principle of marriage, parenting, and ministry, and still fail if you are not doing it in the power of the Holy Ghost, for it is "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit saith the Lord" (Zechariah 4:6).

2 Kings 6:5 (b)
. . . and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed.

It was borrowed. Always remember that. The power upon your life is not your own. If you begin to think that the effectiveness of your ministry or the success of your marriage is because of who you are, one day you will wake up like Samson and stand to do battle, only to find, as he did, that the Spirit of the Lord has departed (Judges 16:20).

- "Grieve not the Holy Spirit," the Word declares (Ephesians 4:30).
- "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever," the Father says (Genesis 6:3).
- "Quench not the Spirit," Paul says (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

How did this man lose his axe head? He lost it in the process of service. He was trying to do what was right, but he became careless. You see, an axe head does not fall off suddenly. It becomes loose slowly.

At this point, all the young man had was a wooden axe handle. Wood in Scriptures is symbolic of the flesh (1 Corinthians 3:12). Here's a young man, doing the work of the ministry, and suddenly, the power is gone, leaving him nothing but the wooden handle of the flesh. To his credit, he didn't say, "So what if the axe head is gone? Who cares if the power has departed? I'll just use this handle." That would have been ridiculous. And yet what do we do? So often, the cutting edge is gone, the power lost, yet we keep on ministering even though the anointing is not there.

This man said, "Alas master." That is always the first step to reclaiming the cutting edge. Open and honest confession that you're not on the cutting edge like you once were is always the place where restoration begins.

2 Kings 6:6 (a)
And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place . . .

Elisha asked one question: "Where did you lose it?" To the church at Ephesus, Jesus said, "I know your good works, your knowledge, your giving. But I have something against you for you have left your first love. Remember from whence you are fallen and repent. And do your first works again" (see Revelation 2:1–5).

Was there a time when you loved the Lord radically, when you worshiped the Lord fervently, when you served the Lord consistently? Was there a time when you couldn't wait to get in the Word, when you found witnessing something that was natural? Was there a time in your life when you were more in love with Jesus and more fervent in serving Him than you are today?

If so, remember how it once was, and then repent. Say, "Lord, I admit to You, I confess before you that I'm not in the place I once was, in the place I long to be. And I repent." Then do your first works again. What were you doing when you loved the Lord? Did you get up early to pray? Do it again. Did you open your house and share the gospel with people? Do it again. Did you come consistently to Bible study and worship meetings? Do it again. It's so simple. Just go back to the place where you lost your cutting edge.

2 Kings 6:6 (b)
. . . And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim.

Elisha took a stick and threw it into the Jordan. And when the flesh was cast into the place of expectation (Joshua 3:13), the cutting edge reappeared. If you think iron can't float, think about the USS *Missouri*. Battleships are iron, and they float quite well.

2 Kings 6:7
Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it.

As the axe head floated to the surface, Elisha said, "I've shown it to you. Now it's your responsibility to reach down and grab hold of it." That's always the way it is in the things of God. He causes a truth or understanding to surface, and then He says, "Reach out and grab it." I think of Noah. He released a dove to see if there was dry land, and Genesis 8:9 says that he reached out and brought the dove unto him. The dove is a type of the Holy Spirit and Noah reached out, grabbed hold, and brought it in. May we do the same.

2 Kings 6:8–10

Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice.

Speaking with the word of knowledge (1 Corinthians 12:8), Elisha warned the king of Israel about the ambushes the Syrians tried to set against them.

2 Kings 6:11
Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel?

"How are the Israelites able to avoid our ambushes?" the king of Syria asked. "There must be a spy in our midst."

2 Kings 6:12–14
And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber. And he said, Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan. Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about.

When it was determined that it was Elisha who was tipping off the Israelites, the king of Syria sent troops to Dathan to capture him.

2 Kings 6:15
And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses

and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?

Although Elisha's servant was lacking faith, he was at least observant enough to get up early to see that he was surrounded by the enemy. Most people never even see the reality of the enemy. There are all kinds of forces at work against us. We're surrounded by the host of hell because Satan is out to destroy us. Elisha's servant understood this. But he needed further revelation . . .

2 Kings 6:16
And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.

"Fear not." Elisha first comforted his servant with the Word. And then he prayed . . .

2 Kings 6:17
And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

"Lord, open his eyes," Elisha prayed. And when his servant's eyes were fully open, he not only saw the problem, but he saw the solution. That is, he saw that the enemy that surrounded him was itself surrounded by angels and chariots far more powerful than any earthly army.

How I pray that, in every situation we face, we would not only see the problem but that we would see the solution—that the Lord is with us; that His angels are surrounding us; that His promises are applicable to us. He says He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He says He will complete the good work He began in us (Philippians 1:6). He says all things work together for good to them that love God (Romans 8:28). He says nothing separates us from His love (Romans 8:35–38). He says all of our needs will be met according to His riches (Philippians 4:19). He says He is the God

who heals us (Exodus 15:26). We need to see the reality of the spiritual forces surrounding the enemies that surround us.

Happy is the people whose God is the Lord (Psalm 144:15). The joy of the Lord is your strength (Nehemiah 8:10). Rejoice evermore (1 Thessalonians 5:16). Who is the person who is happy, who rejoices evermore? It's the one whose eyes are open to see the reality of spiritual promises and the presence of God. Who is the sad, depressed, discouraged, defeated one? The one who sees the problem but not the solution. May God give us eyes to see (Ephesians 1:18).

Even though you thought you were doomed, I suggest that you cannot even recall what you were worried about five years ago. Why? Because the promises of God stood. He is faithful. He promised to guide and provide, and He did. Maybe you know someone who thinks he's going down, going under. Do what Elisha did. First, speak a word of exhortation. Tell him to "fear not." Then pray a prayer of intercession. "Lord, open his eyes that he might see the sovereignty of God, the promises of Scripture, the reality of Jesus."

2 Kings 6:18, 19
And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria.

In this, Elisha is a picture, or type, of Jesus Christ. Like the Syrians, we were blinded by sin. Then, through some person or circumstance, we heard the voice of our Greater than Elisha, saying, "This is not the way. You're going in the wrong direction," and we followed Him. Where did He lead us? Right into the capital city of God's people, right into His body, His church.

"By this shall all men know that you are My disciples," Jesus said, "by your love one for another" (see John 13:35). Love for the family of God is the proof of our commitment to Jesus.

2 Kings 6:20–23

And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria. And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them? And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master. And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.

Instead of killing his enemies, Elisha fed them. Paul tells us to do the same . . .

> Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.
>
> Romans 12:19, 20

In Bible days, if a fire went out in her home, a woman would go to her next-door neighbor's with a clay pot on her head and borrow some coals with which she could reignite her fire. Thus, Paul's admonition was given not to burn someone up, but to warm someone up, not to burn him out, but to help him out. That's love. "Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good," Paul went on to say (Romans 12:21). And here, Elisha is doing just that.

2 Kings 6:24, 25

And it came to pass after this, that Ben-hadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged

it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver.

Time passed, and Ben-hadad was determined to destroy Samaria once and for all. He surrounded the city and famine followed.

2 Kings 6:26–30
And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king. And he said, If the LORD do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress? And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son. And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh.

When the king of Israel heard this story of cannibalism, he tore his clothes, and the people saw that underneath his clothes, he wore sackcloth next to his skin. This was a sign of sorrow. The king was sad about the conditions, but he wasn't repentant. He wasn't seeking the Lord, for the next verse reveals his heart . . .

2 Kings 6:31
Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day.

As is so often the case, God and His people were blamed for the tragedy and difficulty in the land.

2 Kings 6:32, 33
But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him; and the king sent a man from before him: but ere the messenger came to

him, he said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head? look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door: is not the sound of his master's feet behind him? And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him: and he said, Behold, this evil is of the LORD; what should I wait for the LORD any longer?

Elisha knew by the word of knowledge that his neck was on the line . . .



2 Kings 7:1

Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.

"Not only will the famine be over tomorrow, but there will be such an abundance of food that it will be cheap to buy," Elisha declared.

2 Kings 7:2 (a)

Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?

"Even if the Lord opened windows in heaven, a famine can't end in one day," the king's right-hand man scoffed.

2 Kings 7:2 (b)

. . . And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

"You'll see it happen, but you won't taste it," Elisha prophesied.

2 Kings 7:3

And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?

According to Leviticus 13, these leprous men were not allowed to go into the city lest they spread their disease. Normally, they would subsist on leftovers tossed over the wall. But during the famine, there were no leftovers. By abandoning their usual posts, therefore, they knew they had nothing to lose. But they couldn't have imagined how much they had to gain . . .



***For topical study of 2 Kings 7:3 entitled "Why Sit We Here?" turn to page* 1045.**

2 Kings 7:4–6 (a)
If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die. And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there. For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host . . .

I suggest the Syrians heard the same chariots, the same horses, the same army Elisha and his servant had seen. That is, they heard the army of the Lord (2 Kings 6:17).

2 Kings 7:6 (b)–8
. . . and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses,

even the camp as it was, and fled for their life. And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it.

Thinking they were being attacked by both the Hittite and the Egyptian armies, the Syrians had fled across the Jordan, leaving their food, gold, and supplies behind. As a result, the lepers hit the jackpot!

2 Kings 7:9 (a)
Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace . . .

What about us? We've been given so much. Anytime we want, we can turn on TV or the radio and hear good Bible teaching. We have Christian bookstores and Christian schools. We have countless Christian opportunities and fellowship opportunities. And if we're not careful, we can be just like these lepers, devouring one book, one study, one program after another while all around us are people who are dying. I fear we as Christians are increasingly becoming connoisseurs of fine sermons, critical of Bible studies and theological positions, wondering what new truth we can find, what new insight we can glean, how we can be happier, while our neighbors and coworkers are starving spiritually and headed for hell eternally.

2 Kings 7:9 (b)–12
. . . if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household. So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them, saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they were. And he called the porters; and they told it to the king's house within. And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants, I will now shew you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we be hungry; therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide

themselves in the field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city.

When advised of the food and wealth available in the Syrian camp, the king thought it was a decoy to lure the Israelites out of the city only to be killed by the Syrian army waiting to ambush them.

2 Kings 7:13
And one of his servants answered and said, Let some take, I pray thee, five of the horses that remain, which are left in the city, (behold, they are as all the multitude of Israel that are left in it: behold, I say, they are even as all the multitude of the Israelites that are consumed:) and let us send and see.

"We have five horses left," said one of the king's servants. "Let's send them out with five riders and see what happens." It has been wisely said that the fear of failure is the father of failure. If you are afraid to try, you are guaranteed to fail.

2 Kings 7:14–17 (a)
They took therefore two chariot horses; and the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying, Go and see. And they went after them unto Jordan: and, lo, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste. And the messengers returned, and told the king. And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the LORD. And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate . . .

When word came back that the report was true—that the Syrians truly had left their camp—the king posted his right-hand man at the gate in an attempt to control the crowd.

2 Kings 7:17 (b)–20

. . . and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God had said, who spake when the king came down to him. And it came to pass as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, Two measures of barley for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, shall be to morrow about this time in the gate of Samaria: And that lord answered the man of God, and said, Now, behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof. And so it fell out unto him: for the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died.

Here, we see the tragedy of unbelief. The king's right-hand man could see the food but he was trampled to death before he could taste it. The same thing still happens. Without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). You can see what others are experiencing and you can see what others are doing, but you won't enjoy it yourself if you lack faith. You'll be trampled under, feeling like you're stepped on, walked over, missing out. The lepers dined; the counselor of the king died and the difference between them wasn't health, intelligence, riches, or power. It was simply faith.

WHY SIT WE HERE?

A Topical Study of
2 KINGS 7:3

In the days of Elisha, King Ben-hadad of Syria decided to besiege Samaria, the capital city of Israel. His strategy was to surround the city with thousands of his troops. In so doing, he would cut off the supplies that would normally be brought into the city. So effective was his strategy that, as he besieged the city month after month, a great famine ensued so brutal that the Word tells us a donkey's head sold for eighty pieces of silver. I don't know what you can do with a donkey's head other than boil it for soup. Therefore, even donkey-head soup would have been an extravagance.

As the king of Israel cruised through the city of Samaria to assess the situation, a woman cried out, "O, king, help me."

"How can I help you if God doesn't help you?" he said. And his response is all too often ours. If you are facing tough times, be careful. The tendency can be to blame the Lord. But, in reality, the difficulties we experience are often the results of our own foolishness and sin.

In the midst of this devastating famine, a group of lepers decided that it made no sense for them to continue to sit outside the city wall, waiting for the scraps of food that used to be thrown their way. "Let's go to the Syrian camp," they said. "Maybe they'll show mercy to us. We're going to die anyway, so we have nothing to lose."

As they made the journey across the field, what they didn't know was that the Lord had done a miracle. That same evening, He had caused the Syrians to hear sounds of horses, chariots, and soldiers. Hearing the sound of a huge army approaching, the Syrians panicked. So when the lepers cruised into the camp, they were shocked to find it totally deserted. Food was still bubbling in the pots. Bread was left on the table. Amazed by the abundance of silver, gold, and food, the lepers went from tent to tent, gobbling the food and hiding the gold. Finally, one of the lepers said, "What we're doing isn't right. We must go back to the city and share this good news." So they returned to the city and told the gatekeeper that the Syrian camp was deserted and that there was an abundance of food for everyone.

“It’s an ambush,” the king said. But he sent five horses and riders to check it out. When the lepers’ report was verified, the people rushed through the gates, trampling the king’s right-hand man, and found enough food to see them through until their crops were restored.

In this story, I see application for three groups of people . . .

Dining Rather than Doubting

When Elisha told the king that the famine would be over in twenty-four hours, the king's assistant scoffed. "You'll see the food," Elisha then said. "But you won't be able to taste it."

There are those who, like the king's assistant, don't believe what they hear. God says, "I want to forgive your sin. I want to save you. I want to bless you. I want to give you eternal life freely," but they don't believe Him.

A beggar named Lazarus and a rich man both found themselves in eternity with a great gulf separating them. Lazarus was in paradise. The rich man was in the place of torment.

"Lazarus," the rich man said. "Come over here. Dip your finger in the water and cool my tongue. I'm tormented in this flame" (Luke 16). At that point, the rich man clearly saw the reality of paradise. But he never tasted of it.

"O, taste and see that the Lord is good," the psalmist declares (Psalm 34:8).

How?

Simply by believing in your heart and confessing with your mouth that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, for then you're saved (Romans 10:9).

Let us not be trampled under by life. Let us not be those who see what the Word says, but refuse to believe it; who hear the Word, but don't practice it; who know the principles of the Word, but don't apply them. Let us taste and see that the Lord is indeed good. Let us dine rather than doubt.

Stepping Out Rather than Sitting Back

Maybe you're in a place where you feel leprous and famished, relegated to sitting outside the city, barely surviving on crumbs of hope. Our culture says, "Take it easy. Kick back." But I believe the Word of God says, "Take a chance. Step out." Faith is never learned in comfort. We learn faith when we're pressed, when we're hurting, when we're starving. Faith honors God and God honors faith.

These lepers had the faith to step out, to take a chance. If you feel like you're barely surviving spiritually, I would encourage you to follow their lead, to take a chance and step out in faith. Why sit where you are until you die, be it relationally, vocationally, or in ministry? Step out and see what the Lord will do. Exercise the faith God has given you, utilize the gifts He has embedded within you and watch mountains move (Matthew 17:20).

Giving Rather than Gorging

Finally, there are those who, having stepped out in faith, have found abundance. Perhaps you have eaten abundantly, as the lepers did. Maybe you have been enriched spiritually with silver and gold from the Word of God. But it is not good that we should gorge ourselves on more and more of the gospel in a world that is starving and dying. I think it brings grief to the Lord that we go from this seminar to that meeting, trying to find how to be happier, richer, more blessed while there is a world dying of starvation because they don't know the simple plan of salvation. This ought not be.

May the Lord speak to us that we would come to our senses as did the lepers and say, "This is not good. I need to take my eyes off myself, quit worrying about feeding myself, and reach out to those who are dying."

I don't think it's coincidental that the first two letters in "gospel" are "go." May we be a people of faith who share the glad tidings, the truth of the riches God has for all people if they will simply come to Him.



8 2 Kings 8:1
Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the LORD hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years.

In the day of Elijah, God sent a terrible famine that lasted three and one-half years. Here, in the day of Elisha, another famine will come, but it will last seven years. That's the way the Lord works. He slowly but surely increases the pressure in our lives until we bow our knee and say, "Lord, *Your* will be done."

When Elisha told the woman whose son he restored to life that famine was coming, he didn't say, "Here's a miracle to see you through." He said, "You'd better do something practical. Go somewhere the famine is not going to hit." Sometimes the Lord does something miraculous. Other times, He

works very naturally. Elijah told the widow that if she made bread out of the ingredients she had, the Lord would continue to supply for her all the days of the famine (1 Kings 17). On the other hand, Elisha—who did even more miracles than Elijah—said to this woman, "I'm not promising a miracle. I'm telling you to do something practical: leave."

We can't box the Lord in. He works differently with different individuals in different times. You'll find nothing but frustration if you try to formulize God. God didn't write His Word like a manual. He didn't say, "Here's fifteen steps for healing the sick and ten steps for helping the hurting." I have often wished the Bible were written differently than it was. It seems there should be sections on Marriage, Parenting, and Finances. Why did God write it this way? Because in His Word, we find general principles, but we must seek Him for specifics. Why? Because He wants to hear from us.

Dear saint, the Lord truly loves you and wants to spend time with you. The only difference between a strong believer and a weak one is responsiveness. The times you've been wakened in the night, thinking it was the pie you ate or the problems you face may have been the Lord, tapping you on the shoulder, saying, "I enjoy your company and I'd like to spend some time with you right now." The times you felt a stirring in your heart while you watched TV may have been the Lord calling you to spend a few moments with Him. God doesn't have favorites. He doesn't arbitrarily bless some more than others. No, the people who develop and mature in Him are simply those who have said, "I'll turn off the TV or roll out of bed in response to His call." And I guarantee not a one is disappointed.

2 Kings 8:2
And the woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God: and she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years.

The land of the Philistines was the southern coastal area of Palestine, a beautiful area by the beach.

2 Kings 8:3–6
And it came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines: and she went forth to

cry unto the king for her house and for her land. And the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done. And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life. And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now.

The famine over, the woman whose son Elisha had healed returned to Israel. At the very same time she made her way to talk to the king about reclaiming her property, Elisha's servant was telling the king about the miracle God had done in the life of her son. Evidently intrigued, the king restored all that was hers.

In this, I am reminded of the account in Acts 23, where we read that Paul's nephew "just so happened" to hear of a plot to kill Paul. Paul's life was spared because God positioned his nephew in the right place at the right time, just as He positioned Gehazi in the right place at the right time to provide for this woman. In a believer's life, nothing is coincidental or accidental. God's hand is in every detail.

2 Kings 8:7–10
And Elisha came to Damascus; and Ben-hadad the king of Syria was sick; and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither. And the king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of the LORD by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease? So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him, and said, Thy son Ben-hadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease? And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the LORD hath shewed me that he shall surely die.

Elisha told Hazael that the king would, in fact, die but not of the disease he had.

2 Kings 8:11
And he settled his countenance stedfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept.

Elisha joins the company of Jeremiah, Paul, and Jesus, men who wept not for themselves, but for the sorrow in the world brought about by sin.

2 Kings 8:12, 13
And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child. And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The LORD hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.

"The Lord has shown me that you're going to be king, and that you're going to be cruel," Elisha answered.

2 Kings 8:14, 15
So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master; who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me that thou shouldest surely recover. And it came to pass on the morrow, that he took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died: and Hazael reigned in his stead.

Hazael pretended to be caring for Ben-hadad. In reality, he smothered him and reigned in his place, just as Elisha had prophesied.

2 Kings 8:16–18
And in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Jehoshaphat being then king of Judah, Jehoram the son of

Jehoshaphat king of Judah began to reign. Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab: for the daughter of Ahab was his wife: and he did evil in the sight of the LORD.

"Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers," Paul would write (2 Corinthians 6:14). The reason is seen here. Jehoram married the unbelieving daughter of Ahab and it lead to his downfall.

2 Kings 8:19–24
Yet the LORD would not destroy Judah for David his servant's sake, as he promised him to give him alway a light, and to his children. In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves. So Joram went over to Zair, and all the chariots with him: and he rose by night, and smote the Edomites which compassed him about, and the captains of the chariots: and the people fled into their tents. Yet Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day. Then Libnah revolted at the same time. And the rest of the acts of Joram, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And Joram slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead.

Joram or Jehoram as he is also called, was a total failure, largely due to the fact that he married an unbeliever who led him in the ways of evil.

2 Kings 8:25–29
In the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel did Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah begin to reign. Two and twenty years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign; and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Ath aliah, the daughter of Omri king of Israel. And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the LORD, as did the house of Ahab: for he was the son in law of the

house of Ahab. And he went with Joram the son of Ahab to the war against Hazael king of Syria in Ramoth-gilead; and the Syrians wounded Joram. And king Joram went back to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick.

Ahab had two sons: Ahaziah and Jehoram who reigned not successfully but successively. Jehoshaphat had a son and grandson named Jehoram and Ahaziah who also reigned successively. Joram, king of Israel, and Ahaziah, king of Judah, joined forces to battle Hazael, king of Syria. Wounded in battle, Joram returned to Jezreel to recover. Thus, the stage is set for an intriguing story in chapter 9 . . .



2 Kings 9:1–3

And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead: And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him to an inner chamber; Then take the box of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith the LORD, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not.

Anointing a new king during the reign of an existing one was no easy task. Realizing he was too old for such a treacherous, dangerous mission, Elisha sent one of his protegés to find Jehu and tell him he was to be king of Israel from that point on.

2 Kings 9:4–8 (a)

So the young man, even the young man the prophet, went to Ramoth-gilead. And when he came, behold, the captains of the host were sitting; and he said, I have an errand to thee, O

captain. And Jehu said, Unto which of all us? And he said, To thee, O captain. And he arose, and went into the house; and he poured the oil on his head, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of the LORD, even over Israel. And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of Jezebel. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish . . .

Joram was the son of Ahab.

2 Kings 9:8 (b)–10
. . . and I will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel: And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah: And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her. And he opened the door, and fled.

"Open the door and flee," Elisha had instructed this young prophet. And, after delivering this message of the destruction of the house of Ahab, including Joram, the reigning king, he wisely heeded Elisha's advice.

2 Kings 9:11 (a)
Then Jehu came forth to the servants of his lord: and one said unto him, Is all well? wherefore came this mad fellow to thee?

The prophets were often thought to be crazy. Paul was thought to be mad (Acts 26:24). Even Jesus was accused of being demon-possessed (Matthew 12:24).

2 Kings 9:11 (b)–13
. . . And he said unto them, Ye know the man, and his communication. And they said, It is false; tell us now. And he said, Thus and thus spake he to me, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then they hasted, and took

every man his garment, and put it under him on the top of the stairs, and blew with trumpets, saying, Jehu is king.

The captains of the army acknowledged that Jehu was indeed the anointed king.

2 Kings 9:14, 15
So Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi conspired against Joram. (Now Joram had kept Ramoth-gilead, he and all Israel, because of Hazael king of Syria. But king Joram was returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him, when he fought with Hazael king of Syria.) And Jehu said, If it be your minds, then let none go forth nor escape out of the city to go to tell it in Jezreel.

"Don't let Joram know about this," Jehu said. "Let's keep the element of surprise on our side."

2 Kings 9:16–19
So Jehu rode in a chariot, and went to Jezreel; for Joram lay there. And Ahaziah king of Judah was come down to see Joram. And there stood a watchman on the tower in Jezreel, and he spied the company of Jehu as he came, and said, I see a company. And Joram said, Take an horseman, and send to meet them, and let him say, Is it peace? So there went one on horseback to meet him, and said, Thus saith the king, Is it peace? And Jehu said, What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me. And the watchman told, saying, The messenger came to them, but he cometh not again. Then he sent out a second on horseback, which came to them, and said, Thus saith the king, Is it peace? And Jehu answered, What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me.

Assuming Jehu and his army were returning from battle against the Syrians, Joram sent messengers on horseback to ask if they were victorious in battle. Jehu didn't give an answer, but instead told the messengers to be quiet and fall in.

2 Kings 9:20–22
And the watchman told, saying, He came even unto them, and cometh not again: and the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he driveth furiously. And Joram said, Make ready. And his chariot was made ready. And Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah went out, each in his chariot, and they went out against Jehu, and met him in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite. And it came to pass, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, Is it peace, Jehu? And he answered, What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witch-crafts are so many?

There can be no true peace as long as there is sin that has not been confessed . . .

> I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him. But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.
>
> Isaiah 57:19–21

A lot of times people wonder why their spirit is churning, why their soul is troubled. One of the reasons could be that there is sin that needs to be confessed. Something is amiss if you find yourself in continual turmoil, for the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace (Galatians 5:22). The cure for uneasiness and turmoil is so simple, for if we simply confess our sins, God is able to cleanse us from *all* unrighteousness, from all that which robs us of our peace (1 John 1:9).

2 Kings 9:23
And Joram turned his hands, and fled, and said to Ahaziah, There is treachery, O Ahaziah.

Joram suddenly understood that Jehu was launching a rebellion.

2 Kings 9:24–26

And Jehu drew a bow with his full strength, and smote Jehoram between his arms, and the arrow went out at his heart, and he sunk down in his chariot. Then said Jehu to Bidkar his captain, Take up, and cast him in the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite: for remember how that, when I and thou rode together after Ahab his father, the LORD laid this burden upon him; Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, saith the LORD; and I will requite thee in this plat, saith the LORD. Now therefore take and cast him into the plat of ground, according to the word of the LORD.

Joram, the son of Ahab, died in the field of Naboth. When Ahab had an entire kingdom, there was a little garden outside his palace that belonged to a man named Naboth. Ahab wanted that little garden. So his wife stirred up false charges against Naboth and had him killed. Then she gave his garden to Ahab. As Ahab was walking in his newly acquired garden, suddenly Elijah said to him, "God has seen this deed. And your blood will He require in this place, and the blood of your wife, as well." Ahab repented when he heard this, and for a season there was a time of reprieve. But he died in battle and the blood in his chariot was rinsed out in this very place. Here, we see his son wiped out in the field of Naboth, as well.

2 Kings 9:27
But when Ahaziah the king of Judah saw this, he fled by the way of the garden house. And Jehu followed after him, and said, Smite him also in the chariot. And they did so at the going up to Gur, which is by Ibleam. And he fled to Megiddo, and died there.

Because he associated with Joram, who was evil, Ahaziah paid the price and lost his life.

2 Kings 9:28–30
And his servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in his sepulchre with his fathers in the city of David. And in the eleventh year of Joram the son of Ahab began Ahaziah to reign over Judah. And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel

heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window.

Historians tell us Jezebel was one of the world's most beautiful women. She was also one of the most wicked. Here, even in her old age, fourteen years after her husband, Ahab, had died, she tries to seduce Jehu in an attempt to save her life.

2 Kings 9:31
And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?

Here, Jezebel switches tactics from flirtation to intimidation. Zimri was a king who came into power because he assassinated the king who had preceded him. His rebellion lasted seven days. After seven days, the people rebelled against him. He went into his house, burned it down and he died in the fire (1 Kings 16:18). Here, Jezebel is saying, "Remember Zimri." The difference is, Zimri was not told by the Lord to do that, whereas Jehu was obeying the command of the Lord.

2 Kings 9:32, 33
And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, Who is on my side? who? And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs. And he said, Throw her down. So they threw her down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode her under foot.

Now Jezebel is lying in the same field where the blood of Ahab was washed out, and where her son, Joram, was killed.

2 Kings 9:34–37
And when he was come in, he did eat and drink, and said, Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her: for she is a king's daughter. And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands. Wherefore they came again, and told him. And he said, This is the word of

the LORD, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel: And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel.

After Ahab was killed, Jezebel lived fourteen years in luxury and in ease. She thought she had beaten the rap. She must have felt that her position was secured, that the Word of the Lord was not applicable to her.

Maybe you see ungodly people prosper and you wonder what's going on. Their time will come. The Lord is patient, and the wheels of His judgment turn slowly, but they grind thoroughly. Jezebel found this out. She lived a life of sin and rebellion, and she ended up going to the dogs.



10

2 Kings 10:1–3

And Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. And Jehu wrote letters, and sent to Samaria, unto the rulers of Jezreel, to the elders, and to them that brought up Ahab's children, saying, Now as soon as this letter cometh to you, seeing your master's sons are with you, and there are with you chariots and horses, a fenced city also, and armour; Look even out the best and meetest of your master's sons, and set him on his father's throne, and fight for your master's house.

"Ahab's gone, Jezebel's gone, Joram's gone," said Jehu. "Choose a new king and let's do battle."

2 Kings 10:4, 5

But they were exceedingly afraid, and said, Behold, two kings stood not before him: how then shall we stand? And he that was over the house, and he that was over the city, the elders also, and the bringers up of the children, sent to Jehu, saying, We are thy servants, and will do all that thou shalt bid us; we will not make any king: do thou that which is good in thine eyes.

Knowing they were no match for Jehu, the elders of Judah said, "We will do whatever you want."

2 Kings 10:6, 7
Then he wrote a letter the second time to them, saying, If ye be mine, and if ye will hearken unto my voice, take ye the heads of the men your master's sons, and come to me to Jezreel by to morrow this time. Now the king's sons, being seventy persons, were with the great men of the city, which brought them up. And it came to pass, when the letter came to them, that they took the king's sons, and slew seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent him them to Jezreel.

Seventy sons of Ahab were brutally murdered because the men around them were not loyal to them.

How I love being part of the body of Christ. What a joy it is to be related to brothers and sisters in Christ who will stand with and for each other. The world knows nothing of this.

2 Kings 10:8
And there came a messenger, and told him, saying, They have brought the heads of the king's sons. And he said, Lay ye them in two heaps at the entering in of the gate until the morning.

In this, Jehu was saying that his coup was deadly serious, that there would be no insurrections, no challenges.

2 Kings 10:9–15
And it came to pass in the morning, that he went out, and stood, and said to all the people, Ye be righteous: behold, I conspired against my master, and slew him: but who slew all these? Know now that there shall fall unto the earth nothing of the word of the LORD, which the LORD spake concerning the house of Ahab: for the LORD hath done that which he spake by his servant Elijah. So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left

him none remaining. And he arose and departed, and came to Samaria. And as he was at the shearing house in the way, Jehu met with the brethren of Ahaziah king of Judah, and said, Who are ye? And they answered, We are the brethren of Ahaziah; and we go down to salute the children of the king and the children of the queen. And he said, Take them alive. And they took them alive, and slew them at the pit of the shearing house, even two and forty men; neither left he any of them. And when he was departed thence, he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him: and he saluted him, and said to him, Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is. If it be, give me thine hand. And he gave him his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot.

We'll come across Jehonadab again in the Book of Jeremiah. Jehonadab was a wonderful man of God. A mystic and an ascetic, he was one who sacrificed everything to serve his Lord. Jehu recognized this. Just coming into power, he wanted to be seen with this spiritual giant, hoping it would strengthen his political base as a new king. And then Jehu says something that shows a crack in his character . . .

2 Kings 10:16
And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD. So they made him ride in his chariot.

Jehu is showing the early signs of his downfall. Why? He's boasting about his zeal for the Lord and he wants his service for the Lord to be noticed. Those are always two dangers to anyone who serves the Lord.

2 Kings 10:17–28
And when he came to Samaria, he slew all that remained unto Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed him, according to the saying of the LORD, which he spake to Elijah. And Jehu gathered all the people together, and said unto them, Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much. Now therefore call unto me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests; let

none be wanting: for I have a great sacrifice to do to Baal; whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live. But Jehu did it in subtilty, to the intent that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal. And Jehu said, Proclaim a solemn assembly for Baal. And they proclaimed it. And Jehu sent through all Israel: and all the worshippers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left that came not. And they came into the house of Baal; and the house of Baal was full from one end to another. And he said unto him that was over the vestry, Bring forth vestments for all the worshippers of Baal. And he brought them forth vestments. And Jehu went, and Jehonadab the son of Rechab, into the house of Baal, and said unto the worshippers of Baal, Search, and look that there be here with you none of the servants of the LORD, but the worshippers of Baal only. And when they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings, Jehu appointed fourscore men without, and said, If any of the men whom I have brought into your hands escape, he that letteth him go, his life shall be for the life of him. And it came to pass, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, that Jehu said to the guard and to the captains, Go in, and slay them; let none come forth. And they smote them with the edge of the sword; and the guard and the captains cast them out, and went to the city of the house of Baal. And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burned them. And they brake down the image of Baal, and brake down the house of Baal, and made it a draught house unto this day. Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel.

Jehu does a very noble thing in annihilating Baal worship from Israel. But before we applaud him, the next verse is an indictment against him . . .

2 Kings 10:29
Howbeit from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan.

Jehu wiped out Baal, but he allowed the continuation of calf worship in the nation. It was a political necessity, he thought. After all, if he took away the golden calves, people would have to worship in Jerusalem, and he would lose control over them.

2 Kings 10:30–36

And the LORD said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel. But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin. In those days the LORD began to cut Israel short: and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel; From Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the river Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan. Now the rest of the acts of Jehu, and all that he did, and all his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Jehu slept with his fathers: and they buried him in Samaria. And Jehoahaz his son reigned in his stead. And the time that Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria was twenty and eight years.

Jehu had a chance to bring about real revival and true reformation, but because he was politically minded and didn't walk in the ways of the law of the Lord, the nation of Israel began at this point to become diminished. This is the beginning of an irrevocable turn of events that will lead to their destruction by the hand of the Assyrians.



11 We now go back down south to Judah. Jehu has been in a position of power in the north for a number of years. In the meantime, incredible things are happening in Judah . . .

2 Kings 11:1
And when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal.

Athaliah was the wife of Jehoshaphat, the daughter of Ahab. When her son, Ahaziah, was killed, she saw an opportunity to grab the power of the throne of Judah. So she had all of her grandchildren killed in order to secure her own position. There was one son who was saved, however . . .

2 Kings 11:2, 3
But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah and stole him from among the king's sons which were slain; and they hid him, even him and his nurse, in the bedchamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain. And he was with her hid in the house of the LORD six years. And Athaliah did reign over the land.

One son survived. His name was Joash. "And he was with her hid in the house of the Lord . . ." How I love that phrase. "One thing have I desired of the Lord," David said, "and that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life" (Psalm 27:4). David found sanctuary in the house of the Lord. And Joash, his descendant, did as well.

2 Kings 11:4
And the seventh year Jehoiada sent and fetched the rulers over hundreds, with the captains and the guard, and brought them to him into the house of the LORD, and made a covenant with them, and took an oath of them in the house of the LORD, and shewed them the king's son.

Jehoiada, a godly priest, called the leaders of Judah together and said, "I've got news for you. But before I tell you what it is, you've got to make a covenant with me." That's always the way of the Lord. Before there is revelation, there must be commitment. Too often, we want to learn about the Lord to satisfy our curiosity. But the Lord looks for commitment first.

2 Kings 11:5–8
And he commanded them, saying, This is the thing that ye shall do; A third part of you that enter in on the sabbath shall even be keepers of the watch of the king's house; And a third part shall be at the gate of Sur; and a third part at the gate behind the guard: so shall ye keep the watch of the house, that it be not broken down. And two parts of all you that go forth on the sabbath, even they shall keep the watch of the house of the LORD about the king. And ye shall compass the king around about, every man with his weapons in his hand: and he that cometh within the ranges, let him be slain: and be ye with the king as he goeth out and as he cometh in.

A plan was made to announce that Joash was the rightful king of Judah. But such an announcement would require a great deal of protection. So the leaders of Judah were armed. Where did they get their weapons? The next verse tells us . . .

2 Kings 11:9, 10
And the captains over the hundreds did according to all things that Jehoiada the priest commanded: and they took every man his men that were to come in on the sabbath, with them that should go out on the sabbath, and came to Jehoiada the priest. And to the captains over hundreds did the priest give king David's spears and shields, that were in the temple of the LORD.

It "just so happened" that the swords and shields David had captured from his enemies hung on one of the walls of the temple. Having been mounted there for years, they were now to be put to very practical use.

You have been given victories by the Lord, and they need to be mounted in the temple of the Lord. The glory needs to go to the Lord for every victory you've experienced, every blessing you've received. We should be abounding in testimonies, saying, "This is what the Lord has done in my life. And, by His grace and mercy, this is what He is doing presently." What is the importance of such testimony? First, it glorifies God. Secondly, it arms the servants of God. They grab the weapons themselves and say, "I'm

encouraged. God used you in that insurmountable difficulty. He saw you through and I know He'll do the same for me."

If God answers your prayers and gives you victory, I believe you have a responsibility to share that and to post it in the house of the Lord. No matter how seemingly small they might be, share your victories. They'll be used. They'll be definitely needed by someone at some time.

2 Kings 11:11–21

And the guard stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, round about the king, from the right corner of the temple to the left corner of the temple, along by the altar and the temple. And he brought forth the king's son, and put the crown upon him, and gave him the testimony; and they made him king, and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, God save the king. And when Athaliah heard the noise of the guard and of the people, she came to the people into the temple of the LORD. And when she looked, behold, the king stood by a pil lar, as the manner was, and the princes and the trumpeters by the king, and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew with trumpets: and Athaliah rent her clothes, and cried, Treason, Treason. But Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of the hundreds, the officers of the host, and said unto them, Have her forth without the ranges: and him that followeth her kill with the sword. For the priest had said, Let her not be slain in the house of the LORD. And they laid hands on her; and she went by the way by the which the horses came into the king's house: and there was she slain. And Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD and the king and the people that they should be the LORD's people; between the king also and the people. And all the people of the land went into the house of Baal, and brake it down; his altars and his images brake they in pieces thoroughly, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars. And the priest appointed officers over the house of the LORD. And he took the rulers over hundreds, and the captains, and the guard, and all the people of the land; and they brought down the king from the house of the LORD, and came by the way

of the gate of the guard to the king's house. And he sat on the throne of the kings. And all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was in quiet: and they slew Athaliah with the sword beside the king's house. Seven years old was Jehoash when he began to reign.

In this picture, we see our present situation. There's a usurper, an oppressor named Satan who causes trouble and turmoil on every front. But when our Greater than Joash—Jesus Christ—comes, there will be a clapping of hands as we crown Him as King of kings. The people will rejoice. And there will be peace and quietness in the land.

Jesus is coming back soon and when He does, things will be right. Athaliah—that is, Satan—will be dethroned and cast into a bottomless pit. There shall be peace and love between all brothers. Righteousness shall prevail.



12

2 Kings 12:1, 2

In the seventh year of Jehu Jehoash began to reign; and forty years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Zibiah of Beer-sheba. And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him.

As long as Jehoiada was tutoring and counseling him, Joash did well.

2 Kings 12:3–5

But the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places. And Jehoash said to the priests, All the money of the dedicated things that is brought into the house of the LORD, even the money of every one that passeth the account, the money that every man is set at, and all the money that cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of the LORD, Let the priests take it to them, every man of

his acquaintance: and let them repair the breaches of the house, wheresoever any breach shall be found.

Revival is starting and it begins with the desire to see the temple repaired. Joash was hid in the house of the Lord. Perhaps that is why he had such a heart for the house of the Lord. The temple was in disrepair. So he told the priests to take the money that was given on the occasion of peoples' hearts being stirred and complete the project.

2 Kings 12:6
But it was so, that in the three and twentieth year of king Jehoash the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house.

The priests had been given money to do the job, but they hadn't completed it.

2 Kings 12:7–9
Then king Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and the other priests, and said unto them, Why repair ye not the breaches of the house? now therefore receive no more money of your acquaintance, but deliver it for the breaches of the house. And the priests consented to receive no more money of the people, neither to repair the breaches of the house. But Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of the LORD: and the priests that kept the door put therein all the money that was brought into the house of the LORD.

A locked box with a hole in it was placed at the right side of the altar for the collection of money to repair the temple.

2 Kings 12:10–16
And it was so, when they saw that there was much money in the chest, that the king's scribe and the high priest came up, and they put up in bags, and told the money that was found in the house of the LORD. And they gave the money, being told, into the hands of

them that did the work, that had the oversight of the house of the LORD: and they laid it out to the carpenters and builders, that wrought upon the house of the LORD, And to masons, and hewers of stone, and to buy timber and hewed stone to repair the breaches of the house of the LORD, and for all that was laid out for the house to repair it. Howbeit there were not made for the house of the LORD bowls of silver, snuffers, basons, trumpets, any vessels of gold, or vessels of silver, of the money that was brought into the house of the LORD: But they gave that to the workmen, and repaired therewith the house of the LORD. Moreover they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to be bestowed on workmen: for they dealt faithfully. The trespass money and sin money was not brought into the house of the LORD: it was the priests'.

The priests were still provided for by the trespass and sin offerings, but the money raised for the temple was not to be spent on ministry needs. Rather, it was exclusively for temple remodeling. In this, Joash shows real wisdom.

2 Kings 12:17, 18
Then Hazael king of Syria went up, and fought against Gath, and took it: and Hazael set his face to go up to Jerusalem. And Jehoash king of Judah took all the hallowed things that Jehoshaphat, and Jehoram, and Ahaziah, his fathers, kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own hallowed things, and all the gold that was found in the treasures of the house of the LORD, and in the king's house, and sent it to Hazael king of Syria: and he went away from Jerusalem.

Hearing that Hazael, king of Syria, was about to attack Jerusalem, instead of praying for wisdom, Joash paid him off with money from the temple. In the Book of Chronicles, we see that this was a big mistake.

2 Kings 12:19–21

And the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And his servants arose, and made a conspiracy, and slew Joash in the house of Millo, which goeth down to Silla. For Jozachar the son of Shimeath, and Jehozabad the son of Shomer, his servants, smote him, and he died; and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David: and Amaziah his son reigned in his stead.

With a heart for the house of God, Joash began so well. But, as we see in 2 Chronicles, without the godly influence of Jehoiada, Joash would himself fall prey to idolatry.



13 In chapter 13, we head back north to the ten tribes of Israel.

2 Kings 13:1–4
In the three and twentieth year of Joash the son of Ahaziah king of Judah Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned seventeen years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael, all their days. And Jehoahaz besought the LORD, and the LORD hearkened unto him: for he saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them.

Jehoahaz was an evil man. Yet even he knew that the peoples' oppression was the result of their transgression. Here, a wicked king cried out to the Lord, and He heard him.

2 Kings 13:5, 6

(And the LORD gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians: and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents, as beforetime. Nevertheless they departed not from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, who made Israel sin, but walked therein: and there remained the grove also in Samaria.)

The Lord raised up a deliverer to free Israel from the hand of the Syrians. And yet these people continued to walk in their sin. Why would people continue in sin when the Lord raised up a savior for them? That's a question we have to ask ourselves. We have to realize that it's only by the grace, mercy, and lovingkindness of God that a Savior was granted to us.

Why did the Lord give these wicked sinners a savior? Here's a better question: Why did He give His Son for *us?*

2 Kings 13:7–9
Neither did he leave of the people to Jehoahaz but fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, and all that he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Jehoahaz slept with his fathers; and they buried him in Samaria: and Joash his son reigned in his stead.

This is a different Joash from chapter 12.

2 Kings 13:10, 11
In the thirty and seventh year of Joash king of Judah began Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned sixteen years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD; he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin: but he walked therein.

Joash practiced the idolatry which was indigenous to the soil of Israel, and the nation willingly followed.

2 Kings 13:12, 13 (a)
And the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, and his might wherewith he fought against Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Joash slept with his fathers . . .

Joash is off the scene, but before his story is over, there are a few parenthetical thoughts recorded . . .

2 Kings 13:13 (b), 14 (a)
. . . and Jeroboam sat upon his throne: and Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel. Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died . . .

Elisha is one of the greatest miracle workers in the Bible. He was a man of immense power, of fervent faith. He was able to pray so effectively that the dead were brought back to life. He was able to make iron float. And yet here we see that Elisha was sick himself. Sickness isn't always the result of sin. It can be, but not always. Nor is a lingering illness evidence of a lack of faith. It was Elisha's sickness that ushered him into eternity. Thus, the Lord uses even sickness to accomplish His purposes.

2 Kings 13:14 (b)–19
. . . And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it: and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands. And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the LORD's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them. And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed. And the man of God was wroth with him, and

said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.

This story is a classic example of the importance of fervency and the danger of lethargy.



***For topical study of 2 Kings 13:14–19 entitled "The Arrows of Deliverance," turn to page* 1058.**

2 Kings 13:20, 21
And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet.

In the heat of battle, a dead man was inadvertently thrown into Elisha's tomb. But when his body touched Elisha's bones, he immediately came back to life. Amazing!

Like the dead man in this passage, we must die to self if we are going to truly experience life. "If any man come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me," Jesus said (Matthew 16:24). He did not say this to burden us but to liberate us because, as we have discovered, the more we think about ourselves and live for ourselves, the more miserable we become. But the more we die to self and take up the cross, the more we spring to life.

If you want to be effective in ministering to other people, even as Elisha was dead, so too in ministry or in service, you've got to die to popularity. "If I please men, I cannot be the servant of God," Paul declared (see Galatians 1:10). If you take a stand for Jesus Christ and do what you believe is right for the Lord, there will be those who will misunderstand. That can be painful.

But if you are going to minister, you've got to die in order that life might come forth. Jesus said he who lives for his own life will lose it, but if you give up your life, you'll find it (Matthew 10:39).

I have a hard time with this. I struggle on this point because when I sense that someone is unhappy with me or disappointed in me, my natural tendency is to keep from making waves or causing offense. But James said we offend in all things (3:2). The only solution is to live for the Lord and in such a way that you can say, "Father, I have finished the work which *Thou* hast given me and glorified Thy name (John 17:4). I'm doing what You're telling me to do to the best of my perception and abilities no matter the cost."

If you do that, if you die to self, life will spring forth. People will be touched. Lives will be changed.

Elisha was a man who, even after his death, still influenced and affected peoples' lives. How about you? What if the Lord took you home today? Oh, that we might live our lives in such a way that the memory of our lives, the words we spoke, the truth we shared, the love we showed, the example we set, might cause others to spring to life themselves.

2 Kings 13:22–25

But Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. And the LORD was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet. So Hazael king of Syria died; and Ben-hadad his son reigned in his stead. And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again out of the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael the cities, which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war. Three times did Joash beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel.

How many times did Joash beat the Syrian forces? Three times. How many times did he beat the arrows? Three times. Yes, there was a victory, but only a partial recovery. The Syrians were not defeated completely.

THE ARROWS OF DELIVERANCE

A Topical Study of 2 KINGS 13:14–19

The kingdom of Syria was oppressing and depressing the nation of Israel. And God desired to bring deliverance to His bruised and battered people by partnering with Joash, the king of Israel. God could have easily brought deliverance apart from Joash, but it was His desire and design to use Joash. Why? Because God was not only interested in delivering Israel, but He was also interested in developing Joash.

The same is still true. We often find ourselves oppressed and depressed, continually bothered and hurt by the kingdom of Satan. Satan is an oppressor. Satan is a destroyer. Paul said we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against spiritual forces in high places (Ephesians 6:12). Sometimes you might feel like a tank has run over you, a bomb has gone off inside of you, or like there are fireworks and explosions all around you. That is because you are involved in battle and the kingdom of Satan is seeking to oppress and depress you just like the kingdom of Syria sought to oppress and depress the kingdom of Israel.

The attack of Satan manifests itself in three primary ways: through sin, through sickness, and through self. God not only desires to bring deliverance *to* you, but also to work deliverance *through* you in such a way that others who are hurting may be delivered as well.

How does deliverance happen? When Joash came to Elisha, Elisha told him to open the window eastward—in the direction of Syria—and to shoot an arrow out the window. Elisha placed his hands upon the hands of Joash so that when Joash drew back the bow, Elisha's hands were on his. In other words, as God's representative, Elisha joined with Joash, who was weak and unable to bring about deliverance himself. And through His Son, God does the same with us . . .

> *The Spirit of the Lord* GOD *is upon me; because the* LORD *hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives,*

and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

Isaiah 61:1–3

That's the ministry of our Master. He has come to set the captives free, to liberate the oppressed, to heal the hurting, to bind the brokenhearted, to give the garment of praise, to make beauty for ashes. Jesus has been sent as the "Arrow" of the Lord's deliverance.

"That sounds nice," you might be saying. "But if it's true, why am I so discouraged? Why does sin still have dominion over me? Why aren't I experiencing the oil of joy for mourning? Why don't I have the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness? Why is my life still ashes and not a thing of beauty?"

The answer to that is very possibly that you need to be delivered. Deliverance is on the heart of the Father. Deliverance is available to you and yet the Lord won't do it apart from your partnering with Him, joining yourself to Him. He will place His hands upon yours but you must grab the arrow, open the window, and say, "I need You."

After the initial arrow was launched, Elisha told Joash to take the rest of the arrows out of the quiver and beat them on the ground. So Joash took the rest of the arrows out of the quiver and beat them once, twice, three times, and then he stopped.

"Why have you stopped after three times?" Elisha asked. "You should have smitten the arrows five or six times. But because you only hit them three times, you'll only have a partial victory over Syria."

What do those arrows speak of? They speak of the arsenal we have been given by the Lord to bring about the deliverance He intends for us to experience daily . . .

The Arrow of Prayer

The most important arrow in your arsenal is prayer. We can do more than pray, but we can't do anything until we first pray. And yet what do we do with this arrow of prayer? All too often, we tap it lazily, lethargically, half-heartedly. Consequently, Elisha would say to us, "You should have taken that arrow of prayer and beaten it six times fervently, energetically, expectantly. But, because your prayers are routine and mindless, your deliverance is only partial."

We are told in James 5 that Elijah was a man like us, and yet he was a man of power because he was a man of prayer. As he prayed for rain to come, he placed his head between his knees and prayed not once, twice, or three times, but seven times in this intensive posture of prayer (1 Kings 18). Why did he put his head between his knees? In that day, this was the position of birthing and he was birthing something through prayer.

That is the kind of prayer we need if we are to prevail against the kingdom of Satan. Oh, how I love to be with men who know how to pray. I desire to be a man of prayer, to press into the presence of God. In Genesis 32, we read that Jacob wrestled all night with the Lord and said, "I will not let You go until You bless me." When you feel oppressed, have you wrestled all night in prayer, saying, "Lord Jesus, I'm not going to let You go until I receive deliverance"? That's the kind of prayer that moves the hand of God.

The Arrow of the Word

A second arrow in our quiver is the Word of God. When Jesus was doing battle against Satan in Matthew 4, every time Satan came at Him, Jesus repelled Him by quoting Scripture. The Word of God is a powerful weapon in your arsenal, an arrow that will bring about deliverance. But how do we handle that arrow?

All too often, we say, "Let's see, I might have time for devotions this morning . . . Where shall I read . . . I don't know . . . Oops, time to go . . ." tap, tap, tap . . .

Elisha would say to us, "Take those arrows and beat them! Memorize the Scriptures. Meditate on the Word. Study to show yourself approved unto God. Verbalize the Scriptures." But we keep this arrow in its quiver and dust it off only occasionally and halfheartedly and then wonder why our deliverance isn't complete. This is the Word of the Lord, gang. Nothing should have higher priority than studying this book. In those who study the Word consistently, there is a continual pattern of growth and victory.

The Arrow of the Word of Faith

Another arrow in our quiver is the word of faith. Jesus said, "*Say* to the mountain be removed and it shall be removed" (see Matthew 17:20). Too often, too much of our talk is about why we're discouraged or why we're upset. Negative attitudes and talk should be done away with. Instead, we should speak words of faith and life.

In Zechariah 4, we read that Zerubbabel was discouraged when the project of rebuilding the temple was stalled. The Lord told him to shout "grace" to the cornerstone of the foundation. Zerubbabel might have thought this was foolish, but he did it anyway, and it released something in the Spirit that brought about the completion of the project.

What project is before you? Is there a mountain in front of you? Speak to it, shout at it, release a word of faith in that situation. Don't talk about why it can't happen. Speak words of faith. Take the arrow of faith and smash it. Say, "I'm not going to settle for this destruction in my marriage or in my family. I shout it out right now." Even if you have to get by yourself in the bathroom or in your car, take the arrow of the word of faith and smite it against the ground. In so doing, you'll experience deliverance.

The Arrow of Praise

As they waged war against their enemies, the armies of Israel were preceded by a choir who sang, “Praise be to the Lord. His mercy endures forever and ever.” When the praise ascended from the choir, the enemy was so caught off guard, they began to slay each other. And by the time the army of Israel arrived at the scene, there was nothing more to do than simply collect the spoils of the army that destroyed itself (2 Chronicles 20).

There is power in praise! Think about what you’re singing. Don’t just tap through a couple of songs. If you put on the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, you will find the spirit of heaviness fleeing from you quickly.

The Arrow of Communion

Some people are bored by Communion. And yet in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul said many were sick, weak, or even dying because they didn't value the Table of the Lord. "Take and eat," Jesus said. "This is My body broken for you. Drink. This is My blood shed for you" (see 1 Corinthians 11:24). There is much more power in the Lord's Table than we can even imagine. When you eat of the bread and drink of the cup of Jesus Christ, in a sense, you are being born again—and again. And I need that. When I fail to do that or when I do it haphazardly or sporadically, my deliverance will be only partial.

Come to the Lord's Table expecting a fresh measure of His grace and forgiveness. He'll meet you in that place, and your deliverance will be full.

I'm convinced that far too many people are depressed for no real reason other than a failure to realize that deliverance has been granted in the arrows of the Lord Jesus Christ, a failure to take the arrows He left for us and smash them against the ground of our own unbelief.

The Lord's Table, the power of praise, the spoken word of faith, the written Word of God, passionate prayer, whichever arrow you grab, grab it energetically and beat it expectantly, for without faith, it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6).

Why didn't Joash smite the arrows more than three times? I suggest three possible reasons . . .

First, perhaps it was because he felt unworthy. Joash was well aware of the fact that he was not considered one of the most righteous kings of Israel. I'm sure he felt, "That's great for Jehoshaphat or Asa or the prophets. But the Lord doesn't really want to deliver me or work through me. Others can pray, but not me. Others can witness, but not me. I'm not quite good enough."

Not true! The ministry, gifts, and work of God are not dependent upon who we are. They are only dependent on Who *He* is—and He is a gracious God who desires to use the foolish things of this world to confound the wise; the weak to show up the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27). God is looking for trophies of His grace and many of us qualify because, like Joash, we know how unworthy we are.

Secondly, perhaps Joash was unconvinced. Maybe he thought, *Here I am, tapping these arrows, claiming deliverance, but the one telling me to do this is sick and dying. If deliverance is real, why is he sick? If the power of God is available, why is he dying?* Here's how to nullify your ministry: look at people. You'll be baffled and beaten. You'll wonder why the Lord is using that person and not the other. Keep your eyes on people, and you'll tap arrows and go away half-defeated. But fix your eyes on Jesus, and your faith will soar (Hebrews 12:2).

Finally, perhaps Joash was unsure whether or not he wanted to see the Syrians really destroyed. Do you really want to be delivered, or is it possible that you enjoy negativity? Is it possible that you enjoy infirmity because it gives you sympathy? Sometimes, it's easier to say, "Woe is me," than it is to take authority. I suggest that there can indeed be a tendency for us to find reasons why we're depressed and oppressed, to justify why we're not moving in faith and fervency. To a man who was lame for thirty-eight years, Jesus said, "Wilt thou be made whole?" Wouldn't you think the answer would be obvious? Yet the man's answer was, "I have no man to put me in the water" (see John 5). He didn't say, "Yes!" Instead, he gave the reason why he couldn't be healed. After thirty-eight years, he had grown accustomed to being lame and perhaps didn't want to deal with the responsibility of what would take place if he was indeed made whole.

As long as I'm mad at the church, I don't have to give to the building project. As long as I'm mad at the elders, I don't have to come to Wednesday night Bible study. As long as I'm mad at the Lord, I don't have to get up early to spend time with Him. We find reasons why we want to be lame. Perhaps Joash didn't want the Syrians totally annihilated. Beaten back a little? Sure. But wiped out? That was another matter altogether.

The Lord desires to shake us out of our lethargy, gang, to give us complete victory. Therefore, let us be those who worship with intensity, who pray with expectancy, who speak the word of faith loudly, who read the Word consistently, who move out energetically—all for *His* great glory.



14 **2 Kings 14:1–3**

In the second year of Joash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel reigned Am aziah the son of Joash king of Judah. He was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like David his father: he did according to all things as Joash his father did.

David is the standard by which all other kings are measured. Amaziah did that which was right, but not like David. In other words, he made the right motions, but lacked the right emotion. He did good things, but he didn't have a heart that was truly inclined toward the Lord like David's was.

2 Kings 14:4, 5

Howbeit the high places were not taken away: as yet the people did sacrifice and burnt incense on the high places. And it came to pass, as soon as the kingdom was confirmed in his hand, that he slew his servants which had slain the king his father.

His father was assassinated while he was in office, so Amaziah avenged his father's death.

2 Kings 14:6

But the children of the murderers he slew not: according unto that which is written in the book of the law of Moses, wherein the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

The Lord here is approving the fact that, unlike the normal custom, Amaziah killed the servants who killed his father but didn't kill their children. God specifically said that children are not to die for the sins of their fathers (Deuteronomy 24:16). Amaziah honored this.

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel said, "This proverb shall be said no more: Our fathers ate sour grapes. Therefore our teeth are on edge" (Jeremiah 31:29; Ezekiel 18:2). Twice, the Lord raised up prophets to tell His people

to quit blaming their parents. There is validity in the healing of our souls, minds, and emotions. But I believe it is also grievous in the sight of our Lord when people blame their depression and problems on someone else, particularly their parents.

2 Kings 14:7, 8
He slew of Edom in the valley of salt ten thousand, and took Selah by war, and called the name of it Joktheel unto this day. Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us look one another in the face.

Second Chronicles 25 tells us Amaziah raised an army that numbered 300,000 men. But that wasn't big enough for him, so, in order to increase it, he hired 100,000 more soldiers from the kingdom of Israel. With this huge army, Amaziah was determined to battle the Edomites.

The Edomites were constantly troubling the Jews and Amaziah decided, with his huge army, he could wipe them out. He was ready to march against Edom when a prophet came and said, "The Lord God is not with Israel, for Israel has gone against Him. Therefore, go into battle, but don't take the soldiers you've hired from Israel." So Amaziah told all of the men from Israel to go back home. He then led his men into battle against the Edomites and was completely victorious.

But while he was gone, the mercenaries from Israel plundered the cities of Judah on their way back to Israel, killing 3,000. When Amaziah came back and heard this, he was understandably upset. So he sent a message to Jehoash, the king of Israel, challenging him to fight.

2 Kings 14:9, 10
And Jehoash the king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle. Thou hast indeed smitten Edom, and thine heart hath lifted thee up: glory of this, and tarry at home: for why shouldest

thou meddle to thy hurt, that thou shouldest fall, even thou, and Judah with thee?

"You had a victory," Jehoash said to Amaziah. "Enjoy it. Don't start looking for battles you're not called to fight." Jehoash's advice is still sound. It is always dangerous for us to take on battles we're not called to fight, mistakenly thinking we're stronger than we are.

2 Kings 14:11 (a)
But Amaziah would not hear . . .

Jehoash was giving a word of warning, trying to keep Amaziah from meddling. But Amaziah would not hear. So often in our Christian experience, we are like Amaziah. We experience victory by the grace and goodness of God. And in those victories, we tend to take on an air of invincibility. "Because the Lord saw me through, nothing can stop me now," we say. As a result, we find ourselves meddling where we shouldn't.

- "Last time I went to a party, I didn't do anything wrong. I didn't join in. I was victorious. So I'll be victorious at this week's party, too."
- "I know I'm strong enough to absorb what is on the movie screen. No problem."
- "Lord," Peter said, "Though all others forsake You, I never will. You can count on me."

Over and over again, men and women of God have been undermined by overconfidence, putting themselves in situations they think won't affect them. And all the while, they hear the Holy Spirit saying, "Don't go. Stay away. You're meddling to your own hurt."

2 Kings 14:11 (b), 12
. . . Therefore Jehoash king of Israel went up; and he and Amaziah king of Judah looked one another in the face at Bethshemesh, which belongeth to Judah. And Judah was put to the worse before Israel; and they fled every man to their tents.

In this passage, we see four results of overconfidence. The first is that there is disgrace to the nation. Judah lost the battle. Whenever I meddle, I will find myself inevitably bringing disgrace to the people of God. In 2 Samuel 12, when David had sinned, he was approached by Nathan the prophet. Upon David's confession of sin, Nathan said, "The Lord has forgiven you. Nevertheless, you have caused the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme."

When you and I succumb to sin, when we meddle where we don't belong, we bring disgrace to the people of God. Let us be careful lest we disgrace others.

2 Kings 14:13
And Jehoash king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash the son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh, and came to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim unto the corner gate, four hundred cubits.

The second result of overconfidence is that it decreases defenses. The walls that protected the people were broken down. When you become involved in a little sin, your defenses are torn down and it leads to bigger sins. That is the problem with little sins, they never stay little.

"I would never do *that,*" you say. But then you compromise, and before long, you find yourself asking, "How did I get *here?*" You got there by giving in at the first point, meddling where you didn't belong. There are standards you know the Lord has given you. When you ignore them, what used to bother you no longer affects you because the walls of defense are broken.

2 Kings 14:14 (a)
And he took all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house . . .

The third result of overconfidence is that it diminishes worship. The temple itself was plundered. Riches were lost. Haven't you found it to be true that once you are meddling, involved in areas you shouldn't be, your desire for worship diminishes proportionately? I have found that one of the

best barometers to judge where I'm at spiritually is to look at my desire and capacity for worship. When I have meddled in areas I didn't belong, my desire for worship decreases.

When the people of Israel continued in sin, the glory of God departed from the temple (Ezekiel 10). Worship then became formalized and ritualistic. It became an obligation. It is a tragedy when sin brings about the departing of the glory of God from our lives. When the gold and silver is gone, our worship becomes bankrupt. And it's all because we compromised, all because we were overconfident.

2 Kings 14:14 (b)
. . . and hostages, and returned to Samaria.

The fourth result of overconfidence is that it destroys freedom, for not only was the temple plundered, but hostages were taken.

We who are in Jesus Christ are the freest of all people because in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul declared that all things were lawful. People talk about Christianity being restrictive. But nothing could be farther from the truth. We are not under the law, not under regulations and rules, do's and don'ts. All things are lawful but all things are not expedient. That is, there are things that will ensnare and enslave me if I allow myself to fall into their trap. If I meddle in areas I shouldn't, I'll be carried off, hostage to a certain sin or series of sins that will enslave me. If I repent, God will forgive me, but my liberty will be diminished. That is why our loving heavenly Father has given us the Holy Spirit to continually say to us, "Don't meddle in that. Don't compromise at that point."

Precious brother, dear sister, let us not be overcome by overconfidence. Instead, let us be wise, listening for the Spirit to speak at every juncture.

2 Kings 14:15–22
Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash which he did, and his might, and how he fought with Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Jehoash slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel; and Jeroboam his son reigned in his stead. And

Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel fifteen years. And the rest of the acts of Amaziah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? Now they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem: and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish, and slew him there. And they brought him on horses: and he was buried at Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David. And all the people of Judah took Azariah, which was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah. He built Elath, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers.

After Amaziah was defeated in a battle he had no business fighting, his popularity in his nation plummeted. The people of Judah, defeated by their northern neighbors, no longer wanted him. In those days, royalty was risky business. Kings didn't get voted out. They got done in. And Amaziah was no exception. After he was killed, his son, Azariah, reigned in his place.

2 Kings 14:23
In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, and reigned forty and one years.

We go back up north to Israel. This is not Jeroboam of previous writings but another Jeroboam.

2 Kings 14:24
And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

During Jeroboam's reign, the Lord raised up four powerful prophets: Jonah, Hosea, Joel, and Micah. But Jeroboam didn't heed their words.

2 Kings 14:25–27

He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher. For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bit ter: for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel. And the LORD said not that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven: but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.

In spite of Jeroboam's sin, God remained faithful to Israel and gave them victory.

2 Kings 14:28, 29
Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he warred, and how he recovered Damascus, and Hamath, which belonged to Judah, for Israel, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, even with the kings of Israel; and Zachariah his son reigned in his stead.

Jeroboam was a wicked king, and yet the Lord used him powerfully. He had a long reign. He was prosperous. And yet he did not love the Lord. Oftentimes, we get confused on this issue. We see someone who is powerful and prosperous, who seems to get all the breaks while we who love the Lord face one trial after another. Why is it that the evil people seem to do so well? Have you ever asked that question? Asaph did . . .

Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden

me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.

Psalm 73:1–3, 16, 18, 23, 24

Asaph was confused and baffled until he came into the house of the Lord. And suddenly his perspective was restored. I can't tell you how many times that has happened to me. Discouraged or confused, I have plopped into a pew and when the Word was opened, it spoke exactly to me and my vision was restored. That's why I love being in the house of the Lord. My perspective is always clarified once again. Let the Jeroboams have their success now. Ours is coming.



15 In the south, a great king arises named Azariah, better known as Uzziah . . .

2 Kings 15:1–3
In the twenty and seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel began Azariah son of Amaziah king of Judah to reign. Sixteen years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned two and fifty years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jecholiah of Jerusalem. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done;

In the Book of Chronicles, we'll see that Uzziah was a truly great king. He was a capable administrator, a valiant warrior, an inventor, and, above all, a lover of God.

2 Kings 15:4–7
Save that the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burnt incense still on the high places. And the LORD smote the king, so that he was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house. And Jotham the king's son

was over the house, judging the people of the land. And the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? So Azariah slept with his fathers; and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David: and Jotham his son reigned in his stead.

What's going on here? If Uzziah loved the Lord, why is he smitten with leprosy? Uzziah who was doing so well made a tragic, fatal error. He went in to the temple and offered sacrifices. The priests warned him, saying, Don't do it. But he felt God would bless him. So he overstepped his parameters. And he found out God is not a respecter of persons. There is only One who is qualified to be both priest and king—Jesus Christ. Thus, Uzziah distorted the picture of Jesus.

In this, I am reminded of Moses. When the children of Israel thirsted in the wilderness, God told him to speak to the rock and water would gush forth. Instead, Moses struck the rock as he had done previously (Exodus 17:6). But because the rock was a picture of Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:4), the picture became distorted because Jesus would be smitten only once through His death on the Cross for our sins. This picture was so important to God that Moses was unable to enter the Promised Land because, like Azariah, he altered the picture.

2 Kings 15:8–12
In the thirty and eighth year of Azariah king of Judah did Zachariah the son of Jeroboam reign over Israel in Samaria six months. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his fathers had done: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. And Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and smote him before the people, and slew him, and reigned in his stead. And the rest of the acts of Zachariah, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. This was the word of the LORD which he spake unto Jehu, saying, Thy sons shall sit on the throne of Israel unto the fourth generation. And so it came to pass.

Although there was only one dynasty in the southern kingdom—David's family—there were eight dynasties in the northern kingdom. One of these dynasties was that of Jehu. Because Jehu destroyed Baal worship in Israel, the Lord promised that his family would continue on the throne for four generations. This is the fulfillment of that prophecy.

2 Kings 15:13–16
Shallum the son of Jabesh began to reign in the nine and thirtieth year of Uzziah king of Judah; and he reigned a full month in Samaria. For Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah, and came to Samaria, and smote Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria, and slew him, and reigned in his stead. And the rest of the acts of Shallum, and his conspiracy which he made, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. Then Menahem smote Tiphsah, and all that were therein, and the coasts thereof from Tirzah: because they opened not to him, therefore he smote it; and all the women therein that were with child he ripped up.

It is believed that Menahem was the general of Zachariah's army. Hearing of Zachariah's death, Menahem killed Zachariah's murderer and proclaimed himself king. When the people of the city of Tiphsah refused to open their gates to him, he stormed in and committed barbarous acts of murder.

2 Kings 15:17–20
In the nine and thirtieth year of Azariah king of Judah began Menahem the son of Gadi to reign over Israel, and reigned ten years in Samaria. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. And Pul the king of Assyria came against the land: and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to confirm the kingdom in his hand. And Menahem exacted the money of Israel, even of all the mighty men of wealth, of each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and stayed not there in the land.

Menahem raised taxes in order to buy off the king of Assyria, who otherwise would have invaded Israel.

2 Kings 15:21–25
And the rest of the acts of Menahem, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Menahem slept with his fathers; and Pekahiah his son reigned in his stead. In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah Pekahiah the son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned two years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. But Pekah the son of Remaliah, a captain of his, conspired against him, and smote him in Samaria, in the palace of the king's house, with Argob and Arieh, and with him fifty men of the Gileadites: and he killed him, and reigned in his room.

There is no shortage of chaos and confusion, intrigue and assassination in the history of the kings of Israel.

2 Kings 15:26–29
And the rest of the acts of Pekahiah, and all that he did, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. In the two and fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah Pekah the son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned twenty years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abel-beth-maachah, and Jonoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria.

This is the first of two deportations. Tiglath-pileser, the powerful ruler of Assyria, comes down and begins to carry the people back to Assyria for the purpose of assimilating them into the Assyrian culture, taking away their

national identity. Over time, they would no longer be an enemy and no longer pose a threat.

2 Kings 15:30–38
And Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and smote him, and slew him, and reigned in his stead, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah. And the rest of the acts of Pekah, and all that he did, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel began Jotham the son of Uzziah king of Judah to reign. Five and twenty years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jerusha, the daughter of Zadok. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD: he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done. Howbeit the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burned incense still in the high places. He built the higher gate of the house of the LORD. Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? In those days the LORD began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah. And Jotham slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Ahaz his son reigned in his stead.

From the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 27, we learn that Jotham was able to overthrow the Ammonites and collect from them one hundred talents of silver, 10,000 measures of wheat, and 10,000 measures of barley for three years. Although Hezekiah and Josiah would impact the nation spiritually, Jotham would be the last of the Jewish kings to have a prosperous reign politically.



16

2 Kings 16:1–4

In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah Ahaz the son of Jo tham king of Judah began to reign. Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD his God, like David his father. But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel. And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.

It was believed that if a person placed his eldest son on the incandescent arms of the statue of the pagan god, Molech, his family would be prosperous. Before we rush to judge Ahaz for doing this, however, we would do well to look at ourselves and our own culture. There are a lot of kids who have been "sacrificed" in order that there might be financial prosperity in the home. They have been ignored in order that a parent's career might prosper. But our kids don't want every thing. They want *us*. They need *us*. We wonder why our kids are burning up with anger and rebellion and frustration. Perhaps it is because we are doing the same thing Ahaz did—sacrificing our kids for the sake of prosperity.

2 Kings 16:5 (a)

Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to war . . .

Pekah was the king of Israel. He allied himself with Rezin, king of Syria, to fight the king of Judah.

2 Kings 16:5 (b)–7

. . . and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him. At that time Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath to Syria, and drave the Jews from Elath: and the Syrians came to Elath, and dwelt there unto this day. So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, I am thy servant and thy son: come up, and save

me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me.

Ahaz asks Tiglath-pileser to come and rescue him from the confederacy of Israel and Syria. He cries out to the king of Assyria instead of crying up to the King of kings in heaven. He's reaching out for human help instead of praying down divine help.

2 Kings 16:8
And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria.

Ahaz robbed the house of the Lord to pay for help from man. Before we too quickly condemn Ahaz, perhaps the Holy Spirit would convict us and call us to consider our own state. When we feel pressure, when we feel like we're going under, when we're sinking in debt, do we sometimes rob the house of the Lord? "I can't tithe this week because I've got to pay these guys off. Lord, You understand, don't You?" we say.

2 Kings 16:9
And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him: for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin.

Ahaz was saved by Tiglath-pileser's assistance. So relieved was he, he went to meet him in the city of Damascus, where Tiglath-pileser was enjoying his success.

2 Kings 16:10–12
And king Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus: and king Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the fashion of the altar, and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof. And Urijah the priest built an altar according to all that king Ahaz had sent from Damascus: so Urijah the priest made it against king Ahaz came

from Damascus. And when the king was come from Damascus, the king saw the altar: and the king approached to the altar, and offered thereon.

While in Damascus congratulating Tiglath-pileser, Ahaz saw a heathen altar that caught his attention. So he sent for the priest in Jerusalem to go to Damascus to make notes so that he could reproduce it.

I am increasingly concerned that we in the church are all too often following the example of Ahaz, patterning our ministries upon what the world propagates. In previous generations, Satan attempted to counterfeit the church. But it seems in this present day that the church is seeing the heathen altars of the enemy and copying them. The church should be setting the standard, remaining true to what the Word says rather than what the world does.

2 Kings 16:13, 14
And he burnt his burnt offering and his meat offering, and poured his drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings, upon the altar. And he brought also the brasen altar, which was before the LORD, from the forefront of the house, from between the altar and the house of the LORD, and put it on the north side of the altar.

The brass altar is the one the Lord designed. Here, furniture that was placed by divine design is now being moved by Ahaz's whims.

2 Kings 16:15
And king Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, Upon the great altar burn the morn ing burnt offering, and the evening meat offering, and the king's burnt sacrifice, and his meat offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings; and sprinkle upon it all the blood of the burnt offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice: and the brasen altar shall be for me to inquire by.

Ahaz decided the brass altar would be his personal altar.

2 Kings 16:16–20
Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that king Ahaz commanded. And king Ahaz cut off the borders of the bases, and removed the laver from off them; and took down the sea from off the brasen oxen that were under it, and put it upon a pavement of stones. And the covert for the sabbath that they had built in the house, and the king's entry without, turned he from the house of the LORD for the king of Assyria. Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead.

Although he came from an ungodly father, Hezekiah would be a godly king. Hezekiah would do as much to restore the temple as his father did to destroy it. And thus, God's work would continue in spite of the wickedness of man.



17 We come now to a sobering and sad section of Scripture, for in chapter 17, we see the nation of Israel—the ten northern tribes—carried away into captivity . . .

2 Kings 17:1–3
In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him. Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and gave him presents.

Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, put pressure on Israel. Hoshea, king of Israel, paid him tribute.

2 Kings 17:4
And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea: for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and brought no present to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year: therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison.

Hoshea is attempting to strike up a rebellious confederacy with the Egyptian king in order to rid himself of the tribute he was paying the Assyrians.

2 Kings 17:5–8
Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharoah king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, And walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made.

Carrying people into captivity was a common practice of the day. A conquering country would take the conquered people back into its own region for the purpose of assimilation. Over time, the new arrivals would be absorbed into the host culture and thereby lose their national identity. The people of Israel were divided and placed in various areas in order that separation and isolation would keep them from rebelling. After they carried the people of Israel into Assyria, the Assyrians sent other people they had conquered into the area that was once inhabited by the ten northern tribes.

2 Kings 17:9
And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the LORD their God, and they built them high places

in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.

Hebrews 4:13 tells us that all things we do are naked and open before Him with whom we deal. Nothing is done in secret. The Lord sees. Here, Israel's sin caught up with her.

2 Kings 17:10–13
And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree: And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the heathen whom the LORD carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger: For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing. Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets.

While they were practicing their secret sins, the Lord was publicly calling them to return to Him. Many prophets were on the scene at this time, preaching, teaching and calling God's people to repentance.

2 Kings 17:14, 15 (a)
Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God. And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain . . .

The word "vanity" in the OT means "empty." The people of Israel followed empty things and became empty themselves. The same is still true. When we feel empty, it is inevitably because we are following after vanity. Do you ever get to the place where you're hungry inside but think that what you really need is a hot fudge sundae? You have one, only to realize you're still empty inside. So you think you need to watch TV. But after watching a

two-hour movie, you're still empty. Why? Because those things are empty. Then you take twenty minutes, get on your knees, cry out to the Lord, open the Word—and you're deeply satisfied.

2 Kings 17:15 (b), 16
. . . and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them. And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal.

The "host of heaven" refers to astrology, which has its roots in Babylonian religious practices.

2 Kings 17:17, 18
And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.

For hundreds of years, the Lord called to His people, but they would not respond. And because they would not respond to His goodness, they began to experience His judgment.

2 Kings 17:19–24
Also Judah kept not the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made. And the LORD rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight. For he rent Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king: and Jeroboam drave Israel from following the LORD, and made them sin a great sin. For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which

he did; they departed not from them; Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day. And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.

Not only was there deportation *from* Israel, but occupation in Israel. Assyria is occupying the land of Israel with the goal of annexation.

2 Kings 17:25
And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the LORD: therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew some of them.

The occupiers of Israel ate from crops they didn't plant and lived in houses they didn't build. They enjoyed benefits and blessings, and yet all without acknowledging the Lord who blessed the land. So He sent lions in their midst.

Peter tells us that our Adversary, Satan, is like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). Even those who do not fear the Lord in our country enjoy the blessings of health, freedom, Christian heritage, and influence. Yet because they do not acknowledge Him, He allows Satan to bite and devour. Is this to punish them? No, it's to awaken them.

2 Kings 17:26
Wherefore they spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land.

"We don't know what to do. Who is the God of this land?" asked Israel's new occupants.

2 Kings 17:27
Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land.

"Let one of the priests of Israel return to teach the people about the God of the land," the king of Assyria said.

2 Kings 17:28–33
Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD. Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt. And the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, And the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. So they feared the LORD, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. They feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence.

They feared the Lord and yet they served their own heathen deities. They were afraid of the consequences, but they had affection for their previous practices. This is what Spurgeon calls a "sham conversion." And the same thing still happens. When a person goes through a hard time—losing a loved one or the pain of divorce, or bankruptcy—he says, "I must seek the Lord. I'm being bitten." And yet, although they fear the Lord in the sense of being afraid of the consequences of sin, there is no change in their lifestyle. Repentance is the beginning of genuine salvation.

2 Kings 17:34

Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the LORD, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel;

When the lions backed off, the settlers stopped fearing the Lord altogether. If you fear the Lord only because you've been bitten, once the problem you face goes away, you'll no longer fear Him and you won't be saved in the last day. That is why Peter pleads with us to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). Make sure you're saved, not just responding to the growl of a lion or the breath of a beast closing in on you. Make sure your heart is toward the Lord. Seeing a person come forward several times for salvation doesn't bother me a bit. I would rather see people come forward every Sunday, making their election sure than to be part of a sham conversion.

2 Kings 17:35–41
With whom the LORD had made a covenant, and charged them saying, Ye shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them: But the LORD, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship, and to him shall ye do sacrifice. And the statutes, and the ordinances, and the law, and the commandment, which he wrote for you, ye shall observe to do for evermore; and ye shall not fear other gods. And the covenant that I have made with you ye shall not forget; neither shall ye fear other gods. But the LORD your God ye shall fear; and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies. Howbeit they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner. So these nations feared the LORD, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.

Mixture always leads to disaster. Jesus said, "I would that you were either hot or cold. If you're lukewarm, I will spew you out of My mouth. If you're hot, I'll use you. If you're cold, I'll deal with you. But if you're

lukewarm, it's hard for Me to find any use for you at all" (Revelation 3:15, 16).

The Jewish people hated these Samaritans, these new settlers. Some of the Jews had been left behind and they intermarried with people of the Assyrian empire. Thus, they were half-breeds racially. They were also half-breeds religiously because they believed in God, but didn't serve Him wholeheartedly. The Jews despised them. They were the perfect picture of lukewarmness.

There was one Jew, however, who said, "I must go to Samaria." When every other Jew of that day would go miles out of their way to avoid even walking on Samaritan soil, there was One who said, "I must go there" (John 4:4).

In the fourth chapter of John, we see Jesus tenderly but firmly, compassionately yet directly dealing with a Samaritan woman. As a result, there was a revival in Samaria, the home of the half-breed, the home of the lukewarm. And there can be revival in your soul as well.



18 2 Kings 18:1–3

Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Abi, the daughter of Zachariah. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did.

Along with Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Josiah, Hezekiah is one of the four outstanding kings whose life is recorded in Kings and Chronicles as men who did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.

2 Kings 18:4 (a)
He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves . . .

Hezekiah removed the obvious forms of idolatry but he doesn't stop there. He goes on to deal with a more subtle form of idolatry, one to which we as believers can fall prey . . .

2 Kings 18:4 (b)
. . . and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.

Over seven hundred years previously, when the children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness, they were bitten by serpents because of their perpetual murmuring and sin. As they began to fall like flies, they cried to Moses. Moses, in turn, cried to the Lord and was told to make a brass serpent on a brass pole. Brass is the metal of judgment. Therefore, the brass serpent was a picture of Jesus, for He who knew no sin was made sin for you and me and judged on the Cross of Calvary (2 Corinthians 5:21). Anyone who looked upon the brass serpent was healed, just as today, any one of us who look to Jesus Christ will be saved, healed from the snakebite of sin.

Over the years, the brass serpent became an idol. Hezekiah, under the inspiration of the Spirit, called it what it was: *Nehushtan,* or "a thing of brass."

2 Kings 18:5–7
He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the LORD, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses. And the LORD was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not.

Why did Hezekiah prosper? Because he clave to the commandments of the Lord. David knew this secret, for in Psalm 1, he said, "Blessed is the man who meditates in the Law of the Lord. Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

For topical study of 2 Kings 18:1–7 entitled "The Subtlety of Idolatry," turn to page **1074.**

2 Kings 18:8–13
He smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city. And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria, and besieged it. And at the end of three years they took it: even in the sixth year of Hezekiah, that is the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken. And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria, and put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes: Because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed his covenant, and all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them. Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them.

Sennacherib, king of Assyria, began his move to conquer Judah.

2 Kings 18:14
And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; return from me: that which thou puttest on me will I bear.

When Sennacherib came down with his mighty Assyrian army, Hezekiah agreed to pay tribute if he would call a halt to his invasion.

2 Kings 18:15, 16
And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. And

Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house. At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

Hezekiah is in error here. Rather than calling out to the Lord to supply his need, he removes the golden doors and golden overlay from the temple and uses it to pay Sennacherib. But whenever we seek to appease the enemy, it never works. The more you feed him, the fatter he gets. Sennacherib was no exception. Rather than being satisfied with this initial payment of gold and silver, it just whetted his appetite for more.

2 Kings 18:17
And the king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rabsaris and Rab-shakeh from Lachish to king Hezekiah with a great host against Jerusalem. And they went up and came to Jerusalem. And when they were come up, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is in the highway of the fuller's field.

With an army of 200,000 the Assyrians were hoping the Jews would surrender out of intimidation. The fuller's field was sort of the Geneva Conference Center of the day.

2 Kings 18:18–21
And when they had called to the king, there came out to them Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder. And Rab-shakeh said unto them, Speak ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? Thou sayest, (but they are but vain words,) I have counsel and strength for the war. Now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me? Now, behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharoah king of Egypt unto all that trust on him.

"Don't think you can rely on the Egyptians. Pharaoh is nothing more than a broken reed—he can't support you," said Sennacherib's spokesman, Rab-shakeh.

2 Kings 18:22
But if ye say unto me, We trust in the LORD our God: is not that he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?

Hezekiah honored the Lord in destroying the altars of the heathen deities. But the Assyrians misunderstood what he was doing and thought he was destroying sanctified altars. Therefore, they assumed God would not come to Hezekiah's aid.

2 Kings 18:23
Now therefore, I pray thee, give pledges to my lord the king of Assyria, and I will deliver thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them.

"If you surrender," Rab-shakeh said, "I'll give you 2,000 horses."

2 Kings 18:24, 25
How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? Am I now come up without the LORD against this place to destroy it? The LORD said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.

"Forget the Egyptians," Rab-shakeh said, "because they're weak. Forget the Lord because He's angry. Actually, the Lord told me to destroy this land." But saying "the Lord told me," doesn't make it true.

2 Kings 18:26–31
Then said Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and Shebna, and Joah, unto Rab-shakeh, Speak, I pray thee, to thy servants in the Syrian

language; for we understand it: and talk not with us in the Jews' language in the ears of the people that are on the wall. But Rab-shakeh said unto them, Hath my master sent me to thy master, and to thee, to speak these words? hath he not sent me to the men which sit on the wall, that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you. Then Rab-shakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and spake, saying, Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria: Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you out of his hand: Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, The LORD will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me, and then eat ye every man of his own vine, and every one of his fig tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his cistern:

Speaking in a loud voice so that the soldiers defending the wall might give up, Rab-shakeh gives a three-fold argument for why they should surrender. First, he promised that if they came to his side, they would have their own vine, their own land, and their own well. In other words, they would be prosperous.

2 Kings 18:32
Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil olive and of honey, that ye may live, and not die: and hearken not unto Hezekiah, when he persuadeth you, saying, The LORD will deliver us.

The second promise Rab-shakeh made to whoever would defect to the Assyrian side was that they wouldn't die.

2 Kings 18:33–35
Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath,

and of Arpad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? have they delivered Samaria out of mine hand? Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?

Finally, Rab-shakeh sought to plant seeds of doubt in the minds of the Jews by questioning God's ability to withstand the power of the Assyrians.

These three ploys—the promise of prosperity, the denial of death, and the raising of questions—are the same tactics Satan used in the garden of Eden to tempt Eve. This tells me that Satan's playbook is extremely limited. He keeps running the same plays over and over again. "Cheat here and you'll be happy," he says. "You won't die. You have your whole life ahead of you, so live it up," he hisses. "If God is a God of love, why are there starving people in the world?" he taunts.

2 Kings 18:36, 37
But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not. Then came Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, to Hezekiah with their clothes rent, and told him the words of Rab-shakeh.

Here is how to deal with the devil. Follow Hezekiah's command: Answer him not. Too often I think we are too ready to do battle with the devil. The sons of Sceva tried to do this against him and got their clothes ripped off in the process (Acts 19). In Jude we read that Michael the archangel did not dare bring a railing accusation against Satan but left the rebuke of Satan to the Lord (v. 9). It's always good to keep the Lord between you and Satan.

THE SUBTLETY OF IDOLATRY

A Topical Study of 2 KINGS 18:1–7

It can be said without hesitation that Hezekiah was one of Judah's greatest rulers. He ascended to the throne when he was twenty-five years old and did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. Under his reign, Judah experienced a very remarkable, radical revival. Hezekiah was an energetic iconoclast. He destroyed images, cut down groves, dismantled the high places, all which were associated with idolatry.

Our Father is radically and vehemently opposed to idolatry. The First Commandment He gave Moses was that there was to be no other god before Him (Exodus 20:3). There is only one true and living God. But there are other gods. In the Old Testament, these gods had names such as Ashteroth, the goddess of sensuality; Mammon, the god of money; Molech, the god of pleasure; and Baal, the god of the intellect. And although we don't have those same names, our society serves the same gods. Every man will serve some god. There is some master passion of your life that controls you and is a priority for you. If you think you serve no god, in reality, you are worshiping yourself, and that is a terrible god indeed!

In the Second Commandment, God said,

> *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the* LORD *thy God am a jealous God . . .*
>
> Exodus 20:4, 5 (a)

God is not jealous of false gods. No, He is jealous for you. He cares about you and wants the best for you and knows those other gods will mislead and ultimately destroy you. So He says, "You are never to bow down to an image or an idol."

Why is God so vehemently opposed to idolatry?

I’ll suggest two reasons . . .

Protection

Idols can be, and often are, more than merely a piece of carved wood or stone. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul talks about a controversy that was raging in the church of Corinth over whether it was right for Christians to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols. You see, after the meat was sacrificed, it was taken to shambles—little markets—and sold at a cut rate. Some Christians bought this meat. Others, however, looked down on them for doing so . . .

> *What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?*
>
> 1 Corinthians 10:19–22

Paul is saying that the idol in itself is nothing, but behind the idol is a demonic entity. Thus, it is for our protection that God tells us to stay away from idols.

Not only are idols demonic, but they are also demeaning . . .

> *Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them. O Israel, trust thou in the LORD . . .*
>
> Psalm 115:4–9 (a)

The psalmist says these idols are deaf, dumb, and lame. And those that make them and worship them become just like them—lamebrains. In other words, we become like whatever we worship. If we worship a loving, holy,

great, and gracious God, we begin to take on His characteristics, for as we behold Him, we are changed from glory to greater glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Preparation

Secondly, God forbids idolatry for our preparation. They that worship the true and living God must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24). We live in a world that continually gravitates to the material realm. We want to see, touch, smell, and taste. But our God is Spirit, and He is preparing us for eternity, developing within us the ability to move in the Spirit, free from the constraints of the tangible or touchable.

Hezekiah kept the commandment of the Lord. And revival followed. But then he dealt with even a more subtle manifestation of idolatry. He dealt with the brass serpent . . .

Nehushtan means "a thing of brass." The brass snake was kept first by Moses, then by Joshua for forty years as the nation engaged in warfare. During the reigns of Saul, David, Solomon, and the rest of the kings—for seven hundred years—this pole and serpent were preserved. I'm sure it was saved as something to remember what the Lord had done. But over the years, it became an idol. What was initially used *by* the Lord soon was placed in competition *with* Him. I'm sure the people who burned incense to it thought they were simply using it to draw closer to God. But in reality, it was an idol to them. They were burning incense which was only to be burned before Jehovah. Hezekiah called it what it was, and broke it into pieces.

I believe that, like the children of Israel, we, as the people of God, are in danger of subtle idolatry in exalting, lifting up, and worshiping things, which are in competition with the true and living God . . .

Our past can be an idol. "Oh, yes," we say, "I remember in 1948. That's when things were really happening with the Lord and me." If we glory in the past, live in the past, and talk about the past, our past becomes an idol. In Ezra 3, we read that when the foundation of the temple was laid, the young men shouted for joy. The old men, however, wept, saying, "It's not like it used to be" because the past had become an idol to them.

"Forgetting those things which are behind, I press on toward the high calling of Jesus Christ," Paul declared (Philippians 3:13, 14).The human mind has the tendency to remember only the good things about the past. Therefore, we must, like Paul, continually look ahead.

Procedures or practices can become idols. We have to worship with a guitar. No, they're Nehushtan. We can cling to our doctrines, our practices, our style of ministry—and they can actually become idols. We must be careful.

People can become idols. I'm thankful for men and women of God. But they're men and women nonetheless. There was a man several years before Hezekiah came to the throne that was also a great king. His name was Uzziah. So wise, prosperous, and successful a ruler was he that his name was on the lips of everyone from north to south (2 Chronicles 26:15). During his life, the prophet, Isaiah, was on the scene. Isaiah had a fabulous vision of God. He said, "I saw the Lord high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple." But the interesting thing is that the chapter wherein this vision is recorded begins with these words: In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord (Isaiah 6:1). When did Isaiah see the Lord? When Uzziah died. As long as Uzziah was on the throne, people trusted in Uzziah. But when he was gone, people set their sights higher.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us be careful that we not fall into the subtlety of idolatry. There is only One worthy of worship: our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. For His pleasure, all things are created. Therefore, to Him and Him alone be glory and honor forevermore.



19 2 Kings 19:1

And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD.

The house of the Lord is the best place to be. Sometimes, however, it's the hardest place to get to because when the enemy is threatening, sometimes you feel you can't make it to the house of the Lord. Rab-shakeh's railings against God notwithstanding, Hezekiah made it to the house of the Lord.

2 Kings 19:2–5

And he sent Eliakim, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz. And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth. It may be the LORD thy God will hear all the words of Rab-shakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God; and will reprove the words which the LORD thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left. So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah.

With the mighty Assyrian army camped outside his gates and Rab-shakeh's taunts in his ears, Hezekiah sent word to Isaiah the prophet.

2 Kings 19:6, 7
And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith the LORD, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.

Isaiah prophesied of a blast, a rumor, and a sword. The blast was no doubt the death of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night (v. 35). The rumor was that Ethiopia had invaded Assyria (v. 9). The sword was the death of Sennacherib by the hands of his own sons (v. 37). In other words, God was not caught off guard by Sennacherib. He was not surprised by Rab-shakeh. He was not worried about the Assyrians.

I am reminded of another godly man who wondered why the Lord seemed to be oblivious to the violence that surrounded him. God's answer to Habakkuk was the same as his answer to Hezekiah:

Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you.

God knew exactly what He would do in Hezekiah's day. He knew exactly what He would do in Habakkuk's day. And He knows exactly what He'll do in whatever faces you today, as well.

2 Kings 19:8–13
So Rab-shakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah: for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish. And when he heard say of Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, Behold, he is come out to fight against thee: he sent messengers again unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Thelasar? Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?

With his troops spread thin, Sennacherib resumed his attempt to cause Hezekiah to surrender.

2 Kings 19:14–19
And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O LORD God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth. LORD, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, LORD, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, And have cast their

gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD God, even thou only.

Hezekiah received Sennacherib's letter, read its contents, and responded perfectly: he relied on the Lord.



***For topical study of 2 Kings 19:1–19 entitled "Turn Your Cares into Prayers," turn to page* 1079.**

2 Kings 19:20–22
Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard. This is the word that the LORD hath spoken concerning him; The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel.

The Lord is saying, "Sennacherib, you've had it. By attacking My people, you are attacking Me." I'm aware that my kids have shortcomings and I try to correct them. But if someone else seeks to attack my kids, the bear comes out in me. I will fiercely and fervently protect them from attack. Our heavenly Father feels the same way. He knows what we are. He'll deal with us and correct us. The God of Ananias and Sapphira is able indeed to correct His children. We do not need to attack the people of God. When we attack other believers, we are actually attacking God Himself.

2 Kings 19:23–28

By the messengers thou hast reproached the Lord, and hast said, With the multitude of my chariots I am come up to the height of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon, and will cut down the tall cedar trees thereof, and the choice fir trees thereof: and I will enter into the lodgings of his borders, and into the forest of his Carmel. I have digged and drunk strange waters, and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of besieged places. Hast thou not heard long ago how I have done it, and of ancient times that I have formed it? now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste fenced cities into ruinous heaps. Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded; they were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the grass on the housetops, and as corn blasted before it be grown up. But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. Because thy rage against me and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.

"You've put your hook in other peoples' noses. Now I'm putting My hook in yours," the Lord said to Sennacherib.

2 Kings 19:29, 30
And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof. And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward.

This is always the way it is. There can be no visible fruit without invisible roots. If we are to bear fruit in ministry, in worship, in our families, in our communities, our root system must be developed in the unseen area, in the morning hour of prayer, in the evening hour of Bible study.

2 Kings 19:31, 32

For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it.

Almost 200,000 men were camped outside of Jerusalem, yet the Lord said not a single one of their arrows would land in the city.

2 Kings 19:33, 34
By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.

"I'm going to defend My people not because of how good they are or because of how worthy they are, but for My name's sake and for David's. The Lord will defend us, not for our righteousness but because we carry His name, and because of a promise He made to a Greater than David, the Son of David, Jesus Christ. All you need to do is spread the troubling situation before Him and watch Him fight for you (Exodus 14:14).

2 Kings 19:35–37
And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esar-haddon his son reigned in his stead.

Recognizing that something supernatural had taken place, Sennacherib went to the temple and worshiped his god. Historians tell us that his two sons were upset that he was turning his power over to another son. So while he was worshiping, they pushed the idol on top of him, pinned him to the

ground, and beheaded him—unknowingly but unmistakably fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy (v. 7).

TURN YOUR CARES INTO PRAYERS

A Topical Study of 2 KINGS 19:1–19

Hezekiah's heart was very heavy. His head was probably pounding. He had just received a very distressing letter from Sennacherib, king of Assyria, commander-in-chief of the most advanced army in the world at that time—a fighting force that had not lost a battle for one hundred and fifty years. Not only were the Assyrians unbeatable in battle, they were also unbelievable in brutality. Hooks were placed in the noses of their captives through which ropes were passed, thus joining them together in a forced death-march to Assyria.

Sennacherib wrote a letter. Maybe a letter has been delivered to you recently that is disturbing. Maybe it didn't come in the mail but some situation has been handed to you that distresses you, discourages you, disheartens you. King Hezekiah certainly had reason to be disturbed. The Assyrians were right outside the city and a letter from their king was in his hand.

We live in a world full of stress, anxiety, and tension. This shouldn't surprise us because in Luke 21:26 we read that one of the signs of the end times would be that men's hearts would fail them for fear. Ours is the first generation in history to actually experience this prophecy as doctors increasingly correlate heart attacks and heart failure with stress. And yet Jesus came on the scene, saying, "Take no thought for what you shall eat, drink, or wear. The birds of the air do not sow or reap, but the Father in heaven takes care of them. Consider the lilies of the field. Even Solomon was not arrayed like one of these" (see Matthew 6:28–30).

"Take no thought for tomorrow," Jesus said, "for today has enough troubles of its own." Jesus told us we are not to be worried or stressed. Now, anyone can say, "Don't worry." Only the Bible tells us how not to . . .

Be careful for nothing . . .

Philippians 4:6 (a)

“Be careful for nothing.” The King James translators had a different understanding of the word “careful” than we do today. In reference to this verse, they said, “Be full of care about nothing. Don’t be anxious.” God’s intent is that we be carefree.

Paul says, “Be careful for nothing”—but he doesn’t leave it there. He gives a plan to help us do just that . . .

. . . but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving . . .

Philippians 4:6 (b)

Thanksgiving is so important. A grateful person is a great, full person. Think of the people you know who are great. They’re not people who are negative and who complain. They’re people who have an attitude of continual thanksgiving. Paul said, “In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). I am often asked how to discover God’s will. Here it is: Give God thanks in everything. You will be large in stature in the things of God if you are simply grateful.

. . . let your requests be made known unto God.

Philippians 4:6 (c)

Be careful for nothing. Give thanks in all things. Pray about everything. Everything means *every* thing. There is nothing too small for God’s concern. This is where we often err. We often think of God as being so awesome in size that He could not possible care about my lost key. God is infinite. Infinite means He cannot be measured. He’s bigger than time and space. He’s also smaller than the smallest electron and molecule. This means the problems I think are small are as big to Him as the problems I think are insurmountable. He is small enough to care about them and big enough to solve them. Nothing is too small to talk to the Lord about. Nothing. Pray about *every* thing.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:7

If we follow this simple plan in obedience to the plan of Jesus Christ—if we are careful for nothing, give thanks in all things, and pray about every thing—we will experience the inexpressible peace of God.

When things are coming down, the world says, "Look out!" The Word, however, says, "When things are coming down, look up! Pray." After I pray, I don't usually have the answer, but I do have peace—peace that comes not from understanding, but that passes understanding.

Paul preached it. Hezekiah practiced it. Hezekiah began his prayer by worshiping (v. 15). That's always a wise thing to do, for worship wipes out worry. My problems can seem so huge to me. But when I begin to worship and experience the glory and majesty of God, my problems shrink proportionately. If you stand at the foot of the Himalayan mountains, at over 29,000 feet they tower over you. But if you go up in a satellite and look down, you won't even notice them. Worship is the way to get above your problems, to get God's perspective.

In his prayer, Hezekiah didn't tell the Lord what to do. He simply spread Sennacherib's letters out before Him. The problem we have in prayer is that we say, "Lord, here's what should be done. Let me give You some advice because I don't know if You see the situation as clearly as I do." Do you find yourself praying that way sometimes? I do. And when I realize it, I am always terribly embarrassed.

Hezekiah laid out Sennacherib's letters and said, "For Your glory, Lord, do something." The Lord has ideas and plans of which we could never dream. He has creative alternatives we can't even imagine.

At the end of the chapter, in verse 35, we read, "And it came to pass." I love that phrase because things *do* pass. The difficulty you face today *will* pass. Don't give up. It only took *one* angel to smite 185,000 Assyrians (v. 35). The battle was won due to a simple prayer by a desperate king. He prayed to the Lord. When you're in a tight spot, pray, gang. And, like Hezekiah, you will experience the peace of God which passes all understanding.

20

2 Kings 20:1 (a)
In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death . . .

When was Hezekiah sick unto death? In the day of victory, the day of the miraculous, the day of answered prayer. Some Bible scholars believe the killing of the 185,000 soldiers was the result of a plague and that Hezekiah contracted the same disease. This is another passage that reminds me that even in times when the Holy Ghost is moving and miracles are happening, godly men are not immune from sickness. We serve a God who heals. But we also serve a God who—as Elisha experienced, as Hezekiah experienced, as Paul makes reference to—sometimes uses sickness for His glory. Here is a case of a man who, although he did right in the sight of God, was sick.

2 Kings 20:1 (b)
. . . And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.

"It's time to go home," the Lord said to Hezekiah through His prophet, Isaiah. "I'm taking you home and sickness is the tool I'm using." What if the Lord came to you and said, "Set your house in order, I'm taking you home." Would you panic? Or are you walking with the Lord in such a way that you would be at peace about it?

2 Kings 20:2, 3
Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying, I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.

In the original language of a parallel passage, Isaiah tells us Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall and prayed (see 38:2). He didn't want to die, so he cried.

2 Kings 20:4–7

And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered.

The compound of crushed figs was a common medicine of the day. God's healing comes through prayer, through medicine, through our natural healing processes, or through a combination of all three. It is not prayer that heals, medicine that heals, or our bodies that heal. It's the Lord who heals and He can use any method He chooses.

2 Kings 20:8

And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What shall be the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the LORD the third day?

When Isaiah told Hezekiah that God would heal him and give him fifteen more years to live, Hezekiah asked for confirmation. I commend him for this. In the area of divine healing, we must seek confirmation about what the Lord is doing before we make claims about what He's done.

2 Kings 20:9–11

And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forth ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the LORD: and he brought the

shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz.

Ten degrees on the sundial was probably forty-five minutes. The miracle was confirmed.

2 Kings 20:12, 13
At that time Berodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.

So flattered was Hezekiah that bigwigs from Babylon would come to bring him get well wishes that he showed them everything in his empire.

2 Kings 20:14–18
Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon. And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD. Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

"Hezekiah, you botched it," Isaiah said. "The Babylonian messengers will go home and tell their king how rich you are. Then you'll be attacked."

We live in a day when transparency is lauded. While I think there's a time to be open, I also think it's foolish to open yourself up to everyone who shows up with a Get Well card. When prophecies were made about Jesus, Luke says Mary pondered them in her heart (10:19). There can be great damage done when a person opens himself up indiscriminately. In the multitude of words, "there wanteth not sin" (Proverbs 2:19). In other words, the more you open your mouth, the more sin comes out. Let every man be quick to hear and slow to speak, James wisely counseled (1:19). I can't count the number of times I have regretted speaking rather than listening. Lord, help us.

2 Kings 20:19
Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?

After seeing Hezekiah's mistake, here we see his maturity, for even though he was told his kingdom would come crashing down and that his sons would be carried away, he willingly submitted to the will of God.

2 Kings 20:20, 21
And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And Hezekiah slept with his fathers: and Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

When Hezekiah heard the Assyrians were coming, he commanded a tunnel be dug from the spring of Gihon to the pool of Siloam inside the city in order that the Assyrians would be unable to cut off their water source. To accomplish this monumental feat, a 1,777-foot tunnel was dug thirty feet underground through solid rock.

Man can live weeks without food, but only days without water. Water in Scripture refers both to the written word (Ephesians 5:26) and the living Word, Jesus Christ (John 7:37). How deep are we willing to dig? How many obstacles are we willing to tunnel through in order to spend time in the

written Word with the living Word in order to keep our souls from dehydrating?



21 **2 Kings 21:1**

Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hephzi-bah.

Manasseh was the worst of all of the kings, yet he had the longest reign.

2 Kings 21:2, 3

And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.

In other words, Manasseh was the "Ahab of Judah."

2 Kings 21:4, 5

And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD said, In Jerusalem will I put my name. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.

Manasseh erected idolatrous altars even in the temple.

2 Kings 21:6

And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.

In addition to using incantations and spells, Manasseh either offered his son as a sacrifice on the red-hot hands of the idol, Molech, or at the very least, consecrated him to Molech.

2 Kings 21:7, 8
And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house, of which the LORD said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever: Neither will I make the feet of Israel move any more out of the land which I gave their fathers; only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them.

Had God's people remained faithful to Him, they would never have been carried out of the land He had given them (2 Samuel 7:10).

2 Kings 21:9
But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the children of Israel.

Not only were God's people unfaithful to Him, but also they sinned even more than the Canaanites before them had sinned.

2 Kings 21:10–12
And the LORD spake by his servants the prophets, saying, Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols: Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle.

Through Hosea, Joel, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Isaiah, God spoke so plainly and loudly to His people that their words would echo even after they

passed from the scene.

2 Kings 21:13 (a)
And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab . . .

The line and plummet here refer to the implements used to group together captives doomed to destruction (see 2 Samuel 8:2). Samaria had already been led into captivity. Jerusalem would suffer the same fate.

2 Kings 21:13 (b)
. . . and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down.

As polluted as they were, God's people deserved to be wiped out. Instead, God declares He would wipe them up.

2 Kings 21:14–16
And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies; Because they have done that which was evil in my sight, and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt, even unto this day. Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the LORD.

"They were sawn in two . . ." (Hebrews 11:37). Bible scholars believe this verse refers to Isaiah, who was sawn in half by Manasseh. Fifteen years earlier, the Lord had said to Hezekiah, "It's time to go home." But Hezekiah cried. So the Lord let him have his way. As a result, not only would the Babylonians have reason to invade Judah and carry God's people into captivity, but also Manasseh, the worst king in Judah's history, would be born.

Be careful, dear saint, what you insist upon, for it could have disastrous results. Unless you are in the center of God's will, the desire of your heart could lead to leanness in your soul (Psalm 106:15).

How much better it would have been had Hezekiah not tried to talk God into his plans, but just said, "Father, Thy will be done." We make so many mistakes by complaining and griping and murmuring about what God is doing in our lives. And sometimes the Father says, "If that's what you want, have your way." Saints, go with the flow of what God is doing. Yes, offer your requests, but always in submission to the perfect will of God.

2 Kings 21:17, 18 (a)
Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and all that he did, and his sin that he sinned, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And Manasseh slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza . . .

In 2 Chronicles 33, we read that after Manasseh was carried captive to Babylon, he repented and sought God. Eventually, he was restored to his kingdom, where he destroyed idolatry and reinstituted worship of the true and living God.

2 Kings 21:18 (b)–22
. . . and Amon his son reigned in his stead. Amon was twenty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Meshullemeth, the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh did. And he walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them: And he forsook the LORD God of his fathers, and walked not in the way of the LORD.

Rather than following the footsteps of his father's later years, Amon copied the idolatrous practices of Manasseh's earlier years.

2 Kings 21:23

And the servants of Amon conspired against him, and slew the king in his own house.

After only a two-year reign, Amon was killed by his own servants.

2 Kings 21:24–26
And the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead. Now the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And he was buried in his sepulchre in the garden of Uzza: and Josiah his son reigned in his stead.

In Josiah's ascension to the throne, two of Judah's worst kings were replaced by one of Judah's best kings.



22 At this point, Judah will enter a period of peace and prosperity resulting from revival and reformation during the reign of King Josiah. There were four great reformers, four great kings who ushered in revival in the country of Judah: Asa, Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat, and Josiah. But the reforms under Josiah went further and deeper than the reforms of any of the other reformers. In the life of Josiah, we see the reason for revival, the road to revival and the result of revival.

Revival is what every one of us longs for in some way. If your own heart is dry, you need a personal revival. If your children aren't walking with the Lord in the way you know they should, your family needs revival. If your workplace is an atmosphere of ungodliness and carnality, your colleagues need revival. Our God is the God of continual revival. And He *wants* to revive.

What is the reason for revival? One eight-year-old boy was totally in love with the Lord. And in him, the Lord had a base from which He could work. The reason for revival is found in one individual going all out for the things of God. As you study history and read of revivals, you will find

without exception that they begin with one individual excited about the Lord. All it takes is one.

"What difference can I make in my neighborhood or at my workplace?" we ask. "There are so many people, how could I affect that situation?" It only takes one . . .

In the late 1800s, there was a great evangelist named Gypsy Smith. He traveled the world, preaching on every continent. Wherever he preached, revival broke out. One day, a delegation of people came to him and said, "Reverend Smith, we desperately want to see revival in our area. It's so dry and dead. What can we do?"

Gypsy reportedly said, "Go home. Lock yourselves in your bedrooms. Take a piece of chalk. Draw a circle on the floor. Kneel in the circle and pray fervently that God would start a revival in that circle."

Revival doesn't begin by praying for your husband or wife, or praying for your boss. It begins when you get on your face before the Lord and say, "Let it begin with *me.*"

2 Kings 22:1, 2
Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.

A whitewater river guide once told me that the secret of whitewater canoeing is to stay in the "tongue," or the center, of the river because there are currents to the right and left that ultimately lead to a cracked canoe. That's what Josiah did. He didn't go to the right or the left. So often we, as Christians, can go off to the right. We can become very legalistic, thinking we alone are "right." The Pharisees veered off to the right. Or we drift to the left and become so liberal in our theology that we stand for nothing. The Sadducees did this. That is why the Lord calls us, like Josiah, to remain in the center.

2 Kings 22:3–6

And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, that the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the LORD, saying, Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people: And let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD: and let them give it to the doers of the work which is in the house of the LORD, to repair the breaches of the house, Unto carpenters, and builders, and masons, and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house.

In the life of Josiah, we see not only the reason for revival, but also seven steps on the road to revival. Step one is that the people repaired the breaches in the temple. According to Paul, we are the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16). We are living stones, Peter tells us, being fit together into a holy habitation (1 Peter 2:5). The Lord does not work where there is not love. That is why the first step on the road to revival is to repair the breaches. Jesus said that it was our love for each other that would identify us as His disciples (John 13:35). Love is patient and kind, not easily provoked. Love thinks no evil, believes all things, bears all things, and endures all things. Love never fails (1 Corinthians 13).

When you're truly in love with the Lord, you're no longer interested in strife and faultfinding. "If you come before the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you," Jesus said, "leave your gift, be reconciled with your brother, and then present your gift at the altar" (Matthew 5:23, 24). When you're seeking the Lord at the altar, listen for Him telling you how to repair the breaches.

2 Kings 22:7, 8

Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully. And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.

Following the repair of the breaches, the second step on the road to revival is the rediscovery of God's Word. Evidently, Manasseh and Amon had attempted to destroy all of the copies of the Law. But one copy was stuck away in a corner of the temple and was uncovered during the rebuilding project. It intrigues me that the Word of God was lost in the house of God. But, in a sense, that's what often happens today. Churches meet, but there is no emphasis on studying or knowing the Scriptures. As a result, the Word is lost in liturgy, buried in ritual. Manasseh attempted to destroy the Word, but he couldn't, for the Word of God is everlasting (Matthew 5:18).

When revival touches your heart, you inevitably rediscover the Word. The Word can be read aloud from Genesis to Revelation in only seventy hours and forty minutes. The New Testament can be read in eighteen hours and twenty-eight minutes. The Gospel of Luke can be read in two hours and forty-three minutes. In other words, in less than three hours, you can become acquainted or reacquainted with Jesus as you read Luke's Gospel.

This one copy of the Word was uncovered in the day of restoration and revival. That's what always happens in a true revival. There's an appreciation and reemphasis on the Word.

2 Kings 22:9, 10
And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD. And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

This single copy of the Law wasn't placed in an airtight container inside a museum. No, it was read. The key is to *read* the Bible, not just have to own one.

2 Kings 22:11
And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes.

Repentance from error is the third step on the road to revival. Realizing how far off course they were from where they should have been, Josiah tore his clothes in a sign of brokenness.

2 Kings 22:12, 13
And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying, Go ye, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.

A request for instruction is the fourth step on the road to revival. Paul did the same thing. On the road to Damascus, he was knocked to the ground by the Lord. When he realized he was talking to Jesus, Paul said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). I don't know what the Lord would have you do when He brings revival to your soul. Maybe He'll have you start a Bible study at your job or in your neighborhood. Maybe He'll have you visit people in the hospital or take care of some kids in the nursery. I do know that as you seek Him, He'll show you something to do practically if, like Josiah, you request instruction.

2 Kings 22:14
So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her.

At this time, both Jeremiah and Zephaniah were on the scene in Judah. Yet when Josiah heard the Word, he sought out Huldah, a woman who had insight and sensitivity to the Spirit of God.

2 Kings 22:15–20

And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched. But to the king of Judah which sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard; Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.

The Lord's answer through Huldah was that hard times would come but, because Josiah's heart was tender and because he humbled himself, Judah would not experience judgment in his lifetime.

If there was a revival taking place and people were getting right with the Lord, why would judgment still come?

The reason is that, because a crop of sin was planted, the harvest would inevitably come. For years, these people had slaughtered their children, forsaken the Lord, and practiced hideous abominations. Consequently, those things that took place would have repercussions. That is why the Bible says, "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (see Galatians 6:7). Sin always brings about repercussions.

Secondly, although Josiah humbled himself and was tenderhearted, the movement of the people toward the Lord was neither very sincere nor very deep (Jeremiah 7:4). In any revival, there are three kinds of believers. Some are rowboats who must be pushed to move in any direction. Others are

sailboats who keep changing course depending upon the direction of the wind. But a third group are steamboats, people who make up their minds and go in a given direction regardless of wind or weather. Josiah was a steamboat. He had a heart for the Lord, a love for God, and was determined that nothing would pull him to the right or left.

At this point, if I were Josiah, having heard Huldah's prophecy, I'm afraid I would have said, "If judgment is coming, forget the revival." And yet in chapter 23, he continues bringing about reforms, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord.

Rowboat, sailboat, steamboat—which boat are you?



23 2 Kings 23:1–3

And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.

After repairing the breaches, rediscovering God's Word, repenting from error, and requesting instruction, the fifth stop on the road to revival is to respond outwardly. Reading the entire Pentateuch would have been quite a lengthy study and yet this was Josiah's outward response to the revival taking place in his own soul.

The same is still true. When revival really happens, you're ready to take your stand, to go to your knees, to come forward to the altar. "Cool" Christianity melts in the fire of revival and you're willing to do whatever it takes to draw near to God.

During the old summer camps, I can recall every Friday night there was a bonfire service in which all of us were given a little pinecone. Those who had been touched by the Lord would walk down to the fire and throw their pinecone in as if to say, "Lord, that's my life. I give it to You. Consume me. Burn through me." Some people dismiss practices like this as nothing more than an emotional release. I, however, disagree. I praise the Lord for the hundreds of pinecones I chucked into summer camp fires because, to me, each one was meaningful. Sure, they were emotional moments but the Lord made us emotional beings. There's a time to express our emotions and to take a stand. Josiah took his by reading the Word.

2 Kings 23:4–7
And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel. And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven. And he brought out the grove from the house of the LORD, without Jerusa lem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people. And he brake down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the grove.

In the sixth step of revival, we see the removal of sin. Inside the temple, there were actually altars and idols to false gods. Josiah ordered them removed, burned, ground to powder, and stomped on.

Too often, we think this sixth step of revival should actually be the first step—that there must be removal of sin before revival can be experienced. But such is not the case. Throughout Scripture, we see repentance only as a

response to the movement of God. In other words, we are so carnal that we cannot remove sin ourselves. God moves first and we simply respond.

Paul tells us it is the goodness of God that leads men to repentance (Romans 2:4). We have it all backwards. Too often, we preach the conviction of sin before we preach the goodness of God. But when you begin to know and experience, to taste and see the goodness of God, your taste for sin turns sour.

In 1904 one of the greatest revivals in history took place in Wales. A coal miner named Evans Robert was touched by the grace of God. Unlearned and ineloquent, he nonetheless began to teach and preach in the streets. People responded to his message to such a degree that within one year, there was not one functioning pub in Wales. They all closed, not because Christians picketed, but because no one was going. Morality cannot be legislated. Revival is what is needed because when people are touched by the Lord, their lives begin to change and sin begins to be removed. You don't fight darkness by fighting darkness. You turn on the light. When the Lord's love and light come into a life, the darkness is dispelled automatically.

2 Kings 23:8–10
And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beer-sheba, and brake down the high places of the gates that were in the entering in of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on a man's left hand at the gate of the city. Nevertheless the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren. And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech.

Directly below Jerusalem is a small valley called the valley of Hinnom, which became synonymous with Gehenna of hell because it was the place the Jews sacrificed their children to Molech. They called this area *Topheth,*

which refers to the drums that were played loudly and steadily to drown out the cries.

> **2 Kings 23:11–14**
> **And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the chamberlain, which was in the suburbs, and burned the chariots of the sun with fire. And the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, did the king beat down, and brake them down from thence, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron. And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile. And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men.**

Josiah transformed the places where idolatrous worship practices had taken place into cemeteries. Why? Because the Jews respected places of burial and, thus, would not turn these places back into centers of idolatry.

> **2 Kings 23:15**
> **Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove.**

Here we see Josiah ushering in revival not only in Judah, but also in Bethel, which was to the north in Israel. That's always the way it is with true revival—it always spreads beyond its own boundaries. Even though at this point most of Israel had been carried away into Assyria, some of God's people remained in the area and Josiah was concerned about this remnant.

2 Kings 23:16–20

And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words. Then he said, What title is that that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the sepulchre of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Bethel. And he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria. And all the houses also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the LORD to anger, Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Bethel. And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem.

When Jeroboam built an altar in Bethel in order to keep his people from traveling to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices, a man of God prophesied of the day when the altar would be destroyed by a man named Josiah and that the bones of the prophets would be burned upon it. Three hundred years had passed and the prophecy was now being fulfilled to the letter (1 Kings 13:2).

If you're wondering why certain promises the Lord has either spoken to you through His Word, or written on your heart have yet to be fulfilled, don't give up. The Lord's timing is not ours. His is perfect.

2 Kings 23:21–23

And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the LORD your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant. Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah; But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, wherein this passover was holden to the LORD in Jerusalem.

The seventh and last step on the road to revival is the restoration of the ordinances. For hundreds of years, Passover had been forgotten. The celebration commemorating deliverance from Egypt and pointing to the Lamb of God—Jesus Christ—was ignored for centuries. But in the midst of revival, it was celebrated and observed again.

During the days of true revival, New Testament believers desire to return to the New Testament equivalent of Passover, the Lord's Table. This should not be surprising, for the result of real revival in the heart of people is a love for Jesus.

2 Kings 23:24, 25

Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD. And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.

Josiah was a singularly spiritual man—a great man in the eyes of God.

2 Kings 23:26–28

Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there. Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

The life of Josiah is seen in greater depth in the Book of Second Chronicles. But there is one final note concerning his life. He was a great

man and godly king and yet, in a sense, he died prematurely, for the next passage tells us something he did that was unwise . . .

2 Kings 23:29, 30
In his days Pharaoh-nechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him. And his servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own sepulchre. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his father's stead.

Pharaoh-nechoh, king of Egypt, marched his troops to war against the Assyrians. Although this was none of his business, Josiah decided to get involved. Second Chronicles explains the situation more fully. "Do not meddle in this matter," Pharaoh-nechoh said to Josiah. But Josiah hearkened not to the word of God coming through Pharaoh-nechoh and it cost him his life (2 Chronicles 35).

Sometimes, like Josiah, we think we must jump into a situation or straighten out a matter, only to find ourselves defeated in the process. When we realize we don't have to jump into every fight, figure out every problem, or solve every situation, we spare ourselves much needless hurt and pain. Be careful. Josiah was a good king, a great man, but he got involved in a battle not meant for him.

2 Kings 23:31–33
Jehoahaz was twenty and three years old when he began to reign; and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done. And Pharaoh-nechoh put him in bands at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and put the land to a tribute of an hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold.

Pharaoh-nechoh taxed Judah three and three-fourth tons of silver and seventy-five pounds of gold.

2 Kings 23:34
And Pharaoh-nechoh made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the room of Josiah his father, and turned his name to Jehoiakim, and took Jehoahaz away: and he came to Egypt, and died there.

Pharaoh-nechoh installed Josiah's brother, Jehoahaz, as king of Judah and changed his name to Jehoiakim. It was a custom in that culture that if you ruled over someone else, you would change his name as a reminder of his subordination to you and of your authority over him.

2 Kings 23:35–37
And Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give the money according to the commandment of Pharaoh: he exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of every one according to his taxation, to give it unto Pharaoh-nechoh. Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Zebudah, the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.

Jehoiakim's chief function was to collect taxes for Pharaoh-necoh. In this, I am reminded of another tax collector who collected money from God's people to give to a foreign ruler. Yet while Matthew and Jehoiakim performed the same duty, they didn't share the same devotion. Jehoiakim turned away from God. Matthew, on the other hand, heard the call of the Son of God and followed Him.



24 During this time, world power was in the process of shifting from Assyria to Babylon. The Assyrians swept away the ten northern tribes

into captivity. But now there's a transition taking place. In 612 B.C., the capital city of Assyria fell and the Babylonians emerged on the scene.

2 Kings 24:1 (a)
In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years . . .

As Nebuchadnezzar swept through the Middle East, he stopped off in Judah and in the year 605 B.C., he put Jehoiakim in his control and carried away the cream of the crop of the young men of Judah—a group that included a young man named Daniel.

2 Kings 24:1 (b)–4
. . . then he turned and rebelled against him. And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets. Surely at the commandment of the LORD came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; And also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the LORD would not pardon.

Notice how Manasseh's name keeps resurfacing. At this point, fifty years had passed since he died, but the effects of his sin were still being felt. This sobers me because it shows that sin has a rippling effect for a long time. God puts this in His Word to warn and caution us. "Be sure your sins will find you out," God declares (Numbers 32:23). If you're involved in sin, stop now. Confess, repent, and stay away from it because the Lord warns us that the effects of sin have far-reaching repercussions for years to come.

2 Kings 24:5–12
Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers: and Jehoiachin his

son reigned in his stead. And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land: for the king of Babylon had taken from the river of Egypt unto the river Euphrates all that pertained to the king of Egypt. Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. And his mother's name was Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done. At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants did besiege it. And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign.

The year now is 597 B.C. In 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar made his first sweep through the area. Here is his second sweep. This time, he takes all of the treasures out of the house of the Lord.

2 Kings 24:13, 14
And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said. And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land.

The poor people were left behind—an illustration of the fact that wealth is oftentimes more trouble than it's worth.

2 Kings 24:15–20
And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty of

the land, those carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. And all the men of might, even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all that were strong and apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon. And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his father's brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah. Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

Here is Zedekiah, an evil "puppet" ruler in charge of a peasant people. After ruling for eleven years, he rebelled, which brought Nebuchadnezzar down for a third time, this time determined to destroy Judah completely.



25 **2 Kings 25:1–3**

And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about. And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land.

As Nebuchadnezzar and his forces surround the city of Jerusalem, famine and fear set in.

2 Kings 25:4

And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's

garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about:) and the king went the way toward the plain.

There seems to be historical proof that Zedekiah escaped through a secret passageway carved by Solomon.

2 Kings 25:5–7
And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him. So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.

This solves a mystery in prophecy. Concerning Zedekiah, Jeremiah said, "Your eyes shall behold the king of Babylon" (see Jeremiah 34:3). At the same time, however, Ezekiel said, "Your eyes shall not see Babylon" (Ezekiel 12:13). Zedekiah was captured as he ran from Jerusalem. He was brought before the king of Babylon in Judah. There, his eyes were poked out and he was carried captive to Babylon. Two prophets were on the scene, both making seemingly opposite statements. Who was right? History shows they both were.

2 Kings 25:8, 9
And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzar-adan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem: And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire.

The temple, palace, and the costliest homes of Jerusalem were burned.

2 Kings 25:10–12

And all the army of the Chaldees, that were Now the rest of the people that were left in the city, and the fugitives that fell away to the king of Babylon, with the remnant of the multitude, did Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carry away. But the captain of the guard left of the poor of the land to be vinedressers and husbandmen.

The poor were allowed to remain in Judah in order to keep the land from reverting to wilderness.

2 Kings 25:13–21
And the pillars of brass that were in the house of the LORD, and the bases, and the brasen sea that was in the house of the LORD, did the Chaldees break in pieces, and carried the brass of them to Babylon. And the pots, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the spoons, and all the vessels of brass wherewith they ministered, took they away. And the firepans, and the bowls, and such things as were of gold, in gold, and of silver, in silver, the captain of the guard took away. The two pillars, one sea, and the bases which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD; the brass of all these vessels was without weight. The height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits, and the chapiter upon it was brass: and the height of the chapiter three cubits; and the wreathen work, and pomegranates upon the chapiter round about, all of brass: and like unto these had the second pillar with wreathen work. And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the door: And out of the city he took an officer that was set over the men of war, and five men of them that were in the king's presence, which were found in the city, and the principal scribe of the host, which mustered the people of the land, and threescore men of the people of the land that were found in the city: And Nebuzar-adan captain of the guard took these, and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah: And the king of Babylon smote them, and slew them at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was carried away out of their land.

This was the third and final deportation. Jerusalem is now smoldering. The temple is destroyed; the palace is gone; the neighborhoods are ransacked.

2 Kings 25:22–24
And as for the people that remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, even over them he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, ruler. And when all the captains of the armies, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor, there came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, even Ishmael the son of Nethahiah, and Johanan the son of Careah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of a Maachathite, they and their men. And Gedaliah sware to them, and to their men, and said unto them, Fear not to be the servants of the Chaldees: dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon; and it shall be well with you.

From Jeremiah 26:24, we know that Gedaliah was Jeremiah's friend. Nebuchadnezzar put him in a position of authority over the remnant in Judah. Gedaliah wisely counseled them to dwell peaceably under Babylonian rule.

2 Kings 25:25
But it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed royal, came, and ten men with him, and smote Gedaliah, that he died, and the Jews and the Chaldees that were with him at Mizpah.

Gedaliah was warned in Jeremiah 40:13–16 that Ishmael was going to do him in. But, failing to take heed to the warning, Gedaliah lost his life.

2 Kings 25:26, 27
And all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the armies, arose, and came to Egypt: for they were afraid of the Chaldees. And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on

the seven and twentieth day of the month, that Evil-merodach king of Babylon in the year that he began to reign did lift up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison;

Here, thirty-six years after Jehoiachin was carried into captivity, Evil-merodach, the son of Nebuchadnezzar comes into power. Upon ascending the throne, he freed Jehoiachin.

2 Kings 25:28–30
And he spake kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon; And changed his prison garments: and he did eat bread continually before him all the days of his life. And his allowance was a continual allowance given him of the king, a daily rate for every day, all the days of his life.

Why did Evil-merodach show kindness to Jehoiachin? History tells us he was in prison himself for a short time. Possibly having been in prison himself, he felt compassion for others in prison. Some Jewish writers say that Evil-merodach was converted to a true understanding of God by Daniel. That is very possible.

Perhaps, like Daniel, you feel like you're in a confusing or foreign situation. That's okay. The Lord might have an Evil-merodach with whom you're to share.

An infinitely Greater than Evil-merodach came to us when we were blinded and imprisoned by sin, for Jesus Himself came to us. We don't deserve it, but because of what He endured, He came to us compassionately and lovingly.

Is your head down? Are you discouraged and depressed and defeated? The Lord longs to lift up your head and speak kindly to you. No wonder people marveled at the gracious words He spoke (Luke 4:22). Want to hear kind words? Read the Gospel of Matthew and listen to Jesus.

Evil-merodach set Jehoiachin above other kings. Paul tells us we have been seated with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). Evil-merodach changed Jehoiachin's prison garments. We have been robed in Jesus'

righteousness (Isaiah 61:10). Evil-merodach provided food for Jehoiachin all the days of his life. Jesus invites us to dine at His Table continually.

The Book of Second Kings ends with the brightness of Evil-merodach set against the darkness of Judah's captivity. If you find yourself "held captive" by one dark circumstance or another, look for the brightness of the inexplicable grace and kindness of Jesus to meet you there, and fellowship with you all the days of your life.



1 CHRONICLES

Background to 1 & 2 Chronicles

Although we can't be dogmatic, it is believed that the author of 1 and 2 Chronicles was Ezra the scribe. First and Second Chronicles are, in a sense, a repetition of the Books of 1 and 2 Kings. There is a difference, however, because 1 and 2 Kings deal both with the kingdom of Judah in the south and the kingdom of Israel in the north, while 1 and 2 Chronicles deal exclusively with the kingdom of Judah.

Although many of the stories in these books also appear in 1 and 2 Kings, we must remember that whenever the Father repeats Himself in His Word, it is not because He is at a loss for new things to say. No, He repeats that we might receive. The gospels are repeated four times because the Father does not want any of us to miss the message of Jesus. These stories concerning David and the kings are important illustrations of practical truth.



1 CHRONICLES

1 The first nine chapters of the Book of 1 Chronicles deal primarily with genealogies. Genealogies were important to the Jews for ministry and they are important to us prophetically. You see, anyone who desired to serve the Lord in the temple had to prove that he was of the tribe of Levi. Priests themselves were further required to be descendants of Aaron. Therefore, genealogies were vital to establish pedigree. In addition, they are also important prophetically, for they are exacting records for the skeptic to see how Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised centuries before He appeared on the scene.

1 Chronicles 1:1 (a)
Adam . . .

Adam is always a good place to begin any genealogy.

1 Chronicles 1:1 (b)–4 (a)
. . . Sheth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalaleel, Jered, Henoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah . . .

The first ten names that appear in the genealogy of Genesis 2 take us back to the very beginning of humanity. The meaning of these first ten names shed light on a most intriguing revelation . . .

- *Adam* means "Man."
- *Seth* means "Appointed."
- *Enosh* means "Subject to death."
- *Kenan* means "Sorrowful."
- *Mahaleel* means "From the presence of God."
- *Jered* means "One comes down."
- *Henoch* means "Dedicated."
- *Methuselah* means "Dying, he shall send."

• *Lamech* means "To the poor brought very low."
• *Noah* means "Comfort, or rest."

Read together, these literal meanings form the gospel: Man, appointed, subject to death, sorrowful. From the presence of God, One comes down, dedicated. Dying, He shall send to the poor brought very low, comfort, or rest.

1 Chronicles 1:4 (b)–7
. . . Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras. And the sons of Gomer; Ashchenaz, and Riphath, and Togarmah. And the sons of Javan; Elishah, and Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim.

The sons of Japheth eventually inhabited present-day Europe.

1 Chronicles 1:8–16
The sons of Ham; Cush, and Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. And the sons of Cush; Seba, and Havilah, and Sabta, and Raamah, and Sabtecha. And the sons of Raamah; Sheba, and Dedan. And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be mighty upon the earth. And Mizraim begat Ludim, and Anamim, and Lehabim, and Naphtuhim, And Pathrusim, and Casluhim, (of whom came the Philistines,) and Caphthorim. And Canaan begat Zidon his firstborn, and Heth, The Jebusite also, and the Amorite, and the Girgashite, And the Hivite, and the Arkite, and the Sinite, And the Arvadite, and the Zemarite, and the Hamathite.

The sons of Ham eventually migrated south, inhabiting Africa.

1 Chronicles 1:17, 18 (a)
The sons of Shem; Elam, and Asshur, and Arphaxad, and Lud, and Aram, and Uz, and Hul, and Gether, and Meshech. And Arphaxad begat Shelah . . .

The sons of Shemor—Semites—remained in the region of the Middle East.

1 Chronicles 1:18 (b)
. . . and Shelah begat Eber.

Eber is the name from which we get the word "Hebrew."

1 Chronicles 1:19
And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg; because in his days the earth was divided: and his brother's name was Joktan.

There are two possible meanings of this phrase, "the earth was divided." It could refer to the dispersion that took place at the tower of Babel. Or, it could refer to a geological movement of the continents—today called "the continental drift."

1 Chronicles 1:20–27
And Joktan begat Almodad, and Sheleph, and Hazarmaveth, and Jerah, Hadoram also, and Uzal, and Diklah, And Ebal, and Abimael, and Sheba, And Ophir, and Havilah, and Jobab. All these were the sons of Joktan. Shem, Arphaxad, Shelah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terah, Abram; the same is Abraham.

The line is traced from Shem to Abraham and, at this point, the genealogical record changes from that of the world population to that of a specific family. Adam is the father of all flesh, but Abraham is the father of all faithful.

1 Chronicles 1:28
The sons of Abraham; Isaac, and Ishmael.

These are the fathers of the Jews and Arabs. Because Abraham decided to help God out, he birthed Ishmael through Hagar instead of waiting for the promised child through Sarah.

If you are feeling impatient concerning a given situation, don't try to work it out in your own fleshly abilities or understanding. It can lead to real difficulty. Ask Isaac and Ishmael.

1 Chronicles 1:29–32
These are their generations: The firstborn of Ishmael, Nebaioth; then Kedar, and Adbeel, and Mibsam, Mishma and Dumah, Massa, Hadad, and Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These are the sons of Ishmael. Now the sons of Keturah, Abraham's concubine: she bare Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. And the sons of Jokshan; Sheba, and Dedan.

After Sarah died, Abraham married a woman named Keturah, who gave birth to Midian. The Midianites were a continual problem to the Israelites, but they, like the Ishmaelites, had a common father in Abraham.

1 Chronicles 1:33, 34
And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Epher, and Henoch, and Abida, and Eldaah. All these are the sons of Keturah. And Abraham begat Isaac. The sons of Isaac; Esau and Israel.

Israel's name was originally Jacob, or "heel snatcher." But when God changed his character from one who tripped people up to one who was governed by God, his name was correspondingly changed from Jacob to Israel.

1 Chronicles 1:35
The sons of Esau; Eliphaz, Reuel, and Jeush, and Jaalam, and Korah.

The sons of Esau are known as the Edomites (Genesis 25:30).

1 Chronicles 1:36–43 (a)
The sons of Eliphaz; Teman, and Omar, Zephi, and Gatam, Kenaz, and Timna, and Amalek. The sons of Reuel; Nahath,

Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. And the sons of Seir; Lotan, and Shobal, and Zibeon, and Anah, and Dishon, and Ezer, and Dishan. And the sons of Lothan; Hori, and Homam: and Timna was Lotan's sister. The sons of Shobal; Alian, and Manahath, and Ebal, Shephi, and Onam. And the sons of Zibeon; Aiah, and Anah. The sons of Anah; Dishon. And the sons of Dishon; Amram, and Eshban, and Ithran, and Cheran. The sons of Ezer; Bilhan, and Zavan, and Jakan. The sons of Dishan; Uz, and Aran. Now these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the children of Israel . . .

The Edomites established a royal heirarchy. The descendants of Jacob, on the other hand, were not to have a king over them because God was to be their Sovereign.

1 Chronicles 1:43 (b), 44
. . . Bela the son of Beor: and the name of his city was Dinhabah. And when Bela was dead, Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his stead.

Some Bible scholars believe Jobab was Job. If this is true, his position as ruler would explain his wealth, as well as his standing in the community.

1 Chronicles 1:45–54
And when Jobab was dead, Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his stead. And when Husham was dead, Hadad the son of Bedad, which smote Midian in the field of Moab, reigned in his stead: and the name of his city was Avith. And when Hadad was dead, Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his stead. And when Samlah was dead, Shaul of Rehoboth by the river reigned in his stead. And when Shaul was dead, Baalhanan the son of Achbor reigned in his stead. And when Baalhanan was dead, Hadad reigned in his stead: and the name of his city was Pai; and his wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mezahab. Hadad died also. And the dukes of Edom were; duke Timnah, duke Aliah, duke Jetheth, Duke Aholibamah, duke Elah, duke

Pinon, Duke Kenaz, duke Teman, duke Mibzar, Duke Magdiel, duke Iram. These are the dukes of Edom.

According to archaeological evidence, the kingdom of Edom was founded during the thirteenth century B.C. In the ensuing four centuries, the government changed from being run by tribal chiefs to that of a monarchy. It was one of the kings of Edom who refused to allow the Israelites to pass through his country on the way to the Promised Land (Numbers 20:14–21).



2 1 Chronicles 2:1, 2
These are the sons of Israel; Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, and Zebu lun, Dan, Joseph, and Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher.

These, of course, are the twelve patriarchs of Israel.

1 Chronicles 2:3
The sons of Judah; Er, and Onan, and Shelah: which three were born unto him of the daughter of Shua the Canaanitess. And Er, the firstborn of Judah, was evil in the sight of the LORD; and he slew him.

Here, the genealogy follows the line of Judah.

1 Chronicles 2:4–7
And Tamar his daughter in law bare him Pharez and Zerah. All the sons of Judah were five. The sons of Pharez; Hezron, and Hamul. And the sons of Zerah; Zimri, and Ethan, and Heman, and Calcol, and Dara: five of them in all. And the sons of Carmi; Achar, the troubler of Israel, who transgressed in the thing accursed.

The lives of both Er and Acher, or Achan, are summed up by the sins that characterized them. No doubt Er and Achan did good things in their lives.

But those things are not recorded. Rather, the sin they committed characterized them. Therefore, I wonder if it wouldn't be good for us to say, "If my life had to be summed up in one sentence, what would that one sentence be?" I think it's a good thing to occasionally say, "What is the sum total of my life thus far? If my name were in this record, what would be written?"

1 Chronicles 2:8–11
And the sons of Ethan; Azariah. The sons also of Hezron, that were born unto him; Jerahmeel, and Ram, and Chelubai. And Ram begat Amminadab; and Amminadab begat Nahshon, prince of the children of Judah; And Nahshon begat Salma, and Salma begat Boaz,

The wonderful story of Boaz, a picture of our own Kinsman Redeemer—Jesus Christ—is seen in the Book of Ruth.

1 Chronicles 2:12
And Boaz begat Obed, and Obed begat Jesse,

Jesse would have eight sons, his most famous, of course, being David, the man after God's own heart.

1 Chronicles 2:13–15
And Jesse begat his firstborn Eliab, and Abinadab the second, and Shimma the third, Nethaneel the fourth, Raddai the fifth, Ozem the sixth, David the seventh:

David was Jesse's eighth son (1 Samuel 16:10, 11). Why are only seven listed here? No doubt because one died during childhood.

1 Chronicles 2:16
Whose sisters were Zeruiah, and Abigail. And the sons of Zeruiah; Abishai, and Joab, and Asahel, three.

Abishai, Joab, and Asahel, nephews of David, would become generals in his army.

1 Chronicles 2:17
And Abigail bare Amasa: and the father of Amasa was Jether the Ishmeelite.

Amasa, a cousin of Abishai, Joab, and Asahel, sided with another cousin named Absalom. Absalom was David's rebellious son and Amasa would be his general.

1 Chronicles 2:18–20
And Caleb the son of Hezron begat children of Azubah his wife, and of Jerioth: her sons are these; Jesher, and Shobab, and Ardon. And when Azubah was dead, Caleb took unto him Ephrath, which bare him Hur. And Hur begat Uri, and Uri begat Bezaleel.

The majority of those listed in the remainder of chapter 2 are mentioned nowhere else in Scripture. Bezaleel, however, is an exception as he was uniquely gifted by God to work on the tabernacle (Exodus 31:2).

1 Chronicles 2:21–55
And afterward Hezron went in to the daughter of Machir the father of Gilead, whom he married when he was threescore years old; and she bare him Segub. And Segub begat Jair, who had three and twenty cities in the land of Gilead. And he took Geshur, and Aram, with the towns of Jair, from them, with Kenath, and the towns thereof, even threescore cities. All these belonged to the sons of Machir the father of Gilead. And after that Hezron was dead in Calebephratah, then Abiah Hezron's wife bare him Ashur the father of Tekoa. And the sons of Jerahmeel the firstborn of Hezron were, Ram the firstborn, and Bunah, and Oren, and Ozem, and Ahijah. Jerahmeel had also another wife, whose name was Atarah; she was the mother of Onam. And the sons of Ram the firstborn of Jerahmeel were, Maaz, and Jamin,

and Eker. And the sons of Onam were, Shammai, and Jada. And the sons of Shammai; Nadab, and Abishur. And the name of the wife of Abishur was Abihail, and she bare him Ahban, and Molid. And the sons of Nadab; Seled, and Appaim: but Seled died without children. And the sons of Appaim; Ishi. And the sons of Ishi; Sheshan. And the children of Sheshan; Ahlai. And the sons of Jada the brother of Shammai; Jether and Jonathan: and Jether died without children. And the sons of Jonathan; Peleth, and Zaza. These were the sons of Jerahmeel. Now Sheshan had no sons, but daughters. And Sheshan had a servant, an Egyptian, whose name was Jarha. And Sheshan gave his daughter to Jarha his servant to wife; and she bare him Attai. And Attai begat Nathan, and Nathan begat Zabad, And Zabad begat Ephlal, and Ephlal begat Obed, And Obed begat Jehu, and Jehu begat Azariah, And Azariah begat Helez, and Helez begat Eleasah, And Eleasah begat Sisamai, and Sisamai begat Shallum, And Shallum begat Jekamiah, and Jekamiah begat Elishama. Now the sons of Caleb the brother of Jerahmeel were, Mesha his firstborn, which was the father of Ziph; and the sons of Mareshah the father of Hebron. And the sons of Hebron; Korah, and Tappuah, and Rekem, and Shema. And Shema begat Raham, the father of Jorkoam: and Rekem begat Shammai. And the son of Shammai was Maon: and Maon was the father of Bethzur. And Ephah, Caleb's concubine, bare Haran, and Moza, and Gazez: and Haran begat Gazez. And the sons of Jahdai; Regem, and Jotham, and Geshan, and Pelet, and Ephah, and Shaaph. Maachah, Caleb's concubine, bare Sheber, and Tirhanah. She bare also Shaaph the father of Madmannah, Sheva the father of Machbenah, and the father of Gibea: and the daughter of Caleb was Achsah. These were the sons of Caleb the son of Hur, the firstborn of Ephratah; Shobal the father of Kirjath-jearim, Salma the father of Bethlehem, Hareph the father of Beth-gader. And Shobal the father of Kirjath-jearim had sons; Haroeh, and half of the Manahethites. And the families of Kirjath-jearim; the Ithrites, and the Puhites, and the Shumathites, and the Mishraites; of them came the Zareathites, and the Eshtaulites.

The sons of Salma; Bethlehem, and the Netophathites, Ataroth, the house of Joab, and half of the Manahethites, the Zorites. And the families of the scribes which dwelt at Jabez; the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, and Suchathites. These are the Kenites that came of Hemath, the father of the house of Rechab.

So ends the list of the descendants of Judah—David's ancestors and the tribe into which the Son of David would be born.



3

In chapter 3, we come to David's personal genealogy.

1 Chronicles 3:1 (a)
Now these were the sons of David, which were born unto him in Hebron . . .

David had nineteen sons, the best of which was Solomon. And even Solomon became entangled in fleshly pursuits in his latter years. It has been suggested that the reason David, who was a man after God's own heart, had nineteen bad sons is because he was so busy tending the kingdom, he didn't take time to train his children, setting in motion the classic example of the "preacher's kid" syndrome. We can indeed get so involved in the work of the kingdom that we neglect the training of our children. This must not be. Therefore, pray for those in the ministry because Satan likes nothing better than to cause havoc in the family in order to discredit one's ministry.

1 Chronicles 3:1 (b)–5
. . . the firstborn Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; the second Daniel, of Abigail the Carmelitess: The third, Absalom the son of Maachah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur: the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith: The fifth, Shephatiah of Abital: the sixth, Ithream by Eglah his wife. These six were born unto him in Hebron; and there he reigned seven years and six months: and in

Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years. And these were born unto him in Jerusalem; Shimea, and Shobab, and Nathan, and Solomon, four, of Bathshua the daughter of Ammiel:

One of David's sons was named Nathan. I call this to your attention because Nathan the prophet was the one who pointed out David's otherwise secret sins of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. The Bible says that "faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Proverbs 27:6). In other words, it is a sign of love when someone speaks the truth (Ephesians 4:15). So much did David value Nathan's honesty that he evidently named one of his sons after him.

1 Chronicles 3:6–16
Ibhar also, and Elishama, and Eliphelet, And Nogah, and Nepheg, and Japhia, And Elishama, and Eliada, and Eliphelet, nine. These were all the sons of David, beside the sons of the concubines, and Tamar their sister. And Solomon's son was Rehoboam, Abia his son, Asa his son, Jehoshaphat his son, Joram his son, Ahaziah his son, Joash his son, Amaziah his son, Azariah his son, Jotham his son, Ahaz his son, Hezekiah his son, Manasseh his son, Amon his son, Josiah his son. And the sons of Josiah were, the firstborn Johanan, the second Jehoiakim, the third Zedekiah, the fourth Shallum. And the sons of Jehoiakim: Jeconiah his son, Zedekiah his son.

The names in verses 1 through 16 represent the succession of David's throne to the point when Judah was carried into captivity.

1 Chronicles 3:17–24
And the sons of Jeconiah; Assir, Salathiel his son, Malchiram also, and Pedaiah, and Shenazar, Jecamiah, Hoshama, and Nedabiah. And the sons of Pedaiah were, Zerubbabel, and Shimei: and the sons of Zerubbabel; Meshullam, and Hananiah, and Shelomith their sister: And Hashubah, and Ohel, and Berechiah, and Hasadiah, Jushabhesed, five. And the sons of Hananiah; Pelatiah, and Jesaiah: the sons of Rephaiah, the sons of Arnan, the sons of

Obadiah, the sons of Shechaniah. And the sons of Shechaniah; Shemaiah; and the sons of Shemaiah; Hattush, and Igeal, and Bariah, and Neariah, and Shaphat, six. And the sons of Neariah; Elioenai, and Hezekiah, and Azrikam, three. And the sons of Elioenai were, Hodaiah, and Eliashib, and Pelaiah, and Akkub, and Johanan, and Dalaiah, and Anani, seven.

The names in verses 17 through 24 delineate the royal line following the return of the Jews to the Promised Land.



4 1 Chronicles 4:1–9

The sons of Judah; Pharez, Hezron, and Carmi, and Hur, and Shobal. And Reaiah the son of Shobal begat Jahath; and Jahath begat Ahumai and Lahad. These are the families of the Zorathites. And these were of the father of Etam; Jezreel, and Ishma, and Idbash: and the name of their sister was Hazelelponi: And Penuel the father of Gedor and Ezer the father of Hushah. These are the sons of Hur, the firstborn of Ephratah, the father of Bethlehem. And Ashur the father of Tekoa had two wives, Helah and Naarah. And Naarah bare him Ahuzam, and Hepher, and Temeni, and Haahashtari. These were the sons of Naarah. And the sons of Helah were, Zereth, and Jezoar, and Ethnan. And Coz begat Anub, and Zobebah, and the families of Aharhel the son of Harum. And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow.

Jabez was one who experienced such success and prosperity that he had more honor than his brothers. In 1 Chronicles 2:55, we read that a city dedicated to the scribes, the intellectual community of the day, was named after him. Jabez was a man who was singularly blessed and very successful. But it wasn't always that way, for here we see that when he was born, his mother called him "sorrowful." Why? Perhaps it was because he had a birth defect, or perhaps he was an unwanted child coming into an already-

crowded home. Jabez experienced prosperity to be sure, but he also had problems to overcome. How did he do this? Read on . . .

1 Chronicles 4:10
And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested.

The secret of Jabez's success wasn't due to a seminar he attended or to a book he purchased. Jabez's success was due to the fact that he was a man of prayer. James says we have not because we ask not (4:2). It's that simple. The Lord is continually asking His people to ask. "Call unto Me," He says in Jeremiah 33, "and I will show you great and mighty things which you know not."

"Ask, seek, and knock that you might receive and the door might be opened unto you," Jesus said (see Matthew 7:7).

How is your prayer life? Are you experiencing success and prosperity? The pathway to prosperity is prayer. Pray. And pray more. And pray still more.

Prayer is vital. We know that. But here's the problem: Because we know it, we think we're doing it. If the stopwatch was on this past week, how much time would it show that you've actually spent in prayer? God loves you no matter whether you're praying or not. But the blessings He is waiting to pour out upon you, your ministry, your marriage, your family and your friends can only be released through prayer.

***For topical study of 1 Chronicles 4:10 entitled "Prayer: The Pathway to Prosperity," turn to page* 1102.**

1 Chronicles 4:11–14

And Chelub the brother of Shuah begat Mehir, which was the father of Eshton. And Eshton begat Bethrapha, and Paseah, and Tehinnah the father of Irnahash. These are the men of Rechah. And the sons of Kenaz; Othniel, and Seraiah: and the sons of Othniel; Hathath. And Meonothai begat Ophrah: and Seraiah begat Joab, the father of the valley of Charashim; for they were craftsmen.

Here we see a community of craftsmen, a custom seen throughout history wherein those of the same trade or occupation inhabited the same street or neighborhood. According to Nehemiah 11:35, this particular community was located outside of Jerusalem.

1 Chronicles 4:15–18
And the sons of Caleb the son of Jephunneh; Iru, Elah, and Naam: and the sons of Elah, even Kenaz. And the sons of Jehaleleel; Ziph, and Ziphah, Tiria, and Asareel. And the sons of Ezra were, Jether, and Mered, and Epher, and Jalon: and she bare Miriam, and Shammai, and Ishbah the father of Eshtemoa. And his wife Jehudiajah bare Jered the father of Gedor, and Heber the father of Socho, and Jekuthiel the father of Zanoah. And these are the sons of Bithiah the daughter of Pharoah, which Mered took.

The marriage of this Egyptian princess to a descendant of Caleb would have been recognized only if the Egyptian princess had renounced the idolatry of Egypt and embraced the true and living God of Israel. The fact that she appears in the genealogy indicates that this is exactly what she did.

1 Chronicles 4:19–21
And the sons of his wife Hodiah the sister of Naham, the father of Keilah the Garmite, and Eshtemoa the Maachathite. And the sons of Shimon were, Amnon, and Rinnah, Benhanan, and Tilon. And the sons of Ishi were, Zoheth, and Benzoheth. The sons of Shelah the son of Judah were, Er the father of Lecah, and Laadah the

father of Mareshah, and the families of the house of them that wrought fine linen, of the house of Ashbea.

It is most likely that the skill to make fine linen was carried out of Egypt along with the gold, silver, and clothing given to the Israelites (Exodus 12:35, 36).

1 Chronicles 4:22, 23
And Jokim, and the men of Chozeba, and Joash, and Saraph, who had the dominion in Moab, and Jashubilehem. And these are ancient things. These were the potters, and those that dwelt among plants and hedges: there they dwelt with the king for his work.

I like this verse! It lists a group of men who were potters and gardeners. These were common jobs done by common workers. And yet here we read that they had a place in the palace. In other words, because they worked for the king, they dwelt with the king.

If you're a potter or a gardener, a mechanic or a banker, a dishwasher or a teacher, and you're doing it as unto the King, you'll dwell with the King at that very place. Your occupation can become a real ministry if you'll do it as unto the King. For example, if you plant plants and say, "Lord, this is for You, a garden for Your glory," if you give back change as a teller and say, "Lord, bless this person with wisdom on how they will use this money," you can make any occupation a ministry, and if you do it, you'll dwell with the King at that very point as you experience His presence in a powerful, practical way.

1 Chronicles 4:24–43
The sons of Simeon were, Nemuel, and Jamin, Jarib, Zerah, and Shaul: Shallum his son, Mibsam his son, Mishma his son. And the sons of Mishma; Hamuel his son, Zachur his son, Shimei his son. And Shimei had sixteen sons and six daughters; but his breth ren had not many children, neither did all their family multiply, like to the children of Judah. And they dwelt at Beer-sheba, and Moladah, and Hazarshual, And at Bilhah, and at Ezem, and at

Tolad, And at Bethuel, and at Hormah, and at Ziklag, And at Bethmarcaboth, and Hazarsusim, and at Bethbirei, and at Shaaraim. These were their cities unto the reign of David. And their villages were, Etam, and Ain, Rimmon, and Tochen, and Ashan, five cities: And all their villages that were round about the same cities, unto Baal. These were their habitations, and their genealogy. And Meshobab, and Jamlech, and Joshah the son of Amaziah, And Joel, and Jehu the son of Josibiah, the son of Seraiah, the son of Asiel, And Elioenai, and Jaakobah, and Jeshohaiah, and Asaiah, and Adiel, and Jesimiel, and Benaiah, And Ziza the son of Shiphi, the son of Allon, the son of Jedaiah, the son of Shimri, the son of Shemaiah; These mentioned by their names were princes in their families: and the house of their fathers increased greatly. And they went to the entrance of Gedor, even unto the east side of the valley, to seek pasture for their flocks. And they found fat pasture and good, and the land was wide, and quiet, and peaceable; for they of Ham had dwelt there of old. And these written by name came in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and smote their tents, and the habitations that were found there, and destroyed them utterly unto this day, and dwelt in their rooms: because there was pasture there for their flocks. And some of them, even of the sons of Simeon, five hundred men, went to mount Seir, having for their captains Pelatiah, and Neariah, and Rephaiah, and Uzziel, the sons of Ishi. And they smote the rest of the Amalekites that were escaped, and dwelt there unto this day.

As the family of Simeon increased numerically, they felt constricted in their territory. So they looked over their boundaries and saw a land that was very blessed, a land that was fertile, a land that could support their flocks and herds. So they wiped out the enemy to expand their territory for the blessing of their people.

Perhaps you feel restricted in some area of your life or ministry. The key is to look beyond your borders, find some area the enemy is still holding, and go after it. Carve out new territory in your ministry, in your life. Carve out

new areas of new visions of ministry and opportunity beyond your own borders. That's what the sons of Simeon did.

Increasingly, my prayer is that God would make us a people of vision, that we would see beyond our own boundaries and borders, that we would see the possibilities that exist all around us, the opportunities that abound on every side of us and claim them for the glory of God and for the furtherance of the gospel.

PRAYER: THE PATHWAY TO PROSPERITY

A Topical Study of 1 CHRONICLES 4:10

In Jabez, we see not only a man whose family looked up to him, but one who had a city named after him. Jabez was a blessed individual indeed. And yet because his name means "sorrowful," his birth was somehow marked with sorrow. Thus, although Jabez would experience prosperity, he also experienced problems.

Prayer

And Jabez called on the God of Israel . . .

1 Chronicles 4:10 (a)

Jabez overcame his adversity by calling upon the God of Israel. In other words, he prayed. Prayer is not a subject that draws a lot of attention or creates a lot of excitement. People think the answer to their problems lies in a practice or a program they've never heard of before. But the life of this one who was named "Sorrowful"—this one who had a family that looked up to him and a city named after him—is recorded in the Word because he prayed simply and effectively.

Jabez called on the God of Israel. Israel was a nation, but also a person. You might know him as Jacob. Jacob was another man born in an interesting manner, for even at the time of his birth, he exhibited a quality that would characterize his entire life. That is, he grabbed on to his twin brother's heel in an apparent attempt to be firstborn. This caused his mother to name him *Jacob,* or, literally, "Heel snatcher." Jacob grabbed his brother's heel and would spend the rest of his life trying to trip people up that he might get ahead.

After he connived his way into receiving both the blessing and birthright that should have been his brother's, he fled to Padanaram, where he lived with his uncle Laban—also a conniver. After twenty years, he out-connived Laban and ended up prospering with so much wealth that Laban said, "Get out of here. If I see you again, you're dead."

So, taking his kids, family, herds, and riches, Jacob headed back home, hoping that Esau would forgive him. As he neared his home territory, he sent messengers to Esau, saying, "I'm coming home. I'm successful. I'm bringing gifts."

The messengers returned, saying, "Esau is coming to greet you with four hundred armed men."

Jacob knew he was in trouble. What could he do? How could he connive his way out of this? Kicked out of Padanaram, with his brother and four

hundred men coming to do him in, he was at the end of his rope.

That night, he crossed the river Jabok and attempted to get a good night's sleep, knowing that in the morning, he would have his work cut out for him. As he tried to settle down, suddenly an angel of the Lord—Jesus Christ—appeared to him.

"I will not let You go until You bless me," Jacob said. Hosea tells us he did so with tears and a broken heart (12:4).

Genesis 32 tells us they wrestled all night long. As morning dawned, the angel of the Lord touched Jacob's hip and it became dislocated. Then the Lord looked at this pathetic figure with a dislocated hip and tears streaming down his face, and said, "Jacob, thou hast prevailed with God and with man. Henceforth, you'll no longer be called Jacob, but *Israel"*—which means "governed by God."

No longer did he depend on his mental ability. No longer did he walk proudly. He limped, but in greater strength than he ever had before because he was depending on God, governed by God, and looking to God.

You might be extremely clever. You might be very able, intelligent, or gifted. But no matter how clever or able you are, those qualities have limitations. There will always be someone more clever than you, always some problem bigger than you, always some challenge greater than you. But when, like Jacob, you say, "My heel grabbing won't make it any more. I can't walk. I can't run. I can't connive. I can't figure things out. I need You, Lord. I can't go on without You," you become Israel—governed by God.

Jabez was hurting. And he called to the God of Israel—the God of the conniver who learned the secret of being ruled by God as he wrestled with the Lord in prayer.

Passion

. . . "Oh, that thou wouldest bless me indeed . . ."

1 Chronicles 4:10 (b)

The word, "oh," gives us a clue as to the passion of Jabez's prayer. It was said of George Whitefield, the great evangelist, that when he simply said the word, "oh," hundreds of people would repent on the spot because he spoke with such passion. I sense something of this in Jabez's prayer.

Paul says the Spirit prays through us with groanings that cannot be uttered (Romans 8:26). Sometimes the most effective prayer times we have consist of groaning. You're praying for your own situation or for that of someone else and you don't know how to pray, so you let the Spirit groan through you. That's prayer. In this, I sense a passion in Jabez's prayer that moved the hand of God.

Purpose

. . . and enlarge my coast . . .

1 Chronicles 4:10 (c)

"Enlarge my coasts or borders," Jabez prayed. "Make me bigger and larger than I am presently." It is important that, as believers, we are expanding. Are your borders being expanded?

William Carey, the great missionary, said, "Attempt great things for God and expect great things from God." Do something radical. Take a risk in life. Take a risk in your ministry. Take a risk in your understanding of worship and devotion. Enlarge your vision. Attempt something for the Lord so big that, unless God is in it, it's doomed to fail. Such was the heart of Jabez.

Presence

. . . and that thine hand might be with me . . .

1 Chronicles 4:10 (d)

Jabez didn't just want the gifts. He wanted the Giver to be with him. This is something we need to see because so often we can say, "Lord, I need this answer to prayer." And when the answer comes, we run away.

Not Jabez. He said, "*Keep* Your hand upon me. I want You to be with me, directing my steps, guiding my actions." And that's a prayer the Father honors.

Protection

. . . and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!"

1 Chronicles 4:10 (e)

At this point in his life, Jabez understood that sin always brings sadness. Even in the age of inflation, the wages of sin remain the same: death (Romans 6:23). Realizing this, Jabez said, "Keep me from sin lest it grieve me and bring sorrow into my life."

As we read in verse 10, God granted Jabez his request. Jabez was blessed, or enlarged. He experienced both the presence and the protection of God.

If we truly believed that the prayer of Jabez had practical application to our situation, we would be people of prayer. But we don't really believe it. Oh, we believe in God's ability to bless us. But we doubt His willingness to do so. Most of us have an entirely wrong understanding of the nature of our Father. We know He's wealthy, but we think He's stingy.

There are three types of wealthy people. The first is the one who will give money if your presentation for cancer research is good enough. The second type is one who is happy to give regardless of the cause. But the third type doesn't wait for the knock on the door. Instead, he walks around, looking for opportunities to give.

Most of us believe our Father is in the first category, that God is wealthy, but that we have to plead and beg to persuade Him that our cause is worthy of His blessing. Some might even think He's eager to give to us regardless of the worth of our request. But, in reality, our Father is neither of these types. He is the third type, going to and fro throughout the whole world, looking for a man in whom He can show Himself strong (2 Chronicles 16:9). God is looking for Jabezes who have problems, who have difficulty, but who call out to Him.

Jabez's prayer wasn't long. But he did what you and I need to do. He called upon the God of Israel. In brokenness and openness, he poured out his

heart and said, “Lord, bless me.” And the Lord granted him his request. Precious people, spend time with your Father in the posture of prayer, and you’ll be on the pathway to prosperity. I guarantee it because the Word declares it.



5 Chapter 5 deals with the tribes of Reuben and Gad . . .

1 Chronicles 5:1, 2
Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel, (for he was the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father’s bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright. For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph’s)

Although Reuben was Jacob’s firstborn, Judah’s genealogy was given first for two reasons. First, the “chief ruler”—both David and the Son of David, Jesus Christ—would come from the tribe of Judah. Secondly, Reuben forfeited his rights as firstborn when he took his father’s concubine (Genesis 35:22, 49:4).

1 Chronicles 5:3–9
The sons, I say, of Reuben the firstborn of Israel were, Hannoch, and Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. The sons of Joel; Shemaiah his son, Gog his son, Shimei his son, Micah his son, Reaia his son, Baal his son, Beerah his son, whom Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria carried away captive: he was prince of the Reubenites. And his brethren by their families, when the genealogy of their generations was reckoned, were the chief, Jeiel, and Zechariah, And Bela the son of Azaz, the son of Shema, the son of Joel, who dwelt in Aroer, even unto Nebo and Baal-meon: And eastward he inhabited unto the entering in of the wilderness from the river

Euphrates: because their cattle were multiplied in the land of Gilead.

Along with Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh, the tribe of Reuben dwelt east of the Jordan (Numbers 32).

1 Chronicles 5:10
And in the days of Saul they made war with the Hagarites, who fell by their hand: and they dwelt in their tents throughout all the east land of Gilead.

The Hagarites would have been the children of Hagar, or Arabs.

1 Chronicles 5:11–20
And the children of Gad dwelt over against them, in the land of Bashan unto Salchah: Joel the chief, and Shapham the next, and Jaanai, and Shaphat in Bashan. And their brethren of the house of their fathers were, Michael, and Meshullam, and Sheba, and Jorai, and Jachan, and Zia, and Heber, seven. These are the children of Abihail the son of Huri, the son of Jaroah, the son of Gilead, the son of Michael, the son of Jeshishai, the son of Jahdo, the son of Buz; Ahi the son of Abdiel, the son of Guni, chief of the house of their fathers. And they dwelt in Gilead in Bashan, and in her towns, and in all the suburbs of Sharon, upon their borders. All these were reckoned by genealogies in the days of Jotham king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam king of Israel. The sons of Reuben, and the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh, of valiant men, men able to bear buckler and sword, and to shoot with bow, and skilful in war, were four and forty thousand seven hundred and threescore, that went out to the war. And they made war with the Hagarites, with Jetur, and Nephish, and Nodab. And they were helped against them, and the Hagarites were delivered into their hand, and all that were with them: for they cried to God in the battle, and he was intreated of them; because they put their trust in him.

Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh were equipped and prepared to wage war. But in the midst of battle, they realized that, apart from prayer, they would sink. So in the middle of the battle, they cried to the Lord and put their trust in Him.This encourages me because it tells me that it's never too late to pray. God heard the prayers of His people and responded graciously and victoriously.

1 Chronicles 5:21–26
And they took away their cattle; of their camels fifty thousand, and of sheep two hundred and fifty thousand, and of asses two thousand, and of men an hundred thousand. For there fell down many slain, because the war was of God. And they dwelt in their steads until the captivity. And the children of the half tribe of Manasseh dwelt in the land: they increased from Bashan unto Baal-hermon and Senir, and unto mount Hermon. And these were the heads of the house of their fathers, even Epher, and Ishi, and Eliel, and Azriel, and Jeremiah, and Hodaviah, and Jahdiel, mighty men of valour, famous men, and heads of the house of their fathers. And they transgressed against the God of their fathers, and went a whoring after the gods of the people of the land, whom God destroyed before them. And the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and he carried them away, even the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, and brought them unto Halah, and Habor, and Hara, and to the river Gozan, unto this day.

Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh said, "We like it here on the east bank of the Jordan. We don't want to go all the way in to the Promised Land. We'll just stay here at the boundary." But because they didn't go into the Land of Promise, they were the first ones carried away by the Assyrian enemy.

I have observed that it's at the times when we're on the outer edges, not really going in, that we have a tendency to be carried off. We need to go for it all the way in the Lord. If we're just hanging out, observing but not really

involved in the things of God in worship, ministry, and prayer, there's a tendency, a vulnerability for us to be carried away.

Every shepherd knows that the sheep straggling on the outer edges of the flock is the one that will be picked off. It is the sheep who are in the center of the flock, close to the shepherd, who are in the place of safety and protection. May we be those sheep.



6 The genealogy of the Levites—the tribe dedicated to serving the Lord—is given in chapter 6 . . .

1 Chronicles 6:1, 2
The sons of Levi; Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. And the sons of Kohath; Amram, Izhar, and Hebron, and Uzziel.

Three families are mentioned. The Gershonites carried the tent of the tabernacle. The Kohathites bore the furniture of the tabernacle. The Merarites carried the boards of the tabernacle. Each one of these family groups had a specific job and function. Everyone serving the Lord had a specific assignment to carry out, which enabled God's people as a whole to move efficiently in their wilderness wanderings.

I encourage you to ask the Lord to show you what your job is in this pilgrimage we're on together. I believe it is a good goal for every brother and sister to be able to state clearly exactly what their ministry is, to be able to say, "This is what I'm called to do." If you don't know what it is, pray about it and begin to experiment in various types and areas of ministry so you'll find your position and place in the body of Christ.

1 Chronicles 6:3–15
And the children of Amram; Aaron, and Moses, and Miriam. The sons also of Aaron; Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. Eleazar begat Phinehas, Phinehas begat Abishua, And Abishua begat Bukki, and Bukki begat Uzzi, And Uzzi begat Zerahiah,

and Zerahiah begat Meraioth, Meraioth begat Amariah, and Amariah begat Ahitub, And Ahitub begat Zadok, and Zadok begat Ahimaaz, And Ahimaaz begat Azariah, and Azariah begat Johanan, And Johanan begat Azariah, (he it is that executed the priest's office in the temple that Solomon built in Jerusalem:) And Azariah begat Amariah, and Amariah begat Ahitub, And Ahitub begat Zadok, and Zadok begat Shallum, And Shallum begat Hilkiah, and Hilkiah begat Azariah, And Azariah begat Seraiah, and Seraiah begat Jehozadak, And Jehozadak went into captivity, when the LORD carried away Judah and Jerusalem by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.

Eleazar was Aaron's successor as high priest. Here, Eleazar's genealogy is traced to the time of the captivity. Thus, the line is drawn from Eleazar—who came out of bondage in Egypt—to Jehozadak, who went into bondage in Babylon.

1 Chronicles 6:16
The sons of Levi; Gershom, Kohath, and Merari.

Here begins the genealogy of the Levites who were not priests . . .

1 Chronicles 6:17–31
And these be the names of the sons of Gershom; Libni, and Shimei. And the sons of Kohath were, Amram, and Izhar, and Hebron, and Uzziel. The sons of Merari; Mahli, and Mushi. And these are the families of the Levites according to their fathers. Of Gershom; Libni his son, Jahath his son, Zimmah his son, Joah his son, Iddo his son, Zerah his son, Jeaterai his son. The sons of Kohath; Amminadab his son, Korah his son, Assir his son, Elkanah his son, and Ebiasaph his son, and Assir his son, Tahath his son, Uriel his son, Uzziah his son, and Shaul his son. And the sons of Elkanah; Amasai, and Ahimoth. As for Elkanah: the sons of Elkanah; Zophai his son, and Nahath his son, Eliab his son, Jeroham his son, Elkanah his son. And the sons of Samuel; the firstborn Vashni, and Abiah. The sons of Merari; Mahli, Libni his

son, Shimei his son, Uzza his son, Shimea his son, Haggiah his son, Asaiah his son. And these are they whom David set over the service of song in the house of the LORD, after that the ark had rest.

It should not surprise us that David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, should ordain certain of the Levites to minister in song.

1 Chronicles 6:32
And they ministered before the dwelling place of the tabernacle of the congregation with singing, until Solomon had built the house of the LORD in Jerusalem: and then they waited on their office according to their order.

David was a real warrior. But more than that, he was a worshiper. David was tough, but he was also tender. Consequently, he raised up an army not of warriors but of singers. They continually offered praise and worship through song in the tabernacle and later in the temple.

1 Chronicles 6:33
And these are they that waited with their children. Of the sons of the Kohathites: Heman a singer, the son of Joel, the son of Shemuel,

If you think it is easy to be involved in a praise ministry, check out Psalm 88, where we see one of the songs Heman wrote . . .

O LORD God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee: Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry; For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah. Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me;

thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth. Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee. Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah. Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? But unto thee have I cried, O LORD; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee. LORD, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off. They came round about me daily like water; they compassed me about together. Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.

Psalms are often born of great difficulty. The most effective songs of praise and worship aren't worked out mechanically or musically, but are pressed into the heart of a person through difficulty. Psalmists anointed by God and inspired by the Spirit were men who spent time dealing in spiritual warfare. They were men who came into deep understandings because of the depths they walked personally. So when you go through trials and struggles, know that a song is being birthed and praise will pour forth in due time. Heman wrote other songs—songs of victory, joy, and praise. But this song was preserved to show us he went through some heavy-duty experiences in order to come out on the other side as a man of praise.

1 Chronicles 6:34–39
The son of Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Eliel, the son of Toah, The son of Zuph, the son of Elkanah, the son of Mahath, the son of Amasai, The son of Elkanah, the son of Joel, the son of Azariah, the son of Zephaniah, The son of Tahath, the son of Assir, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, The son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, the son of Israel. And his brother Asaph, who stood on his right hand, even Asaph the son of Berachiah, the son of Shimea,

As you read the Book of Psalms, you will see many written by Asaph, one of the full-time singers David had appointed to minister day and night in the place of worship.

1 Chronicles 6:40–48
The son of Michael, the son of Baaseiah, the son of Malchiah, The son of Ethni, the son of Zerah, the son of Adaiah, The son of Ethan, the son of Zimmah, the son of Shimei, The son of Jahath, the son of Gershom, the son of Levi. And their brethren the sons of Merari stood on the left hand: Ethan the son of Kishi, the son of Abdi, the son of Malluch, The son of Hashabiah, the son of Amaziah, the son of Hilkiah, The son of Amzi, the son of Bani, the son of Shamer, The son of Mahli, the son of Mushi, the son of Merari, the son of Levi. Their brethren also the Levites were appointed unto all manner of service of the tabernacle of the house of God.

There was no shortage of work for the Levites to do: the provision of water and fuel; the washing of the utensils and sweeping of the temple; the killing, butchering, and boiling of the sacrifices themselves.

As believers, we are both a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, as well (1 Peter 2:5). And there remains no shortage of work to do in the provision of the meat and water of the Word, in exhorting one another to purity and holiness, and in presenting ourselves as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1, 2).

1 Chronicles 6:49–53
But Aaron and his sons offered upon the altar of the burnt offering, and on the altar of incense, and were appointed for all the work of the place most holy, and to make an atonement for Israel, according to all that Moses the servant of God had com manded. And these are the sons of Aaron; Eleazar his son, Phinehas his son, Abishua his son, Bukki his son, Uzzi his son, Zerahiah his son, Meraioth his son, Amariah his son, Ahitub his son, Zadok his son, Ahimaaz his son.

The sons of Aaron were already listed in verses 3 through 16. Here, we see a less extensive list.

1 Chronicles 6:54–81

Now these are their dwelling places throughout their castles in their coasts, of the sons of Aaron, of the families of the Kohathites: for theirs was the lot. And they gave them Hebron in the land of Judah, and the suburbs thereof round about it. But the fields of the city, and the villages thereof, they gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh. And to the sons of Aaron they gave the cities of Judah, namely, Hebron, the city of refuge, and Libnah with her suburbs, and Jattir, and Eshtemoa, with their suburbs, And Hilen with her suburbs, Debir with her suburbs, And Ashan with her suburbs, and Bethshemesh with her suburbs: And out of the tribe of Benjamin; Geba with her suburbs, and Alemeth with her suburbs, and Anathoth with her suburbs. All their cities throughout their families were thirteen cities. And unto the sons of Kohath, which were left of the family of that tribe, were cities given out of the half tribe, namely, out of the half tribe of Manasseh, by lot, ten cities. And to the sons of Gershom throughout their families out of the tribe of Issachar, and out of the tribe of Asher, and out of the tribe of Naphtali, and out of the tribe of Manasseh in Bashan, thirteen cities. Unto the sons of Merari were given by lot, throughout their families, out of the tribe of Reuben, and out of the tribe of Gad, and out of the tribe of Zebulun, twelve cities. And the children of Israel gave to the Levites these cities with their suburbs. And they gave by lot out of the tribe of the children of Judah, and out of the tribe of the children of Simeon, and out of the tribe of the children of Benjamin, these cities, which are called by their names. And the residue of the families of the sons of Kohath had cities of their coasts out of the tribe of Ephraim. And they gave unto them, of the cities of refuge, Shechem in mount Ephraim with her suburbs; they gave also Gezer with her suburbs, And Jokmeam with her suburbs, and Beth-horon with her suburbs, And Aijalon with her suburbs, and Gath-rimmon with her suburbs: And out of the half

tribe of Manasseh; Aner with her suburbs, and Bileam with her suburbs, for the family of the remnant of the sons of Kohath. Unto the sons of Gershom were given out of the family of the half tribe of Manasseh, Golan in Bashan with her suburbs, and Ashtaroth with her suburbs: And out of the tribe of Issachar; Kedesh with her suburbs, Daberath with her suburbs, And Ramoth with her suburbs, and Anem with her suburbs: And out of the tribe of Asher; Mashal with her suburbs, and Abdon with her suburbs, And Hukok with her suburbs, and Rehob with her suburbs: And out of the tribe of Naphtali; Kedesh in Galilee with her suburbs, and Hammon with her suburbs, and Kirjathaim with her suburbs. Unto the rest of the children of Merari were given out of the tribe of Zebulun. Rimmon with her suburbs, Tabor with her suburbs: And on the other side Jordan by Jericho, on the east side of Jordan, were given them out of the tribe of Reuben, Bezer in the wilderness with her suburbs, and Jahzah with her suburbs, Kedemoth also with her suburbs, and Mephaath with her suburbs: And out of the tribe of Gad; Ramoth in Gilead with her suburbs, and Mahanaim with her suburbs, And Heshbon with her suburbs, and Jazer with her suburbs.

Verses 55 through 81 list the cities given to the Levites. The cities represent a fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy that the tribe of Levi would be scattered throughout Israel (Genesis 49:7). This dispersion of Levites throughout the land would ensure that instruction concerning God's Word and God's ways would be available to all. Included in the Levites' portion were the cities of refuge established in Joshua 21.



7 1 Chronicles 7:1–5

Now the sons of Issachar were, Tola, and Puah, Jashub, and Shimron, four. And the sons of Tola; Uzzi, and Rephaiah, and Jeriel, and Jahmai, and Jibsam, and Shemuel, heads of their father's house, to wit, of Tola: they were valiant men of might in their generations; whose

number was in the days of David two and twenty thousand and six hundred. And the sons of Uzzi; Izrahiah: and the sons of Izrahiah; Michael, and Obadiah, and Joel, Ishiah, five: all of them chief men. And with them, by their generations, after the house of their fathers, were bands of soldiers for war, six and thirty thousand men: for they had many wives and sons. And their brethren among all the families of Issachar were valiant men of might, reckoned in all by their genealogies fourscore and seven thousand.

Here we see the genealogy of the tribe of Issachar. In Genesis 49:14, Jacob prophesied that Issachar would be strong. Issachar spoken of here as "valiant men of might," Jacob's prophecy finds its fulfillment.

1 Chronicles 7:6–12
The sons of Benjamin; Bela, and Becher, and Jediael, three. And the sons of Bela; Ezbon, and Uzzi, and Uzziel, and Jerimoth, and Iri, five; heads of the house of their fathers, mighty men of valour; and were reckoned by their genealogies twenty and two thousand and thirty and four. And the sons of Becher; Zemira, and Joash, and Eliezer, and Elioenai, and Omri, and Jerimoth, and Abiah, and Anathoth, and Alameth. All these are the sons of Becher. And the number of them, after their genealogy by their generations, heads of the house of the fathers, mighty men of valour, was twenty thousand and two hundred. The sons also of Jediael; Bilhan: and the sons of Bilhan; Jeush, and Benjamin, and Ehud, and Chenaanah, and Zethan, and Tharshish, and Ahishahar. All these the sons of Jediael, by the heads of their fathers, mighty men of valour, were seventeen thousand and two hundred soldiers, fit to go out for war and battle. Shuppim also, and Huppim, the children of Ir, and Hushim, the sons of Aher.

Here we find the genealogy of the tribe of Benjamin. Two towering figures in Israel's history—both named Saul—would hail from the tribe of Benjamin. One was the first king of Israel. The other was the first champion of grace (Philippians 3:5).

1 Chronicles 7:13
The sons of Naphtali; Jahziel, and Guni, and Jezer, and Shallum, the sons of Bilhah.

Naphtali's genealogy included Barak, the general who accompanied Deborah into battle (Judges 5).

1 Chronicles 7:14–19
The sons of Manasseh; Ashriel, whom she bare: (but his concubine the Aramitess bare Machir the father of Gilead: And Machir took to wife the sister of Huppim and Shuppim, whose sister's name was Maachah;) and the name of the second was Zelophehad: and Zelophehad had daughters. And Maachah the wife of Machir bare a son, and she called his name Peresh; and the name of his brother was Sheresh; and his sons were Ulam and Rakem. And the sons of Ulam; Bedan. These were the sons of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh. And his sister Hammoleketh bare Ishod, and Abiezer, and Mahalah. And the sons of Shemida were, Ahian, and Shechem, and Likhi, and Aniam.

Manasseh was a tribe divided, for in Numbers 32:33, we read that half of them remained on the east side of the Jordan.

1 Chronicles 7:20–27
And the sons of Ephraim; Shuthelah, and Bered his son, and Tahath his son, and Eladah his son, and Tahath his son, And Zabad his son, and Shuthelah his son, and Ezer, and Elead, whom the men of Gath that were born in that land slew, because they came down to take away their cattle. And Ephraim their father mourned many days, and his brethren came to comfort him. And when he went in to his wife, she conceived, and bare a son, and he called his name Beriah, because it went evil with his house. (And his daughter was Sherah, who built Beth-horon the nether, and the upper, and Uzzen-sherah.) And Rephah was his son, also

Resheph, and Telah his son, and Tahan his son, Laadan his son, Ammihud his son, Elishama his son, Non his son, Jehoshua his son.

Samuel, the last of Israel's judges and the first of her prophets, was of the tribe of Ephraim.

1 Chronicles 7:28, 29
And their possessions and habitations were, Bethel and the towns thereof, and eastward Naaran, and westward Gezer, with the towns thereof; Shechem also and the towns thereof, unto Gaza and the towns thereof: And by the borders of the children of Manasseh, Beth-shean and her towns, Taanach and her towns, Megiddo and her towns, Dor and her towns. In these dwelt the children of Joseph the son of Israel.

In addition to the towns of Ephraim listed here was the town of Shiloh, where the tabernacle was pitched before the temple was constructed (Joshua 18:1).

1 Chronicles 7:30–40
The sons of Asher; Imnah, and Isuah, and Ishuai, and Beriah, and Serah their sister. And the sons of Beriah; Heber, and Malchiel, who is the father of Birzavith. And Heber begat Japhlet, and Shomer, and Hotham, and Shua their sister. And the sons of Japh let; Pasach, and Bimhal, and Ashvath. These are the children of Japhlet. And the sons of Shamer; Ahi, and Rohgah, Jehubbah, and Aram. And the sons of his brother Helem; Zophah, and Imna, and Shelesh, and Amal. The sons of Zophah; Suah, and Harnepher, and Shual, and Beri, and Imrah, Bezer, and Hod, and Shamma and Shilshah, and Ithran, and Beera. And the sons of Jether; Jephunneh, and Pispah, and Ara. And the sons of Ulla; Arah, and Haniel, and Rezia. All these were the children of Asher, heads of their father's house, choice and mighty men of valour, chief of the princes. And the number throughout the genealogy of them that were apt to the war and to battle was twenty and six thousand men.

Although the tribe of Asher consisted of "mighty men of valour," it is Anna—a woman of the tribe of Asher—who is singularly mentioned in the New Testament solely because of her recognition of the Messiah (Luke 2:36).

Regardless of our "valour" in business, in our families, or even in ministry, the only noteworthy portion of our lives is that which looks for and recognizes Jesus.



8 In chapter 8, we see the genealogy of Benjamin, specifically as it relates to Saul and Jonathan.

1 Chronicles 8:1–5
Now Benjamin begat Bela his firstborn, Ashbel the second, and Aharah the third, Nohah the fourth, and Rapha the fifth. And the sons of Bela were, Addar, and Gera, and Abihud, And Abishua, and Naaman, and Ahoah, And Gera, and Shephuphan, and Huram.

In Judges 19 and 20, the account is given wherein the tribe of Benjamin was reduced to only six hundred men. Here, however, we see the tribe of Benjamin as strong as any of the tribes. Such is the mercy and power of our God.

1 Chronicles 8:6
And these are the sons of Ehud: these are the heads of the fathers of the inhabitants of Geba, and they removed them to Manahath:

Ehud is the brave, left-handed man we see in Judges 3 who, with a dagger hidden in his robe, was able to free Israel from an overweight Moabite despot named Eglon.

1 Chronicles 8:7–28

And Naaman, and Ahiah, and Gera, he removed them, and begat Uzza, and Ahihud. And Shaharaim begat children in the country of Moab, after he had sent them away; Hushim and Baara were his wives. And he begat of Hodesh his wife, Jobab, and Zibia, and Mesha, and Malcham, And Jeuz, and Shachia, and Mirma. These were his sons, heads of the fathers. And of Hushim he begat Abitub, and Elpaal. The sons of Elpaal; Eber, and Misham, and Shamed, who built Ono, and Lod, with the towns thereof: Beriah also, and Shema, who were heads of the fathers of the inhabitants of Aijalon, who drove away the inhabitants of Gath: And Ahio, Shashak, and Jeremoth, And Zebadiah, and Arad, and Ader, And Michael, and Ispah, and Joha, the sons of Beriah; And Zebadiah, and Meshullam, and Hezeki, and Heber, Ishmerai also, and Jezliah, and Jobab, the sons of Elpaal; And Jakim, and Zichri, and Zabdi, And Elienai, and Zilthai, and Eliel, And Adaiah, and Beraiah, and Shimrath, the sons of Shimhi; And Ishpan, and Heber, and Eliel, And Abdon, and Zichri, and Hanan, And Hananiah, and Elam, and Antothijah, And Iphedeiah, and Penuel, the sons of Shashak; And Shamsherai, and Shehariah, and Athaliah, And Jaresiah, and Eliah, and Zichri, the sons of Jeroham. These were heads of the fathers, by their generations, chief men. These dwelt in Jerusalem.

The notation that these men dwelt in Jerusalem refers to their willingness to return to their desolate city rather than remain in the established city of Babylon following their release from captivity (Nehemiah 11:2).

1 Chronicles 8:29–33
And at Gibeon dwelt the father of Gibeon; whose wife's name was Maachah: And his firstborn son Abdon, and Zur, and Kish, and Baal, and Nadab, And Gedor, and Ahio, and Zacher. And Mikloth begat Shimeah. And these also dwelt with their brethren in Jerusalem, over against them. And Ner begat Kish, and Kish begat Saul, and Saul begat Jonathan, and Malchi-shua, and Abinadab, and Esh-baal.

Here, of course, we see Israel's first king, Saul.

1 Chronicles 8:34–40
And the son of Jonathan was Merib-baal; and Merib-baal begat Micah. And the sons of Micah were, Pithon, and Melech, and Tarea, and Ahaz. And Ahaz begat Jehoadah; and Jehoadah begat Alemeth, and Azmaveth, and Zimri; and Zimri begat Moza, And Moza begat Binea: Rapha was his son, Eleasah his son, Azel his son: And Azel had six sons, whose names are these, Azrikam, Bocheru, and Ishmael, and Sheariah, and Obadiah, and Hanan. All these were the sons of Azel. And the sons of Eshek his brother were, Ulam his firstborn, Jehush the second, and Eliphelet the third. And the sons of Ulam were mighty men of valour, archers, and had many sons, and sons' sons, an hundred and fifty. All these are of the sons of Benjamin.

To be an archer at this point in history required great strength and skill as the bow—which was made of steel—was held steady by the foot while the string was pulled with both hands.



9 Chapter 9 deals with the priests and the Levites . . .

1 Chronicles 9:1, 2
So all Israel were reckoned by genealogies; and, behold, they were written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah, who were carried away to Babylon for their transgression. Now the first inhabitants that dwelt in their possessions in their cities were, the Israelites, the priests, Levites, and the Nethinims.

Following the captivity, those who first dwelt in the cities given to Israel were those who were involved in the service of the Lord. In this, we see once again the priority of God's work. Those who were committed and

devoted to serving God were those who were sent throughout the land in order to assume positions of ministry to the people of the land.

1 Chronicles 9:3–9
And in Jerusalem dwelt of the children of Judah, and of the children of Benjamin, and of the children of Ephraim, and Manasseh; Uthai the son of Ammihud, the son of Omri, the son of Imri, the son of Bani, of the children of Pharez the son of Judah. And of the Shilonites; Asaiah the firstborn, and his sons. And of the sons of Zerah; Jeuel, and their brethren, six hundred and ninety. And of the sons of Benjamin; Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Hodaviah, the son of Hasenuah, And Ibneiah the son of Jeroham, and Elah the son of Uzzi, the son of Michri, and Meshullam the son of Shephathiah, the son of Reuel, the son of Ibnijah; And their brethren, according to their generations, nine hundred and fifty and six. All these men were chief of the fathers in the house of their fathers.

Here, we see the fulfillment of Ezekiel's and Hosea's prophecies that the children of Judah and Israel would be gathered together, becoming one nation again (Ezekiel 37:22; Hosea 1:11).

1 Chronicles 9:10–16
And of the priests; Jedaiah, and Jehoiarib, and Jachin, And Azariah the son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, the ruler of the house of God; And Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pashur, the son of Malchijah, and Maasiai the son of Adiel, the son of Jahzerah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Meshillemith, the son of Immer; And their brethren, heads of the house of their fathers, a thousand and seven hundred and threescore; very able men for the work of the service of the house of God. And of the Levites; Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, of the sons of Merari; And Bakbakkar, Heresh, and Galal, and Mattaniah the son of Micah, the son of Zichri, the son of Asaph; And Obadiah the son of Shemaiah, the son of Galal, the

son of Jeduthun, and Berechiah the son of Asa, the son of Elkanah, that dwelt in the villages of the Netophathites.

The priests and Levites were "very able men" indeed (v. 13), possessing not only great faithfulness, but also great courage as they reestablished worship in a hostile environment (Nehemiah 4:17, 18).

1 Chronicles 9:17–27
And the porters were, Shallum, and Akkub, and Talmon, and Ahiman, and their brethren: Shallum was the chief; Who hitherto waited in the king's gate eastward: they were porters in the companies of the children of Levi. And Shallum the son of Kore, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, and his brethren, of the house of his father, the Korahites, were over the work of the service, keepers of the gates of the tabernacle: and their fathers, being over the host of the LORD, were keepers of the entry. And Phinehas the son of Eleazar was the ruler over them in time past, and the Lord was with him. And Zechariah the son of Meshelemiah was porter of the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. All these which were chosen to be porters in the gates were two hundred and twelve. These were reckoned by their genealogy in their villages, whom David and Samuel the seer did ordain in their set office. So they and their children had the oversight of the gates of the house of the Lord, namely, the house of the taberna cle, by wards. In four quarters were the porters, toward the east, west, north, and south. And their brethren, which were in their villages, were to come after seven days from time to time with them. For these Levites, the four chief porters, were in their set office, and were over the chambers and treasuries of the house of God. And they lodged round about the house of God, because the charge was upon them, and the opening thereof every morning pertained to them.

The only ministry of a certain group of Levites consisted of opening and closing the doors. Their ministry was twofold: they prohibited access to the unclean—the lepers, the disqualified, the uncircumcised—and they granted

access to those who had need, perhaps unable to come in on their own strength. In this we see precisely what the ministry of intercession is all about: keeping away the hosts of hell, demonic spirits, and influences of Satan that seek to cause havoc and destruction in the lives of the people of God; and opening the door of blessing for those who are hurting.

If you are an intercessor, I bless you in the name of Jesus. The prayer warriors of the ministry will be those who, in eternity, will receive great reward (Matthew 6:6).

1 Chronicles 9:28–30
And certain of them had the charge of the ministering vessels, that they should bring them in and out by tale. Some of them also were appointed to oversee the vessels, and all the instruments of the sanctuary, and the fine flour, and the wine, and the oil, and the frankincense, and the spices. And some of the sons of the priests made the ointment of the spices.

The priests who washed the utensils used in worship could have said to the priests who prepared the incense, "My job stinks compared to yours." But the job of each was equally vital to tabernacle and temple worship. As New Testament believers, Paul likens the ministry to a body in which every part is needed, even those positions which seem less attractive than others (1 Corinthians 12). God has a certain place for each of us, and He wants us to function in that place, even if it's to be a "dishwasher."

1 Chronicles 9:31–34
And Mattithiah, one of the Levites, who was the firstborn of Shallum the Korahite, had the set office over the things that were made in the pans. And other of their brethren, of the sons of the Kohathites, were over the shewbread, to prepare it every sabbath. And these are the singers, chief of the fathers of the Levites, who remaining in the chambers were free: for they were employed in that work day and night. These chief fathers of the Levites were chief throughout their generations; these dwelt at Jerusalem.

In Job 38, we read that the morning stars sang together when God created the world. In Luke 2, we read that the angels sang when Jesus was born. Here, we read that the singers in the temple sang day and night. Therefore, it would seem that God works best with "background music." No wonder Paul would exhort us to make "melody in our hearts to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19).

1 Chronicles 9:35–44
And in Gibeon dwelt the father of Gibeon, Jehiel, whose wife's name was Maachah: And his firstborn son Abdon, then Zur, and Kish, and Baal, and Ner, and Nadab, And Gedor, and Ahio, and Zechariah, and Mikloth. And Mikloth begat Shimeam. And they also dwelt with their brethren at Jerusalem, over against their brethren. And Ner begat Kish; and Kish begat Saul; and Saul begat Jonathan, and Malchi-shua, and Abinadab, and Esh-baal. And the son of Jonathan was Merib-baal: and Merib-baal begat Micah. And the sons of Micah were, Pithon, and Melech, and Tahrea, and Ahaz. And Ahaz begat Jarah; and Jarah begat Alemeth, and Azmaveth, and Zimri; and Zimri begat Moza; And Moza begat Binea; and Rephaiah his son, Eleasah his son, Azel his son. And Azel had six sons, whose names are these, Azrikam, Bocheru, and Ishmael, and Sheariah, and Obadiah, and Hanan: these were the sons of Azel.

In chapter 8, verses 29 through 38, we see this same genealogy. There, it served as the conclusion of the genealogy of Benjamin. Here, it serves as an introduction to Saul . . .



10

1 Chronicles 10:1–10
Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa. And the Philistines followed hard after Saul, and after his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Malchi-shua, the sons of

Saul. And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him, and he was wounded of the archers. Then said Saul to his armour-bearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these un circumcised come and abuse me. But his armour-bearer would not; for he was sore afraid. So Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. And when his armour-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise on the sword, and died. So Saul died, and his three sons, and all his house died together. And when all the men of Israel that were in the valley saw that they fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, then they forsook their cities, and fled: and the Philistines came and dwelt in them. And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his sons fallen in mount Gilboa. And when they had stripped him, they took his head, and his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to carry tidings unto their idols, and to the people. And they put his armour in the house of their gods, and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon.

After being severely wounded in a battle against the Philistines, Saul killed himself when his armor-bearer refused. When the Philistines found him, they chopped off his head and paraded it through their cities before placing it in the temple of Dagon as a trophy.

> **1 Chronicles 10:11, 12**
> **And when all Jabeshgilead heard all that the Philistines had done to Saul, They arose, all the valiant men, and took away the body of Saul, and the bodies of his sons, and brought them to Jabesh, and buried their bones under the oak in Jabesh, and fasted seven days.**

The men of Jabesh-gilead risked their lives to bring back the body of Saul. Why? Years earlier, when the Amorites threatened to destroy them, the men of Jabesh-gilead sent word to Saul that they were in trouble. Saul and his troops, in turn, marched all night and rescued them.

Know this, gang: if you sow seeds of mercy and love, they will come back to you. Saul was not a particularly honorable man, but in this one case, he did something that was good, merciful, and kind. He rescued Jabesh-

gilead and here his kindness is repaid because whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap (Galatians 6:7).

1 Chronicles 10:13, 14
So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it; And inquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse.

Saul was a man who had incredible potential. He was handsome. He was hand-picked by God to be the first king of Israel. He had Samuel at his side. He had a group of men round about him who were loyal to him. He had a change of heart in his own life when the Holy Spirit came upon him. Saul had so much going for him, but his life ended up a miserable failure because he sought a demonic spirit rather than seeking the Lord.

How I pray we would be people who read the Word daily and seek the Lord continually. Don't be like Saul. Don't needlessly lose your head tomorrow in a battle you can't win on your own. Call upon the name of the Lord. Do what He tells you to do in His Word. And, like the shepherd who would become Israel's second king, you'll prosper.



11 With Saul off the scene, we come to the section in Chronicles that deals with the life of David, a man after God's own heart.

1 Chronicles 11:1–3
Then all Israel gathered themselves to David unto Hebron, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh. And moreover in time past, even when Saul was king, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the LORD thy God said unto thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be ruler over my people Israel. Therefore came all the elders of Israel to the king to Hebron; and David made a covenant with them in Hebron

before the LORD; and they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of the LORD by Samuel.

I find it interesting that the Lord told David that he would both feed His people and rule over them. There is a close connection between feeding and leading. If you want to be a leader, you need to be a feeder, be it in your home, in your ministry, or on the jobsite.

"If you love Me, feed My sheep," the Lord said to Peter (John 21:15).

Peter, in turn, exhorted the elders in a church to "feed the flock" (1 Peter 5:2).

David was a shepherd, the quintessential example of what God desires in a leader. He was a feeder of sheep, and thus became a ruler over God's people. In whatever your sphere of influence, the Lord wants you to be a leader by being a feeder as you share principles from the Word of God.

1 Chronicles 11:4
And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem, which is Jebus; where the Jebusites were, the inhabitants of the land.

The city of Jerusalem was originally called Jebus and was thus inhabited by the Jebusites, enemies of the people of God. David, however, desired to make Jerusalem his capital.

1 Chronicles 11:5
And the inhabitants of Jebus said to David, Thou shalt not come hither. Nevertheless David took the castle of Zion, which is the city of David.

"You can't come hither," the Jebusites said. And Satan constantly says the same thing to us. "You can't do that," he hisses. "You can't accomplish that. You can't witness. You can't minister. You can't take on that challenge." Our enemy perpetually propagates negativity.

Paul, on the other hand, said, "I *can* do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13, italics added).

Fear says you can't. Faith says, "Oh, yeah? Watch me."

It's such a joy to be around men who don't give reasons why things can't get done, but who make a way to make things happen. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). I am convinced that the greatest curse upon the people of God today is that we make all of our decisions based upon logical assumptions. We need to be people of faith. The Bible dwells in and centers on faith. And David was such a man.

1 Chronicles 11:6, 7
And David said, Whosoever smiteth the Jebusites first shall be chief and captain. So Joab the son of Zeruiah went first up, and was chief. And David dwelt in the castle; therefore they called it the city of David.

"We're taking Jerusalem and nothing's stopping us," David declared. Then he turned to his men and said, "The first one inside the city will be my general." A man named Joab found his way in by sliding into the sewer and coming up inside the city (2 Samuel 5:8). He smote the Jebusites, opened the gates, and the other soldiers rushed in.

Who are the men and women God uses? Not the ones who say, "It can't be done" but those who say, "We'll find a way even if it means sliding through the sewers," for that's what the Son of David did for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

1 Chronicles 11:8, 9
And he built the city round about, even from Millo round about: and Joab repaired the rest of the city. So David waxed greater and greater: for the LORD of hosts was with him.

David became great for one reason: God was with him.

1 Chronicles 11:10
These also are the chief of the mighty men whom David had, who strengthened themselves with him in his kingdom, and with all Israel, to make him king, according to the word of the LORD concerning Israel.

In verse 10 we have a listing or a catalogue of David's mighty men. These were the six hundred ragtag renegades who came to David when he was fighting off the attacks of Saul. In debt, discontent, and distressed, they joined themselves to David (1 Samuel 22:2). They were a motley crew indeed. But an interesting transformation took place, for as they hung around David, they began to take on his characteristics and, over a period of time, became a band of six hundred mighty warriors.

I like this because we're a group of ragtag renegades ourselves. We have troubles and problems to be sure. But our Leader is perfect. And the more we hang around Him, the more we begin to become like Him. It's a long process indeed, but slowly, yet surely, we are changed from glory to even greater glory as we behold Him (2 Corinthians 3:18).

1 Chronicles 11:11
And this is the number of the mighty men whom David had; Jashobeam, and Hachmonite, the chief of the captains: he lifted up his spear against three hundred slain by him at one time.

Jashobeam, also known as Adino in 2 Samuel 23:8, single-handedly took on three hundred enemies. This speaks to us very powerfully about the importance of lifting up our hands in prayer (1 Timothy 2:8). If you want to be a mighty man or woman of God, prerequisite number one is that you persist in prayer.

"But my hands are tired," you protest. "I've been praying about this issue for a long time and I'm getting worn out and beaten down." Do you recall what Moses did? He was on the mountaintop praying for the Israelites while the battle was raging with the Amalekites. When his hands were in the air, the Israelites would advance, but when his hands grew weary and began to fall, the Amalekites gained momentum. Finally, observing what was happening, Aaron stood on one side of him and Hur on the other to prop Moses' hands up until victory was secure (Exodus 17:12).

We're all like Moses. We all need people to hold up our hands. Therefore, we need to pray for, and cultivate relationships that will enable us to hold up one another's hands in times of weakness.

1 Chronicles 11:12
And after him was Eleazar the son of Dodo, the Ahohite, who was one of the three mighties.

Eleazar means "God is my help." In 2 Samuel 10, we read that Eleazar held on so hard for so long that his hand "clave to the sword." The second prerequisite for any who desire to be mighty men or women of God is that their hands must hold tight to the sword of the Word of God.

1 Chronicles 11:13–16
He was with David at Pas-dammim, and there the Philistines were gathered together to battle, where was a parcel of ground full of barley; and the people fled from before the Philistines. And they set themselves in the midst of that parcel, and delivered it, and slew the Philistines; and the LORD saved them by a great deliverance. Now three of the thirty captains went down to the rock to David, into the cave of Adullam; and the host of the Philistines encamped in the valley of Rephaim. And David was then in the hold, and the Philistines' garrison was then at Bethlehem.

Bethlehem was David's hometown. No doubt with his mouth dry and his lips parched, holed up in a cave on a hot fall day with the Philistines down below surrounding his hometown, David must have thought of the days when, as a boy, he would draw cool, sweet water out of the well in Bethlehem.

1 Chronicles 11:17, 18 (a)
And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, that is at the gate! And the three brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David . . .

Three mighty men—Shammah, Eleazar, and Adino—risked their lives to bring their king what he desired.

I love this because that's what mighty men and women of God do. They don't simply obey the commands of the King, but they sense His desire. Perhaps you are obeying God's commands. That's good, but are you sensing His desires? Even though it might be costly and difficult, do you break through and give Him what He desires?

1 Chronicles 11:18 (b)
. . . but David would not drink of it, but poured it out to the LORD,

David took that which was most precious to him and offered it to the Lord. Some might say it was a waste, even as one did when another poured out her most precious possession on the head and feet of the Son of David.

"It's a waste," Judas protested. "That money could have been spent on the poor."

But Jesus corrected Judas and said, "Throughout world history, this deed will be remembered" (see John 12; Mark 14).

Whatever you pour out to Jesus is never a waste. Others might say, "Be practical. That's a waste of time, or a waste of energy." But nothing you give to the Lord is ever a waste.

1 Chronicles 11:19–22 (a)
And said, My God forbid it me, that I should do this thing: shall I drink the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy? for with the jeopardy of their lives they brought it. Therefore he would not drink it. These things did these three mightiest. And Abishai the brother of Joab, he was chief of the three: for lifting up his spear against three hundred, he slew them, and had a name among the three. Of the three, he was more honourable than the two; for he was their captain: howbeit he attained not to the first three. Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man of Kabzeel, who had done many acts; he slew two lionlike men of Moab . . .

Benaiah means "edified." How was Benaiah edified? First, he took on two lion-like men of Moab. In the Bible, the lion is a symbol for the devil (1 Peter 5:8). Saints, before you ever do battle with the lion himself, like

Benaiah, you'll deal with lion-like situations. "If you can't keep up with the footmen, how will you run against the horses?" Jeremiah asked (see Jeremiah 12:5). In other words, if you're not able to handle the race you're in today, how will you handle tomorrow? I need to remember that the difficult, lion-like situations I face today prepare me because the lion himself could show up tomorrow. The struggles, battles, difficulties, temptations, trials, and snares we face today are building us up for the battles the Father knows we will face in the near future.

1 Chronicles 11:22 (b)
. . . also he went down and slew a lion in a pit in a snowy day.

After he took on the two lion-like men, Benaiah faced the lion himself on a snowy day. Isn't it just like the enemy to come when we're coldest, when our heart is cold, when the situation is chilly, when things are brutal? Not only was it a snowy day, but Benaiah was in a pit. That's where the enemy always seeks to pull us.

But Benaiah was ready. The initiator of the battle, he went down into the pit and killed the lion. "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world," John tells us (1 John 4:4). This means we can go into a pit even on a snowy day and do battle with the enemy because we've not only been prepared, but because we're indwelt. The Spirit of God lives within us.

1 Chronicles 11:23, 24
And he slew an Egyptian, a man of great stature, five cubits high; and in the Egyptian's hand was a spear like a weaver's beam; and he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear. These things did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and had the name among the three mighties.

In addition to the lion-like men and the lion itself, Benaiah faced a seven-foot Egyptian. Egypt speaks of the world. Sometimes, the world looms large over us. Maybe we have victory over the devil, but then the whole world system—the pressure of our peers, the pull of society—threatens us. But we

can have victory if we do what Benaiah did, if we take the world's own weapons and use them against it . . .

When a woman wanted to know how to have victory over her dependence upon nicotine, we counseled her to use her cigarettes as a weapon against the enemy. That is, every time she felt an urge to smoke, she was to quietly intercede for people she knew were headed for hell. She did that. She interceded fervently for the lost. And guess what happened. Her desire to smoke vanished because the enemy was getting beaten by his own weapon.

You can take the very things Satan uses against you and turn them around (Genesis 50:20). That's what Benaiah did.

1 Chronicles 11:25–47

Behold, he was honourable among the thirty, but attained not to the first three: and David set him over his guard. Also the valiant men of the armies were, Asahel the brother of Joab, Elhanan the son of Dodo of Bethlehem, Shammoth the Harorite, Helez the Pelonite, Ira the son of Ikkesh the Tekoite, Abi-ezer the Antothite, Sibbecai the Hushathite, Ilai the Ahohite, Maharai the Netophathite, Heled the son of Baanah the Netophathite, Ithai the son of Ribai of Gibeah, that pertained to the children of Benjamin, Benaiah the Pirathonite, Hurai of the brooks of Gaash, Abiel the Arbathite, Azmaveth the Baharumite, Eliahba the Shaalbonite, The sons of Hashem the Gizonite, Jonathan the son of Shage the Hararite, Ahiam the son of Sacar the Hararite, Eliphal the son of Ur, Hepher the Mecherathite, Ahijah the Pelonite, Hezro the Carmelite, Naarai the son of Ezbai, Joel the brother of Nathan, Mibhar the son of Haggeri, Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai the Berothite, the armourbearer of Joab the son of Zeruiah, Ira the Ithrite, Gareb the Ithrite, Uriah the Hittite, Zabad the son of Ahlai, Adina the son of Shiza the Reubenite, a captain of the Reubenites, and thirty with him, Hanan the son of Maachah, and Joshaphat the Mithnite, Uzzia the Ashterathite, Shama and Jehiel the sons of Hothan the Aroerite, Jediael the son of Shimri, and Joha his brother, the

Tizite, Eliel the Mahavite, and Jeribai, and Joshaviah, the sons of Elnaam, and Ithmah the Moabite, Eliel, and Obed, and Jasiel the Mesobaite.

"It is easier for heaven and earth to pass than one tittle of the law to fail," Jesus declared (Luke 16:17). This means the names of these valiant men are more securely recorded than those of the most powerful rulers that have ever appeared on the world stage. Your name most likely will not be recorded in history books. But if it is recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 21:27), it is written with the indelible ink of Jesus' blood.



12 In chapter 12, we see the men who joined David in Ziklag, where he hung out while hiding from Saul . . .

1 Chronicles 12:1, 2
Now these are they that came to David to Ziklag, while he yet kept himself close because of Saul the son of Kish: and they were among the mighty men, helpers of the war. They were armed with bows, and could use both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows out of a bow, even of Saul's brethren of Benjamin.

The Benjamites began to defect to David's side and were particularly valuable in war because, being ambidextrous, they could fight with both hands.

1 Chronicles 12:3–8
The chief was Ahiezer, then Joash, the sons of Shemaah the Gibeathite; and Jeziel, and Pelet, the sons of Azmaveth; and Berachah, and Jehu the Antothite, And Ismaiah the Gibeonite, a mighty man among the thirty, and over the thirty; and Jeremiah, and Jahaziel, and Johanan, and Josabad the Gederathite, Eluzai,

and Jerimoth, and Bealiah, and Shemariah, and Shephatiah the Haruphite, Elkanah, and Jesiah, and Azareel, and Joezer, and Jashobeam, the Korhites, And Joelah, and Zebadiah, the sons of Jeroham of Gedor. And of the Gadites there separated themselves unto David into the hold to the wilderness men of might, and men of war fit for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains;

A buckler was a spear. This means the men of Gad were capable warriors both offensively with the spear and defensively with the shield. In addition to this, they were fierce as lions and swift as deers,

1 Chronicles 12:9–17
Ezer the first, Obadiah the second, Eliab the third, Mishmannah the fourth, Jeremiah the fifth, Attai the sixth, Eliel the seventh, Johanan the eighth, Elzabad the ninth, Jeremiah the tenth, Machbanai the eleventh. These were of the sons of Gad, captains of the host: one of the least was over an hundred, and the greatest over a thousand. These are they that went over Jordan in the first month, when it had overflown all his banks; and they put to flight all them of the valleys, both toward the east, and toward the west. And there came of the children of Benjamin and Judah to the hold unto David. And David went out to meet them, and answered and said unto them, If ye be come peaceably unto me to help me, mine heart shall be knit unto you: but if ye be come to betray me to mine enemies, seeing there is no wrong in mine hands, the God of our fathers look thereon, and rebuke it.

David couldn't have known whether these men joined David out of sincerity or whether they were trying to infiltrate his camp as double agents. So what did he do? He said, "If you're coming to join me, our hearts will be knit together. But if you're coming to betray me, the Lord will see it and rebuke you." David was a man who recognized that God was his Defender and that God saw all things.

How grateful I am that I can rest in the God of Ananias and Sapphira. Because only God sees the heart of a man, only He is able to judge. I realize how little I know, how incapable I am of seeing another person's heart. So I do what David did. I leave everything with God.

1 Chronicles 12:18
Then the spirit came upon Amasai, who was chief of the captains, and he said, Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse: peace, peace be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers; for thy God helpeth thee. Then David received them, and made them captains of the band.

David held no grudge against these who once fought against him. The graciousness of David is exceeded only by the graciousness of the Son of David, Jesus Christ.

1 Chronicles 12:19–22
And there fell some of Manasseh to David, when he came with the Philistines against Saul to battle: but they helped them not: for the lords of the Philistines upon advisement sent him away, saying, He will fall to his master Saul to the jeopardy of our heads. As he went to Ziklag, there fell to him of Manasseh, Adnah, and Jozabad, and Jediael, and Michael, and Jozabad, and Elihu, and Zilthai, captains of the thousands that were of Manasseh. And they helped David against the band of the rovers: for they were all mighty men of valour, and were captains in the host. For at that time day by day there came to David to help him, until it was a great host, like the host of God.

When the armies of Saul began to experience setbacks, as the popularity of Saul began to decline, more and more people joined David. Initially, there were six hundred renegades who came to his side. They stayed with him when he was not popular. They hung by him in his days of difficulty. When things were going badly, they demonstrated a remarkable degree of loyalty. But the tide is turning, and suddenly thousands of men join David.

1 Chronicles 12:23
And these are the numbers of the bands that were ready armed to the war, and came to David to Hebron, to turn the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of the LORD.

Between verses 22 and 23, Saul died and his kingdom was transferred to David in Hebron.

1 Chronicles 12:24–37
The children of Judah that bare shield and spear were six thousand and eight hundred, ready armed to the war. Of the children of Simeon, mighty men of valour for the war, seven thousand and one hundred. Of the children of Levi four thousand and six hundred. And Jehoiada was the leader of the Aaronites, and with him were three thousand and seven hundred; And Zadok, a young man mighty of valour, and of his father's house twenty and two captains. And of the children of Benjamin, the kindred of Saul, three thousand: for hitherto the greatest part of them had kept the ward of the house of Saul. And of the children of Ephraim twenty thousand and eight hundred, mighty men of valour, famous throughout the house of their fathers. And of the half tribe of Manasseh eighteen thousand, which were expressed by name, to come and make David king. And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment. Of Zebulun, such as went forth to battle, expert in war, with all instruments of war, fifty thousand, which could keep rank: they were not of double heart. And of Naphtali a thousand captains, and with them with shield and spear thirty and seven thousand. And of the Danites expert in war twenty and eight thousand and six hundred. And of Asher, such as went forth to battle, expert in war, forty thousand. And on the other side of Jordan, of the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and of the half tribe of Manasseh, with all manner of instruments of war for the battle, an hundred and twenty thousand.

Up until this point, Israel had been at civil war. For six years, there had been strife between the house of Saul and the renegade army of David. Now, the strife had ceased. At last, there was unity and tranquility. And the soldiers came forth with one heart, to coronate David as their king. Thousands came from each tribe. But Issachar sent only two hundred men. Was this a sign of their reservation about making David king?

I don't think so. I suggest it wasn't a matter of reservation, but of representation. That is, these two hundred men represented the tribe in its entirety. They had a powerful influence in the tribe of Issachar because they had prophetic insight. They were influential because they were insightful. They were useful because they were knowledgeable. They could oversee the tribe because they understood the times—politically, nationally, prophetically.

We live in a world caught up in terrible confusion. People don't know what's coming down or what to do. But we in the body of Christ can be those who, like these men of Issachar, are very influential because we also have understanding of the times and we know what ought to be done.

1 Chronicles 12:38–40
All these men of war, that could keep rank, came with a perfect heart to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel: and all the rest also of Israel were of one heart to make David king. And there they were with David three days, eating and drinking: for their brethren had prepared for them. Moreover they that were nigh them, even unto Issachar and Zebulun and Naphtali, brought bread on asses, and on camels, and on mules, and on oxen, and meat, meal, cakes of figs, and bunches of raisins, and wine, and oil, and oxen, and sheep abundantly: for there was joy in Israel.

There had been feuding and fighting, battles and bitterness between the armies of Saul and David. But on the day of David's coronation, all those difficulties were forgotten. When the Son of David, Jesus Christ, comes back to rule and reign, every wrong will be righted. Every question will be answered. Every hurt will be healed. Every problem will be forgotten. There

will be true celebration at the coming and coronation of our King. Don't miss it!



13 1 Chronicles 13:1

And David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader.

Here we see a picture of the practice of plurality as David sought advice and wisdom from the leaders surrounding him.

> **1 Chronicles 13:2, 3**
> **And David said unto all the congregation of Israel, If it seem good unto you, and that it be of the LORD our God, let us send abroad unto our brethren every where, that are left in all the land of Israel, and with them also to the priests and Levites which are in their cities and suburbs, that they may gather themselves unto us: And let us bring again the ark of our God to us: for we inquired not at it in the days of Saul.**

The country had gone through some tough times under Saul's administration. Morale was low. David wanted to see the glory enjoyed in the land once more and he knew that true glory is found only in the presence of the Lord. So he sought to bring back the ark of the covenant. The ark was the gold-covered box that represented and symbolized the glory of God, for it was upon the mercy seat that covered the ark that God said He would meet with man (Exodus 25:22). In the days of Samuel, during a battle between Israel and the Philistines, someone had the bad idea to bring the ark into the battle, thinking the ark would give God's people victory. Even though the Philistines thought they were doomed at that point, they continued fighting and eventually not only beat the Israelites, but captured the ark. In this, it was as if God was reminding His people that He would not be boxed, that His presence would not be reduced to a good luck charm.

Gang, if you are looking to a church or an individual to win your battles, it won't work. If you're looking to a book, a program, or a seminar to see you through, you're headed for defeat. Even fellowship, Bible study, and worship are not ends in themselves. Their purpose is to draw us to Jesus, the only One who can give us true victory.

1 Chronicles 13:4–7
And all the congregation said that they would do so: for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people. So David gathered all Israel together, from Shihor of Egypt even unto the entering of Hamath, to bring the ark of God from Kirjath-jearim. And David went up, and all Israel, to Baalah, that is, to Kirjath-jearim, which belonged to Judah, to bring up thence the ark of God the LORD, that dwelleth between the cherubims, whose name is called on it. And they carried the ark of God in a new cart out of the house of Abinadab: and Uzza and Ahio drave the cart.

In his desire to bring back the ark so that the people might experience the glory of God, David does the right thing, but in the wrong way. He put the ark on a cart, which was the Philistine method, but not God's. In the Book of Numbers, the Lord specifically said the ark was not to be carried by anyone but the Levites—by people who were dedicated to praise.

What is a cart? Nothing more than boards and big wheels. So often, churches try to bring in the glory of God by calling a board meeting and seeing what kind of "big wheels" they can bring in. But that's not the way of the Lord. The presence and glory of God are always brought in on the shoulders of people who praise and worship Him.

1 Chronicles 13:8, 9
And David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets. And when they came unto the threshingfloor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark; for the oxen stumbled.

When the oxen pulling the cart stumbled, *Uzza,* whose name means "strong," did what was natural: he put out his hand to try to stabilize the ark. This seemed so right, but proved to be so wrong, for it is impossible for anyone to truly stabilize a situation in his own strength.

1 Chronicles 13:10–12
And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him, because he put his hand to the ark: and there he died before God. And David was displeased, because the LORD had made a breach upon Uzza: wherefore that place is called Perezuzza to this day. And David was afraid of God that day, saying, How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?

David had done his best to bring the ark back to Jerusalem. But his best wasn't good enough. "How can I do this?" he asks. But no answer from God is recorded because He had already spoken in the Scriptures concerning what should be done. He had already clearly, unmistakably, carefully declared how the ark was to be carried.

If you're at a point where you're saying, "Lord, what do You want me to do? How come this isn't working? What's going on?" and the Lord seems strangely silent, it could be because He's already revealed His heart, His plan, His principles, and He's simply waiting for you to discover them in His Word.

1 Chronicles 13:13, 14
So David brought not the ark home to himself to the city of David, but carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. And the ark of God remained with the family of Obed-edom in his house three months. And the LORD blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that he had.

Would you have taken the ark into your house? I wonder. After all, when it was in the hands of the Philistines, they were plagued. When the men of Beth-shemesh opened the lid to check its contents, thousands were killed. Here, Uzza touches it and falls down dead. Would *you* have taken the ark into

your home? Obed-edom was willing to take the risk. And the Lord blessed him for his willingness.



14 1 Chronicles 14:1

Now Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and timber of ce dars, with masons and carpenters, to build him an house.

Hiram was not a believer and yet he provided materials and skilled workmen to build a house for David. In this, I am reminded of the time Jesus asked a Samaritan woman for a drink of water in order to give her the opportunity to give something to Him (John 4). Sometimes I feel that we in the Christian community have so barricaded ourselves in some ways that we have not allowed the Hirams or Samaritan women of the world to interact with us and, in the process, be exposed to the things of God. I think there are times when the Lord would have us involved with people who don't know Him in order to open the way for the gospel.

1 Chronicles 14:2, 3

And David perceived that the LORD had confirmed him king over Israel, for his kingdom was lifted up on high, because of his people Israel. And David took more wives at Jerusalem: and David begat more sons and daughters.

David increased the number of his wives. But that doesn't mean that God approves the practice. And as David's life unfolds, we'll see his home life is a mess. The Lord lets us see this, I believe, to warn us of the problem of multiple marriages.

1 Chronicles 14:4–9

Now these are the names of his children which he had in Jerusalem; Shammua, and Shobab, Nathan, and Solomon, And Ibhar, and Elishua, and Elpalet, And Nogah, and Nepheg, and Japhia, And Elishama, and Beeliada, and Eliphalet. And when the Philistines heard that David was anointed king over all Israel, all

the Philistines went up to seek David. And David heard of it, and went out against them. And the Philistines came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim.

Whenever a person is anointed for a task, he can expect the enemy to gather forces and attack him. David was no exception. The greater the anointing, the more intense the attack. If the enemy senses you are moving out in any area of ministry or any sphere of service, he will not take it sitting down. Here, it was when David was anointed king that the Philistines attacked.

1 Chronicles 14:10
And David inquired of God, saying, Shall I go up against the Philistines? and wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the LORD said unto him, Go up; for I will deliver them into thine hand.

When faced with the Philistines, David didn't take a poll asking what he should do. He simply asked God.

1 Chronicles 14:11–13
So they came up to Baal-perazim; and David smote them there. Then David said, God hath broken in upon mine enemies by mine hand like the breaking forth of waters: therefore they called the name of that place Baal-perazim. And when they had left their gods there, David gave a commandment, and they were burned with fire. And the Philistines yet again spread themselves abroad in the valley.

Philistines don't give up easily. Perhaps you've experienced a victory in your life over an attack of the enemy. But one victory doesn't mean the enemy gives up. He retreats only to regroup.

1 Chronicles 14:14
Therefore David inquired again of God; and God said unto him, Go not up after them; turn away from them, and come upon them

over against the mulberry trees.

David had already asked God if he should wage war against the Philistines in verse 10. Here, in verse 14, he asks Him again. My tendency would be to say, "Why inquire of the Lord again? After all, it's the same situation, the same battle, the same enemy, the same place." But David, a man after God's own heart, sought God's heart in the matter. And this time, God told him not to attack. This time His answer was different.

Gang, if we're not careful, we can say, "Well, the Lord did this for me back in 1976. Now that I'm in the same situation, the same formula will work." Not necessarily. The Lord wants us to be in tune with Him and dependent upon Him in every circumstance. I believe this is the secret of David's success. He kept on inquiring at every juncture.

1 Chronicles 14:15
And it shall be, when thou shalt hear a sound of going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt go out to battle: for God is gone forth before thee to smite the host of the Philistines.

If I were instructed to wait until I heard the sound of leaves blowing in the wind before I did something, I think my tendency would be to say, "How will I really know that's You, Lord, and not just normal wind?" This is a question we often ask. Events transpire and we wonder whether they are the result of our prayer or simply the result of natural circumstance. The answer, however, is that the Lord is in just as much control of natural circumstances as He is of supernatural ones. Therefore, we can rest in His sovereignty over every situation.

1 Chronicles 14:16, 17
David therefore did as God commanded him: and they smote the host of the Philistines from Gibeon even to Gazer. And the fame of David went out into all lands; and the LORD brought the fear of him upon all nations.

Although David's fame is spreading and his fortune is increasing, he's still restless inside. Why? The answer is seen in chapter 15 . . .



15 **1 Chronicles 15:1**

And David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent.

The word, "glory," in Hebrew is *chabod* and means "weighty or heavy." Whether he knows it or not, every person hungers for the glory of God in his life. We seek to satisfy that hunger sometimes by eating, going to a movie, or watching TV. Yet the emptiness remains. Then we come into the presence of the Lord, spend time on our knees or in praise and suddenly we're satisfied.

Dear brother, precious sister, the aching in your heart, the stirring in your soul, is the cry of your spirit for the glory of God. David knew this. He had fame and fortune but they were not enough. He longed for the chabod, and knew it was to be experienced most fully at the mercy seat atop the ark.

1 Chronicles 15:2

Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever.

David's previous failure in his attempt to move the ark was not meant to frustrate him, but rather to motivate him to search the Scriptures. This verse tells us David did just that. Evidently, he spent three months studying and finally he found the passage that said the Levites were the ones who were to carry the ark.

Have you failed recently in some area? God is not trying to frustrate you, but to motivate you to spend time in His Word as you seek Him more diligently.

1 Chronicles 15:3–14

And David gathered all Israel together to Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the LORD unto his place, which he had prepared for it. And David assembled the children of Aaron, and the Levites: Of the sons of Kohath; Uriel the chief, and his brethren an hundred

and twenty: Of the sons of Merari; Asaiah the chief, and his brethren two hundred and twenty: Of the sons of Gershom; Joel the chief, and his brethren an hundred and thirty: Of the sons of Elizaphan; Shemaiah the chief, and his brethren two hundred: Of the sons of Hebron; Eliel the chief, and his brethren fourscore: Of the sons of Uzziel; Amminadab the chief, and his brethren an hundred and twelve. And David called for Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and for the Levites, for Uriel, Asaiah, and Joel, Shemaiah, and Eliel, and Amminadab, And said unto them, Ye are the chief of the fathers of the Levites: sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. For because ye did it not at the first, the LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order. So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel.

David had prepared a place for the ark. Here, he prepares the people for the ark.

1 Chronicles 15:15–22
And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the LORD. And David spake to the chief of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers with instruments of musick, psalteries and harps and cymbals, sounding, by lifting up the voice with joy. So the Levites appointed Heman the son of Joel; and of his brethren, Asaph the son of Berechiah; and of the sons of Merari their brethren, Ethan the son of Kushaiah; And with them their brethren of the second degree, Zechariah, Ben, and Jaaziel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehiel, and Unni, Eliab, and Benaiah, and Maaseiah, and Mattithiah, and Elipheleh, and Mikneiah, and Obed-edom, and Jeiel, the porters. So the singers, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, were appointed to sound with cymbals of brass; And Zechariah, and Aziel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehiel, and Unni, and Eliab, and

Maaseiah, and Benaiah, with psalteries on Alamoth; And Mattithiah, and Elipheleh, and Mikneiah, and Obed-edom, and Jeiel, and Azaziah, with harps on the Sheminith to excel. And Chenaniah, chief of the Levites, was for song: he instructed about the song, because he was skilful.

The musicians were divided into three groups under the leadership of Heman, Asaph, and Ethan.

1 Chronicles 15:23–26
And Berechiah and Elkanah were doorkeepers for the ark. And Shebaniah, and Jehoshaphat, and Nethaneel, and Amasai, and Zechariah, and Benaiah, and Eliezer, the priests, did blow with the trumpets before the ark of God: and Obed-edom and Jehiah were doorkeepers for the ark. So David, and the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the house of Obed-edom with joy. And it came to pass, when God helped the Levites that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, that they offered seven bullocks and seven rams.

Considering the number of people who had died (1 Samuel 5:9, 6:19; 1 Chronicles 13:10), being in proximity to the ark was risky business. Yet here, the ark is carried with joy. Why? Because they knew God would help them. Thus it was, no doubt, with a spirit of relief and hearts of thanksgiving that the Levites offered sacrifice to the Lord.

Samuel tells us this sacrifice was offered every six steps (2 Samuel 6:13). This was not very efficient, to say the least. Efficiency is doing things right. But God is not interested in efficiency. He's interested in effectiveness —which is doing the right thing. Six is the number of the flesh. Consequently, here we see the need to continually say, "Oh, Lord, my flesh is welling up again. I am vulnerable to doing things in my flesh and to hearing my flesh take credit for that which only You can do. I must buld an altar to remind me of You."

Maybe you are experiencing problems in your marriage, your family, your business, or your relationships. Wherever you see problems—the lack

of God's glory and substance—the solution is to worship. The glory of God will enter not by might, nor by power, but by His Spirit (Zechariah 4:6), brought in upon the shoulders of people who praise.

1 Chronicles 15:27, 28
And David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, and all the Levites that bare the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the master of the song with the singers: David also had upon him an ephod of linen. Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and with cymbals, making a noise with psalteries and harps.

On the basis of verses 22 and 25, I believe this music was both skillful and joyful.

1 Chronicles 15:29
And it came to pass, as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came to the city of David, that Michal the daughter of Saul looking out at a window saw king David dancing and playing: and she despised him in her heart.

Samuel tells us that because Michal rebuked David for his worship, she would be barren all the days of her life (2 Samuel 6:23). The same is still true. Those who put down worship bring into their own lives a barrenness and an emptiness.

Parenthetically, many commentators suggest it was at this point—when Michal rebuked David—that the seeds were sown in David's heart which eventually culminated in his affair with Bathsheba. Dear brother, precious sister, if you're not joining your husband or wife on the pathway to a closer, deeper walk with the Lord, you're setting yourself up for heartbreak. Don't make Michal's mistake. Serve the Lord together with passion and intensity, and not only will your heart be drawn closer to the Lord, but you will draw closer to each other as well.



16 **1 Chronicles 16:1–3**

So they brought the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tent that David had pitched for it: and they offered burnt sacrifices and peace offerings before God. And when David had made an end of offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD. And he dealt to every one of Israel, both man and woman, to every one a loaf of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine.

The wine and bread given to the people in celebration of the return of the ark speak to me of the celebration we experience at the Lord's Table where we, too, experience the mercy and glory of God. The piece of meat they were given speaks to me of the joy that is ours as we partake of the meat of God's Word (Jeremiah 15:16).

1 Chronicles 16:4–6

And he appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, and to record, and to thank and praise the LORD God of Israel: Asaph the chief, and next to him Zechariah, Jeiel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehiel, and Mattithiah, and Eliab, and Benaiah, and Obed-edom: and Jeiel with psalteries and with harps; but Asaph made a sound with cymbals; Benaiah also and Jahaziel the priests with trumpets continually before the ark of the covenant of God.

It was the job of certain of the Levites simply to record the Lord's blessings. I encourage you to try keeping a record of the blessings of God in your life. At the end of the day, write down the various ways God provided for you. I guarantee you will be surprised at His faithfulness every step of every day.

1 Chronicles 16:7–22

Then on that day David delivered first this psalm to thank the LORD into the hand of Asaph and his brethren. Give thanks unto

the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD. Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth; O ye seed of Israel his servant, ye children of Jacob, his chosen ones. He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. Be ye mindful always of his covenant; the word which he commanded to a thousand generations; Even of the covenant which he made with Abraham, and of his oath unto Isaac; And hath confirmed the same to Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant, Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance; When ye were but few, even a few, and strangers in it. And when they went from nation to nation, and from one kingdom to another people; He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproved kings for their sakes, Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.

This first portion of David's psalm is also seen in Psalm 105.

1 Chronicles 16:23–36 (a)
Sing unto the LORD, all the earth; shew forth from day to day his salvation. Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations. For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the people are idols: but the LORD made the heavens. Glory and honour are in his presence; strength and gladness are in his place. Give unto the LORD, ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. Fear before him, all the earth: the world also shall be stable, that it be not moved. Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice: and let men say among the nations, The LORD reigneth. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof: let the fields rejoice, and all that is therein. Then shall

the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the LORD, because he cometh to judge the earth. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever. And say ye, Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather us together, and deliver us from the heathen, that we may give thanks to thy holy name, and glory in thy praise. Blessed be the LORD God of Israel for ever and ever . . .

This second half of David's song is found in Psalm 96. Sometimes people ask how to worship. David's Psalm provides a great answer. Work your way right through it. Give thanks. Make known His deeds. Glory in His name. Seek His face. The Psalms in their entirety provide a workbook on worship. If you don't know how to worship, read the Book of Psalms and do what they say. When a Psalm says, "Shout," shout; when it says, "Clap," clap; when it says, "Sing," sing; when it says, "Bow down," bow down, and see if your heart doesn't rejoice as you draw close to the Lord in wonderful ways.

1 Chronicles 16:36 (b)
. . . And all the people said, Amen, and praised the LORD.

All the people said, "Amen," or, literally, "So be it." In this, they were not simply encouraging David, but were themselves establishing what was being spoken. When people pray publicly, we also have an opportunity to say, "Amen." First Corinthians 14 tells us that the early church practiced the saying of "Amen." It's a wonderful opportunity indeed to establish our prayers through speaking faith together.

1 Chronicles 16:37–43
So he left there before the ark of the covenant of the LORD Asaph and his brethren, to minister before the ark continually, as every day's work required: And Obed-edom with their brethren, threescore and eight; Obed-edom also the son of Jeduthun and Hosah to be porters: And Zadok the priest, and his brethren the priests, before the tabernacle of the LORD in the high place that was at Gibeon, To offer burnt offerings unto the LORD upon the

altar of the burnt offering continually morning and evening, and to do according to all that is written in the law of the LORD, which he commanded Israel; And with them Heman and Jeduthun, and the rest that were chosen, who were expressed by name, to give thanks to the LORD, because his mercy endureth for ever; And with them Heman and Jeduthun with trumpets and cymbals for those that should make a sound, and with musical instruments of God. And the sons of Jeduthun were porters. And all the people departed every man to his house: and David returned to bless his house.

Notice that it was after being in God's house that the people returned to bless their own houses. Some people think church interferes with family. I believe just the opposite. I believe that church inspires the family. I believe that when families come and hear the Word, the time they spend together is infinitely richer and more profitable than anything else they could do.



17

1 Chronicles 17:1

Now it came to pass, as David sat in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, Lo, I dwell in an house of cedars, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD remaineth under curtains.

At last, the ark was safely in Jerusalem. For any other man, that would have been enough. But not for David. This man in relentless pursuit of the heart of his God longed to do more.

1 Chronicles 17:2

Then Nathan said unto David, Do all that is in thine heart; for God is with thee.

Nathan was a godly man, but, like all men, he was fallible. What sounded so right was not the Lord's plan.

1 Chronicles 17:3–15

And it came to pass the same night, that the word of God came to Nathan, saying, Go and tell David my servant, Thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not build me an house to dwell in: For I have not dwelt in an house since the day that I brought up Israel unto this day; but have gone from tent to tent, and from one tabernacle to another. Wheresoever I have walked with all Israel, spake I a word to any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people, saying, Why have ye not built me an house of cedars? Now therefore thus shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, even from following the sheep, that thou shouldest be ruler over my people Israel: And I have been with thee whithersoever thou hast walked, and have cut off all thine enemies from before thee, and have made thee a name like the name of the great men that are in the earth. Also I will ordain a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, and they shall dwell in their place, and shall be moved no more; neither shall the children of wickedness waste them any more, as at the beginning, And since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel. Moreover I will subdue all thine enemies. Furthermore I tell thee that the LORD will build thee an house. And it shall come to pass, when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build me an house, and I will stablish his throne for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son: and I will not take my mercy away from him, as I took it from him that was before thee: But I will settle him in mine house and in my kingdom for ever: and his throne shall be established for evermore. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.

"Nathan, tell David that although he can't build Me a house, I will build him a house, for from his seed will come One who will reign forever." This is so like the Lord. He tempers our earthly disappointments with eternal blessings.

1 Chronicles 17:16–27

And David the king came and sat before the LORD, and said, Who am I, O LORD God, and what is mine house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And yet this was a small thing in thine eyes, O God; for thou hast also spoken of thy servant's house for a great while to come, and hast regarded me according to the estate of a man of high degree, O LORD God. What can David speak more to thee for the honour of thy servant? for thou knowest thy servant. O LORD, for thy servant's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all this greatness, in making known all these great things. O LORD, there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And what one nation in the earth is like thy people Israel, whom God went to redeem to be his own people, to make thee a name of greatness and terribleness, by driving out nations from before thy people, whom thou hast redeemed out of Egypt? For thy people Israel didst thou make thine own people for ever; and thou, LORD, becamest their God. Therefore now, LORD, let the thing that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant and concerning his house be established for ever, and do as thou hast said. Let it even be established, that thy name may be magnified for ever, saying, The LORD of hosts is the God of Israel, even a God to Israel: and let the house of David thy servant be established before thee. For thou, O my God, hast told thy servant that thou wilt build him an house: therefore thy servant hath found in his heart to pray before thee. And now, LORD, thou art God, and hast promised this goodness unto thy servant: Now therefore let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may be before thee for ever: for thou blessest, O LORD, and it shall be blessed for ever.

David understood that the prophecy was messianic that he would be an ancestor of the Messiah. What a glorious promise. But, saint, God has given you an even greater promise, for you are not simply an ancestor of Messiah. Rather, you are linked to Messiah. You are the Bride of Christ. Consequently, no matter what the Lord is doing or not doing in your life, regardless of

whether your ministry opens up as you hoped, or your dream is fulfilled as you desired, like David, you should sit before the Lord and marvel, saying, "Lord, the fact that You would let me be a lover of You, related to You, a part of You causes me to praise You forever and ever. I'll worship You enthusiastically, consistently, throughout eternity. I'll love You forevermore."

I believe it wearies our Lord to hear His children continually complain and groan about what they don't have, about what's not going right. We of all people should rejoice evermore because of what the Lord has done. I encourage you to ask Him to show you what He has already done for you. If you do, I guarantee that, like David, you'll be rendered speechless.

WHEN GOD SAYS NO

A Topical Study of 1 CHRONICLES 17

When my daughters, Jessie and Christy, were young, I ended up looking like the heavy in their eyes every week because it seemed like almost every Sunday, on our way to church, someone was giving away kittens.

"Daddy, can we take a kitten home today?" they would ask.

And my answer would always be the same: "No."

The reason I said no every week was because we already had a cat named Gabriel. Gabriel was a mellow cat. But one day he did something that I couldn't tell my daughters about. You see, one day, a little kitten wandered into our yard. The girls named it Snowball. I sent them around the neighborhood to ask if anyone had lost a kitten. But no one had. So we kept Snowball. It wasn't long, however, before there was trouble between Gabriel and the newcomer. Gabriel eyed him suspiciously. Then, about four or five days after his arrival, Snowball had the audacity and the poor judgment to eat Gabriel's food. When Gabriel came by, the kitten arched its back, hissed, and clawed Gabriel's face. That did it. Gabriel's fur stood up and he took off after the kitten. Snowball ran for his life—and I never saw him again.

So, because I had seen another side of Gabriel, I became reluctant to bring any other kitten home. Consequently, when Christy and Jessie asked if they could have a kitten, I always said, *No.* But I didn't explain the whole story because I didn't want them to think badly of Gabriel. Even though I came across as the heavy, as a father, I had a responsibility to do what was best for my household, even if my girls didn't understand.

Our heavenly Father has that same responsibility. Oftentimes, He says *No* to our requests without giving a reason why.

Our Father is ready and desirous to answer our prayers but His answer can be one of three: He can say, *Yes,* and grant our request. Or, He can say, *Wait.* Or He can say, *No.* No matter how spiritual you are, how mature you might be in the things of the Lord, there will come times when He says *No* to

you. There was never a more spiritual man in all of the Bible than David, for he alone was called a man after God's own heart. David had a love for the Lord and was in love with the Lord and yet sometimes the Lord said *No,* even to him.

Such is the case in the text before us. At this time, although David was not yet forty years old, he was remarkably successful. He had established his kingdom, subdued his enemies, and prospered materially. Yet as he sat in his palace, his heart and mind wandered outside, to the ark of the covenant. Feeling it wasn't right that he lived in a palace while the ark was in a tent, David declared he wanted to build a temple for God.

"A wonderful idea," the prophet Nathan declared.

But the Lord corrected both Nathan and David.

"Tell David he can't build Me a house." But then He went on to do something so characteristic of Him: He tempered David's disappointment with a new appointment.

Perhaps today you are confused by why the Lord seems to be saying *No* to you.

"Lord," you say, "I've offered myself to go to the mission field. Why have You closed the door?"

"Lord, I wanted to adopt that child, to bring that baby into our home. Why hasn't the door opened?"

"Lord, I started that business, desiring that it would prosper financially so that I could give the profits to Your work. Instead, I'm bankrupt. It failed. Why?"

"Lord, I wanted to marry him and be a help to him. Why hasn't that relationship developed?"

There are so many areas we offer to the Lord. All seem like good ideas, inspired ideas, right ideas, but the Lord shuts the door and simply says *No.* If we're not careful, at that point, we are vulnerable to becoming bitter. How do we keep from blaming God and becoming bitter? The answer is to do what David did when the Lord said *No* to him . . .

Don’t Stomp Out. Sit Down.

And David the king came and sat before the LORD . . .

1 Chronicles 17:16 (a)

David could have been very hurt. He could have stood up to the Lord. He could have stomped out from the Lord. Instead, he sat before the Lord.

When God says *No,* the first thing we must do is what David did: sit down, slow down, quiet down. Because David sat before the Lord, he was both enlightened and encouraged. In chapter 22:7, we read that David understood the reason he couldn’t build the temple was because he was a man of war, whereas Solomon would be a man of peace. Surely, David would never have received this enlightenment had he stomped out angrily.

Secondly, in addition to enlightenment he received encouragement. In 2 Chronicles 6:8, we read that, as Solomon dedicated the temple, the Lord whispered in the ear of David, “For inasmuch as it was in thine heart, thou didst well.” Dear folks, when the Lord says *No* to you—and He will—don’t stomp out. Sit down. And, in due time, you’ll hear words of both enlightenment and encouragement.

Don’t Fret. Focus.

> *. . . for thou hast also spoken of thy servant’s house for a great while to come, and hast regarded me according to the estate of a man of high degree, O* LORD *God.*
>
> 1 Chronicles 17:17 (b)

When the Lord says *No,* don’t fret and fuss and fume. Instead, focus on the blessing. We should be continually blown away and blessed by what God has already done. God chose us before the beginning of the world. He sent His Son to save us. He placed His Spirit within our hearts. He is preparing a place for us to live with Him eternally. Let us never, ever forget what God has *already* done for us.

Don’t Pout on the Premises. Pray in the Promises.

> *And now, LORD, thou art God, and hast promised this goodness unto thy servant . . .*
>
> 1 Chronicles 17:26 (a)

After he blessed the Lord for what He said He would do, David prayed on the basis of His promise. We must do the same. If bills are piling up, say, “On the basis of Your promise to supply all our needs, Lord, I trust in You.” If you long to be married, say, “Lord, Your Word says if I delight in You, You will give me the desire of my heart. Therefore, on the basis of that promise, I’m asking that you fulfill my desires or change my heart.” If you’re worried, say, “Lord, Your Word says You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You. Therefore, according to Your promise, I ask that You inject me with Your peace.”

Gang, with over 3,000 promises in the Word, there is no shortage of things to pray in!

Don’t Complain about What You Can’t Do. Do What You Can.

Now, behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the LORD *an hundred thousand talents of gold . . .*

1 Chronicles 22:14 (a)

In the coming chapters, we’ll see David gathering his army to raid the enemy territory surrounding Israel. The gold, silver, and other riches from those territories were brought to Jerusalem and laid in store for the temple David knew his son would build. He gathered the architects to draw up plans for the temple. He hired workers to go into the quarries to prepare the stones. He raised taxes, gathered materials, and gave of his own wealth. He did everything he possibly could, short of building it himself.

I like that! Maybe you can’t go to the mission field. Do what you can do. Pray for those who are ministering overseas. Give ten percent above your tithe to support other missionaries. If you can’t adopt a child, help support one either here or abroad. If your business didn’t work out, join someone else’s business and help him. It is the man after God’s own heart who does what he can rather than complain about what he can’t.

Our Father knows best. He really does. Jessie and Christy didn’t know why I wouldn’t let them have a kitten. But I knew why. Our heavenly Father, who knows your situation better than you do yourself, says, “Child, even though you don’t see it and I can’t explain it, I want you to trust Me.”

And I guarantee that, as you look back over the years at the times God said *No,* you’ll say, “Glory to You, Father. You’re always right. Veto my plans whenever You want.”



18 **1 Chronicles 18:1–4**

Now after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them, and took Gath and her towns out of the hand of the

Philistines. And he smote Moab; and the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts. And David smote Hadarezer king of Zobah unto Hamath, as he went to stablish his dominion by the river Euphrates. And David took from him a thousand chariots, and seven thousand horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen: David also houghed all the chariot horses, but reserved of them an hundred chariots.

In Deuteronomy 17, the word was given to kings that they were not to multiply to themselves horses because the Lord wanted His people to be dependent only upon Him. Therefore, wanting to be obedient to the Lord, when he captured these horses, David destroyed them.

1 Chronicles 18:5, 6
And when the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadarezer king of Zobah, David slew of the Syrians two and twenty thousand men. Then David put garrisons in Syria-damascus; and the Syrians became David's servants, and brought gifts. Thus the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went.

Wherever David went, the Lord protected him. In this, we must realize that, as the people of God, we are indestructible until the Lord's time comes for us to go home. "It is appointed unto man once to die," we read in Hebrews 9:27. There is a day, an hour predetermined by the Lord in which you will go home. But until that time comes, you're indestructible. That is the reason that, although the crowd reacted so unfavorably to Jesus' first sermon in a synagogue that they wanted to throw Him over a cliff, He was able to walk right through them unharmed (Luke 4).

1 Chronicles 18:7, 8
And David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadarezer, and brought them to Jerusalem. Likewise from Tibhath, and from Chun, cities of Hadarezer, brought David very much brass, wherewith Solomon made the brasen sea, and the pillars, and the vessels of brass.

David desired to build a temple for the Lord. The Lord, however, forbade him, saying his son would build the temple. Instead of complaining about what he couldn't do, David set out to do all he possibly could. Here, he's gathering materials for that very purpose.

A little boy was given a brand new toy sailboat. Thrilled with the gift, he took it out to a little lake nearby. As he held the string, the boat sailed out to the middle of the lake. Then, suddenly, a huge wind arose that snapped the string and capsized the boat. As he watched his brand new boat sink, the boy said, "Wow! What a great day to fly a kite!"

I like that! Instead of complaining about the wind that sank his boat, he got a kite and flew it. That's the heart of David. He didn't bemoan the fact that he couldn't build the temple. Instead he said, "I'm a man of war and I"ll utilize that ability to gather material for the temple."

1 Chronicles 18:9–11
Now when Tou king of Hamath heard how David had smitten all the host of Hadarezer king of Zobah; He sent Hadoram his son to king David, to inquire of his welfare, and to congratulate him, because he had fought against Hadarezer, and smitten him; (for Hadarezer had war with Tou;) and with him all manner of vessels of gold and silver and brass. Them also king David dedicated unto the LORD, with the silver and the gold that he brought from all these nations; from Edom, and from Moab, and from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines, and from Amalek.

Tou was a smart man. When he saw everyone else getting wiped out, he evidently decided, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." So he sent a word of congratulations and some gifts to appease David, which David, in turn, dedicated to the work of the Lord.

1 Chronicles 18:12–15
Moreover Abishai the son of Zeruiah slew of the Edomites in the valley of salt eighteen thousand. And he put garrisons in Edom; and all the Edomites became David's servants. Thus the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went. So David reigned over all Israel, and executed judgment and justice among all his

people. And Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the host; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud, recorder.

Joab was the general and Jehoshaphat was the recorder, the one who kept notes of all that God was doing.

1 Chronicles 18:16, 17
And Zadok the son of Ahitub, and Abimelech the son of Abiathar, were the priests; and Shavsha was scribe; And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and the sons of David were chief about the king.

Zadok and Abimelech were both high priests—Zadok at Gibeon and Abimelech at Jerusalem.



19 1 Chronicles 19:1–5

Now it came to pass after this, that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon died, and his son reigned in his stead. And David said, I will shew kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, because his father shewed kindness to me. And David sent messengers to comfort him concerning his father. So the servants of David came into the land of the children of Ammon to Hanun, to comfort him. But the princes of the children of Ammon said to Hanun, Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? are not his servants come unto thee for to search, and to overthrow, and to spy out the land? Wherefore Hanun took David's servants, and shaved them, and cut off their garments in the midst hard by their buttocks, and sent them away. Then there went certain, and told David how the men were served. And he sent to meet them: for the men were greatly ashamed. And the king said, Tarry at Jericho until your beards be grown, and then return.

David was genuinely trying to express a heart of love and compassion toward Nahash's son, Hanun. But the sin of suspicion was in the heart of Hanun and his men. "These guys aren't really here to give condolences," they

said. They're nothing more than spies." So Hanun shaved their beards—a disgrace in that day—and exposed their backsides in order to humiliate them. When David heard about it, he told them to wait in Jericho until their beards grew back.

Jesus told us to share both love and the gospel with those who are in the world. But He also warned us that even as the world persecuted Him, so it would persecute us (John 15:20). Therefore, we must not be surprised when we are humiliated, embarrassed, and put down. Due to the tendency toward suspicion in all of us, people who don't know Jesus will treat you like you're trying to rip them off when all you're trying to do is help them out.

"Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake," Jesus said, "for so persecuted they the prophets before you" (see Matthew 5:11, 12). Therefore, if people are coming against you, you're in good company—the company of the prophets.

"But I'll never recover from that criticism or suspicion," you say.

Yes you will. Your beard will grow back and you'll be strengthened to serve all the more.

1 Chronicles 19:6–10

And when the children of Ammon saw that they had made themselves odious to David, Hanun and the children of Ammon sent a thousand talents of silver to hire them chariots and horsemen out of Mesopotamia, and out of Syria-maachah, and out of Zobah. So they hired thirty and two thousand chariots, and the king of Maachah and his people; who came and pitched before Medeba. And the children of Ammon gathered themselves together from their cities, and came to battle. And when David heard of it, he sent Joab, and all the host of the mighty men. And the children of Ammon came out, and put the battle in array before the gate of the city: and the kings that were come were by themselves in the field. Now when Joab saw that the battle was set against him before and behind, he chose out of all the choice of Israel, and put them in array against the Syrians.

David sent Joab to lead the troops against the soldiers Hanun had hired from Mesopotamia and Syria. Take heart, dear saint. You might be embarrassed or humiliated, put down, made fun of, persecuted, mocked, or wrongly accused. But there is One who will fight for you (Exodus 14:14). David's servants were put down, but David came to their defense, just as the Son of David will come to your defense in due time.

1 Chronicles 19:11, 12
And the rest of the people he delivered unto the hand of Abishai his brother, and they set themselves in array against the children of Ammon. And he said, If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me: but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will help thee.

Not only were Joab and Abishai brothers by birth, but they were also brothers in battle, fighting a common foe. "If you get overpowered, I'll bring my troops and help you," Abishai said to Joab. "If I get overpowered, you bring your troops and help me."

Gang, this is exactly what we need in the church of Jesus Christ. We need to realize we're fighting a common foe—Satan and the hordes of hell. Therefore, we must not fight each other or fault each other. Yes, we're in different places on the battlefield—different positions, different ministries, different callings. But when some other part of the body is in need, let us be the first to rush to their aid, to support them, stand by them, and assist them in any way we can.

1 Chronicles 19:13
Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people, and for the cities of our God: and let the LORD do that which is good in his sight.

These men were armed, trained, and ready to do battle, but they realized the results would have to be left to the Lord. They did what they could, but realized only the Lord could bring about ultimate victory.

I feel it's important we adopt a similar attitude—that we do the very best we can do in situations of spiritual warfare and ministry, and leave the rest

with the Lord. I fear that we are sometimes reluctant to pray for the sick because we're worried they won't be healed. I fear we're hesitant to pray for those who are worried or depressed for fear that they will remain in their state. The Lord will do what's right in His sight. Our job is simply to prepare for the battle, to place ourselves in positions to do whatever we can do.

If you say to someone, "Dear brother, let me pray for you," and you pray the prayer of faith and seek the Lord—even if that situation does not seemingly or immediately improve or change, you will have done what you can do. Not only is that pleasing in the sight of the Lord, but it will inevitably be appreciated by the person for whom you pray. All too often, we don't pray or move in faith because we fear people will get disillusioned or disappointed if things don't work out the way we think they should.

I suggest that we should say, "We're going to do everything we can. We're going to pray fervently. We're going to work hard. We're going to see what we can do to the best of our ability. But then, Lord, we submit to Your sovereignty and Your wisdom to do what is right."

Pray for each other, dear saints. And don't let fear quench your desire or your aggressiveness in prayer.

1 Chronicles 19:14–18

So Joab and the people that were with him drew nigh before the Syrians unto the battle; and they fled before him. And when the children of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fled, they likewise fled before Abishai his brother, and entered into the city. Then Joab came to Jerusalem. And when the Syrians saw that they were put to the worse before Israel, they sent messengers, and drew forth the Syrians that were beyond the river: and Shophach the captain of the host of Hadarezer went before them. And it was told David; and he gathered all Israel, and passed over Jordan, and came upon them, and set the battle in array against them. So when David had put the battle in array against the Syrians, they fought with him. But the Syrians fled before Israel; and David slew of the Syrians seven thousand men which fought in chariots, and forty thousand footmen, and killed Shophach the captain of the host.

Why were the Israelites victorious? Because they did their best and trusted the Lord.

1 Chronicles 19:19
And when the servants of Hadarezer saw that they were put to the worse before Israel, they made peace with David, and became his servants: neither would the Syrians help the children of Ammon any more.

Not only did Israel win the battle, but the servants of Hadarezer switched sides and became servants of David. I believe this is what it means to be "more than a conqueror" (Romans 8:37)—to not only gain victory against the sin that seeks to dominate us, but, to make it our servant as it serves to show us our need for the Lord every step of the way.



20

1 Chronicles 20:1 (a)
And it came to pass, that after the year was expired, at the time that kings go out to battle, Joab led forth the power of the army, and wasted the country of the children of Ammon, and came and besieged Rabbah . . .

Israel is one of very few countries in the world that has no indigenous sport. In Old Testament times, the Israelites didn't have time for sports. Their national life consisted of two activites: war and worship. Spring was "the time that kings go out to battle" because it wouldn't be too cold and the chariot wheels wouldn't get stuck in the mud.

1 Chronicles 20:1 (b)
. . . But David tarried at Jerusalem . . .

This is when David committed adultery with Bathsheba. David should have been in battle with Joab, but because he wasn't, he was vulnerable to sin. I find it interesting that the text makes no mention of David's sin. We would know nothing of it were it not for the parallel passage in 2 Samuel. In

1 Samuel 25, Samuel died. Therefore, most scholars believe the ending of 1 Samuel and all of 2 Samuel were the work of David. If this is true, it was David who wrote of his own sin in great detail while Ezra, the author of 1 Chronicles, doesn't even mention it. This tells me that any man can deal publicly with his own sin if he feels it would serve as a warning to others. But no one else has a right to talk about someone else's sin. Ezra simply and wisely said, "David tarried in Jerusalem."

1 Chronicles 20:1 (c), 2
. . . And Joab smote Rabbah, and destroyed it. And David took the crown of their king from off his head, and found it to weigh a talent of gold, and there were precious stones in it; and it was set upon David's head: and he brought also exceeding much spoil out of the city.

After the victory was secured, Joab called for David to symbolically enter the city and take the king's crown.

1 Chronicles 20:3
And he brought out the people that were in it, and cut them with saws, and with harrows of iron, and with axes. Even so dealt David with all the cities of the children of Ammon. And David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.

Why did David cut the people with saws and axes? I suggest it was for the same reason that he imposed the death penalty on a man who stole a lamb (2 Samuel 12:5). There is a tendency within people to become harsh, critical, and cruel when they are themselves involved in sin. The most godly people I know are also the most gracious people I know. The most spiritual people I know are also the most merciful people I know. Mercy, grace, and love are characteristics of godliness and holiness. Harshness, judgment, and criticism are often indicative of sin in one's own life.

Once David made confession, as seen in Psalm 51, once repentance took place, as Acts 20:21 says, David's fellowship with the Lord was immediately restored. And the same is true of us. When we fail, when we err, when we miss the mark, once we repent to the Lord, we are immediately

forgiven by the Lord. That doesn't mean we won't experience the problems and repercussions of our sin, but it does mean relationship is restored.

"Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned," David declared (Psalm 51:4). True, Scriptural repentance is always directed toward God. Once we understand this, we are loosed from the burden of judging those who sin against us and free instead just to love them.

1 Chronicles 20:4–8
And it came to pass after this, that there arose war at Gezer with the Philistines; at which time Sibbechai the Hushathite slew Sippai, that was of the children of the giant: and they were subdued. And there was war again with the Philistines; and Elhanan the son of Jair slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, whose spear staff was like a weaver's beam. And yet again there was war at Gath, where was a man of great stature, whose fingers and toes were four and twenty, six on each hand, and six on each foot: and he also was the son of the giant. But when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea David's brother slew him. These were born unto the giant in Gath; and they fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants.

Here we see the servants of David slaying the sons of Goliath even as we can have victory over the demonic forces of Satan because of what our Greater than David did for us on the Cross.

OVERCOMING GIANTS

A Topical Study of
1 CHRONICLES 20:5–8

One of the best-known beaches in southern California is called "The Wedge." The Wedge is an area of the Newport coast that is normally fairly tranquil and peaceful. But every once in awhile, huge swells mount up and slam into the beach with incredible force. When this happens, there are invariably two reactions. When the waders see the swells begin to rise, they turn their backs on the waves and begin to run as fast as they can toward the shore—only to be inevitably knocked down by the very waves they were hoping to escape. The bodysurfers, on the other hand, don't run from the waves, but swim toward them, dive under them, and come up safely on the other side. In life, waves of difficulty inevitably arise in our lives. When they do, we have a decision to make: whether to turn and run from them, and, in so doing, get knocked out, or to face them head-on and come up on the other side.

"That sounds nice, theoretically," you say. "But you don't know the waves that are coming up against me. I've got some big challenges, some difficult dilemmas, some brutal situations headed my way." You're right. I don't know the problems that face you, but I do know they couldn't be bigger than the giants in our text . . .

Unbelievable Giants

One was a brother of Goliath, the others were the sons of Goliath—and they were big. Goliath himself was at least nine feet and four inches tall and perhaps as tall as eleven feet. In addition to their size, Scripture records that they had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. Biologically, this speaks of the fact that they were abnormal. Spiritually, six is the number of man, and speaks of their carnality.

These big, bad giants were stomping through the valleys of Israel. Forty years earlier, David had killed their father and brother. But, as our text says, "there was war again with the Philistines." Take note of this because in the area of spiritual warfare, in your pilgrimage through life, you'll face the same battles over and over again. Just because Goliath went down once doesn't mean he doesn't have some brothers or sons waiting in the wings.

In 2 Samuel 21:16, we read that, although David led his servants out to do battle against these sons of Goliath, his life was threatened. So his servants advised him to go back to Jerusalem. David heeded their advice and went back to his capital, where he was kept safe. But his servants did battle against the giants and were successful. Why? The servants of David were successful in killing giants for one simple reason: years earlier, David had killed Goliath. Thus, David was an inspiration for them and an example to them.

Remember, these men were not even born when David did battle against Goliath. They were not on the scene in the valley of Elah. They didn't see his bravery. They didn't observe his courage. But what David did out of their sight before they were even born was passed on to these servants years later. The giants you are killing in secret presently, the victories you are experiencing in prayer, in spiritual warfare, in witnessing, in giving, in serving will have an effect on the lives of your sons and daughters, your friends and neighbors, even if they don't observe these activities.

In the list of David's mighty men, there are a number of them who are mentioned as killing giants. But among the names of Saul's followers, not one is identified as killing a giant. Why? Because Saul was afraid. Saul never

stepped out in faith. And because he never killed a giant, neither did his sons nor his servants.

Who is our Captain? The Son of David, Jesus Christ. Who is the one He defeated thoroughly and completely? Satan. The author of fear, the perpetuator of problems was dealt a death blow on the Cross of Calvary. But Satan still has his "sons"—demonic entities he releases to do battle against us, for the Bible says we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12). Satan has been defeated. But he has released his henchmen to put fear in your heart, to smash you in the sand as wave after wave of problems come your way.

Unseen Forces

Do you ever wake up in the morning and wonder why you're depressed, why you just want to stay in bed, why you're discouraged when there's no real reason? It is because, even in the night hours, your spirit can battle against oppressive, demonic entities. But because our Captain, our Hero, our Leader, Jesus Christ, beat Satan, we can enjoy the victory He secured for us. Even though these giants loom over us, they have no authority in our lives. Why? Because they don't belong here. Where did the Philistines come from? From the island of Crete. But they were kicked out of their home and ended up in the territory of God's people. Where do demons come from? They were kicked out of heaven and ended up on this planet.

Unworthy No Longer

There are two difficulties that cause us to be afraid of doing battle against demonic entities. First, we feel unworthy. But check out what the Word says about this . . .

> *Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.*
>
> Colossians 2:14

"The handwriting of ordinances" is a shopping list of all the wrong things we've done and all the right things we haven't done. For all of us, that list is rather lengthy. But even the longest list was placed on the Cross of Christ at Calvary. All of the things that cause me to say, "I can't have victory; I can't be powerful spiritually; I can't accomplish that in ministry" were nailed to the Cross of Calvary and the blood of Jesus blotted them out completely. Every sin you have ever done has been blotted out totally by the blood of Christ.

Unable No More

In addition to feeling unworthy to do battle, we also feel unable. But, again, look at what Paul said to the Colossians . . .

> *And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.*
>
> Colossians 2:15

The Greek word translated "spoiled" literally means "stripped." It was used to describe what took place when the Roman army defeated another army: the general of the defeated army would be stripped, tied to his horse, and paraded through the streets of Rome as the citizens lined up to mock him. Suppose this general suddenly stopped and said, "People of Rome, listen to me. I am a great general and I demand you follow me right now." The people hearing this would not be scared in the least. No one would follow a naked general, no matter how loudly he yelled, no matter how much he threatened.

The same is true of demonic spirits that were once powerful and authoritative over you. Because they were stripped of their authority on the Cross of Calvary, they cannot touch you unless you give in to them.

> *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.*
>
> 1 Peter 3:18–20

Following His death on the Cross, Jesus went to a place called Hades, where, according to Peter, He preached unto disobedient spirits. Who are these disobedient spirits? Genesis 6 says that at the time of Noah, there were particularly hideous demons in the world who seduced human women. The result of that demonic union was giants—such as those of the six-fingered

and six-toed variety. It was to these demons that Jesus preached, placing limitations and boundaries around them, telling them their authority had been broken, their power stripped. That's what Paul is talking about in Colossians 2 when he says, "He spoiled, or stripped, principalities and powers." They're still alive. But, like a defeated general, all they can do is yell at you.

It is true that Satan goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. But it is equally true that this roaring lion has had his teeth kicked out by Jesus Christ on the Cross. Now, all the enemy can do is gum you to death by saying, "Watch out. You're going to fail. You're going to be discouraged. Your marriage is going to collapse. Your job is going to go bad." The spirit of fear that Paul talks about in 2 Timothy is just that—a spirit. But God has not given us the spirit of fear but of power and of love and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).

You can either be like the soldiers of Saul that were intimidated by the giants they saw, or you can be like the servants of David who said, "Because of what David did, we can take on the sons of Goliath and be victorious over them."

Too often, we view the enemy like a cat and ourselves like little mice as we hide in corners and scamper behind chairs. The reality is that you are the cat and Satan is the rat. You have been given authority and victory because of what Jesus did on Calvary. Therefore, refuse to accept the lying demands and commands of the spirits who say, "You'll never be spiritual. You'll never be successful. God can't use you, isn't using you, won't use you" because you've sinned once too often. They are Philistines, usurpers that don't belong in your life and you can command that they leave.

Follow the example of the Son of David, Jesus Christ. Take on the sons of Goliath—six fingers and all—and do them in. They must flee, and they will flee as you use Jesus' name.



21 If you took a poll concerning David's greatest sin, the average person would say it was either murder or adultery. But in God's eyes, it was pride. The sins of murder and adultery in chapter 20 were not even worth

mentioning. But the sin of pride is recorded here in chapter 21 as a warning for those wise enough to heed it.

1 Chronicles 21:1
And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.

To attack Israel, Satan went after David, the leader of the nation.

1 Chronicles 21:2
And David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, Go, number Israel from Beer-sheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it.

When David took on Goliath, he depended totally on God. Here, he's planning to rely on the strength of his army.

1 Chronicles 21:3
And Joab answered, The LORD make his people an hundred times so many more as they be: but, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? Why then doth my lord require this thing? Why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel?

Joab—hardly a spiritual giant himself—says, "David, don't do it. May God bless you with more people, but don't count them. I know why you're doing this; I sense pride in your heart."

1 Chronicles 21:4 (a)
Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab . . .

The Lord created us to be dependent upon Him, but in numbering the people, David was attempting to assess his own success apart from the Lord. In Isaiah 14, we read the account of Satan's downfall, and there we see that Satan himself fell because of pride. "I will be like God," he said. And this is always the essence of pride. He didn't say, "I will be greater than God," or, "I will obliterate God, but simply, "I will be like God."

Pride says, “I can do it myself. I don’t need to seek the Lord. I can handle the bills and take care of my kids myself.” How can you know if you’ve succumbed to the sin of pride? The answer is quite simple: pride always manifests itself in prayerlessness.

1 Chronicles 21:4 (b)–6
. . . Wherefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem. And Joab gave the sum of the number of the people unto David. And all they of Israel were a thousand thousand and an hundred thousand men that drew sword: and Judah was four hundred threescore and ten thousand men that drew sword. But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them: for the king’s word was abominable to Joab.

Against his better judgment, Joab numbered the people and 1,100,000 were counted.

1 Chronicles 21:7, 8
And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel. And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing: but now, I beseech thee, do away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.

To his credit, David never argues with God. Rather, he submits to the conviction of the Lord and says, “Forgive me, Lord. I was wrong.”

1 Chronicles 21:9, 10
And the LORD spake unto Gad, David’s seer, saying, Go and tell David, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things: choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee.

“Whom the Lord loves, He chastens and disciplines every son” (see Hebrews 12:6). Here, David is about to be disciplined.

1 Chronicles 21:11, 12

So God came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee Either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to him that sent me.

God gave David three choices of punishment: three years of famine, three months of being wiped out by his enemies, or three days of pestilence.

1 Chronicles 21:13
And David said unto God, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the LORD; for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man.

Forty-eight times in Psalm 136, the psalmist says of God, "Thy mercy endureth forever." This is why David wisely chose to place himself in God's hand rather than in the hand of man.

1 Chronicles 21:14–17
So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men. And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.

As the angel was destroying the citizens of Jerusalem, David cried out to the Lord and demonstrated the heart of a shepherd, saying, "Let the people go. It's my sin. Don't let them be plagued. *I* am the one who should be punished."

Sin always affects others. That's part of its tragedy. Here, David's sin affected 70,000 people directly. But before we feel too sorry for those who were slain, we must realize that in 2 Samuel 24, a parallel passage, we see that even as David was preparing to number the people, the anger of the Lord was already kindled against Israel (24:1). Satan was the one who tempted David to number Israel, but God was the One who was angry with the nation as a whole. And God allowed David to be tempted and to succumb because He not only wanted to deal with David personally, but also with the nation corporately.

This is so important to see. God is in absolute control. He works all the situations together. This keeps us from saying, "If He hadn't messed up, I wouldn't be in the mess I'm in." God is on the throne. And no one can say, "It's not fair that I am a victim." God is sovereign, in absolute control of every situation. When you begin to see this and live in it, you can truly praise the Lord in *all* things.

1 Chronicles 21:18–23

Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David went up at the saying of Gad, which he spake in the name of the LORD. And Ornan turned back, and saw the angel; and his four sons with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat. And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshingfloor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground. Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of this threshingfloor, that I may build an altar therein unto the LORD: thou shalt grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people. And Ornan said unto David, Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing

instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all.

"If it will stop the plague, take my threshingfloor, my oxen, my wood, my wheat—take everything," Ornan said to David.

1 Chronicles 21:24, 25
And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost. So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight.

This man after God's own heart said, "I will not give to the Lord that which costs me nothing" (see 2 Samuel 24:24). Sacrifice always costs. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. God gave everything. David reflects this.

1 Chronicles 21:26
And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering.

As David prepared the offering, the Lord poured out fire upon it—even as Jesus was burned on the Cross by the righteous wrath of the Father for our sins.

1 Chronicles 21:27–30
And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof. At that time when David saw that the LORD had answered him in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there. For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon. But David could not go before it to inquire of God: for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD.

The sword which was stretched over Jerusalem, causing 70,000 to die was placed in the sheath.

After they sinned, Adam and Eve were kept out of the garden with a flaming sword (Genesis 3:24). Here, we see a sword once again, sheathed, but still at hand. In Zechariah 13:7, we read that Jesus absorbed the blow of the sword when a spear was thrust in His side. At that point, the battle was over. The way into Eden was opened once again. Peace with God was made possible at last (Romans 5:1).



22 1 Chronicles 22:1

Then David said, This is the house of the LORD God, and this is the al tar of the burnt offering for Israel.

David decided the temple would be built where the full price was paid, where sacrifice was offered, where fire came down, and where the sword was sheathed.

1 Chronicles 22:2–5

And David commanded to gather together the strangers that were in the land of Israel; and he set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God. And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails for the doors of the gates, and for the joinings; and brass in abundance without weight; Also cedar trees in abundance: for the Zidonians and they of Tyre brought much cedar wood to David. And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the LORD must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death.

The house built to the Lord was not to be cut-rate, bargain-basement, missionary-barrel. It was to be “exceeding magnifical.” We need not be

extravagant, but we should do our very best in anything we undertake in the name of the Lord.

1 Chronicles 22:6–10
Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build an house for the LORD God of Israel. And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God: But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight. Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build an house for my name; and he shall be my son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever.

"David, you're a warrior," the Lord said. "My house is to be connected with peace. So I will use your son, whose name means 'Peace,' to build it." It wasn't until David sat before the Lord (1 Chronicles 17:16) that he understood why he was not allowed to build the temple. Maybe you're wondering why the Lord isn't letting you do what's on your heart in service for Him. As time passes, His plans and purpose will unfold. His reasons will be made known if you, like David, quiet your heart before Him.

1 Chronicles 22:11 (a)
Now, my son, the LORD be with thee; and prosper thou . . .

In David's blessing upon his son, we see some wonderful truths concerning prosperity. First, we see the prayer for prosperity. "The Lord be with you," David said, because prosperity of soul, family, finances, and health always begins in prayer.

1 Chronicles 22:11 (b)

. . . and build the house of the LORD thy God, as he hath said of thee.

Here, we see the purpose of prosperity. The purpose of prosperity is not to kick back or to be comfortable. The purpose of prosperity is to glorify the Lord. I'm increasingly convinced that the Lord is looking for men and women He can bless exceedingly who will allow His blessings to flow through them to others for His glory. The Lord is looking for people to bless abundantly who will pass on His blessing freely.

1 Chronicles 22:12, 13
Only the LORD give thee wisdom and understanding, and give thee charge concerning Israel, that thou mayest keep the law of the LORD thy God. Then shalt thou prosper, if thou takest heed to fulfil the statutes and judgments which the LORD charged Moses with concerning Israel: be strong, and of good courage; dread not, nor be dismayed.

Finally, we see the pathway to prosperity. Why do Jewish people today prosper around the world? It is because, even though they are not believers, they have adhered to the precepts and principles of the Word of God. God's Laws and principles are absolute. Just like gravity, they affect believer and non-believer alike. If you follow the direction, instruction, and wisdom of the Word, you'll prosper.

1 Chronicles 22:14 (a)
Now, behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the LORD an hundred thousand talents of gold . . .

Three thousand seven hundred and fifty tons of gold would equal six billion dollars today.

1 Chronicles 22:14 (b)–16
. . . and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance: timber also and stone have I prepared; and thou mayest add thereto. Moreover there

are workmen with thee in abundance, hewers and workers of stone and timber, and all manner of cunning men for every manner of work. Of the gold, the silver, and the brass, and the iron, there is no number. Arise therefore, and be doing, and the LORD be with thee.

David had given Solomon everything he would need to build the temple. All Solomon needed to provide was obedience. The same is true of us. We have been given "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). Our part is simply to obey.

1 Chronicles 22:17–19
David also commanded all the princes of Israel to help Solomon his son, saying, Is not the LORD your God with you? and hath he not given you rest on every side? for he hath given the inhabitants of the land into mine hand; and the land is subdued before the LORD, and before his people. Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God; arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the LORD God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of the LORD.

Notice the order. Seeking always comes before serving. Too often we say, "What can I do? Give me a job, Lord, and I'll get right on it."

But the Lord says, "No, I want *you*—not what you can do. Seek Me first, and as you begin to know Me, as we begin to walk together and cultivate a deeper relationship, I'll give you assignments, tasks, and ministries."

Gang, Satan would love to get us serving so much we're no longer seeking. He would love to keep us real busy. But once we're too busy to seek the Lord, we're just too busy. Slow it down. Wait on Him. And you'll be blessed.



23 As David comes to the end of his life, he begins the great task of organizing both the religious life and civil life of Israel.

1 Chronicles 23:1–3
So when David was old and full of days, he made Solomon his son king over Israel. And he gathered together all the princes of Israel, with the priests and the Levites. Now the Levites were numbered from the age of thirty years and upward: and their number by their polls, man by man, was thirty and eight thousand.

From Numbers 8, we know that the Levites, up to this point, served between the ages of thirty and fifty. Between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, they were trained. Beyond fifty, they would train younger men. In this, we see the possibility of using every year of our lives for the Lord.

1 Chronicles 23:4 (a)
Of which, twenty and four thousand were to set forward the work of the house of the LORD . . .

From the earliest days of the wilderness wanderings, it had been the job of the Levites to care for and transport the tabernacle. With the establishment of a permanent place of worship, David gives new duties to the Levites. Twenty-four thousand of them were to maintain the temple.

1 Chronicles 23:4 (b)
. . . and six thousand were officers and judges:

Six thousand Levites were appointed to be leaders.

1 Chronicles 23:5 (a)
Moreover four thousand were porters . . .

Four thousand Levites were appointed the job of opening and closing the doors of the temple.

1 Chronicles 23:5 (b)

. . . and four thousand praised the LORD with the instruments which I made, said David, to praise therewith.

David appointed 4,000 Levites to be full-time worshipers, to praise the Lord with instruments he himself had designed. Not only was David a warrior, but he was also an inventor of musical instruments, a musician, and a poet.

1 Chronicles 23:6–23
And David divided them into courses among the sons of Levi, namely, Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. Of the Gershonites were, Laadan, and Shimei. The sons of Laadan; the chief was Jehiel, and Zetham, and Joel, three. The sons of Shimei; Shelomith, and Haziel, and Haran, three. These were the chief of the fathers of Laadan. And the sons of Shimei were, Jahath, Zina, and Jeush, and Beriah. These four were the sons of Shimei. And Jahath was the chief, and Zizah the second: but Jeush and Beriah had not many sons; therefore they were in one reckoning, according to their father's house. The sons of Kohath; Amram, Ishar, Hebron, and Uzziel, four. The sons of Amram; Aaron and Moses: and Aaron was separated, that he should sanctify the most holy things, he and his sons for ever, to burn incense before the LORD, to minister unto him, and to bless in his name for ever. Now concerning Moses the man of God, his sons were named of the tribe of Levi. The sons of Moses were, Gershom, and Eliezer. Of the sons of Gershom, Shebuel was the chief. And the sons of Eliezer were, Rehabiah the chief. And Eliezer had none other sons; but the sons of Rehabiah were very many. Of the sons of Izhar; Shelomith the chief. Of the sons of Hebron; Jeriah the first, Amariah the second, Jahaziel the third, and Jekameam the fourth. Of the sons of Uzziel; Michah the first, and Jesiah the second. The sons of Merari; Mahli, and Mushi. The sons of Mahli; Eleazar, and Kish. And Eleazar died, and had no sons, but daughters: and their brethren the sons of Kish took them. The sons of Mushi; Mahli, and Eder, and Jeremoth, three.

The Levites were divided into three groups to bring about effective, efficient, organized service in the house of the Lord.

1 Chronicles 23:24–28
These were the sons of Levi after the house of their fathers; even the chief of the fathers, as they were counted by number of names by their polls, that did the work for the service of the house of the LORD, from the age of twenty years and upward. For David said, The LORD God of Israel hath given rest unto his people, that they may dwell in Jerusalem for ever: And also unto the Levites; they shall no more carry the tabernacle, nor any vessels of it for the service thereof. For by the last words of David the Levites were numbered from twenty years old and above: Because their office was to wait on the sons of Aaron for the service of the house of the LORD, in the courts, and in the chambers, and in the purifying of all holy things, and the work of the service of the house of God;

As seen in verse 3, the traditional age for a Levite to begin ministry was at the age of thirty. Here, on David's deathbed, he lowers the age to twenty. In so doing, David allowed more Levites to fill the necessary positions in the temple. My personal opinion is that, in these last days, we are seeing a similar dynamic take place as the Lord raises up more young men and women who are giving themselves for His service. Before, it was difficult to be involved in service for the Lord. If you thought about being a missionary, for example, it meant four years of Bible school, three years of seminary and then applying to a mission board. But in these last days, as the need is so great, as the revival is so wonderful, the Lord is raising opportunities for many to serve who previously would not have had such opportunity.

1 Chronicles 23:29, 30
Both for the shewbread, and for the fine flour for meat offering, and for the unleavened cakes, and for that which is baked in the pan, and for that which is fried, and for all manner of measure and size; And to stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at even;

Every morning and evening, these Levites stood and praised the Lord. So often, we think of ministry only as it relates to people. Here, we see an aspect of ministry directed exclusively to the Lord—a wonderful picture, indeed.

1 Chronicles 23:31, 32
And to offer all burnt sacrifices unto the LORD in the sabbaths, in the new moons, and on the set feasts, by number, according to the order commanded unto them, continually before the LORD: And that they should keep the charge of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the holy place, and the charge of the sons of Aaron their brethren, in the service of the house of the LORD.

In this temple structure, the high priest correlates with our great High Priest, Jesus Christ. Priests are the Old Testament picture of New Testament elders—men who minister to people on behalf of the Lord and who intercede to the Lord on behalf of people. Levites were those who did the practical service in the temple and correlate to the present-day ministry of deacons. I find it interesting that the Levites were to keep charge of the priests. This created an equality in ministry—a beautiful and wise check and balance system in spiritual leadership.



24 Whereas chapter 23 dealt with the Levites, chapter 24 deals with the priests. Again, although genealogies such as the one that follows seem redundant to us, they would prove to be vital for the reestablishment of the priestly ministry after the Babylonian captivity. Maybe you're going through some seemingly redundant, mundane dry times in your own life and you're wondering why the Lord isn't doing something more exciting. Take heart, dear saint. He's writing the story of your life according to what He knows lies ahead. Therefore, the "genealogies" where nothing seems to be happening are actually preparatory for future days.

1 Chronicles 24:1–5
Now these are the divisions of the sons of Aaron. The sons of Aaron; Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. But Nadab and Abihu died before their father, and had no children: therefore Eleazar and Ithamar executed the priest's office. And David distributed them, both Zadok of the sons of Eleazar, and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, according to their offices in their service. And there were more chief men found of the sons of Eleazar than of the sons of Ithamar; and thus were they divided. Among the sons of Eleazar there were sixteen chief men of the house of their fathers, and eight among the sons of Ithamar according to the house of their fathers. Thus were they divided by lot, one sort with another; for the governors of the sanctuary, and governors of the house of God, were of the sons of Eleazar, and of the sons of Ithamar.

The priests were divided by lot so that their order of service would be fair and effective. Solomon noted that the lot "causeth contention to cease" (Proverbs 18:18). It must have been this example the disciples followed in choosing a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:26).

1 Chronicles 24:6–10
And Shemaiah the son of Nethaneel the scribe, one of the Levites, wrote them before the king, and the princes, and Zadok the priest, and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, and before the chief of the fathers of the priests and Levites: one principal household being taken for Eleazar, and one taken for Ithamar. Now the first lot came forth to Jehoiarib, the second to Jedaiah, The third to Harim, the fourth to Seorim, The fifth to Malchijah, the sixth to Mijamin, The seventh to Hakkoz, the eighth to Abijah,

The longevity of these courses is seen in the fact that at the time of Christ, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was identified as being of the division of Abijah.

1 Chronicles 24:11–31

The ninth to Jeshua, the tenth to Shecaniah, The eleventh to Eliashib, the twelfth to Jakim, The thirteenth to Huppah, the fourteenth to Jeshebeab, The fifteenth to Bilgah, the sixteenth to Immer, The seventeenth to Hezir, the eighteenth to Aphses, The nineteenth to Pethahiah, the twentieth to Jehezekel, The one and twentieth to Jachin, the two and twentieth to Gamul, The three and twentieth to Delaiah, the four and twentieth to Maaziah. These were the orderings of them in their service to come into the house of the LORD, according to their manner, under Aaron their father, as the LORD God of Israel had commanded him. And the rest of the sons of Levi were these: Of the sons of Amram; Shubael: of the sons of Shubael; Jehdeiah. Concerning Rehabiah: of the sons of Rehabiah, the first was Isshiah. Of the Izharites; Shelomoth: of the sons of Shelomoth; Jahath. And the sons of Hebron; Jeriah the first, Amariah the second, Jahaziel the third, Jekameam the fourth. Of the sons of Uzziel; Michah: of the sons of Michah; Shamir. The brother of Michah was Isshiah: of the sons of Isshiah; Zechariah. The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi: the sons of Jaaziah; Beno. The sons of Merari by Jaaziah; Beno, and Shoham, and Zaccur, and Ibri. Of Mahli came Eleazar, who had no sons. Concerning Kish: the son of Kish was Jerahmeel. The sons also of Mushi; Mahli, and Eder, and Jerimoth. These were the sons of the Levites after the house of their fathers. These likewise cast lots over against their brethren the sons of Aaron in the presence of David the king, and Zadok, and Ahimelech, and the chief of the fathers of the priests and Levites, even the principal fathers over against their younger brethren.

The priests were separated into twenty-four courses, or divisions. There were about 6,000 men in each course, and each course served for two weeks. What did the priests do when they were not serving in the temple? They were the leaders, teachers, and counselors of their cities. It was a wonderful, practical, workable system.



25

1 Chronicles 25:1 (a)

Moreover David and the captains of the host separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps . . .

From 1 Corinthians chapters 12—14, we know that prophecy was a spiritual manifestation that functioned in the NT church. Prophecy is for the purpose of edification, exhortation, and comfort. I find it intriguing that Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun prophesied with the harp. One of the best ways prophecy can be ministered is through music. If you are a musician, I encourage you to pray that the Lord would give you songs that correlate with what He's doing specifically in your own fellowship of believers.

1 Chronicles 25:1 (b)–3

. . . with psalteries, and with cymbals: and the number of the workmen according to their service was: Of the sons of Asaph; Zaccur, and Joseph, and Nethaniah, and Asarelah, the sons of Asaph under the hands of Asaph, which prophesied according to the order of the king. Of Jeduthun: the sons of Jeduthun; Gedaliah, and Zeri, and Jeshaiah, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six, under the hands of their father Jeduthun, who prophesied with a harp, to give thanks and to praise the LORD.

There were two purposes for music in the temple. One was to give God's Word to men. The other was to direct praise to God. Those purposes have not changed. The highest calling of a musician is still to meet those two requirements.

1 Chronicles 25:4–6 (a)

Of Heman: the sons of Heman; Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shebuel, and Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, and Romamti-ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, and Mahazioth: All these were the sons of Heman the king's seer in the words of God, to lift up the horn. And God gave to Heman fourteen sons

and three daughters. All these were under the hands of their father . . .

Even though Heman devoted himself to the ministry of worship, his sons were under his hand. For what purpose? Read on . . .

1 Chronicles 25:6 (b)
. . . for song in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God, according to the king's order to Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman.

Heman was amazing. He was one who wrote, worshiped, prophesied, and raised a big family that followed in his footsteps, becoming part of the ministry team. Heman provides wonderful proof that time spent ministering to the Lord and time spent raising a family do not have to be mutually exclusive.

1 Chronicles 25:7
So the number of them, with their brethren that were instructed in the songs of the LORD, even all that were cunning, was two hundred fourscore and eight.

Two hundred and eighty eight—"all that were cunning"—were in the "orchestra." "Cunning" means "skilled" or "gifted." There was order to worship and beauty in it.

1 Chronicles 25:8–31
And they cast lots, ward against ward, as well the small as the great, the teacher as the scholar. Now the first lot came forth for Asaph to Joseph: the second to Gedaliah, who with his brethren and sons were twelve: The third to Zaccur, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The fourth to Izri, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The fifth to Nethaniah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The sixth to Bukkiah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The seventh to Jesharelah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The eighth to Jeshaiah, he,

his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The ninth to Mattaniah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The tenth to Shimei, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The eleventh to Azareel, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The twelfth to Hashabiah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The thirteenth to Shubael, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The fourteenth to Mattithiah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The fifteenth to Jeremoth, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The sixteenth to Hananiah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The seventeenth to Joshbekashah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The eighteenth to Hanani, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The nineteenth to Mallothi, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The twentieth to Eliathah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The one and twentieth to Hothir, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The two and twentieth to Giddalti, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The three and twentieth to Mahazioth, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The four and twentieth to Romamti-ezer, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve.

The musicians were divided into twenty-four companies, with twelve in each company. Lots were cast to determine order of service. As seen in verse 8, this was done equitably.

"Let all things be done decently and in order," Paul would write (1 Corinthians 14:40), as he gave direction for the New Testament temple—the church. "And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of thee," Paul would contend (1 Corinthians 12:21).

The world is greatly concerned about position and preeminence. But that has never been the way of the Lord. In His economy, humility is what matters (1 Peter 5:6)—as seen in the way He structured both His temple and His church.



26 In chapter 26, we see the office of porter—men who were to tend to the doors of the temple. These men numbered 4,000 and were divided into four groups—one for each door . . .

1 Chronicles 26:1–6
Concerning the divisions of the porters: Of the Korhites was Meshelemiah the son of Kore, of the sons of Asaph. And the sons of Meshelemiah were, Zechariah the firstborn, Jediael the second, Zebadiah the third, Jathniel the fourth, Elam the fifth, Jehohanan the sixth, Elioenai the seventh. Moreover the sons of Obed-edom were, Shemaiah the firstborn, Jehozabad the second, Joah the third, and Sacar the fourth, and Nethaneel the fifth, Ammiel the sixth, Issachar the seventh, Peulthai the eighth: for God blessed him. Also unto Shemaiah his son were sons born, that ruled throughout the house of their father: for they were mighty men of valour.

It is not surprising that the porters are referred to as "mighty man of valor," for not only did they open and close the heavy gates of the temple, but they provided a military guard against would-be plunderers.

1 Chronicles 26:7, 8
The sons of Shemaiah; Othni, and Rephael, and Obed, Elzabad, whose brethren were strong men, Elihu, and Semachiah. All these of the sons of Obed-edom: they and their sons and their brethren, able men for strength for the service, were threescore and two of Obed-edom.

Obed-edom had virtually risked his life to house the ark before David brought it to Jerusalem. Here, we see the fruits of his obedience, as all sixty-two in his lineage were employed in the service of God.

1 Chronicles 26:9–15
And Meshelemiah had sons and brethren, strong men, eighteen. Also Hosah, of the children of Merari, had sons; Simri the chief, (for though he was not the firstborn, yet his father made him the

chief;) Hilkiah the second, Tebaliah the third, Zechariah the fourth: all the sons and brethren of Hosah were thirteen. Among these were the divisions of the porters, even among the chief men, having wards one against another, to minister in the house of the LORD. And they cast lots, as well the small as the great, according to the house of their fathers, for every gate. And the lot eastward fell to Shelemiah. Then for Zechariah his son, a wise counseller, they cast lots; and his lot came out northward. To Obed-edom southward; and to his sons the house of Asuppim.

Scholars believe the house of Assumpim—or collections—speaks of the storehouse containing the supplies for the daily needs of the priests.

1 Chronicles 26:16
To Shuppim and Hosah the lot came forth westward, with the gate Shallecheth, by the causeway of the going up, ward against ward.

Scholars believe this gate was the one through which rubbish was carried.

1 Chronicles 26:17
Eastward were six Levites, northward four a day, southward four a day, and toward Asuppim two and two.

Because the eastern gate had the most traffic, it also required the most porters.

1 Chronicles 26:18
At Parbar westward, four at the causeway, and two at Parbar.

If Parbar is the same as Parvar as some scholars suggest (2 Kings 23:11), this gate led to the dwelling places in the city.

1 Chronicles 26:19

These are the divisions of the porters among the sons of Kore, and among the sons of Merari.

I praise the Lord for porters—those who opened and closed the doors. Spiritually, this office speaks of a more important calling than even that—those who watch what goes in and out in prayer. We are the temple of the Lord and there are people who are praying for our body. Once every other week I get a letter from someone who specifically states what they are praying for, how they are in a time of prayer and fasting, standing at the door, saying, *No,* we reject that. We're not going to be penetrated by that, we're not going to be influenced by that." If you're a porter in prayer—keeping out the enemy, as well as opening the doors of blessing—heaven will reward you.

1 Chronicles 26:20
And of the Levites, Ahijah was over the treasures of the house of God, and over the treasures of the dedicated things.

Certain Levites had specific callings. Ahijah, for example, kept track of the money used for the operation of the temple.

1 Chronicles 26:21–28
As concerning the sons of Laadan; the sons of the Gershonite Laadan, chief fathers, even of Laadan the Gershonite, were Jehieli. The sons of Jehieli; Zetham, and Joel his brother, which were over the treasures of the house of the LORD. Of the Amramites, and the Izharites, the Hebronites, and the Uzzielites: And Shebuel the son of Gershom, the son of Moses, was ruler of the treasures. And his brethren by Eliezer; Rehabiah his son, and Jeshaiah his son, and Joram his son, and Zichri his son, and Shelomith his son. Which Shelomith and his brethren were over all the treasures of the dedicated things, which David the king, and the chief fathers, the captains over thousands and hundreds, and the captains of the host, had dedicated. Out of the spoils won in battles did they dedicate to maintain the house of the LORD. And all that Samuel the seer, and Saul the son of Kish, and Abner the son of Ner, and Joab the son of Zeruiah, had dedicated; and

whosoever had dedicated any thing, it was under the hand of Shelomith, and of his brethren.

Throughout Israel's history, the leaders of God's people, including Moses, Samuel, David, Saul, Abner, and Joab had dedicated the spoils of battle to the Lord.

1 Chronicles 26:29–32
Of the Izharites, Chenaniah and his sons were for the outward business over Israel, for officers and judges. And of the Hebronites, Hashabiah and his brethren, men of valour, a thousand and seven hundred, were officers among them of Israel on this side Jordan westward in all the business of the LORD, and in the service of the king. Among the Hebronites was Jerijah the chief, even among the Hebronites, according to the generations of his fathers. In the fortieth year of the reign of David they were sought for, and there were found among them mighty men of valour at Jazer of Gilead. And his brethren, men of valour, were two thousand and seven hundred chief fathers, whom king David made rulers over the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, for every matter pertaining to God, and affairs of the king.

Although 1,700 Levites served the ten tribes on the west side of the Jordan, 2,700 were needed to serve the two and one-half tribes on the east side because the two and one-half tribes were more susceptible to the pagan culture that surrounded them. That's always the way it is. The closer we are to the center of God's will, the more tightly we are in fellowship with His people, the more we are protected from the enemy that seeks to trip us up in our walk with Him.



27 In chapter 27, we see the administration of civil aspects for the nation.

1 Chronicles 27:1–15

Now the children of Israel after their number, to wit, the chief fathers and captains of thousands and hundreds, and their officers that served the king in any matter of the courses, which came in and went out month by month throughout all the months of the year, of every course were twenty and four thousand. Over the first course for the first month was Jashobeam the son of Zabdiel: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. Of the children of Perez was the chief of all the captains of the host for the first month. And over the course of the second month was Dodai an Ahohite, and of his course was Mikloth also the ruler: in his course likewise were twenty and four thousand. The third captain of the host for the third month was Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, a chief priest: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. This is that Benaiah, who was mighty among the thirty, and above the thirty: and in his course was Ammizabad his son. The fourth captain for the fourth month was Asahel the brother of Joab, and Zebadiah his son after him: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. The fifth captain for the fifth month was Shamhuth the Izrahite: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. The sixth captain for the sixth month was Ira the son of Ikkesh the Tekoite: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. The seventh captain for the seventh month was Helez the Pelonite, of the children of Ephraim: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. The eighth captain for the eighth month was Sibbecai the Hushathite, of the Zarhites: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. The ninth captain for the ninth month was Abiezer the Anetothite, of the Benjamites: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. The tenth captain for the tenth month was Maharai the Netophathite, of the Zarhites: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. The eleventh captain for the eleventh month was Benaiah the Pirathonite, of the children of Ephraim: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. The twelfth captain for the twelfth month was Heldai the Netophathite, of Othniel: and in his course were twenty and four thousand.

The military force of Israel consisted of twelve divisions of 24,000 each. Each man served only one month a year. Thus, David had a standing army of 24,000, which could be enlarged to 288,000 when necessary.

1 Chronicles 27:16–22
Furthermore over the tribes of Israel: the ruler of the Reubenites was Eliezer the son of Zichri: of the Simeonites, Shephatiah the son of Maachah: Of the Levites, Hashabiah the son of Kemuel: of the Aaronites, Zadok: Of Judah, Elihu, one of the brethren of David: of Issachar, Omri the son of Michael: Of Zebulun, Ishmaiah the son of Obadiah: of Naphtali, Jerimoth the son of Azriel: Of the children of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Azaziah: of the half tribe of Manasseh, Joel the son of Pedaiah: Of the half tribe of Manasseh in Gilead, Iddo the son of Zechariah: of Benjamin, Jaasiel the son of Abner: Of Dan, Azareel the son of Jeroham. These were the princes of the tribes of Israel.

These are the leaders of the Twelve Tribes at the time of David's reign and order first instituted by Moses (Exodus 18:25).

1 Chronicles 27:23, 24
But David took not the number of them from twenty years old and under: because the LORD had said he would increase Israel like to the stars of the heavens. Joab the son of Zeruiah began to number, but he finished not, because there fell wrath for it against Israel; neither was the number put in the account of the chronicles of king David.

Reference is here made to the calamitous census ordered by David—incomplete, perhaps, due to the plague that fell upon the nation (1 Chronicles 21).

1 Chronicles 27:25–31
And over the king's treasures was Azmaveth the son of Adiel: and over the storehouses in the fields, in the cities, and in the villages, and in the castles, was Jehonathan the son of Uzziah:

And over them that did the work of the field for tillage of the ground was Ezri the son of Chelub: And over the vineyards was Shimei the Ramathite: over the increase of the vineyards for the wine cellars was Zabdi the Shiphmite: And over the olive trees and the sycomore trees that were in the low plains was Baal-hanan the Gederite: and over the cellars of oil was Joash: And over the herds that fed in Sharon was Shitrai the Sharonite: and over the herds that were in the valleys was Shaphat the son of Adlai: Over the camels also was Obil the Ishmaelite: and over the asses was Jehdeiah the Meronothite: And over the flocks was Jaziz the Hagerite. All these were the rulers of the substance which was king David's.

These were the officers in charge of David's vast private estate.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Psalm 1:1–3

We know that financial wealth is not synonymous with godliness, but I wonder if our tendency isn't to subconsciously equate financial poverty with spirituality. Moses—the friend of God, and David, a man after God's own heart—stand in contrast to this false supposition. Man judges by the outward appearance, but, truly, God sees the heart of the matter (1 Samuel 16:7).

1 Chronicles 27:32–34
Also Jonathan David's uncle was a counseller, a wise man, and a scribe: and Jehiel the son of Hachmoni was with the king's sons: And Ahithophel was the king's counseller: and Hushai the Archite was the king's companion: And after Ahithophel was Jehoiada the son of Benaiah, and Abiathar: and the general of the king's army was Joab.

"For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellers there is safety," Solomon would later write (Proverbs 24:6). Men who had proven faithful to him in the past, these were David's advisors.



28 **1 Chronicles 28:1, 2 (a)**

And David assembled all the princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the captains of the companies that ministered to the king by course, and the captains over the thousands, and captains over the hundreds, and the stewards over all the substance and possession of the king, and of his sons, with the officers, and with the mighty men, and with all the valiant men, unto Jerusalem. Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people . . .

Approaching the end of his life, David called the leadership of Israel to Jerusalem, where he would pass the torch of leadership to a new generation . . .

1 Chronicles 28:2 (b), 3

. . . As for me, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building: But God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood.

Without a trace of self-pity or animosity, David explained what he wanted to do and why God didn't allow him to do it.

1 Chronicles 28:4–8

Howbeit the LORD God of Israel chose me before all the house of my father to be king over Israel for ever: for he hath chosen Judah to be the ruler; and of the house of Judah, the house of my father; and among the sons of my father he liked me to make me king over all Israel: And of all my sons, (for the LORD hath given me many sons,) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the

throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel. And he said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build my house and my courts: for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father. Moreover I will establish his kingdom for ever, if he be constant to do my commandments and my judgments, as at this day. Now therefore in the sight of all Israel the congregation of the LORD, and in the audience of our God, keep and seek for all the commandments of the LORD your God: that ye may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance for your children after you for ever.

David went on to explain the amazing promise God gave him—that he would be linked to the One whose kingdom will never end.

1 Chronicles 28:9 (a)
And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father . . .

Notice that David didn't say, "Know the God of the universe," or, "Know the God of Israel." He said, "Know my God." Why? Because David found such satisfaction, fulfillment, excitement in the Lord that he wanted Solomon to have that same experience.

Dad, would you be excited if your son followed in your footsteps, or would you say, "Oh, son, do not know the god of your father because my god —the master passion of my life—will lead you to frustration, misery, and heartache.

1 Chronicles 28:9 (b)
. . . and serve him . . .

We must know God before we can serve Him. In Daniel 11:32, we read that the people who know their God shall be strong and do great exploits. When you know the Lord, you can't help but want to serve Him. But if you don't know Him, your service will be burdensome and legalistic. Sunday school teacher, youth group worker, elder, deacon, Bible study leader—the order here is essential. Know first and then serve. You can become so busy serving the Lord that you no longer have time to walk with Him, and then you're in trouble. Know Him first.

1 Chronicles 28:9 (c)
. . . with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts . . .

There are ways we can serve the Lord that are not with a perfect heart. That is, we can serve Him halfheartedly. The prophet Malachi indicted the people for sacrificing bulls and rams that were leftovers (1:8). We can do the same with the time, energy, talent, or finances we bring to Him. Secondly, we can serve Him with a cold heart. Through Isaiah, the Lord indicted the people of Israel for drawing near to Him with their lips and mouth but not with their heart (29:13). Finally, we can serve the Lord with an evil heart. Jesus indicted the Pharisees for this kind of service because they sought only to draw attention to themselves when giving alms (Matthew 6:1, 2).

1 Chronicles 28:9 (d)
. . . if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.

"If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee." That's a promise. And the same Spirit that inspired David to say this to Solomon also put it in the mind of James to write to us: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (see James 4:8).

1 Chronicles 28:10
Take heed now; for the LORD hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it.

In John 15, Jesus said, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you . . ." Just as surely as the Lord chose Solomon, He chose you to build a house. Solomon built a physical temple. Ours is a spiritual temple.

"What? Know ye not that your bodies are the temple of the living God?" Paul asked the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6:19). God has chosen to dwell on this earth through your life. Is the temple of your life vibrant or is it in

disrepair? You are chosen by God just as surely as Solomon was to build a temple. Therefore, be strong and do it. How? Read on . . .

1 Chronicles 28:11 (a)
Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern . . .

David gave Solomon the pattern, the playbook, the program. What is that pattern? The pattern of what God wants you to be and to do and how to get there is in the Word. Here, David says, "Here's the pattern, son. Start building." And the Son of David, Jesus Christ, says the same thing to us. As you study the pattern of the Word, you'll find yourself more and more in line with what He wants to do in and through you.

1 Chronicles 28:11 (b)–19
. . . of the porch, and of the houses thereof, and of the treasuries thereof, and of the upper chambers thereof, and of the inner parlours thereof, and of the place of the mercy seat, And the pattern of all that he had by the spirit, of the courts of the house of the LORD, and of all the chambers round about, of the treasuries of the house of God, and of the treasuries of the dedicated things: Also for the courses of the priests and the Levites, and for all the work of the service of the house of the LORD, and for all the vessels of service in the house of the LORD. He gave of gold by weight for things of gold, for all instruments of all manner of service; silver also for all instruments of silver by weight, for all instruments of every kind of service: Even the weight for the candlesticks of gold, and for their lamps of gold, by weight for every candlestick, and for the lamps thereof: and for the candlesticks of silver by weight, both for the candlestick, and also for the lamps thereof, according to the use of every candlestick. And by weight he gave gold for the tables of shewbread, for every table; and likewise silver for the tables of silver: Also pure gold for the fleshhooks, and the bowls, and the cups: and for the golden basons he gave gold by weight for every bason; and likewise silver by weight for every bason of silver: And for the altar of incense refined gold by weight; and gold for the pattern

of the chariot of the cherubims, that spread out their wings, and covered the ark of the covenant of the LORD. All this, said David, the LORD made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern.

The pattern, or the plan, for the temple was inspired by the Lord. Even as Moses got a pattern on Mt. Sinai, so David received a pattern for the temple.

1 Chronicles 28:20
And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD.

Paul was "confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (see Philippians 1:6). Therefore, as sure as a promise was made to Solomon, so the same promise is given to you. You can come to a point in your life where you realize that the dreams you had, the goals you set aren't going to happen. That can, if you're not careful, send you into an introspective crisis. But if you're a believer, there won't be a crisis because the promise of God is that what He wants to do in you will be completed. Period.

Zacharias was a priest. His wife, Elisabeth, was a priest's daughter. For years, they prayed that they might have a child. Suddenly, as Zacharias was serving in the temple, an angel appeared and told him his prayer had been heard. Now, I'll bet Zacharias had stopped praying when Elisabeth passed the age of childbearing. I'm sure he had forgotten all about the prayer he had prayed. Maybe you can relate to that. At one time, you felt you were praying in harmony with God's heart, but nothing happened. Don't give up. The promise is that the work *will* be completed. It might take an entirely different course than what you thought, but God will complete His work for your life.

1 Chronicles 28:21
And, behold, the courses of the priests and the Levites, even they shall be with thee for all the service of the house of God: and

there shall be with thee for all manner of workmanship every willing skilful man, for any manner of service: also the princes and all the people will be wholly at thy commandment.

David not only gave Solomon the plan, but also the servants to assist him. He purchased the ground, gathered all the materials, lined up the workers. He's done everything. And yet the temple is called Solomon's temple. That's just like Jesus. He gives us the plan. He empowers us with His Spirit. He opens opportunity. He gives us energy. He makes it easy for us. And then, He says, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21). It's incredible that He would say, "Well done," to us when He's done it all.



29 1 Chronicles 29:1–4

Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen, is yet young and tender, and the work is great: for the palace is not for man, but for the LORD God. Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood; onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistering stones, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance. Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, Even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses withal:

At this point, David is not only giving materials gathered through warfare, but he is opening his own treasury. He's drawing on his own resources. He's putting his treasure where his heart is (Matthew 6:21).

1 Chronicles 29:5

The gold for things of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and for all manner of work to be made by the hands of artificers. And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD?

David didn't command the people to give. Rather, he modeled the spirit of giving before them and asked those who were willing to do the same. The only way God wants us to give is with a willing heart (2 Corinthians 9:7). God doesn't need our money. It is we who need to give. By nature, we are selfish, but every time we give, we give away part of our selfish tendencies and become a little more like Him.

1 Chronicles 29:6–8
Then the chief of the fathers and princes of the tribes of Israel, and the captains of thousands and of hundreds, with the rulers of the king's work, offered willingly, And gave for the service of the house of God of gold five thousand talents and ten thousand drams, and of silver ten thousand talents, and of brass eighteen thousand talents, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. And they with whom precious stones were found gave them to the treasure of the house of the LORD, by the hand of Jehiel the Gershonite.

Notice that it was the leaders who responded initially and willingly. If you claim to be a leader and you are not a giver, you're kidding yourself. If finances hang you up, I believe you should take a break from leadership and say, "Lord, if I cannot trust You with money, I'm not at a place of maturity and not ready to serve You in ministry. Help me." And He will.

1 Chronicles 29:9
Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy.

First David gave. Then the leaders gave. Then the people gave. And the result was great joy. That's always the way it is. Those who are misery live

in misery. But those who are generous are those who are glad.

1 Chronicles 29:10–14
Wherefore David blessed the LORD before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.

"Lord, we are not giving what is ours at all," David prayed. "It all came from You in the first place. Thank You for the privilege of giving back to You that which is Yours."

1 Chronicles 29:15
For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.

Jim Eliot, martyred missionary to the Auca Indians said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." It's true. Anything you give to God you won't regret. Make eternal investments, gang. Be wise. Time is short.

1 Chronicles 29:16–19
O LORD our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own. I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I

seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee. O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee: And give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart, to keep thy commandments, thy testimonies, and thy statutes, and to do all these things, and to build the palace, for the which I have made provision.

After worshiping the Lord with a heart of thanksgiving, David intercedes for the people and for his son, that their hearts would be toward Him.

1 Chronicles 29:20
And David said to all the congregation, Now bless the LORD your God. And all the congregation blessed the LORD God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads, and worshipped the LORD, and the king.

The people worshiped the Lord as their God, and acknowledged Solomon as His appointed leader over them.

1 Chronicles 29:21, 22 (a)
And they sacrificed sacrifices unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings unto the LORD, on the morrow after that day, even a thousand bullocks, a thousand rams, and a thousand lambs, with their drink offerings, and sacrifices in abundance for all Israel: And did eat and drink before the LORD on that day with great gladness . . .

It is no wonder that the people experienced great gladness as they sacrificed "in abundance." Didn't Jesus tell us that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35)? If you're feeling down or discouraged today, find a way to give—even if it's just a word of encouragement to someone else or a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord—and see if your own spirit isn't buoyed up in blessing.

1 Chronicles 29:22 (b)–25

. . . And they made Solomon the son of David king the second time, and anointed him unto the LORD to be the chief governor, and Zadok to be priest. Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his father, and prospered; and all Israel obeyed him. And all the princes, and the mighty men, and all the sons likewise of king David, submitted themselves unto Solomon the king. And the LORD magnified Solomon exceedingly in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed upon him such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel.

The first time Solomon was proclaimed king was when his brother, Adonijah, usurped the throne (1 Kings 1:39). Here, he's anointed king peacefully rather than in a state of emergency.

1 Chronicles 29:26–28

Thus David the son of Jesse reigned over all Israel. And the time that he reigned over Israel was forty years; seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem. And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour: and Solomon his son reigned in his stead.

Even though David was a warrior, he died full of days. Even though the Lord was his heart's desire, he died full of riches. Even though a large part of his life was spent hiding from Saul, he died full of honor.

1 Chronicles 29:29, 30

Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer, With all his reign and his might, and the times that went over him, and over Israel, and over all the kingdoms of the countries.

And so we come to the end of the life of the shepherd who became a king, the giant-killer who invented musical instruments, the fugitive who wrote

psalms, the sinner who would be in the lineage of the Messiah. We come to the end of the life of David, the man after God's own heart.



2 CHRONICLES

1 2 Chronicles 1:1
And Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom, and the LORD his God was with him, and magnified him exceedingly.

In 2 Chronicles, we come to the apex of Jewish history, a time of unparalleled peace and prosperity. The reign of *Solomon,* whose name means "peaceful," is a prophetic picture of the reign of Jesus, for when He comes back as the Prince of peace and establishes His throne on the earth, there will be perfect peace and incredible prosperity. But please remember that the peace and prosperity that was taking place under the reign of Solomon was made possible only through the blood and battles David had fought previously. Thus, it is David's reign that prophetically pictures the First Coming of Christ, for when He came as a Suffering Savior, He was victorious over the enemy as He died on the Cross of Calvary.

2 Chronicles 1:2–5
Then Solomon spake unto all Israel, to the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and to the judges, and to every governor in all Israel, the chief of the fathers. So Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon; for there was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness. But the ark of God had David brought up from Kirjath-jearim to the place which David had prepared for it: for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem. Moreover the brasen altar, that Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, he put before the tabernacle of the LORD: and Solomon and the congregation sought unto it.

At the beginning of his reign, Solomon gathered the nation to seek the Lord. To do this, he went to Gibeon because, although the ark was now in Jerusalem, the tabernacle was seven miles northwest, in Gibeon. Why didn't David bring the original tabernacle back with the ark to Jerusalem? No one knows. For whatever, reason, David chose to make his own tabernacle for the ark.

Isn't that similar to what happens today? The Lord wants His people to be one (John 17). We should worship as one, love as one, be united as one. But everyone seems to want to make his own tent, to establish his own center of worship. In the chapters before us, Solomon will eventually unify worship. When Jesus comes back, there will be one church comprised of one loving family. Doctrinal differences will be set aside. Personality clashes will exist no more. How I am looking forward to that day.

2 Chronicles 1:6, 7
And Solomon went up thither to the brasen altar before the LORD, which was at the tabernacle of the congregation, and offered a thousand burnt offerings upon it. In that night did God appear unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee.

We burn out giving one offering. Solomon gave 1,000. He spent the day worshiping the Lord, praising the Lord, giving to the Lord, blessing the Lord. And following this inspiration came revelation. Haven't you found that it is as you worship the Lord that His Word becomes alive?

2 Chronicles 1:8, 9
And Solomon said unto God, Thou hast shewed great mercy unto David my father, and hast made me to reign in his stead. Now, O LORD God, let thy promise unto David my father be established: for thou hast made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude.

"What do you want?" the Lord asked Solomon. And Solomon began by acknowledging what the Lord had already done for him. That's always a good place to start. Before you ask the Lord for something, stop and reflect what He's already done for you. You were a captive of Satan, ensnared by sin. So the Father ransomed you from the kingdom of Satan with a heavy-duty price—the blood of His own Son.

Not only are you saved, but you're part of His kingdom. "Lord, You've been merciful in allowing me to reign," Solomon prayed. So, too, the Lord has allowed us to reign with Him (Romans 8:17).

2 Chronicles 1:10 (a)
Give me now wisdom . . .

Where did Solomon get the wisdom to ask for wisdom? It was the answer to his father's prayer (1 Chronicles 22:11).

2 Chronicles 1:10 (b)
. . . and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great?

"Seek first the kingdom," Jesus said, "and everything you need will be added to you" (see Matthew 6:33). Solomon practiced what Jesus preached. He didn't seek wealth, honor, power, or glory. In asking for knowledge to wisely rule, he sought not for himself, but for his kingdom.

2 Chronicles 1:11, 12
And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king: Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like.

In 2 Chronicles 16:9, we read that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in the heart of them whose heart is perfect toward Him. In other words, the Lord looks for men and women He can trust with His blessing. Are you such an individual? Can the Lord trust you with the blessings He desires to pour out upon you? Solomon sought first the kingdom and God was then able to trust him with much blessing. Are you seeking first His kingdom? It's never too late to start.

2 Chronicles 1:13–17
Then Solomon came from his journey to the high place that was at Gibeon to Jerusalem, from before the tabernacle of the congregation, and reigned over Israel. And Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, which he placed in the chariot cities, and with the king at Jerusalem. And the king made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones, and cedar trees

made he as the sycomore trees that are in the vale for abundance. And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn: the king's merchants received the linen yarn at a price. And they fetched up, and brought forth out of Egypt a chariot for six hundred shekels of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so brought they out horses for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, by their means.

As a businessman, Solomon became extremely wealthy. But in the process, he gathered horses for himself. In Deuteronomy 17, the Lord said the king was not to multiply horses, gold and silver, or wives to himself. Why, then, did Solomon accumulate these very things if he was so wise? Solomon asked for wisdom to govern the people. And he did indeed govern wisely. But in his personal life, he let his guard down and in so doing fell prey to the wiles of the world.



2 The nation of Israel reached its greatest power, peace, and prosperity under Solomon's reign. Yet the fact that five-sixths of the record of his life in 2 Chronicles deals with the building of the temple is indicative of what God saw as important.

2 Chronicles 2:1
And Solomon determined to build an house for the name of the LORD, and an house for his kingdom.

The temple has a three-fold application in the Bible. First, it speaks of the body of Christ (John 2:21). Secondly, it speaks of the body of an individual believer (1 Corinthians 3). Thirdly, it speaks of the body of believers corporately (Ephesians 2:21, 22).

2 Chronicles 2:2
And Solomon told out threescore and ten thousand men to bear burdens, and fourscore thousand to hew in the mountain, and three thousand and six hundred to oversee them.

Solomon was determined to build the temple, but he needed others to help him. “I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” our Greater than Solomon declared (Matthew 16:18). And He graciously has chosen us as His tools.

Seventy thousand were to bear burdens. Burden-bearers speak of prayer warriors. How we need people to pray and bear burdens. Eighty thousand were chosen to carve stones. These are “disciplers”—Sunday school teachers, Bible study leaders, and evangelists who smooth the rough edges of living stones (1 Peter 2:5). Thirty-six hundred were overseers and speak of those involved in leadership ministries.

2 Chronicles 2:3–6
And Solomon sent to Huram the king of Tyre, saying, As thou didst deal with David my father, and didst send him cedars to build him an house to dwell therein, even so deal with me. Behold, I build an house to the name of the LORD my God, to dedicate it to him, and to burn before him sweet incense, and for the continual shewbread, and for the burnt offerings morning and evening, on the sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the solemn feasts of the LORD our God. This is an ordinance for ever to Israel. And the house which I build is great: for great is our God above all gods. But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him? who am I then, that I should build him an house, save only to burn sacrifice before him?

Through his request to the king of Tyre, Solomon was not only able to explain the worship practices that would take place within the temple, but also the magnitude of the God he served, for unlike the gods of the surrounding nations, Solomon’s God could not be contained in any building.

2 Chronicles 2:7
Send me now therefore a man cunning to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in iron, and in purple, and crimson, and blue, and that can skill to grave with the cunning men that are with me in Judah and in Jerusalem, whom David my father did provide.

Phoenicians were known around the world as the best architects and construction workers. I like the fact that Solomon says, “I’m building a great

house for a great God. Send me your best."

2 Chronicles 2:8–10
Send me also cedar trees, fir trees, and algum trees, out of Lebanon: for I know that thy servants can skill to cut timber in Lebanon; and, behold, my servants shall be with thy servants, Even to prepare me timber in abundance: for the house which I am about to build shall be wonderful great. And, behold, I will give to thy servants, the hewers that cut timber, twenty thousand measures of beaten wheat, and twenty thousand measures of barley, and twenty thousand baths of wine, and twenty thousand baths of oil.

The servants would be rewarded with wine and oil, which speak to us of the Spirit, and with wheat and barley, which speak to us of the sustenance found in the Word of God.

2 Chronicles 2:11
Then Huram the king of Tyre answered in writing, which he sent to Solomon, Because the LORD hath loved his people, he hath made thee king over them.

Charles Spurgeon saw in this verse a prophetic picture of Jesus Christ. "Because God has loved His people," he said, "He has made Jesus king over them."

"For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world," John writes, "but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). Jesus did not come to condemn people, but to liberate them.

2 Chronicles 2:12–14
Huram said moreover, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, that made heaven and earth, who hath given to David the king a wise son, endued with prudence and understanding, that might build an house for the LORD, and an house for his kingdom. And now I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding, of Huram my father's, The son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre, skilful to work in gold, and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen, and in crimson; also to grave any manner of graving, and to find out every device which

shall be put to him, with thy cunning men, and with the cunning men of my lord David thy father.

One of the ways the king of Tyre answered Solomon's request was by sending him his top craftsman, the son of an Israelite woman and a man of Tyre.

2 Chronicles 2:15–18
Now therefore the wheat, and the barley, the oil, and the wine, which my lord hath spoken of, let him send unto his servants: And we will cut wood out of Lebanon, as much as thou shalt need: and we will bring it to thee in floats by sea to Joppa; and thou shall carry it up to Jerusalem. And Solomon numbered all the strangers that were in the land of Israel, after the numbering wherewith David his father had numbered them; and they were found an hundred and fifty thousand and three thousand and six hundred. And he set threescore and ten thousand of them to be bearers of burdens, and fourscore thousand to be hewers in the mountain, and three thousand and six hundred overseers to set the people a work.

If the temple speaks of the body of Christ; if the burden-bearers speak of prayer warriors, the stonecutters of disciples, the overseers of leaders—why would they all be strangers? Because Israel rejected the message of the kingdom. The Jews did not respond to the invitation of Jesus. No wonder, then, that, as a picture of the church, the burden-bearers, stonecutters, and overseers were not of Jewish heritage.



3 2 Chronicles 3:1 (a)
Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD . . .

In verse 1 of chapter 2, Solomon determined to build the house. Here, in verse 1 of chapter 3, he began to build the house. It's one thing to determine. It's an entirely different thing to begin, to make application, not just proclamation.

2 Chronicles 3:1 (b)

. . . at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the LORD appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.

Solomon built the temple, a house of sacrifice, on Mt. Moriah, the mount of sacrifice. Mt. Moriah is where Abraham offered his son Isaac. Mt. Moriah is where David paid the full price when he bought the threshingfloor from Ornan. Mt. Moriah peaks at a place called Golgotha, or Calvary.

This tells me the place of beginning is always the place of sacrifice, of time, of money, of energy. At some point, there will be sacrifice made if I'm going to begin to do what God is calling me to do.

2 Chronicles 3:2, 3
And he began to build in the second day of the second month, in the fourth year of his reign. Now these are the things wherein Solomon was instructed for the building of the house of God. The length by cubits after the first measure was threescore cubits, and the breadth twenty cubits.

The temple would be ninety feet long, thirty feet wide, forty-five feet high—twice as big as the tabernacle, but still relatively small. And yet the cost would be approximately ten billion dollars.

2 Chronicles 3:4–8
And the porch that was in the front of the house, the length of it was according to the breadth of the house, twenty cubits, and the height was an hundred and twenty: and he overlaid it within with pure gold. And the greater house he cieled with fir tree, which he overlaid with fine gold, and set thereon palm trees and chains. And he garnished the house with precious stones for beauty: and the gold was gold of Parvaim. He overlaid also the house, the beams, the posts, and the walls thereof, and the doors thereof, with gold; and graved cherubims on the walls. And he made the most holy house, the length whereof was according to the breadth of the house, twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof twenty cubits: and he overlaid it with fine gold, amounting to six hundred talents.

Like the tabernacle, the temple was divided into three main areas: the courtyard, the holy place, and the Holy of Holies. While the courtyard was visible to everyone, the holy place was seen only by the priest. The Holy of Holies was seen only by the high priest only once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

Even as the temple has three parts, you are a triune being. Your body, seen by all, is the outer court. Your soul, consisting of your mind and emotions, is seen by only a few people, and is thus equivalent to the holy place. Finally, your spirit, like the Holy of Holies, is reserved exclusively for our great High Priest, Jesus Christ. If you want to be a whole person, you must give attention to all three areas—body, soul, and spirit—for they are intricately connected. If I am physically run down, the rest of my temple will be adversely affected. If my mind is not being stimulated or developed, I will be hampered spiritually and physically as well. If I am not taking time to talk to the Lord and to seek Him, my body and soul will suffer the consequences. Therefore, it is the wise person who worships the Lord while he's working out at the gym, who praises the Lord for what he's learning in school. Wherever you're at, take care of the whole person as much as possible.

The more important application, however, is that these three parts of the temple serve as good indicators of where you're at in your walk with the Lord. Maybe you're in the outer court, the place where sacrifice was offered. That's a great first step, but there will come a time when you'll long to be in the holy place, the place of service. Serving the Lord is truly a high calling, but, as Mary discovered, the best place to be is in the Holy of Holies, sitting at His feet (Luke 10:42).

2 Chronicles 3:9
And the weight of the nails was fifty shekels of gold. And he overlaid the upper chambers with gold.

These golden nails were costly indeed. But their cost was nothing in comparison to that of the nails that pierced the hands of Jesus. Therefore, nothing we do for the Lord is too extravagant.

2 Chronicles 3:10–14
And in the most holy house he made two cherubims of image work, and overlaid them with gold. And the wings of the cherubims were

twenty cubits long: one wing of the one cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house: and the other wing was likewise five cubits, reaching to the wing of the other cherub. And one wing of the other cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house: and the other wing was five cubits also, joining to the wing of the other cherub. The wings of these cherubims spread themselves forth twenty cubits: and they stood on their feet, and their faces were inward. he made the vail of blue, and purple, and crimson, and fine linen, and wrought cherubims thereon.

In Revelation 19, we read that John was so impressed by the angels in heaven that he fell down in worship until he was told by the angel to worship God alone (19:10). Here we see the cherubim facing inward, standing to give worship rather than sitting, facing outward, waiting to accept worship.

2 Chronicles 3:15, 16
Also he made before the house two pillars of thirty and five cubits high, and the chapiter that was on the top of each of them was five cubits. And he made chains, as in the oracle, and put them on the heads of the pillars and made an hundred pomegranates, and put them on the chains.

The chains on the pillars speak of linkage or unity. The pomegranates speak of fruitfulness. Truly, where there is unity, there will be fruit. Where there is division, there will be barrenness. As believers, we must embrace *all* who know Jesus as Savior. And together we'll bring forth fruit.

2 Chronicles 3:17
And he reared up the pillars before the temple, one on the right hand, and the other on the left; and called the name of that on the right hand Jachin, and the name of that on the left Boaz.

In front of the temple stood two huge pillars. One was named *Jachin,* or "He shall establish." The other was named *Boaz,* or "In His strength", because not only was the temple built by God, but it would be maintained by Him as well.

4 The first nine chapters of the Book of 2 Chronicles deal with the reign of Solomon. Yet of those nine chapters, six are devoted to the construction and dedication of the temple. Here in chapter 4, we see the furniture of the temple, every piece symbolic of an aspect of Jesus.

2 Chronicles 4:1
Moreover he made an altar of brass, twenty cubits the length thereof, and twenty cubits the breadth thereof, and ten cubits the height thereof.

The first thing one would see upon entering the courtyard of the temple was the altar. The altar is still where everything begins. Jesus is our Sacrifice. This is what differentiates Christianity from every other religion. Other religions tell people how to live, but make no provision for failure. Christianity not only tells us how to live, but provides provision for inevitable failure through the blood of Jesus Christ.

2 Chronicles 4:2–5
Also he made a molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and five cubits the height thereof; and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about. And under it was the similitude of oxen, which did compass it round about: ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about. Two rows of oxen were cast, when it was cast. It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east: and the sea was set above upon them, and all their hinder parts were inward. And the thickness of it was an handbreadth, and the brim of it like the work of the brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies; and it received and held three thousand baths.

This tank measured approximately fifteen feet across, seven and one-half feet high, and forty-five feet in circumference. After sacrifices were made at the altar, the priests would wash themselves in this huge tank that speaks of Christ, our Purifier. “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you,” He said (John 15:3). As we spend time in the Word and meditate therein, we, like the priests, are cleansed.

2 Chronicles 4:6

He made also ten lavers, and put five on the right hand, and five on the left, to wash in them: such things as they offered for the burnt offering they washed in them; but the sea was for the priests to wash in.

The ten small tanks that the sacrifices were washed in speak of Christ, our Intercessor. We don't know how to pray as we should, so Jesus takes our prayers and "cleans them up" as He intercedes on our behalf, saying, "Father, what Jon really means is . . ."

2 Chronicles 4:7
And he made ten candlesticks of gold according to their form, and set them in the temple, five on the right hand, and five on the left.

The candlesticks, of course, speak of Christ, our Light (John 8:12).

2 Chronicles 4:8 (a)
He made also ten tables, and placed them in the temple, five on the right side, and five on the left . . .

The tables of showbread speak of Jesus, our Bread (John 6:35).

2 Chronicles 4:8 (b), 9
. . . And he made an hundred basons of gold. Furthermore he made the court of the priests, and the great court, and doors for the court, and overlaid the doors of them with brass.

The doors speak of Jesus, our Door to the Father (John 10:9). Why were they made of brass? Because, throughout Scripture, brass is the metal of judgment and the only way we enter into the presence of God is by realizing that Jesus Christ, our Door, was judged for our sin.

2 Chronicles 4:10–16
And he set the sea on the right side of the east end, over against the south. And Huram made the pots, and the shovels, and the basons. And Huram finished the work that he was to make for king Solomon for the house of God; To wit, the two pillars, and the pommels, and the chapiters which were on the top of the two pillars, and the two

wreaths to cover the two pommels of the chapiters which were on the top of the pillars; And four hundred pomegranates on the two wreaths; two rows of pomegranates on each wreath, to cover the two pommels of the chapiters which were upon the pillars. He made also bases, and lavers made he upon the bases; One sea, and twelve oxen under it. The pots also, and the shovels, and the fleshhooks, and all their instruments, did Huram his father make to king Solomon for the house of the LORD of bright brass.

"I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do," Jesus prayed (John 17:4).

"I have finished my course," Paul declared (2 Timothy 4:7).

Here, we see the work that Huram finished. What work has God called *you* to do? Oh, that we would be faithful to finish the task, the work, the course that God has both called us to do and equipped us to complete.

2 Chronicles 4:17, 18
In the plain of Jordan did the king cast them, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredathah. Thus Solomon made all these vessels in great abundance: for the weight of the brass could not be found out.

Again, brass speaks of judgment. Just as the weight of the brass used in the temple was too great to weigh, the judgment Jesus absorbed on our behalf cannot be measured.

2 Chronicles 4:19–22
And Solomon made all the vessels that were for the house of God, the golden altar also, and the tables whereon the shewbread was set; Moreover the candlesticks with their lamps, that they should burn after the manner before the oracle, of pure gold; And the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs, made he of gold, and that perfect gold; And the snuffers, and the basons, and the spoons, and the censers, of pure gold: and the entry of the house, the inner doors thereof for the most holy place, and the doors of the house of the temple, were of gold.

Gold speaks of deity. Yes, brass is emblematic of the judgment Jesus bore on our behalf. But the story doesn't end there. For after Jesus endured the Cross, despising the shame, He sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).



5 2 Chronicles 5:1 (a)
Thus all the work that Solomon made for the house of the LORD was finished . . .

The temple took seven years to complete. This shows me that when God builds—whether it's us personally or His church corporately—it takes time. Maybe you look at yourself and think you're not growing. But the Lord is working on us, chipping away, strengthening us, and developing us. It just takes time. I'm less and less inclined to judge people or ministries because I know it is only as the years go by that results are seen.

2 Chronicles 5:1 (b), 2
. . . and Solomon brought in all the things that David his father had dedicated; and the silver, and the gold, and all the instruments, put he among the treasures of the house of God. Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion.

The ark was made of shittim, or acacia wood (Exodus 25:10). Shittim wood never rots and is found in dry ground. Its exterior has thorns and its interior contains a gum-like substance that is used as medicine in the Middle East even to this day. It is not coincidental that this was the wood chosen for the ark because the ark pictures Jesus. Wood that never rots speaks of the fact that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). As Isaiah declared, Jesus is a root out of dry ground (Isaiah 53:2). Jesus wore a crown of thorns, and it is by His stripes that we are healed (Isaiah 53:5). The wood was covered with gold. Gold is the metal of deity. Wood speaks of humanity. Together, they paint a picture of Jesus as the God-man.

2 Chronicles 5:3–8

Wherefore all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto the king in the feast which was in the seventh month. And all the elders of Israel came; and the Levites took up the ark. And they brought up the ark, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, these did the priests and the Levites bring up. Also king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel that were assembled unto him before the ark, sacrificed sheep and oxen, which could not be told nor numbered for multitude. And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, to the oracle of the house, into the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims: For the cherubims spread forth their wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark and the staves thereof above.

Inside the ark were the Ten Commandments given to Moses. On top of the ark was the mercy seat. It was at the mercy seat that God met with man (Exodus 25). I'm so glad God meets us not on the basis of the law, but at the place of mercy. Otherwise, none of us would have a prayer or a chance.

Why was the Law kept in the ark at all? Because Jesus Christ was the only One who kept the Law. And because Jesus kept the Law, the Lord meets with us in mercy.

2 Chronicles 5:9

And they drew out the staves of the ark, that the ends of the staves were seen from the ark before the oracle; but they were not seen without. And there it is unto this day.

Why did the priests pull the poles out that were used to carry the ark? Because the temple speaks of permanence. The tabernacle spoke of pilgrimage. The tabernacle speaks of Jesus in His First Coming when He literally "tabernacled" among us (John 1:14). But when He comes again, His kingdom will be established. Therefore, poles were no longer needed.

2 Chronicles 5:10

There was nothing in the ark save the two tables which Moses put therein at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt.

Originally, the ark contained Aaron's rod that budded and a pot of manna along with the tablets of the law (Hebrews 9:4). Here, only the Law remained.

2 Chronicles 5:11, 12
And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place: (for all the priests that were present were sanctified, and did not then wait by course: Also the Levites which were the singers, all of them of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, being arrayed in white linen, having cymbals and psalteries and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them an hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets:)

The priests, arrayed in the white linen of righteousness, stood around the altar, the place of sacrifice. Clothed in the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus (Isaiah 61:10; 2 Corinthians 5:21), we are to stand at the altar of sacrifice and die to our own pride.

2 Chronicles 5:13
It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD;

The trumpeters and singers were as one. When we meet together to worship the Lord, our own problems begin to shrink; our own needs are diminished as we are united in praise. I have a tremendous desire to be part of something bigger than myself, don't you? I find that fulfillment in the place of worship, when I am melted together with brothers and sisters in praise.

2 Chronicles 5:14
So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God.

So blessed was the Lord by the praise and worship of His people that there was room for nothing else but His presence.

THIS TEMPLE: A PLACE OF PRAISE

A Topical Study of
2 CHRONICLES 5:11–14

There was a government that spent ten billion dollars on a building that was only ninety feet long and thirty feet wide. In the specs for this building, every nail was to be made of solid gold. Was this extravagant? Wasteful? Not when you consider that the building was Solomon's temple. Solomon's temple was costly indeed, but it was extremely important and spiritually significant for two reasons. It was a picture *from* God and a place *for* God.

A Picture from God

Knowing that we are children, our heavenly Father painted all sorts of pictures in the Old Testament to illustrate spiritual truths. The temple is one such picture and illustrates three things.

First, it illustrates Jesus Himself. The Pharisees came to Jesus and said, "Show us a sign to validate who you are."

"One sign I'll give you," He answered. "Destroy this temple and in three days, I'll raise it up again" (John 2:19).

The tabernacle was half the size of the temple, with an outward appearance that was extremely ordinary. Inside, however, it was magnificent. According to Hebrews 8 and 9, the tabernacle speaks of Jesus in His First Coming. But the temple, a magnificent structure both inside and out, speaks of Jesus in His Second Coming.

- Initially, Jesus came alone as the babe of Bethlehem.
  When He comes again, He'll come with 10,000 of His saints (Jude 14).
- When Jesus came the first time, He wore a crown of thorns.
  When He comes again, He'll wear the crown of a conquering King (Revelation 6:2).
- When Jesus came the first time, He was mocked and rejected.
  When He comes again, He'll be worshiped as King of kings and Lord of lords (Philippians 2:10).

Secondly, the temple illustrates who we are individually. First Corinthians 3 and 6 both tell us our bodies are the temple of God. Are our bodies valuable? In a sense, no. If all the elements of your body were sold, the price would be somewhere between ten dollars and fifteen dollars. And yet ten billion dollars would not begin to pay the price to build a computer that could function one tenth as well as your brain. Fearfully and wonderfully made, we are valuable indeed (Psalm 139:14).

Thirdly, the temple is a picture of our body corporately. In Ephesians 2, Paul tells us we are a holy habitation, being fit together that God might dwell in our midst in the person of His Spirit.

A Place for God

Solomon was wiser than to think that the temple could contain God. In 2 Chronicles 2, he said, "I realize even the heavens can't contain Him." Thus, he constructed the temple not to place parameters around God, but to bring pleasure to Him. As His people, we exist not so much to get as to give.

The Church of Jesus Christ exists for three reasons. The third most important reason is to evangelize the world. The second most important reason is for the edification of the believers—that we might be taught the Word and grow in the knowledge of God. But our primary reason for existence, both corporately and individually is to give God pleasure (Revelation 4:11). What a difference it would make in coming to church if we said, "I'm not coming to be impressed or to find fault. I come to church to assemble with the temple of God, to praise Him and give Him pleasure."

Our text says the people praised Him because He is good and His mercy endures forever. The same is true. I come to church because God is good. He's been so good to me that the least I can do is worship Him with the saints. We complain so quickly and gripe so readily, but the mercy and lovingkindness of God is heaped upon us daily (Psalm 68:19).

Whether we know it or not, every one of us craves the glory of God in our life. Where do we find it? In the temple of God. As it did in Solomon's temple, those who bring glory *to* the Lord will experience the glory *of* the Lord as His presence fills the temple of their lives.

How do we bring glory to God? Following are three ways . . .

We Can Glorify Him with Our Mouths . . .

> *And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God.*
>
> Revelation 19:1

> *Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child . . .*
>
> Isaiah 54:1 (a)

Do you feel barren or sterile? Sing out and you'll find a dynamic released in your spirit that wouldn't have been otherwise.

We Can Glorify God with Our Hands . . .

O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph.

Psalm 47:1

Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name.

Psalm 63:4

When we clap our hands, it's an act of celebration *in* God. When we lift our hands, it's an act of surrender *to* Him.

We Can Glorify God with Our Feet . . .

O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD *our maker.*

Psalm 95:6

Ye that stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God, Praise the LORD*; for the* LORD *is good . . .*

Psalm 135:2, 3 (a)

Let them praise his name in the dance . . .

Psalm 149:3 (a)

Bowing before the Lord is an expression of humility. Standing in the house of the Lord is an expression of respect. Dancing before the Lord is an expression of joy in the Lord.

When we worship the Lord, we'll experience greater and greater dimensions of His glory. Is that the purpose we should worship Him? No. That's just a side benefit. We worship Him to give Him glory and to praise His name because indeed He is *good.*



6 2 Chronicles 6:1, 2
Then said Solomon, The LORD hath said that he would dwell in the thick dark ness. But I have built an house of habitation for thee, and a place for thy dwelling for ever.

It has been said that if an atomic bomb were detonated, anyone within fifty miles who glanced in its direction would be permanently blinded. If the glory and greatness of God were revealed, it would make an atomic detonation look like the lighting of a match. That is why the Lord dwells in thick darkness. He protects us until we have new bodies and can relate to Him without getting blown away (Philippians 3:21).

2 Chronicles 6:3–6

And the king turned his face, and blessed the whole congregation of Israel: and all the congregation of Israel stood. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who hath with his hands fulfilled that which he spake with his mouth to my father David, saying, Since the day that I brought forth my people out of the land of Egypt I chose no city among all the tribes of Israel to build an house in, that my name might be there; neither chose I any man to be a ruler over my people Israel: But I have chosen Jerusalem, that my name might be there; and have chosen David to be over my people Israel.

Jerusalem is an extremely beautiful city. But God didn't choose it because it was beautiful. Rather, it is beautiful because God chose it. You see, Jerusalem is really very ordinary. The prettiest spot is actually in Samaria, where Ahab and Jezebel chose to build their palace. From their palace, they could look to the west and see the Mediterranean Sea. They could look east and see the Jordan Valley and the Jordan River. From the north, they could see Mt. Hermon. Looking south, they overlooked the city of Jerusalem. It was beautiful. But God didn't choose that area. He chose an ordinary place, just as He chooses ordinary people like you and me. He uses the foolish things of this world and then beautifies them, just as, slowly but surely, He's beautifying us (1 Corinthians 1:26–31).

2 Chronicles 6:7–11

Now it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. But the LORD said to David my father, Forasmuch as it was in thine heart to build an house for my name, thou didst well in that it was in thine heart: Notwithstanding thou shalt not build the house; but thy son which shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house for my name. The LORD therefore hath performed his word that he hath spoken: for I am risen up in the room of David my father, and am set on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built the house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. And in it have I put the ark, wherein is the covenant of the LORD, that he made with the children of Israel.

David had at least eight wives and at least twenty sons. But it always impresses me that the Lord chose Solomon to build the temple and rule the country at the very time the kingdom would come to its apex in history. Solomon

was the child of David and Bathsheba. After the Lord dealt with David and Bathsheba by taking their firstborn child home, He turned right around and blessed them with Solomon. God could have chosen one of David's other sons, but in choosing Solomon, it's as if the Father is saying, "I want this to be an illustration of the fact that after I chasten, I bless."

Dear saint, regardless of the mistakes or blunders in your past, if you come to the Lord, He can take any situation and begin to turn it around. Our God is the God of the second chance. He really is.

2 Chronicles 6:12, 13
And he stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands: For Solomon had made a brasen scaffold, of five cubits long, and five cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court: and upon it he stood, and kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven.

The temple was complete. The ark was in place. The glory had descended. And now, after preaching to the people, Solomon prayed for the temple. Note his posture. He was on his knees. You don't need to be on your knees when you pray. And yet prayer on our knees is an outward sign of submission and humility before the Lord. The side benefits of kneeling in prayer are that it's a lot harder to stumble in pride or to fall asleep when you're on your knees.

2 Chronicles 6:14
And said, O LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee in the heaven, nor in the earth; which keepest covenant, and shewest mercy unto thy servants, that walk before thee with all their hearts:

Solomon begins by acknowledging the greatness of God and then the goodness of God. Haven't you found that, when you consider how big and powerful God is, suddenly the problems that seemed so overwhelming to you shrink in size? Solomon wisely begins his prayer by worshiping the Lord. Then he moves into praise . . .

2 Chronicles 6:15
Thou which hast kept with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him; and spakest with thy mouth, and hast

fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day.

Gang, when your prayer life seems to be dry, praise and thank the Lord, and soon you'll find yourself swimming in an ocean of gratitude. After worshiping and praising, Solomon makes his petition . . .

2 Chronicles 6:16–20
Now therefore, O LORD God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit upon the throne of Israel; yet so that thy children take heed to their way to walk in my law, as thou hast walked before me. Now then, O LORD God of Israel, let thy word be verified, which thou hast spoken unto thy servant David. But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built! Have respect therefore to the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and the prayer which thy servant prayeth before thee: That thine eyes may be open upon this house day and night, upon the place whereof thou hast said that thou wouldest put thy name there; to hearken unto the prayer which thy servant prayeth toward this place.

One of the most effective, powerful ways to pray is to pray with your Bible open. When you pray the promises of God, you can be sure that He will answer. "Let thy word be verified," Solomon prayed, holding the Lord to His Word.

2 Chronicles 6:21
Hearken therefore unto the supplications of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, which they shall make toward this place: hear thou from thy dwelling place, even from heaven; and when thou hearest, forgive.

Here, in the midst of his prayer, foreseeing the problems the people will encounter, Solomon wisely intercedes for them before the problems arise. Solomon wasn't the first man in Scripture to do this. In Job 1, we read that every morning, Job offered sacrifice for his kids lest they sinned. It is still the wise parent who prays for his kids *before* they run into problems.

In verses 22 through 39, we see Solomon pray about neighbor problems, national problems, and natural problems . . .

2 Chronicles 6:22, 23
If a man sin against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to make him swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house; Then hear thou from heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, by requiting the wicked, by recompensing his way upon his own head; and by justifying the righteous, by giving him according to his righteousness.

"If a man sins, and he comes to the temple to swear his innocence, You judge him, Lord," Solomon prayed. I like this because it's letting the Lord be the judge. We don't need to judge each other. That's for the Lord to do because only He sees the full picture (1 Samuel 16:7).

2 Chronicles 6:24, 25
And if thy people Israel be put to the worse before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee; and shall return and confess thy name, and pray and make supplication before thee in this house; Then hear thou from the heavens, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest to them and to their fathers.

"If the people sin and go through a season of defeat and pray to You, Lord hear their prayers in days of national difficulty," Solomon prayed.

2 Chronicles 6:26–31
When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; yet if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them; Then hear thou from heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, when thou hast taught them the good way, wherein they should walk; and send rain upon thy land, which thou hast given unto thy people for an inheritance. If there be dearth in the land, if there be pestilence, if there be blasting, or mildew, locusts, or caterpillers; if their enemies besiege them in the cities of their land; whatsoever sore or whatsoever sickness there be: Then what prayer

or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own sore and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house: Then hear thou from heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and render unto every man according unto all his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men:) That they may fear thee, to walk in thy ways, so long as they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers.

"Lord, once Your people humble themselves, forgive their sin and bless them once again."

1 Chronicles 6:32, 33
Moreover concerning the stranger, which is not of thy people Israel, but is come from a far country for thy great name's sake, and thy mighty hand, and thy stretched out arm; if they come and pray in this house; Then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for; that all people of the earth may know thy name, and fear thee, as doth thy people Israel, and may know that this house which I have built is called by thy name.

In this, we see the calling of Israel to be an apostolic nation. That is, Israel was to extend an invitation to the stranger, to the Gentile. Israel was not to be simply a group of people enjoying the blessings of God for themselves. Rather, they were blessed so that others could see the reality of God and to be drawn to Him. Israel's message was to be "Come and see." Jesus' message to His church, on the other hand, was "Go and tell" (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Both the church and Israel were to be missionary-minded. This is true personally as well as corporately, for if you turn inward and consider only how you can be more successful or how you can be happier, your experience with the Lord will sour. We were saved to serve. If we lose that vision, we'll lose our effectiveness, both individually and as a church family.

2 Chronicles 6:34–39
If thy people go out to war against their enemies by the way that thou shalt send them, and they pray unto thee toward this city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name; Then

hear thou from the heavens their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause. If they sin against thee, (for there is no man which sinneth not) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before their enemies, and they carry them away captives unto a land far off or near; Yet if they bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn and pray unto thee in the land of their captivity, saying, We have sinned, we have done amiss, and have dealt wickedly; If they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, whither they have carried them captives, and pray toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, and toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name: Then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee.

Solomon goes on to pray more specifically for the people in times when they would be taken away into captivity. And in captivity, if they would turn to the Lord and remember from whence they had fallen, he asked that God would forgive them. Israel was indeed carried away into captivity in Babylon, where they remained for seventy years. Perhaps it was on the basis of this prayer of Solomon that there was a man in Babylon who, three times a day, opened his window and prayed. That man was Daniel. And God heard his prayers, and restored the people back to their land.

2 Chronicles 6:40–42

Now, my God, let, I beseech thee, thine eyes be open, and let thine ears be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. Now therefore arise, O LORD God, into thy resting place, thou, and the ark of thy strength: let thy priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness. O LORD God, turn not away the face of thine anointed: remember the mercies of David thy servant.

So ends this eloquent yet humble prayer of Solomon, a prayer so effective that it literally brought down fire from heaven . . .



7 2 Chronicles 7:1, 2

Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD's house.

The glory of the Lord filled the house previously when the people praised the Lord (2 Chronicles 5:13, 14). Here, the glory of the Lord fills the house when Solomon prays. This tells me that the glory of God—the substance, fullness, and reality I crave—will fill us both personally and corporately when we praise and when we pray. Two ways you can experience the glory of God flooding into your life is by praising and praying.

2 Chronicles 7:3–5

And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever. Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD. And king Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep: so the king and all the people dedicated the house of God.

Twenty-two thousand oxen and 120,000 sheep is a substantial sacrifice. Yet even twenty-two million oxen and one hundred and twenty million sheep would not compare to the sacrifice of the single Lamb of God. People cringe when we talk about sacrifices numbering this many. Why was there such a slaughter? Because God is painting a picture, showing us the seriousness of sin. The immensity of sacrifices offered point out that the price Jesus paid is immense, incomprehensible.

2 Chronicles 7:6, 7

And the priests waited on their offices: the Levites also with instruments of musick of the LORD, which David the king had made to

praise the LORD, because his mercy endureth for ever, when David praised by their ministry; and the priests sounded trumpets before them, and all Israel stood. Moreover Solomon hallowed the middle of the court that was before the house of the LORD: for there he offered burnt offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings, because the brasen altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive the burnt offerings, and the meat offerings, and the fat.

So numerous were the offerings that the altar was not able to contain them. So additional altars were set up in the temple.

2 Chronicles 7:8, 9
Also at the same time Solomon kept the feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt. And in the eighth day they made a solemn assembly: for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days.

The dedication of the temple took place immediately preceding the Feast of Tabernacles (1 Kings 8:1–12).

2 Chronicles 7:10
And on the three and twentieth day of the seventh month he sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the LORD had shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel his people.

Because a large number of the offerings were peace offerings, joy abounded. Gladness and merriment of heart are the result of being in God's presence (Psalm 16:11).

2 Chronicles 7:11–14
Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD, and the king's house: and all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of the LORD, and in his own house, he prosperously effected. And the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice. If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts

to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

This passage is so important because it says God's people have a responsibility for the society in which they live. We can't just curse our society and the sin therein. We must say, "Lord, forgive *us,*" for Jesus said that we are the salt and light of the earth (Matthew 5:13, 14). If our country is going down the tubes, we must take personal responsibility because we're responsible to heal wounds and light the way. If we're going through difficulty and chaos as a nation, we as believers must say, "Lord, have we been failing? Have we been playing and not praying? Forgive us." Anyone can curse the darkness of our society. We must be those who are lights, praying rather than complaining.

2 Chronicles 7:15–22
Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually. And as for thee, if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statues and my judgments; Then will I stablish the throne of thy kingdom, according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel. But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them; Then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations. And this house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it; so that he shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and unto this house? And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them.

The Jewish people have indeed become “a proverb and a byword among all nations” for there is anti-Semitism in virtually every part of the civilized world. The Lord said this would happen. “If My people ignore Me, this house which is high shall be cast down and the people scattered,” He warned. Four centuries later, that’s precisely what happened. The people had ignored the Lord and returned to idolatry. As a result, He ordered them plucked out of the land and the temple destroyed.

I remind you once again that the Lord will let you go, but you’re going to come back. He’ll let you pursue your own pleasure. The question is, how hard do you want to hit when you return? If you’re flirting with sin, you’ll come home because the Lord loves you too much to let you be lost. The question is, what will it take to bring you back?

SPLAT!
A Topical Study of
2 CHRONICLES 7:17–22

Just as we as earthly parents know the importance of disciplining our children, so our heavenly Father knows the necessity of disciplining us. In the text before us, God the Father speaks to Solomon, concerning the children of Israel, saying, "If they forsake Me, if they forget about Me, if they ignore Me or turn away from Me, I will pluck them out of this land and destroy this temple. And all nations shall mock them."

I believe the Bible teaches "rubber band theology." That is, God will give you lots of space; the Father will give you lots of room. You can wander far away from Him. You can ignore the need for Bible study and fellowship. You can pray only inconsistently and routinely if at all. He'll let you move into times of carnality and sin, but you're going to come back. The question is, how hard do you want to hit when you do?

Like a rubber band being stretched, the farther you wander, the harder you'll hit. It's your choice. Jesus said no man can pluck us out of His hand (John 10:27–30). Therefore, we *will* come back. The only question is, how painful and brutal do you want it to be?

The people of Israel found this out historically. The temple had just been constructed. It was a magnificent structure—ten billion dollars perhaps was spent on this project. There were 80,000 men carving stones in such a way that when the stones were brought to the temple mount, they fit together so perfectly that historian Josephus tells us a knife blade couldn't fit between the stones. Seventy thousand men gathered materials. Thirty-five hundred men oversaw the project. Over 150,000 men worked for over seven years to complete this glorious structure. Finally, the day came when it was completed. The glory of God descended and filled the temple so fully and completely that there was not any room to minister.

Then Solomon prayed. And God sent fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice on the altar. The people experienced the glory of God falling upon them. They worshiped and went their way rejoicing. After this dedication took place, God visited Solomon and gave him this warning: "Your prayer has been heard.

Know this, however. If My people turn from Me, they will experience difficult days."

Now, if God knows we have a tendency to stray, why doesn't He just keep us from straying in the first place? For the answer to this question, turn to Luke 15, where we find a story known virtually in every culture—the story of the prodigal son . . .

A son went to his father and said, "Dad, why should I wait until you die to get my inheritance? By that time, I'll be too old to enjoy it." So the son took his inheritance, went to a far country, and spent it on partying. When famine hit, he found himself in a most peculiar place for a Jew: he found himself in a pigpen. When he finally came to his senses, he said, "This is crazy. The servants in my father's house fare better than this. I'll go home and ask if I can be a servant in his household."

Now what would have happened had the father, hearing his son was having hard times in the far country, sent one of his servants to bring him back? The servant would have traveled to the far country, grabbed the son by the collar, and marched him home, where his father would have said, "Son, I hope you learned your lesson. I want you to go to your room and stay there until you're sorry." If he was like most kids, the son would have gone to his room, but instead of feeling sorry for his sin, he would have felt sorry for himself, thinking he was on the brink of making it big in the bacon and sausage business, until his dad ruined everything.

That's our tendency. If we were rescued, or forced to come home, our tendency would be to say, "I wasn't doing that bad." So the father wisely let the prodigal reach the end of his own rope.

There is something unique about us. We are the only part of God's creation that refuses to get into harmony with His purpose. Look at the trees. Without exception, every single one is fulfilling its purpose. They are all participating in a program designed by God called photosynthesis. That is, they take in pollution and convert it into oxygen. Not one tree folds its branches and pouts. Every single tree is in beautiful harmony with the purpose of God.

Look at the stars above. They are set in position so perfectly and so consistently that captains can navigate in the open sea. Not one star says, "I want to be a superstar. I want to be where I want to be."

Wherever you look in creation, you'll see every part in harmony with its purpose. But there is one exception: the funny, two-legged creatures on planet earth. We go our own way. Why? Because God gave us the choice each day to

either walk in harmony with Him or to rebel against Him. Why did God do this? Because He loves us, and true love must have a choice. Love is not love if it is forced. Therefore, God is willing to take a risk and say, "I'll give you your choice: whether to serve Me and flow with My purpose for your life or to be rebellious, to go into the far country, to live in the pigpen.

The Jews opted for the second alternative. They forgot God. Oh, they gave Him lip service and went through the motions of worship, until the Lord allowed the Babylonians to come down and carry them into captivity for seventy years. Finally, in captivity, a group of them, like the prodigal son, came to their senses and began to seek God. And like the father in Luke 15, God restored His people and brought them back to their land again.

Will the Father have to allow you to be carried off into captivity? Will He allow you to be carried off into some unbelievable difficulty because you have ignored Him and refused to participate in the plan and program He has for your life? He'll give you that freedom. But you'll come back. The question is, how hard do you want to hit?

Hear the heart of our Father and learn the lesson of history. Don't allow your temple to be destroyed. Don't allow your life to be carried away captive, your attitude to grow bitter, your heart to grow cold, your life to be needlessly hurt. You don't have to go through it if you'll cleave to the Lord and stay close to Him.



8 2 Chronicles 8:1, 2
And it came to pass at the end of twenty years, wherein Solomon had built the house of the LORD, and his own house, That the cities which Huram had restored to Solomon, Solomon built them, and caused the children of Israel to dwell there.

In 1 Kings 9:11–13, we read that the king of Tyre had given Solomon gold to build his palace. When Solomon paid him back with twenty cities of Galilee, Hiram declared they were substandard and refused to accept them. So here we see Solomon rebuilding them.

2 Chronicles 8:3
And Solomon went to Hamath-zobah, and prevailed against it.

This is the only war recorded in Scripture in which Solomon was engaged. He was not a fighter, but a man of peace.

2 Chronicles 8:4–8
And he built Tadmor in the wilderness, and all the store cities, which he built in Hamath. Also he built Beth-horon the upper, and Beth-horon the nether, fenced cities, with walls, gates, and bars; And Baalath, and all the store cities that Solomon had, and all the chariot cities, and the cities of the horsemen, and all that Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and throughout all the land of his dominion. As for all the people that were left of the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which were not of Israel, But of their children, who were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel consumed not, them did Solomon make to pay tribute until this day.

Although the Canaanites were to have been exterminated when the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, many of them remained in the land. Solomon taxed them heavily, but did not harm them physically. Why? Because they were a source of revenue. Here, Solomon begins compromising—and he'll pay a price as his reign continues.

Sometimes, like Solomon, we say, "I can't get rid of that sin. I can't rectify that business matter. Oh, I know it isn't right, but I've got to be practical." All too often, we think we get away with sin because we don't experience immediate repercussions. But we don't. "God is not mocked," Paul would write to the Galatians. "Whatever a man sows, that will he reap." (see Galatians 6:7). Because Solomon did not deal with the Canaanites, they would reintroduce idolatry to the people of Israel, and it would lead to disaster.

2 Chronicles 8:9, 10
But of the children of Israel did Solomon make no servants for his work; but they were men of war, and chief of his captains, and captains of his chariots and horsemen. And these were the chief of king Solomon's officers, even two hundred and fifty, that bare rule over the people.

Only the Canaanites were taxed. The Israelites were in positions of leadership.

2 Chronicles 8:11
And Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David unto the house that he had built for her: for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of the LORD hath come.

Solomon continues his compromise by taking an Egyptian woman and keeping her outside of the city. Why did Solomon have seven hundred wives? Some commentators suggest it was for political reasons—that by marrying the daughter of a king, he would be less vulnerable to attack. That is possible. But were *seven hundred* political alliances necessary?

2 Chronicles 8:12–14
Then Solomon offered burnt offerings unto the LORD on the altar of the LORD, which he had built before the porch, Even after a certain rate every day, offering according to the commandment of Moses, on the sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the solemn feasts, three times in the year, even in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles. And he appointed, according to the order of David his father, the courses of the priests to their service, and the Levites to their charges, to praise and minister before the priests, as the duty of every day required: the porters also by their courses at every gate: for so had David the man of God commanded.

Every day there was praise, sacrifice, and music ascending to the Lord.

2 Chronicles 8:15–18
And they departed not from the commandment of the king unto the priests and Levites concerning any matter, or concerning the treasures. Now all the work of Solomon was prepared unto the day of the foundation of the house of the LORD, and until it was finished. So the house of the LORD was perfected. Then went Solomon to Ezion-geber, and to Eloth, at the sea side in the land of Edom. And Huram sent him by the hands of his servants ships, and servants that had knowledge of the sea; and they went with the servants of Solomon to Ophir, and took thence four hundred and fifty talents of gold, and brought them to king Solomon.

The Jews at this time were very suspicious of the ocean and reluctant to go into the sea at all. Yet here Solomon establishes a navy in a joint business venture with Hiram, king of Tyre. The Phoenicians were excellent sailors. So Israel joined them and sailed off to India on what was probably a three-year voyage, netting four hundred and fifty talents of gold in the process. Compare this to the 120,000 talents of gold David was able to acquire not through compromise but through conquest. Solomon went the safe route. David took a more bold approach. Their gain shows the difference. Which do you want? I'd rather fight the war in faith.



9 Because the nation of Israel had an apostolic calling, part of the purpose for the dedication of the temple was so that the rest of the world might see the glory and blessing of God and be drawn to Him. In other words, the world was invited to come to Israel to see what God was doing. As history unfolded, however, Israel made a tragic mistake when she lost this vision and turned inward, concerned only about her own welfare. But at this point in her story, Israel did indeed influence the world, for 1,500 miles away, a queen heard of Solomon's splendor and came to Jerusalem to see it for herself . . .

2 Chronicles 9:1 (a)
And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came . . .

Where was Sheba? There are two possibilities: one was in Arabia, the other in Ethiopia. In the 1980s, there were news stories of Jews leaving Ethiopia, demanding acceptance in Israel as Jewish citizens. How did these Ethiopians become converts to Judaism? Their answer was that they were descendants of the queen of Sheba and of those who converted to Judaism under her reign in approximately 1000 B.C. This is very possible. But even if Sheba was in Arabia, the journey would have been over 1,500 miles from there to Jerusalem—a trip that would have taken this queen seventy-five days on the back of a camel.

2 Chronicles 9:1 (b)
. . . to prove Solomon with hard questions at Jerusalem . . .

Most people think of themselves as seekers of truth. But in reality, are we, or do we simply raise questions intellectually as long as they don't touch us personally? I think of Pontius Pilate who asked Jesus, "What is truth?," but walked away before Jesus answered (John 18:38).

Many people ask, "What is truth?" But, like Pilate, they don't really want to stick around for the answer. Because the queen of Sheba was a genuine seeker of truth, her record is preserved for all eternity in the passage before us, and her character was commended by no less than Jesus Himself (Matthew 12:42).

2 Chronicles 9:1 (c)
. . . with a very great company, and camels that bare spices, and gold in abundance, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart.

The queen of Sheba didn't simply want her curiosity satisfied, but came with riches to give to Solomon. In other words, she came to commit herself to his belief if indeed she found it to be correct.

2 Chronicles 9:2, 3
And Solomon told her all her questions: and there was nothing hid from Solomon which he told her not. And when the queen of Sheba had seen the wisdom of Solomon, and the house that he had built,

The queen of Sheba saw not only the wisdom of Solomon, but also the house he had built. Gang, our Greater than Solomon is building a far greater house, a holy temple of brothers and sisters throughout the world and throughout history (Ephesians 2:19–22).

2 Chronicles 9:4 (a)
And the meat of his table . . .

The meat at Solomon's table was impressive indeed. From 1 Kings 4:22, 23, we know one day's provision consisted of 190 bushels of fine flour, 390 bushels of meal, 10 fat oxen, 20 oxen from pastures, and 100 sheep. The queen of Sheba saw the magnificence of this food spread every day before Solomon and his staff. But our Greater than Solomon has spread before us a Table infinitely richer (1 Corinthians 11:23–27).

2 Chronicles 9:4 (b)
. . . and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel; his cupbearers also, and their apparel . . .

Not only was the queen of Sheba impressed with Solomon's wisdom and riches, but she was also impressed with Solomon's servants and their apparel. The apparel of those who attend our Greater than Solomon is far more magnificent than the apparel of Solomon's court, for Isaiah 61:10 says we are arrayed in robes of righteousness.

You might not feel righteous. Others might not say you're righteous. But, as a believer, the Father looks at you as being robed in righteousness because of the finished work of the Cross. Jesus Christ paid the price for our sin and robed us with His righteousness. Then He opens up opportunities for service, tells us how to serve, energizes us for service, and, finally, rewards us for service. *Amazing* grace!

2 Chronicles 9:4 (c)
. . . and his ascent by which he went up into the house of the LORD; there was no more spirit in her.

The ascent most likely speaks of the stairs to the altar. That Solomon would be able to ascend to the house of the Lord is incredible. But it's not anything compared to the ascent of our Greater than Solomon when He returned to His Father after He rose from the dead.

2 Chronicles 9:5, 6 (a)
And she said to the king, It was a true report which I heard in mine own land of thine acts, and of thy wisdom: Howbeit I believed not their words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the one half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me . . .

When the queen of Sheba saw these things, she melted. Give your life to Jesus, listen to His wisdom, eat at His Table, spend time in His temple, became a servant at His feet, experience His resurrected life within you, and your heart will melt, too.

2 Chronicles 9:6 (b)
. . . for thou exceedest the fame that I heard.

Solomon was extremely famous. His name was known throughout the world for a number of reasons. First, he was incredibly wealthy. As we see in verse 13, he received twenty-five tons—or one billion dollars' worth—of gold annually. So much gold did Solomon possess that the shields of his soldiers were made of solid gold. No wonder people throughout the world heard of his wealth! They also heard of his intellectual abilities. He was a biologist, a botanist, an ichthyologist, a writer of over 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs (1 Kings 4:32).

Hearing accounts of this magnificent king ruling in Jerusalem—so wise and wealthy—the queen of Sheba decided to investigate for herself and check out what she had heard. She came to prove Solomon with hard questions—not as a skeptic to trick him, but as a seeker to learn from him.

2 Chronicles 9:7–12

Happy are thy men, and happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom. Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee to set thee on his throne, to be king for the LORD thy God: because thy God loved Israel, to establish them for ever, therefore made he thee king over them, to do judgment and justice. And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices great abundance, and precious stones: neither was there any such spice as the queen of Sheba gave king Solomon. And the servants also of Huram, and the servants of Solomon, which brought gold from Ophir, brought algum trees and precious stones. And the king made of the algum trees terraces to the house of the LORD, and to the king's palace, and harps and psalteries for singers: and there were none such seen before in the land of Judah. And king Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside that which she had brought unto the king. So she turned, and went away to her own land, she and her servants.

Solomon answered the queen of Sheba with such wisdom that she was not only impressed but converted. How do we know this? Turn to Matthew 12 . . .

The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the

judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost part of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

Matthew 12:41, 42

Just as the entire city of Nineveh turned to the Lord, the implication here is that the queen of Sheba did likewise. And it is no wonder that she did, for Jesus is indeed greater than Solomon . . .

- Solomon had wisdom from God.
  Jesus is *the wisdom of God.*
- Solomon was a great king.
  Jesus is the King of kings.
- Solomon spoke practically to his nation.
  Jesus spoke powerfully to all creation.
- Solomon gave the queen all her heart desired.
  Jesus gives exceedingly abundantly above *all we can ask or think.*
- Solomon answered the queen's questions.
  Jesus is *the Answer to every question.*

2 Chronicles 9:13
Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and threescore and six talents of gold;

This would be equivalent to one billion dollars. Think of one billion dollars this way: if Solomon spent one thousand dollars a day, it would take him three thousand years to spend one billion. Solomon was wealthier than anyone who had ever lived. How did he get his wealth? Read on . . .

2 Chronicles 9:14
Beside that which chapmen and merchants brought. And all the kings of Arabia and governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon.

Chapmen were traders. At this time in history, 1000 B.C., the camel was domesticated. That changed the complexion of the Middle East completely because a camel can travel quite easily for three to four days between watering

spots. This meant trade routes were opened between Egypt and Mesopotamia. The path that led from Egypt and Mesopotamia went right through Israel. So Solomon took advantage of the situation and constructed toll roads.

2 Chronicles 9:15
And king Solomon made two hundred targets of beaten gold: six hundred shekels of beaten gold went to one target.

A target was a large shield that covered one's entire body. The value of these targets was about $400,000 each.

2 Chronicles 9:16–19
And three hundred shields made he of beaten gold: three hundred shekels of gold went to one shield. And the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon. Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold. And there were six steps to the throne, with a footstool of gold, which were fastened to the throne, and stays on each side of the sitting place, and two lions standing by the stays: And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps. There was not the like made in any kingdom.

Solomon's throne was gold-plated ivory with images of lions on either side. It would have been impressive and magnificent indeed. And yet our Lord has chosen instead to be enthroned on the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3). This means that when you lift up thanksgiving and praise to the Lord, you are actually building Him a throne more precious to Him than even the most magnificent throne on earth.

2 Chronicles 9:20
And all the drinking vessels of king Solomon were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold: none were of silver; it was not any thing accounted of in the days of Solomon.

There was so much gold in Solomon's kingdom that silver was no longer counted.

2 Chronicles 9:21

For the king's ships went to Tarshish with the servants of Huram: every three years once came the ships of Tarshish bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks.

Apes and peacocks were imported for entertainment.

2 Chronicles 9:22–28
And king Solomon passed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, that God had put in his heart. And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and raiment, harness, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year. And Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen; whom he bestowed in the chariot cities, and with the king at Jerusalem. And he reigned over all the kings from the river even unto the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt. And the king made silver in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar trees made he as the sycomore trees that are in the low plains in abundance. And they brought unto Solomon horses out of Egypt, and out of all lands.

Uh-oh. Deuteronomy 17 specifies that a king in Israel was not to multiply unto himself gold, wives, or horses. But here's Solomon, accumulating thousands of horses. Isaiah 30 gives us further understanding for there the Lord indicts His people for relying on horses, on military prowess, instead of resting in Him.

2 Chronicles 9:29–31
Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer against Jeroboam the son of Nebat? And Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years. And Solomon slept with his fathers, and he was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead.

Solomon was wise, wealthy, and successful, but, nonetheless, miserable. In Ecclesiastes, we see from Solomon's own hand that, during this time of incredible prosperity, his life was full of misery. Solomon threw unbelievable

parties, gained impressive education, had power, wealth, and influence that was unrivaled in the world. Yet he declared it all to be empty.

All of us think that happiness lies right around the corner—a little more money, and we'll be happy; a little more education or job security, and we'll be content. So did poor Solomon. He was at the top of every conceivable arena. He had nowhere else to go, nothing else for which to strive or hope, and he was still wanting.

It is the wise person who learns from the wisest man who ever lived and sees the fallacy that can so easily penetrate our hearts in thinking that happiness lies right around the corner with the next job, raise, acquisition, spouse, or degree.

At the end of his days, Solomon turned to the Lord, realizing that He was what he was looking for all along . . .

> Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.
>
> Ecclesiastes 12:13



10

2 Chronicles 10:1, 2

And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for to Shechem were all Israel come to make him king. And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was in Egypt, whither he had fled from the presence of Solomon the king, heard it, that Jeroboam returned out of Egypt.

Jeroboam was a very talented, capable, and gifted young man. But he was also cocky, conceited, and rebellious. Seeing that Jeroboam had great potential but also many problems, Solomon sought to kill him. So Jeroboam split and hung out in Egypt. Hearing Solomon was dead and his son Rehoboam was king, Jeroboam returns to Israel.

> **2 Chronicles 10:3, 4**
>
> **And they sent and called him. So Jeroboam and all Israel came and spake to Rehoboam, saying, Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore ease thou somewhat the grievous servitude of thy father, and his heavy yoke that he put upon us, and we will serve thee.**

All the magnificent building projects and expansion of the kingdom over forty years having placed a heavy tax burden upon the people, Jeroboam and the people of Israel came to Rehoboam and said, "Give us a break. The yoke was heavy upon us for years. Ease up somewhat and we'll serve you."

2 Chronicles 10:5
And he said unto them, Come again unto me after three days. And the people departed.

"Come back in three days," Rehoboam said, "and I will give you an answer."

2 Chronicles 10:6–8
And king Rehoboam took counsel with the old men that had stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, saying, What counsel give ye me to return answer to this people? And they spake unto him, saying, If thou be kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants for ever. But he forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men that were brought up with him, that stood before him.

The elderly, wise, mature men counseled Rehoboam to deal kindly with the people. The same principle still holds, for James writes that the wisdom from above is gentle and merciful (3:17). Therefore, it would follow that the longer a person walks with the Lord, the more gentle and merciful he will be. After hearing this advice, however, Rehoboam turned to his contemporaries to see what they would say.

2 Chronicles 10:9–11
And he said unto them, What advice give ye that we may return answer to this people, which have spoken to me, saying, Ease somewhat the yoke that thy father did put upon us? And the young men that were brought up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou answer the people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it somewhat lighter for us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. For whereas my father put a heavy yoke upon you, I

will put more to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

The young men advised Rehoboam to tell the people that if they thought Solomon's rule was heavy, they hadn't seen anything yet.

2 Chronicles 10:12–14
So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king bade, saying, Come again to me on the third day. And the king answered them roughly; and king Rehoboam forsook the counsel of the old men, And answered them after the advice of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add thereto: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

Rehoboam didn't listen to the counsel of maturity, but instead took his advice from his contemporaries. Those who are younger, either chronologically or spiritually in the Lord, would do well to listen to those who have greater maturity and experience.

2 Chronicles 10:15
So the king hearkened not unto the people: for the cause was of God, that the LORD might perform his word, which he spake by the hand of Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

In 1 Kings 11, the prophet Ahijah predicted that the kingdom would split. Here, the prophesied division is about to take place.

2 Chronicles 10:16
And when all Israel saw that the king would not hearken unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? and we have none inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to your tents, O Israel: and now, David, see to thine own house. So all Israel went to their tents.

"We're pulling out," said the ten northern tribes. "We have no influence on the sons of David. Our voice isn't being heard. You're on your own."

2 Chronicles 10:17–19
But as for the children of Israel that dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. Then king Rehoboam sent Hadoram that was over the tribute; and the children of Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. But king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem. And Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day.

In a misguided effort, Rehoboam sent a tax collector to make peace with the northern tribes. But the people stoned him on the spot. From this point on, the ten northern tribes would be known as Israel, while Benjamin and Judah would now be called the nation of Judah.

Although the ten northern tribes called themselves "Israel" and, although the two southern tribes referred to themselves as "Judah," God calls both nations "Israel" because He didn't acknowledge their division. Yes, there will be fighting and continual tension, but through the prophets, God nonetheless called both groups "Israel."

How does the Lord look at denominational divisions, church splits, personality clashes, doctrinal differences? He sees us as one—one body, one kingdom, one church, one people. It would do us so well to get in line with the heart of God on this matter. Jesus did, for in John 17, we see Him praying, "Father, let them be one, even as we are one."



11 **2 Chronicles 11:1–4**
And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he gathered of the house of Judah and Benjamin an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against Israel, that he might bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam. But the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, Speak unto Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren: return every man to his house: for this thing is done of me. And they obeyed the words of the LORD, and returned from going against Jeroboam.

Realizing his empire was divided, Rehoboam sought to reunite it by force. But the Lord sent a prophet, saying, "Don't fight your brethren in striving for unity."

The Lord never desired division, but He allowed it. Why? Under the reign of Solomon that lasted forty years, Israel experienced incredible prosperity. But at the same time, the nation was cracking and crumbling because of moral decay. So the Lord would actually allow the kingdom to split in order to save it.

From this, I understand that although division is not the Lord's best, He sometimes allows it to accomplish His purpose. In Acts 2, we read that the Lord added to the church such as should be saved. In Acts 6, we read that the Lord multiplied the church. But in between Acts 2 and Acts 6 is Acts 5, where we see not addition, not multiplication, but subtraction. Ananias and Sapphira were subtracted because they lied to the Holy Spirit. So, before there could be a further explosion of growth in the church, there first had to be a purging of the church.

In my own life, this same principle holds true. The Lord adds to my life and wants to multiply abundantly. But He sees He must do some subtracting first. So a season of purging follows. If you're wondering why you're being purged, why you seem to be in a season of subtraction or division, it could very well be because the Lord is getting ready to do a great work of multiplication through you.

2 Chronicles 11:5–12
And Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem, and built cities for defence in Judah. He built even Bethlehem, and Etam, and Tekoa, And Beth-zur, and Shoco, and Adullam, And Gath, and Mareshah, and Ziph, And Adoraim, and Lachish, and Azekah, And Zorah, and Aijalon, and Hebron, which are in Judah and in Benjamin fenced cities. And he fortified the strong holds, and put captains in them, and store of victual, and of oil and wine. And in every several city he put shields and spears, and made them exceeding strong, having Judah and Benjamin on his side.

With Israel as his enemy, Rehoboam fortified the cities on his borders against the likelihood of attack.

2 Chronicles 11:13–15

And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their coasts. For the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office unto the LORD: And he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made.

Knowing his people would head south to Jerusalem to worship the Lord, Jeroboam was worried their loyalty would be compromised. So he expelled the priests and Levites and developed his own idolatrous system of worship.

2 Chronicles 11:16, 17 (a)
And after them out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the LORD God of their fathers. So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong, three years . . .

Those with a heart for the true God left Israel and cruised down to Judah. As a result, the kingdom of Judah was strengthened. The same principle is still true, for the secret of the strength of any nation is due to the godly people therein.

2 Chronicles 11:17 (b)
. . . for three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon.

Rehoboam followed the godly path of David and Solomon for three years before he began to backslide and fall into all sorts of sin.

2 Chronicles 11:18–20
And Rehoboam took him Mahalath the daughter of Jerimoth the son of David to wife, and Abihail the daughter of Eliab the son of Jesse; Which bare him children; Jeush, and Shamariah, and Zaham. And after her he took Maachah the daughter of Absalom; which bare him Abijah, and Attai, and Ziza, and Shelomith.

"What portion have we in David?" the ten tribes asked before splitting from Benjamin and Judah (2 Chronicles 10:16). Perhaps it was to counter this

complaint that Rehoboam married into the line of David in an attempt to validate his right to the throne.

2 Chronicles 11:21, 22
And Rehoboam loved Maachah the daughter of Absalom above all his wives and his concubines: (for he took eighteen wives, and threescore concubines; and begat twenty and eight sons, and threescore daughters.) And Rehoboam made Abijah the son of Maachah the chief, to be ruler among his brethren: for he thought to make him king.

The implication is that Abijah was not Rehoboam's eldest son. Therefore, his appointment as king contradicted not only custom but the law (Deuteronomy 21:15).

2 Chronicles 11:23
And he dealt wisely, and dispersed of all his children throughout all the countries of Judah and Benjamin, unto every fenced city: and he gave them victual in abundance. And he desired many wives.

The wisdom spoken of here refers not to godly wisdom but to Rehoboam's political wisdom of broadening his base by positioning his sons throughout his kingdom.



12

2 Chronicles 12:1
And it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him.

From 2 Chronicles 11:17, we know that Rehoboam, king of Judah, walked in the way of his grandfather, David and honored the Lord until he became strong. Then he forgot the Lord.

An elephant and a flea walked over a creaky wooden bridge. When they reached the other side, the flea said to the elephant, "Wow! We sure made that bridge shake, didn't we?" Rehoboam had that same mentality. And so can we. We

walk with the Lord. God's blessing is poured out, and we begin to think, "We sure did something great, didn't we, Lord?" Are you in that place? Be careful. It's when we're doing well that we're most vulnerable.

When Paul had a vision of heaven, the Lord sent a thorn in the flesh to buffet him. "Lord," he prayed, "take this thorn from me."

"Lord, remove this thorn from me," he prayed a second time.

After he prayed the same prayer a third time, the Lord said, "No, Paul. My grace is sufficient for you, for when you are weak, then you will be strong."

Paul went on to glory in his weakness, saying, "If God has to keep me weak that I might be dependent upon Him, so be it. I do not want to be strong if it means I'll be independent of Him" (see 2 Corinthians 12).

Why has God sent you a thorn in the flesh? Maybe it's a person. Maybe it's a physical problem or a situation that pokes and prods. It is very possible that its purpose is to keep you from making the mistake of Rehoboam, the mistake of relying upon yourself.

2 Chronicles 12:2–4

And it came to pass, that in the fifth year of king Rehoboam Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the LORD, With twelve hundred chariots, and threescore thousand horsemen: and the people were without number that came with him out of Egypt; the Lubims, the Sukkiims, and the Ethiopians. And he took the fenced cities which pertained to Judah, and came to Jerusalem.

In the fifth year of his reign, two years after he departed from following the way of the Lord, a massive army came from Egypt to fight against Rehoboam.

2 Chronicles 12:5, 6

Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and to the princes of Judah, that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them, Thus saith the LORD, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak. Whereupon the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, The LORD is righteous.

Here Rehoboam does something surprising. He listens to the words of Shemaiah the prophet, humbles himself before the Lord, and declares that the Lord is righteous. I can't help but think of Revelation 19, where, at the end of the Tribulation, we see the world undergoing cataclysmic disaster. "Righteous and true are Your judgments, O Lord," cries a great host in heaven.

Even in the day of Tribulation, the host of heaven says the Lord is righteous. This is a sign of true maturity. "The Lord is righteous," declared Rehoboam, even on the brink of war. Whether regarding Rehoboam's tribulation, the Tribulation at the end of world history, or the tribulation you face today in your own situation, it is the mature man who says, "The Lord is righteous."

2 Chronicles 12:7, 8
And when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance; and my wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. Nevertheless they shall be his servants; that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.

"I'm not going to destroy My people," the Lord declared. "But they'll have to pay taxes to Shishak in order that they might appreciate Me. Let My people serve him for awhile. Then they'll see how good they had it with Me." Sometimes the Lord lets us get taxed by heavy situations in order to show us how good *He* is by comparison.

2 Chronicles 12:9–11
So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he took all: he carried away also the shields of gold which Solomon had made. Instead of which king Rehoboam made shields of brass, and committed them to the hands of the chief of the guard, that kept the entrance of the king's house. And when the king entered into the house of the LORD, the guard came and fetched them, and brought them again into the guard chamber.

After Shishak took the shields of gold, Rehoboam did something we have a tendency to do. He made brass ones and set guards over them, even though they

were no longer valuable.

"I know my relationship with the Lord isn't what it once was," we say, "but I'll pretend. I'll polish the brass of my flesh. I'll use the vocabulary and play the game so people won't know the gold is gone."

2 Chronicles 12:12
And when he humbled himself, the wrath of the LORD turned from him that he would not destroy him altogether: and also in Judah things went well.

Rehoboam again humbled himself and began to experience once again the grace and blessing of God.

2 Chronicles 12:13–16
So king Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem, and reigned: for Rehoboam was one and forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess. And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD. Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer concerning genealogies? And there were wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually. And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David: and Abijah his son reigned in his stead.

The word translated "prepared" literally means "fixed." Although there were times when he humbled himself, Rehoboam didn't *fix* his heart to seek the Lord. In other words, when tragedy or difficulty arose, he would humble himself. But otherwise his life lacked discipline. I can't stress enough the importance of a disciplined walk. The word "disciple" means "disciplined one."

"My yoke is easy. My burden is light," Jesus declared (Matthew 11:30). He doesn't crack a whip over us or make heavy demands of us. Yet he wants hearts disciplined to seek Him daily.

Is your heart fixed on the Lord, or are you polished brass? Learn the lesson of Rehoboam.



13 In chapter 13, we come to the account of the reign of Rehoboam's son, Abijah . . .

2 Chronicles 13:1, 2 (a)
Now in the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam began Abijah to reign over Judah. He reigned three years in Jerusalem . . .

From 1 Kings 15, we know Abijah was a man who did evil in the sight of the Lord.

2 Chronicles 13:2 (b)
. . . His mother's name also was Michaiah the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. And there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam.

During Abijah's reign, civil war broke out between Judah and the ten northern tribes.

2 Chronicles 13:3
And Abijah set the battle in array with an army of valiant men of war, even four hundred thousand chosen men: Jeroboam also set the battle in array against him with eight hundred thousand chosen men, being mighty men of valour.

Outnumbered two to one, Abijah tries to talk his way into a truce . . .

2 Chronicles 13:4–12
And Abijah stood up upon mount Zemaraim, which is in mount Ephraim, and said, Hear me, thou Jeroboam, and all Israel; Ought ye not to know that the LORD God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt? Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, is risen up, and hath rebelled against his lord. And there are gathered unto him vain men, the children of Belial, and have strengthened themselves against Rehoboam the son of Solomon,

when Rehoboam was young and tenderhearted, and could not withstand them. And now ye think to withstand the kingdom of the LORD in the hand of the sons of David; and ye be a great multitude, and there are with you golden calves, which Jeroboam made you for gods. Have ye not cast out the priests of the LORD, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and have made you priests after the manner of the nations of other lands? so that whosoever cometh to consecrate himself with a young bullock and seven rams, the same may be a priest of them that are no gods. But as for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken him; and the priests, which minister unto the LORD, are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites wait upon their business: And they burn unto the LORD every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense: the shewbread also set they in order upon the pure table; and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening: for we keep the charge of the LORD our God; but ye have forsaken him. And, behold, God himself is with us for our captain, and his priests with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you. O children of Israel, fight ye not against the LORD God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper.

To the ten northern tribes of Israel, Abijah said, "You guys don't have a prayer for two reasons. First, the promise of the Lord is that David will have a son on the throne forever. It is a covenant of salt." A covenant was an agreement wherein two parties took a bull, split it in half, laid it open, and met between the two sides of beef. In killing a bull, they were saying, "We are deadly serious about this agreement." If they wanted to make this covenant especially strong, they would pour salt on the bull because salt prevents putrefaction.

"The Lord made a covenant of salt"—an unbreakable treaty, especially sealed—"that a descendant of David would be on the throne forever," Abijah said. "I'm a descendant of David. Jeroboam isn't. Therefore, you don't have a chance."

"Secondly—not only prophetically, but practically—you're doomed," Abijah continued. "You kicked out the priests and the Levites, made yourselves golden calves to worship, and forsook the true and living God. We, on the other hand, still worship Jehovah. The priests stand before His temple and offer incense and sacrifice to Him. Practically, you've rejected the Lord. Therefore, you'll be fighting against Him because God is for us." The fact that Abijah was not

walking with the Lord didn't negate the promises of God, for God remains true, even if every man is a liar (Romans 3:4).

2 Chronicles 13:13, 14 (a)
But Jeroboam caused an ambushment to come about behind them: so they were before Judah, and the ambushment was behind them. And when Judah looked back, behold, the battle was before and behind . . .

I have found, both in my own life and in the lives of others, that the enemy usually follows this same tactic. He attacks from before and behind. That is, he condemns us about our past—mistakes we made five years ago, last week, or yesterday—as well as getting us to worry about our future. What if the check doesn't come? What if the job doesn't open? What if I say the wrong thing?

"Forgetting the things that are behind, I press on toward the mark of the high calling of Jesus Christ," Paul declared (see Philippians 3:13, 14).

"Take no thought for tomorrow," Jesus taught (Matthew 6:34).

The secret of a happy, successful Christian experience is to neither live in your past nor worry about tomorrow, but to enjoy where you are right now, keeping your eyes on Jesus day by day, moment by moment.

2 Chronicles 13:14 (b)
. . . and they cried unto the LORD . . .

With the outlook looking bleak, Abijah had no other choice but to look up.

2 Chronicles 13:14 (c), 15
. . . and the priests sounded with the trumpets. Then the men of Judah gave a shout: and as the men of Judah shouted, it came to pass, that God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah.

Abijah was not walking with the Lord. Yet, in a moment of desperation, he cried out to Him and his prayer was answered.

2 Chronicles 13:16–22
And the children of Israel fled before Judah: and God delivered them into their hand. And Abijah and his people slew them with a great slaughter: so there fell down slain of Israel five hundred thousand

chosen men. Thus the children of Israel were brought under at that time, and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon the LORD God of their fathers. And Abijah pursued after Jeroboam, and took cities from him, Bethel with the towns thereof, and Jeshnah with the towns thereof, and Ephrain with the towns thereof. Neither did Jeroboam recover strength again in the days of Abijah: and the LORD struck him, and he died. But Abijah waxed mighty, and married fourteen wives, and begat twenty and two sons, and sixteen daughters. And the rest of the acts of Abijah, and his ways, and his sayings, are written in the story of the prophet Iddo.

I believe this story is recorded for a very simple but significant reason: to remind us of the readiness and willingness of our Father to respond immediately to a prayer offered in sincerity. The enemy will tell you God won't answer your prayer because you haven't prayed in a week or you haven't tithed in a month. The reality, however, is that you're not as far gone as Abijah was, and God answered him.

Our Father is waiting to respond to any who humbly and sincerely call upon His name. Therefore, take hope, dear saint. The Father loves you and will respond to you if you'll just cry out to Him no matter where you've been or what you've done.



14 We now come to the life of a very important and interesting king. His name is Asa . . .

2 Chronicles 14:1
So Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David: and Asa his son reigned in his stead. In his days the land was quiet ten years.

Why was there quietness in the land? Read on . . .

2 Chronicles 14:2

And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God:

Note that Asa did that which was both good and right in the eyes of the Lord. You can do that which is good, but it will not necessarily be right. You can pray, and that's good, but if you're like the Pharisees who prayed simply to be heard by men or to fulfill some obligation, it's not right if your motives are wrong. Giving is good, but if you give like the Pharisees, simply to receive the applause and approval of men, you're missing the mark entirely. Witnessing is good, but if you're witnessing simply to add another notch to your Bible, that's not right. Asa did that which was both good and right, and the result was quietness in the land.

2 Chronicles 14:3, 4
For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves: And commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment.

Here we see the beginning of a revival—the first of five revivals in Judah's history.

2 Chronicles 14:5–7 (a)
Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images: and the kingdom was quiet before him. And he built fenced cities in Judah: for the land had rest, and he had no war in those years; because the LORD had given him rest. Therefore he said unto Judah, Let us build these cities, and make about them walls, and towers, gates, and bars, while the land is yet before us; because we have sought the LORD our God, we have sought him, and he hath given us rest on every side . . .

During the time of rest, Asa didn't kick back. He used the time of rest to prepare for future battles. And I believe his example is invaluable to us. If your life is going smoothly, praise the Lord and enjoy it, but prepare for the battles that are sure to come your way. If you're kicking back and watching TV in the time of peace, watch out because you don't know what tomorrow holds. And when the trial or difficulty confronts you, it will be too late to build your cities then. It will be too late to arm the soldiers then. When the attack comes, you'll kick yourself

and say, "Why didn't I prepare when I had the opportunity? I didn't study and pray and meditate like I knew I should have, and now I'm sadly defeated."

Asa is remembered as a godly man because he was wise enough to use the time of peace for a time of preparation.

2 Chronicles 14:7 (b)
. . . So they built and prospered.

They built and they prospered. There are three ways the Bible tells us we can build, or edify. The first is through the Word of God. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). The word translated "grow" literally means "be edified." Peter doesn't address this exhortation to newborn babes or new believers. He doesn't say, "*If* you're a newborn babe, desire the sincere milk of the Word." No, He says, "*As* newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word." In other words, it is as imperative for us as believers to take in the Word as it is for a newborn baby to take in a consistent and continual supply of nourishment.

The second way to build or edify is through our own words. Proverbs 18:21 tells us that life and death are in the power of the tongue. Every word you speak will either build up or tear down. You'll either build up your own or someone else's faith through words of encouragement and blessing, or you'll undermine your own or someone else's faith through cynicism and doubt.

Finally, we edify through love. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8 that knowledge puffs up but love builds up. If you're striving with people, you're eroding the underpinnings of faith. But if you love people, you're building on a firm foundation.

Three practical ways you can build and prosper in the time of peace: Get in the Word; speak positive words; and love. In so doing, you will not only edify others, but your own faith will be built up and strengthened.

2 Chronicles 14:8
And Asa had an army of men that bare targets and spears, out of Judah three hundred thousand; and out of Benjamin, that bare shields and drew bows, two hundred and fourscore thousand: all these were mighty men of valour.

Some in Asa's army held spears for hand-to-hand, close-quartered combat. Others used bows for long-range attacks. We not only have to be defensive against the obvious sin we can see, but also against the long-range, subtle sins of overwork, self-sufficiency, the failure to maintain a consistent prayer life.

2 Chronicles 14:9–11 (a)
And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots; and came unto Mareshah. Then Asa went out against him, and they set the battle in array in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. And Asa cried unto the LORD his God . . .

Good move, Asa. Whenever you face odds that look bad, cry to the Lord.

2 Chronicles 14:11 (b)
. . . and said, LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God . . .

Although this prayer is only one verse long, it speaks volumes. Asa could boldly seek the Lord in adversity because he had diligently sought the Lord in prosperity. He had no need for a long prayer of introduction or explanation. His prayer took only seconds to utter, but it had a background of ten years of seeking and walking with the Lord.

"Don't think you will be heard by your much speaking," Jesus taught (see Matthew 6:7). The heathen made that mistake. They thought the longer they prayed and more ornate their prayers, the more responsive God would be. Not so. Here, Asa simply says, "Lord, we're outnumbered. We're trusting in You. Help us."

Notice that Asa puts no limitation on God. God knows nothing of degrees of difficulty. To God, it makes no difference whether you're praying for healing from a cold or from cancer. Everything is equally easy for Him.

2 Chronicles 14:11 (c)
. . . for we rest on thee . . .

"We *rest* on You," Asa said. So often I pray and then I worry. I pray and then I fret. Asa shows us how it's supposed to be done.

2 Chronicles 14:11 (d)
. . . and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee.

"Let not man prevail against *Thee*." Asa prayed for the glory of God. Prayer is not to move God. It is to move *with* God. It is not to rub the proverbial lamp and have the genie pop out. It's to submit to God and say, "Father, what is *Your* intention in this situation? I want to line up with what You're doing for Your glory."

2 Chronicles 14:12–15
So the LORD smote the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled. And Asa and the people that were with him pursued them unto Gerar: and the Ethiopians were overthrown, that they could not recover themselves; for they were destroyed before the LORD, and before his host; and they carried away very much spoil. And they smote all the cities round about Gerar; for the fear of the LORD came upon them: and they spoiled all the cities; for there was exceeding much spoil in them. They smote also the tents of cattle, and carried away sheep and camels in abundance, and returned to Jerusalem.

Judah not only won the battle, but they plundered the enemy camp and the surrounding cities as well as bringing home much livestock. Thus, God answered Asa's prayer the same way He answers ours, in a way "exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20).



15

2 Chronicles 15:1
And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded:

Throughout Scripture, whenever the Spirit comes upon someone, it's always for the purpose of service.

2 Chronicles 15:2

And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.

If you're looking for a good "life verse," this might be one to consider.

2 Chronicles 15:3–6
Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law. But when they in their trouble did turn unto the LORD God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them. And in those times there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the countries. And nation was destroyed of nation, and city of city: for God did vex them with all adversity.

Azariah reminded Asa of the periods in Israel's history when, although His people had forsaken Him, God didn't forsake His people but showed Himself strong on their behalf when they returned to Him.

2 Chronicles 15:7
Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded.

"Be strong and you'll be rewarded," Azariah said to Asa concerning the work he had begun so well.

2 Chronicles 15:8
And when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from mount Ephraim, and renewed the altar of the LORD, that was before the porch of the LORD.

Renewed courage is always the result of true prophecy.

2 Chronicles 15:9–13

And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and the strangers with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon: for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the LORD his God was with him. So they gathered themselves together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. And they offered unto the LORD the same time, of the spoil which they had brought, seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep. And they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; That whosoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman.

"Seek God or die," became the order of the day. Oh, that we would be deadly serious about seeking God ourselves, or even that we would seek Him with the same determination that we seek breakfast each morning.

2 Chronicles 15:14, 15
And they sware unto the LORD with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and the LORD gave them rest round about.

When you make a commitment to seek the Lord, you will experience two things: rejoicing and rest. Rejoicing is the result of a brother or sister who says, "I'm going for it. I might falter. I might fail. I might fall, but I'll get back up and keep going for it over and over again." Secondly, rest comes from the hand of the One who said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, and you shall find rest in your soul" (Matthew 11:29).

The most dangerous and tiresome place to be is hanging toward the back. That's when your joy disappears, your faith wavers, and you become vulnerable to sin. The front line is the safest place to be. You'll be rested and refreshed on the front line instead of exhausted and burdened at the back.

2 Chronicles 15:16
And also concerning Maachah the mother of Asa the king, he removed her from being queen, because she had made an idol in a

grove: and Asa cut down her idol, and stamped it, and burnt it at the brook Kidron.

Asa honored his commitment to God even though it meant challenging the idolatrous practices of his grandmother.

2 Chronicles 15:17
But the high places were not taken away out of Israel: nevertheless the heart of Asa was perfect all his days.

I take great comfort in the fact that God calls Asa's heart perfect even though there was still work yet to be done.

2 Chronicles 15:18, 19
And he brought into the house of God the things that his father had dedicated, and that he himself had dedicated, silver, and gold, and vessels. And there was no more war unto the five and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa.

Commitment was made; rejoicing and rest followed; peace prevailed.



16 **2 Chronicles 16:1**
In the six and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and built Ramah, to the intent that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah.

Baasha, king of Israel, built a blockade. Having already beaten one million Ethiopians, Baasha's little blockade was sure to be no problem for Asa. So he decided to handle it himself. Big mistake.

2 Chronicles 16:2–6
Then Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of the LORD and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-hadad king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying, There is a league between me and thee, as there was between my father and thy father: behold, I have sent thee silver and gold; go, break thy league

with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me. And Ben-hadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel; and they smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abel-maim, and all the store cities of Naphtali. And it came to pass, when Baasha heard it, that he left off building of Ramah, and let his work cease. Then Asa the king took all Judah; and they carried away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha was building; and he built therewith Geba and Mizpah.

Asa's plan was logical and seemingly successful. He paid the Syrians to attack Baasha in order to keep Israel so busy defending herself that she wouldn't be able to attack him.

2 Chronicles 16:7–9
And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.

The eyes of the Lord are looking for men and women whose heart is perfect. That doesn't mean flawless. It means their hearts beat in harmony with God's, not relying upon themselves, but saying, "Lord, I'm depending on You." At one time, Asa had such a heart. Here, however, he was acting on his own behalf.

2 Chronicles 16:10
Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison house; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And Asa oppressed some of the people the same time.

Asa began well but ended poorly because he grew increasingly independent of God.

2 Chronicles 16:11
And, behold, the acts of Asa, first and last, lo, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.

Asa's acts, from his first to his last, were written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. Your acts, from first to last, are written in the book of the Kings of the universe. Are your present acts matching your first acts? It's a question I must ask myself continually. Your story is being written right now. If you died tonight, how would your story read? Would your last acts be more glorious, or would your first acts be the only key to your spiritual life? "Remember your first works and repent," Jesus said to the church at Ephesus. "And do your first works again" (see Revelation 2:5).

2 Chronicles 16:12–14
And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians. And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign. And they buried him in his own sepulchres, which he had made for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odours and divers kinds of spices prepared by the apothecaries' art: and they made a very great burning for him.

Initially, Asa sought the Lord in every situation. Now, however, he said, "Why pray when I can call a doctor?" The result? He died. Had he sought the Lord first, perhaps he would have lived and perhaps his last acts would have been even greater than his first.



17 **2 Chronicles 17:1–3**
And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead, and strengthened himself against Israel. And he placed forces in all the fenced cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim, which Asa his father had taken. And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim;

David and Asa began so well in their walks with the Lord. Because their hearts were totally tuned in to Him, their actions were right in His sight. But toward the end of their lives, both of these great men had difficult times. So what does Jehoshaphat do? He follows that which was good in their lives.

Gang, it is the wise person who can study history or look at another life and say, "I'll take the meat and leave the bones. I'll glean from them what I can even though there might be some inconsistencies."

2 Chronicles 17:4–6 (a)
But sought to the LORD God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. Therefore the LORD stablished the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents; and he had riches and honour in abundance. And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the LORD . . .

The Hebrew word translated "lifted up" literally means "lively and affectionate." I like that! Jehoshaphat felt enthusiastically affectionate toward the Lord. Oh, that our hearts might be the same.

2 Chronicles 17:6 (b)–9
. . . moreover he took away the high places and groves out of Judah. Also in the third year of his reign he sent to his princes, even to Ben-hail, and to Obadiah, and to Zechariah, and to Nethaneel, and to Michaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah. And with them he sent Levites, even Shemaiah, and Nethaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asahel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobijah, and Tob-adonijah, Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, priests. And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the LORD with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people.

Jehoshaphat not only strengthened his kingdom militarily, but he also strengthened it morally. He sent out teachers who taught the Law of the Lord throughout the entire country. The nation, in turn, prospered spiritually because the people were being taught the Word of God consistently.

Building our armies and increasing our weapons as a nation will not be enough to secure us in this world. We must be right morally. And the best thing

our country can do is take time to seek God's face and heart. Yes, Jehoshaphat armed his forces, but he also sent out Levites and leaders to teach the people the word of the Law of the Lord.

2 Chronicles 17:10, 11
And the fear of the LORD fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat. Also some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and tribute silver; and the Arabians brought him flocks, seven thousand and seven hundred rams, and seven thousand and seven hundred he goats.

Proverbs 16:7 says that when a man is right with the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. Here, the Philistines and Arabians—who normally fought against Judah—no longer wanted to fight and instead paid tribute.

2 Chronicles 17:12–19
And Jehoshaphat waxed great exceedingly; and he built in Judah castles, and cities of store. And he had much business in the cities of Judah: and the men of war, mighty men of valour, were in Jerusalem. And these are the numbers of them according to the house of their fathers: Of Judah, the captains of thousands; Adnah the chief, and with him mighty men of valour three hundred thousand. And next to him was Jehohanan the captain, and with him two hundred and fourscore thousand. And next him was Amasiah the son of Zichri, who willingly offered himself unto the LORD; and with him two hundred thousand mighty men of valour. And of Benjamin; Eliada a mighty man of valour, and with him armed men with bow and shield two hundred thousand. And next him was Jehozabad, and with him an hundred and fourscore thousand ready prepared for the war. These waited on the king, beside those whom the king put in the fenced cities throughout all Judah.

It is not surprising that, both militarily and economically, Judah thrived under the reign of Jehoshaphat, the king with a heart that was "lively and affectionate" toward the Lord.



18

2 Chronicles 18:1
Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab.

Jehoshaphat walked rightly in the sight of the Lord and strengthened his people by exposing them to the Word. Here, in chapter 18, however, he'll make a big blunder by joining with Ahab, one of the most wicked rulers in the history of Israel. Why did Jehoshaphat, who was prospering and walking with the Lord, want to get involved with a character like Ahab? The Bible doesn't say. Many commentators speculate that Jehoshaphat linked himself with Ahab in hopes that the nations might be unified. While His intentions may have been right, however, his story will tell us that we can't build a relationship, be it personal or financial, if it means we must compromise what we believe about the Lord. That is why, in 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul admonishes us not to be "unequally yoked" with unbelievers.

2 Chronicles 18:2, 3 (a)
And after certain years he went down to Ahab to Samaria. And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramoth-gilead. And Ahab king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Wilt thou go with me to Ramoth-gilead?

Ahab changed his tactic from attacking Jehoshaphat to attracting him. "I'm throwing a big party," he said. "Come on down and we'll have a great time. Then we'll go together to rescue Ramoth-gilead." Ramoth-gilead was a city in Gad on the east side of the Jordan. It was a city of refuge originally, an important city spiritually and politically. But the Syrians had taken it over. So Ahab appealed to Jehoshaphat for help in liberating its people.

2 Chronicles 18:3 (b)
. . . And he answered him, I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war.

Watch out, Jehoshaphat. You're not as Ahab is. Ahab is a worldling. You're a man of God. Sometimes in our attempt to be relatable, we, like Jehoshaphat, become so vulnerable to sin that we're no longer useful to the work of the Lord.

2 Chronicles 18:4–6
And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to day. Therefore the king of Israel gathered together of prophets four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for God will deliver it into the king's hand. But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might inquire of him?

Four hundred prophets were brought in to Jehoshaphat and Ahab. "God is with you," they said. "Go for it." But Jehoshaphat sensed something wasn't quite right.

"Isn't there another prophet?" he asked.

Not everyone who says, "The Lord told me to tell you . . ." is really speaking for the Lord. Any time a word of prophecy is given, it can come from any one of three sources. It can indeed be from the Lord; it can be from a demonic spirit coming across as an angel of light; or it can come from the human spirit, just someone wanting to say something that sounds good (see 2 Samuel 7:3). How do you know when it's the Lord speaking? This is where discernment is needed.

How can we be discerning?

Four ways . . .

First, the Holy Spirit gives discernment. First John 2:27 declares that the Holy Spirit will guide and direct every believer seeking direction. Thus, there will either be a confirmation or an uneasiness in your heart regarding any word of prophecy.

Secondly, the Scriptures give discernment. " If we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel than that which has been preached, let him be accursed," Paul said to the Galatians (1:8). If someone shares something that violates the written Word, throw it out.

Thirdly, fruit gives discernment. Jesus taught us we can know from whence a person is speaking by the fruit he bears (Matthew 7:15, 16). We are to observe the fruitfulness of those who claim to speak in the name of the Lord. Is there love,

joy, and peace in their lives? Is there the fruit of salvation and good works (Galatians 5:22; Romans 1:13; Titus 3:14)?

Finally, the body of Christ gives discernment. That is, there are people who, like Jehoshaphat, are particularly gifted concerning the discernment of spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10). That's why the body of Christ is so important. We truly need each other.

2 Chronicles 18:7–12
And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, by whom we may inquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil: the same is Micaiah the son of Imla. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so. And the king of Israel called for one of his officers, and said, Fetch quickly Micaiah the son of Imla. And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah sat either of them on his throne, clothed in their robes, and they sat in a void place at the entering in of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them. And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah had made him horns of iron, and said, Thus saith the LORD, With these thou shalt push Syria until they be consumed. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And the messenger that went to call Micaiah spake to him, saying, Behold, the words of the prophets declare good to the king with one assent; let thy word therefore, I pray thee, be like one of theirs, and speak thou good.

Four hundred prophets were telling Ahab that his venture to liberate Ramoth-gilead would be successful. When Micaiah—the only possible dissenting voice—was brought before him, the messenger asks him to make it easy on everyone and go along with the majority.

2 Chronicles 18:13–15
And Micaiah said, As the LORD liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak. And when he was come to the king, the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And he said, Go ye up, and prosper, and they shall be delivered into your hand. And the king said to him, How many times

shall I adjure thee that thou say nothing but the truth to me in the name of the LORD?

When Micaiah did indeed go along with the rest of the four hundred prophets, Jehoshaphat sensed sarcasm in his voice.

2 Chronicles 18:16–22
Then he said, I did see all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master; let them return therefore every man to his house in peace. And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would not prophesy good unto me, but evil? Again he said, Therefore hear the word of the LORD; I saw the LORD sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left. And the LORD said, Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one spake saying after this manner, and another saying after that manner. Then there came out a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will entice him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go out, and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the LORD said, Thou shalt entice him, and thou shalt also prevail: go out, and do even so. Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil against thee.

This is a very controversial passage, for it says that God gave permission for a spirit to lie. While this causes confusion to some, I believe the issue is really quite simple. In both Job 1 and Revelation 2, we see that the devil and his demons have access to heaven. Oh, there is coming a time in the Tribulation period when Satan and his demons will be cast out of heaven permanently, but until that time, they appear before God. Here, in 2 Chronicles, God is using Satan and his demons as tools in His hand. You see, God wants our love. But love demands a choice. Therefore, after Satan rebelled against Him, God used him to give humanity a choice. If there wasn't a choice, there could be no real love. Nonetheless, Satan and his demons are in submission to the will of God in that they can do nothing without God allowing it. Was it because God knew that Ahab's heart was bent on sinning that He allowed demonic spirits to fill the mouths of his false prophets?

2 Chronicles 18:23
Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near, and smote Micaiah upon the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee?

Zedekiah exhibits the antithesis of the Spirit because wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, and full of mercy (James 3). In other words, wisdom from above is characterized not by force but by love.

2 Chronicles 18:24–27
And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see on that day when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself. Then the king of Israel said, Take ye Micaiah, and carry him back to Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; And say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I return in peace. And Micaiah said, If thou certainly return in peace, then hath not the LORD spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, all ye people.

Micaiah said that time itself would prove whether or not his prophecy of defeat was correct.

2 Chronicles 18:28
So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead.

After observing this whole scene, seeing the foolishness of Zedekiah, and knowing in his own heart it wasn't right, why did Jehoshaphat accompany Ahab into battle? He went for the same reason we see God's truth in the Word, but still go our way unaffected.

2 Chronicles 18:29
And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and will go to the battle; but put thou on thy robes. So the king of Israel disguised himself; and they went to the battle.

In convincing Jehoshaphat to wear his robes, Ahab was apparently setting Jehoshaphat up as a target.

2 Chronicles 18:30, 31 (a)
Now the king of Syria had commanded the captains of the chariots that were with him, saying, Fight ye not with small or great, save only with the king of Israel. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel . . .

In verse 3, Jehoshaphat said to Ahab, "We're one. I am as thou art." Here, sadly, his statement finds fulfillment. Are you mistaken for Ahab? In your attempt to be relatable to the world, are people thinking you're part of the world?

2 Chronicles 18:31 (b)–34
. . . Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him; and God moved them to depart from him. For it came to pass, that, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back again from pursuing him. And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: therefore he said to his chariot man, Turn thine hand, that thou mayest carry me out of the host; for I am wounded. And the battle increased that day: howbeit the king of Israel stayed himself up in his chariot against the Syrians until the even: and about the time of the sun going down he died.

Here, Jehoshaphat, wearing Ahab's royal robes, would seem to be extremely vulnerable. Yet he was protected. Ahab, on the other hand, was cleverly disguised and wearing armor. Yet as the battle drew to an end, a Syrian soldier had an extra arrow in his quiver, shot it, and it went right between a space in Ahab's armor. This tells me that nothing happens circumstantially. Everything is ordered by our Father. Everything happens according to His counsel and wisdom. The arrow shot "at a venture" was, in fact, a guided missile, guided by the hand of God.



19 **2 Chronicles 19:1–4**
And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Je rusalem. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said

to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God. And Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem: and he went out again through the people from Beer-sheba to mount Ephraim, and brought them back unto the LORD God of their fathers.

Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab caused his people to backslide. Therein is the tragedy of a compromised walk. It affects more than we know.

2 Chronicles 19:5–7
And he set judges in the land throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city, And said to the judges, Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.

Jehoshaphat set out to call people back to a relationship with God. Oh, that his words were posted in every law school and above every judge's bench in our own country.

2 Chronicles 19:8–11
Moreover in Jerusalem did Jehoshaphat set of the Levites, and of the priests, and of the chief of the fathers of Israel, for the judgment of the LORD, and for controversies, when they returned to Jerusalem. And he charged them, saying, Thus shall ye do in the fear of the LORD, faithfully, and with a perfect heart. And what cause soever shall come to you of your brethren that dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and judgments, ye shall even warn them that they trespass not against the LORD, and so wrath come upon you, and upon your brethren: this do, and ye shall not trespass. And, behold, Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of the LORD; and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, for all the king's matters: also the Levites shall be officers before you. Deal courageously, and the LORD shall be with the good.

Jehoshaphat instituted a "supreme court" in Jerusalem made up of Levites, priests, and wise leaders of the community. Their instructions were to judge faithfully and courageously in the fear of the Lord and with a pure heart.



20 2 Chronicles 20:1–3

It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the chil dren of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be Hazazon-tamar, which is En-gedi. And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

If you're afraid, if you feel the enemy surrounding you, if you feel problems mounting up against you, do what Jehoshaphat did. He set his heart to seek the Lord and called for a fast. Fasting is simply letting go of the physical arena in order to focus on the spiritual arena.

2 Chronicles 20:4–12

And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the LORD: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD. And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, And said, O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee? Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever? And they dwelt therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name, saying, If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help. And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and mount Seir, whom thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they

turned from them, and destroyed them not; Behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit. O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.

Surrounded by the Moabites and the Ammonites, Jehoshaphat said, "We don't know what to do, Lord. Our eyes are upon You."

Where are your eyes?

If your eyes are on people, you'll be disappointed. If your eyes are on circumstances, like Peter when his eyes were on the waves, you'll go down. But if your eyes are on the Lord, you'll be stable and He'll see you through.

If you're in financial straits, spread your bills out before the Lord and say, "Father, help me. Where have I erred? Give me wisdom." If your marriage is floundering, get on your face with your husband or wife and say, "God, have mercy. We're hurting. We need Your help." If your kids are rebelling, humble yourself before your Father on behalf of your kids. Whatever the battle you face, don't read books or get counsel before you seek the Lord. Keep your eyes on *Him.*

2 Chronicles 20:13–17

And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children. Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation; And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you.

"It's not your battle," the Lord said through the prophet Jahaziel. "Stand still and I will fight for you." And He says the same thing to us concerning the obstacles that face us. "You can't solve that problem or overcome that obstacle in your own energy," He says. "Just stand still." And yet standing still is the hardest thing for us to do.

2 Chronicles 20:18
And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD.

When the people heard that God would fight for them, they immediately worshiped Him. Would you have done that? Why is it that we believe the promises of men but doubt the promises of God? When we know we're getting a tax refund, so sure are we it's coming that we have it spent before it arrives. Yet when we read that God will supply all our needs, we don't believe that particular promise applies to us. In other words, we have more confidence in the government than we do in God. We need to be like Jehoshaphat, a man whose walk God commended (17:3, 4). We need to claim the promises of the Word and say, "Victory is coming. God *will* come through."

2 Chronicles 20:19, 20
And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high. And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.

"If you believe, you will be established." The converse is also true. If you don't believe, you won't be established, for without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Study the lives of the great men of Scripture and of the giants of faith throughout history and you will find they had one thing in common: they saw the invisible. Average people only see the obvious. It is the one who sees beyond that, the one who sees with the eyes of faith, who experiences blessing, prosperity, and anointing on his life. Are you one who sees the invisible and claims the promise of God, or are you one who says, "It's never

going to work. It's never going to happen. It's doomed to fail"? Like Jehoshaphat, everyone who has left a lasting mark on the history of the church of Jesus Christ has been a man or woman of faith.

Even with his enemies surrounding him on all sides, Jehoshaphat says, "Believe in the Lord."

2 Chronicles 20:21
And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever.

Surrounded by enemy forces, Jehoshaphat sends the choir out first. If you were a member of this choir, what would have been *your* response? The choir went out armed with nothing but worship. Logically, this is insane. Spiritually, however, it's the way of the Lord for faith is released through praise and worship. And it is faith that opens the door for God to work.

2 Chronicles 20:22, 23
And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another.

The enemy was so confused by the choir that they began to fight each other. This is not surprising for the enemy is always confounded when God's people praise Him in the place of difficulty. When it seems as though you should be cursing and crying but instead are praising and worshiping, the enemy flees.

2 Chronicles 20:24–30
And when Judah came toward the watch tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped. And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away the spoil of them, they found among them in abundance both riches with the dead bodies, and precious jewels,

which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away: and they were three days in gathering of the spoil, it was so much. And on the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Berachah; for there they blessed the LORD: therefore the name of the same place was called, The valley of Berachah, unto this day. Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat in the forefront of them, to go again to Jerusalem with joy; for the LORD had made them to rejoice over their enemies. And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets unto the house of the LORD. And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the LORD fought against the enemies of Israel. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet: for his God gave him rest round about.

Berachah means "blessing." After spoiling the enemy, the people of God worshiped and praised Him. Because faith comes by hearing the Word (Romans 10:17), even as we have studied this Word, I pray our faith might so well up within us, that we would leave our times of study and meditation as members of Jehoshaphat's choir, praising God.

2 Chronicles 20:31–37

And Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah: he was thirty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. And he walked in the way of Asa his father, and departed not from it, doing that which was right in the sight of the LORD. Howbeit the high places were not taken away: for as yet the people had not prepared their hearts unto the God of their fathers. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of Jehu the son of Hanani, who is mentioned in the book of the kings of Israel. And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly: And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish: and they made the ships in Eziongeber. Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish.

As seen throughout his life, Jehoshaphat was a godly king, one who sought to follow God, and one with whom God walked (17:3, 4). And yet, here at the end of his life, two shortcomings are noted. First was his inability to entirely rid the land of the high places that so enticed God's people to worship false gods. The second misstep noted was his alliance with Ahab's son, Ahaziah to embark on a shipping venture to secure gold (1 Kings 22:46–49). Just as they do in our lives, any alliance that compromises our high calling as servants of God is destined for shipwreck just as surely as Jehoshaphat's ships were.



21

2 Chronicles 21:1
Now Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fa thers in the city of David. And Jehoram his son reigned in his stead.

Jehoram was a sinful son, a brutal brother, and a rotten ruler.

2 Chronicles 21:2–4
And he had brethren the sons of Jehoshaphat, Azariah, and Jehiel, and Zechariah, and Azariah, and Michael, and Shephatiah: all these were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. And their father gave them great gifts of silver, and of gold, and of precious things, with fenced cities in Judah: but the kingdom gave he to Jehoram; because he was the firstborn. Now when Jehoram was risen up to the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself, and slew all his brethren with the sword, and divers also of the princes of Israel.

Just as Jehoram slew his brothers with the sword, all too often, we in the family of God can chop up our brothers with the sword of the Word. Why did Jehoram attack his brothers? It was because he saw them as threats to his position. Whenever we chop at each other, even using the Scriptures, it is often indicative of our own insecurity and jealousy.

2 Chronicles 21:5–7
Jehoram was thirty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter

of Ahab to wife: and he wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD. Howbeit the LORD would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and as he promised to give a light to him and to his sons for ever.

Some people say, "Whenever I read the Bible, all I see is God's judgment, wrath, and brutality." I don't. Whenever I read the Bible, I see God's mercy, goodness, and grace, as seen in the passage before us. At this point, God had every right to destroy the nations of Israel and Judah. But He didn't. He had made a promise that He would preserve the descendants of David (2 Samuel 7:16)—and He honored His promise.

2 Chronicles 21:8–11
In his days the Edomites revolted from under the dominion of Judah, and made themselves a king. Then Jehoram went forth with his princes, and all his chariots with him: and he rose up by night, and smote the Edomites which compassed him in, and the captains of the chariots. So the Edomites revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day. The same time also did Libnah revolt from under his hand; because he had forsaken the LORD God of his fathers. Moreover he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication, and compelled Judah thereto.

With rebellion breaking out around his kingdom and moral decay taking place within, Jehoram actually forced his people to become involved in immorality as they worshiped heathen gods.

2 Chronicles 21:12–15
And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself: Behold, with a great plague will the LORD smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: And thou shalt have great

sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day.

Elijah, the prophet of fire, said to Jehoram, "You've had it." I find this intriguing because at this time, Elijah had already transcended into heaven. So how does this writing find its way to Jehoram? Some say this is a mistake in the Bible, that it's really Elisha the prophet, not Elijah. But I believe it was Elijah. He must have written this letter prophetically and it hung around after he died. You'd think this would cause Jehoram to repent. But did it? No.

2 Chronicles 21:16–19
Moreover the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians, that were near the Ethiopians: And they came up into Judah, and brake into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also, and his wives; so that there was never a son left him, save Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons. And after all this the LORD smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease. And it came to pass, that in process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness: so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers.

The normal practice at funerals was to burn incense. But the people didn't consider Jehoram worthy of even this. Burned up by him, they didn't want to burn anything for him.

2 Chronicles 21:20
Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed without being desired. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings.

What a tragic statement: Jehoram departed without being desired. What about us? What would happen if you died tonight? Are we impacting and influencing lives in such a way that people would genuinely miss us?



22 **2 Chronicles 22:1**

And the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his stead: for the band of men that came with the Arabians to the camp had slain all the eldest. So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah reigned.

Having seen the tragic, empty story of his father's life, one would think Ahaziah would walk rightly with the Lord.

2 Chronicles 22:2–9 (a)

Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Athaliah the daughter of Omri. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counseller to do wickedly. Wherefore he did evil in the sight of the LORD like the house of Ahab: for they were his counsellers after the death of his father to his destruction. He walked also after their counsel, and went with Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel to war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth-gilead: and the Syrians smote Joram. And he returned to be healed in Jezreel because of the wounds which were given him at Ramah, when he fought with Hazael king of Syria. And Azariah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Jehoram the son of Ahab at Jezreel, because he was sick. And the destruction of Ahaziah was of God by coming to Joram: for when he was come, he went out with Jehoram against Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom the LORD had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab. And it came to pass, that, when Jehu was executing judgment upon the house of Ahab, and found the princes of Judah, and the sons of the brethren of Ahaziah, that ministered to Ahaziah, he slew them. And he sought Ahaziah: and they caught him, (for he was hid in Samaria,) and brought him to Jehu: and when they had slain him, they buried him . . .

This story shows us a very simple but important point. That is, Ahaziah, was caught in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong person, and he died because of it. How often we get needlessly beat up when we're in the wrong place with the wrong people.

2 Chronicles 22:9 (b), 10

. . . Because, said they, he is the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought the LORD with all his heart. So the house of Ahaziah had no power to keep still the kingdom. But when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah.

Ahaziah's mother killed all of her own grandchildren—potential heirs to the throne—in order to secure her own position.

2 Chronicles 22:11 (a)
But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons that were slain, and put him and his nurse in a bedchamber.

Seeing what Athaliah was doing, Ahaziah's sister hid one of his children.

2 Chronicles 22:11 (b), 12
So Jehoshabeath, the daughter of king Jehoram, the wife of Jehoiada the priest, (for she was the sister of Ahaziah,) hid him from Athaliah, so that she slew him not. And he was with them hid in the house of God six years: and Athaliah reigned over the land.

Completely unaware of the child being raised in the house of God, Athaliah foolishly assumed her position was secure.



23

2 Chronicles 23:1–5
And in the seventh year Jehoiada strengthened himself, and took the captains of hundreds, Azariah the son of Jeroham, and Ishmael the son of Jehohanan, and Azariah the son of Obed, and Maaseiah the son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat the son of Zichri, into covenant with him. And they went about in Judah, and gathered the Levites out of all the cities of Judah, and the chief of the fathers of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem. And all the congregation made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And he said unto them, Behold, the king's son shall reign, as the LORD hath said of the sons of David. This is the thing that ye shall do; A third part of you

entering on the sabbath, of the priests and of the Levites, shall be porters of the doors; And a third part shall be at the king's house; and a third part at the gate of the foundation: and all the people shall be in the courts of the house of the LORD.

When Joash was seven years old, Jehoiada called the leaders of the nation together and assigned the Levites to arm themselves and stand guard. After watching the people suffer for six years under the wicked reign of Athaliah, this godly priest was about to present the rightful king.

2 Chronicles 23:6–9
But let none come into the house of the LORD, save the priests, and they that minister of the Levites; they shall go in, for they are holy: but all the people shall keep the watch of the LORD. And the Levites shall compass the king round about, every man with his weapons in his hand; and whosoever else cometh into the house, he shall be put to death: but be ye with the king when he cometh in, and when he goeth out. So the Levites and all Judah did according to all things that Jehoiada the priest had commanded, and took every man his men that were to come in on the sabbath, with them that were to go out on the sabbath: for Jehoiada the priest dismissed not the courses. Moreover Jehoiada the priest delivered to the captains of hundreds spears, and bucklers, and shields, that had been king David's, which were in the house of God.

In the house of God were trophies from the victories David had won. Now, years later, those swords, shields, and spears were distributed in order that another generation could be victorious. We are also the temple of the Lord and we must display the trophies of the battles the Lord fights for us. That's why it's so important to share testimonies. They're trophies, shields, spears, and swords, that will encourage others in battle.

2 Chronicles 23:10–15
And he set all the people, every man having his weapon in his hand, from the right side of the temple to the left side of the temple, along by the altar and the temple, by the king round about. Then they brought out the king's son, and put upon him the crown, and gave him the testimony, and made him king. And Jehoiada and his sons

anointed him, and said, God save the king. Now when Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came to the people into the house of the LORD: And she looked, and, behold, the king stood at his pillar at the entering in, and the princes and the trumpets by the king: and all the people of the land rejoiced, and sounded with trumpets, also the singers with instruments of musick, and such as taught to sing praise. Then Athaliah rent her clothes, and said, Treason, Treason. Then Jehoiada the priest brought out the captains of hundreds that were set over the host, and said unto them, Have her forth of the ranges: and whoso followeth her, let him be slain with the sword. For the priest said, Slay her not in the house of the LORD. So they laid hands on her; and when she was come to the entering of the horse gate by the king's house, they slew her there.

Under heavily armed guard, Joash was brought out of hiding and made king. The result was both great joy for the people and the swift and sudden death of the one who had usurped the throne for so long.

2 Chronicles 23:16–18
And Jehoiada made a covenant between him, and between all the people, and between the king, that they should be the LORD's people. Then all the people went to the house of Baal, and brake it down, and brake his altars and his images in pieces, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars. Also Jehoiada appointed the offices of the house of the LORD by the hand of the priests the Levites, whom David had distributed in the house of the LORD, to offer the burnt offerings of the LORD, as it is written in the law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, as it was ordained by David.

It was with rejoicing and singing that the people offered burnt offerings to the Lord because happy indeed are the people whose God is the Lord (Psalm 144:15).

2 Chronicles 23:19–21
And he set the porters at the gates of the house of the LORD, that none which was unclean in any thing should enter in. And he took the captains of hundreds, and the nobles, and the governors of the people, and all the people of the land, and brought down the king from the

house of the LORD: and they came through the high gate into the king's house, and set the king upon the throne of the kingdom. And all the people of the land rejoiced: and the city was quiet, after that they had slain Athaliah with the sword.

This story paints a picture of our present situation. Athaliah was a usurper. For six years, she was on the throne. For six years, wickedness was in the land. But in the seventh year, everything changed when Joash, who was previously hidden from the eyes of the people, was presented as king.

There is a usurper on the throne of this world. Satan is the god of this world, the prince of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4; John 14:30). That's why there is rebellion and hurt, sorrow, sickness, and disease. But there's coming a Greater than Joash. And even though the usurper might yell, "Treason!" he'll be cast into the bottomless pit. Then, in the seventh year, there will be quietness on this planet. There will be peace and prosperity, answers and solutions, rightness and wholeness.

Whatever is bothering or burdening you now won't be soon. "Fear not, little flock," Jesus said. "It is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). Time here is short. The return of Christ is soon. And rejoicing will fill the land.



24 2 Chronicles 24:1–4

Joash was seven years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Zibiah of Beer-sheba. And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest. And Jehoiada took for him two wives; and he begat sons and daughters. And it came to pass after this, that Joash was minded to repair the house of the LORD.

Joash was protected, nurtured, and strengthened in the temple. No wonder it held such an important place in his heart. Week by week, our lives have been changed by spending time in the temple, in the house of the Lord. Why do we teach Sunday school, disciple high-schoolers, give to a building project, serve in the nursery? How can we not? God has done so much for us.

2 Chronicles 24:5, 6

And he gathered together the priests and the Levites, and said to them, Go out unto the cities of Judah, and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that ye hasten the matter. Howbeit the Levites hastened it not. And the king called for Jehoiada the chief, and said unto him, Why hast thou not required of the Levites to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem the collection, according to the commandment of Moses the servant of the LORD, and of the congregation of Israel, for the tabernacle of witness?

The Levites weren't getting the job done because they didn't have Joash's heart for the temple.

2 Chronicles 24:7–10

For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD did they bestow upon Baalim. And at the king's commandment they made a chest, and set it without at the gate of the house of the LORD. And they made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem, to bring in to the LORD the collection that Moses the servant of God laid upon Israel in the wilderness. And all the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end.

Jehoiada made a big collection box. Second Kings 12:9 tells us he carved a hole in it so people could drop their money in. And as they did, they rejoiced. If you can't give and rejoice, don't give at all. If giving is a burden to you, don't do it. The Lord doesn't need your money. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He owns the gold and silver in every mine (Psalm 50:10). He doesn't need us to give. We need to give to eradicate our tendency to become selfish, miserly, and materialistic.

2 Chronicles 24:11–13

Now it came to pass, that at what time the chest was brought unto the king's office by the hand of the Levites, and when they saw that there was much money, the king's scribe and the high priest's officer came and emptied the chest, and took it, and carried it to his place

again. Thus they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance. And the king and Jehoiada gave it to such as did the work of the service of the house of the LORD, and hired masons and carpenters to repair the house of the LORD, and also such as wrought iron and brass to mend the house of the LORD. So the workmen wrought, and the work was perfected by them, and they set the house of God in his state, and strengthened it.

The temple was refurbished and rebuilt because the people had a heart to give.

2 Chronicles 24:14–19
And when they had finished it, they brought the rest of the money before the king and Jehoiada, whereof were made vessels for the house of the LORD, even vessels to minister, and to offer withal, and spoons, and vessels of gold and silver. And they offered burnt offerings in the house of the LORD continually all the days of Jehoiada. But Jehoiada waxed old, and was full of days when he died; an hundred and thirty years old was he when he died. And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house. Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them. And they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass. Yet he sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the LORD; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear.

Following Jehoiada's death, Joash began listening to the counsel of the princes and politicians, and they proved to be ungodly advisors.

2 Chronicles 24:20–22 (a)
And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of

the LORD. Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son . . .

Speaking in the name of the Lord, Jehoiada's son, Zechariah, called the people back to God. But the people didn't listen. Instead, Joash ordered his execution. How can it be that this one who was once so concerned about the house of the Lord is now serving Baal and destroying the prophets of God? I believe the answer is that, when Jehoiada died, everything changed.

It would seem that Joash did not have a personal relationship with the Lord. His was secondhand. As long as Jehoiada was on the scene, he was fine. But when Jehoiada died, Joash spun off into idolatry, immorality, and murder. That is why it is so important to have a personal, genuine link to the Lord. Don't depend on your husband or wife, brother or sister, parents, or friends. If you don't have a real relationship with the Lord, when your "Jehoiada" dies, moves, or disappoints you, you'll collapse and, like Joash, eventually turn against the things of God.

2 Chronicles 24:22 (b)
. . . And when he died, he said, The LORD look upon it, and require it.

Zechariah's final words were: "The Lord sees." Did the Lord see? Yes. Because in Matthew 23:35, in His indictment of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus makes reference to this event.

2 Chronicles 24:23–27
And it came to pass at the end of the year, that the host of Syria came up against him: and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all the spoil of them unto the king of Damascus. For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the LORD delivered a very great host into their hand, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. So they executed judgment against Joash. And when they were departed from him, (for they left him in great diseases,) his own ser vants conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and slew him on his bed, and he died: and they buried him in the city of David, but they buried him not in the sepulchres of the kings. And these are they that conspired against him; Zabad the son of Shimeath an Ammonitess, and

Jehozabad the son of Shimrith a Moabitess. Now concerning his sons, and the greatness of the burdens laid upon him, and the repairing of the house of God, behold, they are written in the story of the book of the kings. And Amaziah his son reigned in his stead.

Here, the repercussion of the murder of Zechariah comes to fruition as Joash, the boy-king who began so well, is himself slain.



25 **2 Chronicles 25:1, 2**

Amaziah was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, but not with a perfect heart.

Amaziah did that which was right, but his heart wasn't fully dedicated. His actions were right, but his heart was lukewarm to the things of God.

2 Chronicles 25:3, 4

Now it came to pass, when the kingdom was established to him, that he slew his servants that had killed the king his father. But he slew not their children, but did as it is written in the law in the book of Moses, where the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin.

Amaziah ascended to the throne when his father, Joash, was assassinated. And once he came to the throne, he rounded up the servants of Joash who assassinated him and had them slain. It was the custom at this time not only to kill the assassins, but to wipe out their families. Amaziah did not do that. He allowed the children to go free. This is commendable.

I think this is applicable to us. We live in a day where it is vogue for people to blame their parents for their present problems. The Lord here specifically says every man shall die for his own sin (Ezekiel 18:2–4). Therefore, I believe it is unbiblical and also illogical to blame our parents or anyone else for our problems.

2 Chronicles 25:5, 6
Moreover Amaziah gathered Judah together, and made them captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, according to the houses of their fathers, throughout all Judah and Benjamin: and he numbered them from twenty years old and above, and found them three hundred thousand choice men, able to go forth to war, that could handle spear and shield. He hired also an hundred thousand mighty men of valour out of Israel for an hundred talents of silver.

In addition to drafting 300,000 of his own men, Amaziah hired 100,000 mercenaries from the ten northern tribes to assist the armies of Judah.

2 Chronicles 25:7, 8
But there came a man of God to him, saying, O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee; for the LORD is not with Israel, to wit, with all the children of Ephraim. But if thou wilt go, do it, be strong for the battle: God shall make thee fall before the enemy: for God hath power to help, and to cast down.

A prophet came to Amaziah and said, "God is not with the army of Israel. Let the mercenaries go. If you want to go to battle, take only men from your own country."

2 Chronicles 25:9
And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, The LORD is able to give thee much more than this.

Having already paid the mercenaries three and one-half tons of silver, Amaziah was concerned about his lost investment.

2 Chronicles 25:10
Then Amaziah separated them, to wit, the army that was come to him out of Ephraim, to go home again: wherefore their anger was greatly kindled against Judah, and they returned home in great anger.

The men from the northern tribes had been paid. Why, then, would they be upset about being sent home? Perhaps it was due to wounded pride at not being needed. Or, more likely, perhaps they thought they were getting shortchanged because they wouldn't be able to keep any of the spoils of battle.

2 Chronicles 25:11–13
And Amaziah strengthened himself, and led forth his people, and went to the valley of salt, and smote of the children of Seir ten thousand. And other ten thousand left alive did the children of Judah carry away captive, and brought them unto the top of the rock, and cast them down from the top of the rock, that they all were broken in pieces. But the soldiers of the army which Amaziah sent back, that they should not go with him to battle, fell upon the cities of Judah, from Samaria even unto Beth-horon, and smote three thousand of them, and took much spoil.

Amaziah and the army of Judah were victorious in battle against the Edomites. Unbeknownst to them, however, while they were gone, the mercenaries that were sent home plundered Judah and Samaria.

2 Chronicles 25:14, 15
Now it came to pass, after that Amaziah was come from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense unto them. Wherefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Amaziah, and he sent unto him a prophet, which said unto him, Why hast thou sought after the gods of the people, which could not deliver their own people out of thine hand?

After wiping out the Edomites, Amaziah decided to make their gods his gods. In other words, he chose to serve the gods that were apparently weaker than him.

2 Chronicles 25:16, 17
And it came to pass, as he talked with him, that the king said unto him, Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbear; why shouldest thou be smitten? Then the prophet forbare, and said, I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel. Then Amaziah king of Judah

took advice, and sent to Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us see one another in the face.

Amaziah, king of Judah, challenged Joash, king of Israel to battle.

2 Chronicles 25:18
And Joash king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle.

In response to Amaziah's call to battle, Joash gives him a parable concerning a bush that began ordering a cedar tree around. "Give me your daughter for my son," the bush demanded, until a beast came by and squashed it. In other words, Joash was saying, "Amaziah, you're out of your league. You have as much chance of victory over me as a bush who's challenging a cedar tree."

2 Chronicles 25:19
Thou sayest, Lo, thou hast smitten the Edomites; and thine heart lifteth thee up to boast: abide now at home; why shouldest thou meddle to thine hurt, that thou shouldest fall, even thou, and Judah with thee?

"Why are you meddling to your hurt?" Joash asks Amaziah. "You had victory over the Edomites. Enjoy it. But don't challenge me."

The same question can be asked of us. Why *do* we meddle to our own hurt? Why do we go into places we shouldn't be in, take on challenges we have no business taking on? We have a victory in our lives and think we're strong. Then we meddle to our own hurt by hanging out with the old gang in the old haunts, all the while thinking we're invincible.

2 Chronicles 25:20, 21
But Amaziah would not hear; for it came of God, that he might deliver them into the hand of their enemies, because they sought after the gods of Edom. So Joash the king of Israel went up; and they saw one another in the face, both he and Amaziah king of Judah, at Beth-shemesh, which belongeth to Judah.

Amaziah didn't listen to Joash and in the ensuing battle, we see four results of meddling where we shouldn't . . .

2 Chronicles 25:22
And Judah was put to the worse before Israel, and they fled every man to his tent.

First, Amaziah's meddling disgraced the nation. You will find yourself disgracing yourself and your Lord if you meddle in places you don't belong. When Peter-John was nine years old, he was already a big baseball fan. He knew all the statistics and collected all of the cards. But it was tough for me as a dad to explain to him the headlines linking his favorite ball players with drugs. That's what sin does. It always brings disgrace.

2 Chronicles 25:23
And Joash the king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, at Beth-shemesh, and brought him to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim to the corner gate, four hundred cubits.

Secondly, Amaziah's meddling decreased Judah's defenses as the walls were broken down around Jerusalem. The problem with a little sin is that it doesn't stay little. The defenses break down and we think we can meddle a little and not be affected.

2 Chronicles 25:24 (a)
And he took all the gold and the silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of God with Obed-edom, and the treasures of the king's house . . .

Thirdly, Amaziah's meddling diminished worship. The beautiful treasures in the temple used in worshiping the Lord were now gone. When we meddle and find ourselves succumbing to sin, we no longer worship with the intensity or consistency we once did.

2 Chronicles 25:24 (b)
. . . the hostages also, and returned to Samaria.

Finally, Amaziah's meddling destroyed Judah's freedom. They were taken hostage. In 1 Corinthians 10:23, Paul said, "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Hang on to your freedom, gang. Don't become enslaved to sin. As believers, we are the freest of all men because we alone are free not to sin.

2 Chronicles 25:25–28
And Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived after the death of Joash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel fifteen years. Now the rest of the acts of Amaziah, first and last, behold, are they not written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel? Now after the time that Amaziah did turn away from following the LORD they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem; and he fled to Lachish: but they sent to Lachish after him, and slew him there. And they brought him upon horses, and buried him with his fathers in the city of Judah.

When Amaziah was victorious, the people were with him. But when he lost the battle, when the city was broken down, when the temple was plundered, the people called for his head. Thus, in addition to disgrace and decreased defenses; in addition to diminished worship and destroyed freedom, Amaziah's meddling brought what sin always brings in one form or another: the wages of death (Romans 6:23).



26

2 Chronicles 26:1–5
Then all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in the room of his father Amaziah. He built Eloth, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers. Sixteen years old was Uzziah when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah did. And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper.

In the life of Uzziah, we see the singular path to prosperity. That is, as long as he sought the Lord, God made Uzziah to prosper. And the path hasn't changed to this day. Seek the Lord, walk with the Lord, love the Lord, and He'll bless you in ways you never dreamed possible.

2 Chronicles 26:6–8
And he went forth and warred against the Philistines, and brake down the wall of Gath, and the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of Ashdod, and built cities about Ashdod, and among the Philistines. And God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians that dwelt in Gur-baal, and the Mehunims. And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah: and his name spread abroad even to the entering in of Egypt; for he strengthened himself exceedingly.

One manifestation of God's blessing upon Uzziah was his victory over his enemies.

2 Chronicles 26:9, 10
Moreover Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate, and at the valley gate, and at the turning of the wall, and fortified them. Also he built towers in the desert, and digged many wells: for he had much cattle, both in the low country, and in the plains: husbandmen also, and vine dressers in the mountains, and in Carmel: for he loved husbandry.

A second manifestation of God's blessing upon Uzziah was in his keen agricultural ability.

2 Chronicles 26:11–15 (a)
Moreover Uzziah had an host of fighting men, that went out to war by bands, according to the number of their account by the hand of Jeiel the scribe and Maaseiah the ruler, under the hand of Hananiah, one of the king's captains. The whole number of the chief of the fathers of the mighty men of valour were two thousand and six hundred. And under their hand was an army, three hundred thousand and seven thousand and five hundred, that made war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy. And Uzziah prepared for them throughout all the host shields, and spears, and helmets, and

habergeons, and bows, and slings to cast stones. And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal . . .

A third manifestation of God's blessing upon Uzziah was in his development of innovative and effective weaponry.

I suggest these same three manifestations are seen in the lives of those who walk with God today, for they will indeed be victorious in difficulty (1 John 4:4), bear much fruit for God's glory (John 15:2), and be skilled with the weaponry of spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:13–17).

2 Chronicles 26:15 (b)
. . . And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong.

Uzziah was a great king. He sought the Lord. He loved the Lord. He caused prosperity to come to the people of Judah. He enabled their defenses to be strong and their territory to expand. In fact, the people did so well under his rule and loved him so much that his fame spread throughout the entire region. But that can be a danger. For, in Uzziah's day, a prophet named Isaiah wrote that it wasn't until Uzziah died that he saw the Lord high and lifted up (Isaiah 6:1).

You see, it seems as though the eyes of the people were on Uzziah. Their security was in Uzziah rather than in the Lord. So it wasn't until Uzziah died that Isaiah saw the Lord.

In your life, those people or things that become "Uzziahs" to you will invariably die before you because the Lord wants you to see *Him* on the throne high and lifted up. If you are depending upon your husband or wife to be your source of strength in spirituality, something will happen that will disappoint or discourage you in some way until you realize that it's not your husband or wife, but the Lord alone who will see you through. If the church or certain leaders therein are your "Uzziah," something will happen through which you'll see it's not them at all. Once again, you'll realize it's the Lord who builds the church, in spite of us, not because of us. The Lord will allow the "Uzziahs" in our lives to die in order that we might see Him, love Him, worship Him, and walk with Him, for He alone is the only One who will never disappoint us, totally satisfy us, and bring stability to us.

2 Chronicles 26:16
But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense.

Although he was king, and although he was remarkably blessed, Uzziah was not a priest and, therefore, forbidden by Old Testament law to go into the temple to burn incense.

2 Chronicles 26:17, 18
And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, that were valiant men: And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God.

When Uzziah thought he was above the law and decided to burn incense himself in the temple, eighty priests begged him not do so.

2 Chronicles 26:19–23 (a)
Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the LORD had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD: and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land. Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, did Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, write. So Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the burial which belonged to the kings; for they said, He is a leper . . .

When Uzziah refused to respond to the warning of the priests, he was immediately stricken with leprosy. Thus, this great man was disgraced at the end of his life because he evidently thought he had earned the right to ignore the direct command of the Lord.

2 Chronicles 26:23 (b)
. . . and Jotham his son reigned in his stead.

Uzziah was a godly man who was eaten by leprosy because of a quarrel in the church. His story serves as a warning to us all, for in the following chapters, we'll see the results of his sin in the life of his own son and grandson. Like Uzziah, you might be a godly person. But if you find fault with church or minimize its importance, there are little ears and eyes listening and watching, developing attitudes about the church based on what they hear and see in you.



27

2 Chronicles 27:1, 2 (a)
Jotham was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Jerushah, the daughter of Zadok. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Uzziah did: howbeit he entered not into the temple of the LORD . . .

Uzziah's son, Jotham, loved the Lord like his dad had. But he saw his dad irritated by the priesthood. So what did he do? He didn't go into the temple at all. Jotham was a good man. But he wasn't what he could have been or should have been because he didn't find his way to the temple.

As parents, we can make a very critical error by criticizing the church, pastor, music leader, or Sunday school teachers in front of our kids. If we do, we can't be surprised when, at age sixteen, they don't want anything to do with the church. The reason Uzziah got leprosy was not because he was in the temple, but because he was in error. Unfortunately, Jotham didn't make this distinction.

A twelve-year-old boy followed his dad across a rapid stream. The father was choosing his steps most carefully when, midstream, he heard his son call, "Dad, choose good rocks. I'm stepping on the same ones you are." Choose to

build your life on the Rock of Jesus Christ, Dad, and you'll see the benefit not only in your life but in the lives of your sons and grandsons.

2 Chronicles 27:2 (b)
. . . And the people did yet corruptly.

Although Jotham may have been able to survive without temple worship, those under his rule couldn't and, as a result, the country plunged into chaos.

2 Chronicles 27:3–6
He built the high gate of the house of the LORD, and on the wall of Ophel he built much. Moreover he built cities in the mountains of Judah, and in the forests he built castles and towers. He fought also with the king of the Ammonites, and prevailed against them. And the children of Ammon gave him the same year an hundred talents of silver, and ten thousand measures of wheat, and ten thousand of barley. So much did the children of Ammon pay unto him, both the second year, and the third. So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the LORD his God.

Even though Jotham didn't partake in worship, he did have a heart that sought after the Lord.

2 Chronicles 27:7–9
Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all his wars, and his ways, lo, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. He was five and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And Jotham slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David: and Ahaz his son reigned in his stead.

I believe Jotham could have been a great king. I believe he had the heart and the background and the potential to be one of the great leaders in the history of Judah. But he didn't reach his potential because he didn't partake of temple worship. We as believers will not be what the Lord would have us be if we forsake the consistent "assembling of ourselves together . . ." (Hebrews 10:25).



28 2 Chronicles 28:1–3

Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned six teen years in Jerusalem: but he did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father: For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abomi nations of the heathen whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.

Ahaz actually had the audacity to offer his own children on the incandescent arms of a metal idol. Before we are too quick to throw stones, however, we must look at our own society. Studies today indicate that, due to business, hobbies, and projects, the average father spends *seven and one-half minutes* per day with his children. If our kids are getting "burned out" on life, could it be because we're sacrificing them to the idol of success?

2 Chronicles 28:4–8

He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree. Wherefore the LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria; and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them to Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter. For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah an hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men; because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maaseiah the king's son, and Azrikam the governor of the house, and Elkanah that was next to the king. And the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren two hundred thousand, women, sons, and daughters, and took also away much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria.

As seen repeatedly throughout the history of God's people, the inevitable result of idolatry is captivity.

2 Chronicles 28:9–11
But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded: and he went out before the host that came to Samaria, and said unto them, Behold, because the LORD God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, he hath delivered them into your hand, and ye have slain them in a rage that reacheth up unto heaven. And now ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondmen and bondwomen unto you: but are there not with you, even with you, sins against the LORD your God? Now hear me therefore, and deliver the captives again, which ye have taken captive of your brethren: for the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you.

Oded, a prophet of the Lord, said to Israel, "The Lord used you to discipline the people of Judah, but you've taken it way too far. You've slaughtered them without mercy and you're capturing them for your own purposes. Because the Lord is angry, you must let them go."

2 Chronicles 28:12–15
Then certain of the heads of the children of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, and Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against them that came from the war, and said unto them, Ye shall not bring in the captives hither: for whereas we have offended against the LORD already, ye intend to add more to our sins and to our trespass: for our trespass is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel. So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the congregation. And the men which were expressed by name rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren: then they returned to Samaria.

To their credit, when the leaders of Israel heard the word of prophecy, they responded accordingly. They clothed and fed the captives, bound their wounds, and sent them home.

2 Chronicles 28:16–21

At that time did king Ahaz send unto the kings of Assyria to help him. For again the Edomites had come and smitten Judah, and carried away captives. The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the low country, and of the south of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, and Ajalon, and Gederoth, and Shocho with the villages thereof, and Timnah with the villages thereof, Gimzo also and the villages thereof: and they dwelt there. For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the LORD. And Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came unto him, and distressed him, but strengthened him not. For Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of the LORD, and out of the house of the king, and of the princes, and gave it unto the king of Assyria: but he helped him not.

Under attack by the Edomites and Philistines, Ahaz hired the godless Assyrians to be his ally. Yet although the king of Assyria took payment, he didn't keep his end of the bargain.

2 Chronicles 28:22, 23
And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD: this is that king Ahaz. For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel.

Ahaz is struggling, striving, floundering. This evil, wicked man who has burned his kids, who has seen his country taken away into captivity, who is now facing threats from the north and south, who got swindled by the Assyrians, turns to the gods of the Syrians in hopes they will help him. Why is it that people will turn to just about anything or anyone but the Lord? In desperation, we'll seek the help of friends, even foes, but stubbornly refuse the only One who can truly come through.

2 Chronicles 28:24, 25
And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the LORD, and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every several city of Judah he made high places to

burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the LORD God of his fathers.

Ahaz brings this three-generation saga to its inevitable conclusion, for in Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz, we see a father who had a quarrel with the church followed by his son who stopped going to church, followed by his grandson who closed the doors of the church. In other words, church attendance is not beneficial only to you, Dad, but the example you set will have a direct effect on your kids and grandchildren.

2 Chronicles 28:26, 27 (a)
Now the rest of his acts and of all his ways, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, even in Jerusalem: but they brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel . . .

So much hurt and harm did Ahaz bring to Israel that they didn't even bury him with the other kings.

2 Chronicles 28:27 (b)
. . . and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead.

Besides David, Hezekiah would be the greatest king in the history of God's people. In the following four chapters, we'll see revival break out, and in studying them, hopefully we'll see revival ignited in our own hearts, as well.



29 There is so much for us to learn from the life of Hezekiah that eleven chapters in the Books of 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and Isaiah are devoted to its record.

2 Chronicles 29:1, 2
Hezekiah began to reign when he was five and twenty years old, and he reigned nine and twenty years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah. And he did that which

was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done.

Hezekiah is one of the greatest leaders and rulers in the history of Judah. He did right in the sight of the Lord, even as did David. Humanly speaking, David had his problems. But from the Father's perspective, David was a man who loved Him and worshiped Him with intensity, fervency, and consistency. Thus, David is held up as the quintessential example of a godly man because his heart was inclined toward the Lord.

2 Chronicles 29:3
He in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and repaired them.

In 2 Chronicles 28:24, we read that Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, shut the doors of the house of the Lord. But now here comes his son, Hezekiah who—in the first month of his reign—opened the doors of the house of the Lord. I like that!

When Hezekiah first ascended to the throne, he didn't build a palace or consolidate his power. No, the first thing he did was open the doors of the temple.

"Those who seek Me early shall find Me," the Lord declares (Proverbs 8:17). Hezekiah models this beautifully.

2 Chronicles 29:4, 5
And he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them together into the east street, And said unto them, Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place.

Ahaz had allowed the holy place to be desecrated and defiled. Here, Hezekiah tells the Levites to clean it up.

Because we are the temple of the true and living God, there must be a continual cleansing of the filthiness that pollutes and penetrates our lives. It is interesting to me that virtually all of creation is concerned with cleanliness . . .

Mice and rats actually spend the majority of their waking hours grooming themselves. They carry disease, but are actually surprisingly clean. So are

elephants. Elephants who become invaded with parasites cover themselves with dust. Then they rub themselves against trees. The dust suffocates the bugs. The tree acts like a towel to wipe the dead bugs from off their back. Finally, they give themselves showers by filling their trunks with water and squirting themselves. The gecko lizards in the southwest desert of our country are interesting because they don't have any eyelids. Yet they live in a place where there is lots of dirt and sand. So what do they do? The gecko lizard has a long tongue which he actually extends all the way to his eyes and thus is able to clean them.

There seems to be innately built into creation a desire to be clean. And yet when it comes to the heart of man, we allow corruption and pollution to affect us internally. Cleansing needs to be carried out daily. How? If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). This verse tells us that even if we feel defiled and desecrated, we can solve that problem right now simply by confessing. When you confess your sin, the blood of Jesus is immediately applied and it removes all the filth from the temple of your life.

2 Chronicles 29:6–9
For our fathers have trespassed, and done that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD our God, and have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD, and turned their backs. Also they have shut up the doors of the porch, and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense nor offered burnt offerings in the holy place unto the God of Israel. Wherefore the wrath of the LORD was upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he hath delivered them to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing, as ye see with your eyes. For, lo, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this.

What a contrast the state of the nation was to its state under the rule of Uzziah, when both militarily and economically the nation prospered abundantly (see 2 Chronicles 26:1–15).

2 Chronicles 29:10, 11
Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us. My sons, be not

now negligent: for the LORD hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him, and that ye should minister unto him, and burn incense.

Hezekiah knew the root of all of the problems in his ailing nation was singular: they had forsaken God.

2 Chronicles 29:12–17
Then the Levites arose, Mahath the son of Amasai, and Joel the son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites: and of the sons of Merari, Kish the son of Abdi, and Azariah the son of Jehalelel: and of the Gershonites; Joah the son of Zimmah, and Eden the son of Joah: And of the sons of Elizaphan; Shimri, and Jeiel: and of the sons of Asaph; Zechariah, and Mattaniah: And of the sons of Heman; Jehiel, and Shimei: and of the sons of Jeduthun; Shemaiah, and Uzziel. And they gathered their brethren, and sanctified themselves, and came, according to the commandment of the king, by the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD. And the priests went into the inner part of the house of the LORD, to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the LORD into the court of the house of the LORD. And the Levites took it, to carry it out abroad into the brook Kidron. Now they began on the first day of the first month to sanctify, and on the eighth day of the month came they to the porch of the LORD: so they sanctified the house of the LORD in eight days; and in the sixteenth day of the first month they made an end.

It took the Levites eight days to sanctify the holy place—to carry out the filth and clean out the cobwebs—and eight more days to clean the outer courtyard.

2 Chronicles 29:18, 19
Then they went in to Hezekiah the king, and said, We have cleansed all the house of the LORD, and the altar of burnt offering, with all the vessels thereof, and the shewbread table, with all the vessels thereof. Moreover all the vessels, which king Ahaz in his reign did cast away in his transgression, have we prepared and sanctified, and, behold, they are before the altar of the LORD.

Things are looking good. The temple is clean. The broken instruments are repaired. It's ready to be used.

2 Chronicles 29:20–23
Then Hezekiah the king rose early, and gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the LORD. And they brought seven bullocks, and seven rams, and seven lambs, and seven he goats, for a sin offering for the kingdom, and for the sanctuary, and for Judah. And he commanded the priests the sons of Aaron to offer them on the altar of the LORD. So they killed the bullocks, and the priests received the blood, and sprinkled it on the altar: likewise, when they had killed the rams, they sprinkled the blood upon the altar: they killed also the lambs, and they sprinkled the blood upon the altar. And they brought forth the he goats for the sin offering before the king and the congregation; and they laid their hands upon them:

When the people laid their hands upon the offerings about to be sacrificed, they realized they were "transferring" their sin to the animals about to be slaughtered. In other words, they would understand that sin is so serious it can only be dealt with by death.

2 Chronicles 29:24 (a)
And the priests killed them, and they made reconciliation with their blood upon the altar, to make an atonement for all Israel . . .

The Hebrew word translated "atonement" is *kapar. Kapar* doesn't mean "to cleanse" or "to eradicate." It simply means "to cover up." As the author of Hebrews makes clear, the blood of bulls and goats would cover up the sin of the people, but it could not take it away. Only the blood of Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, can take away sin (Hebrews 10).

When I spent an afternoon with a leader of a local synagogue, I asked him what he does with the issue of sin since the temple is no longer in service and sacrifices are no longer being made.

"We believe sin is dealt with in two ways," he said, "through confession to God and reconciliation with man. You confess your sin to God and then make things right with the one against whom you've sinned. If you reconcile with man, God will forgive."

"How do you deal with all of the Scriptures in the Old Testament that declare that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness?" I asked.

"If you take those things literally, that's a problem," he said.

We are so blessed as Christians to have proof positive that our sins are forgiven, not based upon our being right with each other, for who among us can say, "I am right with every individual on the face of this planet. No one has anything against me, neither do I have anything against anyone else"? It's a scary position to be in if you base your salvation upon confession and restitution. On the other hand, it is a beautiful place to be in if you base your salvation upon the work of Jesus Christ on Calvary, who declared, "It is *finished*." The price is paid fully and completely. Oh, happy day!

2 Chronicles 29:24 (b)–29

. . . for the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel. And he set the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the commandment of the LORD by his prophets. And the Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the LORD began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel. And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished. And when they had made an end of offering, the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves, and worshipped.

Sacrifice was made. The trumpeters began to play. The cymbals crashed. The people began to sing. And the king and all the people bowed down and worshiped.

One of the beautiful things about worship is that it breaks down barriers. Whether you're a king or a commoner, a prince or a pauper, it doesn't make any difference. In worship, we find unity. I love to worship because I get tired of hearing myself talk. I get weary of my flaws and faults and shortcomings. In worship, we lose our identity. We transcend ourselves. We become part of

something bigger than our own individuality. We become linked together, praising the Lord, kings and commoners alike.

2 Chronicles 29:30
Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the LORD with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped.

Praising the Lord is to be an expression of joy and gladness.

2 Chronicles 29:31 (a)
Then Hezekiah answered and said, Now ye have consecrated yourselves unto the LORD, come near and bring sacrifices and thank offerings into the house of the LORD . . .

Offerings are truly about the giving of thanks for God's goodness.

2 Chronicles 29:31 (b)
. . . And the congregation brought in sacrifices and thank offerings; and as many as were of a free heart burnt offerings.

The burnt offering signified a total commitment. It wasn't required, but those who had a willing heart made this special sacrifice.

2 Chronicles 29:32–34
And the number of the burnt offerings, which the congregation brought, was threescore and ten bullocks, an hundred rams, and two hundred lambs: all these were for a burnt offering to the LORD. And the consecrated things were six hundred oxen and three thousand sheep. But the priests were too few, so that they could not flay all the burnt offerings: wherefore their brethren the Levites did help them, till the work was ended, and until the other priests had sanctified themselves: for the Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests.

People were coming with sacrifices and burnt offerings. Revival was breaking out. And the priests were unable to handle the large numbers, so the

Levites helped them. The Levites legally did not have this right. Offerings were to be made only by the sons of Aaron, the priests. The Levites were simply to assist in the work of the temple, but not to directly offer sacrifices. Yet the work was so great that here the Lord allows, even blesses the Levites for rolling up their sleeves and offering sacrifices.

In these last days, when the Holy Ghost is being outpoured and revival is breaking out, there is so much need that the days when you used to need a seminary education are no more. Thus, we can send people who are not "credentialed" to go and do the work of the Lord because the work is great. Don't ever feel that, just because you haven't had a lot of intellectual training, you can't be used in ministry. In fact, in Acts we read that the Pharisees looked at Peter and John in amazement because they knew they were ignorant men. And yet the way they spoke and moved impressed them greatly. We read that the Pharisees took note that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). That makes all the difference! That's where your credential lies—in being with Jesus Christ, and having a heart willing to serve Him.

2 Chronicles 29:35, 36
And also the burnt offerings were in abundance, with the fat of the peace offerings, and the drink offerings for every burnt offering. So the service of the house of the LORD was set in order. And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done suddenly.

A beautiful revival took place, and there was rejoicing as the Spirit of God moved.



30 Rather than keeping this revival to himself, Hezekiah longed for it to spread even to his sometime-enemies . . .

2 Chronicles 30:1
And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the

LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel.

At this time, the Assyrians were in the process of carrying the ten northern tribes into captivity. Knowing they were in trouble, Hezekiah said to the remnant, "Come on down. Join our revival."

2 Chronicles 30:2–9
For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month. For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem. And the thing pleased the king and all the congregation. So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written. So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will re turn to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren, which trespassed against the LORD God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see. Now be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the LORD, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever: and serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you. For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him.

Those who don't see grace or mercy in the Old Testament just aren't reading their Bibles, for here God says through Hezekiah to the people who had forsaken Him, "If you come back to Me, I will be gracious to you."

2 Chronicles 30:10
So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh even unto Zebulun: but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them.

The people of Israel are going through troubles, trials, and difficulty. An invitation comes to be part of a revival, and what do they do? They mock and scorn. Oh, the tragic blindness of sin!

2 Chronicles 30:11
Nevertheless divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem.

While most mocked and scorned, a few responded. The same is true today. We are like the "postmen" Hezekiah sent, inviting people to join the revival taking place today. Some will scoff and mock. But there will be those who will listen to what you say and respond and come.

2 Chronicles 30:12–18 (a)
Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of the LORD. And there assembled at Jerusalem much people to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great congregation. And they arose and took away the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for incense took they away, and cast them into the brook Kidron. Then they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the second month: and the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought in the burnt offerings into the house of the LORD. And they stood in their place after their manner, according to the law of Moses the man of God: the priests sprinkled the blood, which they received of the hand of the Levites. For there were many in the congregation that were not sanctified: therefore the Levites had the charge of the killing of the passovers for every one that was not clean, to sanctify them unto the LORD. For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim, and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written . . .

The ones who responded positively came from Israel to Jerusalem to enjoy the revival and eat of the Passover. But because they hadn't gone through the purification ceremony outlined in the Scriptures, they were ceremonially impure. Were they forbidden or kept away? Watch what Hezekiah does when they come . . .

2 Chronicles 30:18 (b)–20
. . . But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good LORD pardon every one That prepareth his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the LORD hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.

"Oh, Lord, pardon these people," Hezekiah prayed. "Their hearts are inclined to seeking You. Ceremonially, they're unclean. But, Lord, have mercy upon them."

May God keep us from becoming "churchy," where people who outwardly may be "impure" because of leftover remnants of the world in their lives are held at arm's length. The church is not a museum, but a hospital for real people who come with real hurts. We must never fail to embrace anyone who responds to the messengers and wants to be part of what God is doing.

2 Chronicles 30:21–23
And the children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness: and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, singing with loud instruments unto the LORD. And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the LORD: and they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings, and making confession to the LORD God of their fathers. And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days: and they kept other seven days with gladness.

The seven days of the Passover were so joyful, so rich, that the people extended it another seven days.

2 Chronicles 30:24–27

For Hezekiah king of Judah did give to the congregation a thousand bullocks and seven thousand sheep; and the princes gave to the congregation a thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep: and a great number of priests sanctified themselves. And all the congregation of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the congregation that came out of Israel, and the strangers that came out of the land of Israel, and that dwelt in Judah, rejoiced. So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem. Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven.

There was freedom, gladness and great joy in the revival because there was worship of the Lord and an acceptance of each other.



31 The revival that took place during the reign of Hezekiah was characterized by three things: the reopening of the temple, the reinstitution of Passover, and the rejoicing of God's people. Joy is always a key characteristic in any real revival, whether it's a personal revival or a corporate revival.

2 Chronicles 31:1
Now when all this was finished, all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and brake the images in pieces, and cut down the groves, and threw down the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had utterly destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned, every man to his possession, into their own cities.

After the revival began, the people responded by going into the cities and destroying the idols therein. Saint, this is really important to see: Holiness was the result of revival, not the reason for revival. Many times we hear preachers say, "Tear down the images. Get rid of your sin and revival will come." The biblical pattern, however, is that when the grace and goodness of God is seen,

they cause people to break down their idols (Acts 19; Romans 2:4). In other words, revival doesn't bring about grace. Grace brings about revival.

2 Chronicles 31:2–5
And Hezekiah appointed the courses of the priests and the Levites after their courses, every man according to his service, the priests and Levites for burnt offerings and for peace offerings, to minister, and to give thanks, and to praise in the gates of the tents of the LORD. He appointed also the king's portion of his substance for the burnt offerings, to wit, for the morning and evening burnt offerings, and the burnt offerings for the sabbaths, and for the new moons, and for the set feasts, as it is written in the law of the LORD. Moreover he commanded the people that dwelt in Jerusalem to give the portion of the priests and the Levites, that they might be encouraged in the law of the LORD. And as soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the fields; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly.

When Hezekiah told the people to support the ministry, they did so enthusiastically.

2 Chronicles 31:6, 7
And concerning the children of Israel and Judah, that dwelt in the cities of Judah, they also brought in the tithe of oxen and sheep, and the tithe of holy things which were consecrated unto the LORD their God, and laid them by heaps. In the third month they began to lay the foundation of the heaps, and finished them in the seventh month.

The people gave so much to the Lord's work that it took four months just to gather it.

2 Chronicles 31:8–10
And when Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed the LORD, and his people Israel. Then Hezekiah questioned with the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. And Azariah the chief priest of the house of Zadok answered him, and said, Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the LORD,

we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty: for the LORD hath blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store.

One of the results of true revival is a generous giving by God's people. When the blessings and goodness of God are recognized, there's a natural inclination to respond back.

In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul entreated the Corinthians to give in accordance to what the Lord was doing.

> Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia . . .
>
> 2 Corinthians 8:1

Paul here is saying, "I want to tell you about what the churches in Macedonia are doing . . ."

> How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.
>
> 2 Corinthians 8:2–4

Paul was traveling through the area, telling the churches he planted that there was a need back home in Jerusalem. Famine had struck and the saints were suffering. The churches in Asia Minor responded beautifully. Even though they were going through affliction themselves, they responded liberally and gave out of their poverty that Paul might take their gift to the suffering saints in Jerusalem.

> And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.
>
> 2 Corinthians 8:5

Giving begins with giving yourself to the Lord. The Lord wants us and not our money. Therefore, we need to give our money because as we give our money, we give something of our energy and skills, effort and time.

> Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.
>
> 2 Corinthians 8:7, 8

Paul here is saying the proof of your love is your willingness to give liberally.

> For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.
>
> 2 Corinthians 8:9

May the Holy Spirit speak to our hearts because there's so much more God is calling us to do. And the funding and resources are already in place if we will simply be obedient and say, "Lord, the tithe is yours. And we will give to prove our love for You and commitment to Your kingdom according to the principles and precepts of Your Word."

> **2 Chronicles 31:11, 12 (a)**
> **Then Hezekiah commanded to prepare chambers in the house of the LORD; and they prepared them, And brought in the offerings and the tithes and the dedicated things faithfully . . .**

To store the abundance of resources that were released in this revival, special chambers were built. Later, in the Book of Malachi, the Lord makes reference to such a structure when He said, "Bring ye the tithes and offerings into the storehouse and test Me and see if I will not pour out upon you a blessing so great that your barns cannot contain it" (see 3:10).

People often ask me, "Where should I tithe?" You should tithe in the storehouse, the place where you are spiritually nourished week by week. There, under the guidance and direction of spiritual covering, those resources will be released according to the leading of the Lord.

> **2 Chronicles 31:12–14**

. . . over which Cononiah the Levite was ruler, and Shimei his brother was the next. And Jehiel, and Azaziah, and Nahath, and Asahel, and Jerimoth, and Jozabad, and Eliel, and Ismachiah, and Mahath, and Benaiah, were overseers under the hand of Cononiah and Shimei his brother, at the commandment of Hezekiah the king, and Azariah the ruler of the house of God. And Kore the son of Imnah the Levite, the porter toward the east, was over the freewill offerings of God, to distribute the oblations of the LORD, and the most holy things.

These were the men who were responsible to oversee the funding and administration of the gifts.

2 Chronicles 31:15, 16 (a)
And next him were Eden, and Miniamin, and Jeshua, and Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah, in the cities of the priests, in their set office, to give to their brethren by courses, as well to the great as to the small: Beside their genealogy of males, from three years old and upward . . .

The priests were "on salary" from the age of three. This tells me that the people of God invested in the youth of their nation. As believers, we, too, need to invest of our time, prayers, wisdom, and finances in our kids so that they will have a firm footing in their walk with the Lord.

2 Chronicles 31:16 (b)–19
. . . even unto every one that entereth into the house of the LORD, his daily portion for their service in their charges according to their courses; Both to the genealogy of the priests by the house of their fathers, and the Levites from twenty years old and upward, in their charges by their courses; And to the genealogy of all their little ones, their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, through all the congregation: for in their set office they sanctified themselves in holiness: Also of the sons of Aaron the priests, which were in the fields of the suburbs of their cities, in every several city, the men that were expressed by name, to give portions to all the males among the priests, and to all that were reckoned by genealogies among the Levites.

The Levites—those from the tribe of Levi who assisted the priests, the sons of Aaron—received support from the age of twenty.

2 Chronicles 31:20, 21
And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before the LORD his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered.

Why did Hezekiah prosper? Because he did his work energetically, enthusiastically, and wholeheartedly. There is a way in which we can serve God begrudgingly. Don't do it. Don't teach Sunday school because you feel pressured. Don't give to missions out of guilt. Hezekiah prospered because he served the Lord with all his heart. The word "enthusiasm" comes from *en theos,* and literally means "full of God." May the Lord help us to be like Hezekiah—enthusiastic in our service, in our worship, in our giving, and in our work.



32 You can be sure a revival from heaven will always bring a reaction from hell. Anytime you're going through a personal revival, watch out because the hordes of hell will be released against you. Anytime a church is experiencing revival, the same thing will happen. We are wrestling against demonic entities, and the greater the work, the greater the attack, both in your life personally and in the church corporately.

As the revival under Hezekiah was underway, in chapter 32, we come to an attack of Satan . . .

2 Chronicles 32:1
After these things, and the establishment thereof, Sennacherib king of Assyria came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fenced cities, and thought to win them for himself.

The first ones to develop battering rams and the first to build ramps to scale walls, the Assyrian army was thought to be invincible. They were the ones who placed the heads of their enemies around the cities they besieged. And here they

come against Hezekiah and the people that had just experienced such a glorious revival.

2 Chronicles 32:2–4
And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was come, and that he was purposed to fight against Jerusalem, He took counsel with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the fountains which were without the city: and they did help him. So there was gathered much people together, who stopped all the fountains, and the brook that ran through the midst of the land, saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water?

The Assyrian strategy was to besiege a city, cutting off the food and water supply to the inhabitants within. Knowing this, Hezekiah decided to beat them at their own game by covering the wells that were without the city wall and building a tunnel from the spring of Gihon 1,777 feet outside the wall to the pool of Siloam within the wall. It was a tremendous engineering feat through solid rock. When the Assyrians arrived, they found that this time they were the ones without water.

2 Chronicles 32:5, 6 (a)
Also he strengthened himself, and built up all the wall that was broken, and raised it up to the towers, and another wall without, and repaired Millo in the city of David, and made darts and shields in abundance. And he set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the street of the gate of the city . . .

Hezekiah dug the tunnel, fortified the city, made shields, darts, and weapons. He appointed captains and set them in their stations. In other words, he did what he could, but realized the final result was up to the Lord.

Many Christians fail at this point. They either do their best but fail to commit themselves to God, or they sit back and say, "If God wants me to get a job, someone will come and knock on my door." The correct balance is to do what you can do, knowing all the while it's all in the Lord's hands.

2 Chronicles 32:6 (b)–8
. . . and spake comfortably to them, saying, Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor

for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him: With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.

As hundreds of thousands of Assyrian soldiers were marching toward Jerusalem, Hezekiah spoke comfortably to his people, saying, "There are more of us than there are of them." How could he say this? It was because he saw into the arena of the supernatural.

When the Syrians surrounded the city where Elisha was, his servant said, "Master, we're doomed."

"Open his eyes, Lord," Elisha prayed. And when the servant's eyes were opened, he saw that, surrounding the Syrians was a huge host of angels (see 2 Kings 6:17).

Oh, that God would give us eyes to see into the supernatural arena. The Bible tells us there are ministering spirits—angels—given to stand by us (Hebrews 1:14). Yes, the attempts of the enemy to destroy us are real. But Revelation 12 tells us that when Satan rebelled, one-third of the angels went with him and became demons. That means two-thirds are left. In other words, Satan is outnumbered 2:1. Now, being that a single angel is able to cast the devil into the bottomless pit (Revelation 20:1–3), not only are the demons numerically outnumbered, but they are physically outmatched. Saints, the angels with us are vastly greater than the hordes of hell that come against us.

2 Chronicles 32:9–12
After this did Sennacherib king of Assyria send his servants to Jerusalem, (but he himself laid siege against Lachish, and all his power with him,) unto Hezekiah king of Judah, and unto all Judah that were at Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith Sennacherib king of Assyria, Whereon do ye trust, that ye abide in the siege in Jerusalem? Doth not Heze kiah persuade you to give over yourselves to die by famine and by thirst, saying, The LORD our God shall deliver us out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Hath not the same Hezekiah taken away his high places and his altars, and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall worship before one altar, and burn incense upon it?

“Are you trusting Hezekiah?” Sennacherib’s messengers said to the people of Jerusalem. “He’s the one who tore down the altars and the high places.” Thinking the high places were ordained by God, these messengers didn’t know what they were talking about.

2 Chronicles 32:13–19
Know ye not what I and my fathers have done unto all the people of other lands? were the gods of the nations of those lands any ways able to deliver their lands out of mine hand? Who was there among all the gods of those nations that my fathers utterly destroyed, that could deliver his people out of mine hand, that your God should be able to deliver you out of mine hand? Now therefore let not Hezekiah deceive you, nor persuade you on this manner, neither yet believe him: for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people out of mine hand, and out of the hand of my fathers: how much less shall your God deliver you out of mine hand? And his servants spake yet more against the LORD God, and against his servant Hezekiah. He wrote also letters to rail on the LORD God of Israel, and to speak against him, saying, As the gods of the nations of other lands have not delivered their people out of mine hand, so shall not the God of Hezekiah deliver his people out of mine hand. Then they cried with a loud voice in the Jews’ speech unto the people of Jerusalem that were on the wall, to affright them, and to trouble them; that they might take the city. And they spake against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the earth, which were the work of the hands of man.

Sennacherib’s messengers made challenges and accusations in an attempt to get the people of Judah to doubt Hezekiah and to falter in their faith in God. Sennacherib sent letters to rail on Hezekiah. And when that didn’t work, his messengers shouted at the people.

2 Chronicles 32:20
And for this cause Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz, prayed and cried to heaven.

Amid Sennacherib’s attacks and accusations, Hezekiah and Isaiah held a prayer meeting and cried unto heaven. How would God deliver them from

thousands of Assyrians? The same way He's going to deliver you from Satan's henchmen that wage war against you. He's got ways that are not ours, thoughts that we could never think, plans that we could never dream up. Faith is the key. Hezekiah had already gone on record, saying, "God is going to bring victory." And as he and Isaiah prayed, the Lord answered . . .

2 Chronicles 32:21 (a)
And the LORD sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valour . . .

In a parallel passage in 2 Kings 19, a single angel was dispatched who killed 185,000 Assyrians in one night. When the rest of the troops awoke the next morning and saw their comrades dead, they split.

2 Chronicles 32:21 (b)
. . . and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels slew him there with the sword.

Sennacherib crept back to his home city and went into his temple, where he was killed by members of his own family.

2 Chronicles 32:22–24
Thus the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and guided them on every side. And many brought gifts unto the LORD to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth. In those days Hezekiah was sick to the death, and prayed unto the LORD: and he spake unto him, and he gave him a sign.

This story is recorded in 2 Kings 20 and Isaiah 38 as well. From these passages, we know that, when God sent Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that it was time to go home, Hezekiah begged God to let him live. God granted Hezekiah's request and confirmed it by turning the sundial back ten degrees, or approximately forty-five minutes. But was it His will? I wonder. In the following fifteen years a

couple of terrible things took place. First, Hezekiah fathered a son named Manasseh, who would be the worst of Judah's kings and whose reign would lead to Judah's captivity.

Secondly, when Hezekiah miraculously recovered, the Babylonians sent a contingent of ambassadors with some get-well cards and congratulations. When Hezekiah took them on a personal tour of his storehouses, their report to their leader, Nebuchadnezzar, led to the attack by the Babylonians.

Hezekiah would have been far better off flowing with what the Lord was doing rather than demanding his own way. I don't want to demand my way because I don't know as much as God does. God knows what's right. My Father knows best. Yes, we are to bring our requests to Him. But ultimately we must say, "Not my will, but Thine be done, Father."

As they wandered in the wilderness, the children of Israel begged God for meat. When He answered their demand, Numbers 11:33 tells us they died even as they ate the quail. Of this the psalmist writes, "The Lord gave them their request, but sent leanness to their soul" (Psalm 106:15).

Be careful, gang, that you don't demand from God without submitting it to His perfect will. He might give you your request, only to find it wasn't what you were hoping.

2 Chronicles 32:25–29

But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah. And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels; Storehouses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks. Moreover he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance: for God had given him substance very much.

Monetarily, God gave much to Hezekiah. If you have been given much, rejoice. It is not unscriptural to be rich, but it is not unspiritual to be poor, either.

Jesus Christ, who was rich, became poor that we might become rich in spiritual things (2 Corinthians 8:9).

"Lord, don't allow me to be rich lest I forget You, nor poor lest I steal," Proverbs 30:8, 9 declares. There's something to be said for being right in the middle somewhere.

2 Chronicles 32:30–34
This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper watercourse of Gihon, and brought it straight down to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his works. Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart. Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness, behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, and in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honour at his death. And Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

The true test does not necessarily come in adversity but in prosperity. Be careful. The true test often comes when things are going well. Hezekiah failed to give God the glory for his healing and riches, yet although he faltered a bit at the end of his life, he was nonetheless a great man.



33 2 Chronicles 33:1–3 (a)

Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem: But did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down . . .

Manasseh has the longest reign of any of the kings of Judah. But, because he was the most wicked of all kings, it wasn't because of his worthiness. It was because of God's grace.

Sometimes we wonder why the Lord allows certain people to go on and on in this life. “Lord, why don’t You destroy them?” we wonder. The Bible says that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Our Father is so patient. He extends Himself so far, waiting for even the most wicked man to come to repentance if there’s any hope for him at all. In fact, the Lord waits fifty-five years for Manasseh to turn to Him.

2 Chronicles 33:3 (b)
. . . and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves . . .

Groves were trees that were planted in which the worship of Ashteroth took place.

2 Chronicles 33:3 (c)
. . . and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.

Manasseh engaged in astrology. But it gets worse . . .

2 Chronicles 33:4
Also he built altars in the house of the LORD, whereof the LORD had said, In Jerusalem shall my name be for ever.

Manasseh had the audacity to erect altars in the very house of the Lord to his false gods and pagan deities.

2 Chronicles 33:5
And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.

He worshiped the stars in the courts of the house of the Lord.

2 Chronicles 33:6 (a)
And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards . . .

Statues of Molech were set up in the valley south of Jerusalem with hollow bellies so that fires could be ignited within. As the idol became incandescent,

parents would place their firstborn sons on the arms of the statues. Why? The thinking was that if you sacrificed your firstborn son, the children you would have after that would be blessed and your family would prosper.

Aren't we doing the same thing? Aren't we burning our babies, not with fire, but with a saline solution, convincing ourselves that the children that follow will do better, that they will be more financially stable, or that our situation will improve?

Listen, gang, the same things are happening in our day as they were in Manasseh's. Stars are worshiped and babies are burned.

2 Chronicles 33:6 (b)
. . . he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.

The Lord was righteously angered by what was happening because He saw the damage these sins would do to His people. As we engage in these same kinds of practices, we are setting the stage for the righteous indignation of the Father.

2 Chronicles 33:7–9
And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever: Neither will I any more remove the foot of Israel from out of the land which I have appointed for your fathers; so that they will take heed to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses. So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.

The Lord had previously destroyed the pagans who were in the land. Some people question the fairness of this. In Genesis 15, God said to Abraham that there would come a day when his descendants would be carried to Egypt, where they would remain for four hundred years "until the iniquity of the Amorites was full." In other words, God gave the Canaanites four hundred years to repent, to turn to Him. When they didn't, He ordered their extermination perhaps, in part,

because their practices were growing so bizarre and dangerous that He lovingly put them out of their misery.

2 Chronicles 33:10
And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken.

God sent His prophet, Isaiah, to speak not only to Manasseh, but throughout the land. But no one listened. In fact, tradition says it was Manasseh who ordered the death of Isaiah.

2 Chronicles 33:11–13
Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God.

In this time of his affliction, the Lord, in His amazing grace, heard Manasseh's prayer. Even though Manasseh had been living rebelliously for fifty-five years, the Lord heard his prayers. The psalmist said in Psalm 119:71, "It is good for me to be afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." It's when we're afflicted that, perhaps for the first time in a long time, we pick up the Bible. It's when we're afflicted that we finally cry out to the Lord in sincerity and desperation. If He heard Manasseh's prayers, don't you know He'll hear your prayer when you cry to Him?

I love to think about the grace of God because I need it. I love the way God my Father has been so very gracious to me. The problem is, when I hear about other guys like Manasseh, who I think are awful and who have done evil, I don't want to hear about the grace of God extended to them. In other words, I have found that I compare their worst with my best. In reality, what the Lord would have for me is to compare my worst with their best—to find something that is good or right in them. If you're having difficulty wondering how God could be so gracious to others, it might be a time for you to compare your worst with their best.

2 Chronicles 33:14
Now after this he built a wall without the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entering in at the fish gate, and compassed about Ophel, and raised it up a very great height, and put captains of war in all the fenced cities of Judah.

Realizing the Lord is God, when Manasseh went back to his city, he built up the walls to keep out the enemy. When God has extended you grace, the first thing you ought to do is to reestablish the walls of discipline in your own life, to set boundaries in order to keep out the enemy.

2 Chronicles 33:15, 16
And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the LORD, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel.

When the Lord has shown grace to us, like Manasseh, we ought to be "altared" men and women. That is, we ought to share the Word, pray together in the "family altar" or family devotional time. We ought to be "altared" in personal devotions as well, to spend time with the Lord in the morning hour. Understanding his position as a recipient of incredible grace, Manasseh built up walls, moved out the idols, and rebuilt the altars. And so must we.

2 Chronicles 33:17
Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places, yet unto the LORD their God only.

This proves that devotion can't be dictated. Manasseh commanded his people to serve the Lord God of Israel, but they didn't comply.

2 Chronicles 33:18–23
Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and his prayer unto his God, and the words of the seers that spake to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel. His prayer also, and how God was intreated of him, and all his

sin, and his trespass, and the places wherein he built high places, and set up groves and graven images, before he was humbled: behold, they are written among the sayings of the seers. So Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house: and Amon his son reigned in his stead. Amon was two and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned two years in Jerusalem. But he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them; And humbled not himself before the LORD, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more.

Sometimes people say, "Because God is gracious and full of mercy, if I go astray, I can always come back and He'll hear me when I call on Him." That may be true. But what they fail to factor in to the equation is that the repercussions of sin aren't ever what we think they'll be. We count the cost and think we can pay the price. But when the repercussions come—and they will—they hit us in ways we hadn't planned. In Manasseh's case, he did get right in God's sight, but the repercussion of his sin is now seen in his son. That's the problem. It impacts and affects others. Sin stinks, gang. And the repercussions are more brutal than we could ever imagine.

2 Chronicles 33:24, 25
And his servants conspired against him, and slew him in his own house. But the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead.

Bloody revolution is one of the unforeseen results of Manasseh's sin as Amon is killed in his own house and the people rise up to kill his murderers.



34 2 Chronicles 34:1–5

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem one and thirty years. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined

neither to the right hand, nor to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images, that were on high above them, he cut down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strowed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them. And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem.

This intrigues me because three hundred years earlier, when Jeroboam was king, an unnamed prophet came on the scene and we read that he cried against the altar, saying, "A child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee shall he sacrifice the priests of the high places" (see 1 Kings 13). The promises of God come to pass. Oh, they might take a little longer than we anticipate, but they *will* come to pass.

Perhaps God has whispered a promise in your ear, or placed a promise in your heart and time has passed and you're wondering why it hasn't come to be. The Bible says that it was after Abraham *patiently endured* that he obtained the promise (Hebrews 6:15). Sometimes there's a space between the promise and the performance of the promise. God has His reasons, among which are to cause us to draw closer to and trust in Him. But what He says will ultimately come to pass. Guaranteed.

2 Chronicles 34:6–8
And so did he in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, with their mattocks round about. And when he had broken down the altars and the groves, and had beaten the graven images into powder, and cut down all the idols throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem. Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land, and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the LORD his God.

"Let no man despise thy youth," Paul wrote to Timothy, "but be thou an example of the believer" (1 Timothy 4:12). Josiah was young when he began to

reign. But he sought the Lord seriously when he was sixteen. He brought reformation to the nation when he was twenty. At twenty-six, he's rebuilding, and restoring the temple. If you're young, this is your time. The Lord is doing something wonderful. Be a part of it. Even as a young man, Josiah was engaged in the things of God and God would use him greatly.

2 Chronicles 34:9
And when they came to Hilkiah the high priest, they delivered the money that was brought into the house of God, which the Levites that kept the doors had gathered of the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, and of all the remnant of Israel, and of all Judah and Benjamin; and they returned to Jerusalem.

The Levites gathered money for the work that was being done in Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 34:10–12 (a)
And they put it in the hand of the workmen that had the oversight of the house of the LORD, and they gave it to the workmen that wrought in the house of the LORD, to repair and amend the house: Even to the artificers and builders gave they it, to buy hewn stone, and timber for couplings, and to floor the houses which the kings of Judah had destroyed. And the men did the work faithfully . . .

The workmen put their hands to the plow, rolled up their sleeves, and engaged in the work of restoring the temple. In Exodus 36:1, we are told that God gave wisdom and understanding to Aholiab and Bezaleel, two men who were working to construct the tabernacle. This means that anointing isn't only for the purpose of teaching or healing, but there is also an anointing to fix and build things. Oh, that God would give us more anointed mechanics and carpenters!

2 Chronicles 34:12 (b), 13
. . . and the overseers of them were Jahath and Obadiah, the Levites, of the sons of Merari; and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to set it forward; and other of the Levites, all that could skill of instruments of musick. Also they were over the bearers of burdens, and were overseers of all that wrought the work in any manner of service: and of the Levites there were scribes, and officers, and porters.

While the temple restoration was going on, musicians were playing. Music has a powerful impact and effect upon our spiritual lives . . .

As he waited on the Lord for a word from Him, Elisha called for a minstrel. And as the minstrel began to play, the Holy Spirit spoke to Elisha (2 Kings 3:15). How often have you begun to worship the Lord in song—when suddenly He begins to speak to you? How often have you found yourself encouraged as you've listened to praise music? Saul was haunted and hounded by a demonic spirit. He called for David to come and play his harp. As songs were played and worship ascended, Saul experienced relief (1 Samuel 16:23).

If you're discouraged, depressed, or defeated, if you want your temple restored, play music. It will build you up and cause your spirit to soar. In Job 38, God says that as the foundations of the earth were being laid, the angels were singing songs. In other words, He does His best work with background music. These guys created an atmosphere that was right spiritually. The Lord inhabits the praise of His people (Psalm 22:3). The demons are confused by praise. That is why Jehoshaphat sent a choir before he sent an army to do battle (2 Chronicles 20). Be a person of praise. Sing in your car. Sing in your shower. Sing when you're depressed. As Isaiah said, "Sing, O barren one" (see 54:1). If you'll develop this practice, you'll tap into a spiritual dynamic that will aid and assist you in the days of spiritual warfare.

2 Chronicles 34:14, 15
And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the LORD given by Moses. And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan.

As the temple was being remodeled, refurbished, and restored, someone found a copy of the Law. Manasseh and Amon evidently had destroyed all the copies of the Law. But one was found in the temple in the midst of the rubble. Bookbinding wasn't developed until 900 A.D. Before that time, books were made from dried papyrus woven together and rolled into lengths of approximately one hundred feet. Because the process was not an easy one, books were not easily copied.

Throughout history, every lasting revival that has taken place has been linked to a rediscovery of the Word. The same thing will happen in our lives personally.

That is, if we get into the Word, revival can't help but break out. A Bible that's falling apart usually belongs to a person who isn't. If you want your life to be revived and refurbished and renewed, read your Bible, but know that Bible study isn't always like the fourth of July. When I read the Word in the morning, I'm not always fired up. Sometimes it's just plain discipline. But it's a discipline that will bring about long-term maturity and real stability.

Think about the Christians you know who have a real history in the Lord and are rich in the things of God. I guarantee their walks are not based upon "Holy Spirit goose bumps," or some new experience or hot tip. No, the men and women I've known who are deep and rich in their history and maturity with God are that way because of their knowledge of the Word. If you will center your life on Bible study, I guarantee you will have a rich, stable, mature Christian experience.

2 Chronicles 34:16–19
And Shaphan carried the book to the king, and brought the king word back again, saying, All that was committed to thy servants, they do it. And they have gathered together the money that was found in the house of the LORD, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers, and to the hand of the workmen. Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes.

When Josiah heard the Word, he realized how far the nation had strayed from the heart of God.

2 Chronicles 34:20, 21
And the king commanded Hilkiah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king's, saying, Go, in quire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book.

Josiah sent a committee to find someone who could explain not only information *from* the Word, but application *of* the Word. "We've missed the

mark," he said. "We've gone astray. Go and find someone who can help us understand what we must do to make things right."

And that is still the need. You see, it's not just going through the Word that's important, but it's allowing the Word to go through us. It's not simply marking your Bible, but letting your Bible mark you. The question isn't only theology. The question is, how does the Word affect you personally?

2 Chronicles 34:22
And Hilkiah, and they that the king had appointed, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college:) and they spake to her to that effect.

Josiah's committee went to a woman to get understanding. This intrigues me because, according to Jeremiah 26:24, one of their number, Ahikam, was a friend of Jeremiah the prophet. With Jeremiah on the scene at this time, I would have thought they would have gone to him for understanding of what they ought to do. But they went to a prophetess and her words proved to be correct. Sometimes, it's important to understand that your wife—the "keeper of the wardrobe"—can be a prophetess and the source of great wisdom and revelation from God.

2 Chronicles 34:23–25
And she answered them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell ye the man that sent you to me, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah: Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched.

The Word had been rediscovered. Josiah was eager to apply it, and yet word came that judgment would be poured out. Why? I suggest two reasons . . .

First, when we ask forgiveness, we are immediately forgiven. But be not deceived. Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap (Galatians 6:7). The seeds are sown and the crop comes up. As a country, Israel had sinned.

Therefore, although there was repentance going on, repercussions would still take place.

Secondly, the repentance was not as deep as it ought to have been. Yes, Josiah turned to the Lord, but the rest of the nation was not as deeply committed, for when the winds changed, their commitment would blow away as well.

2 Chronicles 34:26–28
And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard; Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the LORD. Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same. So they brought the king word again.

"Because you are sincere, Josiah, you will die in peace," the Lord said through Huldah, the prophetess.

When Josiah heard this, did he say, "Whew! I've got it made! Sorry about you"? Did it cause him to be apathetic? No, it only further motivated him . . .

2 Chronicles 34:29
Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem.

Even though his own destiny was secure, Josiah was not a man who kicked back and took the easy way out. He could have said, "Judgment has been pronounced. But it doesn't have anything to do with me, so I'll just cruise." Sad to say, sometimes that's our attitude . . .

"The Arabs in Libya might get nuked before too long. Whatever. I'm a Christian. I'm going to heaven. War is breaking out in Central America? Oh, well. That's the way it goes. At least I'm Okay."

The Lord said we are to occupy until He comes (Luke 19:13). So what should be our attitude? One of intensive prayer for the lost. How many of us pray

for our enemies personally and nationally? Josiah said, "I'm going to do what I can." And that must be our attitude, as well.

2 Chronicles 34:30
And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, great and small: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the LORD.

Josiah gathered the people together and read the Scriptures to them.

2 Chronicles 34:31, 32
And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book. And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the LORD their God. And all his days they departed not from following the LORD, the God of their fathers.

In Manasseh, I see the importance of calling out to the Lord in prayer. In Josiah, I see a man who rediscovered the Word and shared it with those around him. Oh, that we would incorporate both of these practices into our own lives daily and determinedly.

35 Joan of Arc left her mark in history by the time she died at age nineteen. Romulus founded the city of Rome when he was twenty. St. Francis began his order at the age of twenty-four. Patrick Henry said, "Give me liberty or give me death," at twenty-six years of age. Napoleon conquered all of Europe by the time he was twenty-six. Martin Luther ignited the Reformation at the age of

twenty-nine. Alexander the Great conquered the known world by the time he was thirty. Therefore, whatever your age, *now* is the time to say with Josiah, "I'm going to seek the Lord diligently. I'm going to get rid of the idols in my life. I'm going to rediscover the Word."

Having refurbished the temple and rediscovered the Law, Josiah now reinstitutes the Passover . . .

2 Chronicles 35:1
Moreover Josiah kept a passover unto the LORD in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.

Passover was the celebration commemorating how the Lord had delivered His people from the bondage of the Egyptians, as well as anticipating the coming of God's Son, the Lamb of God.

2 Chronicles 35:2, 3
And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the LORD, And said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto the LORD, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders: serve now the LORD your God, and his people Israel,

The ark was to be placed in the temple, in the Holy of Holies. Evidently, the ark had been on the move during the dark days of king Manasseh. Manasseh was so wicked, he put an image in the temple. Because of that, evidently the priests took the ark out and moved it from place to place. But now, a godly king was reigning who said, "Bring the ark back and place it in the temple once again. It's not to be carried on the shoulders anymore. Now it's to find its resting place where God intended—in the Holy of Holies."

2 Chronicles 35:4
And prepare yourselves by the houses of your fathers, after your courses, according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son.

Josiah went on to exhort the priests and Levites who would now serve according to course. Twenty-five courses were established that allowed the

priests to share responsibilities. That is, the priests were scattered throughout the land and they would make their way once a year to serve in the temple for a two-week period.

2 Chronicles 35:5–7
And stand in the holy place according to the divisions of the families of the fathers of your brethren the people, and after the division of the families of the Levites. So kill the passover, and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren, that they may do according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses. And Josiah gave to the people, of the flock, lambs and kids, all for the passover offerings, for all that were present, to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand bullocks: these were of the king's substance.

After exhorting the priests and Levites to do what they were ordained to do, Josiah does something wonderful. He presents 30,000 of his own sheep and 3,000 of his own bullocks for sacrifice. I like that!

2 Chronicles 35:8
And his princes gave willingly unto the people, to the priests, and to the Levites: Hilkiah and Zechariah and Jehiel, rulers of the house of God, gave unto the priests for the passover offerings two thousand and six hundred small cattle, and three hundred oxen.

After he made a substantial sacrifice of his own, the men under Josiah followed his lead and gave generously. That's always the way it is. Matthew tells us that the Father, who sees in secret, will reward openly (6:6). Therefore, if I choose to do what's right in God's sight, those around me will be affected. Even if they don't see what I'm doing, the person I become will impact and affect them in a very real way.

When pastors tell me that their congregations aren't tithing, I say, "Are you?" When they tell me their congregations aren't witnessing, I say, "When was the last time you talked about the Lord to the guy who sells you gas or bags your groceries?" What we do privately and personally—whether for good or bad—affects the people around us very definitely. And that is reason enough to walk in integrity.

2 Chronicles 35:9–11

Conaniah also, and Shemaiah and Nethaneel, his brethren, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, chief of the Levites, gave unto the Levites for passover offerings five thousand small cattle, and five hundred oxen. So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their place, and the Levites in their courses, according to the king's commandment. And they killed the passover, and the priests sprinkled the blood from their hands, and the Levites flayed them.

The priests sprinkled the blood on the altar as they were commanded to do. The Levites filleted the lambs, as was their responsibility. All was done according to the ordinances of the Lord given through Moses. One thing however, was never to be done to the Passover sacrifices. That is, the lamb's bones were not to be broken (Exodus 12:46). Why? Because breaking a man's legs hastened death by crucifixion. When Jesus was crucified, there was no need to break His legs, for He had already died (John 19:33). Thus, the picture painted in the sacrificial system found its fulfillment in the Lamb of God.

2 Chronicles 35:12, 13
And they removed the burnt offerings, that they might give according to the divisions of the families of the people, to offer unto the LORD, as it is written in the book of Moses. And so did they with the oxen. And they roasted the passover with fire according to the ordinance: but the other holy offerings sod they in pots, and in caldrons, and in pans, and divided them speedily among all the people.

With a great multitude to be served, the Levites moved quickly, taking these offerings and dealing with them promptly.

2 Chronicles 35:14
And afterward they made ready for themselves, and for the priests: because the priests the sons of Aaron were busied in offering of burnt offerings and the fat until night; therefore the Levites prepared for themselves, and for the priests the sons of Aaron.

After all others were served, the priests and Levites served themselves.

2 Chronicles 35:15 (a)

And the singers the sons of Asaph were in their place, according to the commandment of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the king's seer . . .

Worship was ascending. Songs were being sung. Sacrifices were being made. It must have been a grand and glorious day.

2 Chronicles 35:15 (b)
. . . and the porters waited at every gate; they might not depart from their service; for their brethren the Levites prepared for them.

Because the doorkeepers couldn't leave their posts, the Levites brought the Passover meal to them. We must not neglect the taking in of the Word even as we serve others.

2 Chronicles 35:16–18
So all the service of the LORD was prepared the same day, to keep the passover, and to offer burnt offerings upon the altar of the LORD, according to the commandment of king Josiah. And the children of Israel that were present kept the passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days. And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

There hadn't been such a glorious Passover celebration since the days of Samuel.

2 Chronicles 35:19
In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this passover kept.

In Josiah, we see a man who sought the Lord. As he sought the Lord, he was called to the temple to refurbish that which had previously been desecrated. In the temple, he discovered the Law. After being in the temple and rediscovering the Scriptures, he reinstated Passover.

As we come to the house of the Lord day after week after month after year, we rediscover the Word. That ought to lead us to the Table of the Lord, where we

do exactly what God's people did in Josiah's day: remember how the Lord delivered us from the stranglehold of sin and death.

2 Chronicles 35:20
After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by Euphrates: and Josiah went out against him.

The year is 609 B.C. Josiah is in power. He has done well. But now things get a little bit complicated because three years earlier, the Assyrians had been driven out of their capital city of Nineveh and were being challenged by a new world power: the Babylonians. Regrouped at Carchemish, the Assyrians were now seeking to counterattack the Babylonians with reinforcements from the Egyptians. At this point, as Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, is making his way north to help the Assyrians, Josiah faces him down.

2 Chronicles 35:21 (a)
But he sent ambassadors to him, saying, What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war . . .

"I have no bone to pick with you," Pharaoh Necho said to Josiah. "I'm simply passing through on my way north."

2 Chronicles 35:21 (b)
. . . for God commanded me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that he destroy thee not.

"God has ordained that I go north, so don't try and stop me," Necho continued.

2 Chronicles 35:22
Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo.

When, rather than backing off, Josiah disguised himself and engaged in battle against Necho, perhaps it was because he thought, "Who are *you* to tell me what God is up to? You're an Egyptian. I'm a Jew." Yet the Lord often comes to us with words of warning or instruction, direction, or exhortation through the unexpected person at the unexpected time . . .

- When Jesus gave a sermon in His hometown, the people scoffed, "Who are you? Aren't you the carpenter's son?" They didn't realize He was infinitely much more (Mark 6:3)
- There was a storm at sea. The winds were blowing, the waves rolling. When Jesus came walking on the water to His disciples, they thought He was a ghost because they didn't recognize Him (Matthew 14:26).
- After He rose from the dead, Jesus appeared to Mary. But she thought He was a gardener (John 20:15).
- As He walked on the road to Emmaus, His traveling companions mistook Him for a stranger (Luke 24:18).

Sometimes we say, "He's just a gardener." Or, "She's a stranger." Or, "They're ghosts." But in reality, the Lord can come to you and me at the unexpected time through the unexpected person. Was Necho really the instrument of the Lord? Yes. Should Josiah have listened to what the Lord was saying through him? Yes.

How do you know when what someone is saying is really from the Lord?

James said, "The wisdom from above is first pure then peaceable, then gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruit." (3:17). When a word comes your way, James says if it's causing strife and confusion and envying and tension, it's not from heaven. But if it's pure and peaceable and gentle and good fruit, you can know it's from heaven. Necho said, "Go home and be at peace." That should have been a clue to Josiah. But Josiah didn't listen.

If you're involved in situations where there is tension and envy, confusion and strife, it is not of the Lord. On the other hand, mercy, gentleness, and peace are signs of His presence.

2 Chronicles 35:23, 24
And the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore wounded. His servants therefore took

him out of that chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had; and they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died, and was buried in one of the sepulchres of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.

Josiah, a good man, has now died seemingly unnecessarily because he got involved in a needless battle. Maybe you've been shot or wounded in your heart. Could it be it's because you've meddled where you ought not to, getting involved in needless debates and analysis, gossip and opinions? I don't know why I think I have to have an opinion on everything, weigh in on every discussion, or get involved in every debate when the invariable result is that, like Josiah, I feel wounded and depleted from the battle. We would do well to avoid battles that are full of strife and confusion, condemnation and judgment, and instead to be people who are gentle, peaceable, and merciful.

2 Chronicles 35:25–27
And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold, they are written in the lamentations. Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and his goodness, according to that which was written in the law of the LORD, And his deeds, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah.

Josiah was a great leader, but he got entangled in a battle that wasn't his. Oh, that we would learn from him and determine to be peacemakers. How? Here's the secret: look inward and you'll be depressed; look outward and you'll be upset; but look upward and you'll be at peace.



36

2 Chronicles 36:1
Then the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father's stead in Jerusalem.

Josiah had at least four sons, three of whom would become kings of Judah.

2 Chronicles 36:2–4 (a)
Jehoahaz was twenty and three years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And the king of Egypt put him down at Jerusalem, and condemned the land in an hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. And the king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and turned his name to Jehoiakim . . .

Pharaoh Necho, who was now in the region, replaces Jehoahaz with his brother, Eliakim, whose name he changed to Jehoiakim in order to show his power and his authority over the region.

2 Chronicles 36:4 (b)–5
. . . And Necho took Jehoahaz his brother, and carried him to Egypt. Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem: and he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God.

During Jehoiakim's reign, the Egyptians are driven out of the region, only to be replaced by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.

2 Chronicles 36:6, 7
Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also carried of the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon.

Here we come to the first deportation—605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar with his Babylonian army comes on the scene and carries away not only Jehoiakim but also the cream of the crop of the young men of Judah, including one named Daniel.

2 Chronicles 36:8–10
Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did, and that which was found in him, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead. Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem: and he did

that which was evil in the sight of the LORD. And when the year was expired, king Nebuchadnezzar sent, and brought him to Babylon, with the goodly vessels of the house of the LORD, and made Zedekiah his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem.

Jehoiakim is replaced by his son, Jehoiachin who, in turn, is replaced by his brother, Zedekiah. In Zedekiah, we come to the final and last monarch of the kingdom of Judah. At this time, 597 B.C., there is a second deportation. Further treasures and money are taken out of the temple and Zedekiah is left with only the poorest people in Judah.

2 Chronicles 36:11, 12
Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD.

Jeremiah is on the scene preaching and sharing, pleading with the people in Jerusalem to repent from their evil and turn toward the Lord. But the people didn't listen to Jeremiah. In fact, Jeremiah preached for forty years and evidently no one responded to his ministry. Yet he goes down in eternity as one of the greats because God doesn't call us to be successful. He calls us simply to be faithful.

2 Chronicles 36:13
And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel.

Zedekiah had taken an oath of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar, but he didn't keep it.

2 Chronicles 36:14–16
Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and

on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.

What a sobering thing it must be when the Lord says, "There is no more remedy." Here, the people had hardened their hearts against the Lord, turned their back on the Lord, closed their ears to the Lord, and had gone too far from the Lord.

2 Chronicles 36:17
Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand.

Nebuchadnezzar came first in 605 B.C. and took Daniel in his friends. He came again in 597 for a second deportation of Jews, both times knocking on the doors, saying, "Be careful. Don't mess with me." The third time Nebuchadnezzar shows up, he's not knocking on doors, but kicking them down due to Zedekiah's rebellion.

2 Chronicles 36:18–21
And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon. And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.

Jeremiah prophesied that the Jews would be taken into captivity for seventy years until the land enjoyed its Sabbaths. In Leviticus 25, the Lord declared that every seventh year, the land was to rest. For six years, the people could sow and reap, plant and harvest, but on the seventh, they were to let the land rest. During

the sixth year, God promised to supply them enough to see them through for two years. Not only did this make sense agriculturally, but it would serve as a reminder to the people that everything they had was from God's hand. The people decided, however, to plant on the seventh year in order to increase their crops and financial status. For four hundred and ninety years, the people didn't keep the Sabbath year as they were commanded. They thought they were outsmarting God. But it never works that way, for here the Lord says, "You owe me seventy years. Therefore, the land will rest for seventy years while you're held captive in Babylon."

"If I work seven days, I'm really going to get ahead," we think. Oh, I know that isn't what I'm supposed to do, but I'm an exception." The reality, however, is that you can't outsmart God. If I steal the tithe or don't keep the day of rest, ultimately, like the people taken in captivity, I will miss out in some way.

2 Chronicles 36:22 (a)
Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia . . .

Seventy years have passed. The Babylonians have been replaced by the Medo-Persians. They were dark days indeed but, with Cyrus on the throne, there's a promise of light ahead . . .

2 Chronicles 36:22 (b), 23
. . . that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up.

With Cyrus on the throne, whoever was willing was free to "go up," to return to Jerusalem, to go home. How much greater is the invitation extended to "whosoever will" to come and "take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

All those who would, let them go up. That's the word for us. No matter where we've been, the Lord would say to us, "Let's go up."

Let's rebuild, gang. Let's return once more and say, "Lord, You know what's best." No matter where we've been or how long we've been held captive, may we be those who answer the call of our Greater than Cyrus to return, to rebuild, and to occupy till He comes.

Amen!



EZRA

Background to Ezra

July 18, 586 B.C. was a day of infamy in Jewish history for it was on that day that Nebuchadnezzar led his Babylonian soldiers into Jerusalem, where they burned the temple, destroyed the city, and carried away thousands of Jews into captivity. Watching this scene from a hillside overlooking the city, the prophet Jeremiah wept profusely. For nearly forty years, he had warned the people of judgment unless they repented and returned to the Lord, yet evidently not a single person responded to his message. He preached; he prayed; he prophesied, only to end up in prison.

Daniel and Ezekiel were also alive at this time, but they had already been carried away by Nebuchadnezzar into Babylon during an earlier deportation. Daniel eventually became prime minister, a political power in the kingdom second only to the king himself. Ezekiel's ministry, on the other hand, wasn't to the politicians, but to the people as God used him repeatedly as an illustrated sermon to portray His heart.

Why were God's people carried away to Babylon? Two reasons . . .

First, it was because they scorned God's love by continually serving false gods. The idols they worshiped were not simply images, but they represented a variety of lifestyles. Ashteroth was the goddess of sensuality; Moloch the god of prosperity; Baal the god of the intellect; and Mammon the god of money. God's people found themselves sucked further and further into these lifestyles until finally the Lord sent them to Babylon, the center of all false religions. And during their seventy-year captivity an amazing thing happened: they got burned out on idols to such a degree that, throughout their entire history, we never again see them falling prey to idolatry.

In reference to an individual who continued to live in a state of immorality, Paul instructed the church of Corinth to turn him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh in order that his spirit might be saved (1 Corinthians 5:5). The objective was not excommunication but restoration, to see him brought back into right relationship with the Lord. And in Babylon—as well as in Corinth—that's exactly what happened.

Secondly, God's people were carried into captivity because they had skirted God's Law. That is, according to Leviticus 25:4, every seventh year, they were to let the land rest. They were neither to till nor to sow. But, thinking this was a waste of valuable time, for four hundred and ninety years, they ignored this law. Unbeknownst to them, however, God was keeping track. As a result, the land did indeed rest for seventy years—one year for every seven they had failed to honor the Sabbath (2 Chronicles 36:21).

Studying the Scriptures and realizing the seventy years were nearly expired (Jeremiah 25), Daniel confessed the sin of the nation (Daniel 9). Then, perhaps due to his position of political power, he was able to share some interesting insights with Cyrus, king of Persia . . .

> *That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. Thus saith the* LORD *to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the* LORD, *which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I am the* LORD, *and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the* LORD, *and there is none else.*
>
> Isaiah 44:28; 45:1–6

This is incredible! One hundred and seventy years before Cyrus was even born, Isaiah prophesied that a man named Cyrus would come on the scene and would say, "Build Jerusalem. Let the captives go." Although he didn't know the Lord, the Lord surely knew Cyrus.

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah deal with the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem following her seventy-year captivity. Specifically, Ezra deals with the rebuilding of the temple while Nehemiah deals with the rebuilding of the wall. In chapters 1 through 6 of the Book of Ezra, the main character is Zerubbabel, the grandson of Jehoiachin, one of the last kings of Judah. Zerubbabel was the leader of the first group to leave Babylon and travel nine hundred miles back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

In part two of the Book of Ezra, chapters 7 through 10, the main character is Ezra himself, who led the second group back to Jerusalem sixty years after Zerubbabel.

Part one deals with the restoration of the temple. Part two deals with the reformation of the people. Part one deals with rebuilding and construction. Part two deals with revival and instruction.

In chapter 1, we see the king proclaiming. In chapters 2 and 3, we see the people reclaiming—their genealogy in chapter 2 and their theology in chapter 3. In chapter 4, we see the enemy defaming. And in chapters 5 and 6 we see the Lord sustaining—prophetically in chapter 5 and politically in chapter 6.

It has been rightly said that, for every New Testament principle, there's an Old Testament picture. Paul says we are the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:17). But before we opened the door of our heart to Jesus, we, like the temple of old, were wiped out and in ruins. We, like God's people of old, were carted off into the captivity of our sin. Thus, we, like them, sang a song of sadness . . .

> *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the* LORD*'s song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. Remember, O* LORD*, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy*

shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

Psalm 137

In Isaiah 44:28 Cyrus was called by God "my shepherd." In Isaiah 45:1 he's referred to as God's anointed. Thus, he is a picture of Jesus, the chief Shepherd, God's true Anointed One.

When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. Turn again our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the south. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

Psalm 126

When Jesus, our Greater than Cyrus, came to rebuild the ruined temple of our lives, our song changed radically. Thus, Ezra's story is ours . . .

EZRA

1

Ezra 1:1 (a)
Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia . . .

Persian king, Cyrus, came into power when he overthrew the city of Babylon. One hundred and fifty years before he was even born, he was identified in Isaiah 44 and 45.

Ezra 1:1 (b)
. . . that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia . . .

How did the Lord "stir up" Cyrus' spirit? I believe it was through the prophet, Daniel, who, at the time Cyrus overthrew Babylon, would have been in his nineties. There he was, on the night the Medes and Persians conquered the city as Belshazzar, the Babylonian leader, threw a wild party, drinking from the vessels taken from the temple in Jerusalem. Suddenly a hand appeared, writing on the wall. Belshazzar was understandably stricken with fear. When his mother told him that there was a man in his kingdom in whom was "the spirit of the holy gods," (Daniel 5:11), Daniel was summoned . . .

> This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.
>
> Daniel 5:26–28

Within hours, the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon and it is believed by many that it wasn't long before Daniel had the opportunity to tell the conquering king that his name was written in the Word of God.

So how did the Lord "stir up" Cyrus' spirit? The same way He so often stirs ours: through His Word.

Ezra 1:1 (c), 2
. . . that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said to Cyrus, "You don't know Me, but I know you." And He says the same thing to you, for not only did He know us when we were still in our mother's womb (Psalm 139:13), but He chose us even before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). Before you were ever interested in the things of God, God was interested in you. He named you, ordained you, and chose you before the beginning of time. Amazing!

Ezra 1:3
Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

"Who among you of the people of God wish to go back to rebuild the temple?" Cyrus asks. It has been estimated that there were close to two million Jews living in Babylon. During the seventy years of their captivity, they had, in many cases, prospered quite extensively. So how many would be willing to return? Out of two million, we'll see only about 49,000 willing to leave their Babylonian lifestyle and trade the relative comforts of Babylon for the work that lay ahead in Jerusalem.

Ezra 1:4
And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

"Even if you don't want to go, you have a responsibility to help those who do," Cyrus said. And this is the word of the Lord to His people to this day.

As David fought against the Amalekites, two-thirds of the men who were with him grew faint. "We can't go on," they said. "We're just too tired."

"OK," David said. "You stay here, guard the camp and keep the supply lines going while the rest of us go into battle." When David and the troops returned after their victory over the Amalekites, the men who had fought said to the guys who had stayed behind, "You're not getting any rewards or spoil."

"Not so," David said. "Those who stayed with the stuff shall be rewarded equally with those who went into battle." And from that point on, this was the practice (1 Samuel 30:25).

I like this because it means that even though we might not be able to go to the foreign mission field or pastor a church personally, if we pray consistently and give generously, we're involved in the supply lines and as much a part of the victory as if we were on the front lines.

Ezra 1:5
Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.

That's the way the Lord still works. He stirs the spirit. Philippians 2:13 says it is God who works in you both to will and to do His good pleasure. He gives you the will and then the power and the way to carry out that which He's stirred up within you.

Ezra 1:6
And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

The only way to offer is willingly. Don't ever give begrudgingly. The Lord loves a cheerful or literally "hilarious" giver—one who enjoys the

privilege, the opportunity to make eternal investments. In Mark 11, we read that Jesus sat on the opposite side of the treasury where people deposited their money and watched not *what* they gave, but *how* they gave. The Lord is concerned how we give. Are we giving willingly, joyfully, and hilariously?

Ezra 1:7
Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;

Cyrus returned the vessels Nebuchadnezzar had plundered from the temple.

Ezra 1:8–11
Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives, Thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

Sheshbazzar, which means "joy in affliction," was most likely the Chaldean name given to Zerubbabel. *Zerubbabel* means "a stranger in Babylon." I find both names to be significant for in James 1:2 and 3, we are told to "count it all joy" when we face trials, knowing that the testing of our faith works patience. Captivity was a trial indeed for Zerubbabel, but he evidently found joy even there. Yet, even though he found joy in his affliction in Babylon, he never felt at home there. And perhaps that's why the Lord could use him. God will always use those men and women who say, "This world just isn't my home."

Set your heart on things above, dear saint, for, like Zerubbabel, we're a heavenly people, just "passing through."



2 In chapter 1, we saw Cyrus proclaiming. Here, in chapter 2, we see the people reclaiming. Ezra 2 consists of the names and genealogies of those who went to Jerusalem. It should not surprise us that the people are listed by families, for God's desire is that entire families be saved . . .

> *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," Paul and Silas said to the Philippian jailer, "and thou shalt be saved,* and thy house*" (Acts 16:31, italics added).*
>
> *In Hebrews 11:7, we read that Noah prepared an ark for the saving of his house. In other words, he made space for his sons and their wives, even though he was called to build the ark twenty years before his first son was born.*

Mom and Dad, I believe we have the privileged responsibility of believing on the Lord to provide salvation for our kids and spouses.

> Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border.
>
> Jeremiah 31:15–17

Even now, claim this promise for your kids, no matter how old they are or how far they might have strayed. Never give up praying for them, for it is the desire of God's heart to save them and bring them again "to their own border."

In the first thirty-five verses of chapter 2, we see families listed. In verses 36 through 39, we see the priests listed. In verse 40, we see the Levites. In verse 41, we see the singers. In verse 42, we see the gatekeepers. In verse 43, we see the Nethinims.

Who are the Nethinims? In the early days of Joshua's conquest, the Gibeonites knew they would be destroyed. So they disguised themselves as travelers from a far country and made a peace treaty with Joshua. When he discovered he'd been tricked, Joshua honored the treaty nonetheless, but made the Gibeonites servants from that day on, hewers of wood and drawers of water (Joshua 9:21).

I think of another "hewer of wood," another "drawer of water," for Simon the Cyrene carried the wood of the Cross of Calvary and the Samaritan woman drew water for Jesus to drink (Matthew 27:32; John 4:9). And both of them became followers of Jesus. That's why the Lord asks us to do things. He knows that if we serve Him, our hearts will be linked to Him. He's not after our service. He's after our hearts.

Why are the names of families, priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and Nethinims listed? If I were writing the Bible, I would think a list like this would be a waste of valuable space. I would use these pages for something more practical, like tips on marriage or child-rearing. God, however, is infinitely wiser than I am. Hebrews 6 tells us the Lord will not forget our labor in ministry (Hebrews 6:10). He records that which we do and give in His name. Malachi 3:16 tells us that every time one of His people talks about the things of the kingdom, God makes note in a Book of Remembrance. Revelation 21:27 speaks of the Lamb's Book of Life wherein are listed the names of every believer. God cares for and about His people not as a group but as individuals, and the people of Ezra's day were no exception, for He lists those who were willing to leave the comfort, the "good life" of Babylon in order to make the hard journey back to Jerusalem.

Ezra 2:61–63

And of the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai; which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name: These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood. And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim.

Urim and *thummim* mean "lights" and "perfection." The Urim and Thummim were in the breastplate of the high priest and were somehow used to determine God's will. Until a priest came with the Urim and Thummim, those who couldn't prove their genealogy were not allowed to minister. In a sense, the same is still true today because if you're not absolutely convinced that you are a child of God, your service will be shaky at best. You'll doubt and wonder. You'll be hesitant, confused, and timid.

How can you be sure of your spiritual lineage, that you are indeed a child of God? In Romans 8:16, we read that the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God. In other words, the Spirit of God tells you you're one of His. If you haven't had this experience, get away and seek the Lord. Say, "Lord, I need to have the confidence that I am Your child."

"Make your calling and election sure," Peter declares (2 Peter 1:10). Are you *sure?* You can be. All you need to do is ask.

Ezra 2:64–67

The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore, Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women. Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five; Their camels, four hundred thirty and five; their asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

The number of the congregation, including the servants and singers, was more than twice as large as the number of people initially carried into captivity. This means that, as was the case in Egypt, God's people increased even in a time of affliction (Exodus 1:12). Isn't that the way it is with us? We grow most not during days of ease, but during days of trial (James 1:2–4).

Ezra 2:68–70

And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place: They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand

drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments. So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

The sight of the temple in ruins resulted in hearts willing to give. I like that! At the completion of their journey, rather than grumbling angrily, the people of God gave willingly and abundantly.



3 After reclaiming their genealogy in chapter 2, here in chapter 3, we'll see the children of Israel reclaim their theology . . .

Ezra 3:1
And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

Because they're united, the people are in the proper position for power. As seen in Acts 2, it was when the disciples were in one accord that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them. In light of this, I suggest that the reason revival is so often missing in our country today is that, rather than unity, we see division, fighting, and faultfinding among the people of God.

Ezra 3:2, 3 (a)
Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries . . .

There is something about the morning and evening hours that is to be sanctified in our lives. Morning devotions and evening devotions—beginning

your day with the Lord and ending your day with Him—are key components to a deep and rich walk with God.

Ezra 3:3 (b)
. . . and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening.

Before they began constructing the temple or securing the city, the leaders of Israel built an altar. I like that! "That's not practical," some might have protested. "You should build the building first or make sure you're safe before you get too spiritual." But we know that, as we seek first the kingdom, everything else will be added to us (Matthew 6:33). Begin your day by opening its door with devotions. And in the evening, lock it shut with a time of prayer, praise, and worship, and see how everything else falls into place.

Ezra 3:4
They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required;

The Feast of Tabernacles was the week-long celebration wherein God's people took time to remember His faithfulness to them as they made their way from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Ezra 3:5–7
And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD. From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid. They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.

The men from Tyre and Sidon floated trees down to Joppa, where they were taken from Joppa to Jerusalem. This was the same procedure used when Solomon built the first temple (2 Chronicles 2:16). In this, we see Jews and Gentiles working together in the building of the temple, which is fitting because the New Testament temple is comprised of Jews and Gentiles brought together into a new entity called the church (Ephesians 2:19–22). I find it interesting that it was at Joppa that Jonah refused to go to preach to the Gentiles in Nineveh (Jonah 1:3), but also where Peter was called to minister to Gentiles (Acts 10).

Ezra 3:8
Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD.

At twenty years of age, here the Levites were ordained to ministry. Initially, the law declared that Levites had to be thirty years old to be ordained (Numbers 4). But here, the age of ordination is twenty in accordance with David's last act as king (1 Chronicles 23:27). Still today, I believe the optimum age for ministry to begin is between the ages of twenty and thirty.

Ezra 3:9–12
Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites. And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever

toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

As the foundation of the temple was being laid, two things were happening: The young men were saying, "Alright! We're getting it done! A new temple is being built. Praise God! This is exciting!" while the old men were saying, "This is nothing like it was in the old days. Things were really great back then. Solomon's temple was full of gold and silver, but this one is just stone." Thus, the shouts of joy of the young men mingled with the cries and complaints of the old men.

There is a valuable lesson in this for us today for God continues to do something new and fresh. That is why Jesus likened the Holy Spirit to the wind, for no one can predict or tame it (John 3:8). Yet there is a tendency for us to want that which is comfortable and predictable. "This is nothing like it was back in the revival of 1970," we grumble. "That's when the Holy Spirit was *really* moving."

God sent a prophet to tell these people that the glory of the new temple would actually exceed the glory of the old temple (Haggai 2:9). That's always the way of the Lord. He just takes us from glory to even greater glory as we behold Him (2 Corinthians 3:18). That means the days we are in right now far exceed the former days. And the days ten years from now, if the Lord tarries, will exceed these days. Therefore, be on guard against longing after the old days. Stay young in the Spirit. Shout for joy at what God is doing now, for He is doing marvelous things indeed.

Ezra 3:13
So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

Haggai would say that the glory of the second temple would exceed the glory of the first (2:9). Why? Because Jesus would walk in the latter temple, and where Jesus is, the glory is infinitely greater.

How do we keep from thinking the old days are best? Jesus told us new wine can't be put into old wineskins because as the wine ferments, it expands and the old wineskins would burst (Matthew 9:17). For "new wine," Jesus used the word *neos*. For "wineskin," He used the word *kinos*. *Neos* means "brand new." *Kinos* means "renewed." In other words, when the Lord wants to do a new work, He pours the new wine of His Spirit into renewed wineskins. How were wineskins renewed? By soaking them in water. This is great news because it means that the Lord doesn't discard us if we're old, but renews us by soaking us time and again in the water of the Word (Psalm 119:9; John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26).

Stay in the Word, gang, for that is the way to remain flexible, pliable, and usable in the new work the Lord continually desires to do.



4 The temple foundation has been laid. The work is progressing. Construction is moving along, and you can be sure that whenever God begins to build, Satan will seek to destroy. In chapter 4, we see the enemy defaming . . .

Ezra 4:1, 2 (a)
Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel; Then they came to Zerubbabel . . .

Notice it was when the adversaries heard that the temple was being built that they came to Zerubbabel and sought to do him in. It wasn't when they were building their own houses or doing their own thing, but when people were serious, committed, and dedicated to building the house of God, that the enemy showed up.

Ezra 4:2 (b), 3

. . . and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither. But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.

Who were the ones who said, "Let's work together. Let's help one another. Let's build the temple cooperatively?" They were Samaritans. Many years earlier, the ten northern tribes had been carried off into Assyria. Assyrians, in turn, took up residence in the land vacated by the ten tribes. But when mountain lions began to wipe out the Assyrians, they sent a message back to Assyria, saying, "Send back some of the priests to help us worship the god of this land. We're getting eaten alive by lions. God is punishing us." So certain priests were sent back who built altars to Jehovah, but who also worshiped the gods of the Assyrians. Intermarriage followed soon after and a new race called "Samaritans" emerged. It was to these people that Zerubbabel said, "You have no part here whatsoever."

You see, the enemy's tricks are always the same. Initially, he persecutes. As you study church history, you see this in the brutality of the Roman empire. But an interesting thing happened. The more the early church was persecuted, the more it prospered. The greatest peril to Christianity, therefore, is not persecution. It's prosperity. We're lulled to sleep. So Satan changed his strategy to something much more devastating. Instead of fighting the church, he decided to join it. As he attempted here, he seeks to mix religion with culture and compromise. And that has proven to be a very effective tactic to this day.

Ezra 4:4–6
Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote

they unto him an accusa tion against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

The enemy began a letter-writing campaign against the people of God. In verse 11, we see a copy of their letter . . .

Ezra 4:7–16
And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue. Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort: Then wrote Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, and the Elam-ites, And the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnappar brought over, and set in the cities of Samaria, and the rest that are on this side the river, and at such a time. This is the copy of the letter that they sent unto him, even unto Artaxerxes the king; Thy servants the men on this side the river, and at such a time. Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations. Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt en-damage the revenue of the kings. Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king; That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed. We certify the

king that, if this city be builded again, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river.

The letter said that the very people who were rebuilding had been rebellious and had caused trouble in the past. And, actually, that was correct, for on three occasions, Jerusalem rebelled against the kings seeking to control her. Take note, saint, that the tactic of the enemy is still to go through the records, find out where you failed, and make sure your failure is advertised (Revelation 12:10).

Ezra 4:17–24
Then sent the king an answer unto Rehum the chancellor, and to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their companions that dwell in Samaria, and unto the rest beyond the river, Peace, and at such a time. The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me. And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein. There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them. Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me. Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings? Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power. Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Here we see the effects of condemnation: the work ceases. Why does the enemy condemn you? Why does he comb through your records and bring to light your past failures and flaws? Because he knows it will cause you to become disheartened and hopes it will cause you to give up. God's work stops when God's people feel the effects of accusation and condemnation.

Are you being condemned? Has the enemy been having a field day in your life, reminding you of failures and shortcomings? Realize it is never God who condemns because "there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Yes, the Holy Spirit convicts. But the condemnation of Satan causes you to cease your work, whereas the conviction of the Spirit will always motivate you to continue it.



5 After seeing the enemy defaming, here in chapter 5, we see the Lord sustaining . . .

Ezra 5:1 (a)
Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo . . .

At this point, when the people were discouraged and defeated, Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to them. Haggai was intensely practical. Zechariah was amazingly mystical. "It is not time for you to stop working," Haggai said. "How can you dwell in your ceilinged houses while the house of God is still lying in ruins?" (Haggai 1:4). Haggai tells them to get in gear and get going. Zechariah, on the other hand, shared visions and heavenly insights. Both of these men were used, practical, and mystical together, to stimulate the people to get going.

Ezra 5:1 (b)
. . . prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them.

Zechariah had an encouraging word for Zerubbabel. "You began a work and it will come to completion," he said. "There's coming a day when the headstone will be in place and the people will shout 'Grace, Grace,' " (see Zechariah 4:7). This is a word for us, as well, for it's not by might, not by

power, not by anything we could ever do, but by the Spirit of God that the work goes on (Zechariah 4:6).

Zechariah had a prophecy for Joshua, the high priest, who was also discouraged . . .

> And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.
>
> Zechariah 3:1–4

The angel of the Lord in the Old Testament speaks of Jesus Christ. In this scene, we see Satan ready to condemn Joshua. "Is this not a brand or stick plucked out of the fire?" Jesus said. In other words, "I have plucked this stick out of the fire of judgment and destruction. He's My man." Joshua was in filthy garments, just as even our best works are as filthy rags compared to the Lord (Isaiah 64:6). But the Lord clothed Joshua in clean garments, and He does the same with us. When you opened your heart to Him, Jesus not only took up residence within you, but you were also placed in Him. This means that, when the Father looks at us, He doesn't see our filthy garments. He sees us robed in the righteousness of Jesus. Amazing!

> **Ezra 5:2**
> **Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them.**

In 1 Corinthians 14, we read that the purpose of prophecy is for edification, exhortation, and comfort. In other words, the purpose of

prophecy is to build up, get moving, and bring comfort. And Haggai and Zechariah were doing just that.

Ezra 5:3–5
At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall? Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building? But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter.

A letter was sent to Darius, king of Persia, tattling on the men who were working on the temple.

Ezra 5:6–8
The copy of the letter that Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and his companions the Apharsachites, which were on this side the river, sent unto Darius the king: They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus; Unto Darius the king, all peace. Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands.

Due to the attack of the enemy, work on the temple had stopped. But, hearing the words of Haggai and Zechariah, the people were recharged and renewed and the work continued to such a degree that their progress couldn't be denied. It shouldn't be surprising that the people were inspired, comforted, and encouraged by Haggai and Zechariah, for that is always the result of true prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:3).

Ezra 5:9–16
Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?

We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them. And thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up. But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon. But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God. And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one, whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor; And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be builded in his place. Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished.

"By whose authority do you build this temple?" the leaders of the region asked.

"We're God's servants, and, in addition to that, we have the command of Cyrus to rebuild this temple," the elders of Israel answered. "Yes, we messed up. Yes, because of our sin, we were carried into captivity. But, rather than give up on us, our God allowed us to come back to the land and build this temple."

Ezra 5:17
Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter.

The leaders of the region—enemies of the people of God—told king Darius to check the records to see if his predecessor, Cyrus, had, in fact, ever issued a command that the temple be rebuilt. No doubt, they were sure no such command had ever been issued. But they would soon be proven wrong . . .



6 **Ezra 6:1, 2**

Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon. And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written:

There was no record in Babylon of Cyrus' decree that the Jews were to rebuild their temple, but three hundred miles away in a library a scroll was found that contained it. The enemy of your soul accuses and condemns you in an attempt to stall what God is doing in and through your life. But tucked away in a faraway palace is a scroll—the Lamb's Book of Life—and, if you're a believer, in it, much to the shock of the enemy, is your name. If your name is written there, all of the sins you have ever committed are erased by the blood of Christ shed on Calvary's Cross while your name is preserved eternally, written in the indelible ink of that same blood.

Ezra 6:3–7

In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits; With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house: And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought

again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God. Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence: Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place.

On the basis of the scroll that was found, king Cyrus decreed that the work continue and that the enemies of God be "far from thence." It was on the basis of the Word that Jesus said, "Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written . . ." (Matthew 4:10).

How will you overcome the attacks and condemnation of Satan to get you to cease what you know you could and should be doing? Say, "It is written that the price has been paid, that I am forgiven." Claim the command of the King as recorded in the Word and continue with the work He has called you to do.

Ezra 6:8–10
Moreover I made a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail: That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.

So monumentally did the plan of the enemies of God's people fail that, not only was the rebuilding project allowed to continue, but it would be financed by the Persians! Thus, because the Word was heard, the adversaries were beaten at their own game.

How can we turn the tables on our enemy, the accuser of the brethren, Satan himself? We turn the tables on him at the Lord's Table, the table of

Communion. You see, Jesus told us that we're to agree with our Adversary quickly (Matthew 5:25). Our Adversary is the devil agreeing with him that I am a sinner at the Table of the Lord simply causes me to praise the Lord with greater passion than I would have otherwise. After all, he who is forgiven much loves much (Luke 7:47). Jesus wasn't speaking of the amount of sin, but of the awareness of the sin that dwells within us, the sin that He would pay for on the Cross.

Satan accuses us, to be sure. But, because he isn't omniscient, his accusations don't identify even half of our sin. Yet neither do they take into account the unfathomable grace of God that washes us clean. Don't defend yourself against your accuser, gang. Agree with him, and praise God all the more.

Ezra 6:11–13
Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this. And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed. Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shethar-boznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily.

In this I am reminded of another man who sought to do in the people of God: Haman. In the Book of Esther, we read that Haman thought he had concocted a sure-fire plan to destroy the entire Jewish population, only to see it backfire as he himself was hung on the gallows he had built for another.

Ezra 6:14, 15
And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of

Persia. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

The temple was finished on the third day. I love the third day, don't you, for that's the day Jesus rose. According to Hosea 6:2, after two days, God will revive us and in the third day, He will raise us up. On the third day, this temple will be finished when we're taken up to heaven. What a grand day that will be!

Ezra 6:16, 17
And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

Notice that there were no "lost tribes." All twelve tribes were represented in the dedication of the temple.

Ezra 6:18–22
And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses. And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat, And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

The temple is now rebuilt and dedicated. Passover is celebrated. The priests and Levites are placed in their proper positions. There is unbelievable joy. That's always the result of working for the Lord and seeing the task come to completion. Jesus said, "Father, I have glorified Thee and finished the work Thou hast given me to do" (John 17:4).

May we be those who, when we come to the end of our days, can say, "Father, I have finished the work, not what culture dictated I do or others suggested I do, but what *You* gave me to do."



7 Between chapters 6 and 7, there is a gap of almost sixty years. During this time, the story of Esther takes place. The temple had been rebuilt. But there was a season of silence. That is, nothing noteworthy was happening in Jerusalem that was recorded in Scripture. Maybe you can relate to this. Maybe you've been born again and rescued from the captivity of your own carnality, and you'll be thankful eternally, but it doesn't seem like a lot is happening presently. Good news—the passage before us speaks to your situation, for this is where Ezra appears on the scene.

Ezra's name means "Help" or "Helper." Ezra was a priest, but unable to function as a priest because he had been in Babylon. So, instead, he became a skilled scribe. Most scholars believe that Ezra wrote First and Second Chronicles, along with Psalm 119. We are also told that he was in charge of the council of one hundred and twenty who put together the canon of Scripture and the one who inaugurated the synagogue, a place where God's people could gather together and study the Scriptures. All of this parallels the ministry of the Holy Spirit . . .

Jesus told us that it was important that He go, for He would send another "Helper," or "Comforter" (John 16:7). The Spirit is a ready scribe indeed for, as Peter tells us, the prophets wrote as He moved them (2 Peter 1:21). The Spirit is also a teacher, bringing all things to our remembrance (John 14:26).

Whereas chapters 1 through 6 deal with the construction of the temple, chapters 7 through 10 deal with the instruction of the people. In chapters 1 through 6, we saw rebuilding. In chapters 7 through 10, we'll see reviving, a

sure indication of the presence of the Spirit in the life of an individual, a church, or a nation.

Ezra 7:1–5
Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, The son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, The son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, The son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, The son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest:

Here, we see Ezra's lineage traced back to Aaron, the high priest.

Ezra 7:6 (a)
This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given . . .

Ezra was a ready, or skilled, scribe. When did he get ready? When he was in captivity in Babylon. He could have pouted. He could have been angry he was not in a greater position of importance. But instead of pouting, he prepared. Even if you're in a place of captivity, even if you feel like you're boxed in, don't pout. Prepare. Study. Pray. Seek the Lord. In due time, at the right time, the Lord will release you for those tasks He has prepared for you. Ezra spent years preparing. Then the Lord tapped him on the shoulder to lead another group out of captivity and back to the Land of Promise.

Ezra 7:6 (b)
. . . and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.

Six times we'll hear Ezra say that the good hand of God was upon him. He was definitely one who was in constant touch with the Lord.

Ezra 7:7–10 (a)

And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king. And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD . . .

Ezra prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord. Because it is the Spirit who searches the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:10), it is the Spirit who will teach us how to understand His Word. Ezra pictures this.

Ezra 7:10 (b)
. . . and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

Not only does the Spirit tell us what to do, but He empowers us to do it (Ephesians 3:16). Lots of people want to learn the Word and teach the Word. Fewer long to *follow* the Word. But without this, teaching lacks anointing and authority.

Ezra 7:11–13
Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel. Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace, and at such a time. I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee.

Ezra was given the authority to take those who wanted to go with him to minister to the Lord in Jerusalem. It is the Holy Spirit who says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17), and it is the Spirit who calls men to ministry (Acts 13:2).

Ezra 7:14–18

Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand; And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem, And all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem: That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God.

Ezra was not only a teacher of the Word, and not only a doer of what he taught, but he was instrumental in worship, for here he is charged by Artaxerxes to take that which was needed to establish worship in the temple. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to worship (John 4:24; Ephesians 5:18–21; Philippians 3:3).

Ezra 7:19–23

The vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, those deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem. And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king's treasure house. And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily, Unto an hundred talents of silver, and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred bäths of wine, and to an hundred bäths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God

of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?

Ezra was entrusted with great treasures, among them the equivalent of up to four tons of silver and six hundred gallons of wine. But even these pale in comparison to the gifts and treasures the Holy Spirit bestows . . .

> But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.
>
> 1 Corinthians 12:7–11

Ezra was given both the manpower and the financial resources to accomplish the task before Him. And the church is given no less.

Ezra 7:24
Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them.

I find it interesting that here we see the first example of a state providing tax exemptions for ministry.

Ezra 7:25
And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not.

Ezra was commissioned to establish those who knew the Law and to teach it to those who didn't yet know it. As Paul would write to the

Galatians, the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (3:24). Then, once we are brought to Christ and His Spirit takes up residence within, so lovely is the fruit He produces that there is no law against it (Galatians 5:22, 23).

Ezra 7:26, 27
And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment. Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem:

The Lord not only wants to build His house, but to beautify it. He's not only building us as a people, but He wants to beautify us as a people (Psalm 149:4). It's one thing to put us all together, it's something else to beautify us.

Ezra 7:28
And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

Ezra was strengthened for the work that lay ahead. And, through the Spirit, so are we (Ephesians 3:16).



8 Ezra 8:1
These are now the chief of their fathers, and this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon in the reign of Artaxerxes the king.

The number of men who responded to Ezra's invitation to go to Jerusalem —listed in verses 2 through 14—was approximately 1,500. Keep in mind that most of the Jews carried into Babylon had, over time, become

comfortable there. In the first group, led by Zerubbabel, nearly 50,000 went. In this second group, there are 1,500 who go. Most chose to stay.

The Holy Spirit is a perfect gentlemen. He invites. He encourages. He inspires. He enlightens. But He doesn't force. That is why He is likened not to a vulture or an eagle, but to a dove, a bird of peace and gentleness (Matthew 3:16).

In Ezekiel 47, we see Ezekiel being led to a river, often a picture of the Spirit in Scripture (Joshua 3:13), where he stepped in up to his ankles. Then he was led downstream, where he stepped in up to his knees. Further downstream, he stepped in up to his waist. Still further, he found himself over his head. What does this say to us? The Spirit of the Lord invites us to step in. Some step in up to their ankles. That is, they're standing in Christ, believing in Jesus. Others, however, choose to go deeper. They go to their knees, not only believing in the Lord themselves, but prayer for others. Others go deeper still, sharing their faith and seeing others born again. And others ask the Lord to take total control of their lives, allowing the baptism of the Spirit to wash over them completely. At each stage, Ezekiel had a choice whether or not to step in. So do we. Will I do what the Lord invites me to do? Will I ask for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon me? Will I believe that His Spirit will fill me? Will I witness for Him?

Gang, the Lord will take you as far and as deep in Him as you want to go, but not one step further. Why are some people seemingly so Spirit-filled? I suggest it is simply because they want to be, that they are those who say, "Lord, take total control of me. Do whatever You want with my life. I want to be lost in You."

Ezra 8:15 (a)
And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days:

After gathering the people, Ezra stopped for three days to assess the situation, a wise thing to do in light of the fact that an arduous, nine hundred-mile journey awaited them.

Three days by the river reminds me of the three days Joshua and the children of Israel spent camping by the Jordan River. They had been set free

from bondage in Egypt. They had been in the wilderness for forty years. They were being led by the Lord, but had not yet entered into the abundance the Lord intended for them. After three days, the officers commanded the people to follow the ark—the symbol of the visible, tangible presence of God. But they were to leave a space of about a half mile because they had not "passed this way heretofore" (Joshua 3:4). In other words, God desired time and space to do what He wanted to do.

Many people are trying to be filled with the Spirit when in reality what they need is to be emptied of the flesh. That's why it's so important to follow Ezra's example and wait on the Lord.

Ezra 8:15 (b)–20
. . . and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi. Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding. And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God. And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen; And Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiah of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty; Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name.

Finding no Levites in the company, Ezra decided to "draft" nearly three hundred, for without them, temple worship would have been an impossibility.

Ezra 8:21–23
Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way

for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.

Carrying about five million dollars' worth of gold and silver, Ezra realized they were easy targets. Yet he didn't want to ask the king for protection because he had told him that God's hand was upon them. How many times have we felt backed into a corner, thinking our only two choices were defeat or reliance on the world, when, in fact, God has limitless options for us if we would only call out to Him? Ezra wisely took this third option and called for the people to fast and pray.

Fasting is a wonderful and powerful instrument in the arsenal of the believer who desires to move in the Spirit. Fasting is not intended to earn the Father's approval, for giving up a brownie or two doesn't score brownie points with Him. Whether skipping a favorite food or a meal or two, whether for a day or longer, fasting is simply a means by which we can use the time and effort we would otherwise spend on meeting our physical needs to concentrate on our spiritual needs. Fasting says, "I need to know the way to go. I want to be led by the Spirit." Fasting doesn't impress God—it's for our benefit. When you feel afraid or confused, fast. Deny the physical. Concentrate on the spiritual. Seek the Lord.

Ezra 8:24–30
Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them, And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering of the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered: I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, and of gold an hundred talents; Also twenty basons of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold. And I said

unto them, Ye are holy unto the LORD; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the LORD God of your fathers. Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD. So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our God

The offerings were weighed at the beginning of the journey and would be weighed again at Jerusalem. This was wise leadership and good stewardship. Jesus said in Luke 16:11 that if a man couldn't be found faithful in dealing with unrighteous mammon, money, how could he be entrusted with true spiritual riches? Money, it seems, is the indicator God uses to help us see where our hearts are (Luke 12:34).

Ezra 8:31
Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way.

Ezra knew the enemies wanting to rob them of five million dollars of gold and silver were laying in wait. The children of Israel had no army, but they knew God was with them because they had prayed and prepared. Consistent prayer is that which gives us protection from the enemies that lay in wait on every road, the ones we don't see, and the ones we would never think would be out to get us. Is it really that important that we rise early to pray? Is it really that crucial that I maintain a consistent prayer life. Stop praying and you'll find out, when an enemy you never expected or suspected appears in your path.

Ezra 8:32
And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.

God was with them indeed, for they made it to their destination.

Ezra 8:33, 34
Now on the fourth day was the silver and the gold and the vessels weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest; and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them was Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, Levites; By number and by weight of every one: and all the weight was written at that time.

Just as the priests and Levites gave account for the gifts entrusted to them, there will come a day when we will give an answer for what we did with that which was given to us. That is why Paul would tell Timothy to "stir up" the gift within him (2 Timothy 1:6). The same exhortation applies to us. Don't let the gifts the Spirit has given you go idle, saint. Utilize what God has entrusted to you.

Ezra 8:35, 36
Also the children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he goats for a sin offering: all this was a burnt offering unto the LORD. And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river: and they furthered the people, and the house of God.

I think sometimes we ought to treat people as if they're Christians even when they're not. In the days before self-service gas stations, I don't know how many times I would stop on my way to teach and say to the attendant, "Pray for me. I'm going to speak to a group of high school kids about the Lord. I'll be back next week to tell you how it goes." That's what Jesus did. He talked to people about the kingdom as if they were already believers (Matthew 13, 22). Share the Word with king's lieutenants and with governors, with anyone and everyone, and watch to see how it "furthers the people and the house of God."

9 In chapter 8, we read of preparation for the pilgrimage. Here in chapter 9, we see supplication by the scribe . . .

Ezra 9:1–3
Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass. And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonied.

Arriving in Jerusalem, Ezra discovered that the men of Israel had married the daughters of the Canaanites. Ezra couldn't believe it. He had just completed a long, hard journey no doubt expecting to see people worshiping and growing and serving God. Instead, he heard reports that they had intermarried. Rather than preach at the people, however, he sat down before them and ripped out his beard and hair.

Do you hate sin that much? Does sin bother you so much that it causes you to rip out your hair? Would to God I had a heart like that.

What was Ezra worried about? Why was intermarriage such a big issue? I suggest two reasons . . .

The first deals with prophecy. You see, all of the prophecies concerning the Messiah was that He would come through the Jewish lineage. Knowing this, Satan sought to so dilute the lineage that Messiah could not be born. Have you ever wondered how the Jews have been able to preserve their

identity even to this day? It is because, regardless of how Satan might try, God's prophecies are never thwarted.

Secondly, intermarriage was of major concern practically, for through it, God's people would inevitably begin to follow pagan customs. Not a week goes by when I don't have a conversation with someone who says, "I shouldn't have married him or her. I thought I could set an example and that they would eventually come to the Lord. But they have no intention of doing that." Everyone feels their own case is the exception, that marrying an unbeliever will be alright in their situation. But it is as a loving Father who knows what He's talking about that God says, "Be not unequally yoked with an unbeliever" (see 2 Corinthians 6:14). If you marry an unbeliever, if you violate the command of God, you will pay the price. Be not deceived. God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7).

Ezra 9:4–6

Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonied until the evening sacrifice. And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God, And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God, for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.

Notice how Ezra prays. He doesn't say, "I'm ashamed of these wretches, of these backsliders." He says, "I'm ashamed of ourselves." He recognized his part in the corporate people of God and recognized he was responsible with them.

Ezra 9:7–15

Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day. And now for a little space grace hath been shewed

from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem. And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments, Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness. Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever. And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this; Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping? O LORD God of Israel, thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this.

In this powerful prayer offered by a brokenhearted priest, we see neither pride nor empty promises to do better. We see thanksgiving for God's care and adoration of His character. We see confession of sin and acknowledgement of undeserved mercy. And through it all we see the beauty of humility. No wonder it was a prayer recorded for eternity.



10 In chapter 10, we come to the purification of the people . . .

Ezra 10:1–4
Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore. And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it.

Ezra's prayer was more productive than a sermon, for when the people saw him praying, weeping, and in mourning, they realized the severity of their sin. It wasn't a finger pointing or a temper flaring that brought them to their knees, it was the heart of a man of God breaking.

Ezra 10:5–12
Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware. Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away. And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem; And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been

carried away. Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain. And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel. Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives. Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do.

The remainder of the chapter is a list of the one hundred and thirteen men who said, "We will kiss our wives goodbye, say farewell to our kids, and let them go back to the land from whence they came." This would not be easy for any man. But they were willing to do it when they heard the voice of God speaking through Ezra and the leaders of Jerusalem, telling them that confession and separation was what was required of them.

I believe this list—including seventeen priests and ten Levites—is not one of condemnation, but rather of commendation of the men who were willing to do whatever it took to be right with God. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance," we read in 2 Corinthians 7:10. It's one thing to say, "I'm sorry." It's quite another to say, "I'm sorry and I'm changing direction."

"Behold," Peter said to Jesus, "we have forsaken all and followed Thee. What shall we have therefore?"

"Truly every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life," Jesus answered (see Matthew 19:27–29).

Confession and separation have eternal ramifications. And in every one of our lives without exception, there are decisions that must be made regarding these issues in one way or another because the same temptations come to *all* men (1 Corinthians 10:13). Make the right choice, precious people. Learn the lesson of Ezra. You can't out give God. He won't let you down. He'll restore you one hundred-fold. Trust Him.



NEHEMIAH

Background to Nehemiah

In accordance with God's plan for His people, in the year 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, cruised down to Judah and carried Jews captive to Babylon. Eighteen years later, in 586 B.C., the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, wiped out the temple, obliterated the wall, and carried more Jews away captive. Seventy years later, the prophecies of Jeremiah were fulfilled when the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild and restore the temple first and then the walls surrounding the city itself. In 535 B.C., Zerubbabel led the first contingency from Babylon to Jerusalem. Accompanying him were two prophets named Haggai and Zechariah who spurred the people on, exhorting them to continue the process of rebuilding the temple.

Fifty-seven years later, a second group, led by a priest and scribe named Ezra, returned.

In the book before us, a third contingency is coming back. The year is 445 B.C. and this third group is led by a man named Nehemiah. He is coming back to rebuild the walls around the city in order that the people can worship freely without being attacked by the enemy.

The book before us is one of my favorite books in the Old Testament. And each time I have studied it, I have seen entirely different emphases therein. For example, it is an excellent book to study with regard to leadership, for Nehemiah is the quintessential example of what a leader should be. It is also an excellent book regarding the subject of revival. But one of the most interesting ways to look at it is as a picture of the way the Holy Spirit rebuilds and restores the walls of the human personality.

You see, just as God is a triune Being, and because we are created in His image, we consist of three components as well: body, soul, and spirit. The body relates to the physical world around us. In a believer, the spirit lives forever and relates to the Lord within us. The soul—the personality—consists of mind and emotions and relates to the people around us. When we were saved, the temple that was in ruin, our spirit, was rebuilt and reborn when the Spirit came and dwelt within us. Yet even though that happened

when I was born again, sometimes my soul—my emotions and mind—can still lie in ruins. That is, my mind doesn't think the way it ought. My emotions aren't as stable as they need to be. And as a result, I am vulnerable to attack unless and until the Spirit begins to rebuild the walls of my soul, how I think and how I feel.

I think it's not coincidental that *Nehemiah* means "Comforter from God"—for I suggest he paints a wonderful picture of the true Comforter (John 14:16), the Holy Spirit, who wants to rebuild and restore the walls that have been torn down by sin, the gates that have burned up by rebellion.

Many people say, "I've been born again. Why am I still struggling in this area emotionally or mentally?" I suggest it's because the Holy Spirit needs to do a restorative, rebuilding work in the area of the soul. If you're in that place, you're at the right place today, for the book before us gives us some powerful lessons about what the Lord desires to do in us in order to free us to worship Him . . .



NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah 1:1–4

1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,

When Nehemiah heard about the affliction and reproach of those who had already returned to Jerusalem, he was grieved. The Bible tells us that when we're afflicted, when we're not doing as well as we ought, the Spirit of God is grieved (Ephesians 4:30).

Nehemiah 1:5, 6

And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.

Even though he wasn't in Jerusalem yet, Nehemiah identifies with the people there. Likewise, the Holy Spirit knows what I'm going through and what you're dealing with. That is why He prays through us and for us with groanings that can't even be articulated (Romans 8:26).

Nehemiah 1:7, 8
We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:

"Remember the word," Nehemiah prayed. That's part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:26, we read that when the Holy Spirit is given, He reminds us of that which we've learned of the Lord. If you want Him to bring these things to your remembrance, however, you've got to put stuff in your "remember-er" because He's not going to bring to mind that which hasn't gone in! That's why Bible study is so vital. In due season, He'll cause these things to come to your remembrance right when you need them.

Nehemiah 1:9–11
But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

"I was the king's cupbearer." This final sentence of chapter 1 gives us an indication of Nehemiah's great humility. You see, being the king's cupbearer was a tremendous honor. Originally, the cupbearer sat next to the king and would sample the food and drink brought before him to determine if it had been poisoned. But as time progressed, the office of cupbearer became one of close adviser. In Nehemiah's day, the cupbearer was no longer sampling food, but a "chief of staff." Thus, Nehemiah was in a place of prominence and power.

If I were Nehemiah, I would have mentioned my position at the beginning of the book. Nehemiah, however, mentions it at the end of the chapter and only as it relates to the story about to unfold. Concerning the Spirit, Jesus said that when He came, He wouldn't speak of Himself (John 16:13, 14). The work of the Spirit is to exalt the Son. Where is the Son most exalted? At the Table of Communion, for when I hold the cup of the King at the Table of the Lord, it is then that the Spirit so often begins to advise, correct, and comfort me.

As he was in a position of power, word came back from Jerusalem nine hundred miles away that the walls were still destroyed, the gates still burned, and things were still a mess. Yet, rather than criticize, Nehemiah agonized. He not only confessed sin, but also quoted Scripture. Referring to Deuteronomy 28, he prayed, "Lord, You promised that if we sinned, we would be scattered. But You also promised that if we returned again to You, You would gather us from wherever we've been."

I'm convinced that God loves to hear His children quote Scripture in prayer, as if to say, "Lord, I understand what You said. I'm placing my faith on what You have spoken." And Nehemiah does just that.



2 Nehemiah had it made in the palace of Shushan—the winter palace of the king of Babylon—but in the chapter before us, we'll see him lay aside his possessions, position, and pride in order to become involved in the work of God . . .

Nehemiah 2:1, 2
And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid,

Although it was a capital offense for a cupbearer or close advisor to the king to be sad in his presence, Nehemiah couldn't hide the fact that he was greatly grieved over the condition of his brothers in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 2:3–5 (a)
And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king . . .

Nehemiah prayed to God and then immediately spoke to the king. Certainly, Nehemiah's prayer couldn't have been very long! When Peter took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink, he didn't say, "Oh, great and holy Creator and Sustainer of all things, I beseech You to have mercy upon me and incline Your ear toward me." No, he said, "Lord, save me!" And a three-word prayer saved him (Matthew 14:30, 31).

"Don't think you will be heard because of your much speaking," Jesus warned, "for that's how the heathen pray" (see Matthew 6:7). Both Nehemiah and Peter modeled just the opposite. It's not the length of our prayers that counts, but the strength that matters. You can pray quickly and yet very effectively if your heart is in tune with God.

Nehemiah 2:5 (b)
. . . If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.

"Send me to Jerusalem," was Nehemiah's request. It was in Jerusalem where the disciples were told to wait for the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49).

Nehemiah 2:6
And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it

pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

Throughout Scripture, we see reference to a "set times" in which the Lord works (Exodus 9:5; Psalm 102:13). There's a designated time, a "set time" for the Holy Spirit to work in and through the church, at the end of which, we'll hear the Lord say, "Come up," and we'll go up and go home! (Revelation 11:12).

Nehemiah 2:7
Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah;

Nehemiah requested letters of authority in order that he might be protected and given safe passage. In the Word of God, we, too, have letters of authority that will see us through whatever snares the enemy has laid for us.

Nehemiah 2:8 (a)
And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into . . .

In verse 5, Nehemiah asked to be sent. In verse 7, he asked to be kept safe. Here in verse 8, he asks to be supplied.

"Why doesn't God use me?" some people ask.

"Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name," Jesus said (John 16:24).

If you are one who wonders why God isn't using you, have you, like Nehemiah, asked to be sent?

"If He does send me, will I be kept safe? Will I be able to handle it emotionally or physically?" you wonder.

"I'll never leave you nor forsake you," Jesus answers (Hebrews 13:5).

"But I don't have the supplies, the training, or the qualifications," you might say.

Nehemiah lacked the supplies to build the wall. But that didn't stop him. He asked the king for them. And so must we ask our King, who has promised to give us abundantly above all we could ask or even think (Ephesians 3:20).

Nehemiah 2:8 (b)
. . . And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

Nehemiah's quick prayer was indeed a powerful prayer, for the king granted all three of his requests. I find it interesting that in Ezra 8, we read that when Ezra prepared to go to Jerusalem, he determined not to ask the king for anything because the hand of God was upon him. Here, years later, Nehemiah comes on the scene and asks the king for supplies, also because the hand of God was upon him. Who was right? Ezra or Nehemiah? They both were because God uses different personalities to accomplish His perfect purposes.

Peter and John were incredibly different from each other, yet in the Book of Acts, we see them traveling together because their ministries complemented each other. This is so freeing because, rather than judging or criticizing another's flavor of ministry, if there's fruit in their lives, I can praise the Lord for what He's doing through them.

Nehemiah 2:9, 10
Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me. When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

Hearing that someone was coming to rebuild the wall, the enemies of God's people were exceedingly grieved. This shouldn't be surprising, for any time the Spirit moves in, the enemy will rise up. You can go to the bank on that.

Nehemiah 2:11–13 (a)

So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well . . .

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah quietly surveyed the city by night. There are times in our lives when things are dark, when it seems like nothing is happening. In reality, those can be the very times the Lord is surveying the situation, checking out what needs to be done, allowing you to go through a certain period of dryness or darkness because He's about to do something explosive and powerful. If you're in that place, take hope. God hasn't forsaken you. He's simply preparing you.

Nehemiah 2:13 (b), 14 (a)
. . . and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool:

The dung gate and the king's pool were both devastated equally because the judgment of God respects no person (Acts 10:34; Matthew 5:45).

Nehemiah 2:14 (b)
. . . but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass.

There was so much rubble surrounding the wall that Nehemiah's donkey didn't even have a place to put his foot. Thus, the dark of the night was compounded by the obstacles on the ground. Again, if this sounds like your situation, know that the work of reconstruction can't be far behind . . .

Nehemiah 2:15–18
Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so

returned. And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work. Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.

After three days, Nehemiah said, "It's time to get busy. There's work to do." There come times when you sense the Spirit of God saying, "You've been a reproach long enough. People aren't seeing My reality through you. You're not worshiping the way you once did because walls have been destroyed, gates have been burned, things are torn up that once were strong." Maybe even now the Lord is calling you to rebuild and restore certain areas in your family, your marriage, your family, or your life.

Nehemiah 2:19 (a)
But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us . . .

In verse 10, Sanballat and Tobiah were grieved. Here, they're laughing. Laughter and scorn are often the first response of the enemy to the Lord's work in our lives. "*You* lead a Bible study?" he hisses. "What a joke! *You* share your faith? Who's going to listen to *you?*"

Nehemiah 2:19 (b)
. . . and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?

Like Sanballat and Tobiah, the enemy whispers in our ears, "Who do you think you are, wanting a greater work of the Holy Spirit in your life? You're just trying to build your own kingdom."

Nehemiah 2:20
Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

Rather than cower at Sanballat's laughter and scorn, Nehemiah said to him, "You have no business being here. Therefore, I'm not going to listen to you. We *will* complete this work because God is with us."

God is with us, as well, gang. And He who began a good work in us will bring it to completion and fruition. That's a promise (Philippians 1:6).



3 In chapter 3, the work begins. Here, we see a list of the people who worked as well as the locations in which they worked. It's somewhat laborious, and yet there are excellent lessons tucked away in this chapter. Thirty-eight men are listed in eight different locations. They usually worked closest to their own homes—the place any work we do for the kingdom must begin—because if it doesn't work at home, it won't work at all.

Nehemiah 3:1 (a)
Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate; they sanctified it . . .

The sheep gate is where our Christian walk begins as we realize that Jesus is the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. All we like sheep have truly gone astray, but the Lord has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6). Even after we're saved, the rebuilding process always begins with a renewed focus on the Lamb, a greater love for Jesus.

Nehemiah 3:1 (b)–3
. . . and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Meah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananeel. And next unto him builded the men of Jericho. And next to them builded Zaccur the son of Imri. But the fish gate did the sons of Hassenaah build, who

also laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof.

Once we see the Lamb of God and become linked to him, the next thing we're called to do is to be workers for Him. At the fish gate, we do just that as we fish for men's souls (Matthew 4:19). Yet, as we share the good news of the Gospel, people ask us questions, which leads us to the next gate . . .

Nehemiah 3:4–6
And next unto them repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz. And next unto them repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabeel. And next unto them repaired Zadok the son of Baana. And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord. Moreover the old gate repaired Jehoiada the son of Paseah, and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah; they laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, and the locks thereof, and the bars thereof.

When questions arise, we are drawn back to the old gate—the solid teachings and doctrines of the Word—in order to get the firm foundation of faith every believer must know in order to be effective in service.

Nehemiah 3:7–13 (a)
And next unto them repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite, and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon, and of Mizpah, unto the throne of the governor on this side the river. Next unto him repaired Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, of the goldsmiths. Next unto him also repaired Hananiah the son of one of the apothecaries, and they fortified Jerusalem unto the broad wall. And next unto them repaired Rephaiah the son of Hur, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem. And next unto them repaired Jedaiah the son of Harumaph, even over against his house. And next unto him repaired Hattush the son of Hashabniah. Malchijah the son of Harim, and Hashub the son of Pahath-moab, repaired the other piece, and the tower of the furnaces. And next unto him repaired

Shallum the son of Halohesh, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, he and his daughters. The valley gate repaired Hanun, and the inhabitants of Zanoah; they built it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof . . .

After being saved, after witnessing and being driven back to studying the Word, we come to the valley gate—times of trial and difficulty—for, as any teacher knows, testing always follows teaching.

"Don't be surprised concerning the fiery trials that come your way," Peter would say (1 Peter 4:12).

"Count it all joy when you fall into various trials because the testing of your faith works patience," James would echo. "But let patience have her perfect work that you may be entire and complete, lacking nothing" (see James 1:2–4).

In other words, praise the Lord for the valley gate.

Nehemiah 3:13 (b)
. . . and a thousand cubits on the wall unto the dung gate.

The dung gate was where refuse was carried out of the city. When we're in the valley, we invariably say things we shouldn't, do things we ought not, have attitudes that are amiss. So we need to go through the "dung gate," to admit our failure and confess our sin. Then, once confession is made, we come to another gate . . .

Nehemiah 3:14, 15
But the dung gate repaired Malchiah the son of Rechab, the ruler of part of Bethhaccerem; he built it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof. But the gate of the fountain repaired Shallun the son of Col-hozeh, the ruler of part of Mizpah; he built it, and covered it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof, and the wall of the pool of Siloah by the king's garden, and unto the stairs that go down from the city of David.

There comes a point when we say, "Lord, I know You. I want to serve You as a fisherman. I'm in Your Word. I've gone through the valley. I've made confession of sin. But I need more power and life." The fountain gate speaks of this place. To a man, the people of God who have made a lasting impact upon the world have been those who have come to the fountain gate. D.L. Moody was such a one. He came to a point in his ministry where he locked himself in a hotel room, determined not to leave until he had the power of the Holy Ghost upon his life. Three days later, he emerged, and the world hasn't been the same since.

Nehemiah 3:16–26

After him repaired Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, the ruler of the half part of Beth-zur, unto the place over against the sepulchres of David, and to the pool that was made, and unto the house of the mighty. After him repaired the Levites, Rehum the son of Bani. Next unto him repaired Hashabiah, the ruler of the half part of Keilah, in his part. After him repaired their brethren, Bavai the son of Henadad, the ruler of the half part of Keilah. And next to him repaired Ezer the son of Jeshua, the ruler of Mizpah, another piece over against the going up to the armoury at the turning of the wall. After him Baruch the son of Zabbai earnestly repaired the other piece, from the turning of the wall unto the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. After him repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah the son of Koz another piece, from the door of the house of Eliashib even to the end of the house of Eliashib. And after him repaired the priests, the men of the plain. After him repaired Benjamin and Hashub over against their house. After him repaired Azariah the son of Maaseiah the son of Ananiah by his house. After him repaired Binnui the son of Henadad another piece, from the house of Azariah unto the turning of the wall, even unto the corner. Palal the son of Uzai, over against the turning of the wall, and the tower which lieth out from the king's high house, that was by the court of the prison. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh. Moreover the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel, unto the place over against the water gate toward the east, and the tower that lieth out.

It was at the water gate that Ezra would proclaim the Word (Nehemiah 8:1). Having gone through the valley of experience and with the fullness of the Spirit upon you, you can share the Word with authority and effectiveness. The power of the Spirit and the path of experience will give unparalleled authority in your sharing.

Nehemiah 3:27, 28
After them the Tekoites repaired another piece, over against the great tower that lieth out, even unto the wall of Ophel. From above the horse gate repaired the priests, every one over against his house.

Revelation 19:14 tells us that when Jesus returns, He'll be accompanied by a company on white horses. Thus, the horse gate speaks of the rapture and return of Jesus.

Nehemiah 3:29
After them repaired Zadok the son of Immer over against his house. After him repaired also Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah, the keeper of the east gate.

It is the east gate through which Jesus will enter in His Second Coming. In 1100 A.D., when the Turks heard the east gate was the gate Jesus would enter, they walled it up and sealed it shut. But in so doing, they inadvertently fulfilled the prophecy of Ezekiel 44 that says the east gate shall be sealed until He returns.

Nehemiah 3:30, 31
After him repaired Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, another piece. After him repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah over against his chamber. After him repaired Malchiah the goldsmith's son unto the place of the Nethinims, and of the merchants, over against the gate Miphkad, and to the going up of the corner.

Miphkad literally means "Judgment." When Jesus comes back, He'll bring judgment with Him. As believers, we will be judged at the bema seat of Christ—not for our sins because they were already judged on the Cross of Calvary—but for that which we have done in service for Him (2 Corinthians 5:10). Unbelievers, however, will appear before the great white throne judgment and will be cast into eternal damnation (Revelation 20:11–15).

Nehemiah 3:32
And between the going up of the corner unto the sheep gate repaired the goldsmiths and the merchants.

Here, we see the sheep gate mentioned once again. Why? Because everything both begins and ends with Jesus, the Lamb of God.



4

Nehemiah 4:1 (a)
But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation . . .

Sanballat's name literally means "thorn in secret." In other words, he was a pain—the Old Testament equivalent of Paul's own thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7). A "sanballat" was sent Paul's way to keep him from being puffed up in pride, to keep him in a place of humility and brokenness. I wonder what Sanballat the Lord has sent you. Maybe you look at him as a big pain or at her as a real problem. But could it be that the person who seems to be poking you or breaking your heart is actually allowed by the Lord to cause you to do what we'll see Nehemiah do—to pray? If so, Satan's tactics will backfire because they will draw you closer to the Lord than you otherwise would have been.

Nehemiah 4:1 (b)
. . . and mocked the Jews.

There were plenty of Sanballats in Jesus' day as well. When Jairus' daughter was nearly dead, he asked Jesus to heal her. As they made their way

to his house, they found mourners weeping and wailing. Jesus looked at Jairus and said, "Don't believe them. This isn't the end of the story. She's just sleeping." When the people heard this, Matthew tells us they laughed Jesus to scorn (9:24).

Maybe at one time a promise was given to you, something you know the Lord has placed on your heart or a promise in the Word that practically jumped off the page. But now it seems dead. All you hear are voices inside that mock and laugh. You must do what Jesus did, for it wasn't until Jesus sent the mockers packing that resurrection took place. If you have a promise from the Lord that seems dead and hopeless, the Lord would say to you, "Move out the mockers. Send the voices of cynicism and the whispers of doubt packing."

In the early days of Elisha's ministry, there was a group of young men who laughed at him, calling him a baldheaded man. What did Elisha do? He cursed them in the name of the Lord, and they were immediately devoured by bears (2 Kings 2). When doubts come our way in the temple of our spirit, saying, "It's not going to come about. It's too late. You're too old, baldheaded man," send the bears of the Word upon them. Tell them that all things are still working together for good (Romans 8:28). Tell them that God will indeed complete that which He began (Philippians 1:6). Move out the mockers by standing on the Word of God. And then watch resurrection life surge into the promise that He gave you.

Nehemiah 4:2, 3
And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.

Just as Sanballat addressed an army, our Adversary has an army of demons. This life is a battleground, gang. That's why we shouldn't be

surprised if sometimes we wake up feeling as though tanks had rolled over us. There's a war going on and sometimes we feel the fallout from it.

"Will these feeble Jews fortify themselves?" Sanballat asks. "Will they launch a rebellion against the king from their walled city? Will they really sacrifice once the walls are up, or will they simply live lives of luxury?" Sanballat's questions are the same ones Satan asks us. All of these questions deal with the future, and the Lord doesn't always answer questions that relate to our future because He tells us to "take no thought for the morrow" (Matthew 6:34).

In John 13, we read that it was because Jesus knew from whence He came and where He was going that He was able to wash the disciples' feet. He wasn't concerned about the past or the future. Consequently, He could minister in the present moment. That's always the way it is. Faith takes care of the past because our sins are washed away. Hope secures the future because we know we're going to heaven. That allows us to live in the present.

We are to walk by faith. Faith means we don't know what's ahead or around the next bend. All we need to know is that God is with us right now. You might be having lots of questions and dealing with lots of issues about the future. But the Lord would have you know that He wants to give you peace not that comes *from* your understanding, but that *passes* it (Philippians 4:7) so that you can say, "I trust You, Lord."

Nehemiah 4:4, 5
Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity: And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders.

Notice that Nehemiah doesn't respond to Sanballat's accusations. Instead, he prays that the accusations would backfire.

Nehemiah 4:6

So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.

Despite the threats of Sanballat and Tobiah, the people had a mind to work. “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he,” we read in Proverbs 23:7. It was the strength of their mind rather than the strength of their arms that allowed the people to keep their commitment. That is why Paul would instruct the Philippians to “let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (2:5).

Nehemiah 4:7, 8
But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.

In chapter 2, verse 10, we saw Sanballat and Tobiah. Nine verses later, they were joined by Geshem. Here, the Arabians, Ammonites and the Ashdodites join them—groups that would normally be at odds with each other, but here united in their persecution of the Jews.

Nehemiah 4:9
Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.

Nehemiah prayed and the work continued. The Holy Spirit prays for us and the work goes on as our walls are rebuilt and we’re changed ever so slowly.

Nehemiah 4:10
And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.

Not only are there attacks from without, but there is discouragement within as Judah, the strongest of the tribes, loses heart by looking at the obstacles rather than to God.

The greatest asset we have is Judah or, literally, praise—for, even though we face outward attacks, rubbish underfoot, and internal problems, the Lord wants us to give thanks in everything, to rejoice evermore. Praise is potent and powerful and it ought to lead the way.

I believe that in every man and woman's life there comes a couple of opportunities when life just seems to be overwhelming, unbearable, the rubbish is great, the problems are many. Yet those rare situations are invaluable opportunities for greatness because only then can we say, "In the midst of all this rubble, I'm choosing to praise the Lord."

Nehemiah 4:11
And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.

While Judah is complaining, the enemy swoops in. That's what happens when we complain: the enemy takes advantage of it.

Nehemiah 4:12
And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you.

Catch the scene. The Ammonites, Ashdodites, Tobiah, Sanballat and the boys were cursing. Judah is thinking, "We can't finish this wall."

The Jews living outside of Jerusalem were saying, "You guys better give up and come back to us. Forget what you're trying to do. It's not going to work."

In other words, Nehemiah and his coworkers were being hit from every side, from every angle. Ever feel like that? If so, you're in good company!

Nehemiah 4:13, 14

Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.

Nehemiah had two instructions for his beleaguered companions: "The Lord is with you and your families have need of you." And his instructions apply to us no less. We must be in the Word and walk with the Lord, precious people, because our families are directly affected. Your walk is not yours alone. It affects your family directly. How you walk with the Lord will either bring about fruitfulness or frustration within the hearts of those with whom you are linked. That is why we must consistently be in the Word.

Nehemiah 4:15–18 (a)
And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work. And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded . . .

The wall was built by men who held a brick in one hand and a sword in the other. And that is still the way God's work is accomplished today. The brick speaks of the practical aspect of that which He calls us to do. "I have ordained you, that ye should bear much fruit," Jesus declared (John 15:16). Therefore, even a brick becomes a tool of ministry in the hand of the one who uses it as unto the Lord (Colossians 3:17).

The sword, of course, speaks of the Word (Hebrews 4:12). "Study to show thyself approved unto God," Paul would admonish Timothy, "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). The man with a brick in one hand, the Word of God in the other, and a mind to work is the man God uses.

Nehemiah 4:18 (b)–20
. . . And he that sounded the trumpet was by me. And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us.

Yes, the work is hard. The sacrifices are great. The enemy's attacks can be intensive and never-ending. But our eyes are upon the Lord and our ears are tuned to His trumpet. In our hands are the Word of God and a brick to accomplish what He's called us to do. We're going to make it. We're going to get through the tasks and calling and projects and opportunities the Lord has given us both individually and corporately because He promised He would complete that which He has begun (Philippians 1:6). It's all based upon His promise, not upon our worthiness.

Nehemiah 4:21–23
So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day. So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.

So committed to the task before them were Nehemiah and company that they worked on the wall by day and guarded it by night. To do this, they remained clothed day and night, with the exception of the times they took

their clothes off to wash them. We must remain robed in His righteousness, shielded by the armor provided for us (Revelation 19:8; Ephesians 6:11).



5 It has been said there are basically three kinds of people in the world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened. Nehemiah fits in the first category, for he was a man who made things happen. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls that had been left in ruin by Nebuchadnezzar. Here in chapter 5, the wall is halfway done. And, although the external opposition seems to be waning, it will be replaced by inward depression.

The same obstacles are still in place today, for whenever you do anything for God, you can expect outward opposition, inward depression, or even a combination of the two. As the chapter unfolds, we see that a shortage of food contributed to the peoples' depression. Three reasons are given for this shortage . . .

Nehemiah 5:1, 2
And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews. For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live.

"We . . . are many." When Nehemiah and his contingent showed up, thousands of people flooded into the area, causing a population explosion that must surely have taxed the food supply.

Nehemiah 5:3
Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth.

The second reason for a shortage of food was due to a drought in the land.

Nehemiah 5:4
There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards.

The third reason for a shortage of food could have been that, because the people were actively involved in building the wall around Jerusalem in order that they might have protection from the enemy and freedom to worship without anxiety, the crops and fields were not tended to the degree they had been previously.

Nehemiah 5:5
Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards.

Population increase, a dry season, and the work of the ministry caused the people to buy corn at such exorbitant prices that they were forced to mortgage their homes and vineyards and sell their children into virtual slavery.

I believe this passage has something to say to us because we, too, can go through times we feel depressed, stressed, and malnourished. Perhaps it's due to a population explosion. The Lord adds to the church. New people show up on the scene and pretty soon we no longer get the attention we once did. "Whatever happened to just forty of us meeting together?" we lament.

Or maybe it's due to the inevitable dry season that comes into the life of every believer from time to time. Every one of us will go through seasons of drought. The Lord will allow you to be tested in times you don't feel a spiritual "high" in order that He might develop within you a walk based on faith rather than feeling, a faith that is solid as a rock rather than as unstable as a roller coaster.

Or maybe our times of stress and hunger are due to the fact that we're so busy ministering—be it teaching Sunday school, counseling high schoolers,

or even directing cars in the church parking lot Sunday mornings—that we're no longer finding time to feed our souls from the Word.

Nehemiah 5:6, 7 (a)
And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words. Then I consulted with myself . . .

Before he said anything, Nehemiah called a counseling session with himself, just as David did when he "encouraged himself in the Lord" (1 Samuel 30:6).

Nehemiah 5:7 (b), 8
. . . and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them. And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer.

These men were Jews themselves, yet they exploited the situation at the expense of their own people. When you find yourself in times of stress or drought, there will be those who will seek to exploit the situation, to manipulate your emotions. In fact, in Acts 20, Paul gathered together a group of elders at the church of Ephesus and said, "Know that after I depart, there will arise some from your own midst who will speak perverse things, seeking to draw men after themselves."

Nehemiah 5:9 (a)
Also I said, It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God . . .

The wisest man who ever lived declared that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). Truly, the fear of the Lord is the key to living the Christian life successfully, not being afraid of Him, but being afraid of doing anything that would cause Him grief or disappointment because He's been so good to us, so generous, so merciful.

Nehemiah 5:9 (b)
. . . because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?

Nehemiah called a meeting and ripped on the leaders that were ripping off their brothers. He gave two reasons why they were wrong. First, it compromised their witness as it gave their enemies reason to reproach them.

Nehemiah 5:10, 11
I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn: I pray you, let us leave off this usury. Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them.

Not only did charging their brothers interest compromise their interest, but it contradicted the Word, for in Leviticus 25, they were specifically told not to charge usury, or interest. In light of this, may we be those who are ever cognizant both of our witness and of the Word as we deal with people around us.

Nehemiah 5:12, 13
Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise. Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not this promise, even thus be he shaken out, and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the LORD. And the people did according to this promise.

After being rebuked by Nehemiah, the leaders promised to return the interest they had taken from the people. But Nehemiah didn't simply rest on their promise. He called for a priest and made them take an oath, swearing in the presence of the priest that they would return the money and cancel the mortgages.

"I will never leave you nor forsake you," Jesus said (see Hebrews 13:5). This means that, as followers of Jesus, we are in the presence of our High Priest continually. Therefore, we must be people whose dealings are those of integrity, whose words are those of honesty.

Nehemiah 5:14–19
Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor. But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God. Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants were gathered thither unto the work. Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us. Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people. Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

"We do not rule over you, but are helpers of your joy," Paul wrote to the church at Corinth (2 Corinthians 1:24). That is all a leader, pastor, or elder is to do. And Nehemiah modeled this beautifully. He didn't take from the people—he shared with them. He didn't demand they open their wallets for him, but instead opened his home and heart to them.



6 **Nehemiah 6:1, 2 (a)**
Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the

Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;) That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me . . .

Unable to stop the work on the wall through depression internally, Satan resumes his attack externally. The same is still true. Satan never has a good day, gang. Do you know that? He just keeps pounding and hounding those who undertake any work of faith.

Nehemiah 6:2 (b)
. . . saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief.

No longer are Sanballat and Tobiah mocking and laughing. Here, they change their tactics and try to persuade Nehemiah to meet with them.

Nehemiah 6:3 (a)
And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work . . .

Notice that Nehemiah didn't say he was doing a great job. Rather, he said, "I'm involved in a great work. You guys thought it was hapless or hopeless. But I see it as holy and glorious."

The "Nehemiah" within us—the Holy Spirit—is doing a great work in us both corporately and individually. Yet, because the enemy wants us to doubt this, we need to learn the lesson of Simeon. The promise had been given to him that he would not die until he saw the Messiah. After waiting all his life for this promise to be fulfilled, the Spirit led him to the temple.

"This is it!" he must have thought. "I will see Messiah at last!"

I'm sure he listened for the sound of chariot wheels and soldiers marching. Surely Messiah would be a military leader who would rescue the Jews from Roman oppression.

But all Simeon heard was a baby's cry.

At that moment, he had a choice to make. He could have thought, "This is what I've been waiting for all my life? A baby? What a waste!"

Instead, he did what I'm challenging us to do. He took the Baby and said, "I bless You, Father. I believe what You are going to do is mighty and massive" (see Luke 2).

I wonder if the Spirit hasn't given you a vision in your mind or a desire in your heart that you know is of Him. When it comes, will you choose to embrace it regardless of how small or weak it initially might seem? Will you, like Simeon, choose to say, "I believe this is the beginning of the fulfillment of what You promised, Lord"?

"Too much rubbish!" some will proclaim.

"It will never last," others will protest.

"Even a fox will knock it down," others will predict.

Will you be the one to say, "No, it's a great work the Lord is doing"? It might not be exactly what you were expecting or what you envisioned, but if you choose to embrace it as from God, you, like Nehemiah, will exhibit the one quality necessary for His work: faith (Hebrews 11:6).

Nehemiah 6:3 (b)
. . . so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?

"Why should I come down to meet with you?" Nehemiah said. And the same question is valid today. The enemy wants to eat up your time in futile meetings or in arguing for hours with people who have no intention of changing their minds. Sanballat wasn't interested in restoration but only in distraction in order to stop God's work any way he could.

Nehemiah 6:4
Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner.

Sanballat issued the same invitation four times, and four times Nehemiah refused.

Nehemiah 6:5–7

Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand; Wherein was written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king ac cording to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together.

When negotiation failed, Sanballat resorted to incrimination, sending an open letter accusing Nehemiah of aspiring to be king. Every sister or brother moving out in ministry will face this same accusation from the enemy. "Why are you doing what you're doing?" the accuser of the brethren will hiss. "You just want to be acknowledged as being some spiritual leader. You're only doing this to exalt yourself."

Nehemiah 6:8, 9
Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart. For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.

After brushing aside Sanballat's accusation, Nehemiah prayed, "Strengthen my hands, Lord. Let me get this job done."

Nehemiah 6:10, 11
Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee. And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.

A cloistered, seemingly spiritual man told Nehemiah he should protect himself by taking refuge in the temple. Was Nehemiah being unreasonable in refusing to take his advice? No, he was being unstoppable. How do you stop a guy like Nehemiah? First, the enemy tried negotiation. Next, he tried incrimination. Here, he tries isolation.

Still today, the enemy will try to isolate you. But God desires us to impact the world around us through the work to which He calls us.

Nehemiah 6:12, 13
And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

Nehemiah perceived something was amiss concerning the invitation to isolation, and indeed there was, for Shemaiah was a hireling who had sold out to the enemy.

One of the hardest things about having the gift of discernment is being accused of a lack of love or compassion. However, it's not a matter of love or compassion. It's a matter of listening to the Lord and following His direction.

Nehemiah 6:14
My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear.

If people are coming against you and causing fear in your heart, if even seemingly spiritual people are pronouncing judgment against you, questioning your motives, writing letters about you, recognize it for what it is: nothing more than the enemy. The enemy will always seek to stop what God is doing. Follow the example of Nehemiah, and just keep going.

Nehemiah 6:15

So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days.

The wall was finished. How? The dynamic of God and the determination of man teamed together and saw the work completed.

Nehemiah 6:16–19
And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God. Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them. For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son in law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. Also they reported his good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear.

One thing that cannot be denied is the reality of God's fruitfulness in or through a life. The wall was completed against overwhelming odds. Thus, Sanballat and Tobiah go down in history as fools because they foolishly and arrogantly tried to hinder the work of God. Nehemiah, on the other hand, goes down in history as a great man, not because he was perfect but because he persevered in the calling God had given him.



7 **Nehemiah 7:1, 2**
Now it came to pass, when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, and the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed, That I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many.

Here, Nehemiah begins delegating responsibility. I find it interesting that Hananiah is described as being both faithful and fearful. At any given moment, I'll either be living in the fear of God or in the fear of man. The fear of man is a snare that will trip you up every time (Proverbs 29:25). The fear of God, on the other hand, is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). The fear of God is to be afraid of doing anything that would grieve the Lord. The fear of God says, "I want to live my life in such a way that I truly acknowledge Your presence with me in every situation, in every conversation."

Nehemiah 7:3, 4
And I said unto them, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot; and while they stand by, let them shut the doors, and bar them: and appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, every one in his watch, and every one to be over against his house. Now the city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded.

Even though the wall was completed, Nehemiah was wise enough to realize that the attacks would continue. Do not be deceived, gang. Not until we get to heaven will there truly be peace. If you're doing anything for God, there will always be some battle, some attempt to ensnare you, to put you down, to stop what you're doing. Our tendency is to think, "If I can just get through this . . ." But when you get through that, there will be something else. Nehemiah understood this.

Nehemiah 7:5–7
And my God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first, and found written therein, These are the children of the province, that went up out of the captivity, of those that had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and came again to Jerusalem and to Judah, every one unto his city; Who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani,

Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Ne-hum, Baanah. The number, I say, of the men of the people of Israel was this;

The genealogy in the remainder of the chapter is the same as the one in the Book of Ezra (2:2). We might think this is a waste of ink and paper, but in repeating their names, it's as if God says, "These are the names of My children who left the comforts of Babylon to make their way back to the holy city in order to worship Me. Their names are remembered, recorded, and repeated because I love them." And if you are a believer, if your name is recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life, He says the same thing about you.



8 Nearly twenty-five centuries ago, a band of battered people faced up to the embarrassing evidence of their inability to rebuild their ruined past. And then came a man who, with patient persistence, abundant supply, and deep compassion taught them to pray. He taught them how to resist the attacks of their adversaries. He taught them to be compassionate and kind toward their brothers who were more unfortunate than they. He led them in rebuilding that which was ruined. And in fifty-two days, the project was completed.

Nehemiah is in this story, but he's also in your story personally for he is a picture of the Holy Spirit who teaches us to pray, who empowers us to overcome the attacks of the devil, who enables us to be compassionate and kind, who works with us and in us to rebuild the ruined parts of our lives, the walls of our soul that lie in rubble and ruin. Don't miss Him in this story. Don't miss Him in your story.

Nehemiah 8:1, 2
And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that

could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

Water is a symbol of the Word of God. Therefore, it's appropriate that the people gathered at the water gate. "How shall a young man cleanse his way?" the psalmist asked. By taking heed to the Word (see Psalm 119:9).

"Now you are clean through the Word which I have spoken," Jesus declared (John 15:3).

Along with the church at Ephesus, we are washed by the water of the Word (5:26).

According to Deuteronomy 31:11, the law was to be read publicly every seventh year at the Feast of Tabernacles. Evidently hungry for the Word, the people asked Ezra to reinstitute this practice. The first day of the seventh month was the first day of their civil new year. What a great way to bring in a new year, listening to the Word of God.

Nehemiah 8:3–5
And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:

A pulpit, or scaffold, was constructed that could support Ezra and the thirteen priests who stood by him and that could allow him to be more easily seen and heard by the people.

Nehemiah 8:6 (a)
And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands . . .

Here, we see a perfect example of the office of priest as being one who speaks to God on behalf of the people and to the people on behalf of God. When the people said "amen" it was more than simply a word of encouragement. It was a word of establishment, for Jesus said that when we agree together on earth, things happen in heaven (Matthew 18:19).

Nehemiah 8:6 (b)
. . . and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Worship is not only a happy hallelujah. Sometimes it's a holy hush. Worship is not about how loud we can be. Sometimes, there needs to be a reverential silence. Sometimes, the most intensive times of worship consist not of singing the loudest but of bowing the lowest.

Nehemiah 8:7, 8
Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

Catch the scene: Ezra is standing on the pulpit, reading by the hour while men linked to him gave the people understanding, answering questions and making application. Reading the Word distinctly and explaining the Word in simplicity are still the great needs of the church today.

Nehemiah 8:9
And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.

Tirshatha refers to Nehemiah's office or position. It is not surprising that the people wept when they heard the words of the Law, for it is the Law that shows us our sin. The Law was given to show us how far we are from what we could and should be in order to drive us to the Lord and to His grace (Galatians 3:24).

Nehemiah 8:10
Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

The justice of the Law brings sorrow. But the joy of the Lord brings strength. Notice that it's not joy *in* the Lord but the joy *of* the Lord that brings strength. That is, it's not our joy in Him, but His joy over us that is our strength.

The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

Zephaniah 3:17

Nehemiah 8:11, 12
So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

Having understood the Word, the people went their way rejoicing.

Nehemiah 8:13–17
And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law. And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the

feast of the seventh month: And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written. So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness.

On the second day, following the great preaching service wherein the people were taught for six hours and sent their way rejoicing, the leaders and elders met with Ezra personally and learned that, according to Leviticus 23, once a year they were to celebrate the Feast of Booths, or the Feast of Tabernacles. This was an eight-day festival in which people lived in little huts and remembered the way God had provided for His people during their wilderness wanderings.

If you're in any way interested in ministry, searching the Word is part of your responsibility. Be like these Old Testament leaders and elders. Be like the New Testament saints at Berea (Acts 17:10, 11). Search the Scriptures and find out what needs to be uncovered and reestablished both in your life personally and in the life of the church corporately.

Leviticus 23 tells us there were actually seven feasts and these feasts have significance, not only to the people of God historically, but to us prophetically . . .

The first feast was Passover, It was to be celebrated in the spring, the fourteenth day of Nissan, or our April. The Passover was when the lamb was slain, commemorating how God delivered His people from bondage in Egypt, as well as to portray Jesus, the Lamb of God, who would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). At the very time the Passover lamb was

being slain in the temple, the Son of God, God's holy Lamb would be pinned to the tree of Calvary.

The next feast, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, took place the day after Passover. Leaven is a picture of sin. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was in the tomb the day after Passover, and if there was sin in Him, He would not have risen from the dead, for the wages of sin is nothing other than death (Romans 6:23).

The third feast, the Feast of Firstfruits, took place on the first day of the week after Passover. At the Feast of Firstfruits, the people would offer their firstfruits to the Lord. Jesus rose from the dead on that day as the Firstfruit of many to come, for because He lives, we shall live also.

Fifty days after Passover was the Feast of Pentecost. Among other things, Pentecost was a celebration of the Law being given. When the Law was given, 3,000 people died because of their sin (Exodus 32:28). Conversely, fifty days after Jesus died, when the Holy Spirit came upon the one hundred and twenty in the Upper Room, the church was birthed and 3,000 were saved (Acts 2:41).

The fifth feast was the Feast of Trumpets, which took place on the first day of the seventh month, corresponding with our month of October. One day not too far away, we're going to hear the trump of God and be whisked away in the Rapture (1 Corinthians 15:52).

The sixth feast, Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement, took place nine days after the Feast of Trumpets. Yom Kippur was a time of sorrow and repentance. So, too, after the church is raptured, the Tribulation will break out on earth and, during that time, the Jewish people will understand to a great degree that Jesus is indeed their Messiah.

The last feast is the one we see here: the Feast of Tabernacles. In Zechariah 14, we read that after the Lord comes and establishes His kingdom on the earth, all people will be invited to celebrate this feast and in so doing say, "Thank You, Lord. You saw us through and brought us home."

Nehemiah 8:18
Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days;

and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.

Every day during the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles, the priests would make their way to the pool of Siloam. There, they would draw water from the pool and pour it out on the temple mount, commemorating how God had supplied water for His people in the wilderness. But on the last day, the solemn assembly day, the priests would go to Siloam and return with empty pitchers, signifying the One who was to come. You see Siloam means "Sent one," and the people knew that One would be coming who would give them refreshment, who would set them free. Thus, when, on the eighth day, the priests would pour out their empty pitchers and quote Isaiah's prophecy that God would pour out His Spirit upon them (Isaiah 44:3, 4), the people would pray that Messiah would come. In John 7, we see the answer to their prayer, for it was on the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles that, as the people prayed silently, Jesus declared, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and out of his innermost being shall gush forth torrents of living water" (John 7:37, 38). The pitchers would never need to be empty again. And neither do we, for truly Jesus—the fulfillment of every feast, the culmination of every festival—supplies our every need.



9 Through perseverance and faith, Nehemiah saw the completion of the task to which he was called. When the wall was completed, there was a great celebration among the people. They celebrated intensely. Their joy and gladness was obvious to all. They were excited about serving the Lord. They were encouraged in the Lord. Yet here in chapter 9, we see celebration replaced by humiliation. We see feasting turn to fasting. Why? Was it God who was calling for the people to fast rather than feast? Was it God calling for the people to confess rather than celebrate? No. He had told them that it was His *joy* that was their strength (8:10). But the people themselves felt a need for brokenness. And in this there is an important insight.

The Lord calls us to joy. He calls us to experience His grace, to bask in His goodness. But as we do, as we draw close to Him, we're suddenly made

aware of how far we are from where we should be. It was when Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up that he cried out, "Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5).

It was when Peter realized Jesus was the Son of God that he fell to his knees and said, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8).

So it is when you draw close to the Lord that you are made aware how far you are from where you could be.

Nehemiah 9:1–3
Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.

In the midst of rejoicing and renewal, the people realized their need for repentance. Sometimes we think that if we confess our sins the Lord will show goodness to us. In reality, however, it's the other way around. It's the goodness of God that leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). Here, after the people celebrated God's grace and rejoiced in His love, confession was the natural result.

Nehemiah 9:4–6
Then stood up upon the stairs, of the Levites, Jeshua, and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani, and cried with a loud voice unto the LORD their God. Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are

therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.

The passage before us is the longest prayer in the Bible. It is primarily a prayer of reflection, for after acknowledging that the Lord alone is God, His people reflect upon what He has done.

Why is this prayer recorded? I believe it is to teach us the necessity of remembering our own personal history. How long has it been since you've carved out a chunk of time to reflect with the Lord about the things He's done in you, with you, and for you? I am convinced we get shot down, depressed, discouraged, and defeated because we're always looking ahead to the next day or week or month, failing to look back and see what the Lord has already done in our lives.

When the Israelis bought American F-16 fighter jets in the 1980s, they made a simple modification that saved them countless lives: they added a rearview mirror. This allowed them to see their enemies coming. I'm convinced that many of us who should be flying high are shot down because we don't have a rear view mirror on our spiritual plane. We don't see what's behind us. We don't reflect with the Lord upon how He's blessed us, answered our prayers, seen us through over the years. If you want to get blessed and guard yourself against being shot down, spend a couple of hours with the Lord. Look back and see what the Lord has done.

Nehemiah 9:7–16

Thou art the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham; And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give it, I say, to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous: And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea; And shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get

thee a name, as it is this day. And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threw-est into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters. Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go. Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant: And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them. But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments,

In spite of all God's blessings, the children of Israel remained stiff-necked toward Him.

Nehemiah 9:17–26

And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not. Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This is thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations; Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go. Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their

feet swelled not. Moreover thou gavest them kingdoms and nations, and didst divide them into corners: so they possessed the land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan. Their children also multipliedst thou as the stars of heaven, and broughtest them into the land, concerning which thou hadst promised to their fathers, that they should go in to possess it. So the children went in and possessed the land, and thou subduedst before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would. And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness. Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations.

In spite of God's goodness, protection, and provision, His people constantly rebelled against Him.

Nehemiah 9:27–31

Therefore thou deliveredst them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and according to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviours, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee: therefore leftest thou them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them: yet when they returned, and cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies; And testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (which if a man do, he shall live in them;) and withdrew the

shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear. Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands. Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God.

God's provision and protection, His greatness and goodness are contrasted with the peoples' stubbornness.

Nehemiah 9:32, 33
Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day. Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly:

"Lord," the people prayed, "in all that we've gone through recently, including the seventy years in captivity and the challenges facing us presently, You've done right, but we've done wrong."

Nehemiah 9:34–37
Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them. For they have not served thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked works. Behold, we are servants this day, and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it: And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of

our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.

The people acknowledged that, although God was good to them, patient with them, and gracious toward them, they continued to wander off and go astray. They understood that the reason they were carried into captivity and overtaxed and oppressed presently is because that's what it took for God to get their attention.

I love the way this prayer acknowledges God's mercy and grace even in difficulty. Whatever the Lord does is right. He proved this completely, absolutely, and irrefutably on the Cross of Calvary. Whatever doubts or questions you may have, dear saint, know this to be true beyond a shadow of a doubt: whatever God is doing or not doing in your life is exactly right—for so passionate is His love for you that He died in your place.

Nehemiah 9:38
And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it.

After reflecting on what God had done, the people couldn't help but write down a new covenant with Him, a new commitment to Him. I encourage you to keep a spiritual journal, to write down the things God has done for you, the things He has shown to you, and the commitments you're making to Him, for it will be of tremendous value in the days ahead.



10

Nehemiah 10:1
Now those that sealed were, Nehemiah, the Tirshatha, the son of Hachaliah, and Zidkijah,

Verses 1–28 record the names of the twenty-two priests, forty-four chiefs, and others who were so touched by the Lord that they signed on the dotted line of a new covenant with Him.

Nehemiah 10:28

And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding;

We now see the four results of rededication and revival, the outworking of what takes place when there is an inward, real revival in our hearts . . .

Nehemiah 10:29 (a)
They clave to their brethren, their nobles . . .

The first result of revival is unification of the brethren. "By your love for one another, all men will know that you are My disciples," Jesus said (see John 13:35). Love is the proof of the pudding. A person can claim to be righteous, spiritual, insightful, and prophetic, but if there's not love, that person is simply blowing hot air (1 Corinthians 13:1–3).

Nehemiah 10:29 (b)
. . . and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes;

The second result of true revival is a renewed dedication to the Word. This shouldn't be surprising because when you're in love, you want to know all you can about the object of your affection. And, because this is God's love letter, when you're in love with Him, you'll find yourself wanting to know His heart and His thoughts through His Word.

Nehemiah 10:30
And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons:

The third result of true revival is separation from the world. No longer would God's people marry the heathen people of the land. The same must

still be true. We all know people who at one time were doing well, until they became involved with or linked to someone in the world and down they went. How, then, are we to witness to the lost? I'm not suggesting isolation *from* the world, but rather insulation *in* the world, where we determine not to be involved in situations that negatively affect us. For example, if you're spending time with people who don't know Jesus and they're doing better because you're with them, great. But if you find yourself slowly but surely compromising, separate yourself. We must go to where the sinners are, but only if we go as thermostats and not thermometers. Thermometers merely measure temperature. Thermostats, on the other hand, actually change the temperature. Am I radically impacting any given place, or is that given place impacting me and making me cold toward God? That's always the question.

Nehemiah 10:31–39

And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt. Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God; For the shewbread, and for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering, of the sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin offerings to make an atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law: And to bring the firstfruits of our ground, and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the LORD: Also the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God: And that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the

chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage. And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house. For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.

The fourth result of true revival is seen in a renewed determination to worship. Here, in an act of worship, the people determined that the first of their crops, dough, and cattle would go to the work of the Lord. Why does God want the first of our money, the first of our effort, the first of our time? For one simple reason. It's not that He needs anything we can give. What He wants is our hearts and wherever our treasure is, there our heart is (Luke 12:34). If your treasure is in the stock market, you'll watch the stock market reports every day. If your treasure is in an IRA, you'll keep track of how much you've built up in it. If your treasure is in gold and silver, you'll wonder how those commodities are doing on the world market. But if your treasure is in the things of God, you'll be interested in the things of God. That's why the Lord wants us to give Him the first of our money, the first of our energy, the first of our ability. If I don't give, my treasure, and therefore my heart, will go somewhere else.



11 Nehemiah 11:1

And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts to dwell in other cities.

The wall was completed, but the people were not excited to move into Jerusalem. Why? Maybe it was because they preferred their homes in the suburbs. Maybe it was because the city itself would be crowded. Maybe the rubble still in the city would be a constant reminder to them that much of the city needed to be rebuilt, that their job wasn't yet done.

"Lord, send Your Spirit. Revive us and renew us," we pray. But do we realize that the answer might mean we will have to leave a place of comfort? The Lord desires to rebuild, renew, and fill us. Consequently, this might mean we'll go places we never thought we'd go or do things we never thought we'd do as the Spirit overflows from us.

Here, the people drew straws to determine the one in ten who would move into the city. With approximately 50,000 people in the region, 5,000 would be called upon to make their residence in Jerusalem. They picked straws and one in ten had to go into the city to live. Approximately 50,000 people were in the region. 5,000 would need to make their residence in the holy city.

Nehemiah 11:2, 3
And the people blessed all the men, that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem. Now these are the chief of the province that dwelt in Jerusalem: but in the cities of Judah dwelt every one in his possession in their cities, to wit, Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants.

While one out of every ten was drafted to move into the city, others went willingly and were blessed. The same can be true of you. If you desire to be a part of what God is doing, you will be blessed beyond what you can even dream because, truly, God is a debtor to no man.

Nehemiah 11:4 (a)
And at Jerusalem dwelt certain of the children of Judah, and of the children of Benjamin. Of the children of Judah . . .

In verses 4 through 9, we see the names of the leaders of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin who dwelt in Jerusalem. In verses 10 through 18, we see

the names of the priests and Levites who settled in Jerusalem. Verse 19 speaks of the gatekeepers; verse 20 again of the priests and Levites. Verse 21 refers to the Nethinims, the people originally of the tribe of Gibeon who served in the temple (Joshua 9:23). Verses 22 and 23 refer to the singers; verse 24 to the king's representative in Jerusalem.

I believe we see the groups of people listed in verses 4 through 23 in the church of Jesus Christ today. You see, geographically, Jerusalem was part of the territory originally ceded to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Therefore, those who were of these tribes speak to me of those who have a long heritage in the church. The priests speak of those whose primary service is in the church. The Levites, were scattered throughout the country, teaching people the things of God. Therefore, the Levites speak of those who serve God in the world as teachers and bankers, as schoolteachers and mechanics. The gatekeepers served a very practical purpose and speak to me of the office of deacon, faithful men who meet the practical needs of the body of Christ. The Nethinims speak of those who, although they have no heritage of faith, come to a saving knowledge of the Lord. The singers speak of the highest act all of us can do in the body: worshiping our Lord. And, finally, above all, the king's representative speaks of none other than the Son Himself.

Nehemiah 11:25 (a)
And for the villages, with their fields, some of the children of Judah dwelt at Kirjath-arba, and in the villages thereof . . .

Verses 25 through 36 list the villages and areas where those who worked in the city dwelt. The majority of the people lived in these surrounding suburbs. Notice that the names of villages are given, but not names of people because they chose to stay away from the holy city. The invitation had gone forth to come, but the majority didn't respond. It is the man or woman who chooses to *abide* in Christ rather than merely to call on Him whenever they're in trouble who will be fruitful and useful in the work of the kingdom (John 15:3).

Nehemiah 12:1 (a)

12 **Now these are the priests and the Levites that went up with Zerubba bel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua . . .**

The first twenty-six verses of chapter 12 consist of a list of the priests and the Levites who had returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel and Joshua approximately ninety years earlier and whose families were still in the region.

> **Nehemiah 12:27–29**
> **And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps. And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi; Also from the house of Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba and Azmaveth: for the singers had builded them villages round about Jerusalem.**

Our God is a God of gladness, no question about it! The first miracle Jesus ever did was to inject gladness into a depressing situation when He turned water into wine. Here the dedication of the wall was a celebration marked with gladness, thanksgiving, and song.

> **Nehemiah 12:30**
> **And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall.**

As the singers gathered and the musical instruments were tuned, the priests purified themselves, the people, the gates, and the wall according to the requirements of the Law.

> Then I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall, and appointed two great companies of them that gave thanks, whereof one went on the right hand upon the wall toward the dung gate: And after them

went Hoshaiah, and half of the princes of Judah, And Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam, Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, And certain of the priests' sons with trumpets; namely, Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph: And his brethren, Shemaiah, and Azarael, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethaneel, and Judah, Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God, and Ezra the scribe before them. And at the fountain gate, which was over against them, they went up by the stairs of the city of David, at the going up of the wall, above the house of David, even unto the water gate eastward. And the other company of them that gave thanks went over against them, and I after them, and the half of the people upon the wall, from beyond the tower of the furnaces even unto the broad wall;

Numbers 12:31–38

Nehemiah divided the people into two companies. One company took their places on the wall. Another went in the opposite direction, going north. Both gave thanks, sang songs, and played instruments. "Even if you finish your wall, if a fox walks on top of it, it will collapse," Tobiah had predicted (see Nehemiah 4:3). How wrong he was, for here we see the wall supporting an entire parade.

Nehemiah 12:39–43

And from above the gate of Ephraim, and above the old gate, and above the fish gate, and the tower of Hananeel, and the tower of Meah, even unto the sheep gate: and they stood still in the prison gate. So stood the two companies of them that gave thanks in the house of God, and I, and the half of the rulers with me: And the priests; Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Michaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; And Maaseiah, and Shemaiah, and Eleazar, and Uzzi, and Jehohanan, and Malchijah, and Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang loud, with Jezrahiah their overseer. Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the

wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.

The joy of Jerusalem was heard. The work of Nehemiah, the comforter, had come to completion. No wonder there was such joy that even from a great distance, one could hear the celebration.

Nehemiah 12:44–47
And at that time were some appointed over the chambers for the treasures, for the offerings, for the firstfruits, and for the tithes, to gather into them out of the fields of the cities the portions of the law for the priests and Levites: for Judah rejoiced for the priests and for the Levites that waited. And both the singers and the porters kept the ward of their God, and the ward of the purification, according to the commandment of David, and of Solomon his son. For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God. And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel, and in the days of Nehemiah, gave the portions of the singers and the porters, every day his portion: and they sanctified holy things unto the Levites; and the Levites sanctified them unto the children of Aaron.

I wish the book ended here because there is dedication, joy, showering the priests and Levites with gifts, and great gladness. Yet, if it ended here, it wouldn't be real. Life doesn't end on a celebration. There are challenges before us. You can have the most fantastic experience in the Lord, you can be blessed by the Lord one day and face a huge challenge the next. In this life, there is always something facing you. So in chapter 13, we see Brother Nehemiah face to face with a series of problems . . .



13

Nehemiah 13:1–3
On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the

people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever; Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing. Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.

Reading the Law, the Jews realized that the Ammonites and Moabites were not to be a part of their congregation, so they sent them on their way.

Nehemiah 13:4
And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, was allied unto Tobiah:

Through marriage, the priest was allied to Tobiah. Tobiah was an Ammonite.

Nehemiah 13:5, 6
And he had prepared for him a great chamber, where aforetime they laid the meat offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil, which was commanded to be given to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters; and the offerings of the priests. But in all this time was not I at Jerusalem: for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king:

Nehemiah was on a leave of absence. As promised, he had returned to Babylon to talk to the king (2:6). In his absence, Eliashib, the priest, had given Tobiah a room in the temple. And we can find ourselves doing the same thing. That is, we experience renewal, excitement, and revival, and then slowly but surely, we find ourselves compromising, returning to our old ways, making room for sin.

Nehemiah 13:7, 8

And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber.

Like Nehemiah, the Holy Spirit comes on the scene of our lives to convict us and save us from disaster.

Nehemiah 13:9
Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers: and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense.

Notice that Nehemiah didn't pray about this. He simply said, "This is wrong. We're neither going to compromise with Tobiah nor seek to control him." We are not to try to win victory over sin or compromise with sin." As Ephesians 4:22 says, we are simply to cast it off.

Nehemiah 13:10–13
And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field. Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place. Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries. And I made treasurers over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah: and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah: for they were counted faithful, and their office was to distribute unto their brethren.

In response to Nehemiah's question, the people loosened their purse strings so that the Levites could return to do the work they were called to do.

Nehemiah 13:14

Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof.

After dealing with the compromise and negligence of the people, here Nehemiah prays. "I thought we were to pray first," you might say. We absolutely are. But there are certain situations we need to deal with suddenly and decisively. When my daughter, Christy, was a toddler, if she walked into the street, it wouldn't have been God's will that I should have fallen to my knees, saying, "Father, be with Christy." No, His will was that I grab her! So, too, there come times in our lives when we must deal with sin and evil quickly and radically. I think far too much gets by in our Christian life because we are reluctant or reticent to move with authority.

Nehemiah 13:15, 16
In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

The people had broken the promise they had made previously (10:31). They had violated the covenant by selling and working on the Sabbath.

Nehemiah 13:17–20
Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath. And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be

brought in on the sabbath day. So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice.

Nehemiah ordered that the gates of Jerusalem be shut before the Sabbath in order to keep it from being violated by the buying and selling of merchandise.

Nehemiah 13:21
Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath.

When the merchants set up camp right outside the city wall, Nehemiah addressed them as well because it wasn't only what went on in the city, but what was taking place around the city that concerned him. We have an obligation concerning not only that which goes on within our own soul, but outside of the walls. It's not just about me feeling good in my own walk with the Lord, but about helping others outside of myself to do better, to walk more closely to Him.

Nehemiah 13:22 (a)
And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day . . .

After dealing with the problem directly, Nehemiah delegated the care of it to the Levites.

Nehemiah 13:22 (b)
. . . Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.

As he moves from one fire to another, dealing with situations, doing what's needed Nehemiah prays as if to say, "If I'm doing wrong, forgive me, Lord. You know my heart. I'm trying to see Your work carried out."

Nehemiah 13:23, 24
In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people.

When you marry someone who doesn't love the Lord at least as much as you do, your kids will speak a language that will ultimately grieve you. One day, the way they think will break your heart.

Nehemiah 13:25–27
And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?

When Nehemiah saw that the people of God had married the heathens surrounding them, he pulled the hair of some of them to make his point. Interestingly, when Ezra saw this same situation, he didn't pull the hair of the people, but pulled the hair of his own beard (Ezra 9:3). I call this to your attention to remind you that leadership works out differently in different individuals. God puts different personalities in us to work out different kinds of influences through us. This is so freeing. You can be so patient with people, so generous, so giving if you realize we're all made and used differently. Thus, I respect Nehemiah for his authority and Ezra for his humility.

Nehemiah 13:28
And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him

from me.

Joiada, the son of the high priest, had married Sanballat's daughter. Considering the grief Sanballat had brought the people of God, it is no wonder Nehemiah responded the way he did.

Nehemiah 13:29–31
Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites. Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business; And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

After dealing with the sinful situations before him, in Nehemiah's prayer, I hear the words of humility, as if he's saying, "Don't give up on me, Lord." No wonder Nehemiah is remembered throughout eternity as a wonderful example of solid biblical leadership.



ESTHER

Background to Esther

Written in approximately 485 B.C., the Book of Esther falls chronologically between the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, following the seventy-year period the Jews were held captive in Babylon. When the Jews were first carried into captivity, they asked, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Psalm 137:4). But as the years progressed, apparently they gave up singing the Lord's song altogether, for when they were given the opportunity to return to their homeland, only 60,000 of two million returned. Why? They had evidently grown comfortable in the Babylonian empire. They had built houses. They had established businesses. They had learned to sing the song of Babylon.

This is most likely the reason there is no mention of God in the Book of Esther. Indeed, there is no mention of heaven, hell, prayer, or faith, either. Does this mean God wasn't on the scene? No. Esther is the story of the providence of God, the faithfulness of our Father even in light of the faithlessness of His people. Even though His people are faithless, He still cares about them passionately and is committed to them unquestionably.

One of the reasons I love this book so much is because there are times when I, too, feel faithless and weak. And yet, even when I am faithless, God is faithful (2 Timothy 2:13). Even when we relegate Him to the backstage of our lives, He is still there, behind the scenes, for He has promised never to leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

God is the unseen Rudder of the ship of state here in this glorious Book of Esther, not seen, yet still very much in control. We begin in the city of Shushan, the capital of Persia . . .



ESTHER

1

Esther 1:1 (a)
Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus . . .

Ahasuerus is not a name but a title, like Caesar, Emperor, or King. This king's name is Xerxes.

Esther 1:1 (b)–3
. . . (this is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces:) That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace, In the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him:

Xerxes is ready to mount the greatest military invasion in world history. He had gathered two million men from his empire to invade Greece. He would prove to be successful in this invasion, but it would take a great toll on his army and virtually destroy his navy. He would eventually be stopped at Thalmus, where a great upset took place. Had Xerxes been completely successful, world history would be radically different.

Esther 1:4
When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days.

For one hundred and eighty days, Xerxes threw a party to gain support for his upcoming invasion by building a coalition of leaders from all over the empire.

Esther 1:5, 6
And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace; Where were white, green, and blue, hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble: the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black, marble.

The party was eventually opened to include all of the people to come and join. There were hangings of beautiful colors and beds to lodge the guests.

Esther 1:7–11
And they gave them drink in vessels of gold, (the vessels being diverse one from another,) and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king. And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure. Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus. On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on.

In the middle of Xerxes' party, he ordered his queen, *Vashti,* whose name means "beauty," to appear. This command implied immorality, for at the very least she was to unveil her face, which was taboo. The only logical explanation for Xerxes' command is that he had been drinking. Drink is often a catalyst for carnality. One man wisely said, "When wine enters, wisdom exists." How many stories we could tell of people who found themselves in compromising situations that would never have occurred had alcohol not been present.

Esther 1:12
But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him.

Vashti's refusal to come was a radical move, for in that day a woman didn't say no to her husband, let alone to the king.

Esther 1:13–18
Then the king said to the wise men, which knew the times, (for so was the king's manner toward all that knew law and judgment: And the next unto him was Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, which saw the king's face, and which sat the first in the kingdom;) What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains? And Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus. For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not. Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen. Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath.

"We're in trouble now," the princes said to Xerxes. "When word gets out that Vashti disobeyed you, how will we handle our own wives?"

Esther 1:19–22
If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be writ ten among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto

another that is better than she. And when the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire, (for it is great,) all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small. And the saying pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the word of Memucan: For he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house, and that it should be published according to the language of every people.

For her insubordination, Vashti would no longer be queen. When this decree was published throughout the empire, the princes were sure that no wife would dare disobey her husband.

Letters went out—the law of the Medes and Persians—which was irrevocable that every wife must totally submit to her husband in every situation. Wives are to submit to their husbands, and yet your submission to your husband is always secondary to your submission to the Word of the Lord.



2 **Esther 2:1**
After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remem bered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her.

There's a three-year gap between chapters 1 and 2, during which time Xerxes launched his invasion. He returned a battered, beaten man without even a wife to console him.

Esther 2:2–4
Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king: And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the

house of the women unto the custody of Hege the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women; and let their things for purification be given them: And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so.

It was decided that there was to be a beauty contest to find a new queen.

Esther 2:5
Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite;

Mordecai means "little man," but this particular little man would prove to be of giant stature in the history of God's people.

Esther 2:6, 7
Who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.

*Hadassah*means "myrtle tree." Hadassah's name was changed to Esther, which means "star" This beautiful star, Esther, was raised by her older cousin after her parents died. Her beauty was legendary.

Esther 2:8
So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women.

According to Josephus and tradition, Mordecai was determined to hide Esther. But this was impossible because her beauty was so well known.

Esther 2:9
And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her, out of the king's house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women.

Why did Heger, the keeper of the women, favor Esther? Because God was working behind the scenes, controlling the situation.

Esther 2:10
Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it.

Per Mordecai's instruction, Esther didn't reveal that she was Jew.

Esther 2:11
And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her.

Mordecai followed Esther's progress day by day. More importantly, so did the Lord.

Esther 2:12 (a)
Now when every maid's turn was come to go in to king Ahasuerus, after that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of the women, (for so were the days of their purifications accomplished . . .

The women spent twelve months preparing themselves in order to make a good impression on the king. Do we do the same for our King?

Esther 2:12 (b)
. . . to wit, six months with oil of myrrh . . .

Used in the embalming process, myrrh speaks of death. It was one of the gifts brought to Jesus by the wisemen because it spoke prophetically of the fact that He would die in order to fulfill God's grand plan of redemption.

How willing are we to saturate ourselves with the oil of myrrh, to die to ourselves, to lose our own lives in order to find our lives in our King?

Esther 2:12 (c)
. . . and six months with sweet odours, and with other things for the purifying of the women;)

The sweet odors, or spices, speak of a pleasant fragrance. Throughout Scripture, that which the Lord finds to be a sweet savour is always associated with sacrifice (see Genesis 8:21; Exodus 29:25; Leviticus 1:9). How can we present a sweet savour to the Lord? By placing our flesh, our self, our ambitions, our own agenda, on the altar. How many of us can truly say that our passion and our priority is not to be used *by* the Lord, but simply to be a sweet-smelling fragrance *to* Him?

When God gave Moses the dimensions of the tabernacle as the place to worship Him and fellowship with Him, I'm sure Moses thought he wasn't hearing right. One hundred fifty feet by seventy-five feet for three million people? Surely they wouldn't fit. But the Lord knew that a building that size would be sufficient for the number of people who would sacrifice of their time and energy to make Him a priority in their lives. The most important ministry of all is not ministry *for* the Lord, but ministry *to* Him, and it's one we all can do.

Esther 2:13, 14
Then thus came every maiden unto the king; whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house. In the evening she went, and on the morrow she returned into the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, which kept the

concubines: she came in unto the king no more, except the king delighted in her, and that she were called by name.

After twelve months of a beauty treatment of oils and perfume, the women would appear before the king one at a time. The one who pleased him would be the new queen.

Esther 2:15, 16
Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her. So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

Esther won the beauty contest.

Esther 2:17, 18
And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti. Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the state of the king.

Esther was chosen as queen because God was working in the shadows, not seen directly, but controlling the situation absolutely.

Esther 2:19–21
And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai sat in the king's gate. Esther had not yet shewed her kindred nor her people; as Mordecai had charged her: for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him. In those days, while Mordecai sat in the

king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus.

In his continued effort to watch over his niece, Mordecai overheard an assassination plot against Ahasuerus. I suggest this is no more a coincidence than Paul's nephew hearing of the attempt of a band of Jews to take Paul's life (Acts 23). God had bigger plans for Paul so He spared his life through his nephew. God had big plans for His people, so, as we will see, He spared their lives through Mordecai.

Esther 2:22, 23
And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name. And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out; therefore they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.

Mordecai reported the assassination plot. Yet, although the culprits were hung, Mordecai wasn't rewarded or even acknowledged. Maybe he thought, "What a gyp. Here I do something wonderful, something noble, and I don't get any thanks. God must surely have forgotten me." If he did indeed think this, it was only because he couldn't have foreseen God's impeccably perfect timing.



3

Esther 3:1
After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him.

Esther is now queen. Mordecai has rescued the king's life. And now another thread is woven into the fabric of this story, for it is in chapter 3 that Haman, the Hitler of the Old Testament, appears. Haman was a descendent of Agag, king of the Amalekites. The Amalekites were always warring against

the Israelites and represent the flesh that continually wars against our souls. The Lord told Saul to destroy every single one because the flesh must be destroyed unequivocally. Saul killed most of them, but we read in 1 Samuel 15 that he spared Agag. "What damage can one Amalekite do?" Saul must have reasoned. Enter Haman, the result of a failure to deal decisively with the flesh.

Oh, Lord, You don't mean for me to give up every one of those sins, do You? I can save one Agag, can't I? Lord, isn't that kind of legalistic, kind of stringent? Let's be reasonable."

"They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts," Paul said to the Galatians (5:24).

"Reckon yourselves to be dead unto sin," he instructed the Romans (6:11).

We follow Paul's admonitions—sometimes. But there's that one thing, that one activity, that one person we think isn't that big a deal. Our Father, however, wants every aspect of the flesh destroyed not because He's legalistic but because He sees the Hamans that will inevitably come, bringing much harm and sorrow with them.

Esther 3:2–6

And all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed, and reverenced Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence. Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment? Now it came to pass, when they spake daily unto him, and he hearkened not unto them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand: for he had told them that he was a Jew. And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had shewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai.

Haman's got everything going for him, but there's one Jew who won't bow to him. Incensed, he becomes obsessed with destroying not only Mordecai, but all of the Jews.

Esther 3:7
In the first month, that is, the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar.

By "drawing straws," the day the Jews would be annihilated was determined, a day in the month equivalent to our March.

Esther 3:8, 9
And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries.

Ten thousand talents of silver is equivalent to thirty million dollars. Where would Haman get this money? No doubt from the spoils of the Jews themselves (3:13), which shows how successful they had become in Babylon.

Esther 3:10, 11
And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy. And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee.

Throughout history, there has been a concerted effort to destroy God's people. Pharaoh tried to annihilate them in Egypt. Haman tried to annihilate

them in Persia. Herod tried to annihilate them in the days of Christ. Hitler tried to annihilate them in our own day. Why? After failing to destroy the nation that was to give birth to Christ when He came as a babe to Bethlehem, is Satan now attempting to destroy the place where He will rule in His Second Coming? I believe so. I believe if a skeptic truly studies Jewish history, he'll become a believer, for not only will he see the repeated attempts to destroy God's people, but also His miraculous power to preserve them.

Esther 3:12–14
Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and there was written according to all that Haman had commanded unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written, and sealed with the king's ring. And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey. The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, that they should be ready against that day.

March thirteenth was to be the day of annihilation.

Esther 3:15 (a)
The posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace. And the king and Haman sat down to drink . . .

The order to destroy the Jews having been sent, the king and Haman sat down to drink, which is where the problems began in the first place (1:7–12).

Esther 3:15 (b)
. . . but the city Shushan was perplexed.

It is little wonder that the entire city was perplexed. The Jews who didn't go to Jerusalem when they had the opportunity realized they were destined for destruction. Even the Persians in the city would have been fearful of armed mobs with license to not only kill but to keep the spoils for themselves.

God, however, was neither perplexed nor afraid. He was still on the throne, still in complete control. The Jews in Shushan wouldn't hear His prophets like the Jews in Jerusalem would. They wouldn't celebrate feasts like those in Jerusalem would. They wouldn't experience the glory and joy at the completion of the wall or temple. But even though they would miss out on those glorious events, God would not turn His back on even His weak-faithed children.

"Oh, no! I'm not going to make it," we cry.

God, however, says, "I'm in control. I know your frame, that you are dust (Psalm 103:14). And even when you're faltering and lacking faith, I will never turn My back on you. I will never leave or forsake you. I will be at work providing and protecting in ways that will simply amaze you."

As Esther's story continues, we will see the faithfulness of God breaking through—how good He will be to these Jews in Babylon, and how good He is to you and me, too.



4 Seventeen years before the story before us began, the Jews were given a golden opportunity by king Cyrus when he told them they were free to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, restore the worship, and renew the nation. And yet amazingly only a handful of the Jews took up the offer to step up and move out. Although approximately 60,000 responded to the offer, the rest, millions of Jews, stayed in Babylon.

Why?

Perhaps some stayed because of fear and anxiety about leaving the homes they had lived in for seventy years. Others may have been overcome by

lethargy at the thought of rebuilding the city. But for most, it was no doubt a question of prosperity. To leave that behind didn't make sense to the overwhelming majority.

Even so, God didn't forsake them.

> Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me
>
> Isaiah 49:15, 16

"You may think I have forgotten about you," the Lord says, "but that's impossible. Can a nursing mother forget she has a baby? And even if that were possible, I will never forget you because your names are engraved on My own hands."

One of the overarching themes, one of the real reasons for the Book of Esther is to let you know that if you're His child, God will never forget you. Your name is written in the palm of His hand.

> **Esther 4:1–3**
> **When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry; And came even before the king's gate: for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.**

Understandably there is mourning and weeping, wailing and fasting concerning the decree to annihilate the Jews. But there's no mention of any praying. This is what happens when we're not where we should be, when we're in a backslidden condition. The price of not praying when I'm able to pray is not being able to pray when I need to pray. It's not that the Lord turns His back on me. It's just that I'm out of shape spiritually.

Esther 4:4
So Esther's maids and her chamberlains came and told it her. Then was the queen exceedingly grieved; and she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take away his sackcloth from him: but he received it not.

Mordecai was not interested in a cover-up. He needed a cure.

Esther 4:5–11
Then called Esther for Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her, and gave him a commandment to Mordecai, to know what it was, and why it was. So Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city, which was before the king's gate. And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them. Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to shew it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her, and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people. And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai. Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai; All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.

To save her honor, Vashti lost her crown. To save her people, Esther risked losing her head because the law of the land stated that whoever approached the king without an invitation risked being put to death.

How thankful I am that our King welcomes us into His court at any time. "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden," He says (Matthew

11:28). Therefore, we can come boldly unto His throne of grace. When? Anytime we have need (Hebrews 4:16).

Esther 4:12, 13
And they told to Mordecai Esther's words. Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews.

"If the Jews are destroyed, you will be, too," Mordecai said to Esther. And the same is true of us. As the body of Christ, we're linked together. We tend to associate only with those who are doing well. In reality, we ought to care equally about the person who is doing poorly because even the weakest among us affects the rest of us (1 Corinthians 12:22–25).

Esther 4:14 (a)
For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed . . .

"Even if you choose not to step out, deliverance *will* come," Mordecai said to Esther. "But you'll miss a glorious opportunity. And you'll be destroyed in the process."

If you're not interested in God's work, if you'd rather complain about your difficult situation or cruise in your easy one, God will still get His work done, but you'll perish, not physically, but the vibrancy of your walk, the joy of service, the opportunity and blessing of being used will be absent.

Esther 4:14 (b)
. . . and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

"Maybe you've come into this place as queen of Persia for such a time as this," Mordecai said to Esther. And the same is true of you, dear saint. You are where you are because God is in the shadows, steering the ship of your life. God is in control and He's placed you in your location for such a time as

this because there are people for you to minister to, lives for you to touch, and work for you to do. Nothing is accidental to the child of God. Even if your situation seems difficult, the Lord has you right where He wants you to be. He has you right where you are "for such a time as this," for the sake of the kingdom.

Esther 4:15, 16
Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.

The story is told that, after receiving some advice from Augustine, a young man asked him why he was telling him to stay away from this and to avoid that. "I have to live, don't I?"

"Do you?" Augustine is said to have replied.

"I die daily," Paul said (1 Corinthians 15:31).

"If I perish, I perish," Esther concluded.

"If any man come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me," Jesus declared (Matthew 16:24).

Esther 4:17
So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

"If I perish, I perish. If I go down, I go down. If it's such a time for this that I exist, I'm going to go for it." What are we afraid of? That someone won't like us, that someone will make fun of us? So what? They're doing that anyway! May we be those who share Esther's commitment and clarity.



5 **Esther 5:1–3**
Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal

apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house. And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre. Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom.

Proverbs 21:1 says the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. As Esther is granted access to the king, we see again that God is behind the scenes, setting things up, working things out.

Esther 5:4
And Esther answered, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him.

Esther risked her life to invite the king to dinner. Our King, on the other hand, laid down His life so that we might dine with Him forever (Revelation 19:9).

Esther 5:5, 6
Then the king said, Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther hath said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared. And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed.

Notice that Esther was to make her request at the banquet of the wine. I have found that the place I can most freely make my request and pour out my heart is at the Lord's Table as I hold the wine of His blood in my hand for it is there that I am reminded once again of how much He loves me.

Esther 5:7, 8

Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and my request is; If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to morrow as the king hath said.

What's happening here? Twice Esther is given the opportunity to say what's on her heart, but it seems as if she hedges both times. More than likely, however, Esther sensed the timing to make her request was not right. There is a moment of the miraculous, a moment when the time is right to move in the authority and power of God. We have the power, for example, to pray for the sick and to see them restored. The power has been given to us, but we have to wait until the authority is also present. In other words, two components need to come together: power and permission.

When Peter and John saw the man that had been lame since birth, no doubt they had walked past him dozens if not hundreds of times previously. But this time, something was different. They had received the power of the Spirit, and also must have sensed it was the time to say, "In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk" (Acts 3).

I think many times we, as believers, mistakenly think we can randomly move in the arena of the miraculous. We have been given the power, yes, but we must wait for the authority, the timing that's right. Esther seemingly understood this.

Esther 5:9 (a)
Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart . . .

Haman thought he had hit the jackpot. After all, he had been invited to two private parties hosted by no less than Esther, the queen. No wonder he left happy.

Esther 5:9 (b)
. . . but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai.

Haman had just been in the presence of the king and queen. He had a lot going for him. But he was immediately incensed because a "little man" named Mordecai didn't acknowledge him.

I believe you can take an accurate measure of someone's character by the size of the things that bug him. What does it take to irritate you? We're the bride of Christ. We're welcomed into the presence of the King. Why, then, are we so quickly and easily bugged when someone doesn't acknowledge us or when we experience a situation that doesn't go our way?

Esther 5:10–13
Nevertheless Haman refrained himself: and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife. And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to morrow am I invited unto her also with the king. Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.

"Even though I am second in command, I can't enjoy my riches or power because Mordecai won't bow down to me," Haman said.

Esther 5:14
Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made.

"Curse God and die," Job's wife advised him (Job 2:9). Job wisely resisted this advice and he was rewarded (Job 42:10).

"Build a gallows tall enough to make a public spectacle of Mordecai," Haman's wife and friends said. And Haman foolishly listened—to his own peril.



Esther 6:1, 2

6 On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus.

As Xerxes reads that Mordecai actually saved his life, it becomes clear to us why Esther didn't sense permission to make her request before this.

Esther 6:3–5

And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him. And the king said, Who is in the court? Now Haman was come into the outward court of the king's house, to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in.

Before Haman could bring his request to hang Mordecai, the king had something else to talk to him about . . .

Esther 6:6–9

So Haman came in. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour? Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself? And Haman answered the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on

horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.

"This is great!" thought Haman. "At this time tomorrow, I'll be riding the king's horse, wearing the king's crown and robes, while people proclaim how wonderful I am."

Esther 6:10 (a)
Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew . . .

Wouldn't you have loved to see the look on Haman's face at this moment?

Esther 6:10 (b)–12
. . . that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou has spoken. Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour. And Mordecai came again to the king's gate. But Haman hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered.

Haman knows he's in big trouble.

Esther 6:13, 14
And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him. And while they were yet talking with him, came the king's chamberlains, and hasted to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared.

Whereas previously, Haman's wife and friends told him to build a gallows to hang Mordecai, here they realize it was actually Haman who was going down.



7 Esther 7:1–4

So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom. Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.

At last, Esther made the king aware of the plight of both herself and her people.

Esther 7:5–8 (a)

Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so? And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen. And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath went into the palace garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king. Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the ban quet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was . . .

Evidently, Haman was so afraid, he fell atop Esther, right as the king walked in.

Esther 7:8 (b)
. . . Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.

In those days, a Persian king would never look into the eyes of a man about to die. In other words, Haman received the death sentence on the spot.

Esther 7:9, 10 (a)
And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon . . .

In Proverbs 26:27, we read: "Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him." That's exactly what happened to Haman, for it was he himself who had ordered the construction of the gallows.

"Don't be deceived," Paul writes. "What a man sows, that shall he reap" (see Galatians 6:7).

Esther 7:10 (b)
. . . So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.

Our God has an incredible way of taking what Satan means for evil in our lives and turning it around for good. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. Years later, Joseph found himself prime minister, second only to Pharaoh. His brothers came before him, begging for food. And Joseph revealed his identity. When his brothers reacted in fear, Joseph said, "Don't fear. You meant it for evil, but God has turned it for good to save many people alive this day" (see Genesis 50:20).

That's a promise for you, as well. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD." (Isaiah 54:17). Any attempt of

Haman to come against you and destroy you will not prosper. It might seem like it's going to. The gallows might be built. The noose might be readied. And you might think it's all over for you. But if you're a child of His, God will miraculously and faithfully turn it for good.

Adolph Hitler destroyed six million Jews, and yet what did God do? He turned it for good to create what otherwise never would have happened: World sentiment to allow the establishment of a nation called Israel.

I think of Satan putting Jesus Christ on the gallows of the Cross thinking that he had won. But God turned the tables, for it was Satan who was defeated that day. Only God can do that.



8 Esther 8:1
On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews' enemy unto Esther the queen. And Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he was unto her.

Esther finally revealed to the king that Mordecai was the one who raised her.

Esther 8:2
And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

Haman used to be second in the kingdom. His ring of authority was now given to Mordecai.

Esther 8:3
And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews.

The death decree against the Jews was still in effect because the law of the Medes and the Persians was irrevocable.

Esther 8:4–6
Then the king held out the golden sceptre toward Esther. So Esther arose, and stood before the king, And said, If it please the king, and if I have found favour in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king's provinces: For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?

The Persian government was a constitutional monarchy. That is, the king had to obey the laws of the land. One of the laws was the law of the Medes and Persians which said once a law was established, it couldn't be reversed —not even by the king himself. That's why King Darius couldn't keep Daniel out of the lions' den even though he did everything he could to do so (Daniel 6:14).

Esther 8:7, 8
Then the king Ahasuerus said unto Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows, because he laid his hand upon the Jews. Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring: for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse.

The king said to Mordecai, "You've got my ring. We can't reverse the first decree, but you can make another one." So the ball was in Mordecai's court.

Esther 8:9–13

Then were the king's scribes called at that time in the third month, that is, the month Sivan, on the three and twentieth day thereof; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded unto the Jews, and to the lieutenants, and the deputies and rulers of the provinces which are from India unto Ethiopia, an hundred twenty and seven provinces, unto every province according to the writing thereof, and unto every people after their language, and to the Jews according to their writing, and according to their language. And he wrote in the king Ahasuerus' name, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by posts on horseback, and riders on mules, camels, and young dromedaries: Wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey, Upon one day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, namely, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar. The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, and that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

Mordecai's decree stated that, although the death decree still stood, the Jews had a right to band together and defend themselves. We have a decree issued against us that reads: "The soul that sinneth shall surely die" (Ezekiel 18:20). But there has been a second decree issued. That is, once we recognize that we are sinners, we can have eternal life through Jesus Christ. The wages of sin is still death, *but* the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:23). Because we're sinners, we have to die, but because we're saved, we are born again. That's the grand news of the gospel.

Esther 8:14–17 (a)
So the posts that rode upon mules and camels went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment. And the decree was given at Shushan the palace. And Mordecai went out

from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple: and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour. And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day . . .

Hearing the second decree, joy, gladness, and celebration erupted within the Jewish community, and yet there would still be a battle on the thirteenth of March. The second decree didn't keep them *from* the heat of the battle. But it gave them great hope *in* the battle. And that's the way it is for us. The Lord doesn't promise to keep us from the battle, from the difficulty, from the trial. But He gives us great hope in the battle, the difficulty, the trial because He gives us the promise of His presence (Hebrews 13:5). When the war is raging, the fire burning, and the storm brewing, we've all discovered that the Lord is with us in a most profound and special way.

Esther 8:17 (b)
. . . And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.

Even in the face of coming battles, there was joy and gladness and many became Jews as a result. Why would the Lord have us go through battles and hard times? One reason is for others to see the reality of Jesus in us and be drawn to Him.



9

Esther 9:1, 2
Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, (though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them;) The Jews gathered

themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people.

No wonder fear gripped the hearts of the would-be attackers as they saw the Jews standing together with hope, standing together in the spirit of expectation. God behind the scenes was very much there. Although they weren't in Jerusalem where they could have been, where they should have been, God shows His mercy, faithfulness, and grace. Even though they weren't in the best place, God would still be faithful to His people.

Esther 9:3–5
And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater. Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them.

How are our enemies—Satan himself, demonic powers—defeated? With the stroke of the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. As we read in Judges concerning Eglon, as the sword went in, the dirt came out (3:22). How shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed to the Word (Psalm 119:9). As the sword goes in, the dirt goes out and our enemy is defeated.

Esther 9:6
And in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men.

In the capital city alone, five hundred of the enemy went down.

Esther 9:7–10 (a)
And Parshandatha, and Dalphon, and Aspatha, And Poratha, and Adalia, and Aridatha, And Parmashta, and Arisai, and Aridai, and

Vajezatha, The ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, slew they . . .

It's not just Haman who goes down, but his sons die, too. If we choose to indulge our flesh, to plunge into sin, so often we will have calculated what we think will be the cost. The problem is, the cost will never be what we calculated. It will always be greater than what we anticipated. Sin affects others in heartbreaking ways.

Esther 9:10 (b)
. . . but on the spoil laid they not their hand.

According to Esther 8:11, the Jews could have taken spoil. But they didn't. They weren't fighting for material goods. They fought simply to save their lives.

Esther 9:11–13
On that day the number of those that were slain in Shushan the palace was brought before the king. And the king said unto Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the palace, and the ten sons of Haman; what have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? now what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: or what is thy request further? and it shall be done. Then said Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan to do to morrow also according unto this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows.

Esther asked that the Jews be given an additional day to defend themselves against any who wanted to do them in. She also asked that Haman's ten sons be hanged from the gallows as a visual reminder of what happens to those who attack God's people.

Esther 9:14–17
And the king commanded it so to be done: and the decree was given at Shushan; and they hanged Haman's ten sons. For the

Jews that were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew three hundred men at Shushan; but on the prey they laid not their hand. But the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of their foes seventy and five thousand, but they laid not their hands on the prey, On the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of the same rested they, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.

The day of battle came and they were victorious. Some 75,000 were killed outside of the capital city and three hundred inside. The enemy was soundly defeated.

Esther 9:18–26
But the Jews that were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day thereof; and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. Therefore the Jews of the villages, that dwelt in the unwalled towns, made the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another. And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, both nigh and far, To stablish this among them, that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, As the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day: that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor. And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them; Because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them; But when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letters that his

wicked device, which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. Therefore for all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come unto them,

"This day must be celebrated every year," Mordecai declared. And indeed it is, for to this day, the Feast of Purim, named after the lots that were cast by Haman to determine the day the Jews would be destroyed, is celebrated from March thirteenth to fifteenth. On the thirteenth day, the Jews fast, in commemoration of the battle that would take place. On the fourteenth, people in the outlying villages celebrate. On the fifteenth, celebration breaks out in Jerusalem. The kids dress up in costumes, some as Esther, some as Mordecai, and some as Haman. They pass out candy and cookies, give gifts, and read the story of Esther.

Esther 9:27–32
The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing, and according to their appointed time every year; And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed. Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of Purim. And he sent the letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth, To confirm these days of Purim in their times appointed, according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had decreed for themselves and for their seed, the matters of the fastings and their cry. And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book.

The Feast of Purim was established, a glorious, wonderful celebration.



10 Esther 10:1, 2

And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea. And all the acts of his power and of his might, and the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai, whereunto the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?

The implication is that the kingdom expanded under Mordecai's leadership as prime minister.

Esther 10:3
For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed.

Mordecai, a type of the Spirit, sought prosperity and peace for the people of God. Haman, a type of the flesh, ended up hung up and done in because God was ever on the scene, watching over, blessing, protecting, and providing for His people. The story ends with the people of God experiencing peace and prosperity, with Mordecai in the place of prominence and power and with Haman hanging.

The path to peace and prosperity remains the same today: with the Spirit as prime minister, directing the affairs of the state of your soul, and with the flesh, like Haman, crucified and reckoned dead (Romans 6:11). Romans 8:6 says to be carnally minded is death but to be Spiritually minded is life and peace.

The Jews were destined for annihilation, but ended up with a brand new celebration. Haman was top dog, but ended up a dead duck. Mordecai was on death row, but now is prime time. God, in a most amazing way to an undeserving people turned the tables. Will He do that for me? Will He do that

for you? If we humble ourselves and cry out to Him, the story of Esther tells us the answer is a resounding YES!



JOB

Background to Job

Although the Book of Job deals with the problem of pain and the mystery of misery, the answers we so often desire concerning pain or problems will not necessarily be answered directly in this book. This is how it must be for in Isaiah 55:8 and 9, God declares, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

Translator J. B. Phillips explained it this way: If God was small enough for me to figure out, He wouldn't be big enough for me to worship."

God is so beyond us that there are certain things we won't be able to understand this side of eternity. That's why in Deuteronomy 29:29, we read that the secret things belong to the Lord. The Book of Job, however, does give us insights and inspiration that stir my heart and enlighten my thoughts in a way that is helpful and practical concerning what we should do in times of trouble and days of despair. I pray you'll find the same true for you.

Job is probably the oldest book in the Bible, predating even the Pentateuch. That would explain why there is no mention of the Lord, Israel, or the temple. More than likely, it was written near the year 2000 B.C. This would make it not only the oldest book in the Bible, but one of the oldest books in human history. I find this intriguing because one of the oldest books in the Bible, one of the oldest books in human history, deals with the question we still ask to this day: Why do bad things happen to good people?

"Why do bad things happen to good people?" she asked. I was in Denver International Airport, ready to catch a plane to return to Portland. But the flight had been overbooked and I was about to be bumped.

"I really have to get back," I said to the ticket agent. "It's Saturday night and I have five services to preach tomorrow morning."

"The only available seat is in first class. Would you mind if we upgraded you to first class?" he asked.

That is why, instead of making my way to the back of the plane as I boarded, I settled into one of the luxurious leather seats just inside the door. With the seat next to me empty, I felt doubly thankful for the extra space until, at

the very last moment, a heavy-set woman walked in and sat in the seat next to mine.

"Tell me," she said, "are you married?"

Taking the photo book I always carry with me from my backpack, I proudly showed her pictures of my wife, Tammy, my sons Peter-John and Ben, and my daughters, Jessie, Christy, and Mary. Then I saw tears running down her cheeks.

"I'm sorry if I've offended you," I said.

"It's not that," she said. "You're just so lucky. You have a beautiful family. All I've ever wanted was to have a family. I know I would be a wonderful wife and mother. But I'm getting older and I know the chances of my getting married are slim. But you wouldn't understand."

"Maybe I can," I said. "Years ago, my wife and I were on our way to a day of skiing when our car hit a patch of ice, spun around, and hit a redwood tree. The next thing I recall, I was crawling down the highway one hundred yards or so from the car on my hands and knees. I don't remember anything after that except being in the ambulance with an attendant putting something in my arm.

"How's my wife?" I asked him.

"She's ok," he hesitantly said.

"No, she's not." I said. And then I said, "Yes, she is. She's in heaven."

He looked at me with piercing intensity and decided to tell me the truth.

"You're right," he said. "She's no longer with us."

At that point, I heard what I believe to this day to be an audible voice saying, "I know the thoughts I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil to give you a future and a hope." I would discover later it was a verse in Scripture: Jeremiah 29:11.

"Wait a minute," the woman next to me said. "You said you're a pastor. I don't understand why, if there is a God, He would take your wife and leave you with three little kids. Why do bad things happen to good people?"

Why do bad things happen to good people? The Book of Job gives us part of the answer.

"God is good," I said. "And what He did for me, He'll do for you." I told her that after I got out of the hospital, I took my kids to the beach. I hugged my son, Peter-John, who was five at the time, and said, "Peter, Mommy's not going to be with us because she's in heaven."

"Wow!" he said. "Can she fly? Can she see us, Daddy?"

Jessie, who was almost three just looked at me with her great big eyes and said, "Oh, no. Oh, no. Oh, no."

Christy, only one, was too young to understand anything.

I came back a few days later after that trip and was sitting in the front room of my house. It was ten-thirty or eleven on Saturday night. I would preach the next morning. There were piles of laundry all around me. And I just cried like a baby.

"Lord, why?" I asked.

And the Lord spoke to me a second time in a way I'll never forget. He said, "Jonny, I promised you a peace that passes understanding. Have I given that to you these past couple of days?"

"Yes, Lord," I said. "You've given me a peace that passes understanding."

"Then never seek a peace that comes *from* understanding," He said.

"Over the years, the Lord has continued to give me abundant peace and amazing blessings. Three years later, He brought me a beautiful, fantastic wife and two more kids. I'm blessed indeed," I said to my seatmate. "And God will do the same for you. I don't know how. But you watch, you wait, you'll see. He'll give you peace that passes understanding. I guarantee it."

"I'd like that," she said.

So I said, "Let's pray."

She received Jesus in her heart somewhere over Salt Lake City.

She eventually returned to Boston, where she began a ministry to single women that continues, as far as I know, to this day.

"I know the thoughts I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and hope," the Lord said.

So how thrilled I was, as I sat there in the sanctuary that Monday morning. You see, the previous night, sitting at the dinner table with my daughters, sixteen-year-old Jessie and fourteen-year-old Christy, I said, "I don't want you girls to simply marry a Christian. I want you to marry a Christian who is stronger than you, who can lead you in the ways of the Lord—not just some guy who sits in the pew, but a man who is stronger in the Lord than you are."

This would be no small task, for, even at sixteen, Jessie had an incredibly strong faith and deep walk with the Lord.

“Where am I going to find that man?” Jessie joked. “If I went to a good church, I might have a chance!”

Overhearing the conversation, Peter-John chuckled.

The next morning found me at morning worship—a time when the sanctuary was open from 6:00–7:00 each morning so that people could spend time with the Lord in communion, praise, and prayer before going to work or school. When one of my assistant pastors invited people to lead out in prayer, Jessie stood up.

“Lord, I want to thank You for the promise that You know the thoughts You think toward us, thoughts of peace and not of evil to give us a future and a hope,” she prayed.

Having never shared that verse and what it meant to me either publicly or with my family, I was delighted. “Lord, You’ve blessed me so much with a daughter who knows Your Word and loves You passionately, with kids who are walking with You and serving You wholeheartedly, and with a wife who is a perfect match for me.”

After her prayer, Jessie caught my eye and gave me a wink and a “thumbs-up” as she headed off to school.

Ten minutes later, one of my assistant pastors said, “Jon, there’s been a wreck.”

I jumped in my car, raced down the hill, and into the house. Peter-John came out and grabbed me. He was eighteen at the time.

“Dad, dad, dad,” he cried. “She found the Man. She found the Man.”

I knew what he meant, for the night before, I had told Jessie, “Wait until you find the man that can lead you.”

We headed to where the wreck had taken place and discovered that Jessie had been taken to heaven via the exact injury that had taken her mother. The autopsies were virtually identical.

The last words any of us heard from Jessie were: “I know the thoughts I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil to give you a future and a hope.”

The Book of Job deals with just that, for uniquely in this book, God says, “I know what I’m doing.”

Alfred Lord Tennyson called the Book of Job the greatest poem of ancient or modern times. Author Victor Hugo called it the greatest masterpiece of the

human mind. Essayist Thomas Carlyle declared that there is nothing written in the Bible or out of it of the literary merit of the Book of Job.

The book itself divides into three basic sections. Section 1 consists of chapters 1 and 2 which deal with the dilemma *of* Job. The second section, chapters 3 through 37, deals with the debate *about* Job. In the final section, chapters 38 through 42, we see deliverance *for* Job. My prayer is that this wouldn't be only an academic, intellectual, or theological study. My prayer is that the Book of Job might equip you and inspire you to say, "Lord, whatever You choose to do, we trust You implicitly and completely."



JOB

1

Job 1:1 (a)
There was a man in the land of Uz . . .

We can't be certain where Uz was. It is believed to have been somewhere in the desert area of modern-day Syria. But that is only speculation.

Job 1:1 (b)
. . . whose name was Job . . .

We don't exactly know who Job was historically. It could be that he is the Joban mentioned in Genesis 10. If that be so, he would be a contemporary of Abraham, the patriarch, and that would place him around the year 2000 B.C. *Job* literally means "hated." Indeed, Job would be one who was hated by Satan, yet loved by God.

Job 1:1 (c)
. . . and that man was perfect . . .

We may not know exactly where Uz was or who Job was, but we do know he was perfect. This doesn't mean he was sinless. It means he was spiritually mature (see 2 Samuel 22:33; 1 Kings 8:61; Psalm 101:2).

Job 1:1 (d)
. . . and upright . . .

Job was a straight arrow, a man of integrity.

Job 1:1 (e)
. . . and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.

Job was truly a good man.

Job 1:2
And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters.

Job had ten kids. Having five kids, I can truly say I am happier than a guy who has five million dollars because a guy with five million dollars wants six! In reality, the psalmist said that children are like arrows. Blessed is the man who has a quiver full of them (127:5). Compared to Job, I have only half a quiver, but it's a full one, indeed. I am blessed.

Job 1:3
His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

Not only was Job's quiver full of kids, but he was wealthy beyond description. He was Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, and Donald Trump all rolled up into one.

Job 1:4 (a)
And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day . . .

"His day" could refer to a birthday. Or it could mean that Job's sons took turns hosting parties.

Job 1:4 (b), 5
. . . and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.

Evidently, Job cared about his children's spiritual welfare so deeply that he offered individual sacrifices on their behalf lest they doubt, ignore, or dishonor God. Lest we think it's tough to get up early and pray blessing on our kids before they go to school, it would do us well to consider what Job did every

day. He had to offer a bull as a burnt offering—kill it, filet it, and sacrifice it—for each one of his sons.

Boston University conducted a study recently in which fathers were told to estimate how much meaningful time they spent with their children on a daily basis. The average father said he spent between forty-five and fifty minutes a day in meaningful time with his kids either individually or collectively. But video cameras and microphones revealed that the actual time the average father spent in meaningful interaction with each of his kids on any given day was *thirty-eight seconds*.

We might think we're good dads. But perhaps we can do better by following the example of Job—sacrificing our morning cup of coffee or newspaper if necessary, getting up a great while before morning if that's what it takes to say, "Lord, bless Benjamin. Anoint Peter-John. Keep Your hand on Mary. Lord, embrace Christy."

Of all the places I've been privileged to teach, the place I'm most excited about teaching and feel the greatest Holy Ghost anointing is in my own home during family devotions, sitting down with my kids at every stage of life and simply opening the Bible, talking to them about the stories, telling them how they apply to our lives. That's something every one of us can do. You might not go to seminary. You might not be in vocational ministry. But you have the privilege of carving out some time sacrificially to pray for and with your kids, to teach and sanctify them through a simple Bible story, prayer, and a song or two. It will be a huge blessing not only to your family, but it will be the greatest blessing in your own life. Try it. You'll see!

Job 1:6
Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them.

The "sons of God" is a reference to angels in the Old Testament. As they presented themselves before the Lord, Satan was in their number. Although he had been cast out of heaven for his attempt to make himself equal to God (Isaiah 14), he still must give account to God.

Job 1:7

And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

"Where have you been?" God asked Satan, not that He needed information, but in order to begin a conversation.

"From going to and fro in the earth," Satan answered.

Peter tells us that Satan goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). On the other hand, in 2 Chronicles 16:9, we read that the eyes of the Lord go to and fro throughout the earth to find a man whose heart is toward Him on behalf of whom He might show Himself strong. In other words, Satan goes about seeking whom he might devour while the Lord goes about seeking whom He might empower.

Job 1:8
And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?

The Hebrew word translated "considered" referred to what a spy would do as he scoped out enemy territory to find weakness and vulnerability. Thus, the Lord says to Satan, "What do you think about Job? Have you checked him out? Have you probed? Are you aware of his heart toward Me?"

Job 1:9, 10 (a)
Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?

The implication is that Satan had already probed and tried to get Job to fall. "You've put a hedge all around him and I can't get to him," Satan answered.

Isn't it good to know that the Lord has Satan totally under control. There was a hedge around Job, and there is one around you and me, too. God is our Shield and Protector and, according to 1 Corinthians 10:13, He won't allow us to be tempted above that which we're able to bear, but will, with the temptation, provide a way of escape. Nothing can come to us or at us without the Lord allowing it for His sovereign purpose.

Job 1:10 (b), 11
. . . thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.

Satan insists that Job is a mercenary, that the only reason he walks with God is because God blesses him, that Job's only in it for the money. In so doing, Satan questions man before God just as in the Garden of Eden, He had questioned God before man.

"Hath God said you shall not eat of every tree?" he asked Eve, hinting that God was holding something good back from her (Genesis 3:1).

Attempting to build a case against Job, Satan questioned his motives. And that's what he still does. Revelation 12:10 tells us he accuses us before the Father day and night.

A panda walked into a restaurant, sat down, and ate breakfast. When he was finished, he stood up, shot the waitress, and walked out. The owner of the restaurant ran after him, yelling, "What in the world are you doing?"

"I'm a panda," the panda yelled. "Look it up in the dictionary."

So the owner of the restaurant did just that. He looked up "panda" and read "Panda: noun, mammal. Eats shoots and leaves."

Who is Satan? Look it up in the Word. He's the accuser of the brethren. That's what he does. That's his defining characteristic.

Job 1:12
And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.

"You can take what Job has," God said to Satan. "But don't touch him."

Satan had challenged God's honor, in effect saying, "You have no inherent right to receive worship because people wouldn't worship You if You didn't bribe them with blessings. They don't love You for who You are and wouldn't love You if You took Your blessings away."

As the angels and demons watched, they said, "Is that true?"

So now the issue would be settled in an incredible cosmic duel.

Job 1:13–15
And there was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

A messenger came to Job, saying, "You've lost your livestock."

Job 1:16
While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

Before the first messenger had finished speaking, a second messenger told Job his sheep and servants had been killed by lightning.

Job 1:17–19
While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

Before the second messenger finished speaking, a third told Job his children had been killed by a tornado. Thus, Job's finances and family, his prosperity and posterity were all gone.

Job 1:20–22
Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out

of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

A man of remarkable insight and maturity, Job released his emotion not through ranting and raving, cursing and complaining, weeping and wailing, but through worship.

When Paul and Silas were in the dank, dark dungeon, they began to sing praises to the Lord. They began to worship the One they loved and served. And as they did, the prison doors opened wide. The amazing thing is, not a single prisoner escaped. Why? I suggest it was because they were so amazed that Paul and Silas praised God in the dungeon that they wanted to stick around and see how the rest of the story would unfold.

The same can be true of us. When you feel as though it's dark and damp and dank and dungeony, when you feel as though everything you were hoping for, everything you trusted in has been taken away, it's your opportunity to do what Job did, to do what Paul and Silas did. That is, you can say, "I'm going to worship You, Lord, because You're in control and You know what's best."

Job didn't have chapter 1 to read. He didn't know what was going on. He wouldn't know anything about Satan's challenge throughout his whole ordeal, and perhaps not until he got to heaven. But that didn't matter. He chose to worship nonetheless and untold millions of lives have been impacted by his story.



2 **Job 2:1–3**

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause.

"I removed the hedge of protection around Job," God said to Satan." Yet his integrity is still intact."

Job 2:4–6
And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.

Initially, Satan called Job a mercenary. Here, he says Job's life is the most important thing to him.

"You can touch him physically," said the Lord. "But you can't kill him."

Job 2:7, 8
So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes.

Some have suggested the boils Job experienced was actually smallpox. That may be. Others believe it was psychosomatic dermatitis in reaction to the terrible losses he had suffered. This much we know: Job was hit hard, for chapter 19 will speak of the "boiling of his bowels," or diarrhea, of his skin burning black, his breath being the breath of death.

Job 2:9
Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die.

"Curse God and die," Job's wife said. Maybe she said this out of love, wanting to see Job released from his misery. But whatever the reason, it wasn't right.

Job 2:10 (a)
But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and

shall we not receive evil?

"Are we simply going to love God in the good times and not trust Him in the dark days?" Job asked his wife.

This is the lesson of Job: God does not exist for you. You exist for Him. All things were made by Him and *for* Him (see Colossians 1:16). God can use us any way He chooses. Therefore He can put us in situations that might seem uncomfortable or difficult for reasons we may not understand this side of eternity.

After setting them free from bondage in Egypt, God positioned His people with their backs to the Red Sea. In other words, they were boxed in with Pharaoh closing in on them. It seemed they were about to be wiped out, but God said, "I'm doing this for a reason. I'm putting you in a tough situation in order that Pharaoh and the Egyptians might see My glory" (see Exodus 14:4). The sea would part. Blessings would be bestowed. God's people would eventually reach the Land of Promise. But not immediately. Therefore, I have to remember as I go through life that the Lord may put me in situations from time to time that are uncomfortable or difficult, in part that I might ultimately see how He'll come through for me, but also that the Egyptians around me might see His glory and come to know Him personally.

If we don't remember this as we both go through the Book of Job and through each day of our life, we'll be confused. Job is fulfilling a huge purpose that deals with the honor and integrity of God in the eyes of all eternity. But he didn't know it at the time.

Job 2:10 (b)
. . . In all this did not Job sin with his lips.

Job is in physical pain and misery. He's distraught and distressed emotionally. He's bankrupt and wiped out financially. Yet he doesn't sin by charging God foolishly. And in his submission to God's sovereignty, he's silencing Satan.

Maybe you wonder what's going on in your own life. Maybe you feel like you're being beaten up and run over and you don't know why. It might be that in your choosing to submit to the sovereignty of God by worshiping Him passionately and spending time in His Word consistently that you, too, are

silencing Satan. I guarantee that when Job got to heaven, when he finally saw what had taken place, he didn't say, "What a waste." No, I'm sure he said, "Thank You, Lord, for allowing me the privilege of silencing Satan by simply trusting in Your sovereignty, by worshiping You even though I didn't have a clue what was going on."

Job 2:11
Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him.

Here, we are introduced to the three friends of Job whose dialogue, along with a fourth—constitutes the bulk of this book. We will have some hard things to say about them, but before we do, we need to commend them because they did three things that are definitely to their credit. First, they came to Job. They traveled great distances simply to be with him.

Job 2:12 (a)
And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not . . .

So great was Job's physical and emotional pain that his friends didn't even recognize him.

Job 2:12 (b)
. . . they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven.

As seen in Genesis 50 and Ezekiel 3, this was the reaction to death in that day.

Job 2:13
So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.

Secondly, not only did Job's friends come *to* him, but they sat *with* him. For seven days, they sat with him without saying a word.

After my wife was taken to heaven, many people shared wonderful insights and Scripture with me. But I especially appreciated the ones who would just show up and say very little. In fact, in the first ten days or so following her home going, one guy came by my house, knocked on the door, let himself in, grabbed me by the arm and said, "Come on, Jon. We're going to watch the George Foreman fight on closed circuit TV at the Med-ford Armory." This guy being bigger than me, I went. And it turned out to be the best thing he could have done for me.

Sometimes, the best thing a person can do is just be there without giving any advice. Initially, that's exactly what Job's friends did.

And when they did finally talk, the third thing they did right was talk to Job rather than talk about him. Even though their conclusions were amiss, they talked directly to him rather than talking behind his back.



3

Job 3:1 (a)
After this opened Job his mouth . . .

Silent sympathy created the opportunity for grief to express itself. When you sit with someone and are there for him, it's amazing how he will open his mouth when he's ready. If I'm there with someone who's hurting day by day, week by week, ultimately it will provide the opportunity for that person to express his grief.

Job 3:1 (b)
. . . and cursed his day.

Yes, Job cursed the day he was born but he didn't curse God.

Job 3:2, 3
And Job spake, and said, Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived.

Notice that it wasn't a blob of tissue that was conceived. It was a man child.

Job 3:4–6
Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it; let a cloud dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it. As for that night, let darkness seize upon it; let it not be joined unto the days of the year, let it not come into the number of the months.

"Let the night of my conception and the day of my birth be blotted off the calendar," Job said.

Job 3:7–12
Lo, let that night be solitary, let no joyful voice come therein. Let them curse it that curse the day, who are ready to raise up their mourning. Let the stars of the twilight thereof be dark; let it look for light, but have none; neither let it see the dawning of the day: Because it shut not up the doors of my mother's womb, nor hid sorrow from mine eyes. Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? Why did the knees prevent me? or why the breasts that I should suck?

"Why wasn't I stillborn?" Job asks.

Job 3:13
For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest,

On the basis of this verse, some groups have developed a doctrine of "soul sleep" that says when a believer dies, he sleeps in the grave.

Paul, however, would write that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). And, on the Cross, Jesus declared to the thief who believed on Him, "*Today* you shall be with Me in paradise" (see Luke 23:43).

Doctrine cannot be based on the Book of Job because Job speaks out of frustration rather than revelation. In fact, God will come on the scene ultimately and say to him, "Who is this who darkeneth counsel with words without knowledge?" In other words, "Job, you're talking about things you know nothing about" (38:2).

Job 3:14–17
With kings and counsellors of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves; Or with princes that had gold, who filled their houses with silver: Or as an hidden untimely birth I had not been; as infants which never saw light. There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest.

The quietness and nothingness of the grave sounded very appealing and inviting to Job.

Job 3:18, 19
There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master.

This speaks of the democracy of death, for in death, all men are truly equal.

Job 3:20, 21
Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; Which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures;

"When a man is as miserable as I am, why can't he just die?" Job asks. I think it is important to note that even though he wanted to die, Job never contemplated suicide.

Job 3:22, 23
Which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave? Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?

Job feels he's in the dark because God has hedged him in. In reality, however, it was because God had removed His hedge of protection that Job felt vulnerable (Job 1:10).

Job 3:24, 25
For my sighing cometh before I eat, and my roarings are poured out like the waters. For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me.

There are those who use verse 25 to say that if we speak negatively, that which we fear will come our way. But that is simply not true. God is not saying, "If you say one negative thing, one thing that lacks faith, I'm going to get you." That's not our Father. That's the Godfather!

David says our Father remembers our frames. He knows we're dust. He knows our frailty (Psalm 103:14).

Job 3:26
I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came.

After Job shared with his friends his desire to die in chapter 3, they will begin to speak in chapter 4 . . .



4

Job 4:1, 2 (a)
Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, If we assay to commune with thee, wilt thou be grieved?

"We've been quiet for seven days.," Eliphaz said to Job. "Would you be grieved if we spoke with you now?"

Job 4:2 (b)
. . . but who can withhold himself from speaking?

Certainly Job's friends couldn't withhold from speaking, for, through the course of this book, Eliphaz and Bildad will each give two speeches and

Zophar will give one.

I find the first couple chapters of Job to be intriguing. I find the last chapters to be glorious and grand as God comes on the scene and sets the record straight. But I must confess that I wonder why the debates in the middle go on chapter after chapter.

If I were writing the Book of Job, it would be about six chapters long. Yet I believe it's a full forty-two chapters because its very length is a reflection of real life. That is, when a trial first begins, there are things to learn. When it ends, we're glad it's over. It's the middle part that seems to go on and on and on. We have all found this to be true. When tragedy strikes, people rally around to encourage us. When it ends, they gather again to rejoice with us. But in the middle of the trial, people go their way, leaving us stuck in the proverbial rut, dealing with the issues, the loneliness, the pain, the sorrow. Thus, the length of the debate that follows mirrors that reality . . .

Job 4:3–5
Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled.

"You gave advice to others in their day of difficulty," Eliphaz says to Job, "but now that difficulty has entered in your own door, you're not doing so well."

Job 4:6
Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways?

"This is the very time you ought to be upright," Eliphaz declares.

Job 4:7
Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?

"Did an innocent man ever perish or go through suffering?" Eliphaz asks. Of course, we know the answer is yes, for the most innocent Man who ever

lived would be crucified. And before even Eliphaz's day, even innocent Abel suffered at the hands of Cain. But Eliphaz continued on in his faulty assumption that if Job was suffering, it must have been due to something in his life that was terribly amiss.

Job 4:8
Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.

"You must have sown some wild oats, Job, because look what you're reaping."

Job 4:9
By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed.

"You've felt the blast of God, haven't you, Job, as the winds blew down the homes your kids were in."

Job 4:10, 11
The roaring of the lion, and the voice of the fierce lion, and the teeth of the young lions, are broken. The old lion perisheth for lack of prey, and the stout lion's whelps are scattered abroad.

"As fierce and fit as young lions might be, they'll be broken ultimately," Eliphaz declares. "You might have ruled the land, Job. But now you're broken. The reason? Sin. And even if a lion grows old, he'll end up in a state of misery because that's the inevitable repercussion of sin."

Job 4:12–17
Now a thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a little thereof. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes, there was

silence, and I heard a voice, saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker?

Eliphaz switches from "Here's what I've observed . . ." to "I had a dream . . ." He changed the basis of his argument from physical observation to spiritual revelation.

This is often what happens today. When you're going through a trial or difficulty, there will be people who will say, "God told me to tell you. . . ." Generally, however, God does not choose to sneak up on people that way. In fact, Paul would issue a warning about those who delve into such pseudo-mysticism. "Let no man beguile you," he writes (see Colossians 2:18).

Job 4:18, 19
Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly: How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth?

"If God doesn't even trust His angels, how much less will he trust people who are houses of clay?" Eliphaz asks.

Paul would agree that we are indeed earthen vessels, houses of clay. But he would go on to say that we have the treasure of the Lord in these clay pots. And that's the reason the Lord allows us to go through challenging days and difficult trials (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Facing 135,000 Midianite soldiers, Gideon and his three hundred men surrounded their camp holding flames in earthen jars. On a given signal, they broke the jars and shouted, and when the Midianites saw the light burst forth, they were so confused that they fled in fear (Judges 7).

We have the Light of the world, Jesus Christ, in earthen vessels. When does the light come forth? When is the enemy beaten back? When is the beauty of our Lord seen most clearly? When our earthen pots are broken. That's when people say, "I see the beauty of the Lord in your life because you've gone through some tough times yet there's still a smile on your face and a twinkle in your eye."

Job 4:20, 21
They are destroyed from morning to evening: they perish for ever without any regarding it. Doth not their excellency which is in them

go away? they die, even without wisdom.

"Don't you understand, Job?" Eliphaz says. "If you're being crushed or broken it's because you deserve to be."

These are harsh words from Job's friend, Eliphaz. And he's not finished yet . . .



5 Job 5:1, 2
Call now, if there be any that will answer thee; and to which of the saints wilt thou turn? For wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one.

"Call to the saints if you want to, Job. Call the holy men who have gone before you, and you'll see I'm right," Eliphaz said.

Job 5:3
I have seen the foolish taking root: but suddenly I cursed his habitation.

"The foolish seem to be planted initially, but suddenly, their habitation is cursed," Eliphaz said, implying that there was fruit in Job's life only for a season.

Job 5:4
His children are far from safety, and they are crushed in the gate, neither is there any to deliver them.

His heart already broken, Job continues to listen to Eliphaz's theories about his situation.

People always have opinions. After being shipwrecked, when Paul threw sticks on a fire, a snake jumped out and fastened its fangs on Paul's hand. Observing this, the inhabitants of the island immediately deduced that Paul was an evil man. But when he shook off the snake and suffered no harm, they decided he was a god. In reality, of course, he was neither. He was simply a

man, a man God used through that particular incident to draw the hearts of the islanders to Him (Acts 28).

Job 5:5
Whose harvest the hungry eateth up, and taketh it even out of the thorns, and the robber swalloweth up their substance.

"The fact that not only your kids, but your crops have been ripped off is indicative that there's something wrong with you," Eliphaz said to Job.

Job 5:6, 7
Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.

"Just as surely as sparks fly up in a campfire, you will experience trouble as long as you remain in this state of rebellion," Eliphaz warned Job.

Job 5:8
I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause:

"If I were you, Job, I would certainly seek the Lord," Eliphaz says.

Job 5:9–14
Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number: Who giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields: To set up on high those that be low; that those which mourn may be exalted to safety. He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong. They meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope in the noonday as in the night.

"Not only does God send blessings, but He also causes those who are tricky to be caught in their own traps," Eliphaz declared.

Paul will reiterate Eliphaz's statement, writing to the church at Corinth that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh

the wise in their own craftiness" (1 Corinthians 3:19).

Job 5:15–18
But he saveth the poor from the sword, from their mouth, and from the hand of the mighty. So the poor hath hope, and iniquity stoppeth her mouth. Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole.

We see Solomon echo verse 17 in Proverbs (3:12 and 13) as well as the writer to the Hebrews quote it (12:5). This proves that Eliphaz isn't completely out to lunch, that he does have some things to say that are of value.

Job 5:19–24
He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. In famine he shall redeem thee from death: and in war from the power of the sword. Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue: neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh. At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh: neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth. For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee. And thou shalt know that thy tabernacle shall be in peace; and thou shalt visit thy habitation, and shalt not sin.

"Job, if you get right with the Lord, you will be protected from famine, sword, cruel words, destruction, beasts, earthquakes, and whirlwinds."

Job 5:25–27
Thou shalt know also that thy seed shall be great, and thine offspring as the grass of the earth. Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season. Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good.

"If you get right, Job, you will be protected, insulated, built up, and prosperous. If you don't, although you were prosperous for a season, you will only ultimately experience destruction."

Eliphaz was answering the words on Job's lips, but not the pain in his heart. As we work with people, may we be those who, unlike Eliphaz, hear something of the heart of people rather than simply their words.

I'm sorry to say that I have a tendency to judge others by their actions, but myself by my intentions. "Reverse that," the Lord said to me. "Judge others by their intentions and judge yourself by your actions. Don't get hung up on the words someone says or the things he does. Try instead to understand what's going on in his heart."

"If I have the tongues of men and angels, if I have all knowledge, but have not love, I am nothing," Paul would declare (1 Corinthians 13). Some of the things Eliphaz said were actually correct but, because they weren't enveloped in love, they had no real effect upon Job. If you want to be a good counselor, understand that you need to hear people's hearts. Choose to give people the benefit of the doubt. Let God judge them. You love them.



6 Children never seem to tire of asking, "Why?" I can recall the time my daughter Jessie was four and, after walking outside in the Oregon rain, she looked at me and said, "Daddy, why is water wet?"

"What?" I said.

"Why is water wet?" she repeated.

"I don't have a clue," I answered, feeling like a big drip!

Kids are so curious about everything. As we grow older, we lose a degree of that sense of wonder and curiosity but we still ask "Why?"

"Why didn't that work out?"

"Why didn't they come through?"

"Why am I going through this?"

All too often, we have a bitter taste in our mouth even as we ask, "*Why?*"

Job was in this place, wondering why he was going through the ordeal he was enduring, suffering to an unbelievable degree. Here in chapter 6, he responds to the counsel he received from Eliphaz, who essentially said, "Job, the reason you're in the situation you're in is because of sin. Why are you experiencing so much heartache? The issue is sin."

Job 6:1–3
But Job answered and said, Oh that my grief were throughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea: therefore my words are swallowed up.

"You don't understand the heaviness I feel," Job said. "It's heavier than all of the sand on all of the beaches of the world."

Job 6:4
For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me.

Job felt that surely he must be a target of the Lord.

Job 6:5
Doth the wild ass bray when he hath grass? or loweth the ox over his fodder?

"When the donkey and ox are fed, will they bray or moo? No, they'll be content. That's why I am groaning because, instead of feeding me with words of encouragement, you've accused me of a secret sin."

Job 6:6, 7
Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt? or is there any taste in the white of an egg? The things that my soul refused to touch are as my sorrowful meat.

"That which you've put on my plate, Eliphaz, is tasteless and bitter, inedible, indigestible. The speech you gave me, the accusation you made against me is impossible to swallow. You don't understand not only my heaviness, my bitterness, but my hopelessness . . .

Job 6:8–10 (a)
Oh that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me;

that he would let loose his hand, and cut me off! Then should I yet have comfort; yea, I would harden myself in sorrow . . .

"God withholds the one thing I long for: death," said Job. Aren't you glad the Lord doesn't answer all of our prayers with a "Yes"? "No" is just as much an answer as "Yes" is.

"Wipe me out," Job had prayed. But the Lord knew that wouldn't be best for Job. He had a plan for Job. When your prayers don't seem to be answered, rejoice because a "No" is just as much an answer as "Yes" is. Because God understands we're limited in our knowledge, His Son intercedes for us at His right hand. The Spirit prays through us with groaning we don't understand to bring our prayer into perfect harmony with His plan for us (Romans 8:26).

Effective prayer is not directive. God does not need counsel as to how to get the job done and yet so often I catch myself advising God in prayer, saying, "This is the way we can do it, Lord . . ." Prayer is not to direct the Father. It's to commune with the Father, to pour out our burdens upon Him, to spend time with Him, and then to receive from Him a heart more and more like that of Jesus.

Job 6:10 (b)–12
. . . let him not spare; for I have not concealed the words of the Holy One. What is my strength, that I should hope? and what is mine end, that I should prolong my life? Is my strength the strength of stones? or is my flesh of brass?

"Eliphaz," Job asks, "do you think I'm as strong as a rock? Do you think I can go round after round with you?"

Job 6:13–17
Is not my help in me? and is wisdom driven quite from me? To him that is afflicted pity should be shewed from his friend; but he forsaketh the fear of the Almighty. My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the stream of brooks they pass away; Which are blackish by reason of the ice, and wherein the snow is hid: What time they wax warm, they vanish: when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place.

"You are like streams," Job says to his friends. "In the wintertime, they flow with snow and ice. But when things get hot in the summer, there is no refreshment there. I'm going through fiery trials, difficult days. I'm in the heat of unbelievable difficulty, but you have no words of refreshment for me."

Job 6:18–20
The paths of their way are turned aside; they go to nothing, and perish. The troops of Tema looked, the companies of Sheba waited for them. They were confounded because they had hoped; they came thither, and were ashamed.

Contrast Job's cry with the words of the psalmist . . .

> Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.
>
> Psalm 84:5–7

Baca means "weeping." Therefore, the valley of Baca is a valley of difficulties and sorrows, a place where tears are shed. The thing to remember is that, when you're in that valley, going through tough times, the wells formed from the tears that flow down your cheeks can actually refresh others who will come after you in their journey with the Lord.

Viewed through a microscope, the saline crystal of a tear is in the shape of a cross. "Why am I going through this?" we cry. "Why am I in this valley of Baca, this valley of weeping?" we wonder. I suggest one of the primary reasons is so that we won't be like Job's miserable counselors who had nothing to say but words of innuendo and accusation.

"Blessed be the Father of mercies, the God of all comforts, who comforts us in our troubles," Paul declares, "that we may be able to comfort others with the comfort we have received of Him" (see 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4).

Job 6:21, 22
For now ye are nothing; ye see my casting down, and are afraid. Did I say, Bring unto me? or, Give a reward for me of your

substance?

"Did I ask you for a gift because of what I'm going through?" Job asks. "My need was simply for compassion and sympathy."

Job 6:23, 24
Or, Deliver me from the enemy's hand? or, Redeem me from the hand of the mighty? Teach me, and I will hold my tongue: and cause me to understand wherein I have erred.

"If you show me where I've erred, I'll be quiet," Job says.

Job 6:25
How forcible are right words! but what doth your arguing reprove?

"Right words carry weight," Job contends.

Job 6:26, 27
Do ye imagine to reprove words, and the speeches of one that is desperate, which are as wind? Yea, ye overwhelm the fatherless, and ye dig a pit for your friend.

"Do you think I'm just blowing hot air?" Job asks his friends.

Job 6:28
Now therefore be content, look upon me; for it is evident unto you if I lie.

Maybe at this point, Job's friends were hanging their heads. "Look at me," Job says. "Am I lying about my situation?"

Job 6:29, 30
Return, I pray you, let it not be iniquity; yea, return again, my righteousness is in it. Is there iniquity in my tongue? cannot my taste discern perverse things?

“I can discern the difference between good and bad,” Job protests. “So tell me if there is some error you can see in me.”



7 After talking about his own heaviness and the ineffectiveness of his friends’ counsel, Job paints a picture of life in its futility, its agony, and its brevity.

Job 7:1–5
Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? are not his days also like the days of an hireling? As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work: So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome.

Plagued by insomnia, Job’s days were a grind and his nights were restless. Thus, his life seemed futile.

Job 7:6–8
My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and are spent without hope. O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall no more see good. The eye of him that hath seen me shall see me no more: thine eyes are upon me, and I am not.

“Even at best, life is short,” Job says. “I will never again experience pleasure.”

Job 7:9–11
As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more. Therefore I

will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.

"I'm going to speak out of the condition of my life, the agony, the futility, and the brevity."

Job 7:12
Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me?

"Have you come to be entertained?" Job asks.

Job 7:13–16
When I say, My bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint; Then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions: So that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life. I loathe it; I would not live alway: let me alone; for my days are vanity.

"I long for peace of mind, but you weight me down with your accusations and you scare me with your dreams and visions," Job says.

To discern whether something is from the Lord or of the devil, James says if it causes you to feel strife and confusion, it's from the enemy. But if it's peaceable, without hypocrisy, easily entreated, it's from the Lord (3:17).

Job 7:17, 18
What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? And that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?

Directing his response to God rather than to Eliphaz, Job is awed by God. His counselors talked *about* God. Job talked *to* God. Big difference. I like to be around people who not only talk about God, but talk *to* Him. "Why are You trying me every moment?" Job asks as he cries out directly to God.

Job 7:19–21
How long wilt thou not depart from me, nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle? I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee,

O thou preserver of men? why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, so that I am a burden to myself? And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity? for now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be.

Literally, Job prays, "If I have sinned, what do You want from me?" In his prayer, we see respect, reverence, and awe but also a raw honesty as he asks, "Lord, what is going on here?"

And with that, Bildad steps in . . .



8

Job 8:1, 2
Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said, How long wilt thou speak these things? and how long shall the words of thy mouth be like a strong wind?

Bildad basically calls Job a windbag.

Job 8:3
Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice?

"How dare you challenge the justice of God?" Bildad asks.

Job 8:4
If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away for their transgression;

"It's not only your sin that's a problem, Job but your kids sinned as well," Bildad says.

Job 8:5, 6
If thou wouldest seek unto God betimes, and make thy supplication to the Almighty; If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous.

“If you would get right, God would bless you, Job,” Bildad says. “But your suffering indicates that you’re in a backslidden state.”

We still hear Bildad’s false conclusion today by those who say, “If you’re righteous and pure, you can ask the Lord for a yacht and it will be there the next day. If you’re strong in faith, you won’t be sick. If you’re walking with the Lord, you’ll get the promotion, the raise, or the new car.”

Job 8:7
Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase.

“You would have had a happy ending, Job, if you had walked righteously and refrained from whatever sin you’re hiding,” Bildad says.

Job 8:8–10
For inquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers: (For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow:) Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their heart?

“Don’t just take my word for it,” Bildad says. “Check out history. Listen to the fathers that have gone on before us, the wisdom of men wiser than us. They, too talk of righteousness, that God is just, that if you’re not doing well, it’s not God’s fault. It’s yours.”

Job 8:11, 12
Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water? Whilst it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb.

Bildad tells Job to not only listen to the instruction of the fathers, but to look at the illustration of nature. The reed can pop up and the grass can grow, but if the reed doesn’t have mud and the grass doesn’t have water, they’ll fade away in the heat of the sun. If something dries up, it’s because it’s out of touch with the source of water. In other words, there’s something wrong with the root system. His implication, of course, was that there was something wrong with Job’s root system.

Job 8:13
So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish:

"You prospered for a season, Job. You were the wealthiest man in all the east. You seemed to have it all together, but now the truth comes out. Your roots are revealed and you are found lacking."

Job 8:14, 15
Whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider's web. He shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand: he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure.

"If you lean against a spider web, you're a fool. It can't support a man. So, too, your house was due to collapse because it had no firm foundation," Bildad contends.

Job 8:16–19
He is green before the sun, and his branch shooteth forth in his garden. His roots are wrapped about the heap, and seeth the place of stones. If he destroy him from his place, then it shall deny him, saying, I have not seen thee. Behold, this is the joy of his way, and out of the earth shall others grow.

Bildad's third illustration from nature concerns a plant that finds a fertile place among the stones and it grows. But when it's removed, it's not missed. Bildad maintained that Job was in the process of being uprooted and that others would take his place.

Job 8:20–22
Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evil doers: Till he fill thy mouth with laughing, and thy lips with rejoicing. They that hate thee shall be clothed with shame; and the dwelling place of the wicked shall come to nought.

"If you get right, Job, if you confess your sin and stop claiming to be right, God can bless you again," Bildad said. Job will protest Bildad's speech in

chapter 9.

"Job, there's sin in your life. That's why these things have come upon you," Eliphaz said.

"And you continue to sin by denying that you are in sin," Bildad added.

"God is holy. He judges rightly. Therefore, there must be some sin your life," Eliphaz said.

"How dare you challenge God's justice?" Bildad asked.

Eliphaz and Bildad no doubt thought they were doing God a favor by standing up for Him. They were right that God is just. But they were dead wrong in assuming God's justice was the only issue at play, for there was something going on of which neither they nor Job was aware. Yes, God is just. But God became Man and dwelt among us to teach us that God desires mercy and not sacrifice (Matthew 9:13).

There were only three times that Jesus commanded us to learn . . .

In Matthew 11:29, He said, "Learn of Me."

In Matthew 24, He said, "Learn the parable of the fig tree."

In Matthew 9, He said, "Learn to be merciful."

In other words, we are to be students of humility, Bible prophecy, and mercy.

When the Philistines sent the ark of the covenant back to Israel after capturing it in battle, the men of Bethshemesh were elated. But when they lifted off the mercy seat to make sure the Law was still inside, thousands were killed instantly (1 Samuel 6:19). Sometimes I do that. I set aside mercy to check out the law. And whenever I do, something dies. God declared He would meet with man not on the basis of the law, but at the mercy seat (Exodus 25:22).

Oh, Bildad, you don't understand. You're standing for justice. But you forgot mercy.



9 Why doesn't God break in at this point? We know He will later on. Why does He allow Job to go through this confusion, to feel this depression? I believe the answer is that He is teaching Job how to walk by faith and not by sight. Seeing what's coming down or what's going on doesn't require faith. Faith only kicks in when I can't see. Why does faith need to be developed?

Because faith seems to be the *lingua franca* of heaven, the currency of eternity. And faith can only be developed this side of heaven.

As He did with Job, the Lord takes us through tests to cause us to be made perfect in faith in order that we might be equipped to rule with Him in eternity. But He promises He won't test us above what we are able (1 Corinthians 10:13). This means He will only allow us to be tested in relationship to what He has prepared us for in our walk with Him and in our knowledge of Him.

I think of Abraham. Yes, he was told to offer his only son as a sacrifice, but not until "after these things" (Genesis 22:1). What things? For many years previously, God had prepared Abraham for a test of this magnitude. Abraham had already left his homeland in Ur of the Chaldees. He had left his family and friends. He buried his dad at Heron. He had to send his son, Ishmael, out to the desert. In all these things, God was preparing Abraham every step of the way for this great test.

Our God is a Master Teacher who tests us only after we have been thoroughly prepared. And He guarantees we'll pass the tests He sends before us. Oh, we might have to take them a few times, but we'll pass them eventually!

Our hearts go out to Job understandably. But we must remember that he was thoroughly prepared. When someone we know goes through difficult times, we must understand that, if they're a child of God, the Father has prepared them and will not test them above what they are able. Job is confused, yes. He despairs, yes. But he never curses God. And in this, he'll pass the test with flying colors.

Job 9:1, 2
Then Job answered and said, I know it is so of a truth: but how should man be just with God?

Bildad had raised a legal issue, the justice of God. Now Job will speak in legal terms, as well. "I know God is just," he says. "But how can a man plead his case before Him?"

Job 9:3
If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand.

"Under the cross-examination of God, man cannot begin to answer even one of a thousand of His questions," Job says.

Job 9:4
He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?

"Who has ever opposed God successfully? How can I present my case against Him?" Job asks.

Job 9:5, 6
Which removeth the mountains, and they know not: which overturneth them in his anger. Which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble.

"How can I plead my case before a God who is invincible?"

Job 9:7–9
Which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not; and sealeth up the stars. Which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea. Which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south.

God moves mountains and sets the stars and constellations in place. He is invincible indeed. Not only that, but He is incomprehensible . . ."

Job 9:10
Which doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number.

"God does things we could never figure out," Job says, and he's right, for Deuteronomy 29:29 declares that the secret things belong to the Lord.

Job 9:11
Lo, he goeth by me, and I see him not: he passeth on also, but I perceive him not.

"Not only is God invincible and incomprehensible, He's also invisible. How, then, can I be right with a God who is so wise that I can't debate Him, so powerful that I can't go against Him, so transcendent that I can't even perceive Him?"

Of course, the answer is Jesus, for "great is the mystery of godliness, that God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). Jesus came that we might be able to observe and touch and hear and watch God personally.

"He that hath seen Me has seen the Father," Jesus declared (John 14:9).

It's Jesus who bridges the gap, who brings oneness between sinful man and a perfect Father.

Job 9:12
Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What doest thou?

"God is unaccountable," Job continues. "In a courtroom, who would say to God, 'You're out of order?' Who's going to say, 'I object?' "

Job 9:13
If God will not withdraw his anger, the proud helpers do stoop under him.

"God is also unrestrainable," Job declares. "What bailiff will take God away for being out of order? It's impossible to plead my case."

Job 9:14, 15
How much less shall I answer him, and choose out my words to reason with him? Whom, though I were righteous, yet would I not answer, but I would make supplication to my judge.

"Even if I were righteous, I would simply plead for mercy."

Job 9:16
If I had called, and he had answered me; yet would I not believe that he had hearkened unto my voice.

"If I prayed and God answered me, I wouldn't even believe it was an answer to prayer," Job confesses. "He's just too vast, too great, too big, too large, too 'other.' I would think it was just coincidence."

How could Job, a righteous man, say this? In Acts 12, Peter was in prison and the believers were in the house of John Mark praying passionately for his release. That night, after an angel sprung him loose, he made his way to the house where this group had been praying fervently. He knocks on the door. The servant girl answers and runs into the meeting saying, "Peter's outside!"

"It can't be Peter. He's in prison," said the giants of faith and went back to praying for his release.

We do the same thing. We pray with not a whole lot of faith, but the great news is that if we pray even with faith the size of a mustard seed, mountains can be moved (Matthew 17:20).

Job 9:17–19
For he breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without cause. He will not suffer me to take my breath, but filleth me with bitterness. If I speak of strength, lo, he is strong: and if of judgment, who shall set me a time to plead?

"God has put me through the wringer," Job says. "How could I appear before Him to plead my case?"

Job 9:20, 21
If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life.

"If I said I was perfect, my own words would condemn me. And even if it were true, I don't know my own soul," Job laments.

Job 9:22
This is one thing, therefore I said it, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked.

Yes, God was allowing these things to happen to Job, but God is not the destroyer. He's the One who pours His rain of blessing on the just and the

unjust (Matthew 5:45). Who causes destruction? The destroyer, Satan (Exodus 12:23; Psalm 17:4; 1 Corinthians 10:10).

Job 9:23, 24
If the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent. The earth is given into the hand of the wicked: he covereth the faces of the judges thereof; if not, where, and who is he?

"The judges of this world are corrupt," Job says. "The judicial system is flawed." Job was not alone in thinking this. Habakkuk would be another to share his conclusion (1:4).

Job 9:25–29
Now my days are swifter than a post: they flee away, they see no good. They are passed away as the swift ships: as the eagle that hasteth to the prey. If I say, I will forget my complaint, I will leave off my heaviness, and comfort myself: I am afraid of all my sorrows, I know that thou wilt not hold me innocent. If I be wicked, why then labour I in vain?

"If I'm wicked, why should I bother to try and make sense of this?" Job asks.

Job 9:30, 31
If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; Yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me.

This is despair, gang. Job is saying, "I'm afraid to even encourage myself because of what God might do to me."

Job 9:32
For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment.

"This God is so incredible, so powerful, so unknowable that to me He seems illogical. How can I discuss with Him what I'm going through?" Job asks.

Job 9:33
Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both.

A daysman is an arbitrator, a mediator, a middleman, an umpire. Praise the Lord that we have a Daysman, a Mediator standing for us, an Advocate on our behalf in the person of Jesus (1 John 2:1).

Job 9:34, 35
Let him take his rod away from me, and let not his fear terrify me: Then would I speak, and not fear him; but it is not so with me.

It was the Father who sent the Son, but it was also the Father who was in the Son, for of Jesus, Isaiah said that, along with Wonderful Counselor and Prince of Peace, His name would be called Everlasting Father (9:6). It was God in Christ who reconciled the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). Therefore, when you think of Jesus as a Daysman, don't think of God being angry, with Jesus calming Him down. No, it is God Himself who was in Christ Jesus—the mystery of the Trinity.

10

Job 10:1, 2
My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.

"Show me why You are coming against me," Job says to God.

Job 10:3 (a)
Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands . . .

"You made me, Lord," Job continues. "I am the work of *Your* hands. Is it good that You are oppressing me in this way?"

Job 10:3 (b)
. . . and shine upon the counsel of the wicked?

"Is it right that You pick on me yet honor the decisions of the wicked? Is that fair?"

Job 10:4–6
Hast thou eyes of flesh? or seest thou as man seeth? Are thy days as the days of man? are thy years as man's days, That thou inquirest after mine iniquity, and searchest after my sin?

"Are You unjust? Are you limited, like man? Do you see things only as men see them?" Job asks God.

Job 10:7, 8
Thou knowest that I am not wicked; and there is none that can deliver out of thine hand. Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me.

"Did You make me only to destroy me?" Job wonders.

Job 10:9
Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again?

In Psalm 103, we read that our Father remembers that we are made of dust. Oftentimes, I think we expect more out of ourselves than God expects of us. We mistakenly think we're more than dust. No wonder we're shocked by what we find ourselves thinking or doing. God, however, isn't shocked. He's not even surprised. He knows our frames. He knows what we're made of. But He also knows what we're going to be. He sees us as already glorified in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:21).

If the Anaheim Angels called me last summer and said, "Jon, we heard you're in town and we really need a pitcher because we're headed for the

World Series," and if I agreed to come and take a few practice pitches, the ball would have gone right over the catcher's head and into the stands. But if, for some reason, the coach and the owner liked me, I would be given a uniform. I would be on the team. Yes, I would sit on the bench but I would be on the team. Then, when the Angels won the World Series and the bonus checks were cut and the rings were distributed, when the team photo was taken and the parade took place at Disneyland—there I would be. Why? I can't pitch my way out of a paper bag but, simply because I was on the team, because I wore the uniform, I would get the ring, the photo, the check, the parade, the whole thing.

That's the gospel. Our heavenly Father is the Owner. Our Lord and Savior is our Coach. They happen to like us and chose us for reasons that are beyond me! We're on their team. We get the photo, the ring, and heaven simply because we're robed in the righteous uniform of Christ Jesus (Isaiah 61:10; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Oh, happy day!

Job 10:10
Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese?

This is a poetic description of conception and gestation in the womb.

Job 10:11–14
Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews. Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit. And these things hast thou hid in thine heart: I know that this is with thee. If I sin, then thou markest me, and thou wilt not acquit me from mine iniquity.

"You've done all this for me," Job says to God. "I was conceived miraculously and made wondrously. Yet, if I sin, You mark me like a target."

Job 10:15 (a)
If I be wicked, woe unto me; and if I be righteous, yet will I not lift up my head . . .

"If I'm wicked, You'll nail me," Job says to God. "And if I'm righteous, I can't lift my head because I'll get shot at." Job is terrified. He's confused. He doesn't know how to think or what to do.

Job 10:15 (b), 16
. . . I am full of confusion; therefore see thou mine affliction; For it increaseth. Thou huntest me as a fierce lion: and again thou shewest thyself marvellous upon me.

"You hunt me down like a lion and You show Your marvelous power by crushing me," Job says to God.

Job 10:17
Thou renewest thy witnesses against me, and increasest thine indignation upon me; changes and war are against me.

"You bring in fresh troops to fight against me constantly," Job continues. This great man is going through unbelievable difficulty. He's a man of God, but a man nonetheless and here we see his humanity as he cries out in confusion by his own admission.

Job 10:18, 19
Wherefore then hast thou brought me forth out of the womb? Oh that I had given up the ghost, and no eye had seen me! I should have been as though I had not been; I should have been carried from the womb to the grave.

"Oh, that the first day of my life had been my last," Job laments.

Job 10:20–22
Are not my days few? cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death; A land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness.

Job asks God simply for a little break before he goes to the grave, to the place of darkness.



11 Listening to Job's argument causes Zophar, the third friend, to speak up. The fact that Zophar spoke last could likely mean that he was the youngest of Job's three friends but he was also the harshest. That's the way it often is. When we're younger, we tend to be a little more critical. As we get older, dashed hopes and failure have a way of smoothing some of our points.

Job 11:1–3
Then answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said, Should not the multitude of words be answered? and should a man full of talk be justified? Should thy lies make men hold their peace? and when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed?

"How can I remain silent in the face of your lies and mockery?" Zophar asks Job.

In so doing, he makes a mistake that we can make oh, so easily. When someone is expressing confusion or dealing with depression, we can think it is up to us to defend God. In reality, however, God would say, "I care deeply about the person you want to correct. I know that, like you, he's made only of dust. I understand his frailty."

Job 11:4, 5
For thou hast said, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in thine eyes. But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee;

"Oh that God would speak," Zophar said. Oh, but He did speak. In verse 8 of chapter 1, God declared that Job was the most righteous man on the face of the earth.

Job 11:6 (a)
And that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is!

"There are two sides to God's wisdom," Zophar said. In this, he was correct. From our side, things appear to be tangled and confused but from heaven's perspective, there is a beautiful picture being formed.

And when we get there, we're going to say, "Awesome, Lord! Now I see You were doing something grand and glorious all along."

Job 11:6 (b)
. . . Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.

"You think you have it tough? Let me tell you, Job, you should have it twice as bad as you do," Zophar said. As brutal as Zophar's words were, they were true in a sense for, because the wages of sin is death, all of us deserve to die. The question is, where does that leave Zophar?

Job 11:7–11
Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea. If he cut off, and shut up, or gather together, then who can hinder him? For he knoweth vain men: he seeth wickedness also; will he not then consider it?

It is true that man cannot find God. Praise be to the Lord, therefore, that He found man.

After years spent reading about the existence of God and struggling with the issue, C.S. Lewis writes that he was riding in the sidecar of a motorcycle on his way to a zoo outside London when God touched him and he was born again. He spent years searching, thinking wondering, and then God found him. Think of your own pilgrimage. At a certain point in time, God found you. It's not we who choose the Lord. Rather, the Lord chose us before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).

Job 11:12
For vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt.

An empty-headed man has as much chance of being wise as a donkey does of giving birth to a man.

Job 11:13–15 (a)

If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him; If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles. For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot . . .

"Put away your sin, Job. Then you can lift your face to Him in innocence," Zophar declares.

Job 11:15 (b), 16
. . . yea, thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear: Because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away:

"All of your misery will be like water under the bridge the day you confess your sin and repent of the secret iniquity you're involved in," Zophar continues.

Job 11:17–19
And thine age shall be clearer than the noonday; thou shalt shine forth, thou shalt be as the morning. And thou shalt be secure, because there is hope; yea, thou shalt dig about thee, and thou shalt take thy rest in safety. Also thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid; yea, many shall make suit unto thee.

Not only will you be renewed and revived if you put away your sin, but your insomnia will be cured, your fear will be gone, and people will again come to you for counsel.

Job 11:20
But the eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall not escape, and their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost.

"If they don't turn away from their obvious sin, the only hope the wicked have is death," Zophar insists.

And all the while, God listens.



Seeing his condition, Job's friends concluded that he must have done something
12 terrible. After all, they argued, God is just. Therefore, Job must have been a terrible sinner to warrant the treatment he was receiving.

Job 12:1
And Job answered and said,

Here in chapter 12, Job will respond. With three prosecuting attorneys against him, Job will now speak as his own defense attorney.

Job 12:2
No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you.

"When you die, wisdom will leave the face of the earth," Job says to his friends, his words dripping with sarcasm.

Job 12:3
But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these?

"What you guys are telling me about the sovereignty and justice of God is common knowledge," Job continues.

Job 12:4, 5
I am as one mocked of his neighbour, who calleth upon God, and he answereth him: the just upright man is laughed to scorn. He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease.

It has been wisely said that when life is good, we don't have many questions but when life is bad, we don't have many answers. To his friends, Job says, "You guys are at ease. But I have some questions for you that perhaps you haven't thought through. I'm going to be like a headlight on high beam, shining right in your eyes, making you uncomfortable."

Job 12:6

The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly.

"Look around," Job says. "Notice that the wicked seem to be prospering. It seems as though God gives to them abundantly." Psalm 73 deals with this same issue . . .

> Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.
>
> Psalm 73:1–5, 12, 16, 17

Where did the psalmist regain the right perspective? In the sanctuary. How many are the times we have slipped and struggled until we plopped in a pew and, when the Word was opened, it spoke so directly and incisively to us that we regained perspective and remembered that it's all about eternity.

Job 12:7
But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee:

If you throw a potato chip on the sand, the seagulls don't say to each other, "You first." No, they fight for that chip as if their lives depended on it.

"It's a jungle out there and the strongest one wins. Where's the justice in that?" Job asks.

Job 12:8
Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee.

"Check out the fish," Job continues. "Who is the strongest? The shark." In other words, Job is saying that, contrary to his friends' assertion, it's not

always the good guy who wins.

Job 12:9, 10
Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.

"Who has created the world to be this way?" Job asks. "The Lord."

Job 12:11
Doth not the ear try words? and the mouth taste his meat?

"Just as the mouth can determine whether food is bitter or sweet, my ears can determine whether your words be true or false," Job declares.

Job 12:12–17
With the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding. With him is wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding. Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built again: he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening. Behold, he withholdeth the waters, and they dry up: also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth. With him is strength and wisdom: the deceived and the deceiver are his. He leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools.

"With the ancient is wisdom." I believe Job is alluding to the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:22). Unlike these guys who are pipsqueak philosophers, Job says there is wisdom in the One who has endless days.

Job 12:18–20
He looseth the bond of kings, and girdeth their loins with a girdle. He leadeth princes away spoiled, and overthroweth the mighty. He removeth away the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding of the aged.

God reduces kings to slaves if He so chooses.

Job 12:21–25
He poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty. He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death. He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them: he enlargeth the nations, and straiteneth them again. He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way. They grope in the dark without light, and he maketh them to stagger like a drunken man.

Job contends that the leaders and governments of earth come and go, but God is King of kings. Thus, He is in complete and absolute control.



13 Job 13:1, 2

Lo, mine eye hath seen all this, mine ear hath heard and understood it. What ye know, the same do I know also: I am not inferior unto you.

After Zophar waxed eloquent about God's sovereignty, Job came back and said, "I can top that" and pushes the boundaries even further, maintaining that God can try the just if He so chooses.

Job 13:3
Surely I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God.

"I'm tired of listening to your arguments," Job says. "I wish I could talk directly to the Almighty and reason with Him."

"Come, let us reason together," God says (see Isaiah 1:18).

It is the invitation and heart of our Father to do just that. And we have that opportunity, for James would say, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men liberally" (1:5).

"Woe be to the rebellious children, who take counsel but not of Me," God declares, "for in returning to Me you will be saved" (Isaiah 30:1, 15). Concerning whatever trial you might be going through, the key is to spend time

with the Lord. No doubt there are people you want to talk with or turn to, but just as Job's counselors didn't have a clue, it's only the Father who can truly help you.

In previous generations, church services were followed by extended time at "the altar," where people would pour out their hearts to the Lord. That is, after taking in a Bible study, they would respond by kneeling before the Father and waiting on Him. All too often today, I wonder to what degree the need for counseling would be diminished if we took time to immediately respond to the issues on our hearts by spending time in prayer. May we be those who take time, who make time to come to the altar so that we truly can be "altared."

Job 13:4, 5
But ye are forgers of lies, ye are all physicians of no value. O that ye would altogether hold your peace! and it should be your wisdom.

Concluding that his counselors were no help at all, Job says to them, "The wisest thing you could do would be to shut your mouths."

Job 13:6, 7
Hear now my reasoning, and hearken to the pleadings of my lips. Will ye speak wickedly for God? and talk deceitfully for him?

"In attempting to defend God, you're actually offending Him," Job tells his friends. "You're speaking on His behalf, but what you're saying isn't the whole truth." Indeed, these three put a great deal of value on God's justice, but they forgot to add mercy and grace to the equation.

Job 13:8–10
Will ye accept his person? will ye contend for God? Is it good that he should search you out? or as one man mocketh another, do ye so mock him? He will surely reprove you, if ye do secretly accept persons.

"Are you arguing for God?" Job asks. "Are you prepared to have Him search you, or do you think you can fool Him, too? If you show partiality, you're guilty of hypocrisy."

Job 13:11
Shall not his excellency make you afraid? and his dread fall upon you?

"You lack the fear of God," Job says. "Don't you realize that you should be afraid of Him?"

Job 13:12
Your remembrances are like unto ashes, your bodies to bodies of clay.

"Your platitudes are like ashes. The body of your argument is like clay, frail and breakable."

Job 13:13
Hold your peace, let me alone, that I may speak, and let come on me what will.

"Don't interrupt me," Job says. "I'm going to say what I want and let the chips fall where they may."

Job 13:14, 15 (a)
Wherefore do I take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in mine hand? Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him . . .

And with these words, Satan lost his bet. Although Job didn't navigate his difficulty perfectly, he completely shuts Satan down right here. "Even if I don't understand what God is doing, even though it seems to be to be unfair, even if He should slay me in the process, yet I will trust Him," Job proclaims. Yes, Job's faith will falter, but here it's ignited.

It's one thing to have faith for healing. It's a greater thing to have faith for sickness. That is, it takes greater faith to say, "I come to You for healing. But, Lord, should You, as You did to Paul, say, 'My grace is sufficient,' I will still trust You. I have faith in You, not faith that I can get You to do what I want You to do, but faith that You will do what's best."

Even if the affliction doesn't go away, even if the problem continues, even if the solution doesn't come, faith says, "Though You slay me, I will still trust

You because You were slain for me. You gave up everything because You love me. Therefore, I embrace whatever You decide to do. You see things I don't. You know things I can't."

Here, with his body broken out in boils, with his worldly possession and his family taken from him, with his friends relentlessly accusing him, faith flares up in Job.

Job 13:15 (b)
. . . but . . .

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him, but . . ." Oh, Job, not the "but." You should have stopped with, "Yet will I trust Him. Period." That's the way it so often is. We say something great and then follow it up with a "but." Job's greatest statement of faith is followed by a statement of his greatest weakness . . .

Job 13:15 (c)
. . . I will maintain mine own ways before him.

"I'm going to defend my position," said Job.

Job 13:16
He also shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before him.

"I will be vindicated," Job insisted, "because He won't allow a hypocrite to be victorious."

Job 13:17, 18
Hear diligently my speech, and my declaration with your ears. Behold now, I have ordered my cause; I know that I shall be justified.

"Yes, I trust God," said Job. "But I'm going to keep making my case."

Job 13:19

Who is he that will plead with me? for now, if I hold my tongue, I shall give up the ghost.

"It's up to me," Job said. "If I don't make my case, if I don't stand up for myself, I'll die."

Job 13:20, 21
Only do not two things unto me: then will I not hide myself from thee. Withdraw thine hand far from me: and let not thy dread make me afraid.

Job now directs his words to the Lord. "I ask two things of You, Lord," he says. "Take Your hand of punishment off of me. And, secondly, don't make me fear what You might do tomorrow."

Job 13:22, 23
Then call thou, and I will answer: or let me speak, and answer thou me. How many are mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin.

"How much have I sinned?" Job asks. "Does it merit this much misery?"

Job 13:24
Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?

"Are You hiding from me, Lord?" Job asks. "Am I an enemy in Your sight?"

Job 13:25, 26
Wilt thou break a leaf driven to and fro? and wilt thou pursue the dry stubble? For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.

Evidently, Job concludes that he is being punished for sins of his youth. Many of us can fall into this same error in the midst of trials and troubles. "It must be something I did years ago that's causing the trouble I'm in presently," we say, "something I forgot to confess."

I used to think that if there was one unconfessed sin in my life, God wouldn't hear my prayers. Therefore, as a little boy, I would spend a great deal of time at my bedside going over everything I could think of that I did that day or the previous day or the previous week or year so that I wouldn't be "out of fellowship." Then, one day I understood 1 John 1:9—that if I am faithful to confess whatever the Lord is convicting me of, whatever He brings to my mind or attention, He cleanses me of *all* unrighteousness. And I was wonderfully free!

Job 13:27, 28
Thou puttest my feet also in the stocks, and lookest narrowly unto all my paths; thou settest a print upon the heels of my feet. And he, as a rotten thing, consumeth, as a garment that is moth eaten.

"I can't move on with my life," Job laments. "I can't move forward because I'm held prisoner by my punishment, eaten away daily by despair."



14

Job 14:1
Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.

"Man doesn't last long and the time he does have on earth is full of trouble," Job concludes.

Job 14:2–4
He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.

"How can You demand purity from one who is impure?" Job asks God. He's right, for, as David said, "In sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). We are depraved from the very beginning, gang. We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners. That is, we were born in sin. It's in our genes. That's why we need a change of jeans—to be clothed in *His* righteousness (Isaiah 61:10).

Job 14:5, 6
Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass; Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day.

"Life is short," Job says and again asks God for a break from his trial before he dies.

Job 14:7–10
For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?

"If there's water around, even if a tree is cut down, it can spring back to life again," Job says. "What about me? When a man dies, what happens to him?"

Job 14:11, 12
As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.

"Like water that evaporates or a flood that disappears in the ground below, so a man is not seen again," Job observes.

Job 14:13
O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!

Even in his frustration, Job touches on some important truths. Here, for example, he expresses what happened before Christ came and died on the Cross of Calvary. That is, when a believer died in Old Testament days, he didn't go directly to heaven because his sin had not yet been paid for. So,

according to the teaching of Jesus in Luke 16, he would go to the place of death that was divided into two compartments: the bad side where there was torment and flame, and the good side, Abraham's bosom, or paradise. In Ephesians 4:8 and 9, Paul writes that before Jesus ascended to heaven, He descended to the lower parts of the earth, Abraham's bosom, and led captivity captive. That is, He took those who were in the "holding tank" of paradise and took them to heaven.

"Remember me," Job cried.

"Remember me when You come into Your kingdom," the thief on the cross said to Jesus (Luke 23:42).

Job's prayer would be answered eventually. The thief 's prayer would be answered immediately because of the finished work of the Cross.

Job 14:14, 15
If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.

This is the ultimate question: Can man live again? "All of the days of my life, I will wait for that, Lord," Job says. "When You call, I'll answer." Here, again, Job expresses hope.

If you're not going through a trial presently, you will at some point. And when you do, remember Job. When does his faith flare up? Whenever he talks about living again, whenever he remembers the reality of eternity. Although it's hazy to him, when he focuses on heaven, suddenly there's hope in his heart.

That's why Jesus talked about heaven immediately after telling His disciples one of them would betray Him and that He was about to die (John 13:33—14:3). For hopeless and heavy hearts, the solution is always heaven. That's why the people of Israel were commanded by the Lord to put blue on the borders of their garments (Numbers 15:38). Blue is the color of heaven. Thus, they would be reminded that they were just passing through, that they were a heavenly people with every step they took.

"Let not your heart be troubled," Jesus said. "You believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions and I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, you may be also." When we go through difficulties, trials, and heartaches, we can either let our hearts be troubled or

keep them from being troubled. The choice is ours. It's not just a matter of positive thinking, but of thinking about what really matters. And what really matters is eternity. With every step you take, may your thoughts be of heaven.

Job 14:16
For now thou numberest my steps: dost thou not watch over my sin?

"Lord," cries Job, "You're judging every step I take." Again, this is how it works—when we go through trials, we have flare-ups of faith that are more often than not followed by dousings of doubt.

Job 14:17
My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity.

"Lord, You're collecting my sin and putting it in a bag," Job said. And, in a sense, he was right for, according to Micah 7:19, God does gather our sin and put it in a bag. But it's not to hold it over our heads—it's to cast it to the bottom of the sea. In Bible days, the Jews were terrified of the ocean. And here, the prophet declares that that's precisely where their sins would be dumped, in the place no one would go.

"As far as the east is from the west, that's how far your sins are from me," the Lord would declare (Psalm 103:12).

"Your sins and iniquities I will remember no more," the Lord declares (see Hebrews 10:17).

Job, it's true that your sins were collected in a bag but only to be cast into the sea of God's forgetfulness, the deepest place imaginable.

Job 14:18, 19 (a)
And surely the mountain falling cometh to nought, and the rock is removed out of his place. The waters wear the stones: thou washest away the things which grow out of the dust of the earth;

Mountains and rocks erode.

Job 14:19 (b)
. . . and thou destroyest the hope of man.

Job is despairing. "Just as mountains erode and rocks are removed on a given day, so, Lord You destroy the hope of man," he says.

Job 14:20, 21
Thou prevailest for ever against him, and he passeth: thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away. His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not; and they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them. But his flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul within him shall mourn.

"Thou changest his countenance," or, literally, "You make us wrinkled." Again, Job is right. We grow old, memory fades, and we experience pain physically and emotionally because life is tough and it takes a toll.

And so ends Round One of what will be a Three-Round Title fight.



15 The great debate is underway. The bell is about to ring for Round Two in a Three-Round Heavyweight bout between Job and his three friends who are theologically sparring. Job's three friends are trying to "knock some sense" into him by getting him to admit that he is a terrible sinner. We, however, know he's not. With the advantage of the first chapters of this book that bears his name, we know that what's taking place is not because of Job's sinfulness, but actually because of his righteousness.

Job 15:1, 2
Then answered Eliphaz the Temanite, and said, Should a wise man utter vain knowledge, and fill his belly with the east wind?

"You're supposed to be wise, Job, but you're full of hot air," Eliphaz says.

Job 15:3–6

Should he reason with unprofitable talk? or with speeches wherewith he can do no good? Yea, thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God. For thy mouth uttereth thine iniquity, and thou choosest the tongue of the crafty. Thine own mouth condemneth thee, and not I: yea, thine own lips testify against thee.

"It's not my fault, Job," says Eliphaz. "It's your own words that will condemn you." Eliphaz was more concerned about *being* right than about *doing* right. He makes his case. He states his points—all without compassion or sympathy. Why? I suggest it was because not only did Eliphaz want to be right intellectually, but he was concerned theologically. That is, if Job was right, if problems, pain, and difficulty were not the direct result of sin in a man's life, he himself could be the next target. Thus, for his own peace of mind, he felt he had to make an airtight case that bad things don't happen to good people.

We, too, have a tendency to want to put God in a box, to make things tidy and predictable. But the last people who tried to put Him in a box discovered He wouldn't stay there. Three days later, He rose again. The Lord doesn't stay in boxes you and I construct. "The Lord can't do this," we say. "He doesn't work that way," we insist. Are we sure?

Job 15:7–9
Art thou the first man that was born? or wast thou made before the hills? Hast thou heard the secret of God? and dost thou restrain wisdom to thyself? What knowest thou, that we know not? what understandest thou, which is not in us?

Eliphaz's speech rings a bell. In Numbers 16, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram came to Moses, saying, "You take too much upon yourself. Who set you up in this position? Are we not all endued with wisdom?"

Job 15:10
With us are both the grayheaded and very aged men, much elder than thy father.

Evidently, Job's friends were significantly older than he.

Job 15:11 (a)
Are the consolations of God small with thee?

"Is God's comfort not enough for you, Job?" Eliphaz asks.

Job 15:11 (b)–13
. . . is there any secret thing with thee? Why doth thine heart carry thee away? and what do thy eyes wink at, That thou turnest thy spirit against God, and lettest such words go out of thy mouth?

"What secret sin have you committed that has turned your heart against God and caused you to say things you shouldn't have said?" Eliphaz asks.

Job 15:14
What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?

"You claim to be righteous, Job, but can any man claim that?"

Job 15:15 (a)
Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints . . .

Even though to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, were called to be saints (e.g. Romans 1:7), we know that all have sinned (Romans 3:23). Therefore, Eliphaz is correct in saying that God can't trust us.

Job 15:15 (b)
. . . yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight.

Eliphaz is again right for Satan still has access to heaven. But there's coming a day when there will be a new heaven that hasn't been polluted by sin (Revelation 21:1).

Job 15:16
How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?

I find this intriguing because, although Eliphaz's points are valid, they don't tell the whole story. Yes, it's true that a man is born in iniquity. Yes, it's true that there is none righteous. But what a different heart we hear from a man who was a lover of God . . .

> What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!
>
> Psalm 8:4–9

Eliphaz says, "What is man? He drinks of evil continually. He's a sinner. He's unclean." That's true. But David, a lover of God who understands His grace and mercy adds, "But we're loved by You, God." The tone of the heart of David and Eliphaz are vastly different.

In our understanding of biblical principles, it is important that we do not become those who have knowledge but have not love lest we become as a clanging bell or a tinkling cymbal (1 Corinthians 13). Love is the key. Therefore, I believe the overarching lesson the Lord has for us in Job's miserable counselors is that, although they might have a point, they don't have a heart.

> **Job 15:17–19**
> **I will shew thee, hear me; and that which I have seen I will declare; Which wise men have told from their fathers, and have not hid it: Unto whom alone the earth was given, and no stranger passed among them.**

"The wise men of old know the truth and they passed it on to others," Eliphaz declares.

> **Job 15:20, 21**
> **The wicked man travaileth with pain all his days, and the number of years is hidden to the oppressor. A dreadful sound is in his ears: in**

prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him.

"Even though the wicked man might prosper at first, destruction will inevitably come upon him," Eliphaz says. Job being the most prosperous man of the east, the application is obvious. Eliphaz is indicting Job.

Job 15:22–24
He believeth not that he shall return out of darkness, and he is waited for of the sword. He wandereth abroad for bread, saying, Where is it? he knoweth that the day of darkness is ready at his hand. Trouble and anguish shall make him afraid; they shall prevail against him, as a king ready to the battle.

The man Eliphaz describes was once prosperous but is now begging for bread, hearing things in his ears, and afraid of the dark. Filled with trepidation and anxiety, he's becoming neurotic. In this, Eliphaz is giving his impression of Job.

Job 15:25–27
For he stretcheth out his hand against God, and strengtheneth himself against the Almighty. He runneth upon him, even on his neck, upon the thick bosses of his bucklers: Because he covereth his face with his fatness, and maketh collops of fat on his flanks.

Eliphaz insists that the only explanation for a man who was once prosperous but later experiences tribulation is that at some point he defied God.

Job 15:28, 29
And he dwelleth in desolate cities, and in houses which no man inhabiteth, which are ready to become heaps. He shall not be rich, neither shall his substance continue, neither shall he prolong the perfection thereof upon the earth.

Continuing his erroneous assessment of Job, Eliphaz says, "Yes, you were fat. Yes, you were prosperous. But it's because you took advantage of people.

Such a man will not prosper indefinitely. He'll have a reversal. The bubble will burst. There will be a day of reckoning."

Job 15:30
He shall not depart out of darkness; the flame shall dry up his branches, and by the breath of his mouth shall he go away.

It was fire that consumed Job's sheep and servants. Therefore, Eliphaz is making a heartless and cruel reference to Job's own experience.

Job 15:31, 32
Let not him that is deceived trust in vanity: for vanity shall be his recompence. It shall be accomplished before his time, and his branch shall not be green.

"Not only will emptiness be the wicked man's only reward, but he'll be cut off in the prime of life," Eliphaz says.

Job 15:33
He shall shake off his unripe grape as the vine, and shall cast off his flower as the olive.

This verse is especially cruel for it's an allusion to children. Job had just lost ten children. Eliphaz is referring to Job's personal experience—fire, loss of wealth, and loss of family.

Job 15:34, 35
For the congregation of hypocrites shall be desolate, and fire shall consume the tabernacles of bribery. They conceive mischief, and bring forth vanity, and their belly prepareth deceit.

Eliphaz continues to make his case theologically, but he's absolutely void of any kind of compassion, grace, or mercy. "Not only does the wicked man deceive others, but he deceives himself," he says, referring, of course, to Job as he audaciously and heartlessly weaves Job's painful experience into his sermon.

16

Job 16:1, 2

Then Job answered and said, I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all.

Eliphaz's speech was nothing new to Job. A repeat of Round One, it was a little more cynical and cruel, but offered no new information or insights.

Job 16:3

Shall vain words have an end? or what em-boldeneth thee that thou answerest?

"Won't you ever be quiet?" Job asks his friends. "How dare you speak like this!"

Job 16:4, 5

I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you. But I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should asswage your grief.

"If you were in my shoes and I in yours, I could come down on you, find fault with you, and point my finger at you," Job says. "But that's not what I would do. I would seek to strengthen you, to take away your grief."

When I desire direction, I always look to men who have gone through difficulties, been involved in battles, experienced breaking because they relate to me in an entirely different way than a man who hasn't been broken, who hasn't gone through very much. That is why it's important for us to realize that difficulties are actually blessings from the Lord, for they keep us from ending up like Job's friends: self-righteous and arrogant, heartless and cynical.

Job 16:6

Though I speak, my grief is not asswaged: and though I forbear, what am I eased?

"If I defend myself or keep silent, either way, I'm not being relieved of this grief," Job says.

Job 16:7, 8
But now he hath made me weary: thou hast made desolate all my company. And thou hast filled me with wrinkles, which is a witness against me: and my leanness rising up in me beareth witness to my face.

"I feel like a wrinkled bag of bones because of what I've been through. I'm aging prematurely," Job laments.

Job 16:9–17
He teareth me in his wrath, who hateth me: he gnasheth upon me with his teeth; mine enemy sharpeneth his eyes upon me. They have gaped upon me with their mouth; they have smitten me upon the cheek reproachfully; they have gathered themselves together against me. God hath delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over into the hands of the wicked. I was at ease, but he hath broken me asunder: he hath also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark. His archers compass me round about, he cleaveth my reins asunder, and doth not spare; he poureth out my gall upon the ground. He breaketh me with breach upon breach, he runneth upon me like a giant. I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin, and defiled my horn in the dust. My face is foul with weeping, and my eyelids is the shadow of death; Not for any injustice in mine hands: also my prayer is pure.

After calling his friends miserable comforters, Job describes his own situation as though he's been torn, gnashed at with others' teeth, gaped at by others' eyes, smitten on the cheek, delivered to the hands of the ungodly, hung up like a target, poured out upon the ground, yet all the while innocent. But wait, Job. All of these descriptions are prophetic, pointing to the One who was to come who was literally hung up on the Cross like a target for His Father to pour out the wrath that should have been poured out on you and me.

This means, Job, in this whole ordeal you're going through, you're being like Jesus. I know you're struggling, questioning, and wondering, but you're

becoming like Jesus in the process of this difficulty. You're going through what He would go through. He's entrusted you with the fellowship of suffering.

> That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;
>
> Philippians 3:10

A bonding takes place when you're with people who have suffered like you've suffered, who have cried like you've cried, and who have hurt like you've hurt. Even though Abraham's son would be spared, in obedience to God's command to offer him as a sacrifice, Abraham would.

Job 16:18, 19
O earth, cover not thou my blood, and let my cry have no place. Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.

Regardless of what his friends said about him, Job declared that God was his witness. When people come down on you, hang in there. Regardless of what they think, just keep loving the Lord, serving others, and celebrating your salvation.

Job 16:20
My friends scorn me: but mine eye poureth out tears unto God.

"I can't depend on my friends, but I can pour out my tears to God," Job concluded.

As often quoted, Corrie ten Boom said, "You'll never know the Lord is all you need until the Lord is all you have." It's true. As long as there are people around us whom we can turn to or lean on, we'll do that. So sometimes, the Lord takes away those props that we might learn to lean on Him and in so doing discover more than our best friends could ever provide.

Job 16:21, 22
O that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbour! When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return.

This cry of Job is fully answered in the person of Jesus Christ, for if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father in the person of Jesus Christ (1 John 2:1).



17 Job 17:1–3

My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves are ready for me. Are there not mockers with me? and doth not mine eye continue in their provocation? Lay down now, put me in a surety with thee; who is he that will strike hands with me?

"I can't go on much longer," Job says. "Oh, that there were someone who would take my side."

Job 17:4, 5

For thou hast hid their heart from understanding: therefore shalt thou not exalt them. He that speaketh flattery to his friends, even the eyes of his children shall fail.

"Flattery" in verse 5 literally refers to the idea of preying upon someone. That is, the result of preying on or picking on others is a lack of vision in their own kids. If, for example, kids are continually exposed to gossip and backbiting on the way home from church, their parents can't be surprised if they grow up with no desire to go to church. Therefore, we ought never to speak words of prey toward any sister or brother lest our kids become blind to spiritual things.

Job 17:6–8

He hath made me also a byword of the people; and aforetime I was as a tabret. Mine eye also is dim by reason of sorrow, and all my members are as a shadow. Upright men shall be astonied at this, and the innocent shall stir up himself against the hypocrite.

"I'm being beaten on like a drum," Job says. "My vision and life lack insight. Therefore, fair-minded men will be surprised by my ordeal."

Job 17:9, 10
The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger. But as for you all, do ye return, and come now: for I cannot find one wise man among you.

"The righteous will go forward and onward," Job said. "The hypocrite, on the other hand, should just go back where he came from." This latter statement, referring to his friends, sounds caustic until we realize God would essentially say the same thing (42:7).

Job 17:11–16
My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart. They change the night into day: the light is short because of darkness. If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness. I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou are my mother, and my sister. And where is now my hope? as for my hope, who shall see it? They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when our rest together is in the dust.

"My good days are behind me. My hopes are dashed. My dreams are dark," Job laments. "And they will all accompany me to the grave."

Oh, Job will do better but not before he goes through even deeper waters . . .



18 George Bernard Shaw said the average conversation is like a phonograph with half a dozen records. You soon grow tired of them all. Certainly I suppose Job felt that way as he heard the same song being sung over and over by his three friends. "God is just," they said. "He rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. Therefore if you're going through these things, it must be because you are wicked. Confess, Job. Get right."

In Round Two, we hear from Bildad . . .

Job 18:1, 2 (a)

Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said, How long will it be ere ye make an end of words?

"Job, when will you pipe down?" Bildad asks. If Bildad is impatient with Job, the feeling is mutual, as seen in the next chapter (19:2).

Job 18:2 (b)
. . . mark, and afterwards we will speak.

"Say something meaningful and then we'll converse," Bildad says.

Job 18:3
Wherefore are we counted as beasts, and reputed vile in your sight?

"You treat us like dumb, stupid animals. Why do you talk to us this way?" Bildad asks.

Job 18:4
He teareth himself in his anger: shall the earth be forsaken for thee? and shall the rock be removed out of his place?

"Job, will tearing your clothes cause the earth to be rocked? Will everything be shaken simply because you're going through this?" Bildad asks. At this point, Bildad will get very specific, likening the wicked man to a darkened light in verses 5 and 6, a trapped traveler in verses 7 through 10, a fugitive in verses 11 through 15, and a rotting tree in verses 16 through 21. And the implication is that they are all pictures of Job . . .

Job 18:5, 6
Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine. The light shall be dark in his tabernacle, and his candle shall be put out with him.

According to Proverbs 20:27, the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord. Bildad's point is that the Lord can take the life of the wicked any time He chooses.

Job 18:7–10
The steps of his strength shall be straitened, and his own counsel shall cast him down. For he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walketh upon a snare. The gin shall take him by the heel, and the robber shall prevail against him. The snare is laid for him in the ground, and a trap for him in the way.

The Hebrew word translated "snare" speaks of a pit covered by brush. A "gin" is a noose that, if stepped on, can suspend a person upside down. Thus, Bildad says, "The reason your life has been turned upside down, Job, is due to your own wickedness and sin."

Job 18:11–15
Terrors shall make him afraid on every side, and shall drive him to his feet. His strength shall be hungerbitten, and destruction shall be ready at his side. It shall devour the strength of his skin: even the firstborn of death shall devour his strength. His confidence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle, and it shall bring him to the king of terrors. It shall dwell in his tabernacle, because it is none of his: brimstone shall be scattered upon his habitation.

In Israel today, when a suicide bomber is identified, the house of his family is bulldozed. Bildad says that even though a fugitive experiences momentary freedom, his house will ultimately come crashing down around him.

Job 18:16–21
His roots shall be dried up beneath, and above shall his branch be cut off. His remembrance shall perish from the earth, and he shall have no name in the street. He shall be driven from light into darkness, and chased out of the world. He shall neither have son nor nephew among his people, nor any remaining in his dwellings. They that come after him shall be astonied at his day, as they that went before were affrighted. Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked, and this is the place of him that knoweth not God.

"Not only will your own life dry up from the roots, Job, but your family tree will be cut off as well," Bildad warns Job. Keep in mind, Job had just lost

seven sons and three daughters, rendering Bildad's words especially cruel.



19 Job 19:1–3

Then Job answered and said, How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words? These ten times have ye reproached me: ye are not ashamed that ye make yourselves strange to me.

"Over and over again you accuse me," Job replies. "Aren't you ashamed that you've hardened your heart against me?"

Job 19:4
And be it indeed that I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself.

"Even if I have erred," Job continues, "you haven't proved a thing."

Job 19:5, 6 (a)
If indeed ye will magnify yourselves against me, and plead against me my reproach: Know now that God hath overthrown me . . .

"If you're going to come down on me, you need to understand that what's happened to me has been by the hand of God," Job explains. "It's not what you think. It's not because of iniquity or rebellion. It's God who's doing this for reasons I don't know and can't understand."

Then Job proceeds to paint a more complete illustration of his situation, providing eight analogies, doubling Bildad's four . . .

Now Job says, let me give you a fuller picture, a more complete illustration of my desperate situation. Bildad brought up four analogies. Job will give eight . . .

Job 19:6 (b)
. . . and hath compassed me with his net.

"I'm like an innocent animal that has been trapped by God," Job says.

Job 19:7
Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment.

"I am a wrongly accused criminal in court."

Job 19:8
He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths.

"I am a traveler fenced in without light. God has fenced me in and I can't see any way out," Job says.

Job 19:9
He hath stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head.

"I'm like a king dethroned and defamed."

Job 19:10 (a)
He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone . . .

"I am like a structure destroyed."

Job 19:10 (b)
. . . and mine hope hath he removed like a tree.

"I am a tree that has been uprooted," Job says.

Job 19:11, 12
He hath also kindled his wrath against me, and he counteth me unto him as one of his enemies. His troops come together, and raise up their way against me, and encamp round about my tabernacle.

"I'm like a besieged enemy."

Job 19:13–20

He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are verily estranged from me. My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. They that dwell in mine house, and my maids, count me for a stranger: I am an alien in their sight. I called my servant, and he gave me no answer; I intreated him with my mouth. My breath is strange to my wife, though I intreated for the children's sake of mine own body. Yea, young children despised me; I arose, and they spake against me. All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me. My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth.

"Finally, I am a man forsaken and forgotten," Job laments.

Job 19:21 (a)
Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends . . .

Abraham Lincoln wisely said that he has a right to criticize who has a heart to help. Job's friends, however, weren't there to help. Oh, initially, they might have come with that in mind. But now they were more interested in being right than in doing right.

Job 19:21 (b)
. . . for the hand of God hath touched me.

Job is not quite right on this point because it is not the hand of God that has caused these things to happen. We know from chapters 1 and 2 that it was actually the work of Satan. But Job didn't know this. All he knew was there was no big sin in his life that merited his treatment.

"Wait," you say. "It might not have been God's hand directly, but He removed His hand of protection from Job and allowed the Adversary to bring these things into Job's life. God could have protected him, couldn't He?"

Yes. But once again, when we look at the hand of God that could have shielded Job, we see a hole where a nail pierced it as He hung on the Cross for you, for me, and for Job. Every time we get into a hard situation, we tend to mentally put God on trial. But the answer will always be found in "Cross-examination"—for as we look at the Cross, we have no other option but to say,

"Lord, I understand that You are madly in love with me. You proved it absolutely when You died in my place so that my sins could be washed away and I could live with You forever. Therefore, although I might have lots of questions and confusion, the reality is that every time I hold Your broken body and blood, I realize that You care passionately about me, that, in fact, You love me to death."

Looking back at what Job says concerning himself in chapter 19, we see a picture of Jesus. That's not surprising, for the answer to all Job's questions, as well as the answer to all our confusion is always Jesus . . .

- In verse 7, Job said, "I cry out to God but am not heard."
  "Why hast thou forsaken me?" Jesus cried from the Cross of Calvary.
- In verse 8, Job said, "My path is covered in darkness."
  Darkness covered the face of the earth as Jesus hung on the Cross.
- In verse 9, Job said, "I am stripped of my glory and my crown has been taken."
  Jesus was stripped as He hung on the Cross and the crown of His majesty was replaced by a crown of thorns.
- In verse 10, Job said, "God has destroyed me."
  Jesus was marred, beaten, and disfigured more than any other man, Isaiah tells us (53:5), in ways we can't understand this side of heaven.
- In verse 10, Job said, "My hope has been removed like a tree."
  Jesus was pinned to a tree.
- In verse 11, Job said, "God has kindled His wrath against me."
  The wrath that should have been poured out on us was poured out on Jesus.
- In verse 12, Job said, "God's armies are come together against me."
  Jesus was crucified not only by Roman soldiers, but by all of humanity.
- In verse 13, Job said, "My family is estranged from me.
  Jesus' own brothers didn't believe in Him and His disciples ran from Him.

As Jesus hung on the Cross, the Roman soldiers came to break His legs in order to put Him to death quickly, the next day being a holy day. But when they came to speed up the death process, they marveled that He was already dead.

In other words, Jesus died more quickly than they thought He would. He gave up the ghost sooner than they had anticipated. Perhaps sometimes we go through elongated difficulties and trials because, like Job, we're struggling to prove our point, to justify our position, or to have our way. But could it be that the Lord might say, "Just die. Give it up. Lay it down"?

Truly, there can be no reconciliation apart from death (Hebrews 9:16). Reconciliation between any two people cannot take place without death. Somebody's gotta die. The only question is who and when? Wouldn't it have been a tragedy if Jesus had kept on struggling on the Cross hour after hour, day after day? Aren't we glad that Jesus laid His life down after six hours? Why did He die so quickly? I suggest it was because the sooner He died, the sooner He would rise.

So, too, the sooner we die, resurrection and restoration will follow. I wonder if there is a husband or wife who is going through trials in their marriage because you're right and she's wrong. I wonder if there is a friend who is avoiding another because it's her fault not yours. Here's a better idea: Give it up. Let it go. Lay it down. Die.

To ensure that Jesus was indeed dead, the Roman soldiers jabbed a spear in His side and out poured blood and water, the signs of a broken heart. You'll know you're truly dead to your rights, your point, your self if, when the sticking point is jabbed in your side, the only thing that flows from you is water and blood, redemption and refreshment.

Job 19:22, 23
Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh? Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book!

Job, your words will indeed be written in a book. In fact, it will be a best-seller.

Job 19:24
That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!

Job couldn't have known this, but his words have been engraved on countless tombstones throughout history. At this low ebb with friends forsaking him and God confusing him, Job has yet another grand and glorious breakthrough of faith . . .

Job 19:25, 26
For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:

The word "redeemer" or *goel,* speaks of one who can set free, purchase back, or recoup what has been lost.

In chapter 9, Job said, "I wish I had a daysman."

In chapter 16, he said, "I wish I had an advocate."

Here in chapter 19, he says, "I know I have a Redeemer."

There is an increasingly clear and powerful revelation that takes place as Job's tribulation continues. That's the way it works in spiritual life. Job is confused, but there are fantastic revelations that come his way in the midst of his personal tribulation, and that's what we will discover, as well. In the time of tribulation, there is inevitably grand and glorious revelation of who our Lord is. From Genesis through Revelation, we see this theme over and over again. Whenever God's people go through tribulation and difficulty, testing and trial, they inevitably receive fresh understanding and revelation concerning the nature, the character, and the reality of our Lord.

We see not only revelation, but redirection. That is, when Job was at the bottom, he started thinking about eternity in a way he perhaps never would have had everything remained comfortable. I'm convinced that prosperity is a far greater problem for us than persecution is because when we're prosperous, we tend not to think about eternity or heaven. We start living for this life. So, in His goodness, the Lord says to us, "In order to get you thinking about heaven—where you're going to spend the next gazillion years—to get your focus off of the football game, your backyard, or your car, I will send challenges, trials, and difficulties your way. When you're at the bottom the only place you can look is up."

Tensions in relationships, setbacks in business, debilitating illnesses all make us long for heaven. That's why the Lord allows them to come into our

lives. Without them, we would be too rooted in a world that is passing away. And God loves us too much for that.

Job would have greater understanding of who God is and a greater hope for the future solely because of his losses and difficulties. “In my flesh, I will see God,” he declares. “This is not the end of the road for me.”

Job 19:27
Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.

“Not another” literally means “not a stranger.” In other words, Job said, “I’m going to see God and I’ll know Him.” How would Job recognize God. Through the time they spent together in the fellowship of suffering.

Job 19:28, 29
But ye should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me? Be ye afraid of the sword: for wrath bringeth the punishments of the sword, that ye may know there is a judgment.

“You guys should be careful,” Job warns his friends, “because judgment day is coming.”

How do you summarize success? Bildad, Zophar, and Eliphaz would say it is to live a life of ease and prosperity, free from tribulation and difficulty. Jesus’ definition of success, however, is to hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Unlike his friends, Job was slowly but surely beginning to understand this.



20 Zophar now enters the fray. This will be the last time we hear from him . . .

Job 20:1–5

Then answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said, Therefore do my thoughts cause me to answer, and for this I make haste. I have heard the check of my reproach, and the spirit of my understanding causeth me to answer. Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment?

"It is the evil man who dies young," Zophar says. How, then, Zophar do you explain Robert Murray McCheyne, the great Scottish preacher who died at twenty-nine, David Brainerd, missionary to the American Indians, who died at twenty-eight, Jim Eliot, missionary to the Auca Indians who died at twenty-four? Once again, Zophar is wrong.

Job 20:6–9
Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; Yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he? He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night. The eye also which saw him shall see him no more; neither shall his place any more behold him.

"The godless will be utterly forgotten," Zophar contends.

Job 20:10
His children shall seek to please the poor, and his hands shall restore their goods.

In other words, the children of the godless man will have to repay his debts.

Job 20:11–14
His bones are full of the sin of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust. Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue; Though he spare it, and forsake it not; but keep it still within his mouth: Yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him.

“Your bones ache, Job,” said Zophar. “Your family has been destroyed. And the sin that once seemed so sweet has worked its way down to your belly and is making you sick.”

Job 20:15–19
He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again: God shall cast them out of his belly. He shall suck the poison of asps: the viper’s tongue shall slay him. He shall not see the rivers, the floods, the brooks of honey and butter. That which he laboured for shall he restore, and shall not swallow it down: according to his substance shall the restitution be, and he shall not rejoice therein. Because he hath oppressed and hath forsaken the poor; because he hath violently taken away an house which he builded not;

Zophar says, “I think I’ve got the read on you, Job. You exploited the poor. You kicked them out of their homes. You absorbed their property. That’s why you’re so wealthy.”

Job 20:20
Surely he shall not feel quietness in his belly, he shall not save of that which he desired.

“The wicked man won’t be able to keep that which he dreamed of. It’s all going to disappear,” Zophar says.

Job 20:21, 22
There shall none of his meat be left; therefore shall no man look for his goods. In the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits: every hand of the wicked shall come upon him.

“At the pinnacle of his power, at the height of his career, the godless will be in difficulty,” Zophar declares.

Job 20:23–26 (a)
When he is about to fill his belly, God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him, and shall rain it upon him while he is eating. He shall flee from the iron weapon, and the bow of steel shall strike

him through. It is drawn, and cometh out of the body; yea, the glittering sword cometh out of his gall: terrors are upon him. All darkness shall be hid in his secret places . . .

"The treasure of the wicked will never be found. It will be lost in the dark," Zophar contends.

Job 20:26 (b)
. . . a fire not blown shall consume him; it shall go ill with him that is left in his tabernacle.

Keep in mind that Job has lost his wealth. Fire has come down and consumed his herds. Therefore, Zophar's accusations are very pointedly aimed at him.

Job 20:27–29
The heaven shall reveal his iniquity; and the earth shall rise up against him. The increase of his house shall depart, and his goods shall flow away in the day of his wrath. This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him by God.

I imagine Job was glad that Zophar was finally finished.



21

Job 21:1–3
But Job answered and said, Hear diligently my speech, and let this be your consolations. Suffer me that I may speak; and after that I have spoken, mock on.

"Console me simply by listening to me," Job tells his friends. "Then, after I've spoken, you can continue mocking me if you choose."

Job 21:4
As for me, is my complaint to man? and if it were so, why should not my spirit be troubled?

“My argument isn’t with man, but with God,” Job says. “No wonder my spirit is troubled. I don’t understand what He’s doing.”

Job 21:5, 6
Mark me, and be astonished, and lay your hand upon your mouth. Even when I remember I am afraid, and trembling taketh hold on my flesh.

“You’re going to be shocked by what I have to say,” Job says. “My own thoughts cause me to tremble. I know I’m on thin ice. I know I’m out on a limb in questioning Him. But I must be honest.”

Job 21:7
Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?

“How is it that the wicked live to a ripe, old age?” Job asks.

Job 21:8
Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes.

“The children of the wicked grow up and take over after them.”

Job 21:9–13
Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. Their bull gendereth, and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave.

“God doesn’t discipline or punish the wicked. Everything goes well with them. And on top of that, they die painlessly,” Job says.

Job 21:14, 15

Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?

"The wicked aren't interested in God because they do just fine without Him," Job concludes.

Job 21:16, 17 (a)
Lo, their good is not in their hand: the counsel of the wicked is far from me. How oft is the candle of the wicked put out!

The exclamation mark here would have been better translated as a question mark.

Job 21:17 (b)
. . . and how oft cometh their destruction upon them!

"The wicked don't seem to be snuffed out," Job says. "On the contrary, they seem to do well."

Job 21:17 (c), 18
. . . God distributeth sorrows in his anger. They are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away.

Continuing his argument, Job says, "How often do you see the wicked snuffed out? In reality, it's just the opposite. When the winds of adversity blow, the wicked are like chaff. They just go with the flow, unaffected by it at all."

Job 21:19
God layeth up his iniquity for his children: he rewardeth him, and he shall know it.

Here, Job alludes to an old adage that says God will deal with the children of the wicked.

Job 21:20, 21

His eyes shall see his destruction, and he shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty. For what pleasure hath he in his house after him, when the number of his months is cut off in the midst?

"What does the wicked man care what happens to his family when he dies? He's dead anyway. He's lived in prosperity, pleasure, and power. And even if his kids were to be judged down the road, what does he care?" Job asks.

Job 21:22
Shall any teach God knowledge? seeing he judgeth those that are high.

"God is the highest court on the earth. There is no higher court of appeals," Job says.

Job 21:23–26
One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. His breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow. And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure. They shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them.

"Rich and poor both end up in the same place. Everything ends in the grave."

Job 21:27, 28
Behold, I know your thoughts, and the devices which ye wrongfully imagine against me. For ye say, Where is the house of the prince? and where are the dwelling places of the wicked?

"I know what you're thinking," Job says. "You're going to tell me stories of the wicked men who were once rich but were later judged."

Job 21:29
Have ye not asked them that go by the way? and do ye not know their tokens,

"Ask the guy on the street if the wicked get away with their wickedness. If it always pays to be righteous."

Job 21:30
That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath.

"The wicked seem to be protected from destruction," Job concludes. "They seem to be unaffected by the events that deal a bitter blow to others."

Job 21:31
Who shall declare his way to his face? and who shall repay him what he hath done?

"No one dares to rebuke those who are powerful and prosperous. They seem to get away with behavior that would be unacceptable for anyone else," Job says.

"If you're prospering, you're righteous. If you're suffering, you're wicked," Job's friends said.

"That's not the way it works!" Job protests. "Evil men prosper greatly."

Job 21:32, 33
Yet shall he be brought to the grave, and shall remain in the tomb. The clods of the valley shall be sweet unto him, and every man shall draw after him, as there are innumerable before him.

"When the wicked man dies, there is a large funeral processional, complete with glowing eulogies."

Job 21:34
How then comfort ye me in vain, seeing in your answers there remaineth falsehood?

"Your arguments are illogical," Job says to his friends. But Job's friends have to insist that only the wicked are punished because if they're wrong, anyone—including them—could fall prey to what had befallen Job.

22 Here in chapter 22, as we hear from Eliphaz for the last time, we come to the Third and final round of this Three-Round, Heavyweight bout . . .

Job 22:1–3
Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?

"Do you think it pleases God that you're claiming to be righteous and perfect?" Eliphaz asks Job.

Job 22:4, 5
Will he reprove thee for fear of thee? will he enter with thee into judgment? Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite?

"Admit it, Job. You're the world's biggest sinner," Eliphaz insists.

Job 22:6–9
For thou hast taken a pledge from thy brother for nought, and stripped the naked of their clothing. Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry. But as for the mighty man, he had the earth; and the honourable man dwelt in it. Thou has sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless have been broken.

Eliphaz accuses Job of favoring the rich and powerful and ripping off the poor.

Job 22:10, 11
Therefore snares are round about thee, and sudden fear troubleth thee; Or darkness, that thou canst not see; and abundance of waters cover thee.

“Because of your sin, Job, you’re in the dark and flooded with judgment, just like in Noah’s day,” Eliphaz says.

Job 22:12
Is not God in the height of heaven? and behold the height of the stars, how high they are!

“God is higher than the stars and He sees everything. He knows what you’ve been doing,” Eliphaz declares.

Job 22:13–15
And thou sayest, How doth God know? can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not; and he walketh in the circuit of heaven. Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden?

“Nothing is hidden from God. He sees you’re walking down the same old tired path that the wicked have walked for years,” Eliphaz says.

Job 22:16, 17
Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflown with a flood: Which said unto God, Depart from us: and what can the Almighty do for them?

The wicked man says, “We don’t want God around. What can He do for us?”

Job 22:18 (a)
Yet he filled their houses with good things . . .

“Even though the wicked man wants nothing to do with God, God blesses him anyway.” In this, Eliphaz is right, for Jesus said the sun shines on both the evil and the good (Matthew 5:45). The problem is, for the worldling, this is the best it’s going to be. For us, however, this is the worst it’s going to be because we’re going to heaven.

Job 22:18 (b)–20

. . . but the counsel of the wicked is far from me. The righteous see it, and are glad: and the innocent laugh them to scorn. Whereas our substance is not cut down, but the remnant of them the fire consumeth.

"The righteous will go on," Eliphaz says. "The wicked, however, are ultimately burned and consumed."

Job 22:21, 22
Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee. Receive, I pray thee, the law from his mouth, and lay up his words in thine heart.

"Job, get acquainted with God," Eliphaz says. "Receive His Word. Get right with Him."

Job 22:23
If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles.

"If you'll humble yourself before God, you'll be built up," Eliphaz says.

Job 22:24, 25
Then shalt thou lay up gold as dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks. Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defence, and thou shalt have plenty of silver.

"Get right with God and you'll prosper like you once did before you fell into such obvious sin," Eliphaz says.

How did Eliphaz know about Job's supposed sin of having a hard heart toward the needy and taking advantage of people cruelly? After all, Eliphaz lived in an entirely different region. I suggest he came on the scene and, confused by Job's situation, he did his own investigation, listening to what others said about Job. Because Job was the most prosperous man on earth, no doubt people were jealous of him. Thus, it would not be surprising if their report was negative. Eliphaz, nonetheless, chose to listen and buy in to their appraisal.

All too often, we do exactly the same thing. We form opinions about people based on whatever negative things we hear. We choose to uncover sin rather than to discover a saint, to find fault rather than to find fruit. Our flesh believes the worst. Love, on the other hand, hopes all things (1 Corinthians 13).

In chapter 29, we'll see the accusations leveled against Job are not true at all.

Job 22:26, 27
For then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God. Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows.

Eliphaz extends a great invitation. The problem is, it is the wrong situation, for his words don't apply to Job.

Job 22:28
Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee: and the light shall shine upon thy ways.

This assumption of Eliphaz is the same one we hear today under the banner of "prosperity teaching." The problem with it is that such teaching assumes that we know what to ask for, that we know what's best. We don't.

Job 22:29, 30
When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up; and he shall save the humble person. He shall deliver the island of the innocent: and it is delivered by the pureness of thine hands.

Eliphaz ends by saying, "God will use you, Job, if you get right and open your heart."

23

Job 23:1–4
Then Job answered and said, Even to day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. Oh that I knew where I might find him!

that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.

In answer to Eliphaz's invitation, Job says, "I need a confrontation with the Lord in order to present my case to Him."

Job 23:5
I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me.

"I would not only argue my case, but would listen to what God has to say to me."

In this, I'm reminded of the words of another who verbally wrestled with God. "I will stand upon my watch," Habakkuk declared, "and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved" (2:1).

Job 23:6
Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me.

"God wouldn't argue against me. He would encourage me," Job says.

Job 23:7–9
There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him:

Job looked to the left, to the right, ahead, and behind. But he needed to look up.

Job 23:10 (a)
But he knoweth the way that I take . . .

Even though Job couldn't see God, he knew God would see him. Jesus said the Father seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). And I have discovered that it's a lot easier for God to find me than for me to find Him. Morning by morning, week by week, year after year, I have found this to be such a wonderful, simple, practical key: Worship the Lord because the Father zeroes in on those who worship Him. Worship Him in spirit and truth and see how He'll make Himself oh, so real to you in those morning hours before the breaking of the day or in the quiet hours of the night.

Psalm 22 says the Lord inhabits—or, literally, is enthroned upon—the praises of His people. Therefore, when I praise Him, I provide a throne for Him to rule over me and to make Himself known to me.

Job 23:10 (b)
. . . when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

"I don't have a lot of answers," Job admits. "But this I do know: God knows where I am and when He's tried me, I'll come forth as gold."

I believe it is this verse Peter refers to when he writes, "Our faith, tried by fire, is much more precious than gold that perishes" (see 1 Peter 1:7). In Bible days, gold was purified by increasing the temperature of molten gold to the place where the dross would be burned away and the smelter would know the process was complete when he looked into the pot of molten gold and saw the reflection of his own face.

That's what God wants from Job, from me, and from you. He wants to see His reflection in us. So He allows fiery trials to come our way in order that the impurities might be burned off. Why does He want to see His own reflection? Because He knows He is the essence of life, abundant life, real life.

When Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and life more abundantly," not a single person contested His claim. Multitudes were drawn to Him because of the abundant life that flowed from Him. "I want you to have the abundance I enjoy, the richness, the beauty, the joy, the peace that is Mine," He says to us. "I want you to be like Me because I am life to the greatest degree."

Job 23:11, 12
My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have

esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.

"I have walked in His ways," Job says. "I've kept His commands. And if I have a choice between breakfast and devotions, I go for devotions; between a lunch break with the guys or quiet time with the Lord, I'll opt for time with the Lord." No wonder Job was a righteous man. He had a passion for the Word of God.

Job 23:13–17
But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him. Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him. For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me: Because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither hath he covered the darkness from my face.

"I've walked in His ways, I've prioritized His Word, but I'm still in the dark," Job says. "Therefore, I need to stand before the judge of all the earth and present my case to Him. My questions are for God. I would present my case in such a way that He would hear what I say and would encourage me. But, because I can't stand before Him, I'm just kept in the dark."

After walking this far with Job, after knowing something of his heart, we want to break into the story and say, "Job, your problem is that you want to be the defense attorney when, in fact, you are actually the star witness. You don't understand your role. The case is between the Father and the accuser, the Father and the Adversary, the Father and Satan. You are simply a witness of God's keeping power, of His mercy and grace."

Jesus said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Ghost comes upon you to be My witnesses" (Acts 1:8). He didn't say to witness, primarily, but simply to *be* witnesses of what God can do as we go through hard times, setbacks, and difficulty.

Dear brother, precious sister, you're a witness. What's happening is big. It's eternal. Peter tells us angels are looking in, studying this amazing thing called salvation (1 Peter 1:12). The demons are looking on. Satan is snarling. God is smiling and saying, "Watch and see the reality of My faithfulness."

We don't have to figure it out, gang. We don't have to make a case, argue, or defend. We just have to *be* witnesses of what God has already done.



24

Job 24:1
Why, seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, do they that know him not see his days?

"Since God is not constrained by time, why do godly people not have their day?" Job asks. Then he goes on to talk about the injustice he sees in the country in verses 2 through 11, followed by the injustice he sees in the city in verses 12 through 17.

Job 24:2
Some remove the landmarks; they violently take away flocks, and feed thereof.

Job notes that people remove property markers and eat stolen sheep.

Job 24:3
They drive away the ass of the fatherless, they take the widow's ox for a pledge.

"Widows and orphans are being ripped off by evil men," Job says.

Job 24:4, 5
They turn the needy out of the way: the poor of the earth hide themselves together. Behold, as wild asses in the desert, go they forth to their work; rising betimes for a prey: the wilderness yieldeth food for them and for their children.

"The poor have to go into the desert place to find food for themselves and their families."

Job 24:6

They reap every one his corn in the field: and they gather the vintage of the wicked.

"The wicked exploit the poor widows and fatherless children."

Job 24:7, 8
They cause the naked to lodge without clothing, that they have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and embrace the rock for want of a shelter.

"The poor lack homes and even clothes to cover and shelter them," Job says.

Job 24:9
They pluck the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor.

"So wicked are these men that they even hold kids as collateral," Job says.

Job 24:10, 11
They cause him to go naked without clothing, and they take away the sheaf from the hungry; Which make oil within their walls, and tread their winepresses, and suffer thirst.

"The poor are the ones laboring to produce wine and oil, yet they're not allowed to partake of them," Job says. "They work hard, but don't share in the reward."

Job 24:12
Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded crieth out: yet God layeth not folly to them.

Job observes problems in the city, as well, where people get beat up.

Job 24:13
They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof.

“Evil men in the city neither walk in the light nor do what’s right,” Job says.

Job 24:14
The murderer rising with the light killeth the poor and needy, and in the night is as a thief.

Job is intelligent and observant. “Wherever I look,” he says, “be it in the city or the countryside, I see injustice.”

Job 24:15–17
The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me: and disguiseth his face. In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the daytime: they know not the light. For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death.

“Thieves scope out the houses they want to break into in the daytime and then return at night.”

In the following seven verses, Job’s frustration seems to mount as he denounces the evil man . . .

Job 24:18
He is swift as the waters; their portion is cursed in the earth: he beholdeth not the way of the vineyards.

A better rendering of the first phrase of this verse would be, “May he be as swift as waters.” In other words, “May the evil man pass from the scene quickly.”

Job 24:19, 20
Drought and heat consume the snow waters: so doth the grave those which have sinned. The womb shall forget him; the worm shall feed sweetly on him; he shall be no more remembered; and wickedness shall be broken as a tree.

"May the evil man go down to the grave and be remembered no more."

Job 24:21
He evil entreateth the barren that beareth not: and doeth not good to the widow.

"May the evil man have no sons."

Job 24:22–24
He draweth also the mighty with his power: he riseth up, and no man is sure of life. Though it be given him to be in safety, whereon he resteth; yet his eyes are upon their ways. They are exalted for a little while, but are gone and brought low; they are taken out of the way as all other, and cut off as the tops of the ears of corn.

"Though he be popular, prosperous, and powerful, may the evil man be cut down like wheat at harvest," Job says.

Job 24:25
And if it be not so now, who will make me a liar, and make my speech nothing worth?

"Who wouldn't agree with me that there is wickedness both in the country and in the city?" Job asks.

At this point, I think we see something happening in Job that is commendable. He is not simply focused on himself. Even in the midst of his own unbelievable difficulty and trial, he's looking around, saying, "Others are going through deep waters, as well."

When a storm arose on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples were afraid as the waves were rolling and the wind howling. But Mark tells us that on the sea there were also "other little ships" (4:36). In other words, Mark lets us know other guys were in the same "boat" they were.

Sometimes, in the midst of our own trials, the best thing we can do is simply take our eyes off ourselves, look around, and see what others are dealing with. It is often only in the midst of our own difficulties that we gain a greater sensitivity to the storms others are navigating.

25 Here in chapter 25, we come to the last time Bildad will speak . . .

Job 25:1–3
Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said, Dominion and fear are with him, he maketh peace in his high places. Is there any number of his armies? and upon whom doth not his light arise?

In response to Job's frustration regarding what he saw around him, Bildad piously says, "God is in control." Although this sounds good, Bildad's theology is actually insulating him from considering the plight of hurting people all around him.

Job 25:4, 5
How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight.

"You want to stand before God, Job. You want to plead your case and be justified. But the beauty of the moon and the brilliance of the stars aren't considered pure in God's sight. So how much less will you be?" Bildad asks.

Job 25:6
How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?

"If even the moon and the stars aren't pure in His sight, the grandeur and glory of the skies, how can you, a worm, maintain your innocence and be justified?" Bildad asks Job.

In Psalm 22, a psalm that prophetically speaks of the Crucifixion of Jesus we read,

> But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.

Psalm 22:6

How would a worm like Job ever be justified? Through Jesus, the Son of Man, who would become a worm in his stead.



26 Job 26:1–4

But Job answered and said, How hast thou helped him that is without power? how savest thou the arm that hath no strength? How hast thou counselled him that hath no wisdom? and how hast thou plentifully declared the thing as it is? To whom hast thou uttered words? and whose spirit came from thee?

"What is your basis for speaking?" Job asks Bildad. It is obvious that Bildad wasn't speaking on behalf of God, for the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to comfort, strengthen, edify, and heal.

Job 26:5, 6
Dead things are formed from under the waters, and the inhabitants thereof. Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering.

"God has dominion," Job says. "God sees everything that has passed on."

Job 26:7 (a)
He stretcheth out the north over the empty place . . .

"The stars overhead are unsearchable," Job declares. How right he is, for the more we learn of stars and galaxies, their number increases, leaving us more to learn.

Job 26:7 (b)
. . . and hangeth the earth upon nothing.

Job says this at a time when the Greeks thought the earth was held up on the shoulders of Atlas, when people in India believed it was held on the back of an

elephant, and when people in Africa thought it was supported by a giant tortoise.

Job 26:8
He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them.

"God has dominion not only over the world below and the world above, but the very atmosphere," Job declares.

Job 26:9–12
He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it. He hath compassed the waters with bounds, until the day and night come to an end. The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at his reproof. He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through the proud.

Job understands it is God who keeps the seas and oceans within in their boundaries.

Job 26:13
By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent.

The crooked serpent referred to here is very likely the name of a constellation.

Job 26:14
Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?

"Bildad," says Job, "you're talking about God being awesome. I'm aware of that. But you have to understand that what we see is just a whisper of His power. What are you going to do, then, with the shout and the thunder of His power? Who can figure out this One who is so far beyond our understanding?"

"Show us the Father," Philip said, "and it will suffice us."

"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," Jesus answered (John 14:8, 9).

We can see what neither Bildad nor Job could understand because Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, dwelling among us, giving understanding to us.



27 In chapter 27, we come to the second chapter of a six-chapter discourse Job gives as his final speech, his closing argument . . .

Job 27:1
Moreover Job continued his parable, and said,

Job continues his parable, or literally, his discourse.

Job 27:2–5
As God liveth, who hath taken away my judgment; and the Almighty, who hath vexed my soul; All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils; My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me.

On five previous occasions, Job maintained his innocence. But here he does something new: he backs it up with an oath.

Job 27:6, 7
My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live. Let mine enemy be as the wicked, and he that riseth up against me as the unrighteous.

Why does Job seem to be more insistent than ever regarding his righteousness? Because his friends were attempting to do what you and I can have a tendency to do. That is, they were trying to bring Job under conviction. "You can't be righteous," they said. "No one is." And as they made their case day after day, Job argued all the more energetically and emphatically.

When the Lord finally shows up on the scene, Job will repent. But it is only when the Lord shows up that Job breaks down. It isn't until the Lord comes on the scene that Job gives up his claim of righteousness. Sometimes we can seek

to bring people under conviction. Most of the time, however, it just causes people to build barriers and walls of resentment. How much better it is to leave the convicting work of sin to the Spirit. How much better it is if we love people and pray for them, trusting the Holy Spirit will make known to them the issues that need attention.

Jesus said, "It is expedient that I go away. For if I go not away, the Comforter will not come. But if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment." (See John 16:7, 8).

Job 27:8–10
For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul? Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him? Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he always call upon God?

"I know the hopelessness of the hypocrite," Job says. "And that's not me."

Job 27:11–13
I will teach you by the hand of God: that which is with the Almighty will I not conceal. Behold, all ye yourselves have seen it; why then are ye thus altogether vain? This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage of oppressors, which they shall receive of the Almighty.

"I know what the portion of the wicked man is," Job says. And then he goes on to describe it . . .

Job 27:14–18
If his children be multiplied, it is for the sword: and his offspring shall not be satisfied with bread. Those that remain of him shall be buried in death: and his widows shall not weep. Though he heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay; He may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver. He buildeth his house as a moth, and as a booth that the keeper maketh.

"The wicked man won't last. His children will experience neither health nor satisfaction. Even his widow doesn't cry. It's a horrible scene."

Job 27:19–23
The rich man shall lie down, but he shall not be gathered: he openeth his eyes, and he is not. Terrors take hold on him as waters, a tempest stealeth him away in the night. The east wind carrieth him away, and he departeth: and as a storm hurleth him out of his place. For God shall cast upon him, and not spare: he would fain flee out of his hand. Men shall clap their hands at him, and shall hiss him out of his place.

Virtually every phrase in verses 14 through 23 was first used by Bildad, Zophar, or Eliphaz to come down on Job.

The Bible says whatever a man sows, that shall he reap (Galatians 6:7). We see this principle throughout the Word from cover to cover . . .

Pharaoh ordered the drowning of baby boys that were born to the Jews. How did he die? He drowned (Exodus 1:22, 14:28).

When Adonibezek, king of the Canaanites, was captured, his thumbs and toes were cut off because he had done the same thing to his own captives (Judges 1:6, 7).

Haman built a gallows to hang Mordecai, only to die on the very gallows he built (Esther 7:10).

Daniel was thrown into the lions' den, but it was the men who ordered that he be thrown in that were eaten (Daniel 6:24).

As you read the Word and observe life, you can't help but see that we do indeed sow what we reap. Job's friends were harsh with Job. And now their own phrases are being used against them. That is why Jesus said we are to be people who dispense mercy and who bestow great grace . . .

Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.



28 As Job continues his closing argument here in chapter 28, it's as though he's thinking out loud, wondering where wisdom can be found . . .

Job 28:1–4
Surely there is a vein for the silver, and a place for gold where they fine it. Iron is taken out of the earth, and brass is molten out of the stone. He setteth an end to darkness, and searcheth out all perfection: the stones of darkness, and the shadow of death. The flood breaketh out from the inhabitant; even the waters forgotten of the foot: they are dried up, they are gone away from men.

Here we see a description of an underground mining operation, where water is channeled away.

Job 28:5
As for the earth, out of it cometh bread: and under it is turned up as it were fire.

There might be barley and oats on top of the earth, but underneath are gems and jewels.

Job 28:6, 7
The stones of it are the place of sapphires: and it hath dust of gold. There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen:

Even an eagle with a bird's eye view can't see the riches below the surface of the earth.

Job 28:8–11
The lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it. He putteth forth his hand upon the rock; he overturneth the mountains by the roots. He cutteth out rivers among the rocks; and

his eye seeth every precious thing. He bindeth the floods from overflowing; and the thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light.

Men can move mountains, overturn the earth, and expose what's below.

Job 28:12–28
But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it: and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold. Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; To make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder: Then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out. And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

After referring extensively to mining the earth for gems and jewels, Job ponders how to discover the gems and jewels of wisdom. He concludes that the way to do so is to listen to what the Lord declares and decrees. Solomon said it is the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). Paul would go on to say that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Jesus (Colossians 2:3). I rediscovered that this morning. Pondering some things, I grabbed my Bible and a cup of coffee and made my way to a small park. Enjoying the stars overhead as they broke through the clouds, I talked to the Lord about what was on my heart and my mind. And I came away from that

quiet place having the wisdom I needed for the morning. It's amazing! The Lord will *truly* meet us.

Everything you need to know about how to get through the rest of this day or tomorrow will be found in God—in talking to Him, in walking with Him, and in being in awe of Him. The fear of the Lord is not an abstract concept. The fear of the Lord simply says, "Lord, You're awesome, gracious, and good. And I need You desperately. So I'm going to begin this day with You because in You are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

If we don't fear the Lord, gang, we'll fear everything else. But if we fear Him, we'll have nothing else to fear.



29 In chapter 3, Job cursed the day he was born. Twenty-six chapters later, his perspective is a bit different. Now he's looking back and recalling God's past blessings . . .

Job 29:1–3
Moreover Job continued his parable, and said, Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; When his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness;

Job thinks back to the days when he saw the light, when he wasn't walking blindly in the dark.

Job 29:4
As I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle;

Even as a young child, Job evidently had an understanding of God.

Job 29:5
When the Almighty was yet with me, when my children were about me;

Job remembered the days he spent with his children. If you have kids or grandchildren, how I encourage you to seize the opportunity to share the Word with them, even if it's only a simple Bible story or song for the younger ones or a favorite verse with the older ones. Truly, those are the most special times you'll share.

Job 29:6
When I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil;

This speaks of the success of Job's occupation.

Job 29:7–9
When I went out to the gate through the city, when I prepared my seat in the street! The young men saw me, and hid themselves: and the aged arose, and stood up. The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth.

In earlier days, Job had taken his place among the leaders and wise men of the city in order to give counsel and instruction. Out of respect, young men stepped back when they saw him coming. Older men stood up. Everyone wanted to hear what he had to say.

Job 29:10, 11
The nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth. When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me:

"People listened to me gladly," Job says. "The work I did was blessed. My kids gathered around me. I was respected in town." He isn't bragging. He's simply referring to the reality of his situation in earlier days.

Job 29:12
Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.

Job's friends had accused him of ripping off the poor in order to increase his own wealth (20:19). Here, Job refutes their charge, saying, "People respected me because I was generous with the less fortunate. I shared my wealth freely and helped those who were hurting."

Job 29:14
I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame.

"I lived righteously and walked wisely," Job says. "I helped the blind and the lame."

Job 29:16
I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out.

"I cared for those who were disenfranchised, and if I didn't understand a matter, I tried to get to the bottom of it."

Job 29:17, 18
And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth. Then I said, I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand.

"I took a stand against evil and assumed I would die peacefully at the end of my days," Job says.

Job 29:19, 20
My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon my branch. My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand.

Because children are likened to arrows in Scripture (Psalm 127:4, 5), Job seems to be suggesting that he felt renewed by his kids.

Job 29:21–23

Unto me men gave ear, and waited, and kept silence at my counsel. After my words they spake not again; and my speech dropped upon them. And they waited for me as for the rain; and they opened their mouth wide as for the latter rain.

"Men were satisfied with my counsel," Job says, "and found it to be refreshing." My speech settled in their soul.

Job 29:24
If I laughed on them, they believed it not; and the light of my countenance they cast not down.

"I was able to encourage and uplift others."

Job 29:25
I chose out their way, and sat chief, and dwelt as a king in the army, as one that comforteth the mourners.

"I was both a commander and a comforter."

Remembering past blessings actually improves Job's present situation. This should not be surprising. In Deuteronomy 8, God declares, "Thou shalt remember all the ways the Lord thy God led thee." Fourteen more times in the Book of Deuteronomy alone God commands His people to remember. In days of difficulty, in times of despair, in seasons of despondency, how important it is to simply remember God and the gracious blessings He showers upon us daily (Psalm 68:19).

Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah. And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God?

Psalm 77:7–13

Walking through his own dark days, the psalmist says, "Will I ever be blessed again?" Then he adds the word *selah,* an instruction to wait or stop. After that, he goes on to say, "I'm going to look back and remember what God has done for me—the grace He's shown me, the blessings He has sent my way."

In this day when so many are depressed, it's necessary to remember what God has already done and to realize that, because He saw us through in the past, He's sure to see us through in the future. C.H. Spurgeon said that too often too many of us write our blessings in sand and our infirmities in marble. We focus on our pain and problems but that ought not be. We must be those who remember, recall, and reflect upon all God has done for us.

"How can this be?" the host of the wedding party said. "Most men serve the good wine at first and the cheaper wine at the end when no one would notice the difference. But you have kept the best for last." (See John 2). Why was the best wine saved for last? Because that's always the way of the Lord. He always takes us from glory to greater glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Job will lament in the next chapter but here, he's saying, "Wait a minute. God has been good to me."

And so must we.



30 We have seen sparks flying, tempers flaring, and fireworks igniting in this series of debates between Job and his three friends, who have been mercilessly accusing him of some serious, secret sin.

Here in chapter 30, we see Job in the midst of his last discourse, his closing argument, in the case he's been pleading. In chapter 29, he recalled his past blessings. Here in chapter 30, he laments his present sufferings, and in chapter 31, he'll wager his future standing.

Job 30:1
But now they that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock.

In the previous chapter, Job talked about how the young men made way out of respect when he walked through the city. But now it's a different situation

entirely, for even the poorest of them look down on him.

Job 30:2–8
Yea, whereto might the strength of their hands profit me, in whom old age was perished? For want and famine they were solitary; fleeing into the wilderness in former time desolate and waste. Who cut up mallows by the bushes, and juniper roots for their meat. They were driven forth from among men, (they cried after them as after a thief;) To dwell in the clifts of the valleys, in caves of the earth, and in the rocks. Among the bushes they brayed; under the nettles they were gathered together. They were children of fools, yea, children of base men: they were viler than the earth.

Young men acting like a pack of wild animals were the ones who held Job in derision.

Job 30:9
And now am I their song, yea, I am their byword.

Job is amazed by how far he's fallen.

Job 30:10
They abhor me, they flee far from me, and spare not to spit in my face.

Spitting in a man's face was the ultimate sign of disdain and disrespect.

Job 30:11–13
Because he hath loosed my cord, and afflicted me, they have also let loose the bridle before me. Upon my right hand rise the youth; they push away my feet, and they raise up against me the ways of their destruction. They mar my path, they set forward my calamity, they have no helper.

"Because God has let me go," Job says, "these young men have cast off all restraints. They trip me up and block my path. Not one is kind."

Job 30:14–16
They came upon me as a wide breaking in of waters: in the desolation they rolled themselves upon me. Terrors are turned upon me: they pursue my soul as the wind: and my welfare passeth away as a cloud. And now my soul is poured out upon me; the days of affliction have taken hold upon me.

As men pour out contempt upon him, Job feels like a huge wave is breaking over his head.

Job 30:17
My bones are pierced in me in the night season: and my sinews take no rest.

As if his emotional pain wasn't enough to bear, Job's entire body ached, as well.

Job 30:18, 19
By the great force of my disease is my garment changed: it bindeth me about as the collar of my coat. He hath cast me into the mire, and I am become like dust and ashes.

The word translated "garment" can mean "skin." Even Job's skin had taken a beating.

Job 30:20, 21
I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not. Thou art become cruel to me: with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me.

The picture here reminds me of a child in class, waving his hand energetically, trying to get his teacher's attention.

Job 30:22
Thou liftest me up to the wind; thou causest me to ride upon it, and dissolvest my substance.

"Lord, You throw me into the tornado," Job laments.

Job 30:23, 24
For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living. Howbeit he will not stretch out his hand to the grave, though they cry in his destruction.

The "house appointed for all living" is the grave. "You're not responding to my cry," Job says to the Lord. "You're not saving me when I'm going down."

Job 30:25, 26
Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor? When I looked for good, then evil came unto me: and when I waited for light, there came darkness.

"I felt compassion for those who were in trouble," Job laments. "But now that I'm in trouble, there is no one to feel the same for me."

Job 30:27–31
My bowels boiled, and rested not: the days of affliction prevented me. I went mourning without the sun: I stood up, and I cried in the congregation. I am a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls. My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burned with heat. My harp also is turned to mourning, and my organ into the voice of them that weep.

In earlier days, Job responded to the cries of the hurting. Therefore, he wonders why the Lord won't respond to him, when he is heartbroken and hurting.



31 In this final chapter of his argument, Job wagers his future standing, saying, "If I have done certain things, then I ought to be punished greatly . . .

Job 31:1–4

I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid? For what portion of God is there from above? and what inheritance of the Almighty from on high? Is not destruction to the wicked? and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity? Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps?

Job begins by declaring he has not been guilty of lust. "I will put no unclean thing before my eyes," the psalmist declares (see 101:3). Here, we learn that Job said the same thing.

Job 31:5–8
If I have walked with vanity, or if my foot hath hasted to deceit; Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity. If my step hath turned out of the way, and mine heart walked after mine eyes, and if any blot hath cleaved to mine hands; Then let me sow, and let another eat; yea, let my offspring be rooted out.

Verses 5 through 8 speak primarily of dishonesty. Thus, Job is saying, "I haven't walked in deceit."

Job 31:9–12
If mine heart have been deceived by a woman, or if I have laid wait at my neighbour's door; Then let my wife grind unto another, and let others bow down upon her. For this is an heinous crime; yea, it is an iniquity to be punished by the judges. For it is a fire that consumeth to destruction, and would root out all mine increase.

Verses 9 through 12 speak of adultery. Proverbs says he that commits adultery is unwise because he destroys his own soul. One's mind, emotions, and will are all radically affected by the sin of adultery because sexual union is not just about two bodies coming together, but about two souls becoming one.

Job 31:13–15
If I did despise the cause of my manservant or of my maidservant, when they contended with me; What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he

that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?

Verses 13 through 15 speak about the misuse of authority, of feeling superior to others, a charge of which Job claimed innocence. Philippians 2 tells us we are to esteem every man better than ourselves. I have found that a simple way to do this is to realize that every single person I meet throughout my life is better than me at something.

Job 31:16–23
If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail; Or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; (For from my youth he was brought up with me, as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother's womb;) If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; If his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate: Then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone. For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure.

Here Job is saying, "I'm not guilty of hardheartedness or callousness toward the poor. When they needed covering or food, I cared for them." So sure was Job of this that he said, "If that's not true, let my arm be ripped from my shoulder." The psalmist would later use this same language, saying, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning" or, literally, "Let my right hand be useless." (Psalm 137).

Job 31:24–28
If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much; If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above.

Here, Job maintains his innocence regarding greed and idolatry.

Job 31:29, 30
If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him: Neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul.

"I haven't been guilty of vindictiveness," Job says. "I didn't rejoice when calamity hit those who hated me."

Job 31:31, 32
If the men of my tabernacle said not, Oh that we had of his flesh! we cannot be satisfied. The stranger did not lodge in the street: but I opened my doors to the traveller.

Job was a man of hospitality. He shared freely. He was kind even to strangers.

Job 31:33, 34
If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom: Did I fear a great multitude, or did the contempt of families terrify me, that I kept silence, and went not out of the door?

Job was not guilty of hypocrisy. He didn't cover his sin like Adam or hide in his house, fearing he might be discovered.

Job 31:35
Oh that one would hear me! behold, my desire is, that the Almighty would answer me, and that mine adversary had written a book.

Utterly confused as to why his trial just goes on and on, Job mistakenly sees the Lord as his adversary.

Job 31:36
Surely I would take it upon my shoulder, and bind it as a crown to me.

"If God presented His case against me in a book, I would cling to whatever it was He said," Job declared. This, however, would render faith unnecessary, for if I can see or hear the Lord telling me why things are happening, faith is superfluous. And, because faith is the currency of eternity, it's a muscle that must be constantly exercised this side of heaven.

Job 31:37–40
I would declare unto him the number of my steps; as a prince would I go near unto him. If my land cry against me, or that the furrows likewise thereof complain; If I have eaten the fruits thereof without money, or have caused the owners thereof to lose their life: Let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley. The words of Job are ended.

Job maintains that he is innocent of the exploitation of property, saying, "If I haven't been good to the land or if I have taken advantage of the land of others, let thistles and weeds grow where there was once wheat and barley."

Job won't speak again until he's met by the Lord. But before the Lord shows up, another guy appears. His name is Elihu . . .



32

Job 32:1, 2
So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because he justified himself rather than God.

The fact that Elihu's pedigree was given means that he was not known like the other three friends. *Elihu* means "He is God." *Barachel* means "Blessed of God." Buz was a nephew of Abraham, (Genesis 22).

Job 32:3–7
Also against his three friends was his wrath kindled, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job. Now Elihu had waited till Job had spoken, because they were elder than he. When

Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, then his wrath was kindled. And Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered and said, I am young, and ye are very old; wherefore I was afraid, and durst not shew you mine opinion. I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom. But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.

In Elihu's speech, we see five aspects of his character. First, note that he is indignant. Four times he will talk about his wrath being kindled.

Job 32:9, 10
Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment. Therefore I said, Hearken to me; I also will shew mine opinion.

Secondly, Elihu believes he is inspired.

Job 32:11–14
Behold, I waited for your words; I gave ear to your reasons, whilst ye searched out what to say. Yea, I attended unto you, and, behold, there was none of you that convinced Job, or that answered his words: Lest ye should say, We have found out wisdom: God thrusteth him down, not man. Now he hath not directed his words against me: neither will I answer him with your speeches.

Thirdly, Elihu is independent, employing his own arguments rather than recycling the previous arguments of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

Job 32:15–20
They were amazed, they answered no more: they left off speaking. When I had waited, (for they spake not, but stood still, and answered no more;) I said, I will answer also my part, I also will shew mine opinion. For I am full of matter, the spirit within me constraineth me. Behold, my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles. I will speak, that I may be refreshed: I will open my lips and answer.

Fourthly, Elihu is impelled. “I have let you guys speak,” he says. “I have listened carefully. I’ve been respectful. But there are things I must say that are burning within me. They must be released or they’ll burst like wine in new wineskins.”

Job 35:21, 22
Let me not, I pray you, accept any man’s person, neither let me give flattering titles unto man. For I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my maker would soon take me away.

Finally, Elihu claims to be impartial, not influenced by position or title.

If Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar drew from tradition and education, Elihu piously claims to draw from revelation. The problem is, when God comes on the scene in chapter 39, He’ll talk about Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. But He’ll make no mention of Elihu.



33 Job 33:1–4

Wherefore, Job, I pray thee, hear my speeches, and hearken to all my words. Behold, now I have opened my mouth, my tongue hath spoken in my mouth. My words shall be of the uprightness of my heart: and my lips shall utter knowledge clearly. The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.

“I’m anointed, empowered by the Spirit,” Elihu says.

Job 33:5, 6 (a)
If thou canst answer me, set thy words in order before me, stand up. Behold, I am according to thy wish in God’s stead . . .

“I wish one would come and stand in God’s stead before me,” Job had repeatedly said.

Elihu said, “I’m your man.”

Job 33:6 (b), 7

. . . I also am formed out of the clay. Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee.

"Unlike the others, I'm not going to come down heavy on you," Elihu promises Job.

Job 33:8, 9
Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I have heard the voice of thy words, saying, I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me.

Elihu quotes Job, but not accurately. Job never claimed to be sinless. He claimed to be blameless but never sinless. Elihu is quoting what Zophar said about Job rather than what Job said about himself (11:4). In other words, he's bearing false witness.

"Thou shalt not bear false witness," God commanded (Exodus 20:16). And we assume that to bear false witness means to tell a whopper of a lie. But it's more than that. The term "false witness" is used in reference to the men who testified against Jesus.

"He said that if the temple were destroyed, He would rebuild it in three days," they said (Matthew 26:60, 61).

Jesus did indeed say, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." But He was speaking of the temple of His own body.

Being a false witness is so subtle, but so dangerous, where we pass on information that may be technically correct, but the implication is completely wrong.

Job 33:10–13
Behold, he findeth occasions against me, he counteth me for his enemy, He putteth my feet in the stocks, he marketh all my paths. Behold, in this thou art not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man. Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters.

"Why are you striving against the One who is greater than you, Job?" Elihu asks. Paul would ask the same question . . .

> Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?
>
> Romans 9:20, 21

Like the potter, the Lord has absolute sovereignty. He can do with our lives whatever He chooses. That sounds somewhat scary until we look more closely at the hands of our Potter and see the holes made by a nail driven through them because of His great love for us.

> **Job 33:14–18**
> **For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword.**

God can indeed speak subtly through dreams to keep man from his purposes. The wise men, for example, were warned in a dream not to return to Herod (Matthew 2:12).

"Don't you understand, Job, that the Lord can speak even through a dream to keep you from going off in a wrong direction?"

> **Job 33:19–22**
> **He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: So that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers.**

God can speak quietly through dreams and visions or He can speak loudly through trials. Here, Elihu says, "Your suffering is not punitive, Job. You're not being punished for sin like the other three suggested. It's preventive. The suffering you're going through is to keep you from a direction that would be dangerous and harmful."

In his masterful work, *The Problem of Pain,* C.S. Lewis writes that the Lord whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts to us in our pain. He says that pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Pain has purpose. Ask Dr. Brand. The conventional wisdom of his day was that leprosy destroyed fingers, toes, and noses. But as he observed lepers in India, he discovered that rats would nibble their fingers, toes, and noses while they slept because leprosy had destroyed their nerve endings, rendering them unable to feel any pain.

Pain keeps us awake and alive. Pain alerts us to rats that can nibble at our soul.

Job 33:23–26
If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness: Then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth: He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness.

Here, Elihu shares an insight that is quite amazing when he says, "Job, there is One who has paid the ransom, One who can cause you to be born again, One who can render or impute righteousness to you" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Elihu didn't know it, but, of course, he was talking about Jesus.

Job 33:27, 28
He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.

Here we see the gospel: If any man admits he's a sinner, the Lord will deliver him.

Job 33:29–33
Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living. Mark well, O Job, hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I

will speak. If thou hast any thing to say, answer me: speak, for I desire to justify thee. If not, hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I shall teach thee wisdom.

Save for a problem with arrogance and false witness, Elihu has done well. He has supplied an important piece of the puzzle: that pain has a purpose. Oh, if only he would have stopped at this point. Yes, he had inspiration from the Spirit, but along with that came a vulnerability. Peter knew all about this . . .

"Who do men say I am?" Jesus asked him.

"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Peter answered.

"Blessed art thou, Peter, for flesh has not revealed this to you, but My Father. Upon this rock of your confession, I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Peter had foundational revelation. No doubt he was feeling good until Jesus talked about how He must go to Jerusalem to die and rise again.

"No, no, no," Peter said.

And Jesus said, "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matthew 16).

John tells us we are to try, or test, the spirits because even though there might be a revelation from someone or a wonderful work of the Spirit through someone, it doesn't mean they can't turn right around and go off on a tangent or in the wrong direction (1 John 4:1). And in chapter 34, Elihu will do just that . . .



34

Job 34:1 (a)
Furthermore Elihu answered . . .

Even though Job wasn't asking, Elihu continued answering . . .

Job 34:1 (b)–3
. . . and said, Hear my words, O ye wise men; and give ear unto me, ye that have knowledge. For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat.

“Chew on my words,” Elihu says. “Determine if they’re right or wrong.”

Job 34:4–8
Let us choose to us judgment: let us know among ourselves what is good. For Job hath said, I am righteous: and God hath taken away my judgment. Should I lie against my right? my wound is incurable without transgression. What man is like Job, who drinketh up scorning like water? Which goeth in company with the workers of iniquity, and walketh with wicked men.

“Job, you’ve been hanging around sinners, and you’re sounding like them,” Elihu says.

Job 34:9
For he hath said, It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God.

Elihu, you’re bearing false witness again. Job didn’t say this. He asked, “Does it profit a man that he should pray to God?” (see 21:15) He didn’t say it doesn’t profit a man.

This is so easy to do. Someone says something in a moment of pain or difficulty, and we quote them later on, out of context.

Job 34:10–15
Therefore hearken unto me, ye men of understanding: far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity. For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment. Who hath given him a charge over the earth? or who hath disposed the whole world? If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust.

“If God pulls back, man will literally fall apart,” Elihu declares.

Job 34:16–19

If now thou hast understanding, hear this: hearken to the voice of my words. Shall even he that hateth right govern? and wilt thou condemn him that is most just? Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked? and to princes, Ye are ungodly? How much less to him that accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they all are the work of his hands.

"Job, you wouldn't come across this brashly toward a king or a prince. How dare you, then, be this brash in accusing God."

Job 34:20–29
In a moment shall they die, and the people shall be troubled at midnight, and pass away: and the mighty shall be taken away without hand. For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. For he will not lay upon man more than right; that he should enter into judgment with God. He shall break in pieces mighty men without number, and set others in their stead. Therefore he knoweth their works, and he overturneth them in the night, so that they are destroyed. He striketh them as wicked men in the open sight of others; Because they turned back from him, and would not consider any of his ways: So that they cause the cry of the poor to come unto him, and he heareth the cry of the afflicted. When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only:

Job wondered why God had chosen to be silent. Elihu answers, "God is in control. He can do as He chooses. If He doesn't respond to the cry of those who are oppressed, if He chooses to be quiet, what can they do? They can't make Him respond."

Job 34:30
That the hypocrite reign not, lest the people be ensnared.

Elihu suggests that if God is not responding to people who feel oppressed, it could be that He knows another ruler would be even worse.

Job 34:31, 32
Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: That which I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.

Elihu isn't calling Job a sinner, but he's telling Job to ask God to search his heart and show him if there's something amiss within him.

There is truth in Elihu's counsel. If God has been quiet, it's because He knows things we don't know. Therefore, our prayer ought to be, "Lord, if there's something in me that's not right, teach me, that I might cease from that sin."

Job 34:33 (a)
Should it be according to thy mind?

"Job, should God really do things the way you want Him to?" Elihu asks rhetorically.

Again, this is wise counsel from Elihu. All too often, I think I know more than God does. He's the Father. I'm but a child. So are you. And the fact is, Father knows best.

Job 34:33 (b)–37
. . . he will recompense it, whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose; and not I: therefore speak what thou knowest. Let men of understanding tell me, and let a wise man hearken unto me. Job hath spoken without knowledge, and his words were without wisdom. My desire is that Job may be tried unto the end because of his answers for wicked men. For he addeth rebellion unto his sin, he clappeth his hands among us, and multiplieth his words against God.

Elihu, what's gotten into you? You're the one who said, "I'm going to be kind and gentle. I'm not going to be overbearing. You don't have to be afraid of what I'm saying." But now you're saying, "My desire is that Job be tried to the uttermost. Throw the book at him, Lord."

35

Job 35:1, 2

Elihu spake moreover, and said, Thinkest thou this to be right, that thou saidst, My righteousness is more than God's?

"Job, do you actually think you're more righteous than God?" Elihu asks.

Job 35:3

For thou saidst, What advantage will it be unto thee? and, What profit shall I have, if I be cleansed from my sin?

Again, these were questions Job raised in his pain. They ought not to be held against him.

Job 35:4–8

I will answer thee, and thy companions with thee. Look unto the heavens, and see; and behold the clouds which are higher than thou. If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art; and thy righteousness may profit the son of man.

"Look up, Job," Elihu says. "Does your sin hurt God? No. You're only hurting yourself."

Elihu's question might sound silly but we can fall into saying, "OK, Lord, You're not doing what I think You should, so I'm not going to church this week. I'm not going to tithe this month. I'm not going to pray this year." But in so doing, we only rob ourselves.

Job 35:9

By reason of the multitude of oppressions they make the oppressed to cry: they cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty.

Elihu makes the case that, while wicked men can't hurt God, they can hurt people.

Job 35:10–13
But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night; Who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven? There they cry, but none giveth answer, because of the pride of evil men. Surely God will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it.

The oppressed cry out but not to God. Instead, they say, "We're in pain! This isn't fair! That's not right!" Elihu says if they were truly crying out to God, they would be singing a song of deliverance. Elihu's implication is that Job hadn't been crying out to God, that he needed to pray harder, that his prayer lacked passion.

I've been in meetings or places where people were trying to work up the Spirit in such a way that I thought I was on Mt. Carmel. Four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal were dancing, screaming, and slashing themselves, trying to get God's attention. When it was Elijah's turn to pray, however, he prayed a simple prayer that took about 2.5 seconds to pray and it was answered immediately (1 Kings 18). Therefore, I believe Elihu's accusation is misdirected.

Job 35:14
Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him.

"You don't see God, but He sees you," Elihu says. Indeed, "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13).

Job 35:15, 16
But now, because it is not so, he hath visited in his anger; yet he knoweth it not in great extremity: Therefore doth Job open his mouth in vain; he multiplieth words without knowledge.

"God is not acting irrationally, Job," Elihu says. "You're the one who's out to lunch."

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar presented their case intellectually and theologically. Elihu, on the other hand, claimed to base his case on revelation.

And although none were right about Job's situation, intellect, theology, and revelation need not be at odds. I've been in extremely traditional churches where I've been deeply touched by the Lord. I've also been in more emotional settings where I've been equally blessed. But I've also been in settings where it seemed like it was an effort of the flesh to pump people up in the name of the Spirit. The Lord has a better way . . .

> For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: A land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year. And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.
>
> Deuteronomy 11:10–14

In Egypt, water was pumped to the fields from the Nile. Egypt is a type of the world, the flesh, where things have to be "pumped up." God said, "I'm taking you to a different land, where water comes down from heaven. You won't have to set some kind of atmosphere or try to manipulate the situation. Just love Me with all your heart and soul, and I will pour out the rain upon you."

I suggest that in these days the Lord is indeed pouring out His Spirit. It need not be pumped up in our own energy or manipulated through careful strategy. Rather, if we simply love God and let Him pour out His Spirit, He'll work anywhere and everywhere He's loved.

36 Job 36:1–4

Elihu also proceeded, and said, Suffer me a little, and I will shew thee

that I have yet to speak on God's behalf. I will fetch my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker. For truly my words shall not be false: he that is perfect in knowledge is with thee.

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had all talked extensively to Job. But here, Elihu says, "Now the guy who really understands is on the scene. He that is perfect in knowledge is here. It's me."

It took the Lord one chapter to talk about the creation of the universe in Genesis. Here in Job, we have thirty-five chapters of seemingly endless debate. Unfortunately, I think we see this same ratio in our own lives. How little time we spend conversing with the Lord about the majesty, glory, beauty of His character His ways, and His Word. And how many endless hours we spend chattering about our problems, our perspectives, our trials and troubles.

Job 36:5–14
Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any: he is mighty in strength and wisdom. He preserveth not the life of the wicked: but giveth right to the poor. He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous: but with kings are they on the throne; yea, he doth establish them for ever, and they are exalted. And if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction; Then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge. But the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath: they cry not when he bindeth them. They die in youth, and their life is among the unclean.

"Job," Elihu says, "if you want to be right with God, you will rule and reign in prosperity. But if you don't obey, or if you are hypocritical, you'll feel His wrath."

Job 36:15–26
He delivereth the poor in his affliction, and openeth their ears in oppression. Even so would he have removed thee out of the strait

into a broad place, where there is no straitness; and that which should be set on thy table should be full of fatness. But thou hast fulfilled the judgment of the wicked: judgment and justice take hold on thee. Because there is wrath, beware lest he take thee away with his stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee. Will he esteem thy riches? no, not gold, nor all the forces of strength. Desire not the night, when people are cut off in their place. Take heed, regard not iniquity: for this hast thou chosen rather than affliction. Behold, God exalteth by his power: who teacheth like him? Who hath enjoined him his way? or who can say, Thou hast wrought iniquity? Remember that thou magnify his work, which men behold. Every man may see it; man may behold it afar off. Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out.

As Elihu talks about God's greatness and how He transcends our understanding, evidently there's a change in the climate. The clouds begin to roll in; the winds begin to blow, perhaps it's beginning to rain . . .

Job 36:27–33
For he maketh small the drops of water: they pour down rain according to the vapour thereof: Which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly. Also can any understand the spreadings of the clouds, or the noise of his tabernacle? Behold, he spreadeth his light upon it, and covereth the bottom of the sea. For by them judgeth he the people; he giveth meat in abundance. With clouds he covereth the light; and commandeth it not to shine by the cloud that cometh betwixt. The noise thereof sheweth concerning it, the cattle also concerning the vapour.

Drawing from his surroundings, Elihu uses the storm to speak not only of God's awesome power, but of His abundant provision.

I give Elihu credit for using the things round about him in the teaching he's giving. Jesus was, of course, the Master of this method as He talked about lilies of the field, sowing seed, and sparrows. I encourage you to utilize what takes place around you when you're sharing with people. Use whatever is at hand to draw peoples' attention to the glory and goodness of God.



37

Job 37:1–12

At this also my heart trembleth, and is moved out of his place. Hear attentively the noise of his voice, and the sound that goeth out of his mouth. He directeth it under the whole heaven, and his lightning unto the ends of the earth. After it a voice roareth: he thundereth with the voice of his excellency; and he will not stay them when his voice is heard. God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend. For he saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth; likewise to the small rain, and to the great rain of his strength. He sealeth up the hand of every man; that all men may know his work. Then the beasts go into dens, and remain in their places. Out of the south cometh the whirlwind: and cold out of the north. By the breath of God frost is given: and the breadth of the waters is straitened. Also by watering he wearieth the thick cloud: he scattereth his bright cloud: And it is turned round about by his counsels: that they may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth.

Here, Elihu continues to wax eloquent—at least in his opinion—about the awesome power of God as seen in the storm rising round about him. He alludes to the rain, the clouds, the thunder, and the lighting. Again, he uses that which is round about him to draw attention to God—a commendable practice.

Job 37:13–19

He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy. Hearken unto this, O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God. Dost thou know when God disposed them, and caused the light of his cloud to shine? Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge? How thy garments are warm, when he quieteth the earth by the south wind? Hast thou with him spread out the sky, which is strong, and as a molten looking glass? Teach us what we shall say unto him; for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness.

In order to prove the limits of Job's knowledge, Elihu asks a series of questions regarding natural phenomena. Two chapters from now, God will do the same thing. The difference, however, is that He knows the answers. Elihu doesn't.

Job 37:20–24
Shall it be told him that I speak? if a man speak, surely he shall be swallowed up. And now men see not the bright light which is in the clouds: but the wind passeth, and cleanseth them. Fair weather cometh out of the north: with God is terrible majesty. Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict. Men do therefore fear him: he respecteth not any that are wise of heart.

"God is so great that He is past finding out," Elihu declares. And with that, he ends his speech.

Chapters 1 and 2 dealt with Job's *dilemma.* Chapters 3 through 37 dealt with Job's *debates.* Chapters 38 through 42 will deal with Job's *deliverance.* Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar said God was disciplining Job. Job thought God wanted to destroy him. Elihu said God sought to direct him. But all five were incorrect, as we will see . . .



38 The demanding debates are over. Job has been knocking on heaven's door, longing for God to answer. Now at last, God comes. But take careful note: He comes not *to* answer, but as the Answer. The peace He brings doesn't come from understanding. It transcends, passes, surpasses, and supercedes understanding. The same is still true. You will never have an answer for many of the questions stirring within you. But you'll find that God Himself is the Answer, and that He'll give you a peace that passes understanding.

Job 38:1 (a)
Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind . . .

The storm was brewing. The wind was blowing and the Lord came to Job and spoke with Job at the time of the storm. How often we find that to be true. The disciples were toiling at the oars on the Sea of Galilee as the wind blew and the waves rolled. Even though many of them were experienced fishermen, the disciples were deathly afraid that they were about to go down. Just then, the Lord appeared to them in the storm, walking on water. Initially, they thought He was a ghost until He said, "Be of good cheer. It is I. Fear not." (Matthew 14:27).

Jesus came to His disciples in the storm. And we have found over and over that He comes to us in the storm, as well. When things are tough, difficult, and challenging, it seems that He draws near to us in profound and special ways.

Job 38:1 (b), 2
. . . and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?

"Who is this who doesn't have a clue what he's talking about?" How would you like to be greeted by the Lord in that way!

Job 38:3 (a)
Gird up now thy loins like a man . . .

"Stand up," God said, and I have a sneaking suspicion that our Father would come to many of us, His pouting children, and say the same thing.

Job 38:3 (b)
. . . for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.

"Job, you've been questioning and you've all been dialoguing endlessly. Now I have some questions for you." Indeed He does, for God will ask Job sixty questions before He's through.

Job 38:4
Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.

We think we know so much about the sciences. We have endless theories and hypotheses. But the Lord shows up and says, "What do you know firsthand?"

Job 38:5, 6
Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;

God begins by asking Job, "Where were you when I was designing the earth? Do you understand the underpinnings, the foundation, the history?" We think we have the understanding of geography and paleontology down pat. But, in reality, we know so little.

Job 38:7
When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

"Morning stars" and "sons of God" are phrases that refer to angels. This means that as God was creating the world, the angels were singing. Therefore, I suggest that when things seem to be chaotic or confusing, dark or empty in our own lives, we should start singing because the Lord evidently does His best work to background music.

"Sing, O barren one," Isaiah declares (54:1). I am convinced that much of depression and discouragement would be done away with if we would put on the "garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61:3). Shout for joy, gang. Sing songs of praise. And watch God create something wondrous out of the darkness.

Job 38:8, 9
Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling-band for it,

This most likely alludes to the water canopy that surrounded the planet before the Flood. Evidently, there was a water vapor canopy above the earth's atmosphere that provided protection from the harmful rays of the sun, creating a

greenhouse effect upon the entire planet. This would explain the frozen vegetation that has been discovered below the icecaps in the Arctic Circle.

Job 38:10, 11
And brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?

Five-sevenths of our planet is covered by water. "Were you there when I put boundaries upon the oceans?" God asks Job.

Job 38:12
Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; and caused the dayspring to know his place;

"Do you cause the sun to rise every morning?"

Job 38:13–17
That it might take hold of the ends of the earth, that the wicked might be shaken out of it? It is turned as clay to the seal; and they stand as a garment. And from the wicked their light is withholden, and the high arm shall be broken. Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? or hast thou walked in the search of the depth? Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?

In chapter 3, Job said, "Why didn't I die when I was born, for then I should have been at rest and peace."

"Do you really know what's beyond this life?" God asked.

Job 38:18–21
Hast thou perceived the breadth of the earth? declare if thou knowest it all. Where is the way where light dwelleth? and as for darkness, where is the place thereof, That thou shouldest take it to the bound thereof, and that thou shouldest know the paths to the house thereof? Knowest thou it, because thou wast then born? or because the number of thy days is great?

"Where does the darkness go when the light comes?"

Job 38:22 (a)
Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow?

Billions and billions of snowflakes fall every year and the geometric design, the intricacy, the beauty is amazing because no two are alike.

Job 38:22 (b), 23
. . . Or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, Which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war?

God says snow and hail would be used in times of war. Have they been? Historically, it was snow that finally thwarted Napoleon's invasion of Russia. Prophetically, hailstones that weigh more than one hundred pounds will pelt the earth during the Tribulation period.

Job 38:24 (a)
By what way is the light parted . . .

We know light can be separated, but we don't know how because, to this day, we're not sure whether light is a wave or a particle.

Job 38:24 (b)–31
. . . which scattereth the east wind upon the earth? Who hath divided a watercourse for the overflowing of waters, or a way for the lightning of thunder; To cause it to rain on the earth, where no man is; on the wilderness, wherein there is no man; To satisfy the desolate and waste ground; and to cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth? Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew? Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it? The waters are hid as with a stone, and the face of the deep is frozen. Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?

The Pleiades are thought to be the center of the gravitational force of the Milky Way Galaxy. This seems to be an allusion to that.

Job 38:32
Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons?

Arcturus is called the runaway star. It moves very quickly at 125,000 miles per second. I think of our closest star, the sun. The fact is 1,300,000 earths can fit inside our sun. But our sun is rather small compared to Anteres, for it could hold sixty-four of our suns. Yet that's nothing, because in the constellation of Hercules, there is a star that could hold one hundred million Anteres, which can hold sixty-four suns, which could hold 1,300,000 earths. We're talking big, gang! But there's an even bigger star called Epsilon that could hold one to two million Anteres. And God created and guides the whole thing.

Job 38:33, 34
Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth? Canst thou lift up thy voice to the clouds, that abundance of waters may cover thee?

"Can you cause something as simple as rain, Job?"

Job 38:35, 36
Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee, Here we are? Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts? or who hath given understanding to the heart?

God changes gears here a bit. He speaks of instincts, like that of the arctic terns who travel from pole to pole, from the Arctic to Antarctica. The amazing thing is, when the female lays her eggs during the journey, although she continues on without them, once her babies are ready to fly, they'll meet up with Mom and Dad at their destination. How do they know where to go? They are all part of a magnificent design by a magnificent Creator.

Job 38:37–41

Who can number the clouds in wisdom? or who can stay the bottles of heaven, When the dust groweth into hardness, and the clods cleave fast together? Wilt thou hunt the prey for the lion? or fill the appetite of the young lions, When they couch in their dens, and abide in the covert to lie in wait? Who provideth for the raven his food? when his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of meat.

The raven is an unclean animal, yet who takes care of him? God does.

Job was asking questions of God. When God comes, however, He doesn't give Job answers, but instead asks Job questions. Why? Because our Father is not One who so much gives the answers as much as He *is* the answer. I want to know the reasons why—about life, events, situations, trials, and tragedies. But God is One who, more often than not, does not answer my questions. Rather, He *is* the Answer in my situation.

"What shape is yellow?" my granddaughter, Bailey, asked my son.

"Yellow isn't a shape, Bailey, it's a color," Peter-John answered.

"No, no, no, Daddy. What shape is yellow?"

"It's not a shape, Bailey. "It's a color."

As much as Peter-John would have wanted, he couldn't answer Bailey's question, for it was unanswerable. I'm convinced that so often we ask questions that can't be answered this side of eternity because we're little kids who are all mixed up. We ask the wrong questions. We're limited in our ability to analyze the situation. And the Lord would say to us that it's not answers that we want but His presence that we need.

The good news is that He's here right now, gang, only a prayer away.



39 We question the Lord oftentimes. Job certainly did. But it's a two-way street because the Lord can question us, as well . . .

"Adam, where art thou?" He asked (Genesis 3:9).

"Elijah, what are you doing here?" He queried (1 Kings 19:13).

"Friend," Jesus asked Judas, "wherefore art thou come?" (Matthew 26:50).

Here in chapter 39, the Lord continues to ask Job question after question—sixty in all—dealing with creation round about him.

Job 39:1
Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth? or canst thou mark when the hinds do calve?

"Do you maintain and sustain the creatures of the earth?"

Job 39:2–4
Canst thou number the months that they fulfil? or knowest thou the time when they bring forth? They bow themselves, they bring forth their young ones, they cast out their sorrows. Their young ones are in good liking, they grow up with corn; they go forth, and return not unto them.

Being a farmer himself, Job would have been accustomed to helping the animals give birth. But what about the ones man didn't help, like the wild goats and the deer? "Who sees them through?" God asks.

Job 39:5–8
Who hath sent out the wild ass free? or who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass? Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings. He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither re gardeth he the crying of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing.

The donkey scorns the city and doesn't even respond to the driver who attempts to steer him. "Who made the donkey so stubborn?" God asks Job.

Job 39:9
Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib?

Most likely, this refers to the wild ox. "Can you domesticate him?" God asks Job.

Job 39:10–12

Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? or will he harrow the valleys after thee? Wilt thou trust him, because his strength is great? or wilt thou leave thy labour to him? Wilt thou believe him, that he will bring home thy seed, and gather it into thy barn?

"Do you think a wild ox will harvest your seed and bring it into the barn?"

Job 39:13 (a)
Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks?

"Did you paint the peacocks' wings, Job?" I sense that we're not talking about a God who is angry with Job. He's just firing questions goodnaturedly at Job and even introducing some humor because the animals He chooses are so interesting.

Job 39:13 (b)–17
. . . or wings and feathers unto the ostrich? Which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in dust, And forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers: her labour is in vain without fear; Because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding.

The ostrich is a funny bird indeed. She lays her eggs and forgets where she laid them. "I made the ostrich that way," God says, "without wisdom that other birds have in caring for their eggs and tending their young."

Job 39:18
What time she lifteth up herself on high, she scorneth the horse and his rider.

The Hebrew text says she flaps her wings joyfully. Ostriches can't fly but they can run with great speed. In fact, at 35 mph, an ostrich can outrun a horse for short distances. Through this line of questioning, I wonder if God is saying to Job, "Even though an ostrich lacks wisdom, it can flap its wings joyfully and run effectively."

Sometimes we may lack wisdom concerning a given situation. But that needn't stop us from lifting our hands in praise or from exerting energy to spend time with the Lord. Like the ostrich, we can be joyful even though we're bird-brained from time to time.

Job 39:19–25
Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils is terrible. He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

"The horse is ready to charge into battle. Who made the horse that way? Why would the war horse be so fearless? Job, can you cause these things to happen?"

Job 39:26–30
Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom, and stretch her wings toward the south? Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high? She dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place. From thence she seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off. Her young ones also suck up blood: and where the slain are, there is she.

The fact that He would allude to verse 30 (Matthew 24:28), tells me Jesus Himself was a student of Job.

40

Job 40:1, 2
Moreover the LORD answered Job, and said, Shall he that contendeth

with the Almighty instruct him? he that re-proveth God, let him answer it.

"Are you trying to instruct Me?" God asks.

That sounds crazy. But that's what we often do. So often, as we come to Him in prayer, we say, "Lord, here's what needs to happen. . . ." We pray directive prayers. We give the Lord instructions. True prayer, however, is not about giving God orders. It's about simply reporting for duty. Why? Because God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him. He knows what's best for me. Therefore, it's ridiculous for me to give instructions to the Lord when I should be saying, "Lord, You know what's best. You see what's best for me. Not my will but Thine be done."

Job 40:3–5
Then Job answered the LORD, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.

Job is amazed not by the answers God gives, for God simply asks questions. He's amazed by the majesty he sees. In the presence of God, he's silenced completely. How much less talking there would be if we lived in a continual awareness of the presence of God. Job was so prolific with words earlier, but now his hand is to his mouth.

Job 40:6, 7 (a)
Then answered the LORD unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Gird up thy loins now like a man:

"Gird up your loins," or, "Brace yourself," God tells Job. How does one brace himself when the winds are blowing and the trees are bending? How can you brace yourself in the presence of the Lord? The only way I know is to fasten yourself to the Cross and say, "Lord, I'm dying to myself right here."

Job 40:7 (b), 8
. . . I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?

"Are you going to find fault with Me to make yourself look better?" God asks Job.

Job 40:9–14
Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him? Deck thyself now with majesty and excellency; and array thyself with glory and beauty. Cast abroad the rage of thy wrath: and behold every one that is proud, and abase him. Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low; and tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together; and bind their faces in secret. Then will I also confess unto thee that thine own right hand can save thee.

"Job, if you can do these things, then I'll be impressed with you. Let's see what you can do . . ."

Job 40:15 (a)
Behold now behemoth . . .

Some say *behemoth* refers to a hippo. Others say it refers to an elephant.

Job 40:15 (b)–17 (a)
. . . which I made with thee; he eateth grass as an ox. Lo now, his strength is in his loins, and his force is in the navel of his belly. He moveth his tail like a cedar . . .

The tails of neither the hippo nor the elephant are like a cedar tree . . .

Job 40:17 (b)–24
. . . the sinews of his stones are wrapped together. His bones are as strong pieces of brass; his bones are like bars of iron. He is the chief of the ways of God: he that made him can make his sword to approach unto him. Surely the mountains bring him forth food, where all the beasts of the field play. He lieth under the shady trees, in the covert of the reed, and fens. The shady trees cover him with their shadow; the willows of the brook compass him about. Behold, he drinketh up a river, and hasteth not: he trusteth that he

can draw up Jordan into his mouth. He taketh it with his eyes: his nose pierceth through snares.

Very likely, this is the description of a dinosaur. But it gets even more interesting . . .



41

Job 41:1 (a)
Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook?

Some suggest *leviathan* is a blue whale. It could be. The blue whale is massive in size—ninety-eight feet long and twenty times the weight of an elephant. Others say it's a giant crocodile. Indeed, there are fossil remains of crocs that were fifty to fifty-five feet long. But I suggest the description that follows is that of a water dinosaur . . .

Job 41:1 (b)–8
. . . or his tongue with a cord which thou lettest down? Canst thou put an hook into his nose? or bore his jaw through with a thorn? Will he make many supplications unto thee? will he speak soft words unto thee? Will he make a covenant with thee? wilt thou take him for a servant for ever? Wilt thou play with him as with a bird? or wilt thou bind him for thy maidens? Shall the companions make a banquet of him? shall they part him among the merchants? Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons? or his head with fish spears? Lay thine hand upon him, remember the battle, do no more.

"If you try to battle leviathan, you'll never battle him again," God says as if to say, "If this creature intimidates you, remember that I was the One who created him."

Job 41:9–20
Behold, the hope of him is in vain: shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him? None is so fierce that dare stir him up: who then is able to stand before me? Who hath prevented me, that I

should repay him? whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine. I will not conceal his parts, nor his power, nor his comely proportion. Who can discover the face of his garment? or who can come to him with his double bridle? Who can open the doors of his face? his teeth are terrible round about. His scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal. One is so near to another, that no air can come between them. They are joined one to another, they stick together, that they cannot be sundered. By his neesings a light doth shine, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning. Out of his mouth go burning lamps, and sparks of fire leap out. Out of his nostrils goeth smoke, as out of a seething pot or caldron.

Some suggest this is the description of a dragon.

Job 41:21–34
His breath kindleth coals, and a flame goeth out of his mouth. In his neck remaineth strength, and sorrow is turned into joy before him. The flakes of his flesh are joined together: they are firm in themselves; they cannot be moved. His heart is as firm as a stone; yea, as hard as a piece of the nether millstone. When he raiseth up himself, the mighty are afraid: by reason of breakings they purify themselves. The sword of him that layeth at him cannot hold: the spear, the dart, nor the habergeon. He esteemeth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood. The arrow cannot make him flee: slingstones are turned with him into stubble. Darts are counted as stubble: he laugheth at the shaking of a spear. Sharp stones are under him: he spreadeth sharp pointed things upon the mire. He maketh the deep to boil like a pot: he maketh the sea like a pot of ointment. He maketh a path to shine after him; one would think the deep to be hoary. Upon earth there is not his like, who is made without fear. He beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride.

This doesn't sound like that of a crocodile or a whale to me. I'm not even sure it's a dinosaur or a dragon. It could be an animal that existed in Job's day but that we don't know about now. Or, it could be a picture of Satan himself . . .

- Out of his mouth go burning lamps or fiery darts (v. 19). Certainly, Satan launches fiery darts at us (Ephesians 6:16).
- His heart is hard as a stone (v. 24). Throughout Scripture, when people turn against God, they are described as those with hard hearts.
- In the Book of Revelation, Satan is referred to as a dragon and will be cast into the lake of fire, where he will make the deep to boil like a pot (v. 31).
- Satan is indeed the king over all the children of pride (v. 34), for pride was his own downfall (Isaiah 14:14).

Satan indeed plays a key role in Job's story. Therefore, it could be that, in a sense, the Lord is parading him before Job, saying, "I have a question for you, Job. Can you deal with the very one who brought you such misery and pain?"



42

Job 42:1–3

Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

What a wonderful confession. "Forgive me," Job says. "I spoke things I didn't know anything about." God help us to be those who don't speak merely to hear our own voices, for, truly, "in the multitude of words, there wanteth not sin" (Proverbs 10:19).

Job 42:4–6

Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

I believe this is the key to the entire Book of Job: "I heard about You, but now that I see You, I abhor myself." Remember, Job was the most righteous

man on the face of the earth. And yet the most righteous man on the face of the earth realized he was nothing in the presence of God.

You might feel secure in your theology but if you chatter endlessly, perhaps it's indicative that you've heard about God without seeing Him. Many Christians know a lot about God, but many have not had revelation of Him. Notice that Job doesn't say, "I abhor Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. He says, "I abhor *myself*."

If the most righteous man on the face of the earth needed to come to a place of repentance, how much more do I need to come before the Lord and say, "Lord, forgive me. Have mercy upon me. I need You to save me. I need Your blood to cleanse me."

Earlier, Job had maintained his righteousness and integrity. But now that he has seen the Lord, all he can say is, "I repent in dust and ashes." Does this mean he's getting right with God? I don't think this is the idea here. Rather, I think it proves that he has been right with God all along. Even though he had questions, even though he wrestled through problems, once the Lord comes on the scene and raises questions to him about creation, about spiritual issues and mysteries, Job responds accordingly.

Over many years, I have observed that, at summer camp, the kids who respond at the campfire are not necessarily the ones who are just then getting right with God. More often than not, they're the ones who are already right with Him because their heart is sensitive enough to respond. It's the ones who don't respond who often have a problem.

James calls Job an example to us of what godly patience looks like (5:11). In Ezekiel 14, Job is in the category with Noah and Daniel as exceedingly righteous men. I believe these references give God's viewpoint of Job's character throughout his ordeal, not just at the conclusion of it.

Job 42:7
And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath.

God here declares that Job is right. Yes, Job abhors himself. Yes, he's broken. Yes, he's aware of his insignificance, but he responds. And I suggest

this means he passed the test. Yes, he had struggles. Yes, there were down times. Questions were raised. Complaints were issued. But God sorts it all out and concludes that Job passed the test.

Job 42:8
Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job.

"Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy," Jesus said (Matthew 5:7). It's oh, so easy to become self-righteous and condescending. But God deals with us eventually. Therefore, I'm learning not to speak against people lest God come to me and say, "Now I'm going to deal with *you*."

Eliphaz drew his conclusions from personal observation. Bildad from the fathers' teachings and traditions, Zophar from his own dogmatic diagnosis. All three were wrong, for the guy they were calling a sinner was the very one God called upon to intercede for them.

Job 42:9, 10 (a)
So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did according as the LORD commanded them: the LORD also accepted Job. And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends . . .

God still isn't answering the cosmological questions raised. Instead, he's saying, "Love is the key." When was Job set free? When he prayed for his friends—friends that had come down on him, friends that had found fault with him.

Jesus taught us to pray for our enemies, to bless those that curse us, to do good to those who cause harm to us (Matthew 5:44). Want to be free from the bondage of bitterness? Pray for the people who bug you, the people who have disappointed you, the people who seem to be thorns in your side.

When Jesus tells us to pray for our enemies, I don't believe He means we are to pray that they'll be knocked down a peg or two, that they'll be judged, or

that they'll learn a lesson. No, I believe He means we're to pray for them in the same way we want to be prayed for. If you want to be blessed, prosper, and do well, I encourage you to follow Job's example, to pray God's richest blessings for those who mistreat or misunderstand you.

Job 42:10 (b), 11
. . . also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold.

Now that Job is blessed twice as much as he had been before, all of his friends and family return to his side.

Job 42:12, 13
So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters.

His animals numbered twice as much as they had before. Why not his kids? Because his original ten kids were tucked away in heaven. Therefore, with an additional ten, he had twice as many as he had before.

Job 42:14–17
And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Kerenhappuch. And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren. After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations. So Job died, being old and full of days.

Some people find the end of this story a bit unsatisfying. They're happy that Job came out so well, but wonder why God didn't answer the questions Job

raised. I suggest it is because, in the presence of the Lord, Job found every answer he needed.

Looking back over Job's incredible journey, I see six lessons for us . . .

First, trials and difficulties prepare us for eternity. God wants to develop our faith. That means we won't often see with our eyes what He's doing.

Second, Satan is silenced by submission to God's sovereignty. I'm convinced that when we get to heaven, we're going to discover that a great deal of the difficulty we experienced on earth was simply God proving to the enemy that we're not mercenaries, that we're not hirelings, that He hasn't bought us off with blessings and ease.

When we go through difficulties and misunderstandings, hurts, pains, and problems financially, mentally or emotionally; when we persevere and, like Job, do not curse God or rebel against Him—even though we might have questions for Him, if our attitude is one of worship—Satan is silenced. And when we see the Lord, He'll embrace us and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You silenced Satan and you didn't even know it. Satan was accusing you day and night saying, 'If that marriage isn't healed, she'll curse You; if that job doesn't open, he'll deny You; if that answer doesn't come, he'll backslide from You.' But you didn't. I allowed Satan to touch you within certain parameters to prove that you are not a mercenary, that you really do love Me."

Third, suffering produces clearer vision of ourselves and of God. In suffering, Job finally saw he was a vile man. So, when we go through trials and don't react properly, when we hear ourselves saying foolish things, we realize that we're less mature than we thought and say, "Lord, I need You. I'm vile. I need Your blood." If you've gone through deep waters, your understanding and vision of God will increase exponentially. You'll see the Lord in a new dimension. What does this do? It makes us no longer fear suffering the way we once did. Jesus becomes so real and precious that we begin to reach the point where we say, "Trials and testing are worth it because they allow me to see myself in my vileness and the Lord in His holiness."

Fourth, suffering produces compassion. It was when Job saw he was vile himself that he embraced his friends. When do we have compassion for others who are hurting and troubled? After we've been through our own difficulties and trials. That is why Paul would write, "Blessed be the Father who comforts us that we may be able to comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received (see 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4).

Fifth, suffering teaches us humility. It was when Job was humble that he saw the Lord. Humiliation always brings revelation, for it's when we're going through hard times that we get fresh insight into the Lord and receive revelation of the Lord.

Finally, suffering has a happy ending. Even if you are never healed, you will be in heaven. Even if you're poor on this earth, you'll live in a mansion in eternity. Peter talks about the trial of faith and about the angels that desire to look into these things (1 Peter 1:12). This means that what we go through is not just about us. It's about eternity. It was for the joy that awaited Him that Jesus endured the Cross (Hebrews 12:2). Even on earth, at the end of the story, Job was given twice as much as he had before. That's always the way of the Lord, as He takes us from glory to greater glory (2 Corinthians 3:18), from sorrow to unspeakable joy (John 16:20).

Jon Courson's APPLICATION COMMENTARY



OLD TESTAMENT

VOLUME 2: Psalm—Malachi

Jon Courson's Application Commentary, Old Testament
Volume Two: Psalm—Malachi
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The Silent Years: Between the Testaments



FOREWORD

Many commentaries on the Bible are available today. Most are expositional or exegetical; and they often seek to be so exacting with respect to the letter of the law, or the possible meaning of a particular word, that they lack life and inspiration. It is hard to find a good devotional commentary on the Bible—one that brings both understanding and life to the passage, so that you are inspired to worship the Lord as you gain new insights into the truth of His love and grace toward us.

This commentary is one that does just that.

In Nehemiah, chapter eight, we are told that "the people gathered themselves together" and "they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." I find this to perfectly describe what Jon Courson has done in his commentaries. Giving understanding and meaning to the Word is one of the greatest needs in the church today. In Nehemiah's time, this method of commentary brought great conviction upon the people, and a genuine turning to God. The ultimate result was that the people went their way rejoicing, "because they had understood the words that were declared unto them."

I am convinced that you also will go your way rejoicing after reading the insights that the Holy Spirit has given to Jon on the Scriptures.

Pastor Chuck Smith
Senior Pastor, Calvary Chapel
Costa Mesa, California



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Jon Courson's APPLICATION COMMENTARY





PSALMS

Background to Psalms

It has been said that there is a psalm for every sigh. I would add that for every "high" there is a psalm, as well, for the book before us deals with the entire spectrum of human emotions. We'll experience it all as the psalmists open their hearts and reveal their souls in response to the situations they dealt with spiritually and emotionally.

The Hebrew title is simply "Praises"—a fitting title because this book is about praising the Lord in every situation, on every occasion. It's a book that gives not only exhortation *to* praise and inspiration *for* praise, but instruction *about* praise. Psalms is the definitive workbook on worship. Therefore, if you desire to know how to worship the Lord, this book is custom-made for you.

Many people think of Psalms as simply a historical curiosity, a record of how the ancient Hebrew culture used to worship God. I believe, however, that, rather than being a theological explanation of historical expression, it's a present-day picture of powerful, practical praise.

"If you're talking about singing songs, lifting hands, or bowing knees, you have to understand that's not the way I am," some might protest. I understand. But God didn't save you to keep you the way you are. The Lord wants to enlarge you and to expand me, to make us different than we otherwise would be. As believers, we are the bride of Christ. Our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, desires for us to bring passion into our relationship with Him. The Book of Psalms allows you and me to do just that—to hear the heart of our Lord and to express our love in a way that pleases Him.

So I challenge you to apply the psalms directly to your own life. When you see the psalmist shout to the Lord, do the same. When he stands in awe of the Lord, stand with him. When he bows down before the Lord, join him. In other words, I challenge you to be a doer of the Word rather than a hearer only. As you have your devotions with the Lord, you might find yourself bending your knee, uplifting your hand, or shouting for joy and you might find yourself being enlarged and expanded as you understand how the Lord desires to be worshiped.

This workbook on worship is not only the hymnbook of the Bible, but also the "Him book." You see, of the two hundred nineteen Old Testament quotations in the New Testament, one hundred sixteen are from the Book of Psalms, many of which prophesy about Jesus' First and Second Coming. The gospels tell us Jesus went to the mountain to pray. But the psalms tell us what He prayed. The gospels tell us Jesus was crucified. The psalms tell us what He was thinking while He was on the Cross. The gospels tell us He went back into heaven. But the psalms tell us what He's doing in heaven.

These psalms were written by a variety of human writers who were inspired by the Spirit. David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, wrote seventy-three of the one hundred fifty, and perhaps as many as thirty more. The sons of Korah wrote eleven; Asaph wrote ten; Hezekiah wrote two; and Asaph, Heman, and Moses each wrote one.

"How our hearts did burn within us when He opened the Scriptures and explained all things concerning Himself," they said on that first Easter Sunday (Luke 24:32). On the road to Emmaus, beginning with Moses and going through the prophets, Jesus opened Scripture and explained how they all related to Him. As a result, the hearts of His listeners were warmed, excited, and illuminated. That is my prayer for you as we study this glorious book together . . .



PSALMS

1

Psalm 1:1 (a)
Blessed . . .

Just as Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with this word that means "O, how happy," Psalms begins the same way because happiness is truly the Lord's intent for you and me.

"If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give good gifts to His" (see Matthew 7:11). I want to see my kids blessed. I want to see them happy. I don't want to see them depressed and sad. How much more our Father desires for us to be deeply blessed, to be truly happy.

Notice that the writer of this psalm doesn't tell us how to attain happiness. I suggest this is because once a person is in a relationship with God, happiness and joy, blessing and peace are givens. But because these things can be eroded, instead of telling us how to attain, he tells us what to avoid . . .

Psalm 1:1 (b)
. . . is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly . . .

The blessed man is the one who doesn't get counsel from people who don't know God, be it from an individual, a group, or culture in general. Such counsel robs blessing and erodes happiness.

Psalm 1:1 (c)
. . . nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

If you walk in the counsel of the ungodly, you'll soon find yourself standing in the way of sinners. That is, you'll be stopped in your tracks and

eventually find yourself in the company of those who mock and dismiss the things of God.

Psalm 1:2 (a)
But his delight is in the law of the LORD . . .

Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord, not under it, but *in* it. As believers, we're not under the law (Romans 3:28). But in it, we can glean principles, precepts, and see pictures of our Lord and Savior.

Psalm 1:2 (b)
. . . and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

The Hebrew word translated "meditate" speaks of what a cow does after grazing all day. As she chews the cud over and over again, she extracts every nutrient. In other words, to meditate means to ponder a section of the Word day and night, extracting more from its inexhaustible supply each time.

Psalm 1:3
And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

If you choose to be one who delights in the Word, one who meditates on the Lord, there will be times in your life when you'll be especially prolific and productive. But even in the seasons when you're not bearing bushels of fruit, your leaf won't wither.

> This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.
>
> Joshua 1:8

This promise was originally given to Joshua just as he was poised to assume command of the people of Israel. But its application continues today

in the lives of any who take the time to sink the roots of their soul deeply into the rich soil of God's Word.

Psalm 1:4, 5
The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

During harvest time in Israel, the grain would be thrown into the air, where the breezes would blow the chaff away, leaving the grain to fall to the ground where it could be gathered. Because sinners are blown about by the changing winds of culture, they won't be in the company of those who are saved.

Psalm 1:6
For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

The first word of this psalm was "blessed." The last word is "perish." The contrast is clear—for truly the godly man, the one who meditates in the Word is happy, but the ungodly man will perish ultimately.



2 We know Psalm 2 was written by David because Peter attributes it to him in Acts 4:25. We also know from verse 2 that it is a messianic psalm, one foretelling and dealing with Jesus.

Psalm 2:1
Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?

Why do the kings of the earth create federations of those who would normally be at odds with each other? I think of Herod and Pilate, an Idumean and a Roman. Normally, they would be at each other's throats. But they came together in their hatred of Jesus, in their desire to destroy Him.

Psalm 2:2 (a)
The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed . . .

The word translated "anointed" is *Mesheach* or "Messiah" in Hebrew, and *Christos* or "Christ" in Greek. It refers to Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the Anointed One. Here, David notes that the kings of the earth come together against both the Lord and His anointed, both the Father and the Son.

Psalm 2:2 (b), 3
. . . saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

Verses 2 and 3 give the answer to the question in verse 1. The reason there is such hatred and rejection of Jesus is because people believe He is going to restrict or hinder their lives. This fear is also the foundational reason for the theory of evolution—for if there is indeed a Creator, mankind would be obligated to obey Him. But get rid of the Creator, and you automatically free yourself of any obligation to submit to Him. This, however, is as ridiculous as cutting the brake lines of your car so that you could drive without restrictions.

"The commands of God are not grievous," John declared (see 1 John 5:3). God's commands truly have our best interests at heart.

Psalm 2:4
He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.

The Lord's laugh here is not one of hilarity but of incredulity, as if to say, "These people have the audacity to challenge *Me?*"

Psalm 2:5
Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.

After God laughs, He judges. Is He justified in this? Absolutely. If someone broke into my house, grabbed my wife and threatened to torture her, I would say, "Stop! If you need to torture someone, torture me." But if, after I absorbed the beating, she ran off with him, my anger would be understandable. The Lord came to the earth to die for the sins of the whole world. He paid the price willingly and died in our place sacrificially. Is His wrath justified when He sees people chasing after the very one He came to rescue them from? Unquestionably.

Psalm 2:6, 7
Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

After the kings of the earth and the rulers of this planet rebel against the Lord, culminating in the battle of Armageddon, the Lord will establish His rule and reign on His holy hill in Jerusalem. So certain is this that God speaks as though it has already happened.

Psalm 2:8
Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

According to Matthew 25, following the Tribulation—the seven-year period when God pours out His wrath upon a Christ-rejecting, sinful world—the sheep and goats will be separated. The sheep will be allowed to enter the kingdom during the Millennium, where Jesus will rule and reign for one thousand years on earth. Because they will still have human bodies, they will still be vulnerable to fleshly tendencies. So we, as saints who rule and reign with Jesus, will enforce righteousness. At the end of the Millennium, Satan will be released for a short season. At that point, those born during the thousand-year-period of unparalleled peace and prosperity will have to decide whether to follow Jesus or Satan. Sadly, many will follow Satan.

The good news is that *we* won't be deceived by Satan at the end of the Millennium. We'll never again be tempted, vulnerable to any kind of

deception because when we see our Lord, we will be like Him (1 John 3:2). Oh, what a happy day that will be!

Psalm 2:9
Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

In verse 1, we heard the psalmist ask why the heathen rage. In verse 4, we heard God the Father declare that He'll be laughing. In verse 8, we heard Jesus Christ declare that the Father told Him the inheritance of the heathen will be given to Him. Here, we hear the Holy Spirit speak.

Psalm 2:10
Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.

This is directed to present kings and leaders.

Psalm 2:11
Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

This is a winning combination, indeed! Joy without fear is frivolous. Fear without joy is morbid. The key is to serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.

Psalm 2:12
Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

The Greek word for worship is *proskuneo*. *Pros* means "to turn toward." *Kuneo* means "to kiss." That's the root of worship: to express appreciation, devotion, and love, for while the heathen can rage and the kings can plot, the Lord will ultimately have His way.



3 *A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.*

As the notes under the title say, this is a psalm attributed to David when David was fleeing from Absalom. Absalom was David's rebellious son who wanted to take the throne away from his father and take control of the country. As David was driven out of the city of Jerusalem, fleeing for his life with a broken heart, he took time to write this psalm . . .

Psalm 3:1, 2 (a)
LORD, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. . . .

Previously, David had been extremely popular. Women had sung songs about him. Men had admired him. But now time has passed and, with it, his popularity. His son, Absalom, had captured the hearts of many in Jerusalem. And now David is being chased out of the city. As he leaves, a man named Shimei throws dirt at him, saying, "You're a bloody man," alluding to David's murder of Uriah.

Every David has a shabby Shimei throwing dirt, reminding him of past failure, of past sin. Every Abel has an envious Cain, ready to do him in. Every Isaac has a mocking Ishmael, sneering at him. Every Job has his miserable comforters causing greater pain to his soul. David is experiencing what you and I will inevitably find in our own situations at one point or another.

Psalm 3:2 (b)
. . . Selah.

Selah is a musical notation that tells the musician to stop and rest. For us, it is a wise word to stop and think about what we've just read.

Psalm 3:3
But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.

When my kids were little and would be sad about something, I loved to gently put my hand under their drooping chins, lift up their heads, and say, "It's okay, Peter. It's okay, Jess. It's okay, Christy." David says that's what the Lord does to us. He's the One who comes our way when others are throwing dirt at us, when family members turn against us, when everything seems to be disastrous, and gently puts His hand under our drooping chins so that He can look us in the eye and say, "It's okay."

Psalm 3:4
I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah.

Don't you love the Lord's ability to hear? Innumerable voices cry to Him, yet He coordinates them all. The farmer prays for rain on Saturday while the bride and groom pray fervently for a sunny day. Only God has the ability to work *all* things together for good.

Psalm 3:5
I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me.

I'm so glad that the Lord worked it into His equation that every eighteen hours or so we go to sleep because I blow it so badly every day, I just want to start all over again every morning with a clean slate. I'm so thankful that morning by morning, a fresh batch of mercy is awaiting me (see Lamentations 3:22, 23).

Psalm 3:6–8
I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about. Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongeth unto the LORD: thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah.

Jesus tells us to turn our other cheek when our enemy smites us (Matthew 5:39). Yet David prays, "Smite the cheekbones of my enemies." Why? Because the Old Testament provides physical and external pictures of the

internal and external principles of the New Testament. You see, while David waged war physically, we are to wage war spiritually. That's why Paul says we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, against wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12). Therefore, if I'm fighting against flesh and blood, I'm fighting the wrong battle. I must wage war not against people but against Satan by pleading the blood and binding the work of the enemy in prayer even as it relates to my own sinful nature.

I know my heart. I can be a Shimei; I can be an Absalom, throwing dirt and rebelling against the Lord. Thus, like David, I must wage war against the enemy that seeks to do me in. And I do so by praying, "Break *me,* Lord. Deal with *me.*"



4 *To the chief Musician on Neginoth, A Psalm of David.*

This psalm, written by David, is believed to have been written at the same time as Psalm 3, when he was fleeing Jerusalem due to Absalom's insurrection. It was to be played on an instrument called the neginoth. *Neginoth* means "to strike." Therefore, it is believed that the neginoth was a stringed instrument.

Psalm 4:1
Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.

When was David enlarged? When he was in distress. Why? Because we grow spiritually the same way we gain strength physically. You see, the premise of weightlifting is to break down muscle so that when you're at rest, it rebuilds stronger than it was before. Faith is like a muscle. It must be worked out to be enlarged. Therefore, if you feel like you've been broken down or beat up, take hope, for that is the very time David was enlarged.

Psalm 4:2
O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing? Selah.

After praying to God in verse 1, David speaks to his enemies in verse 2. That's always the way it should be. Before you speak *out* to people, be sure you've prayed *up* to God.

Psalm 4:3, 4
But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him. Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.

Are you distressed today? Do what David did. Stand in awe of God. Be still. Commune with Him even as you lie in bed.

Psalm 4:5–8
Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD. There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.

What a great evening psalm this is. "Lord, You cause me to lay down and sleep peacefully," David says. How much time we waste and sleep we lose in endless conversations about possibilities and potential problems that never come to pass. How much better to simply cast our care upon the Lord and pour out our hearts to Him.



5 *To the chief Musician upon Nehiloth, A Psalm of David.*

After the evening psalm of Psalm 4, we are given a morning psalm in Psalm 5 . . .

Psalm 5:1–3 (a)
Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation. Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray. My voice shalt thou hear in the morning . . .

I have discovered that if I don't begin my morning *with* the Lord, I spend my evening mourning *for* the Lord. If I don't get direction for the day before the sun comes up, I miss out. The manna was available to the children of Israel in the morning but when the sun rose in the sky, the manna would melt (Exodus 16:21). I'm not trying to be legalistic. But, as a brother, I'm saying it really works to cry out to the Lord before you begin your day.

I find that if I whisper my prayers silently, my mind tends to wander. But when I pray out loud—even as I walk through my neighborhood—I find something wonderful happens: I get direction for the day in a very practical and real way. It seems that every great man and woman of God throughout both Scripture and history developed a morning discipline.

Psalm 5:3 (b)
. . . O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.

Notice that David didn't say he would direct the Lord, but that he would direct his prayer to the Lord. When I give directions to the Lord, I become the Lord and He becomes my servant. But when I simply direct my prayer to the Lord, look up, and wait to see what He'll say and do, I'm in the posture of true prayer.

Psalm 5:4
For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee.

"You're not foolish or capricious, Lord. You want the best," David declares.

Psalm 5:5
The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.

The foolish things within me will fall away as I direct my prayer to the Lord and wait on Him at the beginning of the day.

Psalm 5:6
Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man.

When my son, Peter-John, was one year old, I watched as he was intrigued by something in the pasture surrounding our house. Upon closer inspection, I saw that what he was looking at was a big rattlesnake. I first grabbed Peter-John, and then grabbed a shovel and dealt with the snake. Was this mean? No. I had a family to protect. The Lord is also justified in dealing decisively with those who seek to poison and harm others, just as He is justified in dealing decisively with those tendencies within *me*.

Psalm 5:7–10
But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple. Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face. For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue. Destroy thou them, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions; for they have rebelled against thee.

Oh, how I pray that those things within me that are rebellious, deceptive, deceitful, and sinful would be cast out and destroyed. "Lord, I'm calling out to You this morning to set me free of that which is defiling and contrary to Your beauty and glory."

Psalm 5:11, 12

But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee. For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.

Work on the temple was at a standstill. "Shout 'Grace' unto the cornerstone," the prophet Zechariah said (see Zechariah 4:7). Maybe you feel like there are walls surrounding you—emotions that can't be expressed, relationships that are strained. Perhaps the Lord would say to you, "I want you to quit moaning and pouting and choose instead to rejoice and to shout 'Grace.' " I have done this many a time—just shouted out loud, "Lord, grace unto this. I believe You for this." And I've watched walls come down.

Here, David says, "I want to be one who rejoices in You, Lord, because You have never failed to defend me."



6 To the chief Musician on Neginoth upon Sheminith, A Psalm of David.

As we have noted, for every sigh, there is a psalm, and the passage before us is one such psalm. That is, it's one of the seven penitential psalms, one of the psalms that expresses sorrow for sin, a cry of repentance, a plea for forgiveness. Although we know this psalm was written by David, the circumstances are uncertain. Some believe it comes out of the adulterous affair he had with Bathsheba followed by the murder of her husband, Uriah.

The rabbis, however, teach that it was penned by David when he was in the Philistine city of Gath. Determined to destroy David, we read that Saul chased him like a bird (1 Samuel 26:20). Unable to find sanctuary in an Israelite city, David ultimately made his way to Gath and offered his services to Achish, the king. Each day when David would leave the city to do battle, Achish thought he was doing battle against the Israelites. In reality, he was waging war against the enemies of Israel. Although the people of Israel no doubt had written David off at this point, that didn't stop him from writing down his praise to God. That is, even though he may not have been where he

ought to have been geographically, this psalm shows that he was still in communion with God spiritually.

I believe there's a lesson in this for you and me. That is, even though we have a tendency to write people off, the Lord says, "I'm working in and through them. I'm not finished with them—not by a long shot."

Psalm 6:1, 2 (a)
O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. Have mercy upon me, O LORD; for I am weak . . .

David didn't pray, "Lord, give me what I deserve." No, he said, "Lord, give me mercy."

That's always the way to call on the Lord. "Lord, have mercy upon me—not because I'm so together, not because my devotional life is so intense or so consistent, not because of my zealousness or my faithfulness—but simply because I'm weak and I need You desperately."

Psalm 6:2 (b)–4
. . . O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed. My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O LORD, how long? Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake.

Bone-tired and heavy of soul, David longs to once again feel the presence of the Lord in his life. Others, no doubt, had given up on him. But the Lord was simply waiting for David to seek Him once again.

Psalm 6:5
For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?

Either due to possible physical affliction or to his awareness that the Philistines could turn on him at any moment, David feels he's on the verge of death.

Psalm 6:6, 7

I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears. Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies.

Commenting on this psalm, C. H. Spurgeon said that tears are liquid prayers that need no interpretation. I like that!

Psalm 6:8, 9
Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping. The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer.

In verse 3, David had asked how long it would be before the Lord heard his prayer. But as he poured out his heart to the Lord, evidently a breakthrough took place within his soul that caused him to now say, "The Lord has indeed heard me and will receive my prayer." I have found the same thing happens to anyone who does what David did and what Jesus instructed us to do: to *keep* asking, to *keep* seeking, to *keep* knocking (see Matthew 7:7).

Psalm 6:10
Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed: let them return and be ashamed suddenly.

Sometimes, like David, we can feel bone-weary, aware of our own compromises, frailties, weakness, and sin. But David didn't stop there. He prayed with perseverance. He prayed until he sensed the presence and blessing of God.

I think of Elijah on Mount Carmel. With a simple prayer that only took fifteen seconds at most to pray, he called down fire from heaven. Following that, he prayed not for fire but rain. Now, it seems to me that praying for rain to fall would be easier than praying for fire. But this time, Elijah put his head between his knees as he prayed. Why? Because that was the position of birthing. In other words, sometimes our prayers are answered quickly, but there are other times we must labor in prayer.

"Cast your care upon Him, for He careth for you," Peter declared (see 1 Peter 5:7). The Greek word translated "cast" literally means "to roll." The problem is, I roll my cares upon God and feel better. But when they roll back my way again, my cares, anxiety, and stress return. So I roll them back on Him. Then, after a day or two, my care returns. Why does this happen? I suggest it is for the same reason I like to play catch with my son, Ben.

"Ball" was Ben's first word—and ever since then, he's loved every sport with a ball. I've played catch with him ever since he was a little guy, not because I like to play catch, but because I like to be with Ben. Sometimes that's how it is in prayer. We roll our cares on God and He rolls them back to us so that we can roll them back to Him. Why? Because He likes spending time with us. And sometimes, it seems the only time we touch base with Him is when we "play catch."



7 Shiggaion of David, which he sang unto the LORD*, concerning the words of Cush the Benjamite.*

Psalm 7 has been called "the psalm of the slandered saint." It's a *shiggaion,* or literally "a loud cry." Although we don't know who Cush was, we know he was someone who lied to Saul about David.

Psalm 7:1, 2
O LORD **my God, in thee do I put my trust: save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me: Lest he tear my soul like a lion, rending it in pieces, while there is none to deliver.**

David likens this slander to the attack of the lion. I find this interesting because Peter said our adversary, the devil, goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). How does Satan devour us? One of his chief methods is through slander as he accuses us constantly. "You're a failure," he roars in our ears. "God has given up on you."

Psalm 7:3, 4

O LORD my God, if I have done this; if there be iniquity in my hands; If I have rewarded evil unto him that was at peace with me; (yea, I have delivered him that without cause is mine enemy:)

Running for his life, David took refuge in the cave of Adullam. When Saul unknowingly took a nap in the same cave, David's men told him it was his opportunity to lop off Saul's head. David didn't follow their advice. Instead, he cut off a piece of Saul's garment simply to prove that he could have indeed taken Saul's life. As he did this, however, Scripture records that his heart smote him. "I shouldn't have touched the Lord's anointed," he said (1 Samuel 24:5, 6).

In this, we see that, even though he had been anointed by Samuel to be king, David recognized Saul as God's anointed instrument to make him a godly man. In due season, God would deal with Saul. In due season, David would ascend to the throne. But at this point, Saul had a role to play in David's development.

I suggest the same is true of the boss, the parent, or the teacher you're tempted to slander. Wise is the man who realizes that in God's economy, everyone around him has a role to play—making him a different person than he would otherwise be. On three occasions, Saul threw spears at David. But David didn't fire back.

When a man is the instrument of the enemy, he will take every opportunity to throw a spear, to make his point. Saul was such a man. David, on the other hand, was anointed by God. He didn't fire back, and God protected him.

Psalm 7:5

Let the enemy persecute my soul, and take it; yea, let him tread down my life upon the earth, and lay mine honour in the dust. Selah.

Again, David declares his innocence in this matter. "If I'm in error, let me be destroyed," he says.

Psalm 7:6, 7

Arise, O LORD, in thine anger, lift up thyself because of the rage of mine enemies: and awake for me to the judgment that thou hast commanded. So shall the congregation of the people compass thee about: for their sakes therefore return thou on high.

"The people of the congregation are watching, Lord," David says, "Do what only You can do."

Psalm 7:8
The LORD shall judge the people: judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me.

David isn't claiming to be sinless. But he's claiming to be innocent of the accusation hurled against him.

Psalm 7:9–11
Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just: for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins. My defence is of God, which saveth the upright in heart. God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.

In the face of accusation, condemnation, and slander, David says, "My defense is God. He is the only One who judges righteously." David experienced seasons of sin, many points of weakness, numerable failures, yet he had something I desire very much in my life. He had a heart that loved God deeply, fervently, and constantly. Thus, he knew God was able to sort things out and make every situation right.

What is our defense to be when Satan slanders us either internally or through the mouths of others? If you seek to defend yourself, you're a fool because once you start defending yourself, you'll never stop. It will become your full-time occupation and will keep you from ever doing anything significant for God. When Satan accuses and condemns us, Jesus is our defense Lawyer who says, "The penalty has been paid. The blood has been shed."

Hearing that, the Father says, "Case dismissed for lack of evidence because so potent is the blood of My Son that it cleanses every sin."

Psalm 7:12, 13
If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors.

If the slanderer is not going to turn around, he'll be dealt with severely.

Psalm 7:14–16
Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood. He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate.

It's a guarantee that, sooner or later, the slanderer will reap what he sows. He'll fall into his own pit. It might take a month, a year, ten years or twenty. But eventually, he'll fall. Be not deceived. God is not mocked. That which a man sows, that shall he also reap (Galatians 6:7).

Psalm 7:17
I will praise the LORD according to his righteousness: and will sing praise to the name of the LORD most high.

The solution to slander is to sing a song of praise. David is being attacked. What does he do? Rather than getting sore *about* the situation, he soars *above* the situation by praising God.



8 To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm of David.

This psalm was probably written by David when he was a shepherd. The *gittith* was an instrument that was actually used in Gath. So David could have either picked up this instrument there, or perhaps he invented it when he was there. Either way, he brought out of Gath, a Philistine city, an instrument that he used to praise the God of Israel.

Psalm 8:1
O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.

As a shepherd, David would no doubt have had many opportunities to lie on the hillside and look up at the stars above. Perhaps it was this that led him to the inevitable conclusion that the stars do indeed declare the glory of God.

Our universe is quite large, gang. If the distance between the sun and our earth, ninety-three million miles, was represented by the thickness of one sheet of paper, you would need a stack of paper seventy-one feet high to represent the distance between earth and the nearest star, *Alpha Centauri.* But to represent the distance between earth and the edge of the Milky Way galaxy, you would need a stack of paper three hundred ten miles high. That would be a short stack, however, compared to the thirty-million-mile-high stack of paper you would need to represent the distance from earth to the edge of the known universe.

What's beyond the universe? The Word declares it's the glory of God—the *chabod,* the weight, the substance. It's what people crave, and we get to explore it throughout eternity.

Psalm 8:2
Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.

"Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength," or, literally, "hast thou perfected praise." In Matthew 21, as Jesus healed the lepers and caused blind eyes to be opened, multitudes praised Him. Then He cleansed the temple.

"This is out of order," the religious leaders said.

"Haven't you read that out of the mouth of children, God has ordained strength?" Jesus asked, no doubt alluding to the verse before us. "Don't you understand that, rather than being a place where moneychangers rip people off, this place is to be a place where praise ascends, where prayer is offered, where people are helped?"

Or hast thou perfect praise. Jesus quoted this verse in Matthew 21:16. When He was in the temple, He cleansed the temple of those who were ripping the people off. He chased out the moneychangers. He healed the lepers. He caused blind eyes to be opened. As wondrous works were being done, the little children began to praise the Lord. Hosanna! Hosanna! The religious leaders said, "This is out of order." Jesus said, "Haven't you read that out of the mouth of babes and sucklings have you ordained strength, there is perfect praise? Haven't you read that that's what this place is to be continually where praise ascends, prayer is offered, people helped, and power expressed?"

Psalm 8:3
When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

If the sun were hollowed out, one million three hundred thousand earths could fit inside. But the sun is small compared to the star, Anteres, because if Anteres were hollow, it could hold sixty-four million suns. Anteres, however, is nothing compared to the star, Hercules, which, if hollow, could hold one hundred million Anteres. Yet the star, Epsilon, dwarfs Anteres, for if it were hollow, it could hold three million Hercules.

The amount of power needed to put such massive bodies in motion would be incalculable. Yet here, David says it was mere finger play for God. What was the work that required God's arms rather than merely His fingers? The work He did when His arms were pinned to the Cross as He bore the sins of mankind for you and for me. In other words, the work of creation was kid's stuff in comparison to the work of redemption.

Psalm 8:4
What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

Considering the greatness of God and the awesomeness of His creation, it would be logical to think that mankind wouldn't matter to God, but the fact that God visited humanity in the person of Jesus Christ gives us dignity.

Who does a person visit? When someone is sick, people come and visit. If someone is new to the neighborhood, neighbors come and visit. If someone is in prison, he is able to see visitors during visiting hours. That's what the Lord did with us. He visited us. Great is the mystery that God became a man (1 Timothy 3:16). Why? Because we were imprisoned by our sin. We were sick, depraved, and headed for hell. We were the new kid on the block, so to speak. So the Lord came to visit us, to say, "I love you."

Psalm 8:5
For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

Because of Jesus, man not only has dignity, but destiny—for, although we're made lower than the angels, 1 Corinthians 6:3 tells us that one day, we're going to judge the angels.

Psalm 8:6–8
Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

In addition to dignity and destiny, we're given dominion. That is, all the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea are all to be under the dominion of man. The idea isn't so much that we'll conquer nature, but that we'll be in harmony with nature and that nature will respond to us.

Psalm 8:9
O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

Man has dignity, destiny, and dominion—and yet there is a dilemma, for we don't experience these things presently. Why?

But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus . . .

Hebrews 2:6–9 (a)

Jesus came bearing the very dignity of God Himself. His destiny was heaven itself. And His dominion over nature was demonstrated when the beasts were at peace with Him (Mark 1:13), the water supported Him (Matthew 14:26), and the wind subsided at His command (Mark 4:39). We're not yet what we're going to be, gang. But we can see our destiny when we look at Jesus—for when we see Him, we shall be like Him. What a happy day that will be!



9

To the chief Musician upon Muthlabben, A Psalm of David.

Muthlabben means "death of the son." Psalm 9 is a psalm of conquest, believed to be written in response to David's victory over the death of the Philistines' favorite son, Goliath.

Psalm 9:1–3
I will praise thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High. When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at thy presence.

Just as there is a way to praise God halfheartedly, there is a way to praise Him wholeheartedly, fully engaged in worship. David chose to do the latter. So did Mary.

Breaking the alabaster box, she anointed Jesus with costly perfume and wiped His feet with her hair (Mark 14). When everyone left, Jesus bore the fragrance of the perfume, and so did Mary. It would no doubt linger for days. The disciples, on the other hand, retained the fragrance while they were in the house. But when they left, it wasn't theirs. Have you ever left church and, by the time you were halfway home, realized the fragrance was gone? You felt blessed to be there, but you lost it on the way home. Why? Because, like the disciples, you were taking in what someone else was offering. Mary was the one who broke the box, gave the gift, and wiped Jesus' feet with her hair. Mary was wholeheartedly involved. While the others smelled the fragrance, only Mary retained it when she left the room.

The challenge for us is to be like Mary, to be like David, to worship with a whole heart, with passion and fervency, with sincerity and intensity.

Psalm 9:4, 5
For thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne judging right. Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name for ever and ever.

Notice that the word "thou" appears five times in these two verses. It's easy to begin to take credit for what God does for us. But David didn't do this. "Lord," he prayed, "it's *You. You* did this. *You're* the victor. It's not what I did. It's all about *You.*"

Jesus said we're to let our light so shine that men may see our good works and glorify our Father (Matthew 5:16). Without exception, whenever He did a miracle, Scripture records that the people glorified God. In other words, Jesus did His work in such a way that people glorified His Father.

Psalm 9:6–8
O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end: and thou hast destroyed cities; their memorial is perished with them. But the LORD shall endure for ever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment. And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness.

It's no wonder that in heaven, the cry is, "Righteous and true are Your judgments, O Lord"—for whatever He does will always prove to be perfectly righteous and completely true.

Psalm 9:9–11
The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee. Sing praises to the LORD, which dwelleth in Zion: declare among the people his doings.

Sing out and tell the people what God has done! It's important that we share testimonies, how prayer is being answered, how victories are being won. I have an obligation not only to receive blessing, but to release testimony that others might be encouraged.

Psalm 9:12–14
When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them: he forgetteth not the cry of the humble. Have mercy upon me, O LORD; consider my trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death: That I may shew forth all thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion: I will rejoice in thy salvation.

If there's nothing else to be thankful for, praise the Lord you're not going to hell! We're saved—from the penalty of sin, from the power of sin, and eventually from the very presence of sin. Hallelujah!

Psalm 9:15, 16
The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken. The LORD is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Higgaion. Selah.

Higgaion means "meditate." *Selah* means "Stop and think about it." David uses these words to emphasize the fact that, if we are involved in

wickedness, it will always catch up with us.

Psalm 9:17–20
The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God. For the needy shall not alway be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever. Arise, O LORD; let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in thy sight. Put them in fear, O LORD: that the nations may know themselves to be but men. Selah.

This one who had been given victory over Goliath asks God to deal with all of his enemies. And in due time, He will.



10 Most commentators believe Psalm 10 is an extension of Psalm 9.

Psalm 10:1
Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?

David experienced great victory. But now he's wondering where the Lord is when there are still problems to be solved.

Psalm 10:2
The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined.

David prayed that the wicked would themselves be caught in the evil traps they set for others.

Psalm 10:3–6
For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all

his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity.

The wicked man who seems to be prospering says, "I've got my bases covered. I'll never be in adversity. I've got life insurance and health insurance, car insurance, and homeowner's insurance." But does he have fire insurance? That's the real question!

Psalm 10:7–13
His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity. He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones. He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it. Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble. Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? he hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it.

The wicked err greatly when they mistake the longsuffering of God for impotence, apathy, or worst of all, for approval.

Psalm 10:14
Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand: the poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless.

"The poor and disenfranchised look to You, Lord," David prays. And how comforting it is to realize that the God of the universe never takes His eyes off them.

Psalm 10:15, 16

Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man: seek out his wickedness till thou find none. The LORD is King for ever and ever: the heathen are perished out of his land.

This prayer of David's is mine as well. "Break the arm of the wicked man within *me,* Lord. Where there is a part of me that thinks You don't take notice, wherever there is wickedness in my heart, break its arm and deal with it. Deal radically with whatever is not right within *me.* Rule over me, Lord, and send that which is heathen within me into exile."

Psalm 10:17, 18
LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear: To judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress.

David began saying, "Lord, where are You? Why can't I seem to make contact with You? Why are You allowing the wicked to do so well?" He begins with a question, but ends with a solution which is the result of spending time in prayer. He poured out his complaint *to* the Lord, talked things over *with* the Lord, and came to a conclusion *about* the Lord.

I have found that one of the most beautiful benefits of prayer is that, in the midst of conversing with the Lord, I receive answers, understanding, and solutions that would never have come had I not gotten on my knees to seek His face. The psalmist was troubled and perplexed. But in the presence of the Lord, he was reminded that the Lord would indeed deal with the situation perfectly. We look forward to the day when things are right on this earth. In the meantime, our prayer is that the Lord would rule and reign in our hearts.



11 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.*

The eleventh psalm expresses faith's response to fear's advice. Facing difficult days, David was given carnal, cowardly advice. Psalm 11 is his response . . .

Psalm 11:1–3
In the LORD put I my trust: How say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain? For, lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart. If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?

Most commentators agree that the setting for this psalm is found in 1 Samuel 21 and knowing Saul was out to get him, David made his way to where the tabernacle was pitched in Nob. "I'm here on a secret errand for Saul," David lied. "I had to leave so quickly that I didn't have time to gather supplies. Do you have any bread?"

"There are five loaves of consecrated bread you can have," Ahimelech, the priest, answered. "And you can take the sword of Goliath, as well."

So with bread and sword in hand, David went his way.

It just so happened that, overhearing the conversation was Doeg, Saul's chief herdsman. "I saw David at Nob," he said to Saul. "And I saw Ahimelech give him supplies."

Incensed, Saul called for Ahimelech and the priests.

"How could you supply my enemy?" Saul asked.

"I didn't know he was your enemy. He told me you sent him," Ahimelech answered.

But so enraged was Saul that he ordered his guards to kill Ahimelech and all of the priests. When the guards refused, Doeg unsheathed his sword and killed Ahimelech and the eighty-five priests with him.

Word came to David that he should leave the country and hide from Saul's wrath. But instead of looking around at the trouble surrounding him, David decided to look up to the only One who could save him . . .

Psalm 11:4

The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men.

David understood that neither Saul nor what had taken place at Nob was the issue. The only issue was that God was on the throne and in control.

Psalm 11:5, 6
The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup.

After looking up and seeing that God was on the throne, David looked ahead and saw that God would deal not only with Saul but with all those who do wickedly.

Psalm 11:7
For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.

The Lord loves the righteous. Therefore, because we are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21), there is no need for us to fear anything if we simply look up and look ahead.

12 *To the chief Musician upon Sheminith, A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 12:1 (a)
Help, LORD . . .

That's a good prayer right there! The strength of a prayer rather than its length is what matters (Matthew 6:7, 8). When Peter found himself going underwater, he prayed a prayer of three words: "Lord, save me." And the

Lord responded by reaching out His hand and plopping Peter back in the boat (Matthew 14:30, 31).

Psalm 12:1 (b)
. . . for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.

God is not so much looking for men and women of faith as He is looking for faithful men and women. If you're faithful in the little things—in morning prayer, in daily Bible study, in your desire to know the Lord better each day—you will gain spiritual strength over the long haul that will give you stability over the years and decades.

Psalm 12:2–4
They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things: Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?

There are those who choose to get out of whatever difficult situation they're in through clever speech, flattery, deceit, and lies.

Even in the church today, there are those who say we can overcome anything through the words we speak. "We'll determine what's best for us," they say. "We'll make a positive confession. After all it was because God *said,* 'Let there be light,' that there was light." What the proponents of "positive confession" fail to realize, however, is that there was light not because God *said,* "Let there be light." There was light because *God* said, "Let there be light."

Sometimes we treat God like a genie or like the fairy godmother who was at the anniversary party of a sixty-year-old couple celebrating their thirty-fifth anniversary.

"Congratulations," the fairy godmother said. "I'm going to give you each one wish. What would you like?"

"I would like to go on a world cruise," the wife answered.

Poof! Tickets were in her hand.

"What would you like?" she said, turning to the man.

Pulling the fairy godmother aside, he said, "Frankly, I would like to be married to a woman thirty years younger than I am."

Poof! He became ninety.

We ask for the dumbest stuff. And the Lord loves us enough to say, "I'm not going to honor that request because you don't understand what you're asking for." I'm so glad we serve a God who can't be ordered around. I'm so glad our Father loves us too much to grant our petitions if He sees they will be harmful to us.

Psalm 12:5
For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.

Who huffs and puffs at us? Satan. He accuses us night and day (Revelation 12:10). But, because we are in Christ Jesus, he is unable to blow us away.

Psalm 12:6
The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.

In contrast to the flattery of man, the words of the Lord are pure and refined, neither empty nor arrogant.

Psalm 12:7, 8
Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever. The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted.

Even though the wicked walk on every side and the vilest men are exalted, the fact is that the Word of the Lord will stand.

Highly esteemed philosopher, Voltaire, said: "In twenty years, Christianity will be no more. My single hand shall destroy the edifice it took twelve apostles to rear." Twenty years later, the house in which he penned those words was purchased by the Geneva Bible Society and was used to publish and distribute the Word of God. Voltaire was exalted for a season, but he faded away. Not so the Word of the Lord. It remains this day and will remain throughout eternity.



13 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 13:1–6
How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved. But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.

In six verses, David goes from a sigh to a song, from the blues to being blessed. Why? Simply because he prayed. Feeling forsaken and forgotten, he prays. And by the time he's done, the Lord has met him.

I think sometimes we believe the lie from the enemy that says, "It can't be that simple. It will take many months of prayer to break through and get victory over my depression, over my addiction, over my situation." But I suggest this psalm tells us differently. In no more time than it takes to pen these six verses, David finds release, relief, and victory. In other words, it doesn't take as much as we think.

"Don't think you'll be heard because of your much speaking," Jesus said (Matthew 6:7). And, as if to underscore this, the model prayer He gave His

disciples was only sixty-five words long (Matthew 6:9–13).

About a year and a half later, the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Lord, teach us to pray." No doubt they were thinking the first model prayer He gave was fine for beginners. But now that they had walked with Him, they could handle something more complex. What did Jesus do? He gave them the same prayer He had given them earlier but shortened it to fifty-eight words (Luke 11:2–4). The disciples were no doubt expecting volumes. I suggest it was with a twinkle in His eye that the Lord said, "It's simpler than you think."

Like David, I have discovered that, no matter how overwhelming the situation, if I'll just pull away and pray, the Lord meets me. He really, truly does. Talk to the Lord. Question Him. Be honest with Him. And you'll find that the Lord will meet you. The old adage that prayer changes things is true. But the real thing prayer changes is us.



14 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 14:1 (a)
The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. . . .

In the original text, the phrase, "there is," is in italics. This means that this verse originally read: "The fool hath said in his heart 'No, God.' " And that's the real issue. The person who claims to be an atheist or an agnostic does so not because of intellectual struggle but because of rebellion—not wanting God to rule over him or her. So they come up with foolish theories to rid themselves of their accountability to God. Romans 1:22–25 says those who profess themselves to be wise have suppressed the truth. In other words, they know the truth, but willingly exchanged it for a lie.

Psalm 14:1 (b)–3 (a)
. . . They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand,

and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy . . .

When I see what God says about all of humanity, it makes me deal with my fellow man realistically. That is, it makes me see my own need for salvation and to relate to other people with compassion. The pressure is off when we realize what God says about all of mankind. Realizing we're *all* lost frees me from judging or analyzing and allows me instead to embrace and love.

Psalm 14:3 (b)
. . . there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Paul reaches back to this verse and quotes it in his epistle to the Romans (3:12). There's not a good one in the bunch. But God so loved us that even when we were sinners, He sent His Son, Christ Jesus to die in our place that we might be washed in His blood, robed in His righteousness, born again. Amazing love.

Psalm 14:4–7
Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the LORD. There were they in great fear: for God is in the generation of the righteous. Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the LORD is his refuge. Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! when the LORD bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.

Those who prey on God's people and deny the existence of the Lord, those who go their way purposefully saying, "No, God," will have their day. But there's coming a day when the Lord Jesus will truly rule and reign from Jerusalem. At that time, the arrogant man will be put in his place and things will, at last, be right. What a grand and glorious day it will be!



15 *A Psalm of David.*

The situation here deals with the time when David brought the ark of the covenant back from Kirjath-jearim. You see, the ark had been captured by the Philistines and placed in their temple to Dagon. Ultimately, the ark made its way back to Israel and was kept at Kirjath-jearim for a season until David brought it back to his capital city, Jerusalem.

Psalm 15:1
LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?

As the ark is being transferred, David asks, "Lord, who can come into Your presence?"

Psalm 15:2, 3
He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.

The Hebrew word translated "taketh up" literally means "receive." In other words, a righteous man is one who doesn't listen to gossip. If I give ear to gossip, I am just as guilty as the one speaking it.

Psalm 15:4
In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.

The righteous man honors those who are in awe of God. He gives his word and is a man of integrity.

Psalm 15:5

He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.

In this short psalm, David has boiled the six hundred thirteen Old Testament commandments down to a list of eleven. Later on, Micah will reduce the list to three: to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God (6:8). But when Jesus comes on the scene, He'll make it simpler still, for, when asked which is the greatest commandment, He said,

> . . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.
>
> Matthew 22:37 (b)–40

Jesus boils it all down to one: love. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love God above you in heaven. Love people around you on earth. This forms the shape of a cross upon which hang all the law and the prophets.



16 *Michtam of David.*

Michtam means "golden" and/or "hidden." I suggest both meanings are applicable here because hidden in this psalm is a goldmine of meaning concerning something far bigger than David's own situation. Applying this psalm to Jesus, Peter quoted verses 8 through 11 in the sermon he gave on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:25–28). Paul would also apply a verse of this passage (verse 10) to Jesus as a prophecy of His Resurrection (Acts 13:35).

I believe the setting of this psalm is the Garden of Gethsemane, for I believe it tells us what our Lord was thinking the night before He was

crucified . . .

Psalm 16:1
Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust.

Luke tells us that the night before His Crucifixion, Jesus prayed so passionately that the capillaries in His face burst open (22:44).

Psalm 16:2
O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee;

"My goodness extendeth not to thee" or literally, "My goodness is nothing apart from You," Jesus prayed, echoing His statement in John 5:30 that He could of His own self do nothing.

Psalm 16:3–5
But to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight. Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips. The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.

In the garden, Jesus would pray, "Father, if it be possible, take this cup of suffering which is about to come My way. Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done" (see Luke 22:42). That which caused our Lord to be filled with so much anguish that He bled from His face was the knowledge that, for a time, He would be out of fellowship with His Father.

What causes consternation, anguish, and fear within me? Is it that I might be out of touch with the Father? May that be my greatest concern.

Psalm 16:6
The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.

What is Jesus' "goodly heritage?" Us. We are His inheritance. We are His treasure. Looking at us, I can't help but think we're somewhat of a booby prize. Not the Lord. Scripture says it was for the joy set before Him that He endured the Cross (Hebrews 12:2). What joy? You and me. The Lord looks at us and sees a goodly heritage.

Psalm 16:7
I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.

Jesus seemed to pray a lot in the night season (Matthew 14:23; Luke 6:12). When you wake up in the middle of the night, try using it as an opportunity to be instructed by the Lord and to hear from Him.

Psalm 16:8, 9 (a)
I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth . . .

As Jesus prayed, He knew the Father was as close as His right hand.

Psalm 16:9 (b), 10
. . . my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

"As I drink of this cup, I know You'll not leave Me in the grave," Jesus prayed. This, of course, points to the Resurrection.

Psalm 16:11
Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

If verse 10 speaks of the Resurrection, verse 11 speaks of the Ascension —of Jesus' glorious return to fullness of joy, to pleasures forevermore, to heaven.



17 *A Prayer of David.*

Psalm 17 is the first psalm explicitly called a prayer in the psalter. In it, David argues his case before the Lord in prayer in order that his request might be granted. This is a good way to pray. When I present my case to the Father in prayer by saying, "Here's what You said in Your Word . . ." or, "Here's what I know to be true about You . . ." it's not that I'm trying to persuade a reluctant Father but that I'm stimulating faith within my own soul. Here, David argues his case, and in so doing, I know his own faith is being stimulated, just as yours will be.

Psalm 17:1
Hear the right, O LORD, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips.

"Lord," David prays, "Listen to me. Hear my plea. My prayer is not empty words, but from my heart."

Psalm 17:2, 3 (a)
Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things that are equal. Thou has proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night . . .

"In the dark times, Lord, You've tested me," David prays. "You've come my way."

When you wake up in the middle of the night or can't get to sleep at all, you have a choice to make. You can either say, "Hmmm. Must be time for some cherry pie," or you can say, "Maybe the Lord is visiting me right now." If you slip out of your bed, go into another room, and talk to the Lord, you'll be absolutely amazed at how He'll bless, encourage, and minister to you. The Lord is a night-time visitor. But if you choose to watch television instead of responding to His call, He'll call less frequently.

Psalm 17:3 (b)
. . . thou has tried me, and shalt find nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.

"You've tried me, Lord, and You'll find no fault in me. Listen to me because I'm righteous," David prays.

Wait a minute, David. Even at this point you're already guilty of lying. You jeopardized the life of your own wife, Michal, when you snuck out the window and allowed her to lie for you (1 Samuel 19). And what about Ahimelech? Your lies to him resulted not only in his death, but in the deaths of eighty-five other priests (1 Samuel 21, 22).

There are glaring inconsistencies in David's life, so how could he have the audacity to say he was faultless? I suggest the solution is quite simple. That is, although David had problems and failures, he was nonetheless a man after God's own heart. He loved God passionately. He pursued God's heart, not so much to get something from His hand, but to look into His face. And because David sought the face of the Lord, like Noah, he found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8). What is grace? Unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor. I believe David had a firm grasp on where he stood positionally because he understood grace. Therefore, he made his arguments not upon a denial of his present sins but upon a realization of his positional standing.

Psalm 17:4
Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.

The old adage is true: This Book will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from this Book. The Word of God is powerful. Jesus showed this to be true when He beat back the temptations of the devil. Quoting Scripture concerning each temptation that came His way, Jesus unsheathed the Sword, used the Word, and Satan, the destroyer, fled (Matthew 4).

Psalm 17:5–8 (a)
Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not. I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear

unto me, and hear my speech. Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them. Keep me as the apple of the eye . . .

Scripture records that, even in the "waste howling wilderness," God kept Jacob as the apple of His eye (Deuteronomy 32:10). Here, David asks that Jacob's protection be extended to him. The apple of the eye is the pupil. We are told that the reflex that covers the eye is the quickest reflex in the body. When there's danger coming toward your face, your eye will close in 1/10,000th of a second. And the speed with which your eyelid closes to protect your eye is the speed with which the Lord protects His children.

Psalm 17:8 (b)
. . . hide me under the shadow of thy wings,

Sometimes even one ten-thousandth of a second seems too slow. But that's not true . . .

> For the LORD's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.
>
> Deuteronomy 32:9, 10

An eagle makes a massive nest; eggs are laid; and Ernie eaglet is born. Hatching out of his egg, Ernie enjoys the grand view. Day by day, he grows bigger until one day, Mama Eagle jars the nest and Ernie is knocked out. Squawking and frantically flapping his little wings, Ernie thinks he's dying as he falls, falls, falls hundreds of feet, headed for certain destruction on the rocks below. But right then, Mama swoops down, catches Ernie on her wings, and puts him back in the nest. No sooner does Ernie calm down than Mama jostles the nest again. Angry and upset, Ernie falls again. And, again, right before certain death, Mama is there, bearing him on her wings. The process is repeated until something happens—until instead of being sore, Ernie begins to soar.

"I'm not going to let you hit bottom," the Lord says to us. "But I will tip your nest from time to time because I want to teach you to fly."

Psalm 17:9–12
From the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about. They are inclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly. They have now compassed us in our steps: they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth; Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places.

"I'm under attack," David says, "like prey stalked by a lion" or, as Peter would tell us, by the devil who seeks to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

Psalm 17:13
Arise, O LORD, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword:

The sword, of course, is a reference to the Word (Hebrews 4:12). The key is to be in the Word and in touch with the Lord because it is as we hear what He says and make His Word the basis for our prayer that our soul is delivered.

Psalm 17:14
From men which are thy hand, O LORD, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes.

"Deliver me, Lord, from the evil men who appear to be prospering, from worldly men who would seek to seduce me with all of their riches and success stories."

Psalm 17:15
As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

A little boy struggled to uproot a huge weed. Finally, with a mighty tug, he was victorious.

"That was a mighty big tug," said a man, observing the scene.

"Yeah," said the little boy. "It's pretty tough when the whole world is pulling against you."

That's what happens with us. There's a whole world pulling against us. The world system pulls against us. The enemy goes about like a roaring lion, seeking to devour us. Our sin nature continually plagues us. When will we be free of this? When will we be truly satisfied? Not until we awake in the likeness of the Lord.

"When we see Him, we shall be like Him," John tells us (see 1 John 3:2).

"When I see You, I'll be satisfied," David says. "In the meantime, Lord, protect me. Keep me as the apple of Your eye. Hide me under the shadow of Your wings. See me through."



18 To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, the servant of the LORD, who spake unto the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul: And he said,

This psalm is first seen in 2 Samuel 22, when David was at the end of his life. Thinking about how God had given him victory over Saul, the rebellion of Absalom, and enemies on every side, David sings of God's faithfulness. In 2 Samuel, this psalm appears as a record of history. Here, it provides a picture of prophecy, for Paul would apply it to Jesus Christ (see verse 49 and Romans 15:9). In verse 50, we read of the "anointed one." There were three groups of people who received the anointing of oil: prophets, priests, and kings. Jesus is, of course, the King of kings, our Great High Priest, and the perfect Prophet. In this single psalm, we see the rejected Prophet in verses 1 through 19, the reigning Priest in verses 20 through 31, and, finally, the returning King in verses 32 through 50.

Psalm 18:1–3
I will love thee, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.

Here, we see Jesus trusting in His Father before we will see Him travail upon the Cross. "You are My high tower," He says. "I'm safe in You. I get perspective from You." And the same is available to us. We might be surrounded by confusion and questions, but when we get away and seek the Lord, suddenly we see things clearly.

Psalm 18:4–6
The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.

Here, we sense the heart, the tension, the distress of Jesus as He cried out to His Father from the Cross. Surrounded by the hordes of hell, spat upon by men of the earth, Jesus endured the agony for you and me.

Psalm 18:7, 8
Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it.

As Jesus hung on the Cross, all of nature convulsed when it saw mankind murder its Maker. The earth quaked. The rocks split. The graves opened.

Psalm 18:9–11
He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did

fly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies.

As Jesus hung on the Cross, the sky became frighteningly dark as the Father came down. Did He come to save His Son? No, He came to smite Him. Why? For my sins. Jesus didn't just die for the sins of the world generically. No, He died for each of my sins individually and specifically. Thus, the suffering of our Lord far exceeds anything we can understand this side of heaven.

Psalm 18:12–15
At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire. The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire. Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils.

The God we serve is a terrible God in the King James sense of the word. That is, He is majestic, awesome, and more powerful than we can possibly imagine. Sometimes I think we subconsciously think of God as being so busy with other people or situations that we get lost in the shuffle, or so old from being around since eternity past that He's no longer able to handle the situation we face. I encourage you to reconsider your God as you read this psalm.

Psalm 18:16–19
He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me. They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me.

After seeing Jesus trusting in the Father in verses 1 through 3 and travailing on the Cross in verses 4 through 15, here we see Him triumphing over the tomb. He was delivered because the Father delighted in Him. As seen in verses 20 through 31, He was delivered to become the reigning Priest . . .

Psalm 18:20–24
The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his judgments were before me, and I did not put away his statutes from me. I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore hath the LORD recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight.

Here, we see the reigning Priest's authority, proved by His resurrection from the dead . . .

Once each year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest would exchange his splendid robes, mitre, and breastplate for plain linen garments. Then he would go into the temple, through the veil, into the Holy of Holies, where the ark of the covenant stood. After sprinkling blood from a previously offered sacrifice on the mercy seat, which was covered by two cherubim, he would emerge from the Holy of Holies to the crowd anxiously awaiting outside and proclaim that they were forgiven. This would be followed by a glorious celebration.

Sometimes, however, the priest himself was not worthy to enter the Holy of Holies. He was not cleansed properly, not as prepared as he ought to have been. According to historian Alfred Edersheim, on four occasions, the priest died in the Holy of Holies. For this reason, the high priest would attach a rope to his ankle so that, if he died, the people could pull him out without risking their own lives.

The stage is set. The Great High Priest has died on the Cross. He's in the holy place, behind a veil of sorts, a tomb for a curtain. He's lying on a blood-splattered slab of a "mercy seat," wrapped in linen, surrounded by two

angels. The question is: Did His offering take? Was Jesus acceptable? Did His work satisfy the Father? For three days, the question remained unanswered, until Easter morning when He would emerge. Yes, the offering took. Yes, His work was acceptable. And we are forgiven—eternal praise be to Him!

Psalm 18:25–27
With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright; With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward. For thou wilt save the afflicted people; but wilt bring down high looks.

I believe the conversation we're listening in on here is between the Father and the Son. After seeing our Great High Priest's authority, we see His activity, for here He intercedes for you and me.

Psalm 18:28–31
For thou wilt light my candle: the LORD my God will enlighten my darkness. For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall. As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him. For who is God save the LORD? or who is a rock save our God?

Here, we see our Great High Priest's ability. Philippians 2 tells us that when He came to earth, Jesus became like you and me yet without sin. This means that the miracles He did were all done in the power of the Holy Spirit as He depended on His Father. In so doing, He is our example, for He shows us how our own lives would look if we chose to be empowered by the Spirit and dependent upon the Father.

Psalm 18:32–42
It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places. He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of

steel is broken by mine arms. Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great. Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip. I have pursued mine enemies, and overtaken them: neither did I turn again till they were consumed. I have wounded them that they were not able to rise: they are fallen under my feet. For thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle: thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me. Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies; that I might destroy them that hate me. They cried, but there was none to save them: even unto the LORD, but he answered them not. Then did I beat them small as the dust before the wind: I did cast them out as the dirt in the streets.

Here, we see the Lord coming—not as the Suffering Servant but as the conquering King. When He comes again, He'll come as a Man of war . . .

> And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.
>
> Revelation 19:11–16

The Lord is coming not only to conquer the enemy but to establish His kingdom. Things will be right. There will be justice and equity, peace and prosperity. And not only will He reclaim the kingdom *for* His Father, but He will rule *with* His Father . . .

Psalm 18:43–48
Thou hast delivered me from the strivings of the people; and thou hast made me the head of the heathen: a people whom I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me. The strangers shall fade away, and be afraid out of their close places. The LORD liveth; and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted. It is God that avengeth me, and subdueth the people under me. He delivereth me from mine enemies: yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man.

After reclaiming the kingdom *for* God, here we see Jesus reigning *with* God.

Psalm 18:49, 50
Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name. Great deliverance giveth he to his king; and sheweth mercy to his anointed, to David, and to his seed for evermore.

Paul quotes this passage in Romans 15:9. The rejoicing will take place in the kingdom on that day. The King of kings will be ruling. He's on the way!

19 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 19:1
The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy-work.

No doubt this psalm of David was inspired when, as a shepherd in Bethlehem, he looked up at the skies overhead and heard the silent sermon of

the stars. Psalm 19 tells us that the reality of God can be understood in two ways: through God's creation and through His commandments.

Psalm 19:2–4 (a)
Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. . . .

Every culture, every people, every situation has a missionary, for the heavens declare the glory of God, the greatness of the Creator.

Psalm 19:4 (b)–6
. . . In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

After talking about the glories seen in nature, David talks about the supernatural revelation seen in the Word.

Psalm 19:7 (a)
The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul . . .

The Law of the Lord is perfect—but I'm not. I need to be converted. I need to be saved. The Law is a schoolmaster, Paul would say, to show us our sinful condition and that we're in need of salvation (Galatians 3:24, 25).

Psalm 19:7 (b)
. . . the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

The Word of God never is out of date. There are no changes, no addenda to His plan.

Psalm 19:8

The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

When my kids were little, we had a three-foot wading pool in the backyard. After all the neighborhood kids came for a swim, the water would be so cloudy that I couldn't even see the bottom. So I would empty it out, patch the holes and fill it up. Then it would be crystal clear once again. That's what the Word does. It's pure and allows us to get to the bottom of things, to see clearly.

Psalm 19:9
The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

The brass laver in the tabernacle was made from the looking glasses the women brought out of Egypt. Thus, the laver revealed the priests' need to be cleansed as they looked in. But it also brought about the cleansing as they dipped their hands therein. That's what the Word does. It reveals my sin, but it also removes sin as it shows me the blood that was shed and the way I am to walk as I depend on God.

"How shall a young man cleanse his way?" the psalmist will ask. "By taking heed to the Word" (see Psalm 119:9). "Thy Word have I hid in my heart," he will declare, "that I might not sin against Thee" (Psalm 119:11).

We are washed, Paul declares, by the water of the Word (Ephesians 5:26).

"Now you are clean," Jesus said, "through the Word"—the testimony, the statutes, the commandment, the judgments—"I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3).

Psalm 19:10, 11
More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

It is not in hearing or in knowing the judgments of the Lord that there is great reward. It is in *keeping* them that there is great reward.

Psalm 19:12, 13
Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

"Lord, show me my faults," David prays. "Don't let me get away with either deliberate sins or secret sins."

Psalm 19:14
Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

"Cause my meditation in Your Word and my meditation about You to be acceptable in Your sight in order that I might have fellowship and intimacy with You." Oh, that this prayer of David's would be ours.



20 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.*

This psalm, written by David, is a psalm by a king for a king, very possibly written either for his own coronation or for his son, Solomon's coronation. It's an invocation, a prayer, that God's blessing might be upon the king.

Psalm 20:1
The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee;

The word, *Israel,* means "Governed by God." The word, *Jacob,* on the other hand means "Heel Snatcher." Therefore, when you read about the God

of Israel in the Old Testament, the reference is to the nation when it was obedient to God. When you read about the God of Jacob, the reference is to the nation when it was following its sinful tendencies. Thus, David's prayer is, "May the Lord hear you even when you're not doing as well as you ought."

Psalm 20:2–4
Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion; Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; Selah. Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel.

The prayer here is that the king might be helped even in time of struggle.

Psalm 20:5–7
We will rejoice in thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners: the LORD fulfil all thy petitions. Now know I that the LORD saveth his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.

"Know that it's not by your horses, chariots, tanks, or bombers; know that it's not by your technology, ingenuity, or strategy that you will be delivered. May the Lord hear your prayers, for He is the only One who can see you through."

Psalm 20:8, 9
They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright. Save, LORD: let the king hear us when we call.

"Let the king hear us when we call," David prayed.
And may the King of kings hear *us* when we call.



21 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 21 is connected with Psalm 20, for it also deals with the king, not in coronation but in celebration. It can be looked at in three ways: It can be looked at historically as it deals with David's own life. It can be looked at prophetically as it speaks of a Greater than David, the Son of David, Jesus Christ. Finally, it can be looked at personally and practically as it relates to you and me, for the Bible says that, as believers, we are a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9).

Psalm 21:1 (a)
The king shall joy in thy strength, O LORD . . .

This refers, of course, to the Kings of kings, Jesus Christ.

Psalm 21:1 (b), 2 (a)
. . . and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! Thou hast given him his heart's desire . . .

What is Jesus' heart's desire? In John 17, He prayed,

> . . . Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.
>
> John 17:1 (b)–3

In other words, the desire of the King of kings is that you might know Him. In Psalm 20:4, we read, "May the Lord grant the king according to his heart." Here, the Lord has given Him His heart's desire.

Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desire of your heart." This is the great thing about being a believer. This is how the Lord works in guiding and directing us. He writes His will upon the table of our hearts. Jeremiah calls it the new covenant (31:31). Paul says it's

God working in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

If you're delighting in the Lord and staying connected to Him, He will give you the desires of your heart because those desires will be from Him. That's the way He directs and guides.

Psalm 21:2 (b)
. . . and hast not withholden the request of his lips. Selah.

God puts desires in my heart, but I still have the responsibility to pray, to ask for those things stirring within me. "You have not because you ask not," James plainly says (4:2).

"Ask and it shall be given. Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened to you," Jesus said (Matthew 7:7). The verb tense is literally "*Keep* asking, *keep* seeking, *keep* knocking." Why? Because in the very act of prayer, our desires are adjusted.

"Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me," Jesus prayed. "Nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done," He added, committing Himself to obey His Father no matter the cost (Luke 22:42).

Psalm 21:3 (a)
For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness . . .

"For thou preventest—or precedest—him with the blessing of goodness." The king celebrates what the Lord has done in going before Him with the blessing of goodness.

We serve a God who neither sends us out alone nor hides behind us. We serve a God who, throughout Scripture, goes before His people . . .

> And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.

Deuteronomy 31:7, 8

> Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.
>
> Isaiah 45:1–3

> But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.
>
> Matthew 26:32

Psalm 21:3 (b)
. . . thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head.

According to 1 Corinthians 9:25, 2 Timothy 4:8, James 1:12, and 1 Peter 5:4, among other references, there are crowns available to you and to me. These crowns are all about God's grace. After all, it is He who opens up the opportunity to serve Him, He who gives us the power to do what He's opened up for us, He who does it through us. He does the whole thing. Then He gives *us* the reward, the crown. Amazing! No wonder we'll cast them at His feet (Revelation 4:10).

Psalm 21:4
He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever.

"Whosoever believeth in me shall never die," Jesus declared (John 11:26). We are going to live forever, gang. Our last breath on earth will simply bring us to our first breath in heaven. This isn't hyperbole. It's reality. If you're not happy about anything else today, rejoice in the fact that you're saved and you're going to heaven.

Psalm 21:5–7

His glory is great in thy salvation: honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him. For thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance. For the king trusteth in the LORD, and through the mercy of the most High he shall not be moved.

The king continues his celebration, saying, "I'm not going to be moved because I trust in You and Your mercy toward me, Lord."

Stability is always found in understanding the mercy of our Master, in having a grasp on grace. It's not about how we're doing but about what He's done. The price has been paid. The work is complete. Therefore, I can come boldly before His throne of grace that I might find mercy and grace to help in my time of need (see Hebrews 4:16).

Psalm 21:8, 9

Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee. Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger: the LORD shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them.

Here, the king goes on to say, "Lord, You will bring about victory. You'll search out and destroy the enemies that come against me."

The same thing is true for us today. Our Lord, who allows us to come before His throne, who blessed us by making us a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), will also search out the enemies that lurk within us to the degree that we give Him access.

Psalm 21:10–13

Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth, and their seed from among the children of men. For they intended evil against thee: they imagined a mischievous device, which they are not able to perform. Therefore shalt thou make them turn their back, when thou shalt make ready thine arrows upon thy strings against the face of them. Be thou exalted, LORD, in thine own strength: so will we sing and praise thy power.

When Jesus came into Jerusalem, Matthew tells us He saw a fig tree and desired to eat from it. But, finding no fruit on it, He cursed it. When the disciples saw it, they said, "How soon is the fig tree withered away!"

Jesus answered and said, "If you have faith and doubt not, you shall not only do this, but you can move mountains. All things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive" (Matthew 21:19–22).

What does this mean? I usually think of faith exclusively in terms of acquiring. But Jesus is saying in this passage that faith is also about removing—in this case, removing fruitlessness. The only time He ever did a miracle of destruction was to destroy that which was fruitless and unproductive.

If you know of a part of your life that is unproductive—a part others might not even know about—the Lord would speak to your heart and say, "Have faith. You need not give another thought to that which is unfruitful, unproductive, or not pleasing to Me. Just believe that I can remove it from your life."

The problem might seem mountainous to you. But on the basis of Matthew 21, all you need to do is say, "Search me, Lord. I pray that those things that are fruitless would be removed from my life"—and they will be, leaving you to praise His name and exalt His power.



22 *To the chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahar, A Psalm of David.*

Aijeleth Shahar literally means "the dawning of the day." And this psalm was meant to do just that: to give light in the dark. Hanging on the Cross of Calvary, with the sky dark overhead, Jesus quoted a portion of this psalm to give people light.

Psalm 22:1
My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane is explained by the cry of this psalm. You see, what our Lord feared was not physical suffering but separation from His Father.

> But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.
>
> Isaiah 59:2

Sin causes separation. Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is death. What is death? Physically, it is separation of the body from the soul—separation of the body from the mind and emotions. But there's a spiritual death that takes place when the soul is separated from the spirit—when the mind and emotions are separated from the real you, the eternal you. When does that happen? At birth. Spiritually, we are born dead. Our soul is alive. Our body is alive. But our spirit is born dead. We are born sinners. That's why Jesus said, "You must be born again" (John 3:7).

What brings us to life? The understanding that our sins, which separate us from God, were transferred to Jesus as He hung on Calvary's Cross. If I believe that Jesus died for *my* sin, paid for *my* mistakes, I am alive once more. As Jesus hung on the Cross, He quoted this verse to say that, because He was separated from His Father, I wouldn't have to be separated from Him any longer.

But I believe there's something else here. You see, the rabbis had a tradition of quoting the first half of a passage, expecting their students to go home and do their homework by reading the entire passage. In quoting this verse, I believe Jesus was calling His disciples to go home and do their homework—to turn to Psalm 22, for in Psalm 22, crucifixion is perfectly described eight hundred years before it was invented. Thus, He was not only expressing the emotional shock of separation from His Father, but at the same time was instructing those who heard Him to read the Scriptures, to understand that He was the fulfillment of Scripture, that He was their Messiah.

Psalm 22:2 (a)
O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not . . .

Why didn't God hear? Sin (Isaiah 59:2). Not Jesus' sin, for He was sinless. But He who knew no sin became sin that we might be made the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). And as He did, the Father turned away.

Psalm 22:2 (b)
. . . and in the night season, and am not silent.

Jesus was crucified in the morning, but it became a night season at noon, when darkness covered the face of the earth from 12:00 noon to 3:00 P.M.

Psalm 22:3
But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.

This is the answer to verse 2. It was God's holiness that caused Him to turn His back.

Psalm 22:4, 5
Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.

Even as Jesus was feeling the wrath of the Father which should have been poured out on us, He not only affirmed God's character, but confirmed His care—that He did deliver those who cried to Him, that He did come through for those who trusted in Him.

Psalm 22:6
But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.

The Hebrew word translated "worm" is *tolaith.* In Hebrew, *tolaith* is used for both "worm" and "scarlet" because the tolaith was the worm from which red dye was extracted. The tolaith would reproduce by fastening itself to the limb of a tree, dying in the process of bearing its young. The young would then eat the body of the worm, leaving a small scarlet spot on the limb

of the tree. After approximately three days, the crimson spot would dry, turn white, and flake off like snow. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow," Isaiah declared (1:18), and the word he used was *tolaith.*

Great is the mystery that God became a man (1 Timothy 3:16). But greater still is the mystery that the Man became a Lamb and the Lamb became a worm to save you and me.

Psalm 22:7, 8
All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.

Matthew 27 declares this is exactly what happened as Jesus hung on the Cross. "He saved others," the scribes said, "but Himself He cannot save." At last, the scribes were right in admitting that Jesus saved others. But they were wrong in saying He couldn't save Himself. He could have turned the Roman nails that held His hands and feet into thunderbolts and hurled them at the crowd below. He could have called on 10,000 angels to take Him from the tree (Matthew 26:53). But He didn't save Himself because He chose instead to save you and me.

Psalm 22:9, 10
But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly.

Jesus evidently realized who He was long before the age of twelve when He confounded the scribes with His knowledge (Luke 2:46, 47). On the basis of this passage, it would seem as though He understood who He was from the very beginning just as John did, as evidenced by his leaping in his mother's womb when Mary, carrying Jesus, came into his presence (Luke 1:41).

Psalm 22:11
Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.

With the exception of John, all the disciples had split as Jesus hung on the Cross.

Psalm 22:12, 13
Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.

Worshiped by the Canaanites, the bulls of Bashan in Gilead represented demonic entities. Therefore, I believe that, as He hung on the Cross, Jesus was not only surrounded by people who mocked but by demons who also jeered and taunted.

How little we understand of what took place on the Cross. Could it be that if your worship is dry right now, it's because you haven't taken a trip to Calvary and remembered what Jesus did for you? He purchased your salvation, even with the bulls of Bashan cursing and taunting.

Psalm 22:14 (a)
I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint . . .

When a person was crucified, the nails in the wrists caused pain to shoot through the arms and shoulders into the chest muscle. Paralysis followed, rendering breathing virtually impossible. The only way a crucified victim could breathe was to put pressure on the nail in his feet and straighten his legs, thereby forcing air into his lungs. That is why, when the Romans wanted to hasten death, they broke the victim's legs.

The pain and convulsing would actually cause the shoulder joints to become dislocated. During a game of tackle basketball in high school—a game I invented much to my own hurt—I took a hit that caused my shoulder to pop out. It was unbelievably painful. Therefore, I can't fathom, can't imagine, cannot even begin to comprehend what our Lord was feeling physically let alone spiritually as the bulls of Bashan, the hordes of hell, the spittle of mankind, and the wrath of the Father were hurled upon Him. This isn't just a story, gang. This is reality. This is what our King did for us.

Psalm 22:14 (b)

. . . my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.

When the soldiers came to Jesus to break His legs and hasten His death, the next day being a holy day, they were surprised to find He had already dismissed His Spirit. When they jammed a spear in His side just to make sure He was really dead, water and blood flowed forth. Physically, this would indicate that His heart literally exploded. Spiritually, the water and blood would become the symbols of the two sacraments we celebrate: baptism and communion.

Psalm 22:15
My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.

After spending forty days in the wilderness without food, Jesus began His ministry hungry (Matthew 4:2). He ended His ministry thirsty (John 19:28). The Creator of every babbling brook and rushing river in the world was Himself dehydrated.

Psalm 22:16
For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.

In David's day, the death penalty was carried out by stoning. Here, however, reference is made to hands and feet being pierced—exactly what would transpire in crucifixion.

Psalm 22:17
I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.

"I may tell all my bones," or, "My bones are all identifiable." According to Exodus 12:46, not a single bone of the Passover Lamb was to be broken. Here, we read that not a single bone of the Lamb of God was to be broken. Because blood is produced in the bone, I believe a picture is being painted through which the Father says, "I want nothing to imply in any way that there is a limit to My blood."

Where sin abounds, grace abounds more (Romans 5:20). No matter where you've been, no matter what you've done, the blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient to cleanse you.

Psalm 22:18
They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.

While the soldiers divided Jesus' garments, they gambled for His robe. Even this seemingly small detail was prophesied.

Psalm 22:19–21 (a)
But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth . . .

"Deliver my darling, or only one, from the sword of God's wrath and from being overpowered by the dog, the lion, Satan," David prays.

"If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me," Jesus prayed (Matthew 26:39).

Psalm 22:21 (b)
. . . for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.

Some commentators believe the unicorn refers to the rhinoceros; others to the oryx; still others to Gentiles. This much is sure: God heard David's prayers and delivered him.

Psalm 22:22, 23
I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel.

Here in verse 22, prayer turns into praise, for now it's not about crucifixion, but about resurrection as the sob of our Savior becomes a song

of salvation.

Psalm 22:24–29
For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard. My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him. The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever. All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the LORD's: and he is the governor among the nations. All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul.

Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Romans 14:11). Does that mean everyone will be saved? No. Everyone will admit that Jesus is Lord, but you've got to do it in this life to make it into heaven. If you wait until you see Him, it will be too late.

Psalm 22:30, 31 (a)
A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born . . .

"They shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born." Guess who that people is. It's us.

Psalm 22:31 (b)
. . . that he hath done this.

The Hebrew word translated "hath done this" is one word: *Asah,* used one other time in Scripture . . .

> And Huram made the pots, and the shovels, and the basons. And Huram finished the work that he was to make for king Solomon for the house of God;
>
> 2 Chronicles 4:11

Here, the word, *Asah,* is translated "finished." Huram was hired by Solomon to help furnish the temple and he finished the work he was hired to do. Just as Huram finished work on Solomon's temple, Jesus finished the work necessary to fashion us into a temple of living stones (1 Peter 2:5).

And after finishing the work, what does Jesus do? As seen in the next psalm, after giving His life, He leads us in ours . . .



23 *A Psalm of David.*

The Bible doesn't compare us to strong lions, swift antelopes, or clever snakes. No, the Bible likens us to sheep, which are known primarily for their stupidity. "All we like sheep have gone astray," Isaiah declares (53:6). Sheep are clueless. They go astray. They wander off. They have been known to wander over cliffs, one after another to their destruction. They're not only clueless, but so defenseless that they have been known to be beaten back by squirrels.

We, like sheep, desperately need to be shepherded. And the psalm before us speaks to that issue. We have a Shepherd—the greatest Shepherd there could ever be: the Lord Himself.

Some point to verse 4 and suggest David wrote this psalm at the end of his life. Others point to verse 5 and suggest he wrote it during the time his son, Absalom, launched a rebellion against him, for in 2 Samuel 17, we read that there were those who had compassion on David and brought him a banquet in the wilderness. I, however, think David wrote this psalm when he was a young man watching his father's flock on the hills of Bethlehem.

Whether he was in his closing scene, a troubled king, or just a teen, we do know David wrote this psalm and that it speaks to us in a uniquely

wonderful way.

Psalm 23:1
The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want," or, "I shall not lack," or, "I want for nothing." What a fantastic privilege is ours to be able to say, "I'm a dumb sheep who goes astray, who follows other sheep over cliffs, who is cornered by squirrels, but the Lord Himself is my Shepherd. Therefore, I lack nothing."

"No good thing will He withhold from them that love Him," the psalmist declares (Psalm 84:11). If you feel you're lacking something, know that it is not good for you at this point. Otherwise, your Shepherd would give it to you.

Psalm 23:2 (a)
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures . . .

Sheep get so rattled and skittish that oftentimes the shepherd must come and apply gentle but firm pressure to make them lie down. As sheep, we need to be made to lie down as well. How does our Shepherd do this? Sometimes through sickness. Sometimes, it's when we're in bed on our backs that we look up and find that, as we fellowship with Him once again, we're in the pasture in which we need to be. Other times, our Shepherd uses setbacks to get us to lie down. Other times, it's solitude. Whether you lose your job or your girlfriend breaks up with you, it could be that the Lord is gently but firmly making you lie down and seek Him once more.

Psalm 23:2 (b)
. . . he leadeth me beside the still waters.

"If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. And out of his innermost being shall gush forth torrents of living water" (see John 7:37, 38). That's our Shepherd. Whenever I feel thirsty, it's often indicative that I'm drinking from the old wells, looking to the old things to provide satisfaction. But when I drink of Jesus Christ, I am satisfied.

Psalm 23:3 (a)
He restoreth my soul . . .

"He restoreth"—or literally, brings back—"my soul." The soul is made up of the mind and emotions. Who is the Restorer of the soul? Only Jesus. My mind and emotions can be so scattered that only the Lord can pull them back together.

If your soul is hurting, could it be that, although you find it easy to pour out your troubles to other people, your eyes dry when it comes to praying and seeking the Lord? How long has it been since you've cried out to your Shepherd? The Lord alone knows how to restore the soul. David understood this.

Psalm 23:3 (b)
. . . he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Left to themselves, sheep will always walk on the same path. They cover the same ground until the grass is eaten and trampled. There can be a green pasture nearby, but they are too dumb to recognize it. So it's up to the shepherd to lead them to new pastures. We're that way. We get in ruts and feel comfortable in our routines. So what does our Shepherd do? He goes before us for His name's sake and opens up the right paths.

Psalm 23:4 (a)
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me . . .

Leading his sheep into new pastures, the shepherd will sometimes take them through deep ravines and dark valleys. But notice that he doesn't leave them *in* the valley. He takes them *through.*

Psalm 23:4 (b)
. . . thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

The rod was a stick or club the shepherd would use to ward off attacking animals. I think of another shepherd—Moses—who also used a rod very effectively. With Pharaoh's army bearing down upon him, Moses was told to take the rod and to strike the water. The Red Sea parted and the flock of God was ushered through safely (Exodus 14:16). The staff was a long rod with a hook at one end that the shepherd used to pull straying sheep back to the flock. In other words, the rod was used for protection, the staff for communion. And that is why they are both a comfort.

Psalm 23:5 (a)
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies . . .

Our Shepherd doesn't remove us from our enemies. Instead, He prepares a table in the midst of them. You can be attacked all week, wavering and wondering about your faith. But when you come to the Lord's Table, you're refreshed. In the presence of my enemies—when Satan is condemning me, when I'm aware of my own failure and shortcomings—I come to the Lord's Table and remember once again that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses me from all sin.

Psalm 23:5 (b)
. . . thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

A shepherd anoints the heads of his flock with oil for two reasons. First, it is to keep the bugs and ticks out of the ears and eyes of the sheep. Secondly, it is to deflect the blows of bigger sheep who butt heads. Throughout Scripture, oil is a symbol, a type, a picture of the Holy Spirit.

What's "bugging" you? Are you "ticked off?" Are you irritated? If so, does it manifest itself in you butting your head against other sisters and brothers? Whenever we feel bugged or irritated, what we need is a fresh outpouring of the Spirit upon our lives. Jesus said, "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Ghost to them that ask?" (see Matthew 7:11). Ask the Lord to anoint your head in a fresh way.

Psalm 23:6 (a)
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life . . .

Wrath and judgment don't follow us. Goodness and mercy do. C. H. Spurgeon calls goodness and mercy God's footmen. In his day, people would ride in coaches through the streets of London. On the back were two footmen who would open the door when the coach stopped. They would put their own coats down if necessary to make sure things were correct. That's what goodness and mercy are—goodness for our steps and mercy for our stumbles as we journey toward heaven.

Psalm 23:6 (b)
. . . and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

David didn't hope he would dwell in the house of the Lord forever. He *knew* he would. The Bible declares it to be so (Job 19:25, 26) and David knew it to be true.



24 *A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 22 deals with the Cross and Psalm 23 with the crook. Here, Psalm 24 will deal with the crown. Psalm 22 deals with Jesus' death and Psalm 23 with His life. Here, Psalm 24 will deal with His return for us. In Psalm 22, we see the Good Shepherd who laid down His life (John 10:11) and in Psalm 23, the Great Shepherd who guides us in this present life (Hebrews 13:20). Here in Psalm 24, we'll see the Chief Shepherd who is coming back for us (1 Peter 5:4).

Psalm 24:1, 2
The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.

Following temple liturgy, a certain psalm was sung every day of the week. On Monday, Psalm 48 was sung by the temple choir. On Tuesday, Psalm 82. On Wednesday, Psalm 94. On Thursday, Psalm 81. On Friday, Psalm 93. On Saturday, Psalm 92. And on Sunday, this majestic psalm before us that deals with the coming King was sung. Thus, this song would have been sung on the first day of the week as Jesus triumphed over the tomb.

Psalm 24:3–5
Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

Who truly has pure hands and a pure heart? Only Jesus. That's why He could rise again. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), but, because He never sinned, death couldn't hold Him.

Psalm 24:6, 7
This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

The call goes out to open up the gates, and I suggest to you that the picture here is of the gates of heaven—opened to welcome Jesus home.

Psalm 24:8
Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.

Who is the King of glory? The very One who won the victory on the Cross of Calvary.

Psalm 24:9, 10
Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of

glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah.

Why is the call to open the gates repeated? Because I suggest that between verses 8 and 9, two thousand years pass. You see, the first time the call went out, Jesus came as a victory. He came by Himself. The second time, however, He'll come with an army—you and me (Jude 14). He who ascended into heaven and is currently preparing a place for us will descend in the clouds one day and we will be caught up (1 Thessalonians 4:17). We'll meet Him in the clouds and He'll take us to heaven. Oh, glorious day!



25 *A Psalm of David.*

Although we don't know for certain when David penned this psalm, the rabbis believe it was written when David was fleeing from Absalom, his rebellious son.

Psalm 25:1–3 (a)
Unto thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me. Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed . . .

In going through this trial, David's first request was that he be not ashamed. Looking back, I can see that whenever I have been ashamed, it's always the result of a lack of hope. Paul said the same thing . . .

> And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed . . .
>
> Romans 5:3–5 (a)

When you're in the middle of a trial, you often have no choice but just to wait it out as patiently as you can. As you do, you gain experience, seeing that the Lord will never leave you. This experience gives you the hope that

God will be with you in whatever lies ahead. Knowing this, you don't have to embarrass yourself by attempting to manipulate situations. Instead, you can be at absolute peace knowing God is in absolute control.

David is in tribulation and knows that he will have to go through it, gain experience from it, and glean hope from it that he might not be ashamed.

Psalm 25:3 (b)–5
. . . let them be ashamed which transgress without cause. Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.

What does it mean to wait on the Lord? Think of a waiter in a restaurant, there to serve the guests. We are to say, "I'm here to serve You, Lord, with the sacrifice of praise. I'm here to spend time with You. I'm here to love You." Waiting on the Lord doesn't mean sitting idly, wondering when He's going to show up. It means you're waiting on Him to no less degree than a devoted waiter would do.

Psalm 25:6, 7
Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O LORD.

As David fled from Absalom, a man named Shimei threw dirt and rocks at him, calling him a bloody man, no doubt in reference to his murder of Uriah. Perhaps reminded of that, David humbly says, "Remember not the sins of my youth." David's men wanted to lop his head off.

As a younger man, David said, "Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness and integrity" (see Psalm 7:8). Here, however, with an older, wiser, more mature heart, he asks not for the Lord's judgment, but for His mercy.

Psalm 25:8–11

Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way. The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies. For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.

"Pardon my iniquity for thy name's sake for it is great," David prays. To what does "it" refer—the name of the Lord or David's iniquity? I suggest it refers to both. The Lord's name is obviously great. But as he flees the city, David realizes that the rebellion and adultery which infect his family are the repercussions of his own iniquity.

Psalm 25:12–14 (a)
What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth. The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him . . .

So often we ask the Lord what His heart is, and then think we have the option of deciding whether or not we want to go His way. God is not obligated to share His secrets with us if we are not committed to obeying the directions He gives. The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, with those who are in awe of Him, with those who are determined to obey. It is the man who says, "Lord, You are my God. You are my King. And what You tell me to do, by Your grace and with Your help, I am determined to do," who will know His will.

Sometimes people say they're not being directed by the Lord, that they don't know what His will is for them. And sometimes we need to say, "Have you obeyed the last thing He told you to do?" You see, I have found that He won't allow my spiritual "in-box" to pile up. He only gives me one assignment at a time. And when I do that, He gives me the next thing to do. When we do the last thing God told us to do is when we'll be told the next thing we need to do.

Psalm 25:14 (b)
. . . and he will shew them his covenant.

In Colossians 1:27, Paul talks about the mystery of the new covenant, which is Christ *in* you, the hope of glory. Jesus Christ lives in our hearts by His Spirit. And He's the One who will direct us as He writes upon our hearts the things we ought to do. I believe David refers to this mystery.

Psalm 25:15
Mine eyes are ever toward the LORD; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net.

As he flees the city, David says, "My eyes are toward You, Lord. You're the One who will set me free from the snare of the enemy."

Psalm 25:16–18
Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged: O bring thou me out of my distresses. Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins.

Regarding his affliction and pain, David asks that God simply look upon it. Regarding his sin, however, he asks that God forgive it. In other words, his standing with the Lord was more important to David than his physical well-being.

Psalm 25:19–22
Consider mine enemies; for they are many; and they hate me with cruel hatred. O keep my soul, and deliver me: let me not be ashamed; for I put my trust in thee. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on thee. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.

Even in the midst of his own distress, David broadens the scope of his prayer to include the entire nation of Israel.



A Psalm of David.

26

Psalm 26 is most likely related to a three-year famine that took place in Israel under David's reign.

Psalm 26:1, 2
Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the LORD; therefore I shall not slide. Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart.

In Psalm 25, when David was afflicted, he prayed that the Lord would save the nation (verse 22). In Psalm 26, the nation is afflicted and yet David prays that the Lord would judge *him.* Most men pray for mercy for themselves and judgment for others. David did just the opposite.

Psalm 26:3–5
For thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth. I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked.

"I will not sit with the wicked," David says. Is this because he thinks he's better than them? No, I suggest it's because he realizes that being around them will affect him.

Psalm 26:6–8
I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O LORD: That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works. LORD, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.

"I will come to Your altar in order that I can tell Your wondrous works." I like David's mindset. He went to the house of the Lord not for what he could get, but for what he could give.

Psalm 26:9–12
Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men: In whose hands is mischief, and their right hand is full of bribes. But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity: redeem me, and be merciful unto me. My foot standeth in an even place: in the congregations will I bless the LORD.

According to 2 Samuel 21:1, the famine wasn't due to anything David had done but, rather, to Saul's slaying of the Gibeonites. You see, four hundred years earlier, Joshua was tricked into signing a treaty with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9). Saul's action violated this treaty; God took note; and famine followed. What was David to do? He was to make it right with the Gibeonites. They demanded that seven descendants of Saul be hanged. David did just that. And the famine was stopped.

Like David, we need to take responsibility to make things right to whatever degree we can in our own spheres of influence.



27 *A Psalm of David.*

If indeed Psalm 26 stems from the story of 2 Samuel 21, the remainder of that chapter is the setting for Psalm 27. In 2 Samuel 21, David was at war with the Philistines. David fought them, but he grew weary. A giant had David down and was about to do him in, but Abishai came to David's aid and his men forbade him from going to battle lest "the light of Israel" be quenched. So, David, who at this point was approaching seventy years of age, went home and very possibly penned this psalm at that time.

If we listen carefully, we can hear David stubbornly yet beautifully expressing his heart at the time he was told to go home. He didn't want to give up.

Psalm 27:1 (a)
The LORD is my light and my salvation . . .

"I'm not the light," David says. "The Lord is."

Psalm 27:1 (b)
. . . whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

I can see David defiantly singing this psalm in the best sense of the word. "You think I'm too old? You think I'm through? No way," David says. "The Lord is my strength."

Psalm 27:2–4
When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.

David says, "I'm not afraid of the enemies. The Lord will see me through. And even if I do go down, I'm going up—to heaven, where I long to be. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain," Paul declared (Philippians 1:21). Here, David expresses the same thing.

The dynamic of David, one of the greatest men of God who has ever lived, was that he was singlehearted. One thing he desired: to behold the beauty of the Lord, to look upon the Lord, to fellowship with the Lord. According to Exodus 33:20 no man can see God and live. That's the beauty of what David is saying, for, if you are beholding the Lord, your flesh cannot live. "One thing have I desired," David said, "not material riches, not effective ministry, but simply that I might behold the beauty of the Lord."

What is the one thing *you* desire?

Psalm 27:5, 6
For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies

round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.

Joy is a sacrifice that brings the Lord delight.

Psalm 27:7, 8
Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me. When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.

Here, we see a real secret of David's life. That is, when the Lord said, "Seek My face," David didn't say, "I'll get right to it, Lord—next Thursday." No, when the Spirit said, "Seek My face," David immediately said, "Thy face will I seek."

Jesus said the Spirit is like the wind. No man knows when it comes or where it goes (John 3:8). When the winds are right, hang-gliding enthusiasts drop whatever they're doing to take advantage of them because there's no guarantee the winds will be the same tomorrow. The same is true of the Spirit. When the Lord whispers in your ear, saying, "Spend some time in prayer. Bow before Me. Lift your hands and express your heart to Me. Go for a walk and talk things over with Me"—you need to respond immediately.

Psalm 27:9–13
Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up. Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies. Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty. I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

Like David, like you, there have been times in my life when I would have fainted if I didn't believe in heaven, if I didn't have a perspective on eternity.

Hope—the absolute certainty of coming good—is different from faith. Hope looks to the future.

Psalm 27:14
Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.

Even as we study the Word, we are waiting on the Lord. And because of that, we will be of good courage. The Lord meets us through His Word. By faith, receive it and believe that He is going to do good things—the best things—in His time.



28 *A Psalm of David.*

We don't know the exact circumstance that caused David to pen this psalm. As many suggest, it could have been written by a young David as he faced Goliath. On the other hand, it might have been written when he was older, facing a civil war as his rebellious son, Absalom, led an insurrection against him. Whatever the case, we do know that it was written in the context of some kind of battle, for the imagery is very vivid . . .

Psalm 28:1
Unto thee will I cry, O LORD my rock; be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit.

David not only likens the Lord to a rock, but to *his* Rock.

The story is told of a woman on her deathbed. "She's sinking fast," the doctor told her family. Hearing this, the eyes of this elderly saint opened and sparkled. "I'm not sinking," she said. "You can't sink through rock!" Then she closed her eyes and was ushered into heaven.

Psalm 28:2

Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle.

Throughout Scripture, the lifting of hands is an expression of praise (e.g. Psalm 63:4). Even today, at sporting events, hands are automatically raised when a point is scored. How much more worthy is our King to be extolled, appreciated, exalted?

The lifting of hands is also an expression of surrender. If you're at the counter of a convenience store and you suddenly feel cold steel pressed into your back, your hands automatically go up. As we lift our hands to Him, it's as though we say, "Lord, You've stolen my heart and I surrender to You completely."

Lifted hands are an expression of praise, an expression of surrender, and also an expression of prayer. Sometimes, when you're confused or overwhelmed by a situation, all you can do is lift your hands in exasperation. Here, as David cries to the Lord, he does just that. And he would find himself in good company, for Paul would say, "I would that men everywhere lift up holy hands in prayer" (1 Timothy 2:8).

Psalm 28:3–5

Draw me not away with the wicked, and with the workers of iniquity, which speak peace to their neighbours, but mischief is in their hearts. Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavours: give them after the work of their hands; render to them their desert. Because they regard not the works of the LORD, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up.

David prayed that his enemies would be dealt with severely, and like him, we need to pray with the same passion. The difference between our prayers and his, however, are that our enemies are not human enemies but fleshly tendencies. Therefore, we need to pray, "Lord, do whatever it takes to destroy anything in me that is not like Your Son."

Psalm 28:6

Blessed be the LORD, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications.

After crying to the Lord and asking Him to deal with that which is wicked, David praises the Lord. What a great way to pray. Cry out to the Lord—but before you leave your knees, praise Him for hearing your prayer, for what He has already done, for what He's going to do. That's what it means to pray in faith.

Psalm 28:7
The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: there fore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.

Notice that David didn't praise the Lord with a song, but with *his* song. I think it's good to sing songs that are personal and spontaneous. I do this a lot when I'm alone. A verse of Scripture comes to mind and I'll sing it out. Or a thought comes to me and I'll put it to music. Is it recordable? Not to anyone else but my Father.

Paul says we are to speak to ourselves with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19). Do you have a song?

Psalm 28:8 (a)
The LORD is their strength . . .

As your margin may render it, this verse should read, "The Lord is his strength," referring to the one who trusts in Him (verse 7).

Psalm 28:8 (b)
. . . and he is the saving strength of his anointed.

The phrase, "saving strength," is literally "strength of salvations." That is, our salvation is plural. How? The Lord saved us in the past from the penalty of sin when He died on the Cross of Calvary. He's saving us in the present from the power of sin by living inside us through His Spirit. And He

will save us in the future from the presence of sin when He catches us up and takes us with Him to heaven.

Psalm 28:9
Save thy people, and bless thine inheritance: feed them also, and lift them up for ever.

After beginning this psalm by praying, "Help me, Lord," David ends by praying for the people round about him. If this psalm was indeed written during the days of Absalom's insurrection, it is telling that the heart of this shepherd-king would be for his flock rather than for himself. It would foreshadow the heart of our Shepherd King, who, at the height of mankind's insurrection against Him would pray, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

29 *A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 19 must have been composed on a clear night when the stars were shining bright. This psalm, however, seems to have been written when David was observing a storm. I like this because, if it is true, David wrote psalms of praise both for clear skies and stormy days.

Psalm 29:1, 2
Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

Give to the Lord the glory due His name. Why? Because His holiness is beautiful. "Holiness" essentially means "wholeness." There is nothing missing or lacking in God. No sin has eroded Him in any way. That is why the four living creatures in Revelation rest not day or night but cry Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God almighty who was and is and is to come (Revelation

4:8). They're not programmed to do this. Rather, it's a natural response to the overwhelming beauty of holiness.

Psalm 29:3, 4
The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

It is in the storm that we so often hear God's voice. Why? Because it's then that we cry out to Him. It's not when days are sunny, but when things are stormy that we find ourselves calling out to the Lord.

"But I don't seem to hear from Him," you say.

Are you sure?

Psalm 29:5, 6
The voice of the LORD breaketh the cedars; yea, the LORD breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn.

As you imagine the thunder rumbling and the trees snapping, you can hear David saying, "That's the Lord speaking."

Psalm 29:7
The voice of the LORD divideth the flames of fire.

This is the psalm that was read in the temple on the first day of the Feast of Pentecost. In Acts 2, cloven tongues of fire appeared and the voice of the Lord was heard in a miraculous way when the one hundred and twenty in the Upper Room began to speak in languages they didn't know.

Psalm 29:8, 9
The voice of the LORD shaketh the wilderness; the LORD shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests: and in his temple doth every one speak of his glory.

"And in his temple doth every one speak of his glory," or literally, "Every part of the temple speaks of His glory." David likened nature to a temple. With thunder clapping, lightning striking, trees breaking, and winds blowing, it's as if David said, "This is awesome. I'm in the presence of the Lord. He's at work."

Psalm 29:10
The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever.

Perhaps the river was rising as David said, "The Lord is not under the flood. He's *on* the flood. He's not in over His head. He's in control."

Psalm 29:11
The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace.

Because His peace is not dependent upon outward circumstances, even in the midst of the storm, the Lord blesses His people with peace.



30 *A Psalm and Song at the dedication of the house of David.*

Some say this psalm was written at the time when David dedicated his palace to the Lord. Others suggest it was written when he erected a tabernacle to house the ark of the covenant. You see, when David came into power, he wanted his people to experience the fullness of the glory of God which, in those days, was associated with the ark of the covenant. The problem was that the ark was not in Jerusalem or in Shiloh where the tabernacle had been pitched. After it had been taken into battle many years earlier and captured by the Philistines, it was sent to the little town of Kirjath-jearim (1 Samuel 6, 7).

After David ascended to the throne, he gathered 30,000 men to bring the ark from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem. A man named Uzzah drove the cart that

carried the ark, while a man named Ahio led the way. Uzzah means "strong." Ahio means "friendly." Mr. Strong and Mr. Friendly led the parade of 30,000. As they made their way to Jerusalem, they came to Nachon's threshing floor. The threshing floor was the place where wheat and chaff were separated. And it was when they were at the place of separation—where the real is separated from the trivial and trite—that the cart hit a bump. Uzzah immediately reached back to stabilize the ark. And as he reached back to give God a hand, God struck him dead. (2 Samuel 6:7).

Upset and greatly grieved, David stashed the ark in the nearby home of Obed-edom and returned to Jerusalem. Three months later, he received the report that the house of Obed-edom and all therein were being blessed. Realizing there was indeed a blessing attached to the ark, David returned to get it. This time, however, there weren't 30,000 men and a big parade. This time he went back to the Bible, where God declared that the ark was to be carried on the shoulders of the priests (1 Chronicles 15:15). Every six steps, the procession stopped so David could build an altar and offer a sacrifice. Efficiency experts would say that was not the best way to get from the house of Obed-edom to Jerusalem. Efficiency, after all, is doing things right. But God's not interested in efficiency. He's interested in effectiveness—and effectiveness is doing the right thing.

What's the right thing? Six is the number of man, the number of the flesh. Therefore, we need to stop every six steps, every time we feel our flesh well up, and be "altared." We need to stop every six steps to offer the sacrifice of praise, to confess our sin, and to express our dependency upon the Lord. That may not be efficient. But it's guaranteed to be effective.

Psalm 30:1
I will extol thee, O LORD; for thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me.

Praise and worship are acts of the will, something you decide to do. David didn't say, "I feel like extolling Thee, O, Lord." He said, "I *will* extol Thee." In other words, "I am determined to do this."

Psalm 30:2
O LORD my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me.

Perhaps Uzzah's death had taken a toll on David physically as well as emotionally as he struggled to make sense of what God would have him do.

Psalm 30:3, 4
O LORD, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit. Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.

I'm so thankful God is holy, righteous, and perfect instead of capricious, impatient, and flawed like me.

Psalm 30:5
For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

The Lord's anger was indeed felt when He struck Uzzah. But when David got back in the Word, the Lord showed him that there is a new day that dawns for all of us.

Psalm 30:6, 7
And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. LORD, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled.

Maybe you're not going through times of tears, but rather a season of success. That's good, but know it won't insulate you from the difficulties coming tomorrow. So utilize this time of success to make sure your spirit is stout and your faith is firm.

In Ezra 8, we read that Ezra called the people together to fast and pray. Was there a problem? No. They were journeying toward Jerusalem. But Ezra wisely realized that, even though things were going well, there could easily be problems the next day. So he used the time of prosperity to fast, pray, and prepare.

Psalm 30:8, 9

I cried to thee, O LORD; and unto the LORD I made supplication. What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth?

In his season of success, David had said, "I'll never be moved" (verse 6). But, here, in his time of tears, he says, "Lord, what is this about? I just want to die."

Psalm 30:10, 11 (a)
Hear, O LORD, and have mercy upon me: LORD, be thou my helper. Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing . . .

David had left Kirjath-jearim bitter and confused. But when he got back into the Word, he became a worshiper once again, and his mourning was turned into dancing.

Psalm 30:11 (b), 12
. . . thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; To the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever.

Sometimes, just when we think our parade is all in place, the Lord says, "That's not what's it all about," and He brings us back to simplicity. The end result is dancing, rejoicing, and worshiping. The end result is true worship and deep joy.



31 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 31:1–3 (a)
In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me. For thou art my rock and my fortress . . .

David makes many references to the Lord being a rock. It's no wonder, for Israel is full of rocks.

Proverbs 30 says conies are feeble creatures, yet they have hidden in the rock. A coney, sort of like a rabbit, has no defenses, but has learned to use the rocks for protection. I also am aware of my vulnerabilities and weaknesses. But I also know where my defense is. It's in the Rock of my salvation, Jesus Christ.

Psalm 31:3 (b)
. . . therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me.

As His bride—those who bear His name—it is our responsibility not to bring embarrassment or shame to His name.

Psalm 31:4, 5
Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength. Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth.

"Into Thy hands I commend My spirit," Jesus spoke these same words on the Cross before He gave up His Spirit (Luke 23:46).

Psalm 31:6, 7
I have hated them that regard lying vanities: but I trust in the LORD. I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities;

The Lord's mercy not only brought David comfort but also joy.

Psalm 31:8
And hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy: thou hast set my feet in a large room.

Do you ever feel boxed in by your enemies or by physical or financial limitations? Those constraints are not of the Lord—for, while His path is indeed narrow (Matthew 7:14), His room is large. That is, when we commit

to follow His way, the possibilities and resources He provides are limitless (Jeremiah 33:3; Philippians 4:19).

Psalm 31:9–12
Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly. For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed. I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance: they that did see me without fled from me. I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind: I am like a broken vessel.

Do you have a neighbor, a friend, or a family member who treats you like a dead man, who has written you off? Don't think you're alone. David himself—a dynamic man of God—experienced the same thing.

Psalm 31:13–18
For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side: while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life. But I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me. Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies' sake. Let me not be ashamed, O LORD; for I have called upon thee: let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave. Let the lying lips be put to silence; which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous.

Even though others might write you off, ignore you, or slander you, follow David's example. David trusted in God. And God is all we need.

Psalm 31:19, 20
Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men! Thou shalt hide them in the secret of

thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.

"Thou shalt hide those that fear Thee," David declares. "Hide me under the shadow of Thy wings," he prayed in Psalm 17. God does indeed have the ability to hide His people. Just ask Jeremiah, whom the Lord Himself hid from an angry king Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 36:26).

Psalm 31:21–24
Blessed be the LORD: for he hath shewed me his marvellous kindness in a strong city. For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee. O love the LORD, all ye his saints: for the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.

Even though, in a moment of doubt, David was unsure that God saw Him, God never took His eyes off David. The result? David was again filled with hope and courage to face whatever was ahead.



32 *A Psalm of David, Maschil.*

Psalm 32 was written in the aftermath of David's sin with Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of her husband, Uriah.

Psalm 32:1, 2
Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

This is such a fantastic truth that Paul plucked it out of the pages of the Old Testament and incorporated it into his glorious epistle to the Romans

(4:7, 8). Happy indeed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

There is a difference between transgression and sin. The Greek word for sin means missing the mark. You can be doing your best, but if you miss the bull's-eye, it's not good enough. The Bible says all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Jesus said, "Be perfect" (Matthew 5:48). We may try, but we've all sinned. Transgression is different. It's not just missing the mark, but willfully stepping over the line. Transgression is a willful, knowledgeable act of rebellion. David knew he was both a sinner and a transgressor.

Psalm 32:3
When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.

For a little over nine months following David's sin, he wasn't ready to deal with the Lord on the matter. It wasn't until Nathan the prophet came and declared to David right before the child would be born that there was a poor man in his kingdom who had only one sheep that was dearly loved by his family. A rich man who had guests went to the poor man's house—and, instead of killing his own sheep, took the poor man's single little lamb. David was incensed. "That man shall die," he said.

"Thou art the man," Nathan replied (2 Samuel 12:7).

Isn't that the way sin is? We always react most violently to the sins with which we ourselves struggle. On the other hand, it's amazing how little we judge and how free we are of condemning others when we are right with the Lord. Look at Jesus. With stones in hand, they were ready to do her in. But the only One who had the right to cast a stone looked at her and said, "I don't accuse you. Go and sin no more" (see John 8:11). The more you're like Jesus, the less likely you are to throw stones.

Psalm 32:4
For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.

Do you ever feel dry? Do you ever wonder what happened to the flow of the Holy Spirit in your life? Could it be that you are harboring a sin that is causing you to feel like "the drought of summer"? Not all dryness is the result of sin, but much is.

Psalm 32:5
I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

Notice that David frames his confession in the future tense, but God's forgiveness in the past tense. In other words, before he even confessed, God forgave. That's how ready God is to forgive. The only time God is pictured as being in a hurry in the entire Bible is in Luke 15, when the father ran to welcome home the prodigal son.

Psalm 32:6
For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.

God's judgment will not flow over you or drown you. If you confess your sin, He is faithful and just to forgive you.

Psalm 32:7–10
Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah. I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.

"Don't be like the mule or the horse that has to be steered with a bit and bridle," David says.

"Why is God so brutal?" people sometimes ask—never realizing that it's because they're acting like mules.

Psalm 32:11
Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.

Realizing the gravity of his sin, no wonder David declares, "*Happy* is the man whose sins are forgiven, whose transgressions are not held against him." That's us!



33

Psalm 33:1 Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright.

The call of this psalm is to praise the Lord, not only for the beauty of the Lord, but for the beauty that will be ours when we praise Him.

Psalm 33:2, 3
Praise the LORD with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings. Sing unto him a new song; play skilfully with a loud noise.

The psalmist recruits the voice, the harp, the psaltery, and the ten-stringed instrument to join in a new song of praise.

Psalm 33:4, 5
For the word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth. He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.

The first reasons given to praise God are for His truth, righteousness, and judgment. We have become so accustomed to half-truths, mixed motives, and

poor judgment that we can forget to praise God for the sheer beauty of His truth, righteousness, and perfect judgment.

Psalm 33:6–9
By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.

A second reason to praise God is for His awesome, creative power.

Psalm 33:10–17
The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD: and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance. The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works. There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength.

We are to praise God for the purity of His holiness, the power of His creation, and, third, for the perfection of His policies in dealing with individuals, governments, and kingdoms.

Psalm 33:18–22
Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he is our help and our shield. For our heart shall rejoice in him,

because we have trusted in his holy name. Let thy mercy, O LORD, be upon us, according as we hope in thee.

Finally, we are to praise God for His providence, for He alone is what we need.



34

A Psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed.

Fleeing from Saul, David found himself in Goliath's hometown, the city of Gath. Achish, the king—also known as Abimelech—welcomed David. But when the people recognized him as the one who killed their hero, Goliath, David knew he had to leave. So he pretended to be insane. Spittle ran down his beard as he clawed at the gate.

"I don't need another madman in this city," Achish said.

So David was released.

At this time of difficulty, a time when he was being hunted by the enemy, shunned by his countrymen, threatened by the Philistines, David penned this psalm of praise . . .

Psalm 34:1 (a)
I will bless the LORD . . .

Notice David's determination. He says, "I *will* bless the LORD." The word "bless" means "to confer happiness or prosperity upon another." It's amazing to think that *we* actually have the ability to bring happiness and prosperity to the God of the universe. Yet He genuinely enjoys hearing our praise. We are those who have been blessed by the Lord. But we also have the ability to bless Him back.

Psalm 34:1 (b)
. . . at all times . . .

"I will bless the LORD," David declared—not just in good times, not just in easy times, but in *all* times.

"That's easy for David," you say. "He was a king in a palace with servants and all of the money he wanted."

Wait a minute. This psalm was not written under those conditions. In fact, with the king of Israel hunting him and the entire city of Gath suspicious of him, I suggest that not one of us is in a more perilous place than was David when he penned this psalm.

Psalm 34:1 (c)
. . . his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

I'm convinced that one of our Father's favorite attitudes is that of gratitude because we see story after story where His people ended up in big trouble—bitten by snakes, swallowed by the earth—when they murmured and complained (Numbers 16, 21).

Psalm 34:2
My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.

C. H. Spurgeon wisely said, "He who praises God for blessings will always have blessings for which to praise God." One of the reasons I believe David was so blessed was because he purposed in his heart to be one who praised God.

Psalm 34:3
O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.

Haven't you found that, as you come together with believers and bless the Lord, your understanding of Him, your appreciation of Him, your sensitivity to Him is increased? That's why it's important to meet together. When the saints come together, the Lord is indeed magnified in a way that doesn't happen when we're apart from each other.

Psalm 34:4–7

I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.

The angel of the Lord in the Old Testament is a reference to the person of Jesus Christ. In Exodus 23:20, we read that the angel of the Lord was to precede the people and prepare the land for them. How? Hornets would be sent to drive out all of the inhabitants. So too, the angel of the Lord camps round about you and goes before you and clears out the territory God has given to you. How? In a way that you would never dream of, in a way you couldn't imagine.

Psalm 34:8
O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.

Notice the order. The tendency is to say, "If I can see it, then I'll taste it." But the Lord's way is to taste it first—then you'll see it.

Psalm 34:9, 10
O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing.

This verse doesn't say saints won't lack anything. It says they shall not lack any *good* thing. This is where faith comes in, gang. Faith is not demanding that you get your way. Faith is trusting in the lovingkindness, in the perfect wisdom, in the character of your Father.

Psalm 34:11
Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

Even though David had lots of trouble on his hands, he still wanted to teach children—just as our Greater than David would say, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me" (Mark 10:14).

Psalm 34:12, 13
What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.

Here's how to have a full life: Watch what you say. If you are speaking poison about another, it will burn you in the very process of your spewing it out. David says, "If you want a good life, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking guile or poison."

Psalm 34:14–18
Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

When is the time we are most likely to wonder where the Lord is? When our heart is broken. But here, David says that's exactly when He's nearest.

Mary went to the tomb and, realizing the body of Jesus wasn't there, her heart was broken. A man came to her and said, "What seekest thou?"

Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said, "They took away my Lord and I don't know where they have laid Him."

"Mary," the Man said. And she knew it was Jesus.

Why didn't Mary recognize Jesus initially? Perhaps it was because her eyes were full of tears. Sometimes when our eyes are full of tears, we don't see the Lord standing right next to us. This is where faith comes in. This is when we must say, "Lord, Your Word says You are near. Even though I don't see You, on the basis of Your Word, I believe You are near to me even now."

Psalm 34:19 (a)
Many are the afflictions of the righteous . . .

Many are the afflictions of the righteous. But many are the afflictions of the wicked, as well. Never forget that. Both the believer and the unbeliever have problems, but there's one big difference. Only the believer has access to the Problem Solver, Jesus Christ. And that is a significant difference indeed.

Psalm 34:19 (b)
. . . but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.

There is a way through afflictions if you're willing to go through the door the Lord will open for you.

Psalm 34:20
He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.

Not only does this refer to the fact that David escaped intact, but to the fact that, centuries later, as the perfect Lamb of God, the Greater than David, Jesus Christ, would not have a bone broken when He was crucified.

Psalm 34:21, 22
Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.

The righteous are delivered. The wicked are desolate. And the choice is ours.



Many commentators place this psalm in the period when David had just heard from his friend, Jonathan, that Saul was out to get him but would not have victory over him . . .

> And David abode in the wilderness in strong holds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand. And David saw that Saul was come out to seek his life: and David was in the wilderness of Ziph in a wood. And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth. And they two made a covenant before the LORD: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house.
>
> 1 Samuel 23:14–18

Saul was out to get David, while others were gossiping and lying about him. This is our story, too, for we also face a very real adversary who goes about as a roaring lion, wanting to devour and destroy us (1 Peter 5:8).

Here, we see David's response . . .

> **Psalm 35:1**
> **Plead my cause, O LORD, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me.**

David calls on the Lord to take up the fight. That's always the wisest thing to do . . .

> Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.
>
> Jude 9

When contending with the devil about the body of Moses, even Michael the archangel didn't dare to rail on the devil directly, but instead said, "The Lord rebuke you." It's always wise to keep the Lord between you and the devil.

Psalm 35:2, 3
Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help. Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.

A spear was hurled in David's direction time and again by Saul when David was in his court playing the harp. So too, our enemy throws his spear at us time and again—pointing out where we have missed the mark, seeking to pin us to the wall with his accusations. But, in addition to the spear of Saul and the spear of Satan, there is the spear of our Savior that He absorbed in His side when He hung on the Cross and died for our sin.

Psalm 35:4
Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul: let them be turned back and brought to confusion that devise my hurt.

"Turn the tables on my enemies, Lord. Cause there to be confusion in their camp," David prayed. And that's exactly what we see the Lord do for us. When Satan and his hellish henchmen launch their attacks against us, we can turn the tables because of the Lord's victory.

As David fled from Saul, he was joined by a group of ragtag renegades. And as these men spent time with David, they became more and more like him. In 2 Samuel 23, we see the story of one of them . . .

> And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man, of Kabzeel, who had done many acts, he slew two lionlike men of Moab: he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow: And he slew an Egyptian, a goodly man: and the Egyptian had a spear in his hand; but he went down to him with a staff, and

plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear. These things did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada . . .

2 Samuel 23:20–22 (a)

After facing down lion-like men and a lion itself, Benaiah slew an Egyptian with the Egyptian's own spear.

Sometimes people say, "I feel attacked by my own flesh, by the enemy himself, and by the world system all around me. What do I do?"

The best thing to do is what Benaiah did. That is, go on the offensive. Take the weapons of the enemy—the accusations Satan hurls at you—and say, "You're right. In fact, I'm even worse than you say I am. But Jesus has paid the price for my sin. I'm forgiven and I love Him all the more for it."

Jesus said that the one who is forgiven much loves much (Luke 7:47). Therefore, turn the tables on the enemy. When he fires his fiery darts in your direction, say, "Satan, every time you fire one of those thoughts in my direction, I want you to know that I'm going to celebrate what God has done on my behalf and intercede for fifteen of my brothers and sisters in order that they will have victory over the very area with which I struggle." Use Satan's own spear against him and watch him flee.

Psalm 35:5–7
Let them be as chaff before the wind: and let the angel of the LORD chase them. Let their way be dark and slippery: and let the angel of the LORD persecute them. For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul.

Ephesians 6 tells us we wrestle not against flesh and blood. Therefore, we are to realize that, like David, we are to fervently and constantly do battle —not against people but against spiritual principalities and powers through prayer.

Psalm 35:8–10
Let destruction come upon him at unawares; and let his net that he hath hid catch himself: into that very destruction let him fall.

And my soul shall be joyful in the LORD: it shall rejoice in his salvation. All my bones shall say, LORD, who is like unto thee, which deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him, yea, the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him?

Saul laid traps for David. Satan lays traps for us. He has traps and snares and wants to see us brought down. But David says his soul shall be joyful when the enemy himself is destroyed. There will be a day not far away when Satan will be bound for one thousand years—during which time peace and prosperity will fill this planet as Jesus reigns during the Millennium (Revelation 20).

Is your son or daughter breaking your heart? Is your neighbor causing you problems? Is an employer or employee mistreating you? Don't come down on the person, but see the power that is manipulating that person and go to war in prayer against that power. People are not vicious. They're victims. And when you see this, you can love even your enemy as Jesus commanded us to do (Luke 6:28).

Psalm 35:11
False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not.

In David's case, this would refer to Doeg and others who were lying about him, spreading rumors, bearing false witness (1 Samuel 22).

Bearing false witness is not only telling big whoppers. Bearing false witness can also include giving the right information but with the wrong implication. "He said, 'Destroy this temple and in three days I will build it again,' " false witnesses said of Jesus. While Jesus did indeed say those words, He wasn't talking about the physical temple, but rather the temple of His own body that would be resurrected after three days (Mark 14:58).

Satan is a false witness because, even though we have committed the sins of which he accuses us, he fails to acknowledge that they are forgiven through the work of Calvary.

Psalm 35:12–14

They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom. I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother.

After Peter made his great confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus said, "Blessed are thou, Peter, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this to you, but my Father which is in heaven." Then Jesus went on to talk about going to Jerusalem, where He would be crucified and rise three days later.

"Not so," Peter said. "Be it far from Thee."

And what did Jesus say? He said, "Get thee behind Me, Satan" (Matthew 16:16–23).

I don't believe Jesus was calling Peter Satan. Rather, I think Jesus was talking directly to Satan, recognizing that it was Satan who was manipulating and deceiving Peter. So too, we need to see people who are cantankerous, bitter, small-minded, and mean-spirited as people who themselves have been victimized by the enemy. The enemy is the enemy, not the person. Anytime I'm fighting against flesh and blood, I'm fighting the wrong battle. Our battle is not with people. It's with Satan.

Psalm 35:15–18
But in mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together: yea, the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew it not; they did tear me, and ceased not: With hypocritical mockers in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth. Lord, how long wilt thou look on? rescue my soul from their destructions, my darling from the lions. I will give thee thanks in the great congregation: I will praise thee among much people.

Even as David cried for deliverance, he praised God in the great congregation. All too often, I'm afraid we're eager to publish our problems,

talk about our trials, and call attention to our burdens. But when the answers come, we're not as eager to voice the victory.

"I will speak God's praise in the great congregation that others might grow strong in their faith, that the Father might be pleased with my testimony of praise," David seemed to say. I suggest that nine out of ten believers never do this. In other words, when God delivers and blesses, ninety percent never acknowledge it. Where do I get this particular figure? From Luke 17. When ten lepers cried, "Have mercy upon me," Jesus healed all ten. But only one came back to thank and worship the Lord. Only one out of ten made the effort, expended the energy, and publicly acknowledged that Jesus had done something wonderful (Luke 17).

"Go thy way," Jesus said to him. "Thy faith hath made thee whole."

Ten were healed of their leprosy. But only one—the one who took the time and made the effort to praise the Lord—was made whole spiritually as well as physically.

Psalm 35:19–21
Let not them that are mine enemies wrongfully rejoice over me: neither let them wink with the eye that hate me without a cause. For they speak not peace: but they devise deceitful matters against them that are quiet in the land. Yea, they opened their mouth wide against me, and said, Aha, aha, our eye hath seen it.

"Aha! I saw that!" the enemy says as he accuses us day and night (Revelation 12:10).

Psalm 35:22–24 (a)
This thou hast seen, O LORD: keep not silence: O Lord, be not far from me. Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgment, even unto my cause, my God and my Lord. Judge me, O LORD my God, according to thy righteousness . . .

"Judge me, LORD, not according to my righteousness but according to Thine," David prays. Gang, we are the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:9). Why? Because He who knew no sin was made sin for us (2 Corinthians

5:21). And now we're robed in His righteousness (Isaiah 61:10). Oh, such grace!

Psalm 35:24 (b)–26
. . . and let them not rejoice over me. Let them not say in their hearts, Ah, so would we have it: let them not say, We have swallowed him up. Let them be ashamed and brought to confusion together that rejoice at mine hurt: let them be clothed with shame and dishonour that magnify themselves against me.

Let those that bring condemnation—in our case, Satan and his henchmen —be put away.

Psalm 35:27, 28
Let them shout for joy, and be glad, that favour my righteous cause: yea, let them say continually, Let the LORD be magnified, which hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant. And my tongue shall speak of thy righteousness and of thy praise all the day long.

When does our tongue speak of God's righteousness? It will surely happen in heaven. But Jesus said we are to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). So if that's happening in heaven, may it also happen in our hearts and homes even today.

36 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, the servant of the LORD.*

The phrase, "the servant of the LORD," is used in an inscription only one other time: in Psalm 18. Psalm 18 was written when Saul had died and David was at last free from his pursuit. This psalm seems to relate to that same period of time.

Psalm 36:1–4

The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful. The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit: he hath left off to be wise, and to do good. He deviseth mischief upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way that is not good; he abhorreth not evil.

David gives us insight into the heart of the wicked. That is, wickedness seems to begin with the absence of the fear of God.

Psalm 36:5–7
Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O LORD, thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.

"O, Jerusalem, O, Jerusalem," Jesus would cry, "I would gather you under My wings as a mother hen gathers her chicks, but you wouldn't let Me" (see Luke 13:34). A mother hen gathers her chicks when there's a fire in the barn. To protect them, she'll die from the heat, but the chicks will be safe. That is the picture of the Lord and His mercy.

Psalm 36:8
They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.

The promise of food and drink calls to the mind the ultimate Table wherein we are satisfied—the Table of Communion.

Psalm 36:9
For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.

Jesus came not only that we might have life (John 10:10), but that we would be able to walk in light (1 John 1:7). Only Jesus makes everything

clear.

Psalm 36:10
O continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee; and thy righteousness to the upright in heart.

"O continue thy lovingkindness," or, literally, "Draw out at length, stretch out Your lovingkindness to those who know You." Jeremiah 31:3 tells us that God has loved us with an everlasting love. It just goes on and on and on.

The famed opera house in the city of Paris was scheduled to host a well-known operatic singer. The day of the performance, the singer came down with the flu and had to cancel his engagement. But it was too late to alert the ticket holders. So when the guests arrived in the great opera hall, the host came before the people and said, "We regret to inform you that our singer could not be here tonight. He is ill. A local singer will be singing tonight instead." The local singer took the stage. The audience greeted him with silence. The man sang with all his heart. People listened patiently, but were not very impressed. So when he finished, there was no applause whatsoever. But then, from the top balcony, a little voice was heard to say, "Daddy, I think you were wonderful."

Upon hearing that, the entire opera house began to clap and eventually gave the singer a standing ovation.

Others might not be very impressed by you. But there is One in your balcony who says, "I think you're wonderful." And He's the only One who matters because it's God Himself.

Psalm 36:11, 12
Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the wicked remove me. There are the workers of iniquity fallen: they are cast down, and shall not be able to rise.

Even though he's been extolling God's mercy and love, David doesn't presume upon either one. Instead, he asks that the Lord would keep Him from

pride and, in so doing, keep him close to Himself.



37 *A Psalm of David.*

We don't know the setting of Psalm 37, but, on the basis of verse 25, we know that David wrote it near the end of his life. It is one thing to speak from theory, it is something else to speak from personal history. And here, David does just that.

Psalm 37:1, 2
Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.

Don't be confused by the success of the wicked, David says, because they might have their day, but they're going to be mowed down and wither away eventually. This is the best it's ever going to be for them—and even this day will end quickly.

Psalm 37:3
Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.

"Where should I live? What should I do?" people ask. Here's one of the keys: Trust in the Lord, do good, and He'll plant you exactly where you're supposed to be.

Psalm 37:4
Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

Enjoy the Lord. Make Him your delight. And as you do, an amazing thing will happen: He will put His will, His plan in your heart. "For it is God who

works in you both to will and to do His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

Asked how to discern God's will, Augustine answered, "Love God with all your heart and do whatever you want." That is, if you're loving God passionately—wanting to please, obey, and honor Him continually—you can do what you want because His plan will automatically be your desire.

Psalm 37:5, 6
Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.

The word "commit" is literally "roll." In other words, keep rolling your questions, concerns, and problems on the Lord every day and the way in which you should go will be made clear to you.

Psalm 37:7
Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.

I like this psalm because if you take the first words of verses 1 through 6, it reads: "Fret not for trust, delight, commit, and rest." I love that!

Psalm 37:8, 9
Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.

Who inherits the earth? Not the angry person or the one who thinks he has to straighten everyone else out. It is those who wait on the Lord who will ultimately come out on top. Waiting on the Lord does not mean passively waiting for the Lord. Rather, it means to wait on the Lord actively—like a waiter waiting on his customers—in order to bring Him pleasure.

Psalm 37:10, 11

For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

The world says, "Assert yourself." The Word says, "Blessed are the meek, the poor in spirit, those who mourn." Although it's nearly impossible for the world to understand, brokenness and meekness are the qualities that will lead you to abundance of peace both presently and into eternity.

Psalm 37:12–15
The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming. The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.

Goliath laughed at David—until David used Goliath's own sword to lop off his head (1 Samuel 17:51).

Psalm 37:16–22
A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous. The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away. The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth. For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off.

The little we have now is better than the abundance the wicked seem to have because the wicked has only the riches he himself accumulates to

support him. The righteous man, on the other hand, is supported, sustained, and satisfied by the God of the entire universe.

Psalm 37:23, 24
The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.

If you love the Lord, your steps are being ordered by Him. The events in your life—the circumstances where you work or study, the situations at home—are all ordered by the Lord. And if you stumble along the way, He won't cast you off. He won't kick you out. He'll just pick you back up and keep you going with His own hand . . .

"Lord, save me!" Peter cried as he sank beneath the waves. And Matthew says Jesus stretched forth His hand, lifted a drenched Peter out of the water, and plopped him back in the boat (Matthew 14:30, 31). That's a strong hand!

Riding on an unbroken donkey, the hand of Jesus was able to control the animal. That's a strong hand!

Jesus was able to overturn tables and throw out the moneychangers. That's a strong hand!

The hand of Jesus is strong yet scarred, for there is a hole in it from the nail driven through it to pay the penalty for your sin. It is this very hand that picks you up and sees you through.

Psalm 37:25, 26
I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed.

Oh, how true this is! God will see you through—and even your kids will be blessed.

Psalm 37:27–36

Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore. For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever. The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide. The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him. The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged. Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.

Contrasting the state of the wicked with the righteous, David steps back and looks at the big picture of eternity rather than at the picture of any given day. Yes, the wicked may appear to be prospering now, while the righteous might be struggling—but he who waits on the Lord will eventually inherit not only the earth, but heaven as well. It's all a matter of perspective. That is why we are so often told to wait on the Lord—because it's only as we step back and give the Lord time and room to work that we can see the big picture of what He knew He would do all along.

Psalm 37:37–40
Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.

The Lord will help, deliver, and save those who simply today choose to trust Him rather than to murmur and complain, to be anxious or doubtful,

cynical or critical. God doesn't ask for your sacrifice or your money. He simply asks for your trust.



38 *A Psalm of David, to bring to remembrance.*

Psalm 38 is one of seven penitential psalms—psalms that are an expression of sorrow for sin. If you're like me, you don't want to remember your sins. But the Bible tells us it is important to confess sin because when we do, we appreciate what Jesus did for us on the Cross all the more (see Luke 7:47).

Psalm 38:1–3
O LORD, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin.

"Deep within, there is no rest," David says.

And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.

Isaiah 32:17

Righteousness brings peace. Therefore, if you're feeling restless or uneasy deep within, it could be because there's sin that needs to be confessed. Restlessness might be an indicator that something within your heart needs to be adjusted.

Psalm 38:4–7
For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down

greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh.

In addition to this psalm, the next three deal with an event we don't know much about. That is, David was apparently smitten with a loathsome disease. The authors of 1 Samuel and 1 Chronicles don't bring up this event. So it's amazing to me that David himself would write about it so candidly. Here, for example, David declares that his sin literally caused him to stink.

Mom and Dad, tell your kids over and over and over again that sin stinks. It's not bad because it's arbitrarily forbidden by a God who doesn't want them to have any fun. No, it's forbidden by a God who loves them because it's bad. It stinks.

Psalm 38:8–10
I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee. My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me.

Experts tell us that when a person looks at something he delights in, the pupil of his eye gets bigger. David says the light of his eye is gone, that what once delighted him no longer does.

Psalm 38:11
My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off.

If you want to know who your friends really are, get into trouble, then see who's left.

Psalm 38:12–15
They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long. But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth. Thus I was as a man that heareth

not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs. For in thee, O LORD, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God.

Though others turn away from you, the Lord is always there to hear from you. Always. Even in his sin, David understood that God was his hope and he hung on to the Lord.

In dealing with his physical problems, David relied solely on the Lord. So too, whenever we're hurting physically, we can truly count on the fact that the Lord hears our prayers and will heal us absolutely. But it might not be immediately. It might be weeks or months down the road. It might not be until we get to heaven.

Paul was afflicted by a thorn in his flesh which he asked the Lord to remove three times. "My grace is sufficient for you," the Lord answered. "For My strength is made perfect in your weakness." In other words, "Your being in a weakened condition allows My strength to be seen in and through you to a greater degree" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

If you're battling with sickness, I encourage you to follow Paul's example. That is, keep praying until you're either healed or until you have an understanding deep within.

Psalm 38:16, 17
For I said, Hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me: when my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me. For I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me.

In this psalm of remembrance that David has the entire nation sing, he says, "I am ready to halt," or, literally, "I'm about to fall."

I think of two stories . . .

One day, Jesus went to the pool of Bethesda where a man was lying. "Rise, take up your bed and walk," Jesus said to him. And immediately that man stood, took up his bed, and walked. But when the religious leaders asked him who it was that healed him, the man couldn't tell them. He was evidently so thrilled to be healed that he didn't have time to wonder who had done it (John 5:13).

The second man was a can-do kind of guy. So clever was Jacob that he was able to talk his own brother out of his birthright and blessing. Following that, everything Jacob touched seemed to turn to gold. Everything seemed to be going well until he heard that his brother was coming to see him—accompanied by four hundred fighting men. Jacob was worried. As he camped by the brook Jabok on the even before he would meet his brother, the angel of the Lord came to him and wrestled with Him. "I'm not going to let you go until You bless me," Jacob vowed. As morning dawned, the angel of the Lord dislocated Jacob's hip as if to say, "You're not going to be Jacob or 'heel-snatcher' any longer. You're going to be *Israel,* or "Governed by God." Jacob arose, but would walk as a broken man who would need to lean on the Rock of his salvation, who would need to be governed by God each step of the way. Thus, in his weakness, he was indeed made stronger (Genesis 32).

Sometimes the Lord allows us to limp permanently because it forces us to lean on Him. *Why am I still struggling with that?* we wonder. *Why is that temptation or problem back again?*

I suggest it is the Lord saying, "I want you to lean on Me. You'll draw close to Me in ways you never would have otherwise." Maybe you've been set free—but perhaps the Lord is taking you into deeper water. He wants to do more than give you victory—He wants to be your Victor. I suggest that is why David declares that he is ready to halt if that's what it takes for him to lean on the Lord every step of the way.

Psalm 38:18
For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin.

Sooner or later, we will always be sorry for our sin because sin always brings sorrow. Always.

Psalm 38:19–22
But mine enemies are lively, and they are strong: and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied. They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries; because I follow the thing that good is. Forsake me not, O LORD: O my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation.

If you're walking through a season of suffering as a result of sin, if your soul is restless and your heart is roaring, you are no lower than David was at this time. And yet David knew that even during his difficult days, the Lord still cared about him and was waiting to hear from him. That's the way He feels about you, too.



39 To the chief Musician, even to Jeduthun, A Psalm of David.

Psalm 39:1, 2 (a)
I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good . . .

"In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin," Solomon would write (Proverbs 10:19). Foreshadowing this sentiment, David chose to remain silent, even perhaps against false accusations or opinions.

Psalm 39:2 (b), 3 (a)
. . . and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned . . .

Even though David chose to be quiet, a fire burned within him.

Psalm 39:3 (b), 4 (a)
. . . then spake I with my tongue, LORD, make me to know mine end . . .

When David did speak, he spoke to the right Person. He didn't answer his critics. He didn't argue with those who had opinions about his condition. He spoke to the Lord.

Psalm 39:4 (b)

. . . and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.

"Lord, help me to know my own frailty," David prayed. When we want to lash out at others, the key is to do what David did—to ask the Lord to show us our own weakness and frailty. Do I really want to be remembered for being caustic, critical, and cynical? Oh, Lord, remind me how short life is and how frail I am before I point fingers at others.

Psalm 39:5–7
Behold, thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah. Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them. And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.

Even at our best, we're empty. Even in our area of expertise, we're ignorant. The wisest thing, the best thing, the only thing we can do is to place all of our hope in the Lord.

Psalm 39:8
Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish.

Rather than ask that the Lord deal with his accusers, David asks that the Lord deal with his own transgressions. Is it any wonder he was used so powerfully by God?

Psalm 39:9
I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.

David accepts his disease or difficulty as from the Lord. The reason we should keep our mouths closed is because God allows whatever is happening around us.

Psalm 39:10–13
Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand. When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity. Selah. Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were. O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.

"Before I die, Lord, restore me once again," David prays. Will the Lord answer his prayer? Check out the next psalm . . .



40 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 40 is a follow-up to the tensions and questions of Psalm 39 . . .

Psalm 40:1–3 (a)
I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God . . .

Psalm 39 ended on somewhat a note of despair. Here in Psalm 40, David says, "I waited and the Lord really did hear my cry."

Psalm 40:3 (b)
. . . many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.

What shall many see? They'll see how God rescued David from the pit. Why does the Lord allow me to get bogged down in miry clay? One of the reasons is that He knows others will see Him rescue me and, as a result, will

trust in Him. When will people turn to the Lord? Not when they see how together you are or how powerful your faith is—but when they see the pits from which the Lord has delivered you.

Psalm 40:4–6
Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered. Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.

The idea of opening of the ear takes us back to Exodus 21:6. That is, when a slave was eligible to be set free after seven years of service, if he chose instead to remain with his master, he would become a bond slave—a slave by choice. His ear would be pierced and he would wear an earring to identify him as such.

"I no longer call you servants, but I call you friends," Jesus said (John 15:15). But it's because Jesus calls me a friend that I want to be a servant. Why? Because once you become a bond slave of Jesus Christ, then it's His responsibility to take care of you. And that's a real good deal!

Verses 6, 7, and 8 are quoted in Hebrews 10, referring to Jesus as the ultimate example of One who submitted completely and totally. Jesus didn't only pierce His ear—but His forehead, His back, His side, His hands, and feet as He willingly gave Himself to His Father's will.

Psalm 40:7, 8
Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.

How does Jesus come to us? He comes "in the volume of the book." Every page of the Word speaks of Him. Every law, every story, every situation in the Bible in some way speaks of Jesus.

Psalm 40:9, 10
I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.

Oh, the importance of a testimony. You'll never really have a testimony without a test. That's the way it works. Once you go through a test and the Lord sees you through, then you have a testimony. Share it. Let people know what the Lord has done for you, with you, and in you.

Psalm 40:11
Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.

Notice that David asks to be preserved both with lovingkindness and truth. Oh, how blessed we are to serve a God who embodies both love and truth, for one without the other is useless (John 1:14).

Psalm 40:12–15
For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me. Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me: O LORD, make haste to help me. Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it; let them be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil. Let them be desolate for a reward of their shame that say unto me, Aha, aha.

Even though David's iniquities number more than the hairs of his head, we know that the God to whom he cried for deliverance was so in love with him that He took the time to count those hairs (Matthew 10:28–31).

Psalm 40:16

Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: let such as love thy salvation say continually, The LORD be magnified.

David's prayer is that those who seek the Lord might rejoice, and that the Lord whom they seek might be seen to a greater degree.

Psalm 40:17
But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God.

David's cry continues. "Lord, You're doing something wonderful. Keep working," he says, evidently still in the process of being healed and delivered. We're in that place as well. But this we know, that He who began a good work in us will be faithful to continue it all the way until the day that we see Jesus (Philippians 1:6).



41 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 41:1
Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble.

If you have compassion and care for those who are physically, financially, or emotionally worse off than you, the Lord will deliver you when you yourself are in need.

Psalm 41:2, 3
The LORD will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.

Who is it that the Lord preserves in time of trouble? The one who considers the poor. In fact, Solomon would go on to say that he who gives to the poor lends to the Lord (Proverbs 19:17).

Psalm 41:4, 5
I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee. Mine enemies speak evil of me, When shall he die, and his name perish?

As David was in a weakened condition, his enemies circled around him like vultures, saying, "When is he going to die?"

Psalm 41:6–8
And if he come to see me, he speaketh vanity: his heart gathereth iniquity to itself; when he goeth abroad, he telleth it. All that hate me whisper together against me: against me do they devise my hurt. An evil disease, say they, cleaveth fast unto him: and now that he lieth he shall rise up no more.

David's enemies were sure that he was through, that he would never recover. I'm sure Satan and his hellish henchmen thought the same thing about our Greater than David, Jesus Christ, as He hung on the Cross. But David's enemies were wrong. And so was Satan.

Psalm 41:9
Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.

David is probably referring to Ahithophel, a counselor he once trusted. When Absalom, David's son, rebelled against David, Ahithophel sided with Absalom. Why? Ahithophel's granddaughter was Bathsheba. Evidently, the sin David committed with her, along with his murder of her husband, Uriah, caused a root of bitterness to grow in the soil of the soul of Ahithophel which would ultimately cause him to betray David (2 Samuel 15).

In John 13, this verse is quoted by Jesus in reference to Judas and his infinitely greater betrayal.

Psalm 41:10–13
But thou, O LORD, be merciful unto me, and raise me up, that I may requite them. By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me. And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever. Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen.

This psalm that began by blessing the man who considered the poor ends by blessing the Lord. And so ends the first of the five books of Psalms.



42 *To the chief Musician, Maschil, for the sons of Korah.*

Psalm 42 deals with depression. Although we can't be sure, it could have been written by David when Absalom had launched an insurrection against him, forcing him to leave Jerusalem.

Psalm 42:1, 2 (a)
As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God . . .

Maybe in a dry region, the psalmist saw a deer drinking water from a stream. Maybe it was this sight that prompted him to say, "That's exactly how I feel. My heart is thirsty. My soul is longing for God."

Augustine put it this way: Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.

Although people might not be aware of it or able to articulate it, the fact is, God is what every soul craves. That is why Jesus said that it was only he who drank of the water He gave who would never thirst again (John 4:14).

Sometimes, late at night, I'll think I'm craving something. So I'll pour a bowl, or two, or three, of Mini-Wheats. When that doesn't satisfy me, I'll

watch the news or read *Time* magazine. But then, when I finally come to my senses, I turn off the television, throw away the empty box of cereal and say, "Lord, what I really need is just to spend time with You." And, without fail, as I do, I am truly, deeply satisfied and fulfilled.

If you're thirsting, perhaps it's because you've been drinking at the old watering holes, trying to find satisfaction in the world. Come to the Lord. Drink of Him. Draw nigh to Him and He'll draw nigh to you. That's not my word. It's His (James 4:8).

Psalm 42:2 (b)–4
. . . when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday.

If indeed it was an exiled David who wrote this psalm, he would have longed to worship with the multitude. Remembering the days when he had done so would have been bittersweet at this point in his life.

Psalm 42:5 (a)
Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? . . .

David asks his own soul why it was cast down. The soul is the mind and emotions. It seems David knew he could either talk himself into depression or talk himself out of depression. The choice was his.

Psalm 42:5 (b)
. . . hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.

"Here's what I'm going to do," David says, as he continues talking to himself. "I'm going to hope in God. I know things are going to get better. He

is for me. He's with me. He's going to see me through. So I'm going to praise Him."

Psalm 42:6
O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.

Do you ever go outside, look at the stars, and consider the power of God? I suggest that's what the psalmist is doing here—that he is reminded of the power of God as he considers the Land of Promise.

Psalm 42:7
Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.

"Lord, I'm in deep water," the psalmist says. "I'm covered by wave after wave of anxiety." The psalmist is obviously wrestling with his soul. He's honest about his condition, but look at his conclusion . . .

Psalm 42:8
Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.

"God will be with me in the day, and His song will see me through the night."

When I have gone through difficult times, I have found filling my soul with songs of praise has proven to be a wonderful help.

Psalm 42:9
I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

Again, the psalmist is being honest and transparent before the Lord.

Psalm 42:10 (a)
As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me . . .

When you're going through difficult days, even the sword—the Word of God—can be used by the enemy to condemn and taunt you. When Jesus was being tempted by the devil, Satan misquoted Scripture to challenge Jesus (Matthew 4).

Psalm 42:10 (b)
. . . while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?

It's when something terrible happens that people come to us as believers and say, "Where's your God *now?*" Gang, the Bible never promises we'll be insulated from affliction. On the contrary, David himself said, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Psalm 34:19). We're not going to be protected *from* problems, but we'll have help *in* our problems and, eventually, deliverance from them.

Psalm 42:11
Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

"I shall yet praise Him" doesn't mean "someday I'm going to praise Him," or, "someday I'll be able to look back and honor Him." No, the Hebrew language is clear that the psalmist would praise God presently.

This is so powerful and so practical. Even as he's working through his own emotional difficulty, the psalmist says, "Here's what I'm going to do: I'm going to hope in God—absolutely expecting things are going to work out for my good and His glory. I'm going to talk to God. I'm going to be honest with the Lord. He knows what I'm thinking, anyway. So I'm just going to tell Him when I feel forgotten."

The psalmist hopes in God. He talks to God. And he praises God. It is so important that we learn to be people who praise God. It was one thing when Miriam and the congregation of Israel praised the Lord after they were delivered from the oncoming Egyptians (Exodus 15). But how much better it

would have been had they praised God *before* the Red Sea parted. The key is to say, "Lord, even though I don't see how this is going to work out, I know You'll never leave me nor forsake me. And I know that all things work together for good for me. Therefore, I'm going to praise You in advance."

When Silas and Paul were in the Philippians prison at midnight, praising the Lord, an earthquake jolted the doors open. The jailer, figuring all the prisoners had fled, was about to take his life when Paul said, "Wait a minute. We're all here" (Acts 16). Why had no one left? I suggest it was because the other prisoners saw something in Paul and Silas that so intrigued them that they wanted to stick around and see how it all played out. They wanted to be free like Paul and Silas were—not only externally but, more importantly, internally.

That's what happens in our lives as well. When we say, "I'm going to hope in You, Lord," the imprisoned world around us takes note and is drawn to Him.

Before the Red Sea parts, *before* the prison doors open is your moment for greatness. Don't miss it.



43 Most commentators believe this psalm is a continuation of Psalm 42, perhaps written a little later, but concerning the same situation.

Absalom had attained a great degree of popularity by sitting in the city gate and talking to people who were coming into the city. Listening to their complaints, empathizing with their problems, he said, "If I were king, here's how I would handle your situation . . ." As a result, Absalom was able to launch an insurrection against his father. David was not only forced to flee the city, but one of his trusted advisors, Ahithophel, actually sided with Absalom. It is in this context that David most likely wrote this psalm.

Psalm 43:1 (a)
Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation . . .

This could very well refer to those who had sided with Absalom.

Psalm 43:1 (b)
. . . O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man.

This is believed to be a reference to Ahithophel, David's key counselor, who cast his lot with Absalom.

Psalm 43:2 (a)
For thou art the God of my strength: why dost thou cast me off? . . .

In thinking God had cast him off, David is not speaking of reality, for he himself knew otherwise . . .

> Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.
>
> Psalm 139:7–10

David knew that wherever he was, God was with him. Yet, although his question as to why God had cast him off didn't reflect the reality of his situation, it did reflect the honesty of his emotion.

I'm so glad that, like David, we have permission to speak honestly with our Father. David seemed to have a balance between expressing his heart to the Lord openly and yet not allowing his heart to sink deeper into despondency.

Psalm 43:2 (b)–4
. . . why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God.

"When I get through this," David said, "when I return to Jerusalem, I'll be able to return to the altar, to praise God with the congregation."

Psalm 43:5
Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

David gave himself practical advice and good counsel. David re-committed himself to praising God and to hoping in Him, knowing beyond a doubt that God would see him through.

I think of Anna in Luke 2. At eighty-four years old and having lost her husband after being married for only seven years, she could have been bitter. But she was vibrant, moved in the arena of prophecy, and had tremendous depth and maturity. Why? Because she was one who was looking for redemption in Jerusalem . . .

> And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.
>
> Luke 2:37, 38

When rebellion breaks out around us, when tribulation and difficulty surround us, what are we to do? We're to tell our soul to hope in God. If you're in trouble, do what David did: Talk to your soul and hope in God. If you're cast down, do what Anna did: Talk to the Lord and be on the lookout for Him to appear.



44 *To the chief Musician for the sons of Korah, Maschil.*

Korah was the great-grandson of Levi. The grandson of Kohath and cousin of Moses and Aaron, he was a member of one of the three main family groups of the Levites. Yet Korah challenged Moses' authority and launched a rebellion against him, before he was swallowed by the earth (Numbers 16). I believe one of the quickest ways to find yourself in the pit is to rebel against the authority the Lord has placed over you. Evidently, Korah's sons and descendants learned from him what not to do, for here, they are worshipers.

Maschil means "instruction." A Maschil is a song not only for inspiration, but for illumination. This particular psalm is believed to have been written during the days of Hezekiah, when the Assyrians were making their way southward, conquering many cities of Judah, headed for Jerusalem.

Psalm 44:1–8
We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them. Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob. Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us. For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us. In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever. Selah.

"Lord, we know the stories," the psalmist, perhaps Hezekiah himself, declares. The psalmist reflects on the victorious stories of old. That's why it's important to share your testimony. It's important to tell people what God has done in order that they might take courage when they themselves come under attack.

Psalm 44:9 (a)
But . . .

The tenor of the psalm switches with these three letters. The same can happen with us. We read the Word. We hear testimonies. Yet we can find ourselves saying, "Yeah, that's great for them, but my case is different . . ."

Psalm 44:9 (b), 10
. . . thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies. Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy: and they which hate us spoil for themselves.

The Assyrians were a formidable foe, indeed. A clay cylinder written in that day by the Assyrians has been discovered that talks about Sennacherib's conquest of northern Judah. It records two hundred forty-two towns and cities that were conquered as the Assyrians worked their way south.

Psalm 44:11
Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat; and hast scattered us among the heathen.

"You're our Shepherd, Lord, but we're like sheep headed for slaughter," David says.

Psalm 44:12
Thou sellest thy people for nought, and dost not increase thy wealth by their price.

The cry of the psalmist is, "You don't seem to value us very highly, Lord."

Psalm 44:13–15
Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us. Thou makest us a byword among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people. My confusion is con tinually before me, and the shame of my face hath covered me,

“I don’t understand, Lord,” the psalmist writes. “We’ve heard about what You did for Your people, yet we’re struggling. It doesn’t make sense.”

Psalm 44:16–26
For the voice of him that reproacheth and blasphemeth; by reason of the enemy and avenger. All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way; Though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death. If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god; Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart. Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? arise, cast us not off for ever. Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the earth. Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercies’ sake.

The psalmist began by crying, “Lord, we know the stories, how You have come through as You promised. But our situation is brutal. Where are You?” And he ended it by sighing, “Lord, arise for our help.” The years pass. Centuries later, Paul reached for this psalm, pulled out verse 22, and placed it in the glorious context of Romans 8 . . .

> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
>
> Romans 8:35–39

"We are more than conquerors," Paul triumphantly declares. To be a conqueror is to have victory over the enemy. To be a conqueror means to be in control of the circumstances. But to be *more* than a conqueror is different than that. To be more than a conqueror is to say, "No matter who wins, I am victorious." To be more than a conqueror is to have victory not *over* the difficulty but *in* it. To be more than a conqueror is to say, "No matter what happens, I sense the presence of the Lord with me. And, although I might not understand exactly what He's up to, I trust Him because nothing can separate me from His love. He proved that on the Cross of Calvary."

What's the point of being more than a conqueror? Think of it this way . . .

Imagine you wanted to fly from California to Florida and the ticket agent said, "You have a choice. You can either have an absolutely smooth flight, but when you get to Miami, we can't guarantee that the plane won't crash upon landing, or you can take a flight that might have some bumps and turbulence along the way, but one which we guarantee will land safely." Wouldn't you choose to put up with a bump or two during the flight in order that you might arrive in one piece? The Lord has an eternal destiny charted out for us. He's getting us to heaven. The flight this side of eternity might be a bit bumpy. But He guarantees that we will arrive at our destination safely.

Why can't we get there safely and have a smooth flight, too? Think of it this way . . .

I flew on a small commuter plane recently that was terribly turbulent. I couldn't wait for it to land! But if I flew first class on a 747 with the meals and the movies and the slippers, I'd be so comfortable, I wouldn't necessarily want the flight to end! In other words, the Lord wants us to keep our focus on the things of eternity. There are bumps along the way in order that we might long for heaven. If we don't we'll be lulled to sleep. And then, when we get to heaven, we'll be bankrupt because we didn't store our treasures there (Matthew 6:19, 20).

The psalm ends here. I wish I could say the Assyrians were driven off and the people were given victory. But that's not life. Sometimes, it just ends in a prayer. In due time, however, when the Lord calls us home, everything will be right. In the meantime, the struggles and trials we face are all for a purpose—to ready us for eternity. And the plane's almost ready to take off!



45 *To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim, for the sons of Korah, Maschil, A Song of loves.*

Shoshannim means "lilies," which seems to indicate this was a springtime psalm dealing with the Passover season. It's a beautiful love song about a mighty king and his passionate love for a queen. Many commentators believe it was a psalm written by Solomon concerning a queen he took as his bride, Pharaoh's daughter from Egypt. Others say it is connected to Psalms 44 and 46 through 48, and, therefore, deals with Hezekiah, who also took for himself a bride (2 Kings 21:1). While we don't know the exact setting or author, this we do know: Ultimately, the psalm before us speaks of the King of kings, Jesus Christ, and us as His bride.

Psalm 45:1
My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.

The literal meaning of this verse is: "I'm so excited about this that my heart is bubbling over."

Psalm 45:2, 3
Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty.

We see His name girded upon His thigh and the sword of the Word in His mouth when Jesus our King comes back to the battle in the valley of Megiddo (Revelation 19:15, 16).

Psalm 45:4
And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee

terrible things.

Thy right hand of our King is a nail-pierced hand. And as such, it teaches both how far man would go in his determination to destroy God, and how far God would go in His determination to save man.

Psalm 45:5, 6
Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee. Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre.

The author of the Book of Hebrews quotes verse 6 to make the case for the deity of Jesus (1:8).

Psalm 45:7, 8
Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad.

Throughout history, we've seen bad kings, sad kings, and mad kings. Our King is a glad King. Why? Because He hates sin and loves righteousness.

If you want to be glad like Him, understand that sin brings sadness and holiness brings gladness. Mom and Dad, that's what you need to tell your kids over and over again. Contrary to what the devil says and the world propagates, sin brings sadness. Sure, there's pleasure in sin—but only for a season (Hebrews 11:25), for its long-term wages are nothing but death (Romans 6:23).

There's something very attractive and winsome about a person who loves righteousness, who doesn't wink at sin. Jesus was like that. He radiated such joy that crowds would flock around Him and fishermen would leave their nets to follow Him.

Psalm 45:9, 10

Kings' daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir. Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house;

After seeing the beauty and majesty of the King, now we see the queen, the bride, you and me. Here, we're told to forget our own people, our father's house. In Luke 14, Jesus said, "If any man come after Me, he must hate his mother, father, brother, and sister or he cannot be My disciple" (see Luke 14:26). This means our love for the Lord and commitment to our King is so great that it completely dwarfs our love for anyone else.

The more I love Jesus, the more I will love those around me. But my love for Him must far supersede my love for anyone else—even family. As a faithful bride, I am to lay down my life and follow Him alone.

Psalm 45:11
So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.

Do you know why we have devotions every morning? The devotional life is not just so we can get through the day in a better way or so that we can be blessed. Those things happen—but the real deal is this: Our King greatly desires us . . .

The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

Zephaniah 3:17

Did you catch that? The Lord rests in His love for you—not in your love for Him. That's why John described himself not as the disciple who loved Jesus, but as the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7). Jesus has washed us in His blood (Revelation 1:5), robed us in His righteousness (Isaiah 61:10), and chosen us before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). Devotional life says, "It baffles me completely, Lord, why You've chosen me to be Your bride. But You have, and I want to honor You."

Psalm 45:12, 13
And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall intreat thy favour. The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold.

We as the bride are indeed glorious within because of the treasure of Jesus Christ within us (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Psalm 45:14, 15
She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king's palace.

In Revelation 19, we see the bride presented at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb.

Psalm 45:16
Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth.

As the bride of Christ, we will be fruitful, for as we spend time with Him, others will see His beauty reflected in us and will choose to become part of the kingdom, as well.

Psalm 45:17
I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations: therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever.

If you need reason to "praise Thee forever and ever," simply reread Psalm 45 and reconsider who Jesus is as our King and Bridegroom, how He looks at us, and the glorious things He has in store for us.

To the chief Musician for the sons of Korah, A Song upon Alamoth.

46

Psalms 46, 47, and 48 are songs of celebration, rejoicing in God's faithfulness in delivering the nation from a foreign foe. Most commentators agree that the foreign foe from which Israel was delivered was the one in the story we find in 2 Kings 18 and 19, when the Assyrian army of King Sennacherib, led by Rab-shakeh, his general, besieged the city of Jerusalem. It seemed like a hopeless situation for God's people with the massive armies of Assyria camped right outside the walls of the city. But the prophet Isaiah had declared that that they need not worry, that not a single arrow from an Assyrian bow would find its way into Jerusalem (Isaiah 37:33). That's exactly what happened, and these psalms celebrate God's amazing faithfulness.

Psalm 46:1
God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

The literal translation of "trouble" here is "tight spot." The same is still true. God is our help whenever we feel things caving in.

Psalm 46:2 (a)
Therefore will not we fear . . .

Although we live in a culture governed by fear of one kind or another, we know that God has not given us the spirit of fear but of power, love, and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).

Psalm 46:2 (b), 3
. . . though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.

One of the most helpless feelings a person can have is when the earth is quaking. And if earthquakes weren't bad enough in themselves, they usually

cause not only the shaking of the earth but the swelling of the sea, resulting in tidal waves. Be it emotionally, financially, or geographically, it seems that people are always trying to stabilize their situations themselves rather than trusting the Lord.

Psalm 46:4, 5
There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.

Jerusalem is unique in all of the cities of antiquity by virtue of the fact that there is no river in the city. In Bible times, cities were always founded either close to, or on the banks of a river. Not so Jerusalem. So what is the psalmist talking about here? At this time, as the Assyrians made their way south, they thought that by besieging Jerusalem, they could starve the people out, or that their thirst would drive them out. But before the Assyrians arrived, King Hezekiah did an amazing thing. Outside the city walls, in the Kidron Valley, there was a spring called the Gihon spring. Knowing the Assyrians were coming, Hezekiah ordered his men to dig a tunnel. Half began at the Gihon springs and dug westward. Others began at the pool of Siloam and dug eastward. Together, they dug a total of one thousand seven hundred and seventy-seven feet. And when they were done, water flowed from the Gihon springs into the pool of Siloam within the wall of the city. Then Hezekiah covered the springs outside so the Assyrians wouldn't know there was a spring there at all.

I can't help but think centuries later of our Lord standing in Jerusalem centuries later, declaring, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink and out of his innermost being shall gush forth torrents of living water" (John 7:37, 38). Inside our soul is the living water of the Holy Spirit. The Assyrian, the worldling, doesn't get it. But we have tasted of it and it makes our hearts glad.

Psalm 46:6 (a)
The heathen raged . . .

Indeed they did. Sennacherib taunted and teased the people of Jerusalem constantly.

Psalm 46:6 (b), 7
. . . the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

The term "the Lord of hosts" refers to the Lord's position as Captain of all of the angelic army. One hundred eighty five thousand Assyrians encamped round about Jerusalem. That night, dispatched by God, an angel made his way into the camp—and in the morning 185,000 Assyrians were dead, slain by a single angel.

You might say, "The Lord may be the Lord of the angels, but I'm no angel." But look at the next phrase. He's also the God of Jacob. Jacob was no angel, either. So, for you angels, He's the Lord of hosts. And for the rest of us, He's the God of Jacob.

Psalm 46:8–10 (a)
Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God . . .

God is real. He's in our midst. He cares about us deeply. He's going to see us through. So we can be still.

Psalm 46:10 (b), 11
. . . I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

The Lord has a stake in us both because He loves us and because we bear His name. Therefore, He wants us and will enable us to do well (Philippians 2:13).



47 To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.

Psalm 47:1
O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph.

Clap your hands and shout to God, not because He needs affirmation, but because we need liberation. You see, when it seems as though the enemy is besieging the citadel of my soul, if, instead of expressing anxiety or holing up in a cave, I say, "God has seen me through before and I know He'll see me through again, so I'm going to clap my hands in appreciation and expectation," I'll be set free from the worry that would have otherwise engulfed me.

The wall seemed insurmountable, impregnable. Yet Joshua and the people were told to shout. And, as they did, the wall "fell down flat" (Joshua 6:20). I wonder what kinds of walls are up in a relationship or a situation in your life. Perhaps this psalm is for you. Don't worry. Worship. Express your appreciation for what God has done and your expectation of what He will yet do—and watch your own walls become bridges.

Psalm 47:2–4
For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth. He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet. He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved. Selah.

"The Lord most high is terrible" or, more correctly "awesome." God shall choose our inheritance for us—and He always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him.

Psalm 47:5–7

God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.

We are not only to clap and shout to express our emotion and affection, but we are to sing with understanding, engaging our intellect and our hearts in what we're singing (Isaiah 29:13).

Psalm 47:8, 9
God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness. The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted.

If God is God over all of the nations, surely He's in control of my situation.



48 A Song and Psalm for the sons of Korah.

Psalm 48:1
Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness.

"The mountain of His holiness" is a reference to Jerusalem, where the tabernacle, and later, the temple stood.

Psalm 48:2
Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.

Jerusalem is surrounded on three sides by steep valleys that provide a very effective barrier from attacking armies. But the north was vulnerable.

Consequently, the Babylonians and Assyrians both attacked the city from the north. The north side of the city was where the temple would stand. In placing it there, it was as though the people were saying, "God Himself will protect the area where we are most vulnerable."

Where is the "north side" of your city? Where is the area that you feel most vulnerable? Determine in your heart to worship God in that very place, and see if He doesn't defend and protect.

Psalm 48:3–7
God is known in her palaces for a refuge. For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail. Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind.

Although neighboring nations sought to conquer Jerusalem, they were powerless until God allowed it.

Psalm 48:8
As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever. Selah.

"As we have heard, so have we seen . . ." May this be true of us. May we not only hear about Jesus in the stories of the Word, but may we see Him at work in our own lives, as well.

Psalm 48:9
We have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.

When David reflected on the lovingkindness of the Lord, he came to the conclusion that it was better than life itself (Psalm 63:3).

Psalm 48:10–13
According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness. Let mount Zion

rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments. Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following.

After battle, it was important to walk around the city and take note of the vulnerabilities. But when the inhabitants of Jerusalem did so, they were able to tell the next generation that nothing had been damaged. Even though many may have been trembling, God was faithful to see them through.

I believe we can do the same thing through keeping a journal of the things the Lord is showing us, or even situations with which we might struggle. I'm always amazed to look back over my old journals and discover that nothing I was at one time worried about came to pass, that not a single arrow went over the city wall and struck me. I encourage you to make note of your fears and God's faithfulness and you'll find the same to be true. When you do, tell the generation following; tell your kids and grandchildren.

Psalm 48:14
For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.

This was the life verse of Jim Eliot, martyred missionary to the Auca Indians of Ecuador. As evidenced by his fruitful legacy, God was indeed His guide, even to death, and He'll be yours as well.



49 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.*

Although Psalm 49 is another "orphan psalm," whose human author we can't identify, we do know it's a psalm that was born of an internal struggle and that resulted in a grand conclusion. The question at hand is why the ungodly seem to be so successful. In verses 1 through 4, the psalmist gives

his introduction. In verse 5, he raises the question. And in verses 6 through 20, he shares his conclusion . . .

Psalm 49:1–4
Hear this, all ye people; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world: Both low and high, rich and poor, together. My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding. I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp.

"That which was causing me to be in the dark previously I will now make known through this song I will play on my harp," the psalmist declares.

Psalm 49:5
Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about?

Here the psalmist evidently quotes a rich man who essentially said, "What do I have to fear about the repercussions that come my way because of my lifestyle? I don't have to worry about a thing because I have money. I have wealth. I have resources to get me out of any jam I might find myself in."

"How is it that the sinful rich seem to be able to pull it off, to do as they choose, to get what they want?" the psalmist asks.

Psalm 49:6–9
They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever:) That he should still live for ever, and not see corruption.

You might be very, very wealthy—but you can't purchase either the redemption of your brother or of your own soul. "We are redeemed not by corruptible things like silver and gold, but by the precious blood of the Lamb," Peter would write (see 1 Peter 1:18, 19). You might be able to solve

some problems, to escape certain situations—but you can't redeem your soul or your brother's no matter how wealthy you might be.

Psalm 49:10
For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others.

John Jacob Astor, who made his wealth in the 1800s took a boat ride on a ship named the *Titanic*. When it was discovered that Astor was one of the multitude lost at sea, his cousin was asked how much the billionaire left.

"He left everything," the man replied.

How true that is—for no matter how wealthy a man might be, when he dies, he leaves it all.

Psalm 49:11, 12
Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish.

"If I can't take my money with me, I'll secure my legacy by naming my land or buildings after me." But that doesn't work either. A survey showed that only 4% of New Yorkers who walk or drive by the Rockefeller Center every day know anything about the Rockefellers.

Psalm 49:13
This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings. Selah.

If he's wealthy, whatever Dad or Grandpa says is right. Why? Not because he's necessarily right, but because some of his money might be given to those who agree with him.

Psalm 49:14, 15
Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning;

and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling. But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah.

The rich man who doesn't know the Lord will fade away in his emptiness and illusions. But those who do will be received by Him.

Psalm 49:16, 17 (a)
Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away . . .

We can't take our money with us—but we can send it ahead. "Don't lay up for yourselves treasure on earth where moth and rust doth destroy," Jesus said. "Lay up treasure in heaven instead" (see Matthew 6:19, 20). The gifts we give to the Lord will greet us one day. It's an investment I guarantee you'll never regret making.

Psalm 49:17 (b), 18
. . . his glory shall not descend after him. Though while he lived he blessed his soul: and men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself.

A man might make himself happy with his wealth here on earth. Others might praise him, as well. But self-satisfaction and the praise of others will not matter past the grave.

Psalm 49:19, 20
He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.

A man who has wealth, honor, and prestige but does not understand eternity is like a beast. Therefore, the way to view life is through the lens of eternity. That way, you won't become cynical or bitter about someone else's

wealth on earth because you know it's just passing away. It is only when we keep heaven in view that earth makes sense.



50 *A Psalm of Asaph.*

Along with Heman and Ethan, Asaph was one of three prominent worship leaders during the days of David. Psalm 50 has much to teach us in a very powerful way both about our future state and our present walk. Thus, it has been wisely said that it is didactic in aim and dramatic in form; prophetic in scope and practical in hope.

In verses 1 through 4, we see the introduction, the setting of the stage as God comes on the scene . . .

> **Psalm 50:1–4**
> **The mighty God, even the LORD, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people.**

God bursts on the scene in glory and grandeur, calling the people to Him that He might render judgment upon them.

Maybe recently you've been in a place where you say, "I wish God would burst on *my* scene. Why doesn't He come and give me His counsel, give me His direction in a way that's unmistakable. Why doesn't He speak at least once a year to me audibly, or even once a decade. Why is God so strangely silent?"

The psalmist is ultimately alluding to the day the Lord comes physically, sets up His kingdom, and ushers in the Millennium. But why doesn't He do it now? I suggest the reason the Lord is strangely and wonderfully silent—at

least to our own ears and eyes—is because He's teaching us how to hear with the ear of faith, how to walk with steps of faith.

You see, if I could hear God audibly or see Him physically, my faith would not develop the way it needs to develop. God wants me to hear that still, small voice with the ears of the inner man, the spirit, to see that which is neither physical nor material. Why? To prepare me for eternity. Because faith will be essential throughout eternity, our Father is faithful to teach us about faith before we get there. One day, He will indeed burst on the scene physically. Until that day, He's teaching us to hear and walk by faith.

Psalm 50:5–7
Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah. Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God.

God appears on the scene and then renders His judgment. He will indict His people in two ways: First, He'll indict the religious for their formality and then the rebellious for their hypocrisy.

Psalm 50:8–13
I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?

"You've been offering sacrifices to Me in a way that seems obligatory," the Lord says. "You act like I need these things from you, as if I need your money to keep Me in business. That's not so. Because I own everything, I need nothing."

God doesn't need our money, gang. It is we who need to give, because as we do, we give away a little of our tendency to be selfish. That's the beauty of God's command to tithe. He knows our tendency to be greedy and to hold on too tightly. God so loved the world that He gave, and He wants us to be like Him. We don't *have* to give, we *get* to give and, in so doing, we free ourselves from our own selfishness by making investments in heaven that will bear eternal dividends.

Psalm 50:14
Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High:

What does God really want from you? Just for you to acknowledge His goodness all day long. When you're driving in your car, instead of complaining about the traffic, thank the Lord that you're alive and that your car works at all! Worship Him in everything. Offer the sacrifice of praise continually (Hebrews 13:15).

Psalm 50:15
And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

"Don't bother me," people say. "I've got enough problems of my own." Not God. He says, "Call upon Me and I'll deliver you."

Psalm 50:16, 17
But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.

The rebellious don't care what God says. "Why are you quoting Scripture and claiming promises when you have ignored My instruction?" He asks.

Psalm 50:18–21

When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.

Even though the rebellious were sinning in numerous ways, God kept silent. Some people translate God's silence as impotence, that He is unable to do judge them. Others translate it as apathy, that He doesn't care what they do. Still others translate it as His approval of any given situation. God's silence in the face of sin, however, speaks only of His patience.

Because each of us will stand before God at the bema, or judgment, seat to give an account of our time, treasure, and talents, we ought to be thankful for His patience rather than wondering why He doesn't burst on the scene. In other words, I'm glad God has given me as long as He has, still giving me opportunities to get things right, to do things for Him. Do you really want Him to burst on the scene and call you to account today? Wouldn't you say instead, "Lord, be patient with me a little longer and let me hear Your heart"?

Psalm 50:22
Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.

"Consider this," the psalmist says. "Are you caught up in religious formality or rebellious hypocrisy? What a sad commentary on your life if there is nothing to show for it."

Psalm 50:23
Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.

Are you a religious person who has fallen into formality, going through the motions? Are you a rebellious person, living disobediently but still claiming promises and quoting Scripture? The solution is to confess and then

go on to worship thankfully and to walk righteously, for then you will be rewarded eternally.



51 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.*

People often say that we as Christians are obsessed with sin. Their accusation is understandable because the Bible is obsessed with sin. Why? Because the Bible deals with human history and human history consists of one sin after another. It speaks accurately. It paints the picture honestly. The church is the only place I know where people come together to remind each other that we're all sinners. Other organizations try to build people up by telling them how wonderful they are. Not the church. Only the church says, "We're out to lunch here. We're missing the mark there. Oh, Lord, forgive us. We need a Savior."

Psalm 51 deals with true confession as seen in the life of David. Having committed adultery with Bathsheba and ordering the execution of her husband, David apparently refused to deal with his sin for nine months. When Nathan, the prophet, told him a very pointed parable about a man who had stolen a lamb, David said, "That man shall surely die."

Then Nathan looked at him and said, "Thou art the man," referring to his stealing Bathsheba from Uriah (2 Samuel 12:7).

This, at last, caused David to admit his sin. Psalm 51 is the confession David made. As seen in this psalm, true confession deals with three basic areas: a right view of sin, as seen in verses 1 through 5; a right view of God, as seen in verses 6 through 12; and, finally, a right view of self, as seen in verses 13 through 19.

Psalm 51:1
Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

A right view of sin carries with it the understanding that sin deserves judgment. That is why David pleads for mercy rather than justice. He realizes that God hates sin.

Why does God hate sin? Because of what it does to us. Uriah was dead. Bathsheba was polluted. David was crippled. His family was tainted. Sin left nothing but problems, sorrow, and heartache in its wake. That's why God hates sin.

Psalm 51:2
Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Not only does sin deserve judgment, but it demands cleansing. Before revival can come, there first must be removal. In Nehemiah's day, for example, before Israel experienced revival there was repentance (Nehemiah 9).

Many times, we seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit when, in reality, what we need is to be emptied of our sin.

Psalm 51:3–5
For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Thirdly, sin declares guilt. When Adam sinned, he didn't initially declare his guilt. "The woman You gave me caused me to sin," he said, as he not only blamed Eve but God as well (see Genesis 3:12).

In Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's day, one of the proverbs in Israel was: "Our fathers ate sour grapes so our teeth are set on edge." God forbade its use because it kept people from taking responsibility for their own sin (Ezekiel 18:2, 3).

David took responsibility for his sin. "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned," he said.

"What about Uriah and Bathsheba?" you ask. "Didn't David sin against them?"

They were innocent victims perhaps but sinners nonetheless. We rush to place blame, thinking there must be someone wrong and someone innocent. But that's not scriptural, for we're *all* guilty (Romans 3:23). We're *all* in need of salvation.

Psalm 51:6
Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

After seeing a right view of sin, we come to a right view of God. First, we see His holiness. God desires inward holiness rather than an outward show of piety. Why? Because God loves Jesus so much that He wants heaven filled with people just like Him.

Psalm 51:7
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

After seeing God's holiness, we see His power. Hyssop was a small plant that grew in the rocks of Israel. It was used to apply blood on the doorpost when the children of Israel left Egypt on the night of the Passover (Exodus 12). It was also used to apply blood in the ceremony of cleansing a leper (Leviticus 14). The hyssop was also used to apply ashes of the red heifer and holy water in the cleansing of the priests (Numbers 19:6). In other words, hyssop was the agent of cleansing—and David wanted it applied to his own heart.

Psalm 51:8
Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

David understood that God's dealings with him were not punitive but corrective. This verse is a reference to what a shepherd does when a sheep strays. The shepherd breaks its legs and carries the lamb on his shoulders. As

the weeks go by, the lamb develops such a close bond with the shepherd that, when its legs are healed, it never strays from the shepherd again. It's as if David says, "I needed to be dealt with in that way, but I've learned my lesson, Lord."

Psalm 51:9–12
Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

David's salvation wasn't lost, but his joy was. When the joy of your salvation departs, turn to Psalm 51 and do business with God. If the joy is gone, chances are very great that there is some unconfessed sin in your life. The fruit of the Spirit is joy. So if the Spirit is flowing the fruit will be present. Seek the Lord and ask the Father to search your heart and restore to you the joy of your salvation.

Psalm 51:13
Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

After being given a right view of sin and a right view of God, here we see a right view of self. When will sinners be converted? When I have repented of my sin, when there's joy in my life once again. You need not feel that the time you failed or the mistakes you made disqualify you for ministry. In fact, just the opposite is true. If you repent before the Lord, just as He promised to restore the years the locusts had eaten, He'll open up entirely new aspects of ministry to you, for you will be able to speak with authority and conviction about the inexhaustible goodness and grace of God (Joel 2:25).

Psalm 51:14–17
Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O

Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

I must not only be holy for the sinners' sake, but for God's sake. The sacrifice God desires is a humble sacrifice—not mixed with pride of my spirituality or satisfaction with my own righteousness, but with an acute awareness of my own need for mercy.

Psalm 51:18, 19
Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

Finally, I must be holy for the saints' sake. Here, David is praying for Zion, praying for Jerusalem, praying for his nation. After he has repented and received restoration himself, he is now able to pray for others effectively and confidently.

Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

Isaiah 59:1, 2

I must be holy so that I can remain in fellowship with God. I must be holy so that my prayers for His people and the amazing work He desires to do in and through them will be heard.



52 To the chief Musician, Maschil, A Psalm of David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, and said unto him, David is come to the house of Ahimelech.

The setting for Psalm 52 centers on David's being betrayed by a man named Doeg. The story is found in 1 Samuel 21 and 22. As a young man fleeing from Saul, David went to the area of Nob where there was a group of priests. "I'm on an errand for King Saul," he said to Ahimelech, the high priest. "But I'm out of supplies and I have no weapons."

Unbeknownst to either Ahimelech or David, however, a friend of Saul named Doeg was watching the whole scene. When Doeg recounted to Saul how Ahimelech and the priests had assisted David in his flight, Saul ordered his men to go to Nob and kill the priests. Saul's soldiers would eventually refuse the order—but Doeg himself fulfilled the assignment. Thus, an entire community of priests was slaughtered for giving aid to David.

In response, David writes this psalm . . .

Psalm 52:1
Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? the goodness of God endureth continually.

Here, David expresses both his anger with Doeg and his amazement at the goodness of God.

Psalm 52:2–5
Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. Thou lovest evil more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness. Selah. Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue. God shall likewise destroy thee for ever, he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living. Selah.

No doubt Doeg could protest, saying, "Wait a minute. I wasn't deceitful. I simply reported what I saw." Here, however, the Word of God indicts Doeg. He is remembered throughout all history as a deceitful man, a liar, a sinner.

Why? Because his motive was malicious. His motive was to bring harm to David.

Once again, in this we see an illustration of what constitutes a false witness. A false witness isn't one who simply tells blatant lies. A false witness is one who reports the right information, but with the wrong implication or for the wrong motivation. It is wrong to talk about anyone if the reason for your talking is to put someone else down.

Psalm 52:6–8
The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him: Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.

Here's Doeg finding fault. Here's Doeg, seeking to do David in.
And here's David saying, "I trust in God's mercy."

Psalm 52:9
I will praise thee for ever, because thou hast done it: and I will wait on thy name; for it is good before thy saints.

"I will praise God for what He has done," David declares. "And I will wait and see what He shall yet do—for I know it will be good."



53 *To the chief Musician upon Mahalath, Maschil, A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 53:1–3
The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good. God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one

of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

In this psalm, David is speaking of universal corruption. Paul will quote this psalm in his own letter to the Romans . . .

In Romans 3, talking to the Jews, those who had the promises of God, he says . . .

> What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.
>
> Romans 3:9–12

The divine diagnosis of the Great Physician concerning all of human nature and endeavor is that no one does good because all have sinned.

> *The story is told of Abraham Lincoln who said, "Tell me, if we say that the tail of a dog is a leg, how many legs does a dog have?"*
>
> *The answer would come back, "Five."*
>
> *And he would smile and say, "No. Four because calling the tail a leg doesn't make it a leg."*

Calling man good doesn't make him good. Regardless of what the philosopher says, David declares and Paul reiterates that there is none righteous.

This not only shows the need for salvation, but it's also a key for compassion. That is, when my brothers and sisters stumble a bit, I don't have to be shocked or offended, for the Bible says *none* of us do good. Instead of judging and condemning, I'm free to love people and enjoy them, to be tolerant of them and patient with them.

In verses 4 through 6, David writes not of universal corruption, but of a particular situation . . .

Psalm 53:4–6
Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread: they have not called upon God. There were they in great fear, where no fear was: for God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth against thee: thou hast put them to shame, because God hath despised them. Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.

The situation is that the enemies of Israel were encamped against Israel, feeling as though they had the right to annihilate, harass, and destroy the people of God due to their shortcomings. These enemies made a mistake Jude 11 refers to as the "error of Balaam." Balaam was a prophet who realized that the host of Israel was sinning. So when Balak, one of Israel's enemies, asked if he would come and curse the nation, Balaam agreed. The problem was, every time Balaam opened his mouth to curse, blessing poured forth instead. The error of Balaam was this: Balaam mistakenly assumed God would be eager to curse His sinful, defiled people (Numbers 22—24).

There are Christians who denounce God's people because they see flaws and weaknesses in the church. Theirs is the error of Balaam. Balaam didn't factor in grace or mercy, love or patience into the equation.

In the first three verses of this psalm, David readily admits that none is good. Nonetheless, the enemies of God's people have no right to devour His people, for salvation will one day come. Jesus will come back and things will be right. How I'm looking forward to that!



54

To the chief Musician of Neginoth, Maschil, A Psalm of David, when the Ziphims came and said to Saul, Doth not David hide himself with us?

Poor David, he's constantly being betrayed. This time, it's not Doeg, but the Ziphims. The area of Ziph was in the region of Judah. Fleeing from Saul,

David spent time there. But when the people realized who he was, they told Saul of his whereabouts. Thus, Psalm 54 was written when David was aware that, once again, he had been betrayed . . .

Psalm 54:1–7
Save me, O God, by thy name, and judge me by thy strength. Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers are risen up against me, and oppressors seek after my soul: they have not set God before them. Selah. Behold, God is mine helper: the Lord is with them that uphold my soul. He shall reward evil unto mine enemies: cut them off in thy truth. I will freely sacrifice unto thee: I will praise thy name, O LORD; for it is good. For he hath delivered me out of all trouble: and mine eye hath seen his desire upon mine enemies.

When David realized he was betrayed, notice the language of faith he articulates. Of God, he says, "He *hath* delivered me." David is proclaiming as if it's already done. In verse 1, he prayed, "Save me O God." And only six verses later, he says, "He has done it."

There are those who accuse us of having blind faith. Not so. Faith is not blind. In fact faith sees *more.* Faith sees the glory of the future in the gloom of the present.

If you feel like you're in Ziph and the Ziphims have betrayed you, do what David did: Make your prayer to your Father. And then lay hold of the promise of deliverance and guidance.



55 *To the chief Musician on Neginoth, Maschil, A Psalm of David.*

Not only did Doeg and the Ziphims betray David, but his son, Absalom, rebelled against him. Psalm 55 deals with the period when Absalom launched his insurrection against him.

In verses 1 through 8, we feel David's distress. In verses 9 through 15, we sense his indignation. In verses 16 through 23, we hear his confidence in his Lord . . .

Psalm 55:1–8
Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication. Attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise; Because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked: for they cast iniquity upon me, and in wrath they hate me. My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me. And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. Selah. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest.

Can't you relate to David? Sometimes, don't you just feel like flying away? You feel pain and heartache, wondering why everything is going wrong or everything is coming down all around you. David surely felt this way as his own son turned against him.

In verses 9 through 15, we read of David's indignation toward Ahithophel. Ahithophel was once David's closest confidante, counselor, and friend. But Ahithophel turned against David and joined Absalom in his rebellion . . .

Psalm 55:9–14
Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues: for I have seen violence and strife in the city. Day and night they go about it upon the walls thereof: mischief also and sorrow are in the midst of it. Wickedness is in the midst thereof: deceit and guile depart not from her streets. For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine

acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company.

"If it was an outsider, if it was an antagonist, I could deal with it," David writes. "But it was one who was close to me who betrayed me."

If you have felt David's pain, know this: You're in good company, for not only are you in the company of David, but in the company of the Son of David, Jesus Himself. "If they treat Me this way, they'll treat you the same," Jesus said (John 15:20). It's part of life. It's hard. It's sad. But don't be offended. Don't be surprised. Don't be discouraged because when Jesus comes back, all of those relationships will be perfectly and beautifully restored. A solution might never come in this life, but when Jesus comes back, everything will be right.

The longer I walk with the Lord, the more I long for His coming because I see things only He can straighten out, problems only He can solve. I try to solve them, and they only get messier. But when He comes back, He'll hit the bull's-eye.

Psalm 55:15
Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them.

I don't think the lesson here is for us to say to those who have deserted us, "Let death come to you and may you go quickly to hell." Rather, it is to realize that the Old Testament presents physical pictures and illustrations of what we see taking place spiritually in our New Testament days.

Don't you find yourself feeling indignation in your heart toward those demonic spirits that are causing misunderstanding and hurt? I do—and it manifests itself frequently in my prayer life when I do battle against the enemy and take authority with real fervency. I'm tired of Satan causing division and hurt.

Psalm 55:16–19
As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice. He hath delivered my soul in peace from

the battle that was against me: for there were many with me. God shall hear, and afflict them, even he that abideth of old. Selah. Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.

"Why are there so many changes in my life?" people ask. "I just get settled, and then a catastrophe comes my way. Something unsettling happens."

The answer is that change keeps us dependent upon the Lord and keeps our eyes fixed on Him. Without change, we have a tendency to fall into lethargy. Without change, we are vulnerable to apathy. Without change, we settle in our lees . . .

> Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed.
>
> Jeremiah 48:11

The allusion here is to the practice of winemakers in Jeremiah's day of pouring wine from vessel to vessel as it aged so that the wine wouldn't take on the flavor of the vessel itself. That's what God does with us. He pours us from vessel to vessel by changing our circumstances, by jarring us out of our complacency, in order to purify us, to make us a sparkling, bubbling, effervescent wine that might bring joy and refreshment to others.

Psalm 55:20
He hath put forth his hands against such as be at peace with him: he hath broken his covenant.

In joining with Absalom, Ahithophel broke his covenant with David.

Psalm 55:21
The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords.

David likens Ahithophel's words to drawn swords. So too, the author of Hebrews likens God's Word to a sword. The difference, however, is that while Ahithophel's words were used to disguise that which was in his heart, the Word of God brings to light the very thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

Psalm 55:22, 23
Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in thee.

In the wake of Ahithophel's defection, David calls for a renewed commitment to an ever-faithful God. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," Jesus promised (Hebrews 13:5). And it's a promise He'll never break.

56 *To the chief Musician upon Jonath-elem-rechokim, Michtam of David, when the Philistines took him in Gath.*

Psalm 56 was written when David was seeking refuge in the Philistine city of Gath. Not yet king, David was hiding from Saul. Eventually, however, the men of Gath came to their king, Achish, saying, "Do you know who has come to town? David—the one about whom they sing in Israel, 'Saul has slain his thousand, but David his ten thousands.' And one of those ten thousands was our own hero, Goliath."

Realizing he had been discovered, David knew he was in trouble. And it was at this point that he penned this psalm . . .

Psalm 56:1–7
Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me. Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High.

What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul. Shall they escape by iniquity? in thine anger cast down the people, O God.

Here, David declares, "Lord, You know what I'm dealing with. You know what I'm going through. Be merciful to me."

We also can say, "Lord, You know our wanderings—how sometimes we miss the mark, get off track, find ourselves smack in the middle of the world's territory, stuck in Gath."

Psalm 56:8
Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?

"Lord, You record the things I'm crying about, the things I'm dealing with, the things I'm working through," David writes. Malachi also makes mention of a book of remembrance . . .

Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.

Malachi 3:16

The Hebrew word translated "hearkened" speaks of a dog perking up its ears when it hears the call of its master. Thus, according to Malachi, the ears of our Father "perk up" when He hears His children talking to each other about Him, and that He writes it in a book of remembrance. This means that when you talk with someone about the Lord, He listens in, writes it down, and keeps it in a scrapbook, of sorts.

David is in a place where he probably shouldn't be, yet his heart is still toward his Father and God knows that. I'm convinced that when we're in heaven, we're going to be blown away by how much our Father loved us, even when we were in Gath.

Here, we sense that David has come into the understanding that there can be no triumph without trouble. Trouble never leaves you in the same place it found you. It will either make you bitter or better. Jeremiah preached for years, but not a single person responded. In fact, they threatened his life, threw him into prison, and labeled him a false prophet. Finally in his frustration, Jeremiah complained to the Lord . . .

> If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?
>
> Jeremiah 12:5

"Jeremiah, if you're getting tired racing the footmen, how will you be able to handle the real trials that are coming?" the Lord asks. "If you're faltering in the land of peace, how will you make it when you're taken from the land of Jordan into a more difficult arena?" God is not condemning Jeremiah, but simply reminding him that the struggles he was facing were to strengthen him for that which was coming.

This life is not for recreation but for preparation. Do you know that? The Lord is preparing us not only for what He knows is coming ten or twenty years from now, but also for the ages beyond. Why? Because He knows there will be significant things for us to do.

> **Psalm 56:9**
> **When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me.**

Even in Gath, David knew God was for him. Make note of that and never forget it, gang. God is *for* us. And if God be for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31). When did God prove that He was for us? Not when we were

in church, not when we were walking with Him, but when we were at the worst place, for it was when we were sinners that Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). David knew something of this. A man after God's own heart, he knew the heart of the Lord.

Psalm 56:10–13
In God will I praise his word: in the LORD will I praise his word. In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?

"God," David prayed, "You have rescued me from death previously. Therefore, I know you'll rescue me from this place presently." We can say the same thing, for God has rescued us from eternal death. Therefore, I know He'll see us through and do what's best for us . . .

> He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?
>
> Romans 8:32

If God spared not His Son to rescue you from eternal death, then you must know He's going to give you whatever you have need of presently. God is not mad at you or down on you, gang. He's *for* you. He proved it on the Cross of Calvary. Therefore, be confident of this very thing: that He who began a good work in you will indeed be faithful to complete it—even in the Philistine city of Gath (Philippians 1:6).



57

To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtam of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave.

Psalm 57 deals with the mercy of God. Hiding from Saul, David was camped out in a cave at EnGedi, near the Dead Sea. When Saul made his way into the same cave, not knowing David was already there, David's men were jubilant. "This is your opportunity to wipe Saul out!" they said. But David wouldn't do that. Instead, he merely cut a piece of cloth from Saul's skirt—more than likely from the hem of the garment that would have spoken of Saul's pedigree and position. You see, in Bible days, knots were tied to the hems of garments in such a way that they signified a man's family, tribe, and position. Thus, by cutting the garment of Saul, David, in a sense, was cutting off Saul's position, Later, we are told, David's heart smote him, for he knew he must not touch the Lord's anointed (1 Samuel 24:5, 6).

Maybe there's someone chasing you down, hurling spears in your direction, trying to wipe you out, treating you unfairly or cruelly. Here's what you need to remember: that person is anointed by the Lord to work His purposes in your life, to make you into the man or woman He desires you to be in order that you might rule with Him much more effectively. If I retaliate and throw spears back, I'm missing the point, missing what God is doing in my life. The Lord knows. He'll remove Saul in due season. But in the meantime, any given person or situation in your life could be the very instrument God is using to make you into a better person than you otherwise would be. And David understood this.

Psalm 57:1–3
Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast. I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me. He shall send from heaven, and save from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth his mercy and his truth.

In clipping Saul's garment, David knew that he had missed God's best. So he asks the Lord to be merciful to him. "Blessed are the merciful," Jesus said, "for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). David had shown mercy in not lopping off Saul's head. Thus he could ask for mercy to be shown to him.

In Luke 6, Jesus talks about the importance of mercy . . .

> But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.
>
> Luke 6:35–38

"Give, and it shall be given unto you." Jesus isn't talking about money. He's talking about mercy. Every one of us is in need of mercy. We all drop the ball. We all fall short. God has been merciful to us—but we need mercy from each other, as well. Therefore, if you want to receive mercy in your hour of difficulty, be merciful to others.

When people were spitting on Him, hurling curses at Him, Jesus didn't pray, "Father, forgive them when they realize what they've done and repent of it." No, He prayed, "Father, forgive them even now because they don't understand what they're doing" (see Luke 23:34).

That's always the way it is. When people are mean-spirited and throwing spears, it's because they don't see the big picture, the biblical perspective. That is why we need to do what Jesus did. We don't need to be vengeful, we need to be merciful. We don't need to throw spears back at them. We need to pray for them.

> **Psalm 57:4, 5**
> **My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth.**

Even though he was encamped among wild beasts and armed enemies, David's concern was not for his own safety, but that God be exalted.

Psalm 57:6
They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. Selah.

Hunters dug pits and covered them with brush to catch their unsuspecting prey. Although David was Saul's prey, however, he was not unsuspecting. He knew Saul would eventually fall into his own pit. And he ultimately did, on Mount Gil-boa (1 Samuel 31).

Psalm 57:7
My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.

With his enemies surrounding him, David was able to say, "My heart is fixed." We can say the same thing. How? By fixing our eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2).

Psalm 57:8
Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early.

"I myself will awake early," David said, or, literally, "I will waken the dawn." If anyone could have been justified in sleeping in, it would have been David. But David said, "I'll be up before the sun, singing God's praises."

Psalm 57:9
I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations.

Being chased by Saul day after day, week after week, David nonetheless said, "My heart is fixed." When things are grim, when they feel they're in a cave of despair and despondency, people in the world need a fix—of a drug

or a drink. Not David. He said, "The only fix that will ultimately see me through is to praise God."

Haven't you found over and over again, that, even when everything is kind of dark and grim, when you start praising the Lord and worshiping Him, the atmosphere changes radically? David had discovered the same thing, for nothing could shake his determination to praise God.

Psalm 57:10, 11
For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: let thy glory be above all the earth.

Sometimes people say, "I know I'm not supposed to be bitter at her or upset with him, but I can't help it. What can I do?" I suggest two simple keys: First, pray for your enemies. Who is the person who bugs you? I dare you to pray, "Lord, bless him. Guide his steps. Draw him to You. Work wonders in his life." You see, when we pray that way for our enemies, something happens. Yes, they may change—but whether or not they change, our feelings and perspective about them changes because we pour treasure into them through prayer. And Jesus said that wherever our treasure is, there will our heart be also (Luke 12:34). I've found time and again that when I pray for people who irritate me, I become interested in them, wondering what the Lord is doing in answer to my prayer.

Second, come to the Lord's Table. Eat of His body and drink of His blood. And as you do, remember that His blood was shed and His body was broken not only for you, but for the very person who bugs you. Jesus is passionately in love with the very person who irritates you. He paid completely and fully for their sin, just as He did for yours.

How did David ultimately feel about Saul? What did he do when Saul died? The man after God's own heart wept (2 Samuel 1:11, 12).

Most commentators agree that Psalm 58 was probably written early in David's reign as he became aware of the corruption in the judicial system under Saul's reign.

Psalm 58:1–3
Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men? Yea, in heart ye work wickedness; ye weigh the violence of your hands in the earth. The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.

Maybe it was because David declared "In sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5) that he understood that even the seemingly righteous would be prone to sin.

Psalm 58:4, 5
Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely.

David understood that the wicked were like snakes who wouldn't listen to truth no matter how the song was played.

Psalm 58:6, 7
Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O LORD. Let them melt away as waters which run continually: when he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces.

In Ephesians 6, we are told that we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers. We must come against these entities with energy and vehemence. David's prayer models this.

In 2 Kings 13, we read that when the Syrians threatened the people of Israel, Elisha told Joash, king of Israel, to strike arrows from a quiver against the ground and then shoot one out of the window as a symbol of the Lord's deliverance. When Joash tapped the arrows two or three times before

shooting one out the window, Elisha looked at him and said, "You should have smitten the arrows five or six times. But because you only tapped them thrice, you shall only have partial victory."

In the battles we wage, I think we sometimes pray only lethargically and sleepily at best. I sense the Lord saying, "Stir up your soul. Get engaged. Get involved. Bind the work of the enemy. Pray with expectancy." David prayed that way about his physical enemies and we must do the same concerning the spiritual forces of darkness that wage war against us and those around us.

Psalm 58:8, 9
As a snail which melteth, let every one of them pass away: like the untimely birth of a woman, that they may not see the sun. Before your pots can feel the thorns, he shall take them away as with a whirlwind, both living, and in his wrath.

In light of David's prayer concerning his enemies, sometimes God's judgment is as quick and decisive as a wind that blows a fire out before the kindling of thorns even has a chance to warm a pot.

Psalm 58:10, 11
The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.

We are to love people. We are to pray passionately against the forces that bind them. But the Lord will come one day to judge righteously and rule with a rod of iron (Revelation 19:15). And when He does, we will rejoice indeed.



59

To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtam of David; when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him.

In David's younger years, he had played the harp for Saul to calm him. But after Saul threw spears at him on three occasions, David realized Saul was out to get him. So he escaped in the middle of the night. This is the background for Psalm 59 . . .

Psalm 59:1–15
Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God: defend me from them that rise up against me. Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men. For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul: the mighty are gathered against me; not for my transgression, nor for my sin, O LORD. They run and prepare themselves without my fault: awake to help me, and behold. Thou therefore, O LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel, awake to visit all the heathen: be not merciful to any wicked transgressors. Selah. They return at evening: they make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city. Behold, they belch out with their mouth: swords are in their lips: for who, say they, doth hear? But thou, O LORD, shalt laugh at them; thou shalt have all the heathen in derision. Because of his strength will I wait upon thee: for God is my defence. The God of my mercy shall pre vent me: God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies. Slay them not, lest my people forget: scatter them by thy power; and bring them down, O Lord our shield. For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips let them even be taken in their pride: and for cursing and lying which they speak. Consume them in wrath, consume them, that they may not be: and let them know that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth. Selah. And at evening let them return; and let them make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city. Let them wander up and down for meat, and grudge if they be not satisfied.

David likens those watching his house, waiting to devour him, to dogs. The apostle Paul would use this same analogy . . .

Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and

rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Philippians 3:2, 3

The concision were legalizers who followed Paul saying, "Paul preached grace, but it's not that easy. It's not that simple. If you're really serious about following God, you must keep these rules and those regulations."

Who are the true people of God? Those who worship God in the spirit, those who rejoice in Christ Jesus, those who have no confidence in their flesh. Period.

Psalm 59:16, 17
But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble. Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing: for God is my defence, and the God of my mercy.

"Dogs, you can snap at me. Legalists, you can find fault with me. But God is my defense, so I will sing." David went through trial after trial—yet he always ended with a song in his heart and praise on his lips because he hoped and believed in God. We can, too.

"But I'm not getting what I want," you protest. "How can I praise God?"

If you're not getting what you want, then praise God that you're not getting what you don't want. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not," Jeremiah declared (Lamentations 3:22). We deserve terrible things to come upon us. We deserve to be consumed. But God has been merciful to us. So, even if you're not getting what you want, praise God that you're not getting what you don't want. And keep singing to God, for truly He is a God of strong defense and matchless mercy.



60 To the chief Musician upon Shushan-eduth, Michtam of David, to teach; when he strove with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah,

when Joab returned, and smote of Edom in the valley of salt twelve thousand.

King David was at war against the Syrians to the north. As he launched a preemptive attack against them, Edom took advantage of the situation. Seeing that Israel was vulnerable, they attacked Judah to the south and made their way to Jerusalem. This troubled David greatly, for there is no record of him being directed by the Lord in his attack. He sent part of his army, led by Joab, to go down south, while he was still fighting in the northern region, to launch an attack against the Edomites. Psalm 60 was written when David received word that Israel had been attacked and before Joab was discharged to defeat the Edomites.

Psalm 60:1, 2
O God, thou hast cast us off, thou hast scattered us, thou hast been displeased; O turn thyself to us again. Thou hast made the earth to tremble; thou hast broken it: heal the breaches thereof; for it shaketh.

Some commentators believe David is alluding to an earthquake. More than likely, however, he was shook up internally upon hearing reports that Jerusalem had been attacked by the Edomites.

Psalm 60:3, 4
Thou hast shewed thy people hard things: thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment. Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth. Selah.

"We're flying Your flag, Lord. Don't allow Jerusalem to be conquered," David prayed.

Psalm 60:5–7
That thy beloved may be delivered; save with thy right hand, and hear me. God hath spoken in his holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth. Gilead is

mine, and Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my lawgiver;

"I've given you these territories," God declares. "I've given you this heritage. It's Mine. I'm in control." In so saying, God not only shows an awareness of Israel's difficulties, but a readiness to defend His possession.

Psalm 60:8 (a)
Moab is my washpot . . .

In God's estimation, Moab, an enemy of Israel, was washed up, wiped out.

Psalm 60:8 (b)
. . . over Edom will I cast out my shoe . . .

So little regard did God have for Edom, another enemy of Israel, it's as if He's saying He would empty the pebbles in His shoe over her.

Psalm 60:8 (c)
. . . Philistia, triumph thou because of me.

Newer translations render this verse, "I will triumph over the Philistines."

Psalm 60:9
Who will bring me into the strong city? who will lead me into Edom?

The "strong city" refers to Petra, the Edomite capital, thought to be invincible. Although David had dispatched Joab, his general, to go south to engage the Edomites in battle, he himself desired to go.

Psalm 60:10–12
Wilt not thou, O God, which hadst cast us off? and thou, O God, which didst not go out with our armies? Give us help from

trouble: for vain is the help of man. Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies.

At this point, David realizes that the secret of his strength, the source of his success did not lie in the might of his armies but in the might of the Almighty. His armies were nothing unless they were being empowered, anointed, and directed by the Lord. Years later, David would forget this and listen to the subtle suggestion of Satan and fall into his most grievous sin. When most people think of David's most grievous sin, they think of his affair with Bathsheba. But that was not his greatest sin, according to Scripture. His greatest sin was the day he decided to number his army (2 Samuel 24).

In counting his soldiers, David showed he was relying on his own strength and resources. No longer would he say, "Vain is the help of men. It's You, Lord, and only You who allows us to do valiantly." Instead, he would look to his own military machine.

How tragic it is that, perhaps as we grow older in the things of God, sometimes, like David, we begin to depend on our own abilities, resources, or personalities. In earlier days of service, we walked in dependency upon the Lord in fear and trembling with much prayer. The good news is that we can return to those early days the moment we remember that it's only with the simplicity and dependence of a little child that we enter the kingdom (Matthew 18:3, 4).



61 *To the chief Musician upon Neginah, A Psalm of David.*

David was a man who knew how to pray. We think of him as a person of worship. And he was that. But he was also a warrior in prayer. Psalm 61 is a psalm in which we can hear the heart of David expressed in this prayer to his Father. It was written as he fled from Jerusalem, following his son, Absalom's, insurrection. It was to be played upon the neginah, a stringed instrument played by the striking of a small hammer.

Psalm 61:1
Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer.

This man after God's heart, this giant of faith was no sissy. As a young boy, David took on a bear and then a lion. He slew a giant and took on three hundred Philistines. He leaped over walls and led troops in battle. He was by no means a crybaby. But he discovered a secret in life: the importance of crying to the Lord. And he did so freely.

In the following eight verses, we see six benefits of prayer . . .

Psalm 61:2 (a)
From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee . . .

As he fled Jerusalem, David left behind wives, family, friends, and the city he loved so deeply. Yet he could reach out to them through prayer. So too, even though I might be driven to the wilderness, even though I might feel like an exile or an outcast, I can still pray. In fact, I can pray for anyone regardless of where they might be geographically or emotionally. Prayer can reach from the end of the earth.

Psalm 61:2 (b)
. . . when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

Not only can prayer reach farther, but it can go higher. No matter how tall the skyscrapers when you fly into a city, they always look small from the plane. You might feel your problems are overwhelmingly tall, but when you pray, you get above them and gain an entirely different perspective.

The Rock to which we are led is, of course, Jesus Christ—the Rock of our salvation.

Psalm 61:3, 4
For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings. Selah.

Prayer not only allows us to reach farther and go higher, but it also allows us to come closer. The "covert of thy wings" is a reference to the ark of the covenant. Atop the ark were two golden angels whose touching wings formed an arch over the mercy seat. It was at the mercy seat God met with His people (Exodus 25:22). I have discovered over and over again that, even though I come in a moment of misery, a day of difficulty, or a time of trouble, I can come boldly into the Lord's presence through prayer. And He meets me because of His mercy (Hebrews 4:16).

Psalm 61:5
For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name.

Prayer also allows us to grow richer. We become so much richer in the things of the Lord, richer in our experience with Him and our knowledge about Him as we come to Him in prayer.

Psalm 61:6, 7
Thou wilt prolong the king's life: and his years as many generations. He shall abide before God for ever: O prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve him.

Prayer allows us to live longer. Even the medical community is discovering that prayer can affect every part of a person's being. And, even when we leave this earth, we who know the Lord will live forever.

Psalm 61:8
So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows.

Prayer enables us to be happier. "Ask and you shall receive that your joy may be full," Jesus said (see John 16:24). In other words, Jesus asks us to ask Him. Why? Because He "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20).

Even at the time he was being smitten, even when his heart was broken, David knew things would work out. I have found the same to be true. Even

before you see the solution come your way, something happens in your soul when you take time to pray. Like David, you find yourself rejoicing.



62 *To the chief Musician, to Jeduthun, A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 62 continues with the story of Absalom's rebellion against his father. This was a psalm to be orchestrated by Jeduthun, one of the chief musicians (1 Chronicles 25:3).

Psalm 62:1–4
Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved. How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? ye shall be slain all of you: as a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence. They only consult to cast him down from his excellency: they delight in lies: they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly. Selah.

In addition to leading the nation into a deeper understanding of the ways of the Father, David led them successfully militarily and politically as well. Yet Absalom's camp didn't acknowledge this. Instead, they lied about him. Knowing this, David gives advice to his soul . . .

Psalm 62:5
My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.

In verse 1, David said, "Truly my soul waits upon God." Here, in verse 5, he tells his soul to wait only on God, as if to say, "You know it theologically, now do it practically."

"Be still," David tells himself. And that is what we must do, as well. Sometimes, when we're criticized unfairly, we think we have to do something, or, at the very least, say something. But more often than not, the

most effective thing we can do is simply to wait. Many are the times I've regretted doing something. But I've never regretted waiting.

Psalm 62:6
He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be moved.

After advising his soul to be still, David tells it to be sure. In verse 2, he said, "I shall not be greatly moved." Here, in verse 6, he says he shall not be moved at all. In other words, he's stabilizing his own soul.

The Bible declares that the power of life and death is in the tongue (Proverbs 18:21). If we speak words of anxiety, fear, and trepidation, death will creep in. But when we speak the Word of God boldly and confidently, life abounds.

> . . . for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.
>
> Hebrews 13:5 (b), 6

Did you catch that? "He hath said . . . so that we may boldly say . . . ." What hath He said? He said, "I will never leave you." So I tell myself that, as well. He said, "All things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28), so I speak those words to my soul. He said, "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4), so I tell myself to rejoice.

David is strengthening his own soul by speaking to it the things the Lord had spoken to him. And we can do the same thing.

Psalm 62:7
In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.

"Be still," David said. "Be sure." And, finally, "be strong," realizing that his strength was in God.

After advising his soul in verses 6 and 7, David will admonish his subjects in verses 8 through 12 . . .

Psalm 62:8
Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah.

"Trust in God," David says, "and pour out your heart to Him." Can you remember the last time you spent a significant chunk of time pouring out your heart to the Lord? I'm not talking about the discipline of daily devotions, as good as that is. I'm talking about crying to the Lord from the seeming end of the earth. If you do that, I guarantee you'll find that God is truly your strength and refuge.

Psalm 62:9
Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.

"Trust in the Lord and not in men, regardless of their position." We hear these things and we agree. But then we get into trouble and what do we do? We don't seek the Lord. We don't move into a time of fasting and prayer. We go to one another with our problems and try to figure out how to get help from people the Bible calls lighter than vanity. How we need to seek the Lord.

Psalm 62:10
Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.

Don't trust in men. Don't trust in might. And don't trust in money. Money has a way of disappearing. In fact, the Bible says it has wings (Proverbs 23:5).

Psalm 62:11

God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.

Only God has power to see you through. Only God has the authority to solve all problems.

Psalm 62:12 (a)
Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy . . .

God is not only powerful, He's merciful. Men of low degree might be merciful, but they lack power. Men of high degree have power, but they lack mercy. Only God has the winning combination.

Psalm 62:12 (b)
. . . for thou renderest to every man according to his work.

"What must we do to do the works of God?" they asked Jesus.

"This is the work of God," He answered, "that you believe on Him whom the Father hath sent" (see John 6:28, 29).

If you truly believe in Jesus, you have done the singular work of God. That's the glorious good news of the gospel of grace. It's not what we do. It's what He has done that matters. It's not who we are. It's who He is that counts. And He'll render to us according to that singular work. He'll bless us if we simply trust in Him.



63 *A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.*

Having fled from his son, David is in the desert region in Judaea. It's dry, arid, and the conditions are brutal. Tradition has it that this psalm was read every day by the early church fathers.

Psalm 63:1 (a)
O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee . . .

There's something about seeking God early in the day that I find extremely helpful. The manna came down morning by morning but by the time the sun began to rise, it would melt and disappear (Exodus 16:21). So too, if we want to be nourished spiritually, many of us have found that we need to seek the Lord early because, once the day gets underway, temperatures rise, activities and demands jostle for our attention, and we don't have time like we do early in the day to wait upon the Lord. This isn't legalism, just a piece of practical advice.

Psalm 63:1 (b), 2
. . . my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.

David was in a dry place physically and, evidently, spiritually as well. During this time, he remembers what he experienced when he was in the sanctuary. We need to remember the vision we had on the mountain to enable us to go through the dryness of the valleys. Call to mind the special times God has met you, the times He has been real to you.

Why don't we experience the sweetness of the sanctuary or the thrill of the mountaintop constantly? So that we will learn to walk by faith and not by feeling. Our faith will grow, our walk will mature if, during times of dryness, we determine to hang in there and keep going.

What are we to do when we feel dry, when we feel as though we're in a spiritual desert? In this psalm, we see what David did . . .

Psalm 63:3, 4
Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name.

Even though David was in a dry place, he sought to bring blessing *to* God. The word "bless" means "to convey happiness or prosperity." We can't bring God prosperity, but we can bring Him happiness with our lifted hands.

When our two-year-old granddaughter, Bailey, met us at the airport recently, she came running our direction with her hands up. Oh, how seeing

this little redheaded girl running to me with uplifted hands blessed my heart. And that's how our Father feels about each of us.

Psalm 63:5–7
My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.

David meditates *on* God. If you can't sleep, don't toss and turn. Don't try to figure out situations. Meditate. How? Think about one of your favorite gospel stories. For example, think of Jesus touching the blind man's eyes and the joy that he must have experienced. Think about Jesus and how He ministered and you'll find yourself entering into new realms of understanding.

Psalm 63:8–10
My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me. But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. They shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes.

David seeks *after* God. The term "followeth hard" is also seen in the Book of Ruth. When Naomi told her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, to return to Moab, Scripture tells us that Orpah kissed Naomi, but Ruth clave to her (Ruth 1:14). The word "clave" is literally "followed hard." In other words, Ruth said, "I'm going to stick by you. I don't care how dry it gets. I don't care how hot it is. I don't care how unfruitful it might be initially. I'm going to cling to you day by day." And that's what Ruth's great-grandson, David, said concerning the Lord. Oh, that we might say it as well.

Psalm 63:11
But the king shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.

David rejoices *in* God. David chose to bless God. He chose to meditate on God. He chose to seek God. And here, he chooses to rejoice in God. It's all a matter of choice.



64 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 64 is believed to have been written in the same context as Psalm 63, during the period of Absalom's insurrection.

Psalm 64:1–4
Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer: preserve my life from fear of the enemy. Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity: Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words: That they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not.

David had prayed for forgiveness. He had received God's mercy. But his enemies were still shooting at him.

Psalm 64:5, 6
They encourage themselves in an evil matter: they commune of laying snares privily; they say, Who shall see them? They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search: both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep.

In other words, David's enemies were rummaging around in his past.

Psalm 64:7
But God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded.

In verse 3, David spoke of the enemies' arrows. Here, he speaks of God's single arrow. God only needs one arrow because He doesn't miss. It might be months or years later, but in due time, He will come to your defense. And when He strings His arrow and lets it fly, you can be sure it will hit its mark.

Psalm 64:8, 9
So they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves: all that see them shall flee away. And all men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider of his doing.

The words and actions of David's enemies would ultimately backfire. The tragic proof of this is that when Ahithophel realized Absalom would not take his advice, knowing Absalom was doomed, he hung himself (2 Samuel 17:23).

If I am rummaging around in someone's problems or past, bringing up his shortcomings and failure, it will eventually come back and strike me. That is why Paul would warn us that if we bite each other, we'll be devoured by each other (Galatians 5:15).

Psalm 64:10
The righteous shall be glad in the LORD, and shall trust in him; and all the upright in heart shall glory.

The fear of the enemy in verse 1 is replaced by the gladness of the Lord here in verse 10 as David is reminded of the Lord's ability to deal with his enemies.



65 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm and Song of David.*

Psalm 65 is a celebration of both a physical and spiritual harvest. In David's day, it celebrated the harvest of the first fruits, the crop that

promised a great harvest in a later season. But it is also a prophecy of what will take place in that grand and glorious day when Jesus rules and reigns on this planet.

In verses 1 through 4, we see God's graciousness. In verses 5 through 13, we see His government.

Psalm 65:1
Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed.

"Praise waits for Thee," or, literally, "Praise is silent before Thee." Sometimes, I find myself jumping for joy at the mercy of God. But it is equally important and valid to stand in silence before His majesty. Yes, there's a time to shout for joy. But there's also a time to be hushed in holiness.

Psalm 65:2
O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.

See in your mind's eye a harvest of people—not just crops, but souls.

Psalm 65:3, 4
Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away. Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.

Aware of his own sinfulness, David is amazed that he was chosen to be part of God's family, to abide in His house. Truly, it is because of the Lord's mercy that all of us are not consumed (Lamentations 3:22). Like David, we are unspeakably blessed to be part of God's kingdom, and not just us, but those who refuse the mark of the beast and will, therefore, make it through the Tribulation (Revelation 20:4).

Psalm 65:5–8

By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea: Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains; being girded with power: Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people. They also that dwell in the uttermost parts are afraid at thy tokens: thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice.

The Tribulation has come to a conclusion. Mountains have blown up. Islands have disappeared. Blood has been flowing. But, following the awesome demonstration of God's power, people are drawn to Him, coming from all four corners of the earth. In that day, there will be an eradication of all that is false—no more cold, philosophical platitudes, no more hot, hateful tempers flaring. Paganism will be put away. False religions will be put down.

Psalm 65:9 (a)
Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water . . .

The river of God will flow from Jerusalem on the day Jesus comes back. On that day, the Mount of Olives will split in two. From the right side of the altar of the temple, a river will flow to the region of En-gedi and the Dead Sea, causing that which was dead to come to life again in a proliferation of trees, fruit, and blessings (Revelation 22). For 1,000 years, things will be the way they were supposed to be before sin figured into the equation.

Psalm 65:9 (b)–13 (a)
. . . thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures

are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn . . .

Zechariah says that in the kingdom age, rain will fall everywhere except upon the people who refuse to worship the King (14:17). In David's day, God's gracious gift of rain resulted in green pastures and satisfied flocks—in abundance, fatness, and goodness. So too, the gift of the water of God's Spirit results in fruit that cannot be found anywhere else (Galatians 5:22, 23). But He doesn't force it on anyone.

Psalm 65:13 (b)
. . . they shout for joy, they also sing.

The psalm that began with hushed praise ends with shouts of joy as David looks ahead and looks up.



66 *To the chief Musician, A Song or Psalm.*

Most commentators believe that Psalm 66 was penned by Hezekiah, king of Judah, after the Lord delivered the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the attack of the Assyrian army. Although the city was surrounded by 185,000 Assyrians, Isaiah had prophesied that not a single arrow from an Assyrian bow would make its way into Jerusalem (37:33). Indeed, that night, an angel of the Lord came and slaughtered the entire army (2 Kings). It seems Hezekiah wrote this psalm in celebration of this event.

This psalm is divided into two parts. The first half, verses 1 through 12, would be sung by a choir. The second half, verses 13 through 20, would be sung by a soloist, perhaps by Hezekiah himself.

Psalm 66:1
Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands:

A joyful noise doesn't require skill—only desire. Even I can do that! So can you.

Psalm 66:2–4
Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious. Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works! through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee. All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy name. Selah.

This first stanza deals with the God of all peoples. The second stanza deals with the God of Israel . . .

Psalm 66:5
Come and see the works of God: he is terrible in his doing toward the children of men.

Those who, like the Assyrians, have the audacity to oppose God's people will see how powerful the God of Israel is.

Psalm 66:6 (a)
He turned the sea into dry land . . .

As Moses led the people out of Egypt toward the Promised Land, the Red Sea parted before them (Exodus 14).

Psalm 66:6 (b)
. . . they went through the flood on foot: there did we rejoice in him.

After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites made their way to the Jordan to enter into the Promised Land. Again, God miraculously parted the waters and they walked across on dry land (Joshua 3).

Psalm 66:7

He ruleth by his power for ever; his eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah.

Be they Assyrians, Canaanites, or Egyptians, let them be forewarned.

Psalm 66:8–12
O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard: Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved. For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins. Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.

The purest ore is produced in the hottest furnace. The brightest thunderbolts come from the darkest clouds. The Jewish people have indeed been through the furnace and through stormy days. But there's a purity and a wonder that will be produced in them as they make their way through the coming storm of the Tribulation. The invitation is this: See how God has preserved us. See how He has brought us through.

And now the soloist begins to sing . . .

Psalm 66:13–15
I will go into thy house with burnt offerings: I will pay thee my vows, Which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble. I will offer unto thee burnt sacrifices of fatlings, with the incense of rams; I will offer bullocks with goats. Selah.

If indeed Hezekiah is the author, he no doubt felt pressured, troubled, concerned by the Assyrians. Here, he says he will carry through with what he had promised.

We are told to be careful about making vows lightly (Ecclesiastes 5:4, 5). But something wonderful can happen when we are inspired to make a heartfelt commitment or vow. I think of Hannah. "Lord, if You bless me with a child, I will give him to You," she prayed. The Lord heard her vow and

blessed Hannah with Samuel, one of the greatest of the prophets (1 Samuel 1; 2).

Baptism is one such vow, for through it we say, "Lord, I believe in You. I give my life to You. I want to live for You." God honors that kind of commitment.

Psalm 66:16
Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.

If our hearts overflow with thanksgiving for what the Lord has done for us in rescuing us from destruction and from the attack of the enemy, let us be those who continue to praise His name.

Psalm 66:17, 18
I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:

In his day of adversity, when the Assyrians surrounded the city, Hezekiah cried to the Lord, knowing if he harbored sin in his heart, the Lord wouldn't hear him. If your prayers don't seem to get through, it may be due to unconfessed sin. It's not that God is mad at you. Rather, He loves you so much that if you're walking contrary to His will, He will be strangely silent in order that you might ask Him to search your heart and to show you what is amiss (Psalm 139:23).

Peter says, "Husbands, if you're not loving your wives properly, it will hinder your prayers" (see 1 Peter 3:7). Maybe that's why your prayers have crashed recently.

James says "You have not because you ask not. You ask and receive not because you ask amiss" (4:2, 3). When you don't see results in your prayer, come before the Lord and ask Him why.

Psalm 66:19, 20
But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me.

The psalmist acknowledges that it was not due to the piety of his prayer or the purity of his heart that his prayer was heard. It was due simply to God's mercy.



67 *To the chief Musician on Neginoth, A Psalm or Song.*

Psalm 67
God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah. That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Selah. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.

Psalm 67 swings on the hinge of the first word of verse 2: that. "Bless us God," the psalmist writes, "*that* Thy way may be known upon the earth." In other words, "Bless us, God, so that we, in turn, might be a blessing."

So many teachings center on how we can be healthy, wealthy, or happy as if health, wealth, and happiness were ends in themselves. God does want to bless us, but the purpose is that all the earth may be brought to Him. This was God's intention all along for the people of Israel. They were chosen to be a blessing, a light to all the nations . . .

> . . . I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.
>
> Isaiah 49:6 (b)

"I'm choosing you, Israel, that you might be a light unto the nations, that they might see in you My beauty, My reality and be drawn to Me," God said.

The Jews were to be looking out, reaching out to a world that was lost in darkness. They were to be a light, a witness of who God is. But they lost sight of this calling. In fact, they eventually began to view Gentiles as simply fuel to keep hell hot. They had no compassion for the Gentiles and, as a result, turned inward. As they did, things began to sour.

The same thing can happen to us. Like Israel, we can begin to turn inward. We can lose our desire to share our faith. And, I know from experience, that when I stop sharing my faith, I tend to turn inward and become dry.

In the north of Israel lies the Sea of Galilee. It teems with life. But in the south, there is another body of water: the Dead Sea. There's no life there. Why? In the Sea of Galilee, there is inflow and outflow. The Jordan River comes in and flows through. In the Dead Sea, however, although there is an inflow, there is no outflow. Consequently, the saline content of the water has built up to the point where nothing can grow. The same thing can be true of us spiritually. If you feel like the Dead Sea, it could very well be because there is not an outflow in your life.

If I'm not looking for people to reach out to, I miss my calling, my purpose and suddenly, my walk is dry. Bible study will be boring. Prayer will be meaningless. Devotion will be nonexistent. Praise will be an effort. But when I say, "Lord, bless me so I can go to work and share the gospel, so that I can tell someone he's loved by You," suddenly my prayer life will have purpose, the Word will come alive, and praise will overflow once again.



68 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm or Song of David.*

Psalm 68 is a dedicatory psalm that is believed to have been penned by David after he pitched a tent for the ark he had brought back from the house of Obed-edom (2 Samuel 6). We see in this psalm, most likely written for the dedication service, an invocation in verses 1 through 6, a reiteration in verses 7 through 14, celebration in verses 15 through 19, and an invitation in verses 20 through 23.

Psalm 68:1 (a)
Let God arise . . .

"Let God arise," or, literally, "God has begun to rise."

Psalm 68:1 (b)
. . . let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him.

This is the same phrase Moses used in Numbers 10:35 as God's people set out for the Promised Land.

"Lord, as You come in, let Your enemies fall down." When the Philistines captured the ark and put it in the temple of their half-man, half-fish god, the false god fell down. The Philistines propped him up, only to find him fallen down the next day with his hands and head broken off. Finally, to protect their god, they sent the ark away (1 Samuel 5). That's always the way it is. The key to overcoming the enemy is to bring God into the situation. After all, if you walk into a dark room, you don't curse the darkness or command the darkness to flee. You just turn on the light. The light of the Lord will naturally dispel the darkness of wickedness.

Psalm 68:2
As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.

Maybe you struggle with a habit or a thought pattern. But the more you try to deal with it, the more you find yourself enslaved by it. The key is to let God arise. Worship the Lord. Talk to Him through prayer. Read about Him in the Word. Praise Him in song. Let God arise and as you do, His enemies will perish and melt like wax.

Psalm 68:3–5
But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice. Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH,

and rejoice before him. A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.

Rejoice in the Lord. Sing praise to the Lord. He is a Father to the fatherless. He cares for the widows. In fact, throughout Scripture, we see that God has a special commitment to those who are defenseless.

Psalm 68:6 (a)
God setteth the solitary in families . . .

"It is not good that man be alone," God declared when He created Adam (Genesis 2:18). Seeing Adam's need before Adam even knew he had one, God assigned Adam to name the animals. As Adam named Mr. Giraffe and Mrs. Giraffe, Mr. Hippo and Mrs. Hippo—he must have realized there was a partner for each of them except him. In this way, God made Adam aware of his need. For what purpose? To fulfill it—for it was as Adam slept that God created a woman, a bride, a completer for him.

Psalm 68:6 (b)
. . . he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.

Whether you're bound with chains of addiction or chains of depression, chains of regret or chains of fear, the Lord has come to set you free. If you rebel against Him, however, you'll experience drought in your soul.

After this invocation, we see a reiteration of what God had done in the lives of His people . . .

Psalm 68:7, 8
O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; Selah: The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel.

It's always encouraging to remember how God worked in the past. No doubt David had heard the stories about how the mountain shook at Sinai.

Even though this was before his time, even though he hadn't seen or experienced it, David drew encouragement from God's mighty work in the past.

Psalm 68:9, 10
Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance, when it was weary. Thy congregation hath dwelt therein: thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor.

The Lord does this for me all the time. When I'm weary and find myself getting frustrated, the Lord begins to rain blessings upon me. Have you ever noticed that on a day you don't really pray at all, you just get blessed? Sometimes when you forget to have morning devotions, you just get blessed anyway. Why? Because our God is a loving Father who looks at you and says, "I know you're weary. So I'm just going to rain blessing upon you."

We have a tendency to think God is out to blast us, when in reality, He's out to bless us. The enemy will challenge this again and again. But here we read that even when the land was weary and His people poor, God confirmed them both as His inheritance.

In verses 11 through 14, we move from the wilderness to the conquest of the land in the days of Joshua and the judges . . .

Psalm 68:11, 12 (a)
The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it. Kings of armies did flee apace . . .

When the Word was heard, the enemies fled. God's people weren't victorious because of their military might or technology. They were victorious solely because the Lord gave the Word. How will you be victorious? By believing and proclaiming the Word of the Lord. Publish the Word. Grab hold of a promise in Scripture. Share it—and watch the enemy flee.

Psalm 68:12 (b)
. . . and she that tarried at home divided the spoil.

I believe this refers to Jael, the woman who pounded a spike through the head of the enemy that once controlled her (Judges 5). Jael's example is one that we can follow, for we are told in Romans 6 that we're to reckon the old man of our flesh that once controlled us to be dead. How? Not by driving a spike through his head, but by remembering the spikes that were driven through the hands and feet of Jesus, by realizing the work He did on the Cross.

Psalm 68:13, 14
Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold. When the Almighty scattered kings in it, it was white as snow in Salmon.

The wilderness wanderings were over. God's people were in the Promised Land. The enemy was blown away like snowflakes in a blizzard.

In verses 15 through 19, we see a celebration of their present situation . . .

Psalm 68:15, 16
The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan; an high hill as the hill of Bashan. Why leap ye, ye high hills? this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the LORD will dwell in it for ever.

In the northeastern border of Israel are the hills of Bashan. They're the biggest mountains in the region, peaking at Mount Hermon. Mount Zion, on the other hand, is just a little slope. It's not high or topographically impressive. But, because God chose to dwell there, it was blessed indeed. God's choice of Mount Zion should not be surprising, for He has a habit of choosing the small things, the foolish things of the world to confound the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27). And am I ever glad about that!

Psalm 68:17
The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.

Angels are frequently spoken of as being chariots. Elijah was escorted to heaven in a fiery chariot. When Elisha's servant's eyes were opened, he saw fiery chariots ready to defend them (2 Kings 6).

Psalm 68:18, 19
Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them. Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah.

The initial mention of captives would refer to a military victory. But Paul says it's more than that—it's the Son of David who ascended not to the top of a hill, but all the way to heaven. In Old Testament days, those who died couldn't go directly to heaven because Christ had not yet died for their sins. They went to a place called paradise or Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22). After Jesus died on the Cross, Paul tells us He descended into paradise and led them to heaven. Then He gave gifts to them as He poured out His Spirit (Ephesians 4:8).

Psalm 68:20–23
He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death. But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses. The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring my people again from the depths of the sea: That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same.

The invitation is simple: Be delivered or be destroyed. You can either have salvation and deliverance or destruction. God will rescue you if you let Him. We must tell people that hell is real. The invitation is truly a matter of life and death.

Following the invitation of verses 20 through 23, we see the song of the saved in verses 24 through 27 . . .

Psalm 68:24–27

They have seen thy goings, O God; even the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary. The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; among them were the damsels playing with timbrels. Bless ye God in the congregations, even the Lord, from the fountain of Israel. There is little Benjamin with their ruler, the princes of Judah and their council, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali.

A great procession accompanies the ark as tambourines are played, instruments are sounded, and a great song is sung. David closes with a prayer in verses 28 through 31 and a benediction in verses 32 through 35 . . .

Psalm 68:28–31

Thy God hath commanded thy strength: strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us. Because of thy temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto thee. Rebuke the company of spearmen, the multitude of the bulls, with the calves of the people, till every one submit himself with pieces of silver: scatter thou the people that delight in war. Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.

We see the fulfillment of this in Acts 2 and 8—for Egyptians were no doubt in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and, later, an Ethiopian official who was saved when Philip shared the gospel with him.

Psalm 68:32–35

Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises unto the Lord; Selah: To him that rideth upon the heavens of heavens, which were of old; lo, he doth send out his voice, and that a mighty voice. Ascribe ye strength unto God: his excellency is over Israel, and his strength is in the clouds. O God, thou art terrible out of thy holy places: the God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people. Blessed be God.

David issues an open invitation to any and all who would praise the majesty and mercy, the glory and grace of the God of Israel.



69 *To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim, A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 69 is the Psalm of the Suffering One. We can relate to part of it, but only He can relate to all of it. In this psalm a powerful prophecy is portrayed of what Jesus would endure on the Cross of Calvary. With the exception of Psalm 22, it is the most-quoted psalm in the New Testament. Thinking through what He did for me personally reminds me of two things: how little I know about suffering, and how much Jesus loves me.

In this Song of the Sufferer, we see His condition in the first twelve verses. We hear His cry in verses 13 through 28. And we feel His confidence in verses 29 through 36.

Psalm 69:1, 2
Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.

April 10, 1912. In Southampton, England, 60,000 tons of machinery and marvel began to make its way across the Atlantic Ocean headed for the east coast of this country. The *Titanic* was thought to be unsinkable. Five days later, it lay at the bottom of the ocean in dark, icy water. The *Titanic* hit an iceberg and a three-hundred-foot gash was cut into her side.

Jesus left His home in glory. He was unsinkable. That is, Herod couldn't kill Him. His enemies couldn't touch Him. Even the storms on the sea of Galilee couldn't sink Him. But now He cries out as there would be a gash in His side, not made by an iceberg, but by a spear. He's in deep waters. He's going through indescribable difficulty. He who knew no sin was made sin as He took our sin upon Him (2 Corinthians 5:21), and He feels as though He's drowning.

Psalm 69:3, 4 (a)
I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head . . .

Jesus would quote this verse in John 15:25, acknowledging that He was hated without a cause.

Psalm 69:4 (b)
. . . they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored that which I took not away.

Indeed, Jesus paid that which He didn't owe.

Psalm 69:5
O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee.

How could this be that Jesus would talk of His foolishness, His guilt? Again, it's this mystery and marvel that He who knew no sin was made sin for you and me, identifying with us. He took our foolishness, our stupidity, our sin, our iniquity upon Himself.

Psalm 69:6
Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel.

Even while He's going through deep waters, His soul flooded with anguish as He became sin, Jesus is still concerned about others. Perhaps He's praying for Peter, who had denied Him, or for Thomas, who would doubt Him. Yes, they would be ashamed and confounded initially—but Jesus' prayer would be answered, for they would both go on to become giants of faith ultimately.

Psalm 69:7

Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face.

Shame covered our Lord's face in the form of the spittle of His enemies.

"In my life, Lord, be glorified," we sing. "I have decided to follow Jesus," we sing. "I will serve You because I love You," we sing. "Have Thine own way, Lord," we sing.

And the Lord says, "The way you can serve Me, the way you can follow Me, the way I can be glorified is to allow you to go through deep waters, to feel the pain and hurt of suffering, in order that I can show the world that My people aren't mercenaries, that they don't serve Me only for the blessings I give."

Psalm 69:8
I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children.

John tells us Jesus' brothers didn't believe on Him (7:3). In fact, they wouldn't believe on Him until after He had died and risen from the dead. David prophetically and correctly refers to them as "my mother's children" because Joseph was not Jesus' father.

Psalm 69:9
For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.

This verse is quoted in John 2 as the reason Jesus went into the temple and drove out the moneychangers who were charging exorbitant rates of exchange. It has been said that you can determine the size of a man by the size of the things that irritate him. The thing that irritated Jesus was seeing His Father's house used as a den of thieves, thereby preventing people from drawing close to Him.

Psalm 69:10, 11
When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach. I made sackcloth also my garment; and I became a

proverb to them.

When did Jesus make sackcloth His garment? We have no record. That is why John said the earth itself couldn't contain all the books that could be written about Him (21:25).

Psalm 69:12
They that sit in the gate speak against me; and I was the song of the drunkards.

It was in the city gate where business and legislative matters were decided. Thus, not only did the drunkards speak against Jesus, but the city leaders did, as well.

Psalm 69:13
But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O LORD, in an acceptable time: O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me, in the truth of thy salvation.

Rather than complain to man, David prays to God.

Psalm 69:14–16
Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me. Hear me, O LORD; for thy lovingkindness is good: turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies.

David appealed to God not on the basis of his own merit, but on the basis of God's lovingkindness, or, literally, "exuberance of kindness" and His tender mercies, or, literally the affection a mother feels for her children.

Psalm 69:17–19
And hide not thy face from thy servant; for I am in trouble: hear me speedily. Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it: deliver me

because of mine enemies. Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour: mine adversaries are all before thee.

The lovingkindness and tender mercies of the Father would be hidden from the Son as He hung on the Cross in shame and dishonour, or, literally, nakedness, for you and me.

Psalm 69:20 (a)
Reproach hath broken my heart . . .

When the soldiers stuck a spear in Jesus' side to ensure that He was dead, blood and water flowed (John 19:34). This would be indicative of a ruptured—or broken—heart.

Psalm 69:20 (b)
. . . and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.

This very likely refers to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus was full of such heaviness that He was at the point of death (Luke 22:44). It wasn't the physical suffering Jesus feared. It was the thought of being separated from His Father that terrorized Him.

I wonder what terrorizes us. We can go for days without fellowshiping with God. Not Jesus. The very thought of this actually caused Him to sweat blood (Luke 22:44).

Psalm 69:21
They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

As Jesus hung on the Cross, He was offered myrrh and vinegar either as a painkiller or to prolong the ordeal. But He refused (Matthew 27:34). Still today, people reach first for emotional painkillers rather than to embrace the work of the Cross.

In verse 22, the tide turns. No longer on the Cross of Calvary, Jesus is in the valley of Megiddo where the armies of the world will gather together

against Him . . .

Psalm 69:22 (a)
Let their table become a snare before them . . .

Consider what the Book of Revelation says concerning the destiny of those who won't come to His table and eat of His broken body and drink of the blood shed for them . . .

> And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.
>
> Revelation 19:17, 18

Those who refuse to receive the work He has done so graciously and lovingly will end up in destruction and damnation. If they don't come to His table, their table will indeed become a snare.

Psalm 69:22 (b)–24
. . . and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them.

This speaks of the day of the Lord when tribulation is upon the face of the earth, when God's wrath is poured out on a Christ-rejecting, sinful people.

Psalm 69:25
Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents.

Let their habitation be desolate. Peter will quote this verse in reference to Judas (Acts 1:20).

Psalm 69:26 (a)
For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten . . .

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" Jesus would ask the one who would later be known as Paul (Acts 9:4). In other words, in smiting the body of believers, Paul was actually attacking Jesus. The same is still true. Whenever I come down on people in the body of Christ, I am smiting the Lord Himself to a very real degree.

Psalm 69:26 (b)–28
. . . and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded. Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.

Because God desires that none should perish (2 Peter 3:9), I believe every person's name is written in the Book of Life. But names can be blotted out. How? By saying, "I do not want to be part of the Lord's family."

God loves us so much He would say to people today, "The only way you can be blotted out of the Book of Life, the only way you can end up in hell is over My dead body. I died to keep you from that place. But if you trample on that body, if you refuse to receive what was done in the breaking and bleeding of that body, you will experience wrath and righteous indignation because your sin will remain and it will be your sin that will keep you out of heaven."

Psalm 69:29
But I am poor and sorrowful: let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high.

Jesus will indeed be set on high. His name will be so far above all names that at His name, every knee will bow, every tongue confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:10, 11).

Psalm 69:30–33
I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the LORD better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs. The humble shall see this, and be glad: and your heart shall live that seek God. For the LORD heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners.

Perhaps even in the midst of His own pain and shame, Jesus sang on the Cross.

When the day is dark, the psalmist says, "I will praise the Lord with a song and will magnify Him with thanksgiving." To magnify the Lord doesn't so much mean to make Him bigger, but to put Him in focus. You see, when I sing and when I give thanksgiving, things are put into focus—not just for me, but for those around me.

"The Lord despiseth not His prisoners," David declares. Who else sang in a dark night? In Acts 16, Paul and Silas were in prison and what happened? When they praised God with singing and magnified Him with thanksgiving, the prison doors flew open. The other prisoners could have walked out, but they didn't. I suggest they stuck around to learn more about a God that would cause beaten men to sing.

Psalm 69:34–36
Let the heaven and earth praise him, the seas, and everything that moveth therein. For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah: that they may dwell there, and have it in possession. The seed also of his servants shall inherit it: and they that love his name shall dwell therein.

The One who was the suffering Servant will come back as the conquering King ruling and reigning in power and perfection.



70 To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, to bring to remembrance.

Beginning with "Make haste," and ending with "Make no tarrying," Psalm 70 is the psalm of the impatient person . . .

Psalm 70
Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O LORD. Let them be ashamed and confounded that seek after my soul: let them be turned backward, and put to confusion, that desire my hurt. Let them be turned back for a reward of their shame that say, Aha, aha. Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: and let such as love thy salvation say continually, Let God be magnified. But I am poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God: thou art my help and my deliverer; O LORD, make no tarrying.

In this psalm, David says what we so often say: "Oh, Lord, hurry!"

The Lord's clock runs a little differently than ours does. "Behold, I come quickly," He said two thousand years ago (Revelation 22:7).

"Quickly?" we say. "Lord, that was two thousand years ago!"

But, as Peter says, a thousand years with the Lord is as a day (2 Peter 3:8). Therefore, according to the Lord's clock, He's only been gone a couple days.

"Lord, the one thou lovest is sick," Mary and Martha said to Jesus (John 11:3). Surely, their heart was saying, "Make haste, O, Lord. Don't tarry. Come quickly." But Jesus didn't come quickly. In fact, He waited four days. When He at last arrived, both Martha and Mary said to Him, "Lord, if only You had been here, our brother wouldn't have died." Little did they know that a far greater miracle was about to unfold before their eyes. Jesus brought Lazarus back from the dead and a greater witness went out as God was indeed magnified.

71 Although there is no identification of the human author of this psalm, from verses 9 and 18, we know he was an old man. Because all of the verses in Psalm 71 are found in other psalms, I suggest the psalmist heard what had already been sung and embraced the songs as his own in this psalm for old age . . .

Psalm 71:1
In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon Thee," Isaiah declares (26:3). Thus, even in old age—especially in old age—the Lord renews our minds and will keep us from confusion.

Psalm 71:2, 3
Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape: incline thine ear unto me, and save me. Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress.

"You, Lord, are my strong habitation," the psalmist declares. "It's not a matter of a different geographical location, a warmer climate, or a cheaper spot. What I desire is simply *You*."

Psalm 71:4
Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man.

If you're young, you can think that, when you get older, you won't have any more battles. But those of us who are getting older know that, "It ain't heaven 'til heaven," and that there will be battles all the days of our lives. Even in the psalmist's latter days, he asks for deliverance.

The mistake of the young person is thinking that when he gets older, the battles will cease, he'll be wise, and all problems will be solved. Surprise. It doesn't necessarily work that way. Getting older doesn't automatically

make you wiser unless you're making the Lord your habitation, your Rock, your Resort day by day.

Psalm 71:5
For thou art my hope, O Lord GOD: thou art my trust from my youth.

"I've been with You, Lord, since the earliest of days," the psalmist says.

I'm so glad that the Lord not only has saving strength, but keeping power. He can keep us all the days of our lives.

Psalm 71:6–8
By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of thee. I am as a wonder unto many; but thou art my strong refuge. Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day.

In addition to confusion, another pitfall in growing older is complaining. If you're getting older, rather than complaining about your aches and pains or the sorry state of society, choose to talk about the Lord continually. That's the way to grow old gracefully and faithfully.

How can this be done? People try and discipline their tongues, but Jesus said that it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). Therefore, the key to changing your speech is to change your heart. How? By allowing the Word of God to fill it day by day. If you do this, your heart, and therefore your words, will be filled with praise.

Psalm 71:9
Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.

The psalmist knew that, even though his own strength was failing, he was safe in the strong One.

Psalm 71:10–12

For mine enemies speak against me; and they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together, Saying, God hath forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him. O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help.

If you think life gets easier as you get older, it doesn't. The enemies that mount up against you will be there until the day you die. But so will the Lord.

Psalm 71:13, 14
Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul; let them be covered with reproach and dishonour that seek my hurt. But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more.

Hope is the absolute expectation of coming good. As the psalmist grows older, he doesn't look back. He looks ahead, saying, "I will praise You more and more for what You're going to do."

That's what an eighty-five-year-old Caleb said. When offered his choice of property in the Promised Land, he didn't choose a beachfront setting or a home on the golf course. He said, "Give me the mountain where the giants are. I want to stay strong by taking on new territory" (see Joshua 14:12).

What trial are you facing? What giant is looming over you? Embrace it. As you get older, don't get less radical. Don't witness less. Don't sleep in more. Don't kick back. Be like Caleb—stronger than ever.

Psalm 71:15
My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof.

I don't know when my last day is going to be. Oh, how I want to be remembered as one who magnified the Lord.

Psalm 71:16
I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.

The problem with getting older is that we tend to want to talk about ourselves. Not the psalmist. He chose to talk about the Lord.

Psalm 71:17, 18
O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.

The most fulfilling ministry you'll ever have at any age is with your own children or grandchildren—teaching them the Scriptures, talking to them of the grace of God.

Psalm 71:19–22
Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high, who hast done great things: O God, who is like unto thee! Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side. I will also praise thee with the psaltery, even thy truth, O my God: unto thee will I sing with the harp, O thou Holy One of Israel.

Either at the end of our lives, or when Jesus comes back for us, what a great day it will be when we are at last with Him.

Psalm 71:23, 24
My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee; and my soul, which thou hast redeemed. My tongue also shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long: for they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame, that seek my hurt.

The enemy will be done in, wiped out, leaving us to praise our King all day long.



72 *A Psalm for Solomon.*

The inscription tells us this was a psalm for Solomon—most likely a psalm of David written about and for his son who would follow him to the throne. More importantly, however, it speaks of the Greater than David, the Son of David, Jesus Christ, and the kingdom He will establish that will usher in peace and prosperity.

Psalm 72:1, 2
Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment.

David prays for his son, that, as he reigns, he will make good, righteous, and just decisions. Solomon would, indeed, be known for his wisdom. Thus, David's prayer would be answered and, of course, exceeded by the One who was to come, the Greater than Solomon, Jesus Christ (Luke 2:52).

Psalm 72:3
The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.

When Jesus reigns, there will be peace on the hills and in the mountains, on every border and every boundary.

Psalm 72:4
He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor.

Jesus' reign will be perfect. The poor will be taken care of, the oppressor will be put down.

Psalm 72:5–7
They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. He shall come down like rain upon the

mown grass: as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.

Times of refreshing, sweet fragrance, peace, and prosperity will endure for the 1,000 years Jesus will reign on earth.

Psalm 72:8
He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.

A theology known as Dominion Theology says that we'll see righteousness ushered in when we, as believers, make changes in government, establish a new society, and institute a just order in the name of Jesus. Dominion Theology propounds that when we solve all of the spiritual, economic, and political problems, Jesus will come back to rule and reign. He's simply waiting for us to do our work—to take dominion and to take authority.

The problem is, it doesn't square with Daniel's prophecy. In Daniel 2, we read of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a statue revealing the successive empires that would rule the world and Israel specifically. Then, we read of a stone that was cut without hands that will roll down and wipe out the statue. The important thing to note is that it was a stone cut out of the mountain without hands, without the help of man. This means that the Lord can come at any time and any day. He's not waiting for us to take dominion because we can't. Only the stone, the Rock of Ages Himself, can establish a kingdom of righteousness, grandeur, and glory.

Psalm 72:9–14
They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul

from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight.

Liberation Theology says the primary purpose of the church is to overthrow the greed of the capitalistic system and usher in a new economic order that will take care of the impoverished conditions of people across the planet. But, just like Dominion Theology, Liberation Theology is bankrupt. Jesus said, "The poor you'll always have with you" (Matthew 26:11)—until the day He comes to rule and reign.

Psalm 72:15
And he shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised.

When Jesus reigns, continual praise will be offered to Him.

Psalm 72:16 (a)
There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains . . .

Crops don't normally grow on the tops of mountains. Therefore, this is a picture describing unparalleled prosperity, agricultural abundance, and economic security.

Psalm 72:16 (b)
. . . the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.

The fruit trees will be weighed down with so much fruit that they'll tremble. When Jesus reigns, everything will be right. Nature will be restored.

Psalm 72:17 (a)
His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun . . .

The one name that will never let you down is Jesus' name because there's no other name under heaven by which men must be saved (Acts 4:12). Any other name or image you adopt will ultimately go out of style or disappoint. But you can be identified by the name of Jesus forever.

Psalm 72:17 (b)
. . . and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed.

The name of Jesus is not only an enduring name but an enriching name. Men shall be blessed in Him. "Hitherto you have asked nothing in My name," Jesus said. "Ask that you might receive and that your joy might be made full" (John 16:24).

Psalm 72:18, 19 (a)
Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever . . .

Silver and gold have we none, Peter and John would say. But such as we have give we thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And the man did just that. This name of Jesus causes lamebrains like you and me to walk and to leap and to praise God now and eternally. It's an empowering name indeed.

Psalm 72:19 (b)
. . . and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen.

On the day Jesus comes again to rule and reign, the whole earth will be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen—so be it. So be it!

Psalm 72:20
The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

The word "ended" is often translated "fulfilled." When are the prayers of David fulfilled? In the establishment of the kingdom he's been writing about

—when Jesus reigns.



73 *A Psalm of Asaph.*

This psalm could have either been written by Asaph or one of his descendants. Asaph was one of David's chief musicians, but he also had descendants that continued in this tradition.

Psalm 73:1 (a)
Truly God is good . . .

The foundation of our faith is that God is truly good. It was the goodness of God that Satan caused Adam and Eve to doubt by subtly suggesting that God was keeping back something good from them. Therefore, we must never give in to what we don't know, but rather always cling to what we do know. And this we know: God is nothing but good.

Psalm 73:1 (b)
. . . to Israel . . .

Israel means "governed by God." Therefore, God is good to those who place themselves under His rule.

Psalm 73:1 (c)
. . . even to such as are of a clean heart.

"If God is only good to those with a clean heart, I'm disqualified," you might say, "because my heart is not always where it ought to be." But the great news is that, if we walk in the light as He is in the light, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from *all* sin (1 John 1:7).

Psalm 73:2, 3

But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

By taking his eyes off God and looking around at people and their possessions, the psalmist slowly but surely becomes confused.

Psalm 73:4, 5
For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.

You're mistaken, Asaph. Like Adam and Eve, you're being seduced by Satan to believe a lie. Everyone has problems—the believer and the unbeliever alike. The difference is, as believers, we have access to the problem solver, Jesus Christ. And what a difference that makes.

Psalm 73:6, 7
Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.

"The wicked have everything they desire," the psalmist says. But, again he is mistaken, for, as Solomon said, "Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied" (Proverbs 27:20).

Psalm 73:8, 9
They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.

The wicked speak arrogantly; they speak blasphemy; they speak against God. *So how is it that the bad guys seem to get all the good stuff?* the psalmist wonders.

Psalm 73:10

Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.

God's people are squeezed and drained, whereas the wicked man lives in prosperity and ease.

Psalm 73:11
And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?

"God doesn't care what I do," the wicked man says, mistaking the patience of God for apathy, approval, or impotence.

Psalm 73:12–14
Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.

"I've walked in the right way for nothing," the psalmist mistakenly concludes.

Psalm 73:15
If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.

Not wanting to confuse those younger than him, the psalmist decides to keep his thoughts to himself.

Psalm 73:16, 17 (a)
When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God . . .

Note the word *until*. "I was mixed up. I was confused," the psalmist says, "until I went to the sanctuary, to the house of God."

Psalm 73:17 (b)
. . . then understood I their end.

"I came to church, plopped down in a pew, and heard exactly what I needed to hear and knew what I needed to know. I once again saw things from the eternal perspective," the psalmist declares. This happens so often. We're discouraged or confused, and we come to church, where we hear a teaching or a sermon that speaks directly to our situation.

Psalm 73:18
Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.

In verse 2, the psalmist said, "My steps had well nigh slipped." Here, in verse 18, he realized the wicked are the ones who are slipping and sliding into destruction.

Psalm 73:19, 20
How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.

One day the unbeliever will wake up and say, "What was I living for? All these things don't matter; all those pleasures that ultimately backfire. Why didn't I respond when I had the opportunity? Why did I live so foolishly?"

Psalm 73:21, 22
Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.

"When I came to the sanctuary I understood four things . . . ."

Psalm 73:23 (a)
Nevertheless I am continually with thee . . .

The psalmist understood the guarantee of God's presence with him.

Psalm 73:23 (b)
. . . thou hast holden me by my right hand.

The psalmist understood the grasp of God's hand upon him.

Psalm 73:24 (a)
Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel . . .

The psalmist understood the guidance of God's counsel for him.

Psalm 73:24 (b), 25
. . . and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.

The psalmist understood the glory of heaven awaiting him.

What more could we want than to know that God is with us, that His hand is upon us, that His counsel is there for us, and that heaven awaits us?

Psalm 73:26–28
My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.

The psalmist comes out of the funk he's in, the slippery slope he was on by going into the sanctuary and seeing the big picture, the eternal perspective. "Truly God *is* good," he says. "And now I will declare His works to others."

Psalm 74 was written in the aftermath of the Babylonian invasion and the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 586 B.C. The city was smoldering. The citizens were sobbing. The temple was destroyed. Jerusalem was wiped out. And the psalmist, watching everything go up in smoke, his mind in a haze, wrote a *maschil,* a song of instruction . . .

Psalm 74:1
O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?

"Lord, we've been cast off. Lord, we've been wiped out. Everything is in flames," the psalmist declares.

Psalm 74:2, 3
Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt. Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual desolations; even all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary.

Maybe you can relate to this. Maybe your own soul is burned out. Maybe, like the psalmist, you look around and say, "Why is this taking place, Lord? Remember me. Come into the city of my soul and see what's happening. See what the enemy has done."

Psalm 74:4
Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations; they set up their ensigns for signs.

"Your enemies shout their battle cries, Lord. They flaunt their victories."

Psalm 74:5–8
A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees. But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers. They have cast fire into thy sanctuary, they have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of

thy name to the ground. They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together: they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land.

"A man used to be famous for doing something constructive," the psalmist says. "But now it's for destructive acts as he destroys the temple."

Psalm 74:9–11
We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long. O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever? Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? pluck it out of thy bosom.

"Why are You keeping Your hands in Your pocket, Lord? Unleash Your mighty right hand. Deal a blow to these Babylonians." This is a bold prayer but not a blasphemous prayer because it's a caring prayer. What does the psalmist care about? His own comfort? No. Victory for the people? No. He cares for God's honor. "Do something for *Your* name's sake," he prays.

The vast majority of our prayers are for our comforts, our successes, or our ministries. In reality, the way to pray is, "Lord, may *Your* name be glorified."

Psalm 74:12–18
For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters. Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness. Thou didst cleave the fountain and the flood: thou driedst up mighty rivers. The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter. Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O LORD, and that the foolish people have blasphemed thy name.

"You worked wonders historically, Lord. Now look and see what's happening presently," the psalmist prays

Psalm 74:19–23
O deliver not the soul of thy turtledove unto the multitude of the wicked: forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever. Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name. Arise, O God, plead thine own cause: remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily. Forget not the voice of thine enemies: the tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually.

The psalmist is in a haze. His city is up in smoke. There are questions stirring in his soul. Six times, he says, "Lord, remember. Have You forgotten us?"

Maybe that's where you're at or where you've been. Maybe you, too, wonder if the Lord has forgotten you. If so, I believe you'll find your answer in the next psalm . . .



75 *To the chief Musician, Altaschith, A Psalm or Song of Asaph.*

Psalm 75 deals with the story in 2 Kings 19 where God delivered His people in the days of Hezekiah against Sennacherib and the Assyrians.

Psalm 75:1
Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks, unto thee do we give thanks: for that thy name is near thy wondrous works declare.

"Lord, we give thanks for Your nearness to us and the wonderful works You've done for us," the psalmist writes.

Psalm 75:2

When I shall receive the congregation I will judge uprightly.

The phrase, "when I shall receive the congregation," has been translated, "when I shall take a set time."

"How long, O, Lord?" the psalmist asked in Psalm 74.

Here, God answers, saying, "At the right time. Even as I did regarding the Assyrians, I will come through at the set time, at the right time."

Psalm 75:3–5
The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved: I bear up the pillars of it. Selah. I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly: and to the wicked, Lift not up the horn: Lift not up your horn on high: speak not with a stiff neck.

"Everything might be shaking and quaking, but I'm still in control," God says. "Therefore, don't toot your own horn. Don't boast of your ability, your position, or your power."

Psalm 75:6
For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south.

Notice that the north isn't mentioned. The north seems to be linked to God's rule and reign. Sacrifices were to be made on the north side of the altar and Job 26 talks about God keeping the north side of the sky open.

Psalm 75:7
But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.

"I will set up one and put down another," the Lord declares. This blesses me because when this concept sinks in, I realize I no longer have to play the part of the Holy Spirit in someone else's life. Because the Lord judges perfectly, I can just relax. I can pray for people. I can love people. And I can allow the Holy Spirit to do His work in people. It's a fantastic day when a believer realizes that he is not the third person of the Trinity, that he doesn't

have to figure out every situation, have an opinion on every matter, or solve every question.

I suggest that if we didn't know the end of their stories, we would say that Ananias should be exalted and David should be put down. After all, Ananias' only sin was withholding a little bit of his own money, while David was an adulterer, a liar, and a murderer. But God sees things differently. He struck Ananias dead and exalted David. Only God can judge perfectly. That's why we do best when we leave all judgment to Him.

Psalm 75:8
For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them.

"You're telling Me to remember," the Lord would say. "But you need to remember that I am in control and I will do what's best for you. I can prove it to you by the cup in My hand full of the blood I shed for you."

When things are hazy and confusing, when I'm wondering why I'm not being set up the way I ought to be, the cup causes me to remember how much the Lord loves me and the price He paid to save me.

"Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me," Jesus prayed. "Nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done" (see Luke 22:42). When God poured out His wrath, Jesus drank of it willingly.

If things are hazy and fuzzy to you, go to the Lord's Table, drink of the cup, and remember once again the blood He shed for you.

Psalm 75:9, 10
But I will declare for ever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob. All the horns of the wicked also will I cut off; but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted.

The seemingly invincible Assyrians were cut off. God's people, on the other hand, were exalted by putting their trust in Him. No wonder the psalmist would sing His praise forever.



76 *To the chief Musician on Neginoth, A Psalm or Song of Asaph.*

This psalm was to be played on the *neginoth,* a stringed instrument played by striking. Usually, the psalms played on the *neginoth* were psalms dealing with battle. And Psalm 76 is no exception for it has as its backdrop the shocking defeat of the mighty Assyrian army. Numbering 185,000, the Assyrians besieged Jerusalem and it seemed as though nothing could stop them—until God sent a single angel and all of the Assyrians were killed in their sleep (2 Kings 19).

The psalm is divided into two parts. Verses 1 through 6 deal with the fame of God; verses 7 through 12 with the fear of God.

Psalm 76:1 (a)
In Judah is God known . . .

Judah means "praise." Truly, it is in praise that God is known. In times of real praise, how precious and real the Lord is to us.

Psalm 76:1 (b)–3
. . . his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion. There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Selah.

It was in Salem—or Jerusalem—that this great victory took place. It was in Jerusalem that God broke the Assyrian battle strategy and defeated them completely.

Psalm 76:4
Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey.

I believe the mountains of prey speak of what the Assyrians left behind after their army was obliterated. Yet the psalmist says, "Your glory, Lord, is more excellent than any material treasure."

Psalm 76:5, 6
The stouthearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep: and none of the men of might have found their hands. At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep.

"The Assyrians went to sleep, but now they can't lift a hand against us," the psalmist declares.

Psalm 76:7, 8
Thou, even thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry? Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth feared, and was still,

"When we consider what You've done, Lord, we have no recourse but to fear You," the psalmist writes. The idea of fear here is not as a criminal would fear a judge, not as a slave would fear his master, but as a child would respect his father. To be afraid of God doesn't mean to shrink away from Him or to back off from Him, but rather to be afraid of doing anything that would grieve or hurt Him.

Psalm 76:9
When God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth. Selah.

Who did God rise up to save? The meek.

The world around us says, "Be assertive. Be aggressive."
Jesus says, "Blessed are the meek" (Matthew 5:5).
Meekness is not weakness. Meekness has been well-defined as "strength under control."

Moses was the meekest man on the earth (Numbers 12:3), but he didn't always have his strength under control. At forty years of age, he saw a couple of Egyptians beating up an Israelite. Incensed, he thought he had to handle it in his own strength, so he killed the Egyptian and then buried him in the sand.

But his deed was soon discovered. Maybe a hand came poking through, or a toe stuck out. That's always the way it is when we try and handle things in our own wisdom or energy. Things don't work out the way we planned, and when we try and cover up our mistakes, a toe always pokes through somewhere.

Moses ran for his life and, for the next forty years, would find himself on the backside of the desert. It was there that he learned to be meek, that he learned to no longer trust his own ability, strength, personality, or energy. Instead, he learned to become totally and fully dependent upon the Lord.

How long do you and I have to be sentenced to the backside of the desert? When will we learn the secret of meekness—of strength under God's control?

Psalm 76:10
Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.

The Lord will restrain—or, literally, wear as an ornament—the insults and boasting made against Him. In other words, the foolishness of the wrath of man will be seen in light of God's glory and grandeur.

A hundred years or so ago, Robert Ingersoll, a famous outspoken atheist, challenged an open-air preacher at Hyde Park in London. As the preacher spoke of the beauty and glory of God. Ingersoll shouted out, "I propose a test right now. If God is real, let Him prove Himself. In thirty seconds, let Him strike me dead." Thirty seconds passed and nothing happened. "See?" Ingersoll mocked. "God is not real."

The preacher said, "Mr. Ingersoll, do you really think you can exhaust the patience and mercy of God in thirty seconds? Preposterous!"

The wrath of man does indeed praise God. And not only do sinners revere and fear Him, but saints do, as well . . .

Psalm 76:11 (a)
Vow, and pay unto the LORD your God . . .

There is a danger in making rash or foolish vows (Ecclesiastes 5:4, 5). But there's also a dynamic in heartfelt vows, when we say, "Lord, You are so good, so awesome, so powerful. You've done so much for me, and I'm committing myself to You today." Baptism, for example, is such a vow.

Psalm 76:11 (b)
. . . let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared.

"Bring presents unto Him that ought to be feared." The greatest gift we can bring is ourselves. Thus, Paul would write, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1).

Psalm 76:12
He shall cut off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth.

Not only sinner and saint, but sovereign shall stand before God, as well. You might be a bigwig, a CEO of a successful company, but every leader will one day answer to the King of kings.



77 *To the chief Musician, to Jeduthun, A Psalm of Asaph.*

Whereas Psalm 76 dealt with the peoples' preservation from the hands of the Assyrians, Psalm 77 deals with their humiliation at the hand of the Babylonians. One hundred thirty-five years after the Assyrians were thwarted in their attack, the Babylonians would destroy Jerusalem. This time, Israel would not be delivered. This time, Jerusalem would go up in flames.

In verses 1 through 9, we hear the sigh of trouble. But in verses 10 through 20, we hear the song of triumph . . .

Psalm 77:1–4
I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah. Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

In light of the Babylonian invasion, the psalmist says, "I'm so troubled. I can't sleep. I can't speak. I'm sick physically and disturbed emotionally."

Psalm 77:5, 6
I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.

Day and night, the psalmist wonders, "What's wrong, Lord? What happened, Lord?" In a state of depression, he asks a series of questions . . .

Psalm 77:7–10
Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah. And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High.

We hear the psalmist's sigh of trouble—not only concerning what has taken place around him, but that which is stirring within him. It seems God isn't there the way He once was. Then the psalm takes a sudden turn, and we begin to hear the faint strains of a song of triumph. Why? I suggest that the *Selah*—or, literally, "pause"—that ends verse 9 is significant. After raising questions, the psalmist pauses for consideration.

We need to do the same. When I'm going through times of discouragement, when everything around me is going up in smoke, when things within me seem fuzzy, it's important that I pause. You see, when he stopped, when he paused, the psalmist gained some space and his perspective changed from "God is nowhere" to "God is now here." I've discovered the same thing over and over. That is, it is as I pause and reconsider what I have learned in the past that the presence makes sense.

When you feel like you're in an emotional nose dive, here's what to do:

Psalm 77:11
I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old.

First, remember the works of the Lord. The psalmist says, "I'm going to remember the times the Lord's hand has been on me, the times His hand has been outstretched to me." That is why I encourage you to keep a spiritual journal. Although we usually remember the testing and trials, we have a tendency to forget the blessings God has given. And they are many, indeed.

Psalm 77:12 (a)
I will meditate also of all thy work . . .

In addition to remembering His works, reflect on God's work. What is the work of the Lord? Jesus said the singular work of God is to believe on Him whom God hath sent (John 6:29). In other words, we are to meditate on the inestimable price He paid for our salvation.

Psalm 77:12 (b)
. . . and talk of thy doings.

Remember the works. Reflect on the work. And, finally, relate God's doings. Something wonderful happens when I talk to other people about the goodness of God, when I share with other people the riches of His Word. When I share with others about the reality of Jesus, my own faith soars. When I pray for others who are sick, I feel a whole lot better myself. If you want to

get out of depression, give out to others because Jesus said whatever measure we give out will be given back to us (Luke 6:38).

Psalm 77:13
Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God?

God's way is in the sanctuary. Therefore, we come to the sanctuary to learn of the Lord and His ways.

Psalm 77:14–18
Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people. Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah. The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled. The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook.

The psalmist recounts how God rescued and delivered the sons of Jacob and Joseph, the nation of Israel, as He brought them on dry land through the Red Sea.

Psalm 77:19, 20
Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

God's way is in the sanctuary (verse 13). It's also in the sea. God miraculously led His people on dry ground through the waters of the Red Sea. And when they were safely on the other side, the water covered not only Pharaoh's army, but the Lord's footsteps, as well.

If a sailor tries to determine which way to go by following the path of a ship that has gone before, he'll get lost because the "footsteps," the wake, will have disappeared. How does a sailor navigate and find direction? Only

one way: he looks up. He navigates by the stars. So too, we may want to follow the way someone else follows Jesus, but that's not the way of God. His footsteps are in the water. Don't look down. Look up—and see where the Lord wants to lead you individually and personally as He writes His will for you on the table of your heart (2 Corinthians 3:3).



78 *Maschil of Asaph.*

Psalm 78 is a Maschil, or a teaching psalm. What does it teach? It's a hymn for the home. That is, this psalm reminds us to teach our children, to teach the next generation. The responsibility of each parent or grandparent is that our kids and grandchildren know God's Word, that they understand that the key to success is to know the Lord, to love Him, and to be obedient to Him.

Psalm 78 talks about the foolishness of people and the graciousness of God.

Psalm 78:1–7
Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments:

Some parents think they need to let their kids make their own decisions about religion, church attendance, and Bible study. But here, the psalmist says we are to teach our children in order that they might have hope in God rather than be beaten down by the storm of society and the chaos of culture. We need to constantly tell our kids about the blessings that will come their way if they walk according to God's Word and the heartbreak they'll experience if they choose a different direction. Ours is a privileged responsibility, indeed.

We read in Genesis 18 that, as the Lord and two angels made their way to Sodom, the Lord said to the angels that He would share with Abraham concerning the destruction that would take place in Sodom because He knew that Abraham would tell his children (Genesis 18:19). So, Mom and Dad, if you make a commitment to pass on to your children that which you learn from the Lord, He'll give you fresh revelation and practical application.

Psalm 78:8
And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.

Jonathan Edwards, whose most famous sermon was entitled, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," was a giant of the faith the Lord used mightily to ignite one of the few genuine revivals in our country. But he not only preached to his congregation, he preached to his family, as well. A study was done that revealed that, of his direct descendants, fourteen became college presidents; one hundred one became college professors; one hundred six became ministers and missionaries; and one hundred eight became lawyers and doctors. On the other hand, a man named Jacob Jukes mocked Jonathan Edwards and the revival. Here is what happened to his family: four hundred were physically self-incapacitated. That is, they lost limbs or were otherwise unable to function due to inflictions from fights, brawls, etc.; three hundred ten became professional paupers; sixty became thieves; and seven were convicted of murder. Only twenty became tradesman, and ten of those twenty learned their trade while serving in a penitentiary.

Jonathan Edwards embraced the things of God and taught them to his children. Jacob Jukes mocked the things of God. And the fruit of both men is apparent.

Psalm 78:9–11
The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law; And forgat his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them.

We might prepare our children financially and educationally, physically and occupationally—but if we forget the covenant, if they don't understand what God's Word says, when push comes to shove, they'll fail in the day of battle.

Psalm 78:12–14
Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand as an heap. In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire.

Not only did the Red Sea part, but God guided them daily with a cloud by day and fire by night.

Psalm 78:15–19
He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers. And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness. And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust. Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?

Here, the psalmist is retelling the story of God's deliverance in the wilderness, the story that Ephraim should have been telling, but the one they

forgot.

Psalm 78:20–22
Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people? Therefore the LORD heard this, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel; Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation:

Throughout this psalm, God tells us that we need to rehearse the stories of His salvation and plan over and over and over again. "I will not be negligent to put you in remembrance of these things though you know them until you be established in them," Peter said (see 2 Peter 1:12). It's not how much we know, but how well we know what we know that matters.

Psalm 78:23–25
Though he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels' food: he sent them meat to the full.

Day by day, God provided for His people in a miraculous and marvelous way.

Psalm 78:26–29
He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven: and by his power he brought in the south wind. He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea: And he let it fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations. So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire;

When the children of Israel grew tired of manna, God told Moses to give them meat.

"What should I do?" Moses asked. "Do You want me to kill the cattle we're supposed to take to the Promised Land? Or should I fish out all the fish in the sea?" (Numbers 11:22). But the Lord had an option Moses hadn't even considered: quail. They blew in by the tens of thousands (Numbers 11:32).

Psalm 78:30, 31
They were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat was yet in their mouths, The wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel.

The people ate so much quail that their own lust ultimately did them in. That's always the way of lust. It deceives, defiles, and, ultimately deadens.

Psalm 78:32, 33
For all this they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works. Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble.

God guides and provides, directs and corrects—yet still the people don't believe. Consequently, their days are filled with vanity, or failures. And their years are filled with trouble, or fears and terror.

Psalm 78:34
When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and inquired early after God.

God loves you too much to allow you to continue in your rebellion. So He'll allow trouble to come your way to get you back where you need to be.

Psalm 78:35–37
And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant.

Why did the Israelites come to God? Because they were worried. They saw people dying all around them. But their hearts were not right. They were simply going through the motions.

Psalm 78:38, 39
But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.

In Psalm 103, the psalmist says God has pity, or compassion on us, remembering our frames and knowing we are but dust. I love these verses because I need them. Like these people, I can have a tendency to drift away from the Lord. My intensity can be dull. My sincerity can be questionable. But I thank God for His graciousness—that He doesn't give up on me, that He remembers that I am but flesh.

Psalm 78:40
How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert!

As we read the Word, it would do us well to ask God to show us His perspective, to ask Him to help us understand the grief our unbelief causes Him.

Psalm 78:41
Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.

"Why isn't God blessing me?" we ask. "Why don't I feel His presence? Why aren't I moving in His power?"

The reason could very well be unbelief.

Matthew tells us that Jesus didn't do many mighty works for the people of Nazareth because of their unbelief (Matthew 13:58). Tragically, the same can be true of us. God wants to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think (Ephesians 3:20), but we limit Him by unbelief. We don't ask. We don't

believe. We don't expect. Consequently, our unbelief limits what He wants to do for us and through us.

Give us faith, Lord. How does He do this? Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Therefore, as I read the Word, I say, "Lord, help me not to limit You through unbelief. Help me to embrace the promises You've given me in my devotions even today."

Psalm 78:42–51
They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy. How he had wrought his signs in Egypt, and his wonders in the field of Zoan: And had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they could not drink. He sent divers sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them. He gave also their increase unto the caterpiller, and their labour unto the locust. He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycomore trees with frost. He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts. He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them. He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence; And smote all the firstborn in Egypt; the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham:

This is, of course, a reference to the plagues of Egypt.

Psalm 78:52–58
But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. And he led them on safely, so that they feared not: but the sea overwhelmed their enemies. And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary, even to this mountain, which his right hand had purchased. He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents. Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies: But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they

provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images.

In contrast to plaguing the Egyptians, God cared for His own people as a shepherd. Yet they provoked Him nonetheless with their idolatrous practices.

Psalm 78:59–61
When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; And delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand.

The people turned their back on God. And, because He wouldn't force Himself on them, He departed when He delivered the ark of the covenant—the symbol of His presence—into the hands of the Philistines.

Psalm 78:62–64
He gave his people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance. The fire consumed their young men; and their maidens were not given to marriage. Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation.

Here we see the repercussion of sin. "Teach this to your children," the psalmist would say. "Yes, God is gracious, but He can be grieved. If you turn your back on Him, He won't force Himself on you, but devastation will come your way ultimately."

Psalm 78:65–69
Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts: he put them to a perpetual reproach. Moreover he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: But chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved. And he built his sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which he hath established for ever.

The Lord rescued His people once again, but there would be repercussions for their sin. He would never again dwell in Shiloh. Our kids might say, "I can sin. God will forgive me and I'll come back to Him." That's true. God does forgive. And we can come back. But things will be different. We'll be forgiven completely—but opportunities will be lost and scars will remain.

Psalm 78:70 (a)
He chose David also his servant . . .

God rejected Saul for his disobedience and chose David instead. David was flawed indeed, but, unlike Saul, he had a heart for the Lord.

Psalm 78:70 (b), 71
. . . and took him from the sheepfolds: From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance.

A good place to find a shepherd is among the sheep. If you want to be used by the Lord, shepherd the sheep. Like David, be faithful to shepherd whatever flock is around you presently—be that friends, co-workers, schoolmates, or family.

Psalm 78:72
So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands.

A heart for God and hands eager to reach out to others is the winning combination. A man after God's own heart, David's heart was right and his hand was active. No wonder God could use him.



79 *A Psalm of Asaph.*

Psalm 79 is a psalm for those times when everything seems to be going wrong, when everything seems to be going up in smoke. Indeed, when the psalmist wrote this psalm, that's precisely what was happening. The city of Jerusalem had been bludgeoned by the Babylonians and burnt to the ground. The reason for this tragedy in 586 B.C. was the sin and hardheartedness of the Jewish people. God had called them to turn to Him, to turn from their sin, but they wouldn't listen. Consequently, the repercussions of their rebellion were devastating.

In this psalm, those repercussions are recounted in a very vivid way. Thus, it serves to help us understand the repercussions of rebellion. In verses 1 through 7, the psalmist recounts the repercussions of their rebellion and, in verses 8 through 13, the psalmist requests God's redemption of the situation . . .

Psalm 79:1
O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps.

Because of sin, because of rebellion, the temple was defiled. So too, we are the temple of the Lord in which the Spirit resides (1 Corinthians 3:16). And if we get involved in sin, our temple will be defiled as well.

Psalm 79:2, 3
The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth. Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them.

Historian Josephus tells us bodies were thrown over the wall by the tens of thousands. Not only does defilement come as a result of rebellion, but death does, too. The wages of sin is always death (Romans 6:23). Joy dies. Relationships die. Health and happiness die because of sin.

Psalm 79:4
We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us.

Death and defilement are followed by derision.

Psalm 79:5–7
How long, LORD? wilt thou be angry for ever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire? Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name. For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his dwelling place.

The final repercussion of rebellion is devouring.

After recounting the repercussions of rebellion, there's a turning point in verse 8, where the psalmist requests God' s redemption of the situation . . .

Psalm 79:8, 9 (a)
O remember not against us former iniquities: let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us: for we are brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name . . .

"Lord, with everything up in smoke, this is an opportunity to bring glory to Your name," the psalmist prays. That's always a good way to pray. As Bible teacher F. B. Meyer says, "We have an irresistible argument when we plea for God's glory."

Psalm 79:9 (b)
. . . and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake.

"Help us. Deliver us. Forgive us," we pray. But do we ever pray, "Purge us?" There is a difference between confession and repentance. Confession is admitting you've sinned. Repentance is turning away from sin. The word "repent" speaks of a change of direction. Paul says that godly sorrow works repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). That means if you're truly sorry, you'll change your behavior. It's not enough to confess. It's not enough to be sorry you were caught or discovered. True repentance results in a change of direction.

Purging is not easy. It can be painful. But here, the psalmist says, "Do whatever it takes, Lord, to change us."

Psalm 79:10–13
Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed. Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee; according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die; And render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord. So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth thy praise to all generations.

Maybe in your life, everything seems to be falling apart, coming down, or going up in smoke. Maybe it's because there has been rebellion of some sort. The good news is that you can confess it to the Father, repent from it, and experience His forgiveness. Then you can help your kids and grandchildren to understand the greatness of God's grace and the stupidity of man's sin.



80 *To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim-Eduth, A Psalm of Asaph.*

Throughout Scripture, there are three trees that speak of Israel: the vine, the fig, and the olive. Each symbolizes Israel in a different epoch of history. The vine speaks of Israel from the time God's people were planted in the Promised Land until the time Messiah would come. The fig tree speaks of the time from the rejection of Messiah until His Second Coming. The olive tree pictures the period yet to be—Jesus' Second Coming through the Millennium, when He will rule and reign from Jerusalem.

Psalm 80 deals with the vine, specifically the time when the Jews were held captive in Babylon.

Psalm 80:1 (a)
Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock . . .

In Genesis 49, Joseph was likened to a fruitful bough whose branches went over the wall. The picture is one of overflowing fruitfulness. That's what God wants to do in our lives, as well. Jesus taught in John 15 that He wants others to be refreshed and nourished by the fruit of His love and goodness, His graciousness and patience in our lives (15:8).

Psalm 80:1 (b)
. . . thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.

This is an allusion to the cherubims on either side of the mercy seat—the place God declared He would meet with His people (Exodus 25:22).

Psalm 80:2
Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us.

Following the death of Solomon, civil war broke out in Israel, dividing the nation into two kingdoms: the northern and southern tribes. From 605–586 B.C., the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin were carried away by the Babylonians. But here the psalmist intercedes not only for them—but for the ten northern tribes who had already been carried away in 722 B.C. by the Assyrians.

So too, when we go through tough times, suddenly we have new compassion for people who also have gone through tough times—even if previously we couldn't relate to them or were estranged from them. When you go through your own "Babylonian captivity," you find yourself caring for others in ways you didn't before. That is why Paul would write, "Blessed be the Father of mercy, the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our troubles that we might comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received" (2 Corinthians 1:3).

Psalm 80:3–7
Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people? Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure.

Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves. Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

"Lord, turn to us," the psalmist cries. "We're in captivity. We need You desperately."

Psalm 80:8 (a)
Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt . . .

Israel was enslaved in Egypt for four hundred years and was miraculously delivered.

Psalm 80:8 (b), 9 (a)
. . . thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it . . .

About fifty years before Moses, we know that Egypt launched a massive campaign against the Canaanite people living in what would become the Promised Land. This would have softened the Canaanite contingency so that when Joshua and the Israelites went in, work would have already been done.

What does this mean for us? You might be in a place where you feel like you're in Egypt. But the Lord is at work. You might not see Him, but the Lord is going before you to search out a place in which you can pitch our tent. So if you feel as if you're sweating away, making bricks day after day, take hope. God is preparing a place for you—not just in heaven—but even here on earth.

Psalm 80:9 (b), 10
. . . and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars.

The nation of Israel took root and spread out magnificently.

Psalm 80:11

She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river.

"The sea" speaks of the Mediterranean. "The river" speaks of the Euphrates.

Psalm 80:12
Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?

After seeing the royal vine of Israel, we see the ruined vine. The fences are destroyed. The fruit is devoured.

Psalm 80:13
The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it.

Boars not only eat the fruit but dislodge the root. So too, the Jews were not only eaten up, but uprooted and carried away into Babylon.

The nation of Israel has been uprooted time and again. Why? Jesus talked about the vine in Matthew 21. He said, "A certain man took great care to plant a vineyard. He dug wells so that it might be watered adequately. He built towers to provide security. And then he went away and rented it out. When time came for a harvest to be gathered, for rent to be collected, the owner sent his servants to do so. The caretakers of the vineyard, however, beat and killed the servants one after another. Finally, the owner sent his son. But the caretakers said, 'If we kill him, the vineyard will be ours.' So the son was killed."

God sent prophet after prophet, but His people didn't listen. "We will not have this man reign over us," they said (see Luke 19:14). As a result, the people of Israel would be uprooted and their temple destroyed in A.D. 70.

But now we see the restored vine . . .

Psalm 80:14–17
Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; And the vineyard which

thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself. It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself.

"Oh, Lord, restore this vine," the psalmist prays. The great news is that God is indeed going to restore His vine as the "man of God's right hand," the Son of man, Jesus will make His way again to seek and to save.

Psalm 80:18
So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name.

Zechariah 12 tells us that when the Jews see Jesus they'll ask Him where He got His wounds.

"I got these in the house of My friends," He'll answer.

And, following the time of Tribulation, there will come a time of great awakening as the Jewish people at last recognize their Messiah.

Psalm 80:19
Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

In Romans 11:26, Paul says all of Israel shall be saved. Talk about revival! Yes, the Tribulation will take a devastating toll on the nation, but all who survive will turn to Jesus. This is glorious hope, gang, not only for the Jew, but for you and me because if God hasn't given up on the Jew, He won't give up on me and you.



81 *To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm of Asaph.*

Psalm 81 is a grand psalm that was recited during the feast of trumpets, the feast that took place in the fall, celebrating the beginning of the Jewish New Year.

Psalm 81:1–3
Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob. Take a Psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery. Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day.

This is not the silver trumpet of Numbers 10, but the *shofar,* or ram's horn. Why were they to sing joyfully? First, to celebrate the things that were . . .

Psalm 81:4–7 (a)
For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob. This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt: where I heard a language that I understood not. I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots. Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee . . .

God's people were in bondage for four hundred years. Yet when they called, He delivered them. This gives me great hope. You see, the enemy comes to me and says, "How do you think you can call to the Lord when you haven't talked to Him in two days? He's not going to respond to your cry." Don't allow the enemy to tell you you're disqualified because you forgot your devotions yesterday or you haven't been reading your Bible faithfully. The Israelites waited four hundred years. And God still answered. Would it have been better for them to have called sooner? Of course. Had they done so, they would have been spared generations of backbreaking pain and sorrow. The sooner we turn to the Lord, the more pain we are spared. But we must not listen to the lie of the enemy that says there is an expiration date to God's mercy.

Psalm 81:7 (b)

. . . I answered thee in the secret place of thunder . . .

Mount Sinai was a secret place in that it was far removed from other societies. But it was there the Lord spoke to Moses with thunder (Exodus 19). Still today, every time we open the Word, the Lord is oh, so ready to speak. But it's a mystery, a secret, to those who don't know Him.

Psalm 81:7 (c)
. . . I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.

When the people complained and murmured at Meribah because they were thirsty, the Lord told Moses to strike the rock. When he did, water gushed forth. Paul would go on to explain that the rock was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4).

The shofar was to be played in celebration of what God had done. He delivered His people from Egypt. He gave them water from the rock at Meribah. But the shofar was also to be played for the things that are . . .

Psalm 81:8–12
Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me; There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god. I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.

Here, the shofar was to sound not in celebration but in consternation. One long blast followed by three short blasts, then nine staccato blasts, followed by three more short blasts was the signal for trouble. When the Jews failed to respond to God's invitation to turn to Him, the end result was their captivity in Babylon, the destruction of Jerusalem, the burning of the temple.

Psalm 81:13–16
Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned

my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever. He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.

This applies to us prophetically as well as it did to Israel historically. We're going to hear the trump of God. We're going to be caught up to heaven. And when we get there, we're going to see what the Lord would have done for us had we called on Him, had we trusted in Him.

James said we have not because we ask not (4:2). Oh, Lord, help us to see the opportunities You give us, the doors You open for us. Oh, that we would use our time wisely. Let us live with eternity ever in view.



82 *A Song or Psalm of Asaph.*

Psalm 82 concerns the judgment of judges.

Psalm 82:1, 2
God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods. How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah.

With the power they have to sentence a man to death, in Exodus 22:28, judges are called gods. Compared to judges on earth, however, God is the Supreme Court. He is on the throne and there is no higher law.

Psalm 82:3, 4
Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.

Here, God says judges are to do three things: Defend the poor, judge righteously, and defend the needy. Yet how sad our judicial system has become. All too often, it is the rich and famous who seem to get by. But while man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the heart and is, therefore, able to judge fairly (1 Samuel 16:7).

Wouldn't it be amazing if, for one day, everyone was turned inside out and we saw the state of peoples' hearts rather than the color of their skin or the label on their clothes? I wonder who would then be on the cover of popular magazines. That's the way the Lord will judge—from the inside out.

Psalm 82:5, 6
They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course. I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.

"I and my Father are one," Jesus said (John 10:30). This incensed the Jewish leaders so much that they were ready to stone Him.

"For which good work do you stone Me?" He asked.

"We're not stoning You for a good work, but because You declared Yourself to be one with God," they answered (see John 10:33).

Then Jesus alluded to the term "gods," also found in Exodus 22:28, to defuse their argument.

Psalm 82:7
But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.

In other words, "You might be judges, but you're going to die like every other man."

Psalm 82:8
Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.

"Arise and rule, Lord." And one day, He will. When He comes back, all cases will be closed. All issues will be solved. He'll judge perfectly—and

that takes the pressure of judging people off of us, leaving us free to simply love them.



83 *A Song or Psalm of Asaph.*

Psalm 83 has its roots in history, but its flower and fruit in prophecy. Scholars agree that most likely it deals with the story of 2 Chronicles 20 . . .

With the armies of a confederation of nations led by the Edomites, Moabites, and Amorites poised to attack, Judah's King Jehoshaphat was understandably worried. But a prophet was found who said, "Don't worry. Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. The battle is not yours but the Lord's." Believing this word, Jehoshaphat didn't send his soldiers to face the enemy. He sent a choir instead, singing, "Praise the Lord, His mercy endures forever." And so confused were the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites that they unsheathed their swords and began to swing wildly—eventually wiping each other out completely. By the time the army of Judah arrived on the scene, there was no one to fight, only spoil to take.

When you feel besieged and embattled, follow Jehoshaphat's example: In everything give thanks. Rejoice in the Lord always. Praise Him—and watch the enemy of depression and discouragement turn tail and run.

The 2 Chronicles account is very likely the root of Psalm 83, but the fruit is in that which is yet to come, for there will be another confederation of nations—ten in number—led by antichrist.

Psalm 83:1–3
Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God. For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones.

We know the Jewish people will be hidden in the time of Tribulation in a place called Petra. Here, the enemy is taking his course, hatching his plan

against the Jews. Paul says our life is hidden with God in Christ Jesus (Colossians 3:3).

Psalm 83:4–8
They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance. For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against thee: The tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites; of Moab, and the Hagarenes; Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek; the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assur also is joined with them: they have holpen the children of Lot. Selah.

These are the nations who made an unholy alliance to destroy Jerusalem. At the end of the list, we see the Philistines and Assyrians—both perennial enemies of God's people. But notice who joined them. The Edomites and Amalekites were descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob. The Ishmaelites were descendants of the son of Abraham. The Moabites and Ammonites were the offspring of Lot, the nephew of Abraham. The Hagarenes were descendants of Hagar, the handmaid of Abraham's wife, Sarah.

In other words, the people who should have been closest to the Jews, the people who had blood linkage to them turned against them and joined with their avowed enemies. Spiritually, the same thing can happen. People who should be closest, the family of God, often find themselves warring with each other, fighting over doctrinal differences, church philosophies, or personal jealousies. I think the enemy rejoices when he sees the family of God at war with each other.

The author of Hebrews talks about a root of bitterness that blossoms when the enemy exploits these tendencies (12:15). Don't be part of that. Don't fight against your brothers. Don't put other churches or others down. Don't give in to grudges and jealousy.

Psalm 83:9–12
Do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison: Which perished at Endor: they became as dung for the earth. Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb:

yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna: Who said, Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession.

This is a reference to the seemingly invincible Midianites who were defeated in the days of Gideon (Judges 6; 7). back to when the Midianites were innumerable and came against the Israelites in the days of Gideon.

Psalm 83:13–16
O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind. As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire; So persecute them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm. Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O LORD.

Here, we see a picture of the Tribulation. The purpose of the Tribulation is twofold: to shake up the heathen and to wake up a nation. After we're taken to heaven in the Rapture, many people we've talked to will remember the things we said and will be saved in that day. It will be difficult because the majority will lose their lives for taking a stand against antichrist. But they'll be part of the eternal kingdom. Second, Israel will be awakened and will at last recognize Jesus as Messiah.

Psalm 83:17, 18
Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish: That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth.

Tragically, there will be those even in the Tribulation period who won't listen, who won't respond.



84 *To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.*

Psalm 84:1, 2 (a)

How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD . . .

Many commentators have attributed this psalm to the sweet psalmist of Israel, David. They say he wrote this psalm when he was in exile from Jerusalem during the time Absalom launched a rebellion against him. If this be true, we see David longing not for the palace he had or the power he employed, the position he held, or the popularity he enjoyed. We see him longing for the presence of God in the place where he could worship the Father in the tabernacle he had pitched in Jerusalem.

Psalm 84:2 (b)
. . . my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.

Whether we know it or not, David's cry is ours as well, for as Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee." The problem is, we don't realize this. Consequently, late at night, we think we need to watch television. But when that doesn't satisfy us, we go to the refrigerator and have an ice-cream sandwich. And yet we're still restless because it was for the Lord's pleasure that we were created (Revelation 4:11). Therefore, it is only when we are pleasing Him, spending time with Him that we find true satisfaction of soul.

Psalm 84:3, 4
Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah.

Here, the psalmist envies the birds that can make their way to Jerusalem.

The sparrow was the most worthless of birds (Matthew 10:29). Due to its weak feet, the swallow is the most restless. Yet both sparrow and swallow find a home in the house of the Lord.

If you feel worthless in the eyes of others or restless in your own soul, take hope. There's a place for you in the house of the Lord.

Psalm 84:5–7
Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.

The psalmist is thinking about those who would make their way to the tabernacle, and, later to the temple. Leaving their villages, as all of the men were commanded to do three times yearly, families would travel together to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. No doubt, they would anticipate coming into the city and being in the presence of the Lord. But on the way, they would pass through the valley of Baca. The root of the word, *baca,* means "weeping." We're not sure where this valley is geographically. It could even be a poetic picture the psalmist is painting. However, whatever the case historically, we can find ourselves going through tearful valleys presently.

The tears we shed on our way to the house of the Lord—toward heaven, ultimately—actually form pools that provide refreshment for others on their own pilgrimage. That is why Paul would write, "Blessed be the Father of mercy, the God of all comfort who comforts us in our trouble in order that we may be able to comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received" (see 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4).

You can't be a comforter unless you've been comforted. And you can't be comforted unless you've been uncomfortable. So God allows us the privilege of being made uncomfortable from time to time, to walk through the valley of Baca, so that the One who wipes away every tear can minister deeply to us in order that we can help others (Revelation 21:4). The Lord is so good to allow us to experience what Paul calls the fellowship of suffering (Philippians 3:10)—that we might help others and let them know the Lord will see them through, even as He has done for us.

Psalm 84:8–9
O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah. Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.

I believe "thine anointed" refers not to the psalmist, but to the Anointed One, Jesus Christ (Luke 4:18).

I was touched deeply when I looked on the face of my son, Peter-John, standing there in his tuxedo. He couldn't take his eyes off his red-haired bride as I performed the ceremony. I could see that my son was deeply in love. Therefore, it was a delight for me to embrace the bride of my son. So too, we are the bride of Christ. And because of Jesus' love for us, we can expect the Father to gladly hear our prayer.

Psalm 84:10 (a)
For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. . . .

Being in the Lord's presence for a day beats being anywhere else the world might value.

Psalm 84:10 (b)
. . . I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Any one of us can be a doorkeeper in the house of God by opening the door to others through intercession.

Psalm 84:11 (a)
For the LORD God is a sun and shield . . .

The Lord is a sun to warm us and a shield—or, literally, shade—to protect us.

Psalm 84:11 (b)
. . . the LORD will give grace and glory . . .

Grace is unmerited unearned, undeserved favor. Glory, or *chabod* in Hebrew, means "substance" or "weightiness." What a dynamic combination: the substance of glory and the gift of grace.

Psalm 84:11 (c)

. . . no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

If I'm walking with the Lord—not perfectly, but simply if my heart is right—I can be absolutely assured that there is not one good thing He'll hold back from me. We make our requests to Him. We talk things over with Him. We cast our cares upon Him. And we can know with absolute certainty that whatever we desire will come our way—if it's a good thing. If it doesn't come our way, it simply means it's not truly good.

Even as she worshiped Him, Jesus realized Salome had another agenda. I picture Him with a smile on His face and a gleam in His eye as He said to her, "Tell Me what you want."

"Can my two boys, James and John, be on Your right hand and left hand when You come into Your kingdom?" Salome asked.

Jesus looked at her and said, "Can they drink of the cup that I drink of and be baptized with My baptism?"

James and John answered, "Yes" (Matthew 20:20–22).

A few days later, at the foot of the cross, Salome must have heard the thief say to Jesus, "Lord, remember me as You come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42).

And when Jesus said, "Today you'll be with Me in paradise," His answer must have hit her like a ton of bricks. No wonder He didn't grant her request. She was unknowingly asking that her boys be crucified on His right and left.

If you're praying and things aren't happening, know that the Lord sees what you don't see and knows what you can't know. Remember Salome—and trust Him to do what's best for you.

Psalm 84:12
O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

Blessed—or, literally, happy—is the man, the woman, the family that trusts in God.



85 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.*

Psalm 85 was most likely penned after the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon. Carried away by Nebuchadnezzar, God's people were in Babylon for seventy years—just as God had warned them they would be if they didn't repent (Jeremiah 25). When they were released, a small contingent led by Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest, made its way back to Jerusalem . . .

Psalm 85:1–3
LORD, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah. Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger.

It has been rightly said that man's greatest need is God's greatest deed. Because the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), man's greatest need is for forgiveness of sin.

When Moravian missionaries went to Alaska to share the gospel with the Eskimos, they discovered that the Eskimos did not have a word for forgiveness. So they came up with a word that is used still today. Twenty-five letters long, it is the longest word in the Eskimo vocabulary and it literally means "not being able to think about it anymore."

That's what God does. When we are forgiven, our sins are buried in the deepest sea, they are placed as far as the east is from the west from God's memory (Psalm 103:12). Only the Lord has the ability to delete it from His memory bank. That's why we have the freedom to come boldly to the throne of grace, that we might find mercy and help in time of need. In those days the sin was covered. In our day, it's washed away by the blood of Jesus.

Psalm 85:4–8

Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation. I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly.

"Thou hast taken away all Thy wrath," the psalmist said in verse 3. Why, then, does he ask, "Wilt Thou be angry with us for ever?" here in verse 5? The answer is that God did forgive His people and they were allowed to return to the land. But, between verses 3 and 5, as the psalmist writes prophetically, they would not walk in righteousness, but would commit the one sin that causes the anger of God to be kindled into the very fires of eternal damnation. You see, John tells us that when Jesus died, He died not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). Thus, all manner of sin is forgiven all men because Jesus paid the price on the Cross of Calvary for all sin. But there's one sin not covered in that way: the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31).

What is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? Simply rejecting what the Holy Spirit says to a man or woman time and time and time again when He says, "You must be born again." God desires that none should perish, that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). So He laid down His life in the Person of His Son. Therefore, the person who wants to go to hell must trample on the body and wade through the blood that was shed to keep him from that destination.

"We will not have this Man reign over us," the Jews said of Jesus (Luke 19:14). So, because of their rejection of Jesus, the Jewish nation was dispersed and Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus in A.D. 70, and, more completely, by Hadrian in A.D. 132.

Psalm 85:9, 10
Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Mercy and truth are both wonderful virtues. But how do they work together? Look at Jesus. "Go call your husband," He said to the woman at the well.

"I have no husband," she answered.

"You've spoken well," Jesus mercifully said. "You've had five husbands and the man you're living with now is not your husband at all," He continued, truthfully (John 4:17, 18).

Jesus is the only One who perfectly blends the attributes of mercy and truth, righteousness and peace. How impressive and perfect is our Lord.

Psalm 85:11–13
Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yea, the LORD shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase. Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps.

God showed mercy to His people. They rejected Him, shook their fists at Him, said, "We will not have You rule over us," but God is not through with them. His mercy is inexhaustible, His grace unbelievable. Ultimately one day, there will be a great awakening in Israel and among the Jewish nation. They'll have to go through the hellish time of the Tribulation, but they will be awakened during that season, and, ultimately, all of Israel shall be saved (Romans 11:26). Oh, happy day that will be!

86 *A Prayer of David.*

In Psalm 86, we are given the opportunity to listen to the prayer of David —a man after God's own heart.

Psalm 86:1, 2 (a)
Bow down thine ear, O LORD, hear me: for I am poor and needy. Preserve my soul; for I am holy . . .

David understood that, although he was poor and needy practically, he was holy positionally. He knew of his flaws, his failures, his shortcomings, and weaknesses. But he was also keenly aware of how God viewed him positionally . . .

> . . . and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes;
>
> 1 Kings 14:8 (b)

In the Lord's estimation, David did that which was right in His eyes, kept His commandments, and he followed Him with all his heart. So too, it's important that we see ourselves as Jesus' bride, without spot or wrinkle, purified by the blood He shed for you and me (Ephesians 5:27).

> **Psalm 86:2 (b)–5**
> **. . . O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee. Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily. Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.**

In talking about God's mercy, C. H. Spurgeon said, "You can no more exhaust the mercy and the grace of God than a minnow can drink the entire Atlantic Ocean." Truly, where sin abounds, grace abounds *more* (Romans 5:20).

> **Psalm 86:6–10**
> **Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications. In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me. Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto thy works. All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name. For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone.**

"Lord, I know that You are great," David prays. "And I know that, because of Your mercy, You'll answer me."

Psalm 86:11 (a)
Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth . . .

"Teach me, and I will walk in Thy truth," David prays. That's the key.

So often our actions say, "Lord, teach me, and I'll think about it. Show me what You want me to do—and I'll give strong consideration to it." It doesn't work that way.

David says, "Teach me, and I *will* walk in Your way. What you say, I *will* do."

That's the way to pray.

Psalm 86:11 (b)
. . . unite my heart to fear thy name.

"O, wretched man that I am. What I don't want to do, I end up doing. What I do want to do, I don't do," Paul said. What was the solution? How did his heart become united? By being free of condemnation in Christ Jesus (Romans 7:24, 25—8:1).

Psalm 86:12
I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore.

It is when the Lord unites our hearts that we can ignite our hearts and praise Him with passion.

Psalm 86:13
For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.

No matter what else you're dealing with, no matter what else you're going through—you can rejoice simply because you're no longer going to hell.

"If God is so good, how could He send anyone to hell?" people ask.

God doesn't send people to hell. People make that choice themselves. He is light. Therefore, people who don't want Him will be in darkness. God is love. Therefore, people who don't want to love Him will be in a place of perpetual hate. God is life, joy, and peace. Therefore, people who don't want Him will be in the place of death, misery, and pain.

Psalm 86:14, 15

O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul; and have not set thee before them. But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.

Caught in the very act of adultery, they brought her before Jesus. "Master," they said, "Moses said she should be stoned. What do You say?"

What would He say? If He said, "Let her go," He would be violating the truth of God's law which prescribed stoning for the sin of adultery. But if He said, "Stone her," He would not be the master of mercy, the friend of sinners.

The law said that a man and woman caught in the act of adultery were to be stoned and that those bringing the accusation were to be those who threw the first stones. "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone," Jesus said. Then He stooped down and wrote with His finger in the dust. We can't be sure what He wrote. The Greek word translated "write" is *katagrapho,* or literally, "write against." In other words, Jesus wrote against those who had stones in their hands—perhaps a notation of their own sins. John tells us that, beginning with the oldest, they dropped their stones and left (John 8:3–9). The law said that, for a person to be stoned, there had to be two or three witnesses. Now there were none.

"Where are thine accusers?" Jesus asked.

"No man accuses me, Lord," the woman answered.

"Neither do I," Jesus said. "Go your way and sin no more" (John 8:10, 11).

The only One qualified to throw a stone at her didn't. Thus, truth was upheld, but mercy was shown.

That's our Lord. Truly, mercy and truth are met together in Him (verse 10).

Psalm 86:16, 17
O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid. Shew me a token for good; that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed: because thou, LORD, hast holpen me, and comforted me.

David understood God's heart. That's why he was a man after God's heart. May you, too, understand the heart of God—full of mercy, rich in compassion, glorious in grace. God is for you. He's not down on you. You might not have called upon His name for four days or forty days—but if you'll cry to Him now, you'll experience His grace and mercy anew. You really will.



87 *A Psalm or Song for the sons of Korah.*

Psalm 87 deals with Jerusalem and the coming kingdom . . .

Psalm 87:1
His foundation is in the holy mountains.

Jerusalem is 2,500 feet above sea level. The Dead Sea, less than twenty miles away, is 1,290 feet below sea level. Therefore, it's a very short drive from the lowest point in Israel to the highest.

Psalm 87:2
The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

The Lord has a special place in His heart for the city of Jerusalem.

Psalm 87:3
Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah.

Glorious things are spoken *of* Jerusalem's history, *in* her during the ministry of the prophets, *to* her by Jesus when He said He would gather her as a mother hen gathers her chicks, and *about* her in prophecy—for it is from Jerusalem that Jesus shall rule and reign.

Psalm 87:4
I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there.

People that came from these cities were proud of their heritage. Those from Rahab, or Egypt, were proud of its resplendent past. Those from Babylon were proud of its power. The Philistines were proud of their physical prowess. Those from Tyre, a merchant city, were proud of its prosperity. And the Ethiopians were proud of its exotic location.

Psalm 87:5
And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her.

There will come a time when the Jews and Jerusalem are not characterized as they are presently, when buses don't go up in flames. Jerusalem will be a place where there is peace when Jesus rules and reigns from that city.

Psalm 87:6
The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there. Selah.

Revelation 21:27 tells us that we, too, are citizens of the New Jerusalem. We are not only headed *away* from hell, but we are bound *for* heaven because our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Psalm 87:7 (a)

As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there . . .

No wonder songs will arise, for when Jesus rules and reigns, things will be right at last.

Psalm 87:7 (b)
. . . all my springs are in thee.

"All my springs are in thee"—or, literally, "All my heart is in Thee, Lord." And how could it not be, for truly God is good.



88 *A Song or Psalm for the sons of Korah, to the chief Musician upon Mahalath Leannoth, Maschil of Heman the Ezrahite.*

Dealing with despair, depression, discouragement, and death, Psalm 88 is universally acknowledged as the saddest of all the psalms.

Psalm 88:1
O LORD God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee:

"I have cried—or prayed," the psalmist declares. Therefore, no matter how dark the remainder of the psalm, prayer is proof of a lingering hope within his heart.

Psalm 88:2–8
Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry; For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou

hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah. Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth.

Because the psalmist uses language that describes a pit, scholars think this is a reference to one who was in a literal pit: Joseph. After being thrown into a pit by his jealous brothers, Joseph went from a dark situation to an even darker one when he was sold into slavery. After serving in the house of Potiphar for a season, Joseph was falsely accused and thrown into prison. It was from the darkness of prison, however, that he would eventually end up reigning in the place, second only to Pharaoh himself (Genesis 41:40).

Psalm 88:9–12
Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee. Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah. Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

"For in death there is no remembrance of Thee. In the grave, who shall give Thee thanks?" David asked (Psalm 6:5). Here, eighty-two psalms later, we hear the psalmist echo, "Shall Thy wonders be known in the dark and Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?"

Psalm 88:13
But unto thee have I cried, O LORD; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee.

Light shines into the depths of the pit and the darkness of the grave in the form of a three-letter word: "But." Yes, the psalmist was distressed and depressed, discouraged and despairing—*but* he still cried to the Lord and believed that his prayer would "prevent" or, literally, "come before" Him.

Psalm 88:14

LORD, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?

"Why hidest Thou Thy face from me?" the psalmist cries.

The early church fathers taught that Psalm 88 looked not back at Joseph but ahead to the One who would cry from the Cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). In what is believed to have been the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, archaeologists have uncovered a pit which at one time was a holding tank for liquid or food, but, became a dungeon of sorts, based on markings in it and pins that held ropes and chains in place. It is believed that it could be the very place Jesus was held between the time He appeared before Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate. Thus, Psalm 88 could very well be prophetically describing the words, the thoughts, the feelings of Jesus.

Whether this be true or not, this much is sure: Jesus can relate deeply to whatever pit you might be in, for He knows what it's like to be forsaken, forgotten, and in the dark.

Psalm 88:15–18
I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off. They came round about me daily like water; they compassed me about together. Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.

Why would the Lord inspire the psalmist to write such a song of gloom? I think it's because sometimes things just don't make sense. Things happen that we just can't figure out. The psalmist was a man of God and yet he went through something that perplexed and confounded him deeply. Sometimes things happen that don't seem right. The first man who died on this planet was not Adam, the first sinner, or Cain, the first murderer. It was Abel, the first worshiper. We look at this as a great tragedy. But that's due to our earthly perspective. Do you really think Abel thought it was a great tragedy when he was escorted to heaven? I suggest he was rejoicing.

That is why we need to come to the psalms and be reminded once again that, although this life is full of questions and difficulties, we're headed for heaven, where things will be right for all of eternity.



89 *Maschil of Ethan the Ezrahite.*

After David brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem and placed it in the tabernacle he pitched for it, three men were appointed to lead the choir, to direct the praise: Asaph, Heman, and Ethan (1 Chronicles 15:17). Heman's song, Psalm 88, was in a minor key. Here, Ethan's song is in a major key. Oh, he also has questions, but we don't know about them until two-thirds through the psalm because first, he's committed to praise and compelled to pray.

Psalm 89:1, 2
I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens.

"Mercy will endure forever," Ethan declares. "And Your faithfulness is established eternally." Evidently, Ethan, whose name means "Steady," changed his name to Jeduthun, or "the Lord is steady" (1 Chronicles 15:19; 25:1). God is steady indeed. So firmly is His faithfulness established that there is not even a shadow or hint of change in Him (James 1:17).

Psalm 89:3, 4
I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah.

The Lord responds, "I have made an everlasting covenant with David."

Psalm 89:5, 6
And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints. For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD?

It is the mature believer who begins his prayers not by complaining, murmuring, and griping during times of difficulty—but by worshiping.

Psalm 89:7
God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.

We have a right to be concerned these days when God is not being feared. How I pray that we don't lightly esteem the Rock of our salvation (Deuteronomy 32:15), that we don't take God lightly or casually. Our worship must reflect the depth and dimension of praise of which God is worthy.

Psalm 89:8
O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?

The Hebrew word translated "faithfulness" literally means "steady." It's the same Hebrew word we find in Exodus 17:12 . . .

> But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.
>
> Exodus 17:12

Moses was on the mountain, praying for Joshua, who was leading the Israelites in battle against the Amalekites. As Moses held up the rod of God, the Israelites gained momentum in battle. But when his hands grew weary, the

momentum lagged. So Aaron and Hur steadied Moses' arms until the enemies were defeated completely.

Unlike Moses, God is steady and His arms do not need to be supported by anyone. His arms never grow weary to reach out to us—not even when they're pinned to the Cross of Calvary.

Psalm 89:9, 10 (a)
Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them. Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces . . .

It's interesting how many times the psalmists refer to God delivering His people from Egypt. It's a recurring theme because they were wise to remember that, whatever else may or may not have been happening, God rescued them from Egypt. So too, the fact that God saved us from our sin should always cause us to celebrate regardless of what else is or isn't going on in our lives.

Psalm 89:10 (b)–14
. . . as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm. The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them. The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name. Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand. Justice and judgment are the habita tion of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

Mercy and truth are seen nowhere more clearly than in Jesus. He spoke truth, but it was always framed and couched in amazing mercy. Don't you desire that for your own life?

Psalm 89:15, 16 (a)
Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day . . .

How can you rejoice all the day? If you really want to be happy, consider the names of the Lord . . .

- He identified Himself to Moses as I AM THAT I AM (Exodus 3:14). I'm sure Moses thought, *"You are . . . what?"* But the implication is that God would be whatever Moses had need of.
- "I am Jehovah-Ropheka," God declared (Exodus 15:26), the God who heals. Is your heart hurting? Is your spirit wounded? Call upon Jehovah-Ropheka.
- He is Jehovah-Jireh (Genesis 22:14), the Lord who provides.
- He is Jehovah-Nissi (Exodus 17:15), the Lord our banner or covering. If you feel exposed or insecure, call upon Jehovah-Nissi.
- He is Jehovah-Tsidkenu (Jeremiah 23:6), the Lord our righteousness. Do you feel flawed? God is your righteousness.
- He is El Shaddai (Genesis 17:1). *El* speaks of strength. Shad speaks of the breast. Thus, this is the picture of a God who is strong, yet as tender as a mother with her newborn baby.
- He is Abba (Mark 14:36), our Father. When I feel I just need to talk things over with someone and receive wisdom and direction, I turn to Him, my Abba.

The names of the Lord cause our hearts to rejoice indeed.

Psalm 89:16 (b)–22
. . . and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted. For the LORD is our defence; and the Holy One of Israel is our king. Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him. The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him.

"We want a king like the other nations," God's people said (1 Samuel 8:6, 7). So God let them have their way and Saul was given to them—a man who stood head and shoulders above the others. Humanly speaking, Saul seemed to be the perfect candidate. But, spiritually, he proved to be a disaster. So God raised up another king, one that was after His own heart. God raised up David.

Psalm 89:23–25
And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him. But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted. I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers.

Under David's reign, Israel controlled the region from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates—a vast amount of territory.

Psalm 89:26
He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.

This is one of the very few places in the Old Testament where God is likened to a father. Jesus came to reveal to us that God is indeed our Father (Matthew 6:9). But before Jesus, few besides David—a worshiper and lover of God—understood His nature.

Psalm 89:27
Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.

The psalmist speaks not only of David, but of the Son of David, the Seed of David, the Greater than David, the One who would come—Jesus, our Savior. Indeed, He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Psalm 89:28–37
My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for

ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah.

When David wanted to build a temple for the Lord, the Lord said to Nathan, "Tell him that, although he can't build Me a house, I will build him a house (1 Chronicles 17:4–10). The Davidic Covenant is the promise God made to David that his house, his family, would endure forever. Scripture says that when David heard this, he sat down before the Lord, speechless (1 Chronicles 17:16).

September 8, 1998. Those in attendance at Camden Yard that day didn't know they would be watching history made—not by what they saw but by what they didn't see. It was on that day that Cal Ripken, Jr., went to his manager and said, "Scratch me from the starting lineup." After playing in 2,643 consecutive games, it was the first time in sixteen years that Cal Ripken, Jr., wouldn't be playing.

Sixteen years is quite a streak—but it pales in comparison to the streak of the One who will sit on the throne forever. During Cal Ripken's sixteen years, there were weeks when he never connected with the ball. So too, there were times when David dropped the ball and was far from perfect. But God made a promise to him and He would keep His promise because His steadiness, His faithfulness was on the line.

God's steadiness and faithfulness is what keeps us going, as well. It's not how good we're doing. It's that He is faithful. "I'll never leave you nor forsake you," He said. "Nothing can separate you from the love I have for you." God is truly with us, gang. He is for us. He's not going to give up on us. He made a covenant with us—the New Covenant (Hebrews 12:24). The

blood of His Son washed away our sin. And that streak isn't going to end after sixteen years, no matter how many times we strike out.

Psalm 89:38 (a)
But . . .

After all of the praise that had poured from the lips of Ethan, he has a problem. The problem is that Ethan saw Solomon come on the throne. He then saw Solomon depart and catastrophe follow when Solomon's son, Rehoboam, decided to tax the people so heavily that the ten northern tribes broke away and crowned their own king: Jeroboam. Jeroboam commissioned golden calves to be placed in the northern and southern part of the country so that his subjects wouldn't feel the need to worship in Jerusalem. Watching this scene unfold, Ethan's steadiness is shaken . . .

Psalm 89:38 (b)–43
. . . thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed. Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant: thou hast profaned his crown by casting it to the ground. Thou hast broken down all his hedges; thou hast brought his strong holds to ruin. All that pass by the way spoil him: he is a reproach to his neighbours. Thou hast set up the right hand of his adversaries; thou hast made all his enemies to rejoice. Thou hast also turned the edge of his sword, and hast not made him to stand in the battle.

Here, Ethan is speaking not only of the problem of Jeroboam, but, prophetically, of who would come after him: the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and finally, ultimately, antichrist.

Psalm 89:44–49
Thou hast made his glory to cease, and cast his throne down to the ground. The days of his youth hast thou shortened: thou hast covered him with shame. Selah. How long, LORD? wilt thou hide thyself for ever? shall thy wrath burn like fire? Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast thou made all men in vain? What

man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah. Lord, where are thy former lovingkindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth?

Ethan couldn't correlate what he was seeing with the promises the Lord had made to David.

Psalm 89:50, 51
Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants; how I do bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people; Wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O LORD; wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed.

After praising the Lord in the first two-thirds of the psalm, Ethan is compelled to pray to the Lord in the last third. "Here's the problem, Lord," he says. "The nation is split. How does all of this work?"

What Ethan couldn't know is that One would come who would fulfill the promise completely. It will all work out perfectly when Jesus rules and reigns—but not until then.

Psalm 89:52
Blessed be the LORD for evermore. Amen, and Amen.

After praising and then praying, Ethan was content to say, "Blessed be Your name forever, Lord. It's going to work out in the end. I might not see it presently. But I know You'll come through just as You promised."

Have you ever taken a Scripture and said, "Lord, You promised this"—and you prayed about it fervently, maybe even with fasting—and it still hasn't happened practically? I think many times, like the psalmist, we don't understand the full orb of the promise. We're learning, but because we only see through a glass darkly, there is so much we don't understand (1 Corinthians 13:12). Therefore, our best move is to join Ethan and say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord. I trust You, knowing that righteous and true are Your judgments, O, Lord. Therefore, what You're doing is right on."



90 *A Prayer of Moses the man of God.*

Psalm 90 is the oldest psalm in the Bible. Written by Moses, it is not only the story of creation, but the story of man's history in totality . . .

Psalm 90:1, 2
LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

Here, Moses declares that before anything was formed, God was there.

Psalm 90:3, 4
Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.

On the first day of creation, God said, "Let there be light," which resulted in the creation of day and night (Genesis 1:5).

Psalm 90:5 (a)
Thou carriest them away as with a flood . . .

On the second day of creation, God separated the waters and we see the seas. So too, the big event that relates to Bible history was the Flood of Noah in the second Millennium.

Psalm 90:5 (b), 6
. . . they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.

On the third day of creation, God declared, "Let the earth bring forth grass." And vegetation came. What was the big event of history during the years 2000 B.C. to 1000 B.C.? That was when Jacob took his family to Egypt. And they prospered and flourished in the land of Goshen. Seventy souls became millions. But in the evening, they were cut down when they were enslaved in Egypt.

Psalm 90:7–9
For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told.

On the fourth day of creation, the sun and moon were created. So too, in history during the period from 1000 B.C. to the time of Christ, the Jews would be carried away into Babylon, where the moon god was, and is, worshiped to this day.

Psalm 90:10
The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

On the fifth day of creation, the fowls and fish were created. Likewise, from the perspective of the Jew, the big event from A.D. 1 to 1000 would be the burning of the temple and the dispersion of the Jews in A.D. 132.

Psalm 90:11, 12
Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

On the sixth day of creation, man was created. Historically, the big event in the period from A.D. 1000 to 2000 would be the rebirth of the nation of Israel in 1948. Mandated by the United Nations following World War II, it was seemingly a work of man—but in reality, directed by God.

Psalm 90:13–17
Return, O LORD, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants. O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

On the seventh day in the creation story, God rested. So too, I believe we are coming to the end of the day of man and to the day God will establish His kingdom, when He will send His Son.

I believe the Lord's coming is near, that we are at the very threshold. And though we can't know the day or the hour of His coming, we can know the time and season is dawning (Matthew 24).

91

Psalm 91:1
He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

"The most High," or *El Elyon* is a name for God always linked with priestly praise. In other words, he that lives in the secret place of praise and worship—in morning devotions or evening walks with the Lord—shall abide under the shadow of God's protection and provision.

"Lord," we say, "if You provide for me, I'll give You praise. If You protect me, I'll worship You."

"It's the other way around," the Lord says. "Worship Me—and as you do, you will experience the shadow of My protection and provision."

Praise always precedes power. Before thousands were saved at Pentecost, people praised the Lord in their own tongues (Acts 2:11). It was as Peter and Silas praised the Lord in jail that the prison doors flew open (Acts 16). It is as praise ascends that things begin to happen. That's why the Book of Psalms is so important; that's why worship is so necessary.

Psalm 91:2, 3
I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles (Isaiah 40:31). It is the Father's intention that you soar in the Spirit. But Satan is a fowler, a bird catcher, who seeks to pull you down and ensnare you.

Psalm 91:4
He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

Commentator F. B. Meyer tells us there are four kinds of calls a mother hen makes to her brood: one when night is falling, one when danger is lurking, one when food is found, and one when she simply desires to have her chicks close to her.

"O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I would gather you as a mother hen gathers her chicks, but you would not," Jesus cried (Luke 13:34). Our Lord desires to gather us under His wings because He sees the darkness coming; He sees the danger overhead; He has nourishment for us; and, finally, He just desires to be with us.

I hope that when you hear His call, you'll be quick to answer and find yourself under the covering of His wings.

Psalm 91:5–10
Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A

thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

We live in a culture of fear where people are worried about everything from flu epidemics to identity theft to terrorist attacks. Here, the psalmist exults not only in the saving power, but the keeping power of our God. Does this mean that believers will be immune from danger?

No. But it does mean that regardless of the physical, emotional, or financial battles surrounding us, the Lord Himself is our refuge. Therefore, what else do we need?

Psalm 91:11, 12
For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

This is the verse quoted by Satan when Jesus was in the wilderness. In the third temptation, Satan caused Jesus to be taken up to the pinnacle of the temple. "Jump," He said. "After all, You won't get hurt because the angels will keep You from dashing Your foot against a stone" (see Matthew 4:6). But Satan conveniently forgot to quote the phrase "in all thy ways." In other words, the promise was made that Jesus would be kept in all *His* ways—not in all of Satan's suggestions.

"This isn't a chance for Me to test My Father," Jesus would, in effect say. "It's an opportunity for Me to trust My Father. He shall keep Me in all My ways—and My way is to lay down My life, to let go of My will."

Psalm 91:13
Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

The lion, the adder, the dragon are all names that refer to Satan. Thus, it is Satan who will ultimately be trampled.

Psalm 91:14–16
Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.

Those who abide, who dwell in the secret place with the Lord will be not only be provided for and protected presently, but have a glorious destiny eternally.



92 *A Psalm or Song for the Sabbath day.*

Psalm 92:1, 2
It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High: To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night,

In tabernacle and temple worship, sweet-smelling incense was offered to the Lord every morning and evening. We can do the same thing. A great way to start the day and a beautiful way to end it is by offering sweet-smelling prayers of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord.

Psalm 92:3
Upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery; upon the harp with a solemn sound.

The psaltery—or lute—and the ten-stringed instrument were played energetically. The harp, on the other hand, was played solemnly. In this, we see there is a time both for energetic praise and for solemn worship.

Psalm 92:4

For thou, LORD, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands.

It's not through his own hands that the psalmist will triumph, but through the work of God's hands—ultimately, as they were pinned to the cross.

In this psalm for the Sabbath, we are reminded that the purpose of the Sabbath day is to stop what we normally do and remember that everything we have is from the Lord. The world treats Sunday like a day to get ahead. But, by taking the Sabbath break, we say, "Lord, I realize and recognize that anything I have is not due to my energy or ingenuity but to the gracious work of *Your* hands on my behalf."

Psalm 92:5–10

O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep. A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this. When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever: But thou, LORD, art most high for evermore. For, lo, thine enemies, O LORD, for, lo, thine enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered. But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn: I shall be anointed with fresh oil.

"Lord, let others do as they will, but I am coming into Your house and presence with songs of praise, realizing everything I have is from Your hand," the psalmist declares. And in so doing, he would be anointed with fresh oil.

I believe we were created to need one day in seven to change pace emotionally, physically, and mentally—to rejoice, relax, and be refreshed.

"But I don't need a day off," people protest.

Did God need a day off? Was He tired after six days of creation? No, but He showed us the principle that one day a week ought to be treated differently.

Psalm 92:11, 12 (a)

Mine eye also shall see my desire on mine enemies, and mine ears shall hear my desire of the wicked that rise up against me. The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree . . .

Palm trees thrive in dry places. Also, the palm is the only tree that produces more and more fruit the older it gets. This means that, even through dry times, the righteous produce more fruit the older they get. What a glorious hope!

Psalm 92:12 (b)
. . . he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

The cedars of Lebanon grow in the mountains. They send out horizontal roots in order to link to other cedars in order that they might have stability. We can learn from the cedar. Sometimes, people fall in stormy seasons simply because they're not supported in the way the Father intends His family to support one another.

Psalm 92:13–15
Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; To shew that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Oh, this is my prayer. In old age, I want to be fat, flourishing, and fruitful in the things of God. Lord, help me to be a heavyweight in You!

93

Psalm 93:1–4
The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself: the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved. Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting. The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. The LORD on high is

mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.

As a nation, the Israelites had a collective fear of the open sea. Yes, they fished on the Sea of Galilee—but that was a freshwater lake. You might not be afraid of the sea—but what torments you? The good news of Psalm 93 is that the Lord is mightier than any fear that might be rolling your way.

Psalm 93:5
Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever.

Where do we go when storms are raging, when waves are rolling, when winds are blowing? We find shelter in the house of the Lord. There, though the winds and gales bluster and blow, we find exactly what we need.



94 Psalm 94 is divided into two parts. Verses 1 through 7 express the psalmist's concern for the wickedness of men. Verses 8 through 23 express confidence in the righteousness of God. The psalmist's concern is expressed in prayer; his confidence through proclamation.

Psalm 94:1–7
O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself. Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud. LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? How long shall they utter and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and afflict thine heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.

Here, the psalmist asks, "How long, Lord, will this evil and wickedness go on?" And, as we look at our own world, his question is ours, as well.

Psalm 94:8–11
Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know? The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.

As is so often the case, even as he makes his prayer, the psalmist is given the answer in his heart.

Psalm 94:12–15
Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law; That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked. For the LORD will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance. But judgment shall return unto righteousness: and all the upright in heart shall follow it.

Those who are corrected and learn from their chastisement are blessed.

Our greatest need is not to be informed. It's to be reminded. We forget. That's why I come to church. I need to be reminded as I sing the songs, as I offer prayer, as I fellowship with my brothers and sisters. The day is coming when all problems will be solved, when all questions will be answered. Until then, we have to be reminded constantly of eternity.

Psalm 94:16
Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?

"Who will take a stand for righteousness?" the psalmist asks.

Psalm 94:17
Unless the LORD had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence.

"If You didn't help me, Lord, I would be tongue-tied. I wouldn't say a thing. I wouldn't make any protest about the wickedness I see all around me."

Psalm 94:18, 19
When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O LORD, held me up. In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.

"I felt as though I was slipping. I was anxious inside. But, Lord, You comforted me."

Psalm 94:20
Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?

This seems to be the Lord speaking, saying, "Are you going to allow wickedness in your home?"

Psalm 94:21–23
They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood. But the LORD is my defence; and my God is the rock of my refuge. And he shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; yea, the LORD our God shall cut them off.

God will have the final say. He will win the day. Meanwhile, we get to pray. We get to say, "To the best of our ability, Lord, we are not going to partake in wickedness. We're going to join Joshua in saying, 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord' " (Joshua 24:15).

95 Psalm 95 through Psalm 100 make up what are called the "Coronation Psalms," so called because they were compiled for the dedication of the second temple, built after the Jews' seventy-year exile in Babylon. Although Israel had previously asked for a king so that they could be like the

nations that surrounded them, these psalms seem to reaffirm their understanding that the best way for the nation to be ruled was to acknowledge God as King.

These psalms are concerned not only with the dedication of the second temple, but with the anticipation of the Second Coming, for their ultimate fulfillment will take place when Jesus rules the earth as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Psalm 95:1–3
O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

Having just returned from captivity in Babylon, where multiple gods were worshiped, the psalmist emphasizes the absolute, undeniable sovereignty of the true and living God.

Psalm 95:4, 5
In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land.

Even as the temple was being dedicated, there was once again the realization that what they had built couldn't be compared to what God had created.

Psalm 95:6, 7 (a)
O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. . . .

Here, the psalmist says, "Let us bow down. Let us kneel." Clapping hands, standing in awe, lifting the head are all spoken of in the Scriptures as ways we can demonstrate worship. Although worship is stimulated in the heart and can be demonstrated through the body, I have found that sometimes

demonstration through my body works stimulation in my spirit. That is, when I'm dry and I don't sense the Lord's presence as I once did, I find that when I bow my knees before Him or lift my hands to Him, something happens deep within me and my heart is stirred.

In the morning—when my mind might be foggy and my body might be tired—if I'll kneel down before the Lord, if I'll lift up my hands and praise His name, if I'll sing loudly in my study, if I'll worship enthusiastically, even though my spirit may not initially be on board, it doesn't take long for it to respond accordingly. That's why the psalmist doesn't say, "Do these things if you feel like it." He says, "Do these things, period." Worship is not based on feeling. Worship is based on who God is. And He is merciful, generous, wonderful, and loving.

When the Wisemen made their way to Bethlehem, bearing gold, frankincense, and myrrh, Jesus was not yet two years old. Thus, they obviously weren't hoping to get anything from Him. Instead, they brought their gifts to Him simply because they realized that He was the promised One, the King. Whether or not they felt anything was not the issue.

All things were made by Him and for His pleasure. Therefore, when I am pleasing the Lord by worshiping Him, I am actually fulfilling the very purpose for my existence (Revelation 4:11).

Psalm 95:7 (b)–9
. . . To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work.

The reference here is to Meribah (Exodus 17). After the Lord had set His people free from their bondage in Egypt, after He had parted the Red Sea for them, they found themselves hot and thirsty. They could have trusted God. Instead, they murmured and complained. The result was hardened hearts.

So too, at any given moment, I'm either going to be worshiping or murmuring. Thanksgiving leads to grace and glory. Murmuring, on the other hand, leads to discouragement and depression. Murmuring will take us down faster than anything else. When do we murmur? More often than not, as with

the children of Israel, it's when we're going through a dry spell. And when we're dry, we're vulnerable to complaining. "Don't let that happen," the psalmist says.

The Israelites had seen God's work. So have we. We have seen Him save us from hell, take up residence in our hearts, adopt us as sons and plant us in His kingdom. Therefore, regardless of how dry the day might be, we have more than enough reason to rejoice and worship Him enthusiastically.

Psalm 95:10, 11
Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: Unto whom I sware in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.

The tendency to murmur that began in the dry days at Meribah seemed to set a pattern for the children of Israel. Soon, they began to murmur about everything. It was murmuring that eventually kept them from their destiny, for when they were camped at Kadesh-Barnea on the very border of the Promised Land, they believed the report of the ten spies who complained that the giants were unbeatable rather than realizing that no man was a match for the God who had parted the Red Sea.

Murmuring is like cancer—it just begins to spread and take over. How can we keep from murmuring? What is the cure for murmuring? Worship.

96 Psalm 96:1, 2

O sing unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth. Sing unto the LORD, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day.

Three times in the first two verses of this third coronation psalm the people were exhorted to sing. As part of "all the earth," we're to sing, as well. Why? Because God seems to enjoy working to background music (Job 38:4–7).

Psalm 96:3–5
Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people. For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens.

Here we see another affirmation of God's absolute sovereignty contrasted against Babylon's multiplicity of false gods.

Psalm 96:6
Honour and majesty are before him: strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

More than in any gym or beauty salon, strength and beauty are found in God's sanctuary as we worship Him passionately and creatively.

Psalm 96:7, 8
Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts.

Just as in verses 1 and 2 we were told to sing, sing, sing, here we are told to give, give, give. Why? It is not because the God of the universe is a little short on cash and needs us to help Him out. It is because it is by giving to the Lord that our professions are given meaning.

Psalm 96:9
O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.

It was when Isaiah saw the Lord that he became aware of his own sin and was purified (Isaiah 6:5–7). So too, as we worship the Lord and are reminded of His holiness, we ourselves become a little more whole in the process. Worship is wonderfully healing.

Psalm 96:10

Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously.

Isaiah worshiped the Lord, was cleansed with a hot coal, and then he was ready for the Lord to send him with the message. "Woe" became "go." True, impacting worship cannot help but overflow in witness.

Psalm 96:11–13
Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice Before the LORD: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.

Worship, witness, and then rejoice because the Lord is coming to make all things right at last. The more difficult the problems that surround us, the more we look forward to His return.



97

Psalm 97:1 (a)
The LORD reigneth . . .

What the heathen were told in Psalm 96:10, we are reminded of here in Psalm 97. That is: The Lord reigns!

Psalm 97:1 (b)
. . . let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.

When Jesus comes back to rule and reign, the whole earth shall indeed rejoice. But because the kingdom of God is within us, we who know Him can begin the celebration even now.

Psalm 97:2–9

Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about. His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory. Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods. Zion heard, and was glad; and the daughters of Judah rejoiced because of thy judgments, O LORD. For thou, LORD, art high above all the earth: thou art exalted far above all gods.

Why is the earth to rejoice? Why are the multitude of isles to be glad? Because, unlike the gods of the world, the God we are to worship is not at the mercy of nature. We are called to worship a God of infinite power, of absolute righteousness.

Psalm 97:10
Ye that love the LORD, hate evil: he preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked.

Why are those who love the Lord to hate evil? Because of what it does to people. It destroys them.

Psalm 97:11, 12
Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the LORD, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.

In contrast to the light of the fire that burns His enemies, God lights the path of the righteous.

A Psalm.

98

Psalm 98:1, 2
O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory. The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen.

In Luke 2, we find the story of a man named Simeon, an old man who waited day after day for the coming of Messiah, the One who would set His people free. One day, Simeon was told by the Spirit, "Today is the day. Today is the day you have been waiting for." As Simeon made his way to the temple that day, he was no doubt listening for the rumble of chariot wheels. No doubt there would be an awesome army that would march into Jerusalem, led by Messiah, to liberate Israel from the oppression of Rome. Simeon listened. He watched. He waited. But there were no chariots. There was no army. Instead, there was just a peasant couple who had come to dedicate a little, tiny Baby. And Simeon had a choice to make right then. He could have said, "You're kidding me. I've been waiting decades for a teenage girl, a poor carpenter, and a tiny baby?" But he didn't. We are told he took the Child in his hands and blessed the Father for making known His salvation.

Oftentimes, we pray for and focus on a specific person or event to come our way, to solve our problem, to set us free. But more often than not, what God sends our way isn't at all what we expect. We look for an army, and God sends a baby. We think it's going to be a powerful presentation. Instead, it's a peasant couple. At that moment, like Simeon, we have a choice to make. We can either say, "What's the use of praying? God surely doesn't answer prayer"—or we can say, "I don't understand this, Lord. But I bless You and trust that somehow what You've brought to me today is going to be what's best."

Psalm 98:3–6
He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: make a

loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise. Sing unto the LORD with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a Psalm. With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the LORD, the King.

Worship is to be energetic and enthusiastic. "Tell your disciples to pipe down," the religious leaders said to Jesus.

"If they are quiet, then the rocks will cry out," Jesus said (see Luke 19:40).

So, here the psalmist says, "Let the music play!"

Psalm 98:7–9
Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together Before the LORD; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity.

What a day it will be when Jesus comes back—when the floods clap their hands and the mountains break forth into song—when even seemingly insurmountable obstacles and events that we were convinced would drown us are seen to serve His purpose perfectly.



99 Psalm 99:1–5

The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth between the cher ubims; let the earth be moved. The LORD is great in Zion; and he is high above all the people. Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy. The king's strength also loveth judgment; thou dost establish equity, thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob. Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy.

Worship should be joyful and energetic—but also reverent and respectful. Here, we see the psalmist advocating bowing down in a posture

of humility as a response to the awareness of God's holiness.

Psalm 99:6–9
Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the LORD, and he answered them. He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar: they kept his testimonies, and the ordinance that he gave them. Thou answeredst them, O LORD our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions. Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy.

Moses, Aaron, and Samuel are singled out by the psalmist as examples of men who called out to God and were heard by Him. The fact that Scripture records not only the faults and flaws of each of these giants of faith, but that the Lord forgave them should serve as an encouragement for us, flawed as we are, to humbly follow in their footsteps of prayer.



100 *A Psalm of praise.*

Psalm 100:1, 2 (a)
Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness . . .

The worship we give to the Lord and the work we do for Him must always be done with gladness. When I look around, I realize the men I most respect are men who serve the Lord. When I look ahead, I realize that anything I do—even if it's nothing more than offering a cup of cold water in the Lord's name—will be rewarded (Matthew 10:42). When I look back, I realize the enemy attacks the people at the back of the pack—those who aren't serving the Lord (Deuteronomy 25:18). Therefore, the best place to be is in the front lines, serving the Lord wholeheartedly.

Psalm 100:2 (b)
. . . come before his presence with singing.

Something happens when we put our reservations aside and come into the Lord's presence with singing. If you feel far from the Lord, sing songs of praise to Him for He inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3). God seeks those who worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:23). Therefore, if you want the Lord to seek you, worship Him—and, as you do, you'll find that you are once again aware of His presence.

Psalm 100:3
Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

You exist for God. God does not exist for you. He's a loving Father who loves us. But He's also our Creator who made us. Why are we to worship Him? Yes, there are benefits and blessings for us—but, ultimately, it comes down to the fact that He is God. We exist for His pleasure (Revelation 4:11). And He is pleased when we worship Him. Why is He pleasured? Because people become like that which they worship (Psalm 115:4–8). And He wants us to be like Him.

Psalm 100:4
Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

The best way to enter into the Lord's presence is by thanking Him for what He has done and praising Him for who He is.

Psalm 100:5
For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

Truly, the Lord is good. His mercy is inexhaustible. And so solid and unchanging is His truth that we can pass it on to our great-grandchildren.



101 *A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 101 is believed to be David's inaugural address, written when he was crowned king of Israel. We see his personal plan in verses 1 through 4 and his political platform in verses 5 through 8 . . .

Psalm 101:1 (a)
I will sing of mercy . . .

Notice that David doesn't say, "I will sing *for* mercy." He says, "I will sing *of* mercy." In other words, David didn't sing so that God would be merciful to him in the future, but because God had already shown him great mercy—just as He has to us.

Psalm 101:1 (b)
. . . and judgment: unto thee, O LORD, will I sing.

Although it might seem easier to praise the Lord for His mercy than for His judgment, the term judgment refers to all of God's decisions—one of which was, miraculously, to save us.

Psalm 101:2 (a)
I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. . . .

The old adage is true: If you aim for nothing, you're guaranteed to hit it. Here, David is saying, "I am determined to behave wisely and maturely, Lord. I don't want to be less than You enable me to be." This is what Jesus meant when He told us we are to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

Psalm 101:2 (b)
. . . O when wilt thou come unto me? . . .

"I want to behave wisely and maturely, Lord. But to do this, I need Your help desperately," David prays.

Psalm 101:2 (c), 3 (a)
. . . I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes . . .

Both in his administration and his house, David determined there would be no wicked thing set before his eyes. Why? We become like that which we behold. That is why Paul told the Corinthians that as we behold the Lord, we are changed from glory to greater glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Psalm 101:3 (b), 4
. . . I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person.

"I won't spend time with wicked people," David said. But wasn't Jesus called the friend of sinners? Didn't He hang out with people of questionable reputations? Yes. But rather than being changed by a situation, Jesus changed it. You see, we're either going to be thermometers or thermostats. A thermometer goes up and down with the temperature of the room. A thermostat changes the conditions in the room. And if you're going somewhere to share Jesus, to take a stand for Him, to talk about Him, to make no compromise, to be a thermostat—you are free to go anywhere.

Psalm 101:5 (a)
Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off . . .

In a family, in an administration, in a church congregation, there will be those who want to slander others. If you're wise, like David, you'll cut it off. When someone comes with a negative word about another, give no ear to it.

Psalm 101:5 (b)
. . . him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer.

David chose not to spend time with haughty people.

Psalm 101:6
Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me.

David chose to receive counsel from men of faith, from men who loved God. Those who lacked character and integrity wouldn't be part of his administration.

Psalm 101:7
He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.

Character counted with David. Character has wisely been defined as what you do when no one is watching you. Inspired by the Spirit, David is describing how a life, a family, a house, a nation ought to be run.

Psalm 101:8
I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the LORD.

When you move into a new house, you make a list of all the things that need to be fixed because after you live there for a year or two, you won't notice them any more. Maybe that is why David said, he would rid Jerusalem of wicked men *early.* In our own lives, we must not put off dealing with that which is contrary to the nature of our Father, with that which is not right in His sight.



102 *A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the LORD.*

Some commentators suggest this psalm was written by David after he committed adultery with Bathsheba. Others say it was written by a captive in Babylon, perhaps by Daniel. Although we can't be sure of the identity of the human author of Psalm 102, we know he was one who was discouraged. And that makes this psalm extremely applicable to us at one time or another in our pilgrimage . . .

Psalm 102:1–4
Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call answer me speedily. For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread.

So discouraged was the psalmist that he lost his appetite.

Psalm 102:5–7
By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top.

Pelicans don't live in the wilderness. Owls aren't found in the desert. Sparrows don't dwell alone. Therefore, the psalmist is saying, "Nothing in my life is as it should be."

Psalm 102:8
Mine enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me.

Not only was the psalmist distressed internally, but he was surrounded by men out to get him.

Psalm 102:9–11
For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou

hast lifted me up, and cast me down. My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass.

The condition of the moaning and groaning, the isolation and confusion paints a very powerful picture of what sin does—either to the psalmist personally, the Jewish nation corporately, or you and me presently. Sin causes us to become disoriented and discouraged. We groan; we ache; we cry endlessly. That is why we rejoice over what Jesus has done for us when He paid the price for our sin.

Psalm 102:12–17
But thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance unto all generations. Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth thy glory. When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.

Suddenly, the psalmist looks up. Suddenly, he has hope as he realizes the Lord is coming. Gang, we might be going through this or dealing with that, but one of these days, we're going home to heaven, where every tear will be wiped away, where we'll deal with our flesh no more.

Psalm 102:18 (a)
This shall be written for the generation to come . . .

"This shall be written for the generation to come." In Matthew 24, Jesus said the final generation would be the one that sees the fig tree blossom. Throughout the Old Testament, the fig tree speaks of Israel. After almost 2,000 years of not having a homeland, on May 14, 1948, Israel was established once more. Thus, ours is the generation that saw the fig tree blossom.

Psalm 102:18 (b)

. . . and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD.

Which people shall be created? In Old Testament times, there were two groups: Jews and Gentiles. But in Ephesians 2, Paul declares that the Lord makes from them a new entity: the church.

Psalm 102:19–21
For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the LORD behold the earth; To hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are ap pointed to death; To declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem;

What a great picture the psalmist paints of Jesus—the One who came to preach deliverance to the captives (Luke 4:18) and to decimate death's hold on mankind through His own death on the Cross (1 Corinthians 15:54, 55).

Psalm 102:22–28
When the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD. He weakened my strength in the way; he shortened my days. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years are throughout all generations. Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.

"Lord," the psalmist prays, "I might be going through the pits presently and the world will pass away ultimately, but You are going to endure through all eternity. You have a grand plan and everything will be worked out perfectly." Truly, the antidote to depression lies in the realization that, even though our moods change, even though the weather changes, even though our circumstances change, the Lord remains the same (Hebrews 13:8).

Therefore, as I read the newspaper, that which would otherwise cause despair and discouragement actually thrills me because I realize that everything is happening according to plan, fulfilling Bible prophecy.

Concerning prophecy and the rapture of the church specifically, Paul would say, "Comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:18). Take hope and take heart, gang, because one day, we're going to hear Jesus say, "Come up." And away we'll go!



103 *A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 103:1 (a)
Bless the LORD, O my soul . . .

As he did in Psalm 42, David talks to his own soul—his mind and emotions—saying, "Come on, soul, bless the Lord. Get engaged."

Psalm 103:1 (b)
. . . and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

To bless literally means to convey prosperity or happiness upon another. This means that we actually have the ability to bring the Lord happiness.

Psalm 103:2
Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:

Whenever we find ourselves full of anxiety about the future, it's most likely because we don't remember how faithful God has been in the past. When we forget what the Lord has done—the benefits He's made so abundantly available to us, the faithfulness and kindness He so consistently shows to us—our faith begins to falter. If you're like me and don't always remember how the Lord has answered your prayers, I encourage you to write down the things you're wrestling with or going through. As I reread my old

prayer journals I can see how God solved seemingly impossible situations perfectly.

I'm convinced that the Lord has somewhat of a dilemma answering our contradictory and conflicting prayers. "Lord, make me dependent on You alone," we pray. But then when our hours are cut at work or our girlfriend breaks up with us, we go into a tailspin and ask, "Lord, how can this be?" Sometimes a journal can help clarify the things I've prayed through and show me answers I otherwise would have missed.

Psalm 103:3 (a)
Who forgiveth all thine iniquities . . .

Aren't you thankful that the Lord doesn't forgive most of our iniquities, but that He forgives them *all?*

Psalm 103:3 (b)
. . . who healeth all thy diseases

Four friends brought a fifth friend to Jesus that he might be healed. When Jesus said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," I imagine that the other four thought, "Who cares about his sin? We just want him to be able to walk again." Later on, their lame friend would indeed be able to walk (Luke 5:25). But the fact is that, although a person can be in top shape physically, if his sins aren't forgiven, he can't be truly happy (Psalm 32:1).

Psalm 103:4, 5
Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

David has no shortage of reasons to bless the Lord. The Lord forgave him, healed him, satisfied him, renewed him—just as He has done for us.

Psalm 103:6, 7
The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto

the children of Israel.

As seen throughout the law given to Moses, the Lord is the Champion of the poor and distressed.

Psalm 103:8
The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

One Thanksgiving, as I was teaching from this psalm, I was a single parent and my kids—Peter-John, seven, Jessie, five, and Christie, three, were sitting in the front row, as they always did when I taught. This particular day, however, something got into them. Peter started giggling. Then he poked Jessie. Christy looked over at Jessie and hit her on the head. At this point, I stopped my exposition of verse 8 and said, "Peter, Jessie, Christy, come here." Terror filled their eyes as they made their way to me. I took them backstage, where I knew there was a plate of gigantic peanut-butter and chocolate-chip cookies someone had graciously made me. After giving them each a cookie, I ushered them back to their seats. Then I said to the congregation, "Justice is getting what you deserve: a spanking. Mercy is not getting a spanking. But grace is getting a peanut-butter and chocolate-chip cookie." And that's the way of the Lord because, although we've been conditioned to think that God is nervous and uptight, He's actually just the opposite: slow to anger and full of inexhaustible mercy.

Psalm 103:9–11
He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

How high is heaven above the earth? Even though our Milky Way galaxy is one hundred million light-years long and ten million light-years wide, scientists call it an expanding universe because the more we discover about it, the bigger it gets. Isn't that the way it is with God's mercy? The more we experience it, the more there is left to experience.

Psalm 103:12
As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

As far as the east is from the west—that's how far our transgressions are from God. Aren't you glad He didn't say they are as far from Him as the north is from the south? If I walked several thousand miles, I would end up at the north pole. After that, with every step I took I would be going south. But I could go east, east, east indefinitely because east never becomes west.

Psalm 103:13, 14
Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

I'm convinced we expect more from ourselves than God expects from us. After all, He not only knows what we're made of but He became just like us in the person of Jesus Christ. As a result, we have a compassionate and faithful High Priest who knows exactly what we struggle with and go through (Hebrews 2:9–18).

Psalm 103:15–18
As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.

Chesed, the Hebrew word translated "mercy," literally means "exuberant goodness." The exuberant goodness of God is not a fleeting wind that blows through our lives every now and then. Nor is it as feeble as the grass and flowers of the field that are either dried or drowned by the fickleness of the changing winds of weather. It is sure. It is solid. It is everlasting.

Psalm 103:19–22
The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.

As if directing a cosmic orchestra, David cues the angels to bless the Lord. Then he cues all of the spiritual beings to join in. Next, he commands all of creation to add their voices. And, finally, he ends where he began—calling for his own soul to bless the Lord.



104 Psalm 104 is a poetic portrayal of the creation story. In this picturesque portrayal of creation, you will see the creation story unfold in order.

Psalm 104:1, 2 (a)
Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment . . .

On the first day of creation, God created light.

Psalm 104:2 (b), 3
. . . who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind:

On the second day, God created the atmosphere with waters above and below that provided a canopy, causing the earth to be a greenhouse, a tropical paradise.

Psalm 104:4

Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire:

According to Job 38:7, while God was creating, the angels were singing. God apparently does His best creative work with background music. That's why our praise is important to Him.

Psalm 104:5–18
Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever. Thou coveredst it with the deep as with a garment: the waters stood above the mountains. At thy rebuke they fled; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away. They go up by the mountains; they go down by the valleys unto the place which thou hast founded for them. Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over; that they turn not again to cover the earth. He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches. He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart. The trees of the LORD are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted; Where the birds make their nests: as for the stork, the fir trees are her house. The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies.

On the third day, God created oceans that stay in their boundaries, along with the dry land and vegetation.

Psalm 104:19–23
He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down. Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The young lions roar after

their prey, and seek their meat from God. The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens. Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening.

On the fourth day, God created the sun, moon, and stars.

Psalm 104:24–26
O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships: there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein.

On the fifth day, God created the fish and birds.

Psalm 104:27–30
These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth.

On the sixth day, God created man and animals.

Psalm 104:31, 32
The glory of the LORD shall endure for ever: the LORD shall rejoice in his works. He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth: he toucheth the hills, and they smoke.

On the seventh day, God rested.

Psalm 104:33–35
I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD. Let the sinners be consumed out of the

earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless thou the LORD, O my soul. Praise ye the LORD.

When you hike or fish, surf or ski, think about the creative genius of God, for as you do, suddenly your day becomes so much more than just a "day at the beach." Suddenly, your meditation will indeed be sweet. Suddenly, like the psalmist's, your meditation of God will be sweet as you ponder the creative ingenuity of the Father.



105 Psalms 105 and 106 are hymns of history. With scrolls rare and costly in Bible days, history would be preserved in song, making it more accessible. Psalm 105 recounts what God had done for His people; Psalm 106 recounts how His people treated Him. Psalm 105 declares how God was faithful; Psalm 106 how they were fickle. Psalm 105 shows the goodness and grace of God; Psalm 106 shows the rebellion and stubbornness of His children. Thus, they have application for us . . .

Psalm 105:1–5
O give thanks unto the LORD; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing Psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD. Seek the LORD, and his strength: seek his face evermore. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth;

After giving an exhortation to worship, the psalmist gives an explanation of worship. People sometimes wonder how to have devotions—both privately and with their families. The above passage provides a very practical framework . . .

First, we are instructed to sing songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God. We can do this both in our own personal quiet times and by singing praise songs, choruses or hymns together as a family.

Next, we are instructed to talk of God's wondrous works. In our private devotions, we can, as the chorus says, "Count our blessings, naming them one by one," even audibly. As a family, we can simply share with one another the blessings God bestows upon us on any given day.

Third, we're to seek the Lord. "Lo, I come in the volume of the book," Jesus said (Hebrews 10:7). Therefore, the best place to find Him is in the Word as we meditate on a passage privately or share a simple lesson we've learned with our family.

Finally, we are to remember His marvelous work. I have found the best place to remember the Lord's most marvelous work—that of saving our souls—is at His Table, either personally, with our families, or as a church corporately.

Psalm 105:6, 7
O ye seed of Abraham his servant, ye children of Jacob his chosen. He is the LORD our God: his judgments are in all the earth.

The things we read about in the Word are not just to be noted theoretically or thought through theologically. They're to be practiced actively. And as we put them into practice, there will be great benefits. All too often, we hear a teaching or study a passage and then deceive ourselves because we think that, because we've heard it and agree with it, we must be doing it. That is not necessarily so. When Jesus talked about washing feet, He didn't say, "Happy are you if you watch Me," or, "Happy are you if you agree with Me." He said, "Happy are you if you *do* them" (John 13:17, italics added).

Therefore, let us be those who say, "I'm going to do this. I'm going to give thanks to the Lord. I'm going to call on His name. I'm going to make known His deeds to people. I'm going to talk about what He's done for me and what He means to me." The happiness is found not in the studying, not in the agreeing, but in the *doing*.

Psalm 105:8–12

He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations. Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac; And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant: Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance: When they were but a few men in number; yea, very few, and strangers in it.

The covenant spoken of here concerned the land God had destined for His people.

Psalm 105:13
When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people;

God's people did indeed go from one nation to another. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees and went to Bethel. From there, he went down to Egypt and finally back to Bethel. Isaac went to the valley of Gerar, where he dug wells to water his flocks. When the locals became upset with him, he called the well Esek, or "Strife," and moved to a place he named Sitna or "Hatred" when the people in the region again troubled him. From Sitna, he moved further and dug a third well. When no one bothered him there, he named the place Reheboth or "Room for us" (Genesis 26:22).

How do you know where to get involved in ministry? Start digging! If water doesn't flow, if all you find is strife and trouble, perhaps the Lord would have you move down the road and dig again. Eventually, you'll find the place where you'll have a flowing, fruitful ministry. Yes, there will be challenges and attacks from the enemy, but if you listen to the Lord, you'll find your Reheboth.

Psalm 105:14, 15
He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproved kings for their sakes; Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.

God protected Abraham in Egypt. He protected Isaac from Abimelech. He protected Jacob from his Uncle Laban and from his brother, Esau.

Psalm 105:16–22
Moreover he called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread. He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him. The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance: To bind his princes at his pleasure; and teach his senators wisdom.

When famine broke out, God already had His man, Joseph, on the scene. From being friendless in verse 17, Joseph was fettered in verse 18, forgotten in verse 19, and freed in verse 20.

Psalm 105:23
Israel also came into Egypt; and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.

Jacob accompanied his eleven sons to Egypt, where they all settled in the land of Goshen.

Psalm 105:24, 25
And he increased his people greatly; and made them stronger than their enemies. He turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtilly with his servants.

Over the next four hundred years, the nation would grow from a population of seventy to over three million. Even under persecution, God's people flourished. Why did the Jews have to remain in Egypt for four hundred years? Because in Genesis 15, God told Abraham that this would happen until the iniquity of the Amonites was full. You see, the sin and wickedness of the Canaanites had to be judged. But God gave them four hundred years to turn away from their sin and toward Him while the

Israelites were in Egypt. When they refused, God at last ordered their extermination, as seen in the Book of Joshua.

Psalm 105:26
He sent Moses his servant; and Aaron whom he had chosen.

Amram and Jochabed's family was remarkable. Their son, Moses, was a mighty prince. Their son, Aaron, was a ministering priest. Their daughter, Miriam, was a musical prophetess. How important it is for us to see our kids with eyes of faith, to pronounce blessing upon them, to have a prophetic word for them, to believe that God's hand is on them and that He has something significant for them to accomplish for His glory.

Psalm 105:27–30
They shewed his signs among them, and wonders in the land of Ham. He sent darkness, and made it dark; and they rebelled not against his word. He turned their waters into blood, and slew their fish. Their land brought forth frogs in abundance, in the chambers of their kings.

With Aaron at his side, Moses went to Pharaoh and said, "Thus saith the Lord, 'Let My people go.' " When Pharaoh refused, a series of ten plagues followed . . .

Psalm 105:31–36
He spake, and there came divers sorts of flies, and lice in all their coasts. He gave them hail for rain, and flaming fire in their land. He smote their vines also and their fig trees; and brake the trees of their coasts. He spake, and the locusts came, and caterpillers, and that without number, And did eat up all the herbs in their land, and devoured the fruit of their ground. He smote also all the firstborn in their land, the chief of all their strength.

The plagues crescendoed and climaxed in the deaths of the firstborn of every Egyptian family.

Psalm 105:37, 38
He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes. Egypt was glad when they departed: for the fear of them fell upon them.

Finally, the Israelites were set free.

Psalm 105:39
He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night.

God went before His people and gave guidance to them.

Psalm 105:40
The people asked, and he brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven.

God provided His people with quail and manna in the wilderness.

Psalm 105:41
He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river.

The rock was a picture of Jesus, smitten for you and me that we might be cleansed and refreshed by His work on the Cross of Calvary (1 Corinthians 10:4).

Psalm 105:42–44 (a)
For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham his servant. And he brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness: And gave them the lands of the heathen . . .

God guided and provided for His people not begrudgingly or reluctantly but with joy and gladness.

Psalm 105:44 (b), 45

. . . and they inherited the labour of the people; That they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws. Praise ye the LORD.

In Psalm 105, we see the faithfulness of God to the people of Israel. Whether regarding the nation of Israel or your own family, God is in control. This means that history is truly His story. That is why I encourage you to write down the history of your life. Record how the Lord has worked in your own situation—what He's delivered you from, where you would be without Him. Reflect on God's blessings and I guarantee you will be encouraged as you realize the Lord's hand is truly on your life.



106 106:1–5

Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? who can shew forth all his praise? Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times. Remember me, O LORD, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.

Verses 3, 4, and 5 seem to indicate that this Psalm was written by a captive in Babylon. Following the account of God's faithfulness in freeing His people from bondage in Egypt, it's as if the psalmist is saying, "Don't forget about us in Babylon, Lord. You came through for our forefathers. Remember us, that we, too, may see Your good and rejoice in the gladness of Your nation."

Psalm 106:6, 7
We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly. Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea.

"Lord," the psalmist says, "we have erred like our fathers did at the Red Sea. Although they had seen Your miracles in Egypt, they accused Moses of bringing them to the wilderness only to die."

All too often, we do the same thing. Daily, we experience the goodness of God in our lives and yet how easily and quickly we forget.

Psalm 106:8–12
Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known. He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness. And he saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left. Then believed they his words; they sang his praise.

It was good for Miriam to lead the congregation in praise. But how much better it would have been had she and the people praised the Lord *before* the waters of the Red Sea parted.

Maybe you feel boxed in. Maybe you feel tricked or stuck. If so, this is your chance for greatness. *Before* the miracle takes place, *before* the problem is solved, *before* the answer comes, sing God's praise.

Psalm 106:13–15
They soon forgat his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.

Lust has been wisely defined as the craving of salt by a man dying of thirst. Lust doesn't work because it is never satisfied. Like fire, the more you give it, the more it demands. Not satisfied with manna, the Israelites demanded meat. They got it—but it ultimately killed them (Numbers 11:34).

Psalm 106:16
They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the LORD.

"You take too much upon yourself," Dathan, Korah, and Abiram, said along with two hundred fifty others in a challenge to Moses' and Aaron's authority (Numbers 16:3). Their charge was particularly ignorant considering Moses hadn't even wanted the job (Exodus 3:11).

Psalm 106:17, 18
The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram. And a fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked.

If you want to end up in the pit, rebel against those in authority over you. We are concerned about people in authority over us making the right decision. But our Father is far more concerned about us becoming the right people. Submission is not submission if I agree with the decision. Submission begins at the point that I don't agree. Submission is exercised when I finally say, "Not my will but Thine be done."

Psalm 106:19, 20
They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image. Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass.

The law Moses would bring down from the mountain contained provision for failure to keep it. That's always the way of the Lord. "This is the way you should walk," He says. "But here's provision for when you don't . . ."

Moses broke the tablets, even as the people had already broken their intent.

Psalm 106:21–23
They forgat God their saviour, which had done great things in Egypt; Wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red sea. Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them.

Although it was Moses who interceded on behalf of the people, it was God who put the spirit of intercession in Moses in the first place.

Psalm 106:24, 25
Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word: But murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD.

When the Israelites sent in spies to check out the Promised Land, the spies returned saying, "The land is pleasant. But there are giants in it." At this point, rather than believing God, the people murmured words of unbelief in their tents.

Sometimes we think we can say anything in the privacy of our own homes. But such is not the case, for God hears what we say in our homes just as well as He hears what we say in public.

Psalm 106:26–31
Therefore he lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness: To overthrow their seed also among the nations, and to scatter them in the lands. They joined themselves also unto Baal-peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead. Thus they provoked him to anger with their inventions: and the plague brake in upon them. Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed. And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore.

This is a reference to the account in Numbers 22 and 23, when Balak, the king of Moab, called for the prophet Balaam to curse God's people. Looking at the people of God, however, all that came out of Balaam's mouth on three occasions was blessing. "I can't curse them," Balaam finally said. "But they can bring a curse upon themselves if your women seduce their men and introduce them to your gods." Balak followed Balaam's suggestion—and 24,000 Israelites were killed in the plague that broke out as a result.

Psalm 106:32, 33

They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.

Once again, God's people were murmuring. They were out of water, feeling thirsty. "Speak to the rock and the rock will pour forth water," God said to Moses. The rock was smitten previously. But as a picture of Jesus, it was to be smitten only once for all sin, for all time, for all men. This time, Moses was to simply speak to the rock. But he was so tired of the complaints of the people that he struck the rock with the rod that miraculously had budded as a sign of his authority (Numbers 17). Striking the rock no doubt caused the buds to fall from his rod—and the same thing can happen to me. When I get mad, when I lash out, the blossom of the fruit of the Spirit is diminished in my life.

Psalm 106:34–36
They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them: But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them.

Rather than destroying the Canaanites as God commanded them to do, the Israelites joined them in idol worship.

Psalm 106:37–40
Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood. Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions. Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against his people, insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance.

The reference here is to the practice of placing one's firstborn child on the incandescent arms of the idol Moloch as a sacrifice. But before we too quickly cry out in judgment, we must realize our culture does virtually the

same thing. You see, Moloch was the god of prosperity and the thinking was that those who offered their firstborn to him would prosper. As for the sacrificial child, his or her spirit would reappear in the next child. We do the same thing whenever we burn an unborn child with saline solution in the womb of its mother in order that its parents can "get on their feet financially."

"Abort the baby," society says. "Then, when you're able to have children, they will be born into a financially stable, loving home." The reason this is the same demonic reasoning as in the days of Moloch is because Satan's goal never changes. It's always destruction and death.

Psalm 106:41–46
And he gave them into the hand of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them. Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand. Many times did he deliver them; but they provoked him with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity. Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry: And he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies. He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives.

Even though He delivered them time and again only to have them return to their rebellion, God responded to the cries of His people.

Psalm 106:47, 48
Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD.

In light of God's incredible mercy toward and patience with His people, it's as if the psalmist is brought once again to a place of praise and is thus emboldened to ask for deliverance.



107

According to Jewish rabbis and scholars, Psalms 107 through 119 were the songs that were sung when the foundation of the second temple was laid in the days of Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. The first temple built by Solomon was destroyed by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. This was when the Jews were carried captive into Babylon, where they remained for seventy years. After seventy years, just as the Lord had told Jeremiah (25:10–12), the people were released from their captivity when Cyrus, king of the Persians, who was named by Isaiah two hundred twenty years before the event took place (44:28), freed the Jews to go back to their land and rebuild their temple.

Psalm 107:1
O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Ezra gives us an eyewitness account of what took place when the foundation of the second temple was laid . . .

> And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.
>
> Ezra 3:10–13

This is why it is believed Psalm 107 was one of the songs they sang. Ezra in his recounting of this event said a great shout went up.

When the foundation was laid, the shouts of joy and celebration of the younger men mingled with the weeping and mourning of the older men because the second temple was architecturally inferior to the first.

So too, there can be a tendency to look back and say, "Those were the days . . ." But our God is One who takes us from glory to greater glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). In fact, the prophet, Haggai, would come on the scene and say that the glory of the latter house would exceed the glory of the former house (2:9). Why? Because, ultimately, the presence of Jesus Himself would grace the second temple.

Psalm 107:2
Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy;

These people would have been thrilled because they were redeemed from the land of their captivity. They had been rescued and set free. So "say so" they did as they shouted with joy.

So too, when we as believers "say so"—letting others know that we have been redeemed—something wonderful happens. Our own faith is strengthened and our identification as believers is established. If you're moving to a new place, taking a new job, attending a new school, make the most of the situation. Let people know you're a believer by "saying so" from the very beginning.

Psalm 107:3
And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.

In the remainder of this psalm, we see descriptions of the predicaments of people of any age—perhaps where you or someone around you might be even presently . . .

- In verses 4 through 9, we see a fainting traveler needing direction who finds a Guide.

- In verses 10 through 16, we see a weary captive needing freedom who finds a Deliverer.
- In verses 17 through 22, we see a sick soul needing healing who finds a Physician.
- In verses 23 through 30, we see a storm-tossed sailor needing tranquility who finds a Haven.

Psalm 107:4–9
They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.

Although the Israelites wandered for forty years in the wilderness due to their unbelief, the Lord was a faithful Guide who led them, at last, to the land He had promised them all along. So too, He is a faithful Guide to us—leading us every step of the way and filling our longing, hungry souls with His goodness.

Psalm 107:10–12
Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron; Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High: Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help.

Because they continually rebelled against the Lord and, instead, immersed themselves in immorality and idolatry, Israel was carried captive to Babylon. The same thing happens to us when we don't do what the Lord says. We find ourselves enslaved by our own foolish sins and carnal lusts. We plunge into that which we think we're free to do—only to find ourselves

trapped as the very thing that was initially a pleasure becomes a huge, devastating problem.

Psalm 107:13–16
Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their dis tresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder.

The third picture is of a sick soul finding a Physician. The common denominator in all of these situations is that of people who, brought to the place of desperation, sought the Lord with intensity. These people weren't simply chatting with the Lord during their sixty-second devotions. They cried to Him.

Psalm 107:17
Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted.

The Word tells us point-blank that the reason for affliction, pain, and suffering is singular: it is sin. The world doesn't understand this. The man on the street thinks if he sins, God will come down on him and do something terrible to him. That's not true. It's the sin itself that will do him in. Sin doesn't bring destruction because it's arbitrarily forbidden. Sin is forbidden because it invariably brings destruction.

Psalm 107:18
Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death.

The sinner not only abhors the meat of the Word of God, but he abhors all manner of meat. That is, the party no longer gives him the joy it used to. The relationship no longer brings excitement the way it once did. He goes to church, but even that doesn't satisfy him, for he has too much sin to enjoy the

things of the Lord, but too much of the Lord to enjoy the things of the world. And, eventually, his heart and soul lose the will to live.

Psalm 107:19
Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses.

I'm convinced that many people are depressed because they don't cry out to the Lord. They might cry out to people. They might talk to the Lord in passing. But their eyes are dry. Their voice never wears out. I'm convinced that we need to be a people who, in those times of desperation, cry out to the Lord intensively and wholeheartedly. Are you discouraged today? Do you feel like you're sick in your soul, weary in your heart, despairing even of life? How long has it been since you cried to the Lord?

Psalm 107:20
He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.

How did the Lord save these people out of their distresses? By mystically and miraculously touching them? No. The psalmist says He sent them His Word. When you cry out to the Lord, He'll whisper in your heart, "Get back into My Word." Therefore, build your life upon the rock of His truth. Commit yourself to meditation, to contemplation, to study of the Word. Scripture contains over 4,000 promises—and the Holy Spirit is waiting to apply them to your own situation.

Psalm 107:21, 22
Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing.

Realizing the Lord has healed me, I have no other choice but to give Him thanks, to worship Him, to respond to Him with my song of praise, sacrifice of thanksgiving, and word of testimony. Make praise a priority, gang. Take

any and every opportunity to share with others what the Lord has done for you. And if these things come hard to you, they will eventually become easier. But, more importantly, until they do, they will truly be a sweet sacrifice in the Lord's eyes.

Psalm 107:23–30
They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.

Why do we and others go through storms? Sometimes, the Lord allows them because it's only in the storm that we come to our wits' end and cry to Him. Therefore, it's important that we don't try to always calm the storms the Lord has commanded either in our own lives or in the lives of others. Rather, we should say, "Lord, fulfill Your purpose in this storm, that in our desperation, we might cry to You."

But there's a better way because most of the storms we go through are unnecessary. If we learn our lessons from the Scripture, we wouldn't have to learn them in the storm. If we learn in the sanctuary, we won't have to learn in the storm. I have learned both in the sanctuary and in the storm—and I highly recommend learning in the sanctuary!

Psalm 107:31
Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!

In each of the four scenarios of verses 4 through 30, the answer is Jesus . . .

To the fainting traveler who needs a guide, Jesus declares, "I am the Way." If a kindergartner came to me as I was teaching and said, "I want a Tootsie Roll Pop," I could say, "Here's what to do: Go through the lobby. Go through the second set of double doors. Turn right. Go outside and turn right again. Go across the parking lot. Go across the street. You'll see a gas station. Keep going, and you'll see a convenience store. In there, you'll find a Tootsie Roll Pop." I could tell him the way. The problem is, he would either get lost or run over. So the best thing for me to do would be to put him on my shoulders and start walking out the doors, across the parking lot, to the store. That's what Jesus does. He doesn't tell us the way. He *is* the Way. If you don't know what to do or where to go, just spend time with the Lord. Stay close to Him, and you'll end up exactly where you're supposed to be.

Not only is Jesus the Way for the traveler, but He is also the Deliverer for the prisoner. In Revelation 1:18, we read that He has the keys to death and hell. I used to think this meant that Jesus was the One who would lock us up and put us away. But nothing could be further from the truth. The keys are to set us free, to bring us out, to release us from eternal damnation and destruction. The minute we call out to Him, He's there to set us free.

Jesus is the great Physician for the sick of body or soul. Yes, He heals—but even more than that, He is life itself. If health were simply a gift He gave, we would, like the nine lepers in Luke 17 or the man by the pool of Bethesda in John 5, take it and go our way. So sometimes, rather than heal us, He says, "You'll have to draw from Me moment by moment for the strength you need on any given day."

Finally, Jesus is more than the Calmer of the storm. He is our peace. It's not something He does or gives. It's who He is. On the day Moses was told to appear before Pharaoh, he said, "Who shall I say sent me?"

"I AM that I AM," the Lord answered (Exodus 3:14).

"I am . . . what?" Moses must have thought.

But, as Moses would discover, the answer was, "I AM whatever you need."

If you're on stormy waters or feel as though you're lost, wandering around, wondering what to do, whatever you have need of today will be found in spending time with your Lord. For you who are hurting, sick of soul, feeling locked up and boxed in, for you who are being tossed to and fro on

the sea of uncertainty, know that whatever you or your family's need might be will be met by clinging to Jesus.

Psalm 107:32–34
Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders. He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground; A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.

This again alludes to the laying of the foundation of the temple, seen in Ezra 3. Looking around, the small contingency that returned to Jerusalem could have seen that, after seventy years, the land wasn't what it once was. The repercussions could be clearly seen. Their city was in ruins. Their farms were overrun. Their rivers had dried up. The place had fallen apart. But as they waited on the Lord, they could see not only the present reality, but, what it would be prophetically . . .

Psalm 107:35–38
He turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into watersprings. And there he maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation; And sow the fields, and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase. He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly; and suffereth not their cattle to decrease.

"Now we're where we're supposed to be," the returned captives could have said. "We've left Babylon. We're in Jerusalem. We're laying the foundation of the temple. We're obeying God's Word." As a result, blessings would come their way because, although there were hardships yet to face, they knew they were where they were supposed to be.

Psalm 107:39, 40
Again, they are minished and brought low through oppression, affliction, and sorrow. He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, where there is no way.

Those who wouldn't obey would continue to wander aimlessly. Therefore, the key is to obey what the Lord writes on our hearts, whispers in our ears and reveals through the Scriptures.

Psalm 107:41–43
Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction, and maketh him families like a flock. The righteous shall see it, and rejoice: and all iniquity shall stop her mouth. Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD.

Observing God's perfect dealings both with the proud and with the humble gives joy to the righteous man and understanding to the wise.



108 *A Song or Psalm of David.*

Psalm 108 is a compilation of Psalm 57:7–11 and Psalm 60:5–12. Why did the Holy Spirit combine two previous psalms? Couldn't He think of something new to say? I suggest Peter gives us the answer . . .

> Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.
>
> 2 Peter 1:12

Paul would do the same thing, "As I said before," he wrote to the Galatians, "so say I now again . . ." (1:9). "To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe," Paul wrote to the Philippians (3:1). In other words, it's important that we are reminded continually of that which we think we know.

Psalm 108:1, 2

O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory. Awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early.

Is your heart broken? To fix it, wake up early and praise the Lord! Start your day with the Lord.

Psalm 108:3–6
I will praise thee, O LORD, among the people: and I will sing praises unto thee among the nations. For thy mercy is great above the heavens: and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth; That thy beloved may be delivered: save with thy right hand, and answer me.

As the foundation of the temple was being laid, the enemies of the Jews would have been watching. Thus, David's prayer is, "Lord, Your mercy is great. Your truth is undeniable. Be exalted. May You be exalted—and may You deliver us."

Psalm 108:7, 8
God hath spoken in his holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth. Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my lawgiver;

Like the 42,000 Jews rebuilding the temple and reclaiming Jerusalem, you might feel surrounded or outnumbered. But know this: God is in control. And He who has begun a good work in you will be completely, absolutely, totally faithful to complete it (Philippians 1:6).

Psalm 108:9
Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe; over Philistia will I triumph.

Moab was Judah's enemy to the east, Edom to the south, Philistia to the west. So too, you might feel surrounded, but God would say to you as He did

to Israel, "I've got you covered. I'm in control."

Psalm 108:10, 11
Who will bring me into the strong city? who will lead me into Edom? Wilt not thou, O God, who hast cast us off? and wilt not thou, O God, go forth with our hosts?

Edom's rock city of Petra seemed to be impregnable. For man, it was impossible, but not for God (Mark 10:27).

Psalm 108:12
Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man.

We have a tendency to think that if we could just talk to him or get counsel from them, we would receive the help we need. But, as David says, it's only the Lord we truly need.

Psalm 108:13
Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies.

David ends his prayer proclaiming, "Through God we shall—not can, not might—but *shall* do valiantly." This is the way to pray. Yes, we can express our fears, our doubts, our questions to our Father. But in the end, we have no other truthful choice but to say, "Lord, I know You've heard my heart, that You are my Father, and that You'll see me through. Therefore, through You, I, too, shall do valiantly."



109 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 109 is one of what are referred to as Imprecatory Psalms because they pray for evil to befall others. Many find them difficult to understand because they seem to be so violent. The curses spoken of trouble many. Some

say this psalm reveals nothing more than the humanity of David. I don't agree, however, because David forbade retaliation even against the man who threw rocks and flung curses directly at him (2 Samuel 16:10).

"Love your enemies," Jesus said. "Bless them that curse you. Do good to them that hate you. Pray for them who despitefully use you." Therefore, I have difficulty believing that the man after God's own heart would be led by the Spirit to pen words so contrary to the heart and teaching of our Lord.

I don't think the words we see in this psalm are necessarily the words David would speak about his enemies, but rather they are David's report to the Father concerning what others were saying about him. David's example is a good one for us. We ought not to hurl curses at our enemies, but cast our care upon our Father, confident that He will do what's best.

The historical situation most likely reflected in this psalm was Ahithophel's betrayal (2 Samuel 15). But, prophetically, the psalm would point ultimately to Judas, for Peter would allude to it in this regard (Acts 1:20).

Psalm 109:1–4 (a)
Hold not thy peace, O God of my praise; For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me: they have spoken against me with a lying tongue. They compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause. For my love they are my adversaries . . .

Again, this would seem to refer to the defection of Ahithophel, David's trusted friend and advisor to the insurrection of Absalom, David's son.

Psalm 109:4 (b)
. . . but I give myself unto prayer.

David hit the mark perfectly, for

> . . . we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Ephesians 6:12

Anytime I'm wrestling against flesh and blood—whether it's my kids, neighbors, or co-workers—I'm fighting the wrong battle. Where I ought to be energetic and engaged is not against people but against the demons, principalities, and powers that seduce them.

Psalm 109:5
And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love.

Beginning in verse 6, I suggest David is quoting what his enemies were saying about him.

Psalm 109:6–19
Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few; and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places. Let the extortioner catch all that he hath; and let the strangers spoil his labour. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him: neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children. Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the LORD; and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out. Let them be before the LORD continually, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth. Because that he remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart. As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him: as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. As he clothed himself with cursing like as with his garment, so let it come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones. Let it be unto him as the garment which covereth him, and for a girdle wherewith he is girded continually.

If this was indeed spoken by David's enemies, they were surely wrong in saying he delighted not in blessing—for David blessed both the Lord and others.

Psalm 109:20–22
Let this be the reward of mine adversaries from the LORD, and of them that speak evil against my soul. But do thou for me, O GOD the Lord, for thy name's sake: because thy mercy is good, deliver thou me. For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me.

Poor and needy? This is the same David who would give one hundred twelve tons of gold and two hundred sixty-two tons of refined silver for the building of the temple. He was a wealthy man indeed. But he's poor in spirit. He knows he's a sinner. He knows he dropped the ball time and again. He's aware of his frailty. Unlike the charges that he is arrogant and haughty, he knows his personal poverty.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit," Jesus said, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:3–5). If you think you're a sinner beyond hope, I have good news for you: Jesus says you'll inherit the kingdom, you'll inherit the earth, and you'll be comforted simply because you realize you're a sinner in need of a Savior.

Psalm 109:23–27
I am gone like the shadow when it declineth: I am tossed up and down as the locust. My knees are weak through fasting; and my flesh faileth of fatness. I became also a reproach unto them: when they looked upon me they shaked their heads. Help me, O LORD my God: O save me according to thy mercy: That they may know that this is thy hand; that thou, LORD, hast done it.

David didn't want people to know that he was a good guy. He wanted them to know that His God was a great God. And that is the foundation of any and every testimony.

Psalm 109:28–31
Let them curse, but bless thou: when they arise, let them be ashamed; but let thy servant rejoice. Let mine adversaries be clothed with shame, and let them cover themselves with their own confusion, as with a mantle. I will greatly praise the LORD with my mouth; yea, I will praise him among the multitude. For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul.

The enemy would condemn you and accuse me. But the Lord is our Defender, saying, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. Go your way and sin no more. Be free in Jesus' name."



110 *A Psalm of David.*

It is generally considered to be impolite to eavesdrop. But in our text, the Holy Spirit allows us to eavesdrop on a conversation between the Father and the Son. Because Peter quotes this text in connection with Jesus' Ascension, we know that after Jesus died on the Cross and rose from the dead, this is what Jesus heard the Father say . . .

Psalm 110:1 (a)
The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand . . .

Jesus Himself quoted this verse to prove that He was not simply David's descendant, but his Lord (Matthew 22:44).

Psalm 110:1 (b)
. . . until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

When the captains of the army of Israel defeated the Canaanites, Joshua instructed them to place their feet on the necks of the defeated kings as a sign of complete victory (Joshua 10:24).

Psalm 110:2
The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.

Who is the rod of Jehovah's strength? Isaiah gives us the answer . . .

> And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.
>
> Isaiah 11:1–5

The rod of Jehovah's strength is, obviously, the Son of David, Jesus Christ.

Psalm 110:3
Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.

When the Lord comes back, He'll meet us in the clouds and take us to heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:17). The world will go through seven years of terrible difficulty, described in Revelation 6 to 19. At the end of the Tribulation, the Lord will establish His rule on the earth. And we will come back and reign with Him for 1,000 years.

Psalm 110:4
The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

Melchizedek appears in Genesis 14, seemingly coming out of nowhere, ministering bread and wine to Abraham. His name means "king of righteousness" and his position was that of the king of Salem. Realizing he was in the presence of no ordinary man, Abraham worshiped Melchizedek and paid tithes to him.

> Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedek. Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.
>
> Hebrews 5:8–11

"Sit at My right hand," the Father says to the Son. "You will be a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek." The fact that Messiah was spoken of as both a Priest and King confused Old Testament scholars because Levitical priests were not allowed to be involved in the monarchy. To remedy their confusion, many taught that there would be two Messiahs—one a political Messiah and one a priestly, or religious Messiah. But Jesus—born not of the tribe of Levi, but of Judah—would be a High Priest not after the order of Aaron, but of Melchizedek. Therefore, He can be both Priest and King.

> **Psalm 110:5, 6**
> **The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries.**

When Jesus—the King of kings and our Great High Priest—comes back, He will establish righteousness and put an end to rebellion and evil.

> **Psalm 110:7**
> **He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.**

When Jesus comes back to establish His kingdom on earth, as He makes His way to Jerusalem, He will stop and drink of the brooks. He will be refreshed and will lift up His head, knowing what is to come—that men will study war no more, that swords will be beaten into plows, that righteousness will reign at last. Oh, Lord, come quickly.



111 Psalm 111 is an acrostic psalm. That is, every line begins with a consecutive letter in the Hebrew alphabet, making it easy for the Hebrew reader to memorize. Proclaiming as it does the reason for worship, it would be a worthy lesson, indeed. In verses 2 through 9, we see we are to praise God for the works He has done. In verse 10, we are to praise Him for the wisdom that will come.

Psalm 111:1
Praise ye the LORD. I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation.

In 2 Chronicles 5, we read that, as the congregation came together and worshiped as one man, the glory of the Lord descended in the temple so powerfully that the people couldn't even stand. Those who weren't there missed out. No wonder the psalmist was one who worshiped in the congregation.

Psalm 111:2
The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.

Aren't you glad you're not an atheist? An atheist sees a beautiful sunrise or eats a delicious meal—and who does he thank? We who know the Father can praise Him for the works He has done. The fragrances we smell, the sights we see, the things that come our way benevolently are all reasons to praise God. God is so unfathomably good that there is no excuse not to worship Him.

Psalm 111:3
His work is honourable and glorious: and his righteousness endureth for ever.

I suggest that the singular work the psalmist speaks of alludes to the singular work of which Jesus would speak—that of believing on what He did in our place on the Cross of Calvary (John 6).

Psalm 111:4, 5
He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the LORD is gracious and full of compassion. He hath given meat unto them that fear him: he will ever be mindful of his covenant.

God never forgets the promises He makes.

Psalm 111:6, 7
He hath shewed his people the power of his works, that he may give them the heritage of the heathen. The works of his hands are verity and judgment; all his commandments are sure.

It was with His own hand that God wrote the Ten Commandments. And all of the works of His hand are equally certain and true.

Psalm 111:8
They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness.

The commandments He's given, the work of the Cross, creation that surrounds you and me, it's all glorious. Everything the Lord has done is awesome. Therefore, we ought to be those who praise Him continually.

Psalm 111:9
He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name.

What does holiness mean? It doesn't mean spiritual stuffiness. It simply means to be made whole. The bottom line is that sin erodes and destroys. Sin keeps wiping you out, tearing you down. Holiness restores what you were intended to be. That's why the Scripture says the man who fears God and walks in His commandments walks in holiness or wholeness. Holiness leads to happiness. Sin always leads to great sadness and deep sorrow.

Psalm 111:10
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.

In addition to praising God for the works He has done, we can praise Him for the wisdom that will come. You see, the fear of the Lord means we are so in love with our Father that we are afraid to do anything that would grieve Him. And it is when we understand this that wisdom truly begins.

When Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, poured costly oil on Jesus, Judas criticized her for being wasteful. Jesus, however commended her for being insightful. "What she has done, she has done for My burial," He said (see John 12:7). The disciples walked with Jesus, ate with Him, and listened to Him. Yet even though He said repeatedly that He was going to Jerusalem to die, His words didn't sink in. Mary understood what the disciples didn't. Why? Because she worshiped Him.

Those who fear the Lord, those who are in awe of Him, those who spend time with Him will have insight and wisdom in a way others won't. May we be those who worship Him.



112 Psychologists tell us ours is a culture plagued with phobias. In fact, at last count, there are 183 recognizable phobias that the American Psychiatric Association has diagnosed. But there is one fear that will drive away all other fears. That fear is the fear of the Lord—the subject of Psalm 112 . . .

Psalm 112:1
Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.

The antidote to depression or unhappiness is to praise the Lord, to fear Him, and to joyfully do what He tells us to do.

Psalm 112:2
His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed.

If we choose to fear the Lord, to praise Him, and do what He tells us to do, the promise here is that we won't have to be afraid of how our kids will do. Noah was a righteous man who pounded on the ark day after day. When the writer of Hebrews tells us that by faith Noah built an ark for the saving of his family (11:7), it means he provided rooms on the ark for himself, his wife, and his sons and their wives—twenty years before his first son was born.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," Paul told the Philippian jailer, "and your family will be saved as well as you" (Acts 16:31). Does this mean his kids wouldn't have to make their own decisions to be saved? No. But it means that his kids would follow him in doing so as he lead the way.

Psalm 112:3
Wealth and riches shall be in his house: and his righteousness endureth for ever.

Because God will supply all of our needs according to His riches, we need not be fearful of finances (Philippians 4:19).

Psalm 112:4–6
Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.

Those who fear the Lord need not fear dark times or dark days.

Psalm 112:7, 8
He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid, until he see his desire upon his enemies.

Those who fear the Lord need not fear the future.

Psalm 112:9, 10
He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour. The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish.

If it wasn't for our fear of the Lord, we would all be filled with anxiety. We're blessed because we know the Lord. He sees us through. He protects me and you. There are those who get ticked off at us because the blessing of God is upon us. Truly, the fear of the Lord will chase away all other fears.



113 Psalm 113 is the first of six consecutive psalms called "*halal* psalms" or praise psalms because most of them start or end with the Hebrew word, *halal,* or "praise." These are songs that were sung at the three major feasts or festivals of the Jews: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

Psalm 113:1, 2
Praise ye the LORD. Praise, O ye servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD. Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and for evermore.

If you haven't been praising the Lord, it's not too late to start! Do it "from this time forth and for evermore."

Psalm 113:3

From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD's name is to be praised.

The name of the Lord is praised continually as a new day is always beginning somewhere in the world. Here, in our Father's "Manufacturer's Manual," He says, "Here's how to be blessed: Be a worshiper. Be thankful. Be one who praises."

Psalm 113:4–6
The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!

So high is the Lord that He has to stoop down even to look into heaven. Imagine, then, how far He has to stoop to get on our level. No wonder Paul says, "*Great* is the mystery that God was manifested in the flesh—that He became one of us in the Person of Jesus Christ" (see 1 Timothy 3:16).

Psalm 113:7–9
He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people. He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the LORD.

Those who praise will be prolific and productive. I think of Hannah, who went her way rejoicing when she was told she would have a child (1 Samuel 1:18). I think of Mary, who embraced the news of a Son in a most marvelous expression of praise (Luke 1).

If you feel barren, now is the time to sing (Isaiah 54:1), to rejoice, to believe.



114

Psalm 114 is a reflection on the deliverance of God's people from Egypt and their being ushered in to the Promised Land.

Psalm 114:1, 2
When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion.

Judah means "Praise." Because the Lord inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3), the presence of God is particularly perceived in the place of worship. *Israel* means "Governed by God." Thus, we see the unbeatable combination of praise and submission into which God freely enters.

Psalm 114:3–7
The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back. The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs. What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back? Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills, like lambs? Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob;

Why did the waters part? The Red Sea parted so that God's people could begin their journey on dry land. Forty years later, the Jordan parted so that they could enter the Promised Land on dry ground. How did the waters part? The same way they united to support Jesus as He walked on them (Matthew 14:26). The Lord made a way for His people through deep waters and leveled the mountainous obstacles that loomed over them. And He'll do the same for you.

Psalm 114:8
Which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters.

The Hebrew word translated "rock" is *tsur,* which means "lower rock." In 1 Corinthians 10:4, Paul identifies the rock as Christ. When Moses struck

this rock, water came rushing out—just as when Jesus was smitten, blood and water, agents of salvation and refreshment flowed from His side.

The Hebrew word translated "flint," however, is *sela,* which means "high rock." At Meribah, Moses wasn't told to strike the rock like he was at Rephidim. He was told simply to speak to the rock because Jesus had only to be smitten once—and now we can speak to Him freely.

I'm so glad I'm saved. We were trapped by sin, but He set us free by sending His Son. And now, He provides water for us day by day as we talk to Him along the way.



115

Psalm 115 is the third of six *halal* psalms, so named because they either begin or end with the Hebrew word *halal,* or praise, that were sung at the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

Tradition suggests this psalm was penned by Judah's king, Jehoshaphat. Surrounded by the Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites, Jehoshaphat sought the Lord and was told by the Spirit through a Levite named Jahaziel that the battle wasn't his to fight but the Lord's. What happened next is amazing. Rather than sending troops out to battle, Jehoshaphat sent the choir, singing praise to the Lord—which so confused the enemy that they turned their swords upon one another (2 Chronicles 20).

Others say this psalm was written by Moses after the Lord parted the waters of the Red Sea. Still others say it was Ezra who penned this psalm after returning from Babylon, where the Jews had been in captivity for seventy years. While there are commentators who side with each of these suggestions, all three have a common denominator: they all deal with praising God for deliverance. And that is indeed the theme of Psalm 115.

Psalm 115:1
Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.

Whether it was for victory over the Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites, the Egyptians, or the Babylonians, God was to have all the glory. That's the

way we ought to pray . . .

You're at the company picnic. The softball game is underway. You're up to bat, with the boss on second base, counting on you to hit him home. "Help me, Lord," you pray. And then you strike out. Your first inclination is to think that the Lord doesn't answer prayer—but it could be that the Lord's will was for you to strike out and go back to the dugout with a smile on your face and a sparkle in your eye because perhaps that would be a more powerful witness than if you had nailed it.

"May You be seen, Lord—whatever that might mean." That's what it means to pray in Jesus' name, for the glory of God.

Psalm 115:2, 3
Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God? But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.

In Exodus 5:2, Pharaoh said, "Who is the God of Israel that I should obey His voice and let these people go? I know Him not." Oh, but he would. Cynics still say, "Where is now their God?" The answer is that He's in heaven and He'll come through at just the right time in just the right way. He'll open the Red Sea. He'll set you free from Babylon. He'll defeat the Ammonites in due season. He has His own timetable—and it's perfect.

Psalm 115:4–7
Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.

Here we see the sheer stupidity of idolatry.

Psalm 115:8
They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.

We become like what we worship. For us, that's good news because we worship the Lord Jesus, who is altogether lovely. But those who worship idols become like them—hopeless and helpless.

Psalm 115:9–11
O Israel, trust thou in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield.

The covenant people were called to trust God in verse 9; the consecrated priesthood in verse 10, and the converted pagans in verse 11. That last group, called God-fearers by the Jews, would be those who, although they weren't born Jews, saw the reality of the God of Israel and chose to worship Him. "Trust the Lord," the psalmist says to all three groups—and to us, as well.

Psalm 115:12, 13
The LORD hath been mindful of us: he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great.

If you're in awe of the Lord, if you're in love with the Lord, you will be blessed.

Psalm 115:14
The LORD shall increase you more and more, you and your children.

Mom and Dad, rejoice in this promise and receive it today.

Psalm 115:15, 16
Ye are blessed of the LORD which made heaven and earth. The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men.

The heavens are the Lord's, but He gave the earth to man. That's why we're in the mess we're in. God gave the title deed to Adam. Adam, however, turned it over to Satan when he chose to listen to Satan's lies in the Garden of Eden. It's a sad state we're in presently. But the good news is that help is on the way. The Lord is coming back. He purchased the planet with His own blood—and He'll take possession of it once again. When He does, earth will be the way it was always meant to be. Oh, happy day that will be!

Psalm 115:17, 18
The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence. But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the LORD.

This side of eternity is the only time we can praise the Lord by faith. Therefore, *this* is the time to praise Him. *Now* is the time to worship Him.



116 This *halal,* or praise psalm was written by one who was celebrating the deliverance, the healing of a physical affliction. Many of the Jewish commentators, therefore, attribute it to Hezekiah. In 2 Kings 20, we read that Hezekiah was told to get his house in order because he was about to die. Not wanting to die, Scripture says Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall. He cried continually and prayed passionately. Finally, the Lord said, "OK. I'll give you fifteen more years." And Hezekiah recovered from his illness.

Psalm 116:1 (a)
I love the LORD, because . . .

Saying, "I love You, Lord," is always a good thing to do. But it's even better to say, "I love You, Lord, because . . . ." For us, there's always a "because." We love Him, John would say, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). His love for us, on the other hand, is without cause or reason . . .

> For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you . . .
>
> Deuteronomy 7:6–8 (a)

In other words, the Lord loves you because He loves you. There's no reason. "He loved us," Paul said, "while we were yet sinners" (Romans 5:8). When we had no interest in Him, He died for us. Therefore, we can rest in His love. We can be amazed by it. We can bask in it. If He loved you when you were a rebel, don't you know He loves you today? The Lord's love for us is absolutely unconditional.

> **Psalm 116:1 (b)–5**
> **. . . he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful.**

"I love the Lord because He heard my prayer. I called out to Him. And He was right there," the psalmist declares. God's grace is God's unmerited, unearned, undeserved favor. And I remain convinced that our God is looking for people He can bless who don't give Him a reason to do so, who know deep within their soul that His blessings are not due to who they are but solely to His grace.

> **Psalm 116:6–11**
> **The LORD preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living. I believed, therefore**

have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted: I said in my haste, All men are liars.

"I believed, therefore have I spoken." Paul grabs this phrase and quotes it in 2 Corinthians 4:13. We ought to do the same. We ought to speak out that which the Lord tells us. All things *are* working together for good (Romans 8:28). Truly, God *is* good (Psalm 73:1). If I draw near to Him, He *will* draw near to me (James 4:8).

So often, we frame our worlds with negative words and thoughts. "All men are liars," the psalmist declared in haste. We, too, can have a tendency to lash out. But the wisest thing we can do during those times is simply to keep quiet—until we can affirm again that which we truly believe.

Psalm 116:12
What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?

Even though I have a tendency to spout off and lash out, the Lord still shows grace. What can I do to thank Him? The psalmist lists three ways . . .

Psalm 116:13
I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD.

"Do this in remembrance of Me," Jesus said (Luke 22:19). Jesus wants you to dine with Him, to spend time at His Table in order that you might remember and reflect upon the fact that you are forgiven and free. Others might condemn you or point their finger at you, but Jesus wants you to know you are clean in His sight.

Psalm 116:14
I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people.

Not only are we to dine with the Lord at His Table, but we're to keep our promises. This is for our benefit—for it will make us people of integrity. "I will pay my vows," the psalmist declares—"not someday, but *now*."

Psalm 116:15
Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.

If indeed this psalm was penned by Hezekiah, he had every reason to conclude that death wasn't such a bad thing, after all—for in the additional fifteen years given to him, he fathered a son named Manasseh, who would be the worst king in the history of Judah. If that wasn't bad enough, when the Babylonians sent emissaries to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery, he gave them a tour of the riches of Jerusalem—which led ultimately to the Babylonian invasion.

Death might not be precious in the sight of family members who miss those who are in heaven. Death might not be precious in the sight of doctors who see it as a failure of their ability to sustain life. But the death of His saints is precious in the Lord's eyes because He knows the best place for us to be is with Him. Could it be this is why Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus? Eyes have not seen and ears have not heard the wonderful things God has prepared for those that love Him we are told (1 Corinthians 2:9). Jesus knew He would bring Lazarus back to life. Mary and Martha would be excited about it. The friends of Lazarus would be grateful. But perhaps Jesus wept for Lazarus, knowing he would have to leave the wonders of heaven.

Psalm 116:16
O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds.

Here, it's as if we see a change of heart in the psalmist as he says, "Lord, I'm not going to tell You what to do anymore. I just want to be Your servant. Oh, I'll still talk things over with You. I'll still lay my problems before You. But I'm not going to give orders to You."

Psalm 116:17–19
I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people, In the courts of the LORD's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.

We can spend time at the Lord's Table. We can keep our promises. And, third, we can offer Him the sacrifice of thanksgiving in return for all His benefits toward us (verse 12).



117 Even though Psalm 117 is the shortest hymn in the Hebrew hymnal of Psalms—consisting of only seventeen words in the Hebrew language—it is a mighty midget because Paul reaches for this psalm to include in Romans 15 as proof that God desires to see not only Jews but Gentiles brought into His family.

Psalm 117:1
O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people.

The Jewish nation was to be a light unto the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6). They were to show the way to walk with the Lord that the Gentiles might see and be drawn to God like moths to a flame. But the people of Israel lost this perspective and, instead, began to look down on the Gentiles.

Are we sometimes guilty of making the same mistake—of only wanting to spend time with other believers? The Lord would have us inviting, reaching out, encouraging others to join with us because the person or church who doesn't evangelize will fossilize. As you know if you've shared the Lord with others, when you see someone respond to the gospel, there's nothing like it. The joy is truly overwhelming.

Psalm 117:2
For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD endureth for ever. Praise ye the LORD.

The Hebrew word translated "merciful kindness" is equivalent to the New Testament word, "grace." Consequently, in this verse, we see grace and truth—an unbeatable combination indeed. John says that the law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus (1:17). Jesus speaks the truth. He

lets us know what's good and bad, what's true and false. But He also speaks grace, giving us provision for failure and forgiveness of sin.

Every other religion consists of man reaching up, trying to make contact with God. Only Christianity is God reaching down graciously to man.

"Before the cock crows, you'll deny Me three times," Jesus said to Peter (Matthew 26:34). That's truth. But He also gave Peter three opportunities to declare his love (John 21:15–17). That's grace.



118

According to rabbinical tradition, Psalm 118 was the hymn Jesus and the disciples sang following the Last Supper (Matthew 26:30). Seen in this light, this psalm is rich in prophecy . . .

Psalm 118:1–5
O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever. Let Israel now say, that his mercy endureth for ever. Let the house of Aaron now say, that his mercy endureth for ever. Let them now that fear the LORD say, that his mercy endureth for ever. I called upon the LORD in distress: the LORD answered me, and set me in a large place.

Gethsemane, or, literally, "olive press," where grapes were crushed, was the place Jesus went to pray. Luke tells us that, on the night before His crucifixion, He prayed with such intensity that the capillaries in His forehead burst and He sweat blood (Luke 22:44). It wasn't the physical suffering of the Cross that caused Jesus such distress. It was the fact that, for the first and only time in eternity, the Son would be separated from the Father as He who knew no sin was made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

This shames me because I must ask myself if being out of fellowship with the Father is that which terrifies me above all else.

"Father, if it be possible, take this cup from Me," Jesus prayed. "Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done" (Matthew 26:39). And it was at that point—as He submitted Himself to the Father's will—that He didn't feel trapped, but rather in a "large place."

Psalm 118:6
The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?

It certainly wasn't the swords of the Roman soldiers that apprehended Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was the will of His Father.

Psalm 118:7
The LORD taketh my part with them that help me: therefore shall I see *my desire* upon them that hate me.

The words "my desire" are in italics, meaning that they aren't part of the original manuscript. Thus, a better translation of the second phrase is, "therefore shall I see—or literally, look down—upon them that hate Me."

"Who are you seeking?" Jesus asked the soldiers who had come to arrest Him.

"Jesus of Nazareth," they said.

"Ego eimi" or, "I AM," Jesus answered—and as they all hit the ground (John 18:6), Jesus would have stood there, looking down on them.

Psalm 118:8, 9
It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.

Jesus would have no confidence in Pilate. Pilate, would, in fact, cave in to the political pressure around him.

Psalm 118:10–12 (a)
All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them. They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. They compassed me about like bees . . .

Now we are at Golgotha, with all nations—the Romans, the Jews, the Passover pilgrims from every nation—surrounding Jesus.

Psalm 118:12 (b)
. . . they are quenched as the fire of thorns . . .

I can't help but think of the thorns in Jesus' brow and the fact that the fire of man's hostility would be quenched by His blood.

Psalm 118:12 (c)
. . . for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them.

The Hebrew word translated "destroy" is *muwl.* This is the only time this word is translated "destroy." Every other time, it is translated "circumcise." Therefore, I believe the Lord isn't saying, "I'm going to destroy those who are surrounding Me." I believe He's saying, "I'm going to circumcise the souls of those surrounding Me."

"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

That's the heart of our Lord on the Cross.

Psalm 118:13 (a)
Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall . . .

I see the Roman soldier thrusting the sword in Jesus' side to make sure He was dead. Out of His side came blood and water, indicating that the physiological death was a burst heart.

Psalm 118:13 (b)
. . . but the LORD helped me.

"But the Lord helped me." And with this cry, we see Jesus in glory . . .

Psalm 118:14–17
The LORD is my strength and song, and is become my salvation. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly. The right hand of the LORD is exalted: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD.

I hear the cry of our victorious Lord and Savior, who rose from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven. The Lord liveth to make intercession for the saints we are told (Hebrews 7:25). If any man sin, know this, John would say, we have an advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). Jesus is at the Father's right hand, declaring the work that was done when He died in our place.

Psalm 118:18
The LORD hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.

Isaiah 53:5 says the chastisement of our peace was upon Him. He was wounded for us.

Psalm 118:19, 20
Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the LORD: This gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter.

Ezekiel 44 speaks of this gate that is now sealed, the East gate in Jerusalem. When Jesus comes back, He'll land on the Mount of Olives, which will split in half, and make His way into the city of Jerusalem through the East gate.

Psalm 118:21, 22
I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.

Jesus quotes this passage in Matthew 21:42 as a reference to Himself. Tradition says that when the temple was being constructed in Solomon's day with massive stones that were quarried away from the temple mount, a stone was initially thrown into the Kidron Valley below. At the end of the project, the capstone, or cornerstone, was missing—until someone remembered the stone that had been thrown away.

Psalm 118:23–25
This is the LORD's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.

"Hosanna, Hosanna," or, literally, "Save now. Save now." This was the cry of the people as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey (Matthew 21:9). However, Jesus knew their cry would soon become, "We will not have this Man rule over us. We have no king but Caesar. Away with Him." In His First Coming, Jesus came as the slaughtered Lamb. But in His Second Coming, He'll come as a roaring Lion of the tribe of Judah.

Psalm 118:26
Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD.

"You will see Me no more until you say, 'Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord,' " Jesus said (Matthew 23:39). And here, the psalmist prefigures that.

Psalm 118:27
God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.

In the millennial temple, sacrifices will be offered—not for mediation, but for illustration that those born during the Millennium will understand the high price that was paid for sin (Ezekiel 40, 41).

Psalm 118:28, 29
Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

At this point in Psalm 118, the millennial kingdom is set up on earth, followed by a new heaven and a new earth, and the psalmist praising God for

His everlasting goodness and mercy.



119 Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. Nineteenth-century English literary critic and economist John Ruskin was required by his mother to memorize one of the psalms every week. When he came to Psalm 119, he said he resented having to memorize it because it seemed to say the same thing over and over again. That is, that the Word of God is great. But when he got older, he said it was not dreadful but dynamic to learn this psalm because it stirred his mind and called him daily to study the Word.

Following are some of my favorite verses in this glorious psalm that deals with the grandeur of God's Word . . .

Psalm 119:1, 2
Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.

The word, "blessed," means "happy." If you want to be happy, walk in the Word of God. It will really be a delight to you. Unlike the television shows or movies you watch that often leave you so empty, time spent in the Word of God will bring sustained satisfaction to your soul.

Psalm 119:7
I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.

Perhaps you feel somewhat retarded or limited in your ability to praise. I encourage you to do what the psalmist does here. That is, learn the language of praise by repeating the phrases in the psalms. If you do this, the Book of Psalms will become a wonderful part of your devotional life. Practice the language of praise—and, eventually, as you pray these things, you'll become fluent in the vocabulary of worship.

Psalm 119:9–11
Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

How do I get rid of these youthful sins, these tendencies of my flesh? The psalmist says it is done by paying close attention to the Word. Let the Word of God, which is likened to water (Ephesians 5:26), flood your soul and cleanse you constantly.

I challenge you to consider memorizing at least a couple of verses a week. It's sad to me that we are living in a time when people no longer make this a part of their spiritual practice because it's a wonderful thing to do. Write verses that particularly speak to you on 3x5-inch cards, pack them around with you—and before you know it, you'll have a heart full of the Word and a life that reflects it.

Psalm 119:15
I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.

Sometimes, we hear people say, "I just don't know what the Lord is doing"—as if He owes them an explanation. I'm afraid we have a tendency to cast aspersions upon the Lord, to not respect and fear and reverence Him the way we should. I have found that a lack of reverence and respect is due to a lack of consistent time spent in the Word.

Psalm 119:24
Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.

People will often spare no expense for a half hour of counseling—but yet the greatest counsel we can ever receive is found in the pages of Scripture. There is no better counsel than the Spirit of God speaking through the Word of God.

Psalm 119:27

Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.

"Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). In other words, what comes out of your mouth is indicative of what is going on in your heart. Do you ever feel like your words are froth, that your speech is trite? The psalmist says if we understand God's precepts and spend time in His Word, we will inevitably talk of His work—a substantial topic, indeed.

Psalm 119:42
So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word.

A young man is said to have asked C. H. Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, how to defend the Bible.

Spurgeon said, "Son, how do you defend a lion? You just let it out of its cage and it will defend itself." If you memorize Scripture this week, I guarantee that within the week, the Lord will give you opportunity to use it with someone. Someone will have a question for you, and you'll have just the verse to share.

Psalm 119:45
And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.

True freedom is found in walking on the path of the Word.

Psalm 119:48
My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes.

"As I meditate on the Word, I find my hands are raised in surrender, in submission, in adoration."

Psalm 119:54
Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.

Has the Word ever become so real to you that you found yourself singing spiritual songs?

Psalm 119:71
It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

When do we learn the Word? So often it's when we're going through tribulation or affliction. When things are going well, we have a tendency to cruise. It's when things are coming down that we make time to open up the Book.

Psalm 119:74
They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word.

"Those who love the Lord will be glad when they see me coming," the psalmist says. How I love to be around people who can discuss the things of the Word.

Psalm 119:98
Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.

Continually studying the Word made the psalmist wiser than his enemies. An example of this was seen recently when a policeman in Haifa, a port city in Israel, was chasing smugglers who were using a cart pulled by a couple of donkeys. When they saw the policeman in pursuit, they realized they didn't have a chance, so they jumped off the cart and escaped. Very devout in his study of Scripture, the policeman devised a plan. He didn't feed the donkeys for three days, then let them go because, from Isaiah 1:3, which says the ass knows his master's crib, he knew that the donkeys would lead him to the home of their master—which they did.

Psalm 119:104

Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.

Oftentimes, bank tellers are taught how to spot counterfeit bills by handling so many real bills that when a fake is slipped in, the teller can see and feel the difference. So too, I have found the best thing I can do with regard to cults is to know the Word so that when something is said that is contrary to Scripture, it won't sound right.

Psalm 119:130
The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.

The Word wasn't written esoterically so that a person had to be a intellectual giant or mystical guru to understand it. "But I don't understand a lot of what is in the Word," you say. Neither do I. In fact, the more I learn, the more I realize how much more I have to learn. Don't worry about what you don't understand. Just act on what you do understand.

Psalm 119:136
Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.

In 2 Timothy 3, Paul speaks of those who have ignored the commandments of God and in so doing have opposed themselves. The more I read the Word, the more compassion I feel for those who don't know the Word because they're missing out on so much wisdom and guidance, so much insight and comfort.

Psalm 119:153
Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law.

"Abide in Me," Jesus said, "for if you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). One of the secrets of prayer is to pray the Scriptures. James says we have not

because we ask not. And we ask and receive not because we ask amiss (4:2, 3). Many of our prayers are never answered because we don't pray in accordance with Scripture. If you want an effective prayer life, pray the Word.

Psalm 119:176
I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.

"Lord, I feel far from You," the psalmist prays. "Seek me and draw me for I have not forgotten the precepts, the commandments, the promises You have given me."

I encourage you to go through Psalm 119 in its entirety and let it motivate you to spend time in God's matchless Word.



120 *A Song of degrees.*

Psalms 120 through 134 comprise what is known as the Songs of Ascent or the Songs of Degrees. They are wonderful psalms because they were the songs that were sung when the Jewish people made their pilgrimage three times a year to Jerusalem to worship the Lord and fellowship with Him during the Feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Josephus tells us that nearly two million people would crowd into that relatively small city for a week to fellowship together and enjoy the Lord in a rich, dynamic way.

As they journeyed toward Jerusalem during these three feasts or festivals, they would sing, or chant these psalms on the way. As they began their trek toward Jerusalem, Psalm 120, a song of "good riddance" would have been a fitting song to sing . . .

Psalm 120:1–4
In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me. Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue.

What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue? Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper.

The pilgrims felt as though they had been attacked, put down, and lied about in their home regions.

Psalm 120:5
Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!

Mesech and Kedar were antagonistic areas populated with those who were especially hostile to the Jews.

Psalm 120:6, 7
My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war.

"I'm glad to be leaving those regions that are attacking me and instead headed to Jerusalem where I can seek refuge and enjoy fellowship," the psalmist says. And don't you feel just like that sometimes when you're on your way to church, knowing that you get to spend time in God's presence with His family?



121 *A Song of degrees.*

Psalm 121:1
I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

The psalmist was not drawing inspiration from the mountains, but rather from the location of Jerusalem in the midst of the mountains. Making his way to Jerusalem, the psalmist says, "I can see the hills. I'm getting close."

Beginning with *The Little Engine That Could,* from our earliest days we have been taught that if we try hard enough, that if we think we can, we can. But the problem is, sometimes the battles before us are just too great. Sometimes the obstacles that loom over us are just too large . . .

Facing our crosstown rival, Leigh High School, my football coach moved me from my usual position on the line to outside linebacker. Leigh had the best runner in the state that year. Mike Franz was tough, indeed. So the coach put me and another guy at outside linebacker to try and stop the sweep, Mike's favorite play. All week long, I psyched myself up. I watched the films. I worked out. I told myself that I was unbeatable and unstoppable. Then came the day of the game. The first play Leigh called was a sweep to my side, with Mike Franz carrying the ball. I saw him coming my way. Our linemen had fought off Mike's interference so it was just me and him, one on one. I had a clear shot at him. I stuck my helmet right into his gut. I speared him just like I was taught.

Alright! *I thought.* I got him!*—until I found myself flat on my back with his cleats running over me as he went on for twenty-five yards.*

After I got off the ground, the next play Leigh called was exactly the same sweep. Again, I made contact with Mike. Again, he ran right over my body. The third play Leigh called was a sweep to my side once again. I wrapped my arms around Mike's legs—and he busted on through for twenty-five yards. In three plays, Mike gained about seventy yards—all over me. Following the third play, I can still hear the cheerleaders yelling, "You can do it. You can do it. You can, you can."

*I clearly remember getting up, looking at them, and thinking, "*You *can do it."*

Try as I might, I just couldn't tackle the problem I was facing. So too, sometimes no matter how much we psyche ourselves up, we encounter problems that are just too great for us. So then what do we do? All too often, we look to someone else to give us help. But, although people are sometimes willing to help, they're not capable . . .

I remember doing a set of squats as a junior at Biola College. Squats are done by doing deep knee bends with a barbell on our shoulders. Because I was attempting to set a personal record, two of my friends were there as spotters, available to help if I couldn't make the lift. I went down and knew I was in trouble when I heard a "pop" in my lower back. I called out, but these friends of mine were fooling around and didn't see what was happening until it was too late. I went crashing to the floor, writhing in pain. Although my friends were available, they were very incapable!

The psalmist had a better idea. He knew the key wasn't to look in to himself or out to his friends, but to look up to the Lord . . .

Psalm 121:2 (a)
My help cometh from the LORD . . .

Jerusalem was located in the hills on a rocky plateau 2,500 feet above sea level. Thus, what the psalmist and the pilgrims were saying was, "We're lifting our eyes as we head to Jerusalem because our help is found in coming to the temple, into the presence of God. Our help is found in meeting with the Lord, in pouring out our hearts before Him."

Before Jesus fed a hungry multitude with a little boy's lunch, Matthew says He lifted His eyes toward heaven and gave thanks (14:19). The night before He was crucified John tells us He lifted His eyes to the Father and prayed (17:1). Jesus looked up to His Father and received the very help He needed.

Psalm 121:2 (b)
. . . which made heaven and earth.

Sometimes my problems seem really big. But that's because my perspective is all wrong. I'm so close to the problem that it blocks my perspective—just as I can block out the sun with my thumb. Remembering that the God to whom I pray is the One who made heaven and earth makes my problems shrink to a workable size in light of His power.

How great is God's power? Look at the heavens. The most powerful telescopes we have are said to spot sextillion stars. How big is sextillion? It is a one with twenty-one zeros after it. That's a lot of stars, gang. And yet

Psalm 147:4 tells us that not only did the Lord put each of those stars in place but that He calls each of them by name. Einstein's theory of an expanding universe has been verified by experiments conducted in outer space. This means that our understanding of God's power increases, as well.

How great is God's power? Look at the earth, specifically at the bumblebee. Scientists tell us that it is theoretically impossible for a bumblebee to fly because his wings are too short and his body is too heavy. How he flies is a mystery to scientists, yet Deuteronomy 29:29 tells us the secret things belong to the Lord. To create and keep in operation the intricacies of our own planet speaks of a power of ingenuity and creativity beyond anything we can even begin to fathom.

Few of us doubt the ability of God to solve our problems. But many of us struggle with His willingness to do so. But listen to what He says: "Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee. I will help thee. Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness" (Isaiah 41:10). That's a promise not for those who are good enough, but for all of us.

Psalm 121:3 (a)
He will not suffer thy foot to be moved . . .

This would have been a tremendous comfort to the pilgrims winding their way up the mountains to Jerusalem. And the same thing applies to us on our spiritual journey.

Psalm 121:3 (b)
. . . he that keepeth thee will not slumber.

As the pilgrims made their way to Jerusalem, it would be comforting to know that they would be kept safe on their journey. Our God never slumbers. He never dozes off. He never forgets about your situation.

On Mount Carmel, four hundred prophets of Baal were trying to call down fire from their god. For hours, they beat their bodies, slashed themselves with knives, screamed, and danced. Finally, Elijah suggested that maybe Baal was asleep (1 Kings 18:27). Sometimes we can fall into the same error of Baal's prophets, thinking we have to expend incredible

amounts of energy to get God's attention. Such is not the case. David tells us that the Lord's thoughts toward us are more numerous than the sand on the seashore (Psalm 139:17, 18). He's always thinking about you. Your situation is always before Him. What a comfort that is to those who embrace it by faith.

Psalm 121:4
Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

Israel is not only the name of a nation, but also of an individual, more commonly known as Jacob. Jacob was a tricky guy. He tricked his brother out of his birthright and tricked his father into giving him his brother's blessing. You might find it easy to believe that God will keep those whose hearts are after Him. But, when you look within, you see a heart of treachery and trickery. Take hope, dear saint, because God kept Jacob—and He'll keep you.

Psalm 121:5 (a)
The LORD is thy keeper . . .

"Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you blameless and faultless on that day," Jude writes (24). I'm so glad I don't have to keep myself. I'm so thankful I don't have to struggle and strive to make it in my Christian experience. I'm so relieved that the Lord is the One who promises to keep me.

The story is told of a man who wanted to cross a frozen lake. He got on his knees by the edge and tapped on the ice to make sure it was solid. Then he carefully scooted out on his hands and knees and tapped some more. When he found it was still solid, scooted still farther. Every few feet, he would tap the ice to make sure it was strong enough to hold him. The hours went by. His face turned blue. His knuckles turned red. He was almost to the other side when he heard a rumble behind him. As he looked back, he saw twelve Clydesdale horses pulling a heavy wagon. They made it across the lake in a few minutes, leaving the man to think how foolish he had been.

We're like that man. We wonder if we're going to make it in our Christian experience. "Tap, tap, tap, I wonder if the Lord's going to keep me," we say.

"Tap, tap, tap, I wonder if He's going to continue to work in my life." Doubt fills our minds. Discouragement fills our hearts because we don't realize that we're on *solid* ground. The Lord has promised that He will never leave us, that He will never forsake us, that we are in His hand and that no man can pluck us out. What a difference it makes when the truth sinks into our hearts that we can rest in God's keeping power.

Psalm 121:5 (b)
. . . the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand.

Newer translations render the word "shade" as "shield." In battle, soldiers would be exposed on their right side because they wielded the sword with their right hand. Here, the psalmist is saying that the Lord is the shield in the area that is vulnerable to attack.

You know the areas of strength and weakness in your own life. Here, the Lord says He will shield, protect, and cover me in the areas where I am most vulnerable.

Psalm 121:6 (a)
The sun shall not smite thee by day . . .

These pilgrims would be walking through very dry areas. Do you ever feel like you're in a fiery trial, like you're going to burn out, like you're not going to make it? Claim this promise as your own.

Psalm 121:6 (b)
. . . nor the moon by night.

In Bible days, it was believed that if the moon shone on a person, he could lose his mind. We get the word "lunatic" from that idea. If you feel like you're losing your grip, take heart. The Lord has promised that He will keep you, protect you, shield you.

Psalm 121:7, 8
The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in

from this time forth, and even for evermore.

"The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in . . ." To the pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem, this would be a comfort, knowing God would be with them both on their way there and on their way home. And we can be assured of the same thing. You see, when we're coming in to the presence of the Lord, we feel safe and secure. We feel like we're in the place of blessing as we come into His presence. But what about those times when we feel like we're "going out"—when we know our walk is not what it should be, when our relationship with Him is not as strong as it once was? Surely, He must not be with me now, we think. But this verse tells us God will preserve us no matter where we are, that He will, one way or another, preserve our soul and draw us back to Him.



122 *A Song of degrees of David.*

Psalm 122:1
I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.

David was as eager to worship in the house of the Lord as the pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem. David was a man who truly enjoyed being in God's presence with God's people.

Psalm 122:2–4
Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD.

Jerusalem was a small city, yet the people were happy to meet there to give thanks to the Lord. In Psalm 116:17, we read of a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving can indeed be sacrificial. There are times I

would rather grumble and feel sorry for myself. But I have found that if, instead of having a pity party, I respond to the exhortation from a brother beside me or the Spirit inside me, saying, "Come, let us go into the house of the Lord," the Lord accepts my thanksgiving as a sacrifice to Him—and I am invariably blessed in the process.

Psalm 122:5
For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David.

Jerusalem was the place counsel was given, the place where wisdom was disbursed.

Psalm 122:6
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.

"Those who love you shall be blessed and those who curse you will be cursed," God said to Abraham (Genesis 12:3). This doesn't mean all that Israel does as a state or as a government is right. It's not. But we need to realize that Israel as a nation has a special place in God's economy. Our own country has historically had a heart for Israel and stood in alliance with Israel—and I believe that is one of two fundamental reasons God has blessed us. The second reason is that we are a missionary nation. Since our founding, we have sent an untold amount of money and people to the mission field. God hasn't blessed us because of our constitution or our capitalistic system. No, I believe we have been blessed by God's grace because we have been a country who has sought to evangelize the world and to stand by Israel.

Psalm 122:7–9
Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good.

Why did David seek the good of Jerusalem? Because Jerusalem was the place God chose to work in a unique way. So too, why do I need to bless the church of Jesus Christ? Because that's the place God has chosen to work. If I find fault with other churches or other Christians, I myself am in error because I am finding fault with the very place God has chosen to bless.



123 *A Song of degrees.*

Psalm 123:1
Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens.

"I will lift up my eyes and fix them upon the Lord," the psalmist declares. The Jews traveling to Jerusalem would say the same thing. The reason for their pilgrimage was to refocus their eyes on the Lord. Here is a real secret for me: I have found that if I look inward, I'll be depressed. If I look outward, I'll be distressed. But if I look up and fix my eyes on the Lord, I'll be strengthened.

Psalm 123:2
Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us.

The reference here is to a master who would give his servants subtle, almost imperceptible hand motions so as not to interrupt a dinner or conversation. I believe part of the reason God doesn't speak audibly is that if He did, people would say, "Wow! God spoke audibly to him. He must be a giant man of faith." In other words, the focus would shift to the servant. So our Master moves in quiet ways in order that people focus on Him. It's the servant's job, therefore, to be constantly looking at the hand of the master. If a

servant was looking around to see what everyone else was doing, He would miss all the signs and wonder why he wasn't used.

We must keep our eyes only on our Master. If we put them on people, we'll miss what He says to us. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, gang. Start your day looking *to* Him and go through your day with your eyes focused *on* Him.

Psalm 123:3, 4
Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us: for we are exceedingly filled with contempt. Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.

David's prayer was that he would be able to keep his eyes on the Lord instead of looking at the enemies that surrounded him. So too, the pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem would be relieved not to have to see the faces of their enemies during their time of fellowship and thanksgiving. And, as we come together as a body, we can experience the same thing.



124 *A Song of degrees of David.*

Psalm 124:1–5
If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say; If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us: Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us: Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: Then the proud waters had gone over our soul.

I think every one of us could write this psalm because, truly, if it hadn't been for the Lord, we, too, would have been overwhelmed. If it hadn't been for the Lord, we, too, would have been washed up. If the Lord had not been

on our side, we, too, would have been wiped out. Can't every one of us say this? If it wasn't for the mercy, goodness, and kindness of God, we would be curtains, toast, finished. That's why a psalm like this is so important. It causes us to remember how God rescued us in the past and how He delivered us when things looked hopeless. And in this way, the past becomes a prophecy for the future.

In 2 Corinthians 1:10, concerning the Lord, Paul says, "He did deliver me. He doth deliver me. And He will yet deliver me." The same is true for us. Because God saw us through in the past, we can be confident He will see us through all the way to the end.

Psalm 124:6–8
Blessed be the LORD, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

A fowler is one who captures birds and locks them in cages either to sell them on the market or roast them in the fire. Satan is a fowler who would love to capture us, put us in bondage, and ultimately fry us in the fire of hell. But we have escaped his snare—not by our own righteousness, integrity, religious efforts, or energy. We've been covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. And that has allowed us to slip from the cage of the fowler into the glorious liberty of the Father.

125 *A Song of degrees.*

Continuing the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the pilgrims would have been nearing their destination . . .

Psalm 125:1–5

They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever. For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity. Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts. As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.

In sight of Jerusalem, the travelers would see the mountains surrounding Jerusalem—Mount Zion, upon which Jerusalem is built. Mount Skopos in the distance, Mount Golgotha and the Mount of Olives close by.

Those who trust in the Lord will be as strong and as stable as a mountain. That's why I need to have devotions tomorrow morning—not to impress my Lord or to earn righteousness, for that's already secured by the work of the Cross—but to become stable, because if I don't spend time with the Lord, I can get shaken up real easy.

I'm convinced we become slack in our devotional life because, usually, we don't have feelings when we have devotions. That is, we don't feel God's presence. We don't feel a "tingle." But, gang, how we feel is not the issue . . .

When a horse is shod, nails are driven through a horseshoe into his hoof. The horse doesn't feel a thing. But when he goes out on the trail, if he encounters broken glass or sharp rocks, he won't feel their effect because the shoe has been placed on his hoof. That's what the devotional life does. I might not feel one thing when I'm reading the Word. I might not feel one thing when I'm praying and worshiping. But once I get on the road of life that day, inevitably I encounter broken glass, rocks, and nails—and I feel the difference then if the "hooves" of my heart aren't shod. I get uptight. I get tense. I say the wrong thing. Inevitably, I pay the price if I don't take the time with the Lord in the morning. So, next time you have devotions and don't feel anything, remember the horse—and let the Lord prepare you for what only He knows lies ahead.



126 *A Song of Degrees.*

Psalm 126:1–3
When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.

After being held captive in Babylon, being able to travel to Jerusalem to worship God must have indeed seemed to the Jews like a dream too good to be true. So too, we who were captives of Satan and sin are also free to worship and be the people God intended us to be—"whereof we, too, are glad."

Psalm 126:4–6
Turn again our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the south. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus likens the Word of God to seed (Matthew 13). As we teach Sunday school, witness at work, or talk to our neighbors, we bear the precious seed of the Word. Why, then, is weeping involved? We don't weep out of sadness, but out of humility—amazed that God would be so good to us. We share the Lord with people not on the basis of how together or capable we are, but solely on the basis of how good God is. And when we do, we come back rejoicing, amazed that God would use us. We're not great, but the seed we bear is powerful and potent, indeed.

The minister graduated *magna cum laude* from a top-ranked seminary. In his first pastorate on his first Sunday, he proudly stood behind the pulpit with all the confidence that comes from education and preparation. But, suddenly,

when he opened his mouth to preach, his mind went completely, totally blank. Terror filled his heart. Sweat broke out on his brow. He stuffed his notes in his Bible and left, with his head in his hands. A precious old saint turned to her friend and said, "If he had come in like he went out, he would have gone out like he came in."

So too, if we come in proud, confident, and puffed up, thinking we're God's gift to the rest of the world, we'll leave weeping. But if we come in weeping, broken, and humble, we'll go out rejoicing.



127 *A Song of degrees for Solomon.*

Here is another psalm of ascent, chanted or sung by the people as they traveled to Jerusalem three times a year to celebrate Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles—three festivals in which the Lord was honored and the people were refreshed.

On their way to Jerusalem, the Jews frequently traveled as families. In Psalms 127 and 128, we see a family portrait presented. In Psalm 127, verses 1 and 2 deal with the foundation of the family; verses 3 through 5 with the expansion of the family. In Psalm 128, verses 1 through 3 deal with child-launching in the family; verses 4 through 6 with the grown family.

Psalm 127:1, 2
Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.

With fifty percent of all first marriages failing, the family is under attack and Christians are not immune. Even if you're walking close to the Lord, you'll experience attack and assault upon your marriage. Why? Because Satan knows that marriage is a picture of the love relationship between Jesus

and His church. Therefore, if he can mar that picture, he will accomplish a great objective in his attempt to skew the picture people have of the Lord.

What's the solution? The Lord must build the family. Anything else is in vain. You can get up early, you can stay up late, you can eat the bread of sorrow—wondering if your kids are going to turn out okay. But it's all in vain. Jesus reduced it to such incredible simplicity when He said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and ultimately, all these other things will be added to you" (see Matthew 6:33). The best investment you can make as a couple or as a family is to spend time on your knees, together seeking the Lord. How easy it is for us to want to go to seminars and read books about how to have a healthy marriage—but we won't do the foundational thing, which is to seek the Lord together. It's a waste of time to cultivate communication skills if you're not seeking God together. It is pointless to establish a relationship built on fun, vacation, or recreation if you're not seeking the Lord together.

Psalm 127:3
Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.

Children are not hindrances. They're a heritage. Author Charlie Shedd said that when he was in his twenties, he wrote a book, entitled, *How to Raise Your Children.* When he was in thirties and had a child, he wrote a book entitled, *Some Suggestions for Parents.* Later on, when his second child came, he wrote *Feeble Hints to Fellow Strugglers.* And by the time his third child was growing up, his final pamphlet was entitled, *Anybody Here Got a Few Words of Wisdom?*

Years ago, I thought the Lord would entrust me with kids that I might train and develop them. I have found that the Lord gave me kids that they might train and develop me. Having kids obliterates selfishness. You can no longer do what you want how you want when you want. There's a whole world of other considerations. But you know what's wonderful? It kills you. "The man who lives for his own life will lose it," Jesus said. "But the man who loses his life for My sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:39). Kids are one of the ways

the Lord gives us to lose ourselves, to no longer live for our own ease, pleasures, and pursuits. They're a rich heritage because they grow us up.

Psalm 127:4
As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.

Notice that the psalmist doesn't say kids are like clubs or rocks. A club doesn't take a whole lot of skill to use, and anyone can throw a rock. But if you've tried your hand at archery, you know it's difficult. It is not easy to be accurate with an arrow. In fact, it's not even easy to string it up and get it to fly straight. Besides that, there are all kinds of different arrows for different game, targets, and distances. So too, each child is different. To raise them correctly, each child takes skill beyond our own ability. They drive us to our knees constantly.

Psalm 127:5
Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.

Every couple has a specific-sized quiver. No one can tell you how big your own quiver is. For some, it's one or two. For others, four or five. But the Holy Spirit will show you as you seek Him out how many arrows are supposed to be in your quiver.

In Bible days, if you had a bunch of kids, when the enemies came to the gate, you would send your grown kids out and the enemies would flee. The same thing is true, spiritually. When the enemy seeks to attack or derail me, I can't tell you the blessing my kids are to me personally.



128 *A Song of degrees.*

Psalm 128:1

Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways.

Notice the psalmist doesn't say, "Blessed is everyone who has kids." He says, "Blessed is every one who fears the Lord and walks in His ways." Kids will not automatically bring happiness. But if you walk with the Lord, your kids will follow, and you'll be blessed.

Psalm 128:2, 3
For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.

If you plant an olive tree and let it run its natural course, a circle of olive plants twelve to fifteen feet from the base of the tree will spring up. They'll be just like the adult tree—but all of their connection will be below the surface, out of sight, underground. This is sobering and challenging because I realize my kids are going to become like me. If I pray, my kids will become people who pray. But if I don't pray, my kids are less likely to pray themselves. Do you want your kids to pray, to witness, to worship? Then you must do those things. Do you want your children to walk with God? Then you walk with God. They're like olive plants. What you're doing, they'll become.

Psalm 128:4–6
Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel.

As children grow up fearing the Lord, not only are the parents blessed (verse 4), not only is the community blessed (verse 5), but the entire nation is blessed by the contribution they make as adults (verse 6).



129 *A Song of Degrees.*

Psalm 129:1–3
Many a time have they af flicted me from my youth, may Israel now say: Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me. The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows.

How true it is that Israel has been afflicted many a time. No nation in history has experienced the persecution, the attack, the hostility that Israel has. And yet she has survived miraculously.

Psalm 129:4–7
The LORD is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked. Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion. Let them be as the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up: Wherewith the mower filleth not his hand; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom.

Let those who persecute Israel be as the grass that grows on the tops of the houses, the psalmist says. You see, occasionally, seed would blow on to the roofs of the houses made with dirt and, following a rain, it would sprout. But then the sun would scorch it and it would be gone. That is what the psalmist prays would happen to his enemies.

Psalm 129:8
Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the LORD be upon you: we bless you in the name of the LORD.

In Numbers 6, the Lord commanded the priests that they were to pronounce blessing upon the people. And when the priests spoke blessing, blessing was miraculously and undeniably released. In 1 Peter, we are told that, as the church, we are a royal priesthood. Therefore, we, too, have the

opportunity, the responsibility to pronounce blessing. So instead of merely chatting with people, you can, if you desire, say, "May the Lord bless you. May He keep you. May He make His face shine upon you." It's a wonderful thing to do, for, when mixed with faith, the words you speak have power to release blessing.



130 *A Song of degrees.*

Psalm 130:1, 2
Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

Here, the psalmist is crying to the Lord. We do the same—and yet even as we cry out with supplication, we are vulnerable to consternation because Satan perches on our shoulder, saying, "You've done this wrong and you haven't been doing that right, so how could you possibly think God will answer your prayer?" Even the psalmist must have battled with this, for look what he says in the next verse . . .

Psalm 130:3
If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

"Lord, if You're keeping track of sin, no one has a chance because we've all sinned." And, of course, Paul would reiterate this in Romans 3:23, making the case for mankind's need of a Savior.

Psalm 130:4 (a)
But . . .

Here we see this pivotal three-letter word, seen throughout Scripture, that changes everything . . .

Psalm 130:4 (b)

. . . there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

Praise the Lord! There is forgiveness in Him! He is quick to forgive and His forgiveness is so complete that He can't even remember our sins (Hebrews 10:17).

Psalm 130:5, 6
I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.

The Hebrew word translated "wait" is *kavah,* which literally speaks of the extension of a cord from one point to another. What a perfect picture. God is at one point. Our hearts are at another. And it is as we wait for and wait upon Him that He keeps in contact with us.

Psalm 130:7, 8
Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Biblical hope has been defined as "the absolute expectation of coming good." In verse 5, the psalmist declared that he hoped in God's Word. Here in verse 8, he calls the entire nation to join him.



131 *A Song of degrees of David.*

Psalm 131:1
LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.

David writes of the tranquility that comes from humility. You can be at such peace. Frayed nerves can be soothed. Nervous stomachs can be quieted.

Tension headaches can flee if you refuse to be bothered by lofty theories, questions, or philosophies.

Psalm 131:2, 3
Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child. Let Israel hope in the LORD from henceforth and for ever.

Babies cry for attention—for constant feeding and soothing. But the weaned child learns to trust that at the right time, he'll be fed. So too, David is saying, "I know that the Lord will provide, bless, and work. So I'm just going to trust my Father that at the right time, He'll minister to my need. He'll take care of the problem." David had such a simple, wonderful walk with the Lord. No wonder the Lord delighted in him (Psalm 18:19)



132 *A Song of degrees.*

This deals with David's desire to bring back the ark of the covenant from Kirjath-jearim and his desire to build the temple . . .

Psalm 132:1–6
LORD, remember David, and all his afflictions: How he sware unto the LORD, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, Until I find out a place for the LORD, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood.

One of David's first orders of business as king of Israel was to retrieve the ark of the covenant from Kirjath-jearim and to bring it to Jerusalem. After an initial unsuccessful attempt (2 Samuel 6:1–11), David did indeed bring the ark safely to Jerusalem, amidst great praise and worship (2 Samuel 6:12–

19). Following this, it was his desire to build the Lord a temple (2 Samuel 7:1, 2).

If you lived in the days when Jesus was on earth, would you have invited Him to your house? When He said that foxes have holes and birds have nests but the Son of man had nowhere to lay His head, would you have said, "Jesus, You can stay with me"? I would like to believe we would say that. But in reality, Psalm 22:3 says that God inhabits the praises of His people. This means that when I praise the Lord in the morning, I'm building a habitation for Him. When we praise the Lord together, we're building a place for Him to dwell. So, while it's easy for us to say, "Sure, I would have had a place for Jesus," the question is, what will I do tomorrow? Will I build Him a habitation of praise tomorrow?

Psalm 132:7–9
We will go into his tabernacles: we will worship at his footstool. Arise, O LORD, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength. Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy.

David's dream of building a temple was realized through his son, Solomon (1 Kings 8).

Psalm 132:10–12
For thy servant David's sake turn not away the face of thine anointed. The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore.

Verses 10 through 12 are Messianic prophecy. That is, they're talking about the Offspring of David ruling and reigning forever, culminating, of course, in the Son of David, Jesus Christ.

Psalm 132:13, 14

For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.

Geographically, topographically, geologically, Jerusalem isn't very remarkable. The Lord didn't choose Jerusalem because it's a special place. But because He chose it, it became special. That's just like us. We're nothing special. But because the Lord chose us, we are becoming special, indeed.

Psalm 132:15–18
I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed. His enemies will I clothe with shame: but upon himself shall his crown flourish.

Again, this is Messianic prophecy dealing with the reign of Jesus Christ, who will reign righteously, perfectly, awesomely from Jerusalem.



133 *A Song of degrees of David.*

Psalm 133:1
Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

As the Jews traveled together to Jerusalem three times yearly to observe the Feasts of Pentecost, Passover, and Tabernacles, no doubt they anticipated standing in the presence of God together.

Unity is an issue that's very important to the Lord. Why? First, it brings satisfaction to the Father. If you're a parent, you understand this. When your kids have been fighting, invariably they give you all the reasons why it's the other one's fault. If we, being evil,

desire peace and tranquility, love and unity in our homes, how much more is the Father distressed when He hears His children fighting.

"They're wrong doctrinally."

"Yeah, but they're missing the ball socially."

On and on the bickering goes. And if you listen hard enough, you can hear the Father saying, "Kids, let's have peace. Let's have unity."

Secondly, unity is a witness to the world. "By your love one for another shall all men know that you are My disciples," Jesus said (see John 13:35). In John 17, He amplifies this when He prays, "Father, let them be one even as we are one, that the world may know that You are in me and I am in You, that they may believe that You sent Me into the world" (see John 17:21).

When does the world really believe the Father sent Jesus as our Savior? When they see love and unity in the body of believers.

A few weeks ago, a man stood in the back of one of our services. He was obviously a transient. He looked over the congregation as he watched the worship and listened to the Word. Then he slipped out before I could get to the door. He came back the second service, stood in the same place, and watched again. That night, he came back for the evening service. And as we celebrated the Lord's Supper, he didn't participate, but he watched carefully. About 11:00 that night, he knocked at my door. After we talked together for awhile, he accepted Jesus as his Savior based upon one thing. "The thing that drew me is the love I sensed among the people in that building," he said. "I want to give my heart to the One who has caused all those people to love each other."

Psalm 133:2, 3

It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

Following an exhortation to unity in verse 1, we see an illustration and application of unity in verses 2 and 3. "Look at Aaron," the psalmist says. "See how his head was anointed with oil." Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus, our Great High Priest, is the Head of the body, the church (Colossians 1:18). Therefore, the secret of unity is to be linked to the Head and to let the anointing of the Holy Spirit fall from Him down upon the body to the very lowest parts of the skirt. Practically speaking, this means to go to the brother or sister from whom you've been divided and, as the Holy Spirit leads, say, "We've been divided long enough. The enemy has exploited differences between us. Would you meet with me? We can pray together, worship, and sit under the Headship of Jesus Christ and let His anointing run down upon us, His body."

Unity will always be found when the body is linked to the Head, coming together in Jesus Christ. If I want to see unity in the body of Christ, it is imperative that I bring people and problems under Jesus' Headship and allow His anointing to flow down upon me. Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity, to love each other fervently.



134 *A Song of degrees.*

This final song of degrees was sung when the night watch would come into the temple to worship . . .

Psalm 134:1–3
Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD. The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.

When you lift up your hand to bless the Lord, He will reach down His hand to bless you. Bless the Lord and let Him bless you.



135 **Psalm 135:1–3**

Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the name of the LORD; praise him, O ye servants of the LORD. Ye that stand in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God, Praise the LORD; for the LORD is good: sing praises unto his name; for it is pleasant.

Praise is pleasant not only to the Lord, but it is pleasant to be around people who praise God. There is a fragrance that emanates from them and a joy that flows through them.

Psalm 135:4–6

For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure. For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.

People often ask why God does a given thing. He does whatever He pleases. That means the answer is that, for reasons perhaps our finite minds can't comprehend, it pleased Him.

Psalm 135:7–14

He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasuries. Who smote the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and beast. Who sent tokens and wonders into the midst of thee, O Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his servants. Who smote great nations, and slew mighty kings; Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan: And gave their land for an heritage, an heritage unto Israel his people. Thy name, O LORD, endureth for ever; and thy memorial, O LORD, throughout all generations. For the LORD will judge his people, and he will repent himself concerning his servants.

God's power in nature, in warfare, and in judgment all attest to His might.

Psalm 135:15–17
The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; They have ears, but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths.

In contrast to the greatness of God, we see that idols of man are deaf, dumb, and blind.

Psalm 135:18–21
They that make them are like unto them: so is every one that trusteth in them. Bless the LORD, O house of Israel: bless the LORD, O house of Aaron: Bless the LORD, O house of Levi: ye that fear the LORD, bless the LORD. Blessed be the LORD out of Zion, which dwelleth at Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.

If you trust in deaf, dumb, and blind idols, you become deaf, dumb, and blind as well because we become like that which we worship. That's why worshiping the Lord is so important. If you worship Him, you begin to take on His characteristics. Therefore, bless the Lord!



136 This is a song that would have been sung responsively—most likely the Levites singing the first phrase of every verse and the people responding with, "for His mercy endureth forever."

Psalm 136:1–3
O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Here, God's character is praise, for, truly, He is nothing but good—eternally, completely *good.*

Psalm 136:4–9
To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever: The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever: The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever.

As in the previous psalm, God's creativity is praised. Although we can only observe a sliver of what the heavens hold, if the sun, moon, and stars weren't so constant, they alone would be enough to amaze us.

Psalm 136:10–16
To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endureth for ever: And brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy endureth for ever: With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy endureth for ever: And made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy endureth for ever: But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Here, God's care for His people is seen—specifically in His power in freeing His people from bondage and providing for them as they made their way to the Promised Land.

Psalm 136:17–22
To him which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: And slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever: And Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy endureth for ever: And gave

their land for an heritage: for his mercy endureth for ever: Even an heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Here, God's control is praised. That is, once His people arrived in the land of promise, He went before them and brought down the kingdoms that otherwise would have annihilated them.

Psalm 136:23–26
Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever: And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy endureth for ever. Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Finally, God's compassion is praised—for He remembers those of low estate and sustains all of His creation. In other words, He loves and sustains *us*. Why? Simply, solely, singularly because of His mercy—demonstrated nowhere more clearly or completely than on the Cross of Calvary (1 Peter 1:3).



137 Psalm 137 is a song of lament. It was written when the Jews were exiled in Babylon for seventy years, carried into captivity because of their sins . . .

Psalm 137:1–3
By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.

Because the Jews were known for their music, the Babylonians wanted to be entertained by them.

Psalm 137:4–6
How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

"There is a time to mourn and a time to dance," Solomon wisely declared (Ecclesiastes 3:4). For the captives in Babylon, theirs was a time to mourn, for they had no reason to dance.

Psalm 137:7–9
Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

Here, the psalmist asks for revenge upon the Babylonians—even to the point of dashing their children upon the rocks. Again, remember that the Old Testament deals with material and physical issues that picture spiritual New Testament principles. If you don't understand this, the entire Old Testament will be confusing and troubling to you. But if you do understand this, the Old Testament will be wonderfully relevant to you.

Like the Babylonians, there are those who would seek to make us captives and destroy the city of our soul. They are demonic entities and spirits who seek to keep us in bondage and to turn our singing into sighing (Ephesians 6:12). Once you understand this, like the psalmist, you'll develop a hatred for demonic spirits and the enemy that seeks to destroy people, relationships, health, and every area of life. And, like the psalmist, you'll wage war in prayer against these demons.

The glamorization of sin is absolutely appalling to me. Television and the movies make it seem so tantalizing, so exciting. But they don't show the flip side: the sorrow, tragedy, disease, and heartbreak. I hope the understanding of this will move you to wage war through prayer and to dash the heads of those demons against the Rock of ages, the living stone of Jesus Christ.



138 *A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 138:1
I will praise thee with my whole heart: before the gods will I sing praise unto thee.

The gods mentioned here could refer to judges, for in Psalm 82:6 and Exodus 21:6, judges are referred to as gods, having been given the power of life and death. Or they could refer to the Canaanite deities. Either way, David was determined to praise the true and living God with his whole heart.

Psalm 138:2
I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.

So holy is the name of the Lord that the Old Testament scribes wouldn't even write out the vowel sounds, rendering it YHWH—an unspeakable name that, since approximately the twelfth century, has been pronounced as Yahweh or Jehovah. Not only would the scribes render the Lord's name unspeakable, but tradition says that they would throw away the pen they wrote these four consonants with so as not to dishonor the name with any lesser word. The name of the Lord was meticulously revered. And yet here we read that the Lord honors His Word even above His name. How important is the Word? Of utmost importance.

Psalm 138:3–5
In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul. All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O LORD, when they hear the words of thy mouth. Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the LORD: for great is the glory of the LORD.

David's hope, plan, and desire was that the kings surrounding him would worship the true and living God of Israel once they learned of His ways. Is that your prayer for your own neighbors?

Psalm 138:6
Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.

Here the "God helps those who help themselves" myth is shattered. In fact, just the opposite is true: God helps those who realize they can't help themselves.

Psalm 138:7, 8
Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me. The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands.

"The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me," David says.

"Being confident of this very thing—that He who has begun a good work in you shall complete it," Paul echoes (see Philippians 1:6).

God has a whole lot invested in you. He's chosen you. He's redeemed you. He's training you—and He's going to perfect that which He's begun no matter what it takes, no matter how long it takes.

In Ephesians 2:10, we read that we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. The Greek word translated "workmanship" is *poiema,* from which we get our word, "poem." Thus, God is saying, "You are My poetry. You're special to Me. I'm not giving up on you."



139 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 139:1, 2
O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.

"Lord, You know me," David prays. "You know when I'm down and when I'm up." The Lord knows you that well, too. He knows where you're at not to reward or punish you accordingly, but because He cares about you deeply and wants to minister to you personally.

Psalm 139:3, 4
Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.

Because the Lord knows every word on your tongue, every word we speak is being broadcast to heaven. See if knowing that doesn't change the way you talk to and about people!

Psalm 139:5, 6
Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.

"The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked above all things. Who can know it?" Jeremiah asks (17:9). Motives and attitudes are buried so deep within us that we're not even aware of them. That's why David seems relieved that God knows him better than he knows himself.

Psalm 139:7–10
Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

Wherever we go, God is there. Whether you're high or low, up or down, strong or struggling, the Lord is with you (Hebrews 13:5). If you're walking with the Lord, this is comforting. If you're running from Him, it should be convicting.

Psalm 139:11–14
If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

As you consider the human body, you realize that you are wonderfully made indeed. Did you know that your eyes can distinguish between eight million different colors, that your ears can hear between 300,000 and 400,000 different tones, that every day, your body produces one billion red blood cells? Truly, we are incredibly made.

Psalm 139:15
My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

This speaks of our development in the womb. God put us together just the way He wanted us to be. Therefore, for you to bemoan your lack of athletic ability, your limitations academically, or your unique personality is to actually question the ingenious wisdom and ability of God.

I think of an Old Testament hero named Ehud who was of the tribe of Benjamin. Now, "Benjamin" means, "son of my right hand." But Ehud was left-handed. Therefore, he could have easily thought God made a mistake in creating him that way. Maybe he grew up hearing the teasing and taunts of his friends. Maybe he questioned his worth for years—until one day when he was asked to carry out an assignment: to assassinate Eglon, the wicked king of Moab. Ehud hid a twoedged dagger underneath his cloak and strapped it to his right side so that he could draw it across his body with his left hand.

When he went into the presence of Eglon, the king's bodyguards assumed that he, a Benjamite was right-handed and only frisked his left side. Maybe it was at that moment that Ehud understood why he was left-handed. Ehud completed his mission and Israel was free of Eglon's wicked rule because the Lord knew what He was doing all along (Judges 3).

As He did Ehud, the Lord has designed you for a specific purpose, gang. You might not know what it is for years, but at a certain point, if you're observant, you'll begin to see why you are the way you are.

> **Psalm 139:16**
> **Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.**

Newer translations render the phrase "all my members" as "all my days." In other words, God not only designed you physically, but planned out a daily schedule for you practically. If I really believe this, my responsibility is to begin each morning saying, "Lord, what have You mapped out for my life today?" This is certainly what Jesus did . . .

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

In this Messianic prophecy, Jesus is saying, "My Father wakens Me morning by morning that I might have a word for him who is weary and that I might have direction for My ministry." If Jesus got up morning by morning and asked His Father to give Him the plan for the day, how much more do we need to approach the Lord and ask Him to lay upon our hearts directions, impressions, and instructions day by day.

It's an exciting way to live. Try it for a week. With pencil and paper in hand, say, "Lord, give me the ear of the learned. Let me know what's on Your heart."

Psalm 139:17, 18
How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.

This verse is God's postcard to us. On the front is a picture of an endless sandy beach. On the back, it reads: "Thinking of you."

"I know the thoughts I think towards thee," God says, "thoughts of peace and not of evil to bring you to an expected—or certain—end" (Jeremiah 29:11). His thoughts are constantly of us—and they're thoughts of peace.

Psalm 139:19–22
Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men. For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain. Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.

In contrast to the comfort of God's thoughts toward the believer, we see the calamity of the wicked.

Psalm 139:23, 24
Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

After talking about the omniscience and omnipresence of God—that He knows us better than we know ourselves and that He is with us wherever we are, David ends his psalm by giving the Lord free access to his heart and mind—and a request to be continually led in His perfect way.



140 *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 140:1–5
Deliver me, O LORD, from the evil man: preserve me from the violent man; Which imagine mischiefs in their heart; continually are they gathered together for war. They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips. Selah. Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; pre serve me from the violent man; who have purposed to overthrow my goings. The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me. Selah.

This psalm of David shows us that people didn't feel neutral about David. They either loved him or were out to destroy him. The same can be said of the Son of David—for even as the multitudes thronged after Him, the scribes and Pharisees plotted to kill Him.

Psalm 140:6
I said unto the LORD, Thou art my God: hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD.

In that David's enemies gave him cause to lean even more heavily upon the Lord, they unknowingly contributed to his victory. And the same thing can happen in our lives if hardship draws us closer to the Lord rather than away from Him.

Psalm 140:7
O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.

As He did with David, God has made provision for our heads to be covered in the day of battle. "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God," Paul tells us—one piece of which is the helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:17), the knowledge that God chose to save us before the

foundation of the world and that He will never leave us. This assurance protects us from the fiery darts of doubt the enemy continually sends our way.

Psalm 140:8–11
Grant not, O LORD, the desires of the wicked: further not his wicked device; lest they exalt themselves. Selah. As for the head of those that compass me about, let the mischief of their own lips cover them. Let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits, that they rise not up again. Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth: evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him.

Again, David battles physical enemies, just as we are to wage war through prayer against demonic entities.

Psalm 140:12, 13
I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor. Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name: the upright shall dwell in thy presence.

"I know that my Redeemer liveth," Job proclaimed (19:25).

"I know whom I have believed," Paul declared (2 Timothy 1:12).

"I know the Lord will maintain the cause not of the awesome and proud, but of the afflicted and poor," David concluded.



141 *A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 141:1, 2
LORD, I cry unto thee: make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee. Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

Here, David is likening prayer and praise to what took place in the temple and tabernacle. When you pray, it's like incense—delightful to the senses of the Lord. When you lift your hands, it's like the morning sacrifice being offered to the Lord. Why do we do these things? Because outward acts of worship which show an inward heart of love bring the Lord great joy.

Psalm 141:3
Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.

Solomon wisely said, "In the multitude of words, there wanteth not sin" (Proverbs 10:19). The mystics often fasted from talking. They spent a day or two or three in silence. And I wonder if it would be good for us to do the same—just to fast from speaking for a day, a half day, or even an hour in order to more clearly hear what God would say to our souls.

Psalm 141:4, 5
Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties. Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.

"Let the righteous smite me," David prays.

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend," Solomon echoes (Proverbs 27:6).

E. Stanley Jones, a great man of God, said he counted his critics among his best friends for two reasons: they kept him honest and made him humble.

Psalm 141:6–10
When their judges are overthrown in stony places, they shall hear my words; for they are sweet. Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth, as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth. But mine eyes are unto thee, O GOD the Lord: in thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute. Keep me from the snares which they have laid for me, and the gins of the workers of iniquity. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, whilst that I withal escape.

Perhaps alluding to the days when Saul sought his life, David looked to the Lord for deliverance.



142 *Maschil of David; A Prayer when he was in the cave.*

Psalm 142:1–7
I cried unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.

The cave to which the inscription of this psalm refers is most likely either the cave of Adullum or the cave of Engedi, both of which were hiding places for David when Saul was out to kill him. If, like David, you feel like you're in a cave or that things are caving in all around you, do what David does here: tell God what you're thinking and how you're feeling. Pour out your heart to Him in honesty and humility.

And then, when He answers your prayer, do something else David did: praise Him—in words and in song, in sacrifice and worship.



143 *A Psalm of David.*

It is true that David was a man after God's own heart and yet that did not make him immune from experiencing a heavy heart from time to time. Even though he loved the Lord and walked with the Lord, he often experienced heaviness in his soul. That is not only true of David, but of Jesus, our Lord. The night before He was crucified, He went to the Garden of Gethsemane, and there He prayed, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death" (Matthew 26:38). Jesus experienced heaviness of heart. David experienced heaviness of heart. You may also experience a heaviness in your heart. The solution to a heavy heart is what David did here and what Jesus did in the garden. That is, turning to the Father in prayer . . .

Psalm 143:1
Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness.

David is appealing to the Lord not on the basis of his own faithfulness or righteousness, but on the basis of the Lord's faithfulness and righteousness. Therein is a real key. When you come before the Lord with a heavy heart, don't think you deserve His answer because of your righteousness. Rather, come in Jesus' name, saying, "Father, I'm coming to You not because of who I am or because of my righteousness but because of my linkage to Your Son."

Psalm 143:2
And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

Here, David reiterates what he said in Psalm 130, when he said, "Lord, if Thou shouldst mark iniquity, who could stand?" In other words, "If You're keeping track of my sin, I don't have a chance. So I come to You on the basis of *Your* faithfulness and righteousness."

Psalm 143:3, 4

For the enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead. Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate.

"I'm desolate. I'm heavy. It's dark and dreary," David says. Can you relate to this? Why is David downcast? Because the enemy had persecuted his soul (verse 3). When you are downcast, realize that it is very often indicative of a full attack from the enemy.

What are we to do when we're downcast? We're to cast down . . .

(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

2 Corinthians 10:4, 5

It is the enemy who seeks to burden you with fears and doubts. Therefore, if you feel downcast, cast down those false imaginations.

Psalm 143:5, 6
I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands. I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah.

"I'm going to cast down these fears, imaginations, depression, and instead stretch my hands up to You, Lord, as I remember Your works, as I meditate on all You've done for me."

Psalm 143:7, 8
Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.

During the wilderness wanders, manna came down from heaven in the morning to feed the people of Israel. But when the sun came up, it melted (Exodus 16:21). I believe the things God wants to tell us, the manna He has for us, is waiting for us in the morning. But if we fail to seek Him then, we miss out to a certain degree on what He desires to tell us.

Psalm 143:9–12
Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me. Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness. Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble. And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant.

After stating that he was downcast and heavy, David changes gears and begins to muse and reflect on the goodness and greatness of God. As he does, he ends his prayer by saying, "I am Your servant, Lord."

The wise farmer always takes good care of the horse that plows his crops. If, like David, you're a servant of the Lord, if He has found in you a willingness to serve Him, an openness to ministry, you can be sure He will take perfect care of you.



144 *A Psalm of David.*

Psalm 144:1–4
Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight: My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me. LORD, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man, that thou makest account of him! Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away.

“Lord, how could You possibly be interested in me?” David asks. “Why would You take knowledge of mankind, full of vanity and rebellion that we are?”

Psalm 144:5–11
Bow thy heavens, O LORD, and come down: touch the mountains, and they shall smoke. Cast forth lightning, and scatter them: shoot out thine arrows, and destroy them. Send thine hand from above; rid me, and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of strange children; Whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood. I will sing a new song unto thee, O God: upon a psaltery and an instrument of ten strings will I sing praises unto thee. It is he that giveth salvation unto kings: who delivereth David his servant from the hurtful sword. Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood:

Shifting his attention from mankind in general to his enemies specifically, David asks the Lord to make a show of His strength and to deliver him.

Psalm 144:12–15
That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace: That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store: that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets: That our oxen may be strong to labour; that there be no breaking in, nor going out; that there be no complaining in our streets. Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD.

After asking the Lord to bless their sons and daughters, their barns and livestock, David concludes that happy indeed is the people whose God is the Lord.

Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no

meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Habakkuk 3:17, 18

Centuries later, on the eve of national disaster, Habakkuk would come to understand that the secret of happiness lies not in material prosperity but in spiritual contentment. If God is your Lord, then whether or not your barns be full or your garages be packed, you can experience great happiness if you simply choose to rejoice—whatever your situation.



145 *David's Psalm of praise.*

Psalm 145:1, 2
I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever.

Heaven is going to be a place of praise. We are going to be praising the Lord forever and ever. So we might as well learn to praise now! That's what David is doing—fine-tuning his already-wonderful ability to praise.

It's so freeing to praise the Lord. That shouldn't be surprising because it is the garment of praise that cures the spirit of heaviness (Isaiah 61:3). Worship and praise, blessing and loving are invaluable in and of themselves for they free us from the dungeon of self.

Psalm 145:3–7
Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works. And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts: and I will declare thy

greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness.

God is nothing but good to all, and yet, like Adam in the Garden of Eden, rather than cultivating a relationship with Him, man chooses to keep his distance. And, left to his own devices, he suffers the consequences.



***For topical study of Psalm 145:9 entitled "Questioning God's Goodness," turn to page* 169.**

Psalm 145:8–10
The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works. All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee.

There is a stretch of highway I often drive that seems to always be under construction. After seven or eight miles, there's a big sign that reads: "End of Construction. Thank you for your patience." I have often thought this would be a great epitaph for my gravestone. Oh, the patience and mercy God continues to show me!

Psalm 145:11–13
They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.

The secret to understanding the Bible in its totality is to realize that, from Genesis to Revelation, its central message is the kingdom of God. If people are confused in their theology, it's most often because they do not understand this. The kingdom of God has three distinct parts: past, present, and future . . .

"The kingdom of God is within—or among you," Jesus said (Luke 17:21). Why? Because He is the King and He was among them. As you see Jesus in the Gospels, you get a sneak preview of coming attractions. That's why the sick were healed, the dead were raised, the lepers were cleansed, the water was turned to wine. That's why an incredible outpouring of the miraculous took place when Jesus was on earth.

In Revelation 11:15, we read the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of the Lord. When Jesus comes back, the mountains shall break forth into song. The trees of the field shall clap their hands. There shall be health and prosperity, complete and total victory. Watch Him move and minister in His First Coming, and you get a preview of what's going to happen in the future—when the kingdoms of this world will indeed become the kingdom of our Lord.

But between the past and the future—between when Jesus was here and when He will come again, Paul tells us that the kingdom of God is not meat nor drink but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:17). It's not material. It's not physical. It's not political. If I fail to acknowledge the future aspect of the kingdom, I will seek to legislate righteousness now. But that's not what Jesus did. When a committee came to make Him king, He went in the opposite direction (John 6:15). When they tried to involve Him in tax reform, He refused (Matthew 22:17–21). Jesus explained to His followers that His kingdom is not of this world. This frees me from feeling as though I must usher in the kingdom politically or economically. On the other hand, if I don't understand the future aspects of the kingdom, I'll get caught up in trying to make this world the kingdom—and it won't happen until the King comes back.

Because we have been given an earnest of the Holy Spirit—a "down payment"—we do see miracles happen (2 Corinthians 5:5). But I need to understand that the explosion of miracles I desire to see will only come with the full payment. This is not "anti-faith"—it's simply a realization that the kingdom of God is not meat or drink. It's not temporal or external. It's eternal and internal. I seek to carry out the Lord's kingdom work, to be sure, but I keep it in the perspective of the bigger picture of God's eternal program.

Psalm 145:14

The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.

The Lord upholds all that fall. He doesn't let go of those who are stumbling. He doesn't give up on those who are slipping. If you feel like you're falling or have fallen, know that the Lord doesn't give up on you.

Psalm 145:15–19 (a)
The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him . . .

Psalm 37:4, David says virtually the same thing when he writes, "Delight thyself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." What's your heart's desire? If you're fearing the Lord, revering Him, worshiping Him, if you're delighting in the Lord, enjoying Him, pleasing Him, He will give you the desires of your heart because He's the One that put that desire there in the first place.

In Hebrews 6:15, we read that it was after Abraham patiently endured that he obtained the promise. If you have a desire in your heart that has yet to come about, be patient. Don't give up. It might be ten or twenty years in the making, but if you hold fast to that which the Lord has promised to you, in due time, He'll bring it to pass.

Psalm 145:19 (b)–21
. . . he also will hear their cry, and will save them. The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy. My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD: and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.

"I will bless Thy name forever and ever," David declared in verse 1. It is only fitting, then, that this psalm would end with a call for all flesh to join him.

QUESTIONING GOD'S GOODNESS

A Topical Study of PSALM 145:9

In his book, entitled, *Life, Death, and Destiny,* Roger Shin tells the story of an event that took place in the closing hours of World War II. The Armistice had been signed. The war was over. The troops were celebrating and rejoicing—and yet it would be an hour or two before the final cease-fire order made its way to the front lines. There, in the closing hour of World War II, suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, a stray mortar shell was headed toward a group of young GIs—one of whom looked down in horror as he saw his flesh opened and his blood flow freely. "Isn't this just like God?" he said. And then he died.

It is events like this that invariably lead people to question God's goodness. And sometimes they lead even believers to question.

A man named Charles Templeton was an evangelist from 1951–55 for the National Council of Churches. He had a very powerful ministry. He spoke before 70,000 people at Soldiers Field in Chicago. He spoke to an almost full crowd at the Rose Bowl in the early 50s. He spoke at Radio City Music Hall in New York. But in 1958, he walked away from his ministry. He first went to television, where he became a commentator, then to print journalism and finally to his position as head of the BBC. He became an agnostic. Once used mightily by God, he denied his faith. "I looked at the world," he said, "and it doesn't seem to me that it bespoke a God that could be described as 'father.' It seems to be a universe indifferent to man and to all of His creatures."

Is God really good? Templeton couldn't reconcile what he observed and what Scriptures declare. Philosopher John Stewart Mills said, "If God is able to prevent evil and He does not, then He is not good. If He could prevent evil and cannot, then He is not almighty." These questions haunt humanity. Is God good? That's the question. Do we simply take it on blind faith that God is good? Do we simply say God is good because the psalmist says He is? What's the word to give people who honestly question whether

God is good? What's the word for our own hearts when we go through tragedy and difficulty?

Whenever I have questions about the character or nature of God, I have only to look to Jesus to find answers and solutions for the problems and difficulties. When I look at Jesus, I see that He freely acknowledged the problem of pain, the existence of evil. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," He taught us to pray (Matthew 6:13). "In this world, you shall have tribulation," He said (John 16:33). "There's going to be troubles. You're going to have problems."

Jesus not only acknowledged evil and pain, but confronted them. Sailing across the Sea of Galilee, He was resting in the boat when suddenly a storm arose that began to beat the boat about.

"Master! We're perishing!" His disciples cried.

"Peace. Be still," Jesus said to the storm (Mark 4:39). The Greek command is literally, "Be muzzled," and is the same command Jesus used when talking to people who were possessed with demons. This tells me that when a typhoon strikes or an earthquake hits, they're not necessarily acts of God. In fact, according to Paul, it is the devil who is the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). According to Jesus, it is the devil who is the prince of this world (John 12:31).

You see, man gave up the right to rule this planet in harmony and tranquility with God the Father when he sinned in the Garden of Eden. Satan is in control of this world presently. And Jesus demonstrated that storms and disaster frequently can be the work of Satan. But Satan is responsible for even more, for, following the storm, when Jesus arrived at the other side of the Sea of Galilee, He was greeted by a man who had been living in the tombs, clawing his body, ripping his flesh. No one could keep him chained down. He was naked, howling, and frightening. Jesus began to deal with him, eventually casting out a legion of demons who then entered a herd of pigs. As a result, the man was totally changed (Mark 5:15).

Doctors tell us that virtually all disease is the result of man being out of sync either with his environment, his fellow man, or his own conscience. Charles Templeton and John Stuart Mills ask, "Why is God doing this?" But

Jesus shows us their question is misdirected. God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). Rather, man brings harm and hurt upon himself when he rebels against God, when he ignores the ways and Word of God, when he violates the commands and precepts of God.

Why, then, doesn't God remove the temptation, obliterate the devil, destroy the demons? I offer two simple reasons. God created man in His image (Genesis 1:26). Therefore, because He is sovereign, He gave man a certain measure of sovereignty, as well. That is, He didn't create us as robots. He allows us to make daily choices concerning life. He won't force us into His ways. He won't make us live according to His Word. He allows us the freedom of choice. And, many times, the choices we make bring hurt, heartache, and tragedy to ourselves. So to shake our fist at *God* and say, "How come, God?" is patently unfair.

Second, not only did God make you in His image and give you a certain degree of sovereignty, but God made you for a purpose—and that is intimacy. God the Father desires that we love Him. And because true love demands a choice, He won't force Himself upon us but will give an alternative to us. The alternative is evil. The alternative is sin and self. If I choose to ignore God and say, "I do not want to develop intimacy with You, Lord. I want to live for myself, do my own thing, work out my own life," then the only alternative I have is in the direction of evil. And God will allow me that liberty.

God is good to all, and yet man, as a race, has chosen to submit this planet to the devil and suffer the consequences. Man as an individual has chosen to ignore intimacy with God, not cultivate a relationship with God and has been left to his own devices which lead to destruction.

In Luke 13, we are given further insight into the question of God's goodness . . .

> *There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in*

Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Luke 13:1–5

Although the historical occasion is somewhat obscure, most historians believe this refers to Pilate appropriating money from the temple treasury to build a new aqueduct. When the Jews gathered in Jerusalem for the next feast, the Galileans, known for their political activism, began to cause a riot against Pilate's practice. Knowing this riot was coming, however, Pilate had stationed "undercover" soldiers among the people. According to Jewish historian, Josephus, when the riot began, these soldiers began to murder the Galileans, resulting in much bloodshed. In addition to this, during construction of the aqueduct, a supporting tower gave way, resulting in an additional eighteen deaths.

"Do you think those who were slaughtered in the riot were killed because they were more evil than other Galileans?" Jesus asked. "Were the eighteen men who died at Siloam killed because they were greater sinners than you? No. But unless you repent, you, too, shall perish." In other words, Jesus says, "Why are you asking about tragedy and evil in the lives of others when the real question is, 'When are you going to deal with these issues in your own life?' "

Earlier, Jeremiah said that it is only because of the Lord's mercies that we are not all consumed (Lamentations 3:22). Truly, every one of us should have been consumed a long time ago. It's only by God's goodness and mercy that we're alive today. This is true spiritually and even literally, for the air we breathe is composed of nitrogen, oxygen, and a few other assorted gasses. If the oxygen content was a mere two percent higher, the world would catch fire and we would all burn. If the nitrogen content was two percent higher, we would all be poisoned and die immediately. Who keeps the atmosphere in such perfect balance? God.

We have all rebelled against Him. We have all sinned against Him. Yet He is good and merciful to every one of us. He is slow to anger, gracious, full of mercy, longsuffering—and He lets us continue on and on and on until

we come to the place where we finally bow our knee in repentance and give our lives to Him.

The question isn't, "Why is there evil?"

The question is, "Why is God so good?"



146 Psalm 146:1–5

Praise ye the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. While I live will I praise the LORD: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being. Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God:

If your hope is in man, you're on shaky ground because man's breath perishes. Man goes down in the dust. Man doesn't last. Man is unable to help. If your hope is in your husband or wife—or even the church—sooner or later you will be disappointed. Happy is the man or woman, however, whose hope is in the Lord. Hope is the expectation of coming good. And good is always found in the Lord.

Psalm 146:6–10

Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever: Which executeth judgment for the oppressed: which giveth food to the hungry. The LORD looseth the prisoners: The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind: the LORD raiseth them that are bowed down: the LORD loveth the righteous: The LORD preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down. The LORD shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the LORD.

In the psalmist's crescendo of praise, it is hard to miss a portrait of Jesus . . .

- He gave food to the hungry as they sat on the hillside (Luke 9:17).
- He loosed the prisoners of demonic possession (Luke 8:33).
- He opened blind eyes (Matthew 9:29) and restored hope to the downtrodden (John 8:11).
- No one was a stranger to Him (Matthew 11:19) and He took special care of the widow (Luke 7:13).

Is it any wonder that, in light of this, we are called to praise Him?



147 Psalm 147:1

Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.

The best-dressed people of any era are those who wear the garment of praise. You can spend $1,000 a week on clothes. But if your countenance is sad or your heart is heavy, it won't do any good. On the other hand, you can have only two shirts in your closet, but if you're praising the Lord, you'll be an attractive, beautiful person.

Psalm 147:2–4

The LORD doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.

In the year A.D. 100, Hipparchus carefully gazed at the skies and counted 1,022 stars. Two hundred years later, Ptolemy, the father of astronomy, counted 1,026. Today, however, our Milky Way galaxy alone contains a hundred billion stars. How much is a hundred billion? If you counted from one to two hundred fifty in one minute and kept up that pace, it would take a thousand years to get to a hundred billion. Yet the God who built Jerusalem, the God who heals our hearts, is not only the One who hung a hundred billion stars in the sky, but the One who knows their names.

Psalm 147:5, 6 (a)
Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. The LORD lifteth up the meek . . .

What does God do with the mighty power He used to place huge heavenly bodies into submission? He lifts up the meek. Meekness is the opposite of pride. When you acknowledge your need, that's when the hand that hung the stars reaches down to lift you up.

Psalm 147:6 (b)
. . . he casteth the wicked down to the ground.

The Lord lifts up the meek, but He casts down those who walk proudly in their own way. I'm convinced that we are not seeing people converted to Jesus in the numbers we could and we're not seeing conversions last the way they should because we teach the first half of verse 6, but fail to share the reality of the second phrase. When you talk to people about the Lord, make sure they understand the goodness and grace of God. But make sure they also understand the reality of His judgment. Most people don't think of themselves as sinners. Most people don't realize they've broken the law of God to the extent they have. Thus, we need to tell our families and friends that don't know Him what God has said in His Word about how they have missed the mark—for they won't see their need for a Savior until they see the reality of their sin.

If you're talking to people who aren't responsive to the gospel, perhaps you should share the law with them and let the law be a schoolmaster that drives them to salvation, that drives them to grace (Galatians 3:24).

Psalm 147:7–9
Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God: Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry.

From the heights of heaven to the earthbound beast and everything in between—all are a result of God's creation and daily care.

Psalm 147:10, 11
He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.

Again, special note is made of the fact that God is not impressed with the things that so easily impress us—but with qualities that are usually seen as weakness in the eyes of men.

Psalm 147:12–14
Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee. He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat.

Although the Promised Land had no precious stones, spices, or other exotic commodities, it had the finest wheat of the region (Deuteronomy 32:14).

Psalm 147:15–17
He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly. He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold?

This poetic description of God's power is reminiscent of His own description in Job 38:22, 23.

Psalm 147:18–20
He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow. He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with

any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD.

It was with His word that God began His work of creation (Genesis 1:3). It was with His word that He commanded His creation (Mark 4:39). It is with His Word that He sustains His nation (Jeremiah 15:16). And it is through His Word that we find salvation (John 1:14).



148 As we draw near the end of the "Workbook on Worship" which is the Book of Psalms, the psalmist enlists the aid of the entire spectrum of creation to join him . . .

Psalm 148:1–6
Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created. He hath also stablished them for ever and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not pass.

The psalmist begins by calling for praise from everything seen and unseen overhead.

Psalm 148:7–10
Praise the LORD from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps: Fire, and hail; snow, and vapour; stormy wind fulfilling his word: Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars: Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl:

Next, the natural world is called upon to join in the praise of their Creator.

Psalm 148:11–14

Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth: Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children: Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven. He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him. Praise ye the LORD.

Finally, man, the only segment of creation that has a choice, is summoned to praise—from the mightiest king to the weakest child.

John tells us that when Jesus came to earth, He came unto His own, but His own received Him not (John 1:11, 12). In the Greek text, the first use of "own" is the neuter form and speaks of creation. The second use of "own" is in the masculine form and speaks of humanity. In other words, creation received Him, but man did not. When Jesus walked on earth, the winds obeyed His voice. The sea supported His feet. Even the rocks would have cried out if He had let them. But what did man say? "Away with Him. We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). When He comes back, however, *every* knee will bow to Him (Philippians 2:10).

149 Psalm 149:1–5

Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp. For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation. Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds.

Over and over again, the psalmist tells us to sing a new song. Why? Because all too often, frequency leads to complacency. Listen to your prayers. Are you saying the same thing over and over again? If so, I encourage you to fan the flame of worship by writing a psalm, by composing

a song, by memorizing Scripture throughout the day, by taking a walk through your neighborhood as you pray—anything to rekindle the amazement you experienced when you first learned how much God loved you.

Psalm 149:6–9
Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a twoedged sword in their hand; To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; To execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints. Praise ye the LORD.

As we have seen throughout the Book of Psalms, our fight is not against man but against principalities and powers (Ephesians 6:12). How do we overcome the forces of evil? How do we bind the powers that depress, defeat, and discourage us? We overcome the enemy by the praise of God in our mouth and the double-edged sword of the Word of God in our hand.

The dynamics of your house, of your neighborhood, of our country can change if we hold on to the Scriptures and if our mouths are filled with praise. Praise devastates demons because it reminds them of the position they once held in heaven (Isaiah 14:12).

In 2 Chronicles 20, we read that the enemies of Israel were so confused by praise that they destroyed each other. And I suggest that's a model, a picture of what happens spiritually today. When you worship God with high praise, with enthusiastic praise, with sacrificial praise, the enemies of God are reminded of their previous state and they scatter in despair.

150

We come to the final summit in the mountain chain of Psalms.

Psalm 150:1–6
Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise

him according to his excellent greatness. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.

According to Old Testament scholars, none of the instruments listed here were indigenous to Israel. They were all developed by heathen cultures. This means that anything and everything is redemptive.

"We are more than conquerors," Paul would write to the Romans (8:37). How is one *more* than a conqueror? By not only wrestling an enemy's weapons from him, but by using them for one's own advantage. That's exactly what we do whenever we praise God, using breath, strength, or instruments Satan once called his own.

A PANORAMIC PERSPECTIVE OF PRAISE

A Topical Study of PSALM 150

We have seen that the Book of Psalms is actually a workbook on worship as it teaches us how to worship and models for us examples of worship. Throughout the Book of Psalms, we are told to praise the Lord. In Hebrew, the phrase, "praise the Lord" is in the imperative form. That means it's not a suggestion. It's not an invitation. It's a command with no option. We are not only commanded to praise the Lord but to do so energetically, enthusiastically, and creatively—through dance, with organ, and all sorts of stringed instruments.

"That excludes me," you say. "I can't dance at all. I can't play an instrument. And my singing is terrible."

Sometimes we think we're excluded from the command to praise because we don't have great musical abilities. But, according to Psalm 150:6, the only people excluded from the command to praise are dead people. Therefore, regardless of your musical ability—or lack thereof—you're obligated to praise the Lord even if it's with nothing more than a joyful noise (Psalm 95:1).

What is the definition of praise? The Hebrew words translated "praise" are enlightening . . .

The most common word translated "praise" is *halal,* used ninety-nine times in the Old Testament, one-third of which are in the Book of Psalms. *Halal* literally means "to laud, to celebrate, or to boast."

The second most common word translated "praise" is *yadah,* which comes from the Hebrew word, *yad,* or, "hand." *Yadah* literally means "to worship with extended hands." God desires our praise to be with extended hands because the extended hand is the expression of friendship, surrender, and need. Parents, think back to the first time your kids reached out to you. So too, our heavenly Father loves to see us reach out to Him.

A third word translated "praise" is *barak,* which means "to declare God as the origin of power for success, prosperity, and victory." In other words,

barak says, "I acknowledge that You, Lord, are the source of my success. It's not my ingenuity or creative ability, but You alone are the reason for my victory."

The fourth most common word translated "praise" is *shabach,* which means "to shout or commend loudly." When you go to a game, people shout loudly as the quarterback connects with the receiver, or as the baseball soars out of the stadium. If we can shout loudly at a football or baseball game, certainly we can shout and commend Jesus.

A fifth word translated "praise" is *gil,* which literally means "to circle in joy"—to dance before God as David did was so apt to do.

Those are the definitions of praise, but what is the motivation? Following are eight reasons and benefits of being people who praise . . .

First, the world itself was created in the atmosphere in the praise . . .

> *Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?*
>
> Job 38:4–7

Here God is saying, "The morning stars—or angels—sang together and shouted for joy when I laid the foundations of the earth." God loves to work with the background music of praise and worship. Sometimes I wonder how much in my life has been quenched, hindered, or diminished because I failed to provide an atmosphere of praise for God's creativity.

Second, the world is imprinted with a program to praise. Everything created has been created to bring God glory and to give Him praise (Revelation 4:11).

Third, the world will climax with the crescendo of praise. Paul tells us that all of creation is waiting for the day Jesus comes back (Romans 8:22). When He does, Isaiah tells us that the mountains will break forth into song and the trees shall clap their hands (55:12).

Fourth, God Himself dwells in the place of praise. Although I can be somewhat comfortable in many conditions, I'm only truly comfortable in my own house. So too, God resides everywhere because He's omnipresent. But where does He inhabit? Where is the place He's particularly comfortable? In the place of praise (Psalm 22:3).

Fifth, praise provides an entryway for us to move into God's presence. "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise," the psalmist says (100:4). The Lord has invited us into His house. The gate? Thanksgiving and praise.

Sixth, praise is the divine prescription from the divine Physician to help us overcome despair and depression. Isaiah 61:3 says He gives us the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. There is truly a spirit that will weigh you down—which explains why some mornings you wake up full of sorrow and despair. The Lord has provided a cure for this. Slip into the garment of praise. Instead of complaining and analyzing spend an hour honoring the Lord by worshiping Him energetically and enthusiastically. Do this and I guarantee you will find that the garment of praise does indeed take away the spirit of heaviness.

Seventh, praise is a powerful weapon to overcome the wickedness of Satan. In Ezekiel 28, we are told that before Satan fell, he was known as Lucifer, the worship leader of heaven. When he rebelled against God and decided to be worshiped instead of to worship, he took one-third of the heavenly host with him in his rebellion. I believe praise reminds them of their aborted revolution, of what they once were, but will never be again. And they flee in despair.

Finally, praise brings about liberation. It was as Paul and Silas praised the Lord that their prison doors sprung open (Acts 16:25, 26). It was as Jonah offered the sacrifice of thanksgiving in the belly of the fish that God gave that creature the "urge to regurge"—and out Jonah came (2:9, 10). So too, it is as we praise God that we are set free from the sin and selfishness that would otherwise drown us.

For the above reasons and a myriad more, let us be a worshiping nation, a royal priesthood, a people who praise.



PROVERBS

Background to Proverbs

The Books of Psalms and Proverbs balance each other beautifully . . .

- Psalms deals with worship.
  Proverbs deals primarily with work.
- Psalms is to be read on one's knees.
  Proverbs is to be read on one's feet.
- Psalms is man talking to God.
  Proverbs is man talking to man.
- Psalms causes one's heart to grow.
  Proverbs causes one's walk to be stabilized.
- Psalms is best read in the closet of prayer.
  Proverbs is best read in the place of business.

According to 1 Kings 4, Solomon spoke with such practical wisdom and incredible insight that people traveled great distances to glean from his understanding. Yet, even though he was an exceedingly wise individual, he ended up playing the fool, for he would forsake his own wisdom in an attempt to find satisfaction in partying, material possessions, women, and intellectualism—only to conclude it was all empty.

The Book of Proverbs, however, was written by Solomon *before* he embarked on his journey to vanity . . .



PROVERBS

Proverbs 1:1–4

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

As we will see in verse 8, Solomon wrote Proverbs primarily to give his son practical, down-to-earth wisdom. And we are the beneficiaries, as well.

There are two ways we gain wisdom. One is by the experience of life. The second is by the expounding of God's Word. The Lord is committed to instructing us and to seeing us grow, but how that guidance and growth takes place is up to us. We can either be instructed and guided by experiencing life or we can learn by studying the Word. We can learn in the storm or we can learn in the sanctuary. We can learn in the crisis or we can learn in the classroom. Most of us have had experiences learning both places, and I'm sure we'd all say the better way is the latter—to learn in the sanctuary, to learn in the classroom—which is why Solomon wrote this book.

Proverbs 1:5, 6

A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.

Even though this meaning might initially seem obscure, a wise man or woman will put energy into understanding these proverbs. The question is, why would the Lord have Scripture be so obscure? I believe the reason is simple. That is, discovery is a tremendous aid to ministry. It is when we discover something that the light goes on and we have a flash of understanding, that we never forget it. Therefore, our heavenly Father knows that it is as we spend time giving consideration and careful thought to these proverbs that they will be most meaningful and memorable to us.

Proverbs 1:7
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Solomon says the fear of the Lord is the foundation. The fear of the Lord is the single most important essential. The fear of the Lord is where it all begins.



***For topical study of Proverbs 1:7 entitled "The Fear of the Lord," turn to page* 180.**

Proverbs 1:8 (a)
My son, hear the instruction of thy father . . .

Here we see the father heart of Solomon imparting his wisdom to his son.

Proverbs 1:8 (b)
. . . and forsake not the law of thy mother:

It has been suggested that the surrounding cultures required that respect be shown only to the father. If this be so, for Solomon to require his son to follow the words of his mother would have been a noted departure from popular thought. This should not be surprising to us, however, for the Word has always been a great equalizer (Galatians 3:28).

Proverbs 1:9
For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.

In his Song, Solomon will refer to chains of gold on the neck of his beloved (Song of Solomon 1:10). Thus, the wisdom that a child gleans from his parents can beautify his own life.

Proverbs 1:10–16

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood.

Solomon warns his son about those who, for no reason, want to hurt innocent people and shed innocent blood. Obviously, we are not involved in killing people but if we are even bitter or unforgiving, we are just as guilty, for Jesus said whoever is angry at his brother, the same has committed murder (Matthew 5:22). Therefore, it is the mature man and the wise woman who stay away from those who seek to shed innocent blood—be it literally or spiritually.

Proverbs 1:17
Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird.

A bird has an instinctive ability to avoid traps that would ensnare it. "Don't be a bird-brain," Solomon says to his son. "Don't get caught in a trap even a bird would flee."

Proverbs 1:18, 19
And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives. So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof.

You will be harmed in the very process of seeking to harm others, Solomon warns. "Be not deceived. God is not mocked," Paul would echo. "Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Oh, maybe you'll navigate this life without paying a price, but in eternity, there will be a day of reckoning.

Proverbs 1:20

Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets:

In Colossians 2:3, we read that wisdom is actualized in the person of Jesus Christ because in Him are hidden all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom. To know what to do, where to go, how to act in any given situation, simply consider Jesus. While Jesus is the complete actualization of wisdom, here in Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a woman . . .

Proverbs 1:21–26
She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;

Wisdom is seen as a woman crying, "How long will you ignore me? How long will you refuse me? If you keep ignoring me, if you continue to walk in your own folly, when destruction and anguish comes, I will have no other choice but to laugh at your calamity."

I believe one of the greatest tortures for those in hell will be remembering everything they were told about how to get to heaven. They will be in a calamitous situation, indeed—and their adamant refusal to believe the Word that they heard will haunt them forever.

Proverbs 1:27–33
When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own

devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

In Luke 16, we read of the rich man who went to hades. He asked Abraham if there was any way he could speak to his family and warn them about the reality of eternity. Too late, he realized he had ignored his previous opportunities.

Wisdom is crying out, gang. Don't be like the rich man. Take heed today.

THE FEAR OF THE LORD
A Topical Study of
PROVERBS 1:7

In 1945, the chief of the federal government's office of scientific research and development said this concerning the notion of using rockets to deliver bombs: "Such a thing is absolutely impossible," he said. "And it will remain impossible for many, many years. People have been talking about a 3,000-mile-high angle rocket shot from one continent to another, carrying an atomic bomb directed to be so precise that it would land upon a city. Technically, I don't think anyone in the world knows how to do such things and I feel it will not be done for many generations to come." Twelve years later, the Soviet Union successfully test-fired the first intercontinental ballistic missile.

In 1839 a doctor wrote this: "The abolishment of pain in surgery is an impossibility. Knife and pain are two words in surgery that will forever be associated in the consciousness of the patient. To this compulsory combination we shall have to adjust ourselves." He said this seven years before anesthesia was introduced.

An inventor of the radio said this in 1926: "While theoretically, television may be feasible, commercially and financially I consider it an impossibility, a development of which we need waste little time thinking about."

Fortune Magazine in 1938 said this: "Few scientists foresee any serious or practical use for atomic energy. They regard the atom-splitting experiments as useful steps in the attempt to describe the atom more accurately, but never as the key to unlocking new power."

This is from the *Scientific Quarterly* of 1825: "What can be possibly more absurd than the prospect held out of locomotives traveling as fast as stagecoaches?"

Even Charles Darwin—whose theory of evolution has been embraced by our society but is increasingly being questioned by the scientific community—shifted in his understanding of evolution. The single college degree Charles Darwin held was not in biology. It was in theology. Shortly before his death, Darwin said this: "I was a young man with uninformed ideas and I

threw them out as queries and suggestions. To my astonishment, they took off with wildfire."

Toward the end of his life he suggested to a Christian friend that she speak to the servants, tenants, and neighbors. "What shall I speak about?" she asked.

"Christ Jesus," he replied. "What else is there?"

Even Darwin questioned the very theory that has made him so famous to this day.

In light of this, is there any place we can solidly build? I believe there is. I want to look at a statement made by an individual who was considered to be the most knowledgeable of his day. In fact, he is one of the most knowledgeable men of all time. His name was Solomon. It is no wonder that 1 Kings 4 tells us that people literally came from around the world to hear him talk. He was an ichthyologist, a botanist, a zoologist, and a biologist. He wrote 1,005 songs and over 3,000 proverbs. He was an extensive writer, a brilliant thinker, a very wise individual because God had answered his request for wisdom (2 Chronicles 1:10–12). What did this extensive writer and brilliant scholar say? Turn to the Book of Ecclesiastes . . .

> *And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.*
>
> Ecclesiastes 12:12, 13

According to the wisest man who ever lived, the fear of the Lord is the beginning, the foundation of knowledge. The question then becomes, "What does it mean to fear the Lord?" In Hebrews 11, we see a model . . .

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

Noah is one who is held up as one who moved with godly fear. In his day, the earth had become terribly polluted, infected with iniquity. So God said He would judge and destroy the earth. In this, He was showing great mercy, for the world was so sick that it was destroying itself slowly. Noah, however, feared the Lord. So God told him to build an ark.

At that point, Noah had a choice to make. He could either move in the fear of God or in the fear of man. He could have said, "I'm supposed to tell people that water is going to come down out of the sky? They'll just laugh. I'm supposed to build a huge boat miles away from any body of water? They'll make fun of me." The fear of man could have caused Noah to be wiped out. Instead, he moved in the fear of God and for a hundred years, even as people mocked him, Noah kept true to the call of God. When the rain did indeed come down, Noah was kept safe because he chose to fear God rather than man.

The fear of the Lord is comprised of two components . . .

Devotion to Him

When we speak of fearing God, we're not speaking of being afraid of God or of trying to hide from Him. God doesn't want us to be afraid of Him any more than we, as earthly parents, want our kids to run from us. No, when we speak of the fear of God, we're speaking of devotion to Him wherein we become afraid of doing anything that would grieve Him. We do indeed have the ability to grieve the Lord. It was for this reason Jesus wept over Jerusalem when they wouldn't respond to Him (Matthew 23:37).

Dread of Sin

Proverbs 8:13 gives a further explanation of the fear of God when it says that the fear of the Lord is to hate evil—or, literally, to be appalled with evil. Many of us are beginning to get to this point. In our early walk, maybe there were certain sins that seemed attractive. But as we get older, as we see what sin does to us and to those around us, we become nauseated by it.

When we first moved to Oregon, we lived in a cabin surrounded by a pasture. My son, Peter-John, who was two years old at the time loved to toddle around in the pasture when the cows were safely on the other side of the fence. One day, I noticed he was particularly fascinated with something on the ground. Thinking maybe it was a caterpillar or a worm, I was disgusted to see that the object of his attention was a pasture patty, a meadow muffin, a cow pie. He didn't know any better, but I did. And that is why I was disgusted by what fascinated him.

That's the way sin is. Oh, maybe when we're spiritual toddlers, we might not know the difference between what is genuinely intriguing and what is obviously disgusting. But we don't have to walk with the Lord too long before we should be able to discern the difference. Next time you're tempted to think of sin as intriguing, think of a big cow pie, and you'll see it for what it really is.

You'll know you're gaining knowledge; you'll know you're becoming wise when you find yourself not wanting to grieve the Father and when you're no longer interested in that which once intrigued you.

"Fear God and keep His commandments," Solomon says. "That's the whole duty of man."



2 **Proverbs 2:1–3**

My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;

In chapter 1, Solomon wrote of wisdom crying to be heard (verse 20). Here in chapter 2, he says that we are to cry for understanding. Jesus said it is when we hunger and thirst for righteousness that we are filled (Matthew 5:6). It is when we cry for understanding that it will be found.

Proverbs 2:4
If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures;

To know God and to understand Him requires a certain amount of effort and work. Solomon likens the process to a miner searching for gold, silver, and precious stones. If you dig in and get serious about your pursuit of wisdom, wisdom will be yours. But it doesn't come easily. There's a price to pay for wisdom: digging in the Word day after day.

In 1 Timothy 5:17, we read that we are to labor in the Word. The Greek word Paul used for "labour" means "to work to the point of perspiration." Why do we have to labor? Why do we have to mine for wisdom like gold? Because what I mine is mine. That is, what I learn through the grace of God as I dig in and wrestle with a text becomes His Word spoken to me personally. And what is mined stays in the mind. I never forget it.

The story is told of a young man who came to Socrates and said, "Give me understanding, wisdom, and knowledge."

Socrates said one sentence: "Follow me."

As the young man followed the great philosopher, Socrates walked through the city until he came to the edge of the ocean. He walked out waist-deep in the ocean, grabbed the young man by the neck, and thrust him beneath the water.

Finally, the young man fought his way up for some air and gasped, "Master, what are you doing?"

Socrates said, "When you want knowledge and wisdom and understanding as badly as you wanted that breath of air, that's when you begin the journey."

Solomon is saying the same thing. When you really want to dig in and commit yourself to that process, it will be yours. Labor in the Word, gang.

Moisten this book with the sweat of your brow. And God will meet you in that place and reward you greatly with hidden treasures, with real gems.

Proverbs 2:5
Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.

How do I know when I am truly grabbing hold of wisdom or when I've gotten a grip on knowledge? Solomon says if we receive the Word and hide it in our hearts (verse 1), if we hear the Word and apply it to our minds (verse 2), if we dig and search for it (verse 4), then we'll understand fear and find knowledge (verse 5).

The proof lies in the fear of God. I can't claim to be a wise man if I'm not living in the fear of God. We'll know we have it when we're humbled before Him.

Proverbs 2:6–9
For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," James writes (1:17). Thus, it is no surprise that it is the Lord who gives wisdom. But the question is, why does He make wisdom so hard to get?

In Proverbs 25:2, we read that it is God who chooses to conceal a matter but the glory of kings to search it out. Because we are a *royal* priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), God gives us the privilege of searching out what He has concealed. And when we share what we find with others, our words are anointed, for our experience is truly ours.

Proverbs 2:10–12
When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee,

understanding shall keep thee: To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things;

We may never be in the world's "Who's Who," but we can know what's what. We can be people of discretion. We can know what's good and what's foolish, what's right and what's wrong. And this way, we'll be kept from the path of the evil man.

Proverbs 2:13–15
Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked; Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths:

The evil men leave the right path for a path that, at first, seems interesting. But it soon gets dark and deadly.

You don't have to dig deep in God's Word. You don't have to mine its riches. God will still love you. Wisdom is not about earning God's love or gaining His favor. It's about avoiding the path of the evil man. It's about navigating life successfully.

Proverbs 2:16 (a)
To deliver thee from the strange woman . . .

Discretion, wisdom, and understanding will not only keep you from the path of the evil man, but it will keep you from the allure of the strange woman . . .

Proverbs 2:16 (b)
. . . even from the stranger which flattereth with her words;

Because men are suckers for flattery, the immoral woman comes with words of flattery. She builds up the ego and makes you think you're really special—sometimes even in the arena of spirituality.

Proverbs 2:17

Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God.

The immoral woman leaves her guide—or husband—and takes no heed of the vows she made.

Proverbs 2:18, 19
For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life.

Solomon is saying, "Listen son, if you get involved with the strange woman, you'll never return again." What does he mean? When you are involved in a relationship with a strange woman, something is lost. Yes, God will forgive. But the damage is irreparable. The scars will remain.

Proverbs 2:20, 21
That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous. For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it.

We are perfect because we've been perfected in Christ (Colossians 1:28). Therefore, if we abide in Him, we won't be moved by the evil man or the strange woman, but will remain in the place God has for us.

Proverbs 2:22
But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it.

I don't want to be rooted out. I want to be rooted and grounded in love (Ephesians 3:17). I want to be rooted and grounded in the Word, wherein I find the gold and silver of wisdom and understanding.



Proverbs 3:1, 2

3 My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.

The commandments are not for imprisonment, but for protection—that you might have a long, good, successful life.

Proverbs 3:3, 4

Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

If you want to find good favor in the sight of God and man, keep mercy and truth as key components of your life. Some people excel in truth—but they have so little mercy. Others excel in mercy—but they shy away from truth. The key is to keep both of these qualities in balance. Our ultimate example, of course, is Jesus. When He told the woman at the well to call her husband and she told him she had no husband, He said, "You've said well." He commended her. That's mercy. Then He added, "You've had five husbands and the man you're living with now is not your husband at all" (John 4:18).

Jesus exhibits such a perfect balance in everything He does. We're to follow in His footsteps—and if we do, we will indeed "find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man."

Proverbs 3:5, 6

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

Trust in the Lord. Even if it doesn't seem to make sense, follow the leading of the Lord according to His Word.

When I went skydiving, a man on the ground held a big arrow that he turned to show which way the wind was blowing and which way we were to go to catch it. I remember that when I regained consciousness after jumping

out of the plane, I saw the guy turning the arrow. But I thought his direction was wrong, that he was leading me into a power line. His direction didn't make sense to me. Do I follow the arrow? I wondered. Or do I follow my own judgment? For a moment, I ignored the arrow. And then I thought I'd better follow it. So follow it I did—flying right over the power lines and landing in the right spot.

It's tempting to think we know more than the arrow. It's tempting to think, "Well, Lord, I know I'm not to lean on my own understanding. I know I'm to trust You. But what You're doing doesn't seem to make sense." At that point, we have a decision to make—whether to follow the arrow or to do our own thing.

How I encourage you to follow the arrow, gang. Even if you can't figure it out, follow the leading of the Lord according to His Word. You'll dodge the deadly power lines of the wicked and land right in the center of the field every time.

Proverbs 3:7, 8
Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.

Be it through ulcers, tension, or substance abuse, a wicked lifestyle adversely affects health. Conversely, to fear God and depart from evil has a positive effect.

Proverbs 3:9
Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase:

Why does the Lord want our firstfruits? Because in giving Him those, we sanctify the remainder. I'm firmly convinced that the first tenth of all our increase is the Lord's. And when we give Him His due, even our jobs become sanctified. Our jobs become ministries.

Proverbs 3:10
So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.

The single time in all of Scripture that God asks to be put to the test is with regard to finances . . .

> Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.
>
> Malachi 3:10

Abraham was a very wealthy man (Genesis 13:2). Why did God give him so much? I believe it was because He knew none of it mattered to Abraham. The one thing that was valuable to him was his son, Isaac. And even Isaac he was ready to sacrifice.

Here, Solomon says that if you honor the Lord by giving away your greediness and selfishness, your barns will be filled.

> **Proverbs 3:11, 12**
> **My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.**

The writer of Hebrews would go on to say that if you're constantly getting away with sin, you're not a son at all (12:8). Therefore, if you're being corrected, say, "Thank You, Lord. This proves You love me because You're spending an awful lot of time on me!"

> **Proverbs 3:13–15**
> **Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.**

When Solomon said wisdom was better than gold, he certainly knew what he was talking about because so much gold did he have, that even silver was rendered worthless in his kingdom (1 Kings 10:21).

Proverbs 3:16–18
Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.

It was the tree of life in the Garden of Eden from which Adam and Eve were to eat. Instead, they listened to the lie of Satan and chose to eat from the tree of knowledge. Here, it is as though Solomon uses this reference to encourage us to do what Adam and Eve didn't—to choose the way of wisdom, to choose the fear of the Lord, to choose life.

Proverbs 3:19, 20
The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.

Just as David cited creation as evidence of God's majesty (Psalm 19), just as Paul called upon creation as witness of God's power (Romans 1:20), just as God Himself referred to His creation as proof of His wisdom (Job 38—40), so does Solomon.

Proverbs 3:21, 22
My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck.

Life to the soul is internal, unseen. Grace to the neck—like the ornament of chapter 1—is external and seen by others. Wisdom and discretion grant both internal and external benefits. They are favourable both in the eyes of God and man (3:4; Luke 2:52).

Proverbs 3:23, 24
Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.

Our country takes 800,000 pounds of barbiturates to go to sleep at night. Why can't we, as a nation, sleep? Because we have ignored the wisdom of the Word.

Proverbs 3:25–27
Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh. For the LORD shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken. Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.

Don't sit back when you can do good. Don't hold back when you can give out.

Proverbs 3:28, 29
Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee. Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee.

Don't take advantage of a friendship.

Proverbs 3:30
Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm.

"Don't strive with a man for no reason," Solomon says. But, as always, it is Jesus who gives us the final word when He said . . .

> Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.
>
> Matthew 5:38–41

It's not practical to turn the cheek, to give the coat, to walk the extra mile. But the genius of what Jesus is saying is that the person who refuses to fight back is actually the person in control of the situation. The teachings of Jesus are radical. Entire societies change when people embrace them.

The subcontinent of India was changed simply because Mahatma Gandhi understood this principle. Although he was not a Christian, he embraced the reality of what Jesus taught. Had the Indians fought back, the British would have wiped them out. But the British themselves were defeated by a force more powerful than they: the force of love.

When your friends, parents, children, coworkers, neighbors strike out at you, you have a choice to make: to strike back or turn the other cheek. Don't worry about getting walked on. You'll actually see the release of a greater power. Love will prevail.

Proverbs 3:31
Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways.

Don't idolize the man of violence. This certainly goes counter to the idolization of action heroes that seem to dominate our entertainment scene.

Proverbs 3:32–35
For the froward is abomination to the LORD: but his secret is with the righteous. The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just. Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly. The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools.

Both James and Peter pick this up in their epistles . . .

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

James 4:10

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

1 Peter 5:6

Let us be those who humble ourselves—so that the Lord doesn't have to do it for us!



4

Proverbs 4:1, 2
Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law.

Written by a father to his son, the Book of Proverbs is full of good, fatherly advice. But more importantly, because it was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, through the Book of Proverbs, the heavenly Father imparts wisdom to all who are called His sons (John 1:12).

> **Proverbs 4:3–8**
> **For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her.**

Solomon exhorts his son to pursue wisdom and understanding. There is a difference between wisdom and understanding. Understanding speaks of facts, principles, and truth. Wisdom is the application of facts, principles, and truth. Although they're both important, I suggest wisdom is the more important of the two. For example, I would rather know how to most effectively use a nuclear reactor than simply how to build one. Knowledge without wisdom can be dangerous. That is why we need both.

> **Proverbs 4:9–12**
> **She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. Hear, O my son, and receive my**

sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many. I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.

"Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip," David declares (Psalm 18:36). Solomon says the path of wisdom is a path that will never cause one to stumble.

Proverbs 4:13–16
Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life. Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful" (Psalm 1:1). There is a progression of sin—from walking, to standing, to sitting, from passing through to spending time, to being comfortable with it. That is why Solomon says, "Don't even take the first step. Avoid it at all cost."

Proverbs 4:17
For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence.

The bread and wine of the Lord's Table will eliminate the appetite for the bread and wine of wickedness and violence.

Proverbs 4:18, 19
But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.

We hear a lot about being burned out and about midlife crises. Yet here we read that the path of the just doesn't burn out—it lightens up. In other

words, if you walk with the Lord and embrace the precepts of His Word, although there is no promise that your path will become easier, it will be brighter as you move along.

Proverbs 4:20–23
My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

In the 1600s, William Harvey brought about a revolution in medical knowledge when he discovered that blood is pumped by the heart and circulates through the body. Circulate it does—for once every sixty seconds, your blood travels through 70,000 miles of veins, arteries, and capillaries. To do this, your heart beats approximately 100,000 times every single day, an average of two and a half billion times throughout your life.

Keep your heart, Solomon says, for out of it are the issues of life—not only physiologically, but spiritually. The problem man has today is that his heart is spiritually diseased.

> For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man . . .
>
> Matthew 15:19, 20

From murder to blasphemy—evil originates in the heart.

Proverbs 4:24
Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee.

As Jesus taught, it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). Therefore to know how your heart is doing, listen to what your mouth is saying.

Proverbs 4:25
Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.

The way to keep your heart is to focus your eyes on the Lord.

> The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!
>
> Matthew 6:22, 23

If your eyes are focused on wickedness, it will pollute your heart. On the other hand, if you keep your eyes on the Lord, if you spend time in the Word and worship Him, you'll become like Him, for Paul would say that we are changed from glory to even greater glory as we behold the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Proverbs 4:26, 27
Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.

The way to keep your heart is to watch your step . . .

WATCH YOUR STEP
A Topical Study of
PROVERBS 4:26, 27

We all know that sin leads to sorrow. The Word of God expounds it and the experience of life confirms it. "I've fallen into sin," we cry. But in reality, that's not true. No one falls into sin. We walk into sin one step at a time and all along the way, with every step we take, the Holy Spirit speaks to us, saying, "Ponder the path of your feet. Watch your step. You're headed for problems and disaster." But we take one step and then another until finally we are entangled and ensnared.

Consider Eve. How different world history would have been had she not hung around the forbidden tree. Maybe she felt she had it under control, that Satan's suggestions wouldn't really affect her. But when she saw that the fruit was pleasant to the eye and good for food, she reached out and took a bite—and plunged all of mankind into depravity. Had she pondered the path of her feet, had she stopped to consider the direction she was walking, she wouldn't have been in the place where she would succumb to temptation.

In Isaiah 30, the Jews were being attacked by the Assyrians. Worried about their potential destruction, they didn't seek the Lord, but instead sought counsel from the Egyptians. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord came on the scene and said,

> *Woe to the rebellious children, saith the* LORD*, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin: That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!*
>
> Isaiah 30:1, 2

> *For thus saith the Lord* GOD*, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not. But ye said, No; for we will flee*

upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift.

Isaiah 30:15, 16

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

Isaiah 30:21

When would the Israelites hear God's word in their ear? When they stopped, when they put aside their plans, programs, views, and ideas, and said, "Lord, we're not taking a step apart from Your leading and guiding."

"Stop, look, and listen." We teach this to our kids to keep them from running into the street. Spiritually, we need to be taught the same thing. Stop what you're doing. Don't take another step. Don't go in there. Don't hang around there. Look up. Say, "Lord, You're with me and I want to cultivate the practice of Your presence in this very moment."

If you think this is a good word but a little too late because you've walked into sinful situations, if you're already entangled or ensnared in sin, don't worry—there's hope for you, too . . .

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publis heth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

Isaiah 52:7

These are, of course, the feet of Jesus. Consider His feet . . .

I see them walking on the waves of a storm without sinking. This shows He's in control of whatever situation you may find yourself.

I see the feet of Jesus walking in Samaria. The Jews considered the Samaritans to be half-breeds and, therefore, had nothing to do with them. Not Jesus. In fact, John tells us He *must* needs go through Samaria (4:4, italics added). To give hope to one woman who had messed up her life (John 4:7–

29). Jesus walks where no one else does to bring good news to people who are hurting, to people who are despairing, to people like us.

I see the feet of Jesus walking up Mount Hermon, where He would be transfigured as the glory of His divinity shone through His humanity as proof that He had lived His life perfectly. At that point, I believe He could have launched up into heaven, saying to all of mankind, "You see? It *could* be done. You *could* live in obedience. But you chose not to." Is that what He did? No. The same feet walked down the mountain to find a boy below, tortured by a demon, in need of healing (Mark 9:18). Jesus walked down Mount Hermon to touch people in need, people in bondage, people like us.

Finally, I see the feet of Jesus pinned to the Cross of Calvary. And in the blood that flowed freely from His veins, arteries, and capillaries, there is healing for me. For the times when I have walked into sin, messed up my life, not watched my step, or given heed to God's Word, Jesus Christ made provision. The blood He shed cleanses from every single sin I've ever done. *He* brings good tidings. *He* publishes salvation. *He* reigns.

God reigns. Because of our sin and rebellion, He should rain down anger and wrath upon us. Instead, because of the blood of Jesus, He reigns peacefully and powerfully within any and all who will embrace Him. He'll bring restoration and renewal to you if you'll simply ponder the path of your feet and say, "Come into my life, Lord. Cleanse me with Your blood. Reign in my heart. Guide my steps."



5 Proverbs 5:1–4

My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding: That thou mayest regard discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge. For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two edged sword.

With 1,000 wives and concubines (1 Kings 11:3), Solomon knew what he was talking about when he said, "Stay away from strange women." He says

that they come across as sweet, but the end result is destruction (Matthew 7:13).

Solomon speaks with authority when he says, "Having gone through this myself, let me give you some wisdom. Stay away from those who would seek to seduce you. What seems to be as smooth as silk and as sweet as a honeycomb, in the end, will sting you and bring you down."

Proverbs 5:5
Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell.

As he wrote this, perhaps Solomon was picturing the Valley of Hinnom, the valley outside of Jerusalem, from which came the word "Gehenna," a name for hell. Originally, it was the place where refuse was burned. In Solomon's day, it was also the place where children were offered as sacrifices on the incandescent arms of the iron idols of Moloch. No doubt having contributed to idol worship in the nation via the amassing of his many foreign wives and concubines, this must have haunted Solomon all of his days.

"Listen to me, son," he writes. "I know what I'm talking about. These strange women might look seductive and seem intriguing, but they will lead to your destruction and their paths to Gehenna itself."

Proverbs 5:6
Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them.

If you're wondering what is the best path for life, don't look to the strange woman because she isn't even sure of her own perverse path.

Proverbs 5:7–9
Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house: Lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel:

Oh, the cruelty of a broken life, a broken heart, a broken home, and a broken body—all the needless results of promiscuity.

Proverbs 5:10–13
Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labours be in the house of a stranger; And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; And have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me!

When your body is ravaged, when your mental and spiritual strength is gone, you'll say, "Why didn't I listen to my instructors, why didn't I take heed to the Word?" Some people insist on going through life pushing doors that say "Pull." Some people just don't listen. That's why over and over again, Solomon says, "You'll regret the strange woman until the day you die."

Proverbs 5:14
I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly.

"I was on the verge of total ruin in the eyes of the congregation," Solomon says. It has been wisely said that tomorrow is the best reason for doing right today. Yes, there is pleasure in sin for a season (Hebrews 11:25), but the end is destruction. You'll be ruined and disgraced.

Proverbs 5:15, 16
Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets.

Taken together, verses 15 and 16 speak of physical intimacy and the children that are, most likely, the result. In verse 15, Solomon says, "Enjoy the refreshment that comes from physical intimacy safeguarded by marriage." Verse 16 is more correctly translated, "Let *not* thy fountains be dispersed

abroad. . . .” In other words, “Don’t father children who will be running in the streets because you had no commitment to them.”

God built five very powerful drives into the human body. The most powerful is the need for air followed by the need for water and food. Next is the need for elimination and, finally, the sex drive. God programmed the sex drive to be one of the basic drives of our body. Why? Because it was God’s intention from the very beginning that man be fruitful and multiply so that he could subdue the earth in order to drive back the kingdom of darkness and death and replace it with light and life (Genesis 1:28). The only way that could happen would be if there was a strong drive in man and woman to bear kids.

The logical question, then, is if God wanted physical intimacy to occur only in marriage, why didn’t He create the sex drive to wait to kick in until a man or woman was married? I suggest part of the reason is because it gives us opportunity like nothing else within us to learn to master our flesh through prayer and discipline, which will stand us in good stead throughout eternity. You see, the Lord is ever at work, expanding our perspective presently of where we’ll spend eternity. And saying “No” to our flesh is part of that training.

When the Lord, by His grace, places you in a marriage relationship, you can enjoy that relationship to its fullest extent. But before then, we have an opportunity like no other to draw closer to the Lord, depending upon Him to give us the strength and discipline to remain pure in His sight. If you’re single, how I encourage you to make the most of this time to grow in the Lord in ways you won’t be able to once you’re married.

Proverbs 5:17–21
Let them be only thine own, and not strangers’ with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings.

When you're tempted to go to the strange woman, when you're tempted to get involved with stuff you know will lead to your own destruction, remember that you're not alone, for not only is God pondering what you're doing, but the angels are observing (1 Peter 1:12). Not only that, but there is a great cloud of witnesses, ready to cheer you on to righteousness (Hebrews 12:1). In other words, you are anything *but* alone!

Proverbs 5:22
His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.

If we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive our sin (1 John 1:9). God does indeed completely forgive our sin. The problem is, sin itself brings with it its own repercussions. It's not that God judges us. That was done on the Cross. But the sin itself causes real heartache. No wonder, then, that Solomon pleads with his son to avoid strange women and the sin that is sure to follow.

Proverbs 5:23
He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.

Sin diminishes our ability to even take in the Word, which, in turn, makes us vulnerable to more sin (Psalm 119:9).



6

Proverbs 6:1–5
My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth. Do this now, my son, deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend. Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids. Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler.

If you've loaned someone money or co-signed with someone for a loan, Solomon says, "Don't go to sleep until you break the deal. Don't put it off. Don't sleep on it. Take care of it immediately." It has been said that the best way to lose a friend is to loan him money. It's true. Money causes all kinds of tension and hassles. Maybe that's why Jesus taught us to give—not to loan (Matthew 10:8).

Proverbs 6:6
Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise:

Solomon points to the ant as the antithesis to the lazy man who lives from loans and handouts. Ants are industrious, incredible little insects that work day and night and are not too proud to gather scraps others have left behind.

In Acts 3, we read of a lame man who begged for money day after day. When Peter and John walked by, they said to him, "Silver and gold have we none." This is especially intriguing in light of the fact that in Acts 2, we read that the believers sold all their property and possessions and placed the money at the apostles' feet. Peter and John, therefore, had access to significant amounts of money. Consequently, when they told the lame man they had no silver and gold, I suggest they had no silver and gold *for him* because his need was not for a handout. His need was to be healed and to walk himself—which he was (Acts 3:8).

Sometimes we have to say to certain people, "For you, we have no silver or gold. In the name of Jesus, stand up and walk. It's time for you to be stretched and expanded. It's not going to help you to receive a handout if it keeps you in your crippled condition. You need to stand and walk."

Proverbs 6:7, 8
Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.

Ants are industrious, diligent, and wise. No one needs to crack the whip over them or make them punch a timecard because, with winter on the way, they instinctively realize they need to be busy. Too often, Christians say, "God will provide for me and the Rapture is going to happen soon, anyway. So I don't have to do anything regarding the future." This was the attitude of

some in the church at Thessalonica. Paul, however, was very straightforward with them when he said, "If you won't work, you won't eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

The story is told of a farmer's sons whose job it was to hoe the garden. Someone came by and said, "Why are your sons hoeing your vegetable garden? You don't need those vegetables. You have a whole farm.

I'm not raising vegetables," the farmer answered. "I'm raising sons."

We need to be raised, as well. Solomon says forget the idea of someone coming to your rescue to bail you out. You need to be one who seriously considers the ant. Don't live to be bailed out via the Rapture. Plan for the winter season. The best way to do this is to live like the Lord is coming back today, but plan like He's not coming back for a hundred years. If we don't live like the Lord is coming back today, we'll fall into sin because it is those who have this hope who purify themselves (1 John 3:3). On the other hand, if we fail to plan ahead, we are outsmarted by an ant.

Proverbs 6:9–11
How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.

Part of the problem in our society is laziness. Here, Solomon says, "How long will you remain in your sluggish condition?" This applies both to spiritual poverty for lack of devotion and financial poverty for lack of an expenditure of energy. The most tiresome thing in the world is to not work because you never get to stop and relax. Work hard. Plan ahead—and then trust that what the Lord sends your way will be what He intends for you.

Proverbs 6:12–15
A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth. He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers; Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord. Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy.

The idea of winking with your eyes, speaking with your feet, and teaching with your fingers speaks of doubletalk—you're saying one thing but meaning another. Watch out for dreamers, but also for schemers. There is not a way to get rich without applying ourselves because God's purpose is to develop us.

Proverbs 6:16
These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him:

God is a God of love, but Solomon will tell us seven things He hates. And if God hates them, so must we.

Proverbs 6:17–19
A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

All of these things are acts and declarations of independence. All of these say, "I'm going to solve that problem. I can spin the truth. I can take care of it with my clever speech, killer instinct, my running here, my manipulating there."

God hates this kind of thinking because He wants us to be totally dependent upon Him. "If you're dependent upon Me," He says, "I'll see you through. Don't try to make it happen in your own energy. Trust in Me. Look to Me. Lean on Me. I hate pride because I know what it will do to you. It will limit what I could give to you, work through you, and do for you."

Proverbs 6:20–25 (a)
My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life: To keep thee

from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart . . .

Jesus said lust in the heart is the same in the eyes of the Lord as committing the act. Initial temptation is not sin, for we read that even Jesus was tempted (Hebrews 4:15). It is when we cultivate a temptation in our heart and play it out in our mind that we err greatly—just as if we were involved in the activity.

Proverbs 6:25 (b)–29
. . . neither let her take thee with her eyelids. For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent.

So common is this understanding that even the world knows that he who plays with fire gets burned. And the understanding is the same for believer and non-believer alike. The believer who gets burned, however, is doubly foolish because he not only knows this to be true, but is promised an escape from the temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Proverbs 6:30, 31
Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house.

It's understandable if a man steals because he's starving. But he is nonetheless required to make restitution. Seven is the number of perfection or completeness throughout Scripture. Therefore, his restitution is to be complete.

Proverbs 6:32–35
But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound

and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away. For jealousy is the rage of a man: therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will not regard any ransom; neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts.

In Genesis 5:2, we read that God called both Adam and Eve "Adam" because in the marriage relationship, two really do become one. Physical intimacy results in the merging of two spirits. That is why sex outside of marriage is so destructive. When each person inevitably goes his way, something is irretrievably lost because each person walks away with a part of the other.



7 **Proverbs 7:1–3**
My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my com mandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart.

We all know of antiquated laws that make it illegal to whistle in the bathtub or to shake hands while wearing gloves. Unlike these and other laws of men, God's Law is relevant to any culture at any time. It never needs revising or updating.

Proverbs 7:4, 5
Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman: That they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger which flattereth with her words.

The first nine chapters of Proverbs deal with two subjects: wisdom and women. Solomon's instruction is to go for wisdom and to flee from the evil woman.

Proverbs 7:6–20
For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, And beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths,

a young man void of understanding, Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart. (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.) So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him, I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my vows. Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee. I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves. For the goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey: He hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed.

Who is the evil woman? In the case before us here in chapter 7, she's one who returns from temple worship saying, "I've been looking forward to talking with you. My husband isn't here. He took his checkbook and is gone on a journey. Could we spend some time together?"

Proverbs 7:21–27
With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life. Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.

You can almost hear the cry of Solomon as one who has experienced these things, shouting, "Run! Resist!" The irony is that here is a woman who

has spent time in fellowship, paying her vows, keeping the commandments of the Lord. And yet she seeks to ensnare this man. This happens not infrequently. People can leave a time of worship and study and somehow feel that, because they're right with the Lord, they can compromise their standards. For example, we can share things we learn in Bible study with someone from the opposite sex, but unknowingly and sometimes imperceptibly, we find ourselves getting involved in inappropriate ways.

What's the solution? The first step is awareness. We must be aware that, just because we've been in church, we're not insulated from being susceptible to this type of sin. In fact, it can make you even more vulnerable in certain ways.

Second, I believe it is expressly for protection for this kind of sin that Paul says if a woman has a question concerning something that is said in church, she's to ask her husband (1 Corinthians 14:35). It's always best for women to ask their husbands concerning spiritual matters. If you're not married, ask an older sister. If your husband isn't a Christian, ask him anyway. I know men who are part of the fellowship right now because their wives asked them spiritual questions and they themselves were driven to study the Word and to ask other brothers. And in so doing, they were saved in the process.

Jesus said that wherever a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also (Luke 12:34). If a woman pours out her treasure to a brother, suddenly, inevitably, treasure is transferred. Instead of going home and pouring out her heart to her husband, she poured it out to this individual and in so doing, planted the seeds of a potential for a relationship that will lead to problems and difficulty.

The Holy Spirit will show you when you're crossing a line. Be oh, so sensitive to His leading. It may seem initially preposterous and impossible that you are courting problems through a seemingly simple friendship. But many have been wounded. Many strong men have fallen. And not one of us is immune. That's why Solomon spends so much time saying, "Be careful."

Is there someone in your life who takes a more important role than he or she should, anyone who is dependent upon you, or upon whom you're dependent? Is there anyone whose path crosses yours more than necessary? Is there anyone interested in you that shouldn't be? Run for your life. Put up a

barrier. Do what it takes. If the Holy Spirit is leading, listen to His leading. When the Lord wants to change my mind or change my heart or change my ways, I initially want to change the subject. But it is the wise man, the wise woman who listens and determines to do the wise thing.



8 Not all of the women in Proverbs are evil, for here wisdom is personified as a woman . . .

Proverbs 8:1–5
Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths. She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors. Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart.

It has been wisely said that many people might have attained wisdom had they not assumed they already had it. One of the keys to becoming a wise individual is to hear the cry of wisdom. To be teachable is an absolute prerequisite to being made wise. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness," Jesus said, "for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). It is not the one who sits back and thinks he knows it all, but the one who hungers and thirsts to be taught, to be instructed, to be guided by wisdom who will grow.

Here, wisdom cries out, "Simple ones, foolish ones, come to me." And it is the wise individual who accepts the invitation.

Proverbs 8:6–9
Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things. For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse

in them. They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge.

Strong words are used by weak people. We do not need to be those who strengthen our words by profane statements.



***For topical study of Proverbs 8:6–9 entitled"The Plague of Profanity," turn to page* 197.**

Proverbs 8:10–12
Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it. I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions.

According to Colossians 2:3, Jesus is not only the source of all wisdom, but the very essence of wisdom.

Proverbs 8:13 (a)
The fear of the LORD is to hate evil . . .

Again, to fear God speaks of devotion to Him and a dread of sin.

Proverbs 8:13 (b)
. . . pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

The essence of pride is found in the middle letter of the word: I.

Proverbs 8:14–17
Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength. By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth. I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.

Wisdom, seen completely in the Person of Jesus, says, "I love them that love Me and those who seek Me early shall find Me." It was early in the day that the manna fell from heaven. But, as the sun came out and began to beat down upon the earth, the manna melted. I find the same thing to be true spiritually. If I'm not in the Word, gaining wisdom from morning manna, as the day goes on, the manna just isn't there in the same way. That is why the wise man seeks the Lord early in the day—and not only early in the day, but early in the situation.

You see, our Lord is a perfect Gentleman. He doesn't force His way in. Rather, He'll let us try and work out a situation until we become exasperated and finally call upon Him. That is why the wise man seeks the Lord early in any given situation—and not only early in the situation, but early in life.

After the age of thirty-five, the odds of a person becoming a born-again believer are said to be 1 in 50,000. After the age of forty-five, they're 1 in 300,000. After the age of seventy-five, they're 1 in 700,000. Why? Because the more a person resists the Spirit, the harder his heart becomes. Therefore, seek the Lord early in the day. Seek Him early in the situation. Seek Him early in life.

Proverbs 8:18, 19
Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver.

"Ask whatever you will and I'll give it to you," the Lord said to Solomon. Realizing the responsibility of being a king, Solomon asked for wisdom. And the Lord said, "Because you didn't ask for riches, honor, health, or victory over your enemies, I'll give you wisdom and all these other things, as well" (see 2 Chronicles 1:10–12). Therefore, when he said wisdom is better than gold, Solomon spoke with the authority of one who had both.

Proverbs 8:20, 21
I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.

As opposed to the way of the world as illustrated through the Book of Ecclesiastes, here Solomon writes that the wisdom of the Lord gives substance, weight, and stability to those who pursue it.

Proverbs 8:22–31
The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.

It was as a triune Being that, at creation, God said, "Let *us* make man in *our* image" (Genesis 1:26, italics added). Just as wisdom speaks of its presence at creation, Jesus was present at creation, not as a spectator, but as the architect (Ephesians 3:9; Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:16). Not only was Jesus present at creation, but it was for His pleasure that all things were created (Revelation 4:11). Therefore, we fulfill the very reason for our creation when we bring pleasure to Him.

Proverbs 8:32–36
Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD. But he that

sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.

"Whoso findeth me, findeth life." God declares that He will be found by those who seek Him (Jeremiah 29:13). Why? Because it is actually a two-way search. We don't find God. He finds us—as He did the lost sheep (Matthew 18:11–13). With this kind of God, no wonder Solomon says blessed is the man who waits at the door to hear instruction, who comes in "before school" so as not to miss a word.

THE PLAGUE OF PROFANITY

A Topical Study of PROVERBS 8:6–9

Several years ago, astronaut Michael Collins said that the average man speaks 25,000 words on any given day, while the average woman speaks 30,000. "The problem is," he said, "I speak my 25,000 while I'm at work, but my wife doesn't start her 30,000 until I get home." As people, we have a tendency to talk—a lot! So the Bible talks a lot about that tendency.

"Let every man be swift to hear and slow to speak," James writes (1:19). In other words, because we have two ears and one mouth, we should be twice as ready to listen as we are to talk.

"In the multitude of words, there lacketh not sin," Solomon will say (Proverbs 10:19). That is, the more you speak, the more vulnerable you are to saying something you wish you hadn't.

It has been said that a wise man speaks when he has something to say whereas a foolish man speaks just to say something. So the Bible encourages us to be careful about the quantity of our speech. But it has much more to say about the *quality* of our speech . . .

> *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.*
>
> Ephesians 4:29

> *But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.*
>
> Colossians 3:8

> *But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the*

same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

James 3:8–13

Filthy communication is to be far from us. Yet we live in a society that is plagued by profanity. And all too often, we either tolerate or even participate in profanity.

There is a difference between profanity and blasphemy. Blasphemy is using the Lord's name in vain, causing His name to be bantered about in an ungodly, unrighteous way. Profanity, on the other hand, is the use of filthy, foul, coarse words. In 1940, Clark Gable shocked the world when, in the movie, *Gone with the Wind,* he said, "Frankly, my dear. I don't give a damn." People couldn't believe that the movie industry would have the audacity to insert a word like "damn" into a movie. Look how far we've fallen.

In considering the preponderance of profanity that seems to plague our culture, I would like us to look at the stupidity of it, the spirit behind it, and the solution for it.

The Stupidity of Profanity

When you get right down to it, profanity is really stupid . . .

You're putting together a bookshelf, and suddenly as you're hammering, you miss the nail and pound your thumb. So you let out with a curse. But, in so doing, you're cursing the very project you're trying to complete. You're slowing down the very process and actually working against yourself.

The Bible has much to say about the power of the words we speak . . .

Death and life are in the power of the tongue . . .

Proverbs 18:21 (a)

How much better it would be to stop and pray, "Lord, this bookshelf is not coming together. Please give me the skill and patience to complete it." The power of life and death are in the tongue. Therefore, why not use our tongues to speak *life?*

The Spirit Behind Profanity

Why do people curse? What is the spirit behind it? Jesus gives us insight concerning this . . .

> *Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.*
>
> Matthew 5:33–37

Newer translations render the last phrase, "for whatsoever is more than these comes from the evil one." In other words, anything more than Yes or No comes from the evil one. Although Jesus is not speaking directly about profanity, He gives us insight that will help us understand the source behind it. In essence, Jesus was saying, "I want to develop disciples who will not have to go around saying, 'I swear it's true' or, 'I'll take an oath by Jerusalem, the holy city, that what I'm saying is correct.' "

Jesus is saying, "You don't need to fortify your words with oaths, but rather be people who simply say Yes or No. Let your word be as good as gold. Mean what you say. Anything more than that comes from the evil one. If you have to strengthen your words with an oath of some sort, it's because you lack integrity in your speech."

How does this apply to profanity? To prove how angry they are, some people let loose with a string of curse words. To prove their manliness, some guys use profanity constantly. But the truly wise individual, the truly strong individual has no need to prove himself through profanity.

Why would Satan be interested in getting us to learn the language of profanity? Following are four reasons . . .

First, profanity desensitizes people to the reality of eternity. Not long ago, when someone talked about damnation, people listened carefully because they knew it spoke of eternal destruction. Not long ago, talking about hell made an impact because people knew it was a real place. But today you hear "damn" or "hell" so frequently that those words have lost all meaning. Satan did the same thing with Red Evil fireworks. He made himself a comical character with a red suit, pitchfork, and pointed tail. He became laughable so that people wouldn't take him seriously. And he does the same thing with profanity.

Second, profanity debases the human body. The bulk of profanity deals with bodily parts or intimate activity. Why would the enemy be interested in this? Psychologists are now saying that, rather than enhancing sexuality, pornography and profanity actually erode it. In this way, Satan actually weakens the marriage bond and eventually destroys the family.

Third, profanity deflates the boldness to witness. If Satan can get you involved in using profanity even occasionally, when you want to talk to someone about Jesus, he'll be right in saying, "How could you—who just told that joke, who just said that word—talk about Jesus?" Thus, your lips are sealed.

Finally, profanity demotes character at the price of being popular. "I've got to be profane occasionally or else how can I fit in with the boys?" some say. God did not call us to be "good old boys," gang. He called us to be godly men. There are plenty of good old boys. We need godly men who will walk in rightness and integrity even in the way they communicate.

The Solution for Profanity

First, confess it as sin. Don't justify it by saying that everyone does it. Don't rationalize it by saying you've got it under control. Rather, admit it's wrong and confess it as sin. That's what Isaiah did.

Isaiah, a godly man, evidently had a problem with his speech . . .

> *Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips . . .*
>
> Isaiah 6:5 (a)

Here's a prophet of God who had a problem with the language he used. When Isaiah confessed this sin, an angel placed a hot coal from the altar upon his lips, the place of Isaiah's problem (Isaiah 6:6, 7). Was this to punish him? No, it was to heal him because the flow of evil was sealed, cauterized at that point.

Second, convert profanity to blessing. "Bless those who curse you," Jesus said (Matthew 5:44). When someone curses you or some situation is bugging you, don't curse—but bless.

A man of God was giving a new believer a ride when suddenly, a car swerved in front of him. The man of God was about to say, "Can you believe that jerk?" when the younger brother said, "Lord, we bless that driver in Jesus' name. Keep him from hurting himself or others." At that point, the older brother felt about an inch tall because he saw a very real example of what Jesus said we are to do.

How much richer it is to start blessing instead of cursing. Convert the curse into a blessing.

Finally, confront profanity in love. You might be in a situation where people are constantly cursing or being profane. Confront it in love—not as a puritanical Pharisee, not as a Victorian prude, but just allow blessing and life to freely flow where there is cursing and death. Where there is pollution, offer praise. When I hear people taking the Lord's name in vain, I say, "Isn't He good? Don't you just love Him?" And many times, the speaker says, "I didn't even realize I was saying that."

Profanity: Confess it as sin. Convert it to blessing. Confront it in love. And in so doing, you'll be walking in wisdom.



Chapter 9 issues an invitation for people to come and enroll in the college of wisdom . . .

Proverbs 9:1–6
Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding.

In this college of wisdom, the only tuition required is simply the desire to become wise. Knowledge is not enough. Knowledge deals solely with facts. Wisdom is the application of facts. The world has plenty of knowledge. What we need is wisdom.

Proverbs 9:7, 8
He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.

If you're enrolling in the college of wisdom, it would do you well to remember that criticism is one of the courses. A wise man appreciates criticism. A foolish man resents it and puts up walls when he hears it. Author Norman Vincent Peale said that the trouble with us is that we would rather be destroyed by compliments than saved by criticism. Most people would rather hear compliments than the instruction and wisdom of criticism.

Proverbs 9:9–11
Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased.

Wisdom begins with the fear of God. And, as we have seen, the fear of God is to hate evil (Proverbs 8:13).

In his epic poems, Homer talked about the island where sirens—beautiful women with beautiful voices—sang. So melodic and haunting were their voices that sailors would head toward their island only to dash their ships on the rocks and perish in the process. Determined to hear the sirens without perishing, Ulysses commissioned a ship to sail to the isle of the sirens. Approaching the island, he instructed the sailors to put wax in their ears and to tie him securely to the mast. I see that tendency in myself sometimes. I know certain things are wrong, so I bind myself with the cords of legalism, rules, and regulations to keep me from doing them. But there's a better way . . .

A second Greek hero wanted to sail past the island of the sirens. He was a talented musician named Orpheus. When his ship approached the island of the sirens, the sailors steered toward it. But when he took out his flute and began to play, so beautifully did he play that the sailors became so fascinated by his song that they lost interest in the song of the sirens and sailed by safely.

Who is our Orpheus? Jesus Christ. Therefore, we don't have to bind ourselves or others with rules and regulations. The fear of the Lord is to love Him, to hear His song so clearly that the siren song of sin is drowned out completely.

Proverbs 9:12–16
If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it. A foolish woman is clamourous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing. For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city, To call

passengers who go right on their ways: Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him,

"Whoso is simple, let him turn in thither," wisdom cried in verse 4. Here, in verse 16, we see the foolish woman echoing the same words. The student who enrolls in the school of wisdom—even though the course load may be demanding and humbling, graduates a wise person. The student who enrolls in the sweeter, counterfeit school of the foolish, graduates a fool.

Proverbs 9:17, 18
Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell.

There is no denying that sin is pleasant for a season (Hebrews 11:25). But there is also no denying that its end is always destruction (Proverbs 14:12).



10 In chapter 10, we come to the proverbs themselves. Having completed his exhortation to get wisdom and to stay away from the strange woman, Solomon begins his series of proverbs—each one a pithy, powerful, practical lesson . . .

Proverbs 10:1
The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.

Generally speaking, mothers are more inclined than fathers to feel the pain of a son who walks foolishly. Fathers, on the other hand, are more inclined to feel proud when their sons do well.

On two occasions in Scripture, we hear the Father in heaven audibly affirming His Son. The first was when Jesus was baptized (Matthew 3:17).

The second was on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:35). In baptism, Jesus signified that He was submitting to the plan of His Father that He would die, be buried, and rise again. On the Mount of Transfiguration, it was as He conversed with Moses and Elijah concerning His death that His Father said, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him."

Nothing delights an earthly father more than a son who will follow in the footsteps of Jesus and say, "I'm dying to my agenda, to my will, to my way. I want to totally please my heavenly Father. And what He says, I will do." That's *real* wisdom.

Proverbs 10:2
Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death.

If you're living for money, you'll always need just a little more. Righteousness, on the other hand, will free you from the master of materialism, the slavery of status.

Proverbs 10:3
The LORD will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: but he casteth away the substance of the wicked.

In Psalm 37:25, David said, "I have never seen the righteous go begging for bread." If you choose to walk in rightness, there will be a richness in your soul and provision for your life.

Proverbs 10:4
He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.

If your hand is lazy, you're going to become poor. Solomon will talk about this over and over again because a man who is hypocritical in his finances will be hypocritical in other areas.

Jesus said if you can't be trusted with unrighteous mammon, you can't be trusted with the riches of the kingdom (see Luke 16:11). If you give the Lord

not what's right but only what's left, you'll never become what you could have or should have been. Ask Ananias and Sapphira.

Proverbs 10:5
He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.

This speaks to us not only occupationally, but also of ministry. In John 4:35, Jesus said, "Don't say there are four months and then comes the harvest. Lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white to harvest already." It's time to harvest, gang. The seed has been planted and watered. People are ready to hear the gospel.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," Paul declared. "It is the power of God to salvation to every man who believes" (see Romans 1:16). Don't be ashamed of the gospel—the powerfully good news that Jesus died on the Cross and rose again and that He'll come into the heart of any who ask Him. How long has it been since you've led someone to Jesus?

Proverbs 10:6, 7
Blessings are upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked. The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.

The last words to the space shuttle, *Challenger,* from Mission Control was, "*Challenger,* full throttle."

And the last words of the *Challenger* astronauts before their death was, "Roger. Full throttle."

That's the way I would like to die—full throttle. It's not the duration of your life that counts. It's the devotion of your life—how intense you are in serving the Lord and giving yourself to Him—that matters.

Proverbs 10:8, 9
The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall. He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.

If you're walking uprightly, you're walking safely; but if you're walking in compromise, you'll be discovered.

As I was studying one day, I could hear my kids cleaning the garage. "Let's stuff it under there," I clearly heard ten-year-old Peter-John say. "Daddy will never look there." When I inspected the garage an hour later, was he ever shocked to see me look "under there."

Proverbs 10:10
He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow: but a prating fool shall fall.

This speaks of saying one thing but meaning something else. I think of Judas Iscariot in the Garden of Gethsemane as he kissed Jesus only to betray Him.

Proverbs 10:11, 12
The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked. Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.

The Hebrew word translated "covereth" is *kacah,* which means "to overwhelm." Therefore, this verse means that when we see shortcomings in others, the solution is to overwhelm them with love.



***For topical study of Proverbs 10:12 entitled "Love Covers All," turn to page* 204.**

Proverbs 10:13
In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found: but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding.

Because the mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart (Matthew 12:34), it is not surprising that the wise man speaks wisely. On the other

hand, the foolish man unknowingly makes himself a target for the rod of correction.

Proverbs 10:14–17
Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction. The rich man's wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty. The labour of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin. He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth.

Again, the righteous man is contrasted with the wicked, or foolish man and the picture is that of knowledge, wealth, life, and instruction versus destruction, poverty, sin, and error. Solomon couldn't have made the contrast more clear.

Proverbs 10:18–21
He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool. In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise. The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth. The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom.

The more we speak, the more vulnerable we are to sin, and the more likely it is we'll say something we wish we hadn't said. Therefore, I believe it would do each of us well to listen more and speak less.

Proverbs 10:22
The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.

The blessing of chocolate mousse is rich—but there's sorrow that comes with it! Not so with the blessing of the Lord. Everything He does for us, to us, and in us is for our benefit—and there are no regrets afterward.

Proverbs 10:23, 24

It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom. The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted.

"Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart," David declares (Psalm 37:4). What do you desire? If you're delighting in God, follow your heart, for it is He who placed those desires there in the first place.

Proverbs 10:25
As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.

In Psalm 1, we read that the godly man is like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth fruit. The ungodly man, however, is like the chaff which the wind drives away. The godly man is planted firmly while the ungodly man is blown away.

Proverbs 10:26
As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him.

In other words, if you send a lazy employee on an errand, his laziness will irritate you.

Proverbs 10:27
The fear of the LORD prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.

Newer translations render this verse "The fear of the LORD prolongs a day." How many of us wish we had more hours in our day! I think of Joshua doing battle against the enemies of Israel. When he cried to the Lord, the Lord prolonged the day. The sun stood still until the victory was won (Joshua 10:13).

Could it be that the reason our days get away from us is because most of the time we operate in the fear of man rather than in the fear of the Lord? The

fear of man is what people demand or expect of our time, our reputation, our image. I suggest we could find a whole bunch more time in our days and nights if we would operate in the fear of the Lord—concerned not so much with what men think but with what the Lord says.

Proverbs 10:28–30
The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish. The way of the LORD is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity. The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth.

Our society says just the opposite. Our society says, "Manipulate the situation. Be aggressive. Assert yourself. Do whatever it takes to reach the top." But the Word says, "the meek, the righteous shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). The most potent force on the planet today is meekness. Meekness is literally strength under control.

"Happy are the meek," Jesus said. "They're the ones who will inherit the earth." The one who turns his cheek when he's been hit and doesn't retaliate, the one who walks the extra mile when he's commanded to walk one, the one who throws in the shirt off his back when he's asked for his jacket is the one in control of the situation. The strong one is the one who doesn't defend himself.

Proverbs 10:31, 32
The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness.

Frowardness in this case means rebellion. The words of the wicked invariably cause tension and trouble. But the words of the righteous are always helpful because, rather than be conformed to the world, they are transformed, and thus know what is acceptable to God (Romans 12:2).

LOVE COVERS ALL

A Topical Study of PROVERBS 10:12

Some people say the Bible is too complicated to comprehend, too difficult to understand. Maybe this is in part due to the fact that the Jewish rabbis tell us there are seven hundred thirty-six rules and regulations written in the Law of Moses. But as you progress through a Bible, in a sense, it becomes simpler for by the time you get to Psalm 15, the seven hundred thirty-six rules and regulations are reduced to about eleven. Then, traveling on to the Book of Micah, we find that the Lord inspired him to make it simpler still: to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God (6:8). Then we come to Jesus. In Matthew 22, we read that a group of Pharisees asked Him what is the greatest commandment . . .

> *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*
>
> Matthew 22:37–40

Jesus said all of the law is summed up in loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and loving your neighbor. Yet the Spirit inspired Paul to simplify it even further . . .

> *For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*
>
> Galatians 5:13, 14

The entire Old Testament is summed up in love. If you understand that, you have understood the message of the Bible in its entirety. That makes

sense because in 1 John 4:16, we are told that God is love. Therefore, all He has for us and all He wants from us is love.

The question comes to mind. That sounds great. But what is love?

Paul would pen the classic definition . . .

> *Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth . . .*
>
> 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 (a)

This is the definition of love. But where is the demonstration?

In Jesus. Replace the word "charity" or "love" with "Jesus," and you'll see it's a perfect fit.

If love is the essence of the message of Scripture, what happens when we put our name in this text? Try it sometime. It's a good indicator of where you are in your walk.

This kind of love is not only a New Testament concept. It is proclaimed throughout the Bible—as seen in our text. Solomon says love covers all sins. The Hebrew word translated "covereth" is *kacah* and literally means "to overwhelm." In other words, love overwhelms, overshadows, and outshines sin. Hatred focuses on sin. Love overwhelms it.

Look with me at this kind of love demonstrated both in Noah's tent and at Calvary's Cross . . .

The storm was over. The flood had subsided.

> *And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham is the father of Canaan. These are the three sons of Noah: and of them was the whole earth overspread. And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.*
>
> Genesis 9:18–21

Noah was a giant of the faith. He was unquestionably a man of God. Even though he was a man of God, however, he was still a man—with the vulnerabilities of any man. Noah had gone through one hundred-plus years of being strong in faith, righteous in life. When people mocked and attacked him for building his boat, Brother Noah just kept building and preaching and warning. Noah survived the storm that fell upon the earth. He absorbed the accusations of the people on the earth. But it was after the Flood, when things were calm once more that he found himself succumbing to sin.

In that, there's a warning for us. The greatest struggles don't seem to occur when you're really doing battle for the Lord. They occur when things are somewhat routine, when we're not watching quite as vigilantly. Noah became drunk and he uncovered himself. As is so often the case, alcohol caused him to do something out of character.

> *And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without.*
>
> Genesis 9:22

Who saw Noah's nakedness? His family. Who sees my weaknesses, my mistakes, my nakedness? My family. No one knows us like our earthly families. But I believe this also applies to the family of God. As we work together, travel together, and serve together, we will inevitably become aware of each other's humanity, frailty, and weaknesses. We are men and women of God—but we are still men and women. And consequently, our carnality will show itself from time to time.

In Noah's case, Ham began to talk about his father's nakedness. Why? Perhaps it was due to his insecurity. I have found that when I'm feeling insecure or when I have observed people who are insecure, there can be a tendency to want to expose someone else's weakness or nakedness. Why? Because if I'm pointing out someone else's weakness, I don't seem so bad after all. If I'm putting someone else down, I mistakenly think I'm building myself up. The problem is there are seven things the Lord hates—and one of them is sowing discord among the brethren. That means if I'm talking about the sin I see in a brother or sister, rather than elevating me, I am doing worse than whatever sin I am exposing in them.

Maybe it was insecurity that caused Ham to expose his father. Or perhaps Ham was hoping to cultivate a closer relationship with his brothers. When you talk about someone else's problem, you feel close to the people you're talking with. But in reality, Galatians 5 tells us that if you bite and devour one another, you'll eventually be consumed yourself. Expose someone else's nakedness, and the people with whom you're talking will sooner or later turn against you. Galatians 5 teaches it and life proves it to be so.

But notice what Shem and Japheth did:

> *And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.*
>
> Genesis 9:23

Why did Shem and Japheth put the blanket between their shoulders? I suggest it was because they were aware that people walking outside of the tent might look in and see their father's nakedness. So, for the sake of those outside the tent, they stretched a covering between them.

We must be oh, so careful that we are not guilty of allowing the world to see the nakedness of our brother, for if they see Christians exposing one another and gossiping about each other, they will walk away from the family of God. Shem and Japheth covered Noah's nakedness because, although hatred stirs up controversy, love covers all sins.

> *And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the* LORD *God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.*
>
> Genesis 9:24–27

Noah awakes, realizes what had happened, and pronounces blessing on Shem and Japheth. But he pronounces a curse on Canaan, the son of Ham.

Why was Canaan cursed instead of Ham? I believe it was because, as a son, Ham sinned. Therefore, in his son, he was punished. If you're a parent, you know how devastating this would be, for you know you would rather absorb the problem yourself than see your son cursed. And yet, in a very real sense, that's what God the Father was willing to absorb as Jesus hung on the Cross for our sin.

Shem and Japheth modeled the covering of love—but not nearly as fully or as magnificently as Jesus did.

> *And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;*
>
> Colossians 2:13, 14

The most magnificent demonstration of the covering of love is found at Calvary's Cross. Nailed to the tree was a list, spiritually speaking, of our sins, the mistakes we've made, the trespasses we've committed. Yet as the spike pierced Jesus' hand, the blood flowing from His veins covered that list so completely that it could no longer be read. And therein is the ultimate meaning of this verse that says love covers all sin.

> *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*
>
> 1 John 3:16

If Jesus covered my sin with His blood, what right do I have to uncover or expose anyone else's sin? It is so wonderful to be a Christian, to realize that the Lord has called us simply to love and to leave the judging to Him. He'll take care of the problems. Our job is just to love. Let us, therefore, be people who don't seek to stir up strife, but simply to love. That's not only our calling, but our privilege.

11

Proverbs 11:1

A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight.

Measuring was done with weights and balances. The problem was, people would use one set of weights when they were buying and another set when they were selling.

Every day, the farmer delivered a pound of butter to the baker. But the baker began to notice that the pound of butter was becoming smaller and smaller and smaller. "My goodness," he thought, "I'm being systematically cheated." So he reported it to the town constable.

The baker and the constable went to the farmer's farm, where the farmer was accused of shortchanging the baker.

"But the butter I give him weighs one pound," the farmer insisted.

"What are you using for a weight?" the constable asked.

"The baker's one-pound loaf of bread," the farmer replied.

Thus, the baker was caught in his own trap.

It's interesting how we try to connive to get the best possible deal. That's the tendency of the human heart. But the Lord doesn't reward such a tendency. To Him, manipulation is an abomination. This doesn't only apply to our own businesses or lifestyle, but to spiritual things as well.

You see, there's something that far outweighs our sin and failure: a tiny piece of bread and a cup of juice. If you'll come to the Lord's Table and receive what He did for you on the Cross, you will find that whatever sins you've been involved in, whatever stuff you're struggling with, whatever things you're bogged down by will be far outweighed by His righteousness.

A just weight is the Lord's delight. And we are just that because of what Jesus did on the Cross (Romans 3:26).

Proverbs 11:2

When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.

"We'll build a tower that will reach to heaven," mankind boasted at Babel. But it ended only in confusion (Genesis 11).

"Does the Lord only speak to Moses?" Miriam asked. "Doesn't He speak to me?" Pride filled her heart and leprosy her body (Numbers 12).

Herod gave a magnificent speech. "He speaks like a god," the people said. How good Herod must have felt—until a moment later when God struck him dead (Acts 12:21–23).

Throughout Scripture, we see stories of pride and of the shame that invariably follows.

Proverbs 11:3
The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.

The Hebrew word translated "integrity" is *tummah,* the root word of *thummim.* The Urim and Thummim or, literally "lights and perfection," were worn on the breastplate of the high priest and gave people direction (Exodus 28). Therefore, if I want direction today, God will make His will known to me if my request is made with integrity. That is, if I go before the Lord, not out of curiosity but with integrity, God will direct me. A lot of times, we want to know God's will out of curiosity. Then we'll decide if we're going to do it or not. Integrity, however, says, "I come to You, today, Lord, not to see what You'll say, but to *do* what You say."

Proverbs 11:4
Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.

Righteousness delivers a man both from eternal death to come and from internal death presently—the death of joy, of hope, of peace.

Proverbs 11:5–8
The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness. The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness. When a wicked man dieth, his expectation

shall perish: and the hope of unjust men perisheth. The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead.

The righteous are delivered, the wicked takes his place. We see this happening when the Israelites were crossing the Red Sea. The Lord delivered them by parting the Red Sea—and then the Egyptians took their place in the Red Sea (Exodus 14:28, 29). We see this happening when Haman built a gallows to hang Mordecai on—only to end up hanging himself (Esther 7:10). We see Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego spared in the fiery furnace while those who cast them in were consumed by the heat (Daniel 3:22).

Proverbs 11:9
An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered.

It was after Jesus wrote in the dust that the accusers of the woman taken in adultery dropped the rocks they were so eager to cast at her. While we can't be sure what He wrote, the Greek word for "write" implies that it caused them to realize they were in some way guilty of the same sin (John 8:6). If you're finding fault with another individual, you're a hypocrite for you are guilty in one way or another of the very thing of which you accuse him. When this understanding really sinks in, the judging stops. When this knowledge takes root, the just are indeed delivered from a critical and judgmental spirit.

Proverbs 11:10, 11
When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth: and when the wicked perish, there is shouting. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.

When the wicked perish, there is shouting indeed. When Mussolini was hung, there was great celebration in the streets of Rome. When Nero died, there was partying for weeks in Rome. When Hitler died, the world rejoiced.

Proverbs 11:12
He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace.

If you're lacking wisdom, you'll despise people. I think of Shimei. Hurling dust at David, he said, "You're a bloody man," referring to the death of Uriah.

"Let me lop off his head," said one of David's men.

"No," David said. "God has allowed this" (see 2 Samuel 16).

David showed tremendous wisdom for he realized that, although Shimei was playing the fool, the Lord was allowing him at that point in his life to do something deep within his heart.

Is there someone in your life—perhaps a boss or a neighbor—who is constantly throwing dust at you and reminding you of past failures? If you're wise, like David, you'll hold your peace and let the Lord work through him to develop you.

Proverbs 11:13
A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.

There is no such thing as an idle rumor. When you speak against someone, it comes to life and takes on a life of its own. That is why the wise person chooses to let the rumor die with him rather than continue to give it life by passing it along.

Proverbs 11:14
Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.

When men climb mountains, they rope themselves together. That way, if one person slips, the others can pull him back up and continue on. So too, we need to be linked to other brothers and sisters. Don't be a lone ranger in your ministry or in your walk with the Lord. Be open to receiving counsel and

input from others. Take advantage of the body. Many people have fallen off the mountain of ministry because they're not linked to anyone.

Proverbs 11:15
He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretiship is sure.

Solomon echoes his warning of chapter 6, saying, "If you're involved in co-signing and loaning, you're setting yourself up for problems."

Proverbs 11:16 (a)
A gracious woman retaineth honour . . .

Deborah was called a mother in Israel because she had grace and walked with the Lord. Sarah was an example for all time because of her submission to Abraham. Esther was one who saved a nation because of her willingness to get involved in intercession. Women, you have a key role to play in the kingdom. A woman who enjoys, radiates, and shares God's grace will retain honor not just now but in the ages to come.

Proverbs 11:16 (b)
. . . and strong men retain riches.

"When I am weak, then am I strong," Paul would declare (2 Corinthians 12:10). Who is the truly strong man? Not the macho weightlifter, not the authoritarian who rules with an iron fist. The truly strong man is the one who realizes he's weak and relies on the Lord. And because he does, all the riches of Christ are his (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Proverbs 11:17
The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.

In Luke 18, Jesus said, "If you give mercy, men will give mercy to you, pressed down and running over." Show mercy to others and you'll do your own soul good.

Proverbs 11:18
The wicked worketh a deceitful work: but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward.

Death is the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). In other words, sin must be worked at and its payment is death. Righteousness, on the other hand, is not the result of work but the reward of grace (Romans 4:4, 5).

Proverbs 11:19–21
As righteousness tendeth to life: so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death. They that are of a froward heart are abomination to the LORD: but such as are upright in their way are his delight. Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered.

Even if the wicked band together, they aren't able to avoid eventual punishment. On the other hand, even a child of the righteous is safe.

Proverbs 11:22
As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion.

Trying to be as sensual as she can shows nothing more in a woman than a complete lack of discretion.

Proverbs 11:23
The desire of the righteous is only good: but the expectation of the wicked is wrath.

Because God is good (Psalm 73:1), it is no wonder that the righteous desire good in their own lives and in the lives of others. How is goodness brought about? By the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23).

Proverbs 11:24, 25
There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The

liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.

How are we made fat, enriched, blessed? Not by hoarding, but by giving; not by keeping but by sharing.

Proverbs 11:26
He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it.

This speaks of those who would hold their corn until the price was right. When it was at its highest point, they sold it. Here, the Lord says if you do this, people will resent you and curse you for it. But blessing will be upon you if you consider your client, not just considering your own pocket.

If you're involved in business, this is an important principle. If you give wholeheartedly and are determined to serve people, it will come back to you. But if you're always trying to manipulate the situation, to extract every penny you can, your business suffers. Sell the corn. Bless the people.

Proverbs 11:27, 28
He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour: but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him. He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch.

"I am the vine," Jesus said. "You are the branches. Abide in me and I in you, for the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine" (see John 15:4). Any fruit of any value in our lives will only come as we abide in Jesus.

Proverbs 11:29
He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart.

"And the Lord said to Noah, 'Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before Me in this generation' " (Genesis 7:1).

“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” Joshua declared (Joshua 24:15).

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house,” Paul said to the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31).

Throughout Scripture, we see entire families affected by the decision of one. It is no wonder, then, that the lazy, wicked, or deceitful man will indeed trouble his whole house.

Proverbs 11:30
The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.

After Adam and Eve chose to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge, they were driven out of the Garden of Eden lest they eat of the tree of life and remain forever in their sinful state (Genesis 3:22–24). But because Jesus Christ exchanged His righteousness for our sin, eternal life is available once more. And he who not only accepts, but shares that good news is indeed wise.

Proverbs 11:31
Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner.

“Lord, we have left all and followed Thee,” Peter said.

“Truly, there is no man who has left house or brethren or sisters or father or mother or wife for My sake or the gospel’s but that he shall receive a hundredfold now in this life and in the world to come eternal life,” Jesus answered. (Mark 10:28–30). God will not be a debtor to any man. If you do what’s right, if you share liberally, bless people, and give generously, you’ll be recompensed not only eternally, but presently.



12

Proverbs 12:1
Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth re

proof is brutish.

Some people don't want to be educated. They don't want to be reproved. They don't want to be corrected. Consequently, they learn the hard way. Because our Father is committed to bringing us into maturity, He's committed to teaching us. The question is, what will it take for us to learn? Will we learn by being corrected in the Scripture, or will we have to learn by going through brutal times?

"Learn!" wisdom cries out. It's an opportunity for us to save ourselves a lot of heartache.

Proverbs 12:2
A good man obtaineth favour of the LORD: but a man of wicked devices will he condemn.

It's not that God will hurl down judgment on the man of wicked devices. It's simply that He will allow that man's own wicked devices to backfire on him. As seen in the Book of Judges, if God's people continually turn their backs on Him, He allows events to cause them to cry out to Him.

Proverbs 12:3
A man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved.

Unlike the wicked man, the root of the righteous goes deep and doesn't lose ground.

Proverbs 12:4–6
A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones. The thoughts of the righteous are right: but the counsels of the wicked are deceit. The words of the wicked are to lie in wait for blood: but the mouth of the upright shall deliver them.

If you want to be upright, whenever someone is being talked about, remember that Jesus is passionately in love with him. Therefore, come to the

defense of the person who is not there to defend himself.

Proverbs 12:7–9
The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand. A man shall be commended according to his wisdom: but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised. He that is despised, and hath a servant, is better than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread.

The first phrase of verse 9 is better translated, "He that is despised and *is* a servant . . . ." In other words, the one who's willing to take on hard work is better than the one who refuses to stoop down to do such work. One of the wealthiest men I know started out as a garbage man.

Proverbs 12:10
A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.

We know that God cares about animals because Jesus said that when even one sparrow falls, the Father knows (Matthew 10:29). Most people have a natural affection for animals. I suggest this is because we are made in the image of God, who has affection for His creation.

Proverbs 12:11
He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding.

Keep plowing the soil of the Scriptures. Keep planting the seed of the gospel. Keep reading. Keep studying. Even if it seems to be dry and meaningless, if you keep at it, you'll be well-nourished.

Proverbs 12:12–14
The wicked desireth the net of evil men: but the root of the righteous yieldeth fruit. The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips: but the just shall come out of trouble. A

man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth: and the recompence of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him.

When you share something good with someone else, that sweet taste is in your own mouth. When you do good, you yourself are satisfied.

Proverbs 12:15
The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.

A fool always thinks he's right, but the one who shows real wisdom is the one who listens to advice.

Proverbs 12:16–18
A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame. He that speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit. There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.

When you see certain people coming, you grab your shield because you know they're going to say something that hurts. When you see others coming, however, you know you're going to feel better because they bring with them words of healing and refreshment.

Proverbs 12:19
The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment.

If we believed that every time we manipulated the truth we would eventually be found out, how different our speech would be.

Proverbs 12:20
Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace is joy.

There are those who imagine, or plan, how to do evil—how to get ahead at the expense of everyone else. If you want to have a joyous day, however, imagine, or plan, ways to bring peace to the lives of others.

Proverbs 12:21, 22
There shall no evil happen to the just: but the wicked shall be filled with mischief. Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight.

If you have a tendency to lie, kneel before the Lord and ask Him to search your heart and to show you the areas where you have a tendency to twist the truth. And then confess it to Him. Confession is more than saying, "Lord, forgive me for all the wrong I did today." Confession literally means to say the same thing God says. In other words, true confession says, "yes, Lord, I lied there. I didn't communicate truthfully there. I exaggerated there. It's wrong." Confession doesn't mean promising you'll never do something again, for you can't make that kind of promise. It simply means to say the same thing God says. And, as I confess my sins consistently, slowly but surely I become free from them.

Proverbs 12:23, 24
A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness. The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute.

"The slothful shall be under tribute" or, literally, "taxed." If you find work taxing, it could be because you're slothful. The slothful person will always feel tired because the reward for expending energy is more energy. Conserving energy will actually diminish energy—physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Proverbs 12:25 (a)
Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop . . .

Heaviness in the heart of a man makes it stoop. This is true not only figuratively but literally because we know that many heart problems are

directly related to stress.

Proverbs 12:25 (b)
. . . but a good word maketh it glad.

In Philippians 1:10, Paul says we are to approve things that are excellent and everyone has within him at least one quality to approve. Therefore, giving a good word not only brightens the heart of the hearer, but fulfills the role of the speaker. As a result, both hearts are made glad.

Proverbs 12:26, 27
The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour: but the way of the wicked seduceth them. The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is precious.

The slothful man stalks his game. He fires his shot. He likes the chase, the excitement, the adventure. But he doesn't like dressing the animal or building a fire to roast it because those jobs are tedious. In the same way, many preachers spend hours in preparation but only moments in prayer. In the Word, prayer is often symbolized by fire. Therefore, in your own Bible study, make sure you "cook" what you find in the fire of prayer. We can be intrigued by theology, interested in systematic study, amazed by God's truths practically. But if the Word isn't cooked in our own hearts by the passion of prayer, our study and preparation is only half-baked. Anyone can hunt and make the kill. Only the committed will bother to do the real work of roasting it. May God give us substance by making us diligent in all we do.

Proverbs 12:28
In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death.

In the way of righteousness is life—abundant life presently (John 10:10) and life in heaven eternally (John 3:16). The problem is, we're not righteous. Therefore, the provision of righteousness to sinners, the gift of abundant, eternal life to people like us, is the very essence of the gospel . . .

For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Romans 5:17–19



13 Proverbs 13:1

A wise son heareth his father's instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke.

It has been observed that if you are reluctant to receive the rebuke of man, you will also be reluctant to receive the rebuke of your Father in heaven. I think of the wisest Son of all—Jesus Christ. "I always do the things which please My Father," He said (see John 8:29). What a statement. Wouldn't it be radical if we could end even a single day saying, "Everything I did today pleased my Father in heaven"?

In the 1650s, as Brother Lawrence washed dishes in a monastery he was in constant communion with the Father. So radical and real was his relationship with the Lord that people came from all over Europe just to wash dishes with him. In the 1930s another man, Frank Laubach on the Philippine island of Mindanao had a revolutionary, widely impacting ministry because, at the age of forty, he made a commitment to check in with the Father every fifteen to thirty minutes. I wonder how it would affect the way we use our time if, every half-hour, we said, "Father, am I on course? Is what I'm doing right now pleasing to You?" I wonder how many times we'd have to turn off the television, walk out of the movie, or reschedule our plans for the week.

"I always do the things that please My Father," Jesus said. He was a wise Son, indeed.

Proverbs 13:2
A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth: but the soul of the transgressors shall eat violence.

What you speak to others affects your own spirit. If you speak encouragement, you'll be encouraged. If you speak blessing, you'll be blessed. When you speak a good word to someone else, your own soul is warmed, nourished, and satisfied. Conversely, if you speak critically or cynically, something dies inside.

Proverbs 13:3
He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.

President Calvin "Silent Cal" Coolidge was asked why he spoke so little. "I never have regretted anything I didn't say," he answered. How true. We often regret what we do say, but rarely what we don't say. That is why James said it is better to be a listener than a talker (James 1:19).

It would do us well first to *think* about what we're about to say . . .

T is it truthful?
H is it helpful?
I is it inspiring?
N is it needful?
K is it kind?

If what you're speaking is all of those things, go ahead and speak. Otherwise, keep quiet.

Proverbs 13:4
The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.

Although the sluggard may have desires, plans, and dreams, they never come to fruition because he's lazy. The recipe for failure is to wait for

someone else to make things happen for you.

Proverbs 13:5
A righteous man hateth lying: but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame.

Notice that Solomon says a righteous man hates lying—not that he doesn't lie. Missionary and author, E. Stanley Jones said, "Don't call me a Christian. Call me a Christian in the making." It's a long process. But where does it start? Simply by wanting to do what's right, by having the heart to be right. A righteous man hates sin, but it doesn't necessarily mean he'll be perfectly mature and have complete victory in his life at all times. Don't get discouraged. You're a Christian in the making. And it's a long process. At least, for me it is!

Proverbs 13:6, 7
Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way: but wickedness overthroweth the sinner. There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches.

To the church at Laodicea, Jesus said,

> Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.
>
> Revelation 3:17, 18

There are those with nothing who think they're rich and those who have everything but think they're poor. What we need is not more dollars, but more sense. We need sense to see our poverty that we might be rich. "Blessed are the poor in Spirit," Jesus said, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). The person who thinks he has not need is the one who is

poor, while the person who realizes he's poor and needy is the very one who will inherit the kingdom.

Proverbs 13:8
The ransom of a man's life are his riches: but the poor heareth not rebuke.

A man who's wealthy, feels like he's protected. He thinks no trouble can come to him that he can't buy his way out of. But it is often his riches that lead to trouble in the first place. I think of Abraham and Lot. These two men had to part ways simply because "their substance was great." That is, so great was their wealth that one plot of land couldn't support both of them (Genesis 13:6).

"You might think riches protect you," Solomon says, "but, in reality, if you're poor, you don't have to deal with the division and strife that comes with them."

Proverbs 13:9, 10
The light of the righteous rejoiceth: but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out. Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom.

Whenever there is contention, the root reason is pride. Someone is envious of another, feels intimidated by another, or is hurt by another. What is the cure? Paul's was simply to die daily (1 Corinthians 15:31).

Proverbs 13:11
Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.

A couple of years ago, an economist wrote a book entitled, *The Quick Story of the Fast Buck.* It only had six words: "Here it is. There it goes." That's what Solomon's saying. If you're living to make a fast buck by not working, your wealth won't last. But he that labors with integrity shall increase.

Proverbs 13:12
Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.

God makes a promise. Faith believes it. Hope anticipates it. And patience waits quietly for it. That is the divine pattern we see in the pages of Scripture. Abraham was called the father of faith. Yet the Bible says it was only after he patiently *endured* that he obtained the promise (Hebrews 6:15). When the promise is fulfilled, however, what a joy it is. Even if it takes years, hang in there, gang. Be like Abraham and eventually your Isaac—or literally "Laughter"—will be birthed, as well.

Proverbs 13:13
Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.

This isn't a threat by an angry God. It's a warning from a loving Father. If you despise the Word, you'll be wiped out, you'll pay an awful price. Noah was a preacher of righteousness who, through the building of his ark, preached that judgment was at hand. But the people evidently ignored his message, and, because they did, they were destroyed. When Moses warned Pharaoh time after time of the tragedy that would come upon his people if he didn't heed God's Word, Pharaoh ignored the word Moses gave him. And his nation suffered heartbreaking consequences.

Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh (John 1:14). And if you ignore Him, you'll be destroyed eternally, for those who have Him have life (1 John 5:12) whereas those who don't believe on Him have only the wrath of God (John 3:36).

Proverbs 13:14, 15
The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death. Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard.

Verse 15 is one I taught my kids from a very early age. The way of the transgressor *is* hard. That's why this book is written—to keep you from going

down that path. The way of the transgressor is brutal—but good understanding gives favor. Daniel was a man who had good understanding and found favor in the sight of the king. He understood God, for he purposed in his heart that he wouldn't defile himself by eating the king's meat and wine. The result was that the king saw Daniel was healthier than those who ate at his own table (Daniel 1:8, 15). Contrast Daniel with Judas Iscariot who ended up hanging himself (Matthew 27:5).

You and I will experience great hurt, real pain, all kinds of unnecessary problems if we transgress the Word of the Lord.

Proverbs 13:16, 17
Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open his folly. A wicked messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador is health.

We are messengers, for Jesus has entrusted us with the message of the gospel, the good news of salvation (Mark 16:15).

In 2 Kings 5, we read of a Syrian man of power and importance named Naaman who was plagued with leprosy. He heard about a man of God named Elisha and came to meet him. Elisha, however, sent his servant, Gehazi, saying, "Go tell Naaman to dip seven times in the Jordan and he'll be healed."

Upon hearing this, Naaman was angry. "Elisha didn't even come to meet me," he fumed. "And now he's telling me to dip in this muddy river? I'm not interested."

"Wait a minute," his servants said. "What do you have to lose?"

Naaman took their advice and, when he came out of the river, his leprosy was gone. He immediately went to meet with Elisha, saying, "Let me give you silver and fine clothes. Let me reward you for what you've done for me."

Elijah, however, refused Naaman's offer, and Naaman headed back to Syria. But Gehazi caught up with him and told him that Elisha had a change of mind, that he would accept some silver and fine clothes to give to his students. He took Naaman's silver and clothes, intending to keep them for himself. Upon his return, however, not only was Gehazi confronted by Elisha, who knew what he had done—but he was struck with leprosy, as well.

"Freely you have received. Freely give," Jesus said (Matthew 10:8). It's the wicked messenger who, like Gehazi, manipulates the message for his own selfish gain. This applies to every one of us. When we share and witness is it simply because of our love for Jesus? Or is it because we want something out of it—a testimony to share Sunday night, a notch to place in our Bible, a proof of our own spirituality? All kinds of subtle things can creep into our hearts oh, so easily. And we can become wicked messengers ourselves.

As you share the gospel, make sure you're doing it as a faithful messenger, a faithful ambassador, because of the work God has done in your own life. "It's the love of Christ that constrains me," Paul said (see 2 Corinthians 5:14). In other words, "Jesus loves me so much, has shown such grace and kindness to me, has done so much for me that I can do nothing but tell others about Him." We have a message, gang: "Jesus loves you. Your sins are forgiven." And we must share it faithfully.

Proverbs 13:18, 19 (a)
Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured. The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul . . .

Completing a project is indeed sweet to us. The ultimate project is the Lord's work on and in our lives, fashioning us into the image of His Son. In Psalm 17:15, David says, "I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness." In other words, "I'll know the work is complete when I'm just like You."

Here's the irony: In this journey we're on with our Lord, the closer we get to Him and the more we walk with Him, the greater our realization that we are very far from what we should be. It was when he realized he was in the presence of the Messiah that Peter fell at His feet and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). And it was when Isaiah saw the Lord that he said, "Woe is me for I am undone" (Isaiah 6:5).

We say, "Lord, I want to be like You." And yet, as we walk with Him, we realize more and more how far we are from being like Him. But guess what. The day of completion is coming, for when we see Jesus, we'll be instantaneously transformed into His image (1 John 3:2). In the meantime, I'm

a Christian in the making. So are you. I'm a long way from being a true Christian—a true "little Christ." And yet the project will be completed—and when it is, it will be sweet to the soul, indeed.

Psalm 13:19 (b)
. . . but it is abomination to fools to depart from evil.

It is the foolish man who says, "It's too hard to walk with Jesus. I'll just keep on in my course of evil because it's easier to be a sinner."

Proverbs 13:20
He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

We become like the people with whom we spend time. We read in 1 Samuel 22:2 that a group of men who were in debt and discontented, gathered themselves around David. Over the course of years, this ragtag group of renegades became a group of mighty men because, as they hung out with David, they became like him (2 Samuel 23:8). The same can be true of us because if we hang out with the Son of David, the Greater than David, Jesus Christ, we'll begin to take on His characteristics, His flavor. If we spend time with those who love the Lord, we grow in wisdom and are strengthened in our walk.

Lest you think you're an exception, Solomon says here very clearly that if you hang out with fools, you'll be done in. He'll go on to say that iron sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17). That is, one believer sharpens another.

Proverbs 13:21, 22 (a)
Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repayed.
A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children . . .

A good man will leave something for his grandchildren. Even more than material goods, this speaks of spiritual wealth. A good man leaves a spiritual heritage, a reputation, a standard, an example. What a privilege grandparents have to leave a rich spiritual inheritance for their grandchildren.

Proverbs 13:22 (b)
. . . and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.

The Egyptians were wealthy, indeed, but, following the horrendous plagues, they were so glad to see the Israelites leave that they gave their treasures to them (Exodus 12:35, 36). Likewise, when the Israelites finally entered the Land of Promise, they found orchards already bearing fruit and fields already cultivated (Joshua 24:13). They were able to go in and enjoy the riches the heathen thought they were storing for themselves, but which they were unknowingly laying up for God's people, the just.

Proverbs 13:23
Much food is in the tillage of the poor: but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment.

The person who's hungry, who's poor is going to work his field faithfully. But if the one who is rich lacks judgment, he'll lose even what he has. Poverty motivates people. If you're starving, you'll probably do something to stay alive.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness," Jesus said. "for they're the ones who will be filled" (see Matthew 5:6). It is the realization that you need more of the Lord and more of His Word that will motivate you to plow in the pages of the field of Scripture. But if a person thinks he's already doing well, complacency will set in and he'll lose even that which he once had.

In that, there's a sobering truth. That is, you can't stay the same in your Christian experience. You're either getting richer and fuller or you're diminishing. You cannot stay in the same spot in your walk with the Lord. That's why Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are poor in spirit, who realize their poverty. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, who realize their need." If you realize your need, you're in a good place. It's when you think, as they did in Laodicea, that you are rich, full, and have need of nothing that you're in trouble (Revelation 3).

Proverbs 13:24

He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.

According to psychologists, there are criminals who commit crime specifically because they want to be caught and punished. They grew up in a house where they were permitted to do anything they wanted. There was no chastening, no spanking, no disciplining. And when they got away with things, guilt began to build up in them. So, wanting to get caught, they commit crimes against society, hoping to get caught and punished to alleviate the guilt that had been building up for years.

I believe we would see a great reduction in crime if we would lovingly use the rod when our kids are growing up. That way, the child knows he's been dealt with. He can vent his emotions. He can be embraced and kissed and can understand that what he did wrong has been dealt with.

Proverbs 13:25
The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul: but the belly of the wicked shall want.

The righteous man eats and he's satisfied. But the belly of the wicked always craves more. I think of King Ahab in 1 Kings 21. He had the entire empire at his disposal. But there was one field close to his palace that belonged to a man named Naboth. Ahab wanted to buy that field to add to his vast vineyards. But Naboth wouldn't sell it because it had been in his family for generations. While Ahab pouted, his wife, Jezebel, took matters into her own hands and eventually ordered Naboth killed under false charges. Ahab got his field, but it cost Naboth his life.

If you're not walking with the Lord, like Ahab, you'll always want a little more. The rich man is not the one who has the most. The rich man is the one who needs the least. And in the Lord, there's an inner contentment and satisfaction. You can enjoy the blessings He brings your way without being upset that you don't have more.

Proverbs 14:1

14 Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.

The wise woman is the one who realizes that the priority and calling and primary ministry of her life is to build her house. If you are a mother, you have an opportunity every day for dynamic ministry that will change the world. A foolish woman doesn't give her family the attention or energy it needs. The wise woman, on the other hand, realizes the tremendous impact she can have by discipling, praying for, loving, and encouraging her family.

Proverbs 14:2, 3

He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the LORD: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him. In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.

The rod is the instrument of striking. Therefore, Solomon is speaking of the foolish man who strikes out at others and beats up on others. Whenever you strike out or beat up on other people, you're acting like a foolish person. Moses was one who erred greatly in this regard. After listening to the murmuring of the Israelites for so many years, he finally blew up. "You rebels," he said, "Must we fetch water for you from the rock?" Then, instead of speaking to the rock as God had instructed him to do, he struck it with his rod. As a result, he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 20:12).

We must be careful that the rod of pride doesn't come out of our mouths to beat up on people. Rather, let us have the lips of the wise to preserve them.

Proverbs 14:4

Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox.

An empty stable stays clean, but an empty stable brings no profit. Take a chance. Take a step of faith. See what the Lord might want to do through your life and in your life.

For topical study of Proverbs 14:4 entitled "An Empty Stable," turn to page **220.**

Proverbs 14:5
A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies.

A false witness is not only one who makes up outrageous, blatant lies. A false witness can be one who shares the right information, but with the wrong implication. False witnesses at the trial of Jesus said, "He said to destroy the temple and He would build it up," implying that Jesus was an anarchist (Matthew 26:61). The truth, however, is that Jesus was speaking of the temple of His body (John 2:19–21).

Don't be one who passes along information that, although it's technically right, misses the heart of the matter.

Proverbs 14:6
A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not: but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth.

To understand the Word of God, to gain wisdom from God, we have to come not as scorners and skeptics but as children, saying, "Lord, I truly am open to not only hearing from You, but also to obeying what You say."

The reason the Bible seems complicated or doesn't make sense to the cynic is because Jesus said, "Father, I thank You that You have hidden these things from the wise and revealed them unto babes" (see Matthew 11:25). The way to higher learning is through deeper humility. It is to the man who readily admits His need for instruction that the Father gives instruction.

Proverbs 14:7, 8
Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge. The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way: but the folly of fools is deceit.

The wise man understands his way. In Romans 12:3, we are told that every man is not to think of himself more highly than he ought, but to carefully and prayerfully consider who he is and what he's to do.

We read in Acts 8, that as Philip preached in Samaria, revival broke out in the city. Many were healed, many saved. At that point, he called for Peter and John to come and pray for the new believers that they might receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Philip realized "his way." He realized he was an evangelist. Then he utilized Peter and John for their strengths.

The Lord is into teamwork, gang. If you try to do it all, you'll only get frustrated and burn out. The prudent man knows what his calling and ministry is. Therefore, find your gift. Carry it out. And don't feel like you've got to do it alone. Each one of us has an essential function in the body of Christ, a vital role to play (1 Corinthians 12:20, 21).

Proverbs 14:9
Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous there is favour.

You can tell a man's character by what provokes him to laughter. What causes you to laugh? It's a good way to find out where your character is. Does God make jokes about sin? If you want to know what God thinks about sin, go to Calvary.

Proverbs 14:10
The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.

No one else can truly feel your heartache and hurt when you're going through times of difficulty and tragedy. That's why Job said, "Miserable comforters are ye all (16:2). You guys don't have a clue about what I'm going through." There is One, however, who relates to us in every situation. The Book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was tempted every way we are (Hebrews 4:15). No matter what you're going through, Jesus has been there. No matter what temptation you're facing, He's battled against it, as well. Thus, although others might come down on you or might not know what to do with you, Jesus truly understands and cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).

Proverbs 14:11, 12
The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish. There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

It's not what you think, not what I think, but what God says that matters. Man might think he's right, but in reality, he's dead right, for the path he's on leads to destruction.

Proverbs 14:13
Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.

Why are so many comedians prone to drugs and destruction? Because only the Lord can bring true joy. The world can laugh, but it can't have joy.

Proverbs 14:14, 15
The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself. The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going.

In Acts 17:11, we read that the people of Berea were more noble than the people of Thessalonica because, as Paul opened the Word, the Bereans searched the Scriptures to see if what he said was true. Be prudent. Be like the Bereans. Measure what you hear—be it from behind the pulpit, over the radio, or on the pages of a book—against Scripture.

Proverbs 14:16, 17
A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident. He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated.

It has been rightly said that when your temper boils over, you usually end up in hot water. We have seen that in our lives over and over again. It never pays to lose your temper. If you're angry, you'll say or do something you'll wish you never had.

Proverbs 14:18–20
The simple inherit folly: but the prudent are crowned with knowledge. The evil bow before the good; and the wicked at the gates of the righteous. The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends.

One way to have a lot of friends is to be rich. The question is, what kind of friends will they be? The prodigal son had no shortage of friends as long as he was spending his father's money. But when it ran out, so did they (Luke 15).

Proverbs 14:21
He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.

If you look down on the poor, wondering why they're not trying harder or doing better, you're sinning. The Lord calls us to have mercy on the poor—and the byproduct will be our own happiness.

Proverbs 14:22, 23
Do they not err that devise evil? but mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good. In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury.

Just as we're not to look down on the poor, we're not to look down on the validity of hard work—no matter how menial or mundane.

Proverbs 14:24
The crown of the wise is their riches: but the foolishness of fools is folly.

The wise man will use his riches wisely. That is, he will use them to glorify God. The foolish man, however, will use them only to glorify himself.

Proverbs 14:25

A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies.

As seen in verse 5, not only are words spoken of here, but also their implication.

Proverbs 14:26, 27
In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge. The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.

We usually think of fear as the opposite of confidence. The unique beauty of the fear of the Lord, however, is that it results in confidence of the highest order because it finds confidence in God Himself.

Proverbs 14:28
In the multitude of people is the king's honour: but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince.

The more subjects under a king, the greater the king. It was evidently partially due to this understanding that David numbered his people (2 Samuel 24:1–4). But David was severely chastened by the Lord for this because it spoke of a reliance on his own strength rather than on the Lord's (2 Samuel 24:15).

Unlike David, we have no kingdom at our command. But, like him, we can be vulnerable at every turn to relying on the power of our own intellect, personality, paycheck, or energy rather than on the Lord exclusively.

Proverbs 14:29
He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.

Kitsar ruach, translated "hasty of spirit," literally means "short of breath." Throughout the Old Testament, *ruach* is used in reference to the Spirit of God (Genesis 1:2). The connection is clear. He that is short of the Spirit, he that operates under his own power will continually be vulnerable

to frustration and wrath. The person filled with the Spirit, on the other hand, will exhibit the fruit of the spirit—characterized by peace, longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, and self control (Galatians 5:22, 23).

Proverbs 14:30
A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.

Many people are literally sick because they envy what others have. If you want to be withered and wiped out, always wonder why she got the promotion, why he got the raise, why they got the new car.

Proverbs 14:31
He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.

In Proverbs 22:2, Solomon will go on to say that the Lord is the Maker of both rich and poor.

Proverbs 14:32–35
The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death. Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding: but that which is in the midst of fools is made known. Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people. The king's favour is toward a wise servant: but his wrath is against him that causeth shame.

What exalts a nation? Not its political system, economic philosophy, brilliant constitution, or colorful history. What exalts a nation is rightness singularly.

It's righteousness. The existential philosophy—that there are no absolutes—is widespread. And then we wonder why our Marines betray our country so easily. Righteousness means rightness. Sin brings embarrassment and humiliation.

AN EMPTY STABLE

A Topical Study of PROVERBS 14:4

We live in a society where the tendency for people to take it easy is so predominant that when we leave each other, we often say just that. Solomon, however, would never be one to say, "Take it easy." As you read through the proverbs, you get the definite impression that he would say, "Take a challenge." It is in light of this that I would like to consider the text before us.

Many people boast that their stable is clean. They don't make mistakes. There are no "pasture patties" on the floor of their barn. But neither do they have any profit. You see, if a farmer boasts about the cleanness of the floor of his barn, it's because he doesn't have any livestock. Each one of us from time to time has a tendency to say, "I want a clean barn. Therefore, I'm not going to take a chance. I'm not going to accept a challenge. I'm not going to step out lest I mess up." Yet the fear of failure is inevitably the father of failure. When we fear failing, we will inevitably end up doing just that. Oh, our barn floor might be clean as a whistle. But inside, we'll be empty.

Eleven-year-old Peter-John came in the house holding his left elbow with his right hand.

"What did you do to your arm, Peter? Let me see it," I said. Seeing a rather large gash in his elbow, I asked what happened.

"Oh," he said, "I was jumping this hill on my bike and I made a radical turn. Then I fell off and skidded across the street. But it doesn't hurt too bad."

With his eyes sparkling, I could tell that he came in not for sympathy or for help, but because he was, in a sense, proud that he attempted a daring stunt. Even though he failed to make the jump, he found excitement even in the attempt.

In essence, that's what Solomon is saying. Don't be afraid to step out. Don't be afraid to accept a challenge. Sure, you might scrape your elbow. But an empty stable, although it might stay clean, never brings profit.

I'm convinced the Lord doesn't want any of us sitting on the sidelines. I believe He wants each one of us to be prolific and productive in life. Therefore, I want to share with you some "ABCs" that will help you to that end . . .

Attempt Something for God

First, *Attempt something for God.* Don't sit back and wait for some ministry to come to you or some opportunity to be given to you, but do something for God. We see an example of this in 1 Samuel 14 . . .

Saul and six hundred of his men were getting ready to engage the Philistines in battle. Early in the morning, before the battle began, Jonathan, Saul's son, nudged his armor-bearer and said, "Whether the Lord saves by many or by few, it matters not. He can save by using the whole army or by using just a couple of guys like us. Let's go to the Philistine camp and see if He might want to do a miracle and deliver the whole army into our hands." So they went to the Philistine camp. When they got there, Jonathan said, "We'll let the Philistines see us coming. If they say, 'Stay there, you guys, we're going to come and get you,' we'll run for our lives because we'll know the Lord isn't with us. But if they say, 'Come down here, you guys, and take us on,' we'll know God's with us."

So they made themselves known to the Philistines who said, "Look at these Israelites crawling around in the rocks. Come on down here and we'll show you a thing or two." At that point, I can see a smile breaking out on Jonathan's face. Knowing God was with them, they went down to the Philistine camp and the Philistines ended up running for their lives. Jonathan and his armor-bearer were willing to see what God might want to do through them. But they had to attempt something for God. They had to put themselves in a position where God could work through them.

William Carey, giant of the faith and missionary to India, said his life was built on this simple premise: Attempt great things for God and expect great things from God.

May we never stop looking for new challenges. May we be those who continually attempt something for God's glory, trusting He will work through us in His "supernaturally natural" way.

Believe Completely in God

Second, *Believe completely in God.* David was one who not only attempted something for God, but believed completely in Him. For example, when others were sure Goliath couldn't be beaten, David was ready to take him on. The people of Israel thought Goliath was too big to hit. David, however, thought he was too big to miss . . .

> *Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the* LORD *of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the* LORD *deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the* LORD *saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the* LORD*'s, and he will give you into our hands. And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.*
>
> 1 Samuel 17:45–48

Here's a young kid facing a huge giant of a man. And yet David didn't ease his way into battle. No, he ran toward the giant. There are 1,000 ways to please God but apart from faith, not one of them matters (Hebrews 11:6). What is faith? David shows us. There was a giant of a challenge before him, and he ran out to meet it, confident that God would see him through.

Without faith, it is impossible to see God work. If you doubt this, check out Matthew 13:58, where we read that Jesus didn't do mighty works in Nazareth simply because of the unbelief of the people there.

Continue Looking to God

Finally, *Continue looking to God.* Fear and faith will both sail into the harbor of your soul. But only one can sink anchor at any given time. You might take on the challenge, you might be willing to get your elbow scraped or your barn dirty, but as you do, there will come times in the process when fear will begin to sail into the harbor of your soul. What do you do? You must constantly look to the Lord. Initially, the concept will be exciting. But as time goes on—as days, weeks, or even years pass—you'll begin to fear and begin to wonder if anything will really happen.

When Peter and the disciples were out on the Sea of Galilee, a storm battered their boat. As Jesus came walking on the water toward them, Peter said, "Lord, if that's You, bid me come." When the Lord did just that, Peter stepped out of the boat and began to walk toward Him. And, as long as he kept his eyes on the Lord, he succeeded. But when he looked at the waves instead, he began to sink. "Lord! Save me!" he cried. And Jesus reached out and plopped him back in the boat (Matthew 14).

The other disciples might have said, "Aren't you the big man, Peter, walking on the water. But now look at you. You're all wet." Yes, they stayed dry. Yes, their stables were clean. But they never experienced what it felt like to walk on water. I would far rather be a Peter and sink occasionally, knowing that my Lord is able to put me back in the boat of safety. I would rather know there was a time in my life when I walked on water, rather than to be safe and dry in the boat.

An empty stable stays clean, but an empty stable brings no profit. Attempt something for God. Believe completely in God. And continue looking to God all the while.

15 **Proverbs 15:1**

A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

In baseball terms, whenever I strike out in anger, I invariably miss the point and make everything foul. Oh, that we would remember this verse every time we're tempted to defend our position, our rights, or ourselves.

Proverbs 15:2
The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.

The implication here is that knowledge can be used in a foolish way. I think of Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane. When the soldiers came to take Jesus away, he unsheathed his sword and chopped off the ear of the high priest's servant. "Put away your sword," Jesus said (John 18:11) and then healed the severed ear (Luke 22:51). Thus, the last miracle Jesus did before He was crucified was to heal one who His right-hand man, Peter, had wounded with a sword.

The Bible is sharper than a two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). Therefore, we can be just as guilty as Peter if we use it only to chop others up or to cut others down. Hours before this incident, Jesus had asked Peter to pray with Him. Peter, however, fell asleep (Matthew 26:38–40). As a result, he made up for his lack of piety with a flurry of activity. To keep from making this same mistake, we must realize that we must not unsheathe the sword in the Garden of Gethsemane unless we've prayed on the Mount of Olives in brokenness and humility—for if we don't pray, our knowledge will do nothing but cause pain.

Proverbs 15:3
The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.

Depending on what you're doing, the fact that the eyes of the Lord are in every place can either be comforting or convicting. Again, I think of Peter. Luke tells us that, as he stood by the enemy's fire, cursing and denying Jesus, Jesus came out of the house of Caiaphas and looked upon him. Peter, in turn, wept (Luke 22:61, 62). Why? I'm convinced it was because Peter saw in the eyes of the Lord the same thing Noah saw: grace (Genesis 6:8).

Proverbs 15:4
A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.

Profanity and perversion cause a breach in your spirit, whereas wholesome words of blessing and encouragement bring forth good fruit. No matter how difficult it might be initially, speaking the truth causes healing ultimately. Conversely, spinning, twisting, or shading the truth causes breaches or gaps in marriages, families, and friendships. The problem with being deceptive is that you become so good at deceiving that you deceive even yourself. Don't develop that ability. Instead, tell the truth and close the gap.

Proverbs 15:5, 6
A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent. In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.

In the house of the righteous, although there might not be a lot of stuff, there will be rich spiritual treasure.

Proverbs 15:7
The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish doeth not so.

One of the marks of a wise man is that he will go about dispensing knowledge. "Take care how you hear," Jesus said, "for how you mete it out, it will be measured back to you" (see Mark 4:24). In other words, when the Lord gives instruction to you, dispense that instruction to others because then you will be given more revelation.

In Revelation 7, one of the twenty-four elders came to John and said, "Who are these arrayed in white robes?"

"Sir, thou knowest," John said. In other words, "Beats me."

"These are they which came out of the great tribulation," the elder answered.

The interesting thing about this exchange is that we see the elder initiating an opportunity to dispense knowledge. People are not going to come up to you and ask you about the Great Tribulation or about Jesus being everything you need. Therefore, if we're wise, we will be those who create opportunities to dispense knowledge. If, however, you're worried that people will think you're crazy for starting spiritual discussions, remember that the issue is not about what people think of you. The issue is about people being saved and growing in the Lord.

Proverbs 15:8
The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

In Ezra 4:3, we read that when Israel's enemies came to Zerubbabel and offered to help build the temple, he said, "You have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God." Wicked people often seek to appease their conscience by making donations or offering assistance to the Lord's work. But this is abominable to Him.

Proverbs 15:9
The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the LORD: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.

Notice that this verse doesn't say the wicked are an abomination to the Lord. It says the way they walk is abominable to Him, not the sinner, but the sin. Why is the way of the wicked an abomination to our Father? Because He knows the way of the wicked is hard and it leads only to sorrow and pain. Therefore, because we have a Father who wants us to do well and avoid unnecessary hurts, the path of wickedness grieves Him.

Proverbs 15:10, 11
Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way: and he that hateth reproof shall die. Hell and destruction are before the LORD: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?

To many of us, hell is sort of a theoretical concept. Not to God. He cares about the hearts of people because hell is ever before Him. Oh, that we would be aware of the reality of hell.

Proverbs 15:12–14
A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise. A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken. The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness.

Both verses 12 and 14 tell us that, whereas it is because a foolish man thinks he lacks nothing that he is foolish, it is because a wise man thinks he needs more wisdom that he is wise.

Proverbs 15:15
All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast.

Your attitude affects your altitude. That is, the attitude of your spirit affects the altitude of your spirit. "I would be happy if . . ." we often say. But the wise person says, "I will be happy now." Happiness is a decision we make daily. Some have a feast every day. And it's all because of their attitude.

Proverbs 15:16, 17
Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.

It's better to have a few vegetables in an atmosphere of love than to have prime rib where there's hatred and tension.

Proverbs 15:18
A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.

The best cure for a short temper is a lengthy prayer. If you have a hard time keeping your temper, every time you feel your blood rise, pray, and you'll find your anger begins to dissipate.

Proverbs 15:19
The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain.

All that the eyes of the lazy man see are prickly problems. So he opts to do nothing. The righteous man, on the other hand, sees clearly, and therefore makes great progress.

Proverbs 15:20–22
A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish man despiseth his mother. Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly. Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.

Without counsel, things can go bad. I wonder how many crashes we go through unnecessarily because we don't take verse 22 seriously. There are people who could give us good advice, but only if we listen.

Proverbs 15:23
A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!

Not only is the one we counsel, but we ourselves are satisfied when we're able to share truth with someone else at just the right time. How can we give good advice at just the right time? Isaiah tells us . . .

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

Isaiah 50:4

In this Messianic prophecy, we see the secret of Jesus' wisdom. That is, He rose up a great while before daybreak to seek His Father in order that He might have the right word at the right time for the weary individual. How much more do you and I need to get up and seek the Lord if we want to be those who have the right word at the right time to say to a world burdened down and burned-out by sin.

Proverbs 15:24–27
The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath. The LORD will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow. The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD: but the words of the pure are pleasant words. He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live.

If you are greedy of gain, doing whatever it takes to get ahead, you're going to bring problems to your own home. I think of a man named Achan. When the Israelites conquered the city of Jericho, the Lord told them to leave all of the spoils. But when Achan saw a Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold, he took them. When the Israelites lost their next battle, Joshua fell on his face and asked the Lord what went wrong.

"There is sin in the camp," God answered.

So Joshua called the multitude together; and when Achan's sin was eventually discovered, he and his family were put to death (Joshua 7:25).

The same thing can happen to us. Oh, we probably won't die physically as a result of greed, but there will definitely be a death of peace and joy in our homes if we give in to it. Paul didn't say there is contentment in great gain. He said, "There is great gain in simply being content" (1 Timothy 6:6). "I've learned to be abased and to abound," he said (Philippians 4:12). Either way, he was content.

Proverbs 15:28
The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.

The mouth of the wicked is always talking. Conversely, there is something wonderful about silence. Silence has a real place in guarding and protecting spiritual passion. If you've ever been in a steam room, you know that every time the door is opened, steam rushes out. We lose something by always opening our mouths. Even though you might be sharing good things, sometimes it's good to keep the door of the steam room closed, to let the fire of devotion get hot.

Proverbs 15:29
The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.

While God distances Himself from those who distance themselves from Him, He draws near to those who draw near to Him (James 4:8).

Proverbs 15:30, 31
The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart: and a good report maketh the bones fat. The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.

You'll be in wisdom's hall of fame if you can receive rather than reject correction.

Proverbs 15:32
He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding.

The word "instruction" is actually "correction." If you refuse to be corrected, you're cheating your own soul. It has been wisely said that a successful man is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks that are thrown at him. Every time someone throws a brick at you, realize there's something true, something you can learn, something you can gain from that brick. Then build on it.

Proverbs 15:33

The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility.

Before honor, there must always be humility. Before Joseph was prime minister in Egypt, he had to spend time in prison. Before Moses was a leader in the desert, he first had to spend time on the backside of the desert. Before Abigail became the wife of David, she humbled herself and offered to wash the feet of the servants of David.

Why must this be? Because otherwise, we would think honor was due to our great ability, charming personality, intellectual insight, or tremendous spirituality. The Lord allows us to go through humbling circumstances in order that we will join Paul in saying, "I am what I am solely and completely by the grace of God" (see 1 Corinthians 15:10).



16 Proverbs 16:1

The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD.

In Romans 10, we read that we are saved when we believe in our heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and confess with our mouth that He is Lord. Yet who put the faith in your heart and who gave you the ability to confess with your tongue? Here in Proverbs, we see it is the Lord. That is why Jesus said, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). Amazing grace—that God would elect to choose us to be part of His family.

Proverbs 16:2, 3

All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits. Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.

"I know that movie is rated R," we say, "but I need to see what society is dealing with today so that I can communicate better with people at work."

You can justify anything you want, and we do. But the Lord deals with reality and He weighs it out carefully. Therefore, what I think is justifiable isn't the issue. The issue is: What does the Lord think? We need to ask Him continually.

Proverbs 16:4
The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.

According to Revelation 4:11, everything exists for God's pleasure. This means that the degree to which I live for my Lord today is the degree to which I'll fulfill the reason for my existence.

Proverbs 16:5, 6
Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished. By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.

"By mercy and truth iniquity is purged." How does the Lord deal with my sin? He's truthful about it because He calls it sin. But He also shows mercy regarding it because He died and provided a way for me to be forgiven. How am I to deal with the sin of others? In the same way: with mercy and truth. Notice which word comes first. If you're not in a spirit of showing mercy, then don't go about spouting truth.

Proverbs 16:7
When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

"I find no fault in Him," Pilate declared of Jesus (Luke 23:4). Because Jesus pleased the Father, even His enemies found Him blameless.

Proverbs 16:8
Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right.

"All I want is a little peace and quiet," says the weary worker at the end of the day, perhaps envisioning a carefree week or two lying on the sand in Tahiti. But our collective experience tells us that even the most expensive and best-planned vacation we can afford often results in other kinds of stress and tension. Where, then, do peace and quiet come from? They don't come from a change of scenery or a change of income but rather from a change of heart . . .

> And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.
>
> Isaiah 32:17

Better is a little righteousness than ill-gotten gain, for righteousness brings with it peace and quiet.

> **Proverbs 16:9–11**
> **A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps. A divine sentence is in the lips of the king: his mouth transgresseth not in judgment. A just weight and balance are the LORD's: all the weights of the bag are his work.**

Whether regarding one man's steps or an entire culture's system of trade, the Lord is in control. Therefore, it is the wise man, the wise culture that chooses to go *His* way.

> **Proverbs 16:12, 13**
> **It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness. Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right.**

If a king loves to hear his subjects speaking truthfully, peaceably, righteously, how much more does the King of kings love to hear His children speak that way.

> **Proverbs 16:14, 15**

The wrath of a king is as messengers of death: but a wise man will pacify it. In the light of the king's countenance is life; and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain.

How blessed we are that we don't have to tiptoe into the presence of our King, worried that, if He's having a "bad day," He'll ask for our heads. No, our King is constantly, thoroughly, abundantly *good* (James 1:17).

Proverbs 16:16
How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!

Here is the recurring theme of the Book of Proverbs, voiced by a man singularly qualified to say it.

Proverbs 16:17–19
The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul. Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.

This kind of thinking runs absolutely counter to what our society says. Pride, masquerading as self-confidence, is lauded in our culture, while humility is stepped over if not stepped on altogether. But the story isn't over, gang, for Peter tells us that the humble will be exalted in due time (1 Peter 5:6) and that it is the meek who are the true "beautiful people" (Psalm 149:4).

Proverbs 16:20, 21
He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the LORD, happy is he. The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning.

What increases learning? Not the loudness of the lips, the sternness of the lips, or the forcefulness of the lips. It is the sweetness of the lips. Mom and

Dad, do you want your kids to learn? Speak to them sweetly. That's the way the Lord talks to us (Psalm 119:103).

Proverbs 16:22–24
Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly. The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips. Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.

"Thy words were found and I did eat them," Jeremiah declares, "and they were to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (15:16). Solomon speaks of pleasant words being sweet to the soul and providing health to the bones. This makes the Word of God the ultimate "soul food," the quintessential health food.

Proverbs 16:25–27
There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. He that laboureth laboureth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him. An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire.

It's impossible to throw mud and keep your hands clean, and yet there are those who relish digging up dirt on others, eager to share what they unearth.

Proverbs 16:28–30
A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends. A violent man enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him into the way that is not good. He shutteth his eyes to devise froward things: moving his lips he bringeth evil to pass.

Friendships can be obliterated, relationships ruined all through the soft hiss of the whisper of gossip.

Proverbs 16:31
The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.

If you're walking in rightness and your hair is turning gray, you're coming to the richest part of your life and ministry because now you have some maturity and experience behind you. On the other hand, if you're not walking in righteousness now, you'll be nothing more than an old fool one day. Age doesn't guarantee wisdom, gang. So take time now to gain it.

Proverbs 16:32
He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

If you're slow to anger, you possess an ability so great in God's eyes that it's more valuable than the ability to defeat an entire city.

Proverbs 16:33
The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.

Man rolls the dice, picks the straw, casts his vote, but the outcome is determined by the Lord. Oh, how comforting I find this to be. Yes, we are to be responsible citizens. Yes, we are to be aware of the issues. But ultimately, it's God who is in complete control—using any given outcome for His sovereign purpose.



17

Proverbs 17:1
Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sac rifices with strife.

It's better to have a dry biscuit in a quiet house than to have steaks with strife. The idea of sacrifice here comes from Leviticus 7:11–36, where we read of the peace offering in which God's people were to offer meat to the Lord and also to partake of some themselves. Solomon reminds us that we can have all kinds of meat, and yet if we're not right with the Lord, it won't be satisfying at all.

Proverbs 17:2, 3
A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren. The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the LORD trieth the hearts.

In Bible days, a smelter would know gold was pure when he could look into it in its molten state and see his reflection. Peter likens our faith to gold, saying that the Lord allows us to go through fiery trials, hot times, difficult days in order that the dross might be purged, allowing the Lord to see His reflection in us (1 Peter 1:7).

Proverbs 17:4
A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue.

The listening ear must share responsibility with the destructive tongue. That is, if a person is destroying someone with his tongue and I listen to his destructive talk, I am just as responsible as he is for the damage taking place. How people talk about you is what you become in the minds of those who listen to such talk. It could be totally false. But those seeds are planted. Thus, you are participating in a destructive practice when you even listen to that kind of pollution.

Proverbs 17:5 (a)
Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker . . .

If we make fun of the poor, we are actually speaking against God Himself for His heart is especially tender toward the poor (see Deuteronomy 15).

Proverbs 17:5 (b)
. . . and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.

There is something evil within us that rejoices in the calamity of those who do harm to us. But if I don't recognize this as sin and repent of it, the Word says I won't go unpunished.

If anyone had reason to rejoice in the calamity of another it would have been David. Bent on his destruction, Saul pursued him relentlessly. Yet when Saul died, David grieved deeply (2 Samuel 1:11, 12). Lord, make us more like that.

Proverbs 17:6
Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers.

It has been wisely said that nothing makes a little boy smarter than being a grandson. Truly, grandchildren are the pride and joy of their grandparents.

Proverbs 17:7
Excellent speech becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince.

Even the loftiest words carry no more weight than the character of the one speaking them.

Proverbs 17:8, 9
A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth. He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.

"Love covers a multitude of sin," Peter would later write (1 Peter 4:8). If you're covering someone's transgression rather than exposing it to others, you're actively pursuing love.

Proverbs 17:10
A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool.

A single word of rebuke or reproof spoken to a wise man will affect the wise man more than beating a fool a hundred times will affect the fool.

When Nathan spoke to David concerning his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, David was broken before the Lord and repented. Contrast David with Pharaoh who, although he was hit with plague after plague, refused to humble himself before the Lord. That is what made him a fool and David a wise man.

Proverbs 17:11, 12
An evil man seeketh only rebellion: therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him. Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly.

It's better to come face to face with a mother bear than with a fool who's out of control. I think of Herod who was so incensed that the wise men didn't report back to him concerning the newborn King that he ordered the extermination of every boy child younger than two years old born in Bethlehem. I think of Nebuchadnezzar who stoked the furnace seven times hotter than normal rather than bow to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. I think of Saul who killed eighty-five innocent priests because they had unknowingly helped David. Better to meet up with a mother bear than any of these fools, indeed.

Proverbs 17:13
Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house.

When something good is done for you, if you respond with evil, evil will remain in your house. As proof, look at the world. When God finished creating it, He called it nothing less than very good (Genesis 1:31). He placed our representatives, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden, saying, "With the exception of the fruit of one tree, everything else is yours to enjoy." But what did they do? Ignoring the goodness and grace of God, they ate of the tree and plunged this planet into the chaos we see to this day. Therefore, I know that if I respond to the good things God has given me and the grace He has shown me with evil, evil will remain with me.

Proverbs 17:14

The beginning of strife is as when one let-teth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with.

It's easy to start strife, but hard to stop it. I remember when, at three and a half years old, Christy spilled a glass of milk all over the carpet. She tried to pick it up, but, of course, it couldn't be done. That's the way strife is. It's easy to spill, but you can't pick it up. So save yourself a lot of heartache and don't strive with anyone in the first place.

Proverbs 17:15
He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD.

Both the person who justifies the wicked and the person who condemns the just are abominable to the Lord. How, then, can Jesus justify us, for surely we are wicked? He does so not by winking at our sin, saying, "Boys will be boys." No, recognizing the seriousness of our sin, He went to Calvary's Cross to deal with it.

Proverbs 17:16
Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?

It's a waste of time, money, and energy to teach someone who doesn't want to learn. Among other things, this relates to ministry. You see, the enemy would love to get us endlessly talking to cultists. But in reality, we'd only be spinning our wheels unless the Lord specifically showed us otherwise. It would be far better to find people who are teachable and invest our time and energy in them.

Proverbs 17:17
A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

"I no longer call you servants," Jesus said. "I call you friends" (John 15:15). And what a Friend we have in Him. Others are fickle or are limited in the love they have for us. Not Jesus. He is a Friend who loves at all times,

an elder Brother who was born for our adversity. We were in a miry pit and He came to rescue us from our own damnation. And I'm so thankful He did.



***For topical study of Proverbs 17:17 entitled "A True Friend," turn to page* 230.**

Proverbs 17:18, 19
A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend. He loveth transgression that loveth strife: and he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction.

Some people seem to always want to be embroiled in a controversy of one sort or another. Paul, however, would echo Solomon by telling Timothy that the servant of the Lord must not strive (2 Timothy 2:24).

Proverbs 17:20–22
He that hath a froward heart findeth no good: and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief. He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a fool hath no joy. A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

Some people can't find good in anything. They look at a bee and see nothing but a stinger. Others, however, follow Paul's injunction to approve the things that are excellent in any given situation (Philippians 1:10). They look at a bee and see honey. What a joy it is to be around people like that.

Proverbs 17:23
A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment.

This, of course, speaks of the foolishness of bribery.

Proverbs 17:24–26

Wisdom is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth. A foolish son is a grief to his fa ther, and bitterness to her that bare him. Also to punish the just is not good, nor to strike princes for equity.

The wisdom of a wise man will always prove to be a worthy guide. The fool has no such guide, however, and so must search from one end of the earth to the other for direction.

Proverbs 17:27, 28
He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.

The only real substitute for wisdom is silence. If you're not wise, at least you can be silent and be thought wise.

A TRUE FRIEND

A Topical Study of PROVERBS 17:17

A number of years ago, a large newspaper in England ran a contest for its readers to describe the quickest way to London. The winning entry read: "The quickest way to London is with good company." I like that! As we travel through this life, most of us have discovered the value of good company. Yet most of us have also discovered the heartache and tragedy of failed friendships.

One man said, "One day, he rolled out the carpet for me. The next day, he pulled it out from under me." All too often, that's the way friendships are. This is not something unique to us or new to our society or generation. In Old Testament days, David, a man after God's own heart, a dynamic leader, a brave warrior, a gifted communicator, a capable administrator, had many people around him when things were going well. But once Absalom, his son, sought to launch a rebellion against him, even his most trusted advisor, Ahithophel, defected and sided with Absalom (2 Samuel 15).

Certainly we are not the only ones to experience failed friendships. And yet the text before us indicates that a friend is to love at all times. Where can such a friend be found? The answer is that it can be found in the Friend of sinners, in the Friend who will never leave or forsake us, in Jesus. Consider with me the friendship Jesus offers us . . .

The Initiation of His Friendship

"You have not chosen Me," Jesus said, "but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). That's incredible. It has been said you never really know who your friends are until you buy a house with a swimming pool. Yet Jesus initiated a friendship with me not because I had a swimming pool, but because I was in a cesspool of sin. For God commended His love toward me in that while I was still a sinner, Christ died for me (Romans 5:8).

Jesus had nothing to gain by loving me, for God is, was, and always will be completely self-sufficient. And yet, being the essence of love, He chose to create you and me and then to call us friends even though we rebelled against Him. Amazing!

The Endurance of His Friendship

As I look at myself, I realize I'm a lot more like Orpah than Ruth. You recall the story. Ruth clung to Naomi, her mother-in-law, and said, "Wherever you go, I'll go. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God." Orpah, on the other hand, wept and kissed Naomi as well, but then she went back to the land of idolatry. That's an awful lot like us. Yes, we allow tears to stream down our cheeks from time to time and we kiss our Lord on occasion, but in reality, all too often we return so readily to the land of idolatry.

"Lord, though everyone else deny You, I never will. You can count on me," Peter insisted. And yet Matthew tells us that when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, Peter followed Him afar off (26:58). Peter was interested in Jesus. He even had a heart for Jesus. But he was not committed to the point of remaining by His side regardless of the consequences.

> As Jesus was tried inside, Peter stood outside, warming himself by the fire of the enemy. After denying Jesus three times, Luke tells us Jesus came out, turned, and looked upon Peter (22:61). And I suggest His look wasn't one of condemnation but of compassion. You see, three days later, after Jesus had risen from the dead, He instructed the women at the tomb to tell His disciples—especially Peter—that He was alive (Mark 16:7). Later, John tells us that Jesus found Peter and said, "Peter, do you love me?"
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> "You know I *like* You," a humiliated Peter answered.
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> "Feed My lambs," Jesus said. "Do you love Me?" He asked again. "Feed My sheep. Peter, do you love Me?" He asked a third time. "Feed My sheep" (John 21:15–17).

Jesus didn't say, "Peter, it's back to square one with you. Prove your friendship, your allegiance, your loyalty to Me and then I'll decide if I can trust you." No, He said, "I'm aware of your failing, Peter, but I have a job for you to do nonetheless."

The endurance of the love of Jesus Christ is incredible.

The Insightfulness of His Friendship

It has been said that when a man becomes thoroughly acquainted with himself, he stops wondering why he doesn't have many friends. "O wretched man that I am," Paul said (Romans 7:24). He knew what he was.

"Simon, Satan seeks to sift you like wheat," Jesus said to Peter. And then He addressed Peter as Peter, as if to say, "I'm changing your name from Simon, or Shifting Sand, to Peter or Rock, because I see not only what you are now, but what you are going to be" (Luke 22:31–34).

The same is true of us. Jesus sees not only our present weakness, but what we're going to be in eternity. What a Friend we have in Jesus—One who not only initiates friendship, but whose friendship endures, One who sees not only what we are but what we shall be.

"Follow me as I follow Christ," Paul said (1 Corinthians 11:1). Therefore, wouldn't it be radical if we became friends to others as Jesus is a friend to us?

What would that mean?

First, *it would mean that we would be initiators.* Jesus left ninety-nine to find one who was lost and hurting (Matthew 18:12). All too often, we want to spend time with the most popular people, the most together people, the most exciting people. But Jesus said when you have a party, invite people who can't invite you back—the poor people, the hurting people, the lonely people (Luke 14:12–14).

Second, *if we were to be the same kind of friend Jesus is, we would show endurance in our friendship.* A friendship should be like a tube of toothpaste—coming through in a tight squeeze. Too often, that's not the case. Too often, when the tight squeeze comes, we bail out, give up, wash our hands, and walk away. But a true friend loves at all times—not only in good times, successful times, or spiritual times, but at *all* times.

Third, *to be like Jesus, we would be insightful in friendship.* Paul said he knew no man after the flesh (2 Corinthians 5:16). Do you relate to people only on the basis of what they've done to you in the flesh? Paul didn't. He chose to see people in light of the work the Lord had already done and would continue to do in them.

What a Friend we have in Jesus. I'm so thankful for that. And what friends we could be to others. I'm praying for that.



18 Proverbs 18:1

Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermed dleth with all wisdom.

Newer translations correctly render this verse: "For his own pleasure, a man having separated himself, rages against sound wisdom." In other words, man says, "I want to do my own thing. I don't care what others say. I want to do what I think is right." And in so doing, in separating himself, he wages war against wisdom. Selfish desire causes wisdom to be held at arm's length.

Proverbs 18:2

A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself.

A fool places more stock in his feelings than in the facts. This is a very real hazard for all of us. "I feel God doesn't want us together anymore," a wife said concerning her decision to leave her husband.

"Are there reasons for leaving him and your children?" I asked.

"No. I just don't feel God wants me with him anymore."

But it is the foolish person who bases his decision simply on how he feels.

It has been said that faith, fact, and feeling are like three men walking along the top of a fence. Fact is in front; faith is in the middle; and feeling is at the end. As long as faith looks straight ahead at fact, he'll be alright. But once faith turns around to check out feeling, he'll lose his balance and fall.

Whenever I have taken my eyes off the facts and instead analyzed how I'm feeling, I've stumbled. My faith must be based upon the facts of what God's Word says, not upon how I feel on any given day. For example, God's Word says He will never leave me nor forsake me (Hebrews 13:5). If I keep

my focus on that fact, I'll do fine. But if I start to say, "I don't think God is with me today because I don't feel His presence," I'll stumble and fall.

Proverbs 18:3
When the wicked cometh, then cometh also contempt, and with ignominy reproach.

Sin brings disgrace and the sinner brings contempt with him. Be sure your sin will find you out, Numbers 32:23 tells us. God doesn't track us down. Our sin does. In some way at some time, sin finds us out. That's why God says, "Be not deceived. Whatever you sow, you'll reap" (see Galatians 6:7). The problem is, sometimes it takes awhile for the crop to come up and we think we're getting away with our sin. But be not deceived: repercussions always come. Always.

Proverbs 18:4
The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook.

The words of a wise person are not like a noisy, babbling brook but have depth and bring refreshment.

Proverbs 18:5–7
It is not good to accept the person of the wicked, to overthrow the righteous in judgment. A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes. A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.

When young men taunted Elisha, God sent bears to devour them (2 Kings 2). So too, in the foolish things we say, we can actually bring destruction upon ourselves.

Proverbs 18:8
The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

If you've been wounded by gossip and rumor, you know this to be true. A tongue three inches long can destroy a man six feet tall.

Proverbs 18:9
He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.

If you feel like you're going in circles, it could be because you're cutting corners. If you're cutting corners, not diligently performing the task before you, you can feel like your day is a waste. Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God, for even the most seemingly trivial tasks become meaningful if they're done for His glory (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Proverbs 18:10
The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

The name of the Lord is a place of refuge indeed, for His name depicts His character.



***For topical study of Proverbs 18:10 entitled "The Name of the Lord," turn to page* 235.**

Proverbs 18:11
The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.

It is only in his own conceit or mind that a rich man's wealth gives him security, for even the greatest wealth can be lost by a single plunge of the stock market. True security is based on only one thing: the goodness of our Father. "Look at the birds," Jesus said. "Look at the flowers. The Father takes care of them. Trust in Him" (Luke 12:27, 28). This doesn't mean we shouldn't be wise or good stewards. It does mean, however, that we trust in God's love for us rather than in the gifts He gives to us.

Proverbs 18:12, 13
Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility. He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.

Don't answer too quickly. Listen carefully. Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to your inner man before you quickly spout your opinion.

Proverbs 18:14
The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?

A broken bone heals easier than a broken heart. In fulfillment of prophecy, none of Jesus' bones were broken as He hung on the Cross (John 19:36). The blood and water that poured forth from His side, however, indicated that His heart was broken (John 19:34). Not only that, but Isaiah tells us He was bruised for our iniquities (53:5). A bruise is a wound underneath the skin. In other words, Jesus was bruised for the sin and struggles deep within us.

Proverbs 18:15
The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.

It's one thing to seek knowledge, another thing to actually get it. You can seek wisdom by listening to Bible studies, reading books, going to church. But the knowledge you seek won't do you any good until you *get* it—until you purpose in your heart to make it part of your life.

Proverbs 18:16
A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.

The gifts of God are essential if His church is to be enriched. If you practice the spiritual gift He has given you, there will always be room for you to minister. Was there a time when you were using your spiritual gift, but

now it's dormant? Do what Paul told Timothy to do: stir it up, and let the Lord minister through you once again (see 2 Timothy 1:6).

Proverbs 18:17
He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.

The first time you hear something, you agree with it, until someone else presents the other side of the story. That's why we shouldn't speak too quickly. How freeing it was for me to finally realize I didn't need to have an immediate opinion on everything.

Proverbs 18:18
The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty.

Sometimes problems can be solved by simply casting lots, or by flipping a coin. Issues are often less complicated than we make them.

Proverbs 18:19
A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.

Oftentimes, we have more tolerance and compassion for the unbeliever than we do our own brother. I have noticed that the people who are closest theologically will often argue most vehemently because of spiritual "sibling rivalry." Therefore, it's important for me to ask the Lord to keep me from an adversarial mentality lest walls and bars be erected that eventually prove to be impossible to break through.

Proverbs 18:20
A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled.

Wise, kind words are like a juicy steak. If you share kind words with someone else, you yourself will be satisfied.

Proverbs 18:21
Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

Your tongue can either be an instrument of life—encouraging and blessing—or it can destroy and wound. So powerful is the tongue that it is one of only two instruments by which our eternal destiny is determined (Romans 10:9, 10).

Proverbs 18:22
Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.

While the Bible has much to say about the blessings of singleness (1 Corinthians 7:32–34), it is also true that the one thing God declared not good in His creation was man's single state (Genesis 2:18). If you are single, I encourage you to use your single state as an opportunity to serve God wholeheartedly. And if you are married, I encourage you to use your married state as an illustration of His love.

Proverbs 18:23, 24
The poor useth intreaties; but the rich answereth roughly. A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

If you want friends, be friendly. Again, you have a Friend in Jesus and you have One who sticks closer than even your closest brother. My job is not to get people to like me. My job is to like people. If you want to have friends, don't try to get people to like you. Just like them. If you love people and are interested in them, you'll have friends. Yet, regardless of the number of your friends, there is only One who will never leave.

THE NAME OF THE LORD

A Topical Study of PROVERBS 18:10

Someone once said the sweetest sound in any language is the sound of one's own name. If you're walking down the street and someone calls your name, you stop dead in your tracks. That person has an immediate effect upon you simply because he knows your name. It was when Jesus uttered her name that Mary finally recognized Him (John 20:16). We are told that the Lord not only knows our names, but that they are engraved on the palms of His hands (Isaiah 49:16).

The question is, do we know God's name? The word "God" is not a name at all. It is actually a title like "President" or "Prime Minister." It describes a position. In reality, it is the master passion of any individual that is his god. What dominates your thinking? What establishes your priorities or agenda? What do you live for? What are you devoted to? That's your god. There is a multitude of gods. But there is only one true and living, great and glorious God—and His name is LORD. Our text says the name of the LORD is a strong tower.

Many scholars believe that the name LORD in Hebrew, written YHWH is pronounced Yahweh. Others say it is Jehovah. The reason we don't know its pronunciation is because the Hebrew scholars believed God's name was too holy to even be pronounced. So they didn't put vowels in His name. In fact, so highly did they esteem His name that before they wrote YHWH, they would take a bath and put on clean clothes.

Whatever its pronunciation, we see God's name first revealed in Exodus 3.

As the adopted son of Pharaoh, Moses was second in command of the entire Egyptian empire. But Scripture says he chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to live in the splendor of Pharaoh's palace (Hebrews 11:24, 25). That landed him on the backside of the desert, watching his father-in-law's sheep. Shepherds were on the bottom rung of the social ladder in Egypt. So here's Moses, who, only a while earlier had been high

and mighty, a lowly shepherd in the desert, where he would remain for forty years while God worked with him and on him.

If you feel like you're in a desert today, take hope. The Lord has something ahead for you, just as He did for Moses . . .

> *Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.*
>
> Exodus 3:6

I'm so glad the Lord chose to use a bush to show Moses His reality because that means He can use a bunch of bush-leaguers like you and me.

> *Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.*
>
> Exodus 3:10

"Moses, I'm drafting you," God said. "I've heard the cry of My people. And I'm choosing you to deliver them."

> *And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?*
>
> Exodus 3:11

"Who am *I* to do this?" Moses asked. "I'm not even wanted there." Later, he'll complain that he's a poor choice because he stutters. But look at the Lord's answer . . .

> *And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.*
>
> Exodus 3:12

"The issue isn't who you are, Moses. The issue is who *I* am," God answered. "*I* will guide you and work through you."

> *And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?*
>
> Exodus 3:13

"The Israelites are going to ask me who sent me," Moses said. "What shall I say to them?"

And now for the first time in all of history, God identifies His name clearly and unmistakably . . .

> *And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.*
>
> Exodus 3:14

"Tell the people I AM sent you," God said.

And no doubt, Moses scratched His head and wondered, "You are . . . what?"

Moses was indeed used by God to deliver His people from Egypt. In Exodus 33, we hear him saying, "Lord, if You are not going to travel with us into the Land of Promise, we can't make it. If You don't go with us, we don't want to go."

"I'll be with you every step of the way," God answered.

"Then let me see You," Moses pressed. "Let me know more of You."

> *And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine*

hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.

Exodus 33:20–23

"No one can see Me and live," the Lord declared. "But I'll put you in a crack of the rock and cover you with My hand. Then I'll pass by and remove My hand so you can see the afterglow of My glory."

In chapter 34, we read that not only did the Lord allow Moses to see a portion of His glory, but He went on to proclaim His name more fully . . .

And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped.

Exodus 34:5–8

Earlier, God had said His name was I AM. Now He finishes the sentence.

First, He said, "I AM merciful." The first thing God wanted Moses to know about His character was that He was merciful. What is mercy? Mercy is not getting what you deserve. Jeremiah said it is because of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed (Lamentations 3:22). Think of your activities and attitudes during the past two years or two weeks or two hours and you'll know we all deserve to be fried. But God doesn't give us what we deserve.

Second, God said, "I AM gracious." What is grace? Grace is undeserved, unearned, unmerited favor. If mercy is not getting what we deserve, grace is getting what we don't deserve.

Third, God said, "I AM longsuffering. Even when My people turn against Me, I don't give up on them."

Fourth, God said, "I AM abundant in goodness." I'm so glad that our God is abundant in goodness. I think of the deities of Canaan—capricious, evil, cruel, wicked gods all. But the true and living God is abundant in goodness. He is genuinely, thoroughly *good.*

Fifth, God said, "I AM truth." God doesn't change with the latest fad in philosophy. Therefore, you can build your life upon Him.

That is the God we serve. No wonder Solomon likens it to a strong tower that will keep the righteous safe. The problem, however, is most of the time we feel anything but righteous. Therefore, our tendency is to think we can't run to the Lord because we haven't prayed for days or because we haven't had devotions for weeks.

Oh, but we can. The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run to Him and are safe. Who are the righteous? Second Corinthians 5:21 says we are the righteousness of God. Is it because we are sinless? No. Is it because we are obedient? No. It is because we are in Christ Jesus.

I am righteous because I'm in Christ Jesus, covered and clothed by His righteousness. So are you. Therefore, together we can run to Him and find mercy and grace, longsuffering, goodness and truth—everything we need. God proclaims this in Exodus 33. And Jesus explained it in the life He lived among us.

"I AM the way, the truth, and the life," He said. "I AM the bread. I AM the living water. I AM the door. I AM the vine." May you minister in His name. May you run to His name. May you cling to Him in time of need, trial, and distress. The name of the Lord is a strong tower indeed.

19 Proverbs 19:1

Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool.

Newer translations render this verse as: It's better to be poor and honest than rich and foolish. In other words, it's better to be honest and to retain your integrity even though it might lead to poverty than it is to compromise your convictions even if doing so would lead to riches. Many people think

that if a person is poor, it's due to sin in his life or a lack of faith in his heart. But that's not necessarily so.

To the church at Smyrna, Jesus said, "I know you're poor financially, but in reality, you're rich because you're walking with Me" (see Revelation 2:8, 9). Contrast that with what He said to the church at Laodicea: "Your monetary blessing isn't at all indicative of My blessing because, spiritually, you're lukewarm" (see Revelation 3:14–18).

The wealthy person who got his wealth through dishonesty might enjoy it for a season, but he has no assurance of what the next day will bring. We who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, we who have been adopted into God's family, however, know He'll provide for us day by day (Matthew 6:11).

Proverbs 19:2
Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth.

Part of the problem with our lives both personally and culturally is that we're always in a hurry. Tranquility and calm are increasingly rare. But impatience inevitably leads to sin.

When the Gibeonites came to Joshua, saying, "We're from a far country. Make a peace treaty with us," Joshua looked at their moldy bread and worn-out sandals and quickly agreed, only to find that he had been tricked (Joshua 9). Like Joshua, the things we wish we could do over again would be done in a much calmer, slower manner. How we need patience.

Proverbs 19:3
The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD.

A foolish man doesn't listen to the Lord, seek the Lord, or walk with the Lord. Yet when he ends up in trouble, who does he blame? The Lord.

Proverbs 19:4
Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour.

Wealth does make friends. The question is, what kind of friends does it make? While others may distance themselves from you if you hit hard times, there is One who promises that *nothing* shall separate us from His love (Romans 8:35–39).

Proverbs 19:5
A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.

In the original text, this verse is a command. That is, we're not to allow lies or false statements to go unpunished. Don't let your kids exaggerate, Mom and Dad. Don't let untruths go unchecked because they will lead to big problems down the road. If we truly believed that our shading of the truth would one day catch up with us, I wonder how it would affect the way we speak.

Proverbs 19:6
Many will intreat the favour of the prince: and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts.

Both biblically and innately we know we are to love people and use things. But practically, too often we do just the opposite. People have a tendency to hang around those who can advance their career or enhance their social standing. But not Jesus. On the contrary, He said we should give to those who can't return the favor (Luke 14:13, 14).

It has been said that you can judge a man's character by how he treats those who can do nothing for him. That's why Jesus is so remarkable. He chose to hang out with those who, in the world's eyes, were unimportant and forgotten.

Proverbs 19:7
All the brethren of the poor do hate him: how much more do his friends go far from him? he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him.

If a man is poor, even his brothers won't return his calls. The phone calls I return first provide a good indication of where my heart is on any given day. Whose phone calls would Jesus return? To whom did He particularly respond? Herod was the big man, but Luke tells us Jesus answered him nothing (23:9). On the other hand, Jesus had plenty to say to the leper and the blind man, to the woman at the well, and the woman taken in adultery.

Proverbs 19:8
He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul: he that keepeth understanding shall find good.

Unfortunately, we can get wisdom without keeping understanding if we think that simply by hearing, agreeing with, or teaching the Word we're actually obeying it. To "keep understanding" means you not only agree with it but act upon it. James would make this distinction even more clear by saying that it is the doer, not the hearer, who will be blessed (1:23–25).

Proverbs 19:9
A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish.

A false witness not only should be punished, but *will* be punished. Many people don't have a restful, peaceful life because they're always twisting the truth.

Proverbs 19:10, 11
Delight is not seemly for a fool; much less for a servant to have rule over princes. The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.

You're a wise man if you don't give in to anger but instead pass over transgression. Look again at the phrase "pass over." When God's people were in bondage in Egypt, the Lord sent a series of plagues meant to soften Pharaoh's heart—the last of which was to slay the firstborn of every house not marked with the blood of a lamb on the top, bottom, and both sides of the

door. When the death angel saw the blood, he would "pass over" the house and spare the family within (Exodus 12).

Whenever I see my brother or sister, friend or neighbor doing something wrong and think justice must be done, I have to remember justice *has* been done. The price has been paid because even as the blood on the homes formed the sign of a cross, so Jesus died on the Cross for the very sin that infuriates me. Therefore, if I don't pass over it like the death angel did, I'm essentially telling Jesus that His blood isn't sufficient, that He didn't pay a high enough price.

It's a wise man who defers his anger and passes over transgression by realizing the Lord has already dealt with it.

Proverbs 19:12
The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion; but his favour is as dew upon the grass.

Our Lord is the Lamb of God (John 1:29), but He's also the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). Those who don't want to submit to His lordship will hear Him roar, "Depart from Me. I never knew you" (Matthew 7:22, 23). But those who understand He's the Lamb slain for their sin will find His favor.

Proverbs 19:13, 14
A foolish son is the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping. House and riches are the inheritance of fathers and a prudent wife is from the LORD.

A father can provide his son with an inheritance, but he can't give him a prudent wife because it's up to the son to make a good choice. Yet even the son's choice can be affected by a father's consistent prayer.

Proverbs 19:15
Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.

If you're slothful, you'll always be in somewhat of a daze. I have found that when I think I need more rest, I will actually be more renewed by more activity.

Proverbs 19:16
He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways shall die.

If you ignore the Lord's commandments and ways, you do so to your own hurt, for the wages of sin is only death (Romans 6:23).

Proverbs 19:17
He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

If you're looking for a good investment, a wise loan to make, give to the poor; for, in so doing, you're lending to the Lord. And He pays back with great dividends! In Deuteronomy 15:11, God said that the poor will always be in the land. Jesus reiterated this in Matthew 26:11 when He said, "For ye have the poor always with you." This means that there is no shortage of wonderful investment opportunities for us. Ask the Lord to give you a sensitivity to people who are hurting. Then share generously with the people He is sure to bring your way.

Proverbs 19:18
Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.

Throughout the Book of Proverbs, Solomon exhorts parents not to spare the rod. If you don't deal with children when they're young, it will be hopeless later on.

Proverbs 19:19
A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again.

A man who loses his temper will continually find himself in hot water.

Proverbs 19:20, 21
Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end. There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.

We may have lots of ideas or thoughts, but it's only God's counsel that truly stands.

Proverbs 19:22
The desire of a man is his kindness: and a poor man is better than a liar.

The desire—or literally, the attractiveness—of a man is his kindness. If you want to be attractive, be like Jesus, for He is the essence of kindness. Our culture emphasizes outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the inward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7). And, as life goes on, we realize that it is the kind person who is also the most outwardly attractive in the end.

Proverbs 19:23
The fear of the LORD tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.

The fear of the Lord is not only the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10), but also the source of true and lasting satisfaction.

Proverbs 19:24
A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.

Literally, a slothful man buries his hand in his dish, but he's too lazy to bring the food to his mouth. The lazier a man is, the more he intends to do—tomorrow. That can apply to us spiritually, as well, if our plans to study the Word and grow in the Word are always scheduled to begin tomorrow.

Proverbs 19:25 (a)
Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware . . .

Cruising down the road, seeing someone else being ticketed for speeding causes you to instinctively slow down. So too, when he observes someone else being disciplined, even a foolish man takes note.

Proverbs 19:25 (b)
. . . and reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge.

When a wise man is corrected, he will grow even wiser.

Proverbs 19:26–29
He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach. Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge. An ungodly witness scorneth judgment: and the mouth of the wicked devoureth iniquity. Judgments are prepared for scorners, and stripes for the back of fools.

There is a sharp contrast between the shameful son, the ungodly witness, the scorners and fools and the blessed man of Proverbs 1. Who is the blessed man? The one who doesn't follow the counsel of the ungodly, the one who doesn't follow the footsteps of sinners, the one who doesn't make himself at home with the cynic.



20

Proverbs 20:1
Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

After the Flood, Noah became a farmer. Many Bible scholars believe that the fermentation process was a result of the flood and was unknown to man before then. Thus, they believe Noah would not have known about the effects

of fermentation. Whether this be true or not, one thing is certain: drunkenness was his undoing (Genesis 9:21).

Proverbs 20:2, 3
The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul. It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling.

A fool is always looking for a fight, but as the Prince of peace, Jesus spoke truth without starting fights. If you want to be an honorable man, see how many fights you can stay out of, how many controversies you can avoid.

Proverbs 20:4
The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.

"It's too cold," the sluggard says. So he gathers no harvest.

"My spirit is so cold," we sometimes say, "that I can't read the Word."

Yes, there are times when you will feel cold and experience dryness, but here's the key: You can either be a sluggard and not do it, or you can be a wise steward and keep plowing, keep cultivating, reading, studying, and learning even when it's cold and dry. If you choose the second option, you will harvest in due season. The season *will* change. But if you give up, close your Bible, and stop seeking the Lord because your heart is too cold or your spirit is too dry, you'll miss out on a huge harvest of revelation, understanding, and inspiration.

Proverbs 20:5
Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out.

The wise man learns how to so converse with others that he draws out riches and insights from them.

Proverbs 20:6, 7

Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find? The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.

Many of us don't even know the meaning of integrity much less have a commitment to it. But it is a word rich in meaning and a quality greatly to be desired.



For topical study of Proverbs 20:7 entitled "Integrity," turn to page **243.**

Proverbs 20:8, 9
A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes. Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?

Jesus looked at the people gathered around the woman taken in adultery and said, "Whoever among you is without sin can cast the first stone." Yet John tells us that one by one, from the oldest to the youngest, everyone dropped the rocks they held in their hands in a clear admission of their own sin (8:7–9).

Proverbs 20:10
Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the LORD.

Using one set of weights to sell and another to buy is dishonest. The same set of weights was to be used both to buy and sell. Jesus talked about one standard of measurement as well when He said, "With the same measure we give mercy, mercy will be given to us (Luke 6:38).

Proverbs 20:11, 12
Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right. The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them.

As believers, we should be the happiest people on the planet because we realize that God, in His grace, not only gave us eyes that see and ears that hear physically, but eyes and ears of faith, as well.

Proverbs 20:13
Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread.

This applies not only physically but spiritually. We don't have to remain in a state of spiritual deprivation if we open our eyes early enough to be nourished by the bread of God's Word morning by morning (Matthew 4:4).

Proverbs 20:14
It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.

"Your price is too high. What you're selling is not worth it," says the buyer. But after he buys it, he brags about what a good bargain he got. Again, this speaks of a double standard, a lack of integrity.

Proverbs 20:15
There is gold, and a multitude of rubies: but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.

Once again, Solomon compares monetary wealth with knowledge, and wealth comes out the lesser.

Proverbs 20:16, 17
Take his garment that is surety for a stranger: and take a pledge of him for a strange woman. Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.

Any physical wage or object given to you without your having to work for it might be initially pleasing, but in the long run, you will be shortchanged without the development that comes only through labor and patience.

Proverbs 20:18, 19
Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war. He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.

Whether in the halls of government, the streets of your neighborhood, or the aisles of your church, if someone gossips to you about someone else, know that it won't be long before he'll be gossiping to someone else about you. What is the end result of gossip? Casualties and pain from the needless war that inevitably breaks out.

Proverbs 20:20, 21
Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness. An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.

Reiterating verse 17, Solomon says if you get something free, it might be a blessing at the beginning, but not so over the long haul.

Proverbs 20:22–24
Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee. Divers weights are an abomination unto the LORD; and a false balance is not good. Man's goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way?

There is so much I don't understand about myself and about life. Certain things are definitely beyond my understanding. Therefore, I'm learning that I don't have to pretend to understand everything. Rather, I can have a peace that *passes* understanding (Philippians 4:7).

Proverbs 20:25
It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy, and after vows to make inquiry.

This speaks of using that which was once given to the Lord for one's own purposes instead—be it time, money, energy, or anything else we have

committed to Him.

Proverbs 20:26
A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them.

Some scholars believe this speaks of the wheel of the law being applied to the sins of the wicked.

Proverbs 20:27
The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly.

In Romans 1, we read that no man has an excuse to think he doesn't need a Savior because the candle of conscience searches every man and every man knows he's a sinner.

Proverbs 20:28
Mercy and truth preserve the king: and his throne is upholden by mercy.

Whether in business or in your family, how is a man's position held? By mercy. If you're working with others in any realm, this is a key. We must be people of truth, but we must also be those who show mercy. Jesus, of course, is the epitome of truth and at the same time the essence of mercy.

Proverbs 20:29
The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the grey head.

Ours is one of the few societies in world history that does not value the gray head. And we are the poorer for it because the zeal of youth becomes even more effective when mellowed by the wisdom of age.

Proverbs 20:30

The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil: so do stripes the inward parts of the belly.

So great is our sin that nothing less than wounds and stripes could pay for it. Yet the unspeakable mystery of the gospel is that the very One against whom we sinned was the same One who paid for our sin with His stripes and wounds (Isaiah 53:5).

INTEGRITY
A Topical Study of
PROVERBS 20:7

What does "integrity" mean? Webster defines it this way: "An unimpaired condition or soundness, adherence to a code of moral values, and the quality or state of being complete and undivided. See also honesty." What does integrity mean? Soundness, completeness, honesty.

Why should we, as believers, be concerned about walking in integrity? Following are four reasons why integrity is beneficial.

Integrity Benefits Our Families

According to our text, if we want our children to do well in life, we need to be those who walk in integrity. If you want your kids to grow up blessed, prosperous, and happy, you need to walk in integrity, Mom. According to God's Word, Dad, what you do directly affects your children. Therefore, if you're lacking integrity, your kids will miss a certain blessing.

Integrity Provides Direction Personally

"I don't have direction for my life," we sometimes say. One of the reasons could be a lack of integrity. When you ask the Lord for direction, are you asking with integrity, or are you asking out of curiosity? Sometimes, I catch myself praying out of curiosity—not saying, "Lord, whatever You say, I'll do," but rather, "Lord, give me Your opinion on this matter, and I'll decide whether I'll follow it or not."

Approach the Lord with integrity, saying, "Whatever You say, Lord, I'll do," and I promise He'll give counsel and guidance to you. He'll open and close doors. He'll bring the counsel of wise brothers and sisters. He'll open Scripture to you if you seek Him with integrity.

Integrity Protects from Iniquity

Sin stinks. It destroys. It erodes. It ruins life. It robs joy. So how can we be protected from it? One of the ways is through integrity.

Rather than tell Abimelech that Sarah was his wife, Abraham told him she was his sister. But because of Abimelech's integrity, God kept him from sinning with Sarah (Genesis 20:5, 6). Integrity protects us from temptations that bombard us, from the carnal intentions that otherwise would so easily ensnare us.

Integrity Produces Mental Stability

James tells us that a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways (1:8). That is, if you're not determined to walk in a certain direction, if you're not sure where you stand on issues of life, if your standards vary depending on who you're with or where you're at, you'll be like a wave tossed to and fro. Life will be nothing but confusing to you. On the other hand, if you have a solid standard, a sure foundation upon which to build your life, you will have mental stability.

The decision is yours and mine. Are we going to be a people who walk in integrity? God desires it. And we benefit from it.

How do we walk in integrity? Turn to Job 2 . . .

> *Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the* LORD*, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the* LORD*. And the* LORD *said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the* LORD*, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the* LORD *said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause.*
>
> Job 2:1–3

Satan came to God and said, "If You let me deal with Job, he'll curse you. He'll turn his back on You. Take away his blessings, his riches, his family, and see what happens to his integrity." As the Lord allowed, Satan had a field day with Job. Yet even when his family was killed, his crops were wiped out, his house burned down, Job never lost his integrity.

> *And Satan answered the* LORD*, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the* LORD *said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save*

his life. So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die.

Job 2:4–9

When excruciating pain was added to Job's loss, his wife said, "Forget your integrity. Curse God and die." Did he? Turn to Job 27.

As God liveth, who hath taken away my judgment; and the Almighty, who hath vexed my soul; All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils; My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me.

Job 27:2–5

"I don't care what happens," Job says. "I will not walk away from integrity. I'm committed to this course. I adhere to these values. I will keep these standards no matter what. My wife can come down on me. My body can fall apart. My possessions and family can be taken from me. But I will not give up my integrity."

What kind of man would be able to say this? Job 31 gives us insight . . .

I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid? For what portion of God is there from above? and what inheritance of the Almighty from on high? Is not destruction to the wicked? and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity? Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps? If I have walked with vanity, or if my foot hath hasted to deceit; Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity.

Job 31:1–6

At a certain point in Job's life, he made a covenant, a promise, a contract, an agreement. He said, "I am making a legal contract in my heart with myself

that I will not do certain things no matter what. It's not open to debate. It's not a question for consideration. I will not do certain things. Period."

This is the key, the crux, the dynamic of integrity. When you decide, God will provide. He will meet you in that place of decision and provide the strength to maintain your integrity in that area.

I doubt if any of us has a problem with heroin. Therefore, if someone offered it to you, it wouldn't be an issue for you. But what about ice cream? I can say I shouldn't have ice cream. I don't need it. I admit it's not good for me. But am I determined not to have it? Did I make a covenant not to have it? No. Therefore, I am lacking integrity—undivided, complete honesty—concerning it.

Ice cream is humorous, but stretching the truth, gossiping, immorality, substance abuse, unethical business practices, cheating on taxes are not. Once we, like Job, decide to walk in integrity, God will meet us there and provide the strength to keep our commitment. He did it for Job. He did it for Abimelech. He'll do it for you.



21 Proverbs 21:1

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turn eth it whithersoever he will.

Whether we are speaking of the pharaohs of Egypt or the kings of Babylon, the chairman in China or the president of America, any ruler is there only as God allows him to be (John 19:10, 11). In reality, although they seem powerful in our perspective, they're really only puppets for God's sovereign purpose.

Caesar Augustus was one of the greatest leaders of all time, at least in the eyes of man. When he decided to tax the whole world, he no doubt felt potent as he ordered the entire world to go to the cities of their birth. In reality, however, who was pulling the strings of Caesar Augustus' heart? God. You see, when Jesus was about to be born, Mary was in the Galilee area in the city of Nazareth. Yet Micah had declared that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David (5:2). So what would compel Mary and Joseph

to make the journey to Bethlehem? God the Father simply pulled the strings of His puppet, Caesar Augustus, to order everyone to their home towns to be taxed. And in so doing, Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem, perfectly fulfilling Micah's prophecy.

Because God is on the throne, we don't have to panic about government policies. Yes, we are to pray for our leaders. Yes, we are to be engaged as citizens of this country. But we're not to perspire, pout, panic, or plot. Instead, we're to pray, knowing that God is in complete control. And as we do, we'll be at peace.

Proverbs 21:2
Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.

Although every man thinks he can justify what he's doing, God sees the heart. Therefore, He's the only One qualified to judge a man. So I leave the judging with Him. It's His responsibility to judge and ours to love.

Proverbs 21:3
To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

How we live is more important than what we give.

> Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.
>
> Matthew 23:23

The Pharisees were very careful to tithe ten percent of everything they had. They even counted out the seeds of spices and gave one of every ten to God. They were meticulous in this matter. But Jesus told them that, in addition to tithing, they should have been attentive to the heart of the law—wise counsel, mercy, and faith.

Proverbs 21:4
An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin.

Isaiah tells us that, apart from Jesus, even the best we can do is no better than filthy rags (64:6), even if it's something as seemingly innocent as plowing a field. We need to be continually cleansed by the blood of Jesus because sin taints everything we do.

Proverbs 21:5
The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want.

The one who considers carefully will end up with plenty. But the one who is in a hurry will end up lacking.

Proverbs 21:6
The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death.

That which I achieve by being deceitful or manipulative won't last and will ultimately lead only to disaster.

Proverbs 21:7
The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; because they refuse to do judgment.

Those who rip people off in one way or another will themselves be destroyed in the process.

Proverbs 21:8
The way of man is froward and strange: but as for the pure, his work is right.

"You'll know a tree by its fruit," Jesus said, "not by what a person says, but by what they actually do" (see Matthew 12:33).

Proverbs 21:9
It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.

If a man is living with a contentious woman, always allowing tensions and arguments to arise, he would be better off living in an attic. This isn't an indictment against women. It's a warning against being discontent in your single state, thinking marriage is the ultimate solution.

Proverbs 21:10–12
The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes. When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise: and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge. The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked: but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness.

When the cynic is punished, others learn by watching what happens to him. Do jail terms deter crime? The Bible teaches they do because when the evil man is punished the simple man wises up. If you're wise, however, you won't have to learn by watching someone else or by seeing your own situation erode. You can learn directly from the Word.

Proverbs 21:13
Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.

Many times people wonder why God doesn't seem to answer their prayers. Here is one of the reasons the Bible gives. That is, if we ignore the cry of the poor, when we cry in our own time of need, we won't be heard. But we're too busy or self-absorbed to answer them. Our text tells us that if we're not compassionate toward others, our prayers can indeed be hindered.

Proverbs 21:14
A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath.

"Pray for your enemies," Jesus said (see Matthew 5:44). He also said, "When you pray in secret, your Father will reward you openly" (see Matthew 6:6). Therefore, the best gift I can give my enemy is to pray for him. And as I do, the reward will be that, whether or not the situation with him changes, my heart toward him will.

Proverbs 21:15, 16
It is joy to the just to do judgment: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity. The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.

Those who neglect meeting together for worship, Bible study, and prayer still go to church. It's called the congregation of the dead.

Proverbs 21:17
He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.

The word translated "pleasure" is literally "sport." If you live for sports and fancy dining, you'll not be rich. This speaks not only of finances, but of priority. If it's more important to you to go skiing than to study the Scripture, to play racquetball than to pray, your soul will be impoverished.

Proverbs 21:18, 19
The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the transgressor for the upright. It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.

With 1,000 wives and concubines, Solomon could speak with authority about women.

Proverbs 21:20
There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up.

Concerning earthly finances, it is the wise man who saves and the foolish man who spends money as fast as he makes it. The same thing can be said spiritually, for Jesus said we are to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20).

Proverbs 21:21
He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour.

People in any culture generally fall into one of two categories: Pharisee or fool. A Pharisee is committed to righteousness but shows no mercy. A fool, on the other hand, shows mercy to everyone but has no regard for righteousness. The way to have a successful life is to hold righteousness and mercy in balance by walking righteously yourself and showing mercy to everyone else.

Proverbs 21:22, 23
A wise man scaleth the city of the mighty, and casteth down the strength of the confidence thereof. Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.

Here we see another recurring theme in the Book of Proverbs. That is, if you know how to keep your mouth shut, you'll keep your soul from all kinds of problems. Take a tip from nature: Your ears aren't made to close, but your mouth is.

Proverbs 21:24–26
Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath. The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not.

The lazy man looks for what he can take, but the righteous man looks for what he can give.

Proverbs 21:27

The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?

If a person gives a sacrifice to God but only to bribe or manipulate Him, it's an abomination to God. God should be worshiped for who He is, not for what He can do.

Proverbs 21:28
A false witness shall perish: but the man that heareth speaketh constantly.

The word translated "constantly" doesn't refer to one who never stops talking, but to the one whose speech is constant, or consistent. In other words, the man who is heard is the man who speaks with consistency.

Proverbs 21:29
A wicked man hardeneth his face: but as for the upright, he directeth his way.

The wicked man is stubborn, but the upright man considers his way and says, "Maybe I was wrong. Maybe there's a better plan." He considers his way. The wicked are stubborn. The upright are flexible.

Proverbs 21:30
There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD.

When I argue with God, I lose. When I fight against God, I lose. God never loses. The outcome is already determined. God always wins. Therefore, anything contrary to the Word—no matter how wise and mystical it might seem—is destined to fail.

Proverbs 21:31
The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the LORD.

We are to prepare for battle, to ready ourselves for whatever undertaking faces us, but we must never forget that if we're successful, it will be solely because the Lord came through. Without Him, I can't. Without Me, He won't. It's a partnership that will last throughout eternity.



22 Proverbs 22:1

A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.

When Solomon said a good name is more important than wealth, he knew what he was talking about, for no man has been wealthier than he.

The story is told that, as Alexander the Great reviewed his troops one day, one of his soldiers slouched a bit.

"What's your problem?" Alexander asked him.

The soldier explained that he had been out on the town the night before.

"What's your name?" Alexander asked.

"Alexander," the soldier answered.

The general said, "Either change your conduct or change your name."

We have a good name because we carry the Lord's name. It's an important responsibility and a tremendous privilege.

Proverbs 22:2

The rich and poor meet together: the LORD is the maker of them all.

God is the Father only of those who receive His Son (John 1:12). Yet, although He is not the Father of all men, He is the Creator of all men, rich and poor alike. Poverty is not indicative of sin or iniquity. In fact, it has been said that the greatest test of character is how a man handles either wealth or poverty. They're both equally difficult. Jesus chose to be poor, and I believe

He is calling the church today to a greater compassion and greater involvement with those who are poor, both in spirit and in material goods.

Proverbs 22:3
A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.

The prudent man foresees evil and he flees it. The simple man, on the other hand, just gets sucked in.

Proverbs 22:4
By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life.

Walking in awe of God and in humility before people results in a rich, honorable life.

Proverbs 22:5, 6
Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward: he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them. Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

The implication of this passage is that if you train up a child in the way he should go, even when he's old, he'll keep walking in it. There's a difference between training and teaching. A teacher tells what to do. A trainer shows how to do it. "Follow me as I follow Christ," Paul would say (1 Corinthians 11:1). "Walk in my footsteps. Do what I do."

Notice that we are to train up our child in the way *he* should go—not in the way *we* wish he'd go. Dads, we're particularly vulnerable to making our sons walk in the way we think they should go. But wise is the dad who studies his kids carefully to see how the Lord made them specifically. Parenting is not so much about molding as it is about unfolding.

Proverbs 22:7
The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.

If you're constantly borrowing, you'll always be in a subservient position and therefore prone to bitterness.

Proverbs 22:8
He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail.

Do you get angry easily? It could be because you're putting your time, treasure, and talent in things that are empty. When I get angry, I have to say, "Forgive me, Lord. I've been planting my seed in the wrong garden."

Proverbs 22:9
He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.

The term "bountiful eye" should read "single eye." "If your eye be single," Jesus said, "your whole body is full of light. But if your eye be evil, your whole body is full of darkness" (see Matthew 6:22, 23). What does it mean to have an evil eye? According to Proverbs 28:22, having an evil eye means wanting to be rich. A single eye, on the other hand, speaks of generosity. Jesus says that the way a man handles his resources, the way he cares for the poor, will affect his entire character. Unfortunately, being generous seems to run crosscurrent with our present culture, where the goal is to obtain as many goods as we can for ourselves.

Proverbs 22:10
Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease.

When Jesus told Jairus his daughter was not dead but sleeping, Mark tells us he was laughed to scorn (5:40). Jesus would indeed heal Jairus' daughter, but not before he cast out the mockers. Mockers and scorners that question God's promises and goodness can take up residence within my own heart, as well. If I want to see the Lord work, if I want to see Him bring hopes that appear dead to life, I must cast out the mockers and scorners by claiming the Word with faith.

Proverbs 22:11
He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.

Some people have pure hearts but lack grace. Others have grace but lack pure hearts. If you have both, however, you'll be embraced by whoever is in power because purity and grace are an unbeatable combination. The key is to pray that your own heart would be pure and that you would be able to show limitless mercy and grace to others.

Proverbs 22:12, 13
The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor. The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.

The slothful man always finds reasons for not stepping out. The slothful man will stay inside and miss the opportunity to move out for God, failing to understand that while our enemy is indeed a lion (1 Peter 5:8), we have within us the power of the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5).

It was fear of the enemy that kept the Israelites out of the Promised Land (Numbers 13:32, 33). But they eventually entered the Land, only to discover that, all along, their enemies were afraid of them and their God (Joshua 2:9–11). Oh, if we only realized that, truly, greater is He that is within us than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4).

Proverbs 22:14, 15
The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the LORD shall fall therein. Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.

Regardless of what psychologists say in any given era, God's Word specifically tells us that a child's heart is inherently, innately in need of correction. That is why it has been wisely said that much of child rearing is knowing which end to pat and when.

Proverbs 22:16

He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want.

Our tendency is to give gifts to people who are above us in order to impress them. But rarely are they as impressed as we hope. It is by investing in the poor that we find true satisfaction.

Proverbs 22:17–21
Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge. For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips. That thy trust may be in the LORD, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee. Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?

"I've written these things down," Solomon says, "so that you'll be wise and that you'll share this wisdom with others."

Proverbs 22:22, 23
Rob not the poor, because he is poor: neither oppress the afflicted in the gate: For the LORD will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.

Why does the Lord have such a heart for the poor? Because He Himself chose to be poor (Matthew 8:20). Could I suggest an experiment? Next time you want to go out to dinner or to a movie, give money to a poor person instead and see if you don't find more satisfaction from giving it away than any movie or dinner could bring you.

Proverbs 22:24, 25
Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.

Don't be friends with angry people because you'll start to agree with them. Anger and bitterness are contagious.

Proverbs 22:26, 27
Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts. If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee?

If you get involved in financial entanglements, you might not lose your bed, but you'll most likely lose some sleep.

Proverbs 22:28
Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.

The reference here is to Deuteronomy 19:14 in which the Lord prohibits changing the boundaries or borders He established. I believe we are not to change spiritual boundaries or borders. I'm always leery when someone says he has a new truth to share or a new insight from the Word no one has ever seen. There are solid boundaries given to us concerning how to interpret the Bible and how to extract meaning from it. Both individually and corporately we err if we declare the old boundaries to be irrelevant.

Proverbs 22:29
Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.

If you're diligent in your business, you'll be successful. If you're diligent in doing what the Lord would have you do, one day you'll stand before the King of kings and hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21).



23

Proverbs 23:1–3
When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is be

fore thee: And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat.

When Daniel and his three friends were invited to eat of the king's meat and delicacies, they opted out and thrived as a result (Daniel 1). I can't help but think they did this on the basis of this Scripture. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will bring all things to our remembrance (John 14:26). But He can't bring to remembrance that which hasn't been stored in the memory. That is why it's so important to read the Word constantly. Even though you might not be able to make application at the time, down the line, the Holy Spirit can bring it to mind and make application at the perfect time.

Proverbs 23:4
Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom.

Don't use your mental abilities to try to figure out how to amass more and more riches. Did Solomon labor to be rich? On the contrary, when he could have anything he wanted, he didn't ask for wealth. He asked for wisdom.

Proverbs 23:5
Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.

In Scripture, we see money either falling through holes (Haggai 1:6) or flying away with wings. Yet they who wait on the Lord shall themselves mount up with wings as eagles (Isaiah 40:31). Credit is based upon impatience. Therefore, wait upon the Lord, gang. He'll bless in due season.

Proverbs 23:6–8
Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats: For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee. The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words.

As seen in Proverbs 28:22, the evil eye speaks of a lack of generosity. Here, Solomon says if a person doesn't make the same kinds of offers to the poor, the unknown, the person in the back, as he does to the wealthy, he is not to be trusted because his heart is not right.

Proverbs 23:9
Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.

People either want to know truth or they don't. They can't be argued into it. Therefore, don't waste your time talking to someone who only wants to argue.

Proverbs 23:10, 11
Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: For their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee.

In Solomon's day, people were not to go into the fields of the fatherless to take advantage of their situation and rip them off. In our day, we're not to look at another's calamity as an opportunity to better our own situation.

Proverbs 23:12
Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge.

Notice that Solomon doesn't tell us to apply our mind to instruction. Rather, we're to apply our heart. As we've discovered in school, if we apply our mind only, we'll forget what we put there as soon as the test is over. But if it's a subject that intrigues us, we'll retain the information.

Proverbs 23:13, 14
Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.

Solomon isn't talking about beating or bruising one's child because Paul will later prohibit fathers from provoking their kids to wrath (Ephesians 6:4). This verse speaks of the awesome privilege and responsibility we have to train our children carefully and consistently.

Proverbs 23:15–17
My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine. Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things. Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long.

What is the fear of God? Being afraid of doing anything that would grieve Him, not because you're intimidated by Him but because you're in love with Him.

Proverbs 23:18
For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off.

In all my years of ministry, I have yet to hear someone voice regret over not sinning more. Yet multiplied thousands of times I have heard people express deep regret over the sins of their past. Don't envy sinners because sin brings nothing but despair and death. On the other hand, you will never once be disappointed by serving, loving, and obeying the Lord.

Proverbs 23:19–21
Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.

Overdrinking, overeating, and oversleeping result in poverty both spiritually and materially. It is the one who seeks God early who finds Him (Proverbs 8:17).

Proverbs 23:22–25

Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old. Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding. The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice.

Do whatever it takes to get truth, instruction, knowledge, and wisdom. It takes work, but God tells us that if we pay the price and don't give up, we'll be a source of joy to our heavenly Father as well as to our earthly parents.

Proverbs 23:26
My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.

Solomon was able to say, "Don't just listen to what I say. See how I live. Watch what I do with my free time. Observe how I align my priorities." What a statement. How my heart desires to be able to say this.

Proverbs 23:27, 28
For a whore is a deep ditch; and a strange woman is a narrow pit. She also lieth in wait as for a prey, and increaseth the transgressors among men.

I believe it is more than coincidental that immediately after telling his son to observe his ways, Solomon warns about the immoral woman.

Many times, parents feel they can't encourage their kids to walk in purity because of the sin in their own past. But here, it's as if Solomon says, "Learn even from the mistakes I've made."

A hypocrite is one who says, "Do as I say, not as I do."

A mentor says, "Do what I say, not what I used to do. Look at my scars and learn from them."

Proverbs 23:29–32
Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek

mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.

Wine looks so pretty in the goblet. The commercials are so enticing. The jingles are so catchy. It seems so chic to have a drink in your hand. But it has a bite.

Proverbs 23:33–35
Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

Alcohol causes men to lust after strange women, to say perverse things, to end up in brawls. Yet even after all of this, the foolish man says, "Pour me another one," completely unaware of the toll it's taking.

Yes, all things are lawful for the believer, but not all things are wise (see 1 Corinthians 10:23). Of the approximately twenty million alcoholics in America, probably no one set out to be one. Everyone thought he could handle it.



24 Proverbs 24:1 (a)
Be not thou envious against evil men . . .

We're not to envy evil men. Who are evil men? Anyone who doesn't have the righteousness of Jesus Christ, for even though someone might be a nice guy, the Bible says none are righteous (Romans 3:10). The only way we're righteous is if we are in Christ, washed by the blood of the Lamb, robed with *His* righteousness (Isaiah 61:10).

Proverbs 24:1 (b)
. . . neither desire to be with them.

Didn't Jesus spend time with sinners? Yes, but in every instance, they were radically changed by Him. Therefore, if you want to hang around sinners so that a powerful witness can be expressed, if the atmosphere of the gathering changes because of your presence, that's one thing. But if the sinful atmosphere is changing you, that's something else altogether, and you should not be there.

Proverbs 24:2
For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief.

At the heart of the world of which people are often so envious is nothing but destruction.

Proverbs 24:3, 4
Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established: And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches.

Instead of spending time with evil men, build your house, your family, with wisdom. It will be a rich place to be. God will bless.

Proverbs 24:5
A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength.

A man of knowledge is stronger even than the man known for his strength.

No one knew this better than Solomon's father, David. If he was counting on his strength to beat Goliath, he would have been laughably outmatched. Instead, he beat Goliath with his knowledge—his knowledge of the Lord (1 Samuel 17:45–47).

Proverbs 24:6

For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety.

You'll know how to charge into the battle. You'll know how to engage the enemy. You'll know the direction in which you need to go if you have the wisdom that comes from a multitude of counselors. Every one of us has the wisdom of forty wise counselors at our disposal. The wisdom of Isaiah, Moses, John, Peter, James, Ezekiel sits on our nightstand, waiting to direct us. On top of that, we have the Wonderful Counselor living within (Isaiah 9:6).

Proverbs 24:7
Wisdom is too high for a fool: he openeth not his mouth in the gate.

The Hebrew word translated "fool" literally means "rebel," while the gate refers to the place where wisdom was dispensed and counsel given in Solomon's day.

There can be a tendency for us to be critical or caustic especially in our youth, but according to this verse, that type of individual will never sit in the gate. That is, he will never rise to a position of true leadership or authority.

Proverbs 24:8
He that deviseth to do evil shall be called a mischievous person.

The word mischievous literally means "troubling one." When you see a mischievous person, you know trouble is coming. Therefore, it would do us well to ask ourselves if we want to be people who others dread to see coming.

Proverbs 24:9, 10
The thought of foolishness is sin: and the scorner is an abomination to men. If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.

If you faint when trouble comes, if you back away from the battle, fearing its difficulty, your weakness is revealed. Don't pray for an easier life. Pray that you'll be a stronger person. Trials don't make or break a person. They're simply a gauge to show you where you're at in your walk with the Lord.

> If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? . . .
>
> Jeremiah 12:5 (a)

In other words, if you're exhausted by the problem facing you today, what will you do when even bigger problems come your way?

Whatever I'm going through today is strengthening me for what will come tomorrow. God is faithful to not allow us to be tempted above what we're able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). He will never overburden us. Therefore, our moaning and crying is not an indication of the heaviness of our burdens but the weakness of our backs.

> **Proverbs 24:11, 12**
> **If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?**

Although you can say you weren't aware of the plight of those around you, God knows the truth. We can fool each other, but we can't fool Him.

We know there are people in our neighborhoods headed for hell. How can we ignore this? According to Ezekiel 3:18, 19, if they ignore our warnings, we'll be free from their blood. But if we don't warn them at all, we'll be in some way held responsible. That's why Paul was able to say, "I am free from the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26). In other words, he had shared the gospel with everyone he possibly could.

> **Proverbs 24:13, 14**

My son, eat thou honey, because it is good; and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste: So shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul: when thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off.

Just as honey is sweet and pleasant to eat, you'll find that once you acquire a taste for wisdom and understanding, you will want more and more and more. Start reading the Word, start studying the Scripture, start meditating and you'll develop an appetite for it. But an appetite needs to be cultivated. If I don't have a hunger for the Word, the reason is because I'm not in the Word. When I neglect my devotional life, my appetite for the Word diminishes.

Proverbs 24:15, 16
Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting place: For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief.

The difference between a just man and a wicked man is that when a just man falls, he gets back up, but when a wicked man falls, he gives up. Peter fell many times. He cursed the Lord, denied the Lord, and spoke out of line. But each time, he got back up. On the other hand, when Judas fell, rather than get up, he gave up (Matthew 27:5).

The just man isn't the perfect man. The just man is simply the one who says, "I know I've fallen, but I've got to keep going in the Lord. I love Him. I need Him. I want to be more like Him."

Proverbs 24:17, 18
Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him.

If the Lord sees you finding joy when your enemy stumbles, He'll turn His wrath from your enemy and bless him just to teach you a lesson. Don't ever rejoice at someone else's misfortune. It displeases the Lord.

Proverbs 24:19, 20
Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked; For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out.

Don't worry if the evil man seems to be getting away with a lot. His days are numbered. His time is limited.

Proverbs 24:21, 22
My son, fear thou the LORD and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change: For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?

"Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king," Peter would write.

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God," Paul would declare (Romans 13:1).

Proverbs 24:23–26
These things also belong to the wise. It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment. He that saith unto the wicked, Thou are righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him: But to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them. Every man shall kiss his lips that giveth a right answer.

The precedent for fair judgment was set from Israel's earliest days, when Moses declared, "Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it" (Deuteronomy 1:17).

Proverbs 24:27
Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house.

In other words, Solomon said to make sure that necessities were met before conveniences were added, which, in his day and climate, would have included a house as opposed to a tent.

Proverbs 24:28, 29
Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause; and deceive not with thy lips. Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work.

While there is never justification for being a false witness, bringing even a just cause against one's neighbor is wrong if it is done out of malice or for retaliation.

Proverbs 24:30–32
I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction.

Solomon considered the thorns, nettles, and broken fence in a field and vineyard and concluded it was the result of laziness and foolishness. Jesus, on the other hand, called His followers to consider the birds of the air and the lilies of the field and to conclude that we serve a God who lovingly cares for His creation (Luke 12:26–30).

Proverbs 24:33, 34
Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.

Observing the field and vineyard of the lazy and foolish, Solomon said, "I saw what sleep can do." In other words, your dreams will never come true until you get out of bed!

25

Proverbs 25:1
These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.

In chapters 25 through 29, we come to proverbs that were composed by Solomon but compiled by Hezekiah. Hezekiah ruled Judah approximately two hundred fifty years after Solomon. So it would seem as though as Hezekiah's men read through some old literature, they came across additional proverbs. In this, I am reminded that the things we say today might not have impact today—but generations from now, maybe someone will read an entry in our journal, the notes in our Bible, or a letter we wrote and be impacted by it.

In 2 Kings 13, we read that, after Elisha died, some Moabite soldiers in the area placed the body of one of their dead comrades in his grave. When the body of the dead soldier touched Elisha's bones, the man sprang back to life. Talk about a powerful personality! Even after he was dead and gone, Elisha still brought life to others. How I pray that would be true of you and me.

Proverbs 25:2
It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.

In Deuteronomy 29:29, we read that the secret things belong to the Lord. He sees and knows things we don't see and cannot know. So while kings and presidents have to hold hearings and call for investigations to determine a course of action, God works in secrecy because He knows everything.

Our Father wants truth to actually be a part of us. How does this happen? By our searching for that which He has concealed. It might take a day, a week, a year, or ten—but when I find the answer to a problem or a question through mining the riches of the Word and waiting on the Lord in prayer, the truth I glean becomes an integral part of my being. I suggest the reason Jesus spoke truth in parables was partially so that His disciples would have to see Him for further instruction. Truly, it's an honor and a privilege to search out the things of God.

Proverbs 25:3
The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable.

Just as one can't measure the height of heaven or the depth of the earth, the reason kings do what they do is often a mystery, as well. Solomon is a king and he knows that even his heart is unsearchable. We're not going to know why certain decisions are made any more than we'll know how high heaven is or how deep the earth is.

This is true of the King of kings, as well. In Romans 11:33, we read that His heart is unsearchable and His ways past finding out. And yet we can nonetheless be at peace because He gives us a peace that *passes* our meager ability to understand His ways (Philippians 4:7).

Proverbs 25:4
Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer.

When we ask the Lord to use us, He says, "Alright. But the impurities have to go." How does this happen? The same way impurities are removed from silver: by burning off the dross. The refiner would know this process was complete when he could see the reflection of his own face in the liquid. When is the work done in us? When the reflection of Jesus is seen in us, when His glory and grace are reflected from us.

In Jeremiah 15:19, Jeremiah was told that his ministry was to extract the precious from the vile. In other words, it's as if the Lord said, "Don't become hard-hearted and bitter, Jeremiah. Even though you must share the truth, look for the precious." Jesus, of course, modeled this perfectly.

Proverbs 25:5
Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness.

"Get rid of evil advisors," Solomon said. To this end, it would do us well to seriously consider where we get our counsel and who our role models are.

Proverbs 25:6, 7
Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: For better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen.

"Don't seek to be honored," Solomon said. "If you take the best seat, you'll be embarrassed if you're asked to move."

"Seekest thou great things for thyself?" the Lord asks. "Seek them not" (Jeremiah 45:5).

Jesus said the same thing . . .

> When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.
>
> Luke 14:8–11

Don't seek to be great. Instead, seek to greatly honor God because everything you have and are was given to you by Him (John 3:27).

Proverbs 25:8–10
Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame. Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another: Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away.

If you have a problem with a neighbor, go talk to him quietly, personally, privately. If you make a big deal about it by taking it to court, confrontation

will bring revelation that will lead to humiliation because he'll start talking about you and revealing things you'll regret.

Proverbs 25:11
A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.

Most likely, the reference here is to oranges, which grow in Israel. A wise word spoken at the right time is like a juicy orange.

Proverbs 25:12
As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear.

If you have a heart that wants to obey the Lord and learn of Him, you'll receive the word of a wise reprover as gladly as you would receive a beautiful, gold earring.

Proverbs 25:13
As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he refresheth the soul of his masters.

An employee who delivers the message for his employer, one who does right for his boss, is as refreshing as a cool day in the heat of summer. If you want to be a blessing, bless your boss. The task might seem insignificant or trivial, but do it anyway. You'll not only be a blessing to him, but you'll glorify the Lord (Colossians 3:23).

Proverbs 25:14
Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain.

Fads don't produce the rain they promise. Ministries based upon miracles cause people to drift. But the Word of God is solid and practical and wonderful. That's why we're committed to learning the Scriptures and hearing what God says to us in a practical, relatable way.

Proverbs 25:15, 16
By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone. Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it.

According to Leviticus 2:11, sacrifices were not to be offered with honey. Why? Because under intense heat, honey breaks down. That's true of us, as well. It's easy for us to be sweet as long as things are relatively easy. But when the pressure's on and trials come, our natural sweetness goes out the window. The sacrifices speak of Christ. They don't speak of natural sweetness. Therefore, don't rely on the sweetness of your own abilities or personality. Rely only on the sweetness of the fruit of the Spirit.

Proverbs 25:17
Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.

While the possibility exists that we can overstay the welcome of our friends, Jesus is a Friend whose patience we can never exhaust, whose door is always open, whose desire is not that we drop in for a visit, but that we take up residence in Him.

Proverbs 25:18, 19
A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow. Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.

By bearing false witness, a man can damage another just as surely as if he beat him with a club, sliced him with a sword, or pierced him from a safe distance with an arrow. Shading the truth, raising doubt, causing suspicion results in death in one way or another.

Proverbs 25:20–22
As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart. If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give

him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee.

In Romans 12, Paul quotes this passage as the way we are to deal with our enemies. That is, if he's hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. In Bible times, when women needed coals to reignite a fire for cooking or heating, they would borrow them from their neighbor and carry them back in earthen jars on their heads. Thus, this injunction wasn't a way to wipe someone out, but to warm someone up—not about blasting, but about blessing.

Proverbs 25:23
The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue.

If gossip was met with a stern look rather than an eager ear, it would be driven away.

Proverbs 25:24
It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house.

This is a verbatim repetition of Proverbs 21:9. Again, I believe this is not so much an indictment against women, but against thinking that marriage will automatically solve all problems. Only the Lord can do that.

Proverbs 25:25
As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.

We are ones who have indeed heard good news from a far country. Who is the Messenger from the far country? Who is the One who has brought us cold, living water for our dry and thirsty souls? Jesus Christ. He came to give good news. And now we, too, can become messengers, relaying the good news of the gospel—that sin is forgiven, that no matter how brutal one's mistakes might have been, they have been covered by the blood of Jesus.

Proverbs 25:26
A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring.

In contrast to the cold, refreshing water of verse 25, impure water benefits no one. So too, the Lord can't use a righteous man who compromises with wickedness.

Proverbs 25:27
It is not good to eat much honey: so for men to search their own glory is not glory.

Like eating too much honey, boasting will make you sick.

Proverbs 25:28
He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.

If you can't control your temper or your spirit, you're like a city that has no defenses. And it will lead to destruction.



26

Proverbs 26:1, 2
As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool. As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come.

Fools curse freely, but, just as a bird flying in the distance doesn't affect you, a curse without cause won't harm you.

Proverbs 26:3–5
A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back. Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

In verse 4, Solomon says, “Answer not a fool.” In verse 5, he says, “Answer a fool.” Is he contradicting himself? No. In Numbers 20, we see an example of the wisdom of verse 4, for when the Israelites complained yet again of being thirsty, we read that Moses answered them “according to their folly.” That is, he was as angry with them as they were with him when he said, “You rebels, must we fetch water out of the rock?” (Numbers 20:10). And, because he reacted in a foolish manner, he wasn’t allowed to go into the Promised Land.

In verse 5, however, Job shows us the wisdom of answering a fool for the purpose of correction, for when his wife told him to curse God and die, he said, “You’re speaking like a foolish woman. We have been blessed over the years. Therefore, we must also now embrace this difficulty” (see Job 2:10). And Job’s wife stood corrected.

Proverbs 26:6–8
He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off the feet, and drinketh damage. The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools. As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a fool.

A foolish person—one who fails to acknowledge God—is incapable of accomplishing anything of true value.

Proverbs 26:9–11
As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools. The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors. As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.

It is one thing for a person to fail or to fall. It is another for a person to continually return to his folly over and over again. That’s what separates a true believer from a false believer.

The prodigal son inhabited the same pen as the pigs. But eventually he came to his senses and went home. The pigs, however, remained in the mud. As Christians, there are times when we fall, when we find ourselves like the

prodigal. But the difference between you and the fool is that the fool returns to his vomit, remains in the pigpen.

There's only one thing worse than a fool, and verse 12 tells us what that is . . .

Proverbs 26:12
Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him.

The only person more hopeless than a fool is a person who thinks he's wise when he's not. When the chest swells, the brain shrinks. Puffing out your chest and thinking you're wise is actually worse than foolishness.

Proverbs 26:13
The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets.

The slothful man always finds a reason not to step out in faith.

Proverbs 26:14, 15
As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed. The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth.

The slothful man is so lazy that even eating is hard work for him. Sadly, the same can be said of us sometimes when we neglect to feed our souls from the Word.

Proverbs 26:16, 17
The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason. He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.

Following a battle in which he was victorious, Amaziah, king of Judah, proceeded to pick a fight with Jehoash, king of Israel. Jehoash responded to

his challenge by saying, “Why meddle to your own hurt?” But Amaziah wouldn’t listen—and Judah was routed in the ensuing battle (2 Kings 14).

Proverbs 26:18, 19
As a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, So is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport?

The guy who carries on some kind of a deceitful line and then says I was just kidding is like a madman playing with fire.

Proverbs 26:20
Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.

When does strife cease? When people stop talking. Just like fire can’t burn where there is no wood, so strife can’t continue where there are no talebearers. When gossip comes to you, refuse to listen. If gossip found no place to land, it would just go back to its place of origin and disappear.

Proverbs 26:21, 22
As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

The word “wounds” is more correctly translated “dainty morsels.” In other words, a talebearer loves to eat the garbage of gossip.

Proverbs 26:23–26
Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross. He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him; When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart. Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation.

This speaks of the perils and pitfalls of hypocrisy.

Proverbs 26:27
Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.

He who digs a pit to trap someone else will himself go down. Likewise, the stone he intended to cast at another will find its target in him.

Proverbs 26:28
A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.

Flattery will ruin you and your ministry. Whatever your calling might be, whatever part you play in the body of Christ, watch out for flattery. We are to be encouragers, but not flatterers. What's the difference? Encouragement means that, with integrity, I am building *you* up and acknowledging what the Lord is doing in your life. Flattery, on the other hand, is to cause you to think better of *me,* regardless of what the truth may actually be.



27

Proverbs 27:1
Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

James would say the same thing . . .

> Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.
>
> James 4:13–15

We don't know what tomorrow holds. Days that prove to be the most significant are most often the ones of which we have no warning. That is why the wise man extracts the full blessing of God from each day.

Proverbs 27:2
Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.

The person who truly has the right to boast never does. Therefore, my boasting proves I don't have anything to boast about. Jesus never boasted. In fact, He did just the opposite (Mark 7:36; 8:30; 9:9).

Proverbs 27:3, 4
A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's wrath is heavier than them both. Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?

Wrath is cruel and anger is only one letter away from danger. But envy is worst of all. In fact, it would be envy that led directly to the Cross (Mark 15:10).

Proverbs 27:5, 6
Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

If I truly care about you, I will encourage you in your strong points, but I will also, in love, deal with the areas that are weak, wanting to see them corrected in your life. The people who love you the most are the ones who don't flatter you. They're the ones who encourage you, yes, but also rebuke you in love, caring about you enough to point out your weaknesses.

Treasure the friends that occasionally wound you. If you don't receive their correction correctly, they will stop giving it. And you will be the poorer.

Proverbs 27:7

The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.

If you're full, even the sweetest things won't bring satisfaction to you. Many people in our culture are so pampered that nothing satisfies them short of hummingbird wing or peacock tongue. They have to have something exotic. Spiritually the same thing is true. I can't help but wonder if we as Christians haven't been stuffed on so many sermons and studies that we're not satisfied by the Word anymore. We become connoisseurs of fine sermons. We dissect and analyze teachings carefully, but nothing ministers to our hearts deeply. Why? We're stuffed and fat. The solution? Start sharing and ministering, witnessing and teaching, caring and loving. If you're giving out, you'll come back into just about any Bible study and it will be sweet to you because you'll be hungry. Start serving and giving, and you'll love the Word again.

Proverbs 27:8, 9
As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place. Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.

Good counsel from a good friend is sweet indeed.

Proverbs 27:10–12
Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off. My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me. A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished.

One reason Bible prophecy is so important is that it allows us to foresee the evil of the difficult days that are coming upon us, to hide ourselves in the Lord, and to tell others to do the same.

Proverbs 27:13, 14

Take his garment that is surety for a stranger, and take a pledge of him for a strange woman. He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him.

There's a time to bless with a loud voice. But there's also a time to be silently saintly.

Proverbs 27:15–17
A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike. Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind, and the ointment of his right hand, which bewrayeth itself. Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

Just like iron sharpening iron, so two friends can sharpen each other. But when sharpening takes place, sparks inevitably fly. It's a part of genuine friendship. Don't respond with hostility. Instead just realize you're being sharpened. It's hard on you, but good for you.

Proverbs 27:18–20
Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured. As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man. Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.

The eyes of man always want and desire more. As Andrew Carnegie noted, millionaires who laugh are extremely rare. Wealth is apt to take smiles away.

Proverbs 27:21, 22
As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise. Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.

Although foolishness in a child can be driven out by the rod of correction (Proverbs 22:15), even a mortar and pestle will not drive it from an adult. That is why child-rearing is at once an awesome privilege and responsibility.

Proverbs 27:23
Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.

Of course, no one exemplifies this better than our Good Shepherd, who calls us by name (John 10:3) and meets our every need (Psalm 23:1).

Proverbs 27:24–27
For riches are not for ever: and doth the crown endure to every generation? The hay appeareth, and the tender grass sheweth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered. The lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats are the price of the field. And thou shalt have goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance for thy maidens.

Even under his reign of prosperity, Solomon knew that both riches and his crown were transitory. But, for believers, this is not a message of doom —for with Habakkuk, we can say,

> Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.
>
> Habakkuk 3:17, 18

Amen!

28

Proverbs 28:1
The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.

The wicked feel guilty so they flee constantly, always feeling that they said or did something wrong, that this sin is going to ruin them, that that problem will plague them. The wicked flee even when there's no need to do so.

Much of psychology is based on transferring guilt. That is, the reason we lie is because someone lied to us, or the reason we steal is because our parents deprived us. The believer, however, has no need or reason to transfer guilt to another because all of His sin and guilt was transferred to Jesus, who willingly paid the price for it. How can we be bold as a lion? By realizing that we're righteous—not because of who we are, but because of where we are. We're in Christ Jesus and He is our righteousness.

Proverbs 28:2
For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof: but by a man of understanding and knowledge the state thereof shall be prolonged.

When the leaders of a nation lack integrity, the nation will experience instability.

Proverbs 28:3
A poor man that oppresseth the poor is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food.

If someone who is poor oppresses someone else who is poor, like a hard rain, he's a big drip, he's all wet. Certainly the poor should have compassion upon the poor.

We are poor in spirit. We realize the poverty, the inadequacy of our own lives. Therefore, we should be compassionate and forgiving of the problems, mistakes, and weaknesses of others.

In Matthew 18, we read of a king who forgave the debt of a man who owed him the equivalent of ten million dollars. Once exonerated, however,

the man found a person who owed him the equivalent of two thousand dollars and demanded full payment. When the king heard about this, he said to the man he had forgiven, "You will be cast into prison until you pay the full ten million dollars because, although I forgave you much, you wouldn't forgive another man little."

We have no right to hold anything against anyone else because we've been forgiven so much. So if I oppress others, come down on others, heap condemnation on others, I'm like the poor oppressing the poor—and I'm all wet.

Proverbs 28:4–6
They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them. Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the LORD understand all things. Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich.

It's better to be poor and upright than rich and perverse. Jesus taught us this in the story of a rich, unnamed man and a poor man named Lazarus. The rich man robed himself in regal garments and dined sumptuously while Lazarus begged for crumbs. The true difference between them, however, was not their financial status but their spiritual state. The rich man was evil; Lazarus, righteous. When the rich man died, he went to the place of the dead. When Lazarus died, he went to paradise. Seeing Lazarus across the great gulf that separated them, the rich man said, "Dip your finger in the water and cool my tongue. I'm tormented in the flame." But Lazarus was not allowed to cross the gulf (Luke 16).

Who was better off—the rich man who dined sumptuously on earth, but lived in torment eternally, or Lazarus, who begged for crumbs on earth, but dines at the King's table even now?

Proverbs 28:7–9
Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father. He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will

pity the poor. He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.

The prayer of the person who disregards the Word is an abomination because he'll ask for the wrong things. If God doesn't seem to answer your prayers or respond to your requests, it could be that, because you haven't spent time in His Word, you're asking for the wrong things. One of the secrets of answered prayer is to keep in the Word.

Proverbs 28:10
Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit: but the upright shall have good things in possession.

Although Daniel was unharmed in the lions' den, it was in that very pit that his accusers met their deaths (Daniel 6).

Proverbs 28:11, 12
The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out. When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory: but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden.

A poor but wise man is more insightful than a foolish man no matter how rich the foolish man may be.

Proverbs 28:13
He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Who has mercy? The one who both confesses and forsakes his sin. Who has problems? The one who covers his sin. Ask Achan. Nothing was to be plundered from the city of Jericho, but Achan buried a wedge of gold and a garment underneath his tent. When his sin was eventually discovered, he and his family died as a result (Joshua 7). The man who covers his sin shall not prosper. But where there is confession and repentance, there is mercy.

Proverbs 28:14 (a)
Happy is the man that feareth alway . . .

Happy is the people whose God is the Lord (Psalm 144:15). Therefore, because they fear doing anything that would bring dishonor to Him, they are happiest when walking in the fear of the Lord.

Proverbs 28:14 (b)
. . . but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.

Few things in history could be considered more disastrous than the ten plagues—the direct result of the hardness of Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 9:34, 35).

Proverbs 28:15, 16
As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people. The prince that wanteth understanding is also a great oppressor: but he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days.

Covetousness in the heart of a leader—be it for power, property, or prestige—hastens both his and his nation's downfall.

Proverbs 28:17, 18
A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him. Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once.

Violence and wickedness always lead to death of one kind or another. Righteousness, on the other hand, always eventually leads to life.

Proverbs 28:19 (a)
He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread . . .

The one who puts his hand to the plow, the one who engages in honest labor will be the one who has enough to nourish himself and others.

Proverbs 28:19 (b)
. . . but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough.

The word "vain" refers to a "soap bubble" mentality. That is, some people follow after the hot new idea, the get-rich-quick scheme. They follow the bubble until it bursts, and then follow another one. Unlike the one who tills the land, however, this person will always come up short.

Proverbs 28:20
A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.

If you're diligent, you'll have an abundance of blessing. But if you're trying to get rich quick, you'll be at fault.

Proverbs 28:21, 22
To have respect of persons is not good: for for a piece of bread that man will transgress. He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.

An evil eye in Scripture is a term which talks about an ungenerous spirit. Jesus taught about the single eye of the compassionate person, versus the evil eye of the selfish person (Matthew 6:22–23; Proverbs 28:22). If you're trying to get rich quick, the tendency will be to not help others in need. The person trying to make a fortune often loses compassion.

Proverbs 28:23
He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue.

If you rebuke someone, afterwards you'll find a stronger relationship being forged than if you had flattered that person.

Our family was recently adopted by a dog. For two and a half weeks, we asked around our neighborhood to see if he belonged to anyone or if anyone else wanted him. But if you saw him, you would know why there isn't a long

waiting line for him. Finally, my kids talked me into allowing him to stick around for awhile. We bought him food and gave him a place to sleep. He's a good dog—with one glaring weakness: He digs. He digs under our fence so strenuously that our back fence is now beginning to collapse. Now, I care enough about Pooch not to flatter him but to rebuke him. I realize that if he doesn't repent of this activity, he's headed for the Humane Society. Consequently, when I see him digging, I yell at him, clap my hands, or give him a swat. He puts his tail between his legs and slinks off under the porch, no doubt thinking I'm a cruel master. But he doesn't realize that I'm doing everything I can to save him from what he doesn't know is coming. In other words, I rebuke him because I care about him.

In rebuking someone, you run the risk of that person not liking you or being upset with you. But if you truly care about him, those are risks you're willing to take in order that he might ultimately do better.

Proverbs 28:24
Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression; the same is the companion of a destroyer.

This proverb reminds me of Jesus' indictment of those who refused to care for their parents, all the while claiming the law was on their side (Matthew 15:3–6).

Proverbs 28:25, 26
He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the LORD shall be made fat. He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.

"Yes, I know the Bible forbids this, but my heart tells me it's right," people say. Yet according to Jeremiah, the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (17:9). Therefore, wise is the man or woman who relies not on the feelings of their heart, but on the Word.

Proverbs 28:27

He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.

Throughout the Book of Proverbs, we are exhorted to be involved with the poor. You'll lack neither joy nor the work of the Spirit in your life if you're caring for, concerned about, and giving to the poor.

Proverbs 28:28
When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase.

Also seen in verse 12 of this chapter, as well as 11:10, Solomon draws a distinct line between the effects of righteousness and wickedness in a society.



29

Proverbs 29:1, 2
He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be de stroyed, and that without remedy. When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.

The reason people rejoice when the righteous are in authority is because righteous results in peace and safety whereas the result of wickedness is turmoil and danger.

Proverbs 29:3
Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance.

Of course the story of the prodigal son comes to mind. Although he spent his father's substance, when he "came to himself," when he embraced wisdom, so greatly did his father rejoice that he ran to meet him (Luke 15).

Proverbs 29:4

The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it.

This speaks of impartial judgment verses judgment based on bribery.

Proverbs 29:5
A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet.

Flattery has been rightly called the bread of fools. But somehow there's an insatiable appetite within each of us for it. We like flattery. Sometimes we fish for flattery. If we truly care about people, however, we'll encourage them not with flattery but with integrity.

Proverbs 29:6, 7
In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare: but the righteous doth sing and rejoice. The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: but the wicked regardeth not to know it.

The cause of the poor is something the righteous man considers. The wicked man, on the other hand, pretends he doesn't even see it.

Proverbs 29:8–10
Scornful men bring a city into a snare: but wise men turn away wrath. If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest. The bloodthirsty hate the upright: but the just seek his soul.

"Crucify Him!" the crowd cried. "We will not have this man rule over us" (Luke 19:14). They hated Jesus. But He sought the souls even of those who sought His life.

Proverbs 29:11
A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.

The technical meaning of the word "dumb" refers to one who is unable to speak. In reality, however, we've all known plenty of people who are dumb and speak a lot. The older and wiser a person gets, the less they talk but the more they say. In this regard, Mary was wise beyond her years, for rather than "uttering all her mind," she "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19).

Proverbs 29:12
If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked.

The literal meaning here is that if a ruler lies, his servants will follow his example and lie, as well.

Proverbs 29:13
The poor and the deceitful man meet together: the LORD lighteneth both their eyes.

In Proverbs 22:2, the poor man is contrasted with the rich man. Here, the poor man is contrasted with the deceitful man. All too often, deceitfulness and riches walk hand in hand (Matthew 13:22, 19:24).

Proverbs 29:14
The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever.

What a perfect description of the King of kings, for of Him it is said,

> Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy.
>
> Psalm 72:11–13

Proverbs 29:15–17
The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. When the wicked are multiplied,

transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall. Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.

Again, we see the importance of firm and consistent child-rearing—a recurrent theme throughout Proverbs. And, taken in context with the next verse, it is a matter of commitment to the future growth of our children rather than a desire to make life easier for ourselves today.

Proverbs 29:18
Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.

There's a difference between being a visionary and a reactionary. We are to be the former—men and women of vision.



***For topical study of Proverbs 29:18 entitled "Reactionary or Visionary," turn to page* 265.**

Proverbs 29:19–21
A servant will not be corrected by words: for though he understand he will not answer. Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him. He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become his son at the length.

"Henceforth I call you not servant; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth," Jesus said, "but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:15). A servant will not be corrected by words. But, as friends of our Lord, it is our privilege to be corrected by His Word.

Proverbs 29:22, 23

An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression. A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.

That the Lord honors humility should not surprise us for people are innately drawn to the humble man, whereas they try to distance themselves from the proud know-it-all.

Proverbs 29:24, 25
Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth it not. The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.

The fear of man is a snare, indeed. In the enemy city of Gath, David suddenly became frightened when he heard that the people recognized him as the one who slew Goliath. So he pretended to be insane. Spit ran down his beard as he clawed on the gates.

"Open the gates! Let that guy out!" Achish, the Philistine leader said. "We don't need another crazy person" (1 Samuel 29).

David was a brilliant, great man. Yet the fear of man caused him to act like an idiot. Don't be afraid of men. It is the fear of God that is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10). Therefore, only be concerned about what *He* is thinking.

Proverbs 29:26, 27
Many seek the ruler's favour; but every man's judgment cometh from the LORD. An unjust man is an abomination to the just: and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked.

Solomon would know first-hand about men seeking a ruler's favor. In reality, however, it's only the Lord's opinion that matters.

REACTIONARY OR VISIONARY?
A Topical Study of PROVERBS 29:18

People generally fall into one of two categories. First there is the reactionary. This individual reacts to the situations and circumstances around him. Then there is the visionary. The visionary relies on revelation. You will come across situations every day in which you must decide whether you're going to be a reactionary or a visionary—whether you're going to react to the situation or rely on revelation.

Parah, the Hebrew word translated "perish" in our text, literally means "to become uncovered, to loosen, or to run wild." How often I see this happen in my own life. If I'm only reacting, relying on what circumstances dictate, I find myself running wild, saying things I wish I hadn't. In every one of us there is a tendency to be reactionaries, but, praise God, He is reworking and making us into visionaries.

In John 18, we see an example of one who was a reactionary but who would become a visionary . . .

> *Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.*
>
> John 18:10

Approximately five hundred men had come to arrest Jesus, and Peter takes out his sword as if to take on all five hundred. But his aim was a bit off, for instead of chopping off any heads, he only sliced off an ear.

> *Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him, And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year.*
>
> John 18:11–13

Luke tells us that Jesus touched the ear of Malchus and healed him (22:51). Thus, the last miracle Jesus did on earth was to heal a man a well-meaning disciple had butchered with the sword. I see a lot of reactionaries letting the sword of the Word of God fly freely as they throw verses at each other indiscriminately.

Peter would indeed put away his sword. And then, filled with the Holy Spirit, we see a transformation take place in him. Previously he had a tendency to be a reactionary—reacting to circumstances and situations. But now, we'll see this same Peter become a visionary . . .

> *On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.*
>
> Acts 10:9–12

In a dream-like state, waiting for food to be prepared, Peter saw a sheet descend from heaven with food that, according to Leviticus 11, was unclean for Jews to eat.

> *And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.*
>
> Acts 10:13, 14

Told to eat the unclean meat, Peter refused.

> *And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold,*

the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.

Acts 10:15–22

Peter began as a reactionary, relying on the situation surrounding him, but ended as a visionary, receiving revelation divinely given to him.

How can you become a visionary? I suggest by taking the same three steps Peter took . . .

Preparation *for* Vision

Peter was in the place of prayer. That's where it always begins. You cannot be a visionary unless you're in a place of quietness and isolation.

When Habakkuk was struggling with issues and questions, the Lord gave him a specific vision to write down (Habakkuk 2:2). Where was Habakkuk when he received this vision? He was in a tower, waiting to hear from God (Habakkuk 2:1).

The importance of going to the housetop, of climbing the tower, of carving out a quiet time in a quiet place to seek the Lord cannot be overstated.

Illumination *Through* Vision

What the Lord told Peter seemed to contradict everything he had previously thought. “You want me to eat these unclean animals? How can that be?” he asked. So too, you’ll be surprised by what the Lord will reveal to you when you’re in the place of seeking His face. There will be fresh illumination and challenging application.

How we need this illumination. But, to receive it, we must be those who, like Peter, are willing to dialogue with the Lord about it.

Confirmation *of* Vision

After he was illuminated, we read that Peter "doubted in himself." Wouldn't you? I mean, if you were hungry and had a vision of food, wouldn't you think it was all in your head? But Peter's vision was confirmed by three men knocking at his door.

The Lord will also give you confirmation of your vision if it's of Him. If you truly take the time to seek the Lord, He'll send confirmation in one way or another.

I pray that the Lord will continue to instruct and expand us regarding vision so that the way we face life and its inevitable challenges isn't based upon our situation but upon revelation in order that we might truly become men and women of vision.



30

Proverbs 30:1

The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal,

This psalm was written by a man named Agur, whose name means "gatherer." He was one who gathered these proverbs and this was his contribution under the inspiration of the Spirit.

Proverbs 30:2–4

Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy. Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?

He begins his section by saying, "Who really knows God?"

Job said the same thing in chapter 38 of his book. "Who can speak with authority?" he asked. "Who has wisdom?"

Jesus tells us the answer. "No man has ascended into heaven," He said. "But the Son of man has descended" (see John 3:13). In other words, Jesus came from heaven to give us perfect revelation.

Proverbs 30:5
Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.

There are those who say that only part of the Bible is inspired—that it contains the Word of God, but it is not totally the Word of God. Here, however, we read that *every* word of God is pure.

"*All* Scripture is given by inspiration," Paul said (2 Timothy 3:16, italics added).

"Man shall not live by bread alone but by *every* word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," Jesus declared (Matthew 4:4, italics added).

If you think the Bible contains the Word of God, but not that every single statement is inspired, then suddenly you have a problem because you become the judge of the Bible rather than allowing the Bible to be the judge of you.

Proverbs 30:6–9
Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar. Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

Here, Agur extols the middle class. "Lord, help me not to be poor," He says, "lest I go out and steal. But help me not to be rich, either, lest I forget You. Keep me in that middle state."

Proverbs 30:10

Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty.

It seems this would fall under the category of meddling spoken of in Proverbs 26:17.

Proverbs 30:11 (a)
There is a generation . . .

Here, Agur lists four characteristics of a wicked generation . . .

Proverbs 30:11 (b)–14
. . . that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother. There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness. There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.

The people described are ungrateful, hypocritical, proud, and cruel—not a very endearing group!

Proverbs 30:15
The horseleach hath two daughters, crying, Give, give. There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough:

Next, Agur lists three things that, like bloodsucking leeches, are never satisfied . . .

Proverbs 30:16
The grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough.

The grave, the barren womb, drought, and fire are relentless in the sorrow they cause.

Proverbs 30:17, 18
The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it. There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not:

Agur now lists four things which are hard to explain . . .

Proverbs 30:19 (a)
The way of an eagle in the air . . .

Have you ever wondered how a bird—especially a big bird like an eagle—flies?

Proverbs 30:19 (b)
. . . the way of a serpent upon a rock . . .

A snake slithering through dirt or grass leaves a trail. But no trail is left on a rock.

Proverbs 30:19 (c)
. . . the way of a ship in the midst of the sea . . .

When I toss a penny into the water, it sinks. Therefore, how a huge battleship floats is a complete mystery to me.

Proverbs 30:19 (d)
. . . and the way of a man with a maid.

Who can begin to explain how or why people fall in love?

Proverbs 30:20

Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness.

Hearts are broken. Souls are destroyed. The essence of a person is stripped because of immorality. And yet the people involved so often say, "So what?"

Proverbs 30:21
For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear:

Agur lists four situations that cause unrest in a society . . .

Proverbs 30:22, 23
For a servant when he reigneth; and a fool when he is filled with meat; For an odious woman when she is married; and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress.

Unease and tension in a society is the result when people are promoted to positions of which they are unworthy.

Proverbs 30:24
There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise:

As Agur continues his list of observations, he says there are four seemingly insignificant beings that teach very significant lessons . . .

Proverbs 30:25
The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer;

How big is an ant's head? Therefore, how big can his brain be? Yet, it tells him winter's coming and that he needs to prepare.

"Prepare to meet your God," Amos declared (4:12). Yet so often man ignores the warning—and in so doing, is shamed by an ant.

Proverbs 30:26
The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks;

Rabbit-like creatures, conies are fast, but they can't maintain their speed. They can be run down quite easily. Yet they're wise because they realize they have no defense and, therefore, make their homes in the rock.

Paul said Jesus Christ is our Rock (1 Corinthians 10:4). Like the conies, I'm weak and defenseless. But I'm safe and secure when I hide myself in the Rock of Jesus Christ.

Proverbs 30:27
The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands;

Even without a leader, locusts by the billions can swarm in unison across an area.

The Holy Spirit calls us to unity because when the body of Christ moves as one, there's no limit to what can be accomplished (John 17:22).

Proverbs 30:28
The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces.

Are spiders invited to live in palaces? Quite the contrary. Yet they make their way in anyway and hold on with tenacity.

Peter says we have been given exceedingly great and precious promises in order that we might be partakers of a divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Therefore, by faith, you can live in a palace spiritually, emotionally, and relationally. In fact, you can do so much better than you can even dream because Paul said God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we can ask or even think (Ephesians 3:20). All we have to do is reach out with the hand of faith and, like the spider, hold on.

Proverbs 30:29–31
There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going: A lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not

away for any; A greyhound; an he goat also; and a king, against whom there is no rising up.

Agur's final list consists of four things that are impressive—the strength of a lion, the speed of a greyhound, the agility of a mountain goat, and the majesty of a king.

Proverbs 30:32
If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth.

One way to keep from putting your foot in your mouth is to cover your mouth with your hand. In light of this, I encourage you to try fasting from words for a day. Take a day and don't talk. You'll be surprised what you hear and the peace you have.

Proverbs 30:33
Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.

Rather than letting hurt feelings heal, those who continually revisit problems and rekindle the fire of misunderstanding will make the situation infinitely worse as sure as stirring milk results in butter and wringing the nose brings forth blood.



31

Proverbs 31:1
The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him.

Many Bible scholars believe Lemuel was the pet name Bathsheba gave to her son, Solomon.

Proverbs 31:2, 3

What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows? Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings.

There were two things about which Bathsheba warned her son. The first was women. The second was wine . . .

Proverbs 31:4, 5
It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.

Wine is not for kings and princes—not for those who want to be effective, not for those in positions of leadership. Why? Because effective leadership requires the use of one's full faculties.

One of the requirements the apostle Paul would give concerning those who were to serve as elders is that they not be given to wine (1 Timothy 3:3). In fact, this is a recurring theme throughout Scripture . . .

> But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment.
>
> Isaiah 28:7

The Christian community is increasingly accepting alcohol as an option. I'm not legalistic about drinking. People are welcome to drink if they want to—but it's not for kings, not for princes, not for priests, prophets, or elders. In other words, it's not for people who want to make an impact.

Proverbs 31:6, 7
Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.

Here is a description of the man who is free to drink wine: He is ready to perish—or, literally, headed for hell, depressed, poor, and miserable.

Proverbs 31:8, 9
Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.

After dealing with the subjects of strange women and strong wine, the call goes out for sound wisdom—especially in defense of the poor.

Proverbs 31:10, 11
Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.

The first characteristic of a virtuous woman is that she doesn't put financial pressure on her husband. She doesn't expect him to continually earn more so that she can have more.

Proverbs 31:12
She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

In Hebrew, the word "all" means *all.* The truly virtuous woman is a continual asset to her husband.

Proverb 31:13–15
She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.

The virtuous woman not only prepares and shares physical food, but I suggest she shares spiritual food as well. The only way we'll have manna to give to our families each morning is to be up before them. There's just no other way.

Proverbs 31:16–19
She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.

The virtuous woman is not afraid of hard work.

Proverbs 31:20
She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.

People who work hard are vulnerable to looking down on those who don't. However, such is not the case of the virtuous woman. She works hard, yet has a heart and hand of compassion for the poor.

Proverbs 31:21
She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.

It's the wise woman who realizes that storms will come because in that way she's not caught off guard either physically or spiritually.

Proverbs 31:22
She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.

This speaks of the beauty of modesty.

Proverbs 31:23
Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.

The gate was where the leaders of the city would sit. Over the years, I have known a number of gifted brothers who were disqualified from ministry

or who left ministry solely because their wives weren't supportive. The husband of a virtuous woman, however, can be involved in leadership because she sets the stage for that to happen.

Proverbs 31:24–26
She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.

With all of the self-discipline, skills, hard work, and wisdom this woman shows, one could think she would be judgmental of others. On the contrary, however, her speech was characterized by kindness.

Proverbs 31:27
She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.

Idleness is another word for gossip.

Proverbs 31:28–31
Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou ex-cellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

If, as some have suggested, Solomon is reflecting on his own mother, Bathsheba, we should be encouraged—for Bathsheba hardly had a virtuous beginning in the pages of Scripture. But yet, like her, neither did we—for we all have sinned; we all have gone astray (Isaiah 53:6). Yet, like her, we can be seen as being virtuous if we hide ourselves in the virtue and righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The Book of Proverbs set lofty goals for us. But aren't you glad that the Gospels tell us the blood of Jesus covers us? May we be those who make

virtue our goal—and grace our delight.



ECCLESIASTES

Background to Ecclesiastes

Written in the latter years of his life, the Book of Ecclesiastes is actually a journal of Solomon's journey into carnality. In Deuteronomy 17, God specifically said that when a king ascended the throne, he was not to multiply wives, horses, gold, or silver to himself. Yet with seven hundred wives—plus three hundred concubines for good measure, with enough horses to fill the massive stables at Megiddo, remnants of which still stand today, and with enough gold in his kingdom to render silver virtually worthless, it is obvious that Solomon ignored God's injunction.

This interests me because Solomon is known for his wisdom—yet he ends up walking the path of a fool. I point this out because where a person is strongest will very often be the place of his greatest weakness. Consider the following . . .

- While the rest of the world partied and drank, Noah walked uprightly and found grace in the eyes of the Lord. And yet when did Noah fall? When he became drunk in his tent (Genesis 9).
- In a lapse of faith, Abraham—the father of faith—had relations with Hagar, produced a son named Ishmael, and gave birth to the problems of the Middle East that continue to this day (Genesis 16).
- Rather than speak to the rock as he was instructed, Moses, the meekest man on the face of the earth, struck it in anger and was barred access to the Promised Land as a result (Numbers 20).
- Peter, the one who boldly said, "Though everyone else deny You, I never will," denied Jesus for fear of a servant girl (Mark 14).

Peter was a man of courage who became a coward. Moses was a meek man, who, pushed to the limit, lost his temper. Noah was a man of purity who became a drunkard. Abraham was a man of faith who failed in the flesh. And here Solomon, the man of wisdom, plays the fool.

Why?

Because we have a tendency to keep our guard up in the areas we know we're weak. But in the area of our greatest strength, we'll depend on our own abilities and thereby become vulnerable to attack from the enemy. Where we're weak, we're always praying, "Help me, Lord. Guard me. Protect me." But where we're strong, that's where we'll often end up failing.

Let's look into this journal of one man's journey into carnality and see what happened to the king who asked for wisdom but who walked in foolishness . . .



ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 1:1, 2 (a)
The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher . . .

Solomon identifies himself as a preacher because he feels he has something to say.

Ecclesiastes 1:2 (b)
. . . vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

The word translated "vanity" does not mean "conceited." Rather, it means "wisp of vapor." In other words, Solomon is saying that, like a soap bubble, everything lacks substance; everything lacks reality. It's all empty.

Ecclesiastes 1:3
What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

The phrase, "under the sun," pops up over and over again throughout this book—and therein lies Solomon's problem. If you are looking for reality, satisfaction, substance, or happiness *under* the sun, you're in trouble. You've got to look up into heaven, and *to* the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Ecclesiastes 1:4
One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.

We celebrate a lot of holidays—Mother's Day, Father's Day, Grandparents' Day, In-Law Days. It seems Hallmark dreams up a new holiday every year. But I suggest we add one more: Cemetery Day—where people walk through cemeteries and see the reality of what Solomon is

saying. Life is indeed a vapor. One generation comes and it passes away. The earth keeps going—but what is the meaning?

Ecclesiastes 1:5, 6
The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.

Even the wind currents—which, incidentally, were not recognized scientifically until hundreds of years after Solomon—attest to the cyclical, vaporous nature of life.

Ecclesiastes 1:7
All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

Not only did Solomon have something to say about wind currents, but he also alludes to evaporation years before evaporation was understood. You see, although the Bible is not a science book, science never contradicts Scripture. You'll never read stories about the world being held up on the back of a giant tortoise as in Eastern religious books. There is no scientific inaccuracy in its pages.

Ecclesiastes 1:8
All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

The eye can never see enough. The hours spent in front of television rise every year. The ear can never hear enough. I can remember when hi-fi was the big thing. Then it was stereo, followed by quadraphonic sound—a short-lived fad—followed by digital recordings and CDs. There's always something new to see or something new to hear—but never enough.

Ecclesiastes 1:9

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

Even though people search for new things, new sights, new sounds, in reality, Solomon says, there's nothing really new.

Ecclesiastes 1:10
Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

Wait a minute, Solomon. There *is* something new: we are—for if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17). But in his backslidden state, everything is redundant and repetitive to Solomon.

Ecclesiastes 1:11
There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

Who won the Heisman Trophy four years ago? Who won the Oscar for best actor three years ago? In a hundred years, the household names of today will be forgotten. Solomon knew this.

Ecclesiastes 1:12, 13
I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.

Watch this. Here's Solomon's first attempt to find reality. He decides to look to philosophy to find the reason for all things.

Ecclesiastes 1:14, 15
I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked

cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

Solomon delves into the arena of philosophy and finds it empty. "Life is a bad joke," Camus concluded.

Solomon preceded him, saying, "Philosophy doesn't make crooked things straight; it doesn't solve problems; it's empty and vain."

Ecclesiastes 1:16, 17 (a)
I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly. . . .

Experiment #2: "Philosophy doesn't work. I'll try education," said Solomon. According to the Book of 1 Kings, Solomon became, among other things, a botanist, a biologist, an astronomer, and an ichthyologist. He wrote books and plays, poems, proverbs, and songs.

Ecclesiastes 1:17 (b), 18
. . . I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

Solomon discovered that the more one knows, the more one realizes how bad things really are.



2 **Ecclesiastes 2:1 (a)**
I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy plea sure . . .

Solomon abandoned his study of philosophy and his quest for education in order to pursue pleasure.

Ecclesiastes 2:1 (b), 2
. . . and, behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?

We think that being clever and making people laugh would be a tremendous asset. Yet, in reality, drugs and suicide, misery and despair haunt the comedic community as much, if not more, than any other.

Ecclesiastes 2:3 (a)
I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine . . .

In Proverbs 31, Solomon's mother expressly told him to stay away from wine. Here, however, Solomon chooses to ignore her words of warning.

Ecclesiastes 2:3 (b)
. . . yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.

Solomon filled himself with pleasure, partying, joking, and drinking before experimenting with another area: hobbies . . .

Ecclesiastes 2:4–6
I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:

Why was Solomon involved in all these projects—orchards and gardens, aqueducts and pools? We know historically and archaeologically that, for the most part, he undertook them as hobbies.

Ecclesiastes 2:7–9 (a)
I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: I gathered me also

silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem . . .

Through all of his seeking, Solomon's bank account kept growing.

Ecclesiastes 2:9 (b)
. . . also my wisdom remained with me.

Through all of his experimentation, the Lord allowed Solomon to retain the one thing that he had initially asked of Him (1 Kings 3).

Ecclesiastes 2:10
And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour.

"I poured myself into my hobbies, my entertainment, my career. And my heart rejoiced—for a while," said Solomon.

Ecclesiastes 2:11–19
Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun. And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done. Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come

shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool. Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity.

Looking over his orchards, pools, houses, and fortune, Solomon rejoiced for a season. But then the light dawned on him, for, although he had been wise, worked hard, and educated himself, he realized he would eventually die just like the fool. And all of his riches could be passed on to an idiot of a son who wouldn't appreciate them or know how to handle them.

Poor, poor Solomon. You see, the average person knows he's not happy, that life is empty. But he thinks he's going to be happy as soon as he gets his next raise, his next girlfriend, his next degree. So he lives in the hope of happiness. Not so Solomon. He had nothing to look forward to. He was at the top. He had it all. And he says, "Guess what. It ain't there."

Why was this book written? To tell us that someone has been where the average person wants to be—and has found it bogus, for in Ecclesiastes we hear the lonely whine of the top dog.

Alexander the Great experienced the same thing when, at 33, he wept because there were no more worlds for him to conquer. You will not be satisfied, dear friend, with a little more money, with a different lady, with a higher career move, or the next educational degree. It's all empty. Kind of a depressing picture so far. But at the end of the book is a real gem. You see, jewelers traditionally put diamond rings in black boxes because black provides a perfect contrast to the brilliance of the diamond. This is the black box, gang. The gem is yet to come.

Ecclesiastes 2:20, 21
Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. For there is a man whose

labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.

With seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, Solomon left but one son, Rehoboam. If Solomon doubted his son's ability to rule, his suspicions would prove to be correct for it was under Rehoboam's reign that not only would Israel split into the northern and southern kingdoms, but that pagan worship would thrive.

Ecclesiastes 2:22, 23
For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.

Here we see a perfect description of the man who doesn't know God: his days are joyless, his nights restless.

Ecclesiastes 2:24–26
There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I? For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

Our Constitution tells us we are guaranteed the right to pursue happiness. Yet as wonderful as that sounds politically, it is disastrous in reality, for happiness will never be found by those who pursue it. Happiness is an elusive butterfly—the more you chase it, the quicker it flies away. The only way to find real life is to let it go, die to self, and seek first the kingdom of God, whereby all you ever longed for will be added unto you (Matthew 6:33).



3

Ecclesiastes 3:1–10
To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth? I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.

This section of Scripture, set to music in the sixties is not speaking poetically of the cycles or seasons of life in a romanticized way. Rather, in his journey to find happiness and in his attempt to grasp meaning, Solomon is saying, "Life is predictable, mundane, and boring. What you sow is eventually reaped. What you build eventually falls apart. You love, but it's followed by hate. You have peace, but soon there will be war. Everything is futile, boring, mundane, predictable.

It has been said that the problem with life is that it's so daily. And that's what Solomon is saying when he says, "There's got to be more to life than just this." Then he gives us a glimmer of hope in the next verse . . .

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (a)
He hath made every thing beautiful in his time . . .

Our times are boring and mundane, but in *His* time, God makes everything beautiful and meaningful. Please keep in mind when you read this book that brother Solomon is in a backslidden state. Previously, he had given his heart and life to the Lord. But presently, because of the influence of his thousand wives and concubines, because of his hoarding of gold that was

expressly forbidden in Deuteronomy 17, because of his disobedience to the Lord, he now is in a backslidden state. So he has truth and understanding in the back of his mind, yet he is not living it, walking in it, or experiencing it.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (b)
. . . also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.

Many newer translations correctly read "He has set eternity in their heart." Every person understands innately, intuitively that he is an eternal creature. While he may suppress that knowledge (Romans 1), instinctively he knows that eternity is in his heart, that there's more to life than what he sees.

Ecclesiastes 3:12, 13
I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.

Do you sense the struggle in the soul of Solomon? He says, "I know there is eternity in the hearts of men, and yet why not just enjoy what's right before us—the labor, the food, the drink?"

Ecclesiastes 3:14
I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.

I'm so thankful that what God does cannot be changed by us. I have a tendency to think, "I can add to my righteousness if I pray especially hard or study the Word longer than I ever have previously. If I read ten chapters tomorrow, God will really be happy with me." Not so! There is not a single thing we can do to add to what He's already done for us in declaring us righteous. Conversely, we think that, because we kicked the dog, lost our temper, or forgot to pray, certainly something has been lost in our standing with the Lord. Again, not true Jesus meant what He said when He declared, "It is *finished*." And I am oh, so glad!

Ecclesiastes 3:15
That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.

This is a mind-blowing phrase because it gives us an insight into the reality and nature of eternity. There is no past, no present, no future. That's why God declared His name to be I AM that I AM. Not I WAS, not I WILL BE, but I *AM*—in the eternal now.

Imagine you were able to ride a ray of light. Traveling at 186,000 miles per second, in about 1.25 seconds, you would tip your hat to the man in the moon. In about seven minutes, you would have put nose coat on as you sailed past the sun. Fourteen years later, you would button your overcoat because you would arrive at the uttermost planet, Pluto—and it's cold there. One hundred thousand years later, you would come to the end of our Milky Way Galaxy and 1.5 million years after that, you'd come to the next major galaxy: Andromeda. Then you'd return to earth. Upon your arrival, you would find that the earth had progressed three million years in your absence—even though you would have aged less than a single day due to the fact that as you approach the speed of light, time slows down incredibly.

In 1 John 1:5, we are told God is light. What does that mean? I suggest it means that in heaven, everything is in the present "now." There is no past and no future. I suggest that is perhaps what the apostle Paul was suggesting when he talked about the dead in Christ rising first (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Could it be that those who have died and gone to heaven are already experiencing our presence with them now?

Ecclesiastes 3:16, 17
And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there. I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.

Expressing his frustration, Solomon says, "As I look around, I see corruption politically and iniquity spiritually."

Ecclesiastes 3:18–22
I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

At this point in his frustration and backslidden state, Solomon comes to the conclusion that men are no different than animals. Who really knows if there's life after death? Who has authority to speak on these things? Solomon wonders.

The answer is Jesus. No guru can speak, no philosopher can teach, no scientist can state with authority where a man's spirit goes when he dies because Jesus alone came from heaven (John 3:13). You see, gang, when you're talking with an existentialist, a philosopher, an evolutionist, or a scientist, the issue will never be decided on the logic of philosophy or evidence scientifically. While it's intriguing to discuss philosophical viewpoints, in reality it always comes down to one issue: Jesus Christ. Keep bringing the dialogue back to Jesus and say, "Wait a minute. There was a Man who stated with absolute certainty and authority that man is an eternal being, created in the image of God, and will live forever. Therefore, either this Man is the Lord and should be worshiped, He's a lunatic and should be locked up, or He's a liar."

You see, gang, the question is not, "Is there a whale big enough to swallow a man?" or "Can the Genesis account be taken literally?" The question always is, "What do you do with Jesus Christ?"



Ecclesiastes 4:1–3

So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter. Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

Solomon sees the fallacy of the "might is right" mentality. Observing poor people oppressed without a comforter, he contends it is better to be dead than alive.

Ecclesiastes 4:4–6

Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit. The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh. Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit.

In the sixties, the so-called "summer of love" dawned in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco when Timothy Leary exhorted an entire generation to "Tune in, turn on, drop out." Here, Solomon comments on its precursor as he observes the fool fold his hands and drop out. Although the fool correctly assesses the futility of materialism, however his decision to drop out is wrong, for he'll end up starving and devouring himself—which is exactly what happened in Haight-Ashbury.

"We'll quit working; we'll quit striving, for we have seen the vanity of the materialism of the previous generation," they said. But in one year, the "summer of love" turned into a summer of sickness as drugs and death proliferated in San Francisco.

Ecclesiastes 4:7, 8 (a)

Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. There is one alone, and there is not a sec ond; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labour . . .

The one who pursues material goals works hard, yet to whom will he leave his wealth when he dies if he has neither son nor brother? What's the purpose? Solomon wonders.

Ecclesiastes 4:8 (b)
. . . neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail.

The more man has, the more he wants. There's always something new to buy, new to play with, somewhere new to go—but it never brings satisfaction. Most people go through sixty or seventy years of life before they come to this realization and say, "Wait a minute. Why did I do all those things? What was I working for?"

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12
Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

This passage is often used in wedding ceremonies, the reference being to a rope made of three pieces of hemp wound together. If two pieces were used, under stress and strain they would unravel and split apart—like many marriages today. But if the rope-maker wanted to make a lasting rope, he would wind a third cord in the middle to strengthen the two outer cords. The center cord, of course, is to be the Lord Jesus. And it's a wonderful thought.

But in the context of this passage, Solomon is not so much saying, "Make Jesus the center of your relationship," as he's saying, "Two is better than one —and I don't have two. It's just me."

Even in the midst of a thousand wives and concubines, Solomon felt alone. The loneliest people you'll ever find are those who are always at parties—craving something but unable to find what they're looking for. It's vanity. It's empty. And Solomon knew it.

Ecclesiastes 4:13, 14
Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished. For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor.

Who is Solomon talking about? Himself. As a child, he sought after God. Now he's become the most powerful, potent king in the known world and he knows he's foolish. What a tragedy—to come to the end of life feeling like a sad, sorry old king.

Ecclesiastes 4:15, 16
I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead. There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

"I see a new star come on the scene, the one everyone is talking about—just like they used to talk about me. But I know he's going to get old and pass away. What's the point?" Solomon asks.



5 **Ecclesiastes 5:1–3**
Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.

Upon entering the house of god, the tendency of one in a backslidden state is to walk into church and say, "I'm going to do this and I'm going to change that and this is what I promise . . ."

For topical study of Ecclesiastes 5:1, 2 entitled "Silence," turn to page **280.**

Ecclesiastes 5:4–7
When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God.

Don't come into church with much speaking and many promises, Solomon warns. How often we have seen it. How often we have experienced it ourselves, saying, "Lord, I promise I'll never do that again. Lord, I vow I will give You this, that, and the other."

"Be careful," says Solomon. "Better not to vow at all than to vow and not keep it." Thus, even the church experience produces cynicism within the heart of Solomon.

Ecclesiastes 5:8
If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they.

Even in his cynicism, Solomon acknowledges the absolute supremacy of God.

Ecclesiastes 5:9, 10
Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field. He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied

with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.

Perhaps you have a silver serving set. After waiting many years, you were finally able to buy the teapot, the sugar bowl, and the little pitcher for cream. Then you thought, "Oh, if only I had the silver tray, my set would be complete." So you got the tray. But then you needed the cart to go with it, along with a better dining room to house the cart—and on and on it goes. Folks, please hear what Solomon discovered and why God incorporated it in His Word for us: Silver or whatever trinkets, toys, or hobbies you're looking to for satisfaction will never fulfill you. They'll never bring about that which you hope they will.

Ecclesiastes 5:11 (a)
When goods increase, they are increased that eat them . . .

How many of you have discovered that when your pay increases, somehow your expenses go up as well?

Ecclesiastes 5:11 (b)
. . . and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?

What good are possessions? You can look at them for a little while. But that's it.

Ecclesiastes 5:12
The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.

If you're working hard by the sweat of your brow, you sleep well. But if you have all kinds of big investments, portfolios, and intricate financial arrangements, worry and anxiety render sleep more elusive.

Ecclesiastes 5:13

There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.

People strive to be rich—yet riches hurt, disappoint, and enslave. The man with ten antique cars is obligated to store them, wax them, and keep them tuned. Thus, his possessions possess him.

Ecclesiastes 5:14–17
But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind? All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.

A rich man died and at the reading of his will, the question was, "How much did he leave behind?"—to which his lawyer astutely answered, "Everything." The old adage is true, gang. You can't take it with you. But you can send it ahead by investing in eternity.

Ecclesiastes 5:18–20
Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion. Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart.

If you're living for this life, live it up. That's what Solomon is saying. But remember—he's speaking as a backslider.

SILENCE
A Topical Study of
ECCLESIASTES 5:1, 2

Her name was Kirsten Chelbay. She sat in the back row of Mr. Snapp's sixth-grade class and she was very special. So when Gary Burris, a seventh-grader from Ida Price Junior High, took an interest in Kirsten, we sixth-grade guys didn't like it very much. Thinking Kirsten was becoming a little too uppity hanging out with seventh-graders, we decided to teach her a lesson: All of us guys in Mr. Snapp's class would go an entire day without speaking a single word to her. At the end of the day, her best friend, Jill, came over to us and said, "What's going on with you guys?"

"Well, Kirsten's hanging out with seventh-graders now and we have to teach her a lesson," we declared. "How's she taking it?"

I'll never forget Jill's reply. "As a matter of fact," she said, "Kirsten was just saying this was one of the best days of her whole life."

And I'm sure it was!

I suggest to you that the text before us speaks of the attractiveness of quietness. Those who study such things tell us that since 1950, the decibel level of the noise that surrounds us has doubled every ten years. In fact, a recent survey in Japan indicates that, along with their economy, population, and disease, they are highly concerned about the noise level.

Yet the noise from which most of us desire relief is not so much external as internal. As evidenced by his writing in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, Solomon has much to say about silence. And he is not alone, for the apostle Paul goes on to say that silence is a discipline those of us who desire to be students of the Lord need to practice (1 Thessalonians 4:11). Perhaps that is why Jesus constantly retreated into times of silence and solitude . . .

- His ministry began with forty days of quietness in the wilderness (Matthew 4:2).
- When He heard the news that John the Baptist had died, He withdrew to a quiet place (Matthew 14:13).

- After feeding the five thousand, what did Jesus do? Hang around and sign autographs? Go on a speaking tour? No. He went to the top of a mountain to pray in solitude (Matthew 14:23).
- After seeing demons cast out, lepers healed, dead raised, when Jesus' disciples returned, He said to them, "Come apart for a while unto a desert place" (Mark 6:31).
- About to face His greatest challenge, our Lord went into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray alone (Luke 22:41).

"Don't be rash with your mouth," Solomon says. "Study to be quiet," Paul echoes (1 Thessalonians 4:11).

Yet, attractive to us as solitude is, we are also bothered by it. Perhaps that's why people are rarely without music in their homes, in their cars, in their ears. Quietness fascinates us, but also disarms us. Why? I suggest two reasons . . .

Helpless in Silence

When I am quiet, I am genuinely helpless. After all, who will tell it like it is unless I open my mouth? Who will straighten out the situation unless I pontificate and proclaim my theories or vast understanding?

When, like my Lord, who, when He was reviled, reviled not back, who, when He was questioned by Herod, spoke not a word in return, I am quiet, I am helpless. I must depend solely upon the Father for defense, for justification. And that's scary.

Haunted by Silence

When the television isn't blaring or the music isn't playing, when the voices aren't chattering, when it's just me and my Lord in silence—suddenly, confronted with my flaws and hypocrisy, I realize I'm not as deep and spiritual as I like to think I am. My thoughts wander easily. My body gets restless physically. When I don't feel the presence of God, it haunts me.

"Oh, no, God has forsaken me," I cry—ushering in what St. John of the Cross referred to as "the dark night of the soul." Truly, to the one who doesn't feel the presence of God and is aware of the depravity of his own heart, such a time can be dark indeed.

> *Who is among you that feareth the* LORD*, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the* LORD*, and stay upon his God.*
>
> Isaiah 50:10

Saints, I hope you caught that. When you go through the dark night of the soul, when you are seeking your Lord, spending time in silence before Him, waiting upon Him, looking to Him—and yet you experience a darkness inside, don't be afraid. Don't run from it. Instead, realize God is freeing you from your bondage to your emotions. You see, we're "feeling junkies." We desperately long to feel good so we go to the church where we feel the "Holy Ghost highs" and spend time with people who make us feel special and loved. So our Father says, "I'm going to take you through a dark night in order that, free from the dominion of your emotions, you'll walk by faith in the promise that I will never leave you or forsake you."

The dark night of the soul also delivers me from thinking my walk with the Lord is dependent upon how I am doing. "This is going to be a great day," I say, "because I got up early and prayed for twenty-five minutes." But when the whole day collapses, I'm left in confusion. "I've been praying. I've been reading. I've been serving. Why am I not experiencing an explosion of joy right now?" I cry.

"Listen," God answers. "Your walk is based upon who I AM, not upon what you do."

Truly, sometimes when I'm working hardest for the Lord and seeking Him the most, I find myself feeling farthest from Him. It is in those times the Lord is saying, "The issue isn't how much you do. The issue is who I AM."

These are hard matters, folks, because some of us have experienced, even at regular intervals, the dark night of the soul. Don't be afraid of the silence —even though it makes you feel helpless and haunted. Rather, embrace the silence—and, in so doing, join the company of great saints throughout history . . .

> Thomas à Kempis, author of the Christian classic, *The Imitation of Christ,* penned an entire section entitled, "On the Love of Silence."
>
> After traveling hundreds of miles to see each other, St. Francis and Dominique didn't say a single word to each other for three days. Yet they left totally refreshed, inspired, and blessed.

Why did Francis, Dominique, St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and others all the way back to Solomon embrace the discipline of silence? I suggest two reasons . . .

Silence Restores Spiritual Passion

Surrounded by multitudes, crowds calling out to Him, people fighting to get a glimpse of Him, Jesus suddenly stops in His tracks and says, "Someone touched Me"—for after a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years reached out and touched Him, healing power flowed from Him to her and He perceived virtue had left Him (Mark 5).

So too, when someone has questions or comments or struggles and looks to you for insight and strength, virtue goes out from you. That is why, after ministering to people, Jesus would get away and be quiet. Spiritual passion is restored in quietness.

When the door of a sauna is opened, the steam rolls out. The same thing happens when you minister—life and love flow out. So you need to close the door and let life and love rebuild, for if you are always giving out, you will become drained, burned out, and ready to throw in the towel. Solitude is an opportunity to close your mouth and let silence restore your passion.

Silence Resolves Contradiction

I look around and see contradictions on all sides of me. I don't get this; I don't understand that; I can't figure out the other. In theology, I have questions; in my observations of people and circumstances, I find confusion. And I used to think I had to solve these problems, figure out what's going on, that I had to determine who's right and who's wrong. Maybe, like me, you feel obligated to analyze this doctrine vs. that one, this philosophy vs. the other, that you have to unravel all of the knots that make up these controversies. But guess what. You don't.

Habakkuk, whose name means "wrestler," struggled with the question of why the heathen prospered while God's people were judged—until he came to this conclusion: "But the Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him" (2:20).

This is revolutionary for me because through it I realize I no longer have to have answers for contradictions. I can transcend them by being silent. Thus, rather than working out problems, I let problems work on me. I let God work on my life rather than trying to figure out why He is doing this or isn't doing that. I just say, "There's something I need to learn from this contradiction. There's something the Lord wants to work into my life." And I embrace it.

I would encourage you today to begin to experiment with this wonderful discipline of silence.

How can it work practically?

First, try driving to work and back home without the car radio. I'm not saying you should do this every day, but I'm suggesting you try spending twenty minutes in quietness just to see what God might say to your heart.

Or right before you go to bed, slip out and taste the silence of the night. Go for a walk—if even for only two or three minutes. Let the quietness minister to you.

I would encourage you who desire to go a little deeper to periodically fast from words for perhaps one hour, six, or even

twenty-four in order to allow spiritual passion to be renewed in your life.

"Come to Me," Jesus said, "all you who are weary and heavy laden" (Matthew 11:28). You don't have to be restless, gang. You can experience inner tranquility and peace if you'll come to the One who's calling you to a whole new style of life. Give Him a chance. Experience the quietness of holiness.



6 **Ecclesiastes 6:1–2**
There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.

"I have observed," Solomon says, "that rich people are unable to enjoy their riches." It's really true. Was Howard Hughes tremendously happy? How about J. Paul Getty? J. D. Rockefeller? No, says Solomon. He makes the observation that the wealthier a man becomes, the less able he is to enjoy what he has. It's ironic that those who have the most are often able to enjoy it the least.

Ecclesiastes 6:3–6
If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he. For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other. Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place?

Even if a man has a good number of heirs and lives a good number of years, if his soul is empty and he doesn't have an honorable burial—that is, if his contribution during life doesn't warrant much notice at his death—it is of no consequence that he was even born.

Ecclesiastes 6:7
All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.

After four helpings of turkey every Thanksgiving, I always think I never want to see turkey for the rest of my life. But, invariably, around midnight, I find myself getting out of bed and cruising into the kitchen to fix a turkey sandwich. Solomon is right—man's appetite is never satisfied!

Ecclesiastes 6:8, 9
For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living? Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit.

In other words, it's better to have something in your hand than to desire what you can't have. Listen folks, most people spend most of their time romanticizing their past or fantasizing about their future. Solomon recognizes this. That's why he says it's better to see what's before your eyes than to wander in desire.

Ecclesiastes 6:10
That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he.

"How can you argue with God who predetermines the future?" asks Solomon.

The apostle Paul picks up the same point in Romans 9—11, saying, "Who are you, oh man, to argue with the Lord?"

I'll tell you how to be miserable: Argue with God. "How come You didn't save my husband?" or—"I prayed; I fasted; I trusted You, but she still

left me," or—"How come my business collapsed?" Argue with God and you'll become cynical and bitter. And guess what. It won't change a thing.

Why was your car repossessed? Well, maybe when you get to heaven, you'll see that the next day, had you driven it, the front axle would have fallen off and you would have been paralyzed for the next fifty years. We don't see what God sees. All I know is that God loves me so much He died for me on the Cross. Therefore, because He loves me that much, I know that what He's doing in my life—regardless of whether or not I understand it—is for my good.

Ecclesiastes 6:11, 12
Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better? For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?

"Life is vain," Solomon contends. "Life is a shadow—and who knows what's coming next?"

In chapters 1 through 6, Solomon is a hedonist, living for pleasures as he pursues wine and money, power and women, education and philosophy. But in chapters 7 through 12, he changes his direction radically. He trades his Lambourghini for a Chrysler station wagon. He becomes a family man, a moralist—sharing truth, even though he's not necessarily always experiencing it.

In your neighborhood, business, or school, there are the guys who drive the Deloreans and there are the guys who drive the station wagons. Some guys are into pleasure and power, others are into the "nice guy" image. But, as we shall see, they're both equally flawed because even as a nice guy, Solomon will continue to struggle—until he comes to the one all-important conclusion found at the end of the book . . .



7 We come to the second half of the Book of Ecclesiastes—a book that chronicles Solomon's struggle to find the meaning of life. In the first six

chapters, Solomon was a hedonist, hoping to find satisfaction, fulfillment, and answers by pursuing his own pleasures.

But here, in chapter 7, he suddenly shifts gears. No longer a hedonist, he now becomes a moralist. No longer a wild and crazy guy, he's now the quintessential nice guy. He becomes a family man, gets his act together, joins the Moral Majority, and votes Republican. And from this frame of reference, he's going to share with us some good moral principles.

This is where the book gets a little tricky. You see, in the next several chapters, although Solomon is no longer a hedonist, he is still in a backslidden state. There are two books that constantly lead people into false doctrine: the Book of Job and the Book of Ecclesiastes. But these are the two books that should have an asterisk beside them because, while they are inspired and convey accurately Job's struggle to make sense of pain and Solomon's struggle to make sense of life, all of their thoughts are not necessarily doctrinally accurate.

For example, Job philosophizes about many things, but toward the end of the book, the Lord comes on the scene and says, "Who is this man that speaks without knowledge?" In other words, "Job is talking through his hat. He doesn't know what he's saying." Yet cultists quote Job without realizing this.

The same thing is true of Ecclesiastes. What Solomon pens is moral, but you can't build theology or doctrine upon this book. Why, then, are Job and Ecclesiastes included in the canon of Scripture? Because one's carnality doesn't disqualify him from sharing truth. Your math teacher might be a total pagan, but when he tells you two plus two equals four, that's still true. In his book, *On Being and Running,* Dr. George Sheehan asks the right questions concerning the ironies and problems of life eloquently, passionately, and insightfully—yet he comes to the wrong answer when he concludes that all of life's problems are solved by jogging. So too, much of what Solomon says is true—yet not everything he says is true, as we shall see . . .

Ecclesiastes 7:1
A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.

Precious ointment was the currency of the day. Therefore, Solomon gives great worth to a good name.



***For topical study of Ecclesiastes 7:1 entitled "Happy Deathday to You," turn to page* 288.**

Ecclesiastes 7:2
It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.

Solomon's right. It's better to go to a funeral parlor than to Burger King because in the house of mourning, perhaps for the only time in their lives, people are serious about considering eternity.

Ecclesiastes 7:3
Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

When is your heart made better? Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven and they that mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:3, 4). When you finally realize you're a sinner and in need is when you're going to get better. Witnessing is tough where laughter abounds. But when someone is hurting and sorrowful, you have an opportunity to share the gospel. Thus, it is true that sorrow is better than laughter—for then the heart can be truly healed.

Ecclesiastes 7:4, 5
The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.

It's better to go to a revival service and be convicted than to a rock concert and hear the song of fools.

Ecclesiastes 7:6
For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.

The Hebrew word translated both "thorns" and "pot" is *cirah.* Thus, Solomon uses a play on words to describe the emptiness of laughter.

Ecclesiastes 7:7, 8
Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart. Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

I have this verse underlined in my Bible because, in my pride, I think I can accomplish certain tasks. But pride goes before destruction (Proverbs 16:18). Therefore, how much better it is to be patient, to not react, to not intervene, but just to wait. I've never regretted the times I've waited, the times I've refrained from offering my opinion—but how often I have regretted the times I've quickly rushed into situations, vainly thinking I knew all the answers.

Ecclesiastes 7:9, 10
Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools. Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.

Bemoaning the loss of the "good old days" indicates a lack of wisdom. A generation or two ago, people worked seventeen hours a day in some cases, six days a week for forty cents an hour. Disease was rampant and medical care was scarce. It wasn't all just *Little House on the Prairie,* so think twice before you long for yesteryear.

Ecclesiastes 7:11–14
Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun. For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth

life to them that have it. Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.

In the day of adversity, rejoice because the Father is just as involved in the day of adversity as He is in the day of prosperity. So embrace your time of trouble and say, "Thank You, Lord. You've ordered this, as well." So often in adversity, we think our world is collapsing and that everything is going wrong when, in reality, the Lord is birthing a whole new understanding within us.

Ecclesiastes 7:15, 16
All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness. Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?

In his backslidden state, Solomon says, "Don't be too good or no one will like you. You'll be isolated from the crowd."

Ecclesiastes 7:17
Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?

"Don't be too good because no one will like you, but don't be too bad because you'll die too soon." What Solomon espouses is basically the philosophy the Greeks called "The Golden Mean"—which is simply, "In everything, moderation." Don't be too good, don't be too bad. Just be somewhere in the middle.

And that's what the world still says. But what does our Lord say? "I would that you were either hot or cold, but if you're lukewarm, I will spew you out of My mouth" (see Revelation 3:16). Either be hot for Jesus or get into the world where He can convict you. But don't be lukewarm.

Ecclesiastes 7:18–20
It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all. Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city. For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

Solomon's observation is correct. Paul picks up this same theme in Romans when he says there is none righteous, no not one (Romans 3:10). The pressure is off, gang, when you realize no one does good. So don't be disillusioned when one of your friends or sisters or brothers in the Lord doesn't do what you think they should. We're all nothing but sinners, saved by the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.

Ecclesiastes 7:21
Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee:

It has been rightly said that an eavesdropper rarely hears good. If you're expecting to hear compliments behind your back, you're not going to hear them. I'm one hundred percent certain that people talk about me negatively behind my back. How do I know this? Read on . . .

Ecclesiastes 7:22
For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.

I am sorry and embarrassed to admit it, but I've talked about others negatively. Solomon says, "Just as you have talked about others, you can be sure others are talking about you"—not a comforting thought, but true.

Ecclesiastes 7:23–25
All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me. That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out? I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to

seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness:

Solomon desired and determined to be wise, but the application eluded him.

Ecclesiastes 7:26
And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.

Evidently, as Solomon searched for wisdom, he also dialogued with women—and, in the process, became ensnared by them. "I found more bitter than death the woman, and he who wants to please God must not take that path."

Ecclesiastes 7:27, 28
Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, counting one by one, to find out the account: Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.

"I found one wise man among a thousand, but not a single woman." This doesn't mean women aren't wise. I suggest to you it means Solomon shouldn't have been relating to women that way in the first place. You see, due to the numerous snares and temptations lurking in such a relationship—with the exception of the marriage relationship—wisdom should never be sought from those of the opposite sex.

Why was Solomon having such difficulty finding someone who could wisely share with him? Because he was looking for such a person in the wrong place. If you want counsel, if you want friendship, if you want to find strong, meaningful relationships, look for them among the people of God. You'll be surprised at the wisdom resident therein.

Ecclesiastes 7:29

Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

These “inventions” aren’t technological advances. They refer to that which is wrong. In other words, God made man right, but man keeps messing up.

HAPPY DEATHDAY TO YOU

A Topical Study of ECCLESIASTES 7:1

I find myself frequently thanking the Lord for hot, running water. This was something I used to take for granted and for which I rarely thanked the Lord. That was before we moved into a cabin in the Applegate Valley. It was a wonderful place to live; yet for two summers running, we experienced a drought. Consequently, the spring from which our water came dried up, causing us to bathe in the creek. So from that time on, my appreciation for hot showers has never abated.

When the Book of Ecclesiastes was written, Solomon did not have hot, running water. In fact, there were very few bathtubs at all, which made for a distinct aroma throughout the community. But if you were wealthy enough, with expensive ointments or perfume, you could mask the odor somewhat. These precious ointments did three things . . .

First, by concealing one's own aroma, they made one socially agreeable.

Second, they made one spiritually identifiable. In Exodus 30, we read of a precious ointment called "holy anointing oil." Made of cinnamon, calymus, and other sweet spices, the priests were the only ones to wear this particular ointment. I find this helpful in understanding what the Lord wants to do in our lives, for the anointing oil emblematic of the anointing of the Spirit is a sweet fragrance.

Finally, precious ointments made one financially stable. In the days before savings accounts or treasury bonds, when a person had money, he would often invest it in precious ointments. Always in demand, their value remained high. Thus, when Mary of Bethany poured an alabaster container full of perfume over Jesus, she was, in effect, emptying her bank account—which is why Jesus said, "Wherever the gospel is preached, this act of love and costly worship will be spoken of" (see Mark 14:9).

Precious ointments. See them in the context of Solomon's day. Yet what does he say in our text? There is something *better* than precious ointment. That is, a good name. When most of us read this, we equate a good name with a good reputation. But when you study it more carefully, I think you'll

discover that's not really the deepest meaning of this verse. You see, a good reputation is not better than costly ointment because a good reputation can easily be taken away.

Ask the patriarchs or the prophets. The vast majority of the prophets were slandered mercilessly by the people of Israel. Their reputations were dragged through the mud. Accusations and condemnations, innuendoes and attacks abounded. Their reputations were often so marred the people would rise up against them and stone them.

I see Jesus as the epitome of someone who was absolutely good, and yet did He have a good reputation? Philippians 2 says, "He humbled Himself and made Himself of *no* reputation." In fact, the community around Him hurled accusations against Him, calling Him a glutton, a winebibber, a demonized individual who did miracles only through the power of Beelzebub (Mark 3:22).

What, then, is Solomon saying when he says a good name is better than precious ointment?

If you have opened your heart and received Jesus as your Lord, don't you know that's more important than popularity, financial stability, or even ministry? If your name is written in the Book of Life, *then* you've got a good name (Revelation 19).

Revelation 2 tells us that those whose names are in the Book of Life not only have a good name, but they will receive a new name. I'm looking forward to a brand new name, a brand new identity—new papers, new social security cards, new pictures, a change of image. When we get to heaven, gang, you won't call me Jon. We'll address one another with names the Lord has reserved for us and will reveal to us in that day. Why? Because all the stuff associated with our present name is tarnished and tainted. I am so looking forward to a fresh start eternally with a new name and a new countenance. It's going to be wonderful to have a new identity!

As the essence of the high priestly ministry, Jesus has our names written on the breastplate over His heart (Exodus 28). Thus, if your name is written in the Book of Life, it is also on the Lord's heart.

Not only is your name written in the Book of Life, not only is it written over the heart of our High Priest, but it is engraved in the palm of His hand (Isaiah 49:16). Therefore, no matter where you're at, no matter what this

week has held for you, the Lord isn't saying, "Oops, I forgot to watch over you. I forgot all about your situation. I wasn't aware of the crisis you were going through."

No, your name is etched in His hand, inscribed on His heart, written in His Book.

When the disciples came back from their first missionary trip, saying, "Lord, You should have seen us. We cast out demons. We raised the dead. We saw miracles happen!" Jesus said, "Don't rejoice in any of those things, but rejoice in the fact that your names are written in the Book of Life" (see Luke 10:20).

That's what still matters today. How many miracles you observed, how many people you witnessed to, how many mistakes you made, how many sins you committed are not the issue. We worship the Lord because, by His grace, our names are written in the Book of Life. Before that, ministry, popularity, and financial stability all pale. They're irrelevant in comparison to the fact that we're saved and going to heaven.

Why do I feel this is the correct interpretation of "a good name is better than precious ointment?" Because I believe it is confirmed by the phrase that follows: "and the day of death than the day of one's birth."

If your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life, I want to wish you a happy deathday because our text declares the day of death is better than the day of birth. The day of one's birth is wonderful—with one's entire life stretching out before him. But along with that is the realization that there will be heavy trials and difficulties because life is hard.

Some years ago, as I boarded the plane for a flight from Australia to San Francisco, I could sense the excitement as everyone found their places and settled down in their seats at the outset of the fifteen-hour journey. But, after an hour or two, as we hit some turbulence in the sky, many of us reached for the airbags. Then the person two rows back got nervous and started smoking. The movie finally came on, but it was R-rated. When the food appeared, it wasn't exactly what we were hoping for, either. After about the eighth or ninth hour, we began to feel sticky and cramped. And as I watched the faces in the cabin, I observed the wear and tear of frayed nerves as we all grew weary of the journey. But when the pilot said, "We'll be landing in San

Francisco in five minutes," the spirit of the cabin suddenly picked up. Smiles returned. We were home.

Folks, that is why Solomon says better is a deathday than a birthday. The queasiness ceases. The smoking stops. The R-rated films are over. We're Home.

The deathday is not only better than your birthday, but better than your best day. Think of the best day of your life . . .

"The best day of my life was when I turned twenty-one and could do whatever I wanted," you might say. But as wonderful as that day might have seemed to you at that time, it will pale in comparison to the day you see the Lord, for when we see Him, we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2). No more struggling with the flesh. No more wondering why we said that or did the other. In heaven, we will at last truly come of age.

Maybe you say, "My best day was the day I got my inheritance." You just wait. Peter says we have an inheritance that is undefiled and incorruptible waiting for us in heaven (1:4). I'm convinced that the majority of us will be shocked when we see the reward the Lord has waiting for us. Those who think they'll be lucky just to make it in will be amazed to hear the Lord say, "You said this kind word and you ministered that kind touch. You helped your neighbor, cared for your kids, and hung in there in your marriage. Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into my joy!" (see Matthew 25:23).

Perhaps the best day of your life was your wedding day. But at the marriage supper of the Lamb, you'll say, "Alright! *This* is what I longed for all along." You see, as with any relationship on earth, marriage holds tremendous happiness—but also real hurts. Not so in heaven. That is why I am so looking forward to becoming the Bride of Christ. I'm looking forward to Someone else paying the bills, making the decisions, answering the questions. It will be oh, so glorious.

Truly, because the day you see Jesus will so far exceed your best day on earth, the day of your death will be the best day of your life.



8 Ecclesiastes 8:1
Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a

thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed.

In the words of Abraham Lincoln, "Every person over forty is responsible for his own face." Wisdom is truly a determining factor in one's appearance. How attractive it is in any individual.

Ecclesiastes 8:2–4
I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God. Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him. Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?

"Because he's sovereign, be careful how you conduct yourself in the presence of the king. Submit yourself to him," says Solomon. Of course, this speaks to us concerning our King, Jesus. He knows what He's doing. We have no reason or right to question Him. Rather, ours is to submit to His will and to remain in His presence.

Ecclesiastes 8:5
Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.

It is in one's own best interests to keep the king's command. How much more so with God's commandments—for they are given for our good.

Ecclesiastes 8:6–8
Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him. For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be? There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

Such are Solomon's observations: "Be wise that your face might shine. Be careful how you eat in the presence of the king. And realize that, as a human being, you have certain limitations. You can't retain or release your spirit. You can't control your destiny. You are going to die." Only One controlled the destiny of His Spirit; only One gave His life rather than having it taken from Him (John 10:18).

Ecclesiastes 8:9, 10
All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt. And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity.

A man can turn his back on holiness and become a wicked individual, yet when he dies, people have a tendency to elevate him. Solomon calls this emptiness.

Ecclesiastes 8:11
Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

Man thinks he gets away with evil only because God does not move quickly in judgment. Peter says God is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Yet people make a dreadful error whenever they mistake the mercy of God for apathy, impotency, or approval.

Folks, just because God is patient with you, don't assume He approves of what you're doing, that He doesn't care what You're doing, or that He is powerless to bring judgment concerning what you're doing.

Ecclesiastes 8:12–14
Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the

wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God. There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity.

Solomon struggles because he sees righteous men treated like they're wicked and wicked men treated like they're righteous. The key to his dilemma, however, is found in three words in verse 14: "upon the earth."

Yes, there are inconsistencies upon the earth. But things will all even out in eternity. Sure, there's vanity on the earth. Certainly things don't make sense here—but this life is only the vapor that precedes heaven, where all will be made right.

Ecclesiastes 8:15
Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.

Weary with struggling, unable to see things from an eternal perspective, Solomon voices the philosophy of a hedonist when he says, "I can't figure life out, so why not just party? What else is there under the sun?"

Oh, Solomon, there's more to life than what is under the sun. Does the barracuda swimming in the ocean depths know there are birds flying in the sky, that there are sights and sounds he's never heard or seen, that there's an entire dimension above sea level? So too, the backslider and the unbeliever aren't aware of an entirely different dimension called eternity.

Ecclesiastes 8:16, 17
When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:) Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he

shall not find it; yea further; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.

No matter how wise you might think you are, you'll never have answers for why things take place the way they do. Instead, the Bible promises a peace that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7). And I love that. The Lord promises that all things are working together for good, that He is on the throne, and that all will be settled when He comes back.



9

Ecclesiastes 9:1–3
For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

Solomon is saying there's one event common to all mankind. We're all going to die. Whether you're good or bad, whether you offer sacrifice or don't, no matter who you are, the one unifying factor of all people is death.

Ecclesiastes 9:4
For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

Solomon's conclusion is that it's better to be a dog and hang on to life than to die for a noble cause. Why? Because of an error in his thinking, as seen in the next verse . . .

Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6

For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.

"When you die, that's it," says Solomon. In Luke 16, however, Jesus says this isn't so. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man said, "Let me go back and tell my brothers that hell is real." In other words, he was cognizant of both hell and earth. There are those who will try and convince you that, on the basis of this Scripture, when you die, there is no memory, no eternal damnation. But Jesus, our Greater than Solomon, clarifies the issue.

Ecclesiastes 9:7, 8
Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.

Because Solomon erroneously concludes that nothing exists beyond this life, he says all that's left to do is to put on your fine clothes, douse yourself with after-shave, and live as if life is one big party.

Ecclesiastes 9:9
Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.

"Live it up with your wife," says Solomon.

"Wait a minute," says Paul. "Let you who are married be as though you're not. Let you who are mourning be as though you're not mourning, you who are prospering as though you're not" (see 1 Corinthians 7:29, 30). In other words, don't make money, emotions, or even family a priority.

I'm convinced a lot of married couples in the church are putting themselves through unnecessary torture because they're so into their marriages. Jesus said that whoever doesn't hate his family in comparison

with his love for Him can't be part of the kingdom (Luke 14:26). Therefore, we must make Jesus the priority of our lives—not our marriages, not our emotions, not our material possessions. Make the Lord the priority of your life and everything else falls into place.

Love the Lord. Worship Him daily. Serve Him faithfully. Any husband, any wife who makes Jesus the love and passion of his or her life will find his or her marriage radically de-pressurized. But try and make your marriage partner your fulfillment, your focal point, and you will experience continual frustration.

How many marriage seminars did Jesus give? How many apostles were inspired to write handbooks on the home? None. They talked about eternity, about the kingdom of heaven.

- How does one be a happy wife?
  Love Jesus.
- How does one be a good husband?
  Love Jesus.

Ecclesiastes 9:10
Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

Notice in his backslidden state that Solomon emphasizes the material rather than the spiritual when he says, "Get involved in working with your hands—in physical, material pursuits. Do it with all your might because that's all there is."

Ecclesiastes 9:11
I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

Who wins the race or the battle? Not necessarily the best player. Solomon says it's luck.

Ecclesiastes 9:12
For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

"Like a fish scooped up in a net or a bird plucked out of the sky, so too, your time is coming. It's all fate," Solomon concludes.

Ecclesiastes 9:13–18
This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me: There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard. The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.

In the words of noted theologian, Joseph Parker: "We are prone to say, 'Show us true wisdom and the world will instantly recognize it and obey its commands.' History, however, gives a flat contradiction to this supposition. The world has not known wisdom when it has seen it, nor answered the voice of eloquence when it has heard it, nor bowed before the presence of beauty when it has been most openly revealed."

Yet the wise man must not be discouraged—for his time is yet to come.



10 We live in a time when society places a premium on soft diplomacy and where truth is often sacrificed on the altar of tact. Consequently, the Bible has tremendous appeal because it speaks very truthfully, even bluntly, that we might know exactly what the heart of our Lord, the mind of our God really is. Chapter 10 is such a passage, for in it, Solomon speaks directly about the foolish man.

Ecclesiastes 10:1
Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.

If you purchased a bottle of expensive perfume and found a dead fly floating at the top, you would be disgusted. A little folly in someone who is supposed to be wise will cause his reputation to be discredited.

Ecclesiastes 10:2
A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left.

Biblically, the right hand speaks of strength. If you are wise, whatever you do, you'll do it with your whole heart, enthusiastically.

Ecclesiastes 10:3
Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.

A fool need not wear a sign to identify him as a fool, for his lack of wisdom announces his own foolishness.

Ecclesiastes 10:4
If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences.

If your boss comes down on you, don't stand up and storm out of the office. Just turn the other cheek. If we wouldn't fight, if we wouldn't

retaliate, but rather understand that there is something the Lord has for us to learn in every situation, how much better off we would be. Jesus taught us to be those who yield—and yet how determined we are to state our case and stand up for our rights.

Ecclesiastes 10:5–7
There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler: Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.

When my kids were little, every time they saw a limousine, they assumed a rock star was inside. Why? Because, for the most part, our society rewards showmanship rather than true achievement. A man hits a little round golf ball and makes millions of dollars a year, while poverty abounds. Things aren't right in our society.

Ecclesiastes 10:8 (a)
He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it . . .

If you want to end up in the pits, try and entrap someone else.

Ecclesiastes 10:8 (b)
. . . and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.

"I can hedge a little bit," we say as we bend the rules. But here, Solomon is saying that, no matter who you are or how prominent you might be, if you break the hedge—if you overstep boundaries—you're going to be stung.

Ecclesiastes 10:9 (a)
Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith . . .

In Solomon's day, stones or large rocks were placed as land markers. "If you try and change the boundaries, the very rock you moved will fall on you," Solomon warns.

Ecclesiastes 10:9 (b)
. . . and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby.

Deuteronomy 20:19 says to be careful not to chop down fruit-bearing trees during the heat of battle. Solomon picks up on this same theme when he says, "If you're cutting down, you are in danger yourself."

Centuries later, Paul would illuminate this even further, saying, "If you bite and devour one another, know this: You yourselves will be consumed" (see Galatians 5:15).

Ecclesiastes 10:10
If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.

A dull ax requires a lot more energy than a sharp one. You might be saying, "When is my ministry going to blossom? When am I going to have opportunity to do something really significant for God?" Listen, these are days when He's sharpening the ax. The fool quickly grabs any tool, even if it's dull. Not so the wise man. Paul had thirteen years of sharpening; Moses, forty; Jesus Himself, thirty.

Despise not the days of small beginnings, saint (Zechariah 4:10)—for it is then that God does His finest, finishing work.

Ecclesiastes 10:11
Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better.

Like a snake who must continually be charmed with a flute, babblers must be kept happy or they'll bite.

Ecclesiastes 10:12–15
The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness. A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him? The labour of

the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.

A foolish man speaks foolishly, frivolously, and so constantly that he doesn't even know "how to go to the city" or, in our vernacular, "when to come in out of the rain."

Ecclesiastes 10:16, 17
Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child [childish], and thy princes eat in the morning! Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

Poor is the country who has fools in the place of leadership, who, first thing in the morning, begin to party; who, like children, live to pursue their own pleasures. But how blessed is the country who has wise leaders, who realize that the purpose of eating is simply to give them strength to carry out the tasks of the day.

Ecclesiastes 10:18
By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.

In this section, we have seen a foolish person accurately described by Solomon as one with too many words, too little sense, too early partying, and too late getting to work.

Ecclesiastes 10:19
A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things.

These are the words of a fool. How do you know if you're a fool? Is drinking important to you? Is partying a priority for you? Is money the real key to life in your perspective? If so, congratulations. You are a bona fide fool.

Ecclesiastes 10:20
Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

This is where the saying, "A little bird told me" comes from. How many times have we been absolutely amazed to discover that what we spoke in greatest confidence has somehow circulated throughout the entire region? You see, the "bird" of which Solomon writes is the bird of reality. Whenever you speak about someone else, count on your words getting back to him.

At this point in his journey to find the meaning of life, Solomon is sharing good moral principles and practical truth. Having already sought satisfaction through wine and women, money, philosophy, and education, he became the quintessential family man. But he's still struggling, as we'll see in the next chapter . . .



11

Ecclesiastes 11:1 (a)
Cast thy bread upon the waters . . .

Today we would say, "Don't put your extra bread in the freezer—give it away, instead." Jesus underscored this wisdom when He said, "Freely ye have received; freely give" (see Matthew 10:8).

Ecclesiastes 11:1 (b)
. . . for thou shalt find it after many days.

He who gives to the poor lends to the Lord (Proverbs 19:17). And since God will be a debtor to no man, whatever we give will be returned to us "pressed down and running over" (Luke 6:38).

Ecclesiastes 11:2 (a)
Give a portion to seven, and also to eight . . .

"Don't give to only one person—but give to seven or eight."
Why? Read on . . .

Ecclesiastes 11:2 (b)
. . . for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.

If you've been generous with lots of folks, lots of folks will be generous with you. The problem is, although we agree with this in theory, we find ourselves saying, "As soon as I get a better job" or, "as soon as we pay off the credit card bill," or, "as soon as we get our yard planted, then we'll really share." But check out the next verse . . .

Ecclesiastes 11:3, 4
If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.

He who is always anticipating the storm or worried about which way the tree will fall will never sow and, therefore, never reap. Folks, there is never a good time to give. If you're waiting for a more convenient time, it will never come. So do it now. Now is the time to do whatever the Lord has placed upon your heart.

Ecclesiastes 11:5
As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.

Because we don't know the ways of God, we can't base our giving, our loving, or our ministering on our ability to plan when is the appropriate time to do so. Rather, we need simply to be obedient and faithful to keep giving and loving every day.

Ecclesiastes 11:6

In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.

Keep giving because you don't know which seed will sprout. Keep loving because you don't know which person you show love to might respond and see Jesus in the process. Keep sowing in the morning; keep reaching out in the evening. Don't give up. There really is no easy time to open your home, to write that check, to give generously of whatever resources you have. But if you'll do it faithfully, it will return to you in the day of your own trouble.

Ecclesiastes 11:7
Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun:

This is Solomon's way of saying, "Life is really a privilege. Be thankful for it."

Ecclesiastes 11:8 (a)
But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all . . .

The Bible gives no loophole for troubled teenage years, midlife crisis, or the depression of old age. Rather, here we are told to rejoice in every year, every season of life. Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and life more abundantly" (see John 10:10). But the Pharisees couldn't handle Him. So they called Him a winebibber and a glutton. They found fault with Jesus because there was a robustness about His life, an attraction so evident that people from the world loved to hang around Him. I suggest to you Jesus would have a hard time in many ministerial associations even today because they would think Him far too happy to be in the ministry.

Ecclesiastes 11:8 (b)
. . . yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. . . .

Imagine a bird flying in from outer space and taking a single peck off the top of Mt. Everest before returning to outer space. A thousand years later, he returns and takes a second peck before cruising back beyond the solar system. A thousand years later, he makes a third appearance—and keeps on doing this every thousand years. The amount of time it would take the bird to flatten Mt. Everest is equivalent to less than a second in eternity. Truly, it is wise to consider, to the best of our ability, the length of eternity.

Ecclesiastes 11:8 (c)
. . . All that cometh is vanity.

In comparison to eternity, all that comes our way presently is empty.

Ecclesiastes 11:9 (a)
Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes . . .

Parents, I think we should tell our kids how wonderful life is, that youth is a special time. I think sometimes we can be so overbearing and so heavy on trying to make sure they don't make a mistake that we take away the glory and joy that youth can bring.

Ecclesiastes 11:9 (b), 10
. . . but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.

As believers, we know Jesus came to bring abundant life. But we also know that judgment is coming and that, to those who violate the principles of God, the repercussions are tragic.



12 The rabbis say Solomon wrote the Song of Solomon when he was a young man, Proverbs as a middle-aged man, and Ecclesiastes as an old

man. If that be so, it is no wonder that, in this last chapter of his last book, Solomon looks at the reality and the effects of aging . . .

Ecclesiastes 12:1 (a)
Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth . . .

The word translated "remember" doesn't mean to daydream or reminisce, but rather it's an action word that literally means "to act decisively." That is why, throughout the Bible, when God says, "I will remember you," He's not merely saying, "You're on My mind," but rather, "I will act decisively on your behalf."

Solomon is saying, "Act decisively and radically toward your Creator in the days when you're young because harder days are coming."

Ecclesiastes 12:1 (b)
. . . while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

Young people make a terrible mistake when they think, "It's too hard to act decisively for the Lord now. My friends won't understand; the crowd will reject me. It's too tough to live for God now. When I get older, it will be easier."

Solomon is saying that's not so. The older you get, the tougher it becomes. In fact, in his book entitled *We Americans,* George Gallup presented some interesting statistics on the demographics of our country . . .

- If your grandfather was born in 1900, he could expect to reach forty-four years of age.
- If your father was born in 1940, the life expectancy had increased to sixty-three.
- If your son was born in 1980, he can expect to live to be seventy-five years old.
- Presently, there are twelve thousand-plus Americans over the age of a hundred.

Solomon has some interesting things to say about aging that are applicable to every one of us as, regardless of our age, we are older than when we started this chapter . . .

Ecclesiastes 12:2 (a)
While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened . . .

This is a Hebrew idiom that means "Before you get depressed." You see, old age can bring its own crankiness and depression. As Shakespeare said, "I wasted time, now time doth waste me." Many older people are vulnerable to becoming irritable. For them, the sun no longer shines; the moon is no longer bright; the luster of life is gone.

Ecclesiastes 12:2 (b)
. . . nor the clouds return after the rain:

Again, if we were in Solomon's culture, we would understand that this phrase refers to the mind becoming foggy. We all experience storms of forgetfulness, but when we're younger, the sun shines, everything brightens, and we say, "Oh, yeah, now I remember." As we age, however, the clouds take longer to dissipate.

Ecclesiastes 12:3 (a)
In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble . . .

The "keepers of the house" speak of the legs. Those who study physiology tell athletes that the first thing to go is their legs, as the quickness and the spring decline.

Ecclesiastes 12:3 (b)
. . . and the strong men shall bow themselves . . .

The "strong men" refer to the shoulders. Whereas once we stood erect and strong, now our shoulders bend forward a bit and bow somewhat.

Ecclesiastes 12:3 (c)
. . . and the grinders cease because they are few . . .

The "grinders," or teeth, cease working because they're losing numbers. One man described the aging process this way: You begin with milk. Then you go to milk and soft vegetables. Then you go to milkshakes with hamburgers and candy. Then you go to steak and Coke and corn-on-the-cob. Then you go to caviar and frogs' legs and chocolate mousse. Then you go back to milk and soft vegetables.

Solomon says the day is coming when your shoulders will stoop, when your teeth will be missing, when your legs will be shaking. These things are going to happen. And then he continues the description . . .

Ecclesiastes 12:3 (d)
. . . and those that look out of the windows be darkened,

Your eye is an amazing instrument. It is the instrument most sensitive to light on the face of the earth. Incredibly, it can see a star flickering twenty-five billion light years away. And yet even its ability fades with age.

Ecclesiastes 12:4 (a)
And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low . . .

Hearing begins to fail. The ear is also an incredible instrument. At its peak, it can differentiate between 15,000 tones. But when is it at its peak? At about one and a half years of age. After that, it's pretty much all downhill.

Ecclesiastes 12:4 (b)
. . . and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;

With age, sleep patterns are more easily disrupted. Even a bird chirping outside can waken one.

Ecclesiastes 12:5 (a)

Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way . . .

Studies indicate that there are chemical changes which take place in the brain that make us more vulnerable to fears the older we get. I hear myself cautioning Peter-John about the very things I would do most freely and easily as a kid.

Ecclesiastes 12:5 (b)
. . . and the almond tree shall flourish . . .

Almond trees are white on top. Thus, this speaks of the graying of one's hair.

Ecclesiastes 12:5 (c)
. . . and the grasshopper shall be a burden . . .

When asked to perform some task, the inevitable answer of young guys is, "No problem." But as we get older, things that were once no problem suddenly become surprisingly burdensome.

Ecclesiastes 12:5 (d)
. . . and desire shall fail . . .

This, of course, speaks of passion.

Ecclesiastes 12:5 (e)
. . . because man goeth to his long home . . .

The "long home" speaks of eternity.

Ecclesiastes 12:5 (f)
. . . and the mourners go about the streets:

As his passion begins to fail, as the grasshopper becomes a burden, as he becomes almond tree-like on his head, man finds himself mourning at more

and more funerals for his friends and colleagues.

Ecclesiastes 12:6 (a)
Or ever the silver cord be loosed . . .

The "silver cord" speaks of the spinal cord. Paralysis begins to set in.

Ecclesiastes 12:6 (b)
. . . or the golden bowl be broken . . .

The "golden bowl" was a phrase used to describe the brain. Did you know that you will forget ninety percent of everything you learn? And yet the ten percent you retain is actually ten times larger than all of the volumes in the Library of Congress—which number approximately seventeen million volumes of books. Truly, the brain is an amazing device, constantly processing incredible amounts of information.

According to experts, if a computer was built that could perform all of the functions your brain does, it would have to be the size of the United Nations building in New York, cooled with a water source as free-flowing as Niagara Falls, and would require as much power as is used in one year by the state of California.

Yet, in old age, the brain starts to slow down a bit.

Ecclesiastes 12:6 (c)
. . . or the pitcher be broken at the fountain . . .

This speaks of the lungs. If you are an average individual, you breathe 23,040 times every twenty-four hours, taking in four hundred thirty-eight cubic feet of air. But eventually, you find yourself out of breath more easily as your breathing capacity diminishes with age.

Ecclesiastes 12:6 (d)
. . . or the wheel broken at the cistern.

This speaks of the heart—that incredible machine that pumps blood through one hundred sixty-eight million miles of veins, arteries, and

capillaries each and every day.

Ecclesiastes 12:7
Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Finally, after all this process is completed, no matter how healthy we might be or how young we might feel, we eventually die.

What is Solomon saying through all of this?

First of all, aging is inevitable. It is not something about which we should be embarrassed, but rather something we should be embracing, for with the ancient is wisdom and in length of days is understanding (Job 12:12). Gang, even though our bodies may be deteriorating, we can have the possibility of gaining wisdom and understanding. There is a tendency in our youth-oriented society to hang on to youth, but in reality, the Bible says with age comes wisdom. Therefore, let us embrace that process.

Second, aging is not only inevitable, but aging is essential because through it, God gives us daily reminders that we're headed for eternity. "Lord, teach us to number our days," said Moses (Psalm 90:12). God helps us do just that by reminding us of the passing of time every time we look in the mirror.

Aging is inevitable, essential—but, praise God, not eternal because we're only here for a short time. We'll discard these bodies and move on to our glorious, new resurrected state where there shall be no aging or disease, no breaking of the fountain, no trembling of the pillars, no losing of the grinders. Aging is not an eternal process. It's short—then on to heaven, where we'll have new bodies designed for eternity.

That is why Solomon says, "*Today* is the day to remember your Creator. You're not dead yet. You still have your mind. Your heart is still pumping." *Now* is the time because most people think, "As soon as I get out of high school, then I'll really live for God," or, "As soon as I get through college and finish my studies, then I'll be serious about seeking the Lord," or, "As soon as my kids grow up, then I'll have time to wait on God," or, "As soon as my kids get out of the house . . . ."

The truth, however, is that it will never be easier than now for you to serve God. Never. It will never be easier for you than now to develop devotions. It will never be easier for you than now to begin to minister. It will never be easier than now to worship. It does not get easier as you get older. That's what Solomon is saying. Physically, you start to fall apart. Mentally, you're vulnerable to depression. So now is the day, in the day of your youth, to act decisively on behalf of God.

You see, the greatest misunderstanding is that when we get older, we automatically become wiser. Not so. If you are not spending time in the Word now, worshiping God now, serving God now, when you get older, you'll just be an old, cranky fool. And society is loaded with people like that.

But if you decided now to walk with God and commit your life to Him, you will age gracefully, become wise increasingly, and be a blessing to so many.

Ecclesiastes 12:8, 9
Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity. And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs.

Grappling with advancing age, struggling with the meaning of life, Solomon still continued to teach. This says to me that even during seasons of struggle, we need to share. It's important to realize that truth is truth and must be conveyed no matter what season one is in personally. Share truth with people even if, like Solomon, you are struggling because truth needs to be spoken faithfully, consistently, diligently.

Ecclesiastes 12:10 (a)
The preacher sought to find out acceptable words . . .

Solomon searched for just the right words to express what was on his heart. John Stott likens this process to a dog wrestling with a bone, trying to take off every scrap of meat. And that is what made Solomon an excellent preacher. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we approached family devotions looking for just the right way to communicate truth to our kids?

Ecclesiastes 12:10 (b)
. . . and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.

Aren't you beginning to sense that all the while Solomon was struggling, he knew what was real? Even as he partied day and night, even as he experimented with philosophy and wealth, he knew what was really true.

You'll never be effective in ministry until you learn to lay aside your own struggles and trips, depression and victories, joys and disappointments and say, "I'm committed to communicating truth. Period." For if you share only when you're doing well, your ministry will be inconsistent.

Secondly, realize that Satan will constantly whisper in your ear that you have no business, no right, no authority to minister because your life is a mess. That's only the accuser of the brethren trying to sideline you (Revelation 12:10). Don't buy his lies. Instead, keep being faithful in what God has called you to do.

Ecclesiastes 12:11 (a)
The words of the wise are as goads . . .

Just as goads are used to prod cattle, the words of the wise get us moving in the right direction.

Ecclesiastes 12:11 (b)
. . . and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies . . .

Words of wisdom nail down truth.

Ecclesiastes 12:11 (c)
. . . which are given from one shepherd.

And whence come these words of wisdom? Not from me. Not from you. But from one Shepherd—Jesus Christ. The words of the Lord revealed in His Word are what will move the cattle and fasten down truth in the lives of those we love.

Ecclesiastes 12:12, 13 (a)

And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter . . .

"This is it," declares Solomon. "I'm now going to conclude what I have learned from all of my experimentation, all of my partying, possessions, and pursuits . . . ."

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (b)
. . . Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

"After all I've tried, the answer to life is not in pleasure, power, possessions, or the pursuit of knowledge. The meaning of life lies in the fear of God," Solomon emphatically declares.

Ecclesiastes 12:14
For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

The author of the Book of Job was a dramatist, a quintessential playwright. The author of Psalms was a poet par excellence. The author of Genesis and Exodus, a wonderful novelist. The author of Jonah was a storyteller. But here, I see Solomon not so much a storyteller or dramatist but rather a photographer. He takes pictures of life and lets us look at them in order to see they're all bogus. Then, on the last page of his photo album, he says, "This is the key: Fear God and keep His commandments."

But you know what? I close this photo album and still feel discouraged because the problem is, I've broken the commandments, and, therefore, fear judgment.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect" (Matthew 5:48). But I'm not. So, although Solomon's conclusion is correct, I haven't followed it. I haven't obeyed God perfectly.

But our Greater than Solomon—Jesus Christ—appears and says, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest, for except your righteousness exceed that of

the scribes and Pharisees, unless it's better than the most religious individuals, you will not inherit eternal life" (see Matthew 5:20; 11:28).

So it is that I say, "Lord, I failed. But You didn't. You took my sin upon Yourself and died in my place. Oh, what grace. And now, Lord, by Your grace, I can walk in Your ways and keep Your commandments. By Your grace, Lord, I not only fear You, but I love You."

And life has meaning—not under the sun, but *in* the Son.

Amen.



SONG OF SOLOMON

Background to Song of Solomon

The Song of Solomon was the favorite book of D. L. Moody, C. H. Spurgeon, and St. John of the Cross. John Gill, a Puritan preacher mined one hundred twenty-two sermons from its riches. Bernard of Clairvaux, a French mystic, delivered eighty-eight teachings from the first chapter alone.

Solomon wrote, "Vanity of vanities" in Ecclesiastes, but labeled this book his "Song of Songs." He wrote, "There is nothing new under the sun," in Ecclesiastes, but wrote of life under the Son in his Song.

It's a many-faceted diamond, this glorious Song of Solomon—for no matter which way it is studied, or from which angle it is approached, it is sure to reflect and refract Jesus Christ—the Light of the world and the Lover of our souls.

It is one of the most beautiful, but perhaps one of the most controversial books in the entire Bible. It is controversial for two reasons: its content and its intent. The content of the Song of Solomon is controversial because some see it as nothing more than an erotic oriental love poem. It was for this reason that Orthodox Jews were not allowed to read it until they were thirty years of age. But perhaps even more controversial than the content of the Song of Solomon is its intent.

There are those who say it's simply a marriage manual—that in this book a man can learn how to relate to his wife and a woman can learn how to respond to her husband. Others say it is an allegory that speaks of Jehovah's love for the nation of Israel. Still others view it as the account of a love triangle with Solomon representing the world's system, the maiden representing the church, and the shepherd-king representing Jesus Christ.

But the most commonly held viewpoint, and the one to which I personally ascribe, is that the love between the king and the maiden as seen in the book before us is a picture of the love between Jesus and His church.

Part of the problem in interpreting the Song of Solomon is that it is not always clear who is speaking. Many translations have added headings of explanation, but, as is often the case, they can produce more confusion than

clarity. It is therefore necessary to look for contextual clues within any given passage to determine whether it is the king or the maiden speaking.

In one aspect, this is an extremely difficult book to teach because it is so personal. But I promise you this: Whether you are mystical or analytical by nature, whether you are both or neither, if you'll spend time quietly and privately with the Lord reading His book as a love letter from Him, no matter how you choose to interpret it, He will make precious and personal application to your life.



SONG OF SOLOMON

1

Song of Solomon 1:1
The song of songs, which is Solomon's.

Jesus is the King of kings. The temple contained the Holy of Holies. And this is Solomon's Song of songs. First Kings 4 tells us that Solomon wrote 1,005 songs, yet this is the only one God saw fit to preserve for eternity.

Song of Solomon 1:2 (a)
Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth . . .

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth," sings the maiden in the opening phrase of Solomon's "opera." When, after realizing he had lived a life of sin and debauchery, the prodigal son returned to him, his father greeted him with kisses upon his neck (Luke 15:20)—which speak of forgiveness and restoration. The kisses of the mouth here in Song of Solomon are not the kisses of forgiveness, but the kisses of intimacy and communion.

You cannot kiss two people at one time—don't try it! And one of the things that's so important to understand is, if we desire intimacy with the Lord—not simply the kiss of forgiveness, but the kiss of intimacy—we need to forsake all others. We cannot follow after this idol or that desire but, instead, must say, "Lord, I'm fully, completely, totally committed to *You*."

Song of Solomon 1:2 (b)
. . . for thy love is better than wine.

Wine speaks of joy. Here, the maiden says to the king, "Sharing intimacy with you far exceeds even the most joyous substance the world has to offer."

We've found that to be true, haven't we? When you feel the closeness of the Lord—perhaps at His Table or in a time when worship is ascending in a powerful way; perhaps when you're walking in the woods or quietly meditating by a lake; perhaps when you're on your knees in your prayer

closet or bowing down by your bed—you know that *nothing* compares to His presence.

Song of Solomon 1:3 (a)
Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth . . .

When Elvis Presley was popular in the mid-fifties, girls would swoon at the mention of his name. But Jesus' name is much more precious because people don't faint at the name of Jesus—they "walk and leap and praise God" (Acts 3:8).

Song of Solomon 1:3 (b)
. . . therefore do the virgins love thee.

Any virgin, any person who desires purity and rightness will eventually love Jesus. People often say, "But my friend, neighbor, or my family member is so good, so pure. Surely, he can't go to hell just because he doesn't know Jesus."

I suggest to you that whoever is truly a spiritual virgin—whoever truly desires goodness, purity, and righteousness will inevitably desire and submit to Jesus Christ. Conversely, if a person does not want to love the Lord, he is not a good person. That's a hard statement to make, but it's one I believe Scripture backs up through and through. Truly, there is none righteous, no not one. There is none that doeth good (Romans 3:10)—but if a person has even a *desire* to be right and pure, he will inevitably follow the Lord.

Song of Solomon 1:4 (a)
Draw me, we will run after thee . . .

The maiden says to the king whose name is so precious and whose intimacy she desires, "Unless you draw me, unless you invite me, unless you reach out to me, I can't come. But if you draw me, I will run."

In John 15, Jesus said, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." You see, we cannot seek after the Lord unless the Father, through the Spirit,

draws and woos us (John 6:44). It's not that we're lazy; it's that we're powerless.

"Draw me and we will run after Thee." What a prayer to be offered from our lips. "Draw me, Lord—and as You stir my spirit and pull the strings of my heart, I will come. I will respond. Draw me to You—and I'll run."

Song of Solomon 1:4 (b)
. . . the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee.

Here, the scene changes as the maiden is brought into the palace of the king. It is important to understand that, before the king became her lover, she was first brought into the palace where she acknowledged him as her lord.

Understand, folks, that you will not experience the intimacy, the warmth, the beauty of a love relationship with the Lord until you submit to Him as King. Many people ask me, "Why don't I feel God's love? Others around me weep and rejoice, but I never feel a thing. Why?"

I answer, "Perhaps it is because you have not yet come to the palace and truly submitted every part of your personality and being to Him. You see, before there can be intimate communication, there must be complete commitment."

Think about it, guys. When you began to date your wife, you couldn't be intimate with her or expressive toward her until there was an absolute commitment made. When you said, "You are my wife until death do us part" the possibility for intimacy became available. Otherwise, it would have been adultery or immorality.

As a man and woman become more committed to each other, they can begin to share more expression. You date a girl and first you hold her hand. Then, you put your arm around her—and then perhaps the goodnight kiss. In other words, as the commitment increases, the intimacy can be expressed—but never can be completely expressed until the lasting commitment of marriage is made.

I'm convinced that many times, we don't experience the fullness of intimacy with the Lord because, in reality, we're still at the "holding hand"

stage with Him. We're not really committed to Him because there are other things and priorities to which we cling. Like the maiden, we can't experience intimacy until we come into His palace, bow our knee, and say, "You are Lord."

Song of Solomon 1:5 (a)
I am black . . .

In the presence of the king, the maiden suddenly realizes her own blackness. So too, whenever you enter into the company of the Lord, you're in for a shock because you'll be aware of how black you are in and of yourself. That is why when Isaiah came into the Lord's presence, he said, "Woe is me. I am unclean. I am undone" (see Isaiah 6:5).

You can't be proud or boastful; you can't be self-assured in the presence of the Lord. You might think you're on top of everything now, but when you come into His presence and you see *His* beauty, *His* holiness, *His* loveliness, you say, "Woe is me. I am black."

Song of Solomon 1:5 (b)
. . . but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem . . .

I'm black, but I'm also comely because I'm in Christ Jesus. He has cleansed me with His blood. He has put me on His team. He has made me a part of His bride and His body. He has robed me with His righteousness. I'm black, but I am comely because of what He has done for me.

Song of Solomon 1:5 (c)
. . . as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.

The tents of Kedar were black tents, made of black goats' hair. The curtains of Solomon were made of white linen. "I know I'm black on the outside," the maiden says, "but I also know I'm pure."

It's this dichotomy, this struggle of which each of us is aware. Like Paul, we know that in our flesh dwells no good thing (Romans 7:18). And yet, like him, we have the treasure of the Lord's presence within our earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Song of Solomon 1:6
Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.

Here, the maiden explains why she's black. Instead of just saying, "I'm black but comely," and leaving it at that, she gives a reason for why she's black.

Do you ever do that? Do you ever say, "If you had parents like I had, you would be black, too," or, "If you had a boss like I do, you would understand," or, "If you had a husband like I have, you would be *really* dark"?

The maiden says, "The reason I'm so tan"—which was totally looked down upon in her culture—"is because my background was harsh and my brothers were hostile. The sun shone on me. My brothers made me take care of all of the vineyards. I had to work outside—and that's why I am the way I am."

Oh, how often today we hear people say, "The reason I am the way I am is because of my brothers . . . or my mother . . . or my situation." But we don't have to do this. We don't have to explain why we're black—we simply have to admit that we are!

Song of Solomon 1:7
Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?

Here, the bride shows us that her king is also a shepherd. This is why some people say there are three main characters in this story. The shepherd could not be the king, they reason, for what king is a shepherd?

Oh, but there is a King who is a Shepherd: Jesus Christ—the King of kings and the Shepherd of our souls—the Good Shepherd of John 10:14, the Great Shepherd of Hebrews 13:20, the Chief Shepherd of 1 Peter 5:4.

"Tell me," says the bride to her shepherd-king, "where do you keep your flocks? I want to be there, too. Why should I settle for your companions when I can have you? I want to be with *you*."

I feel that in my heart. Sometimes I say, "Lord, where are You? I don't want to settle for just spending time with Your companions. I want You, Lord. Oh, I appreciate the advice of my brothers and sisters—but I need *You,* Lord."

Do you ever feel like you just need to be with the Lord—and you wonder where He is? "Where are You, Lord?" we call out in the noonday, when the sun is highest and the heat is hottest. Notice the king's answer . . .

Song of Solomon 1:8 (a)
If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock . . .

"Do you want to know where I am? Do you want to be with me? Do you want to know where I hang out in the heat of the day?" asks the king. "I'll tell you: First, follow the flock."

So if you want to find the Lord, follow His flock. There is no room for the "Lone Ranger" mentality in the body of Christ that says, "I don't need church. I don't need Bible study. I don't need Communion. I've grown beyond those things. It's just me and Jesus." I have yet to see a Christian who, over the long haul, has done well as a Lone Ranger. It doesn't work. That's why the Bible says . . .

> And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.
>
> Hebrews 10:24, 25

We need to follow the flock, to be a part of the flock. The Lord designed it that way. He's building a family—living stones being fit together for a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5).

Song of Solomon 1:8 (b)
. . . and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents.

"Second," said the king, "feed the kids. Find those who are young and feed them. That's where you'll find me."

Saints, when you feel like you don't know where the Lord is during the heat of the day, during the hard times in your life, come to church. Find some new believers, some Sunday school kids, some junior-highers—and feed them. It's so important. Once you're "feeding kids"—whether in a home Bible study, a Sunday school class, or discipling someone one-on-one—you experience the flow of God's love through you to someone else and it's wonderful!

Where is the Lord? Follow the flock, feed the kids, and I promise you will find Him and experience Him in special ways.

Song of Solomon 1:9
I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots.

The king doesn't compare the maiden to a donkey or to a beast of burden. He compares her to a horse—a prized possession in that culture. In other words, he says, "I have compared you to a Ferrari. I have compared you to a BMW. You're something special."

Notice this key concept as you read through this book: the king has only good things to say about this woman who recognizes her own blackness. The same is true of us. Jesus looks at us and is in love with us. I am so aware of my blackness, yet Jesus actually desires us. *Great* is the mystery!

Song of Solomon 1:10 (a)
Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels . . .

How can cheeks have rows of jewels? In Solomon's day, women wore headdresses with jewels connected to them by leather straps that hung down upon their cheeks.

Song of Solomon 1:10 (b)
. . . thy neck with chains of gold.

Gold is the metal of monarchy.

Song of Solomon 1:11 (a)
We will make thee borders [braids] of gold . . .

Who is "we"? I believe this speaks of the Trinity. "We will make thee braids of gold. We're only going to make you even *more* beautiful," the Lord says.

How is gold braided? By pounding and beating it.

When we wonder what the Lord is doing during the times of trial and testing, He is braiding us—His gold—through hard times of pounding and beating and shaping.

"What right does He have to pound on me and to beautify me in that way?" you ask.

Read on.

Song of Solomon 1:11 (b)
. . . with studs of silver.

Silver is the metal of redemption.

Jesus redeemed you. He bought you with His blood. Therefore, He can beautify you as He sees fit.

Song of Solomon 1:12 (a)
While the king sitteth at his table . . .

First Kings 4 says that at Solomon's table every day there were thirty measures (190 bushels) of fine flour, threescore measures (390 bushels) of meal, ten fat oxen, twenty oxen out of pasture, one hundred sheep besides harts, roebucks, fallow deer, and fatted fowl. Solomon's table was abundant in provision.

Song of Solomon 1:12 (b)

. . . my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.

It was when the maiden sat at the table of her shepherd-king that the fragrance came forth from her.

Gang, when you feast at the Lord's Table, a fragrance comes forth. Jesus said, "This do in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19) and yet we as believers so often say, "We don't have time or the inclination or the desire to come to the Communion Table."

When you feast at the Lord's Table, it's a fragrant, beautiful expression of love in His sight. Therefore, don't come to church only to get. Don't come just to see if you can be blessed. We assemble together because it's fragrant to *Him.* The Lord is blessed when He sees His kids remembering Him. How it changed my understanding of church when I understood that I wasn't coming just to get. I was coming to honor my Lord.

The bride says, "At the king's table, the fragrance of spikenard emanated from me."

What is spikenard? It's the same ointment Mary released upon Jesus as she broke the alabaster box. Jesus said, "She has done this as a memorial unto Me. And this shall be spoken of wherever the gospel is preached. Disciples, leave her alone. This is a beautiful act" (Mark 14:3–9).

Song of Solomon 1:13 (a)
A bundle of myrrh is my wellbeloved unto me . . .

What is myrrh? A burial spice.

Even at Jesus' birth, as He was wrapped in swaddling cloths and later presented with myrrh, a statement was being made that He was born to die.

Song of Solomon 1:13 (b)
. . . he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts.

This passage is better translated "It shall lie all night betwixt my breasts," referring to the bundle of myrrh.

Who is the person who is really in love with the Lord, the person who feels the presence of the Lord upon his breast and within his heart? It is the

person who understands that the Lord died for him personally and for those sins that are so black. It is the person who realizes that Christ's death is not just theology but reality. It is the person who says, "I'm a sinner. And the Lord died for me. It's not just the teachings He shared or the life He lived—it's what He did on Calvary that makes me love Him." It is the person who remembers the Cross.

Song of Solomon 1:14
My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-gedi.

En-gedi is a beautiful oasis surrounded by the deserts of the Dead Sea. It's where David hung out when he fled from Saul—a refreshing spot, indeed.

Here, the maiden says to her king, "You're an oasis to me. You're like the camphire—or the cypress—tree. The shade tree, the beauty in this desert-dry world—that's what you are to me."

Song of Solomon 1:15 (a)
Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair . . .

The king replies, "You are fair." "Fair" does not mean "adequate," "alright," or "passable." It means "excellent," "ravishing," "wonderful."

Song of Solomon 1:15 (b)
. . . thou hast doves' eyes.

The eyes reveal what is in the soul. The dove being a symbol of the Holy Spirit, this verse says that Jesus sees His Spirit in my soul. He doesn't see me in my flesh and stupidity—which is obvious to many. Instead, He sees the reality of His life being lived through mine. And He says to every one who knows Him, to every single believer, "You are fair. You're wonderful because I see in you My work and My life."

Saints, *everything* the king says to his maiden is positive and encouraging. And that's the way the Lord sees us.

Song of Solomon 1:16

Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant: also our bed is green.

The maiden says, "*You're* pleasant, lord. It's not me. It's you!"

Now, remember that in verse 7, the maiden asked for two things: that she might be fed and that she might have rest. What does she find? She is fed when she sits at his table in verse 12. And here, in verse 16, she finds rest in his house.

Song of Solomon 1:17
The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters of fir.

The rest the maiden found in the house of her king was not some shaky, fragile place that would collapse or cave in if she messed up. It was girded with beams of cedar and rafters of fir.

"King," she says, "I'm safe here—not because of who I am, but because of what you've done." The bride rejoices in the fact that she could be at rest in the palace of the king.

I do the same. I'm at rest tonight because of what Jesus has done for me.



2

Song of Solomon 2:1
I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.

As chapter 2 opens, the shepherd-king says, "I am the rose of Sharon."

Jesus identified Himself as the bread of life (John 6:35) and the light of the world (John 8:12). But here, He's speaking of something more than an essential need or provision for life. He is saying, "I'm not just bread and light—I'm something beautiful to behold. I don't only give you the essentials —I bring beauty to your life."

And yet, Jesus was also the essence of strength. A carpenter before the days of power tools, I suggest to you He had massive arms. Perhaps that is why not one vendor dared challenge Him when He overturned money stands

and drove cattle from the temple (Matthew 21:12). When He was taken to the edge of a cliff and about to be thrown over by an angry mob, it took only a look from Him to part the crowd (Luke 4:29, 30).

Song of Solomon 2:2
As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

Of the maiden, the king says, "I am a lily and you're like me. As the lily among thorns, I see you and I love the beauty I see in you."

Song of Solomon 2:3
As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

The maiden praises the pleasantness of her king.

Psalm 34 says, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good." You'll never know how sweet Jesus is until you taste of Him. Give the Lord a chance tomorrow morning. Taste and see. Spend time with Him in the shade of His presence, eating of His fruit.

Song of Solomon 2:4–6
He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.

The king's banner over the maiden was not "Try harder." It was "I love you."

Most of us think that if we sat down under the Lord's tree and ate of His fruit, He would say, "Aha! I've got you. Now I can give you a piece of My mind." But that's not the heart of the Lord, for there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). His left hand is able to support you. His right hand is ready to embrace you. And His banner over you is love.

Song of Solomon 2:7 (a)
I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field . . .

Here, the king speaks to a group of women who have appeared on stage. The daughters of Jerusalem, seen throughout the story, seem to be like a Greek chorus who come on the scene every now and then to give observation.

Unfortunately, some Christians are like the daughters of Jerusalem. They pop in every once in awhile to tell you what they think you should be doing.

Song of Solomon 2:7 (b)
. . . that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.

A better translation of this phrase would be, "that ye stir not up, nor awake my love till I please." Thus, the king is saying, "Mind your own business. Don't wake her up. I want her to be at rest."

What a good word for the "daughter of Jerusalem" in each of us. Listen to the word of the King: "Mind your own business. Let My children sleep until I please. I'll take care of them. I will awaken them in My time."

How I thank the Lord that He lets me rest in Him. In the only autobiographical statement Jesus ever made, He said, "I am meek and lowly and you shall find rest in your soul" (Matthew 11:29). The only thing Jesus said about Himself was, "I am not harsh and demanding, but meek and lowly. Walk with Me, learn of Me, and you'll find rest."

Song of Solomon 2:8 (a)
The voice of my beloved . . .

Here, the story takes on a new dimension. After a night of intimacy between the king and his beloved, the bride hears the voice of her shepherd-king before the breaking of the dawn.

Song of Solomon 2:8 (b)
. . . behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.

While she remains in bed, she hears the voice of her beloved as he leaps on the mountains and skips on the hills. Scripturally, mountains are often symbolic of problems. Yet here, the shepherd-king, a picture of Jesus, leaps on the mountains and skips on the hills.

I like that! The problems that seem so overwhelming to us, the obstacles that seem so awesome to us are mere stepping stones to the Lord. A woman once asked me if her problem was too small to bring to the Lord. I asked her in return, "Is there any problem that's *big* to the Lord?"

The problems that seem so big to us shrink in light of the Lord's power and might.

Song of Solomon 2:9
My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice.

The bride remains in the room while her love is outside, leaping on mountains and skipping over hills. She feels secure and safe—and yet, she and her king are separated. She is inside—"into herself " if you would—while her love is outside calling to her.

Song of Solomon 2:10–12
My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;

Before the dawn breaks, the shepherd-king stands outside the window and says to his bride, "Come! There are places to go and things to do. A new season is upon us. New opportunities are before us. Arise. Come away. Let's go!"

Song of Solomon 2:13
The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and

come away.

Throughout Scripture, the fig tree is symbolic of the nation of Israel. In Matthew 24, Jesus said that the budding of the fig tree would be a sign that His coming is nigh. He went on to say that the generation that sees the fig tree blossom would not pass away. It would be the final generation (Matthew 24:34).

We are that generation, gang, for in 1948, Israel began to bloom. Thus, I hear the voice of our Shepherd-King saying to us, "Arise, church! Get out of bed. There are places to go, things to do, countries to reach, tasks before you in these last days."

Song of Solomon 2:14
O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.

The bride speaks, quoting the words of the shepherd-king. Why was the countenance of the bride comely? Because she was in the clefts of the rock.

Moses desired to see the presence, the glory, the reality of God. God answered his request by saying, "No man can see Me and live. But I'll tell you what I'll do: Hide in the cleft, or crevice, of the rock and I'll put My hand over you as I pass by. Then I'll remove My hand and allow you to see My afterglow" (see Exodus 33:13–23).

The only way we can see God, walk with God, and have fellowship with Him is if, like Moses, we are hid in the cleft of the Rock. And, as Paul said, that Rock is Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4).

Precious people, we are comely not because of *who* we are, but because of *where* we are. We are in the Rock. We are in Christ Jesus. That's why you can say with absolute certainty and integrity, "I am comely. I am spiritually beautiful because I am hidden in Christ Jesus—surrounded and covered by His righteousness. In me dwells no good thing. I know that I'm black—and yet I'm in the cleft of the Rock. I'm in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:13). Oh, what a glorious truth!

Song of Solomon 2:15
Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.

The king speaks. Remember the context: the morning is about to break. He stands outside the window of his bride and says, "Come away, my beloved. There are places to go and things to do. You're like a dove—hid in the cleft of the rock. You're comely." But, here he ads, "Watch out for the little foxes."

In that day, vineyards were surrounded by stone walls to keep the animals from destroying the grapes. But little foxes would find a way to weasel through the crevices and gnaw on the tender vines within. Thus, the shepherd-king says to his bride, "Watch out for the little foxes—those subtle things that will sneak in, gnaw on the vine, and destroy your fruit." It was a word of warning to the bride, but she didn't catch it, for watch what happens next . . .

Song of Solomon 2:16, 17
My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.

The bride didn't heed the warning of her beloved, nor did she respond to his invitation. Instead, she rolled over in bed and said, "My beloved is mine. I'm safe in the position that I have, secure in our relationship. So go ahead and keep running on top of the mountains, skipping over hills. I'll see you later in the day."

How indicting! How much that's like me. The Lord wakens me sometimes before the day begins to break and my natural inclination is to say, "Oh, Lord, I'm so thankful You're mine. It's so good to be linked to Your grace, Your mercy, Your lovingkindness. Go ahead and run on the mountains —and I'll join You in a little while."

When it's dark outside or cold inside, when you have been up late the night before or have a full day ahead, how easy it is to roll over and take a rain check on the Lord's invitation to rise up. There are things He desires to

say, revelation He wants to give, places He longs to take us—but so often we're like the bride as we say, "I'm so thankful that You're mine, Lord. I'll see You later."

That's a dangerous thing to do. For, as the bride will discover, by the time she rises, her shepherd-king will be gone.



3 Song of Solomon 3:1
By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.

The bride sought her shepherd-king but couldn't find him because she had missed the moment when he had given an invitation to her to come into spectacular territory with him. Now it's night and she's alone, wondering where he was.

Have you ever had that experience? Have you ever wondered, "Where is the Lord? What's happening? What's going on? Could it be that when I turned over and buried my face in the pillow that He left?"

A skydiver must jump when the instructor says "Jump!" A hang glider must take off when the current is right. A surfer must hit the waves when the sets are coming in. There are certain things we cannot postpone. And many of us are learning that one of them is responding to the voice of the Lord when we hear Him say, "Arise. Come away. I've got some things I want to talk to you about. I have some things I want to show you."

It might be a Saturday afternoon, a Tuesday evening, or an early Thursday morning. Whenever it is—respond to the Lord's invitation or you'll miss an incredible moment.

Song of Solomon 3:2
I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.

Sometimes our Lord allows us to search and seek for awhile before He makes Himself known to us again (Proverbs 1:28). Is He playing games with us? Not at all. He's teaching us not to take our relationship with Him for granted. If we do, we'll become involved with and vulnerable to things that are destructive and detrimental. And so our Shepherd-King says to us, "Sometimes I will hide Myself from you for a season in order that you won't take for granted the relationship I've cultivated with you."

Song of Solomon 3:3
The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?

The watchmen were unable to help the bride locate her lord. In Scripture, watchmen are symbolic of those watching over the city. They're leaders. And yet even they were unable to help her.

Sometimes we think, "If I could just get some counseling. If I could just get help from a leader then I could find the Lord once again." That's not necessarily the case. You need to seek the Lord personally. "And you shall seek Me and find Me when ye shall search for Me with all your heart," the Lord says (Jeremiah 29:13). It's when you are serious about seeking the Lord yourself that you will find Him.

Song of Solomon 3:4
It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

When the bride finds her shepherd-king, she doesn't wait to bring him across town to their house, but takes the first opportunity possible and the first place available to be with him.

I like that! It's always a blessing when I see people studying the Word in the park or at the beach. They're not waiting for a Sunday service or a Wednesday study. They're just seeking the Lord even on a Tuesday or Saturday.

Song of Solomon 3:5
I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.

The word "he" is better translated "I." Thus, the king says to the daughters of Jerusalem, "Don't bother her. Let her rest. Don't interrogate her. Let her rest. Don't judge her. Let her rest. She's my bride and I have ordained rest and sleep for her."

It's often the tendency of the daughters of Jerusalem to show up on the scene and say, "Well, why didn't you respond to his calling in the first place? Why did you let him go? What's going on in your life?"

And yet the king says to those daughters, "Don't judge her. Let her rest."

I believe our King says the same thing to us today. "Don't judge him. Don't judge her. Leave it to *Me* to deal with them in the right way at the perfect time."

Song of Solomon 3:6
Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?

The scene changes. As the bride is brought out of the wilderness, escorted by the king's soldiers and carried upon his bed, a company of maidens asks, "Who is this one coming out of the wilderness who smells of frankincense and myrrh?"

Guess who it is. It's us!

We have been loved by the Lord. He has brought us out of the wilderness of sin and has given us rest in Him. As a result, we have begun to take on *His* fragrance.

Song of Solomon 3:7–10
Behold his bed, which is Solomon's; threescore valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, being expert in war: every man hath his sword upon his thigh because

of fear in the night. King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon. He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the covering of it of purple, the midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem.

The maidens marvel as they watch the bride being escorted on a glorious bed, surrounded by soldiers with swords strapped to their thighs. Who are the threescore valiant men surrounding the bride, marching under orders of the king?

I believe they're angels—"ministering spirits" as Hebrews 1:14 calls them—who have been sent to escort us out of the wilderness. You are surrounded by angels. Not only does the Spirit live inside of you, but there are angels traveling alongside of you: incredible creatures who are so powerful that it only takes one to hold all of the demons captive in the abyss (Revelation 9:11).

Song of Solomon 3:11
Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.

In other words, the maiden says to the daughters of Jerusalem, "Check out the king!"



4 Song of Solomon 4:1 (a)
Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair . . .

"Thou art fair," says the king to his bride. As we saw in chapter 1, "fair" doesn't mean "adequate." It means "excellent." And as the king views his bride, so the King of kings views us, His church.

Gang, Jesus doesn't look at you and say, "I love you, but . . ." or, "I'll love you if . . ." or, "I'll love you when . . . ." He says, "I love you—period."

Most of us believe that Jesus loves us generically. But that's not the message of this book. Solomon's message to us is that Jesus loves us individually and is in love with us radically.

Song of Solomon 4:1 (b)
. . . thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks . . .

I recently heard from someone who said, "Even though I'm a new believer, I heard a teacher on the radio, but something about him didn't ring true."

"That's great!" I said. "Even though you can't quote chapter and verse at this point in your walk, you have doves' eyes—you have Holy Spirit discernment. You see things others might not see. You understand things others might not understand, for the Holy Spirit lives inside of you."

Concerning those who would seduce you, the apostle John said,

> But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.
>
> 1 John 2:27

In other words, when someone knocks on your door, preaches on TV, or talks to you at work, you'll know in your heart if things aren't right. You have doves' eyes. The Holy Spirit will give you discernment. Jesus said, "When the Spirit comes, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). I'm so thankful for the Holy Spirit. How I need His tutoring!

Song of Solomon 4:1 (c)
. . . thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead.

Scripturally, hair is symbolic of two things: consecration and submission. The Nazarites—those who were *consecrated* to the things of the Lord—were not to cut their hair. That is why Samson was not to cut his hair. He was to have been a Nazarite all his life (Judges 13:5). Paul wrote that long hair is a

sign that a woman is *submitted* to her husband and that she has placed herself under his covering (1 Corinthians 11:15).

Song of Solomon 4:2
Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them.

Biblically, teeth speak of our ability to appropriate and assimilate truth. As we mature in our walk with the Lord, we are able to bite into more meaty subjects with greater understanding (Hebrews 5:12–14).

Song of Solomon 4:3 (a)
Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely . . .

The prophet Isaiah said, "My lips are unclean" (Isaiah 6:5). All of us are aware that our lips, symbolic of our speech, are often polluted and defiled.

And yet, positionally, our King looks at us and says, "Your lips are like scarlet. Because they are washed in My blood, your sins and iniquities I will remember no more" (see Jeremiah 31:34).

Song of Solomon 4:3 (b)
. . . thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks.

The temple speaks of our thought life. Thus, the king says to his bride, "Your thoughts are like pomegranates—fruitful and good."

As Paul wrote to the Philippians, we are to be thinking about whatever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy (4:8)—fruitful thoughts, good thoughts, productive thoughts.

Song of Solomon 4:4
Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.

This speaks of serenity, of tranquility, of peace. You see, in Solomon's day, the tower of David, built atop Mount Zion in the city of Jerusalem, could be seen for miles. Shields hanging on the tower of David signified peace. When the shields were gone, however, it meant battle was raging somewhere. Thus, when the king says, "Your neck is like the tower of David with shields hung thereon," he was saying, "There's a serenity and a peace about you that I find attractive."

Song of Solomon 4:5–7
Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense. Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.

No spot in thee? You may be saying, "That might be true of the maiden, but not of me. If you're talking about tranquility and serenity, speech that is comely, thoughts that are fruitful, eyes that are pure, you're not talking about *me*."

Oh, but it is you. That's what this book is for—that you might see yourself the way the Lord sees you. We are so aware of our blackness, our faults, our shortcomings. And we are certainly aware of everyone else's blackness, faults and shortcomings! But how does the Lord view His bride? Through the filter of His blood.

That is, His blood takes away all sin, defilement, and iniquity. As He looks at you, He approves of you. He's in love with you. And He is pleased to be linked to you for all eternity. This means that when the Lord calls us, saying, "Pray. Worship. Witness. Walk with Me," we can block out that little voice that says, "You can't pray. You can't worship. You can't witness. You can't walk with the Lord because you're spotted and black, messed up and ugly."

Do you ever hear those words? They're those of the accuser of the brethren who accuses us day and night (Revelation 12:10). What does the Lord say? He says, "You're lovely. I approve of everything about you. I not only have compassion on you, but I have passion for you. I am truly impressed and blessed by you."

If you can grab this and live in it, your walk with the Lord will be so free and so beautiful. In chapter 1, the maiden said, "I am black," and gave reasons or excuses for her blackness. Here, however, she's beginning to learn to relax and rest in the perspective that her shepherd-king has of her. May we do the same.

Song of Solomon 4:8, 9
Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards. Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.

I love this passage because it once again demonstrates that our God is the God of the second chance. The first time the shepherd-king said to his bride, "Come, let's go up on the mountains," she put him off and lost the moment. But guess what the king does. He comes back and says, "Let's go for it," again.

The Lord also gives us chance after chance after chance. He doesn't write us off His list, take us out of the game, cut us from the team, divorce us, or forget about us. He says, "I'll give you another chance, My bride. Come with Me to the top of the mountains."

Song of Solomon 4:10
How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!

In chapter 1, the bride said to her king, "Your love is better than wine."

But here, in chapter 4, he says to her, "How *much better* is thy love than wine." In other words, his love for her greatly exceeded her love for him.

What does that say to me? It says that even at the moment I love the Lord the most—perhaps when I'm so deeply touched that I'm moved to tears or brought to complete silence—my love for Him can't compare to His love for me.

"We love Him because He first loved us," John declares (1 John 4:19). His love for you is much more intense than your love for Him even at the most intense moment you have ever experienced. There's passion in the heart of the Lord for *you.* You are His bride.

Song of Solomon 4:11
Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.

"Your language is as sweet as honey, as sustaining and strengthening as milk," says the shepherd-king.

Song of Solomon 4:12
A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

Every king in Solomon's time had a private garden wherein he would find cool refuge in the heat of the day.

So too, you are a garden created for your Lord's pleasure. He desires to walk in the garden of your life, to partake of the fruit He has planted, to savor the fragrances He has instilled, to enjoy the work He has wrought in you. You are created for Him and He wants not only to work in your life but to walk in your garden. Before man fell, God walked with Adam in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8). When the sun sets this evening, the Lord will be waiting for you, desiring to walk with you. And when the dawn breaks tomorrow morning, He will be there again.

Song of Solomon 4:13, 14
Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices:

These are all sweet spices. "You are my garden," said the king. "Everything about you is sweet to my senses. In you, I find refuge, rest, and

refreshment."

Song of Solomon 4:15
A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.

What made the garden of the bride so fruitful?
A well of living waters.

> In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)
>
> John 7:37–39

What makes you fruitful and refreshing, prolific and productive?
The flowing of the Holy Ghost within and from your life.

Seek the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Jesus taught us to ask the Father for the blessing of the Holy Ghost (Luke 11:13), for when the Holy Spirit flows in you and through you, there is a fruitfulness about you. Without Him, there's only barrenness and dryness.

Song of Solomon 4:16 (a)
Awake, O north wind . . .

The bride speaks. The north wind is a cold wind. Perhaps you feel cold presently—you don't feel the intense love for Jesus that you would like to or once did. You feel distant and alone. That is the blowing of the north wind. Let it blow—because the times that are devoid of tingly feelings or "Holy Ghost goose bumps" provide unique opportunity for you to demonstrate your love for the Lord through diligence in worship, prayer, and study of His Word—even though you don't feel His presence.

Gang, an absence of feelings doesn't mean the Lord has forsaken you. On the contrary, He is allowing you to go through a cold season in order to grant you the privilege of learning to walk by faith and not by feeling. Feelings are so fickle. They're affected by what you ate last night, by what your family said to you this morning, by the news, the weather, the economic outlook. Not so faith. It is a constant because it is totally independent of outside circumstances. Therefore, the Lord, wanting the best for His people, desires us to walk in the surety and stability of faith.

Can you, like the maiden, say, "Lord, I'm willing to go through a week, a month, or even a year of the blowing north wind in order to give to You without expecting the sense of Your presence in return"? Can you say, "Lord, if I can best demonstrate what You have done in my life through periods of coldness, so be it"?

Most of the time, whenever I give to God, I get so much back that I can't really call it giving at all! I start to worship and say, "Lord, this is a sacrifice of praise to You," when suddenly, finding myself flooded with feelings of joy, I think, "This is no sacrifice at all. Am I doing this to give—or am I doing this to receive?" But when I feel somewhat distant from the Lord, it's an opportunity for me to give without necessarily receiving anything in return.

If you're going through a cold spell today, if the north wind is howling, rejoice. You have a unique opportunity to minister to Jesus, to give to Him worship and adoration, praise and thanksgiving regardless of your feelings.

Song of Solomon 4:16 (b)
. . . and come, thou south . . .

The south wind is a hot, arid wind. Perhaps you are presently walking through days of difficulty and times of fiery trials. That is the blowing of the south wind. If this is your situation, remember that it's not when you're prospering and cruising through life that others can see Jesus in you. It's when they see you walking through difficult days by the grace of God that they know He is real to you.

Song of Solomon 4:16 (c)

. . . blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. . .

.

At Applegate Lake, I was sitting on the grass when, all of a sudden, I smelled something. My mouth began to water and my stomach started to growl as the fragrance of barbequed steak worked its way down the hillside into my nostrils.

When the winds of adversity and difficulty blow through our lives, a fragrance is released. It is either a foul odor of bitterness and hostility, jealousy and anger—or it is the sweet-smelling savor of praise and thanksgiving, worship and adoration. You see, the wind itself doesn't determine what the fragrance will be. It merely releases the fragrance already present. Therefore, when I find bitterness, anger, jealousy, or hostility coming forth from my life, I must say, "Father, the problem isn't him, her, them, or it. It's *me.* Father, forgive me. I thought I was farther along than that. Oh, Lord, have mercy!"

Gang, if, instead of saying, "It's his fault," or, "They don't understand," or, "Why is she doing that?" you say, "Oh, Lord, the fragrance in my life is not what it should be. I repent, Father. Change my heart," you will find a pleasing fragrance emanating from your life.

Song 4:16 (d)
. . . Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.

Take special note of this verse, saints. The key to life is saying, "I'm Your garden, Lord. Eat of me. I exist for Your pleasure and Your glory. That is why I am alive today. That is why I will awake tomorrow. I exist for one reason: not to heap pleasure upon myself, not even to please others—but to please You."

Why do you exist? To bring pleasure to the Lord (Revelation 4:11).

Tomorrow will be a fabulous, wonderful, exciting, fulfilling day if you'll say, "Lord, I'm here to please You all day long. I'm taking You out for lunch. We'll grab a burger and then I'll meditate on Your Word, talk to You, and worship You. Lord, on my coffee break, my thoughts and prayers will be

ascending to Your throne. I'm going to carry a verse in my pocket so that my thoughts might be upon You as I meditate upon it at various intervals throughout the day."

You exist to bring the Lord pleasure, gang. You are His garden.



5 The Song of Solomon is a mystical, majestic allegory. It's the story of the love of a shepherd-king, great and glorious in wealth and might, for a woman who was previously impoverished, a woman who acknowledged her blackness. The allegory is obvious: The shepherd-king is a picture of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the King of kings. He is the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep. The maiden is a picture of His bride, His church—us.

We saw how the shepherd-king brought the maiden into his presence and took her to be his bride. They shared a night of intimacy and love together. The next morning, he was up early—skipping on the hills and leaping on the mountains. He stood outside her window and called out to her, saying, "Come! Rise! The birds are singing. The flowers are blooming. Let's get going!"

But his bride answered, "You go ahead. I'll stay in bed until the dawn breaks—and I'll catch up with you later." As you recall, she found out, much to her dismay, that he didn't come home. When evening came, she went on a frantic search for him. When she found him, he didn't come down on her. In fact, the shepherd-king never has one single negative word to say about his bride because our King has not a single negative word to say about us.

Why? Because we are cleansed by His blood (Revelation 1:5). We are hid in Christ Jesus (Colossians 3:3). We are robed with His righteousness (Isaiah 61:10). Thus, when He looks at us, He sees a glorious church without spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:27). Practically, we see all kinds of spots and a whole bunch of wrinkles. But, positionally, the Lord sees us cleansed in His blood and robed in His righteousness.

Most believers have a tendency to believe that God is angry with them. Oh, they know He loves them, but they think He is also disappointed in them for not praying enough, for not giving enough, for not ministering enough.

They fail to understand their position in Christ Jesus—that they are hidden in Christ, that there is now *no* condemnation to them that are in Him (Romans 8:1).

I have news for you: God isn't mad at you. And that's what this book is really all about—to show you the way He looks at you. It's a fabulous day when the understanding that you are not condemned, that you are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5) really takes root in your heart.

Song of Solomon 5:1 (a)
I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk . . .

The bride invited the king to come into the garden he had cultivated within her—and he came. When we say, "Lord, come into my garden," He comes—but notice that He doesn't come alone . . .

Song of Solomon 5:1 (b)
. . . eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.

The bridegroom doesn't come alone—He brings a whole group of people with him. And that's the way it is with our Lord. We say, "Lord, it's just You and me—sweetly talking and communing in the garden." But guess what He does. He invites hundreds to trample on us, pick from us, and squash us.

"Wait a minute, Lord," we protest. "I said *You* could come into my garden—but not them!"

But the Lord answers, "When I come, I bring My friends with Me."

That's why John asked, "How can you say you love God if you hate your brother?" (1 John 4:20). It's hypocrisy. It's inconsistent to say, "I love You, Lord—but I'm mad at my brother," because the one you're mad at is His friend, His love.



***For topical study of Song of Solomon 4:12—5:1, entitled"My Life: His Garden," turn to page* 315.**

Song of Solomon 5:2
I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.

Verse 2 begins a new section and a new situation. The honeymoon is over —and the bridegroom was out all night.

This doesn't surprise me, for in Matthew 8:20, Jesus said, "Foxes have holes and the birds have their nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head." John 7 ends with every man going to his house, but John 8:1 says Jesus went to the mountain. He had no home.

Consequently, here is the bridegroom, with dew in his hair, knocking on the door of his bride.

Song of Solomon 5:3
I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?

"Oh, lord," answers the bride. "My coat is off. My feet are clean. I'm relaxing."

Isn't that like us? The Lord knocks and we say, "Oh, Lord the game is on. *Newsweek* just arrived. My friend just called. Oh, Lord, I just put off my coat. Surely, You can't be knocking *now.* You can't be desiring to spend time with me *now,* Lord."

If we're not relaxing in the present, we're relying on the past, saying, "Lord, my feet have been washed. I was at church both Sunday morning and Sunday night. Isn't that good enough for awhile, Lord? Surely I'm clean and right with You."

How often the Lord calls us, but we say, "As soon as the ninth inning is over, I'll spend time on my knees. But, Lord, what a great game this is. Let's finish out the game and I'll see You later."

And it is this way I miss the moment the Lord was desiring to spend with me, I miss the understanding He was ready to give to me. That's what happened to the bride. Again, she missed the moment.

Song of Solomon 5:4, 5
My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock.

As the bride opens the door, she realizes the hand of her bridegroom had been upon the handle.

Song of Solomon 5:6
I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.

Please understand that there is a major difference between the first time the bride didn't respond to her shepherd-king and this time. The first time she let him out of her sight due to ignorance. That is, he called to her, but she was ignorant of her need to respond immediately. This time, however, it's due to indifference. She now knows better and yet she's not willing to exert the energy to respond to his call. Some of us also miss the Lord because of ignorance. Most of us, however, miss Him because of indifference. We're just too lazy to get out of bed, too preoccupied to respond.

Here, we see the bride once again longing for her love, realizing that the love she had shared only hours earlier had grown cold—which is exactly what happens to us when other things creep in and we no longer make time to respond to the Lord.

Song of Solomon 5:7
The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.

As the bride searches for her bridegroom, what do the watchmen do? They wound her. Sadly, that's what pastors and church leaders often do. When, due to ignorance or indifference, people are separated from the Lord, so often it's the watchmen who figure it's their responsibility to smite and expose the bride.

When Jesus ministered, however, it says the common people—people just like you and me—heard Him gladly and marveled at the gracious words He spoke (Luke 4:22). The Lord speaks grace. He loves you. Remember this the next time a watchman comes off the wall and starts beating up on you.

If correction is needed in our lives, how does it take place?

> Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.
>
> Galatians 6:1

It is with a meek spirit that a true watchman, a true shepherd will restore a sister or brother in need of correction, desiring to see people redeemed and restored rather than rebuked and rejected.

> **Song of Solomon 5:8–9**
> **I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love. What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? what is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?**

"What is so special about this one you love?" ask the daughters of Jerusalem. "Why do you seek him so fervently?"

> **Song of Solomon 5:10–16 (a)**
> **My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven. His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set. His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling**

myrrh. His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl: his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires. His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. . . .

As the bride speaks of her beloved, we see Jesus in a very powerful, beautiful way.



***For topical study of Song of Solomon 5:10–16 entitled "A Loving Look at Our Lovely Lord," turn to page* 319.**

Song of Solomon 5:16 (b)
. . . This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Some married couples are passionately in love but fight like cats and dogs and tell me they're not even friends. Romantically and physically, they're in love—but they don't like each other very much.

Such is not the case with Jesus, for He's not only our Lover, He's also our Friend (John 15:15). And He desires to cultivate a deep and meaningful relationship with us.

If you spent as much time with your best friend as you spend with the Lord on a daily basis, how deep would your friendship be? If you spent four minutes a day, five minutes every other day, or twenty minutes every third week together, what kind of friendship would you have? So often, when we say, "I just don't feel the presence of the Lord. I don't enjoy His company," it's because we haven't invested time in cultivating His friendship.

"Be not deceived," warned Paul. "Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

Jesus enjoys me. Even though many times I don't even like myself, He continues to call me friend. What a great and marvelous mystery!

MY LIFE: HIS GARDEN

A Topical Study of
SONG OF SOLOMON 4:12—5:1

The Song of Solomon is a very wonderful and mystical book. Many people, in reading it, see nothing more than an erotic, oriental love song and a romantic piece of literature. In reality, however, it is much more than that, for it deals with the issue of marriage—particularly marriage between Jesus Christ our King and us, His bride. And when it is read and studied in that context, it can be tremendously impacting and very encouraging.

Church, we are married to Jesus Christ. We are His bride. Some people view their marriages as less than the best, as strenuous and difficult. If you are in a situation today where you say, "My marriage is not what I thought it would be or know it can be," know this: your marriage here is temporary and preparatory. That is, it is preparing you, tempering you, and training you for the ultimate marriage—the mystery of which Paul speaks in Ephesians 5—when you will be linked to, loved by, and living with Jesus Christ forever.

> *A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.*
>
> Song of Solomon 4:12

The king likens his bride to a lovely, enclosed garden. In Solomon's day, every king had a well-tended, private garden outside of his palace where he could retire in the cool of the afternoon, the early part of the evening, and at the break of day. So, here this king, a type of Jesus Christ, looks at his bride who represents us and says, "You're a garden to me—something sweet and precious, beautiful and enjoyable."

I have a tendency to look at myself and say, "A garden? Lord, I could understand if it You said I'm a parking lot, a slum, or even the county dump. But Lord, You're calling me a *garden?*"

But, incredibly enough, we are indeed His lovely garden. In chapter 1, the maiden looked at herself and said, "I am black but comely." She realized

her blackness, her inadequacy, and yet she said, "I'm comely." Why? Because she was loved by the king.

I, too, realize I am black. I'm a sinner. I have all kinds of problems and all sorts of weaknesses. But, like the maiden, I can say today, "I am black, but I am comely because Jesus Christ has brought me into His loving heart and life. He has chosen me as His personal garden. Why? I don't know. It's a great mystery to me!"

Do you know what tickles my heart and makes me smile as I read through this book? Never once does the king say to his bride, "You're lovely, but maybe you should think about changing your hairstyle," or, "You're lovely, but you could lose a few pounds," or, "You're lovely—except for the length of your nose." No, in every chapter, the king affirms his bride.

This Song is Jesus speaking to you personally. He's not saying, "I'll love you if you try and do better." He's saying, "I'm in love with you right now." Most of us believe that Jesus loves us generically. He has to—after all, He's Jesus and He loves everyone. But that's not the message of this book. The message of this book is that He loves us individually and is in love with us radically. Oh, that we might see ourselves the way He does—washed by His blood, sanctified by His Spirit, loved, *really loved* by Him.

In Rochester, New York, a retired army sergeant fatally shot a seventy-year-old woman as she left Mother's Day services. He admitted that he mistook the woman for his estranged wife because he forgot his glasses. "I'm sorry about the other woman. I meant to kill my wife," Percy Washman told police. Because he forgot his glasses, he didn't see accurately.

Folks, sometimes, like Percy, I forget my glasses. I look at people and think they're out to lunch. Or I look at myself and think I'm off the wall. But it's because I'm not seeing things accurately. The Bible says that we are the righteousness of God because we are in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21). When I really see this, I will not shoot you indiscriminately or commit spiritual suicide tragically. When I look through the lens of Scripture, I see what Jesus did on Calvary—that He took all the sin we've committed, paid for it, and now says, "Your sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 8:12).

Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. . . .

Song of Solomon 4:16 (a)

The bride is so blessed to be the garden of her beloved that she invites the cold north wind and the hot south wind to blow through her life in order that spices might be released from her.

How can the sweetness of Jesus flow from you? Through the fiery trials and troubles of the south wind.

You see, it's not when you're prospering that people can see Jesus in you. It's when the south wind—hot times, difficult days, seasons of struggle, times of tribulation—blows through your life that people will want to know how you stand up under the pressure. It's when you can answer, "It's only because of Jesus and His grace that I'm not collapsing or caving in," that those around you will be drawn to Him. Truly, His fragrance flows from you in the time of the south wind.

And in the time of the north wind—in those times you feel cold, when you don't feel the intense love for Jesus you would like to—His fragrance is released as well. For when you don't feel His touch or His presence, He's giving you the opportunity to learn to walk by faith. Here's what I have found: When I don't feel the Lord's presence, I have learned to rejoice and say, "Great! Lord, I can worship You today without getting back more than I've given. I can truly just give to You, Lord, because I don't feel Your presence today. You've chosen to allow the north wind to blow today, this week, or this month."

Folks, I've gone through months when I haven't felt the warm presence of the Lord. I have come to actually embrace those times and look forward to those periods when I can say, "Lord, I thank You for this opportunity to worship You and to love You without getting more in return than I give."

Today, if you're going through a cold spell, if the north wind is blowing, rejoice. You have opportunity to really minister to Jesus. Just give and give and give, regardless of how you feel.

. . . Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.

Song of Solomon 4:16 (b)

Folks, I ask you to underline this verse because within it lies the key to life. Who is it who does anything good within us? Who is it who produces fruit for our lives? It's Jesus. Why does He produce those fruits? *For His enjoyment.* Saints, when you bring the Lord pleasure, you are fulfilling the very reason for your existence.

In Matthew 21, Jesus walked by a fig tree that had a lot of leaves. Hungry, He reached to pick from it, but found no fruit. Consequently, He cursed the tree. Why? He was showing us that a tree that doesn't please Him will never be of any value to anyone else.

If your tree, your garden, your life is not existing to please your Lord and your Creator, no matter how healthy you might seem outwardly, you are a cursed individual spiritually. Like the fig tree, you'll dry up from the roots and die. Jesus wasn't being cruel when He cursed the tree. He was simply showing us that if our lives aren't satisfying to Him, we'll not satisfy anyone else—not even ourselves because all things were created not only by Him, but *for* Him (Colossians 1:16).

Live every day with your primary intent being to bring the Lord pleasure —to delight Him with praise and worship, to walk and talk with Him, to enjoy and receive His love—and watch your life produce abundant fruit for His satisfaction and for the nourishment of those around you.

> *I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk . . .*
>
> Song of Solomon 5:1 (a)

When the bride invited her beloved to enjoy the garden he had cultivated within her, he said, "I have come." But notice what else he said . . .

> *. . . eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.*
>
> Song of Solomon 5:1 (b)

"Lord, come into my garden," I say. "Today it will be just You and me." But guess what the Lord does. He brings a whole bunch of other people with Him. Why? Because He's not only in love with me, but with a whole bunch of other people whom He's linking together as His bride. He wants us to get together here and love each other now because we're going to be linked to each other and living with each other for the next quazillion years.

That is why Jesus said we would know we're His disciples by our love for each other (John 13:35). In other words, we show that our love for Him is real by loving our brothers, our sisters, the people He brings into the garden of our lives.

Saints, read through this section again and you will find it pregnant with meaning.

When my wife, Tammy, was pregnant with my youngest son, Benjamin, she and my then-seven-year-old daughter, Christy, were walking in from the store, their arms loaded with groceries. When Tammy dropped something and reached down to pick it up, Christy said, "No, Mommy. Don't bend down. Your stomach will burst!"

So too, if you'll stoop down and take a close look at the Song of Solomon this week—prayerfully, mystically, spiritually, personally, romantically—you'll burst! You'll burst with blessing when you realize that Jesus is in love with you, that you were created for Him, that He wants to come in and enjoy your life, and that He wants to bring His friends with Him.

The Lord *loves* us, gang. What a glorious truth that is!

A LOVING LOOK AT OUR LOVELY LORD

A Topical Study of
SONG OF SOLOMON 5:10–16

Speaking of her bridegroom, the bride said, "He is altogether lovely" (5:16). Indeed, there is only One who is altogether lovely.

- When Isaiah, the prophet, saw the Lord high and lifted up, he said, "Woe is me. I am undone." Literally, "I am un-together" (Isaiah 6:5).
- When Peter, the apostle, saw the power of the Lord, he said, "Depart from me. I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8).
- When John, the revelator, saw the greatness and the glory of the Lord, he fell down as a dead man (Revelation 1:17).

Every man, no matter how spiritual or holy he might seem is, in reality, flawed and imperfect, and undone. But there is One who is All Together—Jesus Christ.

As the bride began to think about, and comment on the beauty of her shepherd-king, the daughters of Jerusalem said, "What's so special about him?"

That is what the world asks us. "What's so special about your Shepherd-King? What's so special about your Bridegroom? What's so special about this Jesus you worship?" And as you look at the bride's response, you will see it is the perfect answer for anyone who wants to know more about our lovely Lord . . .

My beloved is white . . .

Song of Solomon 5:10 (a)

As the bride describes her beloved, she first says, "He is white."

Whiteness speaks of purity. How thankful I am that our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, is so totally pure that even His enemies could find no fault in Him (John 18:38).

. . . and ruddy . . .

Song of Solomon 5:10 (b)

Ruddiness speaks of vitality. The purity of Jesus is not unrelatable or unlikable. He was known as the Friend of sinners (Matthew 11:19). Street people hung around Him and sinners loved spending time with Him because there was a robustness, a vitality, a healthiness in His life that attracted people to Him.

This Jesus was no gentle Jesus meek and mild as is so often portrayed by those who don't know Him. Jesus was One who, with eyes glowing and muscles bulging, walked through the temple, overturning the tables of perhaps one hundred men who dared not stand up to this single individual (Mark 11:15, 16). Indeed, there was a vitality about Jesus.

. . . the chiefest among ten thousand.

Song of Solomon 5:10 (c)

This speaks of His superiority.

Thousands come on the scene and claim to have spiritual insight. Tens of thousands claim to have revelation. The gurus come and go and make a splash for a few years, but there is One who stands above and beyond, One whose words are ageless, One whose thoughts impact all of humanity for all eternity. Truly, Jesus is the singular One among ten thousand.

His head is as the most fine gold . . .

Song of Solomon 5:11 (a)

Gold speaks of deity. Not only does Jesus possess purity, vitality, and superiority—but also divinity.

There are those who say, "Jesus was just one of the enlightened masters. He never claimed to be God." But that isn't true.

Jesus did indeed claim to be God when He said, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30)—and so incensed were the people who heard such blasphemy that they picked up rocks, ready to stone Him.

"In Him," wrote the apostle Paul, "dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9). Paul must have scratched his head as he went on to write, "Great is the mystery of godliness—that God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16).

All the fullness of God manifested in Jesus Christ? What a mystery!

There is a spider that lives in the Amazon jungle basin that, the microsecond it jumps into the water, it blows a bubble around itself. As it begins to sink, it regulates the pressure of its bubble by allowing air in and out. Thus, it is able to hang out on the bottom of the Amazon River for up to two hours before it rises back to the surface, floats to shore, pops its bubble, and walks away.

Jesus Christ came from heaven to this planet with His deity fully intact. Encased by divinity, He was not just a good moral man, but God Himself. Thus, He was able to live in this sinful world without being drowned by it.

. . . his locks are bushy, and black as a raven.

Song of Solomon 5:11 (b)

This speaks of immutability.

Jesus never changes. He never gets older. His locks never get specks of gray. The writer of Hebrews declares Jesus to be the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Jesus never gets old or tired or grumpy. James wrote that there is no shadow of turning in Him (1:17).

When my daughter, Mary Elizabeth, was a baby, we had a monitor in her nursery so we could listen to her as she slept. When Mary awoke crying, Tammy would say, "Oh, no. Mary's going to have a terrible day today. If she starts out on the wrong foot, it goes downhill from here."

I'm so thankful we don't have to approach our Lord and say, "Oh, no. It's going to be a hard day with Jesus. He's grumpy today." No, His locks are bushy. He stays young. He doesn't change.

His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set.

Song of Solomon 5:12

This speaks of sympathy.

The eyes of Jesus are not eyes that condemn you, eyes that are suspicious of you, eyes that are watching to smash you when you get out of line. His eyes are those of a creature known for its gentleness, its peacefulness, its quietness. His eyes are doves' eyes.

In the courtyard of Caiaphas, Peter warmed himself by the fire of the enemy as Jesus was being tried inside. Frustrated and fearful, Peter denied even knowing Jesus. After he swore the third time that he had no part with Jesus, the cock crowed, the doors burst open, Jesus looked at Peter . . . and Peter wept (Matthew 26:75). Why? Jesus' look was not the look of condemnation or accusation. Rather, with doves' eyes, it was a look that said, "Peter, I told you this would happen. I understand your nature. I forgive your weakness." It was Jesus' look of compassion that broke Peter's heart.

So too, Jesus looks with doves' eyes at us who have denied Him by not spending time with Him, at us who have ignored Him or lived contrary to Him, at us who have had a week where we haven't been what we should have been and He says to us, as He said to Peter, "I forgive you. If you love Me, feed My sheep—keep going" (John 21:15).

His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh.

Song of Solomon 5:13

His fragrance is comely.

The average person emits thirty-six distinctive odors for a combination of one hundred fifty smells. Forensic pathologists are developing "scent prints" whereby they can identify people by the smell they radiate.

The scent of Jesus Christ is like flowers. The more time we spend with Him, the closer we draw to Him, the more we find that His is a comely, attractive, beautiful fragrance.

His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl . . .

Song of Solomon 5:14 (a)

The ring speaks of authority, for it was with his ring that a ruler would stamp his seal upon official documents.

The disciples, marveling as Jesus stilled the storm, said, "We never saw such authority" (see Luke 8:25).

According to His perfect plan for our lives, Jesus can speak to any wind that's blowing us away or any storm that's beating us down and it will be still. He has absolute authority to control every aspect of our lives. There is nothing that can touch us, nothing that can come to us, nothing that can attack or affect us without His allowing it to be so. The moment He decides that a change is to be made or enough has come down, He will say, "Be still"—and it will. His hands are authoritative.

. . . his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires.

Song of Solomon 5:14 (b)

This speaks of empathy, for in Solomon's day, it was the belly, not the heart that was referred to as the seat of emotions. In addition, because it was taken from the tusks of dead elephants, ivory speaks emblematically of death.

Jesus, our Lord, our Savior, has been tempted, or tested, in all points—in every experience with every kind of temptation or trial (Hebrews 4:15). When He stood at the tomb of Lazarus and wept, He knew what it was to grieve (John 11:35). When He was called one who was possessed with a devil and one who was illegitimately born, He knew what it felt like to be misunderstood (Luke 11:15). When He sat by the well, He knew what it was to be weary (John 4:6). When He was sold out by one of His closest friends, He knew the feeling of betrayal (Matthew 26:50).

- Are you tired today?
  Jesus can identify.
- Are you tempted?
  He understands.
- Have you been put down recently?
  He can relate.

His belly, the seat of His emotions, is as familiar with the pain of ivory as it is with the sparkle of sapphires.

His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold . . .

Song of Solomon 5:15 (a)

This speaks of certainty.

There is a small box in the Library of Congress with a label on it that reads: The contents of the pockets of the President on the night of April 15, 1865. It contains: an initialed handkerchief, a country-boy's penknife, glasses and a case tied together with string, a small purse with five Confederate dollars, and several well-worn newspaper articles in which certain men called him one of the greatest leaders in American history.

Why did Abraham Lincoln carry those particular clippings? Because at that time in his political career, he was in the midst of great controversy and tremendous pressure. Feeling the temptation to change positions on certain issues, perhaps he carried those clippings to confirm his sometimes faltering convictions, to steady his sometimes shaky persuasion.

Even the greatest leaders this world has known have faced moments of great uncertainty. But when I look at Jesus, I see One who set His face to go to Jerusalem—even though His disciples tried to avert Him, even though He knew it meant certain death (Luke 9:51).

His legs were marble set in sockets of gold. His face was set. Nothing could deter Him—from dying for you.

. . . his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.

Song of Solomon 5:15 (b)

This speaks of stability.

Jesus never gets "down," but, like a cedar of Lebanon—known for its towering height—He is solid, strong, and stable.

His mouth is most sweet . . .

Song of Solomon 5:16 (a)

This speaks of beauty.

Truly, the mouth of Jesus is most sweet. Luke wrote that the people wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth (4:22). Mark wrote that the common people heard Him gladly (12:37). John wrote that the officers said, "Never man spake like this man" (7:46).

. . . yea, he is altogether lovely.

Song of Solomon 5:16 (b)

After extolling the beauty of her beloved, the bride sums it all up by saying, "He's all together."

There is only One who is all together—Jesus Christ. The more you study Him, walk with Him, and look at Him, the more you, too, will say, "He is all together. He is altogether lovely."

I believe the Lord has a simple word for us: we must take time to contemplate Jesus Christ. I've been reading in *Time* and *Newsweek* about recommended reading. Could I recommend some reading? Read one of the gospels and consider Jesus Christ. Study the personality, the characteristics, the greatness of our Lord.

Perhaps it's been months or years since you've read a gospel straight through and looked at the loveliness of your Lord. Consider doing so now. If you do, you'll be elated, delighted, and inspired as you get to know afresh this One who is altogether lovely.



6 Song of Solomon 6:1

Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek him with thee.

In chapter 5, verse 9, the daughters of Jerusalem asked the bride what was so special about her beloved. After the bride described him in verses 10 through 16, here in chapter 6, they say, "We'll help you look for him. We want to find him, too."

That's what happens whenever a congregation worships the Lord, extols His beauty, and talks about His characteristics. Praise and adoration cause the skeptics, the daughters of Jerusalem, to say, "I want to know Him, too."

On the Day of Pentecost, 3,000 were saved. But what sparked the interest? What electrified the situation? A group of one hundred twenty people were praising and worshiping God, speaking in other tongues, and magnifying their Lord (Acts 2:1–7).

When people praise and worship, the daughters of Jerusalem invariably say, "We want to seek Him, too. We'll go with you."

Song of Solomon 6:2, 3
My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies.

How did the bride suddenly know where to find her groom? She spoke of his characteristics. She extolled his virtues. She praised him.

Jesus said that the Father seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). What does that mean? It means that when you worship and extol the Lord, He'll find you.

How often this happens to me. I'll wonder where the Lord is. Then I'll take time to praise and honor Him. I'll think about His characteristics. I'll verbalize and articulate His glory and greatness—and, suddenly, I'll experience His presence once again. You see, the Father is seeking me when I worship Him—and I have found that it's a lot easier for the Lord to find me than it is for me to find Him!

The bride received revelation in the midst of worship—that is how she knew right where to find her shepherd-king.

Song of Solomon 6:4–7
Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners. Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me: thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead. Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there

is not one barren among them. As a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks.

Did the bridegroom say, "Where were you, lady? Why didn't you open the door for me? I'm getting sick and tired of you. Why don't you pack your bags and move out?" No. He said, "You're beautiful."

Song of Solomon 6:8
There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number.

Here, the king is saying, "You're so comely. You're so beautiful. By the way, I've got sixty other queens, eighty concubines, and a whole bunch of virgins."

That doesn't seem to fit here. I mean, why, in the middle of this beautiful, romantic moment, would the king say, "You're not the only one"?

I suggest it is because sometimes we can think, "Aren't we so special to be so spiritual?" And the Lord looks at us and says, "You are lovely. I love you so deeply. But there are a whole bunch of other people I'm really in love with, too."

We have lists for everything: best-selling Christian books, best-selling Christian records, best-selling Christian magazines. And somehow I think we think the Lord has a list of churches: great churches, mediocre churches, barely passable churches, and so on. But that's not the way it is. The Lord works with all churches—drawing out the best in them, convicting and adjusting areas that need correction. He has *many* people in *many* places with whom He's very much in love.

Song of Solomon 6:9 (a)
My dove, my undefiled is but one . . .

"Wait a minute," you say. "In verse 8, the king said he had sixty queens and eighty concubines. Why then, here in verse 9, does he say, 'My dove is *one?*' "

His is the voice of our King, Jesus Christ, saying that He views His church as a *united* body, as a *single* bride.

Song of Solomon 6:9 (b), 10
. . . she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her. Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?

The king extols the glory of his bride, even as Jesus is blessed by the four-fold glory of His church.



***For topical study of Song of Solomon 6:10 entitled "The Glory of the Church," turn to page* 326.**

Song of Solomon 6:11 (a)
I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley . . .

The bride speaks, saying she went to the garden of nuts. What a great name for a church!

Song of Solomon 6:11 (b), 12
. . . and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded. Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.

As she went to the garden, the bride found herself caught up in the presence of her shepherd-king. "It was like chariots carrying me into glory," she says.

Song of Solomon 6:13 (a)

Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee. . . .

When Peter, James, and John were on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, Peter said, "Lord, it's good for us to be here. Let's build three booths and camp out up here" (Matthew 17:4). But the Lord knew they had to go back down the mountain because there were people below who needed to be ministered to and healed.

Sometimes we are tempted to stay caught up in afterglows, Bible studies, and prayer meetings—yet there's a company saying, "Return, return. We need to be touched and taught, witnessed to, prayed for, and loved. Will you do it, church? Will you come off the mountain? Will you leave the glory for a moment to come and help us practically?"

Song of Solomon 6:13 (b)
. . . What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies.

In Genesis 32, Jacob named the place where he had done battle with the Lord, *mahanaim,* or "two armies." You see, previously, he had traveled with his family and entourage as a single army, but as he did battle with the Lord and truly got to know Him, he realized that there had been a second army traveling with him all along—a supernatural army.

We also are two congregations. Our friends and family sit beside us, but there's a second army also among us: a whole bunch of angels, who, according to Scripture, join with us (1 Corinthians 11:10; 1 Peter 1:12)—studying us and trying to understand the incredible grace of a God who would choose sinners like you and me.

THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH

A Topical Study of SONG OF SOLOMON 6:10

Coming home from a wedding one night, I picked up a hitchhiker named Eric. As we drove into town, I said, "Cruise on out to the Fellowship sometime. I think you'll really be blessed."

"Are you one of the teachers out there?" he asked.

"I'm the pastor," I answered.

Then he really caught me off guard when he said, "Oh? Well, how do you like the church business?"

"I'm not really into the 'church business,' " I said. "I'm very aware right now of the controversy concerning televangelism and people's image of the church. I'm more into relationship. Our fellowship is just really casual and people kind of come as they are to worship and study the Scriptures"—which was kind of ironic since I was dressed in a suit and tie with a boutonniere on my lapel.

Although for the next five minutes I apologized for what people think of the church in general, after I let him off, I was haunted in my heart about what I had said. As I drove home, the Lord continued to stir and speak to me as He brought to my mind a verse wherein the writer to the Hebrews declares, "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (2:11, 12).

You see, even though we might feel the need to be defensive and apologetic about the church, Jesus says specifically that He is not ashamed to call us brothers. That is why I am having such a wonderful time studying and meditating on the Song of Solomon—for in this book, we see our Shepherd-King, Jesus Christ, talking to His maiden, His bride, His church—loving her, uplifting her, encouraging her.

Never once in the Song of Solomon does the shepherd-king have anything negative to say about his bride. The same is true of Jesus. He's not ashamed

of us—He's in love *with* us!

In the passage before us, I would like you to note four qualities that illuminate the glories of the bride of Christ, His church.

> *Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?*
>
> Song of Solomon 6:10

Perspective on Life

Who is she that looketh forth as the morning . . .

The prophet Jeremiah said, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:23). How I need morning to come as often as it does because in a twenty-four-hour period, I've messed things up so royally that I *need* new mercies and a fresh start!

It is said that ignorance is bliss. Indeed that's true, for the more we know, the more we realize how tenuous everything is. Yet, as the church, we can look at the events that surround us personally and threaten us politically not with panic, frustration, or fear, but rather with understanding and perspective, saying, "These are all signs of the times. Jesus told us they are signs of His return."

The church alone can face life with expectancy, with enthusiasm, with hope.

It is so exciting to be around people who are not full of gloom and doom, around people who say, "God is the Source of my strength. He is on the throne and in control of the destiny of my life. I will trust Him. I will look to Him and believe that everything that's happening to me is according to Divine design."

Only in the church do you find people who can look difficulty right in the eye and say, "Through Christ Jesus we are more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37). Only the church has an eternal perspective on life.

Purpose for Life

. . . fair as the moon . . .

In John 8:12, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." Yet in Matthew 5:14, we read that we are the light of the world. How can this be? It is not that we have light in and of ourselves. Rather, like the moon, we reflect Jesus' love and His light to a world that is dark, doomed, and dying.

Your neighbors, colleagues, friends, and family don't know Jesus if they're not a part of His kingdom. Thus, they can no more see the light of the Son in their darkened world than we can see sunlight at night. But they *can* see the moon—the church—reflecting His light. As you know, the moon goes through different phases: half-moon, crescent moon, and even sometimes seemingly absent. Why? Because to the extent that the earth comes between the moon and the sun, the light of the moon diminishes.

The same is true of us. Our light will be diminished to the extent that we allow the world to get between us and the Son. Conversely, our light will shine to the degree that we remain in fellowship with Him.

The result? If we are in close fellowship with the Son, not only will we light the darkness of others, but our own lives will be illuminated in the process. You see, when I witness, I have found that I am tremendously fulfilled. When I pray for people who are hurting, I, too, am encouraged. When I share the gospel, my own faith soars. When I share Scripture with another believer, my knowledge of Jesus increases exponentially.

Truly, the church has been gifted with an incredible purpose for life.

Purity Through Life

. . . clear as the sun . . .

In the world's eyes, we are simply the moon, reflecting the glory of the Lord. But in the Lord's eyes, we are as bright as the sun. That is, He sees us linked with Him, actually a part of Him. One of the marvelous mysteries of marriage is that two become one. Thus, as His bride, in the Lord's perspective we are as clear and as bright as He is.

What does this mean? It means that my life is slowly but surely being purified by the heat of the Son. You see, just as the sun burns over a million tons of mass every second, the Son burns the massive amount of junk in my life in order that His light might go forth.

This life is only preparatory, saints. The Lord is readying us and burning out the dross within us because we are one with Him and shall reign beside Him forever. Therefore, in this life, He purifies us through experiences that seem hot and heavy.

When my daughter, Mary Elizabeth, was less than a year old, she discovered the bowl of Reese's Peanut Butter cups that sat on our coffee table. However, not only was she old enough to figure out how to get her hand into the forbidden bowl—she was old enough to understand the meaning of the word, "No."

So when Mary pulled herself up to the coffee table and reached for the peanut butter cups, we would say, "No." Then she would get a big smile on her face, looked right at us, and put her hand into the bowl. We would again say, "No," and gently slap her hand. She would sit down and cry for awhile before pulling herself back up, smiling bigger than ever, and reaching for the bowl again.

How much like us! To justify our own desires, we smile sweetly and say, "It's okay if I do this, isn't it, Father?" And then we feel His love slap our hand. Do you ever wonder why your hand gets slapped so often? It's because the Lord chastens those He loves (Hebrews 12:6). When we, like Mary Elizabeth, reach for that which He knows is harmful to us, He says, "No," and chastens us in order to protect and purify us.

Power in Life

. . . and terrible [*awesome*] *as an army with banners?*

The church is an awesome army whose purpose is to storm the gates of hell (Matthew 16:18). We have a calling to invade the kingdom of darkness and death and see people rescued and brought into the kingdom of life and love.

Throughout history, mankind has fallen into two extremes. In previous ages, everything was superstitiously attributed to Satan and demons. In our present age, however, everything is attributed to psychological and mental problems. Satan is still real. So are demons. And people are in all types of bondage as a result.

For example, the spirit of suicide is not because parents are not involved with their kids. It's not because music has become too heavy. It's because there is a demonic spirit that is out to destroy our youth. We must recognize it. Mark's Gospel teaches it (9:17–27). Jesus dealt with it. We are not told in the Word that psychiatry is the answer. We are told that the church must be engaged in spiritual warfare if we are to see people set free.

Folks, we need to realize that the majority of that which happens around us can't be cured by psychological counseling. The answer is spiritual warfare: prayer, fasting, pleading the blood, speaking out the Word of God with authority. We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers (Ephesians 6:12). Therefore, church, don't be deceived. Realize that there is a very real enemy who seeks to destroy us.

Read the Gospels. Read the Book of Acts and you'll see that when spiritual warfare took place, victory was the result. We are an awesome army, gang—marching under His banner.

What is His banner? "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love," said the maiden (Song of Solomon 2:4).

The banner that flies over our heads is not the banner of militancy, not the banner of judgmental morality, not the banner of confronting and condemning society. It's the banner of love. It says to people, "The Lord loves you, died

in your place to pay the price of your sin, and has beautiful plans for your future."

Gang, we as the church of Jesus Christ have been gifted with perspective *on* life, purpose *for* life, purity *through* life, and power *in* life. How inexpressibly grateful I am to be a member of such an auspicious group!



7 Song of Solomon 7:1 (a)
How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter! . . .

The king compliments his bride upon the beauty of her feet, which is somewhat unusual since feet are not necessarily the prettiest part of a person. But therein lies an interesting thought. You see, according to Ephesians 6:15, we are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. That is, we stand on the gospel of peace—not upon our own efforts, works, or righteousness, but on the good news of God's peace with us.

When Moses stood on holy ground, what did God instruct him to do? Remove the sandals *from* his feet (Exodus 3:5).When the prodigal son returned home, what did his father do? He put sandals *on* his feet (Luke 15:22). Why? Because Moses speaks of the law, while the prodigal speaks of grace.

If you think you can stand on the law, take off your shoes because you'll never make it. You cannot earn or deserve God's blessings. But if you're at a place where you say, "I need God's forgiveness, grace, and mercy in my life," then, like the prodigal, you will experience the gospel of peace being placed upon your feet.

Dear church, dear bride, hear this: We do not stand on what we do or how we behave. We stand on the finished work of the Cross. We stand on what Jesus Christ has done for us. We stand on the gospel of peace.

Song of Solomon 7:1 (b)
. . . the joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman.

The muscle structure of the thighs is the strongest muscle structure in the entire body. It guards a woman's purity. Here we see the bride being loved and commended for her purity.

Song of Solomon 7:2 (a)
Thy navel is like a round goblet, which wanteth not liquor . . .

The navel speaks of independence. Whereas once we were tied to the world's system, we have now been freed by the Spirit of God. No longer are we in bondage to the world.

Song of Solomon 7:2 (b)
. . . thy belly is like an heap of wheat set about with lilies.

I find it interesting that throughout the Old Testament, Israel is likened to trees—a fig tree, an olive tree, a cedar of Lebanon—standing strong, unshakable, and immovable. But here, the bride, the church, is likened to wheat. The church must not think she's a tree—planted firmly, rooted deeply in the world, for Jesus said, "My kingdom is *not* of this world" (John 18:36). We're not the tree, gang. We're wheat—meant to be cut down, carried away, and taken off to the King's barns and granaries.

Song of Solomon 7:3, 4
Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins. Thy neck is as a tower of ivory; thine eyes like the fishpools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim: thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus.

The Book of Leviticus states that if a man had a flat nose, he could not serve in the priesthood (Leviticus 21:18). I believe that stipulation symbolically says that those who are effective in service cannot be seduced or tricked by every false wind of doctrine or every theological fad that comes their way. Rather, they must have a developed spiritual sense of smell in order to discern things that are amiss.

Song of Solomon 7:5

Thine head upon thee is like Carmel, and the hair of thine head like purple; the king is held in the galleries.

First Corinthians 11 teaches that the hair speaks of submission. Purple is the color of royalty. Purple hair, therefore, typifies one who is submitted to the authority of the king.

Song of Solomon 7:6, 7
How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights! This thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes.

The palm tree is the only tree that gets more fruitful as it gets older. So too, if you're getting up in years, your usefulness or fruitfulness need not diminish. You can be like the palm tree: increasing in wisdom, more powerful in prayer, more stable in your walk in the Spirit.

Song of Solomon 7:8, 9
I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof: now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose like apples; And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine for my beloved, that goeth down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak.

The fruitful vine, the best wine, and powerful speech combine to paint a picture of the work of the Spirit in the life of the church—for it speaks of growth, joy, and a potent witness.

Song 7:10
I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me.

Notice how the bride is maturing. In chapter 2, she said, "My beloved is mine." In chapter 6, she said, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." Here, in chapter 7, she says, "I am my beloved's," as if to say, "I'm not trying to claim him. I'm not trying to manipulate him."

There comes a time in your walk when you're no longer trying to manipulate God. There are Christian teachers, I'm sad to say, who teach that we should make demands of God as if He were our genie in a bottle. But He's God and we are His servants—not the other way around.

Earlier, the bride said, "My beloved is mine." Now she's saying, "I'm my beloved's." What a sweetening and softening of her walk.

Song of Solomon 7:11–13
Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves. The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.

In chapter 1, the bride despised the fields. Here in chapter 7, she wants the king to go back with her to the fields. What made the difference? Consider the demoniac of Gadera. When he was delivered by Jesus he said, "Lord, I want to follow You wherever You go."

But Jesus said, "Go back to where you came from—that your family and friends might see the glorious work of God" (see Mark 5:1–19).

There are times when we think it would be wonderful to follow Jesus to the uttermost parts of the earth—but there also comes a point when we maturely say, "I'm ready to go talk to the guys I used to drink with and tell them about Jesus," or, "I'm ready to pour my heart out to my parents and explain to them that Jesus loves them," or, "I'm ready to go back to where I came from and let the Lord use me there."

I'm not discounting being sent out, but there's also an important place when, in maturity, you realize that mission fields are around you on every side. The old missionary saying is true: there's no sense going across the ocean if you won't go across the street.

Have you gone across the street? Is your neighborhood being affected by your witness? Is the atmosphere of your workplace changing because you're there witnessing, praying, loving, encouraging, and sharing? The toughest

place to minister is at home. That's why Jesus said, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country" (Matthew 13:57).

I believe that's why the bride showed great maturity when she said to her king, "I'm ready to go back home—and to take you with me."



Song of Solomon 8:1–4

O that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! when I should find thee without, I would kiss thee; yea, I should not be despised. I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother's house, who would instruct me: I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate. His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he please.

In Solomon's culture, it was acceptable to publicly kiss a family member, but taboo to publicly kiss one's spouse. Thus, the bride says to her king, "I wish you were my brother. Then I could freely express my feelings for you."

Like the Shulamite bride, I find myself limited in loving my Lord because I "see through a glass darkly." While I am completely impressed with what I do see, I'm so aware of how much I don't see. But guess what. Soon, there will be no more limitations. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then [shall we see Him] face to face . . ." (1 Corinthians 13:12 [a]).

Song of Solomon 8:5 (a)

Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? . . .

This question, asked by the daughters of Jerusalem, is pregnant with meaning. Who is it that comes out of the wilderness leaning upon her beloved? It's us. We are delivered from the wilderness of this world by leaning upon our beloved—Jesus Christ.

Song of Solomon 8:5 (b)

. . . I raised thee up under the apple tree: there thy mother brought thee forth: there she brought thee forth that bare thee.

The king's statement is a difficult one to understand, yet I believe the application is that Jesus is not only our Lover and our Friend—He's also the One who brought us forth. He's our Creator and our everlasting Father (Isaiah 9:6).

Song of Solomon 8:6
Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.

"Challenges are coming," says the bride. "There will be difficulties in our relationship. So seal me upon your heart and upon your arm."

In Exodus 28, we read that the high priest carried the names of the tribes of Israel on his breastplate and upon his shoulders. So too, Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, has us on His heart and on His shoulders. The heart speaks of His tenderness toward us, the shoulders of His strength surrounding us.

Song of Solomon 8:7
Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.

"Love will persevere," says the bride. "But if a person tries to buy love, it will be condemned."

Church, rejoice in the fact that the Lord has you on His heart and upon His shoulders. Challenges will come in your relationship, but love will overcome. And yet if you try and buy His love, that love will be condemned.

Don't try and buy the Lord's love. Don't say, "The Lord must really love me today because I had devotions for an hour. What a day this is going to be! I really earned God's love today." That kind of love is useless because it is based upon your works instead of His grace.

"Then why have devotions?" you ask.

Because we love our Lord and want to spend time with Him. We gain strength in His presence and receive understanding. But we're not trying to prove or earn a greater love. Did you know that if you had devotions every day this week for seven hours the Lord wouldn't love you any more than if you didn't have devotions at all?

Now, if you have devotions for seven hours, there will inevitably be a glow on your face and strength in your heart. You would be changed—but God's love for you would not be affected because His love for you is not based upon your actions. It is based solely upon His own nature. That is why Paul wrote that nothing shall separate us from His love (Romans 8:38, 39).

Don't work for God's love, gang. Don't try to deserve it. Just enjoy it!

Song of Solomon 8:8
We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts: what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for?

The bride is concerned about her little sister. As you grow in the Lord, you will find yourself concerned about younger believers.

Song of Solomon 8:9, 10
If she be a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver: and if she be a door, we will inclose her with boards of cedar. I am a wall, and my breasts like towers: then was I in his eyes as one that found favour.

"If she's a wall, that is, separated, she'll live in a palace. But if she's a door, letting anyone and anything in, she'll be imprisoned."

What is God saying to you and me? When we say, "Lord, we care about this person, this friend, this neighbor," He says, "If he's a door, opening to everything, he'll be imprisoned forever. He's damned. But if he's a wall, if he wants to be right and to be separated from the things of this world, a palace will be his, for he'll be saved and taken to heaven."

Song of Solomon 8:11
Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a

thousand pieces of silver.

Those who used the king's property were required to pay rent.

Song of Solomon 8:12
My vineyard, which is mine, is before me: thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.

The bride is not *required* to give. Instead, she *desires* to give. So too, those who live under the law are required. "You must do this. You must do the other. You can't do that. You mustn't do that." That's the law.

But those who live in love say, "Lord, I desire to give myself to You."

The law says, "Responsibility!"

Love says, "Respond."

Song of Solomon 8:13
Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it.

"I want to hear your voice," says the bride to her shepherd-king.

Jesus, our Good Shepherd said, "My sheep hear My voice" (John 10:27).

Song of Solomon 8:14
Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.

"Make haste," said the beloved to the king—even as John, the beloved apostle said, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20), and even as we, His bride say, "Come soon, Lord. We need You."



ISAIAH

Background to Isaiah

The Old Testament is divided into four major sections. The first section is the law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. In the law, God gave to His people principles by which they might live according to His righteous standards. In the Book of Galatians, Paul tells us the purpose of the law was to be a schoolmaster to show us our need for a Savior. The law shows us how sinful we are.

The second section—Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther—deal with history. In this section, we see God working through and in His people, each story providing an illustration of a spiritual principle necessary for our own growth.

The third section—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon—consists of books of poetry. They're mystical, powerful, and extremely practical.

The final and fourth section of the Old Testament are the books of prophecy. This section is itself divided into two sections: the major prophets —Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Lamentations (also written by Jeremiah), Ezekiel and Daniel—and the twelve minor prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Zechariah, and Malachi. The major prophets are called the major prophets not because the books they wrote are more important, but simply because the books they wrote are longer.

The primary call of the prophet was not so much to foretell the future as it was to speak forth the heart and mind of the Lord. And yet there is indeed an element of foretelling in prophecy . . .

> *Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:*
>
> Isaiah 46:9, 10

No other religious writings, no other holy book dares to foretell the future. One-third of the Bible deals with future events. “There is no one like Me,” God says. “And I will prove I am who I say I am by speaking about things before they happen.”

The Book of Isaiah does just that. In fact, because of this, many so-called Bible scholars believe there were actually two Isaiahs—one who wrote in the days of King Uzziah and a second one who showed up hundreds of years later. In fact, some have even suggested there was a third Isaiah who showed up after the time of Christ and wrote the Messianic prophecies.

However, John quotes directly from Isaiah 6 and 53, attributing both to one Isaiah . . .

> *But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.*
>
> John 12:37–40

This means that either John was deceived or a singular Isaiah wrote everything in prophetic anticipation of Jesus Christ.

As is the case with most of the prophets, we don’t know much about Isaiah’s life because the focus was on his message. We do know, however, that he lived in Jerusalem, was married, and that he had at least two sons. We also know from chapter 20 that his ministry was not an easy one, for he was told to walk around Judah for three years without shoes or clothes.

Jewish tradition tells us that Isaiah’s father was King Uzziah’s brother. We know that Isaiah frequented the court and was close to a number of kings. He and Hezekiah were good friends. So it is very possible that he was of royal seed. Jewish tradition also tells us that he was sawn in half by wicked King Manasseh. Hebrews 11 talks about those who were sawn asunder for their faith, a reference many believe is directed to Isaiah.

The Book of Isaiah has been called "the Bible in miniature." There are sixty-six chapters in Isaiah just as there are sixty-six books in the Bible. Chapters 1 through 39 talk about the shortcomings and sins of the people of Judah and Israel and they deal with the law and government—just as the first thirty-nine books in the Bible deal with the law, government, and the shortcomings of God's people. But in chapter 40, suddenly a new direction is taken, for there we read, "Comfort ye My people"—and love and grace are introduced.

Chapters 40 through 66 speak of Jesus constantly. In the Book of Isaiah, we read of His incarnation, of the virgin birth, and of His youth in Nazareth. We read the text of His first sermon and of His ministry to Gentiles. We read of His miracles, His suffering, His resurrection, ascension, and exaltation. And, in the last chapter, we read of the millennial kingdom.

Along with the Books of Genesis, Psalms, John, Romans, and Revelation, the Book of Isaiah has been considered by a consensus of Bible scholars to be one of the six cornerstone books of biblical understanding and revelation. It's a glorious book. I can't wait to get into it . . .



ISAIAH

1

Isaiah 1:1 (a)
The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw . . .

Isaiah was a visionary in the truest sense of the word. In Bible days, the prophets were called "seers" because they saw things others didn't. The same is still true today. People accuse us of having blind faith. But our faith isn't blind. On the contrary, it sees *more.* We see things to which unbelievers are blind.

Isaiah 1:1 (b)
. . . concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

The combined reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah covered a period of approximately sixty years, beginning in approximately 740 B.C. In other words, Isaiah was on the scene for a substantial period of time.

Isaiah 1:2
Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

In this cosmic courtroom, the Lord calls His star witnesses—the stars themselves and all of creation to consider the indictment against the people He had nourished but who had rebelled against Him.

Isaiah 1:3
The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.

“The ox and the donkey are smarter than My people,” God says. The ox is not known for his brilliance. In fact, to this day we say, “He’s as dumb as an ox.” The donkey is known only for his stubbornness. And yet God says they’re smarter and wiser than His people for at least they know their master. “My people don’t consider Me at all. Here, I have blessed them, but they have forgotten Me,” He says.

At this point, Judah was experiencing a time of unparalleled prosperity. And yet, as is so often the case, because times were good, apathy had crept in. In Deuteronomy 6, God warned of this. “I will bless you,” He said. “I will bring you into a land of promise where you will dwell in houses you didn’t build, drink from pools you didn’t dig, eat from vineyards you didn’t plant. But when you come into the land, beware lest you become full and forget the Lord your God.”

What an important word for us this is. Beware when things go well because the tendency can be to be dumb as an ox, as stubborn as a mule, and to forget the blessings of God.

Isaiah 1:4–10

Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah. Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

Here, God indicts His people for being like Sodom and Gomorrah. We think that Sodom and Gomorrah were judged for homosexuality. But that wasn't the root problem, for through Ezekiel, God said the problem with Sodom and Gomorrah was that they heaped luxury upon themselves while lacking compassion for the poor (16:49).

Isaiah 1:11–14
To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.

Here, God indicts the people for their religiosity. "I've had enough of your meetings, sacrifices, and empty religious practices," He says.

Isaiah 1:15
And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

Why wouldn't God hear the prayers of His people? Because their hands were full of blood. Sometimes we wonder why our prayers aren't answered. We go to church regularly. We lift our hands in praise. We tithe. But God says all of that is irrelevant if we're harboring sin in our life. If we're compromising, if we're trying to be righteous through our own efforts or energy, if we're failing to realize our need to come before God in brokenness, God won't answer our prayers—not because He's mad at us or because He doesn't like us anymore, but because He's saying, "There's something wrong in your relationship with Me. If I continue to answer your prayers, you will persist in those things and they'll destroy you. So you're

not going to sense My presence. You're not going to have answers to your prayers in order that you might seek *Me*."

Isaiah 1:16–18
Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

The people were full of blood and sin, apathy and iniquity—and yet God says, "My blood will wash you clean if you'll just come before Me and admit your need of My work and mercy in your life."

That's what we're to do, gang, for if we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). All He asks from you and me is to be honest before Him and say, "I know this isn't right, Father. I need Your mercy. Deal with me. Help me. Change me."



***For topical study of Isaiah 1:18 entitled "A Glorious Invitation," turn to page* 337.**

Isaiah 1:19, 20
If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

If Israel accepted the invitation of the Lord to reason together with Him, they would eat instead of be eaten; they would experience peace rather than persecution.

Isaiah 1:21–23

How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water: Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

Although Judah still had the appearance of righteousness and integrity, one needn't have looked very far to see she was as compromised as unrefined silver and diluted wine.

Isaiah 1:24–27
Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness.

Here is hope that if the people of Judah would come and reason with the Lord, if they would be willing and obedient to follow His command, He would restore and renew their land.

Isaiah 1:28, 29
And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed. For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen.

The oaks and gardens spoken of here were elements in the practice of idolatry.

Isaiah 1:30, 31

For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water. And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them.

The man who delights in the law of the Lord shall be like a tree whose leaf doesn't wither, the psalmist tells us (1:2, 3). The man who believes on the Lord shall be full of living water (John 7:38). Here, however, Judah would be like a dying tree and a dry garden because she forsook the Lord.

A GLORIOUS INVITATION

Topical Study of
ISAIAH 1:18

"You have been especially and specifically chosen to come and test-drive our car," the invitation read. But when I saw that it was addressed to "Occupant," I wondered how specifically chosen I was. Many invitations are humorous. Some are dubious. But some are absolutely, wonderfully glorious. The Bible is full of such invitations . . .

> *Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the* LORD*'s side? let him come unto me. . . .*
>
> Exodus 32:26 (a)

> *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*
>
> Isaiah 55:1

> *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*
>
> Matthew 11:28

> *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scrip ture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*
>
> John 7:37, 38

> *And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely .*
>
> Revelation 22:17

A Wonderful Invitation

There are so many invitations given to come in Scripture. And one of the most important, most powerful, most special is in the text before us . . .

> *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the* LORD*: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*
>
> Isaiah 1:18

Isaiah was writing to people who were in tremendous apostasy. They were rebelling against the Lord and not interested in obeying Him. And yet, instead of giving a word of annihilation, the Lord, in His matchless grace and mercy, offers a word of invitation. To people who were, at best, apathetic toward Him, the Lord says, "Let us reason together. Think with Me. Consider with Me."

And that's the message for us today. "Come now, let us reason together." Sin is sick, gang. It's not bad because it's forbidden by God. Rather sin is forbidden by God because it's bad. He knows it destroys, erodes, ruins, and harms. So He invites us to come to Him and learn why it is unreasonable for us to continue in sin any longer.

First, sin is a grievous sickness that pollutes the entire body.

> *Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.*
>
> Isaiah 1:5, 6

The Book of Romans further describes how sin takes over every part of our being and influences us negatively. A person might look healthy on the outside, but if he is knowingly walking in sin, his very nature is being eroded

and destroyed. That is why it's only reasonable for us to consider our sin and repent from it.

Second, sin is a binding cord that holds man in its power.

> *His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.*
>
> Proverbs 5:22

"I'm free," the sinner insists. "It doesn't matter what I do." And yet when he finds himself addicted, infected with disease, or haunted by guilt; when his family, integrity, and personality are destroyed, he realizes that he is anything but free—that he is bound by the cord of sin.

Third, sin is a destroyer of rest, a disturber of peace.

> *There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin.*
>
> Psalm 38:3

Sin robs us of the rest, peace, and tranquility we long for and which we once enjoyed. That's why our Father says, "Because I want you to have peace and I want you to be at rest, I want you to stay away from sin."

Fourth, sin is an obscuring cloud that will hide the face of God.

> *But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.*
>
> Isaiah 59:2

As when the clouds come overhead and we can't see the sun, when people say, "Where is God? I can't feel Him. I can't sense Him. Where is He?" very frequently, it's due to sin that has come between them and the Son, muting His voice or obscuring His face from them.

Fifth, sin is a clever detective that will find us out.

> *But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.*

Numbers 32:23

Not only does sin suck us in, but it makes our sin known. There really are no secret sins. We might think we get away with sin for awhile, but, according to the Word, we can be *sure* that sin is a clever detective that will suck us in and then seek us out.

Finally, sin is a robber of blessings that strips and starves the soul.

> *Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the* LORD *our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest. Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you.*
>
> Jeremiah 5:24, 25

God wants to rain blessings upon us and give tremendous harvests to us. It is only our sin that prevents the rain of blessings and an abundant harvest.

Sin stinks. It holds back God's blessings from our lives, obscures God's vision from our eyes, sneaks up on us and then makes itself known to all people. It erodes, corrupts, and torments. But God says that even though our sins be as bright as crimson and as visible as scarlet, even though they can be seen for miles away, we are invited to come to Him and let Him deal with them.

A Glorious Expectation

"No matter how glaring and bright your sin might be, I can make it white as snow," the Father says.

> In London many years ago, a minister and his young son were standing in their window, looking down at the street as a parade passed by. In this parade, along with the clowns and marching bands, British soldiers marched in their red coats.
>
> "Look at those soldiers, Daddy!" the little boy said. "Look how white their coats are!"
>
> "Their coats are red, son," the minister said.
>
> "No, Daddy, they're white," the little boy insisted.
>
> And when the minister stooped down to his son's vantage point, he saw that his son was looking through a pane of stained glass that bordered the window. Seen through the red glass, the red coats appeared to be white.
>
> Suddenly a light went on in the minister's head. "That's it!" he thought. "Though my sins are scarlet, the Father looks at them through the filter of the blood of His Son and sees me white and pure and clean."

Though my own sins are as scarlet—glaring and ugly—I choose to heed the invitation of my Father who says, "Come, let us reason together. Stay away from sin in the future and confess the sin of your past. Realize it can be white as snow because of the blood of My Son."

How I encourage you to take the Lord up on His invitation. Come to Him. Reason with Him. Repent of any sin the Holy Ghost is bringing to your mind right now. It might be something obvious or something subtle, but you know it's a cord that is beginning to wrap itself tightly around you, a worm eating away inside of you, a detective beginning to follow you, a cloud obscuring God's glory from you, a thief robbing the harvest from you.

"Come," the Lord says. "Come *now*."

2 **Isaiah 2:1, 2 (a)**
The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains . . .

This prophecy concerns the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Must it be rebuilt before we're raptured? No. But it must be rebuilt before Jesus comes back to rule and reign in Jerusalem. At that time, there will be peace at last. Swords will be beaten into plows. Spears will be shaped into pruning hooks. Annapolis, West Point, and the Pentagon will be shut down. How we look forward to that!

In verse 2, we see the location of the temple. It is in the mountains. As the temple of God, we, too, must be in the mountains. We must be built on Mount Sinai, where the Word of God was given. We must commit ourselves to the proclamation and meditation of the Scriptures. We must also be built on Mount Pisgah, where Moses stood before he died and saw the Promised Land, for we, too, must see things not from a worldview, but from a heavenly perspective. We must also be built on Mount Carmel, where Elijah called down fire from heaven, for the church is the place where the fire of the Holy Spirit can burn brightest. We must also be built on Mount Hermon, the Mount of Transfiguration, for we must be those who are transformed and those who see each other in that way. Finally, we must be built on the Mount of Olives, where Jesus prayed, for the house of God is to be a house of prayer (Matthew 21:13).

Why would we want to pray with intensity, seek the Holy Spirit with fervency, hear the Word of God as Moses did, become visionaries like Isaiah? Because of another mount—Mount Calvary. I want to be a man of the mountain—a man of prayer, a man who can look at people supernaturally, a man of vision, a man of the Spirit—because of the incredible price Jesus paid for me.

Isaiah 2:2 (b)
. . . and shall be exalted above the hills . . .

Secondly, in addition to the location of the temple, notice its elevation. It is in the mountains above the hills. Both corporately and individually, the

Lord will take us just as far as we want to go. The question is, how far do you want to go? Are you content to dwell in the hills—to simply be saved and know you're going to heaven, or do you want to go higher with the Lord? Are you a hillbilly or a mountain man? The temple of the Lord is *above* the hills.

Isaiah 2:2 (c)–3 (a)
. . . and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob . . .

Third, notice cooperation in the temple. All nations shall flow into it. All kinds of nationalities, personalities, economic backgrounds, and educational abilities will flow together into the temple. Lord, help us to continue to be a menagerie, a potpourri of all kinds of different people.

Isaiah 2:3 (b)
. . . and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Fourth, we see that the motivation of the temple is to learn the way of the Lord. So too, we gather at His temple to learn His ways that we might walk in His paths.

Isaiah 2:4 (a)
And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people . . .

Fifth, we see the correction that takes place within the temple.

I'll never forget the time when Peter-John was about four years old and about to be spanked.
"But, Daddy," he said, "you can't do that."
"Why?" I asked.
"Because you and me are friends," he said.

And I said, "Peter, it is because we are friends that I need to correct you."

The Lord says He will judge the nations and rebuke many people. Why? For the same reason I disciplined Peter-John. We're His friends and He loves us.

Isaiah 2:4 (b)
. . . and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Sixth, we see transformation. Swords become plowshares; spears become pruninghooks; fighting is replaced by fruit. Therefore, let's not use the Word of God to chop others up and put others down. Instead, let's use it to plow and to prune that we might bear more fruit.

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

Finally, we see a beautiful invitation to enjoy the light and love of the Lord. But, before that takes place, there will be a time of chastening, as seen in verse 6 . . .

Isaiah 2:6
Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers.

Even as people in Isaiah's day were fascinated by the Babylonian and Syrian cultures with all of their magic and mystery, where are people turning today? To Eastern mysticism and spiritism.

Isaiah 2:7, 8

Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots: Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made:

Like our own culture, the people of Judah were not only rich, prosperous, and enamored with Eastern thought, but they had idols. Theirs happened to be made of stone and wood, while ours can be flesh and blood or chrome and rubber.

Isaiah 2:9–12
And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not. Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low:

It is not idols, but only the Lord who will ultimately be exalted.

Isaiah 2:13
And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan,

The cedars of Lebanon and oaks of Bashan speak of men that are proud of their own abilities.

Isaiah 2:14
And upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up,

The high mountains speak of government.

Isaiah 2:15
And upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall,

Walls and towers speak of military might.

Isaiah 2:16 (a)
And upon all the ships of Tarshish . . .

This speaks of commerce.

Isaiah 2:16 (b)
. . . and upon all pleasant pictures.

This speaks of the arts.

In other words, verses 13 through 16 speak of society as a whole exalting itself.

Isaiah 2:17–20
And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols he shall utterly abolish. And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats;

When the Lord comes back to this planet, before He rules and reigns in the temple, there will be a time of chastening and judging. As a result, people will take all that they once worshiped to the dump to be left to the bats and moles because, at last, all idols will be seen to be meaningless.

Isaiah 2:21, 22
To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. Cease ye from man,

whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?

"Don't look to man," God says. "You don't even know if he's going to have another breath. Instead, look totally, fully, and only to Me."



3 Isaiah 3:1
For, behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water.

Famine is spoken of thirteen times in the Old Testament. Each time, it is directly connected to the judgment of God upon an area. When God desired to wake up a region, He would send famine and drought in order to move the people to repent so that He could pour out His blessings upon them once again.

Isaiah 3:2, 3
The mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, The captain of fifty, and the hon ourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator.

Not only would there be a lack of food and water, but there would be a dearth of leaders, of mighty men, knowledgeable men, wise men, and skilled men.

Isaiah 3:4, 5
And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable.

Whether regarding the last days of the ten tribes or the last days of our own society, children will rule. We see that happening to a degree even now, for in many countries of the world, it is the students who bring down governments. There was a time when gray hair was highly esteemed. Now, however, it is the opinion of younger generations that seems to be most highly valued in our culture.

Isaiah 3:6
When a man shall take hold of his brother of the house of his father, saying, Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler, and let this ruin be under thy hand:

People esteem not only youth but wealth. How many of our congressmen and business leaders hold their positions simply because they have money? Would Jeremiah have been asked to be on the board of directors of a large corporation? How about John the Baptist?

Isaiah 3:7
In that day shall he swear, saying, I will not be an healer; for in my house is neither bread nor clothing: make me not a ruler of the people.

In the day of Tribulation, when things get really heavy, people will say, "Don't bother me. I can't help lead society. I'm having a hard enough time just taking care of my own needs."

Isaiah 3:8
For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen: because their tongue and their doings are against the LORD, to provoke the eyes of his glory.

Although Judah was experiencing a time of prosperity, the handwriting of decay was on the wall. The Assyrians were already camped at their border. But because the stock market was still sky-high, many people weren't listening to Isaiah's warning of destruction.

Paul told us that the signs of the end of our own age will be like birth pangs (1 Thessalonians 5:3). In other words, times of travail will be followed by times of peace. It is the wise individual who doesn't get lulled by times of calm, but rather is constantly aware of the nearness of the Lord's coming.

Isaiah 3:9–11
The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves. Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.

Although Isaiah was prophesying the end of their society as they knew it, the people weren't listening. Instead, they flaunted their sin even as did Sodom.

Isaiah 3:12, 13
As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths. The LORD standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people.

In Acts 7:56, we read of Jesus standing to welcome Stephen home. Here, however, we see the Lord standing not to welcome but to judge.

Isaiah 3:14, 15
The LORD will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof: for ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord GOD of hosts.

Those in authority had abused their power and authority. As a result, they were about to find themselves under the authority of the invading Assyrians.

Isaiah 3:16–24

Moreover the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: Therefore the LORD will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will discover their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tin kling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon, The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, The rings, and nose jewels, The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the vails. And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty.

It has been said that a woman's wardrobe is a barometer of a society. In this society, about to unravel, the women dressed seductively. The little cymbals they wore on their feet caused others to turn and see them. The jewelry, headbands, and costly material were all meant to entice. And because of the moral vacuum of their society, not only would their beauty be lost, but they would have to deal with some brutal consequences—not because God would punish them but because, by ignoring His ways and His Word, they would bring a plague upon themselves.

"Let your adorning be that of a meek and quiet spirit," Peter would write (see 1 Peter 3:4)—for that kind of beauty is never lost.

Isaiah 3:25, 26

Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war. And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground.

Not only would the women be affected by the dark days that lie ahead, but the men of Jerusalem would die and the entire city would fall. That is

why God sent Isaiah with this word of warning.



4 Isaiah 4:1 (a)
And in that day . . .

The phrase, "in that day," speaks not only historically but carries with it a prophetic application as well. Prophetically, "the day of the Lord" speaks of the day when the Lord will intervene very obviously in history in the last days, beginning with the Rapture of the church. While we're in heaven for seven years, this world will go through a terrible time of judgment and tribulation. Called the "time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7), one of the primary purposes of the Tribulation is to cause the nation of Israel to come to her senses and at last recognize her Messiah.

Isaiah 4:1 (b)
. . . seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach.

Due to the death toll of the war, spoken of in the last two verses of the previous chapter, there will be seven women for every man. "We'll pay our own way," these women say to the remaining men. "Just let us take your name."

Isaiah 4:2–6
In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and

by the spirit of burning. And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.

After saying the times are going to be dark and difficult, brutal and blood, in verses 2 through 6, Isaiah says there's hope—for Israel will experience a tremendous awakening. Thus, for the people of Israel, the day of the Lord begins as a dark day indeed. But this is not surprising, for the Hebrew reckoning of any day begins with the setting of the sun. Our day begins with the rising of the sun, but I like the Hebrew way of thinking better because it begins in darkness and works toward light. The day of the Lord begins in darkness—judgment, wrath, trouble, plague, problems, war, worry, disease, destruction. But then the Son comes. Jesus Christ comes back. That's why, in talking to Israel in Matthew 24, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who endure to the end, who make it through that day of Tribulation."

Jesus is coming back. He's going to purge the people of Israel of their unbelief. Oh, glorious day that will be!



5 Our Lord was a Master Communicator. He was able to use common things around Him to give illumination to His hearers. "You can learn of the Father's care by observing the birds and flowers," He said (see Matthew 6:26–30). "You can learn of the Father's Word by observing a man sowing seed" (Matthew 13:18–23). Perhaps one of the most impacting teachings dealt with a vineyard. In John 15, Jesus told His disciples that He was the vine, they were the branches, and that they must abide in Him and cling to Him if they were to be fruitful in their lives.

Where did Jesus get this illustration? I believe He got it from His Father for here in Isaiah 5, God the Father, through the prophet Isaiah, talks also of the parable of the vineyard . . .

Isaiah 5:1–7

Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.

This passage is an awesome indictment against the nation of Israel, for, in it, the Lord says, "I have blessed you. I have worked with you. I have given so much to you. You are My vineyard—but as I look for fruit in your nation, I find nothing but wild, bitter grapes." The people of Israel had indeed been blessed by God. He had brought them into a land that was flowing with milk and honey. He had blessed them exceedingly abundantly. But, although they enjoyed the gifts of God, they forgot all about God Himself.

I see a very real parallel between the people of Israel and our own country. God has blessed us greatly as a nation. He has blessed us with great freedom and incredible prosperity. And yet we have forgotten Him. We think it is our Constitution, our democratic government, or our free enterprise system that has made us great. We think we have done this by our ingenuity, creativity, or hard work. We congratulate ourselves, all the while forgetting God.

In the following verses, we find six woes pronounced upon Israel. Let us have ears to hear that, through them, we might sense and understand what the Lord would say to us both nationally and personally concerning how we have enjoyed the gifts but forgotten the Giver.

Isaiah 5:8–10

Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth! In mine ears said the LORD of hosts, Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant. Yea, ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and the seed of an homer shall yield an ephah.

The first woe pronounced upon Israel deals with corrupt capitalism. Capitalism can become corrupted just as surely as socialism, communism, or any other form of government. Here, God is saying, "People have taken over properties, homes, and fields in order to build their own empires." And, because they were motivated only by money, God indicts them. "You're not going to get away with this indefinitely," He says. "A day of reckoning will come when all of your efforts to increase your empire will backfire. The land won't produce. The resources won't be released."

Isaiah 5:11–17

Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of his hands. Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge: and their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst. Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it. And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled: But the LORD of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy

shall be sanctified in righteousness. Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat.

The second woe is hedonism—the pursuit of pleasure above all else. So too, our own country seems to be in a relentless pursuit of hedonism. Nothing can stand between us and our pleasure. We spend fortunes on alcohol, tobacco, and gambling; on bigger houses and faster cars, but don't have money or time to help the poor.

Isaiah 5:18, 19
Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope: That say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!

Liberalism and looseness is the third woe. People plunge into sin and then mistake the mercy, patience, and longsuffering of God for apathy, impotence, or even approval. Our Father is incredibly longsuffering and the wheels of His judgment turn slowly. He waits for us to repent and to come to our senses—but eventually we will find ourselves ground up in the inevitable wheels of judgment.

Isaiah 5:20
Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

Relativism and existentialism—the lack of absolutes—is the fourth woe. "Dark is light and light is dark. Sweet is bitter and bitter is sweet. You can't really say what's right and wrong for everyone. What's right for you may or may not be right for me. The only absolute is that there are no absolutes. Just do whatever you want."

Isaiah 5:21

Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

The fifth woe is intellectualism. Many self-proclaimed intellectuals are agnostics—but the Bible says it is the fool who has said in his heart that there is no God (Psalm 14:1). This would be like an ant defiantly declaring that he doesn't believe in man. I could yell and jump up and down in front of him to prove my existence, but his perspective is so puny, his intellect so small, his perception so restricted that he doesn't see me. Does that mean I don't exist? No, it means he's too small to see me. The only way I would be able to save that ant from destruction would be to become an ant. That's what God did with us. God said, "I love you so much, I'll become one of you to talk to you about life and death, heaven and hell, sin and salvation." That's how much our Lord loves us.

Isaiah 5:22, 23
Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!

Alcoholism is the sixth woe. Because they have given themselves over to wine and strong drink, people no longer think clearly. Over twenty million people in our country are addicted to alcohol. Woe be to a society who has come under the bondage of strong drink.

Isaiah 5:24, 25
Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore is the anger of the LORD kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcases were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

"You brought judgment and destruction upon yourself," God says, "but My hand is outstretched still." Look at that hand. It's not stretched out to strike you down. As I look at that hand, I see the scars where a nail pierced and penetrated the palm and I realize that His hand is stretched out not to come down on me but to reach out and save me.

God's hand is stretched out to our country, gang. The mistakes we've made personally, as a church family, as a community, and as a country have been forgiven and covered by the blood of Jesus Christ if we'll simply respond and say, "Thank You, Lord, for reaching out, for stretching out Your hand on the Cross, for absorbing My sins. I repent. I change direction. I'm turning away from my old paths to walk in Your way."

God comes to the vineyard of our nation and looks for the fruit of thanksgiving, rightness, holiness, love, mercy, and compassion, but all He finds is sour grapes and wild fruit. What is the solution? Repentance. Nations don't repent. People repent. Therefore, it's time for us to accept our part in the corrupt state of our society. It's time for us to change our activity and pray on behalf of our country.

Isaiah 5:26–30

And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth: and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly: None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken: Whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent, their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind: Their roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like young lions: yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it. And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea: and if one look unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof.

Because of the Lord's allowance, the Assyrian army would descend on Israel in a flawless military maneuver.



6 It has been said that the closer one gets to the altar, the more likely one is to become a missionary. Here, in chapter 6, Isaiah is touched with a coal from the altar and, as a result, says, "Lord, send me."

Isaiah 6:1
In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

Notice when Isaiah had this vision. It was in the year King Uzziah died. Second Chronicles 26:8 tells us that Uzziah was known worldwide as a king who brought peace and prosperity. He was an inventor. He built up his army to be a powerful force. He was a man who walked with the Lord and was strengthened by the Lord. Therefore, I find it interesting that it was when Uzziah died that Isaiah saw the Lord.

Isaiah, no doubt, enjoyed what the people of Judah were enjoying under Uzziah's reign. But he never saw the Lord until Uzziah died. So too, you won't really see the Lord until your "Uzziah" dies. Your Uzziah might be a godly mentor, a vibrant church, a saintly friend. But until your Uzziah is less important to you than the Lord is, you'll never really see Him. Don't fix your eyes upon a fellowship, a ministry, or a man. Your eyes need to be on the Lord Jesus Christ alone. And, because He wants to fill you with a vision of Himself, your Uzziah will die in one way or another.

Isaiah 6:2–4
Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

The word *seraphim* literally means "burning." Like the four living creatures in Revelation 4 who are around the throne, saying, "Holy, holy,

holy," these seraphims are not automatons programmed to say, "Holy, holy, holy." They are superior creatures of incredible intelligence who are so enamored with Someone who is whole, Someone who has not been eroded by sin, that they don't leave day or night.

The more you look at me, the more depressed you'll be. I guarantee it! The more I look at the political situation, the more discouraged I become. Ignorance truly is bliss because the more you delve into any area, the more disappointed you'll be. But such is not the case with the Lord. That's why these beings can't leave His presence. They could fly out to the farthest corner of the cosmos, but they choose just to gaze at the Lord because He's so incredibly attractive. That's why I love walking with Jesus. He has yet to disappoint me. The more I read in His Word, the more I walk in His path, the More I hear His voice, the more impressed I am.

Isaiah 6:5 (a)
Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone . . .

What was Isaiah's reaction when he saw the Lord? In the first five chapters, he was saying, "Woe unto you. Woe unto you. Woe unto you." But when he saw the Lord, he said, "Woe is *me*." That's always the way it is.

When Peter realized who Jesus was, he fell down in his boat and said, "Depart from me, Lord, I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8).

When John saw the Lord on the isle of Patmos, he fell down as though he were dead (Revelation 1:17).

Isaiah 6:5 (b)
. . . because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

Isaiah said, "My problem is my lips, my speech." Maybe Isaiah had a problem with profanity. Maybe he had a problem with gossip, lying, or negative speech. We don't know what it was—but Isaiah did.

Isaiah 6:6, 7

Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

As the coal touched the area where Isaiah was plagued, it wasn't to burn him up but to build him up. It cauterized the flow of iniquity from his lips. When we come to a place of saying, "Lord, woe is me. This area of my life is undone. My mind is impure. My speech is cutting. My eyes are wandering. My hands are evil"—whatever might be your area of weakness, the Lord will send a coal from off the altar. If you'll humble yourself before Him and be open to Him, He'll cauterize that area—just as He did with Isaiah.

Isaiah 6:8
Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

Isaiah didn't passively say, "Lord, if You want, You can use me." Rather, the original text indicates he said, "Behold me. Look at me, Lord." Thus, with the enthusiasm of an eager first-grader who knows the answer, Isaiah raised his hand to get the Teacher's attention and said, "Send me, Lord."

Isaiah 6:9 (a)
And he said, Go . . .

It has been said that Isaiah's calling can be summarized as Woe, Lo, and Go.

- "Woe is me," Isaiah said in verse 5.
- "Lo, this iniquity is taken away," the seraphim said in verse 7.
- "Go," the Lord said in verse 9.

"Who will go?" the Lord asked.

"Count me in," Isaiah answered. "How can I not go? I've seen You. I've been touched by You. I'll go."

Will *you* go? Whether that means across the seas or across the street, around the block or around the office, will you tell people about the One who saved your soul? Daniel 12 says those who win souls are wise and that they shall shine as the stars forever. But if that concept is too hard to grasp, ask anyone who's been witnessing or on the mission field and they'll tell you they find it to be wonderfully fulfilling and addicting in the best sense of the Word. You see, the Holy Spirit is like electricity. He'll only go into an object if there is a way out of that object. People wonder why the Holy Ghost isn't moving in their lives, but it's because there's no outflow. Plug into ministry, sharing, missions—and you will feel the current of the Holy Ghost flowing through you.

Isaiah 6:9 (b)–10
. . . and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

Isaiah sees the Lord. He's humbled before the Lord. He's touched by the Lord. He offers himself to the Lord. But what does the Lord say? "Go and preach—but no one will be converted. No one will listen or respond. You'll open your home for Bible study and no one will come. You'll witness and people will walk away."

Why would the Lord say this? In Matthew 13, Jesus referred to this very passage when He said He spoke in parables lest the people understand what He was saying and were converted. Why wouldn't Jesus want everyone converted? Because God allows man to make his own choice. God won't force His will on anyone. If a person says, "I do not want to know the Lord. I want to be my own God," the Lord will allow his ears to be stopped, his eyes to be blind lest they be converted against their own will.

God wanted Isaiah to speak His Word and to be His witness in order that people might see how they were either rejecting or responding to Him. Our calling is not to be successful in ministry. Our calling is simply to be

obedient to the Master. Those who are elected will respond. Others won't. Our message just shows people where they're at.

Isaiah 6:11, 12
Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

How long would the heart of the nation be hard, the eyes of the nation be blind? Until they were carried captive into Babylon.

Isaiah 6:13
But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.

When Nebuchadnezzar carried the Jews captive into Babylon, one-tenth were left to care for the land (2 Kings 25:12, 22). Thus, this prophecy was fulfilled perfectly.



7 **Isaiah 7:1 (a)**
And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah . . .

Uzziah was a good king and a godly man. His son, Jotham, was also a good king and a godly man. Ahaz, however, was one of the worst kings in the history of Judah and a wicked man. Not only did he turn his own heart against the Lord, but he caused the entire nation to backslide.

Isaiah 7:1 (b), 2
. . . that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it, but

could not prevail against it. And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.

When Ahaz heard that the ten northern tribes of Israel had formed an alliance with Syria and were going to come down and march against the two southern tribes of Judah, Ahaz was blown away like trees in the wind. What was the reason for this alliance? Historically, it would seem that these two countries allied in order to protect themselves from the threat of Assyria. Assyria was to the northeast of Syria—a large and brutal empire. Both Syria and Israel wanted Judah to join in the confederacy, but Judah refused. Therefore, Israel and Syria were coming to attack Judah to force her to join their stand against the Assyrian threat.

Isaiah 7:3
Then said the LORD unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shear-jashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field;

Ahaz deserved to be wiped out. He was, after all, a wicked ruler, a man who had no interest in the things of God. Yet God sent Isaiah to talk to him, thereby giving Ahaz yet another chance to turn to Him. Oh, the mercy of our Lord. How longsuffering and patient He was with Ahaz. How longsuffering and patient He is with me.

Isaiah 7:4–9 (a)
And say unto him, Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah. Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal: Thus saith the Lord GOD, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin; and within

threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. . . .

"Go meet with Ahaz," the Lord said to Isaiah, "and tell him not to fear. The plans of these two firebrands are not going to work the way they think or hope. In fact, in sixty-five years, the ten northern tribes will not even be a people." Indeed, within sixty-five years, the Assyrians came down and carried away the ten northern tribes and they haven't been heard from since.

Isaiah 7:9 (b)
. . . If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.

"Even if you don't believe what I'm saying," Isaiah said to Ahaz, "what I'm saying will still come to pass. That is, this confederacy is not going to be successful."

Gang, what God says always comes to pass. For example, He says, "I will supply all of your needs according to My riches" (see Philippians 4:19). I can either believe that or reject it. If I reject it, His promise still stands—but I'll be all shaken up and will go through all kinds of unnecessary tension. Jesus said He's coming back for us (John 14:3). Even if you don't believe that, He's still coming back. But if you don't believe it, when you look at the situation of the world today, you'll be filled with fear. It's a fantastic thing to learn to simply rest in the promises of God.

Isaiah 7:10–12
Moreover the LORD spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD.

Although Ahaz's response sounds holy, in reality, it was hypocrisy because in 2 Kings 16, we read that Ahaz had previously taken a journey to Assyria to make his own peace pact with the Assyrians. Because he sought the king of the Assyrians, he didn't think he needed a sign from the King of the universe.

Isaiah 7:13, 14
And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

"The Lord will indeed give you a sign," Isaiah said. The word "you" is plural. Therefore, it speaks not only to Ahaz, but to all humanity through all of history. You who feel threatened, intimidated, pressed upon, worried, anxious—the Lord will give you a sign: A virgin shall conceive and bear a Son whose name means "God with us."

I love that! God says, "The sign I'm giving you is that I'll be with you." How? Through the miracle of the Incarnation.

"Great is the mystery of godliness," Paul says, "that God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). God was born a Man in the person of Jesus Christ.



***For topical study of Isaiah 7:1–14 entitled "Immanuel: God with Us," turn to page* 350.**

Isaiah 7:15
Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.

Immanuel will eat butter and honey—common foods in that society. They speak of his humanity. He's going to eat just like you and me. He's going to be a man. Why is that important? Because Hebrews 4:15 says we have a sympathetic High Priest who was tempted in all points as we are. He went through the things we go through. He felt the things we feel. He always chose good, but He knows the struggles. Therefore, He doesn't say to us, "What's your problem?" He says, " I know that struggle."

Isaiah 7:16

For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.

"Before Messiah comes, your land will lose both kings," Isaiah prophesied to Ahaz. Indeed, when Jesus came neither Judah nor Israel had a king that truly ruled them.

Isaiah 7:17–25
The LORD shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the LORD shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. And they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all thorns, and upon all bushes. In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, namely, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the feet: and it shall also consume the beard. And it shall come to pass in that day, that a man shall nourish a young cow, and two sheep; And it shall come to pass, for the abundance of milk that they shall give he shall eat butter: for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land. And it shall come to pass in that day, that every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, it shall even be for briers and thorns. With arrows and with bows shall men come thither; because all the land shall become briers and thorns. And on all hills that shall be digged with the mattock, there shall not come thither the fear of briers and thorns: but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and for the treading of lesser cattle.

Isaiah describes what would happen when Assyria moves into the area of Israel. The picture is one of decimation and desolation.

IMMANUEL: GOD WITH US

A Topical Study of ISAIAH 7:1–14

Sometimes I think we think too much. I clearly remember thinking one day that my wife, Tammy, deserved a break. So I told her the kids and I would ride our bikes to Taco Bell. I gathered the kids and their bikes and we set out. I led the way. Eleven-year-old Peter-John was behind me, followed by nine-year-old Jessie. Seven-year-old Christy brought up the rear. Off we pedaled toward Taco Bell. But as we got outside our little town of Jacksonville, I thought I'd make our ride easier by filling up the bike tires with air. All went well until, after I finished putting the air in my own tires, one of them blew up. It was a hot afternoon as I walked home from the Texaco station with my kids following me. Twenty minutes later, I was knocking at my brother, Jimmy's door, asking if I could borrow one of his bikes.

"Why don't you just go to Pappy's Pizza?" he asked. "It's only two blocks away."

But then I thought. I thought the kids needed more exercise and that Tammy needed a little more time. So we headed off for Taco Bell again. We passed both the Texaco station and Pappy's and finally made it to Taco Bell.

After we ate a few tacos, Christy told me she had a stomach ache. I decided to walk across the street to 7-Eleven to buy her a huge chocolate chip cookie ice cream sandwich. With two bites left, she said, "Daddy, I just can't eat any more."

I realized I was in trouble. I had a sick little girl and four bikes at 7-Eleven.

Right then, one of the guys from the Fellowship came in with a huge truck. I asked him if he could take Christy home. He offered to take all of us and our bikes. But then I thought.

"No, just take Christy," I said. "The rest of us will ride."

So Peter, Jessie, and I rode for about a mile with Peter and Jessie bickering the whole way.

"What's going on?" I finally asked. And I couldn't believe what I saw. Jessie's tire was totally flat. She was in tears after riding a mile on a flat tire with Peter taunting her for going so slowly.

As we stood by the side of the road, another brother from the Fellowship stopped.

"Can I help you?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. "Can you take Jessie home?"

We loaded Jessie and her bike on the truck. Peter and I rode and rode and rode and finally made it home.

As he wrote to his grandparents that night, one of the lines of his letter struck me. "Dear Nana and Papa, we went on a family bike ride. Four of us started. Only two survived."

All along the way on that journey, there were various times I could have been delivered. But, instead of seeking, I was thinking, trying to work out the situation with my own limited mentality. In Isaiah 7, we see a similar account of a man thinking when he should have been seeking. And it led him into big trouble.

His name was Ahaz. He was the wicked king of the country of Judah. Judah consisted of the two southern tribes of Israel. The kings of Israel and Syria had formed a confederation to stand against Assyria and wanted Judah to join them. When Judah refused, Syria and Israel decided to wage war against Judah to force her to join their confederation. But Ahaz had already met with the king of Assyria and had cut a deal with him. He had already taken things into his own hands. He had already submitted his country to a very bad alliance with the godless empire of Assyria.

"You're ignoring the Lord," Isaiah told him. "By working things out in your own ability, you're wearying Him" (verse 13). As a result, a sign was given to Ahaz, a sign that would, in fact, apply to each of us—for Ahaz was promised that a virgin would conceive.

Some have tried to change the word "virgin" in this account because they cannot comprehend the possibility of a virgin birth. Yet the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament—translated this word as *parthenos,* or "virgin" because they realized that the Hebrew word *almah* spoke of a virgin in the literal sense of the word.

Consider the following four reasons why the Virgin Birth is a nonnegotiable element of our faith . . .

The Virgin Birth Makes Jesus a Unique Person

No one else has ever been born of a virgin. All cultures, religions, and societies realize that someone born of a virgin would obviously be unique and important. In Lebanon, the Druze, a sect of Islam, considers the virgin birth of Jesus so persuasive that they have proclaimed their Messiah will be birthed by a virgin male. Therefore, the dedicated men wear pants with a pouch in the front in the event they are chosen to bear Messiah.

The Virgin Birth Gives Jesus Unique Parents

Jesus Christ is the Son of man for He had a human mother, Therefore, as a Man, He was “in all points tempted as we are” (Hebrews 4:15). That is, He feels what we feel. He went through struggles even as we do. He understands the troubles, challenges, and temptations of life. Not one of us will go through any difficulty to which Jesus Christ cannot sympathetically relate. He’s been there. But He’s also the Son of God. And because of this, He is the express image of God (Hebrews 1:3). Therefore, if I want to know what God is like, I simply have to look at His Son, Jesus.

The Virgin Birth Gives Jesus Unique Power

We sin because we were born sinners (Psalm 51:5). But, because God was His Father, Jesus was born without a sin nature. “Christ liveth in me,” Paul declared, “and the life I now live I live by the faith of the Son of God” (Galatians 2:20). Therefore, because there is no sin in Jesus, He enables me, if I choose, to not sin. That is why He told the woman taken in adultery to go her way and sin no more (John 8:11). For the first time in her life, she had the option not to sin. That’s the glory of the Christian life.

The Virgin Birth Gives Jesus Unique Purity

Leviticus 17:11 says the life is in the blood. We need a blood transfusion because our blood is tainted by sin. So Jesus Christ came and shed His blood in my place and now cleanses me by His blood. But His blood must be pure. Just as you can't give AIDS-infected blood to a hemophiliac without killing him in the process, you can't give sin-tainted blood to a sinner and expect him to be cleansed. The blood must be pure. And because blood type is determined by the male at conception, not only is Jesus' blood pure, but it is universal. It matches the blood type of all of humanity.

Isaiah said, "This will be a sign to you: A virgin shall conceive and bear a Son. A sign shall be given to all humanity throughout all history. A sign shall be given to anyone and everyone who feels like they're in trouble, like Assyria is attacking, like circumstances are pressing, finances are crushing, marriages are failing, burdens are heavy. A virgin shall conceive and bring forth a Son named 'God with us.' "

God is with us, gang. Therefore, when we experience the enemy bearing down on us are we going to say, "How can I manipulate the circumstances?" Are we going to ally with the enemy? That's what Ahaz did. Or are we going to say, "Wait a minute. God is with me. Jesus Christ is in me. Although the enemy is looming and the pressure is intense, instead of trying to manipulate the situation, I'm going to look to God alone for salvation"?

Immanuel. "God with us." There could be no better sign.



8 Isaiah 8:1–3

Moreover the LORD said unto me, Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a man's pen concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz. And I took unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah. And I went unto the prophetess; and she conceived, and bare a son. Then said the LORD to me, Call his name Mahershalal-hash-baz.

Maher-shalal-hash-baz literally means "hasten to the prey." In other words, an invasion was on the way.

Isaiah 8:4
For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria.

Isaiah was told by the Lord to go to the officials of that community and write out a birth certificate before Mrs. Isaiah was even pregnant. And before the baby could say "Daddy" or "Mommy," the invasion of Assyria into Israel would take place.

Isaiah 8:5–8
The LORD spake also unto me again, saying, Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son; Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.

The waters of Siloam flowed from a spring on the side of Mount Moriah into a tranquil pool. It was to this pool that Jesus sent a man born blind to regain his sight (John 9). It's a quiet and lovely spot. Therefore, it's as if God is saying, "Because you have ignored the peace I promised and instead allied yourself with the king of Assyria, the raging river of Assyria will flood your region and destroy you in the process."

This speaks very pointedly to me because it's so easy for me to think I don't have time to sit at the quiet pond of tranquility, the still waters of prayer and meditation. I think I've got to get going, that I've got to make something happen in my own power. The result? My soul is flooded and overwhelmed by the raging river of self and sin.

Isaiah 8:9–13

Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us. For the LORD spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

"Don't listen to the cries of the people who tell you to build an alliance," Isaiah says to Ahaz. "Instead, let the Lord be your fear."

At any moment, you and I are walking in fear—either the fear of the Lord or the fear of people. Don't fear people. Don't fear the confederacy. Fear the Lord. Be concerned about what *He* thinks. This is so foreign to us. We try and think logically, but the Lord doesn't always move in the most logical way. What matters ultimately is whether we do things in the fear of the Lord or in the fear of man—whether we seek to please the Lord or whether we strive to please men. Help us, Lord, to be failures in the eyes of the world if necessary and to live in the fear of You rather than to seek success in the eyes of the world and violate Your principles.

Isaiah 8:14, 15

And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.

Who shall be a sanctuary? Jesus. If you come to Him, you'll find a place of safety. If you turn from Him, you'll only stumble and fall.

Isaiah 8:16–20 (a)

Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait upon the LORD, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him. Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion. And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony . . .

Isaiah realized that things would be coming down in the northern tribes. So he gathered his disciples together and said, "I will seek the Lord's face and spend time in His Word. As for you, when others tell you to listen to the astrologers, wizards, or channelers, turn instead to the Word alone."



For topical study of Isaiah 8:19, 20, see "To the Word!" below.

Isaiah 8:20 (b)–22
. . . if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. And they shall pass through it, hardly bestead and hungry: and it shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God, and look upward. And they shall look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness.

Those who look for a new light, a new age, a new way will find only the old darkness and despair.

TO THE WORD!

A Topical Study of
ISAIAH 8:19, 20

Having received the message that dark days were looming on the horizon, Isaiah told his disciples that, in the difficult days that were coming, there would be a tendency for people to seek the occult. "In those turbulent times," he said, "go to the law, to the testimony, to the Word of the Lord. That is to be your priority."

The Word is always where the light is, gang. Four thousand-plus times it says, "Thus saith the Lord . . ." Satan can come across as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), but if we stay in the Word, we won't be deceived no matter how dark the days or troubling the times. Following are five ways we can be people of the Word . . .

Read It Through

Read the Word of God in its entirety. If you just nibble at the Scriptures, you'll never acquire a taste for them. Don't be nibblers—knowing a little bit of Genesis, a few Psalms, the Gospel of John, and portions of Revelation. Read it through cover to cover. Be consistent and systematic in your reading. This will keep you from straying into wrong doctrine because the Word has a wonderful way of balancing itself.

"But I don't understand so much of what I read," you say.

That's okay. Read it through and the understanding and refreshing will come in later seasons. I think of the story in 2 Kings 3, where Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah were experiencing a time of drought. They called for Elisha, who told them to go to the valley and dig ditches. They did just what Elisha said. In the hot sun, in dry times, they dug ditches. The next morning, they went to the valley and the ditches were filled with cool, refreshing water. This speaks to us, I believe, of our own spiritual experience. There will be times when we must say, "I'm going to dig ditches. I'm going to read the Word even though it seems dry and I'm not understanding all that I'm reading." Keep at it, and eventually you'll find the water flowing as it all begins to make sense.

Pray It In

Bible study needs to be a two-way communication. When I call my wife on the telephone, I don't say, "Tammy, this is Jon. I'm going to talk to you for fifteen minutes and then you talk to me for fifteen minutes and that will wrap it up for today's conversation." Yet that's what I found myself doing for many years in my devotions.

"Okay, Lord," I would say in essence. "It's fifteen minutes of prayer time to You and then it's fifteen minutes of Bible study when I'll listen to You." I have found personally a much better, much more real way. That is, as I read, I pray. "Oh, Father, I see that," or, "This reminds me of the struggle I'm going through in this area," or, "Lord, what does this mean?" Praying as I read allows the Holy Spirit to make application of certain points He knows I need.

Write It Down

In Deuteronomy 17:18, 19, we read that one of the requirements of a king ascending the throne was to write a copy of the law. Therefore, I strongly encourage you to approach Bible study with pencil and paper in hand. I have found that when I have a pencil and journal before me, God speaks to me. But when I come empty-handed, very frequently I don't learn what I know I could or should. Why? Because the Father sees that, when I have pencil and paper, I am expecting to receive something worth noting.

In Habakkuk, we read that, as he struggled with why there was so much evil in the world, Habakkuk went into a tower and said, "I'm not leaving until I hear from the Lord about this situation."

The Lord answered by giving Habakkuk a vision he was to write down.

Become students of the Word, gang. Write down what you learn. Even if you never refer back to your notes, the very act of writing them will help you remember them.

Work It Out

Don't simply note what you learn in your journal but purpose in your heart that you're going to do it. In Genesis 12, God told Abraham to leave his family and country for a land He would later show him. In other words, more instruction would be given to Abraham after he obeyed the instruction he had already been given. Many times, I haven't received fresh revelation because I haven't been obedient to what the Lord had already told me to do. Maybe He's told you to write a letter or make a phone call. Be sure you do it. Maybe as you're reading in the Word, He brings to your mind something specific to do. Make sure you work it out. For it is then that you'll receive more.

Pass It On

There are two bodies of water in Israel. The Sea of Galilee is full of life and fish. The Jordan River that flows into the Sea of Galilee continues down through the nation until it comes to the Dead Sea at the southern end. Not even bacteria live in the Dead Sea. Why? Because, although the Jordan River flows in, there is no place for it to flow out.

Here is how to become a stagnant, dead Christian: Take in Bible study after Bible study and never make an effort to pass it on. Don't be like the Dead Sea. Be like the Sea of Galilee—teeming with life as you share what you learn with others. Some people say the Bible is just too complicated to do this. But the Bible is not as hard as the enemy would have you think. There are only 6,000 different words in it, while Shakespeare uses 21,000. The average word in the Bible is only five letters long—and what glorious words those short words are: peace, grace, faith, glory, Jesus. Best of all, you have a tutor if you'll take the time to listen to Him (John 14:26).

"Search the Scriptures," Jesus said, "for these are they which speak of Me" (see John 5:39). As you're reading it through, praying it in, writing it down, working it out, and passing it on, remember that it's all for the purpose of touching Jesus and getting to know Him better.



9 Isaiah 9:1–5

Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. For every battle of the

warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.

"Dark days are coming," Isaiah warns. And then he looks almost eight hundred years down the tunnel of time and says, "But a new day will dawn when there will be true light, when joy will be increased, when there shall be deliverance and peace." How would this day of joy and peace come about? Matthew 4 tells us this is a prophecy concerning Jesus, who began His ministry in Galilee—a region that was dark and despised.

Isaiah 9:6 (a)
For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given . . .

"Unto us a child is born" speaks of Jesus' humanity. "Unto us a Son is given" speaks of His deity.

Isaiah 9:6 (b)
. . . and the government shall be upon his shoulder . . .

The sign of government on His shoulder would not be the braid of a military general or the epaulet of a noted ruler. It would be a wooden cross because Jesus would govern by laying down His life.

Isaiah 9:6 (c)
. . . and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor . . .

You can get counsel from a lot of people in a lot of places, but there is only one *wonderful* Counselor—and with Him, there are neither fees involved or appointments that need to be made (Hebrews 4:16).

Isaiah 9:6 (d)
. . . The mighty God . . .

A counselor can tell you what to do, but can't always help you to do it. Jesus, on the other hand, the wonderful Counselor, is also the mighty God. He can truly solve your situation.

Isaiah 9:6 (e)
. . . The everlasting Father . . .

One thing I've learned by being a father is that, when my kids come to me confused and troubled, my heart goes out to them. Jesus said if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will the heavenly Father give good gifts to His (Matthew 7:11).

"Show us the Father," Philip said.

"He that has seen Me has seen the Father," Jesus answered (John 14:9).

Isaiah 9:6 (f)
. . . The Prince of Peace.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace for real peace will fill the hearts of any who seek Him (John 14:27).

Isaiah 9:7
Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

"When are You going to establish Your kingdom?" the disciples asked Jesus. *When will the oppressive yoke of the Romans be thrown off,* they wondered. Even after Jesus died and ascended, that was the question they asked Him (Acts 1:6).

When Jesus comes back, His kingdom will indeed be established politically and materially. But when He came the first time, His kingdom was not of this world because He was involved with something much bigger than throwing off the yoke of the Roman Empire politically. He was involved with eternity and the salvation of humanity.

Isaiah 9:8–13
The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel. And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria, that say in the pride and stoutness of heart, The bricks

are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycomores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars. Therefore the LORD shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and join his enemies together; The Syrians before, and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with open mouth. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the LORD of hosts.

After giving them a glimpse of the new day that would dawn in the future, Isaiah now talks about his present situation and says to the ten tribes of Israel, "Don't you see what's happening? The invasion of Assyria has already begun. Your buildings are knocked down. Your forests are wiped out. Yet you're boasting that you'll erect stronger buildings and plant more majestic trees." The people just weren't understanding that God was working, judging, and dealing with them.

In Numbers 14, the Lord told the people of Israel that, because they didn't believe the promises of God, they would have to wander in the wilderness for forty years.

"Oh, no!" they said. "Let's storm in and claim the land. Let's make it happen." So they went in to try and take the land that they were previously afraid to take—only to be soundly defeated. Sometimes we, too, need to realize that it's not a matter of doing more or beginning again. Sometimes it's a matter of submitting to the Lord's chastening hand upon us. When we suffer reversals in business or setbacks in relationships, it would do us well to stop and seek the Lord rather than to merely figure out how to rectify the situation. Wise is the man or woman who, in humility, seeks the One who allowed those things to take place in the first place.

Isaiah 9:14–16
Therefore the LORD will cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush, in one day. The ancient and honourable, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail. For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed.

The ones who were to be leading and warning were teaching lies. As a result, the people were destroyed. In Acts 17, the apostle Paul said that those in the town of Berea were more noble than those in other areas because they searched the Scriptures to see if what Paul was saying was true according to the Word. That's our responsibility. When we hear teaching and preaching and prophecies, we are to be Bereans. We are to search the Scriptures daily, not just being moved by a man or a moment, but rather, we're to be searching the Scriptures to see if what we hear is in harmony with God's heart and plan as revealed in His Word.

Isaiah 9:17–21
Therefore the Lord shall have no joy in their young men, neither shall have mercy on their fatherless and widows: for every one is an hypocrite and an evildoer, and every mouth speaketh folly. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. For wickedness burneth as the fire: it shall devour the briers and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forest, and they shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke. Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire: no man shall spare his brother. And he shall snatch on the right hand, and be hungry; and he shall eat on the left hand, and they shall not be satisfied: they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm: Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh: and they together shall be against Judah. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

Although they were united against Judah, the ten northern tribes were not united themselves—as seen in the bitterness between Manasseh and Ephraim—historically and geographically the two closest tribes of the ten. Drought, famine, and fire were the signs of God's judgment and the results of His people's rebellion against Him.

10 **Isaiah 10:1, 2**

Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write griev ousness which they have prescribed; To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless!

In Matthew 23, Jesus picked up this same theme when He talked about the Pharisees. "They devour widows' houses," He said—evidently because they would solicit poor widows to support their ministry.

Isaiah 10:3, 4

And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory? Without me they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

Although widows and orphans offered little resistance, those in power in Israel would soon come up against the power of the Assyrians and bow under it.

Isaiah 10:5

O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation.

In verse 5, the Lord speaks to the Assyrians, the instrument He would use to discipline His people.

Isaiah 10:6, 7

I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few.

“Assyrians, you were to have been an instrument of discipline, but you have become an instrument of destruction,” the Lord says through Isaiah. “I wanted to use you for My purposes, but you have exploited it for your own purposes. I wanted to use you as a paddle, but you have become a destroyer.”

Isaiah 10:8–13
For he saith, Are not my princes altogether kings? Is not Calno as Carchemish? is not Hamath as Arpad? is not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols? Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man:

“Because of the haughtiness of your own heart, because you think it was *your* power and *your* ability to deal with other countries, I’m going to deal with you,” the Lord says to the Assyrians. “You were simply to be an instrument, but you thought it was your military might, your brilliant strategy, your prowess and ingenuity that allowed you to conquer this territory.”

Isaiah 10:14, 15
And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood.

This is a very key point for any who want to be used by the Lord. We need to realize we are nothing more than instruments in His hand. The Lord doesn't need us, gang, for He can use rocks in our place (Luke 19:40). Yet He gives us the privilege of being used in His service. Therefore, when the Lord uses you, please understand it is not because of your great personality, the immensity of your faith, or the power of your prayer. Rather, He uses you solely because of His grace.

"Without Me, you can do nothing," Jesus said (John 15:5). So why would we take pride in being used? We're just tools in His hand. Here's how to get put back in the toolbox real quickly: Think you're special. Say, "Look what's happening through me. What a man of God, what a giant of faith I must be!" You'll be put back in the tool box immediately and God will reach for someone who is amazed to be used.

Isaiah 10:16–19
Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day; And shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body: and they shall be as when a standardbearer fainteth. And the rest of the trees of his forest shall be few, that a child may write them.

When this prophecy was fulfilled in 2 Kings 18, the general of the Assyrian army yelled to the people of Jerusalem who sat terrified on the walls, "You are going to be defeated. Your God is no different than the gods of the other countries we annihilated." Hearing these threats, Hezekiah poured out His heart to the Lord.

"I will defend this city to save it," the Lord answered (2 Kings 19:34).

Hezekiah heard these threats from Rabshakeh and Sennacherib and went before the Lord. He poured out his heart and the Lord said, "Don't worry." And that night, as 185,000 Assyrians were surrounding Jerusalem, it seemed as though the Jews didn't have a chance. But they did have a prayer. The

Lord sent one angel to go through the camp of the Assyrians and in one night 185,000 Assyrians soldiers died (2 Kings 19:35).

In Matthew 26, Jesus said to Peter, "Put away your sword. Don't you know I could call twelve legions of angels?" (see Matthew 26:52, 53). Now, if one angel could kill 185,000 Assyrians, 48,000 angels could certainly take care of any problems facing Jesus.

Isaiah 10:20 (a)
And it shall come to pass in that day . . .

The phrase, "in that day," speaks of the day of the Lord prophetically. The day of the Lord begins with the Tribulation—when the judgment of God is poured out upon a Christ-rejecting, sinful world.

Isaiah 10:20 (b)
. . . that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

Midway through the Tribulation period, the people of Israel will no longer rely on the one that smote them—a reference to the antichrist.

Isaiah 10:21–23
The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God. For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness. For the Lord GOD of hosts shall make a consumption, even determined, in the midst of all the land.

In the day of the Lord, the Jews scattered throughout the world shall return to Israel en masse.

Isaiah 10:24 (a)

Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD of hosts, O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian . . .

"The Assyrian" not only speaks of the literal Assyrian of that day, but in this passage, it's another name for antichrist, the coming world ruler.

Isaiah 10:24 (b)
. . . he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt

According to Revelation 13, antichrist will suddenly turn against Israel and seek to destroy her, just as Pharaoh did before him.

Isaiah 10:25–34
For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction. And the LORD of hosts shall stir up a scourge for him according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb: and as his rod was upon the sea, so shall he lift it up after the manner of Egypt. And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing. He is come to Aiath, he is passed to Migron; at Michmash he hath laid up his carriages: They are gone over the passage: they have taken up their lodging at Geba; Ramah is afraid; Gibeah of Saul is fled. Lift up thy voice, O daughter of Gallim: cause it to be heard unto Laish, O poor Anathoth. Madmenah is removed; the inhabitants of Gebim gather themselves to flee. As yet shall he remain at Nob that day: he shall shake his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem. Behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, shall lop the bough with terror: and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled. And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one.

The cities listed here were on the path that the Assyrians took to carry the ten northern tribes into captivity. But because it's in this section talking about "that day," it is also a map of the route antichrist will take to enter Israel for the battle of Armageddon. In that day, the nations will be cut down. The people in rebellion against the Lord will be destroyed. It's a dreadfully dark and depressing picture. But the first word of the next chapter is "And." Therefore, there's more to the story . . .



11

After going through the Tribulation in chapter 10, we move into the kingdom age in chapters 11 and 12.

Isaiah 11:1 (a)
And . . .

The word "and" connects this chapter with the previous one.

Isaiah 11:1 (b)
. . . there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:

As the nations are cut down, suddenly a branch springs up. Jesse was David's father. Therefore, the rod speaks of David—the one to whom the Lord promised that his descendants would be on the throne forever, ultimately speaking of the Son of David, Jesus Christ. The word "Branch" is capitalized because the word is *netser* in Hebrew, the word from which we get "Nazarene." Nazareth was a hick-town in the northern area of Israel. It was also the town where Joseph and Mary raised Jesus. In Matthew 2, we read that when Joseph and Mary went into that region it was done to fulfill the prophecy seen here in Isaiah that He would be called a Nazarene.

Isaiah 11:2
And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the

spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;

At His baptism, the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove and He was empowered for ministry and service. He was already filled with the Spirit, conceived by the Spirit—and yet now He was empowered for ministry.

How I hope and pray that each one of us might seek the anointing and empowering of the Holy Ghost. You might have been born again twenty years ago, but if you haven't been empowered with the Spirit, you are missing out on a very important, impacting part of the Christian experience.

How can you receive this empowering? Just ask (Luke 11:13).

Isaiah 11:3–5
And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

After seeing the Person of the kingdom, we see the purpose for the kingdom for in that day, righteousness will be the standard for judgment and correction.

You might think you're craving a newer car or a bigger house. But once you get them, you'll realize they're not what you craved at all. In actuality, we're all looking for the kingdom—the kingdom within, which is righteousness, peace, and joy (Romans 14:17)—and the external kingdom which will be instituted when Jesus comes back to rule and to reign.

Isaiah 11:6–9
The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the

lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

Here, we see the peace of the kingdom.

If you look at creation, you can see something of God. But nature doesn't give a full revelation of God because, although we can gain insight into His ingenuity and creativity, we won't see His love since nature is constantly at war with itself through the survival of the fittest and the devouring of one animal by another. Nature can't tell us of the love of God because Adam's fall affected all of nature. That, however, will be reversed when Jesus comes back—for then a little child will be able to lead a menagerie of otherwise deadly animals.

Isaiah 11:10–12

And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the peo ple; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

The program of the kingdom is to restore Israel. We have seen the first gathering of Israel with the Zionist movement, beginning in the late 1800s, climaxing in 1948 when Israel became a nation. But the Lord says there will be a second gathering and that He is going to pull Jews from the four corners of the earth to reestablish them in the land of Israel.

Isaiah 11:13

The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim.

"Ephraim" is another name for the ten northern tribes. Following Solomon's reign, a civil war took place in Israel. In the kingdom age, however, that division will be obliterated as Israel is reunited.

Isaiah 11:14, 15
But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west; they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them. And the LORD shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dryshod.

Just as He used a wind to part the Red Sea in the Book of Exodus (14:21), God will use the wind to part the waters again so that His people can return to Israel.

Isaiah 11:16
And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord," Isaiah will later prophesy. "Make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (40:3). This highway speaks of God's desire to remove all obstacles in the way of His peoples' return to Him. Of course, John the Baptist would echo Isaiah's words in reference to Jesus (Matthew 3:3), for God's heart is always that people have direct access to Him.

Isaiah 12:1 (a)
12 **And in that day . . .**

Again, this phrase tells us that, in addition to an application to Isaiah's day, there is a prophetic application of this passage.

Isaiah 12:1 (b), 2
. . . thou shalt say, O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.

Who has become Israel's salvation? Jehovah. *Jehovah-shuah* means "Jehovah is salvation." It is a name that was shortened to Joshua. Joshua is the Hebrew form of the Greek name, Jesus. So, who is to become Israel's salvation? In that day, they will acknowledge that it is Jesus.

Isaiah 12:3
Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.

"Whoever drinks of that water will thirst again," Jesus said to the woman at the well (John 4:13). The crazy thing about the water of the world is that it only makes you thirsty. If you draw from the wells of materialism or hedonism, you'll have to return because you'll only want more. If you're thirsty today, don't go back to the old watering holes. They won't satisfy you. Come to the Lord and drink afresh.

Isaiah 12:4–6
And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the LORD; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.

This beautiful picture of the kingdom comes to a close with a song of praise, and we enter a new section . . .



13 In chapters 13 through 23, we come to a passage called the book of burdens in which judgments are pronounced upon the nine nations surrounding Israel and Judah. They were called burdens for a reason. That is, they were heavy on his heart. These burdens hurt Isaiah deeply. May that be true of us, as well. When we share the reality of the consequences of sin, of the reality of hell, may the Lord help us to have hearts that are broken. May He give us compassion that is obvious and concern that is very clear to those with whom we share.

Isaiah's book of burdens begins with a judgment pronounced against Babylon, the area of present-day southern Iraq . . .

Isaiah 13:1–4
The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see. Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain, exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles. I have commanded my sanctified ones, I have also called my mighty ones for mine anger, even them that rejoice in my highness. The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people; a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together: the LORD of hosts mustereth the host of the battle.

As we have seen, many of the prophecies in Isaiah have a double fulfillment. There is a present application to a historical situation. But they also look down the tunnel of time prophetically and speak of the end of the ages. The nation of Babylon plays a major part in prophetic Scripture. Revelation 17 and 18 speak of Babylon as representing both a commercial and religious system that are false and abominable. In other words, Babylon speaks of the kingdom of this world—the false systems set up by the god of this world, Satan himself.

Isaiah 13:5
They come from a far country, from the end of heaven, even the LORD, and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land.

The kingdoms will come together in the end times for the battle of Armageddon.

Isaiah 13:6–9
Howl ye; for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man's heart shall melt: And they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames. Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.

In Isaiah's day, this spoke of the surprise invasion of Babylon by the Medes and the Persians (Daniel 5). Looking ahead, of course, it speaks of the Tribulation period.

Isaiah 13:10
For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.

Jesus would pull from this same passage, saying that the sun, moon, and stars would all be dark following the Tribulation period (Matthew 24:29).

Isaiah 13:11
And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.

What is the purpose of the Tribulation period? Not only is it to deal with Israel, who has rejected Messiah, but to judge a world that has cursed the cause of Christ and His kingdom.

Isaiah 13:12
I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.

Those who realize that Jesus is Lord will be refined like gold. How is gold refined? In fire. Thus, good will come from the fire of the Tribulation period for perhaps millions will be refined, will be saved.

Isaiah 13:13
Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.

In the Tribulation period, God will shake the heavens and the earth shall "remove out of her place." The earth is presently "out of her place" because it's tilted on its axis. This means there is a great possibility that at one time, the earth stood straight on its axis. This would explain the evidence of vegetation under the polar ice caps. But something cataclysmic happened—perhaps the result of Lucifer being cast out of heaven or the collapse of the water canopy at the time of the Genesis Flood.

It is very possible that, in the time of shaking and tribulation, the earth will be set back straight. This would cause the polar caps to melt and the world to become uniformly tropical once again.

Isaiah 13:14–19
And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man taketh up: they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land. Every one that is found shall be thrust through; and every one that is joined unto them shall fall by the sword. Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished. Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not

regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it. Their bows also shall dash the young men to pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

Turning again to Isaiah's day, the Lord said Babylon would be crushed by the Medes. In Isaiah's day, the Medes were nothing more than a group of nomads. Yet two hundred years later, the Medes would ally with the Persians and would invade Babylon. Were Isaiah simply making educated guesses, he would have said it would be the Assyrians who would destroy Babylon. Yet the Lord prophesied through him that it would be the Medes who would come against Babylon. And history, of course, would prove it to be so.

Isaiah 13:20–22
It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged.

"Babylon will be desolate," Isaiah prophesied. If you go to the spot where the ancient city of Babylon was located, you will find nothing. In fact, the locals refuse to even pitch their tents on the site of ancient Babylon. They call it the place where the demons dance—just as Isaiah prophesied.



14 Isaiah 14:1–4

For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with

them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob. And the people shall take them, and bring them to their place: and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the LORD for servants and handmaids: and they shall take them captives, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors. And it shall come to pass in the day that the LORD shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve, That thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased!

Many historians and archaeologists believe that the Babylonian empire was the greatest empire in the history of humanity. It was an incredible city, a mystical, somewhat magical place in the eyes of the people. And yet here we are told that this golden city would cease to exist. In Revelation 18:2, we see the same sort of phrase when we read that the false commercial system and religious system will be destroyed.

Isaiah 14:5–9
The LORD hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth. The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing. Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us. Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations.

This is a reference to the fact that antichrist will eventually be destroyed. But then we read of the power behind antichrist . . .

Isaiah 14:10–17
All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou be come like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread

under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?

In this we see Satan's power aborted, his ultimate destiny being hell, and his pride the reason for his rebellion.

Beware of religions that tell you you'll be like God, for that's the very reason Lucifer, the archangel, was cast down from heaven to earth. There is only one true and living God.



For topical study of Isaiah 14:12–17 entitled "Lucifer," turn to page **365.**

Isaiah 14:18–23

All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house. But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcase trodden under feet. Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people: the seed of evildoers shall never be renowned. Prepare slaughter for his children for the iniquity of their fathers; that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities. For I will rise up against them, saith the LORD of hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and

son, and nephew, saith the LORD. I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the LORD of hosts.

Babylon will be cut off. There won't be a name, a remnant, or even a distant relative left. That's why none of us knows a Babylonian. An entire civilization was destroyed, just as Isaiah prophesied.

Isaiah 14:24
The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand:

What a fantastic verse this is. What God determines always comes to pass. And He determines great things for you, for we read in Philippians 1:6 that He who has begun a good work in you shall complete it. He is determined He's going to complete the good work He started in you. And what He determines always comes to pass.

Isaiah 14:25–27
That I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders. This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?

Again, in addition to the present reference to the Assyrians, the prophetic reference is to antichrist.

Isaiah 14:28–31
In the year that king Ahaz died was this burden. Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent. And the firstborn of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in

safety: and I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay thy remnant. Howl, O gate; cry, O city; thou, whole Palestina, art dissolved: for there shall come from the north a smoke, and none shall be alone in his appointed times.

From 2 Chronicles 26, we know that Uzziah had subdued "Palestina," or the Philistines—who lived in the area southwest of Jerusalem. But, because Ahaz was a weak king, the Philistines were actually able to take possession of some cities in the southern part of the kingdom of Judah. Here, Isaiah prophesies that one would ascend the throne of Judah who would be more dangerous to the Philistines than Ahaz ever was. That man would be Hezekiah. And, indeed, Scripture records that "he smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza and the borders thereof" (2 Kings 18:8).

Isaiah 14:32
What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.

Hezekiah would ascribe his victory to God (2 Chronicles 32:23)—evidence of the nature of this godly king.

LUCIFER
A Topical Study of
ISAIAH 14:12–17

In Isaiah 14, we come to a passage that deals with the judgment of the nation of Babylon. The king of Babylon is indicted for wickedness. And yet Isaiah is inspired by the Spirit to see that the real problem was not the king of Babylon, but the power behind him, the power that was manipulating him—Lucifer. Along with Ezekiel 28, this passage gives us tremendous understanding of this being that causes problems and destruction in this world. In it, we see that Satan's power was aborted, that his plans were absurd and that his pride will be abased.

Satan's Power Was Aborted

> *How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!*
>
> Isaiah 14:12

Lucifer literally means "shining one" or "light bearer." In Ezekiel 28:14, he's called the anointed cherub. It would seem that he was the highest of all angelic beings. He was created with incredible beauty, authority, and responsibility. He was the sun of the morning. Yet, it is in Satan that sin has its origin, for, because he had free will, he became proud and launched a rebellion against God. One-third of the angelic creatures joined him and in so doing became fallen angels or demonic spirits.

When Lucifer launched his rebellion, he was cast out of heaven. When did this happen?

In Genesis 1:1, we read that, in the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. And then, somewhat mysteriously, verse 2 says the earth was without form and void, or, in Hebrew, *tohuw va bohuw,* which means "desolate" or "in disorder."

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

Here we see *tohuw va bohuw* again. But this time, the meaning is that God did not create the world in disrepair. So the question is, if God didn't create the world in disrepair, what happened?

During the time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, Satan launched his rebellion. Lucifer, this anointed cherub, was cast down from heaven and became the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4), the prince of this world (John 12:31), the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2).

When he was cast down from heaven to earth, incredible cataclysmic changes took place on the planet. For example, how do all of the prehistoric animals fit into the biblical account of creation? I suggest one likely possibility is that these were part of the first creation recorded in Genesis 1:1. But when Satan was cast out of heaven to earth, everything changed radically. This would explain why grass was found in the mouths of the wooly mammoths that were frozen instantaneously. It has also been suggested by many scientists that this was when the world tilted on its axis. If Lucifer was cast down after Genesis 1:1, it would be the re-creation of the world that we read of in Genesis 1:2–31.

Lucifer was cast down to earth in his first rebellion. But Revelation 20 tells us about a second rebellion when he will be cast down to hell . . .

> *And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*
>
> Revelation 20:7–10

After the Millennium—when Jesus Christ comes back and rules and reigns on the earth for 1,000 years—Satan will be released and he will seek to seduce those who were born in the kingdom age. At that time, when his final rebellion is over, he will be cast into hell itself.

Jesus spoke of hell frequently as a place where there is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, where men will seek to destroy themselves, but will be unable to do so. God never intended hell for anyone but the devil and his fallen angels. If people really want to go to hell, they can—but the only way is to trample on the Cross of Calvary, to say, “I don’t care what

Jesus did for me." I'm convinced it's hard to be lost. God will only let you go if you demand it.

Satan's Plans Were Absurd

> *For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.*
>
> Isaiah 14:13, 14

Satan had an "I" problem. We see the word "I" five times in these two verses. He coveted God's raised position in heaven. He coveted God's ruling power. He coveted God's royal palace. He coveted God's regal presence. Finally, he coveted God's rightful preeminence. "I will be like the most High," he says. But this convicts and challenges me because I can have the same tendency.

Several years ago, I was about to address a group of 500 pastors from across the United States. As I drove, I began to pray. "Lord," I said, "I want to be just like You." And the Lord spoke to my heart so powerfully that I had to stop the car and pull over.

He simply said one word: "Why?"

Do you want to be like God? It's a wonderful ambition if your heart is right. But why do you want to be like Him? Is it so people will appreciate you? Is it so people will respond to your teaching? Is it so people will think you're a spiritual giant? Is it so you'll be successful and see miracles? Or do you want to be like the Lord so you, too, can be forgotten, despised, and misunderstood; a failure in the sight of the world and in the eyes of your colleagues?

Next time we pray, "Lord, make me like You," let's realize it means carrying the cross and being despised—otherwise our plans are as absurd as Satan's.

Satan's Pride Will Be Abased

> *Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?*
>
> Isaiah 14:15–17

Not only will Satan be destroyed in hell, but he will also be derided there. People will look at him and say, "Is *this* the one that made the earth to tremble? Is *this* the one that caused so many problems?"

We know that Satan is a roaring lion—and yet on the Cross of Calvary he had his teeth kicked out. Therefore, while he can intimidate and threaten you, he can't have victory over you because James tells us that he flees if we simply resist him (4:7).

- "Want to see that movie?" he whispers.
  Just say no—and he's gone.
- "Want to hear this gossssip?" he hisses.
  Just say no—and he's gone.

In Revelation 12:10, we read that Satan is the accuser of the brethren, who accuses us day and night. That is, he not only lures us into sin, but he accuses us of it continually. But Revelation 12:11 says that he is overcome by the blood and the testimony. How did Jesus overcome Satan? By shedding His own blood and by submitting to the Word (Matthew 4:1–11).

Gang, the power of the enemy that seeks to do us in at every turn has been aborted; his plans are always absurd; and his pride will soon be abased. Therefore, by the power of the blood of Jesus Christ and the authority of His Word, you can overcome him today, even as he will one day be overcome forever.

15 At the time Isaiah was prophesying, war clouds were gathering in the north. The awesome, seemingly invincible Assyrian empire was preparing to move out in its attempt to conquer the world. That is the scene as Isaiah continues to prophesy concerning the countries that would be affected by this invasion and by the judgment that was falling due to their hard-heartedness and rebellion against a God who desired to draw them to Himself. Here, in chapter 15, we come to the judgment against Moab, the area of present-day Jordan . . .

Isaiah 15:1
The burden of Moab. Because in the night Ar of Moab is laid waste, and brought to silence; because in the night Kir of Moab is laid waste, and brought to silence;

The Assyrians made a night strike against Moab with quick and deadly precision.

Isaiah 15:2–9
He is gone up to Bajith, and to Dibon, the high places, to weep: Moab shall howl over Nebo, and over Medeba: on all their heads shall be baldness, and every beard cut off. In their streets they shall gird themselves with sackcloth: on the tops of their houses, and in their streets, every one shall howl, weeping abundantly. And Heshbon shall cry, and Elealeh: their voice shall be heard even unto Jahaz: therefore the armed soldiers of Moab shall cry out; his life shall be grievous unto him. My heart shall cry out for Moab; his fugitives shall flee unto Zoar, an heifer of three years old: for by the mounting up of Luhith with weeping shall they go it up; for in the way of Horonaim they shall raise up a cry of destruction. For the waters of Nimrim shall be desolate: for the hay is withered away, the grass faileth, there is no green thing. Therefore the abundance they have gotten, and that which they have laid up, shall they carry away to the brook of the willows. For the cry is gone round about the borders of Moab; the howling

thereof unto Eglaim, and the howling thereof unto Beer-elim. For the waters of Dimon shall be full of blood: for I will bring more upon Dimon, lions upon him that escapeth of Moab, and upon the remnant of the land.

There would be a great howling, a deep lamenting over the coming judgment and invasion. Those who thought they could escape the Assyrian army would be consumed by lions. In this, it's as if God was saying, "You can't beat the rap. Even if you elude the Assyrians, there will be lions waiting to devour you."

"Be sure your sin will find you out," Numbers 32:23 declares. We might think we can get away with sin—but the only solution is to be cleansed from it by the blood Jesus shed when He died in our place.



16 Here in chapter 16, we come to a prophecy that had immediate application for the people in Isaiah's day—but also prophetic implication for us in our day.

Isaiah 16:1–4
Send ye the lamb to the ruler of the land from Sela to the wilderness, unto the mount of the daughter of Zion. For it shall be, that, as a wandering bird cast out of the nest, so the daughters of Moab shall be at the fords of Arnon. Take counsel, execute judgment; make thy shadow as the night in the midst of the noonday; hide the outcasts; bewray not him that wandereth. Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab; be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler: for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land.

Many Bible scholars believe this passage speaks of the rock city of Petra. If you go to Jordan, you can take a tour of this amazing site. For centuries, no one knew Petra's location, for it is built in rock cliffs in a

valley with only a single entrance that, in many places, is only wide enough for two horses to walk side by side.

When antichrist comes, he will negotiate a peace treaty in the Middle East. But halfway through the seven-year tribulation period, he will go into the temple and demand to be worshiped as God. At that point, the people of Israel will realize that the so-called man of peace is out to destroy them. In Matthew 24, Jesus talks about this event, saying to the Jews, "When you see the abomination of desolation, when you see antichrist go into the temple, run for your life." Where will they run? Bible scholars believe this place "prepared of God" is the rock city of Petra.

Isaiah 16:5–8
And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness. We have heard of the pride of Moab; he is very proud: even of his haughtiness, and his pride, and his wrath: but his lies shall not be so. Therefore shall Moab howl for Moab, every one shall howl: for the foundations of Kir-hareseth shall ye mourn; surely they are stricken. For the fields of Heshbon languish, and the vine of Sibmah: the lords of the heathen have broken down the principal plants thereof, they are come even unto Jazer, they wandered through the wilderness: her branches are stretched out, they are gone over the sea.

Isaiah's prophecy continues concerning the destruction Moab would experience before becoming a place of covering. That's what happened to Petra. An entire civilization was annihilated but the place of covering remains to this day and will be put into service in the last half of the Tribulation.

Isaiah 16:9–14
Therefore I will bewail with the weeping of Jazer the vine of Sibmah: I will water thee with my tears, O Heshbon, and Elealeh: for the shouting for thy summer fruits and for thy harvest is fallen. And gladness is taken away, and joy out of the plentiful field; and in the vineyards there shall be no singing, neither shall

there be shouting: the treaders shall tread out no wine in their presses; I have made their vintage shouting to cease. Wherefore my bowels shall sound like an harp for Moab, and mine inward parts for Kir-haresh. And it shall come to pass, when it is seen that Moab is weary on the high place, that he shall come to his sanctuary to pray; but he shall not prevail. This is the word that the LORD hath spoken concerning Moab since that time. But now the LORD hath spoken, saying, Within three years, as the years of an hireling, and the glory of Moab shall be contemned, with all that great multitude; and the remnant shall be very small and feeble.

Within three years of Isaiah's prophecy, Assyria came into the area and wiped out the Moabites. Only a small remnant was left—and even they eventually perished.



17 In chapter 17, we come to the prophecy of judgment against the Syrians.

Isaiah 17:1, 2
The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap. The cities of Aroer are forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make them afraid.

Damascus was the capital city of Syria. Because the Syrians were the instigators of the alliance with Israel against Judah (chapter 7), they would be judged first.

Isaiah 17:3, 4
The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria: they shall be as the glory of the children of Israel, saith the LORD of hosts. And in

that day it shall come to pass, that the glory of Jacob shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall wax lean.

Ephraim is another name for the ten northern tribes. It was Damascus and Ephraim who formed an alliance, saying to Judah, "Join with us. The Assyrians are coming." But the Lord spoke to Isaiah, saying, "Don't look to man. Seek Me." Here, the Lord, through Isaiah, is reiterating the fact that, because they forgot the Lord, Israel, along with Syria would be destroyed.

Isaiah 17:5
And it shall be as when the harvestman gathereth the corn, and reapeth the ears with his arm; and it shall be as he that gathereth ears in the valley of Rephaim.

The valley of Rephaim was noted for its fertility. As corn was harvested in this fertile valley, the once-thriving nations of Syria and Israel would one day be laid bare.

Isaiah 17:6 (a)
Yet . . .

As seen throughout Scripture, the appearance of even a small word can give infinite hope even in the darkest of days . . .

> And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. *But* Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.
>
> Genesis 6:7, 8

> . . . for man looketh on the outward appearance, *but* the LORD looketh on the heart.
>
> 1 Samuel 16:7 (b)

> Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their

beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling. *But* God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah.

Psalm 49:14, 15

Therefore, like Job, who said, "Even though I don't understand what God is doing, *yet* will I trust Him" (see Job 13:15) and like Habakkuk, who said, "Even though everything is falling down around me, *yet* I will rejoice in the Lord" (see Habakkuk 3:18), we can inject a small word of faith and thereby change our entire outlook on even the darkest situation.

Isaiah 17:6 (b)–8
. . . gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the LORD God of Israel. At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel. And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall respect that which his fingers have made, either the groves, or the images.

Like the grapes left at the top of an olive tree, those who trusted in God rather than in the idols that surrounded them would be saved even as their idolatrous countrymen were carried away.

Isaiah 17:9–11
In that day shall his strong cities be as a forsaken bough, and an uppermost branch, which they left because of the children of Israel: and there shall be desolation. Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength, therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shalt set it with strange slips: In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish: but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow.

"Strange slips" is believed to be a reference to plants from foreign countries the Israelites imported and added to their well-cultivated land. Unfortunately, they didn't stop with the import of greenery, but also clung to the foreign gods of surrounding nations rather than looking only to Jehovah, the "Rock of their strength." And because of this, they would eventually be defeated.

Isaiah 17:12–14
Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind. And behold at eveningtide trouble; and before the morning he is not. This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us.

Of Assyria's awesome army, the Lord says, "In the evening time, they'll have trouble and in the morning be not." That's exactly what happened. When Assyria finally came down and surrounded Jerusalem, Hezekiah and Isaiah went into the temple and spread out the intimidating letters of the Assyrians before the Lord. "Lord, we look to You," they prayed. "You are our shield and defender" (Isaiah 37). That night, a single angel was dispatched from the Lord to kill the entire Assyrian army (2 Kings 19:35). And, just as Isaiah prophesied, in the morning, they were not.

I wonder how many of us are facing seemingly insurmountable odds or tremendously difficult situations. We try to figure out what kind of alliance we can form, what kind of adjustments we can make, what kind of schemes we can employ—yet all the while the Lord says, "I'll take care of it. Trust in Me."



18 **Isaiah 18:1–7**

Woe to the land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethio pia: That sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters, saying, Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled! All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth, see ye, when he lifteth up an ensign on the mountains; and when he bloweth a trumpet, hear ye. For so the LORD said unto me, I will take my rest, and I will consider in my dwelling place like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest. For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches. They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them. In that time shall the present be brought unto the LORD of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the LORD of hosts, the mount Zion.

The Ethiopians had sent ambassadors to the Jews asking them to join an alliance against the Assyrians. The Lord, however, said, "Refuse their invitation. I'll take care of the Assyrians in My own time." That's the point the Lord makes over and over again. "When will the nations look to Me, wait on Me, trust in Me?" He asks. "How long will they try to succeed in their own abilities only to fail miserably?"

Not only is this a word for nations—but for each of us in our own situations.



19 In chapter 19, we come to judgment pronounced against Egypt . . .

Isaiah 19:1, 2
The burden of Egypt. Behold, the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it. And I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians: and they shall fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbour; city against city, and kingdom against kingdom.

The Lord had no shortage of ways to bring nations down. In the case of the Egyptians, He used civil war.

Isaiah 19:3
And the spirit of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof; and I will destroy the counsel thereof: and they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards.

Following their seventy-year captivity in Babylon, the Jews never again fell prey to idolatry. One would think the same would be true of the Egyptians following the poor showing of their wizards at the time of the ten plagues. But, as seen here, such was not the case.

Isaiah 19:4
And the Egyptians will I give over into the hand of a cruel lord; and a fierce king shall rule over them, saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts.

Nebuchadnezzar was the first of the cruel lords that ruled Egypt, followed by a succession of oppressive Persian kings.

Isaiah 19:5–11
And the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and dried up. And they shall turn the rivers far away; and the brooks of defence shall be emptied and dried up: the reeds and flags shall wither. The paper reeds by the brooks, by the mouth of the brooks, and every thing sown by the brooks, shall

wither, be driven away, and be no more. The fishers also shall mourn, and all they that cast angle into the brooks shall lament, and they that spread nets upon the waters shall languish. Moreover they that work in fine flax, and they that weave networks, shall be confounded. And they shall be broken in the purposes thereof, all that make sluices and ponds for fish. Surely the princes of Zoan are fools, the counsel of the wise counsellors of Pharaoh is become brutish: how say ye unto Pharaoh, I am the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings?

We have seen fulfillment of this prophecy in our own day. The theory behind the Aswan Dam, considered one of the great projects of modern technology, was that, by controlling the flow of the Nile River, Egypt could be more productive in her farming. But it ended up costing her over a million acres of farmland as silt was caught in the dam and salt water began to work its way up the Nile. The nutrients previously carried down the river no longer flowed. Instead, snails proliferated and destroyed the reeds—just as Isaiah prophesied.

Isaiah 19:12–15
Where are they? where are thy wise men? and let them tell thee now, and let them know what the LORD of hosts hath purposed upon Egypt. The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived; they have also seduced Egypt, even they that are the stay of the tribes thereof. The LORD hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof: and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit. Neither shall there be any work for Egypt, which the head or tail, branch or rush, may do.

True to this prophecy, to this day, the Egyptian economy remains unstable.

Isaiah 19:16, 17
In that day shall Egypt be like unto women: and it shall be afraid and fear because of the shaking of the hand of the LORD of hosts, which he shaketh over it. And the land of Judah shall be a terror

unto Egypt, every one that maketh mention thereof shall be afraid in himself, because of the counsel of the LORD of hosts, which he hath determined against it.

For many centuries, who would have ever thought that the Egyptians would be terrorized by the Jews?

Isaiah 19:18–21
In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the LORD of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction. In that day shall there be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the LORD because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them. And the LORD shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the LORD in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the LORD, and perform it.

After the days of confusion and confounding, there will come a time when Egypt will acknowledge the sovereignty and reality of the Lord, for God's plan is to include Egypt in the millennial kingdom.

Isaiah 19:22
And the LORD shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the LORD, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them.

This smiting of Egypt is a reference to Daniel 11:40. In the Tribulation period, the antichrist will conquer Egypt to take over all of Africa. But the Lord shall heal Egypt, and her people will acknowledge Him.

Isaiah 19:23–25
In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into

Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.

Assyria, or Iraq, and Egypt will come to Jerusalem on the highway of holiness not to attack the Jews but to worship with them. What a sight that will be as the Egyptians come from the south and the Iraqis come from the north to worship the true and living God with His people.



20 Isaiah 20:1–4

In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod, (when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him,) and fought against Ashdod, and took it; At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia; So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.

Tartan was the general of the invading Assyrian army. Ashdod was one of the five cities of the Philistines. It was when Assyria invaded Ashdod that the Lord told Isaiah to take off his clothes and shoes and to walk naked and barefoot as a sign to the people of Egypt and Ethiopia. Why would the Lord have His prophet walk around naked? Because He loves people deeply (2 Peter 3:9).

You see, God was not concerned only about the nation of Israel. I think of Jonah. God cared about the Assyrians so much that he sent Jonah to Nineveh, their capital city, to tell them to repent. In Exodus 19:6, God told the people of Israel that they were to be a kingdom of priests. A priest is one who stands

before the people on behalf of God and stands before God on behalf of the people. Therefore, Israel was to be a spokesman for God to all of the other nations of the world. Israel was to be a missionary nation. Entrusted with the Word of God, they were to reflect and radiate God's reality to the entire world.

But Israel made the mistake that we are sometimes vulnerable to making. That is, Israel kept the word to herself and saw the surrounding nations as nothing more than fuel for the fires of hell. We must not fall into Israel's error, having no compassion or concern for those around us who are headed for hell.

We want to be powerful men of God or women of faith—as long as people marvel at our spirituality. But what about when we're told to walk naked? Oh, God won't call any of us to be physically naked. He does, however, call us to share the naked truth, the honest truth with candor. And yet I see us shirking away from the truth. Consequently, we live next to people year after year without ever saying, "I must be honest with you. God loves you but the wages of sin is death. And, according to John 3:36, he that has the Son has life but the wrath of God abides on the one who doesn't have the Son. You might be angry with me for saying that, but I must be honest with you. You need Jesus. You must be born again or you'll be destroyed."

How long has it been since you bared your heart to an unbeliever? God not only told Isaiah to bare his soul, but later Himself would do the same thing. As the Son of man, He would bare His soul in His teaching, bare His life by speaking honestly, and bare His body on the Cross of Calvary—all to bear the sins of humanity. He could have said, "I will not be humiliated. I will not be disgraced by these savages." Instead, He said, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do." Jesus died naked and exposed because He cared about me personally. He cared about you passionately.

Is it any wonder Isaiah would obey the command—no matter how embarrassing—of a God like that?

Isaiah 20:5, 6
And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory. And the inhabitant of this isle shall say in that day, Behold, such is our expectation, whither

we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape?

"How shall we escape?" the Philistines would say when they saw the Ethiopians and the Egyptians, their allies, being carried away naked and barefoot by the Assyrians. That's always the way it is—for as long as we depend on men and look to men, we'll never have true deliverance.



21 Isaiah 21:1 (a)
The burden of the desert of the sea. . . .

"The desert of the sea" is a phrase that refers to Babylon because it was flat and it had abundant water from the Euphrates. Assyria was the dominant empire, but Babylon was beginning to emerge and would become the greatest empire the world had ever seen.

Isaiah 21:1 (b), 2
. . . As whirlwinds in the south pass through; so it cometh from the desert, from a terrible land. A grievous vision is declared unto me; the treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth. Go up, O Elam: besiege, O Media; all the sighing thereof have I made to cease.

This is an incredible prophecy because at the time it was given, Elam, or Persia, and Media were just pipsqueak powers. Media was still a nomadic group of people cruising through the desert. And yet the Lord here is saying Babylon would be destroyed not by Assyria but rather by the Medes and the Persians. It seemed preposterous—and yet that's exactly what happened. Cyrus, king of the Medo-Persian empire would stop the flow of the river that went into Babylon. And his men would actually go underneath the gates where the river once flowed and take the city by stealth.

Isaiah 21:3, 4

Therefore are my loins filled with pain: pangs have taken hold upon me, as the pangs of a woman that travaileth: I was bowed down at the hearing of it; I was dismayed at the seeing of it. My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me: the night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear unto me.

The realization that judgment was coming brought Isaiah no joy. The destruction was so real to him that he himself felt tortured inside. I'm praying that the Lord might do much more of that in our lives because we talk sometimes quite easily about heaven and hell, without really being broken and hurting over the fact that people we care about deeply are truly headed for judgment and an eternity apart from God. Isaiah had not only a prophetic message but a prophetic heart.

Isaiah 21:5–9
Prepare the table, watch in the watchtower, eat, drink: arise, ye princes, and anoint the shield. For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth. And he saw a chariot with a couple of horsemen, a chariot of asses, and a chariot of camels; and he hearkened diligently with much heed: And he cried, A lion: My lord, I stand continually upon the watchtower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward whole nights: And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.

The very night Babylon fell historically, when the Medo-Persian troops entered the city, Belshazzar, the king of Babylon, was throwing a huge party with all of his princes. They knew the Medes and Persians were outside the city walls. But, with walls so thick that chariot races were held on top, they thought their city was absolutely invincible. "Let those guys camp out for years outside of our city," the princes of Babylon said. "They'll never get in." But the very night they were eating, drinking, and polishing their shields, reveling in their power and prowess, their city fell.

So too, in the Tribulation period, an angel will fly across the sky saying, "Babylon is fallen" (Revelation 14:8). Commercial Babylon and religious Babylon—the economic and religious systems of the world—will fall in the Tribulation period because God is not into religious systems. He's into relationships—personal, real, and vibrant.

Isaiah 21:10–12
O my threshing, and the corn of my floor: that which I have heard of the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you. The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will inquire, inquire ye: return, come.

"Watchman, what of the night?" people ask in our day. "Why does everything look so dark? Is there any hope?"

We are to be the watchmen, for Jesus said we are to watch for His coming (Matthew 24:42).

> But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
>
> Matthew 24:48–51

If we really believed Jesus could come back today, there would be no more negative talk, no more gossip, slander, or innuendo among us. That is why John tells us that whoever has the hope of Jesus coming purifies himself (1 John 3:3).

Yes, the world is dark, but if we're not consumed with "smiting our fellowservants," we can say to a world in the dark, "Light is coming. The King is about to come. Jesus Christ is about to return. There *is* hope for this planet."

Isaiah 21:13
The burden upon Arabia. In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye travelling companies of Dedanim.

In Arabia, there were two major tribes: Sheba and Dedan. In Ezekiel 38, these two tribes of Arabia, along with Tarshish and the young lions of Tarshish protest when Russia comes down from the north and invades the Middle East. Prophetically, this tells me that Israel does not need to fear Saudi Arabia.

Isaiah 21:14–17
The inhabitants of the land of Tema brought water to him that was thirsty, they prevented with their bread him that fled. For they fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, and from the bent bow, and from the grievousness of war. For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Within a year, according to the years of an hireling, and all the glory of Kedar shall fail: And the residue of the number of archers, the mighty men of the children of Kedar, shall be diminished: for the LORD God of Israel hath spoken it.

In essence, this prophecy says that within one year, Arabia would be destroyed. Indeed, exactly one year from the time it was given, in the year 716 B.C., Sargon, the Assyrian took control of Arabia.



22

Isaiah 22:1 (a)
The burden of the valley of vision. . . .

Chapter 22 still deals with the Assyrian threat as it relates to Jerusalem. Although Jerusalem is built on a hill, it is surrounded by more prominent mountains, so it is, in a sense, a valley.

Isaiah 22:1 (b)

. . . What aileth thee now, that thou art wholly gone up to the housetops?

When there was trouble coming, the people of Jerusalem would go to their roofs to scout out the situation.

Isaiah 22:2–11 (a)
Thou that art full of stirs, a tumultuous city, a joyous city: thy slain men are not slain with the sword, nor dead in battle. All thy rulers are fled together, they are bound by the archers: all that are found in thee are bound together, which have fled from far. Therefore said I, Look away from me; I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me, because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people. For it is a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity by the Lord GOD of hosts in the valley of vision, breaking down the walls, and of crying to the mountains. And Elam bare the quiver with chariots of men and horsemen, and Kir uncovered the shield. And it shall come to pass, that thy choicest valleys shall be full of chariots, and the horsemen shall set themselves in array at the gate. And he discovered the covering of Judah, and thou didst look in that day to the armour of the house of the forest. Ye have seen also the breaches of the city of David, that they are many: and ye gathered together the waters of the lower pool. And ye have numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses have ye broken down to fortify the wall. Ye made also a ditch between the two walls for the water of the old pool . . .

From their housetops, the Jews could see the Assyrians coming. So what did they do? They fortified their city. They broke down their houses and used the materials to make the wall around the city stronger. They dug a tunnel 1,777 feet through solid rock from the pool of Siloam to the spring of Gihon outside the city walls so that they could have a fresh water supply during the siege of battle.

> And he set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the street of the gate of the city, and spake comfortably to them, saying, Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him: With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.
>
> 2 Chronicles 32:6–8

Hezekiah, a godly king, one of the great kings in the history of Judah, not only fortified the city and prepared the army, but he also encouraged the people to trust in the Lord.

Isaiah 22:11 (b)
. . . but . . .

Although Hezekiah and his people were doing all they could to defend themselves, they failed to do the most essential thing . . .

Isaiah 22:11 (c)–14
. . . ye have not looked unto the maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago. And in that day did the Lord GOD of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for to morrow we shall die. And it was revealed in mine ears by the LORD of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord GOD of hosts.

The prophet Isaiah came on the scene at this time and said, "You're missing the mark. You've made these preparations, but you're still eating and drinking and going about your business in a way that is displeasing to the Lord."

Although the plans were made, the Word was shared, and the encouragement was given, the turning point didn't come until Hezekiah said, "Lord, help us" (2 Kings 19:16–19). And, although the battle hadn't even begun, it was actually at that very point that it was won.

The same is still true. You can be an expert in the Scriptures, but if your knowledge doesn't send you to your knees before the Lord in humility and sincerity, all of the promises and encouragement therein will profit you nothing. It is not enough to simply know the Word, gang, for it isn't until you fall on your face in brokenness before the Lord that victory begins.

Isaiah 22:15–18
Thus saith the Lord GOD of hosts, Go, get thee unto this treasurer, even unto Shebna, which is over the house, and say, What hast thou here? and whom hast thou here, that thou hast hewed thee out a sepulchre here, as he that heweth him out a sepulchre on high, and that graveth an habitation for himself in a rock? Behold, the LORD will carry thee away with a mighty captivity, and will surely cover thee. He will surely violently turn and toss thee like a ball into a large country: there shalt thou die, and there the chariots of thy glory shall be the shame of thy lord's house.

At this time, with the invasion imminent, Shebna, who was a statesman in Jerusalem, was building his own tomb, evidently sparing no expense.

Isaiah 22:19
And I will drive thee from thy station, and from thy state shall he pull thee down.

Shebna was called on the carpet by the Lord for preparing for his own burial rather than praying.

Isaiah 22:20–22
And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah: And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy

government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

In speaking to the church at Philadelphia in Revelation 3, Jesus said, "I am the One who opens doors no man can shut and shuts doors no man can open." Therefore, because he is clothed and strengthened by God, because he has the government in his hand even as Jesus bore the government on His shoulder (Isaiah 9:6), and because he opens doors no man can shut and shuts doors no man can open, I see Eliakim as a type of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 22:23–25
And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons. In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall the nail that is fastened in the sure place be removed, and be cut down, and fall; and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off: for the LORD hath spoken it.

Jesus Christ would be fastened with a nail in a sure place—the Cross—for our sins. Unlike Shebna, Jesus didn't build a sepulcher *for* Himself. Instead, He gave *of* Himself on the Cross of Calvary. Not building a sepulcher for Himself, as did Shebna, but rather giving of Himself on the Cross of Calvary. Jesus didn't come to beat us into bloody submission or bludgeon us to do His will. Rather, He came to fasten Himself to a cross. He came to die.



23 In the twenty-third chapter of Isaiah, we come to the final burden judgment pronounced on the nations surrounding Israel and Judah. Here, judgment is pronounced on the Phoenician city of Tyre, or present-day

Lebanon. So capable a seafaring people were the people of Tyre that there has been speculation that they actually reached the shores of North America. And, because they used their navy for commerce as well as for conquest, they grew very wealthy.

> **Isaiah 23:1**
> **The burden of Tyre. Howl, ye ships of Tarshish; for it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in: from the land of Chittim it is revealed to them.**

Even the people inhabiting Chittim, or the present-day island of Cypress, would hear about the judgment coming down on the city of Tyre.

In Ezekiel 26, we find a fuller description of what would take place in God's judgment of the city of Tyre . . .

> Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus, and break down her towers: I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD: and it shall become a spoil to the nations. And her daughters which are in the field shall be slain by the sword; and they shall know that I am the LORD. For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, a king of kings, from the north, with horses, and with chariots, and with horsemen, and companies, and much people. He shall slay with the sword thy daughters in the field: and he shall make a fort against thee, and cast a mount against thee, and lift up the buckler against thee. And he shall set engines of war against thy walls, and with his axes he shall break down thy towers. By reason of the abundance of his horses their dust shall cover thee: thy walls shall shake at the noise of the horsemen, and of the wheels, and of the chariots, when he shall enter into thy gates, as men enter into a city wherein is made a breach. With the hoofs of his horses shall he tread down all thy streets: he

shall slay thy people by the sword, and thy strong garrisons shall go down to the ground.

Ezekiel 26:3–11

In this prophecy, the Lord said He would bring Nebuchadnezzar with horses and chariots to besiege and eventually destroy the city. In 585 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar did just that. For thirteen years, he besieged Tyre. During this time, he would occasionally pull back to mount other campaigns—but he would always return and continue his attack against Tyre. After thirteen years, he was finally successful. But when his troops burst into the city at last, they were shocked to find hardly anyone there. During the lengthy siege, the majority of the people of Tyre had fled through the "back door" and took ships to an island a mile out at sea. There, they reestablished their city. Ill-equipped to wage a naval campaign, Nebuchadnezzar's victory must have felt somewhat hollow.

But Ezekiel's prophecy continues . . .

And they shall make a spoil of thy riches, and make a prey of thy merchandise: and they shall break down thy walls, and destroy thy pleasant houses: and they shall lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the water.

Ezekiel 26:12

In 332 B.C., Alexander the Great made his way into the area. Also lacking a navy, he was unable to conquer the Phoenicians so he ordered the ruins of the old city of Tyre to be cast into the sea. With them, he constructed a causeway from the old city to the island city. Having done this, he was able to annihilate the island city of Tyre.

But Ezekiel's prophecy continues . . .

And I will cause the noise of thy songs to cease; and the sound of thy harps shall be no more heard. And I will make thee like the top of a rock: thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon; thou shalt be built no more: for I the LORD have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 26:13, 14

Although Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the first city and Alexander the second, Tyre rose one more time and became a commercial center, controlled by Muslims. When the Crusaders arrived in 1190, they drove the Muslims out but used the city as a base of operations. Several years later, the Muslims drove the Crusaders out. But because they felt the city had been polluted by the Crusaders, they tore it down and pushed the remains into the sea. That is why, if you go to the site of Tyre today, you'll find nothing there. Although there is a city named Tyre in Lebanon, it is not the same location. The only thing you'll find at the original site of Tyre is a fishing village where fishermen spread their nets—exactly as God said.

Isaiah 23:2, 3
Be still, ye inhabitants of the isle; thou whom the merchants of Zidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished. And by great waters the seed of Sihor, the harvest of the river, is her revenue; and she is a mart of nations.

The stillness following the defeat of Tyre would be a marked contrast to the bustle of commerce that once characterized her.

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

Zidon refers to all of Phoenicia—which would be greatly weakened by the destruction of Tyre.

Isaiah 23:5–7
As at the report concerning Egypt, so shall they be sorely pained at the report of Tyre. Pass ye over to Tarshish; howl, ye inhabitants of the isle. Is this your joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days? her own feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn.

Because Tyre had been a hub of commerce, her destruction would affect the economy of the entire region.

Isaiah 23:8, 9
Who hath taken this counsel against Tyre, the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth? The LORD of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth.

Tyre had become so pompous and proud that the Lord ordained it would be scrapped like a rock—which is exactly what the Muslims did after they drove out the Crusaders.

Isaiah 23:10–16
Pass through thy land as a river, O daughter of Tarshish: there is no more strength. He stretched out his hand over the sea, he shook the kingdoms: the LORD hath given a commandment against the merchant city, to destroy the strong holds thereof. And he said, Thou shalt no more rejoice, O thou oppressed virgin, daughter of Zidon: arise, pass over to Chittim; there also shalt thou have no rest. Behold the land of the Chaldeans; this people was not, till the Assyrian founded it for them that dwell in the wilderness: they set up the towers thereof, they raised up the palaces thereof; and he brought it to ruin. Howl, ye ships of Tarshish: for your strength is laid waste. And it shall come to pass in that day, that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king: after the end of seventy years shall Tyre sing as an harlot. Take an harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered.

The period from the time Nebuchadnezzar began his reign to the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus was seventy years. At that point, the cities, like Tyre, that Nebuchadnezzar had taken were liberated.

Isaiah 23:17, 18
And it shall come to pass after the end of seventy years, that the LORD will visit Tyre, and she shall turn to her hire, and shall

commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth. And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the LORD: it shall not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the LORD, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing.

Isaiah prophesied that this proud, pompous city would be pushed into the sea and carried into captivity. Yet the time would come when her merchandise would be used to give honor to the Lord. In writing of the coming kingdom, the psalmist declared that Tyre would bring riches to the Lord (Psalm 45:12). This speaks to me of the incredible grace and mercy of our Father—always ready to give people another chance to come to Him.



24 Chapters 24, 25, and 26 are very interesting for they deal with the time known as the day of the Lord. When you come across that phrase, it speaks of a time when the Lord will intervene in history in a way that will be obvious to all the world. Presently, the Lord works in a mysterious manner. That is, the kingdom of God—righteousness, peace, and joy—is within us (Romans 14:17; Luke 17:21). But there's coming a time when God will intervene physically. When the church is taken up, God's wrath will come down and for seven years, this world will experience the judgment of God.

Isaiah 24:1
Behold, the LORD maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof.

When you read Revelation 6 through 19, you realize this world is going to experience events of such magnitude that it will seem as if the world is turned upside down. Again, this could refer to the tilt of the axis that possibly took place when Lucifer was cast out of heaven or at the time of the Genesis Flood. Because this very possibly happened before, it could just as possibly happen again.

Spiritually, the world has already been turned upside down by a church so on fire for the Lord that the whole world was impacted (Acts 17:6). Oh, that the same would be true of us!

Isaiah 24:2
And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him.

The Tribulation period will be the great equalizer. No one will care who lives in the biggest house or who has the fanciest car when fifty-pound hailstones fall from heaven. In that day, when God's judgment falls on this planet, everyone will be equally distressed. Even the rich and mighty will ask the rocks to fall upon them and kill them (Revelation 6:15, 16).

Concerning these times, Jesus said, "Pray that you might be found worthy to escape" (Luke 21:36). Who will escape? Those who are worthy. Who is worthy? Those who are in Christ Jesus.

Isaiah 24:3–6
The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the LORD hath spoken this word. The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left.

Revelation 16:8, 9 tells us that, in the Tribulation, there will be a burning that ignites this planet. But when the scorching of the sun falls upon men, rather than repenting and humbling themselves before God, they'll blaspheme His name.

Isaiah 24:7–12

The new wine mourneth, the vine languisheth, all the merryhearted do sigh. The mirth of tabrets ceaseth, the noise of them that rejoice endeth, the joy of the harp ceaseth. They shall not drink wine with a song; strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it. The city of confusion is broken down: every house is shut up, that no man may come in. There is a crying for wine in the streets; all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone. In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction.

Joy will have no place in the Tribulation period. At the beginning of the Tribulation, Revelation 6 tells us one-fourth of the world will be wiped out by war. Revelation 9 tells us one-third of those who remain will be wiped out by scorpions.

Why would a God of love do this? Because year after decade after generation, this God of love has been speaking to mankind—extending grace, love, and compassion. But man has rejected it all. So God, in His wisdom, will pour out His wrath to shake up the world. Some who would not respond to grace and love will turn to the Lord in that day. But most will die in their sin.

That's why God devotes one-fourth of His Word to not only telling us of His love, grace, and mercy, but warning us of the consequences if we don't respond. Sin must be judged or else God would not be just or holy. Therefore, man has a choice: to submit to the One who bore the judgment for his sin on the Cross of Calvary or to face the judgment that will be hurled upon him the day of Tribulation.

Isaiah 24:13–15

When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, there shall be as the shaking of an olive tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done. They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the LORD, they shall cry aloud from the sea. Wherefore glorify ye the LORD in the fires, even the name of the LORD God of Israel in the isles of the sea.

As seen throughout Scripture, even in judgment, God shows mercy, for here a remnant is saved who will praise Him both for His mercy and His majesty.

Isaiah 24:16–18
From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous. But I said, My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously. Fear, and the pit, and the snare, are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth. And it shall come to pass, that he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the snare: for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake.

Although mercy is shown to those who call upon the name of the Lord, judgment falls on those who refuse Him. So all-encompassing is this judgment that there is nowhere to hide. Those who flee from the noise will fall in the pit. Those who escape from the pit will fall into the snare as the windows of God are opened and judgment pours down.

Isaiah 24:19, 20
The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again.

It's no wonder that the earth will wobble like a drunkard for Revelation 8 says even mountains will be cast into the sea.

Isaiah 24:21, 22
And it shall come to pass in that day, that the LORD shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as

prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited.

Verses 21 and 22 refer to the rulers in high places—demonic spirits. We're told that, as the Tribulation comes to an end, Satan and his demons will be cast into a pit for a thousand years. Then, following the thousand-year period of peace and prosperity when Jesus reigns from Jerusalem, God will loose Satan and his demons.

Why? During the Millennium, generations will be born who will not have the opportunity to see good and evil in a clear way and be able to choose the Lord. So Satan will be let loose and he'll attempt to deceive people. This will give people one more chance to decide whether to follow the Lord or to be seduced by Satan and fall into sin.

Isaiah 24:23
Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.

When the Lord rules and reigns, He'll be so bright and brilliant that the sun and moon will be dark by comparison.



25 In chapter 25, we enter the kingdom age . . .

Isaiah 25:1–5
O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built. Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee. For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his

distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, as the heat in a dry place; even the heat with the shadow of a cloud: the branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low.

Those who survive the Tribulation will at last realize Jesus is Lord and they'll be saved. Here, they burst forth into praise because praise is the language of the kingdom.

Isaiah 25:6, 7
And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the slees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations.

The heaviness, darkness, and destruction of the Tribulation will be swallowed up by the joy of the Lord.

Isaiah 25:8–12
He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For in this mountain shall the hand of the LORD rest, and Moab shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill. And he shall spread forth his hands in the midst of them, as he that swimmeth spreadeth forth his hands to swim: and he shall bring down their pride together with the spoils of their hands. And the fortress of the high fort of thy walls shall he bring down, lay low, and bring to the ground, even to the dust.

As Paul says, now we see through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12), but when we see Jesus face to face, we'll say, "We have waited for Him—and here He is. *This* is our God!" How I look forward to moving into the kingdom and into eternity! How our hearts crave eternity. Don't give up, dear saints. Don't live for this planet. Keep your hearts and minds on things above. We're almost there!



26 In chapter 26, we come to the second of a trilogy of chapters that speak of the coming kingdom. This is a song to be sung in the age of the kingdom, celebrating God's grace . . .

Isaiah 26:1–3
In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

The literal rendering of verse 3 is "Thou wilt keep him in peace whose mind is stayed on Thee." In other words, as believers, we have double peace —not only peace *with* God because Jesus died for our sins, but also the peace *of* God as our hearts and minds are stayed on Him.



***For topical study of Isaiah 26:3 entitled "Perfect Peace," turn to page* 383.**

Isaiah 26:4
Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength:

In the Lord is everlasting strength, or, literally, "the rock of ages." Prudential Life Insurance promises a piece of the rock, but Jesus promises something infinitely better: peace from the Rock of ages.

Isaiah 26:5–9
For he bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low; he layeth it low, even to the ground; he bringeth it even to the dust. The foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy. The way of the just is uprightness: thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just. Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

"We waited for You, Lord," the people of Judah say. "We've desired You in the night and sought You in the morning." America spends over one billion dollars a year on sleeping aids. And yet there is a better way. That is, in the evening hours when you wake up or can't fall asleep, you have a wonderful opportunity to spend time with the Lord. If you worship and express your heart to Him in those late-night or early morning hours, you'll be amazed at how rich and special it can be.

I think of Samuel. Even as a young boy, rather than fuss and fret that he couldn't sleep, he got out of bed to seek the Lord (1 Samuel 3). The result? It was at that point that the Lord opened the door of life-long, impacting ministry to him.

Isaiah 26:10
Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD.

Even though God's grace is extended to the wicked, they will continue in frivolity. I think God is very much justified in pouring out wrath in the

Tribulation period. For thousands of years, God has been so gracious to humanity—blessing those who curse His name, providing for those who deny His existence, loving people who couldn't care less about Him.

"It's inconceivable that a loving God would pour out His wrath on mankind," people say. "It seems so out of character."

"I'm amazed by it, too," I answer. "I'm surprised it's restricted to only seven years. If I were God, it would be reversed. We would have six thousand years of tribulation and seven years of grace."

Isaiah 26:11
LORD, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them.

Even though people seem to be blind to the grace and goodness of God, Isaiah prophesies that they'll see. When? People will see God's grace and goodness through your life as you continue to praise Him even while navigating trials and difficulties. The way God strengthens you, blesses you, and stabilizes you can't be denied.

Isaiah 26:12
LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us.

"It is finished," Jesus declared (John 19:30). Therefore, I can have peace —not because of my great religious devotion or my long hours of meditation but solely because Jesus Christ ordained peace for me and paid for it on the Cross of Calvary.

Isaiah 26:13
O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name.

"Other gods and other people have tried to have dominion over us. But You're the only one worth talking about," the people of Judah proclaim.

Isaiah 26:14
They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish.

What separates Jesus Christ from all other gods? All other gods are dead. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ is based upon the fact that He's alive. He verified His deity by His Resurrection. He verified His claims by coming out of the grave.

Isaiah 26:15
Thou hast increased the nation, O LORD, thou hast increased the nation: thou art glorified: thou hadst removed it far unto all the ends of the earth.

The Lord is not static, but desires to increase us even as He increased the people of Judah. Therefore, don't shy away from opportunities that will stretch you. If you want to be a believer of stature, allow yourself to be stretched.

Isaiah 26:16, 17
LORD, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them. Like as a woman with child, that draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, and crieth out in her pangs; so have we been in thy sight, O LORD.

Like a woman giving birth, pain produces prayer. It's when we're hurting that we most often find ourselves praying. Our tendency is to avoid pain at any price. Yet, in reality, our Father often allows us to go through painful situations because it is in those times that we cry out to Him. Prayerlessness is often the result of painlessness. If we never have pain, we will be hampered in our ability to pray.

Isaiah 26:18
We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not wrought any deliverance in

the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen.

Here is another group saying, "We also have been in childbirth—but nothing's been born." This is important because when you go through times of pain and problems, it will either enlarge you and birth something from you or you'll just produce nothing. What makes the difference? If I am embittered about my pain, I'm just going to blow hot air all over the place. If, on the other hand, I embrace it and use it as an opportunity for prayer, I'll be enlarged and something special will be birthed as a result.

If you're going through pain today, it will either enlarge you and better you, or it will make you a windbag and embitter you. It all depends on how you view it. God doesn't deliver us from all pain but He gives us understanding about it so that we can choose to embrace it.

Isaiah 26:19
Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

Virtually all scholars say this is a reference to what took place in Matthew 27 when, following the death of Jesus on the cross, graves were opened and many people in Jerusalem who had previously died were resurrected. It is a beautiful, prophetic picture of what will one day happen to all believers.

Isaiah 26:20, 21
Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.

As we have seen, the Lord is going to hide the remnant of Jews who, in the Tribulation period, realize that Jesus is Messiah possibly in the rock city

of Petra (Isaiah 16). We, too, as His church, will be hidden in heaven with Him during the Tribulation period.

> And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.
>
> Revelation 5:9, 10

PERFECT PEACE
A Topical Study of
ISAIAH 26:3

We live in a world full of frustration, tension, and problems. Each of us has an internal craving for tranquility. Each one of us desires peace and harmony. Yet the Bible says man will say "Peace, Peace, but there is no peace" (Jeremiah 8:11). Even though mankind desires it, even though we crave it, we look around us and see very little of it.

Why do we crave peace? I think one of the most fundamental reasons is that we are made in the image of a God who revealed Himself as "Jehovah Shalom" or "God is peace." God is the essence of peace, serenity, and tranquility. Yet, although we were made in His image, we have rebelled against Him. As a result, we experience very little peace not only personally but globally. Historians tell us that only 8% of recorded history has been free of a major local conflict. The planet longs for peace, but yet experiences so little peace. Why?

James gives us the answer . . .

> *From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain . . .*
>
> James 4:1, 2 (a)

Why is there war? Why is there hostility? Why is there a lack of peace and tranquility? James says man wars within himself internally and that brings about warring between nations internationally.

There is coming a time, however, when that will not be the case. When Jesus Christ returns to this planet and establishes His throne in Jerusalem, there will be peace and safety, tranquility and harmony. In that day, the lion shall lie down with the lamb. There will be no need for money. Every man shall have his own home. Men will study war no more. There will be no need of weaponry. In that day, there will be peace.

Why? Because the Prince of Peace will rule the world.

The kingdom of God has two aspects. There is the external, physical kingdom—the one that Christ will rule from Jerusalem. But there is also the spiritual, internal kingdom that can exist in your life presently.

How? Paul gives us the answer . . .

> *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*
>
> Philippians 4:6, 7

In other words, we experience the peace of God by worrying about nothing, praying about everything, and being thankful for anything.

Worry has no place in the life of the believer. Praying? That's the key. Praying brings peace because it's how we fix our minds on God. We often hear the phrase, "Prayer changes things." In reality, that's not entirely true. Faith changes things. Prayer changes *us.* We're upset about this, anxious about that, in turmoil about the other. But, as we pray, we experience a change within us regardless of whether the circumstances change.

In Mark 11, we see what Jesus said about prayer . . .

> *And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.*
>
> Mark 11:22–24

"If I believe I have whatever I desire, I'll have it? That's great!" you say.

But notice the qualification. Jesus said, "Whatsoever things ye desire *when ye pray . . .*"

Yesterday, the San Francisco Giants were up against the Los Angeles Dodgers. Now, of course I wanted the Giants to win. Yet I couldn't picture

myself falling on my knees in heartfelt prayer, saying, "Oh, Lord, give the Giants victory." In the atmosphere of prayer, that desire dimmed and became irrelevant. We have lots of desires, wants, cravings. Some of them can even be spiritual. But it's only the things that are on our heart when we're on our knees before God that will come about.

In the atmosphere of worship and praise, of honoring God and submitting to His will, you will find that many things you previously demanded and desired fade away. But what you have when you get off your knees is peace, a peace that passes understanding because your mind is now fixed on God rather than on your desires. It's fixed on the One who truly is your desire. And you leave feeling serene, tranquil, and full of peace. It's a peace that passes understanding because it has nothing to do with outward circumstances.

There are two kinds of peace. There is the peace *of* God that we experience when, in prayer, we pour out our hearts to Him and see our desires modified and our priorities changed. But you'll never experience this until you're at peace *with* God. How can you be at peace with God? Romans 5:1 says we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

If you have ever committed a sin against God or against your neighbor, you're at war with your Creator. You have rebelled against Him. How is the sin, the rebellion dealt with? It is by realizing that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, was placed on a rugged cross on the hill of Golgotha, where He took all of your sin and rebellion upon Himself. Simply by believing that, you can have peace with God. Then, because you're at peace *with* Him, you can experience the peace that comes *from* Him as you set your heart upon Him moment by moment, day by day.

27 Isaiah 27:1

In that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall pun ish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.

According to Revelation 13:1, this is a reference to antichrist.

Isaiah 27:2, 3
In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.

As we saw in chapter 5, the vineyard is a picture of Israel. In chapter 5, it was a wild, unproductive vineyard. Here in chapter 27, however, in the kingdom age, it's a fruitful and lovely vineyard.

Isaiah 27:4, 5
Fury is not in me: who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together. Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me.

"Fury is not in Me," says the Lord. "If you try and keep Me out with briers and thorns, I'll break through because I love you." We have the mistaken idea that God is really angry. All of the anger He rightly feels toward humanity, however, was poured out on Jesus at Calvary. If we will just embrace and receive that, we can be at peace with God.

Isaiah 27:6
He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit.

We're seeing this prophecy fulfilled even today, for Israel is the world's third largest exporter of fruit and the fourth largest exporter of flowers.

Isaiah 27:7, 8
Hath he smitten him, as he smote those that smote him? or is he slain according to the slaughter of them that are slain by him? In measure, when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it: he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind.

Is God as hard on Israel as He is on her enemies? Of course not—for her enemies were destroyed, while Israel will be restored.

Isaiah 27:9–12
By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin; when he maketh all the stones of the altar as chalkstones that are beaten in sunder, the groves and images shall not stand up. Yet the defenced city shall be desolate, and the habitation forsaken, and left like a wilderness: there shall the calf feed, and there shall he lie down, and consume the branches thereof. When the boughs thereof are withered, they shall be broken off: the women come, and set them on fire: for it is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the LORD shall beat off from the channel of the river unto the stream of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel.

This speaks of the future restoration of Israel—when God gathers His people from their dispersion throughout the world.

Isaiah 27:13
And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem.

In the twentieth chapter of Isaiah we saw that the Assyrians and the Egyptians will join with the Jews in Jerusalem to worship the Lord in the kingdom. Those Arab peoples will acknowledge Jehovah and worship Him with Israel. What a day that's going to be!



28 Because it is the largest of Israel's ten tribes, Ephraim is another name for Israel.

Isaiah 28:1–4

Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine! Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one, which as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand. The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet: And the glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower, and as the hasty fruit before the summer; which when he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand he eateth it up.

Ephraim's in trouble here. Once a beautiful flower, now in Isaiah's day, they were fading fast. They were proud and pompous no doubt due in part to the fact that they were overcome with wine.

Isaiah 28:5–8

In that day shall the LORD of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people, And for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate. But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean.

An Assyrian invasion was imminent. It was ominous. Were God's people praying? No. They were partying. "No problem," they said. "We'll just eat, drink, and be merry." Notice it is men of maturity—leaders, priests, and prophets—God indicts.

We read in Leviticus 10 that, when the tabernacle was dedicated and fire came down from heaven to consume the burnt offering on the altar, all of the people celebrated, saying, "God is here." Wanting to join in the celebration,

Nadab and Abihu, two sons of Aaron, grabbed their own fire pots and rushed into the temple. However, as they did, the fire killed them because God had made it clear that no other fire than the fire from the altar was to be used in His service (Exodus 30:9). As priests, Nadab and Abihu should have known this, but evidently they forgot. Why? Right after they were killed, the Lord spoke to Aaron and said, "Do not drink strong drink—you or your sons—lest when you go into the tabernacle you die" (Leviticus 10:9). In other words, "Learn a lesson. You're dealing with holy matters. Don't drink wine or strong drink in My service." Evidently, Nadab and Abihu had been drinking, which caused them to err in judgment and to forget what God had said—and it cost them their lives.

Even the world knows that drinking impairs judgment. That's why we have laws that prohibit the mixture of drinking and driving. Here, through Isaiah, God is saying, "My mature men have erred because they got involved with drink." Paul would pick up this same point with regard to qualifications for elders and spiritual leaders (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7).

Isaiah 28:9, 10
Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:

In other words, the people of Israel said, "Isaiah, what you're saying is kid's stuff. We're beyond that." In 2 Timothy 4:3, we read that in the last days, believers will have itching ears, wanting to hear new doctrine. As a safeguard against strange doctrine that will lead us into error, we must study the Word line upon line, precept upon precept. Here a little, there a little, we must learn the Word.

Isaiah 28:11
For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.

In the midst of this indictment against people who were no longer interested in learning the Word, God said, "I'm going to speak to them through a people of stammering lips and a foreign tongue." Who would these people be? The Assyrians. If Israel wouldn't learn in the Word, she'd learn in war.

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

In the Book of Acts, we see an intriguing parallel to this verse . . .

> And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.
>
> Acts 2:4–6

In Isaiah's day, God used foreigners to speak to His people. On the Day of Pentecost, He would use His people to speak to foreigners.

Isaiah 28:13–15
But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves:

"You're crazy," the people said to Isaiah. "We have made agreements and covenants. We have alliances. Our future is secure." But the Lord clearly

said their alliances wouldn't work.

> **Isaiah 28:16**
> **Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.**

"Your plans, your agreements, your covenants are not going to help you in the least," God declares. "I don't have a program or a plan to give you. I have a Person." This glorious prophecy, quoted in Luke, Romans, 1 Corinthians, and 1 Peter, speaks, of course, of Jesus Christ.

There's a great temptation for us to want some quick fix, some program, some plan to see us through, to help us out. "Lord," we cry, "show us the way."

And Jesus answers, "It's not something I give to you. It's Me. *I* am the Way."

> **Isaiah 28:17–20**
> **Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report. For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.**

"You're making these agreements to protect yourselves from the coming Assyrian invasion," Isaiah warns, "but the bed you're making is too short. It won't cover you effectively."

The same is still true. If you're making finances, friends, or philosophy your rest and security, you're going to be short-sheeted because it won't be as secure as you think. "If any man is weary, let Him come unto *Me,*" Jesus

said. “Learn of Me and find rest for your soul” (see Matthew 11:28). That’s why I’m a believer. All other beds are too short.

Isaiah 28:21, 22
For the LORD shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act. Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth.

“Quit mocking,” Isaiah said. “Quit doubting. Listen to the Word. Don’t fight it lest you make it even harder on yourselves.”

Isaiah 28:23–29
Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech. Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and rie in their place? For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him. For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. Bread corn is bruised; because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen. This also cometh forth from the LORD of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.

This speaks of the plowman who plows the seeds and, with each crop, plants and harvests a little differently. The farmer has discernment concerning how to tend any given crop. The same thing is true spiritually. We must handle situations with different people carefully—not depending on programs or formulas, but carefully discerning what God would have for us in the tilling of soil, in the planting of seed, in the gathering of the harvest He promised is sure to come (John 4:35).



29 Isaiah 29:1–4

Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices. Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow: and it shall be unto me as Ariel. And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee. And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.

Ariel, which means "Lion of God," is another name for Jerusalem. Here, the Lord warns of the siege that would come her way initially by Sennacherib and the Assyrians—but ultimately of her destruction by the Romans (Luke 19:43; 21:20).

Jerusalem has been the most besieged city in world history. No other city has been conquered and fought over as much as Jerusalem. The city of peace has been anything but peaceful because there can be no true peace until the Prince of Peace sits on the throne.

Isaiah 29:5–8

Moreover the multitude of thy strangers shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the terrible ones shall be as chaff that passeth away: yea, it shall be at an instant suddenly. Thou shalt be visited of the LORD of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire. And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, even all that fight against her and her munition, and that distress her, shall be as a dream of a night vision. It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite: so

shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion.

Through Isaiah, the Lord says, "Not only the Assyrians, but throughout all of time, whoever thinks he can take control of Jerusalem is dreaming. It's the city of the great King, where only Jesus Christ will ultimately rule and reign."

Isaiah 29:9–12
Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.

Here, the Lord says to these people at this time that, because they chose to be apathetic, they would remain unenlightened. That is, neither the educated nor the uneducated individual would have understanding of the Word.

In this is an important truth. That is, if you don't want to understand Scripture, you won't. If you're not interested in doing the will of God or knowing the heart of God, the Bible will become meaningless to you. Regardless of how educated or uneducated you are, you will find the Word to be dry, boring, and an unsolvable mystery. It is when we approach the Word with a submitted spirit, saying, "Lord, this Book is talking to me and talking about me. Therefore, change me, Lord. Deal with my heart and life" that we receive illumination.

Are your devotions dry and tedious? Are they difficult? Perhaps it's because you're approaching the Word without intending to be submitted to what it says. What a difference it makes when we approach it, saying, "Lord,

today, use these Scriptures to change my life, to convict me of sin, to change my attitudes and heart within."

Isaiah 29:13
Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

"These people sing songs to Me; they talk about Me; but their heart is far from Me," the Lord declares. Both Matthew and Mark recorded Jesus quoting this Scripture, describing the people of His day (Matthew 15:7, 8; Mark 7:6).

Sometimes it's easy for us to get caught up in the melody, the harmony, the emotion of worship—and yet our hearts are far from the Lord. We call upon His name; we sing about His love; but our hearts are not even in the neighborhood. Our minds are miles away. It's important when you worship to determine that you're going to think about what you're singing. You must approach worship intending to be involved and engaged in expressing your heart to the Lord.

Isaiah 29:14–16
Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid. Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us? Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?

Here, the people were saying, "The Lord doesn't know what we're doing. He doesn't really see what we're thinking."

And the Lord says, “Does that really make sense? If a builder frames something or a potter forms something, doesn’t the potter know about the pot or the builder know what he’s framing? I made you—and yet you don’t acknowledge Me.”

Still today, there are people who say, “God doesn’t really know what I’m thinking or care what I’m doing.” But in reality, they’re nothing more than crackpots!

Isaiah 29:17–21
Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest? And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off: That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought.

In that day—when the Lord comes back—things will be topographically and geographically, physically and emotionally, financially and relationally right at last.

Isaiah 29:22, 23
Therefore thus saith the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel.

The forefathers of the Jews of Isaiah’s day would no longer be ashamed of the unbelief of their descendants.

Isaiah 29:24

They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.

People who were previously murmuring would now be discussing the things of God.



30 **Isaiah 30:1–4**

Woe to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin: That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt! Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion. For his princes were at Zoan, and his ambassadors came to Hanes.

These are the cities where the Jews hammered out a defense treaty with the Egyptians. Here, the Lord is saying, "You sought for a protective covering for your country, but you did not seek Me. You looked for counsel, but you didn't call upon Me. You relied on your treaties with the Egyptians, but they shall be your shame and confusion. Your plans and schemes and programs just won't work."

Isaiah 30:5–7

They were all ashamed of a people that could not profit them, nor be an help nor profit, but a shame, and also a reproach. The burden of the beasts of the south: into the land of trouble and anguish, from whence come the young and old lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent, they will carry their riches upon the shoulders of young asses, and their treasures upon the bunches of camels, to a people that shall not profit them. For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose: therefore have I cried concerning this, Their strength is to sit still.

“Be still and know that I am God,” God declared (Psalm 46:10). “If you want to be strong, sit still and look to Me.”

Isaiah 30:8–14
Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever: That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits: Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon: Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant. And he shall break it as the breaking of the potters’ vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the burst ing of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit.

Habakkuk was told to write the vision God gave him so plainly that even he who was running could see it (Habakkuk 2:2). Isaiah is told to write God’s indictment against the people of Jerusalem so that all who followed would know that God’s judgment against her was justified.

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

“All I want from you is to return to Me and rest in Me,” God says. “I don’t want your ingenuity. I don’t care about your ability. I want you just to come to Me, rest in Me, trust in Me.”

Isaiah 30:16

But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift.

Seeking alliance with the Egyptians would logically and militarily be a good move because Egypt was a strong country also threatened by Assyria. Spiritually, however, it was a disastrous move because, in looking to the Egyptians, the Jews took their eyes off the only One who could save them.

Isaiah 30:17, 18
One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill. And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him.

Why does God want us to wait for Him? Because, in reality, He's waiting for us . . .



***For topical study of Isaiah 30:18 entitled "Who's Waiting for Whom?" turn to page* 392.**

Isaiah 30:19–21
For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more: he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

This is the still, small voice Elijah discovered, that quiet voice that cannot be heard in the hustling, bustling, and scheming to which we are so vulnerable. What a joy it is to take a significant portion of time to be quiet before God, for it is then that we hear His word in our ear, saying, "Go right," or "Go left."

Isaiah 30:22–26
Ye shall defile also the covering of thy graven images of silver, and the ornament of thy molten images of gold: thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence. Then shall he give the rain of thy seed, that thou shalt sow the ground withal; and bread of the increase of the earth, and it shall be fat and plenteous: in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures. The oxen likewise and the young asses that ear the ground shall eat clean provender, which hath been winnowed with the shovel and with the fan. And there shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers and streams of waters in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall. Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound.

Throughout the Old Testament, we see men like Moses and Gideon, Hezekiah and Josiah casting idols down—and yet idol worship is a running theme throughout the Old Testament. It wasn't until after their seventy-year captivity in Babylon that the Jews finally turned wholeheartedly against the worship of the foreign gods that surrounded them. And yet Jerusalem today, as well as the entire planet, looks to, lives for, and sacrifices to attain material possessions that are every bit as idolatrous as the carved images of Isaiah's day. When Jesus comes back, however, the world will be completely free of the stranglehold of idolatry and will walk in His blessing and light.

Isaiah 30:27–31
Behold, the name of the LORD cometh from far, burning with his anger, and the burden thereof is heavy: his lips are full of indigna

tion, and his tongue as a devouring fire: And his breath, as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity: and there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err. Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the LORD, to the mighty One of Israel. And the LORD shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall shew the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones. For through the voice of the LORD shall the Assyrian be beaten down, which smote with a rod.

"I desire to come as a consuming fire to rescue you, to deliver you from the Assyrians," the Lord said. The people of Judah did eventually hear what Isaiah was saying, particularly Hezekiah, the king. He called upon the name of the Lord and the Lord miraculously delivered Judah when a single angel destroyed the entire Assyrian army encamped outside the city walls (2 Kings 19:35).

This speaks not only of that local situation, but also of the end times yet to come, for "the Assyrian" was also a name for antichrist, the charismatic world figure who will seek to dominate the planet. Like the Assyrian army of old, however, antichrist, too, will be beaten down.

Isaiah 30:32, 33
And in every place where the grounded staff shall pass, which the LORD shall lay upon him, it shall be with tabrets and harps: and in battles of shaking will he fight with it. For Tophet is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.

Tophet is another name for Gehenna, the lake of fire. Here, we see that Tophet is ordained for the king. What king? Antichrist. In Matthew 25, Jesus said Gehenna is prepared for the devil and his angels. Technically, there's a

difference between hell and Gehenna. We use those words interchangeably, but hell, or hades, is simply the place of the dead. It is a temporary place.

Old Testament believers went to the side of hades called Abraham's bosom. The unbelievers went to the side that was a place of torment. Both of these aspects are seen in Luke 16, in the story of Lazarus and the rich man. Believers couldn't go to heaven until the price for their sin was paid. So, following His death on the Cross, Jesus descended to hades and "led captivity captive," or, escorted the saints to heaven (Ephesians 4:8–10). When an unbeliever dies, he goes to hell. But that's not his final destination. Revelation 20 tells us that he will be brought before God at the great white throne of judgment, where he will be judged by God. Sinners might challenge God there, saying they don't deserve to go to hell. But when the books are opened, they'll see that their every motive, action, and attitude has been recorded.

Jesus taught more on Gehenna than He did on heaven—warning people of its severity. He said it is a place of outer darkness, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. He said it is a place where the fire never stops and the worm never dies. Gehenna was made only for the devil and his angels—but if a person insists on refusing the goodness, grace, and mercy of God, if a person really wants to go to hell, the Lord will not stop him. It's really hard to go to hell. You've got to ignore the work of God, the Word of God, and the love of God. God never intended men to be there. That is why He gave His life to keep them out.

WHO'S WAITING FOR WHOM?

A Topical Study of ISAIAH 30:18

Throughout history, the people of Israel have been known as a people of great ingenuity. Yet ingenuity gets people into trouble whenever they begin to rely on their own ability to get out of jams. That's the situation in Isaiah 30 . . .

Knowing they were about to be invaded by the Assyrians, the Jews formed an alliance with the Egyptians. In fact, a number of Jews actually moved to Egypt, thinking they would be safer in Egypt than they were in Jerusalem. Trying to protect themselves, organize themselves, they looked to themselves and relied on themselves. Therefore, God inspired His prophet, Isaiah, to speak to this country concerning their military alliance with the Egyptians.

His message was "Blessed—happy—is the man who waits for God. The secret of faith is to wait for the Lord."

Too often I'm in a hurry. And when I can't press a button to make something happen immediately, I lose interest and go on to something else. But in the things of God, in the arena of the eternal, there is no button to push. Instead God says, "I want you to wait. Slow down. Rest. Be quiet. Blessed are those who wait for Me."

Maybe you're sensing the coming invasion of the Assyrians in your own circumstances. Maybe relationally things aren't looking good. Maybe occupationally, the job situation just isn't working out. Maybe financially, it looks as though you're about to be skinned alive. At these times, it is oh, so tempting to get counsel from someone, to try and push the button of some organization, to try and make something happen in our own ability, with our own ingenuity. But all the while, God is saying, "I want you to simply return to Me, to be quiet before Me, to wait on Me."

For the believer, waiting has nothing to do with being lazy. Waiting is not a matter of folding our arms and waiting for something. It's a matter of lifting our arms and waiting on Someone. For the believer, waiting is active. It's

being on our knees before the Lord, lifting our hands to the Lord, returning to the Lord again and again.

Why does an all-powerful God, who could change our circumstances, bless our marriages, and provide finances want us to wait for Him?

Perhaps the answer is best illustrated in the first chapter of the Book of 1 Samuel. There, we see a man named Elkanah, a godly man. One of his two wives, Peninah, bore Elkanah many kids. The other wife, Hannah, had no children. Although Elkanah truly loved Hannah, she was ashamed of her barrenness. While at the tabernacle in Shiloh for one of the yearly festivals, Hannah poured out her heart to the Lord, wept bitterly, and prayed fervently about her situation. Not understanding what she was doing, Eli, the priest, assumed she was drunk. Hannah insisted she was not drunk at all but was praying, "Lord, if You bless me with a child, I will dedicate him to You from the time he is weaned all the days of his life."

Hearing this, in the power of the Spirit, Eli said, "The Lord has heard your prayer and He will answer it."

Hannah went her way rejoicing.

Sure enough, Hannah gave birth to a boy who would become one of Israel's mightiest prophets. She named him Samuel.

Hannah wanted a son because she was embarrassed. God, however, wanted a man through whom He could speak to His people. Therefore, in reality, it wasn't so much Hannah waiting for God all those years but God waiting for Hannah to be in a place where she could say, "If You bless me with a son, I'll give him to You."

"Alright!" God must have thought. "That's what I've been waiting for!"

"Blessed are all they that wait on Him," Isaiah 30:18 says. But the preceding phrase says, "Therefore will the Lord wait." The question, therefore, is, "Who's waiting on whom?"

God says, "Wait on Me because, in reality, I'm waiting for you. There are things I want to do for you, in you, and through you that are much greater than you can even imagine (Ephesians 3:20). I want you to wait on Me because I'm waiting for you to see what I want to do in, through, and for your life. I'm waiting for you to get to the place where I can open doors for you and pour out blessing upon you so great that your barns can't even hold it" (Malachi 3:10).

The Lord wants you to wait on and for Him not because He's playing a game with you but because He's waiting for you to get to a different place than the one you're in now so that He can bless you in ways you never dreamed possible.

There was another couple who prayed for years and years for a child. Finally, when Zacharias was an old man and his wife, Elizabeth, was well past the age of childbearing, the angel Gabriel appeared to him, saying, "Your prayers have been heard. You will have a child."

Zacharias no doubt scratched his head and said, "*What* prayers? I haven't prayed for a child for years!"

And, because, he didn't believe, he wasn't able to speak a word until his son was born (Luke 1).

Why didn't God answer Zacharias and Elizabeth's prayer immediately—or at least within the decade of their request?

Because He was doing something they couldn't possibly have imagined in their wildest dreams or expectations. You see, from Zacharias and Elizabeth came the greatest man who ever lived, according to Jesus, a man named John the Baptist. God was waiting for the time to be right for the forerunner of Messiah to be born, waiting so that Elizabeth could be an encouragement to a young virgin named Mary.

What about us? We have a choice to make today—whether to see who we can talk to, what strings we can pull, what doors we can knock down to change our situation, or to say, "Lord, You said I'm to return to You and rest, to be quiet and confident, so I'm doing that now."

Wait on the Lord because the Lord is waiting for you. And when you're in the right place where He can bless you abundantly—when your motives are adjusted, when the scene is set and the right time is come, He will be exceedingly gracious to you.

Wait on the Lord, gang. He's waiting for you.

31 Isaiah 31:1–3

Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because

they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD! Yet he also is wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back his words: but will arise against the house of the evildoers, and against the help of them that work iniquity. Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth shall fall, and he that is holpen shall fall down, and they all shall fail together.

"Why are you looking to the Egyptians?" the Lord asks. "They're not going to be able to help you. They're not God. They're only men. So seek Me instead." This seems so obvious—but, like God's people in Isaiah's day, we, too, are reticent to seek the Lord. Yet our strength comes from our dependence upon God alone. If that is lost, even though we might be armed to the teeth, we'll discover there is no way out.

> **Isaiah 31:4, 5**
> **For thus hath the LORD spoken unto me, Like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, he will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the LORD of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof. As birds flying, so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it.**

"I will defend Jerusalem," the Lord declares. "Deliverance won't come from an alliance with Egypt. It will come from Me."

> **Isaiah 31:6, 7**
> **Turn ye unto him from whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted. For in that day every man shall cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which your own hands have made unto you for a sin.**

We see this prophecy fulfilled when Hezekiah removed the high places, broke the idols, and cut down the groves used in idol worship (2 Kings

18:4).

Isaiah 31:8, 9
Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not of a mighty man; and the sword, not of a mean man, shall devour him: but he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be discomfited. And he shall pass over to his strong hold for fear, and his princes shall be afraid of the ensign, saith the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem.

This speaks of the night the Assyrian army was slain by the angel of the Lord (2 Kings 19:35).



32 Isaiah 32:1

Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment.

In light of the dark days they were experiencing, this would have been a message of comfort and hope to God's people.

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

Who is the hiding place, the covert, the shadow in a weary land? Jesus.

Isaiah 32:3–5
And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly. The vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful.

When Jesus reigns in righteousness, men will see clearly. As a result, dark will not be called light (Isaiah 5:20). That is, things will be seen for what they are in truth. That is why the vile, or foolish, man will no longer be thought of as generous and noble, and the churl, or selfish man, will no longer be esteemed for his prosperity.

Isaiah 32:6
For the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practise hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail.

The Hebrew word translated "vile" is *nabal.* Perhaps the clearest meaning of this word is seen in the man who bore this very name, for, in withholding food and drink from David's men, he set the stage for what would have been a bloodbath had not Abigail's wisdom prevented it (1 Samuel 25).

Isaiah 32:7, 8
The instruments also of the churl are evil: he deviseth wicked devices to destroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy speaketh right. But the liberal deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand.

In contrast to the man who will be destroyed by his own self-interest and indulgence, the liberal, or generous, man will thrive because of his selflessness. Jesus would not only perfectly embody this principle but put it into words when He said, "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:39).

Isaiah 32:9–11
Rise up, ye women that are at ease; hear my voice, ye careless daughters; give ear unto my speech. Many days and years shall ye be troubled, ye careless women: for the vintage shall fail, the gathering shall not come. Tremble, ye women that are at ease; be

troubled, ye careless ones: strip you, and make you bare, and gird sackcloth upon your loins.

"Women, don't you realize that while you are celebrating your freedom, the country is falling apart?" Isaiah asks. "You should be wearing sackcloth in brokenness and humility. Instead, you're dressed for a party." Any society whose women begin to lose their moral moorings and being to flaunt their sensuality is headed for trouble.

Isaiah 32:12–14
They shall lament for the teats, for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine. Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city: Because the palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and towers shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks;

Because the Lord would mercifully and mightily deliver Jerusalem from destruction at the hand of the Assyrians, this prophecy would see fulfillment when the Jews were carried into captivity to Babylon in 586 B.C. Of course, it would be even more fully and tragically realized in the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in A.D. 70.

Isaiah 32:15
Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.

When the Spirit is poured out, everything changes. We see three great outpourings of the Spirit in Scripture: before the end times in Joel 2, at the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, and in the millennial kingdom as seen here.

Isaiah 32:16, 17
Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be

peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.

If you're walking with the Lord, confessing your sin, allowing Him to change your life, you'll have peace, quietness, and assurance. Therefore, sometimes we do people a disservice by trying to comfort them and soothe their feelings when what they really need is to ask the Lord to search their heart and to show them the reason for their unrest.

"All I want is a little peace and quiet," seems to be the cry of our busy society. Peace and quiet, however, can't be found in a three-day weekend, a three-week cruise, or a three-month vacation. Peace and quiet are the effect of righteousness. Therefore, ask God to search your heart because when you're righteous in Him, you'll have peace, quietness, and assurance independent of your circumstances.



33 Isaiah 33 pronounces judgment on those who seek to destroy God's people and waste God's land. Its immediate application was to the Assyrians who, throughout the Book of Isaiah, have been headed toward Jerusalem. But it also speaks prophetically to any nation at any time in the history of the planet who seeks to come against God's people.

Isaiah 33:1
Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee! when thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee.

The spoiler, of course, was Sennacherib, the king of Assyria. And the avenger is the Lord Himself, for He says, "I will spoil anyone who spoils My people. I will come against anyone who comes against My people."

"Dearly beloved," Paul writes, "avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the

Lord" (Romans 12:19). Therefore, concerning our own situations, it's wrong for us to try and bring vengeance in and of ourselves because we don't have enough information to make the right kind of judgment. Only God does.

Isaiah 33:2–9

O LORD, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble. At the noise of the tumult the people fled; at the lifting up of thyself the nations were scattered. And your spoil shall be gathered like the gathering of the caterpiller: as the running to and fro of locusts shall he run upon them. The LORD is exalted; for he dwelleth on high: he hath filled Zion with judgment and righteousness. And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the LORD is his treasure. Behold, their valiant ones shall cry without: the ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly. The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth: he hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth no man. The earth mourneth and languisheth: Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down: Sharon is like a wilderness; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits.

After the Lord said He would deal with the Assyrians, Isaiah responded by saying, "Our ambassadors of peace weep bitterly because their peace plans produced no lasting fruit. Therefore, we're waiting for You, Lord." Earlier, the Jews had sought to appease the Assyrians. Hezekiah, a godly king, went so far as to strip the gold from the doors of the temple to give to Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:16). But even this attempt at negotiation failed.

World War I was not always called that. Initially, it was known as the Great War, for it was to have been the war to end all wars. As evidenced by the history of Israel, our own country's history, and the history of any nation throughout time, no matter how much we long for it or how varied our attempts to attain it, lasting peace is always beyond the reach of man. Only the Prince of Peace can bring it about.

Isaiah 33:10–13

Now will I rise, saith the LORD; now will I be exalted; now will I lift up myself. Ye shall conceive chaff, ye shall bring forth stubble: your breath, as fire, shall devour you. And the people shall be as the burnings of lime: as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire. Hear, ye that are far off, what I have done; and, ye that are near, acknowledge my might.

In Isaiah's day, this spoke of God's deliverance of Jerusalem from the mighty Assyrian army. But to us, as New Testament believers, it speaks of a far greater deliverance . . .

- "Now will I rise," the Lord declared through Isaiah.
  "After three days, I will rise again," Jesus declared (Matthew 27:63).
- "Now will I be exalted," the Lord proclaimed through Isaiah.
  "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted," Jesus proclaimed (Luke 14:11).
- "Now will I lift up myself," the Lord announced through Isaiah.
  "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me," Jesus promised (John 12:32).

Thus, as mighty, as miraculous, as marvelous as God's deliverance of Jerusalem was in Isaiah's day, it cannot compare to the deliverance Jesus procured on the Cross when He decimated death and demolished the siege of self and sin for all mankind.

Isaiah 33:14
The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?

"Does God see what we're doing? He doesn't even know how we're behaving," God's people had said earlier (Isaiah 29:15). Now, however, having seen God move against the Assyrians, they quake, fearing they're next in line for judgment. Who can stand in the presence of such an awesome God? Verses 15 and 16 tell us . . .

Isaiah 33:15, 16

He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.

It is the man who is walking with God in the time of the consuming, devouring fire of God who will become more like God and thus be able to stand. In other words, the same fire that petrifies those who aren't interested in God purifies those who want to be more like Him . . .



***For topicalstudy of Isaiah 33:14–16 entitled"Our God: A Consuming Fire," turn to page* 398.**

Isaiah 33:17–20

Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off. Thine heart shall meditate terror. Where is the scribe? where is the receiver? where is he that counted the towers? Thou shalt not see a fierce people, a people of a deeper speech than thou canst perceive; of a stammering tongue, that thou canst not understand. Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken.

Of Jerusalem, the most fought-over city in the history of humanity, the Lord says it shall be a quiet habitation, that it shall stand. Therefore, perhaps the safest spot on the face of the earth is Jerusalem, for God guarantees her preservation.

Isaiah 33:21–23
But there the glorious LORD will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby. For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us. Thy tacklings are loosed; they could not well strengthen their mast, they could not spread the sail: then is the prey of a great spoil divided; the lame take the prey.

The broad rivers and streams seen here speak of sustenance and peace. You see, Babylon could boast of being on the Euphrates River. Assyria had the Tigris flowing through it. Egypt had the Nile. But Jerusalem is landlocked —for now. However, in Zechariah 14, we are told that, when Jesus comes back, as His foot touches the Mount of Olives, the mountain will split in two and there shall gush forth a river flowing in two directions toward the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea. This means that Jerusalem will no longer be landlocked as she is presently.

I believe this promise applies not only geographically but spiritually— for it was in the city of Jerusalem that Jesus said, "If any of you are thirsty, let him come unto Me and drink. And out of your innermost being shall flow rivers of water" (John 7:38). John would go on to say that He said this concerning the Holy Ghost. Thus, just as Jerusalem will one day be refreshed and sustained by a physical river, we can be presently refreshed and sustained by the life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit in our souls.

Isaiah 33:24
And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity.

When Jesus comes back, when Jerusalem is quiet, when the river flows through the city, there will be no more sickness. When the Lord walked on earth, all that came to Him were healed without exception. Thus, Jesus' ministry on earth provided a sneak preview of glorious coming attractions.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;

Psalm 103:2, 3

When the four men brought their sick friend to Jesus, He forgave his sin before He healed him (Mark 2:4–12). As wonderful a gift it was for the once-lame man to walk again, it was inconsequential compared to the gift of eternal life that would allow him to walk forever in heaven. Whatever the handicaps or maladies in our bodies presently, an infinitely greater healing has already taken place in our souls, for we have been forgiven all our iniquities. Therefore, bless the Lord, O *my* soul!

OUR GOD: A CONSUMING FIRE

A Topical Study of ISAIAH 33:14–16

Throughout the Book of Isaiah, we see the Assyrians moving toward Jerusalem. History tells us that if they saw the Assyrians coming, entire populations of many cities chose to commit suicide rather than fight because they knew of the brutality and cruelty of the Assyrian soldiers. The Assyrians terrorized the entire region. And now they had come to Jerusalem. With tens of thousands of soldiers, they had besieged the city. With his troops stationed around the walls of the city, a man named Rabshakeh began to speak to the men of Jerusalem who had gathered on top of the wall.

"Who will deliver you from Sennacherib and his soldiers? Are you trusting in Egypt? They're a broken reed. When you lean upon them, they'll crumble under you," he cried. "Are you trusting in Jehovah? Jehovah told us we will have victory over you," he lied (Isaiah 36).

The people panicked, but Hezekiah, Judah's king, went with Isaiah into the house of the Lord. There, these two godly men rent their clothes and spread Sennacherib's threatening letters before the Lord. There, they sought the Lord with intensity and great sincerity.

The Lord answered them, saying, "The Assyrians shall not fire a single arrow into the city. I will wipe them out completely." Isaiah and Hezekiah would embrace the Word of the Lord and believe it. That night, an angel of the Lord would go through the camp of the Assyrians and single-handedly obliterate 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. When the people of Jerusalem awoke the next morning and saw what had happened, no doubt they felt a great deal of excitement. "Look what God has done!" they must have shouted gladly. But, accompanying their excitement and gratitude, there also must have been apprehension and fear, for how could they be sure God's mighty hand of judgment wouldn't fall on them?

Whenever someone has a vision or understanding of the Lord, it's always exciting and exhilarating. But it can also cause fear and apprehension . . .

- I think of Peter. When he first realized Jesus was God, he fell down and said, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8).
- I think of John who, when he saw the Lord, fell down as though he were dead (Revelation 1:17).
- I think of Isaiah himself who, having seen the Lord, cried out, "Woe is me. I'm undone" (Isaiah 6:5).

Whenever you see the working of God—the devouring, consuming fire of God—it's exciting. But, in a sense, it's also terrorizing. "Lord, we desire to see You work," we pray. But when He works, we see that He is indeed a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29).

Throughout the Word, fire is employed to describe God's character and His work . . .

- It was in a fiery bush that the Lord spoke to Moses (Exodus 3:2).
- When Isaiah saw the Lord, an angel took a coal of fire from off the altar and purged his lips (Isaiah 6:6, 7).
- We are told that the eyes of Jesus are like flames of fire and his feet like burning brass (Revelation 1:14, 15).

Who is the one who can stand in the presence of a consuming devouring fire? Only the one who is becoming fire himself. You see, only fire can survive fire. If I put a flame of fire into a larger fire, it feels right at home. But if I lay wood, hay, or stubble in the fire, those materials are consumed immediately. God is a consuming fire. What does His fire consume? Anything and everything in us that is not like Him: the wood, hay, and stubble Paul talked about in 1 Corinthians 3. Why? Because He knows that anything unlike Him in our lives will pollute us presently and destroy us ultimately.

Consequently, the fires burn and blaze in our lives. "This isn't fair!" we cry. "I thought You loved me, Lord." But it is the fire of His love that removes from us everything that is not like Him.

If your whole life is wood, hay, and stubble—if it's only material and carnal—you're in big trouble because when the fire of God goes through your life, nothing will be left and you will be consumed eternally. If you're not interested in being more like God, if you're not walking with God, if you

don't care about God, His consuming, devouring fire will destroy you. But if you love the Lord, if you've given your heart to Him, His fire will only destroy whatever is not like Him.

This means I must welcome the fires that come my way rather than seek to put them out. You see, fiery trials are not sent to petrify me but to purify me. Therefore, I am not to extinguish them but to embrace them, saying, "Lord, You're working in my life. Have Your way."

When your boss "fires" you or your girlfriend breaks up with you, when your car breaks down, your friends give up, your money gives out, or your roof caves in, you have a wonderful opportunity to recognize it as the devouring, consuming fire of God purifying your life. Life is a joy when you see the big picture of what God is doing—seasons of fire sweeping through your life, burning away the wood, hay, and stubble—followed by seasons of fresh vision and renewed growth.

Maturity in the Christian life is all about saying, "Lord, You know what I need more than I do. Therefore, be the consuming devouring fire within me so that all that is left is just like You."



34 In Isaiah 34, we see a picture of the Great Tribulation, specifically the battle of Armageddon. Therefore, it's as if in truth and honesty, God says, "Yes, I'm going to heal all sickness and forgive all iniquity. Yes, I'm going to bring quietness and peace to the city of Jerusalem. But there's going to be something else happening before My kingdom comes."

Isaiah 34:1–3
Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of the LORD is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter. Their slain also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up out of their carcases, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood.

Revelation 14:20 tells us that, at the battle of Armageddon, the blood will flow as high as a horse's bridle. Jeremiah 30 calls this the time of Jacob's trouble, for in the Tribulation, Jacob, the nation of Israel, will be shaken to its core. But it's not Jacob's trouble exclusively, for all the earth will go through troubling, trying times. Why? It's preparation for the coming of the King.

Isaiah 34:4–6
And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree. For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment. The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams: for the LORD hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea.

Bozrah and Idumea refer to the ancient area of Edom southeast of Israel, or, present-day Saudi Arabia. Edom is the area where Jacob's brother, Esau settled. In Romans 9:13, the Lord said, "Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated." Why? Because Esau was a carnal, material man more interested in a bowl of food than in his birthright, more concerned with pampering his flesh than walking with God.

Isaiah 34:7–10
And the unicorns shall come down with them, and the bullocks with the bulls; and their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust made fat with fatness. For it is the day of the LORD's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion. And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever.

For years, Bible scholars wondered how an area could burn forever. Now we know—for if a bomb or some other device ignited the vast oil reserves of Saudi Arabia, they would literally burn forever. Whether a bomb ignites them or they are ignited supernaturally, they will indeed burn. Why? Verse 8 tells us it is the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion. That is, this region of the world has historically brought real pain to God's people in Israel.

Isaiah 34:11–15
But the cormorant and the bittern shall possess it; the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it: and he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness. They shall call the nobles thereof to the kingdom, but none shall be there, and all her princes shall be nothing. And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and bram bles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be an habitation of dragons, and a court for owls. The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest. There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with her mate.

The Hebrew word translated "emptiness" is *bohuw*—the same word we see in Genesis 1:2 to describe the state of the earth after Satan fell from heaven. Thus, following the battle of Armageddon, it is as if the world will come full circle—once again in a state of devastation, waiting for the re-creation that only our loving, creative, awesome Creator can bring about.

Isaiah 34:16, 17
Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them. And he hath cast the lot for them, and his hand hath divided it unto them by line: they shall possess it for ever, from generation to generation shall they dwell therein.

Speaking of the coming judgment, the Lord says, “It’s all going to happen just as I declare.”



35 After the storm of chapter 34, we come to the beauty of chapter 35. Following the utter destruction of Armageddon, we see the ushering in of the kingdom . . .

Isaiah 35:1
The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

Scientists tell us that the deserts on our planet are expanding at an alarming rate. Ten thousand square miles of desert are being added in north Africa alone each year. But when the kingdom comes, the desert shall suddenly rejoice and blossom like a rose. How can this be? It is suggested by some scientists that there will be another shift of the axis. If the earth is made straight again, much of the polar ice caps would melt, adding incredible amounts of water and causing evaporation and the reemergence of a water canopy surrounding the planet. Fossil evidence indicates that the earth at one time was uniformly temperate. Scientists suggest that this could happen again.

In Romans 8, Paul tells us that all creation is groaning, waiting for the day of redemption. In other words, even the earth realizes it’s in a fallen state. But when the Lord comes back, everything will be made right once again.

Isaiah 35:2–4
It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God. Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come

with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.

How are we to strengthen people who feel weak or fearful? We are to tell them the Lord is coming. That's not "pie in the sky" theology. It's God's Word given to us practically. The way to strengthen people—whether yourself or others—is to say, "Fear not. Be strong. Your God will come and save you."

We're pilgrims, gang, on our way to a city with foundations (Hebrews 11:10)—a place that is solid and secure, a place that won't shift with the changing winds of commerce or culture—heaven. If we lose sight of this, if we begin to think this is all there is, we become vulnerable to discouragement and depression. "Lord," we'll cry, "will I *ever* get the job I want? Will I *ever* lose the weight I want? Will it *ever* be right between sisters and brothers?" I can get so discouraged if I think this is all there is. But if I realize God's coming back and will set all things right, I can go on.

Isaiah 35:5, 6
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.

In the kingdom, the healing ministry that Jesus began on earth will be gloriously completed.

Isaiah 35:7 (a)
And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water . . .

The allusion here is to a desert mirage. That is, in the kingdom, what we only imagined in the dry, dusty days of world history will become reality. What we longed and thirsted for will actually, truly come to be.

Isaiah 35:7 (b)

. . . in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.

Bible scholars believe the term "dragons" refers to jackals.

Isaiah 35:8 (a)
And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it . . .

In the kingdom age, the highway of holiness shall be established. Everyone will walk together in love and righteousness as the Prince of Peace reigns.

Isaiah 35:8 (b)
. . . but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.

Even the most foolish of us will not miss the cutoff or take a wrong turn on this glorious highway of wholeness and rightness.

Isaiah 35:9 (a)
No lion shall be there . . .

Satan will be bound at this time. Thus, we will not even hear a growl from the roaring lion of 1 Peter 5:8.

Isaiah 35:9 (b), 10
. . . nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Somewhere we got the mistaken idea that holiness is joyless. Here, however, we see that, as we cruise down the highway of holiness, joy will

replace heaviness and gladness will replace sadness. On the glorious highway of holiness will be replaced by singing and rejoicing.

And I can't wait!



36 The Assyrians had been swallowing up territory between Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, and Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah. They had already defeated Israel's ten northern tribes. With the Assyrian forces only ten miles from Jerusalem, it looked as though Jerusalem, a relatively small and weak city, would be defeated, as well. But God had promised that He would bring about deliverance. And this is the story of that deliverance . . .

Isaiah 36:1
Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the defenced cities of Judah, and took them.

Hezekiah, king of Judah, was a very godly man. Yet, being a man, he had the vulnerability and weakness common to all men. Earlier, he had tried to appease the Assyrians by stripping the gold and silver from the doors of the temple and giving it to Sennacherib. But he found the same thing that you and I find. That is, appeasing the devil never works because he always wants more.

Isaiah 36:2, 3
And the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem unto king Hezekiah with a great army. And he stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field. Then came forth unto him Eliakim, Hilkiah's son, which was over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, Asaph's son, the recorder.

Here, Rabshakeh, Sennacherib's right-hand man, met with the leaders of Judah.

Isaiah 36:4–6
And Rabshakeh said unto them, Say ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? I say, sayest thou, (but they are but vain words) I have counsel and strength for war: now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me? Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him.

"Who are you guys trusting?" Rabshakeh asks the three-man council representing Hezekiah. "Are you trusting in the Egyptians?" That was the earlier tendency of God's people. In chapter 30, they wanted to send ambassadors to Egypt because, like them, the Egyptians were also afraid of the Assyrians. Logically and politically, it would have made sense for Judah and Egypt to become allies. But Isaiah said, "Don't do it. Seek the Lord alone."

Isaiah 36:7
But if thou say to me, We trust in the LORD our God: is it not he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and said to Judah and to Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar?

"You're claiming to trust in the Lord. But that won't work," Rabshakeh continued, "because Hezekiah destroyed the altars of Jehovah." While it is true that Hezekiah destroyed altars, they weren't Jehovah's altars. They were altars of false gods. Therefore Rabshakeh was speaking ignorantly.

Isaiah 36:8
Now therefore give pledges, I pray thee, to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them.

"Your army is so impotent that I'll even sell you 2,000 horses—if you can find men to ride them," Rabshakeh taunted.

Isaiah 36:9, 10
How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? And am I now come up without the LORD against this land to destroy it? the LORD said unto me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.

Rabshakeh continues, saying, "The Egyptians won't help you. The Lord won't help you. You can't even ride horses. And besides that, He sent us to destroy you."

There is no record that the Lord spoke to the Assyrians or that they would have listened if He did. Isaiah had declared God would use them as a tool in His hand. Perhaps this is Rabshakeh's reference (Isaiah 10:5, 6).

In World War I, the Germans were absolutely convinced God was on their side. Their theologians, their pastors, their born-again leaders were convinced that God was on the side of Germany and, therefore, they assumed they must be victorious. Obviously, history proved otherwise. As Americans, we can fall into that same mindset, thinking that everything we do must be of God because, as everyone knows, God is an American. But, obviously, that's just not so, because, as Isaiah will declare, all nations before God are as nothing (40:17).

Isaiah 36:11
Then said Eliakim and Shebna and Joah unto Rabshakeh, Speak, I pray thee, unto thy servants in the Syrian language; for we understand it: and speak not to us in the Jews' language, in the ears of the people that are on the wall.

When the people of Jerusalem began to sit on the wall in order to listen to the conversation taking place between Sennacherib's and Hezekiah's negotiators, Hezekiah's men asked that they be spoken to in Syrian lest the Jewish populace become demoralized.

Eavesdropping on the wall usually ends up only in a fall. In Psalm 131, David said, "I don't think of myself too highly or exercise myself in matters that are too great for me." What freedom there is in understanding we don't have to be privy to everything.

Isaiah 36:12, 13
But Rabshakeh said, Hath my master sent me to thy master and to thee to speak these words? hath he not sent me to the men that sit upon the wall, that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you? Then Rabshakeh stood, and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and said, Hear ye the words of the great king, the king of Assyria.

As exemplified by Rabshakeh, a big mouth is often indicative of a bad heart. When someone has to speak loudly to make himself heard, there's often something amiss in his heart.

Isaiah 36:14–18
Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you. Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, The LORD will surely deliver us: this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me: and eat ye every one of his vine, and every one of his fig tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his own cistern; Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards. Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, The LORD will deliver us. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?

Rabshakeh does just what Satan does to us. First, he plants a question in the ears of the people of Jerusalem concerning their king. "Hath God really said you are not to eat of the fruit of every tree?" Satan hissed, planting doubt in the mind of Eve concerning God's goodness (Genesis 3:1).

"If you eat of the tree, you'll become like God," Satan lied (Genesis 3:5).

"If you surrender, we'll give you corn and your own vineyards, water, wine, and oil," Rabshakeh said. In other words, "If you ignore your king and join me, you'll find true satisfaction."

Isaiah 36:19–22
Where are the gods of Hamath and Arphad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim? and have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who are they among all the gods of these lands, that have delivered their land out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand? But they held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not. Then came Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, that was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder, to Hezekiah with their clothes rent, and told him the words of Rabshakeh.

As Rabshakeh was making accusations, raising questions, and planting doubts, Hezekiah's men were silent because he had told them to "answer the king not." That is a wise word indeed. Too many people dialogue with the devil when they should simply not answer a word. In Jude, we read that not even the archangel dared bring accusation against the devil, but simply said, "The Lord rebuke you" Satan (Jude 9).

Walk with the Lord, gang. Talk to the Lord. Trust in the Lord. But answer Satan not a word.



37 Isaiah 37:1

And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD.

When Hezekiah heard that Rabshakeh was threatening, he went to the best place he could go. He went to the house of the Lord. When things are coming down, when things are looking bad, the best place for us to be is in the house

of the Lord with the people of God. It's also the hardest place to get to because when they're down or attacked, when they feel discouraged or threatened, the tendency of most people is to say, "Lord, I'm just not feeling up to going to church today. I don't have anything to wear. My daughter has a cold. We don't have enough money for gas. It's too late. It's too early. It's too hot. It's too cold." The enemy will do everything possible to discourage us from coming to the house of the Lord. But Hezekiah knew that was exactly where he needed to be.

Isaiah 37:2, 3
And he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth, unto Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz. And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blas phemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth.

Hezekiah sent a message to Isaiah, saying, "Rabshakeh has been troubling us, threatening us, and blaspheming God. The time has come to stand—but we have no strength."

Do you ever feel that way? You know it's a time to be strong, to stand up, to stand fast—and yet you feel drained?

Isaiah 37:4, 5
It may be the LORD thy God will hear the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God, and will reprove the words which the LORD thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left. So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah.

"Pray for us," Hezekiah's messengers said to Isaiah. "Seek the Lord on our behalf."

Gang, this is what the body is all about. There are times when you know you need to be strong and to stand fast, but you feel weak. In those times, you can go to the Isaiahs in your midst and say, "Would you pray for me? I know I need the Lord, but I feel too weak to even call upon Him."

"God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you," Samuel said (1 Samuel 12:23). If you're not drained and weak like Hezekiah and his men be like Samuel and Isaiah. Go to prayer for those who are linked to us but who are sapped and drained. We have opportunity to stand beside them and to intercede for them that they might be strengthened and replenished in their own day of need.

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

Isaiah answered Hezekiah's fears with a sure word from the Lord that Rabshakeh and the Assyrians would fall.

Of Jesus, Isaiah would prophesy, "The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned" (50:4). Do we have a sure word for the fearful people around us? We will if we wake morning by morning to wait on the Lord.

Isaiah 37:8–11
So Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah: for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish. And he heard say concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, He is come forth to make war with thee. And when he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly; and shalt thou be delivered?

When the Assyrian army was called away to engage in a different battle, Rabshakeh said to Hezekiah, "We've got to leave for awhile—but don't think God is delivering you. We'll be back."

Isaiah 37:12, 13
Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed, as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Telassar? Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arphad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?

These were all cities destroyed by the Assyrians.

Isaiah 37:14, 15
And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up unto the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed unto the LORD, saying,

I love this! Hezekiah took this threatening letter to the house of the Lord and spread it out before Him. That's always a good thing to do with threatening letters that come your way or bills too big to pay. Just spread them out and say, "Lord, help!"

Logically and militarily, Jerusalem was no match for Assyria. But that didn't stop Hezekiah from calling out to the only One who could save them.

Isaiah 37:16, 17
O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth. Incline thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open thine eyes, O LORD, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God.

I love studying prayers in the Bible—especially prayers that bring results. Hezekiah begins his prayer by extolling the greatness of God. So too,

when we begin our prayers at the point of worship, the problems we thought were insurmountable shrink radically in comparison to the awesome power of God.

When we look at the earth, we see gigantic mountains and deep valleys. But from heaven's perspective, this earth is as smooth as a bowling ball. In fact, scientists tell us that if our planet were shrunk to the size of a bowling ball, the bowling ball would, proportionately, have more ridges in it than the earth. That's what worship does. It puts us in the heavenlies, above the situation, and suddenly the big mountains in our lives aren't so big anymore.

Isaiah 37:18–20
Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their countries, And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD, even thou only.

This is a prayer that produces power because the motivation was not for Hezekiah's protection but for God's glorification. Hezekiah's prayer was not, "Lord, we want You to deliver us because we want to be comfortable." No, Hezekiah's prayer was that God be glorified.

"In my life, Lord, be glorified," we sing. But what if that means God is more glorified by our poverty than our prosperity? What if it means God is more glorified in our dying than in our healing? What if it means God is more glorified in our affliction than in our comfort? As we pray, we would do well to ask ourselves the reason for our requests. Are they to glorify God or to satisfy ourselves? If they're truly to glorify God, we can trust that God will have His way—no matter the outcome.

Isaiah 37:21–23
Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria: This is the word which the LORD hath spoken concerning him; The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter

of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel.

Sennacherib was accustomed to serving powerless gods who could neither see, hear, nor speak (Psalm 135:15–17). Here, however, he had come up against the Creator rather than the created. Thus, his threats were nothing more than "idol threats."

Isaiah 37:24, 25
By thy servants hast thou reproached the Lord, and hast said, By the multitude of my chariots am I come up to the height of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon; and I will cut down the tall cedars thereof, and the choice fir trees thereof: and I will enter into the height of his border, and the forest of his Carmel. I have digged, and drunk water; and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of the besieged places.

These are allusions to the Assyrian's self-proclaimed capability to overcome any physical obstacle in their path of conquest.

Isaiah 37:26–28
Hast thou not heard long ago, how I have done it; and of ancient times, that I have formed it? now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste defenced cities into ruinous heaps. Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded: they were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the grass on the housetops, and as corn blasted before it be grown up. But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me.

All the while the Assyrians thought it was their own might and ingenuity that enabled them to devour any nation at will, they were only able to do so by God's assent (Isaiah 10:5, 6).

Isaiah 37:29
Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult, is come up into mine ears, therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.

The Assyrians were known for putting hooks in the noses and bridles in the lips of their captives. "Be not deceived," Paul would write to the Galatians, "God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (6:7). Therefore, hooks and bridles would be used upon Assyrians.

Isaiah 37:30
And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such as groweth of itself; and the second year that which springeth of the same: and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit thereof.

Here, God's promise to His people is that they would eat the fruit of their own land, that they wouldn't be carried away captive.

Isaiah 37:31
And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward:

How do you bear fruit? By sinking your roots down deep in the Word of God. It is as your roots go down that fruit will go up.

Isaiah 37:32, 33
For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it.

Even though nearly 200,000 Assyrians were camped outside the city walls, God said to Isaiah, "Not even a single arrow will fly over."

Isaiah 37:34, 35
By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.

The Lord promised to defend His people not because of their righteousness, but for His own purposes. That's the same reason the Lord will defend you. Psalm 2 tells us the Father promised to give the Gentiles an inheritance. As Gentiles, we're that inheritance. Therefore, He's going to protect us and see us through not because of anything we have done, but because of the covenant He made with His Son.

Isaiah 37:36
Then the angel of the LORD went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.

One hundred eighty-five thousand Assyrians were wiped out in one evening by the angel of the Lord—an incredible, monumental victory. God's ways are beyond even our wildest conjectures.

Isaiah 37:37, 38
So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Armenia: and Esar-haddon his son reigned in his stead.

History confirms that, as Sennacherib was praying to his god, his sons pushed over the stone idols upon him and then stabbed him in the back. It was a fitting, although tragic end to this one who worshiped idols created by man instead of the Creator of the universe.



38 Isaiah 38:1

In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.

Unless we're raptured, we're going to die. Are our houses in order? Are our families ready to walk with the Lord?

Isaiah 38:2, 3

Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.

"Set your house in order, it's time to go home," God said. Yet what did Hezekiah say? We'll read in verse 14 that he chirped like a bird, begging for his own way.

Isaiah 38:4–8

Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah, saying, Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city. And this shall be a sign unto thee from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he hath spoken; Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sun dial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down.

A miracle took place. Hezekiah demanded and God obliged. Hezekiah's life would be prolonged fifteen years and the sundial would move forty-five minutes backward as proof.

Isaiah 38:9–16

The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness: I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said, I shall not see the LORD, even the LORD, in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world. Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent: I have cut off like a weaver my life: he will cut me off with pining sickness: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. I reckoned till morning, that, as a lion, so will he break all my bones: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail with looking upward: O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me. What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it: I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul. O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live.

"I'm doomed, I'm going down. I'm dying," Hezekiah declared before the Lord healed him.

In the fifteen additional years he was given, Hezekiah made two terrible mistakes. In addition to giving the Babylonians reason to attack Judah (39:5–8), he fathered a son named Manasseh—the worst king in Judah's history. It was Manasseh who finally brought down the judgment of God upon Judah.

I believe Hezekiah's story is recorded to show us that there is both a perfect and permissible will of God. Therefore, the best way to pray is to pray like Jesus, who, in the Garden of Gethsemane, said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup of suffering pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done. You know what's best. And I submit to that."

Isaiah 38:17–20

Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. For the grave cannot praise thee,

death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth. The LORD was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the LORD.

Hezekiah sang this song of deliverance after being given fifteen additional years to live on earth. We have been given not fifteen years, but all of eternity—not to live on earth, but to live in heaven. How much greater, then, should our song of deliverance be!

Isaiah 38:21, 22
For Isaiah had said, Let them take a lump of figs, and lay it for a plaister upon the boil, and he shall recover. Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the LORD?

Evidently, Hezekiah had some kind of skin disease, perhaps a boil that was causing his body temperature to rise dangerously. Here, we see that, while God performed the miracle of moving the clock backward, He also used a common medicinal substance of the day to heal Hezekiah. Medicine doesn't heal. Miracles don't heal. Our own immune systems don't heal. It is God who heals. And He can use medicine, miracles, our own bodies, or a combination of all three to do His will.



39 Isaiah 39:1 (a)

At that time Merodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon . . .

Following the destruction of Assyria, Babylon emerges as the new world power. This is an important transition because it will be Babylon who will ultimately carry the Jews into captivity. Where did Babylon get the idea to attack Jerusalem? Read on . . .

Isaiah 39:1 (b), 2
. . . sent letters and a present to Hezekiah: for he had heard that he had been sick, and was recovered. And Hezekiah was glad of them, and shewed them the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.

When Hezekiah received a threatening letter from the Assyrians, he prayed. When he got a flattering letter from the Babylonians, did he pray? No, he said, "Thanks for the get-well card, guys. Come and see all my treasures. I'll take you on a tour." No doubt, as the Babylonians were taking in Judah's wealth, they were also making mental notes.

The lesson for us in this is not to take only threatening letters to the Lord, but to take the flattering ones as well because they're just as dangerous—if not more so.

Isaiah 39:3, 4
Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country unto me, even from Babylon. Then said he, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All that is in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them.

In Luke 2, on two occasions, when Mary was given revelation and insight, the Word says she treasured those things in her heart. If God gives you treasured revelation, you don't need to immediately spout it out to everyone. If God gives you insight and glorious truths, sometimes the wisest thing to do is to simply treasure them in your heart.

Isaiah 39:5–8
Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and

that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. Then said Hezekiah to Isaiah, Good is the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. He said moreover, For there shall be peace and truth in my days.

When he learned that his sons would be carried into captivity, rather than chirping, chattering, and demanding his own way, Hezekiah said, "Good is the word of the Lord." It is as if Hezekiah had finally grown up.



40 In chapters 1 through 39, we've seen the Lord as sovereign sitting on the throne. In chapters 40 through 66, however, we see the Lord as Savior, hanging on the Cross. In chapters 1 through 39, we saw the law of God pointedly proclaimed. In chapters 40 through 66, we see the love of God powerfully portrayed. "The burden of the Lord" is the theme of chapters 1 through 39. "The blessing of the Lord" is the theme of chapters 40 through 66. The first section dealt with the judgment from God. The second deals with the joy of God.

Isaiah 40:1
Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

Many people call this section the Gospel according to Isaiah. It begins with these words, which, in a sense, introduce the Gospel story because we hear John the Baptist, in introducing the Person of Jesus Christ, quote this particular chapter to begin the Gospels. After thirty-nine chapters of the Lord convicting His people, He now begins to comfort them.

"Comfort My people," the Lord instructs Isaiah. "I've shared with them the burdens. Now I want to give them the blessings. I've spoken to them with conviction. Now I want to minister to them comfort." They were so prone to

wander, so prone to mess up—and yet they were still God's kids. That's why He says, "Comfort yet *My* people."

Our Father sets a pattern for us as earthly parents. Even as sometimes we have to deal with our kids rather severely, it should always be followed with the second section. After conviction and correction, our Father always comforts. We must do the same.

Isaiah 40:2 (a)
Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned . . .

How was Isaiah to comfort God's people? First, he was to tell the nation that her warfare would come to an end and that her iniquity was pardoned. How are we to comfort others? By telling people that warfare is coming to an end, that life is short, that life goes fast, that Jesus is coming back.

Isaiah 40:2 (b)
. . . for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

In Isaiah's day, if you couldn't pay your creditors, a violation of your contracts would be posted on your house with a warning that in a short time, the house would be repossessed and you would be evicted—unless there was a redeemer who could pay your debt. In that case, the paper would be folded up, tacked to the wall, and marked "Paid."

That's the message of the New Testament. Our sins are forgiven. Therefore, tell the person who feels guilty, depressed, discouraged, or defeated that Jesus is coming back and that their sins are forgiven—for those are comforting words, indeed!

Isaiah 40:3
The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

“Comfort My people,” Isaiah was instructed. “And prepare them for the coming of Christ.”

John the Baptist used this passage when he was asked by the Pharisees who he was.

“Are you the Christ?” they asked. “Are you Elijah? Are you that prophet?”

“No,” he said. “I am a voice crying in the wilderness, preparing a way for the coming of the Lord” (John 1:19–23).

That’s the essence of ministry for you and me as well. We are not to draw attention to ourselves, but rather we are to prepare the way for Jesus. I can’t be like Elijah—raising the dead and calling down fire from heaven. But I can be like John. I can talk about Jesus, preparing a way for Him.

Isaiah 40:4, 5
Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

The valley of depression, discouragement, and defeat needs to be filled in. The mountain of pride and prayerlessness and haughtiness needs to be taken down. The crooked place of errors needs to be straightened out. And the rough places of irritation need to be made smooth. I don’t have time to be in the valley of depression or to feel sorry for myself. I’ve got work to do. I don’t have a right to be proud or irritated because I have a job to do. We need to forget about our own problems and pain, hurts and heartaches. We need to realize that we have the same call John the Baptist did: to prepare a way in the wilderness of this world for Jesus.

Isaiah 40:6–8
The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass

withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

In contrast to the withering grass and fading flower, the Word of God stands forever. His promise that He will never leave you, that He is going to finish the work He began in you, that He's coming back for you will never change.

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

If you want a life of purpose and substance, do the work of an evangelist. Lift up your voice and tell people to behold the One who created them, who loves them, who has a plan and a purpose for them.

The word, "evangelist," comes from a Greek word that speaks of people who traveled from city to city selling soap. These soap-sellers, or "evangelists," went from town to town crying loudly, "You're dirty. But you can be clean!" Then they would demonstrate the power of the soap. We have that same opportunity—to tell people they can be clean, that their sins are forgiven.

Isaiah 40:10, 11
Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

This speaks, of course, of Jesus, our Shepherd. I'm so glad it is the weakest of us that He carries closest to His heart and that it is those of us who are bogged down with cares or concerns that He gently leads.

For topical study of Isaiah 40:11 entitled "Jesus, Our Shepherd," turn to page **412.**

Isaiah 40:12 (a)
Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand . . .

Jesus is not only a gentle Shepherd, but also the powerful Creator. The picture here is one of Him pouring the water of the oceans of the world out of His hand. Three-quarters of our world is water. In fact, there is so much water on this planet that if it were flattened out, the entire earth would be under 1.5 *miles* of water. And yet the Lord measures all of that water with His hand.

Isaiah 40:12 (b)
. . . and meted out heaven with the span . . .

A "span" is the distance between one's little finger and thumb. In other words, God holds the heavens with His hand. The fact that it would take millions of light-years to cross our galaxy alone means that God's hand is a pretty big hand—certainly more than big enough to handle whatever challenges face us.

Isaiah 40:12 (c)
. . . and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?

Thirty thousand cubic tons of cosmic dust falls to our planet each year. And the Lord measures it all.

Isaiah 40:13, 14
Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?

Who counsels this One who measures the seas with His palm, who holds the heavens in His hand, who weighs mountains? I do. How many times I have caught myself praying, "Lord, here's what needs to happen . . . . This is what You must do . . . ."

Do you ever try to counsel the Lord in your prayer—advising Him about what should happen, how He should work, or what He should do? The best way to pray is to cast our cares upon Him and to share our burdens with Him, but then to say, "Lord, *Your* will be done because *You* know best."

Isaiah 40:15–17
Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

How comforting it is to know that our Father is on the throne and that the nations that threaten the world are no problem for Him.

Isaiah 40:18–22 (a)
To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved. Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth . . .

"God sits on the circle of the earth," Isaiah declares. In Job 26:4, we read that the Lord hangs the earth on nothing. Throughout history, there have been other explanations for this phenomenon. African cultures thought the earth sat on the back of a huge tortoise. Hindu cultures thought it was held on

the back of an elephant. The Greeks thought it was held on the shoulders of Atlas. Western cultures thought it was flat.

Isaiah 40:22 (b)
. . . and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers . . .

We read in Numbers 13 that the people of Israel didn't initially enter the Promised Land because they felt like grasshoppers in the eyes of the people who lived there. Here, God is saying, "You might be grasshoppers in their sight, but they're grasshoppers in My sight."

The same is still true. Whoever or whatever stands against you is as a grasshopper in God's sight. Therefore, rather than worrying, believe that your Father loves you and will see you through.

"I have a hard time believing that," you say. "Maybe it's because I'm not praying right."

I think of the little girl who came to her father and said, "Daddy, would you please put gasoline on my lips?"

"Sure, honey," the father said as he went into the bathroom, opened the medicine cabinet, and pulled the Vaseline off her shelf. Yes, the little girl got her words mixed up, but did her father say, "You want gasoline on your lips? Then gasoline is what you're getting"? Of course not! He's her father. He knew what she meant.

"If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, don't you know that the heavenly Father will give good gifts to His?" Jesus asked (Matthew 7:11). Listen, dear folks, your vocabulary might be all mixed up. You might not pray with eloquence, but your Father knows what's in your heart. And even if you get it all jumbled up, He's not going to say, "Gasoline, huh? Gasoline it is!"

Isaiah 40:22 (c)
. . . that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:

British scientist, Sir James Jeans, became very well known in the scientific community when he first discovered his theory was correct. Galaxies are moving away from our galaxy in every direction, which has caused astronomers to conclude that at some point, even as all galaxies are moving out, pressing the edge, expanding the universe, they must have been together at one point in time, lending further scientific evidence to the understanding that there was a single point of creation.

Isaiah 40:23
That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity.

God warns us not to put too much stock in leaders and judges. Don't build your life hoping you'll find a politician, judge, or Supreme Court nominee who is perfect and flawless. It won't happen.

Isaiah 40:24–26
Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble. To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.

Of the stars, Isaiah says God knows each one by name. Who puts the stars in place, names them, and keeps them from falling? God.

Isaiah 40:27
Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?

"That's great that God knows all the stars by name," you might be saying. "It's great that He spans the universe in His hand and sits on the circle of the earth, that He makes leaders and judges as nothing. But could a God who is

that big and powerful be interested in *me?* Does He really care that I'm having a hard time with my electric bill? Does He really care that my daughter has a sore throat?" That was the attitude of God's people in Isaiah's day. They didn't so much dispute God's greatness as they questioned His care.

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

We tend to think of God in anthropomorphic terms, that, because He controls the universe, He must certainly be too tired to talk to us. But here, God says, "I don't have limited time, energy, or understanding."

Isaiah 40:29–31
He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Notice that here, we are told not to wait *for* God but to wait *upon* Him. Like a waiter in a restaurant, we're to take an active part in pleasing Him. We're to honor Him with worship in the morning. We're to talk to Him in the evening. We're to look for ways to serve Him by loving people throughout the day. And, as we wait on the Lord, we'll find more strength to wait on Him even more in a never-ending cycle.

JESUS, OUR SHEPHERD

A Topical Study of ISAIAH 40:11

In many of the major cities across our country, groups of men gather together to bang heads, break bones, throw tackles, and hit hard. These groups of men often liken themselves to animals. There are the Chicago Bears, the Detroit Lions, the Atlanta Falcons, the Denver Broncos. But never in either the history or the future of the National Football League will there be a team named the Lambs or the Sheep. It won't happen because lambs and sheep are some of the dumbest and most helpless animals in all of God's creation.

Yet our Father, in His honesty, has likened us to lambs and sheep because we are rather dumb and very helpless. We've gone astray, wandered off, and foolishly ignored the things that are right and good. Yet God doesn't forsake us or come down on us. Instead, He gives a promise to us—that He will give us a Shepherd who will lead us, a Shepherd who will carry the weakest and most helpless among us in His arms and gently lead those with young.

Who is this Shepherd?

- In John 10, Jesus referred to Himself as the Good Shepherd.
- The author of Hebrews refers to Him as the Great Shepherd.
- Peter refers to Him as the Chief Shepherd.

People in Isaiah's day were very familiar with shepherds, theirs being an agrarian society. But, in addition to being familiar with them culturally, God's people would have had an understanding of shepherds Scripturally and historically . . .

The Good Shepherd

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

John 10:11

In Genesis 4, we see Abel, the first shepherd. His older brother, Cain, was a tiller of the ground, a farmer. One day, these two brothers were preparing a sacrifice for the Lord. Cain brought the fruits of his hands—that which he had toiled and struggled to bring about with his own energy and effort. We are told that Abel, on the other hand, brought his offering not according to his works, but by faith (Hebrews 11:4). God honored Abel's offering, for Abel speaks to us of the good Shepherd who would give His own life for the sheep. You see, after Abel sacrificed the lamb, Cain slew him, angry that his own sacrifice wasn't accepted by God. Thus, it wasn't just the sheep that was slain, but the shepherd was slaughtered as well.

Jesus Christ is the good Shepherd who became the Lamb of God. He became a Lamb for me and was slaughtered on my behalf.

Would you have done that?

If God came to you and said, "I want you to become a sheep. Go out in the valley, live among the sheep, graze with them, hang around them, swat away the flies, put up with the burrs, live in the barn—and then be slaughtered," would you have agreed? Yet when the Father turned to Jesus and Jesus agreed to become a Man the step down for Him was an infinitely greater step down than the step down you would have to take to become a sheep. And He remains in that state of humanity forever. It wasn't that He became a lamb and then laid aside that humility and humanity, but He retains the state of God-Man through the ages to come for you and me.

And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. . . .

Hebrews 12:24, 25 (a)

The blood of Jesus speaks better things than the blood of Abel. Why? Because the blood of Abel spoke of Cain's sin (Genesis 4:10). The blood of Abel spoke of condemnation. But the blood of Jesus speaks not of condemnation but of salvation, redemption, forgiveness. The blood of Jesus cleanses you from all sin and it cries out from the ground, from the foot of the Cross, "Forgiven. Cleansed. Redeemed."

The Great Shepherd

> *Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*
>
> Hebrews 13:20, 21

Joseph was another shepherd in the life of Israel. Joseph had eleven brothers, but, because he was his father's favorite, his brothers were jealous and decided he must die. So they threw Joseph into a pit and left him for dead. One brother, however, went back, pulled him out, and sold him for twenty pieces of silver to a group of slave traders.

The slave traders took Joseph to Egypt. Through a series of events, he became second only to Pharaoh and sat on the throne of Egypt. When a seven-year famine hit the region, Joseph's brothers went to Egypt for food, not realizing it was Joseph with whom they would deal. When he identified himself, they were terrified. But Joseph said, "Although you meant evil against me, God meant it for good, to save many people alive" (see Genesis 50:20). Then he invited his brothers and father to live in Goshen—the best part of Egypt. Even though shepherds were considered an abomination in Egypt, Joseph's brothers were protected there. Why? Because a shepherd was on the throne.

Joseph points to and speaks of Jesus Christ, a Shepherd who also was hated by his brothers, the religious leaders of His day. He, too, was a Shepherd who was slaughtered and left for dead, but who also rose out of the pit of the grave, a Shepherd who sits at the right hand of the Father, where He lives to pray for us and supply our needs while we sojourn in the Egypt of this world.

"In this world"—in this Egypt—"you will have tribulation," Jesus warned (John 16:33). The Egyptians of this world hate the shepherds, the sheep, the people of God. That is why Paul would say that all who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). Yet here's the

irony: Even though Christians are an abomination in the eyes of the world in many places, we're blessed because at the right hand of the Father sits a Greater than Joseph, our resurrected Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

The Chief Shepherd

And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

1 Peter 5:4

For forty years, Moses lived in the splendor of Pharaoh's palace. But he forsook all the pleasures of the palaces and comforts of Egypt because he cared about the people of God who were enslaved in Egypt. As a result, he ended up on the backside of the desert for forty years. It was there that the Lord called him to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let His people go.

Jesus Christ came to this planet to become one of us and to bring deliverance to us. Moses was tempted, no doubt, to avoid the hardship of desert life, even as Jesus, the chief Shepherd was tempted by Satan in the desert. But Jesus turned down Satan's offer, for, even as Moses was sent to deliver the people of Egypt, Jesus Christ was sent to take us out of Egypt into the land of promise, a place called heaven.

Even as Moses went up to Mount Pisgah, and from there saw the Promised Land before the people ever saw it, Jesus Christ has seen heaven. He came down from heaven to say to us, "Let not your heart be troubled. In My Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:1–3). "I've seen it. It's worth it. Hang in there."

Throughout Old Testament and New Testament alike, we see the Good Shepherd dying, the Great Shepherd interceding, the Chief Shepherd returning.

In other words, we see Jesus.



41 Here in chapter 41, it is as if we are looking in on a courtroom scene as God calls worshipers of other gods to state their case . . .

Isaiah 41:1

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

"Keep silent," the Lord says. "Gather your thoughts. Ready your arguments and let us debate."

Isaiah 41:2–4
Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? he gave them as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow. He pursued them, and passed safely; even by the way that he had not gone with his feet. Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.

In God's opening argument, He says He is raising up a righteous man from the east unlike any other. Some say this righteous man is Abraham, the friend of God, father of the nation Israel. Others suggest it's Cyrus, king of the Medes and Persians who will overthrow Babylon and be used by God in a very powerful way. But I suggest to you this is most probably Jesus Christ, for He is the only true righteous One, the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last (Revelation 1:11).

Isaiah 41:5
The isles saw it, and feared; the ends of the earth were afraid, drew near, and came.

The nations are coming before the throne of God.

Isaiah 41:6
They helped every one his neighbour; and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage.

"Don't be afraid," the heathen nations are saying to one another as they stand in the presence of God.

Isaiah 41:7
So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, It is ready for the sodering: and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved.

The heathen depend upon their idols as they appear before God.

Isaiah 41:8, 9
But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.

There are those who say God is through with the nation of Israel, that the promises of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel are irrelevant to the present-day situation in the Middle East. But that just isn't true. The Lord here says He will not cast Israel away and reiterates His promise in Romans 11.

When the Lord gathers the Gentiles and takes the church to heaven, Israel's blind eyes shall be opened and there will be an awakening in that nation like the world has never seen. The entire nation will be saved, which will infuriate antichrist, causing him to wage war on Israel.

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

The only courage the heathen could draw was from each other. Israel's comfort, on the other hand, came from God Himself. This promise is spoken primarily to Israel, but it has application for us, as well. "Don't be afraid. I'm with you," God says. "I'll strengthen you, help you, and uphold you." What a wonderful, glorious promise.

Isaiah 41:11

Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish.

All those who strive against Israel shall perish. In the end times, countries who wage war against Israel are on the wrong team because, according to Matthew 25, treatment of the Jewish nation during the Tribulation will determine what nations move into the Millennium following the Tribulation period.

Isaiah 41:12, 13
Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.

You may be saying, "I understand that the Lord wants to help Israel, but what about me? I'm not as good a student of the Word as I should be. I'm not as good a witness as I ought to be. There are shortcomings and points of failure and struggles in my life. Are these promises simply for people who have it all together?"

I believe the next phrase answers this question . . .

Isaiah 41:14 (a)
Fear not, thou worm Jacob . . .

"I know what you are, Jacob. You're a worm," the Lord said. "But I love you and I'm committed to you."

Isaiah 41:14 (b), 15
. . . and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff.

Here, it's as if the Lord says, "You're a worm, Israel, but I'm going to give you teeth. You're lowly, but I'm going to make you powerful." We see this even today in Israel's amazing military ability.

Isaiah 41:16–18
Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the LORD, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel. When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

Traveling through Israel today, this is exactly what you see—a reclaiming of the desert. God has surely given the Israelis the ability to make a little water go a long way, for areas that were once dry and scorched are now beautiful and blossoming.

Isaiah 41:19, 20
I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.

When the Zionists began to move back to Israel, the land seemed to be either desert or swamp. So they immediately initiated a tree-planting program. They planted eucalyptus in the swamps, which effectively drained the water. They planted pine trees in the rocky, desert areas, whose roots would break up the rocks and produce soil. All in all, since 1948, well over fifty million trees have been planted in Israel.

Isaiah 41:21–23
Produce your cause, saith the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and

shew us what shall happen: let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods: yea, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together.

To these Gentiles with their idols, God says, "Let your idols predict the future or even the past. Then you'll see if they are truly gods."

Between one-fourth and one-third of the Bible is prophetic, describing future events. Why? Because no other holy book dares to do this. God proves His own superiority by the fact that He can do what idols never can.

Isaiah 41:24, 25
Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work of nought: an abomination is he that chooseth you. I have raised up one from the north, and he shall come: from the rising of the sun shall he call upon my name: and he shall come upon princes as upon morter, and as the potter treadeth clay.

Who is this one who is coming? A man named Cyrus. And the prophecy, as seen in chapter 45, is one of the most amazing in all of the Bible.

Isaiah 41:26–29
Who hath declared from the beginning, that we may know? and beforetime, that we may say, He is righteous? yea, there is none that sheweth, yea, there is none that declareth, yea, there is none that heareth your words. The first shall say to Zion, Behold, behold them: and I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings. For I beheld, and there was no man; even among them, and there was no counsellor, that, when I asked of them, could answer a word. Behold, they are all vanity; their works are nothing: their molten images are wind and confusion.

In other words, idols are capable of producing nothing more than hot air —and even that could only be attained by burning them.



42 In contrast with the idols whose works are nothing, here in chapter 42, we see Someone who is everything.

Isaiah 42:1
Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

This is one of the most wonderful prophecies concerning the coming of Christ. When Jesus was baptized, the words were thundered from heaven, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). The Holy Spirit anointed Him at that time, empowering Him for ministry, to accomplish great things for the glory of God.

We receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us. The Holy Spirit was already in them when Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit." But then He said, "Wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes upon you, empowering you for service" (Luke 24:49).

Isaiah 42:2
He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.

This speaks of Jesus' humility and gentleness. Rather than being loud and obnoxious, rather than drawing attention to Himself, Jesus was so ordinary in the eyes of men that Judas had to identify Him to the Roman soldiers (Matthew 26:48).

Isaiah 42:3, 4
A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

Jesus doesn't smash the reed that bends under the heat of the sun. Nor does He douse the smoking flax that doesn't ignite easily. In fact, as evidenced by the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15), Jesus seems to be most interested in the person who is hurting or struggling. Over and over again, Satan will tell you that if your reed is bruised or your flax is nothing more than smoke that Jesus is really tired of you and about to give up on you. But that's a lie. Jesus doesn't break the bruised reed. He doesn't extinguish the smoking flax. You might look at yourself as hopeless. But He doesn't. He sees you as you're going to be. He's not discouraged because, although you might fail time and again, He won't.



***For topical study of Isaiah 42:1–4 entitled, "Beholding Jesus Christ," turn to page* 419.**

Isaiah 42:5, 6
Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;

As the Light of the world, Jesus would indeed be the Light to the Gentiles (John 8:12).

Isaiah 42:7
To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.

Jesus came to liberate. He came to deliver mankind from the prison of our sin. Therefore, our sins are forgiven totally. Our position is secure

eternally. In the Word, He has given us all the answers to life practically. And we know the Creator of the universe personally.

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

When Jesus came on the scene, He was able to do what He taught us we should do. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven," He said (Matthew 5:16). Without exception, every time Jesus did a miracle, the people glorified God.

It's so important that, as the Lord begins to increasingly use you in serving Him, you don't fall into the subtle temptation of touching the glory, of building a name for yourself or an identity for yourself. It will wipe you out. Perhaps the fastest way you can undo what God desires to do in your life is to start taking credit for it.

Isaiah 42:9–13
Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants thereof. Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar doth inhabit: let the inhabitants of the rock sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory unto the LORD, and declare his praise in the islands. The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies.

The first time Jesus came, He came as a Lamb that was quiet even as He was being led to slaughter (Isaiah 53:7). But when He comes again, He'll come as the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). The first time He came, He came as the sacrificing Savior. Next time, He'll come as the conquering King—and He'll roar like a lion.

Isaiah 42:14, 15

I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once. I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools.

When the Lord comes back, He'll say, "I've been quiet for a long time, but now I'm going to make things happen. I'm going to set things right."

"Fear not, little flock," Jesus said, "for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). Therefore, if things aren't right now, don't worry—they will be soon. This world is not where it's at, gang. So don't look here for a city that has foundations (Hebrews 11:10). Don't try to seek total fulfillment and complete happiness now. Realize that not until Jesus comes back will things be truly right.

We're pilgrims here and life is short. But Jesus is coming back and He's going to come with the roar of a lion. When He does, things will be right in all of the world, throughout the entire universe, for all the ages. If you can grasp this, it will take all of the pressure off. If your living room doesn't get painted, you'll realize that's okay. If you don't get the promotion, you'll realize that's okay, too, because when the Lord comes back, everything will be right.

Isaiah 42:16–20

And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them. They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed, that trust in graven images, that say to the molten images, Ye are our gods. Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the LORD's servant? Seeing many things, but thou observest not; opening the ears, but he heareth not.

In this passage, Isaiah is no longer talking about God's servant, Jesus, but His servant, the nation Israel. Israel has been given so much, but she's not seeing. She's not hearing. Thus, she is indicted for being a people who is blind and deaf.

Isaiah 42:21–25
The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable. But this is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses: they are for a prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith, Restore. Who among you will give ear to this? who will hearken and hear for the time to come? Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the LORD, he against whom we have sinned? for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law. Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart.

Of His people, the Lord says, "They're captives. They're in bondage. They're ensnared. I've chastened them. I've poured out fire upon them. But still they don't respond."

Like Israel, what will God have to do to finally get us to see that we need to obey His Word? If you're at a place where you're wondering why you're in bondage or why things aren't working out for you, could it be that there is a point of disobedience or stubbornness in your life? As He did with Israel, God loves you enough to allow the fire of His chastening to come upon you in order that you might return to Him.

BEHOLDING JESUS CHRIST

A Topical Study of ISAIAH 42:1–4

"Behold My servant," God proclaims through His prophet, Isaiah. Who is this servant we are told to behold? We can speak with absolute certainty regarding His identity because, in Matthew 12, these four verses are quoted and applied to Jesus.

The setting was this: The Pharisees and religious leaders took counsel to destroy Jesus because they considered Him a lawbreaker for healing a man on the Sabbath. Rather than arguing with them, however, Jesus withdrew to a remote area. The crowds soon heard where He was and flocked to Him. Seeing the needs of the people in the crowd, Jesus ministered to them and began to heal them. To those He healed, He said, "Tell no man what you have received. Don't make a big deal of this." Matthew said He spoke this way to fulfill the prophecy we see before us in Isaiah.

"Behold, My Servant." It's an exhortation we are given throughout the Word. The word, "behold," doesn't mean to quickly glance at. Rather it means to scrutinize, to fix one's eyes upon, to study carefully. In this day, we are prone to reach for books that give ten steps to this or eight principles for that. But the Lord has a different agenda . . .

> *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 3:18

When you look at the Lord with openness, you are changed and, in the process, become more like Jesus. When you look at Him, you become more like Him—and suddenly, you don't need ten steps to get out of depression or even eight steps for a magnificent marriage. If you're becoming like the Lord, those things take care of themselves. That's what Moses discovered. Up on the mountain for forty days, he beheld the Lord. When he came down, the

people told him his face was glowing. Being in the presence of God caused him to become a reflector of the glory and light of God (Exodus 34).

"You are the light of the world," Jesus said (Matthew 5:14). But before that, He said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). That means we are simply reflectors of His light. We don't have light in and of ourselves. But, like the moon, we reflect the Son. And, as we spend time with Him, beholding Him, learning about Him, His light bounces off us even as it did Moses.

But there can be a problem. That is, sometimes the sun can't shine directly on the moon because the earth is in the way. So too, if we allow the things of the world, the things of this age, the things of this life to become a priority, we won't reflect the light of Jesus properly. When the world gets in the way, His light is eclipsed. But if we behold Him, we are changed from glory to even greater glory. That's why David declared that the one thing he desired of the Lord, the one thing he would seek after was to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple (Psalm 27:4).

Please note with me five characteristics of this One we are told to behold . . .

He Is Appointed

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect . . .

Isaiah 42:1 (a)

According to Acts 4:12, there is no other name under heaven whereby man must be saved. There is only One who has been elected and anointed. Buddha and the rest told us what not to do—and much of what they said was wise. The problem, however, is that if we do the things they told us not to do, there is no solution, no provision for our sins and mistakes. Only One could, only One would die for my sins. That is Jesus Christ. Confucius and company told us what we should do, but they don't give us the power to do it. Only Jesus died for our sins, rose again, and by His Holy Spirit comes into our lives and gives us the power to do what He told us we should. That's why He's the only elect, the only appointed One.

He Is Anointed

. . . I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

Isaiah 42:1 (b)

Jesus is not only appointed, but He's also anointed, for at His baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:16). From that time, Jesus went about ministering miraculously and preaching persuasively.

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was indwelt with the Holy Spirit all the time He was growing up. But He did not receive the "coming upon"—the empowering and anointing—of the Spirit for service until He was thirty years old and ready to begin His public ministry. If you're born again, when you became a Christian, the Holy Spirit was placed inside of you and resides within you. But Jesus would tell His disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 1:8). Then they would be truly ready to serve the Lord in ministry.

How do we receive this Spirit? In Luke 11:13, Jesus said, "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask."

It's really that simple. Just say, "Lord, I need the baptism of, the coming upon, the empowering of the Holy Spirit." Pray in faith and embrace it with the hands of faith.

Philippians 2 says that Jesus Christ, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God but emptied Himself and made Himself of no reputation. He took on Himself the form of a Servant and became obedient to death. Thus, the miracles Jesus did, the healings He ministered, the witness He gave were not done by His own power. For years, I didn't know this. I thought everything Jesus did He did simply because He was Jesus. But Philippians 2 makes it clear that when He came to this planet, Jesus became a Man just like me and you. It was as He prayed to the Father and was empowered by the Spirit that He was able to do the things He did. Thus, He's

a perfect example for us. He was empowered by the Spirit just as we must be. He was dependent on the Father just as we must be.

Jesus was anointed to bring justice to the Gentiles. Keep in mind that, in Jesus' day, Gentiles were despised to such a degree that Jews would travel two hundred miles out of their way to avoid the territory where Gentiles lived. Yet what did Jesus do? Anointed by the Spirit, He brought justice—or help—to all kinds of Gentiles. That's what the anointing of the Spirit does. It motivates and moves one to love.

The fruit of the Spirit is not prophesying loudly, performing miracles noticeably, or speaking in tongues constantly. The fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22). Of this fruit, Paul writes, "If I have the tongues of men and angels, if I have faith to move mountains, if I give my body to be burned in martyrdom, but have not love, I am nothing" (see 1 Corinthians 13). The proof of your being anointed, baptized, and walking in the Holy Ghost is love. Jesus showed it when He went to the Gentiles. He demonstrated it when He touched the lepers. He proved it when He died for me.

He Is Approachable

> *He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.*
>
> Isaiah 42:2

If we were even remotely instrumental in feeding 5,000 people with a couple loaves of bread, in raising the dead, in healing lepers, or in opening blind eyes, we would write books, produce movies, and go on endless speaking tours. Not Jesus. "Don't make a big deal about this," He said. And every time He did a miracle, the people who saw it glorified not Him but His Father. Yes, He was appointed by the Father. Yes, He was anointed by the Spirit. But He was humble before men. And that is what made Him approachable.

Superstars today are unapproachable if for no other reason than the bodyguards that surround them. But Jesus, the Creator of the Universe, was born in a manger—and anyone can come into a barn. You might never get an appointment with the popular and powerful people of our day, but you can always come into the presence of Jesus (Hebrews 4:16).

He Is Affirming

> *A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.*
>
> Isaiah 42:3

Many reeds grew in Galilee—but under the heat of the sun, they would often wilt. Then they'd be stepped on and broken. That's just like us. We spring up—but when fiery trials come our way, we begin to wilt and then finally collapse. I had a football coach in high school who, when I fainted on the field one time, looked down at me and barked, "Courson, get tough or get out." All too often, I'm afraid we think of the Lord saying that to us. But our text tells us otherwise, for a bruised reed He shall not break.

Flax doesn't ignite very well. Mostly, it smolders. That, too, is like us. We know we're supposed to burn brightly for the Lord—yet usually we're lucky just to smolder. We think Jesus must be ready to come with a big bucket and douse us altogether. But that's not what our text says, for a smoking flax He shall not quench. Why? Because He knows our frame and remembers we are but dust (Psalm 103). Therefore, I am convinced that we expect more from ourselves than God expects from us. When we don't reach our goals, execute our plans, or fulfill our promises, we get down on ourselves. But God doesn't because He knows we're dusty, bruised reeds and smoking flaxes. And He loves us nonetheless.

He Is Able

He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

Isaiah 42:4

I get so discouraged with myself. I think, "Lord, my prayer life is not close to what I know it should be. My study of the Word is not what it could be. My witnessing is not what it ought to be." But Jesus doesn't get discouraged with me. Why? Because He knows He will complete the good work He began in me (Philippians 1:6). "My sheep are in My hand, no man shall pluck them out," He says (John 10:28). Jesus is not discouraged and He won't fail because He has you in His hand and on His heart.

It is important for me to spend time thinking about Jesus because when I consider His attributes, something wonderful begins to happen within me. That is, as I see Jesus in His Word, meditate on His character, and study His personality—as I read the Gospels and behold the Lamb, I become more like Him. Therefore, how I encourage you to make beholding Him your priority—for those who behold Him will not only fall in love with Him, but become more like Him.

43 Isaiah 43:1, 2

But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

"I'm going to be with you, Israel," the Lord declared. And indeed He has been—through waters, through fires, through holocausts, through tragedies. King Frederick of Prussia had a debate in his court. He wanted to know if the

Bible was really true. Taking the case of the atheist was Voltaire. Taking the side of the Christians was a Moravian missionary named Count von Zinzendorf. The count stood before Frederick and said, "I can prove the validity of the Bible in two words."

"Oh?" said Frederick. "What are those two words."

"The Jew," Count von Zinzendorf answered.

The Jews are truly a miraculous people—for even without a homeland for almost 2,000 years, they retained their identity, heritage, language, customs, and religion.

Isaiah 43:3–7
For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daugh ters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

"I will gather you and bring you back," the Lord says to His people. We see this happening even now. In the year 1900 when the Zionist movement began to take hold in the area of Palestine, a group of Ethiopian Jews began to make their way north to Israel. When asked why, they said that something stirred in their hearts, calling them home.

Isaiah 43:8–11
Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears. Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and shew us former things? let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, It is truth. Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen:

that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.

In Acts 4:12, we read that there is no other name under heaven whereby men must be saved. I'm glad our Father keeps it very simple for people like me who can get confused so easily.

Isaiah 43:12
I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God.

Here, God says, "I revealed Myself to you when there was no other god among you."

If you don't see God, don't hear from God, don't know God, could it be because there's a strange god in your life? Is it because there is some other passion or priority that is keeping you from seeing the true God clearly? Other gods, other priorities will obscure your vision of the true and living God. They will cloud your spiritual perception very definitely.

Isaiah 43:13–17
Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it? Thus saith the LORD, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships. I am the LORD, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King. Thus saith the LORD, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters; Which bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power; they shall lie down together, they shall not rise: they are extinct, they are quenched as tow.

With access to the Persian Gulf by way of the Euphrates, Babylon took pride in her naval capabilities. And yet it would be the Euphrates itself that would provide the Medes and Persians a way into her heavily walled city.

So too, the Egyptians no doubt knew that the Israelites were sitting ducks before the Lord parted the waters of the Red Sea and allowed them to cross (Exodus 14). Thus, it is as if the Lord is reminding His people that, even as the Red Sea was no obstacle for Him, the Euphrates River would not deter Him.

Isaiah 43:18–21
Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen. This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.

Through Isaiah, God says to His people, "Even though you've done things that are amiss, remember not the former things. I'm not going to concentrate on your problems and failures. I'm going to do something new." That's always the way of our God—looking ahead. Our enemy always looks back. Satan will invariably cause you to reflect or remember the past. Our Father, on the other hand, always fixes our eyes on the things that are ahead because He's always doing something new (Lamentations 3:23; Mark 2:22).

Isaiah 43:22–28
But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings; neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense. Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified. Thy first father hath sinned, and

thy teachers have transgressed against me. Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary, and have given Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches.

"You have not honored Me," the Lord says through Isaiah. "Therefore, remind Me why I should bless you."

In Exodus 32, as God was about to destroy the people of Israel because of their constant complaining and sinning, Moses said, "Lord, You promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their seed would go on forever. Remember the covenant You made with our fathers." And we read that the Lord changed His plan because Moses quoted the promise of the Word.

Would God have broken the promise He made if Moses hadn't quoted it? No, because who put that heart of intercession in Moses in the first place? God put it into Moses that it might be through Moses that He would have reason not to do what judgment demanded. Quoting God's promises back to Him is a wonderful way to pray—for it provides an open door for Him to do what He planned to do all along.

Just as the Father says, "Put Me in remembrance," the Son says, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). You see, when we spend time in communion with Him at His Table, being reminded of the great work Jesus did on our behalf in the past emboldens us to claim His promises for the future.

44 Isaiah 44:1–4

Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus sa ith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.

Here, the Lord is encouraging Israel—here called Jacob and *Jesurun,* or "righteous nation," to not be afraid, that He would pour out the water of His Spirit upon a dry land. We know from Joel 2 that, as the Tribulation period comes to a close, the Spirit will be poured out in such a way that perhaps millions and millions of people will turn to the true and living God in that great and terrible day.

This outpouring was previewed on the Day of Pentecost, but it was not completely fulfilled for Joel 2 speaks of signs in the sky, of the moon turning to blood, and various symbols associated with the Tribulation period. But it also speaks to us personally, for the Lord promises that He will pour water upon he who is thirsty and blessing upon his offspring. I like that because I need the Spirit to be poured upon me and upon my family.

To whom does the Lord pour out His Spirit? Simply to those who are thirsty. And, in that, is a real key. We overcomplicate and overmystify the work of the Spirit in many cases when, in reality, the prerequisite for an outpouring of the Spirit upon your life is simply to say, "Lord, I'm thirsting for more of You." That's why Jesus said the woman who acknowledges her thirst is blessed, why the man who admits his hunger will be filled (Matthew 5:6).

If you're not thirsty, if you don't have a desire to experience a fuller measure of the Spirit flowing through your life, how do you become thirsty? Ask a jogger or a basketball player. If you start expending energy and start sweating a bit, you'll find yourself feeling thirsty real fast. The key is to get out and start ministering. Start sharing, loving, and caring—for it is when you're in the place of loving your neighbor, of sharing with your friends and family, of witnessing to your coworker, of expending energy, that you begin to thirst for more of the Lord.

Isaiah 44:5
One shall say, I am the LORD's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and surname himself by the name of Israel.

In that day, when Israel experiences revival in the Tribulation period, when the Spirit is poured out upon Israel, no longer will her people be

agnostic as eighty percent of the Jewish nation is today. They'll call themselves the Lord's. They'll remember their heritage and roots and take upon themselves the name of the true and living God.

Isaiah 44:6
Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.

In Revelation 1:8, we hear Jesus declaring that He is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. Here, we see God declaring that He is the first and the last. This either means that there are two firsts and two lasts—or that Jesus is God.

Isaiah 44:7, 8
And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them. Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.

As proof of His deity and supremacy, God does what no other god dares to do: prophesy the future. And yet even this didn't keep His people from being seduced by idols.

Isaiah 44:9–17 (a)
They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together. The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the

strength of his arms: yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth: he drinketh no water, and is faint. The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kin-dleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it . . .

The heathen cultures surrounding Israel and even people within the borders of Israel had fallen into the practice of idolatry. They would cut down a tree and from it build a fire both to bake bread and provide warmth. With the leftover piece of wood, they would carve an idol to worship. "Does that really make sense?" God asks.

What about us? "Little children, keep yourselves from idols," John would warn (1 John 5:21). There can be a tendency in each of us to get sucked into the stupidity of idolatry because an idol is anything that has a higher priority in our lives than the Lord.

"Thou shalt have no other Gods before Me," God thundered from Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20:3). Are there gods in our lives that have a higher priority than the Lord? Here's a simple way to find out: What do you think about in your leisure time when you're not focused on a specific task or conversation? Whatever it is that dominates your thoughts is the god in your life. Is it a relationship—a guy you wish you could date or a girl you wish you could marry? Is it your career—wondering how you can get ahead? Is it your ministry—wondering how you can reach more people? Is it your body—how

to get in better shape? Is it your house—what project you want to do next? Where does your mind naturally go when it's free to wander? That, in reality, is what has priority in your life. That is the god of your life.

This is a sobering thought, an important assessment we need to make.

Isaiah 44:17 (b)–20
. . . and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god. They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand. And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?

Not only is there stupidity in idolatry, but there is tragedy, as well, because of its inability to deliver. When tragedy strikes, as it will, you can go to your closet and say to your wardrobe, "Deliver me," but it won't be able to. You can say to your car, "Deliver me," but it can't. You can say to the possessions and creativity in your house, "Deliver me," but they won't provide the deliverance you need.

Idols can't deliver you, but they can and will dehumanize you . . .

> But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.
>
> Psalm 115:3–8

A person becomes like that which he worships. When we worship the Lord, we become more like Him (2 Corinthians 3:18). Conversely, if we worship an idol, we'll become like that idol. How can you have victory over the idols that seem to dominate and control your life?

We see the answer in 1 Samuel 5 . . .

Having captured the ark of the covenant, which represented the presence of the Lord, the Philistines brought it into the temple of their god, Dagon. Upon its arrival, Dagon fell on his face before it. The priests propped up their god, only to discover the next day that it had fallen again—this time, breaking its head and hands. Realizing the presence of the true God their fish-god couldn't dwell in the same place at the same time, the Philistines packed up the ark, put it on a wooden cart, and sent it back to Israel.

From this, we see that the way to have victory over the Dagons in our lives is not to try to pull them down or push them over, but simply to bring in the presence of God because where God's presence is, Dagon naturally falls. The key to overcoming darkness is not to yell at it or fight it. The key is simply to turn on the light. The way to have victory over the idols that have set themselves up in our hearts is to daily bring the presence of God into our lives. As we spend time with the Lord in the light of His Word, Dagon will fall.

Ignore morning devotions, church attendance, Bible study—and Dagon will stand strong in your life. But bring in the presence of the Lord as you worship with His people, as you spend time in His Word, as you worship Him day by day, and you'll be free.

Isaiah 44:21
Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me.

Even to these people who are ensnared by idols, even to these people struggling with sin, the Lord says, "I have not forgotten you."

Isaiah 44:22

I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.

Notice that the Lord doesn't say, "I *will* blot out your sins and I *will* redeem you." He says, "I *have* blotted out your sins. I *have* redeemed you." The work is already done. I don't have to try to merit or earn it. Instead, I can just rejoice in it.

That's the good news of the gospel. In Matthew 12:31, Jesus said, "All manner of sin shall be forgiven all men except the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit—ignoring His tug on your heart to turn to the Lord." That is the only sin that will send a man to hell. Every other sin has been cleansed and forgiven. This is what makes evangelism so exciting. We can go to people and proclaim the good news that their sins are forgiven, that God neither records nor remembers their sin.

Isaiah 44:23
Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.

Throughout the Word, why does the Lord exhort creation to praise Him? In John 1:12, we read that Jesus came unto His own—speaking of all creation—but His own—speaking of humanity—received Him not. Creation did indeed receive Him. When He stepped out of the boat, the water supported Him. When He told the winds to be still, they hushed. "Tell Your disciples to quiet down," the Pharisees said.

"If they did, the rocks would break out in song," Jesus said (Luke 19:40).

All of creation is ready and willing to submit to Jesus Christ except humanity. Mankind is the only part of creation that folds its arms. May this not be true of us.

Isaiah 44:24–26
Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by

myself; That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; That confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof:

The Lord says, "I am the Lord. I make all things and I frustrate the spiritual practitioners, the liars, all of the people who come on the scene claiming to have ability in spiritual matters."

Isaiah 44:27, 28
That saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers: That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.

This prophecy concerning Cyrus which continues on in chapter 45 is one of the most astounding in all of the Old Testament. It predicts that a man named Cyrus would come on the scene, saying that Jerusalem would be built and the foundations of the temple would be laid. At this time, Jerusalem was already built and the temple was standing tall, so what relevancy could this have to anything, the people must have wondered. But 200 years later, a man named Cyrus did indeed appear on the scene as king of the Persian empire. And it would be this Cyrus who would give the order for the Jews to rebuild the city and temple the Babylonians had destroyed.



45 Isaiah 45:1–4

Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron:

And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me:

With her three-hundred-fifty-feet-high walls that were over eighty feet thick and interspersed with two hundred seventy watchtowers, with her granaries that stored a twenty-year supply of food, and with the Euphrates flowing right through the city, Babylon was thought to be invincible. But a Persian king named Cyrus determined that the only way to control that part of the world would be to destroy Babylon itself. So he launched a siege against Babylon. Perhaps to mock the Persians' audacity, Babylon's king, Belshazzar, called his princes and lords together for a party. Unbeknownst to all of them, however, Cyrus had diverted the Euphrates River several miles upstream in order to use its dry riverbed as a path under the city wall. At the very moment the mission was launched, a hand appeared on the wall of Belshazzar's palace, writing the words *Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin* (Daniel 5:25).

When the prophet, Daniel, was called to decipher the writing, he translated it as "You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting." Just then, Cyrus and his men entered the city and Babylon—along with her vast treasures fell—exactly as Isaiah had prophesied two hundred years earlier.

Isaiah 45:5–7
I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.

On the eve of their being carried into captivity, God says He has plans for His people they wouldn't understand. The Hebrew word translated "evil" is *ra,* or "catastrophe." This means that the Lord is the One who at the very

least allows, if not creates, certain situations in my life that to me might seem unsettling or catastrophic.

Too often, we blame Satan for the wrong in our lives. But, as we know from Job 1, Satan can't do a single thing to us unless it is allowed by the Lord. Therefore, if I complain about any given situation, I am actually rebelling against God who is on the throne allowing it or even possibly creating it. I need to remember that my Father not only sends blessings my way but also pours me from vessel to vessel to purify me (Jeremiah 48:11). As unsettling as this may be, the process is necessary in order that He might accomplish His purposes in me that will have repercussions into eternity.

Isaiah 45:8, 9
Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it. Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?

In itself, clay is relatively worthless. But in the hands of the potter with a picture in his mind of what he wants to create, it can become something of beauty. Do you ever feel like you're going in circles, that you're being pushed and poked and prodded? If you do, consider yourself blessed because it means the Master Potter is transforming you into a vessel He can use. The Lord knows what He's doing, so don't fight against it because if you fight against God and "win," you lose. If you demand your way and God finally says, "Okay, have your way," you're in trouble.

Most of the time, people fight against God because they mistakenly think He is going to do less than the best for them. If we really believed that God only wants to do things that are exceedingly abundantly above all we can ask or think, that His plan for us is to make the worthless clay of our lives into something beautiful and useful, we wouldn't fight against Him.

Isaiah 45:10, 11

Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begettest thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth? Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me.

"Command ye Me," the Lord says. And, throughout Scripture, there have been men who have done just that . . .



***For topical study of Isaiah 45:11 entitled "Command Ye Me," turn to page* 430.**

Isaiah 45:12
I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded.

As our understanding of the universe grows, so does our understanding of God, because He stretches it with His hands.

Isaiah 45:13
I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts.

In Isaiah 44:28, the Lord called Cyrus His shepherd. But Cyrus was not simply a hireling, as described in John 10, because, in letting the people of Israel return to their land, there was nothing for him to gain.

Isaiah 45:14–17
Thus saith the LORD, The labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall

make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God. Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour. They shall be ashamed, and also confounded, all of them: they shall go to confusion together that are makers of idols. But Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end.

The Lord, who raised up Cyrus as a deliverer for Israel, now reiterates His promise to her that she would be saved. As Paul would make clear in Romans 11, God is not through with Israel. She has a key role to play in the ages to come.

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

In Genesis 1:1, we read that when God created the earth, it was without form and void or literally, created in vain. Does this verse contradict the Genesis account? No, for, along with many others, I believe that between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, Satan was cast out of heaven—which resulted in cataclysmic changes on earth.

The God who created—then recreated—the earth is the same God who promises His people that He has not forsaken them, that they will be saved. Therefore, His capability to do so is beyond question.

Isaiah 45:19
I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.

"Ask and it shall be given. Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened," Jesus declared (Matthew 7:7). Yet there are things I've asked for and didn't receive. Why? "Ask and it shall be given," Jesus said—but He

didn't say what would be given. "For every one that asketh receiveth," Jesus said (Matthew 7:8). What does he receive? Whatever is best. Anyone who asks, seeks, or knocks will indeed get the very best. It might not be what you think is best, but it is what your Father knows to be best. If I don't ask, I'll never know if I really did get the best. If I do ask, however, I will receive God's best. That is why it's never vain to seek the Lord.

Isaiah 45:20–22
Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save. Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

When the children of Israel were bitten by poisonous snakes, the Lord instructed Moses and Aaron to make a brass pole and to place a brass snake upon it. Then they were to tell the congregation that whoever looked at the snake on the pole would be saved (Numbers 21). Brass is the metal of judgment. A serpent is a symbol of sin. Therefore, it was a picture of Jesus Christ, who bore the judgment for our sins on the Cross. If we simply look to Him and believe in Him, we'll be saved from Satan's poisonous sting of eternal damnation.

- What do you have to lose by looking to the Lord?
  Nothing.
- What do you have to gain?
  Eternity.

Isaiah 45:23–25
I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, in the

LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.

"Unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess," God declares.

"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father," Paul would echo (Philippians 2:10, 11).

COMMAND YE ME

A Topical Study of ISAIAH 45:11

This text is small but significant. It's one of those jewels that will reward those who dig it out of the rich soil of Scripture and polish it as they consider its message. It is a powerful promise, a tremendous verse because, in it, the Lord tells us that we are to inquire of Him about the future and give commandment to Him concerning the present.

Now, I understand that the Lord commands me. I have no problem with that. It seems logical and understandable. But for God to say to His people, "You command Me," seems incredible. What is our Father declaring when He tells us that we are to command Him?

He is not saying what so many seem to be propounding today in the "faith movement." That is, "Whatever you want, if you claim it in faith, it will come to pass," for that theology makes us God and it makes God our slave. In other words, we decide what we want, when we want it and how we want it. Then we simply tell God how it should be done and He is obligated to obey.

What God is saying, I believe, is that, knowing the Word and knowing the heart of our Father, we are to come before Him with such assurance and confidence that our prayers take on the flavor of a command. That is why Jesus said, "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7).

In Old Testament history, there were men of God who learned this lesson, who learned to command the Lord in this way . . .

Joshua

As the Israelites waged war against the Amorites, Scripture says more Amorites were killed by the hailstones the Lord rained down on them than by the swords of Joshua and his men. But when the sun began to set, Joshua realized the Amorites would escape under cover of darkness. So he looked up at the sun and, in front of all Israel, said, "Sun, stand still." Scriptures say the Lord hearkened unto the voice of Joshua and the sun did indeed stand still (Joshua 10:11–14).

Joshua didn't pray. Instead, he spoke expectantly and commanded with absolute certainty. Would you have done that? The only way I would have tried it would be if no one was around to see me fail! It's one thing for us to experiment in the arena of faith as long as nobody's watching. But Joshua did this in front of the whole nation. And it's as if the Lord said, "I like that!" So He hearkened to the voice of a mere man.

Jesus taught us the same thing when He said if we have faith the size of a mustard seed and say to the mountain, "Be removed," it will be removed (Matthew 17:20). Notice that He didn't say if you *hope* the mountain will be removed or if you *pray* that the mountain will be removed, but only if you *speak* to the mountain will it be removed.

Why does Jesus want us to command verbally? Because Romans 10:9, 10 teaches us that although faith is first found in the heart, it is released through the mouth. To be saved we must believe in our heart that Jesus died for our sin and rose again and we must confess with our mouth that He is Lord.

Elijah

Elijah was another man who commanded the Lord. In 1 Kings 17, we read that he walked into the court of Israel's king Ahab and announced that it wouldn't rain for three years. After three years, Elijah prayed seven times with intensity until a little cloud the size of a man's fist appeared. At that point, he turned to his servant and said, "Run for your life. It's going to rain!" And it did just that (1 Kings 17).

In writing about this incident, James says Elijah was a man "subject to like passions as we are" (5:17). In other words, he was just like us. He wasn't a spiritual superstar. He simply knew the secret of praying and commanding.

In Ezekiel 22, we read that, although the Lord was looking for someone who would stand in the gap to pray that judgment would not be poured upon Israel, no one was found. Consequently, the Lord didn't work the way He had desired.

> *Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the LORD.*
>
> Ezekiel 36:37, 38

Because God is committed to maturing His people for the ages to come, He won't work capriciously. Rather, He will work when His people pray expectantly. Will we ever truly be that kind of people? Revelation 22 gives us the answer . . .

> *And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*
>
> Revelation 22:17

The invitation for anyone who's thirsty to come is given by both the Spirit and the bride. The Spirit and the bride are working together, inviting people to come and drink of the waters of salvation. It's not simply God or man working independently. It's the Spirit and bride working together and seeing things happen. That's how God has determined to work.

Therefore, if your seventeen-year-old son is addicted to alcohol, don't just say, "I hope he enlists in Alcoholics Anonymous someday." Command the Lord, knowing His heart is that he not be in bondage. If your parents are not saved, command the Lord, knowing it is His will that none should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). I can't command the Lord to give me a new car because I have no biblical grounds to make such audacious claims. But I can command Him in humility and with expectance that my kids would walk in His way because that's His heart.

Don't limit your ministry. Don't shortchange your family. Don't put barriers around your job. Speak words of faith verbally in the court of Ahab concerning what you know is on the heart of God.

May God help us to be those who command Him as He has invited us to do, realizing that it's preparing us to become those who depend upon Him and work with Him for the ages to come.



46

Chapter 46 is an indictment against idolatry.

Isaiah 46:1, 2
Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: your carriages were heavy loaden; they are a burden to the weary beast. They stoop, they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but themselves are gone into captivity.

Bel was the Babylonian god, Baal—ruler of all other Babylonian deities. Nebo was the Babylonian god of science and learning. Worshipers of these

and other gods would transport them in carts pulled by oxen, horses, or donkeys.

Isaiah 46:3, 4
Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb: And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.

Rather than using beasts of burden to carry His people, the true and living God carries them Himself all the days of their lives.

Isaiah 46:5
To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like?

Throughout history, people have tried to liken God to various beings. The Greeks said, "If I were God, I'd live on Mount Olympus, be all-powerful, and seduce pretty maidens." So that's what their gods did all day long: throw thunderbolts and chase women.

In other cultures, people said, "If I were God, I'd soar through the sky," so they made their idols like eagles. People make gods out of what they think it would be fun to be. But the problem is, those gods become burdens. If your god is pleasure, you will be burdened with lust. If your god is money, you'll be in bondage to greed. If your god is your intellect, you'll be weighed down by pride.

Isaiah 46:6, 7
They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, and hire a goldsmith; and he maketh it a god: they fall down, yea, they worship. They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove: yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble.

Idols are worthless in the day of trial and tragedy. Not so the true and living God.

Isaiah 46:8, 9
Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me,

Throughout Scripture, God calls Old and New Testament believers alike to remember the work He has already done on their behalf . . .

> And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.
>
> Deuteronomy 5:15

> Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth;
>
> 1 Chronicles 16:11, 12

> Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel:
>
> 2 Timothy 2:8

Seeing God's hand in the past encourages us to seek His face in the present.

Isaiah 46:10, 11
Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have

spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.

The Persian ensign was an eagle. Therefore, the eagle here speaks of Cyrus, the Persian king who would conquer Babylon.

Isaiah 46:12, 13
Hearken unto me, ye stouthearted, that are far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory.

"My salvation shall not tarry," the Lord declared through Isaiah. He said the same thing concerning the vision He gave to Habakkuk, another of His prophets . . .

For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

Habakkuk 2:3

The Lord's timing is perfect. As seen in the next chapter, His delivery of His people was nearer than they could have imagined.



47 Isaiah 47 deals with the destruction of Babylon who, at this time was a power just coming into prominence. Approximately 150 years after this prophecy was penned, Babylon would fall by the hand of Cyrus, leader of the Medes and Persians.

Isaiah 47:1–3
Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon, sit on the ground: there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate. Take the

millstones, and grind meal: uncover thy locks, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers. Thy nakedness shall be uncovered, yea, thy shame shall be seen: I will take vengeance, and I will not meet thee as a man.

Babylon is referred to as a virgin not because of her moral qualities but because she had never been defeated by any of her enemies. Yet here, the Lord says she will indeed be defeated and humiliated.

Isaiah 47:4, 5
As for our redeemer, the LORD of hosts is his name, the Holy One of Israel. Sit thou silent, and get thee into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called, The lady of kingdoms.

Why would Babylon be dealt with so severely? Verse 6 tells us.

Isaiah 47:6
I was wroth with my people, I have polluted mine inheritance, and given them into thine hand: thou didst shew them no mercy; upon the ancient hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke.

Babylon was used as an instrument in the hand of God to chasten His people. Because of her continued practice of idolatry, Judah was carried into captivity for seventy years by the Babylonians. Yet the Babylonians showed no mercy, even to the elderly. And I think in this is a very important word for us. That is, we must not think it is our role or our place to mete out judgment because all too often, we will be harsher and more brutal than the Lord would be.

The sorry tendency of humanity is to ask that mercy be shown to ourselves but judgment shown to others. Why? Because the sins of others always look so much worse than our own sins. After all, we know the reason, the background, the excuses for our own sin—but think no one else has any reason to sin.

Isaiah 47:7–9

And thou saidst, I shall be a lady for ever: so that thou didst not lay these things to thy heart, neither didst remember the latter end of it. Therefore hear now this, thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children: But these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood: they shall come upon thee in their perfection for the multitude of thy sorceries, and for the great abundance of thine enchantments.

As so many kingdoms before and after her, Babylon thought herself invincible. Yet in a single night, she fell to the invasion of Cyrus and was thus rendered both widowed and childless due to loss of king and loss of life.

Isaiah 47:10, 11
For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me. Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know.

The Babylonians thought they were on top of every situation, that no one saw them. The atheist still holds this view. Atheists claim not to see God—but the reason is that they don't find God any more than a thief finds a policeman. "You shall seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart," the Lord declare (Jeremiah 29:13).

Isaiah 47:12–14
Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail. Thou art wearied in the multi tude of thy counsels. Let now the

astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.

Idols, crystals, tarot cards, and astrology will all be worthless in the day of judgment.

Isaiah 47:15
Thus shall they be unto thee with whom thou hast laboured, even thy merchants, from thy youth: they shall wander every one to his quarter; none shall save thee.

The fortune-tellers and wizards who had freely plied their trade in Babylon would flee at her fall.



48 Whereas chapter 47 dealt with God's judgment against Babylon, chapter 48 deals with God's grace toward Israel . . .

Isaiah 48:1 (a)
Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel . . .

Abraham was the father of Israel, the first Jew. Called from Ur of the Chaldees, God made a new nation from him. Abraham had a son named Isaac, who had a son named Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons who became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob's name, which means "heel snatcher," or "supplanter," was appropriate because he was one who lived by his wits—conning and tricking people. But one night, seeing no way out of his circumstances, he wrestled all night with the angel of the Lord, saying, "I will not let You go until You bless me."

In the morning, the Lord said, "You're no longer Jacob, but you're going to be called Israel, which means 'governed by God.' You'll no longer rely on your schemes and tricks but by clinging to Me" (Genesis 32).

How I want to be more Israel-like and less Jacob-like. Oh, how much Jacob is still in us. We rely upon our own abilities and personalities, our own plans and principles. But, like Jacob, we need to come to the end of ourselves and say, "Lord, *You* govern me."

Isaiah 48:1 (b)–4
. . . and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the LORD, and make mention of the God of Is rael, but not in truth, nor in righteousness. For they call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel; The LORD of hosts is his name. I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass. Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass;

"You call yourself Israel and claim to be living in the city of God, but your head is hard and your neck is stiff," God says. These people carried the name "Governed by God," but in reality, they weren't living that way. So too, lots of people carry the name Christian, or "little Christ," but don't act like Jesus.

Isaiah 48:5–8
I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I shewed it thee: lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them. Thou hast heard, see all this; and will not ye declare it? I have shewed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, and thou didst not know them. They are created now, and not from the beginning; even before the day when thou heardest them not; lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them. Yea, thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not; yea, from that time that thine ear was not opened: for I knew that thou wouldest

deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb.

God's people had been so seduced by idolatry that God said, "I'm speaking prophetically so that when events unfold, you won't think they happened according to your idols' predictions."

Isaiah 48:9–11
For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another.

"I deferred My anger toward My people for My name's sake," the Lord declares. "I wanted to refine you in the furnace of affliction, but found no silver." What a tragic indictment for God to level at His people: "You wouldn't let the fiery furnace, the hard trials purify you. Therefore, no silver was found."

Sometimes we wonder why we face one affliction after another. Could it be it's because we're not learning our lesson? Could it be that we're so stubborn that the Lord has to continually take us through the fire of affliction? Has the Lord been speaking to you about some issue? Is there something the Lord has told you needs to be changed but about which you persistently say, "Maybe later, Lord"? We all go through fiery trials and many are absolutely mandated. But, as we watch the people of Israel, we see that other trials are the result of our own stubbornness concerning lessons God wants to teach.

Isaiah 48:12 (a)
Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called . . .

Linking both the names Jacob and Israel together, it's as if the Lord says to His people, "I know what you are in the flesh—you're Jacob. But I see your potential—you're Israel."

Isaiah 48:12 (b), 13
. . . I am he; I am the first, I also am the last. Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together.

The One who created heaven and earth would surely have the means to deliver His people.

Isaiah 48:14, 15
All ye, assemble yourselves, and hear; which among them hath declared these things? The LORD hath loved him: he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans. I, even I, have spoken; yea, I have called him: I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous.

The immediate reference would have been to Cyrus. But the ultimate fulfillment would be found in Jesus.

Isaiah 48:16
Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord GOD, and his Spirit, hath sent me.

Verse 16 is one of the great proof texts of the Trinity. Who was the One who was sent? Jesus. Therefore, here we see God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, and God the Son.

Isaiah 48:17–19
Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go. O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea: Thy seed also had been as the sand, and the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof; his name should not have been cut off nor destroyed from before me.

From the days in the Garden of Eden until the present, Satan's greatest lie has been that God is out to condemn and restrict mankind. Here, we see the truth—that He teaches us so that we may profit, prosper, and do well.

Isaiah 48:20, 21
Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The LORD hath redeemed his servant Jacob. And they thirsted not when he led them through the deserts: he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them: he clave the rock also, and the waters gushed out.

Before Cyrus ever decreed that the Jews could return to their land, the Lord paved the way. And just as He miraculously provided for His people during their Exodus from Egypt, so He would provide for them in their return from Babylon.

Isaiah 48:22
There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked.

Chapter 48 ends with an absence of peace for the wicked. Chapter 49, however, will prophesy of the coming of the Prince of Peace to the world . . .



49 Chapter 49 is a Messianic prophecy. It portrays the Prince of Peace, the Messiah, Jesus Christ . . .

Isaiah 49:1
Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.

In Psalm 22, another Messianic prophecy, we read that Jesus had confidence in the Father even as an infant (verse 9). Here, Isaiah reiterates

that, even as an infant, Jesus knew He was called by the Father.

Isaiah 49:2 (a)
And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword . . .

"Never man spake like this man," said the officers of the priests and Pharisees concerning Jesus (John 7:46). Indeed, His spoken word was, like His written Word, a two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). He got to the point. He cut away the calluses and hardness of men's hearts.

Isaiah 49:2 (b), 3
. . . in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

Israel, which means "governed by God" is not only the name of a nation and a person but it also speaks prophetically of the One who was perfectly governed by God—Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 49:4 (a)
Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain . . .

Did Jesus think He labored in vain? Humanly, He would have had reason. He was betrayed by one of His own disciples. And there was only one at the Cross. Certainly, our Lord must have struggled with the whispers of Satan, saying, "You failed. The masses have rejected You and even Your own disciples have forsaken You."

Isaiah 49:4 (b), 5
. . . yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God. And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength.

Although Jesus may have been tempted by Satan to become discouraged, He combated it by looking to His Father—the One who would delight in Him, vindicate Him, and resurrect Him.

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

As a nation, Israel's original mission was to be a light to the rest of the world. But she turned inward. Not wanting to be polluted by the heathen, she lost compassion and vision for them. The nation of Israel failed. But the true Israel—Jesus Christ—never lost sight of His calling. He lived His life as the Light of the entire world and died to save *all* mankind.

Isaiah 49:7
Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.

Although Jesus was despised and rejected in His First Coming, when He comes again, every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:10, 11).

Isaiah 49:8
Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;

Paul would reach for this verse in his second letter to the church at Corinth, telling them that *now* is the accepted time, that *now* is the day of salvation, purchased by Jesus' death on the Cross (2 Corinthians 6:1, 2).

Isaiah 49:9
That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.

In His first sermon, Jesus declared that His mission was, among other things, to preach deliverance to the captives (Luke 4:18). Jesus not only talked about doing this, but accomplished it when He healed those who were bound by Satan (Matthew 8:16) and, ultimately freed all of mankind from the stranglehold of sin through His death on the Cross.

Isaiah 49:10–12
They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them. And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted. Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim.

The immediate, though partial, fulfillment of this prophecy would occur as the Lord would guide His people out of captivity. But it will be perfectly fulfilled when the Tribulation saints see Him in heaven . . .

> They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.
>
> Revelation 7:16, 17

Oh, glorious day that will be!

Isaiah 49:13
Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.

The earth is commanded to break into song at the prospect of the coming Messiah.

Isaiah 49:14
But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.

When asked by the Babylonians to entertain them with their music, the Jews were so saddened by their captivity that they couldn't sing (Psalm 137:3, 4). Surely, they thought, the Lord had forgotten and forsaken them.

Isaiah 49:15, 16
Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.

"Do you think I've forgotten you?" the Lord asks His people. "Look at My hands. You are engraved upon them."

Whenever I am tempted to think God has forgotten me, I need only to go to the Cross of Calvary, for there I'm reminded that He engraved me on the palm of His hands when in them He absorbed nails and paid the price for my sin.

Isaiah 49:17–23
Thy children shall make haste; thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee. Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth. For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thine heart,

Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been? Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

Far from forgetting His people, the Lord says, "I'm going to bring you back into the Promised Land. Kings and queens of other nations will fall at your feet. Even Gentiles will assist you in your return."

Here, the Lord is saying, "You don't see the whole picture. All you see are the immediate obstacles, but I see down the road. I'm going to bring you back into your land. In fact, there will be so many of you and so prosperous will you be that it will be too small for you."

Isaiah 49:24–26
Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children. And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.

To be released from Babylon would have seemed an impossibility to the Jews—but God knew, and would prove, otherwise.

"Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Paul would write, aware that the sin that holds mankind captive is more powerful than any earthly empire. But he answers his own question in

the next verse. Who would deliver him? The same One who would deliver the Jews: Jesus (Romans 7:24, 25).



50 Isaiah 50:1

Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.

God had neither divorced nor given up on His people. It was they who had left Him to chase after other gods. Yet He would still reach out to them and send Messiah to them.

Isaiah 50:2–4

Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering. The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.

How did Jesus have so much wisdom? How did He know just what to say? Morning by morning, He listened to His Father. We read in Mark 1:35 that He arose a great while before morning. In other words, while others were sleeping, Jesus was seeking His Father. If He needed to do that, how much more do you and I?

Isaiah 50:5

The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.

According to Old Testament law, slaves could be kept no longer than six years (Exodus 21:2). But a slave could become a bondslave—a slave by choice if he preferred to remain under the care of his master. To do this, an awl would be driven through his earlobe and a gold ring would be placed therein, signifying his position as a bondslave. Here, Jesus says, "That's Me. I willingly came to do the will of My Father" (John 8:29).

Isaiah 50:6, 7
I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.

Why did Jesus endure the shame, the spitting, the plucking of His hair, the beating of His back, the whipping, the brutality, the pain and agony? The writer of Hebrews tells us it was for the joy set before Him that He endured the Cross, despising the shame (Hebrews 12:2). And, amazingly enough, we are that joy.



For topical study of Isaiah 50:6, 7, see "The Shame He Endured" below.

Isaiah 50:8, 9
He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," Job declared (13:15). Jesus would live out that which Job professed, knowing that, ultimately, the Lord God, His Father, would help Him.

Isaiah 50:10
Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.

Jesus would trust the Father even when the sky turned dark and it seemed He had been forsaken (Matthew 27:46). The Light of the world would trust His Father even in the darkness of the tomb.

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

Unlike Jesus, our Great High Priest, Nadab and Abihu were priests who walked in the light of their own fire and did indeed lie down in sorrow (Leviticus 10:1, 2). The lesson for us is to see how much better it is to walk in seeming darkness in obedience to the Father than to walk in the short-lived light of our own understanding.

THE SHAME HE ENDURED

A Topical Study of
ISAIAH 50:6, 7

"Away with Him! Crucify Him!" the people demanded. So Pontius Pilate, the cowardly governor of the region, ordered that Jesus first be scourged, perhaps hoping to satisfy the bloodthirstiness of the crowd.

Jesus was taken to the praetorium, where His wrists were tied together and the garments stripped from His back. A soldier came with flagellum in hand. A flagellum was a stick twelve to eighteen inches long. Twenty to thirty leather strips were attached to the stick with pieces of bone, glass, and metal embedded in them. At the end of the strips were round iron balls. The soldier first struck Jesus' shoulders, then His back, lower back, and finally the backs of His thighs. The first ten or twelve blows would have caused huge welts to form. After that, the glass, metal, and bone would have ripped open the welts, rendering His back the consistency of ground meat. Many men didn't survive the excruciating pain of the flagellum. Jesus did. And that was only the beginning of His suffering.

In our text we read that Jesus willingly gave His back to the smiters. If I were in His place, I would have called down an angel or two or ten thousand to wipe out those who were inflicting such pain on me. But Jesus didn't. He gave His back.

Not only did He give His back, but He gave His cheeks to those who plucked His beard. Having one's beard pulled is very painful. But the men who did this to Jesus were merciless and cruel in doing so. Not only would this have been painful, but it would have been humiliating, as well. In 2 Samuel 10, we read that, when the king of Ammon died, David sent messengers to convey his sympathy. The leaders of Ammon, however, thought David's messengers were spies, so they cut off their skirts and shaved half of their beards in order to humiliate them. To save face, the men didn't return home until their beards grew back. Jesus didn't save face. Instead, He gave His face in order to save us.

We also read that Jesus hid not His face from shame and spitting. There is something disgusting about spit. We now know that an ounce of spit can carry

a million germs. However, it's not so much the infection but rather the implication of spit that alarms us. I don't know of anything more degrading or embarrassing than being spit on, particularly in the face. Yet Jesus endured this. Later on, He was further mocked when the guards put a purple robe around Him and beat a crown of thorns into His forehead.

Why did Jesus absorb such pain and humiliation?

The writer of Hebrews gives us the answer . . .

> *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame . . .*
>
> Hebrews 12:2 (a)

It was not that Jesus enjoyed the shame. He despised it. It wasn't that He cruised through the suffering. He endured it. Make no mistake about it: what our Lord went through was more shameful and difficult than anything we can imagine. Why did He set His face like flint even as the spit ran down? Because of the joy set before Him.

What joy? You.

For the joy of seeing you in heaven, of seeing your sins forgiven, of seeing you redeemed and saved, growing, and maturing, Jesus said, "I'll go through it."

"All manner of sin is forgiven all men," Jesus said "—except the blasphemy of the Holy Ghost." (see Matthew 12:31). The blasphemy of the Spirit is when a man purposely ignores the voice of the Spirit in his heart, telling him to turn to the Lord, reminding him of the price paid for his salvation. In many ways, apathy is worse than outright rebellion. Therefore, willfully ignoring His work on the Cross causes Jesus more pain than did the Cross itself.

But, while many ignored what Jesus did on their behalf, He saw that many would respond to Him and say, "Thank You, Lord, for dying in my place. Thank You for being humiliated when I should have been. Thank You for suffering when it should have been me. Thank You for giving Your life when mine should have been taken. Now, Lord, I want to be Your child, Your servant, Your friend."

Jesus set His face like flint and absorbed the pain because He loves *you.* You are His joy.



51 Isaiah 51 begins with an exhortation to Israel and ends with encouragement for Israel.

Isaiah 51:1
Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.

Here, the Lord is saying, " Look back and remember where you came from, the pit from which you were rescued." If you think it's hard to be a believer, pause and remember what it was like before you invited Christ into your heart—the meaninglessness, the emptiness, the frustration and insecurity you felt before Jesus took up residence.

The eyes of one of the most powerful preachers in the early days of colonial America—a Puritan preacher—filled with tears whenever he talked about the Lord. Week by week, year by year, he showed tremendous tenderness toward Jesus and the people who were lost. When he was asked what made him so tender, he said, "Every Saturday night, I spend at least an hour reflecting on the days before I was saved. I remember what it was like not knowing the Lord. I remember the futility and vanity and it makes my heart break. It makes me appreciate Jesus and feel compassion for sinners all the more."

Isaiah 51:2
Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.

To His people, the Lord says, "You were in a pit and I rescued you out. Your father, Abraham, was a worshiper of the moon in the land of the Chaldees before I sovereignly called him." The same thing is true of us, for,

even as the Lord sovereignly tapped Abraham on the shoulder and said, "Come, follow Me," so He has done with you and me.

Isaiah 51:3
For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her des ert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

"Even as I have blessed you in the past by rescuing you, by sovereignly choosing you, so too, I have future blessings awaiting you," God says to His people. We're beginning to see the fulfillment of this prophecy in the fruitfulness of their land that was once a desert. But that's only a sneak preview of coming attractions, for when the Lord comes back, the world will be restored not only spiritually and politically, but geologically, as well. It will be like Eden once again.

Isaiah 51:4–6
Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people. My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

Although the earth will be restored, it will ultimately pass away. Scientists tell us that every second, the sun burns 1,200,000 tons of mass. Now, there's still enough mass to last ten billion years. But the point is, everything is winding down, going from order to disorder.

"Heaven and earth shall pass away," Jesus said, "but My Word shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). Therefore, even as the world is winding down

and the sun is burning up, there is something solid and immutable upon which we can build our lives. That is the Word of God.

Isaiah 51:7, 8
Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

Those who revile the Word of the Lord, those who ignore the command of the Lord shall be eaten up. Ultimately, of course, this speaks of hell, where the fire is never quenched and the worm does not die (Mark 9:44). But they're eaten up presently as well—eaten up with fear, with pride, with lust, and greed. You don't have to be one of them. You don't have to be eaten up by your sin if you turn from it and say, "Lord, I want to start again with You today."

Isaiah 51:9 (a)
Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. . . .

The response of the people is, "Lord, You told us to look back and consider our past. You've given us promises for the future. But what about *now?* Wake up, Lord."

Surely the disciples could relate to this. "Master, Master, we perish," they cried as Jesus lay sleeping in the boat (Luke 8:23, 24). We can feel this way, as well. We know we've been saved from past sins. We know there's a future for us in heaven. But we wonder if the Lord is aware of our present difficulties.

Isaiah 51:9 (b), 10
. . . Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great

deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?

"Lord, aren't You the One who dealt with Rahab—or Egypt—in days of old? Aren't You the One who opened the Red Sea for Your people to pass through?" Here, the prophet is saying what we sometimes feel. We read the stories of God's power and deliverance, but wonder where He is in our own trouble and difficulty.

Isaiah 51:11
Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.

In verse 10, Isaiah wondered why the Lord wasn't working. Here, in verse 11, he is sure that the Lord will work. What caused him to change his mind? I suggest it was in the very act of pouring out his heart to the Lord in prayer that the answer to his question, the solution to his frustration was found. "You parted the Red Sea," he said in verse 10. And, as he did, he must have realized that, with Pharaoh's army barreling down on them, the Israelites must have felt even more forsaken than he did. But he also realized that God made a way, that God came through—and that He would do the same for him.

I believe one of the greatest advantages of prayer is that, as we talk to the Lord, we begin to get insights and understanding that will see us through another day—maybe just one more day, but that is all we need. It is a very good thing to pour out your heart to the Lord because, as was the case with Isaiah, so often the answer is found in the very questions and frustrations we share.

Isaiah 51:12–16
I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the

foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor? The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail. But I am the LORD thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The LORD of hosts is his name. And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people.

Through His prophet, Isaiah, God asks His people why they fear man and forget Him. Jesus would speak to this same issue . . .

> And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.
>
> Luke 12:4, 5

How foolish we are to fear what our fellow man thinks of us or will do to us, when God holds life and eternity in His hand.

Isaiah 51:17–20
Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his fury; thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out. There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought up. These two things are come unto thee; who shall be sorry for thee? desolation, and destruction, and the famine, and the sword: by whom shall I comfort thee? Thy sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as a wild bull in a net: they are full of the fury of the LORD, the rebuke of thy God.

In verse 9, the people had said, "Awake, Lord. Help us." Here, God tells the people to wake up themselves and look around at the desolation and destruction caused by His chastening.

As hard as the chastening hand of the Lord fell upon His people, it was nothing in comparison to the way He dealt with her enemies. After all, where are the Assyrians, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites today? They were removed off the face of the earth completely and appear only as a footnote on the pages of history. Therefore, next time you think you've got it tough because you're being chastened by the Lord, you would do well to consider those people who are not part of His family. They'll be lost eternally.

> For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.
>
> Hebrews 12:6–8

God's chastening is a sign of His love, of His commitment to the development of His people—be it in Isaiah's day or ours. If you're continuing in sin and aren't chastened, you're not a son at all. *That's* when you need to be afraid.

> **Isaiah 51:21, 22**
> **Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine: Thus saith thy Lord the LORD, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again:**

After exhorting His people to learn from their situation, the Lord encourages them by giving them a promise for their nation.

> **Isaiah 51:23**
> **But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and thou hast**

laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over.

God is telling the people of Israel that those who come down on them will have to answer to Him. This doesn't just apply to Old Testament times, for in Matthew 25, we see that it is their treatment of Israel during the Tribulation period that will determine which nations are allowed to enter the Millennium—the thousand-year period of peace and prosperity when Christ rules from Jerusalem.



52 Isaiah 52:1, 2

Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful gar ments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

Continuing with His encouragement, the Lord says to His people, "Wake up! The day is coming when the unclean will no longer be in Jerusalem." If you go to Jerusalem today, you can sense the riches of the area, but you can also see the sin and corruption. It won't always be that way, however, for when Jesus comes back to rule and reign in Jerusalem, it will be a holy city, indeed.

Isaiah 52:3–6

For thus saith the LORD, Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money. For thus saith the Lord GOD, My people went down aforetime into Egypt to sojourn there; and the Assyrian oppressed them without cause. Now therefore, what have I here, saith the LORD, that my people is taken away for nought? they that rule over them make them to howl, saith the LORD; and my name continually every day is blasphemed. Therefore my people shall know my name: therefore

they shall know in that day that I am he that doth speak: behold, it is I.

In Babylon, God's people howled. In Egypt, they sighed (Exodus 2:23). And God heard it all. Just as He sent Moses to deliver His people from Egypt, He'll send Cyrus to liberate them from Babylon. However, even with their history of miraculous deliverance, polls show that less than 10% of people in Israel today believe in a personal God. In "that day," however, when Jesus comes back, they will know God's true name and His character.

Isaiah 52:7–10
How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Feet aren't usually thought of as the most beautiful part of the human anatomy. But the Lord calls beautiful the ones who share the gospel. That is not surprising, for the most beautiful people I know are the ones who shared not condemnation, judgment, and heaviness with me but the good news of peace and salvation.

Isaiah 52:11
Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.

"In light of what I have already done for you and what I have ahead for you, don't touch the unclean thing," God says. That's a word for us, as well.

We mistakenly think that we have certain sins under control, that we can "handle" them. But God says we're not even to touch them.

God doesn't give commands to us He can't enable us to keep. He'll never ask you to do anything He won't empower you to do. Therefore, if He says we're not to touch whatever it is that entices or allures us, He will give us victory over it if we so choose.

Isaiah 52:12
For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the LORD will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rereward.

When God delivers His people, they never have to run for their lives. They only have to move at His pace because He goes before and behind.

Isaiah 52:13
Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high.

In verse 13, we begin a section that will continue in chapter 53 dealing with Jesus, the suffering Servant. It is one of the richest and most unmistakable prophecies of the entire Old Testament.

The Hebrew word translated "extolled" literally means "lifted up." Although this is the only place in the Old Testament this word is used, it was picked up by Jesus in John 12:32 when He said, "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to Me." But John 12:33 says He said this concerning the manner of His death. Therefore, when Jesus talked about being lifted up, He wasn't talking about being lifted up in praise or worship. He was talking about the Cross.

Isaiah 52:14, 15
As many were astonied at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

In speaking of the suffering of our Savior, Isaiah declares that when people see Him, they will be startled because He was marred more than any other man. This is not surprising for when His suffering was only beginning, soldiers blindfolded Him and punched Him repeatedly in the face, taunting Him to prophesy which of them had hit Him. In other words, Jesus was literally blindsided, sustaining hits to the face He had no way of deflecting. By the time His beating and scourging were complete, by the time the Cross had its effect, He was marred more than any other man.

In Revelation 5, we see the body of Christ in heaven and in the midst a Lamb having been slain. This means we're going to see the Lord in His slain condition—and only then understand the price He paid for our sin. Later on, Isaiah will say there is no beauty in Him that we should desire Him (53:2). When we finally understand what took place on the Cross, we'll fall at His feet, saying, "Thou art worthy to receive glory and honor and riches and power forever and ever."

People say the idea of worshiping the Lord in heaven for thousands of years sounds boring. But that's because we don't understand the unspeakable price He paid to get us there.



53

Isaiah 53:1
Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD re vealed?

Who has believed our report? People say the message of the gospel is unbelievable—that it's too good to be true. They think there must be more to being saved than simply believing Jesus died for our sin, rose again, and wants to live within us. But that is indeed the message of the gospel and why it is such good news (Romans 10:9, 10).

Isaiah 53:2 (a)
For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant . . .

Here is the report of the One who is coming. First, He is the sensitive One. So tenderhearted is Jesus that, even as He was dying on the cross, He looked down and saw His mother with John. In the midst of unbelievable suffering He said to her, "Behold thy son," and to John, "behold thy mother" (John 19:26, 27), making sure that His mother would be cared for after His death.

Isaiah 53:2 (b)
. . . and as a root out of a dry ground . . .

When Jesus came on the scene, the ground was dry indeed. Politically, Rome had been oppressing the people of Israel. Spiritually, the people had received no word from God, no miracles, no prophecies for four hundred years.

In Jeremiah 2, the Lord said, "My people have committed two evils. They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and they have carved out cisterns that can hold no water." If you're dry because you've forsaken the living water to draw from the cistern of occupational success, materialistic pursuits, or even family or friend relationships, you'll eventually find that it doesn't hold water, that it's a broken cistern. It won't refresh you the way you thought it would.

"If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink," Jesus says. "And out of his innermost being shall gush forth torrents of living water" (see John 7:37, 38). If you're in a dry place, consider the sensitive One, Jesus Christ, who comes in dry times to those who thirst for more.

Isaiah 53:2 (c)
. . . he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

Jesus is the slain One. The psalmist describes Messiah as "fairer than the children of men" (45:2). Because He wasn't affected by sin and anxiety, tension and worry, there was no doubt a physical beauty about the Lord that was very attractive. Yet here, we read there is no beauty in Him. I believe this refers to the fact that, according to Revelation 5:6, we'll see Him as a Lamb having been slain. We are going to see Jesus as One who has been

slaughtered and slain for our sin. Beaten with fists, whipped with a flagellum, crucified on a cross, and attacked by the hordes of hell, Jesus Christ was reduced to quivering flesh on the cross. And not until we see Him will we begin to realize the unspeakable price He paid on our behalf.

Isaiah 53:3
He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Jesus is also the sorrowing One. According to Luke 2:52, as Jesus grew up, He found favor both in the eyes of God and men. But that changed. Men began to despise Him, reject Him, and turn away from Him to such a degree that He asked His disciples if they would leave, as well (John 6:67).

"You've heard it said that you're not to commit murder, but I say to you that if you have anger in your heart toward your brother, you've already committed murder," He said. "If you've looked at a woman with lust, you've already committed adultery" (Matthew 5). Who wants to be called a murderer or an adulterer? People didn't like the way Jesus spoke truthfully and honestly.

Isaiah 53:4
Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

Jesus is the smitten One. God smote His Son—and when God smites, it can be felt very definitely. How greatly it must have hurt the Father when He smote His beloved Son with all of the righteous indignation and justifiable wrath for the atrocities of all of the killers throughout history—knowing all the while His Son was innocent. Yet He did it. Why? So we could go free.

Isaiah 53:5
But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

Jesus is the suffering One. He was wounded for our iniquities. Doctors tell us there are five types of wounds. There is a contusion—which Jesus received when men punched Him in the face. There is a laceration—which He received when the flagellum stripped the skin off His back and shoulders. There is penetration—which He received when a crown of thorns was beaten into His forehead. There is perforation—which He received when the spikes pierced His hands and feet, causing His body to writhe in spasms. Finally, there is incision—which He received when a soldier stuck a spear in His side. Why did the Lord absorb those wounds? So that we could be healed.

Isaiah 53:6
All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Jesus is the sin-bearing One. In 1 John 2:2, we read that Jesus died not only for our sins but for the sins of the whole world. What a shock that must have been. Here, One who had never sinned, who knew nothing of sin, suddenly took on all of the sin ever committed by everyone who has ever lived. The best estimates are that there are seventy-seven billion people who have lived on this planet. And Jesus absorbed all of their sin—except the blasphemy of the Spirit, which is a person's rejection of Him. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). *Amazing* grace.

Isaiah 53:7
He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

Jesus is the silent One. His enemies questioned Him, provoked Him, falsely accused Him—yet He opened not His mouth—perhaps lest He sin in defending Himself, thereby jeopardizing our salvation. He could have called down legions of angels with orders to destroy His accusers, but He didn't He remained silent in order to secure our salvation.

Isaiah 53:8
He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

Jesus is the stricken One. After a mock trial, Jesus was brought before temple guards who blindfolded Him and then punched Him in the face. He could have called down angels and sent His attackers to hell. Instead, He absorbed their blows until His face was marred more than any man. And He did it for you.

"Wait a minute," you protest. "I didn't strike Him. And I wouldn't have been part of that had I been there."

But, as a father, I would rather have my kids be incensed and angry with me than to be cool, detached, and apathetic toward me. Before you fault those guards who struck the face of Jesus—and faulted they should be—realize that perhaps your apathy toward Him is even a crueler blow.

Isaiah 53:9
And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

Jesus is the sincere One. His enemies could find no fault in Him (Luke 23:4); the thief dying beside Him recognized He had done nothing amiss (Luke 23:41); and so sure of His innocence was Joseph of Arimathaea that he risked his standing in the community to provide Jesus a tomb. With Jesus, there is no fine print. He is exactly who He declared Himself to be and He does exactly what He says He'll do.

Isaiah 53:10
Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

Jesus is the submitted One. He knew He would be smitten and stricken to bear the sin of all humanity—and yet He submitted willingly. Hours before His crucifixion, knowing what was ahead, Jesus prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup of suffering pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will but Thy will be done," as He sweat great drops of blood (see Luke 22:42–44).

In Matthew 13, we see the story of a merchant who sold all he had to purchase a particular pearl. So too, God gave all He had to purchase His pearl, and that pearl is you. It pleased the Father to smite the Son. It pleased the Son to submit to the Father—all because of you.

Isaiah 53:11
He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

Jesus is the satisfied One. Was Jesus angry at what we put Him through? No. Hebrews 12:2 tells us it was for joy that He endured the Cross, despising the shame. Of the two thieves crucified with Him, one mocked, rejected, and taunted Him. The other, however, said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). And even though He was beaten and bruised beyond recognition, I believe even then the Father allowed His Son to see the first one who believed, the firstfruit of His labor.

Isaiah 53:12
Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Finally, Jesus is the successful One. Jesus received the spoil, the treasure, you. Sometimes I feel like a spoiled treasure, but in the Lord's eyes, I am His spoil, His treasure. Notice that He not only secured my salvation but maintains it as an intercessor. The writer to the Hebrews tells us He ever lives to make intercession for us (7:25). Therefore, He not only succeeded in

securing our salvation, but He also succeeds as He works out our sanctification. That is, He who began "a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). Jesus will see you through all the way until He receives you in glory.

What a magnificent Savior.



54 After the sorrow of chapter 53 comes the singing of chapter 54.

Isaiah 54:1–3
Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.

The allusion here is to a Bedouin tent being enlarged to accommodate more people. When the Lord first gave the Promised Land to the people of Israel, the boundaries made it equivalent to 300,000 square miles (Joshua 1:4). Under David and Solomon the people of Israel occupied 30,000 square miles. So the greatest extent of Israel in history was one-tenth of what was given to them. Presently, they occupy a little over 7,000 square miles.

How is Israel to enlarge her tent? How is she to expand? The same way we are—through song . . .



***For topical study of Isaiah 54:1–3 entitled "Be Strong in Song!" turn to page* 448.**

Isaiah 54:4–8

Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer.

Israel felt ashamed of her past, forsaken in her present, and unsure of her future as she wondered if the Lord would ever find favor with her again. Here, the Lord says to her, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. You have turned away from Me. Yes, you have felt forsaken by Me—but just for a moment."

"Weren't they in that state for years?" you ask.

Yes, but the Bible tells us that a thousand years with the Lord are as a day and a day as a thousand years (2 Peter 3:8). So, from the eternal perspective, the distance between them was short-lived.

What we're going through presently is just for a little moment in light of eternity. Maybe you had a bad day today or a bad life so far. But really it's just for a small moment because James says this life is like a vapor, a puff of steam (4:14). For a small moment you're experiencing difficulties, but God's kindness will last through eternity.

Isaiah 54:9, 10

For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the

covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee.

"How can the Lord ever overcome this obstacle in my life?" you ask. "It's insurmountable." Take a look at Mt. St. Helens. Four billion cubic tons of earth was moved in thirty minutes. That's a lot of dirt! Therefore, whatever mountain is looming over you is no problem for Him.

Isaiah 54:11–14
O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee.

What glorious promises these are—especially in light of the problems Israel is facing today. "Your kids will be taught of the Lord. They'll experience peace. And terror won't come near you."

Isaiah 54:15–17
Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.

Speaking specifically to Israel, the Lord says, "No weapon formed against you shall prosper." Pharaoh discovered this to be true. When he ordered his chariots to devour the people of Israel, it was he who was

washed up. Haman found this out, as well—for he was hung on the very gallows he built to destroy God's servant, Mordecai (Esther 7:10).

As servants of the Lord, this promise is also for us. But it's not our own righteousness that qualifies us to claim it. Rather, it's because we're in the righteous One, Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21).

BE STRONG IN SONG!

A Topical Study of ISAIAH 54:1–3

On May 31, 1792, a radical believer named William Carey addressed a group of Baptist ministers in a small town outside of London. Preaching from this text, he said theirs was a time for the Christians of England to expand, to stretch out, to reach beyond their own boundaries and borders to a world that was lost and dying. That group caught Carey's vision and realized they needed to reach out to a world that was largely unexplored, much less evangelized. The Baptist Missionary Union was formed—the forerunner of the modern missionary movement that still thrives today. Suddenly, Christians saw the need to go across the sea, around the world to preach the gospel, to stretch out the curtains, lengthen the cords, and drive in the stakes.

I believe this text speaks not only to the church expanding corporately, but to us personally. You see, we never stay in the same place spiritually. We're either stretching the curtain, lengthening the cords and driving deeper the stakes in our own lives or we're shrinking, diminishing, and shriveling. Where are you in comparison to where you were a year ago? Are you more active in the things of God, more in love with Him, more engaged in His Word, more involved in His service—or have you begun to diminish?

In addition to application for the church corporately and for us personally, this passage also speaks prophetically. Seven hundred years before the event took place, in chapter 53, Isaiah prophesied concerning the Crucifixion, burial, Resurrection, Ascension and Second Coming of Christ. Here, in chapter 54, a new prophecy is given concerning the Gentiles. Throughout the Bible, Israel is referred to as the wife of Jehovah. But here, God is saying that someone will come on the scene who, although was previously barren, will become more prolific and bear more children than the wife of Jehovah. Who is it? The bride of Christ, the church, us. "Enlarge the tent," the Lord declares, "because I'm going to bring in a whole new group of people: the Gentiles. Therefore, you who are desolate and barren, sing and make a joyful noise in anticipation of what I am going to do."

All of us go through times when we feel spiritually barren. We feel like nothing is happening. We feel dry and troubled—and the tendency is to pull back, to be discouraged, to be defeated. Yet we must fight this tendency for the Bible says the time we feel barren, desolate, cold, and unproductive is the very time we are to sing, to make a loud, joyful noise. That's why Paul would say, "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4). He didn't say, "Rejoice if you can," or, "Rejoice when it's convenient," or, "Rejoice when you feel like it." He said, "Rejoice in the Lord always—even when you're feeling barren—perhaps *especially* when you're feeling barren."

The people of Judah discovered the reality and power of this principle. Judah was no match for the Ammonite forces surrounding the city. So Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, sought the Lord. "The battle is not yours, but Mine," the Lord answered. "Go into the valley of Baraca, where the Ammonites are waiting for you. But don't send your soldiers first. Send your choir." Logically, militarily, this was suicide. But Jehoshaphat obeyed God. He sent the choir, singing, "Praise ye the Lord. His mercy endures forever"—which so confused the enemy that they became disoriented and began to fight each other (2 Chronicles 20). The sound of our singing when we should be crying is like fingernails on a chalkboard to the spirit of darkness, depression, and discouragement that can surround us.

It wasn't only the people of Judah who experienced this reality, for in the New Testament, after being beaten, Paul and Silas were thrown into a dungeon, where they began to worship the Lord. At midnight—in the darkest hour—they sang praises and the prison doors flew open as the earth began to shake (Acts 16). If you're imprisoned today emotionally, relationally, spiritually, or financially, follow the example of Paul and Silas and begin to sing praises—not for the purpose of manipulation but rather out of adoration and in anticipation of the fact that God will keep His Word and see you through.

> *Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they*

departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

Matthew 2:7–10

We don't think of the wise men as being exceedingly joyful. We think of them trudging across the desert, very dignified in their royal robes and crowns, singing, "We Three Kings" in a minor key. After all, they were intellectuals. Yet the Bible says they were exceedingly joyful. They were ecstatic. Why? Because they were anticipating the blessing of seeing the Lord.

All too often, rejoicing with exceedingly great joy is a foreign concept to us. But false dignity will suffocate the spirit. There is something innate in every human heart that wants to let go. But we are conditioned by culture to be reserved. "Sing a new song," the psalmist told us. "Rejoice evermore," the New Testament exhorts. "Sing out, barren ones, in anticipation of what God will do," Isaiah commands.

When things go wrong, when times look bleak, when the situation is dry, we can either feel sorry for ourselves or we can sing to the Lord. I strongly suggest the latter. Sing enthusiastically. Sing intelligently. Sing joyfully—and watch your tent be enlarged.



55 Isaiah continues on writing of the coming kingdom . . .

Isaiah 55:1, 2
Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

Revelation 18 speaks of this same event when Babylon—the world's economic system will be destroyed, when exploitative capitalism, when rampant commercialism no longer exists.

This speaks not only of the coming kingdom age, but of the present spiritual kingdom. You see, water speaks of life, wine of joy, milk of growth. Romans 14:17 tells us the kingdom is inside of us. Therefore, righteousness, peace, and joy are available even now. The water of life, wine of joy, milk of growth are ours for the taking. And thirst is the only prerequisite.

Isaiah 55:3–5
Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.

Israel's greatest days are yet to come in the kingdom age. Nations who come down on her now will run to her then because they'll sense the Lord is with her.

Isaiah 55:6
Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

Seek the Lord while He may be found. Why? Because in Genesis 6:3, God said His spirit would not always strive with man. If you're not saved, there will be a time when you may seek the Lord, but you won't be able to find Him. There comes a time when all hope of salvation is lost and all that's left is despair.

Hearing the crowds gather, Bartimaeus asked what was happening. "Jesus of Nazareth is coming," he was told.

When he heard Jesus and His disciples walking down the road, he cried, "Son of David, have mercy upon me."

"Be quiet!" the crowd scolded. But Luke tells us Bartimaeus cried all the more, causing Jesus to stop and ask him what he wanted.

"That my eyes might be opened," Bartimaeus answered.

And at that point, Bartimaeus was healed (Luke 18).

What if Bartimaeus had said, "Jesus is coming, huh? I've heard He can do some amazing things. Next time He comes by, I'm going to cry out to Him. Next time He's in the area, I'll call out to Him." If Bartimaeus had not cried out at that time, he would never have been healed.

So too, the Holy Spirit comes by us and whispers, "Go pray. Take a half hour and read the Word. Go for a walk through your neighborhood with Me." Rather than an audible voice, these are impressions that tug on our hearts. If you put them off, you may find you missed a unique opportunity to receive a healing, a blessing, a work of God in your life.

Isaiah 55:7
Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

No matter how wicked you might be, God says if you'll come to Him, He'll have mercy upon you and abundantly pardon. Having been confronted about his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, David said, "I have sinned against the Lord."

Yet in the very same verse, Nathan said, "Your sins are forgiven and you will not die" (2 Samuel 12:13).

God is so merciful. The moment we make confession, we're forgiven.

Isaiah 55:8 (a)
For . . .

The preposition, "for," links this verse to the one before it. In other words, God gives the reason for His mercy.

Isaiah 55:8 (b), 9

. . . my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

How high are the heavens above the earth? Today it was announced a new galaxy was discovered, with the farthest object spotted being seventeen billion light-years away. The mercy of verse 7 is foreign to us because our thoughts and ways aren't God's. That's why it's ridiculous for us to try and command the Lord in any situation. The only logical thing I can say is, "As I talk things over with You, Lord, I realize You see things I don't and see things I can't. Therefore, *Your* will be done."

Isaiah 55:10
For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

I remember jogging past the dry hills of Med-ford on one occasion, only to see the same hills covered with flowers a few months later. What had happened in the interval? Lots of rain. The same thing is true of people. We seem so dry, dusty, and hopeless. But when the Word falls upon us, suddenly all kinds of hidden potential emerges and beautiful things begin to happen.

The more we allow ourselves to be rained on, the more beauty comes forth. So daily soak in the water of the Word, gang—and let it have its miraculous effect upon you.

Isaiah 55:11
So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

The Word will never return void. Therefore, share it with people even if they don't believe it. God promises it *will* have effect, that it *will* accomplish that which He sends it to do.

Isaiah 55:12 (a)
For . . .

Again, the word "for," links verse 12 with verse 11. That is, because God's Word isn't void, His promises do indeed come to pass. Therefore, because He promised that His people would return to their land, their return was sure.

Isaiah 55:12 (b), 13
. . . ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

This glorious prophecy speaks of the Jews being released from captivity in Babylon and returning to their own land in an event so joyful that even nature would join the celebration. Yet presently, it speaks of the joy available to any who exchange the bondage of Satan and sin for the freedom found in walking with the Lord, obedient to His Word.



56

Isaiah 56:1 (a)
Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice . . .

Here, in 750 B.C., God says to His people, "Be fair and just as you live in light of the coming kingdom." And we must live in that same light, for John says that the one who has this hope purifies himself (1 John 3:3). That is, truly believing Jesus is coming will have a purifying effect on your life.

Isaiah 56:1 (b)
. . . for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed.

In Isaiah's day, the salvation "near to come" would have referred to the Jews' release from captivity in Babylon in 539 B.C. In our day, salvation "near to come" speaks of the coming kingdom when Jesus rules and reigns from Jerusalem. But presently, salvation is not only "near to come" but even nearer . . .

> But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.
>
> Romans 10:8, 9

Because of Jesus' finished work on the Cross, salvation is as close as one's mouth and heart.

> **Isaiah 56:2**
> **Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keep eth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil.**

The Sabbath was a unique covenant between Israel and God (Exodus 31:13). When the Gentiles began to be converted, some in the early leadership of the church thought they should keep the Old Testament rules and regulations. Others, however, said, "Why should we make Gentiles keep the law when we, as Jews, couldn't even keep it? We'll tell them to stay away from idols, fornication, and meat that had been strangled" (Acts 15:20). Nothing was said regarding keeping the Sabbath. Hebrews 4 tells us the Sabbath was fulfilled in the Person of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is our rest, we neither work for our salvation nor to impress God with our good deeds.

The Sabbath was not initially a day to go to the synagogue. It was simply a day of rest and refreshment. Therefore, when we take a Sabbath we're acknowledging that we're not indispensable, that it's the Lord who holds our families and our work together. If I begin to think that the world can't go on without me, I have an overinflated view of myself. Keeping the Sabbath protects us from this.

Isaiah 56:3–8

Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people. The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him.

To Gentiles and others who felt cut off from worshiping the God of Israel, the Lord says, "You might feel out of it, but I'm going to gather you and bring you into My house and make you joyful in the house of prayer."

Jesus quoted the last phrase of verse 7 when He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and drove them out of the temple—for by charging exorbitant exchange rates, they were keeping people from God rather than providing access to God (Matthew 21:13). "Don't make My Father's house a den of thieves," Jesus said. "It shall be a house of prayer for *all* people—Jews and Gentiles alike."

Isaiah 56:9–12

All ye beasts of the field, come to devour, yea, all ye beasts in the forest. His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter. Come ye,

say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.

This is an indictment, a stern rebuke against the prophets and priests who should have been feeding God's flock but were instead fleecing them. Although Jesus quoted only verse 7 directly when He cast the moneychangers from the temple, surely this passage was in His mind, as well.



57 Isaiah 57:1, 2

The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.

Many see this verse as a reference to the Rapture for, before the evil days of the Tribulation, the righteous will be "taken away" to heaven. Those who disagree with this contend that, like Noah, Christians won't escape the Tribulation but will be protected in it. I suggest, however, that their model is amiss, for before the story of Noah and the ark, there's an example of another righteous man. His name was Enoch. Enoch walked with God—and then suddenly He was taken up. He never died (Genesis 5:24). Therefore, I suggest that Noah and his family are a picture of the 144,000 Jews who will go through the Tribulation but will be sealed with a mark of God on their foreheads and thereby protected (Revelation 7:3, 4). I suggest the church, on the other hand, is pictured by Enoch. Like him, we'll be snatched up before the judgment of God falls.

Isaiah 57:3 (a)
But . . .

In contrast to the righteous, there follows a description of the rebellious . . .

Isaiah 57:3 (b)–5
. . . draw near hither, ye sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the whore. Against whom do ye sport yourselves? against whom make ye a wide mouth, and draw out the tongue? are ye not children of transgression, a seed of falsehood, Enflaming yourselves with idols under every green tree, slaying the children in the valleys under the clifts of the rocks?

Archaeologists have dug up numerous earthen jars in which were skeletons of newborn babies. During these dark days of apostasy in Israel, a person would place his newborn baby in a jar and entomb it in the walls of his house in hopes of pleasing the god, Moloch. Moloch was the same god people sacrificed their children to by laying them on the incandescent arms of the brass idols representing him.

"How stupid!" we say. Yet aren't we, as a nation, doing this very thing? Every week, thousands of babies in our own country are slaughtered, aborted. Our country is committing the same sin for which God's people are here indicted.

Isaiah 57:6
Among the smooth stones of the stream is thy portion; they, they are thy lot: even to them hast thou poured a drink offering, thou hast offered a meat offering. Should I receive comfort in these?

God's indictment of idolatry continues. Here, the reference is to the smooth stones used to fashion idols. David was one who thought of an infinitely better use for smooth stones—for it was with one of them that he cast down Goliath, ascribing the victory to the true and living God (1 Samuel 17).

Isaiah 57:7
Upon a lofty and high mountain hast thou set thy bed: even thither wentest thou up to offer sacrifice.

Throughout the Old Testament, high places refer to the practice of idolatry.

Isaiah 57:8
Behind the doors also and the posts hast thou set up thy remembrance: for thou hast discovered thyself to another than me, and art gone up; thou hast enlarged thy bed, and made thee a covenant with them; thou lovedst their bed where thou sawest it.

In Deuteronomy 6:9, God told His people to write the declaration that they were to love the Lord their God, one God, with all of their heart, soul, and might upon their doorposts. Here, we read that in direct violation to this command, they used the space to pay homage to their false gods.

Isaiah 57:9
And thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thy messengers far off, and didst debase thyself even unto hell.

This alludes to the alliances Israel was prone to make with other nations rather than relying on God alone.

Isaiah 57:10–12
Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way; yet saidst thou not, There is no hope: thou hast found the life of thine hand; therefore thou wast not grieved. And of whom hast thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied, and hast not remembered me, nor laid it to thy heart? have not I held my peace even of old, and thou fearest me not? I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works; for they shall not profit thee.

The seeming prosperity of God's people blinded them to the hopelessness of their condition. No wonder, then, that Jesus would say the people who recognize their hunger and poverty are blessed, for they would be the ones who recognized their need for Him (Matthew 5:3).

Isaiah 57:13 (a)
When thou criest, let thy companies deliver thee; but the wind shall carry them all away; vanity shall take them . . .

"When you're in trouble, you'll cry to your idols. But you'll get blown away because they won't be able to deliver you," God says.

Indeed, idols can't deliver, but they can destroy because, according to Psalm 135:18, we become like that which we worship. Therefore, because idols are deaf, dumb, and blind, people who worship them are unable to hear, talk to, or see God.

Isaiah 57:13 (b)–15
. . . but he that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain; And shall say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people. For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Here, God identifies Himself as the One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy. And yet with whom does this holy, eternal, magnificent God dwell? With those who are contrite and humble, with those who grieve over their sin and shortcomings.

Isaiah 57:16
For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.

In other words, God says, "I'm not always going to judge because otherwise the spirit should fail and the soul which I have made should disappear. No one would survive. I'm not going to strike out in anger because if I did, no one could stand."

Isaiah 57:17–19
For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the

fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him.

"I've seen the perversity of man," God declares. "Yes, I've disciplined him. But I will heal, guide, and create peace within him. I will deliver him." God does not give up on me and He won't give up on you—ever.

Isaiah 57:20, 21
But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

There is no peace with those who don't submit to the true and living God because their own sins are constantly hounding them (Numbers 32:23).



58 Isaiah 58:1, 2

Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.

God instructs Isaiah to sound out the message that His people were sinning even though they came to the temple and delighted in seeking His ways. In other words, here was a people who loved to study the Word, to fellowship together, to worship God—and yet God indicts them. Why? Because, although they loved to learn of God, they weren't interested in obeying Him. How much that is like so many today. When the Holy Spirit begins to convict us, when the Word of God begins to speak to us, we only think of it in terms of how it applies to others.

Isaiah 58:3–5
Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no

knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?

"You bow down in great outward show. You spread out sackcloth to try and present your case for your spirituality. But I won't honor your fast," God declares, "because, even on the day of your fast, you're still pursuing pleasure and still sin."

Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 6 when He said, "When you fast, don't go around with long, disfigured faces. Wash your face, go about your business, don't let people know what you're doing. Don't do it for the sake of appearance."

Isaiah 58:6, 7
Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

Verses 6 and 7 describe the fast the Lord wanted to see—one that sought to alleviate another's misery rather than parade one's own spirituality.

Isaiah 58:8–11
Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward. Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; And if

thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

Abundant, comprehensive blessings of physical health, answered prayer, and continual guidance are promised to those with a heart for the poor and afflicted of society.

Isaiah 58:12
And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.

This would be fulfilled when, under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the people rebuilt the temple and walls of Jerusalem following their Babylonian captivity.

Isaiah 58:13, 14
If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

The Jews had kept the Sabbath in Babylon to distinguish themselves from the idolatrous practices of their captors. When they returned to their own land, it would be just as imperative to keep the Sabbath in order to keep from falling into the idolatrous ways that led to their captivity in the first place.

59 **Isaiah 59:1, 2**

Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nei ther his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

The same people who were fasting and worshiping, fellowshiping and studying were also praying. But they weren't being heard. It wasn't because God's hand was paralyzed or that He was hard of hearing. According to Jeremiah 5:25, in one way or another, it was due to sin.

***For topicalstudy ofIsaiah59:1, 2entitled"Prayer That Fails to Fly," turn to page* 457.**

Isaiah 59:3–8

For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. They hatch cockatrice' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.

In Romans 3:11–18, we see a parallel passage that speaks of an open sepulcher, poison, bloodshed, destruction, and misery to describe sin. We tend to think of sin as being unfortunate. God, however, sees it for what it is: deadly.

Isaiah 59:9–11
Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men. We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us.

Here, at last, the people acknowledge the consequences of their sin. Oh, the plight of these people. They want justice but don't have it. They want direction but lack it for they continue on knowingly in their sinfulness.

Isaiah 59:12–15
For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them; In transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment.

After acknowledging the consequences of their sin, here the people acknowledge the sin itself.

Isaiah 59:16 (a)
And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor . . .

In Ezekiel 22:30, the Lord says the same thing when He says that He sought for a man to stand in the gap and intercede but found none. No one in Israel's dark days said, "I'm going to pray." Like us, maybe they talked about it. Like us, they were probably aware of it. But, all too often, like us, they didn't *do* it. Yet does God write His people off? No. He shows them grace . . .

Isaiah 59:16 (b), 17
. . . therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.

There was no intercessor among His people, so the Lord Himself fought for them.

Isaiah 59:18, 19
According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence. So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.

"When the enemy comes flooding in, I will lift up My standard and stand on behalf of My children," the Lord declares.

Isaiah 59:20, 21
And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever.

Even though the people were sinning, that couldn't stop the Lord from loving and from keeping His promise to send them a Redeemer. In chapter 60, we'll see that their Redeemer has indeed come.

PRAYER THAT FAILS TO FLY

A Topical Study of ISAIAH 59:1, 2

Whenever a plane goes down, the FAA sends out investigators to find out what went wrong. Oftentimes, we feel as though our prayers crash before answers come or, worse, never even make it off the runway. And when our prayers crash or fail to take off altogether, we have a tendency to give up on prayer. But what we need to do is to be more like the FAA. We need to do some heavy-duty investigation, not looking for the black box that houses the words of the pilots, but looking at the pages of the Word of God.

In the passage before us, God is talking to a group of people who, in the previous chapter, could not understand why they felt cut off from the Lord. They loved to gather in the temple. They loved to learn of His ways. They loved to offer sacrifices. They even fasted consistently. But they still felt cut off, distant, removed. And here in chapter 59, God the Father speaks pointedly to the problem when He says, "My hand isn't paralyzed. I'm not deaf. I hear your prayer. I'm able to reach out to you—but your iniquities have separated us. Communication has been lost because of the separation that takes place through sin."

When our prayers crash, this is a key piece of evidence we need to sift through and carefully consider. "Is there some unconfessed sin in my life, Lord? Is that why You're not responding to my prayers? Is that why I'm not feeling Your hand on my life?"

"If I regard sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear me," David declared (Psalm 66:18). Why? Because if God continued to answer our prayer even when we were in a state of rebellion against Him, we would think all was well. We would go on sinning and destroying ourselves in the process. That is why our loving Father says, "You're going to know there's a problem when you sense that I'm not answering your prayers. This will be a red flag to you that something is wrong." It's not that God is mad at us or wants to disown us. On the contrary, He wants to draw us closer.

Following are five reasons our prayers fail to fly . . .

Failure to Reveal

John tells us that if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Perhaps this is seen no more clearly than in the life of David. Following his affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah, David spent a year attempting to hide his sin. The result was disastrous, as seen in Psalm 32. At last, he reached the point where he said, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And the very next sentence records Nathan’s words of forgiveness (2 Samuel 12:13).

In other words, with confession comes immediate forgiveness and restoration. We put off confession because we mistakenly think that forgiveness is a long, tedious process. In fact, because our sins were completely paid for on Calvary, as soon as we confess, forgiveness is immediate.

Failure to Request

James gives us a second possible reason as to why our prayers fail to fly . . .

> *From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*
>
> James 4:1–3

Rather than asking the Lord to provide our needs, our first response most often is to strive to meet them ourselves. But even when we do pray, we don't receive because we ask for things according to our own lusts—things that would ultimately be dangerous and detrimental to us. There is no need for striving and warring if we're praying, yet there is no point in praying if we're asking for things simply out of lust.

Failure to Respect

Peter gives us a third reason our prayers can fail to fly . . .

> *Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.*
>
> 1 Peter 3:7

Husbands, the Word tells us we need to be very careful how we treat our wives. We are to respect them as joint heirs of Jesus Christ and to honor them as more delicate, intricate vessels. If we don't do this, our prayers may be hindered.

The principle works both ways, I believe. A wrong relationship with your spouse jeopardizes your prayers.

Failure to Release

Sifting through the debris of crashed prayers, we find another piece of evidence . . .

> *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*
>
> Matthew 6:14, 15

Jesus says that if we forgive others, we will be forgiven. If we don't forgive others, we're still forgiven, but the trespasses that stand between us and God will not be forgiven and will sever the line of communication between us and God. In other words, we're forgiven positionally because the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us. Practically, however, our trespasses remain if we're not forgiving others and they will barricade us from communing with our Lord.

If there are people in your life you haven't forgiven, you very well may find your prayers crashing. What are you to do? If a specific person comes to mind, say, "Father, forgive me for not forgiving them. I release them right now totally and unconditionally."

> *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*
>
> Matthew 5:23, 24

Not only am I to forgive others, but if someone else is offended with me, it is my responsibility to reconcile the situation and repair the relationship. This doesn't mean you must track down everyone who has something against you. For many of us, that would be a full time job! It does mean, however, that, when you are worshiping and seeking the Lord, if He places a relationship that needs to be restored on your mind or heart, you are to make it right. But it must be the Holy Spirit who is leading and directing.

Failure to Read

> *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.*
>
> Proverbs 28:9

If you have neglected the study of Scripture, your prayers will be all mixed up and messed up because you'll be asking for the wrong things. Your prayers will be out in left field spiritually, completely removed from the heart of God because you haven't been hearing His Word. That's why the house of prayer, the church, must be a school of the Scriptures. It can't be an effective house of prayer if it's not a school where the Word is taught.

When your prayers aren't answered, don't quit praying. Instead, sift through the wreckage and see what's going wrong. Sometimes prayers that crash can be every bit as valuable, if not more so, than successful prayers because they cause us to get right with the Lord and to gain insight in our walk with Him.

If, to the best of your ability, you determine that none of the above issues apply to any given situation in your own prayer life, then you simply must keep praying. James said "the effectual, fervent prayers of a righteous man availeth much." And then he singled out Elijah as one who prayed effectively (5:16–18). After the Lord answered his prayer on Mt. Carmel by sending fire to prove His supremacy, Elijah prayed for rain. To do so, Scripture tells us he put his head between his knees and prayed. Then he asked his servant if there were any clouds.

"Not, not a cloud in sight," his servant answered.

So Elijah prayed again. Still no cloud. A third time, Elijah put his head between his knees and prayed again. Blue sky. It wasn't until Elijah prayed seven times that his servant saw a cloud the size of a man's fist afar off.

"Run!" Elijah said. "A storm is coming!" (1 Kings 18).

If Elijah were like us, the rain would most likely have never come because when things don't happen after praying once or twice, we tend to give up. Not Elijah. Why did he put his head between his knees? Because that

was the position of birthing. In other words, Elijah was laboring to produce in prayer that which God ultimately wanted to do.

What is God after? Why doesn't He answer the first time we pray? Why does He want us to press through, to labor? For one reason: He enjoys our company. You see, if God gave us our requests the first time every time, we'd run into His presence, saying, "Lord, give me the goods"—and then off we'd run. But, because He wants to cultivate a relationship with us rather than just give stuff to us, I have found that God will often hold back. But perhaps even more importantly, God holds back because in so doing He is training us how to persevere and press through. When we are ruling and reigning with Him in eternity, it will be imperative that we know what it truly means to be in communion with Him. So He's training us now.

When football teams train for the Super Bowl, none of the players say, "Coach, back off. Why do you keep making us run laps or lift weights or hit the tackling dummies, or go through the plays? What's all this repetition for?" They know he's readying them for a Super Bowl victory.

Our Father says, "The Super Bowl is coming. You're going to be involved in some important ministry in eternity. Therefore, I'm going to train you to persevere in prayer and press through with intensity because it will benefit you in the ages to come."

If your prayers are grounded, I encourage you to carefully consider the reason why—and then to determine to pray with renewed intensity and clarity, knowing that your Father wants them to soar in the heavenlies.



60 Isaiah 59 closed with the promise of a coming Redeemer. Chapter 60 begins with a presentation of the Redeemer. So confident was Isaiah that Messiah would come, he writes in the present tense as if it had already happened . . .

Isaiah 60:1–5
Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon

thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee.

We see not only the coming of Messiah but the restoration of Israel. That is, the people of Israel coming from all parts of the world, being gathered together, being nursed at the nations' side. What a day it will be when Israel is restored, when the Jews return to their homeland.

Isaiah 60:6
The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD.

As Messiah has come and the Jews have been regathered, becoming a nation once again, multitudes of camels shall come from Arabia bringing gold and incense. This puts us in mind of the camels bearing gold, frankincense, and myrrh that would come at the time of Jesus' First Coming as the Babe of Bethlehem. In Isaiah's prophecy, myrrh is not necessary for myrrh was the spice of burial and thus indicated that Jesus had come to die. But when He comes again, it won't be as the suffering Servant but as the conquering King, who died once for our sin and paid the price completely.

Isaiah 60:7
All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory.

We see Jesus coming back, the Jews being regathered in Israel, and people coming from the desert areas. Yet we also see sheep and rams being sacrificed upon His altar. In Ezekiel 40 through 44, we read that, in the coming Kingdom age, when Jesus rules and reigns on this earth, temple sacrifice will be reinstituted. Why? I suggest they will serve as a reminder of the sacrifice Jesus made to make kingdom life possible. Remembering that He was slaughtered for our sin will cause us to worship and praise Him all the more.

Isaiah 60:8
Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?

Many Bible teachers see in this a reference to the means by which Israel will return home. The Jews going back to their land, gathered together from all parts of the world, will fly like doves—perhaps a reference to the airplane.

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

Still speaking of the return of the Jews in the kingdom age, we read they will bring treasure with them. In Exodus when the Jews were freed from bondage in Egypt, the Egyptians gave the Jews valuable items (Exodus 12:36). So, when the Jews come back the second time, they'll also bring silver and gold with them.

Isaiah 60:10–14
And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their

kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

In Matthew 25:31–46, Jesus spoke of this event, as well. When the Tribulation is over, the Lord will gather the survivors of all the nations of the world and separate them into two groups: the sheep and the goats. The nations classified as sheep will be ushered into the millennial period—a thousand years of peace and prosperity. The goats will be sent out into outer darkness. Who are the sheep and goats? The defining issue is how people treat Israel during the Tribulation because when antichrist comes, he'll persuade the nations to hate the Jews. The nations who buy into his hatred will be doomed. But the nations who befriend Israel will be brought into the Millennium.

Isaiah 60:15
Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations.

Although nations would forsake Israel and be hostile toward her, God would see her through.

Isaiah 60:16–18
Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings: and thou shalt know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob. For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron: I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy

land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.

What a glorious day it will be when there is no more rioting or fighting, but great prosperity and abiding safety.

Isaiah 60:19–22
The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended. Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time.

At this point, these prophecies were perplexing to the prophets and people alike. After all, they spoke of the glory of the coming Messiah and of security and safety in Jerusalem—and yet other prophecies would speak of Messiah being beaten and physically rejected. It didn't seem to make sense. On one hand, the glory of the coming of Christ was seen in passages like Isaiah 60. On the other hand, the suffering of Christ was seen in passages like Isaiah 53. The prophets couldn't reconcile these things.

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

The prophets didn't have the understanding that we have graciously been given—that is, that Jesus would come twice. Did Jesus understand? Did He know that when He came, He was fulfilling certain prophecies, but others

needed to wait until His Second Coming? I believe we see the answer in the next chapter . . .



61 When Jesus was thirty years old, He walked into a small synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth. Being a traveling rabbi, as was the custom of the day, He was invited to read from the scrolls. He gave His first message from the passage before us . . .

Isaiah 61:1 (a)
The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek . . .

Jesus said that He came to call not the righteous but the sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13). For the most part, the Pharisees and Sadducees, the religious leaders of His day, thought they had no need of salvation. Jesus would call them a generation of vipers (Matthew 3:7). But to the meek—to those who realized they were sinners—He preached good tidings. That's why sinners loved to be around Him.

In our day, our challenge is to be sure that sinners love to be around us. It's too easy for the religious people to like to be around us. But sinners often think we're coming down on them and are intolerant of them. May the Lord help us to be like Jesus—preaching good tidings, good news to the meek, to the sinner.

Isaiah 61:1 (b), 2 (a)
. . . he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD . . .

Here, in the middle of verse 2, Jesus stopped reading (Luke 4:18, 19). Why did He stop here? Because the next phrase deals with the judgment and wrath of the Tribulation. And that wouldn't take place until His Second Coming.

Isaiah 61:2 (b)
. . . and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;

Because Jesus chose not to read this phrase when He came the first time, I believe He knew even as He began His ministry that He was involved in a two-phase event—coming first as a suffering Savior before He would return as a conquering King.

Isaiah 61:3
To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

Following the vengeance of the Tribulation, God will comfort. He'll give beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. This speaks of the Millennium to be sure, but also of our present situation. You see, a garment is something you can put on and take off. That's the way praise is. You can decide to slip it on or cast it off. It's a decision we make every day. When your spirit gets heavy, start praising and worshiping. Speak praise out loud. Sing songs of praise. Worship the Lord. The garment of praise or the spirit of heaviness? It's our choice.

Isaiah 61:4–6
And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations. And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves.

Exodus 19 tells us it was God's original intention that the people of Israel be a nation of priests. But they rebelled against God and lost their

calling. In the Millennium, when Jesus comes back, the Jews again will be ministers of God. They shall be the priests of Jehovah, enjoying the riches of the Gentiles who are presently putting them down.

God is not through with Israel, gang. The prophecies of the Bible will not make sense to you unless you see clearly that the Lord still has a wonderful work to do with her. In Romans 9—11, we see God's plan and heart for His people, the nation of Israel.

Isaiah 61:7
For your shame ye shall have double; and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess the double: everlasting joy shall be unto them.

In other words, the Jews would experience twice as much joy and blessing upon returning to their land as the confusion and shame they felt when they left it as they were carried into captivity.

Isaiah 61:8, 9
For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the LORD hath blessed.

The Lord loves judgment—that is, He loves justice. He loves alleviating the shame and suffering that injustice causes.

Isaiah 61:10, 11
I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth;

so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

This is the song of the ransomed and redeemed. It was sung by the Jews upon their return from Babylon. It is sung by believers, covered with the robe of Jesus' righteousness. And it will be sung in the kingdom age—all to the glory of God.



62 Isaiah 62:1–4

For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.

Hephzibah means "My delight is in her." *Beulah* means "married." In Babylon, Israel felt forsaken and desolate. But God was committed to making her the object of His delight. So too, as the bride of Christ, God is committed to completing the work He began in us when first we trusted in Him (Philippians 1:6).

Isaiah 62:5–7

For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, And give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

Through Isaiah, God says, "Give Me no rest until the things that are upon My heart are accomplished."

Jesus said the same thing. In Luke 11, teaching about prayer, He said, "At midnight, there was a knock on the door of a man's house. 'Go away!' the man said. 'It's late.'

"But the cry came from the other side of the door, 'I'm your friend. Open up!'

" 'No,' the homeowner said. 'My kids are all in bed. I don't want to wake them up.'

"But the man kept knocking. Finally the homeowner arose and let him in —not because of their friendship but because of his importunity. The guy just wouldn't stop knocking!"

Jesus was saying, "If a man who doesn't want to get out of bed responds to constant knocking, how much more readily will your Father respond to you?"

Jesus used this story as an illustration of what prayer is to be. "Ask and it shall be given," He would say. "Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door shall be opened unto you"—or literally, "*Keep* asking. *Keep* seeking. *Keep* knocking" (Matthew 7:7).

"Give Me no rest until these things be established," God says. I wonder how much is not established in our lives simply because we stopped praying. I wonder how many miracles, how many blessings we missed because we stopped knocking. It's not that God is teasing us. Rather, He wants to cultivate a relationship of faith, of perseverance, of affection, of communication with Him.

Isaiah 62:8–12

The LORD hath sworn by his right hand, and by the arm of his strength, Surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou hast laboured: But they that have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the LORD; and they that have brought it together shall drink it in the courts of my holiness. Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the

people. Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken.

A glorious picture is painted of the Jews' return to Jerusalem following their captivity in Babylon—as well as of their return to Jerusalem in the kingdom age.



63 Before the restoration of the kingdom as seen in chapters 61 and 62 takes place, there must first come tribulation as seen here in chapter 63 . . .

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

Named after Esau, Jacob's older brother, Edom is a symbol of the flesh. Bozrah also speaks of the flesh. For us, the picture is of Jesus dealing with the territories that are Edom-ish or Bozrah-like in our lives. He corrects us not to harass us but to free us from that which would ultimately destroy us.

Isaiah 63:2–6
Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to

help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth.

Jesus comes with glory and brightness, mighty to save. This speaks of His Second Coming. Revelation 19:11–13 describes this event very vividly. As seen there, as well as in the passage before us, blood will be on His garments. The question is, will you allow it to be His that was shed in love for you—or will it be yours as a result of His judgment upon you for your failure to accept the work He did on the Cross to set you free?

Isaiah 63:7–14
I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD, and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses. For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them. Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him? That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.

Even in this heavy prophetic picture of judgment, Isaiah remembers the mercies, the goodness, the kindness of God. If you can't think of anything to be thankful for, be thankful that you're not destroyed—for that's what we all deserve. In this picture of judgment, Isaiah does what we should do: remember the lovingkindness and goodness of God.

Isaiah 63:15–19
Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? are they restrained? Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting. O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance. The people of thy holiness have possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name.

"Command ye Me," God had said (Isaiah 45:11). And here, knowing God's heart for His people, Isaiah does just that.



64 Isaiah 64:1–4

Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence. For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.

As Isaiah is praying in the context of the judgment that will take place in the Tribulation, he says, "Lord, we don't even know the amazing things You have ahead for us."

Paul would echo this same thought . . .

> But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.
>
> 1 Corinthians 2:9

If you're living for your job, your bank account, your possessions, or even your family, you'll miss out on the life God has for you both now and eternally. But if, like Isaiah and Paul, you set your heart on heaven, you'll have abundant life on earth thrown in!

If like Isaiah we would just say, "Lord, we are looking and waiting for that which You have in store for us in heaven," you'll not only end up there, but you'll enjoy life as well. If you're living for your job or your bank account or your possessions, you'll miss both. Why doesn't God speak more to us about heaven? Because we couldn't comprehend it.

> **Isaiah 64:5, 6**
> **Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved. But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.**

All of our charitable giving, do-gooding, and volunteering are filthy rags because God sees not only what we do, but the mixed motives behind our actions. Jesus sees right through the things that look so noble to others.

> **Isaiah 64:7**
> **And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us,**

and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.

No one innately reaches out to the Lord because, as Paul would later say, "There is none that doeth good, no not one" (Romans 3:12). The only way we're saved is by God reaching out to us. He chose us and we simply responded.

Isaiah 64:8
But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.

Jeremiah and Paul would both use the analogy of clay to illustrate the sovereignty of God. God is the Master Potter. He can make us whatever He wishes. How can we trust He'll do what's best? By looking at His hands as He shapes us and at His feet as He turns the wheel—for therein we see the scars of the nails that pierced them when He died for us.

Isaiah 64:9–12
Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people. Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O LORD? wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?

God's people would indeed return to their homeland, but they would find the wall, the city, and, above all, the temple greatly in need of repair. God would answer this prayer of His people and provide both the means and the will to rebuild that which was lost. Isn't that always the way of our God?

65

Isaiah 65:1
I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that

sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name.

In Romans 10:20, Paul quotes this verse with reference to Gentiles. Because the Jews were not interested in Him, God sovereignly reached out to those who were not seeking Him at all. And I'm so thankful He did!

Isaiah 65:2–8
I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts; A people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face; that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick; Which remain among the graves, and lodge in the monuments, which eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels; Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day. Behold, it is written before me: I will not keep silence, but will recompense, even recompense into their bosom, Your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, saith the LORD, which have burned incense upon the mountains, and blasphemed me upon the hills: therefore will I measure their former work into their bosom. Thus saith the LORD, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all.

Just as there are good grapes in bad clusters, so there are good people in a nation that wasn't doing very well at all. Spiritually, Israel was rotten. But there were individuals who loved the Lord. It was because of them that He didn't destroy the entire cluster.

Isaiah 65:9, 10
And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there. And Sharon shall be a fold of flocks,

and the valley of Achor a place for the herds to lie down in, for my people that have sought me.

Notice that the Lord calls Israel His elect. Israel is also referred to as God's elect in verse 22 and in Romans 11:28. This is important because in Matthew 24, Jesus talks about gathering His elect in the Tribulation. As believers, we won't be there. His reference isn't to us, but to Israel.

Isaiah 65:11
But ye are they that forsake the LORD, that forget my holy mountain, that prepare a table for that troop, and that furnish the drink offering unto that number.

"That troop" and "that number" refer to games associated with idolatry. Most of the people to whom Isaiah prophesied were not part of the remnant that loved God. They were playing games. In this, I'm reminded of the soldiers who cast lots for Jesus' garments, completely oblivious to the fact that, as He hung on the cross, their eternal destiny hung in the balance (Matthew 27:35).

Most of the people to whom Isaiah prophesied were not part of the elect, the remnant, the group that loved God. They were preparing tables to destiny and fortune. In other words, gambling. They were playing games associated with idols. That's where their hearts were. Troop is fortune, number is destiny.

Isaiah 65:12–15
Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: Behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit. And ye shall leave

your name for a curse unto my chosen: for the Lord GOD shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name:

These who forsook the Lord and chased after other gods would be slain and God's servants would be called by another name. What would that name be? It was in Antioch that believers were called Christians for the first time (Acts 11:26). In calling them "little Christs," people were actually putting down the believers. But it is a name we who know Him should wear with great humility and responsibility. God help us to live up to it by behaving like Jesus, by showing the love and grace He showed.

Isaiah 65:16, 17 (a)
That he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hid from mine eyes. For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth . . .

The Hebrew word translated "create" is *bara* and means to create from nothing. When we read in Genesis 1:1 that God created the heavens and the earth, the word used is also *bara.* In other words, God didn't use preexisting materials to create the earth. He simply spoke the word and it became. The use of *bara* here in Isaiah means that God is going to create something entirely new. It won't be a matter of simply remodeling the earth and the heavens, for in 2 Peter 3:10, we read that this earth will be done away with entirely. In a millisecond flash of unbelievable energy and fervent heat, things will cease to be.

Isaiah 65:17 (b)
. . . and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

The new heaven and earth will be so wonderful that we won't even remember what was there before. The things of this world and the relationships with people that are in hell and lost because of their rejection of Jesus won't even come to mind. Otherwise, heaven couldn't be heaven. I believe we would be mourning throughout eternity if we remembered all of

our friends and family that didn't receive Jesus. So the Lord does something altogether new.

Isaiah 65:18, 19
But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

What a message of hope for the people of Jerusalem today, where there is so much weeping and crying seemingly without a solution or an end. But in the day of the new heaven and the new earth, weeping and wailing will be replaced by joy and rejoicing.

Isaiah 65:20 (a)
There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old . . .

In the kingdom age, there will be health, peace, and rightness to such a degree that most people will live all the way through the Millennium. We who are Christians won't have physical bodies at that time. We'll be ruling and reigning with Christ in the millennial kingdom. But we'll have already been caught up to heaven and will have received our glorified bodies. Therefore, this doesn't apply to us, but rather to those who come to the Lord during the Tribulation.

Isaiah 65:20 (b)
. . . but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.

This evidently speaks of those who, even in the glorious kingdom age, refuse to submit to the lordship of Jesus.

Isaiah 65:21, 22
And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and

another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

In the kingdom age, the houses and vineyards people build and plant will be for their own blessing. This solves the problem of the corruption of capitalism. Communism and Socialism came to answer the corruption of capitalism—only for man to discover that they were even more corrupt systems. In the kingdom, however, there will be a perfect blend of capitalism and communism in the best sense of the word.

As believers, we do a great disservice to our calling to think that capitalism is the answer or that the American form of democracy is where it's at. I'm grateful for our system, but I'm not naive enough to think that our system is the answer. The answer lies only in looking to God and honoring Him. God will bless those people no matter their system of government. Any people who look to God will be blessed by Him.

Isaiah 65:23, 24
They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.

The presence of the Lord will be so real in the kingdom age that there will be no need for fasting, praying through, or pleading with God—for before we even call, He'll answer.

Isaiah 65:25
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.

In the kingdom, harmony will replace ferocity and humility will be the order of the day.

66

Isaiah 66:1

Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my foot stool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?

The house spoken of here refers to the temple. Before the Tribulation, antichrist will apparently work out a compromise between the Muslims and the Jews allowing the temple to be rebuilt on the temple mount. This will give him even greater power in the geopolitical political arena.

Isaiah 66:2, 3 (a)

For all those things hath mine hand made, and those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. . . .

Here, the Lord says, "I'm not impressed by your structures or your sacrifices. After all, you can't offer Me anything I don't already own. What I want is for you to humble yourselves before Me and be obedient to Me."

Isaiah 66:3 (b)

. . . Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations.

"For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings," God declared through His prophet, Hosea (6:6). Anything we give to God is an abomination if it's not accompanied by a heart of mercy and obedience.

Isaiah 66:4, 5

I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not. Hear the word of the LORD, ye that tremble at his word; your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the LORD be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.

The same people who built the temple and made these offerings, would go about casting out the Lord's people, saying, "The Lord be glorified." This speaks prophetically of one who came on the scene and did just that—Saul of Tarsus. Before the Lord stopped him in his tracks on the road to Damascus, Paul thought he was glorifying God by arresting Christians. He was sincere, but sincerely wrong. He was zealous but his zeal was misdirected.

May God help us lest we think we're doing Him a favor by rebuking a brother, putting down a group, or finding fault with a church. The Holy Spirit will convict our brothers when they're mistaken. We don't have to go around doing His job. It's God's part to convict, chasten, and discipline. It's ours to love, forgive, and embrace.

Isaiah 66:6–9
A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the LORD that rendereth recompence to his enemies. Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the LORD: shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb? saith thy God.

"Who has heard of a nation being born in a single day?" the Lord asked. No one in history had heard of such a thing—until our generation. A nation was literally birthed in a day: May 14, 1948. By proclamation of the United Nations, Israel was born in a single day.

Isaiah 66:10, 11
Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her: That ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory.

Those who love Israel will be blessed. Those who pray for her will prosper.

Isaiah 66:12, 13
For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

Likening Himself to a mother, God says, "I'm going to bounce you upon My knee." In Genesis, God identified Himself to Abraham as *El Shaddai*. *El* means "strong." *Shaddai* means "breasted." Thus, God identifies Himself not only as a strong Father, but as a tender, nourishing Mother.

Isaiah 66:14–16
And when ye see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb: and the hand of the LORD shall be known toward his servants, and his indignation toward his enemies. For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many.

To those who would not respond to His love, God pleads through fire and sword.

Isaiah 66:17

They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one tree in the midst, eating swine's flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, shall be consumed together, saith the LORD.

These people were sneaking off into groves to eat pork and mice—both forbidden by Old Testament law. We do the same thing whenever we sneak off to our own little groves to find pleasure in people or activities we know are not of God.

Isaiah 66:18, 19
For I know their works and their thoughts: it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory. And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal, and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles.

In the kingdom age, the Lord shall dispatch Jews to carry His message of salvation to those in far-off regions who survive the Tribulation.

Isaiah 66:20
And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the LORD out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the LORD, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD.

Again, this describes the great gathering that will take place in the kingdom age resulting in the Jews' return to Jerusalem.

Isaiah 66:21–23
And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD. For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed

and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD.

What a great day it will be when the Jews join all people in converging upon Jerusalem to worship. Sometimes I think we get a little taste of this in times of intense worship and fellowship even now.

Isaiah 66:24
And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcases of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.

Sadly, while the kingdom is celebrating, there will be incredible suffering as those who reject the King will be left to the consequences of their own will.

Many a person has been brought into heaven by being scared out of hell. That's why I was saved. I became a Christian when I heard a sermon on hell. At three and a half years old, I usually slept in the pew in the Assembly of God church my parents attended. But one particular Sunday night, the preacher preached on hell and I listened intently. "Satan has a stopwatch in his hand," he said, "and he sees his time coming to an end. Therefore, he's chasing you harder and faster and more energetically than ever because he sees his time is running out and he wants you."

Me? I thought. So when the invitation was given, I slid off the pew, went forward, and got saved that night. My parents prayed with me later on in the evening and I gave my life to Jesus right then.

I knew God's love, but what I needed to know was the reality of hell. Maybe you know people who aren't responding to the goodness of God and committing their life to Jesus. Very respectfully, I say, "Give them hell." Let them know that if they're not going to respond to the love of God, they will have to deal with eternity apart from God.

HELL IS FOR REAL

A Topical Study of ISAIAH 66:22–24

"And they all lived happily ever after." That's the way we like our stories to end. And as we come to the last chapter of Isaiah, that is partially the case, for we read of a new heaven and a new earth where God will wipe away all of our tears, where everything will be right.

It would be wonderful if Isaiah had stopped right there. But there's one more verse. The final verse of Isaiah is not so wonderful, not quite as joyful, for in it he speaks not of the bliss of the thousand-year kingdom or the incredible glory of the new heaven and earth, but of fire and worms that will never die.

I love to talk about the mercy, love, and grace of God, the coming of Christ, and the glories of heaven. Hell is a topic not as pleasant to speak about, but one I must because Jesus gave more teachings on hell than He did on heaven. Why? He knew its reality. So God the Father inspired the prophet Isaiah to end his message not just with the hope of the coming kingdom and the glories of a new heaven, but with a warning about the reality of eternal damnation.

Hell. Many people don't believe in it. The rationalist says, "I can't believe that a God who is supposed to be love would actually send people to hell." Intellectually, people have a hard time accepting it. In fact, they spend much of their time building a case to deny it. And yet the Lord states very clearly that it is a place to be reckoned with, that it is reality.

> *For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not*

quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Mark 9:41–48

Every one of us is in one of two categories. There are those who say, "Thy will be done, Lord" and there are those who say, "My will be done. With my foot, I'll walk where *I* want. With my hand, I'll touch what *I* want. With my eyes, I'll see things from *my* perspective. I'll do it my way." God won't send these people to hell. But if they are absolutely determined to do their own will, He will allow them to go there. That is why hell is not a contradiction to God's love but rather a confirmation of it. Because God is love, He won't force man to do His will. He will let man have his way—but it will invariably, without exception, lead him to hell.

That is why Jesus said, "I implore and beseech you to cut out your eye, cut off your hand, do whatever is necessary to get off the path that will lead to destruction, to hell itself both presently and eternally." If God means nothing to you and rightness has no appeal for you, if you want to walk and touch and see the way you want, He'll say, "Your will be done. I won't force My way upon you." And you will begin the long, terrible descent into hell itself.

When the multitude rejected Him, Jesus wasn't angry. He didn't raise His fist and shout, "To hell with you!" He wept (Luke 19:41). Therefore, we know that it's a brokenhearted, loving Father who say, "If you absolutely insist that your will be done, I won't force you to receive My Son."

Who will be in hell? Satan and his angels, for whom it was created. According to Acts 1:20, Judas Iscariot will be there. Revelation 20:10 says that the antichrist—the world leader that will be indwelt by Satan himself—will be in hell as will the false prophet, his right-hand man. But there is another group of people who will be there, as well . . .

> *But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*
>
> Revelation 21:8

"I'm not a murderer," you say. But Jesus said that if you've been angry with your brother without cause, you're guilty of murder (Matthew 5:21, 22). "I'm not a whoremonger," you protest. But Jesus said that if you've looked at a woman with lust in your heart, you've committed adultery (Matthew 5:28). And who of us would have the audacity to say we've never lied or stretched the truth?

The lake of fire is the second death. The second death is talked about in Revelation 20 . . .

> *And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*
>
> Revelation 20:10–15

Hell is cast into the lake of fire. Death is cast into the lake of fire. What is this lake of fire? The word, *gehenna,* comes from Hinnom—a physical location right outside the eastern wall of Jerusalem which has a very colorful but brutal past. It was in the valley of Hinnom that a wicked king named Ahaz

constructed idols to Moloch upon which babies were sacrificed. In the days of Jesus, the valley of Hinnom was a garbage dump where all of the refuse of Jerusalem burned day and night. We read in Matthew 27 that, after Judas betrayed Jesus, he hung himself outside of the temple. We are then told in Acts 1 that his body fell down to an area of Hinnom known as the potter's field—an area where potters would throw the broken pieces of their pottery. In A.D. 70, when the Romans began to destroy Jerusalem, it was into the valley of Hinnom that they threw the bodies of the 600,000 Jews they slaughtered.

So when *gehenna* was used, people associated it with sizzling flesh, burning garbage, death, and slaughter. It was a terrible place. Yet people today are dumb enough to say, "If I go to hell, that's okay with me. My buddies will be there and we'll play poker and watch videos." Not so. The Greek word used for fire is *pur,* the same word used in Matthew 17 to describe the fire into which the demonized boy threw himself. We're not talking about spiritualized fire. It's literal. But Jesus also said it is outer darkness. In other words, the fire will burn, but no light will come forth. How is this possible? Astronomists have told us that perhaps one-tenth of the universe has been consumed by black holes. Black holes form from an imploding star whose mass is so great, whose gravitational pull is so strong that they are like disposals in your sink. Things go in but are never seen again. Even light, as it's sucked into these cosmic "disposals," never comes out. Could it be that somehow these black holes relate to eternal damnation?

There will be no buddies, no poker, no videos. There will be worms and wailing and fire. Revelation goes on to describe hell in conjunction with a bottomless pit. If you're an unbeliever, enjoy life now because this is as good as you're ever going to have it. Everything from here on is downhill, a bottomless pit. On the other hand, if you're a believer, take hope. This is as bad as it's ever going to be. The struggles with our flesh, the disappointments, the heartaches are real now. But we're going to heaven where there will be no more tears or sorrow.

What does it mean that at the great white throne God will judge those who are resurrected and they will be cast into this lake of fire, into *gehenna?* Where are they right now? And what does it mean that hell itself is cast into this lake of fire?

People are not in the lake of fire right now. That will happen at the great white throne judgment. Once the Millennium is over, God will resurrect the unbelieving dead to stand before Him at the great white throne. Perhaps they'll say, "I'm a pretty good guy. You can't allow me to spend eternity in outer darkness." But as He opens the books of their lives, the thoughts no one knew they were thinking will be revealed. The reason behind all their "good deeds" will come to light. Sins they thought were long forgotten will be exposed. At that point, I believe no one will argue or even wait to hear God tell them to depart from Him, but will flee themselves, knowing of their sin and horrendous iniquity.

Where are these people presently? We find the answer in Luke 16 . . .

> *There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.*
>
> Luke 16:19–26

Before Jesus died, when a person died, he went to one of two sides of hades. One side was called Abraham's bosom, or paradise—a place that was pleasant, a place that was heavenly but not heaven. The other side was what we call hell. Ephesians 4:8, 9 tell us that when Jesus died, before He

ascended, He first descended into the lower parts of the earth and led captivity captive. That is, He took the believers from paradise into heaven where they could now live because the price for their sin was paid. When a believer dies now, he goes straight to heaven, for to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). The unbelieving dead still go to the second compartment of hades or hell, the place of torment, to await the great white throne judgment before they will be sent to *gehenna* itself.

God never intended anyone to be in hell. And even when we chose to do our own will, He didn't give up on us. He sent Jesus Christ, His Son, to die on the Cross of Calvary. As Jesus was slaughtered on the Cross for my sin, He descended to the lower parts of the earth. He paid the price for my sin. He took the heat of hell for me and you.

We're all sinners, murderers, whoremongers, liars—there is no exception for all have sinned, every one. But He who knew no sin took our sin upon Himself, died in our place, and went to hell for us. He paid the price completely and if we simply believe this, we will be saved eternally.

Jesus cared enough about you and me to tell us the truth about hell. We need to listen to what He says. If you're not a believer, this needs to be the day of your conversion. If you're a believer, this needs to be the day of new compassion for those around you headed for hell. And if you're only a nominal believer, I challenge you to make this a day of consideration. Jesus died for you and it's time to start living for Him in light of heaven and eternity, in light of hell and its reality.



JEREMIAH

Background to Jeremiah

Jeremiah is a most interesting personality. Although he was a prophet of God, he wasn't the greatest prophet. That honor would go to Isaiah, who wrote so powerfully about the coming of Christ. Nor was he the most mystical prophet. That honor would go to Ezekiel, who talked about visions such as a wheel in the middle of a wheel. And he was not the most successful prophet. That honor would go to Jonah, for once he finally made it to Nineveh, his single message resulted in the repentance of the entire city of Nineveh. Jeremiah wasn't the greatest, the most mystical, or the most successful prophet—but, without a doubt, he was the most courageous of the prophets. His enemies tied him up and threw him in a dungeon because they didn't like his message. His family and friends rejected him. Other prophets and priests made fun of him. He was placed in stocks and beaten, humiliated, and ridiculed. And yet for forty-two years, Jeremiah kept on proclaiming the message God had laid on his heart. For forty-two years, he preached—even though not a single person responded.

The Lord doesn't ask us to be successful. He asks us to be faithful. Each of us has a job to do and the Lord isn't asking for success, for only He can bring that about. He simply asks us to be faithful—to do what He says. Jeremiah did just that. Faithfully, he preached and proclaimed the message that judgment was coming to the nation of Judah. There was gross immorality, a great degree of idolatry, all kinds of carnality. And God told Jeremiah to tell His people that they were bringing an avalanche of judgment upon themselves.

At this time—from 627 to 586 B.C.—Habakkuk and Zephaniah were also ministering in Judah. Habakkuk could be thought of as the praying prophet. Zephaniah was the preaching prophet. Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. He was a heartbroken prophet with a heartbreaking message. Throughout this book, we will see him weeping, crying, grieving for the people of God who had turned away from their God.

The praying prophet, the preaching prophet, the weeping prophet are all examples of how we should minister in the age in which we live. We should be preaching against sin as Zephaniah did, praying about sin as Habakkuk

did, and weeping over sin as Jeremiah did. Those three characteristics must operate simultaneously in us if we are going to be the kind of servants and ministers in our society that God would have us be.

In 586, Jeremiah went to Egypt and lived there with other Jews who had fled from the Babylonians. Tradition tells us that he was stoned there and buried in an unmarked grave, killed by his brothers who didn't like the message he brought.

Jeremiah's call was to prophesy to a dying nation. We, too, are watching a time when our own society is collapsing and decaying, when we, like the people of Judah, are bringing judgment upon ourselves. As we go through Jeremiah's message, we will see many parallels between his day and ours. My prayer is that, in looking at his life, we will become God's people for our time as Jeremiah was for his.



JEREMIAH

1 In chapter 1, we see the portrait of a prophet. We see his person in verses 1 through 3, his preparation in verses 4 and 5, his problem in verse 6, God's provision in verse 7, His promise in verse 8, and His power in verse 9.

Jeremiah 1:1, 2
The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: To whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign.

Jeremiah was the son of a priest named Hilkiah. He lived in a community of priests in Anathoth, a small village about two miles north of Jerusalem. He began his ministry in the days of Josiah, the last of the good kings of Judah. Josiah began his reign at the ripe old age of eight. When he was sixteen, we are told he set his heart to seek the Lord. At the age of twenty, Josiah destroyed all the idols in the land of Judah. At the age of twenty-five, he refurbished the temple, which had been neglected. In the refurbishing process, the law, which had been lost for years, was recovered. Many scholars believe that the Hilkiah that found the scrolls is the same Hilkiah that was Jeremiah's dad (2 Kings 22:8). When Josiah read the law, realizing how far Judah had strayed from the ways of the Lord, he wept and tremendous reformation followed when he told the people they had to get back to the principles of the Word.

Jeremiah 1:3
It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month.

Jeremiah ministered not only in the days of Josiah, but of Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Although he talked to all four final kings very powerfully, the final three refused to listen to him.

Jeremiah 1:4, 5
Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

Before Jeremiah was born, the Lord had already called him and was shaping him, preparing him for significant ministry. Paul would say he, too, was ordained in his mother's womb (Galatians 1:15). Psalm 139 tells us that it is the Lord who puts man together in the womb of his mother and that all of his days are organized by Him. Passages like these provide the strongest possible arguments against abortion.

Jeremiah 1:6
Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

Jeremiah was probably thirty years old at this time. Thirty years was the age at which priests began their ministry. At thirty years, David began to be king over Israel. At thirty years, Jesus initiated His public ministry. There is something significant about the number thirty. Jeremiah was at that age, but still felt unprepared. Why? Perhaps it was because, as a priest's kid, he knew what it would take to follow in his father's footsteps.

Godly parents are one of the greatest gifts kids can have. Yet the way to turn our kids off to the things of God is to put down the preacher, the musicians, or the people in the church. Talk about the things of the Lord and the people of God in a merciful, kind way, and your kids will be far more likely to grow up loving the people of God and walking in the way of the Lord.

Jeremiah 1:7, 8

But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah's problem was that he felt inadequate to get involved in ministry. The Lord, however, promised not only to provide him with the words to speak, but promised him His presence, that He would be with Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 1:9
Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.

Here, we see the power given to Jeremiah as the Lord put His words in Jeremiah's mouth. The Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). Therefore, just as He provided Jeremiah His words, He has provided us with His Word. True power comes not from sharing with people what we think but what God's Word says, not from our ideas or philosophies but what Scripture states with certainty and authority.

Jeremiah 1:10
See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

The ministry of a prophet is always profitable but not always pleasant. It's not simply planting and building, but the ministry of a prophet is also pulling down, throwing down, tearing up, rooting out. There had to be a breaking before there could be a building. There had to be a clearing of the land before there could be a planting of the seed. Jeremiah knew this. He saw it in his father and in the priestly community that ministry wouldn't always be easy.

"To every thing there is a season," Solomon declared, "and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time

to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up . . .” (Ecclesiastes 3:1–3). Building up is always more fulfilling than pulling down, planting always more exciting than destroying, yet, like Solomon, Jeremiah was told he would have to root out, pull down, destroy, and throw down before he could build and plant. And so must we. Paul tells us we are to pull down strongholds and cast down imaginations that seek to have pre-eminence over Christ in our thoughts and minds (2 Corinthians 10:4, 5).

True ministry is not about getting people to like us but rather speaking as the Lord directs in humility and integrity—even if that means rooting out and throwing down in order that God may build up and plant deep.

Jeremiah 1:11, 12
Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond tree. Then said the LORD unto me, Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten my word to perform it.

Synonymous with life and fruit, the almond tree was the first tree in the area to bud. Aaron’s rod budded with the buds of almonds as a sign of his authority (Numbers 17:8). Therefore, for Jeremiah to see a rod of an almond tree spoke of the authority God had given him for his own ministry.

Jeremiah 1:13–16
And the word of the LORD came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou? And I said, I see a seething pot; and the face thereof is toward the north. Then the LORD said unto me, Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land. For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the LORD; and they shall come, and they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.

This boiling, steaming pot is a reference to Babylon. At this time, the Babylonian empire was beginning to heat up. Before long, they would conquer the Assyrians and cruise down to destroy Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 1:17
Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them.

"Be not dismayed at their faces." Paul would take this command to heart by choosing to obey God rather than to fear man (Galatians 1:10).

Jeremiah 1:18, 19
For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee.

Although Jeremiah saw himself as young and unprepared, God saw him as strong as a fortified city, knowing that He Himself would defend him.



2

Jeremiah 2:1
Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Here we come to Jeremiah's first full message. It's in three parts and goes on for several chapters.

Jeremiah 2:2, 3
Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land

that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the LORD, and the firstfruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the LORD.

The first part of Jeremiah's message is simply summarized in the word, "remember."

"Remember how it was when you first loved Me," the Lord says to His people through Jeremiah—"even when the land was yet wilderness, before it was prosperous."

I think of the words of Jesus to the church at Ephesus when He says, "I know all your good works, all your activities, all the ministry you're doing. But I have something against you. You've left your first love. Your love for Me has diminished. Remember from whence thou art fallen" (Revelation 2:2–4).

Can you remember a time when you loved the Lord more than you do now? Was there a time when your love for Him was real and fresh and vital? Have things changed? Are devotions a drag? Is church a drudgery? Are the things of God a burden? "Remember," God would say, "how it was when you really sought Me. They may have been wilderness times, difficult times, but you loved Me and were wholly committed to Me."

Jeremiah 2:4, 5
Hear ye the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel: Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?

"What have I done to cause you to turn away from Me?" God asks. The heartbreak of God the Father is heard in this chapter.

Jeremiah 2:6–11
Neither said they, Where is the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt? And I brought you into a plentiful country,

to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination. The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit. Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit.

Even though God had been faithful to His people by freeing them and feeding them, redeeming them and rewarding them, protecting them and providing for them, they forsook Him. This was especially unconscionable in light of the fact that there was not a single instance of a heathen nation forsaking its own powerless idols, much less a God who cared for them as the God of Israel had done for His people.

Jeremiah 2:12, 13 (a)
Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters . . .

Jesus would use the term "living water" to refer to Himself (John 4:10, 7:38). Drink of the water of materialism, pleasure, or relationships and you'll thirst again. You'll always need one more party, one more pay raise, one more friend. But in Jesus, you're satisfied at last.

"Our hearts are restless until we find our rest in Thee," Augustine said. Truly, we were created for God and we will be restless, thirsty, and unsatisfied until we drink of Him.

Jeremiah 2:13 (b)
. . . and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

In Jeremiah's day, people would carve cisterns in the sides of the hills to catch the water that would run off. These cisterns would serve as reservoirs to hold the water during the dry seasons. If a cistern developed a crack, however, it could hold no water and would only be used as a grave. Thus, the Lord says, "My people have committed two evils. Not only have they forsaken Me, the Source of their refreshment, but they are seeking to find it in ways that will ultimately bury them."

Jeremiah 2:14–18
Is Israel a servant? is he a homeborn slave? why is he spoiled? The young lions roared upon him, and yelled, and they made his land waste: his cities are burned without inhabitant. Also the children of Noph and Tahapanes have broken the crown of thy head. Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, when he led thee by the way? And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?

This speaks of Judah's propensity to form alliances rather than to seek God.

Jeremiah 2:19
Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts.

When my youngest daughter, Mary Elizabeth, was sixteen months old or so, she loved her baby brother, Ben, who was four months old. Ben loved to swing. And when he did, Mary seemed to always want to give him a kiss. But, knowing that if she tried, she would go sprawling when the swing hit her, we discouraged her from doing so. One day, however, in her rebelliousness and iniquity, Mary Elizabeth didn't heed the commands and guidance of her father. As Ben was swinging, she leaned in to kiss him—and before she knew it, she was laying on her back. Her "backsliding" caused her

to be "backsided." It wasn't a matter of my punishing her—but simply of her reaping the consequences built into her disobedience.

So often, when people find themselves flat on their back and bloodied, they shake their fist and say, "God why are You doing this to me?" But in reality, their calamity is simply the result of their own forsaking the Lord and ignoring His Word. God is grieved when we reject Him because He knows the swing is headed our way and we're going to take a fall.

Jeremiah 2:20–22
For of old time I have broken thy yoke, and burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot. Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me? For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord GOD.

Josiah, who was king at this time, came up with all kinds of rules to aid in reformation. Because they loved Josiah, people tried to clean up their act outwardly. But their hearts were far from God.

Reformation doesn't last. We need regeneration. Jesus was absolutely right: we *must* be born again (John 3:7). The only way man will truly change is not through external rules but through internal transformation.

Jeremiah 2:23–25 (a)
How canst thou say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim? see thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done: thou art a swift dromedary traversing her ways; A wild ass used to the wilderness, that snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure; in her occasion who can turn her away? all they that seek her will not weary themselves; in her month they shall find her. Withhold thy foot from being unshod, and thy throat from thirst . . .

The picture here is one of people following Baal as foolishly as wild donkeys follow each other.

Jeremiah 2:25 (b)
. . . but thou saidst, There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.

This is what Satan does. He seduces us to follow after some stranger and to get sucked into some sin. Then he condemns us to the point where we think our situation is hopeless, that there's no way back for us.

Jeremiah 2:26–28
As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets, Saying to a stock, Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned their back unto me, and not their face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us. But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble: for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah.

"You've made your idols out of stock, wood, or stone. But in the day of trouble, they won't be able to save you," Jeremiah declares. In our culture, we have the same idols—not the stones and wood themselves, but the same ideas behind those stones and wood: money, sensuality, intellectual pursuit.

Everyone has times of trouble when we're face to face with eternity. That's the problem with idols. They can't help you when you need help most. But, in time of trouble, the true and living God just becomes all the more real. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil," David said, "for thou art with me" (Psalm 23:4). Jesus takes us *through* the valley of the shadow of death. He doesn't leave us there.

Jeremiah 2:29–32
Wherefore will ye plead with me? ye all have transgressed against me, saith the LORD. In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction: your own sword hath devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion. O generation, see ye the word of the LORD. Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of

darkness? wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee? Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number.

You can hear the heartbeat of God the Father, grieving over people who ignore Him, wondering what He had done wrong to make the people go days on end without even acknowledging Him.

Jeremiah 2:33–37
Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love? therefore hast thou also taught the wicked ones thy ways. Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents: I have not found it by secret search, but upon all these. Yet thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me. Behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned. Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way? thou also shalt be ashamed of Egypt, as thou wast ashamed of Assyria. Yea, thou shalt go forth from him, and thine hands upon thine head: for the LORD hath rejected thy confidences, and thou shalt not prosper in them.

God didn't need to search far to find proof that His people had turned to other nations and other gods rather than Him.

RISING ABOVE REJECTION

A Topical Study of JEREMIAH 2

Valentines Day, 1967. I was in eighth grade and very much interested in a girl named Pam Harlowe. At that time, I was playing on the Santa Clara County Hornets, a Pop Warner football team. The 1966 Hornets were undefeated, the Pop Warner National Champs. The year I joined the team, we were 11–1: one win, eleven losses. Nonetheless, I wanted to give Pam something special so I unscrewed one of my cleats, sprayed it gold, and put it with a Valentine note into an envelope. When I got to school, I walked up to Pam, Valentine note and spray-painted cleat in hand. As I approached, I could see that she was wearing a gold football on a gold chain.

"Where did you get that?" I asked cautiously.

"Scott Miller," she sighed dreamily.

Scott Miller played quarterback on the '66 team. At that point, I knew I didn't have a chance.

I think every one of us has experienced the pain and sting of rejection. Rejection is always hard to swallow and often hard to understand. But, in reality, no rejection we experience can compare with the audacity of the human tendency to reject the One who created us, cares about us, and gave His life for us. People have the audacity to reject God constantly. It just doesn't make sense that we, being so ugly, would reject One who is so lovely; that we, being so impoverished, would reject One who desires to enrich; that we, being so weird, would reject One so wonderful. It's hard to understand how we, as people, could reject God who is so good.

Not only are we guilty of rejecting God, but every one of us will experience rejection ourselves. This is an absolute fact of spiritual life. "The servant is not greater than his master," Jesus said. "Therefore, because men have persecuted Me, so they'll persecute you" (see John 15:20).

> *At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the*

preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

2 Timothy 4:16, 17

Here was a man who gave himself to ministry, who was radically involved in caring and serving God's people. Yet at the end of his life, Paul said, "All have forsaken me." If the apostle Paul experienced that in his ministry, if Jesus experienced it to the point where on the Cross He cried out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" certainly we must realize that rejection is an integral part of God's program.

Why is rejection a part of God's program for you and me?

Rejection Allows Us to See Jesus

First, rejection allows us to see God's faithfulness. You see, when things are going well, when your friends are at your side and your family is patting you on the back and everything is wonderful, there is a tendency to forget the Lord. But suddenly, when your wife hands you divorce papers, your boyfriend says, "We're through," or the friends you trusted turn against you—suddenly, like Paul, you say, "Even though all men forsook me, the Lord stood with me."

"I will never leave you nor forsake you," Jesus promised (Hebrews 13:5). And His faithfulness shines brightest when contrasted with the frailty of human relationships, the weakness of the human heart.

In John 2:21, we read that Jesus did not commit Himself to any man for He knew what was in men. In other words, Jesus knew that the very crowd saying, "Hosanna! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord," would, a few days later, cry, "Crucify Him!" The fickleness of man lies in sharp contrast with the faithfulness of Jesus.

Rejection Allows Us to Be More Like Jesus

Second, rejection allows us to be more like Jesus. "Make me like You, Lord," we sing. If we are really going to be made into the image of Jesus, rejection is an absolute necessity.

You see, true love gives for the sake of giving, never expecting anything in return. God wants you to be like Jesus in order that you might love others and love Him. But if people always respond to my love, I can subconsciously use my love to get something in return. Therefore, it is only when everyone rejects me, when those who are close to me want nothing to do with me, that I have the opportunity to learn to love supernaturally like Jesus.

True love is only learned and developed in the school of rejection. There is no other way. If you're going to be like Jesus, you'll experience rejection even as He did in order that you might learn to love, even as He does.

When rejection comes my way, I can do one of three things. I can isolate myself from people because they don't appreciate or understand me. The problem is, isolation is in direct violation of God's Word, for Hebrews 10:25 tells us not to forsake the gathering of ourselves together.

"But it hurts to be with other people," you might say.

That's okay. The Bible says we're living stones being fit together to form a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). Therefore, we're bound to chip each other from time to time. But it's all part of the process.

The second possibility is to complain about rejection, saying, "if I must be with people, I'm going to let them know how rotten I'm being treated." But if you choose this option, you're in bad company, for you'll be in the camp of the accuser of the brethren, Satan himself (Revelation 12:10).

Accept the rejection from people *in* your life. More importantly, avoid rejecting God *from* your life. If days have gone by since you talked to or walked with the Lord, today is the day to turn back to Him. He is oh, so ready to receive you. Love the Lord, gang. Cling to Him. And you will truly find blessing in your soul and on your life.

Jeremiah 3:1

3 **They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD.**

According to Old Testament law, if a man divorced his wife and she married another, she could not go back to him under any circumstances lest the land be polluted (Deuteronomy 24:4). Here, however, God invites His people to do just that—to return to Him even though they had followed other gods. And that is still the word of the Lord to you and me. Regardless of the idols you've been serving or how much you've been ignoring the One who loves you, He says, "Return to Me today."

Jeremiah 3:2, 3

Lift up thine eyes unto the high places, and see where thou hast not been lien with. In the ways hast thou sat for them, as the Arabian in the wilderness; and thou hast polluted the land with thy whoredoms and with thy wickedness. Therefore the showers have been withholden, and there hath been no latter rain; and thou hadst a whore's forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed.

The reason there was no rain in the land at this time was because God's people had turned away from Him. So too, we won't experience the latter rain of the Spirit (Zechariah 10:1) if we turn away from Him.

Jeremiah 3:4–6

Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou art the guide of my youth? Will he reserve his anger for ever? will he keep it to the end? Behold, thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldest. The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot.

The mountainous areas of trees and groves were where the people practiced idolatry, which was linked with immoral behavior.

Jeremiah 3:7, 8
And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.

It has been said that the only thing man learns from history is that man doesn't learn from history. Approximately a hundred years before this prophecy was given, in 722 B.C., the Assyrians came down, carried the ten northern tribes of Israel into captivity, and they were never heard from again. Judah saw what had happened to Israel—but she didn't learn from it.

Jeremiah 3:9, 10
And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD.

Judah pretended to love God outwardly. She followed all kinds of rituals and went to the temple regularly. But her heart was far from Him.

Jeremiah 3:11–14
And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah. Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not

obeyed my voice, saith the LORD. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion:

The first part of Jeremiah's message was "remember." The second part was "realize." Here, we see the third part is "return." Because the heart of our Lord is so incredibly merciful and gracious, we don't have to work our way back to Him or prove our sincerity. All we have to do is turn to Him in humility and say, "Lord, I need You."

Jeremiah 3:15, 16 (a)
And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. And it shall come to pass . . .

God jumps ahead thousands of years to the Millennium because, from His perspective, it is coming very soon. "Turn to Me," He says. "My kingdom is coming."

Jeremiah 3:16 (b)
. . . when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more.

In the Millennium, the ark of the covenant will no longer be necessary. Its purpose was to serve as a picture of Jesus—and in the Millennium, He Himself will be on the throne.

Jeremiah 3:17–19
At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart. In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together

out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers. But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? and I said, Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me.

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He told them to address God as their Father (Luke 11:1, 2). In the Millennium, the Jews will be gathered from all corners of the earth to worship the One Jesus gave them the right to address as "Father."

Jeremiah 3:20–25
Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD. A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel: for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the LORD their God. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. For shame hath devoured the labour of our fathers from our youth; their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.

God invited His wayward children to return to Him, and here we see them doing just that as a result of the captivity they would undergo in Babylon—and, ultimately, as a result of the Tribulation yet to come. Oh, the lengths our Father goes to in order to draw His children back to Him.

Jeremiah 4:1, 2

4 If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the LORD, return unto me: and if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of my sight, then shalt thou not remove. And thou shalt swear, The LORD liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; and the nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory.

"Return to Me," God says, "and you will be able to say with enthusiasm, 'The Lord lives!' In other words, you'll know I'm living and working if you come to Me."

Jeremiah 4:3

For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.

Fallow ground is most frequently broken up by the plow of conviction. The hardness of our hearts can only be dealt with by the convicting work of the Holy Ghost. That is why Jeremiah had a most difficult ministry. His ministry was to be pulling down, rooting up, and warning the people of the trouble that would come their way if they didn't forsake their sins and return to God.

Jeremiah 4:4

Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

As part of the Old Testament covenant, men were circumcised as an outward indication of their covenant relationship or commitment to the Lord. Throughout history, the Jews would take great pride in their outward circumcision. But inwardly, where it really mattered, the hearts of these people were not circumcised, not tender, not sensitive to the things of the Lord.

In our day, people take great pride in their denominational affiliations, in their water baptism, in their perfect church attendance, or in their

confirmation when they were twelve. But Paul warned against people who stress an outward show of religion rather than an inward commitment of devotion.

> For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.
>
> Philippians 3:3

True circumcision speaks not of outward rituals, religious activities, or church membership. True circumcision—the true mark of one who is linked to God—is found in those who worship God wholeheartedly and rejoice in Christ Jesus personally.

> **Jeremiah 4:5–8**
> **Declare ye in Judah, and publish in Jerusalem; and say, Blow ye the trumpet in the land: cry, gather together, and say, Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the defenced cities. Set up the standard toward Zion: retire, stay not: for I will bring evil from the north, and a great destruction. The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way; he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate; and thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant. For this gird you with sackcloth, lament and howl: for the fierce anger of the LORD is not turned back from us.**

Because the people were inwardly calcified, because they did not circumcise their hearts, because they did not allow the fallow ground to be plowed by the convicting work of prophecy but continued on in their sin, the Lord now prophesies that the lion from the north is coming to bring destruction to their land. The lion, of course, would refer to Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.

> **Jeremiah 4:9, 10**
> **And it shall come to pass at that day, saith the LORD, that the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder.**

Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! surely thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul.

When Jeremiah heard that Babylon would wreak havoc upon the land, he said, "Lord, You've deceived the people." You see, prophets had been fanning throughout the land of Judah prophesying nothing but peace. Here, Jeremiah is saying, "Lord, why have You allowed the prophets to cry 'Peace'?"

The answer, as seen in 5:31, is that the people wanted to hear a pleasant message that would not challenge them, an easy message that would not convict them.

Jeremiah 4:11–17
At that time shall it be said to this people and to Jerusalem, A dry wind of the high places in the wilderness toward the daughter of my people, not to fan, nor to cleanse, Even a full wind from those places shall come unto me: now also will I give sentence against them. Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as a whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe unto us! for we are spoiled. O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee? For a voice declareth from Dan, and publisheth affliction from mount Ephraim. Make ye mention to the nations; behold, publish against Jerusalem, that watchers come from a far country, and give out their voice against the cities of Judah. As keepers of a field, are they against her round about; because she hath been rebellious against me, saith the LORD.

Although the Babylonian invasion is still forty years away, Jeremiah vividly sees and portrays the coming destruction.

Jeremiah 4:18–21
Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee; this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth

unto thine heart. My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried; for the whole land is spoiled: suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment. How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet?

So real was Jeremiah's vision of the coming destruction of Judah, and so intensely did he feel for both the people and the land, he experienced the deepest physical agony at the very thought of it.

Jeremiah 4:22
For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.

The judgment Judah would bring upon herself was completely avoidable. Just as is the case within our own country, the avalanche of judgment that would fall on her was of her own making.

Jeremiah 4:23–29
I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD, and by his fierce anger. For thus hath the LORD said, The whole land shall be desolate; yet will I not make a full end. For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black: because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it. The whole city shall flee for the noise of the horsemen and bowmen; they shall go into thickets, and climb up upon the rocks: every city shall be forsaken, and not a man dwell therein.

Once again, as it was after Satan fell from heaven, the earth appeared to be without form and void (Genesis 1:2), so devastating would the Babylonian invasion appear to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 4:30, 31
And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do? Though thou clothest thyself with crimson, though thou deckest thee with ornaments of gold, though thou rentest thy face with painting, in vain shalt thou make thyself fair; thy lovers will despise thee, they will seek thy life. For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, and the anguish as of her that bringeth forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, that bewaileth herself, that spreadeth her hands, saying, Woe is me now! for my soul is wearied because of murderers.

When Jezebel realized she was about to be overthrown, she tried to escape destruction by painting her face. Here, Judah is pictured doing the same thing—but she would be no more successful than Jezebel, for both would meet their end. Contrast this with another woman in the Bible who used not paint on her face or crimson in her clothes but scarlet through her window as a way to save her life. Her name was Rahab—and, where Jezebel failed, Rahab was saved not because she was more righteous or more worthy than Jezebel but because she relied on the grace of God rather than on her own schemes (Joshua 2).



5 **Jeremiah 5:1**
Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it.

"Search the city and see if you can find any man who wants to see justice done."

I think of Abraham. “Lord, will You destroy Sodom if fifty righteous men can be found?” he asked.

“No,” the Lord answered.

“How about forty?”

“I won’t destroy it for forty righteous men,” the Lord answered.

“Lord, what about thirty?” Abraham asked.

“I won’t destroy it for thirty.”

“Twenty, Lord?” Abraham ventured.

“I won’t destroy it for twenty.”

“If there are ten righteous men in Sodom will You destroy it?”

“No,” said the Lord.

Abraham left the bargaining table at that point, no doubt feeling as though certainly there were ten righteous men in the entire city. But the Bible says there are none righteous, no not one, that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:10, 23). Obviously, Sodom was no exception.

Jeremiah 5:2
And though they say, The LORD liveth; surely they swear falsely.

The words, “The Lord liveth,” was nothing more than an empty phrase to the people of Judah.

Jeremiah 5:3–5
O LORD, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return. Therefore I said, Surely these are poor; they are foolish: for they know not the way of the LORD, nor the judgment of their God. I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the LORD, and the judgment of their God: but these have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds.

Even the great men, the so-called spiritual men, were sinners just like the rest. We have a tendency to hold certain people in high esteem, as if they’re

nearly perfect. That's a mistake we're reminded of again here, for we *all* need a Savior.

Jeremiah 5:6–8
Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities: every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces: because their transgressions are many, and their backslidings are increased. How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods: when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses. They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour's wife.

"I blessed these people and cared for them, yet, rather than responding to My love, they followed after other gods just as foolishly as animals follow their own instincts," God says.

Jeremiah 5:9–11
Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? Go ye up upon her walls, and destroy; but make not a full end: take away her battlements; for they are not the LORD's. For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against me, saith the LORD.

Here, the Lord gives permission to the Babylonians to attack, but not to destroy, Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 5:12, 13
They have belied the LORD, and said, It is not he; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword nor famine: And the prophets shall become wind, and the word is not in them: thus shall it be done unto them.

As there was among the prophets in Jeremiah's day, there is a tendency in our own culture to mistake the patience of God for apathy. "All these warnings are just a bunch of hot air," the prophets mistakenly surmised. "Surely these judgments won't come down upon us."

"Be not deceived," Paul warns. "God is not mocked" (Galatians 6:7). The Jews would find this out—and so will we if we violate the Word and its principles.

Jeremiah 5:14
Wherefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them.

Far from being hot air, God's Word would be a fire.

Jeremiah 5:15–18
Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say. Their quiver is as an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men. And they shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread, which thy sons and thy daughters should eat: they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds: they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees: they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustedst, with the sword. Nevertheless in those days, saith the LORD, I will not make a full end with you.

In verses 9 through 11, God gave Babylon permission to come against Judah. Here, He tells His people of the course His judgment would take.

Jeremiah 5:19
And it shall come to pass, when ye shall say, Wherefore doeth the LORD our God all these things unto us? then shalt thou answer them, Like as ye have forsaken me, and served strange gods in your land, so shall ye serve strangers in a land that is not yours.

Although He had given them His Word and had sent them His prophets, knowing His people would claim to be mystified by His action, God gives a crystal-clear explanation. That is, "Because you have served foreign gods in your own land, you will now serve them in a foreign land." The irony is that, although they served foreign gods in their own land, they would eventually return to their own God in a foreign land—but the lesson would be a painful one.

If you're pursuing the gods of materialism, lust, pleasure, intellectualism, or any other god, take heed. Whom the Lord loves, He chastens. Therefore, like the people of Judah, you will have no reason to be surprised if He allows you to in some way be removed from the blessings of your own land and plunged into an unfamiliar, brutal, foreign land in order to ultimately draw you back to Him.

Jeremiah 5:20–22
Declare this in the house of Jacob, and publish it in Judah, saying, Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not: Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?

As He did with Job, God appeals to His creation to attest to His awesome power (Job 38—40).

Jeremiah 5:23–25
But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone. Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest. Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you.

Our Father wants to bless us in so many ways, but our sin prevents Him. "If He's such a good God, why doesn't He bless us anyway?" some ask. If He did, we would continue in our sin and destroy ourselves in the process. So He withholds the rain, the spiritual refreshment, the provisions, the blessings to show us there is something terribly amiss in our lives.

Jeremiah 5:26–29
For among my people are found wicked men: they lay wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich. They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?

Idolatry was far from a "victimless crime," for in turning their back on God, His people also turned their back on justice and equity, on compassion and sympathy for those in need.

Jeremiah 5:30, 31
A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?

Prophets, priests, and people were all in alignment. The prophets told the people what they wanted to hear and the priests turned a blind eye to their sin. With the prophets, priests, and people, however, there was a problem: God was left out of the equation.

6

In chapter 6, the indictment continues . . .

Jeremiah 6:1
O ye children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee out of the midst of Jerusalem, and blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and set up a sign of fire in Beth-haccerem: for evil appeareth out of the north, and great destruction.

Benjamin is addressed because Jerusalem was situated in the land of the tribe of Benjamin. Tekoa and Beth-haccerem were cities south of Jerusalem, where a fire signal would warn the inhabitants of Judah of an invasion.

Jeremiah 6:2, 3
I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman. The shepherds with their flocks shall come unto her; they shall pitch their tents against her round about; they shall feed every one in his place.

So intent on pleasure and prosperity had Judah become that she would have no strength to resist attack.

Jeremiah 6:4–6
Prepare ye war against her; arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe unto us! for the day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out. Arise, and let us go by night, and let us destroy her palaces. For thus hath the LORD of hosts said, Hew ye down trees, and cast a mount against Jerusalem: this is the city to be visited; she is wholly oppression in the midst of her.

Unlike Judah who was likened to a delicate woman, the Babylonians were prepared for war and would employ the latest military technology of the day.

Jeremiah 6:7–10

As a fountain casteth out her waters, so she casteth out her wickedness: violence and spoil is heard in her; before me continually is grief and wounds. Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall throughly glean the remnant of Israel as a vine: turn back thine hand as a grape-gatherer into the baskets. To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it.

In Jeremiah 4:4, the Lord said the hearts of His people were uncircumcised. Here, He says their ear is uncircumcised, as well.

Before the people of Israel entered the Land of Promise after being released from Egypt and wandering in the wilderness for forty years, an entire generation grew up that had not been circumcised. The Lord told Joshua to stop at Gilgal before they went into the land and circumcise the people again, for before they could experience the blessings of the Promised Land, they had to deal with their flesh (Joshua 5).

Maybe you and I are not experiencing the land of blessing or the fruitfulness God has for us because we have failed to stop at Gilgal and allow the Lord to deal with our flesh—those parts of our lives that prevent a real relationship with Him. If the Word of God no longer interests us because flesh has begun to cover our heart, how we need to be circumcised again.

Jeremiah 6:11–13
Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD; I am weary with holding in: I will pour it out upon the children abroad, and upon the assembly of young men together: for even the husband with the wife shall be taken, the aged with him that is full of days. And their houses shall be turned unto others, with their fields and wives together: for I will stretch out my hand upon the inhabitants of the land, saith the LORD. For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to

covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely.

In Deuteronomy 6:10, 11, the Lord had promised His people they would live in cities they did not build and eat from vines they did not plant. They took those blessings for granted and, worse, counted the Giver of them as nothing. As a result, their own houses, vineyards, and even their wives would be given to the Babylonians.

Jeremiah 6:14
They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.

A wound cannot be healed by pretending it's not there. The prophets and priests were, in effect, saying, "You can ignore the Lord and do whatever you want without repercussion." Obviously, they would be proven wrong.

Jeremiah 6:15–17
Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD. Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken.

Sometimes we need not so much to move ahead as to get back. In Genesis 26:18, as Isaac looked for water for his flocks, we read that he went to the wells his father, Abraham, had dug many years previously. Although the Philistines had filled them with dirt, after he cleaned them out, the water flowed once again. We must do the same thing. We must go back to the simplicity of the Word of God which is a well of water for us. It's all so very simple. We must beware of over-complicating it.

Jeremiah 6:18–20
Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it. To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me.

All of the offerings and sacrifices of God's people were meaningless because there was neither repentance in their hearts nor obedience in their will.

Jeremiah 6:21
Therefore thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will lay stumblingblocks before this people, and the fathers and the sons together shall fall upon them; the neighbour and his friend shall perish.

Neither the wisdom of age nor the strength of youth would be able to withstand the enemy.

Jeremiah 6:22, 23
Thus saith the LORD, Behold, a people cometh from the north country, and a great nation shall be raised from the sides of the earth. They shall lay hold on bow and spear; they are cruel, and have no mercy; their voice roareth like the sea; and they ride upon horses, set in array as men for war against thee, O daughter of Zion.

Nimrod, the founder of Babylon, is described in Genesis 10:9 as a mighty hunter. The generations that followed would be mighty hunters as well, wielding bow and spear with deadly skill.

Jeremiah 6:24–26
We have heard the fame thereof: our hands wax feeble: anguish hath taken hold of us, and pain, as of a woman in travail. Go not

forth into the field, nor walk by the way; for the sword of the enemy and fear is on every side. O daughter of my people, gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes: make thee mourning, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation: for the spoiler shall suddenly come upon us.

In verse 2, God likened the people of Judah to a delicate woman. Here, they would act as such.

Jeremiah 6:27, 28 (a)
I have set thee for a tower and a fortress among my people, that thou mayest know and try their way. They are all grievous revolters, walking with slanders . . .

God calls upon Jeremiah to confirm the righteousness of His judgment.

Jeremiah 6:28 (b)–30
. . . they are brass and iron; they are all corrupters. The bellows are burned, the lead is consumed of the fire; the founder melteth in vain: for the wicked are not plucked away. Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the LORD hath rejected them.

The imagery here is of the refining of precious metals wherein heat is used to burn away impurities. God had tried His people in the furnace of affliction only to find them to be so full of impurity that there was no silver to be found (Isaiah 1:22).



At this time, one of the greatest kings of the history of Judah was reigning over the people. His name was Josiah. He began to rule when he was eight. At sixteen years of age, he sought God with all of his heart. At twenty, he went throughout the land and tore down all the idols the people had erected. At twenty-five, he ordered the remodeling of the temple during which time the law was discovered which had been lost previously for many years. Josiah called the people back to the ordinances.

In 2 Chronicles 35, we read of the Passover celebration at the completion of the refurbishing work on the temple. Thirty thousand lambs and three thousand bulls were offered as sacrifice. The people were celebrating, feasting, and rejoicing. Yet at this grand reopening of the temple and renewed ordinance of Passover—as people were enthusiastic and excited—when Jeremiah entered, the mood was radically altered.

Jeremiah 7:1–3
The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place.

Here, God shares His heart through Jeremiah, saying, "You're celebrating and sacrificing. But, in reality, your hearts are far from Me." You see, at this time, the temple was "the place to be." Religion was popular, but it wasn't real. It seemed like there was revival, but there was no genuine response in the hearts of the people. They were going through the outward motions, but there was no inward emotion. They were going through the actions, but there was no passion. There was ritual but not righteousness, religion but no relationship.

These prophecies were given at a time when, outwardly, things seemed to be great in Jerusalem. The attendance was way up in temple service and ministry. The people were talking about religion and about Josiah with great response. No wonder the people thought Jeremiah was crazy with his talk of uncircumcised hearts and fallow ground, of judgment and coming destruction. No wonder they didn't listen to him. He seemed to be out of touch with what was taking place.

Jeremiah 7:4–7
Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these. For if ye throughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye throughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; If ye

oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.

As the people took pride in the glory and splendor of the temple, they felt they were righteous. But Jeremiah said, "Don't trust those lies. If you really believe in God, it will affect your behavior in practical, daily living." James tells us that even demons acknowledge God (2:19). True belief, however, is in the heart and affects one's behavior.

Jeremiah 7:8–10
Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?

Jeremiah's indictment continues as he names specific sins. "These words of Jeremiah are not applicable to my situation," you might say. "I don't steal."

Really? Malachi said any time we have failed to give God what is His through tithes and offerings, we rob Him (3:8).

"Well, I don't murder," you say.

Really? Jesus said if you're even angry with your brother, you are guilty of murder (Matthew 5:22).

"I don't swear falsely," you say.

Really? James said, "We are to let our yea be yea and our nay, nay. Yes or no. Period" (Matthew 5:37).

"I would never commit adultery," you say. But Jesus said if you've looked at a woman with lust in your heart, you've already done so (Matthew 5:28).

"But at least I don't burn incense to Baal," you say.

Really? Baal was the god of the intellect. Do you find time to read things that will expand your intellect, but have no time for the Word of God?

Jeremiah 8:11
Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD.

Through Jeremiah, God refers to the temple as a den of robbers. Centuries later, Jesus would come on the scene and say the same thing . . .

> And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.
>
> Matthew 21:12, 13

Religious leaders were using the people of God and the things of God for their own gain. But before we indict them too severely, we must ask ourselves if we do the same thing? Do we use the things of God to find a girlfriend or a boyfriend? Do we use the things of God to make business connections or even to establish a name in ministry? Do we subconsciously ask ourselves how we can use the Lord rather than how we can honor Him?

> And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.
>
> Matthew 21:14

Jesus kicked out those who were using Him, but reached out to those who were choosing Him, those who knew they didn't see the way they could or walk the way they should. When we realize how blind and lame we are, Jesus will reach out to us, as well. In Philippians 1:6 we read that it is God who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. In other words, He changes our desires and then gives us the ability to carry out the desire He's placed within us. That's the beauty of the living Lord. He's not saying, "Get it together." He's saying, "Let Me have your life."

"I am crucified with Christ," Paul declared. "Nevertheless, I live. Yet not I, but it's Christ who lives in me," (see Galatians 2:20). It's not a matter of

trying to be like Jesus. It's not keeping outward rituals or spiritual customs as the people were doing in Jeremiah's day. Growth in the Christian life comes from saying, "I'm a sinner, Lord, and the only way I can be changed is by You forgiving Me through Your blood and living in me through Your Spirit. So I come to You with brokenness and honesty, asking You to live Your life through me."

Jeremiah 7:12–15
But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim.

Shiloh was the place where the tabernacle was first erected (Joshua 18:1). Ephraim, the largest of the tribes, speaks of the entire northern kingdom of Israel. "Go to Shiloh," the Lord says. "See where My glory was once perceived but where now there is only destruction. The people ignored Me and trusted in their structures, in their religiosity—and now it's empty. That's who Jerusalem will be if you don't realize your need to draw close to Me."

Jeremiah 7:16
Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee.

Preaching hastens judgment. Prayer prevents judgment. While Jeremiah was to preach, he was not to pray. We might think this sounds harsh, but God knew it was exactly what was needed. These people needed radical surgery

in order that their entire nation and heritage might not be obliterated as was the northern kingdom of Israel.

> **Jeremiah 7:17–19**
> **Seest thou not what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger. Do they provoke me to anger? saith the LORD: do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces?**

The "queen of heaven" refers to the mother-child cult that originated in Babylon.

> **Jeremiah 7:20–24**
> **Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh. For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have com manded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.**

The Ten Commandments were given before the Levitical law. That is, the requirements of God were to love Him and to love each other, nowhere exemplified more completely than in the life of Christ. But the Ten Commandments speak nothing of sacrifice. In fact, the Book of Leviticus opens not with a requirement of sacrifice but a regulation of it (1:2).

Sacrifice was never meant to be the end result. Rather, it was to be the means by which the picture of the sacrifice Jesus would make could be portrayed. It is in response to the atonement for sin He would provide that sacrifices were to be offered. They were to come from the heart. That is why Cain's sacrifice was unacceptable—and why the people in Jeremiah's day were headed for destruction.

Jeremiah 7:25–27
Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers. Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them; but they will not hearken to thee: thou shalt also call unto them; but they will not answer thee.

Just as the Lord said, for forty-two years, Jeremiah would preach God's heart, but no one would respond. Only the Holy Spirit can convict a person and lead him to salvation. Our responsibility is simply to be faithful. In the world, numbers are an indication of success. But that is not the case in the things of God. We simply must be faithful and leave the results up to He who calls us.

Jeremiah 7:28–31
But thou shalt say unto them, This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the LORD their God, nor receiveth correction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth. Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places; for the LORD hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath. For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith the LORD: they have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to pollute it. And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart.

Outside of Jerusalem, the people burned their sons and daughters as they offered them to Moloch. Throughout history, it has been religion that has been so dangerous—religion not based upon Scripture, not based upon the heart or command of God, but simply on the ideas of man.



Jeremiah 8:1, 2

8 At that time, saith the LORD, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of his princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves: And they shall spread them before the sun, and the moon, and all the host of heaven, whom they have loved, and whom they have served, and after whom they have walked, and whom they have sought, and whom they have worshipped: they shall not be gathered, nor be buried; they shall be for dung upon the face of the earth.

The Babylonians would dig up the graves in the lands they invaded partly to plunder them and partly as an act of contempt.

Jeremiah 8:3–5

And death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of them that remain of this evil family, which remain in all the places whither I have driven them, saith the LORD of hosts. Moreover thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD; Shall they fall, and not arise? shall he turn away, and not return? Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return.

If a man falls, he'll get back up. If he makes a wrong turn, he'll go back and correct it. But, instead of returning to the Lord, the people of Judah were backsliding perpetually.

Jeremiah 8:6, 7

I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle. Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD.

Even birds instinctively know how to migrate, how to return. Romans 1:18 tells us that man instinctively knows there is a God. He can see God in creation. He knows God is real in his conscience within. Yet he suppresses the truth because he doesn't want to turn to God.

Jeremiah 8:8–11
How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain. The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD; and what wisdom is in them? Therefore will I give their wives unto others, and their fields to them that shall inherit them: for every one from the least even unto the greatest is given to covetousness, from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.

Given to them by God Himself, the Jews possessed the most perfect law on earth. Yet it did them no good because possessing it counted for nothing if they had no heart or intent to obey it.

How very easily we can make this same mistake. We can possess multiple copies of the Word and even read and study it—but if we don't obey it, if we don't purpose in our heart to, by the power of the Holy Spirit, put into practice that which we read, we are no better off than the Jews in Jeremiah's day. "Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only," James would write (1:22). And his command is more imperative today than ever.

Jeremiah 8:12, 13

Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD. I will surely consume them, saith the LORD: there shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and the things that I have given them shall pass away from them.

This is the same language Habakkuk will use in writing about the coming Babylonian invasion (3:16, 17). All that God had done for His people would be lost because of their continual backsliding and turning away from Him.

Jeremiah 8:14–16
Why do we sit still? assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the defenced cities, and let us be silent there: for the LORD our God hath put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against the LORD. We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble! The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan: the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones; for they are come, and have devoured the land, and all that is in it; the city, and those that dwell therein.

The snorting of horses refers to the Babylonian cavalry coming from the north down to the southernmost tribe.

Jeremiah 8:17–20
For, behold, I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which will not be charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the LORD. When I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart is faint in me. Behold the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people because of them that dwell in a far country: Is not the LORD in Zion? is not her king in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, and with strange vanities? The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.

As the armies were advancing, as the horses were heard in the land, the people suddenly realized that they had missed the boat by rejecting the message.

In Genesis 6:3, God said that His spirit would not always strive with man. The fact that God would lower Himself to strive with man at all is amazing. But He won't do it indefinitely. If a person continues to say "No" to the Lord, eventually, He will no longer strive with him. The summer will be past. The harvest will be gone.

Jeremiah 8:21, 22
For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?

Seeing the tragic repercussions of rebellion, it is a brokenhearted Jeremiah who asks, "Is there no physician? Is there no medicine?"



Jeremiah 9:1
Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!

Jeremiah didn't deliver his prophecies condemningly, with fingers pointing. He delivered them from a broken heart and with tear-filled eyes. That's why God chose him.

Some people come into our lives and say, "Woe is you," as they condemn and point their fingers. Not Jeremiah. He shared the message of God accurately, but not without weeping compassionately. I believe we have no right to judge any other person or situation if we're not brokenhearted about it. If I don't feel compassion and tenderness, brokenness and love, I need to keep my mouth shut. I don't have any right to point out the dirt on another's feet unless I'm willing to do what Jesus did—to get down and start washing.

If I'm not willing to get involved in restoring, loving, weeping, and caring, I'm missing the mark entirely.

Jeremiah 9:2
Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men.

Jeremiah wanted to isolate himself from his people so that his heart would be broken for them.

Jeremiah 9:3–6
And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD. Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity. Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know me, saith the LORD.

Here, we see the Lord's assessment of the situation.

Jeremiah 9:7–9
Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, I will melt them, and try them; for how shall I do for the daughter of my people? Their tongue is as an arrow shot out; it speaketh deceit: one speaketh peaceably to his neighbour with his mouth, but in heart he layeth his wait. Shall I not visit them for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?

When the Lord speaks of visiting His people, He isn't talking about a social call. The Lord said, "If they break my statutes, and keep not my

commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes" (Psalm 89:32).

Jeremiah 9:10–14
For the mountains will I take up a weeping and wailing, and for the habitations of the wilderness a lamentation, because they are burned up, so that none can pass through them; neither can men hear the voice of the cattle; both the fowl of the heavens and the beast are fled; they are gone. And I will make Jerusalem heaps, and a den of dragons; and I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant. Who is the wise man, that may understand this? and who is he to whom the mouth of the LORD hath spoken, that he may declare it, for what the land perisheth and is burned up like a wilderness, that none passeth through? And the LORD saith, Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, neither walked therein; But have walked after the imagination of their own heart, and after Baalim, which their fathers taught them:

Again and again, God makes it clear that the reason the land would be destroyed, the reason the people would be taken captive was because they forsook Him to follow false gods.

Jeremiah 9:15, 16
Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink. I will scatter them also among the heathen, whom neither they nor their fathers have known: and I will send a sword after them, till I have consumed them.

God's people would indeed be scattered among the heathen. It would be only a matter of years before the Babylonians would destroy Judah and carry the Jews captive to a land they had not known.

Jeremiah 9:17–22

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Consider ye, and call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for cunning women, that they may come: And let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters. For a voice of wailing is heard out of Zion, How are we spoiled! we are greatly confounded, because we have forsaken the land, because our dwellings have cast us out. Yet hear the word of the LORD, O ye women, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth, and teach your daughters wailing, and every one her neighbour lamentation. For death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces, to cut off the children from without, and the young men from the streets. Speak, Thus saith the LORD, Even the carcases of men shall fall as dung upon the open field, and as the handful after the harvestman, and none shall gather them.

Here, the "professional" mourners are called for to lament Judah's miserable state. Contrast this with the scene in Matthew 9, where the mourners are not called for but instead removed. The difference between the two scenarios is that here in Jeremiah's day, there was not only reason but a need to mourn and repent. In the Matthew account, on the other hand, there was no need to mourn, for Jesus Himself was in their midst (Matthew 9:15).

Jeremiah 9:23, 24
Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

Wisdom, riches, and strength will give you an advantage—but only for a time. Neurologically, our brains hit their peak at about twenty years of age. Physiologically, a man is at his apex of physical strength between twenty-seven and twenty-nine. Financially, only a fool thinks his finances are immune to abrupt changes in the economy or the geopolitical situation. But

eternally, if you know God, you'll always be at the top of your game. Those who know the Lord will be rewarded and ready to live in the new dimension He has waiting for us.

Jeremiah 9:25, 26
Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised; Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.

The Jews prided themselves in their external religiosity. But the Lord declared that He would judge circumcised and heathen alike.

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Romans 2:28, 29

It's internal reality rather than external religiosity that matters. When you wake up in the morning and enjoy turning over your day to Him, when you sit down to a meal and enjoy expressing thanks to Him, when you turn over your difficulties, problems, and burdens into His hands, where you study His Word as though it was a love letter to you—that's what it means to have a circumcised heart.

10

Jeremiah 10:1, 2
Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Is rael: Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them.

It was the Babylonians who developed astrology and horoscopes.

Jeremiah 10:3–6 (a)
For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good. Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O LORD . . .

After speaking of the folly of idolatry in verses 1 through 5, Jeremiah extols the majesty and might of the true and living God . . .

Jeremiah 10:6 (b)–11
. . . thou art great, and thy name is great in might. Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? for to thee doth it appertain: forasmuch as among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like unto thee. But they are altogether brutish and foolish: the stock is a doctrine of vanities. Silver spread into plates is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the workman, and of the hands of the founder: blue and purple is their clothing: they are all the work of cunning men. But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens.

According to commentator Matthew Henry, a common saying even among the Greeks was, "He who sets himself up as another god ought first to make another world." Truly there is no God like our God (1 Kings 8:23).

Jeremiah 10:12

He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion.

In the early 1960s, it was determined by studying quasars that the universe is still being stretched out, that it is still expanding. In other words, God didn't set the universe in motion and then leave it. He is still actively and omnipotently engaged.

Jeremiah 10:13–23
When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures. Every man is brutish in his knowledge: every founder is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are vanity, and the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish. The portion of Jacob is not like them: for he is the former of all things; and Israel is the rod of his inheritance: The LORD of hosts is his name. Gather up thy wares out of the land, O inhabitant of the fortress. For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will sling out the inhabitants of the land at this once, and will distress them, that they may find it so. Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it. My tabernacle is spoiled, and all my cords are broken: my children are gone forth of me, and they are not: there is none to stretch forth my tent any more, and to set up my curtains. For the pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the LORD: therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered. Behold, the noise of the bruit is come, and a great commotion out of the north country, to make the cities of Judah desolate, and a den of dragons. O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.

"In light of Your vastness, Lord, I know that it is not in me to direct my own steps," Jeremiah says. We walk, but we walk recklessly apart from the

Lord guiding our steps, apart from His Word guiding our lives. That is why we need the lamp of the Word to guide our feet, the light of the Word to illuminate our path (Psalm 119:105). Aren't you thankful for the Word? It puts everything in perspective.

Jeremiah 10:24, 25
O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing. Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name: for they have eaten up Jacob, and devoured him, and consumed him, and have made his habitation desolate.

After asking the Lord to correct him, Jeremiah asks that judgment be poured out on the heathen. How often my prayers follow this pattern—directing the Lord as to what should be done instead of pouring out my heart to Him and then simply trusting Him to do above and beyond all I could ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).



11 At this time, there was a power play going on in the Middle East. The Assyrian empire—the one that had taken the ten northern tribes of Israel into captivity, was beginning to fade. The Babylonians—the ones who would take Judah—was beginning to rise. Pharaoh-necho in Egypt decided to destroy the Babylonians before they became too strong. In 2 Chronicles 35, the Lord specifically told Josiah that when Pharaoh-necho marched through his land to fight the Babylonians, he was not to get involved. But Josiah thought otherwise. He fought against Pharaoh-necho and died in battle.

That happens to us, as well. How often we get involved in arguments and discussions that have nothing to do with us. How ready we are to express our opinions or stand up for our rights only to lose a part of ourselves as a result. Josiah, a good king, died because he got involved in a battle he had no reason or right to fight.

Jeremiah 11:1–8

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Hear ye the words of this covenant, and speak unto the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; And say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant, Which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Obey my voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so shall ye be my people, and I will be your God: That I may perform the oath which I have sworn unto your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as it is this day. Then answered I, and said, So be it, O LORD. Then the LORD said unto me, Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, Hear ye the words of this covenant, and do them. For I earnestly protested unto your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even unto this day, rising early and protesting, saying, Obey my voice. Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked every one in the imagination of their evil heart: therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do; but they did them not.

Some commentators believe this word came at the beginning of Zedekiah's reign. Others believe it was given at the time of Jehoiakim's reign. Either way, the call was what it had always been since the day the Lord redeemed His people from bondage in Egypt: "Obey My voice. Obey My Word." The message couldn't have been more direct or more clear.

Jeremiah 11:9–13

And the LORD said unto me, A conspiracy is found among the men of Judah, and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear my words; and they went after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers. Therefore thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape; and though they shall cry unto me, I will not

hearken unto them. Then shall the cities of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem go, and cry unto the gods unto whom they offer incense: but they shall not save them at all in the time of their trouble. For according to the number of thy cities were thy gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to that shameful thing, even altars to burn incense unto Baal.

Although it would be at two different times by two different kingdoms, Judah and Israel would both be carried away captive for their refusal to keep the covenant with God that was intended to set them free.

Jeremiah 11:14
Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble.

"I have continually called My people to obey Me, but they're not listening—so don't pray for them," God said to Jeremiah. We saw God say the same thing in Jeremiah 7:16. God knew the time had come for radical surgery if the spiritual life of His people was to be saved.

Jeremiah 11:15
What hath my beloved to do in mine house, seeing she hath wrought lewdness with many, and the holy flesh is passed from thee? when thou doest evil, then thou rejoicest.

"Holy flesh" refers to the sacrifices that, because they were not accompanied by a heart of repentance, no longer delighted the Lord.

Jeremiah 11:16, 17
The LORD called thy name, A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit: with the noise of a great tumult he hath kindled fire upon it, and the branches of it are broken. For the LORD of hosts, that planted thee, hath pronounced evil against thee, for the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have

done against themselves to provoke me to anger in offering incense unto Baal.

Throughout Scripture, the olive tree symbolizes the nation of Israel. Here, the olive tree, as will Judah, is seen going through a time of fiery trial. As believers, we, too, are part of the olive tree of Israel. That is, according to Romans 11, by God's grace and mercy, wild olive trees that we are, we have been grafted on to the olive tree of God's people—and thereby partake of the nourishment of the root, the Source, the true and living God.

Jeremiah 11:18–20
And the LORD hath given me knowledge of it, and I know it: then thou shewedst me their doings. But I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered. But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause.

Not content to simply ignore the prophecy, the people of Jeremiah's own hometown desired to do away with the prophet, as well. In light of this, Jeremiah asks the Lord to judge them accordingly.

Jeremiah 11:21–23
Therefore thus saith the LORD of the men of Anathoth, that seek thy life, saying, Prophesy not in the name of the LORD, that thou die not by our hand: Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, I will punish them: the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine: And there shall be no remnant of them: for I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth, even the year of their visitation.

In the "year of their visitation," in His perfect time, the Lord would indeed punish those who sought Jeremiah's life. He would do it through the Babylonian invasion—but it would be years down the line.

"Lord, do something—and do it now!" we so often pray. But the Lord has more patience and mercy than we could ever show. He gives people so much space to repent and change their ways. And I'm grateful for His patience and mercy—because no one needs them more than I!



12 Jeremiah 12:1, 2

Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins.

Continuing the conversation of chapter 11, Jeremiah says to the Lord, "I know Your judgments are right, but can I ask You a question about what You've decided to do? Why are You allowing the people who want to kill me and who have ignored You to be happy?"

Jeremiah 12:3
But thou, O LORD, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter.

Jeremiah can't help but wonder why evil people prosper yet he suffers.

Jeremiah 12:4–6
How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? the beasts are consumed, and the birds; because they said, He shall not see our last end. If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan? For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father, even they have dealt treacherously

with thee; yea, they have called a multitude after thee: believe them not, though they speak fair words unto thee.

The Lord answers Jeremiah, saying, "I'm toughening you up. If you're complaining now about men who want to do you in, what will you do when the big battles come, when the real difficulties arise?"

Whether we like to admit it or not, there are difficult days, trials, and challenges ahead for each of us. If we're getting weary now or giving up now, what will we do when the heavy challenges come down? It's not that the Lord sends challenges. He simply sees they will come our way and trains us for them.



***For topical study of Jeremiah 12:5 entitled "Toughening Up!" turn to page* 500.**

Jeremiah 12:7–9
I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies. Mine heritage is unto me as a lion in the forest; it crieth out against me: therefore have I hated it. Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her; come ye, assemble all the beasts of the field, come to devour.

Whereas God had once likened His people to sheep, dependent upon Him as a Shepherd, here He compares them to a roaring lion and a bird of prey, so independent and self-sufficient had they become.

Jeremiah 12:10
Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion under foot, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness.

The Promised Land that once flowed with milk and honey would become a desolate wilderness.

Jeremiah 12:11
They have made it desolate, and being desolate it mourneth unto me; the whole land is made desolate, because no man layeth it to heart.

In Genesis 4:10 we read that Abel's blood cried from the ground. Here, we see the land itself mourning. No wonder Paul would write of creation groaning (Romans 8:22)—for the earth itself has had to bear the overflow of God's chastening hand upon His people.

Jeremiah 12:12
The spoilers are come upon all high places through the wilderness: for the sword of the LORD shall devour from the one end of the land even to the other end of the land: no flesh shall have peace.

Even though it was wielded by the hand of the Babylonians, the sword that wreaked havoc upon Judah was nonetheless the sword of the Lord as Babylon was simply a tool in His hand.

Jeremiah 12:13, 14
They have sown wheat, but shall reap thorns: they have put themselves to pain, but shall not profit: and they shall be ashamed of your revenues because of the fierce anger of the LORD. Thus saith the LORD against all mine evil neighbours, that touch the inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit; Behold, I will pluck them out of their land, and pluck out the house of Judah from among them.

Although God's people would undergo severe chastening, they would not be forgotten or forsaken. God would honor His covenant relationship with them even though they had abandoned theirs with Him.

Jeremiah 12:15, 16
And it shall come to pass, after that I have plucked them out I will return, and have compassion on them, and will bring them again, every man to his heritage, and every man to his land. And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, The LORD liveth; as they taught my people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built in the midst of my people.

Here, we see the invitation of salvation extended to the Gentiles if they would trust the almighty God of Israel rather than the worthless idols of their own making.

Jeremiah 12:17
But if they will not obey, I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation, saith the LORD.

The proof that God kept this promise is seen in the fact that not one of us knows a single Ammonite or Moabite.

TOUGHENING UP!

A Topical Study of JEREMIAH 12:5

We read about famine and disease in Africa, about the expanding desert and war in the Middle East. We read of scandal in the church, crime on the streets, and corruption in the marketplace. As a result, sometimes we get weary. That's what happened to Jeremiah. He was just plain tired.

In chapter 1, we read that God told him he was called and ordained even from his mother's womb to be a prophet. He was to speak with integrity and honesty, to root out, to pull down, to break up, as well as to plant, and to build. But, in addition to that, he was told that people wouldn't listen or respond to his ministry. And indeed they didn't. In fact, some in his hometown were out to kill him.

Hearing of their plot, Jeremiah asked the Lord why the wicked were prospering, how long the land would be mourning, and what in the world He was doing. The Lord, in turn, answered Jeremiah with a question of His own . . .

> *If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?*
>
> Jeremiah 12:5

In this question, the Lord revealed Jeremiah's future course, recognized his past accomplishments, and raised his present consciousness. In so doing, the Lord provided tremendous help for you and me when we feel weary or frustrated with our own lives.

God Revealed Jeremiah's Future Course

"If running with the footmen makes you tired, what will you do when the horsemen come on the scene? If you're weary now in a land of relative peace, what will you do when you are carried beyond the Jordan?" God asks His faithful prophet.

"In this world you will have tribulation," Jesus warned (John 16:33). Therefore, if you think you have it tough now, just wait because what's coming your way will be infinitely more challenging than what you're facing today. God knows this to be so.

God doesn't promise to keep us from problems. This is where, as believers, we can so easily get confused. "I gave my life to You, Lord. So why am I experiencing bankruptcy or divorce or cancer?" we ask. Nowhere in Scripture does our Father even hint that He will keep us from problems. What He promises is to be with us in them. And what a difference that makes. Believers and unbelievers alike deal with pain and discouragement, loneliness and failure. The difference is, the believer never deals with these things alone.

Why does God allow us to go through problems? Can't He stop them? He can, but He doesn't because it is in problems that His reality is most clearly seen. When the world sees you navigate problems and make it through, it is then that they see Jesus Christ living in you. Prosperity only fosters jealousy. It's in problems that others see His reality. Therefore the Lord will allow you to go through setbacks just like the unbeliever so that people can see what it means to have Jesus in one's life.

Problems prepare us for eternity. This doesn't mean there will be problems in heaven. But there will be challenges beyond our present understanding as we rule and reign with Christ throughout eternity. Therefore, the Lord prepares us now for the ages to come—and problems are one of the tools He uses.

God Recognized Jeremiah's Past Accomplishments

Not only does God ask Jeremiah how he'll handle running against the horses—but He also acknowledges that Jeremiah had run with the footmen. And because he hadn't given up, pulled out, or kicked back, he would be entrusted with even greater challenges.

I think it is important to realize that, if we are faithful in the challenges before us presently, God will give us even greater challenges eventually. "That doesn't sound like much of an incentive," you say. But if you accept the challenges of this life and contend with the horses as well as the footmen, you'll be rewarded eternally.

God Raised Jeremiah's Present Consciousness

God didn't send the horses until Jeremiah had already run with the footmen.

"I don't know how I would ever deal with a debilitating disease," people say. But before you were to contract a disease, God would have sent footmen your way to prepare you for what He knew would be coming down the road. He will never thrust horses on you with nothing but a "Good luck." Rather, He will train you carefully in order to prepare you for what He sees ahead.

God knows the level of our maturity and He will never give us more than we can handle (1 Corinthians 10:13). That is why the footmen come before the horses show up. He's a faithful God, a wonderful Father who doesn't insulate us from problems, but trains us for the problems He knows will come our way.

Secondly, Jeremiah's past victory is a future prophecy. That is, because Jeremiah made it through his present difficulty, he could rest assured that he would make it through even greater challenges because God was with him. God is so faithful. Take a moment and think about what God has seen you through—times you felt you couldn't go on, times you thought life had all but ended. Yet God proved Himself faithful, for here you are.

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

> *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
>
> Romans 8:38, 39

> *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:*

When we're weary, there's only one thing to do: follow the example of Jeremiah. Go to the Lord. Pour out your heart and let Him remind you how He's seen you through in the past and how He'll see you through in days to come.



13 After answering Jeremiah's questions with one of His own, the Lord gives Jeremiah an assignment . . .

Jeremiah 13:1
Thus saith the LORD unto me, Go and get thee a linen girdle, and put it upon thy loins, and put it not in water.

"Go buy some underwear," the Lord said to Jeremiah. "Wear it, but don't wash it." Oh, the extremes to which the Lord would go to get the attention of people who wouldn't listen to His messenger.

Jeremiah 13:2–7
So I got a girdle according to the word of the LORD, and put it on my loins. And the word of the LORD came unto me the second time, saying, Take the girdle that thou hast got, which is upon thy loins, and arise, go to Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole of the rock. So I went, and hid it by Euphrates, as the LORD commanded me. And it came to pass after many days, that the LORD said unto me, Arise, go to Euphrates, and take the girdle from thence, which I commanded thee to hide there. Then I went to Euphrates, and digged, and took the girdle from the place where I had hid it: and, behold, the girdle was marred, it was profitable for nothing.

Jeremiah was told to take off his underwear and bury it under a rock. He left it there for many days—at least months, if not years—before he was told to put it on again and to tell the people that even as the girdle was rotten and

good for nothing, so were they rendered useless who had ignored the Lord to follow other gods, other interests, other priorities.

Jeremiah 13:8–11
Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Thus saith the LORD, After this manner will I mar the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people, which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart, and walk after other gods, to serve them, and to worship them, shall even be as this girdle, which is good for nothing. For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the LORD; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they would not hear.

In this "illustrated sermon," the Lord is saying, "Even as underwear clings to a man, I want to be close to My people. But instead, they rebelled against Me." And that is the tragedy of our own society. God made us for one purpose: He made us for His pleasure. Therefore, if you're living for yourself, your career, your money, or your own happiness, you'll be miserable and useless. But if you live to walk with and worship the Lord, you are fulfilling the reason for your existence.

Jeremiah 13:12–17
Therefore thou shalt speak unto them this word; Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Every bottle shall be filled with wine: and they shall say unto thee, Do we not certainly know that every bottle shall be filled with wine? Then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will fill all the inhabitants of this land, even the kings that sit upon David's throne, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, with drunkenness. And I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together, saith the LORD: I will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy, but destroy them. Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud: for the LORD hath spoken. Give glory to the LORD your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet

stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the LORD's flock is carried away captive.

After pleading with the people to give glory to God and warning them of coming judgment, Jeremiah said if they wouldn't listen, he would weep for them. Oh, that God would make us more like Jeremiah. When people don't listen to us, rather than being angry with them or frustrated by them, may we be those who weep for them, pray for them, and care about them. How I pray that the Lord would soften my heart.

Jeremiah 13:18–22
Say unto the king and to the queen, Humble yourselves, sit down: for your principalities shall come down, even the crown of your glory. The cities of the south shall be shut up, and none shall open them: Judah shall be carried away captive all of it, it shall be wholly carried away captive. Lift up your eyes, and behold them that come from the north: where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock? What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee? for thou hast taught them to be captains, and as chief over thee: shall not sorrows take thee, as a woman in travail? And if thou say in thine heart, Wherefore come these things upon me? For the greatness of thine iniquity are thy skirts discovered, and thy heels made bare.

Because of their refusal to turn to the Lord, Judah would soon be powerless, as signified by the uncovering of skirts and the baring of heels. I think of Another who suffered the same fate—not because of disobedience to the Lord, but rather because of obedience; not because of chance, but by choice; not because of sin, but because of love. Jesus not only gave up His garments and bared His heel on the Cross of Calvary, but His heel was pierced by a spike. And as His heel was bruised, not only was the earliest prophecy in all of Scripture fulfilled, but the promise was underscored that

the head of Satan would be bruised as well, that one day he would be defeated completely.

Jeremiah 13:23–27
Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil. Therefore will I scatter them as the stubble that passeth away by the wind of the wilderness. This is thy lot, the portion of thy measures from me, saith the LORD; because thou hast forgotten me, and trusted in falsehood. Therefore will I discover thy skirts upon thy face, that thy shame may appear. I have seen thine adulteries, and thy neighings, the lewdness of thy whoredom, and thine abominations on the hills in the fields. Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?

"Woe unto Jerusalem," God declares.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem," Jesus would echo, "how often I would have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chicks under her wings, but you would not" (see Matthew 23:37).

God's people had been lovingly wooed and repeatedly warned, but, because they ignored both, they were headed for woeful disaster.

14

Jeremiah 14:1–4
The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the dearth. Ju dah mourneth, and the gates thereof languish; they are black unto the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up. And their nobles have sent their little ones to the waters: they came to the pits, and found no water; they returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads. Because the ground is chapt, for there was no rain in the earth, the plowmen were ashamed, they covered their heads.

A terrible drought had struck the land. "My people have committed two evils," God had said. "They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters and, instead, carved out cisterns that hold no water" (see Jeremiah 2:13). Because they forsook the water *of* life, they would have no water *for* life.

Again, the Lord's purpose in this was to get His people's attention—that it would cause them to seek His face, confess their sin, and look to Him.

Jeremiah 14:5–7 (a)
Yea, the hind also calved in the field, and forsook it, because there was no grass. And the wild asses did stand in the high places, they snuffed up the wind like dragons; their eyes did fail, because there was no grass. O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake . . .

In this day of drought, Jeremiah asks the Lord to help His people not because of who they were but because of who *He* is, for *His* name's sake. In Exodus 34, the Lord proclaimed His name as merciful, gracious, and longsuffering (34:5, 6). Therefore, it was in light of these qualities that Jeremiah could make his request.

Jeremiah 14:7 (b)–9
. . . for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee. O the hope of Israel, the saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldest thou be as a man astonied, as a mighty man that cannot save? yet thou, O LORD, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not.

Notice how Jeremiah prays. "*Our* backslidings are many," he says. A true man or woman of God doesn't point the finger and say, "You have sinned." Rather, he or she says, "We have sinned." Such a man was Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 14:10–12
Thus saith the LORD unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet, therefore the LORD

doth not accept them; he will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins. Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence.

After Jeremiah asked the Lord to help His people because they are called by His name, the Lord didn't say, "I'll send rain. I'll provide food. I'll protect them from the Babylonians." He said, "Jeremiah, don't pray for them."

God's judgment is not a sign of His giving up. It's a sign of His love. In forbidding Jeremiah to pray for the people of Judah, God was, in essence, saying, "If I send rain, the people will continue in their idolatry. If I don't send the Babylonians, My people will keep making images and offering sacrifices to them. And they'll be eternally lost as a result."

Not too many years after this prophecy was given, the people of Judah began to be carried into captivity. It was a brutal time. The psalmist tells us that their babies were beaten against the rocks. Their heads were crushed. The people wept by the river, longing for Jerusalem. But when they came back, they were completely healed. Never again in their entire history would they fall into idolatry. Even today, the Jews abhor idols. They were healed completely—but it took severe judgment to do it.

Jeremiah 14:13–16
Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place. Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed. And the

people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them, them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness upon them.

In Scripture, God's judgment is sometimes pictured as His wrath being poured out of a bowl, a vial, or a cup (Mark 10:38; Revelation 14:10; 16). But I suggest it's not God who is overturning the bowl. Rather, it's me filling the bowl with so much sin and rebellion that it overflows upon me.

If you keep pouring hot water into a cup, it will eventually overflow and burn you. That's what sin does. We bring the judgment of God upon ourselves and He allows it to come down because it's the only way we'll be healed. It's the only way we'll turn from that which would destroy us.

There was One, however, who willingly drank of the cup of the wrath of God's judgment. Jesus was not the reason for a single drop of the judgment in the cup, yet He drained it dry through His death on the Cross (Mark 14:36).

Jeremiah 14:17–22

Therefore thou shalt say this word unto them; Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease: for the virgin daughter of my people is broken with a great breach, with a very grievous blow. If I go forth into the field, then behold the slain with the sword! and if I enter into the city, then behold them that are sick with famine! yea, both the prophet and the priest go about into a land that they know not. Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? hath thy soul lothed Zion? why hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing for us? we looked for peace, and there is no good; and for the time of healing, and behold trouble! We acknowledge, O LORD, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against thee. Do not abhor us, for thy name's sake, do not disgrace the throne of thy glory: remember, break not thy covenant with us. Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? art not thou he, O LORD our God? therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou hast made all these things.

Jeremiah continues to identify with the people as he acknowledges the sin of the nation. Then he waits on God—for God alone held their political, physical, and spiritual fate in His hands.



15 Jeremiah 15:1

Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth.

Even as Jeremiah interceded for the people of Judah, Moses prayed in earlier days for God's people. In Exodus 32, we read that, as Moses returned from Mount Sinai, the people were involved in all kinds of immorality and idolatry. "I'm going to wipe them out," the Lord said. "I'll make of you a new nation, Moses."

"Lord, You can't do that," Moses protested. "You've made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their seed would go on forever. Besides, if You wipe out these people now, the Egyptians will hear of it and think You're powerless, that You couldn't bring Your people to the Land of Promise."

And God said, "Moses, because you have prayed, I won't judge these people." His wrath was turned away.

In this scenario, was Moses actually more loving than God? Was Moses the voice of reason and patience opposing a frenzied, irrational God bent on destruction? Of course not. All along, God was looking for an excuse not to judge the people of Israel. Moses simply gave Him that excuse. But who put that spirit in Moses in the first place? God. It was God all along. The same was true of Samuel. When the people rejected the Lord, Samuel still prayed for them, saying, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (see 1 Samuel 12:23).

Here, the Lord brings up the names of these two powerful intercessors perhaps as an encouragement to Jeremiah as he interceded for the people of his day.

Jeremiah 15:2–4
And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them, Thus saith the LORD; Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity. And I will appoint over them four kinds, saith the LORD: the sword to slay, and the dogs to tear, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the earth, to devour and destroy. And I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.

More than any other king of Judah, Manasseh led the people into idolatry. The Lord would tear His people down in order that He might build them up. They would be walked on in order that they might walk in His way. It was in the fiery furnace of Babylonian captivity that they were finally freed from the hold of idolatry.

It's important for us to understand that sometimes the Lord has to take us through hard times. We think it's oh, so cruel, but in reality, it's loving because He's freeing us from certain tendencies, habits, and problems to which we're in bondage. The Lord deals with us, chastens us, and breaks us that He might ultimately free us, bless us, and build us.

Jeremiah 15:5–7
For who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem? or who shall bemoan thee? or who shall go aside to ask how thou doest? Thou hast forsaken me, saith the LORD, thou art gone backward: therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and destroy thee; I am weary with repenting. And I will fan them with a fan in the gates of the land; I will bereave them of children, I will destroy my people, since they return not from their ways.

John the Baptist said Jesus was One "whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12). The Latin word for "fan" is *tribulum,* an instrument that was used to separate chaff

from wheat. *Tribulum* shares the same root as "tribulation"—the ultimate fan in the hand of the Lord that will at last separate His people—not to punish them, but to purify them.

Jeremiah 15:8–10
Their widows are increased to me above the sand of the seas: I have brought upon them against the mother of the young men a spoiler at noonday: I have caused him to fall upon it suddenly, and terrors upon the city. She that hath borne seven languisheth: she hath given up the ghost; her sun is gone down while it was yet day: she hath been ashamed and confounded: and the residue of them will I deliver to the sword before their enemies, saith the LORD. Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me.

Because of his prophecies of destruction, Jeremiah was treated like an outcast. People avoided him as they would a bill collector.

Jeremiah 15:11–16
The LORD said, Verily it shall be well with thy remnant; verily I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well in the time of evil and in the time of affliction. Shall iron break the northern iron and the steel? Thy substance and thy treasures will I give to the spoil without price, and that for all thy sins, even in all thy borders. And I will make thee to pass with thine enemies into a land which thou knowest not: for a fire is kindled in mine anger, which shall burn upon you. O LORD, thou knowest: remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in thy longsuffering: know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke. Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.

In contrast to the rejection he felt from the people around him, Jeremiah speaks of the joy that God's Word produced within him. For years, the Law was lost. There was no copy of God's Word in all of Judah. When a copy was discovered—perhaps even by his own father (2 Kings 22:8)—Jeremiah had an insatiable appetite to take it in.

Job felt the same way. Even though he, too, went through some incredibly heavy times, he prioritized the Word even above physical food (Job 23:12). "Man shall not live by bread alone," Jesus said, "but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

If it comes down to a choice, do we have morning devotions with the Lord or do we have breakfast instead? Somehow, we always find time to eat —but my prayer is that we would be like Jeremiah and Job and reach for the Word before we reach for the Wheaties.

Jeremiah 15:17–18
I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced; I sat alone because of thy hand: for thou hast filled me with indignation. Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?

With his friends forsaking him and the nation decaying all around him, Jeremiah wonders why the Lord doesn't intervene. Does God zap him with a lightning bolt for this? Watch what He does . . .

Jeremiah 15:19–21
Therefore thus saith the LORD, If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before me: and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth: let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them. And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brasen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the LORD. And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible.

The Lord here is saying, "Jeremiah, you question Me. You complain to Me. But if you'll come back to Me, I'll make you like a brass wall. I'll be your strength. I'll see you through. Then you'll be able to extract the precious from the vile—you'll be able to find the good even in hard times." Far from blasting Jeremiah for complaining, the Lord commended and comforted him.

God can handle our questions, gang. Therefore, be like Jeremiah. Pour out your heart to Him and listen for His perfect word for you. Your situation might not change—but you'll see it through His eyes and will, like Jeremiah, be able to extract the precious, the good, from the vile.



16 Jeremiah 16:1–4

The word of the LORD came also unto me, saying, Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place. For thus saith the LORD concerning the sons and concerning the daughters that are born in this place, and concerning their mothers that bare them, and concerning their fathers that begat them in this land; They shall die of grievous deaths; they shall not be lamented; neither shall they be buried; but they shall be as dung upon the face of the earth: and they shall be consumed by the sword, and by famine; and their carcases shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, and for the beasts of the earth.

Jeremiah was not to marry. The Lord gave him two reasons for this. First, his single state was to be a prophecy to Judah. That is, even as he was single, the people would feel deserted and alone when they lost all they had to Babylon.

This was not only a prophecy for Judah, but a protection for Jeremiah because the Lord knew the brutality of the days ahead. Maybe the Lord is keeping you single because He's protecting you from what He sees would bring only sorrow to you. In Matthew 19:12, Jesus said that some remain single for the sake of the kingdom. Jesus Himself did this. Paul, too, was single. Many of the saints throughout history have been single. It's a high and holy calling, a heavy price, but with great reward.

Jeremiah 16:5–9

For thus saith the LORD, Enter not into the house of mourning, neither go to lament nor bemoan them: for I have taken away my peace from this people, saith the LORD, even lovingkindness and mercies. Both the great and the small shall die in this land: they shall not be buried, neither shall men lament for them, nor cut themselves, nor make themselves bald for them: Neither shall men tear themselves for them in mourning, to comfort them for the dead; neither shall men give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or for their mother. Thou shalt not also go into the house of feasting, to sit with them to eat and to drink. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will cause to cease out of this place in your eyes, and in your days, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride.

Not only was Jeremiah not to marry, but neither was he to join in observations of mourning or celebrations of feasting as a sign that his message superseded the normal customs of the day.

Jeremiah 16:10–13

And it shall come to pass, when thou shalt shew this people all these words, and they shall say unto thee, Wherefore hath the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? or what is our iniquity? or what is our sin that we have committed against the LORD our God? Then shalt thou say unto them, Because your fathers have forsaken me, saith the LORD, and have walked after other gods, and have served them, and have worshipped them, and have forsaken me, and have not kept my law; And ye have done worse than your fathers; for, behold, ye walk every one after the imagination of his evil heart, that they may not hearken unto me: Therefore will I cast you out of this land into a land that ye know not, neither ye nor your fathers; and there shall ye serve other gods day and night; where I will not shew you favour.

Although their fathers had worshiped idols, as well, the people of Jeremiah's day are additionally indicted for taking it one step further and walking after their own evil imaginations. As a result, they were headed for Babylon, where they would be cured of their idolatry by being so exposed to it that they would grow sick of it.

Jeremiah 16:14, 15
Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers.

After telling them they would be "cast into a land they knew not," the Lord tells His people they would also be brought back to the land of their fathers. And when they were, they would not talk about how the Lord delivered His people from Egypt in days of old, but how He delivered them from Babylon in their own lifetimes.

Isn't that always the way of the Lord? His mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:23). He is always ready to update your testimony.

Jeremiah 16:16–21
Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the LORD, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks. For mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes. And first I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double; because they have defiled my land, they have filled mine inheritance with the carcases of their detestable and abominable things. O LORD, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit. Shall a man make gods unto himself, and they are no gods? Therefore, behold,

I will this once cause them to know, I will cause them to know mine hand and my might; and they shall know that my name is The LORD.

The Gentiles, the observers, the skeptics, the unbelievers will come and say, "Our fathers taught us to worship idols that are not gods at all. But we see in you a quality of life, a reality in your relationship with God that makes us know that He is the Lord." Yes, God's people would go through the fire, but they would come out powerful, productive, useful to the purposes of God in revealing to people that He lives.

Why is the Lord allowing you to go through your present difficulty? Because when you come out the other side, not only will your own relationship with Him be deeper, but others will realize that they worship idols in comparison to what they see in you.



17 "He that spareth the rod hateth his son," Proverbs 13:24 declares. Our God is a Father. We are His children. And the Word declares that whom He loves, He chastens and He scourges every son (Hebrews 12:6). The Lord loves us. Consequently, when we get out of line, He will be faithful to discipline us.

At this point, His children were quite out of line. The people of Judah had persisted in worshiping idols and had involved themselves in perverted immorality. So the Lord sent Jeremiah to speak warning to His people that chastening, or judgment was coming. For forty-two years, this heartbroken prophet with a heartbreaking message faithfully proclaimed the Word of the Lord, telling God's people to change their ways lest they bring judgment upon themselves.

Jeremiah 17:1
The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars;

It is almost as though the tendency to sin was etched or engraved on the hearts of the people of Judah. They were committed to carnality, stuck in sin. And, in the following verses, the Lord says that, because of this, they would not enjoy the inheritance, the prosperity, the blessing He had planned for them.

Jeremiah 17:2–4
Whilst their children remember their altars and their groves by the green trees upon the high hills. O my mountain in the field, I will give thy substance and all thy treasures to the spoil, and thy high places for sin, throughout all thy borders. And thou, even thyself, shalt discontinue from thine heritage that I gave thee; and I will cause thee to serve thine enemies in the land which thou knowest not: for ye have kindled a fire in mine anger, which shall burn for ever.

Evidently, the people didn't heed the word of Jeremiah. They didn't listen to his message of gloom and doom, thinking God wouldn't really judge them. They thought they had the ability to hold back the Babylonians. They thought they could count on their alliance with the Egyptians.

Jeremiah 17:5, 6
Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.

The person who is trusting in the flesh, trusting in man will be like a heath, or a stunted shrub in the desert. Perhaps you can remember times you felt dry and parched and stunted. Often, it is indicative of our trusting in ourselves or in another and not relying on the Lord the way we should. When you face times of trial, do you have a tendency to look within, to gather up inner strength? If you do, you'll eventually realize you don't have the ability to see you through the trials that lie ahead of you. But if you look to other people, you'll be disappointed, as well, because they won't be able to live

up to your expectations. Look within and you'll come up short. Look around and you'll be disappointed. But look up—and you'll be blessed . . .

Jeremiah 17:7, 8
Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

Hope is the absolute expectation of coming good. Someone once said if you plant a tree, you're planting hope because it shows you expect to be around long enough to gather its fruit or to enjoy its shade. If you put your hope in the Lord, you'll be like a tree, always bearing fruit. Jesus used this same metaphor when He said, "He that abides in me and I in him shall bring forth much fruit" (see John 15:5). Fruit doesn't struggle to be fruitful. The branch just hangs in there and the fruit inevitably comes. The same is true of us. We don't have to struggle to produce fruit. Instead, we are just to abide and hope in the Lord.

Jeremiah 17:9
The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

We have a tendency to think we don't have to abide in the Lord, that we can do some pretty good things on our own, that we're not that bad. The average person thinks he's just a couple of steps away from perfection. But that's due to the deception of the heart. When I used to play basketball with Peter-John, I was awesome. With my hook shots, rebounds, and lay-ups, I was unstoppable. When he turned twelve, however, things got a little more difficult!

We can always find people to compare ourselves to and feel okay about. But when you compare yourself to the true standard—not your friend, not your neighbor, but Christ Jesus who lived life the way it was meant to be lived—you realize you're not as hot as you thought. The more you get to know the Lord, the more you realize how far you are from where you should

be. When you're first saved you think, "Once I get off cocaine, I'll be perfect." But as you walk with the Lord, you realize there are so many subtleties in your heart—motives, attitudes, perspectives that are amiss. The closer you get to Him and the more you realize you need His grace, the more you enjoy His forgiveness and marvel at His patience.

Jeremiah 17:10
I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

"*I* am the One who tries your heart," the Lord says. "Don't evaluate yourself. Look to *Me*."

Jeremiah 17:11
As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.

After saying the heart is deceitful and only He can search it, the Lord says, "Be sure you're not getting your nest egg together in ways that are unethical. Don't lay up for yourselves treasures on earth," Jesus would say (Matthew 6:19). Make investments in eternity with your time and ability, your money and energy.

Jeremiah 17:12
A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary.

The Lord Himself is the place of our sanctuary . . .

Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary . . .

Isaiah 8:13, 14 (a)

. . . Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come.

Ezekiel 11:16 (b)

Our sanctuary, our rest, our refuge is found in the Lord.

Jeremiah 17:13
O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters.

I believe that here, we're given insight into the mystery of John 8. When the woman caught in adultery was brought to Jesus, He realized it was a trap. After all, if He said, "Stone her," He would no longer be called the friend of sinners. But if He said, "Release her," the religious leaders would accuse Him of breaking the Old Testament Law. So Jesus said, "Let He who is without sin cast the first stone." And while they were reaching for stones, Jesus stooped down and wrote in the earth. Although John doesn't tell us what He wrote, I suggest it was a reminder of some sin each of them had committed—some proof that they, too, had "forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters" at one time or another.

Jeremiah 17:14–18
Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise. Behold, they say unto me, Where is the word of the LORD? let it come now. As for me, I have not hastened from being a pastor to follow thee: neither have I desired the woeful day; thou knowest: that which came out of my lips was right before thee. Be not a terror unto me: thou art my hope in the day of evil. Let them be confounded that persecute me, but let not me be confounded: let them be dismayed, but let not me be dismayed: bring upon them the day of evil, and destroy them with double destruction.

Although Jeremiah faithfully and repeatedly warned the people of Judah about the "woeful day" when Babylon would carry them away captive, he did not desire it. That is, he didn't secretly hope it happened soon so that he could be vindicated. And I believe his example is an important one for us. As eager as we are to see Jesus, as hungry as we are for things to be right on this planet, we must remember that, between the Rapture of the church and the beginning of the Millennium is the "woeful day" of Tribulation for the unbeliever. Therefore, like Jeremiah, we must not desire this woeful day—but rather, avail ourselves even more to the Lord as tools He can use to draw people to Himself before it comes.

Jeremiah 17:19–27

Thus said the LORD unto me; Go and stand in the gate of the children of the people, whereby the kings of Judah come in, and by the which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem; And say unto them, Hear ye the word of the LORD, ye kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that enter in by these gates: Thus saith the LORD; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction. And it shall come to pass, if ye diligently hearken unto me, saith the LORD, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but hallow the sabbath day, to do no work therein; Then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain for ever. And they shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places about Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south, bringing burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and meat offerings, and incense, and bringing sacrifices of praise, unto the house of the LORD. But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow

the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.

The Lord told His people that He wanted them to set aside one day in seven for rest, refreshment, and contemplation. If they didn't heed this word, they would find that their city would burn up. The palaces they were building would be destroyed. The gates they were proud of would be consumed by fire. But the people ignored this command, thinking they could get ahead by working on the Sabbath.

Just as Jerusalem would be burned up, people will be burned out, trying to get ahead by ignoring the Word of God. All of the regulations and instructions of God's Word were given to be a blessing to us not a burden upon us. They were given to us for our own benefit. Therefore, we ignore them to our own detriment. As our Creator, God knows we function best if we take one day in seven for rest and reflection. When we ignore this wisdom and provision, like Jerusalem, our hard work and grand plans end up in smoke.

18 Jeremiah 18:1–6

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

Here, in chapter 18, the Lord tells Jeremiah to go to the house of the potter. There, he would see the reason God was working as He was with His

people. And Jeremiah's lesson would become ours, as well . . .



***For topical study of Jeremiah 18:1–6 entitled "The Potter's House," turn to page* 512.**

Jeremiah 18:7–10
At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.

Just as the potter was able to make a good vessel from a marred one, so God stands ready to remake any person or nation, regardless how marred, who will simply turn to Him.

Jeremiah 18:11, 12
Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. And they said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart.

When told to return to the Lord, the men of Judah brazenly said it was hopeless for Jeremiah to talk to them because they were committed to walk in ways even they admitted were evil.

Jeremiah 18:13

Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ask ye now among the heathen, who hath heard such things: the virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing.

Even by heathen standards, Judah's response was considered "a very horrible thing."

Jeremiah 18:14
Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field? or shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken?

Judah's choice to forsake the living God made as much sense as a man leaving the refreshing streams of Lebanon for a parched desert. God had offered His people living water (2:13). But they chose broken cisterns instead.

Jeremiah 18:15–17
Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up; To make their land desolate, and a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head. I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity.

Stumbling feet, a desolate land, reproach from her enemies, and, finally, loss of a nation were all the results of a singular sin: forgetting God. To forget something means it was once known. And that is the tragedy of Israel and Judah. Unlike the Gentiles, God's people did know Him at one time. But, because they turned their back on Him, they gave Him no choice but to do the same to them.

Jeremiah 18:18
Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel

from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words.

Jeremiah's enemies decided to bring charges against him on the grounds that he had dared speak against both the priests and prophets (5:31; 13:13).

Jeremiah 18:19–23
Give heed to me, O LORD, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. Shall evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them. Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and pour out their blood by the force of the sword; and let their wives be bereaved of their children, and be widows; and let their men be put to death; let their young men be slain by the sword in battle. Let a cry be heard from their houses, when thou shalt bring a troop suddenly upon them: for they have digged a pit to take me, and hid snares for my feet. Yet, LORD, thou knowest all their counsel against me to slay me: forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from thy sight, but let them be overthrown before thee; deal thus with them in the time of thine anger.

Jeremiah had both interceded and wept for the very people who sought his life. His call of God's judgment upon them was not out of personal revenge but was simply a prophetic record of the judgment they would so insistently bring upon themselves.

THE POTTER'S HOUSE

A Topical Study of JEREMIAH 18:1–6

I remember the night our family had a particularly rip-roaring game of "Dictionary." "Dictionary" is a game wherein one person chooses a word from the dictionary for which the other players are to write down a definition that, although made up, sounds logical. The definitions are read anonymously and the person with the most convincing definition wins. When it was my turn, I chose the word "spank." With paper and pencils in hand, my family wrote out their definitions. Most were fairly good. Eight-year-old Peter-John's was very interesting. He wrote, "Spank (verb): Something Daddy does way too hard."

At this time, Jeremiah the prophet may have felt those same sentiments toward his heavenly Father. You see, throughout the first seventeen chapters of this book that bears his name, the Father has been telling him of the judgment that was to come down on the people of Judah. And anguish filled Jeremiah's heart even as tears filled his eyes. So God sent him to the potter's house, where he would hear the word of the Lord through an illustrated sermon.

As Jeremiah entered the house of the potter, three things would initially grab his attention. First, he would see the potter—an intelligent, capable artisan, a skilled workman, one who knew exactly what he was doing. The second thing he would notice would be the wheel—the instrument upon which the potter would do his work. The third thing that Jeremiah would see would be the clay itself.

Clay is a common substance, virtually worthless, and yet in the hands of a master potter it can be fashioned into something priceless and useful. Clay in Scripture represents us, for this analogy was not simply given to Jeremiah but also to Isaiah (64:8) and Paul (Romans 9:21). We are clay. We come from the earth. We go back to the earth. We are common. In and of ourselves, we really can't do anything of significance. The wheel represents the circumstances of daily life. Round and round and round we go. The potter is a picture of God—a capable, intelligent Workman.

As Jeremiah saw the potter, the wheel, and the clay on the wheel, we gain insight into what God was doing in Jeremiah's day, as well as what He's doing in our lives today.

The Purpose

Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work . . .

Jeremiah 18:3 (a)

The potter was not playing or amusing himself with the clay. He was making something of the clay. And, although an onlooker couldn't be exactly sure what he was making, he knew precisely what he was doing. He had a plan in mind. As the clay went around, his plan would be carried out by the skill of his hands. So too, God has just such a plan for you and me.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works . . .

Ephesians 2:10 (a)

God is the Potter, we are the clay and He is doing a work in our lives. The Greek word translated "workmanship" is *poiema,* from which we get our word, "poem." We are God's poetry. He is making you not just a piece of pottery, but a piece of poetry. He is making you something not only useful but beautiful. What does the workman gain by making a vessel of beauty and practicality? What does God gain from shaping us into something that is poetic?

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:6, 7

We are God's trophies. He takes worthless hunks of clay like us and begins to fashion something of beauty and usefulness so that in the ages to come, when we are living with Him in the heavenlies, the angels will cruise by us and marvel at His grace.

The Procedure

. . . he wrought a work on the wheels.

Jeremiah 18:3 (b)

As the potter would pump the wheel with his foot, the clay went round and round and round and round—just like life. Do you ever feel like your life is going in circles? "Where am I going?" we ask. "Why isn't anything happening? Where is all this heading? Lord, I thought You loved me. But I only see myself going round and round and round and round." Then, suddenly, we feel His touch and are reminded of His presence.

But as He begins to shape us, we become aware of His pressure. When we feel the pressure of life—the problems, trials, and struggles—if we're not careful, we can say, "That's enough. I've had it!" Unlike literal clay, we have the ability to jump off the wheel and say, "I'm tired of going round and round. I'm tired of the pressure. I'm going my own way." So we jump off—only to splat on the ground.

When we grow tired of being stepped on and walked over, finally, we weakly, meekly say, "Lord, pick me up again." And He does. He refashions us into a ball, plops us back on the wheel, and the process begins all over again. I'm convinced that many of us go through far too many cycles on the wheel because we give up at the very point where we're almost shaped up. We try and get out of our circumstances, saying, "No more, Lord. I've had enough."

Finally, we begin to learn the secret of submitting. "Have Your way, Lord," we finally say. "I'm tired of splatting." So the Lord spins us round and round in our daily circumstances and then He begins to pressure and shape us. After that, He turns on the heat of the kiln. That is why Peter would tell us not to be surprised by fiery trials (1 Peter 4:12). There's no way to make clay firm without fire.

The Principle

> *And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.*
>
> Jeremiah 18:4

The potter makes the vessel according to his plan not according to the clay's demand. "Lord, do this in my life," we say.

"I have a plan," the Lord answers. "I will do what I want to do in and through your life."

Paul picks up this same analogy . . .

> *Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?*
>
> Romans 9:20, 21

"Who are you, hunk of clay, to argue with your Maker?" Paul asks. "The Potter has the right to do with the clay whatever He wants. It's His and He is sovereign." This is terrifying to me. What if He decides to make me a spittoon? I don't mind being a vase, but what if He decides to make me a vessel of dishonor? How can I trust the Master Potter with the outcome?

The Person

I see the Potter. And He says to me, "Look at My foot as it pumps the wheel." As I do, I see a hole through which a spike was driven and I realize that this Potter was pierced because He loved me. I look at the hand that is shaping and pressuring me—and in it I see the scar made by another spike.

Jesus paid the price for my sin. He went to hell in my place. And when I get to the place where I say, "Lord, can I really trust You with my life—the circles I'm going in, the pressure I feel, the heat I'm experiencing?"—I need only look at the feet on the pedal and the hands that are shaping me.

> *For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*
>
> Romans 5:6–10

When did God demonstrate His love for you? Not when you were going to church, not when you were caring about Him, but when you were a sinner. If He chose you when you were in rebellion, when you were ignoring Him, when you were sinning against Him, don't you know He loves you now that you're trying to walk with Him? We all fall. But the Master Potter is there to pick us up and make us again into something new according to His perfect, sovereign plan.

The Prophecy

In Matthew 27, we see another mention of a potter, this time with regard to a field . . .

> *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.*
>
> Matthew 27:3–10

The potter's field was the parcel of property outside the house of the potter where pottery that was broken beyond repair was cast. The thirty pieces of silver Judas received to betray Jesus were used to buy a potter's field. And this is wonderful news for us. You see, we have been cast into the potter's field of life. We have been broken and discarded. But the good news of the gospel is that the potter's field was purchased with the blood money of Jesus. He purchased it that He might remake us into something of beauty and worth once again.



19 In chapter 18, we saw the lesson of the potter's house. Here we see the lesson of the potter's bottle . . .

Jeremiah 19:1, 2
Thus saith the LORD, Go and get a potter's earthen bottle, and take of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests; And go forth unto the valley of the son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the east gate, and proclaim there the words that I shall tell thee,

The valley of Hinnom was a valley outside the eastern gate of Jerusalem where babies were burned in sacrifice to Moloch. It later became a dump where refuse burned day and night. Understandably, it became synonymous with *gehenna,* or hell. Jeremiah was to go into this valley with an earthen vessel from the potter's house in hand.

Jeremiah 19:3–6
And say, Hear ye the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem; Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle. Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents; They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind: Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that this place shall no more be called Tophet, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of slaughter.

The people of God had walked one step at a time into incredible wickedness, thinking that what they were doing was religious. But what they were doing never even crossed the Lord's mind.

Much of what is done in religious activity is not from the Lord nor of the Lord. Many times we can get caught up in religious activity that the Lord hasn't directed. And, tragically, as in Jeremiah's day, our sons and daughters

can end up paying the price. As parents, I believe we need to carefully say, "Lord, is what I'm doing in accordance with what You desire—or am I simply running off to this event or that activity without Your direction? Is it false worship?" We must pray that our kids don't get burned out or walk away from the Lord because of our religious busyness.

Jeremiah 19:7–9
And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place; and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hands of them that seek their lives: and their carcases will I give to be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth. And I will make this city desolate, and an hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished and hiss because of all the plagues thereof. And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they shall eat every one the flesh of his friend in the siege and straitness, wherewith their enemies, and they that seek their lives, shall straiten them.

The cannibalism that would take place during the destruction and fall of Jerusalem horrifies us. But we should recoil with equal horror when, for the sake of selfish interests, Americans abort over one million babies every year.

Jeremiah 19:10, 11
Then shalt thou break the bottle in the sight of the men that go with thee, And shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again: and they shall bury them in Tophet, till there be no place to bury.

Jeremiah was told to break the bottle in the place that would become known as Aceldama, or literally, the field of blood. It was a field purchased with the thirty pieces of silver Judas threw on the ground of the temple after he betrayed Jesus. When Judas hung himself, this is where he fell (Acts 1:18, 19).

Jeremiah 19:12, 13
Thus will I do unto this place, saith the LORD, and to the inhabitants thereof, and even make this city as Tophet: And the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses of the kings of Judah, shall be defiled as the place of Tophet, because of all the houses upon whose roofs they have burned incense unto all the host of heaven, and have poured out drink offerings unto other gods.

In Jeremiah's day, the flat roofs of the houses in Jerusalem were used as "high places" to offer sacrifices to the sun and planets (32:29). Peter, however, would put the flat roof to infinitely better use, for it was there that he prayed. And as he did, God gave him the revolutionary vision that Gentiles would be saved as well as Jews (Acts 10).

Jeremiah 19:14, 15
Then came Jeremiah from Tophet, whither the LORD had sent him to prophesy; and he stood in the court of the LORD's house; and said to all the people, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear my words.

At the temple, Jeremiah repeats the prophecy of judgment he had given in the valley. This would not go over well with the religious establishment . . .



20

Jeremiah 20:1, 2
Now Pashur the son of Immer the priest, who was also chief governor in the house of the LORD, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things. Then Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the LORD.

When Pashur, chief governor of the temple, heard Jeremiah's dire prophecy, he struck Jeremiah and then ordered him to be put in stocks, where

he remained all night. While there, Jeremiah received a prophetic word . . .

Jeremiah 20:3–6
And it came to pass on the morrow, that Pashur brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks. Then said Jeremiah unto him, The LORD hath not called thy name Pashur, but Magor-missabib. For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will make thee a terror to thyself, and to all thy friends: and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and thine eyes shall behold it: and I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive into Babylon, and shall slay them with the sword. Moreover I will deliver all the strength of this city, and all the labours thereof, and all the precious things thereof, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah will I give into the hand of their enemies, which shall spoil them, and take them, and carry them to Babylon. And thou, Pashur, and all that dwell in thine house shall go into captivity: and thou shalt come to Babylon, and there thou shalt die, and shalt be buried there, thou, and all thy friends, to whom thou hast prophesied lies.

Upon his release, Jeremiah told Pashur, whose name meant "security on all sides," that the Lord had changed his name to one that means "fear on every side." Because Pashur had prophesied peace, the nation was partying its way to destruction—where they would indeed encounter fear on every side.

Jeremiah 20:7
O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me.

Why did Jeremiah accuse the Lord of deceiving him? Perhaps it was because the Lord had spoken previously that He would be with Jeremiah and that those who sought to come down on him would not have victory over him (1:8). Evidently, Jeremiah thought this meant he would have no problems.

How often we hear people say, "I'm a Christian now, so why am I having all these difficulties?" The reason is that the Lord never promised to keep us from trials. In fact, He warned us not to be surprised when they come our way (1 Peter 4:12). What He promises is to be with us in them.

Jeremiah 20:8, 9 (a)
For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. . . .

"That's it," Jeremiah said. "I've been put in stocks. I've been put down. I've had it, Lord. I'm not speaking any more."

Can you relate to this? Have you ever said, "People make fun of me. I don't understand what You're doing, Lord. I just don't get it. I'll believe in You, but I'll just make an occasional guest appearance on Sunday."

Jeremiah 20:9 (b)
. . . But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.

"Did not our heart burn within us?" the travelers on the road to Emmaus asked when Jesus opened the Word to them. That must have been the kind of "heartburn" Jeremiah felt, for he couldn't keep quiet. He had to speak the Word again.

Jeremiah 20:10, 11
For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, say they, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him. But the LORD is with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper: their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten.

As Jeremiah decides to speak again, the word he speaks is one of faith—not in his own commitment or ability, but his faith is in the faithful One, the Lord alone.

Jeremiah 20:12, 13
But, O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I opened my cause. Sing unto the LORD, praise ye the LORD: for he hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evildoers.

Jeremiah worships even as he is stiff and sore from the stocks. Paul and Silas did the same thing, no doubt with bleeding backs and bruised ribs (Acts 16:25). How can you experience victory even in the most confining circumstances? By doing what Jeremiah, Paul, and Silas did: Keep the Word before you and worship flowing from you.

Jeremiah 20:14–18
Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad. And let that man be as the cities which the LORD overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide; Because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to be always great with me. Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?

What's happening? Didn't Jeremiah say the Word was in his bones, burning as a fire. Wasn't praise flowing from his lips? Why, then, is he cursing the day he was born? It's because he's a man—just like us. How many times have we praised the Lord and embraced His Word—only to feel discouraged again the next moment? The good news is that God didn't shelf Jeremiah—and He won't shelf you. He would still use Jeremiah in spite of—

or, more likely, because of—his humanness. And He'll still use you even though you're not always at the peak of victory.



21 Jeremiah 21:1, 2

The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, when king Zedekiah sent unto him Pashur the son of Melchiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, saying, Inquire, I pray thee, of the LORD for us; for Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon mak eth war against us; if so be that the LORD will deal with us according to all his wondrous works, that he may go up from us.

When Zedekiah finally realized that the prophets who prophesied nothing but peace were wrong, that the Babylonians would indeed wage war against him, he sent messengers to Jeremiah, asking what he should do.

> **Jeremiah 21:3–6**
> **Then said Jeremiah unto them, Thus shall ye say to Zedekiah: Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon, and against the Chaldeans, which besiege you without the walls, and I will assemble them into the midst of this city. And I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath. And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast: they shall die of a great pestilence.**

Jeremiah's message to Zedekiah was that it was futile to fight the Babylonians because the Lord Himself was siding with them against His own people.

> **Jeremiah 21:7–10**
> **And afterward, saith the LORD, I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah, and his servants, and the people, and such as are left in this city from the pestilence, from the sword, and from the**

famine, into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those that seek their life: and he shall smite them with the edge of the sword; he shall not spare them, neither have pity, nor have mercy. And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death. He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey. For I have set my face against this city for evil, and not for good, saith the LORD: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.

The only way to save their lives was to surrender to the Babylonians. So too, the only way to save our own lives is to surrender not to a cruel invader but to a loving Savior, not to be captives but to be captivated by the One who loved us so much He surrendered His own life for us.

Jeremiah 21:11, 12
And touching the house of the king of Judah, say, Hear ye the word of the LORD; O house of David, thus saith the LORD; Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

While judgment could not be avoided, it could be lessened if the people and her leaders changed their ways.

Jeremiah 21:13, 14
Behold, I am against thee, O inhabitant of the valley, and rock of the plain, saith the LORD; which say, Who shall come down against us? or who shall enter into our habitations? But I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, saith the LORD: and I will kindle a fire in the forest thereof, and it shall devour all things round about it.

"If God be for us, who can be against us?" Paul would ask (Romans 8:31). But the converse is equally true, for if God be against us, no military alliance or geographical setting can protect us.



22 Chapter 22 is an indictment against the leaders of Judah. Because they had grown corrupt, the political system had become very immoral.

Jeremiah 22:1–3
Thus saith the LORD; Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word, And say, Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, that sittest upon the throne of David, thou, and thy servants, and thy people that enter in by these gates: Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.

To the leaders of Judah, Jeremiah says, "Be tender. Execute justice." Micah would echo this by saying God required His people to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him (6:8).

Jeremiah 22:4–6
For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people. But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation. For thus saith the LORD unto the king's house of Judah; Thou art Gilead unto me, and the head of Lebanon: yet surely I will make thee a wilderness, and cities which are not inhabited.

Gilead was the most fertile part of the country of Israel; the mountain range of Lebanon was the highest. Thus, the Lord is saying that even though

Judah had been blessed and prosperous, like Israel, she would reap the tragic results of God's judgment.

Jeremiah 22:7–9
And I will prepare destroyers against thee, every one with his weapons: and they shall cut down thy choice cedars, and cast them into the fire. And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this great city? Then they shall answer, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them.

Even as God said, Gentile nations would understand what Judah did not —that she brought judgment down on her own head (Deuteronomy 29:22–28).

Jeremiah 22:10–12
Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. For thus saith the LORD touching Shallum the son of Josiah king of Judah, which reigned instead of Josiah his father, which went forth out of this place; He shall not return thither any more: But he shall die in the place whither they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more.

As seen in 2 Chronicles 35:24, 25, the nation mourned on the anniversary of the death of Josiah. But here they are told not to weep for Josiah, but for his son, Jehoahaz, also known as Shallum. You see, following Josiah's death, the people put his son, Jehoahaz on the throne instead. But Jehoahaz was carried to Egypt after three months, never to see Judah again. Pharaoh-necho replaced Jehoahaz with his brother, Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:31–34).

Jeremiah 22:13, 14
Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work; That saith, I will build me

a wide house and large chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and it is cieled with cedar, and painted with vermilion.

Jehoiakim taxed the people heavily—not only to pay tribute to Pharaoh-necho, but to build himself a palace.

Jeremiah 22:15–19
Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the LORD. But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah; They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

Although Jehoiakim was the son of a good father who left a good example, he was charged with extortion, oppression, violence, injustice, and covetousness during his eleven-year reign. At that time, Nebuchadnezzar came to carry him to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:6). But he was evidently slain by Nebuchadnezzar en route and left unburied outside Jerusalem (Jeremiah 36:30).

Jehoiachin—also known as Jeconiah or Coniah—took his place, only to reign for three months before being carried to Babylon, where he lived until he died (Jeremiah 52:31).

Jeremiah 22:20
Go up to Lebanon, and cry; and lift up thy voice in Bashan, and cry from the passages: for all thy lovers are destroyed.

In addition to having her kings deposed, Judah was left without allies.

Jeremiah 22:21
I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not my voice.

When Judah was prosperous, she would not hear. Isn't that the same way it is with us? When we are going through hard times, we're all ears, straining to hear a word of encouragement from the Lord, a promise of speedy help. But if we turn a deaf ear in prosperous times, we can't be surprised to hear silence in hard times. Oh, that we would listen morning by morning, day by day regardless of the circumstances in order that we might cultivate consistent communication with our Father.

Jeremiah 22:22–26
The wind shall eat up all thy pastors, and thy lovers shall go into captivity: surely then shalt thou be ashamed and confounded for all thy wickedness. O inhabitant of Lebanon, that makest thy nest in the cedars, how gracious shalt thou be when pangs come upon thee, the pain as of a woman in travail! As I live, saith the LORD, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence; And I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and into the hand of them whose face thou fearest, even into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. And I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bare thee, into another country, where ye were not born; and there shall ye die.

In 2 Kings 24, we are given the tragic fulfillment of this prophecy—as not only Jehoiachin and his mother were carried to Babylon, but also his wives, officers, princes, and 10,000 Jews, leaving only the poorest people of the land.

Jeremiah 22:27–30
But to the land whereunto they desire to return, thither shall they not return. Is this man Coniah a despised broken idol? is he a

vessel wherein is no pleasure? wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into a land which they know not? O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah.

In this dire prophecy at the end of this dark chapter, light shines forth. You see, when we read the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1, we see that Matthew traced His lineage from Joseph back to David—including Jeconiah. This creates a problem, for Jeremiah prophesied that Jeconiah would have no descendant on the throne, yet Jesus, the Son of David, will reign forever. The solution is found in Luke's genealogy, where we see Jesus' lineage traced not through Joseph, but through Mary—from David not through Solomon, but through Nathan, Solomon's brother. This line bypasses Coniah. This means that through Joseph's line, Jesus has a right to the throne politically and legally. But spiritually, because Coniah is cursed, Mary's line avoids the curse completely. Thus, Jesus is the only One who both spiritually and legally fulfills these obligations. There is no other.



23 In chapter 22, Judah's king was indicted for his wickedness. In chapter 23, the indictment against corruption continues—not just of the king but governmental leaders, called "pastors."

Jeremiah 23:1–4
Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD. And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. And I will set

up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD.

These leaders were not feeding the flock but fleecing them, scattering not serving them. So the Lord says, "Woe be to those who are only looking after their own interests rather than being concerned for the welfare of My people."

Although this speaks directly to governmental leaders, this word could apply to spiritual leaders, as well. The responsibility of any spiritual leader is to feed the flock the Word of God. When Peter preached to the household of Cornelius, a Roman soldier, it was as they heard the Word that the Holy Ghost fell upon them and they became radically converted (Acts 10:44). This isn't surprising because Jesus said, "The words I speak to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63).

The Word is intricately linked to being Spirit-filled and to moving in the Spirit. I'm convinced that Christians don't need to hear more preaching or more sermons. The great need of the church of Jesus Christ is to hear the Word. You might know the Word but you still need daily, consistent input of the Scriptures to nurture and feed your soul. To think you don't need Bible study any more because you've already been through it would be like me going home after work and saying I don't need dinner tonight because I had dinner last night. We need the bread of the Word to complete that which the Lord wants to accomplish in and through us.

Jeremiah 23:5 (a)
Behold, the days come, saith the LORD . . .

In contrast to the corruption of Jehoiachin, as seen in chapter 22 and the leaders as seen in the preceding four verses, here we see a prophecy proclaiming the coming of Christ, the ultimate Pastor, the perfect Leader . . .

Jeremiah 23:5 (b), 6
. . . that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell

safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

In contrast to Judah's corrupt leaders, we see the righteous Ruler, the King of kings, Jehovah Tsidkenu, or the Lord our righteousness. This is a reference to the Second Coming of Christ. At His First Coming, He came as a suffering Servant. He died for our sin—yet He rose again. As He ascended into heaven, an angel said to the disciples, "Why are you looking up? Jesus shall come to you again" (see Acts 1:11). Great hope was given to them. When He comes the second time, He'll come as the conquering King, the righteous Ruler. We'll call Him Jehovah Tsidkenu, the Lord *our* Righteousness . . .

> For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.
>
> 2 Corinthians 5:21

Not only is Christ in you, but you are in Him. This means that when the Father looks at you, He doesn't see your faults, flaws, and failures. He sees you in Christ. Therefore, you can communicate boldly and freely with Him. Satan will point out your failures, but, because you're in Christ, the Father doesn't even see them because you're washed by the blood and robed in the righteousness of His beloved Son.

In light of these things, Paul said, "I know no man after the flesh" (see 2 Corinthians 5:16). That is, rather than looking at the flaws, failures, and weakness of others, he chose to look at them as God does—in Christ Jesus. The degree to which we follow Paul's example is the degree that we'll experience the glory of the coming kingdom even now.

Jeremiah 23:7, 8
Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that they shall no more say, The LORD liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land.

No longer would God's people say, "Seven hundred years ago, the Lord delivered us out of Egypt." That's a wonderful story, but it's old. The Lord says the day is coming when they would have a new deliverance, a fresh testimony, when they would say, "The Lord delivered us from Babylonian captivity"—and, ultimately, from the dispersion during the Tribulation.

Jeremiah 23:9–11
Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the LORD, and because of the words of his holiness. For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourneth; the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course is evil, and their force is not right. For both prophet and priest are profane; yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the LORD.

Here, Jeremiah laments over the wickedness not only of the politicians, but also of the prophets and priests.

Jeremiah 23:12–16
Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein: for I will bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation, saith the LORD. And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, and caused my people Israel to err. I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets; Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD.

At this time, all kinds of prophets were emerging in Judah. The people were sinning and rebelling. They were opposed to the Lord. They were committed to a course of idolatry. Yet prophets were speaking their own minds.

Spiritual utterances can have three sources. They can truly be from the Holy Spirit, as was the case with Jeremiah. Second, they can be from a demonic spirit. Third, they can be from the human spirit, as was the case here.

How can we know the true source of a spiritual utterance? First, measure it against the Word. If it contradicts the Word in any way, it's not valid. Second, present it to those who have the gift of discernment (1 Corinthians 12:10) and let them weigh it out. If it conforms to the Word and is confirmed by the body, you're on solid ground.

Jeremiah 23:17
They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you.

The message of the false prophets was a happy message. "Even though you are in rebellion against God, no evil shall befall you," they said.

I read of a large hawk that was seen flying with a parakeet in its talons. "Happy day, happy day, happy day," the parakeet could be heard chirping. It seems those were the only words that parakeet knew. In reality, it would have been much better had his only word been "Help!"

Sometimes we're birdbrains in the same way. "Happy day, happy day," we chirp, wanting people to like us. "No evil will come upon you. God will bless you." But in reality, that might not be the message of the Lord at all.

Jeremiah 23:18–22
For who hath stood in the counsel of the LORD, and hath perceived and heard his word? who hath marked his word, and heard it? Behold, a whirlwind of the LORD is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind: it shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the LORD shall not return, until he

have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly. I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophe sied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.

"I have not spoken to these prophets, yet they prophesied," the Lord declares. Had He spoken to them, had they waited on Him, they would have prophesied not peace, but a whirlwind.

"Peace, be still," Jesus said to the storm. But it was in response to the disciples' acknowledgement that there was indeed a storm (Mark 4:38, 39). Thus, the lesson seems to be that if we realize we're in over our heads, Jesus brings peace. But if we think we've got everything under control, He more than likely will send a storm.

Jeremiah 23:23, 24
Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.

"Do these false prophets think I am unaware of what they say and do?" the Lord asks.

Jeremiah 23:25–28
I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart; Which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal. The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD.

Throughout Scripture, God has spoken through dreams (Genesis 40; 1 Kings 3; Daniel 2; Matthew 2). Yet here, He says dreams are chaff compared to the wheat of the Word. Therefore, if you have to choose between going to a meeting where there are prophecies and visions or where the Word is taught, I would encourage you to opt for learning the Word. The best place, of course, is where neither excludes the other. I believe the flakiness we see in Christianity today is due in large part to a lack of a firm footing in the Word.

Jeremiah 23:29, 30
Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour.

Because they weren't hearing from the Lord, the false prophets listened to what the prophet down the street was saying and delivered the message as if it were His own.

Jeremiah 23:31, 32
Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD.

In the Lord's estimation, the prophets with the happy message were unprofitable prophets. But there was another group who fared no better . . .

Jeremiah 23:33–40
And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What is the burden of the LORD? thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the LORD. And as for the prophet, and the priest, and the people, that shall say, The burden of the LORD, I will even punish that man and his house. Thus shall ye say every one to his neighbour, and every

one to his brother, What hath the LORD answered? and, What hath the LORD spoken? And the burden of the LORD shall ye mention no more: for every man's word shall be his burden; for ye have perverted the words of the living God, of the LORD of hosts our God. Thus shalt thou say to the prophet, What hath the LORD answered thee? and, What hath the LORD spoken? But since ye say, The burden of the LORD; therefore thus saith the LORD; Because ye say this word, The burden of the LORD, and I have sent unto you, saying, Ye shall not say, The burden of the LORD; Therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and cast you out of my presence: And I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.

This group of prophets spoke continually about the burden of the Lord. But the Lord said He didn't want to hear that phrase any more.

"Come unto Me all you who are weary and heavy laden," Jesus said, "and I will give you rest, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (see Matthew 11:28–30). As a carpenter, it is possible Jesus made yokes. If so, He would have designed them to fit each animal perfectly. He does the same for us. The yoke He asks us to bear is custom-made for us. It takes into account our personality, interests, and temperament. That's what makes it easy.

When two animals are yoked together, there is a lead animal and one who follows. The lead animal carries most of the weight. If you wonder why your walk with the Lord is so hard and burdensome, it's likely because you're not flowing with what the Lord is doing. Consequently, you're pulling against His lead and getting bruised by the yoke in the process. In Ezekiel 44, the Lord said very clearly that the priests were to wear no garments made of wool because wool causes sweat. In other words, He doesn't want the work we do for Him to be troublesome. You'll know you're in the right ministry when it's a joy rather than a burden to you.

24

In chapters 24 and 25, the Lord gives four reasons He chastens His people—be it in Jeremiah's day or ours . . .

Jeremiah 24:1
The LORD shewed me, and, behold, two baskets of figs were set before the temple of the LORD, after that Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the carpenters and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon.

The first stage of the captivity had already begun. In 605, Nebuchadnezzar came down and took Jehoiachin and a number of the leaders to Babylon. In 597, a second group was carried into captivity. In 586, the final group was taken to Babylon. The temple was then destroyed and the city was sacked. At the time of the first stage, the Lord showed Jeremiah two baskets of figs . . .

Jeremiah 24:2–7
One basket had very good figs, even like the figs that are first ripe: and the other basket had very naughty figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad. Then said the LORD unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah? And I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the evil, very evil, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.

The first reason God chastens His people is not to punish but to purify. Idolatry had been a stumbling block to the Jews from the day they fashioned a golden calf after their release from bondage in Egypt. In Babylon, they would grow so sick of idols that, to this day, idolatry would never be a temptation for them again. Thus, God's chastening was a benefit and a blessing to them.

Jeremiah 24:8–10
And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the LORD, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt: And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them. And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers.

Second, chastisement proves God's love. The group taken to Babylon in 605 were the good figs. The ones left behind were the evil figs. In other words, it was the ones who weren't being chastened who were evil. The Lord says, "The ones being taken away will come back and serve Me with their whole heart." The ones who stayed behind thought they had it made. But the Lord said they would ultimately be scattered by sword, famine, and pestilence.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us it is whom the Lord loves that He chastens, His son that He scourges (12:6). If you wonder why the Lord is always dealing with you, the answer is it's because He loves you. The bad figs thought they were getting off easy when, in fact, they would ultimately be scattered. Those who were chastened, on the other hand, would find themselves ultimately blessed. If you are continually getting away with things you know are wrong, I would encourage you to seek the Lord, to make sure you are a child of His. If, on the other hand, you're being disciplined, rejoice, for it means you're a good fig.

25 Jeremiah 25:1–9

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that was the first year of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; The which Jeremiah the prophet spake unto all the people of Judah, and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, even unto this day, that is the three and twentieth year, the word of the LORD hath come unto me, and I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye have not hearkened. And the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear. They said, Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever: And go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt. Yet ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the LORD; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations.

In addition to seeing that God's chastening is for our benefit and that it proves His love, here we see that it is always prophesied. We will never be able to say that, because we didn't know we were sinning, God is unfair in disciplining. Here, the Lord says very clearly that it was because they didn't hear His words that His people would experience brutal times.

There is no such thing as falling into sin. We walk into it one step at a time. If you're a child of God, all along the way, He'll speak to your heart, saying, "Stop. Back up. Turn around." You'll come to church and hear a sermon that strikes you. You'll turn on the radio and it's confirmed. You'll see a sister or brother and they'll share a word with you. What is the Lord doing? He is personally prophesying to you, saying, "Be careful."

Jeremiah 25:10–12
Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations.

Chastening always passes. It would take seventy years, but it would pass. The Lord doesn't keep you in the place of chastisement indefinitely. After seventy years, God would bring His people back and then He would deal with the Babylonians.

Jeremiah 25:13, 14
And I will bring upon that land all my words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations. For many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of them also: and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the works of their own hands.

Just as the Babylonians had made slaves of Judah, they themselves would become slaves to other nations.

Jeremiah 25:15, 16
For thus saith the LORD God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them.

The cup of God's wrath will one day be poured out on all nations in the day of Tribulation. In Jeremiah's day, this was a reference to the wide-

reaching arm of the Babylonian empire, which He would use as a tool in His hand.

Jeremiah 25:17–28

Then took I the cup at the LORD's hand, and made all the nations to drink, unto whom the LORD had sent me: To wit, Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and the kings thereof, and the princes thereof, to make them a desolation, an astonishment, an hissing, and a curse; as it is this day; Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants, and his princes, and all his people; And all the mingled people, and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Philistines, and Ashkelon, and Azzah, and Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod, Edom, and Moab, and the children of Ammon, And all the kings of Tyrus, and all the kings of Zidon, and the kings of the isles which are beyond the sea, Dedan, and Tema, and Buz, and all that are in the utmost corners, And all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mingled people that dwell in the desert, And all the kings of Zimri, and all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes, And all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another, and all the kingdoms of the world, which are upon the face of the earth: and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them. Therefore thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Drink ye, and be drunken, and spue, and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you. And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at thine hand to drink, then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ye shall certainly drink.

"Judgment must begin at the house of God," Peter declared (1 Peter 4:17). Therefore, Judah would be the first to fall to the Babylonians, followed by Egypt, the Phoenician cities, and possibly Syria. "Shishak" was an ancient king of Babylon who also would drink of the cup of suffering when Babylon met her match with the Medes and Persians (Jeremiah 51:41).

Jeremiah 25:29, 30

For, lo, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by my name, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished: for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith the LORD of hosts. Therefore prophesy thou against them all these words, and say unto them, The LORD shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar upon his habitation; he shall give a shout, as they that tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth.

God had already begun to punish His people for their idolatry. He would also punish those by whom idolatry was introduced.

Jeremiah 25:31, 32
A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth; for the LORD hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; he will give them that are wicked to the sword, saith the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth.

Nation after nation would fall to the Babylonians.

Jeremiah 25:33–38
And the slain of the LORD shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the ground. Howl, ye shepherds, and cry; and wallow yourselves in the ashes, ye principal of the flock: for the days of your slaughter and of your dispersions are accomplished; and ye shall fall like a pleasant vessel. And the shepherds shall have no way to flee, nor the principal of the flock to escape. A voice of the cry of the shepherds, and an howling of the principal of the flock, shall be heard: for the LORD hath spoiled their pasture. And the peaceable habitations are cut down because of the fierce anger of the LORD. He hath forsaken his covert, as the lion: for their land

is desolate because of the fierceness of the oppressor, and because of his fierce anger.

The entire region would be made desolate by Babylonian aggression—just as the whole earth will feel God's wrath in the time of the Tribulation.



26 Jeremiah 26:1–6

In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah came this word from the LORD, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD's house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word: If so be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings. And thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD; If ye will not hearken to me, to walk in my law, which I have set before you, To hearken to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I sent unto you, both rising up early, and sending them, but ye have not hearkened; Then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.

God tells His people that He will turn from His discipline if they will turn from their sin.

Jeremiah 26:7–11

So the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die. Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD. When the princes of

Judah heard these things, then they came up from the king's house unto the house of the LORD, and sat down in the entry of the new gate of the LORD's house. Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears.

Rather than grab the message of grace and mercy God offered, the priests, prophets, and people of Judah chose instead to grab Jeremiah and tell him he must die.

Jeremiah 26:12–15
Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you. As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.

Even with his life at stake, Jeremiah was not about to change his message, for it was from the Lord. "If you want to kill me, fine," he said. "But if you do, you'll be in bigger trouble with the Lord than you already are."

Jeremiah 26:16
Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and to the prophets; This man is not worthy to die: for he hath spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God.

Although the religious leaders still wanted Jeremiah to die, the people themselves, fickle as they were, decided he had spoken in the name of the

Lord. Unfortunately, however, although they spared Jeremiah's life, by ignoring his message, they would lose their own.

Jeremiah 26:17–19
Then rose up certain of the elders of the land, and spake to all the assembly of the people, saying, Micah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spake to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountains of the house as the high places of a forest. Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? did he not fear the LORD, and besought the LORD, and the LORD repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them? Thus might we procure great evil against our souls.

Other prophets who, like Jeremiah, prophesied destruction were named as a precedent for sparking the life of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 26:20–24
And there was also a man that prophesied in the name of the LORD, Urijah the son of Shemaiah of Kirjath-jearim, who prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah: And when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men, and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death: but when Urijah heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt; And Jehoiakim the king sent men into Egypt, namely, Elnathan the son of Achbor, and certain men with him into Egypt. And they fetched forth Urijah out of Egypt, and brought him unto Jehoiakim the king; who slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people. Nevertheless the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death.

Urijah was a prophet who, like Jeremiah, prophesied not peace but punishment. When he heard that the king sought his life for doing so, he fled

to Egypt, where he was captured and brought back to Jehoiakim, who put him to death. Jeremiah, on the other hand, trusted in the Lord, remained in Judah, and was spared.



27 Jeremiah's powerful prophecies did not necessarily make him a popular personality. On the contrary, when he gave the message of the Lord, people wanted him to die. Yet Jeremiah wasn't intimidated by the threats of the people. Rather than backing off or piping down, he continued to share that which the Lord placed on his heart. How can you stop a man who just keeps going even when the tide turns against him?

Here in chapter 27, we see another message that wouldn't go over very big . . .

Jeremiah 27:1–8

In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah came this word unto Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Thus saith the LORD to me; Make thee bonds and yokes, and put them upon thy neck, And send them to the king of Edom, and to the king of Moab, and to the king of the Ammonites, and to the king of Tyrus, and to the king of Zidon, by the hand of the messengers which come to Jerusalem unto Zedekiah king of Judah; And command them to say unto their masters, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say unto your masters; I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me. And now have I given all these lands unto the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him. And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the very time of his land come: and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him. And it shall come to pass, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and

that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the LORD, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand.

Jeremiah was to give an illustrated sermon, placing a yoke oxen wore around his neck. Yokes were also to be sent to the surrounding leaders, declaring to them that the Lord had ordained that they would fall into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was being used by the Lord as an agent of correction. A painful, but needful purging had to take place in the people in and around Judah. And the Lord would use the Babylonians as a rod in His hand to bring it about.

Jeremiah 27:9, 10
Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: For they prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land; and that I should drive you out, and ye should perish.

False prophets were on the scene, saying, "You're not going to fall into the hand of the king of Babylon. You're going to have peace. There won't be problems." But the Lord said His people were not to listen to them.

Jeremiah 27:11–13
But the nations that bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him, those will I let remain still in their own land, saith the LORD; and they shall till it, and dwell therein. I spake also to Zedekiah king of Judah according to all these words, saying, Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live. Why will ye die, thou and thy people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as the LORD hath spoken against the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon?

Rather than futilely trying to recover that which Nebuchadnezzar had already carried away, the Word of the Lord to the remaining people and nations was to peacefully surrender to Nebuchadnezzar, for in so doing, they would in some measure be surrendering to the omniscience and omnipotence of God Himself.

Jeremiah 27:14–16
Therefore hearken not unto the words of the prophets that speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you. For I have not sent them, saith the LORD, yet they prophesy a lie in my name; that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish, ye, and the prophets that prophesy unto you. Also I spake to the priests and to all this people, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Hearken not to the words of your prophets that prophesy unto you, saying, Behold, the vessels of the LORD's house shall now shortly be brought again from Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you.

False prophets declared that temple vessels carried away by Nebuchadnezzar under the reigns of Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin (2 Chronicles 36:7–10) would be returned. But this was a lie.

Jeremiah 27:17–22
Hearken not unto them; serve the king of Babylon, and live: wherefore should this city be laid waste? But if they be prophets, and if the word of the LORD be with them, let them now make intercession to the LORD of hosts, that the vessels which are left in the house of the LORD, and in the house of the king of Judah, and at Jerusalem, go not to Babylon. For thus saith the LORD of hosts concerning the pillars, and concerning the sea, and concerning the bases, and concerning the residue of the vessels that remain in this city, Which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took not, when he carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah from Jerusalem to Babylon, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem; Yea, thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels that remain in the house

of the LORD, and in the house of the king of Judah and of Jerusalem; They shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be until the day that I visit them, saith the LORD; then will I bring them up, and restore them to this place.

Rather than worrying about what they had lost by presumption, the Word of the Lord to His people was to hold on to what they still had by prayer.



28 Jeremiah 28:1–4

And it came to pass the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zed ekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, and in the fifth month, that Hananiah the son of Azur the prophet, which was of Gibeon, spake unto me in the house of the LORD, in the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the LORD's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried them to Babylon: And I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, that went into Babylon, saith the LORD: for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.

Hananiah told the priests and the people that the Lord would break Nebuchadnezzar and that the people already carried away would come back in two years. The problem was, that, although Hananiah sounded like a prophet, although he had the right phraseology and spiritual vocabulary, what he said was in direct contradiction of the prophecy Jeremiah was given.

Jeremiah 28:5, 6

Then the prophet Jeremiah said unto the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests, and in the presence of all the people that stood in the house of the LORD, Even the prophet Jeremiah said, Amen: the LORD do so: the LORD perform thy words which thou

hast prophesied, to bring again the vessels of the LORD's house, and all that is carried away captive, from Babylon into this place.

"Great!" Jeremiah said concerning Hananiah's prophecy. "I hope it's true that within two years these people will come back from Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar will be gone."

Jeremiah 28:7, 8
Nevertheless hear thou now this word that I speak in thine ears, and in the ears of all the people; The prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence.

"But remember the prophets of old," Jeremiah continued. "Study history and see how prophets before me spoke of the coming calamity."

There will come Hananiahs on the scene even today who will tell you that peace and prosperity will come to you if you hold certain crystals, that all roads lead to God, that there are many paths to heaven. But I suggest that those who make such suggestions go back to the prophets of old and see what they have to say. I caution you to be very careful concerning anyone who claims to have a new revelation, insight, understanding, or vision for the people of God. The common denominator of virtually every cult that has ever come into being is that they claim to have something new.

Jeremiah 28:9
The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the LORD hath truly sent him.

"The burden of proof is on you, Hananiah," Jeremiah says. "We will believe you when we see your word come to pass."

Jeremiah 28:10, 11
Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and brake it. And Hananiah spake in the

presence of all the people, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within the space of two full years. And the prophet Jeremiah went his way.

Hananiah broke Jeremiah's yoke as a sign that Nebuchadnezzar would be broken within two years.

Jeremiah 28:12–14
Then the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah the prophet, after that Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Go and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him: and I have given him the beasts of the field also.

The Lord told Jeremiah to tell Hananiah that, although he was able to break a yoke of wood, stronger yokes were coming.

Jeremiah 28:15–17
Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the LORD. So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month.

Perhaps it was because Hananiah wanted to be popular that he preached a message of peace. Unfortunately, it led to his own destruction.

Oh, how thankful I am for the written Word of God by which we can confirm the words others tell us.



29 Jeremiah sent a letter to those already carried away into Babylon . . .

Jeremiah 29:1–7
Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon; (After that Jeconiah the king, and the queen, and the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, and the carpenters, and the smiths, were departed from Jerusalem;) By the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent unto Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon) saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.

Jeremiah's letter didn't tell the Babylonian captives to gather weapons, start assassinating every leader they saw, ruin the economy, or overthrow the government. Instead, he told them they might as well dig in because they would be there for a long time. They were to plant gardens, get married, and build houses. It was God's plan for those people to be in captivity and difficulty for seventy full years until His purposes were accomplished.

This has implication for me. I must realize that if the Lord allows friends of mine to be in hard places, I am not necessarily to try and run in and get

them out. There are some times when it is the Lord's plan to keep a person or even a nation in the place of difficulty for a season to accomplish what He wants to do in them. For example, historically, the church has been the strongest in places where persecution has been the hardest. Therefore, we must, like Jeremiah, react according to spiritual discernment rather than according to political persuasion.

Jeremiah 29:8–10
For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the LORD. For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.

The Lord told Jeremiah very specifically that, after seventy years, the captives would return. There was one captive carried away in the first wave who studied this prophecy very carefully. His name was Daniel . . .

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the LORD my God . . .

Daniel 9:1–4 (a)

Daniel believed Jeremiah's prophecy. So he prayed accordingly.

Jeremiah 29:11
For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

Here, God says to His people, "You'll be in Babylon for seventy years, but know that the thoughts I think of you are of peace, to bring you to a glorious end. I'm doing something special in you." And indeed He was. When the Jews went into Babylon, they were idolatrous people. When they came out, never again did they worship idols. They were purged. They were healed. They were matured in those difficult days of the Babylonian captivity.

This verse is one of my favorites in all the Bible, for it speaks to me and you that even in the times when things look bad, when the Babylonians are carrying you away, the Lord is using it for something glorious.



***For topical study of Jeremiah 29:11 entitled "Thinking of You," turn to page* 533.**

Jeremiah 29:12–14
Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.

What does it mean to seek the Lord with all our heart? I think of my friend, Kirk Ladine. He was an all-state basketball player for the high school I attended. Kirk wore contact lenses and, not infrequently, one of them would pop out during a game. When that happened, Kirk, his teammates, the coach, the referees, and even the opposing team searched with all their hearts to find the missing lens so that the game could continue. That's the kind of diligence, the kind of single-heartedness the Lord wants from us in seeking Him.

Why does God want us to search for Him with that kind of intensity? It's not that He's playing hard to get, but that He wants to strengthen us. You see, the only way we'll be prepared for the ages to come is if we learn how to

pray, worship, and walk by faith this side of eternity. This earth is boot camp, gang. It's spring training. The Lord is training us because He knows what lies beyond this life and He wants to get us in shape for it. That's why He doesn't respond to those who seek Him half-heartedly or lethargically.

Jeremiah 29:15–19
Because ye have said, The LORD hath raised us up prophets in Babylon; Know that thus saith the LORD of the king that sitteth upon the throne of David, and of all the people that dwelleth in this city, and of your brethren that are not gone forth with you into captivity; Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will send upon them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. And I will persecute them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, and an astonishment, and an hissing, and a reproach, among all the nations whither I have driven them: Because they have not hearkened to my words, saith the LORD, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but ye would not hear, saith the LORD.

False prophets in Babylon were telling the people that all would be well when they returned to Jerusalem in two years. Here, Jeremiah contradicts them, saying that those who remained in Jerusalem would suffer destruction as well because they refused to listen to the voice of the Lord.

Jeremiah 29:20–22
Hear ye therefore the word of the LORD, all ye of the captivity, whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon: Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, of Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and of Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, which prophesy a lie unto you in my name; Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall slay them before your eyes; And of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captivity of Judah which are in Babylon, saying, The LORD make

thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire;

In addition to Hananiah, Ahab and Zedekiah were falsely prophesying peace. Because of this, they would be "roasted in the fire" in Babylon. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego would also be "roasted in the fire." But, unlike Ahab and Zedekiah, they would emerge without even the smell of smoke upon them (Daniel 3:27). Why? Because they were joined by a fourth Man, the Son of God. Ahab and Zedekiah prophesied on their own and died alone. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego sought the Lord, and, therefore, were not only joined by Him, but saved by Him.

Jeremiah 29:23
Because they have committed villany in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives, and have spoken lying words in my name, which I have not commanded them; even I know, and am a witness, saith the LORD.

"Beware of false prophets," Jesus said, "which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits . . ." (Matthew 7:15, 16 [a]). The fruit of these prophets was crime, adultery, and lies. Anyone interested in the truth rather than in simply hearing what sounded good could have identified these prophets as false by the fruit of their lives.

Jeremiah 29:24–29
Thus shalt thou also speak to Shemaiah the Nehelamite, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, Because thou hast sent letters in thy name unto all the people that are at Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests, saying, The LORD hath made thee priest in the stead of Jehoiada the priest, that ye should be officers in the house of the LORD, for every man that is mad, and maketh himself a prophet, that thou shouldest put him in prison, and in the stocks. Now therefore why hast thou not reproved Jeremiah of Anathoth, which maketh himself a prophet to you?

For therefore he sent unto us in Babylon, saying, This captivity is long: build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the ears of Jeremiah the prophet.

Concerning Jeremiah's letter, Shemaiah, one of the false prophets, wrote a letter himself saying that Jeremiah was insane and that he should be imprisoned.

Jeremiah 29:30–32
Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying, Send to all them of the captivity, saying, Thus saith the LORD concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite; Because that Shemaiah hath prophesied unto you, and I sent him not, and he caused you to trust in a lie: Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite, and his seed: he shall not have a man to dwell among this people; neither shall he behold the good that I will do for my people, saith the LORD; because he hath taught rebellion against the LORD.

Responding to Shemaiah's letter, the Lord directed Jeremiah to inform the captives that, because Shemaiah caused them to trust a lie, neither he nor his family would see the glorious truth He had in store for His people.

THINKING OF YOU

A Topical Study of JEREMIAH 29:11

On our way to a day of skiing at Mt. Bachelor, in the spring of 1982, I told my wife, Terry, a joke. We laughed and then suddenly our car hit ice, spun around, and hit a redwood tree. I didn't know it at the time, but my beautiful wife died instantly. We were both twenty-nine. The next thing I remember is crawling down the highway about a half-mile from the wreck on my hands and knees. Being very early morning, few cars were on the road. The first car that came stopped and the driver called for help. I don't remember anything after that until I was in the ambulance.

"How's my wife?" I asked.

"She's doing fine," said the attendant.

"No," I said, "she's in heaven."

"You're right," he said. "She's not with us any longer."

At that moment, something happened to me that had only happened a few times in my life. I heard what seemed to be an audible voice, speaking to me a verse I had never heard: "I know the thoughts I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to bring you to a glorious end." After that, I drifted into unconsciousness.

In the hospital, the voice on the other end of the phone was Chuck Smith's, saying, "Jon, I have one thing to share with you. God would say, 'I know the thoughts I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to bring you to a glorious end.' " The very verse I had heard in the ambulance was now being spoken into my ear by my pastor. I clung to God's promise of Jeremiah 29:11 that first hour after Terry had been taken. And for the following three years as Chris, not yet two, Jessie, just three, and Peter-John, almost five were carried along with me into a foreign land of new experiences, God proved to be faithful to His Word.

Recently, the woman sitting next to me on the flight home from Chicago, where I had been speaking at a Men's Retreat, was planning to move from Cape Cod to the Oregon Coast.

“Is Gold Beach like Boston?” she asked.

“No,” I said. “There’s quite a difference between the two,” and then went on to share with her the blessings of living in Oregon. “It’s a great place to raise a family,” I continued. “In fact, I just happen to have some pictures of my family with me,” I said, opening my backpack. “These are my kids and this is my beautiful wife,” I said proudly. “The Lord has blessed me so much with her. She’s absolutely perfect for me.” As I continued talking about my family, tears came to my eyes because the photographs I held in my hand were pictures not only of Tammy and the kids, but of the glorious end to which God had so lovingly, graciously, and faithfully brought us.

For over forty years, Jeremiah faithfully proclaimed this word from God to His people: “The Babylonians are coming and will carry you away to a foreign land.” Yet, although the people rejected Jeremiah’s message in favor of those who prophesied peace and prosperity, the Lord continued to speak through him, saying, “When you find yourselves in the land of Babylon, I don’t want you to be confused. I want you to know that My thoughts toward you are not of evil, but of peace—to bring you to an expected, certain, glorious end.”

What was this end? We know from studying Scripture that there were three reasons the Lord allowed His people to be carried into captivity . . .

To Eradicate Idolatry

The Jews had a tendency to persist in the worship of idols and all that went along with it, including the offering of their children as sacrifices. Therefore, because of their fascination with idolatry, the Lord allowed them to be carried away to Babylon, where they would worship idols day and night until they got sick of them.

During the time I was raising my kids alone, I had a problem with a particular addiction. One late night, while my kids were asleep, I gave in to my irresistible craving when I opened the refrigerator and scooped a big spoonful of Adam's chunky peanut butter out of the jar. I savored the taste as I popped it in my mouth—but this time, instead of sliding down my throat as it had always done before, the peanut butter got stuck.

Gasping for air, I threw open the refrigerator door, grabbed a gallon of milk, and started chugging. But instead of washing the peanut butter down, the milk took the path of least resistance, flowing down my beard and all over my chest. At this point, I could envision my kids getting up in the morning to find me laying on the kitchen floor, covered with milk and peanut butter. Finally, in somewhat of a daze, I put my mouth under the faucet of the kitchen sink and turned on the hot water. Although my lips were scalded in the process, I could breathe again. I was thus delivered from my addiction!

In allowing His people to go to Babylon, the Lord was, in effect, saying, "If this is what it takes for you to get your fill of idols, go to Babylon for seventy years in order that you might come back and love Me with your whole heart" (Jeremiah 24:7). And guess what. Upon their return from Babylon, the Jews never again felt a pull toward idolatry.

To Evangelize Effectively

God blessed a specific group of people in a specific corner of the world because He wanted the rest of the world to see that if people would walk with God, He would bless them. The Jews were to be a witness to the world of what God will do for those who walk with Him. But what happened? The Jews became selfish and actually put down those whom they should have been reaching. So, as the Lord often has done throughout history, He had them scattered. They were taken to Babylon—a land to which they would never have gone otherwise.

Were the Jews a witness there? Refusing to bow down to the statue Nebuchadnezzar built, three young Jewish men named Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were thrown into a fiery furnace. Do you think they were witnesses to Nebuchadnezzar as he watched them standing with Jesus in the fire (Daniel 3:25)? Do you think Belshazzar was blown away when a Jewish captive named Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall that had been inscribed by a mysterious hand? (Daniel 5:14). Do you think the Babylonian officials were shocked when, after spending a night in the lions' den, Daniel emerged unharmed (Daniel 6:22)? The entire Book of Daniel is the story of how God used His people in captivity to witness to the Babylonians in order that they might see His reality.

To Restore the Land Physically

In Leviticus 25, God told the Jews that every seventh year was to be a Sabbath year. That is, they were to do no planting, no agricultural work whatsoever in order that the land might rest. "In the sixth year, I'll bless you twofold," God said, "which will allow you to replenish the land in the seventh year."

Hmm, thought the Jews. *If we get blessed the sixth year, what would happen if we planted the seventh year as well? We could pay our bills, rid ourselves of our credit card payments, get a whole bunch of new stuff, and really get ahead.* So for four hundred ninety years, they planted crops and harvested during the Sabbath year when the land should have been resting.

But all the while God was noticing. "You robbed this land and you robbed Me of seventy years," He said (see 2 Chronicles 36:21). "Consequently, while you are in Babylon, I will refresh the land physically and balance the books on you nationally." So it was that, as the Jews were carried away to Babylon, their land basically sat idle and replenished itself during their seventy-year absence.

"Even as you are carried into captivity," God said to His people, "know that My thoughts toward you are not of evil, but of peace, to bring you to an expected end that you might be liberated from idolatry, that you might witness evangelistically, and that your land might be refreshed physically. I'm doing this for your benefit because I love you."

> *How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.*
>
> Psalm 139:17, 18

When people vacation in some exotic place like Hawaii or Europe and send me postcards that say, "Thinking of you, wish you were here," I know they're not. I don't mean to sound cynical, but who of us thinks about his pastor when he's on a beautiful beach enjoying the sun? Such, however, is not

the case with God. His thoughts toward us are more in number than the grains of sand on the seashore.

Scientists estimate that there are ten to the twenty-second power—that is, a one with twenty-two zeros after it, or one hundred billion times one hundred billion—grains of sand. "One hundred billion times one hundred billion—that's how many times I think of you," God says. "You are always on My mind and on My heart. And as I think of you, My thoughts toward you are of peace, to give you an expected end."

During one of our "Prophecy Update" retreats, I sent the retreatants out on the grounds of the retreat center to contemplate Revelation 6 through 19. My daughter was there—as she seemed to always be—and when everyone gathered to share insights, she said, "Dad, I noticed the seven bowl judgments correspond perfectly with the seven sayings of Christ on the Cross as He absorbed the judgment that should have been ours." That's the way Jessie was. She loved the Word and she loved the Lord.

Thus, at 6:30 A.M., as I sat toward the back of the sanctuary during morning worship a few weeks later, it was no surprise to see my daughter walk in and sit toward the front. After a few worship songs, the worship leader invited folks to lead out in prayer. Several people prayed and then my daughter stood up and said, "Lord, I thank You for the promise in Your Word that the thoughts You think toward us are thoughts of peace and not of evil, to bring us to a glorious end." Jessie didn't know the personal relevance of that verse to me. But Rick, the worship leader, understood and immediately penned a song, which he sang that morning during Communion. After kneeling at the Communion Table, Jessie walked up the aisle, smiled at me, and gave me a "thumbs up" sign as she headed off to school.

Twenty minutes later, one of the pastors came in the sanctuary and said, "Jon, there's been a wreck. It's a yellow Volkswagen. We're not sure yet, but we think it's Jessie."

"No," I said. "That can't be. I've already been through this once."

I jumped in my car and raced home, thinking it was a mistake. But as I walked in the door and saw Tammy, I knew it wasn't. One of the first at the scene of the accident, my seventeen-year-old son, Peter-John walked in a few minutes later, sobbing. "She found the Man, Dad. She found the Man," he said.

You see, the night before, Jessie, Christy, and I were talking about boyfriends and marriage. "Jessie," I said, "you need to find someone who can lead you spiritually—not just a Christian guy, not just someone who loves the Lord, but someone who can lead you in His ways."

Quick-witted as always, Jessie said, "Where am I going to find that man, Dad? I mean, if I went to a good church, I'd have a chance, but . . ."

I cracked up and said, "Jessie, you'll find him. Just don't settle for anything less than a man who can lead you in the ways of God."

Having heard part of this conversation, Peter-John knew she had found the One who could truly lead her.

Every January, our high school youth group kids write letters to themselves containing their goals for the upcoming year. The following January these letters are mailed so the kids can see how the Lord has worked in their lives the previous year. Two months after Jessie went to heaven, there was such a letter in our mailbox addressed to her. Understandably, with hundreds of letters, no one thought to pull hers out. As tears flowed, Tammy and I opened it to find the question: If Jesus could do one thing for you in 1994, what would it be? Like her father, Jessie was never at a loss for words. Therefore, it was surprising to see her answer was only five words long. It read "To take me to heaven."

Leader of her school and youth group, cheerleader, and straight-A student, Jessie loved life. But she had a greater Love than life—she loved Jesus immensely. I'm sure Jessie was thinking about the Rapture, but the Lord saw her heart and had a private rapture just for her, and did indeed bring her to an expected, glorious end.

Precious brother and sister, even if you feel like you're being held captive in Babylon, even if you feel as though you're walking through a foreign land, even if you wonder what's happening in your job, your marriage, your life—embrace the promise of the One who spoke peace even to a people who ignored and rebelled against Him. He's bringing you to an expected end, dear people of God. You might not see it now, but His thoughts toward you are truly of peace, to bring you to an expected end—to bring you to Himself.

30 Jeremiah 30:1–3

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book. For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.

Here in chapter 30, the Lord says He will bring both Israel and Judah out of captivity and back to the land He had given their fathers. When the Jews came out of Babylon in 520 B.C., led by Ezra and then Nehemiah, they were all from Judah. Israel was carried away by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and never returned. So what does the Lord mean when He says Israel shall return? I believe He is speaking of the return taking place in our own day as Jews from all over the world have been returning to Israel since its rebirth as a nation in 1948.

Jeremiah 30:4–7

And these are the words that the LORD spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the LORD; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.

"The time of Jacob's trouble" refers to the Tribulation period, the seven-year period seen in Revelation 6 through 19 when the world will experience the most brutal days and blood times it's ever known. Fires will devour one-third of the land. One-hundred-pound hailstones will pelt the planet. Men will want to commit suicide but will be unable to take their own lives. This is referred to specifically as the time of Jacob's trouble because through it, Israel will finally come to her senses and realize Jesus is her Messiah.

Jeremiah 30:8, 9

For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him: But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them.

Since the time of their captivity, there has not been a descendant of David upon the throne of Israel. Therefore, the reference here is to the Son of David, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who will rule and reign in the kingdom age, following the Tribulation.

Jeremiah 30:10–15
Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished. For thus saith the LORD, Thy bruise is incurable, and thy wound is grievous. There is none to plead thy cause, that thou mayest be bound up: thou hast no healing medicines. All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity; because thy sins were increased. Why criest thou for thine affliction? thy sorrow is incurable for the multitude of thine iniquity: because thy sins were increased, I have done these things unto thee.

Both in their Babylonian captivity and the time of tribulation yet to come, God's hand of correction upon His people is heavy because their sin and sorrow could be cured in no other way.

Jeremiah 30:16, 17

Therefore all they that devour thee shall be devoured; and all thine adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; and they that spoil thee shall be a spoil, and all that prey upon thee will I give for a prey. For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after.

Babylon would fall to the Medes and Persians. In the end times, the nations that seek to destroy Israel will themselves be destroyed at the battle of Armageddon.

Jeremiah 30:18, 19
Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwellingplaces; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof. And out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small.

As seen in the Book of Nehemiah, Jerusalem would indeed be rebuilt following the captivity. Of course, ultimately, it will be from Jerusalem that Jesus will reign during the Millennium.

Jeremiah 30:20–22
Their children also shall be as aforetime, and their congregation shall be established before me, and I will punish all that oppress them. And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the LORD. And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Following their release from Babylon, the Jews would be overseen no longer by a foreign power but by one of their own in the persons of

Nehemiah and Zerubbabel. In the kingdom age, it will be one of their own—the Son of David—who will sit upon the throne.

Jeremiah 30:23, 24
Behold, the whirlwind of the LORD goeth forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind: it shall fall with pain upon the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the LORD shall not return, until he have done it, and until he have performed the intents of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it.

At the completion of the chastening of His own people, God deals with those outside the family of faith.



31 Jeremiah 31:1–3

At the same time, saith the LORD, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people. Thus saith the LORD, The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest. The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

God doesn't tell His people that He will love them with an everlasting love once they learn their lesson in Babylon and put away their idols. He says He loved them all along and that His love would have no end. The steadfast, everlasting love of God is truly unfathomable. After all, it wasn't when we were broken and humble before Him, but while we were sinners that Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). Paul prayed that we might know the breadth, length, depth, and height of the love of God. But even as he wrote, he realized this prayer can't truly be answered because the incredible, steadfast, everlasting love of God is more than we can ever understand (Ephesians 3:18, 19).

Jeremiah 31:4–6

Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry. Thou shalt yet plant vines upon the mountains of Samaria: the planters shall plant, and shall eat them as common things. For there shall be a day, that the watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the LORD our God.

The immediate reference is to Judah's return from Babylon. But the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy will take place in the kingdom age—when all of God's people will join together in worshiping Him.

Jeremiah 31:7–9
For thus saith the LORD; Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations: publish ye, praise ye, and say, O LORD, save thy people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Both at the beginning of their long history with idolatry and at the end, neither the Lord's love nor His plan for His people wavered. Thus, He would make for them a way back to Him. The only thing that could prevent this would be their own hesitancy.

"Follow me," Jesus said.
"Let me first bury my father," came the reply.
"Follow me," Jesus said.
"Let me first say goodbye," answered another (Luke 9:59–62).

God's promise to His people in Jeremiah's day was that, as He had done for them seven hundred years earlier when He led them from Egypt, He

would lead the way, make straight the path, provide water, and nourishment for them. The only thing they had to do was follow. Jesus called His own to do this as well, but their ties to this world rendered the majority too blind and lame to do so.

He calls you to follow Him today. Don't allow any seeming infirmity or inability to stand in your way. Make the first step and you'll find yourself walking by "rivers of water in a straight way"—and you'll stumble no more.

Jeremiah 31:10–14
Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock. For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the LORD.

While the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy won't take place until Jesus rules and reigns during the Millennium, it would be partially fulfilled each time the Jews gathered together during the Feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

Jeremiah 31:15
Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.

The immediate reference is to the weeping and mourning that took place when mothers and children were separated at the time of the Babylonian

captivity. The prophetic reference was to the Jewish babies that were killed by Herod when Jesus was born (Matthew 2:16).

Jeremiah 31:16–19
Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border. I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.

Here we see the work and fruit of repentance—both of which come directly from the hand of God. Repentance has been defined simply as a change of direction. The repentant individual thought one way, now thinks another; he was headed one way, now is headed in the opposite direction. "Turn thou me," Ephraim prays, "and I shall be turned." We don't have to work up any emotional fervor to be repentant. We don't have to wait until we are at our wits' end or on our last leg to be repentant. Even as the father of the demonized boy said through his tears to Jesus, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief " (Mark 9:24), we can join Ephraim and say, "Turn thou me, Lord, and I shall be turned."

Jeremiah 31:20–25
Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD. Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities. How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman

shall compass a man. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; As yet they shall use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity; The LORD bless thee, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness. And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all the cities thereof together, husbandmen, and they that go forth with flocks. For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.

Compared to the strength of Assyria and Babylon, even though God's people might have seemed as weak as a woman, they would one day return to their land in the strength of the Lord.

Jeremiah 31:26
Upon this I awaked, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet unto me.

"I have dreamed, I have dreamed," Jeremiah said (23:25) and apparently, this glorious rebuilding of Israel was another prophecy given to him in a dream.

Jeremiah 31:27
Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast.

Upon their return to the land, God would cause both man and livestock to "be fruitful and multiply."

Jeremiah 31:28
And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah's call was "to root out and to pull down and to destroy and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (1:10). Prior to the captivity, it was all

about the first four. But when His people returned, God would institute the last two.

Jeremiah 31:29, 30
In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.

No more would the children be punished for the sins of the fathers. There was to be a new beginning, a new chapter, a New Covenant . . .

Jeremiah 31:31–34
Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Not only would God bless His people nationally, but He would bless them personally by writing His will on their hearts individually.



***For topical study on Jeremiah 31:31–34 entitled "The New Covenant," turn to page* 542.**

Jeremiah 31:35–37
Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD.

As unchanging as His laws of nature, so is God's commitment to His people.

Jeremiah 31:38–40
Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the city shall be built to the LORD from the tower of Hananeel unto the gate of the corner. And the measuring line shall yet go forth over against it upon the hill Gareb, and shall compass about to Goath. And the whole valley of the dead bodies, and of the ashes, and all the fields unto the brook of Kidron, unto the corner of the horse gate toward the east, shall be holy unto the LORD; it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more for ever.

The boundaries given here signify that the rebuilt Jerusalem would be significantly larger than it originally was. Not only that, but it would stand forever. Thus, this is a prophecy concerning the kingdom yet to come during the Millennium.

THE NEW COVENANT
A Topical Study of
JEREMIAH 31:31–34

Jeremiah 31 is one of the most powerful passages in the book of Jeremiah, for it explains to us the New Covenant. A covenant is basically an agreement or contract. The Old Covenant is the Law—rules, regulations, and standards given to the people concerning how they should live and behave. But, because His people broke the Old Covenant and didn't walk in His ways, the Lord speaks of doing something new with His people. Did the Lord change His mind and decide to dump the Old Covenant because He was surprised it didn't work? No. Paul tells us that the primary purpose of the Old Covenant, the Law, was to be a schoolmaster to drive us to Jesus—to make us realize we can't keep our end of the old agreement (Galatians 3:24). It was as if God said, "If you think you can make it without a Savior, here's the standard . . . ." The purpose of the Old Covenant is to show prideful people like you and me that we desperately need a Savior. The Old Covenant is to show us our imperfections, a mirror to show us our sin and corruption. That was the purpose of the Old Covenant all along.

The New Covenant speaks prophetically of what will happen when Israel acknowledges that Jesus is Lord in the Millennium. Yet, although it deals with Israel prophetically, it also deals with salvation for us presently (Hebrews 8, 12). Once we learn that we're sinners in need of a Savior, the Lord says, "Here is the New Covenant, the new agreement."

There are three basic components to the New Covenant: a new heart, a new part, and a new start . . .

A New Heart

> *But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the* LORD*, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.*
>
> Jeremiah 31:33

No longer would God's Law be external rules written on stone tablets. Rather, something new would happen internally. He would write His will, His desires, not on cold stone but on warm hearts.

Ezekiel clarifies this further . . .

> *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.*
>
> Ezekiel 36:26

Even without the Gospels or Paul's epistles, the early church turned the world upside down because they understood the New Covenant—the Lord speaking in their hearts as to what they should do moment by moment. When Paul's epistles and the Gospels were eventually circulated, they confirmed what the Lord had already spoken in their hearts.

All too often, instead of listening to our hearts, we follow only the letter of the New Testament and miss the power thereof. The Bible becomes a legalistic burden. The light is gone. The joy evaporates. And we wonder why we don't see the Lord working or moving in our lives. We miss the dynamic, the understanding that Jesus Christ lives in us and will write daily upon our hearts what we should be doing. The Bible is not to take the place of the New Covenant, the new work of the Lord in our hearts. Rather, it is to confirm what the Lord is speaking. Otherwise, we'll become dry, legalistic believers. We'll miss the excitement, the adventure of the Christian experience, the anointing of the Holy Ghost. Yet, as Elijah discovers, His is a still small voice (1 Kings 19:12).

Why doesn't the Lord speak to us audibly? Why doesn't He do something spectacular and unmistakable? Because not only is Jesus preparing a place for us (John 14:2), but He's also preparing us for the place. That is, He's stripping us of our dependence upon the physical and material world. He wants us to hear with the ears of the spirit, to see with the eyes of the spirit.

I believe the church would expand exponentially if Christians would simply obey when the Holy Spirit says, "Talk to him. Give to her. Love them." He'll show us things about our kids so that we can minister effectively to them. He'll show us things about ourselves that we need to correct. He'll give us insight how to witness to those who seem so closed to the gospel. God has given us the written Word to correct us when we're not hearing Him clearly and to confirm what He speaks to us. Thus, it's not a matter of dos and don'ts, but of confirmation and correction—of the Word written on paper working in tandem with His will written on our hearts.

A New Part

> *And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the* LORD*: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the* LORD *. . .*
>
> Jeremiah 31:34 (a)

Under the Old Covenant, only the priests could stand in the presence of the Lord. They, in turn, would share the heart of the Lord with the people. Thus, the priesthood stood between the Lord and His people. But when Peter came on the scene and said all believers are part of a chosen generation, a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), it was clear that hierarchies and different levels of spirituality were obliterated. No longer was it only one or two men who spoke for the Lord. Now *every* believer had something to offer.

We must guard against the idea of spiritual hierarchy—that some people have a hotline to heaven. Everyone has a part to play. In fact, Jesus often came in the most unexpected way at the most unexpected time through the most unexpected person to give understanding and revelation . . .

- The storm was raging, the wind was blowing, the waves were beating against the boat carrying the disciples. As they struggled against the storm, suddenly they saw a figure walking on the water toward them. They were afraid it was a ghost. But it was Jesus (Matthew 14).
- Wanting to know where her Lord was buried, Mary asked the man she assumed to be the gardener. Yet when He spoke her name, she finally recognized that He whom she sought was standing right before her (John 20).
- A couple of travelers were walking on the road to Emmaus. Although Jesus had been crucified, rumors were floating around that He had been resurrected. As these travelers discussed these things, a stranger came up beside them and walked with Him. He began to open the Word and expound the Scriptures to them. Then He broke bread with them—and

they realized it was the Lord (Luke 24).

Just as the disciples mistook Jesus for a ghost, the Lord can come to us through the person we think we can see right through. Just as Mary mistook Him for a gardener, He can speak to us through the person doing what the world thinks of as menial labor. Just as the travelers mistook Him for a stranger, He can reveal Himself to us through people from outside our own familiar circle. *Everyone* has a part to play. We can *all* be used by God. Therefore, it is the wise woman, the wise man who does not discount any brother or sister as being simply a ghost, a gardener, or a stranger. Keep your antennae up and remain open to all in order that you might hear God's voice and know His heart.

A New Start

. . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Jeremiah 31:34 (b)

My dad was an absolutely fabulous father who put up with a frequently flaky son. When I was nineteen years old and serving as a youth pastor, I needed transportation because the car I was driving, a 1961 Ford Falcon, had finally died. My dad gave me the family car, a 1966 Buick Skylark. I drove it for a couple months—but my heart wasn't in it because what I really wanted was a Volkswagen. When a friend of mine decided to sell his VW Beetle, I wanted to buy it, but didn't have the money. So I told my dad about it. When my dad graciously bought back the Skylark from me, I used the money to buy my friend's 1968 red Beetle—complete with sun roof and tape deck. When the VW engine blew out, however, I went to my dad again and said, "Dad, the Volkswagen's in trouble."

"You can use the Skylark," he said.

I did—until a left-turn signal light post seemed to pop up out of nowhere, causing me to hit it, thereby totaling the car.

"Pops?" I said from a payphone. "Remember the Skylark? It's smashed."

Here, my dad had given me his car, bought it back from me, loaned it again to me—and I totaled it. Yet he never made a big deal about it. My dad was that way, one of the most merciful, gentle men I've ever known. I'm so thankful for that kind of dad because, among other reasons, when I began to hear teachings about the fatherhood of God, it was easy for me to think of my heavenly Father as being full of mercy and compassion.

My dad and I laughed about the Skylark, but neither of us ever forgot it. This is where our heavenly Father is totally unique. God alone has the ability to say, "I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more." As far as the east is from the west, that's how far your sins and iniquities are from the Lord (Psalm 103:12). How far is the east from the west? It's immeasurable. That means when I go before my Father and say, "Forgive me,

I lost my temper again," He says, "Again?" There is a continual new start in the New Covenant.

How can this be? Suppose a young man is cruising down the streets at 105 mph. He's pulled over and cited for speeding and reckless driving. The next day, when he appears before the judge, however, he can't believe his good fortune—for there, behind the bench sits his father. He knows he'll be in trouble, but surely his father will see him through. The case is presented. The judgment is about to be rendered. The judge clears his throat and orders the defendant to rise. So his son stands up, sure that it won't be too bad—until he hears his dad say, "For your recklessness endangering yourself and others, you must pay $5,000 or spend five years in prison." The son's eyes widen. His jaw drops. His voice breaks. "But Dad," he says, "I don't have nearly that much money."

And the judge looks at the defendant and says, "In this courtroom, young man, justice will prevail. You broke the law. The price must be paid."

At that moment, the judge stands up, removes his judicial robe, and steps down to stand behind his son. "As a judge," he says, "I fine you fairly. But as a father, I'm here to help you in love and mercy." So saying, he takes out his own checkbook and writes a check for $5,000, gives it to the bailiff, and father and son walk out of the courtroom together.

Justice was served. The price was paid. The same father who judged the wrongdoer became a savior to him when he walked off the platform and paid the price for his sin. That's exactly what God did for me. He is a holy, awesome God who will be just, who will not wink at sin, who will not compromise His character by ignoring the sin He knows destroys people and all creation. But, as Paul declared, great is the mystery of godliness that God was manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16). God became a Man. He stepped down from heaven and died for us on the Cross of Calvary. The sentence was served. The price was paid. And we go free.

> *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:*
>
> Romans 5:1

The Greek word translated "justification" is *dikaioo.* It's a legal term, meaning not only pardoned but righteous. If someone is accused of a crime and pardoned, he can walk the streets a free man. But he could still feel ashamed by anyone who knew the situation. If, however, he is not only pardoned but declared to be a man of sterling character, an honor to the country, a model citizen, he could walk with confidence. That's what God declares us to be. We are not only forgiven, we are declared righteous.

> *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ . . .*
>
> 2 Corinthians 5:17, 18 (a)

Through the New Covenant, God gives us a new heart upon which He writes His will. He gives us a new part—a call to each of us to do His will. And He gives us a new start because, in His sight, we are justified. As a result, we are new creatures.

> *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*
>
> Romans 8:31

God is for us. He's not down *on* us, not disappointed *in* us, not angry *with* us. Because of the New Covenant, He is truly *for* us. Oh, happy day!



32 In the thirty-second chapter of Jeremiah, we have before us a beautiful illustration of the working of faith . . .

> **Jeremiah 32:1–3**
> **The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar. For then the king of Babylon's army besieged**

Jerusalem: and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the prison, which was in the king of Judah's house. For Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up, saying, Wherefore dost thou prophesy, and say, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it;

Hoping that Jerusalem would capitulate, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had already positioned his troops for the siege upon the city that would last nearly a year. The prophecy here in chapter 32 was given at the beginning of the siege—one year before Jerusalem would not only fall but be destroyed. Although Jeremiah had been prophesying for years that judgment was imminent, the people of Judah chose to believe the prophets who spoke only of peace.

Jeremiah 32:4–7
And Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall be hold his eyes; And he shall lead Zedekiah to Babylon, and there shall he be until I visit him, saith the LORD: though ye fight with the Chaldeans, ye shall not prosper? And Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption is thine to buy it.

In this bleak situation notice first the conceiving of faith. During this dark time, a spark was ignited in the heart of Jeremiah. A thought was implanted in his mind. A word was given to his inner man. The conceiving of faith was audacious, illogical, seemingly insane, for even as the city was about to be destroyed, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Buy your cousin's field."

Jeremiah 32:8
So Hanameel mine uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said unto me, Buy

my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself. Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.

Here, we see the confirmation of faith. In verse 7, the Lord told Jeremiah his cousin would offer to sell him his field. When his cousin did just that, Jeremiah knew he had indeed heard the word of the Lord.

This greatly encourages me because sometimes I have difficulty discerning the word of the Lord in my heart. But if Jeremiah did, as well, I am in good company. Sometimes we will have impressions in our hearts or thoughts in our minds. The conceiving of faith will take place. Jeremiah shows us it is the wise individual, however, who will wait for confirmation before he goes out with bold proclamation.

Jeremiah 32:9–15
And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver. And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open: And I gave the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel mine uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison. And I charged Baruch before them, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.

Third, we see the clarifying of faith. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah again in verse 15 and he realized that his purchase was to serve as

an illustration to the people that houses, fields, and vineyards would once again be possessed in the land, that their captivity would be temporary, that they would return. Often, clarification comes only after initiation. That is, it wasn't until Jeremiah bought the field that the Lord told him why he was to do so.

Because we are to walk by faith and not by sight, the Lord often says, "Do what I tell you to do and, as you walk down the road, as time passes, as events unfold, you'll see My reason." Don't miss what God wants to do in your life by refusing to obey until you see the reason. Step out in faith, and leave the timing and the reason up to Him.

Jeremiah 32:16–25

Now when I had delivered the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed unto the LORD, saying, Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee: Thou shewest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, is his name, Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings: Which hast set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, even unto this day, and in Israel, and among other men; and hast made thee a name, as at this day; And hast brought forth thy people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, and with wonders, and with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with great terror; And hast given them this land, which thou didst swear to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey; And they came in, and possessed it; but they obeyed not thy voice, neither walked in thy law; they have done nothing of all that thou commandedst them to do: therefore thou hast caused all this evil to come upon them: Behold the mounts, they are come unto the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans, that fight against it, because of the sword, and of the

famine, and of the pestilence: and what thou hast spoken is come to pass; and, behold, thou seest it. And thou hast said unto me, O Lord GOD, Buy thee the field for money, and take witnesses; for the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.

Having already gone through the conceiving of faith, the confirming of faith, the clarifying of faith, Jeremiah now comes to the questioning of faith. "Lord," he says, "You're great and kind and full of love. But we have a problem. There are horses outside these city walls and there are soldiers sharpening their swords."

Confusion once again enters the heart of Jeremiah. Can you relate to this? You're sure the Lord has directed something. It's been confirmed. You gain understanding about it—but then you begin to see the opposition and difficulties. And once again, you start questioning, worrying, wondering.

Jeremiah 32:26, 27
Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying, Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?

In verse 17, Jeremiah said, "There's nothing too hard for Thee, Lord." And now, in answer to his anxiety, the Lord repeats the very prayer he prayed previously. That is one of the primary purposes of prayer. In prayer, we often find ourselves articulating the very answers we need. Sometimes we find solutions to our situation as a result of prayer. But more often than not, we gain insight and find answers in the act of prayer itself. Here, the very prayer Jeremiah prayed is the answer the Lord gave back to him as the answer to his confusion.

Jeremiah 32:28–31
Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, and into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it: And the Chaldeans, that fight against this city, shall come and set fire on this city, and burn it with the houses, upon whose roofs they have offered incense unto Baal, and poured out drink offerings unto other gods, to pro

voke me to anger. For the children of Israel and the children of Judah have only done evil before me from their youth: for the children of Israel have only provoked me to anger with the work of their hands, saith the LORD. For this city hath been to me as a provocation of mine anger and of my fury from the day that they built it even unto this day; that I should remove it from before my face,

Even as Solomon completed the building of Jerusalem, he was the first king to practice idolatry.

Jeremiah 32:32–34
Because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, and the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction. But they set their abominations in the house, which is called by my name, to defile it.

Setting their idols in the temple could be seen in no other way than as an act of defiance, provoking God to anger, almost daring Him to act.

Jeremiah 32:35
And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

In 7:31, the Lord said it hadn't entered His heart that children should be sacrificed. Here, He says such an idea never entered His mind. How low does one have to go to go beyond that which the Creator of the universe could possibly conceive?

Jeremiah 32:36–38
And now therefore thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city, whereof ye say, It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: And they shall be my people, and I will be their God:

God reiterates that the deportation of His people would be temporary, that He would bring them back.

Jeremiah 32:39
And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them:

"I'm doing this for their good," God says. Perhaps you feel carried away tonight. The bill collectors are calling. The lab reports are coming. Maybe the divorce papers are arriving. But the Lord would remind you—just as He did His people in Jeremiah's day—that what He allows is for your good, to bring you to the place where you might have a single heart, a right heart. Everything God does is with this in mind.

Jeremiah 32:40, 41
And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul.

That God would plant His people assuredly meant He would plant them deeply, in stability (Amos 9:15).

Jeremiah 32:42–44

For thus saith the LORD; Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them. And fields shall be bought in this land, whereof ye say, It is desolate without man or beast; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans. Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidences, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the valley, and in the cities of the south: for I will cause their captivity to return, saith the LORD.

God's promise of blessing is as sure to be fulfilled as His promise of chastening.



33 Jeremiah 33:1–3

Moreover the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah the second time, while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Thus saith the LORD the maker thereof, the LORD that formed it, to establish it; the LORD is his name; Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.

What a promise to a people in distress: "Call Me and I'll show you things you never would have known otherwise."

Jeremiah 33:4, 5

For thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city, and concerning the houses of the kings of Judah, which are thrown down by the mounts, and by the sword; They come to fight with the Chaldeans, but it is to fill them with the dead bodies of men, whom I have slain in mine anger and in my fury, and for all whose wickedness I have hid my face from this city.

Why would God allow such destruction to such a degree that the nation would be filled with the dead bodies of His own people? The following verses tell us . . .

Jeremiah 33:6–8
Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me.

Death would result in life. "Except a seed die, it cannot bring forth fruit," Jesus said (see John 12:24). A generation had to die before God's people could experience new life in the Promised Land. In Jeremiah's day, some of God's people would die by the sword, famine, pestilence, or while in captivity. But their deaths would result in life for the remainder of His people, freeing them at last from the grip of idolatry. No wonder Paul would say, "I die daily" (1 Corinthians 15:31). Without death, there can be no life (Matthew 10:39).

Jeremiah 33:9–11
And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it. Thus saith the LORD; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say shall be desolate without man and without beast, even in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast, The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the

house of the LORD. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the LORD.

"I'm tearing down that I might build up," the Lord had said (1:10). And He does the same thing in our lives. Things must be torn down that He might build something wonderful. When a believer understands this, he can embrace the seasons of tearing down. He can say, "Things are falling apart. Things are falling down. But, Lord, I'm trusting that what You are doing because of Your goodness and mercy will ultimately be a huge blessing for me and for those around me."

Jeremiah 33:12–15
Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Again in this place, which is desolate without man and without beast, and in all the cities thereof, shall be an habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down. In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the vale, and in the cities of the south, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of him that telleth them, saith the LORD. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.

The word "Branch" is capitalized because it refers to Jesus Christ. The Offshoot of David, the Descendant of David is coming. When He comes again, He will execute judgment and righteousness in the land. A person doesn't have to be a very astute observer to see that this world lacks justice and equity. Things just aren't right. But when Jesus comes back, they will be.

Jeremiah 33:16
In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.

Not only will the Lord be called The Lord our righteousness, but the city itself—the people who dwell around the Lord will also bear His name.

Jeremiah 33:17–21
For thus saith the LORD; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel; Neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually. And the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers.

David's Son is going to reign forever. This, of course, refers to the Son of David, Christ Jesus. And that promise is ironclad. "Unless you can break My promise of day and night, My promise to David is sure," the Lord declares.

Jeremiah 33:22
As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me.

Interestingly, scientists have estimated the number of stars in the universe: one hundred billion times one hundred billion. Scientists have also estimated that the grains of sand are that number, as well.

Jeremiah 33:23–26
Moreover the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, Considerest thou not what this people have spoken, saying, The two families which the LORD hath chosen, he hath even cast them off? thus they have despised my people, that they should be no more a nation before them. Thus saith the LORD; If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; Then will I cast away the seed of

Jacob, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them.

The people who thought God had cast off Judah and Israel couldn't have been more mistaken. Again, God calls upon nature itself as measure of His everlasting commitment to His people.



34 Jeremiah 34:1–3

The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, when Nebuchadnez zar king of Babylon, and all his army, and all the kingdoms of the earth of his dominion, and all the people, fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities thereof, saying, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Go and speak to Zedekiah king of Judah, and tell him, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire: And thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be taken, and delivered into his hand; and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon.

Here, the Lord told Jeremiah that Zedekiah would speak face to face with Nebuchadnezzar before he would be carried captive to Babylon. Yet Ezekiel prophesied that Zedekiah would never see Babylon (12:12, 13). Is this a contradiction? The answer is given in 2 Kings 25:4 and 5, where we read that when Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem, he captured Zedekiah who was trying to dig out of a wall and run for his life. He poked out Zedekiah's eyes and carried a blind Zedekiah to Babylon. Thus, Zedekiah saw the king face to face and went to Babylon, but, as Ezekiel prophesied, he never saw Babylon.

Jeremiah 34:4–9

Yet hear the word of the LORD, O Zedekiah king of Judah; Thus saith the LORD of thee, Thou shalt not die by the sword: But thou shalt die in peace: and with the burnings of thy fathers, the

former kings which were before thee, so shall they burn odours for thee; and they will lament thee, saying, Ah lord! for I have pronounced the word, saith the LORD. Then Jeremiah the prophet spake all these words unto Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem, When the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish, and against Azekah: for these defenced cities remained of the cities of Judah. This is the word that came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim lib erty unto them; That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go free; that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jew his brother.

The first judicial law given to the children of Israel upon their release from bondage in Egypt prohibited the people from holding longer than seven years their brothers and sisters who, due to debt or distress, were slaves.

Jeremiah 34:10, 11
Now when all the princes, and all the people, which had entered into the covenant, heard that every one should let his manservant, and every one his maidservant, go free, that none should serve themselves of them any more, then they obeyed, and let them go. But afterward they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids.

During the Babylonian siege, Zedekiah proclaimed that every man should free his Hebrew slaves. While everyone agreed initially, they all changed their minds eventually.

Jeremiah 34:12–17
Therefore the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondmen, saying, At

the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother an Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee: but your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear. And ye were now turned, and had done right in my sight, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbour; and ye had made a covenant before me in the house which is called by my name: But ye turned and polluted my name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom ye had set at liberty at their pleasure, to return, and brought them into subjection, to be unto you for servants and for handmaids. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.

Because Zedekiah and the people broke the covenant they had made concerning freeing the Hebrew slaves, sword, pestilence, and hardship would be free to do their work upon them.

The Lord set us free. He released us from the penalty of every sin in our lives. Therefore, we are to forgive others. And sometimes we do that for awhile. But then we remember what he said about us or what she did to us and, like Zedekiah, we change our minds and back into our debt they go.

Jesus told a parable of a man who was released from a two-million dollar debt. But when he found someone who owed him a few dollars, he demanded to be paid on the spot. When the king heard about this, he brought the man before him and said, “I released you of a two-million dollar debt. Yet you demand payment of a man who only owes you a few dollars? You’re going to prison and you won’t get out until you have paid every penny” (Matthew 18). How could the man earn money in prison to pay his debt? He couldn’t. There was only one way out of prison: he had to die.

How will you get out of the prison of bitterness and judgment, depression and criticism? There’s only one way out: die. Die to yourself and your disappointments, your disillusionment and discouragement and say, “Lord,

I've been forgiven so much. Help me to die to what others have said about me or done to me."

This is so important because bunches of us are in prison right now mentally and spiritually because we've brought back into bondage people we once forgave. Whether it's a girlfriend, a husband, a boss, or a neighbor, truly forgive them and resist the temptation to bind them again.

Jeremiah 34:18–22
And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof, The princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, which passed between the parts of the calf; I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life: and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth. And Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes will I give into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which are gone up from you. Behold, I will command, saith the LORD, and cause them to return to this city; and they shall fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire: and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without an inhabitant.

In addition to being freed from the grip of idolatry, their seventy-year captivity in Babylon would be a natural consequence of the failure of God's people to free their brothers and sisters, both as they had promised and as God had commanded.

35 Jeremiah 35:1–10

The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, saying, Go unto the house of

the Rechabites, and speak unto them, and bring them into the house of the LORD, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink. Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habaziniah, and his brethren, and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites; And I brought them into the house of the LORD, into the chamber of the sons of Hanan, the son of Igdaliah, a man of God, which was by the chamber of the princes, which was above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the door: And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink ye wine. But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever: Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers. Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; Nor to build houses for us to dwell in: neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed: But we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us.

The Rechabites were descendants of Rechab, another name for Jethro, who was the father-in-law of Moses. Three hundred years before this event, one of the sons of Rechab named Jonadab called his sons together and said, "Boys, this life isn't where it's at. Don't build houses. Don't plant vineyards. Don't drink wine. Don't live for this world. Rather, live as pilgrims and strangers here and you'll be blessed." Three hundred years later, the Rechabites are brought into the temple, wine is set before them, and what do they say? They say, "We don't care what your prophets are telling us. We don't care if it happens in the sanctuary. Three hundred years ago, we made a promise that we wouldn't do this." For three hundred years, generation after generation passed, yet the Rechabites kept their promise. And even in the temple, they wouldn't break it.

Jeremiah 35:11–17

But it came to pass, when Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came up into the land, that we said, Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans, and for fear of the army of the Syrians: so we dwell at Jerusalem. Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words? saith the LORD. The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment: notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto me. I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers: but ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me. Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them; but this people hath not hearkened unto me: Therefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered.

Like Jonadab, God told His people how to live life successfully. But, unlike Jonadab's descendants, God's people ignored Him.

Jeremiah 35:18, 19
And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you: Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel;

Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever.

I call your attention to this passage because it shows the dynamic of discipline. There's a dynamic about making a firm commitment to certain values, of saying, "I will not do this. Period." As the days, weeks, months, and years go by, you will find yourself so strong in that thing that it will no longer be a temptation for you. But if you make allowances, you'll never be like the Rechabites. You'll struggle with the same sin over and over again.

Whatever the area of temptation, the one who stands before the Lord in victory is the one who says, "No." Open the door a bit and things start falling apart. Those who never decide what the lines are will fall continually. I'm not talking about legalism. I'm talking about wisdom. The Rechabites stood by their conviction and God honored them greatly.



36 Jeremiah 36:1–4

And it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that this word came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day. It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin. Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah: and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book.

The Word was given to Jeremiah, who then dictated it to a man named Baruch. In this, we see an interesting illustration of inspiration—how the Bible came into being. The Lord's Word was revealed to Jeremiah. Jeremiah, in turn, related it to Baruch, who actually wrote the words down on parchment. This is a picture of the way inspiration works. Whether it be

Jeremiah or John, Peter or Paul, the Word of the Lord was revealed to these men. It was revealed then recorded and finally regarded as God's Word.

Some people have a problem with this process. "What if Jeremiah made a mistake in sensing God's heart or hearing His voice?" they ask. "What if Baruch wasn't listening carefully and wrote something down wrong? Can it truly be regarded as the Word of God?"

We could talk about the scientific accuracy of the Bible. Although it is not a book of science, when it does speak of science, it is absolutely accurate. Or we could talk about the archaeological confirmations of the Word. The Bible talks about cities and civilizations whose existence scholars denied for years that were eventually verified by the archaeologist's spade. We could talk about the Bible's miraculous unity—the fact that there are sixty-six individual books united in theme, message, and philosophy yet written over a period of fifteen hundred years.

We could talk about science and archaeology, unity and history—but it all gets down to one simple question. Is God who He says He is? If God is omnipotent, a Father who cares about His children, a King who is concerned about His kingdom, do you think that if mistakes were made when the Bible was either being penned or compiled that He was powerless to do anything about it? If God is a Father who loves us and wants to communicate with us, and if He chose to do it through a book, don't you think He would have safeguarded the writing and compilation processes?

Jeremiah 36:5–8

And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, I am shut up; I cannot go into the house of the LORD: Therefore go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the LORD in the ears of the people in the LORD's house upon the fasting day: and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities. It may be they will present their supplication before the LORD, and will return every one from his evil way: for great is the anger and the fury that the LORD hath pronounced against this people. And Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading in the book the words of the LORD in the LORD's house.

Forbidden to go to the temple, Jeremiah sent Baruch with the message in hope yet again that the people would respond and turn to the Lord.

Jeremiah 36:9–13
And it came to pass in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, in the ninth month, that they proclaimed a fast before the LORD to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people that came from the cities of Judah unto Jerusalem. Then read Baruch in the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the LORD, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the higher court, at the entry of the new gate of the LORD's house, in the ears of all the people. When Michaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, had heard out of the book all the words of the LORD, Then he went down into the king's house, into the scribe's chamber: and, lo, all the princes sat there, even Elishama the scribe, and Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, and Elnathan the son of Achbor, and Gemariah the son of Shaphan, and Zedekiah the son of Hananiah, and all the princes. Then Michaiah declared unto them all the words that he had heard, when Baruch read the book in the ears of the people.

Although the people heard the Word directly, apparently the religious leaders didn't feel their attendance was necessary. Oh, what a subtle danger this is for us who have walked with the Lord for awhile. We can find ourselves thinking that only new believers need to take in the Word consistently, that only baby Christians need to grow in the Lord.

In Acts 18, we see Aquila and Priscilla in the synagogue, listening to a man named Apollos expound the Scripture. Even though Aquila and Priscilla were well-versed in the things of the Spirit, they were in attendance nonetheless. And the Lord used them powerfully. "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves," the writer to the Hebrews would caution (10:25). And this word applies to seasoned believers as well as to those new in the faith.

Jeremiah 36:14–16

Therefore all the princes sent Jehudi the son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, unto Baruch, saying, Take in thine hand the roll wherein thou hast read in the ears of the people, and come. So Baruch the son of Neriah took the roll in his hand, and came unto them. And they said unto him, Sit down now, and read it in our ears. So Baruch read it in their ears. Now it came to pass, when they had heard all the words, they were afraid both one and other, and said unto Baruch, We will surely tell the king of all these words.

The leaders sent for Baruch to read the Word of the Lord to them—but when they heard it, they were afraid.

Jeremiah 36:17–19
And they asked Baruch, saying, Tell us now, How didst thou write all these words at his mouth? Then Baruch answered them, He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book. Then said the princes unto Baruch, Go, hide thee, thou and Jeremiah; and let no man know where ye be.

Knowing how Jehoiakim would respond to this prophecy of destruction and devastation, the leaders advised Jeremiah and Baruch to hide for their own safety.

Jeremiah 36:20, 21 (a)
And they went in to the king into the court, but they laid up the roll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and told all the words in the ears of the king. So the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll . . .

The leaders gave Jehoiakim an abridged version of Jeremiah's prophecy. But he wanted to read it for himself.

Jeremiah 36:21 (b)–23
. . . and he took it out of Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the

princes which stood beside the king. Now the king sat in the winterhouse in the ninth month: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him. And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth.

When Jehoiakim heard the powerful prophecies of Jeremiah, he took out his knife and began to cut up the scroll containing them. Then he tossed the pieces into the fire.

"The Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword," the writer to the Hebrews declares (4:12). Yet, rather than allowing the Word to make the cuts that could have resulted in peace, Jehoiakim cut the Word into pieces.

"His Word was in mine heart as a burning fire," Jeremiah declared (20:9). Yet, rather than allowing the heat of the Word to purify him, Jehoiakim tossed it into the fire.

Oh, that we would be like Josiah, who, when the Word was brought to him, rent his clothes, so deeply did it impact him (2 Kings 22:11). Otherwise, we'll be like Jehoiakim and, bit by bit, cut it out of our lives altogether.

Jeremiah 36:24
Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words.

My ignoring the Word will not insulate me from the repercussions of my sin any more than my denial of the laws of electricity will insulate me from the results of sticking my finger into a live socket.

Jeremiah 36:25–30
Nevertheless Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made intercession to the king that he would not burn the roll: but he would not hear them. But the king commanded Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech, and Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet: but the LORD hid them. Then the word of the LORD

came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned. And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim the king of Judah, Thus saith the LORD; Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? Therefore thus saith the LORD of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost.

Not only would Jehoiakim die by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, but his son would be carried to a Babylonian prison.

Jeremiah 36:31, 32
And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not. Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words.

"My Word shall not return void," the Lord declared (see Isaiah 55:11).

"Though heaven and earth pass away, My words shall not pass away," Jesus declared (see Matthew 24:35).

Therefore, Jehoiakim's pen knife was little threat to the sword of the everlasting Word of God.



37

In chapter 37, we come to Zedekiah, the final ruler of Judah before the Babylonians destroyed the capital city.

Jeremiah 37:1–3
And king Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah. But neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land, did hearken unto the words of the LORD, which he spake by the prophet Jeremiah. And Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Pray now unto the LORD our God for us.

Like Jehoiakim before him, Zedekiah didn't listen to the Word of the Lord. Yet he was aware that the situation was darkening. Thus, even though he didn't want to hear God's Word, he wanted God's help.

> He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.
>
> Proverbs 28:9

If a person isn't interested in hearing or heeding the Word, his prayers are an abomination because his prayers will be all mixed up. It's only by spending time in the Word that we know how to pray.

Jeremiah 37:4, 5
Now Jeremiah came in and went out among the people: for they had not put him into prison. Then Pharaoh's army was come forth out of Egypt: and when the Chaldeans that besieged Jerusalem heard tidings of them, they departed from Jerusalem.

When the Babylonians received word that their enemies, the Egyptians, were headed in their direction, they left their siege of Jerusalem to return home to do battle. The people in Jerusalem must have felt victorious, that the prophets who had prophesied peace must have been right all along.

Jeremiah 37:6–10

Then came the word of the LORD unto the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, that sent you unto me to inquire of me; Behold, Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land. And the Chal deans shall come again, and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire. Thus saith the LORD; Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart. For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire.

"What I have said still stands," the Lord declares. "Even an army of wounded men would be able to destroy this city. My Word stands. There's nothing you can do."

Jeremiah 37:11–15

And it came to pass, that when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh's army, Then Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to separate himself thence in the midst of the people. And when he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward was there, whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he took Jeremiah the prophet, saying, Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans. Then said Jeremiah, It is false; I fall not away to the Chaldeans. But he hearkened not to him: so Irijah took Jeremiah, and brought him to the princes. Wherefore the princes were wroth with Jeremiah, and smote him, and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe: for they had made that the prison.

With the siege temporarily lifted, Jeremiah returned to his hometown where, accused of being a traitor, he was thrown into prison.

Jeremiah 37:16, 17 (a)
When Jeremiah was entered into the dungeon, and into the cabins, and Jeremiah had remained there many days; Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took him out: and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, Is there any word from the LORD? . . .

When Zedekiah called him out of prison and asked if he had received any word from the Lord, how tempting it would have been for Jeremiah to save his own skin by telling him what he wanted to hear. But Jeremiah doesn't compromise . . .

Jeremiah 37:17 (b)–21
. . . And Jeremiah said, There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon. Moreover Jeremiah said unto king Zedekiah, What have I offended against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that ye have put me in prison? Where are now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land? Therefore hear now, I pray thee, O my lord the king: let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee; that thou cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there. Then Zedekiah the king commanded that they should commit Jeremiah into the court of the prison, and that they should give him daily a piece of bread out of the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city were spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

Zedekiah is an individual who is struggling. He didn't want to hear the Word of God, yet asked that prayer be made to God. He had a hard heart toward Jeremiah's message, but a somewhat soft heart toward Jeremiah.

38 Jeremiah 38:1–3

Then Shephatiah the son of Mattan, and Gedaliah the son of Pashur, and Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashur the son of Malchiah, heard the words that Jeremiah had spoken unto all the people, saying, Thus saith the LORD, He that remaineth in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live; for he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live. Thus saith the LORD, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it.

"Your only hope is to leave the city and surrender to the Babylonians," Jeremiah declared. "If you try to hang on to the city and defend it, you'll die in the process—either by the sword, famine, or disease. God is working. Let His will be done."

Jeremiah 38:4, 5

Therefore the princes said unto the king, We beseech thee, let this man be put to death: for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt. Then Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do any thing against you.

Jeremiah was accused of weakening the morale of the country. Zedekiah told his accusers to do what they must to Jeremiah, just as Darius would reluctantly order Daniel to be thrown to the lions (Daniel 6) and as Pilate would reluctantly hand Jesus over to be crucified (Luke 23:4).

Jeremiah 38:6–9

Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire. Now when Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah

in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin; Ebed-melech went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king, saying, My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city.

Ebed-melech means "Servant of the king." As an Ethiopian, Ebed-melech would have had no standing in the community. Yet, although he's insignificant, he found a way to serve the king in a way that would be recorded in God's Word and studied for all of history by God's people. Ebed-melech, a person just like you and me, is recorded in the Word simply because he saw a man in need and wanted to help.

Jeremiah 38:10–13
Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die. So Ebed-melech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah. And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so. So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

Ebed-melech went to the king and interceded on Jeremiah's behalf. Then he gathered ropes and put rags around them so Jeremiah wouldn't be bruised.

You might not be able to perform miracles. You might not have musical talent. You might not be an evangelist. You might feel like an Ethiopian, without anything to offer. But you can find a person in the pit—in your community, your school, your office. You can intercede on his behalf. Then you can do something to help him practically. You can pull him out of the pit . . .

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

Galatians 6:1

Has there been someone who, seeing you were in a pit of some kind, found a way to do something, to say something, to share something that lifted you up? I've had those Ebed-melechs in my life and I thank God for them. Ask the Lord to show you someone in the pit, and God will honor your prayer.



39 We come to the time when the city is actually being destroyed. The city that refused God, God refused.

Jeremiah 39:1, 2
In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, came Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and they besieged it. And in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, the ninth day of the month, the city was broken up.

For two years, the besieging armies of the Babylonians wore down the people of Jerusalem. But finally, because God's people were not broken before God, they were broken by men.

Jeremiah 39:3, 4
And all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate, even Nergal-sharezer, Samgar-nebo, Sarsechim, Rab-saris, Nergal-sharezer, Rabmag, with all the residue of the princes of the king of Babylon. And it came to pass, that when Zedekiah the king of Judah saw them, and all the men of war, then they fled, and went forth out of the city by night, by the way

of the king's garden, by the gate betwixt the two walls: and he went out the way of the plain.

Because Zedekiah refused to walk in the light, he was forced to run for his life in the night.

Jeremiah 39:5–7
But the Chaldeans' army pursued after them, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho: and when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he gave judgment upon him. Then the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes: also the king of Babylon slew all the nobles of Judah. Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with chains, to carry him to Babylon.

As prophesied in 34:13 and Ezekiel 12:12 and 13, Zedekiah was brought before Nebuchadnezzar. Perhaps the last image Zedekiah saw before his eyes were put out was that of his sons being killed. The horrific effects of sin are sometimes unspeakable.

Jeremiah 39:8
And the Chaldeans burned the king's house, and the houses of the people, with fire, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem.

Chapter 39 is simply the proof that whatever a man sows, that shall he reap (Galatians 6:7). If you don't forgive others, you will be bound yourself. If you refuse God, God will eventually refuse you. If you're not broken before the Lord, you'll be broken at the hand of man. If you refuse to see, you'll end up blind.

"Be not deceived," God warns. "What you sow, you'll reap." It might not happen for awhile—and this is where the problem arises. Zedekiah thought the coast was clear. Yes, the Babylonians had besieged his city, but when the Egyptians came, they left. So he thought he didn't need to heed God's message so carefully and repeatedly given. He thought he was an exception. The problem is, there are no exceptions.

Jeremiah 39:9, 10

Then Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carried away captive into Babylon the remnant of the people that remained in the city, and those that fell away, that fell to him, with the rest of the people that remained. But Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, which had nothing, in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.

Except for the poor people who remained, the Jews were marched hundreds of miles to Babylon.

Jeremiah 39:11–14

Now Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon gave charge concerning Jeremiah to Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard, saying, Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do unto him even as he shall say unto thee. So Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard sent, and Nebushasban, Rab-saris, and Nergal-sharezer, Rabmag, and all the king of Babylon's princes; Even they sent, and took Jeremiah out of the court of the prison, and committed him unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, that he should carry him home: so he dwelt among the people.

Although his own people had ignored Jeremiah's words, Nebuchadnezzar had taken notice of them.

Jeremiah 39:15–18

Now the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, while he was shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Go and speak to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring my words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished in that day before thee. But I will deliver thee in that day, saith the LORD: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by

the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the LORD.

Just as Rahab was spared when Jericho fell because she had assisted God's people, so Ebed-melech would be spared when Jerusalem fell because he assisted God's prophet.

"Blessed are the merciful," Jesus said, "for they themselves receive mercy" (see Matthew 5:7). There can be no better reward—just ask Rahab and Ebed-melech.



40 Jeremiah 40:1–3

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, after that Nebuzar- adan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he had taken him being bound in chains among all that were carried away captive of Jerusalem and Judah, which were carried away captive unto Babylon. And the captain of the guard took Jeremiah, and said unto him, The LORD thy God hath pronounced this evil upon this place. Now the LORD hath brought it, and done according as he hath said: because ye have sinned against the LORD, and have not obeyed his voice, therefore this thing is come upon you.

Overseeing the capture of the Jews, a Babylonian captain understood that sin was the reason for the plight of God's people. In other words, he had a better perspective of what was happening than did the people of God. Unfortunately, this is not that unusual. "I find no fault in Him," Pilate said, concerning our Lord (Luke 23:4). Thus, Pilate had a better perspective of Jesus than did the religious leaders of the day.

"Truly this was the Son of God," declared the Roman centurion, even as God's people were cursing Him (Matthew 27:54).

Jeremiah 40:4–6

And now, behold, I loose thee this day from the chains which were upon thine hand. If it seem good unto thee to come with me into

Babylon, come; and I will look well unto thee: but if it seem ill unto thee to come with me into Babylon, forbear: behold, all the land is before thee: whither it seemeth good and convenient for thee to go, thither go. Now while he was not yet gone back, he said, Go back also to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon hath made governor over the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people: or go wheresoever it seemeth convenient unto thee to go. So the captain of the guard gave him victuals and a reward, and let him go. Then went Jeremiah unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and dwelt with him among the people that were left in the land.

The Babylonian captain offered Jeremiah asylum in Babylon. Jeremiah chose instead to dwell with the people in the land.

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

When Nebuchadnezzar carried the Jews in chains back to Babylon, he also appointed a man named Gedaliah to govern those who remained in the land.

Jeremiah 40:8–12
Then they came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, even Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, and the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, and Jezaniah the son of a Maachathite, they and their men. And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan sware unto them and to their men, saying, Fear not to serve the Chaldeans: dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon, and

it shall be well with you. As for me, behold, I will dwell at Mizpah to serve the Chaldeans, which will come unto us: but ye, gather ye wine, and summer fruits, and oil, and put them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that ye have taken. Likewise when all the Jews that were in Moab, and among the Ammonites, and in Edom, and that were in all the countries, heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant of Judah, and that he had set over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan; Even all the Jews returned out of all places whither they were driven, and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah, unto Mizpah, and gathered wine and summer fruits very much.

The Jews who were left in the land, as well as those who had fled to surrounding countries, gathered in Judah.

Jeremiah 40:13, 14
Moreover Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were in the fields, came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, And said unto him, Dost thou certainly know that Baalis the king of the Ammonites hath sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to slay thee? But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam believed them not.

When Gedaliah received word that the king of Ammon had sent a man named Ishmael to assassinate him, he didn't believe the report.

Jeremiah 40:15, 16
Then Johanan the son of Kareah spake to Gedaliah in Mizpah secretly, saying, Let me go, I pray thee, and I will slay Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no man shall know it: wherefore should he slay thee, that all the Jews which are gathered unto thee should be scattered, and the remnant in Judah perish? But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said unto Johanan the son of Kareah, Thou shalt not do this thing: for thou speakest falsely of Ishmael.

Gedaliah was nice but naive. He didn't believe anyone would want to harm him. He should have had a clue that what Johanan said was true

because, throughout Scripture, Ishmael is a name always linked with the flesh (Galatians 4:23).

When you are tempted to give in to your flesh, Johanan and the captains will gather round you, saying, "Don't be deceived. Ishmael is out to do you in. You can't play around with sin without suffering severe consequences." Paul would say we are to mortify the deeds of the flesh for, like Ishmael's assignment in Jeremiah's day, its only goal is to destroy us (Romans 8:13).



41 Jeremiah 41:1–3

Now it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah the son of Elishama, of the seed royal, and the princes of the king, even ten men with him, came unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and there they did eat bread together in Mizpah. Then arose Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men that were with him, and smote Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan with the sword, and slew him, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land. Ishmael also slew all the Jews that were with him, even with Gedaliah, at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans that were found there, and the men of war.

Again, as a picture of the flesh, we see Ishmael posing as a friend to Gedaliah, only to destroy him.

> **Jeremiah 41:4–8**
> **And it came to pass the second day after he had slain Gedaliah, and no man knew it, That there came certain from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, even fourscore men, having their beards shaven, and their clothes rent, and having cut themselves, with offerings and incense in their hand, to bring them to the house of the LORD. And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went forth from Mizpah to meet them, weeping all along as he went: and it came to pass, as he met them, he said unto them, Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam. And it was so, when they came into**

the midst of the city, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah slew them, and cast them into the midst of the pit, he, and the men that were with him. But ten men were found among them that said unto Ishmael, Slay us not: for we have treasures in the field, of wheat, and of barley, and of oil, and of honey. So he forbare, and slew them not among their brethren.

Eighty men from the northern cities of Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria came to mourn the destruction of Jerusalem. Again, posing as a friend, Ishmael wept with them—only to slay all but ten of them. True to his nature, Ishmael spared ten not for mercy, but for money.

Jeremiah 41:9–12
Now the pit wherein Ishmael had cast all the dead bodies of the men, whom he had slain because of Gedaliah, was it which Asa the king had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel: and Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with them that were slain. Then Ishmael carried away captive all the residue of the people that were in Mizpah, even the king's daughters, and all the people that remained in Mizpah, whom Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard had committed to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam: and Ishmael the son of Nethaniah carried them away captive, and departed to go over to the Ammonites. But when Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were with him, heard of all the evil that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done, Then they took all the men, and went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and found him by the great waters that are in Gibeon.

How I like Johanan. When he heard what happened to Gedaliah, he didn't say, "I told him so." He said, "Let's go."

Jeremiah 41:13–15
Now it came to pass, that when all the people which were with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were with him, then they were glad. So all the people that Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah cast

about and returned, and went unto Johanan the son of Kareah. But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men, and went to the Ammonites.

Johanan and his men were able to rescue the captives of Ishmael. In this, I'm reminded of Abraham. Like Johanan, Abraham knew that Lot was in a dangerous situation in Sodom. But also, like Johanan, when Lot was carried away captive, Abraham didn't chide him for his choice—he set out to rescue him. How I pray I would be that kind of man—one who is as ready to rescue as he is to warn.

Jeremiah 41:16–18
Then took Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were with him, all the remnant of the people whom he had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, from Mizpah, after that he had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, even mighty men of war, and the women, and the children, and the eunuchs, whom he had brought again from Gibeon: And they departed, and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is by Bethlehem, to go to enter into Egypt, Because of the Chaldeans: for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon made governor in the land.

Up to this point, Johanan had done so well. Here, however, as we will see, he errs in thinking Egypt—a type of the world—would be a place of safety for him.



42 Jeremiah 42:1–3

Then all the captains of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least even unto the greatest, came near, And said unto Jeremiah the prophet, Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for

us unto the LORD thy God, even for all this remnant; (for we are left but a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us:) That the LORD thy God may shew us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do.

The remnant of Jews left in Judah came to Jeremiah and said, "We now realize you were right all along. Now please seek the Lord for us."

Jeremiah 42:4–6
Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, I have heard you; behold, I will pray unto the LORD your God according to your words; and it shall come to pass, that whatsoever thing the LORD shall answer you, I will declare it unto you; I will keep nothing back from you. Then they said to Jeremiah, The LORD be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the LORD thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the LORD our God.

Because the Jews had turned away from the Lord, they saw their city destroyed and their families carried away captive. Therefore, the remnant in Judah said, "We'll do whatever the Lord says, for we have learned that in obeying the Lord's voice it will be well with us."

That's God's heart for you—not to burden you, not to restrict you, not to make your life miserable, but rather to make it wonderful.

Jeremiah 42:7
And it came to pass after ten days, that the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah.

That it took Jeremiah ten days to hear from the Lord both encourages and convicts me. It encourages me because I realize that even Jeremiah—a giant of the faith—didn't have immediate understanding. But it convicts me because, all too often, if I don't see a prayer answered in ten minutes, much less ten days, I tend to give up.

Jeremiah 42:8–10
Then called he Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces which were with him, and all the people from the least even to the greatest And said unto them, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, unto whom ye sent me to present your supplication before him; If ye will still abide in this land, then will I build you, and not pull you down, and I will plant you, and not pluck you up: for I repent me of the evil that I have done unto you.

Now that His people had been chastened, the Lord would implement the planting and the building process He had spoken of when He first commissioned Jeremiah (1:10).

Jeremiah 42:11, 12
Be not afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom ye are afraid; be not afraid of him, saith the LORD: for I am with you to save you, and to deliver you from his hand. And I will shew mercies unto you, that he may have mercy upon you, and cause you to return to your own land.

"Stay where you are. Don't run away. Trust in the Lord." That's the direction God gave Jeremiah to give the people. But did they receive it? No. As we will see, they did just the opposite. Before we wonder how they could be so dumb, we must realize that man has the dangerous capability to justify almost anything. These people were no exception, for they evidently said, "Although we did say we'd do whatever God told us to do, under the circumstances, it's much better for us to cruise down to Egypt. After all, Nebuchadnezzar is after us."

Jeremiah 42:13–17
But if ye say, We will not dwell in this land, neither obey the voice of the LORD your God, Saying, No; but we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread; and there will we dwell: And now therefore hear the word of the LORD, ye remnant of Judah;

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; If ye wholly set your faces to enter into Egypt, and go to sojourn there; Then it shall come to pass, that the sword, which ye feared, shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine, whereof ye were afraid, shall follow close after you there in Egypt; and there ye shall die. So shall it be with all the men that set their faces to go into Egypt to sojourn there; they shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: and none of them shall remain or escape from the evil that I will bring upon them.

The warning is clear: if these people went to Egypt, the very tragedy they sought to escape would fall upon them there.

Jeremiah 42:18–22
For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; As mine anger and my fury hath been poured forth upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so shall my fury be poured forth upon you, when ye shall enter into Egypt: and ye shall be an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach; and ye shall see this place no more. The LORD hath said concerning you, O ye remnant of Judah; Go ye not into Egypt: know certainly that I have admonished you this day. For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the LORD your God, saying, Pray for us unto the LORD our God; and according unto all that the LORD our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it. And now I have this day declared it to you; but ye have not obeyed the voice of the LORD your God, nor any thing for the which he hath sent me unto you. Now therefore know certainly that ye shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, in the place whither ye desire to go and to sojourn.

Jeremiah's entire ministry consisted of speaking the Word of the Lord to the people—and then being ignored by the people. This chapter would be no different. Jesus said it is the foolish man who hears the Word and then fails to do it. We can take notes in our Bibles and underline verses—but if we don't do what they say, we're like a man who builds his house upon the sand.

When the storm inevitably comes, the house collapses and great is the fall (Matthew 7:24–27).

"Take heed how ye hear," Jesus said (Luke 8:18). When God speaks to you through a sermon, your morning devotions, a book, or a brother, He's serious about what He's saying. It's not enough to write it in your journal, as commendable as that is. It needs to be enacted and obeyed.

Sometimes we think that because we're hearing the Word, we're obeying it. Not true. The people heard the Word from Jeremiah, but when it was revealed, they didn't apply it. Therefore, the disaster they would experience in Egypt would not be the result of God judging them, but the result of a curse they brought upon themselves by not obeying the Word they heard.



43 Jeremiah 43:1–4

And it came to pass, that when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking unto all the people all the words of the LORD their God, for which the LORD their God had sent him to them, even all these words, Then spake Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men, saying unto Jeremiah, Thou speakest falsely: the LORD our God hath not sent thee to say, Go not into Egypt to sojourn there: But Baruch the son of Neriah setteth thee on against us, for to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they might put us to death, and carry us away captives into Babylon. So Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, and all the people, obeyed not the voice of the LORD, to dwell in the land of Judah.

Even though they had asked Jeremiah to seek the Lord on their behalf, even though they promised that whatever the Lord said they would do, even though Jeremiah sought the Lord a full ten days, even though all of Jeremiah's previous prophecies came to pass, the people accused him of lying, of being a tool in the hand of the Babylonians. The only thing more shocking than their stubborn ignorance is my own.

Jeremiah 43:5, 6

But Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, took all the remnant of Judah, that were returned from all nations, whither they had been driven, to dwell in the land of Judah; Even men, and women, and children, and the king's daughters, and every person that Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet, and Baruch the son of Neriah.

Faithful beyond comprehension, Jeremiah remained with the people the Lord called him to serve.

Jeremiah 43:7
So they came into the land of Egypt: for they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: thus came they even to Tahpanhes.

In Scripture, Egypt is a type, or picture, of the world. Nine hundred years earlier, the Jews were in bondage for four hundred years in Egypt, working in the hot, blistering sun, watching their babies drowned, being beaten cruelly. And yet now they go back to Egypt—just like we're tempted to do so often . . .



***For topical study on Jeremiah 43:7 entitled "Mistaken Memories of Egypt," turn to page* 564.**

Jeremiah 43:8 (a)
Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah in Tahpanhes . . .

Just as Jeremiah did not forsake the people, God did not forsake Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 43:8 (b)–13
. . . saying, Take great stones in thine hand, and hide them in the clay in the brickkiln, which is at the entry of Pharaoh's house in

Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of Judah; And say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will send and take Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will set his throne upon these stones that I have hid; and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them. And when he cometh, he shall smite the land of Egypt, and deliver such as are for death to death; and such as are for captivity to captivity; and such as are for the sword to the sword. And I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt; and he shall burn them, and carry them away captives: and he shall array himself with the land of Egypt, as a shepherd putteth on his garment; and he shall go forth from thence in peace. He shall break also the images of Beth-shemesh, that is in the land of Egypt; and the houses of the gods of the Egyptians shall he burn with fire.

Jeremiah was told to hide large stones in the kiln at the entry of Pharaoh's house and to tell God's people that Nebuchadnezzar would one day set his throne upon them. In other words, the very man from whom they were fleeing would find them there.

Running will always be our ruin. "I need a new start," we tell ourselves. "I need to leave the area, my husband, the church." The fact, however, is that we don't need a new start. We need a new heart. If God is leading you, everything will be done decently and in order. You won't leave chaos and confusion behind you. Of Jesus it was said, "He hath done all things well" (Mark 7:37). And indeed He does.

MISTAKEN MEMORIES OF EGYPT

A Topical Study of JEREMIAH 43:7

The average person uses one hundred ten gallons of water each day. Each flush of the toilet uses seven gallons. A ten-minute shower uses twenty-five to fifty gallons. The average bath requires thirty-six gallons. Washing dishes consumes thirty gallons. A hose uses five to ten gallons a minute. Washing your car takes one hundred eighty gallons of water. Washing machines use sixty gallons. Shaving with the tap running uses twenty gallons of water. Brushing your teeth consumes two gallons. A leaky faucet uses thirty to fifty gallons of water a day.

Our minds and memories are sort of like leaky faucets. A psychologist described the mind as being a continual leaky faucet. He said upwards of ninety percent of all we learn is forgotten within one week. The information, insights, observations you make are filed in your short term memory bank and forgotten within seven days. It just leaks out. No wonder we find ourselves acting like drips!

The people of Judah were certainly no exception. For thirty years, Jeremiah had been prophesying in the city, telling the people to repent, that the Lord would allow the Babylonians to come and destroy the city because God's people persisted in their wickedness and rebellion. But, rather than listening to him, on several occasions, the people imprisoned him.

The day finally came when Nebuchadnezzar did indeed destroy the city. The temple was burned, the people were butchered. The king, Zedekiah, had his eyes poked out. Devastation and destruction were rampant. And now the people understood that Jeremiah was indeed a prophet of God. His words had come to pass. His prophecies had proven true. Therefore, the people left in the land turned to him and said, "Seek the Lord for us. Whatever you say, we'll do it."

For ten days, Jeremiah sought the Lord. At the end of ten days, he came back to the people and said, "Do not go through with the plans you have to flee across the border into Egypt. Instead, remain in the land." Upon hearing this, the very people who had seen Jeremiah's prophecies come to pass

perfectly called him a liar and set their face toward Egypt. As people, we are incredibly dumb. No wonder the Bible likens us to sheep!

Whenever God's people went into Egypt, they got into trouble. In Genesis 12 and 13, we read that, when there was a famine in the land, Abraham left Bethel and went into Egypt. The consequences were disastrous. It wasn't until Abraham returned to Bethel and sought the Lord by building an altar that God spoke to him again. When the Jews were in bondage in Egypt for four hundred years, they were treated brutally and beaten constantly as slaves. Finally, they cried out, "God raise us up a deliverer." And the Lord raised up a man named Moses.

When Moses led them out of Egypt, they were free at last. Yet within nine weeks after they were released from Egypt, the people were wishing for the melons, onions, and leeks they had there (Numbers 11:5). Melons, onions, and leeks were delicacies of the Egyptian culture, food for the nobles. The Jews, however, were slaves. Therefore, most probably the closest they got to those foods was to dream about them. For them, the reality of Egypt was death and back-breaking labor.

Nothing paralyzes us and neutralizes our walk faster than thinking we're missing out on the old ways, the old gang, the old parties, the old pleasures we had before we were saved. Satan comes to us and whispers, "You don't have to go all the way back, but you need to back up a bit from these new standards and priorities." Then he begins to lie to us about our old life. He amplifies the pleasures but conveniently fails to remind us of the pain. He reminds us of the melons but keeps quiet about the misery.

Another man who went back was Peter. Oh, he didn't go back to Egypt. Instead, he went back to fishing—not because he was missing out but because he felt he had messed up. Peter had denied Jesus and, therefore, felt unworthy to continue on with Him. So off he headed to the Sea of Galilee. And not only did he go, but a group of men went with him. That's always the problem with going back to Egypt: invariably, we take others with us.

They fished all night, but caught absolutely nothing. Their venture was completely unfulfilling, unsatisfying, unprofitable. Meanwhile, Jesus was on the shore, watching them. "Children," He called, "have you caught any fish?"

"No," Peter replied.

"Cast your net on the other side," Jesus said.

When they did, the net almost broke from so many fish.

John realized it was Jesus—and Peter immediately swam toward shore. No doubt when he got there, he remembered that, not only had he denied Him, but he had disobeyed Him by being on the sea rather than in Galilee (Matthew 28:7). Jesus, however, gave Peter some roasted fish—the very thing he had been looking for all along. Jesus didn't condemn, rebuke, or preach to Peter. He simply served him. Then He recommissioned Peter to leave the boats and the nets and the boys behind and start serving Him again (John 21). As a result, it was only days later that Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost and preached so powerfully that 3,000 were saved (Acts 2:41).

"Leave Egypt, Peter," Jesus said. And Peter did. So too, we have a decision to make: whether we're going to step over the border of Egypt just a little bit—or whether we're going to remain in Bethel with Abraham and Jerusalem with Jeremiah. We're not missing out, gang. We've been freed to love the way we were meant to love, to live the way we were meant to live. Don't turn back.



44 Jeremiah 44:1–4

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews which dwell in the land of Egypt, which dwell at Migdol, and at Tahpanhes, and at Noph, and in the country of Pathros, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Ye have seen all the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, and upon all the cities of Judah; and, behold, this day they are a desolation, and no man dwelleth therein, Because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke me to anger, in that they went to burn incense, and to serve other gods, whom they knew not, neither they, ye, nor your fathers. Howbeit I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate.

The Jews who had fled to Egypt for safety had seen the unmistakable effects of God's judgment in Judah.

Jeremiah 44:5–10

But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense unto other gods. Wherefore my fury and mine anger was poured forth, and was kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they are wasted and desolate, as at this day. Therefore now this saith the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls, to cut off from you man and woman, child and suckling, out of Judah, to leave you none to remain; In that ye provoke me unto wrath with the works of your hands, burning incense unto other gods in the land of Egypt, whither ye be gone to dwell, that ye might cut yourselves off, and that ye might be a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth? Have ye forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, and the wickedness of the kings of Judah, and the wickedness of their wives, and your own wickedness, and the wickedness of your wives, which they have committed in the land of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem? They are not humbled even unto this day, neither have they feared, nor walked in my law, nor in my statutes, that I set before you and before your fathers.

In Egypt, the Jews practiced idolatry—the very sin that led to the destruction of their own land and families. Regardless of their new start in Egypt, their old sin continued because their hearts were never changed.

Jeremiah 44:11–14

Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will set my face against you for evil, and to cut off all Judah. And I will take the remnant of Judah, that have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, and they shall all be consumed, and fall in the land of Egypt; they shall even be consumed by the sword and by the famine: they shall die, from the least even unto the greatest, by the sword and by the famine: and they shall be an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach. For I will punish them that dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, by the sword, by the famine,

and by the pestilence: So that none of the remnant of Judah, which are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall escape or remain, that they should return into the land of Judah, to the which they have a desire to return to dwell there: for none shall return but such as shall escape.

The Jews who went to Egypt thought that, unlike their brothers who were carried captive to Babylon, they would be able to return to Judah. The opposite, however, proved to be true because after seventy years, the Jews in Babylon were freed from the grip of idolatry and were able to return to Jerusalem while the Jews in Egypt would persist in their sin that would eventually destroy them.

Jeremiah 44:15–17 (a)
Then all the men which knew that their wives had burned incense unto other gods, and all the women that stood by, a great multitude, even all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying, As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem . . .

In Jeremiah 24, we read that the Lord showed Jeremiah two baskets of figs—one good and one evil. He then identified the people carried captive to Babylon as the good figs while the ones who remained in Judah as the evil figs. Here, we see the basis for this appraisal because it's hard to imagine a bolder statement of sin and self-will than the one made here.

Jeremiah 44:17 (b)–19
. . . for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine.

And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings unto her, without our men?

The Jews were offering sacrifice to the "queen of heaven," or Isis. She was known as Ashteroth to the Babylonians, Venus to the Romans, and Aphrodite to the Greeks. "When we worshiped the queen of heaven, things went well for us," the Jews said. "When we stopped, things went wrong. So we're going to worship her again."

This is a common mistake to which any of us are vulnerable. In His infinite mercy, patience, and kindness, God continues to bless us in spite of our sin. So we keep sinning, not realizing God is simply giving us space and time to repent. When you and I hit difficulties, more often than not, the seeds were sown months or even years previously. We were neglecting the Lord and compromising with the world and, although the seeds didn't spring up immediately, they would eventually because what a man sows, he'll always reap (Galatians 6:7).

Jeremiah 40:20–23
Then Jeremiah said unto all the people, to the men, and to the women, and to all the people which had given him that answer, saying, The incense that ye burned in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, ye, and your fathers, your kings, and your princes, and the people of the land, did not the LORD remember them, and came it not into his mind? So that the LORD could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which ye have committed; therefore is your land a desolation, and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day. Because ye have burned incense, and because ye have sinned against the LORD, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD, nor walked in his law, nor in his statutes, nor in his testimonies; therefore this evil is happened unto you, as at this day.

"How much good did Isis do for your brothers and sisters carried into captivity?" Jeremiah asks.

Jeremiah 40:24–26
Moreover Jeremiah said unto all the people, and to all the women, Hear the word of the LORD, all Judah that are in the land of Egypt: Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying; Ye and your wives have both spoken with your mouths, and fulfilled with your hand, saying, We will surely perform our vows that we have vowed, to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her: ye will surely accomplish your vows, and surely perform your vows. Therefore hear ye the word of the LORD, all Judah that dwell in the land of Egypt; Behold, I have sworn by my great name, saith the LORD, that my name shall no more be named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, The Lord GOD liveth.

"That's it," the Lord says. "Because you refuse to listen, you will lose all consciousness of Me." I know people like this—people who were once vibrant and on fire for the Lord. But when important issues were brought to their attention, they refused to take heed. And now you'll never hear the Lord's name on their lips. Their lives are a tragedy.

Paul says these things were written for our example (Romans 15:4). That which happened to these people in Jeremiah's day can happen to any of us who refuse to respond to the Word of the Lord.

Jeremiah 44:27–30
Behold, I will watch over them for evil, and not for good: and all the men of Judah that are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine, until there be an end of them. Yet a small number that escape the sword shall return out of the land of Egypt into the land of Judah, and all the remnant of Judah, that are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall know whose words shall stand, mine, or theirs. And this shall be a sign unto you, saith the LORD, that I will punish you in this place, that ye may know that my words shall surely stand against you for evil: Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will give Pharaohhophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies, and into the hand of them that seek his life; as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand

of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, his enemy, and that sought his life.

Historically, this pharaoh is known as Apries, successor of Psammis, who ascended the throne following Pharaoh-necho's defeat by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish. When Apries sent Amasis, one of his generals, to quell a revolt, the people instead crowned Amasis king. Apries was then forced to retreat to the northern part of Egypt. Taking advantage of the conflict, Nebuchadnezzar attacked and left Amasis in charge. When Apries tried to regain the throne, he was taken prisoner and strangled in his own palace. Thus, although Jeremiah's prophecy would, as usual, fall on deaf ears, it was, as always, fulfilled perfectly.



45 Chapter 45 is actually connected to chapter 36, where we read that Jeremiah sent a scroll to the king. After Jehoiakim chopped it up and threw it in the fire, Jeremiah sent another scroll containing the same words but with additional rebukes and warnings.

Jeremiah 45:1–3
The word that Jeremiah the prophet spake unto Baruch the son of Neriah, when he had written these words in a book at the mouth of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, unto thee, O Baruch; Thou didst say, Woe is me now! for the LORD hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest.

When Jehoiakim didn't listen or respond to the Word he gave him, Baruch—the man who had written Jeremiah's words on the scroll—evidently felt like a failure. But the Lord has not called us to see results. He simply calls us to be faithful in obeying what He tells us to do.

Jeremiah 45:4, 5

Thus shalt thou say unto him, The LORD saith thus; Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land. And seekest thou great things for thy self? seek them not: for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the LORD: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest.

"You want to be successful, Baruch, to make your mark. But in reality, you're seeking it for yourself," the Lord said through Jeremiah.

Why do you do what you do? To be esteemed in the eyes of men? To feel good about yourself? To develop a noteworthy ministry? To win the approval of others? To make a name in history? To get ahead financially? As He did to Baruch, the Lord would say to you, "Don't seek great things for yourself." Anything in your flesh, of your flesh, for your flesh will be destroyed. Therefore, keep your eyes only on things above. Set your heart only on the kingdom (Matthew 6:33).



46 In chapter 1, we read that the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, "Before I formed thee, I knew thee and ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." Jeremiah was to have a prophetic ministry to the nations. Yet thus far in our study, we have seen him ministering exclusively to the Jews. Here, in chapter 46, we see the international ministry of Jeremiah unfolding, for in chapters 46 to 51, a series of prophecies was given addressed to the nations surrounding Judah. Although these prophecies are heavy, in them we see the Lord's concern not only for the people of Judah, but for the surrounding nations, as well.

The first prophecy begins with Egypt. Egypt was the old oppressor and, in the days of Jeremiah, the new deceiver . . .

Jeremiah 46:1, 2
The word of the LORD which came to Jeremiah the prophet against the Gentiles; Against Egypt, against the army of Pharaoh-necho king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates

in Carchemish, which Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon smote in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah.

The first prophecy, against the Egyptians, dealt with a very important historic event. Pharaoh-necho, king of Egypt, led the Egyptians to Carchemish, where he battled the Assyrians, the waning world power. Pharaoh-necho beat the Assyrians, which established Egypt as the top world power. But then he made a blunder. After building his fortification at Carchemish, he pulled out many of his troops and retreated to Egypt, leaving Carchemish vulnerable. Seeing a power vacuum, the Babylonians went to Carchemish and overwhelmed the remaining Egyptians left there to hold the fort. Pharaoh-necho, in turn, engaged the Babylonians at Carchemish—exactly as Jeremiah prophesied. When these two titans clashed, what a battle it was. The Babylonians were victorious and Egyptian power began to weaken at this point.

Jeremiah 46:3–8
Order ye the buckler and shield, and draw near to battle. Harness the horses; and get up, ye horsemen, and stand forth with your helmets; furbish the spears, and put on the brigandines. Wherefore have I seen them dismayed and turned away back? and their mighty ones are beaten down, and are fled apace, and look not back: for fear was round about, saith the LORD. Let not the swift flee away, nor the mighty man escape; they shall stumble, and fall toward the north by the river Euphrates. Who is this that cometh up as a flood, whose waters are moved as the rivers? Egypt riseth up like a flood, and his waters are moved like the rivers; and he saith, I will go up, and will cover the earth; I will destroy the city and the inhabitants thereof.

Pharaoh-necho thought he would be like the Nile that overflows its banks annually. In other words, he thought he would overwhelm the Babylonians.

I believe the Nile analogy has application for us. That is, we think we have something under control, that the temptation is no longer going to bother us, that the sin will no longer affect us. Then, like a river that suddenly begins to overflow, the sins we thought were under control reappear and flood all of

our resolve. This word is a warning to us. Never think you have Egypt under control, that you don't need to depend on the Lord because any given sin is no longer a problem for you. We must be very careful to realize that Egypt will continually, seasonally, annually, constantly come at us and seek to overwhelm us.

Jeremiah 46:9–14
Come up, ye horses; and rage, ye chariots; and let the mighty men come forth; the Ethiopians and the Libyans, that handle the shield; and the Lydians, that handle and bend the bow. For this is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, that he may avenge him of his adversaries: and the sword shall devour, and it shall be satiate and made drunk with their blood: for the Lord GOD of hosts hath a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates. Go up into Gilead, and take balm, O virgin, the daughter of Egypt: in vain shalt thou use many medicines; for thou shalt not be cured. The nations have heard of thy shame, and thy cry hath filled the land: for the mighty man hath stumbled against the mighty, and they are fallen both together. The word that the LORD spake to Jeremiah the prophet, how Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon should come and smite the land of Egypt. Declare ye in Egypt, and publish in Migdol, and publish in Noph and in Tahpanhes: say ye, Stand fast, and prepare thee; for the sword shall devour round about thee.

Three Egyptian cities were singled out specifically to hear the prophecy that the Babylonians were coming. Why these three cities. Migdol, Noph, and Tahpanhes were the three cities to which the Jews fled from Nebuchadnezzar. If the Jews had simply listened to Jeremiah and remained in Judah, they would have been safe. But they thought they could figure it out better than the Lord—and as a result, they were destroyed.

Jeremiah 46:15–17
Why are thy valiant men swept away? they stood not, because the LORD did drive them. He made many to fall, yea, one fell upon another: and they said, Arise, and let us go again to our own

people, and to the land of our nativity, from the oppressing sword. They did cry there, Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise; he hath passed the time appointed.

Who were these soldiers saying, "Let's go home?" They were mercenaries Pharaoh-necho hired from other countries. When they saw the force of the Babylonians, they hit the road. Commitment is always a problem for mercenaries. That's why Jesus identified Himself as different than a mercenary, different than a "hireling." His commitment to His flock is eternal because they are His own (John 10:12–14).

Jeremiah 46:18–25
As I live, saith the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts, Surely as Tabor is among the mountains, and as Carmel by the sea, so shall he come. O thou daughter dwelling in Egypt, furnish thyself to go into captivity: for Noph shall be waste and desolate without an inhabitant. Egypt is like a very fair heifer, but destruction cometh; it cometh out of the north. Also her hired men are in the midst of her like fatted bullocks; for they also are turned back, and are fled away together: they did not stand, because the day of their calamity was come upon them, and the time of their visitation. The voice thereof shall go like a serpent; for they shall march with an army, and come against her with axes, as hewers of wood. They shall cut down her forest, saith the LORD, though it cannot be searched; because they are more than the grasshoppers, and are innumerable. The daughter of Egypt shall be confounded; she shall be delivered into the hand of the people of the north. The LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saith; Behold, I will punish the multitude of No, and Pharaoh, and Egypt, with their gods, and their kings; even Pharaoh, and all them that trust in him:

Egypt was defeated and Pharaoh-necho was killed in this invasion of the Babylonians, just as Jeremiah prophesied.

Jeremiah 46:26–28

And I will deliver them into the hand of those that seek their lives, and into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of his servants: and afterward it shall be inhabited, as in the days of old, saith the LORD. But fear not thou, O my servant Jacob, and be not dismayed, O Israel: for, behold, I will save thee from afar off, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and be in rest and at ease, and none shall make him afraid. Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the LORD: for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure; yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished.

Verses 27 and 28 are a promise and prophecy concerning the Jews. "I'm going to bring you back eventually," the Lord declares. "The nations that have been brutal to you will go through some difficulty and I'm going to punish them very definitely. Yet, although you will not go unpunished, I'm going to bring you back."

This prophecy looks to our day, for we are seeing the Jews regathering and the nation of Israel rebuilding in our own time. But this prophecy will be completely fulfilled only in the midst of the Tribulation, when Israel will see antichrist for what he is—a deceiver and a traitor—and will, at last recognize Jesus as Messiah.



47 Chapter 47 deals with the Philistines, the powerful people in the southern coastal area of Israel . . .

Jeremiah 47:1, 2
The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet against the Philistines, before that Pharaoh smote Gaza. Thus saith the LORD; Behold, waters rise up out of the north, and shall be an overflowing flood, and shall overflow the land, and all that is

therein; the city, and them that dwell therein: then the men shall cry, and all the inhabitants of the land shall howl.

A terrible storm is coming. The Philistines, a perpetual thorn in the flesh to the people of Israel, will cry and howl.

Jeremiah 47:3–5
At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his strong horses, at the rushing of his chariots, and at the rumbling of his wheels, the fathers shall not look back to their children for feebleness of hands; Because of the day that cometh to spoil all the Philistines, and to cut off from Tyrus and Zidon every helper that remaineth: for the LORD will spoil the Philistines, the remnant of the country of Caphtor. Baldness is come upon Gaza; Ashkelon is cut off with the remnant of their valley: how long wilt thou cut thyself?

Hearing the advance of the Babylonians, why did the Philistines cut themselves? When Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, they danced, screamed, and cut themselves hoping to get the attention of their god (1 Kings 18:28). The heathen had the idea that, to get the attention of their god, they had to thrash their bodies, cut themselves, and scream. Somehow, a branch of this mentality can take root in the church. But we don't have to go through all kinds of contortions to get the attention of our Father. My kids don't have to slash their wrists to get my attention. When they were little, all they had to do was pull on my pants leg. Now that they're grown, they simply have to say, "Dad," and I'm all theirs. What makes us think God is any different?

Jeremiah 47:6, 7
O thou sword of the LORD, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still. How can it be quiet, seeing the LORD hath given it a charge against Ashkelon, and against the sea shore? there hath he appointed it.

The sword of the Lord could not rest until judgment was complete. But, for the believer, the sword of God's judgment is already at rest because it

was buried in the side of our Savior as He bore the judgment that should have been ours (John 19:34).



48 Chapter 48 is a prophecy against Moab, which was located in present-day Jordan. Moab was a powerful, prosperous country with an abundance of material blessings and military might. Her pride, however, would be her undoing.

Jeremiah 48:1–3
Against Moab thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Woe unto Nebo! for it is spoiled: Kiriathaim is confounded and taken: Misgab is confounded and dismayed. There shall be no more praise of Moab: in Heshbon they have devised evil against it; come, and let us cut it off from being a nation. Also thou shalt be cut down, O Madmen; the sword shall pursue thee. A voice of crying shall be from Horonaim, spoiling and great destruction.

Nebo, Kiriathaim, and Misgab were cities of Moab. Heshbon was the chief city of Moab.

Jeremiah 48:4–8
Moab is destroyed; her little ones have caused a cry to be heard. For in the going up of Luhith continual weeping shall go up; for in the going down of Horonaim the enemies have heard a cry of destruction. Flee, save your lives, and be like the heath in the wilderness. For because thou hast trusted in thy works and in thy treasures, thou shalt also be taken: and Chemosh shall go forth into captivity with his priests and his princes together. And the spoiler shall come upon every city, and no city shall escape: the valley also shall perish, and the plain shall be destroyed, as the LORD hath spoken.

Chemosh was the God of the Moabites. Neither the Moabites nor their god, however, could stand against the judgment of the only true God.

Jeremiah 48:9–11
Give wings unto Moab, that it may flee and get away: for the cities thereof shall be desolate, without any to dwell therein. Cursed be he that doeth the work of the LORD deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood. Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed.

Moab has settled in the dregs. This is a reference to the exacting process of wine making. Wine was poured from vessel to vessel at just the right time. If left too long, the dregs that settle at the bottom of the vessel would cause the wine to become bitter. So the winemaker poured the wine from vessel to vessel until the less, or dregs, would settle. Moab had never been "poured." She had never experienced trials or difficulties.

Do you know any bitter people? Perhaps the reason they're that way is because, like Moab, they haven't been poured from vessel to vessel. Watch someone who is being poured and you'll see changes take place. Pride leaves. Self-sufficiency fades. The pouring process isn't easy but it's absolutely necessary.



***For topical study of Jeremiah 48:11 entitled "The Pouring Process," turn to page* 573.**

Jeremiah 48:12, 13
Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will send unto him wanderers, that shall cause him to wander, and shall empty his vessels, and break their bottles. And Moab shall be

ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel their confidence.

This speaks of the golden calves Jereboam erected and commanded the people to worship (1 Kings 12:27–29).

Jeremiah 48:14–18
How say ye, We are mighty and strong men for the war? Moab is spoiled, and gone up out of her cities, and his chosen young men are gone down to the slaughter, saith the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts. The calamity of Moab is near to come, and his affliction hasteth fast. All ye that are about him, bemoan him; and all ye that know his name, say, How is the strong staff broken, and the beautiful rod! Thou daughter that dost inhabit Dibon, come down from thy glory, and sit in thirst; for the spoiler of Moab shall come upon thee, and he shall destroy thy strong holds.

Moab's destruction was swift, surprising, and sure.

Jeremiah 48:19–28
O inhabitant of Aroer, stand by the way, and espy; ask him that fleeth, and her that escapeth, and say, What is done? Moab is confounded; for it is broken down: howl and cry; and tell ye it in Arnon, that Moab is spoiled, And judgment is come upon the plain country; upon Holon, and upon Jahazah, and upon Mephaath, And upon Dibon, and upon Nebo, and upon Beth-diblathaim, And upon Kiriathaim, and upon Beth-gamul, and upon Beth-meon, And upon Kerioth, and upon Bozrah, and upon all the cities of the land of Moab, far or near. The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, saith the LORD. Make ye him drunken: for he magnified himself against the LORD: Moab also shall wallow in his vomit, and he also shall be in derision. For was not Israel a derision unto thee? was he found among thieves? for since thou spakest of him, thou skippedst for joy. O ye that dwell in Moab, leave the cities, and dwell in the rock, and be like the dove that maketh her nest in the sides of the hole's mouth.

The Moabite cities are named individually perhaps as an indication that, although God's judgment was swift, it was thorough.

Jeremiah 48:29
We have heard the pride of Moab, (he is exceeding proud) his loftiness, and his arrogancy, and his pride, and the haughtiness of his heart.

Here, the Lord pinpoints Moab's problem. Yes, she was powerful. Yes, she was prosperous. Yes, she had plenty. But above all, she was proud.

How can you tell when pride is beginning to pollute the wine of your walk? You'll always know how you're doing by monitoring your prayer life because pride will always manifest itself in prayerlessness. When you stop praying, when devotions are no longer a priority, when you rely on your personality, intellect, or financial resources to navigate life, you'll know you're proud.

Conversely, when you're broken, when you're being poured from vessel to vessel, suddenly you find yourself on your knees, saying, "What's going on? How am I going to get through this? Lord, I need You." Do you find yourself being poured from vessel to vessel weekly or even daily? Maybe it's due to pride lurking within you. Pride was the problem with Moab. It's a problem for us, as well.

Jeremiah 48:30–32
I know his wrath, saith the LORD; but it shall not be so; his lies shall not so effect it. Therefore will I howl for Moab, and I will cry out for all Moab; mine heart shall mourn for the men of Kir-heres. O vine of Sibmah, I will weep for thee with the weeping of Jazer: thy plants are gone over the sea, they reach even to the sea of Jazer: the spoiler is fallen upon thy summer fruits and upon thy vintage.

Sibmah was a town in Moab, famous for luxurious vines and fruit. That her plants would go over the sea speaks of them being carried away, transplanted in the soil of her enemies.

Jeremiah 40:33
And joy and gladness is taken from the plentiful field, and from the land of Moab; and I have caused wine to fail from the wine-presses: none shall tread with shouting; their shouting shall be no shouting.

The sounds of the celebration at the grape harvest and the making of wine would be heard no more.

Jeremiah 40:34–37
From the cry of Heshbon even unto Elealeh, and even unto Jahaz, have they uttered their voice, from Zoar even unto Horonaim, as an heifer of three years old: for the waters also of Nimrim shall be desolate. Moreover I will cause to cease in Moab, saith the LORD, him that offereth in the high places, and him that burneth incense to his gods. Therefore mine heart shall sound for Moab like pipes, and mine heart shall sound like pipes for the men of Kir-heres: because the riches that he hath gotten are perished. For every head shall be bald, and every beard clipped: upon all the hands shall be cuttings, and upon the loins sackcloth.

Bald heads, clipped beards, and sackcloth were signs of mourning.

Jeremiah 40:38–42
There shall be lamentation generally upon all the housetops of Moab, and in the streets thereof: for I have broken Moab like a vessel wherein is no pleasure, saith the LORD. They shall howl, saying, How is it broken down! how hath Moab turned the back with shame! so shall Moab be a derision and a dismaying to all them about him. For thus saith the LORD; Behold, he shall fly as an eagle, and shall spread his wings over Moab. Kerioth is taken, and the strong holds are surprised, and the mighty men's hearts in Moab at that day shall be as the heart of a woman in her pangs. And Moab shall be destroyed from being a people, because he hath magnified himself against the LORD.

“I don’t need the Lord,” Moab had said. Therefore, because she was proud to the point of destruction, she would no longer exist as a people.

Jeremiah 48:43–47
Fear, and the pit, and the snare, shall be upon thee, O inhabitant of Moab, saith the LORD. He that fleeth from the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that getteth up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare: for I will bring upon it, even upon Moab, the year of their visitation, saith the LORD. They that fled stood under the shadow of Heshbon because of the force: but a fire shall come forth out of Heshbon, and a flame from the midst of Sihon, and shall devour the corner of Moab, and the crown of the head of the tumultuous ones. Woe be unto thee, O Moab! the people of Chemosh perisheth: for thy sons are taken captives, and thy daughters captives. Yet will I bring again the captivity of Moab in the latter days, saith the LORD. Thus far is the judgment of Moab.

After a lengthy discussion of the destruction of Moab, still the Lord ends on a note of hope for the sake of Lot, father of the Moabites, to whom Peter refers as being righteous (2 Peter 2:7).

THE POURING PROCESS

A Topical Study of JEREMIAH 48:11

I would have thought Jesus' first public miracle would be to heal someone physically, or to wake up the nation of Israel spiritually. Instead, He turned water to wine quietly in order that a celebration might continue joyfully.

Perhaps the greatest misconception of God is that He's worried someone somewhere is having a good time. But nothing could be further from the truth . . .

> . . . *for the* joy *of the Lord is your strength.*
>
> Nehemiah 8:10 (b)

> *The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.*
>
> Zephaniah 3:17

> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love,* joy, *peace* . . .
>
> Galatians 5:22 (a)

Seen in this light, it's not surprising that the God of joy would create wine, the symbol of joy, in His first public miracle. After all, He's adept at making wine.

Twenty-six hundred years ago, the country of Moab was in a very similar place to our United States in their power and prosperity. In our text, the Lord sends His prophet Jeremiah to warn them of perilous times ahead. He does this using an analogy which would be very familiar to them: the process whereby grapes would be made into wine.

In the days of Moab, the winemaker would take the juice from crushed grapes and pour it into a large container where it would sit until the lees, or dregs, began to settle to the bottom. At just the right time, the winemaker

would then pour the juice into another vessel, leaving the dregs on the bottom, where it would sit until more of the dregs, or lees, settled on the bottom. Then, at just the right time, he would pour the wine again, leaving the dregs behind. He would repeat this process up to seven times—until there were no more dregs, or lees.

At each juncture, timing was critical—for if he poured the wine from vessel to vessel too quickly, the lees would remain in the juice, rendering it dull and murky instead of clear and sparkling. On the other hand, if he let the wine sit in the vessel too long, the wine would take on the sour taste of the lees.

This is what happened to Moab. And such is what can so easily happen to us.

So what does God do?

The same thing He did to Moab . . .

> I'm settled in and things are going pretty well, when suddenly the Master Winemaker says to me, "It's pouring time, Jon." Perhaps it has happened to you when your girlfriend told you to hit the road; or when your boss told you the company needed to cut back; or when the doctor told you the tumor was malignant.
>
> "What are You doing, Lord?" we cry. "I thought You were the God of *joy*."
>
> "I Am," He says. "And because you're not enjoying prayer like you once did; because you're not delighting in my Word like you used to; because you're not reveling in worship like you did before, you are beginning to take on the sourness of the dregs. Consequently, I am going to pour you from vessel to vessel to remove the dregs and return your joy."

"What right does He have to pour me?" we ask.

The answer: He poured out His life for me. You see, the blood of the Winemaker was shed on the Cross of Calvary—perfectly portrayed in the wine He shared with His disciples when He said, "Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:27, 28).

Once we see this, we will no longer say, "Poor me," when trials come our way—but "Pour me, Lord, pour me."

What happens when things get disturbed in your life, or when they don't work out the way you want? Is your reaction "poor me" or is it "pour me?" Your answer will indicate where you're at in your walk with the Lord. If you're saying, "poor me," you need to be poured. If, on the other hand, you say, "pour me," you are in the process of becoming a clear, sparkling wine for the Lord's pleasure, and for the refreshment of those around you.

But count on this: the Lord will continue the process until it's complete because He "will sell no wine before its time"—and none of us is an exception. The Lord will pour us from vessel to vessel. The only question is, will we fight Him or will we flow with Him?

Having recently returned from Israel, I was amazed once again by the energy which pulsates throughout their country. No doubt this is due to the fact that for the last forty years, they have been continually poured from vessel to vessel. Not so with Moab, and not so with America. So often we pray for ease and prosperity within our country when, in fact, persecution and difficulty are the tools the Lord uses to produce purity. The same holds true for our church corporately, our families individually, our lives personally. May we not drown in the dregs of our own comfort, or languish in the lees of our own complacency.

Master Winemaker, do Your work in me, in our church family, in our country as You produce within us the clear, sparkling wine of Your joy.



49 While the Moabites were to the north, the Ammonites were in the southern area of present-day Jordan.

Jeremiah 49:1–6
Concerning the Ammonites, thus saith the LORD; Hath Israel no sons? hath he no heir? why then doth their king inherit Gad, and his people dwell in his cities? Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will cause an alarm of war to be heard in

Rabbah of the Ammonites; and it shall be a desolate heap, and her daughters shall be burned with fire: then shall Israel be heir unto them that were his heirs, saith the LORD. Howl, O Heshbon, for Ai is spoiled: cry, ye daughters of Rabbah, gird you with sackcloth; lament, and run to and fro by the hedges; for their king shall go into captivity, and his priests and his princes together. Wherefore gloriest thou in the valleys, thy flowing valley, O backsliding daughter? that trusted in her treasures, saying, Who shall come unto me? Behold, I will bring a fear upon thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts, from all those that be about thee; and ye shall be driven out every man right forth; and none shall gather up him that wandereth. And afterward I will bring again the captivity of the children of Ammon, saith the LORD.

The Ammonites are indicted for invading territory belonging to the tribe of Gad (Zephaniah 2:8). Also descendants of Lot, like Moab, Ammon would eventually be the recipients of God's mercy.

Jeremiah 49:7–13
Concerning Edom, thus saith the LORD of hosts; Is wisdom no more in Teman? is counsel perished from the prudent? is their wisdom vanished? Flee ye, turn back, dwell deep, O inhabitants of Dedan; for I will bring the calamity of Esau upon him, the time that I will visit him. If grapegatherers come to thee, would they not leave some gleaning grapes? if thieves by night, they will destroy till they have enough. But I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places, and he shall not be able to hide himself: his seed is spoiled, and his brethren, and his neighbours, and he is not. Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me. For thus saith the LORD; Behold, they whose judgment was not to drink of the cup have assuredly drunken; and art thou he that shall altogether go unpunished? thou shalt not go unpunished, but thou shalt surely drink of it. For I have sworn by myself, saith the LORD, that Bozrah shall become a desolation, a reproach, a waste, and a curse; and all the cities thereof shall be perpetual wastes.

The Edomites also lived in the area of present-day Jordan. Descendants of Esau, they lived in cliffs and thus thought they were immune from invasion (Obadiah 3, 4, 8). But the Lord knew otherwise.

Bozrah is known as Petra today. It's a massive city carved out of the side of a massive rock cliff, a city that some estimate could hold tens of thousands. Although it's empty today, Revelation 12 seems to indicate that Petra will be the place in the wilderness to which the Lord takes His people once they make a stand against antichrist.

Jeremiah 49:14–22

I have heard a rumour from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent unto the heathen, saying, Gather ye together, and come against her, and rise up to the battle. For, lo, I will make thee small among the heathen, and despised among men. Thy terribleness hath deceived thee, and the pride of thine heart, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, that holdest the height of the hill: though thou shouldest make thy nest as high as the eagle, I will bring thee down from thence, saith the LORD. Also Edom shall be a desolation: every one that goeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss at all the plagues thereof. As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbour cities thereof, saith the LORD, no man shall abide there, neither shall a son of man dwell in it. Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the swelling of Jordan against the habitation of the strong: but I will suddenly make him run away from her: and who is a chosen man, that I may appoint over her? for who is like me? and who will appoint me the time? and who is that shepherd that will stand before me? Therefore hear the counsel of the LORD, that he hath taken against Edom; and his purposes, that he hath purposed against the inhabitants of Teman: Surely the least of the flock shall draw them out: surely he shall make their habitations desolate with them. The earth is moved at the noise of their fall, at the cry the noise thereof was heard in the Red sea. Behold, he shall come up and fly as the eagle, and spread his wings over Bozrah: and at that day shall the

heart of the mighty men of Edom be as the heart of a woman in her pangs.

It would seem as though a plague swept through Petra and weakened the population before the people eventually fell to Nebuchadnezzar. Those who see Petra today do exactly what Jeremiah prophesied. "Whew," they say. "What happened here?"

Jeremiah 49:23–27
Concerning Damascus. Hamath is confounded, and Arpad: for they have heard evil tidings: they are fainthearted; there is sorrow on the sea; it cannot be quiet. Damascus is waxed feeble, and turneth herself to flee, and fear hath seized on her: anguish and sorrows have taken her, as a woman in travail. How is the city of praise not left, the city of my joy! Therefore her young men shall fall in her streets, and all the men of war shall be cut off in that day, saith the LORD of hosts. And I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus, and it shall consume the palaces of Ben-hadad.

The oldest city in the world is Damascus, the capital city of Syria. This city, once praised for its beauty would, like Jerusalem, fall to the Babylonians and then be burned.

Jeremiah 49:28–33
Concerning Kedar, and concerning the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon shall smite, thus saith the LORD; Arise ye, go up to Kedar, and spoil the men of the east. Their tents and their flocks shall they take away: they shall take to them selves their curtains, and all their vessels, and their camels; and they shall cry unto them, Fear is on every side. Flee, get you far off, dwell deep, O ye inhabitants of Hazor, saith the LORD; for Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon hath taken counsel against you, and hath conceived a purpose against you. Arise, get you up unto the wealthy nation, that dwelleth without care, saith the LORD, which have neither gates nor bars, which dwell alone. And their camels shall be a booty, and the multitude of their cattle a

spoil: and I will scatter into all winds them that are in the utmost corners; and I will bring their calamity from all sides thereof, saith the LORD. And Hazor shall be a dwelling for dragons, and a desolation for ever: there shall no man abide there, nor any son of man dwell in it.

Kedar is present-day Saudi Arabia. The inhabitants were shepherds who lived in tents rather than in fortified cities. Although they lacked the usual treasure, Nebuchadnezzar would rob them of their camels and cattle.

Jeremiah 49:34–39
The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet against Elam in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will break the bow of Elam, the chief of their might. And upon Elam will I bring the four winds from the four quarters of heaven, and will scatter them toward all those winds; and there shall be no nation whither the outcasts of Elam shall not come. For I will cause Elam to be dismayed before their enemies, and before them that seek their life: and I will bring evil upon them, even my fierce anger, saith the LORD; and I will send the sword after them, till I have consumed them: And I will set my throne in Elam, and will destroy from thence the king and the princes, saith the LORD. But it shall come to pass in the latter days, that I will bring again the captivity of Elam, saith the LORD.

Elam is present-day Iran. The Elamites were known as superior archers. Here, the Lord said He would break their bow. That's often the way of the Lord, even with us. That in which we're most secure, that about which we're most confident about is often that which the Lord takes away. It's not because He's capricious or spiteful, but because He realizes that if we're depending on our own strength or ability, we'll be limited in what we can accomplish because no matter how strong we are at any given point, our strength is limited.

God's principle is always brokenness. It's when we're weak that He can show Himself strong (2 Corinthians 12:10). His strength is infinitely greater

than our strength. Therefore, if we're trusting in our bow—be it occupationally, financially, relationally—it's our bow He'll take away. When your bow gets taken away, gang, it's not by an angry God who says, "I want to destroy you," but a loving Father who says, "I see that your bow is giving you a limited, false security and I love you too much for that."



50 Chapter 50 deals with Babylon, present-day Iraq. From Jeremiah 51:59, we know that this prophecy of Jeremiah against Babylon was sent with the first wave of Jews taken captive to Babylon. As God instructed, it was read publicly and then sunk in the Euphrates as an illustration that Babylon, too, would sink in defeat in 539 B.C. at the hand of Cyrus, commander of the Medes and Persians.

Jeremiah 50:1–4
The word that the LORD spake against Babylon and against the land of the Chaldeans by Jeremiah the prophet. Declare ye among the nations, and publish, and set up a standard; publish, and conceal not: say, Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces; her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces. For out of the north there cometh up a nation against her, which shall make her land desolate, and none shall dwell therein: they shall remove, they shall depart, both man and beast. In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the LORD their God.

As the Medes and Persians rose up against Babylon, perhaps it was seeing Jeremiah's prophecy fulfilled that caused the Jews to seek the Lord in brokenness and humility.

Jeremiah 50:5

They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.

If the perpetual covenant spoke of an abhorrence of idolatry, it would be perpetual indeed, for to this day, the Jews never practiced idolatry once they left Babylon.

Jeremiah 50:6–9
My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their restingplace. All that found them have devoured them: and their adversaries said, We offend not, because they have sinned against the LORD, the habitation of justice, even the LORD, the hope of their fathers. Remove out of the midst of Babylon, and go forth out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be as the he goats before the flocks. For, lo, I will raise and cause to come up against Babylon an assembly of great nations from the north country: and they shall set themselves in array against her; from thence she shall be taken: their arrows shall be as of a mighty expert man; none shall return in vain.

The assembly against Babylon consisted primarily of Medes and Persians.

Jeremiah 50:10, 11
And Chaldea shall be a spoil: all that spoil her shall be satisfied, saith the LORD. Because ye were glad, because ye rejoiced, O ye destroyers of mine heritage, because ye are grown fat as the heifer at grass, and bellow as bulls;

Here, we see the reason for God's judgment against Babylon. Yes, He used her as a sword in the His hand to chasten His people and draw them back to Him, but rather than mete out judgment humbly and sorrowfully, Babylon did so gladly.

Jeremiah 50:12–18

Your mother shall be sore confounded; she that bare you shall be ashamed: behold, the hindermost of the nations shall be a wilderness, a dry land, and a desert. Because of the wrath of the LORD it shall not be inhabited, but it shall be wholly desolate: every one that goeth by Babylon shall be astonished, and hiss at all her plagues. Put yourselves in array against Babylon round about: all ye that bend the bow, shoot at her, spare no arrows: for she hath sinned against the LORD. Shout against her round about: she hath given her hand: her foundations are fallen, her walls are thrown down: for it is the vengeance of the LORD: take vengeance upon her; as she hath done, do unto her. Cut off the sower from Babylon, and him that handleth the sickle in the time of harvest: for fear of the oppressing sword they shall turn every one to his people, and they shall flee every one to his own land. Israel is a scattered sheep; the lions have driven him away: first the king of Assyria hath devoured him; and last this Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon hath broken his bones. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria.

Just as Assyria was delivered into the hand of the Babylonians (Ezekiel 31:3, 11, 12), so the Babylonians would be delivered into the hand of the Medes and Persians.

Jeremiah 50:19, 20

And I will bring Israel again to his habitation, and he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan, and his soul shall be satisfied upon mount Ephraim and Gilead. In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve.

Even after they ignored His warnings, imprisoned His prophets, and missed His illustrations; even after they sinned willfully, knowingly, and

arrogantly, God said that, because they had been chastened and had turned back to Him, no sign of the sin of His people would remain.

We have been given the same incredible promise because, if we confess our sin, the blood of Jesus cleanses the sins we have already committed, are committing, and will commit (1 John 1:9). The forgiveness of God is truly overwhelming. If you read Jeremiah and only see judgment, you're missing the most astounding part of his message—God's incredible, unspeakable mercy.

Jeremiah 50:21–24
Go up against the land of Merathaim, even against it, and against the inhabitants of Pekod: waste and utterly destroy after them, saith the LORD, and do according to all that I have commanded thee. A sound of battle is in the land, and of great destruction. How is the hammer of the whole earth cut asunder and broken! how is Babylon become a desolation among the nations! I have laid a snare for thee, and thou art also taken, O Babylon, and thou wast not aware: thou art found, and also caught, because thou hast striven against the LORD.

Not only had Babylon "hammered" other nations, but she had arrogantly opposed the Lord.

Jeremiah 50:25
The LORD hath opened his armoury, and hath brought forth the weapons of his indignation: for this is the work of the Lord GOD of hosts in the land of the Chaldeans.

The armory of the Lord was in the hands of the Medes and Persians.

Jeremiah 50:26, 27
Come against her from the utmost border, open her storehouses: cast her up as heaps, and destroy her utterly: let nothing of her be left. Slay all her bullocks; let them go down to the slaughter: woe unto them! for their day is come, the time of their visitation.

A call to arms is issued to the Medes and Persians—along with instructions of what they were to do. They were to open Babylon's storehouses and slay her leaders like beasts.

Jeremiah 50:28
The voice of them that flee and escape out of the land of Babylon, to declare in Zion the vengeance of the LORD our God, the vengeance of his temple.

Not only had Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple, but he carried the vessels to Babylon, where they were profaned (Daniel 5:3).

Jeremiah 50:29–32
Call together the archers against Babylon: all ye that bend the bow, camp against it round about; let none thereof escape: recompense her according to her work; according to all that she hath done, do unto her: for she hath been proud against the LORD, against the Holy One of Israel. Therefore shall her young men fall in the streets, and all her men of war shall be cut off in that day, saith the LORD. Behold, I am against thee, O thou most proud, saith the Lord GOD of hosts: for thy day is come, the time that I will visit thee. And the most proud shall stumble and fall, and none shall raise him up: and I will kindle a fire in his cities, and it shall devour all round about him.

If Moab had been judged for her pride, how much more would Babylon, to whom God refers as "thou most proud."

Jeremiah 50:33–37
Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The children of Israel and the children of Judah were oppressed together: and all that took them captives held them fast; they refused to let them go. Their Redeemer is strong; the LORD of hosts is his name: he shall throughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon. A sword is upon the Chaldeans, saith the LORD, and upon the inhabitants of Babylon,

and upon her princes, and upon her wise men. A sword is upon the liars; and they shall dote: a sword is upon her mighty men; and they shall be dismayed. A sword is upon their horses, and upon their chariots, and upon all the mingled people that are in the midst of her; and they shall become as women: a sword is upon her treasures; and they shall be robbed.

Although they failed to realize it, the Babylonians were nothing more than a sword in the hand of the Almighty. All their power came only from Him.

Jeremiah 50:38
A drought is upon her waters; and they shall be dried up: for it is the land of graven images, and they are mad upon their idols.

The waters of Babylon were indeed dried up when Cyrus re-channeled the Euphrates, allowing his army to enter the city.

Jeremiah 50:39, 40
Therefore the wild beasts of the desert with the wild beasts of the islands shall dwell there, and the owls shall dwell therein: and it shall be no more inhabited for ever; neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation. As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbour cities thereof, saith the LORD; so shall no man abide there, neither shall any son of man dwell therein.

If you go to the site of old Babylon, all you will see is an uninhabited place—exactly as prophesied.

Jeremiah 50:41–43
Behold, a people shall come from the north, and a great nation, and many kings shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth. They shall hold the bow and the lance: they are cruel, and will not shew mercy: their voice shall roar like the sea, and they shall ride upon horses, every one put in array, like a man to the battle, against thee, O daughter of Babylon. The king of Babylon hath

heard the report of them, and his hands waxed feeble: anguish took hold of him, and pangs as of a woman in travail.

Babylon would experience confusion and anguish at the time of her invasion.

Jeremiah 50:44–46
Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the swelling of Jordan unto the habitation of the strong: but I will make them suddenly run away from her: and who is a chosen man, that I may appoint over her? for who is like me? and who will appoint me the time? and who is that shepherd that will stand before me? Therefore hear ye the counsel of the LORD, that he hath taken against Babylon; and his purposes, that he hath purposed against the land of the Chaldeans: Surely the least of the flock shall draw them out: surely he shall make their habitation desolate with them. At the noise of the taking of Babylon the earth is moved, and the cry is heard among the nations.

The description of Babylon's conquest of Judah (6:22–24), is repeated here almost verbatim as a description of her own defeat.



51 Chapter 51 goes on to talk about the destruction of Babylon and it goes into detail about the judgment that would come upon this powerful city. Although Babylon was the sword the Lord used to punish the Jews, the Lord indicts the Babylonians for their pride. The lesson for us is an important one. "If any of you be overtaken in a fault, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, in a spirit of brokenness and tenderness, realizing that you could fall into an even greater difficulty," Paul would write to the Galatians (6:1). If the Lord uses you to correct someone else, make sure you do so in the spirit of meekness.

Jeremiah 51:1, 2

Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will raise up against Babylon, and against them that dwell in the midst of them that rise up against me, a destroying wind; And will send unto Babylon fanners, that shall fan her, and shall empty her land: for in the day of trouble they shall be against her round about.

Jeremiah had prophesied that the Babylonians would be fanners—those who separated the wheat from the chaff—to separate God's people (15:7). Here, they are on the receiving end of that process.

Jeremiah 51:3–5
Against him that bendeth let the archer bend his bow, and against him that lifteth himself up in his brigandine: and spare ye not her young men; destroy ye utterly all her host. Thus the slain shall fall in the land of the Chaldeans, and they that are thrust through in her streets. For Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of the LORD of hosts; though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.

Even though they were chastened severely, God never forsook His people.

Jeremiah 51:6
Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of the LORD's vengeance; he will render unto her a recompence.

God's people are told to flee Babylon once God's judgment began.

Jeremiah 51:7, 8
Babylon hath been a golden cup in the LORD's hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad. Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed: howl for her; take balm for her pain, if so she may be healed.

Although Babylon was once used by God to pour out His judgment, now she herself would experience destruction.

Jeremiah 51:9, 10
We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go every one into his own country: for her judgment reacheth unto heaven, and is lifted up even to the skies. The LORD hath brought forth our righteousness: come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God.

Once freed from the grip of idolatry, the Jewish captives themselves may have attempted to convince Babylon to turn to the Lord, but could not (Jeremiah 10:10).

Jeremiah 51:11–13
Make bright the arrows; gather the shields: the LORD hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes: for his device is against Babylon, to destroy it; because it is the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance of his temple. Set up the standard upon the walls of Babylon, make the watch strong, set up the watchmen, prepare the ambushes: for the LORD hath both devised and done that which he spake against the inhabitants of Babylon. O thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures, thine end is come, and the measure of thy covetousness.

Surrounded by the Euphrates river, Babylon thought herself secure. Yet history tells us it would be these very waters that would enable Cyrus and his invading army to gain access.

Jeremiah 51:14–19
The LORD of hosts hath sworn by himself, saying, Surely I will fill thee with men, as with caterpillers; and they shall lift up a shout against thee. He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heaven by his understanding. When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens; and he causeth the vapours

to ascend from the ends of the earth: he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures. Every man is brutish by his knowledge; every founder is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are vanity, the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish. The portion of Jacob is not like them; for he is the former of all things: and Israel is the rod of his inheritance: the LORD of hosts is his name.

Again, as He did when prophesying to Israel (10:10–16) God calls upon creation as proof of His power.

Jeremiah 51:20–24
Thou art my battle axe and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms; And with thee will I break in pieces the horse and his rider; and with thee will I break in pieces the chariot and his rider; With thee also will I break in pieces man and woman; and with thee will I break in pieces old and young; and with thee will I break in pieces the young man and the maid; I will also break in pieces with thee the shepherd and his flock; and with thee will I break in pieces the husbandman and his yoke of oxen; and with thee will I break in pieces captains and rulers. And I will render unto Babylon and to all the inhabitants of Chaldea all their evil that they have done in Zion in your sight, saith the LORD.

Babylon had been used as a battle ax in God's hand. Now, however, rather than dealing the blows, she would receive them.

Jeremiah 51:25–28
Behold, I am against thee, O destroying mountain, saith the LORD, which destroyest all the earth: and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a burnt mountain. And they shall not take of thee a stone for a corner, nor a stone for foundations; but thou shalt be desolate for ever, saith the LORD. Set ye up a standard in the land, blow

the trumpet among the nations, prepare the nations against her, call together against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashchenaz; appoint a captain against her; cause the horses to come up as the rough caterpillers. Prepare against her the nations with the kings of the Medes, the captains thereof, and all the rulers thereof, and all the land of his dominion.

Here, God instructs to raise his army in preparation of the invasion of Babylon.

> And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:
>
> Daniel 2:21

God is in control of the political climate as much as He is in control of the natural elements. For the believer, this brings incredible comfort even in the most confusing times.

Jeremiah 51:29–32
And the land shall tremble and sorrow: for every purpose of the LORD shall be performed against Babylon, to make the land of Babylon a desolation without an inhabitant. The mighty men of Babylon have forborn to fight, they have remained in their holds: their might hath failed; they became as women: they have burned her dwellingplaces; her bars are broken. One post shall run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to shew the king of Babylon that his city is taken at one end, And that the passages are stopped, and the reeds they have burned with fire, and the men of war are affrighted.

The once-mighty men of Babylon lost the will to fight once they discovered the Medes and Persians within the city walls.

Jeremiah 51:33–36

For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; The daughter of Babylon is like a threshingfloor, it is time to thresh her: yet a little while, and the time of her harvest shall come. Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon hath devoured me, he hath crushed me, he hath made me an empty vessel, he hath swallowed me up like a dragon, he hath filled his belly with my delicates, he hath cast me out. The violence done to me and to my flesh be upon Babylon, shall the inhabitant of Zion say; and my blood upon the inhabitants of Chaldea, shall Jerusalem say. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will plead thy cause, and take vengeance for thee; and I will dry up her sea, and make her springs dry.

It was because Nebuchadnezzar dealt with Israel so cruelly and harshly that the Lord enabled Cyrus to re-channel the Euphrates and thus enter Babylon's otherwise impregnable city walls.

Jeremiah 51:37–40
And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwellingplace for dragons, an astonishment, and an hissing, without an inhabitant. They shall roar together like lions: they shall yell as lion's whelps. In their heat I will make their feasts, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the LORD. I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams with he goats.

The very night Cyrus entered the city, under the direction of Belshazzar, the Babylonian nobles were feasting in honor of their idols, drinking from the vessels they had taken when they burned the temple in Jerusalem (Daniel 5:1–3).

Jeremiah 51:41, 42
How is Sheshach taken! and how is the praise of the whole earth surprised! how is Babylon become an astonishment among the nations! The sea is come up upon Babylon: she is covered with the multitude of the waves thereof.

The sea and multitude of waves refer to the enemy troops within the once-beautiful city.

Jeremiah 5:43, 44
Her cities are a desolation, a dry land, and a wilderness, a land wherein no man dwelleth, neither doth any son of man pass thereby. And I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up: and the nations shall not flow together any more unto him: yea, the wall of Babylon shall fall.

Bel was Babylon's chief deity. The reference here is to the sacrifices offered to him.

Jeremiah 51:45
My people, go ye out of the midst of her, and deliver ye every man his soul from the fierce anger of the LORD.

This was a warning to the Jews living in Babylon to leave the city before destruction fell.

Jeremiah 51:46–51
And lest your heart faint, and ye fear for the rumour that shall be heard in the land; a rumour shall both come one year, and after that in another year shall come a rumour, and violence in the land, ruler against ruler. Therefore, behold, the days come, that I will do judgment upon the graven images of Babylon: and her whole land shall be confounded, and all her slain shall fall in the midst of her. Then the heaven and the earth, and all that is therein, shall sing for Babylon: for the spoilers shall come unto her from the north, saith the LORD. As Babylon hath caused the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon shall fall the slain of all the earth. Ye that have escaped the sword, go away, stand not still: remember the LORD afar off, and let Jerusalem come into your mind. We are confounded, because we have heard reproach: shame hath

covered our faces: for strangers are come into the sanctuaries of the LORD's house.

As the Jewish exiles headed back to Jerusalem following the destruction of Babylon, they dreaded seeing the destruction of their own temple.

Jeremiah 51:52–55
Wherefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will do judgment upon her graven images: and through all her land the wounded shall groan. Though Babylon should mount up to heaven, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, yet from me shall spoilers come unto her, saith the LORD. A sound of a cry cometh from Babylon, and great destruction from the land of the Chaldeans: Because the LORD hath spoiled Babylon, and destroyed out of her the great voice; when her waves do roar like great waters, a noise of their voice is uttered:

Babylon's massive walls were able to keep out every enemy but the Lord. At the point He determined Babylon needed to be judged, her walls became useless. Cyrus could have been instructed to march around them, blow a trumpet and watch them fall, as did Joshua. Or God could have sent an earthquake to jar the gates open as He did for Paul and Silas in prison. Instead, Cyrus re-channeled the Euphrates and simply walked under them. Whatever the method, the Master behind it was the Lord.

Jeremiah 51:56–58
Because the spoiler is come upon her, even upon Babylon, and her mighty men are taken, every one of their bows is broken: for the LORD God of recompences shall surely requite. And I will make drunk her princes, and her wise men, her captains, and her rulers, and her mighty men: and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire; and the people shall labour in vain, and the folk in the fire, and they shall be weary.

According to historical accounts, it took 200,000 men one year to build Babylon's massive walls. But this great outpouring of labor proved to be in vain.

Jeremiah 51:59–64
The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah into Babylon in the fourth year of his reign. And this Seraiah was a quiet prince. So Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that should come upon Babylon, even all these words that are written against Babylon. And Jeremiah said to Seraiah, When thou comest to Babylon, and shalt see, and shalt read all these words; Then shalt thou say, O LORD, thou hast spoken against this place, to cut it off, that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but that it shall be desolate for ever. And it shall be, when thou hast made an end of reading this book, that thou shalt bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of Euphrates: And thou shalt say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her: and they shall be weary. Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah wrote this prophecy concerning Babylon in a book and set it with a Jewish leader named Seraiah who had been taken captive with Zedekiah. He was to read it to remind the captives that, although Babylon would appear to them to be impregnable, it was no match for the power of their God. Then he was to tie a rock to it and throw it in the Euphrates as a symbol of how low Babylon would fall.

So too, the Word we hold in our hands should be a constant reminder that, like Babylon, the things of this world are all destined for destruction. And it should be a reminder that we, like the Jews, are only pilgrims here.



52 It has been suggested that Ezra wrote this last chapter as a historical footnote to Jeremiah's prophecy. Chapter 52 describes the destruction

of Jerusalem and chronicles the terrible devastation, ending with one ray of hope in the last four verses concerning salvation even in the time of great desolation.

Jeremiah 52:1–3
Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. And he did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, till he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

The Lord's anger with His people and their need for chastening led Him to allow Zedekiah to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, thus fulfilling His purpose without compromising Zedekiah's natural inclination.

Jeremiah 52:4–6
And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it, and built forts against it round about. So the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. And in the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month, the famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land.

Jerusalem was besieged by Babylon for one and one-half years.

Jeremiah 52:7–11
Then the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled, and went forth out of the city by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king's garden; (now the Chaldeans were by the city round about:) and they went by the way of the plain. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his

army was scattered from him. Then they took the king, and carried him up unto the king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; where he gave judgment upon him. And the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes: he slew also all the princes of Judah in Riblah. Then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.

As seen in chapter 39, the terrible fate of Zedekiah is recounted.

Jeremiah 52:12–16
Now in the fifth month, in the tenth day of the month, which was the nineteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzar-adan, captain of the guard, which served the king of Babylon, into Jerusalem, And burned the house of the LORD, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, and all the houses of the great men, burned he with fire: And all the army of the Chaldeans, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down all the walls of Jerusalem round about. Then Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carried away captive certain of the poor of the people, and the residue of the people that remained in the city, and those that fell away, that fell to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the multitude. But Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard left certain of the poor of the land for vinedressers and for husbandmen.

The walls of the city were destroyed, the temple that had stood for over four hundred years, was burned, and the people were carried away captive.

Jeremiah 52:17–23
Also the pillars of brass that were in the house of the LORD, and the bases, and the brasen sea that was in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans brake, and carried all the brass of them to Babylon. The caldrons also, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the bowls, and the spoons, and all the vessels of brass wherewith

they ministered, took they away. And the basons, and the firepans, and the bowls, and the caldrons, and the candlesticks, and the spoons, and the cups; that which was of gold in gold, and that which was of silver in silver, took the captain of the guard away. The two pillars, one sea, and twelve brasen bulls that were under the bases, which king Solomon had made in the house of the LORD: the brass of all these vessels was without weight. And concerning the pillars, the height of one pillar was eighteen cubits; and a fillet of twelve cubits did compass it; and the thickness thereof was four fingers: it was hollow. And a chapiter of brass was upon it; and the height of one chapiter was five cubits, with network and pomegranates upon the chapiters round about, all of brass. The second pillar also and the pomegranates were like unto these. And there were ninety and six pomegranates on a side; and all the pomegranates upon the network were an hundred round about.

The temple vessels carried to Babylon are here recorded.

Jeremiah 52:24–30
And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the door: He took also out of the city an eunuch, which had the charge of the men of war; and seven men of them that were near the king's person, which were found in the city; and the principal scribe of the host, who mustered the people of the land; and threescore men of the people of the land, that were found in the midst of the city. So Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard took them, and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah. And the king of Babylon smote them, and put them to death in Riblah in the land of Hamath. Thus Judah was carried away captive out of his own land. This is the people whom Nebuchadrezzar carried away captive: in the seventh year three thousand Jews and three and twenty: In the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar he carried away captive from Jerusalem eight hundred thirty and two persons: In the three and twentieth year of Nebuchadrezzar

Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carried away captive of the Jews seven hundred forty and five persons: all the persons were four thousand and six hundred.

The three waves of captivity occurred in 597, 587, and 581 B.C.

Jeremiah 52:31–34
And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, in the five and twentieth day of the month, that Evil-merodach king of Babylon in the first year of his reign lifted up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah, and brought him forth out of prison, And spake kindly unto him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon, And changed his prison garments: and he did continually eat bread before him all the days of his life. And for his diet, there was a continual diet given him of the king of Babylon, every day a portion until the day of his death, all the days of his life.

After thirty-seven years in prison, Jehoiachin, former king of Judah, was released by Evil-merodach, king of Babylon. And in this short account, we see a glorious picture of hope and redemption . . .

THE BALLAD OF JEHOIACHIN

A Topical Study of JEREMIAH 52:31–34

For thirty years, Jeremiah preached and proclaimed the necessity of turning back to God. But the people did not listen. So it came to pass that, even as Jeremiah prophesied, the Babylonians began to move south toward Jerusalem. In the year 587 B.C., the Babylonians besieged the city of Jerusalem. The walls were then destroyed; the houses torn down, the temple burned.

Jeremiah's book would have closed with that scene—except there is one story added, one additional picture painted. It deals with Jehoiachin, a king of Judah, who had been captured by Nebuchadnezzar and taken into captivity eleven years before Jerusalem was destroyed. The cause for his captivity was that he had been making ominous threats against the Babylonians. He wasn't submitted to them or in fear of them. So Nebuchadnezzar brought Jehoiachin back to Babylon, where he ordered him thrown into prison.

At this point, we are introduced to a man named Evil-merodach. And, although his name initially sounds foreboding, it literally means "servant of son of God" and he is in fact, a wonderful picture of the true and living Son of God. Notice with me six actions He took on behalf of Jehoiachin that our Greater than Evil-merodach, Jesus Christ, takes on our behalf . . .

First, *Evil-merodach lifted Jehoiachin's head compassionately.* A single crust of bread would be thrown down to Jehoiachin and his fellow prisoners. They would be kept in virtual darkness. Twenty-six years after Jerusalem had fallen, thirty-seven years after he had been thrown into prison, a man named Evil-merodach came to the throne in Babylon. In his first year on the throne, Evil-merodach called for Jehoiachin and lifted up his head. In other words, he encouraged and blessed Jehoiachin.

Why did Evil-merodach do this? There have been a couple of suggestions made. Some say Evil-merodach had himself spent time in prison and, therefore, felt compassion for Jehoiachin. Others suggest he was actually converted to faith in the God of Israel by Daniel. Carried to Babylon in the first wave of captives, Daniel rose to a position of power and prominence

there. Thus, it is possible he could have led Evil-merodach to a knowledge of God.

Whatever the reason Evil-merodach lifted up the head of Jehoiachin, we know that it was to save us that the Son of God came to us in our dungeon of sin and lifted our heads.

Second, *Evil-merodach brought Jehoiachin forth freely.* Jehoiachin was released from prison. Again, this speaks of Jesus, for in the first message He ever preached publicly, He turned to Isaiah and read . . .

> *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;*
>
> Isaiah 61:1

Jesus Christ came to set the captives free, to take us out of prison. Sometimes people think Christians are restricted. In reality, however, we're the freest people on earth because we're free to live life the way it was meant to be lived. We're free to enjoy a day without relying on any other person or substance to see us through. We're free to enjoy the abundance God intended for us all along.

Third, *Evil-merodach spoke kindly.* Certainly, the same can be said of Jesus, for Mark tells us the common people heard Him gladly (12:37). People flocked around Him, marveling at the gracious words He spoke (Luke 4:22). The only rough words Jesus had were for the religious people who felt they didn't need a Savior. But to the people who knew their needs and vulnerabilities, their weaknesses and problems, who knew they were sinners, Jesus spoke kindly (John 8:11). He would say to the woman caught in adultery, "Go your way I don't condemn you. Sin no more. I'm freeing you to a new way of living. I don't condemn you. I free you."

Fourth, *Evil-merodach elevated Jehoiachin graciously.* In other words, he restored Jehoiachin to a place of prominence. You might be a schoolteacher, a carpenter, a lawyer, a mechanic—but above all, you are an ambassador of Christ both presently and eternally (2 Corinthians 5:20). Presently, we are to represent Jesus to a world that doesn't know Him.

Eternally, we will rule and reign with Him. Thus, we are people of tremendous destiny.

Fifth, *Evil-merodach gave Jehoiachin new garments mercifully.* Rather than calling attention to Jehoiachin's tattered clothes, Evil-merodach gave him new ones. Jesus does the same for you and me . . .

> *I will greatly rejoice in the* LORD*, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.*
>
> Isaiah 61:10

Jesus robes our dustiness and earthiness in His righteousness.

Finally, *Evil-merodach gave Jehoiachin bread continually.* A feast was set before Jehoiachin as the Lord prepares a table—or feast—before us even in the presence of our enemies (Psalm 23:5). This means I can get up in the morning, grab my Bible, and feast on the Lord as I see the sunrise. I can share with Him the burdens of my heart and feel peace within. I can confess my sins and know I'm forgiven. I can listen to His voice concerning the things He would have me do. A feast is set before me daily if I'll just sit down and take advantage of it.

In addition, a feast is set before me at His Table. "Do this in remembrance of Me," Jesus said (see Luke 22:19). We can come constantly to His Table and be "born again again." That is, as we eat of His body and drink of His blood, we are spiritually revived.

Jeremiah had severe and strong messages for people who were apostate and rebellious. But in the last verses of the last chapter of the book that bears his name, we see a ray of hope in Jehoiachin. God took him from the dungeon to the palace. Therefore, if you are Jehoiachin—if you have been rebellious against God, He, in His wonderful mercy and graciousness, will lift up your head, open the prison door, change your prison garments, feed you, and use you if you turn to Him. If you have a friend who doesn't know the Lord yet, don't give up hope. The hard times she is going through, the dungeon in

which he may find himself presently might be necessary for them to finally acknowledge their need of God.

This little vignette gives me great hope today—for myself and for my friends, neighbors, and family. There is a Greater than Evil-merodach, for Jesus Christ has truly come to set us free.



LAMENTATIONS

Background to Lamentations

In the last section of the Book of Jeremiah, we see one of the most devastating, darkest days in the history of the Hebrew people as the city of Jerusalem was invaded and destroyed by the armies of Babylon. Not only was Jerusalem the capital city of Judah, but, more importantly, it was special in the sight of Jehovah . . .

> *His foundation is in the holy mountains. The* LORD *loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah. I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her. The* LORD *shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there. Selah. As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there: all my springs are in thee.*
>
> Psalm 87

For forty years, Jeremiah had prophesied to the people of Jerusalem, warning them of destruction if they continued to refuse to turn to God. But for forty years, there had not been a single convert, not even a hint of receptivity. Yet, rather than thinking they were getting what they deserved, as Jeremiah watches the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah weeps.

The Book of Lamentations is just that—a record of Jeremiah's weeping. There are five chapters in Lamentations and each one is its own poem.

- Chapter 1 deals with the provocation against God.
- Chapter 2 deals with the punishment from God.
- Chapter 3 deals with the prophet and God.
- Chapter 4 deals with the people of God.
- Chapter 5 deals with prayer to God.

Chapters 1, 2, and 4 each have twenty-two verses because there are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet and each of the verses begins with one of those Hebrew letters. Chapter 3 has sixty-six verses because, for each three verses, one letter of the alphabet is used. Chapter 5 also has twenty-two verses, but, by the time he gets there, evidently Jeremiah is so emotional that, rather than following any form, the poetry becomes simply an expression of his heart.



LAMENTATIONS

1 **Lamentations 1:1–4**
How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary! She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies. Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits. The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate: her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness.

For forty years, Jeremiah called to Jerusalem, warning her to repent. But she continued in her rebellion—and now she is afflicted. "Be not deceived," Paul would write. "God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, he reaps" (see Galatians 6:7). If we sin, we are guaranteed to experience sorrow. A loving Father tells us over and over in His Word to stay away from sin because He knows sin always brings sadness. Yes, there is pleasure in sin for a season (Hebrews 11:25)—but the end result is always death (Romans 6:23).

With poetic yet powerful language, Jeremiah describes Jerusalem's situation. The city is desolate. Her religious celebrations no longer exist. Her priests are silent. Her virgins are afflicted. Sorrow and tragedy abound.

Lamentations 1:5
Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the LORD hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity before the enemy.

Sin always leads to captivity. That with which we once flirted, that we once flaunted inevitably become the things to which we're in bondage. That's

why the Lord calls us to holiness. Holiness means we're not enslaved by anything. Holiness is the highest form of liberty.

Lamentations 1:6 (a)
And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed . . .

Sin not only leads to captivity but it steals one's beauty. The inner beauty that once shined forth is inevitably replaced by weariness and sadness.

Lamentations 1:6 (b)
. . . her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer.

Weakness is the third inevitable result of sin. In Judges 16, we read that, when the Philistines came upon Samson, he stood up and thought he'd tackle them as he had always done previously. But then we come to one of the saddest verses in all of Scripture when we read that "he wist not that the Lord was departed from him" (Judges 16:20). Samson didn't even know the Spirit had left him. As a result, he was wiped out by the Philistines.

When Moses came off the mountain after spending forty days and nights with the Lord, his face glowed. The people saw it, but Moses was not aware of it (Exodus 34:29).

When you spend time with the Lord, you'll be the last one to know you glow. Other people will observe it, but you won't know it. Conversely, when you're in trouble with the Lord, you're oftentimes the last one to know it, as well. That's what happened to Samson.

Lamentations 1:7
Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old, when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, and none did help her: the adversaries saw her, and did mock at her sabbaths.

The fourth result of sin is that you become a laughingstock in the eyes of the world. The tragic inevitable result of sin is that your adversaries mock

your walk. Life becomes incredibly hazy when you're sinning and out of fellowship.

Lamentations 1:8
Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed: all that honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness: yea, she sigheth, and turneth backward.

The fifth result of sin is that you will find yourself wandering, wondering what life is all about.

Lamentations 1:9 (a)
Her filthiness is in her skirts; she remembereth not her last end; therefore she came down wonderfully . . .

Sixth, we see pollution. The people of Jerusalem didn't think through what the results of their rebellion would be. Instead, they just lived for the moment.

Lamentations 1:9 (b)
. . . she had no comforter. O LORD, behold my affliction: for the enemy hath magnified himself.

Seventh, we see that Jerusalem had no comforter. Who is the Comforter? The Holy Spirit. "Lord, take not thy Holy Spirit from me," David prayed (Psalm 51:11). He realized the Spirit could be grieved by unrepented sin and ultimately removed from his life.

Lamentations 1:10, 11
The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things: for she hath seen that the heathen entered into her sanctuary, whom thou didst command that they should not enter into thy congregation. All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul: see, O LORD, and consider; for I am become vile.

Finally, sin affected the entire congregation. “A little leaven leavens the whole lump,” Paul would write (1 Corinthians 5:6). That is, a little bit of sin can affect everyone around us. Sin and rebellion in our own lives causes *all* the people to sigh. It has repercussions upon many others.

Every time you’re tempted to sin, turn to Lamentations 1 and ask yourself if it’s worth it. Say to yourself, “This will lead me into captivity, take away my beauty, lead me into weakness, make me a laughingstock in the world, cause me to wander and wonder, pollute me, cause the Holy Spirit to be grieved, and will affect the entire congregation. Do I really want to do this?” Lamentations 1 is a good passage to remember when you wonder if sin is worth it.

Lamentations 1:12–14
Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger. From above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaileth against them: he hath spread a net for my feet, he hath turned me back: he hath made me desolate and faint all the day. The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand: they are wreathed, and come up upon my neck: he hath made my strength to fall, the Lord hath delivered me into their hands, from whom I am not able to rise up.

The yoke of our own sin is so heavy that we’re not able to rise. The yoke that Jesus bids us bear, however, is easy (Matthew 11:30). The choice is ours.

Lamentations 1:15, 16
The Lord hath trodden under foot all my mighty men in the midst of me: he hath called an assembly against me to crush my young men: the Lord hath trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, as in a winepress. For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me: my children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed.

The assembly the Lord called against His people was that of the Babylonian army.

Lamentations 1:17
Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her: the LORD hath commanded concerning Jacob, that his adversaries should be round about him: Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman among them.

Because Jerusalem was seen as unclean, no one dared help her.

Lamentations 1:18 (a)
The LORD is righteous . . .

Jerusalem herself speaks in verses 18 and 19. In the day of her destruction, what does she say? "The Lord is righteous," or "Lord, You're right."

At the end of the Tribulation period, when God pours out His wrath on a Christ-rejecting, sinful world, we see twenty-four elders and the four living creatures falling before the Lord, saying, "True and righteous are Thy judgments, O, Lord, You're right" (Revelation 19:2). In that day, no one will question the rightness of God, not even those who are being judged by Him.

Lamentations 1:18 (b), 19 (a)
. . . for I have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity. I called for my lovers, but they deceived me . . .

The idols Jerusalem was serving couldn't come through in her time of trouble. That's always the way it is. In time of trouble call out to whatever in your life is so important that it pushes the things of God aside—your hobby, your car, your career, your family—and you'll find it can't help you. There is no help for you from the idols that have taken the place of God in your life. "I was deceived," Jerusalem says. "All these things I thought were so important, can't help me now."

An idol is anything or anyone in your life that has preeminence over God. It will always deceive you.

Lamentations 1:19 (b)
. . . my priests and mine elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls.

This is a tragic indictment against spiritual leaders who no longer walked with the Lord but only cared about themselves.

Lamentations 1:20–22
Behold, O LORD; for I am in distress: my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled: abroad the sword bereaveth, at home there is as death. They have heard that I sigh: there is none to comfort me: all mine enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that thou hast done it: thou wilt bring the day that thou hast called, and they shall be like unto me. Let all their wickedness come before thee; and do unto them, as thou hast done unto me for all my transgressions: for my sighs are many, and my heart is faint.

Although Jerusalem's prayer is for retribution against her enemies, it is in accordance with God's will, for due to their pride, He would deal with Babylon even more severely than He chastened His own people.



2 Chapter 1 dealt with the provocation against God. Chapter 2 deals with the punishment from God . . .

Lamentations 2:1, 2 (a)
How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his

anger! The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob . . .

Isaiah indicted God's people, saying, "The spoil of the poor is in your houses" (3:14). These houses that were so important to the people would be destroyed.

Lamentations 2:2 (b)
. . . and hath not pitied: he hath thrown down in his wrath the strong holds of the daughter of Judah; he hath brought them down to the ground . . .

God brought even the fortresses, the strongholds, the military might of Judah to the ground. We must learn from this. Our strength as a nation does not lie in our military might. It doesn't matter how many missiles we have or how many weapons we accumulate. If we don't get right with the Lord, it's all for nothing. At this point, historically, Judah was armed to the teeth. But the Babylonians came down and absolutely overwhelmed her. Therefore, our concern must always be that the Lord make us right in His sight rather than depending upon the might of our army.

How easy it is for us to be more concerned about our national defense than being right with God. But Jerusalem proves we do so to our own eventual demise.

Lamentations 2:2 (c)
. . . he hath polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof.

Not only homes and fortresses, but the country itself and its rulers were polluted.

Lamentations 2:3–6
He hath cut off in his fierce anger all the horn of Israel: he hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy, and he burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devoureth round about. He hath bent his bow like an enemy: he stood with his right hand as an adversary, and slew all that were pleasant to the eye in the

tabernacle of the daughter of Zion: he poured out his fury like fire. The Lord was as an enemy: he hath swallowed up Israel, he hath swallowed up all her palaces: he hath destroyed his strong holds, and hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation. And he hath violently taken away his tabernacle, as if it were of a garden: he hath destroyed his places of the assembly: the LORD hath caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion, and hath despised in the indignation of his anger the king and the priest.

What a tragic picture is being painted. The temple itself is destroyed. The feasts and festivals are no longer taking place. As the Lord pours out His fury like fire, as He bends His bow against His own people, they can no longer take refuge in their religious observances and customs.

Lamentations 2:7–10
The Lord hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary, he hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have made a noise in the house of the LORD, as in the day of a solemn feast. The LORD hath purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion: he hath stretched out a line, he hath not withdrawn his hand from destroying: therefore he made the rampart and the wall to lament; they languished together. Her gates are sunk into the ground; he hath destroyed and broken her bars: her king and her princes are among the Gentiles: the law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the LORD. The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground, and keep silence: they have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth: the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground.

Drought, destruction, and death had replaced vision, counsel, and inspiration. Jerusalem, the place that once pulsated with the life of the Lord is now decimated. There is no worship, no praise, no houses for the people, no fortification, no princes. No wonder Jeremiah weeps.

Lamentations 2:11, 12
Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people; because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, Where is corn and wine? when they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city, when their soul was poured out into their mothers' bosom.

Jeremiah's eyes didn't fill with tears when he was put in stocks or thrown in a cistern. He wept not for his own pain. But his heart broke for the very people who sought his life.

Lamentations 2:13–15
What thing shall I take to witness for thee? what thing shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? what shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Zion? for thy breach is great like the sea: who can heal thee? Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment. All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?

Whom the Lord loves, He chastens (Hebrews 12:6). Those apart from the Lord sin to their heart's content without ever seeming to get punished by Him. Yes, they experience the consequences of sin—but they're not chastened by the Father because the Father only disciplines His own. He disciplines because He loves them and He chastens because He's preparing them for eternity.

Lamentations 2:16, 17
All thine enemies have opened their mouth against thee: they hiss and gnash the teeth: they say, We have swallowed her up: certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it. The LORD hath done that which he had devised; he

hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded in the days of old: he hath thrown down, and hath not pitied: and he hath caused thine enemy to rejoice over thee, he hath set up the horn of thine adversaries.

"We have swallowed Jerusalem up," the Babylonians boasted. But they were wrong. It was the Lord doing His work. When things come down around us, we ought not to blame other people. It's the Lord who is at work, either allowing it or using it for our growth and His glory.

Lamentations 2:18, 19
Their heart cried unto the Lord, O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night: give thyself no rest; let not the apple of thine eye cease. Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger in the top of every street.

Jerusalem's only hope was to cry out to the Lord.

Lamentations 2:20
Behold, O LORD, and consider to whom thou hast done this. Shall the women eat their fruit, and children of a span long? shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?

Not only was there destruction and starvation, but cannibalism was taking place. Can a nation really sink that low? Yes. When women in our own country destroy their babies in order that they might have an easier life themselves, it's the same sin as the sin of Jerusalem.

Lamentations 2:21, 22
The young and the old lie on the ground in the streets: my virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword; thou hast slain them in the day of thine anger; thou hast killed, and not pitied. Thou hast called as in a solemn day my terrors round about, so that in

the day of the LORD's anger none escaped nor remained: those that I have swaddled and brought up hath mine enemy consumed.

For forty years, Jeremiah had preached, prophesied, and plead. There was no comfort however, in being proven so accurate. Had only the people listened, what unspeakable tragedy they would have been spared.



3 In chapter 3, we come to the prophet and God. I love this because in it we see a ray of hope as Jeremiah deals with depression concerning the devastation that surrounds him.

Lamentations 3:1–8
I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light. Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day. My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones. He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail. He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old. He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out: he hath made my chain heavy. Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.

Observing the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah is overcome with emotional distress. He's weighed down and bound up. He prays but feels like he's not heard. His teeth feel like they've been kicked in. His bones feel like they've been broken and even his skin feels old.

Lamentations 3:9–20
He hath inclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked. He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places. He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces: he hath made me desolate. He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. He hath caused the arrows of

his quiver to enter into my reins. I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day. He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood. He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes. And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgat prosperity. And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD: Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me.

Jeremiah feels trapped and confused, hunted and haunted, bitter and bewildered, hopeless and humiliated. But then his mood changes radically . . .

Lamentations 3:21–23
This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

"Lord, even though I see devastation all around me, even though I feel heaviness within me, even though I deserve to be consumed and wiped out totally, You are faithful and merciful to me," Jeremiah says. We all deserve destruction. Our attitudes, thoughts, and motives should all cause us to agree with Paul when he says that there is not one that does good (Romans 3:12).

Lamentations 3:24
The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

It's not that the Lord gives my portion, it's that He *is* my portion. Jeremiah reflects not only upon the mercy of God but upon the satisfaction He finds in God.

Lamentations 3:25, 26

The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.

Here, Jeremiah continues to speak words of great hope, hope being the absolute expectation of coming good.

Lamentations 3:27
It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

Sometimes people wonder why they're not at the top of their profession after three months on the job. It's a mistake we can make even in ministry. It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. Be faithful in little things. Start at the bottom (Matthew 20:27).

Lamentations 3:28–30
He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope. He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach.

This picture of humility and submission is, of course, no better personified than in Jesus (Isaiah 50:6).

Lamentations 3:31, 32
For the Lord will not cast off for ever: But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.

God's compassion is limitless, His mercy multitudinous, His pardon abundant (Isaiah 55:7).

Lamentations 3:33
For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

God is not out to rattle your cage. He's not pacing in heaven, planning who to afflict today. Rather, He loves us too much to let us get away with sin continually. So He will afflict us—but He does so reluctantly. As Jeremiah rejoices in these understandings, His depression lifts.

Lamentations 3:34–36
To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth, To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High, To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not.

This speaks of perversion of justice.

Lamentations 3:37–39
Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good? Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?

Even in captivity, the people had no grounds upon which to complain.

Lamentations 3:40
Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.

"Search me, O God," David prayed (Psalm 139:23). Here, Jeremiah echoes his prayer, which is an excellent prayer for us, as well.

Lamentations 3:41
Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.

Is your heart down? Lift it up. How? With your hands. Lift your hands. Worship. Sing praise to God. Shout for joy. Clap your hands. Bow before Him. Kneel in His presence. Worship—and the blues will leave. Depression will lift because the garment of praise is the antidote for the spirit of heaviness (Isaiah 61:3).

For topical study of Lamentations 3:22–41 entitled "Battling the Blues," turn to page **595.**

Lamentations 3:42, 43
We have transgressed and have rebelled: thou hast not pardoned. Thou hast covered with anger, and persecuted us: thou hast slain, thou hast not pitied.

In other words, because the Babylonian captivity had not yet ended, God's people were still in the midst of experiencing God's chastening.

Lamentations 3:44
Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through.

"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear," Isaiah declared (59:2). No wonder, then, that the people felt separated from God.

Lamentations 3:45–47
Thou hast made us as the offscouring and refuse in the midst of the people. All our enemies have opened their mouths against us. Fear and a snare is come upon us, desolation and destruction.

According to Jesus, being reviled is a blessing if it's for His sake (Matthew 5:11). These people, however, were not in the position to be blessed because they were being reviled for their own sin.

> We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.

1 Corinthians 4:10–13

Paul shows us how to live what Jesus taught.

Lamentations 3:48–51
Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people. Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission, Till the LORD look down, and behold from heaven. Mine eye affecteth mine heart because of all the daughters of my city.

Jonah was a whining prophet. Jeremiah was a weeping prophet. Which are we?



***For topical study on Lamentations 3:48–51 entitled "Weeping or Whining?" turn to page* 599.**

Verses 52 through 66 refer to Jeremiah 38, where we read that, as he was cast into a cistern, sinking in the mud, Jeremiah felt as though he was about to be destroyed . . .

Lamentations 3:52–66
Mine enemies chased me sore, like a bird, without cause. They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me. Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off. I called upon thy name, O LORD, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not. O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life. O LORD, thou hast seen my wrong: judge thou my cause. Thou hast seen all their vengeance and all their imaginations against me. Thou hast heard their reproach, O LORD, and all their imaginations against me; The lips of those that rose up against me, and their device against me all the day.

Behold their sitting down, and their rising up; I am their musick. Render unto them a recompence, O LORD, according to the work of their hands. Give them sorrow of heart, thy curse unto them. Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the LORD.

Why is this incident inserted into this poem at this time? Most likely it's because Jeremiah uses it to encourage the people of Jerusalem. "I was going down and I thought my life was over," he says in essence. "But I cried out to the Lord. He heard me and I was delivered."

Testimonies are so important. Multitudes gathered around Jesus when they heard testimonies of the great things He had done. I believe great multitudes will be evangelized and edified today if they hear what the Lord is doing in the lives of His people, the church. In the forties and fifties, the church sometimes emphasized testimonies to the neglect of the Word. Presently, I think the pendulum has swung too far in the opposite direction for testimonies are invaluable tools our Father can use to showcase His matchless mercy and glorious grace.

BATTLING THE BLUES

A Topical Study of LAMENTATIONS 3:22–41

It wasn't that Jeremiah was a giant of a man physically, for he was manhandled and put into prison frequently. Nor would he be considered a giant of a man occupationally, for he preached for forty years without seeing a single soul respond. But he was indeed a giant spiritually and eternally for he prophesied with integrity, honesty, and incredible accuracy. He prophesied the captivity of Judah, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the coming of Jesus Christ. Yet even though he was a spiritual giant of a man, he was a man nonetheless. And, like all men, he battled the blues and dealt with discouragement.

If you never deal with discouragement it is either because you are very dumb or very dead because the more you know about life, the more vulnerable you are to becoming discouraged with life. Observing situations geopolitically or the situations in one's own life personally can lead to depression and discouragement quite easily. Jeremiah was one who knew about this. Therefore, I'd like us to see the way this giant of a man waged war against the blues.

Affliction

> *He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old. He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out: he hath made my chain heavy.*
>
> Lamentations 3:6, 7

What caused Jeremiah's affliction? When the Babylonians came down, as Jeremiah had prophesied for years that they would, they offered him the opportunity to go anywhere he wanted. But Jeremiah chose to remain with his people. He could have had it made in the shade. He could have lived anywhere he wanted in the vast Babylonian empire. Yet he remained in Jerusalem. But in so doing, he became an eyewitness to her destruction.

Maybe, like Jeremiah, you're hurt by what you see happening. Things are coming down. Things are looking bad. And, sitting on a hillside, looking at the situation, you wonder why you're chained up and broken down.

Reflection

This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.

Lamentations 3:21

In Lamentations 3, the mood changes as Jeremiah uncovers a way to get out of the doldrums, to beat the blues, to ward off depression. He reflects upon three things that lift his spirit and give him hope.

First, he reflects on the mercy of God.

It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:22, 23

Jeremiah sees destruction taking place, depression setting in, but he realizes that, because of the Lord's mercies, he is not destroyed. This is an important understanding because, in times of depression, if you're not getting what you want, you can at least thank God that you're not getting what you *don't* want. You deserve to be totally consumed. So do I. We have violated the Word of God. We have rebelled against the Spirit of God. We disobey what we know is right. Therefore, it is simply due to the Lord's mercies that we are not annihilated.

What would happen if, on any given day, your entire day was filmed—not only your actions but your thoughts, as well—and the film was played for all to see. Multiply that day by every day and you'll understand that without the Lord's mercy, we'd all be sunk. If you were God and observed people constantly gossiping, conniving, cheating, stealing, and backsliding, wouldn't you finally say, "That's enough!"? But His compassions fail not. They're new every morning. And that is great news.

Do you ever get so depressed and discouraged you want to die? In essence, the Lord gives us that opportunity every evening. Chemical reactions take place in our bodies that cause drowsiness. We find ourselves slowing down, our systems closing down almost to the point of death when

we fall asleep. I believe this is because the Lord knows that every seventeen or eighteen hours, we've messed things up so badly that we need a fresh start. Thus, we wake morning by morning seeing new mercies. Our bodies kick into action and we approach the day with new energy. Morning by morning, as we seek the Lord, we find a new infusion of spiritual energy because of His mercy.

Second, Jeremiah reflects on the satisfaction he finds in God.

> *The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.*
>
> Lamentations 3:24

Jeremiah doesn't say that the Lord *gives* him his portion. He says the Lord *is* his portion. In this, lies a real secret. That is, we often think we need something from the Lord—be it financial provision, a restored relationship, or a new job. In reality, however, it's not some thing we need it's some One we need. "The Lord Himself is my portion," Jeremiah said. "The city is burning down around me. The people are scattering before me. But the Lord is my portion internally."

Jesus didn't say, "I *give* you life," He said, "I *am* the life" (John 14:6). He didn't say, "I'll show you the door." He said, "I *am* the door" (John 10:9). No wonder Paul would say that all the promises of God are fulfilled in Him (2 Corinthians 1:20). Whatever you need, it's not something Jesus gives *to* you. It's who He is *for* you.

Haven't you discovered that, when you get away and seek the Lord for a period of time, although you thought you needed a solution to this problem or an answer to that question, you realize that what you needed all along was simply the Lord? In the midst of his darkness and depression, Jeremiah said, "the Lord is my portion. He is what I need. And when I spend time with Him, I find such satisfaction in my soul that nothing else matters."

Finally, Jeremiah reflects on the goodness of God.

> *The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.*
>
> Lamentations 3:25

I am made of dust, of molecules. The same molecules in me could have been structured to be a petunia. But I'm a person—a living entity with a body, soul, and spirit. Why? Because, before time, God determined that I would exist and that you would, too. In His goodness, God has gifted you and allowed you to exist not as a petunia, a worm, or a rock but as a person. That He has given us the gift of life is His goodness at its very root. He planned you and ordained you before time even began. He chose the color of your hair, the color of your eyes, the shape of your body, the make-up of your personality. He knew all about you (Jeremiah 1:5).

> *For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:*
>
> Colossians 1:16

We exist for one purpose: to magnify and please God. And when we do this, we fulfill the reason for our existence. The goodness of God is discovered by those who say, "I exist for You, Lord. Therefore, I want to know You."

If you're living for your husband, wife, the next party, paycheck or car, you'll find only emptiness. But if you wait on the Lord and seek Him, you'll find goodness.

Instruction

Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD. *Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.*

Lamentations 3:40, 41

In light of his discouragement, Jeremiah calls first for internal evaluation as he says, "Let us search and try our ways and turn again to the Lord." I think of Peter in the storm. As the waves battered his boat and terror filled his heart, Jesus came walking toward him.

"Lord? Is that You?" Peter asked. "Bid me come."

The Lord did just that. And, as long as Peter kept his eyes on the Lord, he walked on water, above the storm. But once he took his eyes off the Lord and looked at the storm, he began to sink. At that point, Peter didn't go through a lot of gyrations or a lengthy prayer of petition. He simply said, "Lord, save me!" And the Lord immediately picked him up (Matthew 14:30, 31).

On any given day, if we say, "Lord, I'm going to turn to You. I'm tired of talking about, dwelling on, living in my problems. Sure the city is on fire. Yes, there are real difficulties surrounding me. But I'm not going to focus on them any longer. I'm going to turn again to You. *You* are the object of my desire." Like Peter, we will be lifted out of the waves that would otherwise sink us.

Second, when you are battling the blues, dealing with depression, Jeremiah says there is something very practical you can do: worship. "Put on the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness," Isaiah says (61:3). Even as we choose to put on a sweatshirt for the spirit of chilliness, we can choose on any given day to put on the garment of praise when we're feeling defeated.

At sports events, standing up, clapping, lifting hands, and shouting for joy are natural responses. What is within us innately needs to be re-directed to the God of eternity. Why? Because it is with our hands that our heart is lifted up.

You don't have to be depressed hour after hour, day after month after year. You can follow Jeremiah's instruction. You can evaluate internally. You

can express outwardly. You can have success and victory in battling the blues. No one's afflictions are greater than were Jeremiah's. And he found the solution to them by taking his eyes off the flames of Jerusalem and fixing them instead on the faithfulness of Jehovah.

WEEPING OR WHINING?

A Topical Study of LAMENTATIONS 3:48–51

I remember the night when, after teaching on Lamentations, I went home, talked awhile with my wife, Tammy, then went to bed—only to bolt upright just before midnight with my mind in overdrive and my heart stirred. Knowing the Lord was speaking to me, I got up, grabbed a notebook and pen, and began to write. When I finished, I glanced at the clock and was surprised to see it was 4:30 in the morning. I don't say this to impress you with my spirituality—for most of the time, I snooze right through such incidents. I say it to impress upon you my belief that this is the Word of the Lord for you and me today.

Consider, as I did in those early morning hours, the prophets Jonah and Jeremiah . . .

Both Jonah and Jeremiah Hesitated When Called to the Ministry

Jonah hesitated out of hostility. Called to minister to the most vicious and sadistic people in the history of the world, Jonah wanted to see God blast the Ninevites, not bless them. He wanted them to experience God's fury, not His forgiveness. Jeremiah, on the other hand, hesitated out of insecurity. Feeling incapable of carrying out the Lord's mission for Him, "I cannot speak," Jeremiah protested. "I am but a child. I'm not ready to be a prophet" (see Jeremiah 1:6).

What about us? Jesus said, "You shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

But perhaps, like Jeremiah, we hesitate out of insecurity. "Oh, Lord, I can't do that," we argue. "I don't know enough Bible verses. I haven't had enough experience. That's not my personality." Gang, God will never ask you to do that which He does not empower you to do. Jesus didn't say we *should* be His witnesses or we had *better* be His witnesses. He said we *shall* be His witnesses. It *will* happen!

Both Jonah and Jeremiah Were Sent into a City

Jonah was sent to Nineveh—capital of the powerful Assyrian empire, political capital of the world. But it was nearly impossible to get Jonah *into* Nineveh. In fact, he never would have made it there without a storm at sea and a whale for an escort.

Jeremiah was sent to Jerusalem—the city of God, the spiritual capital of the world. But it was nearly impossible to get Jeremiah out of Jerusalem. Before the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, King Nebuchadnezzar sent an emissary to Jeremiah, saying, "We know you're a prophet of God. Therefore, we'll take care of you wherever you choose to go throughout the empire."

"Thanks, but no thanks," Jeremiah said. "I'm going to stay here with my people" (see Jeremiah 40:4–6).

Both Jonah and Jeremiah Were Separated from Their Friends and Families

Jonah was physically separated from friends and family by hundreds of miles geographically. Jeremiah was separated from friends and family emotionally when his friends forsook him and his brothers dealt treacherously with him (Jeremiah 11; 12).

Both Jonah and Jeremiah Were Manhandled

After learning Jonah was the reason for the storms that threatened their lives, his fellow sailors reluctantly threw him overboard. On the other hand, the priests and prophets of Jerusalem, who cast Jeremiah into dungeons on five separate occasions, manhandled him not reluctantly but readily.

Both Jonah and Jeremiah Were Cast into a Pit

Jonah referred to his accommodations in the belly of the great fish as the pit of hell itself (Jonah 2:2). Jeremiah was cast into a pit that, because it had previously been a holding tank for water, was filled with mud and mire. Like Jonah, Jeremiah knew if he kept sinking, he would soon die (Jeremiah 38:6).

Both Jonah and Jeremiah Cried Out to the Lord

Jonah was delivered by the command of God when he was deposited on the beach by the great fish. Jeremiah was delivered by the hand of man when Ebed-melech had compassion on him and pulled him out of the pit (Jeremiah 38:13).

Both Jonah and Jeremiah Preached to the People

Jonah preached a single sermon: “In forty days, Nineveh will be destroyed.” He offered no solution, gave no instruction, showed no compassion. Jeremiah, on the other hand, preached a multitude of messages, not for forty days but for forty years. With illustration, persuasion, and passion, Jeremiah poured out his heart to the people of Jerusalem.

Both Jonah and Jeremiah Saw the People's Response to God

Through his single-sentence sermon, Jonah witnessed a revival from God when the entire city of Nineveh turned to the Lord in humility and repentance. On the other hand, after preaching forty years, Jeremiah witnessed the rejection of God when not a single person responded to his message.

Let this be a word to every one of us in ministry today. For forty years, this prophet—esteemed by heaven and studied by Christians throughout the ages—saw not one conversion. Yet if Jonah and Jeremiah were ministering today, about whom would the books be written? Who would the photographers photograph and the interviewers question? Whose picture would be on the cover of *Christianity Today*? Jonah. What about Jeremiah? He'd be sitting in the back row of one of Jonah's "Effective Ministry" seminars, taking notes and trying to figure out what he'd done wrong.

Dear people, the greatest revival that ever happened took place through a man whose heart was not right with God. Therefore, we are oh, so foolish if we evaluate ministry numerically. I don't care how much fruit you see in your ministry, how much approval you get, how many folks come forward, or how many souls you've led to the Lord. Don't evaluate ministry on the basis of whom God uses. After all, He used a donkey to talk to Balaam and a heathen Pharaoh to speak to a godly Josiah.

Jesus taught that the first shall be last and the last first (Matthew 19:30). This means that in heaven there will be all kinds of surprises when the Lord says to the Jonahs who are sitting in the front row waiting for their rewards, "Why don't you move back a few thousand rows because, although I used you, your hearts were far from Me." And to the Jeremiahs—to those who were thought to be total failures, to those whose ministry never seemed to come together, to those who looked like losers in the eyes of men—He'll say, "Well done, good and faithful servants. Come! Enter into My joy."

That's why Paul says we're not to judge anything before that time (1 Corinthians 4:5). We're not to evaluate who is successful and who is not because only the Lord knows the heart of man.

Both Jonah and Jeremiah Sat on a Hillside at the End of Their Ministry

Jonah whined about his possession—a gourd that had been destroyed by a worm. Jeremiah wept for the people who had rejected, imprisoned, beaten, and mocked him. This absolutely astounds me. If I were Jeremiah, I would have said, "For forty years, I warned you. And what did you do? You threw me in prison, gave me forty lashes, and turned your back on me. Now it's your turn to get beat up a bit." But Jeremiah didn't do that. He sat on a hillside with hot tears running down his dusty cheeks.

What about us? Do we weep—or do we whine? Do we whine about how we're going to make our house payment, about why no one appreciates us, about why we don't feel good? Or do we weep for those who walk in darkness, for those who don't know God, for those who are going to hell? If our tears were measured over the last five years, how many would have been shed for the unsaved? On what do our prayers center? "Bless my ministry, my family, my friends," or, "God have mercy upon those who don't know You, who are down on You, who are going to be destroyed unless they turn to You?" We will become shrunken little people if all we are concerned about is our little world. The Lord desires us to be big people—expansive in our view of *His* world.

In the darkness of those early morning hours, I brokenly said, "Lord, I'm much more like Jonah than Jeremiah. I whine more about my gourd than about Your people. But, Father, what made Jeremiah Jeremiah? What gave him the ability to hang in there for forty years with people who rejected, abused, and despised him? Where did he get that kind of compassion? How does a Jonah like me become a Jeremiah for You?"

As I searched through the Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations, I found nothing. Oh, sure, I could speculate that it was the work of the Holy Spirit upon him or the result of prayer within him, but I needed more than speculation. The next day, I wrestled and struggled and discussed the question to no avail. "Perhaps there is no conclusion," I reasoned. But in my heart, I knew the way of the Lord is not to leave us in that kind of frustration.

And then the Lord led me to Luke for the solution to this situation, for there we see not Jonah, not Jeremiah, but Jesus. And in Jesus *all* answers are *always* found. He is the solution to every problem, the explanation to every dilemma.

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it,

Luke 19:41

As Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem to die for the sins of humanity, knowing Jerusalem was headed for another wave of persecution, He stopped on a hillside and wept for the city—just as Jeremiah had done. Jesus showed the same compassion Jeremiah had shown, the same broken heart, the same tear-filled eyes. That is why, when asked who people thought He was, His disciples answered that some thought He was Jeremiah back from the dead (Matthew 16:14). Interestingly, not one person mistook Jesus for Jonah.

The only way I will have compassion for colleagues, friends, and neighbors is if Jesus weeps for them through me. What does this mean? It means that if I spend increased amounts of time with Jesus, I will become more like Him. I'll see what He sees and feel what He feels.

In 1 Samuel 22, a rag-tag group of renegades who were in debt, distressed, and discontent gathered around David. And as they hung around their leader, who was sharp and effective, they became like him. So too, as we spend more and more time with our Leader, we who are in debt, distressed, and discontent will become more like Him, feeling what He does, seeing people the way He sees them.

As we spend time with Jesus, whining will cease and weeping will increase. Why? Because, although we choose not to think about our neighbor going to hell, Jesus sees him eternally headed for damnation and His heart breaks. While we believe in hell theologically, Jesus knows about hell experientially. That is why He spoke more about hell than about heaven. Forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus wept over the city, knowing what was to happen. And in these last moments before the destruction of the world, He weeps again.

Precious people, you'll know how close you are to the Lord at any given moment by what you're crying about. Are you whining for yourself or

weeping for the lost? May the Father in His great mercy change us Jonahs into Jeremiahs as we spend time with Jesus. May He turn our whining to weeping, our self-pity to compassion, and our hardened hearts to tear-stained cheeks.



4 In the fourth chapter, as Jeremiah watches the destruction of Jerusalem, we see the people of God . . .

Lamentations 4:1 (a)
How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed! . . .

This describes the blackening of the gold that was covering the inside of the temple. In today's economy, it has been estimated the temple would be worth seventeen billion dollars.

Lamentations 4:1 (b), 2
. . . the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street. The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!

The pride of Jerusalem was being likened to earthen pitchers, broken and cracked.

Lamentations 4:3, 4
Even the sea monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones: the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst: the young children ask bread, and no man breaketh it unto them.

Famine was already taking place because the Babylonians had besieged the city for quite some time. Why would children pay the price for the rebellion of their parents? It isn't fair, but that's the way it always is. God's Word is not talking idealistically but realistically, saying that when parents rebel, children pay the price. If there's no other reason to keep us from sinning, let us consider this one. I don't want my kids and others to suffer needlessly because of my stupid iniquity.

Lamentations 4:5, 6
They that did feed delicately are desolate in the streets: they that were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills. For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands stayed on her.

"What's happening here is worse than what happened in Sodom," Jeremiah says. Known for its sin, Sodom was destroyed instantaneously. "That would have been better than suffering the famine, the slow starvation I see all around me," Jeremiah laments.

Lamentations 4:7–10
Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire: Their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets: their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick. They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger: for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field. The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people.

These women were eating their own children. Lest that sounds incomprehensible to us, we must realize that, in abortion, our culture condones the same thing. Certainly these people were no more guilty than we.

Lamentations 4:11, 12
The LORD hath accomplished his fury; he hath poured out his fierce anger, and hath kindled a fire in Zion, and it hath devoured the foundations thereof. The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was built on a hill which gave it strategic advantage. In addition, Jerusalem was also in the middle of an arms build-up. Yet when God judges, neither a country's location nor its fortification is worth a hill of beans.

Lamentations 4:13–15
For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her, They have wandered as blind men in the streets, they have polluted themselves with blood, so that men could not touch their garments. They cried unto them, Depart ye; it is unclean; depart, depart, touch not: when they fled away and wandered, they said among the heathen, They shall no more sojourn there.

"We don't want them here," said the people concerning the false prophets and polluted priests. Those who should have been filled with the knowledge of God were cast out of Jerusalem and even the surrounding heathen countries.

Lamentations 4:16, 17
The anger of the LORD hath divided them; he will no more regard them: they respected not the persons of the priests, they favoured not the elders. As for us, our eyes as yet failed for our vain help: in our watching we have watched for a nation that could not save us.

This speaks of Judah's alliance with Egypt. She trusted Egypt—but Egypt didn't come through for her. Egypt is a type of the world and the world will

never be there for us. If you think you can fall back on your bank account or friends in the time of real need, the Egyptians won't be there. If your heart is not right with God, in the day of trouble, you will have no help to see you through.

Lamentations 4:18–21
They hunt our steps, that we cannot go in our streets: our end is near, our days are fulfilled; for our end is come. Our persecutors are swifter than the eagles of the heaven: they pursued us upon the mountains, they laid wait for us in the wilderness. The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen. Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, that dwellest in the land of Uz; the cup also shall pass through unto thee: thou shalt be drunken, and shalt make thyself naked.

"Rejoice, Edom. Be glad," Jeremiah says sarcastically to Jerusalem's enemies. Later on, Obadiah will come on the scene and will have a scathing word for the Edomites because the Edomites were rejoicing in the problem of the Jews. This should sober us about how we view the afflictions of our enemies. Jeremiah is hinting at what Obadiah will later fully expand. That is, rejoicing in another's pain marks us for our own eventual pain and suffering.

Lamentations 4:22 (a)
The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; he will no more carry thee away into captivity: he will visit thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom . . .

Jeremiah offers a word of hope here in this psalm of sorrow. That is, there's an end. The chastening process won't go on and on indefinitely. Therefore, you who are going through the chastening process or the season of reaping the harvest of sin, wondering if you'll ever get over it, the answer is yes. If you sow sin, it will always come up—but it will always be taken away in due time. You just have to go through it. Why? Because the Lord wants us to learn our lesson well so that we won't keep repeating the same pattern of rebellion.

Lamentations 4:22 (b)
. . . he will discover thy sins.

If we confess our sins, God covers them with His blood. But if we continue in sin, He will "discover" them. As we see in Obadiah, Edom would find this out.



5 In chapter 5, we see prayer to God. Each of the four previous chapters was a stylized acrostic. Each verse began with a letter in the Hebrew alphabet. But in chapter 5, suddenly the stylized acrostic pattern is swept away by sheer emotion. No longer is Jeremiah being poetic. Now he's just being prayerful. And this is an important chapter because in it we see four lessons that help us understand how to pray when we see destruction taking place around or within us.

The first lesson is remembering . . .

Lamentations 5:1–15
Remember, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach. Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens. We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows. We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us. Our necks are under persecution: we labour, and have no rest. We have given the hand to the Egyptians, and to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread. Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities. Servants have ruled over us: there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand. We gat our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness. Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine. They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah. Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured. They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood. The elders have

ceased from the gate, the young men from their musick. The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning.

If you're lamenting in the day of trial, testing, or difficulty, a good way to begin your prayer is to say, "Remember me, Lord." Isn't that what the thief on the cross said to Jesus? One thief mocked Him. But the other said, "When You come into Your kingdom remember me" (Luke 23:42).

I like that prayer because my tendency would have been to say, "Lord, deliver me." Or, "Lord, listen while I tell you why I don't deserve to be here." How often I hear myself praying with that kind of mentality. "Deliver me, Lord. Heal me, Lord. Listen to me, Lord." I hate my tendency to think that the Lord is at my beck and call. How I love the thief on the cross who said not, "Deliver me," not "Listen to me," but simply, "Remember me."

Lamentations 5:16
The crown is fallen from our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned!

After remembrance, we see repentance. Jeremiah doesn't say, "Lord, they have sinned." He says, "*We* have sinned." When Nehemiah, Ezra, and the great men of the Word prayed in brokenness, they always included themselves in the sinfulness of the people.

Lamentations 5:17–19
For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim. Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it. Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation.

Third, we see recognition. Even in the midst of this tragedy, Jeremiah says, "Lord, I know You are on the throne and in control."

"Where is God?" people ask when they're going through times of destruction. But a far better way to pray is to pray like Jeremiah: "Lord, from generations past to generations in the future, You are on the throne. And if You allowed this, You'll turn it for good because You promise that all things

work together for good to those who love You—not just good things, not just some things, not even most things—but *all* things."

Lamentations 5:20, 21
Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time? Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old.

Renewal is the fourth element of praying in dark days and destructive times. "Renew us, Lord," Jeremiah prays. How does the Lord renew us? Not by us trying to earn it but simply through His mercy poured upon us via the Holy Ghost (Titus 3:5).

Lamentations 5:22
But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us.

This would better be translated as a question. "Have You utterly rejected us? Are You still angry with us?" Thus, Jeremiah ends his book with a question—one that will be answered as the history of God's people and His faithfulness to them unfolds.

Lamentations is a heavy book, but it's necessary for our growth. It reminds us not only that sin always brings sorrow but that blues can be battled, that depression can be defeated. It causes us to ask ourselves if we weep for the lost. Our theology says that people who don't know the Lord will be damned. But what would happen if we really knew that our mothers and fathers and friends and brothers were truly going to hell? I believe if we really understood that, we, like Jeremiah, would not be whining about ourselves anymore but weeping for the lost and living to share the gospel.

Finally, Lamentations reminds us that God entrusts tough messages to tender men. Jeremiah was perhaps the most tender man in all of the Bible, yet he had the toughest message of all. When G. Campbell Morgan watched D. L. Moody preach, he concluded that Moody had the right to preach on hell for he always talks about it with tears in his voice.

Lord, make us like Jeremiah—not preaching condemningly, but sharing compassionately.



EZEKIEL

Background to Ezekiel

If Isaiah was the prophet who declared the salvation of God and Jeremiah was the prophet who declared the judgment of God, Ezekiel was the prophet who declared the mystery and majesty of God. We are given the setting of the book that bears his name in verses 1 and 2, where Ezekiel identifies himself as a captive in Babylon.

In the year 605 B.C., the Babylonians came from the north to besiege Jerusalem. They didn't destroy the city at that time, but they did carry away a number of young men who were considered to be the cream of the crop—including a young man named Daniel, along with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego—back to Babylon. In doing this, Nebuchadnezzar was serving notice to Jerusalem that she had better keep in line.

Jerusalem, however, didn't get the message. In 597 B.C., the Jews showed signs of rebellion. So Nebuchadnezzar came down a second time. This time, he took 10,000 people to Babylon, one of whom was a young priest in training named Ezekiel. The captives were not treated cruelly or brutally because, unlike the Assyrians, the Babylonian style was not to destroy them but to impress them. Babylon was surrounded by walls approximately thirty-five stories tall and eighty-seven feet wide with a hundred towers. Inside the city were numerous temples to the Babylonian god, Marduk. Throughout the city, there were over three hundred hanging gardens considered to be one of the wonders of the ancient world. With flowering plants imported from all over the world, their beauty was unparalleled. In addition, Babylonian garments were highly treasured throughout the known world. So when the Babylonians brought the Jews into the city, they didn't destroy them with brutality. Instead, they seduced them with carnality. And the Jews grew so comfortable in Babylon that, when they were allowed to go home seventy years later, only a handful chose to leave.

Ezekiel ministered to people who were carried into Babylon, who, at that time, still had hard hearts toward the Lord. Meanwhile, Jerusalem still showed signs of rebellion. So in 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar came down a third time and this time destroyed the city, burned the temple, and wiped out the populace. We saw that happen in the Book of Jeremiah and felt the

heartbeat of the Lord in the Book of Lamentations. Here, in Ezekiel, we'll be with the Jews in captivity for seventy long years, seven hundred miles from Jerusalem, their home.



EZEKIEL

1 Ezekiel 1:1, 2
Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity,

It was as he sat by the river Chebar, a captive away from home, no doubt feeling lonely and isolated, that the heavens opened to Ezekiel. Therefore, if you feel isolated, cut off from family or separated from friends, as though something is going on that is uncomfortable or uncertain, take hope. Ezekiel had this glorious vision of the reality of God when he was in a place of isolation.

The Bible speaks of the opening of the heavens on a number of occasions. In Matthew 3:16, it was when Jesus was baptized—a picture of death, burial, and resurrection—that the heavens were opened. When we get to the place where we say, "Lord, I'm dying to self and living for You," the heavens will be opened. We'll have visions, new insights, new understanding.

The heavens were opened again in Acts 6. There we see Stephen being stoned to death, martyred for his belief in Jesus. As the rocks were flying, he looked up and saw Jesus standing, ready to receive Him. When you go through persecution, heaven becomes more real.

In Acts 10, Peter was on the rooftop, praying, when suddenly the heavens were opened and he had a vision of a sheet descending from heaven bearing food forbidden to Jews. It was then that the Lord began to deal with him, saying, "You're not under the Law any longer. I'm doing something new." When we seek the Lord and pray with intensity, we'll hear the Lord's voice to a greater degree.

Finally, in Malachi 3, we are told that when we give our tithes to the Lord, He opens the heavens and pours out blessing upon us. When you give to the Lord, when you seek the Lord, when you take a stand for the Lord, when you die to self and live for the Lord, the heavens will be opened to you.

The problem is, we don't sit by a river, we float down it. We don't go up to the mountain, we ski down it. When we're going through hard times, we think we've got to get away for recreation. But how much better it would be to get away for meditation and contemplation. Ezekiel was doing just that—and what a vision he had.

Ezekiel 1:3
The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him.

If Ezekiel was thirty years old when this vision began and it was in the fifth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin, he was carried away when he was twenty-five. Being the son of a priest, he would have been training for the priesthood. Priests began training when they were twenty and began their ministry at the age of thirty, even as Jesus began His ministry at thirty. Instead of an ordination, however, Ezekiel is about to receive incredible revelation.

Ezekiel 1:4, 5
And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man.

These four living creatures are unlike anything we've ever seen. John saw the same creatures and recorded his vision in Revelation 4 and 5. They had the appearance of a man, and therefore provide a model of ministry. Couldn't God have used something more effective than men to accomplish His work? Indeed! But by using people like you and me, those observing can only say, "Is God ever gracious! Look how kind He is to use people like *them!*"

Ezekiel 1:6, 7 (a)

And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf 's foot . . .

"Straight feet" speak of stability. If we are going to be used by the Lord, we can't allow ourselves the "luxury" of impulsive excursions. The Bible doesn't give us excuses to go through emotional ups and downs.

Ezekiel 1:7 (b)
. . . and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass.

This speaks of purity. There's no other way to be purified than through fiery problems and difficulties. Our faith is more precious than gold purified by fire, Peter tells us (1 Peter 1:7). How did the smelter know when the gold was truly pure? When he could look into the molten gold and see the reflection of his own face, he would know the gold was pure. So too, the Lord takes us through hot times and fiery trials. It's a long process but, if we hang in there, we'll begin to see something of Jesus reflected in us.

Ezekiel 1:8 (a)
And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides . . .

The four creatures had wings, but also hands because hands are necessary to reach out practically.

Ezekiel 1:8 (b), 9 (a)
. . . and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another . . .

How important it is if we're going to serve God to be linked together because with unity comes accountability. We'd see fewer problems in the church today if we had fewer "Lone Rangers" unaccountable to anyone else.

Ezekiel 1:9 (b), 10

. . . they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle.

The head speaks primarily of Jesus Christ.



***For topical study of Ezekiel 1:10 entitled "Creature Features," turn to page* 611.**

Ezekiel 1:11 (a)
Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward . . .

Here we see the priority of the four creatures—seeking first the kingdom and heavenly matters.

Ezekiel 1:11 (b)
. . . two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies.

Here we see the humility of the four creatures. We can't be effective if we're pompous, proud, and self-sufficient. These living creatures covered themselves in humility.

Ezekiel 1:12 (a)
And they went every one straight forward . . .

This speaks of integrity. The four creatures moved straight forward—not meandering, not deviating, but straight ahead.

Ezekiel 1:12 (b)
. . . whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went.

Here we see availability. The four creatures went wherever the Spirit led. In Acts 8, we read of a great revival that took place in Samaria through the ministry of Philip. Suddenly, however, the Spirit picked Philip up and plopped him in the desert so he could talk to one man. That doesn't make sense according to church growth manuals. You don't leave a revival to go talk to one guy. But the Spirit knew exactly what He was doing, for from that one man, all of northern Africa was reached with the gospel.

Ezekiel 1:13
As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning.

This speaks of intensity. The living creatures weren't just flickering. They were burning, ignited, on fire. One evangelist of old was asked how he attracted so many people to come and hear him preach. "It's very simple," he answered. "I pray in my closet until I'm ignited. And then I come out and people come to see me burn."

Ezekiel 1:14
And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.

Here, we see activity. The living creatures moved like lightning. It has been said that God never uses a lazy man. If you want to be used by the Lord, you must be wholehearted, energetic, and enthusiastic in your service for Him. You must be ready to lay aside anything that slows you down (Hebrews 12:1).

Ezekiel 1:15–17
Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they

went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went.

Ezekiel sees creatures unlike any he's ever seen or heard about. And right next to them are wheels in the middle of a wheel—like gyroscopes. Due to their ability to travel in any direction, they speak of the omnipresence of God.

Ezekiel 1:18 (a)
As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful . . .

The fact that they were "dreadful or awesome" speaks of the omnipotence of God.

Ezekiel 1:18 (b)
. . . and their rings were full of eyes round about them four.

Finally, covered with eyes, the wheels speak of the omniscience of God. Here, Ezekiel is seeing things he can hardly describe. But even though difficult, he is able to convey some aspect of the omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience of God.

Ezekiel 1:19–21
And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.

The living creatures were linked to, and evidently transported to some degree by the wheels. The same spirit in the living creatures was also in the wheels. This says something glorious to us. That is, if we are servants of the

omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God, He is committed to and linked with us. Christ in you, Paul says, is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).

If we only understood the reality of the presence and power of the Lord in our lives, we would not fear problems, get blown away by Satan, or be paralyzed in inactivity. We would say, "The wheel in the middle of the wheel is with me. And He's awesome."

Ezekiel 1:22
And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature was as the colour of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above.

There is a firmament above the heads of the four creatures that is "terrible," or indescribably beautiful.

Ezekiel 1:23, 24
And under the firmament were their wings straight, the one toward the other: every one had two, which covered on this side, and every one had two, which covered on that side, their bodies. And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host: when they stood, they let down their wings.

When the four creatures took flight, it must have sounded like a 747 jet taking off.

Ezekiel 1:25
And there was a voice from the firmament that was over their heads, when they stood, and had let down their wings.

It was when the living creatures stopped and let down their wings that they heard a voice from the firmament over them.

Yes, the Lord wants us active and energetic. No, we must not be lazy. But neither must we be so busy flying around that we never hear the voice of heaven. We can get so busy in ministry doing good things and helping people,

that we never really hear the voice of the Lord saying, "Come apart into a desert place for awhile" (Mark 6:31).

Ezekiel 1:26
And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.

A Man is on the throne. He is, of course, the Son of Man, Jesus Christ.

Ezekiel 1:27
And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about.

He who is the Light of the world is as bright as fire (John 8:12).

Ezekiel 1:28 (a)
As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. . . .

Ezekiel saw not only the fiery glow of God's glory but also the bow of His grace (Genesis 9:16). Here, the Lord on the throne is as bright as fire but with a gracious bow emanating from Him. The glory of God and the grace of God walk hand in hand.

Ezekiel 1:28 (b)
. . . And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.

Seeing these things, Ezekiel fell on his face. So did the apostle John (Revelation 1:17). When you see the greatness of God, it's inevitable that you fall on your face in brokenness and humility.

This chapter is important for two reasons. First, it guards against a loss of transcendence. That is, it serves as a reminder that God is great and awesome, beyond description and understanding, that He is "other." He's not our Buddy or "the Man upstairs." There is a mystery and majesty concerning the God we serve that should cause us to fall on our face. Failure to acknowledge the transcendence of God results in a lack of worship of God. People who have God all figured out theologically, all boxed in doctrinally will not worship because there's no mystery. That's why visions like this are invaluable to us, even though we don't fully understand them.

Secondly, this chapter guards against a loss of imminence. Yes, God is "other"—but He's also here, among us. Here is this awesome mysterious being revealing something of Himself to Ezekiel, dwelling in the midst of these living creatures, making Himself known by coming as a Man, Jesus from Galilee. Loss of imminence results in cold formality. People might worship, but it will be dead ritualism.

Transcendence and imminence are always necessary in the church corporately and in our lives personally. The first time I went to Candlestick Park, I was in third grade. I saw Willie Mays hit the first pitch of the first inning out of the park. From that day on, he was my hero. Then I had the opportunity to meet him at a dinner through a friend's dad. I sat two rows away from him. He was there, present, but he was totally "other." He was very gracious, but I was aware of his transcendence. That's the way it is with our Lord. He rejoices over us with song. He loves to be in our midst. He calls us friends. And yet He is bigger and more "other" than we can ever imagine. Transcendence and imminence—these two factors are, in essence, the reason for Ezekiel 1.

CREATURE FEATURES
A Topical Study of
EZEKIEL 1:10

We know what it means to be two-faced. But the creatures in the passage before us are four-faced beings, unlike anything we've seen on earth. This shouldn't be surprising for Paul tells us God has prepared things that eyes have never seen (1 Corinthians 2:9). We are unable to comprehend even the little tidbits we know of heaven. In this, we're like unborn babies. You see, if it wasn't for the contractions and the birthing process, a baby would just as soon stay inside his mommy forever where it's comfortable and safe. But once a baby is born, his eyes open to a whole new world of sights and sounds he had no idea even existed. That's exactly what's going to happen when we die. Death is simply a new birth—shooting us through the canal on into heaven.

Eight hundred years after Ezekiel described them, John saw the same living creatures (Revelation 4; 5). What do these beings speak of? The rabbis said they are a representation of all of God's creation. The greatest creation, man, is represented by the face of a man. The greatest wild animal is represented by the face of a lion. The greatest domesticated creature is represented by the face of an ox. The greatest flying creature is represented by the face of an eagle. Thus, all of creation, represented in these four living creatures, bows down, submitted to their Creator.

The rabbis also tell us that these four images were important in the travels of Israel through the wilderness. You see, the people of Israel were divided into four groups—three tribes in each group. When they set up camp, they would camp to the north, south, east, and west of the tabernacle in groups of three. The group that led the eastern side was Judah. The emblem of Judah was a lion. To the south was Ephraim. The emblem of Ephraim was the face of a man. To the north was Dan, represented by an eagle. To the west was Ruben, represented by an ox.

But these creatures serve a much more practical purpose for us, for in them we see how we should serve and worship God on earth even as they do in heaven.

The Lion

The lion speaks of authority. If we are to be effective in life, there comes a time when, like the lion, we need to roar with authority. I think of Joshua. "As for me and my house," he roared, "we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). I like that! He took a stand, made a statement, and went on record. Husband, father, wife, mother, there comes a time for you to make a statement of authority, saying, "As a family, we will serve the Lord."

As the enemies of Judah surrounded Jerusalem, King Joash went to Elisha for counsel. "Open the window," Elisha said. "Take your bow and this arrow and shoot it out the window." Joash obeyed Elisha's instruction and the arrow shot through the air. Elisha identified it as a picture of the Lord's deliverance over Syria. Then Elisha instructed Joash to take the remaining arrows in his hand and strike them against the floor. Again, Joash obeyed, but apparently it was reluctantly for Elisha said that because he only struck the arrows half-heartedly, his victory over the enemy would be incomplete (2 Kings 14).

In prayer, in devotion, in service we need to move with boldness—not just tapping the arrows lightly, but with effectiveness, fervency, and lion-like authority as we approach our Father in the name of Jesus for the kingdom and causes of our Lord. Don't half-heartedly praise or worship. Rather, hear the word of Elisha. Strike the arrows with authority, enthusiasm, and commitment in your praise, prayer, worship, and devotion.

The Ox

The ox speaks of humility. In the days of Jesus, a Roman coin depicted an ox surrounded by the inscription, "For service or sacrifice." There come times in our service to the Lord when we have to say, "Regardless of whether I am rewarded, applauded, or even acknowledged, I'm going to serve You day by day."

"It is required of servants," Paul would write, "that they be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2). Even more than being men and women of faith, may God help us to be faithful men and women.

You'll always know if you're becoming ox-like, if you're becoming a true servant, by how you react when people treat you like one. When you're plowing away day after day, pouring out your heart, giving your best without thanks acknowledgement or appreciation, how do you react? Servants are not honored or acknowledged. They serve anonymously, behind the scenes, out of sight. We need to have the kind of mentality that says, "When others don't acknowledge me or even misunderstand me, Lord, help me to truly be an ox and continue on."

The Eagle

Eagles soar higher than any living creature. The secret of their soaring is they know how to catch the thermal wind currents. Hang gliders employ these currents, as well. Neither hang gliders nor eagles can control the thermal winds—but they can take advantage of them. Spiritually, we're to do the same. When the Lord wakes us at three in the morning and asks us to spend time looking into His Word or at three in the afternoon when He asks us to go for a walk with Him, we have a choice to make. We can say, "Lord, I hear Your voice. I feel the movement, the wind, the breeze of Your Spirit and I'm going to spread my wings and catch it," or we can say, "Lord, I hear You calling me. But the game's on right now. I'll be there as soon as it's over." If we choose the latter, we miss the moment.

In John 3, Jesus said the Holy Spirit is like the wind. No man knows from whence it comes or where it goes. We can't control the wind. When it comes, we can only take advantage of it or miss out on it. Too often I'm not like the eagle, but rather like the hummingbird, flapping my wings thousands of times per minute, trying to make something happen in my own energy. Hummingbird-like activity is often indicative of a failure to understand the principle of the thermal—just quietly but immediately obeying when the Lord calls you to get away with Him, be it for a ten-minute break or a ten-day retreat.

The Man

I must not only be one who roars with authority, serves with humility, and soars with spirituality, but I must always remember my humanity. We are people. We have frailties. The Lord does not expect you to stand at attention at all times. A soldier who is constantly at attention, never relaxing, never resting, will be too fatigued to be very effective in the combat he's called to do. If a Christian is always uptight, never realizing his own humanity, he will find himself burning out. We've all been around people with whom we must speak very carefully because they're always on the edge of exploding. So often this is because they have not recognized their humanity and their need to slow down.

How freeing it is to recognize the need for rest, refreshment, and recreation. How freeing it is to realize we're not the answer to everyone's problems. Rather, we are simply to point people to Jesus.

- Do you roar with authority in your home, in worship, in prayer?
- Do you plow with humility, faithfully serving, even though no one acknowledges your work?
- Are you catching the thermals? Do you drop what you're doing to soar with the Lord and hear from Him?
- Do you understand your humanity and realize the limitations within you?

How can we do these things practically? There is only one way: Jesus. The early church fathers taught that these four faces represent the four Gospels. The lion speaks of Matthew, who portrays Jesus as King of the Jews. The ox speaks of Mark, who shows Jesus as a servant. Luke speaks of Jesus in His humanity as He is repeatedly referred to as the Son of Man. John speaks of Jesus in His divinity, where He is referred to as the Son of God.

To be sure, Jesus moved with authority. He overturned the tables and drove out a host of moneychangers from the temple. But He also served with humility as He washed the feet of His disciples. We see Him in His humanity as He would repeatedly call His disciples to a quiet place for rest. And we

see His deity, for, just as the eagle can look at the glory of the sun and not be burned, Jesus could not only look at God, but was Himself God.

Authority, humility, humanity, spirituality—the only way we can incorporate these essential traits is through Christ in us, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). You can take all the self-help courses you want, go to all the seminars you can afford, but the goals they present will only frustrate you until you realize you must turn your life over to the One who is perfect and let Him do His work in and through you.

Daily, immediately obey the Lord as He lives His life through you and you'll be blown away by how balanced and beautiful your life will be because of Christ Jesus in you.



2 **Ezekiel 2:1, 2**
And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me.

After Ezekiel fell upon his face in chapter 1, the Lord tells him to stand on his feet here in chapter 2. Then the Spirit Himself stood him on his feet. Isn't that always the way of the Lord? He's not only the commander but also the enabler. What He says, He does. If He tells you to love your enemies, it is He who will give you the power to do it. If He tells you to forgive your sister, it is He will give you the ability to do just that.

When you read the Bible and the Lord tells you something specific to do, know that by virtue of the fact that He tells you to do it, He will enable you to do it. He never says, "Here's the goal. Good luck." He says, "Here's My Word and here's My Spirit."

Ezekiel 2:3, 4
And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day. For they are impudent children and stiffhearted. I do

send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD.

After giving Ezekiel a vision, the Lord gives him a commission. If God has given you insights into His character or understanding of His Word, there comes with it a certain responsibility to share it, for to whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48).

Ezekiel 2:5–10
And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them. And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious. But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee. And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe.

No doubt Ezekiel would have liked to deliver a message of sweetness that would encourage and bless the people. Instead, he was given a message of woe, of lamentation, or warning. Yet, preference or not, Ezekiel would be faithful to deliver God's message. In chapters 2 through 32, we see him sounding forth condemnation due to the peoples' failure to respond to the goodness of God. In chapters 33 through 48, following condemnation, he delivers words of consolation.



3 **Ezekiel 3:1**
Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel.

Here, the Lord says to Ezekiel, "Before you go out and give to others, chow down yourself." Sometimes people who want to minister are not devoted to devouring the Word of God themselves. The result is that we have a lot of messengers with very little message, a lot of ministers with very little to say.

> **Ezekiel 3:2, 3**
> **So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll. And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.**

Even the hard things of the Word become sweet to those who take them in and think them through. Even the rebukes, reproofs, and corrections become satisfying. If the Word of God is not satisfying you, chances are it's because you're a nibbler. Here, God tells Ezekiel to stuff himself with His Word.

> **Ezekiel 3:4–7**
> **And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted.**

"If I sent you to foreigners, they would listen," God tells Ezekiel. "But I'm sending you to My people." This indictment is still true today, for God's people are sometimes less hungry and less receptive to God's Word than even the heathen.

Ezekiel 3:8–14
Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place. I heard also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing. So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me.

After he heard his message would be to the house of Israel, to people that would not listen or receive from him, to people who were hardhearted, Ezekiel didn't initially want to go. But the Spirit picked him up and took him anyway. Paul tells us we are to be ready to preach the Word in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2). There are times when you'll feel like ministering. There are other times when you'll feel like that's the last thing you want to do. But God wants to teach us that no matter what mood we're in, no matter where we're at emotionally, we're to be faithfully sharing His Word and showing His love.

Ezekiel 3:15
Then I came to them of the captivity at Telabib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.

After seeing what he had seen and being picked up by the Spirit of God, for seven days, Ezekiel didn't say a word.

Ezekiel 3:16–19

And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

God told Ezekiel he was a watchman. In that day, watchmen walked the walls of the city. Their job was to look for enemies and also to shout out the time to the city. Ezekiel was to warn the people of what was coming and to make them aware of the times in which they were living. If the people didn't listen and died in their sins, it wouldn't be Ezekiel's fault. If, however, he failed to warn them, their blood would be upon his head.

In Acts 20, Paul would reiterate this when he said, "I am pure from the blood of all men for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26, 27).

Ezekiel 3:20–23

Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul. And the hand of the LORD was there upon me; and he said unto me, Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee. Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and, behold, the glory of the LORD stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river of Chebar: and I fell on my face.

Ezekiel must be getting a flat nose! He keeps seeing God's glory and, therefore, keeps going down.

Ezekiel 3:24, 25
Then the spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet, and spake with me, and said unto me, Go, shut thyself within thine house. But thou, O son of man, behold, they shall put bands upon thee, and shall bind thee with them, and thou shalt not go out among them:

After the Spirit set him on his feet again, Ezekiel was warned that, to keep him from prophesying, his countrymen would seek to confine him.

Ezekiel 3:26, 27
And I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover: for they are a rebellious house. But when I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; He that heareth, let him hear; and he that forbeareth, let him forbear: for they are a rebellious house.

Ezekiel would be rendered speechless until God Himself opened his mouth. Wouldn't that be wonderful if that were true of us? We talk about needing the power of the Holy Spirit to speak the Word of God. But sometimes we need the power of the Holy Spirit to keep us quiet. "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin," the wisest man who ever lived declared (Proverbs 10:19). We'll see that, even though Ezekiel's mouth is closed, God will speak mightily through him.



4 Tens of thousands of Jews were now in the city of Babylon. During this time, false prophets began to come on the scene, saying that the Jews' stay in Babylon would be short, that they would be back in Jerusalem in no time at all. So God sent Ezekiel to tell the people that they would be in

Babylon for a long time, that He had much work to do in their lives, and that Jerusalem would soon be destroyed, as indeed it was in 586 B.C.

That was Ezekiel's message, but he was to give it in a most unusual way, for God had rendered him speechless. Therefore, He would use Ezekiel to give a message not by speaking but by acting. Having turned a deaf ear to His message, God would get the attention of His people in a different way . . .

Ezekiel 4:1, 2
Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and pourtray upon it the city, even Jerusalem: And lay siege against it, and build a fort against it, and cast a mount against it; set the camp also against it, and set battering rams against it round about.

In Ezekiel's day, tiles were used as chalkboards. Here, the Lord is telling Ezekiel to draw the city of Jerusalem. Surrounding it, he was to draw armies attacking and battering rams crashing.

Ezekiel 4:3
Moreover take thou unto thee an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city: and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel.

When Ezekiel finished his "chalk talk," he was to put a pan between himself and the tile, symbolizing that there would be some heavy things coming down and that there would be no way out.

Ezekiel 4:4–8
Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it thou shalt bear their iniquity. For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity

of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year. Therefore thou shalt set thy face toward the siege of Jerusalem, and thine arm shall be uncovered, and thou shalt prophesy against it. And, behold, I will lay bands upon thee, and thou shalt not turn thee from one side to another, till thou hast ended the days of thy siege.

Ezekiel was to lie on his left side for three hundred ninety days and on his right side for forty days. Even if he was allowed to get up occasionally, it would still be hard to lay on one side for over a year. People must have scratched their heads and wondered. Either Ezekiel was crazy—or God was definitely saying something. Of course, it was the latter that was true as God was using Ezekiel to give an illustrated sermon to the people that for three hundred ninety years Israel had been collapsing in carnality and that for forty years Judah had been burdened with iniquity, rendering God's people unable to stand for Him.

Ezekiel 4:9–11
Take thou also unto thee wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentiles, and millet, and fitches, and put them in one vessel, and make thee bread thereof, according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon thy side, three hundred and ninety days shalt thou eat thereof. And thy meat which thou shalt eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day: from time to time shalt thou eat it. Thou shalt drink also water by measure, the sixth part of an hin: from time to time shalt thou drink.

Ezekiel was to make meal from six ounces of grain and to drink from a pint of water, symbolizing the famine that would fall upon Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 4:12, 13
And thou shalt eat it as barley cakes, and thou shalt bake it with dung that cometh out of man, in their sight. And the LORD said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them.

Dung was to be used as a fuel to bake this meal as an illustration of how low the people would sink.

Ezekiel 4:14
Then said I, Ah Lord GOD! behold, my soul hath not been polluted: for from my youth up even till now have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself, or is torn in pieces; neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth.

"Lord, I grew up in the home of a priest," Ezekiel protested. "I've only eaten things that were kosher."

Ezekiel 4:15
Then he said unto me, Lo, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy bread therewith.

The Lord was giving Ezekiel a break here but was still driving a point home, determined to tell His people how polluted they had become.

Ezekiel 4:16, 17
Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by weight, and with care; and they shall drink water by measure, and with astonishment: That they may want bread and water, and be astonied one with another, and consume away for their iniquity.

Dark days were about to descend upon Jerusalem and God wanted His people to be fully warned.



5

Ezekiel 5:1
And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife, take thee a barber's razor, and cause it to pass upon thine head and upon thy beard: then take thee balances to weight, and divide the hair.

Ezekiel was to shave himself with a sword. In that culture, when a man lost his beard, it was a real disgrace.

Ezekiel 5:2–4
Thou shalt burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled: and thou shalt take a third part, and smite about it with a knife: and a third part thou shalt scatter in the wind; and I will draw out a sword after them. Thou shalt also take thereof a few in number, and bind them in thy skirts. Then take of them again, and cast them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire; for thereof shall a fire come forth into all the house of Israel.

Ezekiel was told to cut off his hair, shave his beard, and divide the hair into three equal piles. He was to burn one-third of the hair in the city. He was to throw one-third in the air and chop it with a knife. He was to scatter the remaining hair in the wind, saving a few whiskers in his garment. In this, the Lord was saying that one-third of the people still in Jerusalem would be burned in the city, one-third would be killed by the sword, and one-third would be scattered, losing their identity. Only a few remnants would be saved—and even they would suffer.

Ezekiel 5:5–9
Thus saith the Lord GOD; This is Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her. And she hath changed my judgments into wickedness more than the nations, and my statutes more than the countries that are round about her: for they have refused my judgments and my statutes, they have not walked in them. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye multiplied more than the nations that are round about you, and have not walked in my statutes, neither have kept my judgments, neither have done according to the judgments of the nations that are round about you; Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, am against thee, and will execute judgments in the midst of thee in the sight of the nations. And I

will do in thee that which I have not done, and whereunto I will not do any more the like, because of all thine abominations.

Jerusalem's destruction at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians was the worst tragedy that had befallen any nation up to that point. And the tragedy would be repeated at the hands of Titus and the Romans.

Ezekiel 5:10–17

Therefore the fathers shall eat the sons in the midst of thee, and the sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments in thee, and the whole remnant of thee will I scatter into all the winds. Wherefore, as I live, saith the Lord GOD; Surely, because thou hast defiled my sanctuary with all thy detestable things, and with all thine abomina tions, therefore will I also diminish thee; neither shall mine eye spare, neither will I have any pity. A third part of thee shall die with the pestilence, and with famine shall they be consumed in the midst of thee: and a third part shall fall by the sword round about thee and I will scatter a third part into all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them. Thus shall mine anger be accomplished, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted: and they shall know that I the LORD have spoken it in my zeal, when I have accomplished my fury in them. Moreover I will make thee waste, and a reproach among the nations that are round about thee, in the sight of all that pass by. So it shall be a reproach and a taunt, an instruction and an astonishment unto the nations that are round about thee, when I shall execute judgments in thee in anger and in fury and in furious rebukes. I the LORD have spoken it. When I shall send upon them the evil arrows of famine, which shall be for their destruction, and which I will send to destroy you: and I will increase the famine upon you, and will break your staff of bread: So will I send upon you famine and evil beasts, and they shall bereave thee; and pestilence and blood shall pass through thee; and I will bring the sword upon thee. I the LORD have spoken it.

If God does not judge sin, sin will judge man. That is why God went to these extremes to communicate what He was about to do. The people had stopped listening to preaching a long time ago. They ignored the message of the prophets. So, through Ezekiel, God attempted to get their attention in creative ways. If God didn't judge, *all* would be lost. *All* would be devoured. The pollution and sin of these people would destroy the nation in its entirety.



6 **Ezekiel 6:1–3 (a)**
And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, And say . . .

At last, Ezekiel gets to talk. But to whom was he to speak? The mountains.

Ezekiel 6:3 (b)
. . . Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD; Thus saith the Lord GOD to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys . . .

Not only would the mountains listen at the command of God, but they were also fully prepared to speak at His command (Luke 19:40). Oh, that we would obey our Creator so readily.

Ezekiel 6:3 (c)–5
. . . Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken: and I will cast down your slain men before your idols. And I will lay the dead carcases of the children of Israel before their idols; and I will scatter your bones round about your altars.

The term "high places" appears throughout the Old Testament. The high places were groves or little gardens built by the Canaanites in which they would worship their gods in garden-like settings. When Joshua was told to conquer the land, he did a fairly good job, but let the high places remain. Why? Perhaps because they were pleasant to look at. But as the years progressed, the people of Israel were drawn to these little gardens and, there, learned of the worship rituals of the Canaanites.

The warning to us is that sometimes there are sins about which we say, "That's not a big issue in my life. I don't have to deal with that particular thing. It's under control. Besides, it's kind of pretty. I'll deal with everything else and I'll let that high place be."

God, however, says the groves have to go not because He doesn't want us to have fun, but because He knows they'll eventually destroy us.

"Oh, but it's just a small part of my life," we protest.

"It will destroy you," a loving Father answers. "These groves have got to go—now."

Satan's biggest lie—one that he's told ever since the Garden of Eden—is to whisper in our ears that God is holding back something really good from us (Genesis 3:5). But that's not true. God says to us that the groves must go because our bodies will be left on the floor of pagan altars. In other words, we'll be destroyed.

Ezekiel 6:6–10

In all your dwellingplaces the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your images may be cut down, and your works may be abolished. And the slain shall fall in the midst of you, and ye shall know that I am the LORD. Yet will I leave a remnant, that ye may have some that shall escape the sword among the nations, when ye shall be scattered through the countries. And they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations whither they shall be carried captives, because I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols: and they shall lothe themselves for the evils

which they have committed in all their abominations. And they shall know that I am the LORD, and that I have not said in vain that I would do this evil unto them.

Remembering is the first step to repentance. It was the remembrance of home that stirred the prodigal son to change his direction and return to his father (Luke 15:17). That is why, concerning His Table, Jesus said, "This do in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). When we remember what He did on our behalf, repentance cannot be far behind.

Ezekiel 6:11–14
Thus saith the Lord GOD; Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot, and say, Alas for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! for they shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. He that is far off shall die of the pestilence; and he that is near shall fall by the sword; and he that remaineth and is besieged shall die by the famine: thus will I accomplish my fury upon them. Then shall ye know that I am the LORD, when their slain men shall be among their idols round about their altars, upon every high hill, in all the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree, and under every thick oak, the place where they did offer sweet savour to all their idols. So will I stretch out my hand upon them, and make the land desolate, yea, more desolate than the wilderness toward Diblath, in all their habitations: and they shall know that I am the LORD.

Here, the Lord tells Ezekiel to clap his hands and stamp his feet in order to get the peoples' attention and to warn them that they would die among their idols unless they returned to the Lord. We will either die sacrificing our lives to our idols or die as a living sacrifice to our Lord (Romans 12:1, 2).



7 **Ezekiel 7:1–3**
Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Also, thou

son of man, thus saith the Lord GOD unto the land of Israel; An end, the end is come upon the four corners of the land. Now is the end come upon thee, and I will send mine anger upon thee, and will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense upon thee all thine abominations.

The people would be judged according to their ways. That is, they would bring judgment upon themselves.

> **Ezekiel 7:4–9**
> **And mine eye shall not spare thee, neither will I have pity: but I will recompense thy ways upon thee, and thine abominations shall be in the midst of thee: and ye shall know that I am the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD; An evil, an only evil, behold, is come. An end is come, the end is come: it watcheth for thee; behold, it is come. The morning is come unto thee, O thou that dwellest in the land: the time is come, the day of trouble is near, and not the sounding again of the mountains. Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee: and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations. And mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: I will recompense thee according to thy ways and thine abominations that are in the midst of thee; and ye shall know that I am the LORD that smiteth.**

Throughout Scripture, various names of God are revealed. In Genesis 22:14, we see *Jehovah-Jireh,* the Lord our provider. In Exodus 17:15, we see *Jehovah-Nissi,* the Lord our banner, or covering. In Judges 6:24, we see *Jehovah-Shalom,* the Lord our peace. In Jeremiah 23:6, we see *Jehovah-Tsidkenu,* the Lord our righteousness. We like those names. But here we see He's also *Jehovah-Makkeh,* the Lord who smites because God is not only our provider, He is also a smiter And when we come to the Lord, we get the whole package. We can't say, "I'll take *Jehovah-Jireh* and *Jehovah-Shalom,* but I'm not interested in *Jehovah-Makkeh.*" That's not the way it works. When we say, "You are my God," we get His person in totality.

God is indeed the God who smites. But, instead of smiting you and me the way we deserve to be, He smote His own Son on a hill called Calvary.

> Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.
>
> Isaiah 53:10

Our glorious, awesome, powerful Father will not wink at sin. He is *Jehovah-Makkeh.* But He is also the one who loves you and me so intensely that He provided a way whereby we wouldn't be smitten eternally. Jesus took our place. Therefore, if we walk away from the One who gave everything to die in our place, we deserve to be smitten eternally.

> **Ezekiel 7:10–13**
> **Behold the day, behold, it is come: the morning is gone forth; the rod hath blossomed, pride hath budded. Violence is risen up into a rod of wickedness: none of them shall remain, nor of their multitude, nor of any of theirs: neither shall there be wailing for them. The time is come, the day draweth near: let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn: for wrath is upon all the multitude thereof. For the seller shall not return to that which is sold, although they were yet alive: for the vision is touching the whole multitude thereof, which shall not return; neither shall any strengthen himself in the iniquity of his life.**

According to the Law, property was to be returned to its original owner every fifty years (Leviticus 25:13). In Ezekiel's day, however, this would not matter since the rightful owner would most likely either have been killed by famine, sword, or pestilence in Judah or held captive in Babylon.

> **Ezekiel 7:14–16**
> **They have blown the trumpet, even to make all ready; but none goeth to the battle: for my wrath is upon all the multitude thereof. The sword is without, and the pestilence and the famine within: he that is in the field shall die with the sword; and he that is in the city, famine and pestilence shall devour him. But they that escape of them shall escape, and shall be on the mountains**

like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, every one for his iniquity.

A call to defend the city would be useless.

Ezekiel 7:17–19
All hands shall be feeble, and all knees shall be weak as water. They shall also gird themselves with sackcloth, and horror shall cover them; and shame shall be upon all faces, and baldness upon all their heads. They shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD: they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels: because it is the stumblingblock of their iniquity.

The gold and silver that God's people had sacrificed their children to obtain, the gold and silver they had ignored the Sabbath to earn was now worthless.

Ezekiel 7:20–22
As for the beauty of his ornament, he set it in majesty: but they made the images of their abominations and of their detestable things therein: therefore have I set it far from them. And I will give it into the hands of the strangers for a prey, and to the wicked of the earth for a spoil; and they shall pollute it. My face will I turn also from them, and they shall pollute my secret place: for the robbers shall enter into it, and defile it.

At one time, the temple was the most beautiful ornament of the people of God. But its beauty would be far less marred by the invading Babylonian armies than by the idols placed within it by their own hand (2 Kings 16:10–16; 2 Chronicles 36:14).

Ezekiel 7:23–27 (a)
Make a chain: for the land is full of bloody crimes, and the city is full of violence. Wherefore I will bring the worst of the heathen,

and they shall possess their houses: I will also make the pomp of the strong to cease; and their holy places shall be defiled. Destruction cometh; and they shall seek peace, and there shall be none. Mischief shall come upon mischief, and rumour shall be upon rumour; then shall they seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the ancients. The king shall mourn, and the prince shall be clothed with desolation, and the hands of the people of the land shall be troubled: I will do unto them after their way . . .

Like the chain that would signify the siege and captivity of Jerusalem, mischief and rumor would be linked to calamity and destruction with no foreseeable end for the people of God.

Ezekiel 7:27 (b)
. . . and according to their deserts will I judge them; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

"My people insisted on having their own way," the Lord declares. "But when I judge them accordingly, they will know that I am the Lord."

Three things strike me as I come to the close of this dramatic presentation. The first is the absolute integrity of God's message. We have a tendency to want to be liked. God, on the other hand, is committed to declaring the truth. And He knows that sin must be judged or it will bring judgment. One of the key components of conversion is for a man to realize he's a sinner. If he doesn't realize this, he will walk away from the One who was made sin for him (2 Corinthians 5:21). That's why the Old Testament is so important. It's a schoolmaster to show us that what we call personality quirks or idiosyncrasies are actually sin (Galatians 3:24).

Next, I see the remarkable flexibility of God's method. In Ezekiel, He communicates through drama, poetry, art, foot stomping, and hand clapping. Whatever it takes to communicate, God will use. Therefore, next time you think some ministry is bizarre, think of Ezekiel, for God will sometimes use methods that seem shocking to church people to reach a world that is no longer listening to traditional means.

Finally, I see the potential expendability of God's men. Our God has work to do. And He'll use those who are willing to say, "Use me." But it's not always going to be easy. He might say to you, "The way I will use you is to be a model to this community of how a man dies from cancer while keeping his faith intact." God might call some of you to the ministry where you will have churches that grow to the number of seven people after thirty years of preaching. God's ministry for you might be to show the world how to be faithful when you're not seeing results outwardly. He might give you songs to sing but no one comes with recording contracts.

Surely, Ezekiel didn't enjoy all of his assignments. But do you think he's in heaven saying, "What a rip-off. I can't believe God made me do those things"? I don't. I think when he heard, "Well done, good and faithful servant"—it was all worth it.

In heaven, there are rewards, blessings, ecstasy, and fulfillment we can't possibly begin to imagine now. And, like Ezekiel, we'll say, "Thank You, Lord, for letting me suffer, for not allowing me to see my name in lights, for going through hard times because now it all makes sense. I feel honored." If it takes us going through hard times to allow God to do His work, so be it. God does not exist to make us comfortable. He has a job to do through us.



8 Ezekiel 8:1
And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell there upon me.

Several months had passed since the beginning of the ministry to which Ezekiel had been called—a ministry to the captives in Babylon. Many of the Jews in Babylon were listening to false prophets who were saying their captivity would be short. Ezekiel, on the other hand, said, "We're here for awhile. The Lord is dealing with us, breaking us before He rebuilds us. There is work to be done in our lives for we have been a rebellious, hard-hearted, stiff-necked people, wrong in our actions and in our thinking."

Ezekiel spoke straightforwardly and bluntly. And some of the men of Israel were beginning to recognize that he indeed was speaking with the authority of the Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel 8:2, 3 (a)
Then I beheld, and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire: from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire; and from his loins even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the colour of amber. And he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven . . .

Talk about a hair-raising experience! Suddenly the hand of the Lord comes upon Ezekiel and grabs a lock of his hair, picks him up, and he is suspended between heaven and earth.

Ezekiel 8:3 (b), 4
. . . and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy. And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that I saw in the plain.

Caught up in the air, pulled up by his hair, Ezekiel is now transported in a vision to Jerusalem. In the temple arena, an area devoted to worshiping the true and living God, there was an image of jealousy. Most likely it was an idol constructed and placed there by King Manasseh. It was called the image or idol of jealousy because it provoked the Lord to jealousy.

Ezekiel 8:5, 6
Then said he unto me, Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north. So I lifted up mine eyes the way toward the north, and behold northward at the gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry. He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my

sanctuary? but turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations.

"My glory is in the sanctuary and yet My people are involved in idolatry," the Lord declares. Then He tells Ezekiel He would show him an even greater evil than this idol.

Ezekiel 8:7–12
And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall. Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door. And he said unto me, Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here. So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, pourtrayed upon the wall round about. And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up. Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth.

Ezekiel was told to dig a hole through the wall of the temple. As he did, a door appeared, which he entered. On the inside walls of the temple, Ezekiel saw pictures of beasts, creeping things, and pornographic items. The Lord said to him, "This is what is going on in the minds of these men who outwardly are so religious, who offer prayers and worship, who appear so righteous and pious."

Jesus had much to say about our minds. In His day, there were those who were very proud of their outward behavior. They didn't murder. They didn't commit adultery. They didn't use profanity. And yet Jesus said, "That's not the issue. It's what's going on inside of your minds that matters. You pride yourself in not committing adultery. But I say to you that if you look at a woman with lust, in essence, you've already committed adultery. You pride yourself in the fact that you haven't killed, but I say to you if you've been

angry with your brother without cause you're guilty of murder. You take pride in not using profanity, but you use My name in a way that lacks integrity" (Matthew 5).

What goes on in the chambers of our imaginations? What if Ezekiel came on the scene today and dug a hole through your skull? What kind of pictures would he see on your walls? Psychologists tell us that we have approximately 10,000 distinct thoughts in any given day. What if those thoughts were displayed upon screens for all to see?

Paul picks up on this same idea when he speaks to us concerning our imaginations . . .

> For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;
>
> 2 Corinthians 10:3–5

Paul says the battle we wage for the mind is not to be done with human methods. Rather, we must pull down these images with spiritual weapons. I don't know what goes on in the chamber of your imagination. But each of us must deal with images that settle in our minds and come back again and again. Have you ever wondered where in the world a certain thought comes from? They don't come from the world for Ephesians 6:12 tells us we war not against flesh and blood but against rulers of darkness. In other words, the enemy takes fiery darts from hell, shoots them at us, and suddenly we find ourselves thinking things we had no intention of thinking. Paul says there's only one way to deal with those fiery darts—with the shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16). And faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

In 2 Kings 4 we read that, while making a stew, one of the guys in Elisha's prophet's school accidentally put in all kinds of bitter herbs. Elisha didn't tell his students to get rid of the stew. He didn't say to take the bitter herbs out of the stew. He said to pour in good meal and let the good meal naturally dissipate the bitterness in the pot.

Every day, there will be poisonous, bitter herbs placed in the pot of your mind perhaps through the media, through conversation, through education. What can we do? Head for the hills and go to a monastery? No, because we'll bring our mind with us. Pick out the poisons and fight against them? No, because that would be a losing battle. We are to do what Elisha's men did. We are to pour in the meal of God's Word daily. As the meal goes in, the poison dissipates. Evil imaginations begin to shrivel in the light of God's Word.

It is the Word of God that counteracts what is dangled before us all day long by this world's system. As the Word goes through you, there is a cleansing that takes place. Baal and Ashteroth, Mammon and Moloch—the gods of intellect and sensuality, money and pleasure—are rendered helpless by the Word. Therefore, stay in the Word, gang, and make it the number one priority of your life—not just to gain theological information, but to gain much-needed spiritual nutrition.

Ezekiel 8:13, 14
He said also unto me, Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations that they do. Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the LORD's house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz.

On the north side of the temple, Ezekiel saw women weeping for Tammuz. Tammuz was the Babylonian god of resurrection, In Genesis 11, we read of a man named Nimrod, founder of Babylon. He married a woman named Semaramis. Some time after Nimrod died, his wife said she miraculously conceived. The child produced was a man named Tammuz. As a young man, Tammuz went out hunting for wild boar and was killed. After being buried for forty days, suddenly, miraculously, he was resurrected. Weeping for him, as was the yearly custom, the Jews in Babylon were caught up in this counterfeit religion.

In every culture, there seemed to be the propagation of this same scenario. For the Canaanite, it played out through Ashteroth and Baal. In Greece, it was Venus and Cupid. In Egypt, it was Osiris and Isis. Satan knew the prophecies of the Old Testament—that truly a virgin would conceive and

truly the Child conceived would be resurrected from the dead. Thus, these counterfeit religions were his attempt to confuse people.

Here, it was as if the Lord said to Ezekiel, "My people are weeping for Tammuz when they should be weeping for their own sins."

Ezekiel 8:15, 16
Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these. And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east.

The group of twenty-five men Ezekiel observed worshiping the sun most likely consisted of a representative from each of the twenty-four courses of priests along with the high priest himself. That is why they were even a greater abomination than were the women who wept for Tammuz.

Ezekiel 8:17, 18
Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them.

Putting the "branch to the nose" most likely speaks of some element of the Persian-based worship of the sun. Although Josiah was able to do away with sun-worship (2 Kings 23:5, 11), it evidently resurfaced.

Whether it be in the shady groves or in the bright light of the sun, God's people seemed to find ways to worship every god but the true and living God. How could it be any wonder that He would deal with them—and with we who do the same—with fury?

9 In chapter 9, Ezekiel's vision of the temple continues . . .

Ezekiel 9:1, 2
He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand. And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brasen altar.

Who are these men with weapons in their hands? Second Thessalonians 1:7 and 8 identify them as angels dispatched over certain communities to mete out God's judgment. The one in linen, which speaks of righteousness and purity, with an inkwell at his side is the Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel 9:3, 4
And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side; And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.

The Holy Spirit is instructed to go throughout the city and make a mark on the forehead of all who were sighing and hurting because of the sin and abomination of the rebellious city of Jerusalem. This reminds me of another group that will be marked on the forehead. In Revelation 7, in the time of Tribulation, 12,000 Jews from each tribe will marked on the forehead by the Lord. These 144,000 will be powerful preachers during the Tribulation period. As you come to the closing chapters of Revelation the 144,000

appear again—not 143,999 but 144,000. They all made it. Those who were marked by God were kept by God. In Ezekiel's day, those who were grieving over the rebelliousness of the people of Israel were marked men. And, as we'll see, they would be preserved.

Ezekiel 9:5, 6
And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house.

Are you a marked man or woman? Yes. You are either marked by compassion, saying, "Lord, I love You and I care about people" or you are marked for destruction, saying, "I don't care about the Lord and I don't care about people." In the Tribulation period, people will either wear the mark of God on their foreheads or they will take the mark of the beast (Revelation 16:2). But, as believers, we are told in Ephesians 1:13 that we have been sealed or literally marked with the Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel 9:7–11
And he said unto them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go ye forth. And they went forth, and slew in the city. And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and cried, and said, Ah Lord GOD! wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem? Then said he unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say, The LORD hath forsaken the earth, and the LORD seeth not. And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head. And, behold, the man clothed with linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me.

"I have done as thou hast commanded me," the Man in linen says. In John 16, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would not seek His own glory but would only do the things that glorify the Son. Therefore, whenever there is a genuine movement of the Spirit, there will not primarily be a great deal of talk about the Spirit. When the Spirit is moving, *Jesus* is glorified. When the Spirit is working, *Jesus* is exalted. The Spirit desires to glorify the Son even as the Son desires to glorify the Father.



10 Still in Jerusalem, Ezekiel's vision continues . . .

Ezekiel 10:1, 2
Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubims there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne. And he spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, even under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubims, and scatter them over the city. And he went in in my sight.

Coals speak of judgment. Here, the man in linen, symbolizing the Holy Spirit, was to scatter coals of judgment around the city, symbolizing the inferno it would eventually become.

Ezekiel 10:3, 4
Now the cherubims stood on the right side of the house, when the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court. Then the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the LORD's glory.

Here we see the glory of God departing from the temple due to the rebellion and hardheartedness of the people.

Ezekiel 10:5–15

And the sound of the cherubims' wings was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of the Almighty God when he speaketh. And it came to pass, that when he had commanded the man clothed with linen, saying, Take fire from between the wheels, from between the cherubims; then he went in, and stood beside the wheels. And one cherub stretched forth his hand from between the cherubims unto the fire that was between the cherubims, and took thereof, and put it into the hands of him that was clothed with linen: who took it, and went out. And there appeared in the cherubims the form of a man's hand under their wings. And when I looked, behold the four wheels by the cherubims, one wheel by one cherub, and another wheel by another cherub: and the appearance of the wheels was as the colour of a beryl stone. And as for their appearances, they four had one likeness, as if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides; they turned not as they went, but to the place whither the head looked they followed it; they turned not as they went. And their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about, even the wheels that they four had. As for the wheels, it was cried unto them in my hearing, O wheel. And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of a cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. And the cherubims were lifted up. This is the living creature that I saw by the river of Chebar.

The living creatures of chapter 1 are here seen again. These creatures, unlike anything we've ever seen, sound bizarre to us—but that's only because Ezekiel is trying to describe the indescribable. When Paul was stoned at Lystra and left for dead, it was perhaps then that he said he was caught up into heaven, not sure whether he was alive or dead, and saw things that were unlawful for him to speak of because words were inadequate (2 Corinthians 12:2).

Ezekiel 10:16–19
And when the cherubims went, the wheels went by them: and when the cherubims lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also turned not from beside them. When they stood, these stood; and when they were lifted up, these lifted up themselves also: for the spirit of the living creature was in them. Then the glory of the LORD departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims. And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD's house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above.

Here, we see the final step of the departure of the glory of God from the temple.

Ezekiel 10:20–22
This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar; and I knew that they were the cherubims. Every one had four faces apiece, and every one four wings; and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. And the likeness of their faces was the same faces which I saw by the river of Chebar, their appearances and themselves: they went every one straight forward.

The son of a priest, Ezekiel would have been familiar with the description of the cherubim in the temple (Exodus 25). Here, perhaps with a closer look or with more time for reflection, he is able to identify the living creatures he saw in chapter 1 as cherubim.

11

Ezekiel 11:1, 2
Moreover the spirit lifted me up, and brought me unto the east gate of the LORD's house, which looketh eastward: and behold at the door of

the gate five and twenty men; among whom I saw Jaazaniah the son of Azur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, the princes of the people. Then said he unto me, Son of man, these are the men that devise mischief, and give wicked counsel in this city:

These twenty-five men were very likely the same twenty-five seen worshiping the sun in chapter 8. If this be true, no wonder they gave wicked counsel to the city, for without the Son, they could only stumble in the dark.

Ezekiel 11:3
Which say, It is not near; let us build houses: this city is the caldron, and we be the flesh.

The spiritual leaders of Jerusalem insisted that contrary to Jeremiah's prophecies, the destruction of the city would only happen in the distant future. Jeremiah had likened the city to a boiling pot (1:13). In reference to this, the leaders of Jerusalem said if indeed it was like a boiling pot, they were as safe as the meat that boiled within.

Ezekiel 11:4–12
Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, O son of man. And the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and said unto me, Speak; Thus saith the LORD; Thus have ye said, O house of Israel: for I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them. Ye have multiplied your slain in this city, and ye have filled the streets thereof with the slain. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Your slain whom ye have laid in the midst of it, they are the flesh, and this city is the caldron: but I will bring you forth out of the midst of it. Ye have feared the sword; and I will bring a sword upon you, saith the Lord GOD. And I will bring you out of the midst thereof, and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and will execute judgments among you. Ye shall fall by the sword; I will judge you in the border of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. This city shall not be your caldron, neither shall ye be the flesh in the midst thereof; but I will judge you in the border of Israel: And ye shall know that I am the LORD: for ye have not

walked in my statutes, neither executed my judgments, but have done after the manners of the heathen that are round about you.

Jerusalem didn't fall all at once. Her fall began in 605 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar first came down, hoping the people would submit to him willingly. Initially, they seemed to do just that—but they rebelled eventually. So he came down again in 597 and took 10,000 Jews, including Ezekiel, back to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar hoped that would teach Jerusalem to submit to him. But there were still a number of zealots who said, "Jerusalem is our cauldron, our cup of tea. We're going to win it back."

In Jerusalem, however, Jeremiah was telling the people that it was God who had determined to allow Nebuchadnezzar to be victorious over her. Therefore, they were to submit to him and let God do His work in their lives. When the people rebelled, instead, Nebuchadnezzar came down a third time in 586 B.C. and destroyed the city completely. The temple was burned. The people were wiped out.

Here, Ezekiel is reiterating what Jeremiah had said.

Ezekiel 11:13
And it came to pass, when I prophesied, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. Then fell I down upon my face, and cried with a loud voice, and said, Ah Lord GOD! wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?

"Is this man who died indicative of what You're going to do to everyone?" Ezekiel asked the Lord. "Are You going to destroy the entire nation?"

Ezekiel 11:14–17
Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, thy brethren, even thy brethren, the men of thy kindred, and all the house of Israel wholly, are they unto whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Get you far from the LORD: unto us is this land given in possession. Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be

to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come. Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.

"Not all are going to die," the Lord told Ezekiel. God's people would be scattered, but in the countries in which they would be scattered, God would be a sanctuary for them to protect and keep them.

The Jews are the only ethnic group in world history who have survived over three generations apart from their homeland. For over 2,000 years, they kept their identity, their culture, their system of belief because God was indeed a sanctuary to them.

Ezekiel 11:18–20
And they shall come thither, and they shall take away all the detestable things thereof and all the abominations thereof from thence. And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

God not only promised to regather Israel but also to revive her. He regathered them politically and nationally, but He will also revive them spiritually when all Israel is saved (Romans 11:26).

Ezekiel 11:21–23
But as for them whose heart walketh after the heart of their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their way upon their own heads, saith the Lord GOD. Then did the cherubims lift up their wings, and the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city.

This mountain is known as the Mount of Olives. It's the same mountain from which Jesus departed when He went up to heaven following the Resurrection. According to Zechariah, it's also the mountain upon which He will land when He comes back again (14:4).

Ezekiel 11:24, 25
Afterwards the spirit took me up, and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to them of the captivity. So the vision that I had seen went up from me. Then I spake unto them of the captivity all the things that the LORD had shewed me.

After being shown the unbelievable and indescribable, Ezekiel was taken back to Babylon.



12

Ezekiel 12:1, 2
The word of the LORD also came unto me, saying, Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house.

The metaphor of eyes that don't see and ears that don't hear was used not only by Ezekiel, but also by Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Jesus. Because His people wouldn't see or hear, did God give up on them? No. He uses Ezekiel yet again . . .

Ezekiel 12:3–7
Therefore, thou son of man, prepare thee stuff for removing, and remove by day in their sight; and thou shalt remove from thy place to another place in their sight: it may be they will consider, though they be a rebellious house. Then shalt thou bring forth thy stuff by day in their sight, as stuff for removing: and thou shalt go forth at even in their sight, as they that go forth into captivity. Dig thou through the wall in their sight, and carry out thereby. In their sight shalt thou bear it upon thy shoulders, and carry it forth

in the twilight: thou shalt cover thy face, that thou see not the ground: for I have set thee for a sign unto the house of Israel. And I did so as I was commanded: I brought forth my stuff by day, as stuff for captivity, and in the even I digged through the wall with mine hand; I brought it forth in the twilight, and I bare it upon my shoulder in their sight.

Ezekiel was told to pack his belongings and prepare to move. But he wasn't to leave through the door of his house. He was to leave at twilight through a hole in the wall with his face covered.

Ezekiel 12:8
And in the morning came the word of the LORD unto me, saying,

First, Ezekiel obeyed. Then he understood. He didn't know what he was doing, but he just did what God directed and then later found out why. What a necessary word this is for us. We need to obey the Lord even if we don't see the full picture at the time, knowing that, in His perfect time, it will be revealed.

Ezekiel 12:9–13
Son of man, hath not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said unto thee, What doest thou? Say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; This burden concerneth the prince in Jerusalem, and all the house of Israel that are among them. Say, I am your sign: like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them: they shall remove and go into captivity. And the prince that is among them shall bear upon his shoulder in the twilight, and shall go forth: they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby: he shall cover his face, that he see not the ground with his eyes. My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare: and I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there.

Just as Ezekiel dug a hole in the wall and moved out, so too, when Zedekiah received word of the Babylonian invasion, he snuck out through a

"back door" under cover of night (Jeremiah 39:4). But, outside of Jerusalem, a net was spread for him and he was captured. He was taken north to a place called Riblah where his sons were killed and his eyes put out before he was carried captive to Babylon. Thus, just as Ezekiel prophesied, he was taken to Babylon, but never saw it.

Ezekiel 12:14–16
And I will scatter toward every wind all that are about him to help him, and all his bands; and I will draw out the sword after them. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall scatter them among the nations, and disperse them in the countries. But I will leave a few men of them from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence; that they may declare all their abominations among the heathen whither they come; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

God's people would be scattered in order that the heathen might know that He is the Lord. In other words, the heathen would see that when God's people get out of line, He corrects them. Peter tells us that judgment always begins at the house of the Lord (1 Peter 4:17). Therefore, before He corrects this country, it shouldn't surprise us when the Lord corrects us, His own people.

Ezekiel 12:17–19
Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Son of man, eat thy bread with quaking, and drink thy water with trembling and with carefulness; And say unto the people of the land, Thus saith the Lord GOD of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and of the land of Israel; They shall eat their bread with carefulness, and drink their water with astonishment, that her land may be desolate from all that is therein, because of the violence of all them that dwell therein.

The time was coming when the people would be shaking and trembling because judgment and correction were inevitable.

Ezekiel 12:20–25

And the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall be desolate; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth? Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision. For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I am the LORD: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord GOD.

"The days are prolonged. The vision fails" was a common saying in the land. In other words, "The visions and prophecies are never going to happen."

> Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.
>
> 2 Peter 3:3, 4

Even as in Ezekiel's day there were scoffers saying, "This prophecy is never going to pass," Peter says in the last days scoffers will say, "Where is the promise of His coming? We've heard preaching about prophecy and talk of end times for years." Yet in so saying, they themselves will be a fulfillment of Peter's prophecy.

Ezekiel 12:26–28

Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off. Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD;

There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord GOD.

In Matthew 24, Jesus likens those who don't think He will return to servants who smite each other and "eat and drink with the drunken" in their master's absence. In Ezekiel's day, as in ours, one's understanding of prophecy is not important for reasons of theological or intellectual debate but because it directly impacts how we live on any given day.



13 Ezekiel 13:1–3

And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!

There were many prophets on the scene saying, "Thus saith the Lord," when, in reality, they were simply giving their own opinions. This can be a terrible tendency even today. Wanting to be liked or to comfort others, we can find ourselves saying hopeful words to people that are not truly from the Lord.

Ezekiel 13:4–6

O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD. They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The LORD saith: and the LORD hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word.

In Ezekiel 22:30, the Lord says, "I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge and stand in the gap . . . but I found none." In other words, "I sought for a man to pray and intercede on behalf of My people but

found none." There was evidently no shortage of men willing to falsely prophesy, but not one willing to pay the price of prayer.

Ezekiel 13:7–16
Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD saith it; albeit I have not spoken? Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord GOD. And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord GOD. Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered morter: Say unto them which daub it with untempered morter, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it. Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it? Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even rend it with a stormy wind in my fury; and there shall be an overflowing shower in mine anger, and great hailstones in my fury to consume it. So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered morter, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I am the LORD. Thus will I accomplish my wrath upon the wall, and upon them that have daubed it with untempered morter, and will say unto you, The wall is no more, neither they that daubed it; To wit, the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith the Lord GOD.

The false prophets who prophesied peace and prosperity, who said there was no need for people to turn to the Lord or to get right with Him, were

whitewashing reality. They were "daubing with untempered mortar," or putting plaster on a wall that would crumble before their eyes when the rain came down. The false prophets with their false words of peace would not stand in the coming storm.

Ezekiel 13:17–19
Likewise, thou son of man, set thy face against the daughters of thy people, which prophesy out of their own heart; and prophesy thou against them, And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe to the women that sew pillows to all armholes, and make kerchiefs upon the head of every stature to hunt souls! Will ye hunt the souls of my people, and will ye save the souls alive that come unto you? And will ye pollute me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live, by your lying to my people that hear your lies?

Not only were there false prophets in Babylon but false prophetesses as well. Rather than afflicting the comfortable and comforting the afflicted, these women did just the opposite. They comforted the comfortable and afflicted the afflicted.

I think of another group of prophetesses for in Acts 21:9 we read that Philip had four daughters, "virgins which did prophesy." Living in the hedonistic Gentile town of Caesarea, rather than give in to the social pressure all about them, Philip's daughters remained pure. And thus, unlike the women in Ezekiel's day, their prophecy would be pure as well.

Ezekiel 13:20–23
Wherefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against your pillows, wherewith ye there hunt the souls to make them fly, and I will tear them from your arms, and will let the souls go, even the souls that ye hunt to make them fly. Your kerchiefs also will I tear, and deliver my people out of your hand, and they shall be no more in your hand to be hunted; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of

the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life: Therefore ye shall see no more vanity, nor divine divinations: for I will deliver my people out of your hand: and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

The reference to pillows and kerchiefs is either one connected with idolatry or with a pampered lifestyle—neither of which would be anything but harmful to the people. Again, in contrast to these false prophetesses, I think of another seamstress, Dorcas, who, rather than contributing to the demise of God's people, blessed them to so great a degree that God raised her from the dead to continue her work (Acts 9).

False prophetesses or prophetesses of purity, seamstresses of idolatry or servants of God—the choice presents itself to us daily. Which will we be?



14 Ezekiel 14:1–5

Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me. And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them? Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols; That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols.

A group of elders came to Ezekiel seemingly to get counsel from the Lord, but the Lord said they were playing games because they were still heavily involved in idolatry.

Ezekiel 14:6

Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.

The only counsel these men needed could be reduced to one word, or literally two: "repent," or, "change direction."

Ezekiel 14:7–11
For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to inquire of him concerning me; I the LORD will answer him by myself: And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him; That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord GOD.

The prophet spoken of here is a false prophet—one of the many who prophesied peace instead of warning the people of coming destruction. "I the Lord have deceived that prophet," the Lord declares. This was in the same sense that He repeatedly hardened Pharaoh's heart (e.g. Exodus 7:13) because so intent were they in rebelling against the Lord and walking in their own way, He allowed the natural course of their actions and desires to come to pass.

Ezekiel 14:12–20
The word of the LORD came again to me, saying, Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then

will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD. If I cause noisome beasts to pass through the land, and they spoil it, so that it be desolate, that no man may pass through because of the beasts: Though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters; they only shall be delivered, but the land shall be desolate. Or if I bring a sword upon that land, and say, Sword, go through the land; so that I cut off man and beast from it: Though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only shall be delivered themselves. Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast: Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness.

As Ezekiel was giving these messages, warning the people of judgment, the people objected, saying, "Surely, the Lord won't destroy Jerusalem for we have spiritual men in our city."

The Lord, however, said, "Although Noah, Job, and Daniel would be spared themselves, even they would not be able to deliver anyone else. Therefore, don't think you're going to be protected because of your linkage to someone else."

You might say, "My wife's a Christian," or, "My grandfather's a preacher, therefore I'm safe." But the Lord here says that doesn't matter. Each soul is delivered only by his own righteousness. Thankfully, as believers, ours is in Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Ezekiel 14:21–23
For thus saith the Lord GOD; How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine,

and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast? Yet, behold, therein shall be left a remnant that shall be brought forth, both sons and daughters: behold, they shall come forth unto you, and ye shall see their way and their doings: and ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, even concerning all that I have brought upon it. And they shall comfort you, when ye see their ways and their doings: and ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, saith the Lord GOD.

A remnant would be spared in Jerusalem who would eventually be carried to Babylon. According to Ezekiel 20:43, they would be aware of their own sinfulness and, therefore, of God's justification in chastening them —an awareness that would be conveyed to those already in Babylon. Likewise, it is not until we see our own poverty of spirit and mourn for our own sinfulness that we are comforted (Matthew 5:3, 4).



15 In Isaiah 5, Israel is likened to a vine that brought forth wild grapes. In Hosea 10, she's likened to an empty vine. Here in chapter 15, the Lord likens her to a worthless vine . . .

Ezekiel 15:1–3
And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest? Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon?

The wood of a grapevine is too crooked and too fragile to be used in construction of any kind.

Ezekiel 15:4

Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it meet for any work?

The wood of a grapevine doesn't even make good firewood. In fact, it's only good for one thing: to bring forth fruit. Jesus would use this same metaphor in John 15, saying, "I am the vine. You are the branches. He that abides in Me and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit. Herein is My Father glorified—that you bring forth much fruit."

Like Israel, the church is good for one thing. We exist for one purpose: to glorify God by bringing forth much fruit. What is fruit? Galatians 5:22 says the fruit of the Spirit is love. "Love Me," the Lord says, "and then love people with My love flowing through you." How can we love that way? Jesus said if we abide in Him and His words abide in us, we will bring forth much fruit (John 15:5). It's so simple—not necessarily easy, but simple. Just cling to the Lord daily. Live for the Lord totally. Let His Spirit work His love in you and through you.

Jesus went on to say in John 15:6 that any branch that doesn't bear fruit is cut off and cast into the fire to be burned. Ezekiel says the same thing . . .

Ezekiel 15:5, 6
Behold, when it was whole, it was meet for no work: how much less shall it be meet yet for any work, when the fire hath devoured it, and it is burned? Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; As the vine tree among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Israel was cut off because, rather than bearing fruit for the Lord, she rebelled against Him.

Ezekiel 15:7, 8
And I will set my face against them; they shall go out from one fire, and another fire shall devour them; and ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I set my face against them. And I will make the land desolate, because they have committed a trespass, saith the Lord GOD.

If God's people escaped the fires of famine, sword, and disease, they would still have to face the fire of captivity.



16

Chapter 16 tells a very powerful and pointed story.

Ezekiel 16:1–3
Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite.

The city of Jerusalem was not founded by the Jews. It was a Canaanite city, held first by the Amorites and later by the Hittites. It wasn't until the reign of David that Jerusalem became the capital city of Israel.

Ezekiel 16:4–6
And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the lothing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live.

In Ezekiel's day, salt was used as an antiseptic. Thus, following a baby's birth, he was washed in salted water. The picture here is of a newborn being carelessly tossed—and that was Jerusalem's state when the Lord found her.

Ezekiel 16:7–14

I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent ornaments: thy breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou wast naked and bare. Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I throughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with broidered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and broidered work; thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper into a kingdom. And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord GOD.

"I found you. I took care of you. And then I made you spectacularly beautiful," God says to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, the Israel of the Old Testament, prefigures the Israel of God, or the church (Galatians 6:16). And what God did for Jerusalem is exactly what He has done for us. We were born in sin, rebellious against God, left to die. Yet He came to us and said, "Live." He washed us thoroughly with the water of His Word (Ephesians 5:26) and with His shed blood (Hebrews 13:12). He anointed us with the oil of the Holy Spirit (Psalm 23:5). He clothed us with the linen of His righteousness (Isaiah 61:10) and the silk of His own beauty (Psalm 149:4). Although we don't know what badgers were in Old Testament times, we do know that a badger skin was a soft leather, dyed purple. Thus, the Lord says, "I put badger skins upon your feet—not

sandals that were used for working, but badger skins that were used for celebrating and dancing because I wanted the best for you."

> **Ezekiel 16:15–24**
> **But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by; his it was. And of thy garments thou didst take, and deckedst thy high places with divers colours, and playedst the harlot thereupon: the like things shall not come, neither shall it be so. Thou hast also taken thy fair jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given thee, and madest to thyself images of men, and didst commit whoredom with them, And tookest thy broidered garments, and coveredst them: and thou hast set mine oil and mine incense before them. My meat also which I gave thee, fine flour, and oil, and honey, wherewith I fed thee, thou hast even set it before them for a sweet savour: and thus it was, saith the Lord GOD. Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter, That thou hast slain my children, and delivered them to cause them to pass through the fire for them? And in all thine abominations and thy whoredoms thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, when thou wast naked and bare, and wast polluted in thy blood. And it came to pass after all thy wickedness, (woe, woe unto thee! saith the Lord GOD;) That thou hast also built unto thee an eminent place, and hast made thee an high place in every street.**

"I made you so beautiful and blessed you so incredibly," the Lord declares. "Yet what have you done? You've used the very things I've given you and done in you for your own sinful pursuits."

Could a people really be so blessed by God and then do such wickedness? Could they so callously take the blessings of God and pervert them? Could they so easily turn away from their first love? Earlier, the Lord said, "I remember the days of your youth when you loved Me. Where did I go

wrong? Why have you turned away?" That question must not only be asked of Israel—but of our own country.

Ezekiel 16:25
Thou hast built thy high place at every head of the way, and hast made thy beauty to be abhorred, and hast opened thy feet to every one that passed by, and multiplied thy whoredoms.

Jerusalem's beauty had become abhorrent because she had compromised it so often to chase after other gods.

Ezekiel 16:26–29
Thou hast also committed fornication with the Egyptians thy neighbours, great of flesh; and hast increased thy whoredoms, to provoke me to anger. Behold, therefore I have stretched out my hand over thee, and have diminished thine ordinary food, and delivered thee unto the will of them that hate thee, the daughters of the Philistines, which are ashamed of thy lewd way. Thou hast played the whore also with the Assyrians, because thou wast unsatiable; yea, thou hast played the harlot with them, and yet couldest not be satisfied. Thou hast moreover multiplied thy fornication in the land of Canaan unto Chaldea; and yet thou wast not satisfied herewith.

As lamentable as idolatry was in every nation, Judah and Israel's was most tragic not only because they left the true and living God to serve false gods, but because of all nations they alone left their own God to serve those of other nations.

Ezekiel 16:30–38
How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord GOD, seeing thou doest all these things, the work of an imperious whorish woman; In that thou buildest thine eminent place in the head of every way, and makest thine high place in every street; and hast not been as an harlot, in that thou scornest hire; But as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband! They

give gifts to all whores: but thou givest thy gifts to all thy lovers, and hirest them, that they may come unto thee on every side for thy whoredom. And the contrary is in thee from other women in thy whoredoms, whereas none followeth thee to commit whoredoms: and in that thou givest a reward, and no reward is given unto thee, therefore thou art contrary. Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the LORD: Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thy filthiness was poured out, and thy nakedness discovered through thy whoredoms with thy lovers, and with all the idols of thy abominations, and by the blood of thy children, which thou didst give unto them; Behold, therefore I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness. And I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy.

Unlike a harlot who is paid for her services, Israel herself paid to pursue the harlotry of idolatry.

Ezekiel 16:39–43
And I will also give thee into their hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall break down thy high places: they shall strip thee also of thy clothes, and shall take thy fair jewels, and leave thee naked and bare. They shall also bring up a company against thee, and they shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords. And they shall burn thine houses with fire, and execute judgments upon thee in the sight of many women: and I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot, and thou also shalt give no hire any more. So will I make my fury toward thee to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will be quiet, and will be no more angry. Because thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, but hast fretted me in all these things; behold, therefore I also will recompense thy way

upon thine head, saith the Lord GOD: and thou shalt not commit this lewdness above all thine abominations.

In Deuteronomy 22:22–24, the Law prescribed that adulterers be stoned. Thus Jerusalem would meet the fate of the adulterous woman that she was.

I can't help but compare this incident with that of another woman caught in the act of adultery. Rather than mete out the judgment she deserved, however, Jesus not only forgave her, but rendered it legally impossible for even her accusers to throw stones at her (John 8:7). "Go thy way and sin no more," Jesus said to the woman in John 8:11. And that is essentially what God the Father said to Jerusalem. Jerusalem's "way," however, lies in Babylon, from which she would emerge free from her bondage to idolatry.

Ezekiel 16:44, 45
Behold, every one that useth proverbs shall use this proverb against thee, saying, As is the mother, so is her daughter. Thou art thy mother's daughter, that lotheth her husband and her children; and thou art the sister of thy sisters, which lothed their husbands and their children: your mother was an Hittite, and your father an Amorite.

As Canaan was given to idolatry, so was Jerusalem (see verse 4).

Ezekiel 16:46–49 (a)
And thine elder sister is Samaria, she and her daughters that dwell at thy left hand: and thy younger sister, that dwelleth at thy right hand, is Sodom and her daughters. Yet hast thou not walked after their ways, nor done after their abominations: but, as if that were a very little thing, thou wast corrupted more than they in all thy ways. As I live, saith the Lord GOD, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters. Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride . . .

Sodom was destroyed because of sin—but not necessarily the homosexuality we normally associate with Sodom. The root of Sodom's sin

was pride. Sodom was a city-state. She was her own country and had a great deal of pride in her lush surroundings, prosperity, and sophisticated society. Pride was the very sin that sent Satan reeling out of heaven—yet we in America are falling into that same tendency because we take pride in our country. Is patriotism wrong? No—as long as we understand the secret of our success, the source of our strength. It's not our defense, diplomacy, democracy, or economy. America has been great, as the early patriots knew, simply because God has shown grace to us.

How can a country or an individual know if it's falling prey to the sin of pride? By prayerlessness. Pride is the reason people stop praying. Pride is identified most perfectly by its middle letter. "*I* can do it. *I* can get through this day successfully. *I* can raise my family. *I* can handle my occupation. *I* don't need God."

If you and I are not praying, it is the essence of pride because we think we can make it through life on our own power.

Ezekiel 16:49 (b)
. . . fulness of bread . . .

Like Sodom, we have fullness of bread but leanness of soul. Patrick Henry said, "Give me liberty or give me death." Now, however, our country says simply, "Give me." We want more and more and more. With our money, we have done mighty things. But the more we have, the less happy we have become, as evidenced, among other places, by our drug and alcohol consumption, song lyrics, and the subjects of our movies and literature.

Ezekiel 16:49 (c)
. . . and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters . . .

Like us, the people of Sodom evidently put a high priority on sports, hobbies, and recreation. The problem with this is that we no longer have time to study, pray, or serve the Lord because we're too busy pursuing our hobbies. Recreation has become our god.

Ezekiel 16:49 (d)
. . . neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.

Driving flashy cars, building fancy homes, vacationing in exotic locations, Sodom had no time or resources for the poor and needy. Notice Sodom was indicted not for failing to give a handout to the poor and needy but for failing to strengthen the hand of the poor and needy—for failing to come alongside and invest themselves in their plight.

Ezekiel 16:50
And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.

The Hebrew word translated "haughty" speaks of proudly flaunting one's sin. Abomination is defined in Leviticus 20:13. What was the sin of Sodom? It was not only flaunting their homosexuality. That was simply the fruit, the final manifestation of the pride that infected every area of her national and personal life.

Regardless of nationality, form of government, or economic structure, God's concern is that His children walk in love, truth, and holiness just as He does. That is why He will judge any society who walks in pride, fullness of bread, abundance of idleness, and lack of concern.

The solution is simple. "If My people who are called by My name will turn away from their evil and pray, I will hear from heaven and will heal their land," the Lord declares (2 Chronicles 7:14). What are we to do? We're to pray. We're to ask the Lord to forgive us, renew us, and heal us for His glory.

Ezekiel 16:51, 52
Neither hath Samaria committed half of thy sins; but thou hast multiplied thine abominations more than they, and hast justified thy sisters in all thine abominations which thou hast done. Thou also, which hast judged thy sisters, bear thine own shame for thy sins that thou hast committed more abominable than they: they are more righteous than thou: yea, be thou confounded also, and bear thy shame, in that thou hast justified thy sisters.

Judah found fault with Sodom and Samaria but, perhaps due both to their unique calling and to His care for them, in the Lord's estimation, her sin was

more abominable than theirs.

Ezekiel 16:53–55
When I shall bring again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, then will I bring again the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them: That thou mayest bear thine own shame, and mayest be confounded in all that thou hast done, in that thou art a comfort unto them. When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate, then thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate.

Here we see a message of hope. That is, God promised His people would return to their former estate. Judah would have no reason to boast in this, however, because the promise applied not only to her but to Sodom and Samaria—the very ones she had looked down upon—as well.

Ezekiel 16:56–63
For thy sister Sodom was not mentioned by thy mouth in the day of thy pride, Before thy wickedness was discovered, as at the time of thy reproach of the daughters of Syria, and all that are round about her, the daughters of the Philistines, which despise thee round about. Thou hast borne thy lewdness and thine abominations, saith the LORD. For thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant. Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant. And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord GOD.

Even this wicked woman whose sisters were Samaria and Sodom, who was given so much and yet turned away from the Lord, would be restored—not by her own covenant, her own agreement, but by the Lord's covenant with her. The punishment God poured out upon her was to correct, to heal, to bring her into a place of rightness. And, eventually, she would be amazed that He was pacified toward her.

God would be pacified toward Jerusalem, partially seen when, after her captivity, she put away her idolatry. God would be pacified toward Jerusalem, eventually seen through the gospel—which He commissioned first to be preached to Jerusalem (Acts 1:8). But God's peace with Israel will ultimately be seen when all of Israel is saved (Romans 11:26).

When is the Lord pacified toward sinners? Romans 5:1 tells us that we have peace with God through faith. Ephesians 2:14 declares that Jesus is our peace. He died for our sins, for our whoredom, for our backsliding and back-turning. Thus, we, like the people of Judah, need never open our mouth because of shame, but simply be confounded by His grace and goodness to us.



17 Ezekiel 17:1–4

And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel; And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; A great eagle with great wings, longwinged, full of feathers, which had divers colours, came unto Lebanon, and took the highest branch of the cedar: He cropped off the top of his young twigs, and carried it into a land of traffick; he set it in a city of merchants.

As we see in verse 12, the eagle speaks of Babylon. The tree refers to Jehoiakim who was king of Judah at this time. The twigs refer to his sons, who, along with him, were taken into captivity.

Ezekiel 17:5

He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful field; he placed it by great waters, and set it as a willow tree.

After he carried Jehoiakim into captivity, in an effort to control the land, Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah king, thinking that, rather than being a tall, stately cedar, Zedekiah was a flexible willow tree, who would bow down to him.

Ezekiel 17:6, 7 (a)
And it grew, and became a spreading vine of low stature, whose branches turned toward him, and the roots thereof were under him: so it became a vine, and brought forth branches, and shot forth sprigs. There was also another great eagle with great wings and many feathers . . .

This second eagle speaks of Egypt's Pharaoh.

Ezekiel 17:7 (b)–21
. . . and, behold, this vine did bend her roots toward him, and shot forth her branches toward him, that he might water it by the furrows of her plantation. It was planted in a good soil by great waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine. Say thou, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Shall it prosper? shall he not pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruit thereof, that it wither? it shall wither in all the leaves of her spring, even without great power or many people to pluck it up by the roots thereof. Yea, behold, being planted, shall it prosper? shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind toucheth it? it shall wither in the furrows where it grew. Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Say now to the rebellious house, Know ye not what these things mean? tell them, Behold, the king of Babylon is come to Jerusalem, and hath taken the king thereof, and the princes thereof, and led them with him to Babylon; And hath taken of the king's seed, and made a covenant with him, and hath taken an oath of him: he hath also taken the mighty of the land: That the kingdom might be base,

that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping of his covenant it might stand. But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people. Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such things? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. Neither shall Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company make for him in the war, by casting up mounts, and building forts, to cut off many persons: Seeing he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, when, lo, he had given his hand, and hath done all these things, he shall not escape. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head. And I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and will plead with him there for his trespass that he hath trespassed against me. And all his fugitives with all his bands shall fall by the sword, and they that remain shall be scattered toward all winds: and ye shall know that I the LORD have spoken it.

Nebuchadnezzar came down, took Jehoiakim and his sons, and in his place made Zedekiah king of Judah. But when another eagle appeared—Pharaoh—Zedekiah allied with him against Nebuchadnezzar. God, however, expected Zedekiah to keep the covenant he made with Nebuchadnezzar. Thus, He warned that Pharaoh would not be able to deliver him. And that's exactly what happened. Because he didn't keep his covenant, he destroyed both himself and Jerusalem in the process.

I believe this is applicable to us because the Lord expects those who make covenants to keep them. We often find ourselves making agreements and then breaking them because we think we can get a better deal somewhere else—be it financially, relationally, or occupationally. As believers, we have

an obligation and responsibility to keep our word and the agreements we make.

Ezekiel 17:22–24
Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the LORD have spoken and have done it.

Here the Lord speaks of another planting that would take place. From the cedar, which speaks of Israel, from the house of David specifically, He says He would plant Him a branch that would flourish. Under this new tree, all the other trees would dwell. Even the fowls of the air, which speak of evil in the Bible, would be under its authority.

Who is this tree? Jesus (Isaiah 11:1). Planted on what mountain? Calvary. With His blood, Jesus reclaimed the world from the grip of Satan and when He comes, all the trees of the field shall indeed clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12).

18

Ezekiel 18:1–4
The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying, What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use

this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

God forbids His people to use a familiar proverb blaming their parents for their present troubles. All souls are His and accountable to Him.



***For topical study of Ezekiel 18:1–4 entitled "All Souls Are Mine," turn to page* 640.**

Ezekiel 18:5–9
But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right, And hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbour's wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman, And hath not oppressed any, but hath re stored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment; He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man, Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD.

Although every man is responsible for his own actions, he is responsible for others' welfare. That is, God's people were to shun idolatry and immorality, and instead to walk in financial integrity and treat the poor compassionately.

Ezekiel 18:10–13
If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that doeth the like to any one of these things, And that doeth not any of those duties, but even hath eaten upon the mountains, and defiled his neighbour's wife, Hath oppressed the poor and needy,

hath spoiled by violence, hath not restored the pledge, and hath lifted up his eyes to the idols, hath committed abomination, Hath given forth upon usury, and hath taken increase: shall he then live? he shall not live: he hath done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him.

The man who walked contrary to verses 5–9, the man who indulged in idolatry and immorality, who ignored the poor and needy, and who lacked financial integrity would die. This is not surprising, for sin always results in death in one form or another (Romans 6:23).

Ezekiel 18:14–17
Now, lo, if he beget a son, that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like, That hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, hath not defiled his neighbour's wife, Neither hath oppressed any, hath not withholden the pledge, neither hath spoiled by violence, but hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment, That hath taken off his hand from the poor, that hath not received usury nor increase, hath executed my judgments, hath walked in my statutes; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live.

It would be the wise son who, rather than using his father's sin as an excuse for his own, used his father's sin as an example of what *not* to do. The Word declares that no temptation comes to us except that which is common to all men (1 Corinthians 10:13). *Everyone* goes through difficulty. I have a sneaky suspicion that, when we get to heaven, we'll see that no one had it either easier or harder than anyone else.

Ezekiel 18:18, 19 (a)
As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, spoiled his brother by violence, and did that which is not good among his people, lo, even he shall die in his iniquity. Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? . . .

In Exodus 20:5, God specifically says He will judge the sins of the father to the third and fourth generations. This doesn't mean, however, that He will judge future generations for the sins of their fathers. It means He will be faithful to judge each generation if they persist in the sins of their fathers. Exodus 20:6 goes on to say that God will also show mercy unto thousands of generations. In other words, although He is faithful to judge sin in every generation, His deck is stacked toward mercy.

Ezekiel 18:19 (b), 20
. . . When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

God isn't saying, "I'm going to kill the soul that sins." Rather, He's warning that the inevitable wages of sin is death.

I used to have a problem in my backyard with moles. Therefore, I had a can of "poison peanuts"—pellets that I would drop in their holes. I didn't say to my kids, "Kids, if you eat those peanuts, I'm going to kill you." I said, "Kids, if you eat these peanuts, you're going to die." Big difference. So many people read verses like this and malign God, saying He must be brutal when, in fact, it's a *loving* Father who warns and instructs and loves us enough to tell us that if we sin we're going to hurt ourselves.

Sin is not bad because it's forbidden. Sin is forbidden because it's bad. The average person thinks that God set up some arbitrary rules and then waits for someone to "knock the block off His shoulder" so He can toss them into hell. That's not it. It's a loving Father who says, "Kids, it was your choice to bring sin into this world. But now I'm going to tell you how to get through life with the least amount of pain. The soul that sins will die. Stay away from it."

The wages of sin is indeed death. *But* the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:23). Thank God for the antidote of His blood. We have poisoned ourselves. We have eaten the peanuts. But the

Lord has made a blood transfusion available to us. Jesus died for our sins. If I receive and embrace Him, His blood cleanses me.

Ezekiel 18:21, 22
But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.

If you change your mind and follow the Lord, your transgressions won't even be mentioned by Him. Others might bring them up, but the Lord won't. He says, "If you turn to Me and begin to walk with Me, I won't even mention the transgressions you've committed. You'll live life the way it was meant to be."

Ezekiel 18:23
Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?

I know this to be true because I see Jesus weeping at the tomb of Lazarus. Feeling the pain and the sorrow of death, the results of sin, Jesus wept. Why is it that people have the idea that God just can't wait to toss people into hell?

Ezekiel 18:24
But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.

The righteous man who moves toward iniquity and then lives in iniquity will die in his sin. What does this mean? I think it means what it says. We can

either argue about it or be warned from it. I choose personally to take it as a warning.

> **Ezekiel 18:25–32**
> **Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.**

"What does it mean to make you a new heart and a new spirit?" you ask. "I thought it was God who makes us a new heart and a new spirit."

In Philippians 2:12, Paul says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

"I thought salvation was a gift," you say. "What does it mean to work it out?"

Philippians 2:13 goes on to say, "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do His good pleasure."

It's a partnership. God works in you to give you the will and ability to do His pleasure. So you work out your salvation—exercise it the same way you

work out at the gym. God gives you the desire and ability—but He wants for you to give Him permission to do His work in your life.

ALL SOULS ARE MINE

A Topical Study of EZEKIEL 18:1–4

"The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." This was a proverb used in the days of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. But the Lord said He never wanted to hear it again because all souls are His. That is, each individual is responsible and accountable to Him. In this, I believe we gain valuable understanding.

Understanding About Life

Our culture has been influenced by a subtle philosophy known as determinism. Determinism says you have no control over your life but that it has already been determined for you by factors such as genetics, birth order, heredity, and even astrology. God, however, says, "All souls are Mine."

- "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee," God declares (Jeremiah 1:5).
- "Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them," David prays (Psalm 139:16).

Who we are isn't determined by heredity, birth order, astrology, or society. We were created by God alone and we will only be fulfilled by giving our lives to Him.

The Key to Life

Oftentimes, people think God created us because He was terribly lonely and that now He smothers us because He needs us. But this is a huge misunderstanding because it doesn't take into account the mystery of the Trinity. You see, God the Father was so delighted with and blessed by God the Son that He said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). And the Son loved the Father so much that He said, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29). The Holy Spirit, in turn, is sent by the Father and glorifies the Son. In perfect harmony, fulfilled complete, God didn't need to create us.

Why did He make us? Simply out of His creative goodness. God doesn't need us a bit. But He loves us with a love that won't quit (Jeremiah 31:3). And this gives me great hope.

Hope for Life

In Leviticus 19:2, the One who said, "All souls are Mine," said, "You shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy." Many people think of this as a command impossible to fulfill when, in reality, it's a promise impossible to break.

Think of it this way. When my youngest son, Benjamin, was a baby, I said to him, "Ben, you shall have a big nose for I, your father, have a big nose. It's inevitable, Ben. The characteristics in me are going to be in you."

In essence, that is what God is declaring. "You shall be holy unto Me for I the Lord am holy. It *will* happen."

Paul picks up on this same theme when he says, "Being confident of this very thing that He who began a good work in you shall complete it" (see Philippians 1:6). The work He has begun in us *will* be completed.

Coping with Life

Knowing that all souls are God's helps me cope with life. We have a tendency to get frustrated by the faults of others—even of those we love. But if we understand that all souls are truly the Lord's, we can love people rather than judge them.

In Romans 14, Paul is engaged in a discussion concerning the eating of meat and the keeping of holy days. "To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand," he concludes (verse 4). Our tendency is to think everyone is going to fall. God, however, says, "All souls are Mine and I am able to make them stand—including your kids, your family, your friends, neighbors, and colleagues. You just love them and let Me deal with them."

Warning for Life

Our text ends with a sober warning: The soul that sins shall surely die.

We look at death as the absence of brain waves or heartbeat, as the separation of soul and body. But God looks at death entirely differently. He sees it as the separation of a soul from Him. And this can happen even while the heart is beating strongly, even while the brain is functioning perfectly. In other words, people can live their entire lives as dead people. God has no pleasure in death (Ezekiel 18:32).

That is why He sent His Son to give us the gift of eternal life. And, regardless of our heritage, birth order, astrological sign, or cultural background, it's ours simply for the taking.



19 In chapter 19, Ezekiel is told to take up a dirge, a lamentation, a song of sorrow, specifically for the kings of Judah.

Ezekiel 19:1, 2
Moreover take thou up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, And say, What is thy mother? A lioness: she lay down among lions, she nourished her whelps among young lions.

Israel is likened to a lioness who is birthing two young cubs.

Ezekiel 19:3, 4
And she brought up one of her whelps: it became a young lion, and it learned to catch the prey; it devoured men. The nations also heard of him; he was taken in their pit, and they brought him with chains unto the land of Egypt.

The first cub did wickedly and was taken in chains to Egypt. This is Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23).

Ezekiel 19:5

Now when she saw that she had waited, and her hope was lost, then she took another of her whelps, and made him a young lion.

The second cub is Judah's next king, Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23).

Ezekiel 19:6–9
And he went up and down among the lions, he became a young lion, and learned to catch the prey, and devoured men. And he knew their desolate palaces, and he laid waste their cities; and the land was desolate, and the fulness thereof, by the noise of his roaring. Then the nations set against him on every side from the provinces, and spread their net over him: he was taken in their pit. And they put him in ward in chains, and brought him to the king of Babylon: they brought him into holds, that his voice should no more be heard upon the mountains of Israel.

Judah looked to her leaders for protection, but her leaders were themselves carried away by the very enemy they feared.

Then Ezekiel changes metaphors . . .

Ezekiel 19:10–14
Thy mother is like a vine in thy blood, planted by the waters: she was fruitful and full of branches by reason of many waters. And she had strong rods for the sceptres of them that bare rule, and her stature was exalted among the thick branches, and she appeared in her height with the multitude of her branches. But she was plucked up in fury, she was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried up her fruit: her strong rods were broken and withered; the fire consumed them. And now she is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty ground. And fire is gone out of a rod of her branches, which hath devoured her fruit, so that she hath no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule. This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.

Things looked promising. Just like the lioness who had strong lions, the vine had strong branches. But suddenly, the vine was plucked up and

transplanted in a dry, desert. This speaks of the way Judah was plucked up and taken to Babylon.

The only One who could save Judah is the only One who can save us—not the lions of a healthy economy, strong military, or a noble democracy—but the Lion of the tribe of Judah, Jesus Christ. Whether regarding the world at large or your own little corner of it, Jesus is the only Leader who will never let you down.



20 Ezekiel 20:1 (a)
And it came to pass . . .

I think this is one of my favorite phrases in the Bible, for it means that, whatever the problems with which we currently struggle, they *will* pass.

Ezekiel 20:1 (b)–3
. . . in the seventh year, in the fifth month, the tenth day of the month, that certain of the elders of Israel came to enquire of the LORD, and sat before me. Then came the word of the LORD unto me, saying, Son of man, speak unto the elders of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Are ye come to enquire of me? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I will not be enquired of by you.

A delegation of leaders came to Ezekiel and said, "We want you to seek the Lord regarding these matters."

The Lord, however, said, "Tell them I have nothing to say."

In this, I'm reminded of a passage in Deuteronomy . . .

And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment: And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the LORD shall choose shall shew

thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee: According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left. And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel.

Deuteronomy 17:9–12

God says that whoever came to a priest for counsel was obligated to follow it—or die. We have a tendency to go from counselor to counselor until we find one who agrees with us, to treat God's direction to us as one option of many. But when we do, something in us dies in the process—and God's voice is that much harder to hear.

Ezekiel 20:4, 5 (a)
Wilt thou judge them, son of man, wilt thou judge them? cause them to know the abominations of their fathers: And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD . . .

"I will not answer you," God instructed Ezekiel to tell the delegation of leaders seeking counsel. But then He spends the next forty-four verses answering them. Why? Because, while they wanted to talk to God about their present difficulty, He wanted to talk to them about their history.

Verses 5 through 9 talk about their rebellion in Egypt. Verses 10 through 26 talk about their rebellion in the wilderness. Verses 27 through 32 talk about their rebellion in the Promised Land. In other words, all along the line, God's people rebelled . . .

Ezekiel 20:5 (b)–8 (a)
. . . In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up mine hand unto them, saying, I am the LORD your God; In the day that I lifted up mine hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt into a

land that I had espied for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands: Then said I unto them, Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me . . .

Every problem I've had in my life is because of verse 8—when I didn't listen to what God said. Think about it, and I'm sure you'll find the same is true of you.

The Hebrew word translated "hearken" refers to the way a dog's ears immediately go up at the sound of his master's call or whistle. That's what our Master wants us to do.

Ezekiel 20:8 (b)–12
. . . they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they were, in whose sight I made myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt. Wherefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them.

After delivering them from bondage in Egypt, God gave His people statutes for their own well-being. But for a sign to them, He chose something graciously appropriate for a nation of freed slaves: a Sabbath rest.

Ezekiel 20:13–21
But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my sabbaths

they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them. But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out. Yet also I lifted up my hand unto them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands; Because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols. Nevertheless mine eye spared them from destroying them, neither did I make an end of them in the wilderness. But I said unto their children in the wilderness, Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols: I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; And hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the LORD your God. Notwithstanding the children rebelled against me: they walked not in my statutes, neither kept my judgments to do them, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; they polluted my sabbaths: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the wilderness.

As seen in the Exodus account, despite God's provision, rather than keep His statutes or Sabbaths, His people chose instead to murmur and to walk in idolatry.

Ezekiel 20:22–25
Nevertheless I withdrew mine hand, and wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted in the sight of the heathen, in whose sight I brought them forth. I lifted up mine hand unto them also in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the heathen, and disperse them through the countries; Because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols. Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live;

Since His people turned their back on His ways, God allowed them to walk in their own.

Ezekiel 20:26–31

And I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I am the LORD. Therefore, son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed me, in that they have committed a trespass against me. For when I had brought them into the land, for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to them, then they saw every high hill, and all the thick trees, and they offered there their sacrifices, and there they presented the provocation of their offering: there also they made their sweet savour, and poured out there their drink offerings. Then I said unto them, What is the high place whereunto ye go? And the name thereof is called Bamah unto this day. Wherefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Are ye polluted after the manner of your fathers? and commit ye whoredom after their abominations? For when ye offer your gifts, when ye make your sons to pass through the fire, ye pollute yourselves with all your idols, even unto this day: and shall I be enquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I will not be enquired of by you.

God's people wouldn't keep the Sabbath He gave to bless them. Instead, they offered their children as sacrifices to heathen gods. Isn't this just like human nature? We don't do the simple things that God says which would result in health, blessing, and joy. Instead, we either bind ourselves to legalism in an effort to earn our salvation or we bind ourselves to the insatiable demands of our flesh.

God's ways are so refreshing. He wants to bless us. Why do we make it so hard on ourselves?

Ezekiel 20:32–34

And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone. As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out.

After the Lord says, "You've been rebellious in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in the Promised Land," He says, "I'm still going to gather you to Myself. I'm going to purge you. You'll have to go through difficult times. But I'm not going to give up on you."

Ezekiel 20:35–38
And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord GOD. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

"To pass under the rod" speaks of the way shepherds would number their flock. Thus, it is the compassion a shepherd feels for his sheep that the Lord feels even for His rebellious people.

Ezekiel 20:39, 40
As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord GOD; Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me: but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols. For in mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me: there will

I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things.

This refers to the practice of mixing idolatry with the worship of Jehovah. If His people wouldn't serve Him wholly, they might as well serve their idols alone.

Ezekiel 20:41–44
I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to your fathers. And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O ye house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.

Never think God is silent. As long as you have a Bible available to you, God is speaking loudly. Any time you want, you can open the Scripture and understand your situation through the perspective of God's history—the doctrines of the New Testament, the life of Christ, the practice of the early church, the history of Israel. They all constitute the "loud silence" of God.

Ezekiel 20:45–49
Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face toward the south, and drop thy word toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the south field; And say to the forest of the south, Hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree: the flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burned therein. And all flesh shall see that I the

LORD have kindled it: it shall not be quenched. Then said I, Ah Lord GOD! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables?

Ezekiel is told to deliver a fiery parable concerning the destruction of Jerusalem—to be explained even more clearly in chapter 21 . . .



21 **Ezekiel 21:1–5**

And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face toward Jerusalem, and drop thy word toward the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel, And say to the land of Israel, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I am against thee, and will draw forth my sword out of his sheath, and will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked. Seeing then that I will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked, therefore shall my sword go forth out of his sheath against all flesh from the south to the north: That all flesh may know that I the LORD have drawn forth my sword out of his sheath: it shall not return any more.

Ezekiel was to prophesy to Jerusalem that her destruction was imminent because God was against her. If God be for us who can be against us? Paul asked triumphantly (Romans 8:31). But if God be against us, defeat is certain.

Ezekiel 21:6, 7

Sigh therefore, thou son of man, with the breaking of thy loins; and with bitterness sigh before their eyes. And it shall be, when they say unto thee, Wherefore sighest thou? that thou shalt answer, For the tidings; because it cometh: and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak as water: behold, it cometh, and shall be brought to pass, saith the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel was to walk around sighing. When the people asked him why he sighed, he was to tell them it was due to the coming judgment.

Ezekiel 21:8–14
Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus saith the LORD; Say, A sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished: It is sharpened to make a sore slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter: should we then make mirth? it contemneth the rod of my son, as every tree. And he hath given it to be furbished, that it may be handled: this sword is sharpened, and it is furbished, to give it into the hand of the slayer. Cry and howl, son of man: for it shall be upon my people, it shall be upon all the princes of Israel: terrors by reason of the sword shall be upon my people: smite therefore upon thy thigh. Because it is a trial, and what if the sword contemn even the rod? it shall be no more, saith the Lord GOD. Thou therefore, son of man, prophesy, and smite thine hands together, and let the sword be doubled the third time, the sword of the slain: it is the sword of the great men that are slain, which entereth into their privy chambers.

A sword was added to Ezekiel's sigh because sin not only brings sorrow but it causes people to feel brokenhearted and bloodied. Ezekiel was to swing the sword three times as an illustration of the three times the Babylonians would invade Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 21:15–17
I have set the point of the sword against all their gates, that their heart may faint, and their ruins be multiplied: ah! it is made bright, it is wrapped up for the slaughter. Go thee one way or other, either on the right hand, or on the left, whithersoever thy face is set. I will also smite mine hands together, and I will cause my fury to rest: I the LORD have said it.

Here, the Lord uses a sword in the hand of Ezekiel to prove a point, to paint a picture of the coming invasion. In Genesis 3:24, He used a flaming sword in the Garden of Eden for protection—to keep Adam and Eve from returning, eating of the tree of life, and living forever in their sinful state. In Exodus 32:27, He used swords in the hands of the Levites to purify His

people after they worshiped the golden calf (Exodus 32:27). In Luke, we see a sword in the hand of Peter to protest the arrest of Jesus (Luke 22:50). In Hebrews 4:12, we read of the power of the Word likened to that of a two-edged sword. But nowhere does the sword, or spear, play as important a part as it does in John 19:34—for there, in the hands of a Roman soldier, it pierced the side of Jesus and proved that He died of a broken heart for you and for me.

Ezekiel 21:18–20
The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying, Also, thou son of man, appoint thee two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may come: both twain shall come forth out of one land: and choose thou a place, choose it at the head of the way to the city. Appoint a way, that the sword may come to Rabbath of the Ammonites, and to Judah in Jerusalem the defenced.

Nebuchadnezzar could have either attacked Jerusalem directly or first attacked the Ammonites for their part in siding with Zedekiah against the Babylonians.

Ezekiel 21:21–24
For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination: he made his arrows bright, he consulted with images, he looked in the liver. At his right hand was the divination for Jerusalem, to appoint captains, to open the mouth in the slaughter, to lift up the voice with shouting, to appoint battering rams against the gates, to cast a mount, and to build a fort. And it shall be unto them as a false divination in their sight, to them that have sworn oaths: but he will call to remembrance the iniquity, that they may be taken. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are discovered, so that in all your doings your sins do appear; because, I say, that ye are come to remembrance, ye shall be taken with the hand.

There were three methods of divination Nebuchadnezzar employed to determine his battle plan. He could cast lots using arrows; he could consult his idols; and he could "read" the liver of an animal sacrificed for the occasion. Evidently, all signs pointed to attacking Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 21:25–27
And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.

The prophecy of verses 25 through 27 has a two-fold application. Historically, it speaks of Zedekiah, the last king to reign over Judah before the Babylonian invasion. Prophetically, it speaks of antichrist, someone even more wicked than Zedekiah, who will usurp authority and demand to be worshiped. The stage is being set even now for this charismatic, coming world dictator.

Ezekiel 21:28–32
And thou, son of man, prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning the Ammonites, and concerning their reproach; even say thou, The sword, the sword is drawn: for the slaughter it is furbished, to consume because of the glittering: Whiles they see vanity unto thee, whiles they divine a lie unto thee, to bring thee upon the necks of them that are slain, of the wicked, whose day is come, when their iniquity shall have an end. Shall I cause it to return into his sheath? I will judge thee in the place where thou wast created, in the land of thy nativity. And I will pour out mine indignation upon thee, I will blow against thee in the fire of my wrath, and deliver thee into the hand of brutish men, and skilful to destroy. Thou shalt be for fuel to the fire; thy blood shall be in the midst of the land; thou shalt be no more remembered: for I the LORD have spoken it.

This prophecy concerning judgment against Ammon was fulfilled approximately five years after the destruction of Jerusalem when Nebuchadnezzar invaded the region. The Ammonites wouldn't be carried away captive, as were the Jews, for, just as Ezekiel prophesied (verse 30), they would be destroyed in their own land. Why was their judgment to be so severe? Because, in haughtiness and pride, they had looked down upon Judah (Ezekiel 25:3).



22 **Ezekiel 22:1–5**

Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Now, thou son of man, wilt thou judge, wilt thou judge the bloody city? yea, thou shalt shew her all her abominations. Then say thou, Thus saith the Lord GOD, The city sheddeth blood in the midst of it, that her time may come, and maketh idols against herself to defile herself. Thou art become guilty in thy blood that thou hast shed; and hast defiled thyself in thine idols which thou hast made; and thou hast caused thy days to draw near, and art come even unto thy years: therefore have I made thee a reproach unto the heathen, and a mocking to all countries. Those that be near, and those that be far from thee, shall mock thee, which art infamous and much vexed.

Ezekiel prophesied that the Jews would be mocked by those near and far. This speaks not only geographically but historically. The Jews have felt mockery and anti-Semitism both throughout the world and throughout history. They turned away from the Lord and have paid the price for their rebellion.

Ezekiel 22:6–12

Behold, the princes of Israel, every one were in thee to their power to shed blood. In thee have they set light by father and mother: in the midst of thee have they dealt by oppression with the stranger: in thee have they vexed the fatherless and the widow. Thou hast despised mine holy things, and hast profaned my sabbaths. In thee are men that carry tales to shed blood: and

in thee they eat upon the mountains: in the midst of thee they commit lewdness. In thee have they discovered their fathers' nakedness: in thee have they humbled her that was set apart for pollution. And one hath committed abomination with his neighbour's wife; and another hath lewdly defiled his daughter in law; and another in thee hath humbled his sister, his father's daughter. In thee have they taken gifts to shed blood; thou hast taken usury and increase, and thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by extortion, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord GOD.

Here, Ezekiel is given a list of Judah's offenses against the Lord. They were a murderous people, disrespectful of their parents and devoid of compassion for the poor. They had despised the things of God and, instead, reveled in immorality. In financial practices, they lacked integrity. And all of this was because they had forgotten God.

Ezekiel 22:13–16
Behold, therefore I have smitten mine hand at thy dishonest gain which thou hast made, and at thy blood which hath been in the midst of thee. Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the LORD have spoken it, and will do it. And I will scatter thee among the heathen, and disperse thee in the countries, and will consume thy filthiness out of thee. And thou shalt take thine inheritance in thyself in the sight of the heathen, and thou shalt know that I am the LORD.

Here, we hear the heart of God saying, "You've forgotten Me. You've become corrupt in your practices and immoral in your activities. Therefore, I'm going to send you away from your homeland, away from Jerusalem, to consume the filthiness out of you." The Lord would destroy Jerusalem not to harm His people but to free them. A loving Father was saying, "Even if I have to destroy their country, burn their city, and scatter them throughout the world, I'll do whatever it takes to cleanse and free them from the grip of idolatry."

People who don't take time to read the whole story look at these kinds of passages and think God is cruel to come down so harshly on His people. In reality, however, it's a *loving* Father who says, "If this is what it takes to purge you of these tendencies, to clean you of the filthiness that would otherwise destroy you, I'll do it."

Let that be a loving warning to us.

Ezekiel 22:17–22

And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in mine anger and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you. Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof. As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof; and ye shall know that I the LORD have poured out my fury upon you.

God's people had melted gold to make their idols. Now, reduced to brass, tin, iron, and lead, they themselves would be melted and purified in the fires of the furnace that Jerusalem would become.

Ezekiel 22:23–29

And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, say unto her, Thou art the land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation. There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof. Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the

clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain. And her prophets have daubed them with untempered morter, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD, when the LORD hath not spoken. The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully.

The priests had failed to show the people the difference between the clean and the unclean. The political leaders used their office not only to shed blood but to get rich. The prophets, were "daubing with untempered mortar," giving the people a false sense of peace and security that were not from God. And, finally, the people themselves lacked any compassion for those in need.

Ezekiel 22:30, 31
And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD.

Prophet, priest, and politician had all led God's people tragically astray. And the people willingly followed. Thus, their hedge of protection was in disarray and there was none to stand in the gap.

THE PUZZLE OF PRAYER

A Topical Study of EZEKIEL 22:30, 31

For many people, prayer is a perplexing puzzle. For many people, the more they think about prayer, the more questions they have concerning prayer. "If God is indeed a loving God, why does He require us to beg from Him the things we need? Why doesn't He just do what He knows is best for us apart from prayer?"

Others ask, "If this God is so powerful that He spoke the worlds into existence before we even existed, why doesn't He just speak again and make things right whether or not we pray?"

Still others say, "I know my Father loves me. He proved it by sending His Son to die for me. Therefore, I don't really need to pray. I'll just trust Him to make the right decisions for my life and for the world in general."

It is true that God is on the throne. But listen to what He declares from that throne: "Call unto Me and I will show you great and mighty things which you know not" (Jeremiah 33:3). "Ask and it shall be given, seek and ye shall find, knock, and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). You see, if we really believe God is on the throne, we need to hear what He says from the throne. And He invites, exhorts, commands us to pray.

That's exactly what He did in Ezekiel's day, as well. His people had fallen into apostasy and idolatry, inequity and immorality. Therefore, He sought a man to stand in the gap through whom He could show mercy.

What does it mean to "stand in the gap"? The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible. Therefore, turn to Psalm 106, where we see what it means to stand in the gap, to stand in the breach . . .

> *They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image. Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass. They forgat God their saviour, which had done great things in Egypt; Wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red sea. Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had*

not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them.

Psalm 106:19–23

While Moses was on Mount Sinai for forty days, receiving God's Law for His people, His people were worshiping a golden calf. "I'm going to destroy these people," God said to Moses. "I've done so much for them, but they continue to rebel against Me. So I'm going to make of you a new nation."

Moses could have said, "Good idea! Wipe them out, Lord." Instead, he said, "Lord, You have made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their seed would number as the stars in the heaven. You cannot violate Your Word. If you destroy them, take my name out of the Book of Life. Destroy me along with them." Moses stood in the breach, in the gap. He interceded to God. And that's exactly what God was looking for (Exodus 32).

It wasn't that God had to be talked into showing the people mercy. It was that, thorough Moses, He had a way to do so. The holiness and justice of God would demand that judgment come down. But through intercession, Moses appealed to the graciousness and mercy of God and God had reason not to do what He would otherwise have been obligated by His own holiness and justice to do.

There are certain things God cannot do. When Jesus came to His hometown, the people didn't believe Him. As a result, we read that He could do no mighty work there (Mark 6:5). It wasn't that He wouldn't—but that He couldn't. God has chosen to limit Himself to working through prayer. He has chosen to partner with man.

It would be like if you were a multibillionaire but you set up your bank account in such a way that two parties were required to withdraw any money. God's wealth is limitless—but He made a contract with us in which it can't be withdrawn without our cosigning in prayer.

There are hundreds of men sitting underground in relatively small cubicles, watching screens, listening to messages while a hundred feet from them are nuclear missiles ready to launch. All they have to do is punch in certain codes, turn a key, and the missile is sent. But there's a safeguard built in lest someone wanted to play a trick on the world. It takes two people separated by a distance of twelve feet to punch in their numbers and turn their

keys simultaneously. For power to be released, both men must work in tandem—and that is a picture of prayer.

That's why, in Matthew 18, Jesus told us that whatever we bind on earth is bound in heaven and whatever we loose on earth is loosed in heaven. In other words, the Father is saying, "I give you the keys of the kingdom. When we turn them, power is unleashed. But I will not turn My key alone. And you cannot turn your key alone."

In Ezekiel's day, the people were involved in idolatry and walking in apostasy. "I would have blessed Israel," God declares, "if I could have found someone to cosign the check, to turn the key with Me, to pray for revival. But I found none."

How much destruction comes into our lives unnecessarily, how much poverty we experience daily simply because we don't pray. God has signed the check. Power and provision are there, but we say, "I'll just go with the flow. I'll pray someday if I can find the time or work up the energy."

All the while, a brokenhearted Father looks at His people and says, "You have not because you ask not."

Why has God chosen to be helpless apart from man in this area of intercession?

First, it's because He desires to cultivate an intimate relationship with us. He loves us. He wants to spend time with us. Therefore, He made an agreement that the only way the blessing He has for you will be released is by spending time with Him. God wants to cultivate a relationship with you so He says, "I will do nothing apart from prayer."

It's on-the-job training for us. There are big things ahead and God is preparing, training, and developing us for the ages to come.

> *And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.*
>
> Revelation 5:10

We will rule and reign throughout the ages to come. Therefore, the Lord wants us to learn how to be in communication with Him constantly, to move in His authority. If people had never been trained to communicate with Him intimately and constantly, the result would be chaos throughout the ages to

come. So God says, "If you don't pray, I won't answer. I'm going to teach you to become like Me."

In Matthew 9, a man came to Jesus and said, "Master, my daughter is sick, even at the point of death. Come with me and lay Your hands on her that she might be healed. And Jesus went and followed him. Was the man talking Jesus into coming? No. He was simply opening the way for Jesus to come. Prayer allows the Lord to heal, save, release, and work in those areas where it seems like everything is dying. He wants to flow His power and life to hurting people, but He's chosen to use you as the conduit. If you shut up, He shuts down.

If we don't pray, He won't move.

We're called to a great destiny, gang. Use the authority He's given you in prayer—and watch God's blessings be released powerfully.



23

Chapter 23, in which the link between idolatry and immorality is seen, deals with the spiritual adultery taking place in Judah.

Ezekiel 23:1–4

The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother: And they committed whoredoms in Egypt; they committed whoredoms in their youth: there were their breasts pressed, and there they bruised the teats of their virginity. And the names of them were Aholah the elder, and Aholibah her sister: and they were mine, and they bare sons and daughters. Thus were their names; Samaria is Aholah, and Jerusalem Aholibah.

Aholah, or literally, "tabernacle" speaks of the ten northern tribes. *Aholibah,* or literally, "my tent is in her"—referring to the temple—speaks of the southern kingdom.

Ezekiel 23:5–10

And Aholah played the harlot when she was mine; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians her neighbours, Which were clothed with blue, captains and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding upon horses. Thus she committed her whoredoms with them, with all them that were the chosen men of Assyria, and with all on whom she doted: with all their idols she defiled herself. Neither left she her whoredoms brought from Egypt: for in her youth they lay with her, and they bruised the breasts of her virginity, and poured their whoredom upon her. Wherefore I have delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, upon whom she doted. These discovered her nakedness: they took her sons and her daughters, and slew her with the sword: and she became famous among women; for they had executed judgment upon her.

The ten northern tribes flirted with the idols of Assyria and were taken captive by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. You'd think the younger sister would see the difficulty of her older sister and learn a lesson. But that is not what happened . . .

Ezekiel 23:11–17
And when her sister Aholibah saw this, she was more corrupt in her inordinate love than she, and in her whoredoms more than her sister in her whoredoms. She doted upon the Assyrians her neighbours, captains and rulers clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding upon horses, all of them desirable young men. Then I saw that she was defiled, that they took both one way, And that she increased her whoredoms: for when she saw men pourtrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans pourtrayed with vermilion, Girded with girdles upon their loins, exceeding in dyed attire upon their heads, all of them princes to look to, after the manner of the Babylonians of Chaldea, the land of their nativity: And as soon as she saw them with her eyes, she doted upon them, and sent messengers unto them into Chaldea. And the Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they

defiled her with their whoredom, and she was polluted with them, and her mind was alienated from them.

Judah practiced immorality later than did Israel—but went on to practice it more fully than did Israel.

Ezekiel 23:18–21
So she discovered her whoredoms, and discovered her nakedness: then my mind was alienated from her, like as my mind was alienated from her sister. Yet she multiplied her whoredoms, in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, wherein she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt. For she doted upon their paramours, whose flesh is as the flesh of asses, and whose issue is like the issue of horses. Thus thou calledst to remembrance the lewdness of thy youth, in bruising thy teats by the Egyptians for the paps of thy youth.

"Remember not the sins of my youth," David cries (Psalm 25:7). Here, however, we see the sin of Israel and Judah not only remembered but repeated.

Ezekiel 23:22–24
Therefore, O Aholibah, thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will raise up thy lovers against thee, from whom thy mind is alienated, and I will bring them against thee on every side; The Babylonians, and all the Chaldeans, Pekod, and Shoa, and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them: all of them desirable young men, captains and rulers, great lords and renowned, all of them riding upon horses. And they shall come against thee with chariots, wagons, and wheels, and with an assembly of people, which shall set against thee buckler and shield and helmet round about: and I will set judgment before them, and they shall judge thee according to their judgments.

The nations Judah had been so eager to please, those for whom she had turned her back on Jehovah, would be the very ones He would use to chasten

her.

Ezekiel 23:25, 26
And I will set my jealousy against thee, and they shall deal furiously with thee: they shall take away thy nose and thine ears; and thy remnant shall fall by the sword: they shall take thy sons and thy daughters; and thy residue shall be devoured by the fire. They shall also strip thee out of thy clothes, and take away thy fair jewels.

Whether the bejeweled noses and ears of the people would be literally removed, as was known to happen by the hand of the Assyrians and Chaldeans, or whether this refers to the removal of their king and priests—devastating disfigurement of either their person or their nation was the result.

Ezekiel 23:27–34
Thus will I make thy lewdness to cease from thee, and thy whoredom brought from the land of Egypt: so that thou shalt not lift up thine eyes unto them, nor remember Egypt any more. For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will deliver thee into the hand of them whom thou hatest, into the hand of them from whom thy mind is alienated: And they shall deal with thee hatefully, and shall take away all thy labour, and shall leave thee naked and bare: and the nakedness of thy whoredoms shall be discovered, both thy lewdness and thy whoredoms. I will do these things unto thee, because thou hast gone a whoring after the heathen, and because thou art polluted with their idols. Thou hast walked in the way of thy sister; therefore will I give her cup into thine hand. Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou shalt drink of thy sister's cup deep and large: thou shalt be laughed to scorn and had in derision; it containeth much. Thou shalt be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of as tonishment and desolation, with the cup of thy sister Samaria. Thou shalt even drink it and suck it out, and thou shalt break the sherds thereof, and pluck off thine own breasts: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD.

In addition to the cup of astonishment and desolation seen in this passage, we see the cup of salvation in Psalm 116:13, the cup of God's fury in Isaiah 51:17, and the cup of cold water Jesus said doesn't go unnoticed in Mark 9:41. But infinitely more important than any of these was the cup Jesus was willing to drink for us, the cup of the suffering, sin, and solitude He would drink on the Cross as He paid the price for the sin of all humanity. Because Jesus drank this cup, we don't have to drink the cup of astonishment and desolation. We don't have to drink the cup of His fury. We are invited to remember what He did on our behalf by drinking the cup of blessing at His Table (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Ezekiel 23:35–39
Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast forgotten me, and cast me behind thy back, therefore bear thou also thy lewdness and thy whoredoms. The LORD said moreover unto me; Son of man, wilt thou judge Aholah and Aholibah? yea, declare unto them their abominations; That they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands, and with their idols have they committed adultery, and have also caused their sons, whom they bare unto me, to pass for them through the fire, to devour them. Moreover this they have done unto me: they have defiled my sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned my sabbaths. For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into my sanctuary to profane it; and, lo, thus have they done in the midst of mine house.

Idolatry and immorality were running rampant in Judah. God's people would worship their idols and take part in their immoral activities. Then they would go to the temple and act as though everything was fine.

Ezekiel 23:40–49
And furthermore, that ye have sent for men to come from far, unto whom a messenger was sent; and, lo, they came: for whom thou didst wash thyself, paintedst thy eyes, and deckedst thyself with ornaments, And satest upon a stately bed, and a table prepared before it, whereupon thou hast set mine incense and

mine oil. And a voice of a multitude being at ease was with her: and with the men of the common sort were brought Sabeans from the wilderness, which put bracelets upon their hands, and beautiful crowns upon their heads. Then said I unto her that was old in adulteries, Will they now commit whoredoms with her, and she with them? Yet they went in unto her, as they go in unto a woman that playeth the harlot: so went they in unto Aholah and unto Aholibah, the lewd women. And the righteous men, they shall judge them after the manner of adulteresses, and after the manner of women that shed blood; because they are adulteresses, and blood is in their hands. For thus saith the Lord GOD; I will bring up a company upon them, and will give them to be removed and spoiled. And the company shall stone them with stones, and dispatch them with their swords; they shall slay their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses with fire. Thus will I cause lewdness to cease out of the land, that all women may be taught not to do after your lewdness. And they shall recompense your lewdness upon you, and ye shall bear the sins of your idols: and ye shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

In Jeremiah 3:14, we read of Israel and Judah being married to God. But because they proved to be adulterous wives, they would pay the prescribed price of adultery (Deuteronomy 22:22–24) by the stones that would be hurled at them by Babylonian war machines.



24 For twenty-three chapters there have been warnings. Now the day has come when Babylon invades Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 24:1–5
Again in the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, write thee the name of the day, even of this same day: the king of

Babylon set himself against Jerusalem this same day. And utter a parable unto the rebellious house, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Set on a pot, set it on, and also pour water into it: Gather the pieces thereof into it, even every good piece, the thigh, and the shoulder; fill it with the choice bones. Take the choice of the flock, and burn also the bones under it, and make it boil well, and let them seethe the bones of it therein.

Ezekiel was told to put meat in a pot of water and to let it boil that the people might see through this illustration that they were in hot water, that God's anger was at the boiling point.

Ezekiel 24:6–12
Wherefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe to the bloody city, to the pot whose scum is therein, and whose scum is not gone out of it! bring it out piece by piece; let no lot fall up on it. For her blood is in the midst of her; she set it upon the top of a rock; she poured it not upon the ground, to cover it with dust; That it might cause fury to come up to take vengeance; I have set her blood upon the top of a rock, that it should not be covered. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe to the bloody city! I will even make the pile for fire great. Heap on wood, kindle the fire, consume the flesh, and spice it well, and let the bones be burned. Then set it empty upon the coals thereof, that the brass of it may be hot, and may burn, and that the filthiness of it may be molten in it, that the scum of it may be consumed. She hath wearied herself with lies, and her great scum went not forth out of her: her scum shall be in the fire.

After the meat and even the bones were fully cooked, Ezekiel was to place the empty pot upon the fire as an illustration that, not only would the people of Jerusalem experience God's wrath, but Jerusalem herself would be destroyed.

Ezekiel 24:13–15

In thy filthiness is lewdness: because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee. I the LORD have spoken it: it shall come to pass, and I will do it; I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent; according to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they judge thee, saith the Lord GOD. Also the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

Ezekiel's ministry began when the Lord instructed Him to eat a scroll of woe. Then he had to lay on his side for over a year, cut his hair, cook with cow manure, and move out of his house. Each of these actions was symbolic, intended to get the attention of people who no longer listened to the teaching and preaching of the Word. But people still weren't listening, so his next assignment would be the heaviest of all . . .

Ezekiel 24:16–18
Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men. So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.

"The pot is boiling," the Lord said to Ezekiel. "But My people aren't listening. Therefore, tell them that I'm going to take your wife."

"The desire of thine eyes" speaks of the deep affection Ezekiel had for his wife. Yet he was not to mourn for her. He was to keep his turban on and not to cover his lower lip, as was the custom of those in mourning.

This reminds me of Leviticus 10. There, we see the tabernacle being dedicated. Fire was descending from heaven to ignite the sacrifices on the altar. All the people were blown away as they experienced the glory of the Lord. At that point, two of Aaron's sons lit their own fire to burn incense. When the Lord saw it, He struck them dead because they had disobeyed His command to use only fire from the altar in worship. Aaron was forbidden by

the Lord to mourn for his sons because there was a job he had to do and he must keep going.

If you're serious in your desire to serve Jesus, you must learn the secret of Leviticus 10 and Ezekiel 24. Your own personal emotions, your challenges and difficulties must not be allowed to interfere with the calling or ministry God has opened for you. I've seen bunches of people who, because they checked out during times of difficulty were sidelined permanently. God give us men and women who learn that the calling they have, the gifts they've been given must not be compromised by personal problems or emotions. God make us those who would "set our face toward Jerusalem" as Jesus did and not be deterred from what He would have us do.

Ezekiel 24:19–24
And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so? Then I answered them, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Speak unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth; and your sons and your daughters whom ye have left shall fall by the sword. And ye shall do as I have done: ye shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men. And your tires shall be upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet: ye shall not mourn nor weep; but ye shall pine away for your iniquities, and mourn one toward another. Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign: according to all that he hath done shall ye do: and when this cometh, ye shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel was to tell the people that what God had done in his life personally, He would do to Jerusalem nationally.

Too many of us have a tendency to want to serve the Lord for the benefits. But true servants are willing to forego healing if the Lord calls them to be an example to others of how to die, to suffer financial loss if it means showing others that God alone is all they need. True servants, like Ezekiel, give God permission to use their lives in whatever way will give Him glory.

Ezekiel 24:25–27
Also, thou son of man, shall it not be in the day when I take from them their strength, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes, and that whereupon they set their minds, their sons and their daughters, That he that escapeth in that day shall come unto thee, to cause thee to hear it with thine ears? In that day shall thy mouth be opened to him which is escaped, and thou shalt speak, and be no more dumb: and thou shalt be a sign unto them; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

This would be Ezekiel's last prophecy to God's people until chapter 33, during which time he would be prophesying to the surrounding nations. Just as he was not to mourn for his wife, he was to turn his attention from his lamentation and warning to God's people to those outside of Judah until word came to him that Jerusalem had indeed fallen (33:21).



25 The first twenty-four chapters of the Book of Ezekiel consist of warnings to the people of Jerusalem that judgment was coming. Chapters 25 through 32, however, consist of prophecies directed not to Jerusalem but to the surrounding nations because, although judgment begins at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17), it is not limited to the house of God. He will judge not only Judah, but the nations surrounding Judah.

Ezekiel 25:1, 2
The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against the Ammonites, and prophesy against them;

The Ammonites were a nomadic people residing in the area of present-day Jordan. As descendants of Lot through his incestuous relationship with his younger daughter (Genesis 19:36–38) the Ammonites were related to the people of Israel.

Ezekiel 25:3–7

And say unto the Ammonites, Hear the word of the Lord GOD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou saidst, Aha, against my sanctuary, when it was profaned; and against the land of Israel, when it was desolate; and against the house of Judah, when they went into captivity; Behold, therefore I will deliver thee to the men of the east for a possession, and they shall set their palaces in thee, and make their dwellings in thee: they shall eat thy fruit, and they shall drink thy milk. And I will make Rabbah a stable for camels, and the Ammonites a couchingplace for flocks: and ye shall know that I am the LORD. For thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast clapped thine hands, and stamped with the feet, and rejoiced in heart with all thy despite against the land of Israel; Behold, therefore I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and will deliver thee for a spoil to the heathen; and I will cut thee off from the people, and I will cause thee to perish out of the countries: I will destroy thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD.

When Judah went through difficulty, as the temple was being destroyed, Ammon cheered. And because she rejoiced in the hardship of her enemy, she, too, would be destroyed.

Ezekiel 25:8–11
Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because that Moab and Seir do say, Behold, the house of Judah is like unto all the heathen; Therefore, behold, I will open the side of Moab from the cities, from his cities which are on his frontiers, the glory of the country, Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and Kiriathaim, Unto the men of the east with the Ammonites, and will give them in possession, that the Ammonites may not be remembered among the nations. And I will execute judgments upon Moab; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

Descendants of Lot through his incestuous relationship with his older daughter (Genesis 19:36–38), the Moabites lived south of the Ammonites on the north shore of the Dead Sea. When Jerusalem was destroyed, the

Moabites were more subtle than the Ammonites. Instead of cheering, they said, "The house of Judah is like all the heathen." In other words, "Judah's God is simply a local deity. Sometimes He wins. Sometimes He loses. Obviously, because His temple is being burned, He lost this one to the gods of the Babylonians."

Our culture has bought in to the Moabite mentality. "I'm glad you found peace in Jesus," they say. "But all paths lead to divine enlightenment. There are lots of gods, lots of philosophies, lots of ideas—and they all lead to the same place as long as people are sincere."

Ezekiel 25:12, 13
Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because that Edom hath dealt against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and hath greatly offended, and revenged himself upon them; Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also stretch out mine hand upon Edom, and will cut off man and beast from it; and I will make it desolate from Teman; and they of Dedan shall fall by the sword.

The Edomites were descendants of Esau. When Judah was powerless, the Edomites took advantage of the situation and plundered her. Therefore, the Lord would stretch out His hand against them.

Ezekiel 25:14–17
And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel: and they shall do in Edom according to mine anger and according to my fury; and they shall know my vengeance, saith the Lord GOD. Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because the Philistines have dealt by revenge, and have taken vengeance with a despiteful heart, to destroy it for the old hatred; Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will stretch out mine hand upon the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethims, and destroy the remnant of the sea coast. And I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them.

The Philistines, who inhabited the area known today as the Gaza Strip, also exploited Judah's difficulty by taking territory. Consequently, the Lord would deal with them because of their hatred for His people.



26 Chapters 26 through 28 deal with Tyre. Located forty miles north of Israel's northern boundary, Tyre, a seaport town, was the greatest commercial center of the time.

Ezekiel 26:1–3
And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the first day of the month, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, because that Tyrus hath said against Jerusalem, Aha, she is broken that was the gates of the people: she is turned unto me: I shall be replenished, now she is laid waste: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up.

Caravans traveling from Tyre to Egypt would pass through Israel and Judah, where they would be taxed. Thus, with the Jews no longer in control of that region, Tyre's profit margin would rise substantially.

Ezekiel 26:4–21
And they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus, and break down her towers: I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD: and it shall become a spoil to the nations. And her daughters which are in the field shall be slain by the sword; and they shall know that I am the LORD. For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, a king of kings, from the north, with horses, and with chariots, and with horsemen, and companies, and much people. He shall slay with

the sword thy daughters in the field: and he shall make a fort against thee, and cast a mount against thee, and lift up the buckler against thee. And he shall set engines of war against thy walls, and with his axes he shall break down thy towers. By reason of the abundance of his horses their dust shall cover thee: thy walls shall shake at the noise of the horsemen, and of the wheels, and of the chariots, when he shall enter into thy gates, as men enter into a city wherein is made a breach. With the hoofs of his horses shall he tread down all thy streets: he shall slay thy people by the sword, and thy strong garrisons shall go down to the ground. And they shall make a spoil of thy riches, and make a prey of thy merchandise: and they shall break down thy walls, and destroy thy pleasant houses: and they shall lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the water. And I will cause the noise of thy songs to cease; and the sound of thy harps shall be no more heard. And I will make thee like the top of a rock: thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon; thou shalt be built no more: for I the LORD have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD. Thus saith the Lord GOD to Tyrus; Shall not the isles shake at the sound of thy fall, when the wounded cry, when the slaughter is made in the midst of thee? Then all the princes of the sea shall come down from their thrones, and lay away their robes, and put off their broidered garments: they shall clothe themselves with trembling; they shall sit upon the ground, and shall tremble at every moment, and be astonished at thee. And they shall take up a lamentation for thee, and say to thee, How art thou destroyed, that wast inhabited of seafaring men, the renowned city, which wast strong in the sea, she and her inhabitants, which cause their terror to be on all that haunt it! Now shall the isles tremble in the day of thy fall; yea, the isles that are in the sea shall be troubled at thy departure. For thus saith the Lord GOD; When I shall make thee a desolate city, like the cities that are not inhabited; when I shall bring up the deep upon thee, and great waters shall cover thee; When I shall bring thee down with them that descend into the pit, with the people of old time, and shall set thee in the low parts of the earth, in places desolate of old, with them that go

down to the pit, that thou be not inhabited; and I shall set glory in the land of the living; I will make thee a terror, and thou shalt be no more: though thou be sought for, yet shalt thou never be found again, saith the Lord GOD.

This prophecy confuses and frustrates the agnostic historian because it's an incredible prediction whose chances of being fulfilled have been calculated to be one in seventy-five million. In it, the Lord says He would bring Nebuchadnezzar and his war machine to Tyre. Only a few years after this prophecy was given, that's exactly what happened. Nebuchadnezzar's goal was to take Egypt, but for some reason led a siege against Tyre instead. The people of Tyre were tough, however, and held on for thirteen years. When the Babylonians finally broke through, they were shocked to find no one there. Where did the people of Tyre go? They snuck out the "back door" and sailed in small boats to an island one-half mile out to sea, where they built a brand new city.

In 332 B.C., determined to conquer the known world, Alexander needed to subjugate the people of Tyre. So, as prophesied in verse 3, he used slaves from the nations he had conquered to push the rubble from the old city into the water and build a causeway. When it was completed, all that remained for Alexander to do was to march his troops on the causeway and destroy the city.

But, as seen in verse 12, there's a third part of this prophecy. Over the ensuing centuries, Tyre became an important Islamic center. Thus, in A.D. 1290, when the Crusaders came down from Europe to free the Holy Land, they drove out the Muslim residents of Tyre and made it their capital. When the Muslims recaptured their city, they disassembled Tyre and threw every rock and timber into the sea because it had been defiled. That is why, if you go to the ancient site of Tyre today, you will see only a small fishing village, with the fishermen spreading their nets, as prophesied in verse 14.

With a fresh-water spring flowing in Tyre, even those who study geography say there is no reason there isn't a thriving metropolis on the old site of Tyre. But, because the Lord said it would be built no more, the site remains virtually empty.



27 Ezekiel 27:1–4

The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Now, thou son of man, take up a lamentation for Tyrus; And say unto Tyrus, O thou that art situate at the entry of the sea, which art a merchant of the people for many isles, Thus saith the Lord GOD; O Tyrus, thou hast said, I am of perfect beauty. Thy borders are in the midst of the seas, thy builders have perfected thy beauty.

As with Sodom and Samaria (Ezekiel 16), pride was in the hearts of the people of Tyre and, therefore, would be at the heart of the reason for her demise.

Ezekiel 27:5–7

They have made all thy ship boards of fir trees of Senir: they have taken cedars from Lebanon to make masts for thee. Of the oaks of Bashan have they made thine oars; the company of the Ashurites have made thy benches of ivory, brought out of the isles of Chittim. Fine linen with broidered work from Egypt was that which thou spreadest forth to be thy sail; blue and purple from the isles of Elishah was that which covered thee.

Tyre's pride and prosperity were seen even in her sailing vessels, built of the finest materials.

Ezekiel 27:8–11

The inhabitants of Zidon and Arvad were thy mariners: thy wise men, O Tyrus, that were in thee, were thy pilots. The ancients of Gebal and the wise men thereof were in thee thy calkers: all the ships of the sea with their mariners were in thee to occupy thy merchandise. They of Persia and of Lud and of Phut were in thine army, thy men of war: they hanged the shield and helmet in thee; they set forth thy comeliness. The men of Arvad with thine army were upon thy walls round about, and the Gammadims were in

thy towers: they hanged their shields upon thy walls round about; they have made thy beauty perfect.

Zidon and Arvad were cities of Tyre. Gebal was a Phoenician city. According to biblical scholars, Lud refers to Asia Minor and Phut to Africa.

Ezekiel 27:12–14
Tarshish was thy merchant by reason of the multitude of all kind of riches; with silver, iron, tin, and lead, they traded in thy fairs. Javan, Tubal, and Meshech, they were thy merchants: they traded the persons of men and vessels of brass in thy market. They of the house of Togarmah traded in thy fairs with horses and horsemen and mules.

Although Ezekiel was a priest of Judah held captive in Babylon, he was able to speak in great detail concerning Tyre's commercial dealings because his words came directly from the One from before whose eyes nothing is hidden (Hebrews 4:13)—including the trading of "persons of men," or slave trade.

Ezekiel 27:15–19
The men of Dedan were thy merchants; many isles were the merchandise of thine hand: they brought thee for a present horns of ivory and ebony. Syria was thy merchant by reason of the multitude of the wares of thy making: they occupied in thy fairs with emeralds, purple, and broidered work, and fine linen, and coral, and agate. Judah, and the land of Israel, they were thy merchants: they traded in thy market wheat of Minnith, and Pannag, and honey, and oil, and balm. Damascus was thy merchant in the multitude of the wares of thy making, for the multitude of all riches; in the wine of Helbon, and white wool. Dan also and Javan going to and fro occupied in thy fairs: bright iron, cassia, and calamus, were in thy market.

Scholars believe Javan refers to a Greek settlement in Arabia. In other words, from near (Dan) to far (Javan), trade flowed freely through Tyre.

Ezekiel 27:20–22
Dedan was thy merchant in precious clothes for chariots. Arabia, and all the princes of Kedar, they occupied with thee in lambs, and rams, and goats: in these were they thy merchants. The merchants of Sheba and Raamah, they were thy merchants: they occupied in thy fairs with chief of all spices, and with all precious stones, and gold.

Dedan, Kedar, Sheba, and Raamah also speak of tribes in Arabia.

Ezekiel 27:23–27
Haran, and Canneh, and Eden, the merchants of Sheba, Assur, and Chilmad, were thy merchants. These were thy merchants in all sorts of things, in blue clothes, and broidered work, and in chests of rich apparel, bound with cords, and made of cedar, among thy merchandise. The ships of Tarshish did sing of thee in thy market: and thou wast replenished, and made very glorious in the midst of the seas. Thy rowers have brought thee into great waters: the east wind hath broken thee in the midst of the seas. Thy riches, and thy fairs, thy merchandise, thy mariners, and thy pilots, thy calkers, and the occupiers of thy merchandise, and all thy men of war, that are in thee, and in all thy company which is in the midst of thee, shall fall into the midst of the seas in the day of thy ruin.

Allegorized by a shipwreck, Tyre's destruction would affect the economies of every nation whose labor she hired and whose goods she carried.

Ezekiel 27:28–32
The suburbs shall shake at the sound of the cry of thy pilots. And all that handle the oar, the mariners, and all the pilots of the sea, shall come down from their ships, they shall stand upon the land; And shall cause their voice to be heard against thee, and shall cry bitterly, and shall cast up dust upon their heads, they shall wallow themselves in the ashes: And they shall make themselves utterly

bald for thee, and gird them with sackcloth, and they shall weep for thee with bitterness of heart and bitter wailing. And in their wailing they shall take up a lamentation for thee, and lament over thee, saying, What city is like Tyrus, like the destroyed in the midst of the sea?

I am reminded of another shipwreck—the one we read about in Acts 27. Rather than carrying costly merchandise, this ship was carrying prisoners, one of which was the apostle Paul. Like Ezekiel, Paul warned the captain of impending danger. But, like the people of Tyre, the captain ignored Paul's warning and sailed anyway. But there the similarities end, for although Paul's ship was destroyed, not a single life was lost (Acts 27:22). Such would not be the fate of Tyre.

Ezekiel 27:33–36
When thy wares went forth out of the seas, thou filledst many people; thou didst enrich the kings of the earth with the multitude of thy riches and of thy merchandise. In the time when thou shalt be broken by the seas in the depths of the waters thy merchandise and all thy company in the midst of thee shall fall. All the inhabitants of the isles shall be astonished at thee, and their kings shall be sore afraid, they shall be troubled in their countenance. The merchants among the people shall hiss at thee; thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt be any more.

Wise would be those who would be frightened by what happened to Tyre, for in them was a chance of humility and repentance. But those who did nothing but hiss at her would one day share her fate due to their own pride.



28 Ezekiel 28:1–5

The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the

midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God: Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee: With thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures: By thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches:

This prophecy refers to the literal prince of Tyre who proudly proclaimed himself to be wiser than Daniel, prime minister of Babylon at this time. In addition, this prophecy speaks of the power behind the prince of Tyre—of Satan himself.

> **Ezekiel 28:6–10**
> **Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God; Behold, therefore I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness. They shall bring thee down to the pit, and thou shalt die the deaths of them that are slain in the midst of the seas. Wilt thou yet say before him that slayeth thee, I am God? but thou shalt be a man, and no God, in the hand of him that slayeth thee. Thou shalt die the deaths of the uncircumcised by the hand of strangers: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD.**

Because it is inspired by Satan, the New Age idea of self-deification is not a new idea at all. It has its roots in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:5).

> **Ezekiel 28:11–13 (a)**
> **Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold . . .**

In 2 Corinthians 11:14, Paul declares that Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. That is why his ideas seem so enlightened.

Ezekiel 28:13 (b), 14
. . . the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.

Before he fell and became Satan, or literally "adversary," Lucifer was the worship leader in heaven. His entire being was an instrument of praise.

Ezekiel 28:15–17
Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee.

What iniquity was found in Lucifer? His heart was lifted up because of his beauty. The idea speaks not only of physical beauty but of intellect, music, position, and prominence.

Ezekiel 28:18, 19
Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more.

Isaiah 28 tells us that Lucifer fell not because he wanted to take over for God but simply because he wanted to be like Him. As Satan, he enticed Eve to want the same thing (Genesis 3:5)—and continues to whisper this in the hearts of men today. "I don't want anyone to tell me what to do. I'll decide for myself what is right," mankind insists.

Even believers can fall prey to this snare of pride. When you pray, "Lord make me like You," is it so you can be nailed to a cross—or is it so that others will think you're spiritual? When we ask God to make us like Himself, are we really asking to be acknowledged, exalted, admired, and respected? In reality, wanting to be like Jesus speaks of being misunderstood and dying to self.

Ezekiel 28:20–23
Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against Zidon, and prophesy against it, And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Zidon; and I will be glorified in the midst of thee: and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall have executed judgments in her, and shall be sanctified in her. For I will send into her pestilence, and blood into her streets; and the wounded shall be judged in the midst of her by the sword upon her on every side; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon, was the one who introduced Baal worship to Israel (1 Kings 16:31).

Ezekiel 28:24–26
And there shall be no more a pricking brier unto the house of Israel, nor any grieving thorn of all that are round about them, that despised them; and they shall know that I am the Lord GOD. Thus saith the Lord GOD; When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered, and shall be sanctified in them in the sight of the heathen, then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to my servant Jacob. And they shall dwell safely therein, and shall build houses, and plant vineyards; yea, they shall dwell with confidence, when I

have executed judgments upon all those that despise them round about them; and they shall know that I am the LORD their God.

Sidon would experience disease and war. God's people, on the other hand, would one day be gathered together to dwell in safety, no longer either fearful or tempted to follow those around her. We have seen this prophecy partially fulfilled, for, since May 1948, Israel is in the process of being regathered. But the confidence and safety spoken of here will not be fully realized until Jesus returns to rule and reign this planet with righteousness.



29 The next four chapters talk about the land of Egypt—another nation infected with pride.

Ezekiel 29:1–3
In the tenth year, in the tenth month, in the twelfth day of the month, the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him, and against all Egypt: Speak, and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself.

So proud was Pharaoh of his accomplishments that he even took credit for the Nile.

Ezekiel 29:4–9
But I will put hooks in thy jaws, and I will cause the fish of thy rivers to stick unto thy scales, and I will bring thee up out of the midst of thy rivers, and all the fish of thy rivers shall stick unto thy scales. And I will leave thee thrown into the wilderness, thee and all the fish of thy rivers: thou shalt fall upon the open fields; thou shalt not be brought together, nor gathered: I have given

thee for meat to the beasts of the field and to the fowls of the heaven. And all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I am the LORD, because they have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel. When they took hold of thee by thy hand, thou didst break, and rend all their shoulder: and when they leaned upon thee, thou brakest, and madest all their loins to be at a stand. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will bring a sword upon thee, and cut off man and beast out of thee. And the land of Egypt shall be desolate and waste; and they shall know that I am the LORD: because he hath said, The river is mine, and I have made it.

God would cut off man and beast as proof that He is God alone. This is fitting because the Egyptians worshiped all kinds of beasts, birds, and bugs. Thus, the majority of the plagues at the time of Moses related to these things as evidence of God's supremacy over them.

Ezekiel 29:10–15
Behold, therefore I am against thee, and against thy rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and desolate, from the tower of Syene even unto the border of Ethiopia. No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years. And I will make the land of Egypt desolate in the midst of the countries that are desolate, and her cities among the cities that are laid waste shall be desolate forty years: and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries. Yet thus saith the Lord GOD; At the end of forty years will I gather the Egyptians from the people whither they were scattered: And I will bring again the captivity of Egypt, and will cause them to return into the land of Pathros, into the land of their habitation; and they shall be there a base kingdom. It shall be the basest of the kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations: for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations.

For centuries, the Egyptian empire was both financially and intellectually rich. In fact, the great Grecian empire borrowed much of her understanding from the Egyptians. After Egypt was taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar for forty years, although her people returned to their homeland, she would never again be a great empire.

Ezekiel 29:16
And it shall be no more the confidence of the house of Israel, which bringeth their iniquity to remembrance, when they shall look after them: but they shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

The Israelites always had a tendency to look to Egypt for covering, support, and strength. But, after the fall of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar, she would do so no longer.

Ezekiel 29:17–20
And it came to pass in the seven and twentieth year, in the first month, in the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against Tyrus: every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled: yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyrus, for the service that he had served against it: herefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will give the land of Egypt unto Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall take her multitude, and take her spoil, and take her prey; and it shall be the wages for his army. I have given him the land of Egypt for his labour wherewith he served against it, because they wrought for me, saith the Lord GOD.

The siege and conquest of Tyre had been backbreaking and costly work for the Babylonians with little to show for their labor. Because Nebuchadnezzar would be serving God's purpose in humbling both Tyre and Egypt, God ensured his victory over Egypt would be relatively easy and much more profitable.

Ezekiel 29:21

In that day will I cause the horn of the house of Israel to bud forth, and I will give thee the opening of the mouth in the midst of them; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

Babylon was simply a tool in the Lord's hand. Therefore, her power would eventually wane. On the other hand, being God's people, Israel would blossom again and will continue to do so on into the Millennium.



30 As chapter 29 spoke of Egypt's demise, chapter 30 speaks of her desolation.

Ezekiel 30:1–4
The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Howl ye, Woe worth the day! For the day is near, even the day of the LORD is near, a cloudy day; it shall be the time of the heathen. And the sword shall come upon Egypt, and great pain shall be in Ethiopia, when the slain shall fall in Egypt, and they shall take away her multitude, and her foundations shall be broken down.

Historically, this is just what happened. As Nebuchadnezzar marched south, not only did Egypt fall, but Ethiopia did as well. Prophetically, Daniel 11:40–43 tells us this is exactly what will happen when, in the last days, Egypt will be annihilated at Armageddon.

Ezekiel 30:5–11
Ethiopia, and Libya, and Lydia, and all the mingled people, and Chub, and the men of the land that is in league, shall fall with them by the sword. Thus saith the LORD; They also that uphold Egypt shall fall; and the pride of her power shall come down: from the tower of Syene shall they fall in it by the sword, saith the Lord GOD. And they shall be desolate in the midst of the

countries that are desolate, and her cities shall be in the midst of the cities that are wasted. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I have set a fire in Egypt, and when all her helpers shall be destroyed. In that day shall messengers go forth from me in ships to make the careless Ethiopians afraid, and great pain shall come upon them, as in the day of Egypt: for, lo, it cometh. Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also make the multitude of Egypt to cease by the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon. He and his people with him, the terrible of the nations, shall be brought to destroy the land: and they shall draw their swords against Egypt, and fill the land with the slain.

Just as God used the Babylonians to judge His own people, so God would use them to judge Egypt.

Ezekiel 30:12, 13
And I will make the rivers dry, and sell the land into the hand of the wicked: and I will make the land waste, and all that is therein, by the hand of strangers: I the LORD have spoken it. Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also destroy the idols, and I will cause their images to cease out of Noph; and there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt: and I will put a fear in the land of Egypt.

The Nile was the lifeblood of Egypt. Therefore, if it did not rise to its usual height, the results were catastrophic. Not only would the Nile be unable to support her, but Egypt's idols and prince would be destroyed, as well.

Ezekiel 30:14–19
And I will make Pathros desolate, and will set fire in Zoan, and will execute judgments in No. And I will pour my fury upon Sin, the strength of Egypt; and I will cut off the multitude of No. And I will set fire in Egypt: Sin shall have great pain, and No shall be rent asunder, and Noph shall have distresses daily. The young men of Aven and of Pibeseth shall fall by the sword: and these cities shall go into captivity. At Tehaphnehes also the day shall be

darkened, when I shall break there the yokes of Egypt: and the pomp of her strength shall cease in her: as for her, a cloud shall cover her, and her daughters shall go into captivity. Thus will I execute judgments in Egypt: and they shall know that I am the LORD.

No Egyptian city would be immune from the force of the invading Babylonian army.

Ezekiel 30:20, 21 (a)
And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the first month, in the seventh day of the month, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt . . .

Pharaoh's arm was broken when Babylon defeated Pharaoh-Necho's army at Carchemish (Jeremiah 46:1, 2).

Ezekiel 30:21 (b)–26
. . . and, lo, it shall not be bound up to be healed, to put a roller to bind it, to make it strong to hold the sword. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and will break his arms, the strong, and that which was broken; and I will cause the sword to fall out of his hand. And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries. And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and put my sword in his hand: but I will break Pharaoh's arms, and he shall groan before him with the groanings of a deadly wounded man. But I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall stretch it out upon the land of Egypt. And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them among the countries; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

In Ezekiel 28:3, the prince of Tyre declared himself to be wiser than Daniel. He was obviously mistaken, however, for Daniel knew that it is God alone who "removeth kings and setteth up kings" (2:21)—which is exactly what He would do with Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar.



31 After seeing Egypt's demise and desolation in chapters 29 and 30, here in chapter 31, we see Pharaoh's downfall . . .

Ezekiel 31:1, 2
And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the third month, in the first day of the month, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, and to his multitude; Whom art thou like in thy greatness?

"Who are you like?" the Lord asks Pharaoh. Then He answers him . . .

Ezekiel 31:3–9
Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of an high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs. The waters made him great, the deep set him up on high with her rivers running round about his plants, and sent out her little rivers unto all the trees of the field. Therefore his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth. All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs, and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young, and under his shadow dwelt all great nations. Thus was he fair in his greatness, in the length of his branches: for his root was by great waters. The cedars in the garden of God could not hide him: the fir trees were not like his boughs, and the chestnut trees were not like his branches; nor any tree in the garden of God was like unto him in his beauty. I have made him fair by the multitude

of his branches: so that all the trees of Eden, that were in the garden of God, envied him.

Here, the Lord reminds Pharaoh that the powerful Assyrian empire was cut down to size by the Babylonians. Over and over, the Lord reiterates the fact that pride leads to one's fall and destruction.

Ezekiel 31:10–12
Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast lifted up thyself in height, and he hath shot up his top among the thick boughs, and his heart is lifted up in his height; I have therefore delivered him into the hand of the mighty one of the heathen; he shall surely deal with him: I have driven him out for his wickedness. And strangers, the terrible of the nations, have cut him off, and have left him: upon the mountains and in all the valleys his branches are fallen, and his boughs are broken by all the rivers of the land; and all the people of the earth are gone down from his shadow, and have left him.

As Assyria was humbled by a stranger named Nebuchadnezzar, so would Egypt be.

The Lord invests four chapters to drive home an important point: If you think you've got it together, that you can make it on your own, that you're head and shoulders above another, resting in your skills, education, charisma, or wealth, watch out. You're going down—not just in this life, but down into hell itself.

Ezekiel 31:13–18
Upon his ruin shall all the fowls of the heaven remain, and all the beasts of the field shall be upon his branches: To the end that none of all the trees by the waters exalt themselves for their height, neither shoot up their top among the thick boughs, neither their trees stand up in their height, all that drink water: for they are all delivered unto death, to the nether parts of the earth, in the midst of the children of men, with them that go down to the pit. Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day when he went down to

the grave I caused a mourning: I covered the deep for him, and I restrained the floods thereof, and the great waters were stayed: and I caused Lebanon to mourn for him, and all the trees of the field fainted for him. I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to hell with them that descend into the pit: and all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, shall be comforted in the nether parts of the earth. They also went down into hell with him unto them that be slain with the sword; and they that were his arm, that dwelt under his shadow in the midst of the heathen. To whom art thou thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? yet shalt thou be brought down with the trees of Eden unto the nether parts of the earth: thou shalt lie in the midst of the uncircumcised with them that be slain by the sword. This is Pharaoh and all his multitude, saith the Lord GOD.

"Whom art thou like in thy greatness?" the Lord asked Pharaoh in verse 1. After spending the chapter likening his empire to that of the defunct Assyrians, He asks again as if to make sure that Pharaoh got the point.



32 If chapter 31 is Pharaoh's downfall, chapter 32 is his dirge.

Ezekiel 32:1–3
And it came to pass in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, in the first day of the month, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation for Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say unto him, Thou art like a young lion of the nations, and thou art as a whale in the seas: and thou camest forth with thy rivers, and troubledst the waters with thy feet, and fouledst their rivers. Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will therefore spread out my net over thee with a company of many people; and they shall bring thee up in my net.

"You think you're as powerful as a whale," Ezekiel was to prophesy to Pharaoh, "but you're going to get caught in My net. You feel like a young lion, but you're going to be ensnared."

Ezekiel 32:4–6
Then will I leave thee upon the land, I will cast thee forth upon the open field, and will cause all the fowls of the heaven to remain upon thee, and I will fill the beasts of the whole earth with thee. And I will lay thy flesh upon the mountains, and fill the valleys with thy height. I will also water with thy blood the land wherein thou swimmest, even to the mountains; and the rivers shall be full of thee.

Whereas the Nile once flowed with blood as evidence of God's supremacy (Exodus 7:20), the land would be filled with blood again as Egypt fell to the Babylonians. Pride was the cause of both judgments. Repentance would have been the cure (Jonah 3).

Ezekiel 32:7, 8
And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord GOD.

Just as the sky turned black during one of the plagues in the days of Moses (Exodus 10:22), the land is dark once again because Egypt refused to walk in the light of God's will.

Ezekiel 32:9–15
I will also vex the hearts of many people, when I shall bring thy destruction among the nations, into the countries which thou hast not known. Yea, I will make many people amazed at thee, and their kings shall be horribly afraid for thee, when I shall brandish my sword before them; and they shall tremble at every moment, every man for his own life, in the day of thy fall. For thus saith

the Lord GOD; The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon thee. By the swords of the mighty will I cause thy multitude to fall, the terrible of the nations, all of them: and they shall spoil the pomp of Egypt, and all the multitude thereof shall be destroyed. I will destroy also all the beasts thereof from beside the great waters; neither shall the foot of man trouble them any more, nor the hoofs of beasts trouble them. Then will I make their waters deep, and cause their rivers to run like oil, saith the Lord GOD. When I shall make the land of Egypt desolate, and the country shall be destitute of that whereof it was full, when I shall smite all them that dwell therein, then shall they know that I am the LORD.

The surrounding nations would know that Jehovah is God by seeing His power against a nation they thought to be invincible. God will make Himself known in the lives of men either through His blessings or His judgment. Because He is merciful, He makes every allowance possible that it be the former. But, because of man's pride, it often is the latter.

Ezekiel 32:16–21
This is the lamentation wherewith they shall lament her: the daughters of the nations shall lament her: they shall lament for her, even for Egypt, and for all her multitude, saith the Lord GOD. It came to pass also in the twelfth year, in the fifteenth day of the month, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt, and cast them down, even her, and the daughters of the famous nations, unto the nether parts of the earth, with them that go down into the pit. Whom dost thou pass in beauty? go down, and be thou laid with the uncircumcised. They shall fall in the midst of them that are slain by the sword: she is delivered to the sword: draw her and all her multitudes. The strong among the mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of hell with them that help him: they are gone down, they lie uncircumcised, slain by the sword.

Here is the burial service of an empire.

Ezekiel 32:22–30

Asshur is there and all her company: his graves are about him: all of them slain, fallen by the sword: Whose graves are set in the sides of the pit, and her company is round about her grave: all of them slain, fallen by the sword, which caused terror in the land of the living. There is Elam and all her multitude round about her grave, all of them slain, fallen by the sword, which are gone down uncircumcised into the nether parts of the earth, which caused their terror in the land of the living; yet have they borne their shame with them that go down to the pit. They have set her a bed in the midst of the slain with all her multitude: her graves are round about him: all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword: though their terror was caused in the land of the living, yet have they borne their shame with them that go down to the pit: he is put in the midst of them that be slain. There is Meshech, Tubal, and all her multitude: her graves are round about him: all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword, though they caused their terror in the land of the living. And they shall not lie with the mighty that are fallen of the uncircumcised, which are gone down to hell with their weapons of war: and they have laid their swords under their heads, but their iniquities shall be upon their bones, though they were the terror of the mighty in the land of the living. Yea, thou shalt be broken in the midst of the uncircumcised, and shalt lie with them that are slain with the sword. There is Edom, her kings, and all her princes, which with their might are laid by them that were slain by the sword: they shall lie with the uncircumcised, and with them that go down to the pit. There be the princes of the north, all of them, and all the Zidonians, which are gone down with the slain; with their terror they are ashamed of their might; and they lie uncircumcised with them that be slain by the sword, and bear their shame with them that go down to the pit.

The burial of Egypt is preceded by that of Assyria and Persia, Meshech and Tubal, Edom and Sidon—all powerful at one time, but not, as they arrogantly assumed, for all time.

There was a king, however, who knew differently. King of one of the most prosperous and powerful kingdoms in history, he said, "Unto thee will I cry, O LORD my rock; be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit" (Psalm 28:1). David, a man after God's own heart, realized that it was only his dependence upon God that would keep him and his nation from walking in the path that led to the pit of destruction, the pit of hell itself.

The same is true for the kingdoms of each of our lives . . .

> I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.
>
> Psalm 40:1–4

Not only regarding his nation, but regarding himself, David knew the way out of the pit of despair and discouragement wasn't power and pride, but patience and prayer.

> **Ezekiel 32:31, 32**
> **Pharaoh shall see them, and shall be comforted over all his multitude, even Pharaoh and all his army slain by the sword, saith the Lord GOD. For I have caused my terror in the land of the living: and he shall be laid in the midst of the uncircumcised with them that are slain with the sword, even Pharaoh and all his multitude, saith the Lord GOD.**

This is a sobering prophecy indeed for it told Pharaoh he would end up in hell itself with the other great empires in history that were once thought to be invincible. The sin that brought them down was singular: pride.

How do you know if you're moving in the arena of pride? The first manifestation is prayerlessness. You won't pray. You'll think you can raise

your kids, handle your career, and run your life all by yourself. Jesus, however, said, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Prayerlessness is one key indicator of a life that is lived in pride.

The second manifestation of pride is thanklessness. You'll resent worship, devotions, and thanking the Lord. If you're not acknowledging the fact that everything good in your life is yours not by your own effort but by God's grace (James 1:17), you're headed for a fall. Thank the Lord constantly and walk in humility—that's the way to avoid the perilous path of pride.



33 Whereas the previous section dealt with the judgment of Israel and the nations surrounding her, in chapter 33, we come to the last major division of the book, one that speaks of the coming glory of the kingdom.

Ezekiel 33:1–5
Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul.

When the trumpet sounds, if a person doesn't respond and he gets wiped out, it's his own fault. If he does respond, however, he'll save his life.

Ezekiel 33:6, 7 (a)
But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his

iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel . . .

At the outset of this section dealing with the coming glory of the kingdom, we see Ezekiel recommissioned. "Son of man," the Lord says, "you're a watchman with the important task of blowing the trumpet and warning the people. If the people don't listen and they die, it's their own fault. But if you don't blow the trumpet and they're carried away captive, I will require their blood at your hand because you didn't sound the warning."

In Acts 20:27, Paul uses this same imagery. "I'm free from the blood of all men because I have not shunned to declare to you the full counsel of God," he declares. Like Ezekiel and Paul, we are watchmen. We can't convert anyone—only the Holy Spirit can do that. But we are responsible to blow the trumpet, to share the message we've been given about the reality of heaven and hell and the beauty of Jesus Christ.

Ezekiel 33:7 (b)
. . . therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.

Notice that Ezekiel was to hear first and then warn. We are only able to share with others that which we have first received. Of Jesus, Isaiah prophesied, "The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned" (50:4). Jesus was able to give the right word at the right time in the right way because He woke early day by day to receive instruction from His Father. How much more must we.

Ezekiel 33:8–11
When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his

iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

"I don't have any pleasure in seeing you wiped out," the Lord says. "So turn and live." Here's our glorious Father, a mighty Creator, a superior Being in every sense of the word, pleading with puny man.

Ezekiel 33:12–20
Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth. When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remem bered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live. Yet the children of thy people say, The way of the Lord is not equal: but as for them, their way is not equal. When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby. But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby. Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. O ye house of Israel, I will judge you every one after his ways.

“Turn and live,” God pleads.

“God’s not fair,” the people respond.

We hear that today. “How can God judge people who haven’t heard the gospel?” the skeptic says. Yet God simply says He will judge every man according to his own ways, that He will be fair.

And that’s exactly what angels say of Him in heaven. “Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgments” (Revelation 16:7), they proclaim.

I don’t know how God will judge those who haven’t heard about Him. But I do know how He will judge us—according to the knowledge we have. And we have a lot. We’ve heard the gospel. We’ve had opportunity to learn of Jesus Christ, to encounter Him. The only question for us, is what have we done with what we’ve been given?

Ezekiel 33:21

And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, in the fifth day of the month, that one that had escaped out of Jerusalem came unto me, saying, The city is smitten.

Tragically, one finally came to Babylon from Jerusalem, saying, “It’s happening. Destruction is taking place.”

Ezekiel 33:22–25

Now the hand of the LORD was upon me in the evening, afore he that was escaped came; and had opened my mouth, until he came to me in the morning; and my mouth was opened, and I was no more dumb. Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but we are many; the land is given us for inheritance. Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and shall ye possess the land?

After his final message concerning Jerusalem, Ezekiel was to speak about Jerusalem no more until the city was destroyed (24:27). So when he was told to speak again to Israel, he knew what it meant.

Hearing that Jerusalem had fallen, the people said, "The land was given to Abraham. We're his descendants. Therefore, the land is ours." Like buzzards, they wanted to stake out their territory. They weren't repenting to God. They were reacting in greed.

Ezekiel 33:26–29

Ye stand upon your sword, ye work abomination, and ye defile every one his neighbour's wife: and shall ye possess the land? Say thou thus unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; As I live, surely they that are in the wastes shall fall by the sword, and him that is in the open field will I give to the beasts to be devoured, and they that be in the forts and in the caves shall die of the pestilence. For I will lay the land most desolate, and the pomp of her strength shall cease; and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, that none shall pass through. Then shall they know that I am the LORD, when I have laid the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed.

Ezekiel was to tell those who thought they were entitled to the land that, because of their sin, they were only entitled to destruction.

Ezekiel 33:30–33

Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they

do them not. And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.

Suddenly, Ezekiel was in demand. Those who had scorned him previously now flocked to him because his prophecies had come to pass.

As ministers, we are to comfort the afflicted. But we are also to afflict the comfortable. Therefore, if everyone speaks well of you, it can indicate that they're hearing your words but not heeding your message. That is why the Lord told Ezekiel not to take his newfound popularity very seriously.

If people reject you, that's okay (Luke 6:26). What you have to watch out for is when everyone speaks well of you because very frequently that means that you're either not delivering the truth or that people are not responding to it. Beware of the desire to want to be liked. If I really love someone, I will care more about his walk with the Lord than about how he views me.



34 Chapter 34 is a denunciation of the shepherds of Israel. Primarily, the shepherds refer to Israel's kings and political leaders. Secondarily, it speaks to any of us who are shepherding people—as pastors, elders, employers, or parents.

Ezekiel 34:1–4

And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them.

In Acts 20:28, we read that Paul said to the elders of the church at Ephesus, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." The overseers of Israel were neither feeding nor caring for her but were instead leading her astray.

Ezekiel 34:5, 6
And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.

When the sheep scattered, they became prey to wolves. This is not surprising, for whenever a sheep is in isolation, he is vulnerable to annihilation. That's why we, as sheep, need each other.

Ezekiel 34:7–10
Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock; Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them.

Just as God would hold Ezekiel responsible if he didn't warn the people (33:6, 7), He would hold the leaders of Jerusalem responsible for not caring for them.

Ezekiel 34:11, 12

For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.

In contrast to the false and failing shepherds, we see the true and loving Shepherd, Jesus Christ. I love this because we see Jesus going after those who are scattered—not to condemn them but to restore them. Parents, employers, elders, and pastors, this needs to be our heart. We must find those who have wandered off not to come down on them but to encourage, bless, and build them.

In Acts 2:14, we read that, when Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, the eleven other disciples stood with him. Only a few days earlier, Peter had denied Jesus. He was at rock bottom. Yet, recognizing there was an anointing on Peter's life and that his heart was right with the Lord, the disciples stood behind him.

We must do just that. We must find people others have pushed away or set aside. Jesus Christ, our Shepherd, our Example, gathers those who are scattered not to condemn them but to restore them—and we must do the same.

Ezekiel 34:13–15
And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD.

"Come to Me," the good Shepherd said, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28–30). Most of the time, the majority of Christians feel like they're not doing enough. Jesus, on the

other hand, constantly invites us to lie down in green pastures, to come apart to a desert place, to rest, to enjoy Him.

Ezekiel 34:16–21
I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment. And as for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats. Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet? And as for my flock, they eat that which ye have trodden with your feet; and they drink that which ye have fouled with your feet. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD unto them; Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat cattle and between the lean cattle. Because ye have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, till ye have scattered them abroad;

Having addressed the shepherds, God now addresses the sheep themselves, saying that He would deal with those who, because of their size and strength—or, in human terms, money and position—took advantage of the weaker of their brothers.

Ezekiel 34:22–24
Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it.

David had been off the scene for many years. Therefore, this speaks of the Son of David, Jesus Christ—the good Shepherd who gives His life for

His sheep (John 10:11), the great Shepherd who constantly intercedes for us (Hebrews 13:20), the chief Shepherd who is coming back for us (1 Peter 5:4).

Ezekiel 34:25–31
And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them. And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid. And I will raise up for them a plant of renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more. Thus shall they know that I the LORD their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord GOD. And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord GOD.

A promise is given to Israel nationally that applies to us spiritually. These people at this time were idolatrous and rebellious. Yet the Lord says "You're My people. I love you. I will set up a Shepherd over you who will tend to you properly."

We've already seen Israel regathered. One day, we'll see them reborn.

35 In chapter 34, we saw the denunciation of the shepherds. Here in chapter 35, we see the doom of Edom. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau who was a pork-eating, soup-sipping sinner. "Jacob

have I loved," the Lord declared, "but Esau have I hated" because He knew the path Esau would choose would be one of carnality and rebellion (Romans 9:13).

Ezekiel 35:1, 2
Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against mount Seir, and prophesy against it,

The Edomites settled in an area south of the Dead Sea.

Ezekiel 35:3–5
And say unto it, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O mount Seir, I am against thee, and I will stretch out mine hand against thee, and I will make thee most desolate. I will lay thy cities waste, and thou shalt be desolate, and thou shalt know that I am the LORD. Because thou hast had a perpetual hatred, and hast shed the blood of the children of Israel by the force of the sword in the time of their calamity, in the time that their iniquity had an end:

"Remember, O LORD," the psalmist cried, "the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Raze it, raze it, even to the foundation thereof" (Psalm 137:7). Obadiah goes on to say that in the day the people of Jerusalem were carried away captive, the people of Edom rejoiced and joined in the plunder of the city (Obadiah 11–14).

Ezekiel 35:6–9
Therefore, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, I will prepare thee unto blood, and blood shall pursue thee: sith thou hast not hated blood, even blood shall pursue thee. Thus will I make mount Seir most desolate, and cut off from it him that passeth out and him that returneth. And I will fill his mountains with his slain men: in thy hills, and in thy valleys, and in all thy rivers, shall they fall that are slain with the sword. I will make thee perpetual desolations, and thy cities shall not return: and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

Because the Edomites were a perpetual problem to the people of God, they would be perpetually desolate.

Ezekiel 35:10, 11
Because thou hast said, These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess it; whereas the LORD was there: Therefore, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, I will even do according to thine anger, and according to thine envy which thou hast used out of thy hatred against them; and I will make myself known among them, when I have judged thee.

The Edomites thought that when Israel and Judah fell, they could claim the land for themselves. What they failed to figure in to the equation, however, was that although God's people may have been carried away, God was still there.

Ezekiel 35:12–14
And thou shalt know that I am the LORD, and that I have heard all thy blasphemies which thou hast spoken against the mountains of Israel, saying, They are laid desolate, they are given us to consume. Thus with your mouth ye have boasted against me, and have multiplied your words against me: I have heard them. Thus saith the Lord GOD; When the whole earth rejoiceth, I will make thee desolate.

This speaks of the Millennium. When the whole earth is rejoicing, when the trees of the field are clapping their lands, when the mountains are singing, when the lion is lying down by the lamb, Edom won't be around to join the celebration.

Ezekiel 35:15
As thou didst rejoice at the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so will I do unto thee: thou shalt be desolate, O mount Seir, and all Idumea, even all of it: and they shall know that I am the LORD.

Of Israel, the Lord said, "I will bless them that bless thee and curse them that curse thee" (Genesis 12). The Edomites were a curse to the people of Israel. Now they would be cursed themselves.



36 Chapter 36 is a message of comfort to the land of Israel. It says two things: that Israel would return to her land physically and that she would be revived spiritually. God wouldn't do this glorious work because they were worthy but because His name was upon them and He wanted the surrounding nations to see how He dealt with His own.

Ezekiel 36:1 (a)
Also, thou son of man, prophesy unto the mountains of Israel . . .

Although the Babylonians had been able to carry the people of Israel away, the mountains were still standing. Just as Ezekiel was to speak to the mountains, throughout Scripture, we see God speaking from the mountains—from Mount Moriah in Genesis 22, from Mount Sinai in Exodus 20, from Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18, and from Mount Hermon in Matthew 17. But nowhere did He speak more clearly than He did when He said, "It is finished," on Mount Calvary.

Ezekiel 36:1 (b)–9 (a)
. . . and say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD: Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because the enemy hath said against you, Aha, even the ancient high places are ours in possession: Therefore prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because they have made you desolate, and swallowed you up on every side, that ye might be a possession unto the residue of the heathen, and ye are taken up in the lips of talkers, and are an infamy of the people: Therefore, ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD; Thus saith the Lord GOD to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes, and to the cities that are forsaken, which

became a prey and derision to the residue of the heathen that are round about; Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Surely in the fire of my jealousy have I spoken against the residue of the heathen, and against all Idumea, which have appointed my land into their possession with the joy of all their heart, with despiteful minds, to cast it out for a prey. Prophesy therefore concerning the land of Israel, and say unto the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I have spoken in my jealousy and in my fury, because ye have borne the shame of the heathen: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; I have lifted up mine hand, Surely the heathen that are about you, they shall bear their shame. But ye, O mountains of Israel, ye shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to my people of Israel; for they are at hand to come. For, behold, I am for you . . .

"I am *for* you," God declares. Could there have been any music sweeter to the ears of His people than these words? Maybe, like them, you feel you are held captive, far from where you should be because of sin and rebellion. Take heart, dear brother, God is for you, just as He was for His people—and if God be for you, none can stand against you (Romans 8:31).

Ezekiel 36:9 (b)
. . . and I will turn unto you . . .

Eighteen times in this chapter God says, "I will." That's always the way it is. God does the work. All that's left for His people to do is to respond.

I remember when my daughter, Mary Elizabeth, was about one and a half years old. She came to me with a pink balloon not yet inflated. I blew it up for her until it was about as tall as she was. As I handed it to her, I cautioned her to be careful. With a smile on her face, she grabbed the balloon and toddled off. But she wasn't gone two minutes before she came back, blowing into a pink piece of plastic hanging from her mouth. The balloon had popped. The warning was not heeded. I see the same thing happen to a lot of us. Something blows up. Something pops. The bubble bursts. And what do we attempt to do? We blow and blow in our own strength. We try to put the

marriage back together, raise the child, meet the need ourselves. But we get nowhere. Here, the Lord is saying something wonderful to Israel—and to any of us who are aware of a burst bubble, a popped balloon.

Ezekiel 36:9 (c)–11 (a)
. . . and ye shall be tilled and sown: And I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, even all of it: and the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded: And I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bring fruit: and I will settle you after your old estates . . .

After seventy years of rest while the people of Judah were in Babylon, the land would be especially fruitful.

Ezekiel 36:11 (b)
. . . and will do better unto you than at your beginnings: and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

"Most men serve the best wine first, but you have saved the best for last," the governor of the feast said to the bridegroom at Cana (John 2:10). Isn't that always the way of the Lord—to take us from glory to even greater glory? (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Ezekiel 36:12–15
Yea, I will cause men to walk upon you, even my people Israel; and they shall possess thee, and thou shalt be their inheritance, and thou shalt no more henceforth bereave them of men. Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because they say unto you, Thou land devourest up men, and hast bereaved thy nations; Therefore thou shalt devour men no more, neither bereave thy nations any more, saith the Lord GOD. Neither will I cause men to hear in thee the shame of the heathen any more, neither shalt thou bear the reproach of the people any more, neither shalt thou cause thy nations to fall any more, saith the Lord GOD.

By the grace of God, when Israel returned to the land, she would no longer bear the reproach of the people.

Ezekiel 36:16–22
Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and by their doings: their way was before me as the uncleanness of a removed woman. Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it: And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them. And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the LORD, and are gone forth out of his land. But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went.

The Lord would return and revive His people not due to any effort on their part. He would do it to remove any doubt in the minds of the people of the surrounding nations that He is the only true God, that He is the One to whom they should turn.

Ezekiel 36:23–28
And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I

give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.

"I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people," the Lord declared in Jeremiah 31:33. Here, we see Him making the same glorious statement through Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 36:29–32
I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen. Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord GOD, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.

Even as sin destroyed Jerusalem, so it will destroy our own lives, leaving desolation and waste in its wake. But, just as God promised to cleanse Jerusalem, He has promised to cleanse us from *all* unrighteousness if we confess our sin, if we acknowledge that we are unclean (1 John 1:9).

Ezekiel 36:33–36
Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited. Then the heathen that are left

round about you shall know that I the LORD build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it.

When things looked the worst, the Lord said to His people, "I'm going to regather you from out of the countries in which you've been scattered. I'm going to bless your land. The cities that have been wasted are going to be rebuilt. The land that is unproductive shall be tilled again and shall become so prolific that people will compare it to the Garden of Eden."

Ezekiel 36:37, 38
Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the LORD.

The Lord promises to restore and revive, and yet there is a price—but it's a joyous one. "I want you to inquire of Me, to ask that I will do it," He says. "You don't need to impress Me with your spirituality or motivate Me with your intensity. All I ask is that you come to Me and ask." Why does God say this? Because He wants us to partner with Him in what He's doing.

Prayer is the one part we play in this restoration process. Jesus told us to ask, seek, and knock (Matthew 7:7). James declared that we have not simply because we ask not (4:2).

I think of Elisabeth. Week after week, year by year, no doubt she and her husband, Zacharias, prayed for a child. They believed the Lord and claimed the Word in prayer—yet nothing happened. But when Zacharias was an old man, serving in the temple, an angel came to him and told him that his prayer had been heard. And indeed a baby was born to them—one that would grow up to be John the Baptist (Luke 1). But it took time.

"I will rebuild," the Lord says to us today. "I will revive. I will freely give you all things (Romans 8:32). And all I ask of you is, 'Will you be like Elisabeth and Zacharias? Will you pray?' "



37 In chapter 37 we see the continuation of the promise to restore and rebuild Israel, illustrated in a most unforgettable way . . .

Ezekiel 37:1–4
The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.

After prophesying to the mountains in chapter 36, Ezekiel was told to prophesy to dry bones here in chapter 37 . . .

Ezekiel 37:5–8
Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.

As Ezekiel prophesied, the bones came together, but there was no breath in them. Although the bones came together, Ezekiel wisely didn't mistake commotion for regeneration. Even today, the flesh can generate activity, but true revival can't take place without the Spirit.

Ezekiel 37:9, 10

Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

The Hebrew word, *ruach,* means "wind," "breath," or "spirit." Thus, Ezekiel said, "Come, Spirit." And, suddenly, the zombie-like creatures stood up and became a great army.

Ezekiel 37:11–14
Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD.

Here we see a prophecy concerning what the Lord is going to do with the people of Israel as He brings them back to their land. This happened literally following the days of World War II. You've seen the pictures in history books of the open graves where six million Jews were slaughtered in the Holocaust. But out of that, the Lord began to work. The heart of the world became sympathetic toward the Jews and a homeland was carved out of the Middle East. Spiritually, the Jews remain in a "zombie-like" state because the Spirit has not yet moved in Israel the way He one day will.

When will that happen? After the Rapture of the church.

When the church is taken to heaven, the Holy Spirit will begin to move in Israel in a powerful way and the entire nation shall be saved (Romans 11:26). Oh, what a day that will be!

Maybe you think your family or the people around you are dry bones who will never be able to live. But, as He did to Ezekiel, the Lord would say to you, "Prophesy to them." As often as you can, share a verse with those who seem dead. If you think that seems silly, think of Ezekiel and be glad you don't have to preach to bones! "My Word shall not return unto Me void," the Lord declares (Isaiah 55:11). In other words, it will never fail to make an impact.

Ezekiel 37:15–22

The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand. And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these? Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.

The two sticks in the hand of Ezekiel illustrated the unity of Israel and Judah in the hand of God. Upon their release from captivity, no longer would they be at odds with each other, but would stand together in unity.

"Let them be one, Father, even as We are one," Jesus would pray (see John 17:22). Unity is so important in God's economy that Jesus would teach

that it is our love for each other that identifies us as His disciples (John 13:35).

Ezekiel 37:23
Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.

Not only would captivity result in unity, but it would put an end to idolatry.

Ezekiel 37:24–26
And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore.

For these scattered sheep, a shepherd-king was ideal. David was such a king. The Son of David—the Good Shepherd and the King of kings—Jesus Christ, will be the King in the Millennium yet to come.

Ezekiel 37:27, 28
My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.

"My tabernacle also shall be with them," God declares through Ezekiel.

"The Word was made flesh and dwelt—or literally *tabernacled*—among us," John declares concerning Jesus (1:14).

The rebuilding and restoring of Israel will climax when God again dwells among His people.



38 Ezekiel was a prophet who not only witnessed tumultuous times as he saw the Babylonians invade Jerusalem and destroy the holy city, but his prophecies sweep far beyond his own tumultuous period into another period called the Tribulation. Ezekiel 36 and 37 speak of the rebirthing of Israel nationally. Ezekiel 40 through 48 speak of the rebirth spiritually. In between the national and spiritual rebirth of Israel, she will be invaded by Russia.

The invasion of Russia into the Middle East is spoken of in chapters 38 and 39 with uncanny accuracy. We'll look at the background, the buildup and finally the battle.

Ezekiel 38:1, 2 (a)
And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog . . .

The prophecy begins with a word of warning to Gog and Magog. The word, *Gog,* simply means "ruler." Who is the ruler of the land of Magog? In 500 B.C., Greek historian, Herodotus, identified the land of Magog as that of the Scythians, ancestors of the Russians. Roman historian, Flavius Josephus, who lived shortly after the time of Christ, identified Magog as the land we know today as Russia. Throughout the centuries, scholars have identified Magog as Russia, due north of Israel. Even the *Encyclopedia Britannica* associates Russia with this land.

Ezekiel 38:2 (b)–3
. . . the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal:

The prince of Meshech is literally the prince of *Rosh,* from which we get the word "Russia." *Meshech* is the ancient name for Moscow; *Tubal* the ancient name for Tubalsk, both key cities in the history of Russia.

Ezekiel 38:4 (a)
And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws . . .

"I will put a hook in your jaw and bring you down to Israel," the Lord declares to Russia. How will He do this? First, through oil. Oil is necessary for any economic power. Second, in the Dead Sea is three trillion dollars' worth of unextracted potash, a chemical used for fertilizer and the making of weapons—two things Russia needs in great supply. Third, we know the Middle East is the place that will control the power point of the world for it is the gateway to three continents: Africa, Asia, and Europe. In A.D. 300, Alexander the Great declared that whoever controls the Middle East will control the world. Napoleon said virtually the same thing as did Adolf Hitler. Add to the above three reasons, the fact that war is historically a unifying factor for any nation and the hook is complete.

Ezekiel 38:4 (b)
. . . and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords:

After seeing the background of the coming battle, we see the buildup. Our text tells us that Russia will use horses. While this may be a symbolic reference, it could also be literal as we will see in the following verses.

Ezekiel 38:5
Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet:

Persia, or Iran, as well as Ethiopia and Libya will march with Russia.

Ezekiel 38:6

Gomer, and all his bands; the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands: and many people with thee.

Gomer refers to Eastern Europe, specifically the Germanic peoples. Togarmah refers to modern-day Turkey. Turkey will fall and will march with Russia.

The build-up: Verse 4 says the Russians will use horses. There is only one army in the world today that has a significant cavalry: the Russians. What value would horses be? They would be valuable if there is technology dealing with laser beams that would nullify our sophisticated weapons. It would be significant if the crisis in the Middle East makes oil impossible. It would be significant if the passages in the Middle East, like Petra, are so narrow that a man would only be able to get through on horseback. I don't know if this means horses will literally be used or if it is a symbolic reference. Either way, it's intriguing that Russia has a potent cavalry to this day.

Ezekiel 38:7–9
Be thou prepared, and prepare for thyself, thou, and all thy company that are assembled unto thee, and be thou a guard unto them. After many days thou shalt be visited: in the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them. Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land, thou, and all thy bands, and many people with thee.

Even while talking peace, present-day Russia continues to build arms. It is important to note that no nation in history has ever armed herself without utilizing her weapons at some point. According to Ezekiel's prophecy, with her allies in tow, Russia will descend upon Israel like a storm.

Ezekiel 38:10, 11
Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an

evil thought: And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates,

When will Russia come? When walls and defenses are down. In other words, she will come in a time of peace.

Ezekiel 38:12
To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land.

What is the spoil Russia will take? Oil.

Ezekiel 38:13, 14
Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey? to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil? Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say unto Gog, Thus saith the Lord GOD; In that day when my people of Israel dwelleth safely, shalt thou not know it?

Sheba is present-day Saudi Arabia and Dedan is the area of north Yemen. Most conservative Bible scholars believe that the merchants of Tarshish refer to the ancient Phoenician settlements of Tarshish which is present-day England. The English have always been players in Middle East affairs. The young lions could be her offspring, or America.

Ezekiel 38:15, 16
And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army: And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the

latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes.

As recently as the Korean War, Russia has utilized her cavalry because they were not able to be detected by UN reconnaissance planes flying over the area. Today, in rough, mountainous terrain, the most reliable carriers of troops is still horses. We are told that, because they are within a thousand miles of Israel's border, within twelve hours three and one-half million Russian troops could be on the hills of Israel.

Ezekiel 38:17–20
Thus saith the Lord GOD; Art thou he of whom I have spoken in old time by my servants the prophets of Israel, which prophesied in those days many years that I would bring thee against them? And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, that my fury shall come up in my face. For in my jealousy and in the fire of my wrath have I spoken, Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; So that the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground.

When Russia invades Israel, the Lord will shake that region. Geologists say there is increased seismic activity in the region because the tectonic plates located in the mountains of Israel are at a very unstable point.

Ezekiel 38:21
And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord GOD: every man's sword shall be against his brother.

Not only will there be a shaking of the earth, but there will be a shaking of Russia's allies as civil war breaks out among the participants of the invasion. This is not surprising when you consider the myriad of differences represented in this alliance.

Ezekiel 38:22, 23
And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the LORD.

In verse 9, we read that Russia, thinking she is invincible will come like a storm upon Israel. To remind her that she's not, the Lord will unleash a storm upon her.



39 Ezekiel 39:1–8

Therefore, thou son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal: And I will turn thee back, and leave but the sixth part of thee, and will cause thee to come up from the north parts, and will bring thee upon the mountains of Israel: And I will smite thy bow out of thy left hand, and will cause thine arrows to fall out of thy right hand. Thou shalt fall upon the mountains of Israel, thou, and all thy bands, and the people that is with thee: I will give thee unto the ravenous birds of every sort, and to the beasts of the field to be devoured. Thou shalt fall upon the open field: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD. And I will send a fire on Magog, and among them that dwell carelessly in the isles: and they shall know that I am the LORD. So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, the

Holy One in Israel. Behold, it is come, and it is done, saith the Lord GOD; this is the day whereof I have spoken.

Here we see the greatest upset in military history. When Russia comes down, the earth shakes, civil war takes place within the invading armies, and five-sixths of the invading army will be destroyed on the mountains of Israel.

> **Ezekiel 39:9–16**
> **And they that dwell in the cities of Israel shall go forth, and shall set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the handstaves, and the spears, and they shall burn them with fire seven years: So that they shall take no wood out of the field, neither cut down any out of the forests; for they shall burn the weapons with fire: and they shall spoil those that spoiled them, and rob those that robbed them, saith the Lord GOD. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will give unto Gog a place there of graves in Israel, the valley of the passengers on the east of the sea: and it shall stop the noses of the passengers: and there shall they bury Gog and all his multitude: and they shall call it The valley of Hamon-gog. And seven months shall the house of Israel be burying of them, that they may cleanse the land. Yea, all the people of the land shall bury them; and it shall be to them a renown the day that I shall be glorified, saith the Lord GOD. And they shall sever out men of continual employment, passing through the land to bury with the passengers those that remain upon the face of the earth, to cleanse it: after the end of seven months shall they search. And the passengers that pass through the land, when any seeth a man's bone, then shall he set up a sign by it, till the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamon-gog. And also the name of the city shall be Hamonah. Thus shall they cleanse the land.**

It will take seven months to bury the bodies of the Russian army left behind on the mountains of Israel. But only professional men will bury them. If Israel detonates a neutron bomb, this would make sense because radioactive bodies could not be touched. Zechariah 14 says of the same

battle that men's tongues will cleave to the roof of their mouths, that their eyes will melt and run down their cheeks, that their skin will turn black—all indications of heavy radiation.

Ezekiel 39:17–21
And, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord GOD; Speak unto every feathered fowl, and to every beast of the field, Assemble yourselves, and come; gather yourselves on every side to my sacrifice that I do sacrifice for you, even a great sacrifice upon the mountains of Israel, that ye may eat flesh, and drink blood. Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bullocks, all of them fatlings of Bashan. And ye shall eat fat till ye be full, and drink blood till ye be drunken, of my sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. Thus ye shall be filled at my table with horses and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, saith the Lord GOD. And I will set my glory among the heathen, and all the heathen shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid upon them.

The "feast" spoken of is not for man, but for birds and beasts. In other words, the carnage of the battle will be so great, the carcasses so numerous that "the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them" (Isaiah 18:6).

Ezekiel 39:22–28
So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward. And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies: so fell they all by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions have I done unto them, and hid my face from them. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name; After that they have

borne their shame, and all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their land, and none made them afraid. When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; Then shall they know that I am the LORD their God, which cause them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there.

By God's incredible victory over Russia and her allies, both Israel and the surrounding nations would know that God's people went into captivity not because their God was unable to protect them, but rather because they chose to rebel against Him and thereby remove themselves from His protection.

Ezekiel 39:29
Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.

When will God pour out His Spirit upon the house of Israel? Romans 11:25 says that Israel will be blind until the fullness of the Gentiles has come. Israel is spiritually blind. But when Russia comes down, when God begins to shake the earth, when the troops are defeated, Israel will realize that God is in heaven and that He is watching over her—and she'll be blind no longer. When is the Spirit of God poured out? When the age of the Gentiles is over—when the church is raptured.

If you're not saved, realize you might be the very one the Lord is waiting for. You might be the final person to complete His church. So do us a favor and don't keep us waiting any longer! Accept Jesus today—and we'll all move on to the glorious age to come.



40 In chapter 40, we come to the millennial age. Once the Tribulation is over—the seven-year period when the world is judged—the Lord will come back to earth and everything will be made right.

The final eight chapters of the Book of Ezekiel deal primarily with the temple that will be built during the Millennium. We see the description of the temple in chapters 40 through 43, worship in the temple in chapters 44 through 46, and the land around the temple in chapters 47 and 48.

Ezekiel 40:1, 2
In the five and twentieth year of our captivity, in the beginning of the year, in the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after that the city was smitten, in the selfsame day the hand of the LORD was upon me, and brought me thither. In the visions of God brought he me into the land of Israel, and set me upon a very high mountain, by which was as the frame of a city on the south.

After Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, Ezekiel found himself caught up once again and placed on a high mountain where he will have a tremendous vision. It doesn't surprise me that Ezekiel is on a high mountain to receive this vision of the millennial temple because it was on Mount Sinai that Moses received instructions for building the first "temple"—the tabernacle. "Make sure you make all things according to pattern," the Lord told him (Exodus 25:9). And, as he came down from the mountain, Moses did just that.

The year was approximately 1500 B.C. And the portable temple that moved with them as they moved through the wilderness served God's people until about 1000 B.C. At that time, feeling it wasn't right that the Lord should dwell in a tent while he lived in a palace, David decided to build the Lord a glorious temple. But, because he was a warrior, the Lord forbade David to do this, so he gathered the materials and drew the plans but left the actual construction to his son, Solomon. It was this temple that was destroyed by the Babylonians in Ezekiel's day.

In 516 B.C., a new temple was erected by Zerubbabel upon the Jews' return to Israel. Approximately five hundred years later, Herod came on the scene in the days preceding Jesus' birth. Wanting to ingratiate himself to the Jews, Herod remodeled the temple built by Zerubbabel.

Jesus referred to His own body as a temple in John 2:19. Paul spoke of the body of believers corporately as a temple in Ephesians 2:21 as well as our own bodies individually as temples in 1 Corinthians 3:16.

In Revelation 11, we read that when antichrist comes on the scene, he'll broker a deal whereby the Jews will be able to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem. But the final temple is the one described in our text—the temple the Lord will erect when He comes back.

Ezekiel 40:3
And he brought me thither, and, behold, there was a man, whose appearance was like the appearance of brass, with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed; and he stood in the gate.

This "measuring man" appears not only throughout this section, but also in Zechariah 2 and Revelation 21.

Ezekiel 40:4
And the man said unto me, Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee; for to the intent that I might shew them unto thee art thou brought hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel.

The measuring man said to Ezekiel, "Hear with your ears and behold with your eyes and open your heart." That's the way the Lord wants us to learn: with ears, eyes, and heart. "I'm going to give you revelation in order that you might declare all you see to the entire nation. Revelation is often directly linked to communication. If you want the Lord to give you more revelation, be faithful to share what you already understand.

Talk to people about what the Lord is showing you, what He's already taught you, what He's done for you. Those who are faithful to give out will be given yet more. If you want to know more, share more because if you keep sharing, you'll keep receiving.

In verses 5–37, we see measurements for the gates, the porch, and the inner and outer courts. Reading about all of these statistics and measurements, we are prone to wonder who would care about them. But the

captives in Babylon would have studied them diligently and gladly after hearing that the temple that had been the heart and soul of their nation had been destroyed. They had neglected the temple previously through disobedience and iniquity. But now that they were in Babylon, their heart toward it had changed.

That's often the way it is. We take the Bible for granted. We take fellowship and Bible studies for granted. We take relationships for granted. And, like the people of Judah, it's not until they're lost that we realize our stupidity.

In verse 38, we come to the section wherein a description is given for of the tables used to offer sacrifices . . .

Ezekiel 40:38–43
And the chambers and the entries thereof were by the posts of the gates, where they washed the burnt offering. And in the porch of the gate were two tables on this side, and two tables on that side, to slay thereon the burnt offering and the sin offering and the trespass offering. And at the side without, as one goeth up to the entry of the north gate, were two tables; and on the other side, which was at the porch of the gate, were two tables. Four tables were on this side, and four tables on that side, by the side of the gate; eight tables, whereupon they slew their sacrifices. And the four tables were of hewn stone for the burnt offering, of a cubit and an half long, and a cubit and an half broad, and one cubit high: whereupon also they laid the instruments wherewith they slew the burnt offering and the sacrifice. And within were hooks, an hand broad, fastened round about: and upon the tables was the flesh of the offering.

The Old Testament offerings are going to be reinstituted in this millennial temple. "Wait a minute," you say. "Didn't Jesus' death on the Cross nullify the need for animal sacrifices? If they were simply pictures pointing to the Lamb of God, why would they need to be offered again?"

I suggest two reasons sacrifices will be offered in the millennial temple. First, sacrifices in the Millennium will serve as an illustration of the price

Jesus paid on the Cross of Calvary for our salvation. Just as people living in Old Testament days looked ahead to the coming of Christ, people in the Millennium will look back at that event.

Sacrifices in the Millennium will serve as an example of the holiness of God. You see, those who survive the Tribulation will be ushered in to the Millennium, but they will still have human bodies. And, because they will live to be a thousand years old, they'll have lots of kids. The kids who grow up will not have gone through the Tribulation period. So how will they know about sin and the need for salvation if they're living in the glory of the Millennium—when everything on this planet will be right at last? They will see an illustration of the repercussions of sin as they observe animals being slaughtered for sacrifice. And many will be saved as a result.

Ezekiel 40:44–49

And without the inner gate were the chambers of the singers in the inner court, which was at the side of the north gate; and their prospect was toward the south: one at the side of the east gate having the prospect toward the north. And he said unto me, This chamber, whose prospect is toward the south, is for the priests, the keepers of the charge of the house. And the chamber whose prospect is toward the north is for the priests, the keepers of the charge of the altar: these are the sons of Zadok among the sons of Levi, which come near to the LORD to minister unto him. So he measured the court, an hundred cubits long, and an hundred cubits broad, foursquare; and the altar that was before the house. And he brought me to the porch of the house, and measured each post of the porch, five cubits on this side, and five cubits on that side: and the breadth of the gate was three cubits on this side, and three cubits on that side. The length of the porch was twenty cubits, and the breadth eleven cubits; and he brought me by the steps whereby they went up to it: and there were pillars by the posts, one on this side, and another on that side.

The office of the priest was to stand before the people on behalf of God and to stand before God on behalf of the people. As we will see in chapter

44, however, the sons of Zadok were priests with an even higher calling, for they ministered exclusively to the Lord.

Peter tells us that we are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). Therefore, let us be faithful in ministering *to* people on behalf of the Lord and in interceding *for* people in prayer. But, above all, let us be like the sons of Zadok, people who minister not only for the Lord but directly to Him in worship and praise.



41 Chapters 41 and 42 continue the description of the temple. Notice a few things. First, the omissions. There is no veil in this millennial temple because when Jesus Christ died, the veil was rent as a sign that the way was open to come into His presence. Previously, in Old Testament times, that veil separated the people from moving into the presence of God and experiencing His glory. Only on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, could the high priest go through the veil into the Holy of Holies and there see and experience the visible glory of God. But if he wasn't completely cleansed, he could die in God's presence. Only one day a year could one person go in—and then only if he was properly cleansed. But when Jesus died, the veil was rent from top to bottom as a sign that all were welcome. The price was paid. Sins past, present, and future were gone, forgiven. There were no more barriers.

There is also no table of showbread in the millennial temple because Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, will be in Jerusalem as well at that time. There is no golden candlestick because we are told in Ezekiel that His glory will fill the whole world. The whole place will glow, so there will be no need for artificial light. And there is no ark of the covenant. The glory of the Lord that had dwelt over the ark will fill the whole earth, not limited to that little space.

Whatever we are building—whether we're building families or ministries, relationships, occupations, make it according to pattern. The Lord doesn't say, "Just do whatever you want." He gives specific instructions about how things are to be done—very detailed. It's my job to search the Scriptures regarding any project I undertake, saying, "Lord, I need to know every detail of what You say that it might be done right." Make all things

according to pattern. Don't cut corners. So these measurements are given very exactingly.



42 In chapter 42, we see a continuation of the measurements of the millennial temple. I call your attention to verses 13 and 14 . . .

Ezekiel 42:13, 14
Then said he unto me, The north chambers and the south chambers, which are before the separate place, they be holy chambers, where the priests that approach unto the LORD shall eat the most holy things: there shall they lay the most holy things, and the meat offering, and the sin offering, and the trespass offering; for the place is holy. When the priests enter therein, then shall they not go out of the holy place into the utter court, but there they shall lay their garments wherein they minister; for they are holy; and shall put on other garments, and shall approach to those things which are for the people.

Here, we see that the priests were not to wear their holy garments among the people. I believe this speaks of the humility we see no more clearly than in our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, who humbled Himself and took upon Himself the form of a Man (Philippians 2).

Man is so prone to judge by the outward appearance that it is tempting to flaunt our spirituality in any way we can. But the true priest understands that the garments we are to wear are not those of religious authority. Rather, we are to put on mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, and longsuffering (Colossians 3:12).



43 **Ezekiel 43:1, 2**
Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh to ward the east: And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the

way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory.

In Matthew 24, Jesus told us that even as the sun rises in the east and goes to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. In Revelation 1, we read that His voice is like many waters. Therefore, with the glory of God coming from the east and with a voice like the noise of many waters, this vision speaks of Jesus.

> **Ezekiel 43:3, 4**
> **And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east.**

When the Turks controlled Jerusalem, evidently aware of this prophecy, they knew the Jews were expecting their Messiah to enter Jerusalem through the eastern gate. To prevent this, they not only sealed the gate, but they put a graveyard in front. As we will see in chapter 44, however, little did they know that, rather than preventing prophecy, they were fulfilling it.

> **Ezekiel 43:5**
> **So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house.**

What is the glory of God? The Hebrew word translated "glory" is *chabod,* which means "heaviness" or "weight." The glory of God is what you and I truly crave. We think what we want is a nicer car or a bigger house, but Jesus said that whoever drinks of that water will thirst again (John 4:13). In other words, all they will do is whet our appetite for more.

When God's glory departed from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve felt naked and ashamed. They understood that they had lost something. So they went to the mall and got the latest fig leaves—and mankind has been scrambling to cover himself ever since.

Ezekiel 43:6–10

And I heard him speaking unto me out of the house; and the man stood by me. And he said unto me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy name, shall the house of Israel no more defile, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoredom, nor by the carcases of their kings in their high places. In their setting of their threshold by my thresholds, and their post by my posts, and the wall between me and them, they have even defiled my holy name by their abominations that they have committed: wherefore I have consumed them in mine anger. Now let them put away their whoredom, and the carcases of their kings, far from me, and I will dwell in the midst of them for ever. Thou son of man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern.

"Let them measure the pattern." Whether we're building families or ministries, relationships or occupations, we, too, must "measure the pattern." That is, the Lord gives specific instructions about how things are to be done. Therefore, wise is the man or woman who searches the Scriptures regarding any project they undertake, saying, "Lord, I don't want to just get by. I don't want to cut corners. I want to do what You have me do because Your way has proven to always be best."

Ezekiel 43:11

And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them.

It is as we're ashamed of our sin and our own efforts that God will show us the next step in the pattern He has for our lives.

Ezekiel 43:12, 13
This is the law of the house; Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house. And these are the measures of the altar after the cubits: The cubit is a cubit and an hand breadth; even the bottom shall be a cubit, and the breadth a cubit, and the border thereof by the edge thereof round about shall be a span: and this shall be the higher place of the altar.

Here we see the altar as the cure for the shame spoken of in verse 11. In light of the depth of the riches of the wisdom of God, Paul declares that it is only logical for us to present our bodies as living sacrifices to Him (Romans 11:33; 12:1).

Ezekiel 43:14–19
And from the bottom upon the ground even to the lower settle shall be two cubits, and the breadth one cubit; and from the lesser settle even to the greater settle shall be four cubits, and the breadth one cubit. So the altar shall be four cubits; and from the altar and upward shall be four horns. And the altar shall be twelve cubits long, twelve broad, square in the four squares thereof. And the settle shall be fourteen cubits long and fourteen broad in the four squares thereof; and the border about it shall be half a cubit; and the bottom thereof shall be a cubit about; and his stairs shall look toward the east. And he said unto me, Son of man, thus saith the Lord GOD; These are the ordinances of the altar in the day when they shall make it, to offer burnt offerings thereon, and to sprinkle blood thereon. And thou shalt give to the priests the Levites that be of the seed of Zadok, which approach unto me, to min ister unto me, saith the Lord GOD, a young bullock for a sin offering.

Again, in the midst of the measurements for the altar, we see mention of the sons of Zadok, the privileged priests who ministered directly to God.

Ezekiel 43:20–24

And thou shalt take of the blood thereof, and put it on the four horns of it, and on the four corners of the settle, and upon the border round about: thus shalt thou cleanse and purge it. Thou shalt take the bullock also of the sin offering, and he shall burn it in the appointed place of the house, without the sanctuary. And on the second day thou shalt offer a kid of the goats without blemish for a sin offering; and they shall cleanse the altar, as they did cleanse it with the bullock. When thou hast made an end of cleansing it, thou shalt offer a young bullock without blemish, and a ram out of the flock without blemish. And thou shalt offer them before the LORD, and the priests shall cast salt upon them, and they shall offer them up for a burnt offering unto the LORD.

Just as the sacrifices will be salted, our speech—especially to the unbeliever—must be seasoned with the salt of grace (Colossians 4:5, 6). That is, we must speak not of our own togetherness, of our own spiritual attainments, of our own efforts to please God, but only of *His* work on our behalf, *His* faithfulness, *His* grace.

Ezekiel 43:25–27
Seven days shalt thou prepare every day a goat for a sin offering: they shall also prepare a young bullock, and a ram out of the flock, without blemish. Seven days shall they purge the altar and purify it; and they shall consecrate themselves. And when these days are expired, it shall be, that upon the eighth day, and so forward, the priests shall make your burnt offerings upon the altar, and your peace offerings; and I will accept you, saith the Lord GOD.

After the altar is built according to God's pattern, after it is cleansed according to God's specification, after burnt offerings and peace offerings are made according to God's instruction, the Lord will accept the worship of His people. On the other hand, if we present ourselves as sacrifices to Him, even though we are flawed and frail, even though we miss His specifications by a mile, we are, by His miraculous grace, acceptable to Him (Romans 12:1).



44 Ezekiel 44:1–3

Then he brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary which looketh toward the east; and it was shut. Then said the LORD unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the LORD, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut. It is for the prince; the prince, he shall sit in it to eat bread before the LORD; he shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate, and shall go out by the way of the same.

In the year 1517, when the Turks sealed the eastern gate to prevent fulfillment of the prophecy that Messiah would enter through it (Ezekiel 43:5), they unknowingly fulfilled the prophecy seen here in chapter 44 that it would remain shut until the coming of the Prince of Peace. Centuries later, in the 1967 war, Arab tanks were pointed toward the eastern gate. But for reasons still unknown, the order to fire was never given. The Jews recaptured the city and the east gate remains sealed to this day.

Ezekiel 44:4–8

Then brought he me the way of the north gate before the house: and I looked, and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD: and I fell upon my face. And the LORD said unto me, Son of man, mark well, and behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears all that I say unto thee concerning all the ordinances of the house of the LORD, and all the laws thereof; and mark well the entering in of the house, with every going forth of the sanctuary. And thou shalt say to the rebellious, even to the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; O ye house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations, In that ye have brought into my sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, even my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant because of all your abominations.

And ye have not kept the charge of mine holy things: but ye have set keepers of my charge in my sanctuary for yourselves.

Seeing the glory of the Lord, Ezekiel falls on his face yet again (1:28; 3:23; 9:8; 11:13). Twenty years earlier, Ezekiel saw a vision of the destruction of Jerusalem. Here, twenty years later, he's caught up in a vision to Jerusalem again. This time, however, he's not gloomily prophesying the destruction of the city but joyfully proclaiming the construction of the temple.

Ezekiel 44:9
Thus saith the Lord GOD; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel.

Spiritually, Scripture speaks of three parts that need to be circumcised: our hearts, our tongues, and our ears. They all need to be dealt with by the sword of the Word as it cuts away the tendency of the flesh to make us insensitive to the things of the Lord.

In the days of the early church, there were those who told new believers that, if they really wanted to be spiritual, they needed to be physically circumcised. Paul, however, said, "We are the circumcision of God who worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in our flesh" (Philippians 3:3). Who are the "true circumcision," the ones who are truly spiritual? Not those who go through some outward demonstration, but those who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and don't put any stock in their own abilities.

Ezekiel 44:10–12
And the Levites that are gone away far from me, when Israel went astray, which went astray away from me after their idols; they shall even bear their iniquity. Yet they shall be ministers in my sanctuary, having charge at the gates of the house, and ministering to the house: they shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister unto them. Because they ministered unto them before their idols, and caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity;

therefore have I lifted up mine hand against them, saith the Lord GOD, and they shall bear their iniquity.

This passage used to confuse me greatly because it says that the Levites who followed Israel into idolatry would bear their iniquity by ministering to the people. I wondered how offering sacrifices on behalf of people could be punishment. It seemed like a privilege. But My confusion cleared in verse 15 . . .

Ezekiel 44:13–16
And they shall not come near unto me, to do the office of a priest unto me, nor to come near to any of my holy things, in the most holy place: but they shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed. But I will make them keepers of the charge of the house, for all the service thereof, and for all that shall be done therein. But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall stand before me to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord GOD: They shall enter into my sanctuary, and they shall come near to my table, to minister unto me, and they shall keep my charge.

Here, the Lord says that standing before the people is punishment compared to the true ministry of standing before Him. This means our ministry to the Lord is much more important than our ministry for His people. How do we minister to the Lord? The Book of Hebrews says, "By Him, therefore, let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name." The most important ministry is not busily serving in the kitchen as Martha did, but sitting at His feet, adoring Him as Mary did (Luke 10:42).

Worship not only brings pleasure to God, but it makes us aware *of* God. Haven't you found that, when you're really caught up in worship, you're aware of the Lord's presence in a unique way? This is because, as David tells us, He inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3). "The Father is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth," Jesus declared

(John 4:23). The Father zeros in on worshipers. Therefore, ministry *to* the Lord is always a priority over ministry *for* Him.

It was after the believers in the Upper Room prayed and worshiped with intensity that Peter preached the sermon in which 3,000 were saved (Acts 2:41). In Acts 13, we read that it was as Paul and Barnabas ministered *to* the Lord that they were called to minister *for* Him. Worship the Lord and minister to Him personally—and from that, you'll be able to minister corporately.

Ezekiel 44:17, 18
And it shall come to pass, that when they enter in at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments; and no wool shall come upon them, whiles they minister in the gates of the inner court, and within. They shall have linen bonnets upon their heads, and shall have linen breeches upon their loins; they shall not gird themselves with any thing that causeth sweat.

Perspiration is often indicative of a lack of inspiration, for Jesus said His yoke is easy, His burden light (Matthew 11:30).



***For topical study of Ezekiel 44:17, 18 entitled "No Sweat!" turn to page* 685.**

Ezekiel 44:19
And when they go forth into the utter court, even into the utter court to the people, they shall put off their garments wherein they ministered, and lay them in the holy chambers, and they shall put on other garments; and they shall not sanctify the people with their garments.

Keep in mind that all these regulations for the millennial priests have application to us for Peter tells us we are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). When the priests were going out among the people,

they were to take off their holy garments and not wear them among the people. This speaks of humility. Somehow there is perversion in our personality that wants people to think we're more spiritual than we really are. So we'll wear our holy garments and say, "As I was praying for you today at three in the morning . . ." to let people know how spiritual we are. The injunction here is important. Don't parade around in your holy garments, trying to impress people with where you've been.

Ezekiel 44:20
Neither shall they shave their heads, nor suffer their locks to grow long; they shall only poll their heads.

The priests were to neither have shaved heads nor long hair. The idea here is one of moderation. Sometimes people like to impress people with how radical they look. They like to take pride in how different they are from other believers. Be careful. "Let your moderation be known unto all men," Paul wrote to the Philippians (4:5). This is more than a dress code. It's a principle for life.

Ezekiel 44:21
Neither shall any priest drink wine, when they enter into the inner court.

When you're truly seeking the Lord in the inner court, wine just doesn't have a place.

> It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.
>
> Proverbs 31:4, 5

If you want to be a leader, a minister, an effective servant in the kingdom, you can't afford to be "buzzed" on alcohol or high on drugs lest your ability to remember and apply the Word is decreased. That is why, even in the New Testament age of grace, Paul said that elders are not to be given to wine (Titus 1:7).

Ezekiel 44:22
Neither shall they take for their wives a widow, nor her that is put away: but they shall take maidens of the seed of the house of Israel, or a widow that had a priest before.

In marriage, there was to be purity. Again, the same holds true for us because Peter says that if husbands aren't loving their wives, even their prayers will be hindered (1 Peter 3:7).

Ezekiel 44:23
And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.

The calling of priests, leaders, and servants is to teach the difference between right and wrong and to help people discern between the two. In other words, they are not necessarily to teach people what to think but to teach them *how* to think.

Ezekiel 44:24
And in controversy they shall stand in judgment; and they shall judge it according to my judgments: and they shall keep my laws and my statutes in all mine assemblies; and they shall hallow my sabbaths.

When controversy arises, true ministers always minister according to the Word. When you give counsel or get counsel, make sure it's biblical. We don't need peoples' advice. We need to know what the Word says.

Ezekiel 44:25–27
And they shall come at no dead person to defile themselves: but for father, or for mother, or for son, or for daughter, for brother, or for sister that hath had no husband, they may defile themselves. And after he is cleansed, they shall reckon unto him seven days. And in the day that he goeth into the sanctuary, unto

the inner court, to minister in the sanctuary, he shall offer his sin offering, saith the Lord GOD.

Priests, servants, ministers, leaders—that's all of us—are not to hang out with people who are spiritually dead unless it's to reach out to them to bring them into the family of faith.

Ezekiel 44:28
And it shall be unto them for an inheritance: I am their inheritance: and ye shall give them no possession in Israel: I am their possession.

Of the priests, the Lord says, "I am their inheritance." To Abraham, He said, "I am your shield and thy exceeding great reward" (Genesis 15:1). So too, if you give yourself to the service of the Lord, He will become so real to you that your reward will not be something He gives *to* you, but who He Himself is *for* you.

Ezekiel 44:29–31
They shall eat the meat offering, and the sin offering, and the trespass offering; and every dedicated thing in Israel shall be theirs. And the first of all the firstfruits of all things, and every oblation of all, of every sort of your oblations, shall be the priest's: ye shall also give unto the priest the first of your dough, that he may cause the blessing to rest in thine house. The priests shall not eat of any thing that is dead of itself, or torn, whether it be fowl or beast.

The priests were to live off the sacrifices offered to the Lord. And, because only healthy animals were to be offered as sacrifices, the priests wouldn't be reduced to subsisting on leftovers or castoffs. This remains a good word for both pastors and parishioners to consider today.

NO SWEAT!

A Topical Study of
EZEKIEL 44:17, 18

As believers, each of us is part of a royal priesthood, sharing with people the good news of God's love and forgiveness, His grace and mercy (1 Peter 2:9). Therefore, here in chapter 44, I want us to note specifically that the priests were told by the Lord that, as they ministered, they were to wear nothing that caused them to sweat. I believe an understanding of what this means affects our walk, our worship, and our work in a radical, impacting way.

Our Walk with the Lord

There is something inside of man that makes us think it is supposed to be difficult to walk with the Lord. Virtually all religions of the world are based upon this premise—that one must exert a lot of energy and expend a lot of effort if he is going to establish a relationship with God. He must follow the eight steps to Nirvana, the six pillars of faith, or even the Ten Commandments. Every religion in the world and throughout history has been based upon the supposition that man must consistently work, struggle, strive, and do something difficult if he truly desires to establish a relationship with God.

When asked what men must do to do the *works* of God, Jesus said, "This is the work of God—it's one thing—that you believe on Him whom the Father hath sent" (see John 6:28, 29). In other words, it's not the works of man but the singular work of God that matters.

Understanding this takes the sweat, the strain, the pressure off me. And that is exactly what Jesus is after.

> *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*
>
> Matthew 11:28–30

"You neither have to sweat to come into My presence nor strain to stay there," Jesus declares. "I'm meek. I'm lowly. I'm approachable and available, compassionate and sympathetic."

Why is it that, at the moment of salvation, we embrace the fact that Jesus paid the price for our sin—but once we are saved, we fall into the subtle trap of feeling that although we were saved by grace, we must prove to God how serious we are in order to retain our salvation? We get up at five in the morning and pray for three hours, thinking that we'll impress God. We give eighty percent of our income, witness to seven people every day, read

fourteen chapters and memorize ten verses every night—all because we mistakenly think we must do something to maintain our walk with the Lord.

The Lord, however, sees all of our efforts as wool—which He expressly forbids His priests to wear.

> *As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:*
>
> Colossians 2:6

How did you receive Jesus? When you were broken, when you could do nothing, when you realized He did it all, you said, "Lord, I'm not making it. You've got to do it." Immediately, you felt His embrace, experienced His touch, and you were born again. Even as you received Him, walk in Him. Keep going with that same simplicity. Say, "Lord, I'm coming to You today about this electric bill or this problem at work not because I've been so devoted and committed but because You are gracious and I am weary, because you are loving and I am needy, because You have finished the work and I'm in need of Your blessing."

Am I saying you don't *have* to have devotions anymore? Yes—because once you realize how gracious and glorious the Lord is, you will want to meet with Him in the morning, the afternoon, the evening. Your entire relationship will change from one of responsibility to one of response as you say, "Lord, You're so good, I can't wait to talk with You." The sweat stops and your walk takes on a whole new vitality.

Our Worship of the Lord

Once I realize that my walk is based upon what Jesus did on Calvary rather than what I do to try to prove my spirituality, I become a worshiper. People who are sweating aren't singing. People who are working aren't worshiping. They're too busy struggling and straining. But those who realize the work is complete, that the Lord is their salvation, that there's nothing more they can do to earn His blessing or merit His favor, find themselves worshiping. Those who realize that it's nothing we've done, are doing, or can do that will bring God's blessings, find themselves lifting their hands, bowing their knees, and opening their hearts to their gracious, wonderful, kind, and glorious Father.

Yet even worship can begin to be covered in wool.

> *For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: . . . That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.*
>
> Deuteronomy 11:10–14

"I'm taking you into a new land," God said to His people. "It will be prolific and productive not because you'll bring water up from the Nile by pumping on treadmills as you did in Egypt, but because I will water it with the first and latter rains."

When we come into the inner court to worship the Lord, we don't have to "pump up" our emotions. We can allow ourselves to rest in His presence. In other words, sitting silently before the Lord is every bit as acceptable as standing boldly before Him. If you are emotional by nature, express that to the Lord. If you tend to be more contemplative and quiet, you, too, can be who you are in Him. Whatever you do, just don't put on wool when you come into His presence.

Our Work for the Lord

Too many pastors are held hostage by committees, organizational flow charts, and programs. We're here to meet with the Lord, not get involved in programs. Therefore, we must not put on wool and start organizing. The Lord Himself will inspire people to do what He would have them do. Our job as a church is simply to support them in prayer and financially when necessary. It's glorious to watch the Lord stir peoples' hearts.

Whenever I am straining, whenever I am tired and frustrated, I know I'm not moving in the things God has called me to do because He says His burden is easy and His load is light. Don't wear wool, gang. Everything you do should be supernaturally natural and restful. The work of the Lord is so enjoyable if you're doing what you were uniquely created to do. If you love to play football, get some guys together and play football to the glory of God. If you love working on cars, you could help those in the body who don't know the difference between a radio and a radiator. If you love to coach, coach a YMCA team and tell the kids about Jesus.

You're ministers wherever you go. Just make sure that what you do is linen, not wool.



45 In chapter 44, the priests were told how to live. Here, in chapter 45, they're told where to live . . .

Ezekiel 45:1
Moreover, when ye shall divide by lot the land for inheritance, ye shall offer an oblation unto the LORD, an holy portion of the land: the length shall be the length of five and twenty thousand reeds, and the breadth shall be ten thousand. This shall be holy in all the borders thereof round about.

When they came back into the land historically, as well as when the kingdom age is ushered in prophetically, a section of land was to be set aside

as holy territory. As to its size, Bible scholars are mostly divided into two camps. Some say it was a square eight and one-third miles by eight and one-third miles. Others consider it to be sixty miles by sixty miles.

Ezekiel 45:2–7
Of this there shall be for the sanctuary five hundred in length, with five hundred in breadth, square round about; and fifty cubits round about for the suburbs thereof. And of this measure shalt thou measure the length of five and twenty thousand, and the breadth of ten thousand: and in it shall be the sanctuary and the most holy place. The holy portion of the land shall be for the priests the ministers of the sanctuary, which shall come near to minister unto the LORD: and it shall be a place for their houses, and an holy place for the sanctuary. And the five and twenty thousand of length, and the ten thousand of breadth, shall also the Levites, the ministers of the house, have for themselves, for a possession for twenty chambers. And ye shall appoint the possession of the city five thousand broad, and five and twenty thousand long, over against the oblation of the holy portion: it shall be for the whole house of Israel. And a portion shall be for the prince on the one side and on the other side of the oblation of the holy portion, and of the possession of the city, before the oblation of the holy portion, and before the possession of the city, from the west side westward, and from the east side eastward: and the length shall be over against one of the portions, from the west border unto the east border.

In the middle of the kingdom, we see a square of land, divided into three sections. In the middle section sits the temple itself. Living around the temple are the priests because those who serve the Lord will always be closest to Him. That's why serving is so important. Whether you're working in the church nursery or witnessing to a neighbor, if you are serving the Lord, you will find yourself experiencing more of Him.

One-third of this dedicated land was where the Levites lived. The final third contained the city of Jerusalem itself.

On either side of the square, the land continues on, going east to the Jordan and west to the Mediterranean Sea. We see the two strips of land running from Jerusalem to the Jordan and the Mediterranean given specifically and exclusively to the Prince—the Lord Jesus Himself.

Ezekiel 45:8
In the land shall be his possession in Israel: and my princes shall no more oppress my people; and the rest of the land shall they give to the house of Israel according to their tribes.

Along with the Prince, there will be other princes ruling and reigning for Him and with Him. Of them, God will demand absolute honesty.

Ezekiel 45:9, 10
Thus saith the Lord GOD; Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute judgment and justice, take away your exactions from my people, saith the Lord GOD. Ye shall have just balances, and a just ephah, and a just bath.

These units of measurement speak of justice. That is, unlike what happens in the world today, everything the princes do will be done with equity.

Ezekiel 45:11–17
The ephah and the bath shall be of one measure, that the bath may contain the tenth part of an homer, and the ephah the tenth part of an homer: the measure thereof shall be after the homer. And the shekel shall be twenty gerahs: twenty shekels, five and twenty shekels, fifteen shekels, shall be your maneh. This is the oblation that ye shall offer; the sixth part of an ephah of an homer of wheat, and ye shall give the sixth part of an ephah of an homer of barley: Concerning the ordinance of oil, the bath of oil, ye shall offer the tenth part of a bath out of the cor, which is an homer of ten baths; for ten baths are an homer: And one lamb out of the flock, out of two hundred, out of the fat pastures of Israel; for a meat offering, and for a burnt offering, and for peace offerings, to make reconciliation for them, saith the Lord GOD.

All the people of the land shall give this oblation for the prince in Israel. And it shall be the prince's part to give burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and drink offerings, in the feasts, and in the new moons, and in the sabbaths, in all solemnities of the house of Israel: he shall prepare the sin offering, and the meat offering, and the burnt offering, and the peace offerings, to make reconciliation for the house of Israel.

Here, we see the Prince Himself offering sacrifices. Why would Jesus have to do this? After all, He never sinned and, therefore, has no need to offer sacrifice to atone for sin. I suggest He does this for the same reason He was baptized—for identification. Jesus identified with us in baptism even as we identify with Him in baptism. So, I suggest He offers sacrifices with the people in order that He might be at one with them and be an example for them.

I love Jesus Christ for so many reasons—not the least of which is that He is the ultimate, perfect example. He never asks us to do anything that He Himself has not done or gone through. The Bible says He was tempted in all points as we are (Hebrews 4:15). Therefore, no matter what you're struggling with, what disappointment is before you, or what hurt is inside of you, Jesus can relate to you.

Ezekiel 45:18–25

Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the first month, in the first day of the month, thou shalt take a young bullock without blemish, and cleanse the sanctuary: And the priest shall take of the blood of the sin offering, and put it upon the posts of the house, and upon the four corners of the settle of the altar, and upon the posts of the gate of the inner court. And so thou shalt do the seventh day of the month for every one that erreth, and for him that is simple: so shall ye reconcile the house. In the first month, in the fourteenth day of the month, ye shall have the passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten. And upon that day shall the prince prepare for himself and for all the people of the land a bullock for a sin offering. And seven days of the feast he shall prepare a burnt offering to the LORD, seven bullocks and

seven rams without blemish daily the seven days; and a kid of the goats daily for a sin offering. And he shall prepare a meat offering of an ephah for a bullock, and an ephah for a ram, and an hin of oil for an ephah. In the seventh month, in the fifteenth day of the month, shall he do the like in the feast of the seven days, according to the sin offering, according to the burnt offering, and according to the meat offering, and according to the oil.

There were three major feasts all of Israel observed. Passover was in April. Fifty days later came Pentecost. In October, there was the Feast of Tabernacles. Here, the people, led by the Prince, will partake in the Feasts of Passover and Tabernacles—but not Pentecost. Why is Pentecost omitted from these kingdom celebrations?

I suggest it is because the Feasts of Passover and Tabernacles were feasts of commemoration while Pentecost was a feast of anticipation. You see, Passover commemorated God's deliverance of His people from the plague of the death of the firstborn in Egypt. It was fulfilled in Jesus, the Passover Lamb. The Feast of Tabernacles commemorated God's protection of His people as they dwelt in tents in their wilderness wanderings. It was also fulfilled in Jesus, who dwelt, or literally, "tabernacled" among them (John 1:14).

Pentecost, or the Feast of Firstfuits, however, was one of anticipation—looking forward to God's provision in the harvest yet to come. Later, it was on Pentecost that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the one hundred twenty believers in the Upper Room (Acts 2). The Spirit, the "earnest," or down-payment of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13, 14), also looks ahead to the day when, seeing Jesus, we will be like Him (1 John 3:2). Therefore, while the feasts of commemoration will always remind God's people of His faithfulness, the feast of anticipation will be eclipsed by His glorious presence among them in the Millennium.



46 Chapter 46 speaks of the Prince coming and offering worship.

Ezekiel 46:1
Thus saith the Lord GOD; The gate of the inner court that looketh toward the east shall be shut the six working days; but on the sabbath it shall be opened, and in the day of the new moon it shall be opened.

The eastern gate that is presently sealed shut will be opened and reserved for the Prince to use. It will be shut six working days but on the Sabbath it will be opened. I personally believe there is a correlation between the gate being shut six days before being opened on the seventh and this world being outside of the direct rule and reign of Christ.

You see, many conservative Bible scholars believe that the world began in its recreated state (Genesis 1:2), in the year 4000 B.C. If this be so, it means we are presently in the six-thousandth year, the sixth Millennium. Six is the number of man. The age of man, it seems to many, will be completed at the end of the sixth Millennium. That brings us to the seven-thousand-year period. Seven is the number of perfection. That is why in the seventh Millennium, there will be peace, prosperity, and righteousness as Jesus reigns from Jerusalem. At the end of that time period, we're told this earth will be destroyed because it's been defiled by sin. Just as eight in Scripture is the number of new beginnings, God will create a new heaven and a new earth in the eighth Millennium.

Ezekiel 46:2–7
And the prince shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate without, and shall stand by the post of the gate, and the priests shall prepare his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate: then he shall go forth; but the gate shall not be shut until the evening. Likewise the people of the land shall worship at the door of this gate before the LORD in the sabbaths and in the new moons. And the burnt offering that the prince shall offer unto the LORD in the sabbath day shall be six lambs without blemish, and a ram without blemish. And the meat offering shall be an ephah for a ram, and the meat offering for the lambs as he shall be able to give, and an hin of oil to an ephah. And in the day of the new moon it shall be a young

bullock without blemish, and six lambs, and a ram: they shall be without blemish. And he shall prepare a meat offering, an ephah for a bullock, and an ephah for a ram, and for the lambs according as his hand shall attain unto, and an hin of oil to an ephah.

There are those who say this couldn't be speaking of Jesus because, since He never sinned, He had no need to offer sacrifices. But I suggest three reasons why Jesus would indeed offer sacrifice . . .

First, He does so as an example for the people. Jesus Christ, our Lord, never asks us to do anything He Himself has not done. He went to the synagogue even though He knew more than any of the rabbis. He went to the temple even though His knowledge confounded the scribes. He went to Jerusalem for the feasts when His life was in jeopardy. Jesus is not merely a guru telling people how they should live as He's chauffeured around in a limousine. He will never ask you to do anything He Himself has not done. Therefore, in the kingdom age, as sacrifices are made, He makes them, as well.

Second, I believe He did this not only as an example *for* the people, but that he might become one *with* the people.

> But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.
>
> Hebrews 2:9–12

When we sing, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord, God of power and might," Jesus isn't looking down on us, saying, "Isn't that nice?" According to this passage, He's in our midst, singing right beside us. He's honoring His Father right along with us. If we understood this, I believe it would radically change how

we approach worship. I think our mouths would be opened a little wider, our hands lifted a bit higher, our hearts a little warmer, our voices a little louder if we realized Jesus was truly with us.

Third, Jesus offers sacrifice as a reminder *to* the people. When we see the Good Shepherd sacrificing the lambs He created, I believe it will blow us away. Here is One who is so gentle and pure slaughtering lambs and bulls. Why? As a reminder to us of the seriousness of sin. I don't think it's too far to conjecture that when these sacrifices are made, perhaps a tear will roll down the cheeks of the Lord who loves the very animals He sacrifices.

Sin always causes pain. There is always blood shed. There is always life lost. There is always suffering and sadness. It's inevitable. Sin isn't bad because God forbids it. Rather, God forbids it because it's bad. "Be ye perfect and sin not," is not the stern command of a cruel God but the loving injunction of a tender Father who knows the destruction and despair that sin invariably leaves in its wake.

Infinitely more important than the sacrifices He offers is the Sacrifice Jesus Himself became when He paid the price for our sin on the Cross of Calvary. Therefore, even in the Millennium, the sacrifices offered will speak of Him.

Ezekiel 46:8–10
And when the prince shall enter, he shall go in by the way of the porch of that gate, and he shall go forth by the way thereof. But when the people of the land shall come before the LORD in the solemn feasts, he that entereth in by the way of the north gate to worship shall go out by the way of the south gate; and he that entereth by the way of the south gate shall go forth by the way of the north gate: he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth over against it. And the prince in the midst of them, when they go in, shall go in; and when they go forth, shall go forth.

The people are either going to go in the north gate and out the south, or in the south gate and out the north. What is the reason for this? Some might say it's for traffic flow—to keep the people moving. Perhaps part of that is true.

But I believe it's also a statement that whenever we come in to the place of worship, we never leave the same way. We're always affected, always changed. Whenever we congregate in the name of the Lord, whenever we assemble to give praise to Him, whenever we desire to learn more of Him, we come in one way but go out yet another. We're changed.

That is why the author of the Book of Hebrews said, "Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together as is the manner of some" (Hebrews 10:25). Join us—and you'll find yourself leaving a different way than you came in. The Prince, however, comes in the east gate and leaves through the same gate (verse 8) because He has no need to change. He is altogether lovely (Song of Solomon 5:16). He is the essence of perfection—the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

Ezekiel 46:11–18

And in the feasts and in the solemnities the meat offering shall be an ephah to a bullock, and ephah to a ram, and to the lambs as he is able to give, and an hin of oil to an ephah. Now when the prince shall prepare a voluntary burnt offering or peace offerings voluntarily unto the LORD, one shall then open him the gate that looketh toward the east, and he shall prepare his burnt offering and his peace offerings, as he did on the sabbath day: then he shall go forth; and after his going forth one shall shut the gate. Thou shalt daily prepare a burnt offering unto the LORD of a lamb of the first year without blemish: thou shalt prepare it every morning. And thou shalt prepare a meat offering for it every morning, the sixth part of an ephah, and the third part of an hin of oil, to temper with the fine flour; a meat offering continually by a perpetual ordinance unto the LORD. Thus shall they prepare the lamb, and the meat offering, and the oil, every morning for a continual burnt offering. Thus saith the Lord GOD; If the prince give a gift unto any of his sons, the inheritance thereof shall be his sons'; it shall be their possession by inheritance. But if he give a gift of his inheritance to one of his servants, then it shall be his to the year of liberty; after it shall return to the prince: but his inheritance shall be his sons' for them. Moreover the prince shall

not take of the people's inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession; but he shall give his sons inheritance out of his own possession: that my people be not scattered every man from his possession.

When the Prince is on the scene, He's not going to bully the people. He will not take by force that which people possess. Rather, He will give from His own possessions.

Ezekiel 46:19–24
After he brought me through the entry, which was at the side of the gate, into the holy chambers of the priests, which looked toward the north: and, behold, there was a place on the two sides westward. Then said he unto me, This is the place where the priests shall boil the trespass offering and the sin offering, where they shall bake the meat offering; that they bear them not out into the utter court, to sanctify the people. Then he brought me forth into the utter court, and caused me to pass by the four corners of the court; and, behold, in every corner of the court there was a court. In the four corners of the court there were courts joined of forty cubits long and thirty broad: these four corners were of one measure. And there was a row of building round about in them, round about them four, and it was made with boiling places under the rows round about. Then said he unto me, These are the places of them that boil, where the ministers of the house shall boil the sacrifice of the people.

The meat of the sin offering was to be eaten only by the priests. The meat of the peace offering was made available to the people as well as to the priests. What a gracious God is ours—who is able to work all for good, who blesses His people even through sacrifice.



47 Jerusalem has just been wiped out. The Babylonians have wasted the city and destroyed the temple. The people are grieving and mourning, oppressed and discouraged. Prophetically, the Lord shows Ezekiel a better day that's coming. That day is when Jesus comes back and establishes His kingdom on earth. For a thousand years, there will be peace on this planet. When Jesus comes back, Zechariah 14 tells us He's going to set His foot on the Mount of Olives and it will split in half. At that moment, the topography of the region will go through a radical transformation. A new river will flow that will have a radical effect on that entire desert region . . .

Ezekiel 47:1 (a)
Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house . . .

This speaks of the millennial temple.

Ezekiel 47:1 (b)
. . . and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house . . .

Here we see a miraculous river that flows from Jerusalem out to the wilderness. It begins as a trickle and, without any tributaries flowing into it, increases as it flows. It begins in the sanctuary, which speaks of devotion to God.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled," Jesus declared (Matthew 5:6).

Who is filled? Those who thirst for more of God.

If you're satisfied with where you're at, you'll never receive more. It's when you say, "I'm tired of the death, the dryness, the impotency, the inability within me. I want more of the Lord. I need more of the Lord," that the river begins to flow.

Ezekiel 47:1 (c)
. . . at the south side of the altar.

The altar speaks of death to self. In Acts 4, Peter and John had just been beaten up. What did the believers do? They prayed that the Holy Spirit might be given in order that God's servants could preach with even greater boldness. The Holy Spirit isn't given for those who simply want to feel good about themselves or to feel a little happier. No, it's for those who say, "Lord, You've done so much for me. No matter what it costs, no matter what it means, my life is Yours."

Ezekiel 47:2–5
Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side. And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters were to the ancles. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters were to the loins. Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.

The river begins in the temple and ends up in the wilderness. But in between the temple and the wilderness, the "measuring man" took Ezekiel by the hand and said, "Let's go for a walk along this bank." They walked about a quarter of a mile and the man with the reed told Ezekiel to go in. Ezekiel did so and the water came up to his feet. They walked another quarter mile and the man said, "Go in again." This time the river was up to Ezekiel's knees. They walked yet another quarter mile and the water was up to his loins. They walked another quarter mile and the water was over his head.

Ezekiel 47:6
And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen this? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river.

“Have you seen this?” The Lord asks us the same question because that’s the order of what happens in our walk. We’re walking with Jesus and we get our feet wet up to our ankles.

“This is great,” we say. “I’m on solid ground. I’m standing in the Lord. I’m born again. My sins are forgiven. I’m on my way to heaven!”

Then the Lord says, “Let’s go a little deeper.” So He takes us down river a thousand cubits and says, “Go in again.” This time, we go up to our knees.

“I want you to learn what it means to pray—not only to stand, but now to pray because you’re aware of the challenges and problems and struggles of life.”

Then the Lord says, “We’re going deeper still.” So we walk in up to our loins—the place of reproduction. As we grow in the knowledge of God, as we stay in His Word, as we learn how to pray, we’re going to reproduce spiritually. If a congregation is healthy, it will naturally grow because healthy sheep naturally reproduce. It’s inevitable.

Then the Lord says, “There’s one more stop. This time you’re going over your head in water so deep you can swim in it. You can be refreshed by it, but you can no longer control it. You’re over your head.” Praying in the Spirit, dying to self, worshiping with consistency, walking in power—have you seen this?

Where are you? Are you up to your ankles? Have you just begun your walk with Jesus? If you have, that’s great—but move on. Get on your knees. Learn how to intercede, to pray and to be faithful in your devotional life. Are you a prayer warrior? Great, then start reproducing. Start witnessing and sharing. But if you’re still desiring more, take the plunge today. Step in deeper still to the place where you want to be used by the Lord no matter the price.

Where are you now? Where do you desire to be? The Lord will take you as far down the river as you want to go.

Ezekiel 47:7–12

Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other. Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought

forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed. And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh. And it shall come to pass, that the fishers shall stand upon it from En-gedi even unto En-eglaim; they shall be a place to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many. But the miry places thereof and the marishes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt. And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.

This river begins to flow toward the Dead Sea—a sea in which nothing grows today. Not one living creature is found there because it is so salty. But in that day, with this new river flowing, there will be trees on either side that are fruitful. As the water goes into the Dead Sea, the Sea itself will be healed. There will be a multitude of fish and fowl because everywhere this river touches, there will be healing and life and fruitfulness.

The areas and marshes where the river doesn't go, however, will remain dead. What is this river? It is that which Jesus spoke of in John 7 when He said, "If any man thirst, let Him come unto Me and drink. And out of His innermost being shall gush forth torrents of living water." Then John says, "This spake He of the Holy Ghost"—the river that brings healing, fruitfulness, and life.

After He died and was resurrected, right before He ascended into heaven, Jesus said to His disciples, "You shall receive power when the Holy Ghost comes upon you" (Acts 1:8). The word translated "upon" in Greek means "overflowing from."

"Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem," Jesus told His disciples, "until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). In other words, "Don't try

and go out and win the world in your own energy. Wait until the Holy Spirit is overflowing from you—for that is when you will see the river of life bringing healing and fruitfulness and making the desert places of peoples' lives productive and prolific."

Ezekiel 47:13–23

Thus saith the Lord GOD; This shall be the border, whereby ye shall inherit the land according to the twelve tribes of Israel: Joseph shall have two portions. And ye shall inherit it, one as well as another: concerning the which I lifted up mine hand to give it unto your fathers: and this land shall fall unto you for inheritance. And this shall be the border of the land toward the north side, from the great sea, the way of Hethlon, as men go to Zedad; Hamath, Berothah, Sibraim, which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath; Hazar-hatticon, which is by the coast of Hauran. And the border from the sea shall be Hazar-enan, the border of Damascus, and the north northward, and the border of Hamath. And this is the north side. And the east side ye shall measure from Hauran, and from Damascus, and from Gilead, and from the land of Israel by Jordan, from the border unto the east sea. And this is the east side. And the south side southward, from Tamar even to the wa ters of strife in Kadesh, the river to the great sea. And this is the south side southward. The west side also shall be the great sea from the border, till a man come over against Hamath. This is the west side. So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord GOD.

The land is to be divided. Each tribe would receive a certain section. These sections form rectangles. If you're a student of the Bible and have tried

to follow the location of the twelve tribes in the Old Testament, it's hard to do because the boundaries are very obscure at best. In the kingdom, when Israel is redivided by tribes, each of the tribes receives equal territory, all nice rectangles.

The stranger in any of these tribes is to be given his inheritance. This real estate that few would choose God gave to the Jews. Now He's giving a word to them in kingdom context. That is, "Treat the strangers right."



48 In chapter 48, we see each tribe's allotment in the land. *Who would care about these dimensions, measurements, and specifics?* we wonder. *Who cares about where Dan, Asher, and Naphtali were to settle? Who cares about the boundaries of their land or the size of the suburbs?*

I suggest the answer lies in the last verse . . .

Ezekiel 48:35
It was round about eighteen thousand measures: and the name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there.

The people to whom Ezekiel prophesied were captives in a foreign land. They had heard reports that their country had been obliterated, that the temple had been destroyed. But suddenly they hear a message from God, telling them not only that the temple would be rebuilt, that the Levites would be in place, that the priests would be in attendance, that all twelve tribes would be reunited and given a portion of the land—but, above all, that the city would be named *Jehovah-Shammah,* or "the Lord is there."

Maybe, like the Jews in Ezekiel's day, you feel displaced or forgotten, out of touch and out of hope. If you don't know the Lord, leave the captivity of sin behind and turn to Him, for He is as near as your confession of faith in Him (Romans 10:8–10).

And if you do know Him, take heart, for all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for instruction in righteousness—including Ezekiel 48 (2 Timothy 3:16). Through this otherwise-obscure passage, the Lord would say to you, "Fear not. I haven't left you nor forsaken

you. In fact, I have something planned and all measured out for you. The kingdom is right around the corner—and the best part about it is that I will be there."



DANIEL

Background to Daniel

Daniel was both a saint and a seer. Because he was a saint, his book is extremely practical. As we study his life and those of his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, we see commitment, conviction, and courage in standing up against the world system and standing for the Lord. This book is an inspirational example to us and has tremendous lessons for us about how we are to walk in the world in which we live.

But because Daniel was also a seer, the book is very prophetic. In fact, it is perhaps the most prophetic book in the entire Bible for the Book of Daniel is the key that unlocks the Book of Revelation. Without understanding Daniel, the Book of Revelation would be an enigma and a mystery.

Because much of Daniel's prophecies have already been fulfilled, his book confounds the critics. Around the year A.D. 300, a theory was introduced that the reason Daniel was so accurate was because, although he declares he wrote his book in 600 B.C., it wasn't actually written until A.D. 50. In other words, it's a fake. This heresy is often repeated by "higher" critics still today. Thus, in his own day, Daniel was placed in the lion's den —but today he's in the liar's den.

Either these men are incredibly ignorant or downright fraudulent, for all one has to do is look at the Septuagint. The Septuagint, written in 285 B.C. was the Greek translation of the Old Testament. What book is right there in the Septuagint? Daniel. So how could it have been written in A.D. 50 when it was in the Septuagint in 285 B.C.? As Alexander conquered his way to the Middle East, Josephus wrote that, when he came to the city of Jerusalem, the high priest met with him.

"Alexander," he said, "you're mentioned in the Bible." Then he proceeded to open the Book of Daniel and show him where he fit in to the prophetic picture, how three hundred years earlier he was prophesied to come.

Alexander the Great was so moved that he spared the city of Jerusalem. Secular history records this event—so I don't know how critics can claim Daniel was written in A.D. 50 when Alexander was touched by it in 322 B.C.

But the most convincing argument of all is simply that Jesus Himself called Daniel the beloved prophet and quoted extensively from Daniel (Matthew 24; Luke 21). Whether concerning evolution, prophecy, divine inspiration of Scripture, or any other topic of debate, always take the argument back to the person of Jesus Christ. When people say they can't really believe there was a literal man named Adam and a woman named Eve, don't argue evolution. Bring the argument back to Jesus. Say, "The issue is not so much what you or I think about evolution. The issue is that Jesus spoke about Adam and Eve specifically and centered a teaching about marriage on them. So either Jesus is ignorant, a deceiver, or He is right."

"We know a man couldn't be swallowed by a fish. There's something 'fishy' about that kind of 'tail,' " the cynic scoffs.

Yet Jesus used Jonah's three-day stay in the belly of the whale as a picture of His own death, burial, and resurrection (Matthew 12:40).

Jesus used some of the most controversial accounts in the Old Testament —Adam and Eve, Jonah and the whale, Daniel—as foundations for His teaching. And because His Resurrection verifies everything He said, all of His references are equally true. Whenever you're involved in controversies, always steer the discussion back to Jesus. You'll find all of the illustrations and answers you need in Him.

The Book of Daniel confounds the critics—but it comforts the Christian because it confirms our faith. When people ask how we know the prophecies in the Bible will come to pass, we can turn them to the Book of Daniel and say, "Daniel made predictions concerning the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman empires centuries before the events came to pass." Therefore, we know that what he speaks of yet to come will also come to pass.

Sometimes people think we're obsessed with prophecy. But the reason we talk about prophecy so much is because one-fourth of the Bible deals with it. And it's the only holy book that dares to do so. Prophecy has a tremendous purifying effect on our faith and on our walk. After speaking about the coming of Jesus, John said, "Whoever has this hope purifies himself " (1 John 3:3). Truly believing that Jesus could come tonight would affect what we do today.

Another reason we talk about prophecy is found in chapter 12 . . .

But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.

Daniel 12:4

According to this prophecy, in the end times, there will be an explosion of knowledge not only intellectually, but also concerning end-time understanding. "Seal this book, Daniel," the Lord says. "You're not going to understand it, but it will make sense to those who are living in the last days." There's a great amount of teaching on prophecy today because we are living in the last days and, suddenly, so much of these prophetic mysteries are making sense to us.

Not only is the Book of Daniel important in light of prophecy, but what a blessing it is to study the life of Daniel personally. Even in his own day, Daniel was a legend. His contemporary, Ezekiel, puts him in the same category as Job and Noah (14:14). In fact, he's one of only a couple of Old Testament characters of whom no sin is mentioned. This doesn't mean he didn't sin. But it does mean his life was not given to sin.

I think there are three words that characterize Daniel's life. The first is purpose. He was a man who purposed in his heart that he would walk with God. Second, he was a man of prayer. Third, he was a man of prophecy. He was interested in prophecy and was used as a vehicle for prophecy. These three points cause me to say, "Lord, make me a man who purposes in my heart. Make me a man who prays. Make me a man of prophetic understanding that I might know the urgency of the times in which I live."



DANIEL

1

Daniel 1:1 (a)
In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah . . .

So carnal a king was Jehoiakim that when he received a scroll of prophecy from Jeremiah, he chopped it up and threw it in the fire—as if he could invalidate the Word of God. Jeremiah simply sought the Lord for another copy. This time, the Lord added a few things that were pointed directly at Jehoiakim because of his obstinacy. Jehoiakim was told that Judah, his kingdom, would be besieged by the Babylonians and that they would be carried away captive for seventy years because of their disobedience and tendency toward idolatry (Jeremiah 36).

Daniel 1:1 (b)
. . . came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it.

The third year of Jehoiakim would put us at 605 B.C.—the year Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonian empire, the most powerful potentate not only of that day but probably of all time, seeking to consolidate his power in the Middle East, besieges Jerusalem.

Daniel 1:2 (a)
And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand . . .

Nebuchadnezzar thought he was in control, but, in fact, he was just a puppet, for it was the Lord who gave Jehoiakim to Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 1:2 (b)–4
. . . with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god. And the king spake

unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.

In his first attack, Nebuchadnezzar didn't destroy Jerusalem. He simply took treasures from the temple as well as the cream of the crop of the young men of Jerusalem. He made them eunuchs in order that they might study without distraction. Then he educated them in the laws of science and knowledge in preparation to become administrators throughout his empire.

As seen here, sin always leads to two things. The first is blasphemy. The instruments used in the temple to worship the true and living God were now carried to Babylon and placed in the immoral, idolatrous temples of the Babylon. Sin invariably causes people to feel blasphemous toward the Lord.

Second, sin always leads to bondage. The people of God were being carried in chains to Babylon because of their sin. That's what sin does. It has a way of ensnaring and trapping us.

Daniel 1:5–8
And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abed-nego. But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

When offered the king's food and wine, Daniel didn't want to defile himself with meat that may have been offered to idols or with wine that

would pervert his judgment (Proverbs 31:4). I'm sure God wouldn't have faulted him had he partaken of the meat or wine. But, as Paul would say concerning meat and other issues, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient" (1 Corinthians 6:12). In other words, all things aren't wise.

I used to throw the discus and I know that the rule books specifically state that any kind of attire can be worn in the discus ring. Therefore, I could have gone in the ring wearing a business suit, tie, wingtip shoes, overcoat, and hat without being disqualified. It would have been lawful—but dumb! It would hinder the job I was there to do. So, Paul says that, although all things are lawful, some things will simply slow us down and tie us up. He went on to say, "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Paul loved his freedom too much to be enslaved.

Where did Daniel get such high standards? First, I believe they came from his parents. You see, Daniel's name literally means "God is judge." *Hananiah* means "The Lord is gracious." *Mishael* means "None is like God." *Azariah* means "The Lord is my help." These were all godly names given by godly parents. When Daniel was born, a revival was taking place in the land of Judah led by a king named Josiah. He was the one who remodeled the temple. When, during the remodeling process, the sole surviving copy of the Law was found, revival broke out. No doubt Daniel's parents were influenced by this, as were the parents of his friends.

"Train up your children in the way they should go and when they are old, they will not depart from it," Solomon declares (Proverbs 22:6). That's a promise. Train your kids in the Word and ways of God and they will continue to walk with God. Oh, they might take a detour, but God's promise is that if you train up your kids, they'll walk with Him as time goes on.

In addition to parents at home, Daniel had purpose in his heart. That is, he decided he wouldn't defile himself. Are you being defiled tonight in some area? Victory begins when you purpose in your heart. Make a decision. Say, "That's it. No more."

I think of Shammah, one of David's right-hand men. In 2 Samuel 23, we read that the Philistines were attacking and Shammah was given the job of guarding the beans. When the Philistines came, everyone else split and ran for their lives. Not Shammah. He said, "I'm not going anywhere. I'll stay on

my post and do my job." Shammah had purpose of heart. The Spirit of God came upon him and he whipped the entire Philistine army single-handedly just because he was watching the beans faithfully. That's purpose of heart.

Maybe you might wonder why you're in the church nursery changing diapers Sunday after Sunday, or why you're visiting people in the rest home week after week. But if the Lord has called you to do those things, be faithful. As He did with Shammah, He'll honor you and meet you there.

Daniel 1:9
Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.

Those who suggest this was some sort of sexual love just aren't reading the text for this is speaking of eunuchs.

Daniel 1:10
And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.

"If you don't eat the feast that's before you," the prince of the eunuchs said to Daniel and his friends, "you're not going to be as healthy looking as the others. I want to get ahead in the empire—not lose my head!"

Daniel 1:11–13
Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.

"Give us a test," Daniel said. "Give us only vegetables and water for ten days and then compare us with those who are eating the king's meat and drinking his wine."

Daniel 1:14–19
So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse. As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king.

You just can't out-give God. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego gave themselves wholeheartedly to the Lord and what happened? They found favor with both God and man. When you give God your energy, talent, money, or ability, He will not "owe you one." He'll give back to you exceedingly abundantly above all you can ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

The disciples certainly didn't lose out by loaning their boat to use as a floating pulpit, for in return He blessed them with so many fish their boat almost sunk (Luke 5). When the little boy gave his lunch to the Lord, he was one of the 5,000 in attendance who were filled to overflowing (Mark 6). When the widow gave her last bit of meal and oil to Elijah, she never lacked again (1 Kings 17).

One of the great lies of Satan is to try and get kids to think that if they serve Him, they will be unpopular and ostracized. That's just not true. Parents, show your kids the example of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Say, "Here's some young men who refused to give in to the pressures and pleasures of the world—and they found favor with God and

with men, as well." Yes, you will experience persecution if you give your life to the Lord—but there will be a sterling quality about your life and an attractiveness that comes only from walking with God. Violate that and you'll miss out on so much that God wants to do in your life.

Daniel 1:20, 21
And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.

Daniel was probably fifteen years old at this time. He lived until he was at least eighty-five. For the entire seventy years of the Babylonian captivity, Daniel was in a place of leadership and service because God had honored him.

We have a wrong image of God the Father. We think that whoever gives himself to God will be miserable. But nothing could be farther from the truth. Jesus said, "If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give good gifts to His?" (Matthew 7:11).

Serve God. He'll bless your life. He really will.



2 The second chapter of Daniel has been called the backbone of Bible prophecy for Daniel 2 unlocks the rest of the prophecies of the Book of Daniel, which, in turn, unlock the prophecies of the Book of Revelation. For a good handle on eschatology—the study of end times—you need to be thoroughly familiar with the Book of Daniel and of chapter 2 specifically.

Daniel 2:1
And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him.

Psychologists tell us that ninety percent of a person's free mental time—the time not devoted to a specific activity—is spent wondering about the past or worrying about the future. Nebuchadnezzar was no exception.

Daniel 2:2, 3
Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream.

Schooled in the ancient literature and writings of other cultures, the Chaldeans were the most educated men in the empire. "Tell me what my dream means," Nebuchadnezzar said.

Daniel 2:4
Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation.

"Tell us the dream," the Chaldeans said, "and we'll give you the interpretation."

Daniel 2:5, 6
The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill. But if ye shew the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honour: therefore shew me the dream, and the interpretation thereof.

"If you are as wise as you say you are, you should be able to tell me not only the interpretation, but the dream itself," Nebuchadnezzar answered. "Either tell me what I dreamed, or you guys are through."

Daniel 2:7–11
They answered again and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation of it. The king answered and said, I know of certainty that ye would gain the time, because ye see the thing is gone from me. But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, there is but one decree for you: for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can shew me the interpretation thereof. The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can shew the king's matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things at any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean. And it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can shew it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.

"There is not a man on earth that can do what you ask," the Chaldeans said.

Daniel 2:12
For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.

Is there anything in tarot cards, astrology, palm reading? Yes. The devil is in them and that's why we're to stay away from them. The Bible says very clearly that magic of any sort is to have no place in the life of the believer because the enemy uses it as a hook to get us involved in realms of the demonic.

Having said that, there are tremendous limitations as to what Satan can actually do. That's why these men couldn't answer Nebuchadnezzar's demand.

Daniel 2:13, 14
And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain. Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the

king's guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon:

Because of the failure of the Chaldeans to tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream, all of the wise men—including Daniel—were to be killed.

Daniel 2:15, 16
He answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, Why is the decree so hasty from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel. Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would shew the king the interpretation.

Daniel asked for permission to speak to the king. "Give me some time," he said, "and I will tell you your dream as well as the interpretation."

Daniel 2:17, 18
Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

Don't you know that Daniel and his friends had one powerful prayer meeting that night?! They were literally praying for their lives. They needed to have revelation. They desired it desperately and they prayed accordingly.

Nebuchadnezzar took his problems to bed. Daniel took his to God—and what a difference that makes.

Daniel 2:19
Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

When Daniel received an answer, did he run out in order to save the lives of those in jeopardy? No, he stopped and blessed the God of heaven.



For topical study of Daniel 2:16–19 entitled "Learning to Listen," turn to page **704.**

Daniel 2:20–23
Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him. I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter.

Daniel stopped and offered praise before he went out to save lives. I think that's an invaluable lesson. So often the Lord shows us something or gives us something and we can't wait to get going. In reality, before we run out, we should slow down and look up. We should worship and give thanks.

I think of the ten lepers in Luke 12. Jesus told them to go their way and show themselves to the priest. And as they went, they were healed. All ten rejoiced—but only one came back and thanked the Lord. "You are made whole," Jesus said to him. All ten were healed—but only the one who came back and worshiped was made whole, which speaks not only of his body but his soul and spirit, as well. Are we like the nine or are we like the one?

I like Daniel because he wasn't just a prayer warrior, but a praiser and a worshiper.

"But that's not efficient. Time is running out. You don't have time to pray." That's the voice of Judas. As Mary offered the alabaster box of oil to Jesus, Judas said, "That money could have been used for something much better, for feeding the poor."

But Jesus said, "What she is doing shall be spoken of throughout the world wherever the Gospel is preached" (see Mark 14:9).

Like Daniel, Mary was a praiser, a worshiper. And the Lord commended her.

Daniel 2:24–28
Therefore Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise men of Babylon: he went and said thus unto him; Destroy not the wise men of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will shew unto the king the interpretation. Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste and said thus unto him, I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation. The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof? Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king; But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these;

Daniel didn't say, "I can tell you your dream." He said, "Only the Lord can give you the information and understanding you seek." I believe this was why Daniel was used from the time he was a young man all the way until he was eighty-five. He didn't take credit. The fastest way to see the work of God through your life stopped is to begin to think it's because you're special.

Daniel 2:29, 30
As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass. But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.

“The Lord is simply using me as an errand boy in order that you might have answers to those things about which you’re concerned,” Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 2:31–35
Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image’s head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

What a dream! Nebuchadnezzar saw a massive image of a man with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, a brass belly, iron legs, and feet and toes a mixture of iron and clay. Looking at this huge statue, Nebuchadnezzar saw a stone not cut with hands come rolling down. It hit the statue in the feet and pulverized it entirely. Suddenly, the stone became a great mountain that filled the entire earth. No wonder Nebuchadnezzar was troubled!

Notice that the head, arms and chest, belly, and the legs regressed in value. That is, gold is of greater value than silver, which is of greater value than brass, which is of greater value than iron. These four metals in this single image speak of world history in its entirety as it relates to Israel from the time of Nebuchadnezzar until the coming of Christ.

Daniel 2:36–38
This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine

hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.

The Babylonian empire, an absolute monarchy, had a greater effect on the known world than any other empire in history. That is why it was represented by gold.

Daniel 2:39 (a)
And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee . . .

The Medes and the Persians would overthrow the Babylonians in 530 B.C. The Medes and Persians, represented by two arms of silver were a constitutional monarchy.

Daniel 2:39 (b)
. . . and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.

The Medes and Persians would be overthrown by the Greeks in 330 B.C. Alexander had conquered the known world. Heartbroken and depressed that there were no more worlds to conquer, he died at the age of thirty-three in a drunken stupor. Contrast this with Another who died at thirty-three years of age, One who conquered sin and death, Jesus Christ. The Grecian empire was represented by brass because, as an oligarchy, it was less powerful than the Medo-Persian Empire.

Daniel 2:40
And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.

The Greeks would be unseated by the Roman empire. Although they crushed everyone into bloody submission, the Romans, represented by iron, had a limited democracy, which made it even less powerful than Greece's oligarchy.

After four empires, the succession stops because in A.D. 70, the Romans annihilated Israel. The Jews scattered and Israel was never again a sovereign nation—until 1948. Suddenly, the prophetic clock miraculously started ticking again when Israel re-emerged as an independent nation. And now we see the appearance of the last world power . . .

Daniel 2:41–43
And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.

In the feet, the composition is changed. These ten toes which are part iron and part clay don't hold together. In May, 1948, Israel became a nation once again. In May, 1950, two years later, six nations came together, formed the Treaty of Rome, and instituted a new, resurrected, Roman empire. They called it the European Common Market.

Daniel 2:44, 45
And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.

In the time of the ten nations, a stone not cut with hands comes down and strikes the feet. The entire image is pulverized. The stone is the Rock of our

salvation, Jesus Christ. Peter says that, to the Jews, He is s a stone of stumbling (1 Peter 2:8). Indeed to this day, the Jewish people, for the most part, still stumble over Jesus being the Rock. To the Jews He is a stone of stumbling, 1 Corinthians 1 declares. To the Gentiles, He's a stone of crushing. He comes and grinds them out.

> . . . Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.
>
> Matthew 21:42 (b)–44

Concerning Jesus, the Rock of our salvation, we either are broken before Him or will be broken by Him. The choice is ours.

There are those who say that the kingdom will be ushered in as Christians change the economic, political, and educational systems. That is, we'll bring the King back by changing America. But that is heresy. As seen in Daniel, the stone doesn't come to convert the kingdoms of the world. It comes to crush them. It comes instantaneously, explosively, cataclysmically, and all of the empires—the great image of gold, silver, brass, and iron—are wiped out in a moment.

That is not to say we shouldn't be concerned citizens, praying for our country. But if you think that by changing America, we'll bring back the kingdom of God, you are sadly mistaken. The ultimate solution is when the King Himself comes back and strikes the feet of the image. Down it will go. And in its place, Jesus Christ will rule and reign. Oh, glorious day that will be!

> **Daniel 2:46–49**
> **Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him. The king answered unto Daniel, and said,**

Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret. Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon. Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king.

Unfortunately, Nebuchadnezzar doesn't say to Daniel, "Your God is my God." He says, "Your God is pretty impressive." Nonetheless, Nebuchadnezzar is making the first of a series of steps that will eventually lead him into the kingdom of God.

LEARNING TO LISTEN

A Topical Study of DANIEL 2:16–19

People have a tendency to be either fascinated with or frightened by the future. In our country alone, billions of dollars are spent by people going to fortune tellers, astrologers, or channelers. But those who truly know something about the future are more often than not frightened by it. Economists, political scientists, and biologists have a tendency to be upset about it. The economists are concerned about the size of the national debt. The political scientists are concerned about nuclear power in the wrong hands. The biologists are concerned about the ramifications of genetic engineering.

What's happening is ominous. No wonder Americans consume three billion sleeping pills per year. We're wondering and worrying about the future.

Such was the case with Nebuchadnezzar. The most powerful king in the history of the world, he tossed and turned as he wondered about the future of his kingdom. When he finally fell asleep, he had an incredible dream that has tremendous import for any student of prophecy. When he awoke, he knew he had a dream of significance, but he couldn't remember the details. So he called his astrologers, magicians, and wise men. When they were unable to help him, he called Daniel who, in turn, called upon the Lord.

Maybe, like Nebuchadnezzar, you feel troubled. Maybe, like Daniel, you need to hear from God. The question is, does God really speak today like He spoke to Daniel? I say absolutely, unequivocally, with tremendous certainty, the answer is Yes!

Notice with me five elements seen in the life of Daniel that will unlock your ability to hear the voice of God clearly . . .

Separation

Daniel lived a separated life. Others were drinking the king's wine, eating the king's meat, but Daniel had already purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the things of the world (1:8).

God is speaking. The problem is the wax of the world has plugged our spiritual ears. In Matthew 13, Jesus said that the cares of this world and the lust for riches choke out the Word of God. God is speaking. The question is, are we listening—or are our ears so plugged with the things of this world that we can't tune in to His frequency?

> An Indian was walking down Wall Street with a fellow stockbroker. A businessman who had grown up on a reservation, he suddenly stopped and said, "Did you hear that?"
>
> "Hear what?" his colleague asked.
>
> "Listen," he said, walking a few steps to a gutter and picking up a little cricket.
>
> "How in the world among all these people and hustle and bustle and horns and traffic, did you hear the sound of a single cricket?" his friend asked.
>
> "It all depends on what your ears are tuned into. Watch this," he said, as he tossed a quarter on the sidewalk. As it hit, everyone stopped.

No one heard the cricket, but they all heard the quarter. It all depends on what you're listening for. Does God speak? Yes. But the problem is that our ears are so filled with the sounds of the world that we don't hear His voice.

"No partying for me," Daniel said. "I'm going to seek the Lord." And that's why he was in a position to hear from the Lord.

Expectation

"Give me a day," Daniel said, "and I will show you the interpretation." In other words, Daniel knew God would speak to him. When you ask the Lord for His guidance or His Word, separation is where it begins. Expectation is the next step. You've got to believe the Lord is going to speak.

> *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.*
>
> James 1:5–7

If I really believe the Lord is going to speak to me in my morning devotions or when I'm at a Bible study, I'll always have pencil and paper ready. James says the person who doesn't believe the Lord will speak will not receive anything from Him concerning wisdom and direction. Therefore, when you have your morning devotions don't lazily and halfheartedly say, "I wonder if there's anything in the Word for me today," but come eagerly and expectantly.

Cooperation

Daniel went to his friends and said, “Let’s seek the Lord together.” Over and over in His Word, the Lord teaches us that we are not to live in isolation but to live in cooperation. If you want to hear the Lord’s voice, follow the example of Daniel who sought the Lord with his friends.

Jesus said that wherever two or three are gathered in His name, He would be in their midst (Matthew 18:20). It’s not that He’s not with us when we’re alone—it’s that there’s another dynamic that comes into play when we seek the Lord with our brothers and sisters. It’s all part of His plan to develop a body that is linked together and dependent upon one another.

Desperation

Daniel and his friends knew that if the Lord didn't give them an answer, they were dead. We don't often seek the voice of the Lord because we don't think our situation could be classified as desperate. That's how the early church initially felt. It wasn't until James was sawn in half by Herod that the church got on her face before the Lord and prayed with intensity on behalf of Peter. And, as they prayed for him with desperation, Peter was delivered miraculously (Acts 12).

We never know what lies around the corner in our lives, in our vocations, with our children. We don't know what tomorrow holds. Therefore, we can't afford to take life casually. James tells us we don't have because we don't ask (4:2). Kids get into trouble unnecessarily because parents aren't praying desperately. Divorces and separations occur tragically because, when things were going smoothly, the couples weren't praying together consistently. I'm convinced all kinds of trouble comes our way unnecessarily because we think we don't need to pray.

We need to realize that we're at war, that Satan goes about seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). Therefore, we need to keep our guard up and our knees bent. We need to be building a wall of protection around our families and around our lives personally. If God allowed us to see the very real dangers that surround us, I guarantee we wouldn't be so casual.

Communication

Daniel was given an answer in order that he might pass it on to Nebuchadnezzar.

In Genesis 18, as the Lord and two angels moved toward Sodom and Gomorrah en route to destroy the city, the Lord said, "Shall I not show unto Abraham the things that I am going to do? For I know him that He shall command his children and make My ways known to them." God knew that His friend, Abraham, would pass on His words to his children.

Revelation from the Lord is not necessarily given to those who treat it merely as an interesting insight. It is given to those who will faithfully pass it on to others.

> *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son . . .*
>
> Hebrews 1:1, 2 (a)

The ultimate Word concerning anything you need to know about life and eternity is found in listening to and learning of Jesus. It all starts there. Then, having been in touch with the living Word, you will be in position to receive the directive word concerning your specific situation.

Learn of Jesus. Listen for Him. Believe that He will speak to you—and I guarantee He will.



3 In chapter 3, twenty years after he said to Daniel, "Your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings," Nebuchadnezzar does something that reveals the true state of his heart . . .

> **Daniel 3:1**
> **Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set**

it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

In recent years, archaeologists have excavated in the plain of Dura a pedestal forty feet high and twenty feet wide. They are convinced it is upon this pedestal that Nebuchadnezzar's ninety-foot-high statue of pure gold stood. In chapter 2, only the golden head of the image in his dream signified his empire. In the image he constructs here in chapter 3, however, the entire image is gold as if to say, "My empire will not be followed by another. It will last forever."

Daniel 3:2–6
Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

Nebuchadnezzar commanded that, when the music was played, everyone would bow down to this ninety-foot-high image. Failure to do so would result in death.

Daniel 3:7
Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of musick, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and

worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

Music remains a powerful tool that can be used by both the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. Why is music so powerful? Because Satan is a musician. Before he fell, he led all of heaven in worship. God created music and ordained it as a means of praise. Therefore, music remains a constant battlefield that can either motivate us to worship with intensity or to fall into idolatry. Be oh, so wise as to what music you take in because there is always a Nebuchadnezzar striking up the band.

Daniel 3:8–12
Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, shall fall down and worship the golden image: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; these men, O king, have not re garded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego said, "We're not going to give in. We're not going to go along. We're not going to bow down when Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Be-Boppers strike up the up the band."

Daniel 3:13
Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Then they brought these men before the king.

Where was Daniel? Most commentators believe he was on government business out of the area.

Daniel 3:14, 15
Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?

Nebuchadnezzar conquered countries, looted riches, captured people, but he allowed people to worship their own gods. He was considered very liberal and generous in that regard. He let people worship their gods—but he also wanted them to worship his.

That's always the way of the enemy. "You can go to church," he says. "But on Friday night, you have to watch the movie, check out the bar scene, bow down to me. Then, on Sunday, you can go to church again." The enemy will give you the freedom to worship God, hoping you'll feel okay about bowing down to his idols. It's a trade. That's always his way.

Daniel 3:16–18
Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

In the answer of these three godly men, we see a very important lesson. "God is able to deliver us," they said. But then they added, "Even if He decides not to, we're still not going to bow down." They didn't doubt God's power to save them. But they submitted to His will concerning whether He intended to save them. They weren't doubting God's ability. They were submitting to His sovereignty.

> Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.
>
> Hebrews 11:33, 34

By faith, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego "quenched the violence of fire." In other words, because they had faith, they weren't burned. But faith in what? They didn't have faith in faith. They had faith in their Father.

When we pour out our requests to God and say, "If You decide not to heal me, bring me that financial windfall, or save my business, it doesn't matter. All I want is Your will"—that is true faith. How I pray we can learn this.

> **Daniel 3:19**
> **Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.**

The only thing hotter than the fiery furnace was Nebuchadnezzar's anger.

> **Daniel 3:20–22**
> **And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.**

The men that threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego into the fire were themselves burned in the process.

> **Daniel 3:23–25 (a)**

And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonied, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt . . .

The ropes that bound Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were burned off by the fiery trial surrounding them. That is why Peter would tell us to rejoice in fiery trials (1 Peter 4:12, 13). They burn off the cords that would otherwise paralyze us.

Daniel 3:25 (b)
. . . and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.

"How many men did we throw in the fire?" Nebuchadnezzar asked.

"Three," came the answer.

"Then how come I see four—and the fourth is like the Son of God?"

This fiery trial was a testimony to a skeptical, angry unbeliever who saw Jesus in the fire along with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. There are neighbors and colleagues, fellow students and coworkers watching you. And when you go through fiery trials, as they watch you, they will see Jesus with you.



***For topical study of Daniel 3:8–25 entitled "Handling the Heat," turn to page* 710.**

Daniel 3:26, 27
Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, came forth of

> **the midst of the fire. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.**

In addition to burning off the ropes that bound them, and letting others see Jesus, fiery trials are an opportunity for us to draw closer to the Lord than we would have otherwise. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego would have rather been in the fire with Jesus than out of the fire without Him. That is why they stayed there until Nebuchadnezzar ordered them to come out. When do we really see the Lord? More often than not, it's when we're in the midst of a fiery trial.

Prophetically, chapter 3 speaks of the time the Jews, represented by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, take a stand in the fiery trial of the Tribulation period. According to Revelation 17 and 18, in the end times, there will be a unified religious system and a unified economic system both called Babylon. Where are the Jews in Daniel 3? In Babylon.

Just as Nebuchadnezzar made an image and commanded the people to bow to it, in the Tribulation period, antichrist will make an image and command everyone to bow to it. Initially, Nebuchadnezzar treated Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego well. Antichrist will initially come as a man of peace. But his true colors will show when he makes an image of himself and sets it in the temple.

> And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.
>
> Revelation 13:15–18

The number of the image of the beast is 666. Nebuchadnezzar's image was sixty cubits high, six feet wide, and there were six kinds of instruments played. Thus, Nebuchadnezzar's image is a foreshadowing of the beast of the Tribulation period.

> And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.
>
> Revelation 19:20

The beast gets burned in the very fire in which he sought to destroy the Jews. Eventually, the Jewish nation at last recognized that the Lord Jesus is Messiah. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, they won't bow to antichrist but will stand strong in the seven-year fiery furnace of Tribulation. When it looks like they're going to be burned up—just as He did with the three brave men—Jesus will stand in the fire with His people. He'll return at the very point they think they're going down.

> **Daniel 3:28–30**
> **Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, in the province of Babylon.**

When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego emerged from the furnace unharmed, Nebuchadnezzar was amazed, but still not converted. "There is no other God that can deliver after this sort," he declared. He should have stopped with, "There is no other God." And soon, he will.

HANDLING THE HEAT

A Topical Study of
DANIEL 3:8–25

Recent polls reveal that twenty-five percent of adult Americans think the sun is a planet, two percent believe federal income taxes are too low, and one percent read their Bibles more than once a day. In other words, there seem to be statistics for everything, all with varying results. But I suggest one statistic that would be universally agreed upon is that virtually a hundred percent of believers feel they have gone through a trying time, a difficult experience, a hard trial. According to Peter, this should not come as a surprise to us . . .

> *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.*
>
> 1 Peter 4:12, 13

Previously, Peter gave the reason for the inevitable trials we face . . .

> *That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:*
>
> 1 Peter 1:7

To those living in Peter's day, his analogy would mean more than it might to us, for they would be more familiar with the process used to refine gold. In huge furnaces, they would subject the gold to high enough temperatures to liquefy it. The smelter would then stir this molten gold until all impurities were gone. It took heat to make it pure. And the smelter would know the process was complete when he looked into the liquid gold and saw his own

reflection—just as Jesus looks for the reflection of Himself in the gold of our faith as it is purified by fiery trials.

The text before us tells us a great deal about fiery trials. You might think you're going through hot times, but the three Jewish men seen here were in a literal fire. Their names were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego—three godly men who were taken captive from Jerusalem to Babylon, where they were being trained for the service of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar.

When Nebuchadnezzar ordered his people to bow to a ninety-foot-tall image of himself, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego refused—which resulted in their death sentence by way of a fiery furnace. This furnace wasn't a little oven used to bake rolls and biscuits but an industrial furnace in which iron was smelted and bricks were hardened. It was huge—and very, very hot. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, however, had no misgivings about their decision, having told Nebuchadnezzar that God would deliver them—either through death or rescue. So into the fire they went—a fire seven times hotter than normal because Nebuchadnezzar's rage was apparently seven times greater than it usually was due to the audacious faith of the three Jews.

Notice with me three aspects concerning the fiery trial of these bold believers . . .

The Time of the Trial

The trial did not come to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego when they were stumbling in sin but when they were standing strong for Him. It would have been so easy for them to back out, to make excuses. They could have said to each other, "Sure, we'll bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's idol outwardly—but in our hearts, we'll be bowing to the Lord. Surely, with all we've been through already, He'll understand our situation." Or they could have said, "This isn't that big a deal. So we bow to the idol? We can still live for the Lord." Or they could have said, "We'll use this as an opportunity for even greater ministry. If we go along with Nebuchadnezzar's order, he'll leave us in positions of leadership and we can eventually impact more people for God." But they didn't. They resisted all of those excuses and stood up when the trial came down.

We must understand that the Lord sends His trials most frequently not when we're stumbling and struggling but when He sees that we're doing well. After all, Jesus said it's the branch that's already bearing fruit that is pruned in order that it might bring forth even more fruit (John 15:2).

Satan comes to us and says the reason we're going through hard times is because the Lord's angry with us. But that's just not true. If one of my kids burned his or her hand on the stove when they were little, I wouldn't need to punish them for it. They would learn quickly that they shouldn't touch the stove because the repercussions of the sin itself taught them most convincingly. It was when my kids were already doing well that I would challenge them and exhort them because I wanted to see them do even better. And that's what the Father does with us.

That is why James would tell us to count it all joy when we face various trials (1:2)—it means the Father sees something in us worth building upon and improving.

Peace in the Trial

We read in verse 24 that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego weren't running around in the fire, trying to find a way out. They weren't taking off their clothes and trying to snuff out the flames. They weren't sitting down in a corner crying about their ordeal. They weren't striving, complaining, or even seeking to get out. They were simply walking around.

When the going gets tough and the fires grow hot, we have a tendency to want to control the fire if not to put it out altogether. But we must realize that, although we might be able to contain the fire for a season, it will only get hotter eventually. Therefore, we must learn to let the fire burn rather than trying to put it out or cover it up.

When people come down on you, when they don't understand you, when things don't seem to be working out, don't defend yourself. Don't stand up for your rights. Don't try to control the fire. Instead, say, "Lord, let the fire burn. And if anything is left when it's over, I'll know it's of You and I'll rebuild with that material."

Fellowship Through the Trial

"Didn't we throw three men into the fire?" Nebuchadnezzar asked.

"Yes," said his men.

"But I see four," Nebuchadnezzar said. "And the fourth is like the Son of God."

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego could walk around in the fire in peace and they could let it burn with confidence for one reason: the Lord was in there with them.

"I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," Jesus said (Hebrews 13:5). That means He's with us in whatever fiery trial that comes our way. And if we look for Him there, we'll see Him in a way we never would have seen Him otherwise. We can talk esoterically about the Lord. We can discuss theologically His presence. But it's not until we're in the fire of trial that we truly know He's alive, that He's with us, that He's *for* us.

That's what Stephen found. It was when he was being stoned that he looked up and saw the Son of Man welcoming him into the kingdom (Acts 7:56). That's what Paul discovered. It was most likely after he was stoned at Lystra and left for dead that he was caught up into heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2–4). That's what John learned. It was when he was banished to the island of Patmos that he heard a voice, turned around, and saw the Lord (Revelation 1:9–11).

When do people really see the Lord? Most often, it's not when they're cruising, but when they're cooking. And not only do we see the Lord in hot and hard times, but others are able to see Him as well. You see, the Nebuchadnezzars of this world are not impressed when they see us win the *Reader's Digest* Sweepstakes. That only makes them jealous. They're impressed when they see us going through the fire of hard times without panicking. It is then they realize that Someone must be in there with us.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego didn't come out of the fire until Nebuchadnezzar ordered them out. Maybe you're getting to the place in your walk where you would rather be in the fire of hard times with the Lord than cruising in the shade without an awareness of His presence.

Jesus went through a fire greater than anything you or I can comprehend when He went to the Cross to shield us from the fires of hell. Dr. Donald Barnhouse, one of the great Bible teachers of a generation past, tells a story of what happened to him when he was a boy living in the country. He tells of a large oak tree in front of the barn next to his house that, struck by lightning, lit up like a torch. Before the fire from the oak tree leaped to the roof of the barn, his family was able to move most of the barn animals to safety before it collapsed altogether. The next day, little Donald went out and began to kick around in the ashes. As he kicked one rather large clump, much to his surprise, four little chicks ran out in all directions. He later learned that the mother hen, trapped in the corner of the barn, did what mother hens instinctively do: She gathered her chicks under her wings, absorbed the heat herself, and died to save their lives.

On a hillside overlooking Jerusalem, Jesus cried and said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I would gather you under my wings as a mother hen gathers her chicks, but you would not" (see Matthew 23:37). The Lord died to insulate you from the fires of judgment. But He will not insulate us from the fires of trials. He'll allow them to come into our lives to reveal Himself to us and to the bunch of Nebuchadnezzars who are watching us.



In chapter 4, we see the testimony of the last person you would ever think would be saved. Nebuchadnezzar was king of the Babylonian empire and here we see the story of his conversion.

Daniel 4:1–3
Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.

In this letter addressed to all people around the world, Nebuchadnezzar sounds like the apostle Paul as he begins his own conversion story.

Daniel 4:4, 5
I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace: I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.

The most powerful ruler in the history of the world was at rest in his palace and flourishing in his position. Yet, as he laid on his bed, he was troubled. The person you might think is so closed to the gospel could, like Nebuchadnezzar, be struggling with questions about eternity, mortality, the purpose of life—the questions we, as believers, settled when we gave our heart to Jesus.

Daniel 4:6, 7
Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpreta tion of the dream. Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers: and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof.

When Nebuchadnezzar woke up, he didn't know what to make of his dream. He knew it had significance, but he couldn't put the pieces together. So he did the same thing he did in chapter 2. Even though they were powerless the first time, he called his magicians to interpret his dream.

Daniel 4:8, 9
But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and before him I told the dream, saying, O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no secret troubleth thee, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof.

When the magicians were again unable to interpret his dream, Nebuchadnezzar called for Daniel.

Daniel 4:10–12
Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream was of a tree so big that all of the beasts of the earth could gather underneath it. It had many leaves and an abundance of fruit. Plus, it grew so high that one could see it from any point on earth.

Daniel 4:13–18
I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven; He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches: Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth: Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him. This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men. This dream I king Nebuchadnezzar have seen. Now thou, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation thereof, forasmuch as all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me

the interpretation: but thou art able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee.

As this magnificent tree extended into the heavens, an angel descended and cut the tree down, leaving only a stump behind.

Daniel 4:19
Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonied for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spake, and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee. Belteshazzar answered and said, My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies.

Daniel sat speechless for an hour. Finally, he said to Nebuchadnezzar, "I wish this dream applied not to you but to your enemies."

Notice Daniel's tenderness. He could have said, "This serves you right, Nebuchadnezzar. You've been such a pain to so many people for so long, you deserve what's going to happen." But he didn't. Ezra was another one who was rendered speechless over the sin of his people (9:1–4). Jesus, of course, wept (Luke 19:41). You might be able to quote theology. You might have countless charts on eschatology. There might be no end to the knowledge in your head—but until people see your heart, they won't receive from you.

Daniel 4:20–26
The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; Whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth. And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in

the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him; This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king: That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule.

"You are the tree, Nebuchadnezzar, standing so tall. But you will be cut down low and driven out to the fields where you will live like a beast for seven years," Daniel said. "But, just as the stump of the tree was left, you will return to power."

Daniel 4:27
Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.

In addition to Daniel's tenderness, notice his honesty. "Turn away from your unrighteousness," he said to Nebuchadnezzar. Like Daniel, we need to be those who care enough to say to people, "You've got to turn away from the path you're on. You've got to come to Jesus."

That's what Jesus did. "Sell your goods and follow Me," He said to the rich, young ruler, knowing riches were his god (Luke 18). The ultimate expression of self-love is not telling people the truth but rather withholding the truth from people who are lost.

In contrast to the tenderness and honesty of Daniel, notice the stubbornness and stupidity of Nebuchadnezzar . . .

Daniel 4:28–30

All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?

Not only did Nebuchadnezzar hear from the Lord through the dreams that Daniel interpreted, but he literally saw the Lord in the fire with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Like the relentless "Hound of heaven," God was pursuing Nebuchadnezzar. But Nebuchadnezzar hardened his heart and refused to acknowledge Him.

Pride is the foundational sin of everyone who is not saved. Pride is what caused Lucifer to fall.

Daniel 4:31–33
While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

Just as Daniel had prophesied, Nebuchadnezzar went insane and developed a rare medical condition known as lycanthropy. Even in this we see God's faithfulness and tenacity. "Whatever it takes, I'm going after you, Nebuchadnezzar," He said. "Even if it means allowing you to eat grass like an ox, develop feathers like an eagle, and grow claws like a bird, I'm going to bring you to the place where you see you need Me."

God's faithfulness and tenacity to go after people never fails to astound me. God will do whatever it takes to bring people to a place where they see they need Him.

Daniel 4:34
And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation:

The first sign of Nebuchadnezzar's conversion was that, instead of looking down like a beast, he looked up to heaven.

Daniel 4:35
And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

The centurion whose servant was sick spoke to Jesus as a man in authority speaking to One with ultimate authority (Matthew 8:9). So too, Nebuchadnezzar speaks of God as a king speaking of the King of kings.

Daniel 4:36 (a)
At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me . . .

Just as the prodigal "came to himself" (Luke 15:17), Nebuchadnezzar's reason and understanding returned to him. In other words, they were both returned to the men they were before they were railroaded by pride.

Daniel 4:36 (b), 37
. . . and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

Exactly as Daniel prophesied, Nebuchadnezzar returned to power, only this time he knew that his power came not from his own ability but from God's mercy.



5 If I could have one piece of furniture from my childhood, I think it would be our family's kitchen table. It is round and seats six easily—ten or twelve if the leaves are added. I have extremely fond memories of that table because, as I was growing up, after almost every dinner, there would be discussions around that table that would go on at length—discussions not only about the things we did that day but, about politics and philosophy, about religion and Bible prophecy.

Thinking about that table, however, I also have a troubling memory. You see, my older brother, Dave, always sat across from me. Six years older than I, when I was four, five, six, and seven years old, inevitably as the dinner discussions unfolded, suddenly, I was aware that something was happening. Under the table, out of my mom and dad's sight, I knew that my brother Dave's index finger was pointing at me. I just knew it. Even though he was sitting all the way across the table, I could feel it. So I would look underneath, and, sure enough, there was his finger pointing at me.

"Mom, Dave's pointing at me," I would cry.

And she would say, "Jonny, don't worry about it. Just eat your peas and ignore him."

So I would eat my peas—until I had the sensation that Dave's finger was still pointing at me.

Looking under the table, I would see it and cry out all the more. This went on night after night. Usually, about the third or fourth time, it was overpowering because when Dave really wanted to get to me, it wasn't a single finger point at me—it was all five.

Eventually, hearing my cry, Mom and Dad would banish Dave to his room. And then I was spared from the troubling fingers.

But in our text we see another finger appearing that was even more troubling than the finger of my brother pointing at me. In Daniel 5, we see the story of fingers appearing mysteriously and writing a message to the king of

Babylon. The year is 539 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar has been dead and gone for twenty years. When he died, he turned the kingdom over to his son-in-law, Nabonidus. Often away from the city, engaged in military conflicts, Nabonidus turned the day-today operation of the kingdom over to his son, Belshazzar.

Babylon was thought to be absolutely invincible. It was surrounded by double walls, one of which was three hundred fifty feet high and eighty-six feet wide—wide enough for six chariots to race around the top and strong enough to support two hundred fifty towers from which the Babylonian soldiers could not only watch but launch an attack. Inside, the city held supplies that could withstand a twenty-year siege.

During the reign of Belshazzar, in the year 539 B.C., the Medes and the Persians formed a military alliance. Audaciously thinking they could overthrow Babylon, they launched an invasion . . .

Daniel 5:1
Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand.

Belshazzar threw a party for his leaders in an apparent show of strength to the Medes and Persians who were beginning to surround the city. "We don't need to fight or fast in fear," he said, "Let's feast!"

Daniel 5:2 (a)
Belshazzar, whiles he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem . . .

Years earlier, after conquering the city of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar brought back holy vessels, taken from the temple of Jehovah.

Daniel 5:2 (b)–4
. . . that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his

concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.

The only reason women would be in attendance at a party like this would be for immoral purposes. That's the problem with worldly parties. More often than not, the results are immorality and blasphemy, with people doing and saying things they regret the next day.

Daniel 5:5, 6
In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.

When Belshazzar suddenly saw a man's hand writing on the wall of his palace, he didn't need coffee to become sober.

Daniel 5:7
The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. And the king spake, and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and shew me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Nabonidus was the first ruler, Belshazzar the second. The man who could interpret the writing on the wall would be right behind them.

Daniel 5:8–12
Then came in all the king's wise men: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof. Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonied. Now the queen, by reason of the words of the king and his lords, came into the

banquet house: and the queen spake and said, O king, live for ever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed: There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers; Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and shewing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will shew the interpretation.

This queen is not Belshazzar's wife but his mother, the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. Evidently, when Nebuchadnezzar was converted, she was, as well. Thus she told her son about Daniel.

At this point, Daniel had been out of the public eye for twenty years. Approximately eighty-five years old, he had not been in a position of prominence since Nebuchadnezzar died. Sometimes if God hasn't used us today, this week, or this month, we panic. How much better it is to realize that we're simply tools in the Lord's toolbox and He can pull us out whenever He wants to accomplish whatever He desires. Our job is simply to be ready, available, open. It might not be twenty years until the Lord uses you in the significant way you desire. That's okay. Just say, "Lord, I'm available whenever You want to use me." That was Daniel's mindset. He was off the scene for twenty years—and suddenly, he was summoned.

Daniel 5:13–17
Then was Daniel brought in before the king. And the king spake and said unto Daniel, Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry? I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee. And now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation

thereof: but they could not shew the interpretation of the thing: And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom. Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.

Hearing of the reward, Daniel said, "I'm not in this for the money, so keep your gifts. But I will tell you the meaning of this handwriting."

Daniel 5:18–23
O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified:

Seeing what had been written, Daniel first gave a warning to Belshazzar. "You have been rebellious, idolatrous, and blasphemous," he said. "You didn't learn the lessons of Nebuchadnezzar, your grandfather. He had to learn the hard way, becoming like a beast for seven years, eating grass in the field, acting like an animal until he cried out in humility to God. But you didn't learn anything from his experience." Therefore, God has written this against you:

Daniel 5:24
Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written.

They caught her in the very act of adultery and brought her before the Rabbi of Galilee—not because they cared about her, but so they might entrap Him.

"Master, the law declares that she should be stoned. What sayest Thou?" they taunted.

If He said, "Free her," they would accuse Him of being a lawbreaker. If He said, "Stone her," He would no longer be a friend of sinners.

But we read in John 8 that Jesus stooped down and, with His finger—the same finger that wrote Thou shalt not commit adultery, the same finger that wrote on Belshazzar's wall—in the ground. When the woman's accusers asked Him again if the woman should be stoned, He said, "He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone."

And one, by one, they left.

What did Jesus write on the ground that caused them to drop their rocks and go their way? Based on the original text, I believe He was writing the sins of those who held the rocks. I, too, have violated all of God's laws either directly or in spirit. Therefore, there is a long list of sins written against me. But this list was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14), and was made illegible by the blood of the same hand that was pinned thereon, the same hand that wrote on a plaster wall in Babylon and in the dry dust of Jerusalem.

The very hand that wrote against you was pinned to a cross for you. If you believe it, like the woman in John 8, you are free to go your way and sin

no more.

Daniel 5:25
And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

Written in Aramaic, as Belshazzar, his thousand men, their wives and concubines, and his mother watched, they wondered what the words meant.

Daniel 5:26
This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.

In other words, "Belshazzar, your number is up." Belshazzar should have known that his number would be coming up because sixty years earlier, the Lord had warned him through Jeremiah . . .

> I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me. And now have I given all these lands unto the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him. And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the very time of his land come: and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him.
>
> Jeremiah 27:5–7

"I have given Nebuchadnezzar his empire," the Lord declared. "But in his son's son's day, it will end."

Daniel 5:27
TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.

Not only was Belshazzar's number up, but his weight was down. He weighed in and he came up short. He'd been given so much but had done so

little.

Daniel 5:28
PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

Belshazzar's kingdom would be given to the ones surrounding the city that very evening.

Daniel 5:29–31
Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.

That night, an incredible thing happened. One of the greatest upsets of military history was about to unfold—as prophesied by Isaiah two hundred years earlier . . .

> Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.
>
> Isaiah 45:1–4

The general leading the Medo-Persian troops was a man named Cyrus. Although Cyrus wouldn't be born until two hundred years after Isaiah penned

his prophecy, he was the Lord's anointed, the one who would open the gates and plunder the treasures of an empire thought to be impenetrable.

How did the Medes and Persians get into this city surrounded by a wall three hundred fifty feet high? They ingeniously diverted the Euphrates river a mile and a half north of Babylon and went in through the riverbed.



6 Following their incredible military upset, the Medes and Persians are now in control . . .

Daniel 6:1
It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom;

Many scholars and historians believe that Darius is another name for Cyrus. Others say he was a man appointed by Cyrus to rule over Babylon. At any rate, here, we see his cabinet established.

Daniel 6:2
And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage.

These one hundred twenty princes were overseen by three presidents who would be accountable to the king. Daniel was chief among them. What would cause Darius to name Daniel prime minister? Verse 3 gives the answer . . .

Daniel 6:3
Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.

Darius realized there was an "excellent spirit" within Daniel. What was this excellent spirit? The Holy Spirit.

Daniel interpreted dreams. He prayed with effectiveness. He understood visions. He moved in prophecy. He experienced the miraculous. In other words, he was a man who was filled with the Spirit. That's what made him so successful all the days of his life.

In 2 Chronicles 16:9, we read that the eyes of the Lord go to and fro throughout the whole earth, looking for a man in whom He might show Himself strong, whose heart is perfect toward Him. Our Father is still looking for men and women in whom He can show Himself strong—as He did with Daniel.

Daniel 6:4, 5
Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.

Jealous of Daniel yet unable to find any fault in him they could exploit, his fellow leaders were reduced to attacking his faith.

Daniel 6:6–9
Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever. All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree.

In a political maneuver meant to frame Daniel exclusively, Darius' cabinet submitted a law that, under penalty of death, for thirty days, no one could make a request of any God or any man other than Darius himself.

Daniel 6:10 (a)
Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his win dows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem . . .

Why did Daniel face Jerusalem? Because in 1 Kings 8, when Solomon dedicated the temple, he prayed, "If Your people disobey You and are carried away captive as a result—if they face toward the temple and call upon Your name, hear their prayer and deliver them." Therefore, as a student of the Word, Daniel understood it was his responsibility to pray for God's mercy, deliverance, and blessing on behalf of the people.

Daniel 6:10 (b)
. . . he kneeled upon his knees . . .

In prayer, it's the position of the heart rather than the position of the body that matters. Having said that, however, throughout the Bible—Old Testament and New Testament alike—it seems as though there is something particularly powerful about kneeling in prayer. As Solomon dedicated the temple, we read in 1 Kings 8:22 that he stood before the Lord. But as his prayer continued and the intensity built, he found himself on his knees (1 Kings 8:54). When Elijah prayed, he knelt (1 Kings 18:42). In Acts 20, when Paul was praying for the Ephesian elders he would see no longer, he knelt.

Daniel 6:10 (c)
. . . three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God . . .

The law was signed. No prayers were to be offered. No requests were to be made of anyone except Darius. But Daniel did as was his custom. He prayed three times a day as was his practice.

> As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.
>
> Psalm 55:16, 17

David, like Daniel, a giant of the faith, cultivated a practice of praying three times a day That doesn't mean they didn't pray other times. But there were three times of prayer that were set aside religiously.

I wonder if this wouldn't be a good practice for many of us to develop, to quiet ourselves, cloister ourselves in some way and say, "I'm going to start my day with the Lord; I'm going to check in halfway through the day with Him; and, before I hit the pillow at night, I'll reflect on the day with the One who gave His life for me."

Daniel 6:10 (d)
. . . as he did aforetime.

Notice that Daniel didn't say, "Okay, you signed a law. Now I am going to get down on my knees—even though I never did previously—and I am going to throw open my windows so you can see my radical spirituality." That was not the heart of Daniel. He wasn't trying to flex his spiritual muscle. He was simply doing what he had always done. And that's where the power is. If the source of Daniel's success was the Holy Spirit, the secret of His success was consistent prayer.

In Matthew 17, as Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John, down below a concerned father brought his suicidal son to the disciples. But they were unable to cast out the demon. When Jesus came down and cast out the demon, the disciples said, "How come we couldn't do that?"

Jesus said, "This kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting."

In other words, the disciples were to develop a lifestyle of prayer and fasting because they never knew when a situation would confront them in which they would need the power of the Lord flowing through their lives. They couldn't expect to conjure it up on the spot if they had no history or background in it—and neither can we.

We must live lives of prayer and fasting because we don't know what crisis is going to crop up tomorrow or what challenge is going to arise next week.

"I know I should be praying," you might say, "but I get so tired."

What about Daniel? He was eighty-five years old—and yet he prayed morning, noon, and night.

"But I'm too busy," you say.

Daniel was prime minister.

Excuses just don't work.

Daniel 6:11
Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

Notice that the attack came when Daniel was in prayer. More than likely, you're not going to get attacked when you're on the golf course or the tennis courts. The real attacks of the enemy will come when you're in prayer. Think of Jesus in Matthew 4. He was in the wilderness fasting and praying for forty days and what happened? Satan appeared and put him through an incredible series of temptations. It's when we're praying that we're most easily distracted and fatigued because the enemy knows that if he can stop us from praying, he's neutralized what God desires to do in and through our lives.

Daniel 6:12–15
Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king's decree; Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask a petition of any God or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day. Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he

laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him. Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed.

Because the government of the Medes and Persians was a constitutional monarchy, once a law was signed by the king, it could not be rescinded.

Daniel 6:16
Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.

I believe this is not so much a statement of faith made by Darius as it is wishful thinking. Why? Because he had spent all day trying to figure out a way to keep Daniel out of the lions' den.

Daniel 6:17–20
And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?

When asked if God was able to deliver me, if I were Daniel, at this point I would have said, "Yes! Get me out of here immediately!" Not Daniel. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego had been content to remain in the furnace until they were ordered out. As we'll see, Daniel was content to preach a minisermon from the lions' den.

Daniel 6:21, 22
Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

Surrounded by lions, Daniel chats with the king. Lions such as these were bred to be particularly ferocious and were kept in a state of near starvation. But these lions were quiet. They didn't bother Daniel a bit. Who was this angel who was sent? The word "angel" simply means "messenger." John 1:1 identifies Jesus as "the Word," or "the message." Therefore, I believe this angel was the same angel who walked in the fire with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in chapter 3. In other words, it was Jesus Himself.

Daniel 6:23, 24
Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God. And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den.

That the wives and children of Daniel's accusers were tossed in to the lions' den was not the Lord's demand but was according to the custom of the Medes and Persians. Nonetheless, whenever we sin, the sad truth of the matter is that sin always affects those who are closest to us. These men sinned and their wives and kids paid the price along with them.

Daniel 6:25–27
Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be

destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

Overflowing with praise to the Lord and an eternal perspective, the decree of Darius sounds like it could have been penned by the apostle Paul.

Daniel 6:28
So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

No less real than the lions that surrounded Daniel, Peter tells us that Satan is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). He has two basic ways to destroy and devour us. That is, he gets us involved in sin and then accuses us concerning our sin.

. . . for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

Revelation 12:10 (b)

Satan whispers in our ear constantly. It's not a loud roar, but a soft purr: "You're a sinnerrr," he whispers. "You have no right to pray to God. You'll never be used by Him." If Satan and his demons can't devour you through sin, they'll make constant accusations against you until you're ready to give up and walk away from the Lord. But, because you and I found ourselves damned because of sin and doomed to spend eternity in the lion's den of hell, God sent His Son—the ultimate Messenger—to come down to this earth, to stand with us, to die for us, and to go to hell in our place. Every sin we've ever done, are doing, or will do has been paid by Jesus. Therefore, to overcome Satan's roaring accusations, we plead His blood (Revelation 12:11).

Satan is a roaring lion to be sure—but he got tangled up in a catfight with the Lion of the tribe of Judah and he lost.

7 The first six chapters of Daniel are autobiographical history. That is, they speak mainly of the story of Daniel personally. The final six chapters of Daniel are not autobiographical history but incredible prophecy, for they deal with future events. At least in Daniel's day, they were future events. From our perspective, many of them have already come to pass . . .

Daniel 7:1
In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters.

Chapters 7 and 8 actually take place between chapters 4 and 5. In chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar was humbled for seven years before he was restored. In chapter 5, the kingdom was taken from Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar. Here, however, Belshazzar had just come into power and it was at this time that Daniel had another vision . . .

Daniel 7:2
Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea.

Revelation 17:15 tells us the "great sea" refers to the nations of the world. Thus, out of the nations of the world four beasts will arise.

Daniel 7:3, 4 (a)
And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another. The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings. . . .

The lion with eagles' wings speaks of the Babylonians, synonymous with the head of gold in chapter 2. Archaeological discoveries verify that the national emblem of Babylon was a lion with wings.

Daniel 7:4 (b)

. . . I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it.

The wings were plucked off of the lion and it was given the heart of a man. This speaks of what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. Because of the pride of his heart, God humbled him and he became beastly. When he turned to the Lord, however, he was given a new heart and he stood on his feet once again.

Daniel 7:5 (a)
And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear . . .

The bear speaks of the Medo-Persian empire, synonymous with the arms of silver in chapter 2. With an army of two and one-half million men, the Medes and Persians lumbered along like a bear.

Daniel 7:5 (b)
. . . and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh.

The three ribs speak of the three empires immediately devoured by the Medes and Persians: the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and the Lydians.

Daniel 7:6
After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it.

The leopard speaks of the Greeks and is synonymous with the belly of brass in chapter 2. With only 35,000 troops, Alexander could strike quickly and was brilliant in strategy. The four heads represent the four generals who took over his empire after his death.

Daniel 7:7

After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns.

The fourth beast speaks of the Roman Empire and is synonymous with the legs of iron in chapter 2. Out of it, we see ten horns, synonymous with the ten toes of Daniel 2. The horns and toes speak of a confederation of ten nations coming out of the old Roman Empire.

Daniel 7:8
I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.

The little horn is synonymous with antichrist. Although there will be some kind of power struggle, he takes control of the ten-nation confederation. How? From a human perspective, he will be incredible. With the intellect of Thomas Jefferson, the leadership skills of Lincoln, the global strategy of Nixon, the oratorical skills of Churchill, the iron fist of Josef Stalin, the charisma of a Kennedy, he will be humanly impressive.

In other words, when antichrist shows up, he won't be wearing a black cape and twirling his mustache. He will draw people to him like a magnet. Seven of the nations will immediately say, "Lead us." Three will resist initially, but they will be overtaken ultimately.

Daniel 7:9–14
I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened. I beheld then because of the

voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame. As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time. I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

It would have been of great comfort to the captive Jews in Babylon to know that a kingdom not of men but of God was coming that would never end.

Daniel 7:15–18
I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me. I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things. These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever.

In chapter 2, we saw that Nebuchadnezzar's dream was of a huge image of a man with a head of gold, chest of silver, belly of brass, and legs of iron. Man's perspective of world history and the governments that would come was stately, valuable, impressive. But here in chapter 7, we see God's perspective of those same empires. They're not gold, silver, brass, and iron but beasts.

Daniel 7:19–22
Then I would know the truth of the fourth beast, which was diverse from all the others, exceeding dreadful, whose teeth were of iron, and his nails of brass; which devoured, brake in pieces,

and stamped the residue with his feet; And of the ten horns that were in his head, and of the other which came up, and before whom three fell; even of that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spake very great things, whose look was more stout than his fellows. I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom.

Perhaps because it was the only one described as "exceeding dreadful," Daniel asked for more instruction concerning the fourth beast.

Daniel 7:23, 24
Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings.

The fourth kingdom, or Rome, is the one from which the little horn, or antichrist, will arise.

Daniel 7:25 (a)
And he shall speak great words against the most High . . .

Antichrist will be such a great orator that he will capture the imagination of the entire world.

Daniel 7:25 (b)
. . . and shall wear out the saints of the most High . . .

Who are these saints? In Revelation 12, we see who antichrist was against . . .

> And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time . . .
>
> Revelation 12:13, 14 (a)

What is "a time, times, and half a time"? "A time" speaks of one year; "times" speaks of two years. Thus, this is three and one-half years. At the midpoint of the seven-year Tribulation period, antichrist will suddenly wage war against the Jews. When he first comes on the scene, he'll win the approval of the entire world. But, after three and one-half years, he'll show his true colors when he erects an image of himself in the temple and demands to be worshiped as God. God, however, will protect Israel by taking her to a place in the wilderness—most likely the rock city of Petra.

> And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.
>
> Revelation 13:7

The church already having been raptured, the saints mentioned here are the people of Israel as well as the Gentiles who will be saved during the Tribulation period.

Daniel 7:25 (c)
. . . and think to change times and laws . . .

During the French Revolution an attempt was made to do away with the seven-day week because of its religious implications and to institute a ten-day week in its place. Perhaps antichrist will make the same attempt.

Or perhaps this refers to the possibility that, although he knows the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, he thinks he can beat the rap and be victorious in the end.

Daniel 7:25 (d)
. . . and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.

Antichrist will be successful—but only for three and a half years.

Daniel 7:26, 27
But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.

This world leader, this little horn, this big-time power is going down. All dominions shall serve Him—Jesus Christ. Oh, when will man understand this?

Inscribed on the United Nations building in New York City are these words . . .

> . . . and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.
>
> Isaiah 2:4 (b)

The problem is, the first part of the verse is omitted . . .

> And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people . . .
>
> Isaiah 2:4 (a)

They left out the fact that the Lord is the One who will bring peace. Man's attempts at government are beastly at best. What does a beast do? He angers easily. He guards his territory ferociously. He sheds blood callously. You never see a group of bears marching to save the rabbits. What beasts want, they go after. They take whatever they can get. And they expand their

territory whenever possible. That's why God sees these empires as beasts. It's a Person, not a program that will bring peace.

Man does not have the ability to rule himself. He's sinful and corrupt to the core. But the Ancient of Days is coming. And a kingdom that is right and beautiful, true and equitable will follow.

Daniel 7:28
Hitherto is the end of the matter. As for me Daniel, my cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me: but I kept the matter in my heart.

When he saw world history from God's perspective, Daniel was troubled. But he kept the matter in his heart.



8 As in chapter 7, the events of this chapter took place between chapters 4 and 5 during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar.

Daniel 8:1, 2
In the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar a vision appeared unto me, even unto me Daniel, after that which appeared unto me at the first. And I saw in a vision; and it came to pass, when I saw, that I was at Shushan in the palace, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in a vision, and I was by the river of Ulai.

The year was 551 B.C. Daniel was caught up in the Spirit and taken from Babylon to Shushan, or Susa, the capital city of Persia, or present-day Iran. Whether he was literally transported or simply there in spirit, a vision was given him concerning what would take place in the future.

Daniel 8:3
Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns

were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last.

Daniel saw a vision of a ram with two horns, one higher than the other. Verse 20 tells us this ram represents the Medes and the Persians. Indeed, nine years after Daniel had this vision, the Medes and the Persians, having formed an alliance, attacked Babylon and were victorious. The second horn grew stronger than the first because, although the Medes were initially more powerful, the Persians eventually became the stronger of the two.

Daniel 8:4
I saw the ram pushing westward, and northward, and southward; so that no beasts might stand before him, neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will, and became great.

The Medes and Persians became invincible. No one could stop them—until another animal appears . . .

Daniel 8:5, 6
And as I was considering, behold, an he goat came from the west on the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground: and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. And he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing before the river, and ran unto him in the fury of his power.

This he-goat moved so quickly that it appeared he didn't touch the ground. The other unusual feature of his was the single horn coming from his forehead. Verse 21 tells us this he-goat symbolizes the Grecian empire. The "notable horn" is Alexander the Great.

The Medes and Persians ruled until 334 B.C., when suddenly Alexander the Great took 35,000 troops—a very small army—and struck them quickly and speedily. How could Alexander's 35,000 defeat the million-man army of Xerxes? In our own history, we've seen this can be done through guerilla warfare.

Daniel 8:7, 8 (a)
And I saw him come close unto the ram, and he was moved with choler against him, and smote the ram, and brake his two horns: and there was no power in the ram to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground, and stamped upon him: and there was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand. Therefore the he goat waxed very great . . .

After defeating Xerxes, Alexander went on and kept going south to Israel. When he neared Jerusalem, he was poised to annihilate it when the high priest met him outside of the city and showed him this passage, written two hundred years earlier. So convinced was Alexander that it spoke of him that he spared Jerusalem. The city was saved because the Word was shared.

He then went into Egypt and founded Alexandria, swept north into present-day Afghanistan, and then made a run into India. After conquering India, the he-goat went back to Babylon and established that city as his capital. At that point, realizing he had conquered the entire known world, he wept that there were no worlds left to conquer.

Daniel 8:8 (b)
. . . and when he was strong, the great horn was broken . . .

At the party he threw for all of his soldiers upon their return to Babylon, Alexander became drunk. He walked back to his residence in the rain and fell asleep in his damp clothes. Within three days, he died of pneumonia at the age of thirty-three.

Alexander was the epitome of what the world looks for in a leader. His father was Philip of Macedon, a brilliant general. As little Alexander watched his father, he grew bitterly jealous of his conquests. He complained to those around him that his father was going to conquer everything and leave nothing for Alexander to do. When he was thirteen years old, Philip realized his son was uniquely gifted so he brought in the finest scholar of the ancient world, a philosopher named Aristotle, to teach his son. He was then given a black horse so powerful that no other man could tame or ride him. Alexander was able to do both. Seeing his son upon his mighty horse, Bucephalus,

Philip said, "My son, Macedonia is not worthy of you. Conquer a kingdom that is great."

By the time he was twenty, Alexander had gained control of Greece. As he was conquering some of the rebellious areas north of Macedonia, hearing that the city of Thebes had the audacity to revolt against him, he went to Thebes, destroyed every building in the city, and killed every man, woman, and child except 30,000 whom he sold into slavery. At that point, everyone in Greece realized they dare not rebel against him no matter how long he was gone.

Alexander was a powerful man, a military genius. Yet he died broken and empty. I contrast him with another Man who also died at the age of thirty-three . . .

- Alexander was a man who made himself to be God.
  Jesus, who was God, humbled Himself and became a man (Philippians 2:5–7).
- Unlike Alexander, Jesus was not in competition with His Father. Rather, Jesus was in submission to His Father. "I have come to do the will of Him that sent Me," He said (see John 6:38). "I always do the things that please My Father," He declared (see John 8:29).
- At the age of thirteen, Alexander was taught by Aristotle.
  At the age of twelve, Jesus tutored the priests.
- Alexander shed the blood of millions for his own glorification.
  Jesus shed His own blood for our salvation.
- Alexander rode a magnificent black stallion.
  Jesus rode a lowly donkey.
- Alexander wiped out the city of Thebes and enslaved the rebels.
  Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem and freed the sinners (John 8:11).
- "Friend, you must die," Alexander said before killing a friend who he thought had made advances toward his wife.
  "Friend, what seekest thou?" Jesus said to the one who would indeed betray Him.
- When Alexander died, his body was placed in a golden casket and moved from Babylon to Memphis, Egypt and finally to Alexandria,

where a great monument was built to his memory.
When Jesus died, He was also moved from the place where He was buried—not to another burial place but up to heaven where He lives to make intercession for you and me (Hebrews 7:25).

- Alexander is simply a memory.
Jesus is the Messiah who is coming again.

Daniel 8:8 (c)
. . . and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven.

Following Alexander's death, his empire was split into four regions, each overseen by one of his four generals.

Daniel 8:9
And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land.

Out of the four who had taken over Alexander's empire, comes one who is called a "little horn." "Little horn" expands his borders and moves toward a place called the "pleasant land," the land that flows with milk and honey, Israel.

Daniel 8:10–12
And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them. Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down. And an host was given him against the daily sacrifice by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practised, and prospered.

This is exactly what happened in history. One of the four horns, the Seleucid family, controlled Babylon and Syria. Out of that family came a very infamous individual who the Bible calls "the little horn." He is not the

same little horn as the one in chapter 7. That little horn, which came out of the ten-nation confederation, is antichrist. This little horn comes out of the Seleucid family and is a picture, a foreshadowing, an illustration of antichrist. This little horn has already come.

From 175 to 164 B.C., this little horn, known as Antiochus came on the scene as the leader of Syria and Babylon. He called himself "Theos Epiphanes," or "God Manifested." Others called him "Antiochus Epiphanes" or "Antiochus the Shining One," because he was ruling in the area of Antioch. The Jews, aware of this madman, called him "Antiochus Epinanes," which means "Antiochus the Insane One." They recognized he was deranged and history confirms this was true.

He began to expand his empire by conquering everything he set his eyes upon—including Israel. Such hatred did he have for the Jews that he demanded that all of the holy writings of the Jews be burned. Claiming to be God, he built a statue of himself and put it in the temple. When the Jews revolted, 40,000 were killed in a single day and perhaps a million more in the ensuing months. He then butchered a pig on the altar in the temple, smeared the blood on the walls, and forced the priests to drink the remainder. He was a cruel madman, a picture of antichrist himself.

Daniel 8:13, 14
Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spake, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot? And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.

What are these 2,300 days? When Antiochus Epiphanes began his reign on September 6, 171 B.C., a man named Matthias in the village of Modine refused to give in to his pressure. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, he refused to submit. For this, he was killed—but he had five sons. These five sons, led by Judah, the oldest, were so incensed that, with guerilla tactics, they began attacking the soldiers of Antiochus. Others joined and the Maccabean Revolt was underway.

On December 25, 165 B.C., they drove Antiochus and his boys out of the land. Judah and his men then went into the temple, cleaned it from the defilements of Antiochus, and relit the candles. But there was only enough holy oil for one day. A new supply would take eight days to make. When they prayed that the oil would miraculously last, the Lord answered their prayer and the candles burned for the eight days until the new oil was ready. The commemoration of this event is called the Feast of Lights, or Hanukkah. September 6, 171 B.C.—when Antiochus came to power—to December 25, 165 B.C. is exactly 2,300 days.

Daniel 8:15–17
And it came to pass, when I, even I Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then, behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of Ulai, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision. So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face: but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the vision.

Daniel was told that the vision of the ram with two horns, the goat with the single horn, and the little horn rising from the ten horns spoke not only of the time of Antiochus but of a later event yet to come. In other words, Antiochus is a foreshadow of antichrist.

Daniel 8:18–21
Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face toward the ground: but he touched me, and set me upright. And he said, Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation: for at the time appointed the end shall be. The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king.

Here, the goat is identified as the symbol of the Grecian Empire.

Daniel 8:22
Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power.

The four generals following Alexander wouldn't be as powerful as he was.

Daniel 8:23
And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up.

This speaks of both Antiochus and antichrist.

Daniel 8:24
And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people.

Antichrist will perform a host of signs and wonders, but the power will actually be Satan's.

Daniel 8:25 (a)
And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart . . .

Antichrist will claim to be God even as Antiochus Epiphanes did, even as Satan did in Isaiah 14 when pride filled his heart.

Daniel 8:25 (b)
. . . and by peace shall destroy many . . .

Initially, antichrist will come as a man of peace, solving the problems of the Middle East, solving the economic tensions in the world. But in the middle of the Tribulation, he'll show his true colors. Three and a half years after he comes into power, blood will flow and heads will roll. According to

2 Thessalonians 2, when antichrist sets up his image and demands to be worshiped, anyone who doesn't will be jeopardizing their own life.

Daniel 8:25 (c)
. . . he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand.

At the Battle of Armageddon, antichrist will have the audacity to wage war against Jesus Himself, but he'll be broken apart from human help. Jesus doesn't need our help. He's going to take care of the enemy single-handedly.

Daniel 8:26, 27
And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days. And I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king's business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it.

Although the vision was so real to Daniel that it had a physical effect upon him, he didn't understand its meaning. Maybe you can relate to this. Maybe you're saying, "I don't get it. Little horns and ten toes and brass bellies—I'm completely confused!" That's okay. It will affect you just as it did Daniel. Whether or not you can identify the ten toes is not the point. God is saying in this book, "Wake up. We're not playing a game here. We're talking about eternal destiny, about friends and family going through the Tribulation unnecessarily, about suffering, persecution, and eternal damnation."

As believers, we are in an important place as ambassadors of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). Therefore, like Daniel, we, too, must go about the King's business. We can't just cruise through Christianity going through a Bible study occasionally, praying sporadically, hoping things will work out eventually. We must be about the King's business continually. Daniel rose up and did the King's business. May that be said of us.

9 The most important thing we can do in the service of our King is to become men and women of prayer. Here in chapter 9, we see a prayer of Daniel that the Holy Spirit preserved for us to study. Along with those recorded in Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 9, this is one of the three great prayer chapters of the Old Testament.

Daniel 9:1, 2
In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

Although Daniel was a seer, he was still a student. Although he was a prophet, he was still a pupil. That is, he was one who read the Word regularly and studied it carefully. Now, if Daniel was one given to reading and researching the Scriptures, how much more do I need to do the same.

Here, Daniel comes to the twenty-fifth chapter of Jeremiah and sees that Jeremiah foretold that Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians would carry the Jews into captivity. God allowed this because not only had they embraced idolatry but they had ignored God's Word continually—specifically as it related to the Sabbath year.

You see, according to Leviticus 25, every seventh year, God's people were to do no plowing or tilling of the ground. The land was to rest. We now know agriculturally and scientifically why this would be important. But they were simply to take it on faith. On the sixth year, the Lord would give them twice as much in order to see them through the seventh year. But for four hundred ninety years, they ignored that commandment. In other words, the land missed out on seventy years of rest. Therefore, the Lord told Jeremiah that His people would be carried away captive for seventy years. And while they were gone, the land would indeed rest.

Now the seventy years was up. So what did Daniel do? Jeremiah's writings didn't simply stimulate his curiosity but they moved him to activity

—and that's always the purpose of prophecy. After reading Jeremiah's prophecy, Daniel was prompted to pray.

Many times, people don't pray because they're not studying or meditating on the Word. When they try to pray, they don't know what to talk about. I have news for you: God is a great conversationalist and He initiates the conversation through His Word. That's why reading the Bible is important and studying it is essential. As I read the Scriptures, I discover the things I should talk about in prayer.

Daniel 9:3
And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

After the prompting to prayer, we see the preparation for prayer. Daniel set his face, which speaks of determination. Sackcloth is a hairy garment, camel's hair usually, turned inside out so the bristles of the camel continually rub against one's skin. What was Daniel doing? He was showing he was serious in seeking the Lord.

Fasting is a way we can seek the Lord in seriousness. Fasting is an important tool in the Christian arsenal both in doing battle with the enemy and in seeking our Father and His blessings. All day long, we're bombarded by advertising and noise. Not only are our senses bombarded, but our stomachs are constantly craving certain kinds of food. We're stuffing ourselves with this, that, and the other. Fasting is a practical way of saying, "I'm not going to continue showering myself with physical sensations and stimuli. I'm going to slow it down."

Physiologically, you actually become a clearer thinker when you're fasting. Many tests confirm this. Fasting is good for us physically and helpful to us mentally. Fasting is not a way to score points with the Lord but an avenue to deny our flesh physically in order to concentrate on the spiritual realm with greater intensity. Fasting is not meant to prove something to God but to simply place ourselves in a position where we can hear Him more clearly.

As a teenager, Daniel understood the importance of the fast. Here he is now, at eighty-six years of age, still fasting.

Daniel 9:4
And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments;

After prompting and preparation, here we see the preface to Daniel's prayer. He prefaces his prayer by remembering who he's talking to. The Bible says we're to enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise (Psalm 100:4) because as we reflect on the greatness of God, the problems that seemed so big to us shrink radically.

I encourage you to spend time prefacing your prayer by reflecting upon and remembering the greatness of God. After all, if He spans the universe in His hand, He can surely handle whatever challenges face you (Isaiah 48:13).

Daniel 9:5–15
We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us,

and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice. And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly.

Here we see that a major portion of Daniel's prayer is devoted to penitence. He realizes the problems the people of Israel were experiencing were not because God was cruel but because they were sinful.

When the judgments of God come down in the Tribulation period, the saints, angels, and elders in heaven say, "Righteous and true are Your judgments, O Lord" (Revelation 19:2). Not a single one says, "That's not fair!" They say, "What You're doing, Lord, is perfect." So, if we desire to be a mature brother or sister, one of the keys is to recognize that God is right in all He does. The reason we're in the mess we're in is because of sin. It's not God's fault. He's righteous and true in all He does.

"We've sinned," Daniel says. And yet Daniel is one of the few men in all of the OT of whom no sin is recorded. That doesn't mean he didn't sin, but that he lived an incredibly impeccable life. Here, however, he identifies himself with the people around him.

Wouldn't it be radical if we did that—if we really saw ourselves as one body? When you drop a hammer on your toe, the rest of the body doesn't say, "What a jerk you are, toe." No, the rest of the body immediately begins to aid the toe. The whole body gathers around the hurting member. But what do we in the body of Christ do? When someone drops the proverbial hammer, we find fault. That ought not to be.

If I'm finding fault with people, there's a problem with me. Daniel, a truly righteous man, said, "*We* have sinned, Father," and, in so doing, models linkage and covering.

Daniel 9:16–19

O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.

After penitence in prayer, we see the petition by prayer. What does Daniel request? Mercy. The purpose of prayer is not primarily to move the hand of God but rather to hold the hand of God. People say that prayer changes things. The reality, however is, that prayer changes *us*. Here, Daniel is coming to a place where he's saying, "I want to be in harmony with You, Father. I read in Jeremiah that our time here is almost over. I'm confessing our sins, Lord. I realize the jam we're in is because we're rebellious. So remember us, Lord." He's not commanding or ordering God to do something. He's simply placing himself in harmony with the will of the Father. And that is what true prayer really is.

Don't think you have to give God a reason to bless you. Approach Him solely on the basis of His mercy. Otherwise, Satan will quench the Spirit of prayer in you by saying you have no right to pray.

Daniel 9:20–22

And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God; Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he

informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.

Finally, the perspective from prayer. Daniel was praying concerning the seventy-year captivity. But God sent Gabriel with a message that dealt with something much vaster—the entire history of the Jewish people prophetically.

This frequently happens in prayer. We come, concerned about a particular matter, but as we spend time in prayer, God shows us other things and ministers to us so deeply and intimately that we leave with an entirely different perspective. That's why prayer is so important. Daniel went his way blown away by what he learned in the place of prayer.

Daniel's entire prayer takes less than three minutes to read. Granted, Daniel was fasting. Given, he was intense with sackcloth and ashes. But I would encourage you to not think that, in order to receive revelation from the Lord and be impacted by Him, you need to pray for three hours.

The problem is, Satan comes to us and says, "All you have is five minutes? You really think God is going to meet you in five minutes?" So we commit to pray for an hour. But the hour never comes, or the alarm doesn't go off, or we drift off. Therefore, I encourage you to commit to praying even five minutes. Set your face. Bow your knee. Approach God on the basis of His mercy—and watch how you will leave that place a changed individual.

Daniel 9:23, 24 (a)
At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision. Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city . . .

The word "week" in Hebrew is *heptad.* Like a decade that means ten or a dozen that means twelve, *heptad* means seven. It could speak of seven days, seven weeks, or seven years. Here, as is frequently the case throughout the Bible, the heptad refers to seven years. How do we know? There is a principle of Bible interpretation called the Principle of First Mention. That is, if you want to know the meaning of any given term, go to the first place it

is mentioned in the Bible and there you will find a key. In Genesis 29, we see the first time *heptad* is used.

> And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.
>
> Genesis 29:20

The story is of Jacob, who fell in love with Rachel. Her father, Laban, said to Jacob, "Work for me seven years, and I'll let you have her." At the end of seven years, the wedding ceremony took place. According to custom, the bride was veiled. But when Jacob awoke the next morning, he was shocked to find that he had married Rachel's older sister, Leah.

"Laban, I worked seven years for *Rachel,*" Jacob protested.

"We have a custom that the older daughter always gets married first," Laban said. "But if you work for me for seven more years, I'll throw Rachel in."

So Jacob worked seven more years for Rachel.

> And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years. And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also.
>
> Genesis 29:26–28

When Laban said, "Fulfill her week," the word used is *heptad.* Laban wasn't talking about seven days. He was talking about a "week" of seven years.

> **Daniel 9:24 (b)**
> **. . . to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.**

Seventy weeks are determined upon Israel to finish—or literally to restrain—transgression. That is, Satan—the one who causes transgression—will be restrained. After seventy weeks, sin will end. There will also be reconciliation for iniquity and everlasting righteousness. The vision and prophecy will be sealed and the most Holy anointed. In other words, the message to Daniel was, "Daniel, good things are going to happen at the end of seventy weeks, or four hundred ninety years. Iniquity will be forgiven. Prophecy will be fulfilled. The most Holy One, Jesus Christ, will be anointed and received as King."

Daniel 9:25
Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.

Daniel was told that sixty-nine weeks—or four hundred eighty-three years—would pass between the time the command to rebuild Jerusalem was given and Messiah would come. Why is there a division between seven weeks and sixty-two weeks? We see the answer in Nehemiah. Don't forget, the Jews were in captivity in Babylon. Jerusalem was lying in ruins. On March 14, 445 B.C., the command was given the Jews to go back home, to rebuild Jerusalem, and restore the temple. Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah and others began to lead groups of Jews out of captivity and back to Jerusalem to restore and rebuild the city. How long did it take to rebuild the city? Forty-nine years. That's why there are seven weeks followed by sixty-two additional weeks.

If you begin at March 14, 445 B.C. and use the Jewish calendar of three hundred sixty days per year, sixty-nine weeks, or four hundred eighty-three years, brings you to April 6, A.D. 32. What happened on that day? Messiah came riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, offering Himself to be the King of Israel. At first they welcomed Him, waving palm branches and saying, "Hosanna in the highest. Save now. Be our King!"

But within days, the fickle crowd said, "We will not have this Man rule over us. Away with Him. Crucify Him."

> And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! . . .
>
> Luke 19:41, 42 (a)

"Jerusalem," Jesus said, "you should have known that this is your day! Oh, the peace that would be possible if I were your King." But they didn't know it was their day because they didn't know Bible prophecy. And Jesus wept.

> **Daniel 9:26 (a)**
> **And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself . . .**

Messiah will come. And yet He will be cut off. He'll be killed—but not for Himself. Indeed, He who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God through Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus died for *our* sins. Messiah came, was rejected by Israel, was cut off for our sins—exactly as the prophet declared.

> **Daniel 9:26 (b), 27 (a)**
> **. . . and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week . . .**

After sixty-nine weeks Messiah came. But there's still one week left. The history of Israel consists of seventy weeks. Therefore, one seven-year period remains to be unfolded. At that time, the prince of the people, antichrist—a charismatic, influential, intelligent world leader—will appear on the scene. And the people will say, "You're the one we want to lead us."

> **Daniel 9:27 (b)**

. . . and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

Antichrist will come on the scene and negotiate a treaty. He'll solve the Middle East problem ingeniously, including a way that the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem.

"But isn't there a mosque on the temple mount?" you ask.

Archaeological discoveries in recent years have unmistakably confirmed that the temple was a little bit north of the Dome of the Rock Mosque. And, interestingly enough, the space where it sat is blank. The Dome of the Rock Mosque sits in the outer court of the old temple. The outer court of the temple was the area where Gentiles could come.

Orthodox Jews today say they will recognize Messiah as the One who rebuilds the temple. Antichrist will do just that. But in the middle of his seven-year treaty, his true colors will show. He'll go into the temple, cause the sacrifices to cease, and set up an image of either himself or Zeus and demand it be worshiped. Matthew 24 calls this "the abomination of desolation." When this happens, the Jews will say, "What have we done?" And, realizing the Jews are no longer going along with his program, antichrist will wage war against Israel.

For three and one-half years, hell will literally break loose on this planet. Finally, at the end of the seven-year Tribulation—or Daniel's seventieth week—Jesus will come back to rule and reign on this earth. Thus, with the seventy weeks completed, there will be an end to sin, a beginning of everlasting rightness, and the Most Holy will be anointed.

We have already seen the first sixty-nine weeks come to pass historically. When will Daniel's seventieth week begin? It could begin anytime.

But before it does, Jesus will call us up to heaven in the Rapture. For seven years, we'll be in heaven, getting to know Him. The church was not in Daniel's first sixty-nine weeks, so neither shall she be in Daniel's seventieth week. That's why Jeremiah calls the Tribulation the time of *Jacob's* trouble (30:7). What separates Daniel's sixty-ninth week from the seventieth? It's the period of time known as the church age. In A.D. 70, when the temple was

destroyed and the Jews were scattered, the prophetic clock stopped ticking. But in May, 1948, when Israel became a nation once again, the prophetic clock started ticking as well.

What does this mean for us personally? So often I come to the Lord talking about some sort of seventy-year activity. But I end up leaving my time of prayer with an entirely different perspective on eternity. I was concerned about why this person doesn't like me, or why this job didn't work out for me, or why my bill didn't get paid on time. But the Lord says, "I want to talk to you about heaven, about eternity." That's why reading the Bible and praying are so important. We need to be reminded of the big picture. Eternity will be here before we know it.



10 Daniel 10:1–3

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a thing was revealed unto Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar; and the thing was true, but the time appointed was long: and he understood the thing, and had understanding of the vision. In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.

Here, we see Daniel fasting and pressing in to God's presence. Keep in mind Daniel at this point is at least eighty-five years old. If there was ever a time a person could say, "I deserve a break," it would have been Daniel. After all, he had been praying three times a day for years. He had been cast into the lions' den. He had interpreted dreams and visions under intense pressure. If ever there was a time to relax, it would be now. But Daniel didn't do this. At this time, he launches into another fast. For three full weeks, he sought the Lord with intensity. His was a partial fast—no pastries, no meat, no wine. Fasting can take on that form, as well. Fasting can be for varied lengths of time and from varied types of food.

Daniel 10:4–6

And in the four and twentieth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, which is Hiddekel; Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude.

As he fasted and prayed, Daniel saw an appearance of the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ. His vision compares with those recorded in Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 1.

Daniel 10:7
And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves.

You visionaries, you Daniels, please understand this: Revelation will often bring isolation. That is, when the Lord begins to reveal Himself to you because you are truly seeking Him, others will wonder about you and perhaps even flee from you. They won't see the same vision. Oh, they'll feel the effects. They'll feel the quaking of your life changing—but they won't see the vision.

Daniel 10:8 (a)
Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision . . .

Revelation not only sometimes *results* in isolation but often *requires* isolation. When did Daniel see the vision? When he was left alone. When John received the Book of Revelation, he was all alone on the island of Patmos. Thus, the Lord was free to make Himself known to John. The same is true with us. Oftentimes, friends and family just won't be there for us because the Lord wants to deal with us.

Daniel 10:8 (b), 9

. . . and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground.

Daniel saw the Lord, heard the voice of the Lord, and fell down before the Lord.

Daniel 10:10
And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands.

As we will see, this is an angel. As seen in 1 Corinthians 11, the early church was very sensitive to the angelic presence. There are angels in our midst, as well. Hebrews 13:2 says we actually talk with angels, but are unaware of it.

Daniel 10:11, 12
And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling. Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.

"The first day you prayed, your words were heard," the angel told Daniel. Then why was there no answer for twenty-one days? Why does God delay answers to prayer?

God can answer prayer directly and immediately. Or He can deny the prayer in His sovereignty, knowing what we ask for will be detrimental or He can delay the answer. Why does the Lord delay answers to prayer? Oftentimes, the Lord just wants us to spend time with Him and He knows that if we come cruising into His presence and get what we want immediately,

we'll grab the goods and run away quickly. Therefore, oftentimes, I believe the Father says, "It's nice to see you again. Slow down. Don't rush off."

Sometimes, answers to prayer are delayed because God wants us to think through what it is we really want from Him. I remember when my kids were little, every Christmas they gave me wish lists consisting of everything they saw on television, heard about from other kids, and saw in toy catalogues. How did I know what they really wanted? As Christmas got closer, the lists became condensed as they were able to determine the things they really wanted to see under the tree. I believe the same is true with prayer. We come with a torrent of thoughts, ideas, and requests, but sometimes the Lord delays the answer as if to say, "What do you *really* want?" It's not that He doesn't know. It's that He wants us to discover that which is truly on our own hearts.

Answers to prayer can be delayed because the Lord wants us to spend time with Him, because He wants us to recognize what it is we truly seek—or because of demonic spiritual forces. Such was the case with Daniel . . .

Daniel 10:13
But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.

In Ephesians 6, we read that we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places. There are angels, yes. But there are also demons. And they are very real. They're apparently highly organized into principalities, powers, rulers, and spiritual wickedness in high places. The Bible seems to teach that countries have specific demons that oversee or undermine them. Here, the angel says to Daniel, "The day you prayed, I was sent, but I was intercepted by the prince of Persia and for twenty-one days I wrestled with him." That is, the demon who oversees Persia, or present-day Iran, intercepted him and kept him from coming until Michael, the archangel of God, came to reinforce this angel and free him from the grasp of the prince of Persia.

Thus, the answer to prayer was hung up in a heavenly conflict. What would happen had Daniel quit praying after eighteen days? I believe the answer would never have come. He had to pray through. There are demons at

work, gang. We are not wrestling against people, against flesh and blood. It's not your boss's personality, your husband's insensitivity, or your wife's inadequacies that are irritating you. Rather, there are demons in place that are causing all kinds of irritations, improper evaluations, and very real frustrations. If you're wrestling against people, you're fighting the wrong battle. It's the demons you need to war against, not flesh and blood.

James tells us that we have not because we ask not (4:2). In the original text, it's clear that Jesus taught us to *keep* asking, *keep* seeking, *keep* knocking (Matthew 7:7). Part of the reason we're taught to keep praying is because there is a war going on that, although we don't see it with our eyes, we feel its effects. If we give up in prayer, much of the blessing and release that would have come our way won't make it. Daniel discovered this.

Daniel 10:14–19
Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days. And when he had spoken such words unto me, I set my face toward the ground, and I became dumb. And, behold, one like the similitude of the sons of men touched my lips: then I opened my mouth, and spake, and said unto him that stood before me, O my lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength. For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? for as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me. Then there came again and touched me one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me, And said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me.

Once again, feeling the effect of the vision, his strength sapped, an angel comes and tells Daniel to be strong, to not be afraid, that he is greatly loved.

"No wonder an angel came to Daniel," you might say. "He was a great man, loved by God. But me? I'm weak. I struggle. The Lord would never speak to me or be able to use me." But check this out: the same angel

ministering to Daniel, a messenger angel known as Gabriel, later came to Mary and said, "Hail, thou that art highly favored, or literally greatly loved." Then he shared with her how she was chosen among all women to bring forth the Christ child (Luke 1). *Charitoo,* the Greek word translated "highly favored," appears only one other place in the New Testament . . .

> To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.
>
> Ephesians 1:6

The same word spoken to Daniel and to Mary is spoken concerning you. This means you're loved every bit as much as Daniel. You're favored every bit as much as Mary. Because you are in Christ, He'll come to you and use you as surely as He did them.

> **Daniel 10:20, 21**
> **Then said he, Knowest thou wherefore I come unto thee? and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come. But I will shew thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince.**

"The battle isn't over," the angel says. "I'm here to share with you, Daniel, but now I have to go back because the battle goes on." The war isn't over, gang. It continues in the heavenly arena. Therefore, like Gabriel, like Daniel, we cannot afford to kick back, to take it easy. Why? I suggest three reasons . . .

Because of our country. Daniel loved his country. The first year Cyrus became king, he told the Jews in captivity to go home, to rebuild their city and temple. But, as Ezra records, only about 49,000 people—a handful—went back. The rest were comfortable in Babylon. They wondered why they should go back and rebuild the temple when they could kick back and be comfortable in Babylon. Oh, initially it was hard there, but as the years went on, Babylon began to feel like home. And, seeing the people comfortable in carnality broke Daniel's heart.

I wonder what the Lord sees in American Christianity. "Why should I worry about going to prayer meeting Wednesday night?" we ask. "Why should I worry about fasting like I used to?" Daniel loved his country and yet he saw so few who were interested in restoring the nation. So, as an eighty-five-year-old man, he said, "I'll fast and pray on behalf of these people who have grown so comfortable."

The Lord didn't say, "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and vote, I will heal their land." Nor did He say, "If My people will humble themselves and petition, I will heal their land." He said, "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and *pray,* and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14, italics added). If you're a true patriot, be a prayer warrior. There's a battle raging and it must be fought in prayer constantly.

We can't afford to kick back because of our families. Satan never has a good day. Demons never let up—and they will go after our kids if they see they are vulnerable. Job, the most righteous man on the face of the earth in his day, rose early each morning and offered sacrifice on behalf of each of his kids. He knew his kids were being pressured, so he would rise daily, sacrifice, and intercede. Job knew God. He understood spiritual reality. And he knew he couldn't afford to cruise.

Satan is a roaring lion. Therefore, if you love your kids, parents, you can't kick back, pray occasionally, and go to church sporadically. Your kids will be eaten up. You're a priest in the home, Dad. You're a covering, Mom. Don't take it easy or your kids will pay the price.

Finally, if you kick back, you are asking for real trouble personally because in so doing, you make yourself an easy target.

> Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; How he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God.
>
> Deuteronomy 25:17, 18

The Amalekites attacked God's people constantly as they journeyed through the wilderness. Who did the Amalekites pick off? Not the people in the front, but those in the back, those who lagged behind and were "cool" about spiritual things. You might not care about your country. You might not have a family. But if you have a kick-back kind of Christianity, you'll get picked off personally. The front lines aren't where the casualties are. It's when you start dropping back in your intensity, when you start giving up in your ministry that you are in danger of being devoured.

"If God is so good and so powerful, why doesn't He just wipe out the demons that attack us?" you ask. He will eventually, but they are actually serving a purpose presently. Think of it this way: If I see someone at the YMCA working hard lifting weights and take them from him, I am actually doing him a disservice. It is the lifting that gives the strength. And that's the purpose the enemy is fulfilling. Yes, he causes things to get heavy. But the Lord uses him as a weight to strengthen us, to teach us how to press in and be strong. Our Father knows we'll need strength and stamina, experience and endurance for what's ahead, so He allows us to struggle. He'll never give us more than we can handle (1 Corinthians 10:13), but He will allow us to struggle in order to gain spiritual stamina.

Therefore, embrace the struggle and keep going. Become a Daniel. Even when you're eighty-five years old, keep with your devotional life, your spiritual discipline, your studying, and prayer. Don't forsake assembling with other believers (Hebrews 10:25). Don't become a Babylonian, caught up in your business, hobbies, or house. Instead, say, "I will continue on because there's too much at stake."

Lord, by Your grace, keep us going.



11 In chapter 11, we come to the message Gabriel brought Daniel, after Daniel wrestled in prayer for twenty-one days. It's a bird's-eye view—prophetically for Daniel and historically for us—of the events that happen in the Middle East. Scholars have tabulated one hundred thirty-five specific prophecies given in chapter 11, all fulfilled to the most minute detail.

Daniel 11:1, 2
Also I in the first year of Darius the Mede, even I, stood to confirm and to strengthen him. And now will I shew thee the truth. Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth shall be far richer than they all: and by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia.

At this point in Daniel's life, the Babylonians have been overthrown by the Medes and Persians. Now the Persians are in power. And the angel says, "Three Persians are in power. Three kings are going to come in a row and the fourth one shall be richer than the rest and will stir up the entire kingdom against Greece." That's exactly what happened. The fourth king was Xerxes —and he was determined to wipe out Greece. With his vast wealth, he spent four years raising an army of two and a half million men. It took seven days to march the men across boats that acted as a bridge from the land mass across the Aegean Sea into the region of Greece. The battle was the bloodiest battle in history as the Greeks fought against Xerxes and his two and a half million men. And, although the Greeks lost, the army of Xerxes was decimated.

For the next one hundred fifty-plus years, the Greeks waited to take revenge.

Daniel 11:3, 4
And a mighty king shall stand up, that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven; and not to his posterity, nor according to his dominion which he ruled: for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others beside those.

One hundred fifty years later, a mighty king did indeed arise by the name of Alexander. He took all of the anger and revenge that the Greeks were feeling and began to conquer. By the time he was thirty-three, he had conquered the entire known world. But he died of pneumonia shortly thereafter. Following his death, his son didn't take over the kingdom, but it was divided between four of his generals. And now as the story unfolds,

we'll focus on two areas taken over by two of Alexander's generals: the families of the Seleucids and the Ptolemys. The Seleucids were in Syria, directly north of Israel. The Ptolemys were in Egypt, directly below Israel. Why are these two kingdoms of the four singled out? Because they surrounded Israel.

Daniel 11:5, 6
And the king of the south shall be strong, and one of his princes; and he shall be strong above him, and have dominion; his dominion shall be a great dominion. And in the end of years they shall join themselves together; for the king's daughter of the south shall come to the king of the north to make an agreement: but she shall not retain the power of the arm; neither shall he stand, nor his arm: but she shall be given up, and they that brought her, and he that begat her, and he that strengthened her in these times.

Rather than fight the Syrians, Ptolemy proposed that they form an alliance. "I have a daughter," he said to Antiochus in Syria. "Marry her and that will make us one big family like Alexander wanted us to be."

"I can't," Antiochus said. "I'm married."

"Dump her," Ptolemy said.

Antiochus agreed. The wedding took place—but soon after that, Ptolemy died and Antiochus decided he wanted his first wife back. She returned to him—only to stab him in the back before killing Ptolemy's daughter and their child, as well.

Daniel 11:7–9
But out of a branch of her roots shall one stand up in his estate, which shall come with an army, and shall enter into the fortress of the king of the north, and shall deal against them, and shall prevail: And shall also carry captives into Egypt their gods, with their princes, and with their precious vessels of silver and of gold; and he shall continue more years than the king of the north. So

the king of the south shall come into his kingdom, and shall return into his own land.

Enraged by what had happened to his sister, Ptolemy's son, Ptolemy III gathered an army, marched through Israel, and did in the Syrians. And while he was there, he rescued 2,500 gods the Syrians had stolen from the Egyptians years earlier.

Daniel 11:10
But his sons shall be stirred up, and shall assemble a multitude of great forces: and one shall certainly come, and overflow, and pass through: then shall he return, and be stirred up, even to his fortress.

In response to the Egyptian invasion, Antiochus III launched a counterattack against Egypt and, in the process, claimed Israel as part of his empire.

Daniel 11:11–14
And the king of the south shall be moved with choler, and shall come forth and fight with him, even with the king of the north: and he shall set forth a great multitude; but the multitude shall be given into his hand. And when he hath taken away the multitude, his heart shall be lifted up; and he shall cast down many ten thousands: but he shall not be strengthened by it. For the king of the north shall return, and shall set forth a multitude greater than the former, and shall certainly come after certain years with a great army and with much riches. And in those times there shall many stand up against the king of the south: also the robbers of thy people shall exalt themselves to establish the vision; but they shall fall.

Back and forth the battle went, now centering in Israel. Finally Antiochus V came on the scene, determined to solve the problem once and for all. So he persuaded the Greeks to join him in invading Egypt once again.

Daniel 11:15–17
So the king of the north shall come, and cast up a mount, and take the most fenced cities: and the arms of the south shall not withstand, neither his chosen people, neither shall there be any strength to withstand. But he that cometh against him shall do according to his own will, and none shall stand before him: and he shall stand in the glorious land, which by his hand shall be consumed. He shall also set his face to enter with the strength of his whole kingdom, and upright ones with him; thus shall he do: and he shall give him the daughter of women, corrupting her: but she shall not stand on his side, neither be for him.

As tensions began to ease, Antiochus said to the house of Ptolemy, "I've got a beautiful daughter. You have a son. I'll ship my daughter down to you in Egypt. She'll hang out there, wait for your son to grow up, and then they can be married." What he was really after, however, was to place his daughter inside the palace of the Ptolemys to act as a spy. The woman's name? Cleopatra. It was a good idea—until Cleopatra actually fell in love and refused to spy on the house of Ptolemy.

Daniel 11:18
After this shall he turn his face unto the isles, and shall take many: but a prince for his own behalf shall cause the reproach offered by him to cease; without his own reproach he shall cause it to turn upon him.

Antiochus then turned his face toward the Greek isles, determined to conquer them. But when he went north to vent his frustration by conquering the Greek islands, he came into contact with the emerging Roman Empire, which kept him from carrying out his plan.

Daniel 11:19, 20
Then he shall turn his face toward the fort of his own land: but he shall stumble and fall, and not be found. Then shall stand up in his estate a raiser of taxes in the glory of the kingdom: but within few days he shall be destroyed, neither in anger, nor in battle.

He turned back to his own land and died inside the temple of one of his gods. The problem is, all of his military ventures had taken a tremendous toll on the country north. They had a huge deficit. So in 187 B.C., the next Antiochus announced that he would send 1,000 tax collectors throughout the Syrian empire to tax the people. But someone slipped some poisonous mushrooms into his dinner and he died. All of this sets the stage for the remainder of the chapter.

The year is 175 B.C. Out of these two groups of people, one individual emerges: Antiochus Epiphanes—a very important person prophetically, for he is a picture, a foreshadowing of one who is even more vile: antichrist.

Daniel 11:21, 22
And in his estate shall stand up a vile person, to whom they shall not give the honour of the kingdom: but he shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries. And with the arms of a flood shall they be overflown from before him, and shall be broken; yea, also the prince of the covenant.

In 175 B.C., Antiochus Epiphanes, a great public orator, appeared on the scene and, with great trickery and flattery, seduced the people into acknowledging that he was the rightful king—not only of Syria, but of Israel as well. And when he came to power, he overthrew the legitimate high priest and put his own false priesthood in place.

Daniel 11:23, 24
And after the league made with him he shall work deceitfully: for he shall come up, and shall become strong with a small people. He shall enter peaceably even upon the fattest places of the province; and he shall do that which his fathers have not done, nor his fathers' fathers; he shall scatter among them the prey, and spoil, and riches: yea, and he shall forecast his devices against the strong holds, even for a time.

Edom, Moab, all of Palestine, into Syria—Antiochus took control of the "fattest" or richest real estate.

Daniel 11:25, 26
And he shall stir up his power and his courage against the king of the south with a great army; and the king of the south shall be stirred up to battle with a very great and mighty army; but he shall not stand: for they shall forecast devices against him. Yea, they that feed of the portion of his meat shall destroy him, and his army shall overflow: and many shall fall down slain.

When he waged war against the Egyptians, Antiochus renewed the old rivalry but did it with treachery by tricking some of the servants of Ptolemy to turn against their king. Thus, the king of the south was betrayed by his own people.

Daniel 11:27, 28
And both these kings' hearts shall be to do mischief, and they shall speak lies at one table; but it shall not prosper: for yet the end shall be at the time appointed. Then shall he return into his land with great riches; and his heart shall be against the holy covenant; and he shall do exploits, and return to his own land.

The Egyptians knew they'd been had. Although they came to the peace table and set up peace agreements with Syria, they were lying through their teeth.

Daniel 11:29, 30
At the time appointed he shall return, and come toward the south; but it shall not be as the former, or as the latter. For the ships of Chittim shall come against him: therefore he shall be grieved, and return, and have indignation against the holy covenant: so shall he do; he shall even return, and have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant.

Years passed and Antiochus decided to make another military venture into Egypt. The ships of Chittim, or Cypress, were Roman galleys that prevented Antiochus from advancing. History tells us that the Roman soldiers

actually draw a line in the sand and said, "Step over that line toward Egypt and you're dead."

Daniel 11:31
And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate.

Prevented from going to Egypt, in his frustration and anger, Antiochus headed north—right into Jerusalem, where he vented his anger on the Jews. Upon his arrival, 40,000 were killed. By the time his anger was vented, 100,000 had been slaughtered. Then came the "abomination of desolation"—when he went into the temple, killed a pig on the altar, smeared the blood on the walls of the temple, and demanded the remainder be drunk by the Jewish priests. Then he erected a statue of either Zeus or himself and demanded that it be worshiped. It was a sickening scene. That's why the Jews called him not Antiochus Epiphanes, or "Antiochus the Shining One," but Antiochus Epinanes, or "Antiochus the Madman." Indeed, along with Caesar, Nero, and Hitler, he is one of the most insane rulers in history.

Daniel 11:32
And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.

At this point, 170 B.C., the Jews were devastated by the holocaust of Antiochus. Yet there was one family who decided to stand up to the madman. A man named Judah and his brothers—known as the Maccabees, launched a guerilla war against Antiochus that lasted until 165 B.C.—when they overthrew the Syrians and threw them out of Jerusalem.

No matter how big the enemy might be, how dark the day might seem, how large the battle might loom, the people that truly know their God will be strong and do exploits because they realize that, if God be for them, who can be against them? (Romans 8:31). The gutsiest people in the world are believers who know their God, who don't back down or give up in the face of challenge, but who simply say, "I know the Lord is with me and no matter

how dark the day might be, I'm going to continue doing what He's called me to do."

That's why we study the Word—that we might know God and do great exploits.

Daniel 11:33–35
And they that understand among the people shall instruct many: yet they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, many days. Now when they shall fall, they shall be holpen with a little help: but many shall cleave to them with flatteries. And some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed.

Verses 2 through 34 chronicle four hundred seventy consecutive years of Jewish history. Suddenly, verse 35 leapfrogs over centuries. Why? Because the first thirty-two verses speak of Daniel's sixty-nine weeks, while verse 35 speaks of Daniel's seventieth week. In between verses 34 and 35 is the church age. When the church age is over, when the believers are raptured, Daniel's seventieth week—the time of the Tribulation—dawns. That's why Daniel jumps from Antiochus Epiphanes to the end times yet to come. Antiochus Epiphanes was part of the first sixty-nine weeks. Now we go to the seventieth week, where one even more vile than he comes on the scene. His name is antichrist . . .

Daniel 11:36 (a)
And the king shall do according to his will . . .

Just like Lucifer who said, "I will be like God," which caused him to be cast from heaven and become Satan (Isaiah 14:14), antichrist, who is filled with Satan does according to his own will. Contrast this with Jesus who prayed, "Not My will, but *Thy* will be done" (Luke 22:42).

Daniel 11:36 (b)
. . . and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god . . .

Again, contrast antichrist, exalting and magnifying himself, with Jesus who, although He was equal with God humbled Himself and made Himself of no reputation (Philippians 2: 7, 8).

Daniel 11:36 (c)
. . . and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods . . .

Antichrist will speak so powerfully that he'll make Adolf Hitler and Winston Churchill look like stammerers. He'll inspire the entire world to turn against the true and living God.

Daniel 11:36 (d)
. . . and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done.

The world will rally around this coming world leader, this great orator, this magnetic individual—and he'll prosper.

Daniel 11:37 (a)
Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers . . .

This verse is the reason most Bible teachers believe that although he's living in Europe, antichrist will be of Jewish heritage.

Daniel 11:37 (b)
. . . nor the desire of women . . .

Antichrist will very possibly be homosexual.

Daniel 11:37 (c)
. . . nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all.

Antichrist will be his own god. Like antichrist, people who are atheists worship the dumbest god of them all: themselves. "I will worship only that I can understand and comprehend," they say. And in so saying, they worship their own intellects.

Daniel 11:38
But in his estate shall he honour the God of forces: and a god whom his fathers knew not shall he honour with gold, and silver, and with precious stones, and pleasant things.

The one god antichrist will honor is the god of military might—but it is an expensive god, indeed.

Daniel 11:39
Thus shall he do in the most strong holds with a strange god, whom he shall acknowledge and increase with glory: and he shall cause them to rule over many, and shall divide the land for gain.

Antichrist will use his god of military might to dominate the world. Initially, he depended on his charisma, flattery, and talk of peace. But now he begins to flex his military muscle.

Daniel 11:40 (a)
And at the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him . . .

The Egyptians and Arabs will begin to wage war against antichrist in the middle of the Tribulation period.

Daniel 11:40 (b)
. . . and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over.

From Ezekiel 37—39, we know that the king of the north refers not to the Syrians but to the Russians.

Daniel 11:41 (a)
He shall enter also into the glorious land . . .

The glorious land is the same as the pleasant land in Daniel 8:9. It's Israel.

Daniel 11:41 (b)–44 (a)
. . . and many countries shall be overthrown: but these shall escape out of his hand, even Edom, and Moab, and the chief of the children of Ammon. He shall stretch forth his hand also upon the countries: and the land of Egypt shall not escape. But he shall have power over the treasures of gold and of silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt: and the Libyans and the Ethiopians shall be at his steps. But tidings out of the east and out of the north shall trouble him . . .

In Ezekiel 38 and 39, we see the Russians coming before the Tribulation unfolds. Here, they have regrouped. At least three and a half years have gone by, and they're coming down to Israel again. At this point, antichrist is troubled because out of the east, he hears tidings. Revelation 9 tells us those tidings are that the king of the east is coming with an army of two hundred million men. When Revelation was written John must have thought he heard wrong. But in the 1960s, Radio Peking announced that China had established a militia of two hundred million men. Suddenly, people who were studying prophecy took notice. Here, we see not only the Russians and the Arabs pinching antichrist, but the Chinese, as well. No wonder antichrist is troubled. He sees his world empire collapsing.

Daniel 11:44 (b)
. . . therefore he shall go forth with great fury to destroy, and utterly to make away many.

Although antichrist lashes out at the world indiscriminately, his anger will be particularly directed toward the Jews.

Daniel 11:45
And he shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and none shall help him.

Antichrist will make his headquarters in a valley called Megiddo, where the final battle will unfold. As the armies of the world converge to destroy him, no one will help him. He has his munitions—but it could be that they are rendered inoperable by advanced technology. When things get down to the end time, will all of the computer-based weaponry be scrambled? With sophisticated weapons useless will soldiers be reduced to using horses and swords? Maybe not—but I think it's a possibility.

We do know that right when it looks like the whole world—particularly Israel—will be devastated at Armageddon, Jesus will come back. Suddenly, all these armies will stop fighting each other and start firing at the Lord.

Needless to say, they won't have a prayer.



12 Historians tell us that, since 650 B.C., there have been 1,656 arms races between two major empires. Of those, all but sixteen ended in a war between those two empires. The sixteen that didn't end in war were because the race caused the countries to collapse economically and fall from world power. Secular, military history doesn't give a lot of hope for peace in the future. And Bible prophecy says the same thing. There are going to be some heavy-duty conflicts ahead.

These battles will culminate in Israel at the Battle of Armageddon. Antichrist will consolidate his power but will find himself very unpopular. And the king of the east will march with two hundred million men across the Asian land mass down to the valley of Megiddo. The Russians from the north will come down. The king of the south—the Egyptian and Arab countries—will consolidate their countries and move north. Thus, antichrist, who will make his capital in Jerusalem, will be boxed in with nothing to do but await the battle.

The vision of chapters 10 and 11 continues in chapter 12 . . .

Daniel 12:1 (a)
And at that time . . .

As seen in chapter 11, this refers to the Tribulation period, the time of antichrist.

Daniel 12:1 (b)
. . . shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people . . .

Michael is one of only two named angels in the Bible. The other is Gabriel. As seen in chapter 10, Gabriel is the messenger angel. Michael is the archangel who is always linked with Israel. It seems as though the forces of hell are organized very carefully with demonic princes over specific nations and regions. There are angelic beings over certain regions and Michael is the archangel, the "Four-Star General" overseeing Israel.

Daniel 12:1 (c)
. . . and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time . . .

When Michael stands up, there will be trouble. In Revelation 12, we see what happens when Michael stands up and why it causes such difficulty . . .

> And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.
>
> Revelation 12:7–11

In Revelation 12, we see what Daniel 12 is talking about. That is, in the middle of the Tribulation—the seven-year period when antichrist is on the

scene, when we, as Christians, are in heaven with Jesus Christ and the world is going through a series of judgments, in the middle of the Tribulation—Satan is cast out of heaven.

"I thought Satan lived in hell," you say.

Not yet. From Job 1, we know that Satan roams the earth and has access to heaven. What does he do there? Revelation 12 and Job 1 tell us he accuses the brethren—us. But 1 John 2 tells us that we have an Advocate in Jesus Christ. Satan is the prosecuting attorney who brings charges against us, but Jesus is our defense Lawyer who says, "I object, Father. They are believers in Me and My blood has cleansed them." And God dismisses the case for lack of evidence. I would think Satan would tire of losing case after case. But he's a tireless enemy, accusing day and night.

There's coming a time, however, when he will be disbarred and thrown out of court forever. Michael will cast him out and no longer will he have access into heaven.

> Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabiters of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.
>
> Revelation 12:12, 13

The woman referred to here is Israel. The man child is Jesus Christ.

> And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.
>
> Revelation 12:17

When Michael, the archangel, kicks Satan out of heaven, Satan will come to earth and take out his frustration on Israel and the Tribulation believers. That is why Jesus said in Matthew 24:22 that, unless the days were shortened, all flesh would be destroyed. It's literally going to be hell on earth.

Daniel 12:1 (d)
. . . and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.

A remnant of Jews will be miraculously and beautifully delivered, brought into the wilderness—very possibly the rock city of Petra—where they will be preserved from antichrist and the wrath of Satan.

Daniel 12:2
And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

In the Tribulation—with Satan cast out of heaven, with brutal times taking place on earth—there is a resurrection. This speaks directly of Israel. Revelation 20 sheds more light on this . . ., now there's a resurrection.

Revelation 20 speaks of two resurrections. The first speaks of those who didn't take the mark of the beast but embraced the Lord and submitted to His Word. In other words, it speaks of those who are saved during the Tribulation period. Many will read books, remember sermons, remember the witness we gave and will be saved. In addition, an angel will fly across the sky preaching the everlasting gospel, 144,000 Jewish evangelists will be preaching, and two witnesses—perhaps Elijah and Moses back from the dead—will perform miracles. A lot of evangelism will happen in the Tribulation period before Jesus comes again. And I believe multiplied millions will realize Jesus is Lord—but it will cost them. Revelation 20 tells us they will be beheaded. So, if you're not yet a believer, don't lose your head—use it! Get saved now!

At the end of the Tribulation, right before the thousand years of peace, those who were killed in the Tribulation will be resurrected. That's the first resurrection. Then, after the thousand years of peace is over, when the Millennium is completed, the second resurrection takes place when the unrighteous are resurrected. At the great white throne judgment, they'll stand before the Lord as the books of all they've ever thought, done, and said will be opened. At that time, no one will be able to say, "I deserve to be in heaven." Their own works, words, and motives will prove otherwise.

Daniel 12:3
And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

Be wise. In light of what's happening prophetically, we should be motivated to be soul-winners, to evangelize, to share the good news. Prophecy is not meant to titillate our curiosity. It's meant to motivate us to activity. If you are wise, if you want to experience the full capacity of what God intends for you in ages to come, be a soul-winner. Turn people to righteousness. Turn them to Jesus Christ and you'll shine forever and ever.



***For topical study of Daniel 12:3 entitled "Sharing and Shining," turn to page* 745.**

Daniel 12:4 (a)
But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end . . .

"Daniel, these things aren't going to make sense until the end times," the angel tells Daniel.

Daniel 12:4 (b)
. . . many shall run to and fro . . .

Because the phrase, "to and fro," is an idiom for world travel, on the basis of this verse, Sir Isaac Newton, one of the most brilliant men in history and also a wonderful believer, deduced that if Daniel's words were literally true, if man would be able to travel throughout the world, he would have to be able to travel at fifty miles per hour. Voltaire, a contemporary and an atheist said, "That doddering fool. Every scientist knows that if man traveled over thirty miles per hour, his heart would stop."

Daniel 12:4 (c)
. . . and knowledge shall be increased.

Knowledge shall indeed be increased. Eighty-five percent of all scientists who have ever lived are alive today. Three thousand pages of scientific and technological information are being printed every second. To try and keep up with this information explosion is impossible. We know the end is coming because people are traveling the globe and knowledge is exploding.

Daniel 12:5–7
Then I Daniel looked, and, behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river. And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders? And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished.

From the time antichrist sets up his image in the temple and makes people worship it, there will be three and a half years left until Jesus comes back.

Daniel 12:8–10
And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.

"Daniel, go your way. Seal up this prophecy. The wicked will keep on behaving wickedly. The righteous will behave rightly. And the wise will

understand at the right time. But Daniel, shut the book. It's not for your day," the angel said.

Compare this with what John was told concerning the revelation he received . . .

> And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.
>
> Revelation 22:10, 11

John was also told that the unjust will be unjust, the filthy will be filthy, and that the righteous will be moving into more rightness. But Daniel was told to seal the book while John was told not to seal the book. Why? We live in a day when Daniel is no longer an impossible book to understand because so much of it has already come to pass. Therefore, the Book of Revelation is opened to us because the Book of Daniel provides the key.

In your own Bible reading, there might be many things you read that you don't understand. The dietary regulations of Deuteronomy, for example, might be a mystery to you. So you wonder why you should even read about them. But there will come a time in your own pilgrimage, in your own walk when those things will begin to make sense. You'll read in the New Testament about the kinds of things we should be taking in and thinking on, staying away from certain activities and meditating on others—and you'll begin to make connections between them and the regulations in Deuteronomy. If you're not reading the Bible consistently, you'll never make those connections. But if you're reading consistently—even if you don't understand what you're reading today—there will come a time a year or two or five down the road, when it all makes sense. Even though it might be sealed up today, even though you might not understand it now, there will come a time when you hear the words, "Seal not up the book. The time is at hand. I'm going to show you how this applies to your life."

Keep reading—even though you're not fully understanding. The Holy Spirit will honor you for having that information and He'll begin to make application.

Daniel 12:11
And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days.

Three and a half years is 1,260 days. Why, then, if the second half of the Tribulation is over after 1,260 days, is it 1,290 days before the abomination of desolation—the image antichrist placed in the temple—is taken away? Why is there a thirty-day lapse between when Jesus Christ comes back and the image is removed? I don't know. I suggest to you, however, that this gives time for what Ezekiel 20 and Matthew 25 speak of—the regathering of all the Jews who have been scattered under antichrist's persecution and the judging of all the nations that survive the Tribulation. Every nation shall be judged to see if they are allowed to go into the Millennium—the 1,000 years of peace. The single determining factor will be their treatment of the Jews—whether they joined in the persecution of God's people, or whether they protected and stood with them. You see, only those who fear and love God will take that risk.

Daniel 12:12
Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days.

This is when all of the judgments are through, the kingdom is established, the image is gone, the temple is restored, everything is in place. Blessed is he who makes it to that point.

Daniel 12:13
But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.

"Go your way, Daniel," the angel says. "This won't apply to you because you're going to die. But you'll be resurrected. You'll stand. You'll come back again at the right time. So don't give up."

SHARING AND SHINING

A Topical Study of DANIEL 12:3

The true stars that will shine forever and ever are not Oscar winners or Super Bowl winners but soul winners. Here, an angel came from heaven and told Daniel that he who desires to shine as the stars forever and ever will commit himself to winning souls, to sharing the truth of righteousness with others.

The apostle Paul would pick up this same analogy . . .

> *There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. . . .*
>
> 1 Corinthians 15:40–42 (a)

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul talks about the bodies we're going to be given in eternity. One astronomer wrote that there is now conclusive evidence that there are entire galaxies beyond ours made of compressed carbon, which is simply another name for diamonds. It's going to be amazing exploring the cosmos. So the Lord tells us He will give us bodies that are particularly appropriate for exploring the universe and living in the ages to come.

We're going to have bodies designed for heaven. But Paul also points out that the glory of one star differs from another star. In this context, the word, "glory," simply means "outshining." In other words, there will be varying degrees of brightness. If you know Jesus as your Savior, you're going to heaven. But when we get to heaven, the Bible says that crowns will be given for the service we've rendered to the Lord on earth.

You might say, "I have no desire to walk around with a crown on my head in heaven, so what's the big deal?"

But these crowns are not something we'll wear. Revelation 4:10 declares that we'll cast these crowns at the feet of Jesus, the One who did so much for us. In and of itself, that should be enough motivation to serve Him here—so that we might bring Him a gift when we see Him face to face.

But it's more than that. These crowns will determine what kind of star we are in heaven. Paul here is saying that there will be different intensities. Again, you might say, "I don't care if I'm a star or not." But the glory, or "outshining," speaks of your capacity to enjoy eternity.

When my kids were babies, whenever they banged on pots and pans with a wooden spoon, they'd giggle and have the time of their lives. Yet if I played those pots and pans with a wooden spoon, I wouldn't feel a thing because I'm no longer one year old. My capacity to understand and enjoy life is far beyond beating pots and pans. My world is bigger. My experience is greater.

So too, in heaven, we're all going to be happy. Everyone will be elated. But our capacities will differ. Everyone will be filled to the brim, but the size of the cups will differ greatly. Some will be great big barrels filled to the top. Some will be tiny teacups, also full to the brim. Some will be in heaven with a limited capacity to enjoy and experience eternity. Sure, they're saved. But they did nothing with their walks. They rendered no real service to the Lord. They just cruised through life—watching television and waiting to move on to eternity. And we'll see them banging pots and pans in heaven.

But others, because they were wise on earth, because they were soul winners, will have huge capacities in heaven. Therefore, don't miss the big picture, gang. Don't just make it to heaven by the skin of your teeth. Be wise. Enlarge your capacity to experience eternity by winning souls, by sharing the gospel.

As believers, most of us know we should be sharing and witnessing. We've been trained. We know the Scriptures. We've even taken classes and seminars. But we don't do what we know we should do and have been trained to do. We don't witness. Why? I'm convinced it's because we have been mistaken concerning what witnessing or winning souls is all about. We look at witnessing in the context of confrontation, telling people they're sinners and they're going to hell unless they get saved. But when we see people react against that kind of witnessing, when they put up walls and walk

away from us, we say, “I’m tired of confronting people.” And we stop witnessing.

Witnessing, however, is not confrontation. Look with me at an illustration of witnessing not as confrontation but as invitation . . .

Invitation

In Numbers 10, we see the people of God journeying toward the Promised Land. As they set out, Moses talks to his brother-in-law, a man named Hobab . . .

> *And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father in law, We are journeying unto the place of which the* LORD *said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the* LORD *hath spoken good concerning Israel.*
>
> Numbers 10:29

Rather than telling Hobab he was a sinful Midianite and a pagan idolater, Moses said, "Hobab, come with us. We're going to a place that will be good for us."

In the same way, we can tell people we work with, live by, and are related to "Come with us. We're going to a good place. We're going to heaven."

For us as believers, this earth is as bad as it's ever going to get. We're just passing through this wilderness on our way to heaven. But for the unbeliever, this world is the best it's going to be. For them, it's all downhill from here.

Notice what Hobab said . . .

> *And he said unto him, I will not go; but I will depart to mine own land, and to my kindred.*
>
> Numbers 10:30

If you've ever tried to witness, does Hobab's answer sound familiar? "I have my own land, my own people," he said.

"Fine. Stay in Midian. Get wiped out when Midian gets attacked," Moses could have said. But he didn't. After extending an invitation, he now gives Hobab an exhortation . . .

Exhortation

> *And he said, Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes. And it shall be, if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the* LORD *shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee.*
>
> Numbers 10:31, 32

"Hobab, don't leave us to go back to your people," Moses said. "You can be eyes for us in the wilderness. You know this territory. You know the dangers and the pitfalls. You can be of tremendous benefit to us."

Jesus did the same thing. Before He spoke to the woman at the well about heaven, He asked for her help. Before He ministered to her, He allowed her to minister to Him by asking for water (John 4:7).

We miss great opportunities if we don't follow the example of Jesus and Moses, if we don't recognize peoples' gifts and abilities. To the doctor, we can say, "Come with us. We need you. You would be such a blessing to us." To the businessman, we can say, "Travel with us. We could use your skills. You could be a blessing to so many who are trying to sort out their finances." To the teacher, we can say, "Join us. Your ability to impact kids would be so beneficial to us."

Inspiration

We have been given the matchless opportunity of sharing the gospel with people. The gospel is *good* news.

> *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
>
> 1 John 1:9

> *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*
>
> 1 John 2:1, 2

We have the privilege of saying to people, "Maybe things in your past haunt you. But I have good news for you: *All* of your sin—every single sin you've ever committed—has been forgiven because Jesus died not only for my sins but for the sins of the whole world."

When we treat people as though they are forgiven, when we treat them like brothers and sisters, a funny thing happens. Like Hobab, they change their minds and join us. The greatest secret I know in winning souls is simply to treat people as if they're already saved. I have seen so many people come into the family of God because they were treated like brothers instead of sinners. Sinners loved to be around Jesus because He would talk to them about the kingdom, about His Father, and about eternity as if they were already believers. May we do the same.

Talk to people as though they're already part of the family of faith. Share with them what you've been learning and ask where they themselves are in their relationship with the Lord. Invite them to join the family of God as we journey together toward heaven. The ice will melt. People will be drawn in. You'll see souls won. And you'll shine for eternity.



HOSEA

Background to Hosea

In the Book of Hosea, we feel the heartbeat of God possibly more clearly than in any other book of the Bible. This prophet would be commanded by the Lord to marry and love a prostitute even though she would be unfaithful to him as a powerful illustration to the people of Israel concerning their relationship with their Husband, Jehovah.

> *Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband; the* LORD *of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the* LORD *hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.*
>
> Isaiah 54:4–6

Even as the church is the bride of Christ, Israel is the wife of Jehovah. But Israel had a tragic tendency to prostitute herself by leaving the relationship she had with God in order to pursue other gods. Thus, in Hosea's wife, Israel would see an illustration of herself.

We need illustrations. I'm reminded of a four-year-old boy, intently coloring a picture.

"What are you drawing?" his dad asked.

Without looking up, the boy said, "I'm drawing a picture of God."

"Son, no one in the whole world knows what God looks like," his dad said.

And still without looking up, the boy said, "Well, they will in a minute or two."

Although we don't have an illustration of what God looks like physically, through Hosea, we see His heart.

Not only would Hosea's marriage be an illustration to the people, but it would provide Hosea himself the unique and rare opportunity to feel what God felt, to experience what Paul calls "the fellowship of suffering."

> *That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;*
>
> Philippians 3:10

To truly know the Lord means not only to experience the power *of* the Lord, but to feel with *Him.* Only one man in the Bible is referred to as the friend of God (James 2:23). And it was to Abraham, His friend, God said to take his only son to Mount Moriah and offer him as a sacrifice to Him. Why did God tell him to do this? Centuries later, Mount Moriah would become known as Golgotha or Calvary. Therefore, I believe God wanted His friend to experience something of the pain He would feel when His only Son would be sacrificed for our sin on that very mountain.

Sometimes the Lord allows His friends—those who want to know Him intimately and walk with Him closely—to experience the fellowship of suffering. On an earthly level, there is a unique bonding that takes place when we go through hard times with someone. When we suffer, we relate to the Lord on a deeper level than when times are easy and prosperous. Therefore, in His surprising command to Hosea, God was actually saying, "I'm going to allow you the privilege of feeling what I feel."

Hosea ministered to the ten northern tribes of Israel from 750 to 714 B.C., which makes him perhaps the longest-ministering prophet in the Bible. He ministered through the reigns of the last six kings of the ten northern tribes and was on the scene when they were invaded by the Assyrians after refusing to heed the Lord's warnings.

The Book of Hosea is divided into two major sections. In chapters 1 through 3, we see the tragedy in Hosea's home life. Chapters 4 through 14 compose the second half, which speaks of a tragedy in Hosea's homeland. After seeing Hosea's personal ordeal in chapters 1 through 3, in chapters 4 through 7, we see a polluted people—particularly the ten northern tribes. In chapters 8 through 10, we see a punished people. In chapter 11, we see a

prized people. In chapters 12 through 14, we see a pardoned people. And through it all, we see the heart and love of God.



HOSEA

Hosea 1:1, 2

1 The word of the LORD that came unto Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uz ziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD.

As God tells Hosea to marry a harlot who was herself the child of a harlot, we see Him setting up this illustration of the relationship His people had with Him.

Hosea 1:3

So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son.

Hosea married Gomer and she bore him a son.

Hosea 1:4, 5

And the LORD said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel. And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.

Hosea was to name his son *Jezreel,* which means "to scatter," as an illustration of what would happen in 721 B.C. when the Assyrians decimated the land and the ten northern tribes scattered, never to be found again.

Hosea 1:6 (a)

And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. . . .

In verse 1, we read that Gomer "bare him a son," referring to Hosea. Here in verse 6, on the other hand, we simply read that she "bare a daughter." In other words, this baby was not Hosea's.

Hosea 1:6 (b)
. . . And God said unto him, Call her name Lo-ruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away.

According to Bible scholar, J. Sidlow Baxter, the literal meaning of *Lo-ruhamah* speaks of the fact that she never knew a father's mercy or love.

Hosea 1:7, 8
But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the LORD their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen. Now when she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son.

Again, this is not Hosea's son.

Hosea 1:9
Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.

Lo-ammi means "Not mine." Even as Lo-ammi was not Hosea's, so too, the Lord says to Israel, "If you will not let Me be your God, you will not be My people." Be it a nation or an individual, the Lord doesn't force His love on anyone. He offers Himself to be a Lord, a Father, a God, a Redeemer, a Savior—but He will not force Himself upon anyone.

"Behold I stand at the door and knock," Jesus said. "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and sup with him and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). Jesus knocks persistently, but gentlemanly. If anyone chooses to open the door, He will come in and be their Lord and live in their heart—but He won't kick in the door.

I'm always amazed by how polite the Lord is. He constantly gives every one of us the choice to give Him entry into our lives or into any part of our

lives. But the choice is always ours.

Hosea 1:10 (a)
Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered . . .

Even in spite of her rejecting the Lord, a prophecy is given to Israel that she would increase in population.

Hosea 1:10 (b)
. . . and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.

Second, the prophecy was given that Israel would turn to God.

Hosea 1:11 (a)
Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together . . .

Third, Israel and Judah would no longer be divided.

Hosea 1:11 (b)
. . . and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

Fourth, Israel would have one head—which speaks of Messiah.

God is not through with Israel. His people shall become numerous as the sand, be called sons of the living God, be reunited once again, and acknowledge one head—the Lord Jesus Christ. Israel is the wife of Jehovah and He is committed to her in spite of her fickleness and faithlessness. This gives me great hope because, as Paul makes clear in Romans 10 and 11, He is relentlessly committed to us, as well.



2 **Hosea 2:1**
Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ru-hamah.

Jezreel, Hosea's legitimate son, is told to rename his brother *Ammi,* which means "My people," and his sister, *Ru-hamah,* which means "Having obtained mercy."

Hosea 2:2–5
Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born, and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst. And I will not have mercy upon her children; for they be the children of whoredoms. For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink.

Jezreel is told to warn his mother of the brutal consequences of her sin.

Hosea 2:6
Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths.

In Job 3, we see this same hedge of protection when God declared that He would plant a hedge around Job so that the enemy would not be able to harm him more than what the Lord allowed.

There is a hedge around every believer that protects us from the attacks and attempts of the enemy to destroy us. If Satan could, he would strike every one of us with disease or death. He would show no mercy whatsoever. But the Lord has a hedge around us and only what God allows for His purposes in strengthening our faith or developing our ministry can touch us. That is why the Bible tells us to give thanks in *everything* (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Nothing can come into our lives except that which the Lord allows.

Hosea 2:7
And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.

In addition to protecting us from that which would harm us from without, the hedge also protects us from within. That is, it prevents us from trying to leave the Lord to go after another lover, to reach out to some other pleasure.

But there's also a hedge round about the person leaving the Lord trying to go after another lover, trying to reach out to some other pleasure. Be it bread, water, or wool; be it drink, contentment, or pleasure, the hedge will prevent us from grasping what it is we think we want apart from God. "If I could just pursue that, even though I know it's wrong; if I could only have that, even though it's not right, I know I would be satisfied," we think. But, because there's a hedge around us, we will find exactly what Gomer found: it won't work. No one can break through this hedge of thorns without getting hurt. There are no exceptions.

In addition to this being a warning, it can also provide comfort because if you have friends, relatives, or family doing what Gomer did, saying, "I'm tired of walking with God. I'm going to pursue the things of the world for awhile"—they'll find there's a hedge between them and what they're hoping to find. If you know people who are wandering away down the path of vulnerability, plant a hedge in prayer and watch God use it to frustrate their attempts to enjoy carnality.

Hosea 2:8
For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal.

The very things Israel hoped to obtain by sacrificing to Baal, God had already given her. That shouldn't be surprising. All we ever want is always in God's hand. Ask Peter. "I go a fishing," he said—not realizing that the very thing he sought was in the hand of Jesus all along (John 21:3–9).

Hosea 2:9, 10

Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness. And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand.

None of Gomer's companions would be able to save her from the judgment that would come upon her. In a larger sense, the allies Israel so eagerly trusted and the idols she so sacrificially worshiped would prove powerless to save her.

Hosea 2:11
I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts.

Scholars believe Israel's feast days were celebrated not at the temple, as God had intended, but at Dan and Bethel—where images of calves stood. No wonder, then, that God despised this corruption of His plan for His people (Isaiah 1:13).

Hosea 2:12 (a)
And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me . . .

Israel mistakenly attributed the fruit with which God so graciously and consistently blessed her to the hand of her idols.

Hosea 2:12 (b)
. . . and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them.

Following the Assyrian invasion, vineyards and orchards would become overgrown and, with fences destroyed or deteriorated, the wild animals would have a field day in them.

Hosea 2:13, 14 (a)

And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgat me, saith the LORD. Therefore, behold, I will allure her . . .

"My people forgot Me," the Lord declares. "Therefore, I will . . ." One would think He would say, ". . . abandon her." That's what I would have said. But the incomprehensible grace and mercy of God causes Him to say not, "I will abandon her," but, "I will allure her." And I am so thankful He does, for it is that same grace and mercy that allowed Him not to abandon us but to die for us even while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8).

Hosea 2:14 (b)
. . . and bring her into the wilderness . . .

When God redeemed His people from bondage in Egypt, we read in Deuteronomy that He brought them to the wilderness to humble them, to prove them, and to do them good (8:2, 3, 16). We read in John 1:28 that it was to the wilderness region of Bethabara that people went to be baptized by John. It was in the wilderness that Jesus was completely triumphant over Satan (Matthew 4), and in the wilderness that 5,000 were fed (Matthew 15:33). Throughout Scripture, we see that God sometimes does His most powerful work in wilderness settings. Therefore, if you're in such a place right now, take heart and take hope. As He did with His people, God has drawn you there in order to humble and prove you—but also to do you great good.

Hosea 2:14 (c)
. . . and speak comfortably unto her.

"Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem," the prophet Isaiah was told (40:2). God would bring His people to the wilderness to speak words of true comfort to them—not the fickle comfort the world gives, but the eternal comfort that can only come from drawing close to Him (Matthew 5:4; 2 Corinthians 1:4).

Hosea 2:15 (a)
And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope . . .

Achor means "trouble." It was in the valley of trouble that Achan was stoned for being in possession of forbidden spoils from Jericho (Joshua 7). Here in Hosea, however, this valley of trouble has a door of hope, for, following the wilderness experience of invasion by Assyria and captivity in Babylon, Israel would never again walk in idolatry.

Hosea 2:15 (b)
. . . and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.

Following her captivity, Israel would sing again (Ezra 2:65)—just as she did following her bondage in Egypt.

Hosea 2:16
And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali.

Ishi means "My husband." *Baali* means "Master" or "Baal." In other words God is saying, "You'll no longer address Me as a false god because you'll know Me intimately."

Hosea 2:17, 18
For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name. And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely.

The beasts of the field that ate the crops in verse 12 would now do no more harm.

Hosea 2:19, 20
And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD.

In Jeremiah 3:8, we read that God had given His people a single bill of divorce because she had committed adultery. Here, however, three times we see Him committing Himself to betrothing her again.

Hosea 2:21, 22
And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel.

After God regathered His people from their time in the wilderness brought on by the impending invasions of Assyria and Babylon, He would hear their prayers and would send rain upon the earth, which, in turn, would respond by being fruitful once again.

Hosea 2:23
And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.

The people who had been scattered in 1:5 would now be scattered or sown in their own land, where they would take root and be fruitful. They who had known no mercy in 1:6 would now know mercy. They who had not been God's people in 1:9 would now be His.

In all of this, we see the heart and promises, the passion and unspeakable mercy of God. Even though Gomer would prove to be unfaithful time and again, through Hosea's treatment of her, we see the heart of God toward His people, saying, "I'll allure you. I'm committed to you. I'll walk with you in a marriage relationship."



3 In chapter 3, Hosea's wife leaves yet again. Our tendency would be to leave a wife like that. After all, didn't Jesus say if our husband or wife is unfaithful, we have a right to divorce them? Yes, but He said this only because of the hardness of our hearts (Mark 10:5). In other words, we have that right—but, as modeled by Hosea, we don't have to exercise it . . .

Hosea 3:1–3
Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine. So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley: And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee.

Hosea found his wife this time actually in the town square, walking the streets as a prostitute. He paid fifteen pieces of silver—half the price of a slave—and a homer and a half of barley, which was half the ration given to a cow. In this, we see that her life was beginning to reveal the toll her sin was taking.

Immorality takes a toll not only physically, but on the soul, as well. The soul is comprised of the mind and emotions. Therefore, the person who makes a practice of immorality will find his very personality eroded. Like peeling layers from an onion, immorality peels away the layers of your soul. And what is lost in those seasons of immorality are lost permanently. Oh, you can be forgiven—and yet a toll is taken. That's why the Bible says he who practices immorality lacks understanding (Proverbs 6:32).

God doesn't say, "Live morally because I don't want you to have any fun." He says, "There's a reason to stay away from immorality. The physical relationship is a spiritual union. Two people become one. In the context of marriage, this is beautiful. But outside of that context, every time you join yourself with another, you lose part of your essence never to regain it."

Hosea 3:4, 5
For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.

Like Gomer, the people of Israel would become bankrupt and impoverished. But they would one day come back. And the Lord would embrace them yet again. Of this burnt-out nation no longer pulsating with vitality, no longer shining with beauty but beat up and blackened in the open market of world history, God says, "I'm not giving up or walking out. Instead, I'm reaching out because My love is absolutely unchangeable."



4 In Chapters 4 through 14, we come to the section that speaks not of the tragedy in Hosea's home life but of the tragedy in his homeland. Through his marriage to Gomer, the allegory has been established. The picture has been painted. Now prophecy begins to be spoken concerning the nation of Israel.

Hosea 4:1, 2
Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.

The Hebrew word translated "controversy" is a legal term. In other words, the Lord declares He wants to file a complaint against His people. Because they didn't know Him, mercy and truth and a relationship with Him was replaced by swearing, lying, murder, theft, and adultery.

Hosea 4:3
Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away.

This speaks of severe drought.

Hebrews 4:4
Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that strive with the priest.

It would be useless to correct these people because they were so intent on sinning that they didn't even listen to the priest—even though, according to Deuteronomy 17:12, this was a crime punishable by death.

Hosea 4:5 (a)
Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night . . .

Israel would be attacked by Assyria in broad daylight and the battle would continue in the dark of night (Jeremiah 6:4, 5).

Hosea 4:5 (b)
. . . and I will destroy thy mother.

"Thy mother" would speak of the cities of Samaria to the north and Jerusalem to the south—both of which would fall by the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians.

Hosea 4:6
My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.

Because God's people had grown bored of His Word, they would no longer be priests, no longer serve Him. As in Hosea's day, I am convinced that the great need of the body of Christ is to know the Word of God. Churches are in confusion, caught up in odd doctrine all for lack of knowledge. It seems people don't want to hear the Word and study the Scriptures. They want to get on a pet doctrine and ride it until they've missed the point completely.

Hosea 4:7
As they were increased, so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory into shame.

It was as they prospered financially that God's people sinned against Him. Some preachers insist that if you're walking in godliness, you'll prosper financially. But here God says prosperity itself can create problems. Therefore, it is not always God's plan for His people to prosper financially. Yes, He will bless us exceedingly abundantly above all we can ask or think (Ephesians 3:20)—but there are also times when we'll experience difficulties and challenges physically, financially, or emotionally because He knows we have a tendency to forget Him when the going is too easy.

Hosea 4:8, 9
They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity. And there shall be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings.

Because the priests were erring, the people were following in error. Poet John Donne was right when he said no man is an island. Each of us affects others. That's why we have to walk in rightness.

Hosea 4:10
For they shall eat, and not have enough: they shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase: because they have left off to take heed to the LORD.

"Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" the psalmist declares. "For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness" (Psalm 107:8, 9). It is no wonder we read that God's people would eat but not be satisfied—for how could they be if they no longer acknowledged the only Source of true satisfaction?

Hosea 4:11
Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" the Lord declares (Jeremiah 17:9). We have a hard enough time knowing our own hearts without wine further clouding the issue.

Hosea 4:12
My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them: for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God.

Stocks refer to wooden idols and the staff refers to the practice of using different rods to make decisions (Ezekiel 21:21, 22)—rather than waiting on the Lord for guidance.

Hosea 4:13, 14
They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and elms, because the shadow thereof is good: therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses shall commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom, nor your spouses when they commit adultery: for themselves are separated with whores, and they sacrifice with harlots: therefore the people that doth not understand shall fall.

The context here is of the prostitution that accompanied the worship of false gods. It is as if this sin could not be dealt with individually, but was so

infectious that it would take nothing less than the fall of the entire nation to free the people from it.

Hosea 4:15 (a)
Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend . . .

Judah, learn the lesson of what's happening in the north and don't repeat their mistakes. Watch out.

Hosea 4:15 (b)
. . . and come not ye unto Gilgal . . .

Once the place where the children of Israel were circumcised as a sign of a renewal of their covenant relationship with God as they were poised to enter the Promised Land (Joshua 5), in Hosea's day, Gilgal was a center of idol worship (9:15; 12:11).

Hosea 4:15 (c)
. . . neither go ye up to Beth-aven, nor swear, The LORD liveth.

The name *Beth-aven* or "house of vanity" is substituted for Bethel or "house of God" because, although Bethel was the place where God appeared to Jacob (Genesis 28:17), when the nation was divided, Jeroboam made one of two cities where a golden calf was worshiped (1 Kings 12:28). In this context, saying, "The Lord liveth" would have been equivalent to taking His name in vain.

Hosea 4:16
For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer: now the LORD will feed them as a lamb in a large place.

A backsliding heifer speaks of one who struggled to pull away from the yoke. Refusing to bear the yoke of God's love and protection, following the Assyrian invasion, His people would be scattered in the wilderness.

Hosea 4:17
Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.

The Hebrew word translated "joined" literally means "fascinated."

"My spirit shall not always strive with man," God declared (Genesis 6:3). Thus, He would leave Israel to the consequences of her choice.

Hosea 4:18, 19
Their drink is sour: they have committed whoredom continually: her rulers with shame do love, Give ye. The wind hath bound her up in her wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

Israel would be carried away as if blown by the wind.



5 **Hosea 5:1 (a)**
Hear ye this, O priests; and hearken, ye house of Israel; and give ye ear, O house of the king; for judgment is toward you . . .

Priests, people, and king would all be judged because all had contributed to Israel's sin.

Hosea 5:1 (b), 2
. . . because ye have been a snare on Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor. And the revolters are profound to make slaughter, though I have been a rebuker of them all.

Mizpah means "watch tower." *Tabor* means "lofty place." Both were hunting locations and, thus, symbols here of the trap of idolatry into which Israel had so willingly walked.

Hosea 5:3–5
I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me: for now, O Ephraim, thou committest whoredom, and Israel is defiled. They

will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the LORD. And the pride of Israel doth testify to his face: therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity; Judah also shall fall with them.

Although the Lord knew Israel and Judah, they refused to know Him.

Hosea 5:6
They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the LORD; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them.

"Ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart," the Lord declares (Jeremiah 29:13). Israel brought flocks and herds to seek the Lord—but, as Jesus would later say, her heart, His one request—was far from Him (Matthew 15:8).

Hosea 5:7
They have dealt treacherously against the LORD: for they have begotten strange children: now shall a month devour them with their portions.

Some scholars translated "month" as locusts. As seen in Joel, locusts did indeed descend upon Israel, leaving only devastation in their wake. Others say the word "month" speaks of the fact that in a month, Assyria would demand from Israel a heavy tax of fifty shekels per head (2 Kings 15:19, 20). Either way—whether by locust or tax, Israel would experience the effects of her arrogant idolatry.

Hosea 5:8
Blow ye the cornet in Gibeah, and the trumpet in Ramah: cry aloud at Beth-aven, after thee, O Benjamin.

"Blow the trumpet, Hosea. Sound the alarm. My people continue to ignore Me and are determined to turn away from My Word. Therefore, the

enemy is not far behind."

Hosea 5:9–11
Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke: among the tribes of Israel have I made known that which shall surely be. The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound: therefore I will pour out my wrath upon them like water. Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment, because he willingly walked after the commandment.

The commandment referred to here is the one given by Jeroboam to worship calves at Dan and Bethel rather than to worship the Lord in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12).

Hosea 5:12–14
Therefore will I be unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness. When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound. For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue him.

"I'll come first as a moth," the Lord declares. "But if My people don't respond, I'll come as a lion."

We have all experienced this to one degree or another. When we are in times of rebellion, something eats at us from within and we say, "I've got to get back to the place of prayer. I need to put away that sin." But if we don't respond to the fluttering of the moth, because the Lord loves us too much to let us continue in sin, He comes as a lion. Let me encourage you to respond to the fluttering of the moth because the ripping of the lion is tough. It's painful, brutal, and unnecessary. Yet if we won't respond to His gentle voice, we'll hear His loud roar.

Hosea 5:15

I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.

It was in the house that the prodigal son decided to leave his father. It was in the pigpen that he decided to return (Luke 15). It was prosperity that caused God's people to forget Him (verse 7)—and it would be affliction that would bring them back.

Our Father, being infinitely more loving than we could ever be as earthly parents, desires to bless us beyond all we can ask or even think—yet when the blessings He gives turn our hearts from Him, He reluctantly withdraws His hand of blessing in order that we will once again seek Him. The question then becomes not "Why is God so hard?" but "Why are we so dumb?"



6 **Hosea 6:1**
Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.

Speaking through Hosea, the Lord shows He is truly *Jehovah-ropheka,* or the God who heals (Exodus 15:26). The Lord wants to heal these people, but before there can be healing, there must be tearing. Before there can be binding, there must be cutting. Even as cancer must be dealt with severely, the Lord says, "Allow Me to have My way. Allow Me to do what needs to be done even if it's painful—for that is the only way you will be healed."

Maybe you have felt some of that pain as the Lord cut certain things from your life, allowing the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God to operate on specific areas. It's a painful process, but healing is sure to follow. That's always the way of the Lord.

Hosea 6:2
After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.

"We're going to be torn and cut up for two days," Hosea tells the people of Israel. "But after three days, we will rise up." The third day always speaks of resurrection.

> But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.
>
> 2 Peter 3:8

In the year A.D. 70, Jerusalem was destroyed. The people of Israel scattered and ceased to be a nation. From A.D. 70 to the present time, they've been struggling. Even now, they fight for their very existence. For 2,000 years—two days in the Lord's economy—she's been in turmoil. But I suggest that somewhere in the beginning of the third Millennium—the third day—Israel will be revived when the Prince of Peace returns.

> **Hosea 6:3, 4**
> **Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth. O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.**

"I've promised to revive you on the third day," the Lord says. "I've promised to give you rain that will bless you agriculturally. But your commitment to Me is like dew. It's there for a few moments, but when the sun comes out, when challenges come, your commitment disappears." Jesus would use this same analogy in describing what happens to people who embrace the Word initially, but drop it in the heat of trials (Matthew 13).

> **Hosea 6:5–7**
> **Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth. For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But they like men**

have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.

"It wasn't your sacrifices and burnt offerings I was after," the Lord says. "I wanted you to be a people who show mercy toward each other and have a passion for Me."

The word, "knowledge," speaks not of knowing about the Lord but of knowing Him intimately. Even as these people were serving Baal, they were still going to the temple of God religiously. They were there for worship every Sunday morning and Bible study every Wednesday night. They were serving on committees and singing in the choir—but their hearts were far from God. Over and over in the prophecy of Hosea, we hear the heartbeat of God, saying, "I want your love."

Hosea 6:8–11
Gilead is a city of them that work iniquity, and is polluted with blood. And as troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent: for they commit lewdness. I have seen an horrible thing in the house of Israel: there is the whoredom of Ephraim, Israel is defiled. Also, O Judah, he hath set an harvest for thee, when I returned the captivity of my people.

Gilead was one of the three cities of refuge on the other side of the Jordan. Thus, it would be a city of the Levites. Yet even they were defiled by sin. The entire nation—not only of Israel but of Judah as well—was infected and polluted by sin. And the harvest they would reap would be the one they themselves sowed (Galatians 6:7).



7 **Hosea 7:1, 2**
When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, and the wickedness of Samaria: or they commit falsehood; and the thief cometh in, and the troop of robbers spoileth without. And

they consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness: now their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face.

Here, the Lord is saying, "I wanted to heal these people. But their iniquity was discovered or, literally, flaunted." It's not as though the Lord is a harsh taskmaster, saying, "I won't heal you because you've sinned." No, He's saying, "I wanted to heal you, but couldn't because you were so proud of your sin."

There was a time in our own country when people were embarrassed about their sin. Now it's flaunted, leaving us to wonder how much healing, how many blessings are averted because of it.

Hosea 7:3
They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies.

Those in authority as well as those in the general population not only tolerated but celebrated the liberal state of their society.

Hosea 7:4–7
They are all adulterers, as an oven heated by the baker, who ceaseth from raising after he hath kneaded the dough, until it be leavened. In the day of our king the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine; he stretched out his hand with scorners. For they have made ready their heart like an oven, whiles they lie in wait: their baker sleepeth all the night; in the morning it burneth as a flaming fire. They are all hot as an oven, and have devoured their judges; all their kings are fallen: there is none among them that calleth unto me.

Israel's sin is compared to the heat of an oven. Although she thought she could control it, although she thought she could both walk in sin and walk with God, she would be devoured by the very heat she thought she could control.

Hosea 7:8

Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned.

Israel was like a pancake—hot on the bottom but raw on the top. In other words, she was a mixture. Jesus would use a similar analogy when He called the church at Laodicea lukewarm (Revelation 3:16). Throughout Scripture, we see injunctions against mixture. Repeatedly, the Lord speaks against it as if to say, "Either be on fire so I can use you, or be cold so I can convict you, but don't be half-baked or lukewarm."

Hosea 7:9
Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.

Israel wasn't even aware that her vitality and vibrancy were gone. In Judges 16, we see the same thing happen in the life of Samson. One of the saddest verses in the Bible is where we read that he stood up and "wist not that the Spirit of the Lord was departed from him" (Judges 16:20). His hair was cut and now he was powerless—but he didn't even know it until it was too late.

This is what's tricky about losing our spiritual vitality. We don't even know it until the enemy is there. We realize only too late that our strength is gone. To the people of Israel, Hosea says, "Yes, you're celebrating your liberality right now and enjoying your material prosperity. But you don't realize the enemy is at the gates. You're going to stand up like Samson, thinking you'll be able to take them on, but you're going down. A stranger will devour you." Indeed, just as Philistines devoured Samson, so the Assyrians would devour Israel.

If we ignore our walk with the Lord—our devotional life, times of prayer, times of fellowship—there will be an enemy from hell on the way. When he comes, we can't stand up to him if we have no backlog, no history, no consistency in our walk with the Lord. And we'll go down as a result.

The disciples found this to be true. When Jesus was on Mount Hermon, the disciples below were trying to cast out a demon from a boy. But they

were powerless to do so. When Jesus came down, He cast out the demon—and the disciples said, "Why couldn't we do that?"

"This kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting," Jesus answered (Matthew 17:21).

The question obviously is, "How could the disciples have known this would happen?"

And that's the point Jesus is making. We should be living a life of prayer and fasting because we don't know when we're going to be face to face with the enemy. We need to have a history, a backlog, a discipline of fasting and prayer so that when the enemy does come, when the opportunity does arise, we'll have the power to deal with the challenge.

Israel mistakenly thought that, because she was prospering, she would be invincible. Little did she know that in a matter of years Assyria would destroy her. Don't be like Israel. Don't find yourself sidelined by the enemy because you didn't take seriously the message of Hosea. Don't think that you don't need to pray or seek the Lord with intensity but that you'll just cruise into church occasionally. If you do, like Israel, you'll be half-baked. Like Samson, you'll be powerless.

Hosea 7:10–12
And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and they do not return to the LORD their God, nor seek him for all this. Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria. When they shall go, I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven; I will chastise them, as their congregation hath heard.

After laying her eggs, if an intruder comes by, a mother dove will pretend that her wing is broken to distract the intruder. The reason she's called silly is because, when you see a bird flopping on the ground, you know there must be a nest close by. "You're just like a dove," the Lord said to His people. "You're going to Assyria and Egypt for help instead of coming to Me. As a result, you're going to be overtaken." Indeed, the people they were looking to were the very ones that would devour them. By flopping around, Israel would become an easy target.

Hosea 7:13–16
Woe unto them! for they have fled from me: destruction unto them! because they have transgressed against me: though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me. And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds: they assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me. Though I have bound and strengthened their arms, yet do they imagine mischief against me. They return, but not to the most High: they are like a deceitful bow: their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue: this shall be their derision in the land of Egypt.

God had provided, protected, and prospered Israel. He had found her, fed her, and fought for her. Yet for all of that, rather than repent and return to Him, Israel rebelled against Him, turning instead to her powerless idols and relying on her faulty alliances.



8 Hosea 8:1
Set the trumpet to thy mouth. He shall come as an eagle against the house of the LORD, because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law.

The eagle was the national symbol of the Assyrians. Here, the Lord identifies the very group that would devour the ten northern tribes.

Hosea 8:2, 3
Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee. Israel hath cast off the thing that is good: the enemy shall pursue him.

Didn't Jesus say the same thing?

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name

done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Matthew 7:22, 23

These people, like those who stand before Jesus in the day of judgment, will soon find out that although they might have been going through the motions of serving Him, He never knew them. This reminds us that a person who only knows about the Lord in his head without having a relationship with Him in his heart can actually miss heaven by eighteen inches.

Hosea 8:4–7
They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not: of their silver and their gold have they made them idols, that they may be cut off. Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off; mine anger is kindled against them: how long will it be ere they attain to innocency? For from Israel was it also: the workman made it; therefore it is not God: but the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces. For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up.

Rather than seeking the Lord, the people of Israel went to great effort and expense to establish kings and idols so that they could be like the surrounding nations. But whatever a man sows, he reaps (Galatians 6:7). Therefore, because she sowed the seed of self-reliance, she would reap a more devastating crop than she could have imagined when she would have only herself to rely upon as the Assyrians advanced upon her.

Hosea 8:8–11
Israel is swallowed up: now shall they be among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure. For they are gone up to Assyria, a wild ass alone by himself: Ephraim hath hired lovers. Yea, though they have hired among the nations, now will I gather them, and they shall sorrow a little for the burden of the king of princes. Because Ephraim hath made many altars to sin, altars shall be unto him to sin.

Not until she was in captivity would Israel see the sin of her idolatry.

Hosea 8:12
I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing.

"I wrote My law for Israel, but it was counted as strange," the Lord declares. In other words, they thought it was written for someone else. How often do we sit in a Bible study and say, "Oh, I wish my husband was here to hear that," or, "I wish my neighbor would get this message," or, "I wish my boss would understand that point." The Lord writes His Word for *us*. Therefore, we are in terrible danger whenever we think it was written for someone else.

Hosea 8:13, 14
They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of mine offerings, and eat it; but the LORD accepteth them not; now will he remember their iniquity, and visit their sins: they shall return to Egypt. For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples; and Judah hath multiplied fenced cities: but I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof.

These people were doing what we often do in contemporary American Christianity. They were building ministries, programs, and gated communities. But they lost their personal, vital, intimate relationship with the Lord in the process.



In chapter 9, we see five things Israel would experience as a punished people. These same experiences will befall us if we forget the Lord. Yet if any apply to you even now, take hope. Thank the Lord that He is showing you where you're at, that you might get right.

Hosea 9:1, 2

Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people: for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God, thou hast loved a reward upon every cornfloor. The floor and the winepress shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail in her.

The death of joy is the first sign that something is wrong in your walk with the Lord.

Hosea 9:3
They shall not dwell in the LORD's land; but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean things in Assyria.

The second result of rebelliousness is a return to bondage. When you're not in the right place with the Lord, you'll find yourself tangled up in the things of the world from which you were previously free.

Hosea 9:4–7
They shall not offer wine offerings to the LORD, neither shall they be pleasing unto him: their sacrifices shall be unto them as the bread of mourners; all that eat thereof shall be polluted: for their bread for their soul shall not come into the house of the LORD. What will ye do in the solemn day, and in the day of the feast of the LORD? For, lo, they are gone because of destruction: Egypt shall gather them up, Memphis shall bury them: the pleasant places for their silver, nettles shall possess them: thorns shall be in their tabernacles. The days of visitation are come, the days of recompence are come; Israel shall know it: the prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad, for the multitude of thine iniquity, and the great hatred.

Third, we see a loss of discernment. Because she had lost her spiritual bearings, Israel thought God's prophets were fools. We will find the same thing to be so in our own walks. If our hearts aren't right, saints will seem like fanatics and spirituality will seem like lunacy.

Hosea 9:8–10

The watchman of Ephraim was with my God: but the prophet is a snare of a fowler in all his ways, and hatred in the house of his God. They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah: therefore he will remember their iniquity, he will visit their sins. I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first time: but they went to Baal-peor, and separated themselves unto that shame; and their abominations were according as they loved.

Israel had walked into sin that was as dark and depraved as any in her history, including the rape and murder of the Levite's wife in Judges 19:16–22, of which Gibeah is a reference.

Hosea 9:11–16
As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird, from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception. Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left: yea, woe also to them when I depart from them! Ephraim, as I saw Tyrus, is planted in a pleasant place: but Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer. Give them, O LORD: what wilt thou give? give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts. All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house, I will love them no more: all their princes are revolters. Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit: yea, though they bring forth, yet will I slay even the beloved fruit of their womb.

A falling birthrate would be the fourth sign of a rebellious people. Spiritually, the same thing will be true of us. When a flock is healthy, there is always natural reproduction. But when a flock—be it a church or an individual—is not healthy, there is no new birth or growth. We read in Acts 8 that, as Philip was preaching the gospel, people were so eager to share that the entire city was filled with joy.

Hosea 9:17

My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations.

The fifth result of rebellion is isolation. You'll know when you've run aground spiritually because you'll feel cut off from the Lord. "Abide in Me and My words in you," Jesus said. "He who abides not in Me is cast forth as a branch and is withered and cast into the fire" (see John 15:4–6). Like Israel, you'll feel burned out, cut off, and you'll wander in circles if you cease to abide in the Lord.

Again, I encourage you to see these signs not as condemnation but as evaluation. If they speak of your own situation, return to the Lord, call upon Him and He will do what it takes to draw you to Himself once again.



10

Hosea 10:1

Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images.

"Goodly images" speaks of Israel's idols. "Why callest thou me good?" Jesus asked. "There is none good but one, that is, God" (Matthew 19:17). The irony is that Israel's gods were constructed in the land and from the very material given her by the only One who is good, the only One who is God.

Hosea 10:2

Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty: he shall break down their altars, he shall spoil their images.

Because there was no Gideon in her midst (Judges 6), Israel's altars would be broken and her idols spoiled by the hands of the invading Assyrians.

Hosea 10:3

For now they shall say, We have no king, because we feared not the LORD; what then should a king do to us?

In Hosea's day, four kings were murdered by their successors in the space of less than thirteen years. But even that would not cause her to take stock and repent of her sin.

Hosea 10:4–6 (a)
They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field. The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of Beth-aven: for the people thereof shall mourn over it, and the priests thereof that rejoiced on it, for the glory thereof, because it is departed from it. It shall be also carried unto Assyria for a present to king Jareb . . .

Beth-aven, or "house of vanity," is a derogatory name for Bethel, or "house of God." There was a rival going on in history between Samaria and Bethel because both cities were centers for calf worship, initially instituted by Jeroboam to keep his people from leaving Israel to travel to Judah in order to worship at the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:28). On the eve of her destruction, Israel doesn't fear the Lord or mourn for her sin. Instead, she fears and mourns only the loss of her idols.

Hosea 10:6 (b), 7
. . . Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel. As for Samaria, her king is cut off as the foam upon the water.

The rapid succession of kings in Hosea's day verifies that their positions were no more secure than air bubbles.

Hosea 10:8 (a)
The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars . . .

Israel's pagan altars would not be exempt in the desolation of the land.

Hosea 10:8 (b)

. . . and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us.

Jesus would use this same language in reference to another day of devastation—the Tribulation (Luke 23:30).

Hosea 10:9
O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah: there they stood: the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them.

Reference is again made to the days of Israel's judges, when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6)—and it led nowhere but to ever darker sin (Judges 19:16–22).

Hosea 10:10, 11
It is in my desire that I should chastise them; and the people shall be gathered against them, when they shall bind themselves in their two furrows. And Ephraim is as an heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn; but I passed over upon her fair neck: I will make Ephraim to ride; Judah shall plow, and Jacob shall break his clods:

The picture here is of the slavery and servitude Israel and Judah would experience under the rule of Assyria and Babylon. No man can serve two masters, Jesus said (Matthew 6:24). But we all will serve one. We'll either serve the Lord of love as friends (John 15:15) or we'll serve the god of this world as slaves.

Hosea 10:12–15
Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you. Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men. Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people, and all thy fortresses shall

be spoiled, as Shalman spoiled Beth-arbel in the day of battle: the mother was dashed in pieces upon her children. So shall Bethel do unto you because of your great wickedness: in a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off.

After the Lord shared His heartbreak concerning the rebelliousness of His people, telling them that their spiritual strength was sapped, their spiritual hair was gray, yet they still thought they were doing okay because, in His grace and mercy, He still allowed blessings to be enjoyed. But He told them the enemy was coming and they wouldn't be able to stand.

If I were the Lord, I'm sure I would have a tendency to write these folks off at this point. If God was like us, His love would be conditional, His patience short, His motives amiss. But God isn't like us. And in chapters 11 through 14, He begins to say to them, "You're a prize to Me," as He gives them glorious hope concerning how He will restore and bless them.



11 Hosea gives us a pulse on the heart of God in a real, more picturesque way than perhaps any other prophet depicts. In chapter 11, we will see that, although Israel was a polluted and punished people, she was also a prized and precious people.

Hosea 11:1
When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.

As we see in Matthew 2:15, this verse prophetically refers to Jesus Christ. When the wise men came to worship the Babe of Bethlehem, Herod told them to tell him where Jesus was so he could worship Him, too. But the wise men were warned in a dream not to return to Herod because Herod was not out to worship Jesus but to destroy this rival to his throne. So the wise men went home a different way. When Herod discovered this, he was so incensed that he ordered the death of every child two years old and younger. But, before the soldiers arrived on the scene, Joseph was warned to take

Jesus into Egypt and remain there, fulfilling Hosea 11:1. *Israel* means "Governed by God." Truly, Jesus was the One who was perfectly governed by God.

Why was this prophecy given?

I suggest it is because Egypt symbolizes the world. You see, Jesus, the Son of God, spent time in Egypt and was called out of Egypt. This reminds me that Jesus is a High Priest who is touched with the difficulties we go through because He was tempted in every point we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Maybe you feel like you're in Egypt. Maybe you think your sin is incredibly tough, that no one could possibly understand it. But Jesus does. No matter what you're facing, no matter how brutal your sin might be, no matter how heavy your bondage might feel, Jesus has tasted it. Every single sin anyone has ever faced, Jesus Christ dealt with. Others might be horrified but Jesus understands. It was when we were in Egypt—before we had any understanding of spiritual things—that God called us. It was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

Hosea 11:2, 3
As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images. I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them.

"I called My people," the Lord declares. "I carried them in my arms. I taught them how to walk. But they didn't acknowledge Me. They served Baal instead."

If you asked God's people in Hosea's day if they loved God, they would say, "Absolutely! We celebrate all of the feasts and go to the temple religiously." And if you asked them about the little idol on their mantels, they would probably say it was just something to inspire them. They were going through the motions of loving God, but their hearts were divided.

Hosea 11:4–6

I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them. He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return. And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels.

Even as a man draws his favorite ox with a rope, so God drew His people with cords of love. And He took off the muzzle so they could eat the food He prepared. Yet, because Israel listened to her own counsel rather than to that of her loving Master, she would be led by Assyria not with cords of love but with the fetters of slavery and would herself be devoured.

Hosea 11:7–9
And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city.

Admah and Zeboim were two cities destroyed when God judged Sodom and Gomorrah. If I were God, I would say, "My people continually backslide from Me and rebel against Me. That does it. I'm through." But I'm a man and not God. And, praise be to His name, He's God and not a man. Therefore, He would not enter the city to destroy it. This, however, presents a divine dilemma—for if God is the Holy One, how could He love such sinful people?

The story is told of a man in World War II gunned down by the Nazis outside of Paris. Two of his friends picked up his body after the skirmish was over and walked half a mile to a small church outside the village. They knocked on the door and asked the priest if they could bury their friend.

"Was he Catholic?" the priest asked.

"No, he was a Methodist," they said.

"You can't bury him in our cemetery," the priest said. "But you can bury him outside the fence."

So his two friends did just that.

A couple of weeks later, these same two friends, marching back through the area wanted to pay their respects at the grave of their friend. They went to the church and walked along the fence but couldn't find the grave. So they knocked at the door of the church and said, "We're confused. We buried our friend a couple of weeks ago, but we can't find his grave."

The priest answered, "That night, after you left, I couldn't sleep a wink. So the next day I got up and moved the fence. He's inside now."

That's what the Lord did for us. How could He be fair and equitable and yet loving and merciful? He moved the fence. How? Through the Cross of Calvary. We're inside because of the blood Jesus shed in our place.

Hosea 11:10
They shall walk after the LORD: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.

That is, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah would roar, and those in captivity would return.

Hosea 11:11, 12
They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: and I will place them in their houses, saith the LORD. Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints.

"I'm going to bring you back again," God says to His people. "You'll be carried into captivity because of your own foolishness, but I won't wipe you out. You're My prize and I'll bring you back again."

12 Chapters 12, 13, and 14 deal with a pardoned people. Chapters 12 and 13 speak of their present rebellion while chapter 14 speaks of their future salvation.

Hosea 12:1 (a)
Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind . . .

Like a dog chasing his tail, Israel chased the wind.

Hosea 12:1 (b)
. . . he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt.

The oil spoken of here is not petroleum but aromatic oils. That is, Israel was making alliances with the Assyrians and negotiating with the Egyptians. In so doing, she was just like her father, Jacob . . .

Hosea 12:2–5
The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him. He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us; Even the LORD God of hosts; the LORD is his memorial.

Just as Jacob was a deceiver, so was Israel. But Jacob was different for, after he was broken by the Lord and was blessed by the Lord, he returned to the Lord.

For topical study of Hosea 12:4 entitled "The Rest of the Story," turn to page **766.**

Hosea 12:6, 7
Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually. He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress.

Rather than being identified as a spiritual man, Israel was likened to a merchant—one whose priorities and energy are directed toward the things of the world rather than to the things of the Lord.

Hosea 12:8
And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin.

Prosperity is not a proof of God's blessing. God's people were sadly deceived in thinking that, because they were rich, they must be doing something right.

Hosea 12:9
And I that am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast.

In the days of the Feast of the Tabernacles, the people dwelled in tents for a week to remind them of their wilderness wanderings. But, here God said He would make them dwell in tents again—not as a symbol but because their houses would be destroyed.

Hosea 12:10
I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.

God's prophets had warned the people directly, through object lesson, and through allegory—not the least of which was Hosea's marriage to Gomer—all to no avail.

Hosea 12:11
Is there iniquity in Gilead? surely they are vanity: they sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal; yea, their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields.

Like Gilead, Gilgal was a center of idol worship.

Hosea 12:12–14
And Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep. And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved. Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly: therefore shall he leave his blood upon him, and his reproach shall his Lord return unto him.

God spoke to Jacob in a dream (Genesis 28). He spoke to Moses through a vision (Exodus 3). He spoke to them both directly and they heeded His voice. But the people He preserved through them heeded none of His words. Therefore, He was left with no choice but judgment.

THE REST OF THE STORY

A Topical Study of HOSEA 12:4

He was the grandson of Abraham, the father of the Jews. And here he was, returning to his homeland. For twenty years, he had been living with his uncle in Haran after tricking his older twin brother out of his blessing and birthright. Realizing he had been swindled, Esau threatened to kill his brother. So Jacob ran for his life to Haran.

But the conflict didn't begin there. It actually began before Jacob and Esau were even born. When their mother, Rebekah, asked why there was a rumbling inside her, the Lord told her it was because two nations were fighting in her womb (Genesis 25:23). When Rebekah's day to give birth arrived, Esau was born first—but grabbing his heel was Jacob. In fact, *Jacob* means "heel snatcher"—one who trips people. From his first moment of life, Jacob was saying, "I want to be first." The desire to be first would drive him to become a capable, successful, brilliant individual. But, at the time of his birth, he lost out to Esau. Thus, as the older of the two, the birthright and blessing would be Esau's.

The birthright entitled one to three important things. The first was property. The one with the birthright received a double inheritance of the property. The second benefit was priesthood. That is, the one with the birthright became the spiritual leader of the family upon the father's death. The third element was progeny. The one with the birthright would be in the line that would bring forth Messiah.

The purpose of the blessing was different. It was pronounced by the father to the one who had the birthright to give him identity in the present and prophecy for the future. In other words, the one with the blessing would receive insight into who he really was and inspiration as to what he would become.

Jacob wanted these things. So one day when Esau was hungry after a day of hunting, Jacob offered him a bowl of pottage, or stew, in exchange for his birthright. Commenting on this incident, Hebrews 12 says that Esau was a profane—or carnal—man, who, for a morsel of meat, a moment of pleasure,

sold his birthright. After downing the stew, however, Esau realized his loss and bitterness began to fill his heart. It came to the surface once again when, years later, Jacob disguised himself as Esau and received the blessing, as well. Esau lamented his loss and threatened to kill Jacob. At that point, Jacob decided it was time for him to leave.

On the first night of his journey, Jacob found himself in a wilderness area called Bethel. No doubt his conscience was bothering him and fear must have filled his heart as he wearily fell asleep, using a rock for a pillow. As he slept, the Lord spoke to him through a dream, promising that He would be with Jacob. Although He didn't condone Jacob's deceit, He appreciated Jacob's desire to obtain the blessing and the birthright, to be a spiritual individual.

When Jacob awoke, he said, "Surely, God is in this place and I knew it not." I love that because there are times when I'm out in the wilderness—my circumstances are barren; perhaps I feel very alone; maybe I'm bothered from within. But, like Jacob, I need to realize the Lord has promised He will never leave me nor forsake me (Hebrews 13:5). Even though you might feel like you're in the wilderness today, even though your conscience might be troubling you, hear the Word of the Lord to Jacob and to you: God is in this place. He's *with* you.

Jacob traveled on to Haran. For twenty years, he and his uncle tried to outwit each other—until the Lord told Jacob it was time for him to return to his homeland. Receiving word that his brother was still alive, Jacob sent word to Esau that he was a rich man, that he wasn't coming to trick him, but rather to share with him. Hearing that Esau was coming to meet him with an army, however, Jacob prayed that the Lord would be with him.

The night before he was to meet Esau face to face, we read in Genesis 32:24 that "an angel wrestled with him until the breaking of the day." When the angel saw that he couldn't prevail against Jacob, he touched Jacob's thigh and it became dislocated.

"Let me go," the angel said. "It's morning."

"I will not let you go except you bless me," Jacob said.

And his name was changed from *Jacob,* "heel snatcher," to *Israel,* "governed by God."

Although he walked with a limp for the rest of his days, Jacob was a stronger man because he was governed by God.

Were it not for Hosea, we would think the only lesson to be learned from this vignette is the importance of prevailing prayer—an important lesson, indeed. But check out what Hosea adds to the story . . .

> *Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us;*
>
> Hosea 12:4

When did Jacob have power over the angel? Hosea tells us it wasn't when he said, "I won't let you go unless you bless me." It was when he was weeping, saying, "Please bless me." In other words, Jacob wasn't in control. He was crying. He wasn't full of bravado. He was broken.

This is life-changing for me. Jacob didn't initiate the wrestling match. It was the Lord who came to Jacob and wrestled with him. But the Lord didn't prevail. Why? Because He wasn't getting through. The same thing happens to us. The Lord comes to us regarding certain issues. We feel convicted about certain areas of our lives. We feel the Lord wrestling with us. But we can fight Him off if we so choose. We can say to Him, "You're not going to have that area of my life. I'm not going to give in on that point. I'm not going to allow You to have Your way in that situation. I refuse."

Jesus will come to you, talk to you, work with you, even wrestle with you—but He won't force you. According to His own counsel, He has limited himself. Therefore, if you wish, you can resist Him. All night long, Jacob resisted the angel. Then, the angel touched Jacob's hip. Suddenly, Jacob was hurting. Realizing his brokenness, Jacob clung to the Lord, crying, "I'm sorry. I'll never let You go. Please bless me." It's a wounded and weeping Jacob saying, "Please bless me," as he grovels in brokenness. And it was then—when his face was in the dirt, when his hip was out of joint, when he was wiped out physically and crying emotionally that the angel said, "You have prevailed."

When did Jacob prevail? When he no longer resisted the work of God in his life, when he simply said, "I need Your blessing. Lord, I need You. I'm

hurting." And it was then that his name was changed. No longer would he pull this out, manipulate that, or accomplish the other because of his abilities or personality. Now he was Israel. Now he would be governed by God. Because he lost, Jacob won.

The day was breaking. A new day was dawning. Jacob, who previously walked confidently with head held high and chest puffed out, now went back to his family limping. And every step he took reminded him that he could do nothing, that he had to lean upon God every step of the way. No longer would he tell God what to do. Instead, he would be submitted to Him completely and totally.

That's what the Lord wants for us. We think that, with our spirituality, our fasting, prayer, and great faith, we can force His hand and make something happen—only to find just the opposite. It is when I'm on my face disjointed, dislocated, and broken, simply saying, "Have Your way. Direct me, Lord. Use me whatever way You want, whatever that might mean, as I walk haltingly through life" that I'm Israel, that I'm governed by Him. The Lord knows that when we are strong either in our own selves or our own spiritual state, we're weak because our strength has limits. But when we're weak and crying out to Him, saying, "Lord, live Your life through me; do Your will in me," we're strong because His strength is limitless. It is only then that He can do what He wants to do in my life—not because of my strength but because of my weakness.

That's my prayer for us. Have Your way with us, Lord—whatever that means and wherever it leads. We'll be happy to limp through life as long as we can lean on You.

13 Hosea 13:1

When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died.

When Israel was right with God, the nations trembled. When she spoke, people listened. In her was authority; through her was ministry and effectiveness. But past greatness does not guarantee future greatness. There

was a time when Israel was great, but now, because they were worshiping other gods, there was no roaring, no trembling, no impact, no effectiveness, no ministry.

Do you remember a time when you sought the Lord with passion, with all of your heart? He blessed you—and then what happened? So often when the blessings of God come, we begin to slack off. We pray if it's convenient, study the Word occasionally, fellowship sporadically. This is what happened to Israel. God had blessed them—but they used His blessings to serve other gods.

Hosea 13:2
And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.

Proskuneo, the Greek word translated "worship" literally means "to turn and kiss." This is the relationship the Lord desires to have with us. Instead, we see His people kissing calves instead.

Hosea 13:3–6
Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney. Yet I am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me. I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me.

Here, the Lord says, "When you were in the wilderness you sought Me. I knew you in the hard times. But when your pastures were green, when times were good, you forgot Me." The pitfall of prosperity must be understood. Yes, the Lord wants to bless you. There's no question about it. He will withhold no good thing from those that love Him (Psalm 84:11). The problem

is, when He blesses us, if we're not very careful, we'll be enamored with His blessings rather than with Him.

Hosea 13:7, 8
Therefore I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them.

The Lord would be to His people as a lion, a leopard, a bear in the invading Assyrian and Babylonian armies. But rather than any of those animals, He longed to be a mother hen, protecting rather than chastening His people (Luke 13:34).

Hosea 13:9
O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.

"You've destroyed yourself," the Lord says, "but in Me—not *from* Me, but *in* Me—is your help." We read in 2 Corinthians 1:20 that all of the promises of God in Jesus are "yea and amen." That is, when we're walking with Jesus, everything we need is found in Him. He doesn't give us life, He *is* our life. He doesn't give us bread, He *is* the bread. He doesn't show us the way. He *is* the way.

Hosea 13:10, 11
I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath.

Because Israel as a whole wanted a king so that she could be like the nations—and because the ten tribes wanted their own king apart from David's line, it is no wonder God's people ended up first with Saul and then with Jeroboam, both of whom were disastrous leaders. Their clamor for a king was an outright rejection of the rule and authority of God Himself (1 Samuel 10:19).

Hosea 13:12
The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is hid.

If only God's people had confessed, their sin could have been forgiven by God. But because they failed to confess their sin, it would be held against them.

Hosea 13:13
The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him: he is an unwise son; for he should not stay long in the place of the breaking forth of children.

In other words, Israel is like a baby who refuses to come out of the womb and be born. God's people refused to break away from their idols into a deeper, fuller, richer life.

Hosea 13:14
I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.

"O death, where is thy sting?" Paul would ask. "O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:55) because God would ransom His people from the power of the grave when Jesus gave Himself a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).

Hosea 13:15, 16
Though he be fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come, the wind of the LORD shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up: he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels. Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword: their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up.

Although Ephraim's very name meant "fruitful" (Genesis 41:52), an east wind—Assyria—would come on the wilderness route from Assyria to Israel and she would dry up. Her capital, Samaria, would become desolate because her men, women, and even infants would be destroyed. And it all would be the tragic result of rebellion against a God who did everything possible to draw them back to Him.



14

Hosea 14:1–3

O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine in iquity. Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.

If they would render God the sacrifice of praise—the calves of their lips—rather than bowing to a calf of gold, the Lord would receive His people graciously. If they would realize that neither their gods nor alliances could save them, they would find mercy.

Hosea 14:4, 5

I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.

Just as sin is contrasted with repentance, the destruction of the land in chapter 13 is contrasted with its potential fruitfulness here in chapter 14 upon the return of God's people to Him.

Hosea 14:6

His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon.

If they returned to Him, God's people would be as beautiful as a fruit-bearing olive tree. And guess what. By God's incredible, unsearchable, amazing grace, as believers, we are actually grafted into that very tree (Romans 11:17).

Hosea 14:7, 8
They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found.

If God's people would return to Him, they would be as a fruitful vine. Again, by His matchless, limitless grace, as believers, we are branches of the one true vine, Jesus Christ—and it is only as we cling to Him that we bear fruit (John 15).

Hosea 14:9
Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.

The transgressors will stumble indefinitely, but those who are wise will hear.

C. H. Spurgeon visited one of his parishioners and saw a weather vane on the man's barn inscribed with the words "God is love."

"Are you trying to say that God's love changes?"

"Oh, no," the farmer said. "I'm saying that no matter which way the wind is blowing, God is still love."

That is the message of Hosea. God's people would break His heart. And yet, just as Hosea was not to give up on Gomer, God would not give up on His people. His love remained consistent toward them—just as it does for you.

Hear the heart of your Father. Come back to Him. Let Him love you.



JOEL

Background to Joel

There is a great deal of truth to the old proverb that says, "I complained I had no shoes until I saw a man that had no feet." Oftentimes, we feel upset, irritated, or bitter about situations that "bug" us or eat at us. But when we come across another person or group of people who have it harder than we do, we suddenly feel foolish for complaining. If something is bothering you right now, I guarantee it's not bugging you as much as the people in Joel's day were being bugged—for when this book was written, the land of Judah had been invaded by locusts that had completely wiped out the land.

The Lord then raised up a prophet named Joel to explain to the people what was happening, what they should be doing, and what the big picture was concerning the invasion of these bugs. Joel came on the scene and, although his message was relatively short, what he said was power-packed and extremely helpful for any who feel bugged, eaten up, or devoured by any given situation.

We don't know a great deal about Joel himself. It is believed he ministered in the year 830 B.C. If that be so, he would be a contemporary of Elisha the prophet and under the rule of Joash who was king of Judah at this time. He would probably have known Elijah, the miracle-worker, and he would certainly know about Jonah.

The book can be divided into two parts. The first part concerns the day of the locust from 1:1 to 2:27. The second part concerns the day of the Lord from 2:28 to the end of the book. As we will see, the day of the locust was actually an illustration, a sneak-preview of what was to come in the day of the Lord. If God's people thought they had a hard time with grasshoppers, they will experience even greater devastation in the day of the Lord.

Three things happen simultaneously in this short but powerful book. First, Joel was speaking to the people practically. After all, they had seen their land, their investments, their future wiped out by locusts. Second, he was speaking to the people prophetically. That is, he was talking about the day of the Lord, a day yet to come. Third, he was actually speaking to us personally. You see, maybe in the last year, your marriage, ministry, business, or family

has been eaten away by locusts of one kind or another. Take heart! This book is for you because Joel addresses the issue for those who feel as if they've been eaten up, destroyed, set back, or devoured in any area of life.



JOEL

1

Joel 1:1
The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel.

Joel means "Jehovah is God"—a good name for a man who would come on the scene and explain to people what God was doing as their land was being destroyed.

Joel 1:2–4
Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpiller eaten.

There are actually ninety kinds of locusts. Here, we see four. The palmerworm gnawed. The Hebrew word translated "locust" means "storming one." "Canker" means "creeping one." The Hebrew word translated "caterpillar" means "stripping one." Thus, we see four waves of this invading army of insects. First came the gnawing, followed by the swarming, creeping, and stripping.

"Have you ever seen anything like this in all of the generations?" God asks. "Tell your children about this."

Joel 1:5
Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth.

As we will see, Joel won't indict the people for idolatry as did the other prophets. Rather, he says the real sin at this time was drunkenness. Here,

however, there would be an instant withdrawal program for them because the vineyards had been devoured.

Joel 1:6, 7
For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion. He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white.

The locusts destroyed everything in their path, leaving only a white powder in their wake. In modern times, they've even been known to eat plastic and metal. Nothing stops them.

Joel 1:8, 9
Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth. The meat offering and the drink offering is cut off from the house of the LORD; the priests, the LORD's ministers, mourn.

This is one of the few references to drink offerings in the Bible. Before the locusts devoured their crops, people would pour wine on top of their sacrifices and offer them as a drink offering to the Lord.

Joel 1:10–12
The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth. Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished. The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men.

The devastation caused by the locusts not only meant that there would be little to eat or drink in the coming year, but it also meant that the country would collapse as indeed it did.

Sometimes we in America have a tendency to feel very secure in our healthy economy, innovative technology, or strong industry. But this book tells us that something as simple as grasshoppers could put an end to all of that. In reality, the strength of every economy in the world is tenuous at best. All it takes is a couple of years of drought or an onslaught of disease and any country will eventually collapse. Just the year before, the people of Joel's day had experienced an almost unprecedented prosperity. They thought they had it made. But when bugs by the trillions descended on their land, their joy withered as surely as did their crops.

Joel 1:13
Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God: for the meat offering and the drink offering is withholden from the house of your God.

The locusts affected Israel not only economically and physically but spiritually as well because, without meat, they were unable to offer the sacrifices upon which the entire religious system of the Old Testament was built.

Joel 1:14, 15
Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD, Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.

There are three major days or eras spoken of in Scripture. We are presently in the day of man (1 Corinthians 4:3). That is, mankind is having his own way. This world has virtually rejected the Lord—and we're suffering the consequences.

Second, we see the day of Christ in 1 Corinthians 1:7 and 8, 2 Corinthians 1:14 and Philippians 1:6. The day of Christ is synonymous with the Rapture of the church—when the church is snatched up into heaven where we'll spend seven years with Him. We'll be given our rewards and live in

the mansions He's prepared for us during this seven-year "honeymoon" with our Bridegroom. It's going to be glorious. But while that's happening, another day will be unfolding on earth—the day of the Lord.

The third day spoken of in Scripture is the day of the Lord (Isaiah 2:12; 13:6; Ezekiel 30:3). Joel is the first to introduce the theme of the day of the Lord and speaks of it five times in his book. The day of the Lord is different from the day of Jesus Christ. It is the time that immediately follows the Rapture when God intervenes directly in the affairs of humanity. It begins with a period of time called the Tribulation—the seven-year period seen in Revelation 6—19, when God finally gets the attention of a world that isn't listening. The day of the Lord continues into the event directly following the Tribulation—the Millennium. The Millennium is 1,000 years of peace when Jesus rules and reigns from Jerusalem—when men shall study war no more, when things will be right at last. The day of the Lord begins with the Tribulation and goes all the way to the end of the Millennium. It starts darkly, but ends in the glorious light of the kingdom age.

That's the way all Hebrew days go. We begin our day at sunrise and progress to night. The Jewish people, however, begin their day with the setting of the sun. Their days begin dark but get lighter. I like that!

Joel 1:16–20
Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, yea, joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered. How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate. O LORD, to thee will I cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field. The beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

The Romans called the locusts "burners of the field." Indeed, when they came it was as if a fire had swept through the area. Maybe a problem,

challenge, or difficulty has swept through our own life, leaving nothing but ashes. Take heart, dear saint. The dawn of the morning is yet to come.



2 Joel 2:1
Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand;

In Numbers 10, we see trumpets used either to gather the people of Israel or to instruct them in battle. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16, we read that, when Jesus descends to rapture us, He will call us with a voice like a trumpet. Revelation 8 talks about trumpet judgments against the rebellious people who have rejected God's Son instead of responding to His goodness.

In our day, the trumpet speaks of our being called up and of judgment coming down. In Joel's day, it spoke of coming together and seeking the Lord.

Joel 2:2
A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great peo ple and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.

The day of the locust is a dark day indeed. Those who have experienced this kind of invasion of locusts tell us the sun cannot even be seen until the locusts are either killed, fly to another destination, or, are blown away by the wind. This darkness also speaks to us, however, because sometimes that's the way our lives feel—gloomy and dark to the point where we don't even want to face a new day.

Joel 2:3, 4 (a)
A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a

desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them. The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses . . .

Under a microscope, the face of a locust looks just like a horse. In fact, one of the ancient Greek words used for locusts is "little horse."

Joel 2:4 (b), 5 (a)
. . . and as horsemen, so shall they run. Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap . . .

When locusts descend upon an area, they make the sound of a low roar.

Joel 2:5 (b)–7
. . . like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array. Before their face the people shall be much pained: all faces shall gather blackness. They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks:

Proverbs 30:27 speaks of the mystery that, although they have no leader, locusts move like an army. The description here is interesting because they picture something much more terrible that will happen in the day of the Lord . . .

And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them. And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were

as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.

Revelation 9:3–10

Revelation 9 describes what will happen in the day of the Lord and the Tribulation. Locusts will be released from the bottomless pit—but they will be unique in that they will be instructed to harm only those who don't have the seal of God on their foreheads, the people on earth who will still reject God even in the day of the Tribulation when they should be turning to Him. Why should they turn to God? Because of the witness we leave behind, because of the testimony of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists who will preach the gospel (Revelation 7), because of the angel flying through the sky, preaching (Revelation 14), because of the two witnesses—most likely Elijah and Moses—who come on the scene preaching and doing miracles (Revelation 11). Those who reject all of this will be attacked by locusts that strike like a scorpion.

Joel 2:8–11
Neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk every one in his path: and when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded. They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief. The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining: And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?

Of this day, Jesus said, "Unless those days were shortened, no one would survive them" (Matthew 24:22). Why is Joel declaring this?

Through him, God is speaking lovingly but honestly to us, saying, "Terrible times are coming. But you don't have to be there. You can escape them by turning to Me."

In Joel's day, the people weren't as interested in future things as they were worried about their crops that were devastated. Maybe you're saying, "The day of the Lord, the day of Christ, and the day of man are all very interesting, but they don't help me with my marriage, my kids, or my business. I'm not concerned about future events because my relationships are breaking down, my finances are drying up, I have more than enough to handle right now." But Joel speaks to this issue as well . . .

Joel 2:12, 13 (a)
Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments . . .

In Old Testament days, people would tear their clothes as a sign of deep sorrow. But the Lord is saying an outward show doesn't change the inward reality. "Don't go through the outward motions of church and spirituality," He says. "Come before Me with brokenness."

Joel 2:13 (b), 14
. . . and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God?

One of Satan's greatest achievements has been to convince the world that God is just waiting to judge people in any way, at any time, for any thing He can. As we see here, nothing could be farther from the truth. He is, in fact, looking for any way possible *not* to judge people, showing patience and mercy to generations.

Joel 2:15–17 (a)

Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar . . .

Although the devastation caused by the locusts rendered a burnt offering impossible, the priests were to gather the people before the altar and offer a sacrifice of tears.

Joel 2:17 (b)–19
. . . and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God? Then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people. Yea, the LORD will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen:

It wasn't for their own comfort and ease that the people asked the Lord to spare their land. It was for His own reputation among the heathen. As we see throughout Scripture, this is a prayer God is only too willing to answer (1 Samuel 12:22; Psalm 106:8; Isaiah 48:9; Ezekiel 20:14).

Joel 2:20, 21
But I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east sea, and his hinder part toward the utmost sea, and his stink shall come up, and his ill savour shall come up, because he hath done great things. Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things.

Whether the army the Lord will remove refers to the army of locusts or the army of Sennacherib that would invade, the Lord would do great things in

restoring the land (Isaiah 10:12).

Joel 2:22–24
Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength. Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil.

The former and latter rains speak of the October rains and the April rains. In other words, God would once again water the land. He would bless His people agriculturally and economically.

Joel 2:25 (a)
And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten . . .

The promise of God is absolutely incredible, for He promises not only to carry us from the point of devastation but actually to make up the lost time.

Joel 2:25 (b), 26
. . . the cankerworm, and the caterpiller, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.

Notice that the Lord refers to the locust as the army He Himself sent. His people were going down a merry little road of ease and prosperity that was leading them right to damnation eternally. So He said, "Kids, I love you too much to let you continue on your way. I'll send an army of locusts if that's what it takes to get you on your knees and to soften your hearts toward Me. Then I'll bless you. Then I'll do mighty things in your life in ways you can't believe."



For topical study of Joel 2:25, 26 entitled "Restoring the Year," turn to page **778.**

Joel 2:27–31
And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed. And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.

Matthew 24, Luke 21, and Revelation 6—19 speak exactly of what verses 30 and 31 describe. During the Tribulation—the seven-year period that God judges a Christ-rejecting world—these signs will be seen on earth —specifically by the people of Israel. And, as we see in verses 27–29, even as the Tribulation comes down, so does the Holy Spirit. You see, we live in the time of the Gentiles, the Church Age. But the church is going to be raptured in the day of Jesus Christ. Then the day of the Lord will dawn. As God begins to judge, He'll pour out His Spirit particularly on the nation of Israel. That's why Paul would declare in Romans 11:26 that all Israel will be saved. The Jews who are now blinded to the fact that Jesus Christ is Messiah will have their eyes opened at that time. And, oh, what a glorious day it will be!

That is the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy, but the fulfillment began in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost. The disciples had seen the resurrected Jesus Christ. They had spoken with Him. He had made Himself known to them. But when He ascended into heaven, the disciples at that time must have wondered, "What now?" They were believers. They had the Holy Spirit inside of them, for we read in John 20 that Jesus had gathered them around

Him, breathed on them, and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." They were born again at that moment. The Spirit indwelt them. But yet they were not a radical, on-fire group of believers, for before He ascended, Jesus told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father, for the Holy Spirit to come upon them (Luke 24:49). In other words, although the Holy Spirit was already in them, they were to wait for Him to come *upon* them.

So they went to Jerusalem. They hung out and prayed behind closed doors, wondering what would happen next. After ten days—on the day of Pentecost—Acts 2 tells us there was the sound of a mighty, rushing wind. There were flames of fire seen on the heads of the one hundred twenty disciples. They began to speak in other tongues, praising God, magnifying the Lord. Suddenly, they were worshiping and praising God to the point that people on the street below began to nudge each other, saying, "There's a party up there. Those guys are drunk."

When Peter was aware that this was what the people outside were thinking, he addressed the group, saying, "These men are not drunk as you suppose. This is that prophesied by Joel." And he quoted Joel 2:28. The fulfillment of Joel's prophecy began at Pentecost. But its fullness will only be seen after the Rapture of the church. Pentecost was the initiation. The Tribulation will be the completion.

Joel 2:32
And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.

We come to a new section in verse 28—for here the subject shifts from the day of the locust to the day of the Lord, a subject developed in chapter 3.

RESTORING THE YEAR

A Topical Study of JOEL 2:25, 26

The Book of Joel sums up a year in the life of a nation. The people of Israel had been plagued by a swarm of locusts that had devoured the land. The crops were destroyed to the point that even the bark of the trees was stripped. There was nothing left. All of the energy and effort of the previous year had been eaten up in a matter of weeks. Maybe as you look back at the past year of your own life, you feel like locusts have descended upon it. Maybe you put a lot of energy into a relationship only to have nothing to show for it now. Maybe you gave a lot of yourself to your job but were passed by for a promotion. Maybe the creeping, gnawing, crawling, stripping locusts have left virtually nothing behind of that which you so lovingly planted, to which you so energetically gave yourself.

But, as He said to His people in Joel's day, God says to you this day, "I will restore the years the locust has eaten. I'll not only give you a fresh start, but will restore to you the years that were lost, the energy that was wasted." When you feel burned out and bugged, disappointed and devastated, remember this promise . . .

Sincere Repenting

> *Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God . . .*
>
> Joel 2:12, 13 (a)

To tap into the blessing, the promise of the Lord to restore the years that have been lost, there must first be sincere repenting. In Old Testament times, people would tear their clothes to show their sorrow. But it was simply an outward gesture rather than an inward reality. Here, the Lord says, "I want you to be truly broken before Me. I want you to come to Me with weeping, fasting, and a broken heart."

The word "repentance" is a military term that simply means "about face." As they march in one direction, when soldiers hear the command, "About face" they turn around and being marching in the opposite direction. Repentance means you were once moving one way, but you turn around and move in exactly the opposite direction.

Repentance begins with confession. The Greek word translated "to confess" literally means "to say the same." In other words, true confession means I come before the Lord and say the same thing He says about my sin. I don't call it an error, a lapse in judgment, or someone else's problem. I say, "Lord, have mercy on me. My attitude stinks. The sin is mine."

Confession is the beginning, but it's not enough to simply confess our sin. We must turn from it, as well. We must say, "You sent and allowed the locusts to come into my life in order to show me that I've been wrong. Now, Lord, I humble myself before You and I'm going to march in the opposite direction."

Solemn Regathering

> *Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the* LORD*, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O* LORD *. . .*
>
> Joel 2:15–17 (a)

"Blow the trumpet," the Lord says, "and call the people to gather to seek My face." The people had been forsaking this kind of assembly. After all, their crops had been coming in well. Their borders were secure. They thought they had no need to gather together. Yet I can't count the number of times I've heard devastated people mark the beginning of their downfall at the point they stopped assembling with the people of God. They were either angry with someone, disappointed in something, or just too busy to make fellowship a priority.

"Blow the trumpet," the Lord says, "and everyone is to be there."
"But I'm nursing my baby," the mother says.
"Be there," the Lord says.
"But we just got married," the groom says.
"Be there," the Lord says. "There are no exceptions."

People think they can go it alone. But it doesn't work that way. You see, our God is a Father. As a father, I could say, "Kids, just eat whenever you want. We won't have a dinner hour. We won't have family devotions. We'll just have kind of a 'cosmic family.' " But I would be a very poor father if that was my mindset. I want my family to be together. Why? It's important for them to interact. It's important for me to both observe them together and to talk to them as a unit. It's important for them to talk things through and to work things out.

“I can just pray out in the woods,” some say. “I can have my own worship service—just me and the Lord.” The problem is, the New Testament knows nothing of that kind of Christianity. The ones who try to go it alone are vulnerable to getting picked off. The people of Israel discovered this. As they traveled through the wilderness, the Amalekites would attack the ones lagging behind (Deuteronomy 25:18). The same is still true. To grow as a believer and progress on this pilgrimage, I need to assemble with brothers and sisters who will sometimes bless me and other times bug me. It’s all part of being a family.

Spirited Rejoicing

> *But I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east sea, and his hinder part toward the utmost sea, and his stink shall come up, and his ill savour shall come up, because he hath done great things. Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the* LORD *will do great things.*
>
> Joel 2:20, 21

As the trumpet blew, the people who gathered were surrounded by the devastated crops and barren vineyards that had been devoured by locusts. Yet what does the Lord say? He says, "I want you to rejoice because I made a promise to you and I want you to act as though it's already come to pass." That's what faith is. There are many ways to please God, but not one of them lacks faith as an ingredient (Hebrews 11:6). The world says, "If I see it, I'll believe it."

The Lord says, "Believe it and then you'll see it."

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice," Paul would say (Philippians 4:4). In other words, "I'm going to tell you over and over again to rejoice in the Lord." Believe the promise of the Lord even before you see it worked out because faith is essential to seeing the fullness of God's blessings released.

When my daughter, Mary Elizabeth, was about two years old, I remember telling her a bedtime story about a big, red bear who came in the house and said, "Mary, grab my neck. We're going for a walk." So in the story, little Mary grabbed the bear's neck and they go for a walk through Jacksonville and all of the various stores and shops. At the end of Jacksonville, they go into the Jacksonville Trader. Inside the store, the bear sees a big box and in the box is a beautiful baby doll. The bear grabs the box and has the people wrap it, and gives it to Mary.

At that point, Mary jumped up excitedly and said, "Where is it, Daddy? Where is it?"

"Where's what?" I asked.

"The dolly!" Mary said as she looked under the chair, under the bed, and in her closet. You see, Mary was so into the story that she believed what I was saying had actually happened.

The next day I bought the doll.

"If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give good gifts to His?" Jesus asked (Luke 11:13).

If you're saying, "Wow! Beautiful! Thank You, Lord!" as you read His promises in the Word, you can be sure He's going to be so delighted by your faith that blessing you will be His joy (Matthew 8:10).



3 Joel 3:1–3

For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captiv ity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land. And they have cast lots for my people; and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink.

Here, the Lord declares that, in the day of the Lord, He will judge all nations on the basis of how they treated His people—including those who sold Jewish boys and girls into slavery and used the money to indulge their flesh. This has happened throughout history. In A.D. 70, the Roman general, Titus, killed one and a half million Jews and sold thousands into slavery in a three-month period alone. In our own day, of course, there was the horror of the holocaust of World War II.

But the Lord will one day bring all nations to the valley of Jehoshaphat where they will answer to Him. Where is this valley? It's the Kidron Valley —a small valley that only takes a couple of minutes to walk through that leads to the Mount of Olives. It was called the Valley of Jehoshaphat because it was there that Jehoshaphat had a great victory (2 Chronicles 20).

In Matthew 25, we read that at the end of the Tribulation, when the seven-year period of judgment is over and before the world is ushered into the 1,000 years of peace in the Millennium, God will call all of the nations together to judge them. In the Valley of Jehoshaphat, or the Kidron Valley, the Lord will determine which people will be allowed to go into the Millennium. What will be the measure? How they treated the Jews in the day of Tribulation. Those who cared for them, stood by them, and watched over them will be allowed to come into the kingdom. Those who ignored them, who didn't care about them, will be cast into hell itself. Why will that be the criterion? Because when the Jews recognize Jesus as their Messiah midway through the Tribulation, antichrist will wage war against them. Therefore, any nation or individual who stands with them places his own life in jeopardy for the cause of Christ.

On the other hand, this gathering of the nations could refer to the final battle, the battle of Armageddon. We know that this brutal, bloody battle in which all of the nations of the world will converge in Israel will be in the valley of Megiddo. This valley is approximately two hundred miles in length and one hundred miles wide—enough for the nations of the world to converge in battle. But suddenly, when things look hopeless for Israel, Jesus will appear. Thus, whether this passage refers to the battle of Armageddon or to the judgment of Matthew 25, the enemies of God's people will be judged very definitely.

Joel 3:4–8

Yea, and what have ye to do with me, O Tyre, and Zidon, and all the coasts of Palestine? will ye render me a recompence? and if ye recompence me, swiftly and speedily will I return your recompence upon your own head; Because ye have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried into your temples my goodly pleasant things: The children also of Judah and the children of Jerusalem have ye sold unto the Grecians, that ye might remove them far from their border. Behold, I will raise them out of the place whither ye have sold them, and will return your recompence upon your own head: And I will sell your sons and your daughters

into the hand of the children of Judah, and they shall sell them to the Sabeans, to a people far off: for the LORD hath spoken it.

The people of Tyre and Sidon, as well as the Philistines, not only plundered God's temple, but sold His people into slavery. Therefore, because the law of sowing and reaping is an immutable law of God (Galatians 6:7), God's people would eventually be freed while history shows that they themselves would be sold into slavery after they were conquered by Alexander and the Greeks.

Joel 3:9, 10
Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up: Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong.

In Isaiah 2:4, we read that in the Millennium, swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks because peace will render them obsolete. Here, however, the Lord says just the opposite. In the Tribulation period, He'll say, "If you have plows, make them into swords. If you have pruning hooks, sharpen them for spears because war is coming."

Joel 3:11
Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O LORD.

As the armies assemble God's people pray, "O, Lord, let Your mighty ones come down." Who are the mighty ones? We are. When the world looks like it's going to be blown to bits, they'll look up and exclaim, "Behold, He cometh with 10,000 of His saints" (Jude 14).

Joel 3:12, 13 (a)
Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about. Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe . . .

In Revelation 14, we see this "putting in of the sickle" in relationship to the battle of Armageddon.

Joel 3:13 (b), 14
. . . come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

Whether they have come to the Valley of Jehoshaphat or to Megiddo, whether they have come to be judged or to fight, the peoples' future will indeed be decided. Maybe you have friends, children, or parents who are in the "valley of decision" even now. Wage war on their behalf through prayer that they might make the right decision, that they might choose Jesus.

Joel 3:15–17
The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more.

When the Lord comes back and dwells in Jerusalem, there shall be no more strangers. Tensions will be gone. Turmoil will vanish. Instead, Jerusalem will be filled with people who are ruled by the Lord, submitted to the Lord, and walking with the Lord.

Joel 3:18
And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD, and shall water the valley of Shittim.

The picture here is of the abundance of vineyards and flocks, of sustenance and refreshment that will characterize the Millennium, when the Prince of Peace rules and reigns in Jerusalem.

Joel 3:19
Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land.

The Egyptians and the Edomites were two peoples who constantly troubled the Jews.

Joel 3:20, 21
But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed: for the LORD dwelleth in Zion.

The Lord will cleanse the blood of Judah. In Zechariah 12, we see what this means . . .

> And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.
>
> Zechariah 12:9, 10

In that day, God's people will look at Jesus—the One they pierced—and they will at last realize what He did for them. They'll mourn over the fact that they rejected Him. In that day, they'll see Him and embrace Him. They'll be cleansed and forgiven. All of Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26)—and, oh, what a *glorious* day that will be!



AMOS

Background to Amos

The situations in which Joel and Amos ministered are very, very different. When Joel was ministering, the people of God were plagued by grasshoppers. When Amos was ministering, the people of God were prospering in greenbacks. In Joel's day, the people were asking, "What is going on?" In Amos' day, the people were cruising without a care in the world.

The setting of Amos takes us to a time in the history of Israel when, with the exception of the days of Solomon, she prospered unlike any other time in her history. The year was approximately 760 B.C. The ruler was Jeroboam II, a man who ruled the country for forty years with great success.

The people of Israel were riding tall in the saddle. There had been a feudal war going on between the Syrians and the Israelis for about a hundred years. But Jeroboam was able to not only beat back the Syrians but to expand Israel's borders. In the process, Israel gained some lucrative trade routes between the Assyrians to the north and the Egyptians to the south. As the caravans traveled between these two empires, the Jews would tax them accordingly.

On the surface, things couldn't have been better. Below the surface, however, there were some real problems. Below the surface, there was spiritual decay. So the Lord tapped Amos on the shoulder, saying, "Go and rip down the façade of false spirituality. Expose the spiritual disease of the people and the danger that lies ahead unless they return to Me."

Amos was an unlikely character to be chosen for several reasons. First, he was from the area of Tekoa, about ten miles south of Jerusalem. In other words, Amos was from Judah, but his ministry would be to the ten northern tribes in Israel. Tekoa was in the kingdom of Judah, but Amos' ministry would not be to Judah but to the ten northern tribes in Israel. If that weren't enough, Tekoa was the quintessential "hick town." It was known only for sheep and fig trees. Amos tended sheep and picked figs—hardly positions of high esteem. Yet the Lord said, "Amos, I'm sending you to Bethel, the place

where the king hangs out and where intellectual, religious meetings are held. I'm sending you to tell those people what is on My heart."

Amos was called a herdsman, not even a shepherd, and a fig picker. We're talking about hillbilly, migrant worker, a low place on the ladder of status. Yet the Lord said, "Amos, I'm sending you to Bethel, the most sophisticated region of Israel to speak My heart to the intellectual and religious elite." Some scholars believe that all of Amos' messages were given in a week's time. This is very possible. But there was something about this hillbilly from hick town that captured the imagination of the people. They didn't like his message—but he spoke truth in such a way that they were captivated. He talked about farming carts being pressed down, lions chewing up vulnerable sheep, baskets of rotting figs. In other words, rather than try and come across as something he wasn't, he used images and references that related to his own occupation. He simply drew upon his own experiences to speak God's heart in a way people could understand.

The Lord loves to use the foolish things of the world to confound the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27). So often we think we can't be used unless we have a Ph.D. after our name. Not so. The Lord loves to use the Amoses.

This book that bears his name is divided into two parts. In the first part—chapters 1 through 6—eight nations are denounced. In the second part—chapters 7 through 9—five visions are announced.

AMOS

1

Amos 1:1 (a)
The words of Amos, who was among the herdman of Tekoa . . .

Right off the bat, Amos identifies himself. He doesn't try to cover up his background. He doesn't say, "I am a prophet," or, "I am a man of God." He simply introduces himself to the people of Israel as a herdman from a backwoods region in Judah.

Amos 1:1 (b)
. . . which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

Uzziah was ruling in the south, Jeroboam in the north. We know the earthquake mentioned was quite substantial because two hundred fifty years later, Zechariah would also make mention of it.

Amos 1:2
And he said, The LORD will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither.

Beginning in verse 3 and going through chapter 6, we see a series of indictments against eight nations. Amos will begin with the Syrians then deal with the Phoenicians. He'll talk about the Philistines, the Moabites, and the Edomites, drawing a circle that begins to get closer and closer to Israel. When the Israelites heard the indictments against the nations surrounding them, they must have applauded—until they realized the judgments were hitting closer and closer to home.

Amos 1:3 (a)

Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof . . .

Damascus is the capital city of Syria. Amos will use this phrase, "three transgressions and for four" over and over again. This doesn't mean there were four sins, but rather it's an expression that says, "Because they continue on sinning."

Amos 1:3 (b)–5
. . . because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron: But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad. I will break also the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the plain of Aven, and him that holdeth the sceptre from the house of Eden: and the people of Syria shall go into captivity unto Kir, saith the LORD.

Because of their cruelty toward His people, God would judge Syria. Their houses would be burned, their people would be bound. To this day, the Syrians still attempt to attack the region of Gilead—the Galilee area—with "instruments of iron" called tanks. In fact, when the Syrians entered the region in the 1973 war, they came with more tanks than were used in totality in World War II.

Amos 1:6–8
Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they carried away captive the whole captivity, to deliver them up to Edom: But I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, which shall devour the palaces thereof: And I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and him that holdeth the sceptre from Ashkelon, and I will turn mine hand against Ekron: and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, saith the Lord GOD.

The Gaza Strip is one of the political flashpoints of Israel to this day. It was a problem for Israel in the days of Amos, as well. Because the Philistines were selling the Jews into slavery, the Lord said He would judge

them. Their cruelty would come back upon them. In A.D. 70, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, they renamed Israel *Palestine,* or "Land of the Philistines." Even as the Philistines dwelt in Gaza in the days of Amos, the Palestinians claim this land as part of their destiny today.

Amos 1:9, 10
Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Tyrus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant: But I will send a fire on the wall of Tyrus, which shall devour the palaces thereof.

Tyre did not remember their brotherly covenant. What was this covenant? I Kings 9 tells us there was an agreement between Israel and Tyre—a peace treaty that was broken. Therefore, because the Lord is a God of great integrity, He would judge Tyre for failing to honor her agreement.

Amos 1:11, 12
Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever: But I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah.

The people of Edom were descendants of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob. But because Edom continually waged war against Israel, the Lord says they would be judged.

Isn't it interesting that, not only regarding individuals but churches, we often have the most problems with those to whom we're closest? The churches that have the most difficulty are most often those who are closest in theology, in flavor, in philosophy. This ought not to be.

Amos 1:13–15
Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof;

because they have ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border: But I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour the palaces thereof, with shouting in the day of battle, with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind: And their king shall go into captivity, he and his princes together, saith the LORD.

The Ammonites showed no mercy to the people of Israel—even to pregnant women—and destroyed them for one reason: the Ammonites wanted to expand their borders. Here, the Lord said He would judge them for that. But, before we point a finger too quickly at the Ammonites, we would do well to look at our own society. We rip open women and destroy the children within because we want our own occupational, financial, or relational borders to expand. "I just can't afford this baby," our society says. "It will put a strain on my resources and cramp my style. I don't have room in my life for a baby right now."

Thus, I see no difference in the sin of abortion and the sin for which Ammon was judged.



2 If you place yourself in the pews of Amos' day and listen to this country preacher, you can almost hear the people of Israel saying, "Great! Best news I've heard in years. The Lord is going after the Edomites and the Ammonites and the people of Tyre! Preach it, Amos!"

In chapter 2, we come to his indictment against the Moabites concerning their lack of respect for the dead.

Amos 2:1–3

Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime: But I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the palaces of Kerioth: and Moab shall die with tumult, with shouting, and with the sound of

the trumpet: And I will cut off the judge from the midst thereof, and will slay all the princes thereof with him, saith the LORD.

The Moabites desecrated the dead by burning the bones of their enemy, the Edomite king.

My tendency would be to say, "Who cares? Lord, the Edomites were a cruel people, too. So why would You be concerned about the Moabites burning them?" Yet, in reality, there's only One who can truly judge. "Vengeance is Mine," saith the Lord (Romans 12:19). Therefore, if the Edomites are to be judged, only God can judge them.

As Christians, we need to realize that vengeance is the Lord's alone. He is the only One worthy to judge, the only One with all the facts, the only One who sees the heart. Truly, the God of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).

This means I don't have to go around burning people with the fire of my opinion or the flames of my wrath. We are commanded simply to love one another and to leave the judging to God (Matthew 7:1).

Amos 2:4 (a)
Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof . . .

Following the indictments against Syria, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab, we come to the southern tribes of Judah . . .

Amos 2:4 (b), 5
. . . because they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept his commandments, and their lies caused them to err, after the which their fathers have walked: But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.

Because the people of Judah didn't keep the Word, fire would fall upon them.

We hear a lot about people getting burned-out. But the root of their problem is the same as Judah's. That is, they don't hear the Word of the Lord.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," the Lord declares (Exodus 20:8).

"That's archaic," man argues. "We can make more money if we work on the Sabbath."

And we get burned out as a result. Any law of God we violate, we do so to our own destruction. Any law of the Lord we ignore, we do so at our own peril.

Amos 2:6 (a)
Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof . . .

As the circle gets drawn tighter and tighter, we finally come to Israel.

Amos 2:6 (b)
. . . because they sold the righteous for silver . . .

The first indictment against Israel was for bribery.

Amos 2:6 (c)
. . . and the poor for a pair of shoes;

The second indictment against Israel was for slavery. The ten northern tribes had fallen into the despicable practice of selling people into slavery for the price of a pair of shoes.

Amos 2:7
That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek: and a man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name:

The third indictment against Israel was for immorality.

Amos 2:8
And they lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the

house of their god.

The fourth indictment against Israel was for insensitivity. That is, as prescribed by Old Testament law, anyone in financial straits could get a loan by using his cloak as collateral. But the lender was not to keep the cloak at night lest the owner become cold (Deuteronomy 24:12, 13). The people Amos indicts were not only keeping the cloaks, but using them in their false religious practices.

I wonder if this isn't applicable in some ways to our own society. We rip each other off in finances and business. We exploit and then come to church and give our tithes and offerings. That's not right. Here, the Lord calls for justice and rightness in a society.

Amos 2:9
Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath.

The Lord reminds Israel that the Ammonites were destroyed for the very things they were now doing. "If I didn't spare them, do you think I'm going to let you do these things indefinitely?" He asks.

We can save ourselves so much unnecessary pain by learning lessons from every story in the Bible—for while it is true that experience is the best teacher, it doesn't have to be *our* experience. Let us learn from the experience of others.

Amos 2:10, 11
Also I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites. Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel? saith the LORD.

As seen in Numbers 6, the Nazarites were men who were singularly devoted to the Lord.

Amos 2:12, 13
But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophesy not. Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves.

"I blessed you with Nazarites—men who were dedicated—and you talked them into drinking. I sent you prophets, but you forbade them to prophesy," the Lord declares, as He describes the heaviness of His heart with an illustration from Amos' own background.

Amos 2:14–16
Therefore the flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not strengthen his force, neither shall the mighty deliver himself: Neither shall he stand that handleth the bow; and he that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself: neither shall he that rideth the horse deliver himself. And he that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, saith the LORD.

Neither the swift nor the strong, neither the bowman nor the bold would be able to deliver himself from the judgment of the Lord that would be meted out by the Assyrians.



3 **Amos 3:1, 2**
Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

God chose a family, the seed of Abraham, to show the world how life should be lived. He used Israel as a model that all of the world would see that He is good and that walking in His way would bring blessing. Here, He says, "Of all the families of the world, I have known you. I have chosen you, given you a special calling, and tremendous blessing. What are you doing with the privilege, the calling, and the blessing I've given you? You're

walking away from Me. Therefore, I have no choice but to chasten you because you're My family."

Amos 3:3
Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

Two people can walk together only if they are going in the same direction. God was leading His people one way, but they were walking in another. How easy it is for us to fall prey to the same problem.



***For topical study of Amos 3:3 entitled "Simply Walking Together," turn to page* 788.**

Amos 3:4–6
Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing? Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him? shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all? Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?

Using examples first from the wild, then from the air, and finally from the city itself, God asks a series of questions, each of whose answer is "no"—underscoring the fact that, not only would it be impossible for His people to walk in a different direction from Him and still call Him their God, but that the calamity about to befall them would be His way to bring them back.

Amos 3:7, 8
Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets. The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?

"How can we walk in agreement with the Lord? Where's He going?" we sometimes ask.

“I will do nothing without revealing My secrets unto My servants, the prophets,” the Lord answers. “The prophets will speak boldly. My will won’t be hard to find.”

How I thank the Lord for Amos and Isaiah, for Jeremiah and Hosea—for prophets from whom we can learn the heart of God. Get in the Word, gang. Study the prophets. Meditate on the Psalms. Memorize the Gospels. Read the Word—and you’ll know exactly what the Lord wants you to do.

Amos 3:9–11
Publish in the palaces at Ashdod, and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say, Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria, and behold the great tumults in the midst thereof, and the oppressed in the midst thereof. For they know not to do right, saith the LORD, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; An adversary there shall be even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled.

Even the Philistines in Ashdod and the Egyptians in their palaces would agree that God’s judgment of His people was overdue.

Amos 3:12
Thus saith the LORD; As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus in a couch.

“Just as a shepherd rips open the mouth of a lion and takes out the remains of one of his sheep, so too, you will be devoured,” the Lord declares through Amos. Indeed, within forty years, Israel’s boom turned into a bust. The Assyrians destroyed the people of Israel exactly as Amos prophesied.

Amos 3:13, 14
Hear ye, and testify in the house of Jacob, saith the Lord GOD, the God of hosts, That in the day that I shall visit the transgressions of Israel upon him I will also visit the altars of

Bethel: and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground.

When the Assyrians invaded the country, not only would the people of Israel be judged, but their golden calf and altars to their false gods would be destroyed.

Amos 3:15
And I will smite the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the LORD.

The trappings of their economic prosperity—their vacation homes, houses of costly ivory, mansions, and everything else the people of God had worked so hard to achieve—was all about to end.

SIMPLY WALKING TOGETHER

A Topical Study of AMOS 3:3

I clearly remember the day my son, Benjamin, learned to walk. With his older sister, Mary Elizabeth, literally running by the age of one, with Ben still crawling at eighteen months, we wondered if he'd ever walk. So when he took his first steps shortly thereafter, our whole family gathered around him and cheered.

This reminds me of the verse in 3 John 4. At approximately ninety years of age, John wrote, "I have no greater joy than to hear my children are walking in truth." And, here in Amos, we hear that same heart. In fact, throughout Scripture, the Christian experience is likened to a walk.

God Declares That Man *Should* Walk with Him

> *Ye shall walk in all the ways which the* LORD *your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess.*
>
> Deuteronomy 5:33

"I want to bless you. I want it to go well with you. I want your days to be prolonged in the land I'm giving you. I want you to live—really live," God declares.

Jesus said the same thing when He said, "I have come that you might have life and life abundantly" (John 10:10). God's plan and desire is not abundant life only presently—but on into eternity. In Genesis 5, we see the story of a man who walked with God quite literally . . .

> *And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah: And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.*
>
> Genesis 5:21–24

At age sixty-five, Enoch began walking with God. For three hundred years, he walked so closely with the Lord that it is as if one day, the Lord looked at him and said, "Enoch, we're closer to My house than yours, so why don't you just come on up and stay with Me?" Enoch never died. He was just raptured, translated, and snatched up into heaven, where he is living to this day.

You see, walking with God has benefits not only in this life but in heaven —where all things will be right, where every tear will be dried, where every question will be answered, where every problem will be solved.

God Desires Man *Would* Walk with Him

> *And they heard the voice of the* LORD *God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the* LORD *God amongst the trees of the garden.*
>
> Genesis 3:8

God not only declares that man *should* walk with Him, but He desires that man *would* walk with Him. That is, our walking with God is not only for our benefit but for His enjoyment. We see this in Genesis 3, a story we know well. After Adam and Eve rebelled against the Lord in the Garden of Eden, when Adam heard God walking in the cool of the day, he hid himself because, evidently, God and Adam had a habit of walking together at that time. God showed up for His appointment, but Adam hid because now they were no longer in agreement.

God desired that man would walk with Him. But man started doing His own thing. Rather than walk with God, he chose to crawl in carnality. Centuries later, in the day of Amos, we still hear the cry of a Father who desired that His people walk with Him.

God Determined Man *Could* Walk with Him

> *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*
>
> John 1:14

God declared that man should walk with Him and desired that man would walk with Him. But man didn't. He failed in Eden and failed in the days of Amos. Did God wash His hands and say, "Forget it"? No. Even though man was polluted by sin, God determined that man could walk with Him by becoming a Man Himself.

We were crawling in carnality, but God became a Man in Christ Jesus.

> *The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*
>
> John 1:29

God sent His Son to be slain for our sin, to take away the disharmony, the disagreement, the barrier between us and God.

> *Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.*
>
> John 1:35–37

Jesus walked in perfect harmony with the Father. And, as people watched Him walk, as they listened to the words He spoke, as they saw the deeds He did, they followed Him. Why? Because He lived life the way it was meant to be lived. There was a quality, a vitality, an attractiveness about Him that caused people to want to know what He said, to travel where He was going.

Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.

John 1:38, 39

Jesus asks a question that needs to be asked of every individual who has ever lived: What are you seeking? What are you really after in life?

These men who sought Jesus as He walked said, "We want to hang out with *You.*"

We, too, have seen Jesus Christ—not face to face, but through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12). And what we have seen of Him is immensely impressive. The words He spoke, the way He lived, the things He taught, and, above all, the work He did on the Cross is beyond anything we could imagine. The Lamb of God took away every sin I have ever committed in my entire life. On the Cross, He paid for every carnal thought, sinful act, and stubborn mistake. That's why John exclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" We can walk with our Father once again. We can have harmony and unity with God because Jesus paid the price for our sin. The barrier is gone.

Think about when you first got saved. It was so simple. You knew you were a sinner and you knew Jesus died for your sin. But, all too often, after we become believers, something subtle begins to happen. Our walks become complicated. We think we have to learn ten verses a day, read ten chapters in the Bible a week, and witness to ten people at work in order to maintain our walk with the Lord. We develop philosophies and theologies, obligations and regulations—and then wonder where the joy of our walk with the Lord went. Paul addresses this very issue . . .

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after

Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principal ity and power:

Colossians 2:6–10

Here, Paul calls the Colossian believers back to simplicity. "Don't let anyone burden you with traditions and activities," he says. "You're complete in Christ. Enjoy the simplicity. Even as you received Christ, walk in Him."

How did you receive Jesus? You made no bargains with Him. You signed no contracts with Him. You just came in humility and gratitude, saying, "Lord, thank You for dying for me. Take control of my life." It was so simple. The problem with many believers is that, although we understand we're saved by grace and not works, after we're saved, we start working. We start complicating things and wonder where the joy went.

Jesus was invited by a Pharisee named Simon to have dinner at his house. As He sat at Simon's table, a woman came into the room with an alabaster box in her hand. Making her way to Jesus, she wept at His feet. Then she dried her tears from His feet with her hair and anointed them with the costly ointment from within the alabaster box. Simon sat back and watched, thinking that if Jesus were indeed a prophet, He would know what kind of woman this was.

Knowing what Simon was thinking, Jesus told a parable of a creditor who had two debtors. One owed him fifty pence, the other five hundred pence. Neither of the debtors could pay, so the creditor forgave them both.

"Which of the two would love the creditor more?" Jesus asked Simon.

"The one who was forgiven the larger debt," Simon answered.

"You're right," Jesus said, "When I came into your house, you did not kiss Me, as is the custom. But this woman has not ceased kissing My feet. When I came into your house, you did not wash My feet, as is the custom. But this woman has washed My feet with her tears. When I came into your house, You did not anoint My head with oil, as is the custom. But this woman has anointed even My feet."

Then Jesus turned to the woman and said, "Though your sins be many, you are forgiven. The one who is forgiven little loves little. But the one who is forgiven much, loves much."

Simon, no doubt, was cut to the quick. After all, Jesus was saying that a prostitute was in a much better place than he was because she loved Him more. She understood grace in simplicity and her need for forgiveness while Simon, the Pharisee, flaunted his theology and spirituality but loved Jesus little (Luke 7).

When you first got saved, you came as that woman did. You knew you were a sinner and perhaps with tears flowing down your cheeks, or gratitude in your heart, you said, "Lord, You're so good to me. Thank You for dying for my sins." And like her, you opened the alabaster box of praise. But here's the question: have you become like Simon?

Now that you're a Christian, are you working hard to keep the regulations, disciplining yourself religiously, studying hard and worshiping with intensity, witnessing regularly—but loving Jesus only minimally? Have you lost the simplicity? To walk with God simply means realizing you're a sinner and thanking Him for saving you. It's not dependent upon your working, witnessing, praying, studying, tithing, or worshiping. It's just saying, "Lord, I'm a sinner. Thank You for saving me."

We worship and witness, pray and praise, sacrifice and serve not to earn God's favor but because He has already shown such favor to us. The Christian life is a delight because it's so simple. We can walk in agreement with God solely because of the work of the Lamb. It's finished. It's complete. Enjoy your salvation—and be free.



4

Amos 4:1

Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which op press the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink.

Amos, the herdman from Tekoa, compares Israel's affluent society to the cows of Bashan, which were noted for their stubbornness and strength due to the richness of their pasture land (Psalm 22:12).

Amos 4:2

The Lord GOD hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks.

When the Assyrians came down forty years later, they joined thousands of Israelites by hooks and led them into captivity in Assyria, where they would assimilate them into the Assyrian culture.

Amos 4:3
And ye shall go out at the breaches, every cow at that which is before her; and ye shall cast them into the palace, saith the LORD.

Although the people would try to escape as the Assyrian's invaded, their attempts would be futile.

Amos 4:4, 5
Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years: And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.

The people of God were still bringing Him their tithes, offerings, and sacrifices—but they were mixed with leaven, a picture of sin (Leviticus 2:11; 1 Corinthians 5:8). In other words, they were playing a game. Their hearts were not inclined toward God. Their sacrifices were offered only for the sake of appearance.

Amos 4:6–8
And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not

withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

God hoped dry times would motivate His people to return to Him.

Amos 4:9–11
I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

"What more do I have to do to get your attention?" God asks. "When I blessed you, you forgot Me. So I sent both heat and mildew your way. Locusts have devoured your crops. Drought has eroded your economy. You've been overthrown like Sodom. Yet you're still not seeing that I'm calling you to Me."

Amos 4:12
Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

"Because I bless you and you ignore Me, because I blast you and you ignore Me, prepare to meet Me. I'm taking you home," God declares. "You're stubbornly going down a destructive path," God says. "Therefore, you leave Me no alternative but to short-circuit you into eternity."

If you don't grasp this point, I believe your perspective of God will be amiss. This isn't God saying in anger and hostility, "I'm going to destroy

you," but rather, "You're so stubborn. You're unteachable. Therefore, I'll short-circuit you into eternity because the path you're on will destroy you."

Amos 4:13
For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The LORD, The God of hosts, is his name.

God declares His thought to man. How does one declare a thought? The only way is by a word. How did God declare His thought, how did He reveal His heart? In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God (John 1:1). He did it in the person of Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus had to come—not only to die for our sin, but also because everyone had their own idea of what God was like. So God revealed His thought by becoming the Word incarnate.

How do I know what God is like? By studying the life of Jesus Christ, by listening to His words, by seeing what He did in situations. Without Jesus, we could only argue and hypothesize about the character of God. But because Jesus came, we can know what God is like.

"Show us the Father," Philip said.

"Oh, Philip," Jesus answered. "Have I been with you so long? Don't you know that he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. I and the Father are One" (see John 14:8, 9).

How do we know the thought, the heart, the mind, the intent of God? Through Jesus Christ. He is God's final Word.



5

Amos 5:1–3
Hear ye this word which I take up against you, even a lamentation, O house of Is rael. The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall no more rise: she is forsaken upon her land; there is none to raise her up. For thus saith the Lord GOD; The city that went out by a thousand shall leave an

hundred, and that which went forth by an hundred shall leave ten, to the house of Israel.

The mission of a prophet is not an easy one—especially in the setting in which Amos ministered. Here, the people in Israel were singing, "Happy Days Are Here Again." After all, the country was experiencing prosperity and peace like they hadn't experienced since the days of Solomon. But Amos is told to sing a lamentation, or a dirge, because, beneath the façade of peace and prosperity, the spiritual wickedness and moral corruption that pervaded the country would result in the destruction of ninety percent of Israel's population by the hands of the Assyrians.

Amos 5:4, 5
For thus saith the LORD unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live: But seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beer-sheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought.

Bethel, Gilgal, and Beer-Sheba were all centers of idol worship, specifically of golden calves. The people of God were to stay away from these places and instead seek the Lord.

Amos 5:6
Seek the LORD, and ye shall live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Bethel.

If we seek the Lord, we'll live life to the fullest. If we ignore Him, we'll be burned up, consumed by our own sin.

Amos 5:7, 8
Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth, Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea,

and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The LORD is his name:

Only the One who created life knows how it can be lived to the fullest. "Don't ignore Me," the Lord says, "and you'll find the life you're craving."

Amos 5:9
That strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress.

The Creator of the Universe is He who strengthens the spoiled against the strong, who uses the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty (1 Corinthians 1:27). That is why our strength actually lies in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Amos 5:10
They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.

The people of Israel dismissed any who spoke the truth (Isaiah 29:21).

Amos 5:11–13
Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right. Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time.

"Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?" Jesus asked (Luke 12:6). The God who not only created but cared for the sparrows was certainly aware of how His people were mistreating the poor and weak in their midst.

Amos 5:14, 15
Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.

Even though the dirge has already been sung, Amos is saying, "Seek the Lord and it may be that He will be gracious to the remnant. Those who turn toward Him will find God's goodness being poured out upon them."

Amos 5:16–20
Therefore the LORD, the God of hosts, the Lord, saith thus; Wailing shall be in all streets; and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas! and they shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skilful of lamentation to wailing. And in all vineyards shall be wailing: for I will pass through thee, saith the LORD. Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end is it for you? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?

Amos picks up on the same theme Joel developed—the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is the day when the Lord will intervene in history. The people of Israel were looking forward to that day—but not for the right reasons. They simply wanted more comfort and ease. "Do you really know what you're saying?" Amos asks. "For you, the day of the Lord will be dark. You might think you'll escape the lion—the problems of the present world—but there will be a bear or a serpent—future problems—to greet you."

Amos 5:21–24
I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the

peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

"I'm weary of your 'playing church,' " the Lord declares. "I'm weary of your songs, your sacrifices, and your incense because they're not from the heart. You're going through the motions, but there's no emotion. You're going through the ritual, but there's no reality."

How many people go to church simply because it's the respectable thing to do, dropping a quarter in the offering plate, paying their dues? America is full of churches that fall into this category—where people are not interested in seeking the Lord, hearing His voice, or doing what His Word declares.

Amos 5:25–27
Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts.

Even in the days when God's people witnessed His miraculous power firsthand—when they saw the parting of the Red Sea, when they ate manna that fell from heaven and drank water from a rock—they had a tendency to wander toward false gods. And, because this tendency was still with them, they would find themselves held captive beyond Damascus.



6 Amos 6:1 (a)
Woe to them that are at ease in Zion . . .

Whenever you come to the word, "woe" in Scripture, think of it as "whoa," and slow down so you can pay careful attention to what the Lord is saying.

I'm reminded of the preacher who was selling his horse. To the prospective buyer, he said, "This horse is a little bit unusual. If you really want him to go, don't say 'Giddy up.' Say, 'Praise the Lord,' and he'll take off."

"I can handle that," the buyer said.

"And to get him to stop, don't say, 'Whoa.' Say, 'Amen,' and he'll stop."

"Okay," the man said. He bought the horse and galloped away. After riding some distance, he was curious to see how fast the horse would go. "Praise the Lord," he said—and the horse took off at unbelievable speed. Hanging on for dear life, the man saw a precipice ahead and realized the horse was about to race right over the cliff.

"Glory!" he said. But that didn't work. "Hallelujah!" he shouted. But when the horse kept running, he knew that wasn't the right word, either. Right before the horse was to go over the cliff, he said, "Oh, Lord, save me. In Jesus' Name. Amen!" The horse screeched to a stop inches from the edge of the cliff.

And so relieved was the man that all he could say was, "Praise the Lord!"

Amos 6:1 (b)
. . . and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!

In other words, because of the peace and prosperity she was experiencing, all of the nations looked to the region of Samaria as the place to be.

Amos 6:2–4
Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great: then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better

than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border? Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall;

The people of God were living in luxury and plunging into all sorts of immorality and gluttony.

Amos 6:5
That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David;

In 1 Chronicles 23, we read that David, a man after God's own heart, actually invented instruments upon which he could praise the Lord. These people, however, were using instruments not to praise the Lord but to appeal to the flesh.

Amos 6:6
That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.

Rather than being grieved for the people in need, the people in Amos' day indulged in wine by the bowlful.

Amos 6:7
Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed.

Like the word "woe," whenever you see the word "therefore" in Scripture, stop and ask "What is that there for?" Why would God's people be carried away captive? Because of sexual immorality, sensual music, gluttony, and drunkenness. That's why, during this time when everything seemed to be going so well, Amos was on the scene, saying, "Watch out. The path you're on leads only to bondage."

Amos 6:8
The Lord GOD hath sworn by himself, saith the LORD the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein.

The temple in Jerusalem had been Jacob's excellency. But because the people were only going through the motions of true worship, the place in which the Lord once delighted to dwell (Psalm 87:2) was now a place He abhorred.

Amos 6:9–11
And it shall come to pass, if there remain ten men in one house, that they shall die. And a man's uncle shall take him up, and he that burneth him, to bring out the bones out of the house, and shall say unto him that is by the sides of the house, Is there yet any with thee? and he shall say, No. Then shall he say, Hold thy tongue: for we may not make mention of the name of the LORD. For, behold, the LORD commandeth, and he will smite the great house with breaches, and the little house with clefts.

This speaks of the coming destruction both of great and small, of rich and poor by the hands of the Assyrians.

Amos 6:12–14
Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plow there with oxen? for ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock: Ye which rejoice in a thing of nought, which say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength? But, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith the LORD the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of the wilderness.

Israel would be invaded from the city of Hamath in the north and the invading Assyrians would make their way clear to the Nile in the south all because, rather than allowing God's judgment to soften their hearts, their hearts remained as hard as stone.

7 While the first six chapters of Amos deal with the pronouncements of eight judgments, the second half consists of the announcement of five visions . . .

Amos 7:1–6
Thus hath the Lord GOD shewed unto me; and, behold, he formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and, lo, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings. And it came to pass, that when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord GOD, forgive, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small. The LORD repented for this: It shall not be, saith the LORD. Thus hath the Lord GOD shewed unto me: and, behold, the Lord GOD called to contend by fire, and it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part. Then said I, O Lord GOD, cease, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small. The LORD repented for this: This also shall not be, saith the Lord GOD.

Amos' first two visions consisted of grasshoppers eating the land followed by fire consuming the land. Both times, Amos sought the Lord, asking Him how the land would survive.

This speaks to me very practically. What are we to do when we see things that either bug us or burn us? We're to do what Amos did. We're to seek the Lord and pray that the situation would change, that the problem would be solved. In answer to Amos' prayer, God relented because He knew all along that He could find an intercessor in Amos that would give Him the righteous excuse not to do what He was planning on doing. In light of this, I wonder how many of our own situations could be changed if, instead of being bugged or burned, we would pray. James tells us we have not because we ask not (4:2). Therefore, rather than expounding on how bugged we are, how burned up we are, how upset we are, we must be those who get on our knees and pray—and see what the Lord might do in changing the entire situation.

Amos 7:7–9
Thus he shewed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand. And the LORD said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more: And the high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.

In Amos' third vision, we see neither praying on his part nor relenting on God's. Why? Because the Lord is the One who stimulates us to pray in the first place. Without His pressing us, without His motivating us, we would never pray at all. This time, the Lord didn't move Amos to pray. Why? Because the house of Jeroboam was destined to collapse.

Amos 7:10, 11
Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land.

Amaziah was the intellectual, religious priest of Bethel who honored God with his mouth one moment and then honored Baal and polished the golden calf the next. Because he felt threatened by Amos, Amaziah told Jeroboam that Amos prophesied Jeroboam would die by the sword. In reality, however, Amos said the house of Jeroboam would die by the sword. In fact, this prophecy would not be fulfilled until Jeroboam's grandson sat on the throne.

That's the way gossip and innuendo always work. False witnesses tweak the truth just enough to give a false impression that works to the advantage of the talebearer. Of course, this is seen no more clearly than in the false witness borne against Jesus Himself (Mark 14:57, 58).

Amos 7:12, 13

Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: But prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court.

"Go back where you came from, Amos," Amaziah said. "You don't belong here."

Amos 7:14, 15
Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit: And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.

"I'm not claiming to be an intellectual like you," Amos answered. "I'm simply a herdman and a fig-picker. But the Lord told me to preach to the people of Israel and I obeyed."

Where was Amos when he was called? He was with the flock. Where was Moses when he was called to lead Israel? Watching the sheep (Exodus 3:1). Where was David? Watching his father's sheep (1 Samuel 16:19). Where do you find shepherds? Where do you find true spiritual leaders? You find them in those who are tending the flock—caring for people, loving people, and giving themselves to people. You'll always find true shepherds among sheep and fruit-gatherers picking fruit.

Amos 7:16, 17
Now therefore hear thou the word of the LORD: Thou sayest, Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land.

"Because you're not listening to the word of the Lord, Amaziah, here's what will happen," the Lord said through Amos.

If we're not listening to the Word of God, we, too, will find ourselves in big-time trouble. It's just that simple. If we never pray with our husbands or wives, if we never have devotions with our kids, if we never spend time in the Word ourselves, we can't wonder why our families end up held captive by the world, just as Israel would be.



8 In chapter 8, Amos has another vision for the people of Israel who were so enamored with their culture and luxury, for those who were at ease in Zion.

Amos 8:1, 2 (a)
Thus hath the Lord GOD shewed unto me: and behold a basket of summer fruit. And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit. . . .

Amos was a fig-picker. So what did the Lord use to speak to him? He used fruit—something which Amos understood. The Lord is truly a Master Communicator and He will communicate with you in the terms and through the things you can best understand. So often we think we have to delve into areas with which we're unfamiliar and learn concepts we really can't grasp —but that's not so. The Lord will speak to you right where you're at. He'll speak to you in the most wonderful, natural way. Therefore, as you go through your day, keep your antennae up. Listen for the Lord teaching you lessons using the things that are right before you.

Amos 8:2 (b)
. . . Then said the LORD unto me, The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more.

Just like ripe summer fruit that is about ready to spoil, God's people who, at one time were fruitful, were about to perish.

Amos 8:3
And the songs of the temple shall be howl-ings in that day, saith the Lord GOD: there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence.

The songs that were once praise and adoration would become a lamentation.

Amos 8:4–7
Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat? The LORD hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works.

The people had become so material, so caught up in the business aspects of their life that they chafed at the bit to get back to their business pursuits. "Let's get this worship service over so we can get back to making money, so that we can exploit people and rip them off. We'll do whatever it takes to get ahead," they said.

"I see what you're doing," the Lord said. "You think you're prospering but it's only through deceit and exploitation. Therefore, like rotten fruit, you'll be thrown out."

Amos 8:8–10
Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? and it shall rise up wholly as a flood; and it shall be cast out and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord GOD, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day: And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and

baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day.

"Because your hearts are far from Me, trouble is coming," the Lord says to His people through Amos. "The stock market will crash. The economy will collapse."

Amos 8:11
Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD:

God's judgment would affect His people not only agriculturally and economically but spiritually. Prophets would still proclaim the Word and teachers would still explain the Word—but a time would come when people wouldn't hear the Word. The information would still be available, but people wouldn't receive it.

Amos 8:12
And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it.

Because they wouldn't hear the Word of the Lord, people run here, there, and everywhere, trying to figure out the solution to their problems, the answer to their questions. They bounce from one experience to another, trying to determine what life is about.

Amos 8:13
In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst.

After restlessness, we see weariness. As God's people, those who should have been at a place of vitality and fullness will instead faint, give up, and drop out.

Amos 8:14

They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, Thy god, O Dan, liveth; and, The manner of Beer-sheba liveth; even they shall fall, and never rise up again.

The reason for the famine of hearing the Word was that God's people worshiped idols from the north in Dan to Beer-sheba in the south. Consequently, because they filled themselves with idol worship, they could no longer hear the Word of the Lord.

You may wonder why you're not hearing the words of the Lord, why the Bible is so dry, why there is a famine in your land. As seen here, a very possible reason is that you are worshiping an idol of compromising literature, of questionable entertainment, of overworking to make more money. In Mark 4, Jesus said the Word of God is like seed thrown in the soil of men's hearts. But the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust for material things can choke its growth.

When you experience a famine in hearing the Word of the Lord, it's His loving signal that something is amiss. When Scripture is no longer vibrant or important, when the impressions are no longer real or understandable, when spiritual truths are meaningless to you, the Lord in His love says, "That's the first sign I'm giving you that something is wrong in your life. The path you're on will eventually destroy you."

If this is where you're at, seek the Lord. Let Him point out to you the sin of Samaria, the gold calf of Dan before it destroys you. If you turn from it, your appetite for the Word will return. The seed of the Word will flourish once more, bringing forth much fruit.



9 In chapter 9, Amos has another vision that relates to the idols God's people were worshiping . . .

Amos 9:1 (a)
I saw the LORD standing upon the altar . . .

This refers not to the altar in the temple of Jerusalem but to the altar in a temple of a false god.

Amos 9:1 (b)
. . . and he said, Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake: and cut them in the head, all of them; and I will slay the last of them with the sword: he that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered.

"I'm going to bring down this idolatrous temple on the heads of those who worship within." We see an illustration of this in Judges 16, the story of Samson. When he threw away all of the blessings of God and gave in to the temptations of Delilah, the Spirit of God left him and, as a result, he was captured by the Philistines. Physically blind, as he stood between two pillars of the temple of Dagon, he asked the Lord for one last measure of strength. When God graciously gave Samson a second chance, Samson pushed out the pillars. The walls and roof of the temple collapsed, resulting in the deaths of more people than Samson had killed in his life.

Amos 9:2, 3
Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them:

Even if people attempted to flee to hell itself, they would not escape the Lord.

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.

Psalm 139:7, 8

David was comforted by the fact that no matter where he was—experiencing highs or feeling down in the depths of hell, God was with him. But here God is saying, "If you think you're going to get out of this situation by dying, you're wrong. You cannot escape My judgment. There's no place to hide."

Amos 9:4, 5
And though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them: and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good. And the Lord GOD of hosts is he that toucheth the land, and it shall melt, and all that dwell therein shall mourn: and it shall rise up wholly like a flood; and shall be drowned, as by the flood of Egypt.

"The land that is so prosperous right now will be judged," the Lord declares. "It will melt, evaporate, dissipate before your eyes." Because the people of Israel rebelled against God, their enemies came in and, just as prophesied, deforested the nation that was once so beautiful. They cut down trees, which, in turn, altered the climate. The rich soil eroded and the land became arid.

Our lives also become rocky and dry when we rebel against the Lord. Things begin to erode. That which was once productive becomes barren.

Amos 9:6, 7
It is he that buildeth his stories in the heaven, and hath founded his troop in the earth; he that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The LORD is his name. Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel? saith the LORD. Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt? and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?

While the Lord had indeed delivered His people from bondage in Egypt, He would not turn a blind eye to their sin—for He had delivered even heathen nations, as well. Therefore, Israel could not presume she was immune from His judgment.

Amos 9:8, 9
Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the LORD. For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.

God would allow His people to be carried into all nations—yet not one true grain would be lost. In other words, there would always be a remnant of those who were faithful to Him.

Amos 9:10
All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, which say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us.

Although the people denied the Word given to them, they would experience its results nonetheless. In 722 B.C., the Assyrians destroyed hundreds of thousands of them and carried hundreds of thousands more into captivity by putting fishhooks in their mouths and leading them with ropes to Assyria. At that point, the ten northern tribes were never heard of again.

In spite of this, Amos ends his prophecy with a glorious promise, for after declaring the punishment that was coming *to* Israel, he now gives a promise *for* Israel . . .

Amos 9:11 (a)
In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen . . .

This could mean, as Orthodox Jews believe, that there will be a literal rebuilding of the tabernacle in the day of the Lord, in the end times. It most likely refers, however, to the household of David. That is, Jesus Christ, the Son of David, will rule and reign in Jerusalem.

Amos 9:11 (b)–13
. . . and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the

remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt.

This idea of the mountains dropping sweet wine and the hills melting is talking about a restoration of the land. When the mountains first melted, they became rocky and barren. Now, they will flow with wine. They will be lush and bountiful once again.

Amos 9:14, 15
And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God.

The Book of Amos ends with a promise that the kingdom will be restored, the heathen subdued, agricultural blessings renewed, and security guaranteed for the people of Israel. It's a promise of God's abundant blessing in the kingdom that is yet to come.

ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

A Topical Study of AMOS 9:11–15

Fire has contrasting qualities. It can be a blessing or a burden. Depending on where you're standing, it can either warm you up or burn you out. When Amos came on the scene, he warned the people in a fiery way about the coming punishment upon Israel. In fact, no other prophet spoke of fire more than Amos. But as his prophecy unfolds, we see a change of tone. After warning the people of the coming punishment upon Israel, he warms them with the coming promise for Israel. He tells them there are special benefits and blessings that will come upon them very definitely.

In verses 11 through 15, he talks about a restoration of the Davidic covenant—that David's house will be raised again. And indeed it will. When Jesus Christ, the Son of David, comes back and rules and reigns from Jerusalem, the house of David will be restored and resurrected again. He also talks about the subduing of the heathen, abundant crops, and guaranteed security.

We live in a day when we are beginning to see the fulfillment of these promises to Israel. At the same time, a controversy has arisen concerning Israel because the Christians are confused about how Israel and the church relate to each other. Presently, there are four understandings concerning this question . . .

Some say Israel has been replaced by the church. That is, when the Jewish people rejected Messiah, the Lord forsook Israel and decided to start all over again with the church. Therefore, they say, all of the promises concerning Israel apply only to the church.

Others say that Israel is synonymous with the church. That is, all of the Old Testament promises and prophecies concerning Israel materially and nationally are fulfilled in the church spiritually and eternally.

Still others maintain that Israel is equal to the church. That is, devout Jews who practice Judaism will make it into the kingdom of God just as devout Christians will because they are all His children.

But I believe the Word of God teaches clearly that Israel is distinct from the church. And I believe this understanding is important not only prophetically but practically.

One of the key components of Bible interpretation is the primary passage. That is, whenever you're looking at any given subject, rather than taking an isolated verse from here or a small phrase from there, go to the primary passage where a subject is addressed. From that, you'll gain understanding concerning the subject. False teachers don't do this. Instead, they take a verse from here, a phrase from there, and they build an erroneous belief system that ignores the primary passage the Bible presents.

The primary passage that clearly addresses the relationship the church has to Israel is seen in Romans 9, 10, 11.

It was said in antiquity that all roads lead to Rome, for Rome was the center of the world politically, economically, militarily, and culturally. Spiritually, the same is still true, for all theological roads lead to the Book of Romans because it clarifies every important truth in the Bible.

- Romans 1 through 8 deals with the principles of salvation.
- In chapters 12 through 15, we see the practical aspects of salvation.
- But in the middle, in chapters 9 through 11, Paul talks about Israel.

Why? Some commentators think it's just a parenthetical insert. Not true! Romans 9 through 11 is essential to the flow of the Book of Romans because Romans 8, the climax of the principles of salvation says there is no more condemnation, that all things work together for good, that nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. As wonderful as these promises are, however, a question comes to mind. That is, "Will God keep His promises? After all, didn't He make promises to Israel that went unfulfilled?"

Thus, in between the principles of salvation and the practical aspects of salvation, Paul talks about the problem of salvation. That is, what do you do with the Jews in light of this new plan of salvation? Paul brilliantly develops his argument. In chapter 9, he talks about God's past dealings with Israel, revealing God's sovereignty. In chapter 10, he talks about God's present dealings with Israel, revealing God's equality. In chapter 11, he talks about

God’s promised dealings with Israel, revealing God’s integrity. And in each one, God reveals something essential concerning His character.

God's Past Dealings with Israel

Of all the people of the world, Israel was adopted by God. When Abraham was in Ur worshiping the moon goddess, God said, "I'm going to pull that man out of the Babylonian religious system, adopt him, and make him a nation. And the nation that comes from him will show the world what it means to walk with Me."

As God's chosen people, the nation of Israel was the recipient of unique blessings. First, they actually saw the visible, tangible presence of God's glory in a pillar of fire by night, a cloud by day, and the shekinah glory that filled the temple. Second, they had the covenants—the agreements God established with them. Third, the Law was given to them to show them how to live. People used to laugh at the Jews for believing in the principles of the Law. "Crazy Jews," they would say. "They don't even eat pork"—even as the Gentiles were dying of trichinosis right and left. God knew what He was saying. He knew humanity would not have an understanding of trichinosis or the danger of poisonous shellfish for centuries, so in His Law, He gave minute instructions about how He wanted His people to live—for their own good. Fourth, God's people were given the privilege of serving God. But above all, they were given Jesus.

After talking about the gifts of God to Israel in Romans 9:1 through 5, Paul talks about the grace of God upon Israel in verses 6 through 21. Although Abraham had two sons, God chose to bless only Isaac. Of Isaac's two sons, God chose only Jacob. Is this fair? God is sovereign. He does what He wants for reasons He knows. As we see Jacob's and Esau's lives unfold, we see that, although Jacob wasn't always good, he did have a heart for God. Esau, on the other hand, had such little regard for God that he traded his birthright for a bowl of stew (Genesis 25:32). God chose right. He always does.

The opportunity to be God's people was given to Israel sovereignly, but it was not given exclusively. God would later open the door wider. Yet sadly, although the Gentiles would be included, Israel would miss the opportunity. The Gentiles attained righteousness by faith. The Jews tried to show they were deserving, and missed it entirely.

God's Present Dealings with Israel

Now God no longer deals differently with Jews and Gentiles. Now He deals with Jew, Gentile, black, white, young, old, Californian, Oregonian, redhead, blonde, fat, skinny, tall, short—all people equally. Jesus kept the law perfectly. We can see the fulfillment of the law in Jesus Christ. And He died on the Cross as its ultimate fulfillment. The Law serves simply to point people to Him (Galatians 3:24).

In Romans 10, Christ is revealed as Savior in verses 1 through 4 and received as Savior in verses 5 through 15. Christ is received as Savior when you come to the place where you confess Him as Lord (Romans 10:9, 10). Verses 16 through 21 talk about Christ rejected as Savior. This message was entrusted to the Jews, but they did not receive it. Does that mean there's no hope for them?

God's Promised Dealings with Israel

In Romans 11, we see that God's promises to Israel are still intact. "Look at me," Paul says. "I'm saved. Therefore, God hasn't given up on the Jews. All of His promises to them are still valid." The olive tree is a symbol of Israel. Paul says that, although the natural branches were broken off, the root is still in place. That is, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob trusted in God rather than in their own works. So God grafted in the Gentiles as branches. But Paul says the natural branches will be grafted in again because God is not through with Israel (Romans 11:23, 24). If the wild branches are bearing fruit—which we, as Gentiles, are—can you imagine how fruitful the natural branches will be once they're grafted back in? The nation will experience revival unlike any that has ever been seen in the history of the world. The Jews are only blind for a specific amount of time. After the church is raptured, Israel will see that Jesus is Lord and all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26).

"Count on it," Paul says. "The promises to Israel *will* be fulfilled." Therefore, dear saint, the promises given to you are equally sure. What a *glorious* God we serve.

Amen.



OBADIAH

Background to Obadiah

Beginning with Hosea and ending with Malachi, the final twelve books of the Old Testament are known as the minor prophets not because of their importance but because of their length. A sermon's strength is not necessarily equivalent to its length. In fact, sometimes the shortest messages can be the most potent and impacting. With a book only twenty-one verses long, although Obadiah is the "minorest" of the minor prophets, he has a major message for us today.

We don't know where Obadiah was born, when he lived, or what his circumstances were. We do know that his name means "servant of the Lord." A servant, of course, is to serve rather than to be noticed. That's what John the Baptist taught us when he said that Jesus must increase but that he himself must decrease (John 3:30). Like John the Baptist, Obadiah had a servant mentality.

Obadiah was sent by the Lord to minister to the Edomites—a very proud people. Approximately 2,000 years before Christ came, God desired to show the world the benefits and blessings that would come to people who walked with Him. So He tapped a man named Abraham—a man who lived in the city of Ur and worshiped the moon—on the shoulder and called him to become an entirely new nation. Abraham's son was named Isaac. Isaac had a son named Jacob. Jacob had a twin brother named Esau, the father of the Edomites. Even before they were born, Jacob and Esau fought in the womb of their mother, Rachel. When Rachel sought the Lord concerning this, He said it was because there were two nations inside of her and that they were already warring with one another (Genesis 25:23).

The Lord sovereignly and wisely chose the younger of the two to continue His line. He rejected Esau because Esau was a carnal man as evidenced by the fact that he sold his birthright for a bowl of pottage, or stew (Genesis 25:33). When Esau left his family's heritage to begin his own society, he married a number of heathen wives and began a nation called the Edomites. *Edom* means "red"—after the color of the pottage he so desired (Genesis 25:30).

The Edomites lived in an area southeast of Israel, an area in present-day Jordan—a rocky, rugged area. They became a powerful, prolific people and developed three cities: Bozrah, Teman—which was known as a center of knowledge and wisdom in the ancient world—and their capital city of Petra. Because Petra was hidden in the crater of a volcano with only one way in on a narrow mountain pass that was only twelve feet wide in many places, it was thought to be the safest place in the world. Historians tell us it would take only twenty men to defend the city of one million because the Edomites would stand on the cliffs surrounding the city that ranged in height from 200 to 1,000 feet and pelt any intruders with boulders.

As a result, the Edomites were extremely proud and arrogant. So the Lord sent His humble servant, Obadiah, to address them.

He predicted destruction of the Edomites. In verses 17 through 21, we see the promised restoration of the Israelites.



OBADIAH

Obadiah 1
The vision of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning Edom; We have heard a rumour from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle.

In verse 1, we see the Lord sending Obadiah as an ambassador to the heathen nations, telling them they would be stirred up to wage war against the Edomites.

Obadiah 2
Behold, I have made thee small among the heathen: thou art greatly despised.

In verse 2, the Lord's message through Obadiah to Edom was that their doom was imminent.

Obadiah 3, 4
The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the LORD.

Regardless of how invincible they thought they were, the Lord would bring the Edomites down.

Obadiah 5, 6
If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not have stolen till they had enough? if the grapegatherers came to thee, would they not leave some grapes?

How are the things of Esau searched out! how are his hidden things sought up!

Because Edom was thought to be impregnable, banks carved in the cliffs of the rock city of Petra were devoted to holding the treasures of her allies. Here, the Lord says, "Every last one of your treasures will be stolen." When Petra was rediscovered in the early 1800s, although the buildings that were carved right out of rock were still intact, not a single item was found within them. Considering Petra had a population of one million, the fact that there wasn't a single artifact left not only fulfills Obadiah's prophecy, but makes it unique in the history of archeology.

Obadiah 7
All the men of thy confederacy have brought thee even to the border: the men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee, and prevailed against thee; they that eat thy bread have laid a wound under thee: there is none understanding in him.

The Edomites were known as very sophisticated diplomats. But they would be double-crossed.

Obadiah 8, 9
Shall I not in that day, saith the LORD, even destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau? And thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter.

After prophesying that her territory would be subdued, her treasures stolen, and her treaties subverted, here we see Edom's troops and wise men slaughtered. The Edomites were not only known for their military ability but also for their intellectual capability. In the study of ancient cultures of the region, Petra is one of the great unsolved mysteries to this day. Inside the city and all around Edom there was an abundance of agriculture. Yet Edom only received an inch of rainfall a year. How did they irrigate their crops? How could they sustain such a large population? Although archaeologists have

uncovered the ruins of their aqueducts and holding systems, exactly how they worked still remains a mystery.

Despite their technical ingenuity, however, judgment was headed their way. What had the Edomites done to cause such heavy judgment against themselves?

Obadiah 10–13
For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever. In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them. But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger; neither shouldest thou have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress. Thou shouldest not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; yea, thou shouldest not have looked on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity;

After seeing their judgment described, here we see why the Edomites' destruction was deserved: they encouraged Israel's foes. When Israel was in trouble—either when the Philistines attacked in 840 B.C. or during the Babylonian invasion of 587 B.C.—rather than stand by Israel, they stood against her, interested only in what they could get as spoil (Psalm 137:7).

Obadiah 14
Neither shouldest thou have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldest thou have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress.

Not only did the Edomites encourage Israel's foes but they enslaved Israel's fugitives. That is, they captured and enslaved the Israelites trying to escape destruction when Israel was attacked.

Obadiah 15, 16
For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head. For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been.

That which Edom had done to Israel would now befall her. She would be eaten up and swallowed down.

Obadiah 17
But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.

In verse 17, after seeing the predicted destruction of the Edomites, we come to the promised restoration of the Israelites. So much had been given to them but they weren't enjoying it. The time is coming, however, when they shall truly possess their possessions, when they will understand and enjoy the blessings God has given them.

Obadiah 18
And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the LORD hath spoken it.

When the Lord comes back, all shall be Israel's that was intended to be hers. The Edomites, however, would be burned as stubble. Centuries after this prophecy was given, in A.D. 70, when the Romans came into the area, due to guerilla warfare and disease, the Edomites could not effectively resist them. But when they heard there were rebels in Jerusalem standing up to the Romans, the 20,000 remaining Edomites joined them and holed up in the temple. When Titus began to burn Jerusalem and destroy the temple, history tells us that 8,500 Edomites were burned alive with it. The remaining 12,000 Edomites were slaughtered in the city or outside the city gates. That is why,

although you might live next to an Iranian, Ethiopian, or Egyptian, you'll never meet an Edomite. They were permanently destroyed.

Obadiah 19, 20
And they of the south shall possess the mount of Esau; and they of the plain the Philistines: and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim, and the fields of Samaria: and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel shall possess that of the Canaanites, even unto Zarephath; and the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south.

Verses 19 and 20 list the territory Israel will enjoy when the Lord comes back—when she will at last truly possess her possessions.

Obadiah 21
And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD's.

Obadiah's prophecy ends by saying that, although Edom will be destroyed, Israel will go on.

Ethnically, this is a reminder to all people at all times that God's hand is on the Jews in a very special way. In the Book of Genesis, God declared that those who blessed them would be blessed while those who cursed them would themselves be cursed (12:3). Throughout history, nations that bless Israel have experienced blessings while nations that have come against her have ultimately experienced hardship or destruction altogether.

But, because Edom represents so much of the tendency within our own society, I believe Obadiah also says something to us personally. That is, we feel just as safe and secure in our money market certificates, stock portfolios, pensions, and savings accounts as the Edomites did in their rock city. We think we're secure because we're a democracy, because we are masters of technology and have a strong military.

These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent

> blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.
>
> Proverbs 6:16–19

We hate child molesters, murderers, and kidnappers. But God says number one on the list of things He hates is pride.

Why? I suggest two reasons . . .

First, pride makes people independent from Him. Proud people don't seek God because they are secure in what they have. Why is God grieved when we are independent from Him? Because He knows we're missing all the blessings He has for us. When a person experiences tragedy or difficulty, setback or reversal, he prays. He comes to prayer meetings. He has morning devotions. He asks people to pray for him. He prays constantly because he's desperate. But when he's proud, he doesn't pray. And in so doing, he cuts himself off from that which God wants to do for him. So it is a loving Father who says, "If My children are proud, they won't pray. And if they don't pray, they won't receive all that I want to give them and do for them."

Second, pride makes us insensitive to others.

> Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom.
>
> Proverbs 13:10

If you're fighting with your wife, at odds with your neighbor, or having problems with your boss it is always an issue of pride because pride is the root of *all* contention.

> Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.
>
> Proverbs 16:18

Just like the Edomites, we will go down if there is pride in our hearts because we will become independent from God and insensitive to others.

What's the solution? The first is confession of sin. I find that daily, constantly, and specifically confessing my sin to God keeps me in a place of

constant humility. “Lord, I wasn’t listening to that person. I over-reacted to that situation. I ignored that need.” You will not walk around with a puffed up head or puffed out chest if you are constantly confessing your sin. That’s why God desires it.

> Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. . . .
>
> James 5:16 (a)

We are to humble ourselves not only in the sight of God but to confess our faults one to another because there’s nothing that will keep us humble like confessing our faults to a close brother or sister. Everyone has problems, struggles, and difficulties. We’re all in this together.

The pathway to humility winds through confession. The second solution to pride lies in humiliation.

> I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
>
> 2 Corinthians 12:2, 7–9

Paul realized that, because he had been given so much revelation, God saw there was a possibility of pride so He allowed a messenger of Satan to buffet him. Some think this refers to a demon. Others think it refers to a temptation that taunted him. Others say it was an eye disease. Still others say there was a group of people who sought to undermine Paul through innuendo and rumor wherever he went.

Whatever it was, Paul prayed three times to be delivered from it before he finally realized that it was when he was weak that he was actually strong. When he was humiliated, he knew he had to depend upon God. So he embraced the humiliation.

Is there someone who humiliates you constantly? Embrace him. Is there a temptation that taunts you incessantly? Are you plagued by a physical infirmity? Accept what the Lord is doing through it because it's keeping you humble. This will keep you tender toward people and dependent upon the Lord. Humility and brokenness are of utmost importance in His sight. Therefore, He will do whatever it takes to keep His children in that position.

May He keep us ever dependent upon Him lest we become like Edom and are brought down tragically. May we find our security not in our own plans and profits but in Him alone so that we, like Israel, can possess all He has for us.



JONAH

Background to Jonah

Unlike that of any other prophet, Jonah's message was singular and only eight words long: Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown (3:4). Thus, unlike any other prophetic book, the Book of Jonah is not a series of messages. Rather, it is a two-act drama. In Act 1, chapters 1 and 2, the setting is the great sea—the Mediterranean. The plot is Jonah forsaking his mission. In Act 2, chapters 3 and 4, the setting is the great city—Nineveh. The plot is Jonah fulfilling his mission. The star of the cast is God. Jonah is the supporting actor and there is a cameo appearance by the great fish.

In an effort to make the Book of Jonah easier to "swallow," critics and pseudo-scholars have suggested different ways it should be interpreted. Some say it should be interpreted as a myth—that it's an interesting story from antiquity, but not to be taken literally. Like *Moby Dick* or *Robinson Crusoe,* it's fascinating, but fiction nonetheless. Others say it should be interpreted allegorically. That is, they suggest that Jonah represents the Jews; the great sea depicts the nations of the world; and the great fish symbolizes the Babylonians who held the Jews captive for seventy years before freeing them to return to their homeland.

But I believe the Book of Jonah should be interpreted historically. Neither myth nor allegory, it speaks of an actual event. Why do I say this? First, because Jonah is referred to in the Old Testament. Jonah is referred to in 2 Kings 14:25 as an actual person, named as a prophet, and his hometown identified. Second, Jonah is referred to in the New Testament. In Matthew 12 and 16, by referring to Jonah by name, Jesus verified and validated this Old Testament account.

Satan seems to have a special hatred for and a determination to undermine the authenticity of the Books of Genesis, Jonah, and Daniel. Why? I believe it is because Genesis speaks of the Incarnation of Christ, Jonah of the Resurrection of Christ, and Daniel of the Second Coming of Christ. In the opening pages of the very first book of the Bible, we see the Proto Evangelicum—the first mention of the gospel message. Jesus Himself identified this story as a picture of His burial and Resurrection (Matthew

12:38, 39). In Daniel 7, Jesus is seen ruling over the earth and destroying the enemy following His Second Coming.

But just as Satan seeks to stamp out the authority of these books, I find it interesting that Jesus seemed to go out of His way to put His stamp of approval on them. In Matthew 19:4, Jesus used the Genesis account of the creation of Adam and Eve as a cornerstone for His teaching on marriage. In Matthew chapters 12 and 16, as well as in Luke 11, Jesus referred to Jonah in response to the clamor of the people for a sign. In Matthew 24, Jesus spoke of Daniel by name and based His end-time teaching on the second chapter of Daniel's book.

In chapter 1 of Jonah, we'll see God's patience when Jonah protested. In chapter 2, we'll see God's pardon when Jonah prayed. In chapter 3, we'll see God's power when Jonah preached. In chapter 4, we'll see God's pity when Jonah pouted. Some find this book "fishy." Others find it hard to "swallow." But I pray you will get "hooked" on this book, a whale of a tale about a rebellious prophet, a wicked city, and the God of the second chance.



JONAH

1

Jonah 1:1 (a)
Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah . . .

Jonah means "Dove." Throughout Scripture, the dove is the symbol of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is an appropriate name for this one whose anointed ministry ushered in the greatest revival in world history.

Jonah 1:1 (b), 2
. . . the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

Located on the eastern side of the Tigris River, Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, was one of the greatest cities of antiquity. With 1,200 two-hundred-feet high towers and surrounded by a hundred-feet-high wall whose foundation was made of polished stone and of such breadth that three chariots could drive abreast atop it, Nineveh was magnificent to behold. Sixty miles in circumference, enough corn could grow inside the walls to feed the population of 600,000. Within the city were magnificent palaces, including courtyards covering more than a hundred acres. The roof of the king's palace was supported by beams of cedar resting on columns of cypress and inlaid and strengthened with bands of sculptured silver and gold. Hanging gardens filled the city with rich plants and rare animals. Temples, palaces, libraries, and arsenals abounded to adorn and enrich the city beyond belief. And all was built by the labor of foreign slaves.

It was an awesome city—but it was also an awful city. To this day, Assyrians are known as the cruelest, most sadistic people in world history. Furniture made of human skin and pyramids constructed of human skulls attest to their atrocities. Thus, telling Jonah to go to Nineveh would have been comparable to telling him to go to Berlin in the 1940s.

Jonah 1:3 (a)
But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD . . .

Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord out of fear. However, it was not the cruelty of the Ninevites Jonah feared—but the mercy of God toward them (Jonah 3:2). You see, Jonah knew that if the Ninevites turned to God, He would forgive them—and the last thing Jonah wanted was to see the Ninevites blessed. He wanted to see them blasted.

Jonah put patriotism above evangelism. But before we are too quick to judge, we must search our own hearts. What if the Lord said to you, "I have a mission for you: Go to the most anti-American country and give your life to them in My name"? If you're like Jonah—or me—you would have a very hard time with that request. But our Father says, "I love this world—including all of those who shout, 'Death to the Great White Satan America.' You may not understand them, but I do."

We have to be careful of a "Moral Majority mentality" that says, "America is always right and everyone else needs to see things our way." We're part of something bigger than the USA, gang. We're part of the kingdom of God; and our King is merciful, compassionate, slow to anger, and desirous that *all* be saved (2 Peter 3:9).

Jonah 1:3 (b)
. . . and went down to Joppa . . .

Jonah went *down* to Joppa. This is the first of many downward steps he'll take.

Jonah 1:3 (c)
. . . and he found a ship going to Tarshish . . .

Nineveh is to the northeast of Israel. Joppa is to the west. Therefore, Jonah sailed in the opposite direction of the Lord's command. Whenever you're running in the opposite direction from the presence or call of the Lord, you can be sure that Satan will have a ship all ready for you to set sail.

Jonah 1:3 (d)
. . . so he paid the fare thereof . . .

Jonah paid for his excursion in rebellion. Anytime you rebel, know this: The ship will be there waiting, but you'll pay a heavy price because, although sin is exciting initially, it's expensive eventually (Hebrews 11:25).

Jonah 1:3 (e)
. . . and went down into it . . .

Jonah went down into the boat and he's going to go down even lower before he's through. If you feel "down" today, could it be because, like Jonah, you're ignoring or rebelling against something the Lord has told you to do?

Jonah 1:3 (f), 4
. . . to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

God sent a storm.

> For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.
>
> Psalm 107:25–28

Sometimes God sends storms of severity in order to bring His children into port safely. Such was Jonah's case. This storm was not God's punishment of Jonah, but showed His patience *with* Jonah. You see, had Jonah listened, through the howling wind of the storm, he could have heard God's voice saying, "I'm not going to let you go, Jonah. I love you too much. So blow, wind, blow."

Not every storm, however, is the result of rebellion. Jesus sent His disciples into storms on more than one occasion not because they were sinning, but because they had need of strengthening—not to destroy them, but to develop them (Matthew 14:24; Luke 8:23).

Some of the most beautiful trees I've ever seen are the cypress trees of the Monterey Peninsula. The longer the wind blows these trees, the more shapely and beautiful they become. The stronger the wind blows, the deeper their roots go. Thus, the cypress become incredibly sturdy and very lovely because of the constant wind upon them.

The same is true of us. God's stormy winds upon our lives are meant not to destroy us, but to develop us. If you feel in the midst of a storm even now, take hope, dear saint. God is either using it to bring you back to His safe port or He's using it to make your life into a beautiful trophy of His grace.

Jonah 1:5 (a)
Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god . . .

Every man—even the most seasoned sailor—has someone or something he cries to when the storm gets brutal.

Jonah 1:5 (b)
. . . and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship . . .

The sailors began throwing their possessions and treasures overboard—and Jonah went deeper still.

Jonah 1:5 (c)
. . . and he lay, and was fast asleep.

When Jesus was in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, so sound was His sleep that His disciples had to waken Him during a storm (Mark 4:38). Jesus could sleep through the storm in peace, knowing that His Father was in control. This was not the case with Jonah. He was asleep not because he was at

peace with God but because he was rebelling against Him. If you've ever been so weighed down by sin that you just wanted to pull the blankets over your head and fall asleep, hoping everything would somehow be okay when you woke up, you know how Jonah felt.

Jonah 1:6, 7
So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not. And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

The sailors drew straws to determine whose fault the storm was—and Jonah got the short one.

Jonah 1:8
Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?

"Who *are* you?" the sailors asked Jonah. "And what have you done to deserve *this* kind of punishment?"

Jonah 1:9, 10
And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

"The God who made the sea and the dry land told me to go to Nineveh," Jonah explained. "But there's no way I'm going because I hate the Assyrians." Jonah mistakenly thought he could run away in rebellion and hide out in the hold of a heathen ship, where no one would be the wiser.

Crew members of an English ship sailing around Cape Horn in the 1870s mutinied against their captain and shot him in the head before throwing him overboard, where his body landed on an ice shelf. Forty years later, off the coast of central Chile, an iceberg was spotted. To keep it from impeding the passage of sailing vessels in the area, a couple of men sailed out to blow it up, only to discover the frozen body of a man encased within. After chipping away the top layer of ice, the body was identified as that of Frank Shaw, a sea captain who had disappeared. Thus, the mutineers, who, for forty years thought they had gotten away with their crime, were hung on the gallows in London.

Be *sure* your sin will find you out (Numbers 32:23). You never know what iceberg's going to float in!

Jonah 1:11, 12
Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

Jonah said, "Since my sin is the reason you guys are getting seasick, throw me instead of your treasures overboard and the storm will stop."

The problem with sin and rebellion is this: Innocent people get tossed around in our storms. You might say with great bravado, "I'll pay the fare. I'll pay the price for my sin"—but that doesn't take into account the fact that others will get beat up and go down in the process. Our families, friends, and coworkers often pay the price for our own foolishness and rebellion.

Jonah 1:13 (a)
Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land . . .

The sailors fought harder against the storm. Knowing Jonah was the prophet of a very powerful God, they feared to touch him. It is interesting that these unbelieving, heathen sailors had more respect for the omnipotence of God than did His own prophet.

Jonah 1:13 (b)–16
. . . but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them. Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee. So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.

These scared, salty sailors were the first souls saved in a revival that would become the greatest in history.

Jonah 1:17 (a)
Now the LORD had prepared a great fish . . .

The Hebrew word *dag,* here translated "fish," can also mean "creature" or "whale."

Jonah 1:17 (b)
. . . to swallow up Jonah. . . .

If people would do a little more historical research, they wouldn't struggle intellectually with Jonah being in the belly of a great fish or even a whale. The following account is by M. DeParvelle, French scientist and editor of the *Journal Des Debats* . . .

In February, 1891, the whaling ship, *Star of the East,* was in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands when the lookout sighted a large sperm whale three miles away. Two boats were lowered and in short time, one of the harpooners was able to spear the creature. The second boat also attacked the whale but was upset by a lash of its tail, causing the crew to fall into the sea. One of them drowned but the other, James Bartley, simply disappeared without a trace.

After the whale was killed, the crew set to work with axes and spades to remove the blubber. They worked all day and into the night. The next day, they attached tackle to the stomach in order to hoist it to the deck. In so doing,

the sailors were startled by something in the stomach which gave spasmodic signs of life. Inside was found the missing sailor, doubled up and unconscious. He was laid on the deck and treated to a bath of sea water, which soon revived him.

At the end of the third week, he had entirely recovered from the shock and resumed his duties on the ship. His face, neck, and hands were bleached to a deadly whiteness and he took on the appearance of parchment. Bartley affirms that he probably would have lived inside his house of flesh until he starved, for he lost his senses through fright and not through lack of air.

This is only one of several records wherein non-Christian, unbelieving historians and scientists have recorded incidents of men surviving in whales.

Jonah 1:17 (c)
. . . And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah was in a tight spot, no doubt about it! Tight spots are interesting because they will either make us bitter or make us better. The boiling water that hardens the egg softens the potato.

In chapter 2, Jonah will come out better—not bitter—because his tight spot will bring him to a place of prayer.

A WHALE OF A SIGN

A Topical Study of JONAH 1:17

Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it . . .

Matthew 12:38, 39 (a)

The skeptics had gathered around our Lord once again, asking for a sign. Although Jesus could have easily given them one, He chose instead to look those boys in the eye and say, "An evil and adulterous"—or a physical and material—"generation seeks after a sign." He said this because He knew the tendency of skeptic and saint alike to become so confined to the realm of the physical that there is no room for the reality of the spiritual.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

John 20:24, 25

Eight days later, Jesus answered Thomas, saying,

Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

John 20:29

Blessed are they that have not seen and yet believe. Who is the blessed person, the happy person? The one who lives in the spiritual rather than the material arena.

Just as swimmers bind their legs together to develop their stroke, the Lord wants to develop the "stroke" of our faith by binding the "kick" of our physical senses. "Learn to live in the arena of the unseen," He says to us. "Learn to walk by faith rather than by sight. The material world is doomed to disappear. I'm grooming you for eternity."

Jesus did not comply with the demand of the skeptics for the type of sign they had in mind. It wasn't because their request was too hard for the One who had fed 5,000 with a few loaves and fishes, walked on water, and calmed a storm. Their request was not too big. It was too small—for the sign Jesus promised was bigger than anything they could have imagined.

"There is one sign I will give," Jesus said, "to you and to everyone throughout history. It is the sign of the prophet Jonah—for just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights before he appeared again, so too, for three days and three nights, I will be in the heart of the earth" (see Matthew 12:39, 40).

Because the Resurrection was the one and only sign Jesus promised, I would like to share with you three reasons why it is the basis of our belief and the foundation of our faith.

The Resurrection Is Authentication of Who Jesus Was

I remember talking to a man in San Diego who told me that he was the Messiah for our generation. His goal was twofold: to save San Diego and to save the whales.

"How can I know you are really God?" I asked.

"You'll hear of my death very soon," he said. "But after I die, I will resurrect from the dead and make myself known to men."

That was fifteen years ago. I'm still waiting.

There is only One who rose from the dead, which is why the Resurrection validates Jesus as unique among men.

"Yeah," you say, "but did He really rise from the dead? I heard He didn't die at all—that one of His disciples disguised himself as a Roman soldier, took a sponge filled with some sort of knock-out drug, and held it up to Jesus on the tip of a spear as He hung on the Cross. Then, after three days, Jesus came to, claiming He had risen from the dead."

If you believe that a man could endure a beating with the flagellum, have his beard plucked out, be nailed to a cross, have a spear stuck in his side, be placed in a tomb without fresh air, food, or water for three days and three nights then suddenly pop up, push away a three-ton stone, take on a hundred Roman soldiers, and walk around, saying, "I've resurrected" you are a person of *remarkable* faith!

"Well, maybe He died," you say. "But did He really rise from the dead? Maybe the Jewish leaders took His body just to bug the believers."

That is also impossible for me to believe. After all, the Jews considered Christianity to be a blasphemous and heretical doctrine. Producing the body of Jesus would have put an end to it forever.

"Well," you suggest, "maybe the Romans took His body."

The Romans? History tells us that not only did Christianity divide the Roman Empire but that it ushered in its eventual demise. The Romans could have saved their empire and saved themselves the trouble of killing millions of Christians simply by producing the body of Jesus.

“Well,” you wonder, “maybe Mary and the other women went to the wrong tomb on Easter morning.”

Do you mean to say that no one hearing the women’s story would have investigated it thoroughly to see if, in their grief, the women had become confused and mistaken?

“Well,” you theorized, “maybe, wanting to perpetuate the teaching of their leader and to establish His place in history, the disciples stole the body.”

History and human nature say otherwise. Peter was crucified upside down. John was first boiled in oil and then left to die on the island of Patmos. James was sawn in half lengthwise. Thomas was speared in the back. Andrew’s brains were beaten out with a club. To a man, the disciples —many seeing their wives and children tortured—died violent, brutal deaths rather than deny that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. To believe that any group of men would endure the ravaging of their families and the torture of their own bodies in order to uphold what they know to be a lie is beyond the limits of credibility.

Any thinking person who explores the question honestly and with intellectual integrity must conclude that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead.

The Resurrection Is Validation of What Jesus Does

> *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. . . . And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*
>
> 1 John 1:7, 2:1 (b), 2

What does "propitiation" mean? It means "satisfaction."

In other words, according to John, Jesus' death satisfied the demands of a holy God who said that sin must be punished. Jesus was the propitiation, the satisfaction. The question is: Did it work? Did God look at the death of Jesus Christ and say, "Yes. That will do. Jon's sins are now forgiven"? Did the blood truly take away *my* sins?

I could go through the actions of writing you a million-dollar check, it would mean nothing if I didn't have the funds to back it up. Jesus claimed to be dying for our sins, but did His death "take?" Did it really satisfy the demands of a holy God who said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4)?

Yes. The Resurrection proves it. It's the validation of what Jesus does. His blood does indeed cleanse us. It is valid. It "took." It works! "This Jesus hath God raised up" (Acts 2:32)—validating what He did on the Cross and what He continues to do in our lives.

The Resurrection Is Exhilaration for Those Jesus Loves

On Easter Sunday, the women who discovered the empty tomb were excited, the disciples were elated, and all who saw Jesus were exhilarated. Why? It was not because they said, "Theologically, this is the verification and the validation of His work on the Cross and, apologetically, this is the authentication of who He is."

No, these people were not thinking in terms of theology. They were simply aware that Jesus, their Lord, had risen; that Jesus, their Friend, was back.

"My Friend is back!" Peter must have said—"the One who healed my mother-in-law, taught me to walk on water, and paid my temple tax with a coin from a fish's mouth."

"Our Friend is back!" the disciples must have echoed—"the One who calmed storms, fed multitudes, and loved sinners."

"I will never leave you. I will never forsake you," He said. "And I will send you another Comforter—the same kind of Person I am. He will be with you always—even to the ends of the earth" (Matthew 28:20; John 14:16).

So it is what we can say, "Our Friend is *here!* His Spirit lives in our hearts."

When I'm hungry emotionally, spiritually, or physically—He's here to satisfy me and to supply all my needs according to His riches. When I go through storms and feel like my boat is about to sink, it's Jesus, the living Lord, who walks out and rescues me. When sickness strikes my family, when challenges and difficulties surround me, it's Jesus who comes in, takes me by the hand, and lifts me up.

The Resurrection is authentication of who Jesus is, validation of what He does, and exhilaration for those He loves. Truly, it's a whale of a sign—the only sign we need.



Jonah 2:1

2 Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly,

Jonah didn't pray the minute he was swallowed. Three days and three nights passed before he prayed. Why do you suppose he waited so long? I suggest it was for the same reason we do.

When we're in a place where we know we have rebelled against the will of the Lord and we're in a tight spot because of it, we think, "No doubt I have blown it so badly and grieved God so deeply that He won't listen to anything I say. Therefore, why pray? If I were God, I wouldn't listen to me, either."

We have the mistaken idea that God hears the prayers of "good people" but turns a deaf ear to those who are in a place of rebelliousness or weakness.

So often I mistakenly think my relationship with God is based upon the subtle supposition that if I'm really "good"—if I'm reading my Bible, going to church, and praying a lot—God will hear my prayers. But if I'm not, then He's not interested. But that's just not true—for, as Jonah is about to experience, God is gracious and merciful, kind and compassionate, ready to forgive and eager to respond to His children no matter where they're at or why they're there.

Jonah 2:2

And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.

Seaweed wrapped around his head, fish slapping him in the face, the temperature a stifling 98.6 (if it was indeed a whale), Jonah felt as though he was in hell itself. He had gone down to Joppa, down to the ship, down inside the ship, down in the belly of the whale—down into hell itself. At last he called out to the Lord. And the Lord heard his cry.

Jonah 2:3–9

For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will

look again toward thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.

Jonah had no idea what would happen next. He was just glad that, after three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, he sensed the presence of the Lord.

Jonah 2:10
And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

The whale suddenly felt the "urge to regurge," and Jonah was deposited on the beach. So, if you feel that nothing is working out with your job, your relationships or your family; if you feel that your life is going nowhere, that nothing is making sense, take heart—for even when we think nothing is working out, God has promised that it's all working out (Romans 8:28). You see, while Jonah felt forsaken and forgotten, blinded and in the dark—for three days and three nights when he thought his life was going nowhere—the whale was moving.

Where was it going? It was swimming from somewhere out in the middle of the Mediterranean off the coast of Spain back to the place where God had wanted Jonah all along. Jonah didn't have a clue that anything was happening until suddenly he was on the beach at Assyria.

The same is true for you. If you call out to the Lord and say, "Lord, I need You," you'll find that eventually you'll be right where you were supposed to be—that, through the days and nights when you thought nothing was happening, unbeknownst to you, the whale was moving.

3 Jonah 3:1 (a)
And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time . . .

Our God is the God of the second chance.

I remember reading that General Motors Corporation only gave one chance. That is, according to the article, candidates for executive positions were taken out to lunch where their every move was scrutinized—down to the seasoning of their soup. If they salted their soup before tasting it, they supposedly demonstrated the behavior of one who makes decisions before having the facts. One false move like that, and they'd be out!

I'm thankful God isn't like that because we would all be dust, curtains, toast, finished. We wouldn't have a chance! And, lest you think Jonah was an exceptional case, please note that giving people a second chance is God's usual mode of operation.

Abraham denied that Sarah was his wife and watched her carried off to kings' harems—not once, but on two separate occasions (Genesis 12:15; 20:2). Moses murdered a man and tried to cover his sin by burying the body in the desert sand (Exodus 2:12). David committed adultery and subsequently murdered Uriah (2 Samuel 11:4, 15). Peter denied Jesus by the enemy's fire (Matthew 26:74). John Mark left Paul and Barnabas stranded when he ran home to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Yet in each of these cases, God used these men *after* their mistakes.

Why? Because giving people a second chance is God's delight. God loves to use the foolish things of the world to confound the wise and the weak things to confound the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27).

I remember taking my daughter, Jessie, for a walk down the Rogue River. As we walked along the shore, we noticed four or five fishermen standing on the rocks out in the water. They had on fishing hats, vests, and waders. They had fancy fishing poles with shiny reels and tackle boxes with sonic lures.

"Have you caught anything?" I called.

"Not yet."

Just then, Jessie, who was about seven years old at the time, said, "Daddy, can I fish?"

"Honey, we don't have a pole," I said.

Not easily deterred, Jessie reached down, grabbed a stick and said, "Here, Daddy. Here's a pole."

"But, Jess, we don't have any line," I said.

Five minutes later, after digging through the rocks and finding a few feet of used line with a rusty hook on the end, she tugged on the pants leg of one of the fishermen and said, "Could I borrow some bait, please?"

"Sure," the amused fisherman said as he handed her a fish egg.

With a big smile on her face, Jessie dropped her line in, and, within ninety seconds, pulled her stick-pole, recycled line, rusty hook, borrowed egg—and shiny trout out of the water.

That's just like us! The Lord loves to use children like us—with our little poles and rusty hooks—to do His work. In Ephesians 2:4–7, Paul says that God, who is rich in mercy, saved us so that in the ages to come, we might be a testimony to the glory of His grace.

You see, when the angels see you and me ruling and reigning with our Lord in heaven, they'll marvel, saying, "Truly the Lord is full of grace! Look at the people He's chosen. Look at the folks He's rewarded. Look how He's using *them*!"

God loves to use people like you and me—with flaws, failures, and shortcomings. And here, He's about to use Jonah who, only three days earlier, had been sailing in the opposite direction from where he should have been going.

But maybe you read this account and say, "That's nice that God gave Jonah a second chance. But what if Jonah would have blown it a third time or an eighth time? I understand that the Lord gives second chances—but what about a tenth chance or a hundredth chance? What would have happened if, after being deposited on the beach, Jonah went to the nearest port and bought another ticket to sail as far away from Nineveh as he could get?

I think the Lord would have had another whale for him, another situation all set up to bring him back again—a third, a fourth, a thirtieth, a fortieth, a three-hundredth, a four-hundredth time. God's mercy is inexhaustible. He just keeps working with us and remaking us. He doesn't give up on us. He just doesn't.

In Luke 15, Jesus told a profound story about a son who went to his dad and said, "Pops, give me my inheritance. I want to go into a far country and do my own thing." His dad, knowing what his son would do, gave him the money anyway. The son spent his father's money on wine, women, and song—until famine hit. Destitute and impoverished, he got a job feeding pigs. But after he had his fill of eating pig slop and sleeping in the pigpen, he finally said, "I'll go home and be a servant in my dad's house. At least that will be better than being here with the pigs." Much to his surprise, however, upon his return, his father ran out to welcome him home. Instead of getting busted, he got a banquet. Instead of getting kicked, he got kissed.

Now, what would have happened if, after a few months, the son had said, "I'm going back to the far country"? I believe the father would have let him go again—and would have welcomed him home again. And, eventually, after the third or fourth or eighth or tenth trip home—the son would have finally said, "I'm tired of hanging out with the pigs." And he would have returned home to stay.

You see, the difference between the prodigal and the pig is that the prodigal finally says, "I don't belong here." So too, the child of God might find himself in the pigpen from time to time and in the belly of the great fish upon occasion—but he won't stay there.

How do you know if God is still working with you? You'll want out of the pigpen.

You'll go back home eventually—and each time you do, the Father will be there to greet you, to receive you, and—as He did to Jonah—to speak to you yet *another* time.

Jonah 3:1 (b)–3 (a)
. . . saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. . . .

"Arise," God said. Everyone stumbles but God will use any stumbler willing to arise.

Jonah 3:3 (b)
. . . Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

For centuries, scholars claimed Nineveh didn't exist and used its mention in Scripture to prove the Bible fallacious—until the year 1845 when one day, quite by accident, an English archaeologist began to uncover one of the greatest cities of antiquity: the city of Nineveh.

That's always the way it is. The Bible proves itself to be true while the pseudo-intellectuals are proven wrong again and again. The Bible is infallible and, sooner or later, archaeology or science verifies what the Word of God says time after time.

Jonah 3:4
And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

Throughout Scripture, forty is the number of judgment and trial. The people of Israel wandered forty years in the wilderness. It rained on Noah forty days and forty nights. Jesus was tested in the desert for forty days. Here, Jonah declared there would be only forty days until Nineveh would be destroyed.

Jonah 3:5 (a)
So the people of Nineveh believed God . . .

Notice it doesn't say the people of Nineveh believed *in* God. It says they believed God. There's a big difference. Six hundred thousand Ninevites believed God when He said that in forty days, judgment was coming. And the greatest revival in the world took place as a result. But an even greater revival is yet to come. After the church is raptured, there will be 144,000 Jewish evangelists preaching, angels flying across the sky proclaiming the

gospel, Elijah and Moses working miracles—and multiplied millions will call upon the name of the Lord.

This intrigues me because there are those who say that, because Jesus cannot come back until everyone hears the gospel, the church must be present in the Tribulation in order that the gospel can be proclaimed. Yet here, in Jonah 3, we see the greatest revival of all time—before the church was even born.

Jonah 3:5 (b)–9
. . . and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

The Ninevites took the message of Jonah seriously and responded wholeheartedly.

Why? I believe there are two reasons . . .

First, Jonah's message was simple. So often in our witnessing, we make our message so complicated as we try to explain the hypostatic union, eschatology, and theology. We give our defense against evolution and discuss the ramifications of abortion—but many times, the people with whom we're sharing don't understand what we're talking about because we get so defensive or complex. So often, we mistakenly think we have to give all the arguments, answer all the questions, and deal with all the problems. But you would be shocked at how many people respond if you just say, "Hey, could I pray with you to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior right now?"

Second, Jonah's message was real. In the three documented cases of men being swallowed by whales, all three men emerged in the same condition. Due to the gastric juices in the stomach, they looked like hairless albinos—pure white with not even an eyelash or eyebrow to be found. This encourages me because I often think that, in order to be effective, I can have no previous failures, no mistakes, no splotches on my record. But, in reality, it was the scarring, bleaching, and pain—the visible results of his own rebellion that gave Jonah credibility and effectiveness.

Why is it that, as believers, we think we have to impress the world?

I suggest that, like Jonah, we need to say to people, "I've been in the pit. I'm bleached—but I'm alive. The Lord has been merciful and gracious to me. And He's faithful to see me through."

Jonah 3:10
And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

This doesn't mean God made a mistake. It means He changed direction, changed course, altered His plan—just as Jonah feared He would.



4

Jonah 4:1
But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

Jonah was angry that history's most vicious people got saved in history's greatest revival.

Jonah 4:2
And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious

God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

Forgiveness is the deepest need of man and the highest achievement of God. We have this picture that the Lord is just waiting for us to mess up so He can come down and deal with us. But Jonah knew otherwise. He knew that the Lord in His mercy would forgive the Ninevites if they called to Him.

Mercy imitates God and irritates Satan. If you want to be like God, be merciful. Be forgiving. Be slow to anger, slow to criticize, slow to find fault.

Jonah 4:3
Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

Why did Jonah say this? I suggest it was not only because he was mad at the Ninevites but because his reputation was at stake. "In forty days, you guys are going to be toast," he had told the Ninevites. But when he realized it wasn't going to happen, he became more concerned about his reputation than about their salvation.

Jonah 4:4
Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

This verse literally reads, "Is it right for you to be angry because of well-doing?" In other words, God asked Jonah, "Because I have done something good, should that make you angry?"

Jonah 4:5 (a)
So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow . . .

There were 600,000 baby believers within the walls of Nineveh. Jonah should have been in the city teaching and discipling them, encouraging and ministering to them. Instead, he disengaged himself from people and sat on the sidelines.

Here is a guaranteed recipe for depression: Do what Jonah did and distance yourself from people.

Here are ten steps to overcoming depression:

• Step 1: Do something good for someone else.

• Step 2: Repeat Step 1 nine times.

Jonah 4:5 (b)
. . . till he might see what would become of the city.

Even after the Ninevites repented, Jonah still hoped God might blast rather than bless them.

Why? I suggest he doubted the sincerity of their conversion.

But before we come down too hard on Jonah, I wonder if we've ever seen someone walk forward for salvation and said to ourselves, "I know that guy. I bet he's just doing this to impress people." I wonder if we've ever seen someone get baptized and said to ourselves, "I've heard about *her*. This will never last."

There sat Jonah—feeling sorry for himself and judging the city that God had forgiven. If I were the Lord, I would have blasted Jonah at this point. But that's neither what God did to him nor what He does to us . . .

Jonah 4:6 (a)
And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. . . .

God said, "There's Jonah—pouting and mad because I saved 600,000 people. I think I'll just bless him." And He caused a palmchrist to grow beside Jonah, to shade him from the hot Assyrian sun.

Isn't that just like the Lord? The blessings we have are not because we deserve them. They're because God is merciful and kind and gracious. Have you discovered the interesting irony that many times it's when you haven't been praying with great consistency or studying the Word with fervency that blessing comes your way supernaturally?

That's *grace!*

Since before the foundation of the world, through the ages, and on into eternity, God's dealings with us are always by grace. When we least deserve it, He blesses us.

Jonah 4:6 (b)
. . . So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

When Jonah was delivered from the whale, Scripture doesn't record him being happy. When 600,000 Ninevites were saved, Scripture doesn't record him being happy. It was only when his personal comfort was met in the shade of the gourd that, for the first time in the whole book, we see Jonah happy.

Jonah 4:7
But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

Jonah at last was no longer depressed—and then the worm came and his gourd was gone. So too, something happens when you think, *At last, I'm out of my despondency and despair*—it is then that the worm will come. It is important to see and remember that it was God who prepared the worm just as He prepared the gourd. Job said it this way: "It is the Lord who gives and it is the Lord who takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). That's why we are to give thanks in *everything* (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

It was as if the Lord said, "Yesterday, Jonah, I comforted you. Today, I'm developing you." And the same is true with us. One day God blesses us and comforts us. The next day, He deals with us and develops us. It's all part of the process because God is more concerned about our character than about our comfort. He comforts us and blesses us to be sure—but He also sends worms to develop us.

Maybe you had a worm smite you recently—in the form of your boyfriend, your boss, or someone else who let you down. That "worm" is from the Lord.

When his son, Absalom, took control of his capital city, King David found himself running for his life. On his flight from Jerusalem, a little "worm" named Shimei showed up and began throwing dirt and rocks at him

as he yelled, “David, you’re a blood man. You’re getting exactly what you deserve.”

Abishai, one of David’s men said, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord, the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head,”—to which David replied, “Don’t touch him. The Lord has allowed it” (2 Samuel 16:5–11).

When you can say to the worm throwing rocks at you, to the person who hurts you, to the situation that discourages you, “The Lord has allowed it,” *that’s* maturity.

Jonah 4:8
And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

After preparing a whale to deliver Jonah, a gourd to shade him, and a worm to develop him, God prepared a wind to blow upon him.



For a topical study of Jonah 4:6–8, see “Preparing and Repairing” below.

Jonah 4:9–11
And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

“Jonah, you’re grieving the loss of a gourd—but what about 120,000 children in Nineveh who are too young to even know their right hand from their left?” the Lord asks. “I know you’re angry with the adults and their sadistic cruelty. But what about the kids, Jonah—or at least the cattle? Where is your mercy? Where is your compassion?”

The book ends and the question remains, because, you see, the question is one that must be asked continually of each of us to whom God has given a second chance: Where is your heart?

PREPARING AND REPAIRING

A Topical Study of JONAH 4:6–8

Sometime around the year 780 B.C., the Lord looked down from heaven and saw a great but exceedingly wicked city. It was Nineveh, capital of the powerful Assyrian Empire. Desiring to bring a message of warning to Nineveh, God looked to the region of northern Israel by the Sea of Galilee to a small village wherein lived a man named Jonah.

"Go to Nineveh, Jonah," the Lord commanded. "And cry against it for their wickedness has come before Me."

You know the story. When Jonah heard he was to go to Nineveh, he took off in the opposite direction and sailed toward Tarshish.

I don't blame Jonah. The Ninevites were a terrifying people. We read in the annals of history that many cities, upon hearing even a rumor that the Assyrians were headed their way, hoisted up the white flag of surrender rather than engage themselves against these vicious people. The Assyrians led those they conquered into captivity in a most cruel way. They connected them together with fishhooks either in their mouths or noses, connected the fishhooks with rope, and led tens of thousands of people hundreds of miles across rugged terrain.

Other times, the Assyrians chose to annihilate a city completely by chopping off the noses, hands, and feet of their victims before leaving them to bleed to death. Others were skinned alive or beheaded. The skins of the former were pinned to the walls of the vanquished city; the skulls of the latter were stacked in pyramids outside the city wall as a warning to everyone in the region.

When God said to Jonah, "Arise. Go to Nineveh," it's easy to see why Jonah sailed in the opposite direction. But it was not his fear of the Ninevites that caused him to do so. It was his fear of the mercy of God. You see, Jonah feared that the Ninevites would receive his message, repent, and enjoy God's mercy. Jonah didn't want mercy for the Ninevites. He wanted revenge.

Revenge is a desire lurking in the flesh of each of us. Even the ancient Chinese had a proverb that speaks about revenge: If your enemy does you wrong, buy every one of his children a new drum.

Indeed, there is something within us that wants to get back at the people who bug us. Jonah was no exception. That is why he ran in the opposite direction. But the Lord had a way of bringing Jonah back. After a bit of a detour, Jonah at last found himself in Nineveh, preaching a sermon only eight words long: Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed.

Such an impact did Jonah's message have on the people of Nineveh that there was widespread repentance throughout the city. And just as Jonah feared—the Lord had mercy.

So what did Jonah do? He built a lean-to on a hillside overlooking Nineveh so he could witness her destruction should God change His mind and wipe out the city. The irony of this scene is incredible. I mean, Jonah had just experienced the most successful ministry in world history. Six hundred thousand Ninevites repent en masse and turn toward the Lord in the greatest revival the world has ever seen—and Jonah's depressed!

That is why the Lord would now work on Jonah for, you see, it was relatively easy for God to deliver Jonah out of the belly of the great fish compared with the greater challenge of delivering him from the bowels of his "self-fish" nature.

It is as if God said, "You're a selfish individual, Jonah. You live for yourself. You think about yourself. You're wrapped up in yourself. But I'm going to repair you. I'm not going to give up on you. I'm going to deal with you and deliver you from your selfish mentality."

How would He do this? In order to repair Jonah, the Lord prepared three things for him . . .

God Prepared a Wonder to Give *to* Jonah

And the Lord God prepared a gourd . . .

Jonah 4:6 (a)

When did the Lord prepare this wonder, this blessing for Jonah? When he was doing well? When his attitude was right? When his heart was soft and tender? No. It was when Jonah's attitude was stinking, when his mentality was material, when his compassion was lacking.

God's blessings to us are never given on the basis of our deserving them. They are always based upon grace. What is grace? It is the unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor of God. God says to us, just as He said to Jonah, "Here's a blessing. Here's a wonder for you—not because you're worthy of it, not because of anything you've done, but in spite of everything you've done. I know your attitude stinks. I know there are problems in your perspective. But I love you anyway."

Oftentimes, we fool ourselves into thinking we deserve God's blessings because we're pretty together. But we're not. I remember when my kids were little, one night at the dinner table, I could see Peter was somewhat discouraged. So I led my family in a cheer for him.

"Give me a P!" I said. "Give me an E! Give me a T!"

By this time, two-year-old Mary was really getting into it.

"Give me another E!" I continued. "Give me an R! What does it spell?"

And Mary yelled, "Jesus!"

We all laughed hard because we know Peter. And Jesus he's not! None of us is!

Here was Jonah, perched on a hillside, feeling sorry for himself and self-righteously judging the Ninevites, yet God blessed him anyway—just like he's blessing you this very moment.

What do I mean? It's like Daniel said to Belshazzar. "Belshazzar," he said, "don't you realize that your very breath is in the hand of the God you are blaspheming?" (see Daniel 5:23). Truly, our breath is in the hand of God. Composed of seventy-eight percent nitrogen, twenty percent oxygen, and two

percent other gases, every breath we take is a miracle, for if the content shifted even one degree to seventy-nine percent nitrogen, we would all be immediately poisoned. If, on the other hand, it shifted to twenty-one percent oxygen, the whole world would immediately explode in a fireball.

Every second your heart beats, four ounces of blood are displaced. In one year's time, your heart has pumped enough blood to fill eighty-one railroad tanker cars.

We're alive! Every breath we take, every beat of our hearts, the food we had for breakfast—they're all wonders from a gracious God to us, His undeserving children.

God Prepared the Worm That Took *from* Jonah

But God prepared a worm . . .

Jonah 4:7 (a)

After the wonder came the worm. Jonah was happy in the shade of the gourd—until the next day when a worm came slithering along and began chomping away on it. As the gourd withered, Jonah murmured.

We do the same thing. "Why would God take away my gourd of job security?" we ask. "Why would He have my boss (that worm) slither in my direction last Friday and say my services are no longer needed? Why would He take away my gourd of emotional security? Why would He have my boyfriend (that snake) tell me he no longer wants to date me?"

Wait a minute. Before you murmur too loudly, don't forget who prepared the worm. You see, just as the comfort and blessing of the gourd was prepared by the Lord, so was the biting and devouring of the worm.

Why? Because the Lord knows we have a tendency to get too attached to the things of this world and too comfortable in this life. One of the accounts of the sinking of the *Titanic* details that, as the ship began to go down and the deck began to tilt, one of the wealthiest women on board ran below, pushing her way past the security guards and into her stateroom. Once inside, she scrambled furiously—not for the jewels or the money stored within—but for three oranges she had tucked away.

God says to you and me, "It's not the things you think are so important that really matter. I'm going to allow the stripping away of those things you valued so much, in which you had so much time invested, for which you had so much affection in order that you might value what is eternal more than what is temporal, that you might care about people more than you do about things, that you might set your heart on things above."

The Bible tells us to give thanks in everything—not just for the wonders but for the worms, as well (1 Thessalonians 5:18). So be thankful—and take a worm out to lunch!

God Prepared the Wind That Whirled *Around* Jonah

> *And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.*
>
> Jonah 4:8

What does the wind speak of? It speaks of those times when things are swirling around us, when trials are coming down upon us, when we're not sure what's happening.

For Jonah, the wind was not necessarily a negative thing. It could have given Jonah an opportunity for reflection. He could have said, "It's hot today, Lord. Thank You for yesterday when the gourd was shading me and covering me. Thanks for the blessing of yesterday." Or, it could have given Jonah a change in location. He could have said, "Why am I out here on this hillside when I could be in any one of thousands of homes inside the city walls?"

You see, the wind could have driven Jonah into the city—to where he was supposed to be. After all, 600,000 had just been saved. Jonah should have been in the city encouraging them, discipling them, teaching them. But where was he? He was a spectator on a hillside.

If you want to be miserable, do what Jonah did. Remove yourself from people and just sit on the side of the hill with folded arms, watching, analyzing, judging. If, however, you want to be fulfilled and blessed—both personally and in ministry—get out of yourself and into other peoples' lives. Don't be on the hillside watching. Be in the city ministering!

Gang, the winds that blow through your life clear the air and give you a rare opportunity to see where you are. You'll either say, "I need to get back in the city," or, like Jonah, you'll say, "I want to die." The winds—the trials themselves—aren't meant to make or break you. They're meant to show you where you are.

God prepared the blessing of the gourd, the burden of the worm, the blowing of the wind for one reason: to prepare Jonah. To prepare him for what? For eternal life.

> *Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*
>
> John 14:1, 2

What is Jesus doing right now?

Preparing a place for you to live eternally.

What is the Holy Spirit doing right now?

Preparing you for the eternal place.

How? By blessing you with good things you don't deserve, taking from you things that would limit your perspective, and allowing you to go through windstorms that show you where your heart is. Therefore, allow the Lord to mature you. Embrace what He's doing. Go with the flow of how He's moving as He continues to repair you presently and prepare you eternally.



MICAH

Background to Micah

Prophesying in the mid-700s B.C., Micah's ministry lasted approximately forty years—a period in which Israel's ten northern tribes were engaged in a civil war against the two southern tribes. So brutal was this war that in 2 Chronicles 28 we are told 120,000 men from the south alone were slaughtered in a single day's battle.

Micah is unique in that he was the only prophet sent to both the northern and southern kingdoms. His heart must have broken as he traveled between the two warring factions. Not only did he witness decimation in the southern kingdom but annihilation of the northern kingdom when, in 722 B.C., the Assyrians carried the ten northern tribes into captivity.

In addition to problems militarily, the Jews were wavering spiritually. The people who should have known God were not walking with God. Consequently, in His grace, the Lord raised up a group of men to call His people back to walking with Him. Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Isaiah were all contemporaries. Isaiah seems to have played a special role in Micah's life. In fact, the Book of Micah has been called "Isaiah in shorthand" because much of what is written in Isaiah is also recorded verbatim in Micah.

"Here is a classic case of plagiarism," the critics contend. "Micah simply ripped off the prophecies of Isaiah."

I disagree. Isaiah's words seen in Micah are not a case of plagiarism but of impartation . . .

> *And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*
>
> 2 Timothy 2:2

In other words, Paul said, "Timothy, pass what I'm saying on to others who will in turn pass it to others." And that's what we see in Micah. An older Isaiah undoubtedly influenced a younger Micah.

With so much of Isaiah found in Micah, it's easy to wonder why the Lord inspired Micah to write at all. I suggest one reason might be that a lot of us get swamped with Isaiah's sixty-six chapters. So in Micah, we find an abridged version of Isaiah. Second, I believe the Book of Micah underscores the fact that, in order to learn lessons, we need to hear them repeatedly.

> *Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.*
>
> 2 Peter 1:12

Both in our conversations and in our teaching, our tendency is to feel we have to share something creative and fresh, something that has a new twist or an idea never before heard. Not so. We must be more concerned about people being established in truth than about them being impressed with our insights or profound thoughts.

"I know you know this," said Peter, "but I'm going to keep reminding you until you are established in it, until you know it like the back of your hand, until you're doing it not just hearing it." Through Micah the Lord is telling us that these truths are central and that we need to hear them again.

The Book of Micah divides itself into three sections. In chapters 1 through 3, we see the Lord pronouncing grievous retribution. In chapters 4 and 5, we see the Lord promising glorious restoration. After pronouncing retribution, the Lord promises restoration. After disciplining His people, He rebuilds and revives them. That's always the way of our Father. Finally, in chapters 6 and 7, we see the Lord proclaiming gracious reconciliation as His mercy and lovingkindness are seen so beautifully in the final two chapters.



MICAH

Micah 1:1–5 (a)

1 The word of the LORD that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord GOD be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place. For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel. . . .

"Because of the sin of Samaria and Jerusalem, when I come," says the Lord, "mountains will melt; valleys will be divided in two; and judgment will flow like water over a waterfall." Samaria was the capital of the ten northern tribes; Jerusalem the capital of the two southern tribes. The sin of these two capital cities was that which would bring judgment upon them.

Micah 1:5 (b)–7

. . . What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem? Therefore I will make Samaria as an heap of the field, and as plantings of a vineyard: and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will discover the foundations thereof. And all the graven images thereof shall be beaten to pieces, and all the hires thereof shall be burned with the fire, and all the idols thereof will I lay desolate: for she gathered it of the hire of an harlot, and they shall return to the hire of an harlot.

The sin of Samaria and Jerusalem was idolatry. Mornings would find the Jews offering sacrifices to Jehovah in the temple. But evenings would find them worshiping idols in the groves. So too, in Washington, D.C., many of

our country's leaders attend prayer breakfasts in the morning and endless rounds of cocktail parties in the evening.

> I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.
>
> Revelation 3:15, 16

What is lukewarm? A mixture of hot and cold. "If you're hot, I can use you," says the Lord. "If you're cold, I can convict you. But if you're straddling the fence between the two, I will spew you out of My mouth because that's something I just can't stomach." To a certain degree, we know how the Lord feels. After all, steaming tea on a cold day is comforting. Iced tea on a summer day is refreshing. But room temperature tea on any day is annoying.

Because these people couldn't decide between Jehovah and Baal—between the things of God and the things of the world—the Lord said, "I will judge."

Hearing this, Micah responds . . .

> **Micah 1:8, 9 (a)**
> **Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked: I will make a wailing like the dragons, and mourning as the owls. For her wound is incurable . . .**

This prophetic word wasn't something that merely interested Micah casually. It affected him emotionally. He wailed like a jackal. He mourned like an owl. It affected him so deeply that he tore off his clothes as a sign of brokenness.

Micah's reaction should speak volumes to us. When the subject of prophecy is raised, many times our tendency is to say, "Let's hear about how the Russians will get wiped out when they invade Israel and how the Chinese will be destroyed. Oh, boy!" Too often we have a fascination with prophecy that I believe needs to be adjusted. Prophecy should not titillate us

intellectually or fire us up patriotically. Prophecy should break us emotionally.

Micah was a godly man. When he heard about judgment, he wailed; he wept; he was broken. May the Lord begin to work that kind of heart into us.

Micah 1:9 (b)
. . . for it is come unto Judah; he is come unto the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem.

In 722 B.C., Samaria would be destroyed by the Assyrians. Twenty years later, the Assyrians would besiege Jerusalem.

Micah 1:10 (a)
Declare ye it not at Gath . . .

"Tell it not in Gath," David said concerning news of the death of Saul and Jonathan, "lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph" (2 Samuel 1:20).

"Declare ye it not at Gath," Micah echoes concerning the fall of Samaria and Jerusalem lest God's enemies would have reason to rejoice.

Micah 1:10 (b)
. . . weep ye not at all: in the house of Aphrah roll thyself in the dust.

Dust and ashes symbolized great sorrow (Jeremiah 6:26; Ezekiel 27:30).

Micah 1:11, 12
Pass ye away, thou inhabitant of Saphir, having thy shame naked: the inhabitant of Zaanan came not forth in the mourning of Beth-ezel; he shall receive of you his standing. For the inhabitant of Maroth waited carefully for good: but evil came down from the LORD unto the gate of Jerusalem.

In what has rightly been called a funeral for a ruined kingdom, Micah lists some of the cities that fell to Sennacherib's Assyrian army.

Micah 1:13
O thou inhabitant of Lachish, bind the chariot to the swift beast: she is the beginning of the sin to the daughter of Zion: for the transgressions of Israel were found in thee.

Located near the northern border, Lachish was the first city in Judah to copy the idol worship of Israel.

Micah 1:14, 15
Therefore shalt thou give presents to Moresheth-gath: the houses of Achzib shall be a lie to the kings of Israel. Yet will I bring an heir unto thee, O inhabitant of Mareshah: he shall come unto Adullam the glory of Israel.

Israel would appeal to the Philistine city of Moresheth-gath for assistance against the Assyrians but, because Moresheth-gath could not or would not help, Moresheth-gath would likewise fall prey to the Assyrians who would claim her and the neighboring city of Adullam as if they were the rightful heir.

The intrigue of verses 10 through 15 can escape our foreign ear until we realize that Micah, as did Isaiah, employs a series of *paranomasias,* or plays on words . . .

- In verse 10, *aphar,* or "dust," plays on Aprah, the name of the city.
- In verse 13, Lachish plays on *rechesh,* or "swift beast."
- In verse 14, Achzib plays on *achzab,* or "lie."

This technique would have caused Micah's message to lodge in the minds of the people who stood in such need of warning.

Micah 1:16
Make thee bald, and poll thee for thy delicate children; enlarge thy baldness as the eagle; for they are gone into captivity from thee.

"Judgment is coming," Micah declares. "Your enemies will experience victory over you because of your iniquity. So shave your head as a sign of the brokenness of your heart."



2 After seeing the reality of retribution in chapter 1, we see the reasons for retribution in chapters 2 and 3. Here in chapter 2, we see that one reason is due to the sins of the people . . .

Micah 2:1
Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand.

God's people—who should have been meditating on His Word—were lying in their beds, plotting about what they were going to do the next day to get ahead. Contrast this with David, the man after God's own heart, who said, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips when I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches" (Psalm 63:5, 6).

What do you think about when you're having a hard time falling asleep? A good thing to do when you can't sleep is to spend time in prayer or to start memorizing Scripture. It will either bless your heart or knock you out—either way, you win!

Micah 2:2
And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage.

Money is not evil. Things are not evil. It is in the love of money and the love of things that the trouble lies (1 Timothy 6:10). Because the people in Micah's day were manipulating and using people to get things rather than using things to help and serve people, they were headed for trouble.

Micah 2:3
Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, against this family do I devise an evil, from which ye shall not remove your necks; neither shall ye go haughtily: for this time is evil.

"As you're plotting evil, I'm plotting judgment," the Lord declares.

Micah 2:4, 5
In that day shall one take up a parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, and say, We be utterly spoiled: he hath changed the portion of my people: how hath he removed it from me! turning away he hath divided our fields. Therefore thou shalt have none that shall cast a cord by lot in the congregation of the LORD.

"The result of the Lord's judgment against you will be the topic of conversation of those surrounding you as your land is given to strangers," Micah warns.

Micah 2:6, 7 (a)
Prophesy ye not, say they to them that prophesy: they shall not prophesy to them, that they shall not take shame. O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the spirit of the LORD straitened? are these his doings? . . .

"Do you resort to oppression and manipulation because you think the Lord is unable to provide for you, to care for His own?" Micah asks.

Micah 2:7 (b)
. . . do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?

"The Word of God is like a fire," Jeremiah declares (5:14). A fire will either warm or burn. It all depends on where you're standing. Unlike a physical fire, however, the closer one is to the fire of the Word, the more he will be warmed and the farther he strays from the fire of the Word, the more he will be burned.

Micah 2:8
Even of late my people is risen up as an enemy: ye pull off the robe with the garment from them that pass by securely as men averse from war.

The idea expressed here is that the poor were being oppressed because they were easy targets. We have the same problem in our own country. The homeless are among us and the poor are falling further and further behind economically. Many of us have a conservative bent politically, but we must never forget that God cares about the state of the impoverished very definitely. The heart of God through Micah declares, "You're getting rich by ripping the shirts off the backs of the poor—and in so doing, you are waging war against Me."

Micah 2:9
The women of my people have ye cast out from their pleasant houses; from their children have ye taken away my glory for ever.

Financially, things were booming for a certain segment of society in Micah's day. But God says, "What about the women who no longer have houses? What about the kids on the streets?"

Micah 2:10, 11
Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest: because it is polluted, it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction. If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people.

For guidance, God's people were looking to prophets who promised continued prosperity and an abundance of wine and strong drink, ignoring the prophets who spoke God's heart, who called for justice and compassion.

Micah 2:12, 13

I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold: they shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men. The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the LORD on the head of them.

As seen throughout chapter 2, although the sons of the people were a reason for God's retribution upon them, as seen here at the end of chapter 2, His love for His people is the reason for His mercy toward them. This promise would be partially fulfilled when they returned from their Babylonian captivity. But it will be completely fulfilled when *all* of Jacob, all of Israel will at least recognize the One who will break through—her "breaker," her Messiah, Jesus Christ—at His Second Coming.



3 Following the sins of the people in chapter 2, in chapter 3, we see the sins of the princes—the politicians—as a reason for God's retribution . . .

Micah 3:1–3
And I said, Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel; Is it not for you to know judgment? Who hate the good, and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones; Who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them; and they break their bones, and chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron.

The imagery in this passage speaks of treating people like meat, of ignoring the weak, of justice only for the wealthy (verse 11).

Micah 3:4

Then shall they cry unto the LORD, but he will not hear them: he will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings.

"Because they ignored the cries of those looking to them for help, when the leaders of My people call unto Me in their own time of need, I will likewise ignore them," the Lord declares.

Micah 3:5–7
Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him. Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them. Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God.

The true prophets who prophesied judgment were regarded as enemies while the prophets who prophesied good things to those who paid them were embraced as friends. But because prophets were not exempt from the judgment that would befall Israel, they would find themselves in the same captivity, darkness, and shame as the rest of the nation.

Micah 3:8
But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin.

Unlike the prophets for hire, Micah prophesied by the Spirit of the Lord and was thus able to speak directly about the issue of sin rather than worrying about how to tickle the ears of his audience.

Micah 3:9–12 (a)

Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity. They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us. Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps . . .

Here, the priests are indicted. With justice, prophecy, and religion all governed by money, the princes, prophets, and priests of Israel had become financially rich but spiritually bankrupt. Consequently, the Lord was justified in plowing Zion as a field, in bringing Jerusalem to ruin, in judging His people.

Micah 3:12 (b)
. . . and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.

The "house" refers to the temple. At the end of God's pronouncement of grievous retribution, He includes a preview of glorious restoration—for, as seen in chapter 4, He will rebuild His people as surely as He rebuilds the temple.

To these people who were completely corrupt in every aspect of their society, God doesn't say, "I'm giving up on you." He says, "I'm going to build you."



4 In chapters 4 and 5, we come to a different section. No longer is the Lord pronouncing grievous retribution. Now He promises glorious restoration . . .

Micah 4:1, 2
But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the

mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

"I'm going to reestablish My house. I'm going to rebuild My temple," the Lord declares. And I believe that, in these last days, the stage has been set for that very thing. In Jerusalem today, those with the last name of Cohen, which means "priest," are studying seriously and intently—waiting for the day when the temple will be rebuilt and they will be called upon to reinstitute temple worship.

"Wait a minute," you protest. "I've been hearing about these being the last days for years, yet here we are still."

The apostles also believed Jesus would come back in their day. After all, they heard Him say, "Behold, I come quickly" (Revelation 22:7). And He will.

As one approaches the speed of light, time begins to slow down radically. Thus, if you went on a space mission and cruised around for five years at the speed of light—although you might look for your family upon your return to earth, you wouldn't find them because, while you were cruising around the galaxy for five years, one million years would have passed on earth.

I don't know how fast Jesus moved when He ascended to heaven, but I bet He moved real fast. And if He approached the speed of light, then, really, He's only been gone for a couple of minutes. Peter alludes to this when he said that a day with the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day (2 Peter 3:8). So if 1,000 years is as a day, the Lord has only been gone two days. That's not very long.

I firmly believe that Jesus left us with enough information about the rebirthing and rebuilding of Israel to tell us without doubt that we are coming to the end of this age. And in the last days, the Lord says we will see the rebuilding of His temple. The stage is set. The property is bare in Jerusalem.

The money is raised. The priesthood is studying. The people of Israel are back in their homeland—and we are truly living in the last days.

Micah 4:3
And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

This verse is inscribed on the United Nations building in New York City. The problem is, they left out the first part of the verse—which is the key to the entire verse. No matter how organized she becomes, no matter how politically involved she is, even the church will not be able to usher in peace on this earth. Oh, there will be peace internally as the Holy Spirit floods peoples' hearts individually—but there won't be peace nationally until the Prince of Peace comes back.

The only way a person can have peace internally is to allow Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, into his life personally. And the only way the world can experience peace globally is for Jesus to come back and reign in Jerusalem —as seen in this prophecy.

Micah 4:4
But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.

When Jesus comes back, not only will there be peace among the nations corporately—but there will be peace for all men individually.

Micah 4:5–8
For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever. In that day, saith the LORD, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in

mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever. And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem.

Keep in mind the flow of Micah's message: "Yes, judgment is coming," declares the Lord, "but restoration is certain when I reign from Jerusalem." For a thousand years, the Lord will rule in Jerusalem—but there will first be a delay, as seen in verses 9 through 13 . . .

Micah 4:9, 10 (a)
Now why dost thou cry out aloud? is there no king in thee? is thy counsellor perished? for pangs have taken thee as a woman in travail. Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon . . .

Although Jerusalem's enemy in Micah's day was Assyria, Jerusalem would miraculously escape Assyria's siege (2 Kings 18:9—19:37). Here, Micah looks a hundred years ahead to the ultimate enemy who would destroy Jerusalem: Babylon. Micah's prophecy was fulfilled when, a hundred years after making this pronouncement, in 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian army invaded Jerusalem and carried the Jews into captivity.

Micah 4:10 (b)
. . . there shalt thou be delivered; there the LORD shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies.

In other words, "I'll send you to Babylon, but I won't leave you there," says the Lord. Because the people of Judah flirted with idols constantly, the Lord sent them to Babylon—the center of idolatry. While they were there, the Jews got sick of idols. They were delivered, healed of that problem completely.

Be careful about the sins with which you're flirting because the Lord might finally say, even as He did to these people, "Go ahead. Have your fill."

And, although you might be freed of your addiction eventually, you will go through some heartbreaking times in captivity.

Micah 4:11–13
Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. But they know not the thoughts of the LORD, neither understand they his counsel: for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make thine horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass: and thou shalt beat in pieces many people: and I will consecrate their gain unto the LORD, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth.

The Babylonian captivity would not be the only event that would delay the Lord's return. Here, Micah skips centuries ahead to speak of the Tribulation that will preface His return to rule and reign in peace and prosperity.



5

Micah 5:1
Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops: he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek.

Because Micah's message was given seven hundred years before Jesus' birth, Jesus knew His people would actually go to war against Him—that they would smite Him, refuse to respond to Him, and reject Him. And yet, He still came.

Micah 5:2
But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

Bethlehem means "House of bread." It was an insignificant little town among the thousands of Judah. In fact, so many Bethlehems were in Israel at this time that Micah identifies this one specifically as Bethlehem *Ephratah*—or "fruitful."



***For topical study of Micah 5:2 entitled "O Little Town of Bethlehem," turn to page* 835.**

Micah 5:3
Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel.

"If you don't want Me to rule over you; if you smite Me, come against Me, and refuse Me, I won't force Myself on you. I will give you up, Israel," declares the Lord. When does Israel finally recognize Jesus of Nazareth as her promised Messiah? There's a remnant of Jewish people who recognize this even now, but Israel recognizes Jesus nationally during the time of travail, during Jacob's trouble, during the Tribulation (Zechariah 13).

Micah 5:4
And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.

During the trail of Israel in the Tribulation period (Revelation 6—19), the Lord will move among His people. At last, they will acknowledge Him as Messiah as He shepherds the nation of Israel.

Micah 5:5, 6
And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land: and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men.

And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof: thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian, when he cometh into our land, and when he treadeth within our borders.

"The Assyrian" is another name for antichrist—the coming world dictator who will appear to be a friend of Israel initially, but will show his true colors eventually. Haman, Herod, Hitler all moved in the spirit of antichrist and were defeated. So too, "the Assyrian"—the actual antichrist will one day be annihilated (Revelation 19).

Who will protect Israel when antichrist comes to destroy her? The same One who protects and never forsakes us: Jesus Christ.

Micah 5:7–10
And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men. And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, both treadeth down, and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. Thine hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD, that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy chariots:

Israel's glorious restoration is delayed by her captivity in Babylon and the travail in the Tribulation. Jesus will come to her once and will be rejected (John 1:11). Then He'll come again and be accepted (Zechariah 13:9). In his shortened version of Isaiah, Micah has touched on all of this.

Micah 5:11
And I will cut off the cities of thy land, and throw down all thy strong holds:

Because their daily lives depend on their defense, the Israeli army is the most ingenious and committed army in the world. But here the Lord is saying, "When I come, your horses and chariots, your tanks and technology, your strength and ingenuity will all be unnecessary for you will need no other protection than the protection you will find in Me."

Micah 5:12–15
And I will cut off witchcrafts out of thine hand; and thou shalt have no more soothsayers: Thy graven images also will I cut off, and thy standing images out of the midst of thee; and thou shalt no more worship the work of thine hands. And I will pluck up thy groves out of the midst of thee: so will I destroy thy cities And I will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the heathen, such as they have not heard.

In the New Testament, the word translated "witchcraft" is *pharmakeia,* from which we get our word, "pharmacy." There is a direct connection in the Bible between witchcraft and drugs—which doesn't surprise me at all. Cruising into Santa Cruz in the late sixties and early seventies to go surfing, I would invariably see people stoned on LSD and other hallucinogens. And it always amazed me that what they screamed was spiritual: "I am Jesus Christ," they'd say. Or, "I am Satan," or, "I am God." They never spoke of Buddha or Mohammed—only of Jesus and God, heaven, hell, and Satan.

Why? I believe it is because in some way, drugs very definitely open the door to the realm of the spirit. Comedians might make light of drugs. Politicians might trivialize them. But drugs are a serious business that figure prominently into the Book of Revelation and the end-time scene.

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

A Topical Study of MICAH 5:2

Every year, the magazines come out with their "Who's Hot and Who's Not?" issues. Contrast this with the text before us, in which we see something of the heart of our Lord, for He is not looking for the famous people or the hot spot to do His work. In fact, the place God chose for His Son to be born was anything but a hot spot of the world.

If I were God, I think I would have had My Son born in Rome, the political center of the day. People would have been able to take note. Word of His birth would have spread quickly. Or perhaps I would have chosen Athens, the intellectual center of the day—where intellectuals philosophized by the hour, pondering deep questions and debating the meaning of life. If not Rome or Athens, I would have chosen Jerusalem, the religious center of the day. With the temple in her midst, Jerusalem embodied Israel's history and heritage in spiritual matters.

But seven hundred years before the event, God inspired Micah to pinpoint the site Messiah would be born not as Rome, Athens, or Jerusalem but in Bethlehem—a podunk little community five miles outside of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was where the action was; Bethlehem was simply where the shepherds hung out.

Today, we have romanticized shepherding. But in Jesus' day, shepherds were considered outcasts. Because they were usually tending sheep, they could not always take part in the ceremonial cleansing necessary to enter into temple worship. Thus, shepherds were ostracized by the religious elite. Bethlehem was full of shepherds because Bethlehem was full of sheep. You see, the flocks owned by the priests serving in the temple, as well as the flocks used for sacrifices in the temple were kept in Bethlehem. Even today, Bethlehem has sort of an outcast flavor. Seeing the traditional spot where Christ was born, marked by a tarnished bronze and gold star in the floor of a decaying church, one wonders about this little town of Bethlehem.

And yet I suggest that Bethlehem was the most appropriate place for Jesus to be born—for it tells us wonderful things about our Lord . . .

Bethlehem Reflects Our Lord's Personality

In the only autobiographical statement He made, Jesus said, "I am meek and lowly" (Matthew 11:29). No wonder, then, that He wouldn't have been born in Rome with her grandeur and glory or in Athens with her intellectual superiority or in Jerusalem with her religious tradition and ceremony.

And I like that because we are not Rome for we are not famous or powerful. Nor are we Athens for we are not highly esteemed by intellectuals. Nor are we Jerusalem for we cannot claim to be ceremonially pure. We're Bethlehem—the place where outcasts hang out. Thus, Jesus can be born in us.

Bethlehem Reveals Our Lord's Priority

When questioned why He spent time with tax collectors and prostitutes, Jesus said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:13). In other words, "My priority is people who are hurting, people who have need."

Jesus' assertion is especially telling in connection with the account in Matthew 9 . . .

> *While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.*
>
> Matthew 9:18

A man who was esteemed highly in his community fell at the feet of the Carpenter from Nazareth because tragedy had struck his family: his daughter was dead. But it is the verse that follows that amazes me . . .

> *And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples.*
>
> Matthew 9:19

"I have decided to follow Jesus," we sing.

Yet Jesus follows the person in need, the person in difficulty, the person who hurts. Therefore, if I am truly following Jesus, I will go to those who are weeping, those who are aching, those who feel despondent or discouraged, despised or rejected. Truly following Jesus means we'll be surrounded by people who hurt.

- Are you a disciples of Jesus?
  Then follow Him.
- Where's He going?
  To those in need, to the shepherds, to Bethlehem.

Will you go to Jerusalem, Athens, or Rome—or will you follow Him to Bethlehem—where no one will see you, write articles about you, take pictures of you, or applaud you? Jesus goes to the obscure little village, the hurting, insignificant person. And I'm so thankful He does because that's me.

Bethlehem Reminds Us of Our Lord's Abilities

Once Nowhere-ville, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, this little town became renowned for all time. He changed it. He made it a place highly esteemed in the hearts of all who love Him. And I see Jesus doing that very thing throughout the Gospels . . .

I see Him say to a tax collector who was despised by his countrymen because he was working for Rome and ripping them off, "Follow Me." And Matthew, who would have been a forgotten figure in history, was transformed when He came in contact with the person of Jesus Christ.

I think of Simon the zealot—a political firebrand determined to overthrow the yoke of Rome. His life would have ended in obscurity had it not been for Jesus. But Jesus said, "Follow Me"—and Simon became a man for history.

Referred to as "the giant" because of his stature, Peter would have gone down as just another Galilean fisherman—except for the fact that Jesus decided to use him in ministry. And Peter became a giant of the faith because of the impact he made for eternity.

Matthew, Simon, Peter—these are "Bethlehem" men. If you and I simply say, "We know we're not people of Jerusalem or Athens, Rome or Hollywood, we're people of Bethlehem; but, Lord, we know You came for people like us, so leave Your mark on our lives," He will use us. Why? Because He loves to use the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, the weak things to show up the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27).

If you're feeling unworthy, insignificant, un-together—you are a perfect candidate for the Bethlehem miracle. If you allow Jesus to be born in your life, if you open the door of your heart to Him, you will be remembered for all eternity because your name will be written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 21:27). And, unlike, today's magazines, that Book doesn't change each year according to who's hot and who's not. You see, because Jesus died for our sins, our names are written in the Book of Life not with the fading ink of this world, but with the indelible blood of the Lamb.

6 After pronouncing grievous retribution in chapters 1 through 3, after promising glorious restoration in chapters 4 and 5, we now see God proclaiming generous reconciliation in chapters 6 and 7 . . .

Micah 6:1–4
Hear ye now what the LORD saith; Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye, O moun tains, the LORD's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the LORD hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel. O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

Here we hear the heartbeat of a Father who says, "Why do you ignore Me when I have rescued and redeemed you throughout your history?"

Micah 6:5 (a)
O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him . . .

Perhaps nowhere is God's mercy to His people more clearly portrayed than in the account of Numbers 22 and 23, wherein God forbade Balaam to curse Israel.

Micah 6:5 (b)
. . . from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the LORD.

As He led them from Shittim to Gilgal—from their last lodging in the wilderness into their first lodging in the Promised Land, God provided for His people every step of the way.

Micah 6:6, 7

Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

"What do you want from me?" is the exasperated cry of a rebellious child —insinuating that no matter how much is given Him, God is never pleased.

Micah 6:8
He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Although their question was rhetorical, Micah's answer to God's people is wonderfully practical as he reduces the six hundred thirteen commandments of the law to three . . .



***For topical study of Micah 6:8 entitled "What the Lord Requires," turn to page* 839.**

Micah 6:9
The LORD's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.

Before He can reconcile His people to Himself, God now reminds them of their failure to do what it was that He so plainly required of them . . .

Micah 6:10, 11
Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable? Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights?

The scales of justice were imbalanced—tipped in favor of the wicked and the wealthy.

Micah 6:12–14 (a)
For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee, in making thee desolate because of thy sins. Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied . . .

The wealthy elite of Micah's day used their tongues to cheat and deceive. Thus, it is only fitting that God would use their own tongues—their own appetites—against them, as they would no longer be satisfied by the fruit of their labor.

Micah 6:14 (b), 15
. . . and thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee; and thou shalt take hold, but shalt not deliver; and that which thou deliverest will I give up to the sword. Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine.

Reminiscent of Habakkuk's realization that judgment would decimate the agrarian economy of his day (3:17), Micah prophesies of the day when, carried into captivity, the people of God would be unable to reap their own harvest.

Micah 6:16
For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels; that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hissing: therefore ye shall bear the reproach of my people.

Because they led the people of God deeper into idolatry, Omri and his son, Ahab, go down as two of the worst kings in Israel's history.

WHAT THE LORD REQUIRES

A Topical Study of MICAH 6:8

"What in the world do you want from me?" Wives ask their husbands this question and husbands their wives. Children pose it to their parents, employees to their bosses, and athletes to their coaches.

The people of Israel asked the prophet in Israel, "What does the Lord want from us? Does He want us to bring Him a sacrifice of young calves or rams by the thousands? How about costly rivers of oil or our firstborn sons? What does the Lord want from us, anyway?"

"He hath shown thee," Micah declared. "He's already given you His Word."

On the scene three hundred years before Micah, David understood that the Lord had already revealed His heart to His people very clearly in the law given to Israel . . .

> *The law of the* LORD *is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the* LORD *is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the* LORD *are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the* LORD *is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the* LORD *is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the* LORD *are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.*
>
> Psalm 19:7–11

"There's great reward in knowing and keeping the Law of the Lord," David declared. "It makes simple people wise. It gives understanding and light." This is not the case with many of our country's laws . . .

- In Massachusetts, you can be put in jail for one year if you are caught whistling underwater.

- In Tennessee, a woman can be sentenced to five years in jail if she calls a man on a telephone.
- In Texas, you'll pay a $500 fine if you are caught drinking milk from any other cow than your own.
- In West Virginia, it is illegal for a preacher to tell a funny story from the pulpit.

Likewise, people tend to think of the Old Testament law as outdated and irrelevant. But nothing could be farther from the truth. The National Institute of Health is currently studying Old Testament teachings concerning hygiene and sexual practices. Why? Because our country is currently scourged with AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases—new strains and viruses which seem to appear weekly.

"Let's take another look at what the ancient Hebrews did to ward off such diseases," says the NIH. And guess what. They're finding that the rules and dietary regulations embedded in the Mosaic Law make perfect medical sense, that in keeping them there is indeed great reward, that God knew best all along.

The problem is, we can know this to be true and still shy away from the law because it seems like there's so much to it. Indeed there is. According to rabbinical tradition, there are six hundred thirteen specific commandments given in the law. And if you're like me, that's a few too many to get a handle on. So the Lord in His great kindness simplified things when He inspired David to give somewhat of a summary in Psalm 15 . . .

> *LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.*
>
> Psalm 15

David distills the six hundred thirteen commandments of the law to eleven. But even eleven might be too many. So a couple of hundred years later, the Lord simplified it even further here in Micah 6 . . .

To Do Justly . . .

To do justly simply means to do what's right.

A UCLA professor posed this question to his Medical Ethics class: How would you advise the following patient concerning pregnancy and the possibility of abortion? The father has syphilis. The mother has tuberculosis. Their first child was born blind. Their second child died at childbirth. The third child was born deaf. The fourth child contracted tuberculosis. Now the mother is pregnant again.

Seventy percent of the students said, "Abort the child."

"Congratulations," said the professor. "You just aborted Beethoven, for that was his family history."

There are a number of preachers and lawyers, doctors and philosophers saying, "There are no absolutes. Only the situation determines what's right and wrong." But that's not what God says. He says to do justly. Period.

You deposit two quarters in the paper box and accidentally grab two papers. Do you say, "Oh, well, I'll just leave the extra paper on top of the box for someone else"—or do you say, "I owe the publishing company fifty cents," and put another fifty cents in the box without taking another paper?

It's Thursday, garbage day. You know the regulation is thirty-five pounds per can. But you also know you have tons of trash. Do you stuff your can and jump on it to make room for your two hundred pounds of garbage, telling yourself that, for the last three weeks, you only put in ten pounds and so you're justified? Or do you hold to the thirty-five-pound requirement and take the rest to the dump?

The Lord requires us to do justly, to walk in integrity. But that doesn't always mean we'll be rewarded. Seeing a bee drowning in our backyard swimming pool, my daughter, Jessie, scooped him out and set him on the grass. After drying himself off, the bee flew away, rejoicing in his deliverance. The next day, my wife, Tammy, was in the backyard. She, too, saw a bee drowning and, remembering Jessie's example, scooped him out. This bee also dried himself off—then flew straight to Tammy and stung her.

Sometimes that happens. We do what's right and end up getting stung. But, because the Lord is not unfaithful to forget our works of righteousness

(Hebrews 6:10), He says, “Even though no one else notices, even though it may not be a big deal in the eyes of others, when you do justly, you’ll be rewarded eventually—even if you get stung in this life presently.”

To Love Mercy . . .

If you and I do justly, do you know what can happen very easily? We can stick up our noses and say, "Why is he sinning? Why isn't she doing better? Why can't everyone be as good as I?"

Listen again to what God says: Do justly, but love mercy. In other words, "You do what's right, but when it comes to others, look for every opportunity to show mercy." We are not by nature merciful. Our tendency is to want to get back at people who hurt us.

A skinny guy sat at the truck stop counter, enjoying his breakfast when suddenly three big bikers burst through the door, decked out in black leather and silver chains. Wanting to provoke a fight, they grabbed his plate and began scarfing down what was left of his breakfast. But the skinny guy just watched them. When they were done, he calmly paid the bill and walked out the door.

"Can you believe that wimp?" said the bikers to the waitress. "Not much of a man, is he?"

"Maybe not," she said, as she looked out the window. "But he's not much of a truck driver either. He just ran over three motorcycles."

That's our nature—but not God's. He wants us to love mercy, to revel in it, to recklessly look for every opportunity to share it.

Jesus gives us a profound insight into mercy when He says,

> *Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*
>
> Luke 6:38

Maybe you've heard television evangelists use this passage to say, "Give to my ministry and you'll be rewarded financially." But that's not what Jesus was saying. In verses 36 and 37, we see He was talking about mercy, saying the degree to which you substitute mercy for judgment is the degree to which men will be merciful to you.

While conversing with a lawyer at a dinner party, a doctor was interrupted by a woman asking for advice concerning an ache in her leg. Irritated by her interruption, the doctor gave her a piece of advice and sent her on her way.

"Tell me," he said to the lawyer, "do I have the legal right to bill her for the advice I gave her?"

"Certainly," said the lawyer.

Two days later, the doctor found a bill for $500 in his mailbox—for the advice the lawyer had given him.

Judge others and you'll be judged. On the other hand, if you show mercy and love and forgiveness and largeness of heart, people will show the same to you. I always love to be around gracious people, people who are eager to show mercy. How I want that quality in my own life.

To Walk Humbly . . .

To walk humbly means to walk in dependency.

Sixty-three percent of all accidents on stairways come from people going up the stairs. Why? Because people going downstairs tend to walk more carefully. So too, it is when we're on our way "up" in life that pride creeps in—a poison that manifests itself first and foremost in prayerlessness. Whenever we think we can live our lives on our own, we stop praying, and, thus, no longer walk humbly with God.

The year was 1911 when Bobby Leach became the first man to survive tumbling over Niagara Falls in an apple barrel. For the next six months, he toured the country, giving lectures on his feat—until he slipped on a banana peel and broke his neck. The Bible says that pride comes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). Whenever you're tempted to think you don't need to pray, that devotions are not important, that you are doing well—remember Bobby Leach because you don't know what banana peel is ahead of you.

God says, "This is what I require for your own benefit, for your own blessing: that you do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Me." From six hundred thirteen commandments down to three. But if three are still too many for you to remember, Jesus makes it simpler still . . .

> *Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*
>
> Matthew 22:36–39

Jesus reduces Micah's three commandments to two: Love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hangs the entire law.

The use of the word, "hang," I believe, is far more than coincidental, for it is only because Jesus *hung* on the Cross that we can understand the two

great commandments.

> *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*
>
> Romans 5:8

Nowhere are the two great commandments more perfectly fulfilled than at Calvary—where, in obedience to His Father, Jesus died for His neighbor.

Precious people, it all gets down to a single syllable: Love. Paul said, "If I have the tongues of men and angels but have not love, it's nothing. If I give my body to be burned because I'm so radical in service but I don't have love, it's to no avail. If I have enough faith to do miracles but have not love, it doesn't amount to a hill of beans. It all gets down to love" (see 1 Corinthians 13).

"Uh-oh," you say. "If it all gets down to love, I'm in trouble."

That's what Peter thought . . .

"Do you love Me, Peter?" Jesus asked.

"What can I say, Lord? I denied You. I disobeyed You. How can I say I love You?" Peter answered.

A second time Jesus said, "Peter, do you love Me?"

And a second time, Peter answered, "Lord, You know I like You."

The third time Jesus asked the question, He framed it a little differently, saying, "Peter, do you even like Me?"

"Yes, Lord, You know I like You," Peter answered.

"I'll accept that," Jesus said. "Feed My sheep" (John 21:15–17).

God so loved us that He gave His only Son to die for our sins—including our sin of not loving Him.

> *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.*
>
> Micah 7:18

From six hundred thirteen to eleven to three to one. Yet even when, like Peter, we fail, Jesus comes to us where we are with pardon and mercy.

He has shown thee what is good: Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God. If that's too hard to remember, it's all summed up in a single syllable: love. And if even that's too hard, rather than relying on your love for Him, rest in His love for you.

In Jesus' Name.



7

Micah 7:1

Woe is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape- gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluster to eat: my soul desired the firstripe fruit.

"Woe is me!" Micah cries because the sight of the people, the prophets, the politicians, and the priesthood all polluted by their pursuit of prosperity and paganism pained his soul.

Micah 7:2 (a)

The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men . . .

The Marines are always on the lookout for a few good men. Micah was unable to find even one.

Micah 7:2 (b), 3 (a)

. . . they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net. That they may do evil with both hands earnestly . . .

While Micah could find no one of integrity, there was no shortage of men who were bloodthirsty. Unfortunately, the same is true in our day.

Micah 7:3 (b)

. . . the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up.

Not only is integrity consumed by the bloodthirsty, but Micah sees a judicial darkness as the giving and taking of bribes overshadow equity.

Micah 7:4
The best of them is as a brier: the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge: the day of thy watchmen and thy visitation cometh; now shall be their perplexity.

Even the best of men is as dangerous as a hedge of thorns—which is why Jerusalem's watchmen would one day see the arrival of their enemy through whom the Lord would bring judgment to their city.

Micah 7:5 (a)
Trust ye not in a friend . . .

Not only does deceit lurk in every corner of society, but Micah goes on to say that even friends are not trustworthy.

Micah 7:5 (b)
. . . put ye not confidence in a guide . . .

Micah goes even further when he says, "Don't put your confidence in those who claim to be able to guide you—be they pastors or teachers, advisors or counselors."

A Bible school student was taught how to minister to people in the hospital—to stand near them so they wouldn't have to yell across the room, to hold their hands, to pray with them and share some Scripture. Upon graduation, the young man reported to work at his first church. He was only there a few weeks when one of his parishioners became seriously ill. Walking into the man's hospital room, the young pastor remembered what he had been taught. Standing very near the bed, he took the man's hand and began to pray with him. Noticing sweat breaking out on the man's brow and a green pallor coloring his skin, the pastor thought, "Oh, no! This man's dying. I better prepare him for heaven!"

Seeing the man try to mouth something, the pastor put his ear closer to hear the man's final words—only to hear him whisper, "You're standing on

my oxygen cord."

Put not your confidence in guides, Micah says, because, although their heart may be right, they often will be the very ones who inadvertently cut off your oxygen supply!

Micah 7:5 (c)
. . . keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom.

Going further still, Micah says, "Be careful what you say even to your own mate because he or she may betray you, disappoint you, or not understand you."

There is a tendency in some quarters of the Christian community to place one's mate on such a high pedestal that we subconsciously expect him or her to meet all of our needs. When he or she doesn't, we go to marriage seminar after seminar and to buy self-help book after book only to wonder why our marriage isn't fulfilling to us. And the more we read about other marriages, the more we conclude that our own marriage is worse than we thought. So we work harder at it. But the harder we work, the more frustrated we become. Why? Because a wife or husband will never be able to truly satisfy us any more than a friend, hobby, or job will. Only the Lord can satisfy us. But this realization is being lost today—even in the church.

People work so hard on their marriages that they actually put more pressure on them, resulting in an endless, unnecessary cycle of stress. The solution? If a husband and wife seek first the kingdom of God and love the Lord first and foremost, they can just enjoy each other as they travel together toward heaven. But if they're expecting each other to be God and their marriage to be heaven, they'll find nothing but disillusionment and frustration. Seek first the kingdom, Jesus said—and everything else will fall into place (Matthew 6:33).

Micah 7:6
For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter in law against her mother in law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house.

Even your own family will disappoint you at one time or another, Micah declares. Observing a society lacking integrity and riddled with cruelty, friends that couldn't be trusted, marriages that were less than fulfilling, families that were disappointing—was Micah cynical and bitter? Quite the contrary, he was more hopeful than ever . . .

Micah 7:7, 8
Therefore I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me.

The answer lies not in friends or family, society or country. All of them will disappoint you at one time or another. But there is One who you can absolutely count on to fulfill you, to befriend you, to be completely faithful to you. That One is God. "It's God I need," Micah declares. "It's the Lord I long for and He is here for me."

Micah 7:9
I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.

For thirty-six chapters, Job questioned God. When God answered him, the first words out of Job's mouth were, "Behold, I am vile" (Job 40:4).

"Woe is me!" Isaiah cried when he saw the Lord, "for I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5).

"Depart from me," Peter said upon his realization that the Man in his boat was God incarnate, "for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8).

Any clear revelation of deity results in a realization of one's own depravity—and Micah was no exception. Speaking not only for the nation of Israel, but for himself, he says, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against Him."

Micah 7:10

Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the LORD thy God? mine eyes shall behold her: now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets.

"He trusted in God; let Him deliver him now," the scribes and elders said of Jesus as He hung on the Cross for their sin (Matthew 27:43).

"Where is thy God?" taunted the enemies of the psalmist (Psalm 42:3).

"Where is the Lord thy God?" scoffed the Assyrians and Babylonians to the Jews?

But through the lens of history, we see the real questions are: Where are the scribes and elders? Where are the psalmist's foes? Where are the Assyrians and Babylonians? They are all gone—while God is still on the throne.

Micah 7:11
In the day that thy walls are to be built, in that day shall the decree be far removed.

Following their seventy-year captivity, the Jews were released to Jerusalem where, under the leadership of Nehemiah and Zerubbabel, they rebuilt her walls and temple.

Micah 7:12
In that day also he shall come even to thee from Assyria, and from the fortified cities, and from the fortress even to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain.

Upon their return from captivity, the Jews were to occupy their country from the Euphrates River to the Nile River, from the Mediterranean Sea to the ocean, from Mount Libanus to Mount Seir. This prophecy was literally fulfilled during Herod's reign when Jesus was born.

Micah 7:13
Notwithstanding the land shall be desolate because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings.

Although the Jews would return to their land, the fact that it had been desolate for their seventy-year captivity would serve as a reminder of the effects of their sin (Jeremiah 21:14).

Micah 7:14 (a)
Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage . . .

After suffering the consequences of her sin under the rod of her enemies, Micah prays that Israel would now be led by the rod—or shepherd's crook—of her God.

Micah 7:14 (b)
. . . which dwell solitarily . . .

No longer would Israel be dispersed among the nations. She would dwell in her own land according to the promise of God (Numbers 23:9; Deuteronomy 33:28).

Micah 7:14 (c)
. . . in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.

Bashan and Gilead were chosen by Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh because of the abundance of their pasture land (Numbers 32).

Micah 7:15–17
According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I shew unto him marvellous things. The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the LORD our God, and shall fear because of thee.

Answering Micah's prayer, God calls to mind Israel's exodus from Egypt —a time when He moved miraculously and decisively to deliver His people

from bondage. As He did then, so He would do again. Why? Read on . . .

Micah 7:18
Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

The reason God pardons sin as horrendous as Israel's and as hideous as mine is single: He delights in mercy. The justice of God took the wrath I deserved and poured it on Christ Jesus, His Son, who was slain for my sin. When Jesus cried from the Cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He was feeling the anger God should have hurled on me. Thus, God can say, "I delight in mercy"—not, "I have to develop it, discipline Myself to feel it, or determine to show it. No, I *delight* in mercy because the price of your sin was fully paid on the Cross by My Son."

Micah 7:19
He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

Exploring the three-mile deep Mariana Trench off the coast of Indonesia, divers discovered that light becomes nonexistent in such depth. This means that God not only forgives our sins completely but tosses them into the one place in the world where they become totally invisible.

Micah 7:20
Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.

God alone is as merciful as He is truthful. Friends and family disappoint us repeatedly. Pastors and guides step on our oxygen hoses unknowingly. Society lets us down constantly. Therefore, Micah says, "God alone is the One to whom I look, upon whom I rely, in whom I believe."

Does this mean I am to become cynical about people? No—for when I look to God, have hope in God, and walk with God, I'm free to accept

people for the wretches we all are due to our fallen humanity. The more I understand this, the less I pressure you to be something you're not; the less I demand that my wife, my kids, my friends, church, family, boss, or country be that which they can never be. There is only *One* who is good, who passes over iniquity, who delights in mercy, who casts our sin into the depths of the sea.

After praying so intensely that it caused His blood vessels to burst, Jesus saw a company of men coming toward Him. Suddenly, from out of the company, one stepped forward and kissed Him on the cheek. Knowing exactly what Judas was doing (John 6:70), Jesus nonetheless said to him, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?"—even then giving Judas an opportunity to respond to His unfathomable love (Matthew 26:50).

- Jesus called Judas "friend." Amazing.
  Jesus calls me "friend" (John 15:15). Incredible.
- Who is our God?
  Micah was right. There is none *like Him.*



NAHUM

Background to Nahum

Written in 630 B.C., the Book of Nahum is a sequel to the Book of Jonah. Jonah was the prophet sent with a message to Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian empire. Nineveh was an awesome city so big that it took three days to walk across it (Jonah 3:3) and protected by a wall so thick chariots could race atop it. Interspersed in this massive wall were 1,200 towers from which soldiers were able to rain boulders, arrows, and spears on any enemy audacious enough to approach the seemingly impregnable fortress.

As for the inhabitants of Nineveh, there has not been a more cruel people in the history of the world. Consequently, when the Lord commissioned Jonah to preach repentance to this bloody, brutal people, Jonah went as far as he could in the opposite direction in fear that they would receive his message and experience God's forgiveness.

Eventually, however, Jonah ended up in Nineveh. Bleached white from the gastric juices of the whale's stomach, such a sight was he that when he preached, "Repent. Judgment comes in forty days," in the streets of Nineveh, the people listened to what he said and repented. The greatest revival in the history of the world followed as over 600,000 people repented and turned to God.

Now, one hundred fifty years later, we pick up the story in the Book of Nahum—a book that divides itself into three sections. In chapter 1, Nineveh's doom is declared. In chapter 2, Nineveh's doom is described. In chapter 3, Nineveh's doom is deserved.

NAHUM

1 Nahum 1:1
The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.

Nahum was the prophet raised up by the Lord to bring a message to Nineveh—the capital city of Assyria, which had once turned to God but had now drifted far from Him. His name means "comforter"—which is interesting to me because his message of gloom and doom, destruction and devastation, is anything but comforting. Was Nahum named amiss? Should the Lord have changed his name—like Marion Campbell did when he became John Wayne? Is Comforter an appropriate name for this individual? I think we will see that indeed it is.

Although we don't know for certain where Nahum lived, there is a town located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee—the town where centuries later Jesus would establish the headquarters for His ministry—named Capernaum, or Caper-nahum, meaning the town of Nahum. Some have suggested this was Nahum's hometown.

Nahum begins his prophecy with a revelation of the personality and power of God as seen in verses 2 through 7 . . .

Nahum 1:2
God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies.

God is love. But His love is not a sloppy sentimentality. His love is righteous and true. Thus, His very jealousy is part of His love, for He would not be loving if He were not jealous.

"I'm confused," you say. "I thought jealousy was a sign of carnality, a sin of the flesh." Jealousy is a sin as it relates to you and me (Proverbs 6:34)—but not as it relates to God.

You see, when I get jealous it is because I am worried someone is going to take something or someone from me. Not so with God. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are completely content in and of themselves. God isn't saying, "If I lose Jon, My whole world will collapse and I'll be miserable." No, God is all-sufficient. He has need of nothing. This means His love for me is not based upon my satisfying Him or my fulfilling a void in His life. Therefore, because He needs nothing, God's jealousy is vastly different from man's.

God is jealous not because He's worried about His loss—but because He's concerned about our hurt. Think of it this way: If we were at the zoo and a cobra slithered out of its cage and was face to face with my kids, I'd be very jealous for them. It's not that I would worry that the cobra would steal them away from me or that they'd like the snake better than me. No, I would simply be concerned that the cobra would hurt them.

That's the kind of jealousy God has. "Kids," He says, "I'm not concerned that you'll hurt *Me* but that *you'll* be hurt in leaving Me. The cobra is sure to strike, so I will deal with those things that will hurt or harm you. I will take vengeance on My enemies in order to protect My children."

Nahum 1:3 (a)
The LORD is slow to anger . . .

God is jealous in the best sense of the word and He doesn't have a temper. I like that. Haven't you found that when your temper boils over, you always end up in hot water? I have! God is not like that. Over and over again, our Father identifies Himself as One who is slow to anger (Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 103:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2).

Nahum 1:3 (b)
. . . and great in power . . .

Some people mistake the patience of God for apathy. "I'm sinning," they say, "and nothing's happening to me so God must not care." But that's a big mistake indeed. Although the people of Nineveh had responded to God initially, they returned to their evil practices eventually. For one hundred fifty

years, God was slow to anger. But now He's about to demonstrate His power.

Nahum 1:3 (c)–6
. . . and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.

The awesomeness of God's judgment makes me appreciate all the more what Jesus Christ absorbed for me on the Cross of Calvary. When God poured out all of the wrath that should have been poured out on all of humanity, He poured it out on His Son who died in our place. What a price. When you read about the severity of God's judgment and wrath, you cannot help but grow greatly in your amazement that Jesus Christ took the rap for you, for me, for us.

Nahum 1:7 (a)
The LORD is good . . .

After Nahum declares God's power, a reminder is given: The Lord is good. I like that! When you're talking about the awesomeness of His judgment, always keep in mind that the Lord is *good.* The first verse I taught each of my kids was Psalm 73:1: Truly God is good. Why did I choose that particular verse? Not only because it's simple to learn but because it's foundational to their understanding of who God is.

The goodness of God is the first truth Satan attacks. "Has God said you're not to eat of that fruit?" he asked Eve. "He knows in the day you eat it, you'll have new revelation." In other words, "God is holding back something good from you, Eve" (Genesis 3:1–5).

And that's what Satan still does today. He slithers up beside you and hisses in your ear, "Isn't that a little narrow and ressstrictive? Issssn't there a more exciting way to live? Is God *truly* good?"

"I know mentally that God is good, but emotionally sometimes I doubt His goodness," said the psalmist. "But then I go into the sanctuary. And when I'm in God's presence with God's people, I'm reminded of His goodness all over again" (Psalm 73). Haven't you found the same thing to be true? You come to the place where God's people are studying and worshiping—and suddenly you see it again: God *is* good!

Nahum 1:7 (b)
. . . a strong hold in the day of trouble . . .

Do you know that life is hard? "As sure as sparks from a fire fly upward, man is born for trouble," Job declares (see Job 5:7).

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous," David echoes, "but the Lord delivers them out of them all" (Psalm 34:19).

Don't think you have troubles simply because you're a Christian. The unbeliever has just as many difficulties as you do. The difference is, you have access to the Problem Solver. You can turn to the Lord, the "stronghold in the day of trouble"—but he doesn't know he can.

Nahum 1:7 (c)
. . . and he knoweth them that trust in him.

God not only knows those who trust in Him, but He thinks about them. How often? As many times as there are grains of sand on the shores of the sea . . .

> O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand . . .
>
> Psalm 139:1, 17, 18 (a)

God says, "When I'm on the seashores of Waikiki, Bora Bora, or Tahiti, I'm thinking about you more often than the number of grains of sand beneath My feet."

Those who study such things tell us there are ten to the twenty-fifth power grains of sand on the seashore worldwide. They also tell us there are ten to the twenty-fifth power stars in the heavens. I find this more than coincidental, for God promised Abraham that his seed would be as the sand on the seashore and as the stars in the heavens (Genesis 22:17).

So next time you're at the beach, remember that there's a star for every grain of sand. And for every star, there's a thought about you in the heart and mind of your Father. In other words, you're *always* on His mind and in His heart.

Nahum 1:8 (a)
But . . .

In verses 2 through 7, we saw the personality and power of God revealed. Now we change direction. In verses 8 through 15, we'll see the prophecy and plan of God unveiled.

Nahum 1:8 (b)–10
. . . with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies. What do ye imagine against the LORD? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time. For while they be folden together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry.

One of the most fascinating prophecies in the minor prophets is embedded in this passage for Greek historians tell us this is precisely what happened when, eighteen years after Nahum's prophecy was given, the emerging empires of the Medes to the north and the Babylonians to the south joined together to attack the city of Nineveh. With enough food growing within her city walls to feed her population indefinitely and with the Euphrates river flowing through the city itself to provide water, Nineveh

successfully fended off three separate attacks over three years by simply shutting herself off from her attackers and hunkering down within her walls.

To celebrate her victory, the Ninevites threw a party—a drunken orgy that lasted for weeks. But, as they partied, the Lord began to send clouds over Nineveh. As rain fell, the Euphrates began to swell so much that it eventually caused the foundation of the mighty wall to crumble. The Medes and Babylonians stormed through the breaches and torched the city—precisely as Nahum had prophesied.

Nahum 1:11–13
There is one come out of thee, that imagineth evil against the LORD, a wicked counsellor. Thus saith the LORD: Though they be quiet, and likewise many, yet thus shall they be cut down, when he shall pass through. Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more. For now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder.

So completely destroyed was the city that in 330 B.C., when Alexander the Great came marching through the area, there was not a single stone left on the spot where Nineveh once stood. Consequently, as the years passed, skeptics began to say there never was a Nineveh, that it was just a biblical tall tale. But in 1845, an archaeologist happened to hit something with his spade while digging in Iraq—and by the time the project was completed, the city of Nineveh was uncovered.

Nahum 1:14
And the LORD hath given a commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown: out of the house of thy gods will I cut off the graven image and the molten image: I will make thy grave; for thou art vile.

In addition to the city of Nineveh being wiped out, Nahum's prophecy that "no more of thy name be sown" was fulfilled completely—for who of us knows a single Assyrian?

Nahum 1:15

Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off.

The good tidings of which Nahum writes refer to the destruction of Nineveh. How can destruction be good news? Living in Judah, knowing the Assyrians were always ready to pounce on you and skin you alive, if someone said, "Assyria is wiped out," wouldn't you say, "That's good news!"? That's why Nahum was not misnamed. He was indeed a comforter —not to the people living in Nineveh, but to the people of Judah.

> How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!
>
> Isaiah 52:7

Isaiah wrote this, looking forward to the kingdom age, when Jesus will come back and reign in Jerusalem.

> How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!
>
> Romans 10:14, 15

Paul uses the same text to speak not only of a future kingdom but of present salvation. Thus, the same prophetic word is seen in three different passages with three different applications—Nineveh's destruction, the future kingdom, and our salvation—all *good* news.

2 In chapter 1, Nineveh's doom was declared. Here in chapter 2, Nineveh's doom is described. In verses 1 through 8, we read of the pounding of Nineveh. In verses 9 through 13, we see the plundering of Nineveh.

Nahum 2:1 (a)
He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face . . .

In other words—as your margin might read—"the hammer is come up before thy face." Isaiah had prophesied the same thing years earlier when the Lord likened Assyria to a paddle, an instrument in His hand by which He disciplined the people of Israel. "But you have gone beyond that," declared the Lord. "You have prided yourselves in that you have destroyed My people. Therefore, I will destroy you" (Isaiah 10).

"With what measure ye mete, it shall be given you," Jesus said (Matthew 7:2). Because the Assyrians were quick to dispense judgment, judgment would fall upon them. Good lesson there. How you treat others will come back on you.

Nahum 2:1 (b)
. . . keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily.

"Beware, Nineveh," said the Lord through Nahum. "The hammering blows of the Medes and Babylonians are about to fall on you—for they are instruments of My wrath."

Nahum 2:2
For the LORD hath turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel: for the emptiers have emptied them out, and marred their vine branches.

"You have marred My people. You have emptied My branches. Now it's your turn to be emptied and marred," said the Lord to Nineveh.

Nahum 2:3, 4

The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet: the chariots shall be with flaming torches in the day of his preparation, and the fir trees shall be terribly shaken. The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall justle one against another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings.

With its references to chariots, streets, and speed, some have taken this passage as a prophecy concerning the age of the automobile. Although it's interesting, I don't think such is the case. But of the following prophecy, we can be sure . . .

Nahum 2:5, 6
He shall recount his worthies: they shall stumble in their walk; they shall make haste to the wall thereof, and the defence shall be prepared. The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved.

As Nineveh's walls crumbled from the force of the flooded Euphrates, the King of Assyria hid in his palace. He must have thought he would surely be safe there. After all, it was six hundred feet long, six hundred thirty feet wide, had eighty rooms, and was surrounded by gold and silver lions. His private armory, which held his shields and spears, horses and chariots, covered eighteen acres. But it eventually became evident that neither his palace nor his armory could save him. Realizing this, he committed suicide by lighting himself on fire, burning down his palace in the process.

Nahum 2:7
And Huzzab shall be led away captive, she shall be brought up, and her maids shall lead her as with the voice of doves, tabering upon their breasts.

With no historical mention of Huzzab, Queen of Nineveh, being burned in the fire that claimed her husband's life, it is assumed that she escaped and was carried away captive with the rest of her people.

Nahum 2:8
But Nineveh is of old like a pool of water: yet they shall flee away. Stand, stand, shall they cry; but none shall look back.

Panic gripped the city. The king was dead. The palace was dissolved. The enemy was flooding in.

Nahum 2:9
Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold: for there is none end of the store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture.

After pounding the city of Nineveh, the Mede and Babylonian troops were commanded to plunder it.

Nahum 2:10 (a)
She is empty, and void, and waste: and the heart melteth, and the knees smite together . . .

Because they had rebelled against God, the knees of the Ninevites were knocking. Like the Ninevites, we, too, have rebelled against God. But instead of being fearful, we have the opportunity to be prayerful because we are forgiven of our rebellion by the blood of Calvary. Whenever your knees are knocking, kneel on them—and be reminded of the sin-cleansing, enemy-defeating power of the Cross.

Nahum 2:10 (b)–12
. . . and much pain is in all loins, and the faces of them all gather blackness. Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feedingplace of the young lions, where the lion, even the old lion, walked, and the lion's whelp, and none made them afraid? The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin.

With an insatiable appetite, the king of Assyria had been "king of the jungle," devouring surrounding nations to feed his own "family."

Nahum 2:13
Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions: and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard.

"Behold, I am against thee." What terrifying words! Do you realize these are the very words of the Lord toward your relatives and neighbors, colleagues and friends who reject the Word of Jesus Christ? They might think they're partying; they might think they're cruising—but little do they know that it is only God's patience that is preventing His judgment. And when it comes, His judgment will be devastating and damning.

Never give up sharing the gospel, saints, for, "Behold, I am against thee" becomes, "If God be for us who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31) for anyone who simply embraces Jesus.



3

Nahum 3:1 (a)
Woe to the bloody city! . . .

The first reason the destruction of Nineveh was deserved was due to the cruelty of the Ninevites.

Nahum 3:1 (b)
. . . it is all full of lies and robbery . . .

The men of Jerusalem were sitting on the wall of the city when Rabshakeh came out with the mighty armies of Assyria, saying, "We're going to blow you away. No nation has stopped us. No god of any people has proven a match for our armies. However, if you come out and make a deal with us, we'll let you live in pleasant lands" (2 Kings 18). This was the Assyrians' typical method of operation. They would make deals with people

and lure them out of their cities—only to loot their cities once the inhabitants were defenseless.

Nahum 3:1 (c)–3
. . . the prey departeth not; The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the pransing horses, and of the jumping chariots. The horseman lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcases; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses:

The cruelty of the Assyrians is beyond that of any other society in history. They would commit mass murder in every city they conquered, piling the skulls of their vanquished in huge pyramids outside the conquered cities as a warning of the consequence of standing in their way.

Nahum 3:4–7
Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the well-favoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts. Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts; and I will discover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will shew the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame. And I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazingstock. And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her? whence shall I seek comforters for thee?

Carnality was also a reason for Nineveh's destruction. Immorality was a part of it, but the major failing here is actually the idea of witchcraft. In both the Old and New Testaments, witchcraft is associated with drugs. The New Testament word translated "witchcraft" is actually *pharmakeia*—from which we get our word "pharmacy." In the taking of drugs, there's always a connection with the supernatural realm of the demonic world. And the Lord says, "Because you're involved with drugs and witchcraft and because

you've spread your practices throughout the world, I will expose you to the world."

We have seen this very thing happen closer to home. One of the most advanced civilizations in world history was the Inca civilization. From their ruins in Central and South America, we know they were experts in brain surgery at a time when European cultures were still using leeches for bloodletting. Through genetic engineering, the Incans developed a singles bee that was prolific in the production of honey. The Incan postal system guaranteed two-day delivery to anywhere in their empire.

What happened to the Incas? They came across a little plant—the coca shrub—from which they were able to extract cocaine. And eventually the great Incan thinkers and philosophers, inventors, scientists, and architects lost all interest in developing their civilization or defending themselves. In so doing, they destroyed themselves—as will any civilization that glorifies drug use.

Nahum 3:8–10
Art thou better than populous No, that was situate among the rivers, that had the waters round about it, whose rampart was the sea, and her wall was from the sea? Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite; Put and Lubim were thy helpers. Yet was she carried away, she went into captivity: her young children also were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets: and they cast lots for her honourable men, and all her great men were bound in chains.

Stupidity is a third reason for the destruction of Nineveh. "No" was another name for the wealthy Egyptian city of Thebes which the Assyrians conquered only a few years prior to this in 633 B.C. Therefore, God is saying, "Don't you get the picture? Why do you think you can escape the fate of Thebes who also thought it was invincible?"

Nahum 3:11–13
Thou also shalt be drunken: thou shalt be hid, thou also shalt seek strength because of the enemy. All thy strong holds shall be like fig trees with the firstripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even

fall into the mouth of the eater. Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women: the gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies: the fire shall devour thy bars.

Homosexuality is a fourth reason for the destruction of Nineveh. From historical records, we know that the society of Assyria and the city of Nineveh in particular were caught up not only in homosexuality, but in bizarre, masochistic, and sadistic practices. That is why they were no more able to stand against their enemies than a ripe fig could cling to a shaken branch.

Nahum 3:14
Draw thee waters for the siege, fortify thy strong holds: go into clay, and tread the morter, make strong the brickkiln.

Here's Nahum mockingly giving directions to a people who are lacking any kind of leadership. But then he continues on a serious note . . .

Nahum 3:15, 16
There shall the fire devour thee; the sword shall cut thee off, it shall eat thee up like the cankerworm: make thyself many as the cankerworm, make thyself many as the locusts. Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven: the cankerworm spoileth, and fleeth away.

In other words, "As quickly as locusts can level a field, so your boutiques and merchants' shops will be leveled in the day of destruction."

Nahum 3:17, 18
Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are. Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy nobles shall dwell in the dust: thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them.

"When the going gets tough, Nineveh, your leaders are going to run and hide."

Nahum 3:19
There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?

"Everyone who hears about your destruction will applaud," declared the Lord. And that's the way Nahum's prophecy ends.

Was the judgment, the doom, the destruction of Nineveh deserved? Yes, for the wrath of God is an important component of His love. Because they were doomed already by their corruption and disease, God in His love is absolutely justified in destroying such a society.

If a snarling dog came into my house baring its teeth and foaming at the mouth, would I have been justified in judging, in destroying the dog? Yes, because the dog was going to die anyway. He was diseased. He was rabid. He was doomed. But my kids didn't have rabies. And I would have had to protect them from the diseased dog. I would not be loving if I said, "Oh, well, so the dog has rabies. Come on, kids, be big-hearted. Pet the puppy. Give the doggy a kiss."

Love means doing what is right and best for the people about whom you care. Thus, God looked at the Assyrian society and said, "I'm giving you year after decade after century to turn back to Me. But if you refuse, I must destroy you in order to protect the people living round about you."

Our God is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24). This warms me because I know things are terribly wrong in our world. And being a consuming fire, God says, "I'll not allow sin to go on indefinitely. I am patient now for I am not willing that any should perish, that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). But there is coming a day in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise; the elements shall melt with fervent heat; and the earth will be burned up (2 Peter 3:10). Yes, I'm patient. I'm giving people plenty of opportunity to turn to Me. But the day is coming when I will judge radically."

The consuming fire aspect of God's nature warms me—not only because the world around me will be made right but also because the worldliness within me will be consumed. If you are being disciplined by the Lord, rejoice because it means He's not going to allow corruption within you to go unchecked. He's the Great Physician who, with the fire of conviction and chastisement, will burn out the cancer of carnality before it destroys you eternally.

Would anyone knowingly go to a doctor who, not wanting to hurt or offend his patients, never told them there was anything wrong with them in spite of the fact that x-rays showed cancer growing within them? No. We want a doctor who will cut into us if necessary to save us physically. In the same way, our God is a consuming fire, a Great Physician, who will judge not only the world around us but the worldliness within us. This knowledge warms me.

But it also warns me . . .

> Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.
>
> Matthew 7:22, 23

> . . . but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.
>
> Matthew 10:22 (b)

> Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure . . .
>
> 2 Peter 1:10 (a)

Nahum spoke to a city that was once revived, a city that had once turned toward God with fasting and sackcloth, with prayer and sincerity. But, as time went on, the Ninevites slid back into their old, carnal ways, and now Nahum says, "Thus saith the Lord: I am against you."

I do believe there will be people who will stand before the Lord and honestly be shocked to hear the words, "Depart from Me. I never knew you"

(Matthew 7:23).

"But back in 1968, I walked forward at a Billy Graham crusade," they'll say.

Or, "In 1953, I threw my pine cone on the fire at Camp Winnemukka. How can it be that You never knew Me?"

How can we who know God begin to slip away (Hebrews 2:1)? This happens when church is no longer important, when ministry happens only when it's convenient, when prayer no longer has priority, when Bible reading becomes a chore. It happens when, like Nineveh, you're no longer where you once were in your relationship with the Lord. And if you ignore the voice of the Comforter, of the Holy Ghost, saying, "Turn"—you can be in real trouble.

"This is scaring me," you say.

Good. I would rather see you walk in fear and trembling all the way into heaven than to be lulled into lethargy only to be awakened by the words, "I am against you."

Make your calling and election sure, dear saint. On your face before the Lord, ask Him to have mercy upon you. Embrace Him. Submit to Him. Follow hard after Him. He's a loving Father who will send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to be the Nahum in your heart, saying, "Turn away. Get right. Come back."



HABAKKUK

Background to Habakkuk

Habakkuk was the last of the minor prophets to preach in Judah, the southern kingdom, before the final Babylonian invasion. Led by Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians invaded Judah on three separate occasions before carrying the Jews back to Babylon and into captivity in 586 B.C. Ministering in the days immediately preceding Nebuchadnezzar's first invasion, Habakkuk must have written his book sometime around 609 B.C.

The times were troubling. The days were dark. There were ominous signs on the horizon. Having already formed an axis with the Medes to overthrow the Assyrians, the Babylonians would continue to rise in power under the leadership of their king, Nebuchadnezzar.

From internal evidence, we can assume that since Habakkuk began his ministry in 630 B.C., he ministered for a number of years before this book was penned. We don't know much about Habakkuk personally. However, on the basis of the last verse in the book, in which he writes, "To the chief singer on my stringed instruments," we can assume he was a priest before he was a prophet because it was the Levites, particularly the priests, who wrote the songs and played the instruments in the temple. If this be so, he would be in the same situation as a contemporary—a prophet named Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was also a priest before he was called to be a prophet. So these two men, both, it would seem, called from the priestly ministry into a prophetic ministry, ministered in the days immediately before the Babylonian invasion, when the southern kingdom would come crashing down. The priestly ministry was much more regimented than the prophetic ministry. Priests had certain prescribed activities they performed each day. They followed the Levitical calendar with its feasts and festivals.

The prophetic ministry, on the other hand, was anything but regimented and ordered. The prophets didn't have any kind of structure. They were moved by the Spirit of the Lord to do whatever, whenever, however He guided. Isaiah was told to make a point by taking off his clothes and walking through the land—getting peoples' attention and explaining to them the "naked" truth about their situation. Hosea was told to marry a prostitute as an

illustration of God's redemptive ability in embracing people who are unfaithful to Him. Ezekiel was told to chop off his hair and throw it in the fire.

The prophetic ministry was a difficult one! These men were called to do radical things to get the attention of people who had grown so calloused and hard-hearted that God was willing to go to great extremes to get them to listen. If indeed Habakkuk had previously enjoyed being a minstrel in the temple, I'm not sure what his reaction was when he was called to be a prophet. I know what Jeremiah's was. He said, "Oh, Lord, not me. I am but a youth" (Jeremiah 1:6). He was probably thirty years old at the time, but he was trying to find any reason why he shouldn't be thrust into the bold ministry of a prophet.

Habakkuk is interesting because of all the prophets, he is the only one who, in his book, is not being initiated by God into the ministry but rather he is initiating a dialogue with God about the ministry. He's the initiator and God is the respondent.

At the beginning of his ministry, Habakkuk saw the people go through a revival of sorts in the days of King Josiah. Eight years old when he began to reign, Scripture records that, at the age of sixteen, Josiah sought the Lord "while he was yet young" (2 Chronicles 34:3). At age twenty, Josiah ordered the temple to be remodeled during the course of which a copy of the Law was found (2 Chronicles 34:14). Because the country had been so wicked previously that not a single copy of the Scripture could be found in the entire land, when this copy was uncovered in the temple, the people were amazed. As he read it, Josiah realized how far Judah was from where she should be. He wept before the Lord and called the people to seek Him and to observe the festivals and feasts of Israel once again. And a great revival seemed to follow.

But, in reality, no one can legislate spirituality. There was reformation but not regeneration. People went through the outward motions but their hearts were not right toward the Lord. They attended the services and enjoyed the festivals—but they did not respond to the Lord personally. So Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and others were on the scene, calling the people to a true spirituality—not just a religiosity but a genuine relationship with God.

Josiah left the scene. Then came Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim was an evil king. Given a scroll by Jeremiah concerning how he should behave, Jehoiakim cut the scroll into pieces, and tossed them into the fire. Jeremiah wrote another scroll—only this time the message against Jehoiakim was stronger and the prophesied future of Judah bleaker (Jeremiah 36:32).

The spiritual climate was degenerating rapidly. The revival that had happened a few years previously did not affect the people on a deep level. The new king was wicked and the people were plunged into immorality, leaving Habakkuk to wonder, "Lord, why don't You judge Your people? Why aren't You working? Where are You?"

Habakkuk is a beautiful gem of a book, written by the prophet who started out wrestling with God and ended up worshiping Him.



HABAKKUK

1

Habakkuk 1:1
The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.

Habakkuk means "wrestler." Therefore, he's been called the "doubting Thomas" of the Old Testament. In chapter 1, we'll see him wondering and wrestling. In chapter 2, we'll see him watching and waiting. In chapter 3, we'll see him worshiping and witnessing. In chapter 1, he begins in the valley. In chapter 2, he'll climb into the tower. In chapter 3, he ascends to the mountain. In chapter 1, he sighs. In chapter 2, he'll seek. In chapter 3, he'll sing. Thus, this book that bears his name is a great book for any of us who, at any time, wonder, "Where is God?"

Habakkuk 1:2
O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!

"Lord, how long will I cry?" pleads Habakkuk. The second time he uses the word "cry" in verse 2, the Hebrew word is actually "scream." Thus, Habakkuk is actually saying, "I cry to You, Lord, but You don't hear me. I scream out before You, but You don't help me!"

Do you ever feel that way?

Habakkuk 1:3
Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention.

"I look around Jerusalem," says Habakkuk, "and all I see is violence and contention. Why aren't You doing anything about this, Lord?"

I think we feel the same way watching the nightly news. "Lord, can't You see what's happening?"

Habakkuk 1:4
Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.

The Hebrew word translated "slacked" literally means "paralyzed." "The law is paralyzed," moans Habakkuk. "It's not working. The judicial system is not functioning."

Before he is executed, the average capital offender in this country will spend twenty-two years in legal procedures at a cost of 1.8 million dollars. So, if a guy kills someone, it costs our government 1.8 million dollars and twenty-two years of legal hoops before he actually is executed. Our system is paralyzed. Our judicial system is not working the way it was meant to—and history shows that when a society or a country cannot deal with its infection quickly and effectively, like a human body, it will die of infection.

Habakkuk 1:5
Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you.

"Don't accuse Me of not working, of not seeing," says God. "I *am* doing something, Habakkuk—but if I told you what it was, you wouldn't even believe it."

I'm convinced that's why God doesn't tell us what He's doing. He knows that if He told us what would be happening in our lives five years from now, we wouldn't believe it—or we would argue about it. In Isaiah 55:8 and 9, the Lord declares that His ways are not our ways, that His thoughts are higher than ours. This means God does not have an obligation to give us explanation about our expectation. His promise is simply relaxation.

"Be anxious for nothing," Paul would write, "but in everything with prayer and supplication let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which passes understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

In other words, God says, "When you're anxious or uptight, I promise you not a peace that comes *from* your understanding but a peace that *passes* your understanding. I'm going to bypass your puny brain, so to speak, and infuse you with a deep peace in your heart."

Here, He's saying to Habakkuk, "You're accusing Me of indifference and inactivity, but if I told you what I was doing, you wouldn't believe it." And then, it's almost as if Habakkuk says, "Try me," because the Lord proceeds to explain something of what He's doing . . .

Habakkuk 1:6–11
For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it. Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god.

"Here's what's happening, Habakkuk. You think I'm doing nothing but in the north, I'm preparing a people that will come down more swiftly than leopards and more fiercely than lions. They're going to invade this land that you're complaining about. I'm going to use them as a rod in My hand to punish and to deal with the unbelief, the immorality, the inequity of your society."

What does Habakkuk do then? At first he was wondering why God wasn't working and judging his people. But now he's *really* wrestling . . .

Habakkuk 1:12

Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction.

"Lord, You're missing my point entirely!" Habakkuk cries. "Yes, I was concerned about my people. But You can't use the Babylonians to judge us. They're worse than we are!"

Habakkuk 1:13–17
Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore look-est thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous. Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?

"Lord, this is not a good solution," Habakkuk insists. "I know we are wicked—but we are much more righteous than the Babylonians who will descend upon us like cruel fishermen, scoop us up like fish into their nets, and attribute the victory to their gods. You can't allow this, Lord!"

Now, Habakkuk is *really* struggling. Not only is God not doing what Habakkuk thinks He should be doing with the people of Judah, but He seems to be saying that the Babylonians are going to be victorious in their conquest. And that isn't fair at all, Habakkuk protests.

We all can relate to this. "How come they got a new house?" we ask. "Now, Lord, You know that I have devotions regularly and come to church faithfully. But I haven't seen them at church for weeks! Why are You blessing them—when you should be blessing *me?*"

Like us, Habakkuk was a questioner—but we are about to see him do something oh, so wise in chapter 2.

2 After wondering and wrestling in chapter 1, Habakkuk begins to watch and wait in chapter 2.

Habakkuk 2:1
I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.

"I need an answer," said Habakkuk, "so I'm going to go up into my tower and seek My Father."

Please note three key components of this verse. The first is determination. When he needed an answer, Habakkuk said, "I will stand upon my watch." He didn't say, "Maybe I should spend some time with the Lord next week—or whenever it's convenient—or if I can break away from work—or if I can find some time." No, he said, "I need an answer and I'm determined to get one. I *will* seek the Lord."

The Lord promises that we shall find Him when we search for Him with all our heart (Jeremiah 29:13). But so often we lack determination. Oh, there's an acknowledgement in our minds that we should seek the Lord. There's an intention that we probably will seek the Lord sometime. But we don't get answers to the questions with which we wrestle because we lack this key component of determination.

Second, notice Habakkuk's isolation. He got away from his telephone, radio, and television and went up into a tower. He got away from all the distractions that would otherwise bombard him. I believe we don't hear the voice of God because there are so many other voices constantly ringing in our ears. If you really want to hear from the Lord, there is no alternative to a quiet time, a quiet place, and a quiet heart.

Finally, notice Habakkuk's expectation. He said, "I will see what the Lord will say to me," not, "what He might say to me," not, "what I hope He will say to me," not, "what I wish He would say to me," but "what He *will* say to me."

Hebrews 11:6 declares that without faith, it is impossible to please God for he that comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. There are many ways to please God—but none apart from faith. If you don't believe God is going to speak to you and deal with you, you're not going to hear anything from Him.

How do you know if God will speak to you or not? Here is a very simple test: when you seek the Lord, do you have a journal with you—a pencil and paper before you? You see, if I don't really expect God to speak, I'll just kind of show up, casually slumped in my chair, saying, "Wonder if there's anything in the Word for me today . . . Probably not . . ."

We adopt a laid-back mentality in seeking God and then wonder why we never hear from Him. But those who expect to hear from God have pencil and paper in hand. They are on the edge of their chair or on their knees in a posture of expectancy rather than in a spirit of complacency and lethargy.

Habakkuk said, "I am going to seek God. I will get away and I will hear what He has to say to me." That's the kind of faith that honors God. That's the kind of faith that clears the wax of the world out of the ears of the inner man.

Habakkuk 2:2 (a)
And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision . . .

This is as if the Lord said, "Here it is, Habakkuk. You are in the place of determination, isolation, and expectation. You're ready to hear from Me. Take a memo."

Habakkuk 2:2 (b)
. . . and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.

The language here is interesting because it can be interpreted or translated in two ways. The Lord could be saying to Habakkuk, "Write the vision and make it so plain that even the person who runs by quickly can read it easily—like a big billboard. Write this vision so concisely and clearly that the person who runs by you, Habakkuk, will understand it readily."

Or, it could mean, "Write the vision and make it plain so that the person with whom you share it can run with it."

I believe both meanings are embedded in this verse. The vision of your life should be so simple that the people who run by you can know what you're about. And you should be able to share it with others in order that they themselves might be able to run with it.

Habakkuk 2:3
For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

"Be patient, Habakkuk. Don't panic. I'm giving you the vision and it will come to pass in due time," the Lord says.

Habakkuk 2:4 (a)
Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him . . .

Whose soul is not upright?

The soul of the Babylonians.

In Daniel 4, we see Nebuchadnezzar cruising around the city of Babylon, saying, "Look what *I* have done." The Bible says that pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). And how Nebuchadnezzar would fall! For seven years, he acted like an animal. His hair grew like feathers on his back and arms; his fingernails grew like claws and he ate grass. At the end of seven years, he said, "There's only One who is worthy of honor—and that is God." Suddenly, his sanity was restored and he was returned to the position he held previously (Daniel 4:34–37).

Habakkuk 2:4 (b)
. . . but the just shall live by his faith.

This verse is a key component of New Testament understanding. The just shall life by faith—not puffed up with pride concerning their abilities or spirituality, but solely by faith. For Habakkuk, this was not the theological base of salvation that we understand from Paul when he quotes this verse in Romans and in Galatians, and from the writer to the Hebrews who quotes it in chapter 10. Rather, the context here for Habakkuk deals directly with his

own situation specifically. That is, God is saying, "Habakkuk, the Babylonian is proud and puffed up. But the just shall live by faith. You, Habakkuk, are going to live by faith."

This is the hinge upon which this entire book swings. God is not saying, "You should live by faith," or, "I want you to live by faith," but, "you *will* live by faith." He's saying, "You won't always have answers to your questions, Habakkuk. You won't always have solutions to your problems. You are going to live not by intellect, sight, feelings, or touch. You're going to live by faith. That means, you won't always know what I'm doing, how I'm working, where I'm going, or why I'm doing what I'm doing. You will live by faith—like it or not!"

"That sounds cruel," you say.

Not at all.

God says to us throughout Scripture that our physical senses—our eyesight, touch, and hearing will be irrelevant in the ages to come. Faith is the currency of eternity and He wants us to be rich people. Therefore, He desires us to hear Him with the ears of faith, see Him with the eyes of faith, and touch Him with the hands of faith. He says to us, "I'm not going to appear before you like you want Me to because that won't do you any good in the ages to come. I want you to be a people who are spiritually developed and the only way I can do that is to force you to walk by faith."

God is weaning us, gang. Just as a mother lovingly weans her baby, our Father desires to wean us from the sights and sounds and feelings upon which we are so dependent in order that we might grow strong in faith. And since faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1), it's an entirely different dimension than anything we've known.

God says to Habakkuk, "I realize you're wrestling, but the just shall live by faith. I'm going to help you, Habakkuk, develop spiritually because it will come in handy in the next billion years to come. Let the Babylonians be puffed up with their military plans, their strategy, their economy, their ability —but the just shall live by faith, simply trusting Me."



For topical study of Habakkuk 2:4 entitled "Nothing But Faith," turn to page **862.**

Habakkuk 2:5
Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people:

"Habakkuk, understand this about Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians: I'm going to let them have their fill but they will not be satisfied. The more they take, the more miserable they will be," the Lord declares. "I know what I'm doing."

What was true of the Babylonians is also true of us. No matter what we lust after—be it money or people, power or prestige—the funny thing about it is it never satisfies. It always demands more. If you're striving after prominence, position, power, or people, you will always say, "I'm almost there. Just a little bit more and I'll really be happy." But you will never be because you were created for an intimate, deep, real, rich walk with God. Forsake that to pursue your career, your hobby, or anything else—and you're in trouble.

Here, God is saying to an apoplectic Habakkuk, "Relax. I know what I'm doing. The Babylonians will fight and conquer but they won't have any satisfaction."

Habakkuk 2:6–8
Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay! Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them? Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein.

In search of satisfaction, the Babylonians would only experience retribution as the people they devoured would soon devour them. The Scripture tells us as believers to take heed that we don't bite and devour one another lest we be consumed by one another (Galatians 5:15).

Archaeologists in East Africa uncovered two saber-tooth tiger skeletons joined together at the teeth. Piecing together the evidence, scientists concluded that the tigers, embroiled in a bitter fight, inadvertently got their teeth stuck together and subsequently starved to death. It is a "pointed" illustration of what happens when we bite and devour each other: We'll get stuck and go down in the process.

Habakkuk 2:9–11
Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil! Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul. For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.

Not only would retribution replace satisfaction for the Babylonians but they would also have no security. God is saying that the material things they were building would eventually fall apart.

Can you remember the new car you bought, the new house you moved into, or the new sound system you purchased? Initially, you thought, "Oh, this is great!" But I bet it wasn't too long before the dings appeared, the paint started to peel, or the CDs began to skip.

God is saying that the very things the Babylonians were doing would eventually fall apart.

Habakkuk 2:12–14
Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity! Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity? For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

In other words, these people who are expanding their empire and doing their thing are going to get burned out in the very fire of their own energy.

I remember talking to a guy with Barre-Epstein Syndrome. He couldn't get up in the morning and was constantly tired. More and more people in their twenties, thirties, and forties are experiencing these symptoms. They're just burned out. They can't function. In the process of getting their lives together, they grew weary of life itself.

That's what God is saying about the Babylonians. The vain things they were pursuing were about to consume and destroy them.

Habakkuk 2:15
Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!

The Babylonians were being seductive in their partying—taking advantage of people and exploiting them sexually.

Habakkuk 2:16
Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the LORD's right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory.

In other words, "In your very act of trying to manipulate and seduce others, you're going to be manipulated and seduced yourselves. And you're going to see your own nakedness exposed."

Habakkuk 2:17–19
For the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee, and the spoil of beasts, which made them afraid, because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein. What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols? Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall

teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it.

Here, God is saying, "These, Habakkuk, are the natural consequences of people who choose to worship idols of wood and stone rather than to walk with Me. I don't have to do anything. You're so worried about My reputation and about their situation, but it will take care of itself. Watch and see!"

And, as you study the Babylonian empire, you do indeed see the natural consequence of their sin. The Babylonians became a corrupt, vile, unhappy, dissatisfied people who are no longer on the face of the earth.

Habakkuk 2:20
But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.

"I know what I'm doing. I'm on the throne." This is a nice way of saying, "Be quiet, Habakkuk. Calm down." It's a loving way of saying, "Habakkuk, I don't have to tell you anything because the just shall live by faith. But, since you're asking, I'll tell you some principles about life. It's all going to backfire on them. I don't have to do anything. The results of their own lust and their own sin will inevitably come down upon their own heads."

NOTHING BUT FAITH

A Topical Study of HABAKKUK 2:4

In the year 1483, a baby boy was born to a poor coal miner in Eisleben, Saxony. As the boy grew up and observed the poverty of his father, this boy, named Martin, chose to pursue a different vocation. He decided to become a lawyer and, in 1501, entered the University of Erfurt, where he excelled in his studies.

As he came to the end of his schooling in 1504, an event took place that changed his life. While he was walking the campus grounds, a storm broke so forcefully that Martin fell on his face in fear. The thunder was deafening and lightning struck all around him. Instinctively, he cried out to the patron saint of coal miners, whose name he had heard invoked during his childhood, "Saint Anne! Save me from this lightning. If you save me, I will become a monk!" Shortly thereafter, the storm stopped.

Being a man of his word, Martin withdrew from Law school and entered an Augustinian monastery where he applied himself so diligently that he obtained his Doctorate of Theology within a few years. But the more he studied, the more troubled his heart became for, although he was becoming an expert in theology, he lacked peace personally. The question he repeatedly wrote in his diary was, "How can a man find favor with God?"

In search of this elusive peace, Martin devoted himself to an exceedingly pious lifestyle. He would fast for ten to fifteen days at a time. When temperatures dropped below freezing, he slept outside without a blanket. Between his studies, he beat his body until it was black and blue, hoping that somehow, by punishing his flesh, he could rid himself of the thoughts and motives he knew were not right. He went to confession so many times a day that the abbot finally said, "Martin either go out and commit a sin worth confessing or stop coming here so often."

Martin was introspective and continually plagued by what he knew of his own depravity and sinfulness. Once, while sitting at his desk writing theology, he felt the presence of Satan so tangibly that he grabbed a bottle of ink and hurled it across the room to where he thought the devil was standing.

The bottle crashed against the wall and left a mark that can still be seen today. Whipping, fasting, praying, confessing—Martin did everything possible to gain peace with this God he knew to be righteous, holy, and awesome.

Finally, in 1509, Martin decided to make a pilgrimage to Rome in hope of finding the peace for which he longed. He set out on foot and crossed the Alps. On his descent, he almost died of a high fever before making his way to a monastery at the foot of the mountains where the monks nursed him back to health. While there, a wise monk told him he needed to read the Book of Habakkuk. So Martin did just that. He read Habakkuk. It was a good word from that insightful monk, who perhaps had a sense of Martin's struggle. You see, Habakkuk was a struggler himself—just like Martin and just like the people today who say, "If God is good, why does He allow suffering? If there really is a devil, why doesn't God just obliterate him?"

So often, people who wrestle with God throw out questions—then grab their Frisbees, run out to play, and wonder why they don't get answers. If we would be more like Habakkuk and say, "I'm going to build a tower. I'm going to get away from the world. I'm going to seek the Lord and wait on Him until I get an answer"—how many more questions would be answered.

We are told that one verse in Habakkuk captured Martin's imagination. It went round and round in his head. He didn't know what it meant—but he couldn't get it out of his mind. The verse was Habakkuk 2:4: "The just shall live by faith."

Finally, Martin recovered sufficiently to continue his journey to Rome. Upon his arrival, he went to the Church of St. John, a cathedral typical of the day, filled with holy relics and artifacts. To this day, when you go to Rome and Jerusalem, you'll see various objects that people have a tendency to venerate and worship. One chapel in Rome claims to hold the skull of John the Baptist. The story is told of a tour guide who was leading a group through the chapel. One of the tourists interrupted and said, "Sir, we just came from Jerusalem. A church there has a skull also claimed to be John the Baptist's. But it was smaller and wider than the skull you have here."

Under pressure, the guide simply said, "Well, that was John's skull when he was younger."

The most important relic at the Church of St. John was the inside stairway. These stairs were believed to have been the same ones Jesus Christ climbed to stand before Pontius Pilate after He was scourged. Miraculously transported from Jerusalem, the stairs were adorned with glass mosaics marking the drops of blood that had supposedly fallen from the back of Jesus. Penitents who made the pilgrimage to St. John's would climb these stairs on their knees and beat themselves with whips as they stopped to kiss each one.

Martin was doing just that—whipping himself, climbing the stairs on his knees—trying to gain favor, trying to make an impression, trying to get the attention of God. He was halfway up when Habakkuk 2:4 hit him again: "The just shall live by faith." At last he understood. He put down his whip, stood up, walked down the stairs and back to the University of Wittenberg, where he began a movement known today as the Reformation—the single most important event in modern history.

The man's name, of course, was Martin Luther.

Luther went on to explore the revolutionary idea of "justification by faith." He wrote profusely about it and, a few years later, nailed his famous ninety-five theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church. The leadership at Wittenberg wasn't real happy about what Luther said—particularly the idea that people didn't have to pay indulgences to the church in order to find absolution from their sin. After all, the money collected from indulgences was the money that financed the glorious cathedrals of the period.

So, the church leadership called together the Diet of Worms. The Diet of Worms was not the latest fad to lose weight. Rather, the word "diet" means "council" and it was held in the city of Worms. They discussed Martin Luther's theory and eventually excommunicated him as a heretic. But the populace caught the vision of what Luther was saying and they began to rejoice in the freedom they had in Christ Jesus. The Reformation was launched and Martin Luther went on to write theological treatises and commentaries that are still classics to this day. He wrote the hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," and translated the entire Bible into German—a classic that remains the literary masterpiece of the Germanic tongue.

History books declare Martin Luther to be the most influential German to have ever lived—all because he saw the reality of Habakkuk 2:4 while

kneeling on the steps at the Church of St. John. The just shall live—not by beating, not by praying, not by fasting—the just shall live by faith. He saw it, the world caught it, and the great Reformation was launched.

This verse impacted not only Habakkuk the wrestler and Luther the reformer but also Paul the revelator. You see, after Paul was saved on the Road to Damascus, he spent three years in the desert where he was given personal revelation by the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul took Habakkuk 2:4 and upon this single statement—the just shall live by faith—penned his two most important epistles: the Book of Romans and the Book of Galatians. Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted a third time in the New Testament in the Book of Hebrews, which I personally believe Paul wrote.

Hear Paul's heart. He declares the just shall live. What is life about? People want to know. Our neighbors, our kids, people we work with are wondering what living is all about. Who is going to live? The Book of Hebrews tells us the just shall live.

Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and life abundantly" (see John 10:10). Yet people today are going through the motions, not knowing what real life is even about. The average person who lives to be seventy will have spent twenty years of his life sleeping, six years eating, five years dressing, two years on the telephone, three years waiting, and five months tying his shoes. After spending huge chunks of time waiting, tying shoes, or talking on the phone, people can't help but wonder what life is really about.

What's life about? The just shall live by faith, declares Paul.

> *So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*
>
> Romans 1:15–17

"I'm not ashamed to come and share the Gospel," said Paul. "It's good news. You're going to live—really live—both in this life abundantly and on

into heaven eternally. The just shall live by faith."

The *Just* Shall Live by Faith

"The just?" you say. "There's the problem. I'm not just."

That's the whole premise of the Book of Romans. Who is just? Who is righteous? Is it the one who's keeping rules and regulations—beating his body, lying outside in freezing temperatures, fasting, confessing praying, studying? Is that who "the just" is?

Check out Paul's answer . . .

> *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.*
>
> Romans 3:10, 11, 27, 28

Paul says, "No one does good. None really seeks after God. People might try and impress you with their piety or flaunt their spirituality but it's not real. In ourselves, apart from Jesus living in us, there is none that doeth good. We're all corrupt. We're all polluted."

Then how can a man be made just? We are justified by faith. When the judge hits the gavel and says, "This man is guilty but we'll put him on probation," that is not justification. When the judge hits the gavel and says, "This man is guilty but I forgive him anyway," that is not justification. When the judge hits the gavel and says, "This man has never sinned. The charges are untrue. The accusation is unacceptable," *that's* justification.

You see, in Christ Jesus, we are more than just forgiven. We're justified. It's not that God simply says, "I forgive you and I'll put you on probation." He says, "I pronounce those of you who live by faith to be justified—as if you never sinned at all."

In other words, if you say, "Thank You, Lord. I know I'm not good. My rules, regulations, and piety don't make it. But I see Jesus on the Cross at Calvary, paying the price for my sins—every sin I've ever committed, am committing, or ever will commit—and I allow His blood to cleanse me"—

you are justified in God's sight. Why? Because a wonderful thing happens to those who simply, by faith, believe that Jesus is the propitiation, the satisfaction, the Lamb slain. That is, the red blood of Jesus Christ strikes the blackness of our sin and makes it white as snow.

Is God blind to sin? Reverently, I say, "Yes. He is color blind because the red blood of Jesus Christ is a filter through which He sees righteousness, whiteness. It is the mystery, the glory, the liberty of justification. No wonder Paul said, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God unto salvation!"

The just shall live—not by morning devotions, not by tithes and offerings, not by whippings and beatings, not by trying to be spiritual—but by faith.

Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 a second time. In Romans, the emphasis is on "the just." In Galatians, the emphasis is on "faith."

The Just Shall Live by *Faith*

> *I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*
>
> Galatians 1:6–9

Here, Paul is addressing a group of believers in the city of Galatia, a town in modern-day Turkey. He's greatly concerned about them and tells them sternly, "I marvel that you are so soon removed from the good news of the gospel and have bought into other teaching."

The word "angel" in verse 8 is *angelos* in Greek and can either mean "angel" or "messenger." Thus, Paul could be referring to demonic angels or to any pastor, messenger, or teacher who says, "Faith is good, but there's another aspect to consider . . ." The latter is what was happening in Galatia. Judaizers—those who sought to mix Jewish Law with the Gospel of Jesus Christ—were teaching new Gentile believers that, in addition to faith in Jesus, they also had to adhere to the rites and customs of the Jewish Law.

Paul says, "I marvel that you have left the gospel of grace—the unmerited, unearned, undeserved favor of God—in order to become entangled in rules and regulations."

> *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.*
>
> Galatians 5:1–3

"If you give in to this idea of outwardly trying to prove you are spiritual, you are debtor to the whole law," Paul says. "It's all or nothing!"

Because misery loves company, I find myself saying, "If I don't do a certain thing, they shouldn't do it, either. Otherwise, I'm going to let them know just how sinful they are." And I become a Judaizer. I become an inspector of people in order that I might mark them and hurt them rather than love, embrace, and bless them. I become a self-righteous prude who looks at everyone and says, "Why aren't they fasting like I fast? Why aren't they praying as long as I pray? Why don't they go to as many meetings as I go to? What's wrong with *them?*"

And I walk around in Pharisees' robes, saying, "I thank You, God, that I am not like other men" (Luke 18:11). But sooner or later (usually sooner!), I don't keep my own rules and I fall. Then I say, "I'm a wretch. God can never bless me. He will never use me. How can I even talk to Him?" And I put myself under such pressure that my whole Christian experience is either that of a self-righteous prude or one living in the pits of despair. Up and down, up and down I go. It's only faith that breaks the cycle.

The just shall live by faith. Faith says, "Lord, the work is complete. My sins—past, present, and future, are forgiven. I can approach You freely anytime I want to. I don't have to prove my spirituality. I can just love You—and I'm free!"

> *For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.*
>
> Galatians 5:14, 15

Who can love? Not he who bites but he who blesses; not the one who is inspecting others but the one who realizes the just live by faith.

- That's what Habakkuk discovered. The Babylonian? He's proud but the just live by faith.
- That's what Paul learned. The entire law is fulfilled not in works but in love.

• That's what Martin Luther finally understood. It's not dos and don'ts but *done*—for Jesus completed the work.

Habakkuk the wrestler, Paul the revelator, and Luther the reformer were set free when they grasped the significance of Habakkuk 2:4. And so are you, who by faith, realize you are just.

"Yippee! If I'm free, I can just go out and party and do all kinds of things," you might say.

Yes, you can—if you want to ruin your health, your family, your business, and your witness. You see, we are not free to sin. We are free *not* to sin. There's a better way of living—which is what the Christian adventure is about as we study the Word together. My relationship with God and my relationship with you is not based upon anything other than faith in Christ Jesus. Period. Therefore, we should be people who say, "The just live by faith and if you embrace the Cross, I embrace you as my brother."

The just shall live by faith—so be free in the name of Jesus Christ!



3

Habakkuk 3:1, 2 (a)
A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth. O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid . . .

"I've heard Your Word. I get the point," Habakkuk said, realizing he had been corrected.

Habakkuk 3:2 (b)
. . . O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years . . .

"Let Your work live, Lord," Habakkuk says. "And the Babylonians? They'll experience the repercussions of their own sinfulness."

Habakkuk 3:2 (c)
. . . in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.

"Yes, Lord, use them to punish us if that is Your plan for us. But don't forget mercy."

Habakkuk 3:3–15
God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting. I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation? Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers. The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high. The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear. Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah. Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly. Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters.

Habakkuk not only heard a sermon from God but now he has a vision of God. There are two schools of thought concerning this passage. Some say it's a prophetic word speaking of the coming of Jesus Christ. They say it speaks about His coming from Teman in verse 3. Teman is Edom. In Isaiah 63, we

are told that when He comes again, Messiah will move through the region south of Jerusalem, through Bozrah with his garments stained with red blood. He'll move north toward Jerusalem in power and glory.

Others view it historically. They say it speaks of the descent of God to Mount Sinai when the Law was given and it charts the movement of God in Old Testament history as He came down with the Law for the people. In addition, it charts the movement of His people as they wandered through Midian, through Teman, over mountains, and through the Red Sea on their way to the Promised Land.

So which is it? Is it prophetic concerning the coming of Jesus Christ? Or is it historic concerning the Old Testament movement of God and His people? I suggest it is both. I believe what the Lord is saying is both historic and prophetic. In other words, it's as if God is saying, "Habakkuk, look back and see how I have worked. Then look ahead and see that I am coming."

The result? For Habakkuk, it was a reminding of the past and a revealing of the future that he might be renewed in the present. For us, this passage tells us that if we review what God has done for us in the past and anticipate what He will do for us in the future, we'll have peace in the present. When you remember the glorious things God has done for you in past days and you remember that you're going to be in heaven with Him soon, you will have a tranquility, a stability, and a peace in your life presently.

Habakkuk 3:16
When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.

Habakkuk is sobered. Earlier, he said, "Lord, do something." Now, he says, "Lord, I tremble when I see what You will do. I asked for judgment in chapter 1, but I spoke quickly. Now I see that when You step, mountains melt; when You walk, the earth quakes."

Like Habakkuk, so often we say, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus"—but do we remember what that means for those left behind?

Habakkuk 3:17
Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:

"Even though my country will be devastated by the Babylonians, my stocks will crash, my bank account will close, and my house will burn—even though everything is troubling . . ."

Habakkuk 3:18 (a)
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD . . .

The Hebrew word translated "rejoice" literally means "to jump up and down." These words, spoken by a trembling Habakkuk on the eve of the destruction of his country, constitute one of the boldest declarations of faith to be found in all of Scripture.

Habakkuk 3:18 (b)
. . . I will joy in the God of my salvation.

The Hebrew word translated "joy" literally means "to spin around."

"Lord, You are my hope. I have seen You. I will rejoice in You. I will joy in *You,*" Habakkuk declares.

"*In* everything give thanks," Paul told the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 5:18, italics added)—not for everything." I can give thanks in everything because I know that God can redeem the situation and can work out the problem. Although I may not be able to rejoice in the problem, I can always rejoice in the Lord.

Habakkuk 3:19 (a)
The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. . .
.

"I was in the valley in chapter 1 and in the tower in chapter 2. Now I'm walking on top of the mountains in chapter 3," declares Habakkuk. "God, I see that what You're doing is right and I approve. It's hard and I don't always understand, but I trust in You."

Contrast, if you will, two prophets who struggled with God's will: Jonah and Habakkuk . . .

- Jonah ran *from* God when he heard what God would do.
  Habakkuk ran to *God, wondering what God would do.*
- Jonah saw the salvation of God to the Gentiles.
  Habakkuk saw the sovereignty of God through the Gentiles.
- Jonah's story ends in foolishness as he worries about a gourd.
  Habakkuk's story ends in faith as he trusts in God.

The difference between Habakkuk and Jonah—between you and the person who's despairing—is simply this: Jonah had to learn in the fish. Habakkuk learned in the high tower. You and I have a choice. God is going to teach us because the just *shall* live by faith. Where do you want to live? Where do you want to learn your lessons about faith?

I have a choice. I can either seek the Lord with determination and expectation in the tower—or I can get tossed around in the storm in the belly of the great whale and wonder, "Why is my life always going through storms? Why is there always seaweed around my head? Why do I always feel cramped? Why am I always in the dark?"

The reason people are always in the storm is because they're never in the high tower. The message here is simple: Habakkuk's problems were greater than Jonah's, his message much more difficult—but he ends in victory because he learned the secret of seeking God.

The Lord wants us to seek His face, to hear His voice, to see His vision that no matter what is happening around us, we might be oases of tranquility and peace that passes understanding. No matter how bad the news might be, He wants us to rejoice in Him. *He* is our strength and our joy.

Have you discovered that when you seek the Lord about a problem, by the time you're finished talking it over with Him, as you worship Him and spend time with Him, you forgot what you came for in the first place? His

fellowship is so rich. No matter what happens, He is our joy. In seeking Him, we find what we longed for all along.

Habakkuk 3:19 (b)
. . . To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

The wrestler becomes a worshiper, the sobber becomes a singer—and so will you if you learn the secret of the tower.



ZEPHANIAH

Background to Zephaniah

As Babylon began to flex her muscles and grow in power, the judgment of Jerusalem was imminent. Yet, faithful even to His faithless people, God's word of warning could be heard clearly through the voice of His prophets—of whom Zephaniah was one. Keep in mind that, although Zephaniah spoke specifically about the coming destruction of Jerusalem, more importantly he spoke prophetically of the day of the Lord—the seven-year period of time when God will pour out His wrath upon a Christ-rejecting, sinful world.

Thus, like so many of the prophets, Zephaniah spoke not only of a historical confrontation but of the future Tribulation. And in so doing, the book that bears his name holds practical application for our own situation. Zephaniah will speak of the decree of the Lord (1:1–6), the day of the Lord (1:7—3:8), and the deliverance of the Lord (3:9–20).

To our Western mind, day begins with morning and ends in darkness. To the Hebrew, however, day began in the evening (Genesis 1:5). In other words, day began in darkness and moved toward light. So it is that, although Zephaniah's day of the Lord dawns in the shadow, we will see it culminate in the brightness of Sonrise.

Like a Florida hurricane, a Mississippi flood, a California earthquake, a Minnesota snowstorm, and a Hawaiian volcanic eruption all rolled into one, the Book of Zephaniah can be hard to take. My prayer, however, is that, as it calls us to look beyond today and to live in the light of eternity, we will find it hard to forget.

ZEPHANIAH

1

Zephaniah 1:1 (a)
The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah . . .

Although Zephaniah and Jeremiah delivered the same message at the same time to the same people, the two men couldn't have been more different in temperament. Jeremiah was a poet, a lamenter, the "weeping prophet." He delivered his message like a skilled harpist—playing the minor melody of judgment as tears coursed down his cheeks. Not Zephaniah. If Jeremiah played a harp, surely Zephaniah wielded a hammer. He held nothing back as he delivered God's message with relentless force and power.

Yet God used them both. Today, the Lord has a plan custom-made for you. When you hear or see someone whose ministry has a different flavor than yours, don't feel like you have to duplicate his style—for regardless of whether you feel more comfortable gripping a hammer or plucking a harp, God will use you just as He has made you.

Like that of so many Old Testament prophets, Zephaniah's message was twofold as it concerned not only the situation of his day but of a day yet to come. The word of the Lord given to Zephaniah was a word of judgment, with verses 2 through 4 detailing *who* God would judge and verses 5 and 6 explaining *why* He would judge.

Zephaniah 1:1 (b)
. . . the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah . . .

Other prophets either neglect to mention their genealogies altogether or they record two or three generations at the most. Not Zephaniah. He opened his book by tracing his lineage four generations—all the way back to his great-great grandfather, Hizkiah—or, as we know him, Hezekiah. This gives us a possible clue as to why Zephaniah recorded his family tree so carefully. Perhaps, under the inspiration of the Spirit, he wanted to make it known that

he was related to royalty, that he was the great-great grandson of one of the greatest kings of Judah.

Zephaniah 1:1 (c)
. . . in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

As Hezekiah's great-great grandson, Zephaniah would have been a cousin to Josiah—giving him unique access to the king. Josiah being the king who, at the age of sixteen, had a genuine salvation experience, as he "sought after the God of David, his father" (2 Chronicles 34:3), it has been speculated that, because he was a cousin of Josiah, Zephaniah was instrumental in calling the people of Judah back to repentance.

However, the revival would prove to be rather shallow, for although the people went through the motions of religion, they lacked the emotion of relationship. Theirs was more an outward show of morality than an inward work personally. Thus, Zephaniah, who was perhaps instrumental in instituting the revival under Josiah's reign, would be instrumental in warning the people of judgment a mere thirty years later.

Zephaniah 1:2
I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD.

"The land" in Scripture refers specifically, though not exclusively, to the nation of Israel. Although the Lord will bring judgment upon the entire world inclusively, it will center upon the people of Israel specifically, for it is during that time that they will begin to be shaken up, recognize Jesus Christ as their Messiah, and turn to Him in great numbers.

Zephaniah 1:3, 4 (a)
I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD. I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem . . .

In addition to bringing judgment upon Israel, God also promised judgment upon the animal kingdom. Why? Because Romans 8 declares that when Adam fell, even the animal realm was infected and polluted by his sin and rebellion. That is why all nature is groaning, waiting for the day of redemption when things shall be right once again—when the lion will lie down by the lamb, when the poison will leave the ivy, when the earth will return to harmony.

Truly, the animal kingdom is off-kilter. Referring to the breed as "the drug-user's best friend," New York City passed a decree rendering the breeding of pit bulls illegal within the city limits. Like the pit bull, all of creation has been affected by sin. Therefore, it is necessary for the Lord to bring judgment upon all living things in order to return this world to the way it was meant to be.

Zephaniah 1:4 (b)
. . . and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place . . .

Baal—the god of the intellect—was being worshiped.

Zephaniah 1:4 (c)
. . . and the name of the Chemarims with the priests;

Chemarims were priests who dressed in long black robes and black hats and practiced the occult. Mom and Dad, be observant. Is there "blackness," a darkness, a feeling of oppression about the posters your kids buy or the shirts they wear? If so, these things could very well be directly linked to demons and activity of the occult.

Zephaniah 1:5 (a)
And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops . . .

This refers to those who charted the stars from their rooftops and charted their lives according to astrology.

Zephaniah 1:5 (b)

. . . and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham;

Not only would God judge those who worshiped Baal and who tuned into astrology—but He was about to judge those who worshiped Moloch, the god of pleasure, as well.

Zephaniah 1:6
And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him.

Three groups were identified and indicted. Those like the Chermarims were into outright idolatry, worshiping Baal and following astrology. A second group merely flirted with spiritual idolatry—acknowledging the Lord one day and bowing before the god of pleasure the next. Finally, there were those who were brazen in their apostasy and refused to seek the Lord at all.

Zephaniah 1:7 (a)
Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand . . .

After speaking of the decree of the Lord, wherein God said, "I will judge man, the land, and everything therein because they're involved in idolatry, spiritual adultery, and apostasy," Zephaniah goes on to speak of the day of the Lord.

We are presently living in the day of man (1 Corinthians 4:3). In other words, within certain parameters, man is calling the shots and running the show. Therefore, when people say, "If God is a God of love, why is there starvation and war, rape and pollution?" tell them it's because we are living in the day of man. But the day of the Lord is coming when God will intervene. The day of the Lord dawns in the Tribulation—the seven-year period when He will pour out His wrath on our sinful world—and proceed on into the Millennium—the thousand-year period following the Tribulation when Christ will reign in Jerusalem with peace, prosperity, and righteousness.

There is a third day spoken of in Scripture: the day of Christ (2 Corinthians 1:14). The day of Christ or the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 5:5), is the day of the Rapture—when Jesus will descend and, with a voice like a trumpet, summon us to meet Him in the clouds before He takes us to heaven for a seven-year "honeymoon" with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

Don't confuse the day of the Lord with the day of Christ, for if you fail to understand the differentiation between these two days, your understanding of prophecy will be skewed. The day of Christ immediately precedes the day of the Lord. The day of Christ pertains to the church. The day of the Lord pertains primarily to Israel. The day of Christ speaks of the Rapture. The day of the Lord speaks of the Tribulation.

Zephaniah 1:7 (b), 8
. . . for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. And it shall come to pass in the day of the LORD's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel.

Continuing his description of the day of the Lord and beginning with the upper class, Zephaniah describes the people of that day in verses 7 through 14. Too materialistic to listen to Zephaniah's word of warning, they were caught up in their "strange apparel"—in their wardrobes and their appearance. We see the same thing today as people spend more time tending to their bodies than to their souls.

Zephaniah 1:9
In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit.

The lower class was too sinful to listen to Zephaniah. Servants were ripping off their masters, perhaps excusing their actions by saying, "It's okay to steal from our masters because they're so rich and we're so poor."

We hear the same defense given today whenever "the little guy" justifies wrongdoing against his employer, big corporations, or the government on the

basis of disparity of wealth. “I will punish them,” said the Lord. And what was offensive to Him in Zephaniah’s day remains so today.

Zephaniah 1:10, 11
And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD, that there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish gate, and an howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills. Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off.

The fish gate was the gate through which the fishermen entered the city of Jerusalem. Maktesh was the primarily place of business within the city. Therefore, this verse speaks of the working class. While the upper class was indicted for being too material and the lower class for being too sinful, the working class was singled out as being too vocational—more concerned about making money and climbing the corporate ladder than about seeking the Lord.

Zephaniah 1:12, 13
And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil. Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof.

“Settled in their lees” refers to the process of winemaking used in Zephaniah’s day whereby a winemaker would allow wine to settle for a period of time before pouring it into another vessel, leaving the dregs behind. If the winemaker poured the wine from vessel to vessel too soon, the “lees,” or dregs would still be afloat in the wine. But if he waited too long, the wine would take on the taste of the dregs. Thus, it was a very exacting process that was repeated up to seven times until the wine was crystal clear.

With this in mind, hear the Lord saying, “I will punish the men that are settled on their lees,” for not only were the people of Zephaniah’s day too

material, too sinful, and too vocational—they were too comfortable. Sitting still in their barrels, unruffled and untouched, they had taken on a bad flavor and were beginning to stink.

Saint, that's why God suddenly pours you, as well. Your life is going along just fine—until your boss says, "You're out of here," or your girlfriend says, "Pack sand."

"How can this be?" you ask. "I thought God loved me." He does. In fact, He loves you so much that He won't allow you to get too comfortable or too settled because He knows if you do, your life will become clouded with lees and you will lose the clarity you once had. So things get shaken up as He pours you from one vessel to another. And you are left saying, "What's going on? I'd better seek the Lord." And you wait upon Him with renewed intensity.

> **Zephaniah 1:14–17**
> **The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of waste-ness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung.**

In Revelation 6:12–17, we see how the day of the Lord described here by Zephaniah perfectly parallels the day of the wrath of the Lamb described by John. This is important because Paul declared that God has not appointed us to wrath but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

There are those who teach that believers will go through the Tribulation before being caught up in the Rapture. I believe this is yet another passage of Scripture that undermines this premise because, although Jesus warned us that in this world we would have tribulation as the enemy attacks us

constantly (John 16:33), He didn't say we would go through the Tribulation eschatalogically. Do you suppose the Father would allow us to experience the tribulations that come from the enemy daily and the Tribulation that will be poured out from heaven? I don't. You see, the believer endures tribulations now. But the unbeliever will go through tribulation when the wrath of the Lamb is poured out upon a world that rejected Him.

Zephaniah 1:18 (a)
Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath . . .

I remember reading a newspaper article with the headline reading "A-Bomb No Tax Shelter?" It said the following: If you think nuclear warfare will keep you from having to pay taxes, think again. "In the event of an emergency such as a nuclear attack, the Internal Revenue Service will continue to collect taxes," said IRS Chief, Frank Keith. Although the IRS Employee Manual acknowledges tax collection might initially suffer during such a time period, the IRS's post-bomb plan is such that, within thirty days, the Agency would expect to resume collection of taxes. According to the manual, "many workers shall be reassigned regardless of, and without any effect on the current position or grades of the employee." On the premise that collection of delinquent accounts would be most adversely affected if not impossible in a disaster area, "service shall concentrate on those areas where people are still living."

The day of the Lord is coming to be sure—but the IRS thinks even *that* won't stop them!

Zephaniah 1:18 (b)
. . . but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.

Susan was three years old. Lying in her bed, she opened her eyes to find the stern face of a man peering down at her. As she screamed out in fright, the man quickly shuffled out of the room. Hearing her daughter's scream, Susan's mother ran into her room and held her tightly. Meanwhile, the man's voice

could be heard talking to an accomplice on the telephone. He quickly reappeared, snatched Susan out of her mother's arms, ran down the stairs, and into a waiting car. Susan screamed as the car sped through town to a large building. Carried to the fourth floor of the ominous edifice, Susan was placed on a bed and given a shot of a powerful drug. Just before she passed out, Susan looked into the face of yet another stranger—seconds before he unsheathed a knife and ripped into her stomach.

"Give those men the death penalty," we would cry.

But wait.

The man who tore Susan away from her mother was her father. Aware that his daughter had been groaning all night, the call he made was to a doctor who said, "Bring her in immediately." The large building was a hospital. The drug was an anesthetic. The knife was a scalpel. The girl was saved.

From Susan's three-year-old perspective, the events of the evening were understandably terrifying. When people read Zephaniah and Revelation, when they read about the day of the Lord and the wrath of the Lamb, they say, "How could God be so brutal?" But theirs is a three-year-old perspective for, in reality, it's a *loving* Father who shall "devour the land by the fire of His jealousy."

You see, God is not jealous because He's angry with you or mad at this world. He is not jealous of you. He's not saying, "You hurt My feelings and now I'm going to get back at you." No, He's jealous *for* you, knowing that the world you live in is groaning in the middle of the night and in need of radical surgery.

Therefore, not only prophetically but presently—when things are falling apart and coming down all around you—remember that God your Father is jealous *for* you. He sees that, although you might think it's painful and cruel, your situation is necessary to make you into the man or woman He knows you desire to be. The process isn't easy—surgery never is. But sometimes it's imperative.

And if you begin to wonder if you can really trust the One who bears the knife—look at His hand. You'll see a hole where a nail pierced it. And this nail print in the hand of Your Master Physician says, "From before the foundation of the world, I loved you enough to die for you, to go to hell for

you, to pay the price for your sins. If I loved you that much, can't you trust what I'm doing presently?"

The day of the Lord is a difficult, dark day indeed. Yet it is absolutely necessary to prepare us for the coming of the kingdom, the light, the Son. The day of trouble in your own life is not easy, but trust Him. He's worthy. He knows *exactly* what He's doing.



2 Here, in chapter 2, we see the pleading of the day of the Lord . . .

Zephaniah 2:1
Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired;

With whom is the Lord pleading? A nation not desired.

While there are those who argue that the church will indeed go through the Tribulation, I believe this is yet another verse that makes that scenario most unlikely. You see, in Ephesians 1:6, Paul used the word *charitoo,* or "accepted" in reference to the church. The only other place in Scripture *charitoo* is used is in Luke 1:28 in reference to Mary.

Who, then, is the nation *not* desired? Israel.

Why is Israel not desired? Because it is she who will bear the brunt of the cataclysmic event referred to in the Old Testament as Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7)—the Tribulation. Truly, the Lord will plead with Israel during the Tribulation when He dispatches angels to travel across the skies and declare salvation *for* His people, as He sends Elijah and perhaps Moses to Jerusalem to perform miracles *among* His people and while He raises up 144,000 Jewish evangelists anointed by the Spirit to preach the reality of Christ Jesus *to* His people.

Zephaniah 2:2, 3
Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the

day of the LORD's anger come upon you. Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger.

The nation not to be desired is told to seek the Lord that she might be hid in the day of Tribulation. According to Revelation 12, a good portion of the nation of Israel will seek the Lord when, in the middle of the Tribulation period, antichrist will reveal his true colors by going into the temple and demanding to be worshiped. During the ensuing war in which antichrist will fight against Israel, the Lord will hide His people in a place already prepared for them in the wilderness. Isaiah 16 tells us its name: Petra.

Located in present-day southern Jordan and carved out of a rock, Petra is a huge city that can hold a million or more people. Buildings, temples, and places to dwell are already chiseled out of the sides of this walled metropolis. Years ago, an avid student of Bible prophecy, W. E. Blackstone, assembled a group of businessmen who brought hundreds of thousands of New Testaments into Petra. Thus, when the Jews arrive, they're going to be blessed to find copies of the New Testament awaiting them. We get a preview of that day here in verse 3, when many people—not only Jews but Gentiles as well—will cry, "Oh, Lord, this is not just some weird theology. It's reality—and I've been left behind!"

With bullets flying over his head and bombs exploding round about him, the World War II infantryman jumped into a foxhole. As he ducked down in an effort to shield himself from the shrapnel and flack, the tip of a shiny silver object buried in the dirt caught his eye. Pulling it out, he saw it was a crucifix. With bullets still buzzing and bombs still bursting, a chaplain jumped into the same foxhole.

Looking at the chaplain, the soldier held up the crucifix and said, "Am I ever glad to see *you!* How do you work this thing?"

The old adage is true. There are no atheists in foxholes. While it is easy to question the existence of God in the quietness of a library, postulating between puffs on a pipe, when bullets fly and bombs explode, God suddenly becomes reality. The same will be true in the day of the wrath of the Lamb. People who were once proud of their atheism will remember the words

believers shared with them and will be among the many who call upon the name of the Lord in that day.

Zephaniah 2:4
For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation: they shall drive out Ashdod at the noon day, and Ekron shall be rooted up.

After outlining the pleading in the day of the Lord, Zephaniah goes on to delineate the places in the day of the Lord. Located in the Gaza Strip, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron were four of the five primary Philistine cities. This area will be wiped out in the day of the Lord as it comes under severe judgment in the Tribulation.

Zephaniah 2:5–7
Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites [Cretes]! the word of the LORD is against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant. And the sea coast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks. And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for the LORD their GOD shall visit them, and turn away their captivity.

The word, "Palestinian" is a derivative of the word "Philistine." Thus, the Lord is uttering an indictment and a word of judgment against the Philistines of Zephaniah's day as well as the Palestinians of the day yet to come.

Zephaniah 2:8–10
I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people, and magnified themselves against their border. Therefore as I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the

residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them. This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of the LORD of hosts.

Located across the Jordan River from Israel in present-day Jordan, Moab and Ammon were destined for destruction. Why? "Because they went against My people," said the Lord.

Gang, here's how to stir up the judgment of the Lord real quick: Attack His people. Over and over again in the Old Testament, whenever a nation had the audacity or stupidity to come against Israel, they paid radically—even if it was one of God's own who did it . . .

As they wandered through the wilderness, the Israelites grew thirsty once again. Murmuring against Moses, they accused him of bringing them to the wilderness to die. Having led this group for many years, Moses was understandably exhausted. He looked at his congregation and said, "You rebels. Must we fetch you water out of this rock?"—and he struck the rock (Numbers 20:10).

"I don't like you calling My people rebels," God said. "They're My children. Therefore, I can call them what I want, but you can't. Because of this, you'll not enter the land of promise" (see Numbers 20:12).

What kept Moses out of the Promised Land?

He came down on God's people.

Were they out to lunch?

Yes.

Were they deserving of his wrath?

Most definitely.

But the Lord is very concerned when people—whether they're Moabites, Ammonites, or even a great man like Moses—come down on His precious family, His bride. Like Moses, we will end up outside the fullness of God's blessing in our walk presently if we attack God's people maliciously—if we malign other churches, other denominations, other individuals.

Zephaniah 2:11–14

The LORD will be terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen. Ye Ethiopians also, ye shall be slain by my sword. And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness. And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar work.

Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, was thought to be indestructible. But the Lord said, "I'm going to destroy it down to its very foundations." Indeed He did when it was decimated by the Babylonians in 612 B.C.

Zephaniah 2:15
This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand.

Zephaniah prophesied that people would say, "Unbelievable!" *This* is where Nineveh was? Nothing's left but a place for beasts to lie down!" You see, although Nineveh was considered absolutely impregnable, when the Lord allowed the Tigress River to swell, the foundations of the city crumbled. The walls then came down and the enemy rushed in.

It's funny what can bring us down. Nineveh wasn't destroyed by the millions of soldiers who came against her. No, she was brought down by mere rain. Truly, the Lord can humble us in the most amazing ways. I remember reading about an experiment conducted in space to learn more about how protein crystals grow in a weightless environment. The results survived millions of miles of outer space travel only to be rendered useless when, on its way to UC Riverside in California, its container accidentally tipped over on an airport x-ray machine conveyer belt.

You may think your life is together. "I've got my future mapped out. There's no stopping me now. I don't need to seek the Lord or walk with Him. I'm captain of my destiny," you might say—until some airport attendant turns your Styrofoam ice chest upside down—or until the river begins to swell and suddenly, like Nineveh, you who were once so proud, so sure, so certain will crumble and fall.



3 Continuing to talk about the day of the Lord, Zephaniah shifts his focus from the Moabites and Ammonites in the Gaza Strip to Jerusalem herself—a city that should have been totally submitted to the Lord, but that had become far removed from Him.

Zephaniah 3:1
Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city!

Regardless of the noble goals of groups like Friends of the Earth or Save Our Planet, the fact remains that, because man is polluted inwardly, there will always be pollution outwardly—for that which is inside a person will eventually be worked out from within him. When, for a brief time, the deity of Jesus was allowed to shine forth on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter said, "Oh, Lord, it is good for us to be here" (Mark 9:5). So too, if the glory, goodness, and grace of God shine forth from your life, people will say, "It's *good* for us to be with you." If, however, there's nothing but bitterness and anger inside, sooner or later, those around you will say, "Let's get out of here."

Zephaniah 3:2, 3
She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the LORD; she drew not near to her God. Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow.

The official slogan for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the birth of the nation of Israel said a great deal about where she put her trust—for, plastered on posters and printed on postage stamps, was this telling declaration: Science Shall Bring Peace to This Land.

Zephaniah 3:4
Her prophets are light and treacherous persons: her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law.

The word "treacherous" means "uncertain." Haven't you discovered that you can go crazy if you try to keep up with each new study that comes out concerning exercise and nutrition? That is why I'm so glad we hold in our hands the Word of the One who never changes. His is a Word we never have to apologize for or amend. We don't have to remove chapters, erase passages, or update the information. God's Word is a *sure* foundation.

Zephaniah 3:5 (a)
The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not . . .

Even though people are foolish and fickle, even though they neither call upon nor trust in Him, the Lord is still in the midst of them. He is faithful even when His people are faithless (2 Timothy 2:13). Don't you love God for that? Even when we are squirming and floundering, flopping and failing, God is faithful, morning by morning—making His ways known to us, blessing and convicting us, nudging and correcting us. God is faithful, no matter what!

Zephaniah 3:5 (b)
. . . but the unjust knoweth no shame.

To me, one of the most damning aspects of our culture is the fact that people actually flaunt their sin. While there has always been sin in the world, the difference between our society and those that preceded us is that people now take pride in sin.

Zephaniah 3:6–8
I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant. I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings. Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.

The word "indignation" in the Old Testament is synonymous with "tribulation" in the New Testament. Thus, this passage parallels that of Revelation 6 through 19 which speaks of the judgment of the nations during the Tribulation.

After seeing the decree of the Lord in 1:1–6 and the day of the Lord in 1:7—3:8, we are about to see the third and final section of Zephaniah's book: the deliverance of the Lord—a section I love for in it we see the light break forth and the Son rise. Watch for this in four ways: the regathering of Israel (verses 9 and 10), the repenting of Israel (verses 11 through 13), the rejoicing of Israel (verses 14 and 15), and the Redeemer of Israel (verses 16 through 20).

Zephaniah 3:9 (a)
For then . . .

When will the deliverance of the Lord take place?
Not until after judgment is poured out.

Zephaniah 3:9 (b)
. . . will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.

Perhaps the "pure language" spoken of here refers to the rebirth of the Hebrew tongue. This much, however, is sure: with one consent, *all* people will call upon the name of the Lord.



***For topical study of Zephaniah 3:9 entitled "The Language of the Kingdom," turn to page* 879.**

Zephaniah 3:10
From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering.

When modern-day Israel was birthed as a nation in 1948, among the dispersed Jews from all over the world who returned to the land were a black-skinned people from Ethiopia called the Falashas. Although they wore prayer shawls, carried the Torah, and celebrated the three major feasts of Judaism, the Falashas were nonetheless a mystery to the Jews in Israel—until they learned the Falasha tradition that said when the Queen of Sheba returned from her visit with Solomon (1 Kings 10:13), along with the gifts Solomon bestowed upon her, she brought Judaism back with her. As a result, unbeknownst to the rest of the world for centuries, there was a group of people living in Ethiopia who were practicing Jews.

So it was that several years ago, when Ethiopia underwent famine, the Israelis quietly airlifted tens of thousands of these Falashas out of Ethiopia to safety. And so it was that one year later, the Knesset ruled that these people —whose name is actually a derivative of the word "palestine"—were to be granted citizenship with all corresponding rights and privileges.

Zephaniah 3:11, 12
In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. I will also leave

in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD.

Following the miraculous regathering *of* Israel, there will be a massive repentance *by* Israel. What a glorious day that will be!

Zephaniah 3:13
The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.

The word "not" in verse 13 is emphatic. In the day of the repentance of Israel, there will be no iniquity, no lies, no deceit.

When asked the most important language to learn, C. H. Spurgeon replied, "Learn the language of No. It will be of greater value to you than learning Greek and Hebrew combined." Truly, when temptations knock at our door, like a repentant Israel, the best thing we can say is, "No."

Zephaniah 3:14, 15
Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more.

Following the regathering of Israel and the repentance by Israel, there will be rejoicing in Israel. This, very possibly, will be reflected even in her music. Although Jewish music today is written primarily in a minor key, in the day of her rejoicing, I believe the Lord's presence in her midst will cause Israel to sing not only in a major way but in a major key.

Zephaniah 3:16, 17 (a)
In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy . . .

How I love this verse! Here, we see the Redeemer of Israel in her midst—and He is rejoicing. We have a tendency to think God is worried about us. We picture Him with furrowed brow and frowning face. We envision Him watching, wondering, and wringing His hands, reacting to our every mistake. We hear Him saying, "Is Jon going to make it? I'm not sure, but I'm ready to belt him if he gets out of line." Yet nothing could be further from the truth! The Lord in our midst is rejoicing, singing, and resting because He sees us in our glorified state. That is, He already sees the finished product.

Suppose I put some ants in one end of a shoebox, some peanut butter at the other end, and a few barriers and blockades in the middle. If I sat for awhile and watched the ants, I would see them begin their journey, scratch their heads, and wonder if they would ever make it. I would see them struggle and crawl, fight and fall as they questioned all the while if anything was worth such effort. Before long, however, even though many ants would still be struggling and striving in their journey, I would see huge smiles break out on the faces of the first ones to reach the peanut butter and I would know they would all get there eventually.

God sees us marching through time. We wonder if we will make it, convinced that our neighbor probably won't. We snap at each other; we get uptight and worried—but all the while God is rejoicing because He sees the peanut butter. Our vision is obstructed and shortsighted indeed for we can only see our way to the next obstacle. Not so with God. He sees all of time and eternity at once. Yes, He sees our failing; surely He sees our faltering; but He also sees our finishing. He sees us already in glory with Him. That is why He can rejoice over us with great joy.

Zephaniah 3:17 (b)
. . . he will rest in his love . . .

He will rest in His love—not in our flaky love for Him, but in His steadfast love for us. Therefore, because He's resting in His love for you, regardless of how you think you might be doing, you can rest, as well.

Zephaniah 3:17 (c)
. . . he will joy over thee with singing.

In verse 14, Israel was entreated to sing. Here in verse 17, the Lord joins in.

Zephaniah 3:18, 19 (a)
I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden. Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out . . .

Do you feel like you're limping through life? Driven out by someone you love? Take heart: the Lord is One who saves you by His grace as He gathers you to Himself.

Zephaniah 3:19 (b), 20
. . . and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD.

The book ends with the Lord saying to His "hammer-swinging" prophet, "As you close your prophecy, Zephaniah, make sure My people understand that I see the whole picture. Yes, there are difficulties ahead; yes, there are dark days looming; but I see the end result—when I will be in their midst, rejoicing, singing, and resting in My love."

Thus, perhaps the clearest division of the Book of Zephaniah is simply this: Chapter 1: Sad day. Chapter 2: Sad day. Chapter 3: Glad day.

Gang, the seventy or eighty years we spend on this planet are as bad as life will ever be for us. After that, it will only get better—unbelievably better—for the next trillion years. So, if you're sad, take heart and have hope. The glad day is coming, for the Lord's message to His people through Zephaniah prophetically is also His word to you presently: God *will* see you through. Therefore, rejoice!

THE LANGUAGE OF THE KINGDOM
A Topical Study of
ZEPHANIAH 3:9

I had the opportunity to spend some time in Europe, teaching a group of Eastern European pastors. My fellow teachers and I also spent time sharing with pastors in West Germany and Switzerland. During our time in Switzerland, our chauffer was an interesting man named Franz. A big, strong six-foot, five-inch, sixty-year-old, he spoke impeccable English. After complimenting him on his fine command of the English language, I learned that English was actually his ninth language. A German who had served under Hitler and was subsequently captured by the Allied Forces, he spent a year and a half in a prison camp where he began to teach himself English after retrieving a paperback Western that had accidentally fallen from the pocket of one of the guards.

"Let me get this straight," I said. "You taught yourself English just by reading a novel?"

"Yes," he said, laughing. "And the first and last chapters were missing—which made it a little bit harder."

For the life of me, I can't understand how he did that! Yet so proficient in English did he become that when the American forces arrived, he served as a translator between Germany and England and went on to become a United Nations representative for Switzerland. Being around Franz, I began to feel like a mental midget, for, although I majored in Greek in college, language is difficult for me. Consider, for example, the following exchange:

"Do you think the Seahawks will win the Super Bowl?"
"Fat chance. The Niners have it all wrapped up."
"Well, what about the Rams?"
"Not a chance. I tell you, the Niners will win it all."

"Fat chance" and "not a chance" are synonymous? No. They're opposites. Yet in the above context, they mean the same thing. That is why language can be perplexing and confusing, indeed! But Zephaniah tells us the

day is coming when language barriers will be obliterated and we will be able to understand one another perfectly. After the seven years of the Tribulation are passed—when the Lord Jesus shall return to this planet to establish His millennial kingdom—we will all speak one language.

What will that language be? Some suggest it will be Hebrew. That's a real possibility for Hebrew is a pure language. Go to Israel today, and if you hear people curse or swear, it will be in English or German, Yiddish or Spanish because there are no swear words in the Hebrew language.

Not only is the Hebrew language pure, but it is also miraculous. You see, when Roman general Titus and his troops wasted Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Jews scattered throughout the world. While they initially retained their language, as the centuries wore on, only the most conservative of their number continued to speak their mother tongue. Thus, Hebrew became what is known as a "dead" language. Like classical Greek or Latin today, although it was read and understood by scholars, it was not spoken conversationally by anyone.

Then, around the turn of the century, in the early days of the Zionist movement, the course of linguistic history did an about-face when a young man named Eleazar Ben Yehuda and his new bride set foot on the soil of Palestine. "Woman," he said to his wife, "you are now hearing the last English you will ever hear me speak. From this point on, I will speak only Hebrew—and so will you."

Although most people who knew him, thought him nothing more than an eccentric dreamer, Eleazar remained determined. Eventually fathering eleven children, he insulated them from all outsiders until they were seven or eight years old and completely immersed in the Hebrew tongue. As they were "released" into the outside world, their neighborhood friends initially wouldn't have any idea what they were saying. But after time, the neighborhood children would return home speaking Hebrew vocabulary, phrases, and idioms that fanned almost-dead embers of memory and emotion and which eventually ignited hearts throughout Palestine. On September 23, 1922, the League of Nations declared Hebrew the official language of Palestine. Three months later, Ben Yehuda died—but his dream was fulfilled for, unlike any other language in the history of the world, the Hebrew language had been reborn.

So, perhaps the language of the kingdom will be Hebrew. I don't know. But this I do know with absolute certainty: the language of the kingdom will decimate racial prejudice, cultural difficulties, and ethnic bigotry—for in that day, all will call upon the name of the Lord in unity. It won't, however, be the first time all humanity spoke with one tongue . . .

Division Linguistically

The year was somewhere around 2200 B.C. On the plains of Babylon, in a unified language, mankind said, "Let us make a name for ourselves. And lest we be scattered, let us build a tower whose top may reach unto the heavens" (Genesis 11:4). The tower they built was actually a ziggurat, a tower in which men of old studied the stars—not in pursuit of astronomy but of astrology—in order that they might chart the course of their lives. "We don't need to seek the Lord," they said in so doing. "Instead, we'll unify ourselves with this great building project and let the stars lead us."

Scripture records that the bricks in this tower were held together with slime (Genesis 11:3)—a material still used by man today. "Let's bring all people together," man says. "How? We'll join the bricks of education with the slime of humanism and build a tower that will supersede God Himself." Folks, there's nothing wrong with education—it's the slime of existential philosophies and gross immorality that is repugnant.

Back to Babylon—as the Lord saw this tower being built, Scripture records He went down and confused their language (Genesis 11:7). Suddenly, as they were building their tower, one guy said, "Hand me a brick," to which the other guy responded *"Que?"*—and in the ensuing tension and confusion, ethnicity was born; racial barriers were raised; cultural lines were drawn. A tragic day, indeed—but a necessary one because, turning his back on God, man was growing more and more wicked in his unity. Knowing such rebellion would destroy humanity altogether, God split up mankind for his own good. Consequently, we live in a time when the repercussions of man's rebellion on the plains of Shinar are still heard on the face of our planet today.

But the Lord gave the world a beautiful sneak preview of "coming attractions" when, for a very brief time, language barriers fell . . .

Unity Prophetically

A few thousand years after the events of Babel, a few weeks after Jesus died on the Cross, a few days after He had ascended into heaven, a group of disciples met together in Jerusalem, waiting and wondering, watching and praying. Suddenly, their meeting place was filled with the sound of a mighty, rushing wind. Tongues of fire began to hover over their heads and they began to speak in other tongues, praising God as they were filled with His Spirit (Acts 2:3, 4). Meanwhile, the hundreds of thousands—perhaps even a million—visitors who had flooded into Jerusalem from all parts of the world for the Feast of Pentecost heard the sounds coming from this upper room. "How can this be?" they wondered. "We are in Jerusalem, yet we are each hearing praise and prayer in our own languages!"

"This is that which was promised through the prophet Joel," Peter answered (Acts 2:16).

Thus, what transpired at Babel's high tower due to man's sinfulness and rebellion was reversed in Jerusalem's Upper Room because of God's mercy and grace.

At Pentecost, the gift of tongues ushered in a miraculous sense of unity. The same thing happens still today. Praying in the Spirit and speaking in tongues breaks down barriers. It is not the tongues movement that causes division, gang. It is the movement of the tongue—gossip, judgment, and criticism—that divides people. On the other hand, worshiping in the Spirit can bring about beautiful unity because words don't get in the way.

You see, many times, I don't know how to pray in English. "Pray that she'll say yes," he says. Or, "Pray that I'll get the job . . ." but I don't know if those things are what God wants, so how can I pray? I can pray in the Spirit and be in perfect harmony with the heart of my Father.

"I would that you all speak in tongues," Paul said (1 Corinthians 14:5). Yes, he did put very definite parameters on the public use of tongues—but he also strongly encouraged the private, devotional use of the prayer language because many times we just don't know how to pray.

The Kingdom Presently

Although we were historically divided linguistically, with the gift of tongues providing a picture of the unity we will experience prophetically, Zephaniah turns our eyes to the kingdom within us presently. "The kingdom of God," Jesus said, "is within you" (Luke 17:21). Because one can always tell what country a person is from by his accent or language, our language is perhaps the clearest indication of the kingdom to which we belong. Complaining and gossiping, cursing and murmuring, bitterness and unforgiveness are the language of the kingdom of darkness and death. Hope and joy, grace and peace, forgiveness and righteousness are the language of the kingdom of light and life. Which language comes out of your mouth?

When you wake to the sound of yet another rainy day, do you say, "It's raining *again?* How will I ever get my yard work done?" Or, do you say, "It's raining! I can't mow my lawn! The NCAA Final Four is on. *Alright!*"? You see, one is the language of the kingdom of hell—complaining, negative, and grumpy. The other is the language of the kingdom of heaven—thanksgiving, praise, and joy.

"Your speech betrays you," they said to Peter the night before Jesus was crucified. "You are from Galilee" (Mark 14:70)—and Peter was reminded that, regardless of what a man professes verbally, his speech betrays him in reality.

"Okay, I get the message," you say. "I'm going to clean up my act. I'm going to muzzle my mouth."

Good luck. If you're extremely disciplined, you might be able to reign in your tongue for a day or two—or even a week or three. But mark this: Jesus said "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). That is, whatever is in your heart will eventually work its way out through your mouth. Therefore, no matter how much discipline you have, if your heart is full of death, darkness will emerge. Conversely, if your heart is full of God's grace and glory, light will shine forth.

Why did Jesus shine on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:2)? Because for that brief moment in time, the light of His deity was allowed to

shine through the bounds of His humanity. What was always *within* Him was, for that short period, given freedom to emanate *from* Him.

"Wow!" Peter said. "It's good for us to be here," (see Matthew 17:4). And the same is still true. If you're speaking the language of the kingdom, if you're encouraging and loving, uplifting and endorsing, correcting and speaking truth, your family will sense it's good for them to be with you. If, on the other hand, those close to you are not saying, "It's good for me to be here" but rather, "Let me out of here," what should you do?

Turn to Isaiah 50 . . .

> *The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary . . .*
>
> Isaiah 50:4 (a)

We do a lot of talking. It has been estimated that the average person spends thirteen years of his life talking and in one year's time, speaks enough words to fill sixty 800-page books. We speak constantly—but do we speak the words of the learned?

What are "words of the learned"? They're the *right* words—not words of flattery but words of truth. Flattery is the epitome of selfishness because flattery says, "I care more about how you feel about me than I do about telling you the truth." People are funny. Pat us on the back and we swell up in the head. Jesus was not a back-slapper because He didn't want to be a head-sweller. Not given to flattery, He called the Pharisees and Sadducees exactly what they were (Matthew 23:16, 27).

How I long to speak the words of the learned. "If correction needs to be spoken, help me speak it, Lord. If encouragement can be given, allow me to give it. Let me speak the way You did—with the tongue of the learned."

How? Look again at Isaiah . . .

> *. . . he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.*
>
> Isaiah 50:4 (b)

Jesus woke morning by morning, responding to His Father's loving wake-up call in order that He might receive specific instructions for the day ahead, in order that He would have the perfect word to speak to those with whom He would come in contact.

When the storm arose on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus was on the hillside before sunrise—praying (Mark 6:46). If Jesus needed devotions, I must need them, as well. If *He* needed to wait upon His Father morning by morning, I think it would be a good idea if I did. Jesus had it all together—yet He didn't miss an opportunity to spend time with His Father, to get the Word for the day in order to share it with a weary world.

Dear, precious people, I am convinced the Lord is looking today for men and women who will be quiet enough to hear a message from Him, bold enough to share it with others, and honest enough to live it themselves. If you start your day listening to God and meditating on His Word, your day will not be one of cursing, complaining, and gossiping. No, it will be a day of speaking words of the learned to those who are weary. But muzzling your mouth or disciplining your tongue will not change your language because external reformation only comes about by internal transformation.

How does such a transformation take place?

It happens in a quiet heart, a quiet time, and a quiet place in order that, through us, strength and truth, help and hope might be released to those around us.

Allow the King to reign in your heart morning by morning and you'll find yourself speaking light and life as the day unfolds. Meditate on His Word and you'll find yourself speaking words of the learned all week long. Worship Him with praise and adoration and you'll find yourself speaking the language of the kingdom to a weary world.



HAGGAI

Background to Haggai

Consisting of only 1,131 words in thirty-eight verses in two chapters, Haggai is the second shortest book in the Old Testament. Haggai may not have been very effusive—but he was surely effective, for he was able to mobilize and motivate a mass of directionless people to resume the undertaking of a great project.

You see, approximately sixteen years earlier, they had been freed from captivity in Babylon. Led by their political leader, Zerubbabel, and Joshua, the high priest, these people of God had traveled several hundred miles back to Jerusalem and immediately set about doing what the Lord had commissioned them to do. They began to build the temple—the place where God's name could be praised, the place they could assemble to honor His name. They began to lay the foundation, but became intimidated by their enemies and divided by internal contention. So for sixteen years, the work sat idle. Weeds began to grow on the foundation as the people gave up on the project and instead turned to the construction of their own houses.

Throughout history, we see the power of the spoken word. In fact, historians tell us the single most important factor in England's preservation against Hitler's relentless attack was the oratorical ability of Winston Churchill. He was able to encourage and inspire a nation that would have otherwise gone under. Martin Luther King, Jr. was another one who was able to inspire hundreds of thousands of workers to march for civil rights by the power of his words. But neither of these men could hold a candle to Haggai because he spoke under the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

The two chapters in his book contain three separate messages given by Haggai. In chapter 1, we see the message he gave in September. In the first nine verses of chapter 2, we see the message he gave in October. In the remainder of the second chapter, we see the message he gave in December. The September message was directed toward the peoples' hands. There, the word was simply, "Be productive." The October message was directed toward the people's hearts. There, the message was, "Be patient." The December message was directed to the peoples' heads, the minds. There, the message was, "Be prosperous."

Maybe you were once excited about the things of God, excited about serving the Lord but have since grown weary by the squabbling of God's people or the attacks of the enemy. So you have decided to concentrate on your own life instead, tending to your own little world. This book is for you—for no matter how long it's been, we see in these pages that it's never too late to get going again.



HAGGAI

Haggai 1:1 (a)
In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet . . .

In each of his messages, Haggai tells us the exact time it was given to him to share with the people. There are important points in our lives that are punctuated by the interjection of a specific word given to us by the Spirit of God. Our lives are defined by these points. Therefore, it is important that our antennae are up, that our hearts are open to hear those specific instructions the Lord has for us.

You know the Lord is speaking to you about a given matter when there is an indelible impression on your heart, when you have a thought that you know is more than just your imagination, when there is a confirmation in Scripture or from other brothers or sisters.

Haggai 1:1 (b)
. . . unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying,

The word of the Lord came through Haggai to Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. The year was 520 B.C. Sixteen years earlier, Zerubbabel, the political leader, and Joshua, the high priest led a contingency of approximately 45,000 Jews from Babylon a few hundred miles south to Jerusalem after being held captive in Babylon for seventy years. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were excited by the opportunity to rebuild the temple. But their progress was hindered both by external opposition and by internal division. Eventually, they turned their attention from the temple to construction of their own homes. For sixteen years, there was nothing built on the temple foundation they had laid. Thus, it served only as a reminder to the people of their inability to do what the Lord had asked them to do. So the Lord raised up Haggai to speak to Zerubbabel and Joshua and to inspire the people to be productive once again.

Haggai 1:2
Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built.

Notice that the people weren't saying the Lord's house shouldn't be built. They were simply saying that, due to the enemies on the outside and the contention within, this wasn't the time to do it. "We'll get to it later," they said. "We'll do it sometime—maybe even soon. But not right now."

The same thing can still happen. One of the favorite attacks of the enemy is to whisper in our ears, "Next month, next year—after you buy your house, develop your career, have your family—then you can really engage yourself in doing what the Lord has called you to do." But, gang, it's never the wrong time to do the right thing.

After Alexander the Great conquered the world by the age of thirty-three, he was asked by the historians who traveled with him to tell them the secret of accomplishing so much by such a young age. He is said to have responded that the secret lay in three words: Do it now.

What has God called you to do? What has He placed on your heart to accomplish in serving Him? What has He gifted you to do for His glory? Procrastination is what the enemy will use to hinder you from doing it. He won't say it's not worth it. He'll just tell you to do it later.

Haggai 1:3, 4
Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?

"How is it that you have time to panel your houses but not to do what I have called you to do?" the Lord asks His people.

Haggai 1:5
Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.

"Consider" is a command the Lord will repeat five times in this short book. "Consider your ways. Search your heart," He says here.

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

The people were working hard but they were neither satisfied nor getting ahead because no matter how hard they worked, they still felt empty within. That's always the way it is. The very process of trying to live for ourselves is counterproductive because everything we think we gain goes into a bag with holes in it. On the other hand, when we seek first the kingdom, everything else we need will be added unto us (Matthew 6:33).

Haggai 1:7–11
Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.

The failure of the people to build the temple of the Lord resulted in drought in the land. The same can still be true today. If the oil of the anointing of the Spirit is absent from your life; if the wine—the joy of the Spirit—is missing; if there is a barrenness and dryness within, it could be an indication of a point of disobedience in our lives. The solution for us is the same as the solution in Haggai's day: simply to do what the Lord commanded us to do.

Mom and Dad, did you start family devotions and then slowly, as the months went by, did you say, "Our schedules are too busy, our kids are too restless. Maybe some day next year we'll get back to it?" Husband, have you

neglected the promise you made to your wife to pray with her daily? Have you put off the foundational, simple things the Lord asked you to do? Take up the work again and experience the joy and anointing of the Spirit once more.

Haggai 1:12–15
Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD. Then spake Haggai the LORD's messenger in the LORD's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD. And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

According to verse 1, the message came on the first day of the month. Here, we see that on the twenty-fourth day of the month, the people were at work. This means that within twenty-three days, the people heard the word, gathered their materials, got organized, and continued that which they had begun sixteen years ago. Haggai is one of the blessed prophets in the Bible because, rather than being despised as most of the other prophets were, the hearts of the people were stirred. As a result, they rolled up their sleeves and got to work.



2 In chapter 2, we come to the October message, directed toward the peoples' hearts . . .

Haggai 2:1–3

In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the LORD by the prophet Haggai, saying, Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying, Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?

To understand why the Lord is asking this question, we need to be reminded of the historical record as seen in Ezra 3. There, we read that when the people first came to Jerusalem and laid the foundation, the young men all shouted for joy. At the same time, however, the old men howled in grief. You see, the old men had seen the temple Solomon had erected—an ornate, impressive structure of gold and silver. They knew this new temple couldn't compare. There's always a great danger in looking back. That's why Paul said, "Forgetting those things which lie behind, I press on" (Philippians 3:13, 14).

"It's not like it was back in 1906," we say. "The Holy Ghost was *really* moving then." You can fall prey to this mindset even if you're only eighteen or twenty years old any time you start comparing the new with the old. The Lord is always looking ahead to new wine, to a new work of the Spirit (Matthew 9:17).

Haggai 2:4
Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts:

"I am with you," the Lord says. And, truly, since He was with them, nothing could stand against them (Romans 8:31).

Haggai 2:5–7 (a)
According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I

will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations . . .

There would indeed be a shaking of the nations. The Medes and Persians, who had conquered the Babylonians, would themselves be conquered by the Greeks. The Greeks would, in turn, be conquered by the Romans. And the Romans would rule the rest of the nations with an iron fist.

Haggai 2:7 (b)
. . . and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.

Not only was the Lord with them but the desire of all nations would come. The "desire of all nations" is a name for Jesus. Although this temple would be remodeled by Herod, it was this temple that Jesus, the desire of all nations, would heal and teach from (Matthew 21:14; Mark 12:35).

Haggai 2:8
The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts.

The Lord lacks for nothing. Therefore, if He desired an ornate house, He could have had it.

Haggai 2:9
The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.

That Jesus, the Prince of Peace, would walk and work in this temple makes its glory infinitely greater than Solomon's temple.

Haggai 2:10 (a)
In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet . . . .

Haggai's third message came in December—directed not toward the hands or the heart of the people but toward their heads, their minds.

Haggai 2:10 (b)–14
. . . saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the LORD; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean.

Haggai was to pose two questions to the priests. "If a piece of meat that has been offered to the Lord accidentally touches some other object, does the object it touches become holy?"

"No," the priests answered.

Second, "If someone is ceremonially unclean because he touched a dead body, can he make others ceremonially unclean by touching them?"

"Yes," the priests answered.

Simply put, holiness cannot be passed on—but corruption and pollution can be. In other words, if you hang around sin, you can't help but be affected. But simply hanging around a church doesn't make you a Christian. You've got to be obedient to the Lord personally.

Haggai 2:15–17
And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the LORD: Since those days were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the pressfat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the LORD.

"Why is it that, when you go to the presses, you're only getting half as much wine as you hoped for?" the Lord asks. "Why is it that, when you harvest your crops, you're getting less than half of what you were anticipating? It's because you've been corrupted."

As Ezra tells us, the people had been holding their religious services—but for the past sixteen years, they had been disobedient to the single thing the Lord had told them to do. Consequently, everything they did was adversely affected. The same is still true. If the Lord has specifically told us to do something and we say, "Later," our disobedience will pollute and corrupt all of our undertakings. It's not that the Lord is punishing us. It's that He's nudging us back in the right direction. If you're wondering why things aren't working, it could be that God is chastening you not to punish you but to correct you.

Haggai 2:18, 19
Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you.

"Consider now," the Lord said. "Use your heads. Realize that you can be prosperous by doing that which I told you to do. From the very day you start obeying, I'll start blessing."

Maybe it's been fifteen years since you started doing what the Lord called you to do but you have since neglected it. Do it now. Be obedient to what He's told you to do. If He's called you to pray, pray. If He's called you to study the Word with intensity, get back to studying. If He's called you to witness, witness. If He's called you to be a singer, write songs and sing. If He's called you to be hospitable, open your house regularly. If He's called you to the mission field, go. Don't say the time is not now. Neglecting to do what He's called you to do will lead to great emptiness in your life.

Haggai 2:20, 21 (a)

And again the word of the LORD came unto Haggai in the four and twentieth day of the month, saying, Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah . . .

I bet Zerubbabel's knees were knocking at this point. "Oh, no," he must have thought. "Now I'm going to get a word against me. For sixteen years, I've been in charge of this project and nothing's been happening."

Haggai 2:21 (b)–23
. . . saying, I will shake the heavens and the earth; And I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother. In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts.

"I know your heart must be heavy," the Lord said. "I know the work has not been going well these past sixteen years. But know this, Zerubbabel: I've chosen you and I know your heart is right. Therefore, you will be like a signet—in a position of great authority." Indeed he was, for in the genealogies of Jesus—Joseph's line presented by Matthew and Mary's presented by Luke—Zerubbabel's name is the only one in both lines (Matthew 1:12; Luke 3:27). Thus, his place in the lineage of Messiah is unique. In addition to this, most scholars believe that after the Lord shakes the nations in the Tribulation, Zerubbabel will hold a key position in the millennial kingdom.

It greatly encourages me that Haggai ends on this note, for in it the Lord seems to say, "David was prohibited from building the temple because his hands were bloody, but I counted to his credit the fact that he wanted to build it (2 Samuel 7). Zerubbabel, even though the building languished a bit, I see that your heart is right. And you will be rewarded accordingly."

Therefore, take hope, dear friends. If it's been sixteen years since you've done the work God called you to do, get going again. And know that if your heart is right, the Lord hasn't given up on you. On the contrary, He'll use you

powerfully—just as we'll see Him do with Zerubbabel in the Book of Zechariah.



ZECHARIAH

Background to Zechariah

The year was 520 B.C. The Jews had just returned from a seventy-year captivity where they were held hostage in Babylon. Zerubbabel, their political leader, and Joshua, their spiritual overseer, had led the first contingent of approximately 42,000 back from Babylon to Jerusalem. Upon their arrival, they set out to rebuild the temple. Yet, although they began well, after a year, they had given up on the project. Facing intimidation by their enemies and division within their own ranks, they opted to build their own houses instead.

So the Lord sent two prophets to spark their passion, to reignite their devotion, to jump-start their conviction. "What do you mean it's not time to do the Lord's work?" Haggai asked. Haggai was a very pointed and practical kind of prophet whose message consisted of only thirty-eight verses. Zechariah, however, was of a much different flavor and personality. Speaking with visionary imagery, he goes on not for thirty-eight verses but for fourteen chapters as he calls the people to consider the vastness of God's program.

The Lord used both of these men in tandem to get His people going again. And in this we see once again the Lord's tendency to put different kinds of people together to do His work. In John 21, we read that, as they fished on the Sea of Galilee, John, being a mystic and perceptive person, was the first to realize that the Figure calling to them from the shore was Jesus. Hearing this, Peter immediately jumped overboard and swam to shore. John thought it through; Peter dove in—and the Lord used them both as they traveled together throughout the pages of the Book of Acts.

This encourages me greatly because I know that, regardless of the shortcomings in my personality, there's a place for me in the body. God isn't looking for cookie-cutter, carbon-copy Christians. Peter says we're living stones being fit together into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). Therefore, trust the Lord to pair you with those who, although they may not be like you, will bring about growth with you and will complement your personality in a way that will bring great glory to Him.

Zechariah's book is similar to the Book of Daniel, another apocalyptic writer. Interestingly, Daniel was born in Jerusalem and carried away into Babylon where he wrote his prophecies while Zechariah was born in Babylon and moved back to Jerusalem where he wrote his prophecies. His book divides itself into three sections. In chapters 1 through 6, the prophet sees a vision. In chapters 7 and 8, the people ask a question. Finally, in chapters 9 through 14, the Prince comes with salvation.



ZECHARIAH

1

Zechariah 1:1
In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying,

Zechariah means "Jehovah remembers." *Berechiah* means "Jehovah will bless." *Iddo* means "At the appointed time." Thus, in this very first verse, we see the prophecy that sets the stage for the entire book: Jehovah remembers and will bless at the appointed time. "God has not forgotten you," Zechariah will say. "He remembers the plans and promises He made to you. He will bless you at the appointed time—so don't give up."

Zechariah 1:2, 3
The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers. Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.

"Turn to Me and I'll turn to you," the Lord says through Zechariah. James said essentially the same thing when he wrote, "Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you" (4:8). That's a promise. If we will make the effort and expend the energy to draw near to the Lord, He promises He'll respond to us. Therefore, when people say that they've sought the Lord but that He didn't answer, I am reminded of Paul's word to the Romans: Let God be true and every man a liar. Either God is lying or we're not being totally truthful about seeking Him because He has promised that if we draw near to Him, if we even turn to Him, He will do the same to us.

Zechariah 1:4–6
Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear,

nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD. Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the LORD of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.

"Look at your history," Zechariah says, "Don't be like your fathers who, although the prophets were among them, didn't respond to them. Act upon what the Lord is telling you."

Zechariah 1:7, 8 (a)
Upon the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Sebat, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, I saw by night . . .

Here begins a series of eight visions—all apparently given to Zechariah in a single night.

Zechariah 1:8 (b)
. . . and behold a man riding upon a red horse . . .

In verse 11, we see this man identified as the angel of the Lord, or Jesus Christ Himself.

Zechariah 1:8 (c)
. . . and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom . . .

The myrtle tree is a symbol, a picture of the nation of Israel. Unlike the mighty cedars of Lebanon, myrtle trees only grow to a height of eight feet. So, Israel is seemingly insignificant both in population and geography. Yet, just as the myrtle tree is an evergreen, Israel has a remarkable tendency to continue on even though men like Pharaoh, Haman, Herod, and Hitler throughout history have tried to destroy her completely. The blossom of the

myrtle tree releases a wonderful fragrance when crushed. The same is true of Israel. Whenever nations have sought to crush her, the fragrance of God glows from her. There is something special, unique, and supernatural about this nation—and here in this first vision, what an encouragement it must have been to the people to realize that the Lord Himself was standing among the myrtle trees, that He was in their very midst.

Zechariah 1:8 (d)–11
. . . and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white. Then said I, O my lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will shew thee what these be. And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth. And they answered the angel of the LORD that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest.

Who are these other beings surrounding the Lord, riding horses of various colors, walking to and fro through the earth? In Job 1, we read that Satan walks to and fro throughout the earth, causing tragedy and turmoil in the world. But it is encouraging to note that, at the same time Satan and his demons are going to and fro, angels are as well . . .

Determined to kill Elisha because of his ability to prophesy the location of every ambush they attempted to set up against the Jews, the Syrian king and his army went to Dothan to make an end of the prophet. The next morning when Elisha's servant awoke he said, "We're surrounded by Syrians. There's no hope!" But when Elisha asked the Lord to open his eyes, Gehazi saw that the Syrians were themselves surrounded by tens of thousands of angels with flaming swords and fiery chariots (2 Kings 6).

One of the names of the Lord seen repeatedly throughout Scripture is "Lord of hosts." What does the word *host* mean? Army. In other words, God is Lord of the armies. What armies? Angelic armies. Right now, although demons seek to hurt us, angels are surrounding us. If we could see what's

really going on, it would blow our minds and bless our souls. The enemy is real, to be sure, but the forces of God are greater still.

Why were these angels sent in Zechariah's day? They were spying out the situation and came back to report to the Lord that the nations who had troubled the Jews were at peace and prospering. In other words, the very ones who had harmed the people of God seemed to be doing well.

Zechariah 1:12–17
Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? And the LORD answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words. So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction. Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.

The Lord says, "Although these nations were instruments in My hand to discipline My people, they have gone far beyond what I intended. They exceeded the boundaries I placed on them. Therefore, I am returning to Jerusalem not to judge my people but to show mercy to them."

Zechariah 1:18–21
Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns. And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. And the LORD shewed me four carpenters. Then said I, What come these to do? And he spake, saying, These

are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it.

Zechariah's second vision refers to the powers and nations that had come against God's people. Whether these four horns refer to the four powers that had already caused them to scatter—the Assyrians, Medo-Persians, Babylonians, and Egyptians—or whether it speaks both historically and prophetically of the Babylonians and Medo-Persians as well as the coming Greeks and Romans, the Lord will "nail" those who come against His people.

The Lord likens His Word to a hammer (Jeremiah 23:29). Therefore, the weapon you and I need to use when the horns of the enemy, the powers of hell, come against us is the Word of God. It's our primary weapon, our key source of victory over the powers and forces of Satan. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, each time He said, "It is written . . . ." And Satan was rendered powerless (Matthew 4).



2 Zechariah 2:1, 2

I lifted up mine eyes again, and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof.

In the third part of this vision, Zechariah sees a man with a tape measure in his hand, measuring Jerusalem, taking stock of the situation.

Zechariah 2:3–5

And, behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, And said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein:

For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.

Although Jerusalem will be built again and prominent once more, we see in verse 4 that it will be as a city without walls. In Ezekiel 38, we read that it is at the time when Jerusalem is without walls that Gog, or Russia, will attack. That is, the Russian invasion of Israel will happen at a time when Jerusalem is without walls, or, seemingly, experiencing a time of peace.

Zechariah 2:6–8
Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the LORD: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the LORD. Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.

Any nation—be it Babylon historically or Russia prophetically—that touches Israel touches the apple of God's eye. Physiologists tell us the quickest reflex in our entire body is the reflex to cover the eye when something is coming. That's how quick the Lord is to protect His own.

Zechariah 2:9–13
For, behold, I will shake mine hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me. Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD. And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee. And the LORD shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again. Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation.

What a day it will be when Jesus Christ dwells and reigns in Jerusalem, when all things will be right. "Sing and rejoice," the Lord says in verse 10.

"Be silent, O all flesh," He says in verse 13. Worship covers the broadest spectrum of emotions and expressions. There's a time to sing and rejoice and another time to bow silently in awe and humility.



3 In chapter 3, we see the fourth part of Zechariah's vision.

Zechariah 3:1
And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.

Here, we see Joshua standing before Jesus with Satan ready to resist, or accuse, him. According to Revelation 12:10, one of Satan's main occupations is accusing believers. In fact, the word, *devil,* actually means "slanderer."

When Satan talks to you about God, he lies. He tries to get you to think that God is some kind of cosmic killjoy who wants you to be miserable. He whispers in your ear that God is mad at you, disappointed in you, through with you. But when he talks to God about you, he speaks truth. "Look at Jon Courson," he says. "He's supposed to be Your child. But did You hear what he said? Do You know what he thought? Did You see what he did?"

Zechariah 3:2
And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?

As Jesus answers the accuser, He doesn't liken Joshua to a mighty redwood or a majestic oak. No, He says, "See this little twig? I plucked him out of the fire—just like I chose insignificant Jerusalem to be My capital city."

Our security and significance don't lie in who we are, gang, but in Whose we are. Ephesians 1:4 declares that, before the foundation of the world, God

elected us and adopted us into His family. Before we did anything or were anything, God ordained that we would be part of His kingdom. Therefore, we don't have to convince ourselves or others that we're something we're not."

Zechariah 3:3
Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel.

The people didn't think Joshua's garments were filthy. On the contrary, they thought his robes were beautiful, ornate, significant. But in the presence of the Lord, even his priestly robes became as filthy rags. Why? Isaiah gives us the answer . . .

> But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.
>
> Isaiah 64:6

All of our efforts at religiosity or generosity might make us seem like good people. But in the presence of the Lord—as our motives are suddenly exposed—all of our righteousness takes on the appearance of filthy rags.

The picture painted here is very important because Jesus, a Greater than Joshua, would come on the scene and tell the people that unless their righteousness *exceeded* that of the Pharisees, they couldn't enter the kingdom (Matthew 5:20). "Be ye therefore perfect," He said, "even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). In other words, if you're going to try and make it into heaven on your own religious merit, good luck. You've got to be perfect. But once you see you are a sinner, clothed in filthiness, the door is opened for you to see your need for a Savior, a Redeemer. That's what salvation is all about—knowing we can't make it on our own. The entire purpose of the Sermon on the Mount was to drive us to Jesus not as a wise teacher or an astute philosopher but as our Redeemer, our Savior, our only hope.

Zechariah 3:4, 5

> **And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by.**

Notice that the Lord didn't tell Joshua to go to his room and clean up. That's what we think the Lord says to us. When we hear the accusation of the slanderer, we think we have to somehow cleanse ourselves before we can ever pray, worship, or serve. Not so. As Joshua just stood passively, realizing his robes of religiosity were filthy, he heard the Lord say, "I will clothe him with robes that are righteous."

> I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.
>
> Isaiah 61:10

Salvation is not a matter of trying to clean up my act or ironing out my problems and wrinkles. It's a matter of realizing I'm a sinner and letting Jesus robe me with the garments of *His* righteousness.

> Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.
>
> 2 Corinthians 5:17, 21

This is essential to understand. You are the righteousness of God not because of what you do or don't do but because of where you are. When you opened your heart to Jesus, He came in you. But, more importantly, you were

placed in Him. You are in Christ. Therefore, when the Father looks at us, He doesn't see us in our sin. He sees us in His Son.

> My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.
>
> 1 John 2:1, 2

In the heavenly scene, Satan is the prosecuting attorney, calling judgment upon me, pointing out the faults within me before God, the judge of all men. But when my name comes up, I have a defense lawyer, Jesus Christ, who steps up and says, "Father, I died for Jon and My blood has covered his sin. He is in Me."

Hearing this, the Father says, "Case dismissed for complete lack of evidence."

And I am free.

> **Zechariah 3:6, 7**
> **And the angel of the LORD protested unto Joshua, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.**

"Don't be condemned about the temple lying in ruins for the past sixteen years," the Lord says to Joshua. "Don't let that slow you down, but keep going and you'll be used in even greater ways—among heavenly beings in the ages to come."

This life is simply preparatory for eternity, gang. If you walk with the Lord now, He will greet you in heaven with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter into the joy of the Lord" (Matthew 25:23) and you will rule and reign significantly with Him. If, on the other hand, you just cruise through life, living for your own self, your own pursuits, your own

pleasures, when you get to heaven, although you'll be happy, your capacity to enjoy heaven will be greatly diminished.

Your usefulness and capacity to enjoy the ages to come are being determined right now. That's why Paul said, "When I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Corinthians 13:11) and why he pressed on "toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). When Paul had a vision of heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2–4), his life was suddenly changed. He knew that only one thing mattered: obeying the leading and command of the Lord. What we do for ourselves will all burn. But what we'll never once regret is what we did for the kingdom.

Zechariah 3:8
Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah refer to Jesus as "the Branch." Thus, Zechariah is telling Joshua the best news of all: that Jesus is coming.

Zechariah 3:9 (a)
For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts . . .

Seven eyes speak of complete vision—a full understanding, total wisdom.

Zechariah 3:9 (b), 10
. . . and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree.

The iniquity of the land was indeed removed in one day—the day Jesus died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). And the effects of iniquity will also be removed in one day. For on the day Jesus comes back, iniquity will be replaced by peace and prosperity—the way things were meant to be.



4

Zechariah 4:1
And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep,

Evidently, by this point, Zechariah was emotionally exhausted by the visions he had already seen. Yet an angel comes to him and rouses him from his deep sleep that the visions might continue. Even as Zechariah was awakened that he might be envisioned, so too, when we come to church or Bible studies or during our morning devotions, we need to say, "Send an angel if necessary to rouse me, Father. Don't let me slumber in lethargy. Don't let me snooze through this life. Awaken me."

After being prepared for the vision, Zechariah is presented with the vision . . .

Zechariah 4:2
And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof:

In this vision, Zechariah would understand what this lampstand, or candlestick, was all about because he was not only a prophet but also a priest. Part of the priest's job in the tabernacle and temple was to fill the lamps with oil and to trim the wicks of the lampstand that stood in the holy place. But this was different from any lampstand Zechariah had seen before, for on top of this lampstand was a reservoir filled with oil that would flow through pipes to each lamp.

Zechariah 4:3
And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.

On each side of this lampstand stood an olive tree which produced the oil for the reservoir that emptied into pipes through which the oil for the reservoir was carried. From verse 12, we know that these trees were connected to the reservoir in such a way that oil was provided directly. In other words, there was no need for harvesting and crushing the olives to make the oil for the lamps. Zechariah must have been rejoicing—no more chores!

Zechariah 4:4
So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord?

After being prepared for the vision and presented with it, now Zechariah is perplexed by it.

Zechariah 4:5
Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord.

Zechariah freely admitted he needed understanding, that he didn't have all the answers. So now he will be told the purpose of the vision . . .

Zechariah 4:6
Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.

Throughout Scripture, oil is a picture of the Holy Spirit—and a perfect picture it is. Oil brings about lubrication and eliminates friction—just as the fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22). In addition to being a source of illumination, oil brings about healing. Just as the good Samaritan poured oil in the wounds of the man who had been beaten, James instructed the elders to anoint with oil those who were sick (5:14). Oil is also the base of costly fragrances (Matthew 26:7). Truly, the Holy Spirit illuminates the Word for us. He reduces the friction between us. He heals our hurts. He is a soothing

perfume that allows us to take on a fragrance that is very unlike our natural scent.

> **Zechariah 4:7–10**
> **Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.**

Through Zechariah, the Lord said to Zerubbabel, "I know what you're thinking. Sixteen years have passed and the project you began is now stalled. But I have good news for you. I am going to complete that which I began. And your hands will be the hands I use to do it. Therefore, be patient. Don't despise the day of small things. Just be faithful. How will all of this come about? Not by your might or by your resolve. The stalled project will be completed by My Spirit. Just as the oil from the olive trees passes through the lamps apart from human effort, so too, I will work apart from anything man does."

I know there is a time in virtually all of our lives when the Lord lays something on our hearts. A promise is given. A dream is placed on our minds. A vision is set before our eyes. It might be a business or a marriage, a family or a ministry. We begin. We lay the foundation—but then the difficulties come. As the months and years pass by, we say, "It's not going to happen." And our hearts sink.

But, just as He said to Zerubbabel, the Lord would say to us, "I am going to allow the hands that laid the foundation to finish the work. You are going to bring the capstone—the finishing piece—with shouts of grace at the end. It's all by My grace. So don't despise the days of small things, of small beginnings. And don't give up."

Zechariah 4:11–14
Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the LORD of the whole earth.

As Zechariah ponders the vision, he is told that the branches by which the oil of the Spirit flows are the two anointed ones. Historically, this speaks of Joshua and Zerubbabel. Prophetically, Revelation 11 refers to this verse in relation to the two witnesses who will be raised up in the Tribulation. But most importantly, symbolically, the two olives trees speak of the anointed Ones—Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. "I am the vine," Jesus declares. "Ye are the branches" (John 15:5). We're to be the branches through which the oil of the Spirit flows into the reservoir so that the light, the church, might burn brightly. Therefore, if we want to be filled with the Spirit, we must position ourselves as did Joshua and Zerubbabel—in the place of service. You will find that the church burns brighter, that the kingdom is expanded, and that your own life takes on significance when you do this.

When you realize it is only by the power of the Spirit that anything will happen, you'll quit trying to muscle your way through your ministry. Instead, you'll get on your knees before the Lord and say, "It's only by the work of Your Spirit, Lord, that anything will take place in my life." And it is then that the mountain will be removed; the lamp will burn; the temple will be completed—and the Lord will be glorified.



5 In chapter 5, we come to the sixth part of Zechariah's vision. The previous five parts had encouraged the people of Israel concerning the Lord's presence and future for them. But here, in chapter 5, the scene changes a bit. In chapter 4, Zechariah had been given the vision of a lampstand that

would be continuously supplied with oil. For the lamps to burn brightly, however, the wicks would need to be trimmed. Thus, we see the chastening hand of the Lord in order that His people might burn brightly for Him.

Zechariah 5:1, 2
Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll. And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits.

This roll was a scroll thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide.

Zechariah 5:3, 4
Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it. I will bring it forth, saith the LORD of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof.

This mammoth scroll was a record of sins both against God and man. It speaks so practically because we often say, "Lord, ignite me. I want to burn brightly. Fill me with the oil of Your Spirit." But so often the problem lies not in the need to be filled but in the need to be emptied. We seek to be empowered by the Spirit and wonder why it doesn't happen when, in reality, there needs to be a trimming, a cutting, a removing of wickedness.

Zechariah 5:5, 6 (a)
Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what is this that goeth forth. And I said, What is it? And he said, This is an ephah that goeth forth. . . .

In the seventh part of his vision, Zechariah sees an ephah—a large basked used in harvesting.

Zechariah 5:6 (b)–9
. . . He said moreover, This is their resemblance through all the earth. And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this is a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah. And he said, This is wickedness. And he cast it into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof. Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came out two women, and the wind was in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven.

Just as the women in the basket are carried away, the whole world is caught up in the materialism and commercialization symbolized by Babylon in Revelation 18.

Zechariah 5:10, 11
Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah? And he said unto me, To build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base.

Shinar is a name for Babylon. When Judah was carried into Babylon, the Jews were an agrarian people. But after spending seventy years in Babylon, they became merchants and remained in that role until Israel was rebirthed in 1948. At that time, young people moved back into Israel, lived on kibbutzim, and farmed the land once again. This is the foundation of Israeli society today—which explains why they are one of the world's largest exporters of fruit.



6 In chapter 6, we come to the eighth and final section of this vision . . .

Zechariah 6:1–8

And I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass. In the first chariot were red horses; and in the second chariot black horses; And in the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot grisled and bay horses. Then I answered and said unto the angel that talked with me, What are these, my lord? And the angel answered and said unto me, These are the four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth. The black horses which are therein go forth into the north country; and the white go forth after them; and the grisled go forth toward the south country. And the bay went forth, and sought to go that they might walk to and fro through the earth: and he said, Get you hence, walk to and fro through the earth. So they walked to and fro through the earth. Then cried he upon me, and spake unto me, saying, Behold, these that go toward the north country have quieted my spirit in the north country.

These four chariots align perfectly with Revelation 6, where we see that the red horse speaks of war; the black horse speaks of famine; the white horse speaks of a false peace; and the gray horse speaks of death. Brass is the material of judgment, as seen in the brass altar and brass serpent. In other words, judgment was coming.

Zechariah's vision in its entirety was to show the people that the Lord was with them, moving among them, removing sin from them, destroying the commercial system that had polluted them—and that He would bring judgment on the earth.

Prophetically, Zechariah's vision tells the story of Israel. In 1948, when she was brought back home again, the Lord was in the midst of the myrtle trees once again (1:7–11). The powers that came against her ended up being "hammered" themselves (1:18–21). In 1967, Jerusalem was "measured" when the city was brought under the Israeli flag (2:1–5). Like Joshua, Israel will see that she has need of being cleansed and robed by the blood of Jesus Christ (3:1–5). When that happens in the time of the Tribulation, her light

will shine brightly (4:2–5). But, as seen in the flying scroll, those who do not acknowledge the reality of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ will be judged for their sins ((5:1–4). The commercial systems that manipulate and rip people off will be done away with (5:5–11), replaced by righteousness when, following the judgment of the Tribulation, Jesus rules and reigns from Jerusalem (6:1–8).

Zechariah 6:9–11
And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Take of them of the captivity, even of Heldai, of Tobijah, and of Jedaiah, which are come from Babylon, and come thou the same day, and go into the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah; Then take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them upon the head of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest;

Following the four chariots that speak of the Tribulation period, we see crowns which speak of the coming of Christ.

Zechariah 6:12 (a)
And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man . . .

Who else would say, "Behold the man"? Pontius Pilate, pointing to Jesus (John 19:5).

Zechariah 6:12 (b)
. . . whose name is The BRANCH . . .

As seen in Isaiah 11:1 and Jeremiah 23:5, "The Branch" is a prophetic name for Jesus.

Zechariah 6:12 (c)–15
. . . and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace

shall be between them both. And the crowns shall be to Helem, and to Tobijah, and to Jedaiah, and to Hen the son of Zephaniah, for a memorial in the temple of the LORD. And they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of the LORD, and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God.

Isaiah 52 calls Jesus the root coming out of dry ground. The ground would be dry indeed. For four hundred years, a prophet would not be heard in the land of Israel. For four hundred years God was silent—when suddenly, out of the dry ground, the Branch appeared. Looking ahead five hundred years to the First Coming of Christ, Zechariah says, "This One who is coming shall wear the crown of both king and priest." This would have been shocking in Zechariah's day for Old Testament law forbade anyone from holding the office of both priest and king.

Jesus is the only One who can rule with authority as a King and minister compassionately as a Priest. The first time Jesus came, He came as a Prophet. He taught the ways of God and revealed the heart of God. Then He ascended into heaven where He is now our Priest, where He ever lives to make intercession for us. He came as a Prophet, is in heaven as a Priest, and He's coming back as King.



7 In chapters 1 through 6, the prophet, Zechariah, saw a vision. Here, in chapter 7, the people will ask a question . . .

Zechariah 7:1–3
And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Darius, that the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, even in Chisleu; When they had sent unto the house of God Sherezer and Regem-melech, and their men, to pray before the LORD, And to speak unto the priests which were in the

house of the LORD of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?

For many years, the people had fasted on four specific days supposedly in order to seek the Lord and to repent from the sin that landed them in Babylon. Here, with the temple going up and good things happening, they ask if there is a need to keep fasting.

Zechariah 7:4–6
Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?

"Were your fasts ever for Me?" the Lord asks, "or were you fasting simply to prove your own goodness?" The question is still one that must be asked. Why do we do what we do? Is it to assuage our guilt, showcase our goodness, or manipulate God?

Zechariah 7:7–10 (a)
Should ye not hear the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when men inhabited the south and the plain? And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor . . .

"Forget the rituals," the Lord declares. "I want you to show mercy and compassion—especially to the most vulnerable among you."

Zechariah 7:10 (b)

. . . and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.

"Let none imagine evil." We make great cases against people in our imaginations. Everything they say, we analyze. Everything they do, we question. This ought not to be. Let people accuse you of being naïve and too trusting if necessary. But don't imagine evil.

Zechariah 7:11–14
But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts. Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts: But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate.

It wasn't because the people weren't fasting that the land was made desolate. It was because they weren't showing mercy. Therefore, I believe the word of the Lord is simply this: If you wonder why your walk is dry, why your heart, soul, and spirit are desolate, it might not be because you need to pray longer, fast more, or study deeper. The real issue is never our displays of spirituality but rather our willingness to show mercy. Love is always the key.



Zechariah 8:1–4
Again the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury. Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto

Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age.

Due to His sovereignty rather than the people's religiosity, the Lord declares that Jerusalem would one day be known as a city of truth and holiness, a place where even old men would be able to walk the streets in safety.

> **Zechariah 8:5**
> **And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.**

G. Campbell Morgan said that when he wanted to catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God, he didn't go into a room where adults were praying but into the street where kids were playing. If you really want to know about the kingdom, watch little kids. Jesus said essentially the same thing when He placed a child in the midst of the disciples and said, "You must become as a child to enter into the kingdom" (Matthew 18:3). In the kingdom age, crime will be eradicated, allowing children to play without fear.

> **Zechariah 8:6–9**
> **Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built.**

To these people who had grown weary of building the temple, Zechariah comes on the scene with the word of the Lord, saying, "What you're doing has huge significance. All of history is flowing down the channel of prophecy and the temple you're hesitating to build will be the very place from which the Lord will rule. A Branch will come. The kingdom shall be established. Old people will walk in dignity. Kids will play in safety. Every person will experience prosperity. Therefore, what you're doing will impact all of eternity."

If you're at a point where you're wondering why you should keep teaching Sunday school or carve out time for family devotions, why you should labor in this ministry or that calling, I believe the Lord would say to you that what you're doing is of great significance to Him. It might seem small to you, but don't despise the day of small things because it's a foundation for what He will do—culminating in the coming of Christ, in the establishing of His kingdom. We have a huge destiny, gang. Let us press on, robed in His righteousness, empowered by His Spirit, seeing the big picture of where it's all going.

Zechariah 8:10–15

For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men every one against his neighbour. But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts. For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the LORD of hosts, and I repented not: So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not.

Whereas previously there had been a complete lack of prosperity, under the Lord's care, the land would flourish once again.

Zechariah 8:16, 17
These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD.

Here, the people are cautioned against the sins that apparently drew them away from the work in the first place.

Zechariah 8:18, 19
And the word of the LORD of hosts came unto me, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.

The Lord would change the people's fasts into feasts.

Zechariah 8:20–23
Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.

Can you imagine ten men grabbing every Jew, saying, "Take us to your temple. Let's go pray!"? When Jesus comes back, when Israel is prospering and feasting, there will be no more "Middle East Problem." Instead, Israel will be nothing but a blessing—a place where everyone will want to be.



9 In chapter 9, we come to the final section of the book. The flow is noticeably changed because many years have passed. Zechariah is writing now not as a young man but as a seasoned prophet. His emphasis is not so much on the temple, which has long been completed, or on theological questions but on the coming of Jesus Christ. This should not be surprising for it seems to me that the older we get in the Lord, the simpler life becomes as we realize it's all about Jesus.

This section has been called a treasure house of prophetic truth because in it we see the entire scope of the Lord's work both in His First Coming and His Second Coming as it relates to the people of Israel. Centuries earlier, when, at one hundred twenty years of age, Moses stood on the summit of Mount Pisgah and looked from the top of the mountain into the Land of Promise, the Lord supernaturally showed him the entire land. Zechariah is also on a prophetic mountain peak. He sees the whole plan being unfolded of what the Lord is doing. This section covers as much prophetic ground as any section in the Bible. It gives a sweeping survey, a fantastic view of the Lord's coming.

Like all of the Old Testament prophets, however, Zechariah didn't have the understanding we do—that the Lord's coming would be in two parts. We know that Jesus came first as the Babe of Bethlehem, as the suffering Servant. But we also know He will come a second time as the King of kings. The Old Testament prophets didn't understand this. In talking about the coming Christ, they would flip-flop between the First and Second Coming of Christ, not realizing there was a valley of time between the two. That is why people were confused in the day of Christ. They knew Messiah was to come and have dominion over the nations, that He was to usher in peace and prosperity. So they wondered why Jesus wouldn't take advantage of the opportunity

when the people initially wanted Him to be their King (John 6:15). They couldn't comprehend that He came first to die.

Zechariah 9:1
The burden of the word of the LORD in the land of Hadrach, and Damascus shall be the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD.

As Zechariah stands on his prophetic peak, the first thing he sees ahead is something we have already seen: the coming of Alexander the Great . . .

Zechariah 9:2–6
And Hamath also shall border thereby; Tyrus, and Zidon, though it be very wise. And Tyrus did build herself a strong hold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets. Behold, the Lord will cast her out, and he will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be devoured with fire. Ashkelon shall see it, and fear; Gaza also shall see it, and be very sorrowful, and Ekron; for her expectation shall be ashamed; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited. And a bastard shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines.

Beginning with Damascus, these are all cities that were conquered by Alexander. In fact, this is the very path he took as he came down from Greece approximately one hundred fifty years after this prophecy was given.

Zechariah 9:7, 8
And I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth: but he that remaineth, even he, shall be for our God, and he shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite. And I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes.

In talking about the journey of Alexander, Zechariah points out that, when he came to the area of Jerusalem, the Lord would camp in front of Jerusalem, that He would be a protection for her. Indeed, history shows that, when Alexander came cruising into the region, the high priest and a group of elders went out to meet him. Opening the Scriptures to Daniel 8:7 and 8, they showed him how Daniel actually predicted his arrival in the region. So amazed by this was Alexander that, instead of destroying Jerusalem, he offered a sacrificial lamb for his own sins.

Zechariah 9:9 (a)
Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation . . .

When Jesus came riding into Jerusalem the week before He was crucified, the people cried, "Hosanna!" or, literally, "Save now!" Indeed, Jesus came having salvation, able to do just that—but the people didn't realize that the salvation He offered was not political but eternal.

Zechariah 9:9 (b)
. . . lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

At the age of thirty-three, Alexander rode upon his mighty steed, Bucephalus, surrounded by soldiers whose shields were shining, whose spears were glistening. Yet Zion's King, also thirty-three, came riding on a donkey. Why did Jesus ride on a donkey? Why didn't He come with an impressive display of might? Because in so doing, He is humble, touchable, relatable. In fact, so seemingly ordinary was Jesus that, even though He had been in the public eye for thirty-three years, the soldiers evidently needed Judas to identify Him (Mark 14:44).

Zechariah 9:10
And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak

peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.

Now we shift to Jesus' Second Coming—when, at last, there will be disarmament and the peace in Jerusalem for which everyone longs.

Zechariah 9:11
As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.

We were those prisoners in a pit with no water. We were rescued by Jesus.

Zechariah 9:12–17
Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to day do I declare that I will render double unto thee; When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man. And the LORD shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning: and the LORD GOD shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south. The LORD of hosts shall defend them; and they shall devour, and subdue with sling stones; and they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, and as the corners of the altar. And the LORD their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people: for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land. For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids.

This is a reference to what the Lord would do when He used the sons of Zion—specifically the Maccabees—to overcome the sons of Greece. When Alexander died, his empire was split up and one of the descendants of one of the rulers was a man named Antiochus Epiphanes, a picture of antichrist. A terrible ruler, he slaughtered the Jews by the thousands and demanded to be

worshiped—until a group of Jewish men who would become known as the Maccabbees launched a victorious guerilla war against him.



10 Zechariah 10:1

Ask ye of the LORD rain in the time of the latter rain; so the LORD shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field.

In Israel, there were historically two rainy seasons. The first was from October through December and was called the former rain. The latter rains fell in April and May. These rainy seasons caused Israel to be a land of lush vegetation. After the Jews were dispersed by the Romans in A.D. 70, the Turks gained control of the region and began to tax the people there according to the number of trees on their property. It didn't take people long to figure out that it was in their best interests to chop their trees down. As a result, the ecology changed. The soil eroded. There was no more evaporation. The latter rains stopped altogether and the former rains were so drastically diminished that the land became arid and dry. That is why, when they became a nation again, the first project of the Israeli government was reforestation. They still plant millions of trees every year. The ecology is beginning to change and the latter rains have returned.

Spiritually, the latter rain speaks of the outpouring of the Spirit that will take place in the last days (Joel 2:23–28). We are living in a time when the Holy Spirit is being poured out afresh. Yet, although we can observe this and study it, we will not experience it unless we ask the Lord to send the latter rain upon us personally.

I think of Noah. Talk about rain! For forty days and forty nights rain fell upon him. Wondering if the storm had abated, he let out a dove. Throughout Scripture, the dove is a picture of the Holy Spirit. When the dove found no place to land, it returned to Noah and in Genesis 8:9, we read that he pulled the dove in unto him. Noah didn't sit in the ark with folded hands saying, "Dove, if you want to land on me, I'm open." That's the way some people approach the Holy Spirit. And then they wonder why the Holy Spirit never

empowers or uses them. Noah reached out and grabbed the dove and brought it to himself. We must do the same. How? Simply by asking.

> If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?
>
> Luke 11:13

When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples in the Upper Room, they had been praying and waiting for ten days (Acts 2). We no longer have to wait for the Holy Spirit. He's already been given. But we must wait *on* the Holy Spirit. That is, we must say, "Lord is there something in my life preventing You from pouring out Your Spirit upon me?" If you want a fresh anointing, a greater empowering for service, talk to the Lord about it—all you have to do is ask, and He'll take it from there (Matthew 5:6).

> **Zechariah 10:2–4**
> **For the idols have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams; they comfort in vain: therefore they went their way as a flock, they were troubled, because there was no shepherd. Mine anger was kindled against the shepherds, and I punished the goats: for the LORD of hosts hath visited his flock the house of Judah, and hath made them as his goodly horse in the battle. Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail, out of him the battle bow, out of him every oppressor together.**

This speaks of Christ's First Coming. Isaiah tells us He was the Cornerstone, rejected of men (8:14, 28:16). He is the nail, the One upon whom men could hang their lives. Instead, man hung Him on a cross. But in His Second Coming, He will come back as the battle bow, the conquering King, ruling in majesty.

> **Zechariah 10:5, 6**
> **And they shall be as mighty men, which tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle: and they shall fight, because the LORD is with them, and the riders on horses shall be**

confounded. And I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them again to place them; for I have mercy upon them: and they shall be as though I had not cast them off: for I am the LORD their God, and will hear them.

Even though they rejected Him as the Cornerstone, even though they nailed Him to the cross, when all of the nations are ready to crush and annihilate Israel, the Lord will come—no longer riding upon a donkey but upon a white horse as a conqueror to rescue the people of Israel at the very moment it appears they will be annihilated at Armageddon.

Zechariah 10:7
And they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as through wine: yea, their children shall see it, and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the LORD.

Immediately preceding the Lord's return, there will be a regathering of His people . . .

Zechariah 10:8–10
I will hiss for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them: and they shall increase as they have increased. And I will sow them among the people: and they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and turn again. I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather them out of Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon; and place shall not be found for them.

"I'm going to whistle for them," the Lord declares. "I'm going to bring My people back to the land and there will be so many of them that it will barely be able to contain them." In 1948, Israel did what no other nation in history has been able to do. The Lord began whistling and the Jews began returning. Zechariah was seeing this happen prophetically—and it would indeed happen just as he said.

Zechariah 10:11, 12
And he shall pass through the sea with affliction, and shall smite the waves in the sea, and all the deeps of the river shall dry up: and the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the sceptre of Egypt shall depart away. And I will strengthen them in the LORD; and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the LORD.

The Jews would indeed "pass through the sea with affliction." When they saw the clouds of the holocaust forming, many Jews got into boats and headed to Palestine. But when the British mandated that no more Jews would be allowed entrance, one of the great tragedies of history occurred when their boats were turned back.

The seasoned saint, Zechariah, standing in the place of seeing prophecy passing before him is once again calling the people of God to see the big picture. And he calls us to do the same. We're headed for heaven, gang. Never grow weary of reading the prophets. They call us to remember where we're headed. We want something practical. We want to read about how to have a better marriage, how to raise better kids, how to find a better job. But the prophets speak of the mystical rather than the practical because you'll be a better husband if you remember you're headed for heaven, a better mom if you remember you'll live eternally. John tells us it was because Jesus knew from whence He came and where He was going that He was able to wash the feet of those who were too busy jockeying for position to serve one another (John 13:5). That is why our Father sent prophet after prophet to talk about the mystery of eternity, to remind us to set our hearts on things above (Colossians 3:2).



11 Zechariah has been called by many commentators, "the prophet of hope." I think that's a good description because he came to encourage God's people to finish the task they had begun, to realize their high and holy calling. But he is also the prophet of truth. And here in chapter 11, he speaks of some difficult days and tough times as God would chasten His people for their own good.

Zechariah 11:1–3
Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars. Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen; because the mighty are spoiled: howl, O ye oaks of Bashan; for the forest of the vintage is come down. There is a voice of the howling of the shepherds; for their glory is spoiled: a voice of the roaring of young lions; for the pride of Jordan is spoiled.

Zechariah is saying, "There's trouble coming. Beginning in Lebanon with the cedars burning, going down to Bashan—the Golan Heights—and into the Jordan valley, there's going to be fire raging, a howling heard." Indeed, this is exactly what happened. Within forty years after Israel had rejected Messiah, the Romans marched down through Lebanon, through the Jordan Valley and on into Jerusalem itself.

Zechariah 11:4, 5
Thus saith the LORD my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter; Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty: and they that sell them say, Blessed be the LORD; for I am rich: and their own shepherds pity them not.

Both the political and religious leaders of Israel sold out the flock, becoming wealthy by cutting deals with the Romans.

Zechariah 11:6
For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, saith the LORD: but, lo, I will deliver the men every one into his neighbour's hand, and into the hand of his king: and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them.

Why would the Lord allow His people to be sold out by their own leaders? Zechariah acts out the answer to this question . . .

Zechariah 11:7
And I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty,

and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock.

Zechariah acts out this parable by shepherding a flock using two staffs, calling one Beauty and the other Bands, or, literally, Unity. I believe Beauty speaks of Jesus Christ who is altogether lovely (Song of Solomon 5:16) and Unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3).

Zechariah 11:8
Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul lothed them, and their soul also abhorred me.

As Zechariah acts out this parable, he takes on three wicked shepherds. I suggest these shepherds represent the three wicked shepherds Jesus battled: the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Herodians. The Pharisees represented legalism. The Sadducees were liberals who didn't believe in angels or the Resurrection. The Herodians were a political group, thinking they could usher in the kingdom through political action. And all three missed the Good Shepherd, the only true Shepherd, in their midst.

Zechariah 11:9
Then said I, I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another.

After removing these three evil shepherds, Zechariah declares that he will feed the flock no more. Why did Zechariah give up? For the same reason the prophecy was given in verse 6 that the land would be ravaged—because the people said concerning Jesus, "We will not have this Man rule over us" (Luke 19:14). The Good Shepherd came to them with beauty and unity. But they rejected Him. So the Lord let them have their way.

It is a sobering thought that the Lord will let us have our way. If we insist on having our way, He just might let us. And we'll find we don't like the very thing we are demanding.

Zechariah 11:10

And I took my staff, even Beauty, and cut it assunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people.

Jesus came to give the kingdom to His people, to bring peace to His people, but they would not have Him. Therefore, the opportunity was lost for the Jewish nation. Beauty was broken when the One who is altogether lovely was rejected.

Zechariah 11:11, 12
And it was broken in that day: and so the poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the LORD. And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver.

"Pay me what you think I'm worth," Zechariah said, after giving up his flock. And it was decided that he would receive thirty pieces of silver. Matthew 26:15 and 27:9 tell us this prophecy speaks of Jesus. What was thirty pieces of silver? According to Exodus 21:32, it was the price of a dead or wounded slave. Although this would have been insulting to Zechariah culturally, it was exacting prophetically, for it relates to Jesus perfectly . . .

Zechariah 11:13
And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD.

In the small town of Carioth, a boy grew up. Educated and refined, in his twenties, he began following an itinerant Rabbi named Jesus of Nazareth. Chosen by the Master to be one of His twelve disciples, he was the only one from the southern part of the nation. People from the north were thought to be uncouth, unteachable, unyielding. Eleven of the men Jesus chose were from Galilee in the north. Judas of Carioth was not one of them. No doubt he spoke with the accent of an intellectual sophisticate. Maybe that is why he was appointed treasurer of the group. No doubt it would seem that at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Judas would be His right-hand man.

But we know, of course, that Judas was, in fact, His betrayer. Why did Judas betray Jesus? Perhaps it was because he was disillusioned with Jesus. Maybe he thought that when Jesus was made king, he would have the prestigious post of Secretary of the Treasury. But when Jesus began to say that His kingdom was not of this world, when He purposely went to small towns that had no political importance, Judas' heart must have sunk.

The same thing can happen to us. When Jesus doesn't work the way we think He should, we can become disillusioned and vulnerable to a degree of betrayal, as well. When Jesus sat at the Last Supper and told His disciples that one of them would betray Him, they didn't say, "It's Judas." He wasn't even suspected. Instead, they looked to themselves and said, "Is it I?" I must ask this question, as well. "Am I using You to do my own thing, Lord? Search my heart."

After realizing he had betrayed innocent blood, Judas brought the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. When they refused to take it, he cast the money down on the floor of the temple. In Matthew 27:10, we read that a potter's field was purchased with this money—exactly as Zechariah prophesied. Thus, a prophecy given five hundred twenty years earlier was fulfilled to the letter.

Culturally, being paid the price of an injured slave was insulting to Zechariah. Prophetically, however, it was exactly. But personally, it is incredibly comforting. You see, the potter's field was the field outside the house of the potter wherein broken or flawed pottery and clay were thrown. The potter's field was the least valuable piece of property in the area because, filled with pottery accumulated over centuries, the soil was useless. In Jeremiah 18, God likens Himself to a Master Potter and us to lumps of clay He shapes into vessels for His use. If, however, we refuse to respond to the shaping He desires to do in our lives, as worthless pieces of pottery, we find ourselves in the potter's field.

Yet what did Jesus do? The money that was used to betray Him was then specifically used to buy the most worthless piece of property, the place filled with cracked pots and marred vessels. That's what Jesus always does. His blood purchased people like you and me—people with nicks and chips, flaws and failures—and reshapes, remolds, renews us. If I were Jesus, I would have bought beachfront property. He, however, bought me.

If you feel broken, remember Zechariah's prophecy—and never forget Jesus' unspeakable love.

Zechariah 11:14
Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

Once Jesus was rejected, the Spirit was grieved. The Spirit's work is to unify brothers, but rejecting Jesus grieves, quenches, nullifies the work of the Spirit. So the bond between Judah and Israel, between the southern tribes and the northern tribes, was broken.

Zechariah 11:15, 16
And the LORD said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd. For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces.

God's people rejected the Good Shepherd. But another shepherd will come on the scene who won't care for those who are hurting, who won't seek those that are young, who won't heal those who are broken. Who is this one? It speaks of antichrist.

I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.

John 5:43

Jesus came as a Servant—loving, healing, caring, and blessing. Yet the people said, "We will not have this Man rule over us" (Luke 19:14). If this happened to Jesus, we can be sure it will happen to us. In other words, the more servant-like you become, the less you'll be appreciated. So if you feel that no one cares about you, no one thinks of you, no one acknowledges what you're doing, you're in good company. They didn't acknowledge Jesus, either.

Zechariah 11:17 (a)
Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! . . .

Antichrist is called an idol shepherd because we are told in 2 Thessalonians 2 that he will set up an idol of himself in the temple and demand to be worshiped.

Zechariah 11:17 (b)
. . . the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.

At some point after antichrist demands to be worshiped, he'll be blinded and paralyzed in an assassination attempt.

> And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshiped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshiped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? . . .
>
> Revelation 13:3, 4 (a)

Evidently, it will appear as though antichrist comes back from the dead after he is assassinated. Therefore, thinking he's supernatural, many will worship him.



12 Zechariah 12:1

The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.

The spirit of man is formed within man as man is conceived and develops in the womb. This would refute both the Mormon belief that spirits

are "waiting" to be brought into the world and the abortionist's contention that unborn babies are nothing more than bones and tissue.

Zechariah 12:2, 3
Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.

Those who try to come against Jerusalem will be destroyed. Therefore, the people of the world will be perplexed as they ponder what to do about the problem of Jerusalem. We are seeing this fulfilled to a certain degree even in our day.

Zechariah 12:4
In that day, saith the LORD, I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness: and I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah, and will smite every horse of the people with blindness.

As the armies of the world converge, the Lord says there will be tremendous confusion as He strikes horses and riders with madness and blindness.

Zechariah 12:5
And the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the LORD of hosts their God.

Even the outlying regions of Jerusalem recognize that it is a city uniquely chosen and blessed by God.

Zechariah 12:6, 7

In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem. The LORD also shall save the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem do not magnify themselves against Judah.

The Lord is going to give the outlying regions of Judah victory first lest they feel left out or of less value.

Zechariah 12:8
In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them.

The weakest of the Israeli soldiers will be like David, quite an impressive soldier who leapt over walls and took on giants.

Zechariah 12:9, 10 (a)
And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced . . .

John knew about the piercing of Jesus and is the only Gospel writer to describe this event . . .

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they

might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.

John 19:30–34

Why was Jesus pierced as He hung on the Cross of Calvary? Following are six reasons which I believe are significant for you and me . . .

First, Jesus was pierced to fulfill prophecy. When a man was hung on a cross, the nails through his wrists would cause such excruciating pain that the pectoral muscles would be paralyzed and breathing would stop. The only way he could stay alive was to stand upon the nail in his feet, thereby forcing air into his lungs before relieving the weight on his feet, only to repeat the process for each breath. When the Romans wanted to kill a man, they would break the legs, thus ending the victim's life through suffocation. But when they came to break the legs of Jesus, He was already dead. So, to ensure His death, a soldier thrust a spear into His side—exactly as prophesied five hundred years earlier by Zechariah.

Not only was this a fulfillment of prophecy, but it was in keeping with typology. Concerning the Passover lamb—a picture of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ—Exodus 12 and Numbers 6 forbade the breaking of its bones.

Third, the piercing of Jesus' side revealed His heart emotionally. That is, the blood and water that poured forth were indicative of coronary thrombosis —a broken heart. Being spat at, mocked, cursed, and yet dying for the very people who were doing this, Jesus' own heart was breaking—not for Himself but for those who would find themselves in hell for their refusal to accept the work He was accomplishing on their behalf at that very moment.

Fourth, the piercing of Jesus' side shows us the sacraments' priority. The water that flowed speaks of baptism; the blood, of Communion. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," Jesus declared. Paul would say that many in the church at Corinth were weak and sickly—even to the point of death—because they didn't give worth to the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 11:29, 30).

Fifth, the piercing of Jesus' side shows us a great mystery. Blood and water are the elements of birth. As Jesus hung on the Cross, the church was born. Just as Adam's bride was formed from Adam's side (Genesis 2:21, 22), when the spear entered the side of the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), the bride of Christ was born.

Finally, the piercing of Jesus' side speaks of our salvation in totality. Salvation has two aspects: regeneration and sanctification. The penalty of sin has been removed through the blood of Jesus Christ. But the power of sin that hounds us daily is overcome by the power of the Spirit, pictured as water throughout the Word.

> For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. . . .
>
> 1 John 5:4–6 (a)

The blood cleanses us from the penalty of sin. And the water, a type of the Spirit, gives us power over sin. Both are necessary. And both are freely available because of the piercing proof of Jesus' love on the Cross.

> **Zechariah 12:10 (b), 11**
> **. . . and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon.**

As the battle of Armageddon unfolds and it looks like Jerusalem won't survive, Jesus will come back. Centuries earlier, when King Josiah, a beloved king in Judah, died in the valley of Megiddo, there was great mourning in the land (2 Chronicles 35:24, 25).

> **Zechariah 12:12–14**

And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; All the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.

The house of David speaks of the kings. The house of Nathan speaks of the prophets. The house of Levi speaks of the priests. Kings, prophets, priests, and people—every part of Israeli society will mourn as they realize that they were the ones who pierced the very One who had come to save them.



13 **Zechariah 13:1**

In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.

The fountain that would cleanse Israel from her sin began flowing when a soldier thrust a spear into Jesus' side as He hung on the Cross of Calvary.

Zechariah 13:2, 3

And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land. And it shall come to pass, that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the LORD: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth.

When Israel at last recognizes her Messiah, neither idolatry nor false prophecy—two sins that plagued her continually—will be tolerated.

Zechariah 13:4, 5
And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive: But he shall say, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth.

False spirituality will be replaced by integrity and humility.

Zechariah 13:6
And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall an swer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.

I am amazed that Jesus would call Judas "friend" even as Judas betrayed Him (Matthew 26:50). I am more amazed that He would call those who crucified Him friends. But I am most amazed that He would call me His friend (John 15:15). Satan will tell you the Lord is disgusted with you. But that's a lie, for if you desire to love Him, to serve Him, to walk with Him, even though you might stumble and struggle, the Lord calls you His friend.

Zechariah 13:7 (a)
Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts . . .

Who is the "fellow," the equal of the Lord of hosts? The Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.



For topical study of Zechariah 13:7, see "Smitten Shepherd . . . Scattered Sheep" below.

Zechariah 13:7 (b)–9
. . . smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones. And it shall come to pass,

that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.

The Lord says, "Because My people wouldn't acknowledge Me, because they wouldn't take My hand of friendship, I will turn My hand on them. Two-thirds will die." In the Tribulation period, antichrist and the nations of the world will turn against the Jews. As a result, two-thirds of them will die.

I remember when my daughter, Mary Elizabeth, was about two years old. About to cross a busy intersection with her, I said, "Mary, hold Daddy's hand."

"No," she said.

"Mary, we can't cross the street unless you hold my hand," I said.

"No," she insisted.

So, instead of holding my hand, she felt my hand—spanking her. Why? Because I love her.

She cried. And then she held my hand.

That's what the Lord will do to His people. "I came offering the kingdom to you," He said. "But you refused. I'm not giving up on you, however. I'm going to refine you as silver and gold are refined in the fire of tribulation. It will be costly and difficult for you, but in that day, those who remain will say, 'The Lord is my God.' And they'll be brought into the fullness of the kingdom."

SMITTEN SHEPHERD . . . SCATTERED SHEEP

A Topical Study of ZECHARIAH 13:7

In 1969, when Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young sang, "We've got to get back to the garden," they struck a chord with many in our generation. Initially, it seems the baby-boom generation tried to get back to the garden through convocation. That is, they gathered together—first at Woodstock. Bob Dylan, Judy Collins, Led Zeppelin, and others joined in what was supposed to be a festival of garden-like peace. Songs were sung; love was shared. It seemed to go so well that our generation tried it again at Altamont. But this time, the vibe wasn't as good. People were high on LSD. Fights broke out. And by the time Altamont was over, six people had died.

So, after convocation, we tried to get back to the garden through inspiration. In the middle and late sixties, everyone put a flower in their hair and flocked to San Francisco—only to find that, by the early seventies, the same people who were once wearing loves beads and carrying peace signs were now wearing brass knuckles and carrying switchblades as Haight-Ashbury became one of the great crime centers of the West Coast.

When inspiration failed, people tried simplification. There was a move to get out of the city and into the country—to get back to the garden through a simpler lifestyle. The problem is, as many of us discovered, gardens have weeds. And it took a long time to weed the garden, split the wood, and carry the water. So people decided rural living wasn't for them as the hippies gave way to yuppies.

The yuppies introduced gentrification—moving back to the city to reclaim run-down areas. But the longing for the garden remained. Why? I suggest it's because the garden was our first home . . .

> *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden;*

and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:7–9

After God created man, He placed him where He knew man would be happiest—in a garden. No wonder, then, that there is an intrinsic desire to live more simply, to be at peace with nature in a garden. It's the way we're made. Genesis goes on to tell us that man walked with God in the cool of the day, just enjoying talking to his Creator. Things were right. But, because God desired for man to have a loving relationship with Him, He had to give man the opportunity to rebel against Him. Love must have a choice if it is to be true love. So in the garden, God planted the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, If they ate of the fruit of this tree, it would be a sign to God that they chose to rebel against Him. Adam and Eve chose to eat of the fruit—and the results, of course, were tragic . . .

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

Genesis 3:22–24

Once man rebelled against God, he was driven out of the garden—the place where he was most content to be, the place where he was meant to be. "Lest man eat of the tree of life and live forever in his sinful, fallen state, I'm going to drive him out of the garden," God said. And in the gate of the garden, God stationed a cherubim with a flaming sword to keep man out of the garden, away from the tree of life.

From that point on, man has been longing, craving, desiring to get back to the garden, where he might walk with God in the cool of the day once again

and live the way he was meant to. But how can he? There's a sword preventing him from going back to Eden.

Thousands of years after that event, the people of God living in the land of Israel heard a prophet named Zechariah say, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts."

What sword was Zechariah speaking of? I suggest it was the very sword that blocked the entrance to the Garden of Eden, the very sword that kept man out of where he desired to be. I suggest that the sword that keeps people out of the garden is the sword that was buried in the side of Jesus Christ. The sword that would keep me out of the place of fellowship, peace, tranquility, and eternal life was buried in His side as He hung on the Cross for my sin.

Five hundred years after Zechariah gave this prophecy, we see Jesus. Hours away from His death on the Cross, He left the Upper Room and crossed the small Kidron Valley on His way to a garden called Gethsemane.

> *And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.*
>
> Matthew 26:30, 31

Quoting Zechariah, Jesus said, "Instead of causing My followers to rejoice, My absorbing the sword will cause them to scatter because they will be offended, because they won't like what's happening."

Jesus brought offense not infrequently in His ministry. When He said that unless people ate of His body and drank of His blood, they could have no part of Him, John said many were offended in Him and followed Him no more (6:53–66). Matthew tells us people were offended in His hometown, asking, "Isn't this Joseph the carpenter's son? What's the big deal?" (13:55–57). Even John the Baptist was evidently offended when He asked if Jesus was the One he should be looking for (Matthew 11:2–6).

This shouldn't be that surprising. You see, we think of the Cross as something that moves us emotionally and inspires us spiritually, a symbol of something exceedingly precious. But in Jesus' day, wearing a gold cross

around one's neck would be similar today to wearing a gold hypodermic needle, symbolizing death by lethal injection.

> *But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 1:23, 24

The Greek word translated "stumblingblock" is *skandalon.* In other words, the idea of Christ crucified was scandalous, offensive. Therefore, because they were scandalized, Jesus said people would scatter.

Maybe you are in a similar place. Maybe you have scattered or wandered from the Lord because you didn't understand what He was doing. Maybe you have said, "What do You mean, Lord? I prayed about this and it didn't come to pass. I trusted You for that and it didn't happen. I was expecting the other and it fell through. Why isn't my father healed? Why isn't my child saved? Why hasn't the job opened up?"

Even Jesus' closest followers couldn't understand what He was doing. So they scattered. Have we? When we wonder where He's coming from, what He's saying, or what He's doing, we need only to remember that this same Jesus absorbed the sword of judgment for us. Whenever I doubt His love, question His words, or wonder at His ways, it always gets back to Zechariah 13. If I realize that He's the only One who would die for a sinner like me, even though I might not understand what He's doing, I can trust Him.

> *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*
>
> Romans 5:8

Jesus absorbed the sword of judgment. He opened the way for us not only to walk with Him in the garden presently but to live eternally. He loves you more than you can ever understand. Therefore, trust Him. The One who absorbed the sword will only do what's best for you in everything that comes your way.

14

Zechariah 14:1 (a)
Behold, the day of the LORD cometh . . .

The day of the Lord is the time when the Lord intervenes directly, physically, obviously in human history. In Hebrew culture, the day begins with the setting rather than with the rising of the sun. Therefore, although the day of the Lord begins in the darkness of the Tribulation, it ends in the glorious brightness of Jesus' Second Coming.

Zechariah 14:1 (b), 2
. . . and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

The day of the Lord begins with hardship and brutality as the nations of the world come against Israel. Specifically, this speaks of the invasion of the Middle East by antichrist, the leader of a united Europe, when he brings his armies into Israel to consolidate his control of the world.

Zechariah 14:3
Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.

As the nations converge around Jerusalem, there is a series of wars, culminating in the valley of Megiddo, or Armageddon. As the nations converge in an attempt to annihilate Israel, the Lord will return and physically fight for Israel, the people He cares about so deeply.

Zechariah 14:4 (a)
And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east . . .

When the nations are ready to annihilate Israel and destroy Jerusalem, Jesus will come and His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, the same mountain from which He ascended (Acts 1:11, 12).

Zechariah 14:4 (b)
. . . and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.

When Jesus comes back, there's going to be a cataclysmic event, for, as He sets His scarred feet upon the Mount of Olives, it will split in two.

Years ago, when Sheraton Hotel Corporation was looking at the Mount of Olives as a potential site, an environmental impact study showed that, due to a major fault running right through the Mount of Olives, they could not continue construction. In other words geologists "discovered" what Scripture had known for 2,500 years.

Zechariah 14:5
And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.

When the Mount of Olives splits, it will actually provide a way of escape for the people of Jerusalem. In earlier times, the Lord parted the Red Sea in order that His people could escape to safety. In the last days, He'll part not a sea but a mountain for His people to escape from the armies surrounding them.

Zechariah 14:6, 7
And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.

When Jesus comes back, when His kingdom is established, not only will there be changes on earth but in the heavens, as well.

Zechariah 14:8 (a)
And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem . . .

In the impact study done, not only was a fault discovered in the Mount of Olives that would cause a split from east to west, but seismologists also said a massive amount of water would break through if the quake were severe enough. Ezekiel speaks of the same river having its beginning in the temple area (47:1).

Zechariah 14:8 (b), 9
. . . half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be. And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one.

Half of the river flowing from the Mount of Olives will flow toward the Dead Sea. The other half will flow toward the Mediterranean.

The reason the Dead Sea is presently so deadly, the reason it cannot support life of any kind is because, although seven million tons of water gush into it every day, there is no outlet. And, because of that, the water is stagnant. In our Christian experience, along with input there must be outflow. If we're just taking in the Word, we'll become like the Dead Sea unless we share it with others.

When Jesus comes back, the Dead Sea will undergo a change. It will be flooded with a new source of water that will flow into it. Ezekiel 47 says that wherever this new river flows, there will be healing. That's always the way it is. Wherever the work of the Spirit flows, things change. The water of life—the Spirit of God—always brings healing.

Zechariah 14:10
All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up, and inhabited in her place,

from Benjamin's gate unto the place of the first gate, unto the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananeel unto the king's wine-presses.

When Jesus comes back, the entire city of Jerusalem will be elevated.

Zechariah 14:11
And men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited.

Today, Jerusalem is a thorny problem politically. But when Jesus comes back, it will be a place of peace and safety.

Zechariah 14:12
And this shall be the plague wherewith the LORD will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem; Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth.

The flesh of those who come against Israel will melt. Their eyes will run down their sockets. Their tongues will curl up. I find it more than coincidental that scientists tell us this is exactly what would happen physiologically if people were exposed to massive amounts of radiation.

Zechariah 14:13
And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great tumult from the LORD shall be among them; and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour, and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbour.

As the plague is unleashed, there will be panic in the armies surrounding Jerusalem.

Zechariah 14:14

And Judah also shall fight at Jerusalem; and the wealth of all the heathen round about shall be gathered together, gold, and silver, and apparel, in great abundance.

When the Jews left Egypt, they were loaded down with treasures. So too, in this time, they will be loaded with the wealth of the nations that came to destroy her.

Zechariah 14:15
And so shall be the plague of the horse, of the mule, of the camel, and of the ass, and of all the beasts that shall be in these tents, as this plague.

This plague—be it atomic or supernatural—will affect every living thing.

Zechariah 14:16
And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.

After the battle of Armageddon, in the Kingdom Age, there will be glorious times of celebration and worship for the nations who survive the Tribulation.

Zechariah 14:17
And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.

The nations who don't have time to worship will experience drought. People today who don't make time to worship will experience a dryness in their souls.

Zechariah 14:18, 19

And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

With only scant rainfall at best, the Egyptians might have been able to do without rain. But they, of all nations, would dread a return of the plagues (Exodus 6—12).



***For topical study of Zechariah 14:16–19 entitled "Why Worship?" turn to page* 915.**

Zechariah 14:20, 21
In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts.

When Jesus comes back to rule and reign, no longer will there be a division between secular and spiritual. No longer will there be separation and fragmentation. Instead, there will be wholeness. At last, there will be holiness. What a day that will be!



***For topical study of Zechariah 14:20, 21 entitled "Holiness Unto the Lord," turn to page* 917.**

WHY WORSHIP?
A Topical Study of ZECHARIAH 14:16–19

The text before us declares that when Jesus comes back, when His kingdom is established, the Feast of Tabernacles will once again be celebrated every year. First seen in Leviticus 23, the Feast of Tabernacles was to take place in the seventh month—equivalent to our October. God declared that His people were to come together and to celebrate for seven days as they lived in lean-tos constructed of boughs and branches. In other words, the entire nation was to have a gigantic camp-out. When the children asked the meaning of this, their fathers would tell them the story of how God brought their forefathers out of Egypt and into the Land of Promise, how He provided for them and protected them along the way.

As Jesus establishes His kingdom, this feast will be reinstated. All of the people who make it through the Tribulation will be ordered by the Lord to come to Jerusalem yearly to celebrate. Any of the nations who don't want to expend the energy to come will experience drought and plague. In other words, there will be drought and difficulty for those who think they don't need to gather to worship corporately.

Prophetically, that's what will happen when Jesus comes back. But I want us to consider this word as it relates to you and me very practically. It seems as though in the day in which we live people increasingly say, "I don't need to go to church. I'm doing fine without attending Bible study. There's no reason for me to take Communion regularly. I talk to God all the time as I drive to work. Therefore, I don't need to meet with God's people." But, just as Zechariah prophesied, people who think they don't need their sisters and brothers will inevitably experience drought within their hearts, plagues and problems in their lives.

"Don't forsake assembling together," the writer to the Hebrews warns, "especially as you see the end drawing near" (see Hebrews 10:25). Watching the news and realizing the events we see are signs of the end times should cause us to congregate together to worship the King more than ever.

Worship Delights the Father

Something unique happens when we get together to worship the Lord. We experience an outpouring of His Spirit in a dimension unlike that of any other time or place. “O, magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt His name together,” David declared (Psalm 34:3). Corporate worship brings an understanding and perception of the Lord like nothing else I know. Thus, worship is essential for our own growth and understanding—but also because it delights the Father.

This should not be surprising. After all, as parents we take great delight in seeing our own kids enjoying one another. In the same way, our heavenly Father loves to see His kids hanging out together. That’s why David declared, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Psalm 133:1).

Worship Dethrones the Flesh

When I worship the King with the congregation of God's people, the Lord inhabits the throne in my heart to a much greater degree. As the temple was dedicated, we read in 2 Chronicles 5:13 that when the people began to play their horns and sing their songs, they made one sound as they worshiped the Lord. Something was happening. Diverse people with a wide range of personalities were miraculously unified. No longer were they a bunch of individuals. Now they were merged into one. The flesh was dethroned.

When I bow my knee and lift my hands in praise with my brothers and sisters, something wonderful happens. I lose my identity. I become one with them in a wonderful, miraculous mystery. How tired I am of myself—of my problems and petty concerns. How I need to come into a place where I can lose myself in the identity of the body of Christ.

Worship Develops the Body

Even in the body of Christ, we can find divisions creeping in. We can differ in philosophy and clash in personality. But when we meet together to worship the King corporately, all of those divisions miraculously, mysteriously, and beautifully dissipate. And, as a result, the body is free to minister and to serve in unity.

Worship Defeats the Enemy

As King Jehoshaphat prepared to do battle, the Spirit of the Lord came upon a Levite named Jahaziel, who said, "Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chronicles 20:15). Hearing this, Jehoshaphat was moved to send forth not the army, but a choir singing, "Praise the Lord for His mercy endures forever." Hearing this, the enemy forces were so confused that they began to unsheathe their swords and destroy one another (2 Chronicles 20:23, 24).

The enemy is still distracted and defeated in the place of praise because the sound of praise to him is as irritating as a dentist's drill. Satan flees when he hears praise ascending. Praise is powerful. That's why worship is vital.

Worship Defines Priority

There is a tendency today to emphasize worship—but in many cases, it's worship for worship's sake. Therefore, let us be careful that we never fall into the subtle trap of worshiping worship. When the wise men brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus, they didn't come to get something from Him. They weren't hoping to get victory over the flesh, defeat the enemy, or develop unity. Nor were they worshiping Him because of what He had done for them, for at that point, He had done nothing for them. They came to worship Him for one reason: simply because He was worthy. The more I learn of Jesus, the more I have no choice but to worship Him because He is so abundantly worthy.

Five hundred years after Zechariah's prophecy was given, Jesus Himself went to the Feast of Tabernacles. In John 7, we read that on the eighth day, the great day of the feast, something interesting happened. You see, every day of the feast, the priests would take pitchers to the pool of Siloam outside of the city and fill them with water. Then they would reenter the city and empty the pitchers as an illustration of God's provision of water for them during their wilderness wandering. But on the final day of the Feast, although the priests would proceed to the pool of Siloam, or literally, "Sent One," they would come back with empty pitchers, signifying that they were still waiting for Messiah, the "Sent One" to come. As the priests returned with their empty pitchers, this Scripture would be read:

> *For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring:*
>
> Isaiah 44:3

Then the priest would ask for silence as the people prayed for Messiah to come.

But on the eighth day of this particular feast, a Man's voice could be heard, crying out from the crowd of perhaps one million, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. And out of his innermost being shall gush forth torrents of living water" (see John 7:37, 38). And, although the crowd

in attendance that day would, by and large, reject His invitation, it still stands today. Therefore, come to Jesus and drink deeply. *He* is our passion and priority—the only One who can satisfy us completely. Because He is truly worthy of our worship both now and eternally, let us be those who worship Him in unity.

HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD

A Topical Study of Zechariah 14:20, 21

As we come to the end of Zechariah's prophecy, we are reminded that when Jesus comes, things will be right at last for in that day, "Holiness to the Lord" will be engraved on the bells of the horses. In other words, in that day, bumper stickers won't be cute, clever, or carnal. They will read: Holiness to the Lord.

The average person equates holiness with heaviness, with a piety that causes severity. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. Sin erodes a person, destroys a family, and brings ruin physically and financially, relationally and vocationally. Holiness, on the other hand, means "wholeness" and restores man to what he was meant to be. Therefore, when the Father says, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44), I believe He does so with a smile on His face and a sparkle in His eye. He's not saying, "You'd better be holy because I don't want anyone to have any fun." No, He's saying, "Holiness will bring you happiness to the greatest degree."

In the passage before us, I find it interesting that it will be horses that will carry the message of holiness. You see, horses were greatly regulated and sometimes even forbidden to God's people. In Deuteronomy 17, we read that kings were forbidden to multiply horses to themselves. In Isaiah 31, the Lord indicted His people for trusting the horses they bought from Egypt to protect them from the Assyrians. Synonymous with tanks in our day, horses were important to the defense of a nation. But to God's people, they would be detrimental because He wanted them to trust Him rather than their own military strategy. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses," David wrote, "but we will remember the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7).

When Jesus comes back to rule and reign, however, horses will be allowed. And in this, I see a wonderful lesson for us. That is, there might be something you long for presently but that the Lord is withholding because He knows it will turn your heart away from Him. However, when He is truly ruling and reigning in your life, that which you long for will be engraved with

"Holiness unto the Lord" just as the bells on the horses will be. In other words, it will assume its proper priority in your life. In that day, you shall have horses because rather than turning you from the Lord, they will actually magnify Him.

In Romans 14, Paul declares that the kingdom of God is not meat or drink externally but righteousness, peace, and joy presently. This means the Lord wants us to be holy even now. How can you walk in wholeness, in holiness practically? As Zechariah tells us, it won't be by your might nor by your power but by God's Spirit (4:6). It's not a matter of trying to be holy, but a matter of allowing the Spirit to fill you completely.

On their first visit to the East Coast, a group of Eskimos watched in amazement as motorboats with water skiers in tow skimmed across a lake. "How can those boats go so fast?" one asked.

"The man on the end of the string pushes really hard," the other answered.

All too often, we think we have to be the man on the end of the string, pushing ourselves really hard if we're going to make any progress in holiness. Paul, however, says it is God who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

When the Philistines captured the ark of the covenant, they placed it in the temple of their fish-god, Dagon. The next morning, they discovered that their god had fallen before the ark of the covenant, which represented the presence of God. So they propped their god up once again. The next morning, however, they found Dagon again prostrate before the ark of the covenant—but this time his head and his hands had fallen off. "Either Dagon has to go or the ark must be returned," they said. So the ark was sent back to Israel (1 Samuel 5).

The principle is a powerful one for you and me. That is, how do I deal with the "Dagons" in my life? How do I deal with the sin and carnality that prevent me from being holy? Not by trying to be more ethical, more moral, or more spiritual, but by bringing in the presence of God. When the ark comes in, Dagon falls. When the presence of God fills my heart, sin topples. The key is not to do battle against the darkness. The key is simply to turn on the light.

Therefore, every time you hear a bell—be it a doorbell, a telephone, a buzzer, or an alarm clock, I encourage you to think of the bells on the horses in this passage. Think, "Holiness to the Lord." Pray, "Lord allow me to walk in wholeness presently even as I will in heaven eternally"—and listen for the sound of Dagon toppling in defeat.



MALACHI

Background to Malachi

Written in about 400 B.C., the Book of Malachi brings down the curtain on the Old Testament. And as the curtain comes down, the voice of God rings out. Of the fifty-five verses that comprise this book, forty-seven are spoken by God directly. That's a higher percentage than that of any other book in the Bible. Truly, God's voice penetrates and resounds through the book before us.

Malachi is the only prophet to end his prophecy with a warning. Other prophets ended on a note of hope. But in Malachi, the Old Testament closes with a warning because it's setting the stage for the blessing, the redemptive work of Christ Jesus as seen in the first book of the New Testament—the Gospel of Matthew.

It had been a hundred years since Zechariah and Haggai had been on the scene encouraging the people of Judah to finish the work of reconstructing the temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Zechariah and Haggai encouraged the people to return to work—and the people responded. The temple was rebuilt; the walls were restored. Yet success had its own dangers because, after the temple was rebuilt and the walls restored, the people began to kick back a bit. And as they did, their cutting edge was lost. They began to lose their fire and passion. Oh, they weren't committing big, blatant sins. But a mediocrity had crept into them. So the Lord sent Malachi to speak to His people concerning the lukewarm state of their hearts.



MALACHI

1

Malachi 1:1
The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

As with Joel, we don't know very much about Malachi personally. But we do know his name means "Messenger" and, in a sense, that is all we need to know for it's not the messenger but the message that matters. It's the message that makes the difference.

If you heard a knock on your door and opened it to find a FedEx driver standing there with an envelope in his hand addressed to you, you wouldn't ask him about his ancestors, his favorite foods, or his political leanings. Your interests would lie with the message he carried for you. The enemy, however, comes to each of us and whispers, "Who do you think you are, witnessing? Who do you think you are to be teaching or serving?" The enemy's tactic is to condemn us constantly in an effort to neutralize us (Revelation 12:10). But we must realize that it's the message with which we've been entrusted that matters. Therefore, be faithful in what the Lord has given you to do. Pass on what He's entrusted to you. Don't get sucked into the lie that, because you're not spiritual enough, you can't do or say anything on behalf of the Lord.

Malachi 1:2, 3
I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.

Jacob and Esau were twin brothers yet Paul tells us that before either one of them had opportunity to do anything good or evil, God sovereignly chose Jacob to be part of His family. Many people have a problem with this passage. I have a problem with it, too. My problem, however, is not that the Lord hated Esau but that He loved Jacob. And even harder for me to

understand is the fact that He loved and chose me. The One who knows me best loves me most. Amazing!

Malachi 1:4
Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever.

Jacob went on to have twelve sons who became the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Esau, his twin brother, left the Promised Land, headed southeast into a desert region called Edom and founded a country called Edom—a nation that constantly waged war against the people of God.

Malachi 1:5
And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, The LORD will be magnified from the border of Israel.

"When did You love us?" the people had accusingly asked the Lord in verse 2. Here, He says, "Look over the border of Israel and see that while you are blessed, the land of Edom is impoverished."

When depression knocks, instead of answering the door, I believe we simply need to stand on our tiptoes and look around at our world, our neighbors, our colleagues, and our own society to see that people are impoverished and hurting, depressed and enslaved by their own carnal desires. We have been blessed, gang. Yes, we have struggles and trials—but we are a people of destiny. God has a purpose and a plan for us. He has forgiven us. He has liberated us. He's blessed us. Therefore, don't hang your head and say, "When has God loved me?" Instead, stand on your tiptoes. As you contrast your situation with that of those around you, you'll say, "Lord, thank You that I'm part of Your family."

For topical study of Malachi 1:1–5 entitled "A Marvelous Mystery," turn to page **922.**

Malachi 1:6
A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?

"In what way have we defiled Your name?" the priests arrogantly ask God—and their question itself is justification of the charge just as it will be when people ask Jesus, "What do You mean You never knew us?" in the last days (Matthew 7).

Malachi 1:7, 8
Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts.

Contrary to the requirements of the Law, the people were sacrificing bulls and lambs and rams that were diseased and blind. In other words, they were bringing God their leftovers. God, however, desires the firstfruits (Exodus 23:19). Don't bring God what's left over of your time or finances, energy or ability. Bring Him the best and watch Him bless the rest.

Malachi 1:9, 10
And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith the LORD of hosts. Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.

"Shut the doors of the temple," the Lord says. "Stop the hypocrisy altogether."

Malachi 1:11
For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.

To the Jews who prided themselves in their religiosity and exclusivity, the Lord says, "I will step out of the boundaries of your religious activity and do something among the Gentiles. My name will be praised from the time the sun rises until it goes down every day." In other words, all of the nations of the world would have in them pockets of true believers so that wherever the sun is shining on the planet, there are people who love the Lord and call upon His name.

Malachi 1:12, 13
But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the LORD is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible. Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the LORD of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the LORD.

"Concerning His Table, the Lord said, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). But, like the people in Malachi's day, do we tire of it?

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning

the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

1 Corinthians 11:26–30

Many people are spiritually anemic and perhaps even physically weak because they haven't given worth to the Lord's Table. Communion is central to the life of the body—both corporately and personally. It's more than just a little piece of bread and cup of juice. It is a mystery and a miracle to those who give it worth.

Malachi 1:14
But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the LORD a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the LORD of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.

The people weren't being indicted for their lack. They were being indicted for their failure to give back to the Lord the best of what He had already given them. In any area of our walk, the Lord only asks of us that which He has already provided. Jesus didn't condemn the widow for giving only two mites. He commended her as He did no other for giving what she had (Mark 12:42–44).

A MARVELOUS MYSTERY

A Topical Study of MALACHI 1:1–5

The passage before us is one that should bring comfort to the people of God. Instead, it has often caused confusion among the people of God. It should cause a glorious warming of our hearts. Instead, it often causes troubling to our heads. It should be a delight to the believer. Instead, it often results in distress for the believer for the passage before us deals with the controversial doctrine of divine election.

The background of this passage is that the people of God were doubting whether the Lord really loved them. "I have loved you," He declared—to which the people cynically responded, "When have You loved us?" (verse 2).

Here, in this passage, the Lord says, "Look just beyond your borders to the land of Edom." Edom was a neighboring country to the southeast of Israel. Although Edom was significant historically, she was impoverished financially and doomed eternally. "Look to Edom," the Lord says, "and you will see how I have loved you. I have made you significant historically and I have a plan for you eternally. Contrast that with your brothers beyond your border who are troubled and distressed."

The Edomites were indeed the brothers of Israel, for they shared a common ancestry. You see, approximately 1,600 years previously, God had tugged on the heart of a man named Abraham. Abraham lived in the Chaldees, or present-day Iraq. Although he worshiped the moon, as did the rest of the people in his city of Ur, God said to him, "Leave your land and I will make of you a great nation" (Genesis 12:2). The fulfillment of this promise began when, at ninety years of age, Abraham's wife, Sarah, miraculously gave birth to a son named Isaac. When Isaac's wife, Rebekah, became pregnant and inquired of the Lord concerning the rumbling in her womb, the Lord told her she would give birth to two nations and that the elder of her sons would serve the younger (Genesis 25:23). This was very unusual, for in that culture, the older brother was the recipient of the

birthright and blessing—both spiritual and material blessings and leadership. Here, however, there would be a reversal.

> *And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.*
>
> Romans 9:10–16

Paul says that God elected and selected, blessed and brought forth the descendants of Jacob not because of anything Jacob had done—for it was before they were even born that God chose Jacob and hated Esau. And therein lies the problem. People frequently say, "That's not fair." But Ephesians 1:4 says the same thing is true of us. God chose us before the foundation of the world. If you are a believer it is not because you willed it or earned it but simply because God desired it.

> *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*
>
> Romans 8:29, 30

Who God foreknew, He predestined. Who He predestined, He called, or elected. Who He elected, He justified. Who He justified, He glorified. It's all based on His knowledge. Because love is not love without choice, God gives people the choice to choose Him. He foreknows those who will and chooses

them. He elects us based upon His foreknowledge—and yet He leaves the choice with us. Those who don't want to know the Lord won't.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*
>
> John 3:16

> *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*
>
> John 6:37

> *. . . And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*
>
> Revelation 22:17 (b)

God invites everyone, yet He already knows those who will accept His invitation.

> *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you . . .*
>
> John 15:16 (a)

> *There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.*
>
> Romans 3:11

The Lord chose us that we might choose Him. If I had all knowledge, I would buy a lottery ticket because it wouldn't be gambling. I would select the winning numbers with certainty. Therefore, it would be a wise investment. So too, the fact that God, who knows everything, chose you means you are a wise investment in His estimation. Knowing this does three things for me . . .

Election makes me less and less of a worrier. I know the Lord is going to see me through. I know I'm going to live with Him in eternity. Therefore, I don't have to sweat out my salvation presently. "Being confident of this very

thing," Paul declared, "that He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

Election makes me more and more of a worshiper. When I realize that I am saved not by anything I do or don't do but solely because God sovereignly chose me, I have no other choice than to fall on my knees and say, "Thank You, Lord."

Election makes me a little bit wiser as a worker. It is the wise servant who prays, "Lord guide me to those You have already elected. Guide me to the place where You have already put it in someone's heart to turn to You."

God never said to Rebekah when she was carrying her twins, "I love one and hate the other." Nor did He say this when they were grown men. It wasn't until centuries passed that God revealed this through the prophet Malachi and explained it through the apostle Paul. Did God choose correctly? He always does (Revelation 16:7). Esau would sell his birthright for a pot of stew, marry heathen wives, and father a people who would wage war against Israel. Jacob, on the other hand, although he was tricky indeed, had a heart for God.

Never doubt the love of God, gang. Like Jacob, no matter how tricky you've been in the past or how often you stumble even now, because He chose you to choose Him, just as He did with Jacob, He'll see you through.



2 Malachi 2:1
And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you.

It was the priests who were leading the people astray. Had they honored the Lord in their sacrifice and worship, the people would have followed.

Malachi 2:2–6
If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart. Behold, I will corrupt

your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it. And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.

"Who is on the Lord's side?" Moses said as God's people worshiped the golden calf (Exodus 32:26). It was in answering this call that the tribe of Levi was uniquely set apart as priests. Here, their zeal is contrasted with the tepid commitment of the priests in Malachi's day.

Malachi 2:7–9
For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.

The call of a priest was to stand before God on behalf of the people and to stand before the people on behalf of God. These priests, however, were so caught up with religion that they weren't providing a true representation of God's Law.

In Acts 20, Paul told the elders to feed the flock of God. Religious activity is not what ministers are called to do. Bazaars and board meetings are not the calling of true ministry. In the early church, even service was delegated to others in order to free the elders to devote themselves to prayer and the study of the Word (Acts 6).

Malachi 2:10, 11

Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers? Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god.

What is the holy institution the Lord loves? I believe this speaks of the holy institution of marriage. The first miracle Jesus ever did was at a wedding (John 2). In so doing, I believe He was putting His stamp of approval not only on the institution of marriage but on the marriage ceremony itself.

Malachi 2:12
The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the LORD of hosts.

The man who was unequally yoked with a heathen woman, who violated the Word of God concerning marriage was to be cut off from the tents of Jacob, from the blessings of God.

Malachi 2:13, 14
And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand. Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.

In Malachi's day, Jewish men were divorcing their wives to marry heathen women. "This ought not to be," God said. "I will not honor their sacrifices even if they come with tears to the altar." Peter would say virtually the same thing when he told New Testament husbands to honor their wives lest their prayers be hindered (1 Peter 3:7).

Marriage is not based upon emotion. It's based upon covenant, or commitment. When you get married, you vow to spend the rest of your life together—for better or worse, in good times and bad, through success and setback, in happiness and hardship—regardless of how you feel at any given period.

Malachi 2:15
And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.

God delights in godly children. In divorce, however, it's the kids who end up paying the price.

Malachi 2:16 (a)
For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away . . .

God hates neither the person who's been divorced nor the one who has divorced. He does, however, hate divorce.

Malachi 2:16 (b)
. . . for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

The Hebrew word translated "violence" can either mean "violence" or "bitterness." Divorce always results in one if not both of these emotions. That's why God hates it and why it must be avoided at *all* costs.

Malachi 2:17
Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?

The priests were distorting God's Word by saying that God loves those who do evil. While God does indeed love sinners (Romans 5:8), He doesn't commend or approve of evil. The same lie was hurled at the apostle Paul when his enemies distorted his teaching concerning grace and forgiveness to say that he was encouraging sin. There are always those who want to distort God's Word and find a single verse or phrase that gives them license to justify wrong behavior or thinking. That's why I'm so committed to going through the entire Bible. That way, we're not just taking a phrase or a sentence, but getting the full counsel of God's Word.



3 Malachi, or "Messenger," carried a rather severe message as he told the people of God they had grown lukewarm in their love toward God. Here in chapter 3, the Lord gives a promise that He will rectify that situation.

Malachi 3:1 (a)
Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me . . .

The "messenger of the covenant" is a reference to Jesus for He is the Messenger of the new covenant of grace. "You've been distorting the Word," God says, "but I'm going to send the Word made flesh to straighten out the situation."

Malachi 3:1 (b)
. . . and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

Jesus would indeed "suddenly come to His temple." When He was brought into the temple to be dedicated, only two people recognized that the Babe being dedicated that day was Messiah. One was Simeon. Luke tells us he lived for the coming of this Messenger, the consolation of Israel (2:25). The other one who recognized that Jesus was Messiah was a woman named

Anna. Anna had been married for seven years when her husband died. She spent the rest of her days in the temple, giving herself to prayer and fasting. On this day, when the Lord came suddenly as a Babe into the temple, she was eighty-four years old.

Simeon and Anna tell me that whether in prosperity or adversity, the Lord is seen by those who watch for Him. Therefore, I encourage you to look for the Lord's appearance as you go through your day. Most likely, He won't come in the way you expect. But, like Simeon and Anna, with eyes of faith you'll recognize His appearance.

Malachi 3:2–5
But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years. And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.

When Jesus comes, He will judge and correct, convict and adjust. Things would not continue on indefinitely as the people mistakenly thought at the end of chapter 2. How many years would it be from the time Malachi gave his prophecy until the time of Jesus? Four hundred years. So often, we get impatient after four years, four months, or four days. The Lord's not in a hurry like we are. Why? The next verse tells us . . .

Malachi 3:6
For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

"I'm consistent," the Lord declares. Never mistake God's patience for approval or impotence. Everything is going according to His timing.

Malachi 3:7
Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?

How would the people return? In this case, it would be through giving. Why? Giving is not God's way of raising money. It's His way of raising kids. You see, because we're sinners, each of us has the tendency to be selfish, small, greedy, and material. But God is a giver (John 3:16) and He wants His children to be like Him.

In the Bible, there are over four hundred fifty verses on faith and over five hundred fifty verses on prayer. But there are over 2,100 verses on giving. One of every ten verses in the New Testament deals with giving, money, or possessions. Of the thirty-eight parables Jesus taught, sixteen deal directly with giving, money, or possession. Why is the Lord so emphatic about this? Because Jesus said that wherever a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also (Luke 12:34). He wants us to give to Him—not because He needs our money but because He wants our heart.

Malachi 3:8, 9
Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

"How shall you return to Me?" the Lord says. "Consider this: You've been robbing Me." You see, the hearts of the people were held back to the same degree their tithes and offerings were.

The word *tithe* simply means "tenth." The first ten percent of every dollar I receive is the Lord's. Therefore, if I don't tithe, I'm actually robbing God. In giving my tithe, on the other hand, I'm sanctifying the remaining ninety percent. Tithing acknowledges in a very real way that every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17).

The tithe is the Lord's (Leviticus 27:30). "Legalism!" some object. "As New Testament believers, we are free from the Law." Yes, we are. But tithing began before the Law was ever given. In Genesis 14, Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek, a picture or type of Jesus Christ, well before the Law was given. In Old Testament times, tithing was actually about twenty-three percent of one's income. There was a ten percent tithe to the Levites, a ten percent tithe to the Lord directly, and a ten percent tithe every three years to the pool. In addition, one-sixtieth of all crops were to be given to the Lord.

> Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.
>
> Matthew 23:23

The scribes and Pharisees were meticulous about tithing—but the problem is they neglected the weightier matters of justice, mercy, and faith. While they were to give heed to those matters, Jesus said they were "not to leave the other undone." In other words, they were to continue tithing. Therefore, tithing is far more than simply a requirement of the Law. Not only did it precede the Law, but it was confirmed by Jesus.

Malachi 3:10 (a)
Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse . . .

The tithe is to be brought into the storehouse. That is, we are to tithe to the place where we are being shepherded and fed. The tithe should not be given randomly to this cause, that group, or the other individual. You won't find an example of that anywhere in the Word. You can do that with offerings. But the tithe needs to be consistently brought to the storehouse.

I believe the ministry of the local church has been restricted because people have been giving to all sorts of causes rather than to the church. In the Book of Acts, we see the church helping the poor, the church sending out missionaries, the church planting other outreaches. Those who were sent out from the church were submitted and accountable to the church. We see this even in Paul's ministry concerning the issue of circumcision. As seen in Acts

15, Paul didn't say, "I don't care what you guys think. I have my own ministry." No, there was a linkage and a mutual covering as the church met together to discern the Lord's mind.

In my understanding of Scripture, the tithe needs to go into the storehouse where the leadership dispenses the funds.

"But I want to control where my money goes," some say.

That's the beauty of tithing. You can't! Remember Ananias and Sapphira? The Lord is certainly capable of dealing with those who mishandle this responsibility. When we tithe, we're not supporting anyone. We're not getting credit from anyone. We're simply giving to God in humility.

Malachi 3:10 (b)
. . . that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

Throughout the Word God says, "Trust Me." But in the area of giving, He says, "Prove Me. Bring Me your tithes and offerings and see if I won't bless you in such a way that you can't even contain it."

Malachi 3:11, 12
And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.

Do you ever feel like your paycheck is just being eaten up? Through Haggai, the Lord said, "You put your money into bags with holes. Your budget isn't working because, although you're building your own houses, you've neglected My work" (1:6). Tithing makes good sense because God isn't going to be your debtor. You'll never be able to give more to Him than He'll give back to you. He'll never "owe you one."

Malachi 3:13–16

Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered. Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.

"It's a waste of time to serve the Lord," the people said. But even as they did, those who feared the Lord said otherwise—and the Lord took careful note.



***For topical study of Malachi 3:16 entitled "God's Amazing Memory," turn to page* 929.**

Malachi 3:17
And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

What is a jewel? A piece of worthless material that has withstood long periods of pressure and heat followed by a period of cutting and polishing. Jesus told of a man who sold everything he owned to buy a field not for the field itself but for the treasure he knew was buried in it (Matthew 13:44). What is the treasure? You are. You're the jewel the Lord is developing. You're the treasure He died to purchase. Even in the lukewarm environment of Malachi's day, people who called on the Lord were jewels to Him.

Malachi 3:18

Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

Those who said it was vanity to serve God (verse 14) would see the vanity of their own words when Jesus comes back for His gems, His jewels, His treasure.

GOD'S AMAZING MEMORY

A Topical Study of MALACHI 3:16

Computers cannot think logically. They depend completely on memory—but their memories are amazing. A computer can multiply two five-digit numbers in one trillionth of a second. Even though they are able to do this using memory alone, their memories can't hold a candle to the memory of our heavenly Father—for He can remember everything and anything He desires.

In Malachi 3, even as the prophet was indicting the people for their lukewarm relationship with God—a people who had doubted His love and defiled His altar, a people who had devalued His Word and distorted His truth—we read that there were those who feared God and spoke one to another of Him. We also read that the Lord recorded them in a book of remembrance.

A Book of Remembrance

According to our text, whenever people speak about the Lord, He hearkens. The Hebrew word translated "hearken," is the same word that describes the ears of a dog perking up when he hears the voice of his owner. In other words, when the Lord hears His name being talked about, His ears perk up. He tunes in and makes note.

Does God write it down so He won't forget it? No, God doesn't forget anything He desires to remember. Why, then, does He keep a book of remembrance? I suggest it's for the same reason we keep photo albums and scrapbooks. It's not so that we won't forget, but rather because we enjoy certain events in our lives so much that we want to relive them again and again. I suggest our Father is compiling a huge scrapbook of all the times we spoke about Him—and when we get to heaven, He's going to invite us to look at them with Him. And in so doing, we'll be amazed that He would care enough to record every conversation we shared about Him, every witness we gave of Him.

A Bottle of Tears

In Psalm 56, we find that there's a special component of this book of remembrance. David had been called and anointed to be king of Israel. Therefore, Saul, the present king, was out to destroy him. So David fled from the presence of Saul into the wilderness, eventually finding himself in the Philistine city of Gath. When the men of Gath saw David, they closed the gates behind him and said, "Isn't this David—the one who has killed thousands?" When David heard these rumblings, he realized he was in danger in Gath, as well. So he went to the gates of the city and feigned madness. When the king of the Philistines saw this, not wanting a crazy man on his hands, he ordered that David be let out (1 Samuel 21). It was at this time, when he felt his life was in danger both by Saul and the Philistines, that David wrote this psalm . . .

> *Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book? When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me. In God will I praise his word: in the* LORD *will I praise his word. In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.*
>
> Psalm 56:8–11

Evidently, God's book of remembrance also contains a bottle of our tears. When you weep, when you feel forsaken and forgotten, when you feel as though no one understands or cares about you, know this: the tears you cry are caught by the Lord and stored in a bottle. You see, in Old Testament times, women actually collected their tears in "tear bottles." A woman's tears were a precious possession because they spoke of times of deep joy and tragedy, the most important moments of her life. The tear bottle was normally given to the man she would marry.

The woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair probably did so by emptying her tear bottle in an act of tender devotion.

"If You knew what kind of woman this is, You wouldn't allow her to do this," Jesus' host, Simon, thought.

But Jesus said to Simon, "Don't you know that the one who is forgiven much loves much?" In other words, "What she has done is precious. With your hardheartedness and religiosity, your heart is far from Me. But in pouring out her tears, this woman is actually pouring out her heart as an act of worship to Me" (Luke 7:42–47).

Precious people, concerning the things you've been crying over, the events you're confused about, the difficulties and struggles and burdens that cause your heart to break, know this: the Lord has been collecting your tears. He might not answer all of your questions right now. He might not explain why He allowed those difficulties or tragedies presently. But He knows the day is coming when He will wipe away every tear, when your joy will obliterate all sorrow (Revelation 21:4).

I wonder if sometimes it must be hard for the Father to keep quiet. I wonder if sometimes He wants to say, "Here's what I'm doing . . . ." He remains disciplined in His silence, however, because He knows it's necessary for us to go through seasons of weeping . . .

> *Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.*
>
> Psalm 84:5, 6

Baca means "weeping." Therefore, the psalmist says that blessed is the man who goes through the valley of weeping and makes it a spring for others to be refreshed. Paul would say the same thing to the church at Corinth . . .

> *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4

In both of these passages, it's as if the Lord says, "I'm going to allow you to go through hurts and difficulties. I will store your tears in a bottle. I care

deeply and will wipe them away eventually. But presently, they're going to be valuable for you to relate to others who follow in your footsteps as you relate to them, share wisdom with them, and are a comfort for them.

A Bowl of Prayers

> *And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.*
>
> Revelation 5:8; 8:3

The prayers we pray are evidently stored in golden bowls. At a certain point, it's as if those bowls get filled up with our prayers and begin to "tip"—and that's when things begin to happen. For example, for centuries, people have been praying, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done. Come quickly, Lord." And every time that prayer is offered, it goes into the golden bowl. At a certain point, that bowl will be filled and will tip and then the kingdom will become reality. His will *will* be done presently. I'm not simply talking about the prophetic picture, but also practically and personally.

Do you ever wonder why sometimes your prayers are answered immediately and other times you have to pray a million times? I believe some bowls need only a single prayer to make them tip. I think of Elijah on Mount Carmel. In 1 Kings 18, we see the prophets of Baal confronted by Elijah, the man of God. They prayed from morning to evening. They danced and thrashed their bodies—but nothing happened. When it was Elijah's turn, he simply said, "Lord, let these people know I have done these things according to Your Word. Send fire from heaven and consume the bull on the altar." Evidently, it only took two sentences for that particular bowl to tip because fire came down immediately (1 Kings 18:36–38).

And yet, as the story goes on, when Elijah prayed for rain, it took seven seasons of intense prayer before even a cloud appeared (1 Kings 18:44). One would think praying for rain would require less intensity than praying for fire. Yet fire required only a two-sentence prayer while rain required repeated, intense prayer. Therefore, I believe sometimes it takes just a little

bit of prayer to tip the bowl of blessing. Other times, God wants to teach us how to connect with Him, how to persevere through difficulty, how to stretch our faith as He prepares us for the ages to come.

To the people who feared His name in Malachi's day, it's as if God said, "I'm listening. I'm recording your conversations. I'm gathering your tears. I feel your hearts and I will wipe away every tear. But presently it's important that you go through these difficulties that others might be refreshed. Your prayers are being stored in bowls and, at the right time, answers will come. It might be soon—but it might take a while because I want to teach you how to partner with Me."

The Lord remembers every tear I shed, every prayer I pray, every word I share about Him. There's only one thing God does not remember. He doesn't remember my sins . . .

> *This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*
>
> Hebrews 10:16, 17

There's a book of remembrance, a bottle of tears, a bowl of prayers—but the bunches of my blunders are not remembered. Why? Because the blood of Jesus Christ washed them away.

> *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.*
>
> Psalm 103:12

> *He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.*
>
> Micah 7:19

God has actually erased His memory bank concerning our sin. He is not waiting to "get us back" for the mistakes we've made, for the sins we've

committed. He's not waiting to get us back because He gave His back when He was beaten before He went to the Cross.

Our sins are gone, gang. That's the gospel. That's the good news.



4

Malachi 4:1, 2

For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

"And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered," the people said in the previous chapter (verse 15). But when Jesus, the Sun of righteousness, comes again, this will be reversed, for those who rebel against God and are out to destroy His people will feel the heat of His wrath while those who fear Him will feel the warmth of His healing.

Malachi 4:3, 4

And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts. Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.

As the last book of the Old Testament draws to a close, the Lord says, "Remember the Law of Moses"—for it would be this law that would eventually point people to Jesus (Galatians 3:24).

Malachi 4:5

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

The scribes understood that this verse spoke of the coming of Messiah. Therefore, Jesus' disciples asked Him why the scribes said that before Messiah came, Elijah would come.

"Elijah is coming and has already come," Jesus answered (Matthew 17:10–12).

John the Baptist came in the same spirit, with the same power and the same kind of ministry as Elijah. But he wasn't literally Elijah. When will Elijah come? Revelation 11 tells us two witnesses will come on the scene in the Tribulation period who will have the power to stop the rain, to cause plagues to fall on those who come against them, and to speak fire to any who attack them. One will be Elijah—the man who prayed both drought and fire down from heaven (1 Kings 17; 2 Kings 1). Most likely, Moses will be the other—no stranger himself to plagues (Exodus 7—11).

Malachi 4:6
And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

Elijah will come with a ministry of getting things right, of setting things straight lest the Lord comes with a curse. That's the way the Old Testament ends. How does the New Testament end? "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." The Old Testament ends with a curse. The New Testament ends with grace.

The Old Testament ends with a curse because, in essence, it's the Law of God being given to proud and pompous mankind who think they're pretty good. But the Law, God's standard of righteousness and holiness, actually strikes and curses us when we realize we can't keep it. So it is the Old Testament Law that sets the stage for the New Covenant—when He who knew no sin would be made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Amen.

BETWEEN
THE
TESTAMENTS





THE SILENT YEARS

Between the Testaments

As the Old Testament curtain comes down, we move into the Book of Matthew. But as we go to the New Testament, we find ourselves unsettled a bit. Four hundred years have passed between the time of Malachi and Matthew and the scenery has changed substantially.

Most noticeably, the language of the people is different. Hebrew has been replaced by Aramaic and Greek. We also see that the temple, the cornerstone of Old Testament history, has a totally different appearance architecturally. In addition to this, people study the Scriptures in buildings called synagogues scattered throughout the country. No longer is a Jewish king ruling in Jerusalem. Instead, an Edomite sits on the throne.

Things certainly seem different. What's going on?

The changes actually began as far back as 586 B.C. In that year, Nebuchadnezzar came down from Babylon and destroyed the city of Jerusalem. The walls were knocked down, the temple was burned, and the people of Judah were carried into Babylon where they were held captive for seventy years. The prophet Jeremiah had warned the people that this is what would happen because they had neglected God's Word and had clung to the worship of idols.

Evidently having their fill of idols in Babylon, the capital city of idolatry, when the Jews were free to leave Babylon seventy years later, they were never again drawn to idolatry—a national characteristic that remains yet today. Although most of the Jews were allowed to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem, the majority chose to remain in Babylon. Although they had turned their back on the Babylonian idols, they established businesses in Babylon and prospered commercially. So when they had the opportunity to go home, only a small minority actually returned. The rest were content in their material prosperity.

Wanting to worship the Lord even though they were in Babylon, the Jews established synagogue worship. Because they couldn't worship at the temple, they decided that a synagogue would be built wherever there were seven Jewish males in residence. Every Sabbath day would find the Jews in these

synagogues being instructed in Old Testament teachings. The Jews who did eventually trickle back to Jerusalem brought synagogue worship with them. That is why, when you get to the Gospels, you read about Jesus consistently going into the synagogue (Luke 4:16).

In addition to the change in where people worshiped, there was a change in the language they spoke. When the Jews were carried into captivity, the Hebrew language was replaced by Aramaic and Greek. Aramaic was used for common communication, Greek for commerce and culture. The Jews living in Babylon who never made their way back to Jerusalem wanted the Old Testament Scriptures in a language they could understand since Hebrew was no longer spoken. So seventy men convened in Alexandria, Egypt, and translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek. The resulting translation is known as the Septuagint. The group of men who translated the Septuagint became known as the scribes. Because they translated and painstakingly copied the Scriptures, these men became authorities in Old Testament laws and teaching. That is why, when you come to the Gospels, you see scribes in a place of religious prominence.

Following Greek domination of the world, the Romans came into power. In the year 63 B.C., a Roman general named Pompey beat the area of Israel into bloody submission. Having established Roman dominance in the area, Pompey announced a governor, called a king, would rule the area and answer to Rome. That is why, when you come to Matthew, you find an Edomite rather than a Jew on the throne in Jerusalem. At four feet, four inches, Herod was a small man who wanted to do big things. Therefore, in addition to constructing massive palaces and fortresses, he ordered extensive remodeling of the temple—a project that would take eighty-five years to complete. It is this remodeling project the disciples refer to in Mark 13.

Practically, these changes speak to me very definitely. You see, for four hundred years, with no prophet on the scene, it appeared as though God was not working. There was no prophet saying, "Thus saith the Lord . . ." There were no miracles performed. There were no supernatural events. There was only a strange eerie silence—or so it seemed. But behind the scenes, God was allowing certain situations to unfold. The stage was being set . . .

Politically—with the Pax Romana in effect at the time of Jesus' birth—the world was unified as never before. Oh, it was a forced peace to be sure

—but it created an environment where the gospel could travel quickly throughout the empire on Roman highways.

Philosophically, the world was ready for something meaningful after Greek mythology proved to be empty.

Linguistically, the entire world was unified by a common language. Because Greek was spoken in every region, the New Testament could travel without any language barriers or obstacles.

Spiritually, after silence for four hundred years, the people of God were waiting to hear something—anything—from Him.

Why does this speak to me? Because sometimes I go through four hundred hours or four days, weeks, or even months when I don't hear very much from the Lord. I hear others say, "The Lord told me . . ." or, "The Lord spoke to my heart the other day and said . . . ." And I wonder, *What about* me, *Lord?*

Do you ever wonder if the Lord still cares about you—or if you're so out to lunch that you'll never hear from Him again? The four hundred years between Malachi and Matthew tell me that if our Father caused the stage to be quiet for four centuries, He can do the same thing in my life for four months. If you're going through a season of silence, take advantage of the opportunity to worship the Lord even if you don't feel Him close at hand. Stick around. Stay tuned. Don't give up. The Incarnation is coming.

> *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son . . .*
>
> Hebrews 1:1, 2 (a)

In "sundry times and diverse manners," God spoke through the prophets. But in these last days, He has one final word to say: Jesus. Jesus is God's final, ultimate Word. It's as if He says, "I'm not going to give you words any longer. I'm giving you the Word made flesh" (John 1:14).

Believer, all you need to know about living and dying, about God and the Word, about marriage and parenting, about witnessing and worshiping—all you need to know about everything and anything is found in Jesus. Before Jesus came, although man had partial truth about God, it was difficult to

determine the full truth. Like the proverbial blind men describing an elephant, each was able to describe a portion, but none the whole.

People wonder about God. Those who only think of Him as powerful think He's only out to judge people. Those who only think of Him as loving think He winks at sin. It's only as we look at Jesus that we get the full picture.

> *Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;*
>
> Hebrews 1:2, 3

Jesus is the express image of the Father. That's why He said he who had seen Him had seen the Father (John 14:9).

We can argue about God indefinitely. We can discuss God theologically. But Jesus came on the scene to settle the issue completely. In Him, we see the love of God and the righteousness of God, the holiness of God and the humility of God, the power of God and the patience of God working together perfectly. I believe that's why there are four Gospels. It's as though the Father is saying, "Don't miss Jesus. You'll see Me in Him."

Jon Courson's APPLICATION COMMENTARY



NEW TESTAMENT

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FOREWORD

There are so many commentaries on the Bible that are available today. Even though most are expositional, or exegetical, they often seek to be so exacting with the letter of the law or the possible meaning of a particular word that they lack life and inspiration. It is hard to find a good devotional commentary on the Bible, one that brings both understanding and life to the passage, so that you are inspired to worship the Lord as you gain new insights into the truth of His love and grace toward us.

This commentary is one that does just that.

In Nehemiah chapter eight, we are told that the people were gathered together and they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the meaning. I find that this perfectly describes what Jon has done in his commentaries, and is the greatest need in the church today. In Nehemiah's day, this method of commentary brought great conviction upon the people and a genuine turning to God. The ultimate result was that the people went their way rejoicing because they understood the words that were declared unto them.

I am convinced that you also will go your way rejoicing after reading the insights that the Holy Spirit has given to Jon on the scriptures.

Pastor Chuck Smith
Senior Pastor, Calvary Chapel
Costa Mesa, California



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Jon Courson's APPLICATION COMMENTARY





MATTHEW

Background to Matthew

About fifty years after Jesus ascended into heaven, one of His followers, a man named Matthew, picked up his pen and began to write about Him. Matthew had a great appreciation for Jesus—perhaps because of his occupation at the time Jesus called him. As a tax collector, Matthew would have been hated by the people of Israel, not only because he worked for the despised Romans, but because the Jews would have perceived him to be dishonest. Each tax collector was assigned to raise a certain amount of money from his particular region, and any amount he could raise above that figure was his to keep. So here is Matthew—looked down upon by some, hated by most, a pariah. And here comes Jesus saying to him, "Follow Me."

Matthew immediately left his desk and began to follow Jesus. Amazed that Jesus would reach out to a man like him, Matthew opened his heart to Jesus. We then read in the next verses how he opened his home. Immediately, he had all of his tax-collecting buddies and all of the prostitutes (the only people who would hang out with the tax collectors) over to his house to introduce them to Jesus. Seeing Jesus eating in the home of Matthew with prostitutes and tax collectors, the Pharisees were scandalized. But, of course, Jesus would begin to teach those self-righteous Pharisees that the Son of Man came to seek and save those who were lost.

It always interests me how sinners were very comfortable around Jesus as He taught them about the kingdom, about the love of the Father, and about Old Testament Scriptures. Sinners loved to be around Jesus. It was the religious people—the Pharisees and the scribes—who had such a tough time with Him that they eventually ordered Him to be crucified.

I am sometimes concerned because I find that we get too comfortable around religious people. But sinners? When they see us coming, they often run from us as fast as they can in fear that we're going to come down hard on them, preach at them, or turn our backs and walk away from them. Pray about spending a little more time with people who don't know the Lord. Share with them the things you're learning as though they are already believers. Do you know what you'll discover? Amazed that you're not judging them, they'll be attracted to Jesus just as they were in the days of Matthew. Let the Pharisees

sniff and the scribes scoff, but you be like Matthew, a man who opened his heart and then his home. After opening his home, Matthew also opened his hand. A keeper of records by vocation, it's only fitting that he would grab the pen to which he was so accustomed, and use it to keep a new, important record of the teachings and deeds of Jesus, his Hero, and his Leader.

Truly, the Lord uses whatever is in one's hands presently to do His work in ministry. As God called Moses in the wilderness, He said, "Moses what's in your hand? A rod. That's what I'll use as an instrument of authority in your ministry."

"What's in your hand, David? A slingshot. Let's go get Goliath!"

"Peter, what's in your hand? A net. I will make you a fisher of men."

I think too often we wish we had other gifts, skills, or trades, and we think, *"If I could only play guitar, there would be no stopping me!"* But take it from one who's bought more than one guitar. It doesn't work that way, folks! Use what's in your hand right now, and the Lord will use you.

The Gospel Matthew recorded is essential. You see, if you went from Malachi to Mark, you would go from the Old Testament promises to the New Testament promises, but you would have some very great questions. "Wait a minute," you'd say. "What do I do with all of these promises in the prophets concerning the people of Israel, the apple of the Father's eye, the chosen people—the Jews? How do the promises of the kingdom—given throughout the Old Testament by God's prophets—work out?"

Matthew is a bridge-builder, spanning the gap between the Old Testament promises and the New Testament promises. How? By quoting the Old Testament constantly, much more than the other Gospel writers.

- In Matthew's Gospel, the Old Testament is quoted or alluded to 129 times.
- "The kingdom of heaven," a phrase used only by Matthew, is seen 32 times.
- The phrase, "that it might be fulfilled," used only by Matthew, appears 9 times.
- The phrase, "that which was spoken," in reference to the Old Testament, is used 14 times, only by Matthew.

What's Matthew doing? He's constantly drawing upon the Old Testament prophets and relating them to their fulfillment in a Person—Messiah—Jesus Christ. Matthew's Gospel was written primarily, though not exclusively, for the Jews.

Mark, on the other hand, written primarily to the Romans, is a very fast-moving book, only sixteen chapters long. The Roman attention span was somewhat limited, much like that of Americans. So there aren't a lot of long discourses in Mark's Gospel, not a whole lot of heavy teachings, but rather stories that catered to their "video mentality."

As Luke was written to the Greeks, and John was written to the whole world, we see each one of the Gospels has a different audience in mind. Matthew's audience was Jewish; thus, he addresses Jewish questions.

As you read through Matthew's Gospel, you will notice it does not unfold chronologically, but rather topically. There are five main sections in Matthew, each one consisting of a discourse, or body of teaching, a demonstration of how Jesus worked it out practically, and a debate with people questioning, wondering, and talking.

We'll see a discourse, a demonstration, and a debate in each of the following five sections:

- The King *revealed* in chapters 1 through 10, where Matthew writes about the kingdom and the King of the Jews.
- The King *resisted* in chapters 11 through 13, when opposition to Jesus begins to surface.
- The King *retreating* in chapters 14 through 20, where Jesus takes His disciples and pulls them aside to give them personal instruction.
- The King *rejected* in chapters 21 through 27, as the people say, "We will not have this Man to rule over us."
- And finally, the King *resurrected* in chapter 28.

MATTHEW

1 Because every Jewish king must have a record of his right to the throne, Matthew launches out by giving the genealogy of Jesus Christ—a genealogy so interesting that we could spend years studying it. In the interest of space, however, I will point out just one or two things in order that we can move through the first chapter of Matthew before the next millennium arrives!

Matthew 1:1

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Matthew begins by saying Jesus is the rightful Heir to the throne of Israel both racially and royally.

Racially, He is the Son of Abraham. In the Book of Genesis, God made a promise to Abraham that through his seed the entire world would be blessed. Paul would later say the word God used was "seed," not "seeds," and that the "Seed" was Christ Jesus.

Royally, He is the Son of David. One day David said to the prophet Nathan, "I want to build a house for God."

"Far out!" Nathan said.

But that night, the Lord spoke to Nathan, saying, "David can't build Me a temple because his hands are full of blood. He's a man of war, not a man of peace. Go tell David he can't build, but tell him this: Although he can't build Me a house, I will build him a house."

Our God has a way of tempering our disappointments with even greater blessings that we had no idea were coming, and that's exactly what happened with David. The house God built through him was the Messiah—One who will reign forever in a kingdom without end.

The Jews knew the Messiah must be of the seed of Abraham and a Son of David. Did you know there is only one Jew able to make such a claim? In A.D. 70, when the Romans sacked Jerusalem, all of the genealogical records of the Jewish people were destroyed. Thus, there is no Jew today who can claim with certainty and authority to be a Son of Abraham *and* a Son of

David except Jesus. His genealogy recorded in this first chapter of Matthew is the only preserved genealogy that fits both requirements.

To the Jewish student, this is heavy. "You mean there is a Jew who can really trace His genealogy back to Abraham?" Yes. His name is Jesus of Nazareth. There is something in this genealogy that must have blown the mind of the Jew who studied this through. There are four women named: In verse 3, Tamar is mentioned; in verse 5, Rahab and Ruth are listed; in verse 6, we find Bathsheba.

This would be a mind-blower because, you see, Jewish men prayed this prayer daily: "God, I thank You that I was not born a Gentile, a dog, or a woman." It was a tremendously male-oriented kind of society, where women's names were never included in genealogies. What's the Lord doing? He's saying, "The kingdom I'm establishing is different from the kingdom the Jews are expecting." Paul would later write that in Christ there is neither male nor female, for Jesus is the great liberator of women (Galatians 3:28).

Study history. Wherever the gospel has been rejected, women have been treated poorly, even in sophisticated societies. Consider the Grecian culture, for example. The Greeks, perhaps the most sophisticated society in history, believed every man should have three women: a legitimate wife to bear his children, a woman to talk to so he wouldn't have to talk to his wife, and a lover to satisfy his physical needs. But wherever the gospel has gone, women have been elevated.

Because the Jews placed a high priority on *family responsibility,* much like the Mormons do today, Tamar's name in verse 3 would have been a real shocker to the mind of the Jewish reader. You might remember her from the thirty-eighth chapter of Genesis.

Judah, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, had three sons—Er, Onan, and Shelah. The oldest son, Er, married Tamar, and Scripture records that Er did wickedly before the Lord and was smitten, or killed. The cultural practice, which was later recorded in Deuteronomy 25, was such that if a man died and left a woman without child, the younger brother was to marry her and raise offspring in the name of the deceased brother. This happened in order that his heritage might continue and the property might be passed along. So when Er died, Onan was obligated to marry Tamar.

But Onan refused to impregnate her. Therefore, because of the hardness of his heart in saying, "I'm not going to allow her to raise children in my brother's name," the Lord smote him as well. Now Er is dead. Onan's gone, and Judah says, "I've got one son left. Do I want to give my last son to this gal? I mean, her record isn't very good." Understandably concerned as a father, he says, "Listen, Tamar, wait until Shelah gets a little bit older, and then I'll give him to you."

But the years went on, Shelah grew up, and Judah didn't keep his promise. So Tamar took matters into her own hands. She took off her widow's garments, veiled herself as a harlot, and sat beside the road Judah traveled frequently. Judah, noticing this harlot whom he hadn't seen before, approached her and sought to make a deal with her. He didn't have his wallet with him, so she said, "Give me your ring, your staff, and your bracelet, and that will do for now. You can give me the sheep you owe me later." They had sexual relations, and he left her with his ring, his bracelet, and his staff. He had no idea, of course, with whom he was dealing, since she was completely veiled.

A few months later, the news is out in the town and in the community: Tamar, the widow of Er and Onan, the daughter-in-law of Judah, has played the whore. She's pregnant. Judah said, "Let her be burned."

She answered him, "Do you know whose staff this is, whose ring this is, and whose bracelet this is?"

Judah's jaw must have dropped as he said, "Oh no! You mean that was *you?* I have done wrong in that I have not given you my son." Judah realized he was at fault in failing to care for his family in a way that was traditionally and customarily proper. In holding back his son, Judah had robbed Tamar of her rightful seed.

It's a sordid story to say the least. Can't you see the Lord saying, "Let's put Tamar in the genealogy for these Jews who are so proud of their male superiority and their sense of family responsibility"?

The Jews not only valued family responsibility, but they also valued *sexual purity.* And guess who is number two in the genealogy? A prostitute named Rahab. In the days of Joshua, when the spies came to scope out Jericho, it was Rahab who hid them and covered up for them. She is honored not only by appearing here in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, but in the listing

of the Hall of Faith found in Hebrews 11. Rahab was a tremendous woman because, in spite of her limited knowledge and understanding, she risked everything, believing that the God of Israel was the True and the Living God.

Not only were the Jews concerned about family responsibility and moral purity, but the third big issue was *racial superiority.* So determined were they that their racial line remain free from pollution, they believed that if you, as a Jew, even accidentally brushed against a Gentile, you would have to go home immediately, take off your garments, burn them, take a bath, get dressed again, and go on your way. And guess who's in the genealogy—a Gentile, a Moabitess!

Third, Matthew draws attention to Bathsheba, referred to in verse 6 as "she that had been the wife of Uriah." To the Jews, so proud of their history and particularly of their great King David, this reminder of his affair with Bathsheba and his subsequent murder of her husband, Uriah, must have been a particularly painful one. But the inclusion of Bathsheba in this genealogy is further indication that the Holy Spirit, through the pen of Matthew, desired to shake the Jews out of their pseudo-spiritual complacency to alert them of the coming Messiah.

What does this say to me theologically? It says the stage is already set for the Lord to do a new work. "My kingdom is the kingdom of heaven, not the kingdom of the nation Israel." It's much broader than Israel. It's a whole new thing. The Lord declares, "Behold, I make all things new." But personally, it reminds me that these words should never pass from our lips again: "The Lord can't use me because I have sinned greatly, I've shirked my family responsibilities, and I've messed up my family."

The Pharisees may stick up their noses and say, "How can this be?" Let them! Know this: He does all things new, and He's included people like Rahab along with people like you and me. He's the Friend of Sinners. Your family may have had failures in the past, either thirty years ago or three minutes ago. Your morals may be questionable, you might be a Moabitess, feeling you haven't had the education theologically, or haven't been "Christianized" culturally.

So what? Join Tamar and Rahab. Join Ruth, who simply looked at Naomi and said, "Naomi, you're a child of Israel, and wherever you go, I'll go.

Your God will be my God. Your people shall be my people. And where you die, I'll die there as well. I'm going to start traveling with you."

The names go on for fifteen verses—tracing the genealogy of Jesus through Abraham and David and on down to Joseph.

Matthew 1:16

And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

Notice, students, that Matthew doesn't say, "And Jacob begat Joseph of whom was born Jesus," which was the wording he used in the first fifteen verses. No, he specifically breaks the order by telling us very clearly that Jacob begat Joseph (not Joseph the father of Jesus, but Joseph the husband of Mary). Joseph was not the father of Jesus, but His foster-father.

Matthew 1:17

So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

I am so grateful for the genealogy of Jesus. We can't pick our relatives, but Jesus did. He knew exactly who was going to be in His lineage before the foundation of the world. And He chose people like those listed here to give us great hope no matter who we are, no matter where we're at. I hope, if the Lord tarries, that we will saturate ourselves in the Gospel, the Good News, that Jesus takes people like Matthew the tax collector, and Mary Magdalene the streetwalker, Tamar and Rahab, David and Bathsheba. And He delights in rescuing and rebuilding them. And even after they fail yet again, as we will see in Matthew, He never gives up on them. Neither will He give up on you.

I once read an article that talked about a group of psychologists who were studying the victims of the Holocaust, including those who survived concentration camps like Auschwitz and Treblinka. They found that 40 percent of the survivors who had adjusted well and had

gone on successfully in their lives versus the 60 percent who were still struggling shared one common denominator that set the world of psychology topsy-turvy. That is, the 40 percent who had adjusted well did not, when asleep, dream about their past experiences. Until this study, the traditional rap in psychology had been to follow this advice: If you want to get over your hurts, you need to dwell on, relive, and work out the past. Instead, because of what they called "the Auschwitz Studies," psychologists found that the people who were still working through the horrors of the holocaust were not doing well, while those who were healing were those who had been able to say, "That's a closed chapter in my life. That was then. This is now. I'm going on."

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Romans 8:1

The Cross completed the work. If you're reliving the failures of yesterday, last Monday, or last month, you're missing the Good News of the gospel. The genealogy of Jesus says, "I'm doing something new." Go your way rejoicing, saint. You have been included in His family.

Matthew 1:18

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus, whose genealogy has just been given to us, was espoused to Mary. What does it mean to be espoused? An espoused couple was legally considered husband and wife, although the relationship would not be consummated until the marriage festival. During the espousal period, which lasted for one year, if either one felt, "Oh, I cannot live with her," or, "I can't stand him," they could divorce each other during that time. This is the period in which Joseph and Mary are right now. It is during this time that Mary, perhaps fifteen years of age, as most scholars believe, finds herself pregnant.

Matthew 1:19

Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

When Mary came to Joseph and said, "I'm pregnant," he could have charged her with immorality. But Joseph showed mercy. This is why I like Joseph. He is a moral man who stands for rightness, but he is also merciful, which is a rare combination. Most people are either moral *or* merciful. God, make us men like Joseph! Give us his morality, but also his mercy.

Matthew 1:20 (a)

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream . . .

Joseph was also logical, yet mystical. Scripture says, "he thought on these things." He was a thinker, but when he went to sleep, he became a dreamer. Most men are logical; however, some are overly mystical. But here's Joseph with a beautiful balance of both. I personally think Joseph should get more press during the Christmas season! He's a tremendous example of being moral, but merciful, and logical, yet mystical.

Matthew 1:20 (b)

. . . saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

Over and over again, we men, like Joseph, need to hear this message from the Lord: "Fear not." When the women we love become wise by growing in the Lord, something is conceived in them of the Holy Ghost. Perhaps they come back from a prayer meeting and they are just elated in the Lord. Perhaps they begin a new Bible study, where they become excited about the Lord. If we are not careful, we will "think on these things" but then say, "I don't know if this is good for my wife, because she is getting a little too spiritual." And we'll begin to squirm a bit when our wives tell us that a passion for Jesus is being conceived within them because, although they

don't express it and maybe haven't even articulated it, the fact remains that to some men, Jesus can be the other Man in his wife's life.

"You mean you're getting up early now and praying? When did *that* start?" we ask. "What about my oatmeal? You want to go to church *again?* We went last month!"

Somehow in women, who are oftentimes innately more spiritually sensitive than men, the Holy Spirit can begin to conceive something of Jesus. And we guys can start to fear. But the Lord would say to you and to me as husbands, "Fear not! Don't worry!" Husband, the more your wife falls in love with that other Man, the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, her capacity will expand exponentially to love you along with loving Jesus.

A couple had celebrated their golden anniversary with a big party. Presents were exchanged, and congratulations were expressed before they got in their car and drove home. When they got home, the woman made her way into the kitchen. As was her custom, she brewed some tea and took out a loaf of bread, one of which she had baked daily for years. She cut off the heel, warmed it, and buttered it for her husband before cutting another slice for herself. Then she served him the warm piece of bread.

Now this man, who had been married for fifty years, loved his wife greatly, but the stress of the day had taken its toll. He blew up and said, "Honey, I love you, and you know that, but quite frankly, this is the last straw. For more years than I can count, you have baked bread for me every day. But you always give me the heel. You always pass off that crusty piece of bread on me. I've had it! I won't take it anymore!"

She looked at him, blinked back the tears, and said, "But honey, that's my favorite piece."

She was giving him the best.

And, guys, if you want your wives to give you the best in any area, let them be expanded in the Lord. Don't fear!

Matthew 1:21 (a)

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS . . .

Jesus is the name of our Savior. This is His only name as far as His human name goes. Jesus is neither His first name, nor is Christ His last name. No, Jesus is His full human name, which was a common name in that day, probably the most common name in all of Israel. "Joshua" was the Hebrew form, and "Jesus" the Greek form.

We read that Christ is not His human name, but His official name. *Christos* is the Greek form and means "anointed." In the Old Testament, three groups of people were anointed with oil: prophets, priests, and kings. Jesus is the Prophet who came to declare the Word (Deuteronomy 18:18). He is our faithful High Priest (Hebrews 2:17). He is the King of kings (Revelation 17:14).

Matthew 1:21 (b)
. . . for he shall save his people from their sins.

Remember, Joshua was the successor of Moses, and Moses represented the Law. Because Moses could not lead the people of God into the Land of Promise, the responsibility was given to Joshua, or Jesus. It's the same name. So, too, the Law cannot bring people into the fullness of God's blessings. The Law was provided to prepare us and point out to us that we are sinners in need of a Savior who can save us from our sins and bring us into the Land of Promise.

Matthew 1:22, 23
Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

Emmanuel is Jesus' name descriptively, but it was never spoken to Him directly. You'll never read in Scripture about someone saying, "Emmanuel, come over here please." You'll hear them say, "Jesus," "Rabbi," or

"Master," but never Emmanuel. This name Emmanuel is a descriptive title of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ—God *with* us. Jeremiah 33:16 tells us when we see Him in the kingdom, His name will be Jehovah-Tsidkenu. When you see Jesus, you're not necessarily going to call Him "Jesus" or "Christ" or "Emmanuel," but "Jehovah-Tsidkenu" or, "The Lord Our Righteousness." This is great! When I see Jesus, I'm not going to say, "Jesus! Here I am! Aren't I wonderful?" No, I'm going to say, "Jehovah-Tsidkenu, You are my righteousness. It's not me. I have failed miserably. I botch it constantly. *You* are my righteousness. It's *Your* blood that allows me to embrace You and sit beside you. I fall at Your feet and worship You because *You* are my righteousness." Jesus is His human name, Christ His official name, Emmanuel His descriptive name, and Jehovah-Tsidkenu His prophetic name.

Matthew 1:24, 25

Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

Joseph married Mary, but he refrained from having sexual relations with her until after Jesus was born. To me, this absolutely refutes the Catholic teaching that Mary was a virgin perpetually. The word here is he knew her not *until* she had birthed Jesus. We know that at least two of the writers of the New Testament, James and Jude, were the offspring of Joseph and Mary. Mary was not a perpetual virgin. She was, however, an extremely special lady.

Regarding the life of Mary, there are two common views: She is either exalted too greatly, as I believe the Roman Catholic Church presents her, or not honored adequately, as I believe she appears in the Protestant Church. She is a blessed lady, indeed; but it is the One who came from her, Jesus, who is truly the Blessed One.

2 If you followed the development of the Stealth Bomber, you know this aircraft, which looks like a bat, is really beautiful and quite impressive.

With a price tag of five hundred million dollars, it had better be impressive! On its maiden test flight, the Stealth circled successfully for several hours, and preliminary tests indicated it would be able to slip through even the most sophisticated radar. There was an interesting footnote regarding these tests: Where the plane flew, dogs barked. The Stealth emitted a noise the frequency of which could be detected by any garden variety German shepherd. We spend half a billion bucks on these technological wonders, and all you have to do to detect them is get yourself a dog. When you hear him bark, you'll know the Stealth's flying by!

I appreciate our country, and I'm thankful to be an American, but I don't have a lot of confidence in any human government. Not only is the political process vulnerable to corruption, but even our most advanced technology is outdated as soon as it goes into mass production.

I am relieved that the answer is not the Stealth Bomber, but Jesus Christ, our Hope. He is the solid Rock upon which we stand. What we really need in this world is not more sophisticated military technology, but for Jesus to come back personally. When He returns, Scripture says He will rule with a rod of iron. This means He's going to rule rightly and effectively with authority.

Matthew's mission is to present Jesus as such a King. The question is, if Jesus had a right to the throne of Israel, did anyone acknowledge this? It's one thing for Him to say, "I am the King, and here is My heritage." But it is something else altogether to have someone else ratify and recognize such a right. Matthew chapter 2 answers this very concern. In chapter 1, we saw the heritage of the King. Now chapter 2 shows us homage to the King paid by those who did, in fact, recognize His royalty.

Matthew 2:1

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.

Jesus was born in the days when Herod was king of Judaea. Standing only four feet four inches tall, Herod was a short man who wanted to prove he was a big guy. He became a master builder,

erecting palaces, fortresses, and entire cities. He built Masada, Herod's royal citadel; aqueducts; and remodeled the temple in Jerusalem. He made monuments of great grandeur to his name and to his legacy. However, he was also a cruel and vicious individual who murdered his wife and three sons in the same evening, prompting Caesar Augustus to say, "It is safer to be Herod's pig than his son."

Well into his seventies, and realizing no one would mourn his death, Herod ordered the arrest of one hundred of the leading men of Jerusalem. He put them in prison and demanded that the moment he died, those hundred men were to be killed instantly. In his reasoning, he stated, "If the city won't mourn for me, let it mourn for those who die with me." The men were arrested, and Herod eventually died, but his final order was never carried out.

Herod was actually an Edomite, and not a Jew at all. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau. Jacob and Esau, who began warring in their mother's womb, continued their battle throughout history. This war began between the sons of Jacob—Israel versus the sons of Esau—the Edomites. And here we find them still at war in Matthew chapter 2 as a son of Esau, Herod, is trying to slaughter a Son of Jacob, Jesus.

How did Herod become king? He was a conniver who gained political influence through his dealings with Mark Antony of Cleopatra fame. A powerful person in Rome at that time, Mark Antony appointed Herod king of Judaea. This enabled Herod to become the potentate of Judaea, although in actuality, he was a puppet of Rome. It was during this period when Herod was king that the wise men, or magi, came from the East.

Matthew 2:2 (a)

Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east . . .

Regardless of how many Christmas movies you've seen, or how many Nativity scenes you might have, there is no reason to believe there were only three wise men. There may have been three hundred. There's no way to know

for sure. We do know, however, they came from the East. We know these magi were astrologers, studying the stars to determine the future. They were also interpreters of dreams. They were likely to have been residing in the area of Babylon when they saw a star and followed it, believing it to be the sign of the coming King of the Jews. What made them think this to be true? I suggest it was due to another man who resided in Babylon five hundred years prior to this who was also an interpreter of dreams.

His name? Daniel.

In the seventh chapter of the book that bears his name, Daniel wrote that "One would come, called the Ancient of Days, to rule and reign upon the earth; and that He would have everlasting dominion." In fact, Daniel gave the very date this One would ride into Jerusalem. So these wise men, these magi, were most likely very familiar with Daniel's writings, prophecies, and teachings. And no doubt they were watching for the Ancient of Days to appear.

Isn't it great the way the Lord appears to people wherever they're at? The magi studied the stars, and the Lord said, "Okay, I'll speak to them in the stars and reveal to them the true Star, the Star of Jacob, as Balaam declared Him to be in Numbers 24:17." Because the magi were into astrology, God used the stars to draw them to the Son.

Matthew 2:2 (b)

. . . and are come to worship him.

Notice the magi weren't coming to get something from Jesus. After all, He was only a baby, a toddler there in Bethlehem. Nor were they coming because of what He had done for them; for at that point, He had done nothing. They came to worship Him solely because of who He was.

Do you ever come to church saying, "Lord, I'm going to worship You because I've got this business deal coming down next week, and I need Your help," or, "I'm feeling depressed, and I know if I worship, I'll get high emotionally and spiritually"?

There are, indeed, blessings to be found in worship, but they shouldn't be our motivation to worship. Why should we worship the Lord? Because He is the King of kings, the Creator of all things, the reason *for* life, the destiny *of*

life. He is the smitten Rock, the Alpha and the Omega, the Lily of the Valley, the Fairest of Ten Thousand, the Bright and Morning Star. An understanding of who Jesus is should be motivation enough for us to worship Him. For truly, "Thou art worthy O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power" (Revelation 4:11).

Matthew 2:3

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Herod was upset because he realized there might be a true King, a Son of David, a Jew around whom the nation of Israel could rally. Herod realized he could be dethroned, Edomite that he was. But why was all Jerusalem troubled? Because Jerusalem was aware of the political ramifications of what these magi were saying. The birth of a new king introduced the possibility that the people in Israel, and perhaps those in the entire eastern world, would have someone to support and to whom they would willingly submit. Intimidated by this, Caesar would send down his legions into Jerusalem. The city would be trampled, and blood would be shed. Recognizing the makings of a revolution, those closest to Herod foresaw terrifying consequences.

Matthew 2:4–6

And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, and thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

These scribes were aware of Micah 5:2, which said that Jesus Christ would be born in an insignificant little city five miles outside of Jerusalem. Yet, it amazes me that they didn't even bother to make the short journey to Bethlehem to see what was happening. The wise men spent months, perhaps years, traveling across the desert—spending much money and expending

great energy to seek the Lord. The scribes who knew the Word wouldn't even get on their feet to see what was happening a mere five miles away. Isn't there a warning for you and me in this? Sometimes we think knowing the Scriptures is good enough. But it's doing, not merely knowing the Word, that counts. You and I can easily become like these scribes, saying, "Well, we know what is happening. We know what we should be doing, and that's good enough." No, the blessing is in *doing,* not just in knowing.

The scribes told Herod he would find the Christ in Bethlehem. Bethlehem today is a major disappointment for tourists because they go expecting to see something special, but when they get there, all they see is a typical Middle Eastern city.

They go into the church of the Nativity, assuming it will be awesome. But as they walk in, they see the church itself divided into three sections (Catholic, Eastern, and Russian Orthodox) because these three groups have been fighting for centuries over who should control the site. And there are objects hanging from the ceiling that look like Christmas tree ornaments in a garage sale. With church groups fighting and dusty relics hanging, no wonder Bethlehem appears to be disappointing.

But you know what? It's perfect!

You see, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, He was born in a stable, or a cave, which was used as a stable. It wasn't the picturesque setting we often have in our minds. No doubt, it was dirty. There were cow pies on the ground and flies buzzing overhead. It had to be so. Jesus came to a real world as a real Man to help real people. And Bethlehem mirrors reality today.

Bethlehem—a very appropriate place for the Bread of Life to be born, for 'Bethlehem' means 'House of Bread.' Bethlehem was an unimpressive little city then and is an unimpressive little city still. But because Jesus was born there, more songs have been sung about, more poetry written about, more photographs taken of, more trips made to this insignificant little city than any other. Bethlehem is one of the best-known places in the world today for only one reason: Jesus was there.

And so too with you and me. Jesus comes into little people like us—people who are somewhat dusty and not at all that impressive—and He

makes us great, not because of who we are, but because of *whose* we are. We are His.

Matthew 2:7, 8

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

"You wise guys, go ahead and find Him, and when you have located Him, come and tell me that I may go and worship Him as well." Herod said this, not because he sincerely desired to worship the Christ, but because he was determined to exalt his own position, to establish his own authority, to eliminate the Babe of Bethlehem.

Matthew 2:9–11 (a)

When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house . . .

Notice the magi came into the house, not the stable because Jesus was probably about a year and a half old by the time they made it all the way to Jerusalem. So when you set up your Nativity scene next Christmas, put your wise men four blocks away because it took them a long time to arrive!

Matthew 2:11 (b)

. . . they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

Worship is always costly. It might cost you your so-called dignity. It might cost you financially as you learn to tithe and to give. It might cost you

your friends or your family. The magi came worshiping with costly gifts. Gold indicates they acknowledged Jesus as King, since gold is a metal associated with kingly rule. By bringing frankincense, the spice used by priests, the wise men not only acknowledged Jesus as a mighty King, but as a Priest. Myrrh being the spice used in burials, the wise men acknowledged Jesus would be a martyred Prophet. The three-fold office of Jesus, the Messiah, is seen in the gifts of the wise men: gold for a Mighty King, frankincense for a Ministering Priest, myrrh for a Martyred Prophet.

Matthew 2:12

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

The wise men were students not only of stars but of dreams, so it was fitting that they were warned in a dream about Herod's true intentions. At Jesus' birth, Gentile magi acknowledged Him as King. At Jesus' death, Pilate, a Gentile, commanded a placard reading "King of the Jews" be posted on His Cross. Although the Jews said, "We will not have this man rule over us," and rejected His kingship, there were those who did indeed acknowledge Jesus as King.

Matthew 2:13, 14

And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt.

Evidently, Mary and Joseph used the gifts of the wise men to finance their trip to Egypt, where Jesus would be protected from Herod's wrath.

Matthew 2:15

And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of

Egypt have I called my son.

Egypt being a type of the world, Jesus journeyed *into* Egypt that He might free us *from* Egypt.

Matthew 2:16–18

Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, in Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

After Jesus was born and then taken safely into Egypt, Herod ordered the extermination of all male children two years old and younger. Swords flashed, mothers screamed, blood flowed in the streets, and we see the other side of the Christmas story.



***For topical study of Matthew 2:16–18 entitled "Bedlam in Bethlehem," turn to page* 11.**

Matthew 2:19

But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt.

I wish the Lord would call me to the ministry of sleeping. Four times in two chapters, the Lord spoke to Joseph in his sleep!

Matthew 2:20–23

Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young

child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

Nazareth was not the most picturesque or prominent spot. In fact, the word Nazareth literally means "bean town" or "sprout town." We would call it "hick town" today, which is why Nathanael, upon hearing of a Messiah from Nazareth, asked, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Is it possible that Messiah would actually come from a place like that?"

Isaiah writes that Messiah would come forth as "a rod out of the stem of Jesse" (11:1). In other words, Messiah would come as a "sprout" out of the stem of Jesse—from "sprout town," a Sprout. Wherever you're living, or wherever you're from, remember that Jesus can relate to your situation. He chose to be a Nazarene, to be from Sprout Town, to be one of us.

BEDLAM IN BETHLEHEM

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 2:16–18

In the second chapter of Matthew, we come, of course, to the birth of the King of kings, Jesus Christ.

> *Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.*
>
> Jeremiah 31:15

> *Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, in Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her chil dren, and would not be comforted, because they are not.*
>
> Matthew 2:16–18

When the Babylonians invaded Judah in 586 B.C. and carried the Jews captive into Babylon, Jeremiah 40 tells us that the deportation headquarters were in Ramah, a city five miles north of Bethlehem. Inspired by the Spirit, Matthew refers to that event as a picture of its ultimate fulfillment here in the story of the Nativity, six hundred years later. For once again there was weeping in Ramah, as Rachel—the mothers of Israel—wept for the children a crazed Herod had ordered annihilated in his attempt to kill the Christ Child.

"Peace on earth, goodwill towards men" was sung by the angels in the heavens on the night of Jesus' birth. But there's another side to the Christmas story. No longer, "O Little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie," but "O little town of Bethlehem, how deep we hear thy cry."

Soldiers marching in the streets replaced shepherds running through the streets. And piercing swords replaced "Peace on earth" when a Silent Night became a screaming night.

Picture yourself there, mothers. Roman soldiers marching through your town, grabbing your children, piercing swords through their hearts or decapitating them, while you scream and lament without help and without hope. That's the other side of Christmas, for the Babe of Bethlehem brought bloodshed to Bethlehem, fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:15 concerning weeping and lamentation, sorrow and suffering. No wonder in Matthew 10, Jesus gives us these words concerning His ministry:

> *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.*
>
> Matthew 10:34–38

The coming of Christ still causes pain. When you open up your heart to the Babe of Bethlehem, understand that pain and separation are sure to follow.

> *And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.*
>
> Matthew 4:21, 22

You who give your lives to Jesus Christ, know this: It may result in a division among family. I'm not talking about leaving them physically, but about the pain of their inability to understand where you're at or what you're doing. Many parents would rather have their children smoke pot than come to church. "You're not becoming a Jesus freak, are you?" they say. "Anything

but that!" There will be a division among friends. The sword comes, and suddenly, the group you hung out with is no longer so inclined to include you in their plans. "Oh, you used to be so much fun," they'll say. "What happened?"

There will also be a division among the flesh. If you are truly sincere about following this Babe of Bethlehem, the flesh must die. And the flesh doesn't die easily. It screams and cries, "Satisfy me." But you who are serious must say, "The sword has come. I will no longer give in to my fleshly impulses and desires. I will not be dominated by my flesh and by the sins of society."

> The story is told that in the first century, when Hadrian, emperor of Rome, waged war against the Christians in the empire, a group of forty believers gathered to worship. Soldiers surrounded them and said, "Upon order of the emperor, your worship of this so-called King of the Jews must cease immediately, or you will be executed."
>
> "Do what you will," answered the forty, "even if it costs our lives."
>
> So the Roman soldiers took them into a mountainous region. It was wintertime, and the small lake in the area was completely frozen over. The captain of the guard said, "Here is one more opportunity for you to deny Jesus Christ—or we will place you on that lake all night until your bodies freeze."
>
> "It is better to freeze for a night than to burn in hell for eternity," answered the brave believers.
>
> So the forty believers took their places on the ice. With teeth chattering and knees knocking, they sang "Forty Brave Soldiers for Christ" as the Romans looked on and mocked them. Occasionally, the captain would call out, "Come to your senses, men. Deny Jesus just for a moment. Come and be warmed by the fire and be saved." But the believers would not budge, and kept singing "Forty Brave Soldiers for Christ, forty Brave Soldiers for Christ." After an hour or so, one Christian stood up, able to endure the pain no longer. He ran toward the soldiers, saying, "I deny Jesus the Christ." And he was welcomed to be warmed by the fire. He couldn't pay the price, and he turned his

back on the Babe of Bethlehem.

What about you? What would happen if suddenly you were absolutely forbidden to name the Name of Jesus Christ? Would you be willing to suffer, to be tortured, or to die?

> *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*
>
> Matthew 10:34

> *Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.*
>
> John 15:20

> *Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping . . .*
>
> Jeremiah 31:15 (a)

But wait! There's an asterisk, a footnote we must consider. You see, the Jews knew that even as Jeremiah wept over a nation about to be destroyed, he also gave Israel a hope imbedded in chapters 30—33.

> *Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border.*
>
> Jeremiah 31:16, 17

"Don't cry," says the Lord. "I hear the weeping that is going on in Israel, but you don't see what's coming. Refrain from your crying. Your children shall return—stronger than ever. The nation shall survive, and it shall prosper. The kingdom shall be established. The desert shall blossom. And

you will have peace and prosperity unlike any other nation in the history of the world."

And I say the same thing to you this day. Yes, sometimes following the Savior means sword, suffering, and sorrow. Yes, there is a cost. Yes, it can mean difficulties. But I also say, "Refrain from your weeping because the blessings to come are even greater."

You who have felt forsaken by your family because they think you're a fanatic, know this: You have a new family that is eternal—a family with the same values and heart and priorities as yours; brothers and sisters who care about you, older brothers and sisters who will be fathers and mothers to you. This is the meaning behind the dialogue in Mark 10.

> *Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.*
>
> Mark 10:28–30

A hundred fold? How can that be? This is how: If my house burned down today, I know there are a hundred people who would take us in—at least for a while! In my church family, I have a hundred houses. I have land. I have brothers. I have friends, sisters, and mothers. This is much better than me just having my own little trip. I have something much bigger. It's called the family of God.

Your Friend will be faithful. If my friends forsake me, so be it. I have exchanged friends who are fickle for a Friend who will never fail me—even when I fail Him. Jesus called Judas "friend" even in the moment of betrayal. That's the kind of Friend I want.

Your flesh? Let it die.

> *He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.*

What good could you do dying, you ask? Remember the forty believers on the lake in northern Italy? After one of their brothers left and turned away, they still sang, only they changed their song to, "Thirty-nine Brave Soldiers for Christ." One of the Roman soldiers observing this scene was so moved that he ran out upon the lake and said, "No. Forty Brave Soldiers for Christ. Forty Brave Soldiers for Christ."

If you live for your family, your friends, or your flesh, you'll lose everything. But if you give up your life and say, "Lord, I'm following You. I'm dying to self. Let the sword strike where it will," you'll find life. That's the irony of Christianity: The more you die, the more you live. Follow the Babe of Bethlehem. Yes, there will be weeping; yes, there will be sorrow. That's what Jeremiah 31:15 prophesied. But don't forget verse 16. Good things are coming. You who have paid the price and taken up the Cross, refrain from weeping. There can be hurts and sorrows, but the blessings you have presently and those that lie ahead are oh so much greater.

They really are!



3 For four hundred years, the Jews had not heard a single prophet calling to them in the name of the Lord. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, came John.

Matthew 3:1–4

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

John preached in the wilderness, which was appropriate because Israel was going through dry, desert times spiritually. He came on the scene

wearing not the fine flowing robes of the priests in all their glory, but camel's hair—the equivalent of torn Levi's—big leather belt around his waist, grasshopper legs hanging out of his mouth.

Matthew 3:5, 6

Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

Fearlessly and boldly John said, "Repent! Change direction. The kingdom is at hand. Get ready. The time is now!"

> Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist . . .
>
> Matthew 11:11 (a)

No wonder Jesus said of all those born of women, John was the greatest. People came from miles and miles, in those days no small feat, to hear him, sensing he spoke with accuracy and authority. But catch this—Jesus went on to say,

> . . . notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.
>
> Matthew 11:11 (b)

Do you know whom Jesus is talking about? He's talking about you. Jesus said you're greater than John with all of his power and authority. Why? Because you have seen things John couldn't.

John would later question and wonder, "If You are truly the Messiah, Jesus, why don't You do something to establish Your authority?" John struggled and stumbled and didn't see things all that clearly. You do. You understand Jesus came as the Suffering Savior before He will come again as the Conquering King. The Lord has placed you in His kingdom, and Jesus Himself said the least in the kingdom is greater than this greatest of prophets.

What a privilege! I feel so honored that God would place us in this era and include us in His kingdom. He could have had us born centuries before Christ and made us great prophets calling down fire from heaven, raising the dead, healing the lepers. Instead, He said, "I'm going to do something greater. They're going to be part of My church."

Matthew 3:7

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Now, I don't believe John was giving a word of condemnation here, but rather a word of surprise. Amazed, he asked, "Oh, generation of snakes. Who has brought *you* here, you proud legalists and you liberal intellectuals?" I can even hear a chuckle in John's voice as he said this.

Matthew 3:8

Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.

"It's not simply a matter of getting dunked," John warned. "It's a way of living. If your repentance is sincere, fruit will be produced in your life."

Matthew 3:9–12

And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Many people want the power of the Spirit, but they are not interested in the fire, the purity. Acts chapter 8 tells of a man named Simon, a sorcerer, or *magi* in Greek, who performed tricks before the people. When he saw the power of the Holy Spirit dispatched by the disciples, and when he saw people getting filled with the Holy Ghost, he approached Peter and said, "Could I buy that trick from you? Here's some money, tell me how you do that!"

Peter answered Simon, "I perceive you are in the gall of bitterness and in bondage to iniquity," as he gave him a very stern rebuke and a serious warning.

I sense there are still those two kinds of wise men: the wise, wise men and the foolish, wise men. Some come to worship Jesus solely because of who He is. Others say, "I want the power to hold people captivated and spellbound." But the baptism of Jesus in the Spirit is a baptism of fire—which speaks of purity. It's a dying to self, a cleansing of motives. Many folks want that power, but they don't want a changed lifestyle.

Matthew 3:13–17

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

In this passage, we see a perfect picture of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit descending upon the Son, while the voice of the Father is heard. The Trinity had been hinted at throughout the Old Testament, beginning with the first verse.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

The Hebrew word translated "God" is "Elohim." "El" is the singular form of the word; "Elohim" is the plural form. Here in the baptism of Jesus, the Trinity is not only alluded to linguistically, but illustrated physically—the Son baptized, the Spirit descending, and the Father speaking. We see it, yet it is a great mystery. There are not three Gods. There is one God, one God in three Persons. How can this be?

Saint Patrick was one who tried to illustrate this idea in nature. He used the shamrock as a picture of the Trinity—three leaves, but one shamrock.

Others have said, "Look at man—body, soul, and spirit. One man can be father, son, and brother, yet he is still just one person."

Still others have said, "Look at water. It can be liquid, solid, or gas." And scientists tell us that at absolute zero degrees, for a split second, water can be all three at once.

Countless examples have been used throughout history in an attempt to explain the idea of three in one, the concept of the Trinity. Why is the Trinity such an important concept? I struggled for many years with this question.

"Lord, why three?" I asked. "Why didn't You keep it real simple and avoid this confusing Trinity concept? We are accused of being polytheistic. We're confused in our prayers. We get all tangled up. Why didn't You keep it simple, just You, just One?"

In recent years, however, I have come into an understanding of the Trinity, which for me personally has made all the difference. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit dwelled together in ages past—a billion years before years even began—perfectly content. The Father loved the Son. The Son honored the Father. The three of Them dwelled together in complete harmony, in total satisfaction. They are, and always will be, family. But they're only One.

What does this mean? Contrary to much of today's teaching, it means God didn't need me. God went through billions and zillions of years without man. And you know what? He got along just fine. He doesn't need us, folks. So

great is God's love that He gave His only Son to die and plunge into hell in order to redeem you. He's in love with you to be sure, but He doesn't need you. And that takes all of the pressure off because when love is demanding, it isn't love.

- "I need you. I must have you."
- "Where have you been? Who were you talking to?"
- "Where are you going? Who are you going with? Can I come?"

When love is not "trinitarian" in nature, it becomes smothering and restrictive. It causes tension and anxieties, and you feel caged in and cooped up.

Many of us erroneously picture God wringing His hands, pacing the clouds, worried about whether we're going to make it. He's not. He's very happy, totally fulfilled, and perfectly content. Yet He is so magnanimous and expansive that He has chosen to create us, love us, and walk with us. It's not a demand. It's not a need. It's an invitation.

How this blesses me! "You didn't need me, Lord. You don't need me now. But You still love me. You still want me to live with You forever. Wow!"

> Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.
>
> Matthew 11:28, 29

There is One who loves you, who is not uptight about you, or burdensome upon you. He is meek and lowly. And the mystery of the Trinity gives me rest in my love relationship with Him.



For topical study of Matthew 3:13–17, see "The Baptism of Jesus" below.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 3:13–17

Because John's mother and Jesus' mother were cousins, John knew Jesus quite well. And although he did not yet understand that his second cousin was the promised Messiah, he knew Jesus was without sin. That is why, in the midst of baptizing others, John was suddenly aware of his own sinfulness when Jesus approached him.

"There's no fault in you," declared John. "You should be baptizing me."

But Jesus immediately said, "Allow it to be so, for in so doing, we will fulfill all righteousness. It's the right thing to do." Why? If baptism was a sign of repentance, why would Jesus, who was sinless, say, "It's important for Me to be baptized by you"?

I suggest four reasons for your consideration.

1. Jesus' Baptism Was an Affirmation of John's Ministry

In joining the masses and coming to the Jordan to be baptized, Jesus was saying, "Even though John knows he's a sinner, even though John is aware of his inadequacies, I approve of his service for Me. And his message of repentance is a valid one." When Jesus began His public preaching, repentance was His message as well. In coming to the Jordan, Jesus was affirming John's ministry—both the man and the message.

2. Jesus' Baptism Is an Identification with Us Personally

He who knew no sin took our sin, died for us, and identifies with us in baptism. Jesus was immersed, and so are we. Consequently, there is an identification and a bonding.

3. Jesus' Baptism Was a Declaration to His Father Prophetically

In submission to the Father's plan, Jesus came to die. Romans 6 teaches that baptism is a picture of death and burial. In baptism, Jesus was saying, "I know I have come to die. And, Father, I am submitted to that plan of death and burial." But because baptism doesn't end in the water, because He was pulled out again, which speaks of resurrection, Jesus also declared this to His Father, "Yes, I am submitted to Your plan—I will die. But I will also rise again through Your power."

4. Jesus' Baptism Is an Illustration of the Trinity

After Jesus came out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove, and the voice of the Father was heard from the heavens.

The baptism of Jesus was an affirmation of John's ministry, an identification with us personally, a declaration to the Father prophetically, and an illustration of the Trinity practically.

When I read of Jesus' baptism, my mind goes back about twenty-three hundred years earlier to the story of a man whose name means "Comforter." You know him by the name of Noah. Noah was surrounded by a world that was corrupt and defiled. But Scripture tells us that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. And God told Noah, "I'm going to drown this corrupt, wicked world. I'm going to be merciful."

Merciful? Yes.

In sending the Flood, God was doing quickly and mercifully what man was doing slowly and painfully. Noah's society, immersed in the occult and caught up in perversion, was destroying itself. So God sent the Flood. For forty days it rained, and the world was drowned. At the end of forty days, the rain stopped, and Noah let out a raven and a dove. The raven, a scavenger, had plenty to pick on. Carcasses were everywhere, so the raven didn't come back. But the dove, a bird of purity, circled, and finding no place to set her foot, came back and landed on Noah.

The picture is incredible to me. A man called Comfort, surrounded by water, in which the polluted world has been drowned, and the dove comes upon him. Could this have registered in the minds of those who observed the baptism of Jesus? It certainly does for me, and through it, I understand something of the significance of baptism—a dying to the world around us and a resurrection to newness of life as Paul declared in Romans 6:4.

I am not stretching the analogy, because in 1 Peter 3:21, Peter writes that Noah and the Flood are a picture of baptism. But wait—there was another man who was submerged in water, baptized radically, whose name literally means "dove." You know him by his more familiar name of Jonah. Jonah was rebelling against the Lord when he went through a most interesting baptism. He wasn't only immersed in water. He was thrown in! For three days, he was at the bottom of the sea in the belly of a great fish, where he was broken as he

cried out to God and repented from his sin. And suddenly, he was resurrected as the whale had the "urge to re-gurge" him on the beach at Assyria.

Jonah's baptism was not a drowning of the world around him. It was a drowning of the rebellion and selfishness within him. Jonah had his own agenda, but through his baptism, he surrendered it. That's also what baptism is about. Not only are you dying to the world that surrounds you, but to the selfishness within you. Baptism says, "Lord, I will go wherever You lead. Do whatever You desire. Whatever that might mean, I trust You. You are my God and my King."

You might be saying, "This is all very fine theoretically. But I was baptized six months ago, or six years ago, or sixty years ago, and I have failed miserably."

So did Noah. After emerging from the ark, Noah got drunk and exposed himself in a manner that caused a problem in his sons felt to this day. The sinfulness that should have been eradicated from Noah's world resurfaced when he was drunk in his tent.

What about Jonah? Jonah preached, and the greatest revival in history took place as the entire city of Ninevah turned to the Lord. Yet what did Jonah do? He went up on a hillside and pouted, angry because four hundred thousand Ninevites got saved. He failed miserably because the selfishness that should have been drowned in the belly of the whale re-emerged.

During Noah's baptism, it rained for forty days. After Jonah's baptism, he emerged and preached, "forty days until Ninevah is destroyed." Following Jesus' baptism, He was led into the wilderness for forty days. Although all three had times of trial, only One emerged victorious. Only One made it successfully. Only One was baptized and moved on to total and complete victory. Was it Jonah, the great prophet? No. Noah, the man of faith? No. Only Jesus.

Jesus, in His forty-day temptation, overcame Satan. He didn't fail. And because of His victory, baptism not only says, "I am dying to the sin *around* me, and I am dying to the sin *within* me," but most importantly, it says, "I believe in the One who died *for* me."

You see, gang, when you are baptized, it doesn't mean you are going to be perfect from that point on. It means you acknowledge that you are perfectly forgiven and perfectly loved, that Jesus Christ paid the price for every sin

you ever have done, are doing, or will ever do. The One who was baptized and was victorious through those forty days of trial and testing is now living in you.

Thus Paul writes,

> *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*
>
> Galatians 2:20

That's the gospel—Jesus Christ victorious, living in me. I don't know when you were baptized, but I encourage you to reaffirm your baptism in your own heart. Be like Noah. Watch the world drown, and rise above it. Be like Jonah. Die to your selfishness, and walk in newness of life. And if you have failed like Noah did, like Jonah did, like we all have, know this: Jesus is your Victory. He who knew no sin became sin for you. You are perfectly forgiven. Enjoy your salvation, and live to that calling.



4 Chapter 3 closed with the account of the water baptism of Jesus Christ. Indeed, this was when He was baptized in the Holy Spirit as well, for although Jesus had been conceived *by* the Spirit, and had the Spirit residing *within* Him, at the time of His water baptism, the Spirit came *upon* Him to empower Him for ministry. This was a crucial moment in the life of Jesus, and I believe we need to experience such a moment in our lives if we want to minister and serve effectively. How? Simply by saying, "I need to be filled with Your Spirit, Lord. I need Your Spirit to come *upon* me, to empower me." And in faith we receive it at that time. Then we move on to minister effectively, for it is truly "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

So here is Jesus. The Holy Spirit has come upon Him. He has heard a voice from heaven, and no doubt, He must have been on a real high. Then chapter 4 begins.

Matthew 4:1

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

It is often true that after the blessings come the battles. On the heels of His baptism, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, where He would encounter the enemy.

Matthew 4:2 (a)
And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights . . .

Fasting for forty days was not unknown to those who studied the Scriptures and to the people of Israel familiar with their history. Exodus 34:28 says when Moses was given the Law on Mount Horeb, he neither ate nor drank for forty days. In 1 Kings 19, we read Elijah also fasted for forty days after the Lord sent an angel who gave him a certain kind of food that was able to sustain him for that period of time. Moses and Elijah both fasted forty days. Jesus fasted forty days, and later in Matthew's account, we will see how we are to act when we fast as well.

We live in a society addicted not only to alcohol and lust, but to all sorts of things. I suggest to you the reason could be because, as a society, we have ignored the simple principle of fasting, of saying no to the appetites of our bodies on a regular basis. If you feel an addictive pull in some area of your life, try saying no to your stomach's demands for a meal for a day or a week. When you deny the physical to concentrate on the spiritual, a dynamic occurs that I believe will very definitely help you overcome evil.

Matthew 4:2 (b)
. . . he was afterward an hungred.

After forty days in the wilderness seeking His Father and denying His flesh, Jesus was hungry. Physiologists tell us that when one fasts for that length of time, he loses his appetite completely. His hunger returns only when he is on the verge of death. Therefore, at this point, in His fortieth day, Jesus was literally starving to death. Physically, His body systems were crying out, and He was about to die if not nourished soon. It was at this point that Satan

came to tempt Him. Now before we consider the temptation of Jesus, I want you to remember that it was the Spirit who led Him into the wilderness. Why would the Spirit lead Jesus into the place where temptation was certain? I believe there are two reasons, both important for us to understand.

Jesus was led into the wilderness to reveal who He is. First Corinthians 15:45 declares that Jesus is the last Adam. I am reminded of the first Adam in the Garden of Eden who was also tempted directly by Satan.

> *The first Adam was in a beautiful garden. The last Adam was in a barren, forsaken desert. The first Adam ate freely of things except one forbidden fruit. The last Adam ate nothing for forty days. The first Adam was physically strong. The last Adam was on the verge of death. The first Adam blew it. He was the ultimate "Adam Bomb." He gave in to the temptation of Satan and thereby plunged all of humanity into a lost and hopeless situation. The last Adam, Jesus Christ, did not bomb out. He came through, and in so doing, He reveals to us who He is, the One who conquered sin.*

Jesus was led into the wilderness not only to reveal to us who He is, but also to relate to us as we are. The Book of Hebrews puts it this way:

> Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.
>
> Hebrews 2:17, 18; 4:15

No matter what sin you're struggling with, no matter what temptation seems to attack you constantly, Jesus is a merciful High Priest who prays for you effectively because He feels with you sympathetically. He is not shocked by your sin, for according to Hebrews 4:15, He has been tempted in all points as we are—and "all" in Greek means *all.* As our compassionate High Priest, Jesus says, "I understand why you are so critical or negative, lustful

or cynical, hateful or vengeful, lazy or slothful." He understands because He was tempted in all points as we are—yet without sin. He became *like* us that He might relate *to* us, and be strength *for* us in time of temptation.

Matthew 4:3

And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

In the wilderness, there are multiplied millions of round limestone rocks that look remarkably like little loaves of bread. No doubt, as Jesus fasted, those rocks must have taken on the appearance of bread. And now Satan comes to Him and says, "*If* You're the Son of God, turn these stones into bread."

What is the Enemy doing here? He's questioning the Father's provision. During Jesus' baptism, God identified Him as His beloved Son. Now Satan comes on the scene, challenging the very words God had spoken, saying, "*If* You really are the Son of God, why are You hungry? *If* You are the Son of God, why is this happening?"

Satan does the same thing in your life and mine when he comes to us and says, "*If* you are a child of God, where's the Father's provision? Why are those bills piling up? Why is there a lack in your life physically or materially?"

He comes to us and whispers in our ears, "Do something in your own power. Exercise your faith. Make it happen now." But God would have us be patient. We are His children. And He promises He will meet our needs as we pray for our daily bread. Most of us want to reach the Promised Land without ever going through the wilderness. We want to get there immediately, but the Father says, "No. There's a time of preparation. Wait. Don't panic. I will provide."

Like the man who prayed, "Lord, is it true that to You a million years is like a second?"

"Yes," the Lord answered.

"Wow. Is it also true that a million dollars is like a penny?"

"Yes."

"Well, Father, could I have a penny?"
"Sure. Just a second."

We need to realize the Lord's timing is different from ours. Jesus knew this. He would not push or rush the Father by taking things into His own hands. He would wait. And soon—perhaps only hours later—angels would come to Him. Instead of eating dry little loaves of bread, He would dine on angel food cake! How often I settle for bread because I try to do things in my own energy instead of waiting for the Father's perfect timing and the angel food cake.

Matthew 4:4

But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

"The issue," Jesus said, "is not the material realm. More important than physical food is the spiritual food I find in God's Word." Jesus said that it's not the material realm that is important. Man shall not live by bread alone. For you who are involved in the argument over inspiration of Scripture, please note that Jesus quoted Deuteronomy and said, "every *word* that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (8:3). It's not just the thoughts that are inspired. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy and declared that *every word* proceeds out of the mouth of God and is inspired by God. *Every word* is God-breathed.

Matthew 4:5, 6

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

Quoting Psalm 91, verses 11 and 12, Satan now questions the Father's protection. "Do You believe Your Father will really protect You, Jesus? Prove it. Prove it to Yourself, prove it to me, and prove it to all of Israel. Go

to the pinnacle of the temple and jump down. Doesn't Psalm 91 declare that God will give His angels charge over You to keep You from even stubbing Your toe?"

Satan quotes Scripture, but always omits a phrase or two in the process. Psalm 91, verse 11 actually says, "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee *in all thy ways*"—in all *God's* ways. Jesus knew this and answered accordingly.

Matthew 4:7

Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

"The Father will provide for Me, and the Father will protect Me, but I'm not going to test Him in order to satisfy you or anyone else. Scripture says, Satan, that I am not to test God."

Don't take Scripture out of context. Don't test God. If you lie on the freeway saying, "I'm going to prove right now that God is with me and that He will keep me," He'll keep you, all right—in heaven!

Don't tempt the Lord. Don't say, "I wonder how far I can go and not get hurt. I wonder how much I can be like the world without really being in the world." Don't do it. Don't jump off the temple to prove your spirituality, your liberty, or your maturity. Jesus said, "I'm not going to give in to this temptation. I know My Father is with Me. I know He will protect Me. I don't have to prove it."

Matthew 4:8–10

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Lastly, Satan questions the Father's promise. The Father had promised all things to His Son. But Satan came to Jesus saying, "The world is mine to give

You if You worship me."

How did Satan gain control of the world? Originally, God gave man dominion over the earth, but when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, he turned the title deed of planet earth over to Satan. Satan, therefore, had the right to say to Jesus, "I'll give You the whole world right now. You don't have to go the way of the Cross. It isn't necessary for You to plunge into hell. I'll give the world to You if You'll simply fall down and worship me. Take a shortcut! The promise of the Father? Who knows when it will be fulfilled or even *if* it will be fulfilled. Fall down, and You can have it all now!"

And God promises to you, single brother, that He is going to bless you. He whispers the promise in your heart that at the right time, He is going to send someone with whom you can walk in the way of the Lord. But Satan comes to you and says, "Are you sure that promise is going to come to pass? Let me give it to you now. Oh, I know she isn't a Christian, but you can influence her in the right direction. She'll go to church with you. No big deal. It'll be fine."

Satan comes to us and begins to question whether we can trust the Father's promise that if we delight ourselves in Him, He will give us the desires of our heart. "Why are you hungry? Where is your Father's provision?" He says. "Jump! Or do you doubt your Father's protection? Make it happen now! Don't wait for your Father's promise."

If you analyze the temptations that come your way, I think you will find every one will fall into one of these three categories: you will be tempted to deny the Father's provision, to doubt the Father's protection, or to despair of the Father's promise.

Matthew 4:11

Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

How did Jesus overcome Satan? First, He quoted Scripture. Whether He was dealing with questions of provision, protection, or promise, in all three cases, Jesus quoted Scripture. This encourages me because I can do the same thing. When the Enemy attacks, I can quote Scripture. So can you! You can do exactly what Jesus did. If you don't have one, I recommend *The Jesus*

Person Pocket Promise Book, which contains eight hundred promises from the Word, written in categories to fit every situation. Eight hundred promises for you to utilize when the Enemy says, "The Father is not providing for you. He's not really going to protect you. That promise is not meant for you."

Quote Scripture. But notice when Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone," He was saying, "*I* am not going to live by bread alone. The material realm is not going to have priority for Me." When He said, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," He was saying, "*I* am not going to do it because the Word forbids it." When He said, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve," He was saying, "*I* will serve My Father and Him alone."

Many Christians are under the mistaken impression that by simply quoting Scripture, Satan is going to run away. But Satan himself can quote Scripture. So can the demons. The power lies in submission to the Word, not in recitation of it. Satan flees when he hears us say, "I will *do* it," not, "I can *quote* it."

Notice the three Scriptures quoted are all from Deuteronomy 6 and 8—a relatively small portion of Scripture. Personally, I believe Jesus was having His devotions in that particular passage when the temptations came His way. Meditating upon the Word of God is crucial because Satan comes to me when I least expect him. He doesn't say, "Jon, I'm going to meet you in three days. Get ready." No, he watches and waits until he sees I am in a place of weakness, frustration, tension, fatigue, or transition, and—boom!—he'll strike. Ephesians 6 says the Word of God is the Sword of the Spirit. Learn the Word. Meditate upon the Word. Stay in the Word. And like Jesus, in submission to the Word, you'll beat back the Enemy.

Matthew 4:12

Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee. . . .

Galilee, located in northern Israel, was a province comprised of two hundred four villages and over fifteen thousand people. It was called "Region of Death" by the Jews in Jerusalem because, throughout Israel's history, the Gentiles would constantly wage war in this area. Consequently,

there were many mixed marriages and a great deal of Gentile influence within Galilee. The "cool" Jews went to Jerusalem. Jesus said, "I'm going to Galilee where all the outcasts are—the people who are looked down on, the people who have funny accents—that's where I'll be."

Matthew 4:13

And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim.

I don't blame the Lord for making His headquarters in Capernaum! Nestled on the edge of the Sea of Galilee, it's a beautiful beach town.

Matthew 4:14–16

That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.

Jesus set up His headquarters among those who were sitting in a darkened region, in the midst of the ones who were looked down upon by their countrymen. The same is still true today. Jesus looks for those who feel unworthy, on the periphery, in the dark. The person who feels most out of it is the one within whom Jesus is most ready to set up His headquarters.

Matthew 4:17

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The phrase "the kingdom of heaven" appears thirty-two times in Matthew's Gospel, while "the kingdom of God" is used only five times. Since the two phrases are basically interchangeable, why would Matthew be the only one to use "the kingdom of heaven," while Mark, Luke, and John refer to the "kingdom of God"? The reason is because the Jewish people were looking for a literal, physical, temporal, material kingdom based in

Israel. In writing about "the kingdom of heaven," Matthew is saying, "Jesus talked not about a physical kingdom, but a spiritual kingdom—the kingdom of heaven. It's bigger than just you Jews. It's larger in scope and entirely different in substance."

Matthew 4:18–22

And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

Here we see the call of James, John, Peter, and Andrew. We know from John's Gospel that at this point, these men already knew Jesus. Here, however, He is calling them into ministry.

"Follow Me," Jesus said. He didn't say, "Take a course in evangelism." He didn't say, "Study this book, go to this seminar, or practice this technique." He said, "If you hang out with Me, I'm going to be changing you, and inevitably you'll become like Me—a fisher of men."

Notice what Peter was doing when he was called. He was casting his net into the sea because Peter was bold and evangelistic in orientation. On the Day of Pentecost, it was Peter who preached. As a result, three thousand were saved—"caught up" in his glorious net of the gospel. John, on the other hand, wasn't casting nets, but mending them when Jesus called him. John, who would later become known as the "apostle of love," would go on to write epistles that would mend the church and mend people. I believe the Holy Spirit inspired these vignettes to illustrate how the disciples' eventual ministries were already seen in what they were doing naturally. God has a way of turning the natural into the supernatural through His grace and for His glory.

Matthew 4:23

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

Note the order: teaching first, then preaching, and finally healing. Teaching consists of laying down principles and precepts. Preaching is for the purpose of stimulating and proclaiming. Healing is the manifestation, the outworking of teaching and preaching. I believe the reason so many healing ministries are unbalanced and harmful is because they lack foundational teaching. If Jesus is our example, teaching and preaching must precede healing.

Matthew 4:24

And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.

Those who were demonized, those who were paralyzed, those who were hurting—Jesus healed them all.

Matthew 4:25

And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan.

The towns named here cover a one hundred-mile radius. People would literally walk hundreds of miles to see Jesus. Next time you are tempted to complain about your long trip to church, remember this verse!



5 Matthew's Gospel presents Jesus as King, King of the Jews specifically, although not exclusively.

In chapter 1, Matthew outlined Jesus' heritage. As a descendant of David, Jesus was the rightful Heir to the throne of Israel. In chapter 2, we saw homage paid the King by wise men who came from the East to worship Him. Also in chapter 2, we saw hostility toward the King when Herod, feeling intimidated by the Babe of Bethlehem, sought to destroy Him. In chapter 3, we saw the heralding of the King as John the Baptist came on the scene, wearing camel skins, eating honey-coated locusts and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." In chapter 4, we saw a challenge to the King when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness, a challenge that our King met head-on and from which He emerged victorious. Also in chapter 4, we saw the establishing of the headquarters of the King as Jesus taught and healed throughout Galilee. Here in chapter 5, as we continue seeing Jesus as King, we come to the constitution of His kingdom.

Matthew 5:1, 2

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

As the multitudes began hearing of Jesus, the last verse in chapter 4 says they came from one hundred miles or more to be with Him. Jesus, seeing the multitudes, climbed a hill, sat down, and prepared to teach. In Jewish culture, if you were preaching, you would stand. But if you were teaching or explaining, you would sit. That is why even today when a university wants to establish a certain teacher or course, it will call that position "the Chair," as in "the Chair of Philosophy" or "the Chair of Psychology." So, too, when the Pope speaks on doctrinal matters, he is always seated when he makes his proclamation. He is speaking "ex-cathedra," which literally means "from the chair."

So here, we see Jesus seated, ready to give an authoritative, important, significant teaching.

Matthew 5:3 (a)

Blessed . . .

Verse 3 introduces a well-known portion of Scripture called the Beatitudes. "Beatitude," literally *beātus* in Latin, means "happy," and every one of the following nine verses begins with the word "blessed" or "happy." Our United States Constitution guarantees the pursuit of happiness, but Jesus' constitution points out the pathway to happiness as He delineates the attitudes that lead to happiness. The Scriptures declare, "Blessed, or happy, is the people whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 33:12). David said, "Blessed, or happy, is the man whose sins are forgiven" (Psalm 32:1). I believe the Bible knows nothing of a dour, heavy Christianity. I believe Scripture indicates that the people of God should be the happiest, most joyful people on earth.

Matthew 5:3 (b)
. . . are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The world says, "The first step to happiness is to be self-assertive and confident, to highly esteem yourself and feel good about who you are." That's not what Jesus said. He said, "Blessed, or happy, are those who are poor in spirit—who realize their own spiritual poverty." Anyone who truly sees the Lord will inevitably feel poor in spirit.

In the first five chapters of his book, Isaiah indicts the people of Judah and the surrounding nations, saying, "Woe unto you and you and you." But in chapter 6, when he saw the Lord high and lifted up, he said, "Woe is *me!*" When Peter realized who Jesus was on a boat in the Sea of Galilee, he said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). When John the revelator saw Jesus, he fell down as though he were dead (Revelation 1:17).

Matthew 5:4
Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

When you realize you're a sinner and when you mourn over your sin, the Lord will come to you and say, "I don't condemn you. Go your way and sin no more." That's what the woman caught in the act of adultery heard, as did the prostitute who fell at the feet of Jesus weeping. "Leave her alone, Pharisees," Jesus said. "The one who is forgiven much loves much." In the

state of realizing our poverty and in our mourning, we truly enter into the kingdom and are comforted.

Matthew 5:5
Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

When you realize you're a sinner and when you mourn over your sin, the Lord will say to you, "I don't condemn you. Go your way and sin no more."

Meekness is not weakness. Meekness is strength under control. *Praus,* the Greek word translated "meek," is a term used to describe a powerful stallion broken and able to be ridden. Moses was known for his meekness in the Old Testament. Numbers 12:3 declares him to be the meekest man on the face of the earth. Jesus was known for His meekness in the New Testament. In the only autobiographical description of His personality, Jesus said, "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). So too, after a person realizing he is poor in spirit and begins mourning, he finds himself meek with his strength harnessed for the purposes of the King and for Him alone.

Matthew 5:6
Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Notice the order: First you're poor in spirit, then you're mourning over your sin, then you find yourself meek. Now that you've gotten rid of all that self-grandeur and self-glory, you find yourself hungering and thirsting because you're emptied of all that junk.

I am personally convinced the reason many people are not filled is because they have not been emptied. They are still full of themselves. Pride must go before you find yourself hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

My wife fixes me excellent meals, but if I stop off and score a couple of burgers before I head home (as I have been known to do on occasion), even though there's a wonderful meal spread on the table, I don't have an appetite for it because I'm full of burgers and shakes.

Some people have lost their appetite for the Word of God. They no longer desire to worship; they no longer crave rightness. They are no longer meek,

or mourning, or poor in spirit because they are full of the burgers and shakes of self-importance. When you empty yourself of self, happy are you because you're going to hunger once more for righteousness.

Matthew 5:7

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

After you have gone through the emptying process and you're filled with God's love, you'll be merciful toward others—no longer judgmental, critical, or analytical. Truly, the more righteous a man is, the more merciful he will be. The more sinful a man is, the more harsh and critical he will be.

Matthew 5:8

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

There is a difference between having a clean heart and a pure heart. All of us who have embraced the Lord have clean hearts. But a pure heart is one not distracted by the things of the world. Think of it this way: All soap is clean. But only one is 99.44 percent pure. Ivory soap doesn't have deodorants, perfumes, additives, or colorings. Ivory is nothing but soap. Other soaps are

clean, but they're not pure. The pure in heart shall see God.

- "Why don't I see God?" people ask. Could it be because you're no longer pure in heart?
- "Are you saying I'm lost?"

  No. But has your vision been obscured by a bunch of perfumes and additives, still clean, but no longer Ivory, deodorized and perfumed, but no longer pure?

Matthew 5:9

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Being a peacemaker doesn't mean wearing a peace symbol, marching against nukes, or marching for whales. I suggest to you that the finest peacemaking activity in which you can engage is introducing people to the Prince of Peace—Jesus Christ. What happiness is there that can compare to the joy of seeing a friend, relative, or neighbor open his heart to Jesus? Truly, it is then that we are blessed indeed.

Matthew 5:10–12

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

What? Persecution? Maybe you thought if a person possessed a "beatitude mentality"—if he was aware of his own poverty, if he mourned over his sin, if he was meek, if he hungered and thirsted after righteousness, if he had a pure heart, if he showed mercy—he would be popular. But such is not the case, for if the attitudes of meekness and mercy, poverty of spirit and righteousness of heart are being worked out in you, you will encounter persecution. You will have enemies. You will be slandered and misunderstood because in 2 Timothy 3:12, Paul says this, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." That's a promise.

Jesus said, "Happy is the one who is persecuted. You're joining a great company, the company of the prophets. And, indeed, you will have profit in heaven—exceedingly great reward."

"Be happy," Jesus said, "because your reward in heaven is going to be great when men persecute you—and they will!" Notice one more thing before we leave these verses. It says, "and shall say all manner of evil against you *falsely,* for my sake." Many times Christians are being persecuted not because they're living righteously, but because they're weird. Weirdness doesn't count!

These are the attitudes that will lead to happiness and fulfillment: poverty of spirit, mourning over sin, meekness that no longer struts, but submits,

hungering and thirsting for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking, persecution—this is the pathway to happiness.

Matthew 5:13

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Salt promotes thirst, and as the salt of the earth, we should be making those around us thirsty for the living water of Jesus Christ. People should say, "There's something about you that creates in me a thirst for what you're enjoying."

Salt also preserves and heals. Therefore, if our culture is putrefying and decaying, we then, as the church, should hold back from indicting our society or critiquing our political leaders and begin preserving by repenting. "Lord, have we lost our saltiness? Have we lost our flavor and our effectiveness?"

Second Chronicles 7:14 declares, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." It begins with us, gang. We are the salt.

Matthew 5:14–16

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Whenever Jesus did a miracle, people didn't ask Him to pose for a picture or to embark on a speaking tour. They simply glorified the Father. How I respect and admire Jesus for being able to work in such a way that He didn't draw attention or glory to Himself, but only to His Father.

Matthew 5:17–19

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

"I am not coming to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. I am not seeking to weaken it, but to establish it."

> Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.
>
> Galatians 3:24–26

People think, "Well, I'm pretty good."

"Oh?" says the Law. "Here's your standard."

And suddenly, as they read through the Law, they realize they're sinners in need of a Savior.

Matthew 5:20 (a)

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. . . .

This statement would have shocked those who heard it because, according to a popular Jewish saying of the time, "If only two men made it into heaven, one would be a scribe, and the other a Pharisee." The scribes were scholars who studied, interpreted, and commented endlessly upon the Law. The word "pharisee" literally means "separated one." Numbering seven thousand, this company of men kept the minutest details of the Law.

We look at the scribes and Pharisees rather humorously today, but no one did then. They were the Billy Grahams, Chuck Swindolls, and Jack Hayfords

—the spiritual giants of their day. And Jesus said even their righteousness wasn't good enough.

Matthew 5:20 (b)

. . . ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

This is the key to the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is saying, "If you think you can make it into the kingdom without Me as your Savior, you'd better be awfully good. In fact, you'd better be perfect."

So when people say, "I live by the Sermon on the Mount," I say, "Oh? Good luck, because Jesus told us in that sermon to be perfect, that unless our righteousness exceeds that of even the most holy men, we will never enter the kingdom."

The Sermon on the Mount, perhaps the most misunderstood passage in all Scripture, is meant to bring us to the realization that there is no way *anyone* can keep its lofty standards. It is meant to make everyone equally guilty. It is meant to drive us to Jesus.

And once it has driven us *to* Christ, the Sermon on the Mount directs us *in* Christ, causing us to pray, "Lord, I thank You that Your blood has cleansed me when I have failed. But the standard is now before me. Help me to live in Your kingdom mentality—in poverty of spirit and purity of heart; in mourning and meekness and mercy—through *Your* strength, for I have a long way to go."

Our tendency is to compare ourselves with each other. That's what the Pharisees did. Compared to everyone else, they might have thought they looked pretty good.

One day after a wedding, I walked out to greet some of the people, and there was a guy who was over seven feet tall. He was huge! I had forgotten how big a seven-footer really is! When I'm around toddlers, I'm pretty big. But when I was around this guy, I was a runt! So, too, compared to the standards Jesus presented, the Pharisees were spiritual runts just like everyone else. That is why this sermon would have been so shocking.

Matthew 5:21, 22 (a)

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. . . .

"Anger" is only one letter short of "danger" because danger always lurks beneath anger. You might be able to disguise it temporarily, but if anger is brewing inside you, it will lead to danger, for murder begins in the heart.

Matthew 5:22 (b)

. . . and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Is anger ever right? Yes.

Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.

Ephesians 4:26

There is a place for righteous anger, but there is only one appropriate way to vent it. What did David say concerning his enemies? He said, "Lord, may their bones be broken and their skull cracked open. May their teeth be kicked in" (see Psalm 58:6). Since everything in the Old Testament physically is a picture of things in the New Testament spiritually, we are to wage war with violence, but not against flesh and blood.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Ephesians 6:12

There is a place, indeed, to get angry and wage war against the demons. With fasting and prayer, we should come against the forces that pollute, pervert, and destroy. Watch out, though, for unrighteous anger, when you call people idiots and fools. Jesus said that's equivalent to murder, for when you speak angrily or judgmentally of people, you murder a part of them.

Matthew 5:23, 24

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Does this mean we should track down every person who has something against us? For some of us, that would be a full-time job! I believe the key to understanding this is found in the phrase, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and *there* rememberest . . ." When you are at the altar and *there,* in the place of prayer, the Lord says, "This man or that woman has something against you, go get it right," then you must do as the Spirit leads.

Matthew 5:25, 26

Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

The legal system in Jesus' day required the plaintiff to personally track down the defendant. In other words, if you had something against someone, it would be your job to find him and bring him in physically before the judge. This is why Jesus here says, "If you are on the road with your adversary—if he has captured you—cut a deal with him before you get to court. Apologize! Get it right because once the matter reaches court, you could get cast into prison and remain until you pay the last penny." But how can you pay the last penny when you're in prison? You have no way to make money. That's the point. If you let the incident become a big deal by not dealing with it immediately, promptly, in humility, and with transparency, you'll never escape it.

I think many of us have found this to be true at one point or another. When we had the opportunity to deal with a situation, we chose not to because of pride, and then it grew and grew over the days and months and years, until it became so complicated and confusing that there was no way out. Jesus said,

"Avoid this. Be wise. When you are on the road, when you're talking with your adversary, when you're still communicating, be humble, lest you find yourself imprisoned with no way of escape."

Matthew 5:27, 28

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

The issue isn't only what you're doing outwardly; it's what's going on in your heart internally. We have all been angry at some time or another, thus we're all murderers. We have all looked with lust in our heart, thus we're all adulterers. Truly, there is none righteous, no not one.

Matthew 5:29, 30

And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut if off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

One of my friends, a wonderful Christian brother, is a blind man. Yet, his number one problem is lust. Therefore, Jesus is not talking about physically poking out an eye or chopping off a hand. Rather, He's saying, "Deal violently and directly with any part of your being—your activities, your hobbies, your schedule—that is leading you to sin. It's destructive, so deal with it decisively."

Matthew 5:31

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement.

The Pharisees were basically divided into two camps: the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel. Those who followed Shammai were very conservative, saying that on the basis of Deuteronomy 24, divorce could be granted only in the case of uncleanness, which they interpreted to be sexual immorality or adultery. The followers of Hillel were very liberal, saying uncleanness is much broader than simply adultery or immorality. If a woman, for example, put too much salt and pepper on her husband's eggs, which made him lose his temper, she had made him sin, and therefore was unclean —a legitimate reason for divorce. Or, if a man saw a woman who was more righteous or virtuous than his wife, he had the right to divorce her because she was now unclean by comparison. The followers of Shammai said a written bill of divorce must be given. The followers of Hillel said all that was required was for the husband to look at his wife and say, "I divorce you," three times. Consequently, not unlike today, divorce was occurring for the most frivolous reasons.

Matthew 5:32

But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

Based on the original text, I strongly believe this verse means that, although God's plan is that two people remain married until death separates them, those who divorce and remarry, in effect, do commit adultery. However, they don't *live* in adultery. Therefore, God forbid that we should say, "All manner of sin is forgiven all man except for one: divorce." That's not what Jesus said. He said, "All manner of sin is forgiven all men except the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit—the rejection of Jesus Christ" (see Matthew 12:31). We're all sinners, gang. We've all missed the mark. Look around you and you'll see a murderer sitting next to you and a bunch of adulterers in front and behind you. We're *all* sinners. We *all* need a Savior.

Matthew 5:33–37

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

Your words should be so solid that a simple yes or no should be sufficient. The minute you have to say, "I swear!" they're not.

Matthew 5:38–42

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

If you lived in Jesus' day, a Roman soldier could come to you at any time and tap you on the shoulder with his spear. You then would be required by law to carry his armor or baggage for up to one mile. Here, Jesus says, "Blow his mind. Go with him two miles. And if someone wants your coat, give him your undercoat as well. If they hit you on the cheek, turn the other cheek."

There have been those throughout history who have found that what Jesus was saying was potent and dynamic—that turning the other cheek actually puts one in control. The entire subcontinent of India was freed from the powerful British rule because Ghandi read this verse, and although he was not a believer, he believed in what Jesus said. He inspired an entire nation to turn the other cheek, and it blew the Brits away. After all, what can you do if someone won't fight back? You can beat them with clubs, you can fire guns

on them, but the morale of your own army is destroyed in the process. So eventually, the British got on their ships and sailed home.

Martin Luther King, Jr. found the same thing to be true when he mobilized the Blacks in Alabama. If the protesters had fought back, the U.S. Marshals would have felt justified in firing their guns indiscriminately, and the Civil Rights movement would have died. But peaceful resistance won out, and an entire people experienced liberation.

In your family, at work, in your neighborhood—wherever you might be—take the words of Jesus literally. Don't fight back, for he who doesn't fight back controls the situation.

Matthew 5:43, 44 (a)

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies . . .

If you've ever lashed out at someone who refused to fight back, you know how small it made you feel. Don't fight back. Love back. Nothing will disarm your enemy so easily.

But you say, "She has hurt me or has trampled on me. I can't love back."

In the next verse, Jesus tells you how.

Matthew 5:44 (b)

. . . bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.

Bless them! When the person who bugs you the most comes down on you, look at him and say, "The Lord bless you. The Lord be with you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and give you peace." Pronounce blessing upon him; do good to him; pray for him.

I'll tell you a secret: If you pray for your enemies—for the people who bug you the most—you will experience power in your life and an ability to love them that will blow you away. Why? When you pray for your enemies, two things happen: They change and you change. It might take some time, but slowly yet surely, you'll see a change. If I'm praying every day for the guy I

can't stand, something amazing happens. I become involved with him and interested in him. As I pray for him, there is a linkage established through prayer.

Matthew 5:45–48

That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

"Be ye perfect? You mean never be angry because that's equivalent to murder? Never say anything more than yes or no without defending or explaining? Turn the other cheek when people are attacking me? Bless those who hurt me? Be *perfect?* "Rabbi, if what You say is true, if this is what was meant in the Old Testament Law, then no matter how I come across outwardly with my robes, my pious postures, and my religious activities, I'm lost. No wonder You said righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. I'm a Pharisee—and I'm a sinner."

"Great!" Jesus would answer. "That's right where I want you. I will now help you live the way of the kingdom constitution as I, the King, take up residence within you."

Soon we'll see Jesus face-to-face. He's coming back. And when we see Him, the Bible says we shall be like Him (I John 3:2). We shall indeed be perfect. And what a day that will be!



6 Jesus continues His Sermon on the Mount, the constitution of His kingdom. In chapter 5, He addressed inner attitudes. Here in chapter 6, He will discuss outward activities.

Matthew 6:1, 2

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

In the area of praying, giving, and fasting, Jesus will talk about the *hupokrites,* or hypocrites. *Hupokrites* is a Greek word that means "mask-wearer." Hupokrites were actors in the Greek theater who wore masks, very exaggerated in form, with huge smiles and frowns so that even people in the back row could see what kind of emotion was being portrayed. We get the word two-faced from this same idea.

Jesus said, "Don't be hypocritical in your giving." How did the hypocrites give? Originally, there was an area at the side of the temple courtyard called the Chamber of the Secret. People would go there and drop gifts designated for the poor in a large chest called the Trumpet. Later, the poor would come to the Chamber of the Secret and receive gifts from the Trumpet. It was all done very discreetly, with humility and honesty. But as the years went on, the Pharisees decided it wasn't practical to go all the way to the temple to give alms to the poor. So instead, they tied a small brass or silver trumpet to their belts. Then, whenever they wanted to give to the poor, they stood on a street corner and blew their trumpets. Upon hearing this, the poor people in the area would gather around the generous Pharisee as he distributed his alms with great flourish, while everyone around said, "My! Look how righteous he is!"

Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites because they gave not out of concern for the poor, but that they might be seen by men.

Matthew 6:3, 4

But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

Notice, Jesus doesn't say, "*If* thou doest alms," but "*When* thou doest alms." The assumption is we will give. The only question is, how will we do it? Share secretly, and your Father will reward you openly.

Matthew 6:5

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

The Pharisees designated the third hour, the sixth hour, and the ninth hour as times of prayer. In other words, at nine o'clock in the morning, at noon, and at three o'clock in the afternoon, they would faithfully gather in the synagogues or in the temple to offer their prayers. We are told in the Book of Daniel that he, a man of God, opened his windows toward Jerusalem and prayed three times a day. But the Pharisees were not doing it to seek the Lord, but rather to be seen by men. How do we know this? On their way to prayer meetings, the Pharisees would stop on the corner of the street and begin to offer long and verbose prayers. In so doing, they were saying, "We are so eager to pray, we can't wait to get to the synagogue."

And people would say, "Oh, wow! Look how righteous they are!"

We still do that in our own subtle ways, don't we? "Yes, as I was praying this morning at three o'clock, the Lord brought you to my heart." And we subtly let people know we are in a place of continual prayer. Jesus said, "Don't do it. That's hypocrisy."

Matthew 6:6

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

The Father, who sees in secret, will bless you openly and eternally.

Matthew 6:7

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Jesus encourages us to be short and concise in our prayers. To me, this is fantastically liberating because I fall prey to thinking, *The longer I pray, the more impressed God will be.*

In Ecclesiastes 5, Solomon says that God is in heaven. You are on earth. Therefore, let your words be few. You know, I crack up at my own prayers sometimes. "Well now, Father," I hear myself praying, "I just pray right now for my wife, Tammy. She has this particular need, and I just pray You would . . ." As if the Lord is up in heaven saying, "Tammy? Oh yeah, Tammy. Now what need does she have?" We don't need to inform the Lord, nor convince the Lord. We just need to connect with the Lord.

Matthew 6:8–13

Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

As we sing and pray this most famous of all prayers, are we, like the Pharisees, guilty of meaningless repetition? Yes—if we're saying it without thinking. But the Scriptures do not forbid meaningful repetition. Jesus is not saying repetition in and of itself is wrong. How do I know? In Matthew 26, when Jesus made the same request of His Father three times in the Garden of Gethsemane, Matthew writes, "And He spake the same words yet again" (see v. 44). Thus, I believe there is such a thing as meaningful repetition, and I believe this prayer prayed word for word can be potent and powerful, mystical and wonderful, if prayed with an engaged mind and a sensitive heart.

For topical study of Matthew 6:9–13 entitled "The Perfect Prayer," turn to page **34.**

Matthew 6:14, 15

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

When people fail, don't rub it in. Rub it out. Forgive them. How? I personally believe when you pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," the very act of articulating, "as we forgive our debtors," releases forgiveness at that moment. That might sound a bit mystical, but many of us have found it to be very practical. When you say, "Father, I am now forgiving my debtors," in the very act of praying it, you'll experience it.

Matthew 6:16–18

Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

The Pharisees—the ones who blew the trumpet when they gave their gifts and prayed on street corners because they couldn't wait to get to church—fasted every Monday and Thursday. You could always tell when they were fasting because they walked around with long faces, drawn cheeks, unbrushed teeth, and uncombed hair.

Jesus said when you fast, comb your hair, wash your face, brush your teeth, and don't let people know. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Fasting is an important discipline often neglected by American Christians. In the Scriptures, we see fasting primarily for two reasons.

The first is for direction. Both examples in the Old Testament are found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. In the New Testament, we see the examples not only in the life of Jesus but also in the Book of Acts. When people desired to know God's will or direction, they fasted.

Physiologists tell us when there is no food in the stomach, there is greater blood flow to the brain. You can actually think clearer when you're not digesting burgers and fries. Once you overcome those first pangs of hunger, your thinking processes are more focused and clearer than ever. On the other hand, if you have two Whoppers and a couple of shakes, all you want to do is sleep!

Second, people fast not only for direction, but for liberation. When you feel oppressed, bound, or hassled by some sin or problem, fasting is a powerful weapon in your spiritual arsenal. Why? When you say no to your stomach and start praying instead, something dynamic begins to happen. Saying no to your physical appetites helps you say no to the other temptations that hassle you. If you are plagued by temptation, I encourage you to begin to explore the discipline of fasting. When your stomach starts demanding, just say "No," and start praying. You will find a power and a liberty that will help you overcome whatever temptations are seeking to enslave you. There's real power in fasting. If you need direction, if you hunger for liberation, skip lunch, and seek the Lord.

Matthew 6:19–21

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Giving is not God's way of raising cash. It's God's way of raising kids. Every time I give, I am giving away part of my stinginess and selfishness. God doesn't need my money, but I need to give. The Lord wants my heart, not my money, and He knows that wherever my treasure is, that's where my heart will be. If I have financial investments, I will follow the stock market carefully. If I hold real estate, I will follow the housing market with genuine

interest. If I have treasure in heaven, guess where my heart will be? It is profoundly interesting to me that Jesus didn't say, "Where your heart is, there your treasure will be." Instead, He said, "Put your treasure in heaven, and your heart will inevitably follow."

How can we be more heavenly-hearted? By sending our treasure ahead.

Matthew 6:22, 23

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

Because the eye is the channel through which comes illumination, if you have an evil eye, your whole body shall be full of darkness. Proverbs 28:22 says, "He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him." Who has an evil eye? The one who lives for riches. It's not wrong to have things, but if you live for things, your eye is evil, and your life will be dark.

> Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.
>
> 1 Timothy 6:17

Paul didn't say, "Sell your goods." He said, "Don't trust in them."

Matthew 6:24

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Mammon is more than just nickels, dimes, and dollar bills. Jesus identifies mammon as a master. I believe mammon is a god, a demonic force who wants you to be focused on him, in bondage to him, and all wrapped up in him. The entire monetary system in our world right now is incredible.

Truly, it is a religion requiring great faith. I was reading an article some time ago that said if suddenly a whistle was blown in the economic community and all accounts had to be settled immediately, only 10 percent of the debts and 10 percent of the cash would be real. In other words, if the music stopped in the world of financial musical chairs, nine out of ten people would be left without a chair because 90 percent of the transactions that happen in the economic world are backed by nothing. Zip. Zero. It's all faith.

> Even the dollar bill in your wallet, except for a very rare one, doesn't say Silver Certificate anymore. It's a U.S. Government Note, backed by nothing.

Economics is a risky religion. And Jesus said, "You cannot serve God and mammon. You've got to make a choice."

> **Matthew 6:25**
>
> **Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?**

Does this verse mean we shouldn't care at all what we wear or about investments or monetary matters? No. The meaning here is that we are to take no *anxious* thought, or literally, "Take no worry." The word *worry* means literally "to strangle." If you're worried about what you're wearing, eating, or drinking—about what you have or don't have materially—your personality will be tied in knots and strangled.

I once read that it takes sixty trillion droplets of fog to cover seven city blocks. Now sixty trillion droplets, or seven city blocks' worth of fog, can close down airports and tie up cities. Yet, if you condensed those sixty trillion fog droplets, you would end up with only half a glass of water.

That's a good picture of what worry is all about. You begin with something little, only half a glass of water. But you start thinking about it and wrestling with it, wondering, *How is this going to work out? How am I going to do that?* And before long, you can't see straight, and your airport is

shut down. You're not hearing from the Lord, and you're not soaring with the Lord as you once did because you're all fogged in. Jesus said, "Don't take any anxious thought whatsoever. Don't let worry strangle you. Don't end up in a fog."

Matthew 6:26

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

First Peter 5 says we are to cast all of our anxieties upon God. How?

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6–7

Be anxious for nothing. Pray about everything. Be thankful in all things. That's the key. Jesus wants us to be a carefree people.

Matthew 6:27–31

Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

Styles change quickly. I was thinking about this one day when I saw a couple walking through downtown Medford, Oregon. Their clothes were totally out of fashion, but walking hand in hand, there was a glow about them

because of their radiant smiles. And I thought, *There goes one of the best-looking couples I have ever seen.* Don't get all hung up on fads and fashions. Jesus tells us to check out the flowers. Even Solomon couldn't rival their splendor.

> **Matthew 6:32–34**
>
> **(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.**

Seek first the kingdom, and everything else will fall into place. Every one of you is proof of this, for truly God has provided. We may have spent nights worrying, and yet the Lord has been faithful even when we've been foolish. That's why Jesus told us not to worry about tomorrow. Today has enough challenges of its own. Just deal with today, and above all, seek first the kingdom.

THE PERFECT PRAYER

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 6:9–13

As far as we know, the disciples never asked Jesus to teach them to preach, to prophesy, or to cast out demons. There is no record of them asking how to worship or witness or how to build a ministry or lead their families. The one thing the disciples asked of Jesus directly was, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Why? I believe it is because, after watching Jesus for several years, the disciples were convinced prayer was the secret of His ministry and the foundation of all He did.

In Luke 11, Jesus gave His disciples the same prayer, virtually word for word, that He had given two years earlier, recorded here in Matthew. He didn't say, "The prayer I taught two years ago was for the multitudes, but for you disciples, here's something heavier." Or, "The prayer I taught in the Sermon on the Mount was at the beginning of My ministry, but now two years later, here is something more meaty." It was as though He was saying, "Don't you recall what I taught you two years ago?" as He gave this prayer verbatim to them once again.

This revolutionized my thinking. I had always been under the impression that the Lord's Prayer was simply an example or a model that we could study and learn from, but it was not necessarily to be prayed verbatim. While I still believe the Lord's Prayer is a wonderful model and a perfect example, I have come to believe it is more than that. I believe it is actually sacramental.

"Sacrament" refers to that which comes from the outside and works its way in. Baptism, the Lord's Table, and the marriage ceremony are all sacraments because they are external demonstrations that signify internal transformation. I have discovered personally that the Lord's Prayer is sacramental—or close to it. That is, by praying the Lord's Prayer from memory word for word externally, something wonderful, mystical, and beautiful happens internally.

"Wait!" you say. "Didn't Jesus teach against meaningless repetitions?"

Yes, in Matthew 6:7, Jesus did warn about vain and meaningless repetitions. If I say the Lord's Prayer with my mind a million miles away and my heart not sensitive to the Spirit, it will profit me nothing. But, when I say it meaningfully—concentrating, thinking, contemplating, and meditating—when I pray this prayer as the Lord gave it to His disciples in Luke 11 and to the masses in Matthew 6, I have discovered it has a very powerful and potent effect upon me personally. I believe it will upon you as well.

Two characteristics of this prayer strike me. I am amazed first by its completeness. It is wonderful because it covers all of our needs and all of God's worthiness. Secondly, I am impressed with its conciseness. Sixty-five words long, it only takes thirty seconds to pray.

We have fallen into the fallacy of thinking the strength of prayer is in direct proportion to the length of prayer—even though Jesus went out of His way to say that we wouldn't be heard for our "much speaking." Jesus' prayers were complete, but concise. If I asked the Lord to teach me to pray, I would think He would give me a one hundred-page book at the very least. But He didn't. He simply gave a prayer sixty-five words long.

I am reminded of the time Moses' sister Miriam was struck with leprosy. Moses looked to the Lord and said, "Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee" (Numbers 12:13). Eight words, and the Lord healed her.

Now, we also know Moses was so in love with God that he spent forty days and forty nights seeking His face in the desert. Thus, I'm not discounting or diminishing the importance of those lengthy chunks of time when you seek the Lord. But in our daily prayer life, I think we need a readjustment in our thinking.

When I have repeatedly prayed the Lord's Prayer word for word, I have found a liberty, an empowering, and a joy that have been really special and refreshing to me. I can pause in my car before going to my next appointment (already late) and say,

> Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
>
> Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
>
> Give us this day our daily bread.
>
> And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
> For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Then it's out my door and into the meeting with the sense that the Lord is with me and the bases are covered. Notice six elements of this prayer. The first component, verse 9, concerns God's Person. The second, verse 10, concerns God's purpose. Third, God's provision is seen in verse 11. Fourth, God's pardon is in verse 12. Fifth, God's protection is in the first half of verse 13. And sixth, God's preeminence is in the last half of verse 13.

First, God's Person . . .

Our Father . . .

When Jesus taught this prayer, He must have shocked those who were listening to Him when He said, "Our Father." The word for "Father" is "Abba," meaning "Papa." Keep in mind that in the Old Testament, God was addressed as Elohim, the Strong One; El Shaddai, the Mighty One; and Yahweh, the unspeakable word that meant, "I AM THAT I AM."

Why did Jesus suddenly say, "When you pray, call God Daddy, Papa, Abba, Father?" Was He no longer the Powerful, Unspeakable, Omnipotent God of the Old Testament? Did God change? No. God didn't change. We did.

> *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*
>
> John 1:12

We were adopted into His family. If you are truly a child of God, He is still the Unspeakable One, the Almighty One, the Omnipotent One, but because you have been adopted into His family, to you He is also Abba. Notice also, He's not just *my* Father, but He is *Our* Father. He's the Presbyterian's Father, the Pentecostal's Father, the Catholic's Father, and the Lutheran's Father. Regardless of their denomination, Christians, hand in hand, pray, "Our Father," not only now, but throughout the ages.

I can't hit like Babe Ruth, paint like Michelangelo, or sing like George Beverly Shea. But you know what? I can pray like John Knox, like Martin

Luther, and like Charles Spurgeon, because I can pray the same prayer they prayed. It is the perfect prayer because it came from the perfect Pray-er—Jesus Christ. You can pray this prayer daily, hourly, whenever you like. And you will find yourself in incredible company with the great saints of the ages, with believers of all other flavors, who all love God and address Him as Father because of their relationship to the Son.

. . . Which art in heaven . . .

As my Father, I relate to Him. But because He's in heaven, I reverence Him.

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.

Ecclesiastes 5:2

I like that! Solomon reminds us we don't have to pray with lofty terminology or sanctimonious tones. Yes, we must be reverent because God is in Heaven. But we can be real because He's our Father.

. . . Hallowed be thy name . . .

"Hallowed" is a word that has been lost in our language because the concept has been lost from our lives. It means "to make holy, separated, transcendent."

"O Lord, hallowed, holy is Your Name. Everyone around me, everything that touches me, all that is within me has been tainted and eroded by sin. But You are holy. Hallowed is Your Name." Second, notice not only God's Person, but also His purpose.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

There are only two kinds of people: those who are in harmony with God's purpose, saying, "Thy will be done," and those who live for themselves, saying, "My will be done."

God is terrifyingly fair. If you say, "My will be done," He will allow that to happen. If you say, "I don't want God," He will allow you to be damned. If you say, "I want my way," He will give you your way.

We have a choice to make. We can either, as the Psalmist says, "Be still, and know that He is God," or we can say, "God, You be still and know that I am me."

The prophet Isaiah went to Hezekiah and said, "Hezekiah, the Lord wants you to know it's time for you to die. Prepare your house." The original text of Isaiah 38:2 tells us Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and chattered like a bird, "Let me live. Let me live." Finally, God said, "Okay, you got it. Your will be done." Hezekiah lived fifteen more years, and they were the fifteen most tragic years of his life. During that time, Hezekiah set the stage for the Babylonian invasion, and he fathered a son named Manasseh who grew up to be the most wicked king in the history of Israel. Hezekiah would have been so much better simply praying, "*Thy* kingdom come, *Thy* will be done, Father, on earth as it is in heaven."

Do you pray in simplicity, "Father, Thy will be done"? Or do you pray with a demanding mentality, "You listen to me, God. I want this"?

Ruth Bell Graham has said she is glad God did not listen to her foolish demands in her younger years, or she would have married the wrong guy fifteen times. But she showed wisdom when she ended her prayers with the Lord's Prayer, saying, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done."

Third, God's provision . . .

Give us . . .

Notice Jesus did not pray, "Give Me *My* bread," but "Give us *our* bread." There are no singular pronouns in the Lord's Prayer. For me, it's so freeing to think of my needs as "our needs." If I'm feeling tired, I pray, "Lord, give us strength, my brothers and sisters who are feeling fatigued today." If I'm sad, I pray, "Lord, lift our spirits today." There's wonderful, continual intercession when a person prays, "*Our* Father, give *us* this day, forgive *us* our debts, lead *us* not into temptation."

. . . This day . . .

Give us *this day*—not this month, not this year. Why does the Lord want us to pray day by day? Why can't we just sort of blanket our requests by saying, "Lord, give us this month our monthly needs," or "Give us this year our yearly bread"?

The Lord wants us to pray for our daily needs because prayer in and of itself is our greatest need. If the Father gave things to us on a monthly basis, we wouldn't pray very frequently. The Lord wants you and me to come before Him every day. Is it because He's on an ego trip? No. Is it because He has need of us? No. Because we have need of Him. *He* is our Bread.

. . . Our daily bread.

I think it's rather foolish for people to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," but fail to take Communion. It's like praying, "Lord, send light," while keeping our eyes closed. "For this cause," writes Paul, "many are weak and sick and even dying unnecessarily" (see 1 Corinthians 11:30). I believe the ultimate answer to this request is found at the Communion Table, for truly *He* is our Bread. Don't let the pendulum swing too far, fundamental Protestant. Don't diminish the mystery of the Lord's Table by saying, "I don't believe Communion is really mystical or miraculous. It's not really necessary. It's optional."

No. It's foundational. It's essential. Check out the Book of Acts. Communion was a key component of the early church. Jesus Himself said, "Do this often in remembrance of Me. Be constantly fed and refreshed in Me."

Fourth, God's pardon . . .

And forgive us our debts . . .

"What is found in Christianity which is not found in any other religion?" This was the question asked at a seminar featuring several prominent Christian theologians. C. S. Lewis, the brilliant thinker and gifted author, was caught in traffic while the rest of the panel puzzled over this question. After about an hour, Lewis arrived, and the question was posed to him. "That's

simple," he replied. "The forgiveness of sin."

Our past is buried in the sea of God's forgiveness and forgetfulness. He does not remember our sin anymore. And that is what makes Christianity absolutely unique.

. . . As we forgive our debtors.

In the expression of this prayer is the explosion of forgiveness. I might begin praying the Lord's Prayer with bitterness in my heart toward someone who hurt me six years ago, eight weeks ago, or ten minutes ago. But as I pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," suddenly the resentment, the bitterness, the ill-will dissipates from me as I pray this prayer meaningfully.

Fifth, God's protection . . .

And lead us not into temptation . . .

The word "temptation" does not mean a drawing into sin, but into testing. Although Scripture records Abraham was tempted with a knife in his hand and his son on the altar (Genesis 22:1), the temptation was not to do evil. It was a testing. James 1:13 says that God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts He any man with evil. God does not tempt you.

What, then, is Jesus teaching us to pray here? "Lead us not into testing."

Wait a minute! Doesn't the Word declare that testing is *good?* Doesn't James say to count it all *joy* when you fall into various tests and trials, knowing that testing produces patience? Doesn't Peter say that tests purify us as gold purified in the fire? Why would we pray, "Lead us not into testing"? The answer is humility. Which of us would stand up today and say, "Lord, test me! I'm ready! Send testing my way, and watch me flex my spiritual muscles." Foolish is the person who would say such a thing! Thus, it's in humility that we constantly pray, "Lead us *not* into testing." But if I have prayed, "Lord lead us not into temptation," then should God take me through testing, I can embrace it joyfully, knowing He will not test me above what I am able (1 Corinthians 10:13).

. . . But deliver us from evil.

Satan is real, and we need God's protection.

I once read a story about George Adam Smith, a wonderful preacher and author, who was on a mountain-climbing tour of the Alps. On one particularly high peak, he ran to the very precipice and looked out over Switzerland. Suddenly, a strong gust of wind came up that threatened to blow him over the edge. From several feet away, his guide called to him, "Mr. Smith! On your knees, sir! The only way you're safe up here is on your knees!"

It has been rightly said that Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees. Jesus taught us to pray, "God, protect us. Lead us not into trials and testing. And deliver us from the evil one."

Finally, we come to the last component—God's preeminence.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

This concise and potent prayer ends in an explosion of praise, literally reading, "For thine is the kingship, and the weight or substance. It's all Yours. You are King. You are powerful! Glory! So be it!"

When I consider,

- God's Person—that He's my Abba, my Papa,
- His purpose—which is right,
- His provision—daily bread and the Bread of Life,
- His pardon—I am forgiven, and can forgive others, and
- His protection—from temptation and the evil one,

I have no other choice but to worship Him. God does not need our worship, but we need to worship. When I'm at a place where I'm saying, "For *Thine* is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever," with open heart and raised hands, suddenly I'm outside myself, lifted above my cares and worries, my hobbies and toys.

The Lord's Prayer is comprised of sixty-five profoundly simple and simply profound words. You can meditate on this prayer for hours, days,

months, and years for the rest of your life. But I encourage you to appropriate it right now. Allow this sacrament to be worked into your life, and you'll find a whole new dimension of the Lord's Person and purpose, provision and pardon, protection and preeminence worked out through your life.

7 Matthew 7:1
Judge not, that ye be not judged.

The Greek word translated "judge" is *krino,* which means "to judge to the place of condemnation." It's when you're in someone's face, so to speak, pointing your finger at them, and condemning them.

In Romans 16:17, Paul instructs the early church to mark the man who causes division. And in Galatians 1:8, he writes, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." So there *is* a need to judge, but not to the place of condemnation. Rather, we are to judge for identification and for restoration. I am to love people enough that when I see them erring, I am to say to them lovingly, "Because I care about you, I want you to know that you're going in the wrong direction."

> Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.
>
> Leviticus 19:17

Don't hate your brother, but love him by not allowing him to continue in his sin.

> Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.
>
> Galatians 6:1

According to Scripture, I must make some judgments and identification. But I am not to have an attitude of condemnation. How do I know if I'm condemning people? If I am not willing to partake in restoration, then I am

probably practicing condemnation. When Jesus walked into the Upper Room where His disciples were sitting, He noticed they had dirty feet. Did He point His finger and say, "You guys, why don't you wash your stinky feet? It's a mess up here." No. John 13 says He rose from supper, girded Himself with a towel, and began to wash their feet Himself. So, too, I do not believe I have the right to point out someone's dirty feet unless I'm willing to kneel down and wash them.

Matthew 7:2

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

The manner in which I judge is the way I will be judged. Is it the manner in which I will be judged by God? No. All my sins have been dealt with on the Cross of Calvary. Then who is going to judge me? People will. If I am critical of others, pointing out dirt on their feet with no intention of restoring, healing, or helping, I am going to find that same kind of judgment hurled at me.

In the first chapter of the Book of Judges, the men of Judah said to the men of Simeon, "There's a camp of Canaanites over in this valley. Let's go take them on." After beating the Canaanites soundly, the Israelites captured Adoni-bezek, the Canaanite king, and chopped off his thumbs and big toes. Why? Adoni-bezek himself gave the answer when he said, "Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me" (Judges 1:7).

If you chop up someone, or cut down someone, watch out. Jesus said the way you judge is the way you'll be judged.

Matthew 7:3–5

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

I find this fascinating because the words Jesus used imply that the speck —the splinter I see in my brother's eye—is of the same exact material as the beam in my own eye, only smaller in dimension. That's why I can spot certain sins in other people very easily. They're my sins. Whatever sins you struggle with personally are the sins you will point out in others most readily. David found this to be true. The prophet Nathan came to him and said, "David, we have a problem. There's a rich man who has all sorts of sheep. Someone came to visit him, and instead of going out to his own herds and taking one of his own lambs, this rich man went to his neighbor who was very poor, grabbed his neighbor's one and only lamb, and killed it to serve his guest."

Outraged, David said, "What? The man who has done this thing shall surely die!" The Old Testament Law never prescribed death as the penalty for this kind of transgression. Yet, with blood vessels bursting and finger pointing, David said, "Kill him!"

Then Nathan said, "David, thou art the man. It's you. You have many wives and concubines, yet you stole Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, and you took her into your house. Thou art the man."

Why was David so eager to mete out excessive judgment? Because we're always harshest with the sin in others that also lurks within our own hearts. The old saying is true: You can always tell a preacher's sins by what he preaches against. And Jesus is saying, "If you see splinters in others, realize it's a splinter off the beam that is in your own eye."

Jesus is not saying you shouldn't help the brother who has a splinter in his eye. Instead, He is saying to make sure you recognize and deal with the beam in your own eye first. "Create in *me* a clean heart, O God," David prayed. "*Then* will I teach transgressors thy ways" (see Psalm 51:10, 13, emphasis mine). "Once You deal with me, Lord, my attitude will be entirely different as I deal with others."

Matthew 7:6

Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

To be effective in ministry, we must make judgments—not for condemnation, but for identification. Is this person open? Is he sensitive? Is he hungering? Or does he just want to argue and discuss endlessly? The Lord loves to see us effective, and Satan would love to see us sidetracked. How do we know what is wise in these matters? How can we know what we should do and where we should invest our time? How does this work out practically? Jesus gives the answer in the next verse.

Matthew 7:7–11

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Ask your Father! In the Greek language, it's written this way: Keep asking and it shall be given. Keep seeking and you shall find. Keep knocking and it will be opened. The tense used speaks of continual action. When you don't know what to do, *keep* asking, *keep* seeking, *keep* knocking.

Now, please bear in mind folks that God does not want us to keep asking and keep seeking and keep knocking because He's playing hard to get. It's not as though He's holding a dog biscuit out to me, saying, "Speak, Jon. Speak." No, that's not the heart of our Father. Rather, He is determined to cultivate a relationship with me that will be as vital in the ages to come as it is presently. Thus, He says to us, "I want you to be continually asking, continually seeking, continually knocking because you need the exercise in developing spiritual communication skills. And as you do, I'll take care of you. I'm not going to allow you to bite into a rock or eat a snake. I'll guide you and give you wisdom."

Matthew 7:12

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

When you come across the word "therefore," you should always stop and ask what it's "there for." In this verse, commonly known as the Golden Rule, it precedes a summation of verses 1 through 11.

Matthew 7:13, 14

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

I went down the Rogue River in Oregon in a jet boat one summer, and when we came to Hell's Gate, the water seemed so tranquil with rock canyons on either side. But our guide said, "The water below you right now is one hundred fifty feet-deep, and because the river is channeled into such a small area, it is incredibly powerful." When filming the John Wayne movie *Rooster Cogburn,* one of the scenes called for a guy to jump from one of the cliffs at Hell's Gate into this 150-feet deep pool of water. The stunt man studied the currents and found that about four or five feet below the seeming tranquility of the surface, there were whirlpools that could have sucked him straight down. Although this stunt man was paid $150,000 for one jump, afterward, he said he would never do it again.

Jesus said, "Narrow is the way that leads to life." When things get narrow, they get strong, deep, and powerful.



***For topical study of Matthew 7:13–14 entitled "Why One Way?" turn to page* 45.**

Matthew 7:15

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

In Acts 20, Paul said the same thing to the elders at Ephesus: "When I leave, men will rise up, and draw disciples to themselves." He called such men ravenous wolves, even as Jesus did here. How will you know them? Acts 20 says they will seek to draw men after themselves instead of pointing them to Jesus. Secondly, 2 Peter 2:3 says these ravenous wolves will make merchandise of you. They'll go for your pocketbooks, concerned not so much about feeding you as they are about fleecing you.

The writings that circulated among the early church, called the Didache, specifically stated that if a man said, "Thus saith the Lord. I have need of a steak dinner and a new garment," he was to be branded as a false prophet immediately. Beware of any man who preaches about his own needs.

One of Aesop's fables is about a hungry wolf that put a sheepskin over himself and cruised into the sheepfold. It just so happened that the same night, the shepherd also had a strange craving for mutton. So he went out to his sheepfold and plunged his knife into the biggest sheep within the flock, which, of course, turned out to be the wolf.

The wolf who was disguised as a sheep was eventually dealt with by the shepherd. So, too, our Good Shepherd watches out for His flock.

Matthew 7:16–20

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

We are not to be judges, but we are to look for fruit. The fruit we are to look for is not flawless, because we are all full of flaws and shortcomings. No, the issue is not flawlessness, but fruitfulness. The tree that has a lot of leaves but no real fruit is going to be dealt with severely when it is hewn down and cast into the fire.

Matthew 7:21, 22

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

Many of these wolves and false trees will come to Jesus and say, "But, Lord, didn't we prophesy? Didn't we cast out demons? Didn't we do miracles?" The question arises, "How could these wolves, these false leaders, these bogus trees do these things? How could they prophesy, cast out demons, and do miracles if they were fakes?" There are three possible answers.

One is that they were lying. They never did them. Maybe they just thought about doing them, or thought they were doing them. Second, it is possible they were doing these things in the power of the devil. The Book of Acts talks about Simon the Sorcerer, who did miracles, but not in the power of the Spirit. In Moses' day, Pharaoh's magicians copied, to a certain extent, the miracles of God, but it was by the power of the devil. Third, the Lord could have been simply using them in spite of themselves. The Lord used Balaam, even though Balaam was not right with Him. He prophesied through King Saul, even though Saul's heart was far from Him. He spoke prophetically through Caiaphas the high priest, saying, "Should not one man die for the nation?" although Caiaphas knew it not.

Notice that many will say, "Did not *we* prophesy?" Always be wary of people who promote themselves in ministry. Whenever I hear a ministry say, "Look what *we* are doing," bells ring, and red flags go up in my mind because Jesus taught humility and secrecy.

Matthew 7:23

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Engraved in a cathedral in Germany are these words: Thus speaketh Christ our Lord to us.

You Call Me Master

You call Me Master and obey Me not.

You call Me Light and see Me not.

You call Me the Way and walk Me not.

You call Me Life and choose Me not.

You call Me Wise and follow Me not.

You call Me Fair and love Me not.

You call Me Rich and ask Me not.

You call Me Eternal and seek Me not.

You call Me Noble and serve Me not.

You call Me Gracious and trust Me not.

You call Me Might and honor Me not.

You call Me Just and fear Me not.

If I condemn you, blame Me not.



***For topical study of Matthew 7:21–23 entitled "Sincerely Saved," turn to page* 47.**

Matthew 7:24–27

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

Here is the familiar story of two men building houses. Both men used the same material. Both built in the same geographical location. But one man's house stood while the other man's house collapsed. The difference was in the foundations. One built on the rock, the other on the sand. In Palestine, all land becomes parched in the summer, causing even the sandy and unstable areas to appear rock-solid. The true test doesn't come until the rain falls. Jesus here is saying, "Be careful where you build your house. Build on something tried and true. Build upon the Rock."

Who is the one who builds his house upon the rock? The one who hears the Words of the Lord and does them. Who is the one who builds on the sand? The one who hears His Words but doesn't do them.

One of the great dangers for we who love the Scriptures is to think hearing is equivalent to doing. You might say tonight, "Yeah, I agree with the teaching Jesus gave on judging. I shouldn't judge. I need to show mercy. Right on." But if you leave here and immediately turn to someone and start gossiping or analyzing, judging or critiquing, you're foolish, and your house will collapse.

We have such need to hear these words of Jesus because Bible students are in great danger of being foolish men who erroneously conclude that because they are hearing the truth and agreeing with the truth, they are automatically practicing the truth. The wise man not only hears Jesus' words but also puts them into practice. And his house stands when the storm comes.



***For topical study of Matthew 7:24–27 entitled "When Bad Things Happen to Good People," turn to page* 53.**

Matthew 7:28, 29

And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

After this thirty-minute sermon, the people were amazed, accustomed as they were to hearing teaching by scribes who did nothing more than quote

other scribes. “Rabbi So-and-So says . . . but Rabbi So-and-So disagrees. So Rabbi So-and-So proposes.”

After hearing all these rabbis, a person would say, “Wait a minute. This is crazy. What’s the solution? Where’s the authority? There’s no conclusion!”

Jesus said, “You have heard it said of old, but I say unto you . . . .”

The crowds marveled, “Wow!” they said. “He speaks with authority, and what He says makes sense.”

Did the masses then say, “We’re going to follow Him! This is great! He’s our Man!”? No. That’s not what happened. Why? C. S. Lewis, in his classic book, *Mere Christianity,* gives this answer:

> *When I was a child I often had toothaches, and I knew that if I went to my mother she would give me something which would deaden the pain for that night and let me get to sleep. But I did not go to my mother—at least, not till the pain became very bad. And the reason I did not go was this. I did not doubt she would give me the aspirin; but I knew she would also do something else. I knew she would take me to the dentist next morning. I could not get what I wanted out of her without getting something more, which I did not want. I wanted immediate relief from pain: but I could not get it without having my teeth set permanently right. And I knew those dentists; I knew they started fiddling about with all sorts of other teeth which had not yet begun to ache. They would not let sleeping dogs lie.*[1]

That’s why I thank the Lord for the saints at Applegate Christian Fellowship. Because they, as a group of rag-tag disciples, say, “Lord, we have a toothache, and You are the dentist. Keep on drilling. Sleeping dogs notwithstanding, Father, do whatever it takes to make us right.”

WHY ONE WAY?
A Topical Study of MATTHEW 7:13, 14

Over and over again, I find myself dialoguing on this particular point with unbelievers who say, "We like Jesus, but we reject the exclusive mentality you propagate." Why do people feel this way? I suggest to you it is because our culture—our generation in particular—is more interested in equality than in truth. We are more afraid of being thought prejudiced or bigoted than of being wrong. We are scared to death of being labeled narrow-minded.

Yet, that is exactly what Jesus Christ calls us to. He came on the scene and said there is an exclusive mentality to Christianity. He was direct and straightforward when He said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13, 14).

Why is Christianity so exclusive and so narrow? First of all, narrowness is God's protection of us.

God is saying, "I understand the frailty of humanity and that you are but children. So I will keep it real simple. The options? Only two: Jesus Christ or eternal death. That's it."

There are those who say, "All paths lead to God. You can embrace any philosophy and follow any guru as long as you're sincere. They all lead to heaven, bliss, or nirvana." But I ask them, "Do you believe those who followed the teachings of Jim Jones in Guyana were following a godly path as they drank Kool-Aid laced with cyanide? Do you believe if you followed Charles Manson sincerely, you would end up in the right spot eternally? Do you believe sincerely following Adolf Hitler, who used Scripture and quoted theologians, would lead to heaven?"

You see, if the Lord had fifteen legitimate paths to heaven, the Enemy would still counter with fifteen thousand illegitimate destructive paths, and it would still be confusing. There will always be Adolf Hitlers, Charlie Mansons, and Jim Joneses who will be deceptive and manipulative, weird and destructive. So our Father, in His wisdom, says, "Kids, I'm going to keep

it real simple. There are not fifteen paths or eighteen paths. No. There's only one Way: Jesus, My Son."

Second, God made Christianity exclusive not only as protection for us, but as a proclamation to us. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). In Greek, it is most clear that He is saying, "I am the only way. There is no other way to enter into the presence of the Father but by Me." God's proclamation is exceedingly clear to any and all who will listen.

Third, and most importantly, narrow is the gate because of God's provision for us. If, indeed, there are many paths to God and many routes to eternal life, then the sacrifice God made in becoming a Man—slaughtered before the foundation of the world, plunging into hell, suffering in ways we will never comprehend—was all unnecessary.

If you say, "Well, let's be open-minded about the way to heaven," you discount the provision of what God did on your behalf. Mohammed didn't die for you. Buddha wouldn't die for you.

Only Jesus gave everything to save you from your sins.

Mohammed came on the scene and said, "Do not look at me. My teachings are my essence."

Buddha never claimed to be anything of a godly man at all. In fact, his religion or philosophy is basically atheistic.

Hinduism is pantheistic.

Jesus alone says, "It's Me. I am the Way."

You will hear over and over again that "Spirituality is a journey up a holy mountain, and no matter which route you take, when you get to the top, you will find God. So just wander wherever you feel inclined and embrace the other pilgrims on their paths. Don't try to convert them, for every route leads to the top of the mountain, and they will find God just as you will." Bunk. The analogy is all wrong. You see, it is not any mountain upon which God sits and man meanders. It is El Capitan—a sheer face, a stone where there are no handholds and no toeholds—a rock that is insurmountable and un-climbable.

God is holy, folks. He is not some sort of portly gentleman sitting on top of a hill, saying, "Any Buddha or guru who can find Me is wonderful." Rather, He is high and holy on the top of a sheer face, and although man is sinful, God in His love reaches down to him. It is not man meandering up to God. It is God reaching down to man, saying, "I will elevate you and save you if you grab hold of Me through the Person of My Son."

Every religion is man trying to make it up the mountain. Christianity alone says, "You're out to lunch, off the wall, and hopelessly lost—but I love you. And I'm reaching down to you. Grab My hand."

> Before I mow the grass, suppose I see a group of ants headed for destruction, and wanting their lives to be spared from the mower, I say, "Ants, repent! Hide! Run from the judgment to come!"
>
> They would look at me and scratch their heads. They wouldn't comprehend what I was saying because I'm too big. So the only way I could communicate effectively with them would be to become one of them—to become an ant myself.

God declared His holiness and righteousness and love to us, but we didn't hear Him. In His awesomeness, we couldn't comprehend Him.

So God became a Man, an ant, if you would, in the Person of Jesus, and He dwelt among us, not only to communicate to us truth, but to die for us when we violated that truth.

No one else did that. No one else could. No one else would. Only Jesus.

I am narrow-minded because Jesus Christ said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Jesus is God's protection *of* me, God's proclamation *to* me, and God's glorious provision *for* me.

That's fact. That's reality.

SINCERELY SAVED
A Topical Study of
MATTHEW 7:21–23

It was his farewell gathering. Knowing he was on his way to Rome where he could be beheaded, Paul gave final instruction to a group of elders from the church in Ephesus. "For three years," he said, "I have taught you and warned you with many tears" (see Acts 20).

If a shepherd only warns the flock, but never feeds them, they will die of malnutrition. If he only feeds the flock and never warns them, he is simply fattening them up for the kill.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Good Shepherd both fed and warned His flock as the masses gathered around Him on the hillside. He began by talking about the pathway to happiness. His first words were "Blessed, or happy, are the poor in spirit. Happy are they who mourn. Happy are the meek."

Then He talked about the highway of holiness. Many people thought they were pretty good and fairly holy because they didn't commit murder or adultery. But Jesus explained to them that if they were angry with their brother without a cause, they were guilty of murder. If they had looked at a woman with lust in their heart, they were adulterers. Such teaching would drive people to realize that no one is holy, that all are sinners, and that everyone needs a Savior.

Finally, He taught that the broad way is hazardous, concluding His Sermon with this sober exhortation: "There are choices you must make concerning the right way and the wrong way."

> There are two gates. Narrow is the gate that leads to life and broad is the way that leads to damnation. You've got to make a choice, and the wrong choice will be hazardous to your eternal state.
>
> There are two trees. When you're wondering whom you should listen to or receive from, check out the fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Watch out for deception.

There are two foundations. The wise man builds his house upon the rock, and the foolish man builds his house upon the sand. The wrong choice will lead to destruction. You'll lose everything.

It is in this context that we find our text—an extremely sobering, heavy-duty warning. What does it mean, and does it apply to us? In Acts 8, we see an example of one who could say, "Lord, Lord, did I not prophesy? Cast out demons? Do wonderful works?" We see a man who had religion, but not relationship, activity, but not intimacy. Perhaps his story will make us think about our own situations personally.

> *And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.*
>
> Acts 8:1–3

Saul was a man who was radically devoted to God—a Pharisee and a scholar. Believing that Christians were a dangerous cult, Saul thought he was doing God a favor by pulling them from their houses, beating them, and imprisoning them.

> *Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*
>
> Acts 8:4

Fleeing persecution, the church spread out. Christians went everywhere, and as they went, they preached the Word.

> *Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.*
>
> Acts 8:5

One believer, a man named Philip, went to the city of Samaria, which is located between Jerusalem to the south and Galilee to the north. This must have totally confounded the Samaritans, who knew the Jews took great pains to avoid even traveling through their region.

> *And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city.*
>
> Acts 8:6–8

The Samaritans were confounded that Philip came, convicted by what he said, and convinced by what they saw. The lame were healed, the oppressed were delivered, and the entire city was filled with joy.

> *But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.*
>
> Acts 8:9–11

Simon had been on the scene for many years. He was fascinating to the people and had a certain power over them because of his magic tricks. He made himself out to be someone great, and the people thought he possessed the power of God.

> *But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.*
>
> Acts 8:12

Although the Samaritans were confounded that Philip came, convicted by what he said, convinced by what they saw, they were not converted until they

heard the message concerning the kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ. Miracles do not convert people. Deliverance from demons does not convert people. Good deeds and good works do not convert people. What converts people is the message of the kingdom of God in the Name of Jesus Christ.

In John 10, we read that many came to Jesus and said of John the Baptist, "John did no mighty miracles, but all things he spake concerning this Man are true" (see verse 41). Jesus called John the greatest of all Old Testament prophets not because John did miracles, but because John spoke about Him. This encourages me because, although I might not be able to confound people with my good works or convince people with signs and wonders, I can see the conversion of people as I share this simple Gospel: Jesus loves you. He died for you. He wants to live within you.

When the Samaritans heard the preaching of the kingdom in the Name of Jesus, they were baptized, which is an outward sign of an inward acceptance.

> *Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of*

iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

Acts 8:13–24

Although Simon professed to believe and was baptized, in reality Peter said, "You are in the gall of bitterness, in the bond of iniquity." In other words, "Your conversion is not real. And you're in big trouble."

Why wasn't Simon's conversion real? What went wrong?

First, Simon had a wrong view of self. Verse 9 says he made himself out to be someone great. That's the first problem. Jesus said if you want to be great in the kingdom, become the servant *of* all. Simon wanted to be esteemed and noticed *by* all.

How are you doing in the area of servanthood? We sing the song, "Lord, make me a servant." But how do you react when people treat you like a servant—when they don't thank or compliment you on what you've done? A servant serves without expecting acknowledgment. Jesus said if you want to be great, become the servant of all.

Second, Simon had a wrong view of supernatural power. When he saw that the laying on of hands by the apostles gave the believers in Samaria power, he said, "Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost" (see verse 19). He didn't want the power of the Spirit to change his character, only to fulfill his ambition. This is where King Saul, from the Old Testament, blew it. Saul used the things of God to exalt himself. David, on the other hand, allowed himself to be used to exalt God. That's why Saul fell tragically and David was used powerfully.

Do you have a wrong view of supernatural power? Do you pray, "Give me power that I might accomplish this task and fulfill that ambition"? Or do you pray, "Give me the power of Your Spirit to break me and make me more like Your Son"?

Third, notice in Simon a wrong view of the Spirit. In verse 20, Peter said, "You don't understand, Simon, that the gift of God is not purchased with money, nor is it earned by energy. It is a gift that is bestowed freely by God's grace and mercy. You don't earn it, you don't prove that you are worthy of it, and you can't buy it."

And yet people today, like Simon, say, "What can I do to earn the Spirit? I'll fast for thirty days. I'll go to church every week for three months. I won't kick the dog anymore. I'll give to the building fund. I'll do this, that, or the other, and maybe then God will bless me."

That's a wrong view of the Spirit. You cannot purchase Him with energy or with money. Jesus said, "If you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Ghost to them that *ask*" (see Luke 11:13). You just ask for the Spirit in humility, with expectancy, and according to God's grace and mercy.

Fourth, Simon had a wrong view of sin. When told he was in sin, he said to Peter, "Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me." There was not confession, there was not repentance, there was only a concern about repercussions. Although Simon believed initially and was baptized physically, he was headed for damnation eternally because of his wrong view of self, of supernatural power, of the Spirit, and of sin.

There are those today who are in danger of the same thing. You might say, "Well, I believe in Jesus." But the Book of James says that even the demons believe. Intellectual belief isn't enough. Salvation takes place when you put your full trust in Jesus Christ and Him alone.

"But I work for Jesus," you might say. "I teach Sunday school," or "I'm a part of the worship team." You might even lead a Bible study, but that doesn't assure you a place in the kingdom. You might do many wonderful works, but if you're not walking with the Lord personally and intimately, you're in danger of damnation eternally.

No wonder Peter pleads in 2 Peter 1:10, "Make your calling and election sure." What does it mean to make your calling and election sure, to be truly saved? Let's look again at Acts 8.

> *And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great*

authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

Acts 8:25–28

After Philip left Samaria, the angel of the Lord told him to go south toward the desert where he would encounter an Ethiopian eunuch reading from the Book of Isaiah.

Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

Acts 8:29–30

Philip caught up with him and asked, "Do you understand what you're reading?"

And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

Acts 8:31

The eunuch "happened" to be reading Isaiah 53:7, 8, and he asked Philip of whom the passage was speaking.

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

Acts 8:35

There can be no finer exposition, no higher teaching, no more effective preaching than using the Word of God to point to the Son of God.

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ

is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

Acts 8:36–39

This is true conversion.

First, we see in this story the sovereign work of the Spirit. It was a sovereign work of the Spirit when He drew the Ethiopian to Jerusalem to worship. It was an equally sovereign work of the Spirit when He said to Philip, "Leave the revival of Samaria. Go to the desert. There's a man there I want you to meet."

Second, we see the seeking heart of a sinner. The eunuch was searching the Scripture, not watching a miracle.

Third, there was a Scriptural base for salvation. When Philip said, "Isaiah is talking about Jesus Christ," he based his witness upon the Word. Paul declares faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

Finally, there was a sincere expression by the servant. Unlike Simon the sorcerer, the Ethiopian eunuch didn't say, "Give me power." He said, "Baptize me."

Every one of us falls into one of these two categories: Either we are like Simon the Sorcerer, or we are like the Ethiopian eunuch. Both stories are in the same chapter of Acts. Both take place in a similar situation. But each has an entirely different conclusion.

You may have been baptized fifty times or more, but when you see God, you may hear Him say, "Depart from Me. I never knew you." You might be one who's hung around the church for years—maybe you even hold a prominent position. But familiarity alone is no guarantee. The most successful skydiver in history died when he took a jump and halfway down realized he forgot to pack his parachute.

Jesus talked more about damnation and hell than any other subject because He knew its reality. He was a Good Shepherd who said, "This is serious."

How do you know if your salvation is real?

If you are feeling like Simon the sorcerer—in the grasp and dominion of sin—then you are in jeopardy. Repent today, and be finally, truly, and eternally saved.

If, however, you are like the Ethiopian eunuch, you will go your way rejoicing. Romans 8 declares His Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. Thus, you will rejoice in your heart, and you will know that you know that you know you're born again. No one will have to talk you into it or convince you of it because you will have *His* witness in your heart.

WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN
TO GOOD PEOPLE
A Topical Study of
MATTHEW 7:24–27

When a Congressman was killed in a plane crash after researching United States assistance in the Ethiopian famine, the words of the minister conducting his memorial service caught my attention. "Why good people experience tragedy, I can't say," he said. "Why bad things happen to good people, I don't know."

This statement has been stirring in my mind for some time now. Why do bad things happen to good people? Are there no answers? Whether concerning lives lost in Ethiopia, or your own situation of the past week or two, people always ask the question: Why do bad things happen to good people? A few years ago, a best-selling book was entitled just that: *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People.* The author concluded there are no real answers, even as the minister said there are no easy answers. I suggest to you, however, that there is a profoundly simple answer to this question. It is this: There are no good people.

> *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*
>
> Romans 3:10–12

You see, the world thinks, "I'm Okay, you're Okay." But regardless of what psychologists tell us, this just isn't so, for those who look to worldly understandings and explanations miss the central truth: There are no good people. So the real question is not "Why do bad things happen to good people?" but "Why do good things happen to bad people?"

You might have had a bad day or a terrible time this last month or two. But what we deserve is to live in terror, in tragedy, in difficulty every day of our lives because there is none that is good, no, not one.

"Why, then," we sometimes wonder, "are good things happening to those people who live next to me? They're not in church today; they're out on the lake water-skiing. Yet they get the raises and promotions. Why do good things happen to them?"

The first verse my kids learned was Psalm 73:1, "God is good," followed by 1 John 4:16, "God is love," because I'm convinced that the first concepts we should teach our kids are the goodness and the love of God. He is a loving Father who causes His sun to rise on the just and on the unjust, sending rain upon the crops of the good and on the evil (Matthew 5:45). God loves to bless because He is good.

I once read a quote that said, "God is the victim of bad PR, usually propagated by those who know Him." Too often, believers and unbelievers alike generate the false idea that, although God occasionally does a good thing, He's basically mean. We hear sermons and testimonies to that effect, saying, "God got my attention when He broke my legs and took away my house and caused me to go bankrupt." That's not Father God, that's the Godfather!

One of the great frustrations I have in talking with unbelievers is their impression that they have to wait until their marriage is on the rocks, until their finances are crumbling, until cancer is eating them up before they will consider Christ. They think their lives have to fall apart before they turn to Jesus.

So to the person who's skiing on the lake today, behind his power boat, beside his cabin, having left his five-thousand-square-foot house in the city, we shouldn't say, "God's going to get you"—but, "Hasn't God been *good* to you?"

The Bible says God demonstrated His love for us all in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8), but people in the world today have lost this understanding. They don't realize that God demonstrated His love for all people when Jesus died for us, that God looked at us and desired to bless us, even while we were still sinners. Rain falls on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). The sun shines on the believer and the unbeliever because God is good. Everything He gives us is because of grace —unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor. But if we don't recognize this, if

we misinterpret the source of our blessings, we become narrow, bitter, and full of sorrow.

In our text, Jesus says a day is coming when the rains will fall and the winds shall beat on the house of every man. Of what storm is He speaking? Death. The statistics are conclusive: Ten out of ten people die. Every person who has ever lived since Jesus spoke these words has built his house and done his thing until the storm came, at which point it was determined whether he had built upon the rock or upon the sand.

Jesus ended His Sermon on the Mount speaking of—

- two roads: one unto life, one to destruction;
- two trees: one of fruitfulness, one of failure;
- two foundations: one to stand, one to collapse.

The choice is yours. Upon which foundation are you building?

"Wait," you say. "I have one more question. If God is our good Father, why does He allow the devil to inflict pain and disease, destruction and death, discouragement and difficulty? Can't God stop the devil and put an end to our misery?"

Yes, He can. And yes, He will. But presently, God allows storms to arise that test our foundation in order that we might see where we stand eternally.

> Several years ago on the East Coast, cod fishermen began to experience a real demand for their product, and they began to ship frozen cod all over the country. They discovered one drawback, however. In the freezing process, the cod lost their flavor. To remedy this, the fishermen shipped their cod live in saltwater tanks to be processed once they reached their destination.
>
> The fish arrived okay, but because they were sitting in these tanks, they became spongy and soft. For several years, the fishermen didn't know what to do. Then someone had a brilliant idea: Ship the fish in saltwater tanks, but throw in some catfish—the natural enemy of the codfish. They tried it. The catfish chased the cod all around the tank

as they traveled cross-country, and when the cod arrived, those that made it alive were flavorful and were sold at premium prices.

The catfish were necessary to keep the cod moving, thereby enhancing their texture and flavor.

So, too, God says to us,

"Because I want the best for you both now and in eternity, I will allow an occasional catfish to come into your tank and chase you around for a little while. Otherwise, you'll just sit around and get soft."

- I will not test you above that which you are able (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- I will always be there for you (Matthew 28:20).
- Call upon Me in the day of trouble (Psalm 50:15).
- Cast your care upon Me (1 Peter 5:7).
- And remember, all things are working together for good (Romans 8:28).
- Trust Me (Psalm 37:3).

Build your life on the Rock, gang. Jesus is a sure foundation, and He won't let you down.



8 Matthew is the gospel of the King. In the first four chapters, His Person is revealed. In chapters 5 through 7, His principles are recorded. But the question arises: Does Jesus have the power to carry out those principles? Or is He, like so many of our leaders, a nice person with good principles, yet impotent to really make a difference? In Matthew 8, 9, and 10, we find the answer as we see the power of Jesus released.

In the following three chapters, Matthew records ten miracles which show Jesus not only had the rhetoric, but He had the dynamic to make things happen.

Matthew 8:1, 2 (a)

When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper . . .

I think it fitting that the first miracle recorded in the New Testament deals with the cleansing of a leper because Isaiah 1:5, 6 makes it clear that leprosy is a picture of sin. Leviticus 13 teaches that leprosy begins beneath the surface of the skin—just as sin does. What you see outwardly in people's lives is only the result of what is going on within them. We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we're sinners. Leviticus 13 goes on to say that leprosy, like sin, spreads throughout the body. Like sin, one could control it for a season. But if he didn't destroy it, it would eventually destroy him. The Talmud taught that leprosy was second only to death in its list of sixty-one defilements. He who had leprosy was as good as dead because his disease would separate him from the rest of the community. When a person contracted leprosy, he was forced to live only with fellow lepers. If he had to come to the city, the Law required him to cry out, "Unclean, unclean," in order for everyone within a one hundred fifty-foot radius to back away and clear the area. In the beginning stages, the skin of a leper would take on a hard, glossy appearance. As it progressed, it caused his nerves to become numb, which in turn led to the loss of fingers and toes.

The rabbis felt strongly that leprosy was a direct judgment from God. In fact, the word "leprosy" means "smitten." They felt that those who had leprosy were being judged by God and therefore must be terrible people.

Matthew 8:2 (b)

. . . and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

This leper, whose sickness was a symbol of sin, saw Jesus and had the audacity to go right through the multitude following Him and say, "Lord, if You want, You can make me clean." He didn't doubt Jesus' ability to make him clean; he doubted Jesus' willingness to do so. And I suggest to you that, like this leper, there's not one of us who doubts Jesus' ability to do the miraculous in our lives. But I suggest every one of us at times doubts His

willingness.

- "Lord, if You want, You can heal my marriage," we pray.
- "If You want, You can save my child."
- "If You want, Lord, You can take away this habit, free me from that bondage, deal with my leprosy."

We know He *can,* but we question if He *will*.

This leper had the courage, the tenacity, and the audacity to approach Jesus and to come right into His presence. But like you and me, when he got there, he wondered, "Do You really *want* to make me clean?"

Matthew 8:3 (a)
And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him. . . .

To this one with gross, running sores, and a strained voice, odor emanating, and digits missing, Jesus could have said, "Be clean," and the guy would have been clean. But what did Jesus do? He touched him. Regardless of the sin you might be struggling with right now, don't make the mistake of countless thousands of lepers saying, "I need to stay away from Jesus. I'm unclean." Jesus can handle your sin. He's not shocked or horrified by it. He's not embarrassed of it. Jesus touched the leper, and He can handle your sin as well.

The biggest mistake people make concerning Jesus is thinking, "When I get it together, *then* I'll let the Lord come near me. When I deal with my leprosy, *then* I'll let the Lord touch me."

But they'll never get it together *until* the Lord touches them!

You who are faltering in faith, struggling in sin, caught up in carnality, I have news for you. Jesus can handle it.

Not only are there those who say, "Don't touch me until I get it together," but there are those who say, "Touch me, Lord. I want to come into Your presence. I want to lift my hands and sing Your praise. But don't change me. I like myself just the way I am."

If the Lord touches you, you will inevitably be changed. If you don't want to be changed, it's vain to seek His touch.

Matthew 8:3 (b)

. . . saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

How I love these words of Jesus. He said, "I will. I will! Be thou clean." Did you know our Lord never refused anyone who came to Him looking for help? He never said, "No, I don't have time for you." In every instance, He dealt with people graciously, mercifully, and compassionately.

Maybe you're saying, "Well, I've sought the Lord. I've asked Him for His help. I've asked Him to do this thing in my life, but it never happened. Why would He help the leper and not me?"

> Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.
>
> James 4:3

The Greeks had a saying that when the gods wanted to punish a man, they answered all his prayers. Many times our requests are just plain wrong, and our Father loves us enough to say, "No," if "No" is the best answer. But He'll never turn you away. He'll always do what's best for you, and you'll see it sooner or later, if you'll just ask Him. There were multiplied thousands of lepers in this region, but only one came and asked Jesus to be healed, and only one went away clean.

Matthew 8:4 (a)

And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man . . .

Why would Jesus say this? Jesus often told those whom He healed, "Don't tell anyone," because He knew the vulnerability of humanity. He knew our tendency to get excited about the physical, while missing the truly significant realm of the spiritual. Because He evidently didn't want people following Him merely to see what the next circuslike event would be, Jesus

always downplayed the miraculous. He would send His disciples to share the gospel throughout the world, and He would preach before thousands. But when it came to miracles, it seems as though Jesus had a penchant for secrecy.

Matthew 8:4 (b)

. . . but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

"Go show yourself to the priest," Jesus said, because in Leviticus 14, there was a prescribed cleansing ceremony for lepers who were healed. The interesting thing is, although the ceremony had been on the books for fifteen hundred years, never was one leper cleansed until this man.

Matthew 8:5–13

And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

Keep in mind that the Romans had conquered Israel and were therefore the despised occupiers of the land. Furthermore, to attain the position of centurion, one had to prove himself a valiant warrior in battle. Therefore, the centurion in this story was not merely a soldier in the occupying forces—he was a commanding officer. We also know, from Luke's account of the same incident, that he was wealthy.

So, in the passage before us, Matthew paints a picture of a wealthy Roman approaching a poor Galilean, a powerful centurion seeking out a meek Carpenter, a mighty man of war addressing the Prince of Peace.



***For topical study of Matthew 8:10–13 entitled "God's Final Word," turn to page* 60.**

Matthew 8:14 (a)

And when Jesus was come into Peter's house . . .

Mark tells us that Peter's house was in Capernaum. Yet John points out in his Gospel that Peter was from Bethsaida. This caught my attention, and I realized that Peter moved lock, stock, and barrel—fishing business, in-laws, the whole thing. He moved from his hometown of Bethsaida, which means "House of Fishing," to Capernaum, where Jesus had His headquarters. Peter left the place of occupational prosperity to be closer to Jesus. I think it would do us well to remember Peter's example. I am concerned about the number of people who move because of business reasons without considering if there is a group of people with whom they can worship and grow in the Lord.

There was a man in the Old Testament who based the decision as to where he would live on economic conditions. He lifted up his eyes, saw green grass, and said, "This is a great place for my cattle." The man's name was Lot, and he got in a lot of trouble because the green grass was growing right outside of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was a great place to raise cattle, but a lousy place to raise kids. Lot lifted up his eyes, but he didn't lift them high enough.

Peter did just the opposite. He said, "I want to be in the place where Jesus is ministering, in the place most conducive for me to follow, serve, and

walk with Him." May the Lord give us such hearts in these days.

Matthew 8:14 (b)
. . . he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever.

Notice Peter was married. This is interesting because our Catholic friends suggest that to be a good spiritual leader, one should take a vow of poverty and celibacy. But they also teach Peter was the first pope, and look at him! He had a wife, a mother-in-law, and a house.

Matthew 8:15
And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them.

You can always tell a person who has been touched by Jesus because he will begin to minister. When the Lord touches you, you can't help but say, "To whom can I reach out and help?"

Matthew 8:16
When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick.

The darkness was defeated by the light of His Word.

Matthew 8:17
That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.

Here, Matthew draws the attention of his Jewish readers back to Isaiah 53:4, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows." Based on this verse, there are those who teach that since Jesus bore our infirmities and our sicknesses, those who are sick are out of the will of God, or their faith is lacking. Please note that sin, sickness, and death were all defeated on the Cross. When the kingdom is established on earth, the power of sin will be

eradicated. All will be healed. There will be no death. But until then, those who preach true believers should never be sick must also preach that true believers should never sin and never die.

Am I saying that Jesus doesn't heal? Of course He heals. Am I saying we shouldn't pray for the sick? No. We are commanded to pray for the sick. What I am questioning is the dogma, propagated on Christian TV that says "God never intends anyone to be sick. All should be healed."

All *will* be healed. Some will be healed now, some a year from now, some will be healed when they get to heaven. Jesus bore our sicknesses and our infirmities, and all of these problems, hurts, and pains and diseases are going to be healed—sooner or eventually. That's a promise.

Matthew 8:18, 19

Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side. And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

Perhaps this scribe was one who sat on the hillside and listened to the Sermon on the Mount. After hearing Jesus' principles and seeing His power as He healed all who were sick, it's no wonder he said, "Count me in. I'll follow You." Who wouldn't? Who wouldn't follow the Lord? The words He spoke and still speaks are so right on. The work He's done is so obvious. The Lord has done a work among us. We're not perfect, but we're being perfected. We're not what we should be, but we're not what we once were, either. He's changing us. Who wouldn't want to follow Him, seeing the work He's doing in the midst of people?

Matthew 8:20

And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

This man was stung by these words because Jesus knew he wanted a comfortable life.

It's sort of like when my son Peter-John was younger. Watching a parade, he was really into seeing the soldiers marching in their uniforms with white gloves on their hands, shiny guns on their shoulders, and huge tanks rolling behind.

"Daddy, I want to be a soldier like those guys!" he said. I smiled because we who are older know it's not all marching in starched uniforms before cheering crowds. There's blood, dismembered bodies, and death. Yes, it's fun to see the parade go by, but the price of battle is an entirely different issue.

Watching the parade, this scribe said, "Wow. It'll be fun to be Your disciple." And Jesus said, "Wait. There's a price."

Matthew 8:21, 22

And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.

The second man wasn't hindered so much by riches as by relationships. "I'll follow You, Lord, just as soon as I bury my dad." Now, please don't misunderstand. It's not as though his father died and was lying in the front room while this guy was saying, "Let me go home and bury my dad, and I'll come right back." No, he was saying, "As soon as my dad passes away, then I'll really start following You. But right now I feel obligated to that relationship. Plus, I get part of the inheritance."

"Let the dead bury the dead, and you follow Me," Jesus answered because no relationship can stand in the way of those who are serious about following Jesus.

It's still those two issues, I believe, that keep people today from following Jesus. Following Him might mean some changes in business practices. Or it might mean letting go of that unbelieving boyfriend or girlfriend. It might cost riches. It might cost relationships. And like these two men, people today still conclude that they like the parade, but not the price.

Matthew 8:23, 24 (a)

And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves . . .

The word translated "tempest" is *seismos* in Greek, from which we get our word "seismology"—the study of earthquakes. This storm was really a shaker!

Keep in mind that the Sea of Galilee, where this story takes place, is six hundred eighty feet below sea level. Directly to the north, 9,280 feet above sea level, is Mount Hermon, which gets so cold it can be skied in the winter. So what happens is this: Cold air descends from Mount Hermon through a small ravine in the northern part of the valley, which funnels into the Sea of Galilee. As the cold air strikes the hot air below, it creates turbulence, and storms can erupt in seconds. Waves mount up, which in recent times have been recorded at higher than twenty-five feet. As you surfers know, waves are measured from the back, so we're talking about a face of perhaps forty feet. Thus, this wasn't a little drizzle on a lake. We're talking about a sea that terrorized even these salty fishermen.

Matthew 8:24 (b)
. . . but he was asleep.

I love this because it shows the humanity of Jesus. He was tired because He was a Man. In fact, He refers to Himself as the Son of Man eighty times in the New Testament, identifying with His humanity more than any other element in His personality. Next time you feel totally exhausted, remember Jesus can relate to you. In Jesus sleeping, we see His humanity. In His speaking to the storm, we see His deity.

If you sense Jesus is asleep in the storm you're going through—relax! If He's not doing anything, it means He's not pacing. He's not anxious. He's not worried. He's resting. You can rest as well if you remember that at any given moment, Jesus can stand up, speak a word and—boom—the storm will stop.

Matthew 8:25–27

And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

"O ye of little faith." Why did Jesus say this to these men at this time? Mark tells us that Jesus previously had said to His disciples, "Come let us go over to the other side of the sea." He hadn't said, "Come let us sink to the bottom of the sea." He said, "Let us go over. We're going to make it." And He says to you,

> . . . And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.
>
> Matthew 28:20

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

> Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.
>
> Philippians 1:6

Matthew 8:28, 29

And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?

To what time are the demons referring? To the day they would be cast into the bottomless pit.

Notice that these demons had fairly solid theology. They understood eschatology, the study of end times. And they called Jesus the Son of God—which is more than the scribes or Pharisees did. In his Epistle, James says, "You say that you believe? So what? The demons believe and tremble" (see James 2:19). It's not enough to believe Jesus is the Son of God intellectually. Bunches of people will miss heaven by eighteen inches—the distance between their brain and their heart.

Matthew 8:30–33

And there was a good way off from them a herd of many swine feeding. So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils.

Note that the demons could not even go into a pig without permission from Jesus. People are saying, "Ooh, the *Medford Mail Tribune* has a horoscope on page 14, and if I have that newspaper in my house, the demon of horoscopes is going to come into me." Not true. It seems one of the biggest problems we have in the church today, at least here in America, is not demon possession, but demon obsession. Remember, gang, He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world.

Why would the demons want to enter pigs? I believe it was an attempt by these demons to drive Jesus out of the area. You see, pig farming was the number one industry there, and the demons knew that if Jesus interfered with business, the people would drive Him out. Keep in mind that pork was absolutely forbidden for Jews, making these pork ranchers the "marijuana farmers" of their day—hanging out on the rocks in Eastern Galilee, raising an illegal "crop."

Matthew 8:34

And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts.

"Leave, Lord. We care more about pigs than we do about people."

Jesus doesn't stay where He's not wanted, so He left. But in chapter 9, Matthew will continue to portray Jesus the King revealing His power to radically change those who were open to Him.

GOD'S FINAL WORD

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 8:10–13

Put yourself in this setting: You are in Capernaum, observing an encounter between Jesus and a Roman centurion. You hear Jesus commend the centurion, saying,

> "I have not found such great faith in all of Israel. And I say to you that men like you are going to be sitting at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But many of the religious people, the Jewish people who have so much, are going to be in outer darkness."
>
> And you stand there absolutely amazed.

We have been exposed to this gospel story for so long, we begin to think,

> "Big deal. So Jesus is commending a Roman centurion's faith as the greatest faith He had found in the land. So He's saying that Gentiles are going to be sitting at the table, and many Jews will be cast into outer darkness. So what?"

But at the time Jesus said this, those hearing Him would have scratched their heads in utter disbelief.

The reason Jesus' contemporaries would have been shocked by what He said was because in this culture, there were three groups of people who were absolutely, irrefutably looked down upon.

The first group was lepers. Lepers were believed to have been smitten by God. Lepers were banished from society. Leprosy was the AIDS of that day.

The second group was women. Jewish men felt that women were necessary for the propagation of the race, but outside of that, they didn't have a whole lot of value. In fact, if you were living in Jesus' day and were giving birth to a baby, your friends and relatives would gather in your house with presents in hand, anxiously waiting for the news of the baby's birth. If the midwife came out and said, "It's a boy!" celebration would follow. Gifts

would be exchanged, and your friends and relatives would stay at your home for three days in celebration and feasting. But if the midwife came out and said, "It's a girl," your friends and relatives would immediately leave, taking their presents with them.

The third group looked down upon was Gentiles—everyone who was not a Jew. The Jews basically believed that Gentiles existed only as fuel for the fires of hell. With this in mind, check out Matthew 8, where the first three healing miracles Matthew recorded involved a leper, a Gentile, and a woman. Matthew's readers must have said, "What are you trying to tell us, Matthew, that the kingdom of God includes *lepers, Gentiles,* and *women?* This thing is more inclusive and more expansive than anything we've ever heard."

And Matthew would have said, "That's the point. The kingdom Jesus is building is a lot different from what the religious people think it is."

Let me tell you, folks, the message for us is that we must be so careful in our evaluations. We who feel like we've been blessed because we have the Word and we know the Lord need to be careful because the kingdom is bigger than our own theological niche. It's more expansive than our own flavor. It's big—much bigger than any of us think. "Well, it can't include Communists, can it?"

You who are old enough might remember Nikita Khrushchev, who banged the table of the United Nations with his shoe, saying, "We will bury you." I remember as a little boy that whenever I saw his face on TV, my heart was filled with terror, for he represented the Russian menace. I can recall many times during a school year when sirens would go off and we would get under our desks and cover our eyes with one hand and the back of our necks with the other to "protect" ourselves from Russian A-bombs.

"A Russian can't be part of the kingdom—not a guy like Khrushchev!"

Guess what happened to Khrushchev? The Lord included him in His kingdom.

Nikita Khrushchev memorized the entire New Testament word-for-word. And in his later years, he would sit in Gorky Park reciting it to Russians who recognized him. Although he was politically defamed and dethroned largely due to his faith, he gave his comments on New Testament teachings to all

who would listen. Nikita Khrushchev became a teacher of the Word in his last days.

Furthermore, once, when Gorbachev came to America, he requested that Billy Graham travel in his entourage. Gorbachev's mother is a born-again believer—a Baptist. When Gorbachev was asked directly if he too was a believer, he hedged the question and didn't answer it directly. I'm not saying he's a brother, but I am suggesting that something could be happening in his heart.

I've listened to the prayers of Presbyterians and have been deeply touched. The prayers of some Catholic priests have penetrated my heart. I've listened to Christians who worship with rock and roll, and I've said, "Far out!" The kingdom is big. And I encourage you, as I remind myself, to be careful in our evaluations.

Jesus marveled and said, "This Roman-Gentile-Occupier-Centurion has the greatest faith I've found in Israel thus far." Only twice does Scripture say that Jesus marveled—here in Matthew 8, and in Mark 6, where He marveled at the unbelief of those in His home city who had been in the synagogue, who had journeyed to the temple, and who knew the Torah. Jesus marveled at Gentile faith and at Jewish unbelief.

Let us be big people, realizing the kingdom is more expansive and inclusive than what our flavor might be philosophically, or what our theology might be dogmatically. May God give us eyes to see what He's doing in churches other than ours, in fellowships flavored far differently than ours. Be embracive. Be a lover of people. See what the Lord is doing.

The second thing I glean from this simple story is not just to be careful in my evaluations, but to be confident in His articulation.

The centurion said, "Lord, I'm not worthy. Speak the word only."

I have heard messages on this verse that sound like this: "Speak the word, brother. Speak the word, sister. God said let there be light, and there was light, so name it and claim it." But the issue is not God *said,* "Let there be light." The issue is: *God* said, "Let there be light." It's not what was said. It's Who said it.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

John 1:1–4

The Word is not an activity, not an exercise, not a theology. It's a Person. It's Jesus. *He* is the Word.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son . . .

Hebrews 1:1, 2

God's final Word is His Son, Jesus Christ. Anything I want to know about life—the way to treat people, the way to handle various situations, the way to go through storms, the way to receive blessings—I find in Jesus Christ.

I am freed from having to pretend to be some kind of a spiritual prophet, guru, or wise master because I can move with great assurance in simplicity and confidence, saying, "My friend, dear sister, precious brother, God's final Word concerning anything you want to know about any situation you're in is Jesus Christ. What did *He* do? What did *He* teach? How did *He* respond? How did *He* act? Get to know the Savior, for the entire Bible speaks of *Him.*"

After Jesus rose from the dead, Luke tells us that as He walked with His disciples on the road to Emmaus, He opened the Scriptures and explained how they all spoke of Him. Everything God has to say is summed up in the Person of Jesus Christ.

"How can that be," you ask, "when Jesus was only here for three years?"

The speaker preceding him talked an hour and fifty-six minutes. Then Lincoln stood up and began, "Four score and seven years ago . . ."

Within three minutes, his speech was over. The audience was stunned. No one clapped. No one moved. The profundity of his words had silenced them.

So, too, God said, "I'm going to speak to you, humanity, through prophets and through the written Word. But My final Word, My most profound speech is the Logos, the Word—Jesus. Anything you want to know can be found in what He said, taught, and did in those three profound years He was on earth."

Jesus Christ is God's final Word to man. Therefore, throughout the Word, I look for Jesus.

- The Old Testament pointed to Him.
- The epistles of Paul looked back at Him.
- The Book of Revelation watches for Him.

Hermeneutics is the science of Biblical interpretation. But, gang, it's not hermeneutics that we need. It's *Him*-aneutics. We need to look for Jesus in every story and on every page. Whatever your need is, whatever your question might be, the answer is Jesus Christ.

He *is* God's final Word.



9 In chapters 8 and 9, writing of the King and the release of His power, Matthew enumerates ten miracles. In the first three, Jesus showed grace to the outcasts. In the next two, He gave peace to the troubled—the disciples in the storm and those tormented by demons. Now we will see peace extended once again to a man with a very real problem.

Matthew 9:1, 2

And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.

The other Gospel writers tell us the man stricken with palsy was brought by four friends who, because of the crowd, broke through the roof of the home in which Jesus was teaching in order to lower him down in front of the Master. Seeing this man lowered in front of Him, Jesus said, "Be of good

cheer! Your sins are forgiven." But I wonder if at this point, the four friends were a bit disappointed. I wonder if they thought, *That's great, but we didn't lug him all this way and break open the roof just to hear some kind of spiritual statement.* I wonder if they were hoping to hear, "Be healed," instead of "Be of good cheer."

In reality, however, the most important need of the hurting man was forgiveness. In Romans 4, the apostle Paul, quoting David, said, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." In other words, the happiest man is the man who knows he's forgiven. And I suggest to you that, although his friends may have been disappointed to hear those words, they were exactly what this guy was craving to hear due to the fact that, according to early tradition, this man was paralyzed because an immoral lifestyle had taken its toll on him physically.

So, too, I suggest to you that there are people today who are not walking because they are paralyzed by guilt over a sin or a series of sins that took place in their lives previously. And although they can walk physically, they cannot walk with the Lord in good cheer because they think, *I've gone too far. I've sinned too greatly.*

Matthew 9:3–5

And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?

Which is easier—physical healing or redemption from iniquity? For Jesus to physically heal the paralyzed man, He simply had to speak a word. But to forgive him, He had to die.

Matthew 9:6, 7

But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house.

The man took up his bed and cruised out of there, walking physically, but more importantly, walking spiritually. Notice verse 2 says that it was after seeing *their* faith that Jesus said to this man, "Your sins are forgiven." Seeing whose faith? Seeing the faith of the friends who brought their paralyzed buddy to Jesus.

Many times, Jesus would say to the person who was sick, "According to your faith, be made whole," and the person was healed. Other times, seeing other people's faith, Jesus would allow healing to be released. Still other times, at the tomb of Lazarus, for example, it was no one's faith. Mary and Martha were weeping in unbelief, and Lazarus was dead. So whose faith was it? To so-called faith healers who say to the sick, "The reason you aren't healed is because you just didn't have enough faith," I would like to say, "What about *your* faith? Don't *you* have enough faith for him to be healed?"

Matthew 9:8

But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.

Note this, students. Every time Jesus did a miracle, people who saw it glorified the Father. Jesus was able to move in such a way that when people saw His miracles, they praised God.

A man living in Taiwan who was really in love with a certain lady wrote her seven hundred flowery and lengthy letters in one year, sixty-two of which included proposals of marriage. The letters worked. The lady did indeed get married—but not to him. She married the mailman.

When I read that, I thought, *Isn't that just like us? Here the Father loves us and sends good gifts to us, but we're so dumb we exalt the mailman instead of the author of the letter.* If you're used by the Lord, people will either have a tendency to exalt you unrealistically, or to rail on you radically. Our goal should be to do what Jesus did—turn all the attention, all the glory back to the Father.

Matthew 9:9 (a)

And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom . . .

Matthew, the author of this Gospel, was also named Levi, which meant he sprang from the Levites, the priestly class, the tribe dedicated to worshipping and ministering. Matthew was a Levite, but instead of worshiping at the temple, he was working for the Romans, sitting at the receipt of custom collecting taxes. The Lord, however, has a way of seeing good in people, and He saw potential even in a man like Matthew.

Matthew 9:9 (b)

. . . and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.

"Follow Me, Matthew. I'll take you. Others might spit on you, turn their backs on you, and avoid you. But I'm willing to work with you and to work in you." Luke's Gospel tells us Matthew arose and left all to follow Jesus. Matthew, however, doesn't mention this in his own writings. He simply says, "He arose, and followed him."

Proverbs 27:2 says, "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips." Matthew models this beautifully.

Matthew 9:10–13

And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

There are none righteous, but the Lord says, "I am coming particularly to those who recognize their need—to the publicans, the prostitutes, the sinners, and the street people."

I wonder if we as the church today are like that. I wonder if the church, which should be representing Jesus, is now comfortable with the religious people, but is turning off the sinners, the street people, and the common folks. Jesus said, "I don't want sacrifice. I want mercy—compassion and concern for everyone."

I hope unbelievers relate to you well. I hope they don't look at you as being holier-than-thou. I hope people enjoy your company because you represent life and joy, that there's a quality about you that attracts people—believers and sinners alike. Such was true of Jesus. And such was true of Matthew, as he said to his friends, "Come on over to my house and meet the One who has shown such grace and mercy to me." We need more "Matthew parties," where people open their hearts and homes, saying, "I want you to be exposed to the One who's changed me."

Matthew 9:14–16

Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast. No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.

You don't put a new denim patch on old Levi's®, because when you wash them, it won't hold. The cloth will shrink, the stitching will rip, and the hole you were trying to patch will become even bigger.

Matthew 9:17

Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.

Old wineskins, which are hard and rigid, aren't able to flex like new ones. Therefore, it would be foolish to put new wine in old wineskins

because as the wine fermented, the wineskins would burst. Wine is a symbol of the Spirit, and I believe the Lord continually pours new wine. The problem is, the old structures and traditions can't contain it. Therefore, it seems as though the Lord raises up new wineskins in every generation—new vessels to hold the new work of the Spirit.

Matthew 9:18 (a)

While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler . . .

In the eighth chapter of his Gospel, Dr. Luke records this same miracle with much greater detail. He tells us the man's name was Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue. Before the year 586 B.C., virtually all Jews lived within one hundred miles of the temple, so they all worshiped there. But in 586 B.C., the Jews were carried away into Babylon and held hostage for seventy years. No longer able to worship in the temple, they established synagogues in every neighborhood with ten or more Jewish men. The synagogue then became the place of assembly for the Jews where they would worship and study the Scriptures. Each synagogue had ten leaders, called elders. Of those ten, one was elected by the other nine to be the ruler. The ruler of the synagogue was a man of tremendous importance. Not only was he in charge of the synagogue, but he would also settle civic disputes within the neighborhood. Synagogue rulers had power and prosperity, influence and impact. Jairus was such a man. Yet he was willing to risk it all and come to Jesus because death had crept into his family.

Matthew 9:18 (b), 19

. . . and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples.

Luke also tells us that Jairus' daughter was twelve years old. For twelve years, his daughter had brought light and laughter into his home, until suddenly, she was taken with sickness and was at the point of death.

> Much can be learned from the way people react to death closing in on themselves or on someone close to them. Fifteen years before his death, Mahatma Ghandi wrote: "I must tell you in all humility, that Hinduism as I know it entirely satisfies my soul. It fills my whole being, and I find a solace in it that I find nowhere else." Three weeks before he died, however, he made this last journal entry: "My days are numbered. I am not likely to live very much longer. Perhaps a year, maybe a little more. For the first time in my fifty years, I find myself in the slough of despond and in total depression."

When Jairus came face-to-face with death, he knew what to do. He went to Jesus. He ran the risk of losing his prominent position, his wealth, and his reputation in order to save his daughter's life.

Matthew 9:20 (a)

And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him . . .

Because this woman was hemorrhaging, she would have been unable to go to the temple to worship, and she would have been considered unclean and defiled by her community. Notice the parallel: A twelve-year-old girl, full of life, light, and laughter, was suddenly dying, and a woman, who, for the same twelve years, full of darkness, disease, and depression, was on the verge of being healed. Perhaps for the past twelve years you have had things go relatively well. Life has been good. God has been gracious. But you don't know what the next hour holds. You can't guarantee that in the next hour you won't meet with the greatest tragedy, the biggest challenge of your life. Like Jairus, you who perhaps for twelve years have been doing so well, might suddenly find yourself face-to-face with despair. So, too, for the past twelve years if you have been battling discouragement, depression, and disease, know this: You don't know what the next moment holds. The Lord can do something suddenly that will blow your mind and bring an end to your despair.

Matthew 9:20 (b), 21

. . . and touched the hem of his garment: For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.

In Matthew's day, it was believed that there was certain power in the hem of a garment belonging to a rabbi or spiritual leader. "If I could just touch the hem of his garment." This woman probably didn't have the strength to wrestle Him in faith, or to grab hold of Him in belief. Yet she knew if she could even just lightly touch Jesus, she would be healed.

Matthew 9:22

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

Perhaps you say, "I would love to have Jesus touch me, but I don't feel His touch." Then be like this woman. If you're not feeling His touch upon you, reach out and touch Him. Have you made the effort to press through the crowd of unbelief, of busyness, of entertainment, of activities—the crowd of all that stands between you and the Lord? Press through and say, "I just want to touch the hem of His garment. I know if I can touch Him, I'll be helped."

This woman expended the energy to break through the crowd and touch Jesus. Was her theology correct? No. Was her knowledge complete? No. She was acting out of superstition. But the Lord didn't say, "Since your theology is all messed up, I won't help you." No! He's a Savior who heeds the cries of His children, even though their phrases are amiss, or their theology's not right. God honors the person who in desperation is seeking to touch Him.

Now, do you suppose by this time, Jairus was growing a little impatient? "Come on, Lord. My daughter is dying, and You're talking to some lady who's touched Your garment?"

Do you ever feel that way? "Lord, I see You're blessing this person and You're blessing that person. Great! But, Lord, what about me?" I suggest to you that in seeing the healing of this woman, Jairus was being prepared for the healing of his own daughter. You see, whenever the Lord delays in moving and seems to be working in other people or in other places, be observant of where He is working and what He is doing because therein lies

lessons for you as well. Keep your antennae up, your eyes wide, and your journal open to record information the Lord knows you will need shortly.

Matthew 9:23–26

And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, he said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose. And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.

Whenever Jesus wants to work in your situation, there will be mockers, saying, "It's not going to happen. What a joke. The Lord's not going to help you. He's not even real to you. He doesn't care anything about you." And these little voices inside of us, the voices of unbelief, of demons, or even of well-meaning friends, say, "Grow up. Don't expect a miracle."

The laughers, the scorners, and the mockers were moved out before Jesus went in. Move out the mockers, gang. Believe the promises of God, quote Scripture, rejoice in advance, and anticipate His blessing.



***For topical study of Matthew 9:18–26 entitled "Moving Out the Mockers," turn to page* 68.**

Matthew 9:27

And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us.

"Son of David" was a title used for "Messiah." In reality, these blind men had better vision than anyone else, for they saw Jesus as Messiah.

Matthew 9:28 (a)

And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him . . .

How did the blind men follow Jesus and come to Him? After all, they couldn't see! I suggest there's a spiritual principle here. John 1:9 says, "[Jesus] was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." The ministry of Messiah was to open the eyes not only of those physically blind, but of the spiritually blind. Therefore, the blindest of men can follow Him because Jesus, the true Light, lights every man. He makes Himself known to every person.

Romans 1 makes it clear that, both by instinct and observation, every man knows there's a God. But what do men do? They suppress the truth. People don't want to admit there's a Creator, because if there's a Creator, they are accountable to that Creator, and people want to sin. So they conveniently, illogically, and unscientifically bury the truth in the theory of evolution in order to say, "Hey, we're only animals. Let's party."

But even the blindest of men at some point will realize the truth in his heart. When he faces Jesus, no man will be able to say, "I never knew. I never heard. I had no idea." John 1:9 says He is the Light that lights *every* man.

Matthew 9:28 (b)–30

. . . and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.

Why did Jesus say, "Don't tell anyone?" Again, I believe the reason is because He knew the tendency of people to focus on the miraculous more than the Message, on the gifts more than the Giver. Also, perhaps Jesus was saying, "If you guys aren't careful spreading this news around this region at this time, you'll get in a lot of trouble." As opposition to Him was mounting, maybe He was protecting those who believed in Him.

Matthew 9:31

But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country.

These guys couldn't help spreading the word. I can understand that. I mean, they were blind and now they could see. They wanted people to know!

Matthew 9:32–35

As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils. And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

People ask, "Why aren't blind eyes opened, AIDS victims healed, and the paralyzed walking today? It happened then. Why can't it happen now?"

God still heals, but not in the same way. At this point, Jesus was giving the Jews the opportunity to acknowledge Him as their Messiah. Had they received Him, they could have moved right into the kingdom, but they rejected Him when they nailed Him to the Cross. Consequently, although we do see miracles today, they're not the same as the ones He performed physically when He walked the earth. The miracles we read about in the Gospels are "sneak previews of coming attractions" when He will rule and reign, when all will be right, when everyone will be healed.

Matthew 9:36–38

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

Looking at the multitudes, Jesus said to His boys, "Pray. The harvest is plenteous." He didn't say, "It's time for planting." He said, "It's ready for picking."

I sense the same thing is true today, don't you? The harvest is ready. Don't let Satan whisper in your ear, "Your neighbors won't listen. Your relatives won't respond." No, the harvest is *ready.*

MOVING OUT THE MOCKERS

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 9:18–26

Funerals are normally very serious and very sobering. But I want us to look at a funeral where there were no quiet organ chords, no hushed whispers, no silent tears.

This funeral is unique because it was filled with laughter.

> *And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.*
>
> Matthew 9:23, 24

Who were these minstrels? In Jesus' day, when someone died, the bereaved would hire professional mourners and wailers. Even the poorest of families would hire two minstrels, two flute players, and one screamer. But the wealthier one was, the more mourners he would hire. Because Jairus was so wealthy, there were perhaps twenty, fifty, perhaps even one hundred people at his home weeping, wailing, and mourning. Then Jesus arrived. "Give place," He said. "Make way. The maid is not dead. She sleeps."

Matthew writes, "And they laughed him to scorn." It wasn't a chuckle; it was a deep belly laugh. It wasn't a giggle; it was a guffaw. After all, they had been with her. They had checked her pulse. They had watched her die. No doubt about it, she was gone.

The Bible speaks of death with different terminology than the world does. John 11, Acts 7, 1 Corinthians 15, and 1 Thessalonians 4 all say that for the believer, death is sleep. That is, our bodies go to sleep to be resurrected later on, while our spirits go immediately to be with the Lord.

Sleep! Who of us doesn't enjoy a nice nap or taking some time to lie in the sun now and then? Jesus put death in an entirely different context when He said, "Don't worry. She's not dead in the way you think. She's simply sleeping."

> Imagine a funeral taking place in the amphitheatre with hundreds of caterpillars all dressed in black marching slowly down the floor of the amphitheatre, carrying the cocoon of their beloved, departed brother. Meanwhile, a beautiful butterfly is fluttering above them, looking down in utter disbelief. "What are you guys mourning for?" he shouts. "I've been metamorphosed!"

In 1 Corinthians 15, when Paul says we shall be changed, "metamorphosed" is the Greek word he uses. When we die, we get rid of these caterpillar costumes and become the butterflies we long to be.

"Give place," Jesus said. "She's not dead. She's asleep." Then He went in and took her by the hand. To a Jew, touching a dead body was defiling. It was like touching a leper. But Jesus was not afraid to touch defiled people. And He's not afraid to touch you.

Scripture records three accounts of people who were raised from the dead by Jesus: Jairus' daughter, the widow of Nain's son, and Lazarus.

- Following her resurrection, Jairus' daughter was hungry.
- Following his resurrection, the widow's son began to speak.
- Following his resurrection, Lazarus came forth walking.

I suggest to you the same three characteristics are found in those who have been spiritually resurrected and born again.

- Like Jairus' daughter, they hunger for the Word.
- Like the widow's son, they talk differently. The things they enjoy talking about are no longer what they once were.
- Like Lazarus, they walk differently, no longer bound by sin.

I want you to see something else here, because I believe every one of us deals constantly with some area in our lives that is dying.

Perhaps it is in the area of parenting. "My kids are rebelling against God. They're not interested in spiritual things. My daughter is at the point of death even now."

Maybe it's your wife or your husband. Your marriage is collapsing.

Maybe financially or occupationally things seem at the point of death.

It might be ministry.

And we run to Jesus, crying, "Lord, this thing, this person, this plan is at the point of death. Come. Please!" And Jesus hears your prayer. And you leave that place of prayer saying, "Far out! The Lord is with me. Great!"

But then the news comes the next day.

- She left you.
- He moved out.
- Your kids are in juvenile hall.
- You're fired.

And you say, "What happened, Lord? I thought You were traveling with me. Where did You go?"

He is still with you. And He whispers in your heart. "Give place. It's not dead. It's just sleeping."

"No way," you say. "It's over. There's no possibility it will ever work out."

But when the people were put forth, he went in . . .

Matthew 9:25

When did Jesus go in?

When the mockers were put out.

In this, I am reminded of an account in 2 Kings . . .

And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.

2 Kings 2:23

Interestingly the Hebrew word translated "mock" used here is essentially the same Greek word translated "mock" in Matthew 9. The word for "little children" is the Hebrew word *na'ar.* It is used to describe Isaac when he was twenty-eight years old and Joseph when he was thirty-nine years old. Thus, it doesn't mean little children in the sense of preschoolers or kindergarteners. Instead, it means those who were younger than the venerated elders in a community. So these guys could have easily been twenty, thirty, or perhaps even forty years old. They should have known better than to mock a man of God.

Now, who were these "little children"? They were those who had heard about Elijah's miraculous departure in a chariot of fire, but evidently didn't believe it. So they said to Elisha, "Get out of here, man. Go up like Elijah did, if you're such a hot prophet."

What happened next?

And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. *And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them. And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.*

2 Kings 2:24–25

Elisha said, "I won't stand for it. This is un-bear-able. In the name of the Lord, I will not allow these mockers, these scoffers to make fun of the ministry that God has entrusted to me." Suddenly, two female bears came out of the woods and began ripping on these scorners, devouring them. And we see the situation become very "grizzly."

Don't send your pit bulls after those who make fun of you, gang, but realize this: We in New Testament times wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places

(Ephesians 6:12). Our battle is with those demonic forces and with our own sin natures that whisper within us, "Go up. Go up. You think things are going to happen? No they're not, bald head man."

In the Name of Jesus, we need to come against these scoffers, these laughers, these mockers, and say, "I will not give place to these voices of doubt and depression. I will not allow them to whisper in my ear that this is doomed to fail. I refuse to listen to the lies of the enemy or to the doubts of my sinful humanity. I will claim the promises the Lord has given to me in His Word, and I will cling to them and believe in Him."

Over three thousand promises have been given to you in the Word dealing with every single need you might have today. Search the Scriptures. Find the promise. And when circumstances say, "No way," call for the bears!

When Jesus went into His hometown of Capernaum, does Scripture say He could do no mighty miracle there because of their carnality? No. Was it because of their sin? No. Was it because He was tired? No.

He could do no mighty work there because of their unbelief (Matthew 13:58).

Without faith, Hebrews 11 says, it is impossible to please Him. There are many ways to please God, but without faith, none of them mean a thing. Have faith. Give place. Move out the mockers.

> "Eat 'em up, bears of belief. Go get 'em in the Name of the Lord. I'm quoting, claiming, believing, and standing on this Book. Devour those doubts, O Lord."

As the scorners make their exit, the Lord then moves in, and things begin to happen. May you be one who puts out the scorners and stands on Scripture.

Move out the mockers. Make way for Jesus. And let Him bring resurrection into your life.

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10 The story is told of Jesus' return to heaven. After dying for the sins of humanity, He was greeted by the angel Gabriel.

"An awesome thing You did, Lord," Gabriel said. "Incredible! Does the world know?"

Jesus answered, "Not really. As a matter of fact, only a few guys in Palestine understand what I did."

"Well, how is the rest of the world going to understand?"

"I'm entrusting those guys with the message. I'm trusting they will carry My message throughout the world."

"But what if they don't?" Gabriel asked. "What if they decide to return to fishing? Or what if they get afraid? Or what if they get tangled up in relationships? What happens if they don't do it? What is Your plan then?"

And Jesus replied, "I have no other plan."

This story, although it is just a story, is reality. The Lord entrusted the gospel of the kingdom to men and left it with them, sending them out to propagate the Good News that men's sins are forgiven because of His death on the Cross. That was His only plan.

And here in Matthew 10, we see the beginning of this plan unfolding as we see Him training His disciples. After learning *from* Jesus and hanging out *with* Jesus, now they are sent forth *by* Jesus.

Matthew 10:1 (a)

And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples . . .

We saw in Luke 6 that, after spending the night in prayer, Jesus chose from among the many disciples who followed Him twelve to be *apostolos,* or "sent out ones."

Matthew 10:1 (b)

. . . he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

After seeing Jesus' principles recorded and His power revealed, here in chapter 10, we see His people released as He sends forth His disciples. Jesus was so radical. He entrusted His message not to the well-educated and

impeccably trained, but to a rag-tag bunch of renegades made up of a tax collector, political rabble-rousers, and fishermen. The Lord will never ask you to do anything He does not enable you to do by the power of His Spirit. Since the greatest concerns of the culture in which they ministered were demon possession, sickness, and disease, Jesus specifically gave His disciples the power to meet those very needs.

Matthew 10:2 (a)

Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter . . .

Luke 6 tells us that after Jesus spent a full night in prayer, He came down the mountain and chose twelve disciples from among the many who surrounded Him. "Mathetes," or "learner," is the Greek word for disciple. These men had been traveling with Jesus, listening to Jesus, and hanging out with Jesus. They were learners. Jesus called them disciples and transformed them into "apostles" or "sent out ones."

In the listing of the apostles, Peter always comes first and Judas is always at the end. Judas, of course, was the betrayer of Jesus, and Peter was one who had a special place in the apostolic order. Here we see that the Lord does have leaders among leaders. And Peter, indeed, was a leader amongst these leaders.

Nonetheless, Peter was the apostle with the foot-shaped mouth, often saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. Maybe you enjoy talking and your heart is as big as the world, but you have a tendency to speak and to think later. Peter was like this.

The Lord changed Simon from one who was shifting and unstable into "Petros," or "Rock." The Lord renamed Peter because He transformed him from one who was shifting and unstable to one who would become solid and reliable.

Matthew 10:2 (b)

. . . and Andrew his brother . . .

Andrew was known as the younger brother of Peter. Maybe some of you feel like Andrew—always in someone else's shadow. Your older brother, your older sister, or someone else is always the star. Jesus chose someone you can perhaps relate to—Andrew—who was always in Peter's shadow.

Matthew 10:2 (c)
. . . James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother.

James and John were called the "sons of thunder" because of their volatile tempers. When one of the cities did not respond to the message of the gospel, James and John said, "Jesus, shall we call down fire from heaven and destroy them?" So Jesus chose a guy who said the wrong things, a guy who lived in the shadow of his older brother, and a couple of guys with explosive tempers.

Matthew 10:3 (a)
Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican . . .

Then there were Philip and Bartholomew. Remember that Bartholomew is another name for Nathanael, the skeptic who asked, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Add to this group Thomas, a doubter, and Matthew, a rip-off artist. Would *you* have chosen these guys?

Matthew 10:3 (b)–4 (a)
. . . James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite . . .

James, the son of Alphaeus, is an unknown, since there's nothing more we know about him from Scripture. Perhaps you feel that way. You're somewhat shy and retiring, and you don't make your presence known. But the Lord sees you just as He saw James and says, "Yeah, I can use you."

Then there was Simon the Canaanite, a political rabble-rouser. The Gospel of Luke tells us that Simon was a zealot. He was involved in a group trying to overthrow the Roman government. If Simon the Zealot and Matthew, who was employed by the Romans, had met in any other circumstance, Simon

would have put a knife in Matthew's back. But here Jesus brings them together. Just like us! We have some liberals and some conservatives, some Republicans, and some Democrats. And that's the way it should be. People who would normally not hang out together find commonality in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 10:4 (b)
. . . and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

Even a traitor was chosen by Jesus. Were the disciples superstars? Hardly. How I appreciate the quality—or the lack of quality—of these men because it gives me hope that Jesus can use someone like me.

Matthew 10:5, 6
These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Right away, Jesus put restrictions on them. Why? Because He was establishing priorities for them, saying, "This is where you start—in your home country. Start where you're at," Jesus says. "Cross the street before you cross the ocean." In addition to establishing priority, there's another reason Jesus put this restriction on them. Had these apostles gone to the Samaritans —Gentiles—first, no one would have received them when they came back home because the Jews despised the Gentiles. In Romans we read that the gospel went to the Jew first and then to the Greeks, or the Gentiles, not because of priority, but because of precedence. The Jews were prepared by the prophets, by the covenants, and by the promises. So the Lord sent His boys to the Jews first.

Matthew 10:7 (a)
And as ye go, preach . . .

The Greek word for preach is *kerusso.* Maybe you remember Enrico Caruso, the great opera singer who would shatter a glass from fifteen paces

with his powerful tenor voice. Remember Caruso. That's the word for preach. Sing it out. Sing out the gospel!

Matthew 10:7 (b)
. . . saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

What had Jesus been preaching and teaching? This very message: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Consequently, He was able to say, "You've heard it from Me. Now go and tell others." Truly, there is power in the Word, for it speaks to any person in any place during any age.

Matthew 10:8
Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

These would have been impossible tasks had not Jesus already empowered them to do these very things (verse 1). Whatever God has given you—gifts, abilities, money, talent—has been given to you freely by His grace. Now let these gifts freely flow through you to help those around you.

You might be saying, "I feel so bankrupt. I don't feel like I have a lot to give." But the Word tells us that we have not because we ask not (James 4:2). Maybe we should be spending a little more time in prayer, saying, "Lord, I need to be blessed. I need to be empowered so that I might be a blessing to others." Blessings are like the measles—you can't give 'em unless you got 'em!

Matthew 10:9, 10 (a)
Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves . . .

"I'm sending you out. Now go with the flow, and trust Me to take care of you. You don't need to encumber yourselves with lots of gadgets and gizmos. I will provide."

Matthew 10:10 (b)

. . . for the workman is worthy of his meat.

When the disciples went out healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, and raising the dead, don't you think someone might have asked them over for dinner? I do. I think what the Lord is saying here is, "If you're going about doing good, preaching the gospel, healing the sick, and cleansing the lepers, the workman is worthy of his meat. I'll take care of you. The people will respond to you, and blessings will flow freely to you because you are giving freely." Whatever ministry you are involved in, know this: When God guides, God provides. People will be blessed, touched, and encouraged. And they will want to be a blessing in return.

Matthew 10:11–13 (a)

And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence. And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it . . .

Whatever house you go in, stay there. The problem is, we so often get into a place and say, "Well, this is fine for now." But we keep our eye open for a more influential or powerful place to stay.

When I was a youth pastor years ago, I noticed the message of so many youth seminars and books was "Get the quarterback and the cheerleader converted, and you've got it made." But in reality, it was the *common* people who heard Jesus gladly (Mark 12:37). We learned the hard way to focus not so much on the quarterback, but rather to go to the kids who sat by themselves, those whom everyone else ignored. When we went to these kids, there was an openness and a readiness to receive Jesus.

I believe that's essentially what Jesus was referring to when He said, "When you go into a house, be content to stay there. Don't try to move around and move up. Just go in, pronounce peace, and stay until you leave the city."

Matthew 10:13 (b)–15

. . . but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.

Have you ever been visited by some Jehovah's Witness missionaries? After closing the door, if you peek out the window, you see them shake the dust from their feet as they get to the edge of your sidewalk. They do this because they're taking this verse literally and pronouncing judgment. In Jesus' day, when the Jews would accidentally or unavoidably walk across Gentile territory, once they got back to Jewish soil, they would shake their feet. Everyone knew they were shaking off the defilement of Gentile dirt. Thus, when the apostles shook the dust from their feet, people watching would know exactly what was happening. They would know the apostles were sending this message: "You're lost, just like you think the Gentiles are lost. We come to you presenting the Good News, but if you reject it, you bring judgment upon yourselves."

Matthew 10:16

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

Do you remember this story from the past? A twenty-five-foot boa constrictor took up residence in the basement of a house in Florida. Although the owners knew he was down there from the skins he shed, they couldn't find him. He was tricky—twenty-five feet long and still able to hide completely in cracks and crevices. Think about it. A snake has severe handicaps. It has no arms, no legs, and yet it gets around. It wisely maneuvers and stealthily hides itself. Jesus is saying that even if you feel as though you're handicapped, be as wise as a serpent in how you get into places. But also be as harmless as a dove.

Matthew 10:17–20

But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

The religious system and the government are going to come against you. But it's for a purpose. "Opposition," Jesus is saying, "brings opportunity. You'll be brought before magistrates, judges, kings, and leaders as a representative of Me."

Whenever you're called on the carpet because you're serving the Lord, or because you're taking a stand for righteousness, know this: Jesus said opposition would occur. He also said He would use it for His sake. You will be brought before people who will persecute you or come down on you because, in that way, He can use you as a witness. So don't tense your shoulders and furrow your brow when you get called into your boss's office. Realize the Lord put you there as a witness for Him.

Matthew 10:21

And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.

This prophecy of Jesus came to pass as the church went through ten tragic waves of persecution under ten Roman emperors. During this time, perhaps as many as 175 million Christians were killed. Until the rule of Constantine, Christians were systematically scourged, beaten, and burned. Caesar Nero had believers dipped in hot wax so he could ignite them and use them as torches in his palace gardens.

Matthew 10:22–25

And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. But when they persecute you

in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?

Beelzebub, literally "lord of the flies," was a Philistine god, worshiped by people who lived in what is today known as the Gaza strip. There were those who said, "Jesus is using demonic powers to do His work. He's demon-possessed." So here Jesus is saying to His disciples, "If they're calling Me the lord of the flies, they're also going to come down on you."

Matthew 10:26

Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.

A day is coming when all things will be made right.

Matthew 10:27

What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.

"What I am telling you in the dark, speak in the light. What I am telling you in the quiet times, in your morning devotions, in your evening watches, spread abroad."

Matthew 10:28–31

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

You might be treated unjustly at school, on the job, or in your family. But the Father is watching. Do you know this? When you feel like you're getting ripped on and put down, the Father sees. Jesus says He sees when even a sparrow falls to the ground.

Sparrows weren't worth a whole lot. Two sold for a farthing, or one-sixteenth of a denarius. A denarius was a day's wage for the poorest of people. So sparrows were sold very cheaply. In fact, in Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells us that five sparrows could be bought for two farthings. They were so common that you got an extra bird thrown in for free! Here, Jesus says the Father sees when even one of these birds fall. Are not you more valuable than they? You bet. So be assured that when you're falling, stumbling, or hurting, the Lord is watching and caring.

Matthew 10:32, 33

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

This verse is often misunderstood. People ask, "Does this mean the Lord will deny me if I don't stand up for Him?" No. The very night Jesus was led away to be crucified for Peter's sins, Peter was cursing, swearing, and denying Him. Yet after He died, Jesus found Peter and said, "Peter, feed My sheep. Feed My lambs. Keep going, Peter." Jesus did not damn Peter, disown Peter, or disqualify him from service.

We need to remember that when Jesus ascended into heaven, He became our High Priest who ever lives, Hebrews says, to make intercession for the saints. He's praying for us right now. If we deny Him—if we don't stand up for Him—we will miss the benefits He wants to bestow upon us, and we will be the poorer. Thus, in my opinion, this verse has nothing to do with our salvation. It has to do with the blessings God bestows upon us as we stand up for His Son.

Secondly, it has to do with eternal rewards, crowns, and benefits.

> And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.
>
> Daniel 12:3

Daniel declares that you who are soul-winners are wise because you're going to shine as stars forever. If you're standing for the Lord and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, you will be confessed by the Lord when you stand at the Bema Seat of Christ. The Bema Seat is not a place where sins are judged. Our sins were all judged at Calvary. We will never be judged for our sins and denials, our departures and backsliding. However, we will be rewarded for what we did in Christ's Name. If we confess Jesus before men, Jesus will confess us before the Father. And rewards will come our way eternally.

> **Matthew 10:34–37**
>
> **Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.**

I talked with an Oregon county leader one day who said, "Jon, you gotta face it. Your group out there intimidates an awful lot of people. You're claiming Jesus is the only Way. That makes a bunch of people feel pretty uncomfortable. You're going to have some enemies." He's right! It's inevitable. If we are the light we should be, we're going to cause people who are living in darkness to feel uncomfortable.

Jesus says, "There's going to be some severance, some tension, some difficulty if you're standing up for Me and living for Me. But if you value family or friendship more than you value Me, you're not worthy of Me."

> **Matthew 10:38**
>
> **And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.**

How our generation needs to hear this.

- In the ’60s, the goal was to “Find Yourself.”

  We tried that and didn’t like what we found.
- In the ’70s, the goal was to “Improve Yourself.”

  All kinds of courses were taken, and health spas abounded, but it didn’t work. People were not happy.
- In the ’80s, the goal was to “Serve Yourself.”

  As our nation grew more and more materialistic, it became less and less fulfilled.
- In the ’90s, the goal was to “Express Yourself.”

  But even as communication grew by leaps and bounds, the messages we sent and received confused us.
- In every age, Jesus says, “Die to self.”

Die to self. Take up the cross. Today it would be, “Take up the gas chamber,” or “Take up the electric chair.” We wear cross earrings and cross necklaces, but what if we started wearing miniature gas chamber earrings or electric chair necklaces? They would more fully capture the essence of what Jesus was saying.

We sing the hymn, “There’s room at the Cross for you.” But what if we sang, “There’s room in the gas chamber for you”? You see, the Cross has lost its impact because it’s so familiar. But to these people at this time who heard Jesus say, “If you want to come after Me, you’ve got to take up the Cross,” it would be like us hearing, “If you want to follow Me, you must take up the electric chair and die a degrading death.”

Matthew 10:39 (a)
He that findeth his life shall lose it . . .

Do you ever hear people say, “Man, I’m losing it”? The reason they say this is because they’re living for themselves. If you find your life and live for yourself, you’ll lose it.

Matthew 10:39 (b)

. . . and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

If you want to be miserable, turn inward; but if you want to have life, Jesus—the Author of life—says, "Die to self. Live for Me."

Matthew 10:40–42

He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

"Anyone who honors you will be honored by Me. Even if they give you a cup of cold water, they are going to be profited and blessed presently and eternally."

In the Book of Hebrews, we are told the Lord is not unfaithful to forget our works of righteousness (6:10). When you do something for someone else, they might forget about it. But when you do something in the Name of the Lord for the people of the Lord, He promises He will not forget, and you will be rewarded. When? Perhaps now—but even better, in heaven.

Go for it, gang. Take the words of Matthew 10 to heart. Die to self. Live for Jesus.



11 As we have seen thus far, the Book of Matthew presents Jesus Christ as King—King of Israel primarily, but not exclusively, for we know that Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords for all people inclusively. But Jesus, in harmony and agreement with what the prophets predicted, came on the scene and presented Himself to the people of Israel as their King and Messiah. In chapters 1 through 10, we've seen the revelation of the King—His Person, His Principles, His Power, His People. Here in chapters 11 and

12, we see rebellion against the King, where all of the revelations of chapters 1 through 10 will be challenged by His enemies.

Matthew 11:1

And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.

I find it interesting that after Jesus sent out the twelve, He taught in their home cities. Jesus would later say a prophet is not without honor except in his own country. In other words, a prophet can go anywhere and be listened to by everyone, except by those who grew up with him or those who thought they really knew him. When He returned to His hometown of Capernaum, Jesus' neighbors said, "Don't we know You? You're the carpenter's son. We know Your brothers and sisters." And they didn't believe in Him.

Here, Jesus goes into the apostles' home cities, knowing that if the disciples had been sent to those who knew them, the response would be, "You think you guys are apostles? What a joke!" Does this mean you shouldn't be a witness at home? No. We *must* witness there. But if the Lord leads you to Mexico, to the Philippines, or to the untamed jungle of Los Angeles, you just might find yourself enjoying an extra measure of fruitfulness.

Matthew 11:2, 3

Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

Herod, the ruler of Israel, had taken his brother's wife as his own, and John the Baptist boldly and pointedly indicted him for his sin. Herod retaliated by imprisoning John. John probably wasn't worried initially. He probably thought, *That's okay. Messiah's on the scene. He'll spring me out of here in no time. Don't the prophecies declare He shall open prison doors and set the captive free? I won't be in here long! No problem!* But there he sat, week after week after month in that dingy, damp dungeon. And he sent

word to Jesus: "What's going on? You're Messiah, aren't You? That's what I was preaching. I even saw the dove of the Spirit descend upon You. Why, then, haven't You established Your kingdom? Why am I still in prison?"

Do you ever feel like that? Do you ever ask, "Lord, why am I still imprisoned? Why haven't You set me free? Why haven't You worked it out, Lord? Week after month after year has gone by, and here I sit." John did. So he sent emissaries to ask Jesus if He was the Messiah. If not, they would start looking for another.

Matthew 11:4–6

Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

"Look around, guys," said Jesus. "And look it up. See that Isaiah prophesied the very things you are seeing: the blind receiving their sight, the lame walking, lepers being cleansed, the deaf hearing, and the dead rising. Look around, look it up, and tell John that the prophecies are being fulfilled and the kingdom is being seen—although in a different way than perhaps he expected. The political, material, physical kingdom John was hoping for *will* come eventually. But now I am establishing My kingdom spiritually, and touching people individually."

So John was gently rebuked here as his disciples returned to him, saying, "The blind are seeing, the deaf are hearing, the lame are walking, and Jesus said happy is the one who's not offended in Him." I bet when John heard this, his heart sank. "Oh, how could I be so dumb? Of course. He is fulfilling the prophecies. How could I doubt Him?" At this point, John must have been very down on himself, but read the next verse to see Jesus' impression of him.

Matthew 11:7

And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

"Did you go out to see someone who was flimsy and floppy, blowing in the wind and reading the latest public opinion polls before deciding what stance he should take? No! Far from being a reed shaken by the wind, John was a wind shaking the reeds!"

Matthew 11:8 (a)
But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?

No. John wore camel's hair and dined on grasshoppers.

Matthew 11:8 (b)–10
. . . behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

Neither flimsy reed nor pampered courtier, John is the one who was prophesied by Malachi four hundred years previously—the messenger who would come before Messiah.

Matthew 11:11 (a)
Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist . . .

In Jesus' estimation, John the Baptist was greater than Abraham, greater than Moses, greater than Elijah, greater than David. Here's what interests me: This was spoken to the crowd *after* the messengers were sent off to tell John, "Blessed is the one who is not offended in Me." In other words, after John's disciples left, Jesus told the crowd John was the greatest who had ever been born of women. But John's disciples didn't hear that. Nor did

John. So, too, although Jesus often challenges us through the Holy Spirit and convicts us through the Word, there are times He says to His angels, "Look at My people at Calvary Chapel—aren't they impressive? Robed in My righteousness and cleansed by My blood. They study My Word. They sing praises to My Name. They like to pray. They love Me. Aren't they special?"

I know this is going on because I've been reading the Song of Solomon. I know what my Lord's heart is toward me. But sometimes those things are out of earshot because He wants to change me and push me to be all I can be, all I should be here on earth that I might be all He wants me to be in eternity. He keeps challenging us, but at the same time, perhaps out of earshot, He commends us.

Like John, you might be saying, "I'm such a failure. I've erred so badly. I've blown it again. There's no hope for me, my ministry, my walk with the Lord, my relationship with Him." The Lord might convict and challenge you, yes, but at the same time know this: Even as He commended John, I'm confident He commends you.

Matthew 11:11 (b)

. . . notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

In this kingdom age in which we live, even the least of us is greater than John. Why? Because we have an understanding of things John and the Old Testament prophets could not know. Peter tells us the prophets of old tried to understand, asking, "How can these things be?" We, on the other hand, have greater insight because we have been allowed to live in this age where we understand the plan of God, where we have been forgiven of all our sins by the blood of Jesus, and where we have the indwelling Spirit.

Matthew 11:12

And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

In the original Greek language, this can be translated two ways. It could mean that the kingdom of heaven is being attacked by violent men—for

indeed it was. John was in prison, and he was about to be beheaded. Herod had killed perhaps thousands of babies in his drive to murder the Christ Child. Bloodshed and violence abounded as the kingdom emerged, so it could be that this verse speaks of the kingdom of heaven suffering violence by enemies trying to overtake it with force.

Or, it could be rendered another way with equal accuracy. That is, that the kingdom of heaven is taken by men who are aggressively, enthusiastically pressing in and laying hold. It is not for those who just sit back apathetically and say, "*Que sera sera,* whatever will be will be." Rather, it is taken by those who, with fervency in prayer, an exercise of faith, and an expenditure of energy lay hold of the promises of God violently and aggressively. Both meanings of this verse find illustration in John the Baptist.

Matthew 11:13–15

For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

In John 1, the Pharisees asked John directly, "Are you Elijah?" to which he replied, "I am not." And yet here Jesus is saying, "If you can receive it, this is Elijah." How do we reconcile this? Stick around. The answer appears in chapter 17.

Matthew 11:16–19

But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

Continuing His discussion of John the Baptist, Jesus asks, "What can I say about this generation? John came as an ascetic, neither eating, nor

drinking, but chomping on grasshoppers and living on honey, and you called him crazy. Then I came, eating and celebrating, and you call Me a glutton and a winebibber. You didn't receive John with his asceticism, and you do not receive Me with My celebration. You don't want to dance, and you don't want to mourn. Nothing makes you happy."

Matthew 11:20–22

Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities that had been judged. But Jesus says, "Woe unto you, Chorazin and Bethsaida"—cities near Galilee where Jesus had headquartered His ministry. "Woe unto you even more than Tyre and Sidon because, although I have done many mighty works among you, you did not respond to Me."

Matthew 11:23, 24

And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

In addition to Chorazin and Bethsaida, Jesus indicts His hometown of Capernaum. Those living in Capernaum saw His works, they heard His message, but they did not respond.

If you go to Israel, you can go to the sites of Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin. These cities, once hugely prosperous, are now nothing but archaeological digs. By all logic, these cities should be thriving today. The location is beautiful. The climate is primo. The water is abundant. The

resources are many. But these cities were judged and destroyed not very long after this statement was made, and they were never rebuilt. It would be as if Balboa Island, Newport Beach, and San Diego were wiped out and never rebuilt. People would say, "Why not? Those are lovely spots geographically." Yet centuries have come and gone, and these three cities are still dead.

And so are we if we reject the words of Jesus Christ. If any of you say, "I don't believe in this Jesus stuff, not really," you're a dead city. If you refuse to respond to the mighty works of Jesus Christ all around you and to His Word constantly before you, judgment will come upon you.

Matthew 11:25, 26

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.

Jesus' attention shifted from the rebellious to the faithful as He said, "Father, thank You that You have revealed truth to these babes. The Pharisees, the religious, the scholars—they're not responding. But, Father, thank You for the babes." In the Book of Acts, Luke writes that the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes marveled when they heard the wisdom of Peter and John. "How did these fishermen get such wisdom?" they wondered. The answer? Peter and John had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). That's the key. Spend time with the Lord in the Word, and you'll be so wise that even Pharisees will wonder how you became so wise.

Matthew 11:27

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.How do you know the Father? Only one Way, through the Son—Jesus Christ.

> God is so immense. The Milky Way galaxy is approximately 100,000 light years across. Traveling at the speed of light, 186,000 miles per second, it would take 100,000 years just to get across the length of the Milky Way galaxy.

And yet the Word says our Lord spans the universe between His thumb and His little finger (Isaiah 40:12)! Big! Enormous! How do we know such a vast God? Oh, great is the mystery of godliness, Paul said, that God would become a Man, manifesting Himself in Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 3:16).

Our Christian faith is truly ingenious. I mean, this huge, vast God became a Man that we might know Him. But our sin stood in the way of a relationship with Him, so that same God died on a Cross at Calvary to provide atonement for our sin. Then He rose again to live inside of us by His Spirit. It's perfect! There's not a flaw in it!

> **Matthew 11:28–30**
>
> **Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**

"Come to Me," Jesus says. "Yoke with Me. Learn of Me. And you'll find rest in your souls."



***For topical study of Matthew 11:28–30 entitled "A Word to the Weary," turn to page* 81.**

A WORD TO THE WEARY

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 11:28–30

Although it took place in the 1930s, it remains one of the most mystifying missing person cases in FBI files. After spending an evening eating out with friends, a forty-five-year-old New York judge hailed a taxi and was never seen or heard from again. The FBI immediately became involved. They suspected a kidnapping by someone who held a judicial grudge against him. But that didn't seem to pan out. They then suspected Mafia activity because he was an outspoken enemy of the Mafia. But again, that led nowhere. To this day, there is only one clue that remains. When his wife returned to their apartment the evening her husband disappeared, there on the table was a check for a large sum of money made out to her and a note attached to it in her husband's handwriting which simply said,

I am very, very tired. Love, Joe

The question remains—were those words merely a comment made at the end of a particularly trying day? Or was his note saying, "I'm tired; I'm fatigued; I'm weary; I give up"? To this day, we can't be sure. For lack of further evidence, it is presently believed he rode off in a taxicab to an unknown destination where he took his own life because weariness had weighted his soul. I think all of us from time to time can relate to that kind of weariness. I'm not speaking of physical fatigue—the kind of fatigue you feel after mowing the lawn or playing a set of tennis. No, I'm speaking of the weariness which comes from life itself.

If you are of average weight and height, here is what you will go through in an average twenty-four-hour period: Your heart will beat 103,689 times. Your blood will travel 168 million miles as your heart pumps approximately 4 ounces per beat. You will breathe 23,040 times, inhaling 438 cubic feet of air. Your stomach will take in three and a half pounds of food and 2.9 quarts of liquid. You will lose seven eighths of a pound of waste. If you are a man, you will speak 4,800 words, and if you are a woman, you will speak close to

7,000 words. You will move 750 muscles and exercise 7 million brain cells.

No wonder we're tired! But there is a weariness much more draining than physical fatigue. It's the kind of weariness you feel when you just don't know if you can go on another day. It's the weariness a father feels when his child is doing wrong, the weariness a friend feels who has been abandoned or misunderstood, and the weariness a wife feels whose husband has rejected her. It's the weariness that can take a toll on even the most seemingly successful individual—even on a successful judge.

There is One, however, who said, "Come to me, all you who are weary . . ." (see Matthew 11:28). How I appreciate that! The Lord of the universe invited anyone who is weary to come to Him. If I were the Lord, I don't know if I would make that kind of invitation. Keep in mind that at this point in Matthew's Gospel, Israel is rejecting His invitation to make Him King. Consequently, no longer is Jesus speaking to a nation corporately, saying, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

No, now He is speaking to individuals personally, saying, "Come to Me, any who are weary, any who are laboring." Would you have called this group of people? I'm not sure I would. If I were giving an invitation, I don't think I would have said, "Come unto me all you who are laboring and weary—feeling as though you're depressed to the point of death, despairing because of divorce or disease, death or discouragement."

No, I think I would say, "Come unto me, all you who are happy—let's celebrate life together! Let's lift each other's spirits!" Or maybe I would have said, "Come unto me, all you who are wealthy. Come and share your prosperity!" Or maybe, "Come unto me all you who are wise. Let's dialogue and philosophize and interact intellectually." But the personal invitation Jesus extended to people individually as the nation rebelled against Him corporately was: "Anyone who is weary, come to Me. Those are My people—the weary ones."

Come unto me . . .

Jesus didn't say, "Run to Me." So often in my weariness, I can't run. I can only stumble to Him or crawl before Him. But that's okay. He just said *"Come"* any way we can.

Come unto *me* . . .

He didn't say, "Go to church." He didn't say, "Listen to a sermon." He didn't say, "Get some counseling." He didn't say, "Read a book." He said, "Come to *Me*."

Come unto me, all ye that *labour* . . .

What causes us to be weary in our labor? I believe the answer is found in Exodus 5.

The people of Israel were in Egypt. Four hundred years previously, they left the Land of Promise due to famine and headed south to Egypt where there was plenty to eat. They lived there for a while, enjoying the abundance and prosperity. But suddenly the situation changed when a new Pharaoh came on the scene, looked at the Jewish people, and said, "We've got to control these people. How? We'll enslave them." So for hundreds of years, the people of God were enslaved by the Egyptians, baking bricks in the blistering, burning sun for the construction of Pharaoh's monuments. It has been documented that the Israelites baked enough bricks to build a wall ten feet high and five feet thick from LA to New York City. When Moses said, "Let my people go," Pharaoh answered,

> *Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves. And the tale of the bricks, which they did make heretofore, ye shall lay upon them; ye shall not diminish ought thereof: for they be idle; therefore they cry, saying, Let us go and sacrifice to our God. Let there more work be laid upon the men, that they may labour therein; and let them not regard vain words.*
>
> Exodus 5:7–9

The Hebrew word translated "labour" in verse 9 has the same meaning as the Greek word translated "labour" Jesus used in Matthew 11. Do you sometimes feel like you're stuck in Egypt, endlessly making bricks for Pharaoh under the blistering sun? Maybe you've said, "I'm going to Egypt. I'm going to labor to get ahead in my career," or, "I'm going to work hard for this material thing." And for a while, it seemed enjoyable. But then, just like

Pharaoh, it turned against you, and the very thing you thought would be wonderful is now a taskmaster—cracking the whip and enslaving you.

"Come to Me," the Lord says. "All you who are weary from labor, all you who have realized Pharaoh is a fake and Egypt is a rip off, come to Me."

We have a tendency to think, *I'm going to be so happy when I accomplish this task, when I reach that goal, when I get this business or that toy.*

And we labor and labor until we finally say, "This isn't working out the way I thought it could, the way the commercials promised it would. I'm miserable. I'm tired. I'm weary."

Come unto Me, all ye that labour and
are *heavy laden . . .*

What does it mean to be heavy laden?

> *Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the* LORD*, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.*
>
> Isaiah 1:4–6

The Lord says to His people, Israel, "You're beat up and bruised and hurting and desolate and destroyed because you have been laden, loaded with iniquity." You see, Pharaoh makes us labor, but sin makes us heavy laden. Sin weighs us down.

David went through a season of sin on more than one occasion. During one such time, he wrote,

> *There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for*

me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart.

Psalm 38:3–8

Sin will make you tired. What does Jesus say? He says, "Whether you've been seduced and sucked in by Pharaoh's mentality—working for the world and finding it to be nothing but bricks and weariness—or whether you've been heavy laden with iniquity, come unto Me."

Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.

How?

Take my *yoke* upon you . . .

The Greek word translated "carpenter" used in Matthew 13 to describe Joseph refers to a finish carpenter rather than for a framer. Tradition has it that the carpenter shop where Jesus worked with His father, Joseph, specialized in making yokes. To yoke two oxen together, the skilled carpenter designed the yoke to fit each ox individually. Since there was always a lead ox yoked together with one who would follow, the yoke was designed in such a way that the lead ox would pull the greater weight. The follower, or assistant ox, was just to go with the flow.

Take *My* yoke upon you . . .

Jesus used an analogy well known to the people who listened to Him when He said not only, "Come unto Me," but, "Yoke with Me. Let Me be the lead ox. Go with My flow. Don't try to figure out or change My direction. Let Me lead you."

The story is told of a battleship cruising the Atlantic, off the northern coast of Maine. One stormy evening, the commander was notified, "Sir, there's a light ahead. Oncoming vessel."

"Signal the oncoming vessel: change your courses ten degrees to the west."

The message was sent.

But a light flashed back, "Change *your* course ten degrees to the east."

"Signal again," barked the commander. "Change *your* course ten degrees to the west. I am an admiral!"

The light flashed back, "Change *your* course ten degrees to the east. I am a Seaman Third Class."

By this time, the admiral was incensed as he thundered, "Signal again: Change *your* course ten degrees to the west. I am a battleship."

And the message came back, "Change *your* course ten degrees to the east. I am a lighthouse."

So, too, as we impudently and impetuously say to the Lord, "Lord, let's go my way," He answers, "No. We're going My way."

I am the Lighthouse.

I am the Light of the world,

The Rock of your salvation,

the Creator and Sustainer of your soul.

I am the Alpha and the Omega,

The One who knows the beginning from the end.

Trust Me.

Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and *learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart* . . .

This is the only autobiographical statement Jesus ever made.

He didn't say, "Learn of Me because I am majestic and mighty," or "Learn of Me because I am powerful and prominent." He said, "That which you discover when you learn of Me will refresh you, for I am meek."

What is meekness? Meekness is strength under control. Picture a big, gentle Saint Bernard surrounded by yapping, snapping, little Chihuahuas.

Now the Saint Bernard could open his mouth and chomp the Chihuahuas down in one gulp. He could take his paw and knock them away with one swipe. But the powerful Saint Bernard patiently puts up with the yappers and snappers at his feet. That's meekness.

When I study the Scriptures and learn of Jesus, I am always amazed at His goodness, His grace, His kindness, His gentleness, and His meekness.

Jesus says, "Come to Me—you who have been burned out by Pharaoh, you who have been wearied by the folly of sin. Yoke with Me—don't try to maneuver Me, steer Me, or demand of Me. Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly."

The result?

. . . And ye shall find rest unto your souls.

You'll find what your heart is craving: Shabbat. Sabbath. Rest.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

In Acts 15, questions arose concerning Gentile converts and whether or not they should follow the laws and the rituals and be circumcised. Peter gave this response:

> *Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?*
>
> Acts 15:10

"My yoke," Jesus said, "is easy." It's not religion—it's relationship. It's not Judaism—it's Jesus. It's not the law—it's love.

Sometimes I hear people say, "I'm so burdened. It's so tough being a servant. It's so hard to be a brother, a musician, or a witness."

If it's heavy, it's not His burden because His burden is light. If what I'm doing is tough and wearisome to me, then I know it's not the Lord who has placed that burden upon me. His burden is easy. His load is light.

Jesus would say to you today, "Come to Me. Don't labor under the burdens of Pharaoh. You'll become weary if you do. Don't become heavy laden under the bondage of sin. It will rob you of your energy. Don't become

enslaved by the laws of the Pharisees. You'll be weighed down. Just come to Me. Yoke with Me. Learn of Me. And you'll find rest in your souls."



12 The purpose of Matthew's Gospel is to present Jesus as King. In chapter 11, however, we saw the beginning of a rebellion against His authority as Israel failed to respond to His work among them. It is a rebellion that will lead to rejection and ultimately to Calvary.

Realizing that, as a nation, Israel would not acknowledge He was Messiah, Jesus began speaking to people individually, saying, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Upon hearing this, the religious leaders would think, *We don't need His rest. We have our Sabbath. That is all the rest we need.* But in reality, the Sabbath day had become anything but a day of rest, for the scribes had encumbered it with so many rules and regulations that the Talmud devoted numerous chapters to instructions for keeping the Sabbath.

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

Hebrews 4:9

Even though the Sabbath day was established in the Book of Genesis, the author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 95, saying there *remains* a Sabbath for God's people. The argument of Hebrews 4 is that the ultimate Sabbath encompasses much more than a singular day. God's intent was much greater than just to give His people a vacation.

Other people say, "The Sabbath is not a vacation, it's location. It's not so much a day, it's a place." The Jews thought the perfect location would be the Promised Land. But Hebrews 4 goes on to say that even after they were in the Promised Land, the Lord still spoke of a rest that was to come. The Promised Land didn't satisfy the restlessness within them, and the Sabbath day didn't bring them the refreshment for which they longed. So Hebrews 4 concludes that true rest comes neither from vacation nor location. It's found in a Person. Jesus Christ is the Sabbath they sought.

> Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.
>
> Colossians 2:16–17

In other words, don't let anyone tell you that what you are looking for can be found in meats and drinks and holy days and Sabbaths. No, these Old Testament pictures are only shadows describing the reality, which is Christ. We don't have a Sabbath day. We have a Sabbath God in Jesus Christ. *He* is our Rest. *He* is our Shabbat. But these were fighting words for the religious leaders and rabbis. And now the stage is set for chapter 12. The issue? The Sabbath.

> **Matthew 12:1**
>
> **At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.**

See now in your mind's eye Jesus walking with His disciples, flanked by fields of wheat. With roads in that day few and far between, travelers would walk on pathways that wound their way through fields. The law made provision in Deuteronomy 23 for the hunger of such travelers. If you walked on a path through a man's field, you could eat what grew along the path. Therefore, don't be mistaken. Jesus and His disciples were not robbing some poor farmer of his crops. They were well within the legal boundaries of the provision of God's Law.

> **Matthew 12:2**
>
> **But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.**

Here's the question I have: What were these Pharisees doing in the field in the first place? They had broken their own rules by being more than three thousand feet away from their own homes on the Sabbath. But that's the way

Pharisees always are. They would go out of their way to find fault with others, and in so doing, err themselves.

Matthew 12:3, 4

But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

"Haven't you been reading the Scriptures?" Jesus asked. "Don't you know the story of 1 Samuel 21? When David and his men became hungry while fleeing from Saul, the priests gave him the showbread, which was not lawful for them to eat. Don't you remember that story that shows love is more important than the law, relationship more important than ritual?" Jesus chose a particularly interesting illustration, for just as David was at that time rejected as king of Israel, so Jesus was also at this time rejected as King.

Matthew 12:5

Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

Temple priests worked twice as hard on the Sabbath, their supposed day of rest, since twice as many sacrifices were offered to the Lord on that day. Jesus here is making an airtight case.

"Don't you know history?" He said. "David ate the showbread and was held blameless. Don't you know the law? It requires the priests to work doubly hard on the Sabbath day."

Matthew 12:6, 7

But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

"Finally," Jesus asks, "don't you know the Word?" as He quoted from the prophet Hosea. "Don't you know the heart of your Father? He desires mercy more than sacrifice, love more than law, and relationship more than ritual." Notice the ironclad case Jesus makes here. He points to David—a king they honored. He points to the priests—who worked on the Sabbath. He points to the prophet Hosea—who declared God loves mercy more than sacrifice. In validation of His own actions, Jesus identifies with a prophet, the priests, and a king. Jesus is ingeniously driving a point home to those who had ears to hear. "I am the King of kings, the great High Priest, the Prophet of God. I am the Anointed One. I am Messiah."

Matthew 12:8

For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

"It all speaks of Me," declares Jesus. "It all points to Me." When you read the Scriptures, don't get hung up in the regulations, rituals, and technicalities. They are all shadows that point to Jesus. Look for Him and become enamored with Him as you see Him on every page. Jesus is Lord of all—even of the Sabbath day.

Matthew 12:9

And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue.

He went into *their* synagogue. Their synagogue was no longer *His* synagogue. What a tragedy when a church is no longer His church—where Jesus is no longer honored and loved, exalted and worshiped—but where He is simply a mascot. "Oh yeah. We believe in Jesus. Now let's get down to the real matters of the church. We must plan for our Christmas bazaar."

What a tragic loss. What tremendous love. Although it was no longer His synagogue, He still came in. I love the Lord for this. He doesn't give up. He continues on, time and time again.

Matthew 12:10–12

And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days?

that they might accuse him. And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

Keep in mind that in their regulations, the Jews specifically said you could do no healing on the Sabbath day. Let's say a man was bleeding to death. You could put a tourniquet around him to prevent him from dying, but you could put no ointment on the wound that might bring healing. Jesus asks, "Why is it that your regulations say if a sheep falls into a pit on the Sabbath, it's okay to bring him out, but a man cannot be healed on the Sabbath?"

That's what the law always does. When you become all bound up in regulations, traditions, and religious rituals, your heart becomes cold and hardened towards people. You constantly judge them and find fault with them. Religion apart from relationship will make you a pompous, snooty, holier-than-thou Pharisee.

Matthew 12:13

Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

How I love this incident! "Stretch out your hand," said Jesus.

The man could have said, "I can't! It's paralyzed." But he didn't. He simply stretched it out; and as he obeyed, his hand was healed. There's power in the Word, gang. Dare to act, and you'll be able to act because God's commandments are God's enablements.

Matthew 12:14

Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

The problem with the Pharisees was jealousy. Nobody was noticing them anymore, and they didn't like the competition.

Matthew 12:15, 16

But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; and he charged them that they should not make him known.

I think verse 16 should be written very boldly on the pulpits and in the margins of those who have healing ministries. Jesus ministered in such a way that He was *not* trying to advertise His successes.

Matthew 12:17–19

That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.

Matthew quotes Isaiah 42, a beautiful prophecy wonderfully fulfilled in Jesus. God said, "This is the One in whom I am well pleased. My Spirit is upon Him. Justice will come to the Gentiles through Him. And He will not cry, neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets." Jesus was not like some men we see today, striving, crying, and being weird in the name of the Lord. Jesus didn't draw attention to Himself. In fact, He blended into His world so completely that in the Garden of Gethsemane, His enemies couldn't identify Him without a kiss. Here was a Man who had healed, fed, and taught thousands, yet He remained unidentifiable because He moved in such humility and such grace.

Matthew 12:20, 21

A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

Reeds grow in marshes. They were, and still are, good for only one thing: musical instruments. If a reed became bruised or bent, it was good for nothing. Flax, too, was good for only one thing: to be used for wicks in lamps. Through the analogy of reeds and flax, Isaiah described the ministry

of Jesus. Maybe you feel like nothing more than a squeaky reed or a smoking wick. I have good news for you: The Lord will not break you, throw water upon you, or give up on you. He'll strengthen you, rebuild you, and use you for His glory.

Matthew 12:22–24

Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

As Jesus' ministry continued, the dumb began to talk, the blind began to see, and the Pharisees had no other choice but to accuse Him of working by the power of Satan himself. What else could they say? Jesus was healing and affecting so many that they had to come up with some explanation for His power. The same thing happens today whenever a person chooses to believe the work of the Holy Spirit is the result of brainwashing or manipulation, emotionalism or hypnotism, instead of attributing such power to God.

Matthew 12:25, 26

And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

"If I am casting out Satan by the power of Satan, then Satan's house is divided. He's fighting against himself. What you are saying is illogical," declared Jesus. Not only was their accusation illogical, but based on the following verses, it was hypocritical.

Matthew 12:27, 28

And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

The Pharisees endorsed certain exorcists who went throughout the community casting out devils. Jesus said, "If you indict Me because I have freed a man of demonic power, then what about those whom you have endorsed? If, on the other hand, I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, you must acknowledge His kingdom is represented by Me, that it is here in your midst."

Matthew 12:29

Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

The enemy had to be bound through prayer and in faith before Jesus could release the one possessed by a demon.

Matthew 12:30

He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

Jesus says, "You're against Me, Pharisees," as He goes on to give them a scathing indictment.

Matthew 12:31, 32

Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

Follow the flow: A man has been released of a demon. The Pharisees attributed the miracle to the power of Satan, and Jesus now gives a heavy word to these Pharisees: "You are speaking illogically, acting hypocritically, and jeopardizing your own souls eternally." If they had not already done so, they were dangerously close to committing the blasphemy of the Spirit, which according to Jesus, is the only unpardonable sin.

When Jesus Christ died on the Cross of Calvary, He died not only for our sins but also for the sins of the whole world. That's the gospel. Jesus died for every sin every person who has ever lived on the face of this planet has committed or ever will commit. When He said, "It is Finished," the work was done. Every sin was paid for. That's great news! We can tell anyone, "My friend, your sins are forgiven! The price has been paid. You're free!"

But there is one sin that cannot be forgiven. There is one sin that will damn you eternally. It is the blasphemy of the Spirit. If you sin against the Father or against the Son, it's forgiven. But if you sin against the Spirit in this blasphemy, it will damn you eternally. That's the one sin that is unpardonable, the one sin that's unforgivable.

What is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? It is when you come to the wrong conclusion that the reason miracles are happening, people are changing, and the dumb are speaking is due to some kind of hypnotism, demonic activity, or mental delusion. And you begin to blaspheme what the Spirit speaks in your heart when He says, "No, it's real. It's Jesus."

If you ignore the Spirit's voice in your heart and say, "Those people at Calvary Chapel are being brainwashed, those Christians are drinking their bathwater, those believers are under some kind of delusion," there comes a point where you will have said, "No" one too many times to the Holy Spirit. There comes a point when the unpardonable sin has been committed. What does this mean? It means the Holy Spirit will no longer speak to you. You see, in Genesis 6, God declared, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man . . ." He's not always going to speak to you about your need for salvation.

Therefore, if you keep saying, "Those people are just being emotional; they just imagine they hear from God; they're off the wall," eventually you will commit the blasphemy of the Spirit, and you will be damned.

You can only hear the message and see the miracles so many times before God will finally say, "Okay, have your way. You don't want to acknowledge

My reality? Very well. My Spirit will no longer speak to you." And then you're lost. At that point, you not only *will* not believe. At that point, you *cannot* believe.

In Jeremiah 7:16, God said to Jeremiah, "Don't pray any longer for this people. They are lost." Jeremiah was told to preach to them, but not to pray for them. It wouldn't do any good. There comes a time, we know not when, and a place, we know not where, when a man's fate is sealed between heaven and despair. You can't play games when the Spirit is drawing you.

> During World War II, a United States battleship, aircraft carrier, and several other smaller boats were patrolling the waters of the Northern Atlantic in search of German U-boats. One evening, several pilots took off from the carrier and were told to be back by a certain hour. But the leader of the squadron of four planes purposefully stayed out longer, feeling with just a little more time, he could find the enemy and secure an impressive hit.
>
> As the sun set, a German armada entered the area. The American fleet was in trouble for now they were outgunned, outmanned, and outnumbered. Unbeknownst to the pilots, radio silence was ordered between the ships in the water and aircraft still in flight. At this point, as their fuel was getting dangerously low, the pilots radioed to the American ships, but there was no reply. Again and again the pilots cried, "Turn on the lights. Turn on the landing lights." But the lights didn't go on, for to have done so would have jeopardized the lives of thousands of men.
>
> Thus, the story is recorded how the men on that aircraft carrier stood by in horror as they watched four American planes crash into the icy waters of the Atlantic.

So, too, the Scriptures say, "Today is the day of salvation." The light is shining in your heart. You're hearing the Word of the Lord. But there will come a time when the Lord, the Commander-in-Chief, will order radio silence. The lights will be dimmed, and you will not be able to find your way home. You will have blasphemed the Spirit, and there will be no hope for you. The Lord offers you eternal and abundant life. He wants to forgive your

sins and fill you with joy. Only a fool would turn his back on such a gift. *Today* is the day of salvation. When you witness, pray passionately, and express yourself clearly. You need to be zealous in your witness because the stakes are high. A person doesn't have forever to make a decision. There is a point in time when the lights go off, when the communication stops. Such was the case with the Pharisees.

Matthew 12:33

Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.

"Check out what I am doing," Jesus says. "The good fruit of people being healed and liberated will tell you something about Me. Check out the fruit."

Matthew 12:34–36

O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

A news broadcast in Chicago was once interrupted by the once familiar song, "It's Howdy Doody Time, It's Howdy Doody Time . . ." when Howdy Doody broadcast waves hit some sort of an asteroid and bounced back thirty years later. So too, our words go on and on, and Jesus says we will give an account for them. Therefore, how thankful I am for the blood of Jesus. We have been forgiven, but those who blaspheme the Spirit, saying, "I don't want Jesus," must eventually answer to Him.

Matthew 12:37

For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

Your words will either condemn you or justify you.

> That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
>
> Romans 10:9, 10

Matthew 12:38, 39

Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah.

"The one sign I will give you is the sign of Jonah. Jonah preached judgment. I have come preaching grace and mercy. Jonah was disobedient. I have come obediently. Jonah preached to one city. I have come for the whole world. A greater Prophet than Jonah is in your midst, yet you do not respond."

Matthew 12:40, 41

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here.

"The sign of Jonah" is resurrection—the one and only sign Jesus promised as validation of His words and ministry. That's why the Resurrection is so important. It's the one sign upon which we build our faith.

How do I know if the Cross really "took"? Was God fully satisfied with the sacrifice of Jesus? Are my sins really forgiven? Yea and amen! The Resurrection proves Jesus is the Messiah and that His work on the Cross was complete.

As valid as your testimony may be, in reality, the most powerful prod to salvation you can provide is to talk to people about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's provable historically. It's undeniable philosophically and logically. Get the book, *Who Moved The Stone?* by Frank Morison, an Ivy League scholar who was determined to disprove the Resurrection. He studied for seven years, and in the process, became a born-again believer. Read *Evidence That Demands A Verdict* by Josh McDowell, or *Know Why You Believe* by Paul Little. Study the Resurrection and make it the focal point of your witness.

Matthew 12:42

The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

Jesus is referring to the account in 1 Kings 10, wherein we read the Queen of Sheba cruised up from Africa to see Solomon. Having heard about his splendor, his majesty, and his wisdom, she went away saying, "Amazing! The half wasn't even told to me. What I've seen here is a mind blower." Yet a greater King than Solomon was in their midst.

- Solomon had wisdom from God. Jesus is the wisdom of God.
- Solomon was a great king. Jesus is the King of kings.
- Solomon spoke practically to his nation. Jesus spoke powerfully to all of creation.
- Solomon gave the Queen of Sheba gifts. Jesus is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we can ask or think.

Matthew 12:43–45

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he,

and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.

Again, think with me and follow the flow carefully. Jesus here is indicting this wicked generation, saying, "Although you might have cleaned yourself up from the idolatry that once plagued your country and have had reformation, you haven't experienced regeneration. Although you've swept your nation clean of idols, seven times as many demons will flood you because you are rejecting Me."

Jesus is speaking primarily of the nation of Israel. But He also speaks to me personally and to us as a church corporately because we must be careful that we do not seek to get people to merely "clean up" their lives. There's a move today to try to bring reformation to our communities in the name of Jesus. Our communities do not need reformation. Our communities need regeneration. People need to be born again. The work of the gospel is from the inside out. Jesus called us to be fishers of men, and you can't clean the fish until you catch them.

People who try to clean up their lives or their communities through reformation will sweep the house clean, but seven times as many demons will come back. The evil that follows will be greater than the initial evil unless there is rebirth. Do you really think we're going to stop drug abuse by trying to eradicate the fields of coca in South America? Do you really feel that militarily or politically or through slogans like "Just Say No," we're going to rid ourselves of cocaine nationally?

We tried in Prohibition. "We'll sweep it clean," we said. "We'll close down the distilleries. We'll board up the breweries. We'll change this country through legislation." But do you know what followed? For a while, alcoholism seemed to ebb, but in its place came cocaine and heroin—seven times the greater evil.

We need to take the words of Jesus to heart. We must be about regeneration—not reformation; rebirth inwardly—not reform outwardly. Should we not then be involved in community activities and political undertakings? Of course. But as you are involved, you must realize your

ultimate goal is to see people changed through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You must be salt and light—drawing people to and reflecting *Him.*

Matthew 12:46

While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.

Why did Jesus' family want to talk with Him? They were worried about Him. They knew one didn't call the Pharisees a brood of vipers and escape scot-free. According to a long list of rules and regulations concerning infidels and heretics, the Pharisees could stone someone for such an offense. So Jesus' mother and brothers, sensing confrontation, might have wanted to protect Him.

Matthew 12:47–49

Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!

For those who say Mary has some kind of special influence on Jesus, this passage shows she didn't have a whole lot of pull. Jesus said, "Wait a minute. Who is My mother? My mother and My brothers are My disciples."

Matthew 12:50

For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

It is true we can't choose our family. But the Lord did. If you believe on Him whom the Father has sent, He embraces you as His family. Hebrews says He is not ashamed to call us brethren (Hebrews 2:11). He says, "Behold, My brothers, My sisters, My mother—those who hear My word, those who do the will of the Father, believing in Me—they are My family." Before the world began, Jesus chose *us* to live with Him eternally.

Amazing!



13 In chapter 12, we saw mounting opposition to Jesus. Here in chapter 13, the last in this section that presents the King resisted, Jesus heads for the seashore.

Matthew 13:1, 2

The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

In the late 1800s, Charles Spurgeon, the "Prince of Preachers," who at the age of twenty had a congregation of thousands, told young seminarians they would have to weigh at least two hundred fifty pounds to be effective expositors. A big man himself, he believed ample girth allowed voice projection essential in the days before electric amplification.

Jesus employed a simpler technique. He spoke from a boat so His voice could bounce off the water and be amplified in the process. Creator of this principle, Jesus used it powerfully.

Matthew 13:3 (a)

And he spake many things unto them in parables . . .

The use of parables was the way people communicated when they wanted to arouse curiosity and excite interest. They wouldn't use guitars or humor, but rather they would use parables—little stories with big messages. The word "parable" comes from *parabole* in Greek. The Greek word *para* means "alongside," while *ballo* means "to cast, or to throw." Thus, the word "parable" means "casting alongside." Parabolic teaching places a story alongside a truth or a principle. As you study parables, realize this: The lost

and the lazy will not understand them, but for those who are interested in truth, they are wonderfully illuminating.

Matthew 13:3 (b)–9

. . . saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

This parable has two applications. Primarily, it speaks of how we *hear* the Word. Secondarily, it gives understanding about how we *share* the Word. In verse 9, Jesus says, "Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear." Tune in! Think through. Listen up!

A former television news producer conducted a most intriguing survey. Following one broadcast, he sent a crew to survey people who watched the show in its entirety, which at that time consisted of nineteen stories in the thirty-minute broadcast. Fifty-one percent of those who watched the entire half-hour broadcast could not remember a single story. His conclusion was that people don't listen, and a decision was made at that time to simplify news programming.

So, too, understanding the limited attention span of humanity, Jesus taught in simple, unforgettable, powerful parables—one of His most well known being the Parable of the Sower.

***For topical study of Matthew 13:3–9 entitled "Sowing the Seed," turn to page* 99.**

Matthew 13:10–12

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

In other words, the one who receives and responds will gain even more insight, but the one who doesn't respond, even the little understanding he has will be taken away.

Matthew 13:13–15

Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

Here Jesus quotes a difficult passage from Isaiah 6, in which Isaiah is commanded by the Lord to speak to a people who won't hear him or receive from him. It was a prophecy fulfilled completely in Jesus, as He spoke to a people whose hearts were hardened, whose hearing was dull, and whose eyes were closed.

Now, here's the question. Why would God send Isaiah to preach to people who wouldn't listen or respond to him? Because God is a perfect gentleman, and He will not force His will on anyone. He will honor the decision of those who don't want to be saved. Jesus spoke in parables because if He spoke plainly, His presentation would have been so powerful that everyone would automatically be converted—many against their will.

Maybe you've seen films of Adolf Hitler speaking to the German masses, firing them up during World War II. That is nothing compared to what Jesus could have done. He could have mobilized the entire country. He could have swept everyone up in what He was saying. But He bowed to humanity's freedom of choice. "If I speak in parables, those who don't want to see, won't see. Those who don't want to hear won't hear."

A number of years ago a coal mine collapsed, and seven miners were trapped inside for three and a half days. Rescue workers dug feverishly, and when they finally broke through the caved-in mineshaft, the miners were whooping and hollering, obviously grateful they had been rescued—until one of the seven said, "Hey, why doesn't someone light a lantern?" The other six looked at their friend, and they realized he was blind. The light was on. The lanterns were lit. The rescue team had brought light into the darkened shaft, but he could not see because he had been blinded by the cave-in. Until the light came through, no one knew who was blind and who could see. The light had to shine on all seven before anyone could differentiate between those who could see and those who were blind.

So, too, Jesus taught believer and non-believer alike in order to determine who was truly blind. The light was shining for those who wanted to see. But those who chose to be wicked wouldn't see the light, and it would only prove their blindness.

Matthew 13:16, 17

But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

First Peter chapter 1 echoes this same truth. That is, prophets of old penned prophecies concerning the coming of Christ without understanding what they were writing or how it would work out practically. Thus, Jesus says, "You're blessed because you're seeing things come to pass that confused the prophets. You're blessed because you have the opportunity to hear, to see, and to understand."

Matthew 13:18–23

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Jesus now explains the parable of the Sower to His disciples. The seed is the Scripture, which as it is sown, falls on four kinds of soil.

The first is the hard soil of paths that meandered through fields. It was soil packed down and which the seed could not penetrate at all. So the birds of the air swooped down and ate the seed for breakfast. So, too, sometimes people hear the Word, and their hearts are so hard, it makes no sense. It makes no impact.

The second soil represents those who say, "Yeah. All right! Wonderful!" as they receive the Word with joy. Maybe they received the Lord in a service, and they're caught up in the emotion of it. But when tribulation or persecution comes—when they are put down for their belief, or when they begin to understand what it means to take up the cross—they're offended, and they wither away.

The third type of soil is infested with weeds that choke the seed as it springs up. Jesus said the weeds represent the world and the deceitfulness of riches. Many people become excited about the things of the kingdom. They are into Bible study, enjoy prayer, and engaged in worship. But then they get involved in the things of this world. No longer do they have time for Bible study, worship, or prayer.

Lastly, Jesus said some seed falls on good ground and produces bunches of fruit—some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, some a hundredfold. I find this intriguing because the ratio of seed to harvest is generally eight to one. But here, Jesus is saying when the seed is sown in cultivated soil, it's incredible what happens. Not eight to one, but thirty to one, sixty to one, or one hundred to one. We're talking fruit!

What is fruit? Scripture specifies six types.

- Romans 1:13 identifies soul-winning as a fruit.
- Romans 6:22 says holiness is a fruit.
- Romans 15:28 calls financial giving a fruit.
- Galatians 5:22, 23 lists the fruit of the Spirit as love, which results in joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.
- Colossians 1:10 labels good works a fruit.
- Hebrews 13:15 names praise as a fruit.

Matthew 13:24–30

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

Continuing His analogy of sowing, Jesus moved on to a subject very familiar to His listeners. When a farmer planted a field of wheat, anyone who had something against him would, under cover of night, sow tares in with the wheat. Tares have the same color, shape, and fragrance as wheat, but no heads of grain form. In other words, the tares soak up the nutrients, and they take up space, but they produce nothing in return and are unidentifiable until harvest time.

Matthew 13:31, 32

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

Follow the flow. Jesus is giving us insight about the kingdom. In verses 19–23, He talked about the sower sowing seed and how some of the seed falls upon good soil and produces fruit. In verses 24–30, He said in this field there will be some tares growing alongside the true wheat. Developing still further His seed / kingdom analogy, Jesus now likens the kingdom of heaven to the smallest seed sown—a mustard seed. Some commentators say this parable shows how the kingdom starts small and just grows beautifully. But wait—there is no example either in history or in botany where a mustard seed has grown into a tree large enough to support birds.

In reality, Jesus is talking about abnormal, unnatural growth. He's talking about something that begins small, like a mustard seed, but which grows abnormally to a size where birds can call it home. Bear in mind, students, that throughout the Bible, birds speak of evil. This is why I believe Jesus is talking about the kingdom becoming bureaucratic, losing its simplicity, and becoming too big organizationally as ministries have a propensity to do.

Matthew 13:33

Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures

of meal, till the whole was leavened.

Leaven is mentioned ninety-eight times throughout Scripture. In every single case, it is linked with evil. So again, I disagree with those teachers who say these two parables describe the beautiful and mysterious growth of the kingdom. Leaven, symbolizing a puffing up, speaks of evil. In contrast, meal or bread in Scripture speaks of the Word; and I see a very tight connection between this parable and the last. Jesus is saying, "Watch out for outward organization that becomes good only for birds. Watch out for internal deception when leaven is hidden in the meal."

People knock on your door, saying, "May we hold a Bible study in your house? We have some wonderful things we want to share with you." And they come in and open their Bibles, but in addition, they show you the *Pearl of Great Price, The Book of Mormon,* or the *Watchtower Magazine.* What are they doing? They're inserting leaven into the meal of the Word.

Stick with the Scriptures. Don't let people add to the Word as they try to appeal to your spirituality. After all, when Satan came to Eve in the Garden, he didn't say, "Hey Eve, let's party!" No, he said, "Eve, you're so spiritual. You just want to be like God, and the day you eat this fruit, your eyes will be opened, and you will be more like Him."

Matthew 13:34–36

All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world. Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

After Jesus sent the multitude away, the disciples came to Him asking for further instruction and greater illumination. So too, after receiving a teaching —perhaps at a Bible study, over the radio, in a book, or in your own devotions—have you discovered the dynamic of stopping and asking Jesus for further revelation and specific application? I'm convinced we lose much

because once we hear a study, we split out the door and go our way without really taking the time to seek the Lord and say, "Father, what is in this for me today?"

Matthew 13:37–43

He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Throughout chapter 13, Jesus has been teaching about the kingdom of God. In so doing, He is explaining we really don't know who's in the kingdom and who's not. In the kingdom, there are those who appear as though they're believers. They go to church regularly. They carry a Bible. They may even tithe. But they've never had a relationship with Jesus. They're counterfeit and bogus. They're tares. Satan has planted them within the kingdom to cause confusion and consternation.

The Bible speaks of false brethren in 2 Corinthians 11, a false gospel in Galatians 1, a false Christ in 2 Thessalonians 2, and a false church in Revelation 2.

When the church was born, Satan tried to destroy it through three hundred years of persecution. Ten Roman emperors ordered the systematic persecution of the church as Christians were dipped in hot wax and lit as candles, placed in boiling oil, skinned alive, and crucified upside down. But do you know what happened? The stronger the persecution, the more the church grew. It reminds me of Exodus.

> Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel.
>
> Exodus 1:8–12

So, too, concerning the church. The more Satan afflicted and burdened the church, the more she grew. That's always the way it is. Some years ago, when they were going through tremendous difficulty and very real persecution, a group of Russian Christians sent a letter to America, saying, "We are praying for you in America that you will have the opportunity to endure persecution and grow like us."

We pray, "Oh, Lord, don't allow persecution in Russia," but they pray, "Oh, Lord, persecute the church in America," because the Russian church has discovered that persecution brings about maturation and the propagation of the gospel. According to various reports, as of September 2002, there are anywhere between sixty and eighty million believers in China. Incredible! In persecution, the church grows.

Satan goofed in those first three hundred years. The church experienced persecution and began to spread throughout the whole world. So what did he do? He changed his tactics. In A.D. 313, with the edict of Constantine, Christianity was adopted as the national religion of Rome. Satan, in essence, joined the church. And the church has been suffering ever since. You see, the danger is not persecution. The real danger is infiltration. When Christianity becomes respectable and easy, tares pop up all over the place.

Is it our responsibility to rid the church of tares? No. This parable teaches separation will take place by the angels at the end of the world. If we try to figure out who's a believer and who's not, we're going to err and pull out the wrong people. It's our job to love, and it's God's job to judge. We are

to love people, for "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (see John 13:35). Whether he's your brother or whether he's your enemy, whether he's wheat or a tare, it makes no difference. You are to love him and let God judge him. I really like this. I don't have to analyze, scrutinize, and criticize. I can just say, "Lord, thank You for this parable. And now I'm going to practice it. I get to love people and leave the judging to You. You see things perfectly. I don't."

Matthew 13:44

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

In this parable, a man finds some treasure and immediately buys the field in order to gain the treasure therein. You may have heard this parable taught like this: The treasure in the field is Jesus. We are the man. Like the man who found the treasure, when you discover Jesus, you should forsake everything to follow Him. But I believe this is an improper interpretation. I believe Jesus is the Man, and we are the treasure.

Think about it. When you were saved, how many of you sold everything to follow Jesus? None of us did that. We were simply born again. How? Not by our will, not by our efforts, not even by our desire, but by God. God saved us; God elected us; God predestined us. We didn't sell anything to receive Him. He, on the other hand, gave His life to purchase us. Why was the field —the world—purchased? Did the Lord want another planet? No, He wanted the treasure that was buried in the world. He wanted you.

Matthew 13:45, 46

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

A pearl begins as nothing more than an irritating grain of sand stuck in the shell of an oyster. But the oyster surrounds the grain with a crystalline covering, which over years hardens and becomes precious and valuable.

Those who study such things say the most beautiful pearls take seven years to form. During that seven-year period, the irritating piece of sand is hidden away—clothed and covered with beauty. That's us, gang—irritating pieces of sand. Yet, the Lord clothes us in His righteousness.

> For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.
>
> 2 Corinthians 5:21

You are the pearl of great price. You have been clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And His righteousness is a thing of matchless beauty and unspeakable value in the eyes of God.



***For topical study of Matthew 13:44–46 entitled "You Are Treasured!" turn to page* 103.**

Matthew 13:47–50

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

The third illustration Jesus gave His disciples concerning the kingdom is that of a fisherman hauling in a great catch. In the net, there are some edible fish and some terrible fish. Now listen carefully, students. In these three mini-parables that deal with the kingdom—that is, the parables of the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price, and the net full of fish—Jesus outlines three major aspects of the kingdom.

The first concerns the treasure. In the Book of Exodus and throughout the Psalms, the nation of Israel is referred to as a peculiar, special treasure. Entrusted with the riches of God's heart and mind—the Word—Israel was

placed *in* the world to be a light *for* the world. But what happened? Israel did not evangelize. She did not shine forth, but rather turned inward. The Jews hid themselves and their traditions, saying, "Gentiles? Don't talk to them. Don't look at them. Don't reach out to them. If you happen to even brush against one, take off your clothes and burn them. Gentiles are good for nothing but to keep hell hot."

Instead of enriching the world, the treasure became hidden in the world as Israel missed her calling. There are those who say Israel has no place in the kingdom. But in this parable, I believe Jesus teaches the treasure will indeed resurface and prove very valuable. Although Israel failed historically, she will succeed eventually. Revelation 7 says after the church is raptured, suddenly Israel will become a mighty instrument of evangelism in the world. She will enrich the world in the time of Tribulation. God is not through with Israel, gang. There are those who suggest Israel has no place in God's prophetic plan. Not true. Read your Bible: Romans 9—11 makes it very clear that although Israel has been set-aside for a while—hidden—she shall resurface as God's instrument.

Secondly, the church is a major aspect of the kingdom. Here, the church is likened unto a pearl. I find this intriguing. Where is a pearl formed? In the sea. What is the sea symbolic of scripturally and prophetically? In Daniel and Revelation, the sea is always symbolic of the Gentile nations. Where was the church formed? Although there are some believing Jews in the church, there aren't many. The church was formed from the Gentile nations.

A pearl is the only gem that does not need to be cut to bring out its beauty. Diamonds, rubies, sapphires, and amethysts—they all must be cut. But a pearl? If you even scratch it, you ruin it. So, too, in the church there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free. The church is one—one Lord, one baptism, and one faith. The church finds her beauty in her unity—the unity of all kinds of people brought together in Christ. Divisions only mar her, and quite frankly, that is the biggest problem with denominations. There can be a tendency in denominationalism to start dividing the body of Christ instead of enjoying our commonality in Christ.

> That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast

sent me.

John 17:21

Finally, end-time believers comprise the third aspect of the kingdom. Revelation 7 specifically talks about this group.

> And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? And whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.
>
> Revelation 7:13–15

They are those who rejected the message of salvation in the church age, but after the church is raptured, they will refuse the mark of the beast and turn to the Lord. They are not the bride of Christ—sitting with Him, ruling and reigning with Him. No, these Tribulation believers will be allowed to enter into the kingdom, but in a different category than Israel or the Church. Maybe you know people who say, "Well, I'm not going to get saved now. I'm going to wait and see how things come down. *If* all of you Christians really do disappear, and *if* a guy really does come trying to brand my head—I won't take his mark, and I'll get saved."

Tell them this: "If you get saved at that time, it will probably cost you your life. If you choose to go that route, you will make it into the kingdom, but in a different position than if you receive Jesus today. Come to Him now."

So there is one kingdom made up of the treasure—Israel, the pearl, the church, and the fish—end-time believers. Three distinct groups, yet one kingdom.

> **Matthew 13:51, 52**
>
> **Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord. Then said he unto them, Therefore every**

scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

Jesus is saying, "If you understand these things, you're like a scribe who owns a house in which he has new innovations alongside old antiques." If you understand the kingdom, you can read the Old Testament and get blessed. You can look at history and marvel at the Lord's continuity throughout the ages. You can draw from the old. And you can draw from the new if you understand what the Lord is doing creatively and powerfully in these last days.

The scribes, you see, were not originally as off the wall as we think of them today. Originally, in the days when Ezra brought a group of exiled Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city after the captivity, the purpose of the scribes was to teach truth. Initially, the scribes were great seekers and teachers of truth. And Jesus is here saying, "You should be like scribes—drawing from the Old Testament and from the New Covenant."

If we get stuck in the old and are not open to what the Lord is doing presently, we'll miss what the Lord is doing creatively in this day. But if we're only into the new and fail to draw from our history and heritage, we'll become spiritual lightweights and airheads. Jesus said the one who receives from *both* old and new will be a rich man.

Matthew 13:53–57 (a)

And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence. And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him.

They thought they knew Him. A false sense of familiarity kept them from receiving what He wanted to do in their midst. "Oh, we know Him. We know His father." No, they didn't. "We know His brothers." No, they were His half brothers. Jesus' neighbors failed to recognize Him because they thought they knew all about Him.

The same holds true for us when, mistakenly thinking we know all about them, we fail to recognize His presence in our midst through our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Matthew 13:57 (b), 58

But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

In writing of this same incident, Mark said, "He *could* not do many mighty works because of their unbelief." Jesus would have been able to heal them and to work radically among them, but because of unbelief, He was limited in what He could do for them.

> Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.
>
> Psalm 78:41

I encourage you to be open to the brother who talks with you after the service, to the sister who comes into your shop tomorrow. Jesus may be using them in a very real sense. Don't make the mistake of saying, "I know him. The Lord could never use *that* guy!" or "I know more than she does. How could the Lord possibly use *her* to speak to me?" Wonderful things happen when you begin to say, "Lord, I'm looking for You. I believe You're going to work in my homeland in unexpected ways, at unexpected times, through unexpected people—all for *Your* glory."

***For topical study of Matthew 13:54–58 entitled "Unbelief: Its Cause and Cure," turn to page* 108.**

SOWING THE SEED
A Topical Study of MATTHEW 13:3–9

Jesus was a master communicator and a marvelous teacher. Although He was not the inventor of parabolic teaching, Jesus brought the form to unparalleled heights and to great depths of insight, the parable of the Sower being one of His most well known. When we talk about sowers, we're talking about farmers—people who sowed seed. Walking through a field, scattering seed as he went, the seed the farmer in this particular parable sowed fell on four types of soil.

Some seed fell on the hard soil by the wayside or in the pathways. It did not penetrate the ground, and the birds came and picked it off. Other seed fell on shallow, stony ground—ground with topsoil an inch or so deep, covering solid rock underneath. Such seed would spring up quickly, but lacking any real root system, it would wither away when the sun came out. Still other seed fell on ground infested with thorns that would choke the seed. Finally, some seed fell on good soil, and it brought forth fruit.

This parable has two primary applications. First, it speaks to us as hearers of the Word. Jesus said, "Take heed how ye hear," and "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." In other words, "Listen up when the seed is being sown."

What is the seed? Jesus tells us the seed is the Scriptures, the Word of God, specifically the gospel. Peter picks up the same metaphor in his writings when he says we are born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible seed, which is the Word of God. According to this parable, people receive the Word in one of four ways.

Some people have such hard hearts that the Word doesn't penetrate at all. Birds pluck it away before it can make any impact, and their hearts remain unchanged.

Others hear the Word and say, "Yeah, that sounds good!" And they get saved. They come forward, they raise their hands, and they get

baptized, but there's no root; and when persecution and tribulation come, they dry up and check out.

In others, the cares of this world choke out the Word. They don't have time for Bible study anymore. They have to wax their cars, paint their houses, or dig their pools. They can't fit Scripture into their schedules.

Finally, some hear the Word and receive it because the soil is ready. Their hearts are right. They take it in, and it produces fruit—thirty-fold, sixty-fold, or a hundred-fold.

The parable is a powerful one, as it speaks to each of us concerning the condition of our hearts upon hearing the Word. But I want us to look at the second application—not just as hearers of the Word—but also as those who are distributing the seed. We have been called to share the gospel. We have been entrusted with this glorious, fabulous message. And this parable gives insight to some important principles about sharing the Word.

First, I understand from what Jesus is saying that not everyone is going to respond. In fact, if we look at this story, we see only one of four receive the Word and go on to fruitfulness. That's enlightening for me because it explains why some people seem so excited to receive the Word, but don't go on with the Lord. Jesus said this would be so. We shouldn't be surprised by it. Jesus said one of four would bear fruit—only one of four. But there *is* one of four. Think about this: Of all the people you have shared the gospel with—family, friends, schoolmates, neighbors—have one of four gone on to bear fruit? Or is it one of forty? One of four hundred? One of four thousand? Maybe you've never seen one neighbor, friend, family member, or colleague become fruitful in the Lord.

What can be done? I believe the answer lies within the parable itself. If indeed Jesus received the inspiration for this parable from Jeremiah 4, where God instructed Jeremiah to "Break up the fallow ground and sow seed not amongst the thorns," the question then becomes: How do we break up hard ground? Let me suggest to you something that is often overlooked with regard to hardened hearts and fallow ground. The problem is not with the seed, for the Word of God is powerful and real. The problem is with the soil. The soil

has not been properly prepared. We have sown seed without preparing the soil.

Suppose on a 747 heading from San Francisco to Honolulu, the captain suddenly called the stewardess into his cabin and said, "We have a hole in the gas tank and only about thirty minutes of fuel left. We're two hours from Honolulu, but too far to turn back. This plane is going down. Distribute parachutes immediately to all passengers."

And suppose the stewardess comes out of the cabin, wipes the worried look from her face, and cheerfully says, "Ladies and gentlemen, who would like to wear a parachute? Try one on, and you will see how smooth a flight can be, how wonderful the trip can become." People listen to her, scratch their heads, and wonder. A few raise their hands and volunteer.

But after a while, the parachutes become cumbersome. And the people find they can't sit in their seats as comfortably as they previously did. They can't put their tray tables down to hold their Cokes and peanuts. Worst of all, they see the people around them snickering and making fun of them. So, tired of the snickering and tired of squirming, they remove their parachutes. No sooner do they throw them down, however, than the plane sputters and crashes into the ocean, where all lives are lost.

Oftentimes I hear presentations like this: "Come to Jesus. Christians have more fun." Really? Tell that to Paul, who was beaten, imprisoned, and shipwrecked and constantly in pain, suffering, and difficulty.

But if Christianity is "more fun," what did Jesus mean when He said, "In the world you will have much tribulation"? What did He mean when He said we would enter into the kingdom only through trials and difficulties? And what did the writer to the Hebrews mean when he said believers in his day were sawn in half, that they traveled in animal skins to keep warm, and that they lived in caves in poverty?

Others say, "Come to Jesus, and you won't be miserable," only to hear people respond, "I like my life. I enjoy watching the A's and the Giants. I enjoy my ski boat. I like my kids. I'm doing well, thank you."

We try so hard to convince people they're miserable without Jesus, or that they will be happy with Jesus. But sooner or later the sun comes out. People begin to make fun of them for becoming Christians. They begin to have difficulties and problems. They say, "I've been sold a bill of goods," as

they throw off their parachutes. Then the inevitable happens. The plane crashes. Death comes. And they are dumped into hell eternally because they came to the gospel on a wrong set of presuppositions. Their commitment was shallow because the presentation was shallow.

Consider stewardess number two.

She returns from the captain's cabin, saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, listen carefully. There is a leak in the fuselage. We are losing fuel rapidly. We have thirty minutes before we will make an emergency landing. Who wants a parachute?" Suddenly, hands go up everywhere. Everyone straps a parachute on. And you know what? They're still uncomfortable, and they still can't get their tray tables down. But they don't care one whit. They know an event is coming for which they must be prepared.

Maybe some are skeptical. Perhaps some are cynical. They say, "Oh, this is just some kind of drill, some kind of test. I don't want a parachute." And they laugh. But they laugh nervously, wondering, "What if she's right?" as they ask for a second and third and fourth drink. Thirty minutes later, when the plane begins to sputter and the doors open, those who have the parachutes jump to safety. The others are lost.

Gang, we need to make a realistic presentation of the gospel. He that has the Son has life. He that has not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on Him. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. We need to say, "Friend, what will you do with the Person of Jesus Christ? Your eternal state hinges upon your decision. If you receive Him and respond to Him, you'll be saved. If you reject or ignore Him, you'll crash."

"That type of presentation makes me uncomfortable," some might object. But that's what it takes to break up fallow ground. How did Jesus break up the hard ground of the hearts to which He ministered, of those who thought they were basically okay?

He said, "You have heard it said of old that you're not to kill, but I say unto you that if you have been angry with your brother, you are a murderer. You have heard it said of old that you're not to commit adultery, but I say to you, if you've looked with lust, you're guilty. You have heard it said of old that you're not to swear, but I say unto you let your 'yea' be 'yea' and your

‘nay’ be ‘nay.’ Anything more than yes or no is blasphemy. Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (see Matthew 5). And suddenly, people who thought they were basically okay are indicted by the law. The law was spoken of and expanded on by Jesus in order to bring people into an awareness of their sin. Gang, those of you who have family or friends who seem to be hardened to the gospel, have you really sat down with them and said,

- “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
- Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image . . .
- Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain . . .
- Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- Honour thy father and thy mother . . .
- Thou shalt not kill.
- Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- Thou shalt not steal.
- Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
- Thou shalt not covet . . .”?

Do we know the law? Do we even know the Ten Commandments? Do we know why they were given? Galatians 3 says the law was given as a schoolmaster to drive people to Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:24). The law is a schoolmaster who cracks the whip, a schoolmaster who raps the knuckles, a schoolmaster who makes people wake up and realize they’re sinners.

The law is like a mirror (James 1:23). When I look into a mirror and see dirt on my face, I don’t take the mirror off the wall and start scrubbing my face with the mirror. The mirror is simply to show me what’s real. So, too, the Ten Commandments and the law give people a proper understanding of their dirtiness and sinfulness, their depravity and iniquity. Therefore, we who sow seed must have the integrity and the honesty to say to people, “You’re a sinner. You’re headed for destruction. According to the Law of God, you’re not okay. We’re all lost. That’s why Jesus came.”

People will not appreciate how wonderful Jesus is until they realize how lost they are. They"ll say, "Big deal. So Jesus died on the Cross. So you say God loves me. So what?"

But when they realize that God's standard of holiness and righteousness is so transcendent and so valuable that the price of sin is death, they say, "I get it. Salvation is not just a matter of having a better day, or joining a new club that meets on Sundays and Wednesdays. This is heavy."

I believe we will see a much higher percentage of people responding to Jesus and continuing in Him if we sow the seed where the ground has been broken by the plow of the law. May God help us to plow deep and to sow well that people might truly be converted and become fruitful in the glorious kingdom of God.

YOU ARE TREASURED!

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 13:44–46

One morning years ago, when the first heavy dew of the season had fallen in Jacksonville, Oregon, my then three-year-old daughter, Mary Elizabeth, looked out the window and saw the wet grass. With excitement in her voice, she said, "Mommy, Mommy! God made the whole world wet!" Then her little forehead furrowed. Looking rather puzzled, she said, "But He forgot to dry it."

I think, like Mary, we sometimes look around with a smile on our face and say, "Wow! Look what God made!"

> I was reading about the screech owl, which unlike our spotted owl, resides in cities and towns on the East Coast. They're very prolific, but little bugs and maggots can infect and devastate their entire population. To counteract the maggots and bugs, the screech owl ingeniously gathers little snakes called blind snakes and takes them to his nest. The blind snake just so happens to love maggots, larvae, and little bugs, so he lives inside the nest along with the screech owl. They dwell together symbiotically—mutually beneficial to each other.[2]

Who taught the screech owl to go after that particular snake and drop it in the tree trunk in which he is building his nest? I know owls are wise, but they're not *that* smart! Such understanding was programmed into the owl by an ingenious Master Maker, a Creator.

Consider also the Alaskan blackfish.

> The Alaskan blackfish, which lives in ponds and streams that freeze over every winter, has the amazing ability to freeze right along with the pond or stream for up to forty-five minutes. Then he thaws out and continues with his life. These fish have been given the ability to go with the flow in a remarkable way!

Finally, consider the spider.

> The spider spins a web made of a sticky substance that traps insects and bugs for his dinner. Why isn't the spider caught in his own web? Ingeniously built into his little spider feet are tiny oil glands that secrete a minuscule amount of oil, allowing him to move over his own web without being caught.

I watch the spider, I see the owl, and I hear about the blackfish, and I marvel and say, "Oh, Lord, You are a master Creator!" But sometimes I look around, and like Mary Elizabeth, my brow begins to furrow as I say, "God, You made this world—but did You forget to dry it?"

"Why did Hurricane Hugo slam through the Caribbean, causing death and misery for countless thousands? Why are there volcanoes that erupt and wipe out entire villages in the Polynesian Islands? Why are thousands of babies born addicted to crack cocaine each year alone? If You are a God who is so ingenious and powerful, why do these things happen?"

People look around and see tragedy, war, rape, disease, difficulty, and say, "If there is a God who made this world, then how come He doesn't dry it? Why doesn't He take better care of it? Why are these things allowed to happen?" To find the answer, you need to go back to the beginning—back to the Book of Genesis. Here we read of a man who literally had the Spirit of God breathed into him, a man who was never polluted by sin, a man born without a sin nature. He was, in a sense, a champion for you and me. His name was Adam.

God gave Adam the authority, the opportunity, and the responsibility to oversee, tend, and rule this planet. But Satan came to Adam to tempt him, and Adam submitted to Satan when he ate of the forbidden fruit. The Bible says to whom you submit, of him you become the servant. When Adam submitted to Satan, he became the servant of Satan and handed to him the title deed, the authority, and the dominion of this planet. Thus, the ownership of the world changed hands—from God to man to Satan.

Why are there rape and hatred? Why is there starvation in Ethiopia? Why is there AIDS? It's the enemy who has caused the problems, pollution, and plagues that descend upon us.

When Jesus stilled the storm in Luke's Gospel, He said, "Be still," or literally, "Be muzzled," which is the same phrase He used whenever He encountered demonic activity. Therefore, I suggest to you the implication is clearly that many of these storms that bring about devastation and destruction are not "Acts of God," as insurance companies refer to them, but acts of Satan. God gets a bad rap and gets blamed for what the Enemy does.

Will the title deed to earth remain in the devil's grasp forever? Revelation 5 gives us the answer . . .

> *And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.*
>
> Revelation 5:1

Now, what is this book, or literally scroll? Jeremiah 32 identifies it as a title deed to a piece of property. The scroll sealed with seven seals is the title deed to planet earth.

Why is it written on the outside as well as the inside? In Old Testament times, if you lost your property due to hardship or bankruptcy, the deed would be scrolled and sealed with seven seals. On the outside would be written all of your financial obligations. You would have to meet them within seven years in order to regain your property. If those qualifications were met, the person who took possession of your property was required by law to return it to you. Such a transaction took place in the temple, where the qualifications on the outside of the scroll were read before the people. In heaven, the ultimate temple, there is a scroll sealed seven times. It is the title deed to the earth, which was given to Adam, who in turn, passed it on to Satan.

> *And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?*
>
> Revelation 5:2

In other words, "Who can meet the requirements? Who is worthy to take back the title deed of earth from Satan?"

Notice it doesn't say, "Who is *willing?*" Many men have been willing to try to take control of the world—Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Napoleon, Hitler. They were all willing to take control, believing they could bring the world into a new level of glory or grandeur. The angel is not asking, "Who is willing?" The angel asks, "Who is *worthy?*"

> *And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open the book, neither to look thereon.*
>
> Revelation 5:3, 4

John wept at the thought of the world indefinitely in the hand and control and dominion of the Enemy so much so that the Greek word translated "wept" means "sobbing in agony."

You mean poverty will continue, hunger will abound, disease will persist, and hate will be perpetuated? There will be wars, anxiety, tension, trauma, death, disease, and destruction—*forever?* John wept because no one was found worthy to wrest the scroll from the hand of the Enemy. As you read the papers, the editorials, and the news magazines today, no doubt your heart breaks as well. This can't go on. Hurt, pain, sorrow, and evil can't go on forever.

> *And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.*
>
> Revelation 5:5–7

Jesus comes forward, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, saying, "I will redeem the scroll," and the rest of Chapter 5 is a glorious outpouring of praise, adoration, and thanksgiving that someone was able to take the title deed of the planet. Worthy is the Lamb. He alone is worthy.

How did He do it? Look back at Matthew 13, where Jesus gives a one-verse parable that explains the redemptive process.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

Matthew 13:44

In Jesus' day, if a man had wealth, he would bury it in a field to keep it safe from thieves. The man in this parable stumbled across one such treasure chest and realized, "Wow! Someone has left his treasure here." With joy, he bought the field in order to get the treasure. He gave everything he had because he knew within the field lay a treasure of great value.

- *What is the field?*

  In a previous parable, Jesus identified the field as the world.
- *Who is the Man?*

  Jesus Christ.

Think with me for a moment.

- *The first Adam sold us out.*

  Jesus Christ, the last Adam, bought us back.
- *The first Adam ate of a forbidden tree and handed humanity* to *the enemy.*

  The last Adam hung on a tree to redeem humanity *from* the enemy.
- *Through the first Adam, the ground was cursed.*

  For our sake, the last Adam became a curse.
- *Sin, through the first Adam, produced thorns.*

  God, through the last Adam, buried those thorns in His own brow.

Why? So He could, with His own pure blood, appear before the Father in the temple of heaven and declare, "I am worthy to take the scroll."

You see, the price for the redemption of the world was not a million dollars, not ten billion dollars, not a zillion dollars. It was death.

Why did Jesus want the world? He certainly doesn't need this planet, which in many places has been polluted beyond repair. He didn't want another planet just to camp out on. There are a million planets He has created and a billion more He could speak into existence.

- *What did He want?*

  He bought the planet for the treasure.
- *What was the treasure?*

  You.

Jesus came, gave everything He had, and was slaughtered like a lamb in order that He might pay the price for the title deed to this earth. Because He wanted this planet? No. Because He wanted you. You are His treasure. *You* are the treasure He purchased with His own blood.

When the Enemy whispers in your ear that you're not worth anything, please understand this: Jesus, walking through this world, saw you and was so excited about you and so in love with you that He sold everything to buy this whole world in order to take you—the treasure—out of it.

Maybe you're saying, "That might be true theologically, but I couldn't be much of a treasure to Him. I'm always messing up, missing the mark, and blowing it. I'm just an irritation to Him."

Look at the next verse.

> *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.*
>
> Matthew 13:45, 46

- *Who is the One who sold all He had to purchase the pearl?*

  Jesus.
- *Who is the pearl?*

  You are.

> A pearl begins as nothing more than an irritating speck of sand in the shell of an oyster. The oyster coats this troublesome speck with layer upon layer of a crystalline substance called nacre, which hardens and becomes the actual pearl. Interestingly, the more irritating the grain of sand, the more beautiful the pearl.

You are the pearl of great price. When you asked the Lord to come into your life, you became robed with His righteousness and surrounded by His goodness. Although you might feel as though you're terribly irritating, you are actually a trophy of His glory. You are a gem of His grace. And all of the cosmos looks at you and says,

> "Wow! Glory be to the Lamb. Worthy is the Lamb. Hallelujah to the Lamb, who took that little speck of sand and made it a pearl of great price!"

God loves you, gang. Paul said He demonstrated His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

When did Jesus die for us?

Not when we were going to church; not when we were reading the Word; not when we were praying. He looked at us when we were nothing more than an irritation and said, "I love you, and I'll give all I have to redeem you, My treasure."

There's one thing that will ruin a pearl. It's perspiration.

So, too, one thing will ruin your beauty in the Lord. Perspiring, sweating, or trying to prove you are worthy of His blessing. Trying to prove "it's *my* spirituality, *my* energy, *my* togetherness that makes me so wonderful." No, the pearl is destroyed, eaten away, decayed by sweat.

What you need is not to sweat it out, but just let it out. Release praise, thanksgiving, appreciation, and adoration, saying, "Thank You, Lord, for seeing me as a pearl. I'm not going to try to earn it, nor add to it. I don't even understand it. But I am forever grateful."

Be a pearl for His glory.

In Jesus' Name.

UNBELIEF: ITS CAUSE AND CURE

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 13:54–58

After presenting a powerful teaching to His disciples concerning the kingdom, Jesus left Galilee and traveled twenty miles west—home to Nazareth. In Nazareth, unbelief filled the hearts of His countrymen. Matthew ends this chapter saying of Jesus, "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief."

In recording the same incident, Mark takes it a step further when he writes, "And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief." It is not simply that Jesus *would* do no mighty works in Nazareth. Mark tells us He *could* do no mighty works there. He was limited by their unbelief, even as the Old Testament declares that the people of Israel limited the Holy One of Israel through their unbelief (Psalm 78:41).

- Unbelief is hazardous to your health. In this passage, we see it affecting people in three ways.
- Unbelief blinds your eyes, and you become skeptical.
- Unbelief poisons your heart, and you become cynical.
- Unbelief robs your joy, and you become sterile.

First, look with me at the way unbelief blinds eyes.

> *And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?*
>
> Matthew 13:54

Miracles were happening—the dead were raised, the lame were walking, the blind were seeing, the deaf were hearing. It was obvious God was working. But unbelief blinds eyes to the obvious.

> People are still blinded today, even though it is obvious God is real. Just look up. On a clear night, you can see the Milky Way galaxy, consisting of four hundred billion stars. Traveling at tremendous speed, the Milky Way swirls within itself as it is hurled across the universe—all four hundred billion stars. Astronomers tell us there are at least one hundred billion more galaxies each containing at least one hundred billion stars. If you compute that out, it comes to ten billion billion stars spinning around and moving through the universe. Ten billion billion—that's more Big Macs than McDonalds serves in a year! And when you add the planets that circle many of these stars, the figures get even more astronomical.

"My, it must be crowded up there," you say. Well, state your coordinates and choose a point. Even though there are ten billion billion stars with billions of planets around them, what are the chances of your point landing on a star, a planet, a comet, or an asteroid? The chances are one in ten to the thirty-eighth power, or one in a billion trillion trillion—not very good odds. Space is *huge,* gang—enormous beyond our comprehension. And yet people have the audacity, the stupidity, and the idiocy to say, "Well, it just sort of all happened."

Truly, "the fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (see Psalm 14:1). I recently talked with an atheist who said, "Jon, I hear all of your statistics on space, and I hear all of your illustrations on creation, but it still doesn't prove God exists. I would believe in God if He would prove His existence."

"Well, we have a problem here," I said, "because if God proved His existence, you couldn't be a believer. You might be a follower, but you couldn't be a believer, for if God proved Himself, there would be no faith required."

God is interested in developing your faith because faith is what is going to move on with you in the ages to come. He has given you evidence and indications, but He has not given you proof because if He gave you proof, you could never be a believer.

Second, notice not only the blindness of their eyes, which resulted in skepticism, but the poison in their hearts, which resulted in cynicism.

Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him . . .

Matthew 13:55–57

When a person will not believe, his heart will inevitably become poisoned toward the family of God.

"Isn't His dad a carpenter—just an ordinary carpenter? He's not a scholar or a rabbi, a mystic or a miracle worker. We know His dad; he's the carpenter. And Mary? We've heard about *her* problem. She was pregnant before she got married."

You see, the unbeliever will always attack the family of God. His heart will become poisoned as he points out the problems of fallen Christian pastors or this Christian neighbor. He will point out problems in the family, even though, like those in Nazareth, his facts may be wrong. Since no one—not even the most avowed atheist or skeptical cynic—has ever been able to find one single fault with Christ, he or she will attack His family.

"Can you believe what a joke that minister on TV is?"

"Look at those hypocrites sitting in church."

"Some Christian *she* is."

And their hearts become cynical, hardened, and bitter.

Third, unbelief robs you of your joy.

And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

Matthew 13:58

When Jesus went to His hometown, He would have healed many if only they would have believed. Great joy would have filled that little hamlet of Nazareth. But God will not work outside the arena of faith. God has chosen to limit Himself in certain ways. And because they didn't believe, He

couldn't work. As a result, miracles were missing. Healings weren't happening. Joy wasn't exploding.

Unbelief is hazardous to your health. It blinds your eyes; it poisons your heart; it steals your joy. What is the antidote for unbelief? What would the Great Physician prescribe to you and to me who, although we are believers in Jesus, are also guilty of limiting Him?

First, the antidote for the unbelief, which results in blinded eyes, is simply to offer prayer to God. Paul did this when, in Ephesians 1, he prayed for the believers at Ephesus—that their *eyes* might be enlightened. You see, faith is not blind. Faith sees what unbelief never will.

I am reminded of the story of Elisha in 2 Kings 6.

> As the Syrians waged war against the Jews, the king of Syria set an ambush for the Israelites. Elisha sent word to the king of Israel, saying, "Don't go through that pass. You'll walk into a Syrian ambush." The king of Syria then set a second ambush, and again the Lord spoke to Elisha the prophet. Finally, the king of Syria said, "Every time we set up an ambush, Israel suddenly changes directions to avoid it. Someone is spying, and I want his head."

One of his advisers said, "King, there's no spy in our midst. There's a prophet in their land. His name is Elisha. He knows everything you say—even what you say in your bedchamber."

"Where is this man Elisha?" barked the king.

"In Dothan," answered his advisers.

That same night, the Syrians surrounded the city of Dothan with soldiers, chariots, and armaments. The next morning, when Elisha's servant, Gehazi, woke up, he ran to his master, shouting, "Master! We're surrounded! We're through! We're history!"

> *And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.*

2 Kings 6:17

Elisha wasn't worried because faith sees what unbelief never will.

Second, the antidote for the unbelief that results in a bitter heart is to see people in God.

Paul said, "I know no man after the flesh" (2 Corinthians 5:16). In other words, "I see people in Christ—washed in His blood, robed in His righteousness. That's the way I choose to see people."

When you see people in God, suddenly you're not so cynical. You can just embrace, love, and enjoy them.

Third, to thwart the unbelief that robs you of joy, speak the promises of God.

> *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*
>
> Hebrews 11:6

There are many ways to please God—but not one apart from faith.

> *The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach: That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*
>
> Romans 10:8, 9

Faith is worked into our lives by God's Word. It is released from our lives by our spoken word. It's not enough to have a quiet, internal faith. Faith is released via the mouth.

Jesus said, "When you see an obstacle in front of you, a mountain looming before you, a problem facing you, *say* to the mountain, 'Be removed' and it shall be removed" (see Matthew 17:20).

Speak the praises of God. Scripture is packed with promises—over three thousand in number—a promise for every situation. Perhaps you have a difficulty in your life, a problem in your family, a hardship financially or

vocationally, tough times in school or in friendship. Jesus desires to work in those situations. He really does. But we limit Him by unbelief.

God wants us to speak His promises because it's too easy for us to say, "Well, I've got some ideas and thoughts, some hopes and dreams, but I'm not going to go on record verbally lest I seem foolish." Once you have the promise of God in your heart, you need to release it via your mouth. Speak *out* that which has been worked *in*.

Either you will venture out in faith, or you will vegetate. Your Christian life will either grow in faith as you see wonderful things happen in your family, in your ministry, in your life personally, or you will shrink into a "church-ianity." God forbid.

> *Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*
>
> Hebrews 11:3

Hebrews says the worlds were framed by the Word of God. Whenever someone builds a house, he doesn't put up one wall and then move in. No, he constructs all the walls in order that there might be protection, symmetry, and balance.

So, too with God. When He framed the world, it was framed in totality. Therefore, we need to be students of His Word so we don't just put up one wall in our house of faith and say, "Well now, this is the way it has to be. I'm claiming the promise." No, solid faith, real faith, balanced faith comes by hearing the Word—not simply an isolated verse here or there.

As I study the Word, my focus changes. It's no longer me clenching my fists and gritting my teeth, saying, "I'm gonna trust or bust." No, my focus shifts from my faith to the Faithful One—Jesus Christ.

I don't know what struggle you might have, what difficulty you might face, but I know where the answer lies. It lies in the Faithful One—Jesus Christ.

Begin to venture out radically and watch what the Lord does joyfully. He wants to come into your Nazareth and do a mighty work.

14

Thus far in our study, we have seen that the purpose of Matthew's Gospel is to present Jesus as King—King of Israel, King of kings, King of all creation. His Person is revealed in chapters 1 through 4; His principles are recorded in chapters 5 through 7; His power is released in chapters 8 through 10. In chapters 11 through 13, the focus shifts from a revelation of the King to a rebellion against the King. And here in chapter 14, we will see the retreat of the King as Jesus pulls away from the crowds to share essential principles with His disciples.

Matthew 14:1

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus.

You remember Herod from Matthew 2. He was the one who slaughtered all of the male children in Israel when he heard a new King had been born. The Herod referred to here is Herod Antipas, his son. Herod Antipas wasn't as bloodthirsty as his father was, but he was not a great leader in any sense of the word. He loved luxury and lived licentiously.

Matthew 14:2

And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.

Hearing of the fame of Jesus, Herod thought John the Baptist had come back from the dead. Why? His conscience was pricking him, for he was the one who had put John to death.

Matthew 14:3–5

For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife. For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her. And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

Herodias was Herod's brother's wife. Herod took a liking to her, got rid of his own wife, and stole her from his brother. John confronted him, saying, "This is not right. You are king of the country and in a position of authority. You can't live in this kind of immorality." Herod responded by imprisoning the bold and radical Baptist. But Mark tells us when John was in prison, Herod talked with him and began to develop a real affinity for him. Herod saw that John was a just man, a godly man, a wise man. Thus, although he felt convicted by John, he respected him.

Matthew 14:6–11

But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist"s head in a charger. And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother.

At Herod's birthday party, with wine flowing freely, Herodias told her daughter to dance. Herodias' daughter complied, dancing seductively and sensually. Herod, probably under the influence of much wine, said, "Whatever you want to the half of my kingdom, you've got it." Herodias, angry with John the Baptist, instructed her daughter to ask for John's head.

Hardly a week goes by that I don't hear, "I was at this party," or "I was down at the bar," or "I was at the office get-together and I said something I shouldn't have said, and then I did something I shouldn't have done." These statements always come from broken, devastated people whose lives are permanently scarred because they were playing the game, trying to get ahead. Watch out for an environment wherein alcohol is flowing, and seductive music is playing. I don't care what society says. I don't care what the demands from your boss might be. Watch out. Herodias is dancing. You'll get sucked in, and you'll regret it later.

Matthew 14:12

And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

Distressed and discouraged, the disciples of John went to Jesus—a good thing to do. Communication with Jesus is always the best insulation against depression.

Matthew 14:13 (a)

When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart . . .

Jesus and John were close not only in ministry, but as family, being that John was a cousin of Jesus. Hearing John had been beheaded, Jesus withdrew to a quiet place.

Matthew 14:13 (b), 14

. . . and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities. And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

Jesus had need of solitude, but when He saw the crowd, Matthew writes He was "moved with compassion, and he healed their sick." This is always a tension in our walks. We feel the need to get away and seek the Lord in quietness, yet there are needs all around us. The question arises: How do I know when to get involved with the needs I see around me and when to seek the Lord in solitude and tranquility? How do I know when it's time to plunge in and get involved, versus time to retreat and be quiet before the Lord? I believe the answer lies in this passage. As with Jesus, compassion *within* you and anointing *upon* you are good indicators that you need to get involved in the situation *around* you.

Matthew 14:15–20 (a)

And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals. But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. He said, Bring them hither to me. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled . . .

Jesus took limited resources—five loaves and two fish—blessed them, gave them out, and fed five thousand. Notice, however, that in between blessing and giving, there was breaking. You might say, "I don't have much. My talents are limited. My gifts aren't great." That's Okay. In the Lord's hand, a little goes a long way *if* you will let Him bless you and break you.

I think of Mary with the alabaster box, anointing Jesus and ministering to Him. The box had to be broken before ministry could flow (Mark 14:3). I think of Gideon, whose three hundred men put torches in clay pots as they surrounded the hosts of the Midianites. On a given signal, they broke the clay pots, and the light flooded out. Confused by the light, the Midianites fought one another and destroyed themselves. Israel was victorious because before the battle was fought, the clay pots were broken (Judges 7:19).

People often say, "God has been good to me, and I want to be used in ministry. Why then am I going through the pits and through such difficulty?" The answer is very simple. Before the Lord can use a person greatly, He must allow him to be hurt and broken deeply. There's no other way. Pride must go. Self-sufficiency must die to make way for the tenderness and compassion that come only through the breaking process.

Matthew 14:20 (b)–23

. . . and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children. And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him

unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

Now, after a time of ministry, Jesus at last had an opportunity to be alone with His Father. He sent His disciples across the sea and went to a mountain alone for contemplation and intercession.

Matthew 14:24–26 (a)

But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled . . .

"They were troubled"—that's putting it mildly! A more accurate translation would be, "They were scared to death!" Here they were, struggling against the storm, obedient to the command of Jesus to proceed to the other side, when suddenly, they saw a figure walking towards them.



***For topical study of Matthew 14:22–33 entitled "Recognizing Our Redeemer," turn to page* 116.**

Matthew 14:26 (b)–29

. . . saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

The reason Peter could walk on water was not because he wanted to write a book about walking on water, or to send out publicity photos of himself surfing without a board. Peter's motivation was neither notoriety nor fame. He simply wanted to go to Jesus.

Matthew 14:30–32

But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? and when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

In extra-Biblical literature, Peter is referred to as "the Giant." Historical writings corroborate the fact that he was a man of good size. Yet, Jesus was able to lift him out of the water with one hand. Artists' renderings over the centuries portraying Jesus as a wimp are false. Jesus was a carpenter in the days before power tools and lumberyards, which means He logged trees and finished lumber before even beginning the building process.

Anything but a weakling, Jesus was able to single-handedly lift a waterlogged Peter out of the sea and into the boat. And He does the same with us. We tire of our situation and become weary of the people in our boats, so we venture out upon the water and start to sink. Jesus pulls us out of the water and sets us back in the boat because there are yet lessons for us to learn there. He loves us enough to plop us back in the boat until the lesson is learned and His work is complete.

Matthew 14:33

Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

When you're in a storm with the wind raging and the waves pounding, and you feel like you're sinking, know this: The same Lord who stills the storm allows the storm. Why does God allow storms?

Scripturally, storms appear for two reasons. First, there are storms of correction. Ask Jonah about them. If we're out of the Lord's will, He will use a storm to get us back to where we need to be. Storms of correction discipline us. Second, there are storms of perfection that develop us. In this passage, the disciples were obeying Jesus' command to go to the other side. Thus, this was not a storm to correct them, but to perfect them. In this storm, Jesus was saying, "I want to test you now. I've been teaching you. I've been

with you. And now I want you to exercise your faith to go through this storm."

You see, faith is developed through struggle. If you ask people what faith is, most will answer, "Faith is believing even though you don't have evidence." Not true. Faith is not "believing in spite of the evidence." Faith is obeying in spite of the consequence. Faith says, "I will do what the Lord says, even though it means a storm is headed my way. Even though it means there will be difficulties, obstacles, and challenges, even though it may be brutal and difficult, even though I must struggle, I will obey."

When Jesus came to His disciples, they thought He was a ghost. So, too, we can look around and say, "The Lord is nowhere." Or we can slow down and say, "Wait a minute. Is the Lord speaking to me through my sister, through my mother, through that preacher, or through the radio?"

And suddenly, "The Lord is nowhere" becomes "The Lord is *now here"* by adding a little space.

I find if I slow down and give the Lord a little space, He appears through my brother who shares with me, through my wife who gives encouragement to me, or through my children who challenge me. He sent you *into* the storm, He's praying for you *through* the storm, and He'll come to you *in* the storm—perhaps when you least expect Him.

Matthew 14:34–36

And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret. And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased; and besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.

Throughout Scripture, blue is the color of heaven.

Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue.

Numbers 15:38

The color blue on the hem of the garments of the Jews was to be a reminder to them that they were a unique people, a heavenly people. As they dressed each morning and as they saw one another throughout the day, they were to remember they were pilgrims on this earth, headed for a heavenly city whose "Builder and Maker is God."

Maybe you've sought the Lord, but wonder, *Why aren't I healed?* I encourage you to touch the hem of the garment of Jesus Christ and be reminded of eternity. There is healing when you realize, "I might suffer for a few weeks, months, years, or even decades, but I'm going to Heaven. And when I see Him, I shall be like Him. And when I am like Him, I will have a body custom-made for space, the cosmos, and the ages to come. There will be no sickness, no infirmity, no weakness whatsoever."

The Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation call us to a heavenly perspective. I do not understand why we have fallen into this "I've got to have it all now—wealth and health, prosperity and healing" mentality. If God blesses you materially or if He heals you physically, great! But don't build your life on that. Set your heart on things above. Live for heaven. Touch the hem of His garment, and be reminded once again that it's blue.

RECOGNIZING OUR REDEEMER

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 14:22–33

Fighting the Philistines in a brutal battle, as the Israelites' losses mounted, so did their despair. Then someone had a brilliant idea: "Let's bring in the ark of the Covenant!" The ark of the Covenant, a box about three feet long and two feet wide, was instrumental in tabernacle worship.

When the ark was brought into the Israelite camp, the Israelites cheered so loudly that their shout of triumph could be heard in the Philistine camp. But though the Israelites charged ahead with the Ark leading them, they were defeated resoundingly. And the Philistines captured the Ark (1 Samuel 4).

The lesson? An obvious one. The people of God should not have tried to put God in a box, saying, "This box will represent God, and we will have victory because of *it*." Instead of looking to the Lord, they looked to the box and were beaten badly. If there is one thing many of us are learning, it is that the Lord works in mysterious ways. You just can't box Him in. He is predictably unpredictable. He comes at the unexpected time, in the unexpected way.

Here in Matthew 14, the disciples are out in the storm, toiling at the oars, continuing obediently in the directive Jesus had given them to "Go across the sea." And while they were working and perspiring, Jesus was watching and praying. He was letting them go through the struggle, knowing the struggle would strengthen them. Finally, at four o'clock in the morning, knowing His disciples were feeling anxious and fearful, He came to them, walking on the water. He came to them at the unexpected time in an unexpected way, and they, thinking He was a ghost, freaked out. So, too, I suggest to you that many times Jesus comes to us as well, but like the disciples, we don't recognize Him.

> When your boyfriend or girlfriend calls and says, "You know, I've been thinking. I really appreciate your personality. You've been a good friend, but . . ." Your heart stops, and you say, "This is frightening. It's a ghost."

> When your boss calls you into the office and says, “Don’t bother to take off your coat,” you know what’s coming, and you think, “It’s a ghost! I’m scared.”

Oftentimes, when we, like the disciples, are obedient to the Lord and toiling for the Lord, we call out, “Lord, save me. I’m perishing. Lord, help me. I’m struggling.” Then He comes to us—but in ways that are totally surprising, refusing to be boxed in by our preconceptions of how and when He should appear. I would like us to look at four obstacles that prevent us from seeing Jesus when He comes to us in the unexpected way, at the unexpected time.

Fear and Anxiety

When our hearts are full of fear and anxiety, what should we do? Look at Jesus' answer in the text before us. He said, "Be of good cheer. It is I." This intrigues me. He didn't say, "It is I. Be of good cheer." He said, "Be of good cheer. It is I." First, "Be of good cheer"—an exhortation; then, "It is I"—a revelation. The exhortation comes *before* the revelation.

Scripture says that in everything we are to give thanks, to rejoice evermore, for this is the will of God (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18). If you begin to rejoice—to be of good cheer—suddenly you will see that it isn't a ghost, but it's Jesus drawing near. He's freeing you from that job, or from that relationship that will drag you down. It's the Lord coming to you in the storm.

Next time fear and anxiety fill your heart, don't freak out—faith out. By faith, rejoice, and He will reveal Himself to you as He walks on the water in the midst of your storm.

False Familiarity

Jesus came into His hometown, and there the people said of Him, "Hey, isn't this the carpenter's son? And isn't Mary His mother? And don't we know His brothers and sisters?" They thought they knew Him, but their assumptions were mistaken. Matthew writes that Jesus could not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief (see Matthew 13:58).

So, too, Jesus will come to you, gang, in people you know very well. Our tendency, however, is to say,

- "That guy can't tell me anything. I know him."
- "I know her. She's my wife. She has nothing to say to me."
- "Him? He's only been a Christian six months. What could he possibly say to me?"

In reality, those people are Jesus coming to you. Jesus comes to us constantly, yet if we're not careful, we'll say, "I can't receive from her. I can't receive from him. I know them." Paul said, "I know no man after the flesh. I will no longer look at people with their faults, flaws, and failures. I will see people only in Christ" (see 2 Corinthians 5:16). When we begin to look at our husband, our wife, our friends, our kids, our brothers, and our sisters as people in Christ, realizing Jesus indwells them, suddenly we will lay hold of the most incredible understanding, profound revelation, and convicting challenges. Why is it that we are so ready to receive from someone we esteem highly—a Billy Graham, or a Chuck Swindoll? Wouldn't it be radical if we saw *every* man in Christ? Jesus will come to you through the people closest to you, but if you're not careful, you'll miss Him.

Personal Tragedy

It was Easter morning. Mary Magdalene stood outside the sepulcher weeping, thinking the One speaking to her was a gardener (John 20:15).

Sometimes the person who comes to us in time of tragedy, the person who ministers to us most effectively is not an angel or an apostle. In times of tragedy, Jesus will come to you in the most ordinary of people—the gardeners. Mary, no doubt, thought, *If anyone is going to give me understanding, it will be Peter, John, or the angels at the tomb. They will help me.* But Jesus came to Mary directly, and she mistook Him for a gardener.

Maybe you're going through a time of real personal tragedy. In those times of weeping and crying, be careful because sometimes you'll miss Jesus coming to you very personally. You will think He should come in Peter or in John or in an angel sent from heaven. But you know how He'll come? Through a very common person you wouldn't have expected. And if your antennae aren't up, you'll miss Him. You'll mistake Him as being insignificant and unimportant.

Too often we think we need to see the pastor, a staff member, an elder, or an angel, when we should really be looking for the gardener. Look for the person you thought wouldn't have much to say or much to offer. That's where the deep, beautiful ministry of Jesus will often flow most freely.

Despair and Despondency

In Luke 24, we read the account of two followers of Jesus walking on the road to Emmaus, depressed and despondent following the death of their Master. As Jesus joined them and asked the reason for their sorrow, they said, "Are You a stranger here? Don't You know what's happening? Where have You been?" Then Jesus began gently and lovingly rebuking them for their lack of faith. Beginning with Moses and going through the prophets, He told them how all of the Scriptures foretold His death and resurrection.

When you are depressed and despondent, the Lord will come to you. Initially, however, you might feel He's a stranger. Going through a time of emotional turmoil and great difficulty, unable to sleep, I turned on the television to a Christian station and watched a preacher who I had previously thought was very strange. He wasn't into heresy doctrinally, but his whole approach to the ministry was kind of weird. Normally, I wouldn't have given him the time of day, but in this instance, I listened to him, since his show was the only thing on at three o'clock in the morning. And guess what? His words spoke precisely and powerfully to my exact situation.

The Lord will often come through the person you might have previously thought strange. The eyes of the travelers on the Emmaus road were opened when Jesus broke bread with them. So too, when we break bread in Communion, we realize we are one body, all partaking of the same Lord, all cleansed by His blood. Our differences become irrelevant when we break bread, because suddenly our eyes are opened, and we see Jesus.

Fear and anxiety, false familiarity, personal tragedy, despair and despondency—all will keep you from recognizing your Redeemer. But if you say, "I will watch for You, Lord, in the storm. I will praise Your Name and embrace this difficulty, trusting You are revealing Yourself to me."

- I will receive from those who I think I know so well. I will take their words as Yours.
- I will listen for You in the common person, in the gardener, rather than waiting for an apostle or an angel to speak my name.

• I will embrace the stranger who walks alongside of me, and as we break bread at Your table, I will see Your face.

You will find Jesus will come to you in ways and through people you never expected.



15 Matthew 15:1–3

Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusa lem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?

A delegation of scribes and Pharisees came from Jerusalem to ask Jesus why His disciples did not follow the hand-washing tradition of the elders. You see, although the Jews rightly taught that the law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai, they also said that later on, the Lord gave further revelation to Moses that was not written in the Scriptures. This further revelation was passed down orally from generation to generation, and the Jews became so caught up in it, they actually went so far as to say that the word of the elders was weightier than the Word of God.

One such oral tradition dealt with the ceremonial washing of hands. The Rabbis taught that at night, the demon Shibna would often come and sit upon a man's hands as he slept. They went on to say that if anyone ate with hands that had been sat upon by a demon, the demon could enter into him through the food and take control of him. Therefore, the Rabbis concluded, before eating one needed to wash his hands in the following manner:

> One was to take one and a half eggshells of water and pour it over his hands as they were pressed together uprightly, letting the water drip only to his wrists and no further. Then, he would flip his hands over, pointing them downward while yet another one-and-a-half eggshells of water was poured over them. Finally, he was to rub his right fist

with his left palm, then his left fist with his right palm. This procedure was followed not only before every meal, but between each course of every meal.

Jesus' complete disregard of this tradition infuriated the scribes and Pharisees.

Matthew 15:4–6

For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.

The tradition of the elders stated specifically that if you had something in your house which was of great value, you could say it was "corban," or "dedicated," which then made that object a gift to God. You could still keep it in your house and use it for your purposes, but it was technically dedicated to God. It was a convenient way to refuse help to people in need—even to those in your own family. Jesus indicts the people for this practice, saying, "The Scriptures declare, honor your father and your mother. But you have made the commandment of God of none effect by your vain traditions."

Matthew 15:7–9

Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

"Here's the problem," says Jesus—"People think they draw near to Me with their traditions and their songs, with their lips and with their words—but their hearts are far from Me. The issue is the heart."

For with the *heart* man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Romans 10:10 [emphasis mine]

> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your *hearts* to the Lord.
>
> Colossians 3:16 [emphasis mine]

> Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy *heart,* and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.
>
> Matthew 22:37, 38 [emphasis mine]

> Every man according as he purposeth in his *heart,* so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.
>
> II Corinthians 9:7 [emphasis mine]

The issue is the heart. But there's a problem, for as Jeremiah declares, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (17:9). What then is the solution? David gave the answer when he said, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11).

How is the heart cleansed? By the Word. If people criticize you for something you are doing or not doing in the area of religion, say to them, "Show me in the Word where it says I should or should not do that, for unless you can show me in the Word, I don't care what the traditions might have been previously, or what our culture dictates presently. I am free in Jesus Christ."

> **Matthew 15:10–12**
>
> **And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?**

“It’s not what goes into your mouth; it’s what comes out of your heart. That’s the key.” In so saying, Jesus offended the pious, religious leaders.

Matthew 15:13–20

But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever enter eth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

The issue is not washing of hands by the eggshell, but washing of hearts by the Word. Be free in Jesus. Enjoy your liberty and extend it to others graciously.

Matthew 15:21, 22

Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

The phraseology this Canaanite woman uses is most enlightening. She approaches Jesus using a phrase made popular by Jews who were in need of healing. “Have mercy on me, Son of David,” they would cry whenever Jesus approached. Why did they refer to Jesus as “Son of David”? A thousand years earlier, a prophecy was given to David that he would have a Son, a descendant who would reign forever—Messiah. And when Messiah came, the lame would walk and blind eyes would be opened. Consequently, the Jews who recognized Jesus as their Messiah called Him “Son of David.”

Now suddenly, this Canaanite lady, upon hearing of Jesus' coming, searched for the most appropriate way to address Him. Having heard Him referred to as "Son of David" by Jews lining His path, she borrowed the phrase from them.

Matthew 15:23 (a)
But he answered her not a word.

If ever there were a situation to which I would think Jesus would respond quickly, it would be to a mother crying helplessly over her child. Yet, here this crying woman came to Jesus, and He answered her not a word.

Matthew 15:23 (b)
And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

Her tears, no doubt, were having an effect on the disciples, and they came to Jesus, saying, "Lord, send her away. She's bothering us."

Matthew 15:24
But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

If I were this woman, I think at this point I would have slunk away in despair. After all, she had *nothing* going for her. Her race was against her. She was a Canaanite—an enemy of the Israelites. Her sex was against her. She was a woman—in a time where women were held in low esteem. Even the disciples were against her, as they begged Jesus to send her away. But you've got to admire this lady because she didn't give up. And Jesus knew she wouldn't. You see, Jesus was not trying to be difficult with her. Rather, He was drawing out an understanding from her that would be helpful not only in her situation specifically, but to us and to all generations historically. Watch what happens.

Matthew 15:25

Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

No longer concerned about the right phraseology and the proper presentation, in desperation and openness, she worships Jesus. In simplicity, she says, "Lord, save me," and a miracle was underway.

Sometimes when we're going through tough times, we hear how someone else prays, and we think, *That must be the key. King James English is what moves the hand of God.* So we pray, "Father, I thankest Thee that Thou beholdest the cries of all of Thy creation. Now, Father, in Thy magnificence and benevolence, have mercy upon me in my situation." And nothing happens. Or we hear someone share how they lifted their hand to the Lord, and He reached down and pulled them out of their depression. And we say, "Now how high did you hold your hand? Was it your right hand or your left hand?"

This Canaanite woman was in that same situation. She had the formula, but she failed miserably until she threw her formula aside and came in brokenness and openness to worship Jesus. Worship works where formulas fail. The word "worship," or *proskuneo* in Greek means, "to turn and kiss." Guys, when you kiss your wives, hopefully you don't follow a ten-step program to better kissing. I mean, it needs to be spontaneous and expressive, simple and sincere. The same is true of worship. Worship is not a procedure we follow. It's creative and spontaneous, simple and sincere. In II Samuel 6:12, we see an account of one who understood this principle. The ark of the covenant had been in the house of Obed-Edom for some time. David was bringing it back to Jerusalem.

> And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness. And it was so, that when they that bare the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed oxen and fatlings. And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod.
>
> 2 Samuel 6:12–14

There was a time when all the rage was dressing for success. Many years ago, I saw a picture of fifteen men standing with the then current President of the United States. Every single one had on a dark suit and a red tie. Evidently, they had all read the same book! In the things of God, however, it's not so much dressing for success, but undressing; not so much robing yourself in royalty and regality, but disrobing in humility and spontaneity. David laid aside his "Dress For Success" manual and danced in his underwear before the Lord with gladness and spontaneity, expressing his heart creatively, energetically, and sincerely.

> So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. And as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart.
>
> 2 Samuel 6:15, 16

Observing her husband dancing in his boxers, Michal said, "This is terrible. He's the king of Israel. Where's his dignity?"

> Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!
>
> 2 Samuel 6:20

"That was great, Dave," laughed Michal. "You made a big impression out there. You looked like a fool."

> And David said unto Michal, It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father . . .
>
> 2 Samuel 6:21 (a)

"Remember your father, Michal? God was against him because although Saul was royal and regal, he was not humble and open. He was a worker, not

a worshipper. He didn't have a heart after God." In other words, David is saying, "Michal, you're acting just like your dad."

> . . . and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel: therefore will I play before the Lord. And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight: and of the maidservants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour.
>
> 2 Samuel 6:21 (b), 22

"If you think I acted foolishly today, stick around," David declares. "What I have done, I have done unto the Lord as an act of worship. And those maidens you are worried about? They will see the honor of the Lord working in me."

> Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death.
>
> 2 Samuel 6:23

The same is true today. People or churches who feel worship is not important, or that it's foolish to express one's heart to the Lord publicly and privately will, like Michal, experience a barrenness, a dryness, and a lack of fruitfulness in their lives. Those of you who feel like the Lord is "answering you not a word," try worshiping Jesus. Put away your royal robes and futile formulas and say, "Lord, help me express my heart to You today."

> **Matthew 15:26**
>
> **But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.**

Jesus responds to the woman allegorically. In speaking of children, He is referring to the children of Israel, the Jews. In speaking of bread, He is referring to Himself, the Bread of Life. In speaking of dogs, using the Greek word for a pet dog, He is referring to the Gentiles. In other words, Jesus is saying, "Since I have come first and foremost to the house of Israel, my primary focus must be upon the Jews."

Matthew 15:27

And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

"I hear You," she says. "I understand You're working according to certain priorities. Yet even though the puppy dogs don't get the best bread, they still get the leftover crumbs that fall from the table." Can't you see in your mind's eye a smile break out on the face of Jesus? This is what He was after all along—not to destroy her, but to develop her.

Matthew 15:28 (a)

Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman . . .

The word translated "woman" is *gune,* a term of respect. Jesus used the same word when He spoke of His mother.

Matthew 15:28 (b)

. . . great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

Jesus knew all along what He would be doing. He knew He would indeed heal and bless. But in the process, He taught this Canaanite woman, and all who have studied her story, the power and reality of true worship. I encourage you this day, precious people, to put away phrases and forms and instead follow the example of the Canaanite woman. Worship Jesus in simplicity and sincerity and watch Him work powerfully and radically.

Matthew 15:29–39

And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified

the God of Israel. Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way. And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude? And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children. And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.

In this passage, we see Jesus feeding over four thousand people. Were these people praying? Were they asking to be fed? Did the disciples believe Jesus would feed the multitude miraculously? No. The people didn't pray. And even the disciples didn't have faith. Yet Jesus provided abundantly, graciously, and compassionately.



For topical study of Matthew 15:32–39, see "The Key: His Compassion" below.

THE KEY: HIS COMPASSION

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 15:32–39

The passage before us is controversial. Many scholars suggest it is nothing more than a retelling of the "feeding of the five thousand" story in Matthew 14. Why? It's the only explanation they can offer for the seeming stupidity of the disciples. You see, here in chapter 15, the disciples ask Jesus how they are to feed such a large crowd. Why would the disciples wonder how to feed four thousand if only a mere chapter earlier, they had seen Jesus feed over five thousand? "The only logical answer," conclude the scholars, "is that Matthew 14:14–21 and Matthew 15:32–39 are two different accounts of the same event." I, however, reject their premise for the following reasons:

- There were five thousand men in chapter 14.
- There were four thousand men in chapter 15.
- There were five loaves and two fish in chapter 14.
- There were seven loaves and a few fish in chapter 15.
- The multitude sat on the grass in chapter 14—the implication being it was springtime.
- The multitude sat on the bare ground in chapter 15—the implication being it was summertime.
- Jesus was in Bethsaida, the northern side of the Sea of Galilee, in chapter 14. • Jesus was in Decapolis (Mark 8), on the eastern side of Galilee in chapter 15. • After He fed the multitude in chapter 14, they wanted to make Him King. • After He fed the multitude in chapter 15, they made no such request.

Above all, however, the reason I know these two events are separate is because Jesus Himself referred to them as such in Matthew 16:9, 10. If the "scholars" are right in suggesting there was only one feeding with two

accounts, then Matthew wasn't listening to the Spirit as he wrote his Gospel, and Jesus was mistaken and confused about His own miracles.

I find this hard to believe. Many read this story and struggle with it. "How can this be? How could the disciples forget about the miracle that happened only one chapter previously? Nobody's that dumb." I suggest to you that the answer to that very question is very applicable and helpful for me and for you. First, you must understand that Galilee and Decapolis were very different regions. Galilee was the "headquarters" of Jesus' ministry. Galilee was where He hung out, delivered significant teachings, and developed His disciples. Decapolis, on the other hand, was a confederation of ten Gentile cities with its own monetary system, judicial system, king, and army. Decapolis was financially prosperous and very worldly. Huge monuments to Zeus and Aphrodite dotted the landscape, and coliseums provided Roman-style entertainment.

I believe that's where the problem was. Here, the disciples were with Jesus in Decapolis. "Certainly Jesus won't do a miracle *here,*" the disciples must have thought. "This is heathen territory. Most of this crowd is Gentile. The Lord isn't going to feed *these* people. Besides that, they've been with Him three days now. In Galilee, He fed the crowd after only one day. This is the wrong place. These are the wrong people. This is the wrong time."

The same thing happens to me and to you. The Lord blesses us. A miracle happens. Provision is made. Grace is shown. Then we get into a similar situation a month, a year, or a decade later. And we say, "Oh yeah, I know the Lord saw me through that previous difficulty. I know He provided for me graciously. But that was a different time. I was in Galilee then. I was having morning devotions. I was really close to Him. Now? I'm in the wrong place with the wrong people. This is the wrong time. Nothing is going to happen. The Lord isn't going to see me through this trouble. Not now. I'm out to lunch. I'm in Decapolis."

How easy it is to fall into the subtle trap of expecting the Lord to bless us because of our own worthiness or because we're in Galilee. "I'm praying. I'm studying. I'm close to the Lord. Of course He'll bless me!" But what we fail to factor into the equation is this very simple understanding. Jesus, we are told in verse 32, called His disciples and said, "I have *compassion* on the multitude." The word translated "compassion" is actually a Greek word

that describes the retching of the intestines—something which one feels very deeply. Looking out upon the hungry people of Decapolis, Jesus said, "I hurt for them. Even though no one is asking Me to provide, even though no one is believing I can provide, I want to do something for these people because I have compassion upon them."

What a glorious day it is when you understand that Jesus, your Redeemer and your Friend, looks at you in your need and has compassion upon you—even when you're in Decapolis. What a freeing day it is when we finally learn that the blessings the Lord gives us are not based on anything we do, but just because He sees our hunger and has compassion upon us. There's only one prerequisite—just as there was only one prerequisite for the multitude to be fed with so much food that the Greek text says they were "glutted." They needed to be where Jesus was.

You see, the four thousand weren't making requests of Jesus. They weren't exercising faith in Him. They were merely where He was. They were "under the spout where the blessings come out." And that's the same place we need to be. I have found this to be so true in my own life. The Lord has blessed me above all I could ask or think. I wish I could say to you it was because of my powerful prayer life, my disciplined fasting, my great faith. But that's not true. The Lord has blessed me because He looked on me and said, "Wow. You're hurting. And I hurt for you." That's the way Jesus is—He's a compassionate, caring, loving, gracious, and giving Friend. And the only thing I need to do is hang around Him.

Spending time with God's people

As a three-year-old, I sat on the pew with my mom and dad at Calvary Temple in San Jose, California, as Pastor Kermit Jeffries gave a message on hell. Usually, when Pastor Jeffries preached, Mom would give me some cookies or Lifesavers, and I would lie down and fall asleep. But for some reason on this particular morning, when he started talking about the devil, my ears perked up, and I listened carefully. "Satan has a stopwatch in his hand," Pastor Jeffries said. "He realizes time is running out. He's grabbing every man and woman, boy and girl he possibly can, and he's pulling them into the fires of hell." As soon as Pastor Jeffries gave an invitation to those who wanted to escape Satan's grasp, I scooted down the aisle to the front as quickly as I could. I got saved. Why? Because I was seeking the truth? Exploring the philosophies of the Western mentality? Trying to determine esoterically if there is truth, or if existential thought was the conclusion of my pursuit? No. I wasn't seeking, pursuing, thinking, or working. I was just where Jesus was.

My heart breaks when I know people who are hurting are hanging out at the local tavern. They're missing relational, financial, emotional, and occupational blessings because they're not hanging out with Jesus. Those who were around Jesus were blessed just because He looked at them and had compassion on them.

Spending time in God's Word

Jesus is revealed not only through His people, but also in His Word. Often, I open the Scriptures and suddenly find something that answers the question for me, gives a solution to me, and satisfies the longing within me. Coming down from Highway 62 after the accident in which the Lord took my first wife Terry home, a word from the Lord was whispered in my heart that I didn't even know I knew:

> *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end.*
>
> Jeremiah 29:11

As I listen to His still small voice revealed through His Word to my heart, as I hang out with Him in the multitude of His people, I experience miracle after miracle, blessing after blessing. And when I feel like I'm in the wrong place with the wrong people at the wrong time, I have learned that He can work even in Decapolis because He looks upon me with compassion. I so appreciate our Lord Jesus. He is truly good. As the multitudes left, they did so with full stomachs and healed bodies, with praises flowing from their lips and excitement filling their hearts amazed by the compassion and goodness of Jesus Christ. Hang around Him, precious people, and you'll do the same.



16 As we have seen, the Gospel of Matthew is a presentation of Jesus Christ as King. Written from this perspective, chapters 1 through 10 reveal the King: His Person, His prophet, His precepts, His power. Chapters 11 through 13 portray the rebellion against the King: against His Person, His prophet, His precepts, and His power. Chapters 14 through 20 present the retreat of the King as Jesus pulls His disciples away for times of instruction and fellowship. He will still have encounters with His enemies, and from time to time, the crowds will still surround Him, but this section of Matthew is primarily a record of Jesus retreating with His disciples.

Matthew 16:1

The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven.

The Pharisees and Sadducees tracked Jesus down as He withdrew into Galilee. Attempting to test Him, they asked Him for a sign. Now, this absolutely blows my mind because only two chapters earlier, Jesus fed five thousand men with a few loaves and fishes. And then in the sequel, Loaves and Fishes II, He fed four thousand. The Pharisees and Sadducees simply refused to see what was happening all around them. In 2 Corinthians 3:14, Paul writes that Satan has blinded the minds of those who have willingly rejected the gospel. If a person desires to see the light and to know the Truth, however, it will be revealed to him regardless of his surroundings or his situation.

I read about a French woman who lived fifty years ago and had been blind from birth. One day, someone gave her the Gospel of Mark in Braille. She was so blessed by the story of Jesus that she read it over and over until her fingertips became callused and lost their sensitivity. To regain feeling in her fingers, she cut off the calluses, and with bloody fingertips, read Mark's Gospel yet again. As she continued to cut away the skin and the calluses, however, she damaged her nerve endings so badly that soon she permanently lost all feeling in her fingertips. Devastated, she held her copy of the Gospel of Mark in her hands one last time and literally kissed it goodbye. It was then she discovered that her lips were more sensitive than her fingertips had ever been. She continued to study the Scriptures—with her lips—and went on to become a gifted teacher of the Word.

Those who are blind but want to see will see, regardless of the obstacles. Those who don't wish to see—Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees, even though miracles are happening round about them—will not see because they don't want to see.

Matthew 16:2, 3

He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?

In Jesus' day, the rabbis taught that a demon could perform earthly miracles, but only God could work miracles that related to the sky. Therefore, when these Pharisees said, "Show us a sign from heaven," they were actually saying, "Okay, so You fed five thousand, walked on water, and healed a leper. You might be a demon. Show us a sign from heaven to prove You're not."

Continuing with their line of reasoning, Jesus said, "Speaking of the heavens, you can predict the heavenly signs, why not the signs of the times?" Daniel prophesied precisely when Messiah would be on the scene (chapter 9). Thus, Jesus is saying, "Can't you discern the signs of the times? Don't you know Bible prophecy?" knowing that if the religious community of the day had been studying the Word like they should have been, they would have known that this was the exact time for Messiah to appear.

Matthew 16:4 (a)
A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign . . .

Miracles never convert a person. They can satisfy a person's curiosity, but they will never bring him into a born-again salvation experience.

- The world says, "If I can see it, then I'll believe it."
- The Bible says, "If you believe it, then you'll see it."

Signs and wonders can confirm the Scripture, but only faith can convert the sinner. Voltaire, the famous French infidel, was so bitter towards Christianity, it was claimed that he said,

"Even if a miracle should be wrought in the open marketplace before one thousand sober witnesses, I would rather mistrust my senses than

admit a miracle took place."

Such is the mentality of the skeptic, of the sinner, of the non-believer. Interestingly, Voltaire also said, "In one hundred years from now, Christianity will be a thing of the past and the only Bibles will be in museums!"[3] "Twenty years after his death, the Geneva Bible Society purchased his house to be used to print the Bible. Later it became the Paris headquarters for the British and Foreign Bible society."[4]

Matthew 16:4 (b)

. . . And there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed.

Jonah—the one who was thrown overboard in the sea and for three days was seemingly in hell itself in the belly of the great fish before being thrown out on the beach—was himself a symbol of resurrection. "Destroy this temple," Jesus declared referring to Himself, "and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). That's the one sign Jesus promised.

Matthew 16:5–7

And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread.

When Jesus talked about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, His disciples assumed He was speaking on a material level about something physical rather than something spiritual. This happened throughout the Gospels. Whenever Jesus spoke of a spiritual realm, people always confused it with the material world.

In John 3, Jesus said, "You must be born again."

"How does a man enter into his mother's womb the second time?" asked Nicodemus. Jesus was speaking spiritually, but Nicodemus

was trying to figure it out materially.

In John 4, Jesus said, "I have water to give you which if you drink you shall never thirst again."

"Give me this water," said the woman at the well, "so I won't have to keep drawing out of the well!" She was thinking materially, but Jesus was speaking of the water of the Spirit internally.

In John 6, Jesus said, "Unless you eat of My body and drink of My blood, you can have no part of Me."

The crowds, thinking He was talking about cannibalism, began to turn away from Him. Yet again, He was speaking of a spiritual realm, but the people couldn't see past the material world.

Jesus' desire is to free us from this material, physical world in which we're so caught up. He longs for us to gain an eternal, spiritual perspective. But, like the disciples, we so often get hung up in the material realm. Even in our spiritual walk, we often count our blessings only in corporeal terms, and recognize only those miracles we see physically. Only the spiritual realm is eternal. That's why church is so important to me. As I come here to meet with you, to sing songs of praise to the Lord, to study the Word, my focus shifts from the material to the spiritual, from the temporal to the eternal.

Matthew 16:8–12

Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

The leaven of the Pharisees is legalism. The Pharisees kept scores of rules and regulations, but their hearts were not right with the Lord. The leaven of the Sadducees is not legalism, but liberalism. The Sadducees said, "There are no miracles. There are no angels. There is no resurrection. This whole thing is really just to help you become a better person."

Beware of the leaven of legalism and liberalism. Galatians deals with the subject of legalism and Colossians with the subject of liberalism.

Matthew 16:13

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

Over eighty times throughout Scripture, Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man. I believe there is a two-fold reason He uses this term more than any other. First, it speaks of His humility and His ability to relate. He desires to be numbered among us. Second, it speaks of His position prophetically. Daniel 7:13 foretold that Messiah would be known as the Son of Man.

Matthew 16:14, 15

And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

This is the most important question ever asked any man. The door to eternity swings upon it: Who do *you* say Jesus is personally?

Matthew 16:16–18

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Jesus uses two Greek words for "stone" in this passage. *Petros,* or "Peter," means small stone. *Petra* means massive stone. In other words, Jesus is saying, "Blessed are you, little stone. Upon the massive stone of your confession, I will build My church."

Hadn't Peter and others already confessed that Jesus was the Christ?

In John 1, when Jesus told Nathanael He had seen him under the fig tree, Nathanael responded, "Truly Thou art the Son of God, the King of Israel." Yet Jesus didn't say, "Blessed are you, Nathanael. Upon that rock I'll build My Church."

In Luke 5, after a miraculous haul of fish, Peter acknowledged Jesus' lordship when he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Yet at that point, Jesus didn't say, "Blessed are you, Peter. Upon that rock I will build My church."

In John 6, after five thousand were fed, Peter declared, "Truly thou art the Son of God. You alone have the words of eternal life." Yet Jesus didn't say, "Upon that rock I'll build My church."

Why? Because Jesus' disciples had acknowledged His deity previously; in every case their acknowledgements were an emotional response to a physical miracle . . .

- "You saw me under the fig tree? You must be the Son of God!"
- "Look at these fish! You must be the Son of God!"
- "Wow! Five thousand are fed! You must be the Son of God!"

Peter's statement here in Matthew 16, on the other hand, is not an emotional response. His is a carefully thought through conclusion based upon supernatural revelation. Why is this important? Because a lot of times people will make a vow, saying,

"My mom was healed of cancer. I'll start going to church." And they do—for about five months. Or, "My husband didn't get fired

when everyone else did, so we'll go to church." And they go—for a few weeks.

But that isn't the foundation upon which Jesus builds. He's looking for a man or woman who will come to a rational, intellectual conclusion based upon deep, spiritual revelation. He's listening for those who say, "I have concluded that You're the Christ, not because I won the lottery, not because I feel better physically, but because You have revealed Yourself to my heart spiritually and to my mind rationally."

It is then Jesus says, "Blessed are you. You're not talking about an emotional response, or a five-month foray into Christianity. You have made a declaration, a decision, and I will build My church upon the reality, the rock of your confession."

True conversion is not based upon some emotion or some event. True conversion takes place when a man or woman says, "I have concluded that Jesus really is who He declared Himself to be. He is the Son of God. And I'm giving my life to follow Him totally."

Matthew 16:19

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

This binding and loosing is not a picture of heaven doing *our* bidding; rather, it portrays *us* in harmony with heaven. Jesus is not saying, "Here are some keys. Whatever you want to do, I'll make it happen." No, it's just the opposite. We are to be binding and loosing even as it is done in heaven. We are to be in harmony with Jesus.

***For topical study of Matthew 16:13–19 entitled "Just Jesus," turn to page* 130.**

Matthew 16:20–22

Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ. From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

In verse 16, when Peter spoke of Jesus as the Christ, he was into it. But now in verse 20, when Peter sees Jesus on the Cross, he wants no part of it.

Matthew 16:23

But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

This verse tells me two things.

First, it disqualifies Peter as a candidate for pope. You see, one of the qualifications for the papacy is infallibility on spiritual matters. So fallible was Peter on this point that Jesus called him Satan.

"Well," some might say, "that was before Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit."

But in Galatians 2:11, Paul writes, "When I saw Peter I rebuked him to his face." Why? Because Peter was burdening Gentile believers with Jewish rules and regulations. Therefore, even after Peter was filled with the Spirit, he still blundered. I love Peter. But I acknowledge his fallibility.

Second, this verse answers the question, "How can a person speak a word of prophecy Sunday night when Sunday morning he kicked his cat and yelled at his wife? How can he speak with spiritual authority one minute and be so carnal the next?"

We see Peter doing the same thing. One minute he had revelation from the Father—genuine, true revelation, acknowledged by Jesus. The next, he spoke in the flesh. This teaches me to say, "I'm going to listen to what you're saying, even though two weeks ago you said something dumb." Gang, the

frailty of humanity is such that we all can move into times of revelation and deep understanding—then moments later be off the wall and out to lunch.

Matthew 16:24

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

Taking up one's cross doesn't mean suffering from hay fever, foot problems, a heart murmur, or even cancer. Taking up your cross means that you identify with Jesus to the point of suffering and shame, rejection, and perhaps even death. Taking up your cross is something you choose to do, not something you put up with. It's a choice to deny yourself, a determination that, no matter what, you'll stand for Jesus.

Matthew 16:25, 26

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Here's the irony: The more you live for yourself, the more miserable you'll be. But the more you say, "Lord, I'm going to live for You completely, wholeheartedly, and totally," the more abundant your life will be both now and eternally. If you think back on the happiest times of your life, you will most likely find they were when you were really going for it in Jesus—when He was the priority in your life and the passion of your heart.

Matthew 16:27

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

If you take up your cross and follow Jesus, you'll be rewarded in the ages to come as well as presently.

Matthew 16:28

Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

"Wait," you say, "the disciples are all dead and Jesus' kingdom hasn't come yet. Did Jesus make a mistake?"

Stay tuned. The answer lies in chapter 17.

JUST JESUS
A Topical Study of
MATTHEW 16:13–19

As we did every year for his birthday, my son Peter John and I traveled to the Bay Area one August to see the Oakland A's battle the Cleveland Indians. Quite honestly, however, although taking in a ballgame had become a tradition for Peter and me, I wasn't sure I'd ever go again. You see, I had some big problems with big-league baseball.

> Every time I went to the coliseum, I was asked for money. And none of the people sitting next to me introduced themselves. The manager never paid a call on me, never welcomed me to the coliseum, and didn't even know my name. And then there were all those hypocrites in the stands, like the ladies polishing their nails and talking about what everyone was wearing. Behind me were some fanatics who were worse than the hypocrites. Every time Jose Canseco got on base, they stood up, cheered, and looked silly. And the umpires? Some of their calls were ridiculous. I'm sure I know more about baseball than they do. As for Peter, I didn't want to force him to go to major-league baseball games any more. I thought I'd let him decide for himself when he got older.

Now, if someone said that, we would think he was crazy. Those reasons are all bogus. And yet, why is it that no one protests when those same objections are raised concerning church? Those are the exact reasons people give for not going to church: "People are too fanatical and too hypocritical; the pastor talks too much about money, and he didn't call on me; the people weren't friendly. I'll let my own kids decide eventually."

Our generation, it seems, has rejected church. In fact, I remember seeing a bumper sticker in the '60s that sort of summed up our generational mentality: "Jesus, Yes. Church, No." And a lot of people are in that place. "Yeah, I'm into Jesus, but I'm not into the church. No way."

I'm here to say that I am really into the Church. You might think, *Well of course you are. You're a pastor.* But let me tell you, I am not into the church because I'm a pastor. I am a pastor because I am into the church.

The passage before us in Matthew 16 is very important, for it is the first time Jesus Christ uses the word "church." There is a principle of hermeneutics called the Principle of First Mention, which says: You will usually find key foundational understandings about a subject in the first place it is mentioned. Thus, when Jesus first mentions the church in Matthew 16, we find three reasons why it is essential.

Jesus Takes Pride *in* His Church

. . . Upon this rock I will build my church . . .

Matthew 16:18

The language is important. It speaks of a possessiveness, of an intimacy with us. Jesus didn't say, "I will build a church," or "I'll put up with the Church." He said, "I will build *My* church." Jesus is proud of His people.

> *For both he that sanctifieth [Jesus] and they who are sanctified [us] are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.*
>
> Hebrews 2:11, 12

The writer of Hebrews declares Jesus is proud of us. Not ashamed of us, He sings praise to the Father right along with us in the midst of the congregation. Why isn't He ashamed of us? Because He sees our potential. When Jesus first called Peter, He said, "I call you Petros, "Small Rock," because I'm going to change you from one who is unsteady to someone who's solid, stable, and useful." Jesus doesn't see us with our present flaws, but in our potential usefulness.

Secondly, He sees us prophetically. Because we are already seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), He sees us as already perfected.

Thirdly, He sees us positionally. Jesus sees us robed in His righteousness and washed with His blood. Our sins, failures, and shortcomings are completely out of His sight and gone from His memory.

So He looks at us potentially, prophetically, and positionally, and He sees us as perfect. Incredible! This past week the Lord has dealt very deeply in my own heart along these lines, telling me to look not on the outward appearance, but on the heart—the way He looks at me. I have discovered I have a tendency to judge people according to their actions, but to judge myself according to my intentions. And the Lord spoke to my heart, saying,

“Jon, your world would be a whole lot sweeter if you reversed that. Judge yourself by what you do, but judge others by what they meant.” Wouldn’t it be radical if we looked at people that way? At their intentions rather than their actions? That’s the way Jesus looks at His church. He says, “I see your hearts, and I’m proud of you.”

Jesus Prevails *Through* His Church

. . . And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Matthew 16:18

For many years, a lot of us thought that the church was a refuge, a fortress where we could hole up until the Lord came back. The gates of hell would not prevail against us if we huddled together within the church singing, "Hold the Fort till the Lord Comes." But that's not what Jesus meant. Gates don't prevail in and of themselves. How many of you have ever been attacked by a gate?

No. Jesus is saying, "The gates of hell will not hold back My church. I am going to prevail through My church. I will storm the gates of hell, where people have been held in bondage, where there has been darkness, discouragement, disease, and death. I will prevail through My church." When Jesus wants to touch someone in love or talk to someone about salvation, He storms the gates of hell through us, His church.

Jesus Protects *by* His Church

> *And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt lose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*
>
> Matthew 16:19

Dr. Kenneth Wuest gives this proper translation: "Whatever shalt be loosed on earth shalt be loosed even as it is in heaven." Jesus protects by His church, giving her the keys of His kingdom.

If you look at my wife's key chain, you will see keys identical to those on my key chain. I'm her bridegroom. She's my bride. And she has the same keys I do. Why? Because we share authority. We rule together over our Volkswagen fleet and our house. We are one.

So, too, Jesus Christ, the Head, has given His bride, the church, the keys to His kingdom. What does this mean? In Matthew 18 and John 20, this same concept is reiterated. Matthew 18 deals with relationships, while John 20 deals with the forgiveness and the retaining of sin. What Jesus is saying is, "I'm giving authority to the church, to bring together or to loosen, even as it is happening in heaven."

If people within the church are having problems with one another, they are to work them out individually. But if they can't, it's a matter for the church to deal with corporately. It's not that we make those decrees ourselves, but through the Word by the Spirit, the church can speak with authority, unlocking God's truth and revealing God's heart. You see, those who say, "I don't need church. I'll just do my own thing. I've got my own ideas about the gospel and about worship," are vulnerable to anyone who comes along saying, "Let's go to Guyana, or to Waco, and we'll start a whole new movement. Who cares about church history? Who cares about theology? Who cares about collegiality? We'll do our own thing."

That's what happened with Jim Jones and David Koresh. Hundreds were killed because they strayed from the protection that comes from the church, the authority of binding and loosing. And thus, there was death. Any Christian who ignores the church will become vulnerable to needless bruises and

wounds. The question then arises, “Why have so many people in our generation rejected the church?” I suggest one reason:

Jesus Is Not the Priority *of* His Church

Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

Matthew 16:13

Jesus had come to Caesarea Philippi, which is located twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee. At Caesarea Philippi, where the waters of the Jordan begin, there is a massive rock face—sort of like a miniature El Capitan. It's one of the prettiest spots I've seen anywhere in the world. There, Jesus gathered His boys and asked this question: "Whom do men say I am?"

His disciples then repeated the theories concerning Him that were floating around Israel.

"Some say You're John the Baptist."

> John the Baptist came on the scene, saying, "Repent! The kingdom of God is at hand. You soldiers, quit oppressing the people. You tax collectors, quit extorting from the people. You fathers, be good to your children. Get it together. Repent."
>
> When Jesus appeared, He began His ministry with the same words: Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. So, reasoned some, because of His moral teaching and call to repentance, Jesus must be John the Baptist, returned from the dead.

Others said, "No. He's Elijah, returned from heaven."

> Haven't you seen the miracles He's done? The lepers are cleansed. The blind see. The lame walk. Miracles happen. He must be Elijah.

Others said, "No. He's Jeremiah."

> Haven't you seen the care He shows to the lost, how they move His heart, how He weeps over them? He must be Jeremiah, the weeping prophet who cared so tenderly for the lost sheep of Israel.

"No," others said. "He must be *that* Prophet," referring to the prophet promised in Deuteronomy 18:15, who would come and fully explain the Law of Moses.

Scripture records that the people marveled at the gracious words of Jesus, saying, "No man speaks like this man." Truly, the common people heard Him gladly. Surely He must be "*that* Prophet."

As I look around the Rogue Valley in Oregon, the country, and the world, I see churches built upon one of those four misconceptions.

There are those who say, "We're going to build our church on John the Baptist. That's who Jesus is. We'll call it First Moral Majority Church. We'll tell our community to repent. We'll picket 7–11. We'll write our congressman. We'll organize and let our voice be heard in the community. We'll tell people to get it together morally. And we'll meet together to activate believers, to mobilize Christians, to get them going."

Others say, "No, no, no. Our church is going to be built upon Elijah. That's who Jesus is. We'll call our church Miracle Center. It will be filled with miracles, signs, and wonders. People will see the glory and power of God fall at every single meeting. It's going to be heavy!"

Others say, "No, no, no. Our church is going to be built upon Jeremiah. That's who Jesus is. We'll call our church The Evangelical Expression. We'll have a million-dollar mission budget. We'll offer classes in door-to-door evangelism. We'll spread throughout the community, expand throughout the world globally, and we'll reach the world evangelistically. Like Jeremiah, we'll weep over the lost."

"No, no, no," others say. "Our church is going to be built upon That Prophet. We'll have three-hour marathon Bible studies Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday nights. We'll have seminars and syllabi. We'll become hermeneutically flawless, exegetically excellent. We'll offer Hebrew, Greek, Chaldean, and Aramaic. We'll parse each verb. We'll know each doctrine thoroughly. We'll become a great teaching center."

Look at our text. Jesus responded to none of these suggestions. It was only when Peter said, "Thou art the Christ—the Christos, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Son of the living God,"—that Jesus said, "Upon *this* rock I'll build My church."

The church—not a platform for ministry, political activity, or intellectual curiosity—which simply says, "We want to know Jesus personally," is the church Jesus will build. When people say, "Jesus, You're not simply a motivator for us politically, a teacher to us intellectually, a power for us miraculously, or a program for us in mission ministry. You're everything. You're all there is. We just want to know You. We want to love You. We want to walk with You, learn about You, and become more like You," Jesus will build His church upon their confession.

And when a group of people come together and say, "Jesus, we love You. We're impressed with You. We want to learn of You and walk with You," guess what happens? The community around such a group begins to change.

A sheriff in Jackson County, Oregon, who was not a believer wrote me saying that as far as he is concerned, Applegate Christian Fellowship was the best thing that ever happened to curb the drug problem there in the Applegate Valley because so many of the top drug producers in the valley have become converts. Were we marching against marijuana? Were we politically active? No. It's just that wherever Jesus is, the surroundings will be influenced very definitely.

Where Jesus builds His Church, there will be signs and wonders. Power will be experienced—not with fanfare or for itself—but in a supernaturally, natural way.

Where Jesus is the Christos, loved and honored, there will be evangelism, not because of a need to be a part of some program for ego gratification, but rather because people will *want* to share what they have discovered in Christ. They will be in love with Him and will find themselves talking about Him, taking every opportunity to share the One who means so much to them.

The person who is rock-solid in this life and on into eternity will be the one who says, "Jesus, it's You personally. Not ministry. Not study. Not anything but You. I appreciate You, I love You, and I'm committing myself to You. Jesus, You're everything to me."

That's my prayer for us. That's my prayer for you.

In Jesus' Name.

17 At the close of chapter 16, Jesus told His disciples that some of them would see the Kingdom before they died. Over the centuries, many have suggested that since all of the disciples died without witnessing His return, Jesus was amiss when He said this. Thus, they conclude, Jesus was actually fallible. Of course, this is blasphemy, for chapter 17 opens with three of His disciples about to see the glory of the kingdom . . .

Matthew 17:1

And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart.

Once again, we see Jesus calling His disciples apart. It has been often said that if we don't come apart, we'll fall apart. We need to get away from the trials and the daily routine of life to retreat into a "high mountain" where we can be apart with Jesus lest we fall apart under the pressures of the world. Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the mountain. Scripture records three times when Jesus took these same three and ministered to them in very unique ways. Interestingly, each of those occasions dealt with death.

The first time Jesus singled out Peter, James, and John, He took them into the house of a man whose daughter had died. After moving out the mockers, Jesus brought the young girl back to life, and Peter, James, and John saw that He was victorious over *death* (Luke 8:49–55).

On a second occasion, Jesus would take them into the Garden of Gethsemane. As He prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not My will but thine be done," Peter, James, and John would understand that He was submitted to *death* (see Matthew 26:37–39).

And here in Matthew 17, Jesus takes the three up the mountain where they will see Him glorified in *death.*

I believe Peter, James, and John needed these special times of instruction concerning death because these three disciples would each have a very unique encounter with death.

Peter would be the first disciple to be told of his death. In John 21, Jesus said, "Peter, they're going to stretch out your hands and carry you where you don't want to go." And that is exactly what happened when Peter was crucified upside down.

James would be the first disciple put to death, sawed in half lengthwise by his persecutors.

John would be the last of the disciples to die. Banished to the seemingly God-forsaken island of Patmos, it was a ninety-year-old John who received the Book of Revelation.

The Lord uniquely prepared Peter, James, and John for what each of them would face. And He will do the same for you. He will prepare you through Bible studies, radio programs, friends, and books for what lies ahead for you personally. It's amazing to me how I'll study or hear something only to discover a week later that a situation arises in which I need that exact information. Remain sensitive to His voice, and then see the Lord's faithfulness in preparing you for the future.

Matthew 17:2 (a)
And was transfigured before them . . .

The Greek word translated "transfigured" is *metamorphoo,* from which we get our word "metamorphosis"—the same word used to describe what happens to a caterpillar inside a cocoon.

Matthew 17:2 (b)
. . . and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

After Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai, his face began to shine. But as time went on, it began to fade because the glory of Moses was a reflected glory (2 Corinthians 3:13). Jesus, on the other hand, shone not with a reflected glory, but with a radiant glory. As the Light of the world, the light emanated from within Himself (John 8:12).

Matthew 17:3–4 (a)

And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here . . .

Days earlier, as Jesus talked about suffering and death, Peter said, "Lord, be it far from Thee. This shall not be" (see Matthew 16:21, 22). Here, however, as he sees the glory of the Transfiguration, even though death was again the topic of conversation (Luke 9:31), Peter says, "Wow! It's good that we're here."

Matthew 17:4 (b)

. . . if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

This is one of many arguments against reincarnation. Moses and Elijah returned not as cows, butterflies, or someone else living in some other time. They returned as Moses and Elijah. It is also interesting to me that Peter recognized them instantly. There is no record of a formal introduction, no record of Jesus saying, "Peter, meet Moses. Moses, Peter. Elijah, Peter. Peter, Elijah." No, there was simply immediate recognition. This tells me that when we get to heaven, we'll recognize everyone there. No need for introductions, no need for nametags, and no forgetting of names. Won't that be wonderful?

Matthew 17:5

While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

"Peter, I'm going to interrupt you once again," said God the Father from the cloud over the mountain. "You want to build three booths, but you can't put the Law and the Prophets on the same plane as My Son."

Matthew 17:6, 7

And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.

Whereas the voice of God knocks people down in brokenness, Jesus Christ—the Word made flesh—picks them up with tenderness. As I listen to the voice of God thundering from Mount Sinai, "Thou Shalt Not," I fall on my face in humility. Then Jesus comes and says, "Arise. Be not afraid." I'm so thankful for Jesus Christ. Were it not for Him, I would still be on my face. So would you. He is our salvation.

Matthew 17:8

And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

They saw Jesus only. That's the key. May we not try to keep the law. May we not try to follow the prophets. May we have eyes for Jesus only.

The Transfiguration verifies that for thirty-three years, Jesus moved through life flawlessly. He was tempted in all points as we are, yet remained without sin (Hebrews 4:15). And here He is, radiant in His transfiguration. I firmly believe that, had He so chosen, Jesus could have launched right off that mountain into heaven, saying, "So long, gang. I came and showed you that man can live sinlessly. Don't condemn or indict Me for giving you an impossible task. I came and proved it could be done." At that point, the world would have been damned, and God could not have been held accountable for being unfair. But instead of launching into heaven, what did Jesus do? He came down from Mount Hermon to climb Mount Calvary.

Matthew 17:9, 10

And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead. And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?

Malachi prophesied that Elijah would come before Messiah appeared (4:5). Believing Jesus to be Messiah, the disciples asked Him why Elijah hadn't yet made his appearance.

Matthew 17:11–13

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

Elijah had already come—in the spirit and power of John the Baptist.

Matthew 17:14, 15 (a)

And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatic, and sore vexed . . .

The word "lunatic" literally means "smitten by the moon." People in Eastern cultures believed that the moon shining on one's face would drive a person crazy. Perhaps it was in reference to this belief that the Lord made a beautiful promise in Psalm 121:6 to be our covering by night.

Matthew 17:15 (b)

. . . for ofttimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.

This man's son was falling into the fire and into the water in an attempt to kill himself. So too, we see a dramatic rise in teenage suicide today. The

solution to teenage suicide begins with the understanding that it is a spiritual rather than a social problem.

Even *Woman's Day* magazine, a secular publication states: "For many teenagers, Satan has become part of their daily lives. Rock lyrics glorify him. Werewolves leer from T-shirts. Satanic symbols decorate jewelry. Some kids just want to shock adults, but for a disturbed many, the attraction to satanic ritual is great and deadly."

Matthew 17:16 (a)
And I brought him to thy disciples . . .

Realizing his son was in trouble, this dad did a very wise thing. He brought his boy to Jesus.

Matthew 17:16 (b)
. . . and they could not cure him.

I appreciate this father because he didn't give up, even though the disciples were unable to help. So often people say, "I took my kid to see this therapist, that counselor, or that minister, but nothing's happening. I quit." This dad didn't. And his persistence was soon to be rewarded.

Matthew 17:17, 18

Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.

Mom and Dad, you have the responsibility to bring your child to Jesus. Pray for him constantly. Talk to him continually. Bring him to fellowship regularly. How many must die before we understand that the solution lies not in dealing with the drug lords in Columbia or banning music through legislation in Washington? The solution lies in bringing our kids to Jesus.

Matthew 17:19, 20

Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

"Why couldn't *we* cast out the demon?" the disciples asked.

"Lack of faith," Jesus said. "If you had believed in your heart, spoken with your mouth, and expected things to happen, the landscape would have changed. Mountains would have moved."

Matthew 17:21
Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

Mark this, Mom and Dad; remember this, Grandma and Grandpa next time your child or grandchild is in trouble: There is a powerful interaction between prayer and fasting. Prayer attaches us to God; fasting detaches us from the flesh. The disciples, no doubt, would have been thinking, *This kind does not go out but by prayer and fasting? How were* we *to know we would be faced with a lunatic? We didn't have time for prayer and fasting!* And that's exactly the point. Jesus is calling for a lifestyle of prayer and fasting, not an emergency session. Had the disciples been praying and fasting all along, they could have spoken the word of faith that would have resulted in deliverance and salvation.

Maybe you're smugly saying, "I'm glad my son, daughter, or grandchildren don't have problems." Please be wiser than that, dear people, because we do not know the battles they're facing or the strategy of the enemy being plotted in the boardroom of hell for their souls. Satan is a master strategist who invades the lives of our loved ones at the most opportune times—perhaps when we least expect it. Prayer and fasting should be a part of our lifestyle because we don't know what tomorrow holds.

If I hear Jesus right, He's saying, "It's too late to pray and fast when the emergency is before you. You must develop a life of prayer and fasting so that when the problem surfaces, you're already prepared." I am reminded of

Job. Every morning, he sacrificed an ox for each one of his kids because "It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts" (see Job 1:5).

What a glorious privilege we have as parents. We can do more than just hope our kids aren't sucked into drugs or into demonic activity. We can seek the Father fervently. We can fast and pray faithfully. We can take our kids to Jesus continually.

Why weren't the disciples praying and fasting? A possible answer is that they were jealous and had let down their guard, saying, "How come Peter, James, and John always get to see the miracles? Why should we even bother praying? It's obvious Jesus has His favorites." Maybe you feel the same way from time to time. Maybe you wonder why the Lord seems to use everyone else but you. And if you're not careful, that's when you stop praying and fasting. Then the moment comes when you need the power of the Spirit, faith in your heart, weaponry for warfare—and you come up empty.

Matthew 17:22, 23

And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.

The disciples were "exceeding sorry" because they only heard part of the story. They heard Jesus say He would be betrayed and killed, but they didn't hear Him say the third day He would be raised again. All they heard was death, betrayal, and tragedy. And that's just like us. When someone dies, my first response is one of deep grief and sorrow. While that's understandable, it's only part of the story. If that person knew the Lord, he is in heaven. He is where we long to be. Sorrow and grief are completely understandable responses to tragedy. But if we take into account the whole story, there will also be glory.

Matthew 17:24

And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay

tribute?

As they entered Capernaum, tax collectors approached the disciples. They were not raising money for the Roman Empire or for the political system. They were collecting the temple tax. You see, in Jesus' day, the ministry of the temple was not supported by the tithes and offerings of the people. Rather, as outlined in Exodus 30, every man twenty years of age and older was to pay a half-shekel of silver for atonement lest plague come upon him. This has caused no little controversy in theological circles. Was the law suggesting that a person could buy his salvation? Isn't salvation a free gift? Salvation is indeed free to us, but it was costly for Jesus. Silver being the metal of redemption, the temple tax speaks of the fact that, although salvation is free to us, it cost Jesus His life.

Matthew 17:25 (a)

He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him . . .

When Peter was on the mountain, the voice of the Father interrupted him. Here in the house, he's interrupted by the Son. I hope you're "interrupt-able." I hope whether you're on the mountain or in the house, the Father and the Son can interrupt your thoughts and activities lest you become dogmatic and rigid.

Matthew 17:25 (b)

. . . saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?

"Tell me, Simon, who does a king tax?" Jesus asked Peter. "Does he tax the strangers—the citizens of the empire—or does he go through the castle knocking on his kids' doors, saying, 'Pay up, kids. We've got to keep this kingdom going'?" The answer is obvious. No king taxes his own children. He taxes the strangers, the citizens of the nation.

Matthew 17:26

Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.

In other words, Jesus said to Peter, "Should we be taxed if I am the King and you are My child? Does that make sense?"

Matthew 17:27 (a)

Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook . . .

"Peter, go throw your line in." This command in itself would have been most curious because professional fishermen like Peter didn't use a hook and line. That was rookie equipment. It would be like Jose Canseco using a batting tee. *Real* fishermen used nets and boats. But Peter humbly obeyed. And I can see him walking along the shore, carrying his little pole and tackle box, as his colleagues looked at each other and whispered, "What's he doing?"

Matthew 17:27 (b)

. . . and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

"Open the mouth of the first fish you catch, Peter, and you'll find a stater —a full shekel—enough tax for you and for Me," Jesus said. Thus, tucked away in this chapter that spans the heights of the Transfiguration and the depths of the Cross, we find this simple story about a fisherman, a fish, and a coin.



For topical study of Matthew 17:27, see "The Fisherman Casting His Care" below.

THE FISHERMAN
CASTING HIS CARE
A Topical Study of
MATTHEW 17:27

The passage before us speaks to me in a number of ways and interests me on several levels. First of all, it is the only miracle Jesus ever did that dealt with money.

Second, it is the only miracle through which He did something for Himself. All too often, Christian TV and current books on faith say, "Want your needs met? Plant a seed in our ministry and watch what will happen to you financially." Folks, that's the opposite of what Jesus said and did. Although He had the power and authority to turn stones to bread, He refused to cater to His own needs (Matthew 4:3, 4).

Third, this was the only miracle Jesus did that dealt with a single fish. Other times Jesus did miracles with fish, it was always with multitudes of fish as His disciples either hauled them in (Luke 5:6) or gave them out (Matthew 14:19). Many commentators try to explain away the feeding of the five thousand by saying that the multitude was fed simply by people sharing the lunches they had packed. So, too, had Peter used a net in the account before us, commentators would probably say, "As Peter was fishing, he caught some fish, an old boot, and a few coins in his net. Therefore, the miracle of the coin and the fish was nothing more than the beautiful miracle of God's provision in the commonplace." But because Peter used a hook and a line and caught one fish with one shekel in its mouth, there's no way to rationalize such a miracle.

Fourth, the Lord provided the coin in the fish solely for Peter. It was one of a number of miracles done specifically for him.

Healing of His Mother-in-Law

We read in Mark that so complete was Peter's mother-in-law's healing, she immediately began to minister to those around her (Mark 1:31). So, too, maybe you've seen a lot of activity at church—people directing traffic on rainy mornings, tending crying babies in the nursery; or counseling into the wee hours of the morning. "Are they crazy?" you wonder. No, they're not crazy. They've simply been touched by the Lord. He removed the fear and the fever of eternal damnation when He saved their souls. Thus, like Peter's mother-in-law, they have no other choice but to serve Him by ministering to others.

A Boatload of Fish

Luke tells us that when pressed by the crowds while teaching on the seashore, Jesus borrowed Peter's boat (Luke 5:3). Using the water as a natural amplifier, He spoke from the boat to the crowd gathered on the shore. When He had finished speaking, He said, "Here's your boat back, Peter. Launch out into the deep and let down your nets." So Peter sailed to the deep, let down his nets, and the haul was so large that the boat almost sank.

What does this tell me? First, it tells me we can't outgive God. If you give to Him of your resources, your energy, your ability, or your money, He'll never "owe you one." If you let Him borrow your boat, He'll fill it with fish. Second, it tells me that the Lord will sometimes whisper in my ear, "Launch out to the deep. Go deeper than you've gone before in faith, in understanding, in praise, and in prayer. Go deeper. That's where the fish are."

Could that be a word from the Lord for you? Could the Lord be saying to some of you right now, "Launch out into the deep water. Go deeper in Me"?

Walking on Water

> Crossing the Sea of Galilee, Peter and the disciples were struggling in a storm when suddenly Someone came towards them, walking on the water.
>
> "It's a ghost!" they cried.
>
> "Be of good cheer," Jesus said. "It is I. Be not afraid."
>
> "If that's You, Lord, bid me come," said Peter.
>
> "Come, Peter," answered Jesus.
>
> Peter climbed out of the boat and began to walk on water. But you know the story. As soon as he took his eyes off Jesus, he began to sink.
>
> "Lord, save me," he cried. And Jesus stretched out His hand, grabbed Peter, and put him back in the boat (see Matthew 14).

I like this story because sometimes I get tired of the boat I'm in and weary of the disciples with whom I'm rowing. "Lord, get me out of here," I cry. "Even if it means going out where the waves are pounding and the wind is howling, get me out of this boat. I'll go anywhere." Sometimes I step out on my own and sink down in the waves only to have the Lord pick me up and put me right back in the same boat. As a result, I'm beginning to learn that God puts us in fixes to fix us. And if I get out of the boat to try to fix the fix God put me in, He'll have to put me in another fix to fix the fix He wanted to fix in the first place!

A Sword and an Ear

Jesus had taken Peter, James, and John into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray with Him the night before His crucifixion. But having fallen asleep, they were awakened by the sounds of Roman soldiers marching. Before Jesus could say, "Peter, put away your sword," Peter had sliced off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant. Jesus then picked up the severed ear and placed it back on the side of Malchus' head (John 18).

I wonder how many times we use the sword of the Spirit and hurt people in the process. How many times do we quote Scripture and recite verses only to bloody and beat people with our spirituality? If you've unsheathed your sword to cause hurt and damage to others, put it away. The last miracle Jesus ever performed was to heal one who had been hurt by the sword of His own disciple.

Praise, Prayer, and Peace

Some time later, we meet Peter again in another very difficult situation. In Acts 12, we read that Herod had sawn James, the brother of John, in half lengthwise. When Herod saw that this pleased the Jews, he imprisoned Peter as well. In other words, Peter was about to die. Yet we read that he was asleep between two guards—sound asleep and at peace. How could this be when the next day he knew he would either be sawn in half or beheaded?

Peter would later pen these words: "Casting all your care upon him for He careth for you" (see 1 Peter 5:7). The Greek word translated "cast" is a word that describes the process of rolling a heavy object like a stone or a wheel up a hill. Thus, "casting our care" means rolling our care upon Him. Now, if you roll a rock up a hill, what will happen? The rock will roll down again. People say, "I've prayed about that problem. I've rolled it upon Him. Why does it keep returning?"

Listen carefully. Scripture declares that "casting" is a process that happens continually. That is, you roll your care upon Him, and then it comes rolling back. You roll it on Him again, and it comes rolling back. You have peace for an hour, a day, or a month, and then you're troubled, perplexed, and anxious again. Why does God want us to roll our cares upon Him if they're only going to roll back upon us?

The story is told that centuries ago, in the city of Athens, there lived a man named Milo who was the strongest man in the world. How did he get so strong? When he was a young man, one of his cows gave birth to a calf. Every day, Milo picked up that calf, put it on his shoulders, and walked around his property. At first, it was relatively easy. But every day the calf got bigger and bigger, until one day, Milo was carrying an ox on his shoulders. You see, as sure as the calf was growing, so was Milo's strength and stamina.

I'm convinced the Lord wants us to be spiritual Milos. He says, "I'm going to allow this problem to come rolling back on you after a day or two because I want you to keep pushing it toward Me. And every time you do—as you commune with Me, wait upon Me, and talk to Me—you will gain strength. So keep rolling."

Clovis Chapman, a pioneer aviator, was one of the first men to attempt a solo flight around the world. During his journey, after a brief stop in Fremont, California, he heard the sound of gnawing directly behind him. Listening carefully, Clovis realized there was a rat in the cockpit, chewing on a cable. Knowing he couldn't leave the controls to catch the rat, he thought, "My cables will be destroyed. It's all over." But then he had an idea. Pulling the throttle back, the plane rose to five thousand feet and then to ten thousand feet. At twelve thousand feet, Clovis listened and heard nothing. You see, remembering rodents need a high proportion of oxygen, he took his plane where the oxygen was thin, and the rat died.

That's what it means to cast your care upon Him. When you feel a rat gnawing within you, an anxiety overwhelming you, or a concern or a burden pressing on you, kick back and cruise up. In the rarefied atmosphere of praise and prayer, the enemy can't survive. That's what Peter found as he lay sound asleep between two guards.

Truly the Lord does care for me, he must have thought. *My mother-in-law was sick and He healed her. I wasn't catching any fish, and He filled my boat. I gave the wrong answer to some tax collectors, and He got me out of that jam. I chopped off someone's ear when I shouldn't have, and He healed it. And now that I'm in prison, I'll just trust Him. He's seen me through time and time and time again. So I'll just cast my care upon Him.*

And so can you.

18 In chapter 17, the disciples saw Jesus shine miraculously with kingdom light. Here in chapter 18, they will hear Him speak practically about kingdom life.

Matthew 18:1

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

According to Luke 9:46, the disciples here are actually arguing about who is the greatest in the kingdom of which they had just been given a sneak preview.

Matthew 18:2

And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them.

This shows me something of the personality and character of Jesus. He called a little child to Him, and the child came readily. If you go to the mall and watch parents lining up their kids to sit on Santa's lap, you will invariably see tears and terror on the faces of the children. Told to sit on the lap of a big man with a big beard and black boots, it's no wonder they're fearful! But there is never an indication that kids were afraid of Jesus. There was something pure, gentle, and lovely about Him that made children come to Him rather than run from Him.

Matthew 18:3

And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

"You're asking who is the greatest?" Jesus said. "Unless you become like a child, you will not enter into the kingdom." How were the disciples to be childlike? First, they were to be childlike in sincerity. The word "sincere" literally means "without wax" and referred to the practice of merchants in Bible times who patched broken or chipped pieces of pottery with wax. If a vessel was not "sincere," an unsuspecting buyer would take it home and put it on his front porch only to see the wax melt and the vessel break in the heat of the sun.

Second, the disciples were to be childlike in sensitivity.

I remember once when Peter-John was about six, I was somewhat upset with him. Trying to control my feelings as best I could, I began to talk with him. "Daddy, you're mad," he said.

"No, I'm not, Peter," I argued.

"Well, your eyebrows, they're mad," he said.

Kids are sensitive indeed. They can read us like a book!

Finally, the disciples were to be childlike in simplicity.

I read about a kindergarten class on a field trip to the post office. As the postmaster pointed out the pictures of the Ten Most Wanted Men in America, one of the kids said, "Those are criminals?"

"Yes," answered the postmaster.

"Bad guys?"

"That's right."

"Well, then, why didn't you just keep them when you took their pictures?"

Those childlike qualities of sincerity, sensitivity, and simplicity are key ingredients of kingdom life. David wrote in Psalm 131, "I will not look into things that are too great for me, but will behave myself quietly as a weaned child." In other words, "I'm not going to get spun out or hung up on things that are too lofty or too great. Like a weaned child, I'll just keep it simple." A weaned child is neither an infant screaming for milk nor an adult checking out the refrigerator wondering who's going to pay the bills. A weaned child neither cries nor analyzes. He simply trusts that his father and mother will take care of him. And that quality is what Jesus held up to the disciples as a model.

Matthew 18:4

Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

We must guard against the tendencies of cynicism and sophistication and remain like children if we want to be great in the kingdom.

A distinguished elderly gentleman walked into a toy store and saw a Lionel train going around the track. With a sparkle in his eye, he

said to the salesgirl, "I'll take one."

"Oh, your grandson will love it!" she replied.

"You know, you're absolutely right!" he said. "Make that two."

There is something good, Jesus is saying, about retaining a childlike mentality.

At a testimony meeting, a multimillionaire said, "When I was eighteen years old, I heard a missionary speak about the need in Africa. Having recently given my heart to Jesus, I was touched deeply and reached into my pocket for the last five dollars I had to my name. That was the turning point in my walk with God, and He has blessed me ever since."

"Ooh" and "Aaah," said the congregation, until one elderly sister stood up in the back row and said, "I dare you to do it again."

We might say, "Oh yes, there was a time when I was like a child. When I first heard the gospel, I approached Jesus simply and openly as I came forward at a meeting." Do it again! That's what Jesus is saying here. We need to be in the place where we're continually excited about the Word and enjoying the gospel in its simplicity and beauty. Jesus said if you want to be great in the kingdom, humble yourself as a child once again.

Matthew 18:5

And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

A number of years ago, a Scottish pastor stood before his congregation and resigned, saying, "In the past two years, I have seen only one conversion in this congregation: wee Bobby Moffatt. With such little fruit, I can no longer serve in this ministry." And he walked away from the pulpit a broken man. Little did he know that wee Bobby Moffatt grew up to be Robert Moffatt, the missionary who opened the entire continent of Africa to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If you are teaching Sunday school right now, it's very possible that you have a "wee Bobby Moffatt" in your class. If you work with kids, realize that Jesus places a very high value on children. He says if you receive them, you receive Him.

Matthew 18:6

But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

I believe this verse should be written on every schoolteacher's desk. The word "offend" means "to throw off course." In other words, Jesus says, "If you cause one of these little ones to question Me or to be thrown off course in their walk with Me, it would be better for you to drown." This would have made a definite impact on Jesus' audience because the Jewish people of that time had a genuine fear of the open ocean. Yes, they were fishermen, but only on the Sea of Galilee. The Jews have never been a seafaring people. In fact, unlike other coastal countries of their day, they refused to use drowning as capital punishment because of their fear of the sea. Thus, Jesus was giving a very vivid and very real description of terror. "If you cause these little guys to stumble," He said, "you're in grave danger."

Matthew 18:7

Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

The first "woe" is a lamentation. The second one is a condemnation. In other words, Jesus said, "Problems in this world are inevitable. But if people are being derailed in their faith because of your cynicism and unbelief, woe unto you."

Matthew 18:8, 9

Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into

everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

"Take heed," Jesus said. "If something you are doing causes offense, deal violently with it. Get it away from you no matter what the price or how painful it may be."

Matthew 18:10

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

Here is where we get the understanding that each child has a guardian angel. Paul points out that when we get to heaven, we will actually judge angels (I Corinthians 6:3). I wonder if part of that might include asking the angel who was "assigned" to you, "Where were you when that baseball hit me in the head?!"

Matthew 18:11

For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

Children are lost so easily and disoriented so quickly. Continuing on that theme, Jesus begins to talk about His concern for those who are truly lost—not those who pretend to know where they're going and what they're doing, but those who humbly acknowledge that they're lost and hurting.

Matthew 18:12–14

How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

This analogy provides some interesting insights into our Lord. First, it tells me that His love is absolutely unconditional. Notice that although the lost sheep was one who had strayed, the shepherd didn't say, "That dumb sheep was off wandering where he shouldn't be. Why wasn't he with the rest of the flock? Well, maybe he'll learn a lesson out there." No, his love was independent of the obedience of the sheep.

So, too, whether you are staying or straying, God's love for you is absolutely unconditional. Then why not stray? Because there are problems out there: wolves, poisonous weeds, and all kinds of dangers that could bruise and break us. Slowly but surely, we're learning that it's safest to stay close to the Shepherd.

Second, His love is individual. He loves each of us as if there were only one of us. I tend to think, "Lord, You have millions and millions of sheep. Billy's always talking to You and working on the next crusade. Mother Teresa, while alive, was up at four o'clock in the morning talking with You daily. And then there's me—the dumb sheep who's strayed." But I'm beginning to understand that the Lord sees people individually. He would have sent His prophets and apostles and recorded the Scriptures just for me. He would have sent His Son just for me. He would have died just for me.

Finally, His love is emotional. When He finds the wandering, straying sheep, what does He do? Does He rebuke him? Lecture him? Shake him? Skin him? No, the Word says He *rejoices*. When we wander away, and the Lord comes after us and finds us, there follows an emotional outburst not of anger but of joy. He gathers the straying sheep in His arms and rejoices greatly because He loves him deeply.

Keep in mind that this illustration is all in answer to the question: Who is the greatest? Jesus said, "Check out this little child." That's the key. You'll not only enter the kingdom, but you'll be elevated within the kingdom as you continue to humble yourself.

Humility confuses a lot of us because we mistakenly think it means thinking less of ourselves. It doesn't. Humility is not a matter of thinking less of yourself. It's a matter of not thinking of yourself at all. There's a big difference. My saying, "I can't sing. I can't play guitar. I can't fix my car. I can't do anything," is not humility. It's pride because it's egocentric. I'm talking and thinking about me, me, me.

When the Lord called him, Moses said, "No one will listen to me because I stutter."

"Who made your mouth, Moses?" asked the Lord. "I will be with you. Quit stuttering about yourself and look to Me" (see Exodus 4:10–12).

Matthew 18:15–17

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

The first aspect of kingdom life is humility. The second is honesty. If I say I love you, but don't talk with you in honesty when you trespass against me because I'm afraid you won't like me, my love is not real. That would be like a doctor who notices a lump on your body but doesn't want to hurt your feelings by telling you that you need surgery. Love without truth is hypocrisy. But truth without love is brutality. If I speak the truth without love, I leave folks bruised, bloodied, and beaten.

The key is to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). If there's a trespass, a problem, or a difficulty between us, love requires me to lovingly speak to you about it personally. If you won't listen to what I say about the sin or the trespass, I am to come to you again, bringing one or two witnesses with me. If you won't hear them, I am to go to the church. And if you won't listen to the church, you are to be treated as an outcast. Why? It's not for punishment, but for reconciliation. It's not punitive, but restorative. In chapter 5 of Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, he gives the account of a man who, although he was living with his stepmother in immorality, refused to take correction. Paul told the church at Corinth to turn him over to Satan that his flesh might be destroyed but his spirit saved. In other words, "Let him live in the world for a while until he gets so sick of it that his flesh will be destroyed. Then, hopefully he'll come around again and be saved." And that's exactly what happened. He did indeed turn from his sin and return to

the Church (2 Corinthians 7:11, 12). Why? Because the church took a strong stand and said, "This can't go on."

Matthew 18:18

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Jesus is saying, "Church, it's your job to bind sin. Sin is bound in heaven. Therefore you have authority to bind it on earth. Righteousness and holiness, mercy and forgiveness are released in heaven. Therefore you have been given authority to release them on earth." Binding and loosing speak of the authority the Church has in dealing with matters where sin is flagrantly, consistently, and obnoxiously practiced. As seen in 1 Corinthians 5, the church has the right to bind sin and then to release forgiveness and restoration following repentance.

Matthew 18:19

Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

Private prayer is wonderful but I also believe that we need consistent times of prayer with others. Why? First of all, praying with others is motivating. You will pray more if you're involved in a prayer group than you would otherwise. It's like working out. If you work out by yourself, it's real easy to miss week after week. But if three or four guys are working out with you, they provide motivation for you to continue. The same is true of prayer.

Second, praying with others is purifying. When I'm praying in a group, I don't pray selfishly as I can do in my private prayer. In a group, I can't pray, "Lord, smash that guy. Teach that jerk a lesson." That kind of thing just doesn't flow when I'm praying in a circle.

Third, praying with others is confirming. As I pray in a group, if my petition is correct, those around me will say, "Amen, Lord! That's right. Yes,

Lord." But if my request is out to lunch, I'll know by their silence that maybe I should reconsider my petition.

Matthew 18:20

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Keep these words of Jesus in the context of dealing honestly with church matters, relationships, and kingdom life. The church should pulsate with power when it comes to dealing with sin and releasing God's mercy with authority. Too often, however, the church is impotent because she fails to recognize Jesus in her midst. Where the church is moving in the power of prayer and in the authority of binding and loosing, she will make an impact.

Matthew 18:21

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

In kingdom life, there is humility, honesty, and finally, forgiveness. The rabbis taught that one who had been wronged was to forgive the perpetrator two or perhaps three times at the most. So Peter felt noble and generous in asking, "Should I forgive him *seven* times?"

Matthew 18:22

Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Jesus said, "Peter, you are to forgive four hundred and ninety times." Peter must have thought, *Four hundred and ninety? How am I supposed to keep track?* And that was the point. We are to just keep forgiving and forgiving and forgiving and forgiving. Where there is binding and loosing, there must also be a free, unending flow of forgiveness.

Matthew 18:23–35

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

We all know people who are in torment and imprisoned because they will not forgive someone who's wronged them. They're small people in the sense that they're no longer embracive and free. Instead, they're restricted, tormented, uptight, tense, angry, bitter, and harsh. You see, the Lord tells us to forgive not for the sake of the offender, but for the sake of the one who has been offended. Regarding confronting problems, dealing with issues, binding and loosing, Jesus says, "Remember that you are to be a people known for forgiving over and over and over and over and over."

Maybe you see yourself in this story. Maybe you've been hurt so badly that you just can't forgive. Maybe you're imprisoned, robbed of joy and

peace, but you don't know how to get out. The answer lies in this passage. The king commanded that the servant remain in prison until he paid his debt. But how could the servant earn money to pay his debt if he was in prison? The only way he could get out of prison was to go to his master and ask for forgiveness.

If Jesus says we are to be people who forgive over and over again, how much more will our Father forgive us when we go to Him and say, "Forgive me for not forgiving, Lord. Change my heart." And the great thing is that He'll not only forgive, but He'll also forget (Jeremiah 31:34).

- Humility: Getting our eyes off ourselves.
- Honesty: Dealing with problems in a Biblical manner.
- Forgiveness: Forgiving and forgiving until we lose count.

Lord, help us. Be merciful to us in an even greater measure by causing us to live in humility, not as cynics or sophisticates, but as children. I pray that there might be honesty in our lives, that we would care about others in such a way that we might speak the truth in love. Help us, Lord, to be forgiving, even as You are. We confess our bankruptcy and our inability to forgive apart from Your work in our hearts. May the characteristics You spoke of in Galilee become real in our lives.



19 Thus far in Matthew's gospel, we have seen the revelation of the King and the rebellion against the King. Now we come to the retreat of the King as Jesus takes His disciples away for a season of intensive discipleship.

Matthew 19:1

And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan.

Jesus is headed toward Jerusalem, the city wherein He will be crucified, buried, and resurrected.

Matthew 19:2, 3 (a)

And great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there. The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him . . .

As Jesus heals the multitudes, the Pharisees are only interested in arguing with Him. This should not be surprising, for the Pharisaical mentality always wants to debate rather than celebrate.

Matthew 19:3 (b)

. . . and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

The issue of divorce and remarriage was the hot controversy of the day. Two schools of thought proposed by two influential rabbis fueled the debate. Hillel was the liberal rabbi who said that, according to the Law of Moses, there were many justifications for divorce. For example, saying anything negative about her husband's mother would render a wife unclean and justify her husband divorcing her. Or if a husband saw a woman fairer to look upon than his wife, his wife would be unclean by comparison and he would be justified in divorcing her. Needless to say, Hillel had a great following among those looking for a way out of their marriages. Shammai, on the other hand, was very conservative and said there were virtually no grounds for divorce. Thus, the debate concerning divorce and remarriage was as heated as it is in the church today.

Matthew 19:4–6

And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

In answer to their question, Jesus said, “Go back further than the Law of Moses. Go back to the Garden of Eden, for there you will discover the root of the matter.”

Matthew 19:7

They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

In other words, the Pharisees are asking Jesus, “If the union of two who become one is to remain for as long as they live, why does the Old Testament offer the option of divorce at all?”

Matthew 19:8

He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

Jesus answered by saying that the Law of Moses made provision for divorce not because God desired it, but because of the hardness of men’s hearts. Divorce was never God’s heart or God’s intention. But because the people had become so hardened, the Law of Moses allowed this heathen custom of divorce to take place within prescribed boundaries (Deuteronomy 24). Notice, divorce is not mandated in the event of adultery. It is simply allowed. While Jesus is not saying there must be divorce if there is infidelity, He acknowledges that it is possible for a relationship to be dealt a deathblow by infidelity, making it the one ground for divorce.

According to Old Testament Law, the penalty for adultery was not divorce but death. Then came Jesus. In John 8, the Pharisees brought Him a woman who was caught in the act of adultery and He said to her, “I don’t condemn you. I forgive you and free you to a better way of living. Go your way and sin no more.” Though the law came by Moses, grace and truth indeed came by Jesus (John 1:17).

Matthew 19:9

And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

Jesus is saying, "Divorce, not the result of adultery results in adultery if there is remarriage." This raises all kinds of questions. What if a person falls into trouble and difficulty in his marriage when he's twenty years old, and, after going through twenty-five years of being single and walking with the Lord, he meets someone special and wants to get married? If he does so, will the couple live in adultery? Is adultery the unpardonable sin? Is divorce the unpardonable sin? To answer, look at perhaps the most famous marital failure in history, a man after God's own heart, a man named David.

After his affair with Bathsheba, David killed her husband to cover his sin. God dealt with David by allowing the child conceived to be short-circuited into eternity. His death greatly affected David. But once David was dealt with, the next child from his union with Bathsheba was Solomon, the subsequent king of Israel and part of the Messianic line. Of all David's wives, which were many, Bathsheba remained in a prominent place. Even at the end of his life, it was Bathsheba who had access to David and who was instrumental in establishing the next phase of his kingdom.

On the basis of David's life, in which we see the Lord dealing with the situation through chastening, adjusting, and correcting, I do not believe a person who has had a failure in a previous marriage lives in continual adultery in a second marriage. If such were the case, God would not have blessed Solomon. I do believe that where there is divorce and remarriage, there is inevitably a tearing away of a previous relationship and a coming together of a new relationship. Thus, there is in that act adultery. Jesus does not say, however, that although there is an *act* of adultery, the person who remarries *lives* in adultery.

I once talked with a young man about twenty-five years of age who was part of our church family and on leave from an elite branch of the air force. He had fallen in love with a lady who also loved the

Lord but who had been married at age seventeen. After her marriage failed, she was, at age twenty-five, a single mom. This young pilot sat in my office weeping as he said, "I love this lady deeply. But if I marry her, I fear we'll be living in adultery all of our lives."

"I can't tell you what to do," I said. "But I do know this: I'm a bride and I have failed greatly. But my Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, was willing to absorb my pollution and iniquity to bring me into His love and into His family. Therefore, I do not believe it is against the heart of God for you to enter into a relationship to redeem that mother and child—even if it means absorbing pollution and bearing iniquity—because that's exactly what Jesus did for me."

I take time to address this issue because I believe it is important. On one hand, people are taking divorce far too lightly because they fail to realize its seriousness. On the other hand, the church too often mistakenly stands ready to judge and condemn couples who have admittedly failed, but who have sought the Lord and are now starting a new life together. There needs to be a balance in this very sober and serious matter of divorce.

Matthew 19:10

His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.

The disciples said, "If what You say is true, Master, it's better not to get married at all. It's too tricky, too dangerous, and too troublesome."

Matthew 19:11, 12

But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

Jesus answered that there are some who are born eunuchs. That is, they remain single because they were born without any desire for the opposite sex. Others were made eunuchs. That is, they were made eunuchs through castration, which was a common practice of conquering nations upon men placed in certain positions; for example, those in charge of the king's harem. Still others made themselves eunuchs by choosing to live a single lifestyle for the sake of the kingdom.

The apostle Paul would later write that the single state was a superior state (1 Corinthians 7:25, 26) because one could devote himself fully and completely to the work of the kingdom. On the other hand, Philip, the great evangelist who preached to the city of Samaria in Acts 8 and saw virtually the entire city get saved, had a wife and four daughters who grew up to be prophetesses.

So, if you're given the grace and the calling to remain single, rejoice in that and in the freedom it affords you to serve God with abandon. If you're not single, be like Philip and raise godly kids. And if there has been a failure in your past, know there is a redemptive plan for your future as you seek the Lord with sincerity.

Matthew 19:13 (a)

Then were there brought unto him little children . . .

I don't think it's coincidental that right after dealing with the issue of divorce, Jesus turns His attention toward the children, for children are always directly affected by the divorce of their parents. Of this same event, Luke writes: "And they brought unto him infants . . ." (18:15). The Greek pronoun he uses for "they" is masculine. In other words, it was the men who brought their kids to Jesus. I like that!

Matthew 19:13 (b)

. . . that he should put his hands on them, and pray . . .

Dad, how do you lay hands on your kids? While I think it's important that we discipline them, I do wonder sometimes if a lot of us aren't heavy on the

laying on of hands in discipline and too light on the laying on of hands in blessing. When was the last time you pronounced a blessing on your child?

Matthew 19:13 (c)
. . . and the disciples rebuked them.

Whenever Jesus ministered, there was a release of His virtue so noticeable to Him that even in the midst of a crowd He was aware of it (Luke 8:46). No doubt, ministry exacted a toll on Jesus, which may explain why His disciples were trying to protect Him.

Matthew 19:14, 15
But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.

Contrary to what His disciples thought, Jesus is never too tired for anyone—especially children.

Matthew 19:16
And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

This one who came was rich; he was young; and he was a ruler. In other words, he had made it to the top occupationally; he was set financially; and he was young and healthy physically. In response to this encounter with the rich young ruler, throughout the rest of this chapter Jesus will contrast the poverty of riches with the richness of poverty.

Matthew 19:17 (a)
And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God . . .

Scripture records that there is none righteous, no not one (Romans 3:10). Only God is good. Thus, Jesus asks, “Since God alone is good, are you

saying I am God?"

Matthew 19:17 (b), 18 (a)

. . . but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder . . .

There are those who declare that on the basis of the Seventh Commandment, we should never kill under any circumstance. However, Jesus' rendering of the Seventh Commandment, given here, is, "Thou shalt do no murder." You see, freedom and redemption often come only by the shedding of blood. Politically and historically, we are free today because many men shed blood and gave their lives for the freedom we enjoy in this country. The same is true spiritually and eternally. We are free because one Man shed His blood and paid the price for our salvation.

Matthew 19:18 (b)–20

. . . Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

"What lack I yet?" That is the question still being asked. According to an article in a newsmagazine, in the '80s people made a living. In the '90s, they were to make a life. No longer would young executives arrive at the office at six o'clock in the morning and be the last to leave at night. Long weekends, family time, and recreation would be the order of the day. In going from one extreme to another, however, our generation found emptiness once again. The only way to be fulfilled in life is through a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Matthew 19:21, 22

Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven:

and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

Knowing his possessions were possessing him, Jesus' desire was to free this rich young ruler. "Simplify your life," He said, "and follow Me." Please understand that poverty does not produce automatic spirituality. That's not what Jesus is saying. Many of the greatest men in Scripture were exceedingly wealthy. Abraham, David, and Solomon; Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, and Joseph of Arimathea were all men of great possessions. Possessions are not inherently wrong. But when they begin to dictate how you spend your time and how you make decisions, you're in trouble. Jesus was dealing with the particular issue in this man's life that was holding him back. In your life, in my life, there might be another issue entirely.

Matthew 19:23

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

It's hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom because riches can make one independent of God and intolerant of others. Riches can cause us to say, "Why should I pray or seek God when I can consult my banker or stockbroker?" Riches can cause us to ask, "Why is everyone so poor? Why don't they have the initiative, the industry, or the energy I do? What's wrong with them?" When you become independent of God and intolerant of others, you forfeit the kingdom. Riches can be dangerous indeed if they make us stiff of knee and hard of heart.

Matthew 19:24

And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

The Talmud, the Jewish body of teaching present in Jesus' day, contained the similar phrase, "It is easier for an elephant to go through the eye of a needle." Elephants were common in Persia or Iran, where the Talmud was

written, but not in Jerusalem. So Jesus modified the Talmud with something His Jerusalem audience could relate to: a camel. Was He talking about a literal needle and camel, or was He, as G. Campbell Morgan strongly suggests, speaking of something else?

> In Jerusalem, all commerce would stop when the gates of the city of Jerusalem were closed on the Sabbath day and every evening at sunset. Commerce stopped because camels and caravans could no longer enter. But there was a little gate called the Needle Gate that was actually a gate inside of the main gate. It could be opened to allow access and egress to only one person at a time. The only way a camel could possibly get through this Needle Gate would be if all of the baggage was removed from his back and if he crawled through the gate on his knees.

I believe it is very possible that this is what Jesus was alluding to, saying, "There is a way for a rich man to enter the kingdom, but only if he places no priority on his possessions and is willing to fall to his knees in humility."

> **Matthew 19:25**
> **When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?**

The disciples were amazed because in those days, the rabbis taught that the closer one was to God, the richer he would be. Prosperity theology was around even back then. Here, however, Jesus totally shoots that theory down by saying, "Contrary to Jewish theology, riches can actually hinder one entering the kingdom."

> **Matthew 19:26**
> **But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.**

Even a rich man can be saved by the grace and power of God.

Matthew 19:27

Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

"We've left everything to follow You," Peter says. "What the rich young ruler wasn't willing to do, we've done. How will our faithfulness be rewarded?"

Matthew 19:28, 29

And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

Jesus answers Peter by saying, "Any who forsake land, wealth, or family to follow Me will be ushered into the kingdom with great rewards."

Big deal, you might be thinking. *Heaven's too far away to think about. I don't care about rewards there.* But you will definitely care then. Only what you do for the Lord will bring you eternal reward. Jesus will reward you greatly for whatever you're giving up for Him now.

Mark adds this promise to his account of the same story:

> And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.
>
> Mark 10:29, 30

In other words, what you give up for the Lord and for His kingdom will not only be rewarded eternally but will be returned to you a hundred times

over presently. What does this mean? Does it mean, as some suggest, that if I make a vow or "plant my seed," I'll get a whole bunch of money in the mail next month? I don't think so. I believe Jesus is saying that, as part of the kingdom, we have access to a hundred houses and a hundred families. I'm so thankful for the church—for people who love the Lord, who care about each other, who stand by one another, and who share with those in need. Those who are radically following Jesus will find not only rewards in Heaven, but benefits on earth. Our needs will be met a hundred times over because we're part of a community; we're part of a family; we're part of the Kingdom.

Matthew 19:30

But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

"Watch out, Peter," Jesus says. "You're proud of the fact that you have given much to follow Me. But many that are first shall be last, and many that are last shall be first. There will be some surprises in heaven."



20 Matthew 20 is the last chapter in the section dealing with the retreat of the King. It opens with a continuation of the dialogue that began in chapter 19 between Peter and Jesus concerning the rewards of service for the kingdom.

Matthew 20:1, 2

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

A penny, or a denarius, being the daily salary of a Roman soldier, Jesus was speaking of a day's fair wage.

Matthew 20:3–10

And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the

vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

The men who started work at nine o'clock in the morning received the same wage as those who started at five o'clock in the afternoon.

Matthew 20:11–16

And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

This account of the vineyard and the harvest would have been very familiar to the disciples. The grape harvest usually took place in August. Because August was also the beginning of the rainy season in Israel, foremen in charge of the vineyards were always watching for the rains that could ruin the crops. In the morning, if a foreman saw rain coming, he would quickly go to the town square and hire workers to harvest the grapes. If the skies became even more threatening, he would go yet again and hire more workers. This

would continue until the foreman had all the workers he needed to beat the rain.

In this story, those who had been hired early in the morning were upset because the men who were hired an hour before quitting time were paid the same amount they were. "Unfair!" they protested.

"The terms upon which I hired you were met," countered the owner of the vineyard. "You received your denarius, didn't you? If I choose to be generous with those who came late, that is my business."

What meaning does this parable have for us? Keep in mind that the parable was given in response to Peter's question about rewards. Through it, Jesus is saying, "You'll have rewards eternally. You will have everything returned one hundred-fold presently. But because the first shall be last and the last shall be first, when payday comes and rewards are given, there will be some big surprises."

This tells me a couple of key things. First of all, we'll be surprised in heaven. We have a tendency to think that Billy Graham will receive all kinds of crowns and rewards. And no doubt he will. However, I think there will be some cleaning ladies who worked in obscurity and during their breaks went to their knees in a broom closet somewhere to intercede on behalf of Billy Graham's ministry who will be brought to the front and rewarded greatly. I believe sitting in this group tonight are those who have worked quietly and in anonymity who will be escorted to the front when rewards are given. "We didn't do much," they'll say. "We weren't hired until five o'clock. We didn't make much of a mark." But because they were exceedingly faithful, in what the Foreman assigned them to do—visiting rest homes, chopping wood for those who are unable, praying and doing battle in intercession, changing diapers in the nursery—they will be brought to the front. And perhaps a lot of us who have visibility and prominence presently will be sitting in the back. Truly, the last shall be first and the first last.

The second lesson I see in this radical teaching is that we are to watch out for jealousy. "Hey, we were out here all day. These guys just worked for an hour. Unfair!" cried the servants. So, too, there can be a tendency for our flesh to say, "How come *he's* getting blessed when I've been faithful for years and years?"

In Numbers 12, Miriam asked why Moses was always the one who got to say, "Thus saith the Lord." "Why is Moses the one who gets to go up the mountain and come down shining, and all I get to do is play a tambourine?" she asked. The result? She was stricken with leprosy. That's what jealousy always does. Like leprosy, it starts small, but consumes us in the end.

A third principle this story teaches me is that it's never too late to start. You might be saying, "I'm old. I'm *thirty.*" Listen, gang—even though sportscasters talk about thirty-year-olds as if they're dinosaurs, such is not the case with ministry. You might be at five o'clock in your lifespan. You might be fifty, sixty, seventy, or eighty years old. You might be saying, "I've walked with the Lord for ten years and haven't done a thing for Him." Take heart! It's never too late. Those who show up at five o'clock saying, "I'm ready—just point me in the right direction," have a definite job to fulfill in the vineyard.

Matthew 20:17–19

And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.

Since Matthew 16, we have seen Jesus underscoring and repeating that He was going to die. Yet I call your attention to the fact that Jesus never spoke of the Cross without speaking of the Resurrection. I point this out because I often hear brothers and sisters talking about the Cross, saying, "I'm going through this trial," or "I'm dealing with this struggle," or I'm paying this price," but I don't hear them talking about the Resurrection. If you talk about the Cross, follow the example of Jesus and talk about the Resurrection as well.

Precious people, if you think it's tough following Jesus, try *not* following Him. *That's* what's tough. Going through disease, death, divorce, bankruptcy, being fired from your job, or being prosperous on Wall Street but empty internally—*that's* what's tough! If you who are struggling and suffering

weren't a Christian, you would still go through difficult times. The difference is, you would go through them with no solution, no promise, and no hope. That is why every time Jesus talked about the Cross, He never failed to speak of Resurrection.

> Menelik II, Emperor of Ethiopia from 1889–1913, heard that in Europe and America, criminals were executed with an efficient new device called an electric chair. He immediately ordered one for his country and was excited when it arrived—until he realized it needed electricity. There was no electricity in Ethiopia at that time. Undaunted, he said, "If the electric chair can't be used for the execution of criminals, it will be used for the execution of my commands." Thus, for fifteen years, Menelik II sat in an electric chair when he issued his proclamations. He turned the electric chair into a throne.

When Jesus went to the Cross, He did something infinitely greater. He turned an instrument of death into the pinnacle of power as He transformed shame into salvation, rejection into redemption, and grief into glory.

> **Matthew 20:20**
>
> **Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him.**

Mark's Gospel tells us James and John persuaded their mother to talk to Jesus on their behalf (10:35). So she went to Jesus and began to worship Him because she wanted something from Him. All too often I fear, like James, John, and their mother, we worship in order to get something. But that's not what worship is about. Worship is about *giving,* about offering the sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15).

> **Matthew 20:21**
>
> **And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.**

Why did James and John deal with this issue during this particular time? Perhaps they were attempting to demonstrate their faith and devotion. "Lord, You're talking about death, but don't You remember all Your teachings on the kingdom? We believe You're still going to make it, Lord. Let's not talk about death. Let's not talk about the Cross. Let's talk about the seating arrangement in the kingdom."

Matthew 20:22

But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.

"Do you know what you're asking?" Jesus said. "The cup in the kingdom is the cup of death. The baptism is the baptism of suffering. Do you understand what you're asking?"

"Oh, we understand, Lord," insisted James and John.

But they didn't.

Matthew 20:23

And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.

Jesus answers, "My Father is preparing positions of authority in the heavenly arena for those who are preparing for those places." You see, salvation is free but position and rewards in the kingdom are dependent upon what we're doing right now. We want more prestige, more prominence, more power, more toys and more trinkets in this life. But Jesus is ever desirous of lifting our eyes from the temporal to the eternal and from the physical to the spiritual.

Matthew 20:24

And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.

Why were the other disciples upset with James and John? Because they were trying to get a jump on the good seats in the kingdom. Next time you feel moved with indignation, ask yourself if you're upset because there's been a spiritual violation or merely because someone's getting ahead of you in some way.

Matthew 20:25–28

But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister [servant]; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant [slave]; Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

If you want to be great, don't seek prominence. Seek service. Don't say, "Who's praying for me? Who cares about me?" Instead ask, "Who can I serve?"

"Go here. Do that. Get me this." The way you feel when people treat you like a slave is a good indication of how you're doing in the arena of servanthood.

Matthew 20:29, 30 (a)

And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side . . .

Jericho was a beautiful desert oasis located fifteen miles from Jerusalem. A certain bush grew there which was believed to have medicinal value for the treatment of blindness. Thus, there was a large population of blind people in Jericho.

Matthew 20:30 (b)

. . . when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out . . .

The Greek word translated "cried out" is *krazo,* a word that refers to the cry of a woman in childbirth.

Matthew 20:30 (c)–34

. . . saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you? They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.

These two men without eyesight had remarkable insight. "Son of David," they cried, "we recognize You as Messiah."

"Quiet down," said the crowd. But the blind men cried out all the more until Jesus healed them.

This story shows me three things about the nature and character of Jesus. First, it's a demonstration of His compassion. He took time to care for two blind men in a huge crowd. Second, it's an illustration of coming attractions. When He returns, *all* blind eyes shall be opened and *all* sickness healed forever. Finally, it gives illumination concerning our salvation. We too were blind, but when we cried out to our Messiah, we received sight and were then able to follow Him.



21 Following the retreat of the King in chapters 14 through 20, Matthew 21 marks the beginning of a new section: that of the rejection of the King as Jesus heads toward Jerusalem.

Matthew 21:1–3

And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

The city of Jerusalem was teeming with people, probably two million in number. They were there to commemorate Passover, an event that had taken place fifteen hundred years earlier . . .

While His people were being held captive, the hardness of Pharaoh's heart caused God to send a series of plagues upon Egypt, the tenth of which was the death of the firstborn in every home. The only way a family could escape this tragedy was to slaughter a lamb and mark the top, sides, and bottom of their door with blood, thereby painting a prophetic picture of the Cross that would one day save all mankind from the curse of sin and death.

Here, Jesus, the Passover Lamb, heads into Jerusalem, where He will orchestrate a massive public demonstration as He offers Himself to be King of Israel. Keep in mind that normally Jesus moved quietly and preferred obscurity, many times charging those He healed to "tell no man" (see Matthew 8:4). Here, however, He organizes a huge crusade. Why? I suggest it was so the Jews would never be able to say, "If we had only had the opportunity to embrace You as our King, we certainly would have done so." He stripped away that excuse from the Jewish nation when He rode into Jerusalem and publicly offered Himself to them as their Messiah.

Matthew 21:4, 5

All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

Can't you hear the Roman soldiers garrisoned in Jerusalem snickering as they saw Jesus ride in on a donkey? When a Roman leader came cruising into a city, it wasn't on a donkey. No, Roman rulers rode black stallions followed by chariots and thousands of soldiers marching in step with shields gleaming. But I wonder what the Romans of this world will say when Jesus comes again, for next time He comes, it won't be on a donkey. He'll come back riding a white horse followed by ten thousands of His saints (Jude 14). You see, the first time Jesus came, He came as the suffering Servant. But the next time He comes, it will be as the conquering King.

Matthew 21:6–9

And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

Because the word "Hosanna" means "Save now," the crowd was essentially saying, "Overthrow the Roman yoke politically. Help us economically. Lead us militarily. Save Now!" No wonder that, as the week went on and they realized none of that was His intent, they turned against Jesus.

I see the same thing happen today, for there can be a tendency within the heart of each of us to cash it in when things don't work out. If you are expecting Jesus to be a "good luck charm" for you, if you expect Him to help you financially or physically, socially or vocationally, you will be disappointed when things don't go the way you thought they would.

We need to realize that Jesus Christ came to die for our sin and pay the price for our iniquity. If He never does anything else in this life presently, that is more than enough to merit our loyalty, our affection, and our devotion eternally. If He never does another thing for me, if He never gives another blessing to me, I owe Him my life because of what He did on Calvary.

Matthew 21:10, 11

And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

The Greek word translated "moved" is *seio* from which we get our word "seismic." In other words, Matthew writes that the whole city was "quaking"—not physically, but mentally and emotionally— when Jesus made His entry.

Matthew 21:12 (a)

And Jesus went into the temple of God . . .

When Jesus came into the city, the multitude must have thought He would head straight for the fortress Antonia to deal with the Romans. Instead, He went into the temple to deal with the Jews.

Matthew 21:12 (b)

. . . and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves.

Keep in mind that Jesus had already cleansed the temple at the outset of His public ministry (John 2:13–15). So, too, because I myself am a temple (1 Corinthians 3:16), the Lord has to come and overturn the tables of my life. And although I wish this were a one-time process, it's not. Just when I think I've learned a lesson, suddenly I find the old junk back in my temple once again. Then the Lord comes in faithfully and deals with it radically.

The Lord not only desires purity in our temples individually, but also corporately. In the following passage, I see four characteristics He is looking for in us, His corporate temple (1 Peter 2:5).

Matthew 21:13

And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

First of all, we are to be a house of prayer. I thank the Lord for times of corporate prayer. I continue to be blown away by the reports I hear from people, saying, "We prayed specifically for this and here is how the Lord answered our prayer. . . ."

Matthew 21:14

And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.

Second, this is to be a place where people are helped. The blind and the lame came to Jesus in the temple and He healed them. So, too, we who have been spiritually blinded and we who are lame-brained should be able to come into this place and hear the Word, study the Scriptures, and receive help and healing.

Matthew 21:15 (a)

And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did . . .

Third, this is to be a place where power is released. The chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful—or awesome—things He did. You should have seen the awesome things God did in the amphitheatre at Applegate Christian Fellowship one Sunday: On that cold and rainy day, eight or ten radical kids went on record, saying, "You can say we're all wet; you can call us drips; but we're taking the plunge. We're going for it. We're getting baptized. From this point on, Jesus Christ is our Savior and our Lord!"

Matthew 21:15 (b), 16

. . . and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased, And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?

Finally, this is to be a place where praise is expressed. The old fuddy-duddies in our text were "sore displeased," but the kids were crying, "Hosanna." You see, when the kids cried "Hosanna" it wasn't for political reasons; it wasn't for economic reasons; it wasn't for vocational reasons. They cried "Hosanna" simply because they were excited about Jesus. I find that to be true with young Christians as well. It's often the young brother or sister who can lead the way in simple and sincere praise. This house must be a place where such praise is expressed. Following are four key Hebrew words that shed light on the meaning of true praise.

One Old Testament word for praise is *halal* which literally means, "to acclaim or to glory in God who brings the deepest of satisfaction." I like that! Late at night when you think you're hungry, instead of making yourself a peanut butter and pickle sandwich, try worshiping. Over and over again, I have found that when I think I want to listen to some classical music, watch TV, read a book, or have a snack, if I get away and begin to worship, suddenly the deepest satisfaction overwhelms me and I realize that time with God was what I craved all along. If you have been frustrated or restless lately, try worshiping. *Halal* means you will find all you're longing for internally in the One who satisfies you totally.

The second word used for praise is *towdah which means "acknowledging God's work and His character and commending it." Towdah* says, "Yes, Lord, You are good. You are holy and righteous. At last, we have found Someone in this universe worthy of our commendation."

The third word is *zamar* which means "to break out in song." When you find yourself singing joyfully about something of the goodness of God, that is *zamar.*

The fourth word is *shabach,* which means, "to commend God with thanksgiving." *Shabach* is saying, "Lord, we commend You for the way You've seen us through our trials, the way You've answered our prayers, the way You purchased our salvation."

Matthew 21:17

And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.

The day after Jesus entered Jerusalem, He departed for Bethany. Mark tells us that on His way to Bethany, He went through the tiny town of Bethphage, or "House of Figs" (Mark 11:1). It was in Bethany where His friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived, and no doubt He stayed with them.

Matthew 21:18–20

Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!

On the way from Bethany to Jerusalem, on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, Jesus saw a fig tree. Fig trees were common in Israel. Growing to heights of twenty-five feet and widths of twenty to twenty-five feet, they covered the countryside. Because of their abundance, figs were a staple of the Hebrew diet. Here, Jesus—hungry for breakfast—saw a fig tree covered with leaves. Fig trees are unusual in that the appearance of fruit precedes the appearance of leaves. Jesus assumed, therefore, that since this particular tree was covered with leaves, it must surely contain fruit as well. But this fig tree was a hypocrite. It had leaves—the outward appearance of vitality and health—but no fruit. So Jesus cursed it. And it withered, Mark tells us, beginning with the roots (Mark 11:20).

Many people have a real problem at this point. Environmentalists say, "How could this be? What kind of person is this Jesus of Nazareth? Is He just venting His anger by cursing this poor, helpless tree?" Yet if Jesus and the disciples were cold and they used the tree for firewood to warm themselves, no one would think anything of it. Here, Jesus uses the tree not to warm the hands but to warn the hearts of His disciples.

To those who question the environmental correctness of Jesus' action, I say, "Consider what He could have done. Think of Elijah. When a group of soldiers came to get him, he called down fire from heaven and burned them up. Think of Elisha. When some young men were making fun of his bald head, he called a bear out of the woods and they became lunch." When you look at

the Old Testament prophets and see the severity of the lessons they taught, cursing a fruitless fig tree should pose no problem for us. Seeing a barren fig tree, Jesus seized the moment to teach a lesson to His disciples, to you, and to me about hypocrisy, hope, and healing.



***For topical study of Matthew 21:17–20 entitled "The Fate of the Figless Tree," turn to page* 159.**

Matthew 21:21, 22

Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

In contrast to the impotent, barren state of the fig tree, here Jesus speaks of the power of prayer and the potency of faith.

Matthew 21:23

And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

Upon His return from Bethany, Jesus taught in the Temple. With the cleansing of the Temple fresh in their minds, the chief priests and elders demanded to know by whose authority He overturned the tables and drove out the sheep and cows.

Matthew 21:24, 25 (a)

And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what

authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?

Jesus answered their question with a question. "Remember John?" He said. "Was his ministry from God or simply done by his own energy?"

Matthew 21:25 (b)–27

And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

Realizing they were backed into a corner, the chief priests and elders refused to answer. "If you won't answer Me, I have no obligation to answer you," Jesus said. Next, we see Him launch into a series of three parables in which He will answer them, but indirectly. "By whose authority did I cleanse the temple? He asked. "By the authority of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," He'll answer.

Matthew 21:28–32

But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

First, Jesus cleansed the temple by the authority of the Father. Jesus likened the prostitutes and publicans to the first son. They seemed unlikely candidates to receive John's message, but receive it they did. On the other hand, like the second son, the pseudo-religious scribes and Pharisees gave only lip service to the preaching of John.

Matthew 21:33–41

Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

Second, Jesus cleansed the temple by the authority of the Son. Taken from Isaiah 5, this parable speaks of Israel as a vineyard and of God as the owner who went to a far country, expecting to receive payment as the grapes were harvested. When the owner sent messengers to collect, the stewards killed the messengers just as the people of Israel had killed the prophets God had sent to them.

- *Did the Owner then say, "I'm going to send soldiers"?*
  No, He said, "I'll send My Son."
- *Did He say, "I'll send lightning to strike them"?*

No, He said, “I’ll send the Light of the world to instruct them.”

Nonetheless, rather than respond to Him, they killed Him.

Matthew 21:42–44

Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

This reference to Psalm 118, the very psalm sung during Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, speaks of the temple. When the temple was under construction, stones were quarried miles away and transported to the temple mount. Forty feet wide and twenty feet high, these stones were massive. Yet they fit together so perfectly that no mortar was needed, for not even a knife blade could fit between them. Tradition had it that one stone arrived on the scene but, because no one could figure out where it was supposed to go, the builders rolled it off a cliff into the Kidron Valley. Not until the foundation was complete did the builders discover they were one stone short. Sure enough, the stone they had rejected was none other than the cornerstone. Here, Jesus pulls from that tradition as well as from Psalm 118, and says, “Haven’t you read? The One who was rejected, the One who was cast away is indeed the chief cornerstone, the foundation stone.”

Truly, Jesus is our Rock. To the Jews, He is a stumbling stone (Romans 9:32, 33). To the Gentiles, He is a smiting stone (Daniel 2:34). To the believer, He is the foundation stone (Ephesians 2:20). Either you will fall on Him and be saved, or He will fall on you and you’ll be crushed. It’s your choice. I highly recommend the first. I recommend building your life upon the solid rock of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 21:45, 46

And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

At last, the chief priests and elders were getting the point that Jesus did what He did in the authority of the Father and of the Son. But, as we will see in chapter 22, He had one more parable left.

THE FATE OF THE FIGLESS TREE

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 21:17–20

Jesus deals with the issue of hypocrisy in the miracle of the fig tree. You see, although this fig tree was covered with leaves, it was a hypocrite because it had no fruit. Why wasn't there fruit? To answer this question, consider three aspects of this miracle, each of which has practical application for us today. . . .

Practical Application

Verse 19 says it was a lone fig tree. This tree bore no fruit because there was no cross-pollination. It's a matter of biology and a fact of life: A lone fig tree cannot bear fruit.

> *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day ap proaching.*
>
> Hebrews 10:25

You see, gang, when we meet together, a spiritual "cross-pollination" takes place. There's a dynamic unlike any other when people come together corporately to praise, pray, and study the Word. This only makes sense, for our God is a Father who loves His family.

When my kids were all at home, I wanted them to sit around the table and eat together. We didn't serve Peter-John in his room, Jessie and Christy in their room, and Mary and Ben in their rooms because something special happened when we were all together. So, too, our Father desires that His children come together around His table, the table of Communion. Secondly, our Father calls us to come together to the table of Bible study, where the manna of the Word is opened for us to partake of its spiritual nutrition. If you are a lone fig tree, you might appear to be healthy for a while. You might have all the leaves of right theology. Others might be fooled by your outward appearance. But there will be no real fruit found on you. As "living stones being fit together for His glory" (see 2 Peter 2:5), we need each other.

Prophetic Illustration

Scripturally, historically, and presently, the fig tree is a symbol of the nation of Israel. Jeremiah, Amos, Ezekiel, Hosea, and Isaiah all liken Israel to the fig tree. Just as the eagle symbolizes America and the bear represents Russia, so Israel is portrayed by the fig tree. Like the fig tree in this account, Israel had lots of leaves. This nation appeared to be so religious—with temple worship, traditions, and the Torah; with Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees—but Jesus found no fruit in her land. Forty years later, the Romans marched into Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and slaughtered thousands. And the nation of Israel lost her identity until 1948. Thus, for almost two thousand years, the Jews, like the fig tree, shriveled and withered.

Personal Exhortation

When the first Adam came to a fig tree in the Garden of Eden, he was not looking for fruit. He was looking for leaves to cover his nakedness (Genesis 3:7). That's always the tendency of humanity. We cover up our nakedness with outward activity. We join Rotary. We volunteer for the Red Cross. We teach Sunday school. We do whatever it takes to cover our sinfulness because we know what lurks within us. The last Adam, as Paul calls Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15, came looking not for leaves, but for fruit. He didn't care about the leaves of outward demonstration. He desired fruit for inner satiation. And He still hungers for fruit. What fruit? The fruit of His Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance (Galatians 5:22, 23); the fruit of our thanksgiving (Hebrews 13:15); the fruit of the gospel (Colossians 1:6); and the fruit of righteousness (James 3:18).

Jesus comes by your tree every day, saying, "I'm hungry."

What do you have for Him? A bunch of leaves?

"Oh, I'm doing fine," you might say. "I'm involved in this activity. I'm supporting that mission. I'm going to this meeting." Your tree may look healthy. Others might be attracted to it and impressed by it. But Jesus isn't fooled. What is there for Him?

When He comes morning by morning seeking satiation and satisfaction, does He find real fruit? Does He say, "It's such a joy being with you in the morning hour or in the cool of the day as we walk together. It's so wonderful that someone would take ten minutes to thank Me specifically for what I've done, that someone would worship Me for who I am"? Or does He see a tree filled with leaves but lacking fruit?

> *And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.*
>
> Mark 11:13, 14

"No man eat fruit of thee." If we are not satisfying Jesus intimately and personally, we will not satisfy anyone else through service or ministry. What has He found in you today? What will He find in you tomorrow morning? Figs or leaves?

Maybe you're saying, "I don't know if there is any fruit in my life for Him to enjoy. What can I do?" Take a look at Luke 13 . . .

> *He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?*
>
> Luke 13:6, 7

For three years this fig tree had been tended, cultivated, and watered even as Jesus had publicly ministered to the Jews for three years. But there was no fruit. And so the owner said, "Why should it continue to sap nutrients from the soil? Cut it down!"

> *And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.*
>
> Luke 13:8, 9

Here, the vinedresser pleads on behalf of the barren fig tree even as Jesus lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). Jesus is our Advocate, our Defense Lawyer. Like the vinedresser, He says, "Give Me one more year to dig around it." In the parallel passage to Matthew 21, Mark 11 says the fig tree dried up from the roots. That's where dryness always begins. You see, it's what takes place in the quiet, secret, hidden time that matters. Is there a heart for God? Is there communication with the Lord? Is there an expression of thanks to the Lord? Or is there nothing beneath the surface because the roots are dry? The Vinedresser says, "Let Me dig it. Let Me expose sin. Let Me get to the heart of the matter."

What about your root system that was once so vibrant? What about your time with the Lord, your time in the Word, your time of praise and thanksgiving and adoration? Is it withered? Let Him dig it.

Secondly, let Him dung it. What is dung? Manure. In Philippians 3:4–6, speaking of past accomplishments, Paul wrote, "I have quite a record. I was born into a godly tribe, lived an upright life, worked zealously, and studied steadfastly." And then he added: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ" (see Philippians 3:7). Interestingly, the Greek word translated "loss" is "dung."

You might be saying, "I used to be a deacon" or "I used to be a pastor, gospel singer, or Sunday-school teacher." Gang, it doesn't matter what you *were*. You cannot live in the glory of what you were doing in 1942, the revival of 1964, or the spiritual high you felt three years ago. Only what you're doing presently matters. It is only where you're at with the Lord today that counts. When you allow the Vinedresser to dig and to dung, to expose sin and to expel self, fruit will come.

May the Lord make you fruitful. May Jesus come by your tree this week and eat of the abundance. May your goal not be to impress others, but to satisfy your Master. And may this be the fruitiest year of your whole life!



22 Chapter 21 ended with two parables illustrating that Jesus acted with the authority of the Father and the Son. Chapter 22 opens with the third and final parable in this series, a parable that illustrates He carried the authority of the Spirit as well.

Matthew 22:1–3 (a)

And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding . . .

God the Father sent His Spirit to woo a bride for His Son. The ministry of the Spirit is to call people to the wedding, to win a bride for Jesus Christ.

Who did He call first? Salvation is to the Jew first and then the Gentile (Romans 2:9, 10).

Matthew 22:3 (b)–6

. . . And they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.

Just as the Jews had rejected the authority of the Father and the Son, they rejected the ministry of the Spirit. They rejected Jesus when He came to Jerusalem just as they would reject the apostles when they ministered there after Pentecost.

Matthew 22:7–9

But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.

"We're too busy. We're not interested," said the Jews. So the Father said to the Spirit, "Go to the highways and byways. Go to the Gentiles. Go to the Oregonians and tell *them* to come. The meal is ready. The doors are open. Whosoever will, let him come" (see Revelation 22:17).

Matthew 22:10

So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

Good and bad came. That's the church. That's us.

Matthew 22:11, 12

And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

Jesus is telling us that in the church, there will be those traveling in our midst and sitting at the table who are not dressed properly. What does this mean?

> I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.
>
> Isaiah 61:10

Who is dressed appropriately? Who is really saved? The one who says, "I need a Savior. I don't have the answer. I'm not righteous. Lord, I need You to robe me with Your robe of righteousness."

Matthew 22:13, 14

Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.

You see, it's not the person who sits in the pew or is dipped in the water who is saved. It's the one who says, "Lord I need You. You are my Savior. You are my Redeemer."

Matthew 22:15

Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.

The Pharisees and Sadducees decided to counterattack with a series of political, ethical, theological, and personal questions for Jesus. Why? Unknowingly, they were fulfilling the prophecy of Exodus 12 which says that before the Passover lamb was sacrificed, it was to be inspected and observed for five days in order to make sure it was free of blemish or disease. So, too, before the Passover Lamb of God was sacrificed on the Cross, He underwent a period of scrutiny and examination by the most brutal inspectors of all: the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and Herodians—His enemies.

Matthew 22:16 (a)

And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians . . .

First came the Pharisees and Herodians. The Pharisees were those who kept the most minute details of the law. The Herodians, on the other hand, were a political party. It was an interesting combination because the two didn't normally get together. But political and philosophical enemies will often unite in opposition to Jesus Christ.

Matthew 22:16 (b), 17

. . . saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?

The Pharisees and Herodians thought they had Jesus cornered. If He said, "Yes, pay taxes to Caesar," that would be a most unpopular sentiment. You see, Caesar claimed to be God, and the Jews felt that by paying taxes to Caesar, they were in essence acknowledging him as such. On the other hand, if Jesus said, "No, don't pay taxes," He could be arrested for tax evasion and political rebellion.

Matthew 22:18–22

But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought

unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.

In other words, Jesus said, "Because coins are stamped with the image of Caesar, they belong to Caesar. But because man is made in the image of God, man belongs to God."

Matthew 22:23–28

The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her.

The Sadducees brought the next question. As those who didn't believe in resurrection, they asked a question that inferred there were practical problems with a belief in life after death. "If a woman had seven husbands," they asked, "which one would she be married to in heaven?"

Matthew 22:29, 30

Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.

Jesus simply said, "In heaven, relationships are different than they are on earth." But then He continued . . .

Matthew 22:31–33

But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine.

God didn't say, "I *was* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." He said, "I *am* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." By quoting this verse, Jesus gave the Sadducees this message: God is the God of the living. Heaven is real.

Matthew 22:34–36

But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

The scribes had determined that of the 613 commandments in the Old Testament, 248 were positive injunctions and 365 were negative prohibitions. No doubt hoping to spark a controversy, the lawyer asked Jesus which of the 613 was the greatest commandment.

Matthew 22:37, 38

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.

Jesus went right to the heart of the law: the Shemah. "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). The Jews knew this was the Great Commandment. Orthodox Jews wrote it out and put it in their mezuzahs—the small, elongated boxes they fastened to their front doorposts. They wrote it out and put it in their phylacteries—the leather pouches they wore on their foreheads in obedience to the command to keep the Word always on their

minds. Thus, it would have been no surprise that Jesus named the Shemah, Deuteronomy 6:4, as the greatest commandment. But then He went on. . . .

Matthew 22:39

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

"Like unto it" means "linked to it." In other words, the First and Second Commandments are inextricably linked together. Using this commandment, there are those who say that in order to love our neighbor, we must first love ourselves. I don't believe that is what Jesus is saying here. Rather, I believe He is saying, "Just as you already love yourself, care for yourself, and think about yourself, you are to love your neighbor in the same way." You see, according to 1 John 4:20, loving my neighbor is not dependent upon loving myself. It is dependent upon loving God.

The ability to love God and to love people are inextricably linked. The problem is, most of us separate the two because of our "TV dinner" spirituality. In a TV dinner, the Salisbury steak, peas, mashed potatoes, and cherry cobbler are all in separate compartments. And that's just what we do spiritually. "Oh yes, I love God," we say. "I'm going to worship Sunday night." But on Monday we call our boss an idiot behind his back, and on Wednesday we complain about how our neighbor idles his car too early in the morning. Yet Sunday finds us worshiping the Lord once again. We compartmentalize our lives thinking that how we treat people has nothing to do with our relationship with God.

Jesus says our walk with God is not a TV dinner. Rather, if we really love God, we'll inevitably love people, and our lives will become like a chicken pot pie. No longer compartmentalized, the peas, potatoes, and chicken will all be mixed together. Truly, if our love for God is genuine, it will naturally flow into a love for people.

Matthew 22:40

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

The message of the Law and the Prophets, indeed the message of the entire Old Testament is summed up in one word: love. That is why Jesus says, "Love the Lord and love your neighbor and in so doing, you will exemplify the essence of all Old Testament teaching." I love the picture Jesus painted when He said that the Law and the prophets hang on loving God and loving our neighbor. As I look to heaven and love God; and as I look to my right and left and love people, I see the picture of a Cross. On these two *hang* all the Law and the Prophets. Who hung on the Cross? The One who loved His Father with all of His heart and soul, mind and strength; the One who loved us and gave Himself for us. Jesus is the Perfect One who loves His Father and who loves us.

Matthew 22:41–45

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?

Jesus quotes here from Psalm 110. We will see Peter use this same reference in his first sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:34). This passage would have caused great consternation in the minds of the Pharisees who were so eager to confound and confuse Jesus. You see, in the Jewish culture, one would never call his offspring "Lord."

"Why, then," asked Jesus, "is David calling his own offspring Lord? Truly, David is referring to Someone greater than himself. If Christ be merely the Son of David as you suppose, David would never have called him Lord."

Matthew 22:46

And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.

The scribes and Pharisees, who prided themselves on their deep knowledge of Scripture, were stumped. Using the written Word, Jesus Christ

—the Living Word—had beaten them at their own game.



23 We now come to the last public sermon of Jesus Christ, given only days before His death. I would have thought this last message would have been one of salvation and invitation. On the contrary, it was a message of condemnation and denunciation against the religious hierarchy of the day. Calling the Pharisees blind guides, fools, and whitewashed tombs, Jesus didn't hold back but spoke pointedly and powerfully concerning their hypocrisy.

The apostle Paul wrote that it is the goodness of God that leads men to repentance (Romans 2:4). In other words, God's love and grace are a greater motivation to salvation than hellfire and damnation. But Paul went on to say that some will be saved by fire (1 Corinthians 3:15). That is, those who will not respond to God's grace and goodness need to hear a strong message of judgment. That is why, after spending three years preaching the grace and goodness of His Father, Jesus gave this final word of judgment.

So, too, as you share the gospel with people, I encourage you to approach them first on the basis of God's goodness and grace. But if they continually harden their hearts, it may be that they need to feel the heat of His judgment.

Matthew 23:1, 2

Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses" seat.

Newer translations properly render this verse: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in Moses' seat." In other words, the scribes and Pharisees had seized the position of authority, even though they were not called by God to do so. The first sign of false spiritual leadership is that it lacks God-given authority.

Matthew 23:3

All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

Second, false spiritual leaders lack integrity. Although they may teach others to do right, they themselves only talk about it.

Matthew 23:4

For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

Third, false spiritual leaders lack sympathy. They bind heavy, legalistic burdens on others but won't lift a finger to help anyone bear them.

Matthew 23:5–7

But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

Finally, false spiritual leaders lack humility. When the Pharisees went into the synagogue, they sat on the platform in large chairs in order to be seen by all. As time went on, they made phylacteries so big that some could hardly stand straight under the weight. They obeyed the command in Numbers 15 to place blue cloth on the hem of their robes as a reminder of their heavenly calling. But as their pride increased, so did the size of their blue borders.

Matthew 23:8–12

But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

Jesus says the true spiritual leader does two things: He avoids elevated titles and he accepts lowly tasks. Jesus avoided the titles and honors that people wanted to heap upon Him in His early ministry, choosing instead to humble Himself, to eat with sinners, to wash feet, and to touch lepers. Jesus is the ultimate spiritual Leader.

Following His description of a true spiritual leader, Jesus did something I find intriguing. He ended His last sermon pronouncing eight woes. Bible students, think back. How did Jesus begin His public ministry? By pronouncing eight blessings in the form of the Beatitudes. Watch and see how the eight woes at the end of His preaching ministry correlate perfectly with the eight blessings given at the beginning of His ministry.

Matthew 23:13

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:3

Although the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit, the Pharisees were proud in spirit. "I thank You, God, that I am not as other men," they prayed (see Luke 18:11). Their pride, Jesus said, would not only keep them from entering the kingdom, but would prevent others as well.

Matthew 23:14

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Matthew 5:4

Jesus promised that the mourners will be comforted. The Pharisees, however, manipulated those who mourned. You see, when a man died, the

Pharisees would show up on his doorstep telling his widow that if she wanted to honor her husband's memory, she would make a donation to their ministry. Watch out for that, precious people. In this day when there's an abundance of fund-raising, be on guard against those who seek to manipulate rather than to comfort.

Matthew 23:15

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Matthew 5:5

The meek were to inherit the earth. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were trying to convert the earth to their legalistic, hypocritical, religious system. The tragedy is that when a legalist lays his trip on someone else, the convert or proselyte becomes more zealous than the teacher and the end result is damnation.

Matthew 23:16–22

Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Matthew 5:6

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness—for integrity, truth, and simplicity. The Pharisees weren't hungering for righteousness. They were playing games with semantics and vocabulary. In Jesus' day, if one took an oath saying, "I swear by the temple," he could be lying through his teeth, and that would be acceptable. It was only when he said "I swear by the *gold* in the temple," that he was obligated to tell the truth. Thus, righteousness became a game.

Matthew 23:23, 24

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Matthew 5:7

According to Leviticus 11, the largest unclean animal was a camel. The smallest was a gnat. Jesus said the Pharisees picked gnats out of their soup but missed the big camel swimming around. They had all the little details down—even tithing their spice seeds—but missed the big picture of love, faith, mercy and righteousness.

Matthew 23:25, 26

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Matthew 5:8

The purity of the true believer enables him to see God. The hypocrisy of the Pharisee blinds him to the things of God.

Matthew 23:27, 28

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Matthew 5:9

At the same time the Pharisees claimed to be men of peace, they were secretly plotting the murder of the Prince of Peace.

Matthew 23:29–35

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:10

Jesus said, "Blessed are the persecuted and woe to the persecutors."

"If they had been alive in our day, we wouldn't have killed the prophets," boasted the Pharisees. But their claim was invalidated by the fact that at that very moment they sought to execute the One of whom the prophets spoke. From Abel to Zechariah—from A to Z—they killed the prophets.

Matthew 23:36

Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

What will come upon them? The blood, the death, the scourging, the tribulation, the persecution that had befallen the prophets throughout history. "His blood be upon our heads and our sons' heads," the Jews cried a few days later when they demanded the crucifixion of Jesus (see Matthew 27:25). And His blood would indeed be on their heads, for less than forty years after this, the Romans annihilated Jerusalem and slit the throats of ten thousand Jews living in Damascus.

Matthew 23:37, 38

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . ." Every time Jesus used a name twice, it was because His heart was breaking. . . .

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

Luke 22:31, 32

> And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

Luke 10:41, 42

Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? Acts 9:4

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I wanted to gather you under My wings like a mother hen, to shield you from the heat, but you wouldn't let Me."

Matthew 23:39

> **For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.**

I love the way Jesus ends this sermon. What were the people crying when He first rode into Jerusalem on a donkey? "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." Now Jesus refers back to that cry and says, "You'll say it again, only next time you'll say it with new understanding."

Notice He didn't say, "Ye shall not see me henceforth *unless* ye say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." He said, "Ye shall not see me henceforth *until* ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." In other words, it's going to happen. The time is coming when the Jews will acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

There are three things of which the Bible says we are not to be ignorant: spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1), the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13), and the salvation of Israel (Romans 11:25, 26). God is not finished with Israel, folks. The day is coming when Israel *will* say, "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord." When will that happen? In Luke 21, Jesus said Jerusalem would be trodden down until the Gentile age was complete. Jerusalem was trodden down by the Gentiles from the time Rome destroyed the city in A.D. 70 until the return of Jewish control after the seven-day war. Thus, 1967 signaled the end of the Gentile age.

"Well," you say, "if the Gentile age ended in 1967, why haven't we been raptured yet?" According to Romans 11 and Luke 21, we're in overtime, the fifth quarter. Scripture says the Lord is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish (II Peter 3:9). Think of it this way: How many of you have been saved since June 1967? Aren't you glad we were given a "grace period"?

The time is at hand. Jesus will come and establish His throne in Jerusalem. Until then, His desire for us is the same as for the nation Israel. "Let Me gather you under My wings today," He says. "Come back to where you once were. Put away your worldly priorities, your backsliding, and your legalism. Time is short. It won't matter eternally how much money you saved, where you went to college, or how your career developed. What will matter is whether or not you were radical for Me, whether or not you lived to worship Me, whether or not you loved Me."



24 Matthew 24 and 25 comprise what is known as the Olivet Discourse, so named because it is a teaching Jesus gave to His disciples on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. Chapter 24, the prophetic portion of the discourse, is basically a three-point message. In verses 1 through 14 Jesus speaks about the end times as they relate to the nations. In verses 15 through 36 He speaks about the end times as they relate to Israel specifically. In verses 37 through 42 He speaks about the end times as they relate to the church.

Matthew 24:1

And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple.

As the disciples showed Jesus the temple, perhaps they were thinking, *Wait a minute, Lord. Yes, the scribes and Pharisees are fools and hypocrites, but look at this temple! Surely there's* something *good here.* The temple was indeed an incredible building. The gates were brass. The courts were marble. The furnishings were gold. The stones were huge. The chipping and carving of these stones was done in a rock quarry miles away so that

during construction not a sound was heard on the temple mount (I Kings 6:7). Since chiseling and shaping took place in the quarry, when the stones arrived at the temple mount, they fit together perfectly.

Peter tells us we are living stones (I Peter 2:5). All of us will fit together perfectly in heaven. So guess what this world is. It's the rock quarry. Do you ever feel like you're being hammered on? Worn down? Chipped away? Welcome to the rock quarry. The Lord is smoothing us and preparing us here so that when we get to heaven, the sound of a hammer will not be heard.

Matthew 24:2

And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

This would seem impossible in the minds of the disciples. After all, the stones Jesus was talking about were massive in size, measuring twenty feet high, twenty feet wide, and forty feet long. But guess what happened. Less than forty years after Jesus spoke these words, the Romans stormed Jerusalem and, although Titus commanded his soldiers not to desecrate or harm the temple, one of them threw a torch into it. The ensuing fire became so hot that the gold inside began to melt and run down the walls between the rocks. When it cooled and solidified, the Roman soldiers began to pull down the stones of the temple in order to get to the gold hidden in the crevices. They didn't quit until they had managed to pull down every single stone. Exactly as Jesus had prophesied, not one stone remained upon another. That is why if you go to Jerusalem today, all you will see is the Wailing Wall, a part of the temple foundation. It's a massive wall, but small in comparison to what the temple had been.

Matthew 24:3

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

Associating the destruction of the temple with the end of the world, the disciples asked Jesus specifically, "What will be the sign of Your coming and the end of the world?"

Matthew 24:4, 5

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

Although there were many Messianic promises and great expectation among the Jewish people, not one person came on the scene claiming to be Messiah until *after* Jesus came. Why? For the same reason no one counterfeits two hundred dollar bills. Counterfeiters only counterfeit that which is real.

Matthew 24:6, 7 (a)

And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom . . .

With forty tons of explosives and a sophisticated weapon for every person on this planet, mankind has armed himself to the proverbial teeth. One scientist was recently asked which weapons would be used in World War III. This atomic scientist gave an answer that I thought was insightful when he said, "I'm not sure exactly which weapons will be detonated in World War III. But I'll tell you which ones will be used in World War IV: rocks."

"Rocks?"

"Yes. Rocks will be all that's left if World War III ever takes place."

Matthew 24:7 (b)

. . . and there shall be famines . . .

Famine is the result of a population explosion. It took from the time of Adam until 1857 for the population of this planet to reach one billion. Since

then, we add a billion people every twenty years. We now have seven billion people. It's getting crowded, folks. And the effects are felt particularly in the third world.

Matthew 24:7 (c)
. . . and pestilences . . .

The Greek word translated "pestilence" implies unusual pestilence. Consider the AIDS virus. As of May 2001, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) claimed that over one million Americans had been infected with AIDS. But the Brookings Institution and others dispute that figure, claiming the number of Americans infected is much higher, possibly three to four million.

Matthew 24:7 (d)
. . . and earthquakes, in divers places.

In 1976 a geological survey team discovered an interesting change happening in the tectonic plates upon which the earth rests. These gigantic plates are shifting in such a way that earthquakes now occur with greater frequency and intensity than at any time in recorded history. Jesus said when we begin to see pestilence, superpowers at war, famine, and earthquakes, we are to know the end is near.

Matthew 24:8
All these are the beginning of sorrows.

The Greek word translated "sorrows" is what we think of as "birth pangs." Like labor pains, war, famine, earthquakes, and pestilence will erupt and then subside. As we get closer to the time of "delivery," these "contractions" will intensify. I personally believe that the next birth pang will birth the kingdom. We're at eight centimeters, folks. Keep your eyes open and your ears tuned!

Matthew 24:9

Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

Who shall be afflicted, killed and hated by all nations? The Jews. Yes, the Jews will experience a great revival during this time of tribulation. Yes, they will be saved by the millions. But they'll also be hated. All nations of the world will vent their anger and their hostility on one small nation, the nation of Israel.

Matthew 24:10, 11

And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

Although millions will be saved, false prophets will come on the scene and attempt to deceive the whole world.

Matthew 24:12 (a)

And because iniquity shall abound . . .

After Christians are removed from this planet in the Rapture, sin will run rampant. Part of the reason for the Tribulation is that, through it, sin will be exposed in all its grotesqueness. Then, when Jesus comes back seven years later, after experiencing the hideous results of unchecked sin, people will be ready to submit to His righteousness. Yet after one thousand years of living in a virtual Garden of Eden during the millennium, those born during that time and raised in that environment will have one last opportunity to choose. Satan will be released and, incredible as it seems, many will choose to follow him. So much for the theories of B. F. Skinner and other psychologists who contend that environment is responsible for man's problems.

"If you change man's environment, man will be good," they say. Not so. Man will have a perfect environment for one thousand years. Yet he will still rebel against God. Why? Because people are born sinners (Psalm 51:5). The solution, therefore, is not political reformation. The solution is spiritual regeneration. You can try to reform the political system. You can try to

change the environment. But those are not the ultimate solutions. "Ye must be born again," Jesus said (John 3:7). Man must be changed from the inside out. That's the only answer.

Matthew 24:12 (b), 13

. . . the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

Because of sin, the love of people—both for God and for each other—will grow cold. But he who endures the Tribulation will be saved.



***For topical study of Matthew 24:13 entitled "Enduring Through Tribulation," turn to page* 174.**

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

Sometimes I hear preachers say that, on the basis of this verse, we must evangelize the world so Jesus can come back. I personally don't believe that is a correct understanding of this Scripture. Jesus will come back at a time already appointed by the Father. Surely the gospel is to be preached, and surely we are to participate in the process. But the second coming is not dependent upon us, for the greatest explosion of evangelism this world has ever seen will not take place until after we're gone. Revelation 7 tells us that after the Rapture, 144,000 Jewish evangelists will be anointed. Moses and perhaps Elijah will come back on the scene, working miracles and calling down fire from Heaven. An angel will fly across the sky saying, "Don't be fooled by Antichrist's system. Don't take the mark of the beast."

Matthew 24:15, 16 (a)

When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso

readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee . . .

Verse 15 begins the second section of Matthew 24. Jesus had spoken of the nations in verses 1–14. In verses 15–36, He will speak of the Jews. Speaking to the Jews, Jesus says very pointedly, "When you see the event spoken of by the prophet Daniel, called the abomination of desolation, run to the wilderness as fast as you can. Get out! Things are coming down!" What is the abomination of desolation? There are two parts to this cataclysmic event —one historic, one prophetic.

Daniel 11:31 speaks of the historic aspect of the abomination of desolation in reference to a tragic event in Jewish history. Following the reign of Alexander the Great, a king named Antiochus Epiphanes ruled Syria. He was an egomaniacal madman who believed he was the embodiment of the Greek god Zeus. When Antiochus realized that the Jews in Israel were not acknowledging him as God, he became enraged and ordered the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus, on a single day in 170 B.C., one hundred thousand Jewish males were slaughtered, the women raped, the city looted. Then Antiochus himself entered the temple, butchered a pig on the altar, and forced the priests to drink its blood and eat the raw pork. Finally, he smeared the remainder of the blood on the temple walls. It was the abomination of desolation for it was abominable and it left the people desolate.

The second aspect, an event yet to happen, is prophesied in Daniel 9:27. In the last days, a man will come on the scene who will make a seven-year peace treaty with Israel. Appearing to be her friend and protector, this leader will seem to defuse all of the problems in the Middle East. He will be charismatic and persuasive, an impressive intellectual, and a skilled orator. Called Antichrist in Scripture, he will capture the attention of the entire world. Although he will initially come across as a man of peace, in the middle of his seven-year peace treaty, 2 Thessalonians 2 tells us he will set up his image in the temple and demand to be worshipped as God. This second abomination will result in desolation across this planet. Jesus said, "When you see this happen—Run!" Where?

Matthew 24:16 (b)

. . . into the mountains.

Zechariah declares that following the abomination of desolation, the Jews will indeed flee. But only one-third of them will make it to safety (Zechariah 13:8, 9). Tragically, two-thirds of the Jewish nation will be caught in the flood of persecution that will follow Antichrist's declaration of war against them. The violence and bloodshed will be staggering—beyond anything this world has ever seen. Most Bible teachers believe the remainder of the Jews will run to the ancient city of Petra. Located in present-day Jordan, Petra is a mysterious, miraculous city indeed. . . .

> *In approximately 2000 B.C., Esau settled in a volcanic crater that was approximately a mile in length. It was an incredibly secure place, for to get into the crater, one had to go through a narrow canyon only twelve feet wide in many places with a rock face between two hundred feet and one thousand feet high on either side. The entire city could be easily guarded by only fifteen soldiers marching along the ridges above its narrow entrance. Thus, the descendants of Esau, called the Edomites, dwelt in this city of Petra for centuries, believing they were invincible. Over the years, they constructed an architectural phenomenon. Carved right into the rock are amphitheatres, banks, temples, and an aqueduct system that baffles scientists to this day. With a population of one million, no one can figure out how they got enough water into the city to sustain the inhabitants. The Edomites were a proud people who trusted in their fortress, rested in their cliff city, and had no need of Jehovah. So Obadiah came on the scene in the name of the Lord and said they would fall. And guess what. They did. The city began to weaken when it was struck with a plague. Eventually, the Edomites were wiped out entirely.*

For many years, people heard stories about the rock city of Petra. Bible teachers would talk about it, but in most people's minds, it had been relegated to the same status as the lost city of Atlantis—a mythological place that never really existed.

In 1812, however, a Bible teacher/explorer/adventurer named Johann Burckhardt was determined to find Petra. And when he finally did, he couldn't believe what he saw, for although it had been abandoned for centuries and remains desolate to this day, he was amazed by its grandeur and splendor. Perhaps most arresting, however, were the two huge eagles' wings carved into the rock at the very entrance of the city, for the Book of Revelation declares that the remnant of Israel will be saved by the wings of an eagle (Revelation 12:14). A number of years ago, W. E. Blackstone, another Bible teacher, was so convinced that Petra will be the place in which the Jews are kept safe, he purchased thousands of Hebrew New Testaments, underlined passages like Matthew 24 and Revelation 12, and left them in earthen jars throughout Petra.When the Jews get there, the Bibles will be waiting for them. I love it!

Matthew 24:17

Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house.

You might be thinking, *What is this about a housetop? How many times are we on our roofs?* Remember, this section is speaking to the Jews, and in Israel even to this day, people relax on roof-top decks.

Matthew 24:18–21

Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

Pray that the abomination of desolation doesn't come on the Sabbath day. Why? Because in Israel, transportation comes to a standstill on the Sabbath. This is another indication that Jesus is speaking to the Jews. It wouldn't

matter if the abomination of desolation came on the Sabbath in our country. Sadly, our nation treats the Sabbath no differently than any other day.

Matthew 24:22

And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

The final three-and-one-half years after Antichrist reveals his true nature in the temple and the Jews flee to the wilderness will be a time of disaster, destruction, and death unlike any other in history. Here, Jesus is saying that unless the days were shortened, no one would survive them. The entire world would be annihilated. But God will shorten those days for the elect's sake. And here is where controversy arises.

There are those who say that since the church is called "the elect," the church must be in the Tribulation period. Mark this down, students of prophecy: In passages such as Isaiah 45:4; 65:9; and Romans 11:28, God specifically calls Israel "His elect." It's not just Christians who are called "the elect." In fact, there are three groups in the Bible who are called by that name: Israel, the church, and those saved in the Tribulation. Keep in mind that in verses 15–36—with references to Judaea, the Sabbath, and the temple—Jesus is still speaking to Israel.

Matthew 24:23–27

Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

False spiritual leaders will come on the scene, saying, "We have found Messiah. He's in the desert," or "He's over here," or "He's over there."

Jesus said, “Don’t believe any of them. When I truly come, it will be like lightning. It will be obvious to everyone.” He didn’t say, “I’m coming again to Brooklyn in 1921 to reveal Myself to the Watchtower Society.” He didn’t say, “I’m coming again in the late 1800s to reveal Myself through magic spectacles to Joseph Smith.” No. He said, “When I come, it will be like lightning. *Everyone* will see Me.”

Matthew 24:28

For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles [vultures] be gathered together.

Here, Jesus makes an allusion to the battle of Armageddon that is further illuminated in Revelation 19. When the nations of the world come together for war in the Valley of Megiddo, carcasses will indeed abound and vultures will follow. So, too, the world system with all its pride, pomposity, and prowess will become nothing more than a dead carcass. No matter how much progress we might make politically, the system will always be corrupt because of depravity. Things are wrong in society, and the answer lies not in capitalism, socialism, or communism. The answer is not democracy, oligarchy, or anarchy. The only answer is the return of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 24:29, 30

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Why will the tribes of the earth mourn? Zechariah tells us that when Israel looks at Jesus and sees the wounds in His hands, the Jews will say, “Where did You get those wounds?”

“I received these in the house of My friends,” He will answer (Zechariah 13:6).

And Israel will mourn as they look upon the One they have pierced.

Matthew 24:31

And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The angels shall gather the elect. Which elect? The Jews. Remember, Jesus is still dealing with Israel in this section. In 1948, something took place that had never before happened in history: a nation was re-birthed. A nation that hadn't existed for almost two thousand years was suddenly re-established exactly as the Old Testament prophesied when Jews from all over the world gathered in Israel once again. But their gathering has not been even close to complete. For example, more Jews live in New York City than live in the entire nation of Israel. And even though thousands of Russian Jews immigrated into Israel each week in the wake of the fall of the iron curtain, most of them immediately sought to leave Israel for New York. When Jesus comes back again, there will be a *complete* re-gathering. When will that happen? Look at verse 32.

Matthew 24:32–35

Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

The fig tree is the symbol of Israel nationally, historically, and scripturally. On May 14, 1948, the fig tree blossomed once again when the land of Israel was returned to the Jews. Jesus said the generation that sees that event take place will not pass away. Who is that generation? We are.

***For topical study of Matthew 24:32–35 entitled "The Final Generation," turn to page* 179.**

Matthew 24:36

But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

Jesus used the budding fig tree as an example of what to watch for regarding His return, for although no one will know the exact day and hour of His arrival, Paul tells us we will recognize the times and seasons (1 Thessalonians 5:1).

Matthew 24:37

But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

Like Noah, you and I are end times believers. Noah lived before the Flood, we before the fire. Noah spoke of coming rain, we of the coming reign. And just as it was in Noah's day, so it will be in the day of Jesus' coming. What was it like in Noah's day? In Genesis 6, we see four parallels between Noah's day and the days in which we live.

In the days of Noah, there was a population explosion (Genesis 6:1). Due to the fact that in Noah's day, men lived for eight or nine hundred years, there were probably five to six billion people on the planet during the time of the Flood.

In the days of Noah, abnormal sexual practices abounded (Genesis 6:4). Most Bible scholars believe that Genesis 6:4 is a reference to fallen angels having sexual relationships with human women. So, too, we live in a time of abnormal sexual practices. Things that were unthinkable a generation ago are now commonplace and accepted.

When the hierarchy of the Episcopal Church is encouraging homosexual union as a pathway to personal holiness (*Newsweek:* 2/90), we are indeed living in dark, dark days.

In Noah's day, the imagination of man was evil continually (Genesis 6:5). Seeing that men's hearts were only evil continually, God decided to lovingly put them out of their misery. Thus, the Flood accomplished quickly and mercifully the destruction their sin and perversion would bring about inevitably. So, too, the imagination of people in our society is evil continually—as evidenced by the fact that in our country, legal pornography is now a multi-billion dollar industry.

In Noah's day, violence filled the earth (Genesis 6:11). I read recently that the high rate of suicide among policemen is attributed to the fact that of the thousands of violent crimes committed in this country, only a handful of criminals are brought to justice. No wonder policemen are frustrated and suicidal. Violence runs rampant, while justice is hamstrung.

Matthew 24:38

For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark.

Although Noah had been pounding on his ark and preaching to the people for one hundred and twenty years, they didn't listen. Since it had never rained on the planet before, they must have thought Noah was all wet.

Matthew 24:39–41

And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

This is a controversial passage. Many say Jesus is speaking of the judgment that will take place when He comes back to rule and reign in Jerusalem. However, I join those who believe Jesus is speaking not of judgment but of the Rapture. You see, the Greek word translated "took" in verse 39 is *airo.* But in verses 40 and 41, the word translated "taken" is *paralombano.* Why? Looking through my concordance, I find three other

times *paralombano* is used. In Matthew 1:20, the angel told Joseph not to be afraid to *take* Mary as his bride: In Matthew 17:1, Jesus *took* Peter, James, and John with Him up the Mount of Transfiguration. In John 14:3, Jesus said, "I will come again and *take* you unto Myself, that where I am there ye may be also." And I begin to see a pattern. Using *paralombano,* Jesus is not talking about judgment, punishment, and damnation. He's talking about a bride, glory, and Heaven. In other words, He's talking about the Rapture.

Matthew 24:42–51

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In light of the end times, Jesus instructs us to be faithful servants—to be watchful, wise, and warned concerning our Master's return.

***For topical study of Matthew 24:42–51 entitled "Being Watchful, Wise, Warned," turn to page* 184.**

ENDURING THROUGH
TRIBULATION
A Topical Study of
MATTHEW 24:13

Matthew 24:13 is not only applicable prophetically but also presently, for in this world, Jesus said we would have tribulations. Our Christian life is a race to be run (Hebrews 12:1). And that race, dear people, is not a one hundred-meter sprint. It's a marathon.

> *But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*
>
> Matthew 24:13

The Greek word translated "saved" is *sozo,* a word that refers to the full orb of God's blessing. In other words, according to Matthew 24:13, those who endure the marathon will experience the blessing of God upon themselves, their families, their ministries, their finances, and their vocations. They will experience the full orb of God's blessing in every area of their lives.

The Call to Endurance

In the fifth chapter of his book, James picks up on the theme of enduring to the end . . .

> *Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful [compas sionate], and of tender mercy.*
>
> James 5:11

This passage brings a question to our minds: "Lord, if You are merciful and compassionate, then why do You allow troubles to come against us and problems to plague us? Why don't You do something, Lord?"

James says, "Remember Job. Remember the heroes of the Old Testament. Don't lose sight of their example." There was one prophet who felt exceedingly weary. His name was Jeremiah. Jeremiah's problems were mounting on all sides, and he was about to throw in the towel as far as ministry was concerned. "Jeremiah," the Lord said to him, "you have run against the footmen and if you faint in running against the footmen, how will you run against the horses? You've been engaged in some battles. But if you're fainting now, what will you do when the horses come, when the big problems hit you?" (see Jeremiah 12:5). The Lord went on to tell him that the Babylonians were coming to carry the Jews out of their homeland. It's as if God said, "You think it's tough now, Jeremiah, but I see what's coming, and I am preparing you by allowing you to go through these difficulties and trials. I'm allowing you to go through hard times to prepare you for what I know lies ahead."

If God used hard times to prepare Jeremiah for the Babylonians, why didn't He save Himself and Jeremiah a lot of trouble and just destroy the Babylonians in the first place? For the same reason He doesn't destroy the problems in our lives: because this world has rejected His rule. Ever since the Garden of Eden, mankind has thumbed his nose at God and demanded liberation, saying, "We will do what we want."

It is because all of humanity throughout all of history has rebelled against God that we have disease and death, pollution and war, troubles and

problems. Not only in the world generally, but in our worlds personally, whenever you and I rebel against the way of God, we reap devastation, destruction, and sadness. The Father does not promise to keep us *from* problems, but to be with us *in* them. Since He sees what is coming two years down the road, He says, "I see what's ahead and I'm going to work with you right now to get you ready. I'm going to have you race against the footmen so that when the horses come stampeding through, you'll be able to endure."

I think of Mama giraffe. When she gives birth, she does so from a standing position. This means when Baby giraffe is born, he immediately falls on his head ten feet to the ground. Mama then does something that absolutely intrigues me. After quickly stretching her neck down to check Baby's condition, she stands upright once again, swings her front leg, and kicks him. Baby then tries to stand up, wobbles, and falls to the ground in exhaustion. No sooner does Baby collapse than Mama winds up her leg and kicks him once more. This happens, three, four, or five times until Baby finally musters up enough strength—the adrenaline flowing and terror filling his heart—to stand up.

Once Baby gets up on all fours, Mama again swings her leg and kicks his legs out from under him. And the process is repeated two, three, or four more times. The result? Within the first hour of his life, Baby learns how to get up quickly and to move away from Mama readily. Why does Mama giraffe do this? She's not trying to be mean, but she instinctively understands that leopards, lions, hyenas, and jackals were watching the birth of her baby. Because giraffes are defenseless if they cannot move together in a pack, Baby must learn quickly how to stand up and get moving—even if it means getting mad at Mama and not understanding what she's doing.

Maybe you can relate. "What are you doing, God?" you might be asking. "I just barely get up and BAM! I'm down again. I just get going and BOOM! I'm flat on my face once more. What's happening?" The Lord is teaching you something. He loves you and me enough that even though we misunderstand Him, shake our fist at Him, or turn our back on Him, He says, "I know this is needed in your life in order that you might stand and be established, in order that you might be able to run with the horses, in order that you might endure."

The Key to Endurance

God is with us. That is the secret of endurance.

> *By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.*
>
> Hebrews 11:24–26

Having grown up in Pharaoh's court, Moses was in line to ascend the very throne of Pharaoh. Yet he chose instead to take on the reproach of Christ, for it was a greater treasure than the best Egypt had to offer. I like that! Sure, we go through suffering and reproach, tribulations and difficulties. But even they are better than the best the world has to offer us, with its heartache, disappointment, and disillusionment.

At forty years of age, Moses said, "I would rather be with God's people and suffer than remain in this place where the pleasures of sin are for but a season." And he split the scene. Then he began to lead the people out of Egypt. For forty years, he led them through the wilderness. It wasn't easy. It was hot and dry. You think you're going through dry times? Think of Moses! You think people don't like you? Scripture says three million Jews rose up as a single man with rocks in hand, ready to stone him (Exodus 17:4).

How did Moses make it? How did he endure the rejection, dry times, and constant troubles from within and without? Look at verse 27: "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured as seeing him who is invisible." In other words, Moses saw God's hand in every situation.

> Several years ago, I talked with a lady who was devastated. She was ready to leave everything to marry a man who lived across the country. Although she hadn't known him very long, she felt it was providential. But the day before she was to leave, she discovered some things about him that indicated he had some serious problems. She had packed her goods, cut all her ties, and sold her business only

to discover a day before the wedding that it wasn't going to happen. I understood her feeling of disappointment as she wondered, *What's the Lord doing? Where is He? Why is He allowing this to happen to me?*

In response, I told her it would be like if I had come home and seen my daughter Christy unwrapping a king-size Snickers bar. As she was just about to take a big bite, I lunged at her, grabbed the Snickers from her, and threw it to the floor, saying, "Christy, haven't you heard the news? Every Snickers in Oregon has been laced with arsenic. One bite will kill you!" Now, at that point, Christy would either have said, "Oh, Dad, I was just ready to enjoy that Snickers bar, and you took it from me. How mean!" Or she could say, "Oh, Daddy, thanks for rescuing me! You knew something I didn't. You saved my life!"

So, too, when the Father intervened in that lady's situation, she had a choice to make. She could have said, "Why is this happening to me?" Or she could have seen Him who is invisible, seen His hand in everything, and said, "Father, thank You for grabbing the Snickers from me. You caught me just in time!"

Dear saint, you have a choice to make right now in whatever you're going through. You can either shrivel up and fade away like the shallow seed in Mark 4, or you can endure, seeing God's hand in everything and everything in His hand.

Look at God's hand, and what will you see? A nail print. The invisible God became a visible Man in Christ Jesus. And as I see His nail-scarred hand, I have no choice but to say, "If You loved me enough to be pinned to the Cross for me and to plunge into hell for me, I will trust You, even though I may not understand what's happening presently."

What is faith? According to Hebrews 11, it is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. There is no such thing as "blind faith." On the contrary, faith sees more than unbelief ever will because it sees into an entirely different dimension. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (see Hebrews 11:3).

The Hebrew word for create is *bara,* which means "to make something out of that which does not exist previously." In other words, God made everything from nothing. It wasn't that He refashioned material that already existed, but rather that He started "from scratch" when He spoke the worlds into existence. So, too, the world in which you live personally—your children, your job, your ministry, your marriage, and your finances—is presently being framed. You are framing your world, even as God framed this world by speaking the Word.

Think of a carpenter framing a house. The house is formed by how it's framed. Maybe you have framed your world with unbelief and griping, complaining and doubting, saying, "Why me? How come? Where's God?" Maybe you don't like the house you live in because the walls are falling down, the tiles are falling off, and it's a miserable place to live. Don't blame God. You built it. You framed it with complaints, cynicism and faltering faith. We have another option. We can say, "By faith I will frame my world with the Word of God. I will study the Scriptures. I will claim the promises and speak them in faith."

> *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*
>
> Romans 8:28

> *. . . For the joy of the* LORD *is your strength.*
>
> Nehemiah 8:10

> *But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*
>
> Philippians 4:19

Today I can build a house trusting God, seeing Him who is invisible, and believing His promises—or I can murmur to my wife when I get home. God judged the nation of Israel because they murmured in their tents (Deuteronomy 1:27). Husbands and wives got together, spoke words of complaint and unbelief to each other, and a great plague struck the land.

Speak the promises of God to each other. Go on record. Build a world that is in accordance with the Word of God as revealed in Scripture. Speak words of faith, and you'll endure.

> Winston Churchill, 248 pounds of solid inspiration, saw England through Germany's blitzkrieg. As the Third Reich dropped thousands of bombs on London, Hitler felt, as did other international observers, that England would fall easily. But this bulldog of a man, Winston Churchill, went on the air time and time again, calling his nation to hang on and to believe. And England didn't go down. Years later, one of his alma maters, an exclusive prep school, asked him to speak at graduation. When he accepted the invitation, the headmaster of the school was elated. For weeks he told the student body, "Soon Winston Churchill is coming. The most powerful orator in history is going to speak here. When he comes, bring your pencils and paper and take note of every word he says." Finally the day came. The graduation service began. The students, sitting behind the speakers' podium, had pencils and paper poised. The parents and guests settled in for a long, inspirational speech. After many flowery introductions, Churchill finally arose from his chair, took the podium, and turned around to address the young men behind him.
>
> "Gentlemen," he said, "Never give up. Never give up. Never, never, never, never, give up."
>
> Then he sat down. The students were stunned. The audience was amazed. And none of them ever, ever, ever forgot it.

That's what Jesus says to us. Never give up. He that endures to the end shall be saved.

So when the Father seems to be kicking your wobbly legs out from under you or when you seem to be running hard against the footmen, know this: It's all working for your ultimate salvation. Endure, gang, by seeing the invisible. Endure by framing your world with faith.

And never give up.

THE FINAL GENERATION

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 24:32–35

Written by a then-unknown author named Hal Lindsay, *The Late Great Planet Earth* exposed an entire generation to the concepts of the Rapture of the church and the return of Jesus Christ. It was foundational to the Jesus Movement of the '70s, which started on the West Coast, spread across the country, and eventually circled the globe. Lindsay and other teachers of prophecy during that time stressed this teaching in Matthew 24. The parable of the fig tree enflamed the hearts of an entire generation—for Jesus said the budding of the fig tree signaled His impending return.

What is the budding of the fig tree? Scripture interprets Scripture. Thus, Jeremiah, Joel, Hosea, and others identify the fig tree as the nation Israel. For centuries, Israel seemed to be a dead tree. In the year A.D. 70, the Romans marched into Jerusalem, destroyed the city, and took over the country. The Jews scattered every direction in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 28:64–67. But in addition to saying the Jews would be scattered throughout the world, God also said, "But The Lord liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land" (Jeremiah 23:8).

You see, when the Jews were scattered, something happened historically that had never happened previously in world history. Without a homeland, the Jewish people kept their identity, religion, and ethnicity intact. No other nation in the history of the world has ever done that. Every other country swallowed by another has become assimilated by the conquering culture within two generations. That is why you never hear of Babylonians today and why none of you have Assyrian neighbors. The Jews kept their identity—not for two generations, but for two thousand years. Through wave after wave of persecution, prejudice and bigotry, Satan was relentless in his attempt to destroy them. But he failed.

Satan's plans always backfire. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the world said, "The Jews deserve a land of their own. World sympathy was with the Jewish people for the first and only time in history. So it was that on

May 14, 1948, Israel became a nation again. The fig tree that had appeared to be dead and hopeless suddenly sprang back to life and blossomed—just as Jesus prophesied. And, according to Matthew 24:34, the generation that saw that happen would be the final generation.

What constitutes a generation? Hal Lindsay and others taught that a Biblical generation could be a thirty-eight to forty-year time period.

> *And the Lord's anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of the* LORD*, was consumed.*
>
> Numbers 32:13

> *And the space in which we came from Kadesh-barnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the* LORD *sware unto them.*
>
> Deuteronomy 2:14

Thus, anticipation grew. Excitement and expectancy filled the hearts of many, for if you add forty years to 1948—and if you believe the rapture of the Church takes place seven years before the return of Jesus, the Rapture would take place in 1980 or 1981. Truly the time was near! T-shirts, bumper stickers, and posters were printed. Maranatha—"Come quickly, Lord"—became the watchword of believers. 1981 came. So did 1982, '83, '84, '85, and '86. And then something began to happen. A whole bunch of radical Christians began to cool off, saying, "Maybe we're here for a while after all. Maybe we shouldn't be so committed to this kingdom thing." Oh, they didn't say it in those exact words, but that's what they were thinking. And a dulling of expectancy swept over our generation.

What went wrong? Perhaps forty years is not the figure we should work with when looking at a Biblical generation. Take a look at Genesis 15 . . .

> *And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom*

they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again. . . .

Genesis 15:13, 14, 16

Here in Genesis 15, God refers to the four-hundred-year period the Jews were in Egypt as four generations. Therefore, in this model, a generation is not forty years but one hundred years. If a generation is one hundred years, am I suggesting that the Rapture will take place in 2048—one hundred years after the rebirth of the nation of Israel? No. I suggest it will be before then. You see, there is a principle in Bible interpretation called the Principle of First Mention that says foundational understanding about any given subject is usually found in the first place it is mentioned in Scripture. Where is the Greek term, "generation" first mentioned? In Matthew 1:17 we read: So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

Sharpen your pencils and think with me: Christian and Jewish theologians alike agree that, based on Biblical genealogies, Abraham was called by God in the year 2085 B.C. Genesis 2 tells us he was seventy-five years old at that time, which means Abraham was born in 2160 B.C. Matthew 1:17 tells us there were forty-two generations (14x3) from Abraham to Christ. So, if you divide 2160—the year of Abraham's birth—by 42, you get 51.4. Thus, scripturally, there is validity for a Biblical generation to be 51.4 years.

Jesus told us that no man knows the day or the hour of His return. But of the times and season we are not to be ignorant (1 Thessalonians 5:1). Hebrews 10:25 says we are not to forsake assembling ourselves together so much the more as we see that day coming. 1 Thessalonians tells us that the return of Christ will surprise the world but not us (1 Thessalonians 5:4).

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

2 Peter 3:8

From the Lord's perspective, one thousand years equals one day and one day equals one thousand years. This answers a lot of questions. For example, God told Adam that the day he ate of the forbidden fruit he would surely die. Yet Adam lived to be 938 years old. Why? From God's perspective, a day being a thousand years, Adam died towards the end of the "day" in which he sinned. God kept His promise perfectly.

From this perspective, the early church fathers taught that the Genesis account of creation is not only history, but prophecy. God worked for six days. So, too, this world will work for six thousand years. On the seventh day of creation, God rested. So, too, in the seven thousandth year, there will come a one thousand-year period of time called the millennium when there will be rest and peace.

When is the seven thousandth year? When will Christ return?

In the year 1670, a brilliant thinker and theologian, Archbishop Usher, made some calculations that have withstood computer confirmation. By adding the years of the genealogy in Genesis, he calculated that Adam appeared on the scene in 4004 B.C.

"Wait a minute," you say. "It is well known that man has been on the earth for multiplied millions of years. How can you say that the first man appeared only six thousand years ago?"

Science is not at all committed to an ancient earth theory any longer.

Dr. Stuart Ross, a brilliant astronomer and thinker, but not a believer, wrote a book entitled *The Lunar Silence—A Post-Apollo View,* in which he makes a number of fascinating observations, among them the following. . . .

> In our first manned shot to the moon about twenty years ago Neil Armstrong stepped on to the moon's surface saying, "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." Did you ever wonder why it was that he had to climb so far down from the module to actually set foot on the moon? Why was the module perched twenty-five feet off the moon's surface? Ross writes that scientists, believing the moon to be 4.6 billion years old, were convinced that the accumulation of

> meteorite dust on the moon's surface would be at least two thousand and perhaps as much as twenty thousand feet deep. After all, if you didn't dust your house for 4.6 billion years, what would your house look like? So, twenty-five-foot legs with big cushions were constructed in order that the module could compact the dust as it landed and not sink indefinitely into a sea of meteorite powder. Imagine the scientists' surprise when they watched the lunar module set down without sinking a bit. In fact, the greatest depth of lunar dust measured thus far is two inches. Consequently, a number of scientists, including Dr. Stuart Ross, are now saying the moon can be no more than ten thousand years old.

On the other hand, even if you opt for an ancient earth, I still believe that the genealogies of Genesis take you back accurately to 4000 B.C.—or six thousand years ago. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Genesis 1:2 says, "And the earth was without form, and void." The Hebrew translation of "without form and void" is *tohuw va bohuw,* which means "chaotic, turned upside-down, emptied."

Isaiah 45:18, however, says ". . . God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain." In other words, He created the earth *with* form.

Is this a contradiction? No. Along with many Bible scholars, I believe a cataclysmic event occurred between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2. I believe it was between these two verses that Lucifer, the highest angel in Heaven, launched a rebellion against God and was cast out of Heaven. And it was when he fell to earth that the earth became "tohuw va bohuw." So God recreated the earth. That's why, in Genesis 1:28, He told Adam to replenish and subdue the earth (Genesis 1:28). Subdue it from whom? From Satan, who had set up his headquarters on this planet.

Whether you espouse an "old earth" theory or a much younger earth theory, the genealogies of Genesis meet with no scientific contradiction. Adam made his entrance in 4000 B.C. What does this mean? The answer is found in the Book of Hosea. . . .

Come, and let us return unto the LORD*: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.* Hosea 6:1, 2

Writing of the End Times, Hosea says for two days the Jewish people will go through hard, tearing, difficult times. But on the third day, they will be revived. Thus, the calculation is complete:

Day 1	Adam is created	4000 B.C.
Day 4	The coming of Jesus Christ	A.D. 1
Days 5–6	Israel goes through hard times	A.D. 1–2000
Day 7	Israel revived during millennium	A.D. 2000

I am not alone in this interpretation.

In A.D. 150, Iranius wrote concerning the Book of Genesis: "This is an account of things formerly created as it is also a prophecy of things which are yet to come, for the day of the Lord is as one thousand years. And in six days, created things were completed. It is evident, therefore, they will come to an end at the end of six thousand years." Lactanius said this in A.D. 300: "Because all the works of God were finished in six days, it is necessary that the world should remain in this state for six thousand years. Because having finished works, He rested on the seventh day and blessed it, it is necessary then, at the end of the six thousandth year, wickedness should be abolished out of the earth and righteousness should then reign for one thousand years."God's week of human history is rapidly coming to completion. The return of Christ is nigh.

I believe you who are in your teens and early twenties are very possibly the last generation. Set your heart on things above. Live for heaven. Seek first the kingdom, and you will be happy presently, rewarded eternally, and grateful constantly.

You who are older, continue setting an example for us who are younger. Continue to make the Lord top priority in your life. We're looking to you in a very real sense. Please keep the fire hot.

Fellow baby boomers, we need to realize that Jesus Christ is coming soon. We don't have time to play around. We don't have time to chase worldly pursuits any longer. We need to return to ministry and service, worship and prayer, Bible study and street witnessing. Whatever it was you used to do when you were fired up about Jesus in the '70s, do it again.

Maranatha!

BEING WATCHFUL, WISE, WARNED

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 24:42–49

After giving His disciples information concerning the end times, Jesus now gives them inspiration for all times. You see, prophecy is not given to titillate our curiosity. Rather, prophecy should motivate us to sobriety.

An Exhortation to Be Watchful

> *Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*
>
> Matthew 24:42–44

When will Jesus come?
If you're not watching, He'll come when you least expect Him.

The story is told of a lady in Czechoslovakia who was in great despair. Having recently discovered that her husband had been seeing another woman, she stood on her fifth-floor balcony, wondering whether she should kill him or whether she should take her own life. She decided to do the latter. She jumped. Little did she know that at that very moment, her husband was walking on the sidewalk directly below. She landed right on top of him. He died. She lived.

Watch! You never know who will be dropping in! You who are feeling despondent, discouraged, defeated, and depressed, know this: The Lord *is* coming! Watch!

An Exhortation to Be Wise

> *Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.*
>
> Matthew 24:45–47

What are we to be doing in Jesus' absence? We are not to be sitting around, goofing off, or kicking back. Jesus says the wise servant is the one who is doing good.

"But my doing good doesn't seem to be doing any good," you say.

> I heard the story of a man who lived in the North Beach section of San Francisco—an area known for sin and carnality of the worst sort. As he watched the neighborhood begin to sink into sin, he went out on the streets and, while the barkers were trying to pull people into their topless bars, he talked to people about Jesus. In the early '40s and '50s he even wore a sandwich sign with a gospel message neatly lettered on both sides. A few years ago, this precious old man was asked, "Why do you keep doing this? It's not doing any good."
>
> "I may not be changing them," he said. "But I'm doing this lest they change me."

Truly, this was a wise servant.

An Exhortation to Be Warned

> *But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken . . .*
>
> Matthew 24:48, 49

The word "evil" here is interesting. *Kakos* in Greek, it means "something that was once good but has gone bad." It's a word used to describe an instrument out of tune or a piece of fruit gone bad. How did this servant go bad? He simply tired of waiting for his master's return. His sense of urgency and expectancy was replaced with brutality and carnality.

First, brutality. You can tell when you are falling into the "evil servant" mentality when you begin to "smite your fellowservants," when you begin to beat up on people verbally and treat them unkindly. You see, if I am truly looking for the Lord's coming today, it will affect how I treat every person with whom I come in contact. I will treat my wife differently if I believe Jesus is coming back within the hour. I'll talk to the guys at work differently if I believe Jesus will show up there any moment. You won't push people around; you won't put people down; you won't beat people up if you believe Jesus is coming back soon.

Second, carnality. The evil servant began to "eat and drink with the drunken." That's why almost one-third of the Bible deals with prophecy and why prophecy can never be over-emphasized. Speaking of the coming of Jesus, the apostle John said, "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself" (1 John 3:3a). Truly, I am blessed as I look at Applegate Christian Fellowship and see the process of purification taking place. The Lord is changing the congregation there. Why? Because they are looking for His coming. They may have had setbacks. They might yet have struggles. But year after year, decade after decade, we who are looking for His coming find ourselves saying, "Lord, I want to be ready. I want to put away those things with which I once flirted. I want to keep looking for You."

Folks, heavenly rewards are not going to be little medals to pin on our shirts or flimsy trophies to put on our shelves. No, our rewards will affect

our very beings for all of eternity (1 Corinthians 15:40, 41, Daniel 12:3). That's why the Lord talked so much about His coming. That's why He gave us the Book of Revelation. Heaven is *real,* gang. And when you get there, my prayer is that you will hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

How can that happen? One way. Priority is the key. Even though there were still millions of people who were physically diseased and spiritually lost, Jesus said, "Father I have glorified thee and *finished* the work which thou hast given Me to do" (see John 17:4). How could Jesus say this? Because He finished the work *the Father* gave Him to do.

To make your life meaningful presently and to prepare for eternity, you must hear what the Father tells you to do instead of listening to the pressures and demands of people. Burdens from people and preachers, churches and organizations are heavy. But Jesus says, "My yoke is easy. My burden is light" (see Matthew 11:30).

In Ezekiel 44, God told the priests they were to wear no wool, lest it cause them to perspire. They were to wear only linen because He didn't want them "sweating" in their service for Him. The same is true for us. It is not the heart of our Father that we frantically try to meet every need and minister to every problem. We'll burn out in the process. Rather, it is His desire that we are faithful in the work *He* gives us to do.

How do we find out what His work for us is? Moses went to the mountain to meet the Lord and came down with the Commandments (Exodus 19:20). A great while before morning, Jesus would go to a solitary place to pray (Mark 1:35). Follow the example of Moses and Jesus and daily enter the presence of the Lord, saying, "Lord, guide my thoughts right now as I spend time in Your Word and talk about the day ahead with You."

He might say, "I want you to mow your neighbor's lawn." He might whisper, "Can you take an hour away from TV tonight and pray for the mission in Carmen Serdan?" His answer might be, "Write a letter to your brother." The Lord isn't cracking the whip, saying, "Do more. Get busy." No, He's saying, "Let Me guide you and lead you day by day."

That is why I encourage you to take time to seek Him each and every day in a quiet, solitary place. Like Moses, go to the mountain with tablet in hand and write down whatever He places on your heart. You won't be burdened

by His requests. You won't get an ulcer. You won't even sweat. Yours will be a beautiful ministry that will be rewarded eternally if you focus on the work *He* gives you to do.



25 In chapter 25, Jesus closes His Olivet Discourse with a practical exhortation. Hear His heart as He says, "In light of end times understanding, there are three things you must consider: personal salvation (verses 1–13), responsible stewardship (verses 14–30), and practical servanthood" (verses 31–46).

Matthew 25:1–13

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

In Jesus' day, although the day of a wedding was known in a community, the exact hour was unknown. The bridegroom could show up at his bride's house any time during the day or night. He could come in the morning, at noon, even at midnight. But as soon as he arrived at the house of the bride, word passed quickly that the bridegroom had come and the marriage was

about to begin. The community would then accompany the bride and the bridegroom as they made their way to the ceremony.

In this parable, there were ten maidens. Ten is the Jewish number of completion, as illustrated by the fact that there were ten Commandments and that ten Jewish males in a community warranted a synagogue. But of the ten maidens, only five had oil for their lamps. And when the bridegroom came at midnight, the other five were left out of the procession. What is Jesus saying? He's saying that when He, the Bridegroom, comes for His bride at an unknown hour, some will be ready to join the procession but others will not because they lack oil in their lamps. Scripturally, oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Thus, those not born of the Spirit will be left behind.

If the Rapture occurred tonight, I fear some of you would still be sitting here while the rest of us went up. Yes, you've been hanging out with the wedding party—but there's no oil in your vessel. We must realize that many who think they are going up in the wedding party will be left behind for lack of oil. I believe the heartbeat of Jesus revealed in this parable is one which should sober every person. In Luke 21:36, Jesus said, "Pray that you might be found worthy to be kept from the hour of tribulation"—the implication being that some who mistakenly thought they were part of the procession will go through that terrible time of tribulation.

I would rather see my own family and my church family soberly on our knees, saying, "Please, Lord, fill us with the oil of Your Spirit and seal our salvation," than to give anyone false assurance and have him miss the wedding party, lulled to sleep by a false theology. I would rather see a person come forward fifty times to make sure of his salvation than to have him think that because he sits in a pew he's going to heaven.

The story is told of a meeting Satan held with his demons, trying to figure out how to trick people into eternal damnation . . .

One demon said, "I've got a plan. Let's whisper in people's ears that there is no God."

"No," Satan said, "creation declares the reality of God. People are too smart to deny His existence. A few idiots might be sucked in, but not the masses."

"I've got it," a second demon said. "We'll say there's no hell."

"No," said Satan. "People innately understand the need for retribution and judgment. People won't buy that."

A third demon said, "Let me suggest how we might trick them. Instead of saying 'No God' or 'No Hell,' we'll just say 'No Hurry."
'

"That's it!" Satan said gleefully. And he commissioned his demons to go throughout the world whispering, "No hurry."

Many have lost their sense of urgency. But the cry will soon go forth: behold the bridegroom cometh! Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). Don't miss the party.

Matthew 25:14–30

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his Lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that

thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

As with the previous parable, this situation would have been familiar to Jesus' audience. When the owner of a house went on a long journey, he would give his servants the responsibility of caring for his property. In this case, the owner gave varying sums of money to his servants before he left, a talent being a year's wage. Upon his return, he learned that the five-talent servant had doubled his investment. The two-talent servant did the same. But the one-talent servant, afraid to invest his talent, buried it. And the owner of the house rebuked him radically.

So, too, Jesus has gone away to heaven to prepare a place for us. In the meantime, He has given us talents—money, energy, and abilities. It's interesting to me that the fellow who didn't show responsibility was the one with only one talent. That's often where the danger lies with us as well. The person who realizes he has a great musical gift will more often than not develop his gift and seek to use it. But the person who says, "I can't sing. I can't preach. I can't do miracles," often buries his one talent, whatever it might be.

Precious people, we all have been given at least one talent. "Not me," you say. "I have no talents and no abilities. I can't do anything." Can you change a diaper? Sign up to help in the nursery. Can you listen? Call on people at the rest home. Can you feed a child? Spend a month at a mission. You can do so much. The problem is, the one-talent person has a tendency to

bury it. Here, Jesus is telling us that we will give an account for that which has been entrusted to us. If you are one who doesn't think you have been given much, you are one who needs to be especially careful that you don't bury that which you do have.

Matthew 25:31–46

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

In this parable, Jesus refers to the judgment of nations that will take place at the end of the Tribulation. According to Zechariah 14:4, when Jesus comes back to earth, the Mount of Olives will split in half the moment His feet touch down upon it. I found it interesting that contractors were denied a permit to build a hotel on the Mount of Olives because seismological studies indicated a major fault running through it. When Jesus comes, that fault will split the mountain in half, a great valley will open up, and a new stream will begin to flow from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean. Joel refers to this valley as the valley of decision (Joel 3:14) because those who survive the Tribulation will be brought there to stand before the Lord at the judgment of the nations. The sheep will be allowed to enter into the millennium. The goats will be sent away to destruction. Who are the sheep? "The ones who clothed Me; fed Me; and cared about Me," answers Jesus.

"When did we do that, Lord?" the sheep ask.

"When you did it to the least of My brethren—the Jews," Jesus answers.

You see, midway through the Tribulation, Antichrist's determination to destroy the Jews will come to light. All over the world, anti-Semitism will run rampant. At that time, however, many will refuse to take the mark of the beast and will help the Jews, even as some did in Nazi Germany. They will visit those in prison. They will hide those in need of protection. They will reach out to those who are hurting. They will go on record, saying, "We will not take the mark of the beast. We will stand with these persecuted people." Jesus said in so doing, they will demonstrate outwardly their faith in Him.

Years ago, I sat on a hill outside Galilee and watched a single shepherd boy lead a flock of sheep. It was a beautiful sight. Goats, on the other hand, are impossible to lead. They would rather butt heads and eat trash than follow anyone. Goats do what they want. I know those of us who have embraced Jesus Christ as Lord are all sheep, but I fear sometimes there's too much goat in me. May we be like sheep who travel as a flock following the Lord's leading.

26 Matthew 26:1 (a)

And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings . . .

Chapter 25 marked the end of the preaching and teaching ministry of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 26:1 (b), 2

. . . he said unto his disciples, Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified.

The Passover feast was a yearly event in Jerusalem commemorating the delivery of God's people from Egypt. Josephus tells us that in Jesus' day, 250,000 lambs were slaughtered in commemoration of Passover. Since Exodus prescribed that one lamb be sacrificed for every ten people, we can conclude that there must have been at least 2.5 million people in Jerusalem for this festival.

Between the hours of three and five o'clock, the 250,000 lambs would be slaughtered in the temple in preparation for Passover. Blood would have flowed freely from the temple into the Kidron Valley below the temple mount, causing the Kidron brook to actually turn blood-red. Later in this chapter, we will see Jesus leaving Gethsemane and crossing over this creek. Its color must have been a graphic reminder to Him of what was to come as He, the Lamb of God, would shed His own blood for our sin.

Matthew 26:3–5

Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.

Originally, the position of high priest was passed from father to son through the Levitical line. But when the Romans came into the area and seized control of the nation, they began appointing the high priest and he became their political puppet. Caiaphas was the son of Annas. Annas chose to remove himself from the office of high priest, allowing Caiaphas to serve in his place. This was because Annas had four other sons who were making

money from temple concessions, and he didn't want to jeopardize their thriving business.

Think back with me. What did Jesus do with their concession tables? He overturned them (Matthew 21:12). Consequently, Caiaphas and Annas were determined to destroy Jesus. Not only were they jealous of His widespread fame and following among the people, but they were angry that He was upsetting their moneymaking operation and cutting into their profit margin.

Matthew 26:6

Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper.

Simon the leper must have been one who had been healed by Jesus. Otherwise, he would have lived in a leper colony outside the city limits.

Matthew 26:7

There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat.

We know from John's Gospel that this woman was Mary, the sister of Martha. Mary was a worshiper. She is mentioned three times in Scripture, each time at the feet of Jesus.

Mary found her blessing at Jesus' feet. Luke writes of the time Jesus was at the home of Mary and Martha. Martha was in the kitchen, saying, "Lord tell Mary to come here. She's just sitting at Your feet, listening to Your words, and I need help." Jesus, however, told Martha that Mary had chosen the better part (Luke 10:42).

Mary brought her burden to Jesus' feet. John writes that when Lazarus died, Mary ran out to meet Jesus, fell at His feet, and said, "Lord if You had been here, our brother would not have died" (John 11:32).

Mary gave her best at Jesus' feet. John writes that after she anointed Jesus with the oil in the alabaster box, she wiped His feet with her hair. John tells us that the ointment within the alabaster

box was worth three hundred pence. This was Mary's dowry, her ticket to marriage (John 12:3).

Matthew 26:8, 9

But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.

John's Gospel tells us exactly which disciple was the most indignant. It was Judas who said, "This is a waste. You could have done something much more practical with this ointment."

"It's a waste," Judas said. Yet in a few hours, Jesus would call Judas himself the son of perdition, or literally, "the son of waste" (John 17:12). People who don't love God or understand His ways always see worship as a waste.

Please understand this about worship, fellow worshipers: As she broke the alabaster box and poured the ointment upon Jesus, Mary showed us that worship often comes through breaking,. When do you really become a worshiper? When you're broken. When finally you're at your wits' end, you humble yourself before the Lord and worship Him. Worship comes from brokenness.

Worship not only comes from brokenness, but true worship is often costly. It cost Mary her dowry. What does worship cost you and me? Our image. "There's no way I'm going to sing those songs. I'm too cool for that," some say.

"I don't care if Scripture declares lifting hands is a sign of submission and adoration, I'll never lift mine. People will think I'm weird."

Worship is often misunderstood. There will always be those in Judas' corner who say, "Quit trying to be so holy. Do something more practical." But although worship comes through brokenness and although worship is sometimes costly, worship is always beneficial. After Mary wiped the feet of Jesus with her hair, her hair took on the same fragrance as Jesus' feet. That's what worship does. When you're worshiping the Lord, you take on the fragrance of the Lord.

John goes on to tell us that after Mary broke the alabaster box, the entire house was filled with the aroma of the ointment (John 12:3). Mom and Dad, does your house stink? Do you find there's tension in the air? Do you feel your marriage is on the rocks? Do you worry your kids are falling apart? Let me tell you the secret of Mary: The whole house took on the fragrance of Jesus because she was at His feet. Take Mary's mindset. Dad, when your house "stinks," gather your wife and your kids around you and say, "Let's stop and seek the Lord's blessing for a few minutes." You will be amazed how this will affect the aroma of your house. I suggest that perhaps the key isn't always counseling or child-rearing classes. As helpful as those things might be, the real power lies at Jesus' feet. Mary discovered this and the whole world knows her story.

Matthew 26:10–13

When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.

Why did Mary anoint Jesus' body for burial? Because, although He had told His disciples repeatedly that He had come to Jerusalem to die, I suggest Mary was the only one who really understood this. You see, in Jesus' time, bodies were anointed after burial in order to reduce the stench of putrefaction. Yet Mary anointed His body *before* He died. Why? Because, just as David prophesied, I suggest it was because she knew He would not see corruption, or literally, putrefaction (Psalm 49:9). She knew He would rise again. How did she know this? Revelation and adoration are intricately linked together. When you're at the feet of Jesus in worship, you see things others don't. It's amazing what you'll see when, like Mary, you take the time to sit at His feet.

Matthew 26:14 (a)

Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot . . .

"Judas" means "praise." It's a beautiful name, but Judas wasted it and ruined it for future generations. How many parents name their kids Judas today? "Isacariot" most likely means he was from the town of Carioth. Judas of Carioth was the only one of all the disciples from the southern region of Israel—the educated, wealthy region of the country. So impressive was Judas that the disciples appointed him treasurer.

Matthew 26:14 (b), 15

. . . went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.

I believe it was his disappointment with Jesus that prompted Judas to entertain a betrayal mentality. I believe that when Judas initially followed Jesus, he was excited about the prospect of a kingdom being set up on earth. But when Jesus began leaving the area every time the multitude wanted to make Him king, perhaps Judas felt his heart sink. So, too, I see a tendency in people today to sell out when they get disappointed in Jesus. "I thought Jesus would bless my business if I became a Christian," they say. "But what happened? I went bankrupt." If we're not careful, a Judas mentality will creep in and we'll sell out.

Matthew 26:16–19

And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him. Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.

The other Gospels tell us that the man the disciples were to look for would be carrying a water jug. In those days, men didn't carry water jugs. That was "woman's work." Thus, a man carrying a water jug would have stood out. Evidently, the owner of this house was an unnamed friend of Jesus. He was one who worked behind the scenes, making the necessary preparations so Jesus could celebrate Passover with His disciples. I believe there is a special place in heaven for the unnamed servant.

You might be one of those people no one applauds or even acknowledges. You simply serve behind the scenes, making things right for Jesus and His people. God bless you! I'm convinced that a whole bunch of us who are seen and applauded are getting our reward now. But those who are serving secretly, those who are unnamed and unknown will be rewarded openly by our Father who sees in secret (Matthew 6:6).

Matthew 26:20–22

Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?

When told one of their number would betray Jesus, did the disciples say, "It's the one with the black cape—it's Judas"? No. Everyone said, "Lord, is it *I?*"

Matthew 26:23 (a)

And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish . . .

One element of the Passover meal was a paste-like dip made of ground dates, figs, and nuts that was eaten with bread. It was a reminder of the mud the Israelites used in Egypt to bake bricks before God sent Moses to deliver them.

Matthew 26:23 (b)–25

. . . the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.

At the very moment Jesus said, "He who dips His hand with Me into the dish . . ." Judas had his hand right there. This is intriguing to me because in Jesus' day, the master of the home would sit in the center of a U-shaped table with the guest of honor to his left. We know from John's Gospel that John was seated to Jesus' right at this meal. Therefore, if Jesus and Judas were sharing the same bowl, Judas must have been seated to Jesus' left—at the place of honor. Thus, even at this point, we see Jesus affirming Judas, saying, "Son of perdition, I'm seating you in the place of honor because I still love you."

Matthew 26:26–29

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

The Passover became a new celebration—the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, Communion. Now, if I were setting up the Lord's Supper, I would have reversed the order. I would have served the cup first. I would have said, "Before the Body of Christ can enter into us, the blood must first cleanse us." But Jesus didn't follow that pattern. He gave the bread first and followed it with the cup. And in so doing, He essentially said, "I will come into you just as you are. And then I will cleanse you with My blood."

Most people have the mistaken idea that they must clean up their act and get it together before they ask Jesus into their heart. But just the opposite is

true. The bread is first. He comes in and *He* cleans us up. It's not perspiration—our trying harder. It's impartation—Jesus in us, the hope of glory.

Matthew 26:30

And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

Notice that the worship service Jesus led after the Passover meal consisted of a single hymn. Don't fall into the trap of thinking, "If I'm really going to worship, I've got to worship to the point of exhaustion." The strength of worship is not necessarily related to the length of worship.

Matthew 26:31

Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.

Jesus quoted a prophecy from Zechariah that referred to Him personally (Zechariah 13:7).

Matthew 26:32

But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.

"Even though you will be offended in Me, even though you will scatter from Me, I will rise again," Jesus said. "And when I do, I will go before you into Galilee and meet with you there." I love Jesus Christ for this aspect of His character. You see, even when we are flaky, even when we flee, even when we are fickle, Jesus the Good Shepherd never leaves or forsakes us. Instead, He says, "I will search you out. When I rise again, I will see you and go before you into Galilee."

Matthew 26:33–35

Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said

unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.

On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus said, "When I am betrayed and apprehended, you'll all scatter."

"Not me," said Peter. "You can count on me, Lord. I'm solid as a rock."

Matthew 26:36 (a)

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane . . .

The word "gethsemane" means "oil press." In an oil press, olives were crushed, broken, and ground up so that oil might be produced. Scripturally, oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. The picture is clear: before the Holy Spirit could be given, Someone had to be crushed and broken. And that Someone was Jesus Christ. It is not coincidental that it was in the Garden of Gethsemane where He felt the crushing, the heaviness, and the burden of what was about to happen when He who knew no sin would become sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

- *In the Garden of Eden, man's relationship with the Father was broken because of rebellion.*

  In the Garden of Gethsemane, man's relationship with the Father was restored through submission.

- *In the Garden of Eden, the first Adam tried to hide from God.*

  In the Garden of Gethsemane, the last Adam bared His soul to God.

- *In the Garden of Eden, a sword was unsheathed and man was driven out.*

  In the Garden of Gethsemane, a sword was put away and a man was healed.

Matthew 26:36 (b)–38

. . . and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceed ing sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.

Jesus began to feel sorrowful and very heavy. Why? Because He knew what lay ahead. Should He go through with this plan to pay for our sins, He would not only feel the wrath of God poured upon Him as He died in our place, but His suffering would go much farther and longer than what we could possibly imagine. Jesus didn't suffer for just a few hours on a Friday afternoon. Revelation 13:8 speaks of the Lamb slain even before the foundation of the world. In the Garden of Eden a decision was made that resulted in damnation. In the Garden of Gethsemane a decision was made that resulted in salvation. But the price was incredible.

Matthew 26:39 (a)
And he went a little further . . .

That's Jesus—always going a little further. He didn't stop at Gethsemane. He went all the way to Calvary for you and for me.

Matthew 26:39 (b)
. . . and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me . . .

"Is there any other way people can be saved, Father? Can they join a church? Can they give canned goods at Christmas time? Can they treat their pets nice?" People think that if they're just a "good person" or a "nice guy" they'll be saved. In reality, it took nothing less than the death of Jesus Christ to save anyone from any one sin.

Matthew 26:39 (c)
. . . nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

You who are interested in prayer and faith, take note: The key to prayer is not so much "name it and claim it." Rather, the key to prayer is "request and rest." That's the way Jesus prayed. "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from Me. That's My request. Nevertheless, not My will, but Thy will be done. That's where I will rest."

Matthew 26:40–42

And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

Even while in prayer, Jesus began to understand and receive confirmation that it was the will of His Father that He be slaughtered as the Lamb of God for the sins of the world.

Matthew 26:43

And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.

I can relate to this. I can read *TIME* Magazine and be fine. But when I open the Bible or start to pray, my eyes get heavy. Why? Because Satan knows there is power in prayer and profit in Bible study. He doesn't care if you're reading the newspaper. But read the Word or pray, and you can count on your eyes getting heavy, the telephone ringing, the baby crying, and your stomach rumbling. When I kneel by the couch in prayer and find myself "resting in the Lord" a little too literally, I go for a walk and pray along the way. It's much tougher to fall asleep when you're walking!

Matthew 26:44, 45 (a)

And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest . . .

Understanding their humanity and frailty, Jesus looked at His disciples and said, "Sleep on." But while His disciples were sleeping, His enemies were plotting. You can always be sure of that. There are meetings in hell to cause havoc in your family, your ministry, your occupation, and your marriage. Keep that in mind next time you opt for sleep over prayer. It's not that the Lord condemns you for lack of prayer. It's that the Enemy will exploit the situation. You see, prayer is not only for petition. It's also for protection. When you pray, there is a wall of protection round about you, your family, your ministry, and your marriage that is absent when you fail to pray. Jesus didn't collapse in this moment of temptation. The disciples did. He was praying. They were sleeping.

Matthew 26:45 (b), 46 (a)

. . . behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise . . .

Jesus could rise because He had been kneeling. He could stand before His enemies because He had been kneeling before His Father.

Matthew 26:46 (b)

. . . let us be going . . .

"Let *us* be going," Jesus said. If I were Jesus, I would have said, "You guys are a bunch of losers. You're not coming with Me." Not Jesus. Even after His disciples failed Him, He still included them.

Matthew 26:46 (c), 47 (a)

. . . behold, he is at hand that doth betray me. And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude . . .

John tells us this "great multitude" was a "cohort," or literally six hundred Roman soldiers. Six hundred Roman soldiers came to apprehend the meekest Man on the face of the earth and a handful of sleepy disciples.

Matthew 26:47 (b)–49

. . . with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him.

The Greek language indicates that Judas kissed Jesus repeatedly. Why? First, it was as a sign of identification. Jesus' appearance was so ordinary that neither the soldiers nor the company of religious leaders could pick Him out of the small crowd of twelve men. We tend to think of Jesus as glowing, huge in stature, or somehow standing out. Not so. Judas said, "He's so ordinary I'll have to identify Him with a kiss." Second, perhaps Judas continued to kiss Jesus not only to identify Him, but to occupy Him, hoping that Jesus wouldn't pull a fast one and do a miracle or call down some angels.

Matthew 26:50

And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.

Jesus called Judas "Friend" even at the moment of betrayal. Even here, Jesus gave Judas the opportunity to turn away and to change his mind. First Corinthians 10:13 makes it clear that in every temptation there's always a way out provided by God Himself. Here, Jesus is giving Judas a way out as He asks, "Friend, why are you here?" In other words, Jesus was giving Judas one last chance to change his mind.

Matthew 26:51, 52 (a)

And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place . . .

John tells us the one who drew his sword was Peter. In an attempt to protect Jesus, Peter—a better fisherman than a swordsman—lopped off the ear of Malchus, a servant of the high priest. Luke writes that following Peter's show of force, Jesus touched Malchus' ear and healed him. I think that's perhaps the miracle Jesus does most: healing people who have been needlessly wounded by His followers who have used the sword of Scripture foolishly. How often we hurt one another in our attempts to protect Jesus. Ears fly everywhere, and the body of Christ is maimed because well-meaning Christians like Peter unsheathe their Bibles and start chopping away at each other. Listen to the words of Jesus. If you are using the Sword of the Spirit to slice other people up and put other people down, put it away.

Matthew 26:52 (b)

. . . for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

You might want to remember this verse next time you feel inclined to chop up some believer. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. But those who are unsheathing the sword indiscriminately and causing injury needlessly will die by the sword eventually."

Matthew 26:53

Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?

A legion being six thousand, Jesus was talking about seventy-two thousand angels at His disposal—quite a force, considering it took only one to wipe out 185,000 Babylonians (2 Kings 19:35). What a glorious day it is when you learn you don't have to defend Jesus Christ, when you realize that He is perfectly capable of defending Himself. Our job is not to protect, defend, or avenge. Jesus calls us to do one thing: to love.

Matthew 26:54–56 (a)

But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat

daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.

Jesus made it clear that He didn't need Peter's protection and that what was happening was in accordance with prophecy in Scripture as well as with the heart of His Father.

Matthew 26:56 (b), 57

Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled. And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.

The disciples split and Jesus was led alone from the Garden of Gethsemane to stand before Caiaphas. Jesus was not dragged before Caiaphas unwillingly. Rather, He was "brought as a lamb to the slaughter," just as Isaiah had prophesied (53:7).

Matthew 26:58

But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.

You're always headed for trouble when you start following Jesus afar off. Peter followed Jesus afar off right into the high priest's palace, where Luke tells us he warmed himself by the enemy's fire.

Matthew 26:59–60 (a)

Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; But found none . . .

A meeting of the Sanhedrin was immediately called. The Sanhedrin was the seventy-one-member Jewish Supreme Court. From the very outset, however, the trial was illegal, since Jewish Law forbade evening meetings of the Sanhedrin.

Matthew 26:60 (b), 61

. . . yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.

The Ninth Commandment forbids bearing false witness. We have the mistaken idea that "bearing false witness" means telling big lies. But this account makes it clear that bearing false witness consists of giving the right information with the wrong implication. A false witness is not one who makes up a big fib. A false witness is simply one who is tricky with the truth. A false witness gives the right information, knowing the wrong implication will be drawn. Jesus did indeed say, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (see John 2:19). But He was speaking of the temple of His own body.

Matthew 26:62–66

And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.

When Jesus said, "Thou hast said . . ." He was saying, "I *am* the Son of God." Then He went on to say, "And you will see Me in the place of exaltation." Hearing this, the high priest did what was customary at that time when one experienced great grief or pain. Even as Jacob rent his clothes when he heard Joseph was dead and David rent his clothes when he heard Saul had died in battle, if one was really grieved, he would tear his robe from the bottom up. What's happening here is tremendously symbolic. Unbeknownst to him, as Caiaphas rent his priestly garments with his own

hands, he was in fact symbolizing the end of the old Levitical priesthood. A new priesthood is about to be established—the priesthood of Melchizedek.

First mentioned in Genesis 14, "Melchizedek" means "prince of righteousness." He was called the Prince of Salem, or, "Prince of Peace." He came to Abraham with bread and wine. He had no beginning and no end. Who was Melchizedek? The Book of Hebrews tells us he was a picture of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7).

Matthew 26:67, 68

Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?

So brutal was the beating Jesus endured, Isaiah prophesied He would be more disfigured than any man who ever lived (Isaiah 53:2). His beard was plucked; His face was swollen. The spit of His accusers ran down His cheeks. He could have called ten thousand times ten thousand angels. But He didn't.

This really happened. We're not talking about a fairy tale. We're not talking about poetic mythology or esoteric theology. We're talking about a real Man who absorbed the blows, who felt the pain, who endured the spit, the insult, and the agony because He was thinking about you.

"Oh, Jon, you're being dramatic," you say. "He wasn't thinking about me. How could He be? We're only talking about a few hours of suffering and dying. There wasn't enough time to think about everyone individually."

Not true. You see, we're talking about an event that took place before the foundation of the world and that continues on into eternity. The biggest problem we who are familiar with the Gospel story face is thinking of Jesus dying generically for the whole world. We need to understand that He died for each of us individually and for each of our sins specifically.

How do I know this? Because in the Old Testament, every single sin had to be atoned for specifically (Leviticus 1:4). Forgiveness had to be meted out individually. Spend some time contemplating that. Listen to Jesus praying, "Father, if it's possible that people can be saved any other way, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, Thy will be done." See Him with blood-soaked

face leaving the Garden of Gethsemane, His disciples fleeing in fear. Watch as He is led blindfolded before Caiaphas, lied about by false witnesses, beat up, battered, and humiliated—for you.

Matthew 26:69–73

Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee.

Once you become a believer, if you go back to the fires of the world, you won't fit in. Your speech will betray you. You can try and tell dirty jokes again or try and be suggestive with your innuendoes, but people will say, "It doesn't ring true. Your speech betrays you." If you've really been born again, you can't go back to the old fires. It doesn't work.

Matthew 26:74 (a)

Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man.

"My speech betrays me? I'll show you some speech," said Peter as he began to curse and swear. At that time, fishermen had the roughest language of anyone. Why? Perhaps because as their nets became entangled in the bottom of the Sea of Galilee, they had ample reason to swear. At any rate, all tangled up himself, Peter began to curse and swear once again.

Matthew 26:74 (b)

And immediately the cock crew.

Because the priests felt that birds would make a mess and defile the holy city, according to city ordinances, no roosters or hens were allowed in

Jerusalem. Therefore, when Peter heard the sound of a rooster crowing, it would not only remind him of Jesus' words to him previously, but of his own sin. For just as a rooster had no place in the holy city, Peter must have known immediately that his denial of Jesus had defiled and polluted his relationship with Him.

Matthew 26:75

And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

Luke tells us that at this moment, as Jesus was led out of the house of Caiaphas, He "turned and looked on Peter" (see Luke 22:61) with a look that must have said, "Peter I told you this would happen. I told you that you would deny Me three times. But, Peter, I'm not through with you. I love you."



For topical study of Matthew 26:75, see "The Pathway to Pain" below.

THE PATHWAY TO PAIN

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 26:75

Maybe you've said or heard the phrase, "I fell into sin." In reality, there is no such thing. A person never "falls" into sin but rather walks into sin one step at a time. In chapter 26, we see five steps Peter took that led to his sin and sorrow.

Step One—Overconfidence in the Flesh

> *Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.*
>
> Matthew 26:33

"I won't leave You, Lord," Peter boldly declared. "Others might be offended in You. Others might turn their backs on You. But not me."

> Two ducks and a frog hung out at the pond in Farmer Brown's field. One summer, however, a drought caused the pond to dry up. For the ducks, able to fly elsewhere, this was no problem. But the frog, knowing he would literally croak if he didn't find water soon, said to the ducks, "I'm in trouble here. But I've got a plan. You guys hold a stick in your bills, and I'll jump up and grab it with my mouth. Then you start flying. I'll hang on. And we'll keep going until we find another pond."
>
> The ducks said, "Sure. Sounds good." So they put a stick between their bills. The frog jumped up and grabbed it tightly in his mouth. The ducks began to flap their wings, and suddenly the trio was airborne.
>
> Taking in the whole scene, Farmer Brown watched in amazement below. "What a brilliant idea," he said. "I wonder who thought of it?"—to which the frog opened his mouth wide and proudly answered, "I di—."

Pride says, "Look what I did!" It's an "I" problem.

"Lord, I will never deny You," said Peter. But, like the frog, even as he opened his mouth, he started going down.

Step Two—Sleeping Instead of Praying

> *And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?*
>
> Matthew 26:40

Once I am full of pride and feel like *I* can make things happen, I see no reason to pray. Thus, pride and prayerlessness go hand in hand. We must never forget that prayer is not only for petition, but for protection. Prayer not only gives us what we want but also protects us from what we don't want. I have seen things enter into my own life that otherwise wouldn't have whenever I have stopped praying and started sleeping. And that's what Peter discovered.

Step Three—Replacing Devotion with Action

> *And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear.*
>
> Matthew 27:51

Catch the scene: Judas comes into the Garden of Gethsemane with a cohort of Roman soldiers behind him. Peter wakes up, sees a need, and grabs his sword. A better fisherman than a swordsman, Peter manages only to lop off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus healed the severed ear as much for Peter as for Malchus, for if Jesus hadn't healed Malchus, there would have been four crosses on Calvary the next day instead of three as Peter would have been crucified for attempted murder. But just as the Lord does with us, He healed Peter's mistake, making it impossible for Malchus to press charges.

The same thing happens in the heavenly courtroom. But Jesus has forgiven the very sins of which Satan accuses us. Therefore, there is no record of them because His blood has cleansed us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

Step Four—Following Afar Off

But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace . . .

Matthew 26:58 (a)

I have known so many people who have slowly but surely drifted away because they began to follow Jesus from afar. At one time, the desire of their heart was to know the Lord and to walk with Him. But then something happened. That is why Hebrews says: Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (see Hebrews 2:1).

The word "slip" means "drift." As we sail along spiritually, the danger is not that a bomb will sink us, but that we will slowly drift away. How does that happen? It happens when we fail to "give heed to the things which we have heard." In other words, we drift when we fail to read the compass of God's Word. There was a time, perhaps, when you needed, desired, and enjoyed getting your bearings by reading the Scriptures. But eventually you began following Jesus afar off, and the Word was no longer important.

When that happens to me, I find myself drifting slowly and imperceptibly until suddenly I wonder, *Where am I? How in the world did I get* here? My faith didn't sink. I just started drifting away. You and I need to set our anchor deeply in the "things which we have heard"—the truths, doctrines, and principles of Scripture. Otherwise we too will be vulnerable to drifting away and following Jesus afar off.

Step Five—Getting Warm by the Enemy's Fire

> *. . . and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end . . . and when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.*
>
> Matthew 26:58 (b), Luke 22:55

After following Jesus afar off, perhaps Peter thought, *Maybe my old life wasn't so bad after all. I'll go back to the old places, the old ways, the old things and maybe I could even be a witness there.*

The Christian trying to warm himself by the fires of the enemy will always find misery in the world because, although he may have too much of the world to enjoy the Lord, he also has too much of the Lord to enjoy the world. Feeling estranged from the Lord, yet a stranger to the world, Peter began to swear and curse vehemently—until he heard the cock crow. Then he wept bitterly. The Greek phrase, "wept bitterly," speaks of an emotion stemming from the intestines. In other words, it refers to a deep, gut-wrenching weeping.

What caused Peter to weep so bitterly? According to Luke's Gospel, at the moment Peter said, "Blankety blank, I don't know the man," the doors of Caiaphas' house suddenly swung open and Jesus was led out to the courtyard where He saw Peter sitting by the fire. "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter," writes Luke (see Luke 22:61). Jesus looked on Peter and Peter was broken. The look was not one of anger, but of understanding; not one of condemnation but one of sympathy. It was a look that touched Peter's heart deeply.

Jesus knew Peter would go through this, for He had told him only hours earlier, "Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you and sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you and when you are converted (not "*if* you are converted" but "*when*"), strengthen the brethren" (Luke 22:32).

Three days later, when Jesus rose from the dead, the angel in the tomb told Mary Magdalene, "Go tell His disciples *and Peter*" (Mark 16:7, emphasis mine). In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul tells us that when Jesus rose from the dead, before He appeared to the other disciples, He sought out Peter. In

John 21, Jesus ministered to Peter specifically when He gave him the opportunity to say, "I love You, Lord," three times—just as Peter had denied Him three times.

Maybe you've been weeping bitterly today. Maybe you've ignored the Word, drifted away, and like Peter, walked into sin. Know this, precious friend: Jesus comes by you at your lowest point, and He looks upon you not in anger but in understanding. "I have prayed for you," He says, "and when you're converted—when you get through this time of pain and sorrow—strengthen your brethren as I anoint you and continue to use you."

Return to Jesus, and watch what our loving Lord will do with the mess you've made. He'll turn it around for His glory.

You watch. You'll see.



27 Chapter 26 came to a close as Jesus was led out of the palace of Caiaphas after an illegal midnight meeting of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court.

Matthew 27:1, 2

When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.

It was now five o'clock in the morning. After a night of agony in the Garden of Gethsemane followed by a beating at the hands of the palace guards, Jesus was led before Pontius Pilate. Why? To fulfill prophecy. You see, when the Jews put a man to death, they stoned him. Old Testament prophecies, however, all depict the Son of God being crucified. "Cursed," the Old Testament Law declares, "is everyone that hangs on a tree" (see Deuteronomy 21:23). Thus it was in fulfillment of prophecy that Jesus was brought before a Roman governor in order that He might die a Roman death. Keep in mind, however, that Roman soldiers were drafted from all countries throughout the empire. So, although it was the Jews who sentenced Jesus to die, and although it was the Romans who devised His method of execution,

He who died for the sins of the whole world did, in fact, die by the hands of the whole world.

Matthew 27:3, 4

Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that.

If Judas had seen any fault, any inconsistency, any hypocrisy, or any sin in Jesus, he could have justified the betrayal in his own mind. He could have said, "He makes Himself out to be the Son of God, but I've seen Him lose His temper," or "I remember the time He stretched the truth," or "I heard Him gossip." Instead, Judas realized Jesus was exactly who He declared Himself to be—the Lamb of God, the Sinless One.

Matthew 27:5

And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

It intrigues me that Judas hung himself on a tree. Deuteronomy 19:16–19 says that if a man bears false witness and someone suffers because of the lie, the false witness must share the same fate as the one about whom he lied. Do you see what's happening? As Judas realized Jesus would soon be crucified on a tree, it's as if he got as close as he possibly could to sharing the same fate as the One about whom he lied. This is further proof that Judas realized perhaps more clearly than any other man that Jesus was completely flawless and totally innocent.

Matthew 27:6–10

And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The

field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, and they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

What was a potter's field? In Bible times, if a potter discovered cracks or chips in something he had made, he would throw the marred vessel outside of his shop. Over time this area would become full of broken pottery. Because nothing would be able to grow in this portion of land, it was good for nothing except to use as a cemetery for strangers and travelers who had no other place to be buried. Now, think with me for a moment. The blood money of Jesus Christ was used to buy the place where broken pottery and dead bodies were. That's us. Without Jesus we were shattered, dead, and good for nothing.

What hope is there for broken pottery? Only this: If it is reheated and placed in water once again, it will become pliable and able to be reshaped and restored. So, too, if we as broken pieces of pottery become heated by the trials our Master Potter allows in our lives, if we're warmed by the love He has for us and washed by the water of the Word He gives to us, we can be reshaped and used for His glory.

Matthew 27:11 (a)

And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews?

Jesus stood before Pilate who was at this point in big trouble politically. Pilate had already made three big blunders and had been warned by Tiberius Caesar that if he made one more, he would be removed from his post.

Pilate made his first mistake when he initially came into Jerusalem. As his soldiers carried their standards topped with eagles of gold and silver into the temple area, the Jews saw the eagles as idols and became so infuriated that they rioted on the temple mount. Wanting to quell the rebellion immediately, Pilate ordered the riotous Jews held in an amphitheatre outside Jerusalem where they

would be slaughtered unless they repented. These courageous Jews laid their heads down on the ground and said, "Chop off our heads, but there will be ten thousand others to take our places if your images ever come on temple property again." Foreseeing a bloody rebellion and a political strike against him, Pilate backed off. But word got back to Rome that Pontius Pilate had been beaten by some obstinate Jews.

A short time later, Pilate wanted to make up for his bad start with the Jews by bringing in a fresh supply of water. So he built an aqueduct that would carry water from the north down to Jerusalem. It was a great engineering feat. But he financed the undertaking with money from the temple treasury. This infuriated the Jews and blood was shed as Pilate put down the ensuing rebellion.

When Pilate ordered new armor for his soldiers, the new shields bearing the image of Emperor Tiberius Caesar incensed the Jews. Considering them to be a form of idolatry, the Jews rebelled yet again. And when Tiberius heard of it, he was incensed and sent the message to Pilate that if there was one more rebellion, he'd be out of a job.

Matthew 27:11 (b)–14

And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest. And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.

The accusations were being hurled against Jesus, but He answered not a word—just as Isaiah had prophesied seven hundred fifty years earlier (Isaiah 53:7). Jesus could have blown His accusers away. He could have given brilliant legal defense. But He said nothing. Maybe this week you've been defending yourself against accusations or slander. I am learning that the problem with defending yourself is that you'll never be able to stop. Start defending yourself, and that's all you'll do all day long. David found a better solution: Let the Lord be your Defender, your Rock, your Shield, your

Fortress, and your high Tower (Psalm 18:2). He who chose not to defend Himself lives to defend you (Hebrews 7:25).

Matthew 27:15–18

Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.

The name "Barabbas" or "Bar Abba" means "son of the father." From other Gospel accounts, we know Barabbas was an insurrectionist and a murderer. He was despicable, brutal, and hated by the people. As Pilate brought out Barabbas, he must have been certain that the crowd wouldn't want a man like him back on the streets. Pilate must have thought that surely the Jews would want Jesus instead—the true Son of the Father.

Matthew 27:19

When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.

Claudia Procula, the daughter of Augustus, had married Pontius Pilate. History not only tells us she had converted to Judaism, but also that, following this event, she became a convert to Jesus Christ.

Matthew 27:20–22 (a)

But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?

"What shall I do with Jesus?" That's the key question for every person throughout history. Pilate had a choice to make right then. He could either stand up for what he knew was right, or he could follow the crowd and save his political skin. So, too, there are those who truly know in the bottom of their hearts that Jesus Christ is the only Way, even though the crowd all around them says, "Don't be so restrictive. Don't be so narrow. You don't want to be a *fundamentalist* do you?"

Matthew 27:22 (b), 23 (a)

They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done?

Listen carefully and you'll hear the torment in the voice of Pontius Pilate, who examined Jesus and said, "I find no fault with Him."

Matthew 27:23 (b), 24

But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.

This Roman governor who was constantly at odds with the Jews now followed a Jewish practice taken from Deuteronomy 21 that stated that if a man was murdered outside a city and no one knew who the murderer was, the elders were to wash their hands as an illustration of their innocence in the matter.

Matthew 27:25

Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.

They got their way. But the Jews—a beautiful, blessed people—would feel the effects of this statement for centuries.

Matthew 27:26

Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

We know from the other Gospels that the scourging Pilate ordered was his attempt to incite some kind of compassion for Jesus in the hearts of the Jews. Scourging was brutal. It was done with a Roman instrument of torture called a "flagellum"—a whip made of twelve or thirteen leather thongs. Lead balls were attached to the ends of these thongs, and pieces of glass and metal were embedded between the lead balls and the handle. The accused would be tied by his wrists and dangled about a foot off the ground, rendering him helpless to protect himself in any way. Then the beating would begin—usually thirty-nine lashes. The first blows would cause welts to form on his shoulders and back. By the seventh or eighth blow, the glass would begin to cut open these large welts, not only reducing the back to the consistency of hamburger, but also exposing the internal organs. At the end of the beating, the accused would be cut down and he would fall to the ground where he would lay in a pool of his own blood.

Most men died under the beating of the flagellum. But Jesus, of course, did not die here. Soldiers stood Him up, brought Him out, and presented Him to the crowd. "Behold the Man," Pilate said (see John 19:5) as if to say, "Look at this Man. Isn't this enough?"

Matthew 27:27–30

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.

Taking the mock scepter out of Jesus' hand, the soldiers beat the crown of thorns into His skull. With a single word, Jesus could have wiped out these

soldiers and ascended into heaven, saying, "If this is the verdict of Israel, if this is the cruelty of the Gentiles, you're on your own." But He didn't.

We're not talking about a myth or a story, a novel or a movie. This *really* happened. And in the process of His scourging and beatings and ultimately His crucifixion, Jesus was thinking of and absorbing it all for you and me.

Matthew 27:31, 32

And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him. And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.

Because he carried the Cross *of* Christ, Simon of Cyrene became a convert *to* Christ (Mark 15:21; Romans 16:13).



***For topical study of Matthew 27:31–32 entitled "The Government upon His Shoulders," turn to page* 206.**

Matthew 27:33, 34 (a)

And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, they gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall . . .

In the Greek language, "gall" and "myrrh" are the same word. Since myrrh was used as a narcotic to deaden pain, were the soldiers showing mercy to Jesus by offering Him myrrh? Probably not. More likely, it was because they didn't want Him to die too quickly. They wanted to lengthen His suffering.

Myrrh was a costly substance. Exodus 30 says it was used to anoint prophets, priests, and kings. Psalm 45 refers to it as a perfume. John 19 tells us it was used for embalming. At His birth, Jesus was given myrrh (Matthew 2:11). Why? Because He is the Anointed One, because His Name is as ointment poured forth (Song of Solomon 1:3), because He came to die.

Matthew 27:34 (b)

. . . and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.

Perhaps it was because He knew it was a drug to deaden the pain, Jesus refused to take it.

Matthew 27:35

And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, they parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.

Each Jewish male wore five articles of clothing: a headband, sandals, an inner cloak sort of like a nightshirt, a belt, and an outer tunic, or robe. The soldiers divided Jesus' clothing among themselves. But when it came to the outer tunic, they threw dice to see who would get it. Why? Because "without seam" (see John 19:23), it was a beautifully constructed garment. As God Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ died for their sins, the soldiers played games on Golgotha.

Matthew 27:36–38

And sitting down they watched him there; And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.

The pain from the nails piercing Jesus' hands would cause His pectoralis major muscles to go into spasms and His lungs to no longer operate properly. The only way one being crucified could breathe would be to straighten his legs, place his full weight on the nail driven through his feet, and stand straight, thereby forcing air into his lungs. To exhale, he would bend his knees, causing the full weight of his body to hang on the nails in his hands. That is why when they wanted to finally kill a man being crucified, the Romans would break his legs. It was the most cruel, torturous death ever devised by man. Cicero said it was not fit for even the most common criminal.

Matthew 27:39–42 (a)

And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others . . .

"He saved others," said the chief priests, scribes, and elders. They had denied this previously, saying that if Jesus had helped anyone, it had been only through the power of the devil (Matthew 12:24). Now comes the moment of truth. When they think they've got Him, they admit He saved others. How could they do otherwise? The lepers were healed. The dead were raised. The blind saw. The deaf heard.

Matthew 27:42 (b)

. . . himself he cannot save.

Jesus could have come down from the Cross and saved Himself. But had He saved Himself, He could not have saved you.

Matthew 27:42 (c)

If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

This is what the world still wants. The world wants Christ—but not crucified. The world wants a Jesus figure, a Christ-consciousness, a cosmic spirituality, a harmonic convergence, teachings on love, truth, and global unity. The world still says, "Give us Christ—but not on the Cross." Why? Because Christ crucified means we have to acknowledge the part we played in His horrific death. We have to acknowledge that we are murderous sinners in need of a Savior. And the world doesn't want to do that. They want Jesus as a Hero, but not as a Lamb slain for their sin.

Matthew 27:43

He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

"What's wrong, Jesus?" the crowd heckled. "You trusted in God—now look at You." You'll hear the same thing today. People will say to you—or perhaps you'll hear the enemy whisper in your ear—"I thought you trusted in God. How come you're in this mess?"

But, as the old sermon says, "This is Friday. But Sunday's a-comin'."

Matthew 27:44, 45

The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

The Greek word translated "land" is *ge,* from which we get our word "geography." It means "earth." In other words, the whole world was blanketed with darkness. As you study literature and mythology, you find that a three-hour darkness is referred to in virtually every culture. At Jesus' birth, a star shone over the manger and light flooded the sky. At His death, darkness covers the earth because when man rejects the Light of the world, darkness covers his world.

Matthew 27:46

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Every other time Jesus addressed God, it was always as "Abba." But here He speaks from a distance to His Father as He says, "My God, My God." Why? Of God, Habakkuk declared, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Habakkuk 1:13). Yet Paul writes that Jesus not only bore our sin, but actually *became* sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). Therefore, unable to behold evil or look on iniquity, the Father had no other choice but to turn His back on His Son—and Jesus felt the agony of that isolation.

Hear not only the agony of isolation, but a word of information. Those who taunted Him as He paid for their sin should have known Jesus was quoting Psalm 22, the classic psalm that described crucifixion. Thus, even as He was dying, Jesus was clueing people in. As they mocked Him, He was saying, "Psalm 22 is being fulfilled in your very presence." But they didn't understand. They were in the dark not only physically but spiritually because they chose not to see the Light.

Matthew 27:47–50

Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a spunge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

Jesus didn't die—He dismissed His Spirit. His life wasn't taken away—He gave it away. And at last, the price was paid.

Matthew 27:51 (a)

And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom . . .

As the veil in the temple was rent in two, the Holy of Holies became open for anyone to come into the presence of God at any time concerning any matter.



***For topical study of Matthew 27:50–51 entitled "Open House," turn to page* 209.**

Matthew 27:51 (b)

. . . and the earth did quake . . .

When God gave the law to Moses on Mount Sinai, the earth shook (Exodus 19:18) because the Law was meant to shake people up. "You think you're righteous?" the law asked. "You think you're okay? Try this on for size and see how you match up." Paul wrote in Galatians that the law was given as a schoolmaster to make us see that we're sinners in need of a Savior (Galatians 3:24). Here, the earth is shaking again—this time not to shake man up, but to shake him loose. We're free! It is finished. The veil is rent. The price is paid.

Matthew 27:51 (c), 52

. . . and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose.

The word "arose" literally means "appeared." I believe what happened here is this: The earthquake caused the stones that covered the tombs to roll away. The bodies within those tombs then became exposed and visible.

Matt 27:53 (a)

And came out of the graves after his resurrection . . .

Although the stones shook loose, exposing the bodies at the time of the crucifixion, they could not come out of the graves until *after* Jesus' Resurrection. Why? Because Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus is the Firstfruit. Jesus rose first.

Matthew 27:53 (b)

. . . and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

These chosen saints who were resurrected after Jesus arose on Easter Sunday began to walk around the Holy City. What a trip it would have been to see people who were dead for ten years cruising around Jerusalem!

Matthew 27:54

Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they

feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

Centurions were in command of one hundred men. Centurions were tough men—fighters and warriors—chosen for their bravery. This centurion saw the darkened sky, felt the earth quaking, listened as Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," and heard Him cry, "It is finished." And the only conclusion he could make was, "Truly this was the Son of God."

Matthew 27:55, 56 (a)

And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: Among which was Mary Magdalene . . .

Mary Magdalene was the woman from whom Jesus cast seven demons (Luke 8:2).

Matthew 27:56 (b)

. . . and Mary the mother of James and Joses and the mother of Zebedee's children.

In Matthew 20, James and John's mother had come to Jesus saying, "I have a favor to ask. Could one of my boys be on Your right hand and one on Your left hand in the kingdom?"

"You don't know what you ask," He had answered.

As she looked at Jesus now—with a man hanging on His right and another on His left—I wonder if her heart stopped as she realized how little she had understood.

Matthew 27:57–60

When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb,

which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.

John tells us Nicodemus accompanied Joseph of Arimathaea. Both Nicodemus and Joseph were secret disciples of Jesus. What were they risking by burying the body of Jesus? Everything. They could potentially have been sentenced to death for siding with this One who was crucified. They could have lost their prominent positions in the temple and in society if they were discovered to be sympathizers of this itinerant Rabbi from Nazareth. At the very least, they were risking ritual defilement, which meant they couldn't celebrate Passover after touching the dead body of Jesus.

We often hear Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea criticized for being secret disciples. But where were the prominent disciples? Where were Peter, James, and John? They were hiding. It was the heretofore secret disciples—Nicodemus and Joseph—who were at the Cross, ministering to the body of their Lord.

Perhaps you feel like you don't do much. You don't walk on water very often. You haven't healed a whole lot of lepers lately. You're not real vocal on the job about your belief in Christ. Listen—like Joseph and Nicodemus, you'll have your opportunity. Quite frankly, I think sometimes the secret disciples are the ones who really shine when the way gets dark. The quiet ones, the unknown ones, are often the strongest. So it was with Joseph and Nicodemus. Their moment had arrived.

Matthew 27:61–64

And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre. Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.

These skeptics remembered what Jesus said. With Jesus' words about rising again in three days ringing in their memories, Jesus' enemies were worried about what might happen. The believers? They were skeptics. Had they really believed Jesus would rise, they would have been camped out around the tomb to see it happen.

Have you found that sometimes the unbeliever believes more than we do? The unbeliever often has more of an understanding of the power and reality of God than do we who have "theologized" or "dispensationalized" Him away with our doctrinal systems. Clarification would help.

Matthew 27:65

Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.

It's almost as if Pilate is saying, "You have a watch—fifty soldiers—at your command. Make it as sure as you can, but good luck." What happened to Pilate? Tradition has it that a year after this event, upset emotionally and in trouble politically, he resigned his position and went to Gaul (Germany), where he committed suicide.

Matthew 27:66

So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

The seal of the imperial sign of Rome was embedded in wax upon the rope in front of the stone. Anyone who tampered with the rope or touched the stone would be executed. The stone was sealed. The watch was set. Chapter 27 ends on Friday.

But Sunday's "a-comin'."

THE GOVERNMENT UPON HIS SHOULDERS

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 27:31–32

Approximately seven hundred fifty years before Jesus was born as the Babe of Bethlehem, the prophet Isaiah wrote these words, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

Shortly after Isaiah gave this prophecy, the Assyrians, a bloodthirsty people, swooped into Israel and conquered the ten northern tribes. As they carried their captives back to Assyria, they did so with extreme cruelty, leading the Jews across the desert with fishhooks in their mouths. Along the way, the Assyrians would skin many of the Jews alive. They would cut off the heads of those who complained and stack the heads in large pyramids to be left in the desert as a warning to any would-be rebels.

"When would the One come of whom Isaiah wrote?" Israel must have wondered as she longed for release from her torment. But the time was not yet.

About one hundred years after the Assyrian aggression, another invasion was launched against Israel. This time it was the Babylonians. Beginning in 605 B.C., the Babylonians launched a series of attacks against the southern part of the country. These attacks climaxed in the year 586 B.C., when the soldiers of Nebuchadnezzar, led by Nebuzaradan, marched into the Holy City of Jerusalem, raped the women, tortured the children, and destroyed the temple.

The people were terrified. Their hearts cried for the day when He might come of whom Isaiah spoke: the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace who would carry the government on His shoulders. But the time was not yet.

The Babylonians were followed by the Greeks. On his deathbed, Alexander the Great turned over control of Israel to the Seleucid family.

From that dynasty came a man named Antiochus Epiphanes, a picture of the coming anti-Christ. His hatred for the Jews was so great that one day he went into the temple, sacrificed a pig on the altar, made the priests drink the blood, and smeared the remainder on the temple walls.

How the people longed for the day when Messiah would come and the government would be borne upon His shoulders. But the time was not yet.

The Greeks were followed by the Romans. When the Romans descended upon that region of the world and beat it into bloody submission, the people of Israel must surely have wondered if Messiah would ever come. Then news began a to circulate throughout the country about an itinerant Rabbi from Nazareth whose words were so gracious that the common people hear Him gladly (Mark 12:37). "Truly, He must be the Wonderful Counselor," some might have said.

Others might have said, "Did you hear what He did? He spoke a word and the storm ceased. He calls the dead from their graves. He heals those afflicted with leprosy. Truly, He's the Mighty God."

Others might have said, "Did you see the way He took the little children on His lap, laid His hands on them, and pronounced blessing upon them? Truly, He must be the Everlasting Father."

Others might have said, "Did you hear that when His disciples were out at sea, struggling against the storm, He was asleep in the hold of the boat? Such peace we've never seen, never heard of, never known. Truly, He must be the Prince of Peace."

"Could *He* be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy?"

After He fed five thousand men with just a few loaves and fishes, the people gathered around Him to make Him King. No wonder! Just think—a King who could not only free them from Rome's tyranny, but could feed them as well! "We place the government upon Your shoulders," they cried. "Be our King!" But when He heard that, John tells us Jesus departed from the crowd and went up into a mountain alone (John 6:15).

Time went on and people still wondered. Then, after three years of working miracles, giving wonderful counsel, and radiating peace, Jesus rode into Jerusalem. He was greeted by the cries of hundreds of thousands of people gathered in the city to celebrate Passover. They waved palm branches

and cried, "Hosanna. Save Now. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. This is the time! Take the government upon Your shoulders!"

But as the week went on and as the people realized that Jesus was not going to take control politically, their hearts began to turn. By the end of the week, their cry was, "We will not have this Man rule over us. We will not allow the government to rest upon His shoulders. Crucify Him."

They didn't know that on that very day, the government would indeed be placed upon His shoulders. What was upon His shoulders? What is His government? The Cross. The Cross was His symbol, His proof, His method, His government. Putting the Gospel accounts together, we get the scene in totality . . .

As thousands lined the Via Dolorosa, Jesus was preceded by a man carrying a sign reading "King of the Jews" and by two soldiers in full armor. Two additional soldiers followed Him. Along the way, He collapsed. Not wanting Jesus to die on the street, wanting to see Him make it to Calvary where He could be crucified and tortured further, one of the soldiers stopped and rested the point of his spear upon the shoulder of a man named Simon. Simon was now compelled by Roman law to carry the Cross the rest of the way to Calvary.

Simon was from Cyrene—or present-day Libya. We know he was a proselyte, one who had converted to Judaism. Simon of Cyrene, desiring as all Jews did, to celebrate at least one of the feasts in the Holy City, saved all of his money and made all of the necessary plans and preparations. At last the day arrived when he crossed the Mediterranean to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem! But when he arrived, he realized it was an unusual festival. Controversy abounded. At the beginning, people cried, "Hosanna." At the end, they cried, "Crucify." And Simon didn't know what to make of it.

Lined up along the street with hundreds of thousands of others, Simon watched a Man carrying a Cross to Calvary. On the way, the Man stumbled right in front of him. Simon then felt the unmistakable sensation of iron pressed upon his shoulder—the spear of a Roman soldier—and probably wondered, *Why me? Of all the hundreds of thousands of people here, why do I have to carry this criminal's cross up the hill?* But he had no choice. So he put the Cross on his shoulder. The procession continued on to Calvary and Jesus was crucified—with Simon probably watching and wondering.

What happened to Simon? He became a believer. How do I know? Mark writes, "And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross" (Mark 15:21).

Mark, writing his Gospel from the city of Rome identified Simon as the father of Rufus and Alexander—the implication being that Rufus and Alexander were well known in the Christian community in Rome. Forty or fifty years later, in Romans 16:13, Rufus' name again is mentioned when Paul, writing to the church in Rome, salutes Rufus and his mother.

The implication of this is very meaningful to me. Simon of Cyrene, who carried the Cross—the government *of* Christ—became governed *by* Christ. Jesus said, "All who are weary, come to Me and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me and you'll find rest in your souls" (Matthew 11:28, 29). What is the yoke Jesus places upon our shoulders? Surprise. It's the Cross.

"Wait a minute," you say. "That's contradictory. How could a cross be easy? How could a cross give rest to my soul?"

Jesus knew and demonstrated as no one else could that the key to life truly lies in death. The key to life lies in taking up the cross and dying to self. Even as Jesus died for our sin, so we too are to die to self. Live for yourself and you'll end up dying. Life will be a drag. You'll be unhappy, cynical, bitter, and mean. But die to self and you'll find His burden easy and His load light. The cross is a sweet yoke. Ask Simon.

This week, I encourage you to say, "Lord, I'm going to take up the cross. I'm going to quit worrying about why I am misunderstood or why no one is helping me. I'm going to die to myself, reach out to others, and reach up to You." If you do, you will have a fabulous week, for whoever loses his life will find it. That's the beautiful mystery of Christianity.

"Oh, Jon, you're manipulating me," you say. "You're trying to motivate me and I resent it."

That's okay. Simon probably resented the touch of the spear upon his shoulder, too. But the spear compelled him to carry the Cross.

And the Cross drew him to Christ.

OPEN HOUSE!
A Topical Study of
MATTHEW 27:50–51

Sometimes we have a "boys will be boys" attitude toward sin. Human nature being what it is, we wonder what the big deal is about messing up. So what if we miss the mark? We're just human aren't we? What's the problem?

The problem is, being a personal God and loving Father, God is grieved by the sin we commit so easily and nonchalantly. Why? Is it because He's hypersensitive? No. Is He upset that we're not behaving like "good little boys and girls"? No. The Father hates sin because He sees the devastating effects it brings about. He sees the sorrow and the suffering, the problems and the pain that sin leaves in its wake. Thus, contrary to popular opinion, sin is not bad because it's forbidden. Sin is forbidden because it's bad. Sin is serious—deadly serious. In Leviticus 17, God declared there can be no remission of sin, no forgiveness of sin, without the shedding of blood. You see, it's not a matter of "boys will be boys" or "accidents happen." Sin is a deadly matter, and God is deadly serious about it. That's why there can be no forgiveness without bloodshed.

The nation of Israel could experience forgiveness of sin on only one day each year: Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On that day, the high priest would go through a great ceremonial cleansing before robing himself in his priestly garments. He would then take the blood of the bulls and goats and lambs that had been sacrificed on the altar in the courtyard and would walk into the Holy Place, the area of the temple where all priests were allowed.

Beyond the Holy Place was a veil separating it from the Holy of Holies. This veil was massive: sixty feet high, thirty feet wide, and ten inches thick. It was made of seventy-two braids, each consisting of twenty-four cords. The veil was so heavy that it took three hundred priests to hang it. Beyond the veil was the Holy of Holies—a small room only the high priest could enter only on the Day of Atonement. The Holy of Holies contained the Ark of the Covenant. Covering the Ark was the mercy seat, and filling the Holy of Holies was the shekinah glory of God—the visible, tangible presence of the Lord. On one day each year, the high priest went from the altar in the

courtyard, into the Holy Place and then through the veil into the Holy of Holies, where he sprinkled the blood and interceded on behalf of the people. If, however, the high priest was not properly cleansed—if he was not right with God—he would die in the Holy of Holies. In Exodus we read that hanging from the hem of the high priest's robes were hung bells and pomegranates, signifying the gifts and the fruit of the Spirit. As long as the priests in the Holy Place could hear the bells on the high priest's robes ringing behind the veil, they knew everything was all right. But if the bells stopped ringing, they knew there was trouble. In later years, a rope was tied around the ankle of the high priest so that if he dropped dead, he could be pulled out of the Holy of Holies without placing anyone else's life in jeopardy.

It was a powerful, awesome, and, in a very real sense, terrifying moment when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies to intercede for the people. With this in mind, can you imagine how the priests in the Holy Place must have felt on the day Jesus died?

First, there was darkness. Then the massive veil was ripped from top to bottom as if it were a piece of paper. Suddenly, these priests who would never have been allowed into the Holy of Holies could look right in. The way was now open.

> *For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshipers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.*
>
> Hebrews 10:1–4

The shedding of blood and the application of the blood in the Holy of Holies could not really make one right with God. If it could, there would have been no need to do it year after year. But the continued sacrifices were a constant reminder that the blood of bulls and goats and lambs was simply a

shadow, a picture that pointed to One who was to come—the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world forever.

> *By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*
>
> Hebrews 10:10, 17–22

Even as the veil in the temple was ripped from top to bottom, so the body of the Lamb of God was ripped for us. He paid the price for all of my sin, rebellion, and foolishness. "It is finished," He cried. The work is complete. Therefore, Hebrews says, come boldly into the presence of God. You have been cleansed by the blood. The veil is rent. No longer is the Holy of Holies for the high priest only. Every person who simply believes Jesus Christ died for his or her sin can come boldly into the presence of God. That's revolutionary! Not only the high priest, not only the pastor, not only a certain Bible study teacher or prayer warrior or singer can come. "*Everyone* come," God is saying. "The price has been paid by one offering. So come—not hesitantly, fearfully, or reluctantly. Come boldly. It's Open House!"

> During the Gulf of Tonkin crisis, Henry Kissinger asked one of his eager young assistants at the State Department to research the area. The assistant labored round the clock for six days to prepare what he felt was a thorough and profound paper. Proudly, he put it on Kissinger's desk. It came back fifteen minutes later with this note scribbled at the top: Please redo. HK.
>
> *I've got to do it over?* the assistant thought. *I gave it my all.* But he worked doubly hard on the rewrite. He placed the second paper on

Kissinger's desk. Fifteen minutes later, it was again returned with these words at the bottom: Please redo. HK.

The weary assistant took his paper and spent yet a third week working feverishly to get it done. Again it went to Kissinger's desk. Again it came back with the same note. Finally, the young man stormed into Henry Kissinger's office and declared, "Mr. Kissinger, I've barely slept in three weeks. This is the very best I can do."

"Well, in that case, I'll read it now," replied Kissinger.

Sometimes I think we picture our Father like that, saying to us, "Pray harder. Study longer. Sacrifice deeper. Give more. And if you continue to give, pray, sacrifice, and give—maybe I'll read your paper. Maybe I'll listen to your prayer. Maybe I'll respond to your question." But, gang, the issue is not trying harder. The issue is realizing Jesus *completed* the work once and for all.

The Father says to us, "Come boldly into My presence. Whether you have devotions or not is immaterial. Whether you study My Word or not is irrelevant. My Son opened the way for you. His body was torn. He was the ripped veil."

Yet what do we do? We get out our little scissors and say, "I realize there's a big opening in the veil, but I'm going to try to cut my own way through with my works of righteousness—my devotion, my prayer, my witnessing."

Listen, precious people, the work is done. The price is paid. The way into God's presence is open to everyone who believes. It is open to any person at any time at any place. Thus, any time and any place, every time and every place can be holy. Changing a diaper can be just as much an act of devotion and worship as reading your Bible if you do it to the glory of God, celebrating the fact that you can come into His presence anywhere. That's what the Samaritan woman heard from Jesus when, in answer to her question concerning the proper place to worship, He said, "The Father is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). In other words, it's not where your body is that matters. It's where your heart is that counts.

Working out at the YMCA can be an act of worship if you say, "Lord, I thank You for the fact that I can exercise. Help me to somehow reflect something of You as I'm doing this. May this be a time, Lord, when I can encourage someone and really be thankful to You for what You've given me today." You are in the Holy of Holies at that time, even though there's not a pew in sight. Does this mean you should never read your Bible, never pray, never tithe, or never come to church? Of course not. It means, however, that your motivation for doing those things changes. Instead of feeling responsible to demonstrate your spirituality, you realize the work has already been done, the price paid, the veil rent. And your motivation to worship, tithe, pray, and study the Word changes from one of responsibility to one of response.

When my wife gives me a Valentine, I don't say, "I better read this. In fact, I'll have to discipline myself to do it. I'll carve out time tomorrow morning. Hope I can stay awake. Hope she's impressed that I read it." That's crazy! And yet we take the Valentine of God's Word—His love letter to us—and say, "Well, I better discipline myself. Hope I can stay awake. Where should I start?" When you're in love with someone, you *want* to know what she's saying, what he's thinking, what they're feeling. You *want* to know her mind; you want to hear his heart. Why do I study the Bible? Because I am so impressed with my Father that I want to know more about Him.

He has torn the veil from top to bottom. And we can enter into His presence—anyone, any place, any time. Glory be to God! The price was paid. The veil was rent. The way is open. Come on in!



28 Matthew is the gospel of the King—the King revealed in chapters 1 through 10; the King resisted in chapters 11 through 13; the King retreating in chapters 14 through 20; the King rejected in chapters 21 through 27; and here in chapter 28—the King resurrected!

Matthew 28:1

In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James the Less, are not coming in a spirit of expectancy or faith. Rather, they are coming to anoint the dead body of Jesus. Doctrinally, they had missed the point entirely by assuming He would still be in the tomb. But devotionally, they were right on the mark in wanting to minister to Him.

Matthew 28:2 (a)

And, behold, there was a great earthquake . . .

I read about a man who was caught in a severe earthquake. "No matter where I looked," he said, "everything was in motion. Then I looked up through the hole in my roof and saw the stars. They became my fixed points of reference."

How true! This world is constantly quaking, trembling, and shaking. We need a fixed reference point—and we have one in the bright and morning star, Christ Jesus (Revelation 22:16). You see, everything I believe and everything I do must be measured by who He is. If we're going to be stabilized in an ever-quaking, shifting world, we must fix our eyes upon the fixed One, Jesus Christ—the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

Matthew 28:2 (b)

. . . for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

Sometimes movies depict the angel moving the stone so Jesus could come out. Believe me, folks, Jesus did not need the help of an angel to get out of the tomb. He's the same One who, a few hours later, would walk through walls. No, the stone was rolled away not to let Jesus out of the tomb, but to let the disciples look in and see that it was empty.

When General Gordon, a godly man, discovered this tomb in 1885, he did a very wise thing. He took a jar of soil gathered from the floor of the tomb to some chemists and asked if there was any trace of

decomposition in the soil. The analysis found that there was no trace of decay in the tomb. Indeed, there never was.

Matthew 28:3, 4

His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

Members of the finest fighting force in the known world were wiped out. Why? Because they saw the angel of the Lord draw a flaming sword? No. Because the angel spoke a word and they fell down? No. I suggest to you it was the awesome power of purity that caused these Roman soldiers to become as dead men.

Gang, do you know where power truly lies? Do you know from whence effectiveness really comes? It doesn't come from being strong and assertive, proving your point, or standing up for your rights. That's not what Jesus taught. He said, "Blessed are the meek. The whole world will be theirs" (see Matthew 5:5). Meekness, holiness, and purity are what cause the Roman soldiers of this world to collapse. When Jesus taught us to turn the other cheek, it was not so we would become lifeless doormats. No, whether it concerns your husband, your wife, your children, your employer, your relatives, or your neighbors, change comes not through asserting yourself. It comes through the power of purity.

Matthew 28:5 (a)

And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye . . .

"Fear not" was the angelic injunction to the shepherds on the hillside at His birth, to the women at the tomb at His death, and to us today.

***For topical study of Matthew 28:5–6 entitled "Freedom from Fear," turn to page* 216.**

Matthew 28:5 (b), 6 (a)

. . . for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said.

"As he said." I like that phrase. It is a subtle reminder, a gentle rebuke. In other words it's as if the angel said, "You should have known He wouldn't be here. Didn't He tell you He would rise?"

Matthew 28:6 (b)–8

Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

Notice the wording. First: "Come and see." Then: "Go and tell." Sincere in their desire to see missionary work accomplished or evangelism explode, many say, "We're going to win the world for Christ." But it won't happen until they first "come and see." Not until we get a clear vision of the "place where He lay"—of His work on the Cross and His resurrection from the grave—do we have a message to "go and tell."

"Come and see. Then go and tell." That is the message of the angel to these women who were first entrusted with the biggest news story in history. . . .

***For topical study of Matthew 28:8 entitled "Being Used by Being There," turn to page* 219.**

Matthew 28:9

And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail.

"All hail" was a very common expression. Slang of that day, it meant, "Howdy." I like that! When the women came to the tomb, their doctrine was wrong. They thought Jesus was dead. But He Himself came to them because although they were doctrinally wrong, they were devotionally right. I'm convinced a lot of us take pride in our doctrine when what the Lord desires

is our affection. We are committed to precepts about Christ, but are we committed to the Person of Christ? Many believers are doctrinally right, but they're dead right because their doctrine lacks devotion. On the other hand, your knowledge may be limited and your doctrine not perfectly accurate, but if your affection for Him is real, Jesus will appear to you time and time again, saying, "All hail! Howdy!"

Matthew 28:9, 10

And they came and held him by the feet, and worshiped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

When Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, His disciples split the scene. When He was being tried, Peter was cursing and denying he even knew Him. If you were in Jesus' sandals, would you have said, "Go tell my brothers I'm going to meet them in Galilee"—or would you have said, "Go tell those losers I'm back and they're in hot water"?

After He died, Jesus descended into hell. Then He ascended on high and gave gifts to men (Ephesians 4:8, 9). If *I* went to hell for people who forsook and denied me, I would go to heaven and say, "Father, let's deal with them. They've got some lessons to learn. Didn't You say in Your Word that whom You love You chasten? Well, this is the time to chasten."

We have such a tendency to want to teach people lessons, straighten them out, shake them up, and set them right. But that's not the heart of our Lord, our Hero, Jesus Christ. When He ascended He didn't say, "Father, let's punish these guys." He said, "Father let's give gifts to them."

Matthew 28:11

Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.

The Roman soldiers who had stood watch at the tomb came into Jerusalem saying to the priests, "You won't believe what happened. The

earth shook. We saw an angel. The stone is gone. Things are happening!" And what did these "holy" men do?

Matthew 28:12–14

And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.

After employing deceitfulness, treachery, and mob psychology to bring about the death of Jesus, the chief priests and elders finally resorted to bribery to cover up His resurrection. "Here's some money," they said to the Roman soldiers. "We want you to say that while you slept, the disciples came and stole Jesus' body." This was a ridiculous lie for two reasons. First, if the soldiers were sleeping, how could they have known who took the body? Second, if these soldiers had indeed fallen asleep, they would have been executed according to Roman military law for their failure to keep watch. Far from dying, however, these guys showed up the next day driving BMWs.

Matthew 28:15

So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

On college campuses today, some so-called intellectuals still parrot this two thousand-year-old lie. Jesus' disciples took His body? That's pretty hard to swallow when you realize James was sawn in half embracing the Resurrection; Thomas had his brains beaten out with a club; Peter was crucified upside down; and John was placed in a cauldron of boiling oil. To a man, the disciples died violent deaths. Many of them saw their families tortured and killed because they continued to preach the Resurrection. I don't have enough faith to believe that eleven men suffered brutally, watched the annihilation of their families, and died violently for a lie. Certainly one of them would have cracked.

If you do not believe Jesus resurrected, I challenge you to explain to me where His body went. If the Romans had stolen it, why didn't they produce it? Christianity was ultimately the force that led to the destruction of the entire Roman Empire. If His disciples were merely hiding Jesus' body, why did they give their lives believing He had ascended?

You see, I would be a Christian even if I had no emotional feelings about it. Intellectually, when I look at all the evidence, I have no other choice. The body is not there. The Resurrection is the most analyzed event in history. I also believe it is the most provable. That's why Jesus said, "One sign I'll give you. Destroy this body and in three days I will rise again." Truly, the Resurrection verifies that Jesus is exactly who He claimed to be.

Matthew 28:16

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.

According to 1 Corinthians 15:6, it would seem this was also the time when Jesus appeared to the five hundred.

Matthew 28:17

And when they saw him, they worshiped him: but some doubted.

On any given Sunday, we sense the Lord's presence and we worship Him. But some doubt. Even then, some doubted.

Matthew 28:18, 19 (a)

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations. . . .

In this verse, the word "go" is a participle and literally means "as you are going." In other words, "As you are going to the grocery store, as you are going to school, as you are going to Mexico—wherever you're going—share the gospel." In this light, the Great Commission takes on a much broader

perspective. We're to be sharing and teaching wherever we're going, whatever we're doing.

Matthew 28:19 (b), 20 (a)

. . . baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you . . .

Jesus didn't say, "Baptizing them in the *names* of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." He said, "Baptizing them in the *name* of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." Thus, here is another picture of the reality of the great mystery called the Trinity.

Matthew 28:20 (b)

. . . and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

"As you're going, as you're baptizing, as you're teaching, as you're traveling together as disciples of Me, know that I am with you always even unto the end of the world." That is what Jesus says to you today. That is why the Resurrection is so important. He's *with* us!

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

"Christ liveth in *me*." That's the beauty of the Resurrection and the genius of Christianity.

FREEDOM FROM FEAR

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 28:5–6

June 18, 1815 was one of the decisive days in world history. Napoleon had just left the island of Elba, where he had been rebuilding his army in exile. Sailing back to the mainland of Europe with him were seventy-five thousand soldiers, including the Old Guard—perhaps the finest fighting men in the world. Although the Duke of Wellington, Commander -in Chief of the British forces, offered to do his best to stop Napoleon, it seemed like a futile assignment. At Waterloo, with only sixty-seven thousand allied troops, Wellington engaged Napoleon in battle. If Napoleon was indeed victorious, there would have been no stopping him in his drive to reclaim all of Europe. The people in England waited for hours as the battle raged. Eager for news, they positioned a ship in the Channel that would signal the outcome of the contest to watchmen stationed in towers along the shores of Dover.

Finally, before it became enshrouded in fog, the signal ship signaled this message to the towers: Wellington defeated. Although the hearts of the watchmen sank, they relayed the word quickly to the waiting messengers. And word spread like wildfire throughout England that Wellington had been defeated.

Hopelessness and despair set in as the British knew it would only be a matter of time before Napoleon would sail across the Channel and lay claim to their country. However, when the fog lifted, the ship fired a cannon to get the attention of those in the tower and the third and final word of the message was relayed. The word was “Napoleon.” What a difference the third word made, for the completed message read: Wellington defeated Napoleon. Suddenly, the hearts of the British people rejoiced. Napoleon had been stopped. They would remain a free people. The third word filled their hearts with great joy.

But the followers of Jesus experienced far greater joy and liberty on the third day when the rest of His message came through. On the third day, the fog lifted and the third word came forth: He is risen!

In Hebrews 2 we see a passage that will hopefully give you new insight into the glory of the Resurrection.

> *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*
>
> Hebrews 2:14

God Himself became a Man in the Person of Jesus Christ. He became *like* us that He might die *for* us and give hope *to* us.

> *And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*
>
> Hebrews 2:15

Why did God become flesh and blood? To deliver us from the fear of death. You see, the Bible says that, although man might deny it on the surface, he is in bondage to the fear of death deep within. We don't like to talk about death, but we know it's inevitable. After all, the statistics on death are pretty conclusive: ten out of ten people die.

Fear of Physical Death

The Bible says the fear of death is bondage. Regardless of what the commercial says, we're not getting better. We're getting older. We can fight it with surgery. We can eat health foods all day. But the fact is, we're not going to win. We're dying. If you're a believer, you've probably already settled the issue of physical death. Because of what Christ did for you on the Cross, you know you're going to heaven. But maybe you're afraid of another kind of death. I suggest this text paints a much broader picture than simply the fear of physical death . . .

Fear of Financial Death

- "Will I have enough money to live comfortably after I retire?"
- "If inflation hits double digits again, what will happen to me?"
- "What if Alzheimer's strikes me?"
- "How will I afford medical costs?"
- "Will Social Security be enough?"
- "Will Social Security be there at all?"

Fear of Relational Death

- "What if he tells me he's seeing someone else?"
- "What if she says she just wants to be friends?"
- "What if the relationship crumbles?"

Fear of Vocational Death

- "What if I get fired?"
- "What if there's a lay-off?"
- "What if there's a cut-back?"
- "What if I can't make the grade?"

Jesus, who became like us, died for us. But it seemed like everything was hopeless and lost. Then suddenly, He came back to life. And because He conquered death, the ultimate enemy, *nothing* can stand in His way—not physical infirmities, not finances, not relationships, not vocations. How we need to hear the message of the Resurrection. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. Therefore *nothing* can conquer Him. And guess where He is. The One who conquered death now lives in my heart by His Holy Spirit. The resurrected One now indwells *me*.

Physically, if I get sick, the One who lives in me will see me through. He's going to see me through. Either I'll get well and live a few more years or I'll go to heaven—where I long to be.

Financially, He has promised to see us through. He has promised to supply all of our needs (Philippians 4:19) and that no good thing would He withhold from those who walk with Him (Psalm 84:11).

Relationally, maybe your friends have left you or your marriage has collapsed. Know this, dear friend: Jesus is in you. He is the Resurrection. And He has promised in His Word to restore unto you the years the locust has eaten (Joel 2:25). As Jonah discovered, He is the God of the second chance. He is the One who works all things together for good (Romans 8:28). Thus, we have nothing to fear.

"If Christ Jesus be not raised from the dead," Paul said, "then we are of all men most miserable" (1 Corinthians 15:19). But if Christ is raised from the dead, we are free from the fear of death. How does this work practically?

You might be saying, "I believe Jesus died for my sins. I believe He rose again and lives in me. But I am still afraid of this, that, or the other. I'm in bondage to the fear of death. What can I do?" Do what Mary Magdalene and the other Mary did. The next verse in Matthew tells us that they came to the

place where Christ lay. They came to where they thought He was. They came to the tomb. Even though they thought He was dead, they longed to be with Him.

So, too, if you find yourself in bondage to the fear of death, go to the place where you last saw Him—even if you're not sure He's still there. And like the women at the tomb, perhaps when you least expect it, you'll feel His touch upon your shoulder and you'll hear Him say, "You came seeking Me. Thank you. Now what can I do for you?"

I'm so thankful for Jesus Christ because, like you, I have experiences of wondering. "Is this going to die? Is that going to die? What's going to happen over here?" But then I go to the place where I last saw Him, and sure enough, I hear His voice again.

And I'm free.

BEING USED BY BEING THERE

A Topical Study of MATTHEW 28:8

The greatest news story in the history of humanity broke on a spring morning in A.D. 32. The news? Jesus of Nazareth, an itinerant Preacher, had risen from the dead just as He had predicted. An angel told the story and entrusted it not to an investigative journalist from *60 Minutes,* not to a network anchorman, not to an editor of *TIME* or even *Christianity Today,* not to a theologian, not to one of the remaining disciples. No, the ones who were entrusted with the most profound and incredible story in all history were two women. Why? Here are some possible reasons. . . .

Because God Loves to Use the Weak to Confound the Strong

Peter tells us in his first epistle that the woman is the weaker vessel (1 Peter 3:7). Biblically, the concept of the "weaker vessel" speaks not of inferiority but of sensitivity. Innately, a woman has greater sensitivity than a man. Instead of using Peter, James, John, or any of the boys who hung out with Him, roughing it and sleeping on the hillsides of Galilee, God initially used two women to spread the gospel, seemingly delighting in using the weaker vessel to confound the strong.

Because They Were the Last Ones at the Cross

In Matthew 27:55, we read that a number of women were at the Cross beholding Jesus afar off. The two Marys, mentioned at the end of chapter 27 are the same two Marys who are named at the beginning of chapter 28. It remains true, precious people, that those who go through the deepest sorrow will often be those who experience the greatest joy.

Because Thousands of Years Earlier, Death Had Come by a Woman

Seduced by the serpent to eat of the forbidden fruit, Eve shared with Adam in the fall of humanity. It was in a Garden that death came *by* a woman. Here, it is at a garden tomb that life is announced *to* a woman. That's so often the way of the Lord. He takes those of us who have missed the mark or messed up in a certain area and delights in using us to minister to others at a later time. He heals the hurts. He restores, rebuilds, renews, and revives. And then He releases powerful ministry in the very area where we blew it previously. That's Good News. That's the gospel.

Because the Greatest Love Brings the Greatest Privilege

We know from John's Gospel that when Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found it empty, she initially thought someone had moved Jesus' body to another sepulcher. Seeing a Man she supposed to be the gardener, she asked, "Where have they laid my Lord? If you have moved Him, tell me where you have laid Him and I will take Him away," (see John 20:15). How did Mary think she could move the body of Jesus all by herself? I suggest the answer is that when you love someone, you don't weigh the heaviness of the difficulties or the obstacles. When you love someone, you just find a way. And Mary loved Jesus deeply.

Women are special to God's heart and indispensable to His church. I believe that the Lord entrusted women first with the gospel message because He delights to use the weak to confound the strong; because they suffered the deepest sorrow at the Cross and would therefore experience the greatest joy at the tomb; because death came by a woman and life was announced through women; because their great love brought great privilege.

But I think there is one more reason . . .

Because *They Were There*

Who came to the tomb? A couple of women. So God said, "I'll use them. They will be the first messengers of the gospel." I believe God uses people who are there. The people who are used are the ones who gather around the body of Christ and desire to minister to the body of Christ even as these women did. Start saying, "I don't need to pray any more with believers. I don't have time for fellowship. I'm doing fine by myself,"—and you will increasingly miss the opportunity to move in the power of ministry and the effectiveness of revelation. If you start to pull away or kick back—watch out. Revelation will pass you by. Oh, God's love for you will still be the same. His grace will be upon you just as much as ever. Your place in heaven will remain secure. But your usefulness will be diminished proportionately to your moving away from the body.

"But the body's dead," you say. That's what the two Marys thought. When they came to the tomb to wrap Jesus' body in spices, they had no idea He would be resurrected. They were coming to minister to His *dead* body. That is why I don't believe it is ever excusable for a person to say, "I'm not going to minister at that place or to those people because they're spiritually dead." No, if you really want to be a servant, like the women at the tomb, you'll minister faithfully regardless of what *seems* to be.

Maybe you're thinking, *Let someone else have the revelation. Let someone else carry the news. I don't care.* But look at how the women left the tomb. Matthew says they left with great joy. How did the disciples, who were hiding out on their own, feel at this point? Discouraged and defeated.

So you have a choice. You can live like the disciples or like the women at the tomb. If you choose to live like the disciples—on your own and hidden away—your life will abound with discouragement and defeat.

But if you say, "I want to be where Jesus is, I want to be with His Body even if it seems dead. I want to be there listening and learning, serving and giving. I want to pray and worship. I want to be *there*"—you will have a life full of great, great joy.

NOTES

[1]C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 201.

[2]Paraphrased from *Messages from The Wild: An Almanac of Suburban Natural and Unnatural History* by Frederick R. Gehlbach, Copyright © 2002. Courtesy of the University of Texas Press.

[3]Jay Rogers, *The Downfall of Communism,* March 1990.

[4]Jerry Moffit, *The Skeptical Review, Volume One, Number One,* 1990.



MARK

Background to Mark

The shortest of the four gospels, Mark's is only sixteen chapters. It's a fast-moving presentation of the life of Christ. And that's appropriate, for Mark's primary audience was the Romans, a fast-moving people. This explains why there are only two Old Testament references in his entire Gospel. Contrast this with Matthew's account—written primarily to the Jews—in which we find numerous Old Testament references. Luke's Gospel was written for the Greek mind-set. John's was written for the world in totality. But because Mark writes to the Romans, we don't see an abundance of sermons and discourses in his Gospel. Instead, the emphasis is upon the works rather than the words of Jesus.

Mark's full name was John Mark (John his Hebrew name, and Mark his Roman name). John Mark was specifically suited to write this Gospel because of his background. We know from Acts 12 that he was the son of a wealthy woman in whose house the carly church met. And from Peter's reference to him as his son in the faith (1 Peter 5), it would seem as though Peter was influential in John Mark's conversion. If this be so, it would make Mark's Gospel actually Peter's Gospel—for it would have been Peter who informed Mark of the events contained therein. Thus, scholars believe they are hearing the words and feeling the heart of Peter as they study the Gospel of Mark.

Matthew presents Jesus as the King. Luke presents Him as the Perfect Man. And John presents Him as the Son of God. But in the Gospel before us, Mark presents Jesus as a Servant. Chapters 1—10 portray the Servant living His life in service; chapters 11—16 portray Him giving His life in sacrifice.

In Acts 13:5, Mark himself was called a servant as he accompanied his uncle Barnabas and the apostle Paul on their first missionary journey into Asia Minor, or present-day Turkey. Although translated "minister," the Greek word *huperetes* literally means "under-rower." Picture a Roman galley. On the top deck, all of the passengers are enjoying the cruise through the Mediterranean. But down below, away from the passengers on the upper deck, are the *huperetes,* the under-rowers. No one sees them as they toil hour after hour, day after day, week after week; stroking, stroking, stroking. Sixty,

eighty, one hundred twenty in number, the *huperetes* would be underneath rowing, toiling, sweating, working in order that the ship might move.

What does it mean to be a servant? It doesn't mean to overlord, barking commands from the upper deck. No, to be a servant, to be a minister, means to be one who undergirds, who works behind the scenes, who toils steadily and faithfully—even though he might never be recognized or acknowledged. Too often, our idea of "minister" is wrong. If one wants to be a true minister, a servant, a *huperetes,* he will labor in obscurity if necessary, rowing, undergirding. In Mark's Gospel we see Jesus moving away from the crowd, working in quietness, ministering in relative obscurity.

As Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas, something happened. The Scriptures don't say why, but simply that John Mark turned back from Barnabas and Paul and went home (Acts 13:13). Consequently, when Paul and Barnabas were preparing to embark on their second missionary venture and Barnabas said he would get John Mark, Paul said, "Not so fast. He turned back last time. We can't be slowed down by one who is so unfaithful." Barnabas, whose name means, "Son of Consolation," insisted, however, that John Mark come along. As a result, Scripture records that "the contention was sharp between them" (see Acts 15:39).

Instead, Barnabas took John Mark, while Paul teamed with Silas and twice headed in different directions. Who was right? I believe Paul was justified in his position because he had in view the ministry in totality. I also believe Barnabas did well in caring about John Mark because later on we see John Mark laboring with Paul (Philemon 24), recommended by Paul to the church at Colosse (Colossians 4:10), and requested by Paul (2 Timothy 4:11). In other words, so good a job did Barnabas in restoring and renewing John Mark that his young nephew went on to have a vital ministry—even to Paul in the apostle's last days.

This gives me great hope. Maybe, like me, you can think of times in your life when you dropped the ball, turned away, fell down. Following such times, the tendency is to think, *It's over. I'll never be used.* But I would encourage you to remember John Mark who, although he chickened out on his first journey, went on to minister effectively—not only to Paul, but also to us through the Gospel before us. . . .



MARK

1

Mark 1:1
The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The gospel is neither a discussion nor a debate. It's not good views, but Good News. And Mark wastes no time in getting to its heart.

Mark 1:2, 3
As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Mark quotes only two prophecies in his entire Gospel: this one, from Malachi 3:1; and Isaiah 40:3, which refers, of course, to John the Baptist.

Mark 1:4
John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

The baptism of John—this one who came to prepare the way for Jesus Christ—was not for salvation, but for preparation. It was for the one who knew he had missed the mark, the one who knew he was a sinner, the one who knew he needed a Redeemer. Thus, John's baptism was preparatory, but not complete, for Jesus had not yet died for their sins.

Mark 1:5–9
And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; and preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to

stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.

As John called people to repent, suddenly Jesus showed up, requesting to be baptized. Jesus had no sin. What did He need to confess? Why would He ask to be baptized by John? I suggest two reasons . . .

Although baptism is indeed a symbol of death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6), the word *baptizo* was initially used with regard to dyeing cloth. Material "baptized" in colored dye would assume the color of the dye. Therefore, baptism is not only a symbol of dying, but of dyeing. What is Jesus doing here? He's identifying with us. Dipped in the same water we are, not ashamed of us, but identifying with us, He meets us. We take on the same color in the water of baptism. Regardless of the fact that two thousand years separate us from this event chronologically and six thousand miles geographically, we identify with Jesus and He with us through baptism.

Not only does Jesus' baptism illustrate His identification with us, it shows His submission to the Father, for through baptism, Jesus said, "I have come to die." Every other teacher, philosopher, or guru came to live—and yet, their so-called "ministries" were interrupted by their deaths. Not so with Jesus. He came to die. Death didn't interrupt His ministry. It fulfilled it.

Mark 1:10

And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him.

Conceived as He was by the Spirit in the womb of Mary, the Spirit was already *in* Jesus. But here we see the Spirit coming *upon* Him at the beginning of His ministry, empowering Him for service.

Mark 1:11

And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Although it seems too good to be true, if you're a believer, this word of the Father applies to you as well, for, according to 2 Corinthians 5:21, you are in Christ. I can go through the day praising the Lord, casting my burdens upon Him—not because of who I am, but because of where I am, not because of what I've done or haven't done—but because I'm in Christ.

Mark 1:12 (a)
And immediately . . .

Mark's use of the words "immediately" and "straightway" eight times in his first chapter alone illustrate the speed with which he moves through his account.

Mark 1:12 (b)
. . . the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness.

Directly following the glorious experience of hearing the voice of His Father, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness. Why? Not to do Him in, but to show Him off. . . .

> *Suppose you go to the local Jeep dealer and say, "I'm thinking about buying a Jeep." After opening the door of his latest model, a salesman would say, "Hop in"—and proceed to drive you to some rough terrain, where he would shift into four-wheel drive and take you off-road—flying over hills, splashing through rivers. Why? Not to damage the car, but to show you what it can do.*

So, too, in driving Jesus to the wilderness, the Father was saying, "Watch My Son. No matter what Satan throws at Him, He will come through beautifully." And the same thing is true of you and me. You see, only what the Father allows can come into our lives. Therefore, when temptations, trials, difficulties, wilderness experiences, hard times come our way, it is because the Father has allowed them in order to silence Satan's accusation that you only serve God in easy times, and to show you off to a doubting world.

Mark 1:13 (a)

And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan . . .

Forty days puts us in mind of the forty years God's people wandered in the wilderness. Because the law will never lead a man into the Land of Promise, Moses, who speaks of the law, was unable to lead the people into the land. No, it was Joshua, whose name is the Hebrew form of "Jesus," who brought the people into the land flowing with milk and honey.

Mark 1:13 (b)

. . . and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.

Because of his sin, the first Adam lost the dominion over nature given to him (Genesis 1:28). Contrast this with the Last Adam, Jesus Christ, to whom dominion is returned as evidenced by the wild beasts that surrounded Him in the wilderness—a sneak preview of the coming kingdom wherein the wolf shall lie down by the lamb (Isaiah 11:6). Where Adam failed in the garden, Jesus came through in the desert.

Mark 1:14–20 (a)

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him. And when he had gone a little further thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. And straightway he called them . . .

Of the twelve men Jesus called, at least seven were fishermen. To be a fisherman, one must possess patience and perseverance—qualities as

valuable in fishing for men as in fishing for fish. I find it interesting that Peter and Andrew were casting their nets into the sea when Jesus called them. On the other hand, James and John were mending nets. The ministry of Peter and Andrew was evangelism, as evidenced by Andrew repeatedly bringing people to Christ, and Peter preaching the sermon on the Day of Pentecost that "caught" three thousand people in the net of the gospel. The ministry of John and James, by contrast, was that of mending people through their emphasis on both the heartfelt and practical nature of love. Whatever your temperament personally, watch the Lord use it in your own ministry.

Mark 1:20 (b)

. . . and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.

The fact that Zebedee had servants meant that he had money. Therefore, when James and John left their father and the nets, they were leaving a bright future vocationally and financially. Yet they could do no other, for they found a higher calling than simply money. Filet of sole failed in comparison to saving souls. They were "hooked" and their "net" worth skyrocketed when they chose to follow the One who would impact eternity through their lives.

Mark 1:21

And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught.

The synagogue is not the temple. The temple—where sacrifices were made, where the priesthood served—was in Jerusalem. Synagogues, on the other hand, dotted the countryside of Israel, having come into being during the Babylonian captivity when Jews were unable to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. Usually small in structure, synagogues were established wherever ten or more Jewish males lived, and were not places of sacrifice, but of study, worship, and prayer. They were overseen not by the traditional priesthood, but by laymen through a council of elders—one of whom was appointed ruler. When a rabbi would come into the area, the ruler of the synagogue would invite him to come and speak on the Sabbath day. As we

see in the Book of Acts, Paul took advantage of this, going from synagogue to synagogue preaching Jesus.

Mark 1:22

And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.

The scribes would speak *from* authorities, quoting rabbis in their teachings. Jesus, however, spoke *with* authority. "Ye have heard it said . . . but I say unto you . . . ." He declared (Matthew 5—6).

Mark 1:23, 24

And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.

Although this man may have sat undetected in the synagogue week after month after year, it wasn't until Jesus showed up that all hell broke loose quite literally. This should not be surprising. Whenever the Son of God shows up, the forces of hell respond.

Mark 1:25–28

And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him. And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.

The demon left, but not before he tore up this individual. So, too, when we rid evil from our lives—when we say, "Yes, Lord, have Your way," as

old habits, relationships, patterns are forsaken—there may be some tearing initially, but we will also experience freedom and blessing eventually.

Mark 1:29

And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

Peter took Jesus home with him after church—always a good thing to do. I hope we'll increasingly get to the place where, when we leave Bible studies and services, we won't be those who quickly move into the next activity, but will learn to bring the Lord home.

Mark 1:30

But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell him of her.

You who spend time in worship and Bible study, beware. Satan will attempt to discourage you by causing fever in your home, heat in your house. But bring Jesus home with you and watch a miracle happen.

Mark 1:31

And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them.

Throughout his Gospel, Mark emphasizes the touch of Jesus. Jesus heals not only through the word He speaks, but through the touch He shares—not only telling us what to do, but touching us and encouraging us as well.

Mark 1:32–35

And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him. And in

the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.

Jesus had been serving, touching, giving, teaching, praying, healing. And yet, as was His practice morning by morning, He woke early to receive instruction concerning the day before Him.

Mark 1:36, 37

And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee.

"This is great!" said the disciples. "All men seek You! Everyone wants You!" You will find yourself frazzled and fried if you listen to such voices. Your priorities will get mixed up; you'll feel wiped out; your ministry will be done in; your heart will be weighed down.

Mark 1:38

And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth.

It was having "come forth" from the place of prayer that Jesus could say with confidence, "Let's split. My Father has other plans for Me today."



***For topical study of Mark 1:32–38 entitled "The Key to Keeping Focused," turn to page* 227.**

Mark 1:39–41 (a)

And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils. And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him . . .

Jesus did the unthinkable when He reached out to touch the leper.

Mark 1:41 (b)–44

. . . and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed. And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; and saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

By going to the priest, the leper would be able to confirm his healing, and Jesus would be insulated from the circus mentality that all too often typifies today's healing ministries.

Mark 1:45

But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.

Over and over again in the Gospel accounts, we hear Jesus say, "Don't tell anyone." And yet, as did the leper, we see people spreading the word radically. Then, after His death and resurrection, we hear Jesus say, "*Now* go into all the world." And what do we do? We "say nothing to any man." We have it all backward.

Because the healed leper spoke too soon, Jesus was hindered from going into the city. But how many times do we speak too late and hinder someone from coming to Him? Whether we be over-eager ex-lepers, or staid and shy churchgoers, what we must do is God's will—nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.

THE KEY TO KEEPING FOCUSED

A Topical Study of MARK 1:32–38

They accused Him of being a glutton and a winebibber, of being born illegitimately and casting out demons by the power of Satan. But no one ever accused Jesus of being busy or unapproachable, uptight or upset. Our culture values busyness. In our society, the busier one is, the more important he is. But in reality, deep within our hearts, we know that barely making it here, narrowly making it there is not the way life was meant to be. Jesus moved in serenity and tranquility—opposite of what we value in our society, but what we desire innately.

How did He do this? As I read Mark's Gospel, I am increasingly convinced that Jesus' life focused on three things . . .

The Father's Will

In talking about His relationship with His heavenly Father, Jesus said, "Truly I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (see John 5:19). "I'm not doing My own thing," Jesus said. "I'm not pursuing My own pleasure, toying with My own hobbies. My life is about one thing: What I see and hear the Father doing and speaking. My own will? I have none."

This was seen nowhere more clearly than in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup of My suffering pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Thy will be done" (see Mark 14:36).

The Father's Heart

Regarding His earthly ministry, Jesus was able to say, "I always do those things which please the Father" (see John 8:29)—not simply keeping His commandments and following His instructions, but *pleasing* Him.

It's one thing if my kids obey me. But it's something altogether different if they hear my heart and want to please me. That's the way Jesus was. He heard His Father's heartbeat.

The Father's Time

"Son, they're out of wine," Mary said, implying He do something.

"Mine hour is not yet come," Jesus answered. "This isn't the right time" (John 2:4).

"Lord, come quickly," Mary and Martha said. "The one you love is sick" (see John 11:3). Yet Jesus wouldn't go until the time was right. He waited for His Father's timing before moving in any direction.

What did this do?

It freed Him completely from every other demand.

We feel frazzled because we're always trying to figure out, "Should I do this? Should I go there?" We see opportunities open before us, and we think that because we're busy, we're accomplishing a lot. But so does the chicken running in circles whose head has been cut off. People who don't know any better might look at him and say, "Wow! Look at all he's doing. He's really living." In reality, however, he's in the process of dying because he's disconnected from his head. So, too, when you and I lose contact with our Head, Christ Jesus, watch what happens. We'll run here and sprint there; do this and attempt that—but although the world may applaud us, in our hearts, we'll know something is inherently wrong.

Jesus didn't do this. There was a sense of tranquility and serenity about Him because He was focused intently on one thing singularly: pleasing His Father.

When I wake up every morning, I don't have to go through mental gymnastics or philosophical acrobatics concerning the question of whether or not I should brush my teeth. No, as did most of us, I decided a long time ago that I'd brush my teeth every morning. And because of that, I don't spend my day thinking about the question of doing so. The same should be true of spiritual disciplines. Many people think the practices of Christianity are legalistic and confining. Not true. They're freeing and liberating, for we are free from wondering whether or not whatever we consider a non-negotiable priority in our lives will fit into our schedules.

> The recent winner of the all-city handball championship in Portland was unusual because, at thirty-seven years of age, he was relatively

> old for a handball champion. It was also unusual because he didn't start playing the game until he was thirty-five. But more unusual than his age or his newness to the sport was the fact that, having lost his right arm as a Vietnam War veteran, he played handball with only one hand. When asked how he had won, he pared his answer down to one word: decisions. "Every time the ball comes toward my opponents," he said, "they must decide right hand or left hand. I, however, am absolutely sure which hand I'm going to use. There's no debate."

I like that! When you simplify your life concerning certain nonnegotiable issues, you no longer ask, "Should I pray this morning? Should I go to Bible Study on Wednesday?" Should I be in church Sunday night?"—for the decision has already been made. The question then arises, "How do we discern the will, time, and heart of God?" Watch what Jesus does in our text . . .

After teaching the multitude in Capernaum, after healing the sick, and casting out demons, Jesus rose early the following morning to pray. Meanwhile, His disciples realized that everyone was looking for Him. In my imagination, I hear them saying, "Wow! Good job, Jesus! You came through perfectly! Everybody wants You now. Now You can establish Your kingdom —in a beach town no less!"

But Jesus said something remarkable when He said, "Let us go into the next towns." The word translated "town" is an interesting Greek word used only once in all of the New Testament. It refers to an un-walled town, a town with no protection, no identity, but rather just a place on the map. Thus, Jesus was saying, "Let's leave Surf City and go to Cow Town."

This amazes me. I mean, if, as an athlete with aspirations to make the pros, you heard that the 49ers and the Seahawks, the Giants and the Royals all wanted you, would you say, "What an answer to prayer!" or would you say, "Let's get out of here"? If, as a businessman, you realized every corporation in the career of your choice was on the phone saying, "Please come and work for us. We need you. Name your salary," would you disregard their calls?

Didn't Jesus come to reach people? Didn't He come to establish the kingdom? Wouldn't it be wise for Him to take advantage of the publicity and

the opportunity in Capernaum? Wouldn't this be a great moment for "Christianity"? Why would Jesus leave Capernaum? The answer lies in the second half of verse 38: "for therefore came I forth." The place from which Jesus came was the solitary place of prayer (verse 35). As He talked to His Father, Jesus was given direction for the day. Thus, even when demands were placed upon Him or seemingly good opportunities opened before Him, He wasn't swayed. How often you and I get detoured and distracted by hearing, "All men seek for you." We spend time talking about a "great opportunity" and pursue it—only to find we're tired. Not so with Jesus. The will of the Father, the timing of the Father, the heart of the Father directed Him to go to the un-walled cities that day. And that's what He did.

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

Morning by morning, Jesus was awakened to hear the directions of His Father that He might know how to speak during the day. If Jesus needed to pray —day by day by day— to hear a word, to gain direction so that He might move in priority and peace and serenity, how much more do we?

Not only is prayer communion with God, but it is also a commandment from God. At least two hundred times in the Scriptures the command to pray is given. Thus, prayer is not a suggestion. It's a command. Why? I suggest two reasons . . .

Preparation

Because life is oh-so-short, our Father has a very big job to do in the seventy, eighty, or ninety years we're here in order to teach us the language we'll be speaking for eternity—the language of prayer.

> Is it because doctors were mean and brutal that they used to spank babies upon birth? No. Babies come out of a closed environment into a whole new world in which they must breathe immediately. Time is limited. So doctors used to spank them—causing them to cry out and breathe in. Mission accomplished.

So, too, our Father must get us breathing and communicating. So He spanks us. "Why are You doing this, God?" we sob. Then we inhale. And the process begins in which we are being prepared for the environment of eternity in which prayer is the language spoken. Because our ability to serve in the next billion years depends upon how we communicate with the Father now, He says, "I'm going to have to send you through some difficulty from time to time in order that you will cry out to Me and learn about prayer—for that is the only way you will be prepared for the ages to come."

Participation

And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

Matthew 13:58

The Lord not only prepares us for eternity *through* prayer, but He partners with us *in* prayer. This means that the relationships we're developing, the kids we're parenting, the places where we work will not be blessed without our partnering with the Lord. He has chosen to use you as a partner in what He desires to do.

I once read an article about a couple in South Africa who saved a seven-day-old puppy from the belly of a python after they heard the puppy yelping inside of the snake. The wife held the snake by the tail while the husband shook the snake's head and rubbed its bulging stomach until the snake's jaws opened and the puppy was forced out. After massaging the puppy's chest, the puppy started to breathe again.

I don't mean to be cute, but in this, I see a real parallel with what we're called to do. I hear the faint yelp of people in our communities, people who are trapped by the devourer, the serpent, the devil. They're caught up in all kinds of stuff, deceived by what the world has to offer. And here's our Hero, Jesus Christ, who will take the head of that serpent and begin to shake it even as Genesis foretold He would (Genesis 3:15). Our job, then, as His bride, is to join hand in hand with Him, binding the work of the Enemy, allowing our families and our communities to be free.

Do you hear the faint cry of people caught in the grasp of the Enemy? Will you say, "Yes, Lord, I will partner with You through prayer, through intercession, with a focus in my life and a determination in my heart to obey You."? If that be our heart, if that be our prayer, our lives will begin to take on the peace and purpose, the stability and tranquility, the flavor and focus of Jesus.



2 After seeing Jesus' work begun in chapter 1, here in chapter 2, we will see it belittled by the religious establishment that was jealous of the

attention given to the radical Rabbi from Galilee.

Mark 2:1

And again he entered into Capernaum, after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house.

". . . And it was noised that he was in the house." I love this phrase. If people were to summarize the sounds they hear coming from your home, would they say, "Oh yes, Jesus is there. No doubt about it"?

The only thing that will alter the family is a return to the family altar—when fathers and mothers take the time to gather their families around the Word to worship the Lord. I know it's not always easy to find the time, but regardless of how young or old our kids might be, such a time is essential if our homes are to be known as those in which it is "noised" that Jesus is inside.

Mark 2:2

And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.

Hearing that Jesus did miracles—the sick were healed, the demonized liberated, blind eyes opened, lepers cleansed—no doubt people came to be touched by Him. Therefore, I suspect some were initially disappointed when He began preaching. Yet the ministry of Jesus Christ centered around the teaching and preaching of the Word because faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

Mark 2:3–5 (a)

And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith . . .

In this story, we first see Jesus looking up. As He's preaching the Word, He hears commotion overhead and sees the faith of four men finding a way to bring their friend to Him.

Mark 2:5 (b)

. . . he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

After looking up, Jesus looked down at the man before him and said, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

I wonder if the four friends were initially disappointed. *He's not here for forgiveness,* they could have thought. *He's here for healing.* But Jesus was dealing with the root problem, the most important issue. Church historians suggest this man was paralyzed as a result of an immoral lifestyle. If this be so, forgiveness would be the gnawing need of his heart. Jesus always deals with the root. And the root issue is always sin. So although they might have frustrated the four friends on the roof, I believe Jesus' words were what the paralyzed man longed to hear more than anything else.

Mark 2:6, 7

But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?

Next we see Jesus looking around at the scribes, who judged Him with envy (Mark 15:10).

Mark 2:8–12

And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way

into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

Finally, we see Jesus looking within, at the hearts of the scribes who were so eager to ensnare Him. "You will see that I have power to meet this man's greatest need now and eternally—the forgiveness of His sins—by My healing of His paralysis," Jesus declared.

Mark 2:13, 14

And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them. And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

Levi, also known as Matthew, was a tax collector—despised by his countrymen due to the fact that he collected money for their dreaded oppressors, the Romans. But Matthew's occupation didn't prevent Jesus from calling him, because Jesus specializes in using the despised and rejected—people just like us!

Mark 2:15–17

And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

The Good News for any of us who feel off the wall, out to lunch, or incapacitated is that Jesus, the Great Physician, came especially to help people like us.

Mark 2:18, 19

And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.

According to the Talmud, there is one time a man is absolved of duty, even prayer: at a wedding ceremony. The only duty a man had at a wedding ceremony was to rejoice. Thus, Jesus is saying, "This is not the time to be fasting." And He says the same thing today. I don't know when Christianity began being associated with grumpiness, for ours is not a call to religion, but to relationship, not to sadness, but to gladness, not to a funeral, but to a wedding.

Mark 2:20

But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

If a church does not have the presence of Jesus, if the joy of the Lord is not there, services will be like funerals. But if the Lord is there, it's time to rejoice and celebrate the gospel and our great salvation. We're forgiven. We're on our way to heaven. The Lord is risen. *Happy* is the people whose God is the Lord! (Psalm 144:15).

Mark 2:21, 22

No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.

There are those who suggest that Jesus came to reform Judaism. Jesus, however, says "I'm not talking about patching up the old system or refilling old wineskins. Something new is happening." The question then arises: What did He mean when He declared in Matthew 5 that He came not to destroy the old, but to fulfill it? Perhaps the answer is best illustrated with an acorn. If I set an acorn on the ground and hit it repeatedly with a hammer, it would soon be destroyed. If, on the other hand, I bury it in the ground, it would likewise be destroyed. But in the second case, its destruction would bring about fulfillment, for it would bring forth a whole new tree.

When Jesus said, "I have come to fulfill the Law," it was in the sense of the buried acorn. That is, once the law shows us we're sinners in need of a Savior, its work is complete—fulfilled in the Person of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Mark 2:23, 24

And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?

Although it was against Pharisaical tradition to pick grain, it was not against Old Testament Law, for Deuteronomy 23:25 allowed those who were hungry to pick grain no matter the day.

Mark 2:25, 26

And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?

In appealing to the fact that, while fleeing from Saul, David ate the showbread from the tabernacle, Jesus is declaring that human need always

has priority over religious ritual, that the law is fulfilled in love (Matthew 22:37–40).

Mark 2:27, 28

And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

The Old Testament regulations were not meant to be burdens, but to be blessings—given not for punishment, but for protection. When reading Old Testament Scriptures in this light, the law provides beautiful principles to free us to live life the way it was meant to be, the Sabbath—a day when man stops his work in order to reflect and relax—being a perfect example.



3 Before we will see Jesus' work blessed in verses 4–7, as chapter 3 opens, we see a continuation of His work belittled.

Mark 3:1, 2

And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him.

Knowing it was Jesus' manner to seek out those in need, the Pharisees kept a close eye on the man with the paralyzed hand for the sole purpose of seeing if Jesus would break their law by healing him on the Sabbath.

Mark 3:3, 4 (a)

And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?

"People die every day. Therefore, if evil and death don't take a rest, why should goodness and life cease on the Sabbath day? Your rules and regulations don't make sense," Jesus said to the Pharisees.

Mark 3:4 (b)

But they held their peace.

The Pharisees were learning not to argue with Jesus.

Mark 3:5

And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

As the man with the paralyzed hand stretched it forth, he was able to do what the Lord had commanded him to do because God's commandments are always God's enablements.



***For topical study of Mark 3:5 entitled "The Withered Hand," turn to page* 236.**

Mark 3:6

And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.

The Pharisees and Herodians had been enemies for years. But now the Pharisees, a religious group, and the Herodians, a political party, found themselves united in their opposition to Jesus. This was as unlikely as seeing the Pro-Choice and Pro-Life movements saying, "Let's join forces."

Yet even though Jesus' work was being belittled by the Pharisees, the Herodians, the scribes, and others, His work is about to be blessed by the Father . . .

Mark 3:7–12

But Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples to the sea: and a great multitude from Galilee followed him, and from Judaea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumaea, and from beyond Jordan; and

they about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him. And he spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him. For he had healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon him for to touch him, as many as had plagues. And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God. And he straitly charged them that they should not make him known.

Why would Jesus forbid the "free advertising" of the unclean spirits? I believe part of the answer lies in the fact that demonic spirits are not only called unclean spirits, but lying spirits (1 Kings 22:22; 2 Chronicles 18:21). And of what use is the word of a liar?

Mark 3:13

And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him.

The crowd was surrounding Him. Healing was flowing from Him. People were being touched and blessed by Him. And yet Jesus withdrew, no doubt following the directive of His Father.

Mark 3:14, 15

And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils.

Matthew tells us Jesus spent the night in prayer before choosing His disciples. I used to think He did this to receive direction and confirmation from His Father in order that He might choose twelve men who would impact and influence the world most radically. But now I suspect He was praying, "Father, keep Me from choosing those who seem successful outwardly" because look who He chose:

Mark 3:16

And Simon he surnamed Peter.

Simon, whose name means "Shifting Sand," was given a new name, which means "Rock." If you could choose anyone in all of humanity to be your disciples, would you have chosen Peter—a man who would deny he even knew you?

Mark 3:17
And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder.

Jesus called James and John sons of thunder no doubt because of their violent tempers. "Let's call down fire and destroy this city," they said (see Luke 9:54). "Those guys aren't part of our group, Lord, but they're preaching in Your name. Let's forbid them" (see Mark 9:38). Would you have chosen a couple of guys who wanted to blow people away and burn people up if your message was peace, grace, and love?

Mark 3:18 (a)
And Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew . . .

How about Matthew? Would you have wanted to spend three years with an IRS agent?

Mark 3:18 (b)
. . . and Thomas . . .

Would you have included a man who would doubt you were even alive?

Mark 3:18 (c)
. . . and James the son of Alphaeus . . .

James the son of Alphaeus is also called James the Less—not a very impressive description.

Mark 3:18 (d)

. . . and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Canaanite.

Simon is also called the Zealot (Acts 1:13). The zealots were those who wanted to violently overthrow the Roman government. If your message was that your kingdom was not of this world, would you choose a political radical like Simon?

Mark 3:19

And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him: and they went into an house.

Would you have chosen Judas? More importantly, would you have called him "Friend" even as he betrayed you? (see Matthew 26:50).

Yet with the exception of Judas, Jesus' disciples became men who did indeed turn the world upside down because of His Spirit within them. This means that when Jesus chose you and me, He knew we would also be changed and eventually would be those who impact the world now and eternally. He chose us not because of who we are, but because of who He sees we can be.

When I make choices, sometimes they're good; sometimes they're bad. Why? Because my knowledge is limited. God, however, has no limitations on what He knows. If my knowledge was limitless like God's, I would buy a lottery ticket. Because I would know exactly which numbers to choose, it wouldn't be gambling, but a wise investment. So, too, God picks winners.

You might feel like a loser. Those around you might even call you a loser. But the fact that you were chosen by God, who sees the big picture, means you are a winner. We need to realize that everyone who names the Name of Jesus—regardless of her personality, or of the doctrines he may embrace—is a winner because they have been chosen by Him. And we need to treat each other accordingly.

Mark 3:20, 21

And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard of it, they went

out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.

After seeing Jesus' work blessed, now we see it blasphemed. "He's out of His mind," said His friends. "He's so busy preaching and teaching and healing that He's not even eating."

But Jesus would say, "Doing My Father's will is that which sustains and refreshes Me" (see John 4:32–34). So, too, haven't you found that praying for someone, sharing with someone, doing something practical for the kingdom is that which energizes you?

Mark 3:22–26

And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils. And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end.

"To say I'm casting out demons by the power of demons is illogical," said Jesus. "Why would Satan want to defeat himself?"

Mark 3:27

No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house.

In this one-verse parable, Jesus likens Satan to a strong man who, if allowed, seeks to control our families, friends, neighbors, joy, health, and blessings. What must we do? Before we can wrest goods from Satan's control, free people from his grasp, release resources from his restriction, we must first bind the strong man.

The binding of the strong man is done in prayer. Too often we rush in to rescue or reclaim without first binding Satan through prayer. We can do more than pray, but we can't do anything until we pray. To think you don't have

time to pray is as foolish as thinking that, because you have places to go, things to do, people to see, you don't have time to stop for gas for your car—even though the needle on the gauge is to the left of "Empty." If you're witnessing or serving without praying, you're fighting a battle you're sure to lose. The strong man must be bound. Prayer must be given priority.

Mark 3:28–30

Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.

According to 1 John 2:2, Jesus died not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world. "All manner of sin shall be forgiven all men," He said (see Matthew 12:31). Every sin committed by any man or woman has already been paid for and forgiven because of Calvary. When Jesus said, "It is finished," the price was paid for *all* humanity.

But there is one sin that will lead to eternal damnation: failure to believe in Jesus Christ, the Provision for sin. The blasphemy of the Spirit is saying, "I don't need Jesus." That's the one and only sin that will damn a person. You'll never be held accountable for the candy bar you pocketed twenty years ago. You'll never be held accountable for the lustful thought you had five weeks ago. You'll never be held accountable for the lie you told ten minutes ago. But you *will* be held accountable if you blaspheme the Spirit.

I find it interesting that Jesus addresses the subject of the blasphemy of the Spirit in conjunction with the accusations that He had an unclean spirit. Like the scribes in Jesus' day, unable to deny the things he sees the Lord doing in the lives of others, he who refuses to receive Christ will eventually have no other choice but to attribute them to insanity or fanaticism. And it is then that he moves perilously close to eternal damnation.

Mark 3:31–35

There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him. And the multitude sat about

him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.

Chapter 3 has presented a new nation, no longer based upon the twelve tribes of Israel, but upon the twelve apostles; a new family; no longer comprised of Jesus' biological mother and brothers, but of anyone who does the will of God. And in establishing a new nation, and a new family, Jesus opens the door to a whole new understanding of true religion.

THE WITHERED HAND

A Topical Study of
MARK 3:5

Focus with me on four elements of this timeless account . . .

The Withered Hand

The historian Jerome tells us there is strong traditional evidence that the man with the paralyzed hand was a stonemason. If so, his paralysis would have very definitely affected his income, and, consequently, the well-being of his entire family. In addition, medicine being in the state that it was, there would have been no painkillers to help alleviate the pain he undoubtedly felt in his arm and through his chest.

Although our medicine and workmen's compensation are more sophisticated than in Jesus' day, our society is filled with people who feel as though they're paralyzed relationally, wounded financially, or withered emotionally. Thus, this account is as impacting today as it was then.

The Wicked Plan

Hearing stories about the Man from Galilee who worked wonders and miracles, the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem grew concerned, for it seemed as though He was getting far too much attention. So they sent a delegation composed of scribes and Pharisees—those devoted to interpreting the law and to keeping its most minute detail—to Capernaum in order to check out the situation. How did they know where to find Jesus? Could it be that, knowing this man with the paralyzed arm would be in that particular synagogue on the Sabbath, they figured Jesus would be there as well? The scribes and Pharisees did not come to worship. They came to watch. They did not come to commune with the Lord, but to confront the Lord. They did not come to find fruit, but to find fault. And they sat there waiting, knowing Jesus, moved with compassion, would surely do something that would violate their Sabbath rules.

The Wonderful Man

Jesus always shows up where people are hurting and needy. Such is the heart of our Lord. He desires to heal the hurts, to bind the wounds, to restore strength, to straighten out situations. The Lord is always present in the place of hurting, and He'll always move toward the one who is hurting the most. If you're hurting today, the Lord will find His way to where you're sitting and come alongside of you especially, singularly, particularly. Jesus likened Himself to the shepherd who leaves ninety-nine of his flock in order to find the one that's lost (Luke 15:3–7). That's our Lord.

Jesus told us that wherever two or three are gathered in His Name, He's in their midst (Matthew 18:20). And yet why is it in the Christian community that, although we believe this theoretically, we refer people away from the church consistently? If a person battles alcohol, we refer him to AA. If a marriage is in danger, we refer the couple to a seminar. If parents are having troubles with their teenagers, we refer them to counseling. I am not against AA or marriage seminars or counseling. However, I suggest that they have become substitutes because people no longer believe they can come into church with their withered hand and that Jesus will meet them there and touch them miraculously. Instead, they believe they must go through hours and hours of dialogue and deep inner searching before they can find an answer. I suggest to you that just as Jesus was in the synagogue dealing with the man with the withered hand, He is in this place, dealing with any of us who acknowledge our weakness, our paralysis.

The Powerful Command

"Stand forth," Jesus said to the man with the paralyzed hand, perhaps hoping to stir up some sense of compassion with the hard hearts of the Pharisees as they viewed a man whose right arm dangled helplessly at his side. And then He said something so essential when He said, "Stretch forth thine hand."

"Wait a minute," the man could have said. "That's easy for *You* to say. My hand is paralyzed. How can I stretch it forth?" The man could have argued with Jesus. After all, he didn't know who Jesus was. Instead, however, he simply obeyed. He didn't argue. He didn't debate. He simply said, "Okay," and as he stretched out his hand, the Lord met him in that place because in the Lord's declaration there is dynamic. When God speaks, power is released. In God's commandments are God's "enablements." If you can grab that simple concept, the Word will become extremely exciting to you.

To you who are saying, "I'm so depressed. I've had demons cast out. I've gone for inner healing. I've had counseling. I've read every self-help book, and followed every technique—all to no avail," this wonderful Man comes and says, "Rejoice evermore. This is the will of God" (see 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).

You can either argue with Him, or you can say, "If the Word tells me to rejoice evermore, I will now start rejoicing." And in the very act of beginning to rejoice, you'll find reason to continue to rejoice.

The Word says, "Husbands, love your wives . . . ." (see Ephesians 5:25).

"Oh, but you don't know my wife. You don't know what we've been through," you might say. You can argue and debate and go to seminars and read books until you're blue in the face—or you can say, "The apostle Paul, inspired by the Spirit of God, simply tells me to love my wife. So I will love my wife." And because you're doing it, God will give you the power to carry it out.

"Wives, submit to your husbands . . . ." (see Ephesians 5:22).

You can argue and say why this is impossible. Or you can say, "Lord, in Your commandment is Your enablement. I will do it today." And you will receive power.

If you're struggling with drugs, alcohol, pornography, the Lord would say to you today, "Reckon yourself dead unto sin, but alive to Jesus Christ" (see Romans 6:11).

Therefore, if you go home, throw it away, and say, "I'm going to obey the command of Christ," you'll find power and victory.

Maybe you have a problem exaggerating or lying. The Word says, "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor . . . ." (Ephesians 4:25). Simply do it today.

Dear precious people: Every one of us is withered in some area of our lives. We know that. But the solution does not lie in seminars or books. The solution is simply to obey the command of Christ. And as you do, He'll meet you at that point and give you the power to carry it out. Once I quit saying why I can't; once I quit arguing with the Word and saying, "It's not that easy"; once I quit saying, "I'm an exception to the rule," and instead say, "Lord, if You say it, I'll do it. Period,"—He meets me there and a miracle takes place.

The choice is yours. Stand forth. Stretch out your hand. And be made whole.



4 In Mark's portrayal of Jesus as Servant, in chapters 1—3, we saw the Servant's works. Here in chapters 4 and 5, we'll see the Servant's words. Although our Western belief is that "talk is cheap," Hebrew writers and thinkers viewed words as being arrows that, when shot, would carry packets of energy that would leave a lasting impression upon the hearers. This being the case, in the first part of chapter 4, we see insight from Jesus' words; and at the end of chapter 4 and into chapter 5, we see the impact of His words.

Mark 4:1

And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land.

Taking advantage of the natural acoustical properties of water, Jesus spoke from a boat offshore to the group of perhaps thousands who listened to Him on the beach.

Mark 4:2–11 (a)

And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine, Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred. And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God . . .

Before explaining the meaning of the parable to His disciples, Jesus told them they were those to whom the mystery of the kingdom of God would be revealed. In the Bible, the Greek word *musterion,* or "mystery," refers to a truth previously hidden but now revealed. There are a number of mysteries of which the New Testament speaks, among them the mystery of iniquity, revealed through an understanding of spiritual warfare (2 Thessalonians 2:7), and the mystery of godliness, revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 3:16).

Here, Jesus is about to reveal to the disciples the mystery of the kingdom of God. . . .

Mark 4:11 (b), 12

. . . but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and

hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

Why would Jesus want to keep anyone from being converted? The answer lies in the fact that because He could have spoken so powerfully that people would have been forced to concede to the logic of His argument and converted against their will, Jesus chose to speak in a way that would not manipulate people or force them into a decision. Because He will not force His will upon anyone intellectually, emotionally, or spiritually, Jesus spoke in parables in order that only those who wanted to hear would hear, in order that only those who wanted to see would see.

Mark 4:13

And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?

This parable is a key to understanding them all.

Mark 4:14

The sower soweth the word.

The sower here is one who is scattering seed—which speaks of the Scriptures. "You're born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, that is, the Word of God," said Peter (see 1 Peter 1:23). The soil upon which the seed is sown speaks of the condition of men's hearts—not only of the hearts of four different individuals, but of the condition of our own hearts at any given time. When you read this parable, don't think you're automatically always the one who has the good soil and the abundant fruit. On any given day, in any given week, this can change. We don't remain in the same spot. This parable speaks to all of us, depending upon the current condition of our hearts.

Mark 4:15

And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh

away the word that was sown in their hearts.

The first soil described here speaks of people who are hard-hearted. They hear the Word, and it doesn't penetrate at all. "That's for the birds," they say. And the birds come and pluck it away.

Mark 4:16, 17

And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.

This speaks not of hard hearts, but of shallow hearts. "Jesus is great!" say those with shallow commitments as they put bumper stickers on their cars. They spring up quickly—but their roots aren't very deep. And when the sun comes out, when persecution starts coming their way, when people start making fun of them, they begin to wither because their roots are shallow.

Mark 4:18, 19

And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

This speaks not of a hard heart, nor a shallow heart, but of a crowded heart. The cares of the world speak primarily to the person who is poor financially, and thus, always worried about how he'll make ends meet. The deceitfulness of riches, on the other hand, speaks of the wealthy man who mistakenly thinks his new ski boat will make him genuinely happy.

If God blesses you financially, you have every right to freely receive and enjoy the blessings He's brought to you. But don't get caught up in thinking that if you just had one more thing, you'd really be happy. It's simply not true.

Mark 4:20

And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

Normally, a crop brings forth eight times the seed sown. So even thirty –to one is an incredible ration. Sixty –to one is astronomical. One hundred –to one is miraculous. Where are you? The fact that you have made a decision to receive the Word and allow it to penetrate the soil of your spirit even as you study right now is indicative of the potential for miraculous fruit in your life.

Mark 4:21–23

And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick? For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

People often use this verse to say everything you've done wrong, said wrong, thought wrong is going to be exposed. That's not what's being said here. Rather, the Lord is saying, "I don't want people to be in the dark concerning My ways or My heart."

Mark 4:24, 25

And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.

Jesus isn't saying, "Take heed what you hear." He says, rather, "Take heed *how* you hear, the way you hear." In other words, when you receive truth, if you release it to others, more will be given. If, on the other hand, you simply take in truth without allowing it to flow through you to others, you'll begin to lose what was given to you previously, and find fresh revelation or insight no longer being given to you.

Mark 4:26–29

And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

As he sows seed, a farmer doesn't understand exactly how the seed grows. Yet one day he looks out the window and sees a crop. Keep in mind, Jesus is talking about the mystery of the effect of the Word. And, like the seed sown by the farmer, it's inexplicable how studying the Scriptures causes the kingdom to be established within us and among us. People who are not believers think we're crazy to come week by week to study a page or two from a book thousands of years old. Yet when we study the Word corporately and have devotions personally, something happens miraculously. We begin to look at life differently, and good fruit begins to grow. Oh, we're not perfect. We have a long way to go. But the process has begun.

Mark 4:30–32

And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.

After teaching encouragingly about the kingdom, Jesus ends with a warning that the kingdom is like a mustard seed that grows to the point that birds lodge within its branches. Due to the fact that nowhere in the world now or historically has a mustard seed ever grown into a tree big enough to support birds and their nests, I believe Jesus is saying that as the kingdom grows, it will expand unnaturally in its organization and structure; that it will

become bigger than it was ever intended to be, that birds—the Biblical symbol of evil—will lodge therein. We see this in so many systems throughout church history, as complexity replaced simplicity and hierarchy swallowed liberty.

Mark 4:33–35

And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples. And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side.

After teaching about the Word, Jesus now gives His word to the disciples that they would indeed pass over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee—a word Satan would soon test.

Mark 4:36

And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships.

We have the tendency to think that no one faces the same temptations, challenges, or storms we do. Paul, however, tells us no temptation comes to us except that which is common to man (1 Corinthians 10:13). That is why there were with the disciples "other little ships" out on the Sea of Galilee.

Mark 4:37

And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.

Jesus had taught about His Word, and had given His word that the disciples would make it to the other side. But whether regarding a promise Jesus gave to His disciples, or one He gives to you, after teaching comes testing. Always.

Mark 4:38

And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?

If Jesus is in your boat, it can't sink. If He's in your life, you won't go down. He has promised to perfect that which concerns you (Psalm 138:8). And though the storm might rage, causing you to say, "Master, don't You care that I'm perishing?" He's not worried. He's sleeping—not in apathy, but with great security.

"The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty . . . ." Zephaniah tells us, ". . . He will rest in His love . . ." (Zephaniah 3:17). Thus, concerning the storm you may be going through even now or perhaps will face tomorrow, the Lord is not wondering if you're going to make it. He's resting in His love. He knows He's going to see you through.

Mark 4:39 (a)

And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still.

The Greek word translated "be still" literally means "be muzzled." This is the same command Jesus issued when He addressed demons, which implies that this storm was actually stirred by Satan.

Mark 4:39 (b)

And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

When Jesus thwarted Satan's plan and calmed the storm, not only were the disciples at peace, but all of the "other little ships" were spared as well. So, too, when Jesus makes His power known by the storms He calms for us, those around us benefit as they see His faithfulness to us.

Mark 4:40

And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?

The One who calmed the storm was the One who had allowed the storm in order to teach the disciples to believe His Word.

Mark 4:41

And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

It is not the outward circumstances we have to fear, but the inward waves of fear and faithlessness that well up within us. The Lord has given us His Word that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Therefore, no matter how strong the storm might seem, no matter the force of the waves that beat upon our boat, if we love God and are called according to His purpose, all things will work together for good (Romans 8:28); He will complete that which He began in us (Philippians 1:6)—and we can be at peace.



5

Mark 5:1 (a)

And they came over unto the other side of the sea . . .

"Let us pass over unto the other side," Jesus had said in chapter 4. And here in chapter 5, we see the disciples doing just that, for His Word always comes to pass.

Mark 5:1 (b)

. . . into the country of the Gadarenes.

Leaving Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, it was a five-mile journey by water to Gadara, located on the eastern shore.

Mark 5:2

And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit.

Unlike God, Satan is not omnipresent; he can't be everywhere at once. So he carries out his work through demonic, or unclean, spirits—the angels who fell with him when he rebelled against God (2 Peter 2:4). And in this man of Gadara, we see the results of the demonization of an individual . . .

Mark 5:3 (a)
Who had his dwelling among the tombs . . .

He was robbed of his family and friends. Dwelling among the tombs, infatuated with death and darkness, he was as good as dead.

Mark 5:3 (b)
. . . and no man could bind him, no, not with chains.

Secondly, he was robbed of sanity and self-control, hell-bent on his own destruction.

Mark 5:4
Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.

Notice what society did with this man. First, they sought to bind him with chains. We do the same. Statistics show, however, that 72 percent of those released from prison return for similar or worse crimes.

Mark 5:5
And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

Second, society sought to isolate him. Luke tells us a guard actually stayed with him. But even he couldn't stop the man's propensity for annihilation.

Mark 5:6

But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him.

It is neither society's isolation nor its attempts at rehabilitation that will make a genuine, lasting difference in the lives of men—but only the hope of regeneration through this One who crossed through a storm to reach this man.

Mark 5:7, 8

And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not. For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.

James says the devils believe—and tremble (2:19). Demons know who Jesus is. And they quake in their boots when they are aware of His presence.

Mark 5:9, 10

And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many. And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.

A legion is a Roman military term used to denote a unit of six thousand soldiers, so it is possible that there were thousands of demons within this man.

Mark 5:11–13 (a)

Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave.

Jesus did not command the demons to go into the pigs. Rather, the demons requested it, and Jesus simply allowed it. It makes no difference to demons whether they inhabit people or pigs because they can make people into pigs by getting them to trade their God-given natures for animal behavior.

Mark 5:13 (b)

And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.

In light of the current epidemic of teen suicide, I find it more than coincidental that the demons caused the pigs to prefer suicide to life.

Mark 5:14, 15

And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.

Evidently, the fact that this man was torturing himself to death was less frightening to these people than the fact that he was now clothed and in his right mind.

Mark 5:16, 17

And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine. And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.

Pigs were more important to these people than a man's soul. The fact that they prioritized pigs above people should not shock us, however, when we see people petition and protest today on behalf of the spotted owl or snowy plover while they allow babies to be aborted by the hundreds of thousands.

Mark 5:18

And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him.

How was this man delivered so completely that he wanted to stay with Jesus continually? By His Word. So, too, the weapons of our war are not

carnal, but the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (2 Corinthians 10:4; Hebrews 4:12).

Mark 5:19

Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.

"You are the one who can witness most effectively to the people who knew you previously," Jesus said to the man delivered from demons. "I want you to go home to those who knew you before and let them see the reality of My touch upon your life."

Remember once again that we are called not to be defense lawyers, prosecuting attorneys, judges, or juries. We're called to be witnesses (Acts 1:8). What does a witness do? He doesn't argue the case. He doesn't try to persuade or judge. He simply reports what he has seen. All too often, I believe, we've been intimidated by thinking we have to defend the veracity of the Bible, prove the fallacy of evolution, or justify church history. No, we're simply called to be witnesses—to share what the Lord has done in and for us.

Mark 5:20

And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.

There are three prayers offered in this story . . .

- "Let us go into the pigs,' the demons cried.
  And Jesus said, "Go."
- "Leave our region," said the Gadarenes.
  And Jesus left.
- "I want to follow You," said the previously demonized man.
  And Jesus said, "No."

When you and I wage war spiritually, when you and I petition and pray perhaps reverently, we must remember, even as this story illustrates so dramatically, that Jesus can say, "No," and "No" is just as much an answer as "Yes." In fact, "No" is sometimes what God reserves especially for those He loves.

Why?

In the case before us, Jesus answered the prayers of the demons and of an unbelieving, cynical, hostile society according to their request. But He answered the prayer of a believer in a way that changed his course rather than affirmed his request. No doubt, this once-demonized man was disappointed initially, but he realized he must keep the directive of his Deliverer and thus returned to speak to his community—his obedience brought to fruition in church history, which records the group of believers that began to surface in the region. The church had a powerful expression in the area—most likely birthed by the man Jesus sent home.

Take hope, dear friend. Your prayers not being answered in the way you desire are not indicative of God not hearing or not caring—for He only said, "No," to the one who loved Him.

Mark 5:21

And when Jesus was passed over again by ship unto the other side, much people gathered unto him: and he was nigh unto the sea.

One crowd sighed with relief when Jesus left. On the other side of the lake, however, another crowd was set to receive.

Mark 5:22–26

And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet, And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live. And Jesus went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him. And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many

things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.

Of the crowd set to receive Jesus, Mark draws attention to two individuals . . .

- The most visible member of the community, Jairus was famous.

  The woman was anonymous.

- Jairus was wealthy.

  The woman lived in poverty.

- Jairus was the leader of the synagogue.

  Because of her physical condition, the woman was forbidden from entering the synagogue.

- For twelve years, as his daughter grew, the house of Jairus was filled with laughter and joy.

  For twelve years, the house of the woman was filled with misery and despair.

And so these two people—at opposite ends of the spectrum—waited for Jesus.

Like Jairus, you might be riding high. Your business might be booming. Your marriage might be blessed. Your family might be growing. Your body might be healthy. But you don't know what the next moment holds. Before the clock strikes midnight tonight, you might find yourself totally, unexpectedly in the middle of a major tragedy. You and I do not know what the next moment holds. You who are Jairuses right now, realize this: Like this man, the next moment might bring tragedy into your world.

Conversely, if, like the woman, you have either been going through an endless stream of setbacks or one persistent problem, you don't know what the next hour holds. The next moment might bring you a miracle of astounding proportion. Pondering this keeps me from complacency when I feel like I'm in Jairus' sandals, and from despairing when it seems like I'm standing in the woman's shoes. Both of their stories remind me that the Lord is my Shield

and my Protector. And if He allows difficulty, setback, or tragedy to come into my life, He will also be my Glory and the Lifter of my head (Psalm 3:3).

Mark 5:27–29

When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.

As the woman broke through the crowd of people, she didn't come to Jesus with great oration to impress Him. She simply reached out behind Him and touched the hem of His garment. But that was all it took. Why is it we think to receive from the Lord we have to impress Him with long prayers, lengthy fasts, or great discipline? If I can break through the crowd of my unbelief, apathy, and despair, and touch even the hem of His garment, I know I'll be helped in my difficulty.

Mark 5:30–33

And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth.

Did Jesus ask who touched Him because He wanted to embarrass the woman? No. I believe it was because He wanted to encourage Jairus. . . .

Mark 5:34, 35

And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague. While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further?

Come on, Jesus. Let's get going. My daughter's dying, Jairus could have thought, not realizing that it was, in fact, the woman's testimony that would be used to buoy his own faith. You see, the fact that he had seen a miracle in her would allow him to believe Jesus could also help him, even though his situation looked hopeless. So, too, when I wonder if the Lord can help me with any given problem, when I hear what the Lord is doing in your life, my own faith begins to grow.

Mark 5:36

As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe.

"Only believe," or, literally, "Keep on believing"—even though everything looks impossible.

Mark 5:37, 38

And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James. And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly.

The presence of professional mourners would indicate that Jairus was a man of means.

Mark 5:39

And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.

The word "sleep" is the exact word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15 referring to the death of believers. Perhaps Jesus would whisper in our hearts concerning those who have gone on to be with the Lord or concerning those who are in the process of doing so, "Why make ye this ado and weep?" It's not death the way the world thinks. "Today you shall be with Me in paradise," Jesus said to the thief on the Cross. At the moment of death for a

believer, the body sleeps, but the spirit celebrates in the presence of the Lord.

Mark 5:40

And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying.

Like Jairus, when I'm seeking the Lord for help, when I'm in need of a miracle, I come to Him. I pour out my heart before Him. My faith might falter—until I hear a testimony. Then it soars—until reports come in even more brutal than previous reports, my faith turns to fear. Then I hear Jesus saying, "*Keep* believing." And I do. But then in my own heart, a laughing, a scorning, a mocking begins.

Before Jesus could enter Jairus' house and do a miracle, the mockers had to be put out. Why? Not only because without faith, it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6), but because the Holy One of Israel is limited by unbelief (Psalm 78:41). Therefore, when the mockers start knocking, let faith answer the door. Don't allow them to set up shop in your heart, to chuckle knowingly, to question cynically. Instead, listen to the Lord saying, "I desire to do exceedingly abundantly above all that you can ask or think"—and put the mockers out.

Mark 5:41

And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.

Although I've seen self-proclaimed faith healers use this phrase, there's nothing magical about it. It's not what was said which brought Jairus' daughter back to life. It was *who* said it.

Mark 5:42–43

And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment. And he charged them straitly that no man should

know it; and commanded that something should be given her to eat.

Divine miracles never replace common-sense care. A miracle was done, but then Jesus said, "Make sure she gets some chicken soup." I like that!

The Word of the Servant brought victory over danger in the storm, over demons at Gadara, over disease in a woman, and even over death in a little girl.

May we continue to believe in, embrace, speak out, and stand upon this glorious Word. For through it, like the disciples, we will indeed "pass over" no matter the storm.



6 As we come to Mark 6, we see the unfolding of unbelief: in Jesus' acquaintances (verses 1–6); in His adversaries (verses 14–28); and even in His own disciples (verses 35–37).

Mark 6:1–3 (a)

And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him. And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary . . .

This is not an insight acknowledging Jesus' unique birth. Rather, it is an insult, for in that culture one was always identified as the son of his father, whether his father was living or dead. In this case, even if Joseph were indeed dead, as most Biblical scholars believe, Jesus would nonetheless be identified as being his son. But by calling Him the son of Mary, Jesus' countrymen were saying, "We do not even know who his father is," thereby accusing Him of being illegitimate.

It was imperative that Jesus be born of a virgin. At the moment of conception, although a baby draws nutrients and liquids from the mother, it

draws blood from its own blood supply, which is determined by the father. Therefore, the fact that Jesus, being conceived supernaturally without a human father, and developing in the womb without drawing blood from His mother meant that His blood, unlike any other blood in human history, was free from human pollution of any kind—and was, therefore able to cleanse our sin.

Mark 6:3 (b)–4

. . . the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.

After viewing the art in a renowned art museum, a man said to the guard, "I don't see any great value in this artwork."

"Sir," the guard answered, "the paintings are not what's on trial here. The visitors are."

That's true. If you look at a Rembrandt or a Monet, you're saying, "I don't see anything good about that," simply shows your ignorance concerning art.

So, too, these people saying, "We don't see anything so special about Jesus. He's just the carpenter, and we know his mother, brothers, and sisters," showed their ignorance concerning Him.

We are in danger of making the same mistake if we take for granted His proximity to us. Yes, He lives inside us. Yes, He will never leave nor forsake us. Yes, He is always available to us—but He is God nonetheless. And, as God, He has the right to our time, money, abilities, energy, life, and heart. As God, Jesus has the right to all we are.

When Peter at last realized that Jesus was Master of creation, he fell on his face before Him, saying, "Depart from me. I am a sinful man" (see Luke 5:8). So, too, as we cultivate a friendship with Jesus, let us never forget that because He is God, He deserves our utmost respect and devotion, submission and reverence.

Mark 6:5

And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.

Mark doesn't say Jesus *should* do no mighty work, but that He *could* do no mighty work because of their unbelief. Why? Because the Lord has placed Himself in a partnering position with us in order to prepare us for the next billion years when we will rule and reign with Him.

Mark 6:6

And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.

Scriptures record Jesus marveling on only two occasions. One is here—when He marveled at the unbelief of the Jews. The other is in Luke 7 and Matthew 9, when He marveled at the belief of a Gentile. I wonder what Jesus thinks about us. Does He marvel at our unbelief, saying, "Oh, there is so much more I could do if you would just believe and partner with Me in faith"?

Mark 6:7 (a)

And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two . . .

Why did Jesus send His disciples out two by two? Perhaps it's because, as we've experienced, faith becomes bolder when ministering with someone else. But more likely, it's because one of the principles of the law was that in the mouth of *two* witnesses, every word would be established (Deuteronomy 19:15).

Mark 6:7 (b), 8 (a)

. . . and gave them power over unclean spirits; And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only . . .

The connection between power and simplicity is undeniable. Jesus gave His disciples power as He sent them out in simplicity.

Mark 6:8 (b)
. . . no scrip . . .

"Scrip" refers to a beggar's bag. In other words, Jesus said, "Don't beg in ministry." This should be "scrip"-ted into all televangelism programming.

Mark 6:8 (c), 9
. . . no bread, no money in their purse: But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats.

"Travel light," Jesus said because the urgency and nature of what His disciples were to do required that they move about freely and simply.

Mark 6:10
And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place.

In other words, "When you go into a house, stay there until you leave the town. Don't look around for better accommodations."

Mark 6:11
And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.

"Their sin shall remain upon those who don't receive you," Jesus said, "upon those who fail to respond to your message of repentance."

Mark 6:12, 13
And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were

sick, and healed them.

This is the only reference in the Gospels to the practice of anointing with oil, which James will later talk about in his epistle. Throughout the Bible, oil is an emblem of the Holy Spirit, so when one is anointed with oil, it symbolizes his placing himself in submission to the work of the Spirit in his life.

Mark 6:14 (a)
And king Herod heard of him; (for his name was spread abroad:) . . .

Notice it was Jesus' name that was spread abroad—not the names of the disciples. This means that just as when Jesus ministered, all glory went to the Father, when the disciples ministered all of the attention went to Jesus.

Mark 6:14 (b), 15
. . . and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him. Others said, That it is Elias. And others said, That it is a prophet, or as one of the prophets.

Why would Herod think that Jesus was John the Baptist? Josephus tells us that, being second cousins, Jesus and John the Baptist had a remarkable physical resemblance. But more likely, it was because Herod's conscience was haunting him.

Mark 6:16, 17
But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead. For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her.

Herod Antipas was one of the three sons of Herod the Great—the Herod who, following Jesus' birth, had ordered the deaths of all males less than

two years of age. Herod Antipas took his brother Philip's wife—a union that John the Baptist had denounced as immoral.

Why didn't Herod call for this One he thought was John in order the he could investigate for himself? Perhaps it was because he thought John, Jesus, or whoever this was would be out to get him. People make this same mistake today. They look at Jesus as One who is sure to point His finger at them. But such is not the case, for Jesus is the One who dialogued freely with sinners (Matthew 11:19), who ate alongside sinners (Matthew 9:10), who stood up for sinners (John 8:7), who gave great hope to sinners. Jesus' rebukes, in fact, were reserved for the religious people—those who were pious and proud that they "weren't like other men" (see Luke 18:11). I believe had Herod called for Jesus at this time, he would have found Jesus to be exactly who He is to this day: meek and lowly in heart (Matthew 11:29), the Friend of Sinners.

Mark 6:18–20

For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife. Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not: For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.

Realizing John was a man unlike himself—a man of integrity—Herod respected John the Baptist. Yet his wife, Herodias, was incensed by his insistence that Herod's marriage to her was unlawful.

Mark 6:21–29

And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; and when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom. And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said,

The head of John the Baptist. And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother. And when his disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb.

Herod was "exceeding sorry" to have to kill John the Baptist. Yet kill him he did because he was put on the spot at a party where wine and oaths flowed freely. Stay away from such places, dear people. You'll regret it if you don't because there's always a price to pay. Demands will be made. Peer pressure will mount. Things will happen you'll wish hadn't. Ask Herod. Historians tell us he was haunted all the days of his life by what he had done to John the Baptist.

Mark 6:30, 31

And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.

Jesus models something that a lot us are discovering. That is, if we don't come apart, we'll fall apart. There's an ebb and flow in ministry in which times of service alternate with times of quietness and solitude, prayer, and contemplation. We need to come apart daily and have a quiet, quality time with the Lord. We need to come apart weekly for a Sabbath rest in Him.

Mark 6:32–34

And they departed into a desert place by ship privately. And the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot

thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto him. And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.

As the true Shepherd, Jesus felt compassion for the sheep who were wandering and hurting; those in need of a Word from Him to set their lives and hearts in order.

Mark 6:35, 36 (a)

And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed: Send them away. . . .

• The disciples' heart was, "Send them away. We're weary."

• Jesus' heart is, "Come unto Me, all ye who are weary."

I relate to the disciples—but I long to be more like Jesus.

Mark 6:36 (b), 37 (a)

. . . that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat. He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat.

"You saw the need. You meet the need," Jesus said, wanting to partner with them in faith.

Mark 6:37 (b), 38 (a)

And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat? He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see.

"I can't do that," we say. "I don't have those kinds of gifts or money." We have all the reasons why nothing can be done. Jesus, however, takes no

regard for what we lack. Rather He asks what we *have.*

Mark 6:38 (b)–41 (a)

And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes. And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties. And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them . . .

Blessing and breaking always precede true feeding. The Father must allow our lives to be blessed and broken, blessed and broken, blessed and broken before he can use us to nourish anyone else.

Mark 6:41 (b)–44

. . . and the two fishes divided he among them all. And they did all eat, and were filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes. And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men.

So much food did Jesus provide that the Greek word translated "filled" literally means "glutted." John gives us further insight when he says that, following the feeding of the five thousand, some of the men tried to take Jesus by force to make Him king (John 6:15). But their priority was wrong. They saw Jesus as being the king of the material in a physical kingdom. Jesus, however, departed from them because His kingdom is spiritual and eternal.

How easily we make this same mistake. Being so caught up in what is happening presently rather than seeing the big picture eternally, we want the Lord to comfort us now, to provide for us now, to heal us now. While the Lord is indeed a Comforter, a Provider, a Healer, those are not His highest priorities. The priority of God is not our present comfort, but our eternal state. Therefore, He will allow us to suffer presently—be it physically, emotionally, or financially—if that is what it takes to enrich us eternally.

Mark 6:45–48

And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people. And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray. And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land. And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.

Jesus sent His disciples into the sea, where He knew a storm would be brewing. And such is the way He works with us today. He blesses us and then allows us to go into the midst of a storm. Why? Because He knows that storms will inevitably come into each of our lives without exception. And were we not seasoned veterans of the storm, we would be blown away.

Even as five thousand men were fed on the hillside of Galilee, five thousand would be saved in the city of Jerusalem (Acts 3—4). But what happened immediately after the five thousand were saved? A storm of fierce persecution arose. Knowing this, Jesus sent them into the storm in Mark 6 in order to develop the faith necessary to keep them from being blown away in Acts 5.

Mark 6:49, 50

But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out: For they all saw him, and were troubled.

We know from the other Gospel accounts that Peter said, "Lord, if it's You, bid me come"—to which Jesus did indeed bid Peter to come to Him, and Peter walked on water. Why isn't that incident mentioned in this account? Because if Mark's Gospel is indeed comprised of Peter's account given to John Mark, perhaps Peter didn't want to draw unnecessary attention to himself.

Mark 6:50

And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.

Notice the order. Before Jesus identified Himself, He said, "Be of good cheer." That's always the way it is.

- We say, "Lord, if I can see You, I'll be of good cheer."
- Jesus, however, says, "In faith, be of good cheer first—and then you'll see Me."

Mark 6:51–56

And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered. For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened. And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore. And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him, and ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was. And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole.

In simple faith and in need of a miracle, the needy ones simply touched Jesus. And as a result, they were made whole physically, spiritually eternally.



7

Mark 7:1, 2

Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw

some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault.

Although people were being healed and helped, delivered and fed, the scribes and Pharisees found fault with Jesus' disciples because they didn't wash their hands ceremonially as prescribed by sixty-five pages of the Mishnah, the written version of the traditional oral Jewish Law.

The sect of the Pharisees came into being during the period between the Old and New Testaments. Realizing there was a danger of Judaism becoming polluted and paganized, the Pharisees, whose name means "separated ones," were devoted to keeping the most minute detail of the law and the traditions of the elders. The problem is, the tradition of the elders became more important than the law itself. Ceremonial cleansing was a case in point. As seen in the Old Testament, God had given His people principles of hygiene that precluded the discovery of germs and infection. But as the years went by, a group of people called the scribes began to interpret the law and make application concerning, for example, the procedure for washing one's hands. Their findings were known as the tradition of the elders—a body of work so important to the scribes and Pharisees that one rabbi said, "He who expounds the Scripture in opposition to the tradition of the elders will have no part in the world to come."

Mark 7:3, 4

For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.

The scribes and Pharisees not only washed their hands ceremonially, but they also washed their cups and plates between the courses of a single meal.

Mark 7:5–8

Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread

with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.

"You're involved in religious traditions that have nothing to do with what God desires," Jesus said. "With your lips you worship God, but your heart is a million miles away." And lest we be too quick to point fingers at the Pharisees, we would do well to search our own hearts during such times as we sing praise songs to the Lord with our lips while our minds are focused on the list of things we have to accomplish that day.

Mark 7:9–13

And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.

The Pharisees had a tradition whereby whatever they declared to be "corban," or "dedicated," belonged to God. While this practice may have sounded pious, in actuality it provided a way for them to circumvent all charitable giving—even to their own parents, who they were commanded by God to honor (Exodus 20:12).

Again, while it is easy for us to point out the fallacies in the rituals of the Pharisees, I often wonder what Jesus would say concerning the traditions of our modern American Christianity. The test for any church practice—from baptism to Communion, from tithing to missions is threefold: Is it exhibited in

the life of Christ? Does it extend into the Book of Acts? Is it expounded in the epistles?

I encourage you to ask yourself, "Is what I'm doing seen in Jesus' life, in Acts, in the Epistles?" If it isn't, you shouldn't be dogmatic about it or insistent that others practice it.

Mark 7:14–23

And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand: There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable. And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats? And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

Although the scribes and Pharisees were oh-so-careful to follow all of their rituals and practices, Jesus made it clear that the real issue is not external, but internal. In other words, it's not the washing of hands, but the purity of the heart that matters.

Mark 7:24

And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid.

I like that phrase. You can't hide Jesus if He's in your house, if He's in your life.

Mark 7:25–29

For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet: The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs. And she an swered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs. And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter.

Was Jesus being difficult with this brokenhearted mother? No. He was drawing from her an expression of faith in order that not only would her daughter be healed, but that she herself would develop a relationship with Him. So, too, you might wonder if the Lord is being difficult with you. Why isn't He answering your prayers immediately? Why isn't He helping you presently? It could be that He's doing something much deeper. It could be that He is allowing you to discover true faith, perseverance, and prevailing prayer—invaluable understandings that will help you not only in your present situation, but also in the next billion years to come.

Mark 7:30–32 (a)

And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed. And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech. . . .

There is a linkage not only physically but spiritually between hearing and speaking. If I'm not hearing from the Lord on any given day, I'll not be able

to speak clearly to the people who come my way. How can you help those who are hurting? It all begins with listening.

Mark 7:32 (b)–35

. . . and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.

This seemingly small incident tells me a great deal about how I should minister to people if I want to minister the way Jesus did . . .

First, Jesus gave the deaf man *individual attention* as He took him aside from the multitude. Second, there was *close association* as Jesus put His fingers into the deaf man's ears.

Third, there was *open utilization* as Jesus used spit, which, in that day, was thought to contain medicinal value. In so doing, Jesus gave us justification to use the scientific knowledge He so graciously gave mankind to develop medicines and procedures. Fourth, we see *heavenly glorification* as Jesus looked up to heaven—thereby indicating to whom all glory is to go.

Fifth, Jesus demonstrated *heartfelt compassion* in His sigh. How will we feel this kind of compassion? I know of only one way: by going through difficulties ourselves. "Blessed be God who comforts us in our troubles that we may be able to comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received," Paul would declare (see 2 Corinthians 1:3–4). Why does the Lord allow us to have migraine headaches or to be smitten with cancer, to lose a loved one or see a business fail? Did you ever pray, "Lord, use me"? Did you ever ask the Lord to make your life count, to keep it from becoming mundane and irrelevant? If so, part of His answer means having to go through difficulties in order that you might sigh *for* people, hurt *with* them, feel your heart go out *to* them. There's just no other way.

Finally, there was *articulated expectation* as Jesus said, "Be opened." I might feel *for* people, desire to minister *to* them, relate *with* them—but am I willing to go on record and speak the word of faith on behalf *of* them, to say,

"In Jesus' Name, may the depression flee, may He be your health, may He see you through"?

If you follow this pattern when you pray for people—even if circumstances don't unfold the way they wished it would or you thought they should—a person will never resent the fact that you expended the energy in prayer to push through spiritual barricades, to ignore the lies of the Enemy, saying that prayer accomplishes nothing, to speak out a word of faith and expectancy, to wage a spiritual battle on their behalf.

Mark 7:36

And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it.

Not only did Jesus most likely want to avoid the circus atmosphere that can so easily accompany miracles of healing, but knowing it wouldn't be long before He would be on a Cross and that those who spread the word about Him would be candidates for the persecution to follow, perhaps Jesus was sparing them from coming oppression.

Mark 7:37

And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.

He does all things well indeed—and because He does, whatever we do should be done to the best of the ability He gives us if we are to reflect Him (1 Corinthians 10:31).



8

Mark 8:1–3

In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat: And if I send

them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far.

For three days, the multitude had hung on His every word. They had stayed at His side, taking in His teaching, receiving His ministry. And because they had done so, Jesus wanted to feed them lest, without nourishment, they be unable to return to their homes.

It is my opinion that this understanding has been somewhat lost. All too often, it seems, the church feels a responsibility to feed people physically before she can impact them spiritually. Scripture, however, gives us no such precedent. Jesus always fed those who were already being taught and instructed. And Paul says, "Do good to all men—but especially, particularly to those of the household of faith" (see Galatians 6:10).

"Silver and gold have I none," said Peter to the beggar asking for alms (see Acts 3:6). Yet because just a few verses earlier, we read that everyone in the early church sold all of their goods and laid the money at the apostles' feet, it is highly likely that Peter and John had access to a great deal of money. Why, then, would Peter say, "Silver and gold have I none"? It is my belief that he was saying to the beggar, "For you, we have neither silver nor gold. Your need is not silver and gold. Your need is to stand up and walk." And a great miracle followed.

So, too, sometimes we feel the need, or others ask us to pray on their behalf for a physical solution to a physical need. But what will it profit us if we gain the whole world but lose our soul (Matthew 16:26)? Because the fundamental issue is to be able to stand strong in the Lord and walk with Him, any other answer to prayer pales in comparison.

Mark 8:4–8

And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness? And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and

commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets.

There's a remarkable similarity between this story and the one that took place in chapter 6, where we read that Jesus had miraculously fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. Yet here we see the disciples say to Jesus, "How are You going to satisfy these men?" Were the disciples that forgetful? I believe the answer lies in the term "*these* men"—the men of Decapolis. Decapolis was comprised of ten cities on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. The people of Decapolis had their own government, had adopted Greek culture, and willingly lived under Roman authority. This would mean that this crowd of four thousand—unlike the previous crowd of five thousand—was primarily Gentiles. And perhaps this explains the disciples' question when they said to Jesus, "How will You feed these men? We can see You doing a miracle for our people, the Jews, but not *these* guys!"

The Lord has a wonderful way of working through, working with, working on all kinds of people. Jesus, the Bread of Life, was given to the five thousand, to the Jews first, just as the promises were given to them when the covenant was established in the days of Abraham. But then, beginning with the Incarnation and into the birth of the church, the Bread of Life was made available to the four thousand, to the Gentiles, to us.

Mark 8:9

And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away.

Four being the number of the earth, this speaks further of the Gentiles.

Mark 8:10–12 (a)

And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha. And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit . . .

Jesus had just fed four thousand men. Before that, he had opened blind eyes, healed lepers, worked powerfully. Yet the Pharisees had the audacity to say, "Show us a sign to establish Your validity." No wonder He sighed deeply.

Mark 8:12 (b)

. . . and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.

Signs do not produce faith. They only produce a craving for more signs. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). How does your faith grow? Not by seeing miracles, but by studying the Word.

Mark 8:13–15

And he left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side. Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf. And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.

The leaven of the Pharisees speaks of legalism. The leaven of Herod refers to the Herodians who were trying to bring about righteousness through political rule. Jesus would also speak of the leaven of the Sadducees, which is liberal theology. Legalism, politics, liberal theology—like leaven, each of these tendencies can start small and innocently, but grow to impact the entire Body.

Mark 8:16

And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread.

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God," James tells us (see 1:5). Instead, these disciples reasoned among themselves, and came up with the wrong answer.

Mark 8:17–21

And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?

Jesus makes it clear that there is a direct correlation between a hardening of heart and a failing of memory. When does my heart become hardened toward the Lord? When does my heart begin to lack the fire of faith? When I forget the bread the Lord provides for me every day.

My faith is strengthened and my heart softened not only through an awareness of the daily bread He provides for me but also through the broken bread of His Body. "Do this in remembrance of Me," Jesus said (see Luke 22:19). Consequently, whenever I partake of the broken body, the bread of the Eucharist, the table of Communion, I am reminded once again of the Lord's provision for the greatest need I will ever have—the need of salvation.

Mark 8:22

And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him.

Like this man, we were once blind spiritually. Blinded by Satan, the god of this age, we could not see. Church seemed weird to us, the Bible incomprehensible, Christians bizarre. But then someone extended an invitation to us to come to Jesus—and a miracle was set in motion.

Mark 8:23 (a)

And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town . . .

As noted previously, I believe one of the main reasons Jesus led the man out of town was to avoid the frenzied atmosphere often associated with healing ministries.

Mark 8:23 (b)

. . . and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought.

In the Hebrew culture and much of the ancient world at this time, spit was thought to contain medicinal value. Therefore, in applying spit to this man's eyes, Jesus seems to be putting His seal of approval on the use of the medical technology of any given day.

Sometimes when I cut my finger and watch the blood coagulate, I marvel at the ability of my body to seemingly heal itself. Other times, when I have a pounding headache and down a couple of aspirin, I marvel at modern medicine. Still other times, when I'm hurting physically, a couple of brothers will lay hands on me and pray—and I marvel at the power of prayer. But it is not prayer that heals. It is not medicine that heals. It is not our own body processes that heal. It is God who heals. And as God, He can utilize prayer, medicine, and our natural body processes—or any combination of the three.

Mark 8:24

And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking.

I love this man's honesty with Jesus. He saw the Lord, but he didn't yet have an ability to see people properly. And therein is a lesson. When you and I were touched by the Lord and saved, our eyes were opened. And yet even though we were now able to see Him, our healing was not complete until we could also see people clearly, for if we love God but hate our brother, we miss the mark entirely (1 John 4:20).

Many of us have no problem loving God. But there are some people who seem like trees to us. They "stump" us. We wish they would "leave." We try to cut them down. It might be a father who ignored you. It might be a husband who divorced you. It might be a boss who fired you. It might be a friend who deserted you.

"What is the greatest commandment?" they asked Jesus.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength," He answered. "And the second is like unto it," or literally, "There's a second part to it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (see Matthew 22:35–40). Loving God and loving our neighbor are inextricably linked. But how are we to love those we see only as trees? Read on.

Mark 8:25 (a)

After that he put his hands again upon his eyes . . .

The fact that this man needed to be touched twice encourages me in my own areas of need. Be it with regard to physical healing, spiritual help, material provision—sometimes we need to pray for a second touch, a third touch, a tenth touch. Sometimes we must keep coming back to the Lord over and over and over again. You might have been doing well physically as a result of the Lord's help and healing touch. But then the difficulty returned. Seek Him again and continue on until you're totally healed—even if that total healing won't take place until you get to heaven.

Mark 8:25 (b)

. . . and made him look up . . .

When did the man see not only Jesus but also every man clearly? When Jesus lifted his head toward heaven in the posture of prayer. That's the key. Jesus told us to pray for our enemies—the people who bug us, bother us, or hurt us—to pray for those who despitefully use us (Matthew 5:44). I have found that when I pray for people, something begins to happen miraculously. My feelings towards them change. No longer can I hold a grudge against them. No longer can I get upset with them. When I'm lifting my head toward the heavens and communing with the Father, it's impossible for me to be bitter. Pray for the people who bug you. While they might not change, you definitely will!

Mark 8:25 (c), 26

. . . and he was restored, and saw every man clearly. And he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town.

Will we be able to love people perfectly? No, for although we are to *look* up in prayer, it is not until we are *called* up to heaven at the moment of the Rapture that we will see perfectly the things that presently confuse and perplex us (1 Corinthians 13:12). What a day that will be!

Mark 8:27–29

And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am? And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets. And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

"Christ" is the Greek word; "Messiah," the Hebrew word. They both mean "Anointed One."

Mark 8:30

And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.

Matthew tells us that Jesus said, "Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah. Flesh and blood have not revealed this unto you, but My Father which is in heaven. And upon the rock of your confession—the revelation that I am Messiah—I will build My church" (see Matthew 16:17–18).

Mark 8:31

And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Jesus didn't begin to teach His disciples about rejection, suffering, or the Cross until it was first revealed to them that He is the Christ. So, too, in my

opinion, it is a mistake to try to explain the necessity of the Cross to those who don't first understand that Jesus is the Christ. Our first objective in sharing with people must be that they understand who Jesus is.

Mark 8:32

And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.

The original language makes it clear that Peter continually rebuked Him. "Come on, Lord," Peter could have said, "cut out this talk about crucifixion and rejection, suffering and pain. You're the Christ. Let's talk about health and wealth, prosperity and the kingdom!" But there is no crown without the Cross. Jesus knew the Cross was part of the plan from the beginning of the world to provide for our redemption. Jesus always sees the big picture.

Mark 8:33

But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.

"You've got it all wrong, Peter . . .

- Men are concerned about the material.
  God is concerned about the eternal.
- Men are concerned about prosperity.
  God is concerned about sanctity.
- Men are concerned about power.
  God is concerned about purity."

Only moments earlier, Peter had been a heavyweight prophet, having been given revelation so substantial that the entire church would be built upon it. But here, he's totally off the wall. This encourages me greatly because sometimes I share things I believe are truly the heart of the Lord—

only to turn around and say something else that makes me wonder why I even said it. Do you think the Father said, "Oh no! If I had known Peter would say *that,* I would have given revelation to James or John!"? No, He knew Peter. But because God the Father wasn't taken aback by Peter's mistake, I understand He makes room for our humanity. Peter would still go on. God was far from finished with him.

Mark 8:34

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

Jesus spoke not of self-denial, but of denying oneself. And between the two lies a monumental difference.

Mark 8:35

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

The more you live for yourself, the more miserable you'll be. We have all found this to be true to one degree or another. If you want to feel miserable, start thinking about yourself. Wonder how you're coming across, how you're doing, how you're feeling. When we take the temperature of how we're doing, what we're feeling, what we're thinking, we lose the very essence of what it means to truly live. It's in saving others that we so often save ourselves. It's in helping others that we help ourselves. It's in giving to others that we get ourselves. It's when we die to self that we find life.



For topical study of Mark 8:34–35, see "Self-Denial or Denying Self?" below.

Mark 8:36

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his

soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

We wouldn't sell our soul to Satan for a billion dollars. And yet in actuality, we often give it away whenever we allow some cheap trinket, momentary pleasure, or earthly relationship to come between the Lord and us.

Mark 8:37, 38

Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

There is no such thing as closet Christians, secret saints, disguised disciples. It's always been this way . . .

- "Where are you?" God called to Adam—not because He couldn't find Adam, but because He wanted Adam to come forward to admit his sin and his need to get right (see Genesis 3:9).
- "Who is on the Lord's side?" Moses asked the Israelites. The sons of Levi stood with Moses publicly, even though to do so was out of sync with the rest of the tribes (see Exodus 32:26).
- "Who is on the Lord's side?" asked Joshua as the people were challenged publicly to make a stand (see Joshua 24:15).
- "How long will you halt between two opinions?" asked Elijah. "If Baal be god, serve him. But if Jehovah be God, serve ye Him," calling people to make a public decision (see 1 Kings 18:21).

Every man Jesus called, He called publicly.
And He does the same today.

SELF-DENIAL OR DENYING SELF?

A Topical Study of MARK 8:34–35

Jesus would have been a political campaign manager's nightmare. After all, because the common people heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37), thousands thronged around Him; thousands listened to Him; thousands loved to be with Him.

- Yet when told all men were seeking Him, what did Jesus say?

  "Let's depart" (see Mark 1:38).
- When told the masses wanted to make Him king, what did He say?

  "Unless you eat of My body and drink of My blood, you can have no part with Me" (see John 6:53).
- When it was revealed to Peter that He was indeed Messiah, what did Jesus say?

  "The Son of man must suffer many things and be killed" (see Matthew 16:21).
- When the multitude gathered around Him, what did Jesus propose?

  "If any of you intend to come after Me, you must deny yourself, take up your Cross, and follow Me" (see Matthew 16:24).

So it is that we see an apparent contradiction, a seeming tendency in Jesus to draw people to Himself and then repel them from Himself. This is why Jesus would drive the advisors crazy. He wasn't a politician.

There's a difference between a politician and a statesman. A politician looks toward the next election. A statesman looks toward the next generation. The latter is what Jesus does. He doesn't seize the moment politically. He doesn't use Peter's revelation as a new campaign slogan. Instead, He looks down the road at you and me and says, "Let the chips fall where they may.

This is truth. The Son of man came not to set up a material, political kingdom, but to suffer and die in order to provide mankind with salvation. "Whoever will come after Me," He continued, "let him deny himself, take up his Cross and follow Me."

We have sanitized the Cross. We imprint it on our Bibles, wear it on gold chains around our necks, and stamp it on our bulletins. The Cross is a very important and beautiful emblem to us now. But it wasn't in Jesus' day.

Jesus' declaration concerning the Cross would be equivalent in our day to someone standing up in a political rally and saying, "If anyone wants to vote for me, grab your hypodermic needle with a lethal injection and follow me," or, "Put a noose around your neck and follow me," or, "Bring your gas chamber and follow me."

"Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his Cross, and follow Me." You may have heard numerous sermons on this well-known, powerful proclamation of Christ. But all too often they are preached from a perspective of self-denial: Do this and don't do that. Give up this and forsake that.

However, I don't believe that is what Jesus is teaching. His call is not to self-denial. It's to deny self. Our Lord never asks, expects, or desires us to do anything He hasn't done first. Therefore, when He asks us to take up our cross, it means He took up the Cross as well—which He did. But how did He take it up?

As He bore the Cross on His bruised, lacerated, beaten shoulders, the burden caused Him to fall on His face. A Roman soldier leading the procession stopped, placed the flat part of his spearhead on the shoulders of a man named Simon, and ordered him to carry the Cross.

Thus, because Jesus could not carry His own Cross, He would never tell me to carry mine. As Jesus bore His Cross, it brought Him to the place of collapse where He could no longer make it in His own strength. And such is the meaning of denying self. It means coming to the place where we say, "I can't make it, Lord. The loneliness I'm feeling, the misunderstanding hurled in my direction, the pain of separation, the tension I'm experiencing is more than I can bear."

It's my love for Jesus that drives me to my knees—but it's the cross I bear that brings me to my face.

No matter how smart, clever, or capable I think I might be, the burdens, anxieties, worries, and fears I bear show me I'm not any of those things. The temptation, however, is for us to stand up and keep going. But that's not denying ourselves. That's glorifying ourselves and our ability to keep pressing on. It's when we say, "Lord, I want to follow You—but I can't," that we are denying any ability in ourselves to bring this to pass.

When Jesus collapsed under the weight of the Cross He carried, there was someone there for Him. The Father had already orchestrated that Simon be there. We don't have a Simon. We have Someone infinitely better. We have a Savior.

"Two are better than one," Solomon writes, "because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up" (see Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10).

Our "Other" is Christ Jesus.

If you want to have life—real life, abundant life, eternal life the way it was meant to be lived—deny yourself as you take up your cross and follow Jesus. And when the Cross brings you, as it did our Savior, to your face, you will see standing next to you, standing available to you, standing ready to help you Jesus Christ Himself.



9 **Mark 9:1**

And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.

I believe Jesus was speaking not of the Rapture or His Second Coming, but of the event that would take place six days later when Peter, James, and John would witness His Transfiguration.

Mark 9:2, 3

And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by

themselves: and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.

His Transfiguration being a confirmation that He had led a sinless life, I believe that had He so chosen, Jesus could have gone directly to heaven at this point—leaving us with no explanation or justification for our sin before the Father. Instead, Jesus came down from Mount Hermon, the Mount of Transfiguration, to climb Mount Calvary, the Mount of Redemption.

Mark 9:4

And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus.

Elijah representing the prophets, and Moses representing the Law, the Law and the Prophets were, in effect, conversing with Jesus.

Mark 9:5, 6

And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid.

Not knowing quite what to say, Peter blurted out, "Let's build three monuments—one for Moses, one for Elijah and one for You"—thereby putting Jesus on the same plane as the law and the prophets. The law, however, was given to drive people *to* Jesus. And the prophets gave predictions *about* Jesus. Therefore, Jesus is far above the law and the prophets.

Mark 9:7

And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.

Fortunately for Peter, the Father interrupted him, keeping him from making further mistakes.

Mark 9:8

And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.

This happens to us as well. There comes a time when, after looking around, you realize there is no one save Jesus who is worthy of your attention, your affection, your adulation. In all that He is, in all that He says, in all that He's done, He's perfect. So we come together not to celebrate our righteousness or to congratulate ourselves on our morality, activism or accomplishments, but because we have discovered there is none worthy of praise save Jesus only.

Mark 9:9–11

And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean. And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come?

The scribes quoted Malachi, who predicted Elijah would come before the Messiah set up His kingdom (Malachi 4:5).

Mark 9:12, 13

And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought. But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.

Caught up in a fiery chariot because his ministry was not yet over, Elijah didn't die. He is to come before the Second Coming of Christ and proclaim

throughout the nation of Israel the truth concerning Christ Jesus. And yet, Jesus says, he is already come. In Matthew 11 we see Jesus saying that John the Baptist had come in the same spirit as Elijah. Yet when asked if he was Elijah, John the Baptist said, "No" (John 1:21). John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ at His first coming, came in the same spirit of Elijah. But Elijah himself will prepare the way for Christ's Second Coming.

Mark 9:14

And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them.

In the account that follows, we first see the disputing scribes. According to this account as recorded in Matthew 17, we know the scribes were arguing and debating with the disciples concerning the reality of demons. So here are the religious scholars debating theology even as a boy was suffering tragically. How true this is of our society today. People debate, argue, and question while all around us people are dying.

Mark 9:15–17

And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him. And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them? And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit.

Second, we see the despairing father. Luke gives further insight when he tells us this son was the only son of this father (Luke 9:38). Catch the contrast: Up on the mountain, the heavenly Father said, "This is My beloved Son." Here in the valley, a heartbroken father says, "Please help my bedeviled son."

Mark 9:18

And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.

Third, we see the demonized son. When Jesus called Satan a murderer and a liar (John 8:44), He was not only identifying Satan's personality, but His job description as well. Murder and lying are all he does.

Mark 9:19

He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.

Fourth, we see our dynamic Lord. First, He issues a compassionate invitation when He says, "Bring the child to Me." The father had come seeking help from the disciples, but the disciples were unable to help. So, too, perhaps you have brought a child, a friend, a co-worker to church or Sunday School, but they were not helped. That's okay, for if you bring anyone to where the disciples of Jesus are, guess who will show up sooner or later. Jesus Himself. Through a testimony shared, a study given, a story told, a song sung—something will happen. Jesus will come.

"Bring your child to Me," Jesus said. How? Morning by morning in intercession, teaching him what you're learning from the Word as you do errands together, making sure he's growing through fellowship with other believers. The cause of destruction is Satan. The cure is Jesus. The question is: Will you bring your friends and family to Him?

Mark 9:20–22

And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.

Notice Jesus' command of the situation. As this one is frothing at the mouth, Jesus calmly asks, "How long ago was it when this began?" Jesus was not sweating, shaking, or working Himself into a Pentecostal fervor. Rather, He was simply carrying on a very normal conversation.

Mark 9:23–27

Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.

Notice Jesus' convicting exhortation. "You're asking Me if I can do anything," He says. "But let Me ask you, Can you do this one thing? Can you believe?" The Bible says without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Therefore, concerning the son who's not saved, the daughter you're wondering about, the parents you know are far from God, this is what Jesus asks you: "Can you believe? *Will* you believe?" Faith the size of the mustard seed can move mountains that seem insurmountable. But even though a mustard seed is small, it is also alive. Thus, the faith that moves mountains is not a remnant of leftover faith. It is a growing faith. The question is, Are you willing to plant it in the soil of hope, water it with the Word, and see it take root to move the mountain?

Mark 9:28, 29

And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.

Finally, we see the disturbed disciples. "This kind of problem will not be solved by sharing pearls of wisdom, trying to be a better dad, or following some family program," Jesus told them. "This kind of spiritual warfare is won only through fasting and prayer."

How did we have time to fast and pray? the disciples must have wondered. After all, they certainly didn't know this problem would be laid at their feet that day. But that's the point. We never know when the moment for

miraculous ministry will come our way or be needed in our families. Therefore, we must maintain a life of prayer and fasting because when the demonized boy is before you, it's too late to start.

Why were the disciples not maintaining a habit of prayer and fasting? I wonder if it wasn't due in part to the fact that they might have been feeling sorry for themselves. *Thanks a lot, Lord,* they could have thought. *You take Peter, James, and John—your favorites—up on the mountain. They see You shine. They hear the voice from heaven. They get to see Elijah and Moses. Us? We're down here at the bottom, forsaken and forgotten.* If so, how like us they would have been.

So often we think, *I never get called to sing or to teach Bible studies. So why should I fast or pray?* And because we feel we're not important or useful, we give up. But once a year, once every five years, once in a lifetime an opportunity comes our way that is essential, important—an opportunity to move in the miraculous, to see salvation. Something exceedingly important could take place, but we're impotent and powerless because we haven't been praying, fasting, reading the Word, or seeking the Lord.

As a father, I have no other recourse than to maintain a life of prayer and fasting because I never know when the Enemy will strike one of my kids. He has; he does; he will. And as a believer, I have no other recourse than to maintain a close walk with God because I never know the next conversation that will open up before me at the grocery store or in the park with a neighbor that will impact them for eternity.

"But I've never been used," you say. Ah, but you might have the greatest opportunity for earth-shaking, life-changing ministry in the next moment or the next day. Therefore be ready.

Mark 9:30

And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee; and he would not that any man should know it.

On His way to Jerusalem, His face set like a flint (Isaiah 50:7), Jesus didn't want to be slowed down nor derailed.

Mark 9:31–33

For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him. And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?

As Jesus was headed to Jerusalem to die, His disciples were arguing along the way.

Mark 9:34

But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.

No doubt the disciples were embarrassed to admit the subject of their discussion. But if I were Jesus, I would have rebuked them radically. Instead, rather than coming down on them for wanting to be the greatest, He gives them five foundational principles of true greatness . . .

Mark 9:35–37

And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.

The first principle of greatness Jesus shares with His disciples is to treat all men equally. And to illustrate this, Jesus took a child in his arms. If you want to get ahead in life in the world's eyes, you don't take time to hang out with children. They can't do anything for your career. All they do is take from you and depend on you. I believe this refers to anyone who's little, anyone who's "less"—be it chronologically or economically, socially or mentally. The truly great person embraces them all in the name of Jesus.

Mark 9:38–41

And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.

Second, to be truly great, we are not only to treat everyone equally but also to be as magnanimous as we possibly can be—even toward those who are not traveling with us denominationally or theologically.

There are very few things we should take seriously in this life. And yet sometimes we want to fight and take issue over anything and everything. "Those guys are casting out demons and they're not with us," John said.

"Relax," Jesus said. "Anyone who even gives a cup of cold water in My name will be blessed."

Mark 9:42

And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

Third, the truly great person handles others with sensitivity. Paul says the same thing when he says, "Don't eat meat offered to idols if it will cause those weaker in their faith to stumble" (1 Corinthians 8:13). I have observed that truly great people are always aware of those weaker in faith around them and therefore won't flaunt their liberty if it will trip up someone else in his walk with Jesus.

Mark 9:43–48

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth

not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Fourth, the truly great person deals with himself radically—for although he is to be magnanimous and sensitive toward others, he is to be radical and ruthless concerning the sin in his own life. The world tells us to stand up for our rights and that we deserve a break—in other words, to be harsh with others, but to go easy on ourselves. The key to greatness, however, is to reverse the order.

Jesus says, "Deal radically with whatever it is in your life that's hindering you." And you and I know exactly what those things are. It doesn't take morbid introspection or hours of analysis to figure them out. No, you and I know at this moment what thing or things there might be in our lives that cause offense in us. And if we want to be great, we'll cut them out.

Mark 9:49, 50

For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.

The fifth and final secret to greatness is to live with all men peaceably. In the Middle East during Bible times—and even to a certain degree today—when a peace treaty is made, it's salted. That is, bread was salted, broken, and shared between the two parties. Theirs being a hot, desert climate, salt was invaluable in stemming the effects of dehydration.

Leviticus 2 dictates that the sacrifices offered to the Lord were to be salted as opposed to sweetened with honey. Why was honey not used? Isn't our fellowship with the Lord to be sweet? Honey was forbidden because in

high temperatures it breaks down. So, too, my attempt to be "sweet" doesn't hold up in heat. The only way to have peace is to have Jesus Christ, the hope of glory within me.

Treat all men equally. Be as magnanimous as you possibly can be. Handle others with sensitivity. Deal with yourself radically. Live with all men peaceably. These are not prerequisites for us to be saved. If they were, we'd never make it. No, through the Spirit living within us, these are not requirements for salvation—but for greatness.



10 As a Master Teacher, our Lord Jesus employed many techniques by which He communicated truth. Sometimes He spoke in parables and proverbs. Sometimes He used miracles. Other times, He gave lengthy exhortation and instruction. In the chapter before us, we see Jesus employing a method of teaching called the paradox, a statement that turns conventional thinking on its head.

> *Perhaps the best example of a paradox is the hypothetical story of the father and son who were in a tragic car accident in which the father was killed. The son, critically injured, was rushed to the hospital, where it was determined that surgery would be required. But upon seeing the patient, the surgeon said, "I can't operate on this boy. He's my son." How could this be if the boy's father was killed in the accident? The answer is that the surgeon was the boy's mother.*

We will see in the chapter before us five such paradoxes—statements that appear to be impossible initially, but which change our thinking eventually.

> **Mark 10:1**
>
> **And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judaea by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again.**

Jesus never tired of teaching. When people came to Him or gathered around Him, He taught them. I hope we never tire of studying Scripture. It's the bread that sustains us, the fuel for our faith.

Mark 10:2

And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him.

These Pharisees came trying to trip up Jesus with the most theologically controversial question of the day, an issue that remains controversial to this day: the issue of divorce.

Mark 10:3, 4

And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.

In Jesus' day, divorce was so common that in order to keep the rabbinical courts from being clogged with divorce proceedings, if a man simply said to his wife, "I divorce you," three times, she would be given a bill of divorcement.

Mark 10:5

And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.

The Greek word translated "hardness" is *skleros*—from which we get "sclerosis," a word most often used in conjunction with a hardening of the arteries. Whenever a divorce occurs, the reason is never what people say it is. The reason is always hardness of heart.

Mark 10:6

But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.

"Let's go back to the beginning," Jesus says.

Mark 10:7–9

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

The first paradox is that two become one. In the marriage ceremony, when a man and woman stand before the Father, when prayer is offered for their relationship and blessing pronounced upon their marriage, the two of them become one in the eyes of the Father.

Mark 10:10–12 (a)

And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband . . .

This would have been a radical statement in the ears of the disciples. You see, nowhere in Levitical law or rabbinical thought could a woman divorce her husband. Thus, Jesus is placing woman on a level she had never before known—not only in the history of Israel, but in the history of the Roman and Grecian empires as well. Paul would go on to say that in Christ there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28). We have different functions and responsibilities, to be sure—but there is a wonderful equality in Christ.

Mark 10:12 (b)

. . . and be married to another, she committeth adultery.

This doesn't say the person who remarries after divorce will live in adultery, but that theirs is an act of adultery, the missing of God's best. After a failed marriage, there can be a second opportunity—but it must be approached with great sobriety. No matter how innocent they think they might

be, both parties must accept responsibility for their part in the failure. For where sin abounds, grace abounds more.

Mark 10:13

And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them.

The word "they," being masculine in Greek, it was the fathers who brought their children to Jesus.

Mark 10:14–16

But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

The second paradox is that adults must become as children to enter the kingdom. This doesn't mean we are to be childish. It means we must be childlike. One of the most obvious characteristics of children is their trust. My kids never ask me if there will be food in the refrigerator next week. They have absolute confidence that when it's dinnertime, they'll be able to eat. Secondly, although children can't explain a lot, they sure enjoy a lot. As adults, on the other hand, we want to explain everything, but enjoy very little, if anything. The way of the kingdom is not explaining. The way of the kingdom is enjoying—just trusting that our Father will see us through, that He'll provide for us and never give up on us.

Mark 10:17

And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

This is the only instance in the Bible where a man comes and kneels before Jesus and leaves worse off than when he came. Matthew 19 tells us this man was young. Luke 18 tells us he was a ruler. Mark tells us he was rich. But he comes running to Jesus because he's aware there's something wrong inside. He's everything our society values. He's rich, he's young, he's a ruler—but he's empty.

Mark 10:18

And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.

"If you're calling Me good," Jesus says, "is it because you understand that I must indeed be God?"

Mark 10:19–21 (a)

Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him . . .

This man was not only rich, young, and a ruler—but he was also religious. His morals were impeccable. He was a man of integrity. And when he said, "I've done these things from my youth," Jesus didn't disagree.

Mark 10:21 (b)

. . . and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

The third paradox is that the poor will be rich. "You may have kept certain commandments," Jesus said to the rich young ruler, "but the problem is that you are controlled and dominated by money. Be free. Get rid of it." I don't believe the point was for this man to divest himself of all of his money, but rather to recognize his wrong priority.

Throughout Scripture, there are four hundred ninety verses that deal directly with faith, five hundred or more that deal with prayer, and two thousand that deal with money. Two hundred eighty-eight verses in the Gospels alone—one in every ten—concern money. The Bible contains more verses dealing with our use and handling of money than it does concerning prayer and faith combined.

Mark 10:22–24

And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words.

Because at this time it was believed that a man who walked with God would be blessed by God financially, it is no wonder the disciples were astonished.

Mark 10:24–27

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

It's impossible for a rich man to be saved. It's impossible for a poor man to be saved. It takes a miracle for *any* man to be saved.

Mark 10:28–30

Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake,

and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.

If my house burned down tonight, I know there are believers who would take my family and me in. If I walked out into the church parking lot and discovered my car wouldn't start, I know someone would take me home. Thus, I have hundreds of houses and cars and family members. So do you. The more we give, the more we enjoy the benefits of the entire kingdom—the hospitality, love, support, networking, strength, and community of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Yes, there is sometimes persecution. But the extent to which we give is the extent to which our needs will be met in this life, and to which heaven will be enjoyed.

Mark 10:31
But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.

The fourth paradox is that the last shall be first. This statement runs cross current to that which our culture propagates. Our society is becoming increasingly competitive in its orientation. And yet those who win society's competition seem to be increasingly disillusioned with the prize. This explains why top athletes, for example, often find themselves being sucked into the drug scene. They got the prize—but the prize was too small. Jesus comes on the scene and calls us away from competition. How does this work out practically? In your mind's eye, travel back two thousand years ago to a place called Bethesda . . .

There you see hundreds of people with all sorts of physical ailments positioned around a pool of water. Why are they there? The understanding of the day was that the first one in the water after an angel supposedly stirred it would be healed. Consequently, these blind, lame, hurting people jockeyed for position in order that they might be first in the pool. But what does Jesus do when He arrives at Bethesda? He finds a lame man seemingly at the back of the pack and says, "Do you want to be made whole?"

"I have no man to help me into the water," the man answers. "I don't have a network. I don't have the skills. My college education is outdated. I don't have connections. How can I compete in this culture? I have no one to help me."

This man had no stock options. He wasn't a member of the health club, nor on the city softball team. He wasn't competitive. Yet it was he and he alone who captured Jesus' attention that day.

"Arise," Jesus said. "Take up your bed. I'm freeing you from this pool of competition." And the man was healed (John 5:9).

I believe Jesus says the same thing to us today. Maybe we've been jockeying, struggling, planning, conniving, attempting to get the edge, to make it happen, to get ahead—be it financially or relationally, in ministry or in spirituality. But Jesus would remind us that the paradox of the kingdom is that the first shall be last and the last first.

Mark 10:32–40

And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again. And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the

baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.

James was martyred. John was placed in a cauldron of boiling oil and then exiled on the island of Patmos. They did indeed drink of Jesus' cup of suffering and were baptized into His baptism.

Mark 10:41–43

And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:

"Unlike Gentile rulers who dominate, manipulate, and control, the great among you shall be your minister," or, literally, "your waiter," said Jesus.

Mark 10:44–45

And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

The fifth paradox is that the servant shall rule. The easiest way to know if you're a servant is by how you react when people treat you like one. All too often, I'm afraid, my heart is, "Yes, Lord, I want to be a servant as long as people realize I'm serving. I want to be a slave as long as I become Slave of the Year." If you're gladly slaving in the nursery, in the kitchen, or in the Sunday-school class without being noticed, appreciated, or thanked—yours is the heart of a true servant.

Does the Lord want us to be slaves because He likes to see us grovel? No, it's because He's preparing us for the kingdom—for the next billion years—and He knows that the best exercise for strengthening your heart is stooping down to pick up someone else. Others might not acknowledge you.

You might not be rewarded presently. But when you move into the kingdom, and the Lord says, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Father," you'll do so with a large heart and a huge capacity to enjoy eternity.

When we get to heaven, gang, not one of us will regret the times we weren't applauded by people for serving the Lord. Instead, we'll say, "Thank You, Father, for sparing me from getting my reward on earth where it passes away so quickly." If you want to rule, become a slave. It's a paradox indeed. But it's true.

Mark 10:46 (a)
And they came to Jericho . . .

Historians tell us that at this time Jericho was the most trafficked intersection in the world due to the fact that all commerce, travel, and movement of troops between Europe to the north and Africa to the south passed through Jericho.

Mark 10:46 (b)
. . . and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging.

It has been said that there are three basic categories of people: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened. Bartimaeus, I believe, would fit into the third category. No doubt he would hear the creaking of the wagon wheels being pulled by snorting oxen. He would hear the shuffle of sandals on rocky roads, the sounds of camels, the conversations of people—everyone moving, while he sat still. Maybe you can identify. Maybe you feel like all around you things are happening, people are moving, times are changing. But you? You're just sitting, wondering, begging.

Bartimaeus sat by the side of the road because he was blind. Perhaps he was blind due to vitamin deficiencies common in that day. But it is more likely that his blindness was the result of heredity. You see, "Bartimaeus"

literally means "son of the unclean one." Thus, it is very possible that Bartimaeus was so named because his mother or father passed on a disease that produced blindness in their son.

Mark 10:47, 48

And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

Bartimaeus heard that Jesus had come to Jericho. The name "Jesus" is the Greek transliteration of the Jewish name "Joshua," so it was actually "Joshua" who came to Jericho that day.

Thousands of years previously, another Joshua had come into the city of Jericho—not for salvation, but for destruction—for it was his job to bring the people of God into the Promised Land. And here, standing before Bartimaeus, was "Joshua," whose job it was to bring the people of God into the Land of Promise not physically, but eternally—to bring mankind to heaven.

As the feet of the priests and Levites touched the water, the Jordan River parted, and Joshua entered into the Promised Land to begin his ministry. Jesus also began His ministry in the Jordan River when He was baptized at the age of thirty. The water didn't part. Instead, the heavens opened, a dove descended, and the Father declared, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Joshua's ministry was preceded by Moses, who prepared the people *in* the wilderness as he gave them the law. Jesus' ministry was preceded by a prophet *of* the wilderness named John the Baptist who preached repentance (Mark 1:15).

After circling the city, Joshua told the people to shout. And the walls came down. When Jesus came into the city, Bartimaeus was told not to shout, but to keep quiet. But he would soon stand up.

Mark 10:49 (a)

And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called.

Joshua's greatest victory took place on the day he commanded the sun to stand still (Joshua 10:12). So, too, Bartimaeus' life would miraculously change the day the Son stood still.

You who are sitting by the highway of life, saying, "I'm blind. I don't get it. I'm not seeing properly. I'm not going anywhere. Does Jesus care about me, or is He just passing by quickly?" take hope. Bartimaeus cried out—and the Son stood still. Why? I suggest three reasons . . .

Bartimaeus cried out in humility. All too often, we say, "Poor me. Life isn't fair. Why do bad things always happen to me?" Humility, on the other hand says, "I'm a sinner. I deserve judgment. But, Lord, I thank You for Your *mercy*." And such is the voice the Lord hears most clearly.

Bartimaeus cried out tenaciously. "Keep quiet!" the crowd said to Bartimaeus. It's amazing to me how often perhaps well-meaning people try to get us to quiet down. "Don't keep bothering the Lord," they say. "Just accept your blindness. Accept your confusion. Accept the fact that you don't know what's happening." Bartimaeus, however, kept crying—with humility, yes—but also with tenacity.

Mark 10:49 (b), 50

And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.

Bartimaeus cried out expectantly, for when Jesus called him, he left his garment behind. The garment beggars wore was specially striped in order that people would know the wearer was legitimately begging, that he had no other means of financial support. Therefore, in throwing his garment down, Bartimaeus was saying, "I know Jesus will heal me." Truly, without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6)—for it is faith that sees the invisible, believes the impossible, and receives the incredible.

Mark 10:51, 52

And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy

faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.

Bartimaeus was "changed in the twinkling of an eye"—just as we all will be one day. It is no wonder he followed the One who had opened His eyes and given him life.

May today be the day you do what Bartimaeus did: May today be the day you receive the direction, instruction, revelation you need. May you cry out until Jesus stops in front of you. May you cry out until the Son stands still.

And may you join Bartimaeus in following Him anew.



11 Having seen Jesus as the Servant living His life in service in chapters 1—10, chapter 11 marks the beginning of the second section of Mark's Gospel, wherein we see the Servant giving His life in sacrifice. In so doing, Jesus will make a presentation of Himself as King in verses 1–11, followed by provocation as He drives the moneychangers from the temple in verses 15–18, and finally by examination as the political and religious leaders question Him in verses 27 to 12:37.

Mark 11:1 (a)

And when they came nigh to Jerusalem . . .

The population of the city of Jerusalem would have been three times its normal number due to the influx of people who had come to celebrate Passover. In addition, Josephus tells us there were ten times the normal amount of Roman soldiers in the city, guarding against any potential uprising from the zealots—the group of radicals determined to overthrow Roman rule in Israel. Consequently, it was with soldiers watching, people bustling, and the city almost bursting at the seams that Jesus made His way toward Jerusalem.

Mark 11:1 (b)

. . . unto Bethphage and Bethany . . .

"Bethphage" means "House of Figs." "Bethany" means "House of Dates." Bethany is located two and a half miles outside of Jerusalem; Jesus passed through these two small towns on His way there.

Mark 11:1 (c)
. . . at the mount of Olives . . .

Two thousand six hundred feet in elevation, the Mount of Olives offered a commanding view of the city of Jerusalem below.

Mark 11:1 (d)–3 (a)
. . . he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him . . .

The Lord hath need? Why would the Creator of all things have need of anything? The reason He borrowed a manger, a boat, a donkey, an upper room, and a tomb is because He who was rich for our sakes became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9). Why? He chose to place Himself in a position where He would need to partner with us in order to see His will worked out through us.

This is incredible to me. God didn't have to go that route. But He's chosen to place Himself in a position where He will not do what He desires to do in our families, communities, workplaces, marriages, or schools without our partnering with Him. Why? He's getting us ready for the next billion years when we will be ruling and reigning with Him.

"Why should I bother to pray or to study the Word, to worship or to fellowship with other believers?" you might ask. "It doesn't really matter." Oh, but it does. Somehow in God's economy, His blessing and moving in this world are dependent upon our participation. I wonder if one of the mind-blowing moments in heaven might not be when we see what could have happened in the lives of our relatives, friends, and communities had we taken seriously the possibility of partnering with God instead of acting as if the Lord didn't need us.

Mark 11:3 (b)

. . . and straightway he will send him hither.

As the margin of your Bible may render it, this phrase is more properly translated, "He will send him back." That's always the way of the Lord. Anything we give Him—be it our energy or money, our time or abilities—He returns it to us with interest.

Mark 11:4–7

And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt? And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him.

When a Roman general was victorious over an army of five thousand or more, he made a triumphal entry upon his return in which he rode a golden chariot pulled by white stallions. Behind him would be the conquered general or king of the nation, followed by the conquered soldiers in chains. At the end of the procession would be the Roman soldiers marching in pomp and pageantry.

Their numbers swollen in order to keep watch on the crowded city, the Roman soldiers in Jerusalem must have chuckled to see Jesus enter the city riding on a donkey, followed by twelve ragtag disciples, the majority of whom smelled like fish. And yet even by Rome's own standards, He warranted a triumphal entry indeed, for the number of those who would believe in Him after His resurrection would be five thousand (Acts 4:4)—con-quered not by force or shame, but by love.

Mark 11:8, 9

And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Quoting Psalm 118, the crowd cried, “Hosanna!” or, “Save Now!”

Mark 11:10

Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.

When the crowd cried, “Save Now!” they weren’t speaking of their personal salvation. They were looking for a Messiah who would free them politically, who would lead a revolution militarily to overthrow the rule of Rome. But Jesus was coming with an entirely different kingdom in mind.

Mark 11:11 (a)

And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things. . . .

Jesus was not impressed by the crowd because, knowing the fickleness of humanity, He knew that the cry of the crowd would change from “Hosanna” to “Crucify Him” in a few short days.

Why, then, did He who usually said, “Tell no man” (Matthew 16:20) orchestrate His entry into Jerusalem in a way that was sure to draw attention? In addition to fulfilling prophecy (Zechariah 9:9), I believe it was because had He not done so, people could have said, “If we had known You had come into our city, we would never have turned against You. We would have responded to You.” So He came into the city in a way in which no one could have the excuse of not knowing He was there. Riding a donkey in accordance with prophecy, He was proclaiming to be the One sent from God, the Son of David, the Messiah.

Mark 11:11 (b)

. . . and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.

In the temple, Jesus would have observed moneychangers charging exorbitant rates to exchange the currency of those who had traveled great distances to pay their temple tax and to give offerings at Passover. He also

would have seen worshipers bullied into buying temple-approved animals to sacrifice at high prices because the priests had declared theirs to be substandard. But what does Jesus do? Does He drive out the moneychangers and chase out the livestock? No. He goes back to Bethany and reflects on what He had seen.

Is something bothering you today? I encourage you to follow the example of Jesus. Before you spout off, take some time and go back to Bethany—the place of quietness and communion—to get instruction from the Father.

Mark 11:12, 13 (a)

And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: And seeing a fig tree afar off . . .

As seen in Jeremiah 8, Nahum 3, and Hosea 9, the fig tree is a symbol of Israel. In the account that follows, in speaking of the fig tree, Jesus will be speaking of the fruitlessness of Israel—and of our fruitlessness as well.

Mark 11:13 (b)

. . . having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon . . .

Although it was early in the season, because the leaves of a fig tree appear simultaneously with the fruit, seeing leaves on this fig tree, Jesus assumed it would have figs as well.

Mark 11:13 (c)

. . . and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet.

I wonder if Jesus comes by our lives in the morning hours desiring fruit. Outwardly, because of our abundance of leaves—our activities and words—we might look like we've got it together. But upon closer inspection, it is obvious to Him that we lack true fruit—

• the fruit of love (Galatians 5:22, 23),

- the fruit of the conversion of souls (John 4:36),
- the fruit of works of righteousness (Philippians 1:22),
- the fruit of financial giving (Romans 15:28),
- the fruit of praise (Hebrews 13:15).

Why didn't this tree have fruit? Matthew's original text makes it clear that this particular fig tree was a lone fig tree (21:19). Because fig trees require cross-pollenization, a lone fig tree cannot produce fruit. And the same is true with believers. "I don't need to go to church," some say. "I can worship the Lord on my own." Not true.

"Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves," says the writer to the Hebrews (Hebrews 10:25). We need one another in order to bear fruit.

Mark 11:14

And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.

All of His life, Jesus went about doing good. He healed the sick. He fed the hungry. He raised the dead. But here He performs a miracle that is seemingly destructive—the only time in all of Scripture we see Him doing so. Was this act out of sync with the rest of His life and teaching? Did Jesus curse this tree in a fit of hungry rage?

No. On the contrary, Jesus' seemingly destructive cursing of the fig tree was an act of great mercy—for in so doing, He speaks of the absolute necessity of redemptive faith. We know from Colossians 1 that all things were not only made by Him, but for Him. Therefore, providing fruit for Jesus would have been the fig tree's highest calling. But because it was not able to do this, Jesus showed that in reality, it would not be able to provide fruit for anyone else. The same holds true for us. If we don't satisfy Jesus, other people will not be nourished by us, enriched by us, or blessed by us.

Mom and Dad, your kids won't gain spiritual nutrition and strength from you if you are not pleasing Jesus personally, privately, and devotionally. Bible study teacher, your students won't grow in their walk with the Lord through you unless you are growing in your walk with Him. There is no

shortage of those who say, “I want to serve people. I want to see our country changed, our community cleaned up, people helped.” But they will only be going through the motions if they’re not first pleasing Jesus.

Mark 11:15, 16

And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; and would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple.

Forbidding people from carrying any vessel through the temple meant, essentially, that all sacrifices came to a halt. How could Jesus have done this? Evidently there was something in His eyes, something in His face, something in His countenance that kept all men from challenging Him as He drove out the cattle, overturned the tables, rebuked the men, and kept the entire temple sacrificial system from taking place. The fig tree represents the nation of Israel nationally; the cleansing of the temple speaks of the nation spiritually. Nationally, Israel was fruitless. Spiritually, she was bankrupt. What about us?

Mark 11:17, 18

And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves. And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine.

What is a den of thieves? It’s where the thieves feel protected and safe. The temple was to be a place of prayer, but instead it became a place where thieving priests preyed upon rather than prayed for God’s people.

Mark 11:19, 20

And when even was come, he went out of the city. And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from

the roots.

Roots are the secret part of the tree that no one sees. When you feel dry, it's most likely because there's a problem with the root system. Morning devotions are skipped. Evening prayer is no longer a priority. Outwardly, the part of your life that people see might be going along just fine. But the root system, the secret part is dried up.

Mark 11:21, 22

And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.

How do we satisfy the hunger of our Lord? How do we keep the hidden part of our life from becoming dry? The root of the answer is faith. In this passage, we see four aspects of the faith that will keep us from fruitlessness . . .

The Object of Faith

"Have faith in God," Jesus said. Unlike an unfortunate amount of teaching today that seems to encourage believers to have faith in faith, the object of our faith is God. And because He is good (Psalm 73:1), I can bring my requests to Him, share my concerns with Him, and cast my care upon Him, realizing that He is God and I am not; that He is a Father and I am but a child; that He is a Shepherd and I a straying sheep. In this way, my faith is not in my faith, but in my Father.

> **Mark 11:23**
>
> **For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.**

The Outworking of Faith

Did Jesus tell us to pray that the problem, obstacle, or mountain that looms menacingly before us might be removed? No. Did He tell us to study the Word that it might be removed? No. He said, "Say to the mountain Be thou removed, and it will be cast into the sea."

We often hear that prayer changes things. But that's not entirely true. Prayer changes us. Faith changes things. Jesus didn't say, "If you encounter a mountain, pray that it might be gone." No, He said, "Have faith in God and then verbally, audibly tell the mountain to be removed. Speak faith."

Why is saying, speaking, verbalizing so important? Why did Jesus tell us to speak aloud to the mountain? Why does Paul tell us to confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9, 10)? Why does the writer of Hebrews tell us that when a promise is given to us we are to boldly speak it out (Hebrews 13:5, 6)? Because that's when faith kicks in. It's easy for me to think quietly or pray inwardly for the mountain to be moved because then if it doesn't move, no one will know I prayed otherwise. There's no step of faith, no risk involved if I don't speak.

What mountain intimidates you? Is it fear concerning an unsaved child, or depression over a business about to go under? Jesus tells you and me to go on record in the ears of our kids, our parents, our peers, our co-workers and to say, "Be gone." After all, it was what Jesus did Himself in the ears of His disciples, which set the stage for them to believe (Mark 11:14). Maybe you're praying intensely and hoping passionately that a certain problem or a certain situation will somehow be solved. But the fact is, Jesus said it's not enough to simply hope or even to pray. Rather, you must say in faith verbally, "Be gone. Be removed. Be cast into the sea."

Mark 11:24

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

The Obtaining of Faith

Maybe you're in a place where you lack the faith to tell the mountain to be removed. The solution? Ask the Father to give you the faith you need, and He'll give it to you in order that you might speak to the mountain directly.

This is where the "Positive Confession, Name It and Claim It" teachers miss the point. Jesus taught on faith not to obtain a mountain. Rather, it was to curse a fruitless situation and to remove an obstacle. Concerning faith, Jesus didn't tell His disciples how to get a Cadillac, a bigger house, a boyfriend, or a higher-paying job. He didn't tell His disciples how to get more of anything. Rather, He told them how to get rid of the carnal tendencies, addictions, habits, or propensities that made them fruitless. Contrary to what the "Name It and Claim It" mentality propagates, cross-current to what the Positive Confession school maintains, Jesus was not talking about accumulating worldly goods, but about obliterating worldly gods. He wasn't telling His disciples to claim in faith that they would be given a vacation cabin on a mountain. He was telling them to get rid of the mountain altogether.

I want the San Francisco Giants to win the pennant. I really do. But when I'm in my times of prayer, guess what. That doesn't surface in my conversation with God. It's in the time of prayer when suddenly the things the Lord wants to do in and through my life are birthed within me. That's why in the original text, the comma does not appear after the word "desire." As we pray, our desires will change. That which is not important will fade away. That which God does not desire to do in your life will dissipate. And you will be set free to be more like Jesus. To the mountain looming over you today, go on record and say, "Be gone" so clearly that your voice can be heard in hell, in heaven, and in your own heart.

Mark 11:25, 26

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

The Obstacle to Faith

Because Jesus clearly links faith to forgiveness, if we're not forgiving, the power of faith is short-circuited. Why? Because a person who does not love or will not forgive cannot be entrusted with that kind of power. He'll misappropriate it. She'll hurt herself and others with it. That is why Paul makes it clear that faith works by love (Galatians 5:6).

Mark 11:27 (a)

And they come again to Jerusalem . . .

As Jesus reenters Jerusalem, He will face a series of questions concerning His authority, integrity, theology, and priorities. Yet unbeknownst to His interrogators, even their questions perfectly fulfill Biblical prophecy and typology. You see, when the Passover was instituted, the lamb that was to be slain for the family was to be set apart and observed, scrutinized, examined for four days before it was slain lest any fault or spot or blemish be found upon it that would disqualify it from being the Passover lamb. So, too, the events before us taking place four days before Passover, it is only fitting that Jesus, the Passover Lamb, would be carefully scrutinized as well.

Mark 11:27 (b)

. . . and as he was walking in the temple . . .

The outer courtyard of the temple was a place where teaching went on continually. The eastern courtyard, known as Solomon's porch, contained sixty large columns that supported a roof, forming an arcade. The courtyard on the south side of the temple was known as the royal porch and, with one hundred sixty-two columns thirty-five feet high and six feet in diameter, was considerably larger than Solomon's porch. It was in these covered courtyards that skeptics wanting to find fault with Him would find Jesus.

Mark 11:27 (c)–28

. . . there come to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders, and say unto him, By what authority doest thou these

things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things?

The first group to question Jesus was comprised of chief priests, scribes and elders, questioning His authority. "By what authority do You come in here turning over tables, driving out cattle, and interrupting the sacrificial system?" they asked Jesus. They said this to place Him upon the horns of a dilemma, for if Jesus answered, "By My own authority," they would have labeled Him a lunatic. But if He said, "By God's authority," they would accuse Him of blasphemy.

Mark 11:29–33

And Jesus answered and said unto them, I will also ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me. And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed. And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Why did Jesus raise this particular question concerning the baptism of John? Because this was the point where the priests, scribes, and elders first took a wrong turn. They rejected the truth John shared about the One who would follow him. Thus, their rejection of John set the stage for their final rejection of Jesus.

It has been rightly said that obedience is the conduit through which fresh understanding flows unhindered. That is, if I am obeying the Lord, I will get more understanding from the Lord. But at the point I stop obeying, oftentimes He will stop revealing. If you're wondering why you haven't heard anything from the Lord this week or this month, this year or this decade, it could very well be that there was a point where you knowingly, willingly, stubbornly disobeyed and refused to respond. I'm not talking about morbid introspection. I'm talking about an obvious point you know very readily

where the Lord gave instruction to you, but you said, "No. I will not go there. I will not give that up. I will not do what You say." The cure is simply to repent, to say, "Lord, forgive me. As You did with Jonah, give me another opportunity."

This was a route those who were questioning Jesus chose not to take. As a result, caught by the very trap they thought they had set for Him, they were rendered speechless.



12 Jesus follows His answer to the question concerning His authority posed to Him by the priests, scribes, and elders with a parable . . .

Mark 12:1

And he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country.

The parable concerns an absentee landlord—a common figure in those days.

Mark 12:2–12

And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some. Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and

will give the vineyard unto others. And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way.

Servants sent to collect rent were either beaten or killed by the servants of the tenant farmer. Finally, certain they would honor him, the owner sent his own son. But the son was killed just as readily as the others.

In a similar parable, Isaiah identified the vineyard as Israel (Isaiah 5:7). Thus, it was a loving God who sent prophet after prophet to Israel, only to see each one beaten or killed. And it was a God of incomparable love who sent His own Son to die for the very ones who nailed Him to a Cross.

This not only speaks volumes concerning the patience of the Father in sending servant after servant and warning after warning, but also concerning the stupidity of man who thinks that because God must be off in some corner of the cosmos, he need not listen to His servants; he need not reverence His Son; he can do whatever he wants. Mankind mistakes the patience of God for impotence. But when He comes, judgment will fall upon those who have not reverenced His Son. So clearly did the priests, scribes, and elders get the point of Jesus' parable that they knew He had to be done away with.

Mark 12:13

And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words.

Unable to trap Jesus with their question concerning authority, the priests, scribes, and elders made way for the Pharisees and Herodians to question Him concerning His integrity. The Herodians supported Herod, who was a puppet of Rome, and the Pharisees wanted no part of Rome, so these two groups would normally be as close as cats and dogs. But because they realized Jesus was a threat to both of their empires, the Herodians and Pharisees came together in a shared hatred of Him.

Mark 12:14, 15 (a)

And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give?

"Master," said the Herodians and Pharisees, "You're a great teacher, One who can't be manipulated. Therefore, we have a question to ask You: Should we pay taxes or not?"

If Jesus said, "Yes, pay taxes," the people of Israel—who hated paying taxes to the despised Romans—would have turned against Him. If, however, He said, "Don't pay taxes," He would have been arrested for insurrection. Either way, the Herodians and Pharisees thought they had Him.

Mark 12:15 (b)

But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it.

"Health, Wealth, and Prosperity" teachers would call Jesus a dismal failure. Foxes have holes, the birds have nests, but the Son of man had nowhere to lay His head (Luke 9:58). He didn't even have a penny to use as an illustration.

Mark 12:16

And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's.

In Jesus' day, the first thing a ruler did after conquering new territory would be to mint new coinage containing his image as a continual reminder to the conquered people that he was indeed their leader and that his authority extended as wide as his coins were circulated.

Mark 12:17 (a)

And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's . . .

Although the people in the realm were able to use his coins as currency, the person whose image appeared on the coin actually owned the coin. In this case, it would have been the image and coin of Caesar Tiberius.

Mark 12:17 (b)
. . . and to God the things that are God's.

If the coin with the image of Caesar belonged to Caesar, Jesus reasoned, the person made in the image of God belongs to God.

Mark 12:17 (c)
And they marvelled at him.

Just as the priests, scribes, and elders had failed to trap Jesus concerning His authority, the Herodians and Pharisees were also unable to do so concerning His integrity.

Mark 12:18 (a)
Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection . . .

Believing only in the five books of Moses, the Sadducees didn't believe in miracles, angels, or resurrection because they saw none of those elements in the Pentateuch. They were smaller in number than the Pharisees or Herodians, but, being the wealthier businessmen, they were the elite of the day.

Mark 12:18 (b)–23
. . . and they asked him, saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man's brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were seven brethren: and the first

took a wife, and dying left no seed. And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise. And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also. In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife.

According to Deuteronomy 25, if a man died childless, it was the obligation of his next younger brother to marry his widow and bear a child to be his heir, to carry on his name. In order to examine Jesus' theology, the Sadducees pose this question concerning a hypothetical woman who had been widowed seven times over.

Mark 12:24–27

And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven. And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.

Ignoring altogether the absurd hypothetical situation of the widow and speaking to them from the Pentateuch itself, Jesus reminded the Sadducees that five hundred years after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had passed from the scene, God identified Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And by using the present tense to do so, the implication was obvious that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still alive—verifying the reality of resurrection.

Mark 12:28

And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

In asking which is the greatest commandment of all, the last question addressed to Jesus dealt with priority.

Mark 12:29, 30

And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

Jesus answered with the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4, the verse the orthodox Jew quotes many times each day and wears inside the phylactery on his forehead and wrist.

Mark 12:31

And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

The Jews had six hundred thirteen commandments from the Old Testament law. Three hundred sixty-five were negative commandments—one for each day of the year, and two hundred forty-eight positive commandments —one for each of the two hundred forty-eight generations from Adam to their day. In Psalm 15, however, David reduced this number to eleven; and in the sixth chapter of his book, Micah reduced it to three (6:8). Here, Jesus reduces it to two; and in Galatians 5:14, Paul would reduce it to one: love.

Mark 12:32, 33

And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Realizing that relationship far surpassed religion, the scribes could do nothing but agree with the beauty, simplicity, and logic of Jesus' answer.

Mark 12:34

And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.

After answering their questions regarding authority and integrity, theology and priority, it is now Jesus' turn to ask a question . . .

Mark 12:35–37

And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the Son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool. Da vid therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he then his son? And the common people heard him gladly.

Quoting Psalm 110, which the Jews knew to be a prophecy concerning Messiah, Jesus asked how David could call his son his lord. The only way a son could be greater than his father was if he was more than simply the son of the father. In other words, the Messiah for whom the Jews waited was more than a political leader or religious instructor, more than mere man. He was God.

Mark 12:38–40

And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.

Addressing those who weren't trying to trick Him, those who heard Him gladly, the common people, Jesus said, "Watch out for scribes who make a great show of religion, but are first on the scene to swindle widows."

Mark 12:41 (a)

And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury . . .

It was most likely between the columns on Solomon's porch that thirteen chests called "trumpets" were located in which people placed money to help the poor. Jesus was not as interested in what people gave as He was in *how* they gave.

Mark 12:41 (b)–44

. . . and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

After dealing with the questions of His foes, Jesus finds a friend. The foes of Jesus will always raise questions. And the "foe" within me does so as well whenever I am cynical or critical. How I long for the day when that part of my nature is removed completely.

Jesus' friend, however, is presented in complete contrast to the religious bigwigs of the day who chose to criticize and question rather than to give. May God help us to be like this faithful woman, and to show Him our love as we give of our money, energy, time, and heart in His Name.



13 Mark 13:1

And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!

Having turned over tables and driven the moneychangers from the temple, perhaps it was because Jesus' disciples thought He had acted somewhat harshly that they drew His attention to the magnificence of the temple itself.

Valued at over one trillion dollars by today's standards, the temple was without a doubt the greatest single building ever constructed. With brass gates one hundred thirty feet high, stones forty feet long and twenty feet thick cut so perfectly that not even a knife blade could fit between them, the temple was nothing less than magnificent indeed.

Mark 13:2

And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

The size of the temple is beyond our imagining. Even the Wailing Wall, which was simply the foundation stones of the temple, dwarfs all who stand near it. Yet Jesus said it would come crashing down. And indeed it did. Within forty years of this statement, Roman troops, led by General Titus, would not only destroy Jerusalem, but, against Titus' orders, would throw a torch inside the temple, causing a fire so intense that the gold melted within. Thus, it was to get to the gold that trickled down its walls that the Romans razed the temple, leaving not one stone standing on another.

Mark 13:3, 4

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?

Here we arrive at the Olivet Discourse—paralleled in Matthew 24 and Luke 21—where the longest answer Jesus would ever give deals with end

times and future events. Concerning the Olivet Discourse, so named because Jesus gave it as He sat upon the Mount of Olives, I believe it is important to study it four ways . . .

First, it must be studied contextually. That is, it's important to bear in mind that it was four Jewish men asking their Jewish Rabbi when all things would be fulfilled or finalized.

Second, it must be studied comparatively. That is, it must be seen in light of prophecy given previously. It's always dangerous to isolate any passage of Scripture from other passages that give additional information regarding the same topic.

Third, it must be studied practically. Four times in this passage, Jesus says, "Take heed." Therefore, the purpose was not to stimulate controversy or to titillate curiosity. The purpose was to awaken the disciples—and those who would follow.

Finally, it must be studied eschatologically. That is, it must be seen in light of future events.

The Olivet Discourse deals with the Tribulation—the seven-year period following the Rapture of the church when God will pour out His wrath upon a Christ-rejecting sinful world. Verses 5–13 deal with the beginning of the Tribulation, 14–18 with the middle, and 19–27 with the end.

Mark 13:5, 6

And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you: For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

History shows that in the first one hundred years after Jesus spoke these words, no less than sixty-four men came on the scene claiming to be Messiah. And we see a continuance of this today by those who propagate the age-old New Age lie that we all have a "God-consciousness" within us and are all, therefore, deity.

Mark 13:7

And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet.

A government study was conducted by fifteen experts representing a wide range of disciplines, including a historian, political theorist, sociologist, economist, professor of international law, biochemist, cultural anthropologist, and industrialist. The group was told to waste no time agonizing over cultural and religious values. It was to give the same kind of treatment to the hypothetical problem of peace should peace break out as has been given to the hypothetical problems of war. The conclusion of this blue-ribbon panel was that wars would cease if the will to make them cease was there. But since war itself is at the very root of mankind's social system, it is not likely that peace will ever be a serious goal because no substitute is known that can better stabilize and control national economies than war. History has shown war to be the foundation of every stable government—that every governing body that has failed to sustain the continuing threat of an external war has lost control of its constituency. Even the world realizes war is a necessary evil. Therefore, although generation after generation cries for peace, there cannot be true peace until the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, returns.

Mark 13:8 (a)

For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom . . .

Linguistically, this could speak just as accurately of a nation at war with itself internally as of two separate nations at war. Could "kingdom" speak of a return to monarchies? Very possibly.

Mark 13:8 (b)

. . . and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines . . .

Studies have shown that, although agricultural scientists are able to develop super strains of wheat and grains, the high price of oil necessary to produce the petroleum-based fertilizers required to make them grow rule them out as viable alternatives to famine.

Mark 13:8 (c)
. . . and troubles . . .

Matthew refers to "troubles" as "pestilences" (Matthew 24:7). We call them plagues.

Mark 13:8 (d)
. . . these are the beginnings of sorrows.

- These are the beginning of sorrows, or "labor pains."
- "But there have always been earthquakes," you say. And there have.
- "There has always been famine," you say. There has.
- "There have always been war and rumors of war." There have.

But what Jesus is saying is that, like birth pains, these things will increase in frequency and intensity as the Tribulation period draws nearer.

Mark 13:9, 10
But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them. And the gospel must first be published among all nations.

Keep in mind that Jesus is speaking to Jews—as evidenced by His reference to synagogues. This distinction is important because the Rapture of the church does not need to wait until Christians are "delivered to councils," or "brought before rulers." Neither is it dependent upon the gospel being published among all nations. Oh, the gospel will indeed be published. But it

will be by the 144,000 witnesses, by Elijah and Moses, by angels flying across the sky during the Tribulation. Referred to as *Jacob's* trouble in Jeremiah 30, the Tribulation does not concern the church, but Israel.

Mark 13:11, 12

But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost. Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death.

During the Tribulation, Antichrist's rule will be so pervasive that there will actually be children betraying their parents who follow Jesus Christ and refuse the mark of the beast.

Mark 13:13

And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

Spoken to those who become believers during the Tribulation, Jesus says, "There's hope. Don't give up in the times of tribulation. If you endure to the end, you'll be saved."

Mark 13:14–19

But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judaea flee to the mountains: And let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter therein, to take any thing out of his house: And let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment. But woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter. For in those days shall be affliction, such as was

not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be.

In this section dealing with the middle of the seven-year Tribulation period, referring to the point when Antichrist will set up his image in the rebuilt temple, Jesus says, "Split for the wilderness"—specifically, I believe, to the rock city of Petra, a place the Lord has provided to save His people in the time of this outpouring of Antichrist's wrath. In addition to praying that this won't occur in winter, Matthew adds that the Jews are to pray it won't be on the Sabbath (24:20). To this day, all transportation comes to a halt on the Sabbath day in Israel. Thus, only to a Jew would the Sabbath pose a problem with regard to fleeing to the wilderness.

Mark 13:20

And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.

He who uses this verse to say that Christians will be present during the Tribulation fails to understand that "the elect" is a term ascribed to three groups of people: Israel (Isaiah 65:9), believers (1 Peter 1:2), and Tribulation saints (Matthew 24:22).

Mark 13:21–23

And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ; or, lo, he is there; believe him not: For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect. But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things.

In an attempt to trick the Tribulation saints, some will claim to be, or to have seen, Christ Himself. Even in these last days before the Tribulation, the cults are growing exponentially, saying, "Lo, here is Christ; or, lo He is there." The basic premise of the Jehovah Witness theology is that Jesus already came back in 1898 (later revised to 1914) to the Watchtower Society

in Brooklyn, where He shared truth, understanding, and esoteric insights. Their entire theology is based upon a secret return of Jesus.

The Mormons also believe that Jesus came back already. Where did He go? They claim He came to America and gave fuller teaching to the American Indians.

"But the Mormons are good people," you say.

Indeed, ads on TV and in magazines proclaim the goodness of the Mormons, as if to say, "For the Mormons, home and family come first. Theirs will be a family likely to be admired by neighbors for its quiet confidence and self-assurance, and generally envied for its closeness and goodnatured round of family activities. Clean, bright, outgoing, Mormons practice what they preach, setting aside each Monday for Family Home Evening. Stressing family, emphasizing their care for one another, talking about temperance—they don't drink even Coke, coffee, or tea—and an absolute abhorrence of narcotics, they present a goodness, a quality of life attractive to many."

> I am troubled when I realize that this sounds a lot like the claims we evangelicals make. We talk about ourselves as those with better than average marriages, good families, and high moral standards. I came across this statement written by a skeptic named Walker Percy: "I'm surrounded by Christians. They are, generally speaking, a pleasant and agreeable lot, not noticeably different from other people. But if they have the Truth, why is it the case that they are repellently and precisely a turn-off to the degree that they embrace and advertise their truth? One might even become a Christian if there were a few Christians around. But have you ever lived in the middle of fifteen million Southern Baptists? If the Good News is true, why is one not pleased to hear it?"

Our message has been repellent, unaccepted because we, like the Mormons, like the Jehovah Witnesses, have all too often exalted our goodness, holding up our standard of living that, at best, becomes pharisaic when we look down on others, and, at worst, hypocritical when we don't live up to our own image. We must not boast of our morality, but of God's mercy. We should not advertise our flawlessness, but God's faithfulness. It

would do us well to remember Luke 18—the parable of the religious man saying, "I thank You, God, that I am not like other men," and the sinner who smote his breast saying, "God have mercy upon me." Jesus said it was the latter—the one who realized his sinfulness but also believed in God's graciousness—who went his way justified.

Let us be those who, rather than saying, "Look how religious we are, how together our families are, how clean our life is," say, "It is the mercy and grace and goodness of God alone of which we boast. We are not the Moral Majority. We are the Forgiven Few."

Mark 13:24–27

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.

I believe the elect spoken of here refers to Israel. All Jews will be gathered up and brought home as the Tribulation comes to a close and the kingdom is established at last.

Mark 13:28 (a)

Now . . .

Having talked about the beginning, the middle, and the end of the Tribulation, Jesus changes the subject somewhat . . .

Mark 13:28 (b)–29

. . . learn a parable of the fig tree; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors.

As seen in the books of Jeremiah, Nahum, Isaiah, and Hosea, the fig tree is the national symbol of Israel. Therefore, it is my strong conviction that Jesus is talking about the re-blossoming of the nation of Israel that took place in May, 1948, when the Jews returned to their land—the only time in history when a nation came back from the dead—exactly as prophesied by Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. We cannot know the day of Jesus' return—but as seen in the fig tree, we surely know the season (1 Thessalonians 5:1).

Mark 13:30–37

Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.

If you are watching for Antichrist, you're watching for the wrong person. Those who embrace a post-Tribulation position—saying the church will go through the Tribulation period—are not watching for Jesus. They're watching for Antichrist. As believers, Jesus never taught us to prepare for the Tribulation. He taught us to watch for His appearance.

Today could be the day, and "whoever has this hope purifies himself" (1 John 3:3). Believing Jesus' coming is imminent will have a tremendous effect on the way we live each day. Don't let anyone tell you Jesus can't come back for us until after the Tribulation. He could come back today. And if He does, it's fine by me!

14 We have now come to the longest chapter in Mark's Gospel. To set the stage for this drama, it should be noted that Jesus is not so much the main Actor as He is the One being acted upon; not so much the Deliverer, as He is the One delivered into the hands of men, for in the chapter before us, we will see Mary anointing Him, Judas betraying Him, the religious leaders arresting Him, and finally Peter denying Him.

Mark 14:1–3 (a)

After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people. And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman . . .

We know from John 11:2 that this woman was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. It is not surprising that Mary would be here. After all, it is at the feet of Jesus that we most often see her. . . .

While her sister stewed in the kitchen, Mary sat at the feet of her Savior (Luke 10:39).

In grief over her brother's death, Mary poured out her heart at the feet of her Master (John 11:32).

Here, in the house of Simon, we will see her worship her Redeemer.

Whether in the hour of happiness when He was teaching, in the season of sadness when her brother had died, or in this time of questioning as she tries to make sense of Jesus coming to Jerusalem to go to the Cross, Mary positioned herself at His feet.

Mark 14:3 (b)

. . . having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head.

To keep their money secure, people in Jesus' day often invested it in costly perfumes or ointments that would be hidden in a house or buried in a field. In this case, the spikenard, which was from India, would be worth a year's salary. This spikenard was very possibly Mary's dowry—that which she would have presented to her husband at the time of her marriage. If indeed this was the case, in pouring it out upon Jesus, she was signifying that she was ready to give up everything, even marriage, in order to devote herself completely, tenderly, wholeheartedly to Him.

Mark 14:4, 5 (a)

And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor.

John tells us it was the treasurer of the apostolic band—Judas Iscariot—who said this. "This money could have been used for the poor," he protested. Yet he said this not because he cared for the poor, but because he held the bag and was a thief (John 12:4–6). The Greek word translated "waste," describing Judas's estimation of Mary's act, literally means "perdition"—the same word Jesus would use to describe Judas himself (John 17:12).

Mark 14:5 (b)

And they murmured against her.

Although Judas cared nothing for the poor but simply wanted to steal the money, the others evidently believed his argument. Whenever there is group activity, look for the real agenda of those spearheading the group. Others might be sincere, but oftentimes, the one making the most noise has another agenda entirely.

Mark 14:6, 7

And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you

always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always.

Poverty will never be solved by political realignment or economic adjustment because, be it the result of slothfulness or greed, poverty is a matter of the spirit. Until Jesus comes back and makes things right, the poor will indeed always be among us. Therefore, the answer to poverty is not economics or politics, but a change in the heart of man.

Mark 14:8 (a)

She hath done what she could . . .

Mary wouldn't be able to keep the priests from falsely accusing Jesus, the crowds from mocking Him, the soldiers from crucifying Him—but she could pour oil upon Him in an act of worshipful acknowledgment that He had come to die. And in so doing, Mary did what she could.

You might not be able to speak to large groups of people. You might be unable to preach, lead worship, or sing. But can you bake some bread for someone in need? Can you make a hospital visit? Can you mow a lawn? Too often I focus on what I can't do instead of seeing what I can do. Mary did what she could. And Jesus commends her.

Mark 14:8 (b)

. . . she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.

Jesus told His disciples directly that He was going to die, be buried, and resurrect from the dead. But they didn't understand. Yet because she sat at Jesus' feet, Mary was able to understand that which the disciples missed.

Mark 14:9

Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

John tells us that after pouring ointment upon Jesus' head, Mary wiped His feet with her hair (12:3). As a result, her hair took on the same fragrance as His feet. She smelled just like Jesus. That's what worship does. Are you tired of being a stinky person? One of the surest ways to change your fragrance is to be a worshiper. Pour out your love for the Lord in your morning devotions, in worship corporately, in worship daily—and you will find your entire attitude beginning to change.

Furthermore, not only did Mary's fragrance begin to change, but the house began to take on the fragrance of Christ as well. Is there a stench in your house? Are tempers flaring? Are cross words being spoken? How long has it been since you've had family devotions—where you've sat down with your kids or as a couple to spend time worshiping the Lord? When you pour out your praise, when you worship the Lord, His fragrance fills the house.

Finally, Mary's act of worship affected the entire community. Throughout history, Bethany is a place of which people who know the Word and love the Lord have been very aware. Why? Because one woman poured out worship. The early church referred to this event often in its preaching and teaching. So does the church today—as all around the world Mary's singular act of worship is spoken of constantly.

Mark 14:10, 11

And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went unto the chief priests, to betray him unto them. And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him.

It would seem that it was Jesus' commendation of Mary's worship that moved Judas to betray Him.

Mark 14:12–14

And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover? And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow

him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?

Carrying water was the job of women, so a man carrying a jar of water would have stood out even in a crowd.

Mark 14:15

And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us.

Many Bible scholars believe this Upper Room was owned by the mother of John Mark, the author of this Gospel. Most likely, it was the same room wherein the disciples met on the Day of Pentecost.

Mark 14:16–19

And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover. And in the evening he cometh with the twelve. And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I?

Only a few days previously, the disciples had argued over who was the greatest (Mark 9:34). At that time Jesus was not in their midst. Whenever Jesus is not in our midst, we start arguing over our position, our importance, our greatness. But now, in the presence of Jesus, their attitudes change radically. They're not asking "Who's the greatest?" They're asking, "Will I be the one to deny You?"

True humility is always the result of true intimacy with Jesus Christ. If I am close to the Lord at any given moment, rather than boasting of my greatness, I'll be aware of my weakness and His graciousness.

"Woe unto you," said Isaiah the prophet to all of the nations round about Israel in chapters 1—5 of the book that bears his name. But

when he saw the Lord high and lifted up, he said, "Woe is me*" (Isaiah 6:5).*

If we are those who are either overtly or secretly saying, "Woe to you; woe to you; woe to you," it's probably because we haven't seen the Lord as clearly as we should, for once we see Him, we see how sinful and unworthy we are ourselves and find ourselves joining the disciples in asking, "Is it I, Lord? Could I be the one who sells You out? Could I be the one who turns my back? Could I be the one who walks away?"

Mark 14:20, 21 (a)

And he answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish. The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed!

Don't think of the Last Supper as being served on a long maple table with everyone seated in New England ladder-back chairs on the same side of the table to pose for the picture. That's not the way it was. In those days, meals were served on a u-shaped table that was low to the ground. To eat, one would recline around the table, leaning on his right arm and using his left to dip bread into a common dish. From John's Gospel we know that John was on Jesus' right side (13:23). This means the one who dipped his hand into the dish with the Lord must have been on his left side—which was always the place of honor. In other words, Jesus gave Judas the place of honor the very night he betrayed Him. And when Judas would come a few hours later with the soldiers who would arrest Him, Jesus would say to Judas, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" (Matthew 26:50). Until the end, Jesus gave Judas an opportunity to repent.

This blesses me greatly because if Jesus placed Judas in a place of honor, and to the very end called him friend, He is a Friend closer than a brother indeed (Proverbs 18:24).

Mark 14:21 (b)

Good were it for that man if he had never been born.

Jesus wasn't saying He wished Judas had never been born. Rather, brokenheartedly, He was saying it would have been better for Judas had he never been born. The same still holds true for any man. He who is not born again soon will wish he had never been born at all because hell is a real place wherein the fire is never quenched and the worm dies not (Mark 9:43, 44).

Mark 14:22–25

And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

After eating the bread, the cup would be passed seven times. Evidently, on the seventh time, Jesus refused to drink from the cup, but said He would wait until He could drink it with us in the kingdom.

Mark 14:26

And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

Crossing the Kidron Valley, Jesus and His disciples made their way up the side of the Mount of Olives.

Mark 14:27–29

And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee. But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.

"Lord, I'll never leave You," Peter insisted, cock-sure of his loyalty.

Mark 14:30

And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.

"You're crowing about how great you are, Peter, but you'll soon discover otherwise," said Jesus.

Mark 14:31–33

But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all. And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray. And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy.

Facing spiritual and physical suffering more intense than anything we can imagine, Jesus went to the garden to pray—and asked Peter, James, and John to accompany Him. He didn't ask them to pray with Him—simply to be with Him. I find it interesting that during the most intense time of His whole life, Jesus would want human companionship. There is no shortage of people who will say, "Lord, I'll work for You." But I wonder how many say, "Lord, I'm taking some time just to be with You."

Mark 14:34–36

And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch. And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.

Why could Jesus submit to God's will? Because He understood God's nature. Jesus saw God not as a Cosmic Killjoy or an angry cop, but as a Father, a Papa, an Abba.

The greatest prayer of faith we make is when we say, "Lord, here's my perspective, my intention—but it is Your will that must be done because You see things I don't; You know things I can't." When you are truly secure in who the Father is, you'll find yourself praying His will to be done rather than demanding that your own plan be enacted.

Mark 14:37

And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour?

Jesus had changed Peter's name from Simon, or "Shifting Sand," to Peter, or "Rock" (Matthew 16:18). Here, finding him sleeping, Jesus calls him Simon once again.

Mark 14:38

Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.

True prayer is as much protection as it is petition. Things happen to me that wouldn't have happened had I prayed. And the same is true for you.

Mark 14:39–41

And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words. And when he returned, he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy,) neither wist they what to answer him. And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

With a time gap of unknown duration between verse 41 and 42, Jesus told His disciples to give in to the sleep that continued to overtake them.

Mark 14:42

Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand.

Jesus could rise up because He had already knelt down. He could stand up because He already had bowed down. Jesus found strength for this moment because of the time He had spent in prayer.

Mark 14:43–47 (a)

And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely. And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, master; and kissed him. And they laid their hands on him, and took him. And one of them that stood by drew a sword . . .

We know from John 18:10 that the one who smote the servant of the high priest was Peter. Perhaps the reason he's not identified here by name is because Mark's Gospel is his story, maybe he wanted to distance himself from this incident.

Mark 14:47 (b)

. . . and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

Peter used the wrong weapon at the wrong time for the wrong purpose with the wrong motive. So, too, any time I use the Sword of the Spirit—the Word—to chop someone else down, I will only leave ears in my wake. "Put away your sword," Jesus said to Peter (Matthew 26:52). And I wonder if He doesn't whisper the same thing to some of us from time to time. Regardless of how many Bible verses we know, if we're chopping off ears and people are bleeding because we're trying to prove our own spirituality, we're in error.

Luke tells us the Lord stooped down, picked up Malchus' ear and reattached it (22:51). Likewise, He restores the ears I've chopped off and corrects the mistakes I've made. After the Lord corrected him, Peter quit swinging and put down his sword. And so must we.

Mark 14:48, 49

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled.

Jesus' teaching was available to anyone and everyone. He didn't have an esoteric secret agenda to share with a few chosen ones. Rather, He gave His teaching publicly, openly to everyone, to anyone who wanted to listen.

Mark 14:50

And they all forsook him, and fled.

"Let him who thinks he stand take heed lest he fall," Paul warns us (1 Corinthians 10:12). The same one who just a few hours previously had declared, "Lord, I will never forsake You," now fled.

Mark 14:51, 52

And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked.

Most commentators agree that this young man was John Mark. Most likely a teenager at this time, awakened by the sound of the commotion outside, he probably quickly wrapped himself in a sheet and followed the soldiers to the Garden of Gethsemane—fleeing the scene when things looked dangerous.

Mark 14:53, 54

And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes. And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.

Peter was cold not only physically but spiritually—which would lead to his denial of Christ altogether. Was there a time when you were following the Lord with a "front-row" mentality before your schedule filled with hobbies and activities to the point that now you're following Him "afar off "? Peter became so cold that he sought to warm himself by the enemy's fire. So, too, your desire to warm yourself by the fires of the old gang or your old haunts will be proportionate to the distance you have allowed between yourself and the Lord.

Mark 14:55–59

And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none. For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together.

As we see in the next chapter, the reason the priests and leaders were determined to see Jesus killed was simply envy. Realizing there was something about Him that attracted people to Him, they sought to do away with Him. And wanting to give their actions the appearance of legality, they called men who would bear false witness against Him. What is false witness? It's not always an outright whopper of a lie. As in this case, it's simply the right information but with the wrong implication. Jesus did indeed say He would destroy the temple—but He was talking about His own body (John 2:19–21).

Mark 14:60–62 (a)

And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am . . .

• "Who shall I say sent me?" Moses asked.
• "I am that I am," God answered (Exodus 3:14).

And here, Jesus uses the same name.

Mark 14:62 (b)

. . . and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

After speaking of His deity, Jesus immediately refers to His humanity, using a phrase from Daniel 7:13, which speaks of Messiah's humanity.

Mark 14:63, 64

Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.

Even as Caiaphas ripped his clothes, the validity would be ripped from the priesthood of Aaron, and the veil in the temple would be ripped in two, signifying that the entire temple system would no longer be necessary.

Mark 14:65

And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophesy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.

"When someone smites you, turn the other cheek," Jesus had taught (Luke 6:29). Did He do this? There being no inconsistency whatsoever between what He said and what He did, Jesus not only turned His cheek, but He also gave His entire body to die for the very men who beat Him.

Mark 14:66–70

And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with

Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto.

As Peter discovered, our attempts to warm ourselves by the world's fires always backfire. As believers, our accent betrays us. We don't laugh as hard as we once did; we don't enter in as freely as we used to because although we have too much of the world to enjoy the Lord, we also have too much of the Lord to enjoy the world.

Mark 14:71

But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak.

When their nets became tangled on the bottom of the sea, fishermen resorted to using the most vulgar oaths and cursing. Having hit bottom himself, Peter is tangled up in his own pride and sin, and therefore does what came naturally to the fisherman he had been.

Mark 14:72 (a)

And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.

Due to the mess they made, roosters were not allowed in the city of Jerusalem. Therefore, a rooster's crow would have been a strange sound. But, in this case, it was an appropriate one because Peter surely had made a mess of things.

Mark 14:72 (b)

And when he thought thereon, he wept.

Translated "wept," the Greek word doesn't mean to shed a silent tear. Rather, it means to convulse in sorrow. At this point, as far as Peter knew, his relationship with Jesus was permanently and totally severed. As far as he knew, his sin was unpardonable.

No wonder he wept.



15 Mark 15:1 (a)

And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away . . .

Jesus was bound not by puny ropes, but by cords of love. As Creator of the ropes, He could have burst them easily. As the Lamb of God, He chose to be bound by them willingly.

Mark 15:1 (b)–2

. . . and delivered him to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answering said unto him, Thou sayest it.

Pilate, the sixth Roman governor in this region, was in political trouble. He had already made the mistake of allowing a picture of Caesar to be placed on the temple mount, causing the Jews to riot. His second mistake was financing an aqueduct with funds from the temple treasury, again resulting in a riot. Thus, after two riots in which a number of people had been killed, Pilate was warned by Rome that one more strike and he'd be out.

Jesus went through two trials—one before Caiaphas and a second before Pilate and Herod. Due to His claim of deity, the Jews accused Him of being too heavenly, while Herod, thinking He wanted to lead a coup politically, accused Him of being too earthly.

Throughout history, the church has gone through this same two-fold trial —and so will you. People will accuse you of being too heavenly, while, at the same time, another group will accuse you of being too worldly. "You're

all pie in the sky," some will say, while others will tell you you're backsliding because they saw you going thirty-six in a thirty-five mph zone. You'll get hit both ways—and when you do, realize Jesus did as well.

Mark 15:3

And the chief priests accused him of many things: but he answered nothing.

Jesus is an oasis of tranquility in a sea of controversy. To any who truly wanted information, Jesus would answer willingly (Mark 14:62). But to those who hurled accusation, He answered not a word. And therein lies a good principle. If someone wants information, we should share freely and openly. But if they only want to accuse us, we need not defend ourselves.

Mark 15:4–7

And Pilate asked him again, saying, Answerest thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against thee. But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled. Now at that feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired. And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection.

"Barabbas" means "son of Abba," or an Israelite. The parallel is obvious. Barabbas, a son of Abba, had taken a life, while Jesus, the only begotten Son of Abba had come to give His life.

Mark 15:8–10

And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them. But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy.

Any crusade to crucify usually has its roots in envy or jealousy. Even Pilate knew this.

Mark 15:11–15

But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them. And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom ye call the King of the Jews? And they cried out again, Crucify him. Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him. And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified.

Jesus was scourged not because the Father in heaven was allowing sadistic pain to be placed upon His beloved Son, but because, as Isaiah tells us, although it is by the Cross we are saved, it is by His stripes that we are healed (Isaiah 53:5).

Mark 15:16–20

And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Praetorium; and they call together the whole band. And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head, and began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing their knees worshipped him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.

Jesus was led out of the city because the scapegoat—the one who bore the sins of the people in Old Testament typology—was always led out of the city (Leviticus 16:10).

Mark 15:21 (a)

And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country . . .

Simon had traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, and as he approached the procession toward Golgatha, he was tapped on the shoulder

with the flat side of the spear of a Roman soldier and ordered to take up the Cross of the One before him who was no longer able to bear its weight on His lacerated and bruised shoulders.

Jesus does not bear the Cross for two reasons . . .

It was not His Cross. It was mine. I am the one who deserves to go to hell.

Secondly, He's showing us that taking up our cross doesn't mean gritting our teeth and being miserable. It means letting the Cross do to us exactly what it did to Him when it caused Him to fall on His knees and allow another to bear it.

Mark 15:21 (b)

. . . the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.

Simon is identified as the father of Alexander and Rufus because they would have been known as key members of the early church—which means that at some point after bearing Jesus' Cross, Simon got saved.

Mark 15:22–24

And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull. And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not. And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.

Because clothing identifies one's culture perhaps more readily than any other single feature, in being stripped of every article of clothing, pinned to the wooden Cross of Calvary in naked humanity, Jesus shed every identifying mark of any single culture, thereby becoming the Savior for *all* the world.



***For topical study of Mark 15:24 entitled "Christ for All Nations," turn to page* 288.**

Mark 15:25–30

And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS. And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors. And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, Save thyself, and come down from the cross.

"Come down from the Cross" is still being heard today as the world continues to clamor for a Cross-less Christ. "Jesus is cool," they say. "He was a good teacher, a good example, a good moral leader. But don't talk to me about the Cross. It's too bloody."

Mark 15:31

Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save.

The fact that Jesus had indeed saved others was undeniable—for in their midst were lepers who had been cleansed, blind men who could now see, lame men who were now walking. The chief priests were right when they said He saved others. And they were equally right when they said, "Himself He cannot save"—for if He had come down off the Cross, He could not have saved me.

Mark 15:32 (a)

Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.

"If I can see it, I'll believe it," said the skeptics. But the way of the Lord is always if you believe it, *then* you'll be able to see it.

Mark 15:32 (b), 33

And they that were crucified with him reviled him. And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

For three hours, there was complete, total darkness. Why? Think back to Exodus. What happened before the Passover lamb was killed? The entire land was covered with darkness for three days (Exodus 10:21, 22), symbolizing the darkness that would descend as the Lamb of God was slain. Because they had no desire to see spiritually, men became unable to see physically what was really taking place on the Cross of Calvary.

Mark 15:34

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

I believe Jesus' cry is kept in the original Aramaic, His native tongue on earth, in order to show the intensity of His cry. Leprosy didn't intimidate Him; storms didn't frighten Him; armies didn't faze Him. The only thing that terrified our Lord was being out of fellowship with His Father. And when He who knew no sin became sin for us, that is exactly what happened. Because we have grown accustomed to being out of touch with God, the things that terrify us are bounced checks, not getting the promotion, or a boyfriend or girlfriend breaking up with us. Jesus, on the other hand, had faith concerning that that frightens us, yet was terrorized by that which we barely notice.

Mark 15:35

And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias.

Had those at the Cross been perceptive, they would have recognized Jesus' words as the beginning of Psalm 22, a Messianic Psalm describing crucifixion in great detail centuries before it was ever conceived as capital punishment. Instead, some in the crowd thought He was calling for Elijah.

Mark 15:36

And one ran and filled a spunge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down.

Because vinegar was used as a drug to numb some of the pain, was this done out of compassion? No. It was done out of curiosity—to sustain Jesus' life long enough to see if Elijah would indeed come.

Mark 15:37 (a)
And Jesus cried with a loud voice . . .

Jesus' cry was comprised of the three greatest words spoken in the history of humanity: "It Is Finished." From the day of His birth until the day He died, the Enemy came against Jesus relentlessly, trying to derail Him, to destroy Him, to keep Him from providing salvation. But the Enemy failed when Jesus finished the work of redemption on Calvary. Thus, His was a cry not of agony, but of victory.

Mark 15:37 (b)
. . . and gave up the ghost.

Why isn't there a description of the actual act of crucifixion? I believe it's because, rather than arousing our feelings, the Father wants to affirm our faith; that His desire is not to move us emotionally, but that we understand rationally that Jesus finished the work.

Mark 15:38
And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

In rending the massive veil in the temple that kept everyone but the high priest from going into the Holy of Holies where the shekinah—the visible presence of God—dwelt, the Father declared, "Open House! You can come boldly into My presence anytime you want because the price has been paid once and for all."

This grace is free—but it's not cheap because it cost Jesus everything to open the way to the Father. Therefore, don't sew the veil back up, gang, with legalism, rules, regulations, or expectations. Don't feel as though you must prove something to God before you can come into His presence to present your petitions or to enjoy His fellowship. Believers do this in subtle ways, like saying, "Before we can enter into the glory of God, we must spend time praising Him." Not true. The way is open. Nothing else remains to be done. Am I discounting the importance of praise? Of course not. Praise allows us to be refreshed in our knowledge of who the Lord is and what He's done. But it is not a prerequisite to fellowship. Neither is confession. As valid as both of these elements are, we can come boldly into the presence of God not because of our ability to articulate confession or express praise, but solely because of what Jesus did on Calvary.

Mark 15:39

And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.

It was in the Lord's death that the centurion found life. It was in the time of darkness that he saw the light. "Lord," we cry, "if you loved Me enough to die for me, if the veil was rent to open the way for me, then why am I going through this difficulty, this tragedy?"

"Because there are centurions watching," He declares. "And they will see My light in your dark days."

Dear saint, if you want to be used by God, there is no other way than to go through disappointment, difficulty, and pain in order that people might relate to you, observe you, and see by the reality of Jesus in your life that He truly is the Son of God. People are not convinced of the reality of His reality when they see us sailing through easy times and prosperous days. Such times cause only envy and cynicism. When people are truly touched is when they see us navigating adversity and difficulty all the while trusting the Lord (2 Corinthians 1:4). This centurion was won, saved, converted not because he was one of the five thousand eating bread and fish in the sunlight, but because he saw Jesus in the darkness.

Mark 15:40, 41

There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome; (Who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him;) and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem.

In all of the Gospel stories, you will never find a woman opposing or resisting the ministry of Jesus Christ. Where were the disciples at this point? Men's love being primarily based on logic, it was no longer logical for them to be at the Cross. After all, what could they do? They couldn't mount a military defense. Peter tried that and failed miserably. So they simply scattered. Women's love being not so much logical as it is emotional and mystical, however, the women remained at the Cross.

Mark 15:42, 43

And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counseller, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus.

Joseph of Arimathaea was a secret disciple. After all, had he identified with Jesus openly, he would have lost his coveted position in the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court. But seeing Jesus on the Cross caused such courage and passion to flood his heart that he asked for His body—fully knowing that touching it would defile him and prevent him from celebrating Passover, fully knowing he would be in danger from Roman and Jew alike, fully knowing that he would be ostracized financially and socially.

That is the way it always is. When you really see the Cross, you have no choice but to "crave" the Lord. You have no choice but to openly share the gospel. That's why Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19) —for when I remember what the Lord did for me as I eat of His body and drink of His blood, much of what was important to me only a few hours

previously isn't important any longer. As it did for Joseph of Arimathaea, the Cross has an incredible way of changing one's priorities.

Mark 15:44–47

And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre. And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid.

"Joseph" literally means "addition." And that is exactly what will happen when, in addition to Jesus bursting forth from the grave, believers throughout history will one day burst forth to live eternally.

Maybe you're a Joseph—one who is quieter in personality. Although you may not be one who preaches or distributes tracts to everyone you see, I have found that when the going really gets tough, when push comes to shove, a lot of time it's the Josephs who emerge as heroes, solid and steadfast. In the moment of greatest danger, when the hour of challenge has come, it is the Josephs who are often those who are most solid in time of crisis.

May this be true to an ever greater degree of us.

CHRIST FOR ALL NATIONS

A Topical Study of MARK 15:24

A number of years ago, I felt as though I was called on the carpet by the Holy Spirit in conjunction with the war that ensued when, in their determination to silence the PLO shelling of the Sea of Galilee region, Israel invaded Lebanon. The Syrians in their Soviet MIG 23s and the Israelis in their modified American F16s engaged in brutal aerial warfare. But the Israelis won decisively. And when I heard that one hundred three Syrian jets went down to only one of the Israeli jets, I cheered loudly—until the Holy Spirit began to speak to my heart very strongly, saying, "I love the Syrians just as much as I love the Israelis, just as much as I love the Americans. I designed each one of those men. I died for each one of those men. And now you're rejoicing and applauding because one hundred three were shot down from the sky? Is that like Me?"

After that, I went through a real time of repenting before the Lord, saying, "Forgive me, Father, for being so prejudiced in a pseudo-spiritual kind of way against people who are not on my side. Forgive even my understanding of prophecy to manifest itself in a heart that is not like Yours."

> *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*
>
> 2 Peter 3:9

Peter didn't say that God is not willing that any Americans should perish, that any Israelis should perish, or that any of the Western allies should perish. Peter says God is not willing that *any* should perish.

Cultural Application

I believe the text before us speaks to this issue very clearly. You see, before Jesus was nailed to the Cross, He was stripped of His clothes. Although we know this was done partially to fulfill some of the three hundred-plus prophecies given concerning the birth, life, and death of the coming Messiah, I believe the reason for it is broader than that.

Prophecies were given not only to be fulfilled, but also to help us understand who Jesus is and what He does. And because clothing identifies one's culture perhaps more readily than any other single feature, in being stripped of every article of clothing, pinned to the wooden Cross of Calvary in naked humanity, Jesus shed every identifying mark of any single culture, thereby becoming the Savior for *all* the world.

This, however, does not discount the fact that the Lord uses nations to bring about righteousness and judgment. . . .

> *O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.*
>
> Isaiah 10:5–6

After the people of Israel had fallen into all kinds of idolatry, ignored the Sabbath, and turned their hearts from Him, the Lord stirred the hearts of the Babylonians—today's Iraq—to come down and discipline His people.

> *Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? And the LORD answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words. So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at*

ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.

Zechariah 1:12–15

Here, the Lord says, "I am displeased with the Babylonians because they went beyond what I intended for them to do when they began to beat My people, destroy the city, and tear down the temple."

I am not suggesting what American policy should be concerning the Middle East or any other nation. But I know what our attitude and heart must be as believers. If the Lord should choose to use our nation to bring about order in the world, so be it. But let us not "forward the affliction." Let us not rejoice at dead Iraqis. Let us not applaud bombs that hit targets effectively.

The flag with which we must closely identify must not be the one sewn with stars and stripes, but the one stained with blood on wood—the Cross of Christ. May our goal not be nationalism or patriotism—but compassion and intercession.

Personal Application

Not only does the Lord love the Iraqi, Iranian, American, and Indian equally—but He loves us personally as much as He loves Billy Graham. He isn't saying, "I'm really into Montreat where Billy and Ruth are gathering to worship Me. But how I dread going to Calvary Chapel to be with Jon and his wife, Tammy." No! The Lord doesn't see it that way! He is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). He has no favorites.

"What about Abraham?" you ask. "Isn't he specifically referred to as the friend of God?"

Yes (James 2:23). And it is no wonder, for it was Abraham who planted an orchard as a creative, spontaneous act of worship (Genesis 21:33).

But wait.

Centuries later, there was another man whom God called "friend" . . .

> There in the town of Bethany in the house where a small group gathered around Jesus only days before He would be pinned to the Cross of Calvary, Mary broke open a box of costly ointment and poured it upon the Lord as an act of worship and love for Him.
>
> "What a waste," Judas scoffed. "That money could have been used to help the poor" (Matthew 26:9).

How different Judas is from Abraham. Abraham planted a tree in worship, while Judas called worship a waste. And yet, incredibly enough, both were called the friend of God—for there in the garden, even as he was in the very act of betrayal, Jesus called Judas, "Friend" (Matthew 26:50).

Such impartial, unconditional love I don't understand—but I sure do enjoy it. For whether I'm being an Abraham or a Judas, my Lord calls me His friend. And the same is true of you. No matter where you're at, He loves you because His friendship with you is not based upon how you're doing, but upon what He did on Calvary's Cross when He paid the price for every sin you've ever done, are doing, or will ever do.

He loves the person sitting next to you that way as well. And He loves the neighbor who plays his stereo too loudly. He loves the boss who didn't give you the promotion you know you deserve, and the coach who keeps you

on the bench so his son can play. He loves the Iraqi, the Egyptian, the Communist, the Jew, Nelson Mandela, Fidel Castro, Jimmy Carter, and George Bush. He's not a respecter of persons, of races, of cultures, of countries.

Oh, that His heart of love for a lost world would beat in me.



16 Mark 16:1

And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

For Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, it was a sad Sabbath day indeed. The One in whom they believed, the One to whom they had clung, their Hero, their Leader, their Friend was no longer with them. It wasn't a matter of theology, or His redemptive work on the Cross of Calvary. They loved Jesus personally. They enjoyed being with this One who was so gracious, who forgave so freely, who spoke so truthfully. It wasn't a matter of their Messianic hopes being dashed. It was simply a matter of missing Him.

Mark 16:2

And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.

"I love them that love Me," the Lord says, "and those that seek Me early shall find Me" (Proverbs 8:17). Expecting to see nothing more than Jesus' dead body, in their time of depression, discouragement, defeat, sadness, and confusion these women rose early. How much more, then, should we be willing to get up early to seek the living Lord? This isn't an obligation—it's an opportunity available to each of us on any given day. If you feel as though you're in the dark now, be like these women. Rise early and seek the risen Lord—for these who sought Him early would be the first ones to understand and experience Resurrection Sunday.

Mark 16:3–5

And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

The stone was rolled away not to let Jesus out. After all, He could walk through walls (Luke 24:36). Rather, the stone was rolled away to let these women—and others who would follow—in. Why? To see the reality of the Resurrection.

The Resurrection proves the validity of Jesus' sacrifice because without it, we would never know if His work on our behalf was accepted. Then it would be a toss-up between believing Jesus, Buddha, Mohammad, or any other self-proclaimed prophet or guru. The Resurrection places Jesus in a different category than any other so-called holy man.

Secondly, the Resurrection not only proves the validity of His sacrifice, but it provides the ability for us to live in Christ. The Christian life is not a matter of trying to be a "good" Christian or even of imitating Jesus. It is not imitation, but rather impartation. That is, Jesus is alive. He rose again. And He sends His Spirit to come and dwell in me, to tell me what I should do and then to give me the power to be able to do it. That's why the Resurrection is essential.

Mark 16:6, 7 (a)

And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee . . .

This was at a time when, having denied the Lord and having walked away from the Lord, Peter would certainly feel excluded from any Good News, from any hope of being used. If you feel the same way tonight, this verse is for you. To you who feel like you've denied the Lord or ignored the

Lord, the angel says, "Tell His disciples and Peter—especially Peter, particularly Peter—that the Lord goes before you into Galilee and you will see Him. All you have to do is show up."

Mark 16:7 (b)–8

. . . there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.

The word translated "afraid" doesn't mean terrified. It means "ecstatic." For these women who were so despairing only minutes ago, confused about life, depressed by life, without hope for life—everything had changed simply because they rose up early and sought Him, even though they did not believe they would even find Him alive.

We must not talk about our obstacles, our schedules, our busyness, our activities, or our demands without taking into consideration the two-thousand-pound stone that stood between these women and the Lord they thought was dead. Because the stone didn't stop them, now they're ecstatic.

Mark 16:9–11

Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not.

According to the original language, so deeply had they loved Jesus, that after three days, these rugged fishermen were still weeping with convulsive sobs. But when Mary Magdalene reported that He was alive, what did they do? They went right back to weeping and hurting. Why? Because of the thief of unbelief.

Maybe you're weeping tonight because your body is hurting, your business is collapsing, or your relationships are eroding. In reality, however, none of those are the source of your tears. Because the living Lord has said to

you everything is working together for good, because He has said we are to give thanks in all things, because He has given us promise after promise that He is with us and will never forsake us, it is neither your job, marriage, family, finances, or health that cause your tears. It is unbelief. Period.

It has been rightly said that a little faith will get you to heaven, but a larger faith will bring heaven to you. Indeed, I will experience heaven in my heart to the degree that I have faith that the Lord is alive, that He's faithful, and that everything is working out exactly as He promised.

If the disciples had believed at that moment, like Mary, they would have moved into ecstasy. But they chose not to believe and remained in their sorrow longer than necessary.

Mark 16:12, 13

After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them.

- "We saw Him!" the ecstatic pair on the road to Emmaus exclaimed (Luke 24:35).

  "No you didn't," said the downcast disciples.
- "We talked to Him!" said the travelers.

  "You couldn't have," said His followers.

Hour after hour, day after day the disciples remained in a needless state of depression and despondency simply and solely because of unbelief.

Mark 16:14

Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.

Jesus didn't upbraid the disciples for their denying, for their running, for their fear. He upbraided them for one thing only: their unbelief. But then, as only our Lord, does, He quickly moved on.

Mark 16:15

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

It was as if Jesus said, "I've corrected you. I am going to use you. Now get going! There's work to do!"

Although you've probably heard dozens of messages on this text with regard to foreign missions, quite literally what is being said here is not, "Go into all the world," but, "*As* you are going throughout the world, preach the gospel to every creature." In other words, the focus is not on where we are to go, but on what we are to do. Whether it be across the ocean or across the street, around the world or around the neighborhood, on foreign soil or on the campus—whatever we're doing, we're to share the gospel.

I'm convinced most of us really want to do this, but we fail to not so much because of intimidation, but because of articulation. That is, we are not really sure what it means to preach the gospel. Does sharing the gospel mean we're to talk about the creation account of Genesis, about the end times of Revelation, about the praise and worship of the Psalms, about the working of the Spirit in Acts? What does it actually mean to share the gospel?

Paul answers this question masterfully when he reminds the Corinthian believers of the gospel he had shared with them. . . .

> For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures. . . .
>
> 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4

The gospel is comprised of three simple but powerful components. . . .

The first component of the gospel is that Jesus Christ died for our sins. You have the opportunity to tell people their sins are forgiven regardless of what they've done, are doing, or ever will do because Jesus Christ was nailed to the wooden beam of the Cross of Calvary, where He bled profusely to pay the price for every sin. You don't need to convince people they're sinners. They already know it . . .

According to scientists, male moths flutter around candles because they think hot wax smells like female moths—a confusion that is usually fatal! That's what we do! We flutter around things that look hot, that smell good—only to get burned time and time again.

So I get to pick up hitchhikers and say, "You look like you feel pretty guilty. But guess what. You're forgiven! A couple thousand years ago, God sent His Son to become a Man and die in your place. You're free! Only one sin is unforgivable: your failure to accept what He did for you. But every other sin is already forgiven." *That's* Good News!

The second component of the gospel is that Jesus was buried and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Peter tells us that during the time Jesus was buried He went to hell and preached to the worst of the demons, telling them they no longer had authority over man because their toe-hold of sin had been obliterated by His blood (1 Peter 3:18–20). Therefore, although Satan and his demons can try to intimidate us verbally, they are powerless in reality.

The third and final component of the gospel is that Jesus rose again—something no other guru, holy man, exalted teacher, or revered leader ever did before or has ever done since—thereby substantiating and validating His work on the Cross.

In chapter 1, after Jesus healed a man of leprosy, He said, "Tell no man." But what did the leper do? He "published it much" (Mark 1:45)—he told everyone! Here, at the end of Mark's Gospel, Jesus says, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to everyone." But what do we do? We don't tell anyone. Why? I believe it's because we forget the beauty, the simplicity, the wonder of the gospel.

Mark 16:16

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

The Greek word translated "saved" is *sozo,* and while it indeed speaks of the miracle of being born again, it also speaks of experiencing the full orb of God's blessing. We see the same word used in the Gospels and in the

Book of Acts with reference to those who were healed from physical disease or delivered from the influence of demons. Thus, the healing and deliverance Jesus ministered were both physical and eternal.

When asked if one has to be baptized to be saved, my answer is "Yes and no." A person doesn't have to be baptized to be born again. A person can go to heaven without being baptized, as evidenced by the thief who was saved even as he hung on a cross (Luke 23:43). But he would not experience the full orb of that which God intends a person to enjoy in liberty, maturity, and ministry.

Following are *six* aspects of the simple yet potent picture of baptism . . .

Baptism is *illustration.* As spoken of in Romans 6, baptism illustrates the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. This is why I believe the accurate mode of baptism is immersion. After all, we don't bury heads. We bury entire bodies.

Baptism is *proclamation.* Even if we appear to be "all wet," it is in the act of baptism that we go public with our belief that Jesus died, was buried, and resurrected.

Baptism is *identification.* The Greek word translated "baptize" is *baptizo,* which speaks of immersing cloth into a dye. Jesus did countless things we can't do. But baptism is something He did that we can do as we are immersed in the same way He was, taking upon ourselves the blood-red dye of His death for us.

Baptism is *association.* In being baptized, I am not only identifying with Jesus, but with those all over the world presently and down through the ages of history who, regardless of doctrinal or denominational distinctives, are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We might not agree on the timing of the Rapture, the meaning of Communion, or the use of tongues. But we are all wonderfully, powerfully associated in the waters of baptism (Ephesians 4:5).

Baptism is *liberation.* Peter tells us that baptism has the same effect today that the Flood did in Noah's day. . . .

Due to its pollution of sin encasing the world, God sent a flood to drown out the corruption. And the same water that cleansed the world lifted up the ark to plant Noah and his family safely on dry ground. So, too, when a person is baptized, the power of the world's evil system is diminished and drowned

out. This doesn't mean he will no longer sin. It means the power has been broken, that he no longer *has* to sin, that he's delivered to the firm ground of a walk with the Lord.

Baptism is *impartation.* When Jesus was baptized and emerged out of the waters of the Jordan, the Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove, empowering Him to minister, to preach, to work miracles. So, too, I believe that the time of baptism is the ideal time to receive by faith the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. "Repent and be baptized," Peter declared, "and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Thus, embracing by faith the filling of the Spirit as one emerges from the waters of baptism is what is seen in the baptism of Jesus and the teaching of Peter.

Mark 16:17, 18

And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

Notice Jesus did not say those who believe shall follow signs. He said signs would follow those who believe. In other words, as they went into all the world, if they were bitten by a snake or unknowingly partook of something poisonous, the Lord would protect them, and people would see His reality through them. It was as they went into all the world that signs and wonders would accompany them—not as they charged people for seminars or remained within the safety of the church.

Mark 16:19

So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

Jesus left earth and went to heaven to be our Advocate, our Defense Attorney, to intercede for you and me (Hebrews 7:25).

Mark 16:20

And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

Even as we see today, the Lord is *indeed* living and working.
Amen!



LUKE

Background to Luke

A companion of Paul on his missionary journeys as well as being referred to as the beloved physician (Colossians 4:14), Luke could be considered the prototype of today's missionary doctors. Some commentators believe that Paul and Luke were classmates at the University of Tarsus. Be that as it may, we do know Luke was a scholar, for he employed the most exacting Greek of any of the Gospel writers. In addition to his education, Luke's command of the Greek language is primarily explained by the fact that he himself was Greek.

Matthew, a Jew, wrote primarily to the Jews, presenting Jesus Christ as King of the Jews. Mark, a Jew, presented Jesus as a Servant, and wrote to the Romans. John, a Jew, presents Jesus as the Son of God, and writes to all men. Luke, a Greek, writes primarily to the Greeks. And because the Greeks were fascinated with Aristotle's ideal republic and Plato's ideal man, Luke writes of Jesus as the Son of Man, the perfect Man.

LUKE

Luke 1:1–4

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

After interviewing eyewitnesses, Luke wrote a carefully constructed report for Theophilus concerning the things he had been hearing. Some suggest Theophilus was Luke's previous owner. You see, although the practice of medicine was a noble calling, there wasn't a lot of money in it. Consequently, men of means had their own slave doctors. Therefore, it is thought that Theophilus was a wealthy man who had Luke as his slave/doctor, got converted, and released Luke to pursue missionary journeys with Paul. This could well be. Others suggest Theophilus, or "Lover of God," was merely an alias for someone who was being protected from possible persecution. Still others suggest that Theophilus was not an individual at all, but a code name for a group of people meeting in the name of Christ. Be Theophilus a real person, an alias for an individual, or a group of people, Luke's intent was to provide a carefully documented account.

Luke 1:5 (a)

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea . . .

These were desperate, dark days for the nation of Israel. Not only had there been a famine of manifestations or words from the Lord for four hundred years, but Herod the Great was on the throne—a ruler who killed his wives and offspring so readily that a popular saying of the day was that it was safer to be Herod's pig than his son.

Luke 1:5 (b)

. . . a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.

The priesthood was split into twenty-four courses, or groups, of priests who would take one week off twice a year from farming their land or tending their shops to serve in the temple. During the major festivals or feasts, however, all of the priests would gather in Jerusalem to share the temple duties.

Luke 1:6, 7

And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.

In this culture at this time, barrenness was considered a curse from God, indicative that the childless couple must be, or had been doing something very wrong. And yet here we are told that although Elisabeth was barren, she and Zacharias were blameless before the Lord. This is a reminder to me not to judge things too quickly. Yes, Zacharias and Elisabeth are childless presently, but the Lord is setting the stage for something amazing to happen through the child they are about to bear.

Luke 1:8–10

And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.

The altar of incense represents prayer. Every morning and evening, the priests would pour incense upon the altar in the Holy Place, and when it hit

the hot coals, the scent would rise up into heaven, creating a sweet-smelling savor before God.

Luke 1:11–13 (a)

And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard . . .

> And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.
>
> Revelation 8:3

I suggest to you the meaning of the passages before us is very practical for you and me—for if indeed prayers are being stored in heaven, it could be that your bowl of prayers concerning any given person, need, or situation is almost full and ready to be released on your behalf. I don't know how many prayers it takes to fill a bowl. Sometimes, but not usually, I pray once, and things happen. More often, however, it takes a continual asking, seeking, and knocking (Matthew 7:7).

Could it be that some of us are just about ready to give up praying for that situation or need, desire or person? Could it be that the Father is saying, "Don't give up now—just a couple more prayers will tip the bowl. Just a couple more prayers will release the blessing"? When we get to heaven, I wonder if we'll see all sorts of bowls poised to be poured had we not given up, had we not stopped seeking, had we not quit praying.

Luke 1:13 (b)

. . . and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

"John" means "God is Gracious."

Luke 1:14–18

And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.

Zacharias could have rejoiced. Instead, he questioned. That's what the thief of unbelief does. At a time when you and I could be celebrating and rejoicing, with folded arms and cynical hearts, we're robbed.

Luke 1:19, 20

And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

"I believe, therefore I have spoken," declared Paul (see 2 Corinthians 4:13). Zacharias didn't believe. Therefore, he will not be able to speak. If you allow the thief of unbelief to rob you of joy, you'll neither witness to others nor praise the Father. Your lips will be sealed if your heart is cynical. But if you are one who embraces with childlike simplicity the promises the Father has given you in His Word, you will speak and rejoice.

Luke 1:21

And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple.

After the priest burned the incense, he would come out and bless the people. Thus, the people were waiting for the blessing from Zacharias.

Luke 1:22, 23

And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless. And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.

Following his week of service in the temple, Zacharias and Elisabeth returned home.

Luke 1:24, 25

And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.

Although Zacharias' unbelief rendered him speechless, it did not thwart God's purposes.

Luke 1:26, 27

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

According to Jewish custom, based upon the arrangement made between their parents, a couple could become engaged even as young children. Then, a year before their marriage, they would become espoused, which meant that although they would not consummate their relationship, they would be considered husband and wife in a legal binding so strong, it required a divorce to break the relationship.

Luke 1:28 (a)

And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured. . . .

The Greek word translated "highly favored" is *charitoo,* and means "highly blessed" or "much graced." It is used only one other time in the Bible, not concerning Mary, but concerning you (Ephesians 1:6). We are highly favored not because of who we are, but because of where we are. Where are we? We are in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Luke 1:28 (b)
. . . the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

Most scholars believe Mary at this point was about fifteen or sixteen years old, the usual age of espousal in that day. What a wonderful young woman she must have been—a woman selected of all the women of history to be the one to bear God's Son. Later on in the chapter, as we come to the Magnificat, it becomes obvious that she had a heart for God and insight into the Word. And yet I ask you to note that the text reads that she was blessed *among* women, not *above* women. There is no scriptural example to suggest that Mary be worshiped or prayed to. Not a single word. She is indeed the most blessed among women, but she is only a woman.

Luke 1:29–31
And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

"Jesus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew "Joshua," which means "Jehovah is Salvation."

Luke 1:32, 33
He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

The government of the kingdom of God is upon the shoulder of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 9:6). What government did He bear upon His shoulder? The Cross. The Cross identified Him uniquely as a King who would die for His subjects, a King who would become poor so that we might become rich, a King who would go to hell that we might live in heaven, a King who came preaching Good News and great joy for all men.

Luke 1:34 (a)
Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be . . .

Unlike Zacharias, Mary didn't question Gabriel's statement. She simply questioned the methodology.

Luke 1:34 (b)
. . . seeing I know not a man?

"I know not a man," said Mary.

"I have no man to help me," said the lame man (see John 5:7).

Could this be the same thing we so often say when we ask, "What man, what leader, what pastor, what author is going to help me?" But watch Gabriel's answer . . .

Luke 1:35
And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

It's not a man who will bring fruitfulness to our lives. It's the Holy Spirit.

Luke 1:36

And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

Elisabeth was six months ahead of Mary in the process of the miraculous. So, too, some of you are six months ahead of me. I can see what the Lord has done in your life. I can see how He's touched you, used you, and helped you. That encourages me. That's what the body of Christ is all about. Find someone who's a little bit ahead of you in the area about which you're wondering or with which you're struggling, and hang out with him or her just as Mary will do with Elisabeth (Luke 1:39).

Luke 1:37, 38

For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

The 1901 American Standard Version (ASV) of the Bible translates verse 37 as: "For no word from God shall be void of power." I like that. Jesus will be birthed in the area of your life that was previously dark and unproductive if, like Mary, you simply embrace the Word He gives you.

Luke 1:39–44

And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; and entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

Not yet born, John is already worshiping. I've seen that happen, not physically, but spiritually. Sunday after Sunday when I was pastor of Applegate Christian Fellowship, people came with no intention of getting saved, much less baptized. But as they started perceiving the presence of the Lord, even though they were not yet born again, something stirred within them. And before they knew it, they were coming forward for salvation and baptism.

Luke 1:45

And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

The literal idea is that because this young, uneducated girl in the backcountry of Israel believed, that which was promised would now be performed.

Luke 1:46–47

And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

The soul refers to one's mind and emotions. The spirit speaks of one's essence—that which will live forever. The soul relates primarily to people; the spirit relates to God. Thus, Mary says, "My soul—my mind and emotions —magnify the Lord because my spirit— the deepest part of me—has rejoiced in God my Savior. In other words, because God has already elected me, I now choose for my soul to magnify the Lord presently."

Sometimes people say, "I don't worship because I don't feel like it." Mary says just the opposite when she says, "Worship has nothing to do with how I feel emotionally. It's all about what God has already done for me."

Luke 1:48–55

For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to

generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

Herein we see the beautiful theology and the depth of intimacy that was Mary's as she expresses with spontaneity her love for the Lord. No wonder it's called the Magnificat. It's magnificent indeed.

Luke 1:56–59

And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house. Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.

Custom dictated that the firstborn son be named after his father.

Luke 1:60

And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.

Elisabeth reiterated what Zacharias had been told in verse 13.

Luke 1:61, 62

And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.

This means not only was Zacharias unable to speak, but that he was also unable to hear. So, too, if I don't believe, I won't speak. And if I don't speak, I will no longer be able to hear the voice of my Father. It's when I'm speaking, sharing, and ministering that I am in the position to hear my Father more clearly. If you've ever thought you don't want to hear another Bible study, read another chapter, look at another commentary, I suggest it is indicative that you're not sharing with others—because when you're giving out, you'll be hungry to take more in.

Luke 1:63, 64

And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.

In naming his son John, Zacharias goes on record that he embraces what God said and what God did. I see in Zacharias a preview of what will come in Acts 2, when on the Day of Pentecost, the tongues of the disciples were also loosed to praise God in languages they did not know. People often say, "If God wants me to speak in tongues, He can move my tongue or make it happen." But Zacharias' tongue being loosed was predicated on the decision he had already made to believe God. Paul echoed this when he said, "I will pray in the Spirit and with understanding also" (see 1 Corinthians 14:15). In other words, it was a choice he made.

Speaking in tongues is not something that happens to a person mystically. Rather, it's the expression of one who says, "Lord, I don't understand how to pray about this situation properly, or how to worship You powerfully. So I will allow my spirit to pray." If you choose to move in this arena, your prayer might consist of a simple word or two or four—but you will find yourself by faith beginning to worship the Lord in a way your intellect is no longer struggling or straining to do. And you'll find your inner person being built up (see 1 Corinthians 14:4).

Luke 1:65–67

And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea. And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him. And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

After Zacharias's tongue was loosed, he began to prophesy.

Luke 1:68–75

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

Moving in the power of the Spirit, Zacharias began praising God, then prophesying, then pronouncing blessing.

Luke 1:76

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.

People were prepared for the first coming of Jesus through the ministry of John. So, too, I suggest that people will be prepared for the Lord's Second Coming through the ministry of the church. Thus, we have the same three mandates given to John. . . .

Luke 1:77, 78

To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us.

Our first mandate is to give information. What are we to be about this week? We get to tell people the Good News of the gospel—that, except for their rejection of the free gift of salvation, every sin they've ever done, will do, or are presently doing is forgiven because of the tender mercy of God poured out upon them through the Cross of Calvary.

Luke 1:79 (a)

To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death . . .

Our second mandate is to provide illumination. How are we to illuminate people's thinking? Because the Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, we get to be those who share with people not our philosophies, not our ideas, not our agendas, but the light of the Word.

Luke 1:79 (b)

. . . to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Our third mandate is to share direction. The question I am asked most frequently is, "How can I receive God's guidance?" The answer is to walk the way of peace. The Greek word translated "rule" literally means "umpire," so Paul told the Colossian believers to let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts (Colossians 3:15). How are we to know what to do? We are simply to walk with the Lord, enjoy our relationship with Him, and follow the peace in our heart, which will tell us whether any given direction is "Safe!" or "Out!"

Luke 1:80

And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

We leave a camel-skin-wearing, grasshopper-eating John in the desert, poised to give information, illumination, and direction regarding his Messiah and our Lord.



2 Luke 2:1 (a)

And it came to pass . . .

One of my favorite phrases in all of Scriptures is this one. Whatever you may be facing presently *will* pass.

Luke 2:1 (b)

. . . in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus . . .

Known as Gaius Octavius, he was a seemingly successful and powerful ruler. After all, the Gates of Janus—opened only in time of war—had been closed for years due to the Pax Romana—a forced peace brought about after the Roman army bludgeoned her enemies into bloody submission. In light of his position in the known world, Octavius decided he needed a new title—something more elevated than even king or dictator—a name that implied divinity, a name like Caesar Augustus—Caesar the August One.

Luke 2:1 (c)

. . . that all the world should be taxed.

Caesar, "the August One," decreed that everyone return to their homeland to be taxed, little realizing he was simply fulfilling the prophecy of Micah 5:2, which declared that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Where else would the Son of David be born but in Bethlehem, the city of David? Where else would the Bread of Life be born but in Bethlehem, the House of Bread? Yes, Caesar made the proclamation, but God ordained the plan.

Luke 2:2

(And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

On the basis of this parenthetical note, history validates the time and place of Jesus' birth.

Luke 2:3–8

And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

These sheep outside of Bethlehem were most likely the sheep owned by the priests and used for sacrifices in the temple ministry. Because the shepherds who kept watch over them would not have been able to enter into the temple to receive cleansing, they would have been considered unclean. But who are the first to hear of Jesus' birth? The unclean ones, the outcasts, us.

Luke 2:9, 10

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

The angel brought good tidings of great joy not only for Israel, not only for evangelicals, not only for Republicans, but for all people collectively, for each one individually.

Luke 2:11, 12

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Swaddling clothes were strips of cloth similar to those used in the embalming process. In other words, swaddling clothes were essentially grave clothes. This was fitting because Jesus came to die. Although death interrupted the ministry and teaching of Socrates, Plato, Buddha, and every philosopher and thinker throughout history, it did not interrupt the ministry of Jesus Christ. Rather, death fulfilled Jesus' ministry because Jesus alone came to die.

Luke 2:13, 14

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Linguistically, the meaning of this first Christmas carol is, "Peace on earth towards men of good will," toward men who are in God's will.

"This is the will of God," Jesus said, "that you believe on Him whom the Father hath sent" (see John 6:29). If you believe on Him whom the Father hath sent, you will indeed be one who, regardless of what's happening around you externally, will experience a peace in your heart internally. Don't let anyone take that peace from you by implying that you should be doing more or trying harder. Instead, say, "Thank You, Lord, for the Good News of great joy that unto me is born a Savior. I embrace this, and I thank You for the peace I experience not because of what I've done, but because of what You did in coming to earth to die for me."

I never tire of talking about the simplicity of the gospel because I have discovered that it is constantly being challenged. Perhaps even subconsciously, we find ourselves saying, "It can't be that simple. Surely I am supposed to do something, to earn something, to prove something." But such is not the case.

"It is *finished,*" Jesus declared on the Cross (John 19:30). Therefore, all that remains for us to do is to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength in response to the goodness, grace, and lovingkindness He pours out upon us.

Luke 2:15–17

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

Once you see Emmanuel, God with Us, wrapped in swaddling clothes as the One who came to die for you, you can't help but do what the shepherds did. You can't help but spread the word.

Luke 2:18–23

And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)

According to Leviticus 12, forty days after birth, the firstborn male was to be dedicated totally and completely to the purposes and service of the Lord.

Luke 2:24

And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

Leviticus 12:6 states specifically that a lamb was to be brought as a sacrifice of purification, unless one was very poor. In that case, two turtledoves would be sacrificed. Mary and Joseph brought turtledoves not because they didn't love God, but because they were poor. Although according to prosperity teaching, based upon their financial standing, Mary and Joseph must have had a substandard walk with God because they were poor people. Yet Scripture knows nothing of that kind of theology.

Luke 2:25 (a)

And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon . . .

Tradition says Simeon was one hundred thirteen years old. Certainly, there is reason to believe that he was well over one hundred years old.

Luke 2:25 (b)

. . . and the same man was just and devout . . .

The word "just" means "dependable." The word "devout" means "devotional." What a combination. Wouldn't it be wonderful if it could be said of us that we are dependable with people and devotional toward God? Such was the case with our brother Simeon.

Luke 2:25 (c)–27 (a)

. . . waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple . . .

When you look at Simeon carefully, you see a man of sensitivity. Simeon believed the whisper of the Holy Ghost in his heart that said he would not die

until he saw his Messiah.

Luke 2:27 (b)–32

. . . and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

Not only was Simeon a man of sensitivity, but he was also a man of flexibility. When told he would see the Messiah, images of pomp and splendor must have filled his imagination as he thought of One who was sure to throw off the yoke of Roman oppression as He entered the city of Jerusalem astride a powerful white stallion. But when Simeon followed the tugging of the Spirit into the temple, what did he see? A poor young carpenter, a teenage mother, and a tiny Baby. Yet Simeon was miraculously able to change his mental picture and perceive by faith that the Baby was indeed Messiah.

Luke 2:33–35

And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

A man of sensitivity, a man of flexibility, Simeon was also a man of honesty. "Mary," he said, "your soul will be pierced." And indeed it was. . . .

"Don't you know I must be about My Father's business?" Jesus would ask her, the implication being that His relationship with His Father was more important than His relationship to her (see Luke 2:49).

"Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" Jesus would ask, the implication being that she was no more important to Him than were His disciples (see Matthew 12:48).

"Woman, behold thy son!" she would hear her Son say as He bled and died on the rough wooden Cross of Calvary (John 19:26).

Luke 2:36–38

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

After losing her husband, Anna could have become bitter. Instead, she became better and blessed. Rather than simply becoming old and fatigued, she kept about her such a high degree of vitality and spirituality that she was chosen singularly of all women to be the prophetess who recognized Jesus as Messiah. Why? I believe the text gives us three reasons. . . .

Anna prayed *to* the Lord. She didn't give herself over to bemoaning her loss. Rather, she said, "I'm going to use my single state as an opportunity to give myself to God completely and wholeheartedly."

Anna looked *for* the Lord. Like Simeon, she lived in the anticipation of the coming Messiah.

Anna talked *about* the Lord. Not only did she worship like Simeon, but she spoke of Him to all that looked for redemption. So, too, if I am truly worshiping, I cannot help but witness and talk to people about the Lord.

Luke 2:39, 40

And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

Although different legends and hypotheses exist concerning the boyhood of Jesus, the single incident given to us in Scripture is the one that follows . . .

Luke 2:41–43 (a)

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem . . .

When people traveled to the festivals in Jerusalem, they would do so as a community en masse, with the women and children leading the way in order that none would be left behind. I think there's something in that for us to consider in the realm of church life, as we must not leave behind any who are younger in age or younger in the Lord on our journey toward heaven.

However, thinking Jesus was traveling with His cousins or other members of the extended family, Mary and Joseph were unaware He had remained in Jerusalem.

Luke 2:43 (b)

. . . and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.

Under the inspiration of the Spirit, Luke is careful to refer to Mary as Jesus' mother, but not to Joseph as His father.

Luke 2:44

But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

Mary and Joseph came from the Passover—which spoke directly of Jesus, the Passover Lamb—but they didn't perceive He wasn't with them. I wonder how often we leave our own times of worship on Sundays or

Wednesdays, supposing Jesus to be with us, but in reality, our hearts are far from Him.

Luke 2:45

And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

When you feel out of touch with Jesus, when you wonder where He is, it's always a good idea to do what Mary and Joseph did: Go back to the place where you saw Him last. "Remember from whence thou art fallen," Jesus would say to the church at Ephesus. "Repent and do your first works again" (see Revelation 2:5). In other words, when did you most clearly perceive the presence of Jesus? What were you doing? Were you up early in the morning? Was Bible study a priority? Were you worshiping passionately? What were you doing when you were really in touch with Jesus? Go back and do it again.

Luke 2:46 (a)

And it came to pass, that after three days they found him . . .

Three days speaks of Resurrection. Like Mary and Joseph, the disciples thought they had lost Jesus (Luke 24:21). Like Mary and Joseph, the women at the tomb did not know where to find Him (John 20:13). But unlike Mary and Joseph, after three days, they didn't find Him—He found them (John 20:19).

Luke 2:46 (b)

. . . in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors . . .

The word "doctors" speaks of the rabbis, theologians, and scholars.

Luke 2:46 (c)–48

. . . both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto

him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

Because Mary referred to Joseph as His father, Jesus will give a reminder to His mother . . .

Luke 2:49

And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

Here, Jesus reminds Mary that He must be about His *heavenly* Father's business. The word "must" appears two more times in Luke's Gospel—once in chapter 4, when Jesus said, "I must preach . . . to other cities also," and once in chapter 9, when He said, "The Son of man must suffer many things . . . and be slain." There are lots of options in life. But for Jesus, there were only three musts: His Father's business, preaching the Good News, and offering Himself on the Cross.

Luke 2:50

And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

I wonder how often Joseph and Mary didn't have a clue as to what Jesus was talking about. Notice that Jesus rarely gave explanations about His statements. He simply let them stand, never feeling a need to prove His point. Sadly, such is not the case with me. I want people to see things my way, and I'll press my point until they do!

Luke 2:51

And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

The more mature and secure a person is, the easier submission is for him. Therefore, because Jesus knew what He was about, because He was secure in who He was, even though He knew infinitely more than Mary and Joseph,

He was able to submit to them. The underlying principle of submission is not how much one knows, but who one is becoming. Therefore, even if you know more than they do, if you are wise, you will submit to your parents, your employer, and your leaders because submission is not a matter of the right decision. It's a matter of becoming the right person.

Luke 2:52

And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

Jesus increased in wisdom and favor with God and man. Such is the fruit of submission.



3

Luke 3:1, 2

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

In the eyes of the world, the one emperor, one governor, three tetrarchs, and two high priests were important indeed. But the Word of the Lord did not come to the emperor, to the tetrarchs, or even to the high priests. It did not come to Rome or Jerusalem. It came to a camel-skin-clad man in the wilderness. Therefore, I encourage you who are going through dry times and desert experiences to take hope and listen for the Word of the Lord coming to you.

Luke 3:3–6

And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; as it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of

one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah, John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, was baptizing in preparation for the Messiah. This blew the Jews away because the idea of baptism of anyone other than Gentiles who wanted to convert to Judaism was foreign to them. Here John was calling the Jews—the very sons and daughters of Abraham—to acknowledge they were sinners in need of a Savior. John's baptism was in preparation for Jesus. Ours is a proclamation that Jesus did indeed come to die for our sins.

Luke 3:7, 8

Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

"Let's get to the root of the problem," declares John. "You're sinners in need of a Savior. You can't hide in your religiosity, in your denomination, or in your heritage."

Luke 3:9–11

And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.

“In preparation for the coming of Messiah, start showing your sincerity. Give away your excess. Help others in need.”

Luke 3:12, 13

Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

Because tax collectors of the day had a certain amount of money they were required to raise—an amount not published among the people—and because they could keep whatever money they raised above this, they were notorious for ripping off the people.

Luke 3:14, 15

And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages. And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not.

In the margin of your Bible, “do violence to no man” might be more correctly rendered, “Put no man in fear.” Maybe the Lord has blessed you with a high degree of intelligence. Or maybe He has blessed you with physical strength or financial means. Don’t intimidate people with those “weapons.” Don’t take pride if people quake in their boots when you come near. That’s not the way of the Lord. Jesus spoke the world into existence. Talk about power and authority! Yet people marveled not at His strength, but at His grace (Luke 4:22).

Luke 3:16–20

John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his

garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people. But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.

John preached a message of severity in order that Jesus might come and present a message of serenity. John called for holiness in order that Jesus could give a message of hopefulness. John shone a convicting light in order that Jesus might share comforting love. In other words, John embodied the purpose of the law by showing people they were sinners in need of a Savior.

Luke 3:21

Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened.

Of the Gospel writers, only Luke tells us that heaven opened when Jesus prayed.

"I'm not hearing from God," you might be saying. "I have no feeling of God. I have no sense of His will." Are you praying? Luke makes it clear that Jesus communed with His Father through the same channel available to us: prayer.

Luke 3:22

And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

Those who deny the Trinity have a tough time with this passage, for here we clearly see the Son being baptized, the Spirit descending in the form of a dove, and the Father speaking from heaven.

Luke 3:23 (a)

And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age . . .

The Book of Numbers tells us that thirty years of age was the time the priests began their ministry. It was also the age at which David became king of Israel.

Luke 3:23 (b)–38

. . . being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli, which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Janna, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Mattathias, which was the son of Amos, which was the son of Naum, which was the son of Esli, which was the son of Nagge, which was the son of Maath, which was the son of Mattathias, which was the son of Semei, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Juda, which was the son of Joanna, which was the son of Rhesa, which was the son of Zorobabel, which was the son of Salathiel, which was the son of Neri, which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Addi, which was the son of Cosam, which was the son of Elmodam, which was the son of Er, which was the son of Jose, which was the son of Eliezer, which was the son of Jorim, which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, which was the son of Simeon, which was the son of Juda, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Jo-nan, which was the son of Eliakim, which was the son of Melea, which was the son of Menan, which was the son of Mattatha, which was the son of Nathan, which was the son of David, which was the son of Jesse, which was the son of Obed, which was the son of Booz, which was the son of Salmon, which was the son of Naasson, which was the son of Aminadab, which was the son of Aram, which was the son of Esrom, which was the son of Phares, which was the son of Juda, which was the son of Jacob, which was the son of Isaac, which was the son of Abraham, which was the son of Thara, which was the son of Nachor, which was the son of Saruch, which was the son of Ragau, which was the son of Phalec, which was the son of Heber, which was the son of Sala, which was the son of Cainan, which was the son of Arphaxad, which was the son of Sem, which

was the son of Noe, which was the son of Lamech, which was the son of Mathusala, which was the son of Enoch, which was the son of Jared, which was the son of Maleleel, which was the son of Cainan, which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God.

Only two of the Gospels contain genealogies. Matthew has a genealogy because he presents Jesus Christ as King—and a king must have the proper pedigree to claim the throne. Mark presents Jesus as a Servant—and no one cares about the genealogy of a servant. Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man—and it is helpful to know from whence a man comes. And John presents Jesus as the Son of God—rendering a genealogy impossible.

Verses 31–38 of Luke's account are the same as Matthew's account because Mary and Joseph were both descendants of David. But Luke's account from verses 23–31 differs from Matthew's because Matthew traces the line through David's son, Solomon, to Coniah, or Jeconiah—a man upon whom God pronounced a curse (Jeremiah 22:28–30). Therefore, although Joseph was technically in line to take the throne if indeed there was a throne being given, spiritually he couldn't do so because his line had been cursed.

So what happens? The term "son of" can either mean "son of" or "son-in-law of." Therefore, Luke's account is actually Mary's genealogy. And, as seen in verse 31 before us, Mary's genealogy is traced not from David through Solomon, but through Solomon's brother, Nathan—an un-cursed line.

This means that he who traced the royal line legally, ignoring the curses of the Old Testament, would have to conclude that Jesus had a right to the throne because He was supposedly the son of Joseph. But he who believed the curses of the Old Testament could find that in Luke's account, Mary's genealogy bypassed the curse altogether. Therefore, whether legally or spiritually, both genealogies lead to Jesus of Nazareth—the only Person in all of history who could possibly fulfill both lines.

In addition to this, within forty years after Jesus' crucifixion, when the temple was burned in A.D. 70, all records of Jewish genealogies were destroyed—rendering all Jews unable to trace their genealogies. Thus, no one—including the upcoming Antichrist—can claim with integrity to have a genealogical right to the kingdom.

Jesus is Lord uniquely, exclusively, absolutely—of this we can be sure completely.



4 In Luke 3, we saw Jesus baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. When He came out of the water, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove. Then He heard a voice saying, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Talk about a radical baptism! But be aware of this fact: After a high time often comes a hard time; on the heels of a triumph, trouble often follows. Consequently, here in chapter 4, we see Jesus, having been baptized, having heard the voice of the Father, facing a difficult time indeed . . .

Luke 4:1, 2

And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, Being forty days tempted of the devil.

Notice that Jesus was led—or literally driven—by the Spirit into the wilderness, where Satan would tempt Him. Why? Was the Spirit trying to do Him in? Not at all. The Spirit led Him into the place of temptation not to do Him in, but to show Him off. Think of it this way: If you were to show some interest in a Jeep, the salesman would tell you to take it for a drive in the mountains or the dunes in order to show you its power and durability. So, too, the Spirit was able to show off the power and the ability, the holiness and tenacity of Jesus. The same is true for you. Why does the Lord allow hardship in your life? He's out to show His strength in your life that the devil might be defeated once again.

Luke 4:2, 3 (a)

And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered. And the devil said unto him . . .

The three temptations that correlate with what John delineates in his first Epistle constitute Satan's entire game plan. . . .

> For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.
>
> 1 John 2:16

Satan has only three temptations, three plays in his playbook: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. And he runs them over and over again . . .

Luke 4:3 (b)

. . . if thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food . . ." (Genesis 3:6). The first temptation Satan used in the Garden of Eden is the same one He used first in the wilderness: the lust of the flesh. And it's the same temptation he sets before you whenever he whispers, "Don't you deserve a moment of satisfaction, a moment of pleasure? Why should everyone else have all the fun? Aren't you a child of God? Don't you think He wants you to experience life and be fulfilled?"

The author of the letter to the Hebrews was absolutely right when he said there is pleasure in sin for a season (Hebrews 11:25). If you give in to the lust of the flesh, you will indeed have pleasure for a season—for a moment—but you'll experience pain for the rest of your life. If, on the other hand, you deny your flesh, you might experience pain for a moment, but you'll have pleasure for the rest of your life. The choice is yours.

Luke 4:4

And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

In answer to Satan's temptation, Jesus did what you and I are to do. Submitted to the Word, He quoted the Word (Deuteronomy 8:3). Such was the Sword He used to beat back the seduction of Satan.

Luke 4:5–7

And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.

"And that it was pleasant to the eyes" (Genesis 3:6b). After the lust of the flesh came the lust of the eyes. Satan had the right to offer the kingdoms of the world to Jesus, for Paul declares him as the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). You see, when Adam and Eve chose to listen to Satan rather than God, they, in effect, handed him the title deed of the planet. That is the reason for the pain and the problems that beset our world daily, our lives individually.

The lust of the eyes doesn't refer only to looking at something that would tempt or stimulate you to do wrong. The lust of the eyes is seeing any other way than God's to accomplish His purpose. "Why go through the agony and the suffering of Calvary?" Satan asked Jesus. "Just bow down and worship me, and the kingdoms of the world will be yours."

When Satan, one of the highest of all the created angelic beings, was in heaven, his desire to be worshiped was what got him cast out of heaven in the first place. And yet he still desires to be worshiped. "Worship me," he says to Jesus, "and I'll show You a shortcut to saving the world so You won't have to die on the Cross or plunge into hell."

Luke 4:8

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Again, submitted to the Word, Jesus quoted the Word (Deuteronomy 6:13), and therein found victory.

Luke 4:9–11

And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge

over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

"And a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof" (Genesis 3:6c). After the lust of the eyes came the pride of life, as Satan set Jesus on a pinnacle of the temple and said, "Multitudes will come to hear You preach if You jump from the temple and let angels catch You. Show them who You are."

I find it more than coincidental that this temptation took place at the highest point of the holiest place—the temple. Haven't you discovered that it is when you are at church that you are presented with strong temptations of pride or cynicism, envy or apathy? I believe that one of the places the demons are most active is the place where the body meets together corporately.

Luke 4:12, 13

And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.

Satan quoted Scripture, and Jesus came back with another. That's why we are to be students of the Word (2 Timothy 2:15). Any cult, demon, or false religious teacher can build a case from one isolated text, but be completely in error if he doesn't take into account all of the counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Scripture balances Scripture.

I believe the three temptations Jesus faced at the outset of His public ministry are the same three temptations that will come to anyone involved in any aspect of ministry—be it to family or to the body. . . .

The temptation of materialism. "You should be living in a nicer house," Satan will whisper. "You're the King's kid, aren't you? Don't you think He wants you to drive a Mercedes? Aren't you hungry?"

The temptation of pragmatism. "Look at all those nations," Satan says. "Shouldn't they be saved? So you have to bow down to me for just a moment, and look at what you'll get."

The temptation of sensationalism. “Come and see the power of God as we jump from the temple,” the evangelist beckons. “Angels will surround us. The glory of God shall move among us. Healings and wonder and glory will flow through us.”

Materialism, pragmatism, and sensationalism—three ways Satan will try to infect a ministry. Watch out. Be as wise as serpents in these last days in which we live.

Luke 4:14–16 (a)

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day . . .

If it was Jesus’ custom to be in the synagogue, how much more so should it be ours. “I can worship God on the golf course,” some say. Or “Our church is so dead. I get more inspired when I’m surfing.” Do you think the synagogues Jesus attended were places of “Holy Ghost Happenings”? Do you think they were vibrant and moving? I don’t. Do you think Jesus actually learned from the teachings of the rabbis? I don’t. Yet it was His custom to attend anyway. Why? Simply to be in the midst of the church (Hebrews 2:12). And His presence in our midst is much more than enough of a reason to come together corporately, to meet together consistently.

Luke 4:16 (b)–17 (a)

. . . and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias.

As was the tradition in those days, Jesus, a visiting Rabbi, was afforded the opportunity to read and comment briefly on Scripture. And the text for that given day being Isaiah 61—a prophecy concerning the coming Messiah —Jesus’ first sermon would be about Himself.

Luke 4:17 (b)–18 (a)

And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me . . .

We often hear people say, "I feel the Lord's anointing upon my life." But watch what Jesus says His anointing consisted of. . . .

Luke 4:18 (b)
. . . to preach the gospel to the poor . . .

The poor, the downtrodden, the outcast, the unattractive, and the forgotten people—these are the people to whom we are to reach out, especially if we are to be like Jesus.

Luke 4:18 (c)
. . . he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted . . .

Brokenhearted people are not easy to minister to because it's not easy to walk with someone who's hurting, to listen to their repetitive rambling, to dry their seemingly endless tears. And yet these are they to whom Jesus came lovingly, tenderly, and specifically.

Luke 4:18 (d)
. . . to preach deliverance to the captives . . .

Jesus was anointed to preach to the very people to whom we all too often impatiently say, "I've told you what to do once; I've told you how to be free twice; why are you *still* in bondage to that habit, that person, that substance?"

Luke 4:18 (e)
. . . and recovering of sight to the blind . . .

Of the spiritually blind, we are tempted to say in frustration, "Why can't they see it? How could spiritual truth be any clearer?" Yet they are precisely for whom Jesus came.

Luke 4:18 (f)

. . . to set at liberty them that are bruised,

Afraid of getting hurt, bruised people hold back. They're defensive, timid, and fearful. Yet because He is anointed to free them, Jesus finds a way to reach them.

Luke 4:19

To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.



***For topical study of Luke 4:18–19 entitled "A Most Magnificent Mission," turn to page* 312.**

I am so impressed with Jesus. He is the One who is patient with those who are bruised, who listens to those who are blubbering, who continues to take time with those who just can't see, who works with the one who is in bondage. Lord, move me in this direction. Make me more like You.

Luke 4:20–22 (a)

And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.

Here an itinerant Rabbi had opened the Scriptures and shared with the people in such a way that they marveled at the gracious words He spoke. He hadn't come down on them. He hadn't preached at them. Rather, He shared with them in a way they had never heard before.

Luke 4:22 (b)

And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?

All too often, I think I've got a teacher, a brother, a co-worker pegged—only to discover later that, because my information is limited, because my ability to understand is not as great as I think it is, my conclusion is completely amiss. As I read a book or listen to a sermon, if I'm not careful, I can find myself doing just what the Galileans did—first marveling at the message, taking in the teaching, receiving the word coming to me—but then missing out on the miracle because I erroneously analyze the messenger.

Luke 4:23

And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country.

Jesus knew the people would ask Him to validate His ministry and substantiate His authority by doing a miracle among them even as He had done in Capernaum.

Luke 4:24–27

And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.

Jesus' word to the Jews was, "When Elijah and Elisha were not received in their own land, they were sent to the Gentiles to do significant miracles. So watch out because if you're not careful, once again, you will miss the opportunity to receive miraculous ministry."

Luke 4:28

And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath.

Because the Jews believed that Gentiles were good for nothing but to keep the fires of hell hot, Jesus' implication that Gentiles would be the recipients of anything other than the disdain of God filled them with wrath.

Luke 4:29

And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.

So incensed were the Jews that they mobbed Jesus with the intent of killing Him by throwing Him over a cliff.

Luke 4:30, 31 (a)

But he passing through the midst of them went his way, and came down to Capernaum . . .

Why was this mob able to drive Jesus out of the city and all the way to the edge of the precipice, but unable to push Him over? What happened to the crowd that made them part? I don't know. Perhaps it was something in Jesus' eyes, or a look of determination upon His face that allowed Him to walk through them like a hot knife through butter.

Luke 4:31 (b), 32

. . . a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power.

It amazes me that people today don't want to study the Scriptures. They want to go to power seminars and have power meetings wearing power ties at power breakfasts. Everything is power in this decade in which we live. But true power is in the Word—taking in the Word, contemplating the Word, giving priority to the Word. The powerful working of God in our lives is directly connected to our receiving His Word.

Luke 4:33–37

And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out. And the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about.

Jesus never went looking for demons. He never held deliverance meetings. He never taught deliverance seminars. But where Jesus is, the demons suddenly get restless, and they expose themselves.

Nowhere in Scripture are believers told to search for the devil and pray against the devil. If you and I are doing our job in just teaching the Word, sharing the Word, and sharing the Lord, demons will surface from time to time and make themselves known—not necessarily physically or tangibly, but we'll sense their activity. Our emphasis, however, must remain on the person and work and nature of Jesus. Demon possession is a real phenomenon of our day. But I also believe the church can suffer from demon obsession—centering on, talking about, dealing with the devil and demons more than walking in the light. If you walk into a dark room, you don't speak against the darkness, have a rally against the darkness, or give seminars on the darkness. You simply turn on the light. And I think that's the best way, the right way, the scriptural way to deal with spiritual darkness as well. Keep your ministry, your focus, your priority on Jesus—and Satan will run for cover.

Luke 4:38, 39

And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her. And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them.

Coming home from the synagogue, Peter walks in to find his mother-in-law sick with a fever. How often that happens to us. We leave the refreshment and restoration we find in church only to find feverish activity and fiery trials awaiting us at home. But Peter models the solution because guess who he brought with him! Take Jesus home with you. Then, whatever feverish trials await you, the Lord is there with you. Talk about Him on the way home. Talk with Him when you get home, and you will thwart any attempt of the enemy to undo what you have received.

Luke 4:40, 41

Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ.

One of the most effective tactics of the Enemy is to get people who don't know the Lord or care about the Lord to be in positions where they're talking about things of the Lord, even though their lives are a mess and their motives are amiss. In this way, the church, the body of Christ is discredited.

Luke 4:42–44

And when it was day, he departed and went into a desert place: and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them. And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee.

Jesus was accused by His enemies of many things, but one thing He was never accused of was being too busy. He grew tired physically from the demands placed upon Him, but He was never uptight or stressed out. Rather, He moved with a tranquility and a serenity that are sadly lacking in our society.

***For topical study of Luke 4:42 entitled "Solitude and Silence," turn to page* 317.**

A MOST MAGNIFICENT MISSION

A Topical Study of LUKE 4:18, 19

If you have read leadership or management journals, you know that a real trend has been for every organization—whether business or ministry—to issue a Mission Statement, a succinct description of its vision or mission. We find Jesus' Mission Statement in the first message He preached in Nazareth when He said:

> *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the* LORD *hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the* LORD. . . .
>
> Isaiah 61:1, 2

Some commentators have suggested that the year Jesus began His public ministry was the Year of Jubilee—a year of celebration and liberation when all debts were canceled and all slaves set free. If this be the case, Jesus' message would be especially fitting, for He was about to set people free from religious domination as well.

In Jesus' day, the rabbis taught that there were 613 commands in the law. Consequently people struggled under a heavy burden of what they were told constituted true religion and holiness. No wonder, then, that they would marvel at the gracious words Jesus spoke to them (Luke 4:22).

But as He continued speaking to them of their need for Him, their marvel turned to wrath. "How dare He give a word of correction to us?" they asked. "We know Him. He grew up here. This is just Joseph's boy." Jesus caught these people off guard because quite possibly there were boys in the town who were much better candidates to be Messiah than He. After all, the other boys wore phylacteries—boxes worn on the forehead or around their wrists which contained Deuteronomy 6:4. Jesus, evidently, never did (Matthew 23:5).

Because I like to take my Bible with me wherever I go, phylacteries seem like a good idea. Obviously, the scrolls were too big and bulky to carry about, so phylacteries would seem to be a wonderful way to express the importance of the Word of God. I'm sure I would have spotted the guys wearing their phylacteries faithfully and said, "There are our leaders, right there." But that's because I'm a closet Pharisee. I'm impressed with signs of spirituality—phylacteries, prayer shawls, broad borders, and all the rest. Jesus, however, models something entirely different. As they watched Him grow up, the people in His hometown didn't say of Him, "Now *there's* a spiritual young man." No, they wanted to kill Him (Luke 4:29). You wouldn't want to kill a man you thought was qualified to be Messiah.

Not only did Jesus not carry a Bible, He evidently never gave a formal Bible study to His disciples. I look for every opportunity to hold a formal or an informal Bible study. That's what the Pharisees did too. Endlessly. They unrolled the scrolls. They had discussions. They prodded and pontificated. But although Jesus knew the Word better than all of them by the age of twelve (Luke 2:47), His approach to spiritual life and Bible study was entirely different. And because Jesus was able to move about without a big Bible in hand, impressing people with His knowledge, He was able to do incarnational ministry that was completely nonintimidating as when He would derive a succinct lesson on spiritual life simply from seeing a man casting seed into a field (Luke 8:5).

I am anything but succinct. I don't make my points quickly. I love to go on and on. Jesus did just the opposite. When Thomas doubted, Jesus didn't say, "Let Me give you five reasons why the Resurrection is true, fifteen Old Testament prophecies that shed light on what is happening before you." No, He simply said, "Touch My wounds" (see John 20:27).

It's not that He didn't know the prophecies. It's not that He didn't have a grasp on Scripture. But it's as though He had distilled them to the point where the people He cared about could be effectively reached without being intimidated by His knowledge. His was an incarnational ministry that amazes me. Nonetheless, I find myself asking, "Couldn't You have given some Bible studies to Your disciples and recorded them in the Word, which we could use as a model for how Scripture is to be taught?" Oh, Jesus did this on one occasion—on the road to Emmaus. But, being that this is the only time such

teaching is recorded, it was the singular exception rather than the rule—and even then, it was given to two individuals who were outside of His inner circle of twelve.

Not only do we find an absence of recorded Bible study in the Word, but there is not one recorded instance in the New Testament where Jesus prayed with His disciples. There is not one recorded instance when He gathered His boys around a fire and said, "Let's spend some time in prayer," not one time where He said to His disciples, "It's a great night. Look at the stars above. Let's talk to the Father together."

Finally, after a year and a half, His disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray. John does. The Pharisees do." Indeed, the Pharisees did pray: in the parking lot, on the street corner, in the marketplace, they loved to give long prayers. I like that. *That's* spirituality. *That's* holiness. If I were Jesus, I would have taught on prayer, given seminars on prayer, called special meetings for prayer. But what did Jesus do? In response to His disciples' request to teach them to pray, He not only repeated the simple prayer He had taught them a year and a half earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, but He shortened it by five words.

Jesus' disciples knew prayer was the foundation of His ministry. Seeing Him slip away before the break of day morning by morning (Isaiah 50:4), they knew He was a man of passionate prayer. And yet He didn't necessarily pray with them. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, He said, "You stay here while I go and pray" (see Matthew 26:36).

Why? I suggest it was because, although prayer is a glorious privilege, it can also be very intimidating to people. Whenever I tell a congregation to break into groups for conversational prayer, I can feel the tension that fills the room. Evidently, Jesus was so kind, so gracious, so loving that He would not put that kind of trip on anyone. I like to pray with people—but when was the last time I spent all night alone in prayer? Jesus reversed the entire order. He talked about a prayer closet, about praying in secret, as if to say, "Forget the outward expression because it intimidates people. They're burdened by your seeming spirituality, but I came to set them free."

As a result, common people heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37). They were drawn to Him like moths to a flame not because He was well groomed or well attired (Isaiah 53:2), but because there was evidently something in His

eyes that welcomed them, something in His voice that warmed them. I'm sad to admit that I look for guys who are sharp in appearance as leadership material. The Pharisees did too. The best-dressed men of their day, they came across as very polished and sophisticated. But they also came across as stern and unapproachable. Not Jesus.

So easy was He to be with that for His inaugural miracle, He made wine for a wedding party. History tells us that in Jesus' day, when a baby girl was born into the family, her father would annually make a batch of wine for himself and one for his daughter's marriage celebration. Therefore, if the bride at Cana was fifteen or sixteen, there would have been presented to the happy couple sixteen years' worth of wine. But after drinking all sixteen years' worth, the wedding party in Cana ran out of wine. So what did Jesus do? Did He give them a lecture on the danger of overindulgence? Did He make a bottle or two? No, He made one hundred eighty gallons (John 2:6).

If I were Jesus, I would have kicked off my public ministry with a nice healing miracle or by bringing someone back from the dead. Instead, Jesus said, "Here's a little bride and groom who are embarrassed. I want to help them." He gave no teaching; He got no glory. He simply provided wine with no strings attached. In fact, in studying His miracles, very rarely do we see Jesus make application to the people He touched, healed, or helped. With the exception of a couple occasions, no tracts were given out, no teaching was given.

"Sell your goods and follow Me," He said to the rich young ruler (see Matthew 19:21). But when he couldn't do this, Jesus didn't say, "Let's get together for coffee and rethink your decision. I want to take you through Ecclesiastes and explain to you the emptiness of riches." No, He simply let His invitation stand.

Reformers intrigue me. Reformers are intense, single-minded, committed. Yet the fire in their eyes and the determination on their faces can cause people to be intimidated, to back away, to feel bad. Reformers can be uptight. Not Jesus. Why? He trusted the Father that in due time the rich young ruler would see the truth of His words and the depth of His love and come back.

Even when He cleansed the temple, John makes it clear the scourge Jesus made was a *small* scourge and that He took care to protect the doves (John

2:15, 16). There's never any panic or frenzy seen in Jesus. Rather, He moved with serenity, certainty, and tranquility. As a result, although He was referred to as a glutton, a winebibber, and the friend of sinners, no one ever accused Him of being too busy.

> "Master, all men seek for You in Capernaum. That's the hot spot of the northern region, the epicenter of the area outside of Jerusalem. What an invitation!"
>
> But what did Jesus say?
>
> "For this reason came I forth,"—not from heaven, but from His morning prayer time—"to go to a little un-walled village to talk to the villagers there. And that will about do it for today" (see Mark 1:38).

Jesus cared about one thing: His Father's will. That's all. That is how He was able to move around with serenity, focus, and a complete lack of busyness. "My burden is easy and My load is light," He said (see Matthew 11:30). And He lived this out in such a way that no one ever once suggested or implied He was busy.

Jesus truly breaks the mold of what we perceive holiness and spirituality to be. Although we think this is seen in the fact that He hung around publicans and sinners, I believe it is seen more clearly in the fact that He dined with Pharisees. To be sure, He spoke harshly to the Pharisees because He knew that's what it would take to get through to those about whom He genuinely cared. But when they invited Him to their gatherings, He went.

You see, at the home of Simon, Jesus ministered to the Pharisee and prostitute alike (Luke 7:36–39). We understand so little of this. How easy it is for church congregations to say, "We want more young people. What can we do to be more youthful and vibrant?" Or, "We need some tithers. How can we appeal to the older set?" Or "We want hippies. We want to do the 'Jesus Movement' thing." Or "We want to reach yuppies. That's what is current." Or "We want to be interracial. We want our Fellowship to be one about which visitors say, 'Wow, the people in your church are varied and cool.' " Jesus was completely not interested in this. Pharisee, prostitute, woman, man, young, and old—He loved anyone and everyone the Father sent His way.

“Master, we saw Your disciples picking wheat on the Sabbath day. This ought not be” (see Matthew 12:2–4).

“Have you not read of David stealing the showbread from the temple in order to feed his men?” Jesus asked, as if to say, “There are laws, and there is love. But when love and the law collide, love always has precedence.”

A mother was called to the nursery to take care of her baby. But because she forgot to take her nursery identification with her, the nursery staff understandably wouldn’t let her have her baby.

“I’ll get my card,” she said. But when she returned to the amphitheatre at Applegate Christian Fellowship to get it, she was stopped by deacons who were doing their job, trying to keep disturbances at a minimum. So she was stuck. Everyone was doing his job. Everyone was following the rules, but a woman was crushed in the process.

I like rules, parameters. I like everything in place. But Jesus said, “There’s something a whole bunch more important than rules. It’s people.”

Jesus dealt with the woman at the well without ever dealing directly with the issue of her living with a man who was not her husband. If I were Jesus, I would have made sure she understood the importance of getting out of that relationship, of making things right. But in recording the story, the Holy Spirit seems to say to any who question this, “That’s none of your business. You don’t need to know whether Jesus dealt directly with that issue or not.”

Could this be because, knowing this woman had had five husbands and was living with a man to whom she was not married, she would have obviously been branded as an immoral woman whose only option to survive financially was through prostitution? Could it be that Jesus was saying, “What the religious are concerned about, I’m not all that concerned about. And what the religious aren’t concerned about, namely love, concerns me to the utmost”?

“I am anointed to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, to give sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are bruised,” Jesus said in the most magnificent Mission

Statement ever conceived. And He fulfilled it perfectly, exquisitely, and completely.

Jesus blows apart every idea I have about spirituality and ministry. And in so doing He sets us all free from the burdens and baggage of grumpiness and condemnation, of fear and intimidation. Revisit Jesus—this laid-back Lover of people whose intensity was private and personal, who didn't put pressure on people. Reacquaint yourself with the Friend of sinners, the Man who spoke gracious words continually, who healed unconditionally, who loved sacrificially—for although He is unrecognized by most religious people, He alone defines true holiness.

SOLITUDE AND SILENCE

A Topical Study of LUKE 4:42

If a man wants to be used by God, he cannot spend all of his time with people.

A. W. Tozer

Jesus was One who, better than any other, knew the importance of solitude. That is why we see Him repeatedly going off into a desert place, alone. Following are four results of time spent in such solitude. . . .

Realization of Self

When you're in a quiet place away from other people, suddenly you can't blame your schedule, your peers, or your family for your frustration or failure. That's why people avoid being alone. That is why they keep the TV on, the radio loud, people around. They don't want to come face-to-face with themselves.

Compassion for Others

After receiving revelation of myself, I am no longer as hard on you. The reason people come down on others, judge others, find fault with others is because they have spent little time alone in the presence of the Lord—for if they did, like Isaiah, who spent the first five chapters of the book that bears his name saying, "Woe unto you"; "Woe unto you"; "Woe unto you";—after seeing the Lord high and lifted up, like Isaiah they would say, "Woe is *me*. *I* am a man of unclean lips," (Isaiah 6:5). That is why sometimes one of the best things we can do for people is to absent ourselves from them. When we're constantly with people, we have a tendency to find fault. But when we spend a season in solitude, after truly seeing ourselves, we emerge with greater compassion for others.

Transformation of Society

Society is not transformed by people picketing, marching, or even voting. I suggest that when you study history—particularly European history—you cannot help but notice that monarchs, potentates, and powers were moved by monks—men who chose lives of solitude. Withdrawing from society, they changed the face of Europe politically.

Regarding society as a shipwreck from which each individual must swim for his life, the desert fathers knew they were helpless to do any good for others as long as they themselves floundered about in the wreckage. These were men who believed that to allow oneself to drift along passively accepting the tenets and values of society was to court disaster. But once they got a foothold on solid ground, they discovered they had not only the power, but also the obligation to pull their entire culture to safety as well. Consequently, as decades passed, philosophers and thinkers, rulers and politicians journeyed to the desert in order to hear from them and be instructed by them. Thus, Europe was transformed by men who realized the best way to stand on solid ground was to spend moments, years, and decades seeking God and living a solitary life.

Preparation for Ministry

- When did the Word of God come to John?

  When he was in the wilderness.

- When was Moses called to lead the people of Israel?

  After spending forty years in the desert.

- When did Jesus begin His public ministry?

  After spending forty days in solitude.

There is something about solitude that is absolutely essential in the lives of spiritual men and women, for because the Lord has chosen to speak in a still, small voice that is all too often drowned out in everyday activity, it is in solitude that His voice is heard most clearly.

That's all well and good, you may be thinking, *but withdrawing to the desert is simply not practical for me.*

That being the case for most of us, there *is* a way in which every one of us can practice a life of daily solitude. That way is silence. Silence can be the private desert you carry with you wherever you go. But it's not easy. Besides speaking an average of forty to sixty thousand words a day, the average person will receive approximately fifteen messages every day from Madison Avenue, saying, "Buy me; taste me; drive me." Whether generated by Coca-Cola or Cadillac, a constant barrage of noise is hurled at us over billboard, radio, and television.

As a result, the value of words is diminished in our society. But this problem is not ours alone. Concerning much talk, an early church Father wrote the following: "When the door of a steam bath is left open, the heat escapes. Likewise, even though everything it says may indeed be good, the soul's cognizance of God is dissipated through the door of speech. Without the Holy Spirit to keep its understanding free of fantasy, the intellect pours out a welter of confused thoughts. Ideas of value always shun verbosity. Being foreign to confusion and fantasy, timely silence is precious, for it is nothing less than the mother of the wisest of our thoughts."

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled . . . That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you," said John, "that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (see 1 John 1:1–3). John shared freely, but he did not share that which he had not touched.

Could it be that the reason our sharing is sometimes not received or effective is due to the fact that we are speaking that which we ourselves have not touched, heard, or seen? Could it be that the reason we have not touched, heard, or seen is because we have not been in solitude? And could it be that we have not been in solitude because we have not desired to pay the price of silence?

"Learn to be quiet," said Paul (see 1 Thessalonians 4:11).

"Let every man be quick to hear and slow to speak," James echoes (see 1:19).

In Luke's Gospel, as I see the blossoming of John's ministry, and—to an infinitely greater degree—the ministry of Jesus, I realize that both ministries were birthed in times of silence. May the Lord call us into a greater understanding of solitude and silence that we might speak all the more effectively and live in true intimacy with the Father.

5

Luke 5:1

And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret.

Over and over, Luke reiterates that the priority of Jesus' ministry was sharing the heart of the Father and the message of the kingdom.

Luke 5:2

And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.

As we will see, one of these fishermen was Peter. If I were Peter, I would have been tempted not to wash my nets, but to sell them if, after spending an entire night fishing, I had caught nothing. But Peter is an example for me that just because, like him, I may come up empty in ministry, empty in what I put my hand to do, I'm not to sell my nets, I'm not to turn back, I'm not to give up because, like Peter, I don't know what will happen right around the corner.

Peter was washing his nets because if a net wasn't washed and then stretched, it would rot. Every time it was used, a net would have to be washed with fresh water and stretched if it was to remain useful. So, too, as fishers of men, we are nets that must be continually washed with the water of the Word and stretched by the Spirit if we are to remain useful.

You may be thinking, *Why should I get washed and stretched? The Lord isn't using me. Why bother?* But like Peter, you don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. When the Lord wants to use someone, He doesn't find the one who's rotten and brittle. No, He touches the one who's been washed in the water of the Word, who's been stretched and disciplined.

Luke 5:3

And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

Using the water as a natural amplifier to preach to the crowds on the shore, Jesus asked Peter to take Him out in the boat. Why would He need Peter to take Him out? For the same reason He has you teaching Sunday school, parking cars, or working in the sound booth. I'm convinced part of the reason the Lord wants us active in service is because He knows if we're not, we won't be where we can hear the Word. Does the Lord need to use us? No. But we need to be used by Him in order that we might be in a position to hear from and grow in Him.

Luke 5:4

Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

It wasn't until Jesus had told Peter to "thrust out a little" (verse 3) that He told him to launch out into the deep. My problem is, I often say, "Launch me out into the deep, Lord," without first being willing to thrust out a little.

"Use me, Lord, to heal the blind, to raise the dead. But I don't want to teach first graders," we say. Yet Zechariah declared we are not to despise the days of small things (Zechariah 4:10). If you wonder why you aren't in the deeper waters of ministry, maybe it's because you haven't been obedient in launching out in the little things, the simple callings, the unnoticed tasks.

Luke 5:5 (a)

And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing . . .

The Greek word translated "Master" literally means "Rabbi." Peter doesn't refer to Jesus as "Creator of all things," or "God of the Universe." Rather, He addresses Him as "Rabbi," as if to say, "Bible Teacher, we're the fishermen. We'll listen to what You have to say regarding spirituality, but fishing is our territory. And everyone knows that here in Galilee, we only fish at night."

Luke 5:5 (b)

. . . nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

"Lord, this doesn't make sense to me," Peter said. "Experience doesn't validate it practically. It's not the way we were taught to do it in fishing school. But Lord, at Your Word, I will do as You say."

Luke 5:6

And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.

The Greek word translated "brake" speaks only of the beginning of the breaking process. In other words, the net was beginning to show signs of strain. Therefore, had it not been washed and stretched previously, it would have broken completely, and the catch would have been lost.

Luke 5:7

And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

The Lord spoke this verse to my heart when we at Applegate Christian Fellowship started our first outreach church and sent away a good chunk of our congregation. On the Sunday that was to happen, I had doubts because I really loved those people. Yet the Lord brought this little story to mind as if to say, "If you don't call for help, if you try and take in the haul all by yourself, your boat will sink, and everyone will lose." The Lord does not call us to be reservoirs or containers of His blessings. He calls us to be channels through which blessings, resources, and ministries can flow to others.

Luke 5:8

When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

Peter's confession is what ministry is all about. Here's how to take in a haul in your own spiritual life: Don't try to earn it. Peter didn't say, "Ah yes. This makes perfect sense to me. I was faithful in launching out in little things. Then I was sitting in the boat taking in Your words eagerly. No wonder I am used in such a mighty way. No wonder I am a recipient of this great haul." No, He simply fell at Jesus' knees in utter humility.

I am convinced that the Lord is looking for people, organizations, and churches He can bless who will, like Peter, say, "We don't deserve this." Grace is the key to ministry, the key to prosperity, the key to victory in this body corporately and in our lives personally. The highest form of worship is when we're just amazed by how good God is to sinners like us.

Luke 5:9–11

For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And

Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

My tendency would be to say, "Wow! Look what the Lord has given us. What a haul! How can we keep this flow going? The business will expand. We'll add more boats. We'll get a big warehouse. We'll increase our distribution throughout Galilee. This is terrific!" But that's not what these guys said. In leaving the fish, they said, in effect, "Forget the fish, the industry, even the ministry. Lord, it's You personally that we want." Jesus didn't ask them to leave the fish. They did so on their own, realizing that what they had striven for no longer mattered. That's why Peter will be used so effectively—because he left everything to pursue Jesus passionately.

Luke 5:12

And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy: who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

A terrible, dreadful disease, leprosy is a picture of sin, for like sin, leprosy begins below the surface and then begins to spread and destroy. Like sin, leprosy is contagious, affecting not only the one who commits the sin, but those around him. So desperately did this man plagued with leprosy want to be changed that when he heard Jesus was coming into the area, he broke the rules forbidding lepers from entering any area where uncontaminated people were in order to meet Jesus.

The same is true for you and me. When we feel as though there is something eating at us, causing us to lose our sensitivity, the key is simply to go to Jesus.

"*Today* is the day of salvation," declared Paul. "*Now* is the time" (see 2 Corinthians 6:2). And the leper knew this.

Luke 5:13 (a)

And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him.

Jesus did not say, “Go to a seminar on overcoming leprosy.” He said, “You need to be clean. You want to be clean. Therefore you will be clean right now.”

Maybe that’s a word for some who are feeling tainted, polluted, affected by some habit, some sin, something that has a grasp on you. At the moment you say from your heart, “I want to be clean,” the Lord will say, “Be thou clean.” Jesus not only spoke a word, but He touched this one who perhaps had not been touched in years due to his disease. So, too, the Lord doesn’t hold His nose and look away from us in disgust. Others might be put off by your sin or irritated with your flaws, but not Jesus. He embraces us.

Luke 5:13 (b)–15

And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities.

Because He primarily came to save sinners rather than to work wonders, Jesus constantly sought to steer clear of theatrics in His ministry. Likewise, in our lives and ministries, the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. And the main thing is Jesus. “I came to you preaching nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified,” Paul declared (see 1 Corinthians 2:2). Make Jesus the center of your ministry, and you’ll be in harmony with what Paul did.

Luke 5:16, 17

And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed. And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.

According to 1 Corinthians 12:9, there are gifts of healing. This means that at a given time, the Lord releases certain gifts to give out to people who

are hurting according to His sovereign will, according to His perfect plan. But I believe it is a misunderstanding for someone to say they have *the* gift of healing because there might be three gifts of healings or eight gifts to be distributed at that meeting or during that time. Why aren't we seeing more times when the power of the Lord to heal is present? Perhaps it's because we haven't followed the model of verse 16, where we read that Jesus was in the place of prayer. Prayer preceded power. There is an intricate connection between the two.

Luke 5:18, 19

And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.

In Jesus' day, roofs were constructed with dirt packed between beams. So it was that these men climbed up on the flat roof—where people would often either sit or where they would actually have gardens—and began to dig. This was not necessarily that unusual, for Josephus makes mention of the fact that coffins were sometimes lowered through the roofs of larger houses should someone die within.

Luke 5:20

And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

Tradition tells us this man was paralyzed because of a sexually transmitted disease. If this be true, the greatest need of this man would have been to know his sin had been forgiven. Such is the great need of any man or woman. People today cannot walk through life successfully or joyfully because they are haunted by sins committed previously. Thus, they're as paralyzed spiritually, emotionally, and relationally as this man was physically. Yet Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven."

Perhaps the men who lowered their friend down were disappointed. After all, they had brought their friend to Jesus not to be forgiven, but to be healed. Yet Jesus knew that the deepest needs people have are not physical and material, but spiritual and eternal. Therefore, although those on the roof may have felt cheated, I suggest that the paralyzed man was elated.

Luke 5:21–25

And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.

How do we know sins are forgiven? How do we know the gospel is true? When people who were paralyzed and lame begin to walk and leap and praise God. When people who were paralyzed by sinfulness and foolishness embrace the Good News of forgiveness, the reality of a person's conversion is manifested in his walk. If there's no walk, it's just talk.

Luke 5:26

And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day.

Strange things indeed! The roof falling, a bed descending, Jesus forgiving, and a paralyzed man walking.

Luke 5:27, 28

And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him.

Note the order: First, Matthew left all. Then he rose up. Oftentimes, I want to rise up before I leave all. But when you read the Gospels, it's an interesting study to see all of the things left behind by people who rose up to follow Jesus . . .

- Fishermen left their fish.
- The woman at the well left her waterpot.
- The widow of Nain left her son's casket.
- Lazarus left his grave clothes.
- Mary left the pieces of her alabaster box.
- Bartimaeus left his beggar's clothes.

The people who soar the highest in the Lord presently and who will be rewarded in the kingdom eternally are those who have left things behind. I've seen my own life limited in ministry when I was not willing to do so. Satan wants to weigh us down with the stuff of this world. Jesus wants to set us free.

Luke 5:29–32

And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

There were three places Jesus consistently frequented: open places, where He preached to the masses; quiet places, where He prayed to His Father; and festive places, where He would celebrate with the people. When you read the Gospels, you cannot help but see that Jesus loved to go to parties. Whether it was in the home of a religious leader like Simon the Pharisee or in that of Matthew, a tax collector with the riffraff of society, Jesus was often in attendance at feasts or festivals. This shouldn't surprise

us, considering that the first public miracle He ever did was turning water into wine—not for the purpose of serving Communion, but simply in order that a wedding celebration could continue. Jesus had the ability to attract people to Himself constantly and to enjoy being with others immensely.

Luke 5:33

And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?

Indeed, the Pharisees did fast every Monday and Thursday and make prayers at noon, 3:00 P.M., and 6:00 P.M. daily. "Why don't Your disciples do the same?" they asked Jesus. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul said that there was coming a day when men would refuse marriage ceremonies (1 Timothy 4:3). Cyprian, the third-century Catholic Church leader was one such man. Marriage celebrations are too frivolous, he said. Parties and Christianity must be separated absolutely. Thus, the misconception began to grow, which is still with us today, that true spirituality and misery go hand in hand.

Luke 5:34, 35

And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

I suggest Jesus' answer speaks not only of His crucifixion prophetically, but of His place in our lives presently. A person who truly senses the presence of Jesus in his life will celebrate life as Jesus did. What about us? Have we lost sight of the fact that Jesus Christ came to bring us life and life abundantly, to let us experience real celebration? Would we be invited to a neighborhood function readily? Do our co-workers include us when they get together, or is there something about us so Pharisaical that they conveniently forget to invite us? Jesus was included in all kinds of parties. The common

people embraced Him easily and loved to be around Him constantly. Why? Because He brought a higher degree of joy wherever He went.

I pray not only that we might be able to penetrate the parties of our society, that people would feel free to include us in their celebrations, but that we might do what Jesus did—for although He came to people as they were, He left them different than He found them. If you find the party or the people affecting you rather than you affecting them, watch out. But if, like Jesus, you can go into a place and make a difference by your joy and the unmistakable reality of God's work in your life, then go with God's blessing. Acts 8 tells us that the early church was so full of joy that they caused the entire city of Samaria to be full of joy as well. Celebrate your salvation, gang, as you infiltrate your situation. Realize that Jesus can handle your humanity, that He would rather see you a friend of sinners than a self-righteous Pharisee. Then go on to make a difference in your community

Luke 5:36

And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old.

Jesus is saying, "I didn't come to patch up the old religious system. I came to do something entirely new."

Luke 5:37, 38

And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved.

You can't put new wine in hardened old wineskins because when the new wine begins to ferment, the old hardened structure can't flex with it, causing the wineskin to burst and the new wine to be lost. When people try to put something of a new moving of the Lord into an old structure, they end up not

only quenching the wine of the Spirit, but blowing apart the structure in the process.

This applies to people individually as well as to churches corporately, for here's what happens: When people are touched by the Lord and filled with the Spirit, the new wine of joy and vitality begins to bubble within them. But they will often discover that, as happened with Jesus following His own baptism, they will be driven into the wilderness, into a battle, into hard times. And it is at this point that, unwilling to face the difficulty or challenge, the temptation or trial, they burst, give up, and go back to the predictability of their previous ways where they can go to church occasionally, put a dollar in the offering, and play the game.

Does this mean we are doomed to become hardened old wineskins that cannot contain the new work of the Lord at any given time? I don't think so. You see, the Greek word translated "new" in relation to wine is *neos*" But the word translated "new" in relation to wineskins is *kainos* and literally means "renewed." In Bible days, wineskins were relatively expensive, so when they began to get hard, he who didn't have money for a new one would soak the old one in water until the elasticity and the flexibility returned. I find the analogy interesting because the Scriptures are likened unto water (John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26).

How do we stay flexible, usable, and contemporary in whatever the Lord might be doing both corporately and personally? We soak ourselves not in traditionalism or denominationalism, but in the Word. If we make the Word the priority of our life, the emphasis of our ministry, it will have a softening, renewing effect on us. But when the Bible no longer has predominance or priority in the life of a church or an individual and is instead replaced by programs, traditions, or denominational expectations, rigidity is sure to follow.

The entire Bible can be read aloud in seventy-one hours—or twelve minutes a day for a year. Most of us spend more time than that simply brushing our teeth or combing our hair. The question is not whether we have time to read the Word. The question is, do we choose to do it? There is only one place a believer cannot stay. He cannot stay put. That is, he is either growing and expanding in his walk, or he is shrinking and weakening in his walk. Your faith is either more radical today than it was last year, or it is less

so. If we are determined together to soak in the Word, we will experience a continuing renewing—new discoveries, new understanding, constant softening. And the Lord will be able to pour new wine into our vessels.

Luke 5:39

No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.

In a past election, after all the talk of throwing the incumbents out, 94 percent were voted back into office. Why? Because, although we complain about government and say we need new government, the fact is, we're comfortable with the familiar.

I don't need to soak in the Word any longer, you may be thinking. *I've got my knowledge of the Scriptures and my theology in place.* But because it's too late to soften the wineskin when new wine is poured, if you're not soaking in the Scriptures, you'll be left out. I'm not talking about losing your salvation, but about missing out on being on the cutting edge of what the Lord is and will be doing in these last days.

May He give us His wisdom.



6 Chapter 5 ended with Jesus talking about new wine and old wineskins, placing Himself and the Pharisees on a collision course that would center around their most important tradition: the Sabbath . . .

Luke 6:1, 2

And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands. And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days?

According to Levitical law, it was perfectly legal for travelers to pluck corn or grain from the fields they passed in order to sustain them on their journey (Deuteronomy 23:24, 25). Thus, the Pharisees had no problem with

what Jesus and His disciples did. Rather, their accusation concerned *when* they did it. The Jews at this time—and many Orthodox Jews to this day—believe that Messiah will not come until the Sabbath is perfectly kept by the people of Israel. This is why the Pharisees were so intent on keeping Sabbath regulations. Yet in Acts 20, we see the church meeting not on the Sabbath, but on the first day of the week. Why? Under the Old Covenant, man had to work for six days before he could rest. Under the New Covenant, because of the work Jesus did on Calvary, man rests first. We see God's original intent concerning the Sabbath day in the fact that man was created on the sixth day, making his first full day one of rest.

Luke 6:3 (a)
And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read . . .

I love this! Jesus doesn't begin to argue with them philosophically. Instead, He opens the Scriptures to them clearly. "My Word shall not return void," God declared, "but shall accomplish the purpose for which it was sent out" (see Isaiah 55:11). You might not see the effects right away, but like a time bomb, the Scripture you share will make its way into people's hearts and will eventually be brought powerfully and persuasively to their minds.

Luke 6:3 (b)
. . . so much as this, what David did . . .

"Have you not read what David did?" Jesus asked. So well did the Pharisees know the Scriptures that they could tell you how many letters were in the Old Testament, how many of each letter was in the Old Testament, and where the middle letter in the Old Testament was located. They were thoroughly immersed in the Scriptures. Of course they had read what David did—but that's the point, for although they had read it repeatedly, they had missed the meaning totally. So, too, like the Pharisees, we can be guilty of reading the Word over and over again, thinking we know what it's saying, but missing the very essence of its meaning. The Lord always wants to show us more in His Word than what we presently know, but it takes an open mind and a tender heart to receive it.

I think of Samuel. When he heard his name being called, Eli told him to say, "Speak, LORD, for thy servant heareth" (1 Samuel 3:9). Too often, we say just the opposite: "Listen, Lord, while Your servant speaks," as we approach the Word with our presuppositions or legalistic traditions. In Ezra 7:10, we read that Ezra prepared his own heart to seek the Lord and His law before he taught it to others. May that be true of us as well.

Luke 6:3 (c), 4

. . . when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; how he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone?

The holy bread was that which was placed in the tabernacle on the Sabbath day. Hungry, David and his men went into the place where only priests were allowed and ate of the bread therein (1 Samuel 21:6). In drawing attention to this account, Jesus gets to the heart of the issue—that human need must always have priority over religious traditions and regulations. Love is the key.

Luke 6:5

And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

David was justified in eating the showbread, the Pharisees must have reasoned, because he was an anointed king and prophet. But they failed to realize that so too was the One who stood before them.

Luke 6:6, 7

And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him.

You who feel withered, paralyzed, struggling, know this: When Jesus comes into the meeting place, He is always drawn toward the one who is hurting the most. That is so unlike us. We tend to seek out those who are doing the best, the happiest, the spiritual ones. Not Jesus. He found the one who was experiencing paralysis because He's always drawn to the one with the greatest need.

Luke 6:8, 9

But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth. Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?

In effect, Jesus was asking the Pharisees, "Who is in violation of the Sabbath?" "Me for healing, or you for plotting to take My life? Both are work."

Luke 6:10

And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

When told to stretch forth his hand, this man could have said, "I can't. I'm paralyzed." But because God's commandments are His "enablements," the moment he decided to obey, he was able to obey.

"Husbands, love your wives," the Word says (Ephesians 5:25).

"But I can't," we say. "You don't know my wife. You don't know my situation. I can't. I'm paralyzed." We can either make our lists of why we can't obey, or we can say, "Lord, You say to love my wife, and I will, knowing that as I do, You will enable me to do that which You've asked of me."

Luke 6:11

And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.

A paralyzed arm suddenly works. Yet the Pharisees are furious because it does so on the Sabbath.

Luke 6:12, 13

And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.

From the group of disciples, or "disciplined ones"—those who were disciplined in learning and committed to studying—Jesus chose twelve apostles, or "sent out ones" as ambassadors to represent Him.

Luke 6:14–16

Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor.

After establishing a new Sabbath, Jesus establishes a new nation. Twelve being the number of government, twelve being the number of tribes in Old Testament Israel, in choosing twelve apostles, Jesus establishes the new government of the kingdom.

For topical study of Luke 6:15 entitled "Real Zeal," turn to page **327.**

Luke 6:17–20 (a)

And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon,

which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; and they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all. And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said . . .

The following teaching is often called the Sermon on the Mount. But I believe this is a misnomer, for Luke 6:17 tells us Jesus delivered it as He stood in the plain. Thus, I am personally convinced that, although it is an almost exact repetition of Jesus' sermon recorded in Matthew 5–7, it is, in fact, a separate sermon. I point this out because if indeed this was a sermon Jesus gave on more than one occasion, this tells me something. "I will not be negligent to put you in remembrance of these things though you know them until you be established in them," Peter said (see 2 Peter 1:12). Repetition is the mother of learning. Therefore, as a preacher, teacher, or Bible study leader, don't let the Enemy whisper in your ear, "You can't share that. That's too elementary. They've already heard that." And as a student, never think you know enough about any portion of the Word to never need to study it again. The question is not how *much* you know, but how *well* you know it.

The message Jesus had previously given on the mount and now gives on the plain is the message of the King. It was a message meant to drive people to the realization that they couldn't keep it, a message meant to drive people to the place of brokenness, a message meant to drive people to the Cross. Therefore, the only conclusion that can be drawn from the Sermon on the Mount, the Message on the Plain is not, "These are good words to live by," but, "This standard is impossible."

Thus, the one who grasps its meaning doesn't say, "I'm pretty good, but I'll try harder." No, he says, "I'm a sinner in desperate need of a Savior." Then, once he realizes he can't keep this standard on his own, once he is saved, the message becomes helpful to him as it delineates the ways in which the Spirit desires to work in him.

Jesus felt this sermon so significant that He repeated it almost verbatim. It is indeed the greatest sermon ever preached in the history of humanity. So simply read it and let the message of the kingdom impact you afresh . . .

Luke 6:20 (b)–49

. . . Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets. But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your

bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother"s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.

For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.

Let's pray. . . .

"The standards, Lord, of Your kingdom—of giving, blessing, forgiving—are qualities I lack in and of myself. Therefore, I need forgiveness, and I embrace You tonight as my Saviour. I bask, Lord,

in Your grace. I plead Your blood. I invite You to come into my heart again, Lord. And in so doing, to allow my life to more completely display these qualities. Strip from me, Lord, hypocrisy. Take from me, Lord, attitudes of judgment or condemnation. Keep me, Lord, from being one who hears the Word, but doesn't build my life thereon. I pray that my life might truly be built upon the Rock, that as the storms come, I might stand in that day. So by the Spirit, in the Spirit, I absorb these teachings, this message, and pray that I might do unto others as I would that they would do unto me. Make me like You, Jesus. Allow me to be one who is more concerned about compassion than tradition. Allow me to be one who responds to Your commandments rather than argue why they can't be done. I pause in Your presence, asking You to do Your work in my life. Set me free, Lord, to be a liberator and lover of others as I look to and love You."

REAL ZEAL
A Topical Study of LUKE 6:15

Scanning His group of "disciplined ones," one of the men Jesus chose was Simon Zelotes, or Simon the Zealot—a radical choice, considering that the Zealots were a political party single-minded in their agenda to overthrow the Romans using whatever means necessary. Determined to undermine the Romans at any cost, Zealots were known for carrying large, hooked knives under their garments to use on unsuspecting Romans every chance they had. When Jesus called him, perhaps Simon thought, *Good move. Jesus can use a guy like me. I mean, if we're going to see His new kingdom established, we've got to get rid of the Romans. And I'm the guy to do it. I'll fit into His strategy perfectly.*

But when Jesus went on to choose Matthew, a tax collector who worked for the dreaded Romans, Simon had to rely on Jesus—the only One who could bring two people of such diverse political philosophies together in unity. I believe Jesus still chooses people like Simon—people who will pay the price and expend the energy, people who will move with enthusiasm, people who are zealous. The Word addresses the subject of zeal very directly. Look with me at four examples of misdirected zeal seen in Scripture.

Business

Looking around our culture, we see people consumed with getting their business set up or their finances in order. But at a period when the Jewish people were building bigger houses and driving faster chariots, at a point in their history when they were attempting to make great strides financially, the Lord sent Haggai to talk to Jewish business people who were caught up in developing their companies. “You’ve sown much,” he said. “You’ve worked hard, but you’ve reaped little. You drink much and you eat much, but you are not filled. And when you earn your wages, you put them into a pocket which has holes in it” (see 1:6).

Do you relate to this? You’re working hard, but you’re not reaping what you hoped you would? You’re eating more, but you’re not as satisfied as you thought you’d be? Haggai said the reason for this was because, although the people were building their houses and businesses zealously, the temple of the Lord lay in ruins needlessly. He went on to say that if they would seek first the kingdom, if they would get involved in the temple construction, the Lord would bless them abundantly. Jesus said the same thing when He said, “Seek first the Kingdom and His righteousness and everything else will fall into place” (see Matthew 6:33).

Politics

We not only see people in our society zealous about business, but those who are zealous about politics. In the Old Testament, we find the story of another who was zealous politically . . .

After three years of famine in the land of Israel, David inquired of the Lord the reason. And the Lord said, "It is for Saul and for his bloody house because he slew the Gibeonites" (see 2 Samuel 21:1). Catch the scene: Shortly after Joshua came into the Promised Land, he was duped into making a peace treaty with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9). But when Saul became king, he thought it politically wise to rid his kingdom of the Gibeonites. And now, years later, God explained to David that there was a dryness in the land because in his political zeal, Saul destroyed an entire group of people with whom he should have kept the treaty made by Joshua.

I still hear the voice of Saul being sounded throughout our land by those who say, "We shouldn't have to worry about homeless people," or "Let the illegal aliens go back to their own countries. We shouldn't have to take care of them." Sometimes zealous people can lack the compassion and tenderness of the Lord in such a way that it brings grief to the Father. Am I arguing for a politically liberal philosophy? No, I am simply saying that in their zeal over political causes, people can cause great hurt to others and deep grief to the heart of God.

Fitness

In this coming year, as a nation, we will spend a collective $2.5 billion on health club fees alone. Yet studies show that even if every disease were wiped out in our society, if heart problems were no longer an issue, and if there were no more pollutants in our air, the human body is so designed that the average person cannot live past eighty-five years of age. Therefore fitness is a losing battle! Paul the apostle specifically declared that bodily exercise profits but a little (1 Timothy 4:8). Does this mean physical exercise is wrong? Of course not. We have a responsibility to make sure our bodies, the temples of the Spirit, can function. But if you are known as a fitness fanatic, if physical exercise is what you think about and live for, your zeal is misdirected.

Business, politics, and fitness—these are all avenues of misguided zeal that abound in our culture. But add to this list religious zeal, for such zeal is misdirected in the following ways . . .

Partial

> *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.*
>
> Matthew 23:23, 24

Numbering six thousand, the Pharisees were so zealous in trying to keep even the most minute details and regulations of the law that they even tithed their grains of spices, all the while ignoring the weightier matters of righteousness, mercy, and love. And in so doing, they were in effect straining gnats out of their soup while swallowing camels.

Boastful

> *And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the* LORD. *So they made him ride in his chariot.*
>
> 2 Kings 10:16

As evidenced in 2 Kings 9–10, Jehu was not a godly king. Yet when asked if his heart was right, he didn't hesitate to say, "Come and see my zeal for the Lord."

Hurtful

> *Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*
>
> Philippians 3:6

Paul was absolutely convinced he was right in persecuting Christians—until one day, headed toward Damascus, a bright light knocked him to the ground, and he realized that, although his religious zeal was sincere, he was sincerely wrong. So, too, regarding my political, sociological, or philosophical opinions, I might find down the road, like Paul, that although I was sincere, I was sincerely wrong in beating people up verbally or cornering them intellectually.

You will always know that zeal is a false religious zeal if it is partial, if it is boastful, or if it is hurtful. The only zeal God can use is the zeal seen in Jesus—not religious zeal, but righteous zeal. Seeing those who charged exorbitant rates to exchange currency or for the purchase of animals to sacrifice, Jesus drove them from the temple. And His disciples remembered that it was written, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (John 2:17). Jesus was consumed with zeal, enthusiasm, energy for His Father's house, His Father's work, for the things of the kingdom. If there's no other reason why you and I should be zealous, let this be the first and foremost: The model and example of Jesus. Scripture tells us that the zeal modeled perfectly by Jesus consists of four elements . . .

Repentance

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot . . . be zealous therefore, and repent.

Revelation 3:15, 19

Jesus indicts the church at Laodicea for their lack of zeal. If they were hot, He could use them. If they were cold, He could convict them. But being lukewarm, they could be neither used nor convicted. The solution? They were to repent.

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

2 Corinthians 7:10

The word "repent" means "to change direction one hundred eighty degrees." True, godly sorrow manifests itself in turning one's back on that which is wrong and moving in a brand new direction.

Prayer

> *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*
>
> Colossians 4:12

Epaphras was one who prayed not half-heartedly but zealously that people would do well in their walk with the Lord. In this, I am reminded of an Old Testament account. . . .

Facing war against the Syrians, Joash, king of Judah, went to visit a feeble and dying Elisha, who told him to open the window and shoot an arrow toward Syria. After Joash did this, Elisha told him to smite his remaining arrows on the ground. So Joash tapped them on the ground three times. Scripture records that at this point, Elisha was "wroth" with Joash, saying, "Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it; whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice" (2 Kings 13:19).

Because Joash lacked zeal, his victory would not be complete. And the same is true for us. I wonder how often we miss out on that which the Lord would do for us, in us, and through us because, like Joash, we "tap the arrows" a few times rather than energetically, zealously, and expectantly praying with great fervency.

Why must we pray zealously? Why must we keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking (Matthew 7:7)? Why does the Lord want us to come to Him continually? After all, He knows what our need is. Does He want us to grovel and beg? No. The reason He asks us to keep coming, to keep seeking, and to keep beating the arrows is simply because He enjoys our company. He enjoys hearing from us. He enjoys spending time with us.

Righteous Works

> *And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand. . . .*
>
> Numbers 25:6, 7

Because of their blatant, intentional immorality, the Lord sent a plague upon the people of Israel to correct them, to adjust them, and to keep them from continuing in their iniquity. But during this time of repentance, when Phinehas saw an Israelite walking flagrantly with a Moabite woman on his arm, he followed them into their tent and stuck a javelin through them both. And in so doing, he went on record by zealously taking a stand for God's righteousness.

We always need to pray. But there are times to grab the javelin as well, to deal with issues zealously for the sake of God's name. We must deal a deathblow to those areas in our lives that are Moabitish in nature by driving the spear of the Word right through them and allowing them no more place in our lives. Saying, "Maybe someday I won't commit that sin anymore," is not the Lord's way. Rather, His way is to be zealous for righteousness as was Phinehas.

Service

For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many.

2 Corinthians 9:2

The Corinthians collected money a year in advance to give generously to those in need. Paul would go on to say that the Lord loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). Therefore, if you're giving begrudgingly, or out of expectation, don't give. But if you can give, saying, "I can't wait for the offering basket to come my way so I can give away part of my selfishness, my self-centeredness and become more like Jesus,"—give zealously and joyously.

A key concept biblically is to live zealously. How? The only way I know to get hot and to stay hot is to live near the Son. Therefore, if you stay close to Jesus, if you purpose in your heart that He will have priority in your day, you will find the zeal of Jesus reflected toward you and radiating from you. May this be true of each of us.

In Jesus' Name.



7 After the disciples had opportunity to hear instruction from Jesus' lips in chapter 7, they have opportunity to hear His heart in chapter 8. One of the many beautiful things about Jesus is that, not only is He the Instructor par excellence who gives insightful, impacting teachings to us, but He is also the Shepherd who goes before us. The four vignettes that follow deal with a saddened centurion, a weeping widow, a perplexed prophet, and a heartbroken harlot. In each case, Jesus shows His heart of compassion toward them, which blesses me greatly because I know He cares about me in the same way.

Luke 7:1, 2

Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.

Centurions are mentioned four times in the New Testament . . .

- As we will see, this centurion is a man of humility and faith.
- It was a centurion on the hill of Calvary who said to Jesus, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54).
- A centurion named Cornelius was the first Gentile to be converted and baptized in the Spirit (Acts 10).
- A centurion named Julius befriended Paul and assisted him on his journey toward Rome (Acts 27).

The Jews didn't like the Romans in general and centurions in particular. Yet the New Testament paints each of these centurions in a positive light.

Luke 7:3

And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.

Many people are waiting for their ship to come in. The problem is, they never sent one out. Not so with this centurion. He expended the energy and made the effort to send a deputation of Jewish elders to approach the Rabbi of whom he had heard marvelous things.

Luke 7:4–7 (a)

And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my

roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee . . .

His care for his servant and his commitment to the Jews marked this Gentile centurion as a unique individual. No wonder he was highly esteemed by the Jewish elders, who said to Jesus, "He is worthy of Your help."

"No, I'm not," said the humble centurion. Indeed, the greater a person is, the more humble he will be. The smarter a person is, the more he will realize how little he knows.

Luke 7:7 (b), 8

. . . but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

One who was accustomed to having his commands obeyed without question, the centurion would have understood the power of the spoken word.

Luke 7:9, 10

When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

This centurion was one of two people in the entire New Testament of whom Jesus marveled concerning their faith. The other was a Syro-Phoenician woman. These two Gentiles lacked the stories, the oracles, the heritage, and the history of the Jews. Instead, they simply had faith to believe Jesus' authority. One of the ways to kill faith is to hang around religious people. Religious people will explain to you why your prayers aren't answered, why your faith just won't work. Sometimes it's the Gentiles—those who take the Word at face value—whom the Lord loves to honor. The

Jews had their theology refined, but it was the Gentiles who had faith who caused Jesus to marvel.

Luke 7:11, 12

And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.

Jesus went twenty-five miles out of His way to Nain and therein found a miracle waiting to happen.

Luke 7:13

And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.

Compassion is your pain in my heart. It's a quality sadly lacking in our society, but one Jesus exemplified constantly. He is called the Man of Sorrows because He took the pain of people into His own heart. And yet the irony is that Hebrews 1:9 tells us He was anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows. How could He be the Man of Sorrows and yet anointed with the oil of gladness above any other human being who has ever lived—radiating such joy that multitudes would be drawn to Him? These are two qualities that seem contradictory—until we remember the words He taught us when He said, "Blessed, or happy, are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (see Matthew 5:4). One of the keys of happiness is to allow sorrow to penetrate your heart.

Eastern mysticism totally rejects this viewpoint. A foundational principle of Buddha's teaching was to avoid pain and sorrow, for if mankind would enter into the state of detached feeling, of nirvana, there would be no more jealousy or envy, no more wars and fighting. This thinking has affected us more than we know. Having permeated the '60s culture, it was Eastern thought that caused us to say, "I am a rock. I am an island," as we sang along with Simon and Garfunkel.

Jesus, however, came on the scene and annihilated that mentality by saying, "Happy is the man not who detaches himself, but who mourns, who is heartbroken, for he is the one who will be comforted."

"Comfort" is an old English word containing the same root as that of the word "fortify." In other words, Jesus said that the one who is mourning will also be the one who is fortified.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, so deeply was Jesus mourning that blood burst from His forehead. And yet Luke tells us that even as He was agonizing in prayer, an angel came and comforted, sustained, and fortified Him (Luke 22:43, 44).

When is the last time I have been at the place of being pained in prayer for someone else's problem, someone else's sin? Could it be that I am not comforted by the Comforter or the angelic presence because I am not doing what Jesus did? Blessed are they who mourn, who plunge into life and feel the pain of life. They shall be comforted.

Are you unhappy? Do you feel comfortless? Take seriously what Jesus said. It's an irony. It's a mystery. It runs crosscurrent to the thinking of our society. And yet the key to happiness is to mourn for others, to carry someone else's pain in your heart.

Luke 7:14–17

And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about.

In this account of Jesus' compassion, we see two groups of individuals—two only sons, two hurting people—and one amazing miracle.

***For topical study of Luke 7:11–17 entitled "Freedom from Death's Fear," turn to page* 337.**

Luke 7:18, 19

And the disciples of John shewed him of all these things. And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?

Of Messiah, not only did Isaiah prophesy that the sick would be healed and the dead resurrected, but that prison doors would open. Yet, here's John the Baptist, the herald of the King, in prison. "Everyone else is feeling the Lord's compassion, but what about me?" he must have wondered.

Luke 7:20–23

When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

Concerning whether or not He was the Messiah, Jesus' answer to John's disciples was for them to tell John the things they had seen Him do. But because, according to verse 18, they had already told John these things, it was as if Jesus' message to John was: "You've been hearing about the things that are happening, and yet you're only concerned about what is not happening." And the same is true of us. . . .

***For topical study of Luke 7:22 entitled "Dealing with Doubt," turn to page* 340.**

Luke 7:24–28 (a)

And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the

wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist . . .

It wasn't until after John's disciples had left that Jesus honored John. So, too, you might feel like a failure, that you haven't done this or accomplished that, that you're in error here or unproductive there. But if you hang in there with the Lord and continue to walk with Him by faith, when you get to heaven, you will hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." In allowing you to struggle presently, the Lord wants you to wrestle through and keep going. But there will come a time when we will truly know how He sees and evaluates us. And I think we will be exceedingly surprised at even the simple things we did that He noticed (Matthew 10:42).

Luke 7:28 (b)
. . . but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

John was the greatest of all prophets. And yet guess who is greater than John? You are. Everyone who is a born-again believer, who is part of the kingdom, is greater than John. Why?

- John was part of the Old Testament economy.
  You are a New Testament believer.
- John was a herald of the King.
  You are a friend of the King.
- John was a friend of the Bridegroom.
  You are the Bride of the Bridegroom.

As a person, you are not greater than this bold and fearless prophet. But because of your position in Christ, you are not only greater, you're perfect (Colossians 1:28). If you have no other reason to be elated today, let that alone suffice.

Luke 7:29–35

And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! But wisdom is justified of all her children.

The wisdom of the Lord's way is not seen intellectually nor argued logically, but it is seen in the transformation of people practically. Look at the children of the Lord, born-again believers, and you see people who were once strung out on drugs, hooked on pornography, or held captive by materialism; people with messed-up marriages, hurting families, and broken lives who are now in the process of being perfected. God's wisdom is justified in changed lives. Let the Pharisees argue all they want. The irrefutable fact is that lives are changed.

Luke 7:36–38 (a)

And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an

alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears. . . .

This woman was not, as is often suggested, Mary Magdalene from whom Jesus cast seven demons (Luke 8:2). Nor is she Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, who anointed Jesus' head with ointment and who wiped His feet with her hair in the house of Simon the leper (John 12). This Mary, in the house of Simon the Pharisee, did not feel the openness to presume to anoint Jesus' head as did Mary of Bethany, but rather in brokenness and humility anointed His feet.

I believe this differentiation is an important one. In my opinion, pastors and worship leaders err when they try to get people to be more intimate in expression than their level of commitment warrants. If worship is hard or unnatural for you, perhaps it is because your knowledge of Jesus is shallow. Therefore, the problem lies not in your manner of worship, but in your distance from Him. Get to know Him better, and you will find worship flowing more freely. Mary anointed Jesus' head because she knew Him well.

Luke 7:38 (b)

. . . and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

Mary used her hair—one of the "tools of her trade" with which she previously had seduced men—to minister to Jesus.

Luke 7:39

Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

Like Simon, I can spot certain sins in people miles away. Why? Because they're the same sins that reside in me. Therefore, if you are one who is cynical, if you are one who constantly finds fault with this person or that group, more than likely you're the one with the problem.

Luke 7:40–42

And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

"Simon," Jesus said, "the woman's sins are of the flesh; yours are of the spirit. Her sins are observable; yours are more subtle—but also more damnable."

Luke 7:43

Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

Fellow Pharisee, take hope. Jesus knew Simon had problems. But He still accepted his invitation to dinner. We know the Lord accepts the invitation of the repentant sinner, but sometimes we forget that He not only accepts the invitation of the self-righteous Pharisee, but also finds something to commend in him.

Luke 7:44–48

And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

There's not a person who isn't as great a sinner as this one who was known throughout the city as a prostitute. Oh, perhaps we're not guilty of the obvious sin because ours is a sin of attitude, thought, or corruption within. Yet the one who is truly aware of his sin will, like this woman, be heartbroken and repentant.

Luke 7:49

And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?

"Who is this One who can say another's sins are forgiven?" the Pharisees scoffed. The reason Jesus could say such a thing to the woman who kissed His feet, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them is because He will be kissed again by Judas, washed and anointed again by the woman who prepared His body for burial. Therefore, because of His death and resurrection, His is very definitely and uniquely the power to forgive sin.

Luke 7:50 (a)

And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee . . .

Although she was commended for a tremendous demonstration of love in washing Jesus' feet and drying them with her hair, it was not this woman's love that saved her. It was her faith. Yes, true faith will always manifest itself in love (Galatians 5:6). But it is faith that sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, believes the incredible, and does the impossible. It is faith that makes things happen (Matthew 17:20). It is faith that pleases God (Hebrews 11:6).

Luke 7:50 (b)

. . . go in peace.

In previous generations, Christians would go to the altar, confess their sins, weep before the Lord, and go their way with peace in their hearts. Now they seem to prefer a counselor's office. But it is those who are broken before the Lord who find healing from the Lord. The key is to be broken like

Mary rather than self-sufficient like Simon. Our sins are many; our failures are great. But we don't need to mask them, hide them, deny them, or defend them. All we need to do is confess them in brokenness as, like Mary, we spend time at His feet.

FREEDOM FROM DEATH'S FEAR

A Topical Study of LUKE 7:11–17

He was a professional thief. His name stirred fear in the hearts of even the most rugged frontiersman as sure as the desert wind stirred the tumbleweeds. From 1875 to 1883, he successfully held up twenty-seven Wells Fargo stagecoaches. And as amazing as this is, he did so without firing a single shot. His weapons? Fear and intimidation. When a stagecoach driver looked down and saw a man riding alongside whose face was entirely covered with a black hood, he knew he was about to be held up by Black Bart and that he was foolish to fight him. In newspapers and journals from San Francisco to New York City, he was known as one of the most notorious bandits of all time.

Black Bart reminds me of another who haunts all of humanity, one who Jesus called a thief and a robber, a liar and a murderer (John 8:44). His weapons, like Black Bart's, consist of intimidation and fear—especially the fear of death . . .

> *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*
>
> Hebrews 2:14, 15

Although death is something we don't like to think about or talk about, it is something we deal with constantly. Oh, it might not be the fear of physical death that haunts us. It might be the death of a relationship, a marriage, a business. This spiritual Black Bart, identified in Scripture as Satan, intimidates people constantly with the fear of death and holds them in this bondage all of their lives. But Jesus came not only to meet death head-on, but to conquer it completely in order that we might be set free.

In our text, we see Jesus and death meeting face-to-face in an encounter that is not accidental, but oh, so intentional as Jesus goes twenty-five miles out of His way to the little town of Nain . . .

Two Crowds

In Nain we see two groups of people: one going into the city rejoicing, the other leaving the city weeping. The group going into the city was rejoicing because they were traveling with Jesus. The group leaving the city was weeping, knowing nothing about Jesus.

I suggest every single one of us is in one of these two crowds right now. Either we are traveling with Jesus to the city, or we are traveling without Him to the cemetery. If we're traveling with Him, to what city are we headed? To the same one for which Abraham looked: the city which is solid and real, satisfying and eternal, the city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10). Abraham knew such a city would not be found in Mesopotamia, Babylon, New York, or Oregon. He knew the city for which he longed would only be found in eternity. And thus he could head toward it rejoicing.

> Suppose you are an ice skater, and right before you're ready to take to the ice in the final phase of the competition, your coach tells you your preliminary scores are so far ahead of everyone else's that even if you get "0" in the final phase, you'll win. This information would enable you to be as daring and creative as you would want because you'd have nothing to lose.

So, too, life becomes joyful and daring to the one who is not living for this world. Because the pressure is off, because he realizes the gold medal of heaven is already his, he can be carefree and creative (John 14:2). Not so the crowd traveling to the cemetery. Regardless of how popular or powerful they are on earth, they are in bondage to the fear of the death awaiting them.

Two Sons

Not only were there two crowds, but two only sons. The son who had once lived was now dead. The Son who was now living was destined to die.

In the days before Social Security or Welfare, having lost her husband and now her only son, this widow would have no one to look out for her socially or financially. That is why God's only Son, the Son destined to die, was moved with compassion. Jesus uniquely knew His mission was death. In a very real sense, as the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, He was dead before He lived (Revelation 13:8). Slain in eternity past, He entered the time/space continuum wrapped in swaddling clothes, assuming the appearance of a mummy. And so it was that the Father's only Son, destined to die, encountered the woman's only son, destined to live.

Two Sufferers

In addition to two crowds and two sons, we see two sufferers.

Jesus exuded such abundance of life that people loved to be with Him. Thus, He was called a winebibber and a glutton by His enemies (Luke 7:34). At the same time, He is and always will be the Man of Sorrows (Isaiah 53:3). He was not the Man of Sorrows because He was depressed about His own situation, but because He had such great compassion. That is, He carried the pain of others in His heart.

"Weep not," Jesus said to the woman.

"Arise," He said to the young man.

"Come up," He will say to us as He calls us to meet Him in the air.

He who lives in this hope will be free from the fear of death that keeps people in bondage all of their days. Like birth, the process of death is painful. Nonetheless, who of us would say to the unborn baby, "Don't come out. Stay in there. Your skull will be contracted. Your shoulders will be squeezed. Your body will be covered with fluid. Your best bet is to stay in the womb forever"? Not one of us would tell a baby this because not one of us remembers the pain we went through when we were born. Yes, the process was painful, but there was a whole new life awaiting us—including waves to surf, mountains to ski, people to meet, things to learn—a dimension infinitely greater than the dark confines of the womb.

So, too, death was never meant to hurt. When, after He had lived thirty-three years, Jesus was transfigured on Mount Hermon, He began to glow. So, too, I believe God's intention was that after man had lived sinlessly on earth, he would be transfigured and ushered into heaven. But man sinned. Therefore, part of the repercussion of sin is that now, our moving into eternity, like being born, is painful. We watch someone dying and our heart breaks. But the people in heaven are not saying, "Stay on earth" any more than we would tell the unborn baby to stay in the womb. They're saying, "Get out of there! Come up here! There's a new dimension up here more radical in comparison to earth than the difference between the world and the womb. In heaven, there is joy unspeakable and full of glory, for eyes have not seen nor

ears heard the wonderful things God has prepared for those who love Him" (see 1 Corinthians 2:9).

Yes, moving into eternity can be painful because of sin. But just as we have forgotten the pain of our own birthing process, so, too, in heaven, the pain of our death will not even be a distant memory.

Even if the Lord never answers another of my prayers; even if I never sense another feeling of fellowship with Him; even if I never gain another insight from His Word, I'm going to heaven, and that alone is enough. We are a saved people, gang, freed from the fear of what is beyond.

> After eight years, Black Bart was finally apprehended. At his arrest, one of the U.S. marshals pulled the black hood from his head to discover not the desperado from Death Valley as legend held him, but rather a squeaky-voiced, mild-mannered druggist from Decatur, Illinois. The reason Black Bart never fired a shot is because he never had a bullet. His only weapons were fear and intimidation.

So, too, because Satan was defeated and death destroyed on the Cross of Calvary, we can join Paul in proclaiming, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:55).

We're free. So rejoice, precious people, and celebrate your salvation.

DEALING WITH DOUBT
A Topical Study of
LUKE 7:22

In his book *Disappointment With God,* Philip Yancey tells the story of a woman watching her daughter in her early twenties die a painful death due to cystic fibrosis. Both were believers. "I was sitting beside her bed a few days before her death when suddenly she began screaming," recounts the mother. "I will never forget those shrill, piercing, primal screams . . . ."

Yancey continued, "It's against this background of human beings falling apart . . . that God, who could have helped, looked down on a young woman devoted to Him, quite willing to die for Him to give Him glory, and decided to sit on His hands and let her death top the horror charts for cystic fibrosis deaths."[1] Maybe you are in a situation where you are wondering, *Why is God silent? He could have spoken a word and solved my problem. He could have done something to see me through. Why has He chosen to sit on His hands?* Such is the situation in the text before us. . . .

John the Baptist was in Herod's dungeon because he dared to call the king on the carpet. You see, while visiting his brother, Herod lusted after his brother's wife so greatly that he forced his brother to divorce her so that he himself could marry her. Although the gossip columnists of the day were fascinated, John was infuriated. A prophet of righteousness, John came down on Herod like a scorpion in the desert. Stung by his indictments, Herod ordered John imprisoned.

I'm sure when he was first imprisoned, John thought the One who calmed the storm, who brought the dead back to life, who cleansed the temple would surely spring him. But it didn't work out that way. Days passed. Weeks went by. And John was left wondering. "Go ask Jesus if He really is the One," he said to his disciples, "or are we to look for another?"

So the disciples asked Jesus directly, "Are You the One? Or should we look for someone else? It's not working out the way we thought."

This is exactly what happens to us. As has been rightly said, when the warm moist air of our expectations collides with the icy cold of God's

silence, inevitably clouds of doubt begin to form.

No Rebuke

In answering these messengers, Jesus didn't say, "How dare he doubt. What's wrong with him? Why would he have questions?" This shouldn't surprise us, for God never rebukes any who come to Him with sincere questions or honest doubts. Be it Job, Abraham, Moses, or Thomas, as you go through your Bible, you'll never see a questioner rebuked if their questions are sincere. And John's was.

Jesus didn't rebuke John. Instead, He told John's disciples to tell him what they were seeing—hurting people helped, dead people raised, and poor people treasured.

No Release

Jesus didn't rebuke John—but neither did He release him. John's presuppositions of what the kingdom would be like were so set in his mind that when it proved to be something different, he couldn't see it. So, too, I suggest that much of the confusion we are feeling in our own lives personally is not so much due to God being silent as it is due to our failure to recognize the answer He has already given.

John wasn't asking too much. The fact is, he was expecting too little. John was expecting a political kingdom, a material kingdom. But Jesus had something altogether different in mind. John was anticipating a political, material, or military kingdom. Jesus' focus was on eternity. John never got out of prison in the way he had hoped. Instead, his release, brought about by his beheading at the request of Herodius, was infinitely better, as it ushered him into an eternity he would spend with the prophets who went before him, and with Jesus, who would soon join him.

No Regret

Do you think that today John the Baptist is mad at not having been released from prison so he could establish a political party? Do you think he's disappointed he didn't see something happen militarily, materially, or monetarily? Or do you think he's saying, "Excellent! Wonderful! Things didn't work out the way I thought they would, but You were so good, Lord, to leave me in the dungeon because I had the opportunity to join the great prophets who went before me and rejoice eternally."

> *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*
>
> Matthew 5:11, 12

So, too, let us rejoice in the fact that even if things don't work out the way we think they should, God is choosing to wait for the best.

If you are going through tough times, hard questions, or real persecution, rejoice. For you will have great reward in heaven. And when you get there, your tears will be wiped away by the very One we think sits on His hands (Revelation 7:17). Then, upon closer inspection, you'll discover His hands were never sat upon. They were nailed. And all of your questions and confusion will vaporize in a new understanding of the depth of His love for you.

Are we ready for heaven? Or are we, like John, asking all the wrong questions and looking for all the wrong answers, all the while wondering why God isn't working?

May we who are in doubt or confusion presently set our questions against the backdrop of eternity. And may we ever look to the One whose hands, for us, were nailed to the Cross of Calvary.

8

The last phrase of chapter 7 was, "Thy faith hath saved thee." And chapter 8 picks up where this statement leaves off, as it addresses the

topic of faith almost entirely. In verses 5–21, we see teachings about faith. In verses 22–56, we see the testing of faith. Verses 5–21 deal with hearing the Word. Verses 22–56 deal with heeding the Word. . . .

Luke 8:1 (a)

And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God . . .

The glad tidings are these: All manner of sin except one shall be forgiven all men. That one is the blasphemy of the Spirit—rejecting the free gift of salvation (Matthew 12:31). Rejecting the work of Christ is the singular sin that will send a man or a woman to hell—a concept understood even in our own judicial system. . . .

> Convicted of mail fraud in 1830, George Wilson was sentenced to death. But since Wilson's brother had done Andrew Jackson a great personal service, President Jackson wrote George Wilson a pardon. When the pardon was delivered to his cell, however, Wilson refused to take it. The man sentenced to die refused to receive the pardon. What to do? When the case went before the Supreme Court, Chief Justice John Marshall wrote this decision: A pardon is a slip of paper the value of which is determined by the acceptance of the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, it is no pardon at all, simply a piece of paper. Thus, George Wilson must be hanged.

So, too, "You're forgiven," Jesus says, "if you'll take the pardon I offer. If you don't, you render it meaningless, and you will be sentenced to death eternally."

Luke 8:1 (b)–3

. . . and the twelve were with him, And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, And Joanna the wife of Chuza

Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.

As Jesus preached and taught the Good Tidings, an entourage of women traveled alongside the apostolic company, ministering to them from their substance. And in this, we see women of high society and women like Mary Magdalene brought together because of Jesus. I admire Jesus here immensely because, although it is more blessed to give than to receive, it takes more grace to receive than to give. That Jesus would receive from these women is amazing. But that He would receive worship or praise from me is even more incredible.

Luke 8:4

And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable.

Here, Jesus begins His teaching about faith . . .

Luke 8:5–10

A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

Why would Jesus teach in such a way that truth would be concealed? Simply because He will honor the wishes of every person. Therefore, if a person does not want to see, the Lord won't force His way upon him. You

see, Jesus could have spoken so persuasively and argued so powerfully that people who didn't want to be converted would be converted even against their own will. But Jesus is not after conversion by force. Because He honors man's free choice, He says, "If you don't want to know the truth, I will conceal truth from you. If you don't want to know Me, I won't force Myself upon you." Teaching through parables provided a way that those who wanted to know truth could receive it, while those who didn't want to know would be unable to receive it.

At whatever point you say, "My mind is made up. I don't want to know what the Word says or how the Lord might feel about any given situation," you will be cut off from revelation. It is a dangerous place to be. But eventually, you'll get so banged up trying to blindly walk in your own darkness that you'll finally say, "I'm tired of arguing my case or trying to prove my point. Show me Your heart, Lord." And He will—when you're ready.

Luke 8:11

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

We are born again not of corruptible seed, Peter declared, but of incorruptible— the Word of God (1 Peter 1:23). Do you want to be more like the Lord, to experience blessing and joy, to radiate love and peace? The way to do so is not by mustering your efforts to be more Christlike. The seed is the Word. You will be more Christlike if you allow the Word of God to continually and consistently penetrate your inner person. That is how you were born again initially. And that is how more of Jesus will be birthed through you continually. There's just no other way. The seed is the Word of God.

Luke 8:12

Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

The first group is comprised of people who hear preaching or teaching, but don't respond. Their hearts are hardened; and they are lost in their sin.

Luke 8:13

They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.

The second group is comprised of those who say, "Amen" to the Word—but when the hour of temptation comes, or, as Matthew's Gospel says, "the sun begins to shine," they wither (see Matthew 13:6). The problem with the plant withering under the heat of the sun is not the sun, for the same sun could make the plant healthy and prolific. No, the problem is the shallowness of the root system. All too often, we try to shield people from the sun, insulate people from the heat, shelter people from problems. That's all wrong. The sun, the heat, the trial, the difficulty will make them grow. That's why James says we are to count it all *joy* when we fall into various trials (James 1:2), and why Peter said we are not to think it strange concerning the fiery trials that come our way to purify our faith (1 Peter 4:12).

If you desire to truly help people, the key is not to try to shield them, but rather to say, "This trial is causing you to cave in and give up because your roots are too shallow to draw from the water of the Word. You're sporadic in your study. You're inconsistent in your worship. Your prayer is hit and miss. Tend to your root system and you'll overcome." We spend most of our time trying to figure out how to give people sunscreen for their noses when we should be dealing with the root systems of their hearts.

Luke 8:14

And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

Cares affect those who live in poverty. Riches affect those who live in prosperity. Pleasure affects everyone. When you find yourself no longer studying the Scripture, the reason can be found in one of these three areas.

Luke 8:15

But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

The fourth group is comprised of people who have the seed of the Word embedded within them. But notice they bring forth fruit with patience. When planting a garden, one plants the seed, then waters it, then waits, then waters it, then waits before there's even the slightest breakthrough. We understand this about gardens, but we don't understand the same thing is true spiritually. "I've gone to church five times in a row," we say, "but nothing's happening." Or, "I've had morning devotions for two weeks straight, yet I'm not seeing any fruit, or my situation is not changing, or I still don't have peace. I'll give it one more week, and then it's back to sleeping in." We sow the seed, but we don't allow it time to take root and bear fruit. The one who bears fruit is the one who receives the Word with patience.

Luke 8:16–18

No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad. Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Take heed what you're hearing, in order that the seed which is the Word might fall upon good soil and bring forth fruit, that you might experience an even greater degree of faith.

Luke 8:19–21

Then came to him his mother and his brethren, and could not come at him for the press. And it was told him by certain which said, Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see

thee. And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.

Thinking He was so involved in ministry that He was losing His mental stability, Jesus' family came to check on Him (Mark 3:21). Upon hearing this, Jesus identified His family as anyone who hears the Word of God and does it. And the three events that follow will give His disciples the opportunity to do just that as they discover that the key to calming storms is faith; the dynamic to defeat the devil is faith; the prescription for painful problems is faith . . .

Luke 8:22–25

Now it came to pass on a certain day, that he went into a ship with his disciples: and he said unto them, Let us go over unto the other side of the lake. And they launched forth. But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy. And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm. And he said unto them, Where is your faith? And they being afraid wondered, saying one to another, What manner of man is this! for he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him.

After hearing Jesus teach about faith, the disciples are in a storm where they need to apply faith. I suggest this storm was actually stirred up in hell because when Jesus rebuked it, He used the same phraseology as when He addressed demons (Luke 4:35). Yet even though Satan may have stirred up the storm in an effort to drown Jesus' ministry, the storm didn't bother Him. Neither did the devil. The only thing that bothered Him was the lack of faith in the hearts of His disciples. After all, He had told them they would go over to the other side of the lake. And when Jesus says a person is going over, he'll not go under.

To us who cry, "It's not going to work," the Lord lovingly says, "Where is your faith? Haven't I promised you that everything is working together for

good to those who love Me (Romans 8:28)? Haven't I promised you that I will bring you to a glorious end (Jeremiah 29:11)? Haven't I promised you that I will complete that which I've begun in you (Philippians 1:6)? Haven't I promised you that I will restore to you the years the locust has eaten (Joel 2:25)? Haven't I promised you that no weapon formed against you shall prosper (Isaiah 54:17)? Haven't I promised to supply all your need (Philippians 4:19), that if you seek Me first, everything will be added unto you (Matthew 6:33)?"

It wasn't the storm that troubled the Lord. Nor was it Satan. It was the stumbling of faith in the hearts of those He had just finished teaching. Faith and fear will both sail into the harbor of your heart. Don't let fear anchor there. How? Feed your faith and your fear will starve. Stay in the Word. Give your heart to the Word. Fill your mind with the Word and you will overcome the fears that attack you incessantly.

Luke 8:26 (a)
And they arrived . . .

"Let's go over," Jesus had said. And, just as He had promised, that's exactly what they did.

Luke 8:26 (b), 27
. . . at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee. And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs.

This demonized individual was wearing no clothes and was obsessed with death—not unlike what we see happening in our own day. Nudity and obsession with death are the direct insignias of Satanic and demonic activity.

Luke 8:28, 29
When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not. (For he

had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.)

Who else was driven into the wilderness? Jesus—not by the devil, but by the Spirit to overcome the devil. The Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness for His development. The devil drove these men into the wilderness for their destruction. If you find yourself in a hot, dry, wilderness situation, the devil means to destroy you—but the Spirit will use it to develop you. If you say, "I'm going to sit in front of TV and be mad at life," you'll be dominated by the forces of darkness. If, on the other hand, you say, "Lord, I know You brought me here. It's hot and barren and dry, but I will look to You in order that this desert experience might do in me what it did in Your Son—that it might give me victory for greater ministry," you'll be blessed indeed. Whichever you choose, you'll be in the same desert. But, oh how different will be the result.

Luke 8:30

And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him.

A legion consisted of six thousand men.

Luke 8:31, 32

And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep. And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them.

The *abusso*—the place where demons who were particularly evil were incarcerated—would appear to be somewhere beneath the sea.

Luke 8:33–35 (a)

Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked. When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind . . .

You know someone has been freed of demons when he is sitting clothed and in his right mind at the feet of Jesus.

Luke 8:35 (b)–37 (a)

. . . and they were afraid. They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed. Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them . . .

The townspeople were more afraid of a man sitting at the feet of Jesus than they were of a man possessed by demons.

Luke 8:37 (b)-39

. . . for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again. Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.

Hopefully, we too will find ourselves sharing with people the great things God has done for us. The storms are stilled by faith. The devil is defeated through faith. Faith is the key.

Luke 8:40, 41 (a)

And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people gladly received him: for they were all waiting for him. And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue . . .

A ruler in the religious system, Jairus was a prominent man. Yet he was willing to abandon his pride in order to come to this itinerant, radical Rabbi from Galilee who had no credentials, no authority from the Sanhedrin.

Luke 8:41 (b)–42

. . . and he fell down at Jesus' feet, and besought him that he would come into his house: For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. But as he went the people thronged him.

For twelve years, Jairus' home had been filled with the joy and laughter that only a child can bring. Then tragedy struck. A painful problem was now before him.

Luke 8:43

And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any.

During the same twelve years the home of Jairus had been filled with joy and laughter, the home of this woman was filled with despair and suffering. The rabbis having taught that her hemorrhaging was the result of immorality, this woman would have been excommunicated from the synagogue, divorced from her husband, and ostracized by the community. For twelve years, her life was a miserable tragedy.

I find this contrast very interesting because some of you have spent the last twelve years in joy and delight. But difficulty and tragedy will strike every one of us at some point because it rains on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45), because no temptation comes to us but that which is common to all men (1 Corinthians 10:13), because in this world we are promised to

have tribulation (John 16:33). If you're in a good season, rejoice—but prepare. Now is the time more than ever to be in the Word, to be worshiping the Lord, to be growing in faith because tomorrow when tragedy strikes, it will be too late. You will not have the resources necessary to see you through the time of difficulty if you don't prepare in the day of prosperity.

Conversely, for those of you who have been miserable in the last twelve years or months or weeks, good news—you don't know what tomorrow holds. You don't know what miracle is about to happen. I promise you, the Lord will enter your situation in a way that will blow your mind if, like this woman, you seize the opportunity to draw near to Him. We need to be in the place where we know the Lord is traveling. Where is that? He promises to be in the midst of His people (Hebrews 2:12). He promises to be heard in the Word (Hebrews 10:7). He promises to be responsive to prayer (Jeremiah 33:3). This woman heard where He was and said, "I've got to get to the place where Jesus is moving and see what will happen." As a result, she will be healed miraculously and studied throughout history because she had the wisdom to expend the energy and break through the crowds to touch Him even in her weakened state.

Luke 8:44, 45

Came behind him, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanched. And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?

The disciples were impressed by the masses surrounding them. Jesus was intrigued by the one who touched Him. All too often, we evaluate ministry by the masses around Jesus. Jesus, however, is interested in the one who touches Him.

Luke 8:46, 47

And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me. And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she

declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him and how she was healed immediately.

What Jesus did privately, He now tells this woman to declare publicly. Was this to embarrass her? No, I believe Jesus wanted her to testify publicly in order that Jairus might be able to handle what he was about to hear. Likewise, there are people around you who are hurting and need to hear what the Lord has done for you in order that their own faith might be strengthened.

Luke 8:48 (a)
And he said unto her, Daughter . . .

Terrified that He might come down on her, how the single word "daughter" must have calmed this woman.

Luke 8:48 (b)
. . . be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.

Some go to church determined to hear from the Lord—and they will leave having heard from the Lord. Others go out of obligation or habit, not expecting to hear from the Lord—and they will leave without hearing from the Lord. Jesus smiles on this lady who was one among the multitude and says, "Daughter, be of good cheer. In faith, you broke through the crowd, and received from Me the help you needed."

Luke 8:49–56
While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master. But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole. And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden. And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that

she was dead. And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat. And her parents were astonished: but he charged them that they should tell no man what was done.

"Only speak the word and my servant will be healed," the centurion said to Jesus in the previous chapter. Jairus did not have this kind of faith. This helps me understand that although faith is the currency of eternity, all it takes is faith the size of a grain of mustard seed—half the size of a grain of sand—to make things happen. Expect the Lord to work as you take even a baby step of faith, and, as He did with Jairus, He will meet you there.



9 9:1–6

Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and author ity over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick. And he said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece. And whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart. And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them. And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing every where.

After giving them both ability and authority, Jesus commissioned the twelve to go out in simplicity and do what they had seen Him do previously.

Luke 9:7–9

Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by him: and he was perplexed, because that it was said of some, that John was risen from the dead; and of some, that Elias had appeared; and of others, that one of the old prophets was risen again. And Herod

said, John have I beheaded: but who is this, of whom I hear such things? And he desired to see him.

Herod was haunted by the similarity between this One of whom he was hearing and the one whom he had beheaded.

Luke 9:10

And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida.

Knowing power had been drawn from Him, Jesus asked, "Who touched My clothes?" (Mark 5:30). So, too, knowing His disciples had need of replenishment and refreshment following their season of ministry, He took them to Bethsaida, or, "the House of Provision." Whether your ministry be to a congregation, Sunday-school class, family, or your friends at school, it is extremely important to allow the Lord to escort you into quiet times and solitary places in order to recharge the batteries of your faith.

Luke 9:11

And the people, when they knew it, followed him: and he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing.

Here we see the wonderful flexibility of Jesus—for although He was in a place of solitude and intimacy with His twelve, He was still available to those in need.

Luke 9:12–17 (a)

And when the day began to wear away, then came the twelve, and said unto him, Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals: for we are here in a desert place. But he said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes; except we should go and buy meat for all this people.

or they were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, Make them sit down by fifties in a company. And they did so, and made them all sit down. Then he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed them, and brake, and gave to the disciples to set before the multitude. And they did eat, and were all filled . . .

The disciples saw the need of the hungry people, and what did they say? "Tell them to go get a burger, to go find a hotel."

When people come to you asking for help with a hard situation or an answer to a troubling question, do you send them away, saying, "Call the church office. See if you can talk to one of the pastors because I can't help you"? The problem is, you and I don't think we have very much. "What good will my few sardines and couple of wheat thins be," we ask, "in light of this huge need?"

But, as He did to His disciples, Jesus would say to you, "*You* feed them. Even though your understanding may be limited and your resources seem scant, put them in My hands and watch Me multiply them miraculously to touch someone else deeply."

Luke 9:17 (b)

. . . and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets.

Twelve baskets of food remained: one for each disciple. When will you be most blessed? When you watch how the Lord uses your crackers and fish to minister His love to someone else. You may think you're over your head. You may think you have nothing to say. You may think you can't handle it. But when you see what the Lord does because you simply took time to pray or share the Word with someone, you'll get back a whole basket yourself. Truly, whatever measure you give out will be given back to you (Luke 6:38). Therefore, take seriously every opportunity to help the people who cross your path—and watch and see what God will do both for them and for you.

Luke 9:18–22

And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am? They answering said, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again. He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God. And he straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing; Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day.

The first time Jesus mentioned the fact that He would be crucified came only after there was inspiration and revelation that He was the Christ. Inspiration and revelation always precede understanding about tribulation. Therefore, I think believers err when they talk about the cost of being a Christian before talking about the beauty of Jesus.

Luke 9:23–25

And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. or what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?

Jesus burst on the scene with a revolutionary concept never before heard in any spiritual teaching or philosophy when He said, “If you want life, lose it. The more you let go of yourself, the happier you’ll be. The more you give yourself away, the richer you’ll be. The key is to deny yourself, to take up your cross and follow Me.” He said this not to torture or torment us. He said this to liberate and bless us. And whoever lives for others and takes his eyes off himself will discover the truth of Jesus’ words.

Luke 9:26

For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own

glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.

He who doesn't take seriously Jesus' call to the cross will not hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord" (Matthew 25:21). I believe Jesus said this knowing His words in verses 24, 25 would have sounded so impossible to His disciples that they would have thought He couldn't have meant what He said.

Luke 9:27

But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.

"Some who are hearing these words of Mine will see the reality of the kingdom before they taste of death physically," Jesus said. And indeed this came to pass eight days later . . .

Luke 9:28, 29

And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering.

I believe this transfiguration, this glowing, was the original intent of the Father for each of us. That is, I believe that had man lived perfectly without sinning in the Garden of Eden, we too would have been transfigured at some point and taken directly to heaven. But that's not what happened to Adam and Eve. And that's not what happens to you and me. We sin, so we die. We don't glow; we rot. We don't shine awesomely; we start to fall apart physically because the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). At this point, Jesus could have launched straight into heaven. But He didn't. He would go down the Mount of Transfiguration in order that He might climb the Mount of Calvary in order to die for you and me.

Luke 9:30–31

And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.

The Greek word for "decease" is *exodos*. I like that word as a description of death. And who better than Moses to talk about an exodus?!

Luke 9:32, 33 (a)

But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him. And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here . . .

Peter, James, and John came to realize that even in talking about death, it was good to be with Jesus.

Luke 9:33 (b)-35

. . . and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said. While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.

"This is My beloved Son: hear *Him,*" God said to Peter. In other words, Jesus is infinitely superior to Moses and Elijah, to the law and the prophets.

Luke 9:36–39

And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen. And it came to pass, that on the next day, when they were come down from the hill, much people met him. And, behold, a man of the company cried out, saying, Master, I beseech thee, look upon my son: for he is mine only child. And, lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out; and it teareth him

that he foameth again, and bruising him hardly departeth from him.

The Greek phrase translated "for he is mine only child" is literally "for he is my only begotten son." Thus, the only begotten Son of God is coming down the mountain to deal with the only begotten son of this father; the beloved Son is about to free a bedeviled son.

Luke 9:40–43 (a)

And I besought thy disciples to cast him out; and they could not. And Jesus answering said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you? Bring thy son hither. And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him. And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father. And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God.

Jesus had given His disciples authority and power over demons in verse 1. Yet here was a demon they couldn't cast out. Was this because their power had "run out"? No, for the gifts and callings of God are without repentance (Romans 11:29). That is, He never takes them back. But even though the gifts of God remain in place, their effectiveness is not automatic. This is where people so easily err. God uses them in a counseling, teaching, evangelistic or hospitality ministry, and they think, *That's my gift.* And it is. But when it starts losing its effectiveness, they wonder why.

"This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting," Jesus said. In other words, "The authority is given, the power is present, but it won't operate without your participating in prayer and fasting." Therefore, although you might have been one of the most gifted witnesses in the whole country, you're ineffective today if you have not been maintaining that gift by prayer and fasting, by spending time in the presence of God.

Luke 9:43 (b)–45

But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your

ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying.

Why did Jesus speak of His crucifixion directly after He cast out this demon? I believe the answer is found in Colossians 2, where Paul declared that Jesus was nailed to the Cross, blotting out the handwriting of ordinances against us and spoiling the principalities and powers that would come against us. Where were Satan and his demonic henchmen totally defeated? At the Cross. The Cross is the key to seeing people released from the power of the demonic because Satan gains entry at the point a person commits a sin habitually. And nothing short of the blood of Jesus can cause Satan to lose his grip.

Luke 9:46–48

Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him, and said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.

When did the disciples start arguing about their greatness? When, even though they had been given the power to cast out demons, they failed in their attempt to do so. Such is human nature. You can always tell when a person is aware of his shortcomings by his telling you how great he is. Conversely, a person who is truly great never has to talk about it or prove it.

Luke 9:49, 50

And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.

Evidently, the disciples forbade this man not because of his theology, but because of their own jealousy. And Jesus' word to them is equally applicable to me.

Luke 9:51–54

And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?

On the heels of the previous incident, wherein John and James were quick to castigate anyone outside of their circle, this incident casts further light on the tendency of these "sons of thunder" to prove how fired-up they were by blasting others.

A ministry of fault-finding requires no skill because if I say, "You're not praying enough," who will disagree? If I say, "You're not worshiping enough," who will argue? I could rail on people for any number of things, and the response would always be, "Preach it, brother!" because we are all aware of our shortcomings in every area of our walk. It is so easy to blast and call down fire upon people. But all you do is burn them in the process. Of Jesus, Isaiah prophesied, "He shall not strive in the streets, break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax" (Isaiah 42:2, 3). In other words, to the flax barely smoldering, Jesus doesn't say, "Only smoldering, huh?" before drowning it with a bucket of water. To the broken reed, He doesn't say, "Broken, eh?" before crushing it with a heavy foot. That's not His ministry, mentality, or personality. He's a compassionate High Priest who understands our frailty (Hebrews 4:15).

Luke 9:55, 56

But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to

destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.

John, the son of thunder, was transformed into the Apostle of Love. How? By hanging around Jesus. You might feel like you're harsh or insensitive, that you lack tenderness or compassion. The good news is this: Those characteristics will be changed as you continue to spend time with the Lord. You see, the "nature vs. nurture" debate over whether a personality is shaped by one's environment or whether it is determined by one's heredity takes a backseat to the question of with whom one associates. If you spend time with Jesus, you will become like Him. Oh, it may not happen quickly, but it will happen with certainty.

Luke 9:57, 58

And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

Material obstacles kept this man from following Jesus.

Luke 9:59, 60

And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.

Parental obligations stood in the way of this man following Jesus. "I hear Your call upon my life," he said, "but first let me wait until my parents are no longer alive—then my obligation to them will be fulfilled."

Luke 9:61, 62

And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

"I'll follow You, Lord," said the third man, "but let me talk it over with my family. Let me see what they say about following You so radically."

There are always reasons not to follow Jesus. No wonder He could use a man like Paul, who said, "This one thing I do, forgetting the things which lie behind, I press on. I don't dwell on the past or look back. I simply press on" (Philippians 3:13).



10 Luke 10:1 (a)
After these things . . .

After spending time with His disciples, Jesus will now commission them for service. And as He does, we find in this chapter three clear priorities for life: We are to be ambassadors *for* Christ, neighbors *like* Christ, and lovers *of* Christ.

Luke 10:1 (b)
. . . the Lord appointed other seventy also . . .

I find the number seventy interesting, for, based on Genesis 10, the Jews held that all of the nations of the world were seventy in number. Thus, in appointing seventy disciples, it was as if Jesus was saying, "Go into all the world—into every nation, region, country, and culture—and preach the Gospel."

Luke 10:1 (c)
. . . and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.

As those who went before Him, the seventy were ambassadors of Christ —as was Paul (Ephesians 6:20), and as are we (2 Corinthians 5:20). The seventy were to declare Jesus' first coming. We are to declare His soon return. Our call to be ambassadors is not only a high and privileged calling, but one with prophetic ramifications as well, for when war breaks out

between nations, ambassadors are always called home. So, too, I am convinced that before God declares war on the world that rejected His Son, He will call us, His ambassadors, home.

Luke 10:2 (a)
Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great . . .

Jesus sent the seventy not to sow seed, but to bring in the harvest. I have found that people are ripe for the picking a lot more often than we think. We have been given the opportunity and mandate to say to our family, friends, and neighbors, "Why don't you open your heart to the Lord? You've got nothing to lose but hell. Could I lead you in prayer right now?" I think we have been intimidated by a lie from the Enemy, who whispers in our ear that people don't want to get saved. Not true! The harvest is *great.*

Luke 10:2 (b), 3 (a)
. . . but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. Go your ways . . .

Ours is not only a privileged work, but it is a problematic work due, first of all, to the immensity of the task. Yes, the harvest is great, but so, too, the laborers are few. In this, Jesus paints a picture of massive fields ripe for plucking, but with only a few workers laboring. So what are we to do? We're to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send forth laborers into the field. And after following the injunction of verse 2 to pray, don't be surprised if you are then called to obey verse 3—to go! Pray for the Lord to harvest souls in your neighborhood, and guess who He's going to call on to do it. Pray seriously for the area of the world to which your heart is drawn, and guess who He will send!

Luke 10:3 (b)
. . . behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves.

Not only do we see the intensity of the task, but also the inevitability of the attack. When Satan sees you are serious about harvesting—whether it's where you work, on your street, or across the sea—you can be sure he will launch an attack against you. "I'm sending you as lambs," Jesus said. Lambs are even more vulnerable than sheep. He didn't say, "I'm sending you forth as hunters against the wolves," or even, "I want you to be super-sheep marching militantly or organizing politically." No, He simply said we are to be lambs walking in humility because in so doing, the reflection of Jesus can be seen most clearly.

Luke 10:4–9

Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.

Lastly, we see the immediacy of the call. "Don't carry purse or money or shoes," Jesus said. "Don't stop and dialogue with people. Just get going. I will provide for you through people who open their doors to you." We who are called to be ambassadors will never feel adequately prepared. But if you wait until you're ready financially, educationally, or relationally, you'll be sitting here ten years from now, for there will always be something saying, "Not now, not yet, not you."

Luke 10:10–12

But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God

is come nigh unto you. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city.

It's not our responsibility to be successful. Our responsibility is simply to be faithful.

Luke 10:13–16

Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell. He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.

What miracles did Jesus do in Chorazin and Bethsaida? We don't know. There is no record of Jesus doing wonders or miracles in those cities—which validates what John said when he said the world itself couldn't contain a record of all that Jesus did (John 21:25).

Luke 10:17 (a)

And the seventy returned again with joy . . .

Whether you're witnessing where you work, ministering at the convalescent hospital down the street, faithfully discipling your children, going across the ocean—whatever it might mean in your context, when you are doing what the Lord is calling you to do, although initially you went out with fear and worry, you'll always return with joy.

Luke 10:17 (b)–19

. . . saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and

scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

"I saw Satan fall like lightning." What does this mean? It could be that Jesus was giving a word of witness. That is, it could be that He was telling His disciples that, as they were ministering and sharing, the kingdom of darkness was being beaten back, light was breaking forth, and Satan was falling down. More than a cliché, the primary meaning of binding Satan is not something we say verbally, but work we do practically. When we pronounce peace and heal the sick, when we share the gospel, help the hurting, and witness to those who are lost—that is when the Enemy is truly bound.

Secondly, it could be that Jesus was giving His disciples a word of warning. That is, He could have been reminding them that it was when Lucifer was the worship leader of heaven, the anointed cherub, the most powerful of all created beings that he fell. It could be that Jesus was saying, "Be careful that pride doesn't fill your heart, that ministry doesn't become more important to you than I am."

Luke 10:20

Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.

"Don't rejoice about what you're doing," Jesus said to His disciples—and to us. "Rather, rejoice in what I've done on your behalf: that you're saved, that I died for you, that I chose you as My bride." It's exciting to hear what miracles the Lord does in people's lives, but the fact that Jesus chose to write *our* names in the book of life should in itself make us an ecstatic people.

Luke 10:21–24

In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are

delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him. And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

Have you ever wished you lived in the days of Moses—when you could see the Red Sea parting, the Egyptians drowning, the shekinah glory glowing? Have you ever wished you could live in the days of Elijah when fire came down from the sky and he rode a chariot into heaven? Jesus says, in effect, they wish they were us because we understand what they could only wonder about. They could only guess at the meaning of what they wrote, but we see the full picture because we see Jesus, and in Him everything comes together, everything makes sense.

Luke 10:25

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

Lawyers being scholars of the Old Testament law, seeing Jesus as a threat to the rules and regulations of Judaism, this lawyer wanted to trap Him.

Luke 10:26

He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

To this one who was a scholar of the law, who lived under the law, who walked in the law, Jesus answered according to the Law.

Luke 10:27, 28 (a)

And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with

all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right . . .

In response, the lawyer quoted the Shemah of Deuteronomy 6.
"Good answer," Jesus said.

Luke 10:27 (b)
. . . this do, and thou shalt live.

This do, and thou shalt live. Such is the basis of the law. The problem is, we can't. So we're dead. Grace, on the other hand, says, "Live—be born again—then you'll be able to do."

Luke 10:29 (a)
But he, willing to justify himself . . .

People who are under the law invariably seek to justify themselves by comparing themselves with others.

Two campers got out of their tent and began to pour their morning coffee, when suddenly one of them saw a huge black grizzly bear running their way.

"Look at the grizzly!" he said.

The other guy immediately dropped his cup and began to put on his tennis shoes.

"If you think you can outrun a grizzly, you're crazy," said his friend.

"I don't have to," the smarter of the two called out over his shoulder as he sprinted away. "All I have to do is outrun you!"

That's the way of the law. Religion says, "God will accept me into heaven if I'm just better than the next guy." But that's not what the law declares, for it says that whoever violates even one point breaks the whole law and is doomed and damned unless he receives the free gift of salvation from the One who paid for his sins completely on the Cross of Calvary.

Luke 10:29 (b)

. . . said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

Religionists call for a definition of terms in their attempt to muddy the clarity and simplicity of the gospel.

Luke 10:30 (a)

And Jesus answering said . . .

Not only are we ambassadors *for* Christ, but we are to be neighbors *like* Christ. And in the account that follows, Jesus defines this further. . . .

Luke 10:30 (b)

. . . A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed . . .

Twenty miles long, dropping thirty-six hundred feet in elevation, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was widely known as "the Bloody Way" due to the great number of thieves who lay in wait thereupon to ambush unsuspecting travelers. This being the case, why was this man traveling that road alone? He was dumb, and thus a picture of us. We do dumb things; we go down dumb roads. And waiting to ambush us in our foolishness is the murderer Jesus identified as Satan (John 8:44).

Luke 10:30 (c)

. . . leaving him half dead.

When we go our own way and fall into sin, although we remain alive physically, we're actually half dead because we're dead spiritually.

Luke 10:31

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

As those who called the shots and controlled the people, the priests were the politicians of the day. And perhaps this priest looked at the man by the side of the road and thought, *That lazy welfare dependant has no one to blame but himself for being there in the gutter. Why doesn't he pull himself up by his own bootstraps like I did?* Is that how I feel? Do I see people lying on the street who have been beat up by the Enemy and think, *Serves them right?*

Numbers 19 tells us that if a priest touched a dead man he would be unclean for seven days. So perhaps this priest was saying, "I've got ministry to tend, things to do. I can't afford seven days off. My schedule is too full, my demands too many." Either way, the priest's heart was as far from the heart of the Father's as it could be.

Luke 10:32

And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

Even though the Levites would have been akin to the social workers of our day, after a closer look, this Levite passed by as well—perhaps worried that had he done otherwise, he would have been vulnerable to being attacked himself if the man who was beat up was simply a decoy to lure travelers into a place where they could be easily robbed.

Luke 10:33

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.

Although they were avowed enemies, the Samaritan had compassion on the Jew. Someone wisely said that if we could read the secret history of our enemies, we would find in each enough sorrow and suffering to disarm all of our hostility. I like that. Who is the Samaritan? It is the One who knew no sin, but who became sin. It is Jesus. He came to you and me who have been beaten up because of our sin and stupidity and had compassion on us. Each of us thinks his own sins are understandable but that the sins of others are preposterous. Not so with Jesus. He has compassion on us *all*.

Luke 10:34 (a)

And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine . . .

Jesus comes to me and gives me oil and wine. Oil is a symbol of the Spirit, wine a symbol of blood. The Spirit provides power for success; the blood, provision for failure.

Luke 10:34 (b)

. . . and set him on his own beast . . .

The Samaritan elevated the traveler to the position he had enjoyed previously—just as Jesus became a Son of Man that we might become sons of God.

Luke 10:34 (c)

. . . and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

Guess where Jesus takes people who have been beat up. He deposits them in *our* care as believers individually and as fellowships corporately.

Luke 10:35

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

After carrying him into the inn, the Samaritan said to the innkeeper, "Here's money to take care of this man. If you need more, I'll pay you back when I return." This puts the innkeeper in an interesting place. Two pieces of silver were a significant amount of money in that day. If the innkeeper figured the Samaritan was not likely to return, he could dump the traveler on the street and use the silver to remodel his inn. That's what a lot of us do. We've been blessed by the Lord with money, jobs, resources, abilities, and talents. And what do we do with them? Use them for our own gain.

Or the innkeeper could have said, "I'll take care of him until the two pence run out. Then, whether he's healed or not, he's out of here."

A lot of us do this as well. "We'll use what You give us, Lord," we say, "but don't ask us to extend ourselves in faith. We're not going to take on any new challenge or step into any new opportunity. We'll give what You require, but once that's given, that's it because we're not completely sure You're coming back or that we'll be repaid."

I have news for you: Jesus *is* coming back. And, based upon the Word of God, I promise you that anything you have spent above and beyond the two pence you have been given will be rewarded *greatly.* Not once in the next billion years to come will you regret that which you did not do for yourself because you cared for someone who was beat up, someone who was in need, someone who needed to grow in the ways of the Lord. What we will regret is that which we did not spend because we weren't living as though the Samaritan was really coming back.

The Lord has entrusted to us more than enough to take care of the half-dead people who come our way. The question is, will we release what He's given us? Provision has already been made for every area. Will we let it go? Will we make the time? Will we expend the energy? Fellow innkeepers, I trust we will say to our Good Samaritan, "You've already given me the gifts and the goods to care for whoever You send my way. Therefore, I will do whatever it takes, knowing You are repaying even now."

Luke 10:36, 37

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

The thief on the Bloody Way saw the traveler as a numbskull to attack. The priest and Levite saw him as a nuisance to avoid. The Samaritan saw him as a neighbor to love. How do you see people? This story challenges me, blesses me, and convicts me all at the same time.

Luke 10:38, 39

Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.

Ambassadors for Christ, neighbors like Christ, in Mary we see what it means to be a lover of Christ, for Mary is seen three times in the Gospels—each time at the feet of Jesus.

Luke 10:40

But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.

Martha is busy but not blessed. She's busy and she's bitter. I've been there. Maybe you have too.

Luke 10:41 (a)

And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha . . .

When you hear your name spoken twice, take double heed!

Luke 10:41 (b), 42 (a)

. . . thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful . . .

It's as if Jesus was saying, "Martha, you're fixing all kinds of courses. You're preparing a big meal. But don't you understand, I only want one thing—a simple meal?" When I began to think on this, it caused me to wonder how often I give people what I want to give rather than what they really want. For example, if you know guests are coming to your house, do you find yourself busy, busy, busy—only to be exhausted when they arrive? People don't care whether your windows are spotless or your floors waxed. What they care about is substance, peace, love. And those qualities can't be

nurtured if we're spending all of our time frantically making sure there are no leaves on our lawn.

Luke 10:42 (b)

. . . and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

What we do *with* Christ is infinitely more important than what we do *for* Him. You might be performing this duty, caring for that obligation, or involved in other numerous ministries. But in this passage, Jesus shows us that what we do with Him as a Friend is far more important than anything we could ever do for Him in service.

Yes, we are ambassadors for Him.

Yes, we are to look for opportunities to be a neighbor like Him.

But our greatest call and highest privilege is to be a lover of Him.



11 Luke 11:1 (a)

And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray . . .

As far as we know, the disciples never said, "Lord, teach us to preach," or, "Teach us to do miracles." I believe this is because, hanging out with the Lord, they understood that His teaching, His witnessing, His miraculous power—that indeed all He was and all He did was linked to, and a result of, His devoted prayer life.

Notice that the disciples didn't say, "Teach us *how* to pray," but rather, simply, "Teach us *to* pray." Every one of us who is a believer knows that the posture of prayer is the place of power. So why don't we pray? I believe one reason is that we have greatly complicated prayer. We have made it something it was never intended to be because we have believed the lie of the Enemy that prayer is difficult, time-consuming, heavy.

Luke 11:1 (b)

. . . as John also taught his disciples.

When I think of John the Baptist, I think of a rugged individual boldly proclaiming the need for repentance. But evidently, John was known as one who prayed and one who taught others to pray.

Luke 11:2–4

And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

In His answer to His disciples' request, we first see Jesus give a pattern for prayer. Teaching them a prayer only sixty-two words long, it was as if Jesus was saying, "Keep it simple." In fact, when Jesus gave this same prayer as a model two years previously in the Sermon on the Mount, it was a sentence longer (Matthew 6:13). I think our Lord is the only One who gets simpler the longer one walks with Him. We have a tendency to become more complicated. Not so the Lord. He gives a short prayer to begin with, then, after a couple of years, He says, "I'll make it even easier for you."

Luke 11:5–10

And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For

every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Secondly, we see the necessity for persistence in prayer. In Jesus' day, the middle- and lower-class houses consisted of a single room in which one-third of the floor was elevated about eight inches above the rest and contained a small fire ring around which the family would sleep. The remaining two-thirds of the room housed the animals. Thus, it is easy to see why this man was reluctant to crawl over the kids and stumble over the animals to answer his door. Yet he did so nonetheless. Jesus uses this analogy to say that because our Father never sleeps (Psalm 121:3), because our Father never says, "Don't bother Me," how much more would He be willing to respond to the one who keeps asking, keeps seeking, keeps knocking.

Many people have a huge problem at this point. *Why must I* keep *asking,* keep *seeking,* keep *knocking?* they wonder. There's a reason. God is not trying to play hard to get. Nor is He treating us like puppies, trying to teach us to beg—and if we stand up on our hind legs and yap loud enough, He'll drop a biscuit in our mouth. No, no, no. We need to persist in prayer because it helps us determine that which is important to us.

The closer Christmas got, the more Benjamin and Mary, who were toddlers at the time, changed their minds about what they really wanted—until finally a pattern began to develop, based upon a few things to which they kept returning. The same is true of you and me. We're like kids. We want this to happen, or that to work out. And then three days later, we want something else entirely. Consequently, I believe the Lord teaches us to persist in prayer to help us sort through what really is important to us. But even more fundamentally, I think we are to persist in prayer simply because the Father enjoys being with us. And if He gave us what we asked for the first time every time, He knows us well enough to know we would just grab the goods and run. The fact that we must come to Him repeatedly helps us see that, in the end, it was His fellowship we craved all along.

Luke 11:11–13

If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

In addition to a pattern for prayer and the importance of persistence in prayer, Jesus gives the principle of prayer. No good thing will the Lord withhold from them that love Him (Psalm 84:11). Therefore, if that which I want or have prayed does not come my way, I must conclude it is not good for me—at least not at this time—because my Father will do what's best. He will not give me what He knows is a scorpion, even though I think it's a fish. Nor will He give me a rock when what I need is a piece of bread.

Luke 11:14

And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered.

That last phrase is my life verse. The dumb spake and the people wondered.

Luke 11:15–19

But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils. And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven. But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges.

“If indeed I cast out demons by the power of Satan, why would Satan cast out Satan?” Jesus asks. “That makes no sense because a divided kingdom can’t stand.”

Luke 11:20

But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.

Notice Jesus doesn’t cast out devils with the arm of God or even the hand of God. He does so with merely the finger of God. We often think Satan and God are involved in a struggle that goes back and forth, which ebbs and flows. Not true. Because Satan is incomparable to the Person and power of God, He is no match for God. Satan being nothing more than a fallen angel, his counterpart is neither God nor Jesus, but an archangel like Michael. And even they are victorious over him (Daniel 10:13; Jude 9).

Luke 11:21, 22

When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.

The fact that Jesus cast out demons was undeniable. And since it was ludicrous of the Pharisees to think that He cast them out by the power of Satan, the only logical conclusion was that He was indeed the One stronger than Satan, the One who, on the Cross would “disarm principalities and powers, making a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15).

Luke 11:23

He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.

No one can be neutral in the area of spiritual warfare. We either embrace Jesus or we are His enemy.

Luke 11:24–26

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

Continuing His discourse on spiritual warfare, Jesus makes it clear that if someone is freed from the grasp of a demon but doesn't embrace the Lord, demons will return to that individual seven times worse than before. This explains why, although psychology and psychiatry might help someone for a short time, he will end up worse than before if the Lord isn't at the core of the healing process because reformation apart from regeneration only leads to greater frustration. This applies sociologically, culturally, individually.

"We'll march in the streets to ban abortion," we say. "We'll pass laws against it. We'll elect candidates to outlaw it. We'll turn the moral tide of this country against it by reformation and legislation." The result? Seven times the evil has come in the form of RU-486, a pill that causes abortion chemically and quietly. Reformation without regeneration just makes things darker. The real issue is that people must be born again. They must be open to the Word of God to guide them. Therefore, it is not our job as ministers and ambassadors to get people to clean up their acts. Our call is to introduce them to the Person of Jesus in order that they might be born again.

Luke 11:27, 28

And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

Although this woman draws attention to His mother—a position that could be claimed by only one, Jesus redirects her attention to His family—a

position available to all (John 1:12).

Luke 11:29–32

And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

The one sign Jesus would give to this and every generation was His Resurrection. Therefore, whenever you talk to unbelievers, the issue should always center on the Resurrection. The proof of the authority of Jesus Christ over every other so-called religious leader is singular. It is always the Resurrection.

Luke 11:33

No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light.

The reason light shines is in order that people might see. Therefore, if Jesus is the Light of the world (John 8:12), why don't people see the truth about Him? Read on.

Luke 11:34–36

The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body

therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.

Even the brightest sun can't make a blind man see. This explains why even though Jesus is the Light of the world, people don't see properly because their eyes are darkened according to their own choice.

Luke 11:37

And as he spake, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him: and he went in, and sat down to meat.

Jesus never refused an opportunity to have a meal with someone—be it an invitation from a friend or from a Pharisee.

Luke 11:38

And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner.

Washing speaks not of hygiene but of ritual. The Book of Leviticus makes it clear that ceremonial cleansing was intended only for the priests. But over the years, the priests required it of the people. I can see this same tendency in my own life. Perhaps you can in yours as well. Sometimes the Lord might speak to us individually about specific things we are or are not to do. But the temptation and tendency is for us to make what the Lord tells us personally a rule for everyone around us corporately. And such is the basis of legalism.

Luke 11:39–41

And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also? But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you.

True piety is not seen in religiosity, but through generosity. “Forget religion,” Jesus says. “Give alms instead. Help people in need.”

Luke 11:42, 43

But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets.

Jesus indicted the Pharisees for the very thing they were good at: majoring on the minors, concentrating on external details while ignoring that which was essential and eternal. It was not their tithing that was wrong, but their failure to love. If one truly loves, tithing will follow, for while it is possible to give without loving, it is not possible to truly love without giving.

Luke 11:44

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them.

According to the law, walking over a grave caused a person to be defiled. Thus, Jesus said to the Pharisees, “When people come into contact with you, they don’t know you’re dead, but you defile them nonetheless.”

Luke 11:45, 46

Then answered one of the lawyers, and said unto him, Master, thus saying thou reproachest us also. And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.

“Come unto Me all ye that are weary and heavy-laden,” Jesus said, “and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Jesus is the burden-Bearer.

The more I get to know people, the more I find myself praying, "Lord, don't allow me to burden anyone this day more heavily than they're already burdened." You see, although our tendency is to think we're the only ones going through hard times, everyone we meet, everyone we talk to is fighting a tough battle in some area of their lives. No wonder we are to be kind.

Luke 11:47, 48

Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres.

The religious leaders built impressive monuments for the prophets their own number had killed. Here, the greatest Prophet of all stood before them, and they would kill Him as well.

Luke 11:49–51

Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.

From A to Z—the blood of Abel to Zacharias would be required at the hand of the religious establishment.

Luke 11:52

Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.

In the Middle Ages, the Bible was chained to the pulpit, for church leaders believed only a priest could rightly understand its contents. Although

we no longer chain the Bible, I wonder sometimes when we say a clear understanding of the Word cannot be had without a knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, and the intricacies of theology if we're not, in effect, doing the same thing. While there is indeed a place in exposition for reaching back to the richness of the original language and culture, it must never be implied that one cannot, by himself, understand the Bible. Surely, the Lord will teach and instruct *anyone* who reads the Word, regardless of his educational or cultural background.

Luke 11:53, 54

And as he said these things unto them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things: Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him.

The scribes and Pharisees tried to get Jesus to talk—not to gain understanding from Him, but in an effort to verbally trap Him.



12 Luke 12:1 (a)

In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples . . .

Even as the Pharisees and lawyers, scribes and religious leaders tried to trip up Jesus, the common people flocked around Him. So it was at this point that He gave them two warnings about the perils of popularity. . . .

Luke 12:1 (b)

. . . first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

The first danger to watch out for when things seem to be going well in your life, your business, your family, or your ministry is hypocrisy. The word

"hypocrisy" comes from the Greek word *hupokrisis* and refers to the actors in Greek theatre who wore masks to identify their characters. Jesus likens this mask-wearing mentality to leaven because, although it may seem insignificant initially, it becomes puffed-up eventually.

Luke 12:2, 3

For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.

After identifying the danger of hypocrisy, Jesus goes on to speak of the irrationality of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is foolish because the truth eventually comes out. "Be sure your sin will find you out," the Word declares (Numbers 32:23)—not because God will track us down, but because our sin itself will.

The same is true with righteousness. Jesus shone on the Mount of Transfiguration because He was light. Thus, the real miracle of the Transfiguration is not that Jesus was shining. The real miracle is that His humanity was able to conceal His divinity for so long. Indeed, that which is inside a man comes out eventually.

Luke 12:4–7

And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.

Continuing, Jesus speaks of the cause of hypocrisy, which is fear. Although we most often think of hypocrisy in terms of people who pretend to be Christians when they're not, I think an even more subtle form of hypocrisy

is seen in Christians who think they'd better "tone down" their witness for fear of being thought of as too spiritual. "Don't worry about people," Jesus says. "Instead, fear the One whose eye is on you constantly." The realization that God is with you is the cure for hypocrisy.

Luke 12:8–12

Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven. And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.

The second element in the cure for hypocrisy is confession. When you begin a new job, move to a new neighborhood, or enroll in a new school, go on record from day one and let people know you're a believer. Confess Jesus before men, and the Holy Spirit will be right there, telling you what you should say.

Luke 12:13, 14

And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?

Although ministry can all too often become mired in an attempt to right perceived wrongs, Jesus wisely said, "This is not My area of concern," for His purpose was not to make bad men good or good men better. His purpose was to make dead men live, to see people born again and brought into the kingdom.

Luke 12:15 (a)

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness . . .

In addition to hypocrisy, the second danger of which to beware in the day of prosperity is covetousness. "I have heard the confession of every conceivable sin among men," one priest said, "except the sin of covetousness." People feel bad about immorality, lying, swearing—but when was the last time they cried over the sin of covetousness? Yet in Romans 7, Paul says covetousness is the very sin that plagued him. What is covetousness? Simply wanting more of that which we already have enough. And Jesus said it is a sin of which we must be so careful.

Luke 12:15 (b)

. . . for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

Possessions are dangerous because they can possess us. Did you get a new car—or did it get you? You used to be free on Saturdays to toss a ball with your kids. But now you have to wax your car, tune it up, keep it running. Small men seek to get. Great men seek to *be.*

Luke 12:16–20

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

The tragedy of this parable lies not in what the rich man left behind, but in the judgment that awaited him, for he would enter heaven without any

evidence of wise stewardship on earth.

Luke 12:21–24

So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?

God has given us all things not to possess, but to enjoy. The birds sing because they don't have to pay taxes, work on their wardrobes, or paint their houses. They simply enjoy what God gives. Do we do the same?

Luke 12:25–32

And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Don't worry about what you eat, drink, or wear. God knows you have need of these things. He's not out to restrict you. His purpose is to liberate you now and eternally.

Luke 12:33, 34

Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

In the world's stock market, the word is "Buy." In God's, it's "Sell." This doesn't mean you shouldn't have a home or a boat or a car. But if anything begins to possess you, leaving you less time and energy for the things of the Lord, sell it and invest in people, in heaven, in the kingdom.

Luke 12:35–37 (a)

Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching . . .

This text encourages my heart because Jesus doesn't say, "Blessed are those servants who, when the Lord comes, He shall find working, witnessing, praying, preaching, studying or serving." No. Jesus says, "Blessed, or happy, is the one who the Lord finds simply watching"—the one who realizes this life is not where it's at, that life is empty apart from Him. If you are reeling from a relationship that is not working out, finances that are not coming in, or physical pain that is eating you up, blessed are you, for you are acutely aware of the emptiness of this world—and you look forward to heaven all the more.

Luke 12:37 (b)

. . . verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself . . .

I am reminded of another time the Lord girded Himself when, a few weeks after this, as His disciples sat around the table in the Upper Room arguing who was the greatest, He washed their dirty, stinky feet (John 13:4, 5).

Luke 12:37 (c)

. . . and make them to sit down to meat . . .

Why would the Lord have to make us sit down to eat? Because the tendency of our flesh is to pop up, run around, and say, "Okay, Lord, I want to serve You." We are quick to jump up, but sometimes the Lord would have us sit down.

Luke 12:37 (d)
. . . and will come forth and serve them.

The one watching for the Lord's coming will be blessed because Jesus will gird Himself with a towel and will serve him, take care of him, bless him. It was to a cold, weary Peter that Jesus served a hot, hearty breakfast. Thus, even at a time of disobedience in his own life—even when Peter was fishing when he was supposed to be in Jerusalem waiting, he found in the hand of the Lord the very thing he had been searching for all night long (John 21:9).

Luke 12:38
And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.

Why, in John 13, did Jesus wash feet and serve His disciples? Why, in John 21, did He cook fish and feed them? Why does Jesus bless those who are simply looking for His coming? Because those whom the Lord serves realize grace has nothing to do with who they are and everything to do with who He is. Those whom the Lord serves understand it's no longer due to their greatness, but solely to His graciousness that they are blessed; that it's not based upon anything they have or haven't done, but completely upon what He did on the Cross when He died for their sins.

> Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.
>
> 2 Timothy 4:8

The crown of righteousness is given not to those who fight the good fight or run the race successfully. It's given to those who love His appearing. It's given to those who say, "Lord, I realize that this world is not really where it's at. There's got to be more. Therefore, I'm looking for Your coming."

Luke 12:39, 40

And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.

There are those who say that Jesus cannot come back this hour because the church hasn't yet gone through the Tribulation as described in Revelation 6—19. But I challenge this because Jesus in this passage was telling His disciples to watch, to be constantly alert for the possibility of His coming at a time they didn't expect it. If, on the other hand, the church were indeed to go through the Tribulation, we would know precisely the hour of His coming: exactly 1,260 days after the day Antichrist goes into the rebuilt Jewish temple and demands to be worshiped (Daniel 12; Revelation 12—13). Thus, His coming would not be "at an hour we think not." I believe one of the keys to overcoming hypocrisy and covetousness is to live in constant anticipation that *today* could be the day Jesus comes back.

Luke 12:41

Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?

Jesus will talk to both: to the disciples in verses 42–53, and then to the crowd in verses 54 to 59. . . .

Luke 12:42, 43

And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

Blessed, happy is the one living in the expectation that the Son of Man might come even this hour.

Luke 12:44

Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.

Here, Jesus hints at the fact that those who are watching for His coming presently will, in the ages to come, hold positions of authority. In other words, what we do now affects what we'll do in heaven. Maybe there are interests or desires God has placed on your heart that have yet to be worked out or realized. It is very likely that when you get to heaven, those will be the very areas that will come into fullness and fruition in your life.

Luke 12:45

But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken.

The result of saying the Lord can't come today will be a two-fold tendency: brutality and carnality. How would we treat one another if we truly believed Jesus would return in the next twenty-four hours? I only lash out at people or beat up on people if I forget Jesus could very well come today. An awareness of the Rapture is not escapism. Quite the opposite. Jesus said a realization of return leads one to living rightly and rewards eternally.

Luke 12:46–48

The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever

much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

I don't believe the evil servant here is doomed to hell. Rather, I believe the implication is that he simply loses out on what he could have enjoyed eternally had he lived his life looking for his Lord's return.

Luke 12:49

I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I if it be already kindled?

I believe Jesus is speaking of the fire of Pentecost, perhaps as if to say, "I wish I had already gone through the process of the Cross."

Luke 12:50

But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!

Speaking of the baptism of His crucifixion, Jesus reaffirms His commitment to go to the Cross, to finish the Work of our salvation, to save our souls.

Luke 12:51–53

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

In the context of this teaching, Jesus' words serve as a warning that His coming will cause division. Perhaps there are some in your family who say, "Do you really believe Jesus is going to come again, that you're going to be

raptured up to heaven? You're crazy!" Take heart, Jesus told us this would happen.

Luke 12:54–57

And he said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?

We can put a man on the moon, but we don't know what in the world is going on. Scientists can tell us how to get to the stars, but not how to get to heaven. So, while our understanding is expanding technologically, we are left in the dark spiritually.

Although the scientists of Jesus' day weren't able to send men to the moon, they did indeed study the skies. And in so doing, they became adept at predicting the weather, but inept at understanding the climate of their times. You see, they should have known their Messiah was among them, for Micah 5:2 declared He would be born in Bethlehem—and hadn't a so-called King been born in Bethlehem thirty-three years earlier, so intimidating to Herod that he ordered the annihilation of all boys two years of age and under? They should have known their Messiah was among them when people began to imply that the Rabbi from Galilee was conceived illegitimately, for didn't Isaiah declare centuries earlier that when this One came the sign given would be that a virgin would conceive and bring forth a son (Isaiah 7:14)? They should have known their Messiah was among them, for the people of Israel had been enslaved in Egypt for four hundred years before a deliverer was raised up to lead them into the Land of Promise. And now, after four hundred years of silence following the Book of Malachi, hadn't a herald in the form of a locust-eating Baptist come on the scene pointing to the One who would lead them not into the Promised Land, but all the way to heaven? No wonder that before He rode into the city to present Himself as King, Jesus looked down on Jerusalem and wept, "O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, if thou wouldest have known this is thy day"—the day prophesied by Daniel.

Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks . . .

Daniel 9:25 (a)

A *heptad,* or "week," being seven years, sixty-nine *heptads* would be four hundred eighty-three years. It was on March 14, 445 B.C. that Artaxerxes gave the order to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. And exactly 173,880 days—483 years—later, on April 6, A.D. 32, Jesus rode into Jerusalem. No wonder He said, "You should have known this is your day."

Luke 12:58

When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate, as thou art in the way, give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him; lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison.

When you have a legal matter, you try to work it out without going to court—especially if you know you're the one in error. Therefore, wouldn't it be logical to prepare for the Day of Judgment?

Luke 12:59

I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite.

Just as it is impossible for one to work off his debt once he's put in prison, those who are without Christ on the Day of Judgment will be cast into hell with no way to work their way out. Oh, to be watching and wise concerning the day of His appearing.

13 Luke 13:1–5

There were present at that season some that told him of the Gali laeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And

Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

After listening to Him talk about preparing for eternity, those listening to Jesus asked, "What about the tragedy we're seeing presently?"

"I want you to understand something about tragedy," Jesus answered. "Those Galileans were not sinners above others. Nor were those who died in Siloam. And unless you repent, you will perish as well."

This concept is so important. Whether you observe tragedy in the lives of others, or experience it yourself, the question is not, "Why did it happen?" Rather, the question is why it doesn't happen more often. Because of our sin and continual rebellion, we deserve to be wiped out totally. It's only because of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed entirely (Lamentations 3:22). There's far too much muttering about that which didn't work out in our lives when there should be a whole lot more marveling about how good God has been to sinners like us.

Luke 13:6 (a)

He spake also this parable; a certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard . . .

The fig tree was a symbol representing the nation of Israel, so Jesus uses it in a parable to remind the Jews that they are no better than the Galileans or those living in Siloam.

Luke 13:6 (b), 7

. . . and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

Even as Jesus ministered publicly for three years to a people who, by and large, would not respond or receive Him, so, too, regarding the fig tree in this parable, after finding no fruit upon it for three years, the owner says, "Cut it down. It's doing nothing more than soaking up nutrients from the soil and taking up room in the garden."

Luke 13:8

And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it.

Within the year, the vinedresser would do two things: First, he would dig around the roots. The Father, our Vinedresser (John 15:1), does the same with us as He gets to the root issues in our lives by exposing sin. Second, he would "dung"—or fertilize—it. After giving a list of his qualifications and accomplishments, Paul refers to them as dung, an appropriate name for the best the flesh is able to produce (Philippians 3:8).

Luke 13:9

And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

After being cultivated for a year, did the fig tree go on to bear fruit? Jesus doesn't say. Because the parable is open ended, because it must be applied personally, that question must be answered individually. What is fruit? Among other things, the Bible defines it as giving thanks to His name (Hebrews 13:15), giving monetary gifts (Philippians 4:17), loving people (Galatians 5:22, 23), winning souls (Romans 1:13), doing works of righteousness (James 3:18). We exist for one reason: That the Lord might be satiated and satisfied by the fruit in our lives (Colossians 1:16). Does the Lord find fruit on the tree of your life—or does He walk away empty-handed each time He passes by?

The way to bear fruit for the Lord's pleasure is to allow Him to "dig and dung," to expose sin and dispel self. How does this happen practically? By beginning each day and every project saying, "Lord, I need You. I can't do this. My own ability, my own personality is dung. My heart is riddled with

sin. Oh, I can produce leaves to impress people—but not fruit to satisfy You. It is only by Your mercy and grace that I will have anything of substance or pleasure to offer You."

Luke 13:10, 11

And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.

This is a mystery to me because Jesus' referring to her as a daughter of Abraham (verse 16) means this woman was a woman of faith. And yet for eighteen years, the work of the Enemy bound her physically. Nonetheless, here she was in the synagogue. She would have missed the moment of the miraculous had she stayed home the day Jesus "just happened" to walk in.

I can recall specific times in my own pilgrimage when I didn't want to go to a Bible study or a church service but went anyway—to experience Jesus ministering to me in a way I'm convinced He wouldn't have otherwise. Therefore, I have learned this secret: The more I don't feel like meeting with the congregation, the more I need to be there. I am convinced that people walk around needlessly crippled because they're not in the company of believers, not in the place where Jesus is (Hebrews 2:12).

Luke 13:12 (a)

And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him . . .

Upon entering a situation, some have an eye to see what's wrong. Others have an eye to see what's right. Jesus has an eye to see who's in need. I like that.

Luke 13:12 (b), 13

. . . and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

When Jesus touches someone addicted to drugs, alcohol, sexual perversion, or any other sin, there comes a moment when he is made straight. Immediately. For some that might sound simplistic. I've seen it happen enough, however, to know that when Jesus touches people through the Word and through the body, they are made straight immediately.

"But I've been coming to church for eighteen months, and I'm still caught up in this addiction or bowed down by that activity," you say. Keep coming. Keep believing. Keep worshiping—for, because Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, there will come a time when, like the daughter of Abraham, you will hear in your heart, "Thou art loosed." And, like her, you'll be able to stand up straight.

Luke 13:14

And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.

The healing of a godly woman caused the ruler of the synagogue to become indignant. Amazing.

Luke 13:15, 16

The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?

On the Sabbath, Jesus loosed the woman who had been bound physically. But because of their rules and regulations regarding the Sabbath, this religious leader would remain bound in false piety and hypocrisy.

Luke 13:17

And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things

that were done by him.

We follow a radical Leader, gang—One who is liberating, One who is unique, One who is wonderful.

Luke 13:18, 19

Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.

Because mustard seeds don't grow into trees large enough to support birds, and because flocks of birds in Scripture are often symbols of evil (e.g., Genesis 40:19; Matthew 13:4), in this parable, through this analogy, Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God will grow in an unnatural way that will allow strange people to hide out therein. All you have to do is watch religious TV to see that this is so, for there are indeed some strange birds roosting in the name of the kingdom of God.

Luke 13:20, 21

And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

Leaven appears ninety-eight times in the Scriptures—and in every instance it speaks of evil. So when people point accusingly to evil even within church history, I don't have to rationalize or defend it because Jesus said this would happen.

Luke 13:22, 23 (a)

And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?

As Jesus journeyed toward Jerusalem, a man asked Him, "Lord, are just a few going to be saved?"—a controversial question even to this day. Many people question the exclusivity of God, wondering how He could exclude people from living eternally.

Luke 13:23 (b), 24

And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

Hearing this question, Jesus did what He so often did—rather than answering it directly, He dealt with the one who asked it personally. Skirting the hypothetical, He got right to the practical because His concern was not theoretical; it was personal. We are told that the Lord elected us, chose us, predestined us before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). That is why Jesus told His disciples that it was He who chose them—not vice versa (John 15:16).

Luke 13:25

When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are.

To those who don't want to open their lives to Him now, Jesus will not open His kingdom then. I can't help but think of Noah. For one hundred years, he told the people they had better turn around and change directions because a flood was coming. But they thought he was all wet—until the rain began to fall. Then they wanted in. But because it was the Lord who shut the door, Noah couldn't open it to let a few more people inside. And in this, the Lord shows us that there comes a day when the door is shut and one's decision is sealed eternally.

Luke 13:26–30

Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I

tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.

"But, Lord," people will protest, "we ate with You. We listened to You. We were at church regularly. We went to the singles' potlucks every Friday."

And the Lord will say, "I don't know you," because the issue is not association. It's regeneration.

That is why Jesus says, "Strive to enter in," (verse 24). The Greek word translated "strive" is *agonizomai,* from which we get our word "agonize." It is the word used to describe what Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He agonized about the Father's will with such intensity that He actually sweat blood (Luke 22:44). Although Scripture tells us over and over again not to strive (Proverbs 3:30; 2 Timothy 2:14; 2 Timothy 2:24), there is one question over which we should indeed strive: Am I saved? Whether He comes for us tomorrow, or whether we live thirty more years, how can we know we're going to spend eternity with the Lord? Three ways . . .

The Scripture before us . . .

> These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.
>
> 1 John 5:13

The Greek word translated "believe" is *pisteuo.* Used in reference to the way one places his weight on a crutch, *pisteuo* doesn't mean to merely agree with intellectually, but to lean on, or trust in. Yet even though we believe the Word, the fact remains that people can challenge us concerning it. So there is a second place wherein we find assurance of our salvation. . . .

The saints around us . . .

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

1 John 3:14

You know you're born again when you start loving Christians—people you couldn't stand before you got saved. You know you're saved when you find yourself feeling comfortable with the Christian community. But lest we doubt our salvation when we don't love the saints as consistently as we should, there is a third assurance. . . .

The Spirit within us . . .

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Romans 8:14

The work of the Holy Ghost is to give you a witness in your heart in order that you might know that you know that you know you're saved. Martin Luther and John Calvin called this passage the *Testimonium Spiritus Internus Sanctium*—or the Internal Testimony of the Spirit. If you haven't received the witness of the Spirit in your heart, you must agonize until you know with absolute certainty that you truly are born again, that you can go to the Father freely and say, "Abba, I come to You not because of my spirituality, but because You have cleansed me by the blood of Calvary."

Luke 13:31

The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee.

The Pharisees said this not because they cared about Jesus, but to get Him to leave their region.

Luke 13:32

And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.

A three-day journey away from Jerusalem, Jesus said, "I'm going to continue dealing with the devil and healing people on My way to Jerusalem." Once there, He would deal a deathblow to Satan and purchase eternal healing and salvation for mankind as He hung on the Cross of Calvary.

Luke 13:33

Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.

"I don't have to worry about Herod's threats," said Jesus, "because I know I'll make it to Jerusalem, for that's where I must die."

Luke 13:34

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!

Knowing Socrates was innocent of the charge of corrupting the youth of Athens, it is said that his executioner wept as he handed him the hemlock. Here, however, the executioner doesn't weep for the Condemned, the Condemned weeps for the executioners (John 11:35). Truly, the world has never seen such love. What a picture! Jesus cries not because Jerusalem would reject Him, but because they wouldn't allow Him to protect them. How about you? Have you allowed the Lord to do what He desires to do—to place His arm around you, to protect and comfort you? It is not our shortcomings or our failings that cause the Lord to weep. Rather, it is our failure to allow Him to love us that causes His tears to flow.

Jesus called Herod a fox—devious, sly, destructive (Luke 13:32). Yet He likened Himself to a hen—comforting, nurturing, protective. How about us? Has today been a day of devouring others, or has it been a day of defending others? I'm so deeply impressed with Jesus Christ because of His incredible

mercy and largeness of heart. How I long to be less like a fox and more like a hen.

Luke 13:35

Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

"You won't see Me," said Jesus, "until you are finally ready to acknowledge Me as Lord." That's what the Tribulation is all about—to bring Israel to the point where she is awakened to the fact that Jesus is indeed Messiah (Zechariah 12, 14; Psalm 118).



14 Luke 14:1

And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Phari sees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him.

Whether issued by Pharisee or publican, friend or foe, Jesus never turned down an invitation. At this particular meal, He will speak very pointedly to five groups of people. And what He will say will be shockingly honest. In verses 2–6, He will speak to the Pharisees about their pseudo-spirituality. In verses 7–11, He will talk to the guests surrounding Him about their miserable manners and methodology. In verses 12–14, He will correct the host who invited Him concerning his wrong motives for hospitality. In verses 15–24, He will reply to the man who interrupted Him regarding his mistaken assumption of his destiny. In verses 25–34, He will address the crowd about their need to think carefully.

Whether in relation to parenting, vocation, or ministry, every one of us comes to a certain point when we have the opportunity to choose to do what Jesus did so naturally and so beautifully—to care more about others doing well than about what they think of us. All too often, we shy away from speaking truth because we want others to like us. Not so Jesus, for in the

chapter before us, He'll say things that, although hard to hear, were needful not only for His listeners, but for us. . . .

Luke 14:2

And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy.

Knowing Jesus had already healed on the Sabbath six times previously, the Pharisees were waiting to accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath law should he do so again.

Luke 14:3, 4

And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go.

Knowing exactly what the Pharisees were thinking, Jesus tossed the ball back into their court—silencing them in the process.

Luke 14:5

And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?

The same traditions that stated that a man couldn't be healed on the Sabbath also said that an animal that had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath could be rescued. The same thing happens today. Legislation passed recently declares that he who removes an egg from a spotted owl's nest can be punished five years in the state penitentiary. But a doctor can abort as many babies as he wants without anyone saying a word.

Luke 14:6

And they could not answer him again to these things.

It is not our rules, regulations, or pseudo-spirituality that will impact people. It is our love, our compassion, our desire to help those in need that causes even the Pharisees to wonder.

Luke 14:7–11

And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Shifting His attention from the Pharisees to the other guests, Jesus speaks to those who were jockeying for the best spots at the table, who were more concerned about sitting in the right place than about being the right person.

Luke 14:12–14

Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

Addressing the host of the event, Jesus said, “Don’t only invite people who can do something for you—who can pay you back, include you in their circle, or return your invitation. When you give a dinner party, invite the nobodies.”

Luke 14:15

And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.

At this point, the dinner must have been getting a bit tense. After all, the Pharisees and lawyers, guests and host had all been corrected and rebuked. So perhaps it was to change the subject that this man said, "We're all Jews. Let's talk about something we can agree upon. Let's talk about the Resurrection."

Luke 14:16, 17

Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.

Sitting at this dinner party, Jesus speaks of an even greater feast. . . .

Luke 14:18–20

And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

Aren't these the same excuses men use to this day?

- "I can't accept Your invitation, Lord. I've got to take care of my possessions," or —
- "My job just won't allow me to seek God at this time in my life," or —
- "I'm married. My first priority is my spouse."

Jesus is speaking of heaven, of salvation, of eternity—of matters of the greatest possible significance. Yet people say, "Sorry, I just don't have time."

Luke 14:21 (a)

So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant . . .

The master of the house was angry. He had given such great opportunity to people. Yet all they gave him in return were weak excuses.

Luke 14:21 (b)

. . . Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

Why would the master of the house invite those who were poor, maimed, and blind? Because poor people wouldn't be distracted by material possessions; maimed people wouldn't be harnessing oxen; and blind people weren't likely to be married. In other words, the servants were to invite those who were not distracted by possessions, vocation, or affections. They were to invite those who wouldn't make ludicrous excuses, who wouldn't be sidetracked by things of the world, who would have a heart for heaven and sensitivity toward the things of the kingdom. That is why Paul would later say to the early church, "Look around. You don't see many rich, many noble, many wise among you,"—and why we find the same to be true two thousand years later (1 Corinthians 1:26).

Luke 14:22–24

And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

Because the Jews—those who had been invited initially, those who had the prophets and the Pentateuch, those who had Jesus living among them

presently—had excuses, the Gentiles were invited. And, poor, maimed, and blind as we are, we accepted the invitation gladly!

Luke 14:25

And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them,

That the feast at which Jesus was a guest took place in an open courtyard, a crowd would have heard His words to the Pharisees, the host, and the invited guests. And now Jesus has a word for them as well. . . .

Luke 14:26

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

It's as if Jesus said to the crowd, "Before you cheer Me on because of what I've said to others, you yourselves need to think more carefully about what it means to be My disciple."

Having been notified that one of his students had done something foolish, the wise professor answered, "That person may have attended my lectures, but he is not one of my students." So, too, just as there is a difference between attending lectures and being a student, there is a difference between being a Christian and being a disciple. "Disciple" means "disciplined one"—one who is committed to the cause of the kingdom. Thus, Jesus is saying, "You can't be My disciple if other affections have priority in your life."

Luke 14:27

And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

There is a great deal of misunderstanding concerning what it means to bear one's cross. A noisy neighbor is not a cross. Arthritis is not a cross. Financial pressure is not a cross. Neighbors, illness, finances are just the

stuff of life, common to Christian and heathen alike. Jesus showed us what the cross is when He laid down His life in order that we could be lifted up. The cross is the way by which we die to self in order that others can be saved, helped, redeemed, restored. And Jesus says we can't be disciples unless we are willing to lay aside our rights and preferences in order to see others do well.

Luke 14:28–33

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambas-sage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

Whether building or battling—and the Christian life consists of both—a disciple must count the cost carefully and pay the price sacrificially.

Luke 14:34, 35 (a)

Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out.

"You must hate your family, count the cost carefully, bear the cross daily or risk becoming useless." It was because Jesus loved these people deeply that He spoke to them so honestly.

Luke 14:35 (b)

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

The very ideas Jesus conveyed at the table here in chapter 14 are the same ones He speaks to my heart at the table of Communion . . .

As He did with the Pharisees, Jesus deals with my pseudo-spirituality. When I take the bread and drink the cup, all the dials get set back to zero, and my faith becomes miraculously and mystically simple. The Pharisee within me dissipates when I'm at the Lord's table. . . .

As He did with the guests, Jesus reminds me that I *put Him on the Cross;* I *broke His body; He died for* me. *Therefore, when I'm at the Lord's table, I have no desire to be in a position of honor or prominence. Instead, I want to lose my identity and blend into a oneness with the body of Christ, a oneness with Jesus.*

As He did with the host, Jesus zeroes in on my motives. People who want to grow intellectually or who want to be noticed in ministry oftentimes will ignore the Lord's table because they think it doesn't benefit them. Not so the early church. They saw Communion as essential, for it is through Communion that they remembered Jesus.

As He did with the man who brought up the subject of the kingdom, Jesus reminds me of my destiny—that because His body was broken and His blood shed, I'm going to heaven.

And as He did with the crowd, Jesus causes me to think clearly regarding the price He paid for my sin, and the cost of discipleship.

Simple theology, heartfelt humility, motivational purity, a reminder of destiny, and a call to think clearly are found at His table—be it in the home of a Pharisee or at Communion presently.

Come and dine!



15 Luke 15:1

Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

"Those who have ears to hear, listen up," Jesus said—and the publicans and sinners did just that. The Pharisees and the guests of honor didn't gather quite as closely. It was the sinners who responded to Him.

Luke 15:2 (a)

And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners . . .

Even though they didn't know what they were saying, the enemies of Jesus often shared profound insights about Him. . . .

"He saved others, but Himself He cannot save," they said as Jesus hung on the Cross (Matthew 27:42). How true. If He had saved Himself, He could not have saved me.

"It is expedient that one man die for the nation" (John 18:14). Although Caiaphas meant it was better that a "rabble-rouser" die than that the whole nation be bludgeoned into submission by the Romans, he unknowingly spoke prophetically—for Jesus did indeed die not for a nation, but for the whole world.

"He receives sinners," scoffed the scribes and Pharisees in an attempt to put Jesus down. But what a marvelous truth. He does indeed receive sinners. The religious community might reject me, high society might refuse me—but Jesus Christ will always receive me.

Luke 15:2 (b)

. . . and eateth with them.

In Eastern culture, it was believed that a mystical union took place between those who broke bread or shared a meal together. Seen in this light, Communion takes on an entirely new significance.

Luke 15:3

And he spake this parable unto them, saying,

It is in response to the charge that He received sinners that Jesus gives the following parable. Oftentimes, we view this parable as being three—the first dealing with a lost sheep, the second with a lost coin, and the third with a lost son. But notice that the word "parable" is singular. It is one parable with three aspects, one symphony with three movements, one song with three stanzas. . . .

- The shepherd of the first stanza speaks of the Son.
- The woman in the second stanza speaks of the work of the Spirit.
- The father in the final stanza speaks of the Father heart of God.

Perhaps no debate has been more central to our faith than that of divine sovereignty vs. human responsibility. In the mid 1500s, John Calvin came on the scene as a strong proponent of the exclusive role of divine sovereignty in salvation. That is, that man is depraved and hopelessly lost. Therefore, the Lord chooses him apart from anything he can do. Jacobus Arminius disagreed. A contemporary of Calvin, he believed man's responsibility was definitely a factor in his salvation. After all, hadn't Jesus said, "Come unto Me"? Therefore, Arminius maintained, each person must make his own decision whether to be part of the kingdom.

An extreme Calvinist would never feel a need to witness. An extreme Armenian would be vulnerable to pride. So what is the answer? In this single parable, both positions are taught. Hopelessly and helplessly lost, the sheep and the coin are sought by the shepherd and the woman. But in the story of the prodigal, it is the son who decides to turn toward his father.

Consequently, when people ask where I stand on the issue of God's sovereignty versus man's responsibility, I usually say, "Where do *you* stand?" And when they tell me, I say, "I'm with you, brother." You see, because there are convincing scriptural arguments for both sides, I spent a lot of time trying to reconcile these two positions. But then the Lord reminded me that, because He's bigger than me, He never asks me to reconcile seemingly contradictory positions. He never asks me to figure them out. He just asks me to take them in—to marvel that He chose me as well as to be eternally grateful that He provided a way for me to choose Him.

Luke 15:4

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

The shepherd didn't leave the ninety-nine sheep helpless and defenseless, for in those days, when night fell, shepherds would bring their flocks together into one area wherein all of the shepherds would watch the combined flock. The next day, they would take their individual flocks into separate feeding areas. How did they separate the sheep? Each had a different song, chant, or call that their own sheep recognized—even as Jesus alluded in John 10:4.

Luke 15:5

And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

What was on the shoulders of our Shepherd? A wooden Cross—for not only did He go out and find us, but He Himself became a Lamb to be sacrificed *for* us.

Luke 15:6

And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

"Celebrate with me," says the shepherd. "I've found the sheep which was lost." Sheep are so dumb they can't even find their own food or get to water nearby. They wander aimlessly and get mixed up so easily. How right the Lord was in likening us to them (Matthew 9:36).

Luke 15:7

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

When someone gets saved, there is great celebration. If that be the case, you may wonder, *Why not give more reason to celebrate by wandering off every so often?* To answer this, consider the prayer of another shepherd: "Make me to hear joy and gladness that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice" (Psalm 51:8). You see, if a lamb wandered away habitually into areas that could be potentially destructive, the shepherd would break its legs. Then, after carefully setting the bones, he would carry the lamb on his shoulders while the bones mended. When the lamb was healed, so close did it grow toward the shepherd that from that time on, it would never leave his side. And therein lies the reason for not wandering away. Every time you think a particular sin isn't so bad, think "crack, snap, pop" because that's what will happen—not because the Lord is vindictive or angry, but because He wants to save us from danger and damnation. If, like me, you've had a few broken bones on your journey, you too are learning to say, "Lord, I want to stay right next to You every step of the way."

Luke 15:8–10

Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

To explain the seeming panic over the loss of a single coin, it must be understood that in Hebrew households of the time, when a woman was first married, she would string ten coins together and wear them across her forehead as a public announcement of her marriage. Because it sometimes took years to save these coins, losing one would be similar to losing the diamond out of one's wedding ring—a loss not only because of the monetary value, but because of the sentimental value.

A lost coin is worthless. It's only in someone's hand that it becomes valuable. The same is true of people.

"Give Me a coin," Jesus said when asked about taxes. "Whose image is on this coin?"

"Caesar's," came back the reply.

"Then give it to Caesar," Jesus said. "Whose image are you *made in?"*

Obviously, the answer is God's. But if a person is lost, if they're not saved, if they don't know the Lord, although they still have value—gifts, personality, all kinds of possibilities—they are worthless outside of His hand. Therefore, the work of the Spirit is to sweep frantically in search of them. How? First by lighting the light of the Word (Psalm 119:105). Then by searching through inward conviction. And when the coin is found, great is the rejoicing indeed.

Luke 15:11, 12 (a)

And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.

The word "prodigal" meaning "wasteful," it is a prodigal son indeed who says to his father, "I want goods *from* you but not a relationship *with* you." And such were we before we opened our hearts to the Lord.

Luke 15:12 (b)–16

And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

Pig slop never satisfies. Be it through career, money, goods, toys, or trinkets, you're trying to find fulfillment or satisfaction, you'll thirst again.

The Lord is the only One who will truly satisfy you deeply (John 6:35).

Luke 15:17–20 (a)

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father.

"I have sinned." This phrase appears eight times in Scripture . . .

- "I have sinned," said Pharaoh (Exodus 9:27).
- "I have sinned," said Balaam (Numbers 22:34).
- "I have sinned," said Saul (1 Samuel 15:24).
- "I have sinned," said Judas (Matthew 27:4).

Each of these men acknowledged their sin, but none repented from it. But there are four more. . . .

- "I have sinned," said Achan (Joshua 7:20).
- "I have sinned," said David (2 Samuel 12:13).
- "I have sinned," said the prodigal.

And each repented. It's not enough just to say, "I have sinned." True repentance takes place at the point the sinner, like the prodigal, changes direction and heads toward the Father.

Luke 15:20 (b)–24

But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father

said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

I'm sure as the prodigal headed home, he thought, *I've sowed my wild oats and now my father is going to bring out the threshing machine.* But what did the father do? He gave his son a robe for his back, a ring for his hand, shoes for his feet, and a meal for his growling stomach. Even to this day in Semitic cultures, a "sacrifice of the threshold" is made whenever someone returns from a journey—to atone for the sins he committed while he was away. So, too, the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, was slain for our sin in order that we can be welcomed home again.

Luke 15:25–32

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

Imagine what would have happened had the prodigal been welcomed by his self-righteous elder brother rather than by his merciful father. Because a lot of prodigal people are greeted by elder brothers, by self-righteous Christians, they think they cannot go home to the Father, that forgiveness and

mercy is too much to hope for, that their only choice is to return to the pig slop of the far country. What a tragedy. We are *all* prodigals—elder brother and younger brother alike.

Each of the three portions of the parable presented here in Luke 15 speaks of a different aspect of sin: The sheep was lost due to foolishness. The coin was lost due to the carelessness of another. The son was lost due to rebelliousness. I have observed that virtually any sin can be categorized by one of those three characteristics: Sometimes we make foolish mistakes. Other times, as in the case of child abuse, the sins of others leave their marks upon us. And oftentimes we are intentionally, willfully rebellious.

I have also observed that most people can be very understanding toward any two of those three reasons for sin, but become an elder brother regarding a third. And it's a different third for each person. Some people see a brother caught in a foolish sin, and their heart goes out to him. Or they'll see someone hurt by an unloving spouse and will offer help and healing to them. But when it comes to rebelliousness, all they can say is, "You should have known better."

Others say, "I can relate to the rebel. I know what it feels like to hear the call of the far country. And I can relate to the one who makes foolish mistakes. But why can't those who are abused just get over it and move on?"

Still others can relate to the one who's lost because of another's carelessness or to the one who stubbornly chooses to walk in rebelliousness. But they can't figure out how someone could be so dumb as to wander off in foolishness.

But here's the Good News: The Father feels compassion for all three. Our God does not say to the foolish, "You idiot," to the one who is abused, "Grow up," or to the rebellious, "You're getting what you deserve." No, He runs to meet all three equally the moment they turn toward Him. That's the kind of God we serve.



For topical study of Luke 15:11–32, see"My Three Sons" below.

MY THREE SONS

A Topical Study of LUKE 15:11–32

Several years ago a survey was taken of literary scholars to determine the greatest short story every written. When the results of the survey came in, 70 percent said the single greatest short story ever recorded is the story of the Prodigal Son—for to qualify as "great," a story must be able to be read time and time again, each time making an impact, leaving an impression. And the story of the Prodigal Son met those requirements perfectly. I have found this to be true personally, for each time I read the story before us, I see something new in it.

The Prodigal Son

The first time I studied this story, I related to the younger son because he showed an immaturity and an impetuousness I see so often in myself.

"Give me the goods," he said to his father.

And the father—so generous, so gracious, so wise—allowed his son his desire. So off the son went to a far country. He had lots of friends initially, but when his money was gone, so were his friends because the old adage is true: A friend cannot be known in prosperity, and an enemy will not be hid in adversity.

When he tired of eating pig slop, Scripture says the prodigal "came to himself" (verse 17). Paul said essentially the same thing when he said it was the sin within him that caused him to do that which he didn't want to do (Romans 7:16, 17). Truly, we all have experienced this, for when we are caught up in sin, we find ourselves doing and saying things we never thought we would do or say. But eventually, like the prodigal, we "come to ourselves" and we say, "This isn't me," as we head home to the Father.

The father knew this would happen. That is why he didn't send a check in a letter to his son, saying, "I know you're hurting. Here's fifty bucks to see you through a week or two." No, the father let his son hit bottom, knowing this was necessary to draw his son back to the place of blessing and protection.

Although this brings me great comfort, it also carries a real warning, for Jesus told us that we are in the Father's hand—never to be let go (John 10:27–29). Now, if the Lord will never let us go, why did the Prodigal Son's father—a picture of the heavenly Father—let the prodigal—a picture of us—travel to the far country? I believe it was to illustrate "bungee theology." That is, I believe there is a bungee cord wrapped around us, the end of which our Father holds in His hand. We can indeed walk away from Him—all the way to the far country. The problem, however, is that when the bungee cord is stretched as far as it can go, it will snap back—carrying us with it. The question is not whether or not we will come back. The question is, how hard will we hit when we do? Maybe like me, you're learning to say, "Lord, don't let me stretch the bungee cord. I'm tired of getting banged up." The prodigal son hit hard. We don't know what the repercussions were due to his journey

into the far country. We don't know what diseases and scars and pains he might have picked up. But at a certain point, he realized he had to go home. And as he did, he began rehearsing what he would say to his father.

"Give me the goods," he demanded before leaving home.

"Make me a servant," he cried upon his return.

What is *your* prayer? "Give me the goods"—or "Make me a servant"?

At first sight of him, the father did something Aristotle declared no man of dignity would ever do publicly: He ran. It's the only time in the entire Bible where God the Father is seen as being in a hurry.

And when his son drew near, the father smothered him with hugs and kisses—not only out of affection, but for protection. You see, Deuteronomy 21 makes it clear that if a son was stubborn and rebellious, a glutton and a drunkard—as was the prodigal—he was to be stoned (Deuteronomy 21:18–21). Thus, I suggest that in hugging his son, the father was essentially saying, "No one is going to lay a hand on him."

"Put the best robe on him," the father said. Whose would the best robe be? The father's. That is how Isaiah could say we are robed in the righteousness of God (61:10) and how Paul could declare that we are the righteousness of God because we are robed in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21).

"Put a ring on his finger," the father said—which speaks of authority. "Put shoes on his feet," said the father. Servants never wore shoes. But this prodigal was more than a servant. He was a son. On his way home, the Prodigal Son no doubt thought he would get what he deserved: a beating. Instead, he got what he never dreamed possible: blessing.

The Plodding Son

The first time I read this story, I was amazed by the kindness of the Father to the prodigal. But then my attention shifted to the one plodding away in the field—the elder son. "What is the noise I hear coming from the house?" he asked.

"Your dad is throwing a party because your brother is back," answered one of the servants.

"What?!" said the elder son. "I have been working faithfully and diligently, but a fatted calf was never killed for me, a party never thrown for me." And he was angry.

"All that I have is yours," the father said to him. In other words, "You've been so busy trying to earn favor and merit blessing that you never had time to party. It was here for you all the while, but you were too busy working to enjoy it. Yes, your brother was caught up in looseness. But you've been caught up in legalism—and it's robbed you of your joy."

Gang, if you are working to receive blessing, the Father will meet you in that place and give you what you deserve—which won't be much. But what the younger son experienced and what the older son had to learn was that the Father's righteousness and blessing, His merriment and parties, are given not according to works or energy, but simply because of His grace and mercy.

This is a hard concept for us to understand because from very early on, the fact that "there's no free lunch" is ingrained into each of us. The fact that if we want to get ahead, we must pull ourselves up by our own boot straps is very much a part of who we are culturally. Spiritually, however, nothing could be further from the truth. "By *grace* are ye saved, *not* of works lest any man should boast," Paul declared (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

That is why the Father is looking for people the world calls wasted and foolish upon whom He can pour out blessing and receive all of the glory.

You'll know you're an elder brother if you find yourself angry when people are blessed whom you don't think deserve to be. When I find myself feeling this way, I hear the Father whisper to me, "You're relating to Me on the basis of your works, and you'll never enjoy the party until you realize it's all based on grace."

Who do you think became the better worker—the elder son who was resentful and bitter, or the younger son who marveled at the goodness of his father? I suggest that the son who realizes how good the Father has been to him is the son who will begin to be a servant diligently and joyfully, all the while experiencing God's blessings on the merit of grace exclusively.

The Perfect Son

Are you an elder son, still trying to work to prove that God should bless your marriage or your job, your children or your ministry? Are you a prodigal son still in the pigpen? Both of their stories challenge and convict me. But this week in reading the story one more time, I saw a third Son—the One telling the story. . . .

"This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," the Father declared at the outset of His earthly ministry (Matthew 3:17). Why was the Father well-pleased in His Son? Because His Son never sinned. He was tempted indeed (Matthew 4). But He never once sinned. Unlike the younger son, He never wandered off into the pigpen.

Yet He was also unlike the older brother, for the second time He heard His Father say, "This is My beloved Son," was on the Mount of Transfiguration at the end of His earthly ministry (Matthew 17:5). At that point, having demonstrated that it was possible to live a sinless life, I believe Jesus could have launched into heaven, saying, "I worked hard. I made it through. Tough luck for you prodigals." But he didn't. He descended from the Mount of Transfiguration to climb the Mount of Calvary to die for you and me that we might be forgiven of our sin and carnality.

Take heart, fellow prodigal; Good News, fellow plodder: Positionally, you are *in* Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) and prophetically, you will one day be *like* Christ (1 John 3:2). Therefore, if you're a prodigal son, return; and if you're a plodding son, rejoice for the Perfect Son has made a way for you to run into the embrace of your Father.



16 Surprising as it may be, Jesus said more about money than about any other single subject. Fully one-sixth of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke deal with money—as do twelve of the thirty-eight parables. Why? A study several years ago revealed that the average American adult male spends 50 percent of his time dealing with money-related matters—how to make more, how to spend less, what to do with what he has. No wonder, then, that Jesus had so much to say about money. The longest chapter in the

Bible, Psalm 119, deals with the Word. But the second longest, Numbers 7, is all about the giving of money. I find this to be significant. Here in our text, Jesus weighs in on the matter. . . .

Luke 16:1, 2

And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

There was an interesting story in the news concerning a mysterious shooting spree in downtown Los Angeles, wherein a large number of windows in commercial buildings were blown out by a muted shotgun. There were no injuries or robberies—just a lot of broken glass. For a few weeks detectives were at a loss to explain the motive until the perpetrator was apprehended—the owner of a plate glass company.

Jesus tells of an incident not unlike this concerning a steward who was trying to beat the system. Stewards were business managers for wealthy households. This particular steward was accused of cheating his employer.

Luke 16:3–7

Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his Lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

Realizing his days of employment were numbered, the steward devised a plan whereby he cut in half the debts of those who owed his employer money, knowing they would return the favor by taking care of him when he was out of work.

Luke 16:8 (a)

And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely . . .

When the master discovered what his steward had done, far from chastising him for his dishonesty, he commended him for his ingenuity.

Luke 16:8 (b)

. . . for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

How true. The people in the world are on the phone talking to their investment counselors, checking figures on their calculators, shrewdly and carefully planning for their future. Not so the children of light. We are not as aggressive or as wise in preparing for our eternal future as our worldly colleagues are in preparing for their temporal future. This ought not be. After using the incident of the shrewd unjust servant as an example of one who is preparing and planning for the future, Jesus plunges into a discourse about the believer and money in which He will identify four benefits of giving. . . .

Luke 16:9

And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

Giving rewards us in eternity. Asked how much money his father left when he died, Andrew Carnegie's son gave a classic answer when he shrugged his shoulders and simply said, "Everything." How true. The old adage is correct: You can't take it with you. But equally true is the fact that you *can* send it ahead. The money you give to the Lord is sent ahead, waiting

for you in heaven.

I may not know exactly what Jesus meant when he said the money we send ahead to heaven will be waiting with a habitation for me to dwell in. But this I do know: When we get to heaven, not one person will say, "Is this all there is? I wish I had spent the money I gave to the Lord on a new VCR or blender." No! We're going to say, "Wow! What a deal! I traded in that junk for this glory!"

In the early 1800s, Prussia's King Friedrich Wilhelm III was involved in battles against other European countries that bled his bank account. In desperate need of funds to keep his war machine going, he asked the women of his empire to donate their gold jewelry to the war effort. In exchange, they were given chunks of iron fashioned into crosses and were made members of the Order of the Iron Cross—an Order that would go on to impact history. Unlike King Friedrich Wilhelm III, our King isn't bankrupt. On the contrary, He says, "Give Me your chunks of iron, and I'll give you gold and silver in return. Trade in the stuff you're wasting, and see what I will bless you with in the kingdom to come."

Luke 16:10, 11

He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?

Giving releases us in ministry. I might not be able to sing; you might not be able to preach. But one thing is common to everyone in this room: money. Therefore, the Lord uses money as the ultimate test to see if He can entrust to us even greater ministry. This is why D. L. Moody said, "I can see more about the spirituality of a man by reading through his checkbook than I can by reading through his prayer book." Anyone can write flowery phrases, but giving is the true barometer of where one is at spiritually.

"I don't make hardly any money," you say. Oh, but if you make even fifteen thousand dollars a year between the ages of twenty and sixty, you will have been entrusted with more than half a million dollars in your lifetime.

"What are you going to do with it?" asks Jesus. "If I can trust you with the least, with unrighteous mammon, I can open up doors of other ministry for you proportionately. But if you are unfaithful with money, I cannot commit to you the true riches of a fuller, more impacting ministry."

Luke 16:12

And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?

Giving replenishes us financially. We have been entrusted with that which is Another's. That is, specifically, though not exclusively, the Lord has given to us the first-fruits that are His (Leviticus 23:10). What are first-fruits? First-fruits are the tithe. The word "tithe" simply means "tenth." Therefore, the first tenth of everything we make is the Lord's. When the offering plate is passed in front of us, I'm sure none of us is tempted to reach in and take a handful of money to keep for ourselves. Yet when I don't tithe I am doing just that. I am robbing God of what is His (Malachi 3:8).

To those who protest that the concept of tithing being prescribed in the law is no longer relevant to those who live under grace, I point out the following: Tithing is seen prior to the law when Abraham tithed to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:20). Tithing was commended by Jesus when He told the Pharisees that, although they should remember justice and mercy, they should not cease to tithe (Luke 11:42). Tithing was taught by the apostle Paul when he told the Corinthians to give according to how God had prospered them (1 Corinthians 16:2)—which the early church took to mean tithing, as seen in the writings of Jerome and Chrysostom. Tithing precedes the law, is spoken of by the Lord, and is seen in the Epistles. Therefore, to say tithing is not applicable in this dispensation is, I believe, a failure to understand the full counsel of Scripture and church history. And what is the result of this failure?

> Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.
>
> Malachi 3:9

We're cursed with a curse. What curse?

> Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.
>
> Haggai 1:9

You bring home your paycheck, but where does it go? The Lord says, "I blew on it and it scattered. It's cursed because you've robbed Me. What could have been, what should have been, what would have been can't be because the blessing is removed."

> Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.
>
> Malachi 3:10

This is the only place in all of Scripture where God says, "Prove Me." And if we do, we'll see three things happen . . .

Reward. The Lord will open the windows of heaven and bless us in ways we can't possibly imagine.

> And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.
>
> Malachi 3:11

Rebuke. Satan is a destroyer, a murderer, a devourer. If you can recall times when you've robbed God and things started happening—refrigerators burned out, cars broke down—and you wondered what was going on, it

could be that you removed yourself from the promise of covering; that you made yourself vulnerable to the devouring of the Enemy.

> And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.
>
> Malachi 3:12

Revival. When we tithe, fruitfulness will reign in our lives once again to such a degree that even those around us will notice it.

> **Luke 16:13**
>
> **No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.**

"The love of money is the root of all evil," Paul declared (see 1 Timothy 6:10). How can mere paper or copper or silver be the root of all evil? Just as the simple clay idols of Baal, Ashteroth, Moloch, and other Old Testament entities had spirits behind them, mammon is a powerful spiritual force behind the money in our pockets that seeks to dominate, defile, and destroy us. Thus, either the spirit of mammon and Madison Avenue will control us, or the Spirit of God will. But we can't serve both.

Abraham, the friend of God, had just rescued his nephew, Lot, from captivity. On his way home, he was met by Melchizedek, the king of Salem, who was, I believe, a preincarnate appearance of Jesus. After being presented with bread and wine, Abraham fell down and worshiped Melchizedek, giving tithes to him of all he had taken.

In the next verse, guess who came slithering up to Abraham? The king of Sodom. "Thanks, Abraham, for what you've done," he said. "You can keep all the goods that you took."

But Abraham looked at the king of Sodom, the prince of perversity, and said, "I will not take one shoelace from you," refusing to take from Sodom the goods of the world (Genesis 14).

What gave Abraham power over the pull of the world? Giving tithes to the Prince of Peace. That's what tithing does. The world tempts me;

advertisers scream at me, people tell me, "You need this. You must have that. Why not buy the other?" I'm vulnerable—and so are you. The king of Sodom has our number. He knows exactly what bauble, what trinket to wave in front of us to get us caught up in the foolish and vain pursuit of the latest fad. How can we overcome him? Tithe.

Every time I tithe, even as Abraham did, I give away part of my greediness, my covetousness, my selfishness. Tithing changes my personality because I'm not a giver by nature. I'm a hoarder, a collector, a keeper. Not so my Father. God is a Giver (John 3:16; James 1:17). And He wants me to be like Him. In putting money in the basket, you give away part of your carnality. That is why our Father lovingly says, "Give to Me—not because I need the money, but because you need to be set free."

Luke 16:14

And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him.

Covetousness is simply wanting more of anything of which one already has enough.

Luke 16:15

And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

The Pharisees taught that the more godly one was, the more money he would have. The original practitioners of Prosperity Theology, they pointed to their riches as a mark of their spirituality. Those who have money are esteemed highly presently. But God says such standards are an abomination to Him. Therefore, when we get to heaven, there will be some big surprises when things are turned inside out, when the people who are looked down upon as being poor or ugly or social misfits will, because they love the Lord, be those who are wealthy and highly esteemed in eternity. For seventy or eighty years people look on the outside and analyze one another by how they dress, what car they drive, or how big their house is. But for the next zillion

years, those things will not matter one whit. That's why Paul pleads with us to run so as to win a prize that is not material, not monetary but spiritual (1 Corinthians 9:24).

To make sure the Pharisees didn't think He was calling the law an abomination, Jesus goes on to clarify His statement . . .

Luke 16:16, 17

The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.

Paul tells us the purpose of the law was to be a schoolmaster to point out our sin and drive us to Jesus Christ as our Savior. Therefore, in context of the entire chapter, Jesus is saying, "I'm not talking about the law. I'm talking about your covetousness, your misuse of money." And just to show them He's not trying to undermine the law, He refers to the then-controversial principle of divorce. . . .

Luke 16:18

Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.

I find it interesting that in talking about money and the law, Jesus used divorce as an illustration because divorce and money often go hand in hand. Divorce is costly not just emotionally or relationally but financially. No wonder the Lord hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). He doesn't hate the people going through the tragedy, but He hates the concept of divorce because it bankrupts people emotionally and financially.

Luke 16:19–21

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of

sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

The rich man would have been on the cover of *People* magazine. Lazarus? No one would have even known his name. But in the economy of eternity, it is Lazarus who we know and the rich man who is nameless.

Luke 16:22

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried.

In Proverbs 22:2 it says the rich and the poor meet together before the Lord for He hath created them both. In death, these two men from the opposite ends of the social spectrum meet.

Luke 16:23

And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

In hell the rich man finally saw "afar off." Presently, the world says, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die," because they only see what is in front of them. In hell they'll finally see afar off; they'll finally see the big picture of eternity. But it will be too late . . .

Luke 16:24, 25

And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

Although people mistakenly believe that, at best, when they die they will cease to exist, the fact is that not only will they continue to exist—but they

will be able to remember the good things they received on earth—the blessings God poured out upon them, the patience God showed to them, the manifold opportunities He gave them to turn to Him. Therefore, I suggest that one of the most horrendous aspects of hell is the memory people will have of the times they could have received the free gift of salvation, but chose to harden their hearts instead.

Luke 16:26

And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

The Hebrew word translated "hell" is *sheol,* which simply means "the place of the grave." Everyone who died before Jesus was crucified to pay for the sins of mankind went to sheol, which was divided into two compartments, separated by a great divide. One side was filled with fire and torment. The other side was a place called "Abraham's bosom" or "paradise." Those who loved God would go to the paradise, or Abraham's bosom side of sheol. The reason they couldn't go directly to heaven is because the blood of Christ had not yet been shed. So paradise was simply a waiting room. And Abraham, the Father of Faith, the Friend of God, would greet them there. Those who did not believe in God went to the torment side of sheol. And although there was a great gulf between the two, as seen in this passage, those on both sides could call out to one another—which would make the flaming side even more hellish.

Ephesians 4:8–9 tells us that before Jesus ascended into heaven, He first descended into the lower parts of the earth and led those in Abraham's bosom up to heaven. That is why Abraham's bosom no longer exists today. Hell is not the final destiny of the unbeliever, but rather only a temporary holding tank until after the Great White Throne Judgment when he will be cast into Gehenna, or outer darkness (Revelation 20). Contrary to popular belief, hell is not going to be one big New Year's Eve party. Gehenna is a place of heat without light, of eternal isolation, of interminable torment.

In the context of this chapter, the rich man's sin was not that he hated Lazarus, but simply that he neglected him. The Bible says there are sins of

commission—things we do that are wrong—and sins of omission—failing to do that which is right (James 4:17). There was a person in need at the rich man's gate, but he didn't offer to help. And that was his sin—indicative that because he cared not about the man at his gate, he had not the love of God in his heart (1 John 3:17).

Luke 16:27, 28

Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

"If Lazarus can't come over here, send him back from the dead to tell my family that this place exists," begged the rich man. I find it interesting that the rich man realized the power of a testimony. He didn't say, "Send a theologian, a Bible teacher, or a commentary." He said, "Send the one who, although he was poor and covered with sores, believed in God and is now in His presence—that he may share his testimony."

If you haven't already, you will hear Satan whisper in your ear, "You can't witness because you don't know enough about the Bible; you're not that solid in your own walk; your understanding of theology is too elementary." Not true! The most powerful thing you can share is your own testimony.

After he was cornered by the Pharisees, the once-blind man simply said, "I can't answer all of your questions concerning the nature and Person of Jesus. But this I do know: Once I was blind, but now I see." And none could deny it (John 9:25). So, too, the most powerful thing you can tell your unsaved parents or a lost neighbor is simply what the Lord has done for you.

Luke 16:29, 30

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

"Even though they're not listening to the Word, if someone comes back from the dead, surely they will listen and repent," reasoned the rich man. In

hell people finally realize the need to repent—not to believe in theology, but to repent from iniquity. Tragically, there will be those who believe in the existence of Jesus and in the inspiration of Scripture who will be lost eternally because of their refusal to repent, to change direction, to follow Jesus. The devils and demons believe, James tells us (2:19), but they're not saved because their belief is based on intellectual acknowledgment rather than humble, personal repentance.

Luke 16:31

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

When Lazarus did indeed come back from the dead, were the religious leaders persuaded to listen and repent? On the contrary, they were determined to put him to death (John 12:10).

Living sumptuously with no compassion for people and no thought of eternity caused the rich man to end up in a real place called hell. On the basis of Job 3:17, the Jehovah's Witnesses falsely propagate that when they die, wicked people simply cease to exist, that hell is nothing more than a scare tactic of Fundamentalist preachers. Turn them to Job 38, where God asks Job if he knows what lies beyond—the answer being "No" (verse 17).

The Christian Scientist takes it a step further when he says not only is there no hell, but there is no pain at all. Not so. Jesus said hell is real indeed. Because God desires none should perish (2 Peter 3:9), He will not send anyone to hell. "In fact," Jesus says, "if you insist upon going there, you will have to do so over My dead body."

In considering this passage, may we be renewed in our compassion for the lost and our commitment to share what the Lord has given us; may we be reminded of the big picture of eternity and the power of a testimony. In other words, in considering hell, may we become more mindful of heaven.

17 Luke 17:1, 2

Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

Jesus' reference to a millstone—a one-ton stone with a hole in the middle—hung around the neck of anyone who attempted to undermine the childlike faith of His children was in response to the Pharisees who had derided Him in the previous chapter (verse 14). If this doesn't sound like Gentle Jesus "meek and mild," it's because Jesus is also the Good Shepherd who will fight ferociously to protect His lambs from wolves who would come in and seek to destroy their faith.

Luke 17:3 (a)
Take heed to yourselves . . .

Lest we cheer too loudly over His harsh words to the Pharisees, Jesus came back and said, "Take heed to *yourselves* . . ."

Luke 17:3 (b)
. . . If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him . . .

Because we are connected as a body, if one of us is hurting due to the offense of another, it affects all of us. Therefore, we have a responsibility to speak the truth to one another because sometimes connection calls for correction.

Luke 17:3 (c), 4
. . . and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

The rabbis of Jesus' day taught that a perfect man would forgive an individual three times for the same sin. Jesus, however, doubles that number

and adds one for good measure, as if to say we are to forgive without limit.

Luke 17:5
And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.

To truly forgive someone over and over again requires faith that God will correct the offender and protect the one offended. Thus, the only way we can be a forgiving people is if our faith is increased. In this regard, we need not pray for greater love, but for greater faith.

Luke 17:6
And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

The disciples said, "Increase our faith."

Jesus said, "Unleash your faith."

The disciples said, "Expand our faith."

Jesus said, "Express your faith. Say to those about whom you feel a root of bitterness, a tree of unforgiveness, a hedge of hostility, I forgive you. I no longer hold a grudge against you."

Jesus said the same thing regarding any obstacle before us. He didn't say, "Pray that the mountain might be removed." He said, "Speak to the mountain itself" (Mark 11:23). Why were the disciples told to speak? Because while faith is implanted by the Word, it is unleashed through the lips. . . .

> But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.
>
> Romans 10:8, 9

The word translated "saved" is *sozo,* which refers not only to being born again, but to the full orb of God's blessing—to delivering, healing, saving, freeing.

> By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.
>
> Psalm 33:6, 9

How did God make the world? He spoke it into existence. So, too, Jesus altered the course of the world and eternity when He spoke . . .

"Waves, be still" (Mark 4:39).

"Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43).

"It is Finished" (John 19:30).

Made in the image of God, we also speak our individual worlds into existence and alter their course with our words.

> This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.
>
> Joshua 1:8

The Hebrew word translated "meditate" means "to mutter over and over again." If you want to be prosperous and successful in that which the Lord has laid before you to do, mutter the Word day and night. The promises of God will be of no effect if they're simply written in your journal or underlined in your Bible. They only take effect when they're in your mouth.

With his back to the Red Sea and the armies of Egypt barreling down upon him, Moses cried to the Lord.

> *"Why speakest thou to Me? Speak to the children that they are to go forward,"* the Lord answered (Exodus 14:15).

You might be a great student of Scripture. You might even be a prayer warrior. But if you wonder why the Sea isn't parting, could it be that the Lord is whispering to you, "Why are you asking Me? Speak to the mountain that

looms large before you"? Examples abound in the Word of men who understood the absolutely essential principle that the Word in them had to be spoken by them if they were to see results around them. . . .

> *It was when Joshua* spoke *to the sun that it stood still, giving him time to accomplish a great victory (Joshua 10:12).*
>
> *It was when Elisha* spoke *to king Ahab on the basis of Deuteronomy 11:16–17 that there was no rain (1 Kings 17:1).*
>
> *It was when Zerubbabel* spoke *to the cornerstone of the temple that the Lord began moving and the project came to completion (Zechariah 4:7).*

So too . . .

Tomorrow morning when the alarm goes off, you will either say, "Oh no, it's Monday morning." Or you will say, "This is the day that the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it" (see Psalm 118:24)—and the choice you make will alter the course of your day. And when you get to work and discover your co-worker presented one of your ideas as his own, you will either say, "I can't forgive him," or you will say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," (Philippians 4:13). As the day progresses, you will either say, "I'm grumpy because I'm sick and tired and weak," or you will say, "I am strong in the strength of the Lord," (Joel 3:10). As you walk in your front door and are met by your family's problems, you will either say, "Everything is falling apart," or you will say, "The Word of God declares that all things are working together for good" (Romans 8:28). And as you sort out your finances late at night as your family sleeps, you will either say, "We're not going to make it," or you will say, "The Word declares that our God will supply all our needs according to His riches in glory" (Philippians 4:19).

Of God, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says, "For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, 'The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me,' " (see Hebrews 13:5, 6). God hath said that we may say—not that we may know, not that we

may write, not even that we may pray—but that we may *say.*

- Happy is the people whose God is the Lord (Psalm 144:15).
- The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1).
- The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want (Psalm 23:1).
- The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him (Lamentations 3:25).

I challenge you to write down four or five such promises from the Word on three-by-five cards, put them on your dashboard or on your windowsill, and mutter them over and over again. Frame your world and your day with the Word as you speak it forth—and watch what happens.

Luke 17:7–10

But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

After encouraging His disciples to speak words of faith, Jesus comes right back and reminds them that they are servants. I believe this is precisely where the radical "Name It/Claim It Confession" Movement greatly misses the mark. They've lost the understanding that, while there is power in the spoken word, it is always connected with servanthood. So much of the "Name It/Claim It" teaching is based upon a "Give me the goods" mentality, whereas a correct appropriation of faith and authority is only embedded in a "make me a servant" mind-set. The uprooted tree and moved mountain are always in the context of my serving the King and seeing His will done—not

in my personal luxury or prosperity. If you miss this point, you will find yourself erring in your understanding of what faith is all about. Jesus gave His teaching on faith not in the context of getting a bigger house but in that of forgiving others.

Luke 17:11, 12

And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off:

At least one of these ten men was a Samaritan (verse 16), so this group was comprised of two groups who were normally enemies. But they were brought together through the tragedy of leprosy because calamity often brings unity. Our tendency is to avoid hardships, calamities, difficulty, tragedy—but in reality, oftentimes they are the catalysts for a miraculous work of unity.

Luke 17:13

And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

No doubt, because of what had happened in Matthew 8 when a leper cried out for mercy, word spread through the leper colonies that Jesus was able to cleanse leprosy.

Luke 17:14

And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests.

In Matthew 8, Jesus touched a leper and he was healed immediately. Here, however, he sends lepers on a journey, and they're healed eventually. Sometimes He spat in men's eyes, and they could see instantly (John 9:6–7). Another time, a second touch was required for a blind man to see clearly (Mark 8:25). The same is true today. Sometimes we pray for sick people and hear reports of wonderful healing. Other times, there is no sight of healing. In

fact, sometimes things seem to get *worse* after we pray. Sometimes people who are faltering in their walk with the Lord are healed, while those who have a profound walk with God remain in a state of illness. As illustrated by the variety of ways Jesus healed the hurting during His earthly ministry, God will not be boxed in by any preacher or program, by any man or method. Therefore, the manner and timetable of healing remain a mystery. Of, this, however, we can be sure: By His stripes we are healed indeed (Isaiah 53:5) —whether that be on earth presently or in heaven ultimately.

Luke 17:14

And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.

At what point the lepers were healed we don't know. But it wasn't until after they began to walk toward Jerusalem—a long journey. So often we have a tendency to say, "Lord, if You heal me, I'll start walking."

The Lord, however, says, "Start walking and then along the way, you'll see I'm working."

Luke 17:15, 16

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.

Nine lepers went *to* the priest. One came back *as* a priest, offering the sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord (Amos 4:5).

Luke 17:17–19

And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

All ten lepers were healed—but only the one who gave thanks was made whole. That is, he was saved spiritually as well as healed physically. Jesus notices those who come back to say, "Thank you." In fact, according to

Malachi 3:16, the things we say concerning what the Lord has done for us, how He has blessed us, His faithfulness to us are written in a book of remembrance. I think of the baby books parents keep in which to record their children's first words, first steps, and growth. So, too, the Lord keeps such books recording the words, walk, and growth of His children. The question is, how big is yours? I suggest the Lord needs many volumes to contain the thanksgiving of some of His kids. For others, a single pamphlet will do.

When a prostitute began to wash Jesus' feet with her tears and dry them with her hair, Jesus said to his host, "When I came into your home, you didn't greet Me with a kiss or wash My feet"—which means that Jesus not only notices what people do, but what they fail to do for Him (Luke 7:44–46). How many blessings has the Lord given me today without my even pausing to say "Thank You"?

Luke 17:20, 21

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

The Greek word *entos,* translated "within," is more correctly rendered "among." The kingdom of God was indeed among them because Jesus is the King, and where the King is, there is the kingdom. "You're looking for a material, political, physical kingdom," Jesus said, "all the while missing the true kingdom: Me."

Luke 17:22, 23

And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after them, nor follow them.

Jesus warns His disciples of the days that would come wherein people would falsely say, "The Lord is in Brooklyn, or Utah, or India."

Luke 17:24

For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day.

"My coming will not be an esoteric mystery perceived by only an enlightened few," Jesus says, "but will be as obvious as lightning in the sky —visible to everyone."

Luke 17:25–30

But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation. And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.

In the days of both Noah and Lot, people ignored the spiritual climate of their day and carried on with their lives as they always did. So, too, people now go about business as usual, even though the storm clouds are gathering again.

Luke 17:31–33

In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.

What did Lot's wife do? She made the mistake of looking back. Linguistic evidence makes it clear that hers was not a quick glance but a

longing gaze. It's impossible to make any progress physically without getting bruised ourselves or crashing into others while looking back. And the same is true spiritually (Luke 9:62).

Luke 17:34–37 (a)

I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord?

Continuing His discourse on the end times, Jesus speaks of the Rapture.

Luke 17:37 (b)

And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.

Although this is a difficult Scripture, the word "eagles" being better translated "vultures," I believe the implication is that if dead bodies and vultures are linked together, how much more will the living body of Christ and Jesus Himself be linked together at the time of the Tribulation. But even before then, the degree to which we are linked to the Lord presently is the degree to which heaven will be experienced by us most perceptibly.

18 Luke 18:1, 2

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man.

I find it interesting that, although our own judicial system has increasingly moved to restrict prayer, Jesus uses a parable set in a courtroom to teach us about prayer.

Luke 18:3

And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.

In Jesus' time, there was no such thing as a city courthouse. Rather, a judge would travel from town to town, pitching his tent in a given location for three to five days at a time. When the judge was in their town, those with legal issues would begin to make their way toward his tent. Often, however, the needs were so great that the docket would be filled. Then, the only way a person could have his case heard would be to bribe the judge's assistants.

Luke 18:4 (a)

And he would not for a while . . .

This woman's chances at being heard didn't look very promising for three reasons. First, she was a woman in a culture where women were second-class citizens at best. Second, she was a widow—without a husband to stand with her or open the way for her. Third, being a widow, she would have been poor.

Luke 18:4 (b)–5

. . . but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

With three strikes against her, it looked like this widow didn't have a chance to be heard. But that didn't stop her. She came day and night before the judge, pleading and begging that her case be heard, until finally he said, "To get this lady off my back, I'll do what she wants."

Luke 18:6–8 (a)

And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.

Jesus uses the account of the widow to teach what our attitude should be in prayer. But notice, He gave this parable not so much as a parallel, but as a contrast—for our situation is entirely different.

First of all, we appear not before an unjust judge, but before a loving Father. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven," the concept of God as a Father was foreign to the Jews. Paul would go on to address God as "Abba" or "Papa" (Romans 8:15). Thus, far from being our judge, God is our loving Father, our Abba, our Papa.

Second, we appear before God not as strangers, but as His children.

> A photographer captured on film Supreme Court Justice Anton Scalia in his chambers at his massive desk when one of his grandchildren came bursting into the room. The photograph shows Scalia looking up and smiling from ear to ear.

It's amazing the access a person has with his parents. No matter how important a man might be, his son or daughter can burst into his presence anytime. That is the privilege we have as children of the God of the universe.

Third, this woman was a widow. We are a bride (Revelation 21:2). Big difference. A widow feels all alone, not so a bride.

Fourth, the widow went alone, but we have an Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). Jesus stands right beside us.

Lastly, to get help the widow went to a court of law. We come to a throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16).

> **Luke 18:8 (b)**
>
> **Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?**

Even though the widow's situation was more difficult than those we usually face, she never gave up asking. What about us? If we know that God is a Father who loves us, that Jesus is an Advocate standing beside us, and that we are a bride invited to come to a throne of grace, why don't we pray? Why is it that Jesus must ask, "Will I find praying faith when I come again?"

People stop praying whenever they go to the Lord with a problem or a need and He doesn't answer them speedily. "I've come to You, Lord, for weeks and months about this problem, and there seems to be no solution," they say. "I've come for years, but there seems to be no provision. Why pray?" they finally say. They stop praying altogether, failing to understand that, because they are created in the image of God, they are composed of three parts—body, soul, and spirit—and it is the spirit that is most powerfully impacted by prayer.

You see, the body is that which relates to the physical world through the senses of sight and smell, touch, taste, and hearing. The soul, comprised of mind and emotions, is that which relates to people through one's personality. But because it is the spirit—the deepest part of man—that relates to God and will live forever with Him, it is most often through the spirit that prayers are answered. The problem is that we limit our prayers to the realms of only the body or soul. We either want a physical, tangible answer to our prayers, or we want to feel better after we pray. But God knows that what we are truly craving can only be fulfilled in the realm of the spirit.

"Father," we say, "my finances are low. I need bread." And although He is a Father who will indeed provide our daily bread, He also knows bread will not satisfy us ultimately. So He sent His Son to be *Bread for us (John 6:35).*

"I need direction," we pray.
*"*I *am the Way," Jesus says (John 14:6).*

"I need peace," we cry.
"You'll find peace in Me," Jesus answers (John 16:33).

What we think we need is rarely that for which we pray. What we need is the Lord Himself.

Prayer is not to get the goods.

It is to enjoy the One who is good.

Prayer is not to get the gifts.
It is to have fellowship with the Giver of all gifts.

Prayer is not to claim the promises.
It is to embrace the Person.

Everything you crave is found in the Person of Jesus Christ—and you will discover that to be true if you pray and don't faint.

Luke 18:9, 10

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

Jewish tradition dictated that prayer be made in the temple at nine o'clock in the morning, twelve noon, and three o'clock in the afternoon.

Luke 18:11

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

This Pharisee wasn't really seeking God as evidenced by the fact that he "prayed thus with *himself*."

Luke 18:12

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

Not only would a traditional Jew pray three times a day, but he would fast twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays. Not accidentally, Monday and Thursday were market days in Jerusalem, which meant that everyone could see the piety of those who came with the mussed hair and wrinkled clothes of

those who fasted. With long faces they made their way into the temple to pray so everyone could see their spirituality.

Luke 18:13

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

"God be merciful to me a sinner," prayed the publican. With the article "a" better translated as "the," the publican was actually saying, "Lord be merciful to me, the ultimate sinner." And that was all he said. We have a tendency to think our prayers are answered in direct proportion to how many times we've been in church, how many times we've had devotions, how many times we've given offering. But nothing is further from the truth. Prayer is not based upon merit. It's based upon mercy. That's what this sinner discovered—and once you learn this lesson, prayer will become a joy to you as well.

Notice that the publican made no excuses for his sin. He came in total humility and simply said, "Have mercy upon me, the ultimate sinner." He didn't defend himself, explain his sin, justify his rebellion, or vow to do better in the future.

All too often, we come before the Lord and not only say, "Forgive me," but "I promise I'll never do that again." When I make those kinds of promises, I am expressing a confidence in my flesh that will prove to be an embarrassment to me down the road. I can't promise not to sin again. Like the publican, I must simply ask the Father to have mercy upon me.

Luke 18:14

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Once you understand that it is based solely upon mercy, prayer becomes a total pleasure. And when the answers come and the blessings are released and things begin to happen, guess who gets the glory. You can't take credit

because of your spirituality or discipline. You simply glorify God with humility and great appreciation as you stand in awe of His answer to your prayer and His work in your life.

Luke 18:15–17

And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

After teaching on prayer, Jesus prays blessing on the children brought to Him. The Greek pronoun translated "they" is masculine, so it was the fathers who brought their children to Jesus. Dads, it is both your privilege and responsibility to bring your kids to the Lord that they might be blessed by Him. How does this happen? I believe we see the answer in Job. . . .

Knowing his kids were vulnerable to sin perhaps due to his wealth and their youth, Job sacrificed a bull on their behalf lest they forget the Lord and sin in their hearts (Job 1:5). I believe this practice is recorded in the Word as an example for you and me. I have the opportunity in the morning hour to intercede on my kids' behalf—to ask that the Lord would bless them and use them. Conversely, my failure to do so leaves them vulnerable to the attacks of the Enemy. Expend the energy, Dad. Bring your children to the Lord in prayer. It's so important.

Luke 18:18, 19

And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God.

Jesus' statement completely undermines the New Age mentality that says Jesus was a good Teacher, but not God. Jesus is either God, or He's not good. Period.

Luke 18:20, 21

Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up.

Jesus gave the rich young ruler a list of commandments, but purposely did not include the last one: Thou shalt not covet.

Luke 18:22

Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.

I suggest it was because Jesus knew that coveting—wanting more of that which he already had enough—was this man's weakness and that He was giving him the opportunity to recognize it as well.

Luke 18:23

And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.

The problem wasn't that this man possessed riches, but that riches possessed him. Thus, Jesus wasn't trying to make him miserable. He was trying to set him free.

Luke 18:24, 25

And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Riches have a tendency to control and distract. Therefore, Jesus said, "It's difficult for a wealthy man to enter into the kingdom because all too often, his toys and his bank account blind him to his need."

Luke 18:26, 27

And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

The salvation of rich, poor, or middle-class is impossible in our own energy or efforts. Salvation for anyone and everyone requires a work of God's supernatural grace and miraculous power.

Luke 18:28–30

Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.

We who are saved are part of a big family, indeed, who will care for us and stand by us. Not only that, but the riches awaiting those who invest in heaven and serve the Lord sacrificially will make them richly blessed in eternity.

Luke 18:31–34

Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.

Drawing closer to the city of Jerusalem, Jesus speaks straightforwardly to His twelve disciples.

As Christopher Columbus sailed west, he actually kept two logbooks. One contained false information that showed them closer to land than

they actually were. This was the book made available to the crew in hopes that they wouldn't lose hope in ever seeing land again. The other book, showing their true location, was the one Columbus used.

Columbus evidently decided the morale of the crew was more important than the integrity of the captain. Not so Jesus. He says to His disciples, "When we get to Jerusalem, people will reject Me and crucify Me." But He gave hope to them as well when He said He would rise again.

Luke 18:35

And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging.

In contrast to the rich young ruler who left the Lord in sadness, we're introduced to a blind man who will follow the Lord in gladness. Notice three characteristics of this man—whom Mark identifies as Bartimaeus—that are applicable to you and me. . . .

Luke 18:36–38

And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

Bartimaeus was a man of humility. If you were in Bartimaeus' sandals and knew Jesus was passing by, would you say, "Have mercy on me,"—or would you say, "How come of all the people in Jericho, *I* was the one afflicted with blindness? I deserve better than this." Isn't the latter all too often our tendency? It is only because of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed (Lamentations 3:22). Therefore, may God give us the wisdom of Bartimaeus to approach Him with humility.

Luke 18:39

And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

Bartimaeus was a man of tenacity. "Pipe down," the multitude told him. But he yelled all the louder. A living example of the parable of the woman and the unjust judge, Bartimaeus simply kept coming all the more. In prayer, in ministry, and in our walk with the Lord, this really is essential. One of the most famous pieces of music in history, "Braham's Lullaby," took over seven years to compose. We let go too quickly. We give up too easily. It was after Abraham *patiently endured* that He received the promise (Hebrews 6:15). The same was true of Bartimaeus.

Luke 18:40–43

And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

Bartimaeus was a man of expectancy. Mark tells us that when Jesus called him, Bartimaeus left his garment—a garment beggars wore to identify them as those in need of alms. In other words, once he heard Jesus' voice, he said in faith, "I don't need this anymore. I'm expecting the Lord to do a work in me based upon His mercy." You and I will either follow in the footsteps of the rich young ruler or in the footsteps of Bartimaeus. Choose those of Bartimaeus. Call out to the Lord in humility with tenacity and expectancy, knowing that to any who call upon Him, the Lord shows matchless mercy.



19 As we come to chapter 19, we are geographically fifteen miles northeast of Jerusalem as Jesus travels toward the Holy City. Chronologically, we are at the final week of our Lord's time on earth.

Luke 19:1, 2

And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the

publicans, and he was rich.

"Publican" is the name for a tax collector. Tax collectors were not intended to be rich men, but their position allowed them to become exceedingly wealthy if they overcharged the people. Therefore, the fact that Zacchaeus was rich indicates he was probably dishonest.

Luke 19:3, 4

And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.

What a scene: Zacchaeus, a wealthy Roman official, first ran—something dignified men never did—then scrambled up a tree in order to catch a glimpse of this One passing by. John Calvin said the foundation of faith is childlike curiosity and simplicity. Jesus said that we must enter the kingdom as a little child (Luke 18:17), as one who doesn't have all the answers but simply believes. Zacchaeus models this beautifully.

Luke 19:5 (a)

And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him . . .

Although Zacchaeus may have thought he was seeking Jesus, in reality it was Jesus who found him. The same is true of us (Romans 3:11).

Luke 19:5 (b)

. . . and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.

The word translated "abide" is the same word Paul uses in Ephesians when, praying for the believers, he says, "for this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ to *dwell* in your hearts by faith" (see Ephesians 3:17). The word literally means "to be comfortable." I like that!

Some people have a very tense or uptight relationship with Jesus, as evidenced by either the formality or excessive emotion of their prayers. What a beautiful thing it is, however, to hear people pray who simply enjoy the Lord and are comfortable with Him.

Luke 19:6–10

And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Although Abraham is indeed the Father of Faith, James points to him as an example that faith without works is dead. After all, Abraham was ready to sacrifice Isaac as a proof of his faith (James 2:21). Paul, on the other hand, points to Abraham as proof that justification is *apart* from works (Romans 4:13). Interestingly, in the story of Zacchaeus we see the perfect blending of Romans 4 and James 2—for just as Abraham believed God, so did Zacchaeus; and just as Abraham willingly offered to sacrifice his son, so Zacchaeus willingly offered the sacrifice of his goods.

Luke 19:11

And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.

On the heels of Zacchaeus' practical demonstration of his true conversion, Jesus begins to teach on practical stewardship in the parable of the pounds. . . .

Luke 19:12, 13

He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.

This parable is different than the parable of the talents (Matthew 25). The parable of the talents—in which men were given one, five, and ten talents—speaks of a variety of gifts and ministries given to believers. On the other hand, the parable of the pounds—in which everyone is given the same amount—speaks of equality of opportunity. . . .

Because of what they accomplish, it seems some people are given more time each day. The fact is, however, that we are all given the same twenty-four hours every day.

Although the amount may differ radically, we have all been given the same opportunity to invest one-tenth of our income in the kingdom.

Although we may be inclined to think that we can't witness because the message we have been given to share is a lot harder than the message others are given, we have all been given precisely the same gospel.

Luke 19:14

But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.

"We don't want this man to rule over us," said the citizenry. This was the very thing they would say a few days later of the Lord Himself (John 19:15).

Luke 19:15

And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto

him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.

Even though they were in a setting hostile to the nobleman, his servants still had responsibility to carry out his command.

Luke 19:16–26

Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.

The one who is faithful in investing the pound—be it time, tithe, or gospel—will be given ten cities to rule. The one who is semi-faithful will be given five cities. The one who is faithless will lose the opportunity of service altogether. In other words, Jesus is telling us that the reward for good work is more work.

"If the reward for work is more work, why work?" you might ask. Although everyone will be elated in heaven, those who are presently faithful will be challenged and excited. They will grow and develop. On the other

hand, those who didn't invest their time, talents, or finances in heaven will walk the streets of gold wishing they had been given responsibility in the kingdom.

Luke 19:27–30

But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me. And when he had thus spoken, he went before, ascending up to Jerusalem. And it came to pass, when he was come nigh to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount called the mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying, Go ye into the village over against you; in the which at your entering ye shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him, and bring him hither.

Preparing to come down the hillside called the Mount of Olives into the city of Jerusalem, Jesus sends His disciples to get a donkey, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9.

Luke 19:31

And if any man ask you, Why do ye loose him? thus shall ye say unto him, Because the Lord hath need of him.

"Because the Lord hath need of him." What an irony it is that the Lord would have need of anything. But He does. He needed a boat from which to preach (Luke 5:3–6). He needed some loaves and fishes with which to feed the crowd (Matthew 14:16–18). He needed a coin through which to make a point (Matthew 22:19). He needed a room in which to share the Last Supper with His disciples (Matthew 26:18). He needed a tomb from which to rise from the dead (Matthew 27:60). Our Lord has chosen to place Himself in a position of need. Paul said He who was rich became poor for our sake (2 Corinthians 8:9). Why? I believe one of the reasons was in order that we might partner with Him in what He wants to do on the earth. Whether it's preaching the Word or feeding the multitude, the Lord has chosen to say, "I need you."

Luke 19:32–34

And they that were sent went their way, and found even as he had said unto them. And as they were loosing the colt, the owners thereof said unto them, Why loose ye the colt? And they said, The Lord hath need of him.

Before the donkey could be used by the Lord, it first had to be loosed. That's exactly what we're to do. Even though we are born again, like Lazarus coming forth from the grave, oftentimes, we're still bound (John 11:44). But as we come and hear the Word, as we stand hand in hand with our brothers and sisters in prayer, we find ourselves loosed, released from that which so easily binds us.

Luke 19:35–37

And they brought him to Jesus: and they cast their garments upon the colt, and they set Jesus thereon. And as he went, they spread their clothes in the way. And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen;

Jesus' usual mode was to shun publicity. However, He knew that once the multitude cried out to Him and once He received their praise, His enemies had to either coronate Him King or crucify Him as a criminal. Thus, He's forcing their hand.

Luke 19:38

Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.

Luke's Gospel began with the angels saying, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth" (see Luke 2:14). Here, toward the end of his Gospel, because man will reject the Prince of Peace, there will still be glory to God in the highest—but no peace on earth.

Luke 19:39, 40

And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.

"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not," writes John of Jesus (John 1:11). The first word translated "own" refers to creation; the second to humanity. In other words, as evidenced by the water that supported Him (Matthew 14:25), the storm that stopped for Him (Mark 4:39), the rocks that were ready to praise Him had He not quieted them, nature indeed received Him. It is only humanity that fails to do so.

Put the skeptic in Candlestick Park or the Super Bowl, and he will become a radical worshiper. Watch the hands of those who wouldn't be caught dead lifting their hands in worship to the Lord shoot into the air the minute Jerry Rice scores a touchdown. Listen to the sound of applause from those who wouldn't ever clap in worship to the Lord the moment Roger Craig makes a ten-yard gain. Because man is innately a worshiper, he does indeed worship. But it's misdirected toward movie stars or athletes rather than to the only One to whom worship is truly due.

Luke 19:41–44

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

As the crowd rejoiced, our Lord wept. His heart was broken by what He saw everywhere He looked. . . .

As He looked on the city of Jerusalem, He knew she had missed her day. Had the people been studying prophecy, they would have known that this was the exact day of His arrival.

As He looked within, He saw hearts filled with hypocrisy and iniquity.

As He looked ahead, He saw that the city would be surrounded by her enemies, the people slaughtered mercilessly. Indeed, before forty years would pass, the Romans would besiege Jerusalem and in the ensuing one hundred forty-three days, between six hundred thousand and over one million Jews would be killed.

This man's Man who would drive out the moneychangers from the temple with no one daring to stop Him was nonetheless brought to tears as He saw what was happening and where it was leading. Truly there is no one like Jesus, for no one else would weep compassionately for a people He knew would not only reject Him but also crucify Him. I love the Lord because He didn't give up on Jerusalem; He doesn't give up on me; and He won't give up on you.

Luke 19:45, 46

And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves.

The priests who were supposed to be praying for the people were instead those who preyed on the people. They charged exorbitant rates of exchange for the foreign currency worshipers brought for offering and inflated prices for temple-approved animals to sacrifice.

Luke 19:47

And he taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him.

In a few days, Jesus knew Annas and the chief priests would get revenge. Until then, He would keep teaching.

Luke 19:48

And could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear him.

As your margin may render this passage, the people hung on every word Jesus spoke. I find the choice of words interesting, for as they hung on His words, He was about to hang on the Cross for them.



For topical study of Luke 19:47–48, see "Hanging on His Words" below.

HANGING ON HIS WORDS

A Topical Study of
LUKE 19:47, 48

As He taught in the temple, people hung on every word Jesus spoke. This is not unusual, for over and over in the Gospel accounts, we come across similar phrases . . .

The common people heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37).

They wondered at the gracious words He spoke (Luke 4:22).

They were astonished at His doctrine (Mark 1:22).

Jesus communicated in a way that captivated people because He not only preached with clarity but practiced what He preached perfectly. I suggest His Word will captivate you as well to the degree that you study it in the following ways. . . .

Conversationally

"You search the Scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life, but these are they which speak of *Me,*" Jesus declared (John 5:39). Therefore, whether in your devotions morning by morning or joining with fellow believers on a Wednesday evening, the key to Bible study is to realize the purpose is to touch Jesus intimately.

How does this happen? I believe it takes place most effectively through conversation. When I'm out of town, I always look forward to calling my wife. When I call her, I don't say, "Tammy, this is Jon. Listen carefully . . ." and then proceed to talk nonstop for fifteen minutes before telling her it's her turn to talk, after which time I hang up. No, true communication consists of give-and-take, an ebb and flow.

Yet when it comes to conversing with our Lord, our tendency is to say, "Okay, Lord, You can talk to me for fifteen minutes through Your Word, and then I'll talk to You for fifteen minutes through prayer." I'm not saying you can't communicate that way. But I am saying it lacks intimacy. Therefore, I suggest that you talk to the Lord even as you're reading the Word. When you come across a phrase that convicts you, pray about it. Say, "Oh, Lord, forgive me. I've missed the mark so badly." And then go back to the Word and take in some more. When you come to a verse that comforts you, pray about it. Say, "Thank You, Lord for this reminder of Your goodness to me." Dialoguing with the Lord back and forth makes such a difference.

The same is true congregationally. Many of you have learned the secret of how to pray even as you're listening to a sermon. When a point is made that comforts you, you pray, "Lord, thank You for that." When a point is made that challenges you, you've learned to pray, "Lord, help me to do that." Thus, Bible study is never boring because you're touching Jesus through the Word even while teaching is taking place. You can experience intimacy with the Lord even as you're listening to the Word if you pray in what you're being taught from the Scriptures.

In the past twenty years, there has been a tremendous renewal of Bible study—and that's terrific. But there's also been a diminished appreciation for prayer, and that is tragic. Bible study will motivate your Christian life, but it is only prayer that activates Christian life. You can hear a wonderful Bible

study, but your life will remain unchanged until it is activated by prayer. It's as if Bible study builds the car, but prayer is the key that turns on the ignition. Consequently, we have lots of really nice shiny cars in the parking lot of Christendom today—but hardly any of them go anywhere. There's an abundance of knowledge and insights, but not a whole lot of moving because there's not a whole lot of praying. Wise and blessed is the brother or sister who learns to study the Word conversationally as they pray into their lives the points that penetrate their hearts.

Expectantly

"But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. Let not that man expect to receive anything," James warns (1:6, 7). If I come to the Lord in the morning or to church in the evening without expecting to receive anything, I probably won't.

> Wrestling with some issues in his own life, Habakkuk was wondering what he should do. "I will go to the tower," he said, "and I will wait and see what the Lord shall say to me." In other words, Habakkuk *expected* to hear from God.
>
> God honored Habakkuk's expectancy and said, "I'm going to give you a vision, Habakkuk. Get out your pencil and write it down" (Habakkuk 2:2).

When I approach morning devotions with my pencil sharp and journal open, God speaks. When I come yawning and drowsy, He doesn't. It's just that simple. If you are expecting to receive from the Lord, you will always walk away a richer man or woman because you will indeed hear from Him. On the other hand, if you come with lethargy, sleepiness, and apathy, you'll leave lethargic, sleepy, and apathetic.

Even if you don't refer to your notes again, write down truth. Why? Because the very act of writing affords one the ability to better retain information. That is why when Old Testament kings first ascended the throne, they were to copy the Law of Moses into a book in order that it might be lodged in their hearts and minds (Deuteronomy 17:18). Try it. Try having morning devotions this week with pencil and paper before you. Come to Bible study expecting the Lord to speak to you. Then watch and see what happens. I think you'll find a radical difference in your ability to hang on His words.

Obediently

The reason some say, “I’m not receiving anything from the Word I’m reading or the teachings I’m hearing,” could very well be that, because they are not obeying that which they’ve already heard, they will not receive more. This is not because they are being punished, but because our loving Father will not give us more than we can handle (Hebrews 5:12–14).

That’s why Jesus told us that the one who has shall be given more, but the one who doesn’t have—the one who is not obeying—will actually go backward in his knowledge of the Word and in his understanding of God (Mark 4:24, 25). Either I am doing what God says and finding more meat every time I open the Word, or I will lose even the understanding I had previously. Therefore, I must listen obediently. I must say, “Lord, I’m not here simply to satisfy my curiosity or stimulate my intellect. I’m here to do Your will. I am determined to work out in my life practically the things You’re telling me through this study. By Your grace, I will do what You say.” Then more meat will be sent your way—more understanding, more insight, more revelation, more opportunity.

Consistently

Read the Word consistently and don't give up—even if you don't understand what you're reading. All too often we become so concerned about what we don't understand in the Bible that we only read it sporadically at best. But I guarantee you that, because the Holy Spirit lives within you, even though you might not understand the majority of a given chapter, there will be a verse or a phrase that will impact your heart. Focus on what you *do* understand. Even that which you don't understand will nonetheless strengthen your inner man.

I can't tell you how the chicken dinner I had last night nourishes me. I don't know how amino acids and protein molecules work chemically or nutritionally. I just dig in and let them sustain me and give weight to me. The same is true of the Word. You might not understand intellectually every nuance or doctrine, but it will still energize and edify your inner person. It will still do its work. It will still give you spiritual weight and stamina (Isaiah 55:11).

If you are faithful to study consistently, even though it might seem dry to you initially, there will come a time when water will fill those dry ditches you dig faithfully.

> With a drought in the land, things looked grim. "Dig ditches in the sand," Elisha said to the king."But it's bone dry," Jehoshaphat protested.
>
> "Do it anyway," Elisha insisted.
>
> No doubt the diggers were sweating and complaining, but dig they did. The next day, they woke to see the ditches full of water (2 Kings 3:20).

A lot of things we study seem dry to us initially. But if we don't give up, we'll find those very ditches full of water. Every Scripture is pregnant with meaning. Every text abounds with insight—but it takes a lifetime to discover and appreciate them. If we don't give up, that which we once thought was bone dry becomes refreshing and wonderful. We start seeing that every Old Testament story is given as a picture of a New Testament principle, that all of

the stories are powerful illustrations of practical and applicable truth. And as you begin to make the correlations, Bible study becomes an adventure.



20 Luke 20:1

And it came to pass, that on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and preached the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes came upon him with the elders,

On Sunday, as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, He was hailed as King. On Monday, as He cleansed the temple, He acted as the Great High Priest. Here, on Tuesday, as He answers with tremendous skill and wisdom every question hurled at Him, He will show Himself to be a Prophet like no other. Prophet, Priest, and King are the three offices only Jesus can and does hold simultaneously.

Luke 20:2

And spake unto him, saying, Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?

The day the chief priests and scribes decided to question Jesus was the tenth day of Nissan, four days before the slaying of the Passover lambs. This perfectly fulfilled the prophetic picture portrayed in Exodus where we read that Passover lambs were to be scrutinized and inspected for four days to ensure they were without blemish (Exodus 12:3–6). Jesus Christ, our Passover Lamb, would also be examined and scrutinized, and would be found faultless.

Luke 20:3–8

And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing; and answer me: The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not? But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be

persuaded that John was a prophet. And they answered, that they could not tell whence it was. And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

In response, Jesus asked the chief priests and scribes a question of His own. Through it, He implied that, because they hadn't responded to John's identification of Him as the Lamb of God, it was pointless to provide them with further identification.

Luke 20:9

Then began he to speak to the people this parable; A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time.

Isaiah also used a vineyard to portray Israel's relationship with God (Isaiah 5:7). Therefore, Jesus' audience would have recognized the vineyard as a picture of themselves and the vineyard owner as God.

Luke 20:10–15 (a)

And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty. And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out. Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him. But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

Jesus likened the prophets to a series of servants sent to collect fruit from the vineyard. Each was either beaten or killed. In this, Jesus was saying, "I know your plan. I know your intention. I know what's going on in your hearts." I believe He didn't say this to indict them, but to plead with them, "Is

there any of you who want to change your mind, to change your direction, to repent?"

That's exactly what the Lord does with us. None of us falls into sin, but rather we walk into sin one step at a time. Yet, as He sent His servants in the parable and His prophets in the Old Testament, the Lord is faithful to send messengers and warnings to us. All too often, however, we continue on a path of progressive destruction.

In the parable before us, the first messenger was beaten. The second messenger was not only beaten but also treated shamefully. The third messenger was permanently wounded. The fourth messenger was killed. The same progression is seen in the actions of the Jewish leaders: They allowed John the Baptist to be killed. They demanded Jesus be killed. They themselves killed Stephen.

That's the way sin is. It progresses. At first we might be passively allowing it to take place around us. Next, we're requesting that it happen. Finally, we're participating and making it happen. Yet all the while, the Lord faithfully gives opportunities to change direction. We go to a Bible study and get convicted. We turn on the radio and hear words of warning. A concerned brother or sister says, "What are you doing?" Each one is a messenger sent to save us.

Luke 20:15 (b), 16

What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said, God forbid.

In giving the Jewish leaders yet another opportunity to repent, Jesus wasn't trying to protect His own life. He knew He would die on the Cross to pay for their sins. Rather, He was pleading with them to save their own lives. What was their answer? A tragically defensive, "God forbid."

Luke 20:17

And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?

The verse Jesus quotes—Psalm 118:22—is the most oft-quoted Old Testament verse in the New Testament. It refers to the construction of the temple under Solomon's reign when the massive stones were chiseled miles away from the building site in order that no sound be heard upon the temple mount. When the stones arrived, one stone didn't fit and was thrown down the hill into the Kidron Valley. When it became evident that the cornerstone was missing, the stone that had been rejected turned out to be the one that fit perfectly. Jesus applies this to Himself. "You're trying to build your religion apart from Me," He says, "but you're going to see that I am the Cornerstone. Without Me, nothing stands."

Luke 20:18

Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

The one who falls upon Jesus, the Cornerstone, will indeed be broken, for it's only in admitting our sin and our need that we can be saved. You see, those who aren't broken before Him will one day be broken by Him. *Every* knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord (Philippians 2:10). The only question is when will this happen? Will you do it now in brokenness before Him and be saved? Or will you wait too long and be broken by Him?

Luke 20:19–21

And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them. And they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor. And they asked him, saying, Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly:

After inspecting His authority, the Jews will now question Jesus' integrity.

Luke 20:22

Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no?

In Jesus' day, paying taxes to Caesar was tantamount to supporting a man who claimed to be God. Therefore, if Jesus said, "Pay taxes to Caesar," the Jewish leaders could accuse Him of supporting idolatry. If, however, He said, "Don't pay taxes," they could have Him arrested for anarchy.

Luke 20:23–25

But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar's. And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's.

Jesus answered ingeniously when He said, "Give to Caesar that which is made in his image—money—and give to God that which is made in His image—yourselves."

Luke 20:26

And they could not take hold of his words before the people: and they marvelled at his answer, and held their peace.

With two strikes against them, the Jewish leaders move on to question Jesus' theology.

Luke 20:27–33

Then came to him certain of the Sadducees, which deny that there is any resurrection; and they asked him, saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If any man's brother die, having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. There were therefore seven brethren:

and the first took a wife, and died without children. And the second took her to wife, and he died childless. And the third took her; and in like manner the seven also: and they left no children, and died. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife.

The basis for this question is the Old Testament law that when a man died, his younger brother was to marry his widow, and the first child conceived would be the legal descendant of the deceased brother.

Luke 20:34–38

And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.

Jesus draws the Sadducees' attention to Exodus 3, where, in revealing Himself to Moses, God said, "I *am* the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." In other words, to these men who, under the guise of a question about marriage, were actually questioning the reality of resurrection, Jesus said the fact that God refers to Himself presently as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob means that they're still alive.

Luke 20:39

Then certain of the scribes answering said, Master, thou hast well said.

Look at me and you'll find fault easily. Look at the person sitting next to you long enough and close enough, and you will find fault with him or her as

well. But look at Jesus and you will find no fault whatsoever. No matter how carefully you scrutinize His teachings or study His actions, He will never disappoint or disillusion you. Not once.

Luke 20:40
And after that they durst not ask him any question at all.

Lest we are too quick to judge the Jewish leaders for their audacity in questioning Jesus, we would do well to listen to ourselves. Do we put Him on trial every time we wonder why we haven't got the raise we deserve, why our marriage didn't work out as we thought it would, why Mr. Right hasn't yet come along, why we aren't healed of our diseases? And when we don't get the answers we think we are due, do we shake our fist *at* Him, apathetically shrug our shoulders *to ward* Him, or almost imperceptibly walk away *from* Him?

The scribes and Pharisees did not dare question Jesus anymore. Why? The words He spoke and the logic He displayed silenced their cynicism. You and I have an even greater proof before us than the words He spoke, for, unlike the scribes and Pharisees, we can look at the Cross.

You who shrug your shoulders in apathy, look at His shoulder and see it ripped apart by the flagellum and bearing a Cross that should have been yours.

You who shake your fist because things aren't happening in the way you think they should, see His hand not clenched but open, pierced by a nail.

You who have walked away from the Lord in anger or drifted away in busyness, look at His feet and see them pinned to a beam of wood, bleeding for you.

The word "crux" meaning "cross," the crux of every matter is indeed the Cross. Does God love me even when the job doesn't work out as I thought it would, even when people don't treat me the way I think they should, even if

I'm not healed in the way I hoped I would be, even if I'm not understanding what's happening presently? It is in Cross-examining that which is happening in my life; it is in looking at everything through the lens of Calvary, that I have absolute assurance that, although I may not understand it, everything taking place in my life is for my good. If Jesus loved me enough to die for me, surely He will do what's best concerning me.

> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, perhaps the greatest of the modern German theologians, said, "The words why, when, where, and how are all words of the faithless. The only word spoken by a man or woman of faith is 'who.' And 'who' will lead you to *Him.*"
>
> What gave Bonhoeffer the authority to say this? Living in Germany in the 1940s, he began to publicly call for the overthrow of Hitler. As a result, in 1943, SS officers broke into the church where he was preaching and hauled him off to a concentration camp. Upon his arrival, the commandant said, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the famous preacher and writer, come up here and address the assembly. I will give you two minutes."
>
> "I don't need two minutes," Bonhoeffer said, "just two words: Watch me."
>
> Although the Nazis beat him mercilessly, every time they lifted a hand or used a club, Bonhoeffer would smile, lift his eyes toward heaven, and say, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do." He shared a portion of every meal with either a fellow prisoner or one of the Nazi guards. He was constantly smiling, constantly praying, constantly loving—to the point that revival began to break out in the concentration camp. It wasn't because of a word he said, but because of what he did. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was killed April 9, 1945. He could have asked, "Why," but instead He asked, "who"—and was satisfied.

If I had the power, I would change the punctuation for the language of the believer. I would eradicate the question mark and replace it with the mark of the Cross. Whenever people ask questions, put the mark of the Cross at the end, and you'll have the ultimate answer. If you have been wondering what's

happening, consider once more what the Lamb of God did for you—and you will find every question answered conclusively.

Luke 20:41 (a)

And he said unto them . . .

After being questioned concerning His authority, integrity, and theology, Jesus now has a question for His questioners.

Luke 20:41 (b)–44

. . . How say they that Christ is David's son? And David himself saith in the book of Psalms, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Till I make thine enemies thy footstool. David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son?

Because the Jewish leaders did not want to acknowledge His deity, they tried in vain to trip up Jesus intellectually, philosophically, and theologically. But Jesus silenced them the same way He silenced Satan in the wilderness and the same way we silence Satan as well: through the Word.

Luke 20:45–47

Then in the audience of all the people he said unto his disciples, Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; which devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation.

Although He denounces the scribes for their self-serving religiosity, because God always has a remnant of faithful ones (1 Kings 19:18), Jesus is about to draw the attention of His disciples to a widow exhibiting sacrificial generosity.

21 Luke 21:1

And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the trea sury.

Mark tells us Jesus watched *how* people gave (12:41). Paul tells us He loves those who give cheerfully, or, literally, hilariously (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Luke 21:2

And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites.

Even as the scribes and Pharisees argued, discussed, and debated with Jesus, a woman was making her way to the temple and into the gospel record with two mites—an eighth of a cent—to give joyfully and radically to the Lord.

Luke 21:3, 4

And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.

In our giving, the issue is not the amount but the cost. For some people, to put one hundred dollars in the offering is very easy. For others, to put in even one dollar is costly.

After a plague had passed through Israel, leaving an incredible death toll in its wake, David was instructed by the Lord to build an altar and sacrifice to Him. To do so, David sought to purchase a piece of property from a man named Araunah. Hearing the reason for his purchase, Araunah offered to donate the land. David, however, insisting to pay the full price said, “I will not sacrifice to the Lord of that which costs me nothing” (2 Samuel 24:24).

A man after God’s own heart, David reveals the Father’s heart toward giving. God neither needs nor desires our “tips.” This woman gave only two mites, but it cost her everything.

Luke 21:5 (a)

And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones . . .

Forty-eight feet long, eighteen feet thick, and eight to ten feet high, the stones of the temple were massive indeed. Even though it was corrupt internally, the disciples attempted to draw Jesus' attention to the temple's external beauty.

Luke 21:5 (b), 6

. . . and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

As impossible as it must have seemed to those hearing Jesus' statement, a mere forty years later, the Roman siege of Jerusalem resulted in the burning of the temple. This, in turn, caused all of the gold inside to melt into the cracks of the huge stones. After it had cooled, the soldiers pulled down every single stone to get the hardened gold—just as Jesus had prophesied.

Luke 21:7

And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?

Because it was the Jews who required a sign (1 Corinthians 1:22), Jesus' ensuing answer, known as the Olivet Discourse, relates specifically to the Jews.

Luke 21:8

And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them.

The word "Christ" is in italics. Therefore, the actual statement is, "Many will come saying, I Am—Ego Eimi"—a name of deity. For years, people

wondered who would have the audacity to claim deity. But in our day of New Age thinking, it is common for people to walk along the beach with outstretched arms saying, "I am God."

Luke 21:9

But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by.

In the last days, wars will rage.

Luke 21:10, 11 (a)

Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences . . .

The word "pestilence" refers to incurable disease. Certainly the AIDS crisis would qualify.

Luke 21:11 (b)–13

. . . and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony.

Brought before Felix and Festus, Agrippa and Caesar Nero, Paul would be one to use every opportunity to preach the gospel.

Luke 21:14, 15

Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.

Would you be able to do what Paul did? Yes. The Lord doesn't give "dying grace" until one is dying. The same is true concerning any difficult situation. It's not until you're in that place that the Lord gives you the corresponding grace.

Luke 21:16, 17

And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.

In the first two hundred fifty years of the church—beginning with Caesar Nero and extending through the ten waves of persecution that followed—a minimum of six million Christians were killed for their belief in Jesus Christ.

Luke 21:18

But there shall not an hair of your head perish.

"You will be betrayed and killed—but not a hair of your head shall perish." Isn't that a contradiction? No. Jesus is saying, "Not a hair of your head shall perish" in the sense that we say, "That's no skin off my back." In other words, "They might kill your body, but you will be escorted into eternity. The moment you are there, you won't care about what you lost on earth."

Concerning anything you give up for the Lord—be it a boyfriend you let go because he doesn't want to walk with God, a job you've been fired from because you're not willing to compromise in the area of integrity, or even your life itself—I promise you when you get to heaven, you're not going to say, "Phooey, I wish I would have kept that."

Luke 21:19–24 (a)

In your patience possess ye your souls. And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For

these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations . . .

Not only was the temple burned in A.D. 70, but also, by the end of the 143-day siege, over one million Jews were killed. Of those who survived, many were taken prisoner, leaving the rest to scatter throughout the world. They wandered as a people without a homeland until May 14, 1948, when Israel became a nation once again.

Luke 21:24 (b)

. . . and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

It was in 1967 that the Jews reclaimed Jerusalem. Therefore, since then, we have simply been living in prophetic overtime. If you think it's been a long time, you must realize that twenty-five years is miniscule in comparison to all eternity. Besides, a thousand years to the Lord is as a day (2 Peter 3:8). Therefore, He's only a minute or two overdue.

Luke 21:25 (a)

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars . . .

I read recently about the discovery of a black hole one hundred billion times the mass of the sun, a discovery some astronomers call "puzzling."

Luke 21:25 (b)

. . . and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity . . .

The Greek meaning of this phrase refers to the quagmires and quicksand that must be navigated to assist nations in political turmoil. There simply are

no easy answers.

Luke 21:25 (c), 26 (a)

. . . the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear . . .

Jesus said the perplexity and complexity of society will cause hearts to fail. We're seeing that happen. Relatively unknown in the time of Jesus, linked to stress, heart disease is now a common cause of death in our culture.

Luke 21:26 (b)–28

. . . and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

When we see these things happen, we shouldn't be upset—we should look up.

Luke 21:29 (a)

And he spake to them a parable; behold the fig tree . . .

The fig tree in Scripture is the symbol of the nation Israel.

Luke 21:29 (b)–31

. . . and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.

Israel's blossoming as a nation is one of the key signs that the Lord's coming is drawing near. So is the blossoming of "all the trees"—seen in the

resurgence of nationalism in countries like Yugoslavia, the Balkans, and African nations.

Luke 21:32–34

Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

Gideon's three hundred mighty men were chosen because, rather than putting their faces in the river, they drank from their hands. This way, they could remain alert (Judges 7:6). In other words, God uses men who don't take unnecessary time doing necessary tasks. Yes, we have to live. Certainly, we must care for our families. But there can come a point when we take too much time doing necessary things. And that is the point we are disqualified from being used by God in these last days.

Luke 21:35, 36

For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

What are the Jews to pray to escape? The events of the Tribulation.

How will they be counted worthy to escape? By acknowledging the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, as the only worthy One.

Luke 21:37, 38

And in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives. And all the people came early in the morning to him in the temple, for to hear him.

I can so easily be sucked into the cares of this life and bogged down by the things of this world. But when I study the words of Jesus, I am reminded of the big picture all over again. I am reminded that I'm only here for a short time. I am reminded of eternity.

Every single believer who is hurting physically or emotionally, every single saint who is struggling financially will indeed be healed and freed incredibly. It might be tonight. It might be this week. It might be this year. It might be in heaven. But God's promises to you will be kept perfectly if you don't lose sight of the big picture. Spend consistent time with Jesus. Be like those in our text. Come *early* to hear Him—and be reminded of heaven all over again.



22 Luke 22:1, 2

Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Pass over. And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people.

The chief priests and scribes wanted to get rid of Jesus, but they had to be careful lest they inadvertently incite the people to rally against them.

Luke 22:3–6

Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude.

Matthew tells us the chief priests gave Judas thirty pieces of silver, the Old Testament price of a slave. This was a fitting amount, for Jesus came as the Servant of all. Where did the thirty pieces of silver come from? During Passover, the priests carried small bags of money tied to their belts in order to purchase lambs to be used as sacrifices. Therefore, it is highly likely that

the chief priests used money committed to their care for the purchase of sacrificial lambs to "purchase" Jesus, the ultimate sacrificial Lamb.

Luke 22:7

Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed.

Based on the number of lambs slaughtered, there were approximately 2.6 million people packed into Jerusalem to celebrate Passover.

Luke 22:8

And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat.

Passover was to be celebrated by families. Therefore, in celebrating Passover with His disciples, Jesus looked at His disciples as His family. I like that because at this point, these men weren't very spiritual. Judas would betray Him. Peter would deny Him. Thomas would doubt Him. Yet Jesus treated them as family. And if He did that with them, He'll do it with us as well.

Luke 22:9, 10

And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in.

Carrying water was women's work. Therefore, it would have been unusual to see a man doing so.

Luke 22:11–13 (a)

And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he shall shew you a large upper

room furnished: there make ready. And they went, and found as he had said unto them:

"And they went and found as He had said unto them . . . ." That's not true only for the disciples in their day, but for us as well. Whatever Jesus says, you'll find it to be true. There are no exceptions. When Jesus says something you can be sure it's true.

Luke 22:13 (b)–20

. . . and they made ready the passover. And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

Here Jesus institutes the ordinance of Communion, saying, "Do this in remembrance of Me." In Luke's Gospel, this is His last commandment, if you would, His "deathbed wish" for you. I think it's a tragedy when people start diminishing the importance of Communion, for the Lord's Supper is much more than just a little cracker and cup of grape juice. It is much more than something we do out of obligation or tradition. Rather, at the Lord's table, something miraculous happens.

Is it that incredible that a miracle happens through Communion? After all, every time we eat bread or drink juice, a miracle takes place as they literally become part of our blood and body. I have found that stripping the ordinances of their mystery produces sterility in one's walk. Therefore, I am simple enough to believe that if we partake of the Lord's table in faith, saying,

"Lord, I'm expecting that You truly are filling me and that Your blood is once again washing me," we participate in a miracle and mystery.

Incidentally, due to the fact that leaven and fermentation both pictured corruption, both were forbidden in the Passover ordinance. Therefore, I believe the wine was not fermented. Furthermore, I cannot believe Jesus would have equated His blood with a rotting substance.

I love the fact that Jesus chose to use the most common foods possible. Bread and wine have been the most available elements to nourish mankind in virtually every culture and every society on every continent throughout history.

What is bread? Grain that has been ground up and baked in the oven. Jesus, the Bread of Life, was ground up by the religious system and the sin of humanity. He was baked in the oven of adversity and absorbed the very fire of hell for you and me. What is wine? Grapes that have been crushed. When the soldier thrust the spear into Jesus' side, the blood and water that flowed indicate that when Jesus died on the Cross, physiologically, He died from a burst, or broken, heart.

Love desires unity—as seen in the substances Jesus chose to commemorate His death. After being ground, individual grains of wheat are brought together into a single loaf. After they are crushed, individual grapes lose their identity and become one. So, too, when I partake of Communion, I not only intimately and mysteriously become one with my Lord, but I become one with my brothers and sisters as we eat of the same loaf and drink of the same cup.

Communion actually has a three-fold aspect: It looks back in faith as it remembers the Cross. It looks ahead in hope as it waits for the day we will eat with the Lord in the kingdom. It looks ahead in love as we see Christians all around the globe and down the tunnel of history eating of the same loaf and drinking of the same cup. We may never agree on end times, the work of the Spirit, or all points of doctrine. But we will find unity at the Lord's table, at the foot of the Cross.

Of Communion, Jesus didn't say, "Teach it." He didn't say, "Think about it." He didn't say, "Try to fit it in." He said, "*Do* this."

Luke 22:21–24

But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed! And they began to inquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing. And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.

Although one moment the disciples were saying, "Am I the betrayer?" the next they were saying, "Aren't I something?" This is what happens to anyone trying to live a performance-oriented faith. If you live by rules and regulations—trying to impress God with your devotion, your ministry, your piety—like the disciples, you will vacillate between feeling like a betrayer who can't keep your own standards and a superstar when you do keep them for a day or two. If your walk has been up and down, it is probably because you are clinging to a performance-based Christianity. Instead, realize that, because, on the Cross, Jesus declared, "It is finished," there is nothing else that can or must be done.

Luke 22:25–27

And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.

The world says, "Sit at the table and be served."
Jesus says, "I look for every opportunity to serve."

Luke 22:28–32

Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And the Lord said,

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

Did Peter's faith fail? No. He believed in the Lord, even though he ended up denying the Lord. Nor did his love fail. What failed? His hope. When he saw Jesus being led away in ropes, being brought to Caiaphas, his hope was lost. Maybe you're in Peter's sandals. You believe in the Lord. You have a definite love for the Lord. But your hope has been diminished because you can't figure out how what's happening to you could possibly work for good.

A number of years ago, a study was done on Norwegian wharf rats. After being thrown in the open water, one group paddled for about three and a half minutes before drowning. A second group was thrown in, but plucked out right before they drowned. The next day, when the rats were thrown back into the water, scientists were astounded to find them able to tread water for forty-five minutes or more—evidently because they were hoping they would be rescued as they were the previous day.

The same is true with us. If we don't have hope that we'll be rescued, we sink. But if we have hope that a rescue is coming, we can tread water through the hard times.

I don't think it is at all coincidental that the doctrine of the Rapture is called the blessed hope (Titus 2:13) because, although sometimes we feel we're in a rat race and going under quickly, we know today could be the glorious day of the Lord's return.

Luke 22:33

And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.

Cock-sure of himself, Peter was crowing about how reliable he was.

Luke 22:34

And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

Due to their propensity to be noisy and messy, roosters were not allowed in Jerusalem during the Passover. Thus, when this rooster starts making noise, Peter will no doubt be thinking about the mess he made.

Luke 22:35–38

And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end. And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough.

When Jesus told the disciples to buy a sword, He was using an idiom similar to our saying, "Keep your powder dry." In other words, He was telling them the climate was changing from the days previously when they were embraced and provided for in ministry (Matthew 10).

Luke 22:39

And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.

After celebrating the Passover, after speaking very pointedly to Peter, after warning His disciples that the times would be changing, Jesus leaves the city and crosses the little creek bed of the Kidron. The word "Kidron" means "dark" or "murky" because the blood of the sacrifices would drain out of the temple and into the brook below. Therefore, only hours before His death, Jesus would be stepping over a brook that ran blood red.

Luke 22:40

And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.

Prayer is not only for procurement, but for protection. In other words, prayer is not simply to ask for things you need or want—but also to protect you from things you *don't* need or want. Stop praying, and you will be tempted unnecessarily. Stop praying, and your kids will be vulnerable to attacks of the Enemy. Stop praying, and your marriage will be attacked constantly. Jesus said one of the keys to protection from temptation or trouble is prayer. We'll never know until we get to heaven just how important our prayers are.

Luke 22:41, 42

And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

Gethsemane was an appropriate place for Jesus to pray so passionately, for "Gethsemane" means "olive press," the place where olives were crushed to release their oil. The crushing, the pressing Jesus endured in Gethsemane as He was about to feel the wrath of His Father for the sin of all humanity, so far exceeds anything we can even begin to comprehend that it is rendered incomprehensible.

Luke 22:43

And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.

Every life has a Garden of Gethsemane. But every Gethsemane has an angel. The Lord will always send an angel into your Gethsemane—an unexpected person, a Bible study, a radio teaching, a book—to strengthen you in your time of need.

Luke 22:44

And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

- In the Garden of Eden, the first Adam stood in rebellion against God.
- In Gethsemane, the Last Adam knelt in submission to God (1 Corinthians 15:45).
- In the Garden of Eden, the first Adam was sentenced to work by the sweat of his brow.
- In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Last Adam agonized so deeply that blood flowed from His brow.

I say this because perhaps you might be saying, "Life is hard. My job is not going right. My marriage is falling apart. My kids are acting up. Why should I press on in the faith? I'm tired of living by the sweat of my brow. I'm tired of dealing with rebellious kids. I'm tired of trying to make ends meet. I'm just plain tired." When you feel tired because you're sweating as part of fallen humanity, consider Jesus. You might be sweating it out, but have you strived so hard that you've actually bled from your forehead? Jesus did.

Life *is* hard. It's part of the curse humanity brought down on itself. We have all sinned, and the way of the transgressor is hard (Proverbs 13:15). But understand that although it's hard being a Christian, it's a lot harder *not* being a Christian. If we didn't know Jesus, we would still have the same problems, but we'd have no access to the One who solves them.

Luke 22:45–47

And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow, and said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him.

It was common for a student to kiss his rabbi as a sign of submission and affection. Therefore, Judas' kiss would not have seemed unusual. However,

the language implies much more than a simple kiss. It implies that Judas was smothering Jesus' cheeks with kisses, as if to make sure that the soldiers were able to identify the One they were to arrest.

Luke 22:48–51

But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him.

Jesus' final healing miracle was one of healing a hurt unnecessarily inflicted by an overzealous disciple. I think the miracle Jesus does most often is to heal the wounds inflicted by overzealous Christians who, thinking they are standing up for truth and defending the Lord by unsheathing the two-edged sword of the Word, chop off the ears of those round about them. While I do admire Peter's courage in being willing to be outnumbered six thousand to one, his zeal was misdirected.



***For topical study of Luke 22:35–51 entitled "Putting Away Your Sword," turn to page* 410.**

Luke 22:52, 53

Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness.

"Why do you come at Me with this army?" Jesus asks. "I was with you in the temple daily, but I realize this is your hour"—and it's a dark hour indeed.

Luke 22:54

Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off.

Following Jesus afar off is always a dangerous place to be.

Luke 22:55

And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.

Praying in the garden, Jesus was sweating. Sleeping in the garden, Peter was cold. The difference between being hot and cold is simply prayer. To warm himself, Peter sat down at the enemy's fire. So, too, if you're following Jesus from a distance, you'll feel a chill inside, and you'll go back to the old places, the old ways to get warm. The problem is, when you warm yourself at the enemy's fire, like Peter, you'll get burned.

Luke 22:56–58

But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, "Man, I am not."

Peter was identified as a disciple of Jesus on two counts. The maiden recognized him as a disciple because he was with Jesus. The man recognized him as a disciple because he was with the other disciples. Therein are the two characteristics of a disciple. You can hang out in church all the time, but if you don't spend personal and private time with the Lord, you're not really a disciple. On the other hand, you can enjoy spending time with the Lord, but if you don't want to worship with other believers, you're not a disciple either. You will be identified as a disciple—even by the enemies of the Lord—if you spend time with Him personally and with fellow believers corporately.

Luke 22:59

And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaean.

Peter's accent gave him away. So, too, believers are identified by their speech. They have an accent of another kingdom. They don't use the same expressions, tone, or vocabulary as the world (Colossians 3:8).

Luke 22:60

And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew.

As a result of the rooster crowing, no longer would Peter ever be so cocky. Writing his Epistles, he will identify himself as Simon Peter, a servant of Jesus Christ. Simon was his name before he became a disciple. It means "shifting sand" or "unstable one." The Lord changed Simon's name to Peter, or "Rock." But after this event, it was as if he said, "Yes, I'm Peter in the Lord by His grace. But I'm still also Simon because I know my tendency to fail."

I think there's something else here. I believe in using a rooster, the Lord was telling Peter that even though he messed up, even though he committed a singularly hideous sin in denying Jesus even as Jesus was about to die for him, there would be a new day dawning—a new day of humility, of brokenness, of forgiveness after which He would use Peter mightily. The same is true of you. You will find the Lord will do a mighty work in and through you if, at the point of failure, you turn to Him.

Luke 22:61, 62

And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

The look with which Jesus looked upon Peter was not one of condemnation, but of compassion. It was a look not of fury, but of

forgiveness. And it broke Peter's heart.

Luke 22:63–65

And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophesy, who is it that smote thee? And many other things blasphemously spake they against him.

According to Isaiah, the beating Jesus endured was more brutal than that experienced by any other man. Erase the mental image of Jesus with a single trickle of blood down His face. That's not what happened.

Luke 22:66–71

And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying, Art thou the Christ? tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe: And if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go. Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God. Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth.

Every cult diminishes the deity of Jesus Christ, saying Jesus never claimed to be God. Yet the chief priests and scribes began to carry out His crucifixion for the single reason that, by the way He answered them, they understood He claimed to be God.

The issue of Jesus' deity is foundational and essential to our faith. Why couldn't He be simply the "First Created One," as the Mormons claim? Why could He be a good teacher, but not really God? Simply because if Jesus Christ was not God, then God did not die for me. And suddenly the gospel loses its potency.

God didn't simply create a sacrificial Son to take care of the sin of mankind." No, God Himself died for me. That Jesus is God in the flesh moves me, breaks me, and touches me in a way nothing else possibly could.

"*Great* is the mystery of godliness," Timothy writes—that God became a Man (1 Timothy 3:16).

PUTTING AWAY YOUR SWORD

A Topical Study of LUKE 22:35–51

At the end of World War II, when the Americans moved on Berlin, a couple of German soldiers failed to respond to the instructions given them in German. Upon closer inspection, it was discovered they were not German at all, but were from Tibet. When an interpreter was found, they told how, completely unaware of the war going on, they simply wanted to take a journey and crossed the border into Russia. There, they were picked up by Russian military men and immediately conscripted into the Russian Army. A short time later, scared and confused, they were captured by the Nazis and taken to a German POW camp—until, in desperate need of manpower, they were sent to work on the supply lines, where they were eventually captured by American forces.

"Amazing," said the interpreter after hearing their story. "Do you have any questions?"

"Just one," they said. "What's everyone fighting about?"

Sometimes I think the Lord would ask the same thing of us. Like Peter, we are so apt to unsheathe our swords and start flailing away. Consider with me the ways in which Peter's zeal was misdirected . . .

Peter Fought the Wrong Enemy

Not knowing what to expect, the soldiers marching behind Judas were armed and ready for war if necessary. But when Peter drew his sword, he didn't take on any of the six hundred armed soldiers. No, he went for one of the servants who was, most likely, unarmed and defenseless. In his zeal to protect the Lord, Peter went after perhaps the weakest person in the place.

You and I often do the same thing: We fight the wrong enemy. Because Ephesians tells us we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12). Therefore, any time I am wrestling or fighting a person, I am fighting the wrong enemy just as surely as was Peter. I am to wage war, to unsheathe my sword, to release my faith, to express my heart not against people but against the entities that victimize people.

If you're fighting your husband, boss, teacher, or neighbor, you're fighting the wrong battle. Longfellow was right when he said, "If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we would find sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility." Our attack is to be leveled not against people, but against Satan and his demons through prayer, for therein lies the true battle.

Peter Used the Wrong Weapon

Peter used a literal sword—but it is only a spiritual weapon that can pull down the high towers the Enemy has erected in people.

The sword we are to use is not a sword that cuts physically. Rather, it is the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. But because the Word is powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, we must be careful not to use it carelessly or incorrectly. All too often, Christians unsheathe their Bibles and start chopping on people mercilessly by using a Scripture or a principle—usually out of context—to leave people bloodied, battered, and beaten. Just because a person is quoting Scripture does not mean it is applicable in every situation. If someone is giving you a misguided earful, it's no different than what Peter did when he sliced off Malchus' ear.

James gives us a very simple test to know whether any given word is really from the Lord. . . .

> *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*
>
> James 3:17

Is what's being shared with you pure, peaceable, and without hassle and hypocrisy? Or does it cause confusion, strife, and tension? Before you unsheathe your sword or allow another to unsheathe his, be sure it's done with this text in mind.

Peter Harbored the Wrong Attitude

After agonizing in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus chose to submit to the will of His Father. This meant that, at this point, He had already decided to allow His enemies to arrest Him, to try Him, to crucify Him. Yet even as Jesus was submitting, Peter was fighting—completely out of harmony with the mind and will of Christ. Many times, we have a tendency to want to fight back when in reality, Jesus would have us mellow out. I think of David fleeing from his son, Absalom, who had launched a rebellion against him. . . .

> On his way out of Jerusalem, a pipsqueak named Shimei, an enemy of David, threw rocks and dirt at him, saying, "You're a bloody man, David. That's why you're being sent away from Jerusalem. That's why you've lost your kingdom."
>
> Hearing this, Abishai, one of David's men said, "Let me lop off that dead dog's head."
>
> But David would not allow it. "The Lord has allowed him to say these words to me," David said. David recognized Shimei was part of the process through which the Lord was doing a deep work of humility within him (2 Samuel 16).

"Put away your sword, Peter," our Greater than David said. "Your attitude is all wrong. Something rich is being worked out." Jesus would emerge from this situation rich indeed—for, having purchased our salvation, we would be His treasure (Matthew 13:44–46).

Peter Fought At the Wrong Time

Yes, Jesus' arrest was unjust. Certainly, His trial was unfair. But there is coming a time when Peter can indeed unsheathe his sword and address these miscarriages of justice. It will be in the Second Coming, under the direct leadership of Jesus.

"This person must be corrected," we say, or, "This person must be straightened out." Perhaps—but there will come a time when that will happen righteously, perfectly, and completely. Until then, keep your sword at bay.

Peter Fought for the Wrong Reason

The reason Peter drew his sword was to protect the Lord from the six hundred soldiers standing before Him. Do you think the Lord needs protecting? Has He called you to protect Him? Has He called you to straighten out a wrong situation in your own energy?

"What she did is wrong," we fume. "Therefore, I must stand up for the Lord." Maybe—but make sure *He* is directing you.

Perhaps Peter was trying to demonstrate his sincerity, his willingness to take a stand for Jesus. Maybe he was thinking, *You told me I would deny You, Lord. Well, watch this*. . . . So, too, sometimes we want to show how spiritual we are by nailing this person or that situation. Yet one of the most glorious things about being a Christian is the fact that the Lord will judge, leaving us the opportunity to simply love. We are to love, forgive, and encourage people. Yes, there are times of correction—but only if surrounded by love. If the Lord chooses to use you as an instrument of intervention or correction, it won't be as a sword flying indiscriminately, but as a skillful surgeon working exactingly and lovingly.

Like Peter, I have been all wrong. But as I come to Him humbly, the Lord begins to heal the people I have wounded, as well as myself. Like me, you might have been all wrong. But Jesus is all right.



23 Luke 23:1

And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate.

Under Roman rule, the Jews did not technically have the authority to mete out capital punishment. Therefore, Jesus had to be brought before Pilate. However, in Acts 7, we see the Jews themselves stoning Stephen. The question, then, is, if they killed Stephen, why didn't the Jewish leaders kill Jesus for His perceived blasphemy?

I believe it was because it was God's intent that it would not be only the Jews who would kill His Son, but that all of humanity would be involved—

not only Romans and Jews, but those who had traveled from all over the known world to Jerusalem for Passover and would join in the demand to crucify Jesus.

Luke 23:2

And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.

Pilate wouldn't sentence a man to death merely on the basis of a theological issue, so the Jews had to furnish trumped-up charges to present to him. Had Jesus forbidden His followers to pay taxes? No. He did just the opposite (Matthew 22:21).

Luke 23:3–7

And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest it. Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man. And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilaean. And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time.

Pilate already had two strikes against him due to the riots that erupted when he ordered his soldiers bearing insignias—which the Jews perceived as idols—on to the temple mount, and when he paid for the construction of an aqueduct with money from the temple treasury. Therefore, in political hot water, Pilate was no doubt relieved to send Jesus to Herod.

Luke 23:8, 9

And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by

him. Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing.

Upon His arrival, Herod asked Jesus for a miracle. Even though Jesus' entire earthly ministry had been filled with miracles, Herod is only the first who will ask Jesus for yet another.

"Prophesy who hit You," the soldiers will taunt.
"Come down off the Cross," the crowd will jeer.

Sadly enough, we do the same thing. "Why doesn't God answer my prayer?" we cry. "Why doesn't He open the job? Why doesn't He bless the relationship? Why isn't He providing for our need? Why doesn't He show me a miracle? I would believe if I could just see Him do something."

Miracles do not produce faith. All they produce is an addiction to more miracles. Read the Book of Exodus, and you will see the Red Sea parting, manna falling, water flowing. Yet so faithless were the children of Israel—even after seeing miracle upon miracle—they didn't want to talk to God (Exodus 20:19). Signs and wonders and miracles do not produce faith because they invariably leave people confused about the miracles that didn't transpire. People might see ten events take place that are answers to prayer, but the *one* prayer that doesn't get answered the way they want is the one that hangs them up. That is why miracles are never enough.

Does this mean the Father won't do miracles? Of course He will. But the miracles of God are never about power. They're about people. Whenever the Lord is working in the area of healing, it's with individual people, not massive demonstrations of His power in order to persuade cynics—which is why seven times in Mark's Gospel, concerning His healings, Jesus said, "Don't tell anyone."

Jesus cares about people, not about power. The most powerful miracle of all was His Resurrection from the dead. And yet following this glorious event, how many times did Jesus appear to unbelievers? Not once. He never appeared to Pilate, to Herod, or to the religious leaders, saying, "I'm back." No, only those who already believed in Him saw the resurrected Lord. Who

is the one who sees the miracles and the blessings? I believe it is the person who is not seeking them, but who simply loves Jesus.

Luke 23:10, 11

And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate.

Herod was angry that Jesus wouldn't perform during his command performance.

Luke 23:12

And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves.

In their hatred of Jesus, Herod and Pilate become friends. But it will backfire, for history tells us Pilate would become insane, and Herod would be of no help to him.

Luke 23:13–16

And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. I will therefore chastise him, and release him.

Regardless of the fact that neither he nor Herod could find any fault with Jesus, Pilate ordered Jesus scourged. Hoping to appease everyone, he would satisfy no one.

Luke 23:17–19

(For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.) And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas: (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.)

The crowd was to choose between Barabbas, who had been indicted for insurrection, and Jesus, whose ministry would be based upon resurrection.

To this day, there are those who want to bring in the kingdom violently, politically, or legislatively. But the Lord's kingdom is not of this world. Barabbas thought he could bring in the kingdom with a revolution. Only Jesus can bring in the true kingdom through regeneration.

The crowd wanted activity, not spirituality. They wanted insurrection, not resurrection. They wanted to do something, not be something. They wanted Barabbas.

Luke 23:20–25

Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will.

Pilate heard two voices very clearly: the voice of his conscience and the voice of the crowd. He succumbed to the former. Historians tell us that, shortly after this event, Pilate went into isolation on the island of Sicily. Approached years later by a disciple of Jesus, he was asked if he remembered Jesus of Nazareth. A blank look came over his face as he said, "Jesus? Of Nazareth? I don't remember a thing about Him." Yet so haunted was Pilate that shortly thereafter, he hung himself. How tragic it is when any

of us give in to the loud voice of the crowd instead of submitting to the still small voice of the Spirit within us.

Luke 23:26

And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.

Cyrene was located in Tripoli, or present-day Libya. Simon had probably been saving all of his adult life to make the eight hundred-mile journey to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. As he felt the cold metal of a Roman spear upon his shoulder and heard the command to take up the Cross of the Galilean who had already been beaten beyond recognition, Simon must have wondered, *Why me?*

Mark tells us Simon was the father of Rufus and Alexander (15:21). The fact that Paul sends greetings to Rufus and Alexander means they were well-known Christians (Romans 16:13). Therefore, the implication is that Simon got saved—perhaps the very day he carried the Cross. This shouldn't be surprising, for those who carry the Cross of Christ will always fall in love with Him. Initially, we say, "Oh no. I don't want to go through that. I don't want to do that. It's too heavy. It's too burdensome. Why me?" But eventually we come to understand the incredible insight Jesus shared with us when He said it is the person who carries his cross daily who finds true life (Matthew 10:39).

Luke 23:27

And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.

In the gospel record, not one woman is ever seen as skeptical, cynical, or an enemy of Jesus. Yes, the disciples were all men. But one of them was Judas. Yes, men play the central parts—but included in their company were Pilate, Herod, Annas, Caiphas, the rulers of the synagogue, and the temple guard. Women in the Gospels have no such mixed multitude—for every one of them was either sympathetic to Jesus or a follower of His.

Luke 23:28–31

But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

"Don't feel sorry for Me," Jesus is saying. "My agony is about to end—even this day. But you in Jerusalem will go through incredibly difficult times. If they've done this in the time of spring to a green tree—wait until the Romans show their real vehemence toward this city in the season to come."

Luke 23:32, 33

And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.

Although this was deliberately designed to bring humiliation to Jesus, it was also designed by God as an illustration. Here we see two men equally close to Jesus, each having the same perspective of Jesus, and yet each making an entirely different decision about Him. One would be ushered into the kingdom. The other would be lost to eternal damnation.

Luke 23:34 (a)

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

One's ignorance that what he's doing is wrong doesn't negate his responsibility to pay a price. Forgiveness, intercession, and provision are required even for a person who is sinning ignorantly or unaware that what he's doing, thinking, or saying is a sin. This is why the longer you walk with

the Lord, the more you'll understand both the necessity and the depth of God's forgiveness

Luke 23:34 (b), 35 (a)

And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others . . .

The crowd who had once called Jesus Beelzebub, the same folks who had said He was a carpenter's son, actually uttered truth about Him when they said, "He saved others." Indeed He had!

Luke 23:35 (b)

. . . let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.

The problem, of course, is if Jesus saved Himself, He couldn't save us.

Luke 23:36, 37

And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.

A king is known by his ability to assert himself. Jesus, however, is more than a King. He's a Shepherd dying on behalf of His sheep. "Stand up for your rights," the world says. "Intimidate. Dominate." They don't understand that in the kingdom of God, the way to authority is neither through intimidation nor domination, but through sacrifice.

Therefore, the husband who says, "I'm in charge here. Ephesians 5 says so. Submit to me, Wife," has missed the point completely.

Luke 23:38

And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Greek was the language of intellect; Latin, the language of government; and Hebrew the language of religion. Philosophically, politically, and religiously, Jesus is indeed King of the Jews.

Luke 23:39–42

And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

One thief said, "Get me down."
The other said, "Lord, take me up."

What is your prayer? Is it, "Take me down. Get me out of this mess"—or is it, "Lord, take me up into a higher understanding of You"?

***For topical study of Luke 23:32–43 entitled "Faith Alone: Nailing It Down," turn to page* 417.**

Luke 23:43–45 (a)

And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise. And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened . . .

Those who said, "We will not have the Light of the world rule over us," would now walk in darkness. So, too, the extent to which you and I reject His light is the extent to which our lives will be filled with a terrifying darkness.

Luke 23:45 (b)

. . . and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.

The Holy of Holies was now accessible for the first time in centuries. In this, God declared, "Open House! No more ceremonial sacrifices or religious rituals. The Work is done. As believers, come into My presence any time you want."

Don't sew up the veil, gang. Don't get out your needle and thread and say, "You can't come into the presence of God until you sing six worship songs." Or, "You can't come into the presence of God until you have devotions for three days." Or, "You can't come into the presence of God until you give up that sin." Don't fall prey to the formulas and principles that, stitch by stitch, sew up the veil. Instead, move into God's presence freely.

Luke 23:46

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

After six days of creation, the Father looked over what He had made and said, "It is very good." Then He rested. So, too, after being on the Cross six hours, the Son said, "It is finished"—and He rested.

Luke 23:47

Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.

Matthew tells us this centurion would go on to say, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54). What convinced him? It was the way Jesus handled rejection and pain, suffering and death. Why do we as believers insist on never going through suffering, when it is actually the method the Lord uses to bring about the conversion of many a centurion?

In Exodus 14, God had His people camp between Pihahiroth and Migdol with their backs to the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army headed

right towards them. Why? So He would be glorified among the Egyptians when they saw how He delivered His people (verse 4).

Oftentimes, we go to great lengths to avoid being boxed in, to dodge hard times, to escape physical pain. Yet those are the very things that convince the Egyptians, the centurions, and our neighbors of the faithfulness of God as He sees us through.

Yes, we should pray. Yes, we should make our requests and petitions known to our Father. Yes, we should persevere in prayer. But we must also let God be God. We must also allow Him the freedom to do what He wants in our lives no matter how painful it might seem. It was for the joy set before Him that Jesus, our Model, our Lord *endured* the Cross (Hebrews 12:2).

Luke 23:48

And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.

The crowd knew they had done wrong, that a travesty of justice had occurred.

Luke 23:49–51 (a)

And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things. And, behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counseller; and he was a good man, and a just: (The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;) . . .

Although a member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph had not consented to the crucifixion of Christ.

Luke 23:51 (b)–53 (a)

. . . he was of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews: who also himself waited for the kingdom of God. This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen . . .

Jesus' body was wrapped in linen—the very material the high priests would wear during Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

Luke 23:53 (b), 54

. . . and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid. And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on.

History tells us that in A.D. 61, Philip sent Joseph of Arimathea to England. Tradition goes on to say that he took with him the chalice used by the Lord at the Last Supper. Be that as it may, it is highly possible that this one who gave up his position on the Sanhedrin and his standing in the community in order to bury Jesus did indeed take the gospel message to England.

Luke 23:55, 56

And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.

It's a good thing these women rested on the Sabbath, for they're about to do quite a bit of running on the joyous day to follow.

FAITH ALONE: NAILING IT DOWN

A Topical Study of
LUKE 23:32–43

. . . and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah 53:12 (b)

Seven hundred years before Jesus was crucified between two thieves, Isaiah prophesied that He would be numbered among the transgressors and that He would die in the midst of sinners. This was the plan of the Father. Why? Consider the following . . .

To Show the Depth of His Compassion

When Jesus came to dwell among men, there was no room for Him in the inn. So He was born in a stable, placed in a manger, surrounded by animals. Not only was He to be born among animals, but He was to die among criminals. In so doing, He demonstrates the depth of His love for us.

The Fact That God Is Sovereign

Two men guilty of the same crime, cursing the same Lord, were dying the same death. They were equally close to the Lord in proximity, both close enough to talk to Him even amidst the shouts and jeers of the crowd. They were equal in every way except one: One would be lost, the other saved. Herein is a great mystery. How did the man on the right recognize who Jesus was? How did he catch what the apostles missed? How did he see what His disciples didn't? How did he understand that the Lord's kingdom was eternal? How did he get saved? The only answer is the sovereignty of the Father.

To illustrate this principle, Paul goes back through the tunnel of time and points to Jacob and Esau. Before they were even born, God declared that the elder would serve the younger because "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated" (Romans 9:13). People have real difficulty with this, wondering how God could say He hated Esau before Esau was even born. I have a problem with it too—not with the fact that God hated Esau, but that He loved Jacob, that He could save anyone, that He would choose *me.* The longer I walk with the Lord, the more I realize how far I am from His standard of holiness. Therefore, the mystery to me is not that God hated Esau, but that He loved Jacob. The mystery to me is not that some are not chosen, but that I was.

Was God right in His choice? Read the story of Jacob and Esau, and you see that Esau was a man who cared nothing about spiritual life. Jacob, on the other hand, although he had all kinds of problems, desired to be blessed by the Lord to the point that he wrestled all night with the angel of the Lord in order to obtain His blessing. So when I read Genesis, I realize God made the right choice—this shouldn't surprise me. Righteous and true are His judgments (Revelation 16:7). He always makes the right choice.

"I protest," you might say. "Because I'm not elected does that mean I have no hope, no possibility of getting into the kingdom?"

How do you know you're not elected?

"Because I'm not saved."

Well, get saved today, and you'll find you *are* one of the elect! After all, who put you in this sanctuary today? It is God who works all things to

accomplish His purpose for you in time, in space, in history—even as He put that common criminal right next to Jesus on the mount of Calvary.

A Final Witness to the Innocence of His Son

As people were cursing and spitting, as Jesus was in physical and spiritual torment beyond description, the thief to His right said, “He has done no wrong.”

The one who betrayed Him said the same thing. Tossing the thirty pieces of silver on the floor of the temple, Judas said, “I’ve lived with Him. I’ve walked beside Him. For three years, I’ve observed Him—and I have betrayed innocent blood.”

Even Pontius Pilate, who six times went out to the crowd and back in to talk to Jesus, concluded unequivocally, “I find no fault in Him.” The witness of Judas, the witness of Pilate, and the witness of the criminal combine as a final witness to the world of the innocence of the Son.

To Cushion the Blow

As Jesus was dying, as Satan was snarling, as the demons were cheering, as the crowd was jeering, even as the Father was turning His back on the Son, there, on His right hand, was the first who would follow, the first one who would say, "Lord, remember me." I believe this was a sneak preview of coming attractions, for Jesus could look at that man in his desperation, that man who was previously headed for eternal damnation, and say, "Today you will be with Me in paradise." Suddenly, no doubt, how His heart must have leapt, even though His body was in pain as He saw the very beginning of what would be coming, the first of multiplied millions who would follow.

Life is full of sneak previews of coming attractions even in the midst of the Cross. We see some glorious healings. We see some marvelous victories. Some days are so special, so beautiful, in which things become so clear. All of those are simply sneak previews of what will happen when we move into the kingdom. Each is a "down payment" of what's ahead (2 Corinthians 5:5).

To Nail Down Truth

While all of the above sheds light on the reason Jesus hung between two thieves, I believe the most practical reason is to nail down a truth with absolute certainty and finality. That is, it is faith alone that saves. The man who heard the words, "Today you will be with Me in paradise," simply looked on the Lord and talked to the Lord. That was it. He did nothing more. He could do nothing more. He was pinned to a cross.

Therefore, when anyone says to you,

"Believe in Jesus and get baptized in this manner. . . ." or,

"Believe in Jesus and sell 'Watchtower' . . ." or,

"Believe in Jesus and wear holy underwear . . ."

walk away, change the channel, write them off. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," Paul declared, "and thou shalt be saved." Period (Acts 16:31).

The gospel is so simple. I simply come pinned in helplessness like the thief on the cross and say, "Lord, remember me. Have mercy upon me." That's why Paul refers to the "offence of the Cross" (Galatians 5:11). It's so simple it offends people because it strips them of their pride and power. The Cross affords no possibility of pride in earning salvation, and no potential for power in manipulating one's way into the kingdom.

I'm so thankful for this story—for it nails down with finality the fact that the gospel is profoundly simple and simply profound. This man couldn't get baptized, couldn't sell magazines, couldn't meet in a deep study group. All he could do was call out to the Lord.

And that was all it took.



24 Luke 24:1, 2

Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had

prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre.

The last ones at the Cross are now the first ones at the tomb. When Joseph of Arimathea placed the body of Jesus in his tomb, there would not have been time for a complete embalming because Passover would begin at sunset. Consequently, these women were now coming to complete the task. All of the gospel writers tell us that they came early—always a good time to come to the Lord.

"They that seek Me early shall find Me," the Lord declares (Proverbs 8:17). Truly, those who seek the Lord early—early in life, early in a situation, early every day—will uniquely find Him. These precious women would prove to be no exception.

After a grandfather lost his treasured watch during a family gathering, he called his grandchildren together and told them he'd pay twenty-five dollars to the one who found it. This sent the kids on a mad scramble—running and screaming and turning over every rock. But the youngest grandson just sat and watched his brothers, sisters, and cousins all come back empty-handed. The next morning at breakfast he handed his grandfather the watch.

"How did you find it?" asked the puzzled old man.

"I just got up real early and listened for the ticking," replied his clever grandson.

There's some timely advice in that little story. Oftentimes, there's so much noise and commotion going on all around us that it's hard to hear the Lord in the middle of the day. The time to hear Him is early in the morning—just as these women did.

Luke 24:3, 4

And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, be hold, two men stood by them in shining garments:

Because the other Gospel writers tell us these men were angels, Luke's account implies that angels actually appear to men as men. These women saw two men. Yes, they were shining—but they appeared as men nonetheless. Therefore, when we get to heaven, I think we will be amazed by how much contact we had with angelic beings without even realizing it. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers," the writer of Hebrews reminds us, "for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2).

Luke 24:5

And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?

"Why do you seek the living among the dead?" People still seek Jesus among the dead. "He was a great Example," they say, "a powerful Role Model. Study His life and see how He handled this situation, or what He had to say about that matter." They study Him philosophically. They study Him theologically. But they treat Him as though He's dead. We as believers can fall into that error as well.

As we gather together to worship Him, Jesus is here. He truly is. We're not talking about the thoughts of Jesus or the memory of Jesus. "Whenever two or three are gathered in My Name, I will be in the midst of them," He said (Matthew 18:20). When we begin to grasp this, the way we worship, study, and pray is affected.

Luke 24:6–8

He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words,

The fact that the angels said, "Don't you remember how Jesus told you He would be crucified and rise again the third day?" indicates that the angels were listening when Jesus said these words to His disciples. Peter tells us that the angels long to look into the things taught and spoken of concerning Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:12). Why? Because they are not saved like we are.

They're not sinners, rescued by the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, the way they understand that their King and Master is a God of incredible mercy and incalculable love is by watching you and me. "Wow, how could our God love *her?* How could our God be so patient with a guy like *that?*" they say. And it makes them worship Him all the more.

Luke 24:9, 10 (a)

And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene . . .

I think Augustine was right when he called Mary Magdalene "the apostles' apostle." She, indeed, was the first one to share the gospel with the disciples.

Luke 24:10 (b), 11

. . . and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.

Although these women were speaking the absolute truth, because it seemed impossible to believe, the disciples dismissed their report as idle tales—or, literally, "babbling that comes from a fevered and insane mind." As a result, they spent longer in the darkness of despair than was necessary. Wise is the man who takes serious the "babblings" of the woman in his life—for therein often lies great truth that will shine light in his darkness.

Luke 24:12 (a)

Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulcher . . .

After initially thinking the women had lost their minds, John 20:3 tells us Peter and John ran to the tomb to check out their story. Peter had sinned incredibly against Christ—yet John keeps his arm around Peter and stays close to him. That's the kind of biblical Christianity we need today—people who will say even to the one who has erred greatly, "I'm still with you. I'm

still for you. I'm not going to walk away from you or turn my back on you." Oh, how the church needs more Johns.

Luke 24:12 (b)
. . . and stooping down, he beheld the linen
clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

Notice the word "clothes" is plural. The implication from the Greek text is that there was more than just one piece of cloth used to encase the body of Christ. This makes me suspect the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin. I doubt its authenticity not simply on the basis of this text, but also due to the way the Lord works.

Although the brass serpent Moses had been instructed to make was to be an illustration of Jesus on the Cross, the people had begun to worship the serpent itself. So when revival came to Israel during the reign of Hezekiah, it is no wonder he broke the brass serpent into pieces, calling it "Nehushtan," or "thing of brass" (2 Kings 18:4).

Because man has a craving for something tangible and touchable, his tendency is to venerate and idolize relics. But because the Father's purpose is to move us into the realm of the spiritual and eternal, He wants us to walk by faith not by sight.

Luke 24:13–15
And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.

I love this! As these two travelers are talking about Jesus, guess who shows up right in their midst. Don't you love talking with brothers or sisters

about the Lord? Something more than just an intellectual exchange transpires. These two didn't have answers or insights. They were just talking about Jesus—and He joined them.

Luke 24:16–18

But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?

"Are You from out of town?" they asked. "Don't You know what's been going on the last few days?" I love how Jesus answered. . . .

Luke 24:19 (a)

And he said unto them, What things?

Did Jesus not know? Of course He knew. Sometimes we think, *The Lord already knows what's going on. Why pray?* But every parent knows the answer. When your child has something to share with you, even though you already know the story or the facts, you love to hear it from him. So, too, Jesus would say to you today, "Talk to Me—about that trouble at work, about that feeling in your heart. I already know all about it, but I want to hear it from you."

In talking over the events that had transpired in Jerusalem, the two on the road to Emmaus will find themselves convicted by their own words. As they start talking to the Lord, they will inadvertently give all sorts of reasons for why they shouldn't have been sad, shouldn't have been weak in faith. This is the beauty of prayer. Read the Psalms, and you'll find the psalmist often pouring out complaints to the Lord. But by the time he works through it, about ten verses later—he ends by giving praise to the Lord. When I talk things over with the Lord and recount the situation to Him, suddenly I begin to see I'm wrong. Here I thought I had this case or this reason to be upset; yet as I begin to recount the tale to the Lord, my own words convict me.

Luke 24:19 (b)–26

And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not. Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

"Don't you see it, guys? The apostles went to the tomb and it was empty. The women had a message from the angels. All of these things are happening. You should be excited and full of expectation. Instead, you're sad, depressed, and slow of heart. The word from the angel, the witness of the apostle, the emptiness of the tomb should stimulate in you hope and interest. Instead, you're just trudging to Emmaus, sharing your sadness." No wonder Jesus lovingly but pointedly called them fools.

Luke 24:27

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

Whether you're a Sunday-school teacher, a youth worker, or a Bible study leader, your job is to look for Jesus in every part of the Word. Focus on *Him,* look for *Him,* speak of *Him* every time you teach.

Do you think Jesus was carrying scrolls of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms under His arm? I don't. Thoroughly immersed in the Word, I suggest He was quoting Scripture from memory and from His heart. Sometimes you

might think, *I don't need to study the Word because I've already studied it. I already know it.* Do you? Can you walk along the road and discuss Genesis 37—50, Ezekiel 44, Luke 21—24, Romans 5—8? Until you're at that place, you need to be where the Bible is taught consistently.

Luke 24:28

And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further.

Always the perfect Gentleman, Jesus does not impose Himself, but would have kept going. Jesus will never burst in to your situation. He'll walk with you, but won't force Himself on you. He'll stay with you as long as you want Him to, He'll go with you as far as you want Him to—but He won't break in and make you listen to Him, learn of Him, or be with Him.

Luke 24:29–32

But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

The travelers were won by the Word. No longer slow of heart, they are on fire in their hearts simply through hearing the Scripture. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of hearing and studying and reading the Scriptures. Not only were the travelers won, but they were one. "Did not our *heart* burn within us?" they exclaimed. So, too, we have one heart because we're in the Word together, listening to the Lord together. Being with the Lord together, we are one.

Luke 24:33, 34

And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.

In 1 Corinthians 15:5, Paul mentions the fact that before the Lord appeared to the others, He appeared first to Peter. Where, when, and how we don't know. It was a personal meeting, a private meeting in which Jesus had a special session with Peter to affirm His love. If you feel like you've blown it completely, the Lord will seek you out first and foremost and meet you uniquely. That's not a sentimental thought. That's a fact based upon the ministry of the Resurrected Lord.

Luke 24:35–40

And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread. And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet.

The only thing man-made in heaven are the nail prints in the hands and feet of Jesus Christ. Why do they remain? I suggest two reasons. . . .

First, to identify Himself. It was the nail prints that showed an unbelieving Thomas not only the reality of His Resurrection, but the depth of His love.

Second, to identify with us. Life is painful. Hurts, pains, and problems abound. So often, we find ourselves tempted to think we can't stand it any longer or handle it anymore. But then we hear Jesus say, "When you think you can't handle it, look at My hands and be reminded that I know the pain you're feeling, the pressure you're facing. When you think you can't stand anymore, look at My feet and be reminded that I understand."

This is the point the writer of Hebrews makes when he writes, "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18).

> *If Jesus loves me enough to die in my place and bear nail prints for eternity, why am I going through what I'm going through right now?* you might be wondering. *If I'm really in His hand, if I'm really on His heart, why is my business collapsing or my body decaying? Why aren't things working out the way I thought they would at this point in my life? If he really loves me, why am I being scarred?*

Again, I suggest two reasons. . . .

First, that we might identify with Him. Paul said, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection . . ." and Christians say, "Amen! I want to know You, Lord, and the power of Your resurrection." But then Paul went on to add, ". . . and the fellowship of suffering" (see Philippians 3:10) A unique intimacy is the result of suffering with someone. The people with whom you are closest are not those with whom you laugh, but those with whom you cry. Therefore, the Father says, "If you want to really know Me, it requires the fellowship of suffering."

Second, we suffer not only that we might identify with Him, but in order to identify with others. The teaching of present-day American Christianity that says that God wants His children to be healthy and wealthy, that those who walk in faith should never have problems flies in the face of the early church and the teachings of the apostles. It flies in the face of the martyrs of every continent of every age who knew nothing of such a so-called gospel.

> *Shipwrecked on the island of Malta, Paul gathered sticks to build a fire to warm the drenched soldiers and prisoners. When a poisonous snake fastened itself to Paul's hand, the villagers thought Paul must have been a murderer to deserve such a fate. So they watched him and waited for him to swell up and die. But Scripture records that, although he was smitten by the same serpent that had killed others on the island, Paul shook it off. And then they thought he was a god (Acts 28).*

When will people listen to what you have to say about Christ Jesus? When, although you've been smitten by the same serpents that smite them, you shake it off and go on. When your business goes bankrupt, when your health fails, when problems mount, unbelievers expect you to swell up or fall down, to no longer love God or walk with the Lord. But when, like Paul, you shake off the snake and keep praising God, the islanders take notice.

The cynics and skeptics who live on your street and work in your office are not waiting to see how rich you can get. What they are waiting to see is what you do when the serpent strikes, when pain comes, when things get tough. Will you swell up and fall down, or will you keep on?

Such are the results of suffering.

Luke 24:41

And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?

"I want to share a meal with you," Jesus said. And He still does. "I stand at the door of your heart and knock," He says. "If any man open the door, I'll come in and enjoy a meal with him. I'll have fellowship with him" (Revelation 3:20).

Luke 24:42–45

And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.

Verse 45 is clearly marked in my Bible. Oh, Lord, open my understanding, that I might indeed understand the Word.

Luke 24:46–48

And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.

Notice Jesus doesn't call His disciples defense attorneys or judges, lawyers or juries. He calls them witnesses. We often think we have to argue with people, debate against people, present persuasive cases to people. But the Lord doesn't call us to any of that. He simply says, "Share with people what you've seen. Share with people what you've found. Share with people what I have done in and for you."

Witnessing is a total joy when you simply share with people that which blesses you. If you have an answer to prayer or an insight into the Word, share it with those around you as if they're already saved. That way there will be a lot less arguing and a lot more sharing. Share with those around you whatever you're learning, whatever you're experiencing. Be faithful in being a witness, and leave the rest to the Lord.

Luke 24:49

And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

What is the promise of the Father? It is the Person and power of the Holy Ghost.

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

John 14:26

Jesus came to implement something brand new—the New Covenant—based upon a promise given centuries previously. . . .

> Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.
>
> Jeremiah 31:31–33

> A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.
>
> Ezekiel 36:26, 27

In Hebrews 8, we see the New Covenant further articulated. I find the comparison and contrast between Moses, the mediator of the Old Covenant, and our Resurrected Lord, mediator of the New Covenant, intriguing. . . .

> Moses went to the top of Mount Sinai to get the law.
>
> Jesus went to the top of the Mount of Olives in order to send us the Spirit.

> Mount Sinai was in the wilderness.
>
> The Mount of Olives was in the center of the Promised Land.

> On Mount Sinai, Moses ate nothing for forty days.
>
> With His disciples for forty days, one of the first things Jesus said was, “Have ye anything to eat?”

> Moses was isolated from the people of God.

Jesus was in the midst of the people of God.

Moses lifted up his hands to smash the law and blast the people.
Jesus lifted His hands because He fulfilled the law and could therefore bless the people.

The law was written on tables of stone.
The New Covenant is written on hearts of flesh.

The law says, "Do."
The New Covenant says, "Done!"

Life is confusing. Therefore, oftentimes the tendency for people is to want a prescribed program of rules and regulations: Ten Steps to Better Parenting, Fifteen Keys to Prayer, Seven Ways to Witness. But we err greatly whenever we look for programs, plans, and pointers instead of to the Person of the Holy Ghost in our lives to guide us moment by moment.

The most radical group of believers in the history of the world was the group of Christians who, having received the promise of the Father, turned the world upside down without a single book of the New Testament (Acts 17:6). They didn't have Romans, Hebrews, or the Epistles of John. They didn't have the Gospels, Galatians, or the Book of Revelation. What they did have, and the reason they were so powerful, is an understanding that Jesus truly was writing His will on the tables of their hearts, whispering, "Go here," "Do that," "Stay away from this," "Avoid that."

Decades later, the Lord saw fit to inspire writers to record New Testament teaching—not to become the law, but rather so that when believers read Paul's writings or Peter's exhortations, they could say, "Right on. That's what we've been doing for years. John tells us to love each other. Of course! That's what the Lord's been showing us all along. Brother Paul tells us to flee youthful lusts. That's exactly what the Lord has been telling us."

Two thousand years later, what do we do? We so often have the tendency to come to church and say, "Give us some rules, programs, regulations, laws —and then we'll go our way." That's why so much of present-day

Christianity is so dead. We've made the New Testament the New Law—rules, regulations, and external expectations—instead of expecting the Lord to guide us hour by hour, step by step.

So many Christians wonder why their church is so dead or why their own walk is so dry. The reason is that, although they study the Bible, although they believe the Bible, although they're submitted to the Bible—they've lost the essential message in the Bible, which is that the Old Covenant, the old law is over. It was only the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ who, day by day writes His will upon our hearts. . . .

> *You're relaxing at home when suddenly you find yourself inspired to call your sister. As you do, you discover she needed the encouragement you alone could give her.*
>
> *You're at the office, and suddenly the Spirit prompts you to have lunch with your coworker in the next office. As you do, you find it was ordained of God.*

Your Christian walk only becomes vibrant and real to the degree that you're living it hour by hour, moment by moment according to the New Covenant working within you.

The Lord is alive, gang. Moment by moment, not only will He put on your heart the things He wants you to do and say and be, but He'll give you the power to carry them out perfectly (Philippians 2:13). When He says, "Write the letter," write the letter. When He says, "Take a break and worship Me for five minutes," do it. When He says to go into your son's room, lay your hands on him while he sleeps, and bind the work of the Enemy on his life," do just that. When He says, "Bring your wife red roses," don't bring her marigolds. The key to parenting, to the Christian walk, to marriage, and to life is to realize that Jesus is alive in you and will direct you moment by moment. Don't let church become ritual. Don't let Christianity become a series of responsibilities. Don't make the New Testament the Old Covenant. Respond to the Spirit's leading moment by moment and your walk will be transformed.

Luke 24:50–52 (a)

And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him . . .

The last act of Jesus after His resurrection was to bless. The first act of the believers after His ascension was to worship. People often think worship is the means of getting blessed. True worship, however, is simply responding to what God has *already* done for us.

Luke 24:52 (b), 53

. . . and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.

The Gospel of Luke began in the temple with Zacharias unable to say a word because he didn't believe what he was told. It ends in the temple with people believing, rejoicing, singing, and worshiping.

We are the temple. Part of our numbers are like Zacharias—not saying a word because they don't believe that the Lord really is with them right now and desires to bless them just as they are. So they leave in silence.

Others, however, do believe. Because of His Word, they believe that the Lord loves them and lives inside of them. They believe the Lord has forgiven them and will walk beside them. As a result, they go their way rejoicing, worshiping, and praising Him. In every session, the choice is ours whether to slink out silently or to leave rejoicing; whether to be slow of heart, or to listen to the One traveling alongside us. May God give us the grace tonight to believe that Jesus is alive, is with us, and is truly *for* us.

THE NARROW WAY
A Brief Look at
THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

"Broad is the way that leads to destruction," Jesus declared. "Narrow is the way that leads to life" (Matthew 7:13, 14). In fact, so narrow is the way that it is only as wide as one Person—the Person of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is the only One who has done the things He taught us to do, the Christian walk is not about trying to be Jesus. It's about being impressed with Jesus. It's about falling in love *with* Him, being amazed *by* Him, and drawing near *to* Him.

With this in mind, reconsider with me some of the passages we have seen in Luke's Gospel . . .

The Roman Centurion

Directly following the account of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Luke 6, we come to the story of the Roman centurion who sent word to Jesus that his servant was sick. When Jesus neared his house, the centurion again sent word, this time that he was not worthy that Jesus should come to his house, but that simply a word from Him would heal the servant (Luke 7:7).

Here, Jesus had just finished giving a sermon in which He had said in effect, "If you think you can get to heaven simply by not killing your brother or committing adultery, I have news for you. You can't even be angry with your brother or look lustfully at another woman. You have to be *more* righteous than those among you who follow the most detailed letter of the law. In short, you must be perfect."

On the heels of this sermon, Jesus hears from a centurion who doesn't say, "I'm okay," or, "I'll try harder," or, "I'll do better," but simply says, "I'm not worthy."

Bingo. No wonder Jesus commended him (Luke 7:9).

There are two ways to heaven: either by keeping the law perfectly or by realizing we need a Savior desperately. And because it is impossible for us to do the former, our only hope is the latter. Therefore, the purpose of the law from before eternity began was to be a schoolmaster, a tutor to show us that it's impossible to think we can enter the presence of God through the law, through our own works, or through our own energy (Galatians 3:24).

A lifeguard's abilities are never seen until someone is drowning. So, too, we never see the magnitude of Jesus' work on our behalf until, like the centurion, we realize we are sinking in our own sin and selfishness. To showcase the glory of His Son, God sent Him to a drowning world to rescue all of humanity, leaving mankind no other option but to say, "*Thou* art worthy, O Lord." His greatness and beauty, His kindness and glory would never be known apart from our collective sinking into the sea of our own iniquity.

You see, it's not as though God said, "Here's Plan A: The law. That didn't work? Okay, let's go with Plan B: the Cross." No, the law was given from the outset to bring people into an awareness of their sinking condition in order that the Son's glory, greatness, and mercy could be seen very clearly by all of humanity.

The Good Samaritan

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" the lawyer asked Jesus.

"How do you read the law?" Jesus asked in response.

"You shall love the Lord and love your neighbor," the lawyer answered.

"This do and you shall live," Jesus said.

"But just who is my neighbor," the lawyer asked, looking for a loophole.

In answering with the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus essentially said, "Your neighbor is anyone at any time in any situation who is in need for any reason."

Who of us is able to say, "I help every person I ever see in need"—be it the person whose car is broken down by the side of the road or the homeless man begging for money in front of the grocery store? Only Jesus has, does, or ever will do this.

The Prodigal Son

When the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them," Jesus gave three parables about lost things. The last parable concerned a lost son and his seemingly righteous older brother. In this parable, when the lost son returned, the older brother was trying to prove his worth by working in the field, even though all that the father had was already his (Luke 15:31).

We often think that the Lord is looking for some good men who will hold the course, steady their hand on the plow, and labor in the field of ministry.

But maybe He's not. Maybe there are times He wants us to come to the party with those who were lost—yet we can't because we're busy trying to prove how spiritual we are. And, like the older brother, we miss out. Even as he was claiming he never disobeyed his father, the older brother was indeed in a place of disobedience because he was working instead of rejoicing.

The Rich Young Ruler

"Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" asked the rich, young ruler.

"Sell all you have, give the money to the poor, and follow Me," Jesus answered (Luke 18:22). But of the rich young ruler, this was, evidently, too much to ask.

The story following that of the rich young ruler is that of Zacchaeus, whom Jesus declared to be saved after he simply said he would give away half of all he owned (Luke 19:8, 9). Why did Zacchaeus get saved after giving only half of all he owned, when the rich, young ruler was told to give *all* he owned? Because Zacchaeus admitted he had cheated people. The rich young ruler claimed to be righteous. Zacchaeus, on the other hand, recognized his need for Jesus.

All of Jesus' stories and parables are for the purpose of bringing people into an awareness that, without Him, we fail completely. We're either prodigals in the pigpen living in sin, or we're older brothers in the field trying to be righteous. Either way, we're guilty. Either way, we're lost.

Jesus took everything the law said and made it tougher. Everything He does in Matthew, Mark, and Luke—until the time of the Cross—says, "You are in a heap of trouble. You're in hot water, and it's going to get hotter."

It's shocking for those who think they are religious to realize that they're not okay. It took three Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—to say this. Thus, these Synoptic Gospels are, to a certain degree, more closely related to the Old Testament than to the New Covenant.

I suggest this is the reason that, in the thirteen letters he penned, Paul quotes Jesus only once (1 Corinthians 11:23–25). One would think that Paul would quote Jesus constantly. After all, we do. But Paul didn't. He talked about the work of Jesus continually, but not the words of Jesus directly because, I believe, the message of Jesus was intended for the Jew, for the religious person who thinks he's righteous. But Paul was called to the Gentiles.

"Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5). How often is this—the great Shema, the most

foundational, fundamental tenet of Judaism quoted in the epistles? Not once. We preach sermons on it, but the apostle Paul never mentions it. Neither does James. Neither does Peter. Why? Because it is impossible. Who of us could say, "I love the Lord with *all* my heart, soul, and strength"? There is only *One* who always did the things which pleased His Father (John 8:29). It's all about Jesus.

Jesus would take three years to explain to the people of Israel, to the Jew, to the religious mind-set, the hopelessness of their condition. This is the purpose of the synoptic Gospels. The law had to be established by no less than three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15), so Matthew, Mark, and Luke were the three witnesses the Holy Spirit chose to record not only the beauty of the Savior but the helplessness of the sinner.

Therefore, as you journey through the synoptic Gospels, so named because they present similar views of the life and teachings of Jesus, I encourage you to look at them not as a presentation of rules for us to live by, but as the portrait of a Redeemer who came to rescue.

The Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation were the last of the canon to be written. Eusebius tells us that the apostle John had the synoptic Gospels —Matthew, Mark, and Luke—before him and was able to draw from them as he defined, commented upon, and explained them in his Gospel.

John, therefore, wrote not only to the Jew, but also to the Roman centurion, to the prodigal son, to Zacchaeus. He wrote to any and all who believe in the One who made room for us on the narrow way that leads to life by stretching out His arms as wide as they would reach and allowing them to be nailed to a Cross (John 20:31).

NOTES

[1]Philip Yancey. *Disappointment With God.* Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1988, p. 178.



JOHN

Background to John

In 2 Corinthians 3, the apostle Paul gives us a most important understanding when he writes: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (3:18). In other words, Paul contends we become like Jesus when we spend time looking at Jesus. Similarly, the words of the apostle John from his first epistle, "when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (3:2), have application not only eternally but presently—for when we truly see the Lord, we cannot help but become like Him.

As David hung out in the hills, fleeing the wrath of Saul, six hundred men gathered around him—men who were in debt, distressed, discontent (1 Samuel 22:2). And as this ragtag group of renegades spent time with David, they became more and more like him—so much so that, as the years passed, these six hundred rebels were transformed into one of the finest fighting units of history. So, too, we are a ragtag group of renegades who are likewise in debt, distressed, and discontent. But as we hang out with our greater-than-David—the Son of David, Jesus Christ—we will begin to find ourselves experiencing and exhibiting *His* characteristics, *His* flavor, *His* fragrance. We will find ourselves changed from glory to even greater glory as we behold *Him.* That's why the Gospels are so important. They let us see Jesus. And as we look upon Him, we become more and more like Him. I believe there are four in number because it's almost as if the Father is saying,

> "When you open your New Testament, the first thing you'll see is the story of My Son. But if you sleep through Matthew, there's Mark. And if you skip Mark, there's Luke. And if you overlook Luke, you'll see Him in John. I don't want you to miss My Son. I want you to behold Him, for when you see Him, you'll be like Him."

The writer of the Gospel before us went through an incredible transformation himself. You see, John is known as the "apostle of love" because more than anyone else in Scripture, John both preaches and personifies love. This can be seen even in his initial call. . . .

And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.

Matthew 4:18–21

When called by Jesus, Peter was casting his net, for he would become an evangelist who would bring so many people into the kingdom that three thousand-plus were saved the first time he preached (Acts 2:41). John, however, was mending his net when called by Jesus, for his ministry would be one of restoring relationships and knitting people together in love.

Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

1 John 2:8–10; 3:14

This was the message of the one who was mending nets, the one who was trying to keep believers from fragmenting and splitting. John was a man whose message was love. But it is important to understand that John did not speak from a lofty, theological perch far removed from real life. You see, all of Jesus' original disciples died violent, brutal deaths except for John. But it was not for lack of trying. The Roman emperor, Domitian, ordered John put into a cauldron of boiling oil. But when that failed to kill him, he was exiled to a rocky, seemingly God-forsaken island called Patmos, where he received the Book of Revelation.

Following his release from exile on Patmos, probably nearing one hundred years of age, John returned to Asia Minor, where he went from church to church, sometimes carried on a stretcher. The historian

Eusebius tells us that when John would come into the meeting places, people would break out in applause for this one who knew Jesus, this one who had leaned on His breast.

"Give us the word, John," they would say. "Tell us something heavy."

But all John would deliver was a single-sentence sermon: "Children, love one another." From church to church, John traveled with his single message: "Children, love one another."

"Why don't you say something a little more weighty, a little more meaningful?" asked an elder.

Eusebius says John looked the elder in the eye and said, "The sole commandment of Christ is to love, for he that loves has no need of anything else."

Folks, this is so freeing. I used to think I had to figure things out and analyze situations. But recently the Lord has impressed on me that all of that is *His* business. My calling is simply to love the brothers—every brother, any brother. John knew this. He taught it. He exemplified it. But here's the interesting thing: the "apostle of love," the one who penned the Gospel that has been called "the love letter to the world," was not always this way. Quite the contrary, John was initially a walking powder keg whom Jesus called a "son of thunder" (Mark 3:17). Take a look at Luke 9 to see "Stormy" in action. . . .

And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.

Luke 9:49, 50

John was upset because someone outside the circle of disciples was using the name of Jesus to see people released from demons. "We told him to stop because he's not part of our denomination," he said. "He doesn't share our doctrinal understandings. He's not one of us." We do this as well. People can be saved, blessed, helped, and strengthened—but because we might not have doctrinal agreement, we put them down. Because they might worship differently

from us, we find fault. Such is not the way of love. One would think this "son of thunder" would have learned. But the text goes on to tell us differently. . . .

> *And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.*
>
> Luke 9:51–55

Here's John, saying, "Come on, Lord. Let's me and You cast down fire. Let's blow these guys away."

"Oh, John," answered Jesus, "don't you understand? I didn't come to hurt; I came to heal. I didn't come to blast people; I came to bless them." Saints, hear the word of our Lord. He's not out to find fault; He's not out to put down; He's not out to critique. He came to save. John heard this word—yet continued to exhibit "thunderous" tendencies. . . .

> *And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again. Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshiping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.*
>
> Matthew 20:17–21

I find this incredible. No sooner had Jesus told His disciples He was about to be crucified than we read that John was worried about where he would sit in the kingdom. Jesus was right when He called John "Stormy," for that was his

nature—finding fault with other ministers, wanting to cast down fire on unbelievers, concerned about his own position in the kingdom.

Yet along with his faults, John did possess one sterling quality. For of the thousands who came to see Jesus heal lepers, open blind eyes, and raise the dead, only hundreds came to hear Him teach. And of the hundreds who heard Him teach, only seventy would actually follow Him (Luke 10:1). Of the seventy who followed Him, only twelve left everything. Of the twelve who left everything, only three went with Him to the Mount of Transfiguration and prayed with Him in Gethsemane. And of these three, only one was at the Cross. John lacked love, but he had loyalty. Perhaps that's why, from the Cross, Jesus looked down at this loyal one and commended His mother into John's care (John 19:26).

When did John become the "apostle of love"? I believe it was at the Cross. I believe it was when John finally realized how much Jesus loved him. And I believe this is the reason that, throughout his Gospel, he refers to himself not as "the disciple who loved Jesus" but as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." John knew he was a "son of thunder." Therefore, it was no surprise that he loved Jesus. After all, who wouldn't love One so gracious and merciful, so powerful and kind? It was no surprise that John loved Jesus. The surprise was that Jesus loved him. That is why we will spend time in the Gospel of John just looking at Jesus—for, like John, as we see Jesus, we will slowly change from thunder to love.

As we study this book together, I would like us to keep in mind three unique characteristics inherent in John's Gospel. . . .

Authenticity

The apostle John knew Jesus long before he became His follower. John's mother was a woman named Salome. Most commentators agree that Salome was the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. This would have made John and Jesus cousins. Like any other Jewish family in that day, John and Jesus probably spent much time together at family reunions, special celebrations, and above all, traveling together to Jerusalem for the celebration of feast days. Most likely, they talked, laughed, and played games together on those long trips from Galilee to Jerusalem. But one day, John became convinced that this cousin of his, this boyhood pal and companion, was God—which gives great authenticity to his Gospel. After all, how many of us would leave all to follow our cousin? Or who of us would say as John did in the first verse of his book, "My cousin is God"?

Selectivity

John closes his Gospel stating that the world could not contain the books that could have been written about Jesus' life and works. Because of this, John was very selective in what he chose to record. He based his entire account upon only eight signs or miracles. Thus, there are no boyhood incidents recorded. Jesus' baptism is not mentioned. There is neither a record of the temptation of Jesus nor one of His Gethsemane agony. There are no publicans and no demoniacs. John chose not to write about much of what the synoptic writers—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—spent a great deal of time recording. Instead, John chose to write about the eight signs Jesus used to illustrate His great "Ego Eimi"—"I Am"—statements.

"What is Your name?" Moses asked God (Exodus 3:13).

"I AM THAT I AM," answered the Lord.

Moses must have scratched his head and thought, *You are . . . what?*

Jesus came on the scene, echoing that same declaration of deity, and in John's Gospel says,

- "I AM the Bread of Life.
- I AM the Good Shepherd.
- I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life.
- I AM the Resurrection.
- I AM the Vine.
- I AM the Door."

In essence, Jesus filled in the blank left by His Father when God declared His name to be I AM.

Practicality

The reason John wrote this book is given in verse 31 of chapter 20. “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” That is why I love this Gospel. When someone says he doesn’t know if he believes Jesus is really God, I can say, “Invest two hours of your life reading the Gospel of John straight through. Ask the Lord to show you if He’s real. And, believe me, He will!” Because John was written so people might believe that Jesus is God, I think it is the most powerful tract you can share with anyone. I suggest you have on hand many copies of John’s Gospel in order to share with people who are skeptical or questioning.

The second reason John wrote his Gospel was, “that believing ye might have life through his name.” He wrote it for those of us who already believe. The Greek word translated “believing” speaks of a continual action. Therefore, John is saying the more we believe, the more life we will experience. Thus, John wrote to convince the skeptic, but also to provoke the believer toward a continual, growing belief in the Savior.

“By your love shall all men know you are My disciples,” said Jesus (John 13:35). As we study this Gospel of love, my prayer is that, like its author, we will be transformed and changed from glory to greater glory as we fall in love with Jesus all over again.

JOHN

1

John 1:1 (a)
In the beginning . . .

John marks the beginning of Jesus' life as an event that took place before the beginning of eternity. "In the beginning was the Word"—not "*at* the beginning," not "*from* the beginning," but "*in* the beginning," Jesus was already there.

John 1:1 (b)
. . . was the Word . . .

John's use of the Greek word *logos* is important. The Greeks had developed a philosophy articulated by Plato and others that was built upon the assumption that the logos, the word, was the foundation of everything on earth. The earth, Plato said, was simply a shadow of the reality of the logos that existed somewhere in the heavens. The Jews took the Greek concept of the logos one step further. Whereas Plato said behind everything there's a perfect thought (logos), the Jews said that behind the thought there must be a thinker.

*"We don't see perfection (*logos*) here on earth, but it must exist somewhere," said the Greek.*

*"Yes. And if there is a true, perfect thought (*logos*), there must be a true, perfect thinker," added the Hebrew.*

John bursts into the middle of this discussion, saying, "In the beginning was the *Logos,* the Word, God—not just a philosophy but a Personality. In the beginning was the *Logos*—the perfection *and* the Thinker."

John 1:1 (c)
. . . and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The Hebrew word for God in Genesis 1:1 is *Elohim,* a word that speaks of three or more. The use of *Elohim* way back in Genesis hints at the mystery of the Trinity. Its use by John reiterates the reality of the Trinity.

For topical study of John 1:1 entitled "Jesus Is God," turn to page **443.**

John 1:2
The same was in the beginning with God.

Contrary to the teaching of most cults, Jesus was not the first Created Being. He was already present in the beginning. He has always existed.

John 1:3
All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Everything was made by Jesus Christ—even this day.

Our sun is big—so big that 1,300,000 of our earths could fit inside. It is small, however, compared to Anteres, a star in our galaxy. Anteres is so big that 64 million of our suns could fit inside of it. But Anteres is a relatively dinky star. Hercules is a big star. 100 million Anteres could fit inside Hercules. So, 100 million Anteres, each big enough to hold 64 million of our suns, which are big enough to hold 1,300,000 of our earths could fit into Hercules.

When we realize this, it is clear that on this planet, we are nothing more than specks on a speck in a speck. And yet most of the time we think we're pretty "speck-tacular," don't we? Now, put down your telescope, pick up your microscope, and consider a drop of water, which is equally amazing.

If you think back to junior-high science class, you'll recall that each molecule of water is composed of two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen. If you were able to enlarge each of the atoms in only a single drop of water to the size of a grain of sand, you would have enough sand to make a slab of concrete one foot thick and one half-mile high, stretching from San Francisco to New York City.

Of Jesus, Paul said, "All things were created *by* Him" (see Colossians 1:16). Scientists call the atomic force that holds together the nucleus of the atom "atomic glue." The Bible, however, identifies this mysterious atomic glue as Jesus Christ, for "by *Him* all things consist, or hold together" (Colossians 1:17). There is coming a day when Jesus will let go of His hold on the atom. And the result will be chaos and utter devastation (2 Peter 3:10, 11). But in this day of grace, He continues to hold the galaxies, the atoms, and our lives together. Why do you exist today? You were made *by* Him. You were made *for* Him. And if you don't give your life *to* Him, like errant atoms you'll fall apart. Life won't make sense. You'll wonder what you're doing, where you're going, and why you're living. The secret of life is found here in the prologue of John. All things were made by Him.

John 1:4, 5

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

The Greek word translated "comprehend" can mean either "extinguish" or "understand." Both meanings are applicable in this verse, for the darkness could neither understand nor extinguish Jesus. For three hours, the earth was darkened when it seemed the Light of the World was extinguished (Matthew 27:45). But three days later, He was back—to shine in our hearts as the Bright and Morning Star (Revelation 22:16), the Dayspring From on High (Luke 1:78).

John 1:6

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

Here, John the apostle introduces us to John the Baptist. As a prophet, John the Baptist spoke to people on behalf of God. As a priest (Luke 1:5), he spoke to God on behalf of the people. That's what ministry is all about. Ministry is both prophetic and priestly—talking to people about God and talking to God about people.

John 1:7 (a)

The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light . . .

We are not called to be attorneys. We are not called to debate, argue, convince. We are called to be witnesses—to share the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth concerning what the Lord is doing in our lives.

"I see you got a new car," someone says to you. "Wow. You sure are lucky."

If you're a faithful witness, you'll tell the truth and say, "I'm not lucky. I'm blessed. The Lord provided this car for me."

Or —

"I see your new car was towed away," someone says to you. "You must be angry."

If you are a faithful witness, you'll tell the truth and say, "I know God will work this out for good. He always does."

Too often people think witnessing is confrontational and argumentative. It doesn't need to be that at all. I have found great freedom in simply sharing with people what the Lord is showing me. I feel no pressure to convert or convince anyone. Rather, I find great pleasure in simply sharing what the Lord has done, is doing, and will continue to do in my life.

John 1:7 (b)
. . . that all men through him might believe.

God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). The desire of God's heart is that not one person should die without knowing Him. Think of the person who bugs and irritates you the most. Did you know that our Lord is madly in love with him, and desires that he be saved? I personally reject the ultra-Calvinistic teaching that says God has already determined that some are born to be damned. The Scripture says John was sent for a witness that *all* through him might believe. The word "all" in Greek is an interesting one. It means "*all*"!

John 1:8
He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

At the time John wrote his Gospel, in A.D. 75 or so, people were already beginning to worship John the Baptist. We see the same thing happening today with the Baha'i mentality that teaches there are many men of equal greatness. Jesus is good, it says. So is John the Baptist, Moses, Buddha, and Mohammed. The apostle John wanted to nip this idea in the bud. Thus, at the very outset of his Gospel, he makes it crystal clear that John the Baptist was not Jesus' equal.

John 1:9

That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

At the end of time, no one will be able to say that he didn't have an opportunity to know that there is a God. The Light has come, and it lights *every* man who comes into the world. Romans 1 tells us that creation around us is a testimony to God's reality and that our conscience within us verifies His truth. Psalm 19 states that the heavens declare the glory of God, and that there is no place on earth where their voice is not heard. Thus, whether a man looks up to the sky, around at creation, or within his own heart, he is left without excuse regarding the existence of his Creator. Every man knows innately, intuitively that there is a God. I firmly believe that if there is someone in the most remote corner of the earth who is hungering and thirsting after a saving knowledge of God, God will do whatever it takes to contact that one. He may choose to speak to him through an angel, a miracle, or through . . . you. If you're concerned about lost people and God's ability to reach them, don't stay here and discuss the ramifications of predestination. Go tell them Jesus died for them! You may be the very messenger the Lord uses to reach one who is waiting to hear the gospel.

John 1:10, 11

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

The first time the Greek word translated "his own" is used in this verse, it is in a neuter form, referring to creation. The second time, it is masculine, referring to humanity. In other words, Jesus came into this world, and all of creation acknowledged Him. The winds obeyed Him. The water supported Him. The rocks were ready to cry out to Him. But there was one segment of creation

that received Him not: man. Human nature is the only part of nature that refuses to worship God.

When the Bulls and the Blazers play basketball, people in the stands go crazy. They lift their hands in the air victoriously, clap exuberantly, and cheer wildly. They stand, yell, and stomp their feet. And they won't care who sees them. The same thing happens at rock concerts and hockey games, beauty pageants and rodeos. Humanity creatively and radically worships with abandon. But when it comes to worshiping Jesus, arms fold, voices hush, and sitting becomes the position of choice. Our culture finds it very easy to worship sports, movie, or rock stars—but has great difficulty worshiping Jesus.

John 1:12 (a)
But . . .

Praise God for the word "but." How many great truths swing on this small hinge!

John 1:12 (b)
. . . as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

"Thou shalt call his name Jesus," the angel said to Mary (Luke 1:31). The name "Jesus" means "Jehovah is salvation." You will receive power to become a son of God when you believe that Jesus is not merely *a* Savior, or even *the* Savior, but that He is *your* Savior.

John 1:13 (a)
Which were born, not of blood . . .

Your grandfather may have been an awesome Christian, and you may have fourteen preachers in your family tree. But according to this verse, none of that makes a bit of difference because birth into God's family is not passed on genetically. It has nothing to do with blood, which speaks of descent.

John 1:13 (b)
. . . nor of the will of the flesh . . .

Nor does birth into God's family have anything to do with desire. Paul tells us there is none that seeks after God, not one who really desires Him (Romans 3:11).

John 1:13 (c)
. . . nor of the will of man . . .

Nor does birth into God's family have anything to do with determination. Man can't will himself into a relationship with God.

John 1:13 (d)
. . . but of God.

God does it all. It is His sovereign work in the hearts of men that draws them to Himself. "Wait a minute," you say. "Didn't verse 9 say that His desire is that not one should perish? Why, then, doesn't He do His sovereign work in the heart of every man and draw everyone to Himself?" I don't know. I do know we serve an enormous God. He has given *every* man the opportunity to choose Him and yet has retained His right to choose whom He will. How can these two principles be compatible? I don't know. I do know that, according to Romans 8:29, God's foreknowledge is a big factor. But did God choose us because He knew we'd choose Him—or did we choose God because He had already chosen us? I don't know. I do know that if you think very long about this, your brain will short-circuit. You'll get so frustrated that you'll beat your fist against the wall and finally concur with J. B. Phillips, who said, "If God was small enough to figure out, He wouldn't be big enough to worship." Then you'll fall on your face and worship Him, saying, "Lord, I don't understand it all, but I thank You for choosing me."

John 1:14 (a)
And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . .

The Greek word translated "dwelt" literally means "tabernacled" or "encamped." The Word, the Logos, the Creator, Sustainer, and Reason for All Things became flesh and tabernacled among us. The tabernacle, covered with badger skins, was plain on the outside. But the interior was adorned with gold, silver, fine embroidery, and precious stones, for the *chabod*—the presence, the

substance, the glory of God—was to be found inside. The same is true of Jesus. So ordinary looking was He externally that Judas had to identify Him to the Roman soldiers with a kiss. But the presence, the substance, the glory of God dwelt within Him to such a degree that some of it "leaked out" on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:2).

Internal and external evidence indicate that Jesus was probably not born on December 25, the Festival of Saturnalia. Based on the fact that the shepherds were grazing their flocks on the night of His birth, He was probably born sometime in the fall. Some scholars suggest He was born on the fifteenth of Tishri, the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles—the week-long celebration wherein the Jews came together, lived in pup-tent-like booths, and celebrated how God had seen their forefathers through their pilgrimage from Egypt to the Promised Land. To the Jews, the Feast of Tabernacles was the most joyous time of year. And the fact that Jesus "tabernacles" with us and walks with us through our earthly pilgrimage should produce abundant joy in our hearts as well.

John 1:14 (b)

. . . (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) . . .

Just as the *chabod,* the glory of God, was seen in the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34), it was also seen in His Son. In Old Testament times, only the high priest on the Day of Atonement dared enter the Holy of Holies to behold the glory of God. But now, because of His atoning work on the Cross as Jesus rent the veil of the Holy of Holies (Matthew 27:51), we can behold His glory daily, freely, intimately.

John 1:14 (c)

. . . full of grace and truth.

The longer I walk with Him and the more I learn about Him, the more I am impressed with Jesus because He is the perfect blending of grace and truth. Some people are very truthful but show little grace. They're hard to be around because they have a tendency to make you feel guilty. Other people are gracious but not very truthful. They're fun to be with for a time, but they have a tendency to be a little flaky. Jesus was neither hard nor flaky. He spoke the truth with great candor and honesty. Yet His grace caused people to marvel (Luke 4:22).

John 1:15

John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.

Chronologically, John was six months older than Jesus. Yet Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I AM," (John 8:58). Thus, John's reference was not to the chronological age, but to the eternal nature of his younger Cousin.

John 1:16

And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

The phrase "grace for grace" literally means "grace upon grace"—continual grace, inexhaustible grace. Even where sin abounds, grace abounds *more* (Romans 5:20). You cannot exhaust the grace of God if you embrace the Person of Jesus Christ.

John 1:17

For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

The law was given on a quaking mountain. Grace and truth were born in a quiet manger. The law was written on tables of stone. Grace and truth were wrought in a heart of love. When the law came down, three thousand people died (Exodus 32:28). When the Spirit came down, three thousand were saved (Acts 2:41). The law kills. Jesus gives life.

John 1:18

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

The Greek word translated "declared" is *exe geomai,* from which we get our word "exegesis," meaning "to expound." Jesus expounded on the Father because Jesus had seen the Father. We are to expound on Jesus because we have seen Jesus. Therefore, the key to all of Bible interpretation, the key to hermeneutics is really "*Him*aneutics." Whether you're teaching a Sunday-school class, preaching to thousands, or serving on the mission field, expound upon

Jesus. Look for Him in every passage and on every page of Scripture. Focus on Jesus and you'll behold the Father as well.

John 1:19 (a)
And this is the record of John . . .

With both of his parents from the house of Levi, John could have followed in his father's footsteps and served comfortably as a priest.

John 1:19 (b)
. . . when the Jews . . .

When John uses the term, "the Jews" (seventy times throughout his Gospel), he is not making a racial or a religious distinction, for virtually all of the people in the Gospels are Jews. No, when he speaks of "the Jews," he is referring to the Sanhedrin—the equivalent of our Supreme Court—comprised of the religious leaders of Jerusalem.

John 1:19 (c)
. . . sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?

"Who am I?" John could have answered, "I'll tell you who I am. I am a priest. I am a prophet. I am the miraculously born son of Elizabeth and Zacharias. I am called of God and chosen by God. I am the one prophesied in Isaiah and Malachi. I am the forerunner of the Messiah—that's who I am." But he didn't. . . .

John 1:20
And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ.

We will find our true identities when, like John the Baptist, we realize we are not the Christ. "Oh, I already know I'm not the Christ!" you say. Do you? If you go to your job thinking you can pull it off through your own ability; if you work on your marriage thinking you can make it because of your own insight; if you raise your kids thinking you can draw on your own experience—no matter

what your mouth may say, your life says, "I am the Christ." If, however, you truly realize you are not the Christ, you will be a man or woman who spends significant time in prayer today, because you will know that without Him, you can do nothing (John 15:5). Life starts when you put away your "Can Do" mentality and realize you can't do anything without Jesus.

John 1:21 (a)

And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not.

Still needing a label for this paradoxical prophet and peculiar priest, the delegates pressed further. "Are you Elijah?" they asked.

"No," answered John.

John 1:21 (b)

Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.

The term "that prophet" refers to the one prophesied in Deuteronomy 18 who would come to the nation of Israel and fully explain the way of God.

John 1:22, 23

Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.

Folks, you will never lack identity if you learn the secret of John the Baptist: that you're simply a voice to talk to people about Jesus Christ. So many people go through midlife crises because they don't realize their stability can't be found in the right situation vocationally or the right location geographically. Consequently, they're always wondering, *Should I work somewhere else? Should I live somewhere else? Should I do something else?*

Gang, follow the example of the Baptist and say, "No matter where I am, I realize I'm not the Christ; I'm not the prophet; I'm not Elijah. I'm simply a voice to talk to whoever comes my way on any given day about the Person, nature, and return of Jesus Christ.

John 1:24, 25

And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?

Baptism was singularly reserved for Gentile converts to Judaism as a sign of renunciation of their past life. Thus, when John burst on the scene baptizing Jews, he caused a ripple that could be felt all the way to the Sanhedrin.

John 1:26, 27

John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.

"The One standing in your midst is my motivation for doing what I do," said John. So, too, the person who perceives the presence of the Lord at the office, in the shop, at school, or in the home cannot help but speak about Him. Why was Jesus in the desert with John? Was it because He wanted to talk about politics, sports, or financial strategy? No. Jesus was standing in the midst of that group because He knew John the Baptist would be talking about Him. Talk about Jesus in your home this afternoon, and that's when you will sense His presence. Talk about Jesus in the office tomorrow morning, and that's when you will have an awareness of His nearness. Whenever someone talks about Jesus, He'll be there.

John 1:28

These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Bethabara was located in the rough, rocky region surrounding the Dead Sea. Sometimes, like John, that's where we are called to witness as well. Never think you must wait until your life is perfect, your walk pure, or your circumstances plush before you can talk about Jesus. Sometimes we witness most effectively when we share from our desert experiences.

John 1:29

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

As Abraham climbed Mount Moriah to offer his son as a sacrifice in obedience to God's command, Isaac said, "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (see Genesis 22:7). Where is the lamb? That is the question that rings throughout the Old Testament. Here in the New Testament, we hear John the Baptist's answer as he points to Jesus and announces, "Behold the Lamb!" In Revelation 5, we hear ten thousand angels join him, declaring "Worthy is the Lamb!"

- "Where is the Lamb?"—the cry of the Old Testament.
- "Behold the Lamb"—the hope of the New Testament.
- "Worthy is the Lamb!"—the summation of eternity.

The message of the Lamb of God grows wider and becomes more encompassing as you travel through Scripture. In Genesis, as Abel brought a lamb for sacrifice we see a lamb offered for an individual. In Exodus, as each household sacrificed a lamb during Passover, we see a lamb offered for a family. In Leviticus, when the people of Israel were instructed to sacrifice a lamb, we see a lamb offered for a nation. In John, as the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, we see a Lamb who would be offered for the world.

John 1:30

This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.

Reiterating his statement of verse 15, John refers to the eternal nature of Jesus.

John 1:31

And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.

In the Old Testament, a priest was washed with water when he began his role of priest (Leviticus 8:6). Thus, in a sense, as John stood in the water baptizing people, like priests of the Old Testament, he was washed with water. Through His baptism, Jesus Christ was washed with water as well—not because he needed cleansing from sin, but in order that He might identify with sinners.

John 1:32–34

And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

Up until this point, apart from His birth, there is no record of the miraculous in the life of Jesus Christ, for it was not until the Spirit descended upon Him that He was miraculously empowered for ministry. You see, Jesus didn't perform miracles simply because He was God. No, He laid aside that power when He became the Babe of Bethlehem and assumed humanity (Philippians 2:7). Every miracle Jesus did was based upon His dependency on the Spirit in obedience to the Father.

For the longest time, I didn't understand this. I would read about Jesus' miracles and think, "That's not such a big deal. Of course He could walk on water, heal the sick, feed the multitude. He's *Jesus*." But when I began to understand Philippians 2, when I began to see that Jesus emptied Himself of His prerogatives and powers, when I begin to grasp the fact that He was truly just like me yet without sin, His life took on an entirely different dimension to me. He became an example for me, a model of One who worked the miraculous because He walked in the power of the Spirit. At last I realized that the same power upon which Jesus relied was available to me.

Have you been baptized in the Spirit? Oh, I know the Holy Ghost is in you. That happens at salvation. But has He come *upon* you, as He did the disciples at Pentecost, to empower you for greater service? I believe every believer needs his own personal Pentecost—when he knows he has been empowered with the Spirit upon his life. How does this happen? Simply by asking. Jesus said, "If you being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more

will the Father give the Holy Ghost to them that ask?" (see Matthew 7:11). Ask for the Holy Spirit. Ask with the realization that His purpose is not to give you a "Holy Ghost high" or "Holy Ghost goose bumps" but that you might be a witness like John, that you might be a voice in the wilderness drawing people to Jesus.

John 1:35–37

Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

As the disciples of John shift their allegiance to Jesus Christ, we see that the purpose of his preaching was not to draw people to himself, but to push people to Jesus. Such needs to be the purpose of your service as well. As you talk with people, your focus should not be on denominations or personalities. Your intent should always be to nudge people closer to Jesus.

John 1:38 (a)

Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye?

The first words Jesus uttered in public ministry were, "What seek ye?"

John 1:38 (b)

They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?

Perhaps not knowing how to answer Jesus' question, the disciples pose one of their own. Jesus asked them what they were seeking. And in essence, maybe even unbeknownst to them at this point, their answer was, "It's You."

What are *you* seeking? A wife, a husband, a better job? Help with raising your kids or getting them through college? More friends, a better personality, a way out of debt? In 2 Corinthians 1:20 Paul declares, "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen . . ." In other words, all the promises of God are wrapped up in a Person—the Person of Jesus Christ. We think we're after a change in our situation, or help with a difficulty. But, like these early

disciples, what we're really craving is the Lord Himself, for in Him all God's promises are fulfilled.

John 1:39 (a)
He saith unto them, Come and see.

I love this! Jesus didn't say, "Go down the bank about three hundred yards, turn left, and look for a little house with roses and a white picket fence in front. . . ." No, He said, "Come with Me."

John 1:39 (b)
They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.

The disciples came and never left. So radically did their lives change when they accepted Jesus' invitation to come that they even remembered the very hour their pilgrimage with Him began.

John 1:40–42 (a)
One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus.

Throughout Scripture, Andrew is referred to as "Simon Peter's brother." If I were in Andrew's sandals, I think at this point, I might have been tempted to say, "At last! I'm out of his shadow! I've found the Messiah, and I'm not breathing a word about it to Peter. This is *my* moment to shine." But that's not what Andrew did because he was one who couldn't help but bring others to Jesus. It was Andrew who introduced his brother, Peter, to Jesus. Jesus would later use Peter to bring three thousand to Himself (Acts 2:41). It was Andrew who brought the little boy to Jesus whose lunch He would multiply to feed five thousand (John 6:8, 9). And when a contingent of Greeks came to Jerusalem, saying, "We would see Jesus," it was Andrew who brought them to the Master (John 12:20–22).

John 1:42 (b)

And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.

In changing Peter's name, it was as if Jesus said, "Simon, you're about as stable as the sand on the seashore. But I see your potential; I see what you will become. That's why I'm changing your name to Cephas, or Rock. Stick with Me, Peter, and you will see incredible changes take place in your person."

John 1:43–45

The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

This cracks me up! In verse 43, Jesus finds Phillip and says, "Follow Me," but in verse 45, Philip says, "*We* have found *Him.*" According to Romans 3:11, we don't find God. *He* finds *us.*

John 1:46 (a)

And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?

Off the beaten path, Nazareth was forgotten and forsaken economically, unimportant militarily, and insignificant politically. Nathanael, however, was referring to more than merely the isolation of Nazareth. A student of Scripture, he knew the promise of Micah 5:2, which stated that the Messiah would come not from Nazareth but from Bethlehem.

John 1:46 (b)

Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

Although Nathanael raised a legitimate question, Philip wasn't thrown off course. Why? One reason: Philip had tasted and seen that the Lord is good and, although at this point he couldn't defend Jesus of Nazareth theologically or intellectually, Philip knew experientially that He was real. So, too, there will come those who will try to confuse you theologically. They'll hand you a green

Greek New Testament called The New World Translation, and say, "What John 1:1 *really* says is, In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was *a* god." Or they'll hand you a black Book of Mormon and say, "The Bible is great, but you also need to read this."

At this point in my walk, I'm not thrown off course very easily theologically or intellectually. Because our faith is a rational faith, it can withstand any argument in every situation. There are times, however, when someone like Nathanael, with more clever arguments or keener intellect than I, has challenged me. But, like Nathanael, all of these people have been wrong. You see, what neither Nathanael nor Philip knew was that Jesus was not born in Nazareth but in Bethlehem. We know the story but they didn't. In challenging situations, the best thing to do is follow Philip's lead. Look those who question your faith in the eye, and say, "I can't answer your question right now, but come and see. Come to church with me on Sunday and just watch what the Lord is doing. Come and see for yourself."

John 1:47 (a)

Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him . . .

Good for Nathanael! Even though he had questions spiritually and reservations intellectually, he accepted Philip's invitation to "come and see."

John 1:47 (b)

. . . and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!

The word translated "guile" is "Jacob" in the Septuagint. Jacob was tricky. He tricked his brother Esau out of his blessing and birthright and tricked his uncle Laban out of the better part of his goods. But after wrestling one night with the Lord, Jacob realized that what he wanted all along was not Esau's birthright nor Laban's riches but the Lord's blessing (Genesis 32:26). And at that point, the Lord changed his name from "Jacob" to "Israel," from "Heel Snatcher," "Guile," and "Tricky One" to "Governed by God."

John 1:48

Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.

In Jesus' day, students traditionally studied under fig trees. The fig tree being the national symbol of Israel, I believe it was under a fig tree that Nathanael was very likely studying Genesis 28—the story of Jacob in the wilderness. . . .

> *Although it has been said that the softest pillow is a good conscience, fearing for his life because of his treachery and deceit, Jacob used a rock. As he slept, he saw a ladder extending from the heavens to the earth, with angels ascending and descending upon it. "Truly God is in this place and I knew it not," Jacob declared.*

That is why, in the midst of his study of Genesis 28, Jesus approached Nathanael, calling him an Israelite in whom there is no guile, or no "Jacob."

> **John 1:49**
>
> **Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.**

Suddenly, Nathanael dropped his theological disputation and said to Jesus, "You're making reference to the very passage I was reading. How can this be? Surely, You are the Son of God, the King of Israel."

> **John 1:50**
>
> **Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these.**

"Do you believe simply because I made reference to the passage you were reading?" asked Jesus. "Stick around, Nathanael. You're going to see a lot more than that!"

> **John 1:51**
>
> **And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.**

“Think back to your story, Nathanael,” said Jesus. “The ladder you were reading about is Me. I am the stairway between heaven and earth. I am the Way to eternity. Upon Me the angels ascend and descend.”

Notice Jesus said “ascending and descending.” Most people think angels live in heaven, come down to earth occasionally, fly around a bit, and then head back up to heaven. Not true. Angels are ministering spirits assigned to specific saints, churches, and regions of the world (Acts 12; Revelation 2:1; Daniel 10). Although they can go up into the heavens, their primary place of residence is with us, with this church, and with various nations. Thus, the word order here is significant. Yes, angels ascend into the heavens, but they always descend back to earth.

“I am the ladder,” Jesus said to Nathanael.

And from that moment on, Nathanael followed Him.

JESUS IS GOD
A Topical Study of JOHN 1:1

When John wrote his Gospel, heresy was already present within the church. Maintaining that the body is evil and only the spirit is good, Gnostics insisted that if Jesus was God, He couldn't have had a body. According to the Gnostics, when Jesus walked, He left no footprints; when He ate, He didn't really swallow His food. He appeared as a Person, but He actually had no physical body.

What does John say to this? "We have heard Him with our ears; we have seen Him with our eyes; we have touched Him with our hands."

"Jesus had a body," said John. "He is God. He became Man" (see 1 John 1:1).

"If Jesus did indeed have a body," argued the Gnostics, "He is not God but rather an emanation from God, an extension of God."

"Wait a minute," countered John in the first verse of his Gospel. "There are three proofs that Jesus Himself is God. . . ."

Jesus is eternally God.
In the beginning was the Word . . .

Whenever the beginning was, wherever it was, whatever it might have been, Jesus—the Word—was already there. He had no beginning and He has no end. He is eternally God.

Jesus is equally God.
. . . and the Word was with God . . .

Jesus, the Word, was with God—equal to the Father and the Spirit.

"I thought there was only one God," you say.

There is. "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord," Deuteronomy 6:4 declares. But the word "one" is *echad,* which refers to a compound unity, like *one* people, or *one* cluster of grapes. Thus, God is a compound unity, a "tri-unity." One plus one plus one does not equal one. But one times one times one equals one. And that is the mystery of the Trinity.

Jesus is essentially God.
. . . and the Word was God.

In His very essence, Jesus is God. The gnostics denied this, and their heresy is still alive and well today. Every cult stems from Gnosticism for every cult denies that Jesus Christ is God. The Mormons deny it. They say the Son of God is not equal with God. Rather, they maintain He is merely the offspring of God. The Jehovah's Witnesses declare Jesus is *a* God. And the Way International has decided that, although Jesus is the Son of God, He is not equal to God.

What do you say to these present-day gnostics? Turn them to Revelation 21:6: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." Ask a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness, "Who is the One who gives of the water of the fountain of life? Who is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end?" He will say, "It's God."

Then, have him turn the page to Revelation 22:12–13: "And, behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." Ask him, "Who is going to return?" He will say Jesus. But he will now have a problem, because if he says Jesus is not God, he has two Alphas and two Omegas—two firsts and two lasts. Truly, the only logical conclusion is that Jesus is God. The doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ is essential and nonnegotiable. Yet there are two verses attacked constantly by those seeking to undermine it. . . .

The Humanist and Genesis 1:1

The humanist—the unbeliever—refuses to believe God created the heavens and the earth. Why? Romans 1 says it's because if he acknowledges that he is created by God, he will then be responsible and accountable to God. Therefore, because man wants to act and live independently from God, he rids himself of his Creator and says, "Because I came from the ooze, I can live in the slime and do whatever I want."

In the 1940s, the seven leading problems in public schools were talking, chewing gum, making noise, running in the hallways, getting out of place in line, wearing improper clothing, and not putting paper in wastebaskets. Fifty years later, the seven leading problems became drug abuse, alcohol abuse, pregnancy, suicide, rape, assault/burglary, and arson/bombing. We've gone from talking and gum chewing to rape and school bombing. Something's going on. But what do we expect when we teach our kids they came from animals? Told they're animals, they act like animals. To counter this, we then spend millions of tax dollars on self-esteem courses to teach high-school kids that they're important.

The problem, however, is that before they ever get to sixth period self-esteem psychology class, they have to go to fourth period biology and hear they came from slime. It just doesn't make sense. We've got to get back to the foundational presupposition that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth—that He made us, has a plan for us, and wants to work in us. Without that, the entire fabric of culture begins to unravel in our homes, our schools, and our lives.

The Cultist and John 1:1

The second most commonly attacked Scripture is John 1:1. It also deals with the beginning, and is attacked not by the humanist, but by the cultist. The cultist says, "I've got a new truth to share. Jesus is not God. He's the Son of God, the emanation of God; He's a Prophet who speaks on behalf of God, but Jesus is not God." And on this single premise, heresy is born and cults are founded. You can recognize a cult by three characteristics. . . .

Exclusivity

"Of all of the people living presently and throughout history who have named the name of Christ, only our little group of fifty, or five hundred, or fifty thousand is right," declares the cultist. Listen, gang—if it's new, it's not true. And if it's true, it's not new. This is an absolute fact.

Authority

"Submit to me," says the cult leader. "I will tell you what to read, where to go, and who to marry." Whenever someone tries to put this trip on you—run! Paul said, "We do not seek to have authority over you, but are helpers of your joy" (see 2 Corinthians 1:24). Cult leaders are out to dominate, whereas true ministers of the gospel desire only to serve.

Deity

Every single cult denies the deity of Christ. Why is this so important? Because if you begin to say Jesus is simply a created extension of God, you open the door to every other heresy. But even more important than opening the door to other aberrations, if you deny Jesus is God, you minimize the work God did on your behalf when He became a Man.

Suppose you accidentally get caught in a meat grinder, and I come to your rescue, put my arms around you, and allow my flesh to become hamburger in the process. You leave in shock, but unharmed. And then someone tells you Jon Courson destroyed his own arms to save you. Suppose, hearing this, you said, "No, he didn't. That was someone who looks like Jon. That was an emanation from Jon. That was the son of Jon, Peter-John. But it wasn't Jon." If you didn't acknowledge what I had done on your behalf, it would be an arrogant, ignorant insult.

Yet that is exactly what gnostics propound when they insist God Himself didn't really become a Man. The message given to Abraham in Genesis 22 was that God will provide Himself a lamb—not *for* Himself a lamb, but that He Himself would *be* the Lamb. God became a Lamb. To diminish this is blasphemy. It is the one nonnegotiable heresy. In order for a person to be saved, he must confess that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9). What does it mean to confess Jesus is Lord? It does not mean that He is Lord of every area of your life, for who here or down the tunnel of history can truly say that Jesus Christ is Lord of every single area of his life? I suggest none. Consequently, none would be saved.

No, to confess Jesus as Lord means to realize that Jesus is God—that He is your Creator, Redeemer, and King; your Lover, your Friend, your everything. To confess Jesus as Lord means to recognize He is God in the flesh—eternally God, equally God, essentially God. If you deny that, you are a heretic. The Way International is heretical. Jehovah's Witnesses are heretics. Mormons are heretics. What are we to do with heretics? According to Titus 3:10, after a first or second warning, we are to have nothing to do with them.

"For one who constantly preaches grace and love, that sounds kind of tough," you protest. If a brother doesn't understand a doctrine, has erred in sin, or is stumbling in his walk, embrace him. Stand with him. Hang in there beside him. But you must differentiate between a stumbling saint and a devouring wolf,

because sheep don't hang around wolves, hoping to convert them. When a wolf is around, sheep split.

A wolf in sheep's clothing might look like a sheep, talk like a sheep, smell like a sheep, even walk like a sheep. How, then, can you tell if he is a sheep? You don't have to be an expert in theology. You don't have to know Greek perfectly. Just watch what he eats. If he eats sheep, he's a wolf. Jehovah's Witnesses, followers of the Way International, Mormons, and other cultists approach people who name the Name of Jesus and begin to cause confusion and doubt. They get people off the mark of simply loving the Lord and loving one another. We under-shepherds hate wolves because we see what they do to the flock as they shift people's focus from the Shepherd to side issues and insignificant matters in order to devour believers for their own purposes and egos.

Keep centered, gang. How? By keeping focused on the Word and on Jesus Christ. Truly, Jesus is God. Love Him. Learn about Him. Talk to Him. Walk with Him. And you'll do well.



2 John 2:1

And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there.

In Jesus' day, Jewish wedding celebrations lasted for one week, during which time relatives and friends would stay in the home of the bride and groom —sort of a honeymoon/family reunion/bachelor party/wedding shower all rolled into one! During this seven-day celebration, the bride would be tucked away in a secluded part of the house and would not be seen by anyone but her groom. At the end of the week, she would emerge with great fanfare and celebration. This is fascinating as it relates to the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. You see, when the Rapture takes place, we—the bride of Christ—will be carried away into heaven for seven years. Just as the Jewish bride was in seclusion with her groom for seven days, we will be tucked away in intimacy with our Lord Jesus Christ, away from the Tribulation that will be unleashed upon the earth.

John 2:2

And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.

Jesus' presence at this particular wedding signals His stamp of approval upon all aspects of the institution of marriage—civil, legal, and religious. A wedding ceremony itself has an effect that is not often understood. Couples find a commitment made to each other in a public ceremony harder to break when the going gets tough. Perhaps that is why statistics show that those who live together before marriage have a substantially higher divorce rate than those who don't. I continue to be amazed at the large number of couples who say, "What does a piece of paper matter? Why can't we just make a private commitment to God and to each other without all of the legal and religious procedures?" Here in John 2, at the very outset of His public ministry, Jesus honored and elevated the institution of marriage.

John 2:3

And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.

Some have suggested Mary's concern over the shortage of wine indicates she may have been a hostess at this wedding. Since the role of hostess at a Jewish wedding was usually filled by an aunt of the groom, this marriage celebration could very well have been that of Mary's nephew, John. Mary turned to her Son for help. However, based on Jesus' following response, it is my personal conviction that Mary was interested in more than simply the provision of wine. Might she have been seeking a restoration of her reputation? You see, as a young woman of perhaps fourteen or fifteen years of age, Mary had become miraculously pregnant by the Spirit of God. Yes, she was highly favored by God and blessed among women. But she also must have become the subject of speculation and slander, raised eyebrows and wagging tongues. Defending their own righteousness, the Pharisees smugly declared to Jesus, "We be not born of fornication" (John 8:41), their implication being that He had been.

For thirty years, Mary had lived with the knowledge that her character had been unjustly maligned. Is it not possible that at this point, she looked to her Son not only for wine but for vindication, thinking that if people could only see who He really was, perhaps they would at last see the truth about her as well?

John 2:4 (a)
Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee?

Gune is the Greek word translated "woman." It is a term of respect but not of warmth. Thus, Jesus responds to Mary with a gentle rebuke. This sounds like a cold response on Jesus' part to His longsuffering and gentle mother. Yet, as is seen in the remainder of the verse, it was as much for His mother's good as for His Father's glory.

John 2:4 (b)
. . . mine hour is not yet come.

"Mine hour" is a term used in John's Gospel seven times. To what hour is Jesus referring? In John 17:1, He prayed, "Father the hour is come; glorify thy Son that thy Son also may glorify thee."

- "The hour" is the time of Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.
- "The hour" is the time of the irrefutable declaration of who He was, of the undeniable proof of His deity.
- "The hour" is when His earthly ministry would be finished, His appointed mission completed, His Father fully glorified.

"Woman . . . Mary . . . Mother . . ." said Jesus, "I better than anyone know you have been waiting patiently. I know better than anyone how you have been hurt. I understand better than anyone your situation. But it is not time to rectify everything . . . not quite yet."

What does this say to us? Oftentimes, I think we ask the Lord to do something that will get us off the hook or make us look a little better. We ask Him to do something that will smooth our road or lighten our load. Like Mary's, our requests might sound very noble, very generous, very altruistic—but in reality, they're self-centered. And in such instances, Jesus might whisper in our hearts, as He did to Mary, "What have I to do with thee? This is not the hour. This is not the time. This is not the place. The problem will be solved. Your reputation will be salvaged. The provision will be made. The healing will be enjoyed. But not yet. Mine hour is not yet come."

Daniel was in a place of prominence and tremendous authority in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. Then, when he was about sixty-five years old, Nabonidus came into power, and Daniel was removed from office. For twenty years, Daniel is not seen in the narrative given to us in the book that bears his name. But then the day dawned that Belshazzar called for him to interpret the mysterious writing on the wall (Daniel 5:13). When Darius the Mede seized control of the kingdom shortly thereafter, Daniel was placed in a position of prominence once again. Thus, for twenty years, Daniel was neither used in ministry nor given a position of responsibility. Yet Daniel, being a man of integrity, did what we must do: He remained ready.

Be like Daniel, gang. Don't say, "I've been walking with the Lord for five years, and nothing's happening, so I think I'll just go to the movies, join the city softball league, or take up bird-watching." Folks, it is your job and my job to be ready—to walk with the Lord, to spend time in the presence of the Lord, and to learn about the Lord so that when Belshazzar says, "What does this mean?" like Daniel, we can say, "I can tell you because for twenty years I've been in touch with God. For twenty years, I've been in the place of prayer. For twenty years, I've been close to the Lord."

Are you in prayer? Are you studying the Word? Are you loving the Lord? Are you ready? In a certain moment, your hour will come. Your time will arrive. A significant task, a life-changing opportunity will arise, and then it will be too late to prepare.

As Jesus descended the Mount of Transfiguration, He was met by a man who said, "Master, I brought my epileptic son to Your disciples but they couldn't help him." Jesus then cast out the demon within the boy.

"Why couldn't we do that?" asked His disciples.

"This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting," answered Jesus (Matthew 17:21).

If it takes prayer and fasting to cast out a demon of that nature, how were we to know we would have that kind of encounter? *the disciples must have wondered. But I believe Jesus was implying that, because they wouldn't know when opportunities to minister would come their way, they should have been living a life of continual prayer and fasting.*

Why weren't the disciples praying? I suggest it was because Jesus was on the mountain with Peter, James, and John. I suggest it was because the nine disciples down below were saying, "It's always Peter, James, and John. They get to go up the mountain. They're always in the inner circle. But what about us? We never get to do anything." And because that was their mentality, they weren't interceding. They weren't praying. They weren't ready.

So, too, there are those today who say, "The Lord never uses me. The church never calls on me." But when the opportunity arises before them, they are either unable to meet it or are completely unaware of it. Saint, your responsibility in ministry is to be ready and then to rest. Study the Scripture in the place of intimacy and prayer. Worship the Lord. Get to know Him all the more. Then just rest, saying, "Lord, when the hour comes in which You want to use me to do something for Your glory, I'm ready."

Radical transformation will occur in your walk with the Lord when you realize *He's* the Master and you're not. *He's* the King, and you're the subject. *He's* the Boss, and you're the servant. Your job is not to order Him or even to make suggestions to Him. Your place is to be ready *for* Him, and to rest *in* Him.

John 2:5

His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.

I find it theologically significant that in these, her last recorded words in Scripture, we see Mary directing the servants to her Son rather than acting as a mediator or liaison for Him. Those who believe they need to go through Mary to have their prayers heard or to gain influence in heaven have not studied carefully the relationship between Jesus and His mother. She didn't carry a whole lot of weight with Him. Oh, He loved her and cared for her even when He was on the Cross. But He was neither influenced by her nor did He take orders from her.

When it was told Him that His mother wanted to see Him, Jesus said, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? They who hear and heed the Word of God are My mother and My brothers" (see Luke 8:21). Later, in Acts 1, we see Mary with the other disciples praying in the Upper Room. She's not leading the meeting. She's not in a place of honor or prominence. She's just one of them. There is *one* Mediator between God and man—not Mary, but "the Man, Christ Jesus" (see 1 Timothy 2:5).

John 2:6–8

And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece [about 20 gallons]. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.

For you who seek to serve Jesus to a greater degree, there are three important characteristics of the servants to note in this story. . . .

The first is obedience. The servants didn't argue with Jesus, or ask questions of Him. They simply did what He asked them to do.

The second is exuberance. The servants filled huge twenty-gallon vessels to the brim, even though they had no idea what would happen next. There was nothing halfhearted about these guys!

The third is patience. Jesus didn't say, "Okay, servants, huddle up. Here's the plan. See those big water pots over there? I want you guys to fill them with water. Then, as you begin to pour them out and serve them to the governor, a miracle will take place and the water will turn into wine. John will write about it in the second chapter of his Gospel, and you guys will be famous!" No, Jesus told the servants what to do only one step at a time. First, they were to fill the water pots. After they had done that, He instructed them to draw the water out and take it to the governor. The miracle occurred only as they faithfully followed each step. Too often, I want to know what steps two through five are going to be before I follow step one. "Let me know where this is all going, Lord. Let me know where I will be next month, next year, and three years from now. Lay it out clearly, Lord, and then I'll go for it." The Lord doesn't work that way. He unfolds His plan for us the same way He did for the servants at the wedding: one step at a time. And the point where we stop obeying is the point where that stops happening.

John 2:9 (a)

When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) . . .

So well known is this story, it can be recounted today by believer and non-believer alike. At the time, however, the only ones who knew what had transpired were the lowliest people in attendance at the wedding: the servants. No one else knew from whence the wine came. There were no "oohs" and "aahs" as the wine was poured. There were no glances of recognition toward the thirty-year-old Carpenter. There was not a sudden rush of people to Jesus' side. There were only some dropped jaws and wide eyes on the faces of some tired servants. This first public miracle of Jesus was similar to His first appearance on earth, for then only a few shepherds were aware of what had happened. There would be times later in His ministry when He would demonstrate His deity with bold and awesome authority. But on this particular day in Cana, He chose to reveal Himself only to some humble, obedient servants.

John 2:9 (b), 10

. . . the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.

Throughout history, there have been those who use this story as justification for drinking alcohol. "Jesus made wine. Jesus drank wine. So don't talk to me about not drinking," they insist.

"If your argument is sincerely based upon the example of Jesus, you will never drink again," I answer. "Look at Luke 22:18 where Jesus says He will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God shall come. Even if Jesus was drinking fermented wine—a viewpoint to which I don't personally subscribe—since He as your role model will not drink again until the kingdom comes, neither should you."

As a pastor, I'm tired of seeing the damage alcohol inflicts upon our children, our families, and our society as a whole. Everyone who has ever begun to drink has done so thinking they would be careful, that they would remain in control. But the fact that eighteen million Americans are known alcoholics proves otherwise. Solomon declares, "It is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink, lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that are of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and

forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more" (Proverbs 31:4–7). If you're perishing, which literally means "damned," or if you're depressed to the point where you cannot bear life, you have Solomon's permission to partake of alcohol.

> But if you want to be a leader, he warns you to stay away from it lest you short-circuit your thinking process. Solomon was right, for science has since proven that every ounce of alcohol consumed permanently destroys ten thousand dendrites, or filaments, in the nerve cells of the brain. While it is true that each of us has millions of dendrites, I think it is fair to say that none of us has any to spare. If you're like me, you need all the dendrites you can get! Be wise, precious people, and consider very seriously the effects of alcohol upon your spiritual and physical well-being, your family stability, and the health of our society.

John 2:11 (a)
This beginning of miracles did Jesus . . .

Compare this first public miracle of Jesus, the "grace-bringer," with the first miracle of Moses, the lawgiver. Moses turned the water of the Nile into blood, which speaks of judgment. Jesus turned the water at the wedding into wine, which speaks of joy. So, too, if you approach the Word legalistically, it will become like the Nile. You'll bloody yourself and everyone around you. But if you look for Jesus in the water of the Word, you will find the wine of joy producing such hilarity within you that people for miles around will be drawn to you.

John 2:11 (b)
. . . in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

Our Lord's first public miracle took place at a marriage ceremony. I believe that is because daily miracles are essential to our marriages. In the brief account of the miracle at Cana, a beautiful picture develops that illustrates how the Lord can take a marriage that seems washed-up or watered-down, and turn it into something sparkly, bubbly, and joyful. Marriage should not be simply workable, like water. It should be wonderful, like wine.

As quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle,* ninety-nine-year-old Abel Kibiak, America's oldest living Olympian, winner of the silver medal in the fifteen hundred-meter race in 1912, said he is looking for a woman to "take up with."

"She doesn't have to have teeth," he said, "just a driver's license."

I think too often we have an "Abel Kibiak" mentality concerning marriage. We settle for so little when the Lord wants to bless us with so much. You see, God has chosen marriage to be the singular illustration by which an unbelieving world might see that Jesus is alive.

How does this happen? Look at the story, and you'll find the procedure to be so simple. Stone vessels were filled to the brim with water, servants drew out the water, and the water became wine. Paul declares we are earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). Therefore, I am to allow the Word of God to fill me to the brim. Then I am to make the effort and take the time to draw from what has filled me in order to serve my wife, Tammy. She, on the other hand, is to allow the Word of God to fill her to the brim in order that she might serve me. And as we do this, we find ourselves in Cana, where the water of the Word is transformed into the wine of joy. I'm not talking about discussing theological complexities or an exegesis of the Pentateuch. I'm talking about just sharing whatever it is that stimulates, convicts, or interests you on your journey through the Word.

John 2:12 (a)

After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother . . .

Here is Mary still at her Son's side. The rebuke earlier in the chapter did not deter her from following Him. Perhaps it brought them even closer. Do not despise the rebuke of the Lord, gang, for it is meant to draw you nearer to His side.

John 2:12 (b), 13 (a)

. . . And his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days. And the Jews' passover was at hand . . .

Passover was linked with another feast that took place seven days later—the Feast of Unleavened Bread. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Jews

had to make sure that absolutely no leaven was present in their homes. They searched every corner, every cupboard, and every cooking utensil to rid their homes of every trace of leaven, the symbol of sin. In the following account, we will see Jesus bring to life this Old Testament picture as He cleanses His own Father's House from the evil and sin within it.

John 2:13 (b)–14

. . . and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting.

In front of the temple were four courtyards separated by four doors leading from one to the other. The first courtyard, the court of the Gentiles, was accessible to everyone. Men and women, Jews and Gentiles could all enter the court of the Gentiles. Beyond the court of the Gentiles was the court of the Israelites. Gentiles were barred from this court upon penalty of death. The third courtyard was the court of men. Jewish males were the only ones allowed access to this court. Finally, adjoining the temple itself was the court of priests, where only priests were allowed admittance.

In the court of Gentiles, oxen, sheep, and doves were sold. Why? Because the priests were filled with greed and covetousness. Coveting being simply wanting more of that which one already has enough, these Jewish pseudo-religious leaders wanted more money to increase their own coffers. Thus, the oxen, sheep, or doves brought by the people to sacrifice at the temple were, upon inspection by the priests, usually declared unfit for sacrifice due to some microscopic flaw or blemish. Worshipers were then instructed to purchase "preapproved" animals from the stalls in the courtyard. The prices for the "pure" animals were exorbitant, so the priests made a killing off the unsuspecting supplicants.

The moneychangers employed a similar tactic. When foreigners came to the temple to pay their temple tax and to make offering, their money was declared unfit due to the image of Caesar or other foreign deity inscribed upon it. The moneychangers would then exchange foreign currency for shekels at a cost of up to ten times the normal exchange rate. Jesus entered this scene and saw immediately that His people were being robbed and ripped off. In the court of the Gentiles—the very place where the world should have been introduced to

the True and Living God—the priests were fleecing His flock instead of feeding them.

John 2:15

And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables.

Here, the story is quite a contrast to what had happened earlier in the chapter . . .

At the wedding, Jesus sat at the table.

Here, he's throwing tables.

In Cana, He worked quietly and privately.

Here, He's reacting conspicuously and publicly.

At the wedding feast, the emphasis was on joy. Here, the end result is judgment.

And yet I think there is a very interesting link between these two accounts. Both deal with tables. Both deal with Jesus desiring to bring joy. Our bodies being the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), there are things in our lives, in our temples, that are ripping us off just as surely as the priests and moneychangers ripped people off in Jesus' day. Consequently, there is a direct connection between the joy produced at the wedding table and the judgment that took place at the temple table, for if I am a going to have joy, the Lord wants to drive out the sin that is ripping me off. Joy and judgment walk hand in hand, for without joy, judgment would be unbearable; but without judgment, sin would run rampant. Yes, there is pleasure in sin for a season, but it is followed by destruction (Hebrews 11:25). Therefore, the Lord lovingly says to you and me, "I want to go through your life, overturn the tables, and drive out the cattle so you won't be ripped off from what I want to do in and through you." How does this happen practically? I believe it takes place at a third table—not the table of the wedding feast or the table in the temple, but at the table of Communion.

Communion produces rich and satisfying joy coupled with deep and purifying judgment, for it's when you hold the elements of Communion in your

hand as you're on your knees before the Lord that you can hear His voice of compassion and correction in a uniquely powerful way.



***For topical study of John 2:13–15 entitled "Turning over Tables," turn to page* 454.**

John 2:16 (a)

And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence . . .

This short phrase indicates that, even in His righteous anger, Jesus was totally in control. He was not running wildly through the temple courtyard, driving out oxen and throwing over tables in a blind rage. If that were the case, He would have knocked the cages of doves to the ground. No, knowing the doves would die if they fell to the ground locked in their cages, Jesus said, "Would you guys please take these out?" as He continued to crack the scourge and overturn tables.

"Be angry and sin not," said Paul (Ephesians 4:26). Jesus provides the perfect example of what this means. Although He acted with great strength and firmness, He was never out of control. A spoken word was given to those who sold doves. A show of force was given to the moneychangers. Jesus communicates differently to each of us. Sometimes He comes with His Word. Sometimes He comes with His might. But always He comes in righteousness.

John 2:16 (b)

. . . make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.

Here, Jesus referred to the temple as "my Father's house." At the end of His earthly ministry three years later, because they refused to acknowledge Him as their Messiah, He will tell the Jews the temple was *their* house (Matthew 23:38).

John 2:17 (a)

And his disciples remembered that it was written . . .

John records three times when Jesus' disciples remembered either something in Scripture or something Jesus said (2:17; 2:22; 12:16). Thus, uneducated though they might have been by the world's standards, it was obvious they had the Word hidden in their hearts (Psalm 119:11).

John 2:17 (b)
. . . the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

As Psalm 69:9 was brought to their remembrance, the disciples suddenly realized Jesus' passion for the physical temple. So, too, Jesus is zealous and passionate about His spiritual temple—us. We are His temple not only individually (1 Corinthians 6:19) but corporately (1 Peter 2:5). And as His corporate temple, we as a church exist for three reasons . . .

The first reason the church exists is for exaltation—for worshiping, exalting, and extolling the Lord. Why? Because all things were made by Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16)—including the church. Therefore, the church exists for the Lord's pleasure (Revelation 4:11).

The second reason the church exists is for edification. The church exists to edify the saints—to build them up, to bring them into maturity into the "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (see Ephesians 4:12, 13). How? By seeing Jesus through the study of the Scriptures. I am convinced that the greatest single need in the church of Jesus Christ today both nationally and internationally is the straightforward study of His Word.

The third reason the church exists is for evangelization. The inevitable result of exaltation and edification will be evangelization. Why? Because healthy sheep just naturally reproduce. If sheep are properly fed and tended, the shepherd had better make room because baby lambs can't be far behind. Acts 6:7 declares that when the Word increased, the number of disciples multiplied. That is why the reason we meet together is not primarily for evangelism. Evangelism is the effect. Exaltation and edification are the cause.

> *There was a man at Applegate Christian Fellowship who had been coming to the Fellowship for about a year. He was studying, digesting, meditating, and taking in the Scriptures. As a result, in the past eleven months, he led eight of his co-workers to Jesus Christ and all eight became a part of the body. Truly, evangelism is the result of edification.*

People often said, "You're baptizing fifty or sixty new believers every week. How can this be?" The answer was simple: Healthy sheep reproduce.

> *I recently talked to a lady at my son Peter-John's baseball game who said, "When I first came to the Fellowship, I remember thinking that people were crazy to travel such a long distance. But as I began to worship with you, take in the Scriptures, and see what the Lord was doing, I found myself saying, 'You know, it's not such a long drive. . . .' "*

Folks, if you're not into the church, if you're down on the church, if you don't have time for the church, you're out of sync with the heart of the Lord because He's zealous for and radically in love with His church.

> **John 2:18**
>
> **Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?**

Notice they didn't say, "*Why* are You doing this?" Every single person there knew the temple needed cleansing because its practices were corrupt. Thus, no one asked Jesus why He did what He did. Rather, they asked who had given Him the authority to do it.

> **John 2:19**
>
> **Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.**

The Greek word translated "temple" is *naos,* which was also used in reference to the Holy of Holies. Perhaps Jesus physically pointed to Himself when He made this declaration. At the very least, He alluded to Himself when He made it. "Destroy this temple—Me," He said, "and in three days I will raise it up"—which is precisely what happened at Calvary.

> **John 2:20, 21**
>
> **Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body.**

Herod had begun renovation of the temple in the year 20 B.C. The account before us took place in A.D. 26–28. Thus, the temple had been under construction for forty-six years at this point and would remain under construction until A.D. 64. As impressive as it was massive, Josephus records that eighteen thousand men were employed on the project over the course of its renovation. With this in mind, it is easy to see why the Jews thought the Galilean Carpenter crazy with His claim to rebuild the whole thing in only three days.

John 2:22

When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.

This is the third recorded instance in this chapter where the disciples "remembered" or "believed." In verse 11, the water changed to wine caused them to believe. In verse 17, the cleansing of the temple caused them to remember. But here in verse 22, the Resurrection caused them to both remember *and* believe.

John 2:23

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.

There are those who seek miraculous proof that Jesus is real and that He loves them. They search for physical, material, or financial verification of His reality. But theirs is a flimsy, faulty faith built upon a sandbar foundation because, as we will see, Jesus is not committed to those who demand a sign. You see, the problem with signs is that they're never enough. If you base your faith upon signs, you'll always be upset by the one that didn't happen—the prayer that wasn't answered, the healing that didn't come, the payment that didn't arrive. That is why our faith must be built and based not upon what Jesus does, but upon who He is. Who He is as revealed in the Word. That is why Paul says faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). It's the Word pointing to the Person of Jesus Christ that produces genuine faith.

John 2:24, 25

But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

The word translated “commit” in verse 24 is the same word translated “believe” in verse 23. In other words, many believed in Jesus when they saw the miracles, but He did not believe in them because He knew their hearts. Stay tuned, folks. In John 3, we’ll be introduced to one who, unlike these people, sought Jesus for who He was rather than merely for what He could do.

TURNING OVER TABLES

A Topical Study of JOHN 2:13–15

I am constantly amazed by how the Lord works in the most predictably unpredictable places and through the most unusual and interesting people. One of the things I love about walking with Him is that I never know what the next step will be—which is exactly how Jesus' disciples must have felt in John 2. Up to this point, they probably thought they had Jesus pretty well figured out. After all, their introduction to Him was as the Lamb of God—He was gentle. Their invitation from Him was, "Come and see"—He was approachable. Their impression of Him was as the miraculous Winemaker—He was wonderful!

But in verse 13 of chapter 2, everything changed. The gentle, approachable Lamb of God becomes the Roaring Lion of Judah. With eyes flashing and scourge flying, muscles bulging and tables soaring, Jesus took on a seemingly new persona. Certainly the disciples must have thought, *Who* is *this One we thought we knew so well?*"

In verse 7, Jesus quietly met a need.
In verse 14, He conspicuously caused a scene.

In verse 2, Jesus sat at the marriage table.
In verse 15, He overturned temple tables.

At Cana, Jesus created the wine of joy.
In the temple, He initiated the work of judgment.

But Jesus was not schizophrenic. There is a direct connection between the joy He produced at the wedding table and the judgment He pronounced at the money-changer's table. Joy and judgment are two sides of the same coin. They go hand in hand. And nowhere do they blend more perfectly and more powerfully than in the Person of Jesus Christ. Scripture records four occasions when Jesus exhibited righteous anger. . . .

In Matthew 18:6, Jesus used strong language to describe the punishment of anyone who caused a child to stumble. In Mark 10:14, Jesus was "much displeased" when His disciples hindered little children from coming to Him. In Mark 3:5, Jesus looked with anger on the Pharisees who were eager to prosecute Him for healing on the Sabbath. And here in John 2, Jesus' anger is seen in the cleansing of the temple.

Please note that in all four of these situations, Jesus' anger is directed toward those who put up barriers to prevent others from coming to Him. We often think the Lord is angry with our watching TV or with our imperfections and inconsistency. We think He's angry with us for not reading the Word or for not praying. But in reality, what angers the heart of Jesus are those things that keep others from experiencing and enjoying the presence of God—traditions that say, "You can't be healed on the Sabbath," or inspections that say, "Your sacrifice is unacceptable."

When individually or corporately we erect walls or barriers that discourage people from coming to the Lord, Jesus is angered. That is why, with scourge in hand, He overturned the tables of the moneychangers in the temple. And that is why He scourges us as well. You see, if there are barriers, barricades, people or problems in your life that prevent you or others from enjoying Him, He will scourge you (Hebrews 12:6).

"Well, there are all kinds of barriers in my life, but I'm not being scourged," you boast. Listen—if you are building barriers and are not being dealt with, if you are sinning and not being scourged, according to Hebrews 12:8, you are not truly a son or daughter of God. Even though you're at church every Sunday and Wednesday, if there is no table-turning in your life, if there is no removal of the barriers that so easily erect themselves between you and the Lord, you're not part of the family. The author of Hebrews says to rejoice if you are being scourged because through it, the Lord is removing blockades that would keep you from the joy He wants to produce in your life. How does He scourge us? Often, it's with a scourge made from "small cords" (verse 15) . . .

> A number of years ago, I was making a shelf for Peter-John's toy trucks. Due to my lack of carpentry skills, tools, and materials, what should have been a ten-minute project turned into a five-hour ordeal. At long last, after the single shelf was in place, I went into the kitchen to pour myself a well-deserved cup of herb tea. No sooner had I sat down, however, than I heard an excruciatingly loud crash. Running into Peter's

room, I found the shelf on the floor, surrounded by trucks and a huge piece of drywall. Sitting on top of the shelf was my then one-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Jessie.

"How could you do this, Jessie?" I said as tears began to roll down her chubby little cheeks. "I spent my whole day putting up this shelf, and now look at it!"

Peter-John was standing in the doorway, hands on his hips. I looked at him, and he looked at me, shook his head, and said, "Daddy, Jesus is going to have to spank you!"

Ouch! A small cord, scourging my heart!

Folks, it might be a son or daughter, a sermon, a letter, or a traffic ticket. It might be a rebuke from a neighbor, sickness, or a setback. But if you're smart, you'll recognize even seemingly minor incidents as small cords in the hand of the Lord and say, "Oh, Lord, teach me. Change me. Remake me. I receive this right now as correction from You."

What gives Jesus the right to do this? Not the scourge in His hand, but the scourge upon His back. You see, in John 19:1, we read of Pilate scourging Jesus—not with a scourge made of small cords, but with a flagellum, commonly called a "cat of nine tails."

The flagellum consisted of a wooden handle about twelve inches in length from which extended thirty strips of leather. On the end of these leather thongs were round iron balls the size of fishing weights. Pieces of glass and iron were embedded between the iron balls and the handle of the flagellum. When Jesus was scourged, the large metal balls caused welts to rise. After about the sixth blow, the pieces of glass and metal tore into those large welts, reducing His back, shoulders, and legs to the consistency of hamburger. Most often, a man would die from such a scourging. Jesus, however, absorbed the full thirty-nine blows.

Jesus took the beating in order to pay the price for my sin. "I did it," He says, "because I want the best for you and because I'm in love with you. Now allow Me to take small cords—irritations, rebukes, hard times—and use them to overturn anything in your temple that is ripping you off, anything that is placing a barricade between you and Me."

And when I submit to His scourging, what happens? Joy returns. Worship flows. Intimacy is restored. Don't despise His scourging, saint. Embrace it, and

say, “Lord, as painful as this might be presently, I know You’re doing a work in me to bring joy eventually.”

When we get to heaven, we will finally see that all of the work the Lord did in us was necessary for us to enjoy eternity. Therefore, let us decide today, dear brothers and sisters, that not only personally, but as a church corporately, we will not allow barriers or barricades of any kind to prevent people from coming into the presence of God.

We must refuse to allow vain traditions, political persuasion, or cultural expectations to become barriers. We must guard against anything that would keep people from worshiping with us. We must keep the way clear for the Lion of Judah to come in regularly to drive out the moneychangers, overturn the tables, and keep this temple free.



3 Chapter 2 ended with belief based on miracles. Chapter 3 begins with a miracle based on belief as we see Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus, a man who sought Him for all the right reasons. As the story unfolds, we will observe Nicodemus and Jesus as they meet face-to-face, in verses 1–3, mind to mind, in verses 4–8, and heart to heart in verses 9–21.

John 3:1

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

Three words come to mind in describing Nicodemus: religious, rich, and ruler. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus was extremely religious. We know this because the entire Pharisaical brotherhood, numbering six thousand, was dedicated to keeping the most minute regulations of the Old Testament law, as delineated by their fellow brotherhood, the scribes. It was the scribes’ job to interpret the law and the Pharisees’ job to implement it.

As for riches, we know Nicodemus was wealthy because in John 19, we read it was he who brought costly myrrh and aloes to the tomb of Jesus. Thus, it is not surprising to read that Jewish tradition names him as one of the three wealthiest men in the nation of Israel. Furthermore, the fact that Nicodemus is identified as a “ruler of the Jews” means he was a member of the elite seventy-

member Jewish Supreme Court, the Sanhedrin—a position that would have guaranteed him the highest regard and respect.

John 3:2 (a)
The same came to Jesus by night . . .

It has been suggested that the reason Nicodemus came to Jesus at night was because he was afraid to be seen with Jesus in the light. I disagree with this assumption. You see, in those pre-air-conditioned days, the most enjoyable part of the day was the evening. For this reason, each home had a flat roof, easily accessible by a narrow, outside stairway along the side of the house. Rooftop conversations in the cool of the evening were common.

In addition to cooler temperatures, the evening hours provided a calm not found in the heat of the day. Keep in mind that this encounter took place during the Passover season. As a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus would have been teaching during this time, and Jesus would have been pressed by crowds familiar with His miracles. Thus, with the days during Passover particularly busy for both men, perhaps evening was the only time Nicodemus could make private contact with Jesus.

David meditated on the Lord in the night watches (Psalm 63:6). I like that, because sometimes, like Nicodemus, I feel pressed by the busyness of the day. In the "night watches," however, my mind is free for concentration and meditation. Just as a radio picks up dozens of extra stations at night, so my heart is sometimes extra-sensitive to Him when the sky is black, the air still, and the house quiet at last. I'm so glad Jesus is One who welcomes late-night company.

John 3:2 (b)
. . . and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

Put yourself in Nicodemus' sandals. He didn't know he was talking with the Son of God. He had simply heard that the thirty-year-old Carpenter who had raised a ruckus in the temple was now performing miracles the like of which he had never seen. Nicodemus felt he had to meet this Man.

John 3:3

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Jesus could have answered Nicodemus by saying, "Oh, you're aware of My miracles! Pretty powerful, huh? Quite incredible, eh?" But instead, Jesus cut through the flattery and immediately drew Nicodemus' attention to the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God has past, present, and future application. If you don't understand this, your interpretation of Scripture will be muddled and your understanding unclear.

The past application of the kingdom of God is based upon the realization that when Jesus walked on earth as a Man, the kingdom was present on earth (Luke 10:9). The miracles and signs He ministered on this planet were but sneak previews of what the kingdom will be in its future state. The present application of the kingdom of God is based upon the understanding that it is presently not external but internal (Luke 17:21). The future application of the kingdom of God is based upon the belief that when Jesus Christ returns, we will see not only the internal manifestations of the kingdom, but the external aspects as well (Isaiah 11:6).

Thus, in essence, Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You'll not see the kingdom presently unless you realize who I am. You'll not experience it internally unless you open your heart. You'll not be there eternally unless you're born again."

John 3:4

Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

Notice Nicodemus did not ask, "*Why* should a man be born again?" He asked, "*How* can a man be born again?" No doubt, Nicodemus knew something no one else knew. That is, although others looked at him as a respected ruler, he saw in himself frailty and failure. Although others looked to him as someone spiritual, he looked at himself and saw a sinner. I wonder how many nights Nicodemus had fallen asleep with the unspoken desire in his heart to begin life all over again; to do things differently—to love God more fervently, to serve his family more humbly, to treat people more gently. Oh, for a fresh start! And here was this Rabbi, offering him just that chance. Truly, I believe his inquiry was not the challenge of a hardened skeptic, but the question of a wide-eyed seeker.

John 3:5–7

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

To understand the meaning of "water and Spirit," travel back with me to the Book of beginnings, the Book of Genesis. I, along with many others, believe that between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, Lucifer was thrown out of heaven and cast down to earth, causing a tilting of the axis and cataclysmic changes upon our planet. These changes resulted in darkness, formlessness, and emptiness. Genesis 1:2, therefore, begins an account not of the creation, but the *re*-creation, the rebirth of planet Earth. How did God re-create the earth? The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2). What does water refer to in Scripture? The Word of God (John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26).

God re-created the earth by the Spirit and His Word. How does He re-create us? The same way. When the Word of God, energized and empowered by the Spirit of God, speaks to our dark, formless, empty lives—a new birth, a re-creation takes place. When the Word and Spirit work in tandem to draw us to the Father by way of His Son, we are reborn.

John 3:8

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

Perhaps at this point in their conversation, a cool breeze arose. "The Spirit is like the wind," Jesus said. "You can't predict it. You can't understand it. But you can take advantage of it." It's as if Jesus said, "Put up your sail of faith, Nicodemus, and let the wind of the Spirit carry you into the kingdom."

John 3:9, 10

Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

The original language intimates that Nicodemus was not only "*a* master of Israel," but "*the* master of Israel"—which is why Jesus was amazed that Nicodemus, the primary spiritual teacher of Israel, would have such a difficult time understanding Him. You see, Jesus' reference to the wind should have drawn Nicodemus' mind to a passage well-known by every Jewish scholar: Ezekiel 37. . . .

> *After showing him a valley of dry bones, the Lord asked Ezekiel, "How can these bones live again?"*
>
> *"I don't know," answered Ezekiel.*
>
> *The Lord then instructed him to prophesy to the bones. Ezekiel did so and the bones connected together to form lifeless human bodies. Then, the Lord told him to prophesy to the wind, or* ruwach *in Hebrew.* Ruwach *is also translated "spirit." Ezekiel did so and the dead bones came to life. They were, in essence, reborn.*

Prior to this account in Ezekiel, God promised His people a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 18:31). Known as the New Covenant, it was the promise with which Old Testament scholars like Nicodemus were most familiar. It was the hope for which they longed. And in a rooftop conversation that took place during this breezy Jerusalem evening, the Son of God began to explain to Nicodemus how all of the pieces fit together: the Spirit and water; dry bones and a desert wind; the New Covenant and a new life.

John 3:11, 12

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

Perhaps it was with a heavy heart that Jesus said, "Nicodemus, you don't understand because you haven't been listening. John the Baptist came as a voice crying in the wilderness to prepare hearts for My coming. The law and the prophets all pointed to Me."

John 3:13–15

And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Brass is the metal of judgment. Jesus, the Lamb of God, became like the brass snake of Numbers 21 when He was lifted up on the Cross to absorb the judgment that should have been ours. Here, He says to Nicodemus. "Look to Me and you will be born again. It's so simple."

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

"In twenty-five words or less, tell us why your mother should be Mother of the Year," reads the contest rules. "In twenty-five words or less, explain the importance of the French Revolution upon the economic and social structures of the thirteen colonies," reads the test question. Now, although I probably wouldn't have much trouble with the second question, the first one would be extremely difficult for me because the more we know about any given subject, the harder it is to communicate our thoughts succinctly. Not so with Jesus. John 3:16 is exactly twenty-five words long, and in these twenty-five words, Jesus communicates the Father's heart, the Father's plan, and the Father's will. . . .

- His heart: He loved the world.
- His plan: He gave His only begotten Son.
- His will: Whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Although I know it is somewhat coincidental, I find it interesting that in our English translation of this verse, the middle word is Son. It is no coincidence, however, that those who have experienced God's presence most powerfully are those who have made the Son the center of their lives. Just as Jesus is the center of the greatest verse in all Scripture, He must be central in our hearts and lives

if they are to have meaning, purpose, and impact (Ephesians 1:10). This means that any person, pursuit, or passion in my life that cannot be centered on Jesus Christ has no place in my life.

Surrounding the word "Son" in this verse, there are nine other key words: God, loved, world, gave, whosoever, believeth, perish, have, and life. If you want to be really blessed, meditate on John 3:16 every day for ten days, giving emphasis to a different word each day . . .

- For *God* so loved the world . . .
- For God so *loved* the world . . .
- For God so loved the *world* . . .

Perhaps you memorized this verse when you were three years old. But I believe it will come alive for you in new ways as you contemplate the enormity of its simplicity.

John 3:17

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Jesus came to this world not to come down on people, but to reach out to people. God sent His Son into the world not to point His finger at the world, but to embrace the world and draw it to Himself.

An old legend tells of a traveler attempting to circle the globe who found himself trapped in quicksand. As he slowly sank, Confucius came by and said, "Confucius say, it is evident man should avoid such situations." And he went on his way.

Mohammed came by and said, "Alas, it is the will of Allah." And he went on his way.

Buddha came by, and said, "Let this man's dilemma be an illustration for many." And he went on his way.

Krishna came by and said, "Better luck next time." And he went on his way.

Jesus Christ came by, reached out to the man, and pulled him out.

You see, the unique thing about our Lord is that, while all others tell us what we must do to reach up to heaven, He alone reaches down from heaven and pulls us out of the quicksand of sin. God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, to give us some cute spiritual sayings, or to make us feel bad because of our spiritual inadequacy. No, the purpose of God in sending His Son was singular: to save us.

John 3:18–21

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

Why don't people come to the light? It is not because they don't believe the gospel intellectually or because they struggle with it philosophically. Please remember this the next time you're involved in a discussion with those who attempt to undermine your faith. The issue is never evolution, Cain's wife, or the Immaculate Conception. According to Jesus, the one and only reason people don't come to the Light is because they prefer darkness.

John 3:22–24

After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized. And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. For John was not yet cast into prison.

Why did John baptize in Aenon? Was it because he had received heavenly instructions to minister there? No. Was it because he was fulfilling Old Testament prophecy? No. John baptized in Aenon "because there was much water there."

Too often, we make finding the will of God very difficult. I believe we would do well to demystify the process of discovering what God wants us to

do. John simply went where the water was. His location was perfectly suited to what God had instructed him to do. I am reminded of Chuck Smith's account of how he determined it was God's will he go to Costa Mesa . . .

> *In the early 1970s, Calvary Chapel was located in the middle of nowhere—smack in the center of a huge bean field. In the ensuing twenty years, not only did the church explode numerically, but the Costa Mesa area grew to the point that Calvary Chapel is now sitting on some very valuable real estate. Chuck has often been asked if he had received a vision, a word of prophecy, or a special sign to pastor the little church in the sticks. And he just laughs as he replies, "I took the church in Costa Mesa because I like to surf and it was the closest available church to the beach!"*
>
> Augustine said it best when he essentially said, "Love God with all of your heart and do whatever you please." If you truly love God with all of your heart, your desires will be in harmony with His will. Therefore, I encourage you to trust the Lord to use your desires, interests, and abilities in His naturally supernatural way to bring joy to your heart and glory to Himself. Whether it's for baptizing or for surfing, go where the water is!
>
> **John 3:25, 26**
>
> **Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.**

At this point, John was presented with news from his disciples that multitudes were coming to Jesus for baptism. But John's disciples missed the point. What they perceived as competition to John's mission, John saw as completion of his ministry.

> **John 3:27**
>
> **John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.**

John knew he had nothing apart from God. Any abilities, gifts, or ministry he possessed came directly as a gift from his heavenly Father. So, too, if there is any area in which you excel, it is solely because God sovereignly and graciously gave you the necessary desires, abilities, and provisions. Truly, God uses and blesses us not *because* of who we are but *in spite* of who we are!

John 3:28, 29

Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.

When John first "met" Jesus, both were in their mother's wombs. John leapt for joy when Mary, pregnant with Jesus, entered the room (Luke 1:41). Here in our text, we see that, at the zenith of his ministry, John still finds his joy in the sound of Jesus' voice. To explain the reason for his ministry and the basis for his joy, John used an analogy very familiar to his disciples. You see, wedding custom in John's day dictated it was the best man, the "friend of the bridegroom," who invited the guests to the wedding, made preparations for the wedding, and finally, upon completion of the wedding, escorted the bride and groom into the bridal chamber. Thus, it was the voice of the bridegroom signaling to him that everything was okay within the chamber that brought joy to the heart of the best man.

Do you know when joy is fulfilled? It is not when we get something *from* the Lord, or do something *for* the Lord, but when we hear the voice *of* the Lord. If you are expecting your joy to be fulfilled through a nicer husband, faster car, or better job, you are headed for disaster. If you are caught up in thinking, *If I can move to this place, teach that Bible study, or sing with the other worship team; if I can just be effective here, or used there,* then *I will be joyful*—you are headed for disappointment and despair. But if you spend time with the Lord, reading His Word, and simply listening for His voice, your joy will be fulfilled. If you are a baby Christian like John in the womb, you will leap for joy at the sound of His voice. And if you are a seasoned saint like John in the desert, your joy will be full when you realize that what you longed for all along is found in Him.

John 3:30

He must increase, but I must decrease.

He must increase, but I must decrease: seven words which capture the essence of true ministry.



***For topical study of John 3:30 entitled "Three Major Musts," turn to page* 462.**

John 3:31, 32 (a)

He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth . . .

Jesus didn't speak theoretically. He spoke experientially. When Moses lifted up the brass snake, Jesus was there. When Ezekiel prophesied to the wind, Jesus was there. Thus, Jesus doesn't teach from secondhand information. His is a firsthand, eyewitness account.

John 3:32 (b)

. . . and no man receiveth his testimony.

God says, "Rejoice evermore. In everything give thanks. Be ye holy, for I am holy." But mankind refuses to receive His testimony, saying, "I can't rejoice evermore because I'm emotionally starved. I can't give thanks because I came from a dysfunctional family. I can't be holy because I'm co-dependent."

John 3:33

He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.

The one who does receive His testimony will proclaim loudly with John, "God is true!" for the one who believes God's commandments are His "enablements" will find God true every time. The one who refuses to excuse sin with psychological jargon and instead steps out in faith to "flee youthful lusts,"

to "reckon the old man dead unto sin," to "judge not" will experience God's faithfulness at every step.

John 3:34

For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.

In the Old Testament, it was with limitation that the Spirit of God was given to men. Such was not the case with Jesus. He was totally and completely Spirit-filled.

John 3:35, 36 (a)

The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life . . .

The Son being central to the Father's heart, plan, and will (Ephesians 1:10), it is on the basis of belief in Jesus that we are given not only eternal life but *everlasting* life—life that begins the moment we believe on Him.

John 3:36 (b)

. . . and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Why does the wrath of God abide on the one who does not believe on His Son? Because he who does not believe is trampling on the sacrificial blood of His only begotten Son. This world is sinking fast in the quicksand of sin. God does not condemn us for being in that place—only for refusing to reach out to the nail-pierced hand offering to pull us out.

THREE MAJOR MUSTS

A Topical Study of
JOHN 3:7, 14, 30

Those who study such things tell us that the average person makes three thousand decisions a day. The majority of these decisions are admittedly inconsequential. But in our text, we are presented with three decisions that are eternally essential. They're not maybes. They're *musts*. . . .

The Must of the Sinner

Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

John 3:7

George Whitefield, mighty preacher of the Colonial Era, was asked why he always preached that man must be born again. “Why do I preach you must be born again?” said Whitefield? “Because you must be born again!”

Gang, the message of Jesus Christ is not about giving us maxims on how to be better people. It’s about seeing the Spirit of God birth something new in our lives. It’s not about reformation. It’s about regeneration.

Two courtiers argued incessantly over whether a man could be made a gentleman, or whether he had to be born one. Finally, in frustration, the king gave each of them some money and sent them out to settle their dispute. The courtier who held the viewpoint that a man could be made a gentleman walked into an inn, where he ordered a cup of hot chocolate. After a few minutes, in walked a cat, dressed like a waiter, carrying a cup of hot chocolate between his front paws.

“Oho!” said the courtier to the innkeeper. “Here’s my answer, for if a common cat can be trained to be a waiter, certainly a man can be trained to be a gentleman. Sir, I want to buy your cat.”

“That will be one thousand pounds,” said the innkeeper.

“No problem,” said the courtier as he paid the innkeeper and went on his way.

As the excited courtier traveled toward the palace, his opponent got word of the cat. “Oh no” he said, “how can I argue my point against a cat who can serve hot chocolate?” But as he headed dejectedly toward the palace, his eye caught something in a shop window that pleased him greatly.

“Could I buy what’s in the window?” he said.

“Gladly!” answered the shopkeeper as he put the courtier’s purchase in a box.

So it was that both courtiers arrived at the palace within moments of each other. “Do you have your answer?” asked the king.

"Yes," said the fellow with the cat. "Here is proof that a man can be made into a gentleman," he said as the cat walked in, bringing the king a cup of hot chocolate. At this point, the other courtier opened his box and released twelve mice. As the mice scampered across the floor, the cat dropped the cup and saucer, and took off after them—providing conclusive proof that one cannot be made a gentleman because he will eventually return to his baser instincts.

It's true, folks. You can wear a tie, go to church, and learn how to be a Christian. You can sing in the choir and take Communion. You can go through the motions, but sooner or later, a mouse will run across your path and your real nature will suddenly dominate you unless you're born again. That's why Jesus wasn't talking about reformation. He was talking about regeneration when He said, "You *must* be born again."

The Must of the Savior

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,even so must the Son of man be lifted up.

John 3:14

As the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness, they grew tired of the manna God had provided for them. No doubt, they prepared it every way possible: bamanna splits, bamanna bread, manna-cotti—but finally said, "Manna-live! We're tired of this!" Poisonous snakes began to smite them as they complained and grumbled and murmured, and they began to die by the thousands.

Seeking the Lord for a remedy, Moses was instructed to make a brass snake on a brass pole and erect it in the center of the camp. Whoever looked upon the brass snake would not die. When Moses told this to the people, some must have said, "What kind of a cure can there be in a brass snake on a brass pole?" But those who simply looked in faith upon the snake were spared (Numbers 21).

Jesus Christ was made a snake when He was made sin for you and me. Not only have we been bitten by the snake of sin—we are ourselves the snakes. We have hurt other people. We have wounded them, lied to them, and cheated them. But here is the Good News: Jesus said, "Because you've been bitten by the snake of sin and because you are also the snakes through which sin is unleashed, I will become like you, yet without venom. I will go to the Cross in order that you who have been bitten will be healed, in order that you who are biting will be forgiven. If you will just look on Me and believe in Me, you will be saved. I must be lifted up. There is no other way."

The Must of the Servant

He must increase, but I must decrease.

John 3:30

Like John, we must get out of the way and talk to people about Jesus, focus our attention on Him, and live for the purpose of sharing Him. In other words, we must decrease.

If I don't pull in a big salary, so be it. If I don't play for the Forty-Niners, so be it. If I don't have a nice house, I don't care. I must decrease so that I can be about the business of sharing *Him.*

Jesus said, "If you die to self, you'll find life" (see Matthew 10:39). Therefore, the more we spend on our hobbies, pursuits, and pleasures, the more miserable we'll be. But the more we say, "I must decrease and *He* must increase," the more clearly we'll hear His voice and the greater our joy will be.



John 4:1, 2

When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,)

Since the word "but" can also be translated "except," the idea here could be that, although Jesus did not baptize the masses, He did baptize His disciples. Or it could mean His disciples were doing the baptizing. Either way, people were responding to Jesus' ministry.

John 4:3

He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee.

As the number of Jesus' followers multiplied, the Pharisees realized that their enemy was no longer John the Baptist, but an itinerant Preacher from Galilee. At this point, not wanting to get involved in confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus decided to go north to Galilee.

John 4:4

And he must needs go through Samaria.

Israel is divided into three regions: Judea in the south, Galilee in the north, and Samaria in the middle. When a Jew wanted to go from Judea to Galilee, the most direct route led through Samaria. But good Jews would never go that way. They would go through Perea on the other side of the Jordan River. Why? Because there was such tension between the Samaritans and the Jews, that Jews uttered the word "Samaritan" only as a curse word. Why were the Samaritans so despised? In the year 722 B.C., the Assyrians invaded Israel from the north and carried the majority of the people from the ten northern tribes into captivity. The Assyrians then sent some of their people to Israel, where they intermarried with the Jews not taken into captivity. The marriages that took place between the Assyrians and the Jews produced the Samaritans—half-breeds in the eyes of the Jews. Barred from the temple, the Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim. Although they still believed in the Pentateuch—the first five books of Moses—they changed the stories. The Garden of Eden was on Mount Gerizim. Noah's ark landed on Mount Gerizim. And Abraham offered Isaac—you guessed it—on Mount Gerizim.

As Jesus headed north to Galilee, He said, "I'm going straight through Samaria." Why? Because there was a divine appointment awaiting Him there. The following story is another classic illustration of how to witness and share our faith. Contrast this fourth chapter of John with John 3. In John 3, Jesus talks to a religious man named Nicodemus. In John 4, He talks to an immoral woman whose name is not given. In John 3, Nicodemus is a calm contemplator. In John 4, the woman is a fiery debater. In John 3, Jesus speaks with Nicodemus in the cool of the night. In John 4, Jesus speaks with the woman in the heat of the day. In John 3, Nicodemus initiates the conversation. In John 4, Jesus begins the dialogue. For you who are interested in personal evangelism, there is much to chew on as you see the different methods our Lord employs to draw people to Himself.

John 4:5, 6

Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there.

Jacob's well still stands. One hundred fifty feet deep, it's one of few verifiably authentic biblical sites. But if you get the opportunity to visit Jacob's well, take your helmet, as it's located in the war-torn West Bank.

John 4:6 (a)
Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey . . .

Hebrews 2:11 says Jesus was made like unto his brethren—like you. He knows how it feels to be bone-tired. I'm glad about that because I feel that way not infrequently. The battles rage. The problems mount. The struggles continue. And I just feel weary. Yet it is often at the point when we are weary or feeling weak that we will be used to the greatest degree (2 Corinthians 12:10).

John 4:6 (b)
. . . sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour.

Women typically drew water in the morning or in the evening. But this woman, for reasons we shall see, wanted to avoid the other women of the community. Consequently, she would wait until the hot, noontime hour—when everyone else would be resting or eating—to make her journey to the well.

John 4:7, 8
There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)

Jesus—the One who fed five thousand on the hillside by the Sea of Galilee with a few loaves and fishes, the One who fed four thousand shortly thereafter, the One who is the Provider of all good gifts—is hungry. And what does He do? He sends His disciples into town to pick up some food. You'll never once see Jesus perform a miracle solely to satisfy His own need, desire, or hunger. "Turn these stones into bread," Satan taunted after Jesus had fasted forty days in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:3). But Jesus' refusal to do so causes me to analyze my own prayers and consider how often I make requests of the Lord for my own satisfaction versus how often I pray for the needs of others and the glory of the kingdom.

John 4:9 (a)

Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me . . .

Why isn't Jesus a gentleman here? Why doesn't He say, "Let *Me* draw water for you?" It seems that would be the right thing to do. In actuality, however, Jesus is demonstrating a very important principle. "Give to Me," He says to the woman—not because He wants the water, but because He wants her heart. He wants to see her saved.

As believers, oftentimes we err on this point. We think, *What can I do for other people to find a way of entry into witnessing or sharing?* While there certainly is a place for that, often letting people do something for you—humbling yourself and allowing them to make an investment in or give assistance to you—is the most effective way to reach them. Jesus knew that wherever a person's treasure is, there will his heart be also (Matthew 6:21). If someone shares with you something of his "treasure," something of his heart will be sure to follow—affording you the opportunity of reaching it with the gospel. Our tendency is to want to be helpers rather than "help-ees." We want to be the givers because it's truly more blessed to give than to receive. But, as Jesus shows us, sometimes it's imperative to receive in order that another might come into the kingdom.

The classic biblical example of this principle is found in Numbers 10. As Moses prepares to lead the people of Israel on their journey toward the Promised Land, he invites his Gentile brother-in-law to join them. "Hobab, come with us. It's a good land to which we are going, and good things will happen to you if you travel in our company."

"Sorry," said Hobab. "I'm going back to my own people."

It was then that Moses changed his tactic. "Hobab," he said, "we need you. You understand the wilderness. You can be our eyes. Would you help us?"

Hobab agreed and ended up in the Promised Land with the people of Israel (Judges 4:11).

How important it is that we don't come across simply as those who say, "We're going to heaven. We're great. Join us." Rather, sometimes we need to say, "We need you. The talents you have and the abilities you've been given would be such an asset to us."

John 4:9 (b)

. . . which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

This woman had two strikes against her: She was a Samaritan and she was a woman. In Jesus' day, rabbis refrained from talking to women in public to such an extent that even if one saw his own wife on the street, he would not acknowledge her. That is why this Samaritan woman was so shocked by Jesus' request.

John 4:10

Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

Jesus had a way of masterfully reaching the people with whom He shared. To the woman at the well, He spoke of living water. To aging Nicodemus, He talked about being born again. To the blind man, He identified Himself as the Light of the world (John 9:5). To sisters grieving the death of their brother, He was the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25). To fishermen, He issued an invitation to become fishers of men (Matthew 4:19).

John 4:11 (a)

The woman saith unto him, Sir . . .

I like this! The disdain the Jews had for the Samaritans being mutual, in verse 9, the woman called Jesus a Jew. Here, however, she elevates Him to "Sir."

John 4:11 (b)–14

. . . thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the

water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

The woman was thinking in terms of material, physical water, when Jesus was, in fact, speaking of the eternal, spiritual realm. How often we make the same mistake today. "The kingdom is about prosperity, Cadillacs, and third homes," thunder so many preachers. But Jesus said whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again—because nothing material will ever satiate or satisfy the thirst of the soul. When believers get thirsty, sometimes it's because they have drifted back to the old watering holes. They've pulled away from the Word, from ministry, from the things of the kingdom—and they end up dry as bones, as miserable as fish out of water.

John 4:15, 16

The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw. Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither.

Why did Jesus ask her to call her husband? Because there is no true conversion without conviction.

John 4:17, 18

The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.

Notice the skill with which the Physician of our soul handles the scalpel of conviction. "You said well," He said. He found something to approve. Jesus shows grace and truth. I love Him for that because that's the way He works with me. Jesus didn't come to condemn the world but to save the world. That's grace. Yet, because there can be no salvation without conviction, He always speaks the truth.

Notice also Jesus didn't say, "You've had five husbands. Let's talk about Husband number one: Sam. Then, we'll talk about why you left George in session two. Come next week, and in the third session, we'll talk about Pete. In session four, we'll discuss Harry." No, it didn't take Jesus five sessions to

discuss the five husbands. He didn't delve into codependency or into the woman's past iniquities. Yes, Jesus revealed her sin—but He didn't revel in it. Big difference. I think it is dangerous for people who mean well to start reveling in the past sin of another—talking about it, exploring it, pursuing it. Jesus does not model this for any minister of the gospel or for any servant of the kingdom. He simply says, "I know you're a sinner. You know you're a sinner. Now, let's go on from there."

John 4:19

The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.

Now the woman refers to Jesus as a prophet. As her knowledge of Him expands, her esteem for Him grows.

John 4:20 (a)

Our fathers worshipped in this mountain . . .

The woman is about to ask a hot theological question of her day. And the same thing will happen to you when you share with someone who feels the gentle hand of conviction upon him. You'll hear questions like, "Did Adam have a belly button? Where did Cain get his wife? How could all of the animals fit on the ark?"

To which mountain is the Samaritan woman referring? To Mount Gerizim—where the Samaritan temple was built.

John 4:20 (b), 21

. . . and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.

The woman talked about "our fathers." Jesus talked about *the* Father.

John 4:22

Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.

Why is salvation of—or through—the Jews? Because Jesus was a Jew, and salvation is through Him.

John 4:23 (a)

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth . . .

Could it be that the woman was not simply raising a theological question? Could it be she was also revealing a subconscious desire within? Could it be that her question was not meant to sidestep the issue of her five husbands, but that she was saying, "I want to worship—but where? And how? What does it mean to really worship?"

When I was growing up, people basically had to choose between worshiping the Lord in spirit, and worshiping the Lord in truth. If they wanted to worship the Lord in spirit, they would go to churches where they would hear statements like, "Wow! Wasn't that a great service? The Spirit was moving so powerfully, the preacher didn't even have time to give a message!" If they wanted to worship the Lord in truth, they would go to churches that seemed to believe that the Trinity consisted of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Bible—churches where there was no room for the Spirit to work spontaneously or for the gifts to be exercised congregationally. That's what's neat about the time in which we live. There is an understanding that God must be worshiped in Spirit *and* truth. They flow together. It's not either/or. "The *words* which I speak are *spirit* and life," Jesus said (see John 6:63). It's true—as we take in the *Word,* we grow in the *Spirit.*

John 4:23 (b)

. . . for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

The Father *seeks* worshipers. If this verse isn't underlined in your Bible, underline it now. Whenever you feel far from God, don't try to find Him. Let Him find you. He can find you a lot easier than you can find Him, so just start worshiping. With bended knee, lifted hand, and open heart, embrace Him through your praise. This is a real key for your Christian walk. When you feel God's a million miles away, worship. If it's in your car during lunch hour, if it's locked in your bathroom when everyone else is still asleep, if it's walking down the street—whatever it might take, get away and start worshiping. Start

acknowledging the greatness and goodness of God. The Father is seeking those who do.

John 4:24

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

The combination is unbeatable. Worship Him in spirit *and* in truth.

John 4:25, 26

The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.

The first of Jesus' Ego Eimi (I AM) statements, the word "he" in verse 26 is absent in the original text. Some folks have the audacity to say Jesus never claimed to be Messiah. Turn them to this verse. Watch our Master as He witnesses. First, He establishes contact with the Samaritan. Then He stimulates curiosity by saying, "You've come to draw water; you're thirsty; let Me tell you about the living water available to you." Finally, He keeps focused. She wants to get off into a theological discussion. But He brings the conversation right back around again, saying that Jerusalem and Gerizim are not the issue, that her fathers are not the point. He brings the conversation back to Himself.

John 4:27

And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?

The disciples marveled but said nothing because, after spending time with Jesus, they had come to expect the unexpected.

John 4:28 (a)

The woman then left her waterpot . . .

Why did she leave her water pot? I suggest two possible reasons. The first is that it was an illustration. That which was previously important to her no

longer mattered. Second, perhaps she left her water pot out of appreciation. "You have told me about my sin and my need," said the woman. "You have told me about true worship. You want a cup of water? Take the whole pot. Take everything I have. It's Yours." When people truly get saved, they quit asking, "What can I get *from* God?" and ask instead, "What can I give *to* God?"

John 4:28 (b)

. . . and went her way into the city, and saith to the men,

You'll always know when someone's truly born again because, like a newborn baby, he'll start crying—proclaiming the Good News of the gospel to all who will listen. Why did the woman talk only to the men? Most likely it was because the other women would have nothing to do with her.

John 4:29

Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?

From "Jew" to "Sir" to "Prophet" to "Christ," we see the woman's understanding of Jesus expanding after spending only a few moments with Him.

John 4:30

Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.

This woman, whose morality was suspect at best, said, "There's a Man who told me everything I've ever done." Thus, it was, no doubt, with a certain degree of apprehension they wanted to find out just how much He knew about them as well.

John 4:31–33

In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat?

When the disciples arrived with food, Jesus was no longer hungry because He had experienced revival, refreshment, and renewal as a result of reaching

out.

John 4:34

Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.

"My meat," said Jesus—"that which sustains, refreshes, and nourishes Me—is to do My Father's will and to finish His work."

John 4:35

Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.

See with me in your mind's eye the Samaritan men to whom the women had witnessed coming toward Jesus, dressed in turbans and robes of white. What harvest was white and ready to reap? To which harvest was Jesus referring? The field of the Samaritans. The same is true today. The people in our culture who are ignored and forgotten, those no one else wants to be around, those others we pass by are the ones who are ripe for the picking. We say, "How can we win the quarterback of the high-school football team or the president of the company for Christ?" But the real action lies with the Samaritans—the people others aren't interested in, the people who won't help our business or gain us a reputation in ministry. I am not negating the importance of sharing with those whom the world esteems highly. Yet here we see our Lord's wisdom in gleaning from a field that was already ripe.

John 4:36–38

And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.

Because the Samaritans were a broken people, despicable in the eyes of the Jews, barred from the temple—the soil for their salvation had already been

tilled and cultivated. Truly, they were ready for harvest. The same is still true today. The harvest is ready. Go out and pick it.

"He that winneth souls is wise," Solomon declared (Proverbs 11:30). Daniel said the one who turns many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever (Daniel 12:3). Jesus says he who reaps presently shall receive wages eternally.

"I don't care about that," you say. "Heaven is too far away. I've got enough problems now. I have to mow my lawn, clean my house, buy a car." If those are your priorities, if that's what you're living for, if that's where your energy is going, you will become exhausted. Those pursuits will not fulfill you here on earth—and when you get to heaven, you'll be bankrupt.

"But it's so tough to witness," you say.

Find the Samaritans. Reach out to the unlovely, to the unlovable, to the ignored person where you work. Reach out and you'll see they're prime for harvest.

John 4:39

And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did.

Previously, Jesus used masterful metaphors, perfect parallels in His gentle yet convicting presentation of the gospel. But the woman? She was simple and untrained—just like me. While I long to be more like Jesus as a masterful witness, I also realize that even in very simple, straightforward testimony, there will be fruit. I don't need to be intimidated when I can't answer questions or come up with the right illustrations. I can join the Samaritan woman and say, "Come and see," for Scripture records that *many* believed because of her simple testimony.

John 4:40, 41

So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word.

Many believed because of the simple testimony of the woman and many *more* believed when Jesus Himself began to share more fully the Scriptures and

the truths of the kingdom.

John 4:42

And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

"Jew," "Sir," "Prophet," "Christ," and finally "Savior of the world." The Samaritans understood Jesus was not only the Messiah for the Jews, but a Savior for all of humanity—even for them.

John 4:43, 44

Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee. For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country.

It must have been hard for Jesus to leave the revival in Samaria—where people were responding and folks were getting saved—to return to Galilee, where He knew He would not be received in the same way. Why, then, did He go to Galilee? Matthew 4:12–16 gives us a clue. You see, the prophet Isaiah predicted Messiah would go into the dark region called "Galilee of the nations." Truly, it was an area of darkness and death, for not only was Galilee far removed from Jerusalem, the center of worship, it was also constantly attacked and overrun by Gentiles. Yet Isaiah prophesied that when Messiah came, He would go to this very place and shine brightly (Isaiah 9:1, 2).

Therefore, I believe Jesus returned to Galilee because He understood what the Word said about His ministry. Think through this with me. The Scriptures to Jesus were not only predictive, but directive. That is, when Jesus read the Scriptures, He found not only predictions *about* His ministry, but direction *for* His ministry. As He matured in His understanding, He realized increasingly that the prophecies written *about* Him must be fulfilled *by* Him. Thus, Jesus was not just a hearer of the Word, He was the quintessential Doer of the Word. The great need for the church corporately as well as for you and me personally is not just to be hearers of the Scriptures but to *do* them. Jesus would later say, "Happy are ye if ye do these things" (John 13:17). Happiness does not come from hearing Scripture or agreeing with theology. Happiness comes when we get it in gear and carry out the things the Word directs us to do.

John 4:45

Then when he was come into Galilee, the Galilaeans received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast.

The Galileans received Jesus as a curious miracle-worker—but not as their Savior. They were not interested in who He was, but only in what He could do.

John 4:46

So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.

This nobleman was popular, prominent, and powerful—a courtier in Herod's court. Yet the saying of Jesus' day is still true today: "The black camel of grief kneels at every man's gate." It doesn't matter how rich, powerful, or successful one might be. Sooner or later, we all experience sorrow and tragedy.

John 4:47

When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death.

The nobleman besought Jesus. The idea in the Greek is that he begged Jesus to come and heal his son.

John 4:48

Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.

While the Samaritans simply heard His word and believed (verse 42), the Galilaeans needed miracles, signs, and wonders to believe.

John 4:49, 50 (a)

The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth.

In Matthew 8, another Gentile nobleman—a Roman centurion—faced sickness in his house. He too was a man of prominence and political power. He too lived in the region of Capernaum. He too came to Jesus. But there the similarities end. "My son is dying," said the Roman centurion.

"I'll come to your house and heal him," said Jesus.

"Oh, I'm not worthy to have you come into my house," protested the centurion. "Just speak the word."

And Jesus marveled at the centurion's faith. Contrast this with the account here in John 4, wherein the nobleman directed Jesus to go to his house. Although Jesus did indeed heal his son, He didn't comply with the nobleman's order to go to his house. I wonder how often we are guilty of the nobleman's error—of giving directions to Jesus.

"Okay, Lord, there are the bills, here is the need, and this is what You need to do to make it happen."

"There he is. I'm single and so is he. Let's get this relationship going, Lord."

"Lord, this is a great business opportunity. So bless it by next Monday."

We have a tendency to give instructions and directions. But that is not the finest and highest way to approach our Lord. The centurion in Matthew 8 was a much wiser, deeper man. He simply said, "Lord, here's the situation." Period. No directions. No instructions. No advice.

And Jesus said, "I'll respond to that."

John 4:50 (b)

And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.

In fairness to our brother, the nobleman, when the Lord said, "Go your way," he went his way. His wasn't the same quality of faith as the centurion's, but it was a high degree of faith nonetheless.

John 4:51, 52

And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.

The implication here is fascinating because the distance from Cana to Capernaum being only a four-hour walk means that when the nobleman heard Jesus say his son would be well, he didn't go straight home. My tendency would have been to jog home, to rush home, to run home and see. But to this man's credit, he heard the word and didn't show up until the next day—which means he believed the Word he heard. How stress-free and happy you and I could be if we too would just read the Word and believe it.

John 4:53

So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house.

I like this because, although his faith was rather feeble initially, once he heard the Word of Jesus, the nobleman embraced it wholeheartedly. As I have observed families, I have found that when Dad becomes a believer, almost without exception, the whole household will come into real faith. "As for me and my house," said Joshua, "we will serve the Lord" (see Joshua 24:15). How I encourage and bless you men who are taking that kind of stand. You watch. Your family will follow. That's what happened here.

John 4:54

This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judaea into Galilee.

The first miracle performed in Cana when Jesus turned water into wine was at a time of family celebration. Here, His second miracle was performed at a time of family devastation. Whether you are experiencing times of gladness or times of sadness, Jesus is the Man for the moment. Whether celebration or devastation, a wedding party or a funeral gathering, Jesus is the One you can count on, look to, and receive from miraculously.

5 Before looking at the following story with regard to its practical application, I would like us to consider its theological implications, for in it we find a clear picture of the impotency of tradition and organized religion. . . .

John 5:1 (a)
After this there was a feast of the Jews . . .

The feast referred to is most likely the Feast of Pentecost—the celebration of the giving of the law.

John 5:1 (b)
. . . and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

No matter from which direction or elevation one traveled, it was always "up" to Jerusalem because Jerusalem was where the temple was, where worship took place, where the Word was taught.

John 5:2 (a)
Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market . . .

The very location speaks of Judaism, of the law, of men's traditions—for it was through the sheep gate that sacrifices were brought into the city of Jerusalem.

John 5:2 (b)
. . . a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda . . .

Although for years critics doubted its existence, the site of the pool of Bethesda, which means "House of Mercy," has been confirmed archaeologically and is today a must-see site of the Holy Land.

John 5:2 (c)
. . . having five porches.

The pool had five porches—a covered "deck" on each side and one across the middle. Five speaks of the Pentateuch—the first five books of the law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. With one of the covered porches extending across the pool, the pool itself created a physical likeness to the stone tablets Moses brought down from Sinai. Thus, the pool portrays a perfect picture of the law.

John 5:3 (a)
In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk . . .

Bible teacher J. Vernon McGee visited a sanitarium many years ago, where, during the Sunday morning devotional service, one of the residents read this passage as, "There lay a great multitude of important folk." McGee was about to correct him, when he realized the man was right. The people at the pool of Bethesda *were* important folk.

John 5:3 (b)
. . . of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

When people are spiritually blind, they are also "halt." That is, no matter what rules and regulations, ordinances and laws are placed upon them, they cannot walk in righteousness or freedom. And because they are "halt," they are also "withered"—unable to reach out practically, unable to give lasting and beneficial assistance to those who are hurting. Blind, halt, and withered is a description of the condition of every culture globally and of you and me personally without Jesus. If we are not reborn, if the Spirit of Christ does not dwell in us, we will not see; we will not walk uprightly; we will not reach out with impact. Many lay by the pool, sheltered and covered, but not healed. So, too, although religion can shelter people with good values and disciplines, it cannot save them.

John 5:4 (a)
For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water . . .

Kolumbethra, the Greek word translated "pool," is a very precise term that means "a deep pool from underneath that comes bubbling." Thus, it would seem

that the stirring of the water was due to the occasional eruption of an underground spring. "But doesn't the text say an angel came down?" you ask. Yes, but I believe that is a quote. You see, Greek text has no quotation marks. If it did, I believe this phrase would be enclosed in them as reference to the conventional wisdom of the day.

John 5:4 (b)

. . . whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

Tradition said the first one in the pool after the water stirred would be healed. That's what the law, religion, and man's regulations always say. "Be the first. Be the best. Try harder. Fight your way to the top. God helps those who help themselves."

John 5:5 (a)

And a certain man was there . . .

Jesus singled out one man, just as Israel—one of many nations—was singled out by God to be His people.

John 5:5 (b)

. . . which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.

This man was lame for thirty-eight years, just as Israel wandered in the wilderness for thirty-eight years (Deuteronomy 2:14).

John 5:6, 7 (a)

When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool . . .

To whom did Jesus come? Not to those closest to the edge of the pool, but to the one who was clear at the back, farthest out of the way. He came not to the aggressor, the initiator, the leader—but to the one who was the least competitive of them all.

John 5:7 (b)

. . . but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.

"Every time I try to get up, someone else gets there first." Maybe you can relate. You're just about to get a break in business or in a relationship, but someone comes along and beats you to it. You who, like me, have a tendency to be competitive, please note the fact that Jesus was not interested in helping the lame man be the first one into the pool. His purpose was to take him out of the competition altogether.

John 5:8, 9

Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.

The picture is perfect. Jesus comes and delivers a man in the place of competition and tradition, rules and regulations. Jesus delivered the one who was lame, withered, and unable to get the help he so desperately needed. The lame man was delivered not by "a man to help him," but by the Son of Man who saved him.



For topical study of John 5:8 entitled "Read Your Bible," turn to page **477**.

John 5:10

The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.

Rather than rejoicing that a man was healed, the Jews were upset that he was carrying his bed. You see, Jewish law said a man could bear no burden on the Sabbath. This meant he could not wear a wooden leg or even his false teeth. Thus, you can imagine the outrage of the Jews at seeing a man flaunting his disobedience by carrying his bed.

John 5:11, 12

He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?

Isn't this amazing? I mean, here's a guy, lame for thirty-eight years, suddenly walking around—and the clergy is uptight and upset. In all fairness, however, although the violation of tradition might not be a point of contention for you and me, we get just as upset when Jesus violates our expectations—when He doesn't work the way we are claiming, believing, praying, or demanding. We have our own arena of anger. It's not tradition. It's expectation. "Now, Lord," we say, "we fasted. We spoke the Word. We believed. But You didn't come through—and we're ticked off." Oh, we might not say it that straightforwardly, but when Jesus blows apart our expectations—just as He blew apart Jewish tradition—we can get angry.

John 5:13 (a)

And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away . . .

Why didn't the lame man know who healed him? Was it because Jesus was busy posing for publicity pictures? No. Was it because He was talking to His agents about appearing on the cover of *Judaism Today?* No. Was it because He was giving an interview on Christian radio? No. The man didn't know who healed him because Jesus had simply left the scene. I really like this. After enabling a man to do the impossible, Jesus splits.

John 5:13 (b)

. . . a multitude being in that place.

If indeed this event took place during the Feast of Pentecost, all of Jerusalem would have been packed with people.

John 5:14 (a)

Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple . . .

To this man's credit, he wasn't on the testimony circuit, saying, "I was lying there when suddenly I perceived a Power on the deck with me, and with great

faith, I embraced His word." No, he humbly went to the temple to worship God. And Jesus met him there. So, too, you will discover that the Lord meets you in the place of praise. You will often find the Lord has just the word you need to hear or just the touch you need to feel when you come to the house of prayer. Quite frankly, it's hard for me as a pastor to hear people say, "I just don't sense the Lord. I just don't feel Him," when I know they haven't been to Bible study for months or at the Lord's table for weeks. I *know* the Lord will find them if, like this man, they'll just go to the temple—to the house of prayer, to the place of praise.

John 5:14 (b)

. . . and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.

Many scholars believe this man's lameness was caused by a sexually transmitted disease. Whether or not this was the case, Jesus' warning was very pointed and practical. He didn't say, "Behold, you're made whole. Now call My secretary for therapy." No, He said, "You've been made whole. Now don't sin anymore. Walk in a new way."

John 5:15, 16 (a)

The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him . . .

The war is escalating. Tensions are mounting. And because Jesus violated their traditions, the Jews are seeking to destroy Him. So, too, some, even in our midst, have turned their back on Jesus because He violated their expectations. These things are written as a warning to me. Because He is Lord, and I am not, He can sovereignly touch whoever He wants on the deck of lameness and say, "Rise. Take up your bed. Walk." Therefore, if I try to instruct him, or order Him, like the nobleman in the preceding chapter, I will hear Him say, "No. You've got it wrong, Jon. I'm the Lord. You're the servant. I want you to share your heart with Me, and cast all your burdens upon Me. But be careful you don't start advising, demanding from, or directing Me."

Allow the Lord to be the Lord, gang. Be like the centurion in Matthew 8. Say, "Lord, here's the situation. Now just speak the Word, and what You want

will happen."

John 5:16 (b)
. . . because he had done these things on the sabbath day.

The Jews sought to slay Jesus for desecrating the Sabbath, when, in actuality, they themselves were guilty of distorting the Sabbath. You see, the true Sabbath is not based upon inaction, but upon satisfaction; not upon simply refraining from work, but upon rejoicing in work well done. When God the Father took a Sabbath break after six days of activity, He looked at all He had made and saw it was very good (Genesis 1:31). Thus, because He was satisfied with His work, He rested from His work. This allowed us the glorious freedom to follow His lead and say, "Lord, through Your grace, You've blessed. And now I am going to rest."

John 5:17 (a)
But Jesus answered them . . .

At this point, as tension is heightened and the war is at hand, Jesus gives an incredible, insightful, and important defense of why He could blow apart Jewish traditions, of why He was not bound by religious systems, of why He did what He did. Jesus lived the most attractive, powerful, beautiful, joyful, wonderful life ever lived. There was a quality about Him, a joy emanating from Him, a peace within Him, a love flowing through Him that attracted the common people to Him like moths to a flame (Mark 12:37). When He said He had come that they might have life abundantly (John 10:10), no one challenged him, saying, "Why don't we see abundant life in You?" No, so abundant was Jesus' life that people left everything to be near Him.

Hebrews goes on to say Jesus was anointed with the oil of gladness "more than any of His fellows" (1:9). That is, He had a gladness about Him unparalleled in any other person. Truly, whoever looks at the Lord cannot help but be impressed with Him. One would think the secret to such attractiveness, effectiveness, and joy would be very complex. One would think that Jesus must have understood esoteric mysteries and implemented difficult methodology. But such is not the case, for in the remainder of the chapter, we see the simplicity of the secret Jesus understood that produced in Him the life that was so successful and so beautiful. What was this secret? In the following defense, we see not

only why Jesus healed on the Sabbath, but the very foundational principle that governed His entire life: His relationship with His Father.

If I were to question you about the defining principle of your life, you might say, "It's my ministry," or "It's my family," or, "It's this vision," or, "It's this attempt to see the kingdom grow." But as valid as those things might be, they are insignificant in comparison to your relationship with the Father. That's all there is—no other agenda, no other ministry, no other vision, no other priority. Jesus was so focused on His relationship with His Father that nothing else mattered. As a result, everything else fell into place beautifully. His life was fruitful. His relationships were special. His ministry was bountiful. In the following passage, we see eight statements Jesus makes about His relationship with His Father. . . .

John 5:17 (b)

. . . My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

1. *Reflection of the Father.* Truly, the Father works on the Sabbath. The sun rises; rain falls; crops grow; life is sustained. Furthermore, God's Sabbath was "broken" in Genesis 3:8 when He went on a rescue mission to track down Adam and Eve after they had eaten the forbidden fruit. In order to help them, the Father broke the Sabbath He Himself had established. With that in mind, here Jesus is saying, "The reason I do what I do is not based on doctrine, philosophy, or tradition. The issue is singular: My Father works on the Sabbath and I simply reflect Him."

John 5:18

Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.

The phrase "making himself equal with God" employs a present perfect tense verb, which means Jesus was continually making Himself equal with God. Regardless of what the Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, or the Way International declare, the fact is, those who heard Jesus knew He was claiming deity. That's why they were out to kill Him.

John 5:19 (a)

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do . . .

2. *Contact with the Father.* Why could "the Son do nothing of Himself "? Because in Philippians 2, Paul declares Jesus emptied Himself of all powers, privileges, and abilities He had enjoyed previously in order to become a Man just like you and me, yet without sin.

"Well, what about all of those miracles He did?" you ask.

Jesus performed miracles only because He was in contact with His Father and empowered by the Spirit in the exact same way we can be. You see, in the Garden of Eden, the forbidden fruit came from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And once man ate of the knowledge of good and evil, he said, "I know what's good and what's evil, what's right and what's wrong. I can intellectually figure it out." In so doing, he became independent of the simple childlike relationship that asks, "Father, what about this? Father, should I do that?"

How do you know from which tree you're eating? It's so simple! Do you pray? That's the whole issue. If I pray, I'm saying, "Father, I'm not sure what's right here, and I just pray Your will be done, that You will nudge me in the right direction, that You will inspire my thoughts, that You will guard my heart." If you're praying today—just today—then you're on the right course. But if you haven't prayed today, it's indicative of pride because you think you can pull it off by yourself. Have you eaten of the forbidden fruit today? There's no condemnation, but how I pray you might move into maturation and say, "Lord, I'm tired of thinking I know what to do." The solution is simply prayer.

John 5:19 (b), 20

. . .For what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.

3. *Security in the Father.* What a day you will have if, like Jesus, you'll simply say, "The Father loves me and shows me everything necessary for me to navigate through this day successfully. And I know He's going to show me greater things down the road." How simple your life will be if you find your security not in what your spouse, the crowds, or society thinks of you, but in

what the Father thinks of you. How does the Father feel about you? When you were your most rotten and vile, God said, "I'm so in love with you that I am going to send My Son to die for you (Romans 5:8). Why did the Father send the Son? Why didn't He die for us Himself? He did. He was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). When the Son, pinned to the Cross, cried out, "My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken Me?" the Father felt the pain, the Father felt the agony, and something in the Father was dying at the same time, for God was *in* Christ, reconciling the world to Himself. How dare you or I say, "I'm not sure God loves me." God demonstrated His love for us conclusively in that while we were dirty, rotten, foul sinners, He died for each of us personally.

> **John 5:21–26**
>
> **For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.**

4. *Harmony with the Father.* "The Father raises the dead, so I too raise the dead," declared Jesus. This would be a mindblower to the Jews who taught that God alone is the keeper of three keys: the key to the heavens, which He uses when rain falls (Deuteronomy 28:12); the key to the womb, which He uses when a couple conceives (Genesis 30:2); and the key to the grave, which He used when the dry bones came to life (Ezekiel 37). But here comes Jesus, saying, "I have the same key. Just as the Father opens the grave and gives life, so do I. Just as the Father receives honor, so must I. If you don't honor Me with the same honor you give Him, then you're not honoring Him at all." This is a good passage to use when talking to the cultist because all cults diminish Jesus. All cults make Him a created being, less than the Father.

John 5:27–29

And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

Why does the Father let Jesus do the judging? Because Jesus walked in the same places we walk. He was tempted in all points like you and me (Hebrews 4:15). "I'm in harmony with the Father," said Jesus. "I do the same things the Father does—including judging."

John 5:30

I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

5. *Submission to the Father.* Jesus had no program, no agenda, no vision other than the Father's will. I challenge us to live each day saying, "My only desire is simply to do the will of the Father—not to make it easier on myself or better for my family; not to find more fulfillment in what I do personally or to establish myself financially. I just want to do the Father's will by the power of the Spirit within Me."

John 5:31–36

If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved. He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.

6. *Validation from the Father.* "My validation comes not from Myself. John the Baptist told you I am the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (see

John 1:29). If that's not good enough for you, look at the works I'm doing, the miracles happening. Yet even they aren't the issue, for ultimately the validation for what I do comes from the Father Himself."

John 5:37, 38

And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.

The Father validated the Son when He said, "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased," (Matthew 3:17). And that's the key. Jesus' validation came not from John the Baptist, nor even from His own works. It came directly from the Father. Is your validation coming from your own accomplishments, or from others patting you on the back? It'll never be enough. You'll always be one pat shy of satisfaction. Validation for your life will not come from someone pointing out how good you are. Nor will it come from your own achievements. True validation comes when you hear the voice of the Father in your heart, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant." That's the only validation that brings security, satisfaction, and stability. That's the only validation that will make your life attractive, fruitful, and effective.

John 5:39

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

The Greek word translated "search" is *ereu nao,* which means "to track the scent"—like a lion, or a bloodhound. That's the way to study Scripture: Follow the scent of the blood. Sniff out the scarlet thread of the Cross. Look for Jesus.

John 5:40–43 (a)

And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. I receive not honour from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not . . .

"You study the Scripture doctrinally," Jesus said, "but you've missed the point entirely because you've missed Me."

John 5:43 (b)

. . . if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.

Here Jesus is referring to the peacemaker, the Middle East problem-solver, the anti-Christ who will come in his own name and who will be embraced by the world.

John 5:44

How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?

7. *Concern about the Father.* Jesus cared only about the honor that came from the Father—not the honor that came from men. That's why He was free to fulfill the Father's will. Solomon was right when he said that the fear of man will trip you up, but the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 29:25; 9:10). Jesus could say, "Father, I've finished the work You gave Me to do, and I've glorified You" (John 17:4) because He sought honor from God rather than man.

John 5:45, 46

Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.

8. *Silence before the Father.* To those who were out to kill Him, Jesus said, "All of the sacrifices and prophecies Moses wrote of in the Pentateuch were about Me. Therefore, I don't need to accuse you before the Father. There is no need for Me to tattle or whine. The Word has condemned you already. Moses nailed you totally."

John 5:47

But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?

Here's a simple experiment: Go through the next twenty-four hours saying, "I want to be a reflection *of* the Father in every conversation, in every encounter. I'm going to depend *on* the Father, making no decisions without prayer. My security is *in* the Father. I'm going to believe He loves me because He proved it on Calvary. I'm going to be in harmony *with* the Father, just doing

what I see Him do. I will be submitted *to* the Father, doing nothing on the basis of my own will. My validation will come only *from* the Father. I won't be fishing for compliments, or looking for approval from men. My only concern will be *about* the Father—not what the world says about me, not what my friends think of me, but only how the Father sees me. I will be silent *before* the Father, resting in the sufficiency and potency of His Word."

Fellow adventurers on this spiritual pilgrimage, if you try this tomorrow, you will find tomorrow to be the most successful, wonderful, powerful, fruitful day of your life. My prayer is that some of us might make such a discovery and be set free from agendas, vision, and even ministry—to live for the Father and for Him only.

READ YOUR BIBLE

A Topical Study of JOHN 5:8

Sitting on a park bench, looking rather glum, Linus said to Charlie Brown, "Sometimes it seems like life has passed me by. Do you ever feel that way?"

Charlie looked at Linus and said, "No. Life has knocked me down, and keeps walking all over me."

As we look at Jesus' words, I think you'll find them intriguing as they relate to you personally in areas where, like Charlie Brown or the lame man in our text, you feel walked on, hurt, or defeated.

Rise

Jesus came to the lame man and said, “I’m going to ask you to do the impossible. Stand up.” You see, Christ’s words work His will. Truly, God’s commandments are God’s “enablements.” The very word “rise” would enable the lame man to do the impossible. Just because Jesus said it, there would be the power to do it.

Take Up Your Bed

Make no provision for failure. Don't say, "I'll leave my bed here to save my place on the deck in case it doesn't work out." If you have been in bondage to anything that seems to have a grip on your life, the word of Christ comes to you today, and says, "Take up your bed. Make no provision for failure. Don't keep a video stored in your bottom drawer just in case you get a craving again. Don't keep a six-pack tucked away in the back of the pantry in case you might want a sip or two or three. Don't keep his phone number just in case no one else calls you for the next three weeks. Make no provision for failure."

Walk

No one will carry you. When will Christians learn this lesson? Like the lame man, we think we need help from man—from a counselor, a psychologist, or a Christian therapist. "Where is someone to disciple me, pray for me, study with me?" we cry. The lame man had a choice to make. He could either obey the word of Christ, or argue that it wouldn't work for him. So can we. But when we finally realize no man is going to carry us, we will find Jesus is all we needed all along. Corrie Ten Boom was right: You will never discover Christ is all you need until Christ is all you have.

"Well," you say, "if Jesus was here in the flesh as He was with the lame man, I too would walk. But He's no longer in the midst of us. We can no longer hear from Him directly."

Really? Jesus says, "Lo I come in the volume of the book" (see Hebrews 10:7). He is here, gang—not only through His Spirit residing in you, but in the Bible open before you. Read your Bible—and you will hear words that will speak to you personally and specifically.

People are no longer reading the Scriptures. They're too busy saying, "What man is going to help me? What clinic is going to assist me? What pastor is going to solve the problem for me?"

Read your Bible. Peter says, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in this world through lust" (see 2 Peter 1:4). Everything we need to escape the sickness and sadness of this world is found in the exceedingly great and precious promises of the Bible. Yet people don't read their Bibles. They'll drive fifty minutes to go to a thirty-minute counseling appointment but won't spend fifteen minutes in the Word. It's a tragedy. God has clearly said that the one who is meditating in the Word will bring forth fruit, will never shrivel up, and will prosper in all he does (Psalm 1). Yet the top-rated religious broadcasters are no longer Bible teachers. They're psychologists. People flock to the seminars, videos, and books of those who say, "The key is psychology and human understanding. Yes, we're Christians. But Scripture is not totally sufficient. We need to talk to you about how to raise your kids, how to communicate, how to be successful based upon psychology."

Can those things be helpful? Perhaps. Are they necessary? No. The Scriptures are all-sufficient, for they speak of Christ, point to Christ, and bring us to Christ. *Stay* in the Scriptures, gang. Read your Bible! Check out Psalm 19:7–9, and you will see six descriptions and six effects of the Word of God in one's life. . . .

1. *The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting—or restoring—the soul* (verse 7). The law speaks of the totality of the Word. From where does emotional or mental restoration come? Not from delving into or digging up our past. It comes from taking in the Word.

2. *The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple* (verse 7). The word "sure" means "solid." The word "simple" means "open-minded." Thus, the Word of God gives solid footing to those who would otherwise sink in the sands of open-minded naiveté. How solid is the Word? Peter declares it is even more sure, more solid than the voice of God he himself heard on the Mount of Transfiguration (2 Peter 1:18, 19).

3. *The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart* (verse 8). Studying the Word of God will make your heart happy. Jeremiah—who was cast into a pit, and whose ministry was seemingly unsuccessful—said, "Thy Word was found and I did eat it. And thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (see 15:16). Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, said, "You know where I find joy? In the Word of God."

4. *The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes* (verse 8). The commandments are pure—without flaw. They are workable, understandable, and powerful. How does one see clearly? Through the Word.

5. *The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever* (verse 9). The Word of God is not based upon a passing fad, pop culture, or humanistic understanding. It's clean—pure, straightforward, easy to grasp—and it lasts forever.

6. *The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether* (verse 9). We know in our heart of hearts that the Word is true. Our spirit confirms its veracity.

How can you be healed emotionally? How can you live in stability? How can you have joy experientially? How can you see clearly? How can you be guided continually? How can you find truth in totality? Through the Word, the Word, the Word. Period.

"I've tried that," you say. "But the Word has failed me."

Wrong. The Word hasn't failed. You have. You stopped reading your Bible. You stopped meditating on the Word of God. Movies and television, hobbies and other pursuits became more important than seeking God. The Scriptures have never failed a single person. People have failed the Scriptures. They've turned their back on the Word. They've diminished its priority. They've lost their passion. And they wonder why they're not enlightened, rejoicing, or enduring.

Whatever you do, precious people, don't fall into the trap of seeking a man to help you. Get back in the Word and seek the Lord. In Jeremiah 2:13, God indicts His people for committing two evils: "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." Christians all over the country are carving out cisterns that don't hold water. "Now you are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you," Jesus said (see John 15:3). "The words which I speak are spirit and life" (see John 6:63). We are cleansed by the washing of the water, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 5:26). It's the Word, the Word, the Word.

I realize I may have lost some people and made some enemies with this particular study. But I am more committed to speaking the truth, as difficult as it might be for some to receive, than I am to keeping the peace because I believe the church is being seduced by humanistic psychology. Such was not the case in previous generations.

Growing up in Depression-era Southern California, my mom cannot recall a single Christian counseling clinic. The term itself would have been oxymoronic. You see, in my mom's day, the Word of God was taught, altar calls were given, and people were convicted. They would kneel at the altar, weep before the Lord, repent from their sin, and go their way rejoicing. Today, people hear Bible studies, then go home, fire up the barbecue, watch the baseball game on

TV, and remain troubled inside. Four days later, they call a counselor—then wonder why they're not really helped.

I say this to pastors, elders, psychologists, social workers, and psychiatrists—to all who are involved with people: The key is to point people back to the Person of Jesus Christ. Tell them to get in the Word and do what it says. If that means turning off the TV or shutting down the barbecue to spend time seeking God, tell them to do it. Tell them to spend whatever time it takes to get to the point where rationalization and justification end and where true confession begins.

"Do you want to be made whole?" Why would Jesus ask this of a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years? Because some people want to stay lame. They're comfortable on the deck at Bethesda with their sunglasses, tanning oil, and Walkman. They don't have to take care of their families; they have no responsibilities; they cannot work because they're lame. So others take care of them and put up with them while they ignore the true healing available to them.

You might be living with marital strife, addiction to alcohol, or a fascination with pornography. You might have a tendency to lie, to gossip, or to lose your temper. Will you be made whole? Listen to the words of Jesus: Do the impossible. Make no provision for failure. And don't expect anyone to carry you.



6 In contrast to chapter 5 where we saw Jesus seeking an individual, as chapter 6 opens, we see a multitude seeking Jesus. . . .

John 6:1

After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias.

From Mark 6:31, we know that as the crowds began to gather around Him, Jesus didn't have time for leisure or even to eat. That is why He said to His disciples, "Come with Me and rest awhile." It's an invitation still needful today—for if we don't come apart with the Savior, we'll fall apart at the seams.

John 6:2–4

And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.

Although the disciples and Jesus ascended a mountain, the crowd tracked Him down—not so much because they wanted to be with Him, but because they were curious about Him. Having seen His miracles, they no doubt looked at Jesus either as a magician to entertain them or as a physician to assist them. The crowd followed Jesus for the wrong reasons. And it still does. The crowd mentality is still to manipulate the Lord for a personal, private agenda—to get something from Him rather than simply to be with Him.

John 6:5

When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?

I love this about our Lord! Even though the crowd followed Him for the wrong reason and would, in the space of the chapter, turn away from Him completely, Jesus still has compassion on them, for, as Mark's Gospel tells us, He looked on them as sheep without a shepherd (6:34). If you're a mom or dad, you know how this works. You know when your kids are coming to you for the wrong reasons—when their priorities are amiss or their motives are not right. But you also know you still love them and are there to tend them. So, too, every pastor, elder, or spiritual leader must realize that no matter how wrong people might be, it is never right to beat up on them, to come down on them, or to point a finger at them. When those in ministry say, "If it wasn't for these immature believers, things would really be happening at my church," it only shows that the speaker is not really a shepherd. A true shepherd will never beat the sheep, for he knows he is there to feed the flock. And anyone who tries to beat up on you will feel the wrath of this under-shepherd. I will not stand for it.

John 6:6

And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.

"Where shall we buy bread?" It's the only time Jesus appeared to ask for advice. Why did He ask Philip? In order to test him. So, too, Jesus puts us in situations where we feel there's no solution in order to show us our progress in the arena of faith.

John 6:7

Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.

Like a New Deal Democrat, Philip's first thought was that money would solve the problem. But after a quick survey of the situation, he knew the disciples didn't have enough money in their treasury to buy enough to even give folks a crumb.

Our country is $3.5 trillion in debt because we have the "Philip mentality" that money is the key. But there will always be a deficit because he who looks to mammon instead of to the Master will always come up short.

John 6:8, 9 (a)

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes . . .

Good job, Andrew! Andrew's a people person—always bringing folks to the Lord.

John 6:9 (b)

. . . but what are they among so many?

Andrew almost has it. "There's a boy here with some loaves and fishes, *but* . . ." How easily the word "but" creeps into our thinking. We are aware of the provision, but we start raising an objection when we look at the situation practically. I wonder how many times the Lord has brought us five barley loaves and two small fishes, but we failed to use them because we thought they were too small.

God used a small stone in a small sling to slay a huge giant (1 Samuel 17:50). He used a little maiden girl to lead a mighty Syrian general to the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 5). He used a little child to teach His disciples

(Matthew 18:2). The Lord seems to delight in using a little to do a lot. If you're feeling the need for a miracle—for something to break loose or something to take place—perhaps it's already in your hand. Perhaps it's already been entrusted to you. Yet, like Andrew, perhaps you are saying, "Let's be practical. How's this really going to work?"

John 6:10 (a)
And Jesus said, Make the men sit down.

Jesus didn't say to His disciples, "You bozos. Get out of the way and let Me do a miracle." No, He met them where they were and said, "Even though you don't have the faith to see what I can do with the little given to Me, I'll use you anyway. Could you make the people sit down? Could I use you in that way?" Luke's Gospel tells us the people sat down in groups of fifty (9:14). When the Good Shepherd feeds His sheep, He does so decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Not only does Jesus feed His flock decently and orderly, but He feeds His flock carefully. Too often we have a "drive-thru" perspective of devotions. "Okay, Lord, I've got six minutes before I have to be out the door," we say as we flip open the Scriptures and expect to be fed. It doesn't happen that way. Not usually. As He did here, the Lord would have us not only sit down, but slow down.

John 6:10 (b), 11
Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.

The bread kept coming and coming. And the disciples kept serving and serving. It's astounding to me how many commentators try to nullify this miracle with ridiculous explanations. Some suggest it wasn't a genuine feeding of five thousand, but rather a kind of Communion service, where everyone was given a tiny piece of bread and a tiny piece of fish. Others say that, because in Jesus' day men had long, billowing sleeves wherein they would carry their lunches, when they knew Jesus was looking for some food to share, they tightened their

sleeves. Then, when they became convicted by the willingness of a little boy who shared his lunch, everyone opened his sleeves and shared in a big potluck. Nonsense!



***For topical study of John 6:5–11 entitled "Facing Frustration," turn to page* 488.**

John 6:12 (a)
When they were filled . . .

The Greek word translated "filled" means "glutted." What Jesus did wasn't a trick, a gimmick, or a potluck. It was a miracle.

John 6:12 (b), 13
. . . he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.

I like this because it is true that even when our faith is faltering or lacking, if we will simply obediently do what the Lord tells us to do, even our small and insignificant actions will be multiplied and blessed. In obedience to the Lord's command, the disciples simply made the multitude sit down and then distributed the food. The result? Not only were the disciples fed along with the multitude, but there were twelve baskets left over—one for each of them. That's why we're always encouraging each other to get involved in serving, in sharing, in ministry. It's when you do what the Lord sets before you—no matter how mundane it might appear—that, along with those you serve, you receive a full basket as well.

John 6:14
Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.

In Deuteronomy 18, Moses prophesied that a prophet would come who was like, but greater than, himself. Those who witnessed the miracle that had just taken place thought surely Jesus must be the prophet of whom Moses spoke.

John 6:15

When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.

Although the crowd referred to Jesus as a prophet in verse 14 and they desired to make Him a king in verse 15, what they failed to acknowledge was that their real need was for a priest. Jesus, the Christos, the Christ, the Anointed One would not only be the promised Prophet and the King of kings. He would also have to be the great High Priest who would lay down His own life as a sacrifice for the sin of mankind. Thus, perceiving the crowd's misconception as to who He was and what He was about, Jesus withdrew.

John 6:16, 17 (a)

And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea, and entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum.

Perhaps it was to turn the focus of His disciples to a spiritual rather than an earthly kingdom that Jesus distanced His disciples from the crowd by sending them to Capernaum.

John 6:17 (b)

And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.

Maybe, like the disciples, you're at a point in your life where it's dark and you don't sense the presence of the Lord at all. Know this: Omnipotence can afford to wait.

John 6:18

And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew.

Jesus is not only the Savior *in* the storm but also the sender *of* the storm. And, just as He did with His disciples, He will send you into a storm knowingly

and lovingly if He sees you're about to get pulled into the mentality of the crowd.

John 6:19, 20

So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid.

In the midst of your own struggling and toiling, Jesus knows the perfect time to come to you and whisper in your ear, "It is I. Be not afraid." But it won't be a minute too early, and it won't be a moment too late.

John 6:21 (a)

Then they willingly received him into the ship . . .

Jesus didn't jump into the disciples' boat. He didn't force Himself on board. The disciples received Him willingly. So, too, I can either say, "Nice to see You, Lord, but I'm going to bring this thing to shore myself," or, like the disciples, I can willingly and wisely welcome Him into my boat.

John 6:21 (b)

. . . and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.

If the Lord has sent you into a storm and then seen you through that storm, don't go back to the same stuff that caused the storm to be sent in the first place. Turn away. Say, "Lord, that storm almost sunk me. My marriage almost dissolved. My business almost went under. My kids were almost wiped out. It seemed so dark and impossible. But You came my way and told me to be of good cheer. You said You were still there, and You saw me through. Lord, I acknowledge that it's You who sent the storm, and it's You who stilled the storm. Therefore, I will not continue on that course one more day."

***For topical study of John 6:15–21 entitled "Sender of the Storm," turn to page* 490.**

John 6:22–24

The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one whereinto his disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with his disciples into the boat, but that his disciples were gone away alone; (Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks:) When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus.

Realizing Jesus was no longer among them, the day after the feeding of the five thousand, the multitude began to look for Jesus in Capernaum—not to simply be with Him, but, as we will see, to get something from Him.

John 6:25, 26

And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither? Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.

The multitude asked Jesus when He had come. Rather than answering them directly, Jesus dealt with the issue of why *they* had come, as if to say, "You came here not because you saw the meaning of the miracle, but because you wanted another free lunch."

John 6:27 (a)

Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you . . .

All of us realize material things are going to perish eventually, but Jesus says they're perishing even presently. If you're laboring for something in this world—be it anything from a reputation to some kind of physical satisfaction—it will never work. It's cotton candy. You bite into it but there's no substance. Whatever it is you're striving for won't fill you up because everything this side of heaven lacks solidity.

> Ninety-six percent of your body is nothing, zip, zero. It's true. Your body is made up of atoms, which, in turn, are made up of protons, neutrons, and electrons. Considering that the distance between the protons and neutrons of the nucleus, and the electrons outside the nucleus is proportionately greater than the distance from the sun to the farthest planet, Pluto, we're talking a lot of empty space!

Our bodies are space. Yet we pamper them, all the while wondering why we're so spaced-out and discontent. The materialistic person doesn't understand that reality lies in the spirit. He doesn't understand that if, instead of looking to the physical, he would labor for true spiritual food, he would be satisfied presently and rewarded eternally. Next time you feel a craving for something earthly, let me suggest something infinitely better: Get in touch with reality. Spend time seeking that which is everlasting. Come into the presence of the Lord with praise and worship. You're not truly craving the video or the hot fudge sundae. You're not craving the sporting event or the bigger car. What you're really craving is the everlasting food found only in the pursuit and enjoyment of God.

The Lord isn't sternly pointing His finger, saying, "Labor not for the meat that perishes." He's saying, "To live life fully, don't get caught up in laboring for things—physical things, relational things, material things. Instead, put your energy and focus on that which leads to life everlasting."

John 6:27 (b)

. . . for him hath God the Father sealed.

In Jesus' day, a baker would put his seal on the loaves of bread he baked. Thus, in using this terminology, Jesus is saying, "I bear the imprint of God the Father."

John 6:28, 29

Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

"What must we do to do the *works* of God?" the crowd asked.

"The *work* of God is singular," Jesus answered. "It is that you believe on Me."

John 6:30

They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work?

"What sign can You give us to prove You indeed are the One whom the Father has sent?" asked the crowd. Only the day before, Jesus had miraculously fed five thousand. But the crowd asked for another sign because miracles never produce lasting faith.

John 6:31

Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat.

Could it be that, as their stomachs were growling after their journey to Capernaum, the crowd is saying, "We're hungry. Give us something to eat—as Moses did"?

John 6:32

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.

"Moses didn't provide the manna in the wilderness. It came from My Father," said Jesus.

John 6:33

For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.

Jesus was speaking of something infinitely greater than manna. He was speaking of Himself.

John 6:34

Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.

Like the woman in John 4 who asked for living water in order that she would no longer have to draw from the well, the crowd failed to understand that Jesus was not speaking in terms of the physical, but of the spiritual; not of the temporal, but of the eternal.

John 6:35–40

And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

"I understand who Jesus is," you say, "and I understand what's being said. But I'm one who has been laboring for meat that perishes."

I have good news for you! Jesus says, "Of all which has been given to Me, I will lose *nothing*." Check out verse 12. Jesus said, "Gather up the fragments—the crumbs." That's me. You might feel "crumb-y," insignificant, or fragmented. But Jesus says, "The called will understand My message, and *none* shall be lost."

You gotta love the Lord for speaking the truth in not only telling us how to live, but also saying, "Even when you fail, I've still got you and I'm going to see you through."



***For topical study of John 6:35 entitled "Jesus: the I AM," turn to page* 493.**

John 6:41

The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven.

When the manna was given in the wilderness, what did the people do? They murmured (Exodus 17:3). And now they're murmuring once more in response to Jesus' statement that He is the "bread sent from heaven."

John 6:42 (a)

And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?

The crowd was, of course, wrong. Jesus wasn't Joseph's son. He's God's Son.

John 6:42 (b), 43

. . . how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven? Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves.

"Murmur not," Jesus said. We have a saying that the squeaky wheel gets the grease. Consequently, murmuring and complaining are sort of acceptable to us. First Corinthians 10:10, however, teaches otherwise—for sometimes rather than getting the grease, the squeaky wheel gets replaced.

John 6:44–48

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life.

When the crowd said, "We know Him. He's the son of Joseph," Jesus didn't correct them because the real issue was that they simply believe that He is the "bread sent from heaven"—an impossible feat for them unless the Father drew them.

John 6:49–51

Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

The human being can survive longer on bread than on any other substance. Although it is baked in different ways and fixed in different forms, bread is truly cross-cultural. It's also extremely palatable, for most of us eat some sort of bread every day. But the most intriguing aspect about Jesus' identification with bread is the process by which bread is made. That is, a seed of grain is planted in the ground. After some weeks, it springs up and grows into maturity. Then it is cut down, ground up, and placed in the fire. After it is thoroughly baked, it is enjoyed by humanity.

That's exactly what happened to Jesus. A seed was planted in the womb of Mary miraculously. God Incarnate came forth and grew to maturity. He was cut down as He was pinned to the Cross; ground up as He was cursed and spat upon; and placed in the fire of God's wrath as He absorbed all of our sin. And because He had been planted, cut down, ground up, and burned in the very fire of God's wrath, you and I have the opportunity to eat of Him daily—never tiring of Him, always receiving strength and sustenance for the challenges of any given day. Truly, Jesus is the Bread of Life. The analogy is perfect.

John 6:52–58

The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.

As the Jews wondered what He meant, Jesus began to explain the absolute necessity of their taking this teaching and applying it personally. In other words, they would have to eat of His body or they would not live.

Biblically, we can understand what it means to eat of Jesus when we understand what happened to Adam and Eve when they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was after they ate the forbidden fruit that they fell because they no longer were completely and constantly dependent on the Father. You see, prior to the Fall, whenever they had questions, whenever they had problems, whenever there might be confusion, they said, "Father, what should we do?" But once they ate of the forbidden fruit, they became independent. They no longer talked to their Abba, their Papa, their Father. They said instead, "We know what's good. We know what's evil. We know how to handle this or accomplish that."

Here, Jesus says, "You've eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and it led to your fall. Now eat of Me, the Tree of Life. Internalize Me. Allow Me to come into the deepest recess of your being. Allow Me to take control of your life.

Practically, we can understand what it means to eat of Jesus, when we realize that, although we can get by without exercise, excitement, or education, we can't get by without eating. We may not do a lot of things we think we should do. But there is one thing we make sure we do: We eat. And here the Lord, in using this analogy, gets very practical when He says, "I want to be the priority of your life. Make it a necessity to eat of Me daily and consistently."

Mystically, we can understand what it means to eat of Jesus when we come to Communion. Paul wrote that many in the church at Corinth were weak, sick, and had even died unnecessarily because they had not given worth to the Lord's table (1 Corinthians 11:30). The same, in a sense, is still true. I believe the reason so much of Protestant Christianity is sterile, boring, and impotent is because a lot of Protestants, in overreaction to Catholicism, have reduced the importance and necessity of the Eucharist. There is a tremendous power in the Lord's Supper. While I do not believe that the elements are literally transformed into the Lord's body and blood, neither do I believe they are nothing more than symbols, for I have experienced grace and power at the Communion table that I have found nowhere else. Perhaps that is why Satan seems to try to keep people away from Communion even more than from Bible study.

John 6:59, 60

These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?

The Greek text makes it clear that the disciples found Jesus' saying hard not because they couldn't understand it, but because it was offensive.

John 6:61, 62

When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?

"If this offends you," said Jesus, "how will you feel when you see Me ascend to heaven by way of a Cross?"

John 6:63

It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

We're not able to comprehend intellectually the mystery of the Lord's table or what it means to eat of Him personally. It is only by the Spirit that we can receive revelation.

John 6:64–66

But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

Jesus didn't plead with those who left. He didn't say, "Let Me explain further." He neither ran after them nor reasoned with them because He knew they could not understand unless the Father had drawn them. Sometimes we spend hours talking and days dialoguing when we should be following the example of Jesus—realizing that unless the Father is drawing, no one can come. I sense such a "relaxed-ness" in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Not striving, not

struggling, not straining to persuade, He simply shared the truth, knowing the Spirit would give application in the hearts of those the Father had drawn.

John 6:67, 68

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go?

"Where else can we go?" asked Peter. Too often, our answer is, "Cinema 5, Blockbuster Video, Red Lion." We could fill in the blank all too easily, I'm afraid. But Peter had already done all the world's stuff. He knew it was bankrupt.

John 6:68

Thou hast the words of eternal life.

Although they were no doubt excited and inspired by Jesus' works, Peter and the boys were converted and committed by Jesus' *words*. May this be a place corporately, and may we be people individually who understand that conversion and commitment are based not upon signs or miracles, entertainment, hype, or hoopla, but upon the Word of God. I've heard people say, "We don't want to study the Bible. We just want to move in the Spirit." Yet I don't know how much more Spirit-filled a meeting can be than one in which the words of Jesus Christ are proclaimed, for the words He speaks are Spirit and life (verse 63).

John 6:69

And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

Note the order: We believe and are sure. People often say, "I would believe if I could be sure." But the way of the Lord is always believe first and then you will be sure, for it is only through faith that we can understand (Hebrews 11:3).

John 6:70 (a)

Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve . . .

After seeing the crowds walk away from Him, I'm sure there was a momentary smile on Jesus' face as He looked at the twelve who stood beside Him.

John 6:70 (b), 71

. . . and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve.

As He corrected Peter's misconception that all twelve "believed and were sure," the smile must have slowly faded from Jesus' face.



***For topical study of John 6:70–71 entitled "Why Jesus Chose Judas," turn to page* 495.**

FACING FRUSTRATION

A Topical Study of JOHN 6:5–11

Because there's a good chance you're feeling frustrated about something even now, I want us to look at a man who faced frustration in his own life. The situation is this: The disciples had just returned from a mission in which they had seen blind eyes opened, the sick healed, the oppressed liberated (Matthew 10). Wisely realizing they needed time to unwind, time to be rebuilt, and time to be renewed, Jesus took them across the Sea of Galilee (Mark 6:30–32). Arriving in Bethsaida, however, they discovered that a crowd had figured out where they were headed and had gone around the lake to meet them. Seeing the multitude, and knowing their need, Jesus turned to Philip and said, "Philip, we're in your town. A lot of these people are your friends, your relatives. What are we going to do?" (see John 6:5).

"I don't know," answered Philip. "We don't have enough money to even begin to feed this crowd."

Maybe today you feel that same frustration. Maybe bills are piling up on your desk. Maybe the job you hold is not generating the necessary income to keep your books balanced. Maybe a relationship seems to be lacking the love you desire. Maybe you find yourself frustrated—like Philip.

The Frustration of Philip

Philip was frustrated by the situation he was in. I can relate to that. I face frustrations that are very great, very deep, and weigh heavily upon me. You do too. *Lord, why are You picking on me?* Philip must have wondered. *Why don't You ask Peter what to do? Or James? Why single* me *out, Lord?*

Do you ever feel that way? Amidst times of challenge and periods of frustration in each of our lives, there is a tendency to want to pass the buck. "Why, Lord, are You asking *me* what to do with these five thousand people? Why not ask someone else?"

Philip was frustrated not only by the situation he was in, but by the figures he had. "Lord, as I add up our account, I realize we have enough money to feed about thirteen people." He was frustrated by the figures he had because, dear friend, he was looking to his own resources rather than to the Source. How easily I fall into that same trap. I find myself looking at figures, statistics, and facts—and coming up short. Yet even though Philip failed to see with the eyes of faith, his failure didn't frustrate God's work. I like that! Even though Philip was frustrated, God's work still went on.

Folks, the Lord's work *will* go on. And even if we go through seasons of failure and lapses of faith, I am so thankful He's bigger than our failure and greater than our lack of faith. He's building His church, establishing His kingdom, pouring out His Spirit, and proclaiming the gospel to the entire world in these last days. Philip's failure had no effect upon the work of the Lord. Neither did it disqualify Philip from the work of the Lord. Although Philip didn't see what could have taken place had he been a man of faith, Jesus still said to Philip, "Can you get everyone to sit down in groups of fifty and pass out the food?" (John 6:10, 11).

This is what is so neat about Jesus. Even though Philip wasn't able to see the miracle come through him, the Lord didn't say, "You turkey, Philip. You lacked faith. I'm not going to use you in any way in any time. Hit the showers. You're through." No, He gave Philip something else to do. Philip didn't see miraculous power flow through him in the way he could have, yet Jesus used him anyway.

The Confidence of Christ

While Philip was sweating it out, Jesus was cool as a cucumber. He knew what He was going to do all along. Why, then, did He ask Philip's advice? In order to give Philip the opportunity to stretch and to grow. The same is true in your situation. Whatever is frustrating you today—whatever fears you face, whatever tensions you feel, whatever burdens you're bearing—Jesus already knows what He's going to do concerning them. We don't, but He does. And He wants us to walk by faith, to trust Him.

Not only did Jesus know what He was going to do, but He also knew *how* He was going to do it. Before the miracle ever took place, He lifted up His eyes and gave thanks to His Father (John 6:11). So, too, regarding your dilemma, your frustration, your fear—do what Jesus did. Lift up your eyes and say, "Thank You, Father, that You're going to take care of this situation. I know You will. You are faithful. You have never let me down but have done exceedingly abundantly above all I could ask or think. When I thought I couldn't make it, You pulled me through. When I thought I was going under, You pulled me up. When I thought I was out of it, You pulled me back. You've been so good. Thus, I give you thanks right now in this moment of frustration."

In *everything* give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you (1 Thessalonians 5:18). There is power in praise, gang. The Lord is pleased with people who are thankful as opposed to those who complain, murmur, and worry as they utter words that are depressing, defeating, and discouraging. The Lord blesses those who take what they have—as insufficient as it might seem—place it in His hands, and say, "Thank You, Lord. I believe in You."

Philip and Jesus were two men standing in the same place. One was frustrated, the other at rest. One was hot and bothered, the other cool and confident. The difference? Philip looked at the figures. Jesus looked to the Father.

We have a choice to make, both as a church and as individuals: We can follow the example of Philip and say, "Why are You picking on me, Lord? My resources are so limited. My situation is impossible." Or we can be like Jesus and lift our eyes to heaven, give thanks to the Father, and watch Him multiply and bless.

I'm asking you today to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. In everything give thanks. Give Him what you have and expect Him to multiply it. You do not have to be frustrated today. You can be free right now if you'll fix your eyes on heaven, have faith in the Father, and in *everything* give thanks.

SENDER OF THE STORM

A Topical Study of JOHN 6:15–21

The teacher walked into the third- and fourth-grade Sunday-school class just in time to hear one of the students pray. "Dear God," said the nine-year-old, "bless our mothers and our fathers, and our sisters and brothers. And bless the teachers. And oh, by the way, God, take care of Yourself because if anything happens to You, we're all sunk."

The text before us makes it clear to us that Jesus is unsinkable. Truly, our Lord and Friend is our Savior in the storm who will come when the hour is darkest, when the danger is greatest. But I want you to see something else here. That is, Jesus Christ is not only the Savior in the storm but also the Sender of the storm, for in Matthew's account of this same story, Jesus commanded the disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee, even though a storm would be coming (14:22). Why would Jesus be the Sender of the very storm you're going through presently? Why would He allow the wind to rise, and the waves to beat on your little boat? I submit four reasons why Jesus Christ, our Captain, our Savior in the storm, is also the Sender of the storm.

He Sends Storms to Give Us New Direction

> *They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the* LORD*, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the* LORD *in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.*
>
> Psalm 107:23–28

The Lord creates storms to cause sailors to come to their wits' end. You see, in times of pride and pomposity we think, *I'm captain of my ship and master of my fate*—until a storm suddenly and savagely comes into our life. Then we find ourselves calling out to the One for whom we had no time previously, or didn't think we had need of personally. Paul says it's the goodness of God that leads men to repentance (Romans 2:4). That's the ideal—but not always how it works practically. With those who don't respond to His goodness, God must deal radically in order to get their attention.

"What does it profit a man," Jesus asked, "if he gain the whole world, but lose his soul?" (Mark 8:36). Sometimes the Lord may have to put us in a difficult situation to get our attention because He's more concerned about our eternal state than He is about our present comfort. Truly, He sends storms to bring us to our wits' end in order that we might call upon Him and change direction.

He Sends Storms to Give Us Necessary Correction

> *And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the* LORD*, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.*
>
> Jonah 2:2, 3

God wanted to use Jonah greatly in Nineveh. But Jonah found a ship going in the opposite direction. It's interesting how that works. Whenever you want to backslide, turn away, or sail in the opposite direction, guess who is in port with a ship all ready to go? Satan never says, "You want to backslide? Great! Where's a ship? Somebody get me a ship!" Nope. He's already got the ship in port, engines revved, sails set. Right now, Satan has a ship waiting for you if you want to jump on it. But the problem is, like Jonah, you pay for it (Jonah 1:3).

A man was telling me about his diet. "It seemed like the Lord spoke to my heart about cutting down," he said. "But one day, I thought it might be His will that I have a donut. So I asked Him to give me a parking place right in front of the donut shop if it was His will. And sure enough—after only the third time around the block, there one was!"

Maybe some of you are circling around the block right now, saying, "Well, Lord, if You want me to get involved with him . . ." or "If you want me to go there . . ." It'll probably happen because Satan always has a ship ready. But know this: If you're running from God or trying to rationalize what you know is not His best for you, a storm is sure to follow.

He Sends Storms to Give Us Needed Protection

> *And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children. And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.*
>
> Matthew 14:21, 22

The people had been fed miraculously, and now they wanted Jesus to rule them politically. Knowing this would sound like the moment His disciples had been waiting for and realizing it would seem like the fulfillment of their dreams, Jesus sent them away for their own protection.

A fire department received a shipment of high-tech helmets. Brightly colored, scuff-resistant, adjustable-strapped, they were incredible works of art, complete with five-hundred-dollar price tags. There was only one problem: They melted when they got near heat. Likewise, the Lord has to say to you and me, "You're getting your house together, and your car all shiny. You're involved with this gadget and that gizmo, this hobby and the other activity. But they're not going to take the heat." When our lives are tested with fire at the judgment seat of Christ, that which is wood, hay, and stubble will burn. Only that which is gold, silver, and precious stones will remain (1 Corinthians 3:12–15). So what does the Lord do? He says, "To get your mind off the material world, I'm sending you into a storm where you will wrestle with issues and struggle with difficulties. I'm watching over you, praying for you, and living right inside of you. But it's a struggle you'll have to go through in order that your focus can be shifted from the temporal to the eternal."

He Sends Storms to Nurture Perfection

> *And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.*
>
> Acts 4:1–4

After feeding five thousand people, Jesus sent His disciples into a storm while He ascended to a mountain (Matthew 14:23). I believe He did this to prepare them for the time He would ascend not to a mountain, but all the way to heaven. You see, in Acts 4, another crowd of five thousand appears—not being fed but being saved. And immediately after the five thousand were saved, a storm of persecution broke out so brutal that the disciples were cast into prison. Thus, I believe the storm they went through in John for a couple of hours on the Sea of Galilee was simply preparatory for what would happen in the storm of persecution that would follow in Acts.

Our Captain sees what tomorrow holds. That's why He says, "As difficult as this might seem, it's absolutely necessary to prepare you and perfect you for what is coming." Suffice it to say, there were storms I went through previously that were absolutely necessary for the storms that would follow a decade later. Gang, the storms you and I are going through presently are necessary to enable us to navigate what lies ahead.

So what should we do? Should we freak out, give up, turn back? Should we take a ship in the opposite direction? No. We should follow the example of the disciples, embrace the storm, and stay the course, knowing Jesus will appear to us at exactly the right moment, saying, "It is I; be not afraid."

Fellow sailors, be of good cheer, and rejoice that the Sender of the storm is also our Savior in the storm—for without Him, we'd all be sunk!

JESUS: THE I AM
A Topical Study of
JOHN 6:35

As we tucked three-year-old Benjamin in bed every night, his request was always the same: Sing "Allelu, Allelu, we have come into His presence, Allelu."

This is great! we thought. *We're raising a spiritual giant!*

After a few weeks, however, Benny asked, "When do we get His presents?" And suddenly it dawned on us that while we were singing, "We have come into His presence," Ben was singing, "We have come into His *presents*"—as in birthday and Christmas!

That's where the crowd was in Jesus' day. They were thinking temporal and touchable, when Jesus was speaking to them of the spiritual and eternal. "Give us bread—as Moses did," they demanded of Jesus.

Truly, the manna that sustained the people of Israel as they wandered through the wilderness for forty years was an interesting substance. It was small, round, and white. It tasted like honey and came from heaven. Its size speaks of humility. So, too, Jesus left His throne of glory to live among us (Philippians 2:7). Its color speaks of purity. So, too, our Lord has no sin, no spot whatsoever (1 Peter 1:19). Its shape speaks of eternity. So, too, Jesus has neither beginning nor end (Revelation 1:8). Its taste speaks of ecstasy. So, too, Jesus satisfies our deepest longing (Psalm 34:8). Its origin speaks of deity. So, too, Jesus is one with the Father (John 10:30).

Because the Jews failed to realize the manna Moses gave the children of Israel was nothing less than a picture of Him, however, Jesus uttered two words that should have taken the crowd all the way back to Exodus 3 when He said, "I AM." You see, when Moses received God's call to lead His people out of Egypt, he debated with God as to whether he would be able to do it. "Who should I say sent me to lead them into the Land of Promise?" Moses asked. "Who are You? What is Your name?"

"My name is I AM," answered the Lord (Exodus 3:14).

At this point, Moses must have scratched his head and thought, *You are . . . what?*—not realizing that what God really is would only be fully and completely revealed when Jesus Christ came on the scene.

At the end of His ministry, Jesus could say, "I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou hast given Me (John 17:6) because He filled in the blank completely and perfectly.

Are you hungry today? Is there something gnawing in your soul? Are you dissatisfied? Are you empty? Jesus would say to you, "I am the Bread." Are you in the dark today? Do you feel like you don't know which way to turn? Jesus would say to you, "I am the Light." Are you vulnerable, unsure, or fearful? Jesus would say to you, "I am the Door. I will protect you and keep out anything that would harm you." Do you feel cut off and isolated? Jesus would say to you, "I am the Vine. Abide in Me. Cling to Me. Find your security in Me." Gang, whatever you have need of, Jesus will be. "I am what?" He asks. "I'm everything."

The problem is that all too often we look for something *from* Jesus, instead of simply clinging *to* Him, moment by moment.

If Benjamin had come to me as a toddler, saying he wanted to go home because he didn't feel well, I could say, "Well, Ben, walk through the amphitheatre, take a left down the gravel path, turn right in the parking lot, go up the hill, stick your thumb out, and hitchhike on Highway 238 for eleven miles until you get to the bottom of Jacksonville Hill. Then take a left at Van Wey's Market, turn right on G street, turn left on Huener Lane, go three houses down, and you'll be there."

Or, I could have said, "Come here, Benny." And I could have held him in my arms, walked out to the parking lot, and driven him home. *That's* what Jesus does. He doesn't tell us the way. He *is* the Way.

"Whom seek ye?" He asked of the soldiers who had come to arrest Him.

"Jesus of Nazareth," they answered.

"*Ego Eimi,*" said Jesus. "I AM."

And the soldiers—most likely several hundred in number—fell over backward (John 18:4–6), knocked down not by anything Jesus did, but by the sheer power of who He *is*.

So, too, once you grab this, once you see it's not something Jesus gives *to* you, but who He is *for* you, you'll be bowled over. You'll say, "Lord, I've been asking for this continually and looking for that fervently. But in reality it's all wrapped up in You personally. And if I rest in Your arms, I'll end up at the right spot. If I stay close to You, I'll be protected. If I cling to You, I'll feel whole. If I allow You into my life, I'll feel satisfied at last?"

"That's right," Jesus answers. "I am the Way. I am the Door. I am the Vine. I am the Bread."

When the manna fell from heaven, the children of Israel could have done any one of four things . . .

They could have picked it up. They could eat it morning by morning and receive strength for the day's journey—just as spending time with Jesus, the Bread of life, gives us strength for the challenges of each new day.

They could have trampled on it. Those today who are unwilling to expend the energy or make the effort to partake of the Lord are essentially saying, "I don't need the Lord. I can journey on without Him." Desiring that none should perish, God laid down His life for us (2 Peter 3:9). If, however, we reject Him, He'll allow us to go to hell. But we'll have to trample on Him to get there.

They could have ignored it. So, too, you might not think you're trampling on the Lord—but, you see, if the manna wasn't gathered, it melted (Exodus 16:21). Many times, people say, "I just don't feel the Lord, or sense His strength." And I always have to ask them, "Did you take time this morning to feed on Him and look to Him—or were you simply too busy?" Oftentimes, it's because I have neglected the Lord in the cool of the morning that He can't be found in the heat of the day. Oh, He's still there, for He never leaves us nor forsakes us. But I don't perceive His presence.

They could have stored it. Some said, "Hey this is too hard to do daily. Let's gather a bunch of manna to tide us over for several days." But you know what happened? It bred worms and stank (Exodus 16:20). So, too, there are those who say, "I've had enough Bible study. I don't need to go to church on Wednesday night. I don't need to go to home fellowship. I've been doing this for some time. I've got enough stored up."

Usually, in about the third-to-fifth year of his walk, a believer finds himself vulnerable to saying, "I know it. I've got it down. I don't need to hear the Gospel of John again. I don't need to get up early and seek the Lord." That's why Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day our *daily* bread" (Matthew 6:11). Day by day, He wants to be your I AM.

Jesus is everything you have need of personally. The question is, are you going to slow down, stoop down, and pick up the Bread of Life? "I listen to tapes on my way to work," you say. That's fine. But the Lord isn't in the fast-food business, gang. He prepares for us a table (Psalm 23:5). He invites us to come and dine (John 21:12). He feeds us as we sit in His presence (John 6:10).

Each day, may God grace you with the simple reminder that He is the Bread, the Manna sent from heaven. Take the time to feed on Him, and you'll find He will satisfy you now and forevermore.

WHY JESUS CHOSE JUDAS

A Topical Study of JOHN 6:70–71

As the crowd turned away and as the twelve chose to stay, Jesus said there was one in their midst who would betray Him. Why did Jesus choose Judas? Yes, Jesus had to die on the Cross for the sin of humanity. Yes, Judas was part of that plan. But why did it have to be one of His inner circle who betrayed Him? Why couldn't it have been a Roman soldier, a Pharisee, or a government leader? Why did it have to be one of His own, one whom He had chosen? I'd like to suggest several reasons. . . .

Jesus Chose Judas in Order to Fulfill Bible Prophecy

The Old Testament contains over three hundred exacting prophecies concerning Messiah, including where He would be born, how He would be born, where He would live, how He would be betrayed, and how He would die. Psalm 41:9 is one of those three hundred: "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." By the time Jesus was twelve years old, His knowledge of the Word was so incredible that He blew the minds of the religious scholars in Jerusalem (Luke 2:46, 47). Jesus knew the Word. Therefore, I wonder what His morning devotions were like as He read prophecy after prophecy that spoke of His own suffering and death.

If you really want to mature in your Christian walk, I suggest you go through your Bibles regularly and claim the promises you have *not* underlined—those that you have sought to avoid. I've never found "Yea all those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," (see 2 Timothy 3:12) in a "Coffee With Christ" promise box. I've yet to read, "Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake" (see Matthew 5:11) in a "Minute with the Master" devotional. There's a big difference between the promises we underline and the full counsel of God. Many brothers and sisters err, I believe, by failing to recognize and claim the promises that are a little bit tougher. Jesus chose Judas because He knew the Scriptures and, as difficult as it was, He knew it was part of the plan of the Father for Him according to the Word.

Jesus Chose Judas in Order to Relate to You Personally

Maybe you have been hurt by someone who has betrayed your trust, broken your heart, misunderstood your motive, and "lifted his heel against you" to kick you in the teeth. Jesus Christ knows exactly how you feel. He was tempted in *all* points like as we are (Hebrews 4:15). There's not a single temptation or hurt you'll ever face that Jesus didn't feel. No matter what your pain is, no matter what your vulnerability might be, Jesus can sympathize because He's gone through the very same trials.

Jesus Chose Judas as an Impartial Witness of His Moral Excellency

After Judas betrayed Jesus, he threw his reward away, saying, “I have betrayed innocent blood” (Matthew 27:4). This one who was out to destroy Jesus, this one who had lived daily with Jesus concluded he never saw Jesus do a single thing wrong. When you apply for a job and are asked for references, do you list the person who hates you, the person who has a grudge against you, the person who is mad at you? That’s what Jesus did. His character reference is the one who was determined to destroy Him, the one who was disappointed in Him, the one who betrayed Him. It’s a testimony to the moral excellence of our Lord that even the one who hated Him the most had to admit He never did anything amiss.

Jesus Chose Judas in Order to Enlighten Us about Hypocrisy

"The church is full of hypocrites," grumbles the non-believer—as if this is a new revelation. Listen, if there was a hypocrite even in Jesus' inner circle, there are sure to be hypocrites in the church today. Jesus warned that, along with the wheat, tares were sure to grow (Matthew 13:24–30). And His own disciples were no exception.

Jesus Chose Judas in Order to Warn Us Powerfully

When Jesus sat at the table and said one would betray Him, no one pointed a finger and said, "It's the guy down there with the black cape, the black hat, the beady eyes, and the handlebar mustache. It's Judas." No, no one suspected Judas. No one even suggested Judas. On the contrary, each of the men around the table suspected only himself (Matthew 26:22).

Why did Jesus reveal Judas as being the betrayer at this point in John 6? Because this was the moment when something must have clicked within Judas, when something dark began to happen, when Judas became disappointed in the Lord. *Jesus,* Judas must have thought, *You missed Your chance. A crowd of people wants You to be their king—but You turn them away by telling them to eat of Your body and drink of Your blood? It's political stupidity. It doesn't pay off financially. It's crazy.*

So, too, there are hundreds of people in the Rogue Valley in Oregon who, although they were once on fire for Jesus Christ, turned their backs on Him when He failed to bless their little kingdoms. If things aren't going the way you think they should at work, at home, financially, professionally, or relationally—watch out. At that point, if you're not careful, you will become disappointed because the Lord is not doing what you think He should, and you will be vulnerable to turning your back on Him.

Jesus Chose Judas in Order to Show His Beauty

"Friend, wherefore art thou come?" Jesus asked Judas (Matthew 26:50). Jesus called Judas His friend even as Judas was in the very act of betraying Him. Maybe you can relate to Judas. Maybe you've been demanding your own way. Maybe you've become vulnerable to bitterness. Maybe you're disappointed in the Lord.

I have good news for you: Not a single person sitting here is in a worse place than was Judas at this point. And Jesus called Judas "*Friend.*"

"Wherefore art thou come?" Jesus asked Judas. Certainly He knew why Judas was there. But I believe He was giving Judas one more opportunity to rethink what he was doing, to turn, to repent, to get right.

So, too, the Lord could be saying to you today, "Wherefore art thou come? I'm giving you one more opportunity to come to Me."

The invitation is yours. You can take advantage of the beauty of Jesus right now. You can say, "I surrender, Lord. I'm no longer demanding my will or fighting for my way. Today I give myself totally, wholeheartedly to You."

And such is my prayer for each of us.



7

John 7:1 (a)
After these things Jesus walked in Galilee . . .

The Greek word translated "walked" is in the perfect tense, denoting continual action. Thus, although the people had walked away from Him, Jesus continued to walk in their region. So, too, when you talk with people who don't respond to the gospel, there comes a point when you have to let them go, even as Jesus did. But, like Jesus, continue to walk in their region. Be available to them should they have a change of heart, should the Spirit work within them to draw them to the kingdom.

John 7:1 (b)
. . . for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him.

Because Jesus had healed a man on the Sabbath, thereby claiming equality with the Father (John 5:18), the Jewish leaders made plans to kill Him. Consequently, we see Jesus walking prudently by staying out of Jerusalem altogether.

John 7:2

Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand.

As they camped out in tabernacles—little lean-tos—the Jews commemorated God's provision for and protection of His people through their wilderness wandering. It was, in effect, the Jewish equivalent to Family Camp.

John 7:3, 4

His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world.

It's as if Jesus' brothers challenged Him, saying, "Go show the people in Jerusalem what you can do. We dare You." Brothers do things like that.

John 7:5

For neither did his brethren believe in him.

Can you imagine growing up with a Brother who never did anything wrong, who never called you a name, never teased you, or never made fun of you? Jesus was the nicest brother who ever lived. Yet His brothers didn't believe in Him. We know, however, that later on, Jesus' half –brother, Jude, came to such a saving knowledge of Jesus that a Book in the Bible bears his name. And His half brother, James, so strong in the faith that he was the leader of the early church, penned the Book of James. But neither James nor Jude became believers until Jesus was crucified on a Cross and resurrected from the dead.

A lot of times we think, *If I'm a nice person, my neighbor is going to get saved. I'll mow his lawn; I'll bake him cookies; I'll smile when he drives by. I'll be a lovely person—and that will convert him.* Gang, there was no lovelier person than Jesus Christ. Yet His brothers did not believe in Him until after the

Resurrection. Therefore, I think some of us need a greater aggressiveness in preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified. You can wave to your neighbor for twenty years and wave him right into hell. Or you can take the time at some point to say, "You know what? Jesus Christ died for your sins and rose again from the dead—and you must believe on Him." May we be wisely, but aggressively and radically, bold in sharing the full story of the gospel.

John 7:6–10

Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil. Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come. When he had said these words unto them, he abode still in Galilee. But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.

"You can go to Jerusalem anytime you want," Jesus said to His brothers. "You can fit in. You have no reason to fear. But because they hate Me, I must walk wisely." Jesus did, however, end up going to Jerusalem. Why did He go if the Jews were out to kill Him? Why did He go if He couldn't fit into that scene? Because in Deuteronomy 16:16, God commanded Him to go. Therefore, even though it may not have been prudent for Jesus to go, prudence bowed to obedience as He submitted to His Father.

What does this mean for me? It means that, while I am to walk wisely and circumspectly—not looking for confrontation, not endangering myself or others, not moving in the world's scene, or going where it's dark—the Word of God has priority over my own understanding. How I thank the Lord that His Word doesn't change from day to day, month to month, year to year; that it is immutable, timeless, and practical; that it needs no addenda, updates, or changes. I think sometimes we who come week after month after year to study God's Word begin to perhaps take for granted the profundity of the truth that has been given to us therein. Jesus knew the Word completely. Thus, fulfilling the law perfectly, He went to Jerusalem secretly.

John 7:11–13

Then the Jews sought him at the feast, and said, Where is he? And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him: for

some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people. Howbeit no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews.

As in verse 40, we will see people divided time and time again because of Jesus.

John 7:14

Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught.

The first time Jesus went to Jerusalem, He cleansed the temple (John 2:13–16). This time, He's teaching in the temple. And that's always the way it is: Before Jesus can impart His Word effectively *to* me, there must first be a cleansing *within* me. The moneychangers must be driven out, the cattle chased away. That is why as you study the Word with us corporately and in your devotions personally, it's always good to say, "Lord, before I even begin reading, search my heart. Show me that which needs to be confessed."

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me," declared the psalmist (Psalm 66:18). Why? Because our Father won't allow us to live in sin that will hurt both us and those around us. Consequently, He says, "I'm going to break communication with you not because I'm angry with you or because I'm giving up on you, but because something's amiss within you that will bring pain into your life and problems into the lives of those around you. So when your prayers aren't being answered or when the Word doesn't seem to speak to you, call upon Me. Let Me come in and cleanse your temple. And *then* I will teach. *Then* you will hear My voice. *Then* you will see My face." I think too many of us minimize the importance of quietly waiting on the Lord and asking Him to search our hearts. Before teaching, there must be cleansing.

John 7:15

And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?

At the time Jesus was ministering, there were at least thirty seminaries in and around Jerusalem. Jesus had a degree from none of them. Consequently, when the Jewish leaders heard Him speak, they wondered where He had garnered such insight. The same thing would later be said of His followers, for

when Peter and John spoke in Acts 4, the Jews marveled at their boldness. Then they realized they had been with Jesus. That's the key. You see, it's not what you know; it's who you know that counts. And if you've been hanging out with Jesus, if you've logged in some morning time with Him, some afternoon breaks in His Word, or some evening sessions of contemplation, even if you're unlearned and ignorant according to the world's scholastic system, people will marvel at you.

John 7:16–19 (a)

Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him. Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law?

Notice Jesus said if any man *do* His will, he shall know of the doctrine. Revelation is directly linked to application. If you do what you've already been told, more will be revealed to you concerning His doctrine. The problem with us so frequently is that we don't do what we already know to do—and then wonder why we don't learn more. Truly, obedience is the door through which revelation enters.

John 7:19 (b)–24

Why go ye about to kill me? The people answered and said, Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee? Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and ye all marvel. Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man. If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day? Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

"Why are you angry with Me? Why are you out to kill Me?" asked Jesus. "Because I healed a man on the Sabbath day. Yet you allow circumcision on the Sabbath." Indeed they did—and still do. You see, according to Genesis 17, eight

days after birth, Jewish boys were to be marked through the cutting away of the flesh as those who had a covenant relationship with God. Jesus' argument here is brilliant. He says, "You're not upset when someone causes pain on the Sabbath, when something is taken away on the Sabbath, when there is a cry of anguish on the Sabbath. Yet because I healed on the Sabbath, because I restored health on the Sabbath, because there was a cry of joy on the Sabbath, you're upset."

Isn't that typical of religion? Religion says, "You better not be happy. If you're spiritual, you should be miserable. If any of you are having a good time on Sunday, shame on you." That's religiosity, the way of the law—painful, heavy, and miserable.

But here's Jesus, our wonderful, radical Savior, saying, "Does it really make sense that you circumcise on the Sabbath but won't let Me heal on the Sabbath?"

John 7:25–27

Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this he, whom they seek to kill? But, lo, he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing unto him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ? Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is.

The reference here is to Isaiah 53—the classic prophecy concerning Messiah. In this passage, the Jews understood Isaiah to say no one would know from whence Messiah came. Therefore, because they knew Jesus' parents (or thought they did), they argued Jesus couldn't be the Messiah.

John 7:28–30

Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am: and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. But I know him: for I am from him, and he hath sent me. Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come.

Unable to argue with Jesus, the Jewish leaders resorted to violence against Him.

John 7:31–34

And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done? The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him; and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him. Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come.

Jesus could deal candidly and boldly, straightforwardly yet lovingly with people because He did not live in the fear of men, trying to fashion a reputation or build a ministry. His sights were set on heaven. He knew He would be there soon, and the implication of His statement is that the Pharisees and chief priests wouldn't be joining Him.

John 7:35, 36

Then said the Jews among themselves, Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles? What manner of saying is this that he said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come?

The Jews wondered what Jesus meant. "Is He going to be some kind of missionary?" they asked.

John 7:37–39

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

On the great day, the last day of the feast, the priests provided a powerful picture of Israel's longing for her Messiah. You see, whereas in the previous seven days, the priests had drawn water from the pool of Siloam and poured it out in the temple courtyard as an illustration of God's provision for the thirst of

their bodies, on the last day of the feast, the priests returned from the pool of Siloam with empty pitchers as an illustration of their need for One to satisfy the thirst of their hearts. Thus, it was at the very moment when the priests held empty pitchers in their hands that Jesus cried out, "If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink." Certainly the crowd must have wondered about this itinerant Rabbi, this Carpenter from Galilee who had the audacity to cry out in the midst of the congregation. Yet no one called for the ushers or deacons to escort Him out because something about Him rang true. Perhaps something in His eyes, perhaps something in His voice caused people to listen when He spoke.



***For topical study of John 7:37–39 entitled "Living in the Living Water," turn to page* 502.**

John 7:40–43

Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? So there was a division among the people because of him.

There was a division among the people because of Him. Haven't you found that to be true in your family, at your job, or in your school? Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). Therefore, don't be surprised; don't be shocked when you sense divisions due to your stand as a believer in Jesus Christ. It's inevitable. It happened here, and it will happen in our lives as well.

John 7:44–46

And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him. Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.

"We went to arrest Him," said the officers sent by the Pharisees and chief priests, "but we ended up arrested by Him, for we never heard anyone talk like He talks—with such generosity, such clarity and such authority."

John 7:47–49

Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed.

"Don't be duped by this Galilean," said the Pharisees. "*We're* the ones with the education and degrees."

John 7:50, 51

Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?

In John 3, as Nicodemus first came to Jesus, he was in the midnight hour of his soul. Here in John 7, not yet sure who Jesus is, he is in the twilight of transition as he pleads for fairness on the part of his fellow Pharisees. In John 19, we'll see Nicodemus in the daylight of salvation. When did the sun finally rise on Nicodemus' understanding? At the Cross (John 19:39).

Folks, as you talk with people about the Lord, don't get tangled up in evolution, philosophy, or existential mind games. Keep focused on what Jesus Christ did on the Cross and how He rose from the dead. *That's* where people see the Light. Turn every conversation, every debate, and every discussion back to the Cross. "Jesus died, rose again, and wants to be your Savior, King, and Friend. What are you going to do with Him?"

John 7:52

They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.

Thinking Nicodemus a fool, his fellow Pharisees asked him if he too was an unschooled Galilean. I am amazed that these guys who prided themselves on their knowledge of Scripture didn't know that, according to 2 Kings 14:25, there was indeed a prophet from Galilee. His name? Jonah.

John 7:53

And every man went unto his own house.

The great day of the feast over, the little booths knocked down, the sleeping bags rolled up, everyone headed to his own house. Not Jesus. Having no house, He headed home—into the company of His Father, as we'll see in the opening verse of chapter 8.

LIVING IN THE LIVING WATER

A Topical Study of JOHN 7:37–39

It is the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Within six months, Jesus would be pinned to a Cross as payment for our sin and rebellion. If I were Jesus, I think my tendency would have been to say, "I'm about to be betrayed, tortured, and slaughtered as I personally take upon Myself the wrath that should be vented upon a sinful world. Therefore, I am going to withdraw from people until that time." But that's not what Jesus does. Instead of holing up in isolation, Jesus heads to Jerusalem for an important convocation. There, standing in the midst of a huge congregation, He gives a great invitation, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink."

One of three major festivals celebrated in Jerusalem each year, the Feast of Tabernacles was the happiest and most joyful. Camped out in little lean-tos similar to pup tents, parents would tell their children how God miraculously provided for their fathers for forty years in the wilderness. They would tell of a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day; of bread from the sky and water from a rock.

To commemorate the miraculous provision of water, a procession of priests would draw water from the pool of Siloam and pour it out on the floor of the temple courtyard during each day of the feast. On the eighth day, the last day, the great day of the feast, however, the priests would return from the pool of Siloam with empty vessels, signifying that when the Israelites entered the Promised Land, water from the rock was no longer needed. The Feast of Tabernacles not only commemorated the past—it anticipated the future. As the priests symbolically poured out their empty vessels on the last day, the high priest would read Isaiah 44:3: "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring."

The picture was unmistakably clear. You see, "Siloam," the name of the pool from which the priests drew the water, means "Sent One"—just as Messiah would be the Sent One who would pour out His Spirit upon a thirsty people. It was at this climactic moment of the week-long celebration that a thirty-three-year-old Carpenter from Galilee stood up and broke the silence as

He cried, "If any man thirst, let him come to Me. And out of his innermost being shall gush forth torrents of living water."

The long-awaited Messiah had come to the people of Israel. And here, in their midst, He invited them to come to Him. If they had, they would have received rivers of water—not only water within, but flowing forth from them in order that others might be served and refreshed. It is what is called the filling of the Spirit, the overflow of the Spirit, the coming upon of the Spirit, the baptism in the Spirit. The same is true today. If you're a believer, you have the Holy Spirit *in* you. But has the Holy Spirit come *upon* you? Is He overflowing *from* you?

After Jesus died and rose from the dead, He said to His disciples, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." He breathed on them, and they did indeed receive the Holy Ghost *within* them (John 20:22). But were they empowered? Were they like rivers of water? No. They were hiding in an upper room. Yes, they were Christians. Yes, they were born again. But they were still timid and unsure of what they should do. Then, forty days later, the Spirit came *upon* them on the Day of Pentecost, and three thousand were saved (Acts 2).

Gang, there's a difference between the Spirit being *in* you, and the Spirit coming *upon* you, flowing *from* you. People say, "I received the Holy Spirit when I was saved." "Amen," I say. "You did. Like the disciples in John 20, when you opened your heart to Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit took up residence within you. You have the Holy Spirit. My question is: Does the Holy Spirit have you?"

"Go and wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Ghost comes *upon* you," Jesus said to His disciples (see Luke 24:49). "Then you shall receive power." The Greek word translated "power" is *dunamis,* from which we get the word "dynamite." Jesus promised dynamic power to enable them to be His witnesses as His Spirit not only satisfied them but also overflowed from them.

In a vision of the millennial kingdom, Ezekiel saw a river flowing from the temple (Ezekiel 47). "Walk with me," a man said to him. And they walked fifteen hundred feet. "Step in," the man said. And Ezekiel stepped into the river up to his ankles. "Walk with me," the man said again. And they walked fifteen hundred feet further. Again, Ezekiel was instructed to step into the river. This time, the water came up to his knees. A third time, they walked together; and a third time Ezekiel stepped into the river, which came up to his waist. Finally, after walking further, Ezekiel stepped into the river once again—but this time,

he could not stand. The water being over his head, Ezekiel was enveloped in the flow of the river.

It's a perfect illustration of life in the Spirit. That is, you get saved. You step in. And you're up to your ankles, standing on the promises of Jesus Christ. As you head down the road toward heaven, you go a little deeper in your walk, and you become aware of impotence in your life. So you call upon the Lord, and you're up to your knees in prayer. A little further on in your pilgrimage, you want to see others saved. You start witnessing and ministering, and you're up to your waist—a picture of the reproductive life of the Spirit. Finally, you get to the place where you say, "I just want to be over my head in You, Lord, immersed in Your Spirit. I no longer want to control my ministry or my destiny. Take me, Lord. Sweep me off my feet. Baptize me in Your power. Do with me as You wish."

That's being filled with the Spirit. "But how does that happen practically?" you ask. "How can I live in the Spirit? How can I be like Ezekiel—over my head, immersed in His power?" I would like to suggest three steps for your consideration. . . .

Come to the Rock

Moses struck the rock in Exodus 17, and it poured out water for a thirsty people. Paul tells us that Rock was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). You see, when Jesus Christ, the Rock of our salvation, was smitten on the Cross, blood and water flowed from His side (John 19:34). While the blood speaks of the cleansing of sin, the water speaks of the Spirit. The blood must be shed before the Spirit can flow (1 John 5:6). Therefore, because the Holy Spirit cannot dwell in you or come upon you until your sin is dealt with, the first step to being filled with the Spirit is simply to get saved. Come to the Rock. And, like the woman at the well, you will find your thirst quenched forevermore.

Speak to the Rock

In Numbers 20, the Israelites were thirsty once again. Moses cried to the Lord, and the Lord said, "Speak to the rock and it shall give forth water."

But Moses, weary of the whining of his congregation of three million, said, "You rebels, must we fetch water for you?" as he struck the rock twice. And, although water came out graciously, Moses was punished for his misrepresentation of God to the people. "I'm not mad at My people," God said to Moses. "I'm not disappointed in them. I'm not through with them. Therefore, because you called them rebels and smote the rock when I told you to speak to it, you'll not enter into the Land of Promise."

Folks, because the Rock of Ages, Jesus Christ, was smitten when He died for our sins, when you are thirsty, when you are aware you need empowering—you don't need to work something up emotionally or expend a lot of energy physically. You don't need to lash out in frustration as Moses did. All you need to do is *speak* to the Rock. Say, "Lord, I'm thirsty. My life is not flowing. Nothing's happening. Have mercy."

Jesus said, "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that *ask* Him?" (Luke 11:13). Why do we think we have to position ourselves in a certain way physically, shout emotionally, or dance heatedly in order to receive the water of the Spirit—when all we need to do is speak to the Rock? All we need to do is *ask.*

Sing to the Rock

In Numbers 21, the Israelites thirsted once again. This time, however, they simply sang a song (verses 17, 18), and water sprang from the well they dug. You see, the rock didn't actually literally, physically follow them in their wilderness wanderings. Rather, most commentators agree that a subterranean river flowed from the rock, providing a perpetual flow of water under their feet. Consequently, all the Israelites had to do to be refreshed at any given moment was realize that even if they couldn't see it, the current was moving below them. All they had to do was sing out in faith, and water would bubble to the surface. So, too, if you're saved, the Spirit is in you and with you wherever you go. But He will come upon you and overflow from you if you will simply sing out in faith. "Be filled with the Spirit," Paul said, "speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:18, 19).

Why do we gather together on Sundays? Because something happens when people come together to sing praise and to speak to each other in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Something happens at the Lord's table when we realize the Rock has already been smitten. Something happens in the place of prayer when we simply talk to the Rock. Something happens when we begin to sing. Something begins to bubble up and overflow. How do you get filled with the Holy Ghost? How do you experience the coming upon of the Spirit? Not by incantations, gyrations, or manipulation, but simply by coming to the Rock given to us, speaking to the Rock smitten for us, and singing to the Rock present within us. Come to the Rock. Speak to the Rock. And sing out—believing that the Rock has already provided a flow underneath the surface. It's there presently, so sing out expectantly. Receive it by faith today. And may the Lord cause you to be over your head in Him, carried along in the refreshment, joy, and power of the Holy Ghost.



8 John 8:1
Jesus went unto the mount of Olives.

In the last verse of chapter 7, we read that, following the Feast of Tabernacles, every man went unto his own house. Not having a house, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane, nestled on the slope of the Mount of Olives, in order to commune with His Father. So frequently did Jesus do this, Judas would later know right where to find Him at the time of his betrayal.

John 8:2

And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them.

The morning after the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus was in the temple, ready to meet with any who might seek Him. "I love them that love Me," declares the Lord, "and those that seek Me early shall find Me" (Proverbs 8:17).

John 8:3, 4

And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.

Caught in the act of adultery, the woman was brought, perhaps naked, to the Rabbi from Galilee.

John 8:5 (a)

Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned . . .

While Leviticus 20 and Deuteronomy 22 both declare adultery to be a capital offense punishable by death, due to the severity of the sentence, there were safeguards to protect the innocent. That is, there could be no doubt about any of the details. The evidence had to be conclusive and unmistakable. In fact, there had to be a number of witnesses to the actual act of immorality. And their stories had to collaborate perfectly. History tells us that one couple was set free simply because the witnesses who observed their adulterous act couldn't name the tree under which it took place. Consequently, the Jewish historian Josephus tells us adultery would be punished on the average of only once every seven years.

John 8:5 (b)

. . . but what sayest thou?

If Jesus said, "Stone her," He would jeopardize His position as Friend of Sinners. Prostitutes and publicans, tax collectors and street people would no longer feel comfortable around Him, knowing He had sentenced one of their own to death. If, on the other hand, He said, "Let her go," He would be dishonoring the very Word of God He had come to fulfill (Matthew 5:17).

John 8:6 (a)

This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him.

Had these scribes and Pharisees been truly interested in justice, why didn't they bring the man along with the woman? Most scholars believe it was because it was a setup to entrap Jesus and that the man himself was in collusion with them.

John 8:6 (b)

But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.

It was the finger of God that wrote, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" in tablets of stone (see Exodus 31:18). Two thousand years later, we see the finger of God once more—this time on the hand of Jesus Christ, writing in the dust of the earth.

John 8:7 (a)

So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself . . .

In defense of the woman, the Rock of Ages stood up to the men who held rocks in their hands.

John 8:7 (b)

. . . and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.

Commentator J. Allen Blair properly translates Jesus' statement as: "Let he who is without *the same* sin cast the first stone."

John 8:8, 9 (a)

And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last . . .

What did Jesus write that would cause the men to become so heavily convicted? I suggest what He wrote was in fulfillment of Jeremiah 17:13, where Jeremiah prophesied that the names of all who forsook the Lord would be written in the earth. I suggest He wrote the names of those who held rocks in their hands—and by each one a female name, a date, a place, or some other reminder of something in their past that they themselves may have long ago forgotten. Am I suggesting that all of the scribes and Pharisees present had committed adultery or that they were all involved in immorality? All I know is this: Jesus said if a man looked on a woman with lust in his heart, he was guilty (Matthew 5:28). Therefore, the words Jesus wrote on the ground were, very possibly, reminders that, because none of them was without sin, none of them was qualified to cast a stone.

John 8:9 (b), 10

. . . and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?

Finally, when all her accusers were gone, Jesus lifted up His eyes and spoke to the woman. Notice He didn't call her, "harlot" or "sinner". He called her *gune,* or "woman"—the same title with which He had addressed His mother (John 2:4).

John 8:11 (a)

She said, No man, Lord.

The scribes and Pharisees called Jesus "Master" or "Rabbi." The woman called Him "Lord."

John 8:11 (b)
And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee . . .

In the strictest sense of the word, Jesus couldn't have condemned her because the Law of Moses specifically states that it took a minimum of two witnesses to condemn someone (Deuteronomy 19:15). Therefore, in dismissing the scribes and Pharisees who had witnessed her sin, Jesus relinquished His opportunity to condemn her.

John 8:11 (c)
. . . go, and sin no more.

Jesus didn't say, "I won't condemn you this time, but if it happens once more, you're toast." No, He said, "Go your way, free to sin no more."

John 8:12 (a)
Then spake Jesus again unto them . . .

How I love the serenity and tranquility of our Lord. He never was and never is uptight. He had every reason to object to the rude intrusion of the keyhole-peeping, sin-sniffing, self-righteous Pharisees (verse 1). But He didn't. He simply used their interruption as an illustration. And just as a jeweler most effectively displays the radiance of his gems against a background of black, so the next statement Jesus would make would be seen all the more vividly when placed against the backdrop of the blackness and darkness of what had preceded it.

John 8:12 (b)
. . . saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

During the years of the wilderness wanderings, the tabernacle was lit by the shekinah glory of God (Exodus 40:34). Later, the temple was also filled with the glory of God (2 Chronicles 7:1). But because the people chose to live in

darkness, there came a point when the tangible, visible presence of the light of God departed (Ezekiel 10:18). Consequently, the people of God had to light candles and trim lamps in the temple because the shekinah, the true light, had long since departed. Now, here stands Jesus, perhaps right in front of one of the candlesticks in the temple, saying, "I am the Light of life—the shekinah, the glory. I'm back." And I suggest He made this declaration with a smile on His face and His arms outstretched as He offered Himself to them.

John 8:13

The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true.

After one thousand years, the glory returned in the Person of Jesus Christ. Yet what did the Pharisees do? They questioned Him, rejected Him, and, finally, extinguished Him.

John 8:14–19

Jesus answered and said unto them, Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go. Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man. And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me. It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me. Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.

Jesus said this not to defend Himself but to condemn those who declared His words invalid on the grounds that He lacked a second witness (Deuteronomy 19:15). Jesus' second witness was His Father, who validated Jesus' mission and position when He said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," on the day of His baptism (Matthew 3:17).

John 8:20–24

These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come. Then

said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come. Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come. And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.

The word "he" is italicized in your Bible because the original manuscript reads "for if ye believe not that I am, ye shall die in your sins." The singular issue of salvation is one of believing that Jesus is I AM, that Jesus is God. It's not enough to believe Jesus is a good guy, a great guru, or even the Son of God. The Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, the Moonies and cults down the line are all damned in their teachings because they deny this most essential, basic truth of salvation in denying that Jesus is God.

"Here's the fire, and here's the wood, but where's the sacrifice?" Isaac asked Abraham on Mount Moriah, which today is known as Calvary.

"God shall provide Himself a lamb," Abraham answered prophetically (see Genesis 22:8).

Abraham didn't say, "God shall provide *for* Himself a lamb." He said, "God will Himself *be* the Lamb." Therefore, if I say God did not Himself become a Lamb, if God Himself did not take on my sin but instead created a Son to die, I diminish what God did for me. And this is the great hinge of salvation that separates us from the cults. Every single cult robs Jesus Christ of deity. Some will say He's God's Son. Some will say He died for the sins of the world. Some will even say He rose again. But look a cultist in the eye and ask him if Jesus Christ is God, and he'll say, "He's God's Son," at best. And in so doing, he destroys what God did redemptively on his behalf.

John 8:25, 26

Then said they unto him, Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him.

It has been rightly said that the art of eloquence is knowing when not to speak. This is nowhere demonstrated more beautifully than in Jesus. As the Jews continue to badger Him, Jesus says, "There is so much I could say. But I only speak those things the Father instructs Me to say."

John 8:27, 28 (a)

They understood not that he spake to them of the Father. Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he . . .

The lifting up of the Son of Man speaks of the Cross. "When you see Me on the Cross, you're going to know I AM," declares Jesus. "When the sky is dark and the earth shakes; when the graves open and the veil is rent, you will at last understand that I AM."

John 8:28 (b)–30

. . . and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. As he spake these words, many believed on him.

It's proof of His purity that not one of Jesus' contemporaries raised an objection to this statement, that not one ever saw Him do anything that would not please God. On the contrary, even as He made this claim, many believed on Him.

John 8:31, 32

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

The word "disciple" means "disciplined one." Who are Jesus' disciples, His disciplined ones? Those who continue in, take heed to, and make a high priority of His Word. And it is as they comprehend the truth of the Word that they are free—really, truly free.

For topical study of John 8:32 entitled "Really Set Free," turn to page **511.**

John 8:33

They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?

"What do you mean be made free?" protested the Jews. "We're the people of Israel. We've never been in bondage to any man."

Really? What about when they were in bondage to Pharaoh for four hundred years, baking bricks in the brutal, burning Egyptian sun century after century? What about the three-hundred-five-year period chronicled in the Book of Judges when they were in bondage to seven different nations? What about the year 722 B.C. when the Assyrians—a people so cruel that merely upon hearing they were coming, many nations would commit mass suicide—used fishhooks in the mouths of the Jews to lead them captive to Assyria? What about the Babylonians who, in 586 B.C., destroyed not only the temple, but the entire city of Jerusalem? What about the fact that even as they spoke these words, the Jews were in submission to Rome? Truly, their rejection of Jesus rendered these scribes and Pharisees incapable both of viewing their history correctly and discerning their situation presently.

John 8:34

Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.

The one who practices sin becomes enslaved to that sin. Nowhere is this truth more plainly illustrated than in the life of Samson. Samson took a Nazarite vow that forbade three things: touching dead bodies, drinking wine, and cutting his hair. Yet he touched dead carcasses (Judges 14:8, 9), and no doubt drank wine at the Philistine parties he attended. Therefore, when Delilah cut his hair, I'm convinced he thought nothing would happen because nothing had happened when he touched the carcass and drank the wine. But when Delilah said, "Samson, the Philistines are upon thee," the third time, Samson was bound and taken captive to grind like an ox in prison because no one beats the rap. No one gets away indefinitely with sin and compromise.

John 8:35 (a)

And the servant abideth not in the house for ever . . .

The one who continually sins becomes enslaved to sin. And sin is a cruel master indeed. By offering pleasure for a season (Hebrews 11:25), it is initially comfortable to serve in the household of sin. But sooner than later, sin eventually throws everyone out on the street.

John 8:35 (b)–41 (a)

. . . but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father.

"I know you are Abraham's seed," Jesus says in verse 37. "You are not Abraham's children," He says in verse 39. Is this a contradiction? No. Abraham's seed and Abraham's children are two separate entities—an important distinction to make in understanding prophecy.

The term "Abraham's seed" refers to the physical offspring of Abraham—the people of Israel. "Abraham's children" refers to all who believe God (Romans 4:1). If you don't understand this point, you'll be confused when people say, "The church is equivalent to Israel. Therefore the promises of the Old Testament do not speak to a literal, physical restoration of Israel, but to the church," as they misinterpret prophecy to conform to this foundational error.

"I know you're Israelites. I know you're Jews physically and racially," Jesus said. "But you're not Abraham's children because you don't believe in Me."

John 8:41 (b)

Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication . . .

The Pharisees respond by striking at Mary, raising the question of the legitimacy of Jesus' birth.

John 8:41 (c)–42

. . . we have one Father, even God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.

Anyone who says, "We love Jehovah. We love the God of the Bible. We love the God of Israel. But we don't love Jesus Christ as God"—doesn't really love God.

John 8:43

Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.

"You can't understand what I'm saying because we're speaking two different languages," said Jesus. "You're talking about worldly stuff, and I'm speaking of the eternal."

John 8:44

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

Scripture declares the wounds of a friend to be faithful (Proverbs 27:6) because only a friend cares enough to tell the truth. Jesus is not being vindictive here. On the contrary, His words prove His faithfulness. He's using strong language because nothing less would get through to these men.

John 8:45, 46 (a)

And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin?

"Why don't you believe Me? What wrong have I done in your sight?" Jesus asks.

John 8:46 (b)–48

And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?

Jesus' point is so well taken, His logic so irrefutable, that the Pharisees' only recourse is to resort to name-calling.

John 8:49–51

Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me. And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth. Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.

Pleading with the Pharisees, Jesus says, "If you'll simply receive and embrace what I'm saying, you'll never see death." The same is true for us. You see, for those who know Jesus, death is neither annihilation nor termination. Death is transformation because the moment we close our eyes in the final minute of this life, we'll see Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:8). And in seeing Him, we'll become like Him (1 John 3:2).

John 8:52–56

Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself? Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: Yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.

When did Abraham see Jesus? I believe this reference is to the story in Genesis 14 when, after rescuing his nephew, Abraham was greeted by a man named Melchizedek. "Melchizedek" means "King of Righteousness."

Melchizedek was from Salem. Salem means "Peace." Melchizedek had no mother or father, no beginning or end (Hebrews 7:3). He offered bread and wine to Abraham and accepted a tithe from him—all of which point to the distinct possibility that Melchizedek was a Christophany, an earthly appearance of Jesus before He came as the Babe of Bethlehem.

John 8:57

Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?

This interests me because, at this point, Jesus was only in His early thirties. Yet the Pharisees used fifty years as a reference to His age. Perhaps as the Man of Sorrows who carried the burden of a sinful world, He looked older than His age.

John 8:58, 59 (a)

Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at him . . .

So clear was Jesus' claim to deity that those who heard these words were ready to stone Him on the spot.

John 8:59 (b)

. . . but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them . . .

After being absent one thousand years, the shekinah glory reappeared in the Person of Jesus Christ. But because the people rejected Him, the Light departed once again from the temple.

John 8:59 (c)

. . . and so passed by.

Where did Jesus go? In the next chapter, we'll see exactly where He went: He found a blind man. He found me.

REALLY SET FREE

A Topical Study of JOHN 8:32

After committing adultery with Bathsheba and then murdering her husband, David was sitting in his palace when Nathan the prophet came to him, saying, "There's a poor man who lives next door to a wealthy man. The wealthy man threw a party and needed a lamb to serve his guests. Instead of taking one from his own flock, however, the wealthy man went to his neighbor's house and took his only sheep—the family pet."

"What?!" said an enraged David. "That man shall surely die" (see 2 Samuel 12:5).

That's always the way it is when we sin. You see, Old Testament law prescribed restoration and restitution for such an offense—not the death penalty. But indignation and harsh judgment are always the result of the failure of sinners to see their own sin.

How Sinners Treat Sinners

> *Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man's wife go aside, and commit a trespass against him, and a man lie with her carnally, and it be hid from the eyes of her husband . . . and the spirit of jealousy* [*suspicion*] *come upon him . . . then shall the man bring his wife unto the priest . . . and the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the* LORD*: And the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel; and of the dust that is in the floor of the tabernacle the priest shall take, and put it into the water: And the priest shall charge her by an oath, and say unto the woman, If no man have lain with thee, and if thou hast not gone aside to uncleanness with another instead of thy husband, be thou free from this bitter water that causeth the curse: But if thou hast gone aside to another instead of thy husband, and if thou be defiled, and some man have lain with thee beside thine husband . . . the* LORD *make thee a curse and an oath among thy people, when the* LORD *doth make thy thigh to rot, and thy belly to swell; and this water that causeth the curse shall go into thy bowels, to make thy belly to swell, and thy thigh to rot: And the woman shall say, Amen, amen. And when he hath made her to drink the water, then it shall come to pass, that, if she be defiled . . . the water that causeth the curse shall enter into her, and become bitter, and her belly shall swell, and her thigh shall rot: and the woman shall be a curse among her people.*
>
> Numbers 5:12–27

If you, as an Old Testament husband, suspected your wife was unfaithful, you would take her to the tabernacle or temple, where the priest would pour holy water into an earthen vessel, add dust from the floor, and give it to your wife to drink. If she was guilty, her belly would swell, her legs would tremble —and she would be a curse among her people. Although they didn't know it, this is exactly what was taking place as the scribes and Pharisees brought the woman taken in adultery to Jesus. You see, Israel being the wife of Jehovah (Ezekiel 16; Hosea 2), it was not the woman taken in adultery, but the nation of Israel who was already on trial.

Think with me. Just as the Old Testament priest was to pour holy water into an earthen vessel, the water of the Word (Ephesians 5) was spoken through an

earthen vessel—Jesus Christ. Just as the Old Testament priest was to add dust from the floor of the temple, so Jesus wrote in the dust of the floor of the temple. They thought they were bringing a woman caught in adultery, but in reality, the Jews themselves were on trial in the temple before the great High Priest, Jesus Christ. But they didn't see it. They couldn't understand it. They missed the point because that's what sin does. When you are caught up in sin, when you are enslaved by sin, you will not see the need you have personally. You'll say, "I'm free. I'm okay. It's them; it's him; it's her who's in sin," as you point your finger, find fault with, put blame on everyone else. Sinners treat sinners brutally. It's true. I will lash out at you most strongly for that sin that is most tempting to me.

If you're trying to prove you're more deserving of blessing because you're more righteous than the person sitting next to you, like the Pharisees, you'll be a rock-thrower. Sin-sniffing, fault-finding, and keyhole-peeping always take place in the lives of those who do not understand the grace or goodness of Jesus. But if you realize you're a sinner saved only by grace, you'll see how far you are from what you could and should be in the Lord. And you'll lose your interest in throwing rocks.

How the Law Treats Sinners

If there ever was a standard that would bring salvation, it would be the Old Testament law. It's perfect (Psalm 19:7). The problem is, we can't live up to it. That is why I believe that in the midst of the accusations by the self-righteous Pharisees concerning the woman taken in adultery, Jesus wrote on the ground twice (John 8:8).

You see, after Moses had received the law on Mount Sinai, he returned to the people only to find them worshiping the golden calf. In anger, he threw the tablets to the ground, where they shattered—a picture physically of what the people had already done to the law spiritually (Exodus 32:19). Moses returned to the Lord and was given a second copy of the law. This time, the tablets were not smashed, but carefully placed inside the ark of the covenant, covered by the mercy seat upon which blood was sprinkled—which speaks of the only way the law can be kept.

The ark speaks of Jesus Christ. He kept the law perfectly—and guess where you are. If you're a Christian, you are in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) just as surely as the law was in the ark. Therefore, when the Father looks on you, He doesn't see your sins and mistakes, your rebellion and iniquity. He sees His Son. Positionally, you are perfect because you are in Him.

In Romans 7, Paul declares that we who are believers are dead to the law. This is the glory of biblical Christianity—for although the rules and regulations are still in effect, they no longer have jurisdiction over us because no court of law tries dead men.

How the Savior Treats Sinners

Having captured the ark of the covenant, the Philistines placed it in the temple of their fish god, Dagon (1 Samuel 5:2). The next morning, they entered the temple to find Dagon facedown before the ark of the covenant. The Philistines helped their god up—only to return the next day to find him prostrate before the ark once more—this time with head and hands cut off. "Something's gotta go," said the Philistines, so they sent the ark back to the Jews.

The ark is a picture of Jesus Christ. What was in the ark? The tablets of stone, the Word of God. You might have some Dagon in your life right now—some addiction, some habit, some problem you've been trying to get rid of, to push over. But the harder you try, the more frustrated you become. The key, gang, is not to deal with Dagon. The key is to bring in the ark. Bring in the Word. Stay in the Word. Study the Word. Obey the Word. And watch Dagon fall. "How shall a young man cleanse his way?" asked the psalmist. "By taking heed according to thy Word," was his answer (see Psalm 119:9).

"Go your way and sin no more," Jesus said to the woman taken in adultery. And by virtue of the very fact that the Lord said this, she would be free to sin no more. She didn't need a syllabus. She didn't need ten steps. She didn't need a counseling appointment or a discussion group. She needed only the Truth to set her free.

Precious people, God's commandments are God's "enablements." Therefore, when He tells you to rejoice evermore (1 Thessalonians 5:16), don't say, "I can't because I'm hurting." When He tells you to love one another (John 15:12), don't say, "Impossible. You don't know my husband." No, when the Lord speaks, there is power in the very commandment He gives. It's so simple. If you just do what He says, you will find Him meeting you at that point, empowering you to keep His command. Nowhere in the New Testament will you find any other model than that of a simple command given, with the choice being either to reject it and walk away, or to believe it and obey.

If you simply say, "Thank You, Lord. I choose this day to receive Your grace and obey Your command," you will find you will be free. And he whom the Son sets free is free *indeed.*

9

John 9:1

And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.

Incensed by His claim to deity, the Jews took up stones to throw at Jesus (John 8:59). But not more than a stone's throw away sat a man whose life was about to change radically and eternally.

John 9:2

And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

The disciples voice the foundational question of all suffering: "Why?"—and then proceed to give Jesus two possible answers. The blindness is either the result of the blind man's sin, they reason, or it is the result of his parents' sin. If his blindness was a result of his own sin, when did he sin? He was, after all, *born* blind. Based on the story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25, the rabbis taught man could sin in the womb. That's the way they explained birth defects. If his blindness was the result of his parents' sin, however, on the basis of Exodus 20:5, the rabbis taught that his mother's, father's grandparent's or great-grandparent's sin could have repercussions in him.

Is this what God means when He says He is a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation? No—that's the godfather, not Father God. Exodus 20:5 simply means that God doesn't change the rules. He continues to visit, deal with, convict, and judge generation after generation. Regardless of what society says; the fact remains that sin is always sin because God is consistent in His heart and in His ways.

John 9:3 (a)

Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents . . .

It is true that all sadness and sorrow are the indirect result of sin. But Jesus says no one can point a finger at another as the culprit. I talk to many people who say the reason they are vulnerable to the occult or pornography is because the vulnerability has been passed from generation to generation in their family. Scripture, however, teaches exactly the opposite. In the days of Ezekiel, people

would justify their own sin with a proverb that said, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge."

God, however, said, "As I live, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold all souls are mine," (see Ezekiel 18:2–4). In other words, "Every single soul is created by Me, belongs to Me, and is individually responsible to Me."

John 9:3 (b)–5

. . . but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

"The issue is not sin," said Jesus. "Rather, this man's misery gives Me opportunity for ministry. I am the Light of the world, and I have only so many hours in which I can work before night falls on the day of My public ministry."

Misery always opens the door for ministry.

As a junior in high school, I had the opportunity to represent our district at the Athletes in Action National Conference. Although the conference began Monday morning, the featured speaker failed to show up for Monday's, Tuesday's and Wednesday's meetings. He was on campus, but the pain he lived with continually prevented him from joining us.

Maybe you've heard his story: During the '68–'69 season, Brian Sternberg was at the West Coast Relays in Fresno, California, pumped, primed, and poised to break the world record in the pole-vault. The day before the meet, he was doing what pole-vaulters often do—working out on the trampoline. But following one particular double flip, he hit the metal railing and broke his neck. It was a tragedy and a shock to the track and field world when Sternberg was told not only that he would never vault again, but that he would be a quadriplegic for the rest of his life.

Other speakers and athletes filled in for Brian at the AIA Conference. Then came Thursday night. After Brian was wheeled out, he began to share with this group of young athletes how he had been a

nominal, lukewarm Christian for a number of years. Then came the tragedy. And he said, "As I was in the hospital flat on my back, hearing I would never run, never walk, never even lift my hands again, God started to do a work in my life and gave me a peace I cannot explain. Jesus became so incredibly real to me at that time and has been real to me since then in a way I could never comprehend or explain." Then, with tears rolling down his cheeks, this world-class athlete said, "If that was the only way I could have what I have right now in my heart, I would take that jump all over again."

When he extended an invitation to make a real commitment to Jesus Christ, virtually the entire audience came forward. We saw revival happen unlike anything I've ever seen before or since. But it came through a man who was broken and in pain.

You who are going through difficulties, you who are experiencing tragedy, sickness, or hard times—watch out that you don't become introspective and wonder what you've done wrong. Jesus would say to you today, "Sin is not the issue." The question is not, "Who caused the misery?" The question is, "Will you allow Me to use it?" The Greek language has no punctuation, so I believe a better rendering of this passage would be: "But that the works of God should be made manifest in him, I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day." In other words, "It's not a time to speculate philosophically. It's a time to reach out compassionately."

Not only does this passage provide an explanation of suffering, but it also provides an illustration of salvation. Did the blind man see Jesus pass by and say, "I want to follow Him"? No. He didn't have a clue as to what was happening. The same is true of you and me. You and I are the blind man. Before we were saved, we stumbled in the dark (Ephesians 4:18).

"I'm kind of a spiritual guy," you might be saying. "I've been pursuing the cosmic reason for being. And in my pursuit, I came across Christianity." Wrong. You and I were blind as bats as we sat begging for a tidbit of pleasure, a crumb of happiness, a scrap of satisfaction from materialism, relationships, or anything else that passed our way. But even though we couldn't see Jesus, He saw us. And as He passed by, He said, "I'm going to stop and do a work in them. I'm going to save them from their own misery and poverty."

John 9:6

When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay.

The man was now doubly blinded: not only blind from birth, but blind from the clay—which speaks of humanity, of depravity. "In sin did my mother conceive me," wrote the sweet psalmist of Israel (Psalm 51:5). So, too, we were born in sin. We live in sin. We're sinners in desperate need of a Savior.

John 9:7 (a)
And said unto him, Go, wash . . .

Feeling the irritation of the mud in his eyes, the blind man was no doubt ready to follow instructions. How often it is the way of the Lord to cause irritations in us in order to drive us to the place of healing and redemption.



***For topical study of John 9:1–7 entitled "Here's Mud in Your Eye," turn to page* 518.**

John 9:7 (b)
. . . in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.)

Jesus was *sent* to be the Light of the world. He in turn *sent* this man to the pool of Siloam in order to receive his sight.

John 9:7 (c)
He went his way therefore, and washed . . .

The Puritan writers say this man blindly obeyed the Lord's command. I like that!

John 9:7 (d)
. . . and came seeing.

Not only does this miracle give insight into the nature of suffering, but it gives encouragement regarding the need for service. You see, in their

theologizing and philosophizing, the disciples were attempting to be teachers when in reality Jesus had called them to be "touchers." It's easy to discuss situations and solutions. But when we get to heaven, the Lord is not going to say, "Well said, good and faithful servant." No, He's waiting to say, "Well *done*."

In addition to being an encouragement to the disciples, I suggest this miracle was an encouragement to Jesus. For as the Jews picked up stones to throw at Him in John 8, just outside the temple sat a man who would receive not only his sight, but his salvation. So, too, perhaps you feel rejected and misunderstood. But it could very well be that a mere stone's throw away from where you are right now sits someone who needs love. If you will reach out to him, listen to him, and pray for him, you will find great encouragement and your own depression will lift. Follow Jesus' example: Take your eyes off yourself and let the Father use you to bring sight to someone else.

John 9:8–10

The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged? Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he. Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened?

The disciples asked *why* the man was blind. His neighbors asked *how* his eyes were opened. But both groups missed the most important question, which was, "*Who* performed the miracle?"

John 9:11

He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight.

This man omitted part of the story. He said Jesus made clay but failed to say how He did it. Why? Because, blind when Jesus spat in the ground, he didn't see it. In other words, he didn't see exactly how the miracle took place. He just knew it did. So, too, we have felt the Lord's touch on our lives. Exactly how it happened, we are at a loss to explain. We only know that, after walking in darkness from birth, like the blind man, we received sight.

John 9:12

Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not.

This breaks my heart. After receiving the gift of vision, the blind man lost sight of the Giver.

John 9:13–16 (a)

They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind. And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes. Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see. Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day.

Here, a man born blind now sees. Yet the Pharisees say, "Wait a minute. That violates Statue 2482.6, which forbids making clay on the Sabbath."

John 9:16 (b), 17

Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them. They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet.

In verse 11, the blind man called Jesus a man. But now, about five minutes old in his knowledge of Jesus, he realizes He is more than a man—He's a Prophet.

John 9:18–20

But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see? His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind.

As parents, we know our kids were born blind spiritually. After all, how many of us have said, "Okay, sweetheart, you're three months old. I'm now going to teach you how to cry your head off until you get your way.

And when you turn two, we'll start working on lying. At four, we'll move on to stealing"? Having watched the demise of Communism, understand that the flaw of Marxism is the completely erroneous presupposition that man is basically good. "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need," said Karl Marx. In reality, however, because all men are born blind, the question we ask is not, "What is your need?" but "What's in it for me?" Thus, Marxism was doomed from its very inception.

John 9:21–23

But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself. These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him.

Being put out of the synagogue meant one lost his ability to pray to God or to be blessed by God. It meant that his family was to treat him as though he were dead and that his business would be absolutely off-limits to all Jews. Thus, to be put out of the synagogue was a serious matter.

John 9:24, 25

Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner. He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.

I like this! The blind man said, "You may be able to trip me up intellectually and outmaneuver me logically, but all I know is this: Once I was a miserable, blind, wretched sinner like you—and now I see!"

John 9:26, 27

Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes? He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples?

"Do you want me to tell you again so you can be converted too?" asked the once-blind man.

John 9:28–33

Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is. The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.

Isaiah prophesied three times that when Messiah came, He would open blind eyes (29:18; 35:5; 42:7). Here, the blind man, now six minutes old in his faith, says, "The One who opened my eyes is of God. How else do you explain what happened to me? It's never happened in all of history. You're professing to be authorities, yet you can't answer this simple question?"

The story is told of a teacher who was as wise as this blind man. Four of her seniors came cruising into class one day, saying, "Sorry we're late again, but we had a flat tire on the way to school."

"Oh?" she said, "Okay. You sit here in this corner, Bill, and you in that one, Steve. Jim, you take a seat in the third corner; and, Joe, you're in the fourth. Now take out a piece of paper, and tell me which tire was flat."

This newly sighted man is doing the same thing. He's deflating the puffed-up egos of his accusers.

John 9:34

They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out.

It's interesting how the Pharisees resort to name-calling whenever they're backed into a corner. When you're sharing your faith, and people start calling

you names, when they get uptight, when they get angry—rejoice because when you throw a rock into a pack of dogs, the one that barks the loudest is the one that got hit. I'd far rather someone react in this way than to hear him say, "You found your way. I found my way. And we'll all end up in bliss together." No, I like it when someone's angry because it means he's convicted.

John 9:35, 36

Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?

At last we hear the pivotal question as the blind man asks, "Who is He?"

John 9:37, 38 (a)

And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe.

The blind man went from calling Jesus a man to a prophet of God to Lord.

John 9:38 (b)

And he worshipped him.

By receiving worship, Jesus once again assumes deity.

John 9:39

And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.

Although judgment is not the reason for Jesus' coming (John 3:17), it is the result.

John 9:40, 41

And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.

“If you truly didn’t understand,” said Jesus to the Pharisees, “you wouldn’t be held responsible.” But such was not the case with the Pharisees, for, had they desired, they could have understood. However, preferring the darkness of their pride, they rejected the Light of the World.

HERE'S MUD IN YOUR EYE

A Topical Study of JOHN 9:1–7

In chapter 8, Jesus said, "I am the Light of the World." And His dealing with the woman taken in adultery verifies His declaration, for in it He revealed the blindness of the scribes and Pharisees. In chapter 9, Jesus again says, "I am the light of the world." This time, however, the account that follows does not show Him *revealing* blindness, but *healing* blindness.

I've read about the amazing benefits of laser surgery. A shaft of light when used carefully and exactingly on the eyeball can correct not only nearsightedness, but in some cases, even blindness. People who were once in darkness are given their sight through a beam of light. But let me tell you—the technology of laser surgery can't hold a candle to the methodology of Jesus in John 9 because what does Jesus do? He uses something more amazing than a laser. He packs the blind man's eyes with mud. Why does He do this? I suggest several possible reasons. . . .

Medicinally

Both Tacitus and Pliny, ancient writers of this era, tell us that in Jesus' day, people believed spit had curative powers. Thus, in using spit and clay perhaps Jesus was, in a sense, blessing and approving the medical knowledge of the day.

Some people say, "Because God is the God who heals (Exodus 15:26), there is no need for medicine." But while God does indeed heal through prayer, through the laying on of hands, through the anointing of oil, through the gift of healing—He also heals through medicine. Even my own body has an incredible ability to heal itself. When I cut my finger, it's amazing what happens as coagulation begins right before my eyes. The bleeding stops. A scab forms and then falls off. And the skin is restored like new.

Listen, gang, it is not my own body system in and of itself that heals. It is not prayer in and of itself that heals. It is not gifts of healing in and of themselves that heal. It is not medicine in and of itself that heals. It is *God* who heals. And He can use medicine. He can use prayer. He can use the anointing of oil. He can use the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He can use my own body. Or He can use any combination. But it's all God.

Symbolically

The healing of the man born blind was a creative not a restorative miracle. Sight had to be created. So what did Jesus do? He used clay. When Adam was formed in the Garden of Eden, the entire process began with clay. Thus, I suggest that by using clay once again, Jesus shows He is our Creator—and that He knows the stuff of which we are made (Psalm 103:14). Truly, we're nothing but dust. And yet so often we deny our earthiness. We spray-paint our dustiness, add some chrome, and put expectations on ourselves that God never intended. Being dust, it's ludicrous for us to walk around cloaked in pseudo-spirituality or to burden others with heavy expectations. We need not be uptight with ourselves or condemned by others. God knows exactly what we are. And yet He's put His Treasure—His Son—within our dusty, earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Practically

The healing of the blind being the miracle most often recorded in the Gospel accounts, we see it happen in various ways: In one case, Jesus spoke to a man (Mark 10:46–52). In another, He touched the man's eyes with His hands (Matthew 20:30–34). In a third, He touched the man's eyes twice (Mark 8:22–25). Here, He uses mud. Jesus works creatively, individually, uniquely. Yet we have a tendency to want to box Him in according to how He works in our own lives.

If this miracle had happened today, I'm convinced the man who was healed by simply hearing the Word and believing would say, "I'm going to start a denomination of healing. I'll call it the Word of Faith Ministry. Just hear the Word, and if you believe you'll be given sight. You'll experience a miracle."

The next man would say, "No, no, no. That's not the way God works. He works through the laying on of hands. I'm going to write a book and begin a movement called Healing Hands Ministries. The power is in the touch."

The third man would say, "No. It takes more than one encounter with the Lord to really be healed. I'm going to offer a course in Second Touch ministry. It will be a two-step program because everyone knows true healing can't happen all at once."

And this man in John would say, "No, that's not it at all. Mud is what's important. Mud In Your Eye Ministries. That's the key. That's where the blessing lies."

We err greatly whenever we think that because the Lord worked one way in our lives, He must work the same way in everyone's life. You can't box the Lord in. The last people who tried put Him in a tomb—and He refused to stay there.

Personally

When Jesus put mud in the blind man's eyes, the man could have said, "Wait a minute. You're putting mud in my eye. You're not making things better—You're making them worse."

Gang, many, many times the way of the Lord is to make things seem worse than they were before in order to get you to the place you really want to be: healed and seeing clearly. When the Lord muddies the waters, we usually don't know what He's doing. "I've been praying; I've been believing, but things are only getting darker and dimmer," we say. "What are You doing, Lord?"

But you know what mud does in one's eye? As a veteran of more mud fights than I care to remember, I know it causes pain. So when Jesus said, "Go to the pool and wash," this guy didn't have to be asked twice. I don't believe his obedience was so much a statement of his great faith as it was a simple desire to get the mud out of his eye!

Maybe this week Jesus has allowed an irritation to come into your life that is causing you pain. Maybe a situation at work or a problem with a relationship is causing you to say, "Lord, I'm talking to You. I'm looking to You. I'm calling on You—but all I'm getting is mud in my eye." Here's what to do: Run quickly to the pool of Siloam, and you will receive your sight more clearly than if the mud—the irritation—had never been there in the first place.

Where is the pool of Siloam? Jesus said, "You are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you" (see John 15:3). Ephesians 5 says we are washed by the water of the Word. It's oftentimes when we are most irritated and most frustrated that we finally turn back to the Word. And when we do, we see things clearly in the way the Lord always intended us to see. Consequently, I am learning that when irritations come, it's not for me to despise them or to wonder what's going on, but rather to embrace them and to stumble, if need be, to the pool of Siloam—to the Word of God—where I can have my eyes opened once again.



10 Chapter 9 ended with a once-blind man's excommunication from the Jewish religious system. Here in chapter 10, Jesus addresses this issue by speaking of a new order, a new fold, a new flock of which the once-blind man would be a part. Bear in mind that although sheep and shepherds might sound a

bit foreign to us, the role sheep played in Jewish history rendered this analogy tailor-made for Jesus' audience.

In what is most likely the oldest book of the Bible, we are told Job had fourteen thousand sheep (Job 42:12). On the day the temple was dedicated, Solomon offered one hundred twenty thousand of his sheep as a sacrifice to God (1 Kings 8:63). David and Moses, the two great leaders of Old Testament Israel, were both shepherds. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Zechariah all drew analogies from sheep and shepherds. Therefore, talking to Jews about shepherds would be similar to talking to West Virginians about coal miners, to Texans about cowboys, to Californians about surfers, or to Oregonians about loggers. It was an analogy to which they could easily relate.

A shepherd of Jesus' day would wear a cotton tunic held together by a leather cord belt, upon which hung a leather pouch to carry dried fruit or small stones for the sling that also hung upon his belt. The sling was used not only to ward off predators but also to herd wandering sheep, for an experienced shepherd would have such precise aim that he would be able to drop a stone right in front of the nose of a straying sheep, thereby drawing it back to the flock. Another item attached to the belt of the shepherd was a horn of oil. Oil was used to anoint the heads of the sheep in the flock—not only as an insect repellent but also to reduce the friction that occurred when they butted each other. Fourthly, attached to the shepherd's belt was a small clublike instrument called a rod that was used to fight predators in close "hand-to-hand combat" situations. The rod was also used as an instrument of correction, for if a lamb continually, persistently wandered away from the flock, the shepherd would use the rod to break its legs. Then he would put the lamb on his shoulders and carry it until its legs healed. When at last the lamb was again able to walk on its own, because of the bonding that took place during the time the shepherd carried the lamb on his shoulders, it never again wandered. Finally, in his hand the shepherd held a staff—a large stick seven or eight feet long with a crook at one end with which the shepherd would hook lambs or sheep headed in the wrong direction. With this picture of a Middle-Eastern shepherd in mind, Jesus begins His discourse . . .

John 10:1

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

During certain times of the year, shepherds would lead their flocks away from the village to greener pastures. During such times, the sheep slept in temporary sheepfolds made of brush. When the sheep remained in the village, however, all of the shepherds of the community brought their sheep nightly into a common sheepfold that had stone walls six or seven feet high. Theft from these communal sheepfolds was common. A two-man operation, a thief would stand upon the shoulders of a partner and climb into the sheepfold. Then, with great stealth, he would slit the throats of four or five sheep and toss them over the wall to his buddy.

John 10:2, 3 (a)

But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice . . .

While the sheep stayed in the communal sheepfold, all of the shepherds would return home each night except the one who would act as a porter, or watchman. In the morning, the shepherds would return for their flocks. How did they know whose sheep was whose if they were all mixed together in the sheepfold? Each shepherd had a distinctive call, or song, to which only his own sheep responded.

John 10:3 (b)

. . . and he calleth his own sheep by name . . .

In Revelation 2:17, we are told that our Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, will give us new names that will fit us perfectly and that we'll possess for eternity.

John 10:3 (c)

. . . and leadeth them out.

Shepherds never drove the sheep, never beat the sheep, never pushed the sheep. They led the sheep. Go to Israel today, and you'll see shepherds just walking along with a stream of sheep following right behind them. Americans tend to drive themselves and others. Not so a Middle-Eastern shepherd. So, too, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, doesn't drive me. He *leads* me. In other words, He goes first through the valley of the shadow of death before He ever asks me to go through it. Scripture declares that Jesus, our Shepherd, our Leader, was

tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Consequently, there is nothing you will ever face He hasn't felt or isn't feeling presently. Gang, Jesus doesn't send you into battle or drive you into any given trial. He doesn't pontificate or preach. He *leads.*

John 10:4, 5

And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

You can always tell when a stranger creeps into the flock. He will cause division. Knowing something's not quite right, the sheep will scatter.

John 10:6, 7 (a)

This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again . . .

I have the word "again" circled in my Bible. Jesus didn't say, "You dumb sheep. How can you miss this obvious picture? I'm going to write you off." No, He came to them *again.* And haven't you found that the Lord keeps coming to you time and time and time again, saying the same thing until it finally sinks in? Have you ever resisted something the Lord has told you, only to hear a teaching over the radio on the same subject or a scripture from a friend along the same line? The Lord is faithful to keep coming time and time again, dealing with you and me concerning those issues that need to be addressed in our lives.

John 10:7 (b)

. . . Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

"Wait a minute," you say. "Is Jesus mixing metaphors? I thought He was the Shepherd. But here He's talking about being the Door. Is He drawing another analogy?" No. Jesus' audience would have understood this perfectly. You see, neither the sheepfolds made of brush in the high country nor the sheepfolds made of stone in the community had need of doors, for once the sheep came in to the fold, the shepherd would lie down across the opening and would literally

become the door. That way, no sheep could leave, and no man could enter without stepping on the shepherd and waking him up. Thus, in referring to Himself as the Door, Jesus was saying, "I'm the Shepherd on duty. I'm the One whose job it is to guard the flock."

John 10:8

All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

"I am the Door—not a door, not one of the doors. I am *the* Door. And everyone else is a thief." Jesus alone makes this claim. Whether you read the writings of Krishna or Buddha, Confucius or Zoroaster, you'll find that every one claimed to be *one* of the ways in which the God-consciousness was manifested. Jesus uniquely says, "I am the Door and everyone else is a ripoff." How do we know Jesus is truly who He says He is? It gets back to the foundational issue of the Resurrection. Buddha kicked the bucket—and he's still down. You don't see Confucius walking around. These guys gave their rap until death came and terminated their so-called ministries. Only Jesus fulfilled His ministry by dying for our sins and rising again to verify, to validate, to substantiate His claim to be the Door.

John 10:9, 10 (a)

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.

It would do us well if we really grasped the fact that Satan only wants to rip us off. He tantalizes us with a variety of fancy lures, but ultimately all he wants to do is destroy us. In my reading this week, I came across an interesting little nugget in the Book of 1 Chronicles. Tucked away in the fourth chapter is the prayer of a man named Jabez, who prayed, "Lord, that You would keep me from evil so that it won't grieve me" (see 4:10). So often we think of sin only in terms of its grieving God—which indeed it does. Jabez, however, shows great insight in saying, "Keep me from evil, Lord, so it doesn't grieve *me*." There's a misconception in our society today that sin brings pleasure, that sin is fun, that there's happiness in a little escapade here and a little carnality there. Jabez, this man of God, knew better. He knew sin would grieve *him*.

John 10:10 (b)

I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

I love John 10:10, but increasingly as I hear testimonies and preaching, it comes across this way: "Come to Jesus, and you will have abundant life. Get saved, and you'll have peace, joy, and love you've never known." While that is all true, if people respond to the gospel based solely upon John 10:10, when they get fired from their job or dumped by their girlfriend, they say, "Wait a minute. Jesus said I would have life abundantly—but look at me." And they become disillusioned and disoriented in their faith. John 10:10 is the result of the gospel but not the essence. The essence of the gospel is found in the next verse. . . .

John 10:11

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

The essence of the gospel is not what Jesus will do for you—it's what He *already* did for you when He died for your sin. Because Jesus bore the wrath of God we deserved, our sins past, present, and future are forgiven in totality. Thus, the gospel means we need to be about the business not of saying, "Get saved so you can buy a new car," or, "Get saved so you won't have any more problems," but, "Get saved because Jesus Christ died for your sins."

John 10:12, 13

But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

Usually, the shepherd was either the owner of the sheep or a son of the owner. In some cases, however, a man would have to hire help. Hirelings had the tendency to split the scene when danger came. That's why, according to Amos 3:12, if a flock was harmed while under the care of a hireling, the hireling would have to produce the ears or the legs of the lambs that were

carried off as proof that he did everything in his power to fend off the attack. The Good Shepherd tenaciously cares for His flock because He's not a hireling. He's the Son.

John 10:14–16 (a)

I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father know eth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice . . .

I don't think we have any idea how big our Shepherd is. That's why we must watch out for sectarianism—for thinking people are suspect concerning their place in the kingdom if they don't believe exactly as we do on nonessential issues. "I have sheep you don't even know about," Jesus says.

John 10:16 (b)

. . . and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

One fold, one Shepherd. Unity in the body of Christ is not our responsibility —it's reality. When I was pastor of Applegate Christian Fellowship, people would often ask what we were doing to unify the believers in the Rogue Valley in Oregon. My answer was, "We're already unified."

"But the believers don't get along," they would protest. "They squabble."

"Well, so do my kids," I would say, "but we don't have big rallies to remind ourselves that we're all Coursons."

So, too, did I worry that some folks only worshiped with us for three months and then worshiped somewhere else?

No. Did I chase them down when they weren't around any longer?

No. I didn't chase them in. Why would I chase them down?

The Lord is alive. *He's* the Good Shepherd, and His is a big fold. He'll lead people to that corner of His pasture for however long they're supposed to be there.

John 10:17, 18 (a)

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of

myself.

In New York City on February 24, 1925, Dr. Evans Keith, a surgeon who had practiced medicine for thirty-seven years, took part in an operation he had performed dozens of times previously. The only solution for the patient complaining of severe intestinal pain was an appendectomy—a rather common operation. This particular appendectomy, however, was unusual for two reasons. One was that it was the first time in medical history that a local anesthetic was used. Dr. Keith had been arguing for a number of years that the use of local anesthesia was a safer, less complicated procedure. Yet although other doctors agreed in theory, none would endorse the practice until it was actually performed successfully. And therein lay the problem, for no one was brave enough to volunteer for the procedure. Consequently, this day in February was unusual not only because of the medical procedure, but because of the patient, for, you see, the patient was Dr. Keith. The doctor became the patient in order that patients might trust their doctors.

Jesus did something infinitely more remarkable than that. He willingly laid down His life that we might find life. The Shepherd became a Sheep that we sheep might know our Shepherd.

As an Old Testament believer, if you wanted to be touched by God, you would bring a lamb to the temple. There, the priests would carefully inspect and scrutinize it for any spot or blemish. It was not the worshiper who was judged. It was the lamb. In this lies a fabulous truth. You see, I can be guided by the Father tonight and led by the Father tomorrow. I can expect to receive abundant life. I can look forward to His blessing upon me and upon my family. I can trust He will anoint my head with oil and that He will take care of the predators who are coming out to get me. I can expect that He will lead me through the valley of darkness. I can expect all of this not because I'm spotless, but because the Lamb has been inspected and found perfect. Worthy is the *Lamb.* I can receive blessing not because I've gone to church, not because I've read fifteen chapters in my Bible, not because I didn't watch television. I enjoy the blessing of God upon my life solely because of the Lamb.

"I lay down My life," Jesus said. He didn't say, "You'd better lay down your life if you expect to be blessed." While it is true that He would call us in discipleship to take up our cross daily and follow Him, my entry into the presence of the Father is not based upon who I am, what I do, or what I don't

do. It is based upon who *He* is, and what He did on the Cross. The Shepherd became a Lamb that we dumb sheep might know the Shepherd.

John 10:18 (b)

I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.

In laying down His life, Jesus became the Door through which we enter His fold. In taking it up again by rising again, Jesus remains our Good Shepherd, guiding us, watching over us, tending us, His flock.

John 10:18 (c)–21

This commandment have I received of my Father. There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?

The Puritans rightly said that not all unity is holy, and not all division is from hell. Over and over again in John's Gospel, we see people divided because of Jesus.

John 10:22

And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter.

The Feast of Dedication, which took place on December twenty-fifth, commemorated the overthrow of the terrible Syrian General, Antiochus Ephiphanes, by Judas Maccabee and his band of brave guerrillas. To this day, the Jews still celebrate the Feast of Dedication, also known as the Feast of Lights, or Hanukkah.

John 10:23, 24 (a)

And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. Then came the Jews round about him . . .

The Greek meaning of the Greek text is, "They boxed Him in, hemmed Him in, surrounded Him."

John 10:24 (b)–29

. . . and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

Like a little child crossing the street, holding Mommy and Daddy's hands—on one hand, we have the Father, on the other we have our Lord Jesus Christ. We are eternally secure because we are secure in the Eternal One.



***For topical study of John 10:27–30 entitled "You're in Good Hands," turn to page* 525.**

John 10:30

I and my Father are one.

In verse 24, the Jews said to Jesus, "If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." Here, Jesus gives His answer.

John 10:31

Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.

Sometimes people ask questions not because they want to know the answer, but because they want to argue. Such was the case here. The Jews didn't want to know the answer. They just wanted to hear Jesus give it again in order that they might have reason to stone Him.

John 10:32, 33

Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews

answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.

The fact that the Jews picked up stones to throw at Jesus proved they understood His claim to deity. The fact that they were unable to throw them shows they experienced the proof of His deity.

John 10:34–36

Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?

Quoting Psalm 82:6, Jesus refers to the Old Testament, wherein judges were called gods because they held the power of life and death in their hands. “Doesn’t Scripture say you are gods?” asked Jesus. “Why, then, are you so upset when I say I am the Son of God?” He throws them a curve ball—and they have a tough time hitting it.

John 10:37–42

If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him. Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand, and went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode. And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there.

When I went through a time of questioning and wondering why I wasn't perceiving the power of the Holy Spirit moving through my life in the way I desired, I began to become somewhat disoriented in my walk—until the Lord laid this passage on me. Jesus said the greatest prophet born in the history of the world was a man who did no miracle. None. At that point, I realized that if I were never to see any miracle through my life, if I were never to see the power of the Spirit in a tangible way, it would be fine with me if it could be said of me what was said of John: that all things I spoke of Jesus were true.

What's the priority of ministry? Doing exactly what John did: talking about Jesus, pointing people to Jesus, exalting Jesus. No wonder John was the greatest prophet of all (Matthew 11:11).



***For topical study of John 10:39–42 entitled "Resorting Unto Jesus," turn to page* 529.**

YOU'RE IN GOOD HANDS

A Topical Study of JOHN 10:27–30

Statistics show the average adult American is exposed to between two hundred fifty and three hundred commercials every day. But of those two hundred fifty-plus commercials, only a few have what is referred to in the industry as "sticking power." That is, very few are remembered for any length of time. The ad campaign with perhaps the greatest sticking power in advertising history was launched when the Allstate Indemnity Company declared, "You're in good hands with Allstate."

But the temporal life insurance policy you can buy from Allstate does not compare to the eternal life assurance you can get free from God Almighty, for while the Allstate salesman tells you you're in good hands, the Son of Man says, "You're in God's hands."

Strong Hands

> *And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves. . . .*
>
> Matthew 21:12

A carpenter in the days before Black and Decker, Jesus felled His own trees and made His own lumber. Thus, I see callused hands holding a scourge, overturning tables, driving moneychangers from the temple, exuding such strength that none dared challenge Him. I see the strong hand of Jesus reaching into the raging waves to pull Peter out of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:31). Considering that the church fathers referred to Peter as "the Giant," I picture Jesus pulling this big fisherman—doubly heavy with the weight of his waterlogged clothing—out of the water with an incredible one-armed curl.

Tender Hands

> *But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.*
>
> Matthew 19:14, 15

When children were brought to Him, Jesus laid His hands upon them and blessed them. As Christmas draws nearer, the line to see Santa gets longer. Watch the kids, and, as they get closer to Santa, you'll see terror fill their eyes. After all, they have to sit on the lap of a fat man with a big beard, dressed in a red suit, saying, "Ho, ho, ho." If it weren't for the elves blocking the exits, none of them would probably stay long enough to even have their picture taken! Not so with Jesus. Something in His touch and in His countenance caused little children to feel comfortable around Him. They came to Him willingly and were touched by Him tenderly.

Wonder-Working Hands

> *From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?*
>
> Mark 6:2

"What wonders hath His hands wrought," the people said as Jesus multiplied a few loaves of bread to feed five thousand men and as He touched the skin of the lepers and made them whole. A grotesque, disfiguring, highly contagious disease, leprosy was most likely more dreaded in Jesus' time than AIDS is today. Old Testament regulations dictated a distance of one hundred yards be kept between lepers and the general populace. But what did Jesus do? While He could have healed them with a simple command, He chose instead to risk contamination and *touch* them. If you had the ability to simply say, "Be healed," would you put your fingers in the ears of the deaf or on the eyelids of the blind? Jesus did. Knowing that the greatest need people have is to feel loved, Jesus touched them compassionately.

Inclusive Hands

> *And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!*
>
> Matthew 12:49

While it has been said that you can choose your friends but not your family, such is not the case with Jesus. He chooses His friends to *be* His family. He stretches out His strong yet tender hands and says to you and me, "You who hear My Word and receive it in your heart are My mother, My brothers, My family." As I consider the strong, tender, compassionate, wonder-working, inclusive hands of Jesus Christ, I know I'm in a good place if I'm in His hands. But Jesus declares to us in our text that, not only are we in His hand, but we're in the Father's hand as well—which causes me to consider the Father's hand. . . .

The Hand That Spans the Cosmos

> *Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span? . . .*
>
> Isaiah 40:12

With the naked eye, man can see 1,029 stars on a clear night. With his first telescope, Galileo counted 3,336 stars. Now we know there are more than 100 billion stars in our galaxy, more than 100 billion galaxies in our universe, each having at least 100 billion stars. That's a lot of stars—and the Lord knows each of them by name (Isaiah 40:26). Can you imagine remembering the names of 100 billion stars times 100 billion more?

Right now, the earth is spinning 1,000 miles per hour on its axis. At the same time, it's traveling around the sun at 67,000 miles per hour. While that's happening, the sun is moving across the Milky Way with her planets at 64,000 miles per hour. And the galaxy as a whole is moving across the universe at 483,000 miles per hour. Added together, we are moving at a speed of 1,350,000 miles per hour. No wonder we feel spun out and dizzy! In actuality, however, we are one of the slowest-moving galaxies in the universe. We're lumbering along at 400,000 miles per hour, while most galaxies move at 10,000 miles per second. What keeps it all together? What keeps everything from colliding and exploding? Who's the cosmic traffic cop? Who's in charge of the whole show? The Lord—"for he is strong in power. Not one faileth" (see Isaiah 40:26). Nothing can compare to the big Hand of the Father. The entire universe and whatever is beyond is spanned in His hand.

The Hand That Holds the Worm

> *For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff.*
>
> Isaiah 41:13–15

The same Hand that spans the cosmos holds *you.* The Lord says to His people, "I'm going to keep you in the right hand of My righteousness. I'm going to make you into a threshing instrument with teeth—to eat up the mountains of difficulty that threaten you, to chew up the challenges which lie before you."

"But He's speaking to Israel, to His people," you say, "and I feel so far from what or where I should be. He must get tired of keeping His hand on me. I'm just a worm."

Good News! Look at verse 14. God says, "I'll make even you worm, Jacob, into a lean, mean threshing machine."

That's why, in talking about His eternal life assurance policy, Jesus calls us sheep (John 10:27). He doesn't say, "My lions hear My voice," or "My tigers and bulls know Me." No, He says, "My sheep—creatures known for their stupidity, for their tendency to stray, for their helplessness and vulnerability—hear My voice."

You might be as stupid as a sheep or feel as low as a worm. That's okay. You are eternally secure in the Father's hand. Am I saying you can never lose your salvation? Worms can't and sheep can't—but I'll tell you who can: the dog who returns to his own vomit (2 Peter 2:22). In speaking of those who relish returning to their own sin time and time again, Peter says they were never sheep and not even worms. They are dogs who love to eat their vomit, pigs who long to return to the pen.

The prodigal wandered away, erred greatly, and ended up in the pigpen. But he came to his senses and said, "I don't belong here. I'm going home" (see Luke 15:18). The difference between a pig and a prodigal is that, although you can scrub a pig, shampoo his hair, and put a bow on his tail—he'll dive into mud the

first chance he gets. Perhaps there are those here who can't wait for this service to end so they can dive back into the mud. Be careful. That could identify you as a pig and not a prodigal. Others of you, however, know you're splattered with mud. But, like the prodigal, you say, "I don't want to be in the pigpen. I want to be in my Father's house."

The Hand That Bears Your Name

> *Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continu ally before me.*
>
> Isaiah 49:16

"Behold My hands," said Jesus to Thomas (John 20:27), for in those hands, love was engraved. When Jesus was pinned to the Cross for you and me, He nailed down our eternal state. The price was paid for any sin and every sin—whatever it was, is, or will be. That's why He was able to say, "Your name is permanently engraved in the palms of My hands, and no man shall pluck you out." That's eternal life assurance, gang.

Don't let the Enemy tell you you're not saved or that you've blown it once too often. Don't let the Enemy say your salvation is in jeopardy. Don't let him produce in you a feeling of insecurity. Instead, marvel at what Jesus said when He declared, "You're in the Father's hand and you're in My hand. Therefore, you're not only in good hands—You're in the best hands."

RESORTING UNTO JESUS

A Topical Study of JOHN 10:39–42

Chronologically, at this point in our study, we are approximately three and a half months away from Jesus' crucifixion. In our text, we see Him leave Jerusalem, not to return until His final week. When John declares in verse 22 that it was winter, I don't think he was simply giving us information seasonally, but rather providing us insight into the climate of the city spiritually. You see, when Jesus walked throughout Jerusalem, it was summer. The people had opportunity to see His works, to hear His words, to be gathered into His kingdom. But, because they rejected Him, as He left Jerusalem, Jeremiah 8:20 was indeed fulfilled. The harvest was past. The summer had ended. But the people were not saved.

Crossing the Jordan River, Jesus went to Bethabara—the place where His public ministry had begun three years previously. He went there not because He was running from the people, but rather that He might be readied for the battle He knew lay ahead. He went to Bethabara not out of fear of the future but to retreat into the presence of the Father. And, as Jesus spent three and a half months at Bethabara, seeking His Father and preparing for what He knew would be the culmination of His earthly ministry, John writes that many resorted unto Him there. They left the cold city where it was winter—where people were rejecting Him—and went out to the desert, where they found refreshment and rest.

So, too, I believe every one of us needs to withdraw from the city, to withdraw from the cold climate and hectic pace of our usual activities, to withdraw even from ministry occasionally in order to resort unto Jesus at Bethabara. Why Bethabara? Because that is where we will call to mind John's words that rang out in that region when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

The Man Became a Lamb

Great is the mystery, Paul declared, that God left heaven and became a Man (1 Timothy 3:16). But God didn't stop there. He went lower still. He became a Lamb.

If you were to transport yourself through the tunnel of time back to the days of the tabernacle or the temple, your entry into those places of worship would depend not upon whether you were worthy, but upon the purity of the lamb you brought with you. If, upon inspection, the lamb was found pure, you were free to enter into the tabernacle or the temple. So, too, I come to Bethabara today—I resort unto Jesus and enter into God's presence—not on the basis of my perfection, my good deeds, or my activity. I enter only through the worthiness of Jesus, the Lamb of God.

"I find no fault in Him," declared Pontius Pilate, the very one who ultimately sentenced Jesus to death (Luke 23:4). Even Judas, the one who betrayed Him, said, "I have betrayed innocent blood," (see Matthew 27:4). Worthy is the blood of the Lamb.

In speaking of the Lamb of God, David prophesied not a bone would be broken (Psalm 34:20)—unusual because after a period of time, the guards usually broke the legs of those crucified in order to hasten death. In addition to a prophecy to be fulfilled, however, Psalm 34:20 is a reminder that the blood of Jesus Christ is *continually* available to cleanse me from all sin past, present, and future. Why? Because where is blood produced? In the marrow of the bone. No wonder, then, that the Father dictated none of Jesus' bones be broken, for in so doing, He says the blood supply will never be diminished. That is why Paul could declare that where sin abounds, grace abounds yet more (Romans 5:20). Worthy is the Lamb!

The Lamb Became a Worm

Not only did God become a Man, and the Man became a Lamb, but Psalm 22:6 tells us that the Lamb became a worm. Why? The Hebrew word for worm, *tolàath,* is translated two ways in the Old Testament: either as scarlet or as worm. To obtain the color specified for the garments of the priests and the curtains of the tabernacle throughout the Book of Exodus, *tolàaths,* or worms, were ground up, thereby producing a scarlet dye in which cloth would be dipped. When bearing its young, the female *tolàath* would climb a tree and fasten herself to a branch, where, in the process of giving birth, she would explode, leaving a spot of blood on the tree. Truly, Jesus was right when He declared, I am a *tolàath,* for as our High Priest, He is clothed in the dye of His own blood; the spots of blood left on the tree of Calvary being the only way we could be born again. No wonder Isaiah declares, Though your sins be as scarlet (*tolàath*), they shall be white as snow (1:18). *Great* is the mystery. God became a Man, became a Lamb, and became a worm. Would you have done that?

Suppose you die today and go to heaven. There, the Father takes you on the tour of the cosmos, where you see places to surf that have never been discovered. You're ready to ski down Mount Zion. You're blown away by the beauty and glory of heaven. Then He takes you beyond the farthest star and shows you a tiny planet, isolated in a far corner of the universe. As you look closely, you see it is inhabited by dogs. "Little dogs on a planet—how cute," you say.

"Look a little more closely," says the Lord. And as you do, you see the dogs are not so cute after all. With teeth bared and foam dripping from their mouths, they're biting and devouring one another.

"This is sick," you say. "Those dogs are all rabid. Destroy them, Lord."

"No," He answers. "I love them. I want to tell them I have a plan to heal them, but they don't listen to Me because I'm too big for them to relate to. That's why I brought you here today. I want you to go down there and tell them I have an antidote for their rabid sickness."

"Okay," you say.

"But wait. There's more," says the Lord. "If they're going to listen to you, you must become like them: a dog."

"Let me get this straight," you say. "You want me to become a dog and tell them You have a plan for them, an antidote to heal them?"

"Yes," answers the Lord. "But there's something else: They're not going to listen to your message. On the contrary, they'll turn upon you, rip you to shreds, and kill you. I will resurrect you with great glory and honor—but from that point on, you'll be a dog forever."

If God asked that of me, I would say, "No, Lord." But you know something? Jesus Christ becoming a man is a far greater step down than you becoming a dog. His descent was a lower step than we will ever comprehend this side of eternity. Granted, He is resurrected. Granted, He is glorified. But He remains in His humanity in order that He might pray for us as a compassionate Priest and feel the hurts we're going through right now. He remains a Man to this day. Great is the mystery. Incomprehensible is the love. No wonder many resorted unto Him at Bethabara, where they remembered the words of John the Baptist. No wonder we join them and say, "John, you were right. He *is* the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world."

We are free to enter into the presence of the Father and receive blessing today solely because of the worthiness of the Lamb, the sufficiency of the blood, the bones never broken. Dear brother, precious sister—if it is winter in your soul today, make your way to the desert. Resort to Jesus at Bethabara and behold the Lamb once again.



11 Living together in a house presumably given them by their parents, two sisters and a brother became friends with a radical Rabbi, a controversial Figure, a miracle Worker named Jesus of Nazareth. And as they opened up their hearts to Him, they also opened up their home for Him. Yet although no doubt Jesus greatly appreciated their hospitality and loved the friendship they offered Him so freely, their linkage with Him and their relationship to Him did not insulate them from difficulty nor immunize them from tragedy. Thus, as chapter 11 opens, we see ominous storm clouds hovering over this little home in Bethany. So, too, I think most of us who love the Love have opened the home of our hearts to Him and who want to be linked with Him have discovered that these sentiments do not insulate or protect us from dark days. Let's take a look and see how this family navigated the waters of difficulty. . . .

John 11:1–3

Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.

Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus, about twenty miles away in Bethabara, that the one He loved was sick. I like that! They didn't say, "The one that loves You is sick," but rather, "The one You love is sick." Like Martha and Mary, I don't approach the Lord on the basis of my love for Him. You know why? Because my love for the Lord is fickle and feeble. But His love for me, however, is fixed and firm. He's never surprised by what I say, never taken aback by what I do. Therefore, wise is the man or woman who approaches the Lord based on *His* love.

Interestingly, the Greek word translated "lovest" is not *agapao*—the perfect love that gives simply for the sake of giving—but *phileo,* which refers to affection or friendship. Maybe you think the Lord loves you because He is love and, therefore, has to love you. Not true. Jesus said, "I have not called you servants but friends" (see John 15:15). He doesn't love you simply because He's stuck with you. No, He *chose* to love you (John 15:16). He loves you as you would love a friend.

Notice that Mary and Martha didn't instruct the Lord concerning what He should do. Oh, how often I make that mistake. I become aware of some problem or need and immediately start instructing the Lord about how He can solve the situation. "Who hath given the Lord counsel?" asked the prophet rhetorically. (Isaiah 40:13). A lot of us try. We would be far wiser to follow the example of Martha and Mary. "Lord, the one who You have affection for is sick," they said. They weren't commanding. They were communing.

John 11:4, 5

When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.

Precious Mary—songwriters sing of her; poets write about her; artists draw pictures of her. Mary is always elevated. But did you catch what the Holy Spirit inspired John to write? "Now Jesus loved *Martha* and her sister." You who are

Marthas, be encouraged. You who say, "I'm not one who easily sits at Jesus' feet and contemplates His character. I'm the one who's washing dishes after the potluck is over, the one who's changing diapers in the nursery"—take hope. Scripture says Jesus loved Martha.

John 11:6–7

When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was. Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judaea again.

As the messenger returned with Jesus' message that Lazarus' sickness was not unto death, no doubt relief flooded the hearts of Mary and Martha. Yet as time passed, Lazarus became weaker by the hour. Meanwhile, Jesus remained in Bethabara for two more days, letting events play out before He said, "Let's go to Judaea."

John 11:8

His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?

"You're going back toward Jerusalem? Lord," warned His disciples, "they're out to get You there."

John 11:9, 10

Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.

"Don't worry," answered Jesus. "It's still daylight. There are still things for me to do before the night falls." Oh, night would come soon enough when He would be crucified on a Cross, when His work on earth would cease. But not yet. Consequently, Jesus was implying that He was indestructible. So are you. The Bible says man is appointed unto death (Hebrews 9:27). No matter how many airbags you have in your car, no matter how many injections of vitamin C you take, once your appointed hour comes, that's it. But until that time, you're basically indestructible. Does that mean you can skydive without a parachute?

No, for the moment you do will then become your appointed hour. When Satan told Jesus to jump off the temple in order to prove who He was, Jesus said, "It is written thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (see Matthew 4:7). Don't be foolish—but realize there is a period of time in which you can work without being destroyed.

John 11:11–14

These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

In my mind's eye, I see Martha getting ready for the funeral, taking care of the arrangements perhaps, or cooking a meal for the family, guests, and mourners who would be coming. I see Mary, with her beautiful contemplative spirit, quietly ministering to people or perhaps pondering the events that had transpired.

John 11:15

And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.

There was sadness in the home, but gladness in the heart of Jesus Christ. Why? Because He saw the big picture. He knew the end of the story. He knew that this event that began with grief would end in belief.

John 11:16 (a)

Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus . . .

I've always liked Thomas. I think he gets a bad rap. He should be remembered not only as the doubting one, but also as the devoted one because watch what he says. . . .

John 11:16 (b)

. . . unto his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.

When the other disciples were saying, "Don't go near Jerusalem," Thomas said, "Let's go and die too." I think this shows real devotion and true courage. When Jesus appeared to the disciples in the Upper Room after His Resurrection, Thomas wasn't there (John 20:24). Why? I suggest that while the other guys were hiding in the Upper Room, Thomas was the only one who had the guts to be out on the streets. A lot of times, I think we read things into the lives of Bible characters that aren't totally fair. I think Thomas, for example, is one who deserves a little more credit.

John 11:17–20 (a)

Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already. Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off: And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him . . .

In running out to meet Jesus, Martha broke Oriental custom and tradition. Thus, I see Martha as being very much like Peter (John 21:7).

John 11:20 (b)

. . . but Mary sat still in the house.

I think Mary and John are also similar. Mary is a contemplator and John a mystic who received Revelation from Jesus.

John 11:21

Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

I think remorse rather than rebuke was the incentive for Martha to say, "Lord, if You had been here, I know Lazarus would still be with us."

John 11:22

But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.

Here we see a spark of faith ignite in Martha's heart.

John 11:23

Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

Responding to Martha's faith, Jesus gives a promise.

John 11:24

Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

Jesus gives a promise to Martha. But rather than embracing it joyfully and expectantly, Martha looks at it as a theological principle. Do you ever do that? The Lord opens a promise to you in the Word about a situation, a relationship, or a financial struggle and you think, *Well, this probably doesn't apply to this dispensation. This can't really be true for me today. Come on, the Lord isn't* really *going to bless, heal, restore, or help. There must be some other meaning theologically. It's just too good to be true.* But in so doing, you share the mind-set of Martha.

John 11:25, 26

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

"You're talking theologically, Martha," says Jesus. "But I'm relating to you personally. *I* am the resurrection. *I* am what you need right now."

John 11:27

She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.

There's not a believer in this room tonight who doubts the Lord's ability to do a miracle. What we struggle with is the same thing with which Martha struggled. That is, we don't question His ability. But we do question His willingness. Like Martha, we say, "I believe You're Someone special, unique, powerful, the Son of God, Messiah. But I can't believe You would be willing to do something for *me*."

John 11:28 (a)

And when she had so said, she went her way . . .

Although there was a spark of faith initially within Martha, we'll see her get sidetracked theologically, wondering whether Jesus would do a work for her personally.

John 11:28 (b)–30

. . . and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee. As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him. Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him.

In waiting for Jesus to call her, Mary held to Eastern tradition.

John 11:31, 32 (a)

The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there. Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet . . .

How special Mary is. In Luke 10, we see her at the feet of the Lord in a happy time. Here, we see her at His feet during a hard time. Mary is one who both in days of delight and difficulty positioned herself at the feet of Jesus Christ.

I have found that some are inclined to spend time with the Lord in easy times. "Oh, Lord," they say, "You're so good to me. I'll sing Your praises. I'll be at church on Sunday." But when the hard times come, they pull away. In anger and frustration and confusion, they say, "Why expend the energy? Why pay the gas money? I'll just stay home and watch TV." Others run to church in hard times. This is seen, for example, in times of war. In hard times, many seek the Lord and sit at His feet. But when things are back to normal, they disappear.

Many of you, however, are like Mary, who, regardless of the circumstances, find themselves *always* at Jesus' feet. People often wonder how they can

experience intimacy with the Lord to the degree Mary did. The answer is simple: Spend time at His feet.

John 11:32 (b)

. . . saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

Mary repeats verbatim what Martha had said previously. This tells me something about human nature. That is, we begin to talk like the people with whom we spend time. Watching their brother grow paler and weaker, no doubt Martha and Mary said, "Where's the Lord? Didn't He get our message? Doesn't He care?" And they spoke the same words.

I have chosen, as much as possible, to establish relationships with people who speak words of faith, who rejoice in the Lord, who give thanks in everything because that's the language I want to speak. I don't want to be one who is cynical, one who doubts, one who complains, murmurs, or is grumpy. This doesn't mean we shouldn't minister to those people and bear their burdens. But in establishing long-lasting relationships, I encourage you to be with those who speak faith, who love God, who trust the Lord. Spend time with people who will take you a notch higher, because if you don't—if your closest friends are those who are always questioning and doubting and grumbling—their language will sooner or later flow from your lips as well.

John 11:33–35

When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept.

As the mourners wail, as Mary weeps, as Jesus is at the scene, He finds Himself also crying, which intrigues me because He knew what would be happening. Why, then, does He weep?

Perhaps Jesus wept because He was reminded that sin destroys, sin kills, sin stinks. Aren't you finding this to be so? Aren't you seeing heartache and sadness all around because of sin? Doesn't it make you heavy of heart sometimes when you realize that precious people are hurting because of sin?

Perhaps Jesus wept because of the unbelief that surrounded Him. He had given a promise that Lazarus would rise, but no one embraced or believed it. On the contrary, they were all mourning. Jesus said, "It's going to be all right." But they said, "No, it's not." So, too, when He says all things are working together for good (Romans 8:28), and we say, "No they're not," our unbelief must break His heart as well.

Perhaps Jesus wept because He knew He was going to pull Lazarus out of Paradise and bring him back to this planet. Poor Lazarus!

Perhaps Jesus wept because, although He knew everything would turn out well eventually, those around Him were hurting presently. We are told in the Book of Hebrews that Jesus is a High Priest who sympathizes with us, feels for us, and prays on behalf of us. Therefore, even though I should be stronger in faith, when I'm hurting, Jesus hurts too.

So it is that the shortest verse in Scripture becomes the most powerful when seen in light of both the deity and humanity of our Lord.

John 11:36, 37

Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?

Couldn't Jesus have done something? Yes and no. Yes, He had the power. But no, it wasn't His plan—not until a few moments later . . .

John 11:38, 39

Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.

No doubt in that hot climate, the body of Lazarus took on a distinct odor. That is why Martha said, "Lord, just let it be. Don't ask me to roll away the stone. It stinks." The same is true of you and me. The Lord wants to do something in our lives. But before He does, oftentimes He'll say, "Roll away the stone. Expose the problem. Let Me have total access to the situation."

"Oh, Lord, not that," we say. "Do we have to deal with *that?* I'm embarrassed about it. I'm ashamed of it. It stinks."

The Lord said, "I gave you a promise, Martha. But here's the prerequisite: Roll away the stone." Do you think Jesus could have rolled away the stone Himself? Later on, He did—His own stone. But here He says to Martha, just as He says to me, "The promise is given, but here's the prerequisite: Roll away the stone. Even though what's inside stinks, let Me deal with it."

John 11:40–42

Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

Jesus didn't pray in public very frequently. His communion with His Father was not like that of the Pharisees who loved to be seen on the street corners praying at great length. No, Jesus communed privately with His Father moment by moment. Here, however, He prays audibly, saying, "Father, I'm praying aloud in order that they who are watching might know what's happening."

John 11:43

And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

Jesus had to address Lazarus by name lest everyone in the cemetery came forth.

John 11:44

And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

Turning to His disciples, to His followers, to the family, Jesus said, "I resurrected Lazarus. But I'm giving you the privilege and responsibility of

loosening him." That's what happens Sunday after Sunday in the amphitheatre at Applegate Christian Fellowship? People are born again by the score. And the Lord says to you who know them, "I resurrected them. Now you loose them by praying for them, sharing with them, and standing by them."

John 11:45

Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.

In light of this fabulous miracle—the last miracle John records before Jesus Christ is crucified—I call your attention to two principles to jot down, think through, and pray in. . . .

The first is that delays are determined by the Lord for His glory. "Where are You, Lord?" we cry. "I sent a message to You in prayer. I've cried out to You in sincerity. But You're not working. You're not coming. Where are You?

"Lord, come and heal," cry Mary and Martha.

"I'm going to do something a whole lot more impacting than that," answers Jesus. "I'm going to resurrect Him. But that means He has to die first."

I have found that the longer the Lord waits to do His work in my life, the longer He waits to come on the scene, oftentimes the greater blessing it is for His glory and my good. You more mature believers have sung, "Lord, use my life." But what if that means tragedy? What if it means cancer, bankruptcy, death, setback, or pain? What if God can get the maximum amount of glory when a world who doesn't believe watches you go through terrible times and sees His strength see you through? Samson's greatest victory did not take place until he stood as a blind man in the temple of Dagon and brought the roof down upon himself (Judges 16:30).

"Use my life, Lord," I pray. "I'm ready for the Jon Courson Evangelistic Association, or the 'Jon Courson's Greatest Hits' album."

But the Lord says, "Okay. I'll use you. I'll show My goodness and reality as you go through horrendous difficulty—for when the roof caves in and the house comes down, the demons will flee; the Philistines will fall; and I will be glorified."

If you really want your life to be used, precious people, let the Lord do what He knows will bring Him the greatest glory. Baby Christians don't understand this. Like all babies, all they care about is themselves. They want their stomachs

full and their diapers changed. They want to be satisfied. While there's nothing wrong with younger believers wanting to be pampered and fed, there comes a time to put away childish things (1 Corinthians 13:11). There comes a point when a believer grows up and says, "To God be the glory—whatever that may mean in my life."

Second, not only are delays determined by the Lord for His glory, but the solution to your frustration is not something. It's Someone. "*I* am the resurrection," Jesus says. "It's *Me. I* am what you're looking for." Dear brother, precious sister, the solution to your frustration is the Person of Jesus. You don't need more money necessarily, for Jesus says, "I am the Bread." You don't need some kind of mystical experience to guide you directionally, for Jesus says, "I am the Way." It's *Him.* If you realize He is the I AM, you'll make it through—and you will find yourself actually embracing the difficult day rather than resenting it.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego left their fiery furnace only when commanded to do so by Nebuchadnezzar. Why? Because it was in the fire that they found Jesus (Daniel 3:25). So, too, if you allow the Lord to do His work, you will perceive the presence of Jesus Christ so clearly that you will say, "Lord, keep me in the fire all of the time if that's the only way we can see You."

"I'm going through tough times," you say, "but I'm not finding the Lord in the fire."

Easter Sunday, Mary was at the tomb. Seeing who she thought was the gardener, she said, "Where's the body of my Lord"—not realizing the One standing right before her was the very One she was looking for. Why didn't Mary recognize Jesus? Perhaps it was because there were tears in her eyes and she wasn't seeing clearly. So, too, sometimes our own fears and tears blind us to Jesus' nearness. He's here, saint. He promised to be. He's been there for you previously. He's been there for me personally. And sometimes to experience His presence, all we have to do is quit blubbering, dry our eyes, and say, "Lord, I believe You will see me through."

John 11:46

But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.

Lazarus comes out of the grave and what happens? Some believe—but others say, "Let's go tattle to the Pharisees about what Jesus is doing now."

John 11:47, 48

Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.

"What are we going to do about Jesus?" the Jews ask each other. "If we don't stop Him, the Romans will come down to quell a potential insurrection and we'll lose our place." You see, for the Pharisees, the ministry was simply a platform for personal prestige and power. Thus, they weren't concerned about God being in His rightful place. They were only concerned about losing their place.

John 11:49–52

And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.

So wealthy did Annas, the high priest, become from the money-making schemes that surrounded the temple, to avoid a conflict of interest, he appointed his son-in-law, Caiaphas, to serve as high priest. From his office of high priest, Caiaphas spoke more profoundly than he could possibly have known when he said, "It's prudent that one man dies in order that the whole nation might live."

Little did Caiaphas know that what he said was inspired by the Spirit. This shows me something about our Lord. God can use anyone to speak His heart, to reveal His truth. Caiaphas was a loser, a charlatan, a fleecer. Yet the Spirit still inspired him at this moment to speak truth. Just as Caiaphas prophesied, one Man did indeed die—not only for the nation, but for the sins of all men. God can use a Caiaphas; God can use a donkey (Numbers 22), a neighbor, a professor, or

any other voice He chooses to speak truth. Be wary of the mind-set that thinks if a person isn't born-again, he cannot speak truth. God can use *anyone.*

John 11:53–57

Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews; but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with his disciples. And the Jews' passover was nigh at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves. Then sought they for Jesus, and spake among themselves, as they stood in the temple, What think ye, that he will not come to the feast? Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where he were, he should shew it, that they might take him.

Now we are coming to the very end—the last week in the life of our wonderful Lord, the last week before He would be crucified on the Cross. At this time, many are going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. How many? Josephus tells us temple records indicate that at least 250,000 sheep were slaughtered in the temple during this particular Passover. Since one lamb was sacrificed for a household, and since each household averaged ten people, including extended family, there would have been 2.5 million people flooding into Jerusalem. In your mind's eye, catch the scene: 2.5 million people jammed into a city only a few miles square, standing room only, sheep everywhere. And in the midst of those crowded people and bleating sheep walks the Lamb of God —coming to die for the sin of the world.



12 John 12:1

Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Laza rus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead.

In the final week before He would be pinned to the Cross, Jesus went to Bethany, about two miles outside the city of Jerusalem, to the house of His

friends.

John 12:2, 3

There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.

Jesus taught us that whenever two or three gather in His name, He would be in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20). And here, in this house in Bethany, we see the components of the church in the three who opened their house to Him as we observe Martha working, Lazarus witnessing, and Mary worshiping.

Martha Working

This is the same Martha who, a few months previously, said, "Lord, tell my sister to get in here in the kitchen and give me a hand."

"Martha, you're troubled by many things," Jesus had said. "*One* thing is needful, but you're striving and stressing and troubled about many things" (see Luke 10:41). The same is true of us. How often we are so busy, but not very blessed. People come to simply spend time with us, but we make fancy desserts, vacuum the carpets, wash the windows, mow the lawn, sweep the walks—and by the time they get there, we have a headache and want them to leave. "One thing I desired, Martha," said Jesus, "sitting at My feet, Mary has chosen better."

Martha evidently learned this lesson, because now, several months later, the scene is repeated again. Martha is still working—only this time it's not for one guest, but for seventeen: Jesus, His disciples, Simon (mentioned in Luke's account), Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Martha's still in the kitchen—but this time she's not complaining. Good for her.

Certain of you are workers by nature, Martha-like in your mind-set. That's good, as long as you're not complaining and striving, feeling obligated, burned-out, or hassled. If you can work joyfully as unto the Lord, great! The body of Christ desperately needs Marthas. I thank the Lord for the Marthas who serve joyfully, helping people practically. If such is your role, I commend you.

Lazarus Witnessing

Although Lazarus never speaks a word, he's a major witness. Jesus would be doing the teaching, the speaking, and the sharing. But Lazarus was the proof of the pudding (verse 9) because witnessing is not only what you say. More importantly, it's what you are. Jesus didn't commission us to go into all the world and witness. He said, "You shall *be* My witnesses" (Acts 1:8). In other words, it's as if Jesus said, "Like Lazarus, you were dead. Your countenance was drab; you reeked of the grave; you were bound up in all sorts of stuff. But I freed you. And now you shall be My witnesses because people will look at the difference in you and be amazed."

> I like what Samuel Chadwick, the classic Methodist evangelist and educator of the 1900s, said: "If God is at work week by week raising men from the dead, there will always be people coming to see how it is done. You cannot find an empty church that has conversion as its leading feature. Do you want to know how to fill empty chapels? Here is the answer: Get your Lazarus."

I'm convinced that Applegate Christian Fellowship sees the amphitheatre packed to overflowing because a lot of folks go to see people being baptized Sunday after Sunday. It intrigues, interests, stimulates, and draws. And not only does conversion fill empty churches—it fills empty lives. If you are finding your own joy diminishing, let me ask you this question: How long has it been since you've shared with an unbeliever? You see, saved sinners not only cause joy in heaven (Luke 15:10), but they bring about feasting and merriment in our own hearts as well (Luke 15:23, 24). Living your life before the unbeliever in such a way that he'll be curious about the gospel is the key not only to filling empty churches, but also to filling empty Christians. Find Lazarus. Be Lazarus. Evangelize.

Mary Worshiping

Mary is a symbol of the beauty of worship. Worship is costly. It might cost you a relationship even as it cost Mary when, in pouring the ointment upon the feet of Jesus, she was pouring out her very dowry. If we are true worshipers, people in our lives might shy away from us a bit and call us crazy. "Lifting hands, singing songs, praising, and kneeling are signs of fanaticism. I'm not interested in that or in you if that's what you're going to do," they might say. Worship can be costly. It cost Mary not simply her alabaster box and oil, but she would be analyzed and criticized by Judas. So will we be.

When David danced before the Lord with all his might, stripped down to his undergarments, his wife mocked him (2 Samuel 6:20). David went on to continue worshiping the Lord all the days of his life. But Michal "had no child unto the day of her death" (2 Samuel 6:23). The same is still true. Those who critique or find fault with worship will experience barrenness, dryness, and a lack of productivity. Ask Michal. Ask Judas. Then ask Mary about worshiping. . . .

The ointment she poured out upon Jesus was not used several days earlier on her brother Lazarus possibly because she was saving it for Jesus' burial. Yet she did not use it at His burial either, for it was Mary Magdalene who went to anoint His body with perfume and spice on Easter morning—not Mary of Bethany. Nor was Mary of Bethany at the foot of the Cross. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was there—but not Mary of Bethany. Why did Mary of Bethany seemingly have no part in the death and burial of her Lord? Because Mary evidently understood something no one else comprehended. Although Jesus had spoken directly to His disciples, saying, "I'm going to die, be buried, and rise again after three days," they didn't get it. Mary is the only one who understood what was going to happen. She alone saw the big picture. She alone understood there was no need to save the ointment for Jesus' burial—because He wasn't going to stay buried. There was no need to go with the other Marys to the Cross—because that wouldn't be the end of the story.

How did Mary have such profound insight? I suggest it was because she was at His feet constantly, expressively, and expectantly. Be a worshiper in your morning devotions and in your evening watches. Be a worshiper in church on Sundays and Wednesdays. Be a worshiper and watch and see what will happen, for, like Mary, you'll hear the Lord's heart and know things others don't.

John 12:4, 5

Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?

I find it interesting that the first recorded utterance of Judas the traitor is, "Why?"

John 12:6, 7

This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.

"Leave her alone," said Jesus to Judas. "Mary saved this ointment for My burial. But she's giving it to Me now."

John 12:8

For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.

In other words, Jesus says, "You'll always have opportunity for activity, but don't miss these precious moments of intimacy."

John 12:9–11

Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead. But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.

"Not only must we put Jesus to death—but we also must deal with Lazarus," concluded the Jewish leaders, "because he's a testimony of Jesus' power." They would have to keep going, however, for they would have to not only silence Jesus, Lazarus, and the disciples—but all of the believers. In the days of the early church, six million Christians were

killed in an effort to stamp out Christianity. The more Christians killed, however, the stronger the church became.

In March 1990, *Christianity Today* reported that between the years 1900 and 1990, an average of three hundred thousand believers have been martyred every year. Yet where the church is persecuted, the church is powerful. Truly, the blood of the saints is the seed of the church.

John 12:12 (a)

On the next day much people that were come to the feast . . .

It was Sunday, the tenth day of Nisan—by our calendar, the sixth day of April—four days before the Feast of the Passover. According to the Book of Exodus, it was the day when every family celebrating Passover would choose a lamb to sacrifice. Then priests would watch it closely from the tenth to the fourteenth day of Nisan in order to ensure it was in the best of health and was without flaw or blemish. Picture in your mind's eye tens of thousands of lambs being brought into the holy city. And in the midst of all the choosing, inspecting, and bleating, the Lamb of God entered the city of Jerusalem.

The Lamb of God came to Jerusalem on the tenth day of Nisan—the very day prophesied hundreds of years previously. "Know this," Daniel was told, "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the prince, shall be sixty-nine heptads, sixty-nine seven-year-units, or four hundred eighty-three years." Four hundred eighty-three years from March 14, 445 B.C.—the day Artaxerxes gave the Jews the charge to rebuild Jerusalem —was April 6, A.D. 32. No wonder Jesus cried, "Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem" (Matthew 23:37), for they should have known the day of His coming.

John 12:12 (b), 13

. . . when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, they took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.

The waving of palm branches and crying of Hosanna was a tradition that began two hundred years earlier, following the reign of a bloodthirsty Syrian

king named Antiochus Epiphanes. A man so blasphemous that he slaughtered a pig in the Holy of Holies and made the priests drink its blood, Epiphanes bludgeoned the Jews into submission. After several years of this, however, a man named Judas Maccabee, whose name meant "hammer," and his brothers decided to nail Antiochus Epiphanes by launching a guerrilla war against him. Approximately nine years later, when Maccabee and his band of renegades miraculously overcame the Assyrian army and drove Epiphanes from Jerusalem, the people spontaneously celebrated by waving palm branches. And from that time on, the back of Jewish coinage depicted a palm branch as a symbol of deliverance from oppression.

Here in John's account, two hundred years after Maccabee, the Jews find themselves oppressed again, not by the Syrians, but by the Romans. Consequently, what the people were essentially saying when they cried Hosanna and waved palm branches as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, was, "Be Judas Maccabee. Deliver us from the Romans." But when they realized Jesus had a different agenda than a political one, a different agenda than a national one, a different agenda than a material one—their cry changed from "Hosanna" to "Crucify him."

The same is still true. Christians individually and churches corporately mobilize politically for this cause or for that personality; to change our government or to change our economy. But very few are interested in a Cross that speaks of dying to self. An arresting picture of Calvary depicts three empty crosses on Golgotha, with a donkey in the background, chewing on a palm frond. You see, it's one thing to shout at a parade, and something else altogether to stand at the foot of the Cross.

John 12:14, 15

And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt.

According to rabbinical theory, when Messiah came, He would ride into Jerusalem on a white horse. If, however, Israel was not ready for Messiah, He would ride in on a donkey. And here's Jesus riding on a donkey—not to confirm rabbinical speculation, but to fulfill prophetic indication made hundreds of years earlier when Zechariah said the King would come riding on a donkey (9:9).

John 12:16

These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him.

Jesus riding in to Jerusalem on a donkey, the people waving palm branches and shouting Hosanna meant nothing to the disciples until Jesus was glorified. Are the Scriptures confusing to you? Do they make no sense? Keep reading; keep studying—for as Jesus is glorified in your life, you will have a greater and greater understanding of Scripture. The problem is, we want understanding, but we don't want to glorify the Lord by obeying Him.

We want to understand esoteric insights; we want to grasp the meaning of this verse, or that chapter—but it is only when we glorify the Lord in obedience that we will understand what's being said in any given passage. The disciples didn't understand initially. But when Jesus was glorified, they understood eventually.

John 12:17–19

The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record. For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him.

The Pharisees felt threatened needlessly—for this very crowd that seemed ready to leave everything to follow Jesus would soon desert Him.

John 12:20

And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast.

At Jesus' birth, Gentiles came from the East to worship Jesus (Matthew 2:1, 2). Here, prior to His death, Gentiles came from the West for the same reason.

John 12:21, 22 (a)

The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew . . .

Perhaps it was because he knew Jesus had come to minister to the lost sheep of Israel and was unsure whether He would receive these Gentiles that Philip went to Andrew.

John 12:22 (b)

. . . and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus.

Andrew, in turn, did what he always did (John 1:41; 6:8, 9). He brought Philip to Jesus.

John 12:23, 24

And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

In answering the Greeks, Jesus didn't allude to Old Testament prophecy as He did on other occasions. Instead, He talked about a grain of wheat falling into the ground. Why? Because these Greeks would be far more familiar with science, nature, and philosophy than with Old Testament prophecy. Therefore, Jesus gave Andrew and Philip an analogy the Greeks would understand readily when He said, "You can't see the potential of a grain of wheat until it dies. So, too, the only way you can see Me is in light of My death, burial, and resurrection."

Gang, unless you see Jesus in light of what He did at Calvary, you'll miss Him. Truly, no matter to whom you're talking or what you're facing, the answer for everyone is always found at the foot of the Cross. I believe that with all of my heart.

"If the Lord loves me, why did my husband leave me?" says the brokenhearted woman. "I don't understand."

I don't either. But this I do know: Jesus' arms are open on the Cross of Calvary, and He's saying to you for all He's worth, "Trust Me. You watch. You wait. You'll see that out of death will come life." It's so great to be a believer,

because in every situation, we get to take people to the Cross and say, "Here's your answer. The love that pinned Jesus to the Cross and the power that resurrected Him from the grave are all you need."

John 12:25

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

In this chapter, Jesus gives His final public teaching. And in this final public teaching before His crucifixion, He lets everyone in—Jews and Greeks alike—on the secret of life. "Get a life," people say. And Jesus tells us how. "Get a life," He says, "not by asserting yourself, not by pampering yourself, not by changing yourself—but by dying to self."



***For topical study of John 12:21–25 entitled "The Only Way to See Our Lord," turn to page* 544.**

John 12:26

If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.

The story is told of a prince and his servant traveling through a hostile region who were taken captive by the enemy. After being beaten and thrown into a dungeon, the prince developed a terrible fever, and it looked as though his days were numbered. Semiconscious as he was, however, he didn't miss the opportunity to alert his servant when their guard fell asleep one day.

"Get his keys and get out of here," the prince said. "I'm too weak; I can't make it. But you go. This is your chance."

"My prince," answered the servant, "where you are, there I will be. If need be, we'll both die here together."

Two weeks later, the prince's father launched an invasion and freed his imprisoned son in the process.

"Oh, Father," said the prince immediately upon his return, "even as my servant stayed with me in my danger, suffered with me in my

sickness, stood by me in my imprisonment, honor now him." And the servant was honored throughout the kingdom.

The same is true with you. The Lord knows you could opt to escape, that the Cross and obedience are not always easy. The Lord knows many of you are truly paying a price to follow Him. You've been passed by for promotions at work because you've stood for integrity. Or you've stayed in a relationship because you committed yourself in matrimony.

"Forget it," the world says. "Here's a key: Get out. Go on. Be free."

But you've said, "No. My Master, my Prince, my Savior has called me to follow Him. And even when it's not easy, I will stay by Him."

I've got good news for you who have taken this stand by the Father's Son, the Prince of Peace. After the invasion, when He brings you safely home to heaven, you will be honored greatly, for the Father honors those who honor His Son.

John 12:27

Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say?

Thinking about the implications of the Cross troubled Jesus' soul, but notice what He does in His troubled time: He prays. . . .

John 12:27 (a)

Father, save me from this hour . . .

In complete honesty, Jesus asks, "Can I get out of this, Father? Can You save Me from this hour?"

Did you know you can be totally honest with God? Jesus was.

John 12:27 (b)

. . . but for this cause came I unto this hour.

"Father, can I get out? But wait," says Jesus. "This is why I came." Haven't you found that often it is in your own time of prayer, even as you're expressing your hurt or fear, that you're reminded of your calling. And everything becomes crystal clear once again.

John 12:28 (a)

Father, glorify thy name.

Jesus didn't pray, "Glorify My name," He prayed, "Glorify *Thy* name."

John 12:28 (b)

Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.

This is the third time the voice of the Father thunders from heaven. The first time was at Jesus' baptism at the beginning of His ministry (Matthew 3:17). The second time was on the Mount of Transfiguration in the middle of His ministry (Matthew 17:5). The third time is here at the end of His ministry as He talks about the Cross. All three of these occasions spoke ultimately of His death. In baptism, Jesus was, in effect, saying, "I submit to the death and burial I know awaits Me." On the Mount of Transfiguration, Luke tells us He talked with Moses and Elijah about His death (9:31). And here, Jesus struggles with the Cross.

"I never hear from God," you say. "He never speaks to me." Here's the question: Where do you stand in relation to the Cross? Are you dying to self, or are you living for self? The one who dies to self is going to hear the heart and voice of the Father as it resonates within his inner man.

John 12:29

The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him.

"That's not really God," said the crowd. "It's just thunder." They didn't understand. Neither will they understand when you say, "You know, the Father's really speaking to me." But just because the crowd mistakes Him for thunder, that won't negate the truth of what He speaks to your heart.

John 12:30, 31 (a)

Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world . . .

"That which has damned man, that which has held mankind in bondage—sin—is being judged by My going to the Cross," Jesus declared.

John 12:31 (b)
. . . now shall the prince of this world be cast out.

Because the sin of the world is being judged, the prince of this world is cast out. You see, gang, when you sin, you give Satan a handle to grab. But the good news of the gospel is that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses you from all sin (1 John 1:7). Therefore, because Satan has no more dominion over you, no more toe hold in your life, no more grip on your heart, he is inevitably cast out.

John 12:32, 33
And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.

"How come you have so many kids at Applegate Christian Fellowship?" people asked. Or, "How do you reach older folks?" The answer is very simple. The reason there are teenagers, as well as folks in their seventies and eighties, in abundance is because of this verse. Jesus said if the Cross is central, He would draw all men. Truly, the message of the Cross is cross-generational. We don't have to be hip to reach the kids or conservative to reach the older people because the Cross is the magnet that draws all men to Jesus. Teach the Cross. Share the Cross. Walk in light of the Cross. Revel in its riches and apply it to your life. Share it with your friends however young or old they might be. And watch it draw them to Jesus, just as it drew you.

John 12:34
The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man?

"What do you mean Messiah is going to die? Our law says He will live forever," said the Jews. The people didn't understand the two comings of Christ—that first He came as a Lamb to die for you and me, but that He's coming again as the Lion of Judah who will rule eternally. Watch, however, what Jesus says in light of their confusion. . . .

John 12:35, 36

Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them.

"What does this mean Messiah must die? How does this jive with His eternal reign?" the people wondered. Jesus doesn't answer their question directly, because you see, He Himself is the Answer.

He answers as if to say, "You guys want to talk about theology, but I want to talk about relationship. While you have Me, link yourselves to Me. Stay close to Me. Enjoy Me."

John 12:37

But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him.

Miracles don't produce faith. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). The only path to faith is to be in the Word and to grab hold of the Word.

John 12:38 (a)

That . . .

The word translated "that" would be better translated "consequently."

John 12:38 (b)–40

. . . the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.

Those who *would not* believe in verse 37 *could not* believe in verse 39. Since they didn't want to believe, they weren't able to believe because God hardened their hearts. Why? To ratify their choice. You see, had not God blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Jesus' teachings would have been so powerful, so persuasive, and so overwhelming that they would have believed against their will. The same is true today. To those who don't want to believe, to those who continually stand in the posture of unbelief, there will come a time when they *cannot* believe (Matthew 12:31).

John 12:41

These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.

When was verse 40 given initially? In Isaiah 6:1. Everyone—including Jehovah Witnesses—agrees that Isaiah 6 concerns Jehovah. But John here says Isaiah spoke of *Him,* the subject being Jesus, making this a good verse to use in discussions concerning the deity of Christ.

John 12:42, 43

Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

Fearing excommunication and prioritizing the praise of men above the praise of God, although they believed in their heart, many did not name the name of Jesus openly.

John 12:44–48

Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

“I didn’t come to judge,” says Jesus. “I came to save. But if you don’t believe Me, the Word itself that I have given will condemn and judge you. If you don’t accept the free gift of salvation, My words will condemn you on the last day and will haunt you forever.”

John 12:49, 50

For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.

And so Jesus ends His public ministry with the promise that he who embraces His Word would have life everlasting. Finished talking with the crowd, Jesus now huddles His intimate followers together and in the next three chapters, known as the Upper Room discourse, gives them the ultimate lessons, the heaviest and most meaningful teachings, the chalk talk before the kickoff, the last-minute strategy before the invasion.

THE ONLY WAY TO SEE OUR LORD

A Topical Study of JOHN 12:21–25

In the midst of millions of people packed into the city of Jerusalem were certain Greeks who had journeyed hundreds of miles to attend the Passover celebration. Why would these men have left their home country—the fountainhead of philosophy, the matrix of mythology, the cradle of civilized society—to worship Yahweh, the God of Israel? Perhaps they were frustrated with Greek philosophy which said that, because everything is either a reflection or an imperfection of an ideal thought, one could never be sure if what he saw or experienced was a true prototype or rather a misrepresentation of the ideal. Or perhaps they found their own mythology embarrassing— what with their gods so susceptible to fighting, partying, incest, and immorality. Perhaps they found their "civilized society" disillusioning because in reality it was crumbling. Homosexuality was pervasive and justice so perverted that Socrates, tried on nothing more than charges of hearsay, was sentenced to death.

Fatalistic philosophy, foolish mythology, flawed society— the Greeks could have come to Jerusalem for any or all of these reasons. Once there, they heard rumors and stories, thoughts and impressions concerning a Jesus of Nazareth. So they approached Philip, the only one of Jesus' disciples with a Greek name, saying, "We want to see Jesus." Why? Perhaps, as has been suggested by some, it was their intent to save Him from Socrates' fate. Or, more likely, perhaps they were just curious about Him and wanted to converse with Him.

Whatever the reason, these Greeks wanted to see Jesus. Yet, as far as we know, Jesus never gives audience to them. Instead, He says to Andrew and Philip, "No one can see Me except in light of the Cross. No one can understand or comprehend Me except they see Me in light of My death, burial, and resurrection."

Maybe you have the same request. "I don't get what's happening in my life. I don't understand what's coming down. I don't understand what's going on. I need to see Jesus."

And Jesus would say to you precisely what He said to these Greek seekers: "You will only see Me in light of Calvary."

"Why is the Lord doing this? Why isn't He taking care of that? Doesn't He love me?" I can't answer the question of why your loved one died, why your wife left, why your business went bankrupt, why your cancer returned. But I can say that Jesus declares to the seeker, to the Greek, to you and to me, "You will never understand apart from the Cross. For it is there that you will see that I am madly in love with you. I died in your place. My heart was broken over your sin. Everything I have, I gave for you personally. Can't you trust Me? Won't you trust Me?"

Gang, the only answer you'll have this side of eternity is the Cross, for rather than dialogue endlessly about every problem and hurt, Jesus demonstrated His love conclusively by dying in our place. That's why we celebrate Communion. At the Lord's table, I am reminded I can trust My hand to His nail-scarred hand and that I must stand by His sword-pierced side. I may not understand what's going on. I may not be sure which direction to take, but I know that in His hands and by His side I'm exactly where I need to be.

And once you see the Lord on the Cross, you'll want to take up His Cross.

> *He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me . . .*
>
> John 12:25, 26 (a)

"Tell the Greeks they'll not see Me except in light of the Cross—and if they desire to follow Me, the only way it can happen is if they take up their cross and lose their lives," Jesus told Andrew and Philip.

If you took a single grain of wheat and put it in the ground, it would produce a single stalk. If you took the seeds from the stalk, planted them, and kept repeating the process, within fourteen years, every square inch of the earth would be covered in wheat. Mortification brings multiplication. Death brings life.

> The family of a missionary in the Amazon Basin went to visit him. After traveling by plane, helicopter, canoe, and foot, they reached him at last.
>
> "Wow, you've really buried yourself down here," they exclaimed.
>
> "Not buried—planted," said the missionary. "Big difference."

Death brings life.

Is it easy?

No.

Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.

John 12:27

Reflecting on the Cross, Jesus was in agony as He realized He would take upon Himself the sins of all men, that He would be estranged from His Father, that He would be plunged into hell for my rebellion.

Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.

John 12:28

Jesus ends His prayer, saying, "I'm not in it for Me. I'm in it for Thee. Father, glorify Thy Name—even though that means death." And from that point on, He never looked back.

The same can be true for you today. Maybe you're saying, "I've been living for myself. I've been questioning the Lord. I've been uptight and upset, wondering why I can't see Jesus, and why I don't hear from Him."

Understand today that the only way you'll see Him is at the Cross. Go to Calvary, for it is there you will see Jesus.



13 Within a span of five days, the two most important foot washings in the history of the world took place. On the Saturday before Palm Sunday, the Saturday before Jesus rode into Jerusalem to present Himself as King, He went into the house of Mary, who washed His feet with costly perfume (John 12:3). Five days later, this One who had His feet anointed with the spikenard of Mary washes the dirt off the feet of the disciples before sharing with them a powerful, penetrating teaching known as the Upper Room discourse. That's always the way it is with the Lord—before He teaches, He touches.

John 13:1 (a)

Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world . . .

Regardless of the fact that at this moment, as Luke tells us, His own disciples are bickering and arguing among themselves concerning who is the greatest, Jesus looks at His disciples and calls them His own. So, too, as Jesus' followers, we are His own—His own sheep in John 10, His own brethren in Hebrews 2, His own bride in Ephesians 5, His own Body in 1 Corinthians 12. His ownership was creative in that He made us, elective in that He chose us, redemptive in that He died for us.

John 13:1 (b)
. . . he loved them unto the end.

Jesus looked at this motley crew of ragtag renegades and loved them to the end, or, literally "unto the uttermost." In other words, He loved them with no limit—even though He was aware of their past faltering.

"Let's call down fire from heaven and kill everyone who doesn't respond to You," said James and John heatedly (see Luke 9:54).

"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" scoffed Nathanael skeptically (see John 1:46).

He was also aware of their future failings.

"Satan desires to sift you like wheat, Peter," He would say. "But I have prayed for you, and when you come through, strengthen the brothers" (see Luke 22:31, 32).

He was also aware of their present flaws.

As they sat together in the Upper Room, Luke tells us the disciples were not sitting in ladder-backed chairs gazing piously at Jesus. No, they were reclined around a low table, arguing among themselves about who was the greatest (Luke 22:24).

Not only was there arguing around the table, but stinking feet underneath the table. You see, it was customary for a servant to wash the dust off the feet of anyone who entered the home of his master. In this case, however, no one humbled himself to wash feet, so everyone's feet remained dirty.

Past faltering, present failure, future flaws, and stinking feet notwithstanding, Jesus saw His disciples not only in their present vulnerabilities but also in their eventual victory—and loved them to the uttermost.

John 13:2, 3

And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God.

Jesus looked at His bickering, stinky disciples and loved them because He knew from whence He came and where He was headed. Both are absolute prerequisites for love. You see, only faith concerning the past and hope concerning the future allow one to genuinely love in the present.

John 13:4 (a)

He riseth from supper . . .

Just as Jesus rose from the Last Supper, He rose, in eternity past, from the banquet that He enjoyed with the Father and Spirit continually to willingly take upon Himself the form of a Man. It wasn't that a committee of three—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—voted who would go, and Jesus lost two to one. No, in the council of eternity past, the Son said, "I choose to leave the intimacy of this heavenly banquet to invade the time/space continuum in order to redeem mankind" (see Philippians 2:7, 8).

John 13:4 (b)

. . . and laid aside his garments . . .

Just as Jesus laid aside His earthly garments, Philippians 2 says He laid aside His garments of glory to come and dwell among us. When you grasp this vital concept, your reading of the Gospels will take on an entirely new dimension, for you will understand that the miracles Jesus did—the walking on water, the multiplying of the loaves and fishes, the quieting of the storm—were all done not because of any innate power, but simply because of His dependence upon the Father.

John 13:4 (c)
. . . and took a towel, and girded himself.

Just as Jesus wrapped Himself in a towel, so He wrapped His divinity in human flesh. He was still God, totally God, always God—yet wrapped in the towel of humanity. One commentator points out that the word "towel" used here refers to a linen towel. Linen speaking of righteousness, the picture is perfect. Jesus wraps Himself in the righteous towel of human flesh, for He was like us—yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

John 13:5 (a)
After that he poureth water into a bason . . .

Water speaks of the Word. "You are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you," said Jesus (see John 15:3). We are washed, says Paul, by the water of the Word (Ephesians 5:26). So, wrapped in the towel of human frailty, Jesus pours out His Word to us. He tells us who God is. He tells us how to live. He becomes flesh and dwells among us.

John 13:5 (b)
. . . and began to wash the disciples' feet . . .

This model is not a picture of salvation, but of sanctification; not of conversion, but of confession (1 John 1:9). As I walk through this world, I get dirty feet. And here's Jesus, who not only pours out the truth of purity, but then makes application for you and me as He washes us continually.

John 13:5 (c)
. . . and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.

Just as He dried the disciples' feet, what's Jesus doing at this moment? He is interceding for us. And He's going to complete the job. He'll not leave us all wet. He'll dry our feet. He'll see us through (Philippians 1:6).

John 13:6–8

Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.

The washing of feet being the job of a slave, Peter couldn't understand why Jesus would do this. Yet instead of saying, "Peter, this is a beautiful type or model of Philippians 2," Jesus simply said, "Peter, you're not going to understand what I'm doing now—but later you will." Did Peter? Yes, for in 1 Peter 5:5, it's as if he draws upon this very scene as a picture of humility.

Is the Lord speaking to you right now about some area of obedience—some challenge, some adjustment in your life—but you're saying, "I'm not going to do it until I can see how it's going to work out"? Husband, are you saying, "I'm not going to stay with her until I see a change in her attitude"? Wife, are you saying, "I'm not going to submit to him until he proves himself "? Teenager, are you saying, "I'm not going to obey them until they make sense"? That's backward. Revelation *follows* obedience.

John 13:9–11

Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.

"You don't need a bath, Peter. You're already clean. You see, it's just your feet that need washing." This speaks of communion with Jesus on a daily basis. If I walk in pollution and don't allow cleansing to take place in my life, I will experience a separation from Him. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me," declares the psalmist (Psalm 66:18). It's not about losing

salvation—it's about losing intimacy. In Exodus 30, we see the Old Testament illustration of this New Testament principle. . . .

> *When a priest was first called, he was washed from head to toe in a ceremonial bathing equivalent to our baptism. From that point on, although he never again needed a head-to-toe cleansing, before entering the tabernacle, he would wash his hands and feet in the laver that stood in the tabernacle courtyard. Otherwise, although he would still be a priest, although he would still be a son of Aaron, he wouldn't be allowed access to the Tabernacle and would therefore be hindered in his ability to minister and receive blessing.*

So, too, as the priests needed a continual cleansing of their hands and feet, we need a continual cleansing of our hearts through confession (1 John 1:9). The word translated "confess" in Scripture is *homologeo,* or, "speak the same." Confession is not promising never to sin again, but rather saying, "Father, Your Word is right. That's sin, and I confess it as such. Have mercy upon me. Lord, deal with me."

Considering the fact that the blood of Jesus has already been shed and that the work of the Cross is fully completed, why is confession so important? I suggest three reasons. . . .

Appreciation of the Cross

Confessing my sin ten, fifteen, or even thirty times a day causes me to appreciate what Jesus did for me all the more. I look at myself as the chief of sinners and say, “Wow, Lord. I’ve had to confess fifty things today—just today. How I appreciate Your love. How I appreciate the work You did for me in paying the price for each of my sins individually.” Gang, true confession and trivial Christianity are mutually exclusive because when we really see our sin, we can’t help but marvel at the immensity of God’s love.

Realization of Grace

If you're not a confessor, you can start to think, *I can see why I'm being blessed. It makes sense because when the Lord chose me, He made a wise choice.* But when you're in a mode of continual confession, those kinds of thoughts never enter your mind. Instead, you say, "Lord, it's only because of your mercies that I am not consumed" (Lamentations 3:22).

Liberation from the Enemy

Unconfessed sin in any area provides the bricks with which the enemy builds a "stronghold" (2 Corinthians 10:4) from which he manipulates you over and over again in that area until that particular sin becomes an addiction, a habit, a part of your life to be used at will by him. "How did I get *here?*" we ask. "How did I get so entangled? How did I get caught up in this attitude or that sin?" The answer can be found at the point where we began to say, "I don't need to confess"—for it is then that the Enemy starts building his stronghold.

"If you don't let Me wash your feet, I have no part with you," Jesus said. "You don't need to be baptized again. You don't need to be saved again. You don't need a bath, Peter. You just need your feet washed." And so do we.

John 13:12

So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?

"Do you understand the example I have set for you?" Jesus asks His disciples—for it would only be in understanding what He had done for them that they would be able to do the same for others.

John 13:13 (a)

Ye call me Master and Lord . . .

In the Gospels, the disciples call Jesus "Lord" and "Master," but never "Jesus." When describing Him, the Gospel writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write "Jesus"—but in addressing Him, it is always as "Lord" or "Master." Am I suggesting we should not call the Lord "Jesus"? No, because as in the Book of Acts, these same apostles refer to Him as Jesus because, having been born again after Jesus died for them, rose again, and set His Holy Spirit within them, they are now the bride of Christ. The relationship has changed. Therefore, I personally feel at perfect liberty to call my Lord and Master Jesus because I, too, am His bride.

John 13:13, (b), 14

. . . and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

"Master," or *didaskalos,* refers to a teacher—a fitting title for the One who is the Truth (John 14:6).

John 13:15, 16

For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

Why humble myself and wash feet? Because after humiliation comes exaltation (Philippians 2:8, 9). Tired of being in the pits? Want to be lifted up to a higher plane? Want to experience joy on a level you've never known before and happiness in a dimension you've never understood? The key is humility. Just as the branch that bears the most fruit bows the lowest, the one who's really fruitful in the things of Jesus Christ will bow the lowest to serve others.

John 13:17

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

Either Jesus is telling the truth when He says we'll be happy if we follow His example and love as He loved, or He is lying. I have found Jesus to be true in everything He's ever said—absolutely, completely, totally true. And here He's saying the way to happiness lies not in agreeing with what He's told us to do, not in taking notes on what He's told us to do, but in *doing* what He's told us to do. Next time you feel depressed or distressed, discouraged or despondent; next time you feel like throwing in the towel, do what Jesus did instead. Grab the towel, find some dirty feet to wash, and experience the happiness He promised.

***For topical study of John 13:1–17 entitled "Washing Feet," turn to page* 551.**

John 13:18, 19

I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.

Explaining that there was one in their midst who needed more than just his feet washed, Jesus quotes Psalm 41:9, where the reference is to David's betrayal by a man named Ahithophel. You recall the story. When David's son, Absalom, launched a rebellion against him, Ahithophel, David's key advisor, defected and joined Absalom. "He who ate bread with me—the guy who sat at my table, the one who shared with me—has kicked me," a crushed David lamented. What happened to David, though, was simply a picture of what would happen to the Son of David, Jesus Christ, as Jesus would be betrayed by one who ate bread with Him, one who traveled alongside of Him, one who had his feet washed by Him. And Ahithophel was a picture of what would happen to Judas, for, like Judas, he too eventually hanged himself because of guilt (2 Samuel 17:23).

There is another who was guilty of betrayal. Peter denied Jesus, but he didn't end up hanging from the limb of a tree because he looked to the One who hung on the tree of Calvary in his place. Every one of us has a choice to make, for you and I are Peter, Judas, and Ahithophel. We have all sinned. The only question is, are we going to get hung up and say, "I'm going to end it all"—or are we going to look to Him who hung on the tree and say, "Thank You for dying in my place"?

John 13:20

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

"Don't be blown away by what's about to happen," says Jesus. "I'm sending you out that others might hear about and receive Me."

John 13:21, 22

When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray

me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake.

Each disciple suspected himself before he ever suspected Judas (Matthew 26:22).

John 13:23 (a)
Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples . . .

As was customary, the disciples were reclining around a U-shaped table, propping themselves up on one arm while eating with the other.

John 13:23 (b)
. . . whom Jesus loved.

As Karl Barth—the father of neo-Orthodoxy, a prolific writer, a man of great intellect—got older, his faith got simpler, and I believe, deeper. Toward the end of his life, he was asked to state the most profound truth he knew. He replied by repeating the words of a well-known child's song, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." The more I know Jesus, the more I love Him. But the more I know me, the more amazed I am that Jesus loves me. I believe it's in this spirit of amazement that John refers to himself as the disciple Jesus loved.

John 13:24, 25
Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it?

Whatever your question, the best place to get it answered is at the breast of Jesus Christ. "That may sound good poetically," you say, "but how does it translate practically?" I believe you are nearest His heart when you're at His table. That's where John was. I know of no finer place to feel the love of Jesus Christ and to experience oneness with Him than at the table of Communion. I have found I hear the heart of the Lord at His table in a way I do nowhere else.

John 13:26 (a)

Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it.

John being seated to the right of Jesus, Judas was seated to His left—the customary place of honor. So amazing is Jesus that even at the very end, He showed His love for Judas by giving him a place of honor at His table, still offering Judas opportunity to come to Him.

John 13:26 (b), 27

And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly.

Even though Jesus identified Judas with the sop—a piece of bread dipped in sauce—the other disciples still didn't realize the one who would betray Him was Judas. Why? Perhaps they didn't hear Jesus speak this word to John. Or perhaps they couldn't put it together, for, evidently, Judas, their treasurer, was the last one they suspected.

John 13:28, 29

Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor.

The rest of the disciples thought Jesus was merely sending Judas on an errand.

John 13:30

He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night.

It was night when Judas left to betray Jesus. And Judas' soul would itself become increasingly darker.

John 13:31–35

Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Even though it was dark, Jesus said to His disciples, "This is the hour of glory. I'm going to be leaving, and where I'm going, you can't come now. So in the meantime, I'm giving you a new commandment to love one another." A *new* commandment? Doesn't it say way back in Leviticus that we are to love God and that we are to love our neighbor? Isn't that the message, really, of the Scriptures in their entirety? Hadn't Jesus Himself said that upon these two commandments—to love God and to love people—hang all the law and the prophets? What does He mean a *new* commandment?

Look carefully at what Jesus is saying because it's radical. Yes, the Old Testament is filled with commandments and exhortations to love. But Jesus here makes everything new when He says, "Love one another *as I have loved you.*" How did Jesus love them? How does Jesus love us? *That's* what's new. Paul tells us how He loves us when he writes, "Husbands love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and *gave Himself for it*" (Ephesians 5:25).

The newness, the unfolding, the fullness of this new commandment is that we are to love in a way that costs us your life—not just loving generally, but loving sacrificially to the place of death. You see, biblically there is never true reconciliation apart from someone or something dying. In the Old Testament, reconciliation was impossible without the sacrifice of an animal. In the New Testament, we see Old Testament typology become reality with the death of the innocent Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. There will never be true reconciliation between you and the person with whom you're angry or from whom you're estranged until you say, "I'm not going to grind my ax any longer. I'm not going to press my point any further. I'm not going to prove I'm right anymore. I'm just going to die." The question is, will you?

"But I'm innocent," you say.

So was Jesus.

"But I'm right."

Wasn't He?

The commandment He gave us is to die—to our pride, our complaints, our position, our proof. "What if I die?" you ask. "Does laying down my life and giving up my rights guarantee reconciliation?"

Was everyone reconciled to Jesus? No. Not everyone is born again. Not everyone says, "Thank You, Lord, for laying down Your life for me." When you love like Jesus, some will respond and there will be reconciliation. Others, however, will continue to spit and curse and mock—even as they did to Jesus as He was in the very act of dying for their sins. But if we are to love as Jesus loved, like Him, we'll pray, "Father, forgive them. They just don't know what they're doing."

"By this kind of love shall all men know you are My disciples," said Jesus, "—when you love like I do—when you love to the point of death."

John 13:36

Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.

Peter wanted to get back to Jesus' earlier statement in which He said He was going somewhere no one else could come (verse 33).

John 13:37

Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake.

"You can count on me, Lord," insisted Peter. "I'll die for You if necessary."

John 13:38

Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.

"Peter I know what you're about to go through," said Jesus. "I know the failure that will haunt you. But read ahead to chapter 14. Let not your heart be

troubled, Peter. Why? You're going to heaven!"

WASHING FEET
A Topical Study of JOHN 13:1–17

"What the world needs now is love, sweet love. It's the only thing that there's just too little of." Written by Burt Bacharach, it was a song destined to become a top-seller because it struck a chord in my generation. "All you need is love," sang the Beatles. And we answered, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." Not only my generation—but in every generation there is a craving for the reality of love. Jesus Christ addressed this issue radically. In John 13–16, He reaffirms to His disciples that the key commodity, the key component of Christianity is love. As He calls His boys together only hours away from the Cross, the commandment He gives them is not a commandment to be more zealous, more dedicated, or more committed. The commandment He stresses so emphatically is that they love one another, for by this, He would say, all men would truly know they were His disciples (John 13:35). Before He gives this teaching *to* them, however, Jesus sets the stage by being an example *for* them as He washes their feet. And in the example He sets for His disciples, I see four key factors I believe will help you and me to carry out the commandment to love one another.

The Freedom to Love

Even as they're arguing, even as Judas is preparing to betray Him, even as the hour is heavy, Jesus has perfect liberty to love. Why? Because He knew He came from God (verse 3). If you are still struggling with mistakes you made last week or last month or last year, you will not be free to love. If you are still working through your past, living in your past, haunted by your past, you will not be able to love in the present because the more you try to love someone, the more Satan will whisper in your ear, "You're a hypocrite." We are told in Revelation 12 that Satan is the accuser of the brethren. How does he accuse us? He accuses us by constantly replaying our past failures and inconsistencies to the point where we feel unqualified to do anything but wallow in defeat.

But the good news is that, if you're a believer, the blood of Jesus has washed away all of your failures and sin. Every sin you've ever committed is not only forgiven, but also forgotten (Hebrews 8:12). I am absolutely at peace with my past not because of my perfection—not by a long shot—but because of my position in Jesus Christ and in what He did for me at Calvary (Romans 5). Not only did Jesus know He came from God, but He also knew He was going to God (verse 3). If you're always concerned about how the stock market's going, or if the relationship will survive—if you're living in the future, you'll miss the opportunity to love in the present.

If my past is taken care of by the blood of Calvary and my future is in heaven, I am free to love in the present. That's why Paul said that of the three great virtues, the greatest is love (1 Corinthians 13:13). It takes faith for the past and hope for the future to allow men to love in the present. Faith makes all things possible. Hope makes all things inevitable. But love makes all things enjoyable. Knowing from whence He came, knowing where He was going, Jesus was free to love.

The Cost of Love

Sitting at dinner, Jesus was suddenly aware that His disciples needed their feet washed. And in choosing to wash them, His meal was interrupted. So, too, if you are going to be one who loves people, count on interruptions. There you'll be with a bag of popcorn in your hand and the 49ers on TV when suddenly there will be a knock on your door or a ring of your phone. If you're going to be one who loves, it means you'll have to be willing to be interrupted. Notice not only interruptions, but also involvement. Jesus didn't stand up and say, "There's a strange odor in here. I now want to tell you guys why you should wash your feet before you eat. Peter, you big heel, don't you see your foot is cruddy? James, your sole is dirty." No, Jesus didn't give a lecture on dirty feet. He simply got down on His hands and knees and washed them.

If you are not willing to wash feet, then keep your mouth closed when you see dirt. When I see dirt, I can either talk about the dirt, which then is called judging—or I can involve myself in that person's life by tending the situation on my knees in humility through intercession. Jesus chose the latter. He didn't simply point out the dirt on the feet of His disciples. He did something about it.

A Model for Love

Jesus' act was unannounced. He didn't stand up and say, "Disciples, you will now see love in action. Watch Me. Take notes. A few photos will be allowed." No, He just quietly got up and washed feet. It was not something He announced. It was not something all of Jerusalem could see. He just quietly took care of the situation.

"Well, that would be easy," you say, "if I had the opportunity to minister to guys like the disciples."

Really? Have you ever been around a political rabble-rouser? That was Simon the Zealot. How about someone so shy that not a single word of his is ever recorded? That was James the Less. How about one who was skeptical of you? That was Nathanael. One who would deny you? That was Peter. How about one who would stab you in the back like Judas? Go from man to man in the group, and you'll see they're people just like the folks around you every single day. Yet Jesus, in a beautiful, humble way, loved these guys who were not very lovable. This gives me great hope because I'm not very lovable either. And it gives me great comfort to realize that the Lord loves me not because I'm lovable, but because He is Love.

The Difficulties with Love

Jesus wants to wash Peter's feet, but what happens? Peter protests, saying, "You're not going to wash any part of me." When Jesus corrected him, he said, "Wash all of me." But that wasn't right either. You see, in addition to the pride of independence, there's a problem of overdependence. Some people essentially say to us, "If you don't help me every day in every way, you're not a good Christian." Such people expect much from us and lay demands on us. They seek to exploit and manipulate us to get more than what they need. Therefore, sometimes the loving thing to do is to say, "I'm not the Lord in your life. I can't be the solution to your problem. I can help you. I can wash your feet. But you don't need a bath."

What's the solution? Simply to say to people, "I'll go with what I believe the Lord is showing me in my heart. I'll respond according to His leading, but not according to your demanding." Gang, the Lord's burden is easy, and His load light (Matthew 11:30). Therefore, to any who would overload or overburden you, sometimes you gotta learn to say no.

Practically

In our culture, not everyone wears sandals or goes barefoot. And even if they did, the roads aren't dusty or muddy—so this passage might not mean washing feet. You're washing your car in the front yard. Maybe it's old and cruddy and doesn't run very well. Instead of complaining about it—why not extend your hose a bit and wash your neighbor's car? Or maybe it means washing your neighbor's windows while he's on vacation. It might mean washing diapers in the nursery—or washing the dishes without being asked.

"That sounds good," you say, "but I'm going through such hard times right now that I'm not in a position to wash anything."

Really? At any given point, at every single point in our lives, we live by "basin theology." That is, we either call for the basin, like Pontius Pilate did (Matthew 27:24) and wash our hands of everything we know to be true of ministry and service—or we take up the basin and wash someone's feet in humility and love. At the very time Jesus was going through a time of intensity we will never understand this side of eternity, He didn't wash His hands of those who would deny and betray Him. He washed their feet.

Theologically

Positionally, we are the very righteousness of God in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21). But as we walk through the world, there is a need for the cleansing of fellowship that takes place in the confession of sin. We're born again. We're believers. We're going to heaven—but we still have failings. We still have shortcomings. And we need to be washed continually. How? 1 John 1:9 says if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We need to live in the place of continual confession in order to appropriate the finished work of Calvary and to eliminate Satan's toehold in our lives.

Mystically

So often, people come to me, saying, "I was baptized six years ago. But since then, I've gone through a period of backsliding. Should I be baptized again?"

"No," I say. "But there is something else available to you . . ."

You see, in my understanding, the washing of feet is a mini-baptism for those who say, "I know I didn't lose my salvation, but I've been walking in pollution and defilement. I just want to do something tangibly and outwardly to express what I'm feeling inwardly—that I'm back in fellowship with the Lord." And as others humble themselves to wash their feet and pray for them, to give a word of prophecy or encouragement to them, there's a unique, undeniable dynamic that takes place.

It's not enough just to hear a Bible study and agree with it intellectually. We must not simply be a community where we affirm our beliefs. We must be a place where we encounter God.

How? We can partake of the body and blood of Jesus Christ in Communion, take a stand in baptism, and make confession through the washing of feet.



14 The Texas Chauffeurs and Drivers' Association's "Driver of the Decade" was so excited about her commendation that she invited seventeen of her friends to accompany her to the award banquet. On her way there, however, she flipped the van she was driving, and, although no one was seriously injured, all seventeen of her passengers were hospitalized. Here the Texas "Driver of the Decade" was on her way to pick up her award, and what happened? She crashed.

So, too, every one of us find ourselves going through times when it all comes down, when the roof caves in, when things fall apart. And the disciples were no exception. In the previous chapter, Jesus had told them that one of them would betray Him (13:21), that Peter would deny Him (13:38), and that He would leave them (13:33).

"*How can this be?*" they must have wondered. They had left all to follow Jesus. But now it seemed as though it was all for nothing. We know the story. We know it has a glorious, happy ending. But if you put yourself in their sandals,

you can see it must have been a moment of real intensity not only for the disciples, but for Jesus as well.

Oftentimes we look at these events through the eyes of the disciples. But consider what Jesus was going through, as only hours after this He would be nailed to a Cross to absorb the sin of humanity—and would remain as a Lamb slain into eternity (Revelation 5:6). No wonder He prayed, "Father, if it be possible, remove this cup from Me" with such intensity that He actually sweat blood (see Luke 22:42–44).

Here in John 14, in the midst of His Upper Room discourse, Jesus knew the hour of great difficulty was upon Him. Yet notice how He ministers to those around Him . . .

John 14:1 (a)
Let not your heart be troubled . . .

Even in the hour of His own temptation and struggle, Jesus looked at His disciples with compassion. What a model for you and me. What an example for what we deal with daily. What a comfort to know that Jesus looks on me—dirty feet and all—and His heart is full of compassion toward me.

John 14:1 (b)
. . . ye believe in God, believe also in me.

Jesus gives the commandment, "Do not let your heart be troubled." And then He gives the way to obey it when He says, "Believe in God; believe in Me."

Belief being the singular key to a trouble-free heart, Jesus goes on to give the disciples five reasons why they shouldn't be troubled—and why we shouldn't be troubled when things seem to be falling down around us. . . .

John 14:2 (a)
In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you.

The key to keeping your heart from being overwhelmed in sadness and depression is to remember that you have a home in heaven.

John 14:2 (b)
I go to prepare a place . . .

To those who doubt the existence of heaven because no matter how far we travel in space, we have yet to locate it, consider the following: The distance between the electrons and the nucleus of an atom being proportionate to the distance between Pluto and the sun, all matter on this earth is comprised of ninety-five percent space—leaving plenty of room for an unseen dimension to coexist with the material world we presently perceive.

Flanked by enemies, Elisha prayed that the eyes of his servant, Gehazi, would be opened. When the Lord did so, Gehazi saw a mountain full of angels previously invisible to him (2 Kings 6:17). Could it be that when Paul said we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1), he meant that they are literally surrounding us? Is this what Jesus meant when He said the kingdom of God is within us (Luke 17:21)? Stay tuned for more information. We'll know the answer when we get to heaven.

John 14:2 (c)
. . . for you.

When Jesus says, "I go to prepare a place for you,"—He is not speaking generically, but specifically. Jesus is preparing a place for *you* specifically. Think through this. What do you enjoy? What has God built into your being? Whatever it is, know this: Jesus is preparing a place for you to fulfill the elements He's woven into the fabric of your personality uniquely and specifically.

John 14:3
And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

Jesus is what makes heaven heaven.

For topical study of John 14:1–3 entitled "Heaven," turn to page **558.**

John 14:4–6

And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

If there's ever a bone of contention people want to pick with believers, it's exclusivity. "You're too narrow," they say to us. "I don't mind you believing what you believe, but don't say it's the only way."

We don't say this—it's Jesus who declared it. Call me narrow if you wish, but *Jesus* is the One who said, "Narrow is the way which leads to life eternal, and broad is the path that leads to destruction," (see Matthew 7:13). In His wisdom, the Father kept the way to heaven very exclusive, knowing that if there were ten ways, there would be fifty counterfeits and it would be all the more confusing. "Neither is there salvation in any other," Peter would say, "for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (see Acts 4:12). Period. Case closed.

Understanding the naiveti of people, God said, "I'm going to keep it real simple. There's only one Way"—making His not an act of exclusivity, but of love.

John 14:7–11

If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.

Not only do we have the hope of heaven, but we know the nature of the Father. "Show us the Father," Philip said. "That would help."

Is “Where is God?” your cry in troubling times?

Jesus looked at Phillip and said, “You know the Father already because you’ve been with Me. He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.”

The trend in our generation is to blame our parents for our present perversions, problems, depressions, and difficulties. Such thinking has also infected the Christian community wherein believers are saying, “I can’t relate to the Father because my earthly father ignored me, abused me, or abandoned me.” I think that’s bogus. The issue is not a matter of understanding one’s earthly father. The issue is one of understanding Jesus Christ. If you want to know the nature of the Father, study the Son. The character of one’s earthly father is immaterial. The sole issue is Jesus, for in seeing Him, we see the Father.

John 14:12–14

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

In addition to the hope of heaven and an understanding of the nature of the Father, we have been given the privilege of prayer. We have the privilege of asking in Jesus’ name for anything of which we have need. “I have a hard time with that,” you say, “because I’ve asked for a lot of things in Jesus’ name that haven’t come my way.”

Gang, asking in Jesus’ name is not simply attaching the phrase, “In Jesus’ name” to our prayers the way a trucker closes his calls with “Ten-four, good buddy.” No, asking in Jesus’ name means asking in harmony with His character and His personality, for the Name speaks of nature.

“Show me Your glory, Lord,” prayed Moses. So after hiding Moses in the cleft of a rock, the Lord passed by and in proclaiming His nature to Moses thereby revealed His glory and proclaimed His name (see Exodus 34:6, 7).

If I’m praying, “Lord, she’s been really mean to me. Sic her!” or, “Lord, what I really need is a new Cadillac so I can make everyone jealous,” I’m not praying in the name of the Lord no matter how many “In Jesus’ name’s” I attach.

Is what I'm praying for full of mercy and goodness? Is it in line with the personality of Jesus? That's what it means to pray in His name.

John 14:15–25

If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.

We have also been given the comfort of the Spirit. The word translated "Comforter" is *para kletos,* referring to someone "called to one's side." With His disciples, Jesus was limited in that He could only be in one place at one time. That is why He would say, "It is expedient for me to go away that the Comforter might come (John 16:7). The Comforter is One who will heal your hurts, still your storms, and supply your needs."

John 14:26

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

Although sometimes comforting involves correcting and convicting, the Spirit is not a buzzard who circles over us waiting for us to fail that He might

come and pick at us. Nor is He a screeching hawk who makes a lot of noise, striking fear in the hearts of everyone around Him. Neither is He a hummingbird who flaps His wings incessantly, yet makes no progress practically. The Spirit is a dove (Matthew 3:16)—known for His gentleness, beauty, and purity. Truly, He is a *Comforter* in reality.

John 14:27, 28

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.

Finally, we have been given the peace of Jesus Christ. Even though I might not understand what's going on, I have a peace that bypasses my brain and permeates my heart. I might not know why things aren't working out, or why things are coming down. But in the midst of it all, Jesus offers me His peace.

John 14:29, 30

And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.

"Don't let your heart be troubled," Jesus said. "Believe in God. Believe in Me." Therefore, I can either drown in doubt or I can choose to say,

"Thank You, Father, that I'm going to heaven.

Thank You that I can know Your nature because I can see it in Your Son.

Thank You that I can talk to You freely because of the privilege of prayer.

Thank You for the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Thank You for the peace you give to me in Jesus Christ.

In obedience to Your command, Lord, I will not let my heart be troubled."

John 14:31

But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.

To you who are down in the mouth, down in the dumps, and troubled in spirit, Jesus would say, “Don’t be! Believe in God. Believe in Me. Arise and let’s go out in ministry.”

HEAVEN
A Topical Study of
JOHN 14:1–3

No doubt the disciples were deeply distressed, for there in the Upper Room Jesus began to inform them of the troubling news that one would betray Him, that Peter would deny Him, and that He would leave them.

Yet, as the room fills with confusion, Jesus looks at His disciples and says, "Let not your heart be troubled. Heaven is the key."

According to an April 24, 2000, *Washington Post* article, 88 percent of all Americans believe in a literal place called heaven—an important statistic because imagine what our society would be like if we *didn't* believe in heaven. . . .

A society that didn't believe in heaven would be obsessed with youth. It would spend hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to look, stay, and feel young through plastic surgery, diets, and exercise programs. A society that didn't believe in heaven would spend billions of dollars on life support systems to delay facing an unknown future. In a society that didn't believe in heaven, crime would soar without fear of eternal judgment. The theology of a society that didn't believe in heaven would be based upon the here and now—on health and prosperity.

Wait a minute. We *are* that culture, because although our generation gives lip service to the *idea* of heaven, we do not live out the *reality* of heaven.

Why isn't Heaven a reality?

I suggest the following reasons . . .

Ministry

There is tremendous pressure in the ministry presently to "teach to the times," to "scratch where it itches." "No one wants to hear about heaven," we are told. "Preach to people here and now."

Accused of being old-fashioned because he always preached on heaven, a classic English preacher gave this response: "While everyone is preaching to the times, may not this poor soul speak for eternity?"

Such is my feeling. Let others talk about cultural relevancy—I desire to be a voice for eternity. The Bible speaks of heaven 557 times; it's a fundamental, foundational truth.

Society

Ours is the first generation to teach that, materially, one can have heaven on earth.

"Your life will be perfect if you use Arrid Extra Dry," we are told. And, although we fall for this pitch time and time again, each time we do, we rediscover that nothing on this earth is substantial, that nothing this side of eternity can do more than whet our appetite for heaven.

Has your soul ever been stirred simply by watching the water cascade down a waterfall? Has your heart ever been overwhelmed by the beauty of the sun setting into the ocean? Have you ever been moved to tears by the "Hallelujah Chorus"?

I suggest these are feelings common to man. And I suggest that what they rekindle is a vague, foggy, misty memory of a place called Eden—where there was no sin, no sorrow, no disease, and no death; where man walked with God in the cool of the day, and where things were right. When such a memory stirs within me, I feel like a frog that has been cursed. I'm waiting for the prince to come and kiss me before I "croak."

And that's where our society is. We know there has to be something more because our experiences with true beauty and with true reality are always so fleeting.

"What happened to the waterfall experience?" we cry.

"What happened to the sunset?

What happened to the "Hallelujah Chorus"?

Why do they elude me?

Where's my prince?"

Good news! Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, is a frog-kisser. How do I know? Because in the moment of confusion, He says to us, as He said to His disciples, "Don't lose sight of the big picture. The solution to your confusion lies in a single word: heaven."

As always, Jesus was right, for whenever we consider the ramifications of heaven, our confusion turns to clarity, our despair to delight, and our fear to faith.

The Perspective of Eternity

Believers are sometimes accused of being so heavenly-minded that they're no earthly good. The Bible, however, teaches just the opposite—that we won't be any earthly good *until* we are heavenly-minded because, as Paul points out, "if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (see 1 Corinthians 15:19). This one who was shipwrecked, beaten, imprisoned, starved, stoned, and left for dead declared, "If there is no heaven, then life is miserable." Perhaps it was his proximity to death on so many occasions that prompted him to write, "Set your affections on things above" (see Colossians 3:2)—for once Paul experienced even a taste of heaven, nothing else mattered to him except to run the race, to win the prize, and to live with eternity in view.

The Puzzle of Prosperity

Suppose you're waiting to board a flight to Portland, Oregon, and the pilot walks in, saying, "You are going to have the flight of your life. Smooth sailing all the way! I guarantee we won't hit one pocket of turbulence. You will have quadraphonic earphones, an Epicurean experience with a seven-course meal, and your choice of first-run movies. There's only one problem: We haven't figured out how to land. We've tried it a thousand times, and everybody dies—but while you're in the air, I promise your flight will be smooth and your experience fulfilling."

At this point, a second pilot enters the boarding area, saying, "I can't promise smooth sailing. In fact, from here to Portland, you'll no doubt hit some bumps and you might even have the 'urge to re-gurge.' However, we have a perfect landing record, and we will get you to your destination safely. Guaranteed."

Which plane would you board?

To some, the question itself poses a problem, for, like David, they feel envious of the foolish when they see the prosperity of the wicked (Psalm 73:3). What's the answer? It is found in the sanctuary of God—for it is there that David understood that although the wicked were experiencing smooth sailing presently, they were headed for hell eternally (Psalm 73:17–19).

The 1991 Oakland/Berkeley Hills fire consumed million-dollar homes, leaving nothing. "I not only lost my house, I lost everything," an elderly man was quoted as saying. "My life's savings were in cash, which I kept in my home. My wife and I were very careful all of our years to save our money. We were saving for a rainy day, never counting on a fiery night."

Listen, gang, for the unbeliever, life on earth is as good as it gets. But for the believer, life on earth is the worst it gets.

The Promise of Productivity

Most people have the idea that heaven is sort of like a long, Sunday afternoon nap—plucking a few strings on a harp, eating a grape or two now and then, lounging around on a white cloud. Not true, for in heaven you will be able to experience to the fullest extent the desires of your heart.

Maybe you just love music, but you don't really have the gift to do a lot with it. When you get to heaven, you can own a choir! You can sing gloriously to your heart's content. Maybe your love is gardening. In heaven, the grass really is greener. No weeds!

Or maybe you're a people person. The people you know here, you'll know there. Won't our bodies be changed? Yes, but look at Jesus—when He came back from the dead, although He walked through a wall, Thomas still recognized Him immediately (John 20:28). As for those in heaven we haven't yet met, nametags will be unnecessary, as it seems we will instinctively know people there. Why do I think this? Because on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus didn't say, "Peter, James, and John, I'd like you to meet Moses and Elijah. Moses and Elijah, say 'Hi' to Peter, James, and John." There were no formal introductions, yet Peter, James, and John knew intuitively that it was Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus (Matthew 17:4).

Productivity like we've never known awaits us in heaven, where we will rule angels, govern cities, and manage the universe (Revelation 22:5).

The Reality of Relativity

The source of the greatest frustration of people presently is the lack of time—which is why we constantly find ourselves saying, "Where did the time go?" or "My kids are growing up too fast," or "There's so much I want to do, but I can't find the time."

Do the birds complain about the air in which they fly? Do the fish complain about the sea? Only man complains about his environment because it is one in which he doesn't belong. Time frustrates him because he is made for a timeless eternity

C. S. Lewis said it best when he wrote, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."[1]

The fact that, according to Ecclesiastes, there is no past, present, or future in eternity means heaven is a continual "now." How can this be? Ask Albert Einstein. His "theory of relativity" has more to do with eternity than he probably could have guessed, for in propounding that when one travels at the speed of light, time stops, he validated the fact that, because God is Himself light (1 John 1:5), in His presence, time ceases.

Thus, if time—man's biggest frustration on earth—is nonexistent in heaven, we can be sure every lesser frustration will be obliterated as well. Heaven will truly be absolutely, wonderfully, and incredibly perfect.

"How can it be perfect if those I love are still on earth?" some ask.

If you put a glob of peanut butter at one end of a shoebox, ants at the other end, and a maze in between, you would see the ants begin to wind their way through the maze, journeying toward their celestial peanut butter glob city. You would see it all: the beginning, the journey, and the end. But they wouldn't. All they would see is the next wall in front of them. So, too, those in Heaven see the whole thing unfolding simultaneously. Not only are events occurring concurrently, but from their perspective, we are already standing beside them in eternity.

Still others are concerned about the people who won't be in heaven. *How can it be heaven if I know people I care about aren't there?* they wonder.

Concerning the Amalekites who were hassling the people of Israel, the Lord said, "I will destroy them and remove their memory from your minds" (see Deuteronomy 25:19). The psalmist picks up the same theme when, in six

occasions, he talks specifically about the “blotting out of the names of those who are against God.” Thus, I suggest you will not even remember the people who are not saved.

The Answer to Inequity

Heaven is the place where we will at last have all our questions answered. Why was this person born severely retarded? Why was that person born to starvation? Why wasn't this person healed when we prayed in faith? Why was that baby allowed to be conceived only to be aborted? Why, why, why?

Psalm 139 tells us that all of our days are written in a book. Could it be that the "book" is what science now calls the DNA genetic code—the strand wherein is packed all of one's characteristics, appearance, and entire being? So much information is crammed into the DNA genetic code that it would fill one hundred volumes of an encyclopedia. Consequently, could it be that even if a baby is aborted or born prematurely, his or her genetic code will be fully revealed and realized in heaven?

"Hang on," Jesus said. "It's not over yet. The first will be last; the last will be first; and the score will be settled."

The Response to Opportunity

Maybe you've had opportunity to hear Jesus say, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,"—but you have rejected Him. God will honor your choice. You'll be allowed to go where you want. But know this: Hell is not a party. It's a place of eternal weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12).

But for you who have taken Jesus up on His offer as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, congratulations! You're going to heaven! So, let not your heart be troubled.

Get ready. Get packed. Get set. We're going home!



15 In the previous chapter, Jesus had said, "There's hope for you—hope in heaven. See the big picture. Get a handle on your destiny. Let not your heart be troubled." Here, in chapter 15, He puts in the clutch, changes gears a bit, and gives us a message not so much dealing with hope in heaven but rather about help on earth. The last phrase in chapter 14 being, "Arise and let us go hence," Jesus and the disciples left the Upper Room, made their way through the city of Jerusalem, and headed toward the Garden of Gethsemane via the Kidron Valley. Thus, it would seem that John 15 is actually given to the disciples when they are en route from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane. It being Passover season, they would have been traveling under a full moon and would, very possibly, have seen the magnificent temple structure, with its massive vine-engraved doors, off in the distance. The vine being the historic as well as the religious symbol of Israel (Isaiah 5; Ezekiel 19; Psalm 80), perhaps it was the gold-covered vine reflected in the moonlight that inspired the masterful teaching that follows.

John 15:1 (a)
I am the true vine . . .

In His eighth "*Ego Eimi*" or "I AM" statement, Jesus says, "I am the True Vine." I find this intriguing. Why would He use the word "true" at this time? Perhaps it is because as we go through this chapter into the next, we'll see that Jesus knew His disciples would soon be kicked out of temple worship, barred from the synagogue, ostracized from the glory, tradition, and beauty of Judaism.

Thus, I believe it is in this reference that Jesus declared, "I am the *true* Vine," as if to say, "Don't be deceived. It's not Judaism. It's not religion. It's *Me*."

John 15:1 (b), 2

. . . and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

If I had a nickel for every message or study I've heard on the pruning procedures of Jesus Christ based upon this passage, I would be a wealthy man. It's a commonly used text for the premise that if you're bearing fruit—if things are going good, watch out because Jesus is on His way, hedge clippers in hand. Hearing such messages, I invariably leave bloodied and bruised, battered and afraid Jesus is going to come with His clippers and prune me. I believe such teaching is a complete misunderstanding of this passage because linguistically, contextually, and logically it doesn't fit. Let me explain. The word translated "takes away" in verse 2 is *airo*—a word in which three of the four definitions deal with lifting up, raising up, or pulling up. Yes, the fourth definition in the Greek lexicon is "take away." But there are three that precede it. *Airo* is used in John 11:41, where Jesus *lifts* up His eyes toward the heavens—and again in Luke 17 when the people *lifted* their voices. Thus, the idea here is not "take away" but "lift up."

The word translated "purge" is *kathairo* from which we get our word "catharsis," referring to a cleansing process. *Kathairo* is used in John 13 when Jesus cleansed the feet of His disciples. In fact, in virtually every case in New Testament language, *kathairo* being translated not "purge" but "cleanse," I believe the use of "purge" here in John 15 is a mistranslation. If you put these thoughts together, you get an understanding of what Jesus is really saying—and it's wonderful. It's not terrorizing; it's terrific. It doesn't cause consternation, but rather comfort, for He says, "Every branch in Me that bears not fruit, I lift up. And every branch that bears fruit, I cleanse that it might bring forth more fruit."

You see, in vineyards, it is not uncommon for branches to become so heavy with fruit that they sag to the ground—leaving them vulnerable to the mud from the rainy season sure to follow. Consequently, the vinedresser, seeing a branch in the mud, lifts it up and braces it. And if there is fruit on it, he washes the mud off the fruit—lovingly, carefully, and tenderly.

Thus, Jesus paints a picture not of the Lord lopping you off, but of Him lifting you up; not of Him cutting you, but of Him cleansing you. How do I know this with certainty? Look at the next verse. . . .

John 15:3

Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

In following this analogy, in keeping with the flow logically, what Jesus is saying is, "I lift the downtrodden branch; I wash the contaminated fruit. How? Through the Word." You're clean through the Word. Gang, how do you bear more fruit? Not by the Lord butchering you or bloodying you, but by being in the Word. How do we get our lives cleaned up? How does more fruit come? Fruit comes by a commitment to the Word, a receptivity to the Word, and by staying in the Word. The psalmist said the same thing in Psalm 119 when he said "How shall a young man cleanse his way? How does a young man walk in a clean way? By taking heed thereto according to thy Word." And Paul picks up the same analogy in Ephesians 5 where, talking about husbands and wives, he says that the bride is washed by the water of the Word.

Jesus gives us an important, absolutely essential exhortation when He says, "I am the True Vine. You're the branches. When you're downcast or dirty, the Father will come and pick you up and wash you off via the Word through your morning devotions, Wednesday evening Bible study, home groups." Being in the place where the Word is taught, where we are basing our beliefs on what Jesus said, has a cleansing effect upon our lives.

John 15:4

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

"Stay close to Me," Jesus is saying. "Abide in Me. Cling to Me because if you don't, there won't be any fruit coming forth from your life." What is fruit? Fruit is vital to spiritual life presently and will affect you eternally. Romans 1:13 and John 4 identify fruit as winning lost souls. Romans 6:22 defines fruit as holiness. Romans 15:28 names financial giving as fruit. Colossians 1 describes fruit as helping practically. Hebrews 13 tells us that the fruit of our lips—giving praise to His Name—is fruit. And ultimately, most importantly, Galatians 5:22 teaches that the fruit of the Spirit is love. Love is the ultimate

fruit. What about joy, peace, and longsuffering; gentleness, goodness, and faith; meekness and self-control? Doesn't Galatians list them as fruit? Yes, but the fruit (not *fruits*) of the Spirit being singular, those are definitions of what love is.

So, when your life is filled with love, when you're giving financially, when you're praising the Lord verbally, when you're doing good things practically, when you're witnessing to the lost boldly, when you're joyful, peaceful, and patient—all of these constitute fruit.

John 15:5 (a)

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit . . .

I like this! In the beginning of verse 2, there was no fruit. In the middle of verse 2, there was fruit. At the end of verse 2 there was more fruit. And here in verse 5, there is *much* fruit! How is "much fruit" produced? By abiding. I have an apple tree in my backyard that bears prolifically. Suppose I brought in a branch from this apple tree and said, "Hey, gang, this tree produces so much fruit that we're going to set this branch right here. In April it'll start blossoming, and a couple months later we'll have all kinds of apples right here in the sanctuary."

"That's crazy," you'd say. "The branch has to be linked to the trunk. Otherwise, there's no way fruit will be produced on that limb."

And that's what Jesus is getting at. We might know how we should behave and what we should do—but if we're cut off from the Lord, if we're distanced from the Lord, there won't be any fruit. We need to be in His presence daily, in His Word continually. If not, we'll cut off the flow of sap that would have produced fruit for His pleasure and rewards in eternity. If there's a lack of fruit in our lives, we mustn't say, "I can't understand why there's not more fruit coming my way"—because an irrefutable fact of spiritual life is that every man, every woman is only as close to the Lord as he or she chooses to be. And if you choose to abide in Him, to intertwine your life with His, to wrap yourself around Him and stay close to Him, you will inevitably bring forth much fruit.

How is fruit produced? By abiding—not struggling, not striving. The apple tree in my backyard is interesting. As I've watched it for many years, I have never once observed it struggling, complaining or groaning to bear apples. I've

never in my whole life seen branches struggling or straining to produce fruit. Yet I have seen Christians, myself included, struggling and straining to control temper or change character. But it never works in the long haul because sooner or later (usually sooner), the old character will emerge and dominate once more. The only way you can really bear fruit—which is love defined by joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, and faith; the only way you really bear fruit—which is boldness in witnessing, sincere expression of praise, and generous giving—is just to abide in Christ. What does the apple branch do? It just hangs in there day after week after month after year. And in due season, the blossoms come and the apples appear, and there's fruit—all because it just hangs in there. So, too, you hang in there with the Lord, and as the days turn into weeks, months, and years, you will see fruit and then more fruit and then much fruit.

John 15:5 (b)

. . . for without me ye can do nothing.

If you're not abiding in Christ, whatever you're doing is a huge waste. It's nothing. Zip. Zilch. Zero. It's worth nothing. It will not count. It will not be there in eternity. "Oh, but I'm a Kiwanan, or a Rotarian, or I work for the Red Cross." If it's not done as you're abiding *in* Christ, for the glory *of* Christ, because you were led *by* Christ, it is for nothing. Period.

Why, then, do people donate time to the Red Cross? Why do they join service organizations? Why do they perform good deeds? Perhaps to appease a guilty conscience, to be part of a fraternity, to strike up business deals, for camaraderie—for lots of reasons which have nothing to do with absolute goodness. Only what you do in Christ and for Christ and because of Christ will count in the ages to come. That's why Jesus says, "If I'm not in the center of it, it's worth nothing."

John 15:6

If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

Does this mean that if we don't abide in Jesus, we'll be lopped off and cast into the fire? If we don't abide in Him, the fruit-bearing part of our life will

indeed burn—but not our position because our salvation was secured by what Jesus did on the Cross. The wood of a vine is so soft it is useless to build with, so here, Jesus is saying, "If your life is not bearing fruit, it's good for nothing but kindling." It's an interesting analogy because that's what life is all about. We're either bearing fruit, or we're just burning up the clock.

John 15:7 (a)
If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you . . .

The word "abide" is really important. It means "be at home in." "Thy Word have I hid in my heart," said the psalmist (see Psalm 119:11)—not in his head, but in his heart. Paul prayed in Ephesians 3 "that Christ may dwell in your *hearts*." Why does the Lord want His Word to abide in our hearts and not just in our heads? Because affected by data, discussions, and information, the mind is incredibly fickle. I can change my mind one hundred times in a single day concerning a single issue. So can you. But not so the heart. If a girlfriend or boyfriend ever broke up with you, you know how this works. You may have known in your head that you were better off without him or her, but you still cared for that girl or guy. Why? Because the heart doesn't let go that easily. That's why the Lord wants His Word to dwell there. How does this happen? For me the most practical way knowledge moves from the head to the heart is through meditation and contemplation—so that the Word can sink in and permeate my inner man. It must not just be written on paper; it's gotta be written in my heart.

John 15:7 (b)
. . . ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

"If you're clinging to Me, if your life is intertwined with Mine, you can ask whatever you want, and your prayers will be answered without exception." Notice the qualification: "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you." This is the problem with most of our prayers. James 4:2, 3 says, "You have not because you ask not. But when you ask, you receive not because you ask amiss." In other words, our requests are out of line. Gang, when we're not in the Word, we don't know how to pray. Prayer and the Word go hand in hand. As I'm in the Word, His words abide in me, and it is then that I know how to pray and for what to ask.

If I went to the Father tonight and said, "Oh, Father, we need money for missions or for expanded ministry, so I pray You would help me find a big stash of cocaine to sell,"—would the Lord answer that prayer? No, because it is completely out of line with what His Word says I should be doing. We chuckle at that, but I have a hunch that if we could play back our prayers, we would be both shocked and amused by them. "Oh, how foolish that was," we would say. "How out of line with what I now know is God's heart. No wonder that prayer wasn't answered!"

John 15:8–11

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

"I'm telling you these things," Jesus says, "so that you might be full of joy."

You're playing on the church softball team. The pitcher hurls one in your direction. You cock your arm, swing mightily, and hear the crack of the bat as it sends the ball deep into left field. You watch the left fielder fade deeper and deeper. His back is against the fence. He leaps into the air. The ball clears his glove. And are you ever happy! It's a four-bagger with bases loaded. You're ready to take your victory trot—when you hear the voice of the umpire yell, "Foul." And suddenly, your happiness dissipates.

Jesus promises not happiness, but a constant sense of joy in your heart regardless of whether you hit a homer or a foul. That doesn't mean your life is going to be trivial, giddy, and trite. It does mean, however, that even when you feel discouraged, underneath it all somehow mystically, miraculously, mysteriously there's still joy. And Jesus said this joy will be in proportion to our abiding in His Word.

John 15:12

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

"Speaking of abiding in My Word," Jesus says, "My Word to you is that as I have loved you, so I want you to love one another. It doesn't matter how much theology you know, or how much wisdom you claim to have. If you don't love Me and the person sitting beside you, nothing else matters." Notice it's a commandment—which means love is not a matter of emotion, but of volition. It's a choice. Jesus doesn't ever command us to feel something. He commands us to do something. "Help the world to see I am alive," the Lord says. "They pinned Me to a Cross. They thought they did Me in. But I'm alive. And how will they know I'm alive? By your love one for another."

Again, in the context of Jesus' teaching, love is not so much an emotion as a decision. And the beautiful thing is, oftentimes when you implement the action, the emotion will follow. Guys, maybe you've lost the feeling for your wife. Treat her like a treasure, and your emotions will follow because Jesus taught that where our treasure is, there will our heart be also (Luke 12:34). Our culture has lost the meaning of what real love is. Consequently, husbands and wives are saying, "I don't have feelings for him or her anymore, so I'm leaving." But feelings aren't the issue. Love is not an emotion or a feeling. It's a decision. It's an action. "My commandment," Jesus said, "is that you make the decision to love."

You will come across people tomorrow who might initially seem to be an interruption to your schedule. But if you say, "Wait a minute. Here's an opportunity for me to love," you know what will happen? As you make that decision, there will be a change in your emotions. The Lord will meet you in that place. I guarantee it.

John 15:13

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

An entire nation was revived when John Knox prayed, "Lord, give me Scotland, or I die." But what many people don't know is what Knox wrote concerning the answer to that prayer. The Lord responded in his heart, saying, "First die, then I'll give you Scotland."

"Make this relationship work, or I'm going to die," we pray.

"Die first," the Lord says.

Lay down your life for your wife, your neighbor, your friend. That is not only the proof of your love, but the pathway to love, because love is not some feeling you hope returns, not some kind of elusive mystical emotion. It's the decision to die to your dreams, your desires, your needs, and your wants and instead lay down your life for your friend, your husband, your neighbor, or your kids.

John 15:14, 15

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

Jesus considers me His friend. That's amazing. I'm flaky, fickle, and foolish. But the Lord looks at us and calls us His friends. This means He doesn't love us because He has to, but because He chooses to. He *likes* us. He gets a kick out of us. We're a delight to His heart. We bring a smile to His face. Amazing! And because we're His friends, He wants us to know what He's doing.

"Shall I hide from Abraham this thing which I do?" asked the Lord in Genesis 18:17. "No," He answered. So God did, indeed, tell the man singularly called the Friend of God (James 2:23) He was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. As He did to Abraham historically, God will whisper in your heart concerning what He's doing presently. You'll know things about which the world is unaware because He calls you His friend.

John 15:16 (a)

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain . . .

Not only does Jesus tell us what's going on and what's coming down eventually, but He ordains us to be involved in ministry presently. Whether or not you've been credentialed by some ordination council is irrelevant, for on the basis of this passage, you are ordained just as much as Billy Graham. What, then, is the purpose of formal ordination—when we put the title Reverend in front of someone's name? It's simply a legal ratification that confirms a man has, indeed, been keeping the commands of Jesus, thereby allowing him to move

through the legal processes of marrying and burying. But there's really not a whole lot to it because nowhere in the Scripture do you see councils and tests and examinations for ministry. Jesus said, "I've ordained you." That's all you need.

> The story is told that as Napoleon was talking to a group of his high-ranking officers, his horse, standing nearby, spooked and bolted. A quick-thinking private, observing the scene, pursued the runaway on his own steed, and was able to return Napoleon's horse safely.
>
> "Well done, Captain," said Napoleon upon his return.
>
> The private, with eyes as big as saucers, saluted smartly and said, "Yes, sir."

Then he went immediately to the supply tent, got himself a captain's uniform, and moved into officer's quarters. He never said, "I don't deserve it. I should have worked my way up through the ranks. I need to earn this." No, he just said, "Yes, sir."

Likewise, the Lord calls us "Friend," "Ordained Minister"—and all that's left for us to say is, "Yes, Sir!"

John 15:16 (b)

. . . that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

If you walked into a store, made one hundred thousand dollars worth of purchases, and then pulled out a check upon which was written at the top "Jon Courson," you would be laughed out of the store. But if you walked into that same store with an authorized check from Donald Trump, there would be no problem because the issue isn't how rich you are, but how rich is the person upon whose account you draw. And that's the beautiful thing about prayer. My request isn't based upon how many devotions I've had this week, how many folks I've witnessed to this month, how many hours I've spent in prayer today. No, that's all irrelevant. I draw from the bank of heaven based solely upon the riches of Jesus Christ, who gave me His Name to use. How free your prayer life will be when you understand what it means to use Jesus' name with the Father.

John 15:17

These things I command you, that ye love one another.

"Okay, Lord, we hear You. You want us to love one another by laying down our lives, by making the decision to love based not upon ethereal emotions or fuzzy feelings, but on the basis of Your command. And if we do that, You say we are Your friends—giving us the privilege and power of prayer; the right to be ordained by You in service and ministry. Incredible! That's a wonderful package You've given us. And now we'll just carry it out. We'll make the decision to love." Now, it seems if you, if I, if any of us do this—if we really love people—we would be popular and embraced. After all, everybody loves a lover. But watch what Jesus says. . . .

John 15:18, 19

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

If the world loves you, watch out—you're in hot water. Paul told his protigi, Timothy, that all who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). That's a fact. If you are living godly, you're not going to make it into the *Who's Who* of the world's system. It just won't work that way.

John 15:20–22

Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.

The reason the world will hate you is because you're light (1 Thessalonians 5:5). And when light shines, people in the dark get real uneasy. Like bugs under a rock, they start scrambling and fleeing. "If I hadn't come," said Jesus, "men could continue on in their sin, and no one would feel uncomfortable. But because I came, because of how I lived, because of where I stand, men have no

cloak for their sin. Consequently, they feel exposed and foolish in their iniquity. And will hate you as a result."

John 15:23
He that hateth me hateth my Father also.

Many people claim to love God, Yahweh, Elohim, or Jehovah. But they hate Jesus Christ. Here Jesus goes on record saying that the one who hates Him hates His Father. Therefore, a person cannot say he loves God but doesn't acknowledge Jesus Christ. The Buddhist in his monastery may be sincere in his desire to attain the state of a snuffed-out candle (the state also known as Nirvana) so that no desires can pollute him, no feelings can cause ill will between him and another. But when you talk to him about Jesus Christ, he doesn't want to listen. The Hindu can claim to love the Brahma; the Jew can claim to love Jehovah. Regardless of how many prayers the Hindu offers, or how many synagogues the Jew attends, however, the fact remains that Jesus Christ made a powerful, nonnegotiable proclamation when He said to all mankind, "If you don't love Me, if you don't acknowledge Me, if you hate Me, you hate My Father also. Period. End of quote."

John 15:24–27
If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause. But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

Here's our Lord, saying, "They hated Me without a cause." When people hate you or me, they've got cause. Oh, I'm not speaking just about our making them uncomfortable because of our Christian witness or testimony. I'm saying that the hatred of people toward us is justifiable because we deserve it. Yes, there might be persecution, yes there might be lies, yes there might be hurtful words spoken or wrong deeds done against us. But the fact is, every one of us deserves more of that than we get because we're sinners.

Having fallen sick, Benhadad, king of Syria, sent his servant, Hazael, to inquire of Elisha the prophet if he would recover.

"You'll recover from your disease," answered Elisha, before proceeding to weep uncontrollably.

"What's wrong?" asked the servant.

"I see the evil you will do," answered Elisha. "You'll set the cities of the Israelites on fire; you'll kill her young men, dash her children, rip open her pregnant women."

"That's preposterous," said Hazael. "What do you think I am? A dog? I would never do those things."

But the very next day, we see Hazael smothering Benhadad and reigning in his stead, setting into motion the events that would culminate in a fulfillment of Elisha's prophecy (2 Kings 8).

The Word of God tells us we are depraved and sinful. "I would never do *that,*" we say. "What do you think I am—a dog?" But yet so sinful is our flesh that even the good things we do are tainted with wrong motives and mistakes. Because we all want to be liked and appreciated, we carefully cultivate an image to impress people. It might be through intellectual ability or appearance, athletic prowess, or through service to humanity. It doesn't work, however, because there is *none* righteous (Romans 3:10). And sooner or later we *all* act like dogs.

But here comes Jesus on the scene with cloth in hand, not to smother our face, but to wash our feet. And it is this One who has chosen us, ordained us, and called us to abide in Him that we might bring forth much fruit for His glory. Truly, they hated Him without a cause. But He is the only One who can say that. We're all dogs. This doesn't depress me about my human nature. It just causes me to be impressed all the more with Jesus' lovingkindness.

16 Hours before His crucifixion, Jesus is in the Upper Room. After investing three years of His life in His disciples, He's sharing final instructions with them when suddenly He says, "Verily, I say unto you, one of you shall betray Me" (John 13:21).

"Ask Him which of us it is," whispered Peter to John.

And Jesus said, “The one to whom I hand this bread is the one who will betray Me.” He then handed the bread to Judas Iscariot and said, “What you do, do quickly.”

But the disciples didn’t get it. They thought Judas was going to buy more food for their celebration. Here Jesus had clearly said the one to whom He gave bread would betray Him—yet no one in the room caught on. Why couldn’t they see?

Then Jesus said, “I’m going away and you can’t come with Me for a while.”

Peter pipes up and says, “What do You mean we can’t come with You? I’m going to go wherever You go. I’m going to die if necessary to be with You” (see John 13:37).

“Oh, Peter,” Jesus said, “before the rooster crows, you will have denied Me three times. But let not your heart be troubled. In My Father’s house are many mansions. I’m going to prepare a place for you.”

It was then Thomas’s turn to interject, “Lord, we don’t know where You’re going,” (see John 14:5).

Hadn’t Jesus just said, “I’m going to My Father’s house”?

Jesus went on to say, “If you had known Me, you should have known My Father also.”

But in the very next verse, Philip says, “Show us the Father” (see John 14:8).

Jesus had just said, “You’re seeing the Father when you see Me.”

But Philip still said, “Show us the Father.”

I wonder if at this point Jesus was thinking, “What have I gotten Myself into with these numskulls?” Still, He continued on. “When the Spirit comes,” He said, “He will abide in you, and the world will know I am living. I will manifest Myself to the world when My Spirit dwells in you.”

But Judas (not Iscariot) said, “How are You going to manifest Yourself to us and not to the world?” (see John 14:22).

At this point, if I were in Jesus’ sandals, I would have fired them all. I would have said, “This is our final session together, and you guys don’t have a clue about anything I’m sharing. How could you be so thick-headed. How could you be so blind?”

And maybe that’s the way you feel about your unbelieving wife, your teenage daughter who’s straying, your friend who’s just not seeing. But watch

what Jesus does. As chapter 16 opens, He continues to teach them, confident in due time that the Spirit will put it all together.

John 16:1–6

These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you. But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.

Although the disciples were not grasping what Jesus was saying, He knew that, due to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, they would understand eventually. Thus, He could continue to teach His disciples with confidence—not confidence in them, but confidence in the Spirit soon to come.

John 16:7

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

"It's expedient I go away in order that the Spirit might come to you," Jesus said. How does He work? Read on.

John 16:8

And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.

What does the Spirit do to the blinded eye, to the hardened heart? He convicts it of sin, of righteousness, of judgment.

John 16:9

Of sin, because they believe not on me.

The one and only sin the Holy Spirit will convict an unbeliever of is that of not believing in Jesus. He doesn't convict people of smoking. He doesn't speak to them about their swearing, drinking or partying—only of their unbelief in Jesus. And this is what makes being a believer, a minister, so incredible. We get to share with people the good news that no matter what they've done or where they've been, if they believe in Jesus, they are forgiven of *all* sin (Matthew 12:31).

Doesn't the Holy Spirit convict us of sin once we're Christians? Yes, He does. But the conviction of the Spirit does not drive us away from God. On the contrary, it draws us to God. It's the condemnation of Satan that makes us ashamed to talk to the Father. You can always tell the difference between the Spirit convicting you and Satan condemning you because if it's Satan condemning you, you won't want to pray, and you won't want to spend time in the Word. You'll just hang out in a hole and hide your head. But if it's the Spirit convicting you, you'll hear, "Come unto Me all that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest,"—and you'll be drawn back to Jesus.

John 16:10

Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more.

The Spirit also convicts of righteousness by pointing to the only righteous One. "Because I go to My Father, you see Me no more," said Jesus.

"I'm okay," you say. "I belong to Rotary. I volunteer for the American Cancer Society. I'm pretty righteous." Oh? Righteous enough that death can't hold you? So righteous that when you die you'll rise again? Did Ghandi? Did Mohammed? Did Confucius? Did Buddha? Unlike any other figure in history, Jesus Christ alone rose from the dead and ascended to the Father. Thus, He is the only Righteous One to whom the Spirit points, of whom the Spirit convicts.

John 16:11

Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

When Jesus died on the Cross, the ruler of this world was judged and his power permanently broken. It's not we who were judged. No, the one who held you in his grasp, the one who made you miserable, the one who caused you problems has been judged. That's good news!

John 16:12, 13

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

Jesus here is wrapping up His teaching. But is He doing so worried and frustrated that none of His disciples understand what He's saying? No. Look at the next verse. . . .

John 16:14, 15

He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

Jesus is not worried—and neither should you be about your son, daughter, wife, brother, neighbor, friend.

"But they're not seeing it," you protest. "I'm talking to them. I'm sending tapes to them. I'm lining up counseling for them—and they're still not getting it."

Jesus said, "I know you can't understand what I'm saying. But I also know that when the Spirit comes, He will guide you into all truth."

Truly, it's not by excellent argumentation or through a powerful presentation that the light goes on and the heart opens up. It's only by the work of the Spirit that people who are blind begin to see. Jesus knew this. That's why He didn't worry. And neither should you.

John 16:16, 17

A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father?

This, of course, is a reference to the fact that Jesus' disciples would see Him again in heaven. But they didn't understand this. Unable to figure out what Jesus was saying, they discussed it among themselves.

John 16:18

They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith.

Here the disciples are discussing things about Jesus, while He is in the room with them. They were talking *about* Him when they should have been talking *to* Him. How often that's true of you and me as well. "What's going on?" we say. "What does this mean?" or "Why did that happen?" we ask one another rather than talking directly to the Lord. I'm always amazed at how ready I am to talk to another person—when it is the Lord alone who knows the solution.

John 16:19–22

Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.

Keep in mind that the disciples listening to this discourse had left everything to follow Jesus. Friends, family, and business positions—they had left it all to put their stock in Him. They had hitched their wagons to Him and followed after Him for three years. And now, in this Upper Room, He tells them He would no longer be with them. Thus, understanding their confusion, Jesus gives His disciples three elements that would replace their depression with joy. . . .

First, He gives them a principle to hold on to. The principle is simply this: The object of your pain presently will produce great joy eventually. To illustrate, He spoke of a woman going through labor. Yes, there's pain and struggle, perspiration and anguish. But yet it's the very object that produced the pain that provides the joy when the baby is finally born. In other words, Jesus says, "My leaving, My being crucified, My death is going to cause you great joy

when you see Me again in heaven, when you finally understand it was necessary for Me to go to Calvary in order that your sins could be forgiven completely."

When you go through pain, the Lord does not take away that which caused the pain and replace it with something else to bring joy. It is not substitution, but *transformation* as He produces joy with the very thing that once caused pain.

> *Joseph was thrown into a pit by his envious older brothers. But, picked up by some merchants in a passing caravan, he ended up in Egypt. Sold as a slave into the house of Potiphar, he worked his way up in Potiphar's household until suddenly things turned sour when Potiphar's wife wrongly accused him of sexual assault. Cast into prison, Joseph languished there day after month after year until God miraculously worked through a series of incredible events to release him from prison and elevate him to the position of Prime Minister of Egypt. Thus, the very things that produced the pain—rejection by his brothers, the pit, the prison—were transformed not only to work out for his own good, but to save his entire family in the day of famine (Genesis 50:20).*

> **John 16:23–28**
>
> **And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.**

Second, Jesus gives His disciples a power to plug in to. The power to transform that which produces sorrow into that which provides joy is the power of prayer. "You've asked nothing in My name," Jesus says. "Ask and you shall receive that your *joy* might be made full." Notice Jesus says we must ask in His name. What does this mean? Two things: authority and conformity.

Short on cash, I decide to cash a check at Valley Bank in California. As I hand the teller my check, however, she says, "This check is out of state. We can't cash it."

"Look at the name on the top," I say. And as she does, she quickly apologizes and cashes my check immediately. It's great—but it has nothing to do with me. You see, my dad is President of Valley Bank, so I am treated well because of his name. So, too, when I approach the Father in heaven, I don't come saying, "Did You see how long I prayed last week, Father? Fourteen hours logged in, eighteen chapters read, twenty-two verses memorized. On that basis, I come to You with these requests, and I'm sure You'll give them to me." No, I come simply on the authority of the name I've been given to use: *Jesus'* name.

Third, Jesus gives His disciples a name to conform to. If I went into that same Valley Bank, pulled out a gun, and said to the teller, "I'm Jon Courson. Now, give me all your money, or I'm blasting your brains out," she might perhaps start loading my bag with money—but she would also hit a silent alarm, for although I would be using the name of Courson, I would not be acting in conformity with that name, with the nature of my dad. So, too, when we ask in the name of Jesus, we must do so not only in His authority, but in conformity to His nature. Consequently, if someone cuts me off as I'm driving and I pray, "Father, in Jesus' name, help that guy to drive off the road"—it's not going to happen because that's not in conformity with His nature. Oftentimes, we ask for things that are out of harmony with the nature of our Lord—and we wonder why our prayers aren't answered. That's why, for me, a real secret in prevailing prayer is to be in the Word constantly, studying the life of Christ specifically, so that the things I pray for are in conformity with His character.

John 16:29, 30

His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God.

After Jesus gave this word about childbearing, prayer, and joy, the disciples thought, *Okay. We get it now.* But they really didn't. . . .

John 16:31

Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?

The implication is that they really didn't.

John 16:32

Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.

"You don't get it," Jesus is saying. "In fact, the hour is coming when your unbelief in My words will cause you to scatter from My side."

John 16:33

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

Fourth, Jesus gives His disciples a position to lay claim to. "I have overcome," Jesus said. "And you are in Me. So even if you do scatter, even if you do stumble, even if you do fail—be of good cheer. I have overcome the world. I lived a life in which the world did not seduce Me, in which Satan could not conquer Me, in which sin never tainted Me. I have overcome and you are in Me. Therefore, you will overcome as well."

With Goliath towering over him, David goes to the brook and grabs five stones. Why five? Five is the number of grace. Besides, Goliath had four brothers, and I believe David was ready to take on the whole family if necessary. He slings one stone in the air, and Goliath is down for the count. And because Goliath was defeated, *all* of the Philistines fled. And the men of Israel who were previously reluctant to take on the giant, now *all* share in the victory won by a shepherd boy singularly. So, too, our Champion—the Good Shepherd, the Son of David, Jesus Christ—took on the Goliath of my sin and failure, of Satan and the world system—and He beat them. And I just enjoy the victory.

The Christian race is the only race in the world that begins at the finish line. We don't fight *for* victory. We fight *from* victory. The battle's already won. Jesus has already overcome. No wonder He says, "Be of good cheer."

17

John Knox, great Scottish reformer of the sixteenth century, called John chapter 17 the "Holy of Holies in the Temple of Scripture." So much did Knox love this chapter, that as he lay on his deathbed, he had it read to him over and over again. I believe John Knox's choice was a good one, for in John 17, we see Jesus approaching His own death. About to be crucified, He pauses to talk things over with His Father, giving a report concerning what He did in the three years He was here on earth in public ministry. And in His evaluation, I see eight areas Jesus identified as the foundations of His success. The world names money, power, and prestige as foundational. Jesus shows us an entirely different way of evaluating life and ministry. . . .

John 17:1 (a)

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father . . .

After talking about the Father to His disciples in the Upper Room, Jesus talks to the Father about His disciples.

John 17:1 (b)

. . . the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.

Prayer is not the way to get God to do our will in heaven. Prayer is the way to get man to do God's will on earth. Once this is understood, you will find yourself praying in an entirely different manner. And that's what Jesus is doing here. "Glorify Me," He prays, "so that You might be glorified—even if that means that I will be pinned to the Cross of Calvary."

"That sounds sadistic," you say. But it isn't because on the other side of the Cross is a crown—joy unspeakable, full of great glory. We only see five months or ten years down the road. But God sees the next ten zillion years. You see, Jesus' allowing the Father to be glorified *through* Him ultimately bought a bride *for* Him for all eternity.

It's so radical when a believer finally gets the big picture and stops saying, "God do it my way." God is not Burger King. We can't give orders about how things should be done, and then complain when we don't get the lettuce and

onions we asked for. God is not Burger King—He's the King of kings, and He sees what is going to be absolutely best in the long run.

John 17:2–4 (a)

As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth.

"I have glorified You on the earth." This is the first point in determining how successful in life you are. It is said that former Mayor Ed Koch used to walk the streets of New York City asking everyone—the garbage man, the meter reader, the businessman—"How am I doing?" So, too, I think it's sometimes good for us to say, "How am I doing, Father? Who has received the glory?"

Maybe you're an excellent mother, a gifted musician, a deep Bible teacher, a wonderful neighbor, a hard worker. But who has received the glory? Jesus had a way of working where, without exception, every time He showed power, Scripture says the people saw it and glorified God in heaven.

How about you? Jesus said, "Let your light so shine among men that they might see your good works and glorify the Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Are you getting the glory, or is God? God chooses to use the foolish things of the world (1 Corinthians 1:27) because then people say, "Wow! God is good to use a foolish weakling like him."

John 17:4 (b)

I have finished the work . . .

Jesus didn't say, "I started the work," or, "I thought about the work," or, "I was going to get to the work." He said, "I have *finished* the work." The roads from Bible studies and Bible conferences are strewn with the broken commitments of men and women who began but never finished what God told them to do. I'm sure glad that after Noah finished the frame on the ark, he didn't say, "Close enough. We don't need a roof." No, he *finished* the work. He *completed* the task. If he hadn't, we would all be sunk. What about you? If you

knew you only had a few hours to live, could you say, "Father, I finished the work You gave me to do"? Or would you have to say, "I know you put this on my heart last year and I meant to get to it, but . . ."?

Have you finished the work? Saul didn't. "Let not one Amalekite remain," Samuel told Saul (1 Samuel 15:3). And Saul killed *almost* every one—but he decided to keep Agag, king of the Amalekites as a trophy. Twenty-five years later, wounded in battle, rather than being captured by the enemy, Saul turns to a young man on the field and says, "Kill me." And the young man—an Amalekite—did just that. Where did he come from? Somewhere along the way, Agag fathered a son.

"Don't leave a single Amalekite alive," Samuel said.

"I gave it a pretty good shot," said Saul. "Ninety-nine point nine percent isn't bad."

But the one he didn't finish was the one who did him in.

What has God called you to do? What has He spoken to your heart about? Maybe it's a certain sin that's got to go, and you think, *Well, I've got it pretty much taken care of. I know the Lord's told me not to do this, but I've cut way back.*

"Have you finished it?"

"No, but I've got it under control."

Watch out. Agag is out to get you.

"It is Finished," cried Jesus from the Cross. I'm so glad He didn't say, "I almost did it, but I'm going to come down now"—because if He came down from the Cross, we would go down to hell. He paid the price. He finished the work.

John 17:4 (c)

. . . which thou gavest me to do.

"The whole city wants You," Jesus was told in Mark 1:37. Having spent the morning in prayer, however, He knew that the directive of His Father was for Him to minister in the backwoods region of Galilee. Thus, He went in the opposite direction of the clamor of the crowd. I believe this is why you never see Jesus accused of being busy. His enemies accused Him of being a winebibber, a glutton, demon-possessed, and crazy—but never busy. Jesus moved with a paced peace and an ordered steadiness because He knew the

heart of the Father. People's burdens will give you an ulcer. People's expectations will drive you crazy. Whenever the burden's not light, I know I'm not doing the will of the Father. But when He directs me morning by morning, I find His yoke easy (Matthew 11:30).

John 17:5–7

And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.

"I have manifested Thy name." The word translated "manifest" is *phaneroo,* which means "to shine forth." It doesn't mean so much declaration as it does illustration. When Jesus said, "I have manifested Your name," He wasn't saying, "I have preached about it verbally," but rather, "I have lived it out observably."

"Great is the mystery," Paul would later say, "that God was *manifest* in the flesh," (see 1 Timothy 3:16). Truly, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Jesus said, "This is what I've done Father—I have fleshed out, lived out Your Name and Your Nature before these men You've entrusted to Me. They have seen You by seeing Me."

As the law came down from Mount Sinai, it read, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not covet." It was heavy—but the people received it because it was delivered to them by a man whose face glowed (Exodus 34:29). So, too, if you come down on your friends, colleagues, or kids, and you're growling instead of glowing, they'll resent you and reject the law you bring. Your kids will rebel; your friends will leave; your employees will quit because they'll resent what you share. But if, like Moses and like Jesus, you're spending time with the Father, you will be able to correctly manifest *Him.*

John 17:8 (a)

For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me . . ."

"I have given them thy words." The word translated "words" in this verse is *rhema,* and refers not to the written word, but to the spoken word. *Rhema* is

also found in Ephesians 6:17, in conjunction with the sword of the Spirit. In this context, *rhema* refers not to a theological, scriptural, doctrinal statement, but to a particular word for a particular person.

> *"You have said well you have no husband. You've had five husbands and the man you're living with now is not your husband at all" (see John 4:18) said Jesus, as He tenderly wielded the daggerlike, Spirit-inspired* rhema*—the particular word for a particular person.*

Maybe you've been following the story that has been in the news several times lately about a group of kids who preach at the top of their lungs on their way to school, using their Bibles for megaphones. Recently kicked out of school because they refused to quit preaching, they're now being home-schooled. "Obviously what they're doing doesn't seem right," people say. "But they *are* preaching the Word."

Ah, but it's not the *rhema* word. It's not the exact word. It's not the right word at the right time. It's offending, not convicting. When people justify obnoxious behavior under the guise of preaching the Word, we need to say, "Wait a minute, brother. The Word of God is exact—for the right person at the right time in the right way. And what you're doing is not right."

> **John 17:8 (b)–11**
>
> **. . . and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.**

"I pray not for the world," said Jesus. The term "world" has three references scripturally. First, it speaks of the planet, of the earth (Job 37:12). Second, it speaks of humanity (John 3:16). But the world Jesus is talking about here is neither the planet nor the people, but the system. Consequently, He is praying not to transform the system, not to politically organize to change the

system, but rather He is praying for those the Father has called *out* of the world's system.

John 17:12 (a)

While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept . . .

"I have kept them," Jesus said. According to the teaching of Jesus in John 10, we are in the Father's hand and no man can pluck us out. *Nothing* can loosen us from His grip. Therefore, while we must not be ignorant of Satan's devices, the key to overcoming darkness is to walk in the light and to realize that Jesus Christ promises to keep us (Jude 24). Yes, there is a danger in demon possession or demon oppression—but I believe the greatest danger right now is demon obsession. We should be obsessed not with darkness, but with Jesus. *He* should be the subject of your study, the passion of your ministry.

"I have kept them," Jesus said. What about us? In one sense, in order to apply this to our lives, we need to realize we cannot keep our children, grandchildren, or people to whom we're linked in ministry because they're not ours to keep. They're His. You have opportunities one day at a time to be a blessing to your children and others to whom you minister—to serve them, discipline them, and love them. But you can't cling to them because they're not yours (Ezekiel 18:4). I cannot keep people selfishly—but I must keep them in my heart tenderly. This is what Paul speaks of in virtually all of his epistles when he says, "I have you in my heart."

Old Testament priests wore stones representing each tribe both over their hearts on a breastplate and on their shoulders because there's a connection between the burden of intercession and the heart of compassion. When you pray for people, you will find that as you bear them on your shoulders in intercessory ministry, they will become jewels on your heart.

John 17:12 (b)

. . . and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.

The word "perdition" means "wasteful." What did Judas say when Mary anointed Jesus with oil? The son of waste himself said, "Is not that wasteful? Couldn't it have been used more practically?" (see John 12:4–5). This son of

perdition could not understand the reason one would bestow anything of worth on Jesus.

"Have not I chosen you, yet one of you is a devil?" Jesus said (see John 6:70). Judas was never saved. That is why he was not kept.

John 17:13, 14 (a)

And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word . . .

Unlike in verse 8, the word translated "word" here in verse 13 is *logos*. "I have given them the Scriptures," Jesus says.

John 17:14 (b)–17

. . . and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

"Thy Word is truth." Truth comes in a three-volume set. The first volume is the Scriptures—a Book you can learn from. The second is the Son (John 14:6) —a Person you can love. The third is the Spirit (1 John 5:6)—a Power to live by. If you are learning from the Scriptures, loving the Son, and living in the Spirit, you will be walking in truth.

John 17:18

As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

"I have sent them." Jesus not only kept those entrusted to Him, but He sent them out. He made opportunities for them. Earlier, He had said, "They are not of the world,"—but yet He sends them into the world. Christian, listen carefully. We are not to be of the world—but we must be in the world. The mistake of the monastery movement lies in isolation from the world. You can get away, yes, but don't stay away. Jesus ripped into that wrong understanding when He told the parable of the Good Samaritan. You can't walk on the other side of the street to

avoid the stench and infection of the world. The answer lies not in isolation, but in incarnation—for just as God became Man yet retained His deity, so we are a people who, although we live among humanity, are linked to eternity. We're here in the flesh, but we are really living in the heavenlies. That's where our hope, our destiny, and our source of strength lie.

> In the aftermath of the December seventh bombing of Pearl Harbor, divers were sent to rescue the survivors. In one compartment of the USS *Utah,* however, it was impossible to get to the men trapped inside. The divers could hear men tapping "Is there any hope?" in Morse Code—but rescue was impossible with the technology then available.

We're deep-sea divers, gang—down here on earth, but connected to heaven. We don't fit in here, we don't belong here, and we ain't gonna stay here. But the Lord has allowed us to be here, pumping the oxygen of the Spirit and the Scriptures to us, saying, "There are people to rescue. Do what you can as I guide and lead you."

If you're of the world, you're in big trouble. You're going to try to boogie eighty feet underwater, and it's just not going to work. We've got souls to save, people to reach, things to do. Let's get moving—and let's go home to heaven.

John 17:19, 20

And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.

Jesus prayed not only for those with Him at that time, but for those who would believe later on—for you and me.

John 17:21

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

Keep in mind that it was after talking about truth in verse 14 that Jesus prays His people might be one here in verse 21. Ephesians 4:15 says we are to speak the truth in love because love without truth is hypocrisy, while truth without

love is brutality. You see, if I speak the truth without love, it's like a fire without warmth. Who wants to be in a room on a cold night with light but no warmth? If I speak love without truth, however, it's like a blaze without light. And who wants to be in the dark? The idea is to have light *and* warmth. Unity is based upon telling the truth in love—not always easy, but absolutely necessary.

> Such a powerful evangelist was George Whitefield that thirty thousand people would regularly attend his open-air meetings. So anointed and eloquent was he, history records many orators and actors would come just to watch him. Charles Wesley, a contemporary of Whitefield's, was also preaching to multitudes. Yet so diverse were the views of these two men on certain doctrines, they took out advertisements in the newspapers explaining why they believed what they did—and why the other was amiss. People thought these men hated each other—until one reporter asked Whitefield, "Tell me, Mr. Whitefield, do you expect to see Charles Wesley in heaven?"
>
> "No," answered Whitefield. "He's going to be so close to the throne, and I'm going to be so far back, I'll never see him."

I like that! Here these guys had very different views doctrinally, and very different flavors in ministry, but they had unity through love in their diversity.

> **John 17:22, 23**
>
> **And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.**

"I have given them the glory," Jesus said, speaking of the *chabod,* the substance, the reality of holiness.

Jesus gave the glory to His disciples? To men who would deny Him and abandon Him? Yes. And that same glory has been given to you, for whom He justified, He glorified (Romans 8:30). Listen carefully, saint: The Father looks at you and says, "You are not only elected and predestined, called and justified, but you are already glorified." I'm so glad the Father doesn't see me in my frailty and my flesh, my carnality and stupidity. I'm so thankful He sees me glorified in His Son.

Wouldn't it be radical if you looked at your sons and daughters, husband or wife in their glorified state? Think about the person who bugs you the most. Now, ask the Lord to show you how He views him. You see, it's not that love is blind. It's that love sees *more.* And because love sees more, it is willing to see less. Filled with glory, the eyes of love don't have room for shortcomings and failure.



***For topical study of John 17:20–23 entitled "Unity in the Family," turn to page* 577.**

John 17:24, 25

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.

I know for a fact we're going to heaven because of the promise Jesus made in John 14:1, the prayer He prayed here in John 17:24, and the price He paid (1 Thessalonians 5:10).

John 17:26

And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

"I have declared thy Name," said Jesus. Unlike manifesting God's Name, which involves living it out (verse 6), declaring His Name refers to speaking it out. "I AM the Bread of life," Jesus declared. "I AM the Door. I AM the Way. I AM the Vine. I AM the Truth. I AM the Light. I not only showed people illustratively, but I declared Your Name verbally."

Gang, as we treat people as though they are already glorified, as we speak the truth in love that we might be unified, as we keep those the Lord has given to us on our hearts through intercession, as we manifest as well as declare the nature of the Father, as we give people the exact word, and share with them the

Scriptures, as we finish the work He gives us to do, we will be doing the very things Jesus said our lives should be about.

But as you who are students of management know, this measurement of success is radically contrary to what is propagated in our American culture. It doesn't chart well in popularity polls, on financial fact sheets, or resumes. It won't produce trophies in your case or plaques on your wall—only a voice in your ear, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

UNITY IN THE FAMILY

A Topical Study of JOHN 17:20–23

We are part of a family, a big family—the family of God. And according to the Scriptures, our Father is proud of us. Are we perfect? Well, it depends on how you look at it. Oh, I know we still have flaws and faults and shortcomings. No doubt about it. But Hebrews 10:14 says that by one offering, God has perfected forever those who are sanctified. So, by the offering of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary, we have been perfected positionally. We are family—and as family, it is the intention of our Father that we dwell together in unity. Why is the Lord so concerned about unity? I suggest a couple of reasons. . . .

Pleasure in Unity

> *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*
>
> Psalm 133:1

Parents are blessed by seeing their kids playing together, sharing toys, and being kind to one another. Conversely, they're grieved when they see their kids fighting and bopping one another. The same is true of the Heavenly Father. Seeing His kids together, with all of their various personalities and characteristics, yet dwelling together in unity, causes Him to say, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

Power in Unity

The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands.

Proverbs 30:27

If a single cricket or grasshopper lands in your garden, you simply brush him off. Locusts, however, have a secret: They move together in vast numbers. They don't have a king, but instinctively they travel across a country into a community and are able devour everything in sight simply by their unity. So, too, the world says to us as individual believers, "Quit bugging me, you little cricket," as they brush us off and put us down. But when God's people, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, move in unity—without king, pope, or denominational headquarters—we can storm the very gates of hell and make a lasting, permanent impact.

The Christian community is splintering and that is why, more than ever, we need to hear the heart of the Lord in this area—that we might be one as a family in our homes, as a congregation, as a body. Now, if the prayer of Jesus is for unity and cohesion, what is the program of Satan? Division. What does Satan intend to do to disrupt the unity in your family, in your church locally, or among the church universally? Lacking creativity or innovation, he seeks to divide and conquer the same ways he has since the beginning . . .

Competition

> *And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the* LORD. *And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the* LORD *had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.*
>
> Genesis 4:3–5

Here we see the first tactic of the Enemy: getting brothers to compete against each other. Although the world exalts competition as a key component of its system, such is not the way of the kingdom. We're one body, one family, (1 Corinthians 12). Therefore, when one part of the body is blessed, the whole body should rejoice. If good things are happening to a brother or sister, don't be intimidated, but rejoice because you're being blessed as well.

Jesus showed us what He thought of competition at the pool of Bethesda. The conventional wisdom of the day was that whenever the water stirred, the first one in would get healed. When Jesus came on the scene, He went to a guy at the very back—the one who was not fighting to get ahead, the one forgotten by everyone else and said, "Rise, take up your bed. Let's get out of this place of competition," (see John 5). And I suggest to you that's still the heart of Jesus.

Exposure

> *And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without.*
>
> Genesis 9:20–22

The Flood over, Noah became a vinedresser. It is possible Noah didn't know that, due to the collapse of the water canopy that had surrounded the earth before the Flood, fermentation would occur under the damaging rays of the sun. But as he drank the grape juice that perhaps had been sitting out for a few months, maybe he did indeed know exactly what he was doing. Either way, drunk and naked in his tent, he was exposed by his son.

Why do we expose the nakedness of others? I suggest it's for the sense of camaraderie that follows. You see, if Rick says to Roger, "I can't believe what Peter did last week," initially there's something in human nature that produces a bond between Rick and Roger as they talk about Peter. They might sound very spiritual, as in, "Did you hear what happened to Peter? I know you'll pray about it, so I want to share with you what he did . . ." but cut through all the piety, and gossip is at the root.

A day or two later, however, when Rick sees Roger talking with Peter, he thinks, *Uh, oh. I bet they're talking about me.* And paranoia creeps in.

Thus, exposure produces a false fellowship because you can be sure that if someone has listened to you gossip about another, they will also be involved in gossip about you. "Oh, but I didn't say anything. I was just listening." According to Proverbs 17:4, even if you listen, you are a partner in that sin. Proverbs goes on to say, "Where there is no wood, there can be no fire" (see 26:20), because if you refuse to listen, guess what. The gossip stops.

Proverbs goes even further in saying, "He that covers a transgression seeks love" (see 17:9). And that's what is seen in Genesis 9. Ham exposed his father's sin—but his brothers covered it. Shem and Japheth walked in backward with a blanket between their shoulders lest anyone walking outside look in and see Noah's nakedness. It's tragic when Christians talk about the dirty laundry that's in the tent and expose the nakedness of their brothers and sisters, because

those outside the tent—the ones who aren't saved—say, "I don't want to go in there." Instead of talking and gossiping, Shem and Japheth covered the iniquity carefully and completely. And they were blessed as a result (Genesis 9:26–27).

Legalism

> *And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyp tian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.*
>
> Genesis 21:8, 9

Galatians 4 gives us the interpretation of this event: Ishmael represents the law, the Old Covenant. Isaac represents grace, the New Covenant. The law always mocks grace. The law will always come down on grace, find fault with grace, belittle grace. Watch out for this third attack of the Enemy—where we come down on others, make fun of others, separate ourselves from others when they don't keep our prescribed rules. Beware of legalism. Don't let cultural traditions or personal convictions cause division between you and any other believer.

Favoritism

> *And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.*
>
> Genesis 25:27, 28

Isaac grew up, married Rebekah, and fathered twin sons—Jacob and Esau. As Esau grew up, Isaac said, "I like this kid—All-State in hunting." But Rebekah loved Jacob. Thus, because of favoritism, seeds of division were planted, which caused life-long tension between these two brothers. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul warns of the same danger. "You're carnal," he said to the Corinthians believers, "not because of some gross and obvious sin, but because you each have your favorite teacher. Some follow me; others follow Apollos; others Peter. This ought not be."

Jealousy

> *And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him. And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more.*
>
> Genesis 37:4, 5

Whenever we look at someone else's power, position, or possessions and think, *That would make me happy,* jealousy is the inevitable result. Such was the case with Joseph and his brothers. After Joseph was bestowed with a coat, signifying a position of prominence, and after he prophesied that they would one day bow to him, so angry did his brothers become that they tossed him into a pit to die. Then, seeing a band of slave traders traveling through the region, his brothers picked him up and sold him as a slave in Egypt, where he was eventually thrown into a dungeon before finally rising to the position of prime minister. Keep Joseph in mind when you see someone who seems to have more prowess spiritually, more power vocationally, more possessions materially than you. As was Joseph's, the path of their prominence is often strewn with pits and prisons about which you know nothing. So be thankful where you are. Like Paul, learn to be content wherever the Lord has planted you (Philippians 4:11).

Competition, exposure, legalism, favoritism, jealousy all constitute the plan of the Enemy to cause division. What, then, is the pathway to unity?

It's not crusades. It's not saying, "Let's get all of the churches together and have a unity rally." Neither is it causes. It's not saying, "We'll all stand together for a certain cause politically or morally—and that will unify the body of Christ." I don't see any hints in Scripture that indicate crusades or causes unify the body. I only see one force that does: the Cross of Christ.

Revelation of the Cross

Some believers sense the presence of God through high liturgy. That is, when they hear the swishing of robes and the chanting of choirs, when they smell the burning of incense, and see the flickering of candles, they think, *Wow. I'm with God. I feel His presence.*

Other churches employ what is called a "low" liturgical order. "Forget formality," they say, for unless there's prophecy, tongues, an interpretation, some healings, and some spontaneous sharing—they don't sense the Spirit moving.

Others say, "It's not high or low liturgy that matters. Rather, the church should be caring for the poor, feeding the hungry, housing the homeless." We might put them on the left side of the spectrum. They're social activists, caring about people practically.

Fundamentalists, who tend to congregate on the right side of the spectrum, say, "We're going to ground our people in the Word, in the importance of doctrine."

Put all these flavors together—the height, the depth, the left, the right—and they form a cross. And that's where fellowship is found. Not in doctrine, not in activism, not in causes, not in crusades. True fellowship is found when we finally say, "The Lord is bigger than I thought." You see, gang, the Lord looks at those in high liturgical churches as a reflection of His holiness; at those who worship sans liturgy as a reflection of His power; at "left wing" activists as a reflection of His compassion; at "right-wing" fundamentalists as a reflection of His righteousness.

There's room for *all* who truly name the Name of Jesus. Catholics, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Episcopalians, even renegades like us—there's room for everyone at the Cross. God made all kinds of different people. He loves them all and He's provided churches to minister to the way He made them. It's not a matter of better or worse, right or wrong. It's not a matter of finding oneness doctrinally or trying to get together politically. It's a matter of joining together at the Cross of Calvary.

Appropriation of the Cross

How do we come to the Cross practically?

At Communion.

Just as my family gathers around our table, so, too, the family of Christ gathers around His table. No matter where we've come from, or what our flavor might be, we all eat of the same Bread, we all drink of the same Blood. Communion, how important it is because it is there we find all the dials set back to zero, all of the divisions melted away as we are reminded that His Body and Blood are our common ground.

Application of the Cross

With every church, with every brother or sister who names the name of Jesus, we must come to the realization that we are all sinners saved by grace. Therefore, our prayer must be, "Lord, remind me of what I am, and of where I've been in order that I might look lovingly and mercifully on *every* sister, on *every* brother, on *every* church who is preaching Your name and has received You as their Savior."

May we truly, practically, daily walk in unity. We'll do it to the extent that we live in the shadow of Calvary.



18 John 18:1 (a)

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron . . .

Leaving the area of the temple, where, following the Upper Room discourse of John 13–14, He very likely prayed His High Priestly prayer of John 17, Jesus and His disciples made their way down the side of the small valley wherein flowed a small river called the Kidron. Crossing the Kidron, I wonder if Jesus wasn't deeply moved by what He saw at His feet.

When David numbered the people to ascertain the strength of the nation, the result was great punishment because their strength was to be in God alone. (2 Samuel 24). Therefore, when the Romans wanted to know how many people were in Jerusalem during Passover, they could only do it by counting the sheep offered as sacrifices. Josephus tells us that during this particular Passover, 256,000 sheep were counted. The Kidron, meaning, "Murky" River, the river flowing at the foot of the temple mount, would be flowing blood-red from the blood of a quarter-million sheep.

I wonder if Jesus' mind went back to how David, centuries before, crossed the very same brook when there was a rebellion launched against him by his own son, Absalom (2 Samuel 15)—for even as David was rejected by the people of Jerusalem, so the Son of David would be rejected as well.

John 18:1 (b)

. . . where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples.

On the side of the Mount of Olives were many private enclosed gardens, where the well-to-do people of Jerusalem would go to escape the heat of the city. Jesus had access to one such garden. Named, "Gethsemane," or "Oil Press," it was a site where olives grew and were crushed by a press in order to produce oil. In Gethsemane, the place of the Oil Press, Jesus would Himself be crushed as, submitting to the will of the Father, He sweat great drops of blood (Luke 22:44).

In another Garden, called Eden, the first Adam rebelled against the Father's will. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus—the Last Adam (1 Corinthians 15)—submitted to the Father's will. In the Garden of Eden, Adam hid from God. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is transparent before God. In the Garden of Eden, man was driven out because of his sin. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prepares to die for sin. In the Garden of Eden, a sword was unsheathed (Genesis 3:24). In the Garden of Gethsemane, a sword is put away (John 18:11). That which was lost in the Garden of Eden will be reclaimed in the Garden of Paradise—all because of the Garden of Gethsemane.

John 18:2

And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus ofttimes resorted thither with his disciples.

About to betray Jesus, Judas knew right where to find Him in time of trouble. He knew Jesus would be found in the place of prayer. Do people know where you would be in troublesome times or difficult days? Would they look for you at church, studying the Scriptures, in the place of prayer—or would they look somewhere else first?

John 18:3 (a)

Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees . . .

"A band of men" speaks of a cohort, which was one-tenth of a legion, or six thousand soldiers. Think about this. Here comes Judas with six hundred soldiers —not including the contingent of chief priests and Pharisees—all to confront the Lamb of God.

John 18:3 (b)

. . . cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Passover took place under a full moon, so what would be the need for torches and lanterns? No doubt, the thinking was that Jesus would be hiding and His disciples positioned for an ambush.

John 18:4

Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?

Jesus disarms the mob by coming out to meet them, saying, "Who are you looking for?" You see, Jesus is not caught off guard, surprised by what is happening. No, He's in complete control of the entire situation.

John 18:5

They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them.

The word "he," in italics, Jesus is actually saying, "I AM," "*Ego Eimi*"—a declaration of deity.

John 18:6

As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.

With torches flying, armor clanking, and swords falling, these guys go down under the sheer power of Jesus' proclamation.

John 18:7 (a)

Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye?

With His captors sprawled on the ground, Jesus could have walked away. Instead, He waited until they came to, and repeated His question.

John 18:7 (b)

And they said, Jesus of Nazareth.

I bet this time, the mob answered a whole lot more cautiously—and braced themselves for His answer.

John 18:8, 9
Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none.

"If you want Me, here I am. But let My disciples go," Jesus said. Indeed, the disciples scattered at that point—all except for Peter and John.

John 18:10 (a)
Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it . . .

Why did Peter have a sword? Because Jesus had previously said, "Times are changing. Be prepared for hostility. Buy a sword" (see Luke 22:36). Perhaps Jesus spoke figuratively, but Peter must have taken Him literally.

John 18:10 (b)
. . . and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear.

It was Thomas who had said, to Jesus, "We'll die with You if necessary" (see John 11:16)—but it's Peter, here, who was ready to do just that. While commendable, Peter's zeal was misdirected because it was not based on knowledge. Why didn't Peter understand what was happening? Why didn't he see clearly that everything was transpiring according to pattern? Because instead of praying, Peter had been sleeping (Matthew 26:40). Consequently, Peter wakes up groggy, sees a battle, whips out his sword, and swings it wildly.

So, too, many times we as disciples hurt people unnecessarily as we whip out the Scriptures and let them fly, all the while thinking, *Others may be carnal and weak, but not me, Lord. You can count on me. I'll stand up for You.* Like Peter, we cause pain and hurt whenever our zeal is not based on the knowledge that can only come from spending time in prayer.

John 18:10 (c)

The servant's name was Malchus.

Luke tells us at this point, Jesus reached down, picked up Malchus' ear, and placed it back on his head (22:51). Had Jesus not done so, there would have been four crosses on Calvary a few hours later because Peter would have been crucified for such an offense. The last recorded miracle of our Lord was to heal a wound inflicted by one of His right hand men who was flailing the sword indiscriminately and inappropriately.

John 18:11

Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?

"Do this in remembrance of Me," Jesus said (see Luke 22:19). If we would take more often the cup, we would lay down more easily the sword. What's in your hand? A sword causing pain or the cup of suffering that brings about humility and unity in the body of Christ?

John 18:12

Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him.

It was not the chains, the ropes, or the soldiers that bound Jesus. It was love.

John 18:13

And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year.

High Priest from A.D. 5 to A.D. 16, Annas turned his position over to his son-in-law, Caiaphas, in favor of the temple concessions that needed his full attention and were making him a wealthy man. So here is Jesus, standing before the one whose livelihood He had dared to threaten when He overthrew the tables of the moneychangers and drove the oxen out of His Father's house (John 2).

John 18:14

Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

Although Caiaphas didn't realize it, he spoke profound truth—for one Man must indeed die for the salvation of mankind.

John 18:15 (a)
And Simon Peter followed Jesus . . .

Matthew tells us Peter followed from afar (Matthew 26:58). I like Peter because, although all but John had scattered, he continued to follow Jesus. But at the same time, I learn from Peter that if I follow Jesus from a distance, I'm going to get in trouble.

John 18:15 (b)
. . . and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest.

The disciple spoken of here is John. There is a spot in Jerusalem traditionally and historically identified as Zebedee's fish stand. With boats and servants, Zebedee was a successful entrepreneur. According to history and tradition, it would seem as though this is how John knew the high priest, for, you see, Zebedee and his boys would sell the fish they caught in the Sea of Galilee to the wealthy folks in Jerusalem—salted fish from the north was considered a delicacy in the days before refrigeration. With the revenue from their thriving temple concessions, the priestly family could afford to eat at Zebedee's fish shop, where, according to tradition, John worked as a young boy or teenager.

John 18:16–18
But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself.

Uh-oh, Peter, not only are you following Jesus from afar, but now you're warming yourself at the fires of His enemies.

When you feel cold, where do you go to get warm? If you go to the fires of the world when you're confused, hurting, or lonely, you're sure to get burned. Ask Peter.

John 18:19

The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine.

The high priest is completely out of line here in asking Jesus of His doctrine. You see, Jewish law had a stipulation, much like our Fifth Amendment, in which it was considered illegal to ask the accused anything that might implicate him. Thus, at the very outset, the illegality of the trial of Jesus is evident.

John 18:20, 21

Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always re sort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said.

"Ask some witnesses," said Jesus. And in so saying, He was reminding the high priest of the illegality of the proceedings.

John 18:22

And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so?

Understanding Jesus' implication that the high priest was in violation of the law, the officer struck Jesus.

John 18:23, 24

Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me? Now Annas had sent him bound

unto Caiaphas the high priest.

It was during His religious trial that the intense suffering of Jesus began. You see, it was in the courtyard of the high priest where, with a bag over His head, Jesus was punched in the face by the religious guards and challenged to prophesy who it was that hit Him. Think about this. When someone is about to strike you, you usually see it coming out of the corner of your eye. And even though you might take the blow, you're able to instinctively move in its direction. But when you're blindsided, the result is excruciating pain. No wonder He became marred beyond recognition—more than any other man (Isaiah 52:14).

John 18:25–27

And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not. One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.

The crowing of the rooster would have been a very penetrating sound, for, due to the mess they made, roosters were outlawed in the city of Jerusalem during the holy festivals. Thus, it was appropriate that Jesus would say, "You'll hear the cock crow, Peter, because you're going to mess up." But I suggest to you there's a bright side as well—for the crow of a rooster also signifies the dawn of a new day. Thus, it's as if Jesus said, "Yes, Peter, you've blown it. Yes, you've cursed and sworn and denied Me not once but thrice. But a new day is dawning. I'm not through with you—not by a long shot." Following His Resurrection, Jesus sought out Peter individually and specifically. He dealt with Peter in chapter 21 and commissioned him back into ministry. On the Day of Pentecost, it was Peter who stood up and preached the Word and three thousand were saved. Peter became the most prominent apostle in Jerusalem.

I tell you this because wherever Peter went, there were those who followed him around, crowing like roosters as a reminder of his failure. But they didn't stop Peter. He kept preaching. "Brethren," Paul would later write, "if any of you be overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual restore such a one" (Galatians 6:1). Notice Paul didn't say, "remind," "rebuke," or "reveal." He said,

"*restore*." We ought to always be looking for opportunities to see men and women continue on, to be restored, to not be held back because of a failure. Aren't you glad our God is the God of the second chance—and the tenth chance, and the eight hundred eightieth chance? I am.

John 18:28

Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover.

Here they are, about to kill the Son of God, yet worrying about defiling themselves by stepping on Gentile territory. Jesus said it's crazy how people will strain at gnats but swallow camels (Matthew 23:24). And yet we do the same thing in religious circles. We are so careful about certain issues, but we risk missing the big picture altogether.

John 18:29

Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man?

When Herod the Great died, his three sons became Tetrarchs, ruling over Israel. So lousy a ruler was Herod Archelaus, however, that the Jews appealed to Rome to send someone else to reign in his place. Rome answered with Pontius Pilate—a former slave who, through marriage and political maneuvering, became a Procurator, or overseer. The first time he came to Jerusalem, Pilate made a big mistake by bringing with him soldiers carrying busts of the emperor. As they approached the temple area with what the Jews considered to be idols, a riot broke out, and blood was shed. Rome sent a warning to Pilate, saying, "Get it together. We don't want this kind of ruckus." Thinking he could appease the people by building them an aqueduct, Pilate diverted funds from the temple treasury to finance the project. The Jews were infuriated. Rome heard about it and issued yet another warning: "You have two strikes against you, Pontius. One more and you're out." So Pilate, already on the political hot seat, goes out to survey the situation.

John 18:30, 31 (a)

They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee. Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law.

Hoping to ward off yet another outburst, Pilate puts the ball back in the court of the religious leaders.

John 18:31 (b)

The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.

In the year A.D. 30—two years prior to these events—the Romans took away the Jewish right of capital punishment. In response, the rabbis ripped their clothes, donned sackcloth, threw dirt on their heads, and said, "God has failed us. God has failed us," as they marched through the streets of Jerusalem. Why did they cry, "God has failed us"? Because in the Book of Genesis, the promise was given that the scepter would not depart from Judah until Messiah came (49:10). But the basic foundation of government was the ability to deal with lawbreakers, so the scepter had, indeed, departed—with Messiah seemingly nowhere in sight. Oh, but Messiah *was* there—right in their midst. They just didn't recognize Him.

John 18:32–34

That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die. Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?

"Do you really want to know?" asked Jesus. As we have all discovered, a lot of times people ask questions without really wanting to know the answer. They just want to argue. You would be wise to learn whether people are asking for answers or asking to argue. If they're asking to argue, don't cast your pearls before swine. That way, you'll avoid endless hours of argumentation that will get you nowhere.

John 18:35–37 (a)

Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king.

In other words, Jesus said, "You're right, Pilate."

John 18:37 (b)

To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

No matter where they live, no matter when they live, every person who wants to know the truth will hear God's voice. "God's not fair in choosing some and not choosing others," some protest. Not true. Jesus said *every* one who wants to know the truth will hear His voice.

John 18:38 (a)

Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews . . .

Notice that Pilate asks, "What is truth?"—but doesn't even stick around to hear the answer. How many of our prayers are like that?

John 18:38 (b)

. . . and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all.

Finding Jesus faultless, Pilate yet hopes to appease the crowd . . .

John 18:39, 40

But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.

"Barabbas" means "son of the father." History tells us that his first name was Jesus. "Who do you want released," asked Pilate, "Jesus Bar-Abbas—Jesus, son of the father—or Jesus the Christ?" Barabbas will be set free because Jesus would go to the Cross in his place. And Jesus went to the Cross in my place as well.

We're all a bunch of sinners, gang. But the good news is that Jesus Christ truly went through all of this in our place. Therefore, there is no condemnation, no record kept of our sins or failures (Romans 8:1). This leaves us free to bask in God's grace and express our appreciation to the One who was bound with cords of love.



19 It has been rightly said that people are a lot like teabags—you never really know what their true flavor is until they get in hot water. In a political boiling pot, Pontius Pilate was determined to keep the peace at any price—even if it meant ignoring his own conscience. With the cries of, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" ringing in his ears, Pilate buckles under the pressure of the crowd, hoping that by subjecting Jesus to thirty-nine lashes with the flagellum—an ordeal in itself that killed many men—perhaps the crowd would be satisfied.

John 19:1–3

Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, And said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands.

The scourging that took place was painful beyond our understanding. Prophesied by Isaiah in chapter 53, to the thinking student of Scripture, the question becomes, "If the crucifixion of Christ provided for our redemption and salvation, what was the purpose of the scourging?" Peter tells us in his epistle that by His stripes we are healed (1 Peter 2:24). Thus, while the Crucifixion provides for our redemption presently and eternally—it is the stripes Jesus bore and absorbed that actually release the grace of healing for our bodies physically.

John 19:4, 5

Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!

"Behold the man," or literally, "Here is a man." After having endured the bursting of blood vessels as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, the beating in the courtyards of the high priest and Pontius Pilate, and the brutal blows of the flagellum, Jesus, as Isaiah prophesied, was marred beyond recognition (52:14).

We have heard this account so often, and we know it so well that it loses its punch oftentimes. We know Jesus was beaten. We know He was marred more than any man and eventually nailed to a tree. But I think it would do us well sometimes to take a long walk in the evening or get up early in the morning to consider what Jesus willingly went through with you on His mind and in His heart. We were on His mind. We were on His heart when He took those blows, felt that pain, and endured unspeakable suffering. It was all for me. It was all for you.

John 19:6

When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him.

The uniqueness of Jesus is verified by the fact that Pilate went on record, saying, "I find no fault in Him"—a finding that has never been disputed by historian or cynic. According to many historical records, Pilate himself committed suicide not long after this.

John 19:7

The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.

"Jesus never claimed deity," the cultist insists. Take him to this passage and say, "The Jewish leaders understood very clearly His claim to deity. That is why they killed Him."

John 19:8–11

When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; and went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto him, Speak-est thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.

Pilate thought he was in a position of power, when in reality he was simply a pawn. God is always on the throne. Everything goes according to *His* plan.

John 19:12, 13

And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha.

As Pilate sits down in his judgment seat to make a decision, the irony is that he himself is being judged on the basis of his response to Jesus Christ. So, too, some of you will sit back and say, "I'm going to analyze, scrutinize, and evaluate Jesus Christ." In reality, however, you're not judging Him, but your reaction to Him is judging you because He is the King of kings regardless of what you decide. He's going to have His way whether you choose to get on board or not. Thus, the judgment seat you're occupying right now is that of your own judgment. And how you respond to Him will determine whether you go to heaven or spend eternity in hell.

John 19:14, 15

And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priest answered, We have no king but Caesar.

Throughout history, the nation of Israel has undergone unparalleled pain and problems. Why? In 1 Samuel 8, we see the Jews rejecting the Father as they begged Samuel for a king to rule over them. Here in John 19, we see them refusing the Son as they cry, "We have no king but Caesar." Finally, in Acts 7, we see them resisting the Spirit, and stoning Stephen as a result. Rejecting the Father in the Old Testament, refusing the Son in the Gospels, and resisting the Spirit in the Book of Acts caused the collapse of the people of Israel. But God is faithful. The message of Romans 9–11 is that even though Israel has refused the Son, rejected the Father, and resisted the Spirit—God will keep His promises to her. And all of Israel shall be saved.

John 19:16, 17

Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha.

In Latin, "Golgotha" is "Calvary," or "The place of the skull."

John 19:18

Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.

Between two thieves is a fitting place for our Lord to be positioned because He is the Ultimate Thief. He's stolen my heart and wants to steal yours.

John 19:19, 20

And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin.

Hebrew was the theological language; Greek, the intellectual language; and Latin, the political language. Let those who view things theologically; let those who view things intellectually; let those who view things politically know this: Jesus is King.

John 19:21, 22

Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.

Pilate at last shows a little courage when he says, "What I've written stays."

John 19:23, 24

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.

According to Exodus 28, the high priest's robe was to be made of one piece of material. Jesus being the great High Priest, His robe was seamless as well. So here are the soldiers—playing games on Golgotha, even as Jesus was dying for their sins. Are we doing that? I wonder. Those in the "Name It and Claim It" camp say, "I'll get some nice clothes, a faster car, a bigger house on the basis of the finished work of the Cross." This ought not to be.

John 19:25, 26 (a)

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved . . .

When Jesus was healing the sick, and feeding the multitudes, He captivated people's attention. Like metal filings to a magnet, the masses were drawn to Him. But as His ministry progressed, when His teaching became a little more intense, the number of those who followed Him was reduced from thousands to seemingly hundreds. Only seventy shared the gospel of the kingdom (Luke 10:1). Only twelve left everything to follow Him. And of the twelve only three would be with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, where He spoke of His death and

in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He prayed with such intensity. And of the three, only one would be at the foot of the Cross.

But there were four women there—although it was not easy for them. It was not easy for Mary to watch her Son convulsing in pain, or for her sister to hear the curses hurled at Him. It was not easy for the wife of Cleophas to see the spit of the crowd running down His face, or for Mary Magdalene to see His blood flowing from His wounds. But these four women, lovers of the Lord and followers of Him, were there at the foot of the Cross, no matter how great the price, no matter how deep the pain.

John 19:26 (b)

. . . he saith unto his mother, Woman . . .

Why would Jesus use the word *gune,* or "woman"—a term of great respect but not particularly affectionate? Perhaps because His use of this term would cause Mary's mind to race back to a point three years previously when, at the very outset of His public ministry, He had used this same term. "They have no wine," she had said—perhaps hoping that her own reputation would be salvaged when a thirsty wedding party saw that her Son was who she had always said He was.

"Woman, what have I to do with thee? My hour is not yet come," Jesus had answered her (John 2:4). Jesus did, indeed, provide wine for the wedding. But no one knew about it except some lowly slaves.

Yet here on the Cross, Mary's request is finally answered, for it was at the Cross where even the most cynical Roman centurion would look at Him and say, "Truly, this must be the Son of God" (see Matthew 27:54).

John 19:26 (c), 27 (a)

. . . behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother!

I find this fascinating in light of the fact that, as we know from Matthew 13:55, 56, Jesus had four half brothers and a bunch of sisters. Yet He bypassed the earthly bloodline and established a new family. And in so doing fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 69:8: "I am become a stranger unto my brethren and an alien unto my mother's children." You see, at this point, Jesus' brothers didn't believe in Him. So He turned to one who did. Why John? No doubt it was partly

because John was there—the only male disciple willing to jeopardize his life by taking a stand at the foot of the Cross. Yet perhaps it was only fitting that Jesus entrust the one whose breast had cradled Him to the one who had himself reclined on His own breast (John 13:25).

John 19:27 (b)

And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

A family is formed at the Cross because that's where true families are forged and held together.



***For topical study of John 19:25–27 entitled "The Family Tree," turn to page* 590.**

John 19:28, 29

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a spunge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth.

"My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" cried Jesus—signifying to all in attendance that He was the fulfillment of Psalm 22. "Today you will be with Me in paradise," He said to the thief—setting the precedent for salvation by faith alone. "Behold thy mother," He said to John, thereby establishing a new order of family. Redemption and sanctification, justification and propitiation—questions of eternal import were being settled on the Cross. And yet Jesus also declared, "I thirst"—reminding us of the personal agony He endured through it all.

John 19:30

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

Mom and Dad, when your kids have questions—be it concerning resentment toward some other kid at school, bitterness about someone who hurt them, or

rivalry in the family—the crux of the matter is always discerned at the foot of the Cross. No wonder that the Latin word *crux* means "cross."

"It is finished." This Greek phrase denotes such power that if Jesus' hands hadn't been nailed down, it would have been uttered with a clenched fist raised in the air. It was the phrase an artist would use when he put the last stroke on his paper; a writer when he put the last period in his book. It was the statement a businessman would make when a transaction was final; the pronouncement given concerning a lamb that passed inspection.

Every other religion and cult bases its teaching on what one must do. Only true New Testament Christianity bases a belief system not on what remains to be done, but on what He's already done. We can't do anything to get right with God or closer to God except to realize that it's all been done. And as we continue in our walk, we continue to say, "I'm coming to You, Father, expecting Your blessing and confident of Your grace not because of who I am, but because of what Your Son accomplished when He cried, "It is Finished."

John 19:31

The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

The next day was Passover, so the Jews didn't want the bodies left on the crosses. "Let us break their legs," the Jews said to Pilate, "and speed up death so we can move on with our holy convocation."

John 19:32–34

Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.

Medical experts tell us that the outpouring of blood and water indicates that Jesus died literally of a ruptured heart, a broken heart. Blood and water are also the fluids of birth—for just as a bride was birthed from the side of the first

Adam, so the church was birthed through the blood and water from the side of the last Adam.

John 19:35–37

And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.

If you look at prophecies given and fulfilled in Jesus simply to prove that He is the fulfillment of those prophecies, you're missing a great deal. In this case, John takes four or five verses to make it clear that, just as prophesied, not a bone of Jesus was broken. Why is this so important? Because where is blood continually produced in the body? It's produced in the bone. Therefore, God mandated not a bone of His would be broken, ensuring a perpetual and inexhaustible supply of blood. That's why Paul could later declare, "Where sin abounds, grace abounds yet more," (Romans 5:20). Truly, the blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient to cleanse you from every sin you have ever committed or will commit because not a bone of His was broken.

John 19:38, 39

And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.

Suddenly, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea, men who were once hesitant to be seen with Jesus, asked permission to take His body. Because the bodies of crucified victims were destined for a garbage heap, this request would ruin Joseph's business and jeopardize Nicodemus' religious standing. The way to motivate people to serve Christ is not to make them feel guilty, not to put pressure on them, not to try to manipulate their emotions—but simply to allow them, like Nicodemus and Joseph, to see what He did for them on the Cross.

John 19:40–42

Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.

Joseph takes the body, wraps it in linen, and places it in a stone tomb with myrrh and spices—just as another Joseph, thirty-three years earlier, had taken the same body, wrapped Him in swaddling linen cloth, placed Him in a stone manger, and watched as He was presented with myrrh.

In Leviticus 16, it is prescribed that on one day each year—Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement—the high priest was to trade his beautiful priestly robes for the simple linen robes worn by his fellow priests. And what did the high priest do on the Day of Atonement? He went through the veil into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle blood on the lid, or mercy seat, of the ark of the covenant—the two-foot-by-three foot box that held the Ten Commandments. If he were defiled, he would stay in that place as a dead man and would later have to be pulled out with a rope. But if he wasn't defiled, he would walk out into the courtyard of the temple to the jubilant cries of the people who knew they were forgiven for another year.

Here, our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, is inside the tomb. Would He emerge? Did the sacrifice work? Are we free? Only if He came out among the people as He had prophesied could there truly be celebration and could we know our sins are forgiven—not just for one year, but forever.

THE FAMILY TREE
A Topical Study of JOHN 19:25–27

Crucifixion was developed by the Persians, today called the Iranians, around the year 1000 B.C. Designed to be excruciatingly painful, its purpose was to bring a man such agony that not only would his body convulse physiologically, but he would be tormented psychologically to such an extent that he would blaspheme and curse the very life he lived. But because the Persians considered the ground of their country to be holy, they mandated that a crucified victim be elevated lest his cursing defile it. That is why when a man was crucified he was raised up usually three to four feet off the ground. When the Greeks took over the Persian Empire, they adopted crucifixion. And when the Romans came on the scene, they borrowed it from the Greeks.

Here in John 19, the Romans are ruling the world. And on a hill outside Jerusalem, we see Jesus being crucified on a tree. Yet even as His body was writhing in pain beyond anything we could possibly even begin to imagine, even as His body was bleeding, even as His muscles were twitching, Jesus our Lord had such clarity of thought and such a heart of love that in the midst of His misery, He was able to look down from the Cross and care for His mother.

"Woman," He said, "behold thy son." Then, looking at John, He said, "Behold thy mother,"—and in that single moment a family was birthed. Perhaps John took Mary into his house that very hour, sparing her from having to witness the most painful part of her Son's crucifixion.

As reported in newspapers and magazines, unmarried couples living together is growing in acceptability in our country even as divorce rates soar and the family unit breaks down. At the same time, surveys indicate that the divorce rate in the church is only about five percentage points behind the soaring divorce rate of the world. Whereas divorce in the church was virtually unheard of thirty years ago, it is now taking place at a dizzying rate. What's going on? I believe the vignette before us powerfully underscores the fact that Jesus did more to solve the problems of marriage and the family in two sentences than Christian books have done in two hundred thousand volumes, for it is here we see the true family tree: the Cross of Calvary.

Family Forms Around the Cross

When the soldier thrust his spear in Jesus' side, out came a mixture of blood and water. Every woman who has given birth knows blood and water are the fluids of birthing. The blood and water that flowed from the side of Jesus resulted in the birth of a bonding between John and Mary that was absolutely unbreakable until death separated them.

Why is it that you and I will do just about anything to keep our families together—from taking a family vacation to Hawaii, to playing Monopoly on Tuesdays or soccer together on Saturdays—yet when it comes to telling a father or mother, a husband or wife that bonding and binding take place only at the foot of the Cross, our response is usually, "But I was looking for something a little more practical"?

I'm a fool if I take my kids to basketball games, go on family vacations, and read every parenting book available, but don't take them to the one place where bonding and binding truly take place. Satan will let you do all kinds of good things if he can keep you away from the Cross of Calvary—for it is there alone, through prayer and humility, through remembering what Jesus did on our behalf, that true bonding begins.

Forgiveness Flows from the Cross

Think back to the soldier with the spear. As he withdrew the spear that had cut Jesus deeply, that had been thrust into His side callously, on the tip of the spear was the blood of the Lamb—a reminder that no matter how deep the wound, how callous the cut, the blood of the Lamb cleanses and covers. It's at Calvary—when a husband and wife drink of the cup and eat of the body together—that they can no longer foster petty bickering and unforgiving attitudes toward each other. It's at Calvary where cruelty between brothers and sisters ends, where wounds inflicted upon us by our own family are healed, where forgiveness flows freely.

If your home is a battlefield, you can watch Christian TV and listen to Christian radio by the hour—or you can choose to go to Calvary together and say, "Let's remember what He's done for us," as we eat together of His body. Many of you will choose to take the other route. You'll keep searching and struggling, trying this, that, and the other as you wonder what's wrong. But until you go to the Cross and pray together, you're fighting a losing battle. It's only at Calvary that forgiveness flows freely.

Fickleness Flees at the Cross

Jesus didn't say, "Woman, if you're into this, would you consider opening your heart to John and maybe begin a relationship and see if it works out? And if it does, John, would you consider perhaps trying to communicate your heart and talk with Mary?" No, with blood flowing freely, Jesus said, "This is the way it is. Woman, that's your son. John, there's your mother." Period. No discussion. No debate. No argument. It's a done deal.

What does the Lord say to you? He says the same thing. "Husband, wife, you're married. That's it. Divorce is not an option. Trial separations are not an option. Period." You will see your fickleness flee when you say, "Divorce is not a word that shall be uttered from my lips. It will not be spoken in this house. It is not an option." Precious people, there are only a few things in Scripture that God says He hates. And one of them is divorce. I don't care how tough it might be living with her because she's so cold to you, or how much you might want to split because he doesn't say nice things. If you really understood how God feels about divorce, you would *make* your marriage work.

I know there are many in this room who have been divorced, who have been deserted. Your husband or wife just walked out. Divorce was the last thing you desired. The Lord looks on you and at you with love. And if you continue to trust in Him, He will restore to you the years the locust has eaten (Joel 2:25). But if you willingly and rebelliously walk out on your family, the repercussions and scars will follow you all the days of your life. That's why a loving Father says, "I hate divorce" (see Malachi 2:16).

Any man who stands at the foot of the Cross, any woman who bows in front of the Tree, will find fickleness replaced with fortitude, and capriciousness with commitment as they are reminded of the One who gave His life for them.

Fuzziness Fades at the Cross

Not only were Salome's two sons in the apostolic band, but she herself was part of a group of women who followed the Lord and ministered to the practical needs of Jesus and His disciples. At one point, we see Salome begin to worship Jesus. But Scripture says she also "desired of Him" (see Matthew 20:20)—meaning she had a request for Him. How often that's a mistake I make. "I love You, Lord. Oh, and by the way, I have this request. . . ." How easily we fall into the subtle error of worshiping the Lord that we might "soften Him up" and then slip in our petition.

How much better it is to be like the wise men. They traveled a great distance, bringing gold, frankincense, and myrrh to a toddler, who, at that point, could do nothing for them. They didn't come for manipulation; they came for adoration. They didn't come to get something from Him; they came to give something to Him. They didn't come for what He could do; they came because of who He was.

Not so Salome. She worshiped Him and then asked, "Lord, could one of my sons be at Your right, the other at Your left when You come into Your kingdom?"

Perhaps gently shaking His head, Jesus answered, "You know not what you ask." At the time, Salome didn't understand His answer. But at the foot of the Cross, as she saw one man being crucified on Jesus' left, one man on His right, it must have all become so clear.

So, too, when, like Salome, you really see Jesus on the Cross, dying for you, you'll say, "If You loved me enough to die for me, I know I can trust You with my life completely. And if You say I don't know what I'm asking, I'm just going to leave it there and trust You."

Gang, the Lord always does what's best. Even if you don't see it immediately, you'll look back and see it eventually. But don't take my word for it. As Salome did, climb the hill to Calvary and see Jesus on the Cross. And as you look at the One dying for you, the fuzziness of your faith, the double-mindedness of your worship, God's Provision in the past and promise for the future will all come sharply into focus.

If He died for you then, don't you know He loves you now? If He paid that price for you then, can't you trust Him today? You know He's going to only do what's best for you and for your family. The Cross of Calvary proves it and experience will verify it.

20 John 20:1 (a)

The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher . . .

Mary Magdalene—the woman who was last at the Cross because she loved the Lord deeply—had been possessed by seven demons previously. But the Lord freed her, and from that time on, she followed Him with all of her heart. "I love them that love Me, and they that seek Me early shall find Me," declares the Lord (see Proverbs 8:17). How are your morning devotions? Mary Magdalene is going to be the first one to see the Resurrected Jesus simply because she was at the tomb early in the morning.

John 20:1 (b)–3

. . . and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.

Peter the Activist, John the Mystic; Peter Impulsive, John Contemplative travel together in the Book of Acts. Others, no doubt hearing of Peter's denial, looked down on Peter and distanced themselves from him. Not John. The "apostle of love" takes Peter into his home and into his heart—not knowing exactly how events would unfold. Praise the Lord for people like John, who, when folks flounder and falter, will take them in even before they know how the story's going to conclude.

John 20:4

So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.

Nicknamed "The Giant" in church history, Peter was obviously a big man—and perhaps that's why John outran him. John was also younger. Called by Jesus

when he was perhaps only seventeen years old, at this point, John was possibly only twenty.

John 20:5

And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in.

John looks into the tomb but doesn't rush in. Contemplators don't.

John 20:6, 7 (a)

Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes . . .

This proves to me conclusively the Shroud of Turin is not authentic. Think of the pictures you've seen of the shroud. They always show the imprint of the crucified victim from head to toe. Here, the Scripture record says there was a napkin—a separate piece of cloth around the head. Thus, the shroud does not meet this particular criterion.

John 20:7 (b)

. . . but wrapped together in a place by itself.

As is His custom—never in a hurry, never frustrated, but always moving at the right pace—the Prince of Peace folds the napkin carefully.

John 20:8

Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.

In verses 5, 6, and 8, the word "saw" or "see" is used. First, John came to the tomb and saw the linen clothes lying. The word translated "saw" is *blepo,* meaning, "to look at, to see visibly." In verse 6, Peter saw the linen clothes lie, and the word used is *theoreo,* meaning, "to study more carefully," and from which we get our word "theory." Finally, in verse 8, the word translated "saw" is *eido,* from which we get the word "idea"—or "I get it."

I find it interesting that most of the time our faith progresses according to this pattern. First you're exposed to some piece of information. You hear what the teacher is saying. Then you give it some more thought down the road. And finally comes that moment when you really get it. It's not just a concept theologically—but it becomes part of your life personally. But if you never hear the information, you'll never be able to embrace it. And that is why you'll never see the process unfold if you don't come to the place where you can investigate the claims of Christ. So keep in the Word, gang.

"But I'm not getting much out of it," you say.

You wait. Eventually, it will begin to stir something in your thinking, and finally it will become part of your being. Read your Bible. Stay in the Scriptures and see the process unfold for you even as it did for Peter and John.

John 20:9, 10

For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.

They went their way wondering. Oh, they were believers—but their belief is not yet full-blossomed or fully comprehended.

John 20:11, 12

But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

The two angels, the blood-spattered mercy seat, the linen garments—of course the picture is of the ark of the covenant.

John 20:13 (a)

And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou?

Mary didn't write a book entitled *I Saw Angels*—because when your passion is for the Person of Jesus Christ, you're not caught up in other things, no matter how spectacular or supernatural.

John 20:13 (b)

She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.

I have the word "my" circled. "He's *my* Lord," Mary said. "He is all that matters to me."

John 20:14 (a)
And when she had thus said, she turned herself back . . .

Mary turned away from the angels. You and I would have stared at the angels, taken pictures of them, been all caught up in dialoguing with them. Not Mary. She was more concerned about what she thought was the dead corpse of Christ than the living presence of angels.

John 20:14 (b), 15 (a)
. . . and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener . . .

Jesus comes through the unexpected person at the unexpected time in the unexpected place. The Lord will come to you through a brother or sister, through a family member or friend. But so often, like Mary's, our eyes are so filled with tears that we don't even recognize it's the Lord speaking to us.

John 20:15 (b)
. . . saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

"I will carry Him back," said Mary because love bears all things (see 1 Corinthians 13:7).

John 20:16 (a)
Jesus saith unto her, Mary.

Something in the way Jesus said her name caused Mary to recognize His voice (John 10:4).

John 20:16 (b), 17 (a)

She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father . . .

"Don't cling to Me in the way you knew Me previously as a Teacher, a Rabbi, or a miracle Worker. I came to restore you to the Father eternally. And I am working on that restoration presently."



***For topical study of John 20:17 entitled "Finding Fulfillment in the Father," turn to page* 597.**

John 20:17 (b)

. . . but go to my brethren . . .

Earlier, Jesus said to His disciples, "I call you not servants, but friends" (John 15:15). Here, He takes it a step further. He calls them brothers. The Book of Hebrews says He is not ashamed to call *us* brothers as well (2:11). Amazing.

John 20:17 (c)

. . . and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

"It is better that the words of the law be burned than to be entrusted to a woman," taught the Rabbis. So what does Jesus do? He gives the gospel to a woman. Mary's love for the Lord qualified her to be the first missionary with the full story.

John 20:18, 19

Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her. Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

Here are the disciples, with questions mounting and confusion rising like waves on the sea—when suddenly, just as before, Jesus comes to them and stills their storm with one word: Shalom. His first word is, "Peace." He doesn't say, "You guys are busted. Where have you been? I'm on the Cross and you're running around, pretending like you don't even know Me. What's the big idea?" No, that's not what Jesus does. He comes to them and says, "Peace." And that's what He says to you (Romans 5:1).

John 20:20

And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.

No wonder the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. If someone died, Jesus could bring him back to life with a simple word. Hungry? A few loaves could feed thousands. His provision was abundant; His presence, a delight.

John 20:21, 22

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.

At this point, the disciples are born again. Although they were already following Jesus, they were not yet regenerated because He had not yet died for their sins. But here Jesus breathes on them—reminiscent of Genesis 2:7, when God breathed life into Adam's nostrils and he became a living soul.

John 20:23

Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

In Mark 2, when Jesus pronounced forgiveness to a paralyzed man, the Pharisees were aghast. "Only God has the right to forgive sin," they said (see verse 7). And they were right. What, then, does this verse mean? It means we as His ambassadors don't provide forgiveness, but we do proclaim it. Therefore, to the one who says, "I don't feel forgiven," it is our responsibility to say, "According to the Word of God, if you open your heart to Jesus Christ and

believe in His work on the Cross, your sin is gone." Conversely, to the one who says, "I don't need Jesus Christ. I'm into meditation,"—it is our responsibility to say, "Your sin remains because only the blood of Jesus can wash it away."

John 20:24

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

I suppose one of the saddest things I see as a pastor are disciples who miss the meeting. They're out there struggling, while at a Sunday evening service, for example, at some point Jesus begins to appear through the Word or in worship, through prophecy or the washing of feet. "I can worship at home," they say. But Jesus didn't go to Thomas's house. He went where the saints were meeting together. "Don't forsake assembling together," Paul would say (see Hebrews 10:25)—because Jesus shows up in the midst of the congregation.

Thomas missed the meeting. Why? He's been called Doubting Thomas throughout history—but keep in mind the kind of guy he was. When Jesus announced He was going to Jerusalem, Thomas said, "Let's go and die with Him" (see John 11:16). Thomas was a guy who went for it. And so now, while the other disciples huddled together behind closed doors, where was Thomas? I suggest he was out on the street saying, "I'm not hiding. I'm out here in public. Anybody want to take me on?"

After catching a cargo ship to India to preach Jesus Christ, Thomas was warned to be quiet. When he kept preaching, his opponents ran a spear through his back. But the church he started in India still flourishes today.

John 20:25 (a)

The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord.

Galatians 6:1 tells those who are spiritual to restore those who are overtaken in faults. That's what's happening here. These guys are reaching out to their brother Thomas.

John 20:25 (b)

But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my

hand into his side, I will not believe.

Thomas was loyal but he lacked imagination. That is, he didn't know that Jesus specializes in taking that which was dead and bringing it to life. Maybe you've had shattered expectations in marriage, business, or family, and, like Thomas, you're not going to dream anymore. Don't give up, for Jesus "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or even think" (see Ephesians 3:20).

John 20:26 (a)

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them . . .

I suggest the disciples said, "Thomas, we're meeting again next week, and you'd better be there. In fact, we're bringing you with us."

John 20:26 (b), 27

. . . then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

Here Jesus is teaching a lesson of great import, for in repeating Thomas's ultimatum, it's as if He's saying, "Boys, even though you don't see Me, I'm with you always."

John 20:28

And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

When Peter went into the house of Cornelius, Cornelius fell at his feet. "Stand up," said Peter. "I'm a man also" (see Acts 10:26). When the people of Lystra started worshiping Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Barnabas ripped their clothes and said, "Stop. We are men of like passions" (see Acts 14:15). When John fell down before an angel, the angel said, "Don't do that" (see Revelation 22:9). Paul, Peter, and the angel all refused to be worshiped. Regardless of what the cults say, Jesus accepted this proclamation of deity for one reason: He is God.

John 20:29

Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

"Thomas, you believe because you've seen," said Jesus. "But blessed, happy are those with an imagination, with vision, with faith to see what is not physically visible." Faith sees what the man who lacks faith never does. It's a whole different dimension and an entirely different perspective.

John 20:30, 31

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

Other signs were done, but they were done to help people rather than to produce belief. What we have before us are the stories, the miracles, the work Jesus did, recorded for you and me that we might truly believe and go on believing in Him.

FINDING FULFILLMENT IN THE FATHER

A Topical Study of JOHN 20:17

No doubt her eyes would often flame like fire—not unlike the look in the eyes of Charles Manson when he was apprehended. Other times, her eyes must have been dark, dull, and dead. You see, according to Dr. Luke, Mary Magdalene had previously been possessed by seven devils (8:2). But when she encountered Jesus, she was freed from the demons that had dominated her. No wonder that from that point on, she loved Him deeply and followed Him radically. Tradition says Mary is the woman spoken of not only in Luke 8, but also in Luke 7. You know the story. A Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to his house for dinner. And as he sat at the head of the table with the other Pharisees listening to Jesus, skeptical about Jesus, a woman burst into the room and wept. The tears streaming down her face hit Jesus' feet. And with her hair previously used to entice men, she wiped the feet of the Son of Man. Observing the scene, Simon thought, *If this man were truly a prophet, He would have known what kind of woman this is.*

Knowing Simon's thoughts, Jesus said, "Simon, there were two men in debt to a creditor. One man owed five thousand dollars, the other owed five hundred dollars. But out of the goodness of his heart, the creditor said to both men, "Your debt is forgiven." Which of these two debtors would love the creditor more?"

"The one who was forgiven the larger amount," answered Simon.

"You have said well, Simon," was Jesus' gracious reply, "for the one who is forgiven much loves much. Notice, Simon," He continued, "I came into your house, and you didn't greet Me with a kiss; you didn't anoint My feet with oil; you didn't welcome Me lovingly. But this woman has not stopped kissing My feet, washing them with her tears, and wiping them with her hair."

You see, Jesus knew what kind of woman Mary was all along. Love is not blind—it just sees more. And because love sees more, it chooses to see less.Maybe you feel like a terrible sinner today. The good news is that you have the potential, the possibility of loving God greatly. If you don't feel like you're a sinner today, you can join Simon the Pharisee and love a little bit. But if you are

aware of your sin, your failures, and your shortcomings, you have the potential to be a lover of God and a lover of people in the biggest sense of the word. The one who is forgiven little—the one who is unaware of his sins—loves little. That's why many church people are not lovers of God. They fail to see their need for forgiveness. But people like you and me *know* God's great grace and mercy because we experience it daily.

And now Mary is at the tomb. The last one at the Cross was the first one at the tomb. That's what love does. It stays the longest. It bears all things and believes all things. It endures all things and hopes all things. It's the last one at the Cross and the first one at the tomb. And when she gets there, her eyes swollen from crying, she stoops down to look inside. But when she sees the body is gone, her tears begin again. "Woman, why are you weeping?" asked the angels in attendance.

"Because they've taken away my Lord," Mary answered. And turning away from the angels, she saw Jesus. But she didn't know it was Him. Why? I suspect it was because her eyes were full of tears. Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said, "If you've moved the body for some reason, let me know where you've moved Him, and I will return Him to the tomb."

Think about this. As a woman, Mary would have been significantly smaller than Jesus. Yet Mary doesn't say, "You bring Him back," nor even, "Help me carry Him back." She just says, "*I'll* carry Him"—because love doesn't take into account the heaviness of its object. It pays the price. It expends the energy. It finds a way. At that point, Jesus uttered her name, and recognizing His voice, Mary fell at His feet. The picture is wonderful, for if she was indeed the same woman of Luke 7, even as she fell at His feet previously—washing His feet with her tears and drying them with her hair—she falls at His feet again as she clings to Him.

"Don't cling to Me, Mary," was Jesus' response, "because I have not yet ascended." At first reading, this sounds harsh. Yet there's an important lesson here, for Jesus is saying, "Mary, My mission was to come to earth to die for your sins. The purpose of My coming was to provide reconciliation so that you and all who believe could be reconciled to the Father and have relationship with *Him.* Don't cling to Me."

Ours is a generation of "cling-ons." Books, seminars, retreats about this subject abound. A wife will cling to her husband, hoping she might find fulfillment in him. And the tighter she clings to him, the more he backs away. So

she clings harder—and he backs away further. Or the husband clings to his wife, hoping to find satisfaction in her. But feeling used and smothered, she backs away. Husbands and wives say, "If you're not going to fulfill me, I'll find someone who will; if you're not going to satisfy me, I'll find someone who can." It happens over and over again. We cling—but never find what we want. Inevitably, the results are divorce, depression, and destruction. Not even children are exempt. "If you don't meet the needs of your daughter," say the best-selling books, "she'll try to fill them in someone else." And so we think we've got to make sure our kids cling to us and receive from us—otherwise who knows what will happen to them.

But Jesus comes in an entirely different manner to this sister of His, saying, "Don't cling to Me. You've got to see the big picture. It's called reconciliation between you and the Father. That's why I came—to die for your sins, to pay the price for your iniquity, so that you won't have to cling to your husband or wife, your pastor or the church."

Who clings to the pastor, the boss, or a so-called lover on the side? People who are insecure. And the reason they are insecure is because they don't understand that what they really need is, like Adam and Eve, to walk with God in the cool of the day. You see, any of you who say, "This afternoon I'm going to put down the paper. I'm going to turn off the TV. I'm not going to cling to my husband or wife. I'm going to go for a walk. I'm going to talk to my Father; I'm going to tell Him the things that are troubling me, laugh with Him about a sight we might see, look at the sky in its beauty"—will come back with a sparkle in your eye, and a peace in your heart. You won't cling to the first person you see, suffocate those around you, or be disappointed in those you love.

The most secure Being in the entire universe is God. God doesn't need you. He loves you, but He doesn't need you. He likes you, but He doesn't need you. God got by for billions and trillions and zillions of years without us—totally content because the Father, Son, and Spirit fulfilled one another and loved one another. But part of God's plan was to show another side of His character—grace and mercy—to the entire universe. To do that required sinners like you and me.

There are those who teach God needs you. No, He doesn't. I'll find in God strength, joy, and love—but He doesn't smother me. And He won't smother you.

The real issue, gang, is a lack of spending time with the Father, because a person who spends time with the Father will not have dependent characteristics

and fifteen steps to work through to begin recovery. When you get rid of the clinging, relationships take on maturity, depth, and solidity. But it doesn't happen by psychology or twelve-stepping your way out. It comes by doing one thing: walking with the Father. That's where you find security.

We need to care and to share. We need to interact with one another. But we mustn't cling because the sad thing about clinging is that it drives people away. And the more they back away, the more we want to cling. It's a cycle that can only be broken by spending time with the Father. But you can't talk to the Father, walk with the Father, or receive security from the Father until you realize what Jesus Christ did for you on the Cross.

> *And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ . . .*
>
> 2 Corinthians 5:18 (a)

God is holy and beautiful. But because of our sin, we couldn't relate to Him or be one with Him. So Jesus Christ came to bridge the gap, to die for our sin that we might be forgiven and fellowship with the Father anytime we want.

> *. . . and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 5:18 (b)

Not only can we come freely to the Father because we have been reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ, but we are to reconcile others to the Father as well. Mom and Dad, your ministry is not to reconcile your kids to you—to get them to depend on you or to look to you. Your ministry ultimately is to reconcile your kids to the Father. If you say, "I'm going to meet their needs. I'm always going to be there for them," they'll rebel because you'll eventually let them down. But if you are a minister of reconciliation, you'll say, "I want my kids to grow up knowing God. I know I have failings and shortcomings as a dad, but the heavenly Father will never let them down. Never. Therefore, I don't care what they think about me as much as I care about them being one with God."

When my daughter says, "Dad, I need thirty bucks," sometimes I give it to her. But other times I say, "Would you pray about it? Would you see what doors God opens for you?" It is far easier for me to open my checkbook. But it's infinitely more important for my kids to learn not to cling to me because I won't

always be there for them. Therefore, I want them to learn to pray, to walk with God, to know the Lord.

I have been given the ministry of reconciliation—and so have you. "Don't cling to Me," Jesus lovingly says to Mary. "I go to the Father." May God give us this understanding as well.



21 We come to the epilogue of John's Gospel, the final chapter in this glorious study presenting Jesus Christ as the Son of God. To many people, the epilogue seems as though it's been tacked on—for in chapter 20, concluding with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, John signs off by saying, "These things were written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing you might have life through His name"—a seemingly logical conclusion to his Gospel presentation. Yet John goes on to tell one more story. Why? A couple of possible reasons . . .

John 21 provides validation of ministry. You see, although Peter and John would go on to travel together in ministry, there would be those who would question Peter's ministry due to his denial of the Lord previously. John seems to write this epilogue, including this final story, to let us know that our God being the God of the second chance, Peter's ministry was particularly and singularly commissioned by the Lord. Secondly, John 21 provides a correction of a misunderstanding. That is, word had gone out through the early church that John wouldn't die before the Lord's return. We'll see John address this issue toward the end of the chapter.

John 21:1

After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself.

Jesus showed Himself again. I really like that because my desire is that Jesus would show Himself again to me, to you, and to the church. Robert W. Gale, a famous Congregational minister with numerous degrees, was preparing an Easter message. Hundreds of people would hear this particular address, thus he worked very hard on polishing it. He had a historical faith, but he later said that on that night before Easter Sunday, his historical faith became "hysterical faith" as he realized the Lord is *truly* alive. I hope you have hysterical faith.

Historical faith says, “Christ lives.” But hysterical, radical faith says, “Christ lives *in me*” (see Galatians 2:20).

John 21:2 (a)

There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee . . .

Seven of the twelve disciples were fishermen. I find it interesting that Jesus seemed to be inclined toward choosing fishermen to be His disciples. Fishermen by nature must know how to persevere through both calm seas and stormy weather. The same is true of ministry. If you want to serve the Lord, you must learn to serve Him, as Paul would tell Timothy, “in season and out of season” (2 Timothy 4:2). Whether the sun is shining or the trials abounding, we must be like fishermen, who, regardless of the weather, make their way to the sea. Working in teams, fishermen were those who could take commands. One would tell the other where to cast the net and when to draw it in. Certainly those of us who want to be used by the Lord must be those who work as a team and take commands easily. Perhaps more than any other occupation, any other endeavor, fishing requires patience. So, too, those who minister for the Lord must be those who are exceedingly patient as they wait for the haul to come in.

John 21:2 (b)

. . . and two other of his disciples.

Two of the disciples in the boat are unnamed. Why? I suggest it allows you and me to take our place with these disobedient renegades, for we too have found ourselves going fishing when we should have been on the mountain. You see, in Matthew 28, we read that the Lord specifically told His disciples to meet Him in Galilee at a mountain He had appointed. But where did these disciples go? To the beach. Thus, maybe your name fits as one of these unnamed disciples. Mine certainly does as the other.

John 21:3

Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee.

The problem with going off on our own excursions is that others are affected by our little detours, our disobedient side trips. Jesus warned us about setting our hand to the plow and looking back (Luke 9:62). "Forgetting that which lies behind, I press on," declared Paul (see Philippians 3:13). But Peter here is looking back—and looking back will paralyze. Ask Lot's wife.

John 21:3 (b)

They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night . . .

It's not surprising that the disciples entered the ship at night because it's always dark when you say, "I wonder if I should go back to the old gang, to the old ways, to the old spots." Truly, whenever you go back, it's *always* dark.

John 21:3 (c)

. . . they caught nothing.

Isn't this what we've found when we've gone back? When you go back, it's just not there. It just doesn't work any longer. You come up empty.

John 21:4 (a)

But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore . . .

Daylight was breaking for the Dayspring was observing (Luke 1:78).

John 21:4 (b), 5 (a)

. . . but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat?

"Backsliders!" Nope. "Rebels!" Nope. "Ex-Apostles! Former Disciples!" Nope. Jesus calls these disobedient disciples His kids.

John 21:5 (b)

They answered him, No.

Here is where a true miracle takes place. When asked if they had caught anything, these fishermen answer, "No." Fishermen always say, "The nibbles

have been fabulous," or "You should have seen the one that got away." But there comes a point in life when you go back and realize it stinks, that there's nothing there. It sounded so good as you reminisced about the wind blowing your hair and the smell of fish in the air; the rocking of the boat and being with the boys. It sounded so good when you thought about it, but when you actually got there, it wasn't the way you thought it would be. Satan has the ability to remind us of the kicks of the old ways. But what he fails to bring to mind are the kickbacks that inevitably follow.

John 21:6 (a)

And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.

Why the right side? Because whatever Jesus says is always right.

John 21:6 (b)

They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.

Think about this, you who have been toiling, working, wondering when it's going to happen. Success for these disciples was only a boat's width away. Three, perhaps four, feet from one side of the boat to the other—that's how close they were to success in this fishing endeavor. And you might be just three or four feet away from seeing success happen in your life, in your ministry, in your occupation. How do you move the three or four feet that make all the difference?

"Mr. Getty," asked an eager young man, "what's the secret of success?"

"It's very simple," answered the billionaire. "Rise early, work late . . . and strike oil."

How do you strike oil?

How do you find success? You do what Jesus says. Listen to what He's telling you in your heart. Perhaps He's been dealing with you, speaking to you about a certain issue, but you've thought His direction doesn't relate to the challenge you face or the endeavor you've undertaken. The disciples could have said, "We've been fishing all night. We're experts. What do three feet have to do

with anything?" But when they did what He said, they were immediately on the right side.

So, too, you might be very close to success in the best sense of the word. All you have to do is decide to obey what Jesus has told you in your heart. It's not mystical. It's not difficult. It's just a matter of saying, "You've been telling me in my heart that I am to do a certain thing, Lord. And I now purpose to do it."

John 21:7 (a)

Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord.

There's the contemplator, the mystic, John.

John 21:7 (b)

Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea.

Literally "stripped for work" to his undergarments, Peter grabs his coat and dives in. That's the doer, the activist, Peter.

John 21:8, 9

And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.

All night long the disciples had been looking for fish—when all the while, Jesus had it right at hand, freshly grilled, ready to eat. Haven't you discovered this to be so? Haven't you discovered over and over again when you go off on your little excursions, that when you come back to the Lord you find in Him what you longed for all along?

John 21:10, 11 (a)

Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes . . .

In verse 6, the disciples were not able to lift the net. Yet the same word is used here in verse 11 to say that Peter himself was able to draw it. In other words, in drawing the net, Peter did single-handedly what the group could not do collectively. How? There is only one explanation: because the command of the Lord was given. Thus, what the disciples couldn't do in their own strength, Peter could do by himself simply because the Lord had said, "Bring the fish." The Word God speaks is the very source of power to do what He asks.

John 21:11 (b)

. . . and hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.

Why do you suppose the number of fish is recorded? And why are we told the net was not broken? Earlier, in a similar miracle, Luke says when they took in a miraculous haul, the net broke (5:6). This speaks of evangelism. In the amphitheatre at Applegate Christian Fellowship or in crusades, the gospel is preached and a haul is taken in, but not all who respond will continue on. In the parable of the soils, only one in four goes on to bear abundant fruit (Matthew 13). Consequently, when sixty or eighty people are baptized on a Sunday morning at Applegate, not every one is going to go on and bring forth fruit abundantly. But of those who are truly in the kingdom, of those who are brought to shore, not one will be lost. Each one will be accounted for exactly. Thus, as this scenario unfolds, Jesus shows Peter and John that they are not only fishers of men, but tenders of sheep.

In the arena of evangelism, we cannot deal with statistics because we can't see men's hearts. But in the shepherding ministry—in pastoring, discipling, or parenting—we must account for every sheep. We must be aware of the brother or sister in need of tending, of touch, of care. Whose job is this? Each of ours. Those of us who love the Lord have the joint responsibility of saying, "Where is #151? I gotta go find him." And here Jesus makes a transfer in Peter's thinking, showing him he is to be not only a fisher of men evangelistically, but a tender of sheep pastorally.

John 21:12 (a)

Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine.

"Come and see," Jesus said in John 1.

"Come and drink," He said in John 7.

"Come and dine," He says in John 21.

John 21:12 (b), 13

And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise.

A meal of fish and loaves—does that ring a bell? (Matthew 15:36).

John 21:14, 15 (a)

This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead. So when they had dined . . .

It wasn't until after Peter was fed that Jesus talked to him about feeding others. Gang, if you're not being fed, don't attempt to feed others, because what you give out will not be nutritious. It'll be junk food, hollow calories. If, however, you are being fed, make sure you feed others—because if you just keep getting fed and don't feed others, you'll become spiritually bloated and lethargic.

John 21:15 (b)

. . . Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?

To what does the word "these" refer? Perhaps Jesus was pointing to the disciples. "Lord, if they all fail you, I never will," Peter had said earlier. Perhaps Jesus was pointing to the one hundred fifty -three fish, thereby saying, "Do you love Me more than fishing, Peter?" Perhaps it was in reference to the boats. "Do you love Me more than your occupation—or is work your highest priority?"

"Do you love Me more than these disciples, more than those fish, more than that boat? Do you *love* Me, Peter?" The word Jesus uses is *agapao*—the highest kind of love. "I've fed you; I've shown grace to you; I'm reaching out toward you," said Jesus. "Do you love Me with a perfect kind of love?"

John 21:15 (c)

He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.

There are four words in Greek for love. *Storge* is the affection one feels for a puppy. *Eros* is a sexual kind of love. *Phileo* is brotherly love. *Agape* love gives for the sake of giving, never expecting anything in return. Here, Peter uses *phileo.*

John 21:15 (d)

He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

"A good place for you to start, Peter, in this restorative process is to feed lambs." Want to be a good minister, a good teacher, a good communicator? The best training you'll ever get is with children because they won't snow you. If you're boring, they won't look at you and nod politely. If you're not communicating, if you're not connecting, you'll know it. Children force you to define your terms. They don't let you hide behind big words. Maybe you feel like you've been on a fishing excursion. Get involved in kids' ministries. Feed the lambs. It's a privilege and the finest preparation you'll ever have.

John 21:16

He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

The Greek word translated "feed" is *poi maino,* which means "to tend, or to shepherd." "Feed my lambs, Peter, but also care for them," Jesus instructed.

John 21:17 (a)

He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?

This time Jesus uses the word *phileo.*

John 21:17 (b)

Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

Peter *would* not say, "I love You unconditionally" because He *could* not say it. You see, Jesus had earlier said that the one who loves Him is the one who keeps His commandments (John 14:21). He had commanded His disciples to meet Him on the mountain (Matthew 28:16)—which is why Peter here says, "You know all things, Lord. You know I'm in the wrong place even now. That's why I can't say I love You the way You taught us to love You. But I do like You."

"Great," answered Jesus. "I'll meet you there. Feed My sheep. Get involved in service. Let Me use you."

The Lord will meet us wherever we're at—and He'll go with us as far as we want to go. You can go on in ministry, in knowing the Lord intimately, in worship, in praise, and in prayer. You can go on as far as you want, and He'll go with you.

John 21:18, 19

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

"Peter, when you were young, you wanted to give your life for Me. But you didn't. You backed down. Guess what. You're going to make it when you're old. Yes, they'll carry you off—but it's ultimately what you aspired to in your younger days."

John 21:20–22

Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.

What about John? John would be poisoned, boiled, and exiled before he finally died. But Jesus doesn't tell Peter this.



For topical study of John 21:18–22, see "What Is That to Thee?" below.

John 21:23

Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?

Jesus didn't say John would live until He returned. He simply said John's days were in His hand.

John 21:24, 25

This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.

The world could not even hold all that should be written of Jesus. But Ephesians 2 indicates that in the ages to come, we will at last be able to explore more fully His grace and mercy.

John tells us in Revelation that there are four creatures in heaven who praise the Lord ceaselessly, perpetually, and eternally. This goes on day and night because they're continually seeing different facets, different sides, different aspects of the Person of Jesus (4:8).

And the same thing will happen eternally with you. Jesus will so captivate your heart and expand your mind that, as you explore and experience the exceeding riches of His grace and goodness, you will praise Him throughout eternity.

WHAT IS THAT TO THEE?

A Topical Study of JOHN 21:18–22

Some folks seem to be not accident-prone but incident-prone. That is, they always seem to be doing or saying the wrong thing at the wrong time in the wrong place. Such a man was the apostle Peter. He had a tendency to be involved in incidents where he said and did the wrong thing. And here in our text, he's at it once again. You see, Jesus, who had been resurrected from the dead at this point, told the disciples to meet Him at the appointed mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16). But on their way to Galilee, Peter had said, "I'm going fishing," the language indicating more than a one-time excursion. In other words, "I'm going back to fishing—back to what I used to do, back to my old way of living."

Here's Peter on the beach, when he should have been on the mountain, hearing Jesus say, "When you're old, you're going to be carried where you don't want to go"—speaking of the death Peter would die by crucifixion. "You can count on me," Peter had said earlier. "If everyone else forsakes You, Lord, I never will." And there in Gethsemane, Peter took out his sword and started swinging. Peter wasn't dumb. He was serious about going to the end with the Lord. Yet a few hours later, feeling threatened by a servant girl, he denied the Lord three times. So here's Jesus, saying, "Peter, we're at another fire now. Remember the other fire—where you caved in, where you turned back, where you denied Me? I'm telling you before this fire on the beach that you're going to burn brightly, that you're going to make it, that you're going to die for Me." But Peter didn't hear the blessing. Instead, he took his eyes off Jesus, pointed to John, and said, "What about him?"

Remember what happened in Matthew 14? The wind was blowing; the waves were rolling. Suddenly, the terrified disciples see a figure walking toward them. "Lord, if that's You," Peter said, "then bid me come." The Lord did, and Peter actually walked on water—until, looking at the waves, he started to sink. The same thing happens to you and me. We start looking at the storm, fretting over circumstances, wondering about people—and we start to sink. "It's none of your business what happens to John," Jesus told Peter as they stood by the fire. "*You* follow Me." And Peter did.

I find four aspects of this vignette tremendously helpful. . . .

It Encourages Me

Like Peter, I'm a bumbler and a stumbler. Perhaps you are too. Yet Jesus, in His grace and mercy says, "You're going to make it." Truly, the Lord will see us through, gang. Maybe you're straining and striving to hold on to the Lord, fearing that if you let go, you'll be lost. Relax. The truth is, He's got you in the right hand of His righteousness (Isaiah 41:10). If you've opened your heart to the Lord, I can assure you that you are going to make it because He completes that which He has begun (Philippians 1:6). "Now unto Him," Paul says, "who is able to *keep* that which is committed unto Him . . ." (see 2 Timothy 1:12) Jesus told Peter He would keep him all the way to death. So I know He'll do the same for us.

It Enables Me

It seems like he's got it made in the shade, this one who leaned on Your breast at the table, this one who's so close to Your heart, Peter must have thought concerning John.

Do you ever look at a person, a couple, a family, and say, "They've got it made. It's not fair"? Let me tell you what happened to John. We know, because Iranius, a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John himself, wrote an exhaustive history of John. According to Iranius, John ministered in Jerusalem for a season, then found himself in Rome, capital city of the empire. There, he experienced such difficulty and persecution that the enemies of the gospel poisoned his drink in an attempt to kill him. That is why in early church records, John's symbol is a chalice with a snake emerging from within. Although John drank it, he miraculously did not die from it. Still determined to destroy him, Caesar Nero ordered John to be placed in a cauldron of boiling oil. But although his skin was burned, John did not die. So he was sentenced to exile on the island of Patmos, where the most perverted people, the most incorrigible prisoners were sent. A rocky, barren island, it was the most hell-like place the Roman Empire knew about. Yet it was on Patmos that John was given the Book of Revelation.

Now this enlightens me because Jesus didn't say to Peter, "You're asking about John? Let me tell you about him. Yes, Peter, you're going to be crucified, but then you'll go straight to heaven. John, on the other hand, is going to be poisoned; he's going to be put in a cauldron of boiling oil; he's going to be exiled. He's going to live a very painful and difficult life." No, Jesus simply said, "If I will that John lives until I come back, what does it matter to you? You, Peter, follow Me. Period."

You will have a temptation at some time or another to look at someone else and say, "Poor me. I'm being crucified while he's cruising," because you won't understand what battles the person you envy is presently fighting or will be facing. The Bible says no temptation comes to any of us except that which is common to *all* people (1 Corinthians 10:13). Every person goes through equal difficulty. We just don't see it. When we get to heaven, not one of us will say, "Well, I really had it rough. Lord, You picked on me." On the contrary, we will fall before the throne and say, "Lord, You were fair and equitable in everything You did," (see Revelation 16:7). So next time you are tempted to have a

personal pity party, remember that Jesus doesn't explain. He simply says, "You follow Me."

It Enlarges Me

John and Peter had very different temperaments, very different personalities. John was a thinker, a contemplator, a mystic. Peter was an activist, a go-getter. In fact, when Jesus called them, what were these two men doing? Peter was casting his net into the sea (Matthew 4:18). "Follow Me and I'll make you a fisher of men," Jesus said. And indeed Peter became an evangelist who would bring many people into the kingdom—three thousand saved during his first sermon alone. John, on the other hand, wasn't casting his net. He was mending nets (Matthew 4:21). And John would go on to mend people, as he taught, preached, and practiced love. These two were very different in ministry, in mentality, in temperament, in personality. But you know what? God used them both. Peter's wondering about John, when in reality, the Lord would use them equally.

I think of two other men used powerfully by the Lord . . .

Leading a contingent of people from Babylon to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, Ezra realized he was short of provision and lacking protection. So what did he do? Not wanting the king to doubt the Lord's provision, he instructed the people to fast and pray. And indeed the Lord came through (Ezra 8). Seventy years later, Nehemiah led another group back to Jerusalem from Babylon to rebuild the walls around the city. Whereas Ezra had said, "I'm not going to ask the king for anything because the hand of God is upon us," Nehemiah said, "Because the hand of God is upon us, O king, we want provision and protection" (see Nehemiah 2).

Who was right? They both were. Arriving in Jerusalem, Ezra was dismayed to find the Jews had intermarried with Gentiles. So what does he do? He pulls out his beard in remorse, and the people repent (Ezra 9). Seventy years later, Nehemiah reacts to the same situation not by plucking his hair, but by plucking the hair of the people—and the people repent (Nehemiah 13). Who was right? The Lord used *both* Ezra and Nehemiah. God can work through an Ezra, a mystic, a John. And He can work through a Nehemiah, a beard-plucker, a Peter. When I understand this, I can accept ministry from different kinds of people and of different types of flavors.

It Instructs Me

"Follow Me," Jesus says.

"Why should I," you might say, "if it means being crucified upside down, if it means being placed in a cauldron of boiling oil? Thanks, but no thanks. I'll chart my own course. I'll live my own life." And you can. Our loving God gives you and me that option—because if you follow Him, you'll have to deny yourself and take up His Cross. Why should you do that? I suggest two reasons. . . .

First, follow Jesus for abundant life. Jesus said He came that we might have life and life abundantly (John 10:10). The reality of the world never lives up to its hype. Not so with the Lord. "Whoever believes in Me shall never thirst," He said (see John 6:35). And it's true. We've found that to be so. We have fished all night in the world, only to come up empty. But when we come back to the Lord, we find the substance, the solidity, and the reality of what we were looking for all along.

Second, follow Jesus for eternal life. If you want to go to hell, to live in outer darkness where there's weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, where you won't see another individual for age to age and eternity-to-eternity, where your body will convulse, where your conscience will haunt you, where your sin will be ever before you, then don't follow Him.

But if, like the disciples, you say, "Lord, You alone have the words of eternal life," you'll follow Him and you'll end up in heaven. It's such a good deal—abundant life now and eternal life in the ages to come. Who *wouldn't* want to follow Him?

"Follow thou Me," Jesus says.

Accept His invitation today. And continue to do so all the days of your life.

NOTES

[1]C .S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity.* Harper Collins, 2001, pp. 136, 137.



ACTS

1

Acts 1:1 (a)
The former treatise have I made . . .

The Book of Acts was written by Luke. The "former treatise" referred to is the Gospel that bears his name. From his exacting use of the Greek language, we know Luke was an intelligent man. We also know from Colossians 4:14 that he was a doctor. Many Bible scholars and historians further believe that, since the slaves of wealthy men usually held the position of physician, Luke was a slave.

Acts 1:1 (b)
. . . O Theophilus . . .

Scholars and historians believe Theophilus was Luke's owner who, following his own conversion to Jesus Christ, freed Luke to travel with the apostle Paul. I am intrigued as I stop to consider the incredible energy and effort Luke expended to communicate the gospel to his former owner. After all, Luke didn't say, "Today I am writing the Bible. I had better keep my wits sharp because people will be studying these words for many centuries." No, for all Luke knew, he was simply writing to one man, which is the same mentality our Lord had.

Jesus was the Good Shepherd who left the ninety and nine to find one who was lost (Matthew 18:12). He was the Great Communicator who conversed with one woman at a well (John 4:7). He was the gifted Teacher who sought out one man in a tree (Luke 19:5).

Acts 1:1 (c)
. . . of all that Jesus began . . .

In his Gospel, Luke had written of the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus, but that was only the beginning. The Book of Acts is the continuation of the gospel story. And the story goes on. Africa and South America are experiencing

great revival. And only now are we beginning to discover the depth and breadth of the church in communist China. Jesus is still working, folks. That's what makes being a Christian so exciting!

Acts 1:1 (d)

. . . both to do and teach,

That's always the divine order—doing first, then teaching. If you want to impact your children, if you want to have power in ministry, follow this simple principle: Do it before you teach it. Our Lord moved with incredible authority, and those who heard Him were "astonished at his doctrine" (Matthew 7:28) because He didn't only teach the Word theoretically, He lived it out before them.

Acts 1:2, 3 (a)

. . . Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs . . .

After His Resurrection, Jesus "dropped in" on His disciples over a period of forty days, causing them to understand that even though they would no longer see Him visibly, He would be in their midst in reality.

"I'm not going to believe this resurrection stuff unless I can put my hand into the wound in His side and the nail prints in His hands," said Thomas (see John 20:25). The following week, when Jesus said to him, "Put your hand in My side. Touch My wounds," Thomas's eyes were opened, and he realized that, even though he hadn't seen Jesus, Jesus had seen him.

My prayer is that, like Thomas, we would grasp the fact that, even though we may not see Him or feel Him, Jesus truly is with us.

Acts 1:3 (b)

. . . being seen of them forty days . . .

The Greek word for "seen" is *optanomai,* from which we get our word ophthalmologist, or eye doctor. It literally means Jesus was being "eyeballed"

by them, "stared at," or "scrutinized." The disciples didn't gaze at Jesus with wispy, dreamy looks. No, they stared at Him. Wouldn't you? If your leader had been crucified, but came back on the scene from time to time, wouldn't you eyeball him? Not only did His disciples see Him, but according to 1 Corinthians 15:6, there were five hundred eyewitnesses to whom Jesus appeared following His Resurrection.

Acts 1:3 (c)
. . . and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

We might not hear Jesus audibly or see Him visibly as the disciples did, but He continues to speak to us "of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." How? Through pains and problems. If you had a hard day today or a hard week, a hard year, or a hard life, understand this: It's the Lord speaking to you concerning His kingdom, saying, "Child, this is not your home. I don't want you to sink your roots here too deeply because all of this is going to pass away quickly. I know that if I don't allow dark days to poke you and prod you to look heavenward, you'll put your time and energy into things that are destined to burn, and you'll be disappointed for the next billion years to come."

So don't be upset and bitter when times are tough. Realize they are God's reminder to seek first the kingdom (Matthew 6:33).

Acts 1:4, 5
And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

There is so much confusion today about the baptism in the Spirit. People get hung up and miss out because they don't understand there are three relationships Jesus talked about that a person can and should have with the Holy Ghost.

- He is *with* us when we are convicted of our need to be born again (John 14:17);

- He comes *in* us the moment we open our heart to the Savior (John 20:22); and
- He comes *upon* us when He empowers us for service (Acts 1:5).



***For topical study of Acts 1:4–5 entitled "The Gift of the Spirit," turn to page* 614.**

Acts 1:6

When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

"Are You finally going to establish Your kingdom?" the disciples asked Jesus.

Acts 1:7

And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

"It is not for you to know," answered Jesus. I have this phrase underlined in my Bible. What makes me think I need to know everything? Certain things are just not for me to know.

Acts 1:8 (a)

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you . . .

The steam in a locomotive does not exist to toot the whistle. Its purpose is to power the engine and move the train. So, too, the empowering of the Spirit is not given for people to feel "Holy Ghost goose bumps," emotional highs, or warm fuzzy feelings. The Spirit comes upon people in order that the message of the gospel might be moved throughout the world.

Acts 1:8 (b)

. . . and ye shall be witnesses unto me . . .

Jesus didn't say, "You will witness." He said, "You'll *be* witnesses. Things will happen in a naturally supernatural way in and through you that will witness My reality."

Acts 1:8 (c)

. . . both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Billy Sunday used to say, "The Lord has anointed me to preach to the *guttermost* parts of the earth." What made Billy Sunday tick? What drove D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, or Charles Finney? Read their biographies, and you will see that, without exception, each of these men had an undeniable encounter with the Spirit.

Acts 1:9

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

When the temple was dedicated, Scripture records the cloud of glory filling it (1 Kings 8:10). Here in Acts, I believe Luke is speaking of this same cloud of glory—the shekinah glory of the Father.

Acts 1:10, 11 (a)

And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?

Some have suggested that the two men in white apparel were Moses and Elijah, which would correspond with their appearance during the Transfiguration in Matthew 17.

Acts 1:11 (b), 12

This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Then

returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.

On the Mount of Olives, there is a church called the Church of the Ascension. If you go there today, guides will show you a footprint that is supposedly the place from which Jesus took off when He ascended to heaven. Yet Luke 24 says that Jesus traveled with His disciples *past* the Mount of Olives to Bethany before He ascended (Luke 24:50). When people don't read the Word, they are vulnerable to traditions and myths that have no biblical base at all.

Acts 1:13, 14 (a)
And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women . . .

Prayer produces unity, and unity empowers prayer. When you pray with people, you experience a glorious unity that allows a greater release of blessing. That is why Jesus said, "If two or three of you agree in prayer, there's a dynamic released, and things will happen" (see Matthew 18:20). As a result of this prayer meeting, the church would soon no longer consist of one hundred twenty believers hiding away in an upper room, but would, in a single day, explode to number over three thousand (Acts 2:41).

Acts 1:14 (b)
. . . and Mary the mother of Jesus . . .

Renewal and revival continue to take place in the Catholic Church today as many are opening up to the power and the Person of the Spirit of God. I say to those who are considering such things, "Look at Mary. There she was in the Upper Room when the Spirit came down—the first charismatic Catholic!" This is the first and last time Mary is seen in the Book of Acts. In some quarters of the Catholic Church, there is a skewed theology concerning Mary. They do not see her as simply an especially blessed woman, but as a co-redemptress.

In Jerusalem today, there is a Catholic Church called the Church of Mary. Located on Mount Zion, for many centuries it was thought to be the spot where Mary was buried. However, when the Catholics changed their theology and decided that Mary never died, but instead ascended into heaven, they permanently shut the doors of the Church of Mary.

In Rome, a Catholic Church next to the railroad depot is also called the Church of Mary. In this church, a two-sided crucifix depicting Jesus on one side of the Cross, and Mary on the other is prominently displayed.

Dear friend, Mary did not supernaturally ascend into heaven. She did not die on the Cross. She cannot gain favors for those who pray to her.

When Jesus was told His mother and brothers wanted to speak with Him, He answered, "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (see Mark 3:33–35).

In John 2:5, we find the last recorded words of Mary when she said to the servants at the marriage feast, "Whatever He [Jesus] saith unto you, do it." She didn't say, "Tell me your problem, and I'll take care of it." She said, "Whatever He *saith unto you, that's what you need to do."*

Mary is seen here in the midst of the disciples, but not in a place of prominence. She is the most blessed of all women—uniquely and singularly chosen by God to bring forth His Son. She is honored, indeed, but she does not have special pull or power with God.

Acts 1:14 (c)
. . . and with his brethren.

James and Jude—sons of Joseph and Mary and half brothers of Jesus—were in the Upper Room. This is interesting, because the Gospels make it clear that they had previously been cynical, skeptical unbelievers. What changed their minds about their Brother? His Resurrection. When James and Jude saw Jesus resurrected from the dead, they became believers in Him. James went on

to write the Epistle of James; Jude, the Epistle of Jude. If anyone could have questioned the deity of Jesus Christ, it would have been His own brothers, yet here are James and Jude, numbered among the believers.

Acts 1:15, 16 (a)

And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled . . .

Notice that Peter was a student of prophecy. He said, "This Scripture *must* be fulfilled." He was absolutely certain that prophecy would come to pass. So am I.

Acts 1:16 (b)

. . . which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

Not only was Peter a student of prophecy, but he believed in the divine inspiration of Scripture, saying it was the Holy Spirit who spoke through David.

All Scripture is inspired (2 Timothy 3:16). It's God-breathed, gang. And if you ever get involved in a church or become part of a Bible study group where the teacher says, "Well now, we can't be sure if this verse or this section is inspired," I would encourage you to immediately stand up, walk out, and never go back. Why? Because once you start to say, "I'll decide which part of the Bible is inspired and which part isn't," you suddenly become the judge of the Bible rather than allowing the Bible to judge you. And it's amazing what verses we will cross out given the opportunity! I've often encouraged people to go through their Bibles and meditate on all the verses they *don't* have underlined. We have all the promises starred and all the blessings highlighted, while verses like, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12) are strangely unmarked!

Acts 1:17, 18 (a)

For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity . . .

We know from Matthew 27:10 and Zechariah 11:13 that this field was originally a potter's field—the field outside the house of every potter wherein he would throw any of his marred creations that, because they had become hardened, could not be reshaped. Over the years, due to the accumulation of broken pottery, the potter's field would thus be useless for anything but a burial ground.

What happened to the money for which Jesus was betrayed? It was used to purchase a potter's field—a useless field full of broken pots and dead bodies. The picture to me is powerful: The blood money of Jesus—His work on the Cross—was spent to redeem useless vessels and lifeless bodies—us.

Acts 1:18 (b)

. . . and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.

"Contradiction!" cry the skeptics. "Doesn't Matthew 27:5 say Judas hanged himself?" Judas *did* hang himself, then the rope broke, and he was disemboweled as he fell to the ground. Thus, rather than contradicting Matthew's account, Luke confirms it.

Acts 1:19

And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.

The next time you feel like a cracked pot, the next time you feel useless, the next time you feel there's no hope for you, remember Aceldama—the field of blood—for even the place where the traitor died was purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ.

Acts 1:20

For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let

another take.

Making application to Judas, Peter quoted from Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8. This tells me Peter was no ignorant fisherman. He knew the Scriptures. And I strongly suspect Peter's knowledge of the written Word came from hanging out with the Living Word, Jesus Christ.

Acts 1:21, 22

Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

The one who took Judas' office was to have been a witness of the Resurrection. Paul will use this same argument concerning his own claim to be an apostle. When did Paul see the resurrected Lord? Some commentators believe, as do I, that Paul, following his conversion, was discipled personally by Jesus in the Arabian desert (Galatians 1:17, 18).

Acts 1:23–25

And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

The casting of lots was a common practice in Old Testament times. If a person wanted to know God's will, he would go to the high priest who had the Urim and the Thummim in his breastplate. The Urim and the Thummim were possibly two stones, one black and one white. When asked a question, the high priest would offer a prayer and then pull out a stone, perhaps black meaning "No" and white meaning "Go."

A specific example of an Old Testament character involved in the casting of lots is found in the Book of Jonah. Sailors on the boat cast lots to determine whose fault the storm was before they tossed him overboard (Jonah 1:7).

People today still think that casting lots is a nifty idea. Borrowing an idiom from the account of Gideon in Judges 6, they call it "setting out a fleece" (see Judges 6:36–40). But that's not the way of the New Testament. When Paul and Barnabas were commissioned for ministry in Acts 13, it was not through the casting of lots, but through the voice of the Spirit. How did He speak? I suggest it was through the gift of prophecy (Acts 13:2).

Next time you have a decision to make, or a struggle within, I would highly encourage you to get together with other brothers and sisters and say, "Would you pray with me about this?" While you may not get immediate vision or direction, God will indeed honor such prayer and will fulfill His promise to "write His will upon the table of your heart" (see Hebrews 8:10). It amazes me how reluctant we are to do that. We'll talk to our spouses, we'll wrestle with ourselves, but we will rarely ask someone else to seek the Lord with us. The one who does, however, will hear His voice in wonderful ways.

Acts 1:26

And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Although Peter knew the Word and was right in discerning that Judas needed to be replaced, I believe he and the other disciples erred when they chose two men and said, "Now, Lord, which of these two do You want?"

I believe God's choice was neither man. Revelation 21:14 tells us that the names of the apostles are written on the twelve foundations in heaven. My personal conviction is that we won't see Matthias' name on any of those foundations. We'll see Paul's name. I believe Paul was the one who should have filled Judas' office.

I believe the disciples got ahead of the Lord by trying to make something happen before the power of the Spirit came upon them on the Day of Pentecost. That's a mistake I make frequently. I'll see a principle in the Word and say, "Okay, now how can I make this happen?" instead of saying, "I see the principle, Lord. Now I'm going to wait on You for the power of Your Spirit to bring it about."

Maybe you're wrestling with a decision right now, saying, "Which one is it, Lord? This or that? Here or there? What do You want, Lord? Here are Your choices."

In Numbers 11, we see something so typical of what we do.

The Israelites were murmuring, saying, "We're sick and tired of this manna."

Hearing their complaints, Moses said to the Lord, "What am I supposed to do? You told me You would give them meat. Do You want me to kill the flocks and the herds we're bringing into the Promised Land? Or do You want us to fish all the fish out of the Red Sea? Which is it, Lord?"

But the Lord said, "Trust Me, Moses, and you'll see that I have more choices than just those two. I have options you would never think about, even in your wildest dreams." And suddenly quail by the thousands flew into the camp two feet off the ground—right in the strike zone. The Israelites grabbed sticks and batted them down. I know that's what happened because verse 32 says, "He that gathered least gathered ten homers."

Be careful about saying, "Okay Lord, is it this, or is it that?" because the Lord has options we've never even heard of. Wait on Him and listen for His answer. Like the children of Israel, you'll hit one out of the park every time!

THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

A Topical Study of ACTS 1:4, 5

Vance Havner was right on the money when he said, "We will move this world not by criticism *of* it, nor conformity *to* it—but by combustion *within* it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God."

The early believers found this to be true, for even their enemies referred to them as those who "turned the world upside down" (see Acts 17:6). They did it without a single media consultant, church growth seminar, management strategy, or slick presentation. They impacted the Roman Empire and the entire known world without buildings, busses, or budgets. They turned the world upside down through one thing: the power of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 8, Jesus promised that after the Holy Spirit came upon them, they would be witnesses—not that they would witness, but that they would *be* witnesses. Truly, the early believers had such joy in their hearts and such love in their lives that it was undeniable something radical had happened and that Jesus must be real.

Gang, it's not "witnessing" that will turn your world upside down. It's *being* a witness, an example of what the Lord can do in a marriage and in a family, at your job and at your school. How exciting it is to see our world impacted by the power of the Spirit upon our lives. What a joy it has been to see Applegate Christian Fellowship grow—without strategies or demographic studies, slick programming or hype—by watching the Holy Spirit do His beautiful work in a very simple way.

I once received a book in the mail entitled *Marketing the Church.* After thumbing through it, I was greatly grieved by it, as I was reminded once again that the present trend to get the church to be culturally relevant is the way of the world, not the way of the Lord. The Lord has a better way: not by might, nor by power, but by His Spirit (Zechariah 4:6), igniting individuals who will be witnesses of His reality and who, in turn, will draw people to Him like moths to a flame. That's the way it worked in the Book of Acts. The early church never heard of "marketing the church." They were simply in love with Jesus

Christ and were experiencing the power of the Holy Ghost. As a result, the world was permanently altered.

> Many years ago, before the first Sunday service at Applegate Christian Fellowship, one of the brothers shared this word of prophecy to a group of us who had gathered in a living room to pray and seek the Lord: "The Lord has given me a vision. He showed me a map in which our valley was ignited by a fire, which in turn generated sparks that ignited other fires all around it." He continued, "I believe this means that the Lord will ignite our fellowship, and from it will come many other fellowships."
>
> As a twenty-three-year-old, I wrote that prophecy in my journal, filed it away, and thought, *We'll see.* For at that point, it was my prayer that if God's grace were upon us, Applegate Christian Fellowship might blossom to a group of one hundred people. Then the Lord began to move in ways that were completely unpredictable and totally unplanned. The fellowship began to grow and grow, not because of our strategy or slickness, but in spite of us! And as we grew, we began to establish other fellowships round about us—in Grants Pass, Medford, and other communities in this area; then north into Roseburg, Eugene, and Washington; and south to California, Mexico, Honduras, and Jamaica.

Reading this journal entry some time ago, I thought, *Lord, You did it just like You said You would—not by might, nor by power, but by the simple, significant work of Your Spirit. Our hearts have been touched, our lives are being changed, and people are seeing not our strategy, but Your reality.*

> I remember our first Sunday together. We met in a place called Grange Hall past Little Applegate Road. At that time, Oregon and California were in the midst of a significant drought. But as I was teaching, rain began beating down on the tin roof. The congregation started laughing, which made me kind of nervous, but I went on anyway. After the service, I walked outside, grabbed Tom Patrick, and said, "Tom, what was all the laughing about?"
>
> Tom answered, "Before you moved here, a prophecy was given to us that God would rain upon us and pour out His Spirit upon this

ministry—and that it would happen simultaneously with rain falling physically. So, when it started pouring while you were preaching, we started rejoicing!"

I could go on about how, in the earliest days of this ministry, prophecies were given and visions shared that have come to pass, each one by the power of the Spirit of God. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). We shall see, as we study Acts together, that the early church impacted the world in a greater way than any other group in history because they were ignited by the power of the Spirit. That was their simple key.

Maybe your world—your kids, your marriage, your business, or your school—is "wrong-side up." How will it be impacted? How will it be turned upside down and therefore made right? The same way the world has been impacted globally: by the power of the Holy Ghost upon your life. What's needed is not more programming, not more fleshly striving, not more clever organizing. It is the power of the Spirit that will make things start happening. The power of the Spirit will change you, your marriage, your family, your business, and your service for Jesus Christ. It will change every aspect of your life.

Keep in mind that the disciples in Acts 1 were already born again and had already received the indwelling of the Spirit. How do we know this? Because following His crucifixion, as the disciples met behind locked doors in the Upper Room, worried that someone would discover them, Jesus appeared to them, breathed on them, and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (see John 20:19–22). But, as they were about to discover, the indwelling of the Spirit is only one of three relationships available to a believer.

The Holy Spirit *with You*

In John 14:17, Jesus said to His disciples, "The Holy Spirit is with you, but He shall be in you." Those prepositions are important. The Holy Spirit is *with* a person when He begins to talk to that person about becoming a believer.

You never would have been born again unless the Holy Spirit had been *with* you, whispering, "God loves you. You're a sinner, but Jesus died in your place." Whether it was through a meeting at church, or at a Billy Graham crusade, whether it was over the radio, or through a friend, it was the Holy Spirit *with* you who began to tug on the strings of your heart, drawing you to salvation. If the Holy Spirit had not been with you, you could not have been born again.

"There is none that seeketh after God," wrote Paul (Romans 3:11). "We are born again not of the will of man, but of God" (see John 1:13). A person can't, on his own, say, "Hmm. I think I'll be born again." The only way someone can be born again is for God to sovereignly choose to send His Holy Spirit to work *with* him.

The Holy Spirit *in* You

When you opened your heart to Jesus, the Holy Spirit came *into* you. He indwelled you. You were born again. You were regenerated.

In John 20, the disciples had the Spirit *in* them, just as He is *in* every one of you who has been born again (John 20:22). You have the Holy Ghost. The question is: Does the Holy Ghost have you?

You see, Jesus not only breathed on His disciples, He also instructed them to go to Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father (Luke 24:49). What is the promise of the Father? It is the third relationship Jesus spoke of concerning the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit *upon* You

The Spirit of God is available not only to work with you to become a Christian, or to come into your life once you open your heart to Him, but He is now available to come upon your life and to empower you to see your own world turned upside down and made right-side up.

> In the Old Testament, when the Holy Ghost came upon men like Moses and David, Gideon and Ezekiel, Samson and Bezaleel, it was to empower them for service.
>
> So, too, Jesus said to His disciples, "The Spirit is in you, but when the Spirit comes upon you, you will be empowered for unique ministry and service, and then you will be My witnesses" (see Acts 1:4–8).

So it was that these born-again disciples, one hundred twenty in number, huddled together in the Upper Room for ten days, waiting and praying with one accord. Suddenly, on the Day of Pentecost, they heard the sound of a mighty rushing wind. Why wind? *Pnoe* means "wind" in Greek. It also means "breath" and "spirit." *Ruwach* means "wind" in Hebrew. It also means "breath" and "spirit."

Since both Hebrew and Greek have one word for wind, breath, and spirit, the *breath* of Jesus upon His disciples in John 20 and the mighty rushing *wind* in Acts 2 are unmistakable illustrations of the *Spirit.* The mighty rushing wind filled the room, tongues of fire sat upon each of the disciples, they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and the world hasn't been the same since (Acts 2:1–5).

The same is true today. The Spirit of God is made available not only to work *with* you to become a Christian, and to come *into* you once you open your heart to Him, but to come *upon* your life and to empower you in your service for Him. We no longer have to wait for the Spirit as the disciples did. On the Day of Pentecost, GOD made the power of the Spirit available to the church corporately and to all believers individually. The power of the Spirit is a gift that has already been given and that is available to you even today.

What do you have to do to receive or appropriate that gift? The same thing you did to become a Christian. . . .

The Power of the Spirit Is Appropriated by Believing

For GOD so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son . . .

John 3:16

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

Luke 11:13

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of GOD, even to them that believe on his name.

John 1:12

Just as God *gave* His Son, He *gives* the Holy Spirit. How did you receive the Son? By faith. How do you receive the power of the Spirit? The same way.

For some, when you asked Jesus into your heart, tears rolled down your cheeks, you felt a weight lifted from your shoulders, and you felt warm inside. For others, it was not an emotional experience at all. You simply said, "Okay, I've prayed the prayer. Now what?" So, too, when some receive the power of the Spirit, they speak in tongues, prophesy, or see visions. But others receive it and say, "Now what?" As with the salvation experience, some have an emotional response, while others don't. But as with the salvation experience, *all* who receive the gift of the power of the Spirit look back and see their lives radically altered from that moment on.

While I was a student at Biola University, the Spirit came upon my own life, but I didn't have a tremendous emotional experience. The Lord touched me, and I knew He impacted me at that moment, but it wasn't until later that I began to see some significant changes: My faith wasn't dry, as it had been previously. Bible study was no longer merely a discipline or a drudge. Sharing the Word was no longer an obligation. You see, although I had the Holy Spirit for many years, it wasn't until He had me and flowed from me that Bible study became my passion and sharing the Word my joy.

Suppose someone came forward today to receive Christ, saying, "I want Jesus in my life," and he prayed the sinner's prayer. Then the next day he came

back, saying, "I *really* want the Lord in my life," and he prayed the sinner's prayer again. And the third day, and the fifth day, and the eighteenth day, he came again and again and again, saying, *"Please,* I want the Lord in my life." What would you tell that person?

Hopefully you would say, "By grace are you saved through *faith.* It's the gift of God (see Ephesians 2:8). You don't need to keep begging or pleading or crying. Just embrace what He has *already* given you!"

Why then do we have an entirely different mind-set when it comes to the power of the Spirit? We go to meetings. We pray with intensity. People lay hands on us and say, "Come on, brother. Hold on. Pray through." Then someone else comes along and says, "Let go, brother. Let go." So we hold on. We let go. And finally we give up because much of classic Pentecostalism has subtly transmitted the message that we have to prove ourselves worthy by our intensity or purity to receive the power of the Spirit. But that's not what Scripture teaches.

> In Acts 8, after Peter and John laid hands upon them, believers in Samaria were empowered with the Holy Spirit. Simon, the resident magician, observed the scene and said, "Wow! That's neat. Hey, Peter, I'll buy that trick from you" (see Acts 8:14–19).
>
> Peter looked at Simon and said, "Your money perish with you. The gift of the Holy Ghost cannot be purchased" (see Acts 8:20).

The gift of the Spirit cannot be purchased—not with money, intensity, purity, or anything else. It is a gift to be received by faith. At this moment, you can be a recipient of the power of the Holy Ghost upon your life if by faith you simply say, "Thank You, Father, for the promise. Jesus, do the work You said You would. Baptize me with Your Spirit."

"Wait a minute," you say. "My Baptist background doesn't confirm this. First Corinthians 12:13 says: For by one Spirit we have all been baptized into one body. So what's this about a second "coming upon" of the Spirit?"

The moment you opened your heart to Jesus Christ, the Spirit baptized you, immersed you, and plunged you into the body of Christ. First Corinthians 12:13 speaks of the baptism into the body. But that's an entirely different baptism than that of Jesus baptizing you into the Spirit.

Check your concordance, and you will see a number of baptisms mentioned in the Word. There's the baptism of John (Acts 1:22), the baptism of repentance (Acts 13:24), the baptism of suffering (Matthew 20:22), and the baptism into Moses (1 Corinthians 10:2). In fact, there are at least seven different baptisms in Scripture.

"But doesn't Ephesians 4:5 say there is *one* Lord and one baptism and one faith?" Yes. But, again, that speaks of the unity of the body. Study carefully before you build any theology upon an isolated verse.

The Preparation of the Spirit Comes Through Waiting

"Wait a minute," you say. "Didn't you just say we no longer have to wait for the Spirit?" Yes. We don't need to wait *for* the Spirit. But we need to wait *on* the Spirit.

That is why Jesus didn't say to the early believers, "Receive the power of the Spirit right now." He could have done it that way, but instead He said, "For ten days, lock yourselves in a room and wait on Me that I might pour out the Spirit of promise upon you."

Now, if the power of the Spirit is available right now—and it is—then what's the purpose of waiting on Him?

There are several reasons . . .

Transition

After a psalmist came to a profound point, he would often say, "Selah" or, "Stop and think about it." So, too, concerning the dynamic of the Spirit—the new song of the Holy Ghost. I suggest for some, "selah" means not merely taking someone else's word for it, but thinking it through themselves as they wait on the Lord and study His Word. Many of us came out of a dispensational background and were taught that there is no second blessing; that there is no baptism with the Spirit; that the gifts of prophecy, healing, tongues, and visions were for an earlier dispensation and are no longer available for us today.

Personally, I had to go through a couple of years of transition—of rethinking and reevaluating—before I received the empowering of the Spirit by the laying on of hands.

Protection

The danger facing the early believers was not in failing to do something, but in *trying* to do something. Look what happened. . . .

As they were praying in the Upper Room, Peter said, "The Scriptures declare that someone should take the place of Judas. So let's draw straws here between these two guys to see which one of them God wants to use" (see Acts 1:15–26). A man named Matthias drew the long straw and was chosen, but he's never again mentioned in the Book of Acts.

I believe Peter's plan was a big mistake. Why? Because Peter spoke *before* the empowering of the Spirit. Using his own logic and analysis, he said, "We've got to replace this guy, and here's how we'll do it." Shortly thereafter, however, Paul the apostle came on the scene, and I believe Paul was the one intended to fill the office of Judas Iscariot.

Did God throw up His hands and say, "Oh no! I wanted to use Paul. But I'm stuck with Matthias. Now what am I going to do?" Of course not. God used Paul mightily, regardless of what seems to be Peter's mistake.

Vision

It was in the dungeon that the Lord said to Jeremiah, “Call on Me, and I’ll show you things you never would have imagined” (see Jeremiah 33:3).

It was when Abraham was well-advanced in years that God said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them. So shall your descendants be” (see Genesis 15:5).

As we wait on the Lord, He directs our vision beyond even prison walls and physical limitations in order to give us His vision of what He wants to do in our lives.

Evaluation

After the Spirit of the Lord carried the prophet Ezekiel to a valley full of dry bones, He told Ezekiel to preach to the bones (Ezekiel 37:4). When Ezekiel preached, there was a great noise as the bones started to connect. But Ezekiel realized that although his preaching had produced commotion, there was no creation—the bones were still dead. God then told him to prophesy to the wind, the *ruwach,* the Spirit. Ezekiel was no longer to prophesy to the people, but to intercede in the Spirit on behalf of the people. What happened? The bones came to life. The rattling bones became a mighty army when creation replaced commotion (Ezekiel 37:1–10).

The same thing happened in the Book of Acts. One hundred twenty believers in an upper room were wondering what to do and where to go. When the mighty rushing wind filled the room, however, the dry bones became living witnesses who turned the world upside down. And the world has marveled ever since.



2 Acts 2:1

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

Pentecost was a celebration. Taking place in the early spring, fifty days after Passover, it celebrated the completion of the winter harvest.

Pentecost was a commemoration. As outlined in Leviticus 23, the Jews were to bring two loaves of bread as an offering representing the two stone tablets on which the Law was written.

Pentecost was an illustration. Three thousand people died the day the law was given (Exodus 32:28). But on the day the Spirit was given, three thousand were saved (Acts 2:41). Thus, the two loaves commemorating the tablets of stone came to illustrate Jew and Gentile coming together in one new organization called the church. Unlike most other sacrifices, these loaves had leaven in them, a picture of the sin that would exist in a church made up of sinners saved by grace.

Acts 2:2

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

The disciples were seated. They weren't rolling around, lying on the floor, or even kneeling in prayer. Sixty-dollar seminars teaching people how to hold their hands in order to experience the power of God, thereby merchandising the gospel. This ought not be! Are you waiting on the Lord? Are you hungering and thirsting for Him? You don't have to do something weird to get His attention, just be open to Him.

Acts 2:3

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

The audio came before the visual, the sound of the wind before the sight of the fire because the Word of the Lord always precedes the work of the Lord.

Man says, "If I can see it, I'll believe it."

God says, "Believe it, and then you'll see it."

Acts 2:4

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

While the wind and the fire are never seen again in the New Testament, speaking in tongues is seen repeatedly.

- In 1 Corinthians 14:18, Paul wrote, "I speak in tongues more than you all."
- In Acts 10, when Peter was in the house of Cornelius preaching the Word, he didn't even finish his message before the Holy Spirit came upon the believers and they started speaking in tongues (Acts 10:44).
- In Acts 19, Paul led the Ephesians into a knowledge of Jesus Christ, laid hands on them for the power of the Spirit, and they spoke in

tongues (Acts 19:1–6).

Although the word "tongues" conjures up wild images of a big tongue flapping up and down, all it means is "languages" or "dialects." The direction of tongues is to God (1 Corinthians 14:2). The purpose of tongues is to strengthen the inner man (1 Corinthians 14:4). The effect of tongues is to build our faith (Jude 20).

Praying in the Spirit is an invaluable weapon in the spiritual arsenal God has given us. However, I'll tell you the truth: Almost everyone I've ever talked with has discovered that when they began to pray in the Spirit with words they had never learned and sounds they had never uttered, they were immediately challenged by Satan's voice in their ears, saying, "That's bogus. That's gibberish. That's dumb." But this should not be surprising, for in every area of spiritual life, God declares, Satan denies, and we decide.

- God declared to Adam and Eve, "Eat of the fruit and you will die" (see Genesis 2:16, 17).
- "Did God *really* say that?" the serpent asked (see Genesis 3:1).
- And Eve decided to listen to Satan rather than to believe God.

I came to a point in my early twenties when I said, "I see in the Word, Lord, that You encourage the private devotional use of praying in the Spirit for faith to be edified. It's a tool available for me, and, Lord, I choose right now to move into that." Satan immediately challenged my decision, yet thirty years later, praying in the Spirit is still a wonderful part of my spiritual life. Is it the key? No. Am I on a tongues kick? Absolutely not.

"Let all things be done decently and in order," Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:40. The Pentecostal churches have the first part of that verse down pat: Let all things be done! The Baptist churches are experts on the second part: Decently and in order. I believe that the Lord wants us to experience *both* portions. Let all things be done, yes, but decently and in order.

Acts 2:5–7

And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the

multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?

Dispersed Jews from all nations had gathered together in the Holy City for the Feast of Pentecost. When they heard about what was happening in the Upper Room, they gathered together to see for themselves what was going on. As they heard praise, adoration, and worship in their native tongues, they were amazed.

Acts 2:8–11

And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

Are tongues always in a known language? In 1 Corinthians 13:1, Paul refers to the tongues of men and of angels. Because 1 Corinthians 12—14 deals specifically with the manifestations of the Spirit, I believe the implication is clear: When people praise and worship the Lord in tongues, it may very well be in a language unknown on earth but known in heaven, the dialect of angels. Thus, tongues can be known, or unknown; the language of men, or the language of angels.

I'll never forget a meeting I attended at the Lake Arrowhead Hilton in California where about one hundred believers had gathered together for a time of waiting upon the Lord. Since hotel rules dictated that the bar remain

open whenever the conference room was in use, the bartender stood in the back of the room polishing glasses while we studied, worshiped, and prayed. Toward the end of the meeting, a fellow stood up and gave a beautiful utterance in tongues. Because there was no interpretation, the brother overseeing the meeting wisely said, "We thank the Lord for that

utterance, but since there is not interpretation flowing here tonight, that will be our only public utterance of tongues."

When the meeting concluded, the bartender approached us, and with tears running down his cheeks, said, "I must talk to that man who stood up and prayed. How does he know my tongue? I'm Iranian, and he worshiped the True and Living God in perfect Farsi." Needless to say, the bartender got saved that night.

Acts 2:12, 13

And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

Whenever people start experiencing the dynamic of the Holy Spirit, there are those who say, "What meaneth this?" Others mockingly say, "They're full of new wine."

While David worshiped the Lord and danced before God with all his might in his underwear, his wife, Michal, watched from her window. When David walked in, she sarcastically said, "Didn't you look wonderful out there? That was real kingly."

"What I have done I have done as unto the Lord," David replied. "But, Michal, because you have mocked this, you will be barren all the days of your life" (see 2 Samuel 6:20–23).

So, too, the Michal in you and me will forever mock. "You're lifting your hands, isn't that great? You're praying in gibberish. Isn't that wonderful? Come on, now. Get real." There are born-again believers with the mentality of Michal who mock the things of the Spirit and call them demonic. I'm not saying they don't love the Lord. I'm not saying they're not born again. I am saying there's a "barren-ness" about them.

Acts 2:14 (a)

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice . . .

Peter, the giant of a fisherman who had cowered before a servant girl, now towers above the crowd. Why? One reason: He was empowered with the Spirit.

Acts 2:14(b), 15

. . . and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

"These are not drunk as you suppose," can have a couple of implications. It can mean, "These men are not drunk, as you're suggesting." Or it can mean, "These men are not drunk in the way that you think. They're drunk with a different wine, the new wine of the Holy Ghost, not distilled spirits, but the dynamic Spirit."

Acts 2:16 (a)

But this is that which was spoken . . .

When people have questions about things they see happening in ministry, in the Spirit, or in worship, like Peter, we should be able to answer, "This is that which is spoken of scripturally." I believe this is where many in the Pentecostal movement have greatly erred. When I ask about the scriptural basis for some of the things they do, I hear answers like this one given by a Pentecostal "superstar": "You have to realize more can be cooked up in the kitchen than appears on the menu. God is bigger than the Bible."

Not so. What makes for solid doctrine and good church practice are those occurrences or precedents we see in the Gospels which continue in Acts and are taught in the Epistles. Anything else throws the door wide open to New Age author and actress Shirley MacLaine and anyone else who claims to have had his or her own special encounter with God.

Acts 2:16 (b)

. . . by the prophet Joel.

Peter was an incredible expositor, quoting from the Psalms in Acts I and from Joel in Acts 2. The fisherman became a scholar by hanging out with Jesus. If you want to be one whom the Lord uses, be like Peter. Hang out with Jesus, and inevitably, you will get a firm grasp of the Word.

Acts 2:17

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

Joel prophesied that in the Last Days the Spirit would be poured out upon the young men and the old men, the young men seeing visions, the old men dreaming dreams (Joel 2:28).

Acts 2:18

And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

Who will prophesy? Servants and handmaidens. I have found that women often possess an especially blessed ministry of prophecy because of their sensitivity to the still, small voice of the Spirit.

Acts 2:19, 20

And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come.

Joel 2 speaks about the Day of the Lord, the day when the church is raptured and judgment comes down. Pentecost was not the fulfillment of Joel 2, but only a sneak preview of coming attractions. In many ways, what happened at Pentecost is being experienced to a much greater degree today in countries other than America. Why? Because who needs the gift of healing when we have Blue Cross and Excedrin PM? Who needs a word of wisdom or a word of knowledge when we have computers? I believe many of the blessings our

society enjoys medicinally and technologically have shut us off from what the Lord does elsewhere miraculously as a picture of what's to come prophetically.

Acts 2:21

And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

People are being exposed today to the name of the Lord in more ways than ever before—through billboards, T-shirts, books, bumper stickers, and Christian music. I believe this is because the Lord is already preparing the hearts of a whole bunch of our friends, relatives, and neighbors who, although they are presently closed to the gospel, will open their hearts in the incredible revival that will take place during the Tribulation period.

Acts 2:22 (a)

Ye men of Israel, hear these words . . .

Following Peter's quotation of Scripture, he explains Scripture.

Acts 2:22 (b)–24 (a)

Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death. . . .

In verse 22, Peter summed up the life of Jesus. In verse 23, he talked about the death of Jesus. In verse 24, he spoke of the Resurrection of Jesus. Thus, in less than thirty seconds, Peter encompassed Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection. That's good preaching!

In verse 23, we see the tension between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man when Peter said, "You crucified Him. But it was by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God."

"Wait a minute," you say. "If it was by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, it was God's will that it happened. How then could the Jews be indicted for the death of Jesus?" It beats me. It's an endless argument we pea brains cannot figure out. All I know is this: God is sovereign, yet man is responsible. God's will is worked out, yet man is held accountable. In the words of J. B. Phillips: If God was small enough for us to figure out, He wouldn't be big enough for us to worship.

Acts 2:24 (b)

. . . because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is death. Since Jesus never sinned, death could not hold Him. He died in place of you and me, He died for us personally, but death could not hold Him permanently. He rose again.

Acts 2:25 (a)

For David speaketh concerning him . . .

Here, Peter quotes yet another psalm, as he says, "David speaks concerning Him," or "in place of Him" (see Psalm 16:8–11).

Acts 2:25 (b)–28

. . . I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.

Put quotation marks around these verses, because although David is speaking prophetically, it's actually Jesus speaking personally, who, following His crucifixion, descended into hell (Ephesians 4:9, 10).

Acts 2:29, 30 (a)

Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet . . .

Although we always think of David as a king, he was also a prophet.

Acts 2:30 (b)–32

. . . and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

Since David's body did indeed see corruption when it became dust, he couldn't have been speaking about himself, but about the One who would succeed him—the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ.

Acts 2:33–35

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool.

David called his descendant his Lord. In Jewish culture, one would never call his offspring "Lord." "What is Peter implying?" his audience must have wondered. Peter's implication was simply this: Jesus, the Son of David, is more than merely a descendant of David. He is the Son of God.

Acts 2:36, 37 (a)

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart . . .

The Jews had heard amazing things through the utterance of tongues. They had seen Peter stand up boldly to preach powerfully and persuasively. They heard him use Scripture accurately and irrefutably. As a result, they were pricked in their hearts.

Acts 2:37 (b)

. . . and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

"What shall we do?" they asked. The same question had been asked of John in Luke 3, to which the Baptist had replied, "If you have two coats, give one away. If you collect taxes, do not collect more than his due. If you're a soldier, do no man unnecessary violence."

"Do, do, do" was John's message of preparation—but it's not the message of salvation. The message of salvation is not: "Do." It's: *"Done!"*

Acts 2:38

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

To repent simply means to change direction. "You once thought Jesus was a blasphemer, a heretic, a dangerous individual," said Peter. "Change your mind about who He is." Gang, the gospel is not based upon people cleaning up their lives or getting their acts together. The gospel is simply based upon a change of mind concerning Jesus Christ.

For many of you, Jesus was no more than a curse word. To others, He was a political revolutionary, a good teacher, or a wise man. But then you heard the Word, you saw the power, and you were pricked in your heart. You had no other recourse but to repent, no other choice but to admit He is the Christ, and you were saved.

Acts 2:39

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

There are those today who say the gift of the Holy Ghost is no longer available. I disagree. The promise of the Father is to you, your children, and to those who are afar off in coming generations and in other regions. Precious people, don't let anyone deny you the gift and empowering of the Holy Ghost. Don't let them say it's no longer applicable or no longer available. The promise of the Father experienced on the Day of Pentecost is available to you, to your children, and to those who are afar off, regardless of how far spiritually or geographically we might be.

Acts 2:40, 41 (a)

And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized . . .

I like that word "gladly." On one of my walks, I was reading the Scriptures and found myself placing a kiss upon my Bible as I felt my heart overflow with the goodness, the truth, the practicality, the encouragement, and the reality of the Word.

Acts 2:41 (b)

. . . and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

When the law came down, three thousand men died (Exodus 32:28). When the Spirit came down, three thousand souls were saved. The law kills. Move into a legalistic Christianity, and you will reek of death. But allow the Spirit to come upon you, and life will flow from you.

Acts 2:42

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

The early church taught the Word, shared in fellowship, broke bread in Communion, and prayed.



***For topical study of Acts 2:42 entitled "The Church: Keeping It Simple," turn to page* 626.**

Acts 2:43–45

And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

College professors in the '60s and '70s who used this verse to say that the early church was Communist missed the "Marx" completely. The early believers were not Communists. They were "commonists." And there's a big difference. Communism says: What's yours is mine. "Com-monism" says: What's mine is yours.

The story is told that a number of years ago in London's Hyde Park, where free speech is the order of the day, a Communist took the podium, pointed to an impoverished elderly gentleman in the crowd, and said, "When the Communists are in charge, they will put a new suit on that old man!"

A pastor in the audience responded, "When Christ is in charge, He'll put a new man in that old suit."

Political systems claim to have the ability to put a new suit on an old man. But Jesus Christ truly puts a new man in the old suit by changing people from the inside out.

If you were around in the '60s and '70s, you might remember the many communal-type ministries that sprang up on the West Coast. Where are they now? Why didn't they work? I suggest they failed in their attempt to duplicate what happened in Acts 2 because there was no inherent reason for them to do so. On the Day of Pentecost, three thousand folks were saved in one day—three thousand people who had come from all over the world to celebrate Pentecost. Following their conversion, they sensed the need to remain in Jerusalem in order that they might be grounded in their newfound faith. But what were they to do? Jump on a 747, fly home, get their stuff, and come back?

You see, the early church didn't arbitrarily say, "Wow! Here's a groovy idea: Let's live communally!" No, the believers in Jerusalem pooled whatever resources they had for the express purpose of allowing the new believers to remain in Jerusalem rather than having to return to the lands from which they came.

I suggest to you that we may very well see Christians living communally again, but it won't happen because someone says, "Here's a neat idea . . . ." If persecution were to fall upon this country, which it may; if the economy were to collapse, which it might; if things really get tough, which they could, you'll be amazed how quickly and how beautifully the church will come together communally. But until then, it's artificial.

Acts 2:46

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

They met together daily in the temple and spontaneously in one another's homes.

Acts 2:47

Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Programs and evangelistic techniques didn't add to the church. The *Lord* added to the church.

THE CHURCH: KEEPING IT SIMPLE

A Topical Study of ACTS 2:42

Some things are hard for me to understand—like the recent case of a mugger who won a court settlement of nearly twenty-five thousand dollars for injuries suffered when a cab driver chased him down and pinned him against a wall until police arrived. The criminal took the hero to court, and the criminal won. Fifty years ago, such a judgment would never have been rendered. As a society, we seem to have set aside our moral compass, if we have not put it away all together.

Consequently, many people long for simpler days and simpler ways, not only judicially, but technologically. If you were in high school or college during the '70s, you may remember reading Alvin Toffler's book, *Future Shock,* which predicted that by the early '90s, technology would be so advanced that the average American would work less than twenty hours per week, yet make twice as much as he did in the '70s. Toffler was wrong, for the truth is, although we are more technologically advanced than ever, we are also more frazzled and frayed.

Economically, things don't look much better. As of September 25, 2002, our country was over $6.2 trillion in debt.[1] "That may be so," you say, "but I'm doing okay. I'm living as well as my parents did when I grew up." If you're living as well as your parents did, it's probably because both you and your wife work. And, should the Lord tarry, by the time our fourteen-year-olds reach twenty-one, it will take five incomes to live as well as you do now.

No wonder we long for simpler days and simpler ways judicially, technologically, economically, and even ecclesiastically. Acts tells us that the early church turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). Our text tells us they did so by steadfastly continuing in four simple pursuits. . . .

1. The Apostles' Doctrine

The early church didn't just dabble in the Word, folks. They devoured it. Joshua 1:8 says, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."

How can you be successful and prosperous? By being steadfastly committed to the Word of God. A Bible that's falling apart usually belongs to a person who isn't. If you're wearing out your Bible because you're continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, you will be prosperous and successful. That's a promise.

2. Fellowship

The Greek word for "fellowship" is *koinonia,* which means "communion," or "communication." *Koinonia* is people sharing with one another the things of the kingdom and the things of God. Unfortunately, the richness of *koinonia* has been reduced to a lightweight frivolity in so many churches today, where a time of fellowship is usually synonymous with nothing more than a time of cookies and punch.

"I don't need *koinonia,*" you say. "I've been a Christian for fourteen years. I'm as strong and tall as a redwood tree." Really? Think about the redwood tree: Redwood trees appear invincible, but in reality, a relatively mild wind can topple one. You see, above the surface, redwoods seem strong, but their root systems are very, very shallow. That is why they always grow in groves. Their strength comes from interlocking their roots with other redwoods.

Exodus 36 paints a wonderful picture of this principle. As the tabernacle, which speaks of the body of Christ, was being constructed, God gave these instructions: The length of a board was to be ten cubits, and the breadth of a board one cubit and a half (Exodus 36:21). Now, if you study Biblical numerology, you know that one and a half is an imbalanced number. Only when the boards were joined *together* would they form the perfect number of balance and stability, the number of the Trinity—the number three. Thus, through the picture of the tabernacle, the Lord declared, "There needs to be a linkage, a bonding within My people, without which they will be imbalanced."

The picture continues: "And he made bars of shittim wood; five for the boards of the one side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the boards of the other side . . ." (Exodus 36:31, 32). Individual boards were paired together. The pairs were then held in congruency and kept straight by five bars. What are the five bars? I believe Ephesians 4:11 tells us: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." You see, it's not enough for you and me to be linked individually. We need the following "five bars" to bind us together in congruency and harmony.

A. Apostles —Apostles have a governing ministry. As seen in Romans 16:7, the Holy Spirit appoints apostles, "sent out ones," to establish and oversee ministry within the Church.

B. Prophets —Prophets have a guiding ministry. They speak the heart of God and reveal the mind of God. We see them throughout the Book of Acts, as they guide the church, saying, "You need to move in this direction," or "Watch out as you head off in that direction."

C. Evangelists —Evangelists have a gathering ministry as they invite people to follow Jesus. I'll never forget the first time I heard one of my colleagues preach. As I listened to him, I thought, *Oh, no! He's butchering the text.* But it was when he gave an invitation and over three hundred college students came forward that I understood the gift of evangelism.

D. Pastors —Pastors have a guarding ministry. Although some pastors are teachers, a pastor isn't by definition a teacher. A pastor is one who cares for people, watches out for people, and prays on behalf of people.

E. Teachers —Teachers have a grounding ministry. They love to explain the Scriptures and set folks on a firm foundation in the Word of God. We need the entire church, saints. It's not enough to have a special brother or an intimate little group, for it is through apostles governing, prophets guiding, evangelists gathering, pastors guarding, and teachers grounding that there is stability in the church.

3. Breaking of Bread

The breaking of bread speaks of Communion. Communion is vital to the health of the church corporately and to believers individually. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth that, because they took Communion lightly, many of them were weak, sick, and even dying unnecessarily (1 Corinthians 11:30). Whenever we fail to give worth to the Lord's table, I believe we jeopardize not only our spiritual life, but our physical, marital, and emotional life as well (see 1 Corinthians 11:29, 30 notes for further commentary).

4. Prayer

"Prayer?" you say. "I don't need to go to church to pray. I can pray by myself." Yes, you can pray by yourself. In fact, Scripture commands us to do so (Matthew 6:6). However, Jesus also spoke of a dynamic that takes place uniquely when we pray corporately (Matthew 18:19, 20).

> Years ago, my four-year-old son, Benjamin, came to me, saying, "Daddy, can you please take me to the park?"
>
> "I'd like to, son," I said, "but I'm kind of busy."
>
> Two minutes later, Mary, then five years old, appeared on the scene. "Daddy, *please* can we go to the park?"
>
> There we were: Mary was batting her eyes, Benny was hopping up and down, the two were in agreement—and my resistance was breaking down rapidly when Tammy, my bride, walked in, saying, "Let's go to the park, honey."
>
> We went to the park.

So, too, when we as God's children come to Him together, saying, "Father, this is our desire, this is our prayer," He delights in our request. I'm not suggesting that we can manipulate or pressure God by "ganging up" on Him. I am saying that He enjoys and responds to our corporate requests in a unique way.

The early church devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, Communion, and prayer. And they did so *steadfastly.* Unfortunately, steadfastness is not characteristic of much of the church today. Many believers reflect the attitude of the following letter, purportedly written by a faithful church member. . . .

> Dear Pastor,
>
> You often stress the importance of attendance at worship. But I think a person has a right to miss now and then. I think every person ought to be excused for the following reasons and the number of times indicated: Christmas (1) Death in the family (3) Anniversary (1) New Years (1) Easter (1) Last day of school (1) July 4th (1) Labor Day (1) First day of school (1) Sleeping late (4) Memorial Day (1) Family reunions (2)

Anniversary (1) Sickness (5) Vacation (3) Business trips (3) Unexpected company (4) Bad weather (6) Time changes (2) TV specials (3) Ball games (5). But you can count on us to be in church on the fourth Sunday of February and the third Sunday in August—unless it's Leap Year, or we're otherwise providentially hindered.

Why should we steadfastly continue in the Word, Communion, fellowship, and prayer? Look at three other places Luke uses the word "steadfastly."

1. Steadfast Because of the *People* We're With

In Acts 6, Stephen was about to be stoned. After the elders had challenged him and were ready to sentence him to death, "All that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15).

How can you, like Stephen, have the face of an angel? Ask Moses. . . .

Moses was in the presence of God for forty days on the mountain. So blessed was he, so full and satisfied, he forgot to eat (Exodus 34:28). And when he came down, his face glowed. Steadfastly spend time with God, and like Moses and Stephen, your face will glow with the peace and joy of His presence.

2. Steadfast Because of the *Place* We're Going

In Acts 7, we read that before Stephen died, "He, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). Stephen saw heaven, and that was all that mattered.

Gang, in heaven it won't matter how shiny my car was or how many hobbies I had. The only thing that will matter will be what I did for Christ. Therefore, I am a fool of immense proportion if I prioritize anything but the kingdom.

3. Steadfast Because of the *Price* that Was Paid

"And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). Jesus set His face steadfastly to die with *me* on His mind.

What if Jesus had done what I so often do? If He had said, "I *think* I'm going to Jerusalem," or "I'd *like* to go to Jerusalem," or "I *hope* to go to Jerusalem," I would fry in hell.

Instead, Jesus said, "I have a job to do, and nothing is going to stop Me. I *steadfastly* set My face to Jerusalem"—and our salvation was the result. May the Lord keep our ministry simple as we *steadfastly* continue in the Word, Communion, fellowship, and prayer.

"But what about our singles?" you ask. "We have to have ice cream socials and singles' activities."

Do we?

"Yeah. How else will they meet one another?"

Listen gang, the church was never intended to figure out peoples' social activities. Ask Isaac. . . .

> *And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel.*
>
> Genesis 24:63

Did Isaac meet Rebekah through a Christian dating service? No. Through an ice cream social? No. Isaac was simply meditating in his field—enjoying God, thinking about the Word, walking with the Lord—when at the perfect moment, he saw camels in the distance.

"Well, what about our youth? We have to have something for our high-schoolers." Do we? If we try to entertain our kids into Christianity, we're missing New Testament church life. The world can out-fun us, out-entertain us, and out-slick us every time because whenever Christians try to copy what the world does, they never do it as well.

But I'll tell you what we can do with our kids: We can love them and give them truth like the world never can. And so we have two hundred high-

schoolers gathering together at the youth center to study the Scriptures, sing praise, offer prayer, and share in *koinonia.*

It's so simple. Precious people, we must continue steadfastly to keep a simple perspective, because the tendency of ministry, just like government, is to get bigger and more complicated. And it ought never to be.

May our churches be oases where we come together to continue steadfastly in the power and simplicity of the Word, Communion, fellowship, and prayer.

In Jesus' Name.



3 Acts 3:1

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, be ing the ninth hour.

Peter and John were men of consistency. Like all devout Jews, according to the Jewish custom of the day, every day at 9:00 A.M., noon, and 3:00 P.M., they stopped what they were doing and headed to the temple, where they spent an hour in prayer. This time consisted of fifteen minutes of silent meditation, thirty minutes of petition, and fifteen minutes of adoration—which, by the way, I think is a neat pattern for prayer. Meditate on the greatness and goodness of God, and you will be confident in bringing your requests *to* Him. When you realize that even your biggest concerns are no problem *for* Him, your heart will overflow in worship *toward* Him.

Acts 3:2–4 (a)

And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John . . .

Peter and John were men of sensitivity. As the lame man called out to them, they found their eyes "fastened" on him. *We've passed this guy hundreds of*

times before, they must have thought, *but at this moment something unique is happening.*

Acts 3:4 (b)
. . . said, Look on us.

Peter and John were men of flexibility. When they saw this man, they could have said, "We don't have time for him. We have to start the temple prayer meeting in just a few minutes." But they realized what we all must learn: Interruption is often divine inspiration. For some of us, life is one bother after another. I have found that when I start a day, saying, "Nobody better bother me," I find myself getting bothered at every turn. But if I expect to be bothered and remain flexible, I allow the Lord room to work in moments of the miraculous.

Acts 3:5
And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

It's interesting to me that even unbelievers understand that because Jesus Christ cared about hurting sinners, so should His body. Like the lame man, the hurting people in our culture know intuitively that the one group of people most likely to help them is the Christian community. Unfortunately, many times the world understands this better than even the Church does.

Acts 3:6 (a)
Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none . . .

"Silver and gold have I none." That's a far cry from the "Name It And Claim It /Prosperity/ Seed Faith" mentality of today.

The story is told that the pope was counting the silver and gold coins in his coffers one day when Thomas Aquinas walked in. "Greetings, Thomas," he said as he gleefully held up some coins for Thomas to see. "We can no longer say, silver and gold have we none, now can we?"

Thomas looked at the pope and said, "And neither can we say, "In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

Throughout history, whenever the church has traded purity for prosperity, she has lost power.

Acts 3:6 (b)

. . . but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

Peter and John were men of authority. Having the power of the Spirit upon their lives, they were given the green light by the Spirit to proceed in the arena of the miraculous.

Acts 3:7

And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

The original Greek text seems to indicate that this man's ankles were congenitally and permanently dislocated.

Acts 3:8–11

And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

Peter and John were men of humility. I believe the moment of greatest potential peril for Peter was when he took the lame man by the hand and lifted him to his feet. How easy it would have been for Peter to say, "Hey, look what just happened! I had this surge of faith and power and I grabbed this man, and he's now walking and leaping. This calls for the birth of a new ministry: THE APOSTLE PETER HEALING MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL. I hope we got a picture of this. I can put it on my prayer calendar. I can take this guy on tour!" In the next verse, however, we see Peter do exactly the opposite.

For topical study of Acts 3:1–11 entitled "Helping the Hurting," turn to page **635.**

Acts 3:12

And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

At this very crucial moment when Peter could have been shelved from ministry, what did he do? He said, "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? You know your history, how God parted the Red Sea, provided manna from heaven, used a slingshot to kill a giant. Our God is the God of the miraculous. Why, then, are you surprised that He healed a lame man?"

Whenever God uses people in any way, there will be those who will look to them and say, "You're special. You're anointed. My goodness, you're spiritual." Watch out! Be careful. It is the base part of our nature that wants people to assume we're deeper than we really are, think we're special, and know our name.

Go into a crowded room where nine or ten conversations are taking place simultaneously, and no matter whom you're talking with, if someone speaks your name, you'll pick it up because each person's ears are tuned to the sound of his own name. Salesmen know this. That's why the first thing they do is ask your name. Industry understands this. That's why they monogram shirts, imprint pencils, and personalize coffee mugs. People are stuck on themselves! They want to see their name in print or hear their name on people's lips.

But what does God say?

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

If you're a musician or a Sunday-school teacher, a writer or a singer, a pastor or a worship leader, know this: The quickest way to be taken out of ministry is to say, "I want my name exalted." I know a number of men and

women who were at one time greatly used by the Lord but are now on the shelf gathering dust because they wanted the glory—or even just a portion of it.

Acts 3:13 (a)

The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus . . .

Peter wisely and immediately took the spotlight off himself and pointed it at Jesus, for it is at His Name that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess (Philippians 2:10). Before leaving this vignette, I would like to consider one other aspect: Not only do Peter and John provide principles *for* us, but the lame man is a picture *of* us.

You see, like the crippled man, we too were lame from birth. Adam, our father in the flesh, fell. And so great was his fall that all of his descendants were born lame. Unable to walk with God, or after the things of God, we sat outside the temple—alienated from God because of our sin—and begged enough silver or gold to get us by for one more day. Maybe we weren't bitter about life, but every one of us realized our handicap to some extent.

And then something happened.

Through a brother or sister, a church or a fellowship, perhaps when we least expected it, Jesus grabbed us by the hand and said, "Stand up and walk. I'm calling you into the kingdom. I'm taking you to heaven." Thus, it is no wonder that like the crippled man, we not only walk, but we leap and praise God for His goodness and grace to us lamebrains.

Acts 3:13 (b)–15

. . . whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.

"You killed the Prince of Life," Peter declared. "You murdered the One who came to *give* life to you and *be* life for you."

Acts 3:16

And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

"The faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness." Not only did the healing itself come from God, but even the faith to believe came from Him—which is why I thoroughly reject the implication that people are sick because they don't have enough faith to be made well. I would say to the preachers and faith healers who propound such an idea, "Why isn't *your* faith kicking in?" In this example it wasn't the lame man's faith that figured into the equation at all; he was just begging for bucks. It was the faith given by God to Peter and John that healed him.

Acts 3:17

And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.

I like Peter's tact here. He said, "What you did, you did through ignorance." He left the door open for his audience to repent. Sometimes I think we press our point so hard that we win the argument, but lose the soul.

Acts 3:18

But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

Even though Peter allowed that they acted ignorantly, he also insisted that Christ's death was not accidental. It wasn't a massive mistake. It was part of a prophetic plan.

Acts 3:19 (a)

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out . . .

"Repent," said Peter. "You looked at Jesus as One worthy of death. Change your mind concerning Him and see He is the Prince of Life. Your ignorance nailed Him to the tree. Now repent and bow your knee."

Peter is not saying, "Get your life together." He's saying, "Change your mind."

At one time, you may have said, "Christianity is a crutch for weak people." Then you changed your mind and realized Christianity is a crutch, but it is also a wheelchair, a hospital bed, a surgical team, and an ambulance! It's everything we need because we have been run over and wiped out by the dump truck of sin.

"I'm a sinner," you said, "and He died for me. I'm sick, and He came to heal me. I'm weak, and He wants to be strong through me." It's no longer: I'm okay, you're okay. It's: He's okay, and I'm a mess.

Acts 3:19 (b)

. . . when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.

"The times of refreshing" have a prophetic meaning spoken of in Deuteronomy 30, Joel 2, and Zechariah 12, as they speak of the time when Jesus returns. But they also speak to you and me personally.

We can be refreshed presently whenever we repent of how we used to think and turn toward Him.



***For topical study of Acts 3:19 entitled "Our Relationship with His Spirit," turn to page* 639.**

Acts 3:20, 21

And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

There are those who say "the restitution of all things" spoken of here means that every person will one day be saved—including demons and even Satan. The problem with that interpretation is that Jesus didn't teach it. In Matthew 25:41, He spoke clearly of sending some into everlasting fire. The word "everlasting" is the Greek word *aionios,* which is the same word used in John

3:16. Therefore, whoever says that the fire in Matthew 25 is not really everlasting—that people will only burn for a while until they're purged (i.e., purgatory), or until the restitution of all things—must also say that the everlasting life God promised in John 3:16 is equally transitory.

"The restitution of all things" refers not to the condition of the soul, but to the people of Israel. Israel shall be restored (see Romans 9—11). She will one day acknowledge Jesus as Lord because the promises and covenants of the Old Testament toward the Jewish people are unconditional. They will be fulfilled.

> Perhaps because Karl Marx was himself a Jew, many Jewish young people and intellectuals have been fascinated by and drawn toward Marxism since the founding of the modern state of Israel in 1948. Consequently, the kibbutzim were perhaps the purest form of true Marxism on the face of the earth. But since the collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union, thousands of Russian Jews have returned to Israel, bringing with them stories about where Communism actually leads. Because of this, the kibbutzim have experienced a whole-scale turning from Communism and a turning toward traditional Judaism. As a result, there is now a massive move by many of the kibbutzniks to explore traditional Judaism once again. In many kibbutzim, the Sabbath and traditional hours of prayer are kept, the Shema is recited, and the Torah is studied. To those who understand Israeli society, this movement is just as remarkable and impacting as the demise of Communism in Russia, or the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in Germany.

I personally think this sudden interest in Judaism is preparatory for the Jews to at last recognize their Messiah (Zechariah 13:9). God is not through with Israel, folks—not by a long shot.

> **Acts 3:22–26**
>
> **For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets,**

and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

A street preacher with an incredible handle on the Word, Peter quotes here from Genesis, Deuteronomy, and 1 Samuel to those who had gathered on the porch of the temple. If you want to be used by the Lord, learn the Word. The study of Scripture is a lifelong discipline and an eternal delight. It's pleasurable. It's fascinating. It's stimulating. Take notes. Write in the margins of your Bible. Do whatever it takes to help you remember and become thoroughly familiar with the Scriptures. If you do, not only will your heart be filled and your mind enlightened, but like Peter, you will be used by the Lord time after time.

HELPING THE HURTING

A Topical Study of ACTS 3:1–11

You've seen homeless people on the freeway exits and entrances holding cardboard signs, asking for work or food. You've seen them pushing their shopping carts downtown.

> You've seen them, and perhaps your heart has gone out to them, to those who are homeless and hurting, to those who beg for change and cry for help.
>
> You've seen them, and perhaps your heart has been angry with them. Those lame people. Didn't they see the "Help Wanted" sign at Burger King? Why don't they get a job?
>
> You've seen them, and perhaps your heart goes out to them one moment, and is angry with them the next.

I believe this passage in Acts sheds light on how we are to respond to the hurting people around us.

> During World War II, a church in France was bombed by the Luftwaffe. When the war concluded, the people in the community cleared away the rubble and found a statue of Jesus, the base of which was inscribed with these words: Come unto Me, all ye that are weary. It was remarkably preserved except for both hands, which had been destroyed. Hearing of this, the sculptor whose work it was immediately offered to replace the hands. But the pastor wisely declined. And so it was that the statue was returned to its original position in front of the church, but with a new inscription that read: He has no hands on earth but ours, for we are His body.

It's true; we are the body of Christ. If Jesus is going to reach out and touch a lame person—a beggar, a hurting individual—it will be through our hands. He will use us. In our text, I see three key components that will help us deal with the hurting folks around us.

Sensitive Hearts

No doubt Peter and John had glanced at the lame man many times, but this particular day something took place deep within their hearts that drew them to him. It was a moment of the miraculous. It was a time for ministry.

The same is true for you and me. When you drive by the fellow who is asking for help, and you know it is not merely general cultural guilt being imposed upon you, but a spiritual dynamic taking place deep within you, you have a choice to make. You can say, "Wait a minute. The Lord is doing something here." Or you can look away, adjust your radio, and drive on.

Now, understand this: As the lame man sat in the Gate Beautiful, Jesus Himself probably walked past him a number of times. This tells me that Jesus didn't minister according to need, but according to obedience. We see an example of this in John 5. . . .

A whole lot of hurting people were lying by the Pool of Bethesda, each one hoping to be the first in the pool when the water stirred, for the first one in would be healed. Jesus went in the back way, found the man farthest from the edge of the pool, and healed him (John 5:2–9).

If I had been Jesus, I would not have come in the back door and talked to one man at the rear. I would have gone to the front, looked at everyone, and said, "Everyone stand up! You're *all* healed!" Why didn't Jesus do that?

I suggest it is because He didn't minister according to the needs He saw, but according to the directive of His Father, who said, "There's one person I want You to touch at the Pool of Bethesda today." I believe that's why Jesus was so at peace in Himself and why tranquility radiated from Him. Although Jesus was accused of being a glutton, a winebibber, and a friend of sinners, He was never accused of being busy or frazzled. He didn't act according to the needs He saw. He acted in obedience to what His Father said.

So, too, when we do what He tells us to do, we won't be weighed down or stressed out because His burden is easy and His load is light (Matthew 11:28–30). He won't overwhelm us with the needs we see; rather He'll direct us specifically.

"You have a ten-dollar bill in your pocket; give it to that person," or
"Give some of your time to that man who needs to hear about Me."

Listen to the voice of the Spirit, and like Jesus, you will respond not out of compulsion, but out of compassion.

Discerning Minds

"Give me some money," the lame man said.

"Silver and gold have we none," answered Peter and John.

Really? Hadn't at least three thousand believers sold their goods and pooled their money? Peter and John must have had access to a lot of money. Were they lying? No. I believe this is what Peter and John were saying when they said they had neither silver nor gold: "For *you,* sir, silver and gold have we none because your need is not for a coin or two, or ten, or twenty. Your need is more profound. You need to be healed."

Impacting Words

As Peter grabbed the lame man by the hand, saying, "In the Name of Jesus, stand up and walk," I wonder if at that moment he thought, *What if nothing happens? Here I am, the leader of the Church. What if I say, "In the Name of Jesus, walk"—and he falls down? It's not going to look good on my application for pope.*

But Peter's words were impacting. He told the lame man to walk, and the lame man did just that. Why? I suggest three reasons. . . .

Peter and John Were Men of Preparation

Where were Peter and John when this event took place? They were on their way to the temple for prayer, as was their custom.

Often we're confronted with an opportunity to touch someone in order that he might take steps physically or spiritually, but because we have not built up a history of prayer, we are impotent and miss the moment of the miraculous. In Matthew 17, we see the disciples in this position. . . .

> The disciples asked Jesus why they were powerless to cast a demon out of a boy brought to them for healing. Jesus answered, "This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."
>
> The disciples probably scratched their heads and thought, "How were *we* to know that a demonized boy would be brought into our presence? We didn't have *time* to fast."
>
> And perhaps with a smile on His face, Jesus may have said, "That's the point. You can't wait to begin fasting until it's time to minister. You need to live a *life* of prayer and fasting."

You see, when the moment of the miraculous opens before you, it's too late to say, "Boy, I had better get my faith together." Unless there has been a backlog of prayer and the Word, of fasting and seeking, it will be too late. Perhaps you've seen a lame man. Your eyes became fastened to him, and you knew it was an opportunity to share, but you felt impotent and powerless. Was it because you were not a person of preparation?

Precious people, be in a place where you are constantly being prepared, because you don't know what's coming an hour, a week, a month, or a year down the road.

> You don't know when your colleagues at work are going to say, "I need something from you," even as this lame man did.
>
> You don't know when your neighbors are going to come to you crying and brokenhearted.
>
> You don't know when your kids are going to need you to minister powerfully in the Spirit.

I don’t know when those moments will be, but I do know this: Like the disciples, we’re powerless unless we’ve been prepared.

Peter and John Were Men of Impartation

Peter and John had been filled with the Holy Spirit.

You can look at the lame people with whom you work, the homeless who come your way, the hurting folks who surround you every day; but unless you are filled with the Spirit, you will have neither impacting words nor a healing touch. Jesus said to His disciples, "Go to Jerusalem. Wait for the promise of the Father for you shall receive power when the Holy Ghost comes upon you. And *then* you will be My witnesses" (see Acts 1:8). How thankful I am to be linked to a body of believers—where so many hunger and thirst for more of the Lord, for more of His Spirit.

Peter and John Were Men of Authorization

In addition to the power of the Spirit upon our lives, we need authority—the okay, the green light—for a miracle to happen.

You might drive a Corvette with a four-hundred-cubic-foot engine under the hood. When you drive, the ground shakes, people stare, and men drool. You've got power. But when you come to a red light, it doesn't matter how big your engine is or how much power you have—you've got to stop. So, too, many of you have been empowered by the Spirit. The ground may shake and rattle all about you, and that's terrific. But until the Lord turns the light green, until He says, "Now is the time to deal with that man, or give to that person," you can rev your engine all you want, but you won't make any progress.

On the other hand, you might drive a car like my Volkswagen Beetle: Even though the light may be green, there's no power when you hit the accelerator. You see, to cross the intersection of the supernatural, we need power *and* authority; and when those two points come together at a given moment, the result is a miracle.

In the tiny compartment of a passenger train sat a young lieutenant in uniform. Next to him sat his commanding officer, a crusty old general. Across from him sat a beautiful young lady. Next to her was her grandmother. As the hours passed, an attraction developed between the young lieutenant and the young lady. They were laughing and talking and enjoying the trip when suddenly the train went through a long dark tunnel. Midway through the darkness, the sound of a kiss was followed by the smack of a slap.

As the train emerged from the tunnel, the four travelers looked at one another with a variety of expressions. The young lady was delighted that the lieutenant would kiss her at that moment, but puzzled as to why her grandmother would slap him. The grandmother was angry that the lieutenant had the audacity to kiss her granddaughter, but grateful to the general who slapped the young man in line. The general was proud of his lieutenant for kissing the young lady, but confused and smarting from the slap of the young girl. The lieutenant was hardly able to contain the laughter within him, as he alone knew what had actually transpired in the tunnel. Under the cover of darkness, he had seized the moment to kiss the girl and smack the general.

Seize the moment, folks! Watch for the moment of the miraculous when the Lord will use you in this dark tunnel of time to slap the Enemy in the face, as you heal a hurting world.

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS SPIRIT

A Topical Study of ACTS 3:19

All Jerusalem was abuzz. Tens of thousands of Jews from all over the world had congregated in the Holy City to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, just as they had done annually for centuries.

But this Pentecost was different.

There were rumors that there was a group of Christians, followers of the radical Rabbi from Galilee, huddled together in an upper room, praising and worshiping God in different languages. The Jews on the street below, recognizing the various mother tongues of their homelands, were amazed. Some said, "What does this mean?" Others mockingly said, "These guys are drunk."

Hearing their accusations, Peter declared, "These men are not drunk as you suggest. This is the fulfillment of Joel 2, which speaks of an outpouring of the Spirit." Many, hearing the preaching of Peter, responded to what he shared and to what they saw—and three thousand were saved that day.

Acts 2 goes on to say that the new believers lived together in great hilarity, with gladness of heart, sharing all of their possessions communally. They were immersed in the teaching of the Word, they loved each other intensely, and the whole city looked upon them and found favor with them.

Then in chapter 3, after Peter and John were used by God to heal the lame man, the people began to congregate on Solomon's porch to see for themselves the man who walked and leapt and praised God. Peter realized he had an opportunity to preach again—so he did. The thesis of his message is found in our text: "Repent and be converted, that your sins might be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come."

"The times of refreshing" spoke to Israel nationally. For centuries, the prophets had spoken of a time of refreshing when the kingdom would be established in Israel—a time when the wolf would lie down with the lamb, when there would be prosperity, and when men would study war no more. "The kingdom is coming," Peter said to the Jewish people nationally. "Repent. You rejected the Messiah. You crucified Jesus Christ, but He is the King. You nailed

Him, but He is Messiah. Now repent, turn around, and you will see the times of refreshing which are to come."

I suggest that the times of refreshing spoke not only to Peter's audience nationally, but to each one of them individually. "If you will individually give your heart to this One, Jesus Christ," Peter said, "you will have a time of refreshing, knowing that your sin is forgiven."

Not only nationally and individually, I suggest to you "the times of refreshing" speak to you and to me personally. You might be saying, "I read about the power of the Holy Spirit and the love of the saints. I see the miracles happening and the boldness emanating from the disciples. Wow! How wonderful. But even though I read about the power of the Spirit on the pages of the Bible, I'm dry as a bone. I read about it. I believe in it. But I am not personally experiencing the times of refreshing."

I've got news for you, dear saint: The Holy Spirit is the agent of the times of refreshing. Water is a symbol, or type, of the Spirit throughout the Scriptures. "The times of refreshing," "the latter rain," "the overflow" all relate to the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit—not just for Israel eschatologically, not just for Peter's audience historically, but for you and me presently. If you're dry, listen carefully: "Times of refreshing" are what the Lord desires for you today. This is the day of refreshment.

Jesus said, "If any man thirst, let Him come unto Me and drink. And out of his innermost being shall gush forth torrents of living water. This spake He of the Holy Ghost" (see John 7:37–39). Now, as we have seen and experienced, Scripture clearly presents three relationships a person can have with the Holy Ghost.

The Spirit *with* You

In John 14:17, Jesus said, “The Spirit is with you, but he shall be in you.” The first relationship you can have with the Holy Spirit is when He is with you. The Spirit was with you before you became a Christian, telling you to get saved.

Blaspheming the Spirit

There is a negative counterpart to this first relationship.

In Genesis 6:3, God says, "My spirit shall not always strive with man."

In Acts 7:51, Stephen, talking to people who were not responding to the Word, said, "You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and in ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye."

Jesus said, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men" (Matthew 12:31).

In other words, the Spirit is with you, but He won't always be there. If you continually say, "I'm not interested in becoming a believer," there will come a point when the Spirit is blasphemed. He will no longer be with you. You see, the Holy Spirit is a perfect gentleman. He will woo you. He will invite you. He will draw you. But He will not force Himself on you.

The Spirit *in* You

You can have a second relationship with the Spirit. Jesus said, "The Spirit is with you, but he shall be in you" (see John 14:17).

When does the Spirit come in you? When you open your heart and say, "Jesus, be my Lord," you are sealed with the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). He comes into your life.

When did this happen to the disciples? It couldn't have happened in John 14 because Jesus had not yet died for their sins. But in John 20, after Jesus had died and risen from the dead, He met again with His disciples and breathed on them, saying, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." At that point the Holy Spirit was in them. They were born again.

Grieving the Spirit

Just as there is a negative response to the "with" ministry of the Spirit, there is a negative response to the "in" ministry of the Spirit. Paul writes: "Grieve not the holy Spirit whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

You can grieve the Spirit. He is not a force. He is not a power. He's a Person. Once He has come into your heart, He will never leave you, but He can be grieved greatly. How? Ephesians 4 tells us we are to put away lying, that we are to steal no more, that we are not to let corrupt communication come out of our mouths, that we are not to be bitter or full of wrath or anger or evil speaking. Those things will grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:25–31).

What happens when the Spirit is grieved? Ask David . . .

> David, who should have been fighting with his army against the enemies of Israel, one day found himself relaxing on the rooftop of his house. Looking down, he saw a woman taking a bath, whose name, appropriately, was Bathsheba. Feeling attracted to her, David called for her. Adultery was committed, and Bathsheba conceived. To cover his tracks, David ordered her husband back from battle, saying, "Hey, Uriah, spend some time with your wife. You've been fighting hard, you've earned some time off." But Uriah didn't go to his house. How could he be with his wife when his brothers were dying in battle? He slept on the steps of the palace.
>
> David knew he was in trouble; his plan wasn't working. Then he had another idea. "I'll send a message to my general Joab. All the forces will rush against the enemy, and on a certain signal they'll all retreat, all except Uriah." Thus, Uriah died in battle, murdered by the diabolical plan of David (2 Samuel 11).

I got away with it! thought David. But something happened inside him because the Spirit was grieved, as seen in the psalm he wrote in the course of the following year.

> *O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth*

me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me.

Psalm 38:1–4

"I'm a mess," David said. "My skin shows it. My bones ache. I'm over my head in sin."

My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh.

Psalm 38:5–7

"I stink. There's an odor that emanates from me." Perhaps David was speaking spiritually. But perhaps he was speaking physically, for you see, most Bible scholars believe that the "loathsome disease in his loins" speaks of a sexually transmitted disease that resulted from his affair with Bathsheba.

My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me. . . . For I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me.

Psalm 38:10, 17

"I am feeble; I'm broken. The sparkle is gone from my eye; the spring is no longer in my step; I'm ready to give up."

For a year, David went through an unbelievably dry time. He had grieved the Spirit, and the result took its toll physically and emotionally, as well as spiritually. And I would bet there are people who have, for the past year or longer, been going through a very dry season as well. The times of refreshment, the latter rain, the torrents of living water are not happening in your life as they once were. There is no longer the outpouring, the bubbling of the Holy Ghost within your heart.

It could very well be because you have grieved the Spirit. You haven't dealt with the sin you know the Lord has put His finger on. You find yourself getting

dry—desert dry. Your bones are aching, your walk faltering, and your eyes dulling.

The Spirit *upon* You

After Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive ye the Spirit," He said, "Go to Jerusalem, and wait until the Spirit comes upon you" (see Luke 24:49). As the Spirit came upon Samson, upon Moses, upon David, and upon Gideon in Old Testament times, so, too, Jesus said the Spirit would come upon His disciples, and they would be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). The "coming upon," "the baptism," "the overflow" of the Spirit, whatever term you want to use, is an empowering for service.

Quenching the Spirit

The negative response to the "coming upon" ministry of the Spirit is quenching Him. "Quench not the Spirit," wrote Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:19). How is the Spirit quenched? First Thessalonians 5:20 says, "Despise not prophesyings." People quench the Spirit whenever they say, "The gifts of prophecy, tongues, healing, word of knowledge, and discernment of spirits are all irrelevant."

"Well," you protest, "I don't really despise those things. I'm open. And if the Lord wants to bring a prophecy to me or through me, I'll be happy to accept that gift."

That's not what Noah said . . .

> A dove was released, and it circled the earth, which was covered with water. As it looked for a place to land, the Bible says it found no place for the sole of its foot. Throughout Scripture, the dove is the symbol of the Holy Spirit. And I believe the Holy Spirit is still circling—looking for churches, looking for people whom He can come upon, those who will not quench Him. Has He found a place to land in your church? Has He found a place to land in your life?
>
> Genesis 8 goes on to say that Noah stretched forth his hand and grabbed the dove, bringing it unto himself. C. H. Spurgeon nailed it when he said this is an illustration of the active pursuit of the Spirit in a man's life. You see, Noah didn't say, "Well, dove, you know where I am. If you want to land on me, that's fine." No, Noah reached out his hand in faith and brought the dove in.

The person who moves in the overflow of the Spirit is not one who sits passively with arms folded. Rather, he is one who hungers and thirsts after rightness; he is one who says,

> "I deeply desire the power of the Spirit upon my life. I'm going to reach out in faith and pursue all that God has for me. I'll not be satisfied with a theology of the Spirit. I want the power of the Spirit upon my life and

the gifts to flow through my life. I will not despise prophesying. I will not quench the Spirit."

Now, even if you have already received the "coming upon" of the Spirit, if you are presently not pursuing Him in the way you once did, He'll be quenched, you'll be dry, and the times of refreshing will just be a nice historical event to read about in Acts 3. What's the solution? In all three cases—whether we're resisting the Spirit, grieving the Spirit, or quenching the Spirit—the cure is repentance.

"Repent ye therefore," Peter preached, "and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). He didn't say, "Get your life together, and be converted." He said, "Repent and be converted."

Remorse says, "I feel bad about what I did, but that's my weakness, so I'll probably do it again." Repentance is not remorse.

Regret says, "I feel bad about what I did because I got caught." Repentance is not regret.

Resolve says, "I feel bad about what I did, but I'll try harder next time." Repentance is not resolve.

Repentance says, "I change my mind about who Jesus is." Repentance is a return to the Lord, a change of thinking, and a change of direction, which results in a change of heart.

If you have been resisting the Spirit's tug at your heart, change your mind about who you think Jesus Christ is, and give your life to Him.

If you have been grieving the Spirit, change direction and deal directly with the sin you know He is speaking to you about.

If you have been quenching the Spirit, change direction and pursue Him instead of being apathetic toward Him.

And guess what? You will experience times of refreshing upon your life.

That's what happened to David when he finally dealt with the issue of his sin, for you see, David, the broken man who wrote Psalm 38, also wrote Psalm 51.

> Nathan the prophet came to David and said, "David, we have a problem. Within your kingdom, there's a rich man who owns many sheep. Wanting to give a visitor leg of lamb, he went to his next-door neighbor's house. Now, his neighbor was so poor that he had only one little lamb that he treated as a pet. But the rich man took the poor man's single lamb and fed it to his guest."
>
> "What?" thundered David. "The rich man ripped off the poor man? He shall surely die!" (see 2 Samuel 12).

You'll always know you're in sin when you're harsh with other people. Stealing a lamb was not a capital offense, yet David was treating it as such. Whenever a person is in sin, his tendency is to start nailing everyone else because finding fault with others makes us feel a little better about our own sin.

> Nathan then said, "David, thou art the man. It's you. The story relates to *your* sin." And David repented. After a year of bones aching and skin stinking, after a year of failing to deal with the issue, he changed the direction of his life, and he cried out to God, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned . . ." (Psalm 51:4).

Wait a minute. Didn't David sin against Bathsheba, against Uriah, and against Ahithophel, Bathsheba's grandfather, who was one of David's own advisors? What about them?

The psalmist rightly declared that he had sinned against God. Sin is always only against God because no matter what we do to someone else, and no matter what someone else does to us, it's less than what we or they deserve. We're all sinners and we all deserve to be wiped out, destroyed, and consumed. But God? He is perfect and holy, loving and gracious, patient and kind. He is the only One unfairly hurt by the consequences of our sin.

David went on to say, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation. Then will I teach transgressors thy way (see Psalm 51:12, 13). I've learned my lesson,

Father. Restore me." And God did. Oh, there were still repercussions of his sin, but there was also the restoration of joy. David became a psalm-writer once again, and he experienced the time of refreshing upon his life. So will you, and so will I if today we choose to repent.

As we study the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts, perhaps you are saying, "I just can't seem to get filled. I've been praying. I've been asking. But I can't get filled." Perhaps it is because you don't need to be filled as much as you need to be emptied—of carnality and sin, of rebellion and unbelief. How? By saying, "No more excuses, no more justifying, no more whitewashing, I repent."

Repent, precious people, and you will experience times of refreshing in beauty and in reality.



4

Acts 4:1–3

And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.

In the Gospels, the Pharisees were the primary opponents of Jesus. Radical fundamentalists, they claimed Jesus and His disciples violated their rituals and traditions. Here in Acts, however, the Sadducees are the primary opponents of the church. Materialists through and through, they were upset with the church because of the stories of miracles and resurrections, angels and healings that circulated throughout Jerusalem.

Acts 4:4

Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

Share the Word with the guys at work, the kids at home, your neighbors who are unbelievers, your mother-in-law, and your grandfather. Share the Word—it's powerful!

Acts 4:5–7

And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?

Old Testament Scriptures declare he who did a miracle in the name of any other besides Jehovah was to be stoned (Deuteronomy 13). Here, Caiaphas, Annas, and the boys—perhaps with rocks in hand—were hoping Peter would say, "We did it in the Name of Jesus."

Acts 4:8

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel.

Only two months previously, Peter stood by a fire and denied Jesus Christ (Luke 22:55–57). But now, this same Peter, having been touched by a tongue of fire in Acts 2, is a different person. By the enemy's fire, Peter was burned. Touched with fire, he's hot. Under fire, he stands.

Acts 4:9, 10 (a)

If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead . . .

Look at Peter's boldness. He's saying, "We did this in the Name of Jesus Christ, whom you crucified."

Acts 4:10 (b)–12

. . . even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for

there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Quoting Psalm 118:22, Peter referenced the construction of the temple. He would later write that *we* as living stones are part of a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). Sometimes we rub each other the wrong way. That's what living stones are supposed to do. That guy you married, the one you thought would be such a rock, turned out to be a blockhead. Why did you get stuck with him? Because that blockhead is the living stone who will knock the rough edges off you and prepare you for heaven.

Tradition has it that in the days of the construction of Solomon's temple, although the engineers at the temple mount searched and searched, they couldn't find the cornerstone. A message was sent to the quarry: "Where is the cornerstone?"

Word came back to the mount: "We sent it to you months ago."

Then someone remembered: "Oh, maybe it was that stone we didn't know what to do with. It didn't fit anywhere, so we rolled it down the hill into the Valley of Gehenna."

The Valley of Gehenna was the place of burning, the place of rubbish, the place where babies were sacrificed in the days of Ahaz, the place of weeping and sorrow, refuse and stench. And the rejected stone was indeed found in the Valley of Gehenna.

Thus, Peter makes application, saying, "The Chief Cornerstone is Jesus Christ. This One rejected by you, this One who went to hell for you is the Rock of Deuteronomy 32 (verse 4), the Cornerstone of Psalm 118 (verse 22), the Smiting Stone of Daniel 2 (verse 35), the Rock of our salvation."

Acts 4:13 (a)

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled . . .

"Who are these unlearned and ignorant men?" asked the Jewish leaders. "They didn't study with our scholars. How is it they understand the Scriptures?"

Acts 4:13 (b)

. . . and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

How could Peter and John, uneducated men, get away with saying, "We did this in the Name of Jesus of Nazareth whom you crucified" (see Acts 4:10)? Because those who heard them perceived that they had been with Jesus.

After spending forty days in the presence of the Lord, Moses' face shone (Exodus 34:29). And the glow of his face prepared the people for the law he held in his hand.

Mom and Dad, how do you get Junior to listen when you need to lay down the law in your house? Spend time with Jesus and replace a glowering face with a glowing face. I'm in the process of learning that before I come down with the law, I better make sure I have spent time with the Lord. I better make sure my face is glowing.

Acts 4:14

And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

Please note that the lame man not only stood with Peter and John in the temple (Acts 3:11), but he stood with them in their trouble. Peter and John were in hot water here, and this guy could have said, "Hey, this is a little heavy. Thanks for healing me, but I gotta go." But he didn't. He stood by Peter and John, even though he could have been executed with them.

You see, it's easy to be friends in the temple. But you can only find out who your true friends are when you're in trouble. So, too, you will be able to evaluate the depth of your friendship with Jesus by how willing you are to stand with Him in times of testing and difficulty. Stand with the Lord, fellow lamebrains, for He stood for you and stood by you.

And stand by your brothers and sisters even when they're blowing it, even when they're in hot water, even when they're in difficulty, even when they're in trouble.

Acts 4:15, 16

But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.

The man who was lame previously had been healed—and all Jerusalem knew it.

Acts 4:17, 18

But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

You may not be able to grab the hand of a lame man and say to him, "In the Name of Jesus, stand up and walk," but there are other things you can do.

- In Mark 9:41, Jesus said we can give a cup of cold water in His Name. Every one of us can go to someone who is thirsty, someone who needs a simple act of kindness shown to them, and say, "I'm doing this in the Name of Jesus because He's blessed me."
- He said we could receive a little child in His Name (Matthew 18:5). When you go to the nursery and change a diaper or two, you can do it in the Name of Jesus.
- We are to baptize in His Name (Matthew 28:19).
- We can pronounce the remission of sins in His Name (Luke 24:47). You can be a champion of the gospel, a carrier of the Good News to the person who is despairing and feeling he has failed miserably. You can say, "In the Name of Jesus, I want to tell you that your sin is truly forgiven and forgotten."

Acts 4:19, 20

But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

Peter and John said, “We can’t help but speak that which we’ve seen and heard.”

Do you have a hard time speaking about the Lord? Perhaps it’s because you haven’t seen or heard much from Him lately. I find that my witness is proportional to what I am presently seeing and hearing from the Lord in my own life. If I am not seeing or hearing from Him, I find I don’t speak as boldly, as quickly, or as readily as during those times when I am hearing His Word and seeing His work.

Acts 4:21

So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.

The people who saw a lame man leap for joy glorified not Peter, but God. I encourage you to keep your antennae up and your eyes open concerning ministries that are built upon men, around men, and for men. The response to the healing of the lame man is how it should always be: people glorifying God. Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they might see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Acts 4:22

For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.

This man had been lame for forty years, but his healing came at the exact moment that would maximize glory to God and confirm the fact that although Jesus was no longer seen physically, He was still working through His church. So often we wonder, *Lord, why aren’t You working? I’ve been praying. I’ve been believing. Where are You, Lord?* It’s been forty minutes, forty days, or perhaps even forty years. Take hold, dear saint. Don’t give up. At the right time, the Lord will work to His glory. You watch. You wait. You’ll see.

Acts 4:23

And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

“They went to their own company.” When pressure mounts, when things come down, you’ll always go to your own company. When you face intimidation, problems, and potential difficulty, where do you go? Do you polish your gold chain and hang out with the lounge lizards? Or do you find yourself heading toward fellowship? Where do you go—to the lounge, or to the Lord?

Acts 4:24

And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is.

Please note with me three elements of this prayer.

Who He Is

When you're feeling pressured, when you're being threatened, it's always a good idea to start prayer by remembering to whom you're talking. Sometimes my problems seem so big and insurmountable until I start to worship and remember who He is—the Creator of all things.

> *What if I told you no one made this watch on my wrist. That's right; an incredible, fortuitous occurrence of accidental circumstances took place in which there was some crystallization under intense heat on the beach of Malibu, where the positioning of the sand crystals was such that a glass face formed. And then, amazing as this sounds, there was an explosion in a print shop down the street from Malibu out of which came a round circular object with numbers miraculously printed on it. Then, there was a turbulent storm at sea that washed some gold out of the Mariana Trench and onto the glass face. Next, a cow, walking down the beach died, and part of his skin joined to the gold that had formed around the glass face. Finally, some gears and springs joined together, and lo and behold, the watch started ticking.*

You would say, "Who are you trying to fool?" Yet consider the wrist underneath the watch. With its nervous system, muscle structure, sensors, the ability to heal itself, it is a million times more complicated than the watch on the wrist. Yet people actually believe not only their wrists, but their arms, heart, brain, and eyes are all the result of an amazing, unplanned, uncreated event that "just happened."

Why has our culture been so deceived, duped into believing that the human body with all of its intricacies and capabilities "just happened"? Ask people if this watch could form by itself, and they'll say, "No." But ask them if the human body could form by itself and they'll say, "Yes." It doesn't make sense!

We need to start our prayers by remembering, "Father, You're the Creator of all things. There is nothing too hard for You" (see Jeremiah 32:17).

> **Acts 4:25–28**
>
> **Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the**

earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

What Is Happening

"In Psalm 2, Father," the believers prayed, "You told us that the heathen would try to come against You and Your people—just as we're seeing here. We acknowledge that this is all in accordance with Your will."

David wrote that the heathen seem to prosper while the godly suffer (Psalm 73). Peter would later write, "Think it not strange when fiery trials come upon you" (see 1 Peter 4:12).

When persecution comes, it is in accordance with the Word and the will of the Father.

Acts 4:29, 30

And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

Why We Come

The early church didn't pray that they might have a break from persecution, but that they might have boldness in persecution. And that kind of prayer prevails!

Acts 4:31 (a)

And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together . . .

We often pray when we are shaken up. These guys prayed so they could *be* shaken up!

Acts 4:31 (b)

. . . and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spoke—not in tongues—but the Word of God. Never forget that the purpose of the empowering of the Spirit is not that we might speak in tongues. The purpose of the power of the Spirit is that we might be bold witnesses (Acts 1:8).

Acts 4:32, 33

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

They had great power and experienced great grace. I like that!

Acts 4:34–37

Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had

need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

They shared together not out of compulsion, but out of compassion; not out of obligation, but out of love.



5 **Acts 5:1–2**

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

George MacDonald rightly said, "Half the misery in the world is caused by people trying to look rather than trying to be."

Such was the case with Ananias, whose name means "God is gracious," and his wife Sapphira, whose name means "Beautiful." Wanting to fit in with the believers who sold their goods and shared their resources with the new believers who were in Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 4:32–37), Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of land and brought a portion of the proceeds to the apostles. The problem was not that Ananias held back some money for himself, but that he was trying to appear more religious than he really was. The issue was not selfishness. The issue was hypocrisy.

Acts 5:3

But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?

Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "Sin has many tools, but a lie is the handle which fits them all."[2] As with Ananias, no matter what the area of sin, a lie can always be found at the root.

Acts 5:4 (a)

Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?

"We didn't ask you to sell the property," Peter said to Ananias. "But when you did, you could have done with the money whatever you wished."

Acts 5:4 (b)

Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

In verse 3 Peter said, "Why have you lied to the Holy Ghost?" In verse 4 he said, "You have not lied to men, but to God." Thus, this is an important proof text for the doctrine of the Trinity.

Acts 5:5–7

And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

Sapphira had no idea about what had happened to Ananias. Why? Because Satan always keeps his victims in the dark. Perhaps there was a time when you were involved in an area of sin, and although others prayed for you, talked to you, and were concerned about you, you remained in the dark until everything came down on top of you.

Satan always operates that way. Like Sapphira, his victims are always the last to know of the destruction he has planned for them. We are so easily blinded, and that is why we need one another. How I thank the Lord for the brother or sister who will come to me and say, "Be careful. Beware."

Acts 5:8–11

And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the

Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

The church went from "great grace and great power" in Acts 4:33 to "great fear" in Acts 5:11.



***For topical study of Acts 5:1–11 entitled "Hypocrisy Kills," turn to page* 654.**

Acts 5:12–13

And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

People held the early church in high esteem, but they didn't rush to join. After hearing about the penalty for Ananias' lie, can you blame them?

Acts 5:14

And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)

Although the church was no longer the "in" place to hang out for anyone and everyone, those who had truly been touched by the Lord said, "This is where I need to be: in the place of power and purity. Even if it's painful, even if I'm smitten, and even if I'm uncomfortable from time to time, this is where I'll stay." The Book of Acts illustrates how intimately purity and power are linked together. Many times, we sing, "More love, more power . . ." when in reality our need is less sin and less carnality. A wise and loving Father, knowing the results of the misuse of power, will not give it to those who are not pure.

Acts 5:15, 16

Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

Peter's shadow was not powerful in and of itself. It was simply a point of contact and a place of release for people who were prepared to receive healing.

As a child, I suffered from intense asthma. My mom told me that many nights, after I stopped breathing and started turning blue, she would rush me into the bathroom and turn on the hot water so the steam could open my breathing passages. She also told me recently that during those long nights, she would listen to the radio, while a certain preacher would often instruct people to pray for healing by placing their hands on their radios.

Many were the nights, Mom said, she would hold me on her lap, lay her hand on the radio, and pray for my healing. Now, there was nothing magical or mystical about the radio, but like Peter's shadow, like anointing with oil, like the laying on of hands, like agreeing together with a verbal amen, it was simply a contact point for the release of faith, blessing, and eventual healing.

Acts 5:17

Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation.

Vehemently opposed to anything having to do with the supernatural, it is no wonder that, after observing the multitude of healings, the Sadducees were filled with indignation.

Acts 5:18

And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

Although the Sadducees were a numerical minority, they were the ones who held the purse strings as well as the political power.

Acts 5:19, 20

But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

"All the words of this life"—I like that phrase! You see, we're not just talking about future life, afterlife, or eternal life. Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life now and have it more abundantly" (see John 10:10).

Life is what the Bible is all about. I don't understand those who say, "Well, the Bible's great and it's a good starting point, but we have more to add. We have some innovative techniques, some educational tools, and some resources that were unavailable to those who penned the Bible that can help heal people psychologically and emotionally." Peter would later write that God has given us everything that pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). It's all in the Word.

Acts 5:21

And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught.

"They entered into the temple early in the morning." I like that! It doesn't say, "They went into the temple the first chance they had," or "They waited until noon." No, following their release from prison the night before, the apostles headed straight for the temple early the next morning. The largest nation in the world today is procrasti-nation. No doubt about it! Our tendency is to say,

"Thank You, Lord. You freed me from prison. You freed me from eternal damnation, from meaningless existence, and from emotional depression. You opened the door for Me, Lord, and I'm going to share Your gospel with others real soon—maybe at noon, maybe tomorrow night. I know You told me to go and share the Word with everyone. And I'll get right on it, Lord—pretty soon."

Procrastination is a real problem in spiritual life and spiritual discipline. When the Lord speaks to your heart, be it in Bible study, in devotions, through a book you read, or through a sister or brother, learn to respond immediately.

> I read of one very wealthy inventor who said, "Without exception, after I have invented something and patented it, at least ten men come to me and say, "I thought of that a long time ago." But the difference between their poverty and my wealth is that they thought about it, and I *did* it."

The same thing is true spiritually. There are those who think, *You know, I really should share my faith,* or *I really should intercede,* or *I really should get involved.* They think and they think and they think, while they remain poor spiritually. The ones who are used by the Lord are those who hear and *do.*

> **Acts 5:21–24**
>
> **But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.**

These officials were greatly disturbed. "What next?" they wondered. "Where's this thing going to go? Where's it going to stop?" Good question!

> **Acts 5:25–28 (a)**
>
> **Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine . . .**

"Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." What a wonderful indictment! The first time my life was threatened in ministry was when a fellow knocked on my door, looked me in the eye, and said, "You have ruined Applegate Valley. I suggest you leave, or I can't guarantee you'll be alive a year from now."

He went on to explain that before Applegate Christian Fellowship started, there were some wonderful parties in the area. But when some of the best party-ers got saved, the party was over.

Acts 5:28 (b)
. . . and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

Hadn't the crowd said to Pontius Pilate, "Let His blood be upon us and our children" (see Matthew 27:25)? Yet here they are complaining because they're being made to feel guilty and responsible for the death of Jesus.

Acts 5:29
Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

"We must obey God," declared Peter. "Even though you have legislative and political authority, the fact remains that there is a higher authority than you: God. He has told us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. We have no other recourse than to obey Him."

God has set men in positions of authority in order to maintain peace (Romans 13). But if the authorities the Lord has ordained act contrary to Him, we must submit to Him rather than them. Consequently, should there come a time when those in authority say, "We're not going to allow witnessing on the streets or in public places because it violates the separation of Church and State," we must not submit to that kind of law. We answer to a higher Authority who has commanded us to share the Word wherever we go (Matthew 28:19).

Civil disobedience is not uncommon in the Scriptures.

- The midwives in Egypt were told to destroy all of the Jewish male children. They refused, and God honored them (Exodus 1:17, 21).

- Rahab the harlot hid the spies who were sent in to scope out the Land, and she withstood the questioning of civil authorities. God blessed her and put her in the line of Messiah (Joshua 2:4; Matthew 1:5).
- Against the king's command, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego did not bow their knees to the image of Nebuchadnezzar. God blessed them and stood with them in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:18, 25).
- Daniel refused to cease from praying three times a day, even though doing so was in direct violation of the law. God honored him and saved him in the lions' den (Daniel 6:10, 21, 22).

However, regarding biblical civil disobedience, there are two important requirements to keep in mind.

Civil Disobedience Must Be Carried Out with Scriptural Authority

The angel of the Lord said to the apostles, "Go speak in the temple" (see Acts 5:20). In addition, Jesus had already commissioned them, saying, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel" (see Matthew 28:19). Thus, the disciples weren't following a nebulous feeling; they were following the Word of God. You see, one cannot simply say, "God told me I can go seventy-five miles per hour in this thirty-five-mile-per-hour zone," or "I'm not going to obey my parents because I just don't feel right about what they're saying."

If you are going to disobey your parents, oppose the leading of your husband, or contradict the laws of the land, it must be by the authority of Scripture.

Civil Disobedience Must Be Carried Out with Humility

Peter and the apostles willingly took their lumps. In every case throughout Scripture, those who said, "We can't do this because we have a higher authority," did so without hostility, bitterness, or violence.

Acts 5:30–32

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

"You allowed Jesus Christ to be crucified and hung on a tree, but God has exalted Him," declared Peter. "We're not going to back down from this message."

Acts 5:33–34

When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them. Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space.

Due to his knowledge of the law and because he walked with great integrity in his attempt to keep the law, Gamaliel was called "The Beauty of the Law" by his contemporaries. A brilliant thinker and one of the most influential teachers in all of Jewish history, Gamaliel was Paul's teacher. Jewish historians tell us that Gamaliel's one criticism of Paul was that it was impossible to find enough reading material for him. This is not surprising, since those who study Greek tell us that Paul's vocabulary and sentence structure is the most sophisticated of any Greek writer. The guy was brilliant.

Acts 5:35–39

And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up

Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

Gamaliel wisely said, "If what these guys are doing is through human energy, it will come to nothing. But if what they're doing is of God, you'll be fighting against God, and you won't have a prayer. So back off. Let them go. Don't forget what happened to Theudas," continued Gamaliel. "Men gathered around him, and when they were slaughtered, the movement died as well. And what about Judas of Galilee? When he launched an insurrection, his followers also perished in the process."

Theudas came on the scene claiming to possess deep spirituality. He claimed to be a Messiah who would lead Israel into spiritual illumination. Judas of Galilee launched a political reformation based upon less taxation. He claimed to be a Messiah who would free Israel from Roman bondage. Both were phonies. It's easy for you and me to spot a false Messiah, a false teacher, or a false leader. He will do the same two things that Gamaliel said Theudas and Judas of Galilee did: Like Theudas, he will "boast himself to be somebody," claiming to have supernatural or special powers. Or like Judas, he will "draw away much people after him," saying, "Follow me, and I'll set you free."

Acts 5:40–42

And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every

house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Winston Churchill once defined a fanatic as someone who can't change his mind and won't change the subject. That's what these guys did. They wouldn't change their minds, and they didn't change the subject. Knowing Jesus is Lord, they kept talking about Him wherever they went.

HYPOCRISY KILLS

A Topical Study of ACTS 5:1–11

Things are not always what they appear to be, particularly in the realm of spirituality.

Some years ago, a painting was auctioned for many thousands of dollars. It portrayed a monk sitting at a table with a prayer book before him, his hands folded in the posture of prayer. Upon closer inspection, however, the buyer discovered that the prayer book on the table was not a prayer book at all, but a shallow pan. And the hands folded together seemingly in prayer actually held a lemon. Thus, the picture portrayed not a monk praying, but a man squeezing lemons.

So, too, oftentimes, we think, *My, that person is spiritual*. But upon closer examination, it proves to be a bitter, sour story when we see the real picture. This is precisely what happened in our text concerning the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

At this point, the church was experiencing great grace (Acts 4:33). Jews had come from all over the world to celebrate the Jewish festival of Pentecost. During the Feast of Pentecost, thousands were converted to Christ. Apparently not wanting their new brothers and sisters to return to their homes without being instructed and grounded in the Word, the Jerusalem believers pooled their resources and shared with one another in order that the new believers could remain in Jerusalem where they could grow together.

Ananias and Sapphira, apparently wanting to fit in and seem spiritual, sold their property but secretly kept a chunk for themselves. As they brought their money to the apostles, Peter asked, “Is this the total amount of the land?”

“Certainly,” replied Ananias. And he fell down dead.

Three hours later, his wife Sapphira came in. “Tell me, Sapphira,” said Peter, “when you and your husband sold your property, did you bring all the money?”

"Yes," she answered. And like her husband, Sapphira was history.

"I don't understand," you say. "The Christians were flourishing, and a couple brought some money to the apostles to share with their brothers and sisters. Wasn't it a little severe to strike them dead because they didn't give it all? Wasn't death a rather extreme penalty for fibbing?"

The answer to that question lies in the principle of precedence that says:

God will make a strong statement at *one* point in time to be remembered and applied to *all* points in time.

An example of this is seen in Joshua 6.

> After wandering in the wilderness for forty years, the children of Israel were at last ready to enter the Promised Land. With great rejoicing and anticipation, they crossed the Jordan River only to find the powerful and seemingly impenetrable city of Jericho looming large before them. But the Lord miraculously delivered the city of Jericho into their hands as the walls came tumbling down. Then He said, "Don't take anything from Jericho. Other cities you can spoil, but let this city be a sacrifice to Me" (see Joshua 6:18, 19).
>
> All except one of the Israelites obeyed the Lord's command. His name was Achan. Seeing the glimmer of gold, the shining of silver, and some Babylonian garments that were the hot threads of the day, Achan thought, *What would it matter if I borrowed a bit of gold, took a sliver of silver, and lifted a garment or two?* So, he grabbed the goods and hid them under the floor of his tent.
>
> The next battle found the Israelites at war with a little town called Ai. It should have been an easy fight, but they got whipped. "What's going on, Lord?" Joshua cried. "We conquered Jericho in Your Name, but at Ai, we were soundly defeated. Why?" God informed Joshua that sin in the camp had defeated the country—and the one who sinned was to be put to death (Joshua 7:15).

"Isn't that a bit severe?" you ask.

No, because in this new country, the Lord wanted to reveal from the very outset how deadly serious He was about sin. Why? Because sin would kill them. Not just Achan, the one who committed the sin, but his whole family as well.

Precious people, when you and I sin, other people are bruised and beaten and end up in the pit along with us. That's why, among other reasons, sin stinks. God made that point very clear in those first days in the new land. "Listen," He said. "Sin brings pain. It'll hurt you. It'll affect your family and others who are linked to you. You'll end up in the pit."

Now we're in another new country here in Acts—not a new country physically, but a new country spiritually. The church has been formed as an entirely new entity. And just as sin had to be dealt with severely and pointedly in the Old Testament, so, too, a powerful point is being made in the New Testament. I'm so glad we can study this chapter and see what God thinks and how He feels about sin, because if we were dealt with in the same way that Ananias and Sapphira were, our church would be very small. Certainly, you wouldn't have a pastor—at least not this one!

Think about it: What if, like Ananias and Sapphira, we were struck down for the same sin for which they were struck down—the sin of hypocrisy? Whenever we stood up and sang, "All to Jesus, I surrender; all to Him I freely give . . . I surrender all, I sur . . ." Boom! Down we'd go! If we were treated in the same manner as Ananias and Sapphira were, the church would be thinned out real fast! And so God is saying, "I'm going to make a severe point at this point in time in order that you might get the point for all time. Learn the lesson: Hypocrisy kills."

Hypocrisy was the one sin that riled our Lord Jesus. He loved to eat with the sinners. He hung out with the publicans. The tax collectors and prostitutes felt comfortable with Him. But when He said, "Woe unto you . . ." it was always directed at those who wanted to be thought of as more spiritual than they really were.

The word "hypocrite" comes from the Greek word *hupokrites,* which means "one who is wearing a mask." It refers to actors who wore large masks on stage in order to be seen by those in the back row. *Hupokrites,* then, were those who had two faces: one for the stage and one for the street.

I am told there is a restaurant in New York City whose business is thriving because of hypocrisy . . .

A couple is seated, and the maitre d' hands them menus. Both contain the same items, but because the prices listed on the woman's menu are

three times higher than the prices on the man's menu, when the man says, "Order whatever you want," the woman is highly impressed.

Hypocrisy may be good for the restaurant business, but it is grievous to the heart of God. Psalm 103:14 says the Father knows our frames, He remembers we are but dust. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:7 that we have this treasure, Christ Jesus, in *earthen* vessels. In other words, God knows we have frailties and earthiness, but it doesn't bother Him. Jesus loved to be around real people. It was the *hupokrites*—the religious folks and the play-actors—who were a problem to Him because hypocrisy truly kills.

What does it kill?

Hypocrisy Kills Your Witness.

How many people say, "I'm not going to go to church. I took my car to a mechanic who had a fish in the yellow pages. And man, I got ripped off. He charged high prices and did lousy work, and yet he has a Bible on his desk and his radio tuned to the Christian station"? Or how many make a business deal with one who claims to be a believer and they find out later they were charged exorbitant prices?

If you say, "I'm not going to become a believer because of hypocrites," you will spend eternity in hell with the very hypocrites you hate. So if you don't like them, get saved, get to church, and get right. Otherwise, you'll be with them forever. Whenever people say to me, "There are hypocrites in church," I say, "You're right. That's why you will fit right in! We freely acknowledge that we are not even close to perfection."

When people say, "I'm not going to go to church or get saved because of hypocrites," they're wrong. Nonetheless, the fact remains that people use that excuse more than any other for not going to church or seeking the Lord. Hypocrisy kills your witness.

Hypocrisy Kills Your Joy.

Just as Ananias and Sapphira were struck down, so, too, is your joy whenever you're hypocritical. You become sour. You become analytical. In order to justify your own hypocrisy, you begin to analyze others and see how hypocritical they are that you might feel better about your own hypocrisy. You become a sour, dour believer, soaking in the lemon juice of bitterness. You lose the joy of just being real before the Lord.

Hypocrisy Kills Your Peace.

Living in hypocrisy, one must always keep his mask on and his guard up. Fearing that someday someone will see the real him, he becomes tense, uptight, and unstable. Therefore, as it did with the early church, great fear should come upon us—the fear of hypocrisy. While such fear could potentially freak us out, in reality it should free us up. You see, when we finally get the picture of Acts 5, we understand that the Lord is asking us just to be who we are. Paul put it this way: "By the grace of God I am what I am . . ." (1 Corinthians 15:10)

Hypocrisy works from the outside in and says, "I'm going to try to be this way, and maybe it'll sink in a bit." It's imitation.

Christianity works from the inside out as Jesus says, "I'm going to work within you to do and to will of My good pleasure" (see Philippians 2:13). It's impartation.

How I need to understand that the Lord delights in me just the way I am. Those areas that need to be changed, He will change—not by my imitation of spiritual people, but rather by His impartation of the Holy Spirit. I don't have to play a game. I don't have to learn the phrases. I don't have to wear a tie. I can just be who I am, because the Lord looks at me and says, "I know what you are, and I love you. I'll work within you regarding the areas of your life that need changing. Don't try to pretend to be something you're not. Don't put on airs. Don't be a church person—learning the phrases and going through the motions."

When this begins to sink in, am I ever free!

"You mean, Lord, You love me just as I am, and You want me to be just the way I am, with my humor or lack thereof, with my style or lack thereof? You just love me? You want me to be how You made me? This earthen vessel?"

"Yes," answers the Lord. "I not only love you, I enjoy you—except when you put on an act, pretend to be something you're not, or try to impress people with a spirituality that isn't really there."

Hypocrisy will kill your witness as others see the masks you wear and the act you put on. Hypocrisy will kill your joy as you analyze and criticize others in order to justify your own deceit. Hypocrisy will kill your peace as you live in fear that someone will someday see the real you.

Put it away. Give it up. Be free!

In Jesus' Name.

6

Acts 6:1 (a)

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied . . .

Notice the mathematics in the Book of Acts. In chapter 2, the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47). Here in chapter 6, the number of the disciples was multiplied. But between the addition to the church and the multiplication of the church, there was subtraction from the church when the Lord removed Ananias and Sapphira in chapter 5.

Sometimes that happens to us as well. That is, things are moving along. We're growing. We're being added to—then suddenly we're hit with a painful period of subtraction. If you're in that place today, take hope. It means good things are coming. As He did in Acts, the Lord often subtracts right before He multiplies.

Acts 6:1 (b)

. . . there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

Three potential problems began to appear in the church at this point: the surfacing of discrimination, the temptation of professionalism, and the challenge of prioritization.

The Surfacing of Discrimination

During the days of Alexander the Great, Greek culture, style of dress, and philosophy of life permeated the then-known world. As a result, many Jews, known as Grecians or Hellenists, adopted Grecian ways. Other Jews, referred to as Hebrews, remained true to the old ways and traditions of Judaism. The Hebrew believers looked down on the Grecian believers as compromising, "second-class" Jews. Thus, with the Grecians claiming that their widows were being neglected in the daily serving of food, discrimination set in. Consequently, there was a potential division in the baby church based upon who was supposedly "more spiritual"—a problem that can surface whenever a church grows. . . .

"Can you believe it? He actually wore a business suit. Who let *him* in?"

"Hey, those bikers can't come dressed like that."

Discrimination can take place in all kinds of subtle ways, and the early church was no exception. Here in Acts 6, as the church was multiplying, storm clouds were forming that could have blown the whole thing apart.

Acts 6:2

Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

The Temptation of Professionalism

Oftentimes people have said to me, "What are you going to do about this situation, Jon? You're the pastor. Murmur, murmur, murmur."

More often than not, I have replied, "What are *you* going to do about it? That's the issue. Don't look to the professionals. If you're aware of the problem, it could be that you've been called to be part of the solution. The reason you feel the burden, the reason you're aware of the situation is because God is calling *you.*"

Acts 6:3–5 (a)

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude . . .

The Challenge of Prioritization

The apostles said, "The widows are in need—Hebrews and Hellenists, traditionalists and Grecians alike. But our calling is not the distribution of food. Our calling is the distribution of the Word. Therefore, choose people whom you know to be good men, godly men, gifted men—and let them take care of this matter."

Acts 6:5 (b)

. . . and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. . . .

Stephen would become the first martyr. He was a powerful Bible expositor, as we will see in chapter 7.

Acts 6:5 (c)

. . . and Philip . . .

Philip went on to become an evangelist. The father of four daughters who became prophetesses, he was a godly man who increased the boundaries of ministry.

Acts 6:5 (d)

. . . and Prochorus . . .

Church history tells us that Prochorus would later become the secretary, or the assistant, to the apostle John. Following John's death, Prochorus became the bishop of Nicodema—a large and growing church—before being martyred himself.

Acts 6:5 (e)

. . . and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch.

Many Bible scholars believe that, after serving faithfully for a season as a deacon, Nicolas started a sect known as the Nicolaitans, mentioned in

Revelation 2 and 3. Although we might be mistaken and will find Nicolas to be a good brother when we see him in heaven, the weight of evidence seems to indicate that he was one who veered into heresy.

***For topical study of Acts 6:1–5 entitled "The Church: A Place for Programs?" turn to page* 660.**

Acts 6:6

Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

We usually lay hands on someone and *then* pray. These guys went about it differently. They prayed before the laying on of hands. Perhaps this is what Paul meant when he told Timothy to "Lay hands on no man suddenly" (see 1 Timothy 5.22). Over the years, I have ordained people and ratified ministry far too quickly. Thus, I am slowly learning the importance of praying *before* the laying on of hands in order that I might hear the heart of the Lord and the witness of the Spirit before setting someone apart for ministry.

Acts 6:7 (a)

And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly . . .

This verse should be starred, circled, underlined, and highlighted by everyone involved in ministry. The secret to church growth and ministry expansion is simply to feed the flock. Healthy sheep reproduce. It's inevitable.

Acts 6:7 (b)

. . . and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

***For topical study of Acts 6:7 entitled "Finding and Focusing Your Gifts," turn to page* 666.**

Any priest walking into the temple on the first Good Friday, seeing the veil rent from top to bottom, would have known something miraculous had taken place. After all, it would have been unthinkable for any man to tear the veil. Everyone knew the penalty for entering the Holy of Holies unworthily was death. It also would have been impossible for any man to tear the veil. Sixty feet wide, thirty feet high, and ten inches thick, the veil was so massive it required a company of priests to hang it. No wonder a great number of priests —some seeing the torn veil, others hearing about it and watching what was happening in Jerusalem—were converted.

Acts 6:8

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

In Matthew 25:21, Jesus taught that those who are faithful in little things will be made rulers over greater things. If we desire to be used by the Lord, we must be faithful in whatever God gives us to do in the beginning days of our ministry. Although Scripture tells us not to despise the days of small things (Zechariah 4:10), yet many people find themselves reluctant to do the seemingly insignificant tasks. Desirous of something grander, they feel menial service is beneath them. But the way of the Lord is that we first prove ourselves in smaller things and, as we are faithful in them, He will give us greater responsibility.

The reward for faithfulness in service is greater service. Jesus came on the scene and said something radical when He said, "Happiness is found in losing your life, in giving yourself away. Happiness is found in serving, not in being served; in giving, not in getting" (see Matthew 10:39). Today if you're feeling somewhat blue, perhaps it's because you're not engaging yourself in serving others. When you feel like throwing in the towel, take up the towel instead. Wash someone's feet and suddenly you'll be refreshed.

Stephen modeled this beautifully. He began by serving tables, helping feed widows—not necessarily a glorious position, not an exalted ministry. But because he was faithful, he was then elected to the office of deacon (Acts 6:5) —one of seven men chosen by the early church as being a man full of the Holy Ghost, full of wisdom, and full of good works. Here, two verses later, we see him doing "great wonders and miracles among the people." Stephen went from

being a table server to a deacon to a miracle-worker because he was faithful at each step.

> **Acts 6:9–11**
>
> **Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.**

These who came against Stephen and argued with Stephen were outgunned by Stephen. They couldn't beat his logic. They couldn't resist his reasoning. They couldn't withstand his persuasive speech. So what did they do? They hired liars who said, "We've heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God."

> **Acts 6:12–15**
>
> **And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.**

> Addressing his students concerning ministry, C. H. Spurgeon said, "Men, when you teach on heaven, let there always be a glow on your face, a gleam in your eye, and a smile on your lips. When you teach on hell, your normal face will do fine."

As false accusations, lies, and anger preceded the rocks that would soon follow, Stephen's face reflected neither hatred nor horror, but heaven.

THE CHURCH:
A PLACE FOR PROGRAMS?
A Topical Study of
ACTS 6:3, 4

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

Matthew 13:31, 32

As Jesus taught about His kingdom, He used an analogy that, at first reading, is rather puzzling and perplexing, for nowhere in the world has there ever been a mustard seed known to grow into a tree big enough to support birds. Was Jesus mistaken in His botany? Was He sloppy with His analogy? Was He confused factually?

No, what Jesus said, while at first puzzling and perplexing, was actually profound and prophetic, as it relates to His kingdom, the church. For, like the mustard seed, the church would begin in simplicity, but would grow into something abnormal and complex. And whenever the church loses her simplicity, birds—a scriptural symbol for evil—have roosted in her branches.

At the outset, the early church was about only four things (Acts 2:42): the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. But here in the sixth chapter of Acts, her simplicity was challenged as the temptation arose to pull the apostles away from the ministry of the Word into the organization of a food distribution program.

Is there any place for programs in the church?

To answer that question, whatever we want to know concerning the body of Christ is not found in ministry magazines or theological manuals. Rather, everything we need to know concerning any point of theological understanding can be found in Jesus. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that it is Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith. Therefore, when I want to know what the body should be like, I needn't turn to a manual, but to the Master. I should look at Jesus.

How? The Gospels reveal certain aspects of His physical body that tell us what His spiritual body—the church—should be like.

His Body Was Conceived Miraculously.

Jesus' physical body was conceived when the Holy Spirit came upon the virgin Mary. His body was conceived miraculously and supernaturally (Luke 1:35). The same is true of the body of Christ in any given location. It must not be born through demographic strategy or statistical studies. It must not be born from clever organizing or careful analysis. I believe that when the Lord chooses to birth His body, He sovereignly moves upon virgin territory—a new area, a new place, a new work He desires to do. And by His grace, something is miraculously conceived.

> I think about the body at Applegate Christian Fellowship and how the Lord miraculously, sovereignly, graciously did something there that none of us expected. It wasn't the result of studies or strategy. It wasn't carefully worked through or thought out. It was just the Lord moving in a new place. Before that Fellowship was birthed twenty-five years ago, I am told there was a group of elderly ladies who, for ten years, met every week to pray that the Lord would do something special in that region. Only heaven will reward and reveal fully what took place in the Spirit as a result of those ladies praying, tilling the soil, and readying this place for the seed that would be planted when the Word was opened.

His Members Functioned Harmoniously.

Jesus wasn't paralyzed in His right hand, or lame in His left foot. No, all of the members of His earthly body functioned harmoniously. So, too, every member is to function in the body of His church. In Romans 12 we are told that we are His body, and each member is to function accordingly.

He Was Coordinated Physically.

Jesus' body was not spastic. Parts of His body were not going off in one direction or lurching off in another. So, too, the body of His church is meant to move in coordination. How? The same way our physical bodies are coordinated—by the body responding to impulses sent from the brain through the nervous system. Jesus is the Head (Ephesians 1:22). The impulses that will guide us and direct us as a church will come from Him through the "nervous system" of the Holy Spirit. When we, the body, respond to Jesus through the leading of the Spirit, we will move in coordination and harmony.

Upon Birth, His Body Was Attacked Ruthlessly.

Following the birth of Jesus, Herod ordered the annihilation of all male children two years of age and younger (Matthew 2:16). In the attack launched against this newborn baby, His physical body was immediately threatened. So, too, I recall as the Applegate Body was formed twenty-five years ago, we were attacked sometimes ignorantly, other times intentionally. In those early years, as we met at Cantrell Buckley Park, baptizing people in the river and playing guitars on the hillside, the attacks and vicious rumors were very real. So, too, any body—any expression of Jesus—will be attacked initially.

He Grew in Wisdom and Stature Favorably.

Luke 2:52 tells us that as Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, He found favor with God and man. Jesus did not remain the babe of Bethlehem. He was not a two-foot-high midget walking around preaching the gospel. He grew into a Man. He matured. He developed. So, too, a church that is truly of the Lord and from the Lord will grow. It's inevitable. And like Jesus, she will find favor with God and man. I have letters from the Sheriff 's Department, the Mayor's Office, and from different people in prominent positions who wrote expressing their appreciation for Applegate Christian Fellowship—not necessarily because we taught and preached Jesus Christ—but because we impacted the drug scene. God was so gracious in allowing us to find favor in His eyes and in the eyes of man.

But notice that even though Jesus grew, even though He found favor in the eyes of God and man—following His sermon at Nazareth in Luke 4, the people drove Him out of the city and took Him to a cliff over which they wanted to throw Him. At the edge of the cliff, He stopped and looked at the crowd, as only He could, and, like the Red Sea, it suddenly parted. Why? Because the body of Christ cannot be destroyed. There are times in this body—and in any true expression of Jesus—when it seems as though we're going down. But then Jesus somehow miraculously makes a way because He gave us His promise that the gates of hell could not prevail against the body of His church (Matthew 16:18).

He Was Baptized in Water and in the Spirit Simultaneously.

The Spirit came upon Jesus at the time of His baptism, empowering Him for His public ministry. As He emerged from the water, He looked up, and the Spirit of God came upon Him in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:16). It was then that He was sent out into public ministry.

"Wait a minute," some might say, "this idea of being baptized in the Spirit, this idea of a second blessing, is not needed. When a person becomes a Christian, he has all of the Spirit he'll ever need."

Really? Before the Spirit came upon Jesus—was He a believer? Yes. Even at the age of twelve, He confounded the Pharisees with His knowledge of the Word and with His heart for the Father (Luke 2:47). Yet, as He entered the dimension of public ministry, He was empowered by the Spirit. Therefore, I suggest that if Jesus needed the baptism of the Spirit and was receptive to it, how much more do you and I? If the body of His church is to be like His physical body on earth, we need the Spirit to come upon us as well.

He Ministered Powerfully.

All five ministerial offices were seen in the life of Jesus: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. The word "apostle" means "sent one." Jesus was the Apostle sent from heaven (John 20:21). He was the Prophet who spoke God's heart with perfect accuracy (Matthew 21:11). He was the Evangelist who spoke to the multitudes and brought them into the kingdom (Matthew 5:1, 2). He was the Pastor who looked at the people with compassion, as sheep having been scattered without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). He was the Teacher the common people heard gladly because of the gracious words He spoke (Mark 12:37; Luke 4:22).

The five-fold ministry was seen in Jesus' body when He was on earth, and it must be seen in the body of His church if we are to be like Him. Not only did the offices function within Him, but the gifts flowed through Him. The gifts listed in Romans 12 all flowed through Jesus Christ. The manifestations found in 1 Corinthians were all seen clearly in His life.

"Wait a minute," you say. "What about tongues?"

There is no record of Jesus speaking in tongues. It is the one manifestation not recorded. Why? I suggest to you the reason might be very simple. How could Jesus speak in an unknown tongue? Although as a Man, Jesus spoke Aramaic, as God, He knows all the tongues of men and of angels. He knows every dialect of heaven, every language on earth. There is no tongue unknown to Him.

His Body Was Broken Finally.

Jesus' body was broken on the Cross for you and me. So, too, if the body of His church is to be like Him, there will come times of breaking. Why? Because revelation comes through breaking. On the road to Emmaus, the followers of Jesus didn't recognize Jesus initially. It wasn't until He broke bread with them that their eyes were opened (Luke 24:30, 31). So, too, it is often in time of trouble—in the day of difficulty, in the process of breaking—that others can see the reality of the resurrected Jesus in the midst of His church.

The eight similarities between the physical body of Christ and the body of His church are more than merely interesting theologically. They have much to say to us personally. You see, even though Acts makes it very clear that the church was to function in the simplicity of teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer—in Acts 6, a program surfaced.

Thus, I can see that programs are not necessarily wrong. In fact, they're part of the life of the body. But notice we're not talking about bureaucracy. We're not talking about fleshly energy. In the program seen in our text, believers had been feeding the widows—tending them, caring for them, ministering to them. And when cultural tensions arose, the apostles gave instruction. I believe this is the pattern for the way the church is to be involved with programs. The apostles didn't sit in their office and say, "Hmmm. What we need is a widow-feeding program, so let's get an architectural rendering; let's print up brochures; let's make a presentation; and let's recruit." No, the apostles simply recognized what the Lord was already doing in their midst.

Many times, churches become vulnerable when they initiate programs because then they have to crack the whip to get people involved. That is the reason why so many folks are burned-out on church. They're exhausted by the programs and the pressure. That's not the way it should be.

Applegate Christian Fellowship currently sends thousands of teaching tapes all over the world. But it began twenty-five years ago, with an elderly gentleman who brought his $39.95 K-Mart tape recorder to church, sat in the front row, and recorded our studies in the Gospel of Mark. In the middle of the message, he would bend down to the condenser mike and whisper, "This is the end of side 1. Please turn tape over for Side 2." Following the service, he'd take his recorder back to his trailer, where, using another $39 recorder, he'd copy the tapes one at a time. Today, Tree of Life has a lot of sophisticated

machinery and staff and all kinds of stuff. But it all began with one man having a tape ministry on his heart.

A few years later, someone else came along who said, "We've been listening to your tapes. They would be great to put on the radio. It's real workable. And here's what we have on our heart. . . ." So some guys who were trained in media began to invest some time and energy and thought. One of them, who worked at a TV station, took it up a notch higher, developed it further, and we saw the birth of Searchlight—a radio program that produces real fruit as it airs across the nation.

Twenty-two years ago, some women approached us and said, "We have a desire to help unwed mothers. We don't want them to feel condemned or to succumb to the temptation of abortion. We want to provide an alternative for them." As I listened to them, I said, "Go for it." And from their burden, Living Alternatives—Applegate's outreach to unwed mothers—was born.

A number of years ago, a man named Ross Meador and some of his buddies came to me and said, "We know how we can practically teach our high-school kids the truths of God's Word: We'll take them on week-long trips. Day one, they'll climb sheer rocks outside of Bend, Oregon. Day two, we'll race bicycles down Mount Bachelor. Day three, we'll kayak in white water. Day four, we'll hang-glide. When we teach on faith and prayer before those events take place, those kids will listen!" And Maranatha Mountain Ministries was born.

Years ago, a man named Jeff Bates came up with an idea for a rock band. "We can reach kids for Jesus this way," he said. So the band Zion went out, touched lives, and introduced kids to the Savior.

Another man from the body had a heart to start a small orphanage in Mexico. It did so well, he found himself up to his ears and asked us to step in and help. That was the beginning of the Mission in Carmen Serdan.

Then, a lady contacted my brother, saying, "My husband and I had a mission school here in Honduras. But there have been some problems, and I've been wondering what to do. I heard of your fellowship and want to turn this mission base over to you." That was the origin of Applegate's mission station in Honduras.

Gang, this is why it was such a joy for me to pastor there. I didn't have to initiate, program, or strategize. I just stuck to the simplicity of teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayer. Out of that came "Acts 6 people" with a

heart to take on new challenges. When they came our way, as a body, we said to them, "Go for it! If it works, if God's in it, we'll join you and give you the resources or advice needed. And if it doesn't work, you will come out wiser, deeper, and more knowledgeable than if you hadn't tried."

> I can vividly recall my own introduction to ministry. As a sophomore in high school, working at a camp for junior-high kids, I planned an activity in which I put fourteen junior-high boys in a large circle and gave them raw eggs to attach to their foreheads by placing nylon stockings over their heads. I tied blindfolds over their eyes and put a junior-high girl on top of their shoulders. The game was simple: The girls were to take fresh flounders that I had bought at the fish market and smash as many of the eggs on the guys around them as possible while trying to protect the egg of the guy beneath them.
>
> The one thing I wasn't expecting was the exuberance of those junior-high girls! With one hand on their nose and the other hand holding the raw flounder, they went for it! They started slapping those boys with those flounders so hard that by the fifth or sixth hit—not only were eggs breaking, but the flounders started breaking apart as well. Fish guts were everywhere!
>
> I obviously didn't know what I was doing! And yet, even though I hadn't chosen the best way to reach kids, the fact is that the Lord saw my heart and said, "I'm going to use you anyway. I'm going to take you on down the road in ministry for Me."

You might "flounder" about a bit. You might think you're making a mess of things. But keep going—and the Lord will bless you for it.

> I think of David. At thirty years of age he became king over all of Israel. He saw the city of Jerusalem in the distance, which was held by the Jebusites—enemies of Israel. "I want that city as my capital," David said to his army. "The first man to find a way into the city and open the gates will be my general, my chief of staff." Joab—not a man of the highest integrity or the deepest spirituality—found a way to get in by shinnying up a seventy-foot water shaft. He opened the gates, David's soldiers rushed in, and the city was conquered (1 Chronicles 11: 6).

I suggest to you, fellow soldier, that the Son of David—the King of kings, Jesus Christ—says to us, "There's a city I want to take. There are people I want to touch. There's a project that will manifest My nature. Who will find a way in? Who will go for it?"

Don't expect something to happen from the top, gang. Just do what the Lord directs. If you hit a snag or a problem—as they did in Acts 6— hopefully those in authority over you will be available to provide some counsel, and to help facilitate what the Lord is already doing. And pray that the Lord will keep them on track. Please pray that He will place on your heart the things you should do and how you should function in His body for His glory.

FINDING AND FOCUSING YOUR GIFTS

A Topical Study of ACTS 6:7

I am convinced that people who are productive in their lives are people who have priorities for their lives. That is, I believe that productivity and proper priority go hand in hand. In Acts 6 we see this principle wonderfully modeled and beautifully illustrated. When the administrative problem concerning food distribution to the widows arose, the apostles could very easily have been sucked into the struggle. Instead, they kept their focus fixed and their priority in place. As a result, the Word of God increased and the number of disciples multiplied greatly.

I firmly believe that, in these last days, the Lord is not looking for machine gunners who spray spiritual bullets everywhere hoping to hit something. I believe He's looking for sharpshooters—people who will focus on a singular target and be effective in a singular ministry.

- David said, "*One* thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after" (see Psalm 27:4).
- Paul said, "This *one* thing I do" (see Philippians 3:13).
- Jesus said to Martha, "*One* thing is needful for you" (see Luke 10:42).

The Lord wants every one of us to know the one thing we are to do for the kingdom—and to do it wholeheartedly. Perhaps you say, "I've been a Christian for some time, but I don't know what the one thing is that I should do. How can I know what God's will is?"

> *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*
>
> Romans 12:1

The first step is to present your body to the Lord. Give your life to Him wholly and completely. It's the reasonable thing to do. Why is it reasonable to give your whole life to the Lord sacrificially? Here are three reasons. . . .

Because of What Jesus Did on Calvary

Jesus died for my sins and paid the price for my rebellion. Jesus loves me and gave everything for me. Therefore, it's only reasonable that I should say, "Lord, I'm Yours because of what You've done for me."

Because of Where We Will Spend Eternity

We're racing toward eternity, and what we do here will affect the rewards we receive there. Maybe you're saying, "Frankly, Jon, I don't care about rewards in heaven."

Listen, you might not care now—but I guarantee you will then.

Because of What It Does for Us Presently

Jesus taught us that we will receive to the degree that we give (Luke 6:38). If you want to be miserable, unhappy, and depressed—just live in a little tiny world where you're only concerned with your trinkets, your feelings, and your hobbies. If, however, you want a life that is full, rich, and expansive, get involved in ministry. I have discovered when I pray for people who are sick, *I* feel better! When I share the gospel with people who are lost, *I* get born again, again! When I share the Scripture, *I'm* the one who gets fed and blessed! Jesus was right. To the extent I give out, I get back.

"Sounds good," you say, "but how do I know what I should do?"

Read down five verses to Romans 12:6 where Paul gives the list of the seven motivational gifts.

"Wait a minute," you protest. "I heard there were *nineteen* or more spiritual gifts. Aren't there gifts listed in Corinthians and Ephesians that are different from these?"

Students, tune in here: Romans 12 is the only place where the term "spiritual gift" is used. In 1 Corinthians 12, we see the difference. . . .

> *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 12:1

In your Bible, the word "gifts" is in italics, which means it was added by the translators. The Greek word translated "spiritual" here is *pneumatikos,* or, "spirituals." The word gift is not there. And this is what has caused so much confusion. First Corinthians 12 deals with *spirituals*—operations and manifestations, while Romans 12 deals with *gifts.* Paul makes the distinction clear in the verses that follow.

- In verse 4 of 1 Corinthians 12, he writes of "diversities of gifts."
- In verse 5, he writes of "differences of administrations."
- In verse 6, he writes of "diversities of operations."

- In verse 4, he writes of the Spirit.

- In verse 5, he writes of the Son.
- In verse 6, he writes of the Father.

- Romans 12:6–8 deals with the gifts of the Spirit.
- Ephesians 4:11 relates to the ministries linked with Jesus.
- Corinthians 12:8–10 speaks of operations—or manifestations appointed by God.

I firmly believe there is a differentiation between the gifts of the Spirit, (Romans 12), the operation or manifestation of the *pneumatikos* (1 Corinthians 12), and ministries (Ephesians 4).

Not everyone will function in these 1 Corinthians 12 manifestations because many people say, "These are not for today. There are no more miracles possible. They are for a different age." That may be their position, and that's fine. God's not going to force those operations on anyone.

But *every* person has a Romans 12 gift embedded within him or her. I believe that as you exercise your Romans 12 gift and if you're open to the powerful operation of God in the *pneumatikos* of 1 Corinthians 12, you will simply move in an extra dimension through which God can, if He so chooses, open an Ephesians 4 ministry for you.

Everyone has one of the motivational gifts found in Romans 12. How can you know which is yours? Whenever you want to understand anything about how the body of Christ is to function, study the earthly ministry of Jesus, for, although you have one primary motivational gift and may experience others from time to time, all of these gifts existed simultaneously in Him. And, because Jesus declared, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6), I believe each of these seven gifts can be linked to the Truth as seen in and through Him:

Prophecy—Declaring Truth

In John 4, Jesus declared truth both by forth-telling and by foretelling. "Woman, go call your husband," He said to the woman at the well.

"I don't have a husband," she countered.

"You've said well that you have no husband," Jesus replied. "You have had five husbands, and the man you're living with now is not your husband at all."

"I perceive you're a prophet," she answered.

Bingo.

Then Jesus said, "The time is coming and now is when worship will not be based in Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim, but the Father is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth."

As Jesus demonstrated through his conversation with the woman at the well, prophecy is declaring truth through a powerful, pointed proclamation. It is often spontaneous and invariably moves people a notch higher in their perception of Jesus and their understanding of Him. Maybe you have the ability to speak powerfully and pointedly as you proclaim truth and take people forward in their knowledge of Jesus. If so, yours is the gift of prophecy—an important function in the body.

Ministry—Illustrating Truth

Ministry simply means service. It's one thing to talk about love, but what did Jesus do? He illustrated it practically when, after seeing hungry people and hearing their stomachs growling, He said, "Let's feed them," (Matthew 14:16) Ministry means caring for people practically—not just talking about it, but actually doing it.

In Acts 9, there was a death in the early church. Everyone said, "Quick, call for Peter! We've got to pray for a miracle, a resurrection!" Who died? John the apostle? No. James? He was already dead. Some heavy-hitter? Not in the way you might suspect. The person the entire church was so upset about losing was not an anointed apostle or a dedicated deacon, but a woman named Dorcas. Why was the whole church so upset about losing her? Was she a prophet? No. Was she a teacher? No. She sewed clothes—and in so doing, she demonstrated the practicality of love. People who say, "I can sew your shirt. I can tune up your car. I can bake you a cake," more than likely have the gift of ministry.

Teaching—Clarifying Truth

In Matthew 5, Jesus said, "You've heard it said of old that you're not to commit murder. But let Me clarify that point. Let Me tell you the real issue: If you hate your brother, you're guilty of murder. Why? Because you will kill his reputation, destroy his character, and rip him apart bit by bit with your gossip, hatred, and bitterness."

What did the people say to this? "No man speaks like this man. He speaks with authority," (Matthew 7:29). If you are one who has the ability to clarify truth—to make things clear to people's minds and applicable to their lives—your gift is probably that of teaching.

Giving—Furthering Truth

Jesus exemplified the gift of giving when He shed His blood for you and laid down His life on Calvary for me. He died in the place of despicable sinners like us. Thus, His was the ultimate gift of giving.

There are those who figure out their tithe with computers and calculators, saying, "Okay. I made $331 this week. Ten percent of that is $33.10 cents. We'll round it down to $33." And that's okay. It's certainly better than not tithing at all! But the person with the gift of giving has an entirely different mind-set.

Around the turn of the century, a man who owned a fledgling business had the gift of giving. "Lord," he said, "I know it's important to tithe. But as far as the profits of my little business go, I'm not going to give you ten percent. I'll keep ten percent. From this day on, as long as I live, You, Lord, will get ninety percent of the profits of this company." He became a multimillionaire on ten percent. You see, he founded the Quaker Oats Company. The person with the gift of giving gives with abandon and hilarity.

Ruling—Administrating Truth

What did Jesus say when He fed the five thousand? “Make these men sit in groups of fifty (Luke 9:14). Let’s do everything decently and in order. Let’s do things carefully, not haphazardly. Let’s make sure things are done with integrity.” There are those who look for ways of doing things decently and orderly. And theirs is the gift of ruling.

Mercy—Radiating Truth

Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, even though He knew that in a moment or two He would say, "Lazarus, come forth," and Lazarus would indeed come out (John 11:35). The Greek word John used for "wept" speaks of great intensity. Jesus felt the hurt of those around Him. Perhaps you are one who hurts for people and with people, one who feels the pain of others as if it were your own. You may be one who empathizes with the poor in spirit and who feels drawn toward the lowly of heart. If so, you have the much-needed gift of mercy —a gift that radiates the reality of the love of Jesus.

Exhortation—Recalling Truth

The storm was raging and the disciples were struggling. They shouldn't have been, for hadn't Jesus directed them to go to the other side? Wasn't His command also His promise that He would bring it to pass? Yet they were afraid. So He walked out on the water toward them and exhorted them. "Be of good cheer," He said. "It is I. Be not afraid" (see Matthew 14:27).

The Greek word translated "exhortation" is *paraklesis,* the root of *parakle tos*—a word that refers to the "coming alongside" of the Spirit. If you have the ability to come alongside someone who is either going through a storm or sitting in the doldrums and get them going again in the right direction, yours is the gift of exhortation.

Of the seven motivational gifts, how can you know which is your primary gift? Here's one way to find out: If the pastor of your church fell down dead today and the elders said to you, "Please, be the pastor"—what would be the first thing you would do?

Those with the gift of prophecy would say, "This Fellowship is wonderfully loving and glorying in grace, but we need a new call for righteousness and holiness. If I were pastor, I would proclaim truth boldly and seek to take our people a notch higher spiritually."

Those with the gift of ministry would say, "If I were pastor, I would make sure folks are being helped practically. Are we helping people make sense of their finances? Are the new mothers being cared for?"

Those with the gift of teaching would say, "We need a deeper understanding of hermeneutics, homiletics, and eschatology. We need to be more serious in our study and application of the Word."

Those with the gift of giving would say, "If I were pastor, I would raise money in order to see ministries continue and missionaries go out. We need to further the truth of the gospel in these last days."

Those with the gift of ruling would say, "The great need is for better organization—that we may do all things decently and orderly."

Those with the gift of mercy would say, "Hospital care, concern for those who are homeless and hungry, compassion for those who are hurting, help for the orphans and widows—that's what we need."

Those with the gift of exhortation would say, "If I were pastor, I would concentrate on personal counseling for those who are going through storms or

are stuck in depression. We need more one-on-one interaction."

What would you do if *you* were pastor?

The problem is, we have a tendency toward "gift projection"—of seeing everything in terms of our own individual motivational gift. Oftentimes, we'll wonder why everyone doesn't see the same needs we see and feel the same way we feel. Instead of using our gifts to complement one another and to build up the body, we grow frustrated when that which we view as crucial is not top priority for everyone else.

Let me put it this way: Suppose my four-year-old son, Benjamin, left Sunday school and came in to the sanctuary to bring me a glass of water. Suppose as he made his way toward the platform, he stumbled and fell—spilling the water and shattering the glass. How would you respond? I suggest the way you would respond will further identify your motivational Romans 12 gift.

The one with the gift of prophecy would say, "Benjamin, listen carefully. The world is full of pitfalls. Be careful how you walk. Walk straightly. Walk carefully."

The one with the gift of ministry would say, "Where's the mop? Where's the broom? I'll clean this up."

The one with the gift of teaching would say, "Ben, listen. When you carry a glass of water, make sure that you wipe away all the condensation from the outside of the glass. Then, apply equal pressure with both hands, grip tightly, and walk slowly."

The one with the gift of giving would pull out his wallet and say, "How much does that cost? Let me take care of it."

The one with the gift of ruling would say, "Hmm. Who put those stairs there? That was poor planning. We should have had a ramp."

The one with the gift of mercy would blubber, "Come here, big guy. I know just how you feel. I used to spill things too. Don't worry."

The one with the gift of exhortation would say, "Come on, Benny. Let's go get another glass of water. Be a little more careful and try again. I know you can do it!"

That's the body acting in unity. Everyone looks at the same event and sees it through his own motivational ministry perspective. It doesn't mean anyone's right or wrong, better or worse. It just means we're differently gifted. How do you view an event? Don't come down on others for not seeing it the way you

do. Wisdom says, "This is the way I see this situation, so it must mean that this is my place in the body. My job is not to change *them,* but to do what *I'm* supposed to do."

My strong encouragement to you today is to present yourself a living sacrifice to God. Find out what your gift is. Keep focused on it. And be a sharpshooter in the Name of Jesus for the benefit of His Body.



7 Here in chapter 7, Stephen gives a defense that is absolutely brilliant. A masterpiece of logic and theological understanding, it is one of the most profound and powerful arguments in all of Scripture.

Serving faithfully first as a waiter, then as a deacon, then as a miracle-worker, we now see Stephen as a theologian par excellence. This is precisely what Paul said would happen when he wrote that those who use the office of deacon well purchase for themselves a great degree of boldness (1 Timothy 3:13). But as Stephen boldly proclaimed and declared the truth of the gospel, it caused great consternation among the enemies of the church. Unable to refute his wisdom and his logic, their only recourse was to hire false witnesses to lie about him and indict him on trumped-up charges. What were the charges? Stephen was accused of speaking blasphemy concerning the temple and the law, which was tantamount to charging him with undermining the entire Jewish faith.

Acts 7:1, 2

Then said the high priest, Are these things so? And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran.

Stephen began his defense by reminding his accusers that God appeared to their father, Abraham, not in the Holy City of Jerusalem, but in the pagan city of Mesopotamia, where worship centered around a moon goddess.

Acts 7:3

And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.

Abraham became a pilgrim because spirituality is not static—it's dynamic. We keep flowing. We keep growing. We keep expanding our understanding if we remain open to the moving of God.

Acts 7:4

Then came he out of the land of the Chal-daeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.

Abraham left Mesopotamia and stopped in Haran, evidently at the suggestion of his father, Terah. The years in Haran were lost until Terah passed away and Abraham got moving again. The point for you and me is simply this: Whenever we stop and park, we're missing it. There must be continual movement and growth in spirituality. It's a pilgrimage we're on—not a place we arrive.

Acts 7:5

And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.

Abraham owned no land—only a promise. Even at the end of his life, the only portion of the land he actually possessed was the cave he purchased in which to bury his wife (Genesis 23:9).

Acts 7:6, 7

And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.

What happened while Abraham's descendants were in Egypt—away from the Promised Land? They grew and multiplied. In recounting Jewish history, Stephen is reiterating the fact that "place" is not important. The Jews grew and multiplied not in the Promised Land, but in Egypt.

Acts 7:8 (a)

And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day . . .

God said, "Abraham, I want you to circumcise your son. Deal with the area that speaks of reproductive energy in the flesh." And Abraham did it. Without a temple, Abraham obeyed God.

Acts 7:8 (b)–10

. . . and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

When was God with Joseph? Not when he was in Israel, but when he was in Egypt. Joseph is a perfect picture of Jesus Christ. . . .

- Joseph's brothers were "moved with envy."

  Pilate "knew that for envy" they delivered Jesus unto him (see Matthew 27:18).
- Joseph was sold for twenty pieces of silver.

  Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver.
- Joseph was punished for sins he did not commit.

  Jesus, the sinless One, was punished for our sins.
- Joseph was cast into prison.

  Jesus descended into the "prison" of the earth (see Ephesians 4:9).
- Joseph became ruler of the prison.

  Jesus preached in hell and led captivity captive (Ephesians 4:8).
- Joseph miraculously was freed from prison.

  Jesus miraculously arose from the grave.

The picture is perfect.

Acts 7:11

Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance.

When his brothers rejected Joseph, what happened? Famine came. The same was true in Stephen's day. When the Jews rejected Jesus Christ, a spiritual famine descended upon the land.

Acts 7:12–16

But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, and were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.

During a time of famine, Joseph's brothers went to Egypt for help. They stood before the Prime Minister of Egypt, not recognizing him to be their own brother. As Joseph began to question them when they appeared before him a second time, they admitted that they had sinned greatly against their brother. Then, in that powerful emotional scene, Joseph said, "I am Joseph" (Genesis 45:4). It wasn't until the second time they saw him that Joseph's brothers realized who he was. So, too, after going through a time of famine, drought, and tribulation, Israel will finally recognize Jesus in His Second Coming (Romans 11:26).

Acts 7:17–19

But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.

Stephen continued his history lesson. As the nation of Israel multiplied and grew—not in Israel, but in Egypt—Pharaoh saw their number grow from seventy-five to two million. Fearing a rebellion, he sought to reduce their population by ordering the destruction of all Jewish baby boys.

Acts 7:20 (a)

In which time Moses was born . . .

Stephen shifts gears here. He had spoken of Abraham in relation to "the place"—the land of Israel—as he proved that the land was not really the issue, since Abraham had an encounter with God in Babylon, and since God's people had prospered and multiplied even in Egypt. God is not confined to a piece of property, argued Stephen, but to a Person—Jesus Christ. And now he develops his argument further as he speaks of Moses in relation to a procedure, proving that God is not confined to the law.

Acts 7:20 (b), 21

. . . and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months: And when he was cast out, Pharoah's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.

Where did Moses' mother get the idea of putting him in a boat? I suggest that, being a godly woman, she had pondered the Scriptures and was reminded of another family in danger during dark times—Noah's. I point this out not merely for the sake of speculation—but for application. Reading the Bible is a wonderful thing to do. It will help you out in very practical ways and in all areas of life. Ask Jochabed!

Acts 7:22, 23

And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

Moses returned to his brethren not out of curiosity, but out of kinship. Raised in the house of Pharaoh, he left the palace to serve his brothers.

Acts 7:24–26

And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?

Notice that the ministry of Moses was twofold. When he left the palace of Pharaoh to be linked with his suffering brothers as they baked bricks under the burning, brutal, blistering Egyptian sun and when he defended the Israelite who was smitten by the Egyptian, he sought to bring liberation *to* God's people. When he intervened in the strife between two Israelites, he sought to bring reconciliation *among* God's people.

The same is true of Jesus. When He left the palaces of heaven and came to this desert called Earth, it was to bring liberation *to* us and reconciliation *among* us.

Acts 7:27

But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?

"Beat it," the Israelites said to Moses. "We don't want you to judge us or to rule over us." So, too, they would say of Jesus, "We have no king but Caesar. Away with this man. Crucify Him."

Acts 7:28, 29

Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday? Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.

After he was rejected, Moses went into the land of the Gentiles, took a Gentile bride by the name of Zipporah, and had two sons. So, too, when the Jewish people rejected Jesus Christ, He went to the Gentiles, took a Gentile bride — the church—and begat many sons.

Acts 7:30–34

And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.

The Lord declares, "I have seen," then, "I have heard," and finally, "I am come." And He says the same thing today to you who are feeling the pressures of some Pharaoh or the bondage of some burden.

"Where is He?" you say. "I've been waiting so long. Why isn't He working?"

He *is* working—but in ways we won't see for perhaps many years, or possibly until we get to heaven.

Unbeknownst to the children of Israel, all the while they were slaving in Egypt, the Lord was working in the Promised Land—which at that time was inhabited by Amorites, Jebusites, Hittites, Hivites, Canaanites, Perizzites, and probably termites! God, who is slow to anger and full of mercy, gave these people four hundred years to get it together—to repent and to turn from their wicked ways. Yet for four centuries they fell deeper and deeper into depravity—offering their babies on the incandescent arms of Moloch, practicing indescribably aberrant sexual lifestyles, living heathen, pagan lives. Thus, after a grace period of four hundred years, God was fully justified in saying to the Jews upon their release from Egypt, "Rid the land of these people."

The Lord still declares, "I have seen. I have heard. I am come." Trust Him to come at the right time—the fullness of time—to deliver you.

Acts 7:35

This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.

Stephen twisted the knife by reminding his Jewish audience that not only did they reject Joseph, failing to recognize him until they saw him the second time—but they did the same thing to Moses.

Acts 7:36–38 (a)

He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years. This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness . . .

The church is not Israel, but she certainly parallels it.

- Israel was fed with bread from heaven. The church partakes of the bread of Jesus' broken body.
- Israel was delivered by the blood of the Passover lamb. The church is delivered by the blood of the crucified Lamb.
- Israel came out of Egypt, which is a type of the world. The church is called from out of the world.
- Israel went through the waters of the Red Sea. The church goes through the waters of baptism.

Acts 7:38 (b)–40

. . . with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

Not only did the Jews reject Moses when he first came on the scene, but later on even after they understood he was their deliverer, they rejected him again. When he went into the mountain and spent forty days in the presence of God, the people below said to Aaron, "What are we paying that guy for? We don't know where he is or what he's doing."

Jews today ask those same questions about Jesus: "Where is He? We who have been suffering these many centuries, we who have been oppressed and gassed in the chambers of the Holocaust, wonder where He is. If He's our Messiah, our Savior—*where is He?*"

Acts 7:41

And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

Aaron collected jewelry from which he fashioned a golden calf, and the people stripped off their clothes and danced around it. To these religious Jews, who took great pride in the heritage of Moses, Stephen said, "What did you do with Moses? When he was on the mountain, you were playing games." And what about Jesus? When He was on Mount Calvary, they stripped off His clothes and played games to see who would get His robe (Matthew 27:35).

Acts 7:42, 43 (a)

Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch . . .

Who was Moloch? He was the god of prosperity and success. He was the god to whom parents would offer their first-born children and watch them die, believing their families would be more prosperous and their businesses more successful as a result. Moloch is still worshiped by many today even in America. "We'll abort the baby," they say, "so we can have more success and prosperity. We don't have time for children because we're climbing the corporate ladder."

Acts 7:43 (b)

. . . and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

"If it's idols you want," God declared, "I'll send you to Babylon where idolatry is flourishing." For seventy years, the Jews would live in Babylon, where they became so sick of idolatry that to this day, devout Jews have a particular abhorrence of idols of any kind.

Acts 7:44, 45

Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David.

The tabernacle was constructed and God raised up Joshua to lead the people into the Promised Land.

Acts 7:46–50

Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?

Keep the context in mind. To these people who were so concerned about the temple, Stephen quotes the prophet, saying, "God never even asked for a temple. It's foolish to think you can box the almighty God into a little temple."

By this time, I bet the blood of Stephen's audience was beginning to boil. After all, they couldn't have liked being reminded of their own history, of their own tendencies, of what God had spoken so pointedly. They couldn't have liked being reminded that God never asked for a temple in the first place. They couldn't have liked being reminded that they had a tendency to reject every prophet God had sent their way.

Acts 7:51

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

"The issue," Stephen declared, "is not reviling the holy temple. The issue is resisting the Holy Spirit."

Acts 7:52 (a)
Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?

The Jews were brutal to the prophets. They tried to stone Moses. They put Isaiah into a dead tree trunk and sawed it in half. They threw Jeremiah into dungeons several times before they finally stoned him to death. They killed Zechariah in the temple.

Acts 7:52 (b)
And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.

"You accuse me of slighting Moses," Stephen argued. "But you have slain the prophets and even Messiah Himself."

Acts 7:53
Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

"The issue is not my blaspheming the law," declared Stephen. "The issue is your breaking the law."

Acts 7:54–55 (a)
When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God . . .

Stephen began his sermon by talking about the God of glory (7:2). At the end of his sermon, he saw the glory of God. That's the way it always is.

Whenever you start talking to people about some quality of the Lord, by the time you've finished the conversation, you find yourself enjoying and seeing that very quality in your own heart. It's incredible how that works. Start telling someone how wonderful Jesus is, and by the time you conclude, you'll be totally in wonder of Jesus. Begin sharing about the God of grace, and you'll find yourself receiving the grace of God. That is why I encourage you to share your faith—not because it is a job to do—but because it is a joy to experience.

- "I'm so dry," you say.

  When was the last time you talked to someone about Jesus?
- "It's just not very real to me."

  When was the last time you got into an interesting full-on dialogue with someone about what you believe?
- "I'm just not experiencing joy."

  When was the last time you ministered to someone who was depressed?
- "I just don't know if I really have faith."

  When was the last time you shared what faith you do have with someone who had less than you?

Acts 7:55 (b)

. . . and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.

Many times in Scripture, we read of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God. Here, however, we see Him standing—not in anxiety, but to welcome Stephen into glory.

Acts 7:56–58 (a)

And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him . . .

The contrast is great between the uptightness, anger, and bitterness of the crowd and the peace and tranquility of Stephen, who had the "face of an angel" (see 6:15). While these men were frenzied, Stephen was totally at peace. Why?

Because while the crowd looked down on Stephen, Stephen looked up to heaven.

Acts 7:58 (b)

. . . and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

This is Paul, who would later become the great apostle.

Acts 7:59–60

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

How could Stephen be so peaceful—dying, without fighting back or lashing out, crying, "O, Lord, don't hold this against these guys"? He looked into heaven and saw Jesus. You see, Revelation 5:6 tells us that when we see Him, we will see Him as a Lamb having been slain. Therefore, if I'm looking up to heaven and seeing the Lord, inevitably I will understand that the scars He still bears were caused by me. My sin, my rebellion, my carnality, my depravity caused Him to be slaughtered on Calvary. And as I look into heaven and see what my sin did, what my sin wrought, I have no other alternative but to say even of those who are gnashing their teeth and throwing stones at me, "Lord Jesus, forgive them. Don't hold this against them."

When I truly see Jesus, I have no other choice but to be amazed at His grace and to be at peace with others. It's only when I lower my sight and begin to look at people horizontally that I want to say, "Who do you think you are to say that about me?" It's only when I take my eyes off Jesus that I become defensive and antagonistic, uptight and combative, abrasive, callous, and critical.

What about you? Are you tense? Nervous? Uptight? Losing sleep, hair or teeth unnecessarily? The solution is so simple: Don't look down on people. Look up into heaven and see the Lord. See how He has forgiven you. See the grace He has shown to you. See His mercies extended in your direction.

In 2 Kings, we read the account of a battle between Israel and Moab. Losing the battle, and realizing his number was up, the king of Moab in

desperation sacrificed his eldest son on the wall of his city. When the people of Israel saw the sacrifice of the king's own son, they departed from him and returned to their own land (2 Kings 3:27). They lost the will to fight when they saw the sacrifice the king made.

So, too, when we see the sacrifice of our King's Son, when we see clearly the price that was paid, we lose the will to fight. And, like Stephen, we're at peace even when the enemy throws stones.



8 Chapter 7 recounted the defense and death of Stephen, the dynamic deacon who boldly declared that the Lord was not interested in religion, but in relationship. And chapter 8 picks up the story. . . .

Acts 8:1 (a)
And Saul was consenting . . .

This Saul, of course, would later be known as the apostle Paul. The word "consenting" actually means "voting," implying that Saul was a voting member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court. This interests me because marriage was one of the requirements for a position on the Sanhedrin—and yet Paul wrote to the church at Corinth that it was good for the unmarried and the widows to remain in a single state even as he was (1 Corinthians 7:8). If Paul was married in Acts and single in 1 Corinthians, what happened to his wife?

Some suggest she died, that he was a widower who chose to remain single in order to give himself more fully to ministry. Much more probable, however, based upon the writings of early church history, is that Paul's wife left him when he was converted. Either way, it's interesting that Paul doesn't tell the story. Truly, he practiced what he preached when he wrote, "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13, 14).

If you've experienced pain or a problem in the past, perhaps Paul can be an example to you today. I know it's not easy, but Paul shows the possibility of forgetting the past, pressing on, and seeing how the Lord can do something unique and special in your situation presently.

Acts 8:1 (b)
. . . unto his death.

Was Paul actually a thrower of stones?

No.

We read in Acts 7:58 that the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. This brilliant young theologian would vote for Stephen's death, but he was above bloodying his own hands to bring it about. And yet something happens as we read the story, for later in the Book of Acts, we'll see Paul use his own hands to drag men and women out of their homes in order to imprison and persecute them. This would haunt him all of his days—so much so that he would write about it to his young protigie, Timothy, calling himself a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an injurious person (1 Timothy 1:13). In Romans 15, Paul wrote that wherever he went he raised money for the poor saints in Jerusalem. No doubt, whenever he walked through the streets of Jerusalem and saw a wife sitting without her husband, or a man without his wife—he would be reminded of the results of his radical and relentless persecution.

I find this to be a word of warning to us personally. We can think we're doing the Lord a big favor by coming down on people, beating up on people, or pointing our finger at people—all in the name of "purifying the church" or "taking a stand for righteousness." But what a shock it must have been for Paul on the road to Damascus when he finally realized that all of the time he thought he was doing God a favor, he was actually persecuting His Son. Be careful. Remember Paul when you feel like going from house to house pointing out sinners or finding fault with preachers. Like Paul, we can be radical—but we can be radically wrong.

Acts 8:1 (c)
And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria . . .

"You shall receive power when the Holy Ghost comes upon you, and you shall be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth," promised Jesus (see Acts 1:8). In other words, "My work starts here

in Jerusalem, but it must move on from here." We all have a tendency to camp out where it's comfortable. So did the early church. Because Jerusalem was the center of spiritual activity, for six years, no one wanted to leave. It took persecution to get the believers moving, to scatter them to Judaea and Samaria. It was the persecution in Acts 8:1 that moved the church to obey the command of Acts 1:8.

Maybe you face a job transfer, a relational change, or something else that makes you unsettled or unsure. Maybe doors are closing and you're wondering why. Although it would be wonderful if we were all so spiritually sensitive that we would feel the prompting of the Lord and respond immediately, most of us don't have that kind of sensitivity. For most of us, it takes a pink slip, a job transfer, a broken romance to get us moving. Perhaps you'd rather stay where you are, but in reality the Lord sees where He can use you most effectively. Trust Him.

Acts 8:1 (d)
. . . except the apostles.

Why didn't the apostles leave? I believe it was because they had previously fled in fear. You remember the story: The night Jesus was brought to trial in the court of Caiaphas, only a few of His disciples followed Him—and even then from afar. The next day when He was nailed to the Cross, all except John had deserted Him. Now, six years later, perhaps recalling their former fear, they said, "We're staying here in Jerusalem even if it means risking our lives."

Acts 8:2
And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

Does this verse imply that we should make "great lamentation" when a believer dies? Notice Luke didn't say, "The *apostles* carried Stephen to his burial," or, "The *disciples* carried Stephen to his burial," but "*Devout men* carried Stephen to his burial." "Devout men" means "Godfearers." Thus, it could be that those who carried Stephen to his burial weren't believers. If, on the other hand, these devout men were indeed Christians, perhaps they didn't understand heaven very clearly. You see, as we read in 1 Thessalonians 4,

many in the early church believed they would see the Second Coming of Christ—that any believer who died before His return would miss the rapture and not make it into Heaven. That is why Paul explained to them that, although the dead in Christ would rise first, they wouldn't be left behind (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Acts 8:3

As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

The word "havock" comes from a root word used to describe the results of wounding a wild boar. When a boar is wounded, he goes on a rampage and loses all sense of sanity—which is exactly what happened to Paul. This refined, cultured, religious scholar who sat at the feet of Gamaliel—this student par excellence, this man whose command of the Greek language was greater than any other writer—lost all sense of sanity. At first he merely consented to the death of Stephen. But then, like a shark that smells blood, he began going from house to house, hauling out and imprisoning believers, committing them to their deaths.

Acts 8:4

Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

Running from Saul and his posse, the early church fled, preaching the Word as they went. So even as Paul tried in vain to stomp out the flames of faith in Jerusalem, sparks were flying and igniting fires everywhere.

Acts 8:5 (a)

Then Philip . . .

Philip was another one of those dynamic deacons we read about in Acts 6. Like Stephen, he is a powerful reminder that if we are faithful in the little things, God will open up more and more for us to do.

Acts 8:5 (b)

. . . went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

Second Kings 17 gives the account of the Assyrian invasion of Israel in 721 B.C., when the ten northern tribes were carried into captivity before the Assyrians claimed the northern part of Israel. As they moved into the area, the Assyrians married the impoverished Jews who were left behind, and a half-breed race was produced known as the Samaritans. The Jews in the south looked down on the Samaritans, calling them half-breeds and dogs, and went out of their way to avoid any contact with them. That is why it would have been shocking to hear Jesus say, "I must need go through Samaria" (see John 4:4). Seven years after Jesus talked with the Samaritan woman at the well, I wonder if she was there, hearing Philip preach.

Acts 8:6

And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

We usually think of miracles in terms of sight, but miracles can be heard as well—through a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, a word of prophecy, and the teaching of the Word.

Acts 8:7

For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

There are those who read the Gospels and the Book of Acts and say, "It's interesting that Jesus cast out demons and that the early church was involved in deliverance ministry. But we're beyond that today." Are we really? Or have we allowed psychology to simply shift the attention away from demonic activity with terms like "psychosis" and "syndrome," "dysfunction" and "disorder"?

Acts 8:8

And there was great joy in that city.

The word "gospel" means "good news." Wherever the gospel is preached and received, great joy replaces pseudo-spiritual heaviness.

Acts 8:9–11

But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

Was Simon simply a clever magician? Or was he a conduit of demonic power? Whether it was magic, trickery, or demonic activity, I don't know. But I do know that Satan used Simon to keep people away from God. That is why we need to keep ourselves and our kids away from crystals, pyramids, hypnosis, and anything else that smacks of the occult. Satan can, indeed, empower individuals to do signs, wonders, and impressive miracles. But he can only make things worse. . . .

In Exodus 7, when Pharaoh demanded a sign from Moses, Aaron cast down his rod, and it became a snake. Pharaoh then called for his magicians, and they duplicated the miracle, as their rods became snakes as well. Moses then touched the Nile River with his rod, and it turned to blood. Pharaoh's magicians did the same thing to other sources of water, turning them all to blood. Moses called for a plague of frogs to cover the land. What did Pharaoh's magicians do? They conjured up frogs as well. Now, the last thing the Egyptians needed was more snakes, more blood, or more frogs. What they needed was deliverance from those things. But Pharaoh's magicians were powerless to help. That's the way it always is. Satan and demons can and do perform miracles and wonders—but only to bring about harm.

Acts 8:12

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Philip came and began to preach Jesus Christ and the Good News of the kingdom. Suddenly, people realized there was hope, joy, a reason for living—and they responded to his preaching.

Acts 8:13 (a)
Then Simon himself believed also . . .

Simon believed, but he was not a born-again believer. James 2:19 says that even the devils believe in God and they tremble. But they're not saved. Did you know you can miss heaven by eighteen inches? You can believe in your head intellectually. You can affirm the theology mentally. But if faith is not in your heart, you are in no better shape than the demons in hell. There is not one demon who doubts the reality of hell. That is why James points out the fallacy of intellectual faith. "Your heart must be touched," he says. "Your faith must affect the way you live, for faith without works is dead" (see James 2:17).

"Faith without works?" you say. "I thought salvation was by faith." It is. It's not faith *and* works. It's not faith *or* works. It's faith *that* works.

Acts 8:13 (b)–17

. . . and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

Notice that, although the people in Samaria were born again and baptized, they were not yet empowered with the coming-upon of the Spirit. So Peter and John came down from Jerusalem and laid hands on them. Why didn't Philip do it? Since Philip was the one who led the city into a knowledge of Christ Jesus; since Philip was the one who baptized and taught and shared the Good News of the kingdom—why didn't Philip lay his hands on the Samaritans to receive the power of the Spirit?

I suggest two possible reasons. In sending for Peter and John, the "Big Guns in Jerusalem," Philip was linking the Samaritan Christians to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. He was not starting a separate movement in Samaria nor a distinct denomination of believers. They were all one body. Sending for Peter and John verified the linkage and support between the believers in Jerusalem and those in Samaria.

But a second and more important reason may have been that perhaps Philip wasn't gifted in that way. Although he was gifted in preaching and in evangelism, it is possible he was not gifted in the laying on of hands for the empowering of people. Wise enough to realize that a couple of his brothers had that anointing, that gifting, that calling—he sent for them.

Again we see the importance of the body working together. No one person can do it all. No one person should do it all. Every part of the body has a specific role to play. It's so relaxing when you finally realize you don't have to do it all. People around you might expect you to be everything for them, but you know you're not and can't be. So what should you do? Do what you're called to do and let a brother or a sister do those things you haven't been gifted or called to do. The Lord's burden is not heavy. His yoke fits perfectly (Matthew 11:29).

Acts 8:18, 19

And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

"Wow!" Simon said. "That's a neat trick. Let me buy it from you." To this day, magicians buy tricks from each other, which is why I believe Simon was operating through magic and not necessarily through demonic power.

Acts 8:20–24

But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the

bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

When Simon was called on the carpet, he didn't say, "Pray that my heart will be changed." He said, "Pray that these things won't happen to me." He wasn't interested in having his life corrected. He just wanted to be protected from the consequences of his sin.

Acts 8:25

And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

What happened to Simon? Tradition says he went insane and buried himself alive—but not before he introduced the heresy of Gnosticism, which, among other things, stated that, matter being evil and spirit good, God could not have created the world out of matter, nor could Jesus have become Man and died for our sin. John wrote his first epistle, in part, to counter the threat of Gnosticism within the early church.

Acts 8:26, 27 (a)

And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went . . .

Philip, whose ministry had brought about the wonderful work of the Lord in Samaria, was now being called to Gaza. "But, Lord, what about the posters?" he could have protested. "What about the book-signings? Lord, I'm so influential here in Samaria. The entire city is getting turned on to You. Why are You asking me to go to the desert? There's nothing down there."

Please note that the Lord didn't say why He was sending Philip to the desert. He simply said, "Arise and go." And Philip arose and went. If you struggle with finding God's will, know this: God's will is for you to obey what He tells you to do one step at a time. He doesn't give us the full story. He just says, "I want you to go down to the desert. And once you do that, I'll show you

the next step." That's why the Christian life is so incredibly exciting. We never know what's ahead.

An experiment was performed in which caterpillars were placed on the rim of a large pot containing dirt and several of their favorite plants. The caterpillars began to move along the rim of the pot—each one following the one in front, every caterpillar thinking the one ahead of him knew where he was going. Around and around and around they went until they all died of starvation. Do you feel like you're drying up and getting dizzy? Could it be because the Lord spoke to you at some point but, because you were so intent on following the caterpillar in front of you, you missed the adventure? The key to the exciting, impacting Christian life is to be like Philip and obey when you hear the Lord's voice or feel His pull—even though you don't know the end of the story at the beginning.

Acts 8:27 (b), 28

. . . and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

The treasurer in the kingdom, this man was perhaps the second most powerful individual in Ethiopia. Evidently, he was a God-fearer who had gone to Jerusalem to worship. Very likely, it was his first pilgrimage to the Holy City. But not finding answers in the law, or in the ritualism of temple worship, he rode home in his chariot with his heart still hungry as he pored over the Scriptures.

Acts 8:29

Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

This proves to me that the Lord will do whatever it takes to reach a person who desires to know Him. On the Day of Judgment, no one will be able to say, "I really wanted to know You, God, but I couldn't figure out how." God will send a Philip to anyone who wants to know Him. And that Philip could be you!

Acts 8:30 (a)

And Philip ran thither to him . . .

I love this phrase! It doesn't say, Philip said, "Okay. I hate the desert, but if I gotta go, I'll go." No. Philip *ran.* How wonderful it is to see someone full of enthusiasm concerning ministry and service. The word "enthusiasm" comes from the Greek words *en* and *theos,* meaning, "full of God." An enthusiastic person is a person who is full of God. And Philip was enthusiasm personified.

Acts 8:30 (b)–34

. . . and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

Already sovereignly drawn by the Spirit, the eunuch was searching and wondering.

Acts 8:35

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

Philip preached not Judaism, not denominationalism, not water baptism, but Jesus.

Acts 8:36, 37 (a)

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.

The same Peter who saw the deception of Simon the sorcerer would later write, “Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10).



For topical study of Acts 8:35–37, see “Avoiding the Unexpected End” below.

Acts 8:37 (b), 38

And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

The Ethiopian had at last found what he was looking for—not a ritualistic religion, but a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ.

Acts 8:39

And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

The eunuch had come seeking to the Holy City. He had left struggling with the Scriptures. Now he returns rejoicing in his salvation.

Acts 8:40

But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

As a deacon, Philip served tables. In Samaria, he became an evangelist. In Gaza, he was removed from the public arena to minister one on one to the Ethiopian eunuch. In Caesarea, he found himself raising a family of four daughters who became prophetesses (Acts 21:9). Wherever he was, Philip flowed in ministry. I’m sure he was as thrilled serving tables as he was preaching to multitudes and as enthusiastic talking to the Ethiopian as he was raising daughters to be godly women.

In your walk with the Lord and your work for the Lord, like Philip, you will go through different seasons. There will be times when you'll wait tables and minister practically. There will be other times when the Lord might use you to speak to multitudes as you minister publicly. Other times, you will work one on one as you minister personally. Still other times, you'll invest in your kids as you minister to your family. To everything there is a time and a purpose. Trust the Lord. Go with the flow. Walk with Him one step at a time, and He'll lead you in paths you could never imagine. Just ask Philip!

AVOIDING AN UNEXPECTED END

A Topical Study of ACTS 8:35–37

When my son Benjamin was four years old, he was completely and wonderfully obsessed with Bible stories and Bible characters. If you came to our house, chances are you would have seen Benjamin wearing what looked suspiciously like a burlap sack. That was his David outfit. He was David for a good part of each day. Then he would become Joshua, marching around and knocking down his building-block walls. He loved Bible stories in a way that blew me away. Once on his "special day," I said, "Benjamin, where do you want to go? Do you want to go to the park? Do you want to go to McDonald Playland?" No, he wanted to go to the Christian bookstore. So that's where we went. We spent two hours there, with Benny sitting on the floor looking at books and playing with puzzles. After watching Ben's enthusiasm, Fred, the owner, offered to hire him!

Thus, it was not surprising that after every service, Benjamin would head for the bookstore at Applegate Christian Fellowship. One week he saw something that had escaped his notice in all of his previous visits. Way up on the top shelf sat a Bible Nintendo game. Intrigued as he studied the pictures of Noah and the ark, Joshua and Jericho, Jonah and the whale on the cover, Benjamin brought it home.

Now, at four years of age, Benny was not very adept at video games—but he patiently and laboriously pushed the buttons and tried to advance to the different levels where he could see Noah's ark sail and Jericho's walls tumble down. After a couple of hours, however, frustration began to cloud his face. Finally, he said to my wife, Tammy, "Mommy, get a piece of paper and write down what I tell you. I want to send a letter to the bookstore." This is what he said:

> Dear Bookstore,
>
> I am talking about Nintendo and so please help me to get to Goliath. Please help me to get to the flood of Noah and help the animals to go

two by two. I am Benjamin. I am only four. Don't you know that? Bye-bye, bookstore. I love you, bookstore.

Benny

Benjamin was disappointed because the game didn't end the way he thought it would. So, too, many, many people will encounter a far greater tragedy when they find themselves face-to-face with the Lord, believing that they have a right to enter into heaven, but instead hearing Him say, "Depart from Me. I never knew you" (see Matthew 7:23).

Here in Acts 8, knowing we need stories and illustrations to understand truth, the Lord ingeniously placed the stories of two conversions back to back —those of Simon the sorcerer and the Ethiopian eunuch. These two men appear side by side in Scripture, I believe, so that you and I can verify the reality of our salvation and thereby avoid an unexpected and tragic end.

Look first at Simon's conversion and note four characteristics that prove it was not real.

Simon Had a Wrong View of Self

> *But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one. . . .*
>
> Acts 8:9

You'll always know someone's off the wall if he tries to pretend he's someone great. That's what Simon was doing—making himself out to be someone special. Although it is true that "pride is a weed that grows in the garden of every man," in Simon's case, his weed of pride was a tree, for as the story unfolds, we will see Simon seeking to be a superstar above all rather than a servant of all.

Simon Had a Wrong View of Supernatural Power

> *And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.*
>
> Acts 8:18, 19

Simon wanted to buy the gift of the Holy Ghost—not to change his character, but to fulfill his ambition. So, too, before leaving home, the prodigal said, "Father give me the goods" (see Luke 15:12). But when he returned—humbled and broken—he said, "Father, make me a servant" (see Luke 15:19). True conversion never says, "Give me the goods." It says, "Make me a servant."

Simon Had a Wrong View of the Spirit

> *But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.*
>
> Acts 8:20

This is where we get the term "simony"—the practice of buying a position in church hierarchy. During the Middle Ages, many of the popes actually bought their way into the office. To this day, in many churches, positions on boards or ministry teams can still be bought. Even though that is not the case here, there is a "Simon mentality" that can creep into our lives whenever we subconsciously think we can purchase the gift of God through our devotional life, our piety, our fasting, or our spirituality. The Holy Spirit is a *gift* (Luke 11:13). He cannot be purchased with money or energy. Jesus said, "If you, then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father *give* the Holy Spirit to them that ask?"

Simon Had a Wrong View of Sin

> *Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.*
>
> Acts 8:24

Simon didn't want the sin rooted out of his life; he only wanted protection from its repercussions. The Lord declared that unless the days were shortened, no man would survive (Matthew 24:22). Like Simon, however, our society is concerned only with the repercussions of our sin rather than regeneration and deliverance from sin.

Now contrast Simon with the Ethiopian eunuch as you note four aspects of his conversion that prove it was real. . . .

The Sovereign Work of the Spirit

> *And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.*
>
> Acts 8:26

True conversion is always the result of God's stirring and moving rather than of some plan or plot someone hatches to get ahead. True conversion takes place when the Lord stirs and brings a Philip—a radio broadcast, a tract, a New Testament, a neighbor, a church, or a crusade—to someone who, like the eunuch, is simply riding along in the chariot of life, pondering and curious.

The Searching Heart of a Sinner

> *And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.*
>
> Acts 8:30, 31

Already sovereignly drawn by the Spirit, the eunuch was searching and wondering. “You shall seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart,” the Lord declared in Jeremiah 29:13. God tugs on our hearts sovereignly, but it’s up to us to respond personally.

The Scriptural Base for Salvation

> *Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.*
>
> Acts 8:35

Simon's so-called conversion was based on seeing wonders. The eunuch's conversion was based upon seeing Jesus in the Word. True conversion always comes not by seeing wonders, but by hearing the Word (Romans 10:17). Build your faith upon the Word of God. Become students of the Scriptures. Stay in the Scriptures. Submit to the Scriptures. And you will experience true conversion.

The Sincere Expression of a Servant

> *And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*
>
> Acts 8:36, 37

Simon the magician asked for power to promote himself. The Ethiopian eunuch asked for baptism to die to self. "Bury me in the waters of baptism," he said. "I want to serve God. I want to submit to His authority. I want to submerge myself in His will."

The same Peter who saw the deception of Simon the sorcerer would later write, "Brethren give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). There's nothing more important for you to consider than if you are truly saved! You may have been sitting in a pew for years—but are you truly saved? You may have been baptized—but are you truly saved? You might be active in church—but are you *sure* you're saved?

Romans 8:16 declares His Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God. Do you have that witness? Does His Spirit affirm and resonate in your heart, "Yes, you are My child"—or is it still a little fuzzy? If you're not sure, take time today to let the Holy Spirit minister to you and give you His witness that you are born again.

Dear people, make your calling and election *sure.*



9 **Acts 9:1, 2**

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

Saul of Tarsus was religious. Trained by Gamaliel, the "teacher's teacher" of that day, Saul knew the Scriptures well. Saul was respected. He was a member of the Sanhedrin—the Jewish Supreme Court. Saul was refined. We read in chapter 7 that when Stephen was being stoned, Saul gave consent to the execution, but he was above picking up a rock himself. And now we see Saul as relentless, traveling throughout Judea, Samaria, and northern Israel—even across the border into Damascus, one hundred forty miles from Jerusalem—to hunt believers down and bring them back bound.

Why did this religious, respected, refined man become relentless in his pursuit of those who named the name of Jesus? I believe that when Saul saw Stephen's face glow like an angel's and heard the words, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," from his lips, something snapped within Saul. Witnessing not only Stephen's death, but the reality of his faith, Saul was shaken. And, in his insecurity, he became a crazed reactionary. But even as his anger ignited and his rage rose, something else happened within Saul as he watched the stoning of Stephen, for years later (Acts 17), Saul would make reference to the very message Stephen preached moments before his execution.

This encourages me because it proves that, although people might seem to be turning a deaf ear to what we're saying—or worse, picking up stones to put us down or shut us up—the Word of God does not return void (Isaiah 55:11). Scripture is like a time bomb, gang. Share the Word. Even though the person you're talking to might look at you as if you're crazy, you're planting little time bombs in his inner man. Share the Word with your kids, your co-workers, your friends—and wait for the "bombs" to go off, just as they did in the heart of Saul.

Acts 9:3

And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven.

While walking down the road, a light shone on Saul. Do you know people who seem absolutely hardened to the gospel? Maybe you work with one. Maybe you're married to one. The Lord has ways of breaking through to them and shining His light on them unpredictably and unexpectedly—even as He did with Saul.

Acts 9:4

And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

"Why persecutest thou me?" This is not the voice of protestation; it's the voice of consideration, as if to say, "Saul, stop and think about what you're doing, for in persecuting those people, you're persecuting Me." We are the bride of Christ. He's jealous for us and in love with us. Thus, when we find fault with one another—even if there's reason—He takes it personally, as any husband would. Next time you want to come down on one who is in love with Jesus Christ, be careful, for in attacking His bride, we attack Him.

Acts 9:5

And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

"It's hard to do what you're doing, isn't it, Saul, when in your heart you know what you're doing isn't right?"

Acts 9:6 (a)

And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?

Underline this verse, because it is the essence of what conversion is all about. You'll always know when a person is truly born-again, for when he's had an encounter with the Lord, he will invariably ask, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

A man in a restaurant, choking on a chicken bone, grabbed his throat and fell to the floor. From five tables over a doctor stood up, ran to the scene, and quickly dislodged the bone. "Doctor, what do I owe you?" asked the man.

"Whatever you thought it was worth when you were choking," replied the doctor.

So, too, what the Lord asks us to do is not a pressure upon us, but a privilege for us when we realize the price He paid to save us when we were choking on sin and headed for eternal damnation.

Acts 9:6 (b)

And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

The Lord always directs one step at a time. How often I want to see the big picture, but the Lord doesn't work that way. Be obedient to what you know you should do, and, as you do it, more will be revealed to you.

Acts 9:7–9

And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

What happened to Saul is a perfect picture of what happens in photography: Film, coated with light-sensitive salts and chemicals, is kept in darkness. When the shutter opens, light pours in, and whatever is seen in the light at that second is printed on the film. Then it's quickly returned to darkness, lest it be overexposed. Finally, it is taken into a darkroom, where it is placed in a chemical solution and fully developed.

When Saul was persecuting Christians, he was in spiritual darkness. Suddenly, on the road to Damascus, the shutter release was pushed, and he saw the Light. Then he was returned to darkness through physical blindness in order for the image of Jesus alone to be permanently imprinted upon his heart and developed within his life.

Acts 9:10, 11 (a)

And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight . . .

Straight Street is still in Damascus. It's the main road that runs east to west through the downtown section of this, the oldest city in the world.

Acts 9:11 (b)

. . . and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth.

How do you know when a person is converted? First, he says to the Lord, "What do You want me to do?" Secondly, he continues talking to the Lord. He prays.

Acts 9:12–14

And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

It's interesting that the Lord used a man named Ananias to be the instrument of Saul's recovery and that Ananias was to go to the house of Judas. Ananias and Judas are two names that are infamous in the New Testament. Judas was the betrayer of Jesus. Ananias was the liar of the early church (Acts 5). And certainly the name Saul doesn't exactly conjure up images of spiritual perfection! The Lord is doing something neat here, I think: He's redeeming names even as He continues His redemptive work in people.

Acts 9:15, 16

But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

God told Ananias that Paul's ministry was to be to the Gentiles first and foremost, secondly to kings, and lastly to the people of Israel. Initially, however, Paul would keep trying to minister to the Jews and find himself frustrated in the process. So, too, sometimes the reason we get upset in serving the Lord is because we don't understand or aren't obedient to His plan for our individual ministry.

Acts 9:17 (a)

And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul . . .

Not "Brutal Saul" or "Bruiser Saul," Ananias called him "Brother Saul" because Ananias immediately accepted the fact that Saul was a brother regardless of his previous spiritual blindness, regardless of his present physical blindness.

Acts 9:17 (b), 18

. . . the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

Notice that although Saul was a brother, he was not yet empowered with the Spirit. Although some argue this point, I believe the Book of Acts clearly depicts an empowering subsequent to salvation.

Acts 9:19, 20

And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

Thinking he was custom-made to be a witness to the Jews—educated by Gamaliel, and a member of the Sanhedrin—Paul headed for the synagogues. In Romans 9 he would write, "I would be accursed if it would lead to the salvation of my brethren" (see Romans 9:3).

Acts 9:21

But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

The Jews in Damascus were amazed—but they weren't converted. They were confounded, but not persuaded. At this point, realizing the Jews were not receiving his testimony, Paul took off for the desert, where he would spend three years in Arabia (Galatians 1:17). What did he do there? Saul, the Old Testament scholar par excellence, enrolled in a three-year course taught by the Holy Spirit on how every symbol, every sacrifice, every picture in the Old Testament related to the Person of Jesus Christ. Seminarians today graduate with a DD, a Doctorate of Divinity. Saul graduated with a much more powerful DD, a Doctorate of the Desert.

Acts 9:22

But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

Three years later, Paul came back and said, "Wait until you hear what I've got to share," as he talked to the Jews once more.

Acts 9:23–25

And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

Paul won the debate, but he didn't win their hearts. Although it seemed like he was the perfect one to carry out ministry to the Jews—that was not the plan of the Lord. In fact, his ministry to the Jews was met with such animosity that he had to be let down in a basket under cover of night to save his life.

Acts 9:26 (a)

And when Saul was come to Jerusalem . . .

Now does Paul go to the Gentiles? Not yet. He goes to Jerusalem, the capital of Judaism.

Acts 9:26 (b), 27

. . . he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

The disciples didn't buy Paul's conversion story. Only Barnabas, whose name means "son of consolation," said, "Hey, boys, give Saul a break. He really has had an experience with the Lord. I saw him in Damascus preaching Jesus Christ."

Acts 9:28–30

And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

Finally, the brothers sent Saul to Gentile territory, saying, "It's just not working here, Paul. Go back to Tarsus."

Acts 9:31

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

The churches were edified and multiplied—when? When they got rid of Paul. Paul, who had such a heart for the people of Israel, was finally sent out of Israel, into Gentile territory, where he would spend the next seven to ten years living in obscurity in Tarsus.

Maybe you can relate. Maybe you were saved ten years ago, and you had such vision, such desire to be used in ministry or service. You thought, *I'm tailor-made to do this,* or, *I've got a call upon my life for this.* And you tried. But it just didn't work out. Maybe for the past ten years, you've been waiting, wondering, *Is the Lord* ever *going to use me?*

Be of good cheer! The man who would turn the world upside down—the most important preacher of all time, the most powerful person who has ever lived except for the Lord Jesus Christ—had to first experience shut doors, shut doors, shut doors, and ten years of sitting in Tarsus while the Lord reworked and rewired him. If the Lord is doing that in your life, don't be discouraged. Don't throw in the towel. Don't walk away. Let Him do His work and have His way. Go with the flow. Put away your agenda. Get back to basics and say, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"



***For topical study of Acts 9:25–31 entitled "Let Down? Look Up!" turn to page* 692.**

Acts 9:32 (a)
And it came to pass, as Peter . . .

With Paul tucked away in Tarsus, the focus returns to Peter.

Acts 9:32 (b)
. . . passed throughout all quarters . . .

"Peter passed through all quarters." I feel this is a key component in this vignette. Peter was on the move, a man of motion, a man looking for opportunities. So, too, today—when the Lord wants to use a man or a woman, He'll use someone who, like Peter, is on the move, looking for ways to serve Him.

Acts 9:32 (c), 33
. . . he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.

I'm so blessed and challenged and intrigued by my brother Peter. Even though he was the "Big Gun in Jerusalem," here we see him ministering to people one at a time.

Acts 9:34, 35

And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately. And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.

Notice not only Peter's motion, but notice his motivation when he said, *"Jesus Christ* maketh thee whole."

Acts 9:36–38

Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.

"Quick! Call for Peter. Dorcas is dead." Following the demise of no other apostle or spiritual leader did the early church ever call in the apostles. "The apostles, the prophets, the spiritual superstars, they're dead? Well, let's move on. But Dorcas? We *need* her." Why? Because Dorcas was one who ministered practically. She did good things for people. She sewed clothing. She cared for them in a very tangible way. She was down to earth. She was real. When your car isn't working, you don't want a prophet or an apostle or a preacher—you want a mechanic. Give us more mechanics! Give us more seamstresses! Give us more cooks! God, give us more practical, loving people like Dorcas.

Acts 9:39 (a)

Then Peter arose and went with them.

Peter was available. That is the most important requirement for personal ministry. He didn't say, "I'm too big to minister to one dead woman. Do you think that's a good use of my time?" No, Peter responded to the need at hand. Maybe there's a dead person in your life—not physically but spiritually—whom the Lord wants to revive through you, as He taps on your shoulder and says, "Come quickly."

Acts 9:39, (b), 40 (a)

When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed . . .

Peter was prayerful. I suggest to you the reason Peter knelt down was because he realized that not only was he inadequate for this ministry, but if anyone happened to look into his room while he was praying, they would see him calling upon the Lord.

Acts 9:40 (b)–42

. . . and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.

Peter was fruitful. His ministry to one dead woman caused an entire city to be exposed to the gospel.

By many peoples' evaluation, Mordecai Ham was one of the least effective preachers of his day. But a young man named William heard his message, responded, and got saved. This makes Mordecai Ham's entire ministry valid, for William Franklin Graham, better known as Billy, would, in turn, reach millions.

When you reach one third-grader in Sunday school, you don't know if that third-grader might not be the next Billy Graham. Like Peter, you never know the fruit that will come from working with one "dead" person.



***For topical study of Acts 9:32–42 entitled "What Would Jesus Do?" turn to page* 695.**

Acts 9:43

And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

Peter was flexible. Where did he lodge? With a tanner. Because they dealt with dead animals, so unclean did the Jews esteem tanners that the Mishnah—Jewish regulation—stated that the wife of a tanner had the right to divorce him.

Thus, the Lord's work with Peter concerning the issue of legalism began in the house of a fellow whom Peter previously would have avoided completely. If we're going to be used individually and corporately, like Peter, we need to show flexibility within the parameters of Scripture—not bound by traditions or preconceived opinions—even if it means hanging out with tanners.

Be like Peter. Be available. Be prayerful. Be flexible—and watch the Lord make you fruitful.

LET DOWN? LOOK UP!

A Topical Study of ACTS 9:25–31

Years ago, a book appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list that dealt with statistics and probabilities. It was an intriguing volume, wherein the author, a statistician, presents nuggets of information like these:

> One in one thousand Americans will have murdered someone in his lifetime. (Next time you're at a baseball park or a football stadium with forty thousand other folks, keep in mind that statistically there are forty murderers in the stadium with you.)
>
> One in two hundred Americans will spend time in prison.
>
> Seven in ten who start a company will see it go bankrupt.
>
> Nine in ten who lose weight on a diet will gain back every single pound. (If you start a business, the odds are 70 percent it will go belly-up. And if you go on a diet, the odds are 90 percent it will be belly out!)
>
> The chance of being hit by lightning is one in nine thousand.
>
> The chance of winning the lottery is one in four million.

But the chance of being let down by someone or something is one in one—which brings us to our text—where we see the apostle Paul, still called Saul at this point, let down from the city wall in a basket. Initially, it must have been disconcerting, disappointing, and disillusioning to him. But Paul would later write that this time of being let down—in more ways than one—would be the second greatest event in his life.

> *If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 11:30–33

Paul says, "If I'm going to glory, this is what I will glory in: my difficulty."

Listen to this paraphrase of 2 Corinthians 11: "The greatest event in my life was when they took me at night and let me down over the wall of Damascus in a basket. That was the most meaningful experience I have ever had since the day I met Christ."

Far from feeling let down by this event, Paul actually gloried in it. But it took time. You see, following his conversion, Paul's singular passion was to preach Christ to the Jews. In Romans 9:3 he says he would literally go to hell if doing so would bring about their salvation. Would you do that? Would you spend eternity in hell if your brother would be saved? I know nothing of that kind of love.

Paul cared so deeply for Israel that he said he would be accursed for his brethren. Trained as a Jewish scholar and theologian, it would seem as though Paul was tailor-made to be a minister unto the Jews. But in Acts 9:15, God had told Ananias that Paul's ministry would be first to the Gentiles, second to kings, and lastly to Jews. So what did Paul do? Acts 9:20 tells us he headed straight for the synagogues—to preach to the Jews. So poorly was he received, however, that his audience wanted to kill him, necessitating his escape by night in a basket. What did he do then? He headed for Jerusalem—the very capital of Judaism!

We pick up the story as Paul shares his testimony in Acts 22. . . .

> *And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.*
>
> Acts 22:17–21

What's happening here? After spending fifteen days in Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18), Paul went into the temple. Through a trance, the Lord said to him, "I'm sending you to the Gentiles, Paul," to which Paul answered, "But, Lord, You're

missing a great opportunity! The Jews here know I was a radical on their behalf, going into the synagogues and the homes where Christians met to drag them out and have them killed. They know I consented to the death of Stephen, the first martyr. Don't you see, Lord, how powerful my testimony could be here in Jerusalem?"

And the Lord responded by saying, "Depart, Paul. I'm sending you to the Gentiles."

So Paul was sent to Tarsus, where he would spend between seven and ten years laboring in obscurity. Maybe you can relate to this. Maybe, like Paul, you have said, "Lord, You're missing a great opportunity. I'm custom-made to reach these people. If You bless my business, my family, this project—Lord, just think how good it would be!"

And the Lord says, "Depart. I'm sending you somewhere else."

In Matthew 11:28, Jesus said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest." Rest from what? Rest from your works, rest from trying to be spiritual, rest from trying to be religious.

Jesus said,

> *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*
>
> Matthew 11:29

When you come to Jesus initially, you find rest from your works. But it's only when you are yoked to Jesus that you find rest in your heart. Perhaps today you might have rest from your works—you've been born again; you're a believer—but you don't have rest in your heart. You're troubled about many things: family, finances, ministry, health, and relationships. Do you know why that is? We are troubled in our hearts when we fail to take His yoke upon us; when *we* try to call the shots and direct what *we* think should happen. Our ideas could be good, our motives noble. But they're worthless if they're not what God intends.

If you're troubled today because someone let you down, some project didn't open up, some relationship didn't work out, you can become a basket case—let down over the side of the wall in bitterness and defeat. Or, like Paul, you can learn to trust the Lord and see a bigger picture by saying, "*Your* way,

Lord, not mine. I give up. I let go. What do *You* want to do? I yoke myself with You."

What is a yoke? A device that connects a weaker, dumber ox to a stronger, wiser ox. Guess which ox you are. "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me," Jesus says to us. "Link to Me and learn of Me. Let Me lead you."

"But, Lord," we say, "we can bless those folks. We can see things happen! Come on, Lord." And we try to pull God in our direction.

I believe that's what Paul was trying to do. And it took seven to ten years before he finally gave up. Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles, changed the world when he accepted the yoke the Lord placed upon him and said, "Okay, we'll go in *Your* direction." And that is why he looked back on the day he was let down in a basket as the most important day in his life, second only to the day he met Christ (2 Corinthians 11:30–33). What if Paul hadn't learned that lesson? What if he kept storming into synagogues, trying to make a way into Jerusalem? He would have either died at a very young age or he would have had a very ineffective ministry.

Don't try to persuade the Lord to go your way. When you're let down, don't give up. Instead, say, "Okay, Lord, what do You want to do now?" His plan for you might be very different from your own. His vision of you might be different from the way you see yourself because those whose ministry is based upon their own abilities, skills, and talents are those who have a tendency to take the glory for themselves.

"To the Gentiles, Paul. I want to do an entirely different thing through you," said the Lord.

"But my heart—" protested Paul.

"To the Gentiles, Paul," answered the Lord.

"But my background—"

"To the Gentiles, Paul."

"But my training—"

"To the Gentiles, Paul."

"But, Lord—"

"To the Gentiles, Paul."

"But—"

"To the Gentiles, Paul."

"Okay, Lord."

Some of you will make that decision today. You'll finally choose to say, "Okay, Lord." And when you do, you will find rest in your soul.

WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?

A Topical Study of ACTS 9:32–41

Five hundred million dollars up in smoke; forty-one lives senselessly snuffed out; a city smoldering; a nation questioning. The images we saw on television eleven years ago of the Los Angeles riots have been indelibly imprinted on our collective memory.

We'll never forget the shopkeeper shaking his head in disbelief as gang members broke into his shop and carried out his life's work while police stood by watching. We'll never forget the woman cradling her fifteen-year-old daughter in her arms after she had been struck down by a stray bullet on Crenshaw Boulevard. We'll never forget the drugstore manager with tears in his eyes, telling his employees they no longer had a job. We'll never forget the truck driver being pulled from his cab by six young men who proceeded to grind his face into the pavement.

It's been a dark week. I'm so glad that on this Sunday we can come to God's house and look into His Word—because, for any dark time, His Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. How are we to deal with the sickness and the sadness we see all around us? I believe our text gives us the answer. . . .

> *And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately. And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.*
>
> Acts 9:32–35

What intrigues me about this passage is that the story is incredibly similar to what had transpired a few years previously when Jesus was at a pool called Bethesda. Lame people were lying all around the pool, waiting for the stirring of the water, after which the first one to take the plunge would be healed of his

infirmity. It was there that Jesus approached a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years and said, "Rise and take up your bed" (see John 5:8). And here a few years later, Peter used virtually the same phraseology when he said to the lame man at Lydda, "Rise, make up your bed."

"Rise"—a command.

"Take up your bed"—an exhortation.

So, too, the Lord comes to you and me and says, "Rise. I'm giving you victory today. I'm healing you of that lame sin with which you've been involved. Now take up your bed and don't expect or provide for any relapse whatsoever."

"Rise, take up your bed," said Jesus.

"Rise, make up your bed," echoed Peter.

And miracles happened.

After finding sickness in Lydda, Peter found sadness in Joppa . . .

> *Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.*
>
> Acts 9:36–41

Tabitha was dead, and there was great sadness in the city. The disciples called for Peter, and when he arrived, he immediately put out the mourners. Why? Some say it was because he needed the room. Others say it was because

if he prayed and nothing happened he wouldn't be embarrassed. But I say it was because that's what he had seen Jesus do.

You recall the story. Jesus was asked to come to the house of Jairus to heal his daughter. But before He arrived, she died. When Jesus said, "She's not dead. She's just sleeping," the mourners who were gathered around the house, mocked Him to scorn. Luke wrote that Jesus sent all of the mockers out (Luke 8:53, 54). Then He went into the room of Jairus' daughter, took her by the hand, and said, "Talitha cumi," or "Little lamb, arise."

"Talitha cumi," said Jesus.

"Tabitha cumi," echoed Peter.

And miracles happened.

What does this have to do with the LA riots of eleven years ago? Plenty. No doubt at the time you engaged in discussions about the events that took place—the sickness and sadness, the death and darkness, the destruction and despair. And no doubt the discussions centered around these questions. . . .

Why Did This Happen?

Why was there looting and robbing and killing and rabble-rousing? There are those who say, "It's indicative of the end times. Doesn't the Bible say that in the last days perilous times will come when men will be lovers of themselves, boasters, disobedient, unthankful, unholy, unloving, without self-control, despisers of good" (2 Timothy 3:1–3)?

Others say, "I'm not sure it's end-time prophecy. Rather, I suggest it's Old Testament prophecy. Haven't you read Isaiah, Micah, or Amos? Don't you recall what the prophets of God said in days of old—that if the poor were forgotten and there was a lack of compassion, there would be judgment throughout the land?"

So goes the debate among believers.

Who Was to Blame?

Some say it was a jury in Simi Valley.

Others say, "It's youth. The verdict in Simi Valley was merely their excuse to practice anarchy. Didn't you see the picture of the man breaking out of the store carrying a TV and declaring, 'Forget Rodney King. I'm king today'?"

Others say, "It's not the jury in Simi Valley, and it's not the kids roving about in anarchy. It's the fault of our prosperous white society. The comfortably wealthy have seen the plight of the poor on their TV screens and heard about it on their radios. But, like Cain, they have chosen to shrug it off, asking, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' "

But I suggest we're asking the wrong questions. We who name the name of Jesus should not have been asking, "Why?" or, "Who?" but "What?"

"*What* would Jesus have done if He were there in the flesh that day?" You see, when there is sadness or sickness in our society, in our families, or in our lives personally, I suggest to you the issue is not "Who is to blame?" or, "Why did this happen?" but . . .

What Would Jesus Do?

What *would* He have done? Would He have called Rush Limbaugh? Would He have politicized the event? Would He have analyzed the outcome?

"How can we know what He would do?" you ask. "He never saw a city like LA."

Oh, really?

As He came down the mount called Olivet and rode toward the city of Jerusalem, Jesus heard the people crying, "Hosanna!" But He knew that within a few hours their cry would change. Anarchy would sweep through the city, and a bloodthirsty mob would unjustly and unlawfully cry out, "We will not have this man rule over us. Crucify Him!" So Jesus stopped, and what did He do? He cried not for Himself, but for the people. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings" (see Luke 13:34).

And if you think this is stretching the point because the crowds weren't rioting or violent, consider the soldiers who plucked Jesus' beard and spat in His face. Consider the soldiers who rolled dice for His garments even as He hung on the Cross to pay the price for their sins. Did Jesus give a discourse on the ills of society? No. He said, "Father forgive them. They don't know what they're doing."

What about us? We usually make our case, give our opinion, and justify our position. When I get to heaven, I know I'm going to be absolutely stunned by the prejudiced and flawed opinions I held that I was sure were so right. No wonder Paul writes, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part: but then shall I know even as I am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

So what are we to do in the meantime? Philosophize? No. Analyze? No. In dealing with your boss, your spouse, your neighbor, or your children, the question is not: "Who is to blame?" or "Why is this happening?" The question always is: "What would Jesus do?"

"How do *I* know what Jesus would do?" you ask.

The answer is very simple: Read your Bible.

Put down the paper, turn off your TV, and open Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—four accounts of the actions, thoughts, and heart of Jesus. Found in the

very beginning of the New Testament, the Gospels are the Father saying, "Here is the life of My Son. I'm repeating it four times so you won't miss it."

What do the Gospels tell us Jesus did in dark days? According to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, as He overlooked Jerusalem, and as He hung on the Cross surrounded by people acting like animals, Jesus did a singular thing: He prayed. Compassionately and forgivingly, He prayed. That is what you and I are called to do in dark days like these: Pray.

"I'd rather discuss. I'd rather debate. I'd rather write a letter to the editor," you say. Pray. That's what Jesus did. He didn't discuss the situation philosophically. He didn't debate it politically. He saw a city headed for anarchy. He hung on the Cross and was tortured brutally. Yet He did one thing singularly: He prayed.

> *If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*
>
> 2 Chronicles 7:14

"If My people who are called by My name"—

That's us

"Will humble themselves"—

Will quit theorizing, analyzing, and philosophizing

"And pray and seek My face and confess their sin"—

Will pray not about the wicked ways of those in LA or anywhere else, but about the sin within themselves

"*Then* will I hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land."

The promise of God practiced in the life of Jesus is so incredibly simple. For whatever problem you face, whatever sickness or sadness, darkness or death in your life—ask yourself a very simple question:

What Would *Jesus* Do?

I pray that, like Peter, we'll be imitators of Jesus—knowing His ways, hearing His heart, and praying as He prayed.



10 Ten years prior to the events of this chapter, Jesus told His disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Matthew 28:19, 20). But could He have really meant that? The apostles must have wondered, for, although they had gone through Jerusalem and Judaea and up into Samaria as we saw in Acts 8, they hadn't yet approached "all the world"—the world of the Gentiles. Certainly, reasoned the disciples, the Lord couldn't have meant for them to take the gospel to the *Gentiles.* Weren't Gentiles created only to serve as fodder for the fires of Hell? When Jesus spoke of "all the world," surely He must have meant the world of the Jew. So it was that the gospel had not yet been taken to the Gentiles until here in Acts 10, where we will see the Lord use Peter, to whom He had entrusted the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:19), to open the door of His kingdom to the Gentiles.

Acts 10:1

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band.

The Italian band wasn't the entertainment at Luigi's on Saturday night, but a band of soldiers. The Roman army was divided into legions of six thousand men. The legions were divided into cohorts of six hundred men. The cohorts were divided into six groups of one hundred men—each overseen by a centurion. Centurions were the "master sergeants" of the Roman army. They were brave of heart, sound of mind, and strong in discipline. Interestingly, every time a centurion is mentioned in the New Testament, he is always spoken of in a favorable light. . . .

It was a centurion in Luke 7 who caused Jesus to marvel when he said, "I am not worthy for You to come under my roof. Just speak the word and my servant will be healed" (see Luke 7:6, 7). It was a centurion in Matthew 27, who, upon witnessing the crucifixion of Jesus and the events that followed said,

"Truly this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54). And here is Cornelius—yet another centurion whom God will use.

Acts 10:2 (a)
A devout man, and one that feared God . . .

The Holy Spirit calls our attention to three important qualities in the life of Cornelius. Here we see the faith of Cornelius. Cornelius feared God. Yet, although he was a very religious man, he was a very lost man. Although he was a man of prayer and of almsgiving, he was not saved.

Acts 10:2 (b)
. . . with all his house . . .

Secondly, we see the family of Cornelius. After seeing the vanity and fallacy of the gods of Rome, Cornelius wanted his family to know the True and Living God. This is amazing to me. His family had seen Rome—the Hollywood or New York of that day—and yet somehow Cornelius was able to inspire in them a fear of God.

Acts 10:2 (c)
. . . which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.

Thirdly, we see the fervency of Cornelius as he went about doing good and praying always. There are those who say, "Even though a person doesn't know Jesus Christ, as long as he loves God and does good to his fellow man, he'll be okay." But this account tells me they are wrong, for if all it took for a man to get into heaven was that he loved God and his fellow man, God would have said, "There's Cornelius down there. He's a pray-er. He's a God-fearer. He's a giver. I'll let him be."

That's not what God said. Instead, Acts 10 is the story of a seeking Savior searching out a seeking sinner. This comforts me because whether a person lives in America, Israel, or a country dominated by Islam; in the subtropical jungle of South America, or the outback of Australia—this story tells me that God will do whatever it takes to get *anyone* who is truly seeking Him pointed in the right direction.

Acts 10:3–8

He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; and when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

Why did the Lord send an angel to tell Cornelius to find Peter? Why didn't the angel himself share the gospel with Cornelius? Because it is not the job of angels to share the gospel. It's ours. God could thunder the gospel from heaven if He so desired. But He's chosen to use you and me as instruments to tell people His good news. Gang, if we ever get it through our heads that the gospel really is good news, we wouldn't need classes or motivational seminars on witnessing. Telling people that the Lord loves them—that every sin they've ever committed, are committing, or will commit is forgiven because of Jesus' death on the Cross—is not a burden. It's a privilege! Talking about religion is a pain. But sharing the gospel is pure joy.

Daniel 12:3 says those who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever. If you're a soul-winner, a Good News-sharer, you're going to shine—not only in heaven, but here on earth as well. How long has it been since you looked someone in the eye and said, "I've got Good News for you! Jesus loves you and died for your sin"? A week? A month? If you feel kind of dull and burned-out, share the gospel and shine once again!

Acts 10:9–12

On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet

knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

It was lunchtime. As Peter was on the rooftop praying, his stomach started growling, and he fell into a trance. Overlooking the Mediterranean Sea from his rooftop perch, he saw a sheet—or "sail," as the word "sheet" can also be translated—full of unclean foods. Our Lord is so good! He uses the things we're feeling and the world in which we're living to speak to us in wonderful ways. He doesn't condemn us for feeling hungry or for spacing out. He'll even use our growling stomachs and heavy eyelids to fulfill His plan.

Acts 10:13, 14 (a)
And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord . . .

You can say, "Not so, buddy." Or you can say, "Not so, dude." But you can't say, "Not so, Lord." If Jesus is truly Lord, you can't say, "Not so" to Him.

Acts 10:14 (b)
. . . for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

That's the language of legalism, the pride of the Pharisee. Legalism says, "I have never done this." Liberty says, "I have never done this *before*."

Acts 10:15, 16
And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

What God has cleansed, don't call common. God has cleansed you. He's washed you in the blood of His only begotten Son. Don't call yourself common. Most of us have the tendency to say, "God couldn't use me. I'm no good. I don't pray like I should. I say things I regret. I struggle with things. I'm just common. I'm just dirt. I'm nothing."

But God says to us, “Don’t call common or unclean what I have cleansed. I’ve cleansed you. I chose you by name before the foundation of the world” (see Ephesians 1:4).

Acts 10:17–21 (a)

Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon’s house, and stood before the gate, and called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius . . .

Notice that God works on both sides. He spoke to Cornelius through an angel and to Peter through a vision. When these three men showed up at Peter’s gate, it was confirmation that both Cornelius and Peter had heard God correctly. Sometimes well-meaning brothers and sisters come to you and say, “The Lord told me to tell you . . .”

When this happens, your answer should be, “If that’s so, He’ll tell me, too.”

So much is said in the name of the Lord that is not from the Lord or of the Lord. We need to be careful. Well-meaning people are sometimes convinced they’ve had a vision or a prophecy, and they’ll share it freely—even though it may never come to pass. Acts 10 shows us the model of how the Lord works. He works on *both* ends.

***For topical study of Acts 10:9–20 entitled “Vision,” turn to page* 703.**

Acts 10:21 (b)–23 (a)

. . . and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to

send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. Then called he them in, and lodged them.

According to the law, a Jew could not allow Gentiles into his house for any reason. But Peter, realizing the Lord was breaking down the wall between clean and unclean, said, "Come on in, boys." And they came in.

Acts 10:23 (b)

And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

Peter took an entourage of six disciples with him. He was stepping out in faith, but perhaps it was because he was worried he could get in big trouble that he took six witnesses along.

Acts 10:24–26

And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.

Cornelius fell at Peter's feet and worshiped him. Do you know people still do that in Rome today? In St. Peter's Basilica, they line up in front of Michelangelo's statue to kiss the feet of Peter. Over the centuries, the statue has been kissed so many times that the big toe on Peter's right foot is missing. It's wrong. It's not healthy. People can get "toe-maine" poisoning! Then they have to call a "toe" truck! Why is it we worship people? We elevate and idolize people and it ought not be. Peter instinctively knew this. He knew his frailties, he knew his weaknesses, and he knew only One is worthy of worship—his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Acts 10:27

And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.

I like this! It's a home Bible study!

Acts 10:28

And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Although Peter didn't understand the vision immediately, as events began to unfold, walking from Joppa to Caesarea, he got the picture.

Acts 10:29–31

Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

Have you ever heard people say God doesn't hear the prayers of unbelievers? This passage says otherwise, for although Cornelius was not yet a believer, an angel appeared to him saying God had heard his prayers.

Acts 10:32, 33

Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

What a great congregation! Peter walked in and Cornelius said, "We're all ears." When asked what makes a great preacher, Charles Spurgeon is said to have answered quickly: "A great congregation." Where people want to hear the Word, there will always be good teaching and preaching. I'm convinced it's not a good preacher that produces a great congregation, but a great congregation that produces a good preacher.

Acts 10:34

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.

God is not a respecter of persons. He doesn't care if you are intellectually brilliant or if you flunked kindergarten four times, if you spend eight hours in prayer or if you haven't prayed in eight months. God is not a respecter of people. He's a lover of people.

Acts 10:35–37

But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached.

"The word which was published" was the Word become flesh—Jesus Christ.

Acts 10:38, 39

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree.

Why did Peter use the phrase, "Hanged on a tree"? Why didn't he just say, "Whom they slew"? The Jewish method of execution was by stoning. It was the Romans—the Gentiles—who utilized crucifixion. Thus, by using this phrase, Peter was saying, "There's no room for antiSemitism. All men are guilty—Jew and Gentile alike."

Acts 10:40–43

Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he

commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Whoever believes in Jesus will enjoy and receive the forgiveness of sin.

Acts 10:44 (a)
While Peter yet spake these words . . .

Peter was a man who was frequently interrupted. He was interrupted by the Father in Matthew 17 when, on the Mount of Transfiguration, God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matthew 17:5). He was interrupted by the Son when Jesus said, "What thinkest thou, Simon? Do the children of the king pay taxes to the king?" (see Matthew 17:25). And here in Acts 10, he was interrupted by the Spirit. Like Peter, I need to be interrupted by the Father, by the Son, and by the Spirit. I hope you're not upset when your plans are interrupted or when your program is altered, for truly the Lord is the Great Interrupter.

Acts 10:44 (b)–45
. . . the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

When did the Spirit move? When Peter spoke the Word. There was no mumbo-jumbo. There was no seminar entitled, "How to Speak in Tongues." It was simply when Peter taught the Word that the Spirit began to move. People often say, "Your church spends too much time teaching and not enough time moving in the Spirit." My answer to them is that the biblical pattern is that of the Spirit moving *through* the teaching of the Word.

Colossians 3 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. Wives submit to your husbands. Husbands love your wives. Children obey your parents. Employees obey your employers."

Ephesians 5 says, “Be not drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to each other with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. In everything give thanks. Wives submit to your husbands. Husbands love your wives. Children obey your parents. Employees obey your employers.”

The results of “letting the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” (see Colossians 3) are exactly the same as being “filled with the Spirit” (see Ephesians 5). Therefore, it follows that the Word and the Spirit are intimately linked together. If you want to live in the Spirit, keep in the Word. Become totally saturated with the Scriptures, and you’ll find yourself overflowing with the Spirit.

Acts 10:46 (a)
For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.

Without exception, in every biblical reference, tongues are directed to God to give praise and adoration and exaltation to Him. They are never directed to man, never a message for man. Tongues are always used to praise God.

Acts 10:46 (b)–48
Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

Reminiscent of the Ethiopian eunuch in chapter 8, these believers were eager to be baptized, eager to demonstrate their acceptance of God’s amazing grace that was vast enough to embrace even Gentiles.

VISION
A Topical Study of
ACTS 10:9–20

Saul DeVries was a billionaire who made his fortune during the Great Depression. Born of immigrant parents, he grew up in poverty. But as a young adult he had an idea, a vision of how he might become a rich man. Realizing that in the Depression years, people were unable to buy new appliances or to remodel their kitchens and bathrooms, DeVries decided what was needed was a single product that would clean appliances and keep things sparkling. So he invented an all-purpose cleaner, the first of its kind, called Spic and Span®. It sold well throughout the years of the Depression and continues to do so today. Saul DeVries made billions from his vision and literally cleaned up!

So, too, in our text, Peter had a vision dealing with cleanliness. Unlike Saul DeVries, Peter would not become a rich man materially. He would, however, become wealthy spiritually. And the entire Gentile world would become the beneficiary.

Whenever God wants to do something new, something special, something wonderful, He will usually motivate a man or a woman through a vision. . . .

When God wanted to deliver the children of Israel from Egypt, He called Moses by causing a bush to burn in the desert that caught Moses' attention. Wondering why the bush burned without becoming consumed, Moses approached it, and it was then that God called him to go to Egypt to free His people from bondage (Exodus 3:3).

When God wanted to open Europe to the gospel, He called Paul through a vision in which he heard a man from Macedonia saying, "Come over and help us" (see Acts 16:9). Until that time, it had never entered Paul's mind to cross the Mediterranean sea with the gospel.

And here in Acts 10, God is again about to do something new, something special, something wonderful as He is about to fling wide open the door of the church to the Gentiles.

The *Gentiles?*

How shocking this would have been to the apostles and to the leaders of the early church, for as Jews, they had been taught throughout their history that Gentiles were unclean. The Mishnah itself stated that Gentiles existed for one primary purpose: to fuel the fires of hell. Thus, Jews had nothing to do with Gentiles. If a Jew even accidentally brushed against a Gentile, he would immediately go home, burn the clothes he was wearing, and take a ceremonial bath. Jews did not talk to Gentiles. They did not care about Gentiles. They had no hope for Gentiles.

This was not the original plan of God. The prophets—particularly Isaiah—proclaimed very clearly that Israel was to be a light to the Gentiles and that God would bless the people of Israel in order that Gentiles might see the benefits of walking with Him (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). But the Jews lost that understanding. They turned inward and thought Gentiles were good for nothing but to keep hell hot.

Here in Acts 10, God is about to use Peter to bring salvation to the Gentiles. First, however, He must give Peter a new understanding. He must prepare Peter's heart. So what does He do? He gives Peter a vision.

Whether you're Saul DeVries marketing Spic and Span®, or an apostle with a much more significant calling—you need to have vision. Solomon said, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). Thus, God desires to give us vision for our lives, our families, our ministries, and our country. How?

In this passage, I see three steps God uses to give vision. . . .

Preparation *for* Vision

> *On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour.*
>
> Acts 10:9

In Bible times, housetops were flat and accessed by a stairway that ran up the outside of the wall. They were used as places of quiet retreat away from the crowd and clamor of the cities. So it was that Peter went to the housetop to pray. Vision always begins away from the crowd, away from the busyness—in a quiet place, through a quiet time, with a quiet heart.

In Isaiah 30, the people of Israel were panicking because they were surrounded by their enemies, the Assyrians. Afraid of the Assyrian threat, the Jews sent ambassadors to Egypt seeking safety through an alliance with them. However, Isaiah came on the scene saying, "Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me. . . . For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not" (Isaiah 30:1, 15).

How often we seek advice and help from other people, and yet fail on a daily basis to get away to a "rooftop" and seek the Lord. We make our plans, form our alliances, and get counsel—all dependent upon other people. But the Lord says to us, as He did to the children of Israel, "It's not going to work. The Egyptians are unable to help you. Return to *Me* and rest, for in *My* quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

Illumination *in* Vision

> *And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.*
>
> Acts 10:10–13

In Leviticus 11, the Jews were given very specific instructions concerning what foods they could and couldn't eat. Here in Peter's vision, he sees clean and unclean, kosher and un-kosher foods all together upon a sheet. I find it fascinating that in this illumination in vision, the Lord used food. This is great! I love Peter because, just like me, he sometimes had a hard time being spiritual. In the Garden of Gethsemane when the Lord asked him to pray with Him for an hour, what did Peter do? He fell asleep (Matthew 26:40). He wanted to pray. His spirit was willing. But he fell asleep because his flesh was weak.

Here, Peter wanted to pray again. He went up to the rooftop, but he was hungry. And in his hunger he sort of spaced out. Did the Lord come down on Peter and say, "What's wrong with you? You should be spiritual. You should be able to miss a meal or two"? No, He said, "You're hungry, Peter? Okay. I'll use your hunger to show you something new. Watch out. Here comes some food!" This story helps me a whole lot because through it I understand that the Lord uses common, everyday things to teach us lessons and to give us vision. Don't think the Lord only gives vision at church or in a Bible study. Yes, He uses His Body and His Word powerfully, but not exclusively. If He has already prepared your heart to receive it, He can give you vision anytime, any place—even when, like Peter, you're in line waiting for a Quarter Pounder®!

Confirmation *of* Vision

> *While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.*
>
> Acts 10:19

God spoke to Cornelius through an angel and to Peter through a vision. When three men showed up at Peter's gate, it was confirmation that both Cornelius and Peter had heard God correctly. Whenever God gives a vision in your heart, it will be confirmed by a knocking on your door. The voice of the Lord will always be confirmed. That's always the way of God throughout Scripture.

> *And Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption is thine to buy it. So Hanameel mine uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself. Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.*
>
> Jeremiah 32:6–8

Sometimes we say, "Wow! It's the Lord," when in reality, it could just be Satan bugging us.

> When my son Benjamin was a toddler, he spent some time with his uncle Jimmy and aunt Julie. Julie later told us that Ben was saying, "Wow," as he moved his head in circles. "Do you hear that buzzing?"
>
> "What buzzing?" she asked him.
>
> "*That* buzzing. Don't you hear that buzzing?"
>
> Finally, looking a little closer, Julie discovered a ladybug in Benny's ear.

Benjamin believed there was a buzzing in the room—but actually, it was all in his head. That's why confirmation is essential. Make sure you're hearing the *Lord's* voice. Wait for His confirmation. God is faithful. It will come. And when it does, like Jeremiah, you can say, "Then *I knew* it was the Word of the Lord." And you can press ahead.

My prayer is that we will not wander around aimlessly year after year, wondering what our life is about—but that we will be men and women of vision. For without vision, we'll wander indefinitely and perish eventually.

Saul DeVries became a billionaire because he had a vision about people in depression needing to clean up. When he died, as was instructed in his will, his body was cremated and his ashes were poured into his kitchen sink. You see, although Saul DeVries was a billionaire, because he didn't know the Lord, his life went down the drain literally. He is said to have died a miserable man.

You might have vision today to build a big business, to have a glorious ministry, to accomplish something athletically or academically. But Jesus said, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul?" (see Mark 8:36).

The reason you're studying the Word is because God is giving you a new vision even now—an invitation to be a part of His kingdom. It is confirmed by the knocking of opportunity as Jesus says to you, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. And if any man hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and sup with him and he with Me" (see Revelation 3:20).

Today, wherever you've been, I invite you to be born again—to confess you are a sinner, to call Jesus your Lord—and to emerge truly Spic and Span®!



11 Acts 11:1

And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gen tiles had also received the word of God.

To the Jews living in biblical times, world population was divided into two groups: Jews and Gentiles. In God's economy, the Jews were to be a testimony

to the Gentiles of how to live and in whom to believe (Isaiah 42:6). But something happened over the years. Instead of seeing themselves as a light unto the Gentiles, the Jews saw Gentiles as despicable, grotesque, and to be avoided at all costs. With this in mind, imagine what a shock it must have been to Jewish Christians when they heard that Peter had the audacity to go into the house of Cornelius—a *Gentile*—and actually share a meal with him.

Acts 11:2–4 (a)

And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them . . .

In response to the accusations of his Jewish Christian brothers, Peter repeated the vision he was given in chapter 10. This intrigues me. Luke was not writing in a book, but on a scroll. The largest scrolls were thirty-five feet in length. Longer than that, they would have been too big to handle. Thus, with only a limited amount of space, literature in biblical times had to be concise and succinct. Why, then, would the Holy Spirit inspire Luke to take valuable space to repeat the story of chapter 10 almost verbatim in chapter 11? I suggest it's because it's real important—as though the Holy Spirit is saying, "Don't miss this. I want you to grab hold of, and never forget that what the Father calls clean, you are not to call common."

Acts 11:4 (b)–10

. . . saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.

Isaiah wrote, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels" (61:10).

What a fabulous day it is when we say, "I'm righteous because I'm in Christ Jesus and because of what He has done for me on the Cross of Calvary. I'm His bride. I am aware of my uncleanness, my "four-footed beastliness," and my "fowl" mentality—but God has cleansed me eternally."

Why is it that we beat ourselves when, in so doing, we only cast aspersions on the work Jesus did on Calvary? Salvation is so wonderful! What the Lord has done for us is incredible! But it's so hard for us to receive grace graciously because there's something in us that says, "I don't deserve that kind of unconditional, unmerited love. I've got to earn it. I've got to prove myself worthy of it." Whenever you talk to the Lord freely and cast your care upon Him joyfully, expect Satan to whisper in your ear, "You're a creep, a four-footed beast, foul and unclean. You don't deserve to even enter God's presence, much less stay there!"

May your answer always be, "What He has cleansed, don't call common. And He has cleansed *me*."

Acts 11:11, 12 (a)

And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. And the spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me . . .

Peter was smart. Called to the house of a Gentile, he took six men with him to witness what would transpire.

Acts 11:12 (b)–17

. . . and we entered into the man's house: And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he

said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?

"Don't blame me," Peter said. "I didn't make this happen. I was just waiting for lunch when I saw a vision wherein the Spirit told me three men would come and escort me. When they showed up at my gate, I went with them and heard about the angelic preparation in Cornelius' heart and life. Then I started teaching the Word, and the Holy Ghost fell upon them, and they began to speak in tongues. This wasn't *my* idea!"

Acts 11:18

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

"Oy vey!" At last the light began to dawn on the Jewish Christian mentality that the barriers were broken down between clean and unclean, between Jew and Gentile. Finally, they began to realize that the Gospel was indeed to be preached to the entire world.

Acts 11:19 (a)

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen . . .

Following the stoning of Stephen, a wave of persecution scattered the church.

Acts 11:19 (b)

. . . travelled as far as Phenice . . .

Phenice was located in the southern part of present-day Israel, on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

Acts 11:19 (c)

. . . and Cyprus . . .

Cyprus was an island off the coast of present-day Syria.

Acts 11:19 (d)
. . . and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

The Christians scattered—but still spoke of salvation only to Jews. In Antioch, that would all change, for it was in Antioch that a base was established for missionary work in Gentile territory. Antioch, the third largest city in the Roman Empire, was dedicated to the Greek goddess, Daphne, who had been seduced by the Greek god, Apollo. With the possible exception of Corinth, immorality abounded in the city of Antioch more so than in any other city of the empire.

Acts 11:20–22
And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

When the believers in Jerusalem heard folks were being saved in Antioch, they sent Barnabas to check it out.

Acts 11:23 (a)
Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad . . .

I love this phrase! People say, "Why are you Christians so glad?"

"Because of the unmerited, undeserved, unearned grace of God," I answer. "You see, legalism makes people sour, but grace always produces great gladness."

Acts 11:23 (b)

. . . and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

Barnabas didn't exhort the Antioch believers to cleave unto the law, but to cleave unto the *Lord!* He didn't lay down rules and trips on them. He said, "Cleave to the Lord Jesus. Enjoy Him, hang on to Him, abide in Him, with purpose of heart."

It's the heart that's important, folks—not the mind. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness," (Romans 10:10). Why is the Lord so interested in the heart? Because the mind can change very quickly and very easily. I can change my mind about something a hundred times in a given day. I can go back and forth and back and forth, depending on what I hear, the conclusions I make, the information I have. But the heart does not change easily. Think of that time, guys, when the girl of your dreams told you to pack sand—or girls, when your boyfriend walked out of your life. Your mind may have accepted it—but your heart was broken. It didn't let go that easily.

The Lord is not after an intellectual assertion. He desires heartfelt unification. That's why He says, "Open your *heart* to Me—not your brain, but your heart." You see, the Lord knows that if my faith is intellectual only, academic arguments about evolution or existentialism will cause me to get confused and to vacillate. But if my heart is His, even though I may not be able to counter intellectual assaults, my relationship with Him will remain secure.

Acts 11:24, 25 (a)

For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus. . . .

Barnabas looked around and said, "Wow, here are all of these Hellenists, Grecians, and pagans being added to the church. Who can really speak to them effectively? I know! The guy I left at Tarsus seven or eight years ago—Saul!"

Acts 11:25 (b)

. . . for to seek Saul.

The word translated "to seek" is *anazeteo,* which means "to search up and down, or high and low." It's used only one other time by Luke—in Luke 2 where he wrote that Mary and Joseph searched diligently for Jesus after Passover. The idea of *anazeteo* is that of a parent frantically, desperately, energetically searching for a lost child. And that's exactly what Barnabas, the "son of consolation," the quintessential discipler, the ultimate encourager, did. He searched high and low for Saul, who had been in Tarsus for seven to ten years, living in obscurity.

I know some of you have been gifted and graced by the Lord to be Barnabases. Blessings on you—what a wonderful calling! You're encouragers, "sons and daughters of consolation." You're one-on-one kind of people. You have no need to be the big gun or the head hog at the trough. Like Barnabas, you're "good men and women—full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." I encourage you to search high and low for that one who, like Paul, is stuck off in obscurity—loving the Lord and committed to the Word, but in need of someone to throw an arm around him and strengthen him in the Lord.

Acts 11:26 (a)

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

In verse 20, men from Cypress "preached the Lord Jesus." In verse 23, Barnabas "exhorted them." In verse 26, Paul "taught much people." That's generally the order of effective ministry: First, there is preaching as we present the gospel evangelistically. Then comes encouragement as we say, "I rejoice with you. Cleave to the Lord." Finally, there is teaching in order that believers may mature in their faith. Preaching, encouraging, and teaching—all three are important and essential for a healthy ministry.

Acts 11:26 (b)

And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

What does the word "Christian" mean? It means "Little Christ." Wouldn't it be great if someone called you "Little Jesus" because you had so much of Him in you?

Acts 11:27, 28

And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Into this atmosphere of teaching, exhortation, and preaching came a prophet named Agabus who, given opportunity to declare a prophetic word, said drought would fall upon Jerusalem. This is exciting for me, as it relates to our own Christian community. How important it is that we as a body have opportunity to hear the heart of the Lord through prophecy.

I was once asked by a pastor, "How do you maintain a sense of excitement in your fellowship? I know you stress teaching, but so often in my situation, teaching becomes dry and the people lose interest." My answer? Teaching does indeed become dry when there is not opportunity to hear what the Spirit desires to say personally and directly to the body. So much of what I personally have enjoyed in my walk with the Lord over many years has been the result of hearing something from the heart of the Lord when He speaks to the body through the body as He did here in Acts.

Acts 11:29

Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea.

It has been wisely said that we make a living by what we get. But we make a life by what we give. There was life in the early church because they gave. After hearing the word of prophecy, they didn't say, "Wow, there's going to be a drought, huh? We better store our beans, buy guns, get gold, and build shelters." No, they said, "There's a drought? Let's take an offering. Tough times? How can we help?"

I personally have a hard time with the prophecy mentality in our day that says, "Hard times are coming, so get your gold and get your guns, and if anybody tries to get your food, let them have it with both barrels." I reject that. I don't think it's the heart of the Lord.

Acts 11:30

Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

So it was that Barnabas and Saul left Antioch to travel three hundred miles south to share with the body in Jerusalem.



12 Acts 12:1

Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex cer tain of the church.

Whenever Herod's name appears in Scripture, it's easy to get confused. "Wasn't Herod the one who killed the infants when Jesus was born? Didn't he die in Matthew 2? What's he doing here?" The answer to those questions lies in the fact that "Herod" is a family name. Herod the Great—the one who slaughtered the infants at Jesus' birth—was an Idumean—a descendant of Esau, who married Mariamne—a descendant of the Maccabeans. Mariamne was one of Herod's eight wives, and one of at least six he killed. But before she died, Mariamne gave Herod a son named Aristobulus. Aristobulus was one of at least fifteen sons Herod killed. But before he died, Aristobulus fathered a son named Herod Agrippa. Realizing it was dangerous living in Jerusalem with people getting butchered right and left, Aristobulus' mother shipped her son to Rome—where he became friends with a man named Caligula. You might remember Caligula from your history lessons. He was a terribly depraved man, who, when he came into power, said, "I'm going to put my buddy Herod Agrippa on the throne in Jerusalem." Thus, it is Herod Agrippa of whom we read here in Acts 12.

Acts 12:2, 3

And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)

Herod Agrippa, Idumean on his father's side, Jewish on his mother's, was very interested in Jewish culture and deeply desirous of Jewish acceptance.

But, although he was circumcised and followed Jewish customs and rituals, the Jews never embraced him as one of their own because they considered him a half-breed at best. Here in Acts 12, Herod Agrippa finally—although perhaps quite accidentally—gained the approval of the Jews by ordering James sawn in half lengthwise. *At last I've found a way to get the Jews to like me,* he must have thought and decided to go after Peter next.

Acts 12:4 (a)
And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him . . .

Four quaternions is literally four soldiers. The worst criminal would have had two soldiers—one chained to each arm. But Herod ordered four soldiers chained to Peter to make sure he wouldn't escape.

Acts 12:4 (b)
. . . intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

"After Easter" should have been translated "after Passover." Knowing it was against Jewish law to kill a man during Passover, Herod Agrippa intended to wait until after Passover to execute Peter.

Acts 12:5
Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

Prayer was made on Peter's behalf, and what a difference it would make! What would have happened had the believers prayed when James was in prison? I wonder. Why didn't the church pray for James? Perhaps they thought, *Why pray? God's will is going to be done anyway.* The Bible says we have not because we ask not (James 4:2). Why are we so dumb? Why do we have to learn the hard way? Why does there have to be difficulty, sadness, and tragedy before we say, "You know what? I better pray"?

What difference does it make if you pray? All I know is this: The church didn't pray for James, and he was sawn in half. They prayed for Peter, and he is about to be spared. You see, the Lord has sovereignly chosen to work through

the avenue of prayer in order to teach us how to talk to Him, and depend on Him, so that in the ages to come when we rule on behalf of Him, we will already have established communication with Him.

Acts 12:6

And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.

This cracks me up! Here's Peter—sleeping again! Luke tells us that while Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter slept (Luke 9:32). Matthew writes that while Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter slept (Matthew 26:40). And here in Acts 12, we see Peter asleep on the night before his execution. But this time it's different. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter slept because he didn't expect anything to happen. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he slept in disobedience to the Lord's command to pray with Him. In prison, he slept because he was totally at peace.

Put yourself in Peter's chains. If you were bound to two soldiers and knew you were going to be killed the next morning, what would you do? I know what Peter did: Blanketed with the "peace that passeth understanding" (see Philippians 4:7), he slept.

Acts 12:7

And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

Throughout Scripture, angels are almost always pictured as being in a hurry. Conversely, God is seen hurrying only once—in the person of the father who ran down the road to welcome home his prodigal son (Luke 15:20). Why do angels always seem to be rushing around? Perhaps it's because angels understand human nature so well that they just want to come on the scene, do their work, and get out before men get caught up in worshiping them.

Acts 12:8, 9

And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

I'm dreaming, thought Peter. *What a trip!*

Acts 12:10, 11

When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

What if Peter, sitting in prison, had said, "Wow, what a dream," and then continued sitting there? He would have been dead before his time. You see, even though Peter wasn't sure what he was seeing was reality, he acted on it as if it were. I wonder how many of us remain imprisoned because, although we hear teachings and exhortations, prophecies and illuminations—although we take notes and nod our heads in agreement, we just sit in our cells thinking they must be dreams. Our culture says, "Take it easy." Christianity says, "Take a chance." We'll never experience what God intends us to enjoy until we follow what He lays on our hearts by stepping out in faith.

Now, sometimes when we step out, we find it was only a vision after all. That's okay. Proverbs says an empty stable stays clean, but an empty stable brings no profits (Proverbs 14:4). Some people say, "I've never messed up. I've never made the mistake of following a vision. Look how clean my barn is. The floor is spotless." But the farmer who has some meadow muffins on the floor and a few flies swarming around is the one who is productive. Follow the Lord's leading even if it seems like only a vision. The worst that could happen is that a pasture patty or two could appear in your barn. But the best that could happen is, like Peter, you could be set free!

Acts 12:12 (a)

And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark . . .

This was probably the same upper room used for the Last Supper and on the Day of Pentecost.

Acts 12:12 (b), 13

. . . where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.

"Rhoda" means "Rose."

Acts 12:14, 15 (a)

And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad.

Oh, Rose. You're a blooming idiot, the believers must have thought. *That can't be Peter. Don't you know he's in prison?* Then they returned to their praying: "Lord, free Peter in Jesus' Name. Oh, Lord, we look to You to free Peter." Isn't this a great story? Aren't these early believers just like you and me? I mean, here they are, praying fervently for Peter's release, while he's standing right outside their door!

Acts 12:15 (b)

But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.

This intrigues me because evidently these early believers were so accustomed to seeing angels, they didn't even bother to get up to see this one. It seems the early church had the awareness that angels were always around. We've lost that awareness. Our eyes have become dull. As a result, I think we're missing something because we don't really believe angels are here right now.

Acts 12:16, 17 (a)

But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James. . . .

This is James, the half brother of Jesus, author of the Book of James, leader of the church in Jerusalem.

Acts 12:17 (b)

. . . and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

This story encourages me a whole bunch because it shows that the Lord responds to prayer even when it's not accompanied by a great deal of faith. These believers were praying fervently and intensely, but you cannot say they were praying the prayer of faith, since they didn't even have enough faith to believe Peter was free when he was knocking at their gate! I like this story because I find myself praying a whole lot like them. I pray fervently, even intensely—but a lot of times I'm not sure anything's going to happen. This story tells me that's okay. God can still work through a tiny smattering of faith. Jesus said faith the size of a mustard seed—just a tiny bit of faith—can move mountains (Matthew 17:20). If you have faith enough just to pray, things can happen. Doors can open. Ask Peter!

You who feel imprisoned, boxed in, and as though nothing's happening, in your job, in your family, in your ministry—take heart and take hope and pray anyway. Sometimes it takes only enough faith to pray for a miracle to happen.

Peter would later write these words:

For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

1 Peter 3:12

The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous—that's why Peter had peace. The ears of the Lord are open to prayer—that's why the church could pray. But the face of the Lord is against evil—that's why Herod was about to perish.

Acts 12:18, 19

Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode.

Infuriated by the news of Peter's escape, Herod left Jerusalem for the seacoast city of Caesarea, the resort town of the day. A beautiful city built by the Romans on the beach of the Mediterranean Sea, Caesarea was opulent and luxurious.

Acts 12:20 (a)

And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon . . .

Tyre and Sidon were two cities located in present-day Lebanon. We do not know why Herod was displeased with them, but we do know his displeasure would have been bad news for them, since non-agrarian communities such as theirs were totally dependent upon Herod for food.

Acts 12:20 (b)

. . . but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country.

When the delegation from Tyre and Sidon arrived in Caesarea, they somehow persuaded Blastus, Herod's chief of staff, to make an appointment for them with his boss.

Acts 12:21 (a)

And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel . . .

Jewish historian Josephus tells us Herod's royal robes were actually made of pure silver threads—a gown that would have made even Elton John envious!

Acts 12:21 (b), 22

. . . sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.

In need of Herod's bread, what did the delegation from Tyre and Sidon do? They buttered him up. "You're a god! You're a god," they shouted. Folks, flattery is like bubble gum—you can enjoy it for a moment, but don't swallow it. More often than not, when someone flatters you, he is attempting to get something from you—which is exactly what was happening here.

Acts 12:23

And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

Here, Herod—arrayed in silver splendor, glistening in the Mediterranean sun, drinking in the praise of the people—was suddenly eaten by worms. Now whether worms actually began to eat his flesh—or whether, as Josephus suggests, Herod, struck with severe intestinal pains, died five days later, and, during the autopsy, his insides were found to be full of worms—we can't be sure. Whether the worms ate him from inside out, or from outside in—either way, it was gross! But the Lord doesn't tell us this to gross us out. He tells us this to fill us in, for I believe the purpose of this account is to teach us the absolute necessity of giving God glory.



For topical study of Acts 12:20–23, see "What's Eating You?" below.

Acts 12:24

But the word of God grew and multiplied.

Herod was struck down—but the Word of God grew and multiplied. I like that!

Acts 12:25

And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their minis try, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

After delivering the offering of the believers in Antioch to the believers in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch, bringing John Mark with them. John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas and the son of the woman whose upper room was used by the disciples for the Last Supper and on the Day of Pentecost, was a young man who had a rich Christian heritage. He also had a lot to learn, as we will see in chapter 13.

WHAT'S EATING YOU?

A Topical Study of ACTS 12:20–23

When we talk about giving God glory, people get very confused. Why are we to give God glory? Is He insecure? Does He have a poor self-image? Does He need us to gather together and tell Him how wonderful He is so He'll feel better about Himself? No. God doesn't need us—but He does love us. And He knows that, although He doesn't need our praise, we need to praise. He knows it is in thanksgiving and in glorifying Him that we are de-wormed. He knows that, like Herod, if we do not honor Him, worms will destroy us.

Following are three worms that will torment us, gnaw on us, and ultimately devour us if we do not give God glory and thanksgiving continually.

The Worm of Anxiety

Paul wrote that in everything we are to give thanks to the Lord (Ephesians 5:20). Why? Because, as James wrote, every good and perfect gift comes from above (1:17).

If I think the job I have, the house in which I live, the family I enjoy are mine because I have worked hard and have been clever and diligent, I will eventually be eaten up by the worm of anxiety because I will either be worried about maintaining what I have or attaining what I don't. If I say, "I have health because of my commitment to physical fitness, success because of my business acumen, and a place on the baseball team because of my athletic prowess," I will be consumed by worry because if I strived to attain these things, I'll have to strive to maintain them.

If you believe you are where you are today because of your diligence, your ability, your personality, or your creativity—you will be eaten up with anxiety. On the other hand, if you believe every good gift comes from *above,* you realize you neither earned nor deserve the blessings in your life. And since you didn't work for them, since they are yours by God's grace, you can trust in Him and give thanks to Him for where you are today.

Then, if the job doesn't work out, if the relationship goes kaput, if you get cut from the team, you can say, "Lord, You gave it to me in the first place. And if You're taking it away from me now, then I know it's ultimately for my good and Your glory." And when you thank the Lord for whatever situation you're in and give Him glory for everything you've enjoyed, you'll be at peace—wonderful peace that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7).

> Miriam led the children of Israel in praise and worship as they danced and celebrated after God miraculously parted the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20). But do you recall what the children of Israel were doing *before* the Lord parted the Sea? They were complaining and murmuring (Exodus 14:11, 12). They were stressed out. They were uptight. They were eaten up. How much better it would have been for the people to dance before the Lord and give glory to Him *before* the Red Sea parted —while they were trapped and boxed in by the Sea in front of them and the Egyptians behind them.

It’s relatively easy to give thanks after the answer has come. But how much better for your health, your faith, your witness, if you’ll take up the tambourine in faith before you see the Red Sea part—and watch the worm of anxiety drown in the waters of praise!

The Worm of Perversity

Romans 1 gives us the pathway to perversion . . .

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

Romans 1:18–27

When a man, a woman, or a society stops glorifying God and giving Him thanks, perversion is the ultimate result. Oh, we might not make idols of men and birds of wood and stone as they did in Paul's day—but we fashion rock idols, Hollywood idols, and political idols. We might not worship creeping things and fourfooted animals anymore—but we teach our kids that they came from primordial slime and evolved into monkeys.

We are surrounded in this country by perversity that leads to homosexuality and God's judgment inevitably. And, according to Romans 1:21, it all began when we stopped giving God thanks. I'm so sorry about our culture. I take responsibility for it and repent to the Lord concerning it. Like Herod, our society is being devoured by the worm of perversity because, as a nation, we refuse to glorify God.

The Worm of Negativity

A man or woman who does not continually give thanks in everything becomes vulnerable to the worm of negativity. He or she will become grumpy, grouchy, and cynical. The way to escape from the worm of negativity is to give thanks to God continually.

> In the late 1800s, when cotton was undisputed king of the South, every cotton plantation in Coffee County, Alabama, was wiped out by the boll weevil. The economic fallout was disastrous, causing the Christians in the little town of Enterprise to meet together and pray, "We thank You, Lord, that You have blessed us for so many years with cotton. Now it's gone, but we know You work all things together for good. So we trust You."
>
> Following their prayer meeting, the town of Enterprise decided to change crops from cotton to peanuts. Now, although peanuts at that time were virtually unknown, there was a man of exceptional intelligence—one of the greatest thinkers in our country's history—who in the same year the folks of Enterprise felt the Lord nudging them to plant peanuts, was also talking to the Lord. A wonderful believer, with a deep interest in astronomy, he prayed, "Father, teach me the secrets of the universe." Then he hung his head and said, "Lord, I know that's too presumptuous to ask. Just teach me about the peanut."
>
> The man's name, of course, was George Washington Carver—and how the Lord answered his prayer! Beginning in 1895, Carver developed over three hundred products from the lowly peanut—of which the primary discovery, as far as I'm concerned, was peanut butter! As a result of George Washington Carver's discoveries, suddenly there was an unexpected, unprecedented demand for peanuts. And Coffee County began to prosper beyond belief. What had been a disaster became a blessing. What had been adversity became prosperity—all because instead of being eaten up by the worm of negativity, the people of Enterprise glorified God.

If you go to Enterprise today, you will see a monument in the town square with a boll weevil on top and this inscription underneath:

In profound appreciation for the boll weevil and what he has done as the herald of prosperity, this monument is erected by the grateful citizens of Coffee County, Alabama. All things work together for good (see Romans 8:28).

Gang, you and I can be de-wormed by giving God glory. May He give us wisdom and application. And may this be the most un-wormy congregation in the whole country!



13 In Acts 1:8, Jesus told His disciples they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. That's what He said—and that's exactly what happened. First, the early believers were accused of filling all Jerusalem with their doctrine (Acts 5:28). Then, persecution scattered the church throughout Judaea (Acts 8:1). Later, revival broke out in Samaria after Philip preached Christ unto them (Acts 8:8). And here in Acts 13, we see the final phase of Jesus' commission coming to pass, as Paul is about to launch out on his first missionary journey to the uttermost parts of the earth.

I say this not only to give you a basic feeling for the Book of Acts, but for a very practical reason as well. You see, throughout Scripture, the commands of the Lord are not heavy exhortations—they're glorious expectations. Therefore, instead of reading Acts 1:8 like this: "You shall be *witnesses* unto Me, so get out there and pass out tracts. Be My witnesses. That is My command"—it should be read like this: "You *shall* be witnesses unto Me. It *will* happen!"

So often people say the commands of Jesus are heavy. But Jesus said His burden is easy and His load light (Matthew 11:28). So, when the Lord says, "You shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2), He's not saying, "You'd *better* be holy like Me," but—"You *will* be holy like Me. The holiness inherent in Me will be enjoyed by you. You watch. You'll see!"

It's like me saying to Benjamin, "Son, you shall have a big nose, for I, your father, have a big nose. It *will* happen!" As we learn the Scriptures, my prayer is that we catch the inflection of the Father's voice so we can more clearly hear His heart.

Acts 13:1 (a)

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers . . .

"There were certain prophets and teachers." Notice the distinction: Prophets are those who, under the inspiration of the Spirit, guide the church as they speak the heart of God through edification, exhortation, and comfort. Teachers are those who ground the church as they point out the ways and mind of God revealed through the Word. There are those in certain denominations who say that prophets and teachers are one and the same in the New Testament. Not so. Here in Acts 13, there's a clear-cut distinction.

Acts 13:1 (b)
. . . as Barnabas . . .

Remember Barnabas, the "son of consolation"? He was the one who took Paul under his wing before anyone else in Jerusalem believed Paul was born again. Later on, we'll see Barnabas take John Mark under his wing and walk with him through a season of failure.

Acts 13:1 (c)
. . . and Simeon that was called Niger . . .

Simon was from present-day Nigeria. This is probably Simon the Cyrene, the one who carried the Cross to Golgotha after Jesus sank beneath its weight (Luke 23:26).

Acts 13:1 (d)
. . . and Lucius of Cyrene . . .

How did Lucius get saved? I suggest Simon the Cross-bearer went back to Cyrene, talked to his buddy Lucius, and together they started walking with the Lord, eventually becoming significant figures in ministry.

Acts 13:1 (e)
. . . and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch. . . .

Manaen was a foster-brother of Herod Antipas—the Herod who cut off John the Baptist's head. Talk about the grace and sovereignty of God! Manaen grew up in Herod's vile, polluted family—yet the Lord rescued him and saved him for ministry.

Acts 13:1 (f)
. . . and Saul.

We'll see Saul's name change later in this chapter. The word "Saul" means "requested one"—even as King Saul was requested by the people (1 Samuel 8:6). What does "Paul" mean? "Little." You see, something happened in Paul's life when he was converted to Christ. No longer did he identify himself as Saul, the "requested one," the "man in demand." No, he said, "Call me little."

In the early part of his ministry, Paul said, "I am the least of the apostles" (see 1 Corinthians 15:9). In the middle of his ministry, he said, "I am less than the least of all saints" (see Ephesians 3:8). At the end of his life, he said, "I am the chief of sinners" (see 1 Timothy 1:15). I find it interesting that the longer Paul walked with the Lord, the more he realized how far he was from Him. That's always the way it is. The Pharisee, praying on the street corner said, "God, I thank thee, I am not as other men," while the true convert beat his breast and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (see Luke 18:11–13).

Acts 13:2 (a)
As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted . . .

Luke doesn't say they ministered *for* the Lord. He says they ministered *to* the Lord. Lots of people desire to minister for the Lord, but there are few who desire to minister to the Lord.

> *In Ezekiel 44:10, 11, and 15, the Lord said, "The Levites that are gone away far from me, when Israel went astray, which went astray away from me after their idols; they shall even bear their iniquity. Yet they shall be ministers in my sanctuary, having charge at the gates of the house, and ministering to the house: they shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister unto them. But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that*

kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me."

It was the faithful sons of Zadok whom God reserved for ministry to Himself. This shows me that in the eyes of the Lord, the most important ministry is not ministering *for* Him, but ministering *to* Him in worship and praise, in prayer and adoration.

Acts 13:2 (b)

. . . the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

The Holy Ghost said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul." How did the Holy Ghost say this? I suggest it was through the prophets mentioned in verse 1. Later on, Paul would write, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Timothy 4:14). In other words, "Timothy, don't neglect the gift you received when prophecy was uttered over you and hands laid upon you."

*Twenty-five years ago when I was part of a ministry in San Jose, California, a word of prophecy was given by a very quiet businessman during a time when about thirty of us were worshiping and waiting on the Lord. He said, "Jon, I think the Lord is giving me a word for you to consider: He wants to move you to a higher mountain." Now, unbeknownst to him, that very day I had been wrestling with whether I should move from San Jose to Applegate. "*Applegate?" *I thought. Who's ever heard of* Applegate? *To me, the area was as rugged and mountainous as the Yukon Territory! So, that particular prophecy was very important for me to hear. It edified me. It exhorted me. It comforted me greatly. Looking back through my journal I find many such accounts of a prophetic word for me personally or for the body corporately. Prophecy is vital.*

Acts 13:3

And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Notice they were *sent* away. In the area of missions, we need more people to be *sent.* A lot of people are hyped into going on a missionary venture or journey. But throughout Scripture, I never see people capriciously going because of some presentation. As is the case here, I see a deep work of the Spirit saying, "Separate *these* guys. *They're* to go and minister."

Now, I'm not discounting taking a couple of weeks and going on a missionary journey or a short-term ministry. That's fine. But before you sell your house and quit your job—make sure you're not being pulled or manipulated by some kind of presentation that moves you emotionally. Pray. Wait on the Lord. Minister to Him. And then go not as one who went, but as one who is *sent.*

Acts 13:4 (a)
So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed . . .

Here is an important truth for you who are trying to discern God's will for your life. Look carefully. The text says, "they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed." The Holy Ghost pushed them out, but *they* departed. The Holy Ghost gave direction, but it was up to *them* to begin the journey. There comes a point when the Lord, having made His will for you clear to you, expects you to depart—to take the first step on whatever path He has directed you to walk.

Acts 13:4 (b)
. . . unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

Why Cyprus? I suggest it was because Cypress was the homeland of Barnabas. You see, the Lord gave the inspiration, but the practical application was worked through Saul and Barnabas as they simply began to move out in a supernaturally natural way. It was natural for Barnabas to want to go to Cyprus. Cyprus was home. "The Lord's calling us. Where should we go, Paul?"

"What do *you* think, Barney?"

"Well, there's great surf in Cyprus and good fishing. It's my home country, and I care about those people there. Besides, there's great need in Cyprus." And indeed there was. The worship of Venus, also known as

Aphrodite, the love goddess, was centered in Cyprus. Every woman on Cyprus was required to serve as a temple prostitute at least once in her life. And as you read the history of Cyprus, you read of disease, debauchery, and tragedy. Even the appearance of the women as recorded by historians was unbelievably sad. It was a sick island. Sin always takes a toll. Some years ago, I was talking to a promiscuous young lady. "If you keep living this way," I said, "by the time you're thirty, you're going to look like forty and feel like fifty." The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). And sin kills emotionally as well as physically.

Acts 13:5

And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.

John Mark, first mentioned in verse 25 of chapter 12, was the nephew of Barnabas. According to 1 Peter 5:13, it seems he was converted by Peter and later discipled under the tutelage of his uncle Barnabas.

Acts 13:6

And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus.

Traveling through the depraved island of Cyprus, Barnabas and Saul encountered Bar-jesus, literally "Son of Jesus"—a false prophet, a sorcerer, a wizard.

Acts 13:7

Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

Sergius Paulus, the Roman-appointed governor of the island, hearing of two men traveling through his island who were sharing the truth of God's love and grace, said, "I want to hear more."

Acts 13:8

But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

Bar-jesus, also called Elymas, or "Enlightened One," was jealous and worried. After all, if Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor, got saved, where would that leave him? So Elymas started speaking against Barnabas and Paul to Sergius Paulus.

Acts 13:9 (a)

Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) . . .

This is where Saul's name changed to Paul—from "requested one" to "little."

Acts 13:9 (b), 10

. . . filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

What a look this must have been! With eyes of discernment, Paul saw this man was no good. So, too, today, people might say, "I'm a follower of Jesus. I'm close to Jesus. I speak for Jesus"—but you'll know in your heart if something's amiss.

Acts 13:11

And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

Paul was not a wimpy Christian, but his heart was always for restoration—even with a guy like Elymas. How do I know? Consider what happened to Paul before he was converted: Like Elymas, he was blinded (Acts 9:9). It wasn't until Paul was blinded physically that he could see spiritually. And I suggest

that although Paul was not mincing words with Elymas, his prayer was not, "Sic him, Lord." It was "Save him."

Acts 13:12

Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

It interests me that Luke didn't say Sergius Paulus was astonished at the miracle that took place. No, Luke said he was astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. "You mean God loves *me?*" Sergius Paulus must have wondered in amazement. "You mean He became a Man and died in *my* place? You mean *I* can be forgiven and saved—made right and redeemed?" May we never become so accustomed to hearing the story of the Cross that we become hardened. The wonder of it all! *Amazing* grace! O, Lord, keep us astonished.

Acts 13:13 (a)

Now when Paul and his company . . .

Wait a minute. Before, it had been, "Barnabas and Saul" (13:2). Now it's "Paul and his company." This means that, although Paul was originally following Barnabas, at this point Paul was thrust into the forefront.

Acts 13:13 (b)

. . . loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia . . .

Visualize a map of the Middle East. Paul and Barnabas left Palestine, traveled to Cyprus, and headed north to Turkey.

Acts 13:13 (c)

. . . and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

John Mark split. He turned back and ran home to Jerusalem. Why? Perhaps the most logical reason is found at the beginning of this verse. When Paul took the helm, Uncle Barnabas was demoted to second in command at best. Can't you hear John Mark saying, "Well, if *he's* going to be in charge, I'm going

home. I like you, Uncle Barnabas. You're always so encouraging. But Paul is mean. I'm not going to serve with *him!*"

David said it is the *Lord* who sets up one and puts down another (Psalm 75:7). I believe John Mark forgot this. My prayer is that we might be those who learn to say, "Lord, righteous and true are Your judgments and decisions. You're on the throne. You're in control. Regardless of whether my uncle is in charge or not, Lord, I'm traveling with You and in the company to which You've called me."

Acts 13:14 (a)

But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia. . . .

This was not the same Antioch from which Paul and Barnabas sailed. There were seven cities named Antioch in this region during this time. The Antioch in this verse was located northeast of Perga, the city in present-day Turkey from which John Mark left.

Acts 13:14 (b)

. . . and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.

Paul always followed the same mode of operation. That is, upon arrival in a new city, he would head into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and share with the Jews who were studying there. In Romans 1:16, he said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Paul always shared the gospel with the Jews before he shared with the Gentiles. It was not a matter of preference, however. It was a matter of precedence.

The Jews had precedence for two reasons. First, they were a people who had preparation. For two thousand years, they had been given Old Testament prophecies, types, and stories—all pointing to the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ. Thus, converted Jews made radical Christians due to their thorough understanding of Old Testament Scripture. Second, the Jews were a people who had a promise. From their midst arose One who would come to be a deliverer for them, a King over them, a comfort to them.

Acts 13:15

And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

Seeing Paul and Barnabas were well-educated, well-traveled, well-informed visitors, the rulers of the synagogue invited them to address the synagogue.

Acts 13:16

Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.

Here is Paul's first recorded sermon—remarkable in its similarity to Stephen's sermon in Acts 7. As Stephen was going down, had he glanced in the direction of Paul, who was holding the garments of those throwing stones, no doubt he would have thought, *I failed. These people aren't receiving or responding to my message.* But because the Word of God will not return void (Isaiah 55:11), Stephen's words rattled around inside Paul, and fourteen years later, out of Paul's mouth came a replay of Stephen's sermon. This gives me great hope because, although sometimes when I share with people and feel that no one is listening, that none are responding, the Word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12).

Acts 13:17

The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it.

Paul began his sermon by reminding the Jews of their history—reminding them of their ancestors who were held captive in Egypt, baking bricks under the burning sun. How many bricks did they bake? Using only the bricks from the pyramids, sphinxes, and monuments that remain today, a person could build a wall ten feet thick and fifteen feet high that would stretch from Medford, Oregon, to Brooklyn, New York. That's a lot of bricks!

Acts 13:18

And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.

The phrase "suffered their manners" is a unique Hebrew idiom that can either mean "to feed" or "to put up with." So which is it? When Scripture says God "suffered their manners," was He putting up with the Israelites, or feeding them? He was doing both. God both hung in there with the children of Israel and provided for them for forty years.

Acts 13:19, 20

And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot. And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.

Paul singled out Samuel because Samuel was preparatory to David; just as John the Baptist, to whom Paul will make later reference, was preparatory to the Son of David, Jesus Christ.

Acts 13:21

And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.

Israel wanted a king. They got one in Saul—a man who stood head and shoulders above the rest; a man who was initially humble and who moved in the power of the Spirit; a charismatic man who was able to galvanize the nation around him.

Acts 13:22 (a)

And when he had removed him . . .

God removed Saul from the throne. Why? First Samuel 15 tells the story. God spoke to Saul through Samuel the prophet, saying, "Destroy the Amalekites —the people who snuck up behind you and attacked your weakest and most

feeble when you were wandering in the wilderness (see Deuteronomy 25:18). Make sure you destroy every man, woman, child, and beast. Leave nothing behind."

So Saul gathered two hundred thousand footmen from Israel and ten thousand footmen from Judah, marched on the Amalekites and utterly destroyed them—all except for one. He kept Agag, king of the Amalekites, along with some sheep. As Saul returned victorious to Israel, he saw Samuel in the distance. "Blessed be the name of the Lord!" Saul said. "I have obeyed all of His commandments!"

"Really?" said Samuel. "Then what's that bleating I hear?"

"Well, we saved the best of the sheep and the oxen to bring back as a sacrifice to Jehovah!" declared Saul.

Samuel looked at Saul and said, "To obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken more than the fat of rams. Rebellion is as witchcraft and stubbornness is as idolatry. Who's he?" asked Samuel, catching a glimpse of Agag.

"This is Agag, king of the Amalekites. I brought him back as a trophy," answered Saul.

Samuel grabbed a sword and hacked Agag into pieces right there on the spot, threw down the sword in utter disgust, and said, "Saul, you have disobeyed. No longer will you be king—neither you, nor your descendants. The kingdom is taken from you." And indeed his kingdom was taken away.

"That seems pretty harsh," you say. "I mean what's wrong with bringing home some sheep to sacrifice and Agag as a trophy to march in the victory parade?" Read on. At the very end of 1 Samuel and in the first chapter of 2 Samuel, we see Saul twenty years later on Mount Gilboa, fighting the Philistines. Wounded in battle, he heard the voice of his attacker behind him.

"Who are you?" Saul cried out.

"I am an Amalekite," came the answer.

You see, the period between the time Saul brought Agag back until the time he talked to Samuel was probably less than a week, but in that time, Agag must have escaped and fathered a son.

We think we have sin under control, but whenever we keep a little trophy hanging around to show how powerful we are, we're playing with fire. Ask Saul. "MTV used to be a problem," you boast, "but I've got it under control now. No need to block out that channel. I can turn it off whenever I want." Watch out. The son of Agag is out to get you.

That's why a Father who loves you says, "Destroy completely every Amalekite. If something is wrong, if something is tempting, if something is pulling on you carnally, if something is attacking you from behind annihilate it. Don't play around with the Amalekites because if you leave even one, he'll come back and get you."

Acts 13:22 (b)

. . . he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.

Like Saul, David was a sinner. The difference was that David wasn't playing games with God. He had weaknesses, problems, and failures to be sure. But his heart was right in the sight of the Lord.

Acts 13:23

Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.

Paul now turns the attention of his audience to Jesus.

Acts 13:24–27

When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose. Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.

"Don't you get it?" asked Paul. "All of history led to the moment when the Son of David—the Promised Seed, Messiah—came on the scene. The fact that

you neither recognized nor received Him fulfills the very prophecies that were written about Him."

Acts 13:28

And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.

Why did the Jews demand of Pilate that Jesus be slain? They themselves stoned Stephen in Acts 7. They'll stone Paul in Acts 14. Why didn't they stone Jesus? Because the prophecies of the Old Testament all pointed toward crucifixion. The serpent on the pole in Numbers 21, the law that declared "Cursed is every one who hangs on a tree" (see Deuteronomy 21:23), and Psalm 22 all portray crucifixion. Therefore, moved by forces they didn't even understand, the Jewish leaders appealed to a Roman Pilate so that Christ would die a Roman death—exactly as prophesied.

Acts 13:29

And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre.

Put yourself in these guys' sandals. You're sitting in the synagogue on the Sabbath day when a visiting rabbi stands up and begins to recount Jewish history, ending with the statement, "And it all came to a crescendo in the One who was crucified on a tree and resurrected from the dead."

How would that hit you if you had never heard it before? You would probably say, "Okay, who let him in? Come on, get real. What are you saying? I mean, we enjoy your history lesson. But your conclusion is preposterous." And then Paul threw in the clincher.

Acts 13:30, 31

But God raised him from the dead: And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.

Paul said, "Don't take my word for it. A whole bunch of guys saw Him." Later on in 1 Corinthians, he'll say "Five hundred men saw Him, talked to Him,

and give witness that He rose from the dead." Five hundred witnesses is a formidable group.

> *Suppose there was a holdup at a 7–11 store near your house. Curious about it, you sit in the courtroom observing the trial, listening carefully as the first witness takes the stand and says, "I was in 7–11 on June 24, getting a Big Gulp, and this guy with black hair, a handlebar mustache, and a scar down his left cheek walked in, pulled out a pistol, and said, "Hit the ground! This is a stickup!" So I hit the ground along with everyone else. He took the money, fired a shot, ran out the door, and jumped in his car, a blue Corvair." And then a second witness took the stand, saying, "On June 24, I was in 7–11 buying a Slurpee. A guy came in with a scar down his left cheek and a black handlebar mustache. He pulled out a pistol and told us to hit the ground. Then he took the money, fired a shot, and took off in a blue Corvair." And a third witness said, "I was in 7–11 buying a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup and this guy—I'll never forget him as long as I live—with a scar and a handlebar mustache came in holding a gun and told us to hit the deck. He fired a shot and drove away in a blue Corvair." And as you listened, a fourth witness, a fifth, an eighth, a tenth, a two hundreth, a three hundred eightieth, a four hundred fortieth, a four hundred ninety-eighth—five hundred witnesses come in and told the very same story. Since our system of jurisprudence is based upon eyewitness evidence, the accused would be convicted of robbery if five hundred witnesses gave corroborating evidence.*

Paul appealed to this reasoning when he said, "Five hundred men saw Him." It is interesting to me that Paul's contemporaries, who were trying to disprove the Resurrection, gave all sorts of explanations—ranging from mass hypnosis to mass delusion—in an attempt to nullify the eyewitness accounts of those who saw the resurrected Jesus. But none of them—not one of the unbelieving historians of that day—said, "There are no eyewitnesses. Paul's making that up." The fact that there were eyewitnesses was as irrefutable as the empty tomb.

If I weren't a believer simply because of what Jesus has done for me personally, I would be a believer because of the overwhelming proof intellectually. Anyone who looks at the evidence historically must factor in the

eyewitnesses—men who chose to die brutal and violent deaths rather than deny they had seen the resurrected Christ.

Acts 13:32, 33

And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

The cults use this phrase, "This day have I begotten thee," to say, "Jesus was the first created Being. He's important, He's wonderful," a Jehovah's witness or a Mormon will say, "but He's not God. He was created." Wait a minute. They're missing the point. "This day have I begotten thee." What day? The day of His Resurrection.

Psalm 2, as quoted here by Paul, is not talking about the Incarnation, but about the Resurrection. Jesus is unique among all men by virtue of the fact that He rose again from the dead. It's not the womb David is speaking of—it's the tomb. This is a key understanding when you talk with people who try to sell you *Watchtower Magazine,* or the Mormon rap. Look at the context. Paul is talking about Jesus being raised from the dead.

Acts 13:34 (a)

And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption . . .

The corruption spoken of here is in regard to the decomposition of a dead body.

Acts 13:34 (b), 35

. . . he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

This promise, although given to David, does not apply to him, for he would indeed see corruption as his body decayed in the coffin. To whom, then, does the promise apply? It applies to the *Son* of David—Jesus Christ.

Acts 13:36–38

For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.

Man's greatest need is God's greatest deed. The greatest need for your sixteen-year-old son at home, or your thirty-eight-year-old husband sitting beside you, the greatest need for *every* person is the same: forgiveness. And we have the privilege of telling people, even as Paul told his audience, "Through this Man is the forgiveness of sin."

Acts 13:39

And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

You are justified from all things. The word "all" in Greek means "*all"!*

One Sunday, before I baptized a young man, I told him, "Your being here testifies to everyone that you're serious about Jesus Christ. And because of that, any compromise that you're involved in, any sin or stuff that's going on in your life that's not right—" At this point, the guy started weeping, no doubt thinking that the sin in his life presently would disqualify him from salvation. I said, "You're here because you're serious about the Lord, and I want you to know any sin you're now committing is forgiven." With a look of amazement on his face, he looked up at me and said, "Really? You mean I'm forgiven of the sin I'm *presently* involved in?"

"Yep," I said.

We don't get it. We know our old sins are forgiven, but we think, *Now I've got to toe the line and make sure I don't mess up from here on out.* That's not salvation. That's not justification. *Every* sin you've ever committed, or are presently committing, or ever will commit in the future is forgiven and forgotten because where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (Romans 5:20). The price has been paid.

Acts 13:40, 41

Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.

There are people even now, saying, "I don't believe I am justified. I've got to prove my morality, prove my righteousness, prove my spirituality." Habakkuk 1, quoted here in verse 41, says the work of salvation is so wonderful that there will be those who will not believe it. They'll just say, "It's too good to be true." The fact is, it's so good it has to be true! Only an omnipotent God *could* provide total justification and complete forgiveness of sin. Only a loving God *would.*

Acts 13:42

And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.

"Hey, Paul! Come and tell us more about this justification," said the Gentiles. "Maybe the Jews don't get it, but this is terrific news to *us!*"

Acts 13:43

Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

To his followers, Paul said, "Continue in grace. Continue in grace. Continue in grace." Did they? No. This same group had to be addressed later in the Book of Galatians because they believed the rap of those who came to them, saying, "It's nice that you're believers in Jesus and that you think you're forgiven. But if you really want to be spiritual, you must be circumcised because spirituality and misery go hand in hand." The same thing happens today in Christian experience:

- "Why is she wearing that?"
- "Why is he raising his hands like that?"

• "Why is that guitar so loud?"

I have heard all of these critiques from people who want to dispense their miserable attitude to people who are excited about justification and salvation. But we must continue in the grace of God. And we must not, by God's grace and with His help, become sin-sniffing circumcisers or legalistic analyzers, judging the flesh of others by whatever miserable standards we ourselves are unable to keep.

Set up standards of legalism, and you'll keep your little rules and regulations for a month or two or three. You'll walk around with your nose in the air and your heart bitter and hardened, saying, "Who can I rebuke? Who can I correct?" Then, because no one can keep the law, you'll eventually break your own rules and say, "Woe is me. I'm such a miserable failure. I'm such a loser. I'm not going to church anymore. I don't belong there. I don't belong anywhere. Nobody likes me." That's what legalism does. Up and down, up and down, up and down we go until the day comes when at last we understand what justification is all about—that our Lord, our Love, Jesus Christ fully paid the price when He said, "It is *finished*" (John 19:30).

Acts 13:44–47

And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

"Okay, if you Jews are not receiving this, we'll do what Isaiah 49 prophesied," said Paul and Barnabas. "We'll be a light to the Gentiles."

Acts 13:48

And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

Who believed? Those who were ordained to believe.

"You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you," Jesus said (see John 15:16). A man doesn't decide to be saved. A man must be ordained, chosen, predestined, elected to be saved.

"That's not fair," you say. "What if I'm not ordained to be saved?"

Well, get saved and you'll find that you too were ordained and elected to receive Jesus Christ!

Acts 13:49–52

And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.

In ministry and in life, we will either "shake it off" or get shaken up. Those who shake the dust off their feet when an attack comes or when rejection hits will go on. Those who get shaken up will quit. I pray you and I will be those who, like Paul and Barnabas, shake off the dust and keep going in order that those around us might be "filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost."

14

Traveling through present-day Turkey, Paul and Barnabas pressed on to the city of Iconium after being expelled from Antioch.

Acts 14:1 (a)

And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews . . .

As was their usual practice, Paul and Barnabas went first to the synagogue.

Acts 14:1 (b), 2

. . . and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

Although many believed, those who didn't believe sought to sabotage the ministry of Paul and Barnabas by speaking evil against them, gossiping about them, and starting rumors concerning them.

During a freak electrical storm, a couple was gossiping on the telephone. The storm caused a scramble in the electrical signals and sent their conversation from the phone line to a cable TV line through which close to one million people heard their conversation.

Would we say the things we do if we thought our conversation would be transmitted through the TV set? Is our conversation honoring to the Lord? Or does it grieve Him as it short-circuits ministry and hinders His work?

Acts 14:3

Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

The Lord confirmed the Word of His grace with signs and wonders—even as He promised He would in Mark 16:17, 18.

Acts 14:4 (a)

But the multitude of the city was divided . . .

Due to the whispering campaign led by unbelieving Jews, Iconium was divided.

Acts 14:4 (b)

. . . and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

Bible students, take note that Barnabas is referred to here as an apostle. God appointed one Apostle: Jesus Christ. Jesus appointed twelve apostles: His disciples. The Holy Spirit continues to appoint numerous apostles: church-planters, founders, and spiritual statesmen like Barnabas.

Acts 14:5, 6 (a)

And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, they were ware of it, and fled . . .

The gossip campaign became so intense that Paul and Barnabas had to flee for their lives. The good work begun in Iconium was short-circuited by jealousy, unbelief, and innuendo. That is why I pray our churches would make covenants saying, "Accusations, insinuations, and allegations will find no place here. They will not have an audience. Period."

Acts 14:6 (b), 7

. . . unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: And there they preached the gospel.

Notice that Paul and Barnabas didn't go to the synagogue when they arrived at Lystra and Derbe. Because every town with at least ten Jewish males had a synagogue, we can assume that there were not even ten Jews in Lystra or Derbe. Legend had it that many years earlier, Jupiter and Mercury came to Lystra and walked among the people. Because no one but a man named Philemon and his wife, Baicus, realized they were gods, Jupiter and Mercury killed everyone in the city—except for Philemon and Baicus, whom they turned into trees to stand in front of the temple of Jupiter.

Acts 14:8–10

And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.

As Paul preached, he saw a lame man in the crowd who seemed to have a measure of faith. “Stand upright,” Paul said. And the man not only stood, but leaped and walked.

Acts 14:11–13

And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.

Thinking Mercury and Jupiter had returned in the form of Paul and Barnabas, the people of Lystra rushed to worship them. I personally believe this was the most dangerous point in Paul’s entire ministry—more dangerous than any snakebite, shipwreck, or stoning he would ever face. You see, when the entire town offered them garlands and called them gods, I wonder if the thought didn’t cross Paul’s mind that he could use their adulation as a platform for ministry; that he could accept their adoration as a way to be relatable.

When Captain James Cook, discoverer of the Hawaiian Islands, first dropped anchor in Hanauma Bay, he was greeted with great ceremony. Realizing the islanders thought he was their god, Lono, Cook thought, *Oh, well. Why not?* Consequently, he and his men were treated to everything the island had to offer—until one evening, when, Cook, about to take advantage of yet another woman, was clubbed in the back of the head by her husband, who, in his anger, forgot that Captain Cook was Lono. Bleeding and groaning, the Captain went down. By the time he regained consciousness, he found himself looking into the eyes of his aggressor, who said, “Gods don’t bleed. Nor do they groan.” And Cook was killed on the spot.

Acts 14:14, 15 (a)

Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, And saying,

Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you . . .

Paul and Barnabas were as wise as they were humble. They didn't flirt with, joke about, or take lightly the worship of the people of Lystra. Instead, they rent their clothes in an outward demonstration of deep inner grief. No wonder God could use them so powerfully.

Acts 14:15 (b)

. . . and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God . . .

"Vanities" means "idols." Paul said, "Turn from Jupiter, Mercury, and all the other vain idols you worship—and turn instead to the living God."

Several years ago in India, ten people drowned when a mammoth stone statue of Buddha slid off a barge in the city of Hyderabad. Fifty people were aboard the barge at the time of the accident, but only forty were able to swim to safety. As tragic as this is, we must not be too quick to judge any other country for their idols when, in our own culture, we idolize men who can hit a leather ball with a wooden bat. Psalm 115:8 says we become like whatever we idolize—which is why worship is so important. When we worship the Lord, we become like Him.

Acts 14:15 (c)

. . . which made heaven . . .

"The heavens declare the glory of God," wrote the psalmist (Psalm 19:1). And indeed they do! The vastness of space is truly incredible. If the distance between here and the sun (ninety-three million miles) was represented by the thickness of a single sheet of notebook paper, it would take a stack of paper seventy-one feet high to represent the distance between us and the nearest star; thirty-one miles high to represent the distance between us and the edge of the Milky Way, and three hundred ten thousand miles high to represent the distance between

us and the edge of the known universe. It's *big* out there, folks!

Acts 14:15 (d)
. . . and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein.

Scientists have recently discovered worms ten feet long living a mile below the surface of the earth. The blue whale, a gigantic creature with a tongue equivalent to the weight of thirty-six full-grown men, survives on microscopic plankton. The Creator of whom Paul spoke filled His creation with incredible wonders.

Acts 14:16
Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.

God could have forced His ways upon this world. Instead, He chose to allow people and nations to "walk in their own ways." What happens when nations choose their own way rather than God's? When people ignore the Word, the results are tragic. If I were God, I would have judged this world, this country, this society long ago. I would have devastated this planet. But what does God do? Read on.

Acts 14:17
Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

Although society rejects Him and nations turn from Him, God still does good. He allows rain to fall upon the just and the unjust. He allows food to be produced. He allows our hearts to be filled with gladness. He allows people to have life, to experience the joy of a sunrise, to surf, to hold a baby—all because of His goodness.

Acts 14:18
And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

After Paul finished this simple yet powerful sermon, the people decided not to offer sacrifices to him. It was a close call. But watch what happens next.

Acts 14:19 (a)
And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium . . .

Those who had expelled Paul from Antioch and those who had sought to stone him in Iconium joined forces and followed him to Lystra.

Acts 14:19 (b)
. . . who persuaded the people . . .

One minute the people of Lystra cried, "They're gods!" The next, "Kill them!" We do the very same thing whenever we idolize an author, a speaker, or a teacher one day but criticize him the moment we see something in him of which we disapprove. The way to break free from the "Lystra syndrome" is not through adoration, nor annihilation—but through appreciation. The Lord instructed His people not to lay an axe to a fruit-bearing tree (Deuteronomy 20:19), for their own hunger would be the result. That's what happened to the people of Lystra—and it happens to us whenever we pick on groups, ministries, churches, or authors instead of picking from them. It's the treasure, folks, not the earthen vessel that is important (2 Corinthians 4:7). I can be enriched, fed, and blessed by the Word others share, even though I may see some earthiness in their vessels. On the other hand, God also instructed His people to chop down any trees that did not bear fruit (Deuteronomy 20:20). There is no place for ministries or cults that undermine our faith, deny the Word, or cast aspersions on the finished work of Christ.

Acts 14:19 (c)
. . . and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city . . .

The men of Lystra backed down. They heard the Word—but then turned away. Why? Why were the men of Lystra so fickle and so easily manipulated by those who wanted to see Paul dead? I believe Jeremiah 26 gives the answer . . .

> Thus saith the LORD; Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD's house,

> all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word: If so be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings.
>
> Jeremiah 26:2, 3

In obedience to the Lord's command, Jeremiah stood in the temple courtyard and preached powerfully, telling the people to repent of their evil ways so that the Lord could bless instead of chastise them.

> Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die.
>
> Jeremiah 26:8

"We don't like what you're saying, Jeremiah. We're going to kill you," the people said.

> Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard. As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.
>
> Jeremiah 26:12; 14, 15

"Do with me as you want," said Jeremiah. "But if you kill me, you will only compound your problems and bring innocent blood upon your own head."

> Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and to the prophets; This man is not worthy to die: for he hath spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God.
>
> Jeremiah 26:16

Jeremiah took a stand. He refused to back down, and his life was spared.

> And there was also a man that prophesied in the name of the LORD, Urijah the son of Shemaiah of Kirjath-jearim, who prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah . . .
>
> Jeremiah 26:20

"Jeremiah, what you're saying makes sense," said Urijah. "So I'm going to prophesy just like you. The very words you say, I'll say."

> And when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men, and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death: but when Urijah heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt . . .
>
> Jeremiah 26:21

When Urijah heard his life was at stake, he backed down, ran away, and fled to Egypt.

> And Jehoiakim the king sent men into Egypt, namely, Elnathan the son of Achbor, and certain men with him into Egypt. And they fetched forth Urijah out of Egypt, and brought him unto Jehoiakim the king; who slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people.
>
> Jeremiah 26:22, 23

Let me tell you one simple way to get wiped out: Run. Back away from the things you know are true and say, "I need a fix from the world. I think I'll go to Egypt." Whenever you take a vacation from the Lord or from the Word, like Urijah—you'll get chopped up.

Why did Urijah back down? Because, while Jeremiah was hearing and receiving directly from the Lord, Urijah was merely mimicking Jeremiah. He agreed with Jeremiah's message mentally, but it wasn't in his heart personally.

Mom and Dad, pray for your kids fervently that they'll have more than a head knowledge of the Lord based upon what they hear from you. Pray that, like Jeremiah, they'll own the truth in their hearts based upon their own fellowship with Him. How does truth move from one's head to one's heart? Through prayer.

Following the church service on Sunday, your devotions tomorrow, or the radio message you will hear next week—if your response is merely, "That's interesting," the Word of the Lord will never penetrate your heart. And when tough times come, you will join Urijah in Egypt. On the other hand, if you leave church, your morning devotions, or the radio message, saying, "Lord, what do You have in this for me today?"—you will be able to stand strong like Jeremiah. You see, it's not enough to mimic what we hear. Urijah did that and died. We, like Jeremiah, must internalize what we hear because it's not enough to hear the Lord's voice through an interpreter—be it an author, a pastor, or a speaker. We must hear His voice *ourselves.*

> Nevertheless the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death.
>
> Jeremiah 26:24

Jeremiah stood his ground and thereby saved his life. Had the men of Lystra done the same, their city would have been blessed.

Acts 14:19 (d)
. . . supposing he had been dead.

I personally believe that Paul was indeed dead. He will later refer to this event in 2 Corinthians 12 and write, "I know a man in Christ who, fourteen years ago, (whether alive or dead, I really don't know), was caught up in the third heaven, where he saw things unlawful to speak about."

When people write books saying, "I died on the operating table, went to heaven, and here's what I saw. . . ." I get very suspicious because when Paul went to heaven, he was forbidden to talk about what he witnessed.

Paul went on in 2 Corinthians 12 to say that at that time he was given a thorn in the flesh to keep him from becoming too proud about what he had seen in the heavenlies (2 Corinthians 12:7). The word "thorn" doesn't mean a thorn like you would find on a rosebush. It means "tent stake." Thus, Paul's thorn in the flesh wasn't some inconvenience he had to put up with now and then. It was painful and very possibly, according to many Bible scholars, the result of

permanent injuries he received from this stoning. Yes, he went to heaven. Yes, his spirit was changed. But his body was permanently weakened as a result.

Acts 14:20 (a)
Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up . . .

These disciples were risking their own lives by standing around Paul's body. What were they doing? Were they praying? Was Luke trying to revive him? Were they crying? Were they having a memorial service? The Bible doesn't say. It just says they were there.

My mom, who lives in Southern California after being a widow for about a month, told me her days were very, very challenging. During that time, following an earthquake, she told me she felt helpless as the house and pool were rocking and rolling. When it was over, she went outside and started walking around her neighborhood, looking for someone to talk to. Since no one was outside, she went back to her house, only to feel a second quake. Just then, she said, the phone rang and on the other end was a sister from Applegate Christian Fellowship saying, "Mary, I know you know God's promises, so you don't need a sermon. I just want to talk with you. No sermon, no promises—just talk." My mom was deeply touched and greatly encouraged.

We all have experienced times when we have felt wiped out, finished, dead. And then some precious people gathered around us and we felt our hearts resurrected, our spirits revived. There are those whom the Lord will lead you to stand by, hang out with, and be there for—be it in person, over the phone, or through a letter. Be sensitive to His leading—and watch for revival.

Acts 14:20 (b)
. . . and came into the city . . .

After he was stoned, what did Paul do? He went right back into the city. How do you stop a guy like that?

Acts 14:20 (c), 21

. . . and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch.

Wrapping up their year-long tour that began in Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas doubled back on their return trip. In 2 Timothy 3:11, Paul made mention of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch when he wrote of the persecutions and afflictions he suffered there. In Antioch, he was expelled. In Iconium, he narrowly escaped. In Lystra, he was stoned.

The Lord delivered Paul out of all of these dangerous traps. But in each case it was in an entirely different way. In Antioch, he was kicked out. In Iconium, he caught wind of a plot. In Lystra, he was left for dead. I point this out because our tendency is to say, "If I'm going to get out of my dilemma, it must be in this way, or according to these ten steps." But God will not be boxed in by any program, agenda, or formula. He has promised to deliver us (2 Corinthians 1:10), but He has not predicted how He'll do it.

Acts 14:22

Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

How do we enter into the kingdom? Through much tribulation. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego knew this. They were in a fiery trial, indeed, yet they didn't come out until they were ordered out (Daniel 3:26) because they preferred walking in the fire with the Lord to sitting in the shade without Him.

What happened to the fourth Man in the furnace (Daniel 3:25)? He remained in the fire. Where is Jesus—the fourth Man—today? In the fire. We have a tendency to try to avoid the fire whenever possible—and it's a great mistake. I'm not saying we should be masochists. I am saying it's in the fire, when times are tough, when your heart is breaking that Jesus is most visible, most real, and most precious.

Acts 14:23

And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom

they believed.

These elders were probably only a few months old in the faith. Yet, with prayer and fasting, Paul and Barnabas commended them to the Lord.

Acts 14:24–28

And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples.

Did Paul and Barnabas live happily ever after? Not by a long shot. Stay tuned. In chapter 15, we'll find out what happens next.



15 The story is told that, on a snowy January day at the turn of the century, a crowded passenger train steamed its way from Chicago to St. Louis. At one of many stops along the way, one of the travelers observed a young mother board the train with two small children in tow. "Please, sir, I need to get off at the city of Beaumont," he heard her say to the conductor.

The passenger, taking note of the overworked conductor, approached the young woman and said, "The conductor is busy. No doubt he'll forget you want to get off at Beaumont. I've been on this train a hundred times. I'll make sure you get off at the right place." Several hours later, as the train decelerated, the man made his way to the young mother and said, "This is the spot. Here's where you want to get off." Thanking him, she gathered her children and went out into the blizzard.

Half an hour passed before the conductor called out, "Where is the woman who wants to get off at Beaumont? It's coming up in five minutes."

Horrified at what he heard, the man said, "What do you mean? Beaumont was the last stop we made."

"No, sir," replied the conductor. "The last stop we made was to pick up water at a tank in the middle of nowhere." And both men instantly realized that the woman and children had been sent off the train to their deaths.

"Let not many of you desire to be teachers," James wrote, "because if you seek to give instruction and direction, there is an inherent possibility that you will lead someone astray" (see James 3:1). And that is precisely what happened in Acts 15. Those who desired to be teachers in the radical missionary church at Antioch came from Jerusalem to give teaching to the new Gentile converts. But, as we will see, their teaching led to a blizzard of confusion and a storm of controversy.

Acts 15:1 (a)

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren . . .

These teachers carried weight because they were from Jerusalem—Headquarters, the Mother Church. Galatians 2 tells us they were associated with James himself. Even Peter was on the scene at this time, at least for a short season, for in Galatians we read that when Paul showed up, not only did he dispute the legalizing teachers, but he withstood Peter himself (Galatians 2:11).

Acts 15:1 (b)

. . . and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

Perhaps these men were sincere. Nonetheless, they were sincerely wrong in insisting that the new Gentile believers be circumcised before they could be saved. In other words, they were wrong to insist that to become a Christian, one had to first become a Jew.

Acts 15:2

When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

I wonder if Paul didn't say, "You want us to go to *Jerusalem?* The headquarters of Judaism? Can we get a fair trial there? Will I have the opportunity to speak? Will the Lord be able to work in the city where Judaism is so deeply entrenched?"

Acts 15:3

And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

When the legalizers came into town there was heaviness, but when Paul and Barnabas passed through, there was great joy. I like that! Some people bring joy wherever they go. Others bring joy *when*ever they go. We can bring joy wherever we go because the gospel is such good news. We have the privilege of telling people, "Your sins are forgiven. You don't have to be better or try harder. The price has been paid. The work is complete!"

Acts 15:4, 5

And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

Unlike the Sadducees, Pharisees embraced the miraculous—especially the possibility of resurrection. So, when Jesus rose from the dead, many Pharisees became believers. Here, they are arguing that Christianity should become a denomination within Judaism. Within the broad context of the Jewish religion, there are all sorts of flavors: Orthodox, Ultra-Orthodox, Reformed, Ultra-Reformed. Thus, if these Pharisees had their way, we would be just another flavor—following Rabbi Jesus.

Acts 15:6, 7 (a)

And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up . . .

As Peter took the stand, I wonder if Paul's heart sank. After all, there had been obvious and unmistakable tension between them. You see, these early believers were anything but "cookie cutter" Christians. Read the writings of Paul and contrast them with James and Jude. Read 1 and 2 Peter, contrast them with Galatians, and you'll sense wonderful individualism and a very healthy tension.

Acts 15:7 (b), 8

. . . and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us.

Peter is alluding to the events of Acts 10, wherein he shared the gospel with the household of Cornelius.

Acts 15:9

And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

They were purified *because* of their belief, not *before* their belief. Although we're to be fishers of men (Matthew 4:19), the problem with so many Christians today is that they are trying to clean the fish before they catch them. In reality, it is not until *after* men are hooked on Christ and brought into the boat of salvation that their hearts will change. Therefore, the great need of our world, our communities, and our families is not reformation but regeneration.

Acts 15:10

Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

"Neither we nor our fathers could ever do enough to justify ourselves, to cleanse our sin, to earn God's favor," argued Peter.

> When asked the reason for his wealth, a multimillionaire is reported to have said, "As a young man, when I was first married I was dirt poor. Those were tough times, but being energetic, I took my last nickel and bought an apple. I spent the night polishing it until it became so shiny that it was indeed a thing of beauty. The next day, I sold it on the street corner for a dime. I took the dime and bought two apples, which I again laboriously polished. The next day, I sold those two apples for twenty cents. I took the twenty cents and bought four apples, which I polished and sold for forty cents. I took the forty cents, bought eight apples, and went on this way until I reached $1.60. Then, my wife's dad died—and left us a million dollars."

That's just like us! We try to say, "I am rich in the things of God because of my fasting and prayer, my devotion, sacrifice, and apple polishing"—when in reality we are rich only because Jesus died and opened the floodgates of God's grace upon us.



***For topical study of Acts 15:10 entitled "Is the Yoke on You?" turn to page* 736.**

Acts 15:11

But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

I love this! Peter didn't say, "*They* shall be saved even as *we,*" but "*we* shall be saved, even as *they.*" In other words, "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we Jews, who are so entangled in legalism, can be free to enjoy salvation by grace—even as Gentiles do."

This sounds dangerous to me, you might be thinking. *After all, if we don't keep a yoke on young Christians, they'll run wild.* Not so. The law leads to rebellion. Love leads to relationship.

Growing up, every Saturday I had the job of washing our family car, a 1966 green Buick Skylark. The "law" demanded it—so I did it. I squirted it down, threw a towel across it, and called, "It's done, Pops," even though there were spots on the windows and soap suds on the roof. But when I was sixteen, I got my license and fell in love (I thought) with a girl named Stephanie. From that point on, before every date, I could be found in the driveway washing, drying, waxing, and polishing my 1960 turquoise Falcon. And when I finished there wasn't a spot to be seen, not a soap sud in sight. What was the difference? Love.

Dear brothers and sisters, love is the ultimate source of spirituality. Don't put yokes on people. Instead, let them see how much Jesus really loves them, and watch their relationship with Him soar (Romans 2:4).

Acts 15:12, 13 (a)

Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered . . .

Called "James the Just" because he was so righteous and "James the Camel-Kneed" because he spent so much time in prayer, this was the half brother of Jesus and the leader of the church at Jerusalem.

Acts 15:13 (b), 14

. . . saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

James wisely used Peter's Hebrew name because the debate centered on Jewish issues.

Acts 15:15, 16

And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which

is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up.

Many Bible scholars believe Amos 9, quoted here in Acts 15, alludes to the fact that before the temple is rebuilt, a tabernacle will be pitched in Jerusalem as a temporary temple. Be that as it may, Romans 11:25–26 declares that when the time of the Gentiles is over, the Lord is going to turn again to the nation of Israel and all of Israel shall be saved. But notice it is *after* the time of the Gentiles.

At the end of the Gentile Age, the Rapture of the church will take place. Because Jesus said Jerusalem would be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled (Luke 21:24), and because under Israeli rule, the city of Jerusalem has not been trodden down by the Gentiles for the last twenty-five years, does that mean the Rapture is twenty-five years late? No, it means we're in overtime. The Age of the Gentiles is complete. The Rapture is imminent. But the Lord has chosen to extend His grace before ushering in the Tribulation.

Acts 15:17

That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

"The residue of men" refers to those who will survive the Tribulation.

Acts 15:18

Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

A group of theologians recently introduced the theory that God doesn't really know exactly who's going to be saved or what's going to happen —that He's kind of playing everything by ear as He goes along. Not true! When you get to heaven, God's not going to say, "Oh, I'm glad you made it! I wasn't sure you would." No, James says God has known everything from the beginning of the world.

Acts 15:19, 20

Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

"In light of the Gentile Age," concluded James, "there are four things from which we should tell new believers to abstain"—one of which dealt with morality, the remaining three with sensitivity. The moral issue was fornication. I read in the paper recently that, according to one survey, couples who live together before marriage are fifty percent more likely to divorce during the first eight years of marriage than those who don't. The Word is right again.

The remaining three issues dealt with sensitivity because Jews were very sensitive about the issues of blood, strangulation, and meat offered to idols. You see, the best meat in those days was offered as a sacrifice in pagan temples before it was sold in the market at cheap prices. That is why in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul said, "It doesn't matter whether meat is offered to idols or not. For yourself, don't ask where it came from—just enjoy it. But if your eating it will cause a weaker brother to stumble—stay away from it."

The same is true today. Every one of us is either a stepping-stone or a stumbling stone, as we either allow people to get closer to God or cause them to stumble unnecessarily. In our freedom, we also need sensitivity.

Acts 15:21

For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

Moses was unable to lead the people of God into the Promised Land because the law never leads to the land of milk and honey. It was Joshua who led the people into the Promised Land. What is the Greek name for the Hebrew name Joshua? Jesus. Jesus leads us into the Land of Promise because the law never can.

Acts 15:22

Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren.

One of the men who was sent to Antioch was named Barsabas, which means literally "son of the Sabbath." I like that! Son of the Sabbath was sent to tell the Gentile believers they were free to rest in the finished work of Christ.

Acts 15:23–25 (a)

And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord. . . .

The question I am asked more than any other is: "How can I know God's will for my life?" Following are six ways I believe we can know the will of God as we see the hand of God guiding His people.

God guides through church unanimity.

The letter written to the church at Antioch stated that the believers in Jerusalem were in one accord. That's so important. Whether you're wrestling with an issue of lifestyle or doctrine, find out what the church says about it. Throughout church history, what has been the stance of the church regarding the subject with which you're struggling? Beware of those who say, "You don't need the church. It's outdated and old-fashioned." Proverbs 22:28 says, "Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set." It is through the wisdom of church unanimity presently and historically that God has guided His people very significantly.

Acts 15:25 (b)–27

. . . to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord

Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.

God Guides Through Gifted Men and Women in the Body

God gave to the church prophets, pastors, evangelists, and teachers for the perfecting of the saints and the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11, 12). How can you know God's will? Be around whenever prophets, pastors, evangelists, or teachers expound the Word. It's the wise woman, the mature man who approaches every Bible study, every time of fellowship expecting the Lord to speak through His body.

> **Acts 15:28, 29**
>
> **For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.**

God Guides Through the Gifts of the Spirit

Earlier in this chapter, there was much debate and discussion. Suddenly, James the Camel-kneed stood up, and as he spoke, an interesting thing happened. Everyone in the room melted into unity and agreement. The same is true for us. There are times when, during an endless dialogue or discussion, someone suddenly says something that settles not only in your brain or your mind, but deep within your heart—and you know it's the Lord, speaking through a word of wisdom. I hope when you're struggling with finding God's will for your life, you avail yourself of settings where words of wisdom, knowledge, and prophecy are being exercised. Frequently, that's how the Lord speaks most clearly.

Acts 15:30, 31

So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

"Wonderful!" these Gentile men would have cheered in unison. "We don't have to be circumcised. We don't have to carry the heavy burden of legalism!"

It amazes me how many people feel they haven't been to church unless they walk out emotionally bloodied and battered. "I'm such a wretch," they say. "Beat me, Pastor. Beat me. That was great. I can't wait until next Sunday." I believe this is due to a failure to understand the finished work of the Cross. We are truly forgiven—not just theologically, but in reality.

Acts 15:32–34

And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.

God Guides Through Desires We May Have Personally

As the delegation headed back to Jerusalem, Silas said, "I like it here in Antioch. I think I'll stick around." We'll see how the Lord will use Silas' personal desire as the book unfolds. The reason I teach the Word is because I love to teach. I'm doing exactly what I want to do. Those who imply that ministry is supposed to be a drudgery are lying. That's bad theology and a blasphemy to the nature and character of our Father.

> In the highlands of Papua New Guinea, there is an area where it rains 362 days a year and the frogs spit poison. As of yet, Wycliffe Bible Translators has not found anyone to go into that region to translate the Word for the few folks who live there. But somewhere the Lord is preparing someone who will have a fascination with spitting frogs and rainy weather. That's the way the Lord works. How do I know? Because Psalm 37:4 declares, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart."

> **Acts 15:35, 36**
>
> **Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.**

God Guides Through Concerns We Feel Internally

Paul said, "I'm curious about how the believers we saw five years ago are doing." The same thing happens today. Suddenly, a situation, a need, or an opportunity will tug on your heart. The person next to you might not feel a thing —not because he's insensitive or unspiritual, but because meeting that particular need is not his calling. The way of the Lord is to guide us individually through concerns we feel internally.

Acts 15:37–39 (a)

And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other . . .

God Guides Through Interpersonal Difficulty

"Let's take John Mark with us," said Barnabas. "I know he backed out last time, but I see potential in him."

"We can't afford to bring someone we can't count on," insisted Paul. "Let's leave him here."

Paul said, "What can he do for God's work?"

Barnabas said, "What can God's work do for him?"

Who was right?

They both were.

When Paul was in prison awaiting his death, who did he send for to comfort him? John Mark (2 Timothy 4:11). The consoling ministry of Barnabas paid off. Who crisscrossed the known world with the gospel? Paul. The compelling ministry of Paul paid off.

God often guides through interpersonal difficulty. Is it the best way? I don't think so. I think it's much better to hear a word of wisdom, to learn from a teaching, to receive counsel and understanding from a gifted brother or sister. But a lot of times I'm just too dull of hearing and hard of heart to receive a word of wisdom or to make personal application from a Bible study. I have to bump heads with someone for God to get me going in the right direction. I wish I could say, "My spiritual sensitivity is at such a level that I never have conflict with anyone at any time. I hear the voice of the Lord whispering in my ear in every situation. Consequently, I never have to go through contention or difficulty"—but I'm not there, folks. I find great comfort, however, knowing that even Paul the apostle, at the high point of his ministry, was directed through interpersonal difficulty.

Acts 15:39 (b)–41

. . . and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

The Lord used interpersonal difficulty to send two teams out instead of one. As a result, twice as many believers were encouraged, and twice as much ministry ensued.

Six ways in which God guides His people are: through Church unanimity, through gifted men and women in the body, through the gifts of the Spirit charismatically, through the desires we have personally, through concerns we feel internally, and through interpersonal difficulty. Travel with us, and we'll see three more in chapter 16.

IS THE YOKE ON YOU?

A Topical Study of ACTS 15:10

Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

Acts 15:10

Peter's question is pointed directly at me: "Jon, why do you attempt to correct God by laying burdens upon people?" In thinking through my answer, I believe there are five explanations for the propensity within each of us to put expectations, stipulations, obligations, and regulations upon our kids and our wives, our husbands and our friends as we burden them with yokes they are unable to bear.

We put yokes on people because we sincerely care about them.

"Because I really care about you," we say, "I must tell you this Christianity thing is not as simple as you might think. You see, there are a few rules and regulations you need to know in order to be successful. Otherwise, you'll go hog-wild and do things you shouldn't." And then we proceed to furnish people with our personal list of do's and don'ts.

Such has always been the tendency of people involved in religion. For example, God said, "Honor the Sabbath day." Judaism said, "It's not that simple." That's why the Talmud contains seven volumes concerning the do's and don'ts of keeping the Sabbath. But the problem with rules and regulations is, there's always a way to get around them. For example, although the Talmud forbade travel of more than one thousand paces on the Sabbath, if a Pharisee had to travel farther than that, he would stretch a rope from his house one thousand paces and call it an extended hallway. From the end of his new "hallway," he would stretch another rope one thousand paces and continue doing so until he finally reached his destination.

There's a better way than the law—it's love.

As a father read to his three-year-old one night, his son interrupted him and said, "Daddy I love you."

"That's great," the father said and kept reading.

Two minutes later, the toddler interrupted again, "Daddy, I love you."

"That's great, son. I love you, too."

Finally, the little boy stood up on his dad's lap, hugged him around the neck, smothered his face in his chest and said, "Daddy, I love you so much I just gotta do something about it."

Human nature will always find a way around the law. Love, however causes us do more than the law ever could.

We put yokes on people because we secretly desire control over them.

When Rehoboam, Solomon's son, ascended the throne, he called the older men of the kingdom together and said, "Give me some advice."

"Your dad worked us hard and taxed us heavily," they said. "Free us from the yoke he put upon us, and we'll serve you to the end."

Then he called the younger men together and said, "What do you guys think I should do?"

"Put a *heavier* yoke upon the people," they answered (see 1 Kings 12:10–12).

Rehoboam followed the advice of the younger men. Under his rule, the people labored continuously, were taxed outrageously—and finally rebelled completely. The country split in two because yokes always lead to division and rebellion.

Watch out, parents. Compassion for people will produce what control over them never can. The heavy yokes you think will control your kids may do just the opposite and cause them to rebel, dividing your entire household in the process.

We put yokes on people because we selfishly need to be esteemed by them.

Because the Pharisees wanted to be thought of as more spiritual than they really were, they strutted through town with their phylacteries, praying long prayers on the street corners.

After being instructed by God to dig through a wall in the temple, Ezekiel discovered a door through which he saw "every form of creeping things, abominable beasts and all the idols of the house of Israel" being worshiped by the elders of Israel (Ezekiel 8:10, 11).

"This is what is happening in the chambers of imagination of the elders of Israel," said the Lord. "Outwardly, they walk around piously in their flowing robes and phylacteries—but inwardly they're carnal and full of iniquity."

God never intended us to walk in false piety or phony spirituality—which is why Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart and the poor in spirit" (see Matthew 5).

We put yokes on people because we simplistically think we know what's best for them.

Because each of us is so different, God wants to work with us individually and in our hearts personally. Philippians 2:12 tells us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works within us to will and to do of His good pleasure. The principle of the New Covenant, as seen in Jeremiah 31, says the Lord will write His plan for *each* of us on the tables of our hearts. Thus, there is no need for us to tell others what they can and can't do.

Many years ago, I observed my kids as they watched a thunderstorm. Seeing the lightning, Benjamin, who was four at the time, immediately said, "I want to play Noah!" while Mary Elizabeth, who was five, started waving. One saw a flood; the other saw flashbulbs.

As parents, we know how different our kids are. So, too, we must give that same space to our heavenly Father to deal with each of His children uniquely.

We put yokes on people because we sadistically want to share our misery with them.

The circumcisers said, "Because we endured pain, you have to endure pain as well." And there are those today who, because of their misery and lack of joy, make everyone around them equally miserable by placing yokes of rules

and regulations upon them. This ought not be. God's desire is that we walk in joyfulness and with gladness of heart (Deuteronomy 28:47), which is why Jesus was accused of being a glutton, winebibber, and a friend of sinners. "Surely *He* cannot be the Son of God," the Pharisees said. "He's too happy."

Jesus said, "Take *My* yoke upon you—not the yoke of religion, legalism, manipulation or expectation. My burden is easy. My load is light. Under My yoke, you will find rest for your souls." (see Matthew 11:28–30)

Paul said,

> *Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*
>
> Philippians 3:1–3

Who is the true circumcision? Who are the true God-lovers? Not those who point to themselves, puff up themselves, or depend upon themselves; but those who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ, and have no confidence in the flesh. Gang, I want you to be the most free people in all the earth—free to walk in the glorious liberty to which you've been called, and free to allow others to do the same.



16 Perhaps you recall the story. A man bought a painting at a Philadelphia flea market for eighteen dollars. The painting was rather plain, but the frame was of interest to him. After returning home, he set to work to remove the canvas, when a piece of paper tucked inside caught his eye. As he carefully extracted the document, he was amazed to find one of only four original copies of the Declaration of Independence, which he in turn sold for over four million dollars.

This incident interested me because often when I look at a passage of Scripture, I see it framed and painted, only to find that behind the scenes there can be a wealth of information waiting to be discovered. Such is the case in Acts 15 and 16, where, not only does Paul deal with the issue of legalism but also with the ways God makes His will known to us.

Acts 16:1, 2

Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.

Five years have passed. Upon his return to the people who had stoned him, Paul discovered that his ministry "took" in a young man of real promise named Timothy.

One Wednesday night, I was blessed by a lady who said, "You probably don't remember me, but when you were a sophomore in college, you spoke to our youth camp at Big Bear and I got saved." And now almost twenty years later, here she was, still walking with the Lord and growing in grace. The proof of faith is not initial excitement. It's long-term commitment. Jesus said, "I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit and that your fruit should remain" (see John 15:16).

Acts 16:3 (a)

Him would Paul have to go forth with him . . .

It seems as though Paul was always looking for young men to bring alongside him. Six times, in six different epistles, Paul referred to Timothy and called him "my son in the faith." If you're older in the faith, one of the greatest joys you'll ever have is that of investing yourself in a younger person.

Acts 16:3 (b), 4

. . . and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.

Paul had Timothy—with whom he would deliver decrees of liberty to new believers—circumcised. Why would Paul, the champion of liberty and grace, place Timothy under this ritualistic burden? Understand that Paul was not compromising his theology. No, he was conforming to the higher priority of

love. You see, although Timothy's father was Greek, his mother was a Jew—making Timothy a Jew as well. Therefore, Paul didn't want Timothy to be a stumbling block to the very people he sought to win. On the other hand, in Galatians 2, when the Judaizers wanted to circumcise Titus, Paul absolutely forbade it. Why? Because Titus was a Gentile.

Paul would later write,

> For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.
>
> 1 Corinthians 9:19–22

Are we willing to give up our rights so that we won't unnecessarily cause someone else to stumble? Are we, like Timothy, willing to give up our liberty for the sake of love and effective ministry?

Acts 16:5

And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

They were established not in programs, not in hype, but in faith. Later on, Paul would say to these very people, "O foolish Galatians . . . having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:1, 3). 1 think if Paul were writing to the church in America, he would say the same thing. "O foolish American Christians, having begun in the Spirit are you now made perfect by programs?"

Acts 16:6, 7

Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word

in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.

Here is the seventh time in Acts 15 and 16 we see the Lord directing His people. This time it is through physical infirmity. Paul, wanting to go into Asia (present-day Turkey), was forbidden by the Holy Ghost. But Paul was one who didn't take "no" easily. He was stoned in Lystra—but returned to the city the very next day (Acts 14:20). In Acts 21, the Spirit said, "Don't go to Jerusalem." But Paul went anyway.

Once Paul decided to do something, nothing would deter him. So how did the Spirit stop Paul from going into Turkey? Most Bible scholars believe Paul was struck at this time with a brutal infirmity, a sickness, an Asian fever so severe that his eyesight would be permanently damaged (Galatians 4:13–15). I also personally believe this is what happened because in verse 10, we see the pronouns "we" and "us" replacing "they" and "them" as Luke joined the journey very possibly to attend to the medical needs of Paul.

Sometimes, to those of us who are stubborn and thick-headed like Paul, the Lord gives guidance through infirmities. I am not saying every illness is a word from the Lord. However, sometimes the Lord does, indeed, work though infirmities.

As a freshman in high school, I wanted to be a distance runner like my big brother, Dave. The only problem was, where Dave was lean and lanky—I was husky and stocky. But with only five other guys trying out for six spots, I earned a place on the distance team and found myself participating every day after school in what were, to me, grueling workouts. Every day after practice, I hit the locker room sicker than a dog until the week before my first meet, when I landed in the hospital with double pneumonia. Tom McKee, my youth pastor, came in and prayed for me, and I was confident I would be healed in time for the first meet. But it didn't happen quite that way. Upon reexamination of my lungs, my doctor said, "Jon, you're not running this week, next week, or for a couple of years. Your lungs are too scarred."

When I was finally well enough to go back to school, I wandered rather forlornly out to the track and to the upper field where the

discus throwers tossed frisbeelike objects into the air. They wore sunglasses. They listened to the radio. They laughed and joked with each other between throws. Suddenly, it dawned on me that this *was the sport for me! In my sophomore year, I set the league record in discus, and by the time I threw for the last time, I had set some central California records, gone to college on a scholarship, and traveled across the country and into Africa—all by throwing a flat plate!*

I'm so thankful I got pneumonia! I would have been a very poor runner, hating every step. The Lord had another plan for me. But He made it clear to me only after I was knocked flat on my back.

Acts 16:8, 9 (a)
And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night.

At Troas, with his back against the Mediterranean Sea, forbidden to go into Turkey, Paul returned to the coast, where the environment was much healthier. Once there, he must have wondered, *Where do I go? What do I do now? Here I launched out enthusiastically to serve the Lord—but nothing's going right.* Ever feel that way? You're probably in just the right spot for a vision.

Acts 16:9 (b)
There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

Here is the eighth time in Acts 15 and 16 we see God guiding His people, as He directs through vision supernaturally. While I have had dreams that have ministered to my heart, I have never had a vision that directed me—which is okay because I am reminded in Jeremiah 23:28 that dreams are as chaff compared to the wheat of the Word. As a pastor, I sometimes get frustrated with people who want to know God's will but won't come to Bible study. If I had to choose between the Word and a vision, I'd take the Word every time.

Acts 16:10–13

And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

Upon entering the city of Philippi, Paul and his company must have looked for a synagogue, as was their custom. Finding none, they instead found women gathered on the bank of a river for their own Sabbath meeting. It is interesting to me that, although Paul heard the voice of a Macedonian male in verse 9, when he arrived he found only women in verse 13. So, too, sometimes I feel the Lord directing and guiding—but when I reach my destination I find it a whole lot different than I expected.

Acts 16:14, 15

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

"If you have found us to be faithful, come to our house," said Lydia. What could Paul say? No wonder Lydia was a successful saleswoman!

Acts 16:16

And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying.

Here, a demon-possessed girl was exploited by greedy men in the dark world of the fortunetelling trade.

Acts 16:17, 18

The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

Why did Paul want this girl to stop? Because, although her message was true, the medium was all wrong. I have been asked hypothetically, if I had the chance to give my testimony in *Playboy* magazine, would I do it? My answer is no, because I don't need nor want this ministry to be advertised by that which is contrary to the message of Jesus Christ. The Christian community is becoming increasingly weakened, I believe, because we have too often said, "We'll use this worldly source to communicate the gospel." Why, then, did Paul allow this girl to cry out for many days before commanding the spirit to come out of her? I believe he was waiting for the green light, the authority of the Holy Spirit before stepping out in the power of the Spirit.

Acts 16:19–25

And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

The final way we see God guiding His people throughout the past two chapters is through the giving of thanks continually. As He did with Paul and Silas, God directs our lives when we're in the posture of prayer and praise. "I'm in the midnight hour," you say. "It's so dark. I'm trapped, locked in, with

no way out. I don't know what to do." Quit griping and start singing. Then, like Paul and Silas, you will see things happen to you, around you, and through you.



For topical study of 16:19–25 entitled "Being Beaten," turn to page **743.**

Acts 16:26, 27

And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

Knowing heads would roll when news of the escape reached his superiors, the jailer said, "I'll just kill myself now and get it over with."

Acts 16:28–30

But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

"Not only have I been shaken up by the earthquake under me, but I am shaken up by the fact that you guys didn't split when you had the chance," said the jailer.

Why are you in prison? Why are things not happening? Why aren't things opening up as quickly as you hoped they would? Could it be because there are prisoners and jailers watching, who are about to see what happens in your life when things are shaken up? Could it be because there are people who need to see what's going to happen to you in the midnight hour? For the most part, prosperity only creates jealousy. But when those around you hear you singing in the day of adversity, like the jailer they will say, "What must *I* do to be saved?"

Acts 16:31

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

This does not mean, as has been suggested, "If you believe, your whole house will be saved." No, it means, "You believe and you'll be saved. And when your family believes, they'll be saved as well."

Acts 16:32, 33 (a)

And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes . . .

You know a person is truly saved when he wants to wash feet and cleanse wounds.

Acts 16:33 (b)–36

. . . and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace.

After the jailer had held Paul and Silas under "house arrest," word came to let them go.

Acts 16:37 (a)

But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans . . .

Thinking Paul and Silas were merely Jews, the magistrates felt completely justified in beating them without a trial. But to have done so to a Roman citizen was a great and grave offense.

Acts 16:37 (b), 38

. . . and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the sergeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.

Why didn't Paul say, "Wait a minute. I'm a Roman citizen," *before* the flagellum was unleashed, *before* his back was beaten, *before* he was cast into the dungeon, *before* he was locked in stocks? Why didn't Paul claim his Roman citizenship earlier? And why did he claim it when he did? I believe the answer lies in verse 40. . . .

Acts 16:39, 40

And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

Notice that Paul and Silas comforted the *brethren.* This poses an interesting question: Up until the time Paul and Silas landed in prison, all they had seen were women. Who, then, were these brethren? I suggest they were the prisoners who, in the dungeon with Paul, were converted when they heard his songs of praise. Paul's mind-set concerning himself was, "Go ahead. Beat me. Throw me in prison. I've been looking for some men to work with—now I can begin a jail ministry!" But his mind-set concerning others was, "I am a Roman citizen and I'll be watching you, so you had better watch your step with my brothers."

When you and I come to the point where we can say, "I don't care what happens to me—but when it comes to my brothers and sisters, I'll go to the wall for them and do whatever I can to cover and protect them," *that's* maturity. Most of us protect ourselves and figure whatever happens to others is God's will. Paul did just the opposite. No wonder the Lord could use him.

BEING BEATEN
A Topical Study of
ACTS 16:19–25

None of us likes to get beat up.

I think back a number of years ago to the day when my oldest son came home from kindergarten with tousled hair, torn shirt, and tearstained cheeks.

"What happened, Peter-John?" I asked.

With quivering chin he said, "The biggest kid in my class beat me up."

I gave Peter a hug and we talked for a while.

The next morning Peter-John was up bright and early getting ready for school. As he walked out the door, I couldn't help but notice the baseball bat he carried over his shoulder. "Where are you going with that bat, Peter?" I asked.

With eyes of steel, he said, "Daddy, today is "show and share" day. I'm taking my bat to show and share."

Knowing exactly to whom and on whom he wanted to show and share his bat, I insisted he choose something else.

In our text, we see Paul and Silas beaten, bruised, and bloodied—but instead of grabbing their bats and swinging, they glorified God by singing. I suggest three reasons Paul and Silas could sing in such a dark hour.

Paul and Silas' beating showed the desperation of the enemy.

When you find yourself beaten up, it means Satan considers you a threat to his dominion of death and darkness. I can recall one such incident that stands out vividly in my memory. It blew my mind when a man I had never met, but who was obviously demonized, looked me in the eye and said in a voice not completely his own, "Jon Courson, I know you, and I hate you." Although it freaked me out initially, I rejoiced later on because whenever Satan and his demons have our number, it means they're threatened.

Paul's and Silas' beating was a validation of their ministry.

In Colossians 1:23, 24, Paul would later write, "I Paul am made a minister; who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." In

other words, part of Paul's job as a minister was to fill up—or complete—the sufferings of Jesus.

"Wait a minute," you say. "Are you saying that the suffering of Christ on the Cross was not sufficient?"

No. His work on the Cross was completely sufficient—validated by His resurrection. The idea here in Colossians relates to the church.

You see, even as Jesus today has thornprints on His brow, nail holes in His hands and feet, lash marks on His back, a spear wound in His side—so, too, His church must bear the marks of suffering. If His body is to fully conform to and correctly reflect Him, some, like Paul and Silas, will have to suffer brutally.

Paul's and Silas' beating was an indication of their maturity.

You'll never know how far along you are in the maturation process until you get beaten up. Trials neither make nor break us. They reveal what is going on inside of us. Thus, when you're beaten up verbally, emotionally, or perhaps even physically—you have an opportunity to see how much the Lord has accomplished in your life. Christians are like tea bags, folks. We'll never know what our flavor is until we're in hot water.

After teaching at a retreat in Palm Springs, I decided to go for a walk. It was about nine-thirty at night and about ninety-five degrees outside. Walking briskly down Palm Canyon Drive, I was reading the Word and thinking about this text when, failing to see a puddle in the middle of the pavement, I lost my footing and fell flat on my back. My glasses flew off, my Bible landed in the middle of the street, and I lay there in the mud and blood, rejoicing and thinking what a great illustration it would be for this study. Feeling pretty good as I picked up my Bible and glasses, I continued on. After about three miles of walking and reading, my foot hit a crack in the cement, causing me to lunge forward and break my sandal in the process. Knowing I had to walk back barefoot for five miles on hot cement, I wasn't rejoicing. Thinking one trial per walk should be sufficient, when the second one came my way, I was far from singing. By the time I got back to the hotel, it was 11:30. My feet were cut. I was upset—and then the Lord whispered in my ear, "You see, Jon, it's not the expected trial that reveals where you're at. It's the one that sneaks up behind you that shows what's really going on inside."

We all know of potential trials that will come our way next week—but it's the ones we don't expect that will reveal what's going on internally. You who are beaten up today by persecution on the job, ridicule on the campus, or ostracism from your family—Isaiah 54 is for you.

> *No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the* LORD*, and their righteousness is of me, saith the* LORD*.*
>
> Isaiah 54:17

Know this, you who are beaten up: no weapon that comes against you will prosper. You can be sure of that. Ask Paul and Silas. Yes, they were beaten up—but they went out victoriously into deeper ministry and fuller glory.

Perhaps you're saying, "It's fine for you spiritual giants to talk about being beaten up for your spirituality. Good for you. But that's not where I'm at. I'm not being beaten up—I'm being beaten down by my family, my marriage, my job."

You, too, can have hope today because, although Paul and Silas were beaten up, the jailer was beaten down—just like you! Roman law decreed that prison guards were to serve the sentence of any prisoner who escaped while in their charge. No doubt in that Philippian dungeon there were those who had committed capital offenses and were about to be executed. Consequently, this jailer said, "My head's going to roll tomorrow, so hand me a sword and I'll take my life right now."

Just as he was about to do himself in, Paul said, "Don't do that! We're all still here." So it was that the jailer, beaten down by circumstances beyond his control, was saved in the very dungeon in which he sought to take his own life.

If you're beaten down, know this: God is going to do something wonderful even in the situation that is presently depressing or distressing. If you're beaten up, like Paul and Silas, God will work through you to bring others to Himself. If you're beaten down, like the Philippian jailer, God will work for you to bring you to Himself.

Whether you're beaten up or beaten down, you can rejoice. Why? Because Satan has been beaten back.

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

Isaiah 53:4–6

Satan has been beaten back because the back of Jesus was beaten. By whom? By the Father (Isaiah 53:6). The Father beat the Son. Why? One reason: to purchase a bride for Him.

The Father said, "I love My Son so much I'm going to smite Him, beat Him, and lay upon Him the judgment, wrath, and damnation that should have fallen on Jon—because forgiven, pure, and robed in righteousness, Jon will make a perfect bride for Him."

Now, if this be so—if God the Father paid that kind of price for me to be the bride of His Son, if He beat His Son in order that I might be healed—then He is equally committed to continue to do good things through me and good things for me.

You who are beaten down today by a relationship that isn't working out, money that isn't coming in, a job that isn't opening up—Isaiah 54 is for you.

Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD.

Isaiah 54:1

Sing! Shout for joy, you who are barren and dry, you who are beaten down by the circumstances of life, because you will be more fruitful, more prosperous, more blessed than the one who seems to be doing so well in the world right now.

Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left;

and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.

Isaiah 54:2, 3

What are you to do, you who are beaten down? Because His back was beaten, know this: He's going to do good things for you. Don't kill yourself. Don't curse. Don't mourn. Don't moan. Don't gripe. Don't despair. Rather sing out today and say, "Lord, if You loved me enough to smite Your Son for me, I trust You. And even though I feel barren, dry, and desolate, I'm going to enlarge my tent and prepare for Your blessing."

Beaten up or beaten down—either way rejoice because Satan has been beaten back through the beaten back of the Son.



17 Acts 17:1 (a)

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia . . .

On his second missionary journey, Paul left Philippi and headed toward Thessalonica, approximately two hundred miles away. On his way there, he traveled through two cities. Evidently, Paul passed through these two cities quickly, for they were small, and his strategy was to impact the major population centers so that in due time they could send out their own missionaries into the more remote areas.

> Historically, such was the pattern of Christian missionary service. But when news of David Livingstone's work in the jungles of Africa reached the church, mission strategy began to take a new course as missionaries left the urban centers and headed into the bush. While I praise the Lord that missionaries are going to primitive areas, I pray that the Christian community will not neglect the metropolitan areas of the world, for if major population centers can be reached with the gospel, I believe we will see a renewing of Paul's missionary strategy as national believers in turn effectively minister to the more isolated areas in their own countries.

Acts 17:1 (b), 2 (a)

. . . they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them . . .

Whenever Paul went into an urban area, the first thing he did was head for the synagogue. To those with an understanding of the Old Testament and somewhat instructed in the ways of God, he would explain the plan of salvation. If Paul were to go into a city of Europe today, he would probably make his way toward the Catholic church in order to minister to those who, because of their affiliation with the church, have already shown an interest or an inclination toward God. If he were in Egypt, on the other hand, he would head probably for the Coptic Church and talk with those whose association with that church expresses an interest in the Lord, even though they may not yet have a personal relationship with Him.

Acts 17:2 (b)

. . . and three sabbath days reasoned with them . . .

When Paul walked into a synagogue, it was obvious by the way he carried himself and by his style of speech that he was a learned scholar, a rabbi. As was the custom in those days, the ruler of the synagogue would turn part of the meeting over to a visiting rabbi of Paul's stature.

Acts 17:2 (c)

. . . out of the scriptures,

Parents, how we need to reason with our kids out of the Scriptures—not merely telling our kids what to do, but telling them why. Truly the Word is reasonable. It's logical. It makes sense.

Acts 17:3

Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

This presented a thorny problem to the Jewish theologian who knew passages like Isaiah 53, which spoke of a suffering Messiah, but also Psalm 2, which spoke of a ruling Messiah. The only way to reconcile a Messiah who reigned with authority, with a Messiah who suffered brutally, was to have two Messiahs. Thus, the Jews called the reigning Messiah "Messiah Ben David," after Israel's mightiest king. They called the suffering Messiah "Messiah Ben Joseph," after the Old Testament hero who suffered unjustly at the hands of his brethren. In the synagogue, Paul opened the Scriptures and explained how both sets of prophecies were fulfilled in one Person, how Jesus—son of Joseph—was the suffering Messiah who was crucified on the Cross, but after three days, He—Son of David—rose from the dead to rule and reign forever.

As seen so beautifully in the ministry of Paul, the key to opening the Scriptures is always to look for, talk about, and focus on the Person of Jesus Christ. Whether sharing with children, talking to a neighbor, or teaching a Bible study—the key to opening men's hearts is to look not for principles of parenting or methods of marital communication, but for Jesus Christ. Our faith is not in a philosophy, not in principles, but in a Person. You will be a wonderful Bible student and an excellent Bible teacher if you learn this simple lesson: talk about *Jesus*. Look for *Jesus*. *He* is the key to opening Scripture.

Acts 17:4

And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

The Word, the Word, the Word—that's what impacted the Jews in the synagogue. It wasn't Paul's excellence of speech, but his exposition of the Scriptures that caused them to believe.

Acts 17:5 (a)

But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy . . .

The unbelieving Jews, envious of the ministry of Paul and Silas, decided to take action against them. When people bring accusations, almost invariably it is due to a deeper reason than that which appears on the surface. Therefore, if

you're working with people, it's wise not to listen to the charge itself, but to seek the Lord concerning the underlying problem.

Acts 17:5 (b)

. . . took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

Envious Jews gathered some rabble-rousers to start a riot and assault the house of Jason, wherein Paul and Silas were staying.

Acts 17:6, 7 (a)

And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received . . .

"Those who have turned the world upside down are come hither also." When man rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, he caused this world to be plunged into rebellion. The world, therefore, is not what it was supposed to be, nor what it was intended to be. It's upside down. Thus, by turning an upside-down world upside down, Paul and Silas actually turned it right-side up!

Acts 17:7 (b), 8

. . . and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.

The charge against Paul and Silas was treason. Church historians record six million Christians were killed in the first two and a half centuries for refusing to say, "Caesar is Lord."

Acts 17:9

And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.

Evidently, the Jews made a deal with Jason, saying, "If Paul and Silas get out of here and don't come back, we won't press charges. Send them out, Jason, and give us money as security." Jason complied in order that Paul and Silas could go free. I'm not sure if this was wise of Jason, but I understand his heart. Perhaps it wasn't the highest road, but it was certainly understandable. He didn't want Paul and Silas harmed.

Acts 17:10

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.

You gotta like these guys! I think I would have been burnt out by repeatedly being beaten and/or imprisoned every time I entered a new city—but not Paul and Silas. They just kept going for it.

Acts 17:11

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

The Bereans listened to Paul as he taught in the synagogue. Every day, they searched the Scriptures, saying, "Let's check out the teaching Paul's giving. Let's consider what he's saying as it relates to the Scriptures." And because the Bereans searched the Scriptures daily, they have been noted throughout the ages as being noble.

Acts 17:12

Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

Folks, the power is in the Word—it's not "What do you think?" or "What do I think?" but "What does *God* say?" How many problems would be solved, how many questions would be answered if people would only take the time to study the Scriptures daily. Faith comes not by encounter sessions or group therapy, but by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Faith comes to those

who are in the Word, for only the Word can affect lives, change hearts, strengthen faith, and renew minds.

Acts 17:13, 14

But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

"Time to go, Paul," said the Bereans. "We've heard the Word and understand it. Now, since the Jews are out to get you again, you'd better keep moving."

Acts 17:15

And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

Paul left Berea and headed for the next city, the city of Athens—the intellectual capital of all of history, the city of Aristotle, of Plato, of Socrates. The Athenian architecture alone was overwhelming. To this day, the Parthenon is considered the most architecturally sophisticated building in history. To allow for optical illusion, it was constructed in such a way that the roof lines are concave and the columns lean inward so that the structure looks perfectly straight when viewed from any direction at any distance.

Acts 17:16

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

While Paul waited for Timothy and Silas to join him, his spirit stirred within him, for here, in the intellectual center of the world, were over three thousand altars and temples built to different deities. The temple dedicated to Aphrodite, with temple prostitutes abounding, was man's attempt to justify

sexual promiscuity. The Temple of Zeus was for those with a "Clint Eastwood Make My Day Mentality" who were into savagery. The Temple of Bacchus was for those who enjoyed alcohol. Paul's heart was stirred within him. But notice that he neither mobilized people politically to campaign against idolatry nor gathered a group of people to take a stand culturally. What did he do? Read on.

Acts 17:17

Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

What did Paul do about the idolatry that broke his heart? He talked. In the church and on the street, Paul dialogued daily concerning the idolatry that gripped the city. I am discovering that it's my job as both a pastor and as a father to dispute, to dialogue, and to discuss in depth.

Mom and Dad, we have the responsibility and the privilege to talk to our kids constantly, to share with our kids consistently, to invest in our kids wisely —not so much telling them what to do, but teaching them how to think so that, slowly but surely, they will make the right decisions.

How do we teach our kids how to think? Through the Scriptures. How long has it been since, like Paul, you've talked with your kids in depth concerning issues as they relate to the Word?

In 2 Kings 4, we read that the responsibility of one of the young men who studied under Elisha was to prepare breakfast. But when the other students dove into the meal, they spit it out, saying, "This stuff is terrible. There's poison in the pot." Spitting and sputtering, they were about to dump out the whole thing, when Elisha said, "Hold on. Don't dump it out. Take the meal—the good stuff—and pour it into the bad stuff." They did, and a miracle transpired, for when the good was poured in, the poison dissipated.

That's the key, Mom and Dad: We are not to pick the poison out of our kids' lives, for that will only lead to legalism and result in resentment and rebellion. Instead, we're to pour in the meal of the Word when our kids are poisoned by the pottage of the world, for greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4).

Not only are we to pour in the meal, but we are to let the dirt go, for in 2 Kings 5, we see another relevant example in the life of Elisha. . . .

Naaman, a Syrian who had leprosy, was told by Elisha to dip in the Jordan River seven times. When Naaman obeyed, he was healed immediately. He then said to Elisha, "I must go back to Syria, but I want to take some soil from Israel with me so I can worship Jehovah at home." You see, in this region of the world, the prevailing point of view was that gods were local and could only be worshiped on the soil of the country of their origin. That is why Naaman wanted to take dirt from Israel back to Syria. Elisha's response? "Go in peace. Do it."

"Elisha, what are you doing?" I protest. "You know that the God of Israel is not a local deity to be worshiped superstitiously. Why didn't you correct Naaman?" But upon further reflection, I believe there's a wise reason Elisha let Naaman return to Syria with dirt from Israel. That is, Elisha knew Naaman's understanding of God was very limited. Naaman had been touched by God, had received healing from God, but he was not yet very deep in his knowledge of God. Did Elisha give him a lecture on theology? No. Elisha simply let him go his way, knowing that as a brand-new baby believer, he would, in time, discover he didn't need the dirt at all.

So, too, Mom and Dad, if we fight every side issue our kids struggle with, when they face the crucial issues—the ones dealing with sin and black-and-white matters—we will not have their attention. We see a lot of Christian young people whose circuits are blown because a well-meaning parent pushed too hard on nonessential matters and fought the wrong battles. Consequently, as a father I have to pray, "Heavenly Father, help me to know what issues are essential for my kids. Help me see which questions need to be addressed, and help me, Lord, to let the bags of dirt go."

Folks, our Father delights in dilemmas without easy answers because they make us go to Him. A lot of us would rather talk to a pastor, read a book, or seek counsel from a friend—but in so doing, we are robbed of the opportunity of cultivating a deep, intimate, eternal relationship with a Father who says, "See Me for specific instructions. Search the Scriptures daily, and I'll guide you and show you what battles need to be fought, for I alone know the hearts of your children."

Acts 17:18 (a)

Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him.

The Epicureans and Stoics now get involved in the fray. Epicureans were the philosophers who said, "Eat, drink, and be merry. Tomorrow we die, so satisfy yourself sensually. Live the good life. Relax. Take it easy." Epicureans were couch potatoes. The Stoics, on the other hand, were aerobics instructors. "Be disciplined," they said. "Free yourself from anything that is emotional, sensual, or material." The Epicurean said, "Enjoy life." The Stoic said, "Endure life." Neither considered eternal life.

Acts 17:18 (b)

And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

Neither Stoic nor Epicurean believed in eternal life. Therefore, Paul's talk about the resurrection captured the attention of both.

Acts 17:19, 20

And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

The Areopagus—Mars Hill—was three hundred and thirty-seven feet in elevation and located in the center of Athens. It was the place where philosophers hung out and where the council of education and religion met daily. Whenever a new religious thought was propounded, it had to clear the council of education and religion. I find it fascinating that the Athenians—the smartest men in history from the world's perspective—said, "Religion and education are inseparable." How far we have come from that today.

Acts 17:21

(For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

The Athenians endlessly analyzed and continually discussed new things. But, folks, if it's true it's not new. And if it's new, it's not true. What the

Athenians needed, what saints today need, is not some novel truth or new understanding. We need a return to the old truths that have been with us from the beginning. If you're searching for some new book, tape, or teaching that will suddenly unlock the mystery of spirituality, you'll be on a wild goose chase. Paul warned that in the last days people will not endure sound doctrine, but will heap up unto themselves teachers who will tickle their ears with some strange doctrine (2 Timothy 4:3). How I thank the Lord for every church family that has over the months and years determined to know the Word and the sound doctrine of this timeless Book.

Acts 17:22

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

"I can see, as I look around, that you are very religious." So Paul began what is unquestionably his most polished presentation—complete with good introduction, applicable illustrations, and sequential order of thought. In verse 24, he spoke of the greatness of God. In verse 25, he spoke of the goodness of God. In verses 26, 27, he spoke of the government of God. In verses 28, 29, he spoke of the glory of God. In verses 30–34, he spoke of the grace of God. Yet I personally believe, as we will see, that this was one of the most ineffective messages of Paul's ministry. While it was his most polished, it was his least powerful. While it had great finesse, it bore little fruit.

Acts 17:23

For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

Although the Athenians had three thousand altars and temples in their city, worried that they might have missed or forgotten someone, they dedicated a huge altar to the Unknown God.

Acts 17:24

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands.

God is our Creator. "The Unknown God is the God who made everything," Paul declared. "He's too big for any singular temple or any carved altar no matter how beautiful or impressive it might appear."

In Exodus 20, the Lord said, "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me . . . And if thou make an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone, for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it" (Exodus 20:24, 25). In other words, the Lord said, "If you build Me an altar, make it very simple—preferably of dirt. If you use rock, don't carve or polish it. Keep it simple so that the attention of the people will remain focused upon Me instead of on the altar." This gives me great hope because, although I want my life to be used by the Lord, I am increasingly aware of my plainness, my earthiness. I'm not very polished. I don't know if I'm "cut out" to do great things for God. Yet, according to Exodus 20, these very doubts make me eminently qualified! Paul said, "We have this treasure [Jesus Christ] in *earthen* vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:7). We're not fancy vases. We're just plain canning jars, boasting not of our exterior—but of whom we have within. If you don't feel capable to share, witness, teach, or minister, you are an ideal candidate because God will get the glory, not you.

Acts 17:25

Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.

God is our Provider—we are not His provider. Any implication that God needs our money to keep from going under financially is completely amiss. God needs nothing. I, however, need to tithe, for if I don't give the way the Word instructs me to, I will become a restricted person—selfish, materialistic, and very unlike my Father. The Father is a giver. He loves us so much He gave the ultimate gift when He gave His Son (John 3:16).

Acts 17:26, 27

And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.

God is Creator, Provider—and Ruler. He has established the boundaries of all men, the boundaries of all nations. This means that the boundaries of the nations are governed by God. There is a lot of talk today, even in Christian literature, about getting rid of nationalism. "If there were no separate nations," proponents say, "the world could just be one big village, one Spaceship Earth." In reality, however, the Bible teaches it was God who established nations. In Genesis 10, it is clearly seen that after the Flood, boundaries were established in which men would dwell nationally. This is part of God's plan for the world in its fallen state. Study history, and you will see the wisdom of His plan, for invariably, whenever a nation has overstepped its boundaries in an effort to swallow another country or culture, oppression, racial prejudice, bitterness, and death have been the result. Therefore, while there is indeed a unity of humanity in which God has made of one blood all nations, there is also a diversity of nationality in which He has established boundaries for our protection until the time Jesus Christ returns to rule and reign with righteousness.

Acts 17:28, 29

For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

Creator, Provider, Ruler, God is also our Father. I'm so thankful that our God is also our Father.

Near the turn of the century, a little boy, walking along the Mississippi River, saw an old man on the bank and began to chat with him. Suddenly, the little boy saw the majestic riverboat, the *River Queen,* making her way down the river. As the boat drew closer, the little boy stood up and began to shout at the top of his lungs, "Let me ride! Let me ride!"

The old man looked at him, smiled and said, "Sit down, sonny. That riverboat's not going to stop for you." Then, to the old man's amazement, the mighty *River Queen* did indeed slow down and pull up

to the bank. And as the little boy ran up the gangplank into the arms of the awaiting captain, the old man heard him utter two words that explained it all: "Hi, Dad!"

That's the way it is with us. "God's not going to answer you," say the old men in our lives. "He's too busy. He's got elections to oversee and famines to figure out." Not true. Any of us who have little children know that the cry of our children has precedence over anything else we do. And the same is true of God.

Acts 17:30

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.

Creator, Provider, Ruler, Father—finally, God is our Savior. "Previously, in His grace," said Paul, "He overlooked your ignorance. He winked at your idolatry." Here is where many people make a grave mistake. Because God is not judging them or chastening them, they think they're getting away with the sin in which they're involved. What they fail to factor in, however, is the longsuffering of God. Folks, we make a critical error whenever we mistake the patience of God for apathy or impotence. As Paul said, "God has been gracious. But now is the time to repent—to change your mind, to change your direction."

Acts 17:31

Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

In John's Gospel, Jesus said the Father had committed to Him all judgment (John 5:22). Therefore, Jesus is "that man" to whom Paul referred. I'm so grateful Jesus is my Judge because, having been "in all points tempted like as we are" (see Hebrews 4:15), He understands what I'm going through and the battles I wage.

Before he began his ministry, Ezekiel was caught up by the hand of the Lord and brought to the river Chebar, where the people of Judah were

held captive (Ezekiel 3:15). Before Ezekiel delivered His heavy message of judgment, God first had him sit with the captives. So, too, Jesus looked on the multitude with compassion (Matthew 9:36). He didn't come down on the sheep—He felt for them. Why? Because He sat where they sat. He walked where they walked. Our Leader, Jesus Christ, has gone through everything we're going through or will ever face. He understands it. Others might say, "What's wrong with you?" Not our Lord. He says, "I understand. I was tempted in the same way. I know exactly what you're struggling with."

Before I can be effective in ministry, I must first sit where others have sat. It's easy to come down on people, easy to find fault with people, easy to be critical of people. But when you sit where they've sat, you have a ministry based on compassion and mercy, forgiveness and love. I believe the Lord allows us to go through hurts, pains, and struggles physically, emotionally, and spiritually because they are what give us hearts of compassion.



***For topical study of Acts 17:30–31 entitled "Here Comes the Judge," turn to page* 753.**

Acts 17:32 (a)
And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked . . .

Some will always mock. They mocked Noah for one hundred years. "You're all wet, Noah," they said. But when judgment came, they missed the boat.

Acts 17:32 (b)
. . . and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.

"We want to think about it," some said. "Come back tomorrow."

Folks, tell your children, your friends, your relatives—anyone you care about—that, regarding their eternal state, it's a very dangerous thing to say "tomorrow." The Bible warns about a hardening of the heart that takes place in

people who say, “Later.” If you are a believer—if you have already responded to the Lord regarding your salvation—when you hear His voice calling you to do certain things or change certain attitudes, respond immediately. It’s a dangerous thing to say, “I’ll think about it.”

Acts 17:33, 34

So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Paul left Athens. And I personally believe that the message he gave there is recorded not as a model to copy, but as an example of failure. Why? In most of the other cities Paul visited, a church was born as a result of his ministry. Not so in Athens. Even though Paul gave an incredibly polished sermon, only a couple of folks believed. Why? I believe it is because in Acts 17, Paul never mentioned the crucifixion of Christ, nor even the name of Jesus. Why? Could it be that, knowing he was in the company of brilliant men, Paul thought the coarseness of the crucifixion was not culturally correct?

In church leadership journals and seminars today, the overriding message is that we must be culturally relevant. That is why we see ministries, churches, Bible studies, and witnesses trying to be careful that they are relatable philosophically and relevant culturally. But, as a result, very few believe. From Athens, Paul went to Corinth, and in his letter to the Corinthians, he explains how he came to them.

> For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.
>
> And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him

> crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.
>
> 1 Corinthians 1:17, 18, 22–24; 2:1–5

A great church was born in Corinth, and a powerful, impacting work of God took place there because Paul said, "After Athens, I came to you in weakness, fear, and trembling, preaching nothing but Jesus and Him crucified." Gang, it doesn't matter whether you're preaching in South America, South Central Los Angeles, or South Medford, Oregon—wherever you go, whomever you're with, whether it be college grads or high-school dropouts, liberals or conservatives, teenagers or golden-agers—the key to relating to anyone and everyone is to preach the Cross of Jesus Christ. That's where the power is; that is how we will truly be "Cross-cultural."

I have found that every single question and problem in life and ministry is always answered at the foot of the Cross and in the Person of Christ Jesus. Jesus said, "If *I* be lifted up, I will draw all men to Myself" (see John 12:32). Preach Jesus Christ and the power of the Cross, saints. Learn the lesson of Paul. Keep your ministry focused. Keep your message simple. Point people to the Cross. And they'll find Jesus.

HERE COMES THE JUDGE

A Topical Study of ACTS 17:30–31

How will God judge the aborigine in Australia who never knew the gospel?

How will He judge the woman in New Guinea who never heard of Jesus?

How can He judge the man in central Africa who was never exposed to the plan of salvation?

I don't know.

But I do know that our text tells us He will judge righteously, fairly, and perfectly. On the day of judgment, no one will say, "Unfair!" On the contrary, all will bow and say, "Righteous and true are Your judgments, O, Lord" (see Revelation 16:7).

The Bible teaches that the Day of Judgment is comprised of two parts: judgment of believers and judgment of unbelievers.

Judgment of Believers

The next event on God's timeline is the Rapture of the Church—when the Lord will come for we who believe and escort us to heaven, where we will spend a seven-year honeymoon with Him. During that time, we will stand before Jesus at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). Please understand that the judgment seat of Christ is not a place where we will be judged for our sins—for every flaw and failure, every sin and shortcoming was paid for on Calvary.

> "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" declares the Lord (Isaiah 43:25).

> "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12).

I'm so glad God said, "as far as the east is from the west." If He had said, "as far as the north is from the south," we'd be in trouble, since there are places where north is only one step away from south. Consider the North Pole, for example. If I were to go as far north as possible—to the North Pole—with the next step I took, I would be going south. Not so with east and west. Although I circle the globe, going east indefinitely, I will never arrive at "west."

The judgment seat of Christ is not a place where we will be judged for our sins, but where we will be rewarded for the things we've done in the name of God. It is the place where all of our works will pass through a purifying fire. The things we did with the right motives—not to glorify self, but because we loved the Lord and wanted to serve Him—will, like gold, silver, and precious stones, be purified by the fire. But those things that were done for other motives will, like wood, hay, and stubble dissipate totally. That which makes it through the fire—the gold, silver, and precious stones—will determine the crowns we receive. The Bible names five such crowns: those of righteousness, witnessing, serving, overcoming adversity, and resisting temptation.

"Why would I want a crown?" you say. "Who cares about walking around heaven with a crown on my head? I'm not into crowns. They're not my style."

Folks, these crowns are not mere ornaments in which to parade around. No, they are what will determine our capacity to enjoy heaven. You see, just as the

stars in the sky have different intensities, so, too, our capacity to enjoy heaven will vary greatly (1 Corinthians 15:41).

"But I thought everyone will be completely happy in heaven," you say.

They will, but the potential for happiness will differ. A thimble and a barrel, when filled to the brim, are both considered completely full. However, the difference in their capacities determines the difference in their volumes.

> When my daughter Christy was a baby, she loved to pull pots and pans from the cupboards and use them for drums. One day I decided to join her. But although Christy was intrigued and fascinated by the clanging of kettles, it did nothing for me because my capacity to enjoy and understand life was greater than hers.

Paul understood that the crowns he would receive would be significant in relation to the next zillion years. Consequently, he said, "I'm running the race. I'm stripping myself of anything that would entangle me, slow me down, or otherwise keep me from winning the prize of the high calling of God" (see 1 Corinthians 9:24–27 and Philippians 3:14).

Judgment of Unbelievers

Following the seven-year-period we as believers will share with the Lord, we will return to earth, where we will rule and reign with Him for one thousand years. At the end of that thousand-year period, there will be another judgment, called the Great White Throne Judgment, where unbelievers will come before the Lord. Many at the Great White Throne Judgment will probably say, "Okay, so I didn't believe in Jesus. I was a lot better than most Christians I knew. I was a member of Rotary and the United Way. I gave blood faithfully and was a good person morally."

Then, the books will be opened—and suddenly all of the deeds, motives, and hidden aspects of their lives will be revealed. Every thought they've ever had, every deed they've ever done, things they've long ago forgotten, stuff they were never even aware of will be brought to light. You see, if you're not a believer in Jesus Christ and you stand at the Great White Throne, saying, "I'm a pretty good person," the Father will simply say, "Let's open the books." And the Judge, Jesus Christ, will look upon you and wait to hear from you as you attempt to defend yourself.

But no excuse will come to your mind; no defense will come to your lips because you will finally understand the extent of your sin. You will at last realize that you're *not* a good person, for although you may have polished up the outside pretty well, and learned how to behave externally in a way that impresses people around you, at the Great White Throne, your *heart* will be exposed.

It is the end of time. Billions of people are gathered in small clusters on a large plain. A low rumble from the sound of their conversations floats across the air. Suddenly, a woman stands up, rolls up her sleeve, and shouts, "God, how can You judge me? Look at this." And on her arm is the tattoo of a swastika with seven numbers underneath. "I died at Auschwitz for nothing more than my ethnic background and my religious belief. How can You judge *me?*"

Then the voice of a man rings out. "And what about this?" he asks, unbuttoning the collar of his shirt to reveal rope marks around his neck. "I was hung for no other reason than the color of my skin. How can You judge *me?*"

Next, a Japanese woman comes forward, saying, "And what about me, God? I was only a young girl when my life was destroyed in Hiroshima. How can You judge *me?*"

Hearing these arguments, the entire crowd begins to shout its assent, until finally, these three people, along with everyone else who had gone through very painful experiences, join together and approach God, saying, "Before You can judge any of us, You must first be sentenced to life on earth as a man so that You can see and understand what we have gone through. And to ensure that You don't make it too easy on Yourself, You must be born in such a way that the legitimacy of Your birth will be questioned."

"Yes!" agrees the crowd.

"Second, You must be born to a racially persecuted and oppressed people."

"Yes!" from the crowd.

"Third, You must grow up in a working class and denied a formal education."

"That's right!" the crowd concurs.

"Fourth, You will have to champion a cause so just and so radical that every religious organization and political body will be against You.

And finally, You must be betrayed by one of Your closest friends, sold out for an insignificant amount of money, brought before a cowardly judge on false charges, indicted by a prejudiced jury, and sentenced to die the most excruciatingly painful death ever devised by man."

The crowd goes wild—until suddenly on that plain covered by billions of people it becomes so quiet one could hear a nail drop as all of humanity at last realizes that God had already served His sentence.

God became a Man. He walked where we walk. He sat where we sit. He went through all the hurts and pains we do. That's why His judgment will be absolutely righteous, perfect, and fair.

Come to Jesus today, precious people. He uniquely understands where you've been. He alone identifies with where you are.



18 Here in chapter 18, Paul arrives in Corinth, where a great work will begin as he gets back to basics—preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Acts 18:1

After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth.

Corinth was an exceedingly wicked city. In the center was a temple dedicated to Aphrodite, from which one thousand prostitutes would emerge each evening to offer themselves to men as an act of worship to the goddess of sensuality. So sinful was Corinth, calling someone a Corinthian was synonymous with calling him a "party animal" or a "lounge lizard." It is therefore not surprising that Paul wrote the first chapter of the Book of Romans —the passage that traces the devolution of man—while in Corinth.

Acts 18:2

And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.

After Emperor Claudius, an anti-Semite, drove the Jews from Rome, Aquila and Priscilla fled to Corinth, where they would eventually come into contact with Paul.

Acts 18:3

And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

Like all Jewish rabbis, Paul had a trade. To this day, the rabbis teach that every man—be they rabbis, teachers, or business executives—have a trade to fall back on should something unforeseen happen in their professions. Paul was a tentmaker, but as he sewed tents, he was primarily sowing seeds as he shared the truth of the gospel with Aquila and Priscilla.

Acts 18:4

And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.

As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue on the Sabbath.

Acts 18:5

And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.

It interests me that although Paul went into the synagogue and shared prophecy and theology, he never specifically said, "Jesus is Messiah" until Timothy and Silas arrived on the scene. Why did he wait to make this declaration? I believe there are two reasons. First, he was emboldened by the presence of his friends. Don't you find yourself becoming a whole lot bolder when standing by a fellow believer? That's why Jesus sent His disciples out two by two (Luke 10:1). It's wonderful to minister with another brother or sister. Second, he was emboldened by the pressure in his heart. He knew he had held back long enough, and that he had to share Jesus or, like a volcano, erupt!

Acts 18:6 (a)

And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed . . .

When the Jews heard Paul say, "Jesus is Messiah," they were blasphemously angry because they were looking for a politically powerful personality who would free them from the oppression of Rome—not Someone who talked about being poor in spirit, turning the other cheek, and setting one's heart on things above.

Acts 18:6 (b)

. . . he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean . . .

The Lord said to Ezekiel, "If you don't tell people the truth, their blood will be upon your hands" (see Ezekiel 3:17–21). So, too, if we're not faithful to communicate to the people to whom the Lord has called us to share, their blood will be on our hands, so to speak. There's a difference, however, between blood on the hands and blood on the head.

In Joshua 2, prior to the fall of Jericho, the spies told Rahab that whoever remained in her house would be spared when destruction came upon the city. Blood would be upon the head, however, of anyone who ventured outside her house. Blood on the head means, "I've brought judgment on myself." Blood on

the hands means, "I have failed to reach out to others." Therefore, because Paul was faithful in sharing the gospel with the Jews at Corinth, their blood would not be upon his hands, but upon their own heads if they rejected his message.

Acts 18:6 (c)

. . . from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

This statement would have pierced the heart of the Jews. "What? You, Paul —a Jewish rabbi—are going to the *Gentiles?*" Paul would later write that this was all part of God's plan to provoke the Jews to jealousy (Romans 11:11).

Acts 18:7

And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.

"I'm going to the Gentiles," said Paul. Where did he go? Next door. Talk about provoking the Jews to jealousy! With Paul right next door, these Jews couldn't help but see miracles happening, joy abounding, the church growing.

Acts 18:8

And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

What was happening next door to the synagogue was so irresistible and undeniable that even the ruler of the synagogue believed.

Acts 18:9

Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace.

If the Lord came to Paul at night, saying, "Don't be afraid," the implication is that Paul must have, indeed, been afraid. As he saw revival happening, he must have been reminded of the stoning he endured in Antioch and of the beating he received at Philippi. Paul was beginning to realize that wherever he

saw external gain, it was followed by personal pain. Thus, as he rejoiced in his heart over what was happening in Corinth, no doubt he was concerned in his mind about what was to come. So the Lord appeared to Paul and gave him the same two gifts He gives to us in the dark seasons of our lives: His promise and His presence.

Acts 18:10 (a)
For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee . . .

"Paul," said the Lord, "I'm giving you this promise: I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee." So, too, the Lord has given over three thousand promises to you and me in His Word. He has already given them. All that remains to be done is for us to believe them. Consequently, we have a choice to make: to freak out in the night, or, like Paul, to continue in the city. You see, contrary to Paul's typical pattern of making short stops in the cities to which he ministered, Paul stayed in Corinth a year and a half. Why? I suggest he was established because of the Lord's promise. Gang, we don't need to be on an emotional roller coaster—rejoicing one moment and fearful the next. Like Paul, we can say, "The Lord gave a promise to me. Therefore I will continue on steadfastly."

In Isaiah 7, we see another man who also received a promise from the Lord. Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of the ten northern tribes of Israel, formed an alliance and planned an attack against Judah, the two southern tribes. The Lord told Isaiah to speak to Ahaz, king of Judah, who was fearful and upset about the upcoming battle. "Your response to the promise of God will have no effect on the outcome of the battle," Isaiah told Ahaz, "for God has already determined that Israel and Syria will be unsuccessful. *However,* your response to God's promise will have great effect upon you, for if you don't believe God, you won't be established. You'll be unstable. You'll be emotional. You'll cave in unnecessarily."

The same is true with us. The Lord says to you and me, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (see John 14:2, 3).

Like Paul, we can be established and strengthened in such promises, or, like Ahaz, we can fret and fear needlessly. Whether we choose to claim them or ignore them, God will keep His Word. He will prepare a place for us as believers and return for us whether we consciously and consistently ascribe to this or not. But if we don't take Him at His Word, we will live a life of instability, inconsistency, and anxiety—totally needlessly.

"But what if I'm misunderstanding the promises?" you ask. "What if I'm misreading the Bible? What if I'm misinterpreting the context? So often I come across a promise and I believe it's for me—but what if it's not?"

Consider Isaiah's words to Ahaz: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). The word "you" in this verse is plural—which means the sign was not only for Ahaz but for everyone. "Ahaz," the Lord declared, "a sign will be given to you—and not to you only, but to all people. A virgin shall conceive, and a Son shall be born whose name will be Immanuel, or God with us."

God still says to the Ahaz in you and me, "I am Immanuel. I am the ultimate source of stability." You see, I might question if I understand the Scriptures properly. I might wonder if what I'm reading is applicable to me personally. I might doubt whether I interpret the theology correctly. But the Lord says to me, "Even if you're not sure if the promises apply to you, I, Immanuel, am with you."

> *On a trip to Los Angeles years ago, my daughter Mary Elizabeth rode in the front seat between my wife, Tammy, and me. Fascinated by a map of California, she kept busy trying to figure out where we were and where we were going. At five years of age, Mary could barely read. So, even if she was confused about where we were in relationship to her map, or if we were going the right way according to her interpretation of the map, it didn't matter at all because she wasn't driving. I, her father, was in the driver's seat. She could have been reading the map backward and upside down, and it would have had no affect whatsoever on my ability to get her to Los Angeles.*

So, too, even if we're not reading the map of God's Word correctly—even if sometimes we feel like we're holding it upside down and backward—the

fact remains that Immanuel is with us, and *He's* in the driver's seat. The only thing that could have gone wrong on our trip to L.A. would have been if Mary suddenly lurched out of her seat and grabbed the wheel, saying, "Let me steer. Let me steer." You see, gang, anytime we grab the wheel of our lives and say, "Let me steer; I gotta figure this out; I have to make this happen," our lives begin to careen and swerve—and we end up wondering why we crash. Read the Word, saints. Saturate yourselves in Scripture, and look for His promises as you rest in His presence.

Acts 18:10 (b)
. . . for I have much people in this city.

"I am with you, Paul," promised the Lord. But where was He when Paul was left for dead at Lystra and thrown in prison at Philippi? As He did with Paul in Corinth, sometimes the Lord keeps us from trouble. Other times, however, the Lord is with us in trouble, as He was with Paul in Lystra and Philippi.



***For topical study of Acts 18:10 entitled "Seeing Our City," turn to page* 762.**

Acts 18:11
And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

The fact remains that the great need in the church and in our homes today is not "encounter sessions" or pie-eating contests, but the teaching of the Scriptures.

Acts 18:12 (a)
And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia . . .

Gallio was the brother of Seneca, a philosopher in Rome and the tutor of Caesar Nero. When he was appointed governor, the Jews thought, *Aha! A change of leadership! Here's our chance to get rid of Paul.*

Acts 18:12 (b)–14 (a)

. . . the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth . . .

In his own defense, Paul would have said, "I object! I'm not teaching men to worship contrary to the law. I am preaching the fulfillment of the law in the Person of Jesus Christ." Paul didn't get the chance to defend himself, however, because Gallio spoke instead.

Acts 18:14 (b)–16

. . . Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment seat.

"This is not a question of civil judgment," Gallio said. "It's a religious matter for you Jews to figure out among yourselves."

Acts 18:17 (a)

Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue . . .

Newer translations say it was the Jews who "took Sosthenes," the man who replaced Crispus as chief ruler of the synagogue after Crispus got saved.

Acts 18:17 (b)

. . . and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things.

Whether it was the Jews who took Sosthenes because he didn't argue their case persuasively—or whether the Greeks took him because he was bugging them about things that didn't concern them—Sosthenes was beaten. Later on, in 1 Corinthians 1:1, Paul greets Sosthenes. Therefore, guess who got converted!

Like Sosthenes, people are often brought to salvation when they get beat up. If someone you care about is in the process of being beaten, don't try to protect him or her because oftentimes it is through that very process that people finally see their need of the Lord. If you are being beaten up presently, take heart. Blessing will follow, if, like Sosthenes, you allow the beating to draw you closer to Jesus.

Acts 18:18 (a)

And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila . . .

Paul worked *for* Aquila and Priscilla when he sewed tents. He worked *on* Aquila and Priscilla by giving them the gospel. He worked *with* Aquila and Priscilla as they headed for Ephesus together.

Acts 18:18 (b)

. . . having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

When he left Corinth on his way to Jerusalem, Paul got a haircut. Why? He had taken a Nazarite vow to touch no grapes, drink no wine, touch no dead body, and to allow his hair to grow before cutting it off as a sign of purification (Numbers 6).

"Wait a minute," you say. "Why would Paul, the champion of grace, put himself under such bondage?"

Consider the mentality of Paul, this one who said, "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (see 1 Corinthians 9:22). Heading toward Jerusalem, the capital of Judaism, Paul was willing to go with the flow and to fit in with the Jews not because he was under the law, but because he was filled with love for his people.

Acts 18:19, 20 (a)

And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them . . .

The Ephesians wanted Paul to stick around. Because he was a treasure chest of truth and a storehouse of spiritual knowledge, people always wanted Paul to stay a little longer. Folks enjoyed his company not because of an endearing personality, vivaciousness, or friendliness—but because he shared with them concerning the kingdom. And I'm convinced the same is still true today. How I love to be around those who are rich in the things of God. Take in the Word, dear people. Give out the Word, and you too will find that others will want you to stick around.

Acts 18:20 (b), 21 (a)

. . . he consented not; But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem . . .

With a directive in his heart and determination on his face, Paul was headed for Jerusalem.

Acts 18:21 (b)

. . . but I will return again unto you, if God will.

"I will return, if God wills," said Paul. James echoed this when he wrote, "Be careful that you don't say I'm going to do this thing on such and such a day." Instead, say, "If God wills, I am going to do this thing" (see James 4:13–15). There is only One who didn't have to say, "If God will," and that One is our Hero, Jesus Christ. He said, "I *will* come again" (John 14:3). Period.

Acts 18:21 (c), 22

And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.

Although he was determined to go *to* Jerusalem, and although he had taken a vow in order to fit in *at* Jerusalem, Paul didn't stay *in* Jerusalem. You see, Paul was not always real popular in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem boys—Peter, James, and John—had a different flavor than the Antioch boys—Paul and Barnabas, Timothy and Silas.

James would stress that faith without works is dead (James 2:20). John would say, "Children, keep yourself from idols" (1 John 5:21). Peter would

write, “Be sober, be vigilant because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). But Paul just went on chapter after chapter celebrating the finished work of the Cross of Calvary.

As you read the New Testament, you can feel the healthy tension between the brothers in Antioch and the brothers in Jerusalem. I share this with you not simply as a historical note, but to realize that even today different people will have different flavors within the body of Christ. There will be Pauls and Barnabases who will comfort you by reminding you that you’re perfect in Christ, that the veil is rent, that the work is done. And just when you begin to settle in maybe a bit too much, a James or a Peter will remind you that faith without works is dead, that you must be sober and vigilant. Like the tension on a trampoline, this balance is healthy and important, for without it, we would hit bottom in one extreme or the other.

Acts 18:23, 24

And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

Alexandria was the second largest city in the Roman Empire. One-third of the city was Jewish. It was a city of such intellectual wealth that recent excavations have uncovered an Alexandrian library of seven hundred thousand volumes. Apollos, a man mighty in the Scriptures and eloquent in speech, hailed from the learned city of Alexandria.

Acts 18:25 (a)

This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit . . .

Apollos was not only brilliant intellectually, but he was fervent of heart spiritually. So charismatic a figure was he that Paul would later chide the Corinthians for priding themselves in being his followers (1 Corinthians 3:4).

Acts 18:25 (b)

. . . he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

Apollos had never heard about the death of Jesus Christ nor of His Resurrection from the dead. All he knew at this point was what John the Baptist preached. That is, "Repent, Messiah is coming." This encourages me greatly because, although there was a huge gap in his understanding, Apollos was commended for sharing what little he did know.

Acts 18:26 (a)

And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard . . .

Who was in the synagogue listening to Apollos? Aquila and Priscilla. Aquila and Priscilla could have said, "We're beyond this synagogue stuff. We're more advanced than this," but they didn't. You see, even though Aquila and Priscilla were Christians, they went back into the synagogue to see what the Lord would have them do there—not to be ministered unto, but to minister to others.

Acts 18:26 (b)

. . . they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

Realizing Apollos didn't have the full story, Aquila and Priscilla took him aside. They didn't interrupt the service, but they privately shared with him the message of the gospel. I love Aquila and Priscilla for being there with hearts to serve in humility. And I love Apollos for being teachable. After all, he could have said, "Who are you, you tentmakers? I am a man mighty in the Scriptures, eloquent of speech, fervent of spirit. Read Acts 18 if you don't believe me." But that wasn't his heart. Apollos shared what he had, and the Lord sent Aquila and Priscilla to give him more.

How can you know more about the way and heart of the Lord? Share what you already know. I read about an army paratrooper who had completed his twenty-thousandth jump. Asked by one of his students why he got into parachuting, he answered, "I was an infantryman fifteen

thousand feet in the air when the third engine on our plane went out. I jumped because I had no other choice." When do you become a teacher, a Bible student, an evangelist? When you take the jump, knowing you are the person on your street, in your office, or at your school who knows more about the kingdom than does the person next to you.

God will give you opportunity to minister tomorrow if you choose to take it because I guarantee you will find yourself next to someone who is dumber than you concerning the things of the Lord. And when He does, you can either say, "I'm not a pastor. I don't have a lot of knowledge theologically. I don't know that much about the Bible, so I won't say anything,"—or you can be a Priscilla or an Aquila and say, "I may not be a pastor or a theologian, but I know more than this guy next to me, so I'm going to jump in because his plane is going down."

Acts 18:27, 28

And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

Apollos went on to use his newfound knowledge of the gospel to prove Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One. Isaiah, referring to the Syrian rule of the people of Israel, prophesied this concerning the anointing upon Jesus Christ: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing" (Isaiah 10:27).

Gang, the bondage that people are in, the yoke that people are under, is broken not through our understanding of behavior or through counseling, but through the work of the Anointed One. I received this letter one day:

Dear Jon,

I smoked for thirty-four years and enjoyed every cigarette. I wanted to stop, but the thought of quitting ran chills down my spine. A year ago, I heard your message taken from John 5:8, "Take up your

bed and walk." I had no idea how powerful that message was, or how it would change my life. I left the service that Sunday morning, and the Lord took my cigarettes from me that day. I did not need "the patch" or anything else. The Lord is my "patch" and my light.

This person understood the reality of Jesus Christ—that when He says, "Go your way and sin no more," it is not a word of warning, but a word of liberation. Folks, the answer to every burden lies not in techniques or counseling, behavior modification or clinical psychology. The Answer is Jesus. Jesus is the Christ. He is the Anointed One. And the yoke of bondage shall be broken because of Him.

SEEING OUR CITY
A Topical Study of
ACTS 18:10

It has rightly been said that Europe is looked over by millions of travelers and overlooked by millions of believers. Such was not the case with Paul, who, on his third missionary journey, went to Europe not as a sightseer, but as a soul-winner. Here in chapter 18, however, after meeting opposition in Corinth, Paul was ready to throw in the towel and move out of the region before the Lord spoke to him, saying, "Fear not, Paul. Speak boldly. Don't hold back, for in this place of moral decay and depravity, I have many people."

It is important to keep in mind that the people of whom the Lord was speaking were not yet Christians. You see, at this point, "His people" were still wandering the streets, frequenting the temples of prostitution, partying, struggling, and straying. Yet in the Lord's perspective, they were His people nonetheless. Therefore, I can't help but wonder what He would say about Grants Pass, Medford, Ashland, or Jacksonville, Oregon; about the cities in which we live, the schools we attend, the places we work. For although we might be disgusted by them and grieved by what goes on within them, surely the Lord would say to you and to me as He did to Paul, "Don't pull away. Don't hold back. I have many people in your city, in your school, in your neighborhood. They're just not saved yet."

Therefore, I believe the Lord wants us as a Christian community to be city-takers for Him. How? Three ways.

Envisioning

Acts 18:9 tells us that Paul had a vision from the Lord in the night—in a time of darkness. So, too, when you go downtown to the dark areas of Medford and you cruise by the Sunrise Hotel, what's your attitude toward the men and women there who will become part of the millions of people this year who will contract a sexually transmitted disease? Some of those very people are the Lord's people—they're just not saved yet.

What about the high-school kids who smoke during lunch hour? How does the Lord view them? I believe He would say to you and to me, "Don't pull back. Don't pull away. I have many people in that orchard. They're Mine. Many of them think they're seeking some sort of family and some kind of acceptance, but in reality, they're seeking Me. I'm going to work on them and reach out to them, and I want to use you in the process of praying for them and sharing the truth with them."

What about the guys who sit on the hoods of their cars, waiting for a drug deal to take place? We say, "Let's clean up those areas. Let's call in the law." But the Lord says, "I have many people there—people who are doing these things because they're craving Me. I know them; I want to reach out to them. And I want to use you in the process."

Gang, I'm praying that every time you go into a "dark" place—into an area that tends to turn you off, that your eyes are opened and your heart is deeply touched by the Lord's perspective of the people there.

Invading

In Acts 5, we read that the apostles were accused of "filling Jerusalem with their doctrine" (see Acts 5:28). How did they do it?

I believe the answer lies in the fact that one of the Greek words for "preaching" means "conversing." You see, "preaching" is not limited to speaking behind a pulpit or into a microphone. Preaching can also mean conversing, talking with people, and filling the city with the doctrine of Jesus Christ. I have found that one of the keys to talking about Jesus is to share with people as if they are already believers. That's what Jesus did. He treated folks as if they were already part of His kingdom as He spoke to them of heaven. He didn't come down on them. He didn't preach at them. He simply shared with them.

Be bold, saints, as you invade your home, your school, your neighborhood for the Lord. And listen for His voice as He says to you, "Fear not. Speak out—for I am with you and I have many people on your street or in your community who are waiting to hear about Me."

Enjoying

In Acts 8, we read that after Philip shared the gospel with the people of Samaria, there was great joy in the city, for not only did the people of Samaria see miracles, but they heard them as well (Acts 8:6). So, too, in a world that is drifting aimlessly and confused incredibly, when you or I speak truth clearly, saying, "This is the fact about that matter," or "Here's the big picture," miracles will follow because people will see changed lives and hear a new perspective.

Imagine what would happen if five people in your office, in your neighborhood, or on your campus got saved next week, next month, or next year. You would see parents start parenting again, husbands and wives working out their difficulties, people who were once disenfranchised and disoriented made whole again. As a result, not only would they be filled with joy, but joy would fill your heart as well.

"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy," proclaimed the angel the night of Jesus' birth (Luke 2:10). And we can bear the same message of joy today to the people in our schools, our offices, our communities. How I pray that the Lord will change us to a greater degree—that the people we once looked down upon or were disgusted with might become part of a tremendous harvest of souls for His kingdom.

I pray that we might envision—that we may see people the way the Lord sees them. I pray that we might invade—filling our city with His Good News. I pray that we might enjoy what the Lord is doing as He drives out demons, heals souls, and works wonders in our community.

Perhaps you're saying, "That all sounds great, but how does it happen practically?" There's only one way I know in which our perspective on our cities, our communities, our schools, or our neighborhoods can be changed. It's found in Mark 8. . . .

After He touched the eyes of a blind man, Jesus asked if he could see.

"I see men as trees," the blind man answered. And Jesus touched his eyes again and *made him look up.*

"Now I see all men clearly," declared the once-blind man (see Mark 8:22–25).

Maybe, like the blind man, you see the people at work, next door, or in the questionable areas of town as trees. They "stump" you. You want to "cut them down." You wish they would "leave." Maybe you say, "The people in my city

bug me. I want to move away from them to a place where I can find peace and quiet, to a place where I won't have to deal with depravity, to a place where I can get away from it all." But I believe, just as He did with the blind man, the Lord desires to make us look up to another tree—the tree of Calvary.

You see, Jesus was pinned to a tree, saying, "Jon, I'm in love with the person for whom you have no time and in whom you have no interest. And I care deeply about the person you want to chop down."

Gang, Jesus loves the girlfriend who dumped you, the husband who deserted you, and the boss who fired you. He cares about the kids on skateboards who cuss and swear and wear blasphemous T-shirts. He died for the prostitutes and for the drug dealers. But we'll never come to that realization until we look up and see Jesus on the tree of Calvary.

Join in Communion. Eat of His body. Drink of His blood. And be reminded all over again that Jesus *loves* people. If your perspective on people is a little fuzzy, go to the Lord's table in brokenness and openness. See Jesus on the Cross of Calvary, and you'll see people more clearly. Then you will be able to envision what He wants to do. Then you will be able to invade the area in which you live as you share the Good News of His gospel. Then you will be able to enjoy watching Him work in and through you as He takes your city for His glory.

19 Acts 19:1 (a)

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus . . .

On his third missionary journey, en route to Jerusalem, Paul traveled through present-day Turkey and came to one of the major cities in the region—the city of Ephesus.

Acts 19:1 (b), 2 (a)

. . . and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?

In Ephesus, Paul found a group of believers who prompted an important question from him, one I strongly believe is a valid question for every believer to consider: "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?" Keep in mind that these Ephesian believers were disciples—or "disciplined ones." So, too, maybe the people you work with, or those in your Bible study group, are devoted to the Lord and disciplined in their walk—but there's no light in their lives, no sparkle in their eyes. Worship is a drudge and witnessing a chore. There is about them a lack of boldness, a dearth of excitement, an absence of enthusiasm. To them, Paul would probably echo the same question he asked of the Ephesian believers: "Have you guys received the Spirit since you believed?"

Acts 19:2 (b)

And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

"What Holy Ghost?" they asked.

Acts 19:3 (a)

And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized?

Their answer was a mystery to Paul, who, on the basis of the life of Christ and the birth of the church, believed that water baptism and baptism in the Spirit were intimately and intricately linked (Matthew 3:16; Acts 2:38).

Acts 19:3 (b)–7

And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve.

These Ephesians were disciples of John the Baptist because they had not yet heard the story of Jesus.

John's baptism was in preparation for the Messiah. Jesus' baptism was in celebration of the Messiah. John's baptism was a sign of repentance. Jesus' baptism was a sign of regeneration.



***For topical study of Acts 19:1–7 entitled "Have Ye Received the Spirit?" turn to page* 768.**

Acts 19:8, 9 (a)

And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them . . .

Paul taught in the synagogue until the Jews rejected his ministry and his message.

Acts 19:9 (b)

. . . And separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

History tells us that the pattern of a workday in Ephesus was as follows: People worked from seven to eleven o'clock in the morning, took a break during the heat of the day from eleven to four o'clock in the afternoon, and went back to work from four to nine o'clock at night. Taking advantage of this schedule, Paul held classes during the afternoon, when the building used by Tyrannus, the philosopher, was vacant. I'm so impressed with the servant's heart and mentality of Paul. Not only did he support himself in ministry by making tents, he used his time off to teach about the things of the kingdom.

Acts 19:10–12

And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So

that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

The handkerchiefs spoken of here were actually the sweatbands Paul wore around his forehead when he labored as a tentmaker. The aprons were not the kind June Cleaver wore in the kitchen. They were the leather aprons of a blacksmith. Why were Paul's sweatbands and aprons used for healing? Certainly it was not because they had any magical power in and of themselves. Rather, they were powerful because of what they represented. I suggest to you that, as proofs of Paul's love for the people to whom he ministered, his sweatbands and aprons provided a point of contact and triggered within the Ephesians faith to be healed and set free.



***For topical study of Acts 19:10–12 entitled "The Sweetness of Sweat," turn to page* 772.**

Acts 19:13

Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.

These Jews weren't believers. They were using the name of Jesus merely as a formula to exorcise demons.

Acts 19:14

And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.

The seven sons of the chief priest, Sceva, were among those who used the name of Jesus to exorcise demons. Why? Since in those days, exorcists collected a fee whether or not they were successful, perhaps they did it for the money. Or perhaps they were sincere in their efforts to alleviate misery. Whatever their motive, their method was to copy Paul.

Acts 19:15

And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?

The Word very clearly warns against using someone else's formula to try to accomplish spiritual victory. In Exodus 30, for example, the law states specifically that if anyone duplicated the compound of the holy anointing oil, he would be cut off from the people (Exodus 30:33). Therefore, if you want to see your ministry, your effectiveness, or your witness curtailed, be like the sons of Sceva and say, "I think I'll copy that person. I'll wear the same clothes he wears, speak the same words he says, do the same things he does. He's successful in ministry, and I will be too." As seen in verse 16, it won't work.

Acts 19:16

And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

I have been here. I have felt naked when, in my own energy, I have tried to imitate someone else. Folks, if you want to be fruitful and effective in your service for Jesus Christ, don't try to copy another's anointing. Instead, seek the Lord. Spend time with Him. Log in some history with Him. And He will work in and through you effectively, uniquely, powerfully.

Before leaving this passage, I want to commend these seven sons of Sceva for believing enough to confront demonized people in the name of Jesus. In our culture—even in the Christian community—the possessed man would not be called demonized. He would be labeled depressed, distressed, or manic depressive; psychotic, neurotic, or schizophrenic. We have diluted our effectiveness by referring to spiritual battles as "disorders." Therefore, before I come down too hard on the sons of Sceva, I must ask myself when the last time was I had enough faith to look someone in the eye and say, "In the name of Jesus Christ, be healed."

The story is told that, years ago, a man came into a small town in the Bible belt and wanted to open the first tavern. Upset by this, the local Christians called a prayer meeting. "Lord," they begged, "don't let this

happen." The man built his tavern anyway, but the Christians kept praying. The tavern was demolished by lightning the first week it was open. The owner, knowing the Christians had been praying, hired a lawyer and sued them for destroying his business. The Christians, in turn, hired a lawyer, saying, "We had nothing to do with the lightning that struck your tavern." Now, isn't that curious? The tavern owner had more faith in the power of prayer than did the believers.

That's often the way it is. Like the sons of Sceva, people who have no relationship with Jesus Christ often believe in the potency and power of His name more than we who do.

Acts 19:17–19

And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

Even though fifty thousand pieces of silver would have been equivalent to the yearly wage of one hundred fifty men, these new believers didn't hold a garage sale or give their stuff away. They burned it. Folks, don't sell stuff you know is harmful. Be like these guys, and trash it. Pour it down the drain. Destroy it.

Acts 19:20

So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

When did the Word of God grow and prevail? When the believers burned their junk. If you're burned-out with Bible study, prayer, or meditation—chances are it's because you need to burn something up. When my appetite is dull, when I'm not interested in spiritual things the way I once was, when I find worship a drudge or a discipline—inevitably I say, "Father, search me and show me the junk in my life that has caused my appetite for You to be diminished." And you know what? He does.

I've been there a thousand times. Whenever my appetite for the meat of the Word diminishes, invariably it's because I'm filling up on the junk food of the world. I'm not talking about blatant sin, but rather empty calories for my mind, Twinkies for my spirit. But when I finally say, "Enough of that," my appetite for the Word returns.

Acts 19:21

After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.

Paul wasn't talking about sight-seeing, but about soul-winning. He wanted to go to Rome not to take in the Coliseum or catch a chariot race, but to share the gospel and touch people. Indeed, he did go to Rome as we will see—although not in the way he expected. He went as a prisoner.

Acts 19:22–27

So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.

The idol of the goddess Diana was unbelievably ugly. Fashioned from a chunk of black rock believed to have been sent from Jupiter, she was a grotesque-looking multibreasted female. Yet people came from all over Asia to worship at the shrine of Diana, the goddess of fertility. Consequently, enterprising businessmen like Demetrius decided to go into the souvenir

business, making miniature shrines, which they sold for big bucks—until Paul came to town.

> In the Welsh Revival of 1901, under the anointed ministry of Robert Murray McCheyne, so great was the revival that every tavern and pub in Wales went broke. How many anti-alcohol sermons did McCheyne deliver? None. How many tirades against taverns? Zero. People simply lost all interest in alcohol when they got touched by the Lord and filled with the Spirit. The same thing happened in Ephesus. When people got saved, the idol business dried up.

> **Acts 19:28–30**
>
> **And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not.**

Although the disciples saw danger, Paul saw an opportunity to preach.

> **Acts 19:31–32**
>
> **And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.**

Have you ever seen a fight on the beach? It always amazes me how a crowd starts to gather, growing so large so quickly that those on the perimeter don't even know why they're there. That's what was happening here.

> **Acts 19:33**
>
> **And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward.**

As in every community throughout history, the Jews knew they would inevitably be held responsible for any trouble. So they picked their leading spokesman, Alexander, and instructed him to tell the crowd they were not linked to Paul, but were actually in opposition to him.

Acts 19:33, 34

And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

When I first read this a number of years ago, I wondered, *How could this be? How could people shout for two hours?* But that was before the hostage situation in Iran, when, nightly on the news, we watched Iranians shout outside our embassy by the hour. And what about our own country? When the Houston Oilers made it to the playoffs fifteen years ago, seventy-five thousand people packed the Astrodome—not to watch a game, not to cheer for their team, but to yell "We love you, Big Blue" for hours across an empty field.

Acts 19:35–41

And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

This constable knew that if the Romans had to come in to settle the dispute, it would be disastrous for the free citizens of Ephesus. “Calm down,” he said. “Don’t do anything rash.” And the crowd, at last listening to reason, dispersed.

HAVE YE RECEIVED THE SPIRIT?

A Topical Study of ACTS 19:1–7

On his third missionary journey, in the city of Ephesus, Paul found himself faceto-face with a group of believers who seemed dull and dry, listless and lifeless. I wonder if, at this time, Paul was not reminded of another man who ministered in a very dry and dull arena. The man's name? Ezekiel.

In Ezekiel 37, we read how he was caught up in the Spirit of the Lord and taken to a valley. As he looked across the plain, he saw only dead, dry bones. The Lord said to him, "Son of man, can these bones live again?"

"I don't know," Ezekiel answered.

"Speak to the bones," the Lord commanded.

So Ezekiel preached to the bones. And as he did, something incredible happened. With a great noise, the bones began to miraculously link themselves together into skeletons. Yet, although skin appeared on them, they remained lifeless. And Ezekiel realized that commotion is not equivalent to creation.

If you watched the political conventions before the last presidential elections, like Ezekiel, you saw a great deal of commotion—lots of noise and shaking, rhetoric and oration, banners waving and people applauding. What happens at political conventions can also happen in churches. There can be all kinds of noise, shaking, and commotion—but that doesn't mean creation is taking place.

So the Lord said to Ezekiel, "Prophesy to the wind." The Hebrew word for wind is, which also means "breath" or "spirit." The same word in Greek, *pneuma,* means "wind," "breath," or "spirit" as well. As Ezekiel prophesied to the wind, life entered the lifeless bodies, and they became a living army. It was not when Ezekiel preached *at* them, but when he interceded *for* them—when he preached to the wind on behalf *of* them—that they became an effective, vibrant, living army.

"Not by might, nor by power but by My Spirit, saith the Lord," (Zechariah 4:6). And in Acts 19, as Paul talked to the disciples in Ephesus, he realized that even though they were disciplined, even though they were students, there was a dullness in them, a dryness about them that could only be cured by the ruach, the

pneuma, the Spirit within them. That is why he was pressed to ask if they had received the Spirit since they believed.

I must ask the same question to myself and to this congregation. I know you're believers, but have you received the Holy Ghost since the time you opened your heart to Jesus Christ?

"Wait a minute," you protest. "I thought when I opened my heart to Him, I automatically became a recipient of His Spirit."

You did. Paul declared that any man who does not have the Spirit is none of His (Romans 8:9). In other words, if you don't have the Holy Spirit, you're not a Christian. When you opened your heart to Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit took up residence with you. You have the Holy Spirit. But the question for you, your children, and the people you care about is this: Does the Holy Spirit have you? That's the issue. You see, there are different relationships you can have with the Spirit.

In John 14, addressing His disciples, Jesus said, "The Spirit is *with* you, but He shall be *in* you" (see John 14:17). When did the Holy Ghost come in them? In John 20, when, following His Resurrection, Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Then He said, "Now that the Holy Spirit is in you, go to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Ghost to come *upon* you, for that is when you shall receive power" (see Acts 1:8). The word Luke used for "power" was *dunamis* from which we get our word "dynamite." The disciples went to Jerusalem and waited for ten days until the Day of Pentecost. When a mighty wind blew through the Upper Room, the Spirit came upon them and they emerged as mighty dynamos.

The question still must be asked today: Have you received the Spirit since you believed? I know the Spirit is in you, but have you allowed the Spirit to come upon you, to empower you? Or are you still in the Upper Room, hiding out, cloistered away, with a lack of boldness, a lack of living water flowing from you, and lots of dryness within you? Have you, or the ones you care about, received the Holy Ghost since you believed? That's what Paul asked the men here in Acts 19.

"What Holy Ghost?" they said. "We never heard about this."

"You've never heard about the Holy Spirit?" Paul asked. "Then how were you baptized?" You see, to Paul, baptism in water and baptism in the Spirit were intimately and intricately linked. In Acts 2:38, we read that Peter emerged from the Upper Room and declared to the crowd gathered outside, "Repent and

be baptized. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Peter linked water baptism with baptism in the Spirit. In Matthew 3, we read it was when Jesus was baptized in water that the heavens opened and the Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove.

I find it extremely significant that throughout Scripture, the Holy Spirit is typified by a dove. The Spirit came in the form of a dove—not a hawk.

When my son Peter-John was about two years old, we were driving into town, and I said, "Peter, do you know what Daddy does every day?"

He said, "Yeah. You're a creature."

"No, Peter," I answered, "I'm not a creature."

"Oh. You're a screecher."

"No, Peter, I'm a preacher."

Due to the misconception that those who really have the anointing of the Spirit will shout and screech, a lot of preachers are screechers. But the Spirit came not in the form of a screeching, shrieking hawk. Nor did He come in the form of a duck. He's not a "quack." Maybe you've followed the sad story of Ivan Popov, the evangelist who, claiming to have the power of the Holy Ghost, called people out of the crowd and "miraculously" told them where they were from. As it turned out, Popov was getting his information through the wireless microphones of his assistants planted in the audience.

Neither is the Holy Spirit pictured as a peacock, for He is not proud. In John 16, Jesus said the Spirit does not speak of Himself. Therefore, any church or person who is truly Spirit-filled will be one who draws attention not to the Holy Ghost—but to Jesus Christ.

Nor is the Holy Spirit symbolized by an ostrich—with His head in the sand, oblivious to the sin in our lives. The Spirit does indeed convict, for part of His ministry is to keep us from sin. Listen for His voice within you as He speaks to you, saying, "Be careful. This is the way, walk ye in it," (see Isaiah 30:21).

The Holy Spirit is not likened to a vulture, for He doesn't swoop down to pick on you, to pick at you, or to pick from you. There have been people with a "vulture mentality" who have said to me, "The Holy Spirit is moving me to prophesy doom and gloom against you, or against Applegate Christian Fellowship." But because the Spirit is not like a vulture, I know it is not Him speaking.

The Spirit is like a dove—gentle and pure, acceptable and pleasing, beautiful and loyal. One of the few species of animals that mate for life, if a dove loses its mate, it will spend the rest of its days mourning. So, too, the Holy Spirit is loyal and unwavering in His desire to come upon you and to empower you in order that you might walk in a way that is sweet in the sight of the Father and successful in ministry.

Simultaneous with the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove. I suggest to you that's the ideal. There should not be confusion about baptism in the Spirit. We should tell people, "Even as you come to the waters for baptism, expect by faith to receive the coming upon of the Holy Spirit at that time."

There has been unneeded division between pentecostal and dispensational theology over the issue of the baptism of the Spirit. By and large, pentecostal theology declares the baptism of the Spirit is subsequent to water baptism. On the other hand, dispensational theology generally teaches the baptism of the Spirit is inherent in water baptism. I believe that the baptism of the Spirit, ideally, is simultaneous with water baptism.

As seen in Jesus' baptism, when a believer comes out of the waters of baptism, that is the ideal time to expect the baptism of the Spirit as well. Now, it doesn't always happen that way because many people aren't aware of the possibility of being baptized in the Spirit at the time of water baptism. Consequently, it can be months, years, or even decades before they understand that the lifelessness and listlessness, the dullness and dryness of their spiritual lives is the result of an absence of the "coming upon" ministry of the Spirit.

If, like the Ephesian disciples, you have been baptized, but would have a hard time answering Paul's question as to whether you had received the Spirit, the way to do so is so simple. You see, the baptism of the Spirit is truly within your reach even now.

I am reminded of another baptism—that of a man named Noah. According to Peter, the drowning of the polluted and corrupted world of Noah's day was an illustration of what happens when we symbolically say goodbye to the corruption and pollution of our sin nature in the waters of baptism (1 Peter 3:20, 21). Following his "baptism" in the Flood, Noah released a dove, which circled the skies as it searched for a place upon which to set the sole of its foot. So, too, I believe the Spirit of the Lord is circling our world and our lives, saying, "Is there room for Me to come upon you?"

This is the point where many believers miss out. “I’m open,” they say. “If the Lord wants to empower me, baptize me, or come upon me in a fresh way through His Spirit, He knows where to find me.” Noah could have stood on the deck of the ark saying the same thing. “If the dove wants to land on me, he sees where I am.” But that’s not what Noah did. We read that Noah “put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark” (Genesis 8:9).

Ezekiel 22 teaches the same lesson. “I looked for a man to stand in the gap, but I couldn’t find one,” said the Lord (see 22:30). Saints, the economy of God is such that He partners with us. He doesn’t work apart from us. He waits for an intercessor. If there’s trouble in your family, if there’s sin in our country, the problem is not with God—it’s with us. Where are we? Why aren’t we partnering with God? He’s waiting to bless. He desires to move. He wants to touch your kids. He wants to save your parents. He wants to work in the situation you see as so tragic. But He’s waiting for you to partner with Him. Does He need to? No. But He’s chosen to.

It has been wisely said that without God, I can’t. But without me, He won’t. He’s waiting to partner with us. Why? Because He’s preparing us for the next billion, zillion, quadrillion years, when we will partner with Him for eternity. Therefore, you can either say, “I’m open,” and wait for something to happen for the next forty years, or, like Noah, you can say, “I see the dove circling above. Oh, Lord, I need Your empowering. With the hand of faith, I now receive the dynamic of Your Spirit upon my life.”

Precious people, the Spirit is even now within reach. Grasp Him by faith. Draw Him to you. And if you do, your walk will never be the same.

THE SWEETNESS OF SWEAT

A Topical Study of ACTS 19:10–12

Did you hear the news? A cosmetic company has collected the sweat of various movie stars, analyzed it, and reproduced the contents so it can be marketed throughout the country as "Scent From the Stars." Personally, I think the idea "stinks"—yet in our text, we see the people of Ephesus seemingly likewise interested in Paul's sweat as they collected his sweatbands and aprons. Were these people "spiritual groupies"—precursors of the modern-day "roadies" who follow rock stars around?

Greg Eckler, a drummer at Applegate Christian Fellowship, was at the Monterey Pop Festival when Hendrix smashed his guitar over a loud speaker, lit it on fire, and threw it into the audience. Greg, who happened to catch a piece of the guitar as it flew over his head, sold it for thousands of dollars at an auction in New York City.

Is that the type of thing that was happening here in Acts 19? No, the Ephesians were not spiritual groupies—nor were they spiritual quacks. You might hear TV evangelists or radio preachers, who on the basis of this passage, say, "Send us an offering today, and we'll send you a prayer cloth." While I believe some of these men are sincere, most are spiritual quacks who, on the Day of Judgment, will find themselves dead ducks.

If the Ephesians were not spiritual groupies, nor spiritual quacks, then what *was* happening? I believe there are three lessons to be learned from this brief passage that can have eternal impact upon you and me.

The Element of Mystery

There are many passages in the Bible I can't figure out—like the one in 2 Kings 13. Following the death of Elisha, some Moabites were marauding the country of Israel when an Israelite died suddenly. Wanting to dispose of the body of their comrade as quickly as possible, the Israelites threw his body into Elisha's tomb. But when the corpse touched Elisha's remains, the man sprang back to life (2 Kings 13:21).

Incredible! Amazing! The Lord is too big to be boxed in by the theology or intellectual capacity of finite man. Thus, there is an underlying element of mystery about Him and about His dealings that we cannot begin to grasp or comprehend until we see Him face-to-face.

The Illustration of Ministry

Although there is an element of mystery inherent in the passage before us, there is also an illustration of ministry that is important for us personally. You see, oftentimes, we know the Lord *can* work, but we have trouble believing He will. That is why we find our faith wavering. We don't question His ability, but we do wonder about His willingness to work in the situations that confront us personally.

Consequently, God has given us certain physical expressions to help trigger our faltering faith. This is what I believe the laying on of hands, for example, is all about. When we lay hands on people to pray for them to be filled with the Spirit, or to ordain them for ministry, there's nothing magical, mystical, or miraculous about the act in and of itself. Rather, the laying on of hands simply provides a point of contact for the person who needs to be filled or who desires to be used, as it triggers his faith and unlocks his ability to believe.

That's what happened with the woman who was hemorrhaging. For twelve years to no avail, she sought a doctor who could help—but only lost all of her money in the process. When she heard Jesus was coming to her region, she said to herself, "If I could just touch the hem of His garment, I know I would be healed." So when Jesus came through the city, although a great crowd of people lined the street, this woman fought her way through the crowd and touched Him. Jesus stopped instantly. Now, although there was nothing magical about the hem of His garment, it provided a point of contact for the woman. And as the faith bottled up within her was released, she received healing that very day (Luke 8:43–48).

The anointing of oil, spoken of in James 5, is another example of something material being used spiritually. As with the laying on of hands, there is nothing supernatural or particularly special about oil. But as a picture of the Spirit, it is a physical illustration the Lord has graciously given to us as a point of contact to release faith. There are those who are so skeptical, so uptight, and so rigid that they say, "No one's going to lay hands on me. No one's going to put oil on my forehead. No one's going to dunk me in water." But others, who understand that faith can be triggered and released through physical points of contact, are blessed and healed as a result of these external expressions.

The Alleviation of Misery

All around us we see people who are miserable—depressed, discouraged and defeated; hurting, helpless, and hopeless—like the people in Ephesus who were diseased in body and demonized in spirit.

I believe the reason sweatbands and aprons are particularly mentioned by the Spirit and recorded for us to study is that they were proofs of Paul's love for the people to whom he ministered. You see, six days a week, Paul sewed tents from seven to eleven o'clock in the morning, taught the Word from eleven to four o'clock in the afternoon and sewed tents again from four to nine o'clock in the evening. It was an exhausting schedule, yet Paul did this for over two years in Ephesus in order to support himself in ministry. Thus, his aprons and sweatbands were saturated not only with the sweat of his brow, but with his love for the people.

So, too, the people in our homes, in our church families, and in our communities who are distressed, discouraged, and defeated are greatly helped and their misery alleviated to a tremendous degree whenever we are willing to love them practically. For Paul, that meant sewing tents and teaching in the afternoon. For you, it might mean making a pie, making a phone call, or mowing a lawn; taking someone out to lunch, fixing a washing machine, or chopping a cord of wood. In the past week, what have you done to help someone else? What have you done to practically say, "You're loved" to someone who's discouraged, defeated, or depressed?

Do you know people who are miserable and lost because there are no sweatbands for them to see—no aprons for them to touch? Miracles will happen, and misery will be alleviated if you will practically love someone through the sweat of your brow. You can be used just as Paul was if you're willing to take your eyes off yourself and your problems, your struggles, and your needs, and instead say, "Who can I love today?"

"How can I love someone else?" you ask. "No one has ever loved me."

Really?

Go to the Garden of Gethsemane, and there you will see One who loved you so intensely that Luke tells us He actually sweat blood (Luke 22:44). Why did He sweat blood? Because He was about to absorb your weaknesses, your failings, your shortcomings. He was about to pay the price for every sin I have

done, am doing, or ever will do. It is, therefore, nothing less than audacity, nothing short of insanity, for us to say, "Nobody cares about me."

Go to the Garden of Gethsemane and see His sweat of blood. Go to Calvary and see His sweatband of thorns. In Genesis 3, because Adam sinned, God said, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee," (Genesis 3:17, 18). In the Person of Jesus Christ, this prophecy is seen in an entirely different dimension. You see, as the thorns and thistles—the very curse of the earth—were embedded in His brow for me, He carried upon Himself the curse of Genesis 3. Thus, because of the sweat and the thorns upon His brow, the way is opened for me to live eternally in the new heaven and the new earth, where there will be no more sweat, no more pain, no more thorns.

Know today, precious people, that there is One who sweat blood for you. Once you truly see how much He loves you, you'll find yourself reaching out to touch the crown of thorns that circled His head. And once you touch it, once you grasp it, once you understand it, His love will trigger in you such faith that demons of depression and discouragement, defeat and despair will flee. Like the Ephesians, you will be healed. And then you will say, "Who can I love practically? What can I do to encourage someone else so that my apron or sweatband might become a point of contact for his or her faith to be released?"

Saints, I pray that, because you've been touched by the blood-stained sweat of Jesus, you'll find you have no other choice than to touch someone else for His sake.

20

The apostle Paul is on his third missionary journey and headed toward Jerusalem, where it is his desire and intention to celebrate Passover.

Acts 20:1

And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia.

Realizing it was time to get moving, Paul embraced his Ephesian brothers and headed north to Macedonia in northern Greece, where he would gather

money from the Macedonian believers to share with the famine-stricken church in Jerusalem.

Acts 20:2, 3 (a)

And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece, and there abode three months.

During these three months in Corinth, Paul penned the Epistle to the Romans. Corinth was a very sinful city, and Paul found himself inspired by the Spirit to talk about the depraved, sinful nature inherent in man.

Acts 20:3 (b)

And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia.

As he was ready to board the ship to cross the Mediterranean Sea, Paul caught wind of the plot of certain unbelieving Jews who intended to toss him into the ocean once his ship set sail. Consequently, he returned to Macedonia, to eventually go south to Jerusalem.

Acts 20:4, 5

And there accompanied him into Asia Sopa-ter of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. These going before tarried for us at Troas.

As Paul returned to Macedonia, he gathered an entourage to accompany him. Very likely, each one of these men was carrying money raised from his own fellowship. Thus, for the purpose of safety as well as of accountability and unanimity, they made the journey together.

Acts 20:6

And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.

As the entourage headed for Jerusalem, they sailed from Philippi to Troas in five days. This intrigues me, because in Acts 16:11 we read they made the same journey going the other direction in only one day. So, too, sometimes, in our journeying, we experience seasons of smooth sailing. Other times, it's tough going. Some of you may be in rough waters right now. Take heart: It doesn't mean you're out of the Lord's will. Be like Paul, and keep sailing.

Acts 20:7 (a)

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow . . .

The early church met many times during the week, but the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, seemed to be a special time of Communion and fellowship. I point this out because there are those who say we shouldn't worship on "Sunday" because we're worshiping the sun.

I respond, "Well, if you worship on "Saturday," you're worshiping Saturn."

Others say, "Sunday was not when the early church met because it was not until Constantine came into power in A.D. 313 that the Lord's Day was paganized."

"Wrong," I protest. "Tertullian, the early church father who preceded Constantine argued that Sunday, the first day of the week, was the only day in which Christians should celebrate Communion."

Such arguments aside, I believe Paul gave the best answer when he said we are not to be those who judge the personal convictions of others, since each of us will give an account to our Master individually (Romans 14:4, 5).

Acts 20:7 (b)–12

. . . and continued his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. When he

therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.

The story of Eutychus, whose name means "fortunate," is one that contains practical application for each of us who desires a keen spirit and focused attention.



***For topical study of Acts 20:7–12 entitled "The Danger of Drowsiness," turn to page* 785.**

Acts 20:13

And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot.

Paul let the team sail while he made the twenty-five-mile journey on foot. Headed toward Jerusalem where he knew he would encounter great difficulty, Paul had many things to think through, sort out, and pray about. Perhaps that's why he said, "Boys, you sail. I'm walking. Pick me up on the other side."

I can't tell you how wonderful it is, and how important for me it has become, to walk. Oftentimes, when I kneel and pray, I find myself "resting in the Lord" a little too literally. Jesus told us to watch and pray (Mark 13:33)—and I find praying while walking brings that about in a very practical way.

Acts 20:14–16

And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus. For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.

Although Paul had planned to be in Jerusalem for Passover, when it didn't work out that way, rather than getting upset or uptight, he simply said, "I'll try

to make it for Pentecost." Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not break! That was Paul's mentality. You don't sense a tension in his personality. Rather, he seemed to be wonderfully flexible as he trusted the Lord to work all things out perfectly.

Acts 20:17

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.

In His grace, the Lord has allowed me to be involved in ministering to pastors. Many are the times I've heard people say, "Jon, can I go with you to a pastors' conference? I'd love to hear from the various brothers who will be teaching and speaking." To them I say, "Here's your chance!" I want to invite you all to what I think is the richest pastors' conference ever convened—when here on the island of Miletus, Paul called for the pastors and elders from Ephesus. Knowing he was headed for imprisonment, and, ultimately, eternity, Paul called the elders together to give them final instruction and exhortation about ministry and service. Thus, besides the teachings of our Lord Jesus in the Upper Room the night before His crucifixion, this is perhaps the richest text dealing with ministry in the entire New Testament.

When you're reading through the New Testament, keep in mind that "elder," "pastor," and "bishop" are all interchangeable terms describing the same position. The Greek word translated "elder" doesn't speak of chronological years, but of spiritual maturity. Thus, "elder" describes the man. The Greek word translated "bishop" means "overseer." Thus "bishop" describes the ministry. The Greek word translated "pastor" means "feeder" or "shepherd." Thus, "pastor" describes the method. Although certain denominations teach that elders are subordinate to pastors, who are subordinate to bishops, in New Testament terminology, there's no hint of such a hierarchy.

Acts 20:18 (a)

And when they were come to him . . .

It has been rightly said that one of the greatest abilities in the kingdom of God is availability. The elders had jobs. They had family obligations. They had responsibilities. But when Paul called, they came. And by making the journey

from Ephesus to Miletus, these elders demonstrated that the kingdom of God had priority in their lives.

Deuteronomy 20 gives a powerful illustration of the importance and necessity of being available if you're going to be used in service to any degree. In this chapter concerning warfare, the priest was instructed to say to the people of Israel, "When you see the enemy more numerous than you—with horses and chariots and armor—be not afraid because the Lord is with you and He will bring you victory." Right after that word was spoken, however, the captains were instructed to go to the same group of people and say, "Whoever among you has a new house and has not yet dedicated it, a vineyard and has not yet eaten of it, a new wife, or fear in your heart—go home lest you die in battle."

In other words, if you say, "What if I get wounded and can't hold a hammer or power saw any longer? How will I finish my house?" or, "I'd like to teach Sunday school or go overseas, but I'm climbing the corporate ladder and my job won't allow for it," or, "I'd like to serve more, but my wife really needs me, and she doesn't like me to be away at night or on Saturdays," or simply, "I'm afraid," you won't make it on the front line. These areas of concern referred to in Deuteronomy 20 are actually concentric circles. For most of us, our material possessions don't have priority. Our jobs? That's a little closer to home. Our wives? That's getting real close. Our own hearts? Bull's-eye.

If you want to be used in ministry, these four areas must be committed to the Lord. When you can say, "My material possessions, my vocation, my family, and even my own fears and insecurities do not have priority and will not dominate me," you will see the Lord minister through you powerfully. Please understand, this is not a word of condemnation—it's a word of honest evaluation. Many men and women have entered positions of ministry only to find once they're in, they're not ready for them.

The key to ministry is availability. The elders came. It wasn't easy. There was no workmens' comp, no paid vacations. To come when Paul called required sacrifice, and it was difficult indeed. But when Paul said, "Brothers, we need to get together. We need to be instructed, exhorted, and encouraged"—they showed up.

Acts 20:18 (b)

. . . he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you . . .

Paul said, “From the day I arrived in your city, you knew what kind of man I was.”

In talking to a couple moving to a different part of the country, I said, “You’re going fifteen hundred miles away from here. No one will know you. You don’t have to live down, worry about, or explain any mistakes and misunderstandings of the past. So from day one, identify yourself as a radical Jesus person. If you carry your Bible to your new job or school the first day, people are not going to say to you, “Hey, want to party?” because they’ll know from the very beginning that you’re a follower of the Lord.

Parents, help your kids: When they graduate from elementary school and go to junior high, say, “You have a new start. Be radical for the Lord.” And when they get through junior high, say, “You’re going off to high school. Here’s another chance for a first impression. Be extreme for Jesus.” At each stage of life, encourage your kids or your grandkids to go for it from the first day. I don’t know where we get this idea that we should “fit in” and “relate,” because if people don’t know where we stand, there will be temptations coming our direction that wouldn’t have been there had we taken a stand the first day.

Acts 20:18 (c)
. . . at all seasons.

In ministry and in service, you will inevitably go through various seasons. There is the excitement of spring when you get new understandings from the Word and fresh insights into the Lord. Things blossom and bud; new growth abounds. Spring leads to the fruitfulness of summer, when you start to see ministry opportunities open. The Lord uses your life and you say, “Wow! Fruit!” Then comes fall when the Lord says, “There are some dead leaves that need to be knocked off.” The winds blow, trials come, and you wonder what’s going on. Fall is followed by winter—long periods where you feel nothing and hear very little.

Early in my walk, not understanding the necessity of seasons, I used to get discouraged when winter came. Oh, my, *I thought,* I must be backsliding. I must be doing something terrible because I don’t feel the

Lord's presence. *In reality, however, it was in the wintertime that the Lord was giving me the opportunity to walk by faith and not by feeling. What are we to do during the winter times in our lives? Worship. Praise. Sing. Why? Because in the wintertime, we have unique opportunities to worship the Lord without immediately receiving more than we give.*

As I sat in the sanctuary at Applegate Christian Fellowship in early morning worship, I saw a brother in the winter season of his life come toward the Communion table and go to his knees in prayer while lifting his hands in praise. A few hours earlier this man's wife had been taken home to heaven, yet he didn't call for counseling. He didn't ask for pity. He came to worship.

How contemporary Christianity needs this kind of maturity.

Acts 20:19 (a)
Serving the Lord . . .

How was Paul able to continue in ministry even when people threw rocks at him? By serving the Lord rather than serving people. If you're in ministry to serve people, you might last for a year, or ten, or fifteen—but you'll burn out eventually because oftentimes, like Paul, all you'll receive from those you serve will be stones and beatings. If, however, you are in ministry not to serve people or to satisfy some innate need within you, but to serve the Lord because of what He did for you—you will endure through good times and bad times, through the spring, summer, fall, and winter seasons of your life.

Acts 20:19 (b)
. . . with all humility of mind . . .

Paul's gifts were great. His abilities were mind-boggling. Intellectually, theologically, oratorically, the guy was incredible. Yet he said, "I served you with humility of mind," because he knew each of his abilities was a gift from God. Humility of mind means truly esteeming others better than oneself (Philippians 2:3). Humility of mind means not finding fault with a brother or sister, but finding fruit—approving those things that are excellent within them.

Humility of mind means realizing it's the grace of God, not our own merit, that allows us to know Him and walk with Him.

I recall driving Highway 42 from San Bernardino, California, to Twin Peaks Conference Center, where I was to address a group of spiri tual leaders. As I wound my way up the road, I found myself praying, "Lord, I want to be like You when I talk to my brothers at the conference."

I thought it was a pretty good prayer—until the Lord spoke to my heart so clearly that I literally had to pull off the road.

"You want to be like Me?" He asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"Why do you want to be like Me, Jon?"

"Well, Lord, because You're so awesome."

"Did you ask to be like Me when you were with your kids two mornings ago?"

"No."

"But you're asking to be like Me now—when you're about to talk to a group of pastors?"

I was busted. I had prayed that prayer hundreds, if not thousands, of times before. It was a noble request. But my motivation was amiss. I didn't necessarily want to be like Him so I could serve my kids humbly. No, I wanted to be like Him so I could minister powerfully.

Be like Paul. Serve the Lord with humility of mind, and watch out for those times when you think you are being spiritual lest an entirely different form of pride surfaces.

Acts 20:19 (c)

. . . and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews.

Those who were out to get Paul were on a righteous crusade, sure that they were keeping Judaism free from heresy. Paul himself was absolutely convinced he was doing the right thing when he went from house to house dragging Christians out to have them imprisoned and executed (Acts 9:2). This sobers

me greatly and causes me to say, "Lord, before I crusade against this person, or come down on that person, am I, like Paul, thinking I am sincerely right, but in reality imprisoning people and hurting them unjustly? Will I see the light a year or five from now and realize what I did was unfair, unnecessary, or unkind?"

Acts 20:20 (a)
And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly . . .

"I gave you everything I had," Paul declared. "I shared with you everything I knew; I held back nothing that would be profitable for you."

Acts 20:20 (b)
. . . and from house to house.

Milk trucks used to come through neighborhoods and deliver milk house to house. Paul was like that. He delivered the milk of the Word one house at a time to the newborn believers. Jesus did the same thing. He talked to Nicodemus on the rooftop (John 3), to a woman at a well (John 4), to a demoniac in a cemetery (Mark 5), and to a woman in the middle of a crowd (Luke 8). I appreciate Jesus so much for His individual nurturing.

Acts 20:21
Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

What was Paul's message? "Turn toward God and have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." The city of Ephesus was filled with idolatry and brimming with immorality. The culture was decayed. The problems were great. Yet Paul didn't preach against sin—he preached repentance toward God. So often, we try to get people to turn from sin. But that was not the methodology of Paul nor of Jesus, for they knew that when people turn toward the Lord and see His goodness, they will automatically turn from sin.

When Billy Graham was in Portland, Oregon, for a Crusade, reporters tried to get him to comment on Proposition 9, the Oregon anti-homosexual bill. I think Billy hit a home run when he responded, "I

didn't come to Oregon to talk about politics. I came to talk about Jesus Christ."

Never forget, precious people and fellow servants, it is the *goodness* of God that leads men to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Acts 20:22–24 (a)

And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself . . .

In every city Paul visited, the Holy Spirit warned him he would face tremendous difficulty in Jerusalem. Paul responded by saying, "I don't care." Why could Paul say this? Because he didn't count his life dear.

"Deny yourself," Jesus said, "and take up the Cross" (see Matthew 16:24). And what Jesus taught, Paul caught.

Such is the great need of the baby-boomers, self-centered generation that we are, miserable lot that we have become. In the fifties, one of the most popular magazines was *LIFE.* In the sixties, it was *PEOPLE.* In the seventies, it was *US.* In the eighties, it was *SELF.* If you want to make millions in the new millennium, publish a magazine called *ME.* Shame on our generation! We're so caught up in ourselves. Paul genuinely didn't care about himself in light of the gospel. That is why the danger awaiting him had no hold over him.

Acts 20:24 (b)

. . . so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

The word "joy" means "exceedingly happy." The way to happiness is to testify of the grace of God. Many people grew up in an atmosphere or in a church that said, "It's your responsibility to pray, to study, to serve." And they became burdened by a weight of responsibilities they could never fulfill. Then,

at some point in their walk, they understood that, on the basis of the finished work of Jesus Christ, they didn't *have* to study, pray, or worship.

"You mean, Lord, my sin is forgiven?" they said. "I'm robed in Your righteousness? I don't have to work to try to attain Your favor or merit Your blessing?"

"Yes," answered God. "It's all grace."

"You mean You love me as much when I'm not doing so well as when I'm studying Leviticus and Deuteronomy?"

"Yes."

"Wouldn't You love me more if I was studying Leviticus and Deuteronomy?"

"No, I can't love you any more than I love you right now."

And what does that do? "Wow," we say, "I wonder what Leviticus says. Where is Deuteronomy, anyway?" We find ourselves *wanting* to study. We find ourselves *enjoying* worship. We find ourselves freely talking to the Lord. Our Christian walk changes from responsibility to response—and that's when it becomes a whole lot of fun.

If you want an explosion of joy in your heart tomorrow, go to the person you work with and say, "Every sin you committed last weekend is forgiven. Every sin you're thinking about today is paid for. You're free because when Jesus died on the Cross, He died for every sin every man has ever done. There's only one unpardonable sin, and that is refusing to receive His forgiveness."

I guarantee if you're grumpy, critical, or weary in your walk, it's because you have not been "testifying the gospel of the grace of God." A funny thing happens to a person who's sharing his faith: He becomes a channel through which the joy and power of the Lord flow. For just as electricity will not enter an object unless there's an outflow from that object, the power of the Lord will not enter a church or an individual in whom there is no conduit for evangelism. When people say, "The electricity is gone from our church corporately or from my life personally," invariably it's because there's no outflow.

Paul was one who was charged-up and red-hot because he was one who continually testified of the gospel. He never stopped sharing his faith in Christ Jesus—with Jews and Gentiles, "publicly and from house to house."

Acts 20:25

And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.

"Boys," said Paul, "this is it. I know this is the last time we will share together on this earth. You won't see my face anymore." And indeed, they wouldn't.

Acts 20:26, 27

Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

"I'm free from the blood of all men," said Paul. This refers to Ezekiel 3:18, wherein the Lord said, "Ezekiel, I've given you the message to tell My people to believe in Me and walk with Me. If you don't tell them, Ezekiel, their blood will be upon you." Paul echoed this principle when he said, "I have not shunned any part of the counsel of God. I have delivered His entire message to you."

The temptation for teachers, parents, and Christian workers is to share only certain topics or subjects. I understand that. Certainly, there are parts of the Bible I would rather not teach and issues with which I would rather not deal. But we need to have the full counsel of God. That is why I believe it is necessary for Christians to know the Bible from cover to cover, and for churches to go through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation—not skipping over any part, but dealing with every book, studying every chapter.

I don't want to leave anything out. Like Paul, I want to be able to say, "To the best of my ability, by Your grace, Lord, I've declared Your full counsel—even those things I would rather not have preached or talked about. If it was in Your Word, Lord—we dealt with it." Because the Bible is written in such a way that it contains the perfect proportion of encouragement and exhortation, I encourage you to get involved in a church or a Bible study that studies the entire Word systematically. I'm convinced the way to spiritual maturity and health is to study the Bible book by book, chapter by chapter.

Acts 20:28 (a)

Take heed therefore unto yourselves . . .

Notice the order. Take heed to yourself first. Make sure you're cultivating a personal devotional life—that you're a man or a woman of prayer. Make sure you're one who is engaged in consistent communion with the Lord personally. Take heed to yourself.

Here is a great danger: When you get involved in Christian service, you can find yourself serving the Lord and doing the work of the Lord at the expense of your own personal walk with the Lord. True ministry is the overflow of what is taking place in your life personally, secretly, intimately. So take heed to yourself. Make sure you are personally cultivating a walk with the Lord.

> *Abraham was a lover of God. On his way to the Promised Land, wherever he went, he built an altar. As he traveled, because the Lord prospered him more and more, his flocks began to increase. So he dug wells to ensure that his flocks were sufficiently watered. When Abraham's son, Isaac, came on the scene, seeing his father's expansive flocks, he decided the key to his father's success was digging wells. So Isaac dug many wells—but he built only one altar. Consequently, his wells were named Sitnah and Esek, or "Strife" and "Contention." When Isaac's son, Jacob—the third generation from Abraham—appeared, he built no altars and dug no wells. Instead, he said, "The key to seeing the flock grow is ingenuity, creativity, and genetic engineering" (see Genesis 30).*

That's what often happens. A man or woman loves God, and from that love, there's an overflow whereby the flock grows. Then the second generation says, "I, too, want to be in ministry and see a flock grow"—so they copy the outward activity of the generation before them—but it only produces tension, strife, and agony. Why? Because they're not altar-builders. Finally, the third generation comes along and says, "Programs—that's the key. We'll have excellent entertainment. We'll have relevant, current messages that, although they aren't necessarily biblical, speak to the needs of the people." And it's exciting for a while, but it's not sustaining. They have to try harder and harder in their Jacob mentality to keep everything going with creativity and ingenuity.

Folks, true ministry starts with an altar-building man or woman loving God and enjoying the Lord. All too often, however, the lover of God is followed by a well-digger—one who wants to see the flock watered, but who has lost the understanding of the altar and a personal, private passion for the Lord. The

third generation, the program people, the Jacobs, then come on the scene and say, "We're going to really wow the world with our creativity."

I see this happening not only in churches, but in my own life as well. Quite frankly, I can go through all three generations in one day. I can begin the day as an altar-builder, a lover of God. Then, sometime around noon, I can become a well-digger, saying, "Lord, I don't have time to talk to You. I've got to water these sheep." As a result, in the evening, I find myself thinking, *Oh no. My ministry's slipping. I better do something creative and ingenious.*

> *What happened to Jacob? Finally, this clever heel-snatcher came to the end of his rope when he heard his estranged brother, Esau, was coming with four hundred men to meet him. After Jacob crossed a little creek called Jabok, he wrestled the angel of the Lord and said, "I'm not going to let You go until You bless me" (see Genesis 32:26). Talk about close contact and a restoration of intimacy! Jacob was no longer striping stakes. He was wrestling with God all night long.*
>
> *In the morning, the Lord said, "Jacob you have prevailed. No longer will you be called Jacob, or, 'Clever One.' You'll now be called Israel, which means 'Governed by God,' because at last you understand it's staying close to* Me; *it's wrestling with* Me; *it's depending on* Me *that matters."*

I've seen churches finally get to the place of being exhausted from "Jacob-ing" it. They get back to the altar, back to saying, "Lord, we just want to know You." Churches like that are used by the Lord time after time because they touch people from the overflow of an "altar-ed" life.

Acts 20:28 (b)
. . . and to all the flock . . .

Take heed to yourself first and then to the flock because if you're in right relationship with the Lord, blessings will flow through you to the flock of your family, to the Sunday-school kids you teach, to the people to whom you witness.

Toward the end of his life, David was surrounded by a group of men who are recorded as being men who killed giants (2 Samuel 21:15–22). Saul, on the other hand, who had been afraid of Goliath, was surrounded by men who never

engaged in battle against a giant. Therein lies an extremely important principle as it relates to ministry: If I want those around me to be giant-killers, I must kill giants myself. I often tell pastors that if they're not worshiping or witnessing, chances are, their congregations won't worship or witness, because, as seen in the lives of David and Saul, what we are is what those around us will become. I cannot stress too heavily the importance of a secret, personal devotional life. "Take heed to yourself and to the flock," wrote Paul—not because the priority is to be on self, but because a preparation of self will allow you to see those around you kill giants.

Acts 20:28 (c)
. . . over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers . . .

People often ask, "How does one become an elder?" In the Scriptures, it is very clear that elders were never elected. In America we're into democracy, but since (and this may be news for some) God is not an American, the church is not a democracy. Nor is the church a dictatorship. It's an oligarchy—a small group of men ruling together, who oversee—not overbear, or overlord—but *oversee* the work.

How, then, does one become part of this oligarchy? I see in New Testament teaching four ways in which a man is appointed to eldership:

First, a man points to himself. As Paul wrote to Timothy, "If any man desires the office of a bishop, he desires a good work" (see 1 Timothy 3:1).

Second, the Holy Ghost points to him. I believe the Holy Spirit points to a man through the fruit of the Spirit, which is love (Galatians 5:22). To be effective in ministry, a man must be a lover of God and a lover of people. I talked to a pastor a number of years ago who, with great anguish, told me, "I love the ministry. I just don't like people."

"The fact is, you're not called to ministry if you love ministry but not people," I replied. "What was Moses doing when he was called to pastor his congregation of three million? He was on the backside of the desert watching his father-in-law's sheep (Exodus 3:1). Where was David when Samuel was looking for the next king of Israel? He was watching his father's flock (1 Samuel 16: 11). You'll always find a true shepherd amongst the sheep."

Third, the sheep point to him. Jesus said the sheep recognize the voice of their shepherd (John 10:27). A man will know he's being raised up by the Lord

for the office of elder when his peers respond to and receive from him.

Finally, the present leadership points to him. Paul told Timothy and Titus to ordain elders in every city (Titus 1:5).

When these four areas point to any one person—when he wants to serve in ministry; when the Spirit points to him with the overflow of love; when the sheep receive from him; when the present leadership recognizes God's anointing upon him—you can be sure he is being raised up to serve in the office of elder.

Acts 20:28 (d)
. . . to feed the church of God . . .

The only way the flock will grow, the only way the church will expand, is if we, as sheep, are being fed consistently and faithfully—for when sheep are fed properly, they will reproduce very naturally. Thus, the great need today is for people to be fed. In many places, believers gather together, but are never really taught the Word. Consequently, the flock is anemic and not reproducing numerically. The pastors or boards of such churches will often implement programs or techniques to bring about growth—door-to-door evangelism, contests, and all sorts of tricky activities to try to motivate people to share their faith. But they don't work. So then the pastor does something oh, so dumb: Instead of feeding the flock, he begins to beat the flock, saying, "Why aren't you evangelizing more? Why aren't you working harder? Why aren't you engaged in this ministry, or joining that committee, or involved in the other activity?"

After shepherding sheep on the backside of the desert, the Lord called Moses to shepherd three million people through the wilderness. On their way to the Promised Land, Moses' authority was questioned repeatedly. In Numbers 16, we read that Dathan, Abiram, and Korah brought two hundred fifty leaders of the nation of Israel to Moses, saying, "Who gave you your authority? Who do you think you are?" In response to their question, the Lord instructed Aaron to have one leader from each tribe place a rod in the tabernacle along with his. They did so, and the next morning, the rods looked just as they had left them—all except for Aaron's, which had blossomed.

From whence comes authority in ministry or in your family? From the blossom of fruitfulness. What is fruit? Galatians 5:22 defines it as love—love that is joy, love that is peace, love that is longsuffering, love that is gentle, good, faithful, meek, and temperate. If we truly love people, we will have authority to give direction to them because they will see the fruitfulness of the Lord's love blossoming in us.

> *The story of Moses continues. The years passed and the people began complaining once again saying, "We're out of water, Moses. You've brought us out here to die." In response to their complaint, the Lord instructed Moses to speak to the rock from which water would flow (see Numbers 20:8). Instead of speaking to the rock, however, Moses struck it with the rod, while saying to the people, "You rebels. Must we fetch water for you?" What happened to the rod as he smote the rock? No doubt, the blossoms fell off. Most likely, the fragrance was diminished. Surely, the fruitfulness was lost.*

Whenever I beat one of God's people verbally or in my heart, I'm smiting Christ, the Rock of my salvation, and destroying the fruit of His Spirit in the process. Therefore it is not my job to beat the flock—to analyze, scrutinize, or criticize. It is my job to feed the flock—to encourage, nourish, and love. Certainly feeding includes warning and exhorting. But it does not include beating, bruising, or wounding. "Feed the flock," said Paul. He didn't say, "Beat the flock," because there has already been One who was bloodied, bruised, and beaten on our behalf. They beat His face. They beat a crown of thorns into His scalp. They beat Him with rods. They beat Him with fists. They beat Him with words. Therefore, because He was beaten in our place, I must not beat myself or beat others.

Acts 20:28 (e)
. . . which he hath purchased with his own blood.

Use this verse with your Jehovah's Witness friends who doubt the divinity of Jesus Christ. It is irrefutable that if God purchased the church with His own blood, then Jesus—the One who gave His blood—must be God.

For topical study of Acts 20:28 entitled "Shed Blood . . . Shared Blood," turn to page **789.**

Acts 20:29

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

"After I leave," said Paul, "wolves will move in." You can always recognize wolves because, rather than feed the flock, they'll fleece the flock. A wolf in sheep's clothing looks like a sheep, smells like a sheep, and may even bleat like a sheep. The only difference between a sheep and a wolf in sheep's clothing is their diet. Wolves eat sheep. And you can always identify a wolf because inevitably there will be sheep carcasses in his wake.

Acts 20:30

Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

While David was in the palace conducting the affairs of state, his son, Absalom, sat outside the gate saying to passersby, "David doesn't have time for you, does he? If I were on the throne, it would be different. Your needs would be met. Your voice would be heard." Ultimately, Absalom launched a full-scale rebellion against his father and drove him from the palace (see 2 Samuel 14—15).

"Not only will wolves from the outside sneak in," warned Paul, "but perverse men will stir things up from within."

Acts 20:31

Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

Paul not only fed the flock—he warned them night and day. So, too, in our own families or ministries: If we feed but don't warn, we're just fattening up the flock for the kill.

Years ago, an eight-and-a-half-foot Burmese python escaped in Medford, Oregon. When hungry, he was capable of eating small animals or even babies. Now, suppose I said, "Folks, there's an eight-and-a-half-foot python slithering around and I know where he is. But I don't want to offend or frighten anyone unnecessarily, so I won't be too specific in telling you his location." You'd think I was crazy! Why, then, is the tendency in ministry to say, "There are some general things we should watch out for, but I don't want to name names or be too specific lest people say I'm not very loving"?

Folks, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, Paul named those who were poisoning the people of God (1 Timothy 1:20). So, too, although we must not be judgmental for condemnation, we must be analytical for the purpose of protection and correction in order that those new in the faith won't get swallowed by the Enemy.

Acts 20:32 (a)
And now, brethren, I commend you to God . . .

Knowing he would never again see these men this side of heaven, Paul said, "I commend you to God." The same is true of our kids and the people we serve. We feed, warn, and love them. But ultimately, we must say, "God, they're Yours."

Acts 20:32 (b)
. . . and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up . . .

Grace is what will build you up. So often in ministry or service, parenting or discipling, we tend to emphasize what man should do rather than what God has done. In Ephesians 4—6, Paul stressed the behavior of the believer—but not until after he had spent chapters 1—3 telling us we're blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, that we're in Christ, that we have been adopted and sanctified. Paul spoke of what God had done before he spoke of what man should do.

I can say to my kids or to the people to whom I'm ministering, "Read your Bible. Worship. Pray. And they'll do it out of obligation for a day or two. But

once they begin to understand that they are loved unconditionally, that they are in Christ, that their sin, past, present, and future, is washed away—they will worship and pray, witness and serve not because they *have* to but because they *get* to.

Acts 20:32 (c)

. . . and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

The inheritance waiting for you is incredibly wonderful. Don't allow anything to obscure that fact. Paul said to these men whom he knew would go through difficulties, troubles, and challenges, "Remember the inheritance that is yours. Keep focused. Keep centered on the eternal."

Acts 20:33

I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.

At one point, Paul did covet (Romans 7:7). At this point, however, he says, "I have coveted after no man's gold, silver, or apparel." It has been rightly said that the happiest person is not the one who has the most, but the one who needs the least.

> The young bride flashed her diamond ring at the party. It was the biggest rock anyone in attendance had seen. "Wow," they said. "Where did you get that diamond?"
>
> "This is the famous Rabinowitz diamond, the second largest diamond in the world," she said. "But it comes with a curse."
>
> "A curse?" asked her friends.
>
> "Yes," she answered. "It comes with Mr. Rabinowitz."

Aren't we discovering that things that are flashy and shiny come with a curse? Once you get them, you've got to maintain them, worry about them, and keep track of them. Paul was free from the curse that accompanies material possessions because they were no longer important to him.

Acts 20:34

Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.

Paul didn't want gifts for himself. He wanted fruit for the believers. You see, whenever you give to a ministry—whether in service, finances, or prayer—whatever the Lord does through that ministry goes to your account eternally. That's why giving is such a good deal!

Acts 20:35

I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

I have heard preachers use this text to say, "Since it is more blessed to give than to receive, give to my ministry and you'll be blessed." But, folks, keep the context of this verse in mind. Paul was giving *of* himself, not asking *for* himself. To the rich young ruler, Jesus said, "You're in bondage to material things. Go sell all your goods and give to the poor." He didn't say, "Give to Me." He said, "Give to the poor" (see Matthew 19:21).

Does that mean you should give your tithe to the poor? No, because the tithe is not yours to give—it's God's. When people say, "I'm not going to bring my tithe to church. I have a Jesus Fund and I'll just give wherever I want," I say, "Hold on. The tithe isn't something for you to figure out what to do with or how to spend—it's God's. Now, if you want to give to the poor above and beyond your tithe, terrific! You'll be blessed indeed. Just make sure it's your money, however—not God's."

Studies have shown that if Christians would tithe, within two years, every church facility in the world would be paid for, every ministry would be functional and out of debt, every Christian University, Bible school, and training center would be funded, and every hungry person would be fed. People wonder why ministries struggle or why people starve—but if Christians would be obedient to God's principle of the tithe, incredible power would be released through the church. In verse 33, Paul said, "I have not coveted." In verse 35, he said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." I believe the proximity of these two

statements is more than coincidental because the divine prescription for the disease of coveting is giving.

Look at Abraham. After he rescued Lot and Lot's servants, the king of Sodom offered him anything he wanted. Abraham looked him in the eye and said, "I won't take even a shoelace from you" (Genesis 14:23). Why was Abraham not enticed by the offer of the king of Sodom? Because he had met the King of Salem. You see, before the king of Sodom came to Abraham, another King appeared to him—Melchizedek, the King of Salem, whose name means "King of Righteousness." Melchizedek was a Christophany—an Old Testament appearance of Jesus Christ. And Abraham fell before Him and paid tithes to Him (Genesis 14:20).

The principle is practical and powerful. That is, because Abraham paid his tithes to the Lord, he could look the world in the eye and say, "I'm not interested in what you have to offer." How do you defeat greediness in your own life? Give to the Lord, and, like Abraham and Paul, you will covet no more.

Acts 20:36–38

And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.

Paul finished his message, and with tears and prayer, he went on his way.

THE DANGER OF DROWSINESS

A Topical Study of ACTS 20:7–12

After reading this text, I wonder if it would be wise to print this label on the bottom of our bulletin: "Warning! The Supreme Surgeon General has declared sleeping in church to be hazardous to your health." I think our brother, Eutychus, would wholeheartedly agree!

I really feel for Eutychus. His story in the original Greek indicates that, although he fought sleep, sleep won—which is understandable, considering that Sunday being a workday like any other, Eutychus had very likely put in a full day of work before coming to church.

> A precious brother who works unbelievably long hours once told me that, because he came during his breaks or at the end of a shift, sometimes, like Eutychus, he found himself nodding off during Bible study at Applegate Christian Fellowship.
>
> "What you do is amazing," I said. "Not many men would make the effort you do. Therefore, know that even though sometimes you might doze a bit, the Lord sees your heart. Remember Samuel? He fell asleep in the temple and the Lord spoke to him three times—even as he slept!" (see 1 Samuel 3).

And I believe the Lord can speak to each of us as well—whether we're wide-awake, or dozing off—through the story of Eutychus. Following are three lessons we can learn from him, as his situation relates to the very real danger of our own spiritual drowsiness.

The Reason for Drowsiness

> *And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together.*
>
> Acts 20:7, 8

The reason there were many lights in the room where Paul was preaching was because of the rumors circulating throughout the community concerning the early church. Christians were accused of sexual promiscuity because they always talked about agape love. They were accused of cannibalism because they talked about eating the body of Jesus and drinking His blood in Communion. Consequently, when the early church met together, they lit their meeting halls very brightly in order that anyone walking by could clearly see what was going on.

Inherent within people is the tendency to think the worst. . . .

> The hostess of a party called the liquor store. "My name is Susie Smith," she said. "Please send me a case of vodka as soon as possible."
>
> Unbeknownst to her, however, she had mistakenly dialed not the liquor store, but her minister.
>
> "This is Reverend Jones," said the voice on the other end.
>
> "Reverend Jones!" she said incredulously. "What are *you* doing at the liquor store?"

So often we impose whatever sin or temptation we struggle with upon others. To the pure, all things are pure, but to the depraved, suspicion and rumors abound (Titus 1:15). So the Christians lit lamps. And because Eutychus was in this room with warm lights and a bunch of bodies—this room wherein the oxygen supply decreased as the temperature rose—it is no wonder his eyelids began to feel heavy.

So, too, if the only time we're letting our light shine, if the only time we're singing forth praise or speaking out testimony, is in a place where there's lots of light and a whole bunch of Christians, we will become spiritually drowsy. If

church is the only place you vocally express your belief in Jesus Christ, the only place wherein you seriously think about the Word, you will begin to doze in your pew. On the other hand, if you really believe you will be called upon to practice what you hear preached, you will remain wide-eyed and on the edge of your seat.

If you knew today you would be expected tomorrow to share this passage with some guys at work, your family, some kids on your campus, or some cultists at your door—you would have pencil and paper in hand, an alert mind, and an eager heart. You would say, "If I'm going to give this out, I better get it down."

But so often, we say instead, "Ho, hum. There are lots of Christians here. I'll just sit on this ledge here in the back row . . . ZZZ." It's no wonder we feel lethargic at that point, because spiritual drowsiness is exactly proportionate to our failure to give out what we take in.

In Israel, there are two major bodies of water, both fed by the Jordan River: the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. While the Sea of Galilee teems with life, not even single-celled beings can survive in the Dead Sea. Why? Because, although the Jordan River flows into both, it only flows out of the Sea of Galilee. Thus, the Dead Sea is devoid of life because there's input but no outflow.

You and I will either be like the Sea of Galilee, giving out the Word, and teeming with life as a result—or we will be like the Dead Sea, taking in but, because we don't give out, dozing in the back row.

The Result of Drowsiness

> *And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.*
>
> Acts 20:9

Now, while it is possible that a drowsy Eutychus may have moved to the back row and sat near the window in order to stay awake, over the years, I've seen many people who, although at one time, were in the front row and excited about Bible study, start moving toward the back and gradually lose all interest in the things of the Lord.

Believers are like automobiles, folks. When we start to miss, we eventually stop running altogether. When people start pulling away from Bible study, from prayer, from Communion, from corporate expression, they weaken their walk without exception.

"Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together," said the writer to the Hebrews (see Hebrews 10:25). Those who do so are in danger of experiencing what happened to Eutychus: moving toward the back, then falling out altogether.

The Recovery from Drowsiness

> *And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.*
>
> Acts 20:10–12

Perhaps you are working with someone like Eutychus who is spiritually drowsy, or even dead. It might be your husband or your brother, your high-school son or your next-door neighbor. This person, who was once on fire, is now like Eutychus. He moved to the back, fell off the ledge, and now he's dead.

How are you to minister to him? Our text gives the answer. We read that Paul didn't *come* down on Eutychus, but *went* down to Eutychus. I believe the account in 2 Kings chapter 4 sheds light on the reason Paul did this. . . .

Because Elisha the prophet had been lovingly tended by a Shunammite woman who had prepared a room in her house for him to stay whenever he passed through the area, Elisha promised her that, although she was barren and her husband was old, she would bear a son. Sure enough, she conceived and gave birth to a son. A few years later, while working with his dad in the field, the child fell down, crying, "My head, my head." The father ordered servants to take the boy to his mother, but, although she put his head on her lap and comforted him, he died. The Shunammite woman then took her son's body into a room to prepare him not for burial, but for a miracle. "Saddle up the donkey," she ordered her servants. "We're going to get Elisha." Finding the prophet at Mount Carmel, she grabbed him by the feet and said, "You deceived me, Elisha. You allowed this son to come into our family, and now he's dead."

Elisha responded by ordering his servant, Gehazi, to take his staff and lay it upon the boy. But that wasn't enough for the wise and wonderful Shunammite woman. "I'm not going back, Elisha," she said, "until you come with me." So while Gehazi took the staff and went quickly, Elisha and the Shunammite woman followed a little more slowly. When Gehazi reached the woman's home, he laid the staff on the boy, but nothing happened. When Elisha arrived,

however, he himself lay on the boy—mouth to mouth, eye to eye, hand to hand. And as he did so, Elisha felt warmth in the boy's body.

Mom, Dad, fellow brother, minister, sister—when someone has fallen off the third story because of his own spiritual lethargy or apathy, the tendency is for you and me to say, "Let's call the church and get the staff on the job," or, "Let's send the rod of rigidity. Let's preach at him." But, as Gehazi found, neither will bring life.

The key is for us to be like Elisha—to go hand to hand, mouth to mouth, eye to eye—to do what Paul did: to embrace the person and say, "I love you unconditionally. I care about you. I'm here for you. I will stand by you."

It's *love,* gang, not delegation or doctrine, that will bring about resurrection. We need to go hand to hand, mouth to mouth, eye to eye with folks who have fallen. And what will happen? Like Elisha, we'll feel some warmth, sense a stirring, hear some sneezing (a clearing of the system), see an opening of the eye—and finally they will sit up.

You might be saying, "That *sounds* great, but you don't understand my situation. No one has ever even sent his staff to me, much less pressed in to me personally. How can I do for someone else that which has never been done for me?"

"Oh, but there *is* One," I answer, "who came and pressed in to you in a way we cannot even begin to understand. God Himself came down not on you, but came down to you in the Person of Jesus Christ. His hands were pressed to the Cross for you and me. His mouth cried, "Father forgive them." His blood, sweat, and tear-filled eyes said, "I love you." Therefore, it is *His* love that motivates us to love others (2 Corinthians 5:14). In *His* love may you find the Eutychuses—those who were once doing well, but who moved to the back and fell off the ledge—and come down not *on* them, but *to* them.

May God grant us the grace to be ministers of resurrection. May He give us opportunity to touch lives this week. May He use us greatly.

SHED BLOOD . . . SHARED BLOOD

A Topical Study of ACTS 20:28

We who teach the Bible are often accused of preaching a bloody religion. To such a charge, I proudly plead guilty. Hebrews 4:12 declares that the Word of God is living. Therefore, we should not be surprised that blood pulsates through its pages and courses through its chapters. Truly, there is a scarlet thread connecting every verse, every chapter, every book in the Bible. That thread is the blood of the Lamb. Five times more often than he talked about the death of Christ, Paul talked about the blood of Christ. Three times more often than he spoke of the Cross of Christ, he spoke of the blood of Christ.

There are those who say the emphasis Paul placed on the blood is a throwback to ancient mythology or to present-day superstition. They cite Homer, the Greek poet, who wrote of ghosts drinking the blood of men in order to regain their lives. They point to the practice that took place in the days of the Roman gladiators wherein those who were diseased—particularly with epilepsy—would be brought down to the floor of the Coliseum to lap up the blood that was shed because it was believed to have healing powers. They refer to the tribes in Africa who established peace treaties through the drinking of the blood of cows or goats.

Those who criticize you and me as Bible-believers say, "The emphasis on the blood is nothing more than a throwback to mythology or superstition. It has no more validity than the antiquated belief that the fourth finger of the left hand is the apex of the circulatory system—which is why we wear our wedding ring on that finger to this day."

"No way," I reply. "The emphasis on the blood is not a remnant of ancient mythology. It is relevant in light of modern biology." Four thousand years ago, God said that the life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11). And what Moses declared under inspiration four millennia ago, science confirms today, for truly the life is in the blood. If you're an average person, five quarts of blood are presently coursing through your body. For what reason? There are three reasons

—all of which apply to you not only physiologically, but also spiritually and eternally.

Your blood provides nourishment to sustain you.

The five quarts of blood within you nourish every one of the one hundred trillion cells in your body. How? In every microliter of blood, there are five million red blood cells that function as tiny supply rafts. They load up oxygen, potassium, calcium, and amino acids before beginning a journey in which they travel sixty thousand miles of veins, arteries, and capillaries every twenty-three seconds.

Your blood produces cleansing that invigorates you.

Not only do the red blood cells deliver nourishment, but they also pick up waste material. As they give out the goodies, they also pick up the garbage—never confusing the two. Surely the psalmist was right when he said we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14).

What would happen if the red blood cells shut down—if there was a garbage strike in your body? To find out, put a tourniquet around your arm, and watch what happens when the toxins begin to build up: First, your arm will get a tingly feeling. Then it will turn blue. Remove the tourniquet. Blood will rush in; the toxins will be carried out. And you will have use of your arm again—all because of the cleansing power of your blood.

Your blood prevents infection from destroying you.

In every micro-liter of blood not only are there five million red blood cells —there are also three hundred thousand platelets. What do the platelets do? When your body gets cut, the platelets rush into the injured area and melt into a weblike substance called fibrinogen. When the red blood cells come cruising by, they crash into the fibrinogen, causing a traffic jam, which we call coagulation. The amazing thing is that the platelets must act with perfect precision because if too many gathered together and caused too major a traffic jam, your arteries would become completely clogged, and you would die immediately.

Not only are there three hundred thousand platelets in every micro-liter of blood, but there are seven thousand white blood cells. What do the white blood

cells do? The white blood cells make up an army numbering twenty-five billion —with twenty-five billion reserves—which gathers around any virus, germ, or invader that threatens you. White blood cells actually die in battle—which is what constitutes pus. The white blood cell cannot do battle, however, against a virus or germ until the spikes, the strange protrusions that are on every virus, are first covered and softened.

What does this? Antibodies. Before the white cells begin their attack, an antibody specifically designed to fit the spikes of the invading virus covers the virus and blunts its spikes, thereby allowing the white blood cells to do their work. Consequently, you are vulnerable to whatever disease for which you don't have antibodies—which is the problem with the AIDS virus. The AIDS virus actually mutates—changes its spikes—making it very difficult if not impossible for scientists to come up with an antibody. As you study history, you realize that the greatest devastation to mankind has come not through famine or even war—but through disease. Because it takes the human body at least eight hours to diagnose infection and manufacture antibodies, before the discovery of vaccines, a single disease had the potential to destroy entire civilizations.

> Edward Jenner and Louis Pasteur did work of great significance when they injected the antibody-laden pus of an infected person—or, in the case of smallpox, a cow—into a person who was not yet infected. In 1802, smallpox threatened to virtually wipe out the entire population of Columbia. With Jenner's work fairly accepted throughout Europe, it was decided that smallpox vaccine should be sent from Spain to Columbia. However, there was a problem: Because the vaccine lasted only a few days, it would die during the journey across the Atlantic. The solution? The Spaniards chose twenty boys who would sail to Columbia and who would be infected one at a time with smallpox, thereby keeping the vaccine alive with their own bodies. The plan worked. The ship carrying the boys arrived in Columbia just as the twentieth boy was showing symptoms of the dreaded disease. King Carlos called the boys "Overcomers" because they were the means by which the entire civilization of Columbia was spared the deadly scourge of smallpox.

"That's great," you say. "But what does any of this have to do with me?" If you're a believer, it has everything to do with you. God told us that the life is in the blood. Following are three things His blood will do in your life.

His blood provides nourishment to sustain you.

Jesus said, "He who does not eat My flesh and drink My blood has no part with me, no life from Me" (see John 6:53). It is no wonder that Scripture goes on to say that, because of this, many were offended in Him and followed Him no more (John 6:66). After all, although the Jews were accustomed to eating the meat of the sacrifices they brought to the temple, they were forbidden to eat the blood (Leviticus 17: 10). Thus, it must have been highly offensive to hear this Rabbi from Galilee say, "Drink My blood."

Yet, although it remains offensive to many people today, partaking of His blood in Communion is powerful and essential. For even as the blood in my body consistently circulates to nourish each part of my body, so, too, at His table, the blood that He shed for me can be shared by me to provide nourishment to me. You see, whenever I want, I can say, "I need to be nourished by You right now, Lord. I'm tired. I'm weary. I'm weak. Infuse Your life in me through Your blood." And in so doing, I am, in a sense, born again—again.

Cut yourself off from the life flow of His blood, and you will become weak and sick and dead spiritually just as surely as you would if you were to cut off your blood supply physiologically. I'm not talking about death as it relates to your eternal state. I'm talking about the death of your present joy. On the other hand, when you eat of His body and drink of His blood, when you say, "Lord, infuse me again with Your life," you will be nourished greatly and revived continually.

His blood produces cleansing that invigorates you.

I'm so thankful for the cleansing work of His blood because it only takes about twenty-three seconds for me to get full of sin and carnality. Even as my blood continually cleanses me physically, so, too, the blood of Jesus cleanses me spiritually.

The error that many people have concerning Communion is thinking they need to repent and to be cleansed before they can partake. Not true. Repentance is not doing something so you can come to the Lord. Repentance is coming to

the Lord just as you are! The table is available to anyone who has been polluted, wiped-out, infected by sin and carnality. That's why it's more than a table of commemoration—it's a table of celebration, where we can say, "Oh, Lord, thank You that You invited me to come and dine. Thank You that I can come right now just as I am to not only be sustained in my spiritual life, but also to receive cleansing through Your blood."

His blood prevents infections from destroying you.

In life there are temptations that number in the millions. These temptations bombard us constantly, just as germs and viruses do physiologically. How are we protected from so vast a number of temptations? How are we to overcome the attacks planned in hell that threaten to destroy us? Through the spiritual antibodies contained in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 12:11).

There is only One Man who has been tempted in every point of sin possible and was an overcomer: Jesus Christ. That's what is so great about His blood. He was tempted in every single sin—not just pride or lying or gossip—but the grossest kind of sin you can imagine, the kind of sin that turns your stomach, the kind of sin you could never even fathom. He was tempted in every possible sin known to humanity or to the demons in hell—and He overcame (Hebrews 4:15). Therefore, His blood is overcoming blood.

The smallpox-infected boys who sailed from Spain to Columbia produced antibodies that sustained an entire culture. So, too, the blood of Jesus Christ is laden with antibodies capable of overcoming every infection Satan throws my way and every sin to which I am so vulnerable—past, present, and future.

Now, when those early scientists and physicians began to understand that truly life was in the blood, they decided to infuse healthy blood into people who were sick and weak and dying. Sometimes, as a result of such a transfusion, their patients would spring back to life. Other times, however, their patients would die. This puzzled physicians for many years—until the discovery of blood types.

It is now known that we can only take blood from those whose blood type is the same as ours. Otherwise, the nourishing, cleansing, and protection hoped for in a blood transfusion would instead be detrimental and deadly. The Bible says that we are all of one blood (Acts 17:26). It's true. We all have one blood: polluted blood, Adam's blood. When he fell in the Garden of Eden, we all fell with him (1 Corinthians 15:22). And the fallout from Adam's bomb infects our

blood to this day. So what must happen? Pure, healthy, untainted blood must be transfused into us. Who can give us untainted, uninfected, pure blood that will match our individual blood types? One who has blood untainted by Adam.

Although a fetus gets its nutrients from, and grows in the placenta of its mother, it never takes a single drop of the mother's blood because at the moment of conception it begins the process of producing its own blood supply, which is genetically influenced by the blood of the father. Therefore, only One born of a virgin would have blood untainted by humanity. There is only One Man who has been born of a virgin: Jesus Christ. And His Blood can be transfused into you today.

Four-year-old Billy was informed that his three-year-old sister had a very serious disease that required a draining of her infected blood and a transfusion of healthy blood. "Billy, would you be willing to share your blood with your little sister?" asked the doctor.

Billy looked at the doctor. His chin began to quiver. A tear rolled down his chubby little cheek, and he said, "Okay, Doctor." The nurse came in, stuck a needle in Billy's arm, and began to draw blood from him. After a few minutes, she removed the needle from his vein and said, "Okay, Billy. You're all done," to which Billy replied, "Well, when do I die?"

You see, Billy thought when the doctor asked him to give his blood, it meant he would give his life for his little sister.

Seeker, skeptic, non-believer—there is One who did, indeed, give His life by giving His blood. Jesus Christ so loved you that He poured out His blood in order that it might be transfused into you. He drained Himself that He might give you life. You who have never believed, you who have never opened up your heart to Him—you are dying. The toxins of your past and the sin of your present struggle are making you sicker and weaker by the day. Jesus said, "Unless you drink of My blood, open your heart and receive My life, you'll die in your sin." God loved you so much, precious friend, that He became a Man in Christ Jesus, born of a virgin, so that His blood—pure and untainted—could cleanse, nourish, and strengthen you today.

And you who know the Lord—what if we were really convinced His blood would provide nutrition that would sustain us eternally? What if we knew beyond any doubt that the blood of Jesus Christ would produce in us cleansing

that would invigorate us completely? What if we truly believed that by taking in His blood, we would be protected from infections that would otherwise destroy us spiritually?

I hope you will place a high priority on the Lord's table, for in so doing, you will begin to experience the wonder-working power of His blood in your life. May you be renewed by and committed to His shed blood, His shared blood in a fresh way today.



21 From the earliest days of his conversion, Paul had a deep desire to minister effectively to his own people—the Jews. In Romans 9, he declared he was willing to be accursed, or damned, if it would mean their salvation. In Romans 10, he said it was his heart's prayer and desire that Israel might be saved. Yet although he desperately wanted to minister to his countrymen, it was made very clear to him from the outset of his salvation that his ministry was to be primarily to Gentiles, secondarily to kings, and lastly to the children of Israel (Acts 9:15). His was to be a ministry to Gentiles—yet Paul struggled with this.

Following his conversion, Paul spent three years being discipled by the Lord in the Arabian Desert. When he returned to Damascus, he headed straight for the synagogue, thinking that the Jews there would surely receive his ministry once he explained to them how their Old Testament Scriptures pointed to Jesus prophetically. Far from receiving Paul, however, the Jews wanted to kill him. So the brothers put him in a basket and lowered him over the wall to safety (Acts 9:25).

Where did Paul go next? To Jerusalem—the capital of Judaism. When he got there, I'm sure he was still thinking, *Come on, guys. You've got to admit what I'm saying has validity. I'm one of you. I was a Pharisee of Pharisees, schooled at the feet of Gamaliel.* But they, too, were out to kill him. So off he went to Tarsus, where he hung out for about thirteen years. Finally, Paul got to the place where he was at peace with the calling the Lord had given him—ministering to the Gentiles.

Here in chapter 21, after Paul had been working effectively for years in the Gentile countries of Asia Minor and Macedonia, the desire to minister to his people surfaced in his heart once again. It was a passion he just couldn't seem

to get out of his system. So here he is, headed once more toward Jerusalem—this time knowing that bonds and afflictions await him there.

Acts 21:1–3 (a)

And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria . . .

Paul is sailing south from Asia Minor toward the coast of Israel to eventually dock at the seacoast city of Caesarea.

Acts 21:3 (b)

. . . and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden.

When Paul arrived in Tyre, the boat stopped for seven days to load and unload cargo. You see, Paul was traveling on a cargo carrier, not a cruise ship. In Tyre on this seven-day break, it certainly would seem justifiable for Paul to have said, "I deserve a break. I'm going to retire and be tired here in Tyre." But, as we'll see, that's not what he said.

Acts 21:4 (a)

And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days . . .

The Greek word translated "finding" is a powerful one that means Paul was "diligently searching out, and looking for" disciples. During this unexpected break, others might have said, "What a great opportunity for a vacation."

Not Paul.

He said, "I want to be with the brothers. I desire fellowship."

There's a misconception among believers that, when they're out of town on vacation or business, it's a good time to take a break from church. But then they wonder why they end up fighting on their vacation, why they're angry with their family, why things don't work out right. When you are traveling or vacationing,

find a fellowship to attend. God will honor you, and you'll be amazed to find special brothers and sisters wherever you go.

Acts 21:4 (b)
. . . who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.

The brothers whom Paul sought out said, "Don't go to Jerusalem, Paul." So what did Paul do? He went to Jerusalem.

Acts 21:5 (a)
And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way . . .

This group of believers, like another group we'll see further on in the chapter, traveled with and stood by Paul—even though they didn't agree with the direction in which he was going. Why? Because they loved and respected him in the Lord. So, too, it would be radical if we would put away the need to be heard and simply say, "Here's my opinion. Here's my perspective. But I respect you in the Lord, regardless of your decision."

Acts 21:5 (b)
. . . with wives and children, till we were out of the city . . .

The disciples took their families with them on this journey to be with Paul, to listen to Paul, and to pray for Paul. Sometimes I hear people say, "We don't go to church on Wednesday night because it's family night"; or "We don't make it to church Sunday evening because it's family time"—as if coming to church as a family, hearing the Word of God, driving home discussing what was said, and praying together doesn't qualify as "family time." I strongly believe it's a fallacy in this age of emphasis upon the family to say that "family time" and church attendance are mutually exclusive. As one who grew up in the church and in a strong family, I believe there's nothing you can do that will be more beneficial to your family than to come to church.

Acts 21:5 (c)

. . . and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.

What a witness it must have been to the fishermen and surfers there at Tyre to see the believers bowing in prayer together on the sand. One of the things I so enjoy about the amphitheatre at Applegate Christian Fellowship is the opportunity to witness to the unbelievers in the service through baptism. Even more so, at baptisms in the Applegate River on a summer Sunday afternoon, the people out there chugging beer and throwing frisbees are certainly stimulated by the witness. So, too, it's a witness whenever you pray before your meal at Denny's® or McDonald's®. Don't be ashamed. Like the believers in the early church, you can witness even through prayer.

Acts 21:6

And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again.

As they went home, do you think any of these men, women, or children said, "Boy, walking all this way to pray for Paul was really a waste of time. We should have had family hour back home"? I don't think so. I don't think one person regretted the energy expended or the time it took to pray for Paul and to be a witness on the beach at Tyre.

Acts 21:7–8

And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day. And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.

I would love to have been a mouse in the house of Philip. You see, twenty years earlier, Philip's colleague, Stephen—another one of the original seven deacons—was martyred, his death unleashing great persecution in the church. Who was the one behind the stoning of Stephen? Who was the one who voted for it in the Sanhedrin? Who was the one who held the coats of those who threw the rocks? Paul. Paul was the one who, in a very real sense, brought about the death of Stephen. Paul was the one who caused the persecution of the church,

which drove Philip to Caesarea. And Paul was the one who was knocking on Philip's door. Thus, I wonder what Paul and Philip said when they first encountered each other face-to-face. I imagine they embraced each other, realizing that which was behind them was buried beneath the blood of Calvary.

Acts 21:9

And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.

Philip was a dedicated worker in the church (Acts 6), a dynamic preacher in the world (Acts 8), and now a devoted father in the home.



***For topical study of Acts 21:8–9 entitled "A Focused Family," turn to page* 799.**

Acts 21:10

And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus.

Prominent in the early church, Agabus was the one who correctly prophesied there would be a famine in Jerusalem (Acts 11:28).

Acts 21:11

And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

Rough and rugged individuals, prophets like Agabus tended to do amazing things that jarred people into attentiveness. Ezekiel lay on his side for days in order to deliver a message to God's people (Ezekiel 4:4–9). Many days after the Lord told Jeremiah to put his underwear under a rock on the Euphrates River, He told him to dig it up, put it on, and walk through the city, saying, "You people are like this underwear" (see Jeremiah 13:1–11). And here, Agabus used Paul's belt to deliver an illustrated sermon.

Acts 21:12, 13

And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

"I know there's trouble awaiting me in Jerusalem," said Paul, "but I'm going anyway. And if I die there, so be it."



***For topical study of Acts 21:11–13 entitled "Burning Out or Burning Bright?" turn to page* 804.**

Acts 21:14, 15

And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done. And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem.

"We've shared our hearts," said the brothers. "And now the will of the Lord be done," they said as they ceased arguing and started traveling.



***For topical study of Acts 21:14–15 entitled "Go with the Flow," turn to page* 809.**

Acts 21:16

There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.

We know nothing of Mnason's history. Perhaps his name, which means "solicitor" or "pleader," reflects the kind of man he was—one given to hospitality.

Acts 21:17

And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem with the offering he had gathered on this, his third missionary journey, the brothers received him gladly. Rather than thank Paul for the gift, however, they started telling Paul he needed to do more.

Acts 21:18–23 (a)

And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee.

Although the Christians in Jerusalem were believers in Jesus, they still adhered to the rituals and ceremonies of Judaism. Thus, the leaders of the church said to Paul, "Because the Christians in this community have heard you tell people they don't have to circumcise their children, observe the rituals, or attend the festivals, they will be offended when they see you. To show them you can be trusted, here's what you need to do. . . ."

Acts 21:23 (b)

We have four men which have a vow on them.

Four men had taken a Nazarite vow. That is, they had let their hair grow long; they drank no wine; they ate no grapes or raisins; they didn't touch anything dead; and they devoted themselves for a period of time to singular dedication to God. At the end of their vow, they would go into the temple, spend seven days worshiping God, cut off their hair, burn it, and give offerings

and sacrifices to God. It was all part of the prescribed process of purification following a time of separation (Numbers 6).

Acts 21:24, 25

Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.

Because those who took a Nazarite vow had to take time off work to carry out the procedures at the conclusion and because the sacrifices required were costly, it was customary for wealthy men to sponsor them. And because Paul had in his possession the offering for the church in Jerusalem, the brothers in Jerusalem asked him to foot the bill for the four men. "We're not putting this trip on Gentiles, Paul. But supporting these men in their vow would be a wonderful way for you to relate to the Jewish believers here in Jerusalem who still subscribe to the rituals of Judaism."

Acts 21:26 (a)

Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification . . .

Paul, wanting so desperately to be effective in Jerusalem, perhaps said, "If this is a way to make them listen, I'll do it. I'll cut my hair. I'll purify myself. I'll go through the sacrificial rituals even though I know they've already been fulfilled in Christ." Exhibiting a great deal of grace and flexibility, Paul would later write, "To the Jew I became a Jew that I might win some" (see 1 Corinthians 9:20); and, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18). So here, even though he was not a believer in rituals and regulations, Paul said, "Okay, if that's what you guys want, I'll do it."

Acts 21:26 (b)

. . . until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

I'm sure Paul did not offer a sin offering, for he would later point out very clearly that Jesus Christ is the ultimate offering for sin. But he did probably offer one of the other offerings that spoke not of atonement but of fellowship. While I commend Paul's flexibility, I am grieved by the church's frailty. The Jerusalem church was not as powerful as the church in other regions during this period because they were still caught up in traditionalism and compromise.

The Book of Hebrews, probably written by Paul, was written to the Hebrews to tell the Hebrews to quit being Hebrews. "Give it up," the Book of Hebrews says, "you can't go back to the old sacrificial system and traditionalism because all of those things are only pictures pointing to Jesus Christ. Why are you still caught up in the pictures when the Reality is here, the Fulfillment has come, the Work is complete?"

When my daughter Jessie and I were at Van Wey's Market years ago, a little girl was out in front of the store giving away puppies. I had no desire or intention of getting a puppy, but Jessie made an airtight case about how all of her life all we've ever had have been "used" dogs, stray dogs, or old dogs. "Dad," she said, "do you really think I should go through all of my growing-up years never having had a puppy? Here I am, a freshman in high school, and this could have a deep psychological effect on my life." So we got a puppy and named him Zeke. Now, Jessie, who was active in school and church groups was gone most of the time. One afternoon, however, she happened to be home when there was a knock on the door by Ed, the man who was pouring cement in our driveway. Zeke had gotten loose yet again, and Ed was returning him to us. But Jessie couldn't be bothered to answer the door. Why? She was watching a video on "How To Train Your Dog." You see, Jessie had no time to get her dog or be with her dog because she was too busy watching a video about her dog!

Such was the problem with the Hebrews. Jesus was among them. Jesus had died for them. But they weren't focusing on Him because they were still caught up in the rituals pointing to Him. They were watching the video, but missing the Reality.

Acts 21:27–29

And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen be fore with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

Although anyone could go into the outer courtyard of the temple, beyond that, there was a sign reading: "Any Gentile entering in will be put to death." It was absolutely forbidden for Gentiles to go past the outer court. Paul had come into the city with some Gentile believers, and the Jews erroneously assumed they were the men who were in the temple with him.

Acts 21:30 (a)

And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple . . .

Wherever Paul went, one of two things happened: either a revival or a riot. This time it was a riot.

Acts 21:30 (b)

. . . and forthwith the doors were shut.

Oh, Paul, the doors were shut long ago—you just didn't see it, dear brother. I am sorry to say there have been times more than once when, like Paul, I have been determined to enter closed doors. You know what happened? I got a smashed nose and a headache from running into them.

"Oh, I just want to do this so badly. I'm called to it. I feel good about it. It's on my heart," we say. But is the Lord opening the door? Are we flowing—or are we striving? Perhaps this incident was the reason Paul would later write to Timothy, "The servant of the Lord must not strive" (2 Timothy 2:24).

Acts 21:31, 32 (a)

And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them . . .

On the northwest corner of the temple mount sat the Fortress Antonia from which Roman soldiers could look down upon the temple to make sure nothing was out of order. When they saw the entire city running toward the temple, they headed there as well.

Acts 21:32 (b)

. . . and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.

Here's the question: Where were the Jerusalem believers? Paul had come bringing an offering for them. He had shown flexibility in doing what they asked of him, even though it wasn't his conviction—and now he was getting beat up as a result. Where was the church when Paul was in trouble? Nowhere to be found.

That's what happens whenever legalism and compromise begin to set into a church or an individual. Energy and commitment are replaced by traditionalism and ritualism. And the church becomes the "frozen chosen." How I pray we will continually be adjusted as a church and as individuals. "Lord, don't let us care more about external regulations and forms than we do about love, commitment, and standing by one another when someone's getting beaten up." It's a tragic commentary that in Jerusalem, it was the Romans rather than the Christians who rescued Paul.

Acts 21:33, 34

Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle.

Paul was carried into the Fortress Antonia.

Acts 21:35, 36

And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.

About whom else did the crowd say, "Away with Him"? About another Radical who said, "It's not outward religion that matters—it's inward righteousness"; about One who reduced everything to great simplicity when He said, "Love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself" (see Matthew 22:37–39).

"Away with Him," they said concerning Jesus. And, "Away with him," they're saying concerning Paul, champion of His grace.

Acts 21:37, 38

And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?

In the year A.D. 54, an Egyptian, whose name meant "dagger-bearer," led men to the wilderness to launch a revolt against Rome. Here in Acts, the captain, thinking Paul was this same Egyptian terrorist, was taken aback when Paul started speaking Greek. "You speak Greek?" he said. "I thought you were an Egyptian."

Acts 21:39

But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.

Paul was a gutsy guy. Here, the Jews were out to kill him—yet he still wanted to speak to them.

Acts 21:40

And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying . . .

Paul must have thought, *This is my opportunity! Virtually the entire city is here. This is the moment I've been waiting for twenty years!* I'm convinced Paul was sure there would be a great revival among his brothers. Suffice it to say, however, his sermon was not the best-received sermon ever preached, as we'll see in chapter 22.

A FOCUSED FAMILY

A Topical Study of ACTS 21:8, 9

In election seasons, we hear a lot about family values. But I would like us to look instead at a valued family, for in the family of Philip, we see a family that was focused, a family that was valuable for the kingdom, a family that provides a wonderful example for you and me.

At this time, Philip was living in the seacoast city of Caesarea—an incredibly beautiful spot on the Mediterranean coast of northern Israel. Philip's wife is not mentioned in this passage perhaps because she was quietly behind the scenes. It is also very possible that at this point she had died. Others suggest that Philip was deserted by his wife—something that happened not infrequently in the days of the early church, when rabbis encouraged the spouses of those converted to Jesus Christ to divorce their mates.

Heading south from Turkey on their way to Jerusalem, Paul and his entourage stopped at Caesarea to hang out with Philip and his family. This doesn't surprise me, for, according to our text, Philip's was a house of hospitality and spirituality. Even though there were four daughters and perhaps cramped quarters, Paul and his company enjoyed being there. It was a good place to be—not the circus many families can tend to be.

P. T. Barnum, the man who said there's a sucker born every minute, promoted one of his circus acts as a unique family situation: a lion, a tiger, a bear, and a lamb all living together under one roof. Taking Barnum aside, a reporter said, "Mr. Barnum, seriously, how long has this family been together?

"Eight months," answered Barnum.

"You mean they've all been in that cage for eight months?" pressed the reporter.

"Well, the lion, tiger, and bear—yes. We do change the lamb regularly," the showman said.

So, too, many homes are places where people get chewed up and torn apart —but not Philip's. His was a family that Paul and his company sought out and

stayed with many days.

The Hospitality of Philip's Family

Romans 12 teaches that one of the components in the life of the believer is hospitality. We are to be men and women of hospitality—not out of obligation, but out of opportunity. Why? Because the writer to the Hebrews would later tell us to let brotherly love continue and be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware (Hebrews 13:2).

Open your home. Open your heart. Be hospitable. Why? Not only because the Word demands it, but because there's a blessing in it: You will entertain angels unaware. What does that mean? Ask Abraham. In Genesis 18, we see him sitting in front of his tent. Seeing three men in the distance walking toward him, Abraham went out to greet them, saying, "Let me fix a meal for you and give refreshment to you," little realizing that the group of strangers was actually two angels and Jesus Himself in a Christophany—an appearance of Christ before He came to earth as the Babe of Bethlehem.

Jesus would later say, "When you take care of someone who's naked and poor, someone who's hurting and troubled, someone who's in jail, someone who's not doing well—when you do that to the least of My brethren, you're doing it to Me. When you reach out in hospitality and open your heart and your home to people who are hurting, you're doing it to Me." (see Matthew 25:40).

The word "angel," or *aggelos* in Greek, means "messenger." You'll be surprised, amazed, and blown away by the messages the Lord will give you when you open the doors of your home and heart, and show hospitality to people. Conversely, when folks say, "I'm not hearing anything from the Lord," sometimes I wonder when the last time was they opened their home to a stranger.

The word "hospitality" has embedded within its meaning the word we use for hospital—that is, a place to bind up, patch up, lift up folks who are hurting, bruised, or wounded. Hospitality includes not only the people we might like to be around, or the people we enjoy being with—but also those who are "strangers" to us.

You might be saying, "I don't have a home of my own. I'm a teenager," or "I'm homeless." Check out what Peter said in 1 Peter 4:9, when he exhorted believers who had been scattered throughout all of the world—homeless quite literally because of persecution—to show hospitality. You see, you don't need a house to show hospitality. You can show hospitality at school by sitting with the

person who sits alone in the cafeteria, by reaching out to the person who's hurting at work, by spending a moment or two with the person who's discouraged in the supermarket. And if you do, because you'll be entertaining angels unaware, you'll be surprised at how the Lord will bless you, the things He'll show you, the honors He'll give you—just as He did to Abraham.

The Spirituality in Philip's Family

Notice first the purity of Philip's daughters. Dominated by Gentiles, Caesarea was a wicked, hedonistic beach town. Yet Philip's daughters were singled out as being pure—as being virgins. How vital it is in these days that we stress within our families the importance and the blessing of purity.

Our kids are being taught that freedom of choice is the key as it relates to the abortion dilemma. I, too, believe in the freedom of choice: the choice whether or not to come together sexually outside of marriage. Once that choice is made, there are no other choices—not logically, not ethically, not biblically.

> The final score of a women's basketball game was 175–42. In a post-game interview, the losing coach said, "The entire game hinged on one call."
>
> "Incredible," said the sportswriter. "What call was it?"
>
> "The call I made a few months ago to schedule this game," answered the weary coach.

So, too, regarding the issue of abortion, the entire game hinges on one call: the call to enter into a sexual relationship in the first place. Philip was a man who, living in a very sinful city, raised his daughters in such a way that they were pure. He must have taught them, as Proverbs 6:32 declares, that he who commits sexual immorality destroys his own soul.

Sex within marriage can be illustrated by taking a glass of red-colored water and mixing it with a glass of blue-colored water. The result? A glass of purple-colored water. That's what sex is: two individual souls being unified into one. On the other hand, sex outside of marriage can be illustrated by taking a glass of red-colored water, a glass of blue-colored water, and slowly emptying each one down the drain.

Referring to sex, the world says, "I got a piece of her," or "I got a piece of him." That's exactly true. Outside of marriage, a piece of one's soul is removed with each intimate encounter. It's like an onion—if you keep peeling off layers, pretty soon there's nothing left. And there are kids and adults who, not understanding the nature of sexuality, are being peeled away layer by layer until there's nothing left.

Mom and Dad, I'm convinced that in the days in which we live, we must make sure our kids thoroughly and completely understand that the issue is not contraception, safe sex, or abortion. The issue is that of the soul being eroded and destroyed.

Kids often say, "If sex is so dangerous, why didn't the Lord just give us a switch that couldn't be turned on until we're married? Why do we have to wrestle with this issue from the time we're teenagers all the way until we get married?" In Revelation 14, we read of 144,000 who do not take the mark of the Beast during the Tribulation period. Instead, they take a stand for the Lord, walk with the Lord, and are used by the Lord. Revelation 14:4 says, "These are they which are not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."

Teenager, single brother, single sister—you might be saying, "Yeah, if I was part of the 144,000, I'd make a stand, too."

Well, here's your chance! Every one of you who is single has the unique opportunity to follow the Lamb in the tribulation you're in right now—with society flashing messages of compromise to you and with kids who are flaunting the fact they're no longer virgins all around you. You can say, "I will follow the Lamb. Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, I will not bow to the passions that burn within me. I will stand tough. I will stand strong."

Then, your single state becomes not a curse, but rather an opportunity for you to demonstrate your love for, and your commitment to, the Lord. Follow the Lamb, and I guarantee you will not say, "I wish I would have messed around. I wish I had picked up some sexually transmitted disease. I wish I had had an abortion or two. I wish I would have given myself to this guy and lost part of my soul to that one." I have yet to talk to one person who has said, "I really regret being a virgin when I got married." But I have talked to hundreds of couples who have said, "I regret compromising my virginity—because even in my marriage, I'm suffering the effects."

Mom and Dad, it's not enough to tell our kids to "Just Say No." We've got to tell them *why.* We must remind them that sin is not bad because it's forbidden—but that sin is forbidden because it's bad. Sin hurts, maims, and destroys. Sin will strip and rob us of what could have been and of what God wants us to be. Truly, Philip is to be commended. In a seacoast city and in a carnal culture, he was able to teach his daughters the importance of being pure.

Notice not only the purity of Philip's daughters, but also the piety of his daughters. Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 7:34 that the word "virgin" not only meant sexual purity but spiritual piety. You see, the married woman must constantly factor the care of her husband and family into her life. But the virgin can live a life of unparalleled piety, caring only about the things of the Lord. Philip's daughters were not self-righteous prudes, but young women who were singularly devoted to God.

Notice, finally, the power of Philip's daughters. "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy . . ." said the Lord (Joel 2:28). First Corinthians 14 tells us that prophecy consists of words of edification to build up, words of exhortation to stir up, and words of comfort to cheer up. Philip's daughters were women who were not gossiping, arguing, and fighting—but building up, stirring up, and cheering up.

"Good for Philip," you say. "But how does his story help me in my situation with my family?"

There's a connection between the hospitality of Philip's house and the spirituality in Philip's house that I don't want you to miss. Keep in mind, this isn't the first time we hear of Philip in the Book of Acts. In chapter 6, he was a dedicated worker in the church. In chapter 8, he was a dynamic preacher in the world. Here in chapter 21, he is a devoted father in the home—not by focusing on his family, but by seeking first the kingdom.

"We can't be hospitable," some might say, "because we're focusing on our family. We can't come to Wednesday night Bible study because of our family problems and needs. And we can't come to pray on Sunday nights because it cuts into family time." As a result, the church is becoming less and less spiritual, less and less hospitable—all in the name of "family time" and "family values." Consequently, we are seeing kids grow up who are drifting because parents are not seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

I heard a story on the news one night concerning what happened to a couple who really wanted to create a safe and secure environment for their kids. They moved to the outskirts of San Francisco—three weeks before the San Francisco earthquake hit the Bay Area. After part of their house actually collapsed, they said, "We can't live here. Our family's in danger." So they moved away from the earthquakes to Florida—five weeks before Hurricane Andrew flattened

their home. Distraught and upset, they took their family on vacation to Hawaii —two days before Hurricane Iniki wiped out their hotel.

When I heard this, I thought, *That's just like me—trying to plot and figure out what is best and safest for my family, when in reality it's not up to me to protect them or our time together—but to seek first the Kingdom.*

Mom and Dad, seek first the kingdom. Make spiritual life priority. Establish family devotions. Get your kids plugged into church and a youth group. Open your own heart and home to those in need of hospitality.

Seek first the kingdom of your family, and like the family on the news, you'll be shaken-up, wiped-out, and blown-away. But seek first the kingdom of God, and, like Philip, you'll see your family walk in purity, piety, and power.

BURNING OUT
OR BURNING BRIGHT?
A Topical Study of
ACTS 21:11–13

I can recall many times as a young boy, when Gertie came to visit. What a character! Whenever she returned from town or came back from church, the first thing she would say when she walked into the house was, "I can't wait to take my girdle off—it's killing me!" In fact, so often did Gertie say this, for years I thought her name was "Girdie"—short for the girdle she always talked about.

In our text, the girdle Paul wore was used by a prophet named Agabus to vividly communicate to him that his life would be in jeopardy. You see, Agabus took Paul's girdle—a leather belt—and bound his hands and feet with it, saying, "The owner of this girdle will be bound in Jerusalem and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles." The message was unmistakable: "Your life will be in danger, Paul. Don't go."

What was Paul's response? He said, "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem if necessary for the name of the Lord Jesus."

It is important to understand that Paul was not simply stating a silly sentiment—like the guy who wrote to his girlfriend, "I love you so much, I would be willing to climb the highest mountain to be with you, to swim the widest river to see you, to cross the hottest desert to be near you. P.S. If it's not raining tonight, I'll be over at eight."

Nor was Paul mouthing empty words—as we do so often when we sing, "I have decided to follow Jesus." "The world behind me, the Cross before me," we sing—until someone challenges us and we change our tune.

No, Paul meant what he said. Truly he was ready to die in Jerusalem. After all, according to 2 Corinthians 11, Paul was the one who had been given thirty-nine lashes with the flagellum five times, stoned, beaten, left for dead, shipwrecked, imprisoned—all while carrying the burdens of those to whom he ministered upon his heart. Thus, when Paul told Agabus he was ready to suffer persecution in Jerusalem, he knew what he was talking about.

I marveled when I received an issue of *Ministry Today* magazine. The cover story, entitled "Burnout in the Ministry," talked about how the average pastor in America stays with a congregation only two and one third years before leaving—burned-out by his congregants, his board, or the stress of daily life.

"That's the professional clergy's problem," you say. "It doesn't relate to me." Oh, but the article went on, describing how laypeople are leaving churches as well—taking back-row seats, no longer engaged in service, no longer involved in teaching. In other words, the article concluded that everyone's getting burned-out on ministry.

Why didn't Paul burn out? What kept him going strong through shipwrecks and beatings, stonings and imprisonment? In the Book of Leviticus, we find a classic passage on burn-out and what I believe was the reason for Paul's endurance. . . .

The children of Israel had just finished construction of the tabernacle.

> *And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them, and came down from offering of the sin offering, and the burnt offering, and peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation, and came out, and blessed the people: and the glory of the* LORD *appeared unto all the people. And there came a fire out from before the* LORD*, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces.*
>
> Leviticus 9:22–24

With fire coming down from heaven, the burnt offering igniting, people shouting and falling on their faces in worship, it was certainly a Grand Opening!

> *And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the* LORD*, which he commanded them not.*
>
> Leviticus 10:1

Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron and next in line to be high priest, took their censers, the instrument in which incense was burned, and lit them with "strange fire."

> *And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.*
>
> Leviticus 10:2

Why were Nadab and Abihu destroyed? Following are three reasons I would like you to consider . . .

Presentation of Ministry

> *Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.*
>
> Leviticus 10:3

"*I* will be sanctified. *I* will be glorified," said the Lord—implying that Nadab and Abihu were drawing glory and attention to themselves.

Look how spiritual we are, they must have thought. *Look how devoted, how anointed, how special we are.*

Contrast Nadab and Abihu with our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ. Every time He did a miracle—without exception—Scripture records that people glorified God. He was able to do His work in such a way that people didn't glorify Him but gave glory to His Father.

In anything we do—whether it's offering worship in solitude, talking with one individual, singing before fifty, or preaching to ten thousand—it's only by God's grace that He uses any of us to any degree at all. After all, He could bypass us so easily.

> "Quiet your disciples," the Pharisees demanded.
>
> "If they quieted down, the stones would take their place," Jesus answered (see Luke 19:40).
>
> That means all Jesus needs to replace us are a few rocks.

"*I* will be glorified," saith the Lord. And if you or I start to think we're kind of hot, like Nadab and Abihu, we'll burn out in ministry.

Tribulation in Ministry

> *And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled.*
>
> Leviticus 10:6

There are times in each of our lives when we will go through personal tragedies and difficulties. It might be that of a loved one taken from you, a girlfriend walking out on you, a bankruptcy in your business, or an affliction in your body. But here's the key. The Lord says to us, "Didn't you sing,

> Refiner's Fire, my heart's one desire is to be holy . . .
>
> I will serve You because I love You . . .
>
> Have Thine own way, Lord, have Thine own way . . .?
>
> Why, then, are you surprised that I have allowed tribulation to come into your life?"

A. W. Tozer was right when he said, "Before God can use a man greatly, He must allow him to be hurt deeply." When we are comforted in times of trouble, it's not to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters (2 Corinthians 1:4) because it's only when we have gone through tribulation personally that we can say to others, "I *know* God will see you through. He's done it for me."

Motivation for Ministry

And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord.

Leviticus 16:12

The only fire from which the priests were to ignite their censers was the fire on the altar. What did Nadab and Abihu do? They lit their own fire. As fire came down from heaven, as people were worshiping, Nadab and Abihu must have said, "Wow—what a holy happening! Let's join in—let's get involved in the ministry."

Often, we enter into ministry—be it youth work, on a worship team, or teaching a Bible study—because we look around and say, "Wow, look at the people getting saved. Look at the folks loving the Lord. I want to be a part of that too." And in our enthusiasm, in our desire to participate in some sort of revival, we light our own fire.

Sometimes people start a Bible study but find little or no response. They become burned-out on people and ministry if their motivation was to see souls saved and lives changed.

Jeremiah preached forty years, and guess how many people responded to his message. Zero. Finally, he found himself in a dungeon, saying, "This just isn't working. I'm not going to speak anymore." But because people were not Jeremiah's motivation for ministry, Scripture says the Word of the Lord was like fire in his bones (Jeremiah 20:9). You see, although Jeremiah was burned-out temporarily, he was fired up eventually—and he began to prophesy again.

Perhaps your motivation is not to see others' lives changed, but to see your own life used. Understand this, precious people: You will join the ranks of the burned-out ministers and congregants if your motivation for ministry is to find some inner fulfillment because something else will come along that will pull those same strings within you and you'll be distracted. It might be some hobby, sport, or activity; it might be vegetarianism, political activism, or intellectual philosophy. But sooner or later, it will tug on your heart, and you'll lose interest in ministry.

Only one thing will keep you from burning out regardless of what troubles come into your life or what testings you go through. There is only one thing that

will keep you going year after year like Paul the apostle, who said, "I've been beaten, I've been stoned, I've been imprisoned—but I don't care."

What is that one thing?

Fire from the brass altar where sacrifices were slain.

Of what does the brass altar speak?

Calvary.

In 2 Corinthians 5:14, Paul declared it was the love of Christ that motivated him. He kept going not because he wanted to be a part of the happening, not because he wanted some inner fulfillment, not even because he wanted to see people changed. He kept going because of what Jesus did on the Cross at Calvary.

So, too, the fire that will keep you fired up, the fire that will never burn you out, comes from seeing that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for you personally and for each of your sins individually. Then, ministry will no longer be

"How can I be part of the happening?"

"How can I change lives?"

"How can I find fulfillment?"

It will be,

"Jesus, You did so much for me on the Cross. I have no other choice but to serve You."

We've seen people burn out. We've watched people who were once engaged in ministry and used effectively fade away. And, although they might blame people or situations, it's always for one simple reason: Strange fire has crept in. They've lost the vision of the Cross.

The hunter took his new bird dog out on the first trip of the season. Hiding in his blind, he stood up, pulled the trigger of his shotgun, and a duck fell into the water. To the hunter's amazement, his dog walked out on the water and retrieved the duck. The incredulous hunter scratched his head, rubbed his eyes, and thought he was seeing things. Fifteen minutes later, he popped out of his blind once again, pulled the trigger,

and down went another duck. Again, the dog walked on water to retrieve it. This happened a third and a fourth time. Finally, seeing another hunter approaching, he said, "Watch this"—as he hit his target once again. Sure enough, the dog walked on water to retrieve the duck.

"Did you see anything unusual about my bird dog?" he asked.

"Yep," answered the other hunter. "Your dog can't swim."

Some people, like the second hunter, are oblivious to the miraculous. They either can't or won't see what Jesus Christ did for them personally. They can only say, "I'm burned-out on serving. I'm disappointed in people. I'm giving up on ministry."

And maybe you feel like that today.

The cure? Go back to the altar and see what Jesus did for you. And like Paul, you will say, "What people do is irrelevant. My personal fulfillment is not the issue. My fire comes from the altar, the Cross of Calvary."

In the Name of Jesus Christ, may you who have been burned-out be restored currently. May the Spirit give you revelation in your inner man to see the Cross clearly once again. May it be like fire in your bones and may you go forth again in ministry—not burned-out, but burning bright.

GO WITH THE FLOW

A Topical Study of ACTS 21:14–15

When Peter-John, my oldest son, got his driver's license, this produced a certain amount of parental anxiety within me. In reality, however, it was ridiculous for me to worry about Peter-John driving his 1982 Subaru Galaxy—considering the unbelievable rate of speed at which we are all moving constantly.

> The earth is spinning on its axis 1,000 miles per hour. It is also traveling 67,000 miles per hour around the sun. The sun is moving in an orbit within our galaxy at 385,000 mph. And our galaxy (one of the slowest-moving galaxies known to man) is moving across the universe at 1,350,000, miles per hour.

So, if you feel a bit dizzy this morning, you have good reason!

Now, when you think about the incredible speed with which everything is moving—it would seem like a galactic collision is inevitable. And yet, I bet not one person got up this morning and said, "My goodness. The galaxy is moving at 1,350,000 miles per hour through the universe. With millions of galaxies moving at least that speed, what's to keep us all from colliding in a gigantic Cosmic Destruction Derby?"

No, we don't give a thought about the galaxy moving at 1.3 million miles per hour. Yet I got uptight about Peter-John going forty miles per hour. Why?

I have discovered something about my fallen nature: I don't worry about the planet *on* which I live, but I am constantly vulnerable to worrying about the world *in* which I live. I have opinions about the way my family should behave, the way my country should be run, the way my church should respond. And in my flesh, I worry that if my opinions are not heard and heeded, chaos, confusion, and collision are inevitable. Therefore, within the little world in which I live, my flesh dictates I must make sure I am heard and heeded. Otherwise, my tendency is to get hurt, back off, and pull away.

In our text, the men who were traveling with Paul had reason, in their flesh, to be hurt and to pull away. Why? Because they felt they were headed for chaos

and collision. You see, Paul deeply desired to go to Jerusalem. But on the way, he was warned repeatedly that problems and persecution awaited him there. Hearing of trouble in Jerusalem in every city they visited, Paul's companions began to beg him not to go. But Paul responded, "Why are you breaking my heart? I don't care if I'm bound, or even killed in Jerusalem—I'm going anyway."

Was Paul being stubborn and sinful? Commentators are divided. Some say Paul erred in ignoring the warnings and going to Jerusalem. Others, with whom I'm inclined to agree, say Paul was right in going to Jerusalem because it was made clear to him from the first days of his salvation that he would suffer great things and be brought before kings (Acts 9:15, 16). "If in Acts 9 the Spirit told Paul he would suffer great things," you ask, "why were all the warnings given here in Acts 21?"

Perhaps because the Spirit was simply saying, "Paul, the end is near. You can back out if you want to."

Here's the question: If you were in Paul's entourage and you plead with him not to go to Jerusalem, but he continued on anyway, what would you have done? Hurt and angry, would you have pulled away? These men didn't. They simply said, "The will of the Lord be done," and not only went with him, but they carried the baggage that went along with his decision.

Were these men blindly following Paul?

No, they were not blindly following their friend. They were fully trusting their Father. You see, they knew Paul had been wrong before. Do you recall the story? He thought he was protecting God's honor as he went throughout an entire region tracking down heretics who called themselves Christians, pulling them out of their homes, putting them in chains, and carrying them off to be imprisoned, tortured, and killed. As he traveled down the road to Damascus on one such mission, the Lord intervened and straightened him out. Thus, knowing God knocked Paul off his feet once (Acts 9:4), Paul's friends knew He could do it again if He so chose. That's why they could "cease, saying, The will of the Lord be done."

What a difference a comma makes.

It was not until after he had sent his wife on a buying spree to Europe that the financial empire of millionaire John Astor began to crumble. Unaware of her husband's financial crisis, Lady Astor tracked down one of the most expensive

pieces of jewelry in the world and sent a wire to her husband telling him what a treasure it would be to own. When he saw that the price was $250,000, Astor wired back immediately: “No, price too high!” Unfortunately, the cable operator forgot the comma. So when Lady Astor got the cable, she read: “No price too high!”—and happily purchased the diamond.

So, too, when your wife doesn’t see it your way, or when your employee, boss, teacher, or coach doesn’t take your advice, perhaps your tendency is to remove the comma and change verse 14 from “We ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done” to “We ceased saying, The will of the Lord be done.”

Paul’s friends didn’t forget the comma. They ceased arguing and started traveling, knowing the will of the Lord would be done. As a result, the Lord blessed them greatly and used them mightily.

What the Lord Did *for* Paul's Friends

Please note three blessings the Lord bestowed upon those who stood by and with Paul:

Protection. Throughout the Book of Acts, Paul's friends went through storms at sea, riots in cities, and all kinds of challenges. But they were protected in them all.

Provision. Paul's great passion was to go to Rome. These men went with him, although not exactly as they planned. He went as a prisoner. Nonetheless, the journey was all-expenses-paid!

Promotion. What would have happened if Luke, who was in this group, had said, "Paul, you're stubborn. You're bullheaded. You're not listening to our advice. Go ahead and go to Jerusalem—but count me out. I'll just hang out here at the beach and date one of Philip's daughters"? He would not have become the author of the Book of Acts. Unlike these friends who traveled with Paul, after a dispute with him over John Mark, Barnabas parted company with Paul (Acts 15:39). While Barnabas is a great man and a wonderful example in so many ways, following his split with Paul, he is never again seen in Scripture.

I suggest Barnabas lost something by demanding his own way. And I wonder how many brothers and sisters miss out on what God could have done in and through their lives had they not bailed out and said, "If my advice isn't being heeded, if I don't get my way, I'm pulling back; I'm getting out."

Wives, you may not like the decision your husband is making. He's not hearing what you're saying. He's not following your suggestions. And perhaps you're tempted to say, "I've had it. See you later."

Before you do, consider Sarah.

> "When Abimelech sees you," her husband, Abraham—the man of faith, the friend of God—said, "he's going to want you in his harem—and he'll kill me to get to you. Protect me, Sarah. Tell him I'm your brother" (see Genesis 20).
>
> Abraham made a decision; Sarah carried the baggage of his decision—and what happened? Like Paul's friends, Sarah was given protection when the Lord spoke to Abimelech, saying, "You touch her, you're dead" (see Genesis 20:3); provision when Abimelech offered Abraham great riches for her sake (see Genesis 21:16); and promotion when she

was singled out in the New Testament as the quintessential example of a good wife (1 Peter 3:6).

What the Lord Did *in* Paul's Friends

The Lord replaced their arguing with His peace. They never again brought up the issue. When storms came down, when persecution rose up, they didn't say, "See, Paul—we told you not to go to Jerusalem." No, they had peace in their hearts because they had faith in their God.

Faith and worry are mutually exclusive. Thus, at any given moment you will either be in a state of tranquility, saying, "The will of the Lord be done,"—or you will worry, get uptight, and develop an ulcer.

The mature man or the wise woman is the one who says, "The will of the Lord be done. Where are your bags? I'm going with you."

Keep in mind that this debate between Paul and his friends did not deal with rebellion against the Lord, but rather the direction of the Lord. Paul wasn't saying, "I want to go sell drugs," or, "I think I'll dabble in pornography." No, this argument did not concern a violation of the Scriptures, but an interpretation of the Spirit.

If someone says to you, "Let's do this"—and you know it's sin, you are not to say, "The will of the Lord be done. Let's go do it." That was not the issue here. This was an honest debate about a decision dealing with the will of the Lord and the direction of the Spirit.

These guys didn't agree with Paul's interpretation of the Spirit—but they had trust in the Father, saying, "Father, You stopped him before on the road to Damascus. If necessary, You can do it again."

What will happen when that becomes your mind-set? What will happen if, like these men, you say, "Here's my opinion—but the will of the Lord be done"?

You will experience what Paul's friends did. You will experience protection—even if it's a wrong decision. You'll experience provision—God will bless you. And you'll experience promotion—you will be honored for your willingness to trust in the sovereignty of God.

You will not be a worrier. You will not be hurt or tempted to pull back. All of the stuff that eats at a person will not be eating at you. With a smile on your face, a sparkle in your eye, and a spring in your step you can say, "I've shared my thoughts. Now the will of the Lord be done. I trust Him. Surely, the One who spans the universe in His hand can control the little universe in which I live."

What the Lord Did Previously

I've made the wrong decision time and time again. In outright rebellion, I have turned my back on what I knew was right and have hardened my heart against the Lord. Yet not once has He ever said to me, "Jon, you're not heeding My advice. That's it. You're toast." No, time and time again He has said, "Jon, you're not listening. You're not heeding. Okay. I'll carry your baggage."

What baggage?

The baggage the Lord carried for me was not a nice leather suitcase. It was a rough wooden Cross. He carried it to pay for my stupidity, my rebellion, my iniquity. Therefore, in light of what the Lord has done for me, it is absurd for me to think I have the right to get mad at, hurt by, or upset with anyone who doesn't take my advice.

Truly, it is the wise man or woman who says, "The will of the Lord be done because of what He will do for me, because of what He'll do in me, and because of what He did in my place when He carried my baggage."



22 Working through this section of Scripture, some days I think Paul must have known something no one else knew. He must have been completely convinced that no matter what everyone else told him, no matter what persecution he would face—it was the Lord's will he go to Jerusalem.

Others days I think he was just stubborn. He had a heart for the Lord, and yet, on this issue, he thought he knew better than the Lord. The Book of Isaiah asks, "Who has been the Lord's counselor?" (see Isaiah 40:13). The answer? I have. And most of you have as well. We've counseled the Lord, saying, "Now, Lord, this is the way it should work out. Here's who needs to do this, and here's how we need to do that." And I'm wondering if Paul, this great man, this giant of the faith, wasn't showing his humanness by insisting that he could be effective in Jerusalem.

It's an open question to which I don't know the answer.

But I do know that when Paul arrived in Jerusalem, trouble was there to greet him, for no sooner had he entered the temple than the entire city was filled with the rumor that he had taken Gentiles in with him. A riot erupted, which

would have ended in his demise had not Roman soldiers rushed in and rescued him from his own people.

Taken into protective custody, on his way into the Fortress Antonia, Paul stopped long enough to ask Claudius Lysias permission to speak to the crowd that wanted to kill him. Surely his heart must have been pounding as he anticipated the opportunity to address the city. *At last the Lord will see how powerful I can be,* he might have thought.

We pick up the story on the steps of the Fortress as Paul addresses virtually the entire city of Jerusalem.

Acts 22:1 (a)
Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence . . .

The Greek word translated "defence" is *apologia,* from which we get our word "apologetics." Theologically, "apologetics" means defending the faith—giving reason and rationale for the things we believe.

Acts 22:1 (b), 2 (a)
. . . which I make now unto you. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence . . .

Paul spoke to the centurion in Greek, but he addressed his countrymen in Hebrew. Why? Because although the Jews understood Greek, Hebrew was the language they learned from birth. Therefore, Paul used their mother tongue to speak to their hearts.

Acts 22:2 (b), 3 (a)
. . . and he saith,) I am verily a man which am a Jew . . .

Paul's message was neither a teaching on Old Testament prophecy nor an exposition of temple typology. No, Paul's "apology" was his own testimony. And this encourages me greatly—because even I can give my own testimony.

"Who is this Jesus?" asked the Pharisees of the blind man whom Jesus had healed.

"All I know is this," he answered. "Once I was blind and now I see" (see John 9:25).

The most powerful defense you have is your own testimony. People can argue with anything you say theologically or philosophically. But they cannot argue with what the Lord has done for you personally.

Acts 22:3 (b)

. . . born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia . . .

Tarsus being a city in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey), Paul would have been a Hellenist—a Jew with a Greek background.

Acts 22:3 (c)

. . . yet brought up in this city . . .

"I was born in Tarsus, yet I was brought up in Jerusalem,"said Paul. This meant he could relate not only to the Hellenists but also to the Hebrews.

Acts 22:3 (d)

. . . at the feet of Gamaliel . . .

One of the greatest rabbis in Hebrew history, Gamaliel was respected by all Jews—Hebrews and Hellenists alike.

Acts 22:3 (e), 4 (a)

. . . and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death . . .

"The Way" was a phrase that referred to believers.

Acts 22:4 (b)–6 (a)

. . . binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and

went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished. And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey . . .

With letters from the high priest in hand, prior to his conversion, Paul headed toward Damascus on a mission to bring the Christians from that region to trial in Jerusalem.

Acts 22:6 (b)–9

. . . and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

In Acts 9:7, we read, "And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man." Here in his testimony, however, Paul said, "They heard not the voice of him that spake to me." Is this a contradiction? No. The Greek usage in 9:7 indicates the men with Paul heard a noise. But here in 22:9, Paul used the Greek word *phonea* to indicate that the men with him heard no words.

Acts 22:10 (a)

And I said, What shall I do, Lord?

You'll always know when someone's truly saved because, like Paul, he'll say, "Lord, what do You want me to do? What do You want *from* me? What do You want *for* me? What do You want to do *in* and *through* me?"

Acts 22:10 (b)

And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

"Go into the city, Paul. And when you get there, further instructions will be given." The way of the Lord is always one step at a time. He gives His people

one instruction and waits until they obey it before more information is given.

In the midst of a great revival taking place through Philip's ministry in Samaria, the Lord told him to go to Gaza. Philip obeyed, and the Ethiopian eunuch was saved (Acts 8).

While Peter was praying on his rooftop, the Lord instructed him to follow three men who would knock on his door. Peter obeyed and the house of Cornelius was converted (Acts 10).

The Lord called Abraham from Ur and told him to follow Him one step at a time. Abraham obeyed and a nation was born (Hebrews 11:8).

Every time the Lord calls a man or a woman, every time He wants to bless someone, He does it by encouraging them to take a step of faith. Many times a lot of us miss out on years, or even a lifetime, of being in God's will because we don't act on the singular instruction He gives us. Precious people, we must obey the one thing the Lord has made known to us either through His Word, times of prayer, or the desires He has placed within our hearts.

- If we knew how it was going to work—it wouldn't be faith.
- If we knew where the supplies would come from—it wouldn't be faith.
- If we had it all mapped out—it wouldn't be faith.

Faith says, "Okay, Lord. Like Abraham, I don't know exactly how it's all going to work out—but here we go!"

In 1 Samuel 14, the Israelites were at a standoff in a battle against the Philistines. Perhaps looking up at the stars one night, Jonathan was reminded that the Creator who made such beauty and displayed such glory was with him constantly. Perhaps pondering God's promise that one could chase one thousand and two could put ten thousand to flight if they were in God's will (Deuteronomy 32:30), he poked his armor-bearer and said, "Let's sneak over to the Philistine camp and see what the Lord might want to do."

So while the other guys snoozed, Jonathan and his armor-bearer made their way to the camp of the Philistines. As they approached the Philistine garrison, Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Now wait a minute. We want to be men of faith, but we don't want to be fools. I'll yell to the Philistines, and if they say, "Stay there, you guys. We see you, and we're coming to get you,"—we'll split and make our way back to camp as fast as we can. But, if they say, "Come up here, you guys. We'll take you on"—we'll take that as a word from the Lord, and we'll go get them."

That's the way I believe the Christian life should be lived: by taking steps of faith without being foolish. We should put on our armor, get ready for battle, go out to the edge, and say, "Here we are, Lord. What do You want to do?"

Jonathan called out. The Philistines answered, "Hey, come up here, and we'll teach you guys a lesson,"—and Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "God is with us. Let's go get 'em." God was indeed with them. And a great, miraculous victory took place that day as two guys took on an entire army—and won.

Stepping out in faith and yet always being willing to pull back if God isn't in it—that's the key. Step out in faith—but if you sense the Lord's not in it, regroup, and see what else He might want to do. Be a Jonathan. Take a step of faith. You'll never regret it.

Acts 22:11 (a)
And when I could not see for the glory of that light . . .

Paul could have sat by the roadside, saying, "I can't go to Damascus, Lord, because I can't see." But although he was blinded physically, he had 20/20 vision spiritually because he knew he must go in accordance with the divine directive he had been given.

Acts 22:11 (b)–13
. . . being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law,

having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight.

Speaking to a Jewish audience, Paul pointed out that Ananias was a devout man according to the law, a good man in the sight of all Jews. Conveniently, however, Paul didn't bother to mention that Ananias also happened to be a Christian.

Acts 22:13
And the same hour I looked up upon him.

The last thing Paul saw before he was blinded was the Person of Christ. The first thing he saw when he received his sight was a disciple of Christ. He saw the Head first—and then the body. So, too, although I've seen the Lord through a glass darkly, I've seen His body very clearly. I see the reality of Jesus in you, His body.

Act 22:14
And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth.

This was my prayer for each of you—that you might know His will, see His face, and hear His voice.

Acts 22:15–17 (a)
For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem . . .

Continuing his testimony, Paul said, "After I left Damascus by way of a basket, I went to Jerusalem."

Acts 22:17 (b)–21 (a)

. . .even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart . . .

"Get out of Jerusalem," the Lord said.

What did Paul say?

"But, Lord, my background and my talents, my training and my gifts fit perfectly with these people."

And what did the Lord say?

"Split, Paul. This isn't what I want for you."

Acts 22:21 (b), 22 (a)

. . . for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word . . .

The Jews listened to Paul—until he said the word "Gentile."

Acts 22:22 (b)

. . .and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.

"Blasphemy!" cried the Jews. "How dare Paul say that God sent him to the *Gentiles*. Everyone knows Gentiles are good for nothing but to keep hell hot."

Acts 22:23

And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air.

It was fortunate there were no rocks on the temple mount, for had there been, Paul would most likely have been stoned on the spot.

Acts 22:24

The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.

Examination by scourging was a tortuous, cruel method used to extract information. The accused would be bound and beaten with the flagellum until he either confessed or died.

Acts 22:25

And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?

It was a jailable offense to even bind a Roman citizen without following proper legal procedures and a capital offense to scourge him without doing so. Why did Paul wait until he was bound to declare his Roman citizenship? Because in so doing, he had Claudius Lysias right where he wanted him.

Sometimes people ask, "Should a Christian stand up for his civil rights?" When dealing with believers, we are told very clearly that we are not to take them to trial (Matthew 18:15). But Paul's example tells me that when dealing with the world, sometimes it's appropriate and very necessary to do so. Surely in the litigation-mad world in which we live, this has been taken to an extreme. But I believe there are times when it is valid.

Acts 22:26–28 (a)

When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom.

The wife of Emperor Claudius encouraged him to raise money for their personal treasury by selling Roman citizenships. Claudius Lysias was one who took advantage of that practice.

Acts 22:28 (b)

And Paul said, But I was free born.

Most historians believe Paul's father was a Jew who had been granted Roman citizenship because of some service he had given to the empire.

Acts 22:29

Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

Claudius Lysias knew he was on thin ice.

Acts 22:30

On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.

Unable to examine Paul by scourging, yet still wanting to get to the bottom of the issue, Claudius Lysias decided to bring Paul before the Jewish Supreme Court—the Sanhedrin.



23 At last, Paul had returned to Jerusalem, where, following two riots and one near scourging, he found himself standing before the Sanhedrin—the Jewish Supreme Court.

Acts 23:1 (a)

And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren . . .

Customarily, members of the Sanhedrin were addressed as "fathers." Referring to them as "brethren" implies that before his conversion, Paul had himself been a member of this auspicious body.

Acts 23:1 (b)

. . . I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

It has been said the only way to have a good conscience is to have a bad memory. Paul was an exception. He was an incredible individual who, before his conversion, could truly say, "According to my conscience, I was blameless." The only indication Paul ever gave of violating any part of the Law was in Romans 7, when he said, "I violated the commandment not to covet," (see Romans 7:7).

What did Paul covet? Probably not material possessions or sensual pleasures—but prestige and power in the religious system of which he was a part.

From the outside, Paul looked impeccable—radical for righteousness, a Pharisee of Pharisees—which proves to me conclusively that, although a conscience can be a good goad, it's a lousy guide. Paul's conscience goaded him into enslaving, incarcerating, and ultimately executing Christians, but it was unable to guide him to the truth.

Acts 23:2

And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

A multimillionaire by today's standards, Ananias was one of the worst high priests in the history of Israel. He had worked out a deal with the priests so that animals brought to the temple for sacrifice would conveniently be found flawed upon inspection.

"Can't use this one," the priest would say. "This sheep is blemished. But this is your lucky day. We just happen to have some sheep over here you could purchase."

"Really?" the relieved supplicant would say. "How much?"

"Well, they're a little pricy—but they're worth it," the priest would answer. "They've already been preapproved."

Through such deals, Ananias gouged the people and pocketed huge amounts of money. No wonder that, after serving twelve years as high priest, he was

assassinated by his own countrymen.

Acts 23:3 (a)
Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall . . .

If you were in Israel at this time, making your way to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, for example, it would have been very important that on your way you didn't accidentally become ceremonially unclean by stepping on or brushing against a grave or sepulchre. Consequently, graves and sepulchres were painted white to warn people of the dead bones within. Thus, in calling Ananias a "whited wall," Paul was actually calling him a bag of bones.

This passage is often cited by people who say there are times when it's right to respond vehemently. "Because Paul raised his voice and called Ananias a bag of bones," they say, "it's okay for me to speak my mind just as pointedly."

I suggest to you, however, that although Paul does do that here—there is a higher example of Another who was struck in the mouth in the presence of a high priest. Like Paul, Jesus was struck by one who stood by the high priest. But instead of heatedly raising His voice, He humbly raised a question when He said, "If I said something wrong, correct Me. But if what I have said is true, then why are you doing this?" (see John 18:23).

As excellent a model as Paul might be for us, we must always make sure our model for behavior is the Person of Jesus Christ, for He set a higher standard than any other.

Acts 23:3 (b)
. . . for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?

"How dare you judge me," said Paul to Ananias, "when you're violating the law yourself." You see, according to Deuteronomy 25, it was absolutely forbidden for a man to be smitten without due process of law. And if smitten, he was to be smitten on the back, not on the mouth.

Acts 23:4
And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?

Those who stood by Ananias were aghast. "Do you *dare* to revile God's high priest?" they asked Paul.

Acts 23:5
Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

Why didn't Paul know Ananias was the high priest?

It could have been an oversight. Ananias may not have been wearing his high priestly regalia.

It could have been because Paul was out of sight. That is, because he had been away from Jerusalem for many years ministering in Asia Minor, Paul may not have been aware that Ananias had ascended to the office of high priest.

It could have been due to bad eyesight. Many scholars believe Paul's vision was extremely impaired (Galatians 4:15; 6:11).

"Well, then," you say, "since Paul didn't know who Ananias was, it is excusable that he lashed out at him." But isn't that the point? We never know people like we think we do.

I love the story of the German schoolteacher who clicked his heels together and bowed before each of his second- and third-grade students as they entered his classroom every morning. When asked why he did this, he said, "I don't know which of these students might one day be a king or a chancellor. I want to respect them now because I don't know what they'll become."

The reason this story is known is because it was told by one of his more famous students—a man named Albert Einstein. Truly, before I call someone a bag of bones, I better realize I may not know as much about him as I think I do.

***For topical study of Acts 23:5 entitled "Speak No Evil," turn to page* 821.**

Acts 23:6–8

But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

Looking at the crowd, Paul saw two parties in the room: the Pharisees, who believed in the supernatural—and the Sadducees, who didn't. Paul exploited this division when, referring to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, he said, "Resurrection is the reason for the controversy that surrounds me."

Acts 23:9

And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

When Paul said the word "resurrection," the Sanhedrin was immediately split in two. "If he saw someone resurrected or an angel—we have no problem with that," said the Pharisees. But, of course, the Resurrection presented a major problem for the Sadducees.

Acts 23:10

And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

Here's Claudius Lysias again—rescuing Paul from riot number three.

Acts 23:11

And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

As Paul reflected on the events that led to his being held in protective custody, he must have thought, "I went into the temple to try to appease James and the other brothers—and a riot broke out. I shared my testimony on the steps of the Fortress—and people wanted to kill me. I came into the Sanhedrin—and created tumult and turmoil. I failed. There's no fruit, no headway whatsoever."

But that's precisely when the Lord came to him, saying, "I have seen you witness for Me. Be of good cheer, Paul. You're doing more than you think."



***For topical study of Acts 23:11 entitled "Be of Good Cheer," turn to page* 824.**

Acts 23:12–16

And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him. And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle and told Paul.

Forty men took an oath not to eat until Paul was dead. Their plan was to tell Claudius Lysias that the Sanhedrin wanted to question Paul the next day, but when he was brought to the council, they would spring out and kill him. However, it "just so happened" that Paul's nephew heard the entire conversation.

Acts 23:17–21

Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.

It was neither coincidence nor accident that Paul's nephew was in earshot of the plan to kill Paul; it was part of God's program for Paul.

At some point in their walk, most believers ask, "How can I know what God wants me to do?" And, like Elijah in 1 Kings 19, they sit in a cave, wondering. Like Elijah, they feel the earth shaking—but the Lord is not in the earthquake. They see the fire glowing—but the Lord is not in the fire. They watch the wind blowing—but the Lord is not in the wind. Many people are still looking for an earth-shaking confirmation, a fiery illumination, or a wind to blow them in divine direction.

But it's much simpler than that: As Elijah discovered, God's is a still, small voice (1 Kings 19:12). The Lord whispers in your heart, writes desires upon your heart, and then gives confirmation to your heart through situations and people around you. Accuse me of being simplistic, but I find it so wonderful to say, "Father, this is the desire of my heart. I'm going to pursue this course, knowing You will close and open doors—as You lead me in a supernaturally natural way."

For whatever question you face presently, just make sure your heart is open to the Lord—and He'll have a nephew in the right place at the right time who will overhear a conversation, go to the Roman captain, and set events in motion, which the world will call luck, but in which you'll see the hand of God.

Acts 23:22–24 (a)

So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me. And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; and provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on. . . .

What a trip! Paul is about to be escorted by two hundred infantrymen, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to the seaport city of Caesarea in the middle of the night. Imagine the reaction of the forty men who took the oath to kill Paul. Can you hear their stomachs growling?

Acts 23:24 (b)

. . . and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.

The only slave in Roman history to become a governor, Felix was a cruel character who received his appointment because his brother, Pallos, was a friend of Caesar Nero. Of Felix, the brilliant Roman historian, Tacitus, said, "He executes the prerogatives of a king with the spirit of a slave," for although he was in power as governor, Felix retained a slave's mentality of getting back at the world for all the abuses it had heaped upon him.

Acts 23:25–27

And he wrote a letter after this manner: Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.

It's funny how Claudius Lysias conveniently forgot to mention he had Paul bound and was ready to beat him.

Acts 23:28–30

And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: Whom I perceived to be

accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.

"I'm sending Paul to you, Felix," wrote Claudius Lysias. "Let his accusers come and present their case to you. You're the governor. Now Paul's your problem."

Acts 23:31–35

Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris. On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

Herod's judgment hall was neither a dungeon nor a prison, but rather a palace on the shore of the Mediterranean. Thus, as we'll see in chapter 24, Paul would spend two years in protective custody on the beach.

SPEAK NO EVIL
A Topical Study of
ACTS 23:5

I feel this is an important verse in light of the political climate. It's so easy to feel emotions rising and passions stirring—and to find ourselves saying things that are not right in the sight of the Lord, for truly, "we are not to speak evil of the ruler of the people."

"But politicians are so undeserving of respect," you say. "They're all a bunch of con artists."

"Read the eye chart," the draft board physician said.

"What eye chart?" asked the draft dodger.

"Son, you better sit in that chair while I check your records," the concerned doctor said.

"What chair?"

Convinced the would-be soldier had terrible eyesight, the doctor wrote him a deferment. Greatly relieved, the young man walked into a darkened theatre and sat down with a bag of popcorn to celebrate. He had a great time—until the lights came on and he realized he was sitting next to the eye doctor.

Thinking fast, the young man turned to him, and said, "Is this the bus to Detroit?"

Sometimes, as we see politicians change their stories and position themselves quite cleverly, we find ourselves becoming cynical and bitter toward our leaders. "I'm so upset with those guys and how they behave. I'm perfectly justified in berating them verbally and criticizing them caustically," we say.

Really? That's not what Paul said. When he realized Ananias was the high priest, he said he would not have called him a bag of bones because the position is to be honored even if the person holding it is dishonorable.

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever

therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God . . .

Romans 13:1, 2 (a)

To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity.

Isaiah 40:18; 22, 23

In the day Isaiah wrote these words, every culture and every society had determined that the world was flat.

- Those living in India thought a huge elephant held the flat world on its back.
- The Egyptians thought the flat world rested on the back of a large tortoise.
- Greeks were convinced it was held up by the strong arms of Atlas.

Although Isaiah declared that God sits upon the circle of the earth, and that Job said He hung the earth upon nothing (Job 26:7), it would not be until centuries later that scientists would make the "profound discovery" that the earth is round and suspended in mid-air.

Truly God sits upon the circle of the earth. He's on the throne. He is the One who makes princes, presidents, and Supreme Court justices come and go as He wishes. Therefore, it is up to us not to criticize and complain, but to take heed to Peter's words.

Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

1 Peter 2:17

"That was easy for Peter," you say. "In his day, those in positions of authority had character."

Really?

When Peter wrote these words, Caesar Nero was on the throne. Caesar Nero was the man who rode naked in his chariot, shrieking at the top of his lungs in demonic laughter while he watched over one thousand Christians who had been dipped in wax, ignited as human candles to light his garden. What did Peter say to do about Nero? He didn't say to impeach him, sign petitions about him, or rebel against him. He said to honor him.

Am I suggesting we shouldn't be engaged politically?

No.

I'm suggesting we do what God's people were to do in Jeremiah's day. The Babylonians had carried the Israelites into what would turn out to be a seventy-year captivity in Babylon. "Since we're only going to be here for a little while," said the Israelites, "let's not get too settled."

But the Lord said otherwise:

> *Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.*
>
> Jeremiah 29:5–7

Some Christians say, "We're only here on earth for seventy years. Since our real home is in heaven, we're not going to get involved with what's going on down here."

But the Lord says we are to be like the children of Israel. We're to leave this place better than we found it. Therefore, even though Babylon is not our home, even though we're only here for a relatively short season, we are to build houses, plant gardens, seek peace, and pray for our cities. And as we pray, we can trust our Lord, knowing He is sovereign and He sees what needs to happen presently based upon what will happen prophetically.

This applies not only politically, but parentally. Kids, you are told to honor your parents (Exodus 20:12). "Oh, but they're such idiots," you say. "My dad's a bag of bones, and my mom's out of it. They don't relate to me, and I can't understand them." Listen, if you are living at home, the word to you is to *honor*

your parents. Why? Because of all the billions of parents throughout history who have peopled this planet, God chose *your* mom and dad as the ones to work on your life in a unique way.

The same is true in marriage. Ephesians 5 says wives are to reverence their husbands (Ephesians 5:33). "You don't know my husband," you say. "Everything he does rubs me the wrong way."

Oh, but that's the way it's *supposed* to be.

> The massive stones used in the construction of Solomon's temple were actually shaped and chiseled to perfection a great distance from the temple mount. Why? So that on the temple mount the sound of a hammer or chisel would not be heard (1 Kings 6:7).
>
> So, too, Peter says we are living stones, being fit together for eternity (1 Peter 2:5). This earth is the rock quarry wherein we are being shaped, chipped, and chiseled. As living stones, we are constantly moving, each of us knocking rough edges off, smoothing, shaping one another. Why? So that when we reach heaven, the ultimate temple, the sound of a hammer or chisel will not be heard.

We must realize the Lord has allowed us to be in the situation we're in—be it politically, parentally, or maritally—for our good and His glory. Therefore, we are not to revile. We are not to reject. We are to realize He is sovereign and in control. Then we can say,

> "Lord, if You're allowing this politician to be elected to fulfill Your purpose nationally and prophetically—so be it."
>
> "If You're allowing these people to parent me, even though I may not understand them presently—I will honor them."
>
> "If You're allowing my husband or wife to shape me for eternity—Thy will be done."

My prayer for you, precious people, is that during these days you will not be uptight or stressed-out, cynical or caustic—but that in the midst of political, parental, or marital turmoil, you will remember that the God who sits on the circle of the earth is still in complete control.

BE OF GOOD CHEER

A Topical Study of
ACTS 23:11

Training to be a paratrooper, an army private was instructed to jump out of the airplane, count to ten, and pull his ripcord. If his primary parachute didn't open, he was to pull the ripcord on his front pack, which would open his auxiliary chute, whereby he would float to safety, after which time a truck would pick him up and take him back to the base. The private did exactly as he was told: On command, he jumped out of the airplane, counted to ten, pulled his ripcord —but nothing happened. He then pulled the ripcord on his front pack, but, again —nothing happened.

"Great," he said. "My parachute didn't open. My backup didn't open. The truck probably won't be there to pick me up, either."

Paul must have felt the same way. After twenty years of ministering to the Gentiles, he had finally returned to Jerusalem. When he arrived in the Holy City, he must have expected something wonderful to happen. Instead, it seemed as though everything came crashing down around him, when, after causing three riots, nothing less than the Roman army was needed to save his life.

Maybe you can relate to Paul. Maybe you've longed to do something for the Lord and have stepped out in faith to serve Him. But you feel like nothing's happening except a mess. I have good news! Our text is for *you.*

The Lord Appearing *to* Paul

And the night following . . .

Acts 23:11 (a)

When did the Lord appear to Paul? In the darkest hour of Paul's darkest day. When does the Lord appear to you and me? Frequently, He becomes most real to us when we're in the midst of darkness—when we're discouraged and defeated, when things appear hopeless.

Why?

Didn't Jesus say He was the Light of the World (John 8:12)? If I strike a match in a well-lit room, it won't be noticed at all. But if I strike a match in a pitch-black room, it will be seen very readily. The same is true of the Lord. I have found He is seen most clearly by me when things are pretty dark. When things go fine, I get caught up in everything around me, and I'm not always tuned in to the Lord. It's in the night, when I'm wondering, *Lord, am I doing anything right at all? Why am I so stubborn? Why am I so hard of heart?* that I see the Lord most clearly, for, as the Light of the World, the darker the situation, the brighter He shines.

The Lord Standing *by* Paul

. . . the Lord stood by him . . .

Acts 23:11 (b)

The Lord didn't say, "Forget it, Paul. You're so stubborn coming here to Jerusalem. I'm not standing by you." No, the Lord stood by Paul because, when we are faithless, He is faithful still, for He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13).

Even if I am fickle, faithless, and foolish, the Lord is faithful. He can't be anything other than that, for His faithfulness is not a decision He makes—it's who He is.

> *And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.*
>
> Zechariah 3:1–4

There is a courtroom drama constantly taking place in heaven wherein Satan accuses me day and night. But Jesus is my Advocate, my defense lawyer, who says, "Father, Jon is spotless because My blood has cleansed him totally" (see 1 John 2:1).

The Father then hits the gavel, if you would, and says, "Case dismissed for complete lack of evidence."

Satan, however, comes back again and again, bringing up case after case before becoming so frustrated by his inability to win his case in heaven that he chooses a different tactic: He perches on my shoulder and whispers in my ear, "You've really blown it. Your motives are mixed. You're lacking in prayer. Your ministry is empty. Your service is nothing."

It's then that, like Paul, I can begin to think, *Maybe I'm not doing anything at all. Maybe I'm out of God's will. Maybe He's no longer interested in me.*

It was when Paul was in a dark hour that the Lord said, "Be of good cheer. I'm standing by you. Why? Because, Paul, even if you have failed, the work of the Cross covers and cleanses totally."

Moses had taken Aaron and Hur up on the mountain at Rephidim, where he instructed his protigie, Joshua, to lead the Israelite troops into battle against the Amalekites. Joshua obeyed, while Moses stayed upon the mountain with the rod of God in his hands. As long as Moses held up the rod, the Israelites were victorious. But whenever his arms got heavy and began to fall, the Amalekites took control. Finally, Aaron stood on one side of him, and Hur stood on the other, and together they propped up Moses' arms, and Israel won the battle (Exodus 17).

While this story has wonderful application concerning the importance of prevailing prayer, there's something else I want you to see here. That is, every time Joshua looked back and could see three men on the hill—one in the middle holding up the rod with outstretched hands—he knew he would be victorious in battle.

So, too, on another hill, called Calvary, another Man's hands were outstretched between two men (Matthew 27:38). And, like Joshua, as long as I see His hands on the Cross and understand that even if my motives are mixed, even if my vision is fuzzy, even if I'm not exactly where I should be—I can engage in battle, I can keep going, I can be of good cheer, knowing He has provided His blood to cleanse me.

I can look to the mountain and see One who does not fail, One whose hands have never fallen, One who paid the price completely. And as long as I see Him, even when I do fail, and even if I am failing, Satan has no case against me."

The Lord's Evaluation *of* Paul

> *. . . For as thou has testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.*
>
> Acts 23:11 (c)

"You testified of Me here," said Jesus.

"Really, Lord?" Paul must have said. "I thought I only caused problems."

In Matthew 10:42, Jesus said, "If you offer a cup of cold water to a little one in My Name, you'll have reward." When you gave a cup of cold water to a kid; when you helped your neighbor get his trash out to the street; when you wrote a letter of encouragement—the Lord took note. "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love" (Hebrews 6:10).

You see, although we have a tendency to think we're never doing enough, and that the little we are doing is probably flawed—in reality, the Lord keeps record of all the good stuff we do—even the things we think are insignificant.

> In Matthew 25 Jesus told the story of a man who went to a far country. Before he left, he gave talents to his servants, a talent being one year's salary. To one servant he gave one talent, to another, five talents, to another, ten. When he came back, he found the man who had ten talents had doubled the money by investing it wisely. The same was true of the man with five talents. But the man with one talent said, "Master, I know you're a harsh man, that you reap where you have not sown, and gather where you have not strawed. So I buried my talent."
>
> "It is true I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not strawed," said the master. "But you are a fool because you could at least have put the money in the bank and drawn interest. I'm going to give your talent to the one who has ten; and you will be cast into outer darkness."

Now, a lot of us hear that story and say, "That's me. I'm the foolish servant. I have buried my talent. I'm not doing enough. And I know when the Lord returns, I'll just hand Him my one muddy talent, and He'll send me to outer darkness.

No, no, no! The man who was cast into outer darkness didn't even know the Lord. He wasn't a believer. That's why he said, "You are a harsh man" (see verse 24). The world always views the Lord as a "harsh man." Yet, although the master in the parable repeated the servant's claim that he reaped where he had not sown, and gathered where he had not strawed—he did not repeat the claim that he was a harsh man (verse 26)—because he wasn't.

"I am meek and lowly in heart," Jesus said in the only autobiographical statement He ever made (Matthew 11:29). "Give a glass of cold water to someone and I'll reward you. I'll take notice of even the simplest expression of My love. Even if you're making a mess of things in Jerusalem, Paul, I can find something good in what you've done. You did testify of Me. And because of that, I'm sending you somewhere you've always wanted to go: on an all-expenses-paid trip to Rome."

Folks, in the times you thought you messed up and were disobedient, the Lord says, "Even though you think you've made a mess of the situation, I acknowledge the good you have done."

If you don't believe me, let's look at Hebrews 11.

As you read the list in God's "Hall of Faith," you come across Rahab the harlot.

"But she lied," you say.

"She also hid My people," counters the Lord.

Next is Gideon. The Lord said, "I'm going to use you, Gideon."

"Give me a sign," said Gideon. "I'll put a fleece out, and if it is wet in the morning, I'll believe You."

Sure enough, the fleece was wet, and the ground was dry.

"Hmm. I still don't believe You," said Gideon. "This time make the ground wet and the fleece dry."

The next day Gideon rowed his boat out to the fleece, and it was totally dry.

Yet the Lord lists Gideon as a hero of *faith?*

Next is Samson.

Would you put *Samson* in your "Hall of Faith"?

After Samson is Barak, who was told by the prophetess Deborah that he would experience victory as he led the Israelites against Sisera to battle. What did Barak say to Deborah? "I'm not going unless you go with me." Yet Barak, hiding behind Deborah's skirts, makes it into Hebrews 11 as a hero of *faith.*

I'm perplexed by this until I understand the nature of my Father, the character of my Lord, the heart of my Savior. He's incredibly kind, and if there's any good thing He can find, He will. You see, gang, in the New Testament, there is *no* mention of *any* sin of an Old Testament saint.

"Well, Barak, at least you went."

"Gideon, you finally did get out there."

"Samson, you did some good things (we won't mention Delilah)."

"Rahab, despite your lie, you saved the spies," says the Lord.

So, too, here's Paul sitting in prison. The Lord stood by him, threw an arm around him, and said to him, "Be of good cheer, Paul. You have been a witness for Me here. Now I'm sending you on to further ministry."

Dear brother, precious sister—don't listen to the condemning accusation of the Enemy saying, "You're not doing enough—and what you are doing is tainted by false motives." Instead, look behind you to the three men on the hill. See the Man in the middle with outstretched hands, and understand the price He paid. Jesus Christ has cleansed you from all sin. And even when you are faithless, He is faithful to come to you time and time again, saying, "Be of *good* cheer."



24 Here is Paul, standing before Felix—a man who, according to biblical scholar and secular historian alike, had no business being in a position of power.

Acts 24:1

And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.

Paul had been in Caesarea for five days, when one of the most famous lawyers of his time, an eloquent speaker named Tertullus, arrived from Jerusalem to argue against him. It is interesting to me that Ananias made the journey along with Tertullus. At this point, Ananias was eighty years old, and the trip from Jerusalem to Caesarea was an arduous sixty-mile journey. For Ananias to make such a difficult trip at his age to see Paul go on trial before Felix speaks to me of the great degree of animosity he felt in his heart toward Paul.

Acts 24:2 (a)

And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness . . .

Quietness? There were riots breaking out constantly.

Acts 24:2 (b)

. . . and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence.

Worthy deeds? Felix had robbed the people blind and had appointed corrupt leaders.

Acts 24:3, 4

We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.

Everyone in the country knew Felix was a rat, yet Tertullus came on with flowery language and flattery, knowing his case would be strengthened as Felix drank it all in.

Acts 24:5 (a)

For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world . . .

“Paul’s a pest,” charged Tertullus. “Wherever he goes, he causes riots and problems.”

Acts 24:5 (b)
. . . and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes . . .

The enemies of the early church called the believers either Christians or Nazarenes. “Christian” or “little Christ” was meant to mock the Lord, and “Nazarene” called attention to the fact that He was from Nazareth—the hick-town about which Nathanael asked, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (see John 1:46).

Acts 24:6 (a)
. . . who also hath gone about to profane the temple . . .

Rumor had it that Paul had taken Gentiles into the temple. Although that was not true, Tertullus didn’t care about the truth. He simply wanted to make his point and win the case.

Acts 24:6 (b), 7
. . . whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands.

Contrary to the testimony of Tertullus, the Jews were not about to judge Paul according to their law, but rather to tear him limb from limb (Acts 23:10). It was only through the intervention of Lysias and the Roman army that Paul’s life was spared.

Acts 24:8
Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.

After rescuing Paul from three riots and one death threat, Claudius Lysias decided he had done his part and turned Paul over to Felix.

Acts 24:9

And the Jews also assented, saying that these thing were so.

Those who went with Tertullus and Ananias from Jerusalem to Caesarea were all in one accord—united in their stand against Paul.

Acts 24:10 (a)

Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered . . .

Paul acted as his own defense lawyer.

Acts 24:10 (b)

. . . forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself.

Paul addressed Felix with the only truthful thing he could say about him: "Felix, it's true you've been here many years."

Acts 24:11–13

Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.

"These men speak lies, rumors, and innuendoes. They cannot present any proof whatsoever," insisted Paul.

Acts 24:14, 15

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

"These are the things of which I am guilty," said Paul. "I'm a follower of the Way. I'm a believer in the Scriptures. I'm waiting for the Resurrection."



For topical study of Acts 24:14–15 entitled "Paul: Guilty or Not Guilty?" turn to page **832.**

Acts 24:16

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

"I have a clean conscience toward God and men," said Paul.

Acts 24:17–20

Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council,

Here's the question: since the law required every accusation to be verified by at least two witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15), where were the witnesses? I have another question: Not only where were the witnesses, but where were James and the leaders of the church in Jerusalem who gave Paul the counsel to go into the temple in the first place? Tertullus, Ananias, and the elders made the journey to accuse Paul. Why did no one make the same journey to defend him?

Acts 24:21

Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.

When Paul went into the Sanhedrin and said he believed in the resurrection, he caused a riot to break out. "I am guilty of that," he said.

Acts 24:22 (a)

And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them . . .

How did Felix get his knowledge of the Way—of Christianity? We don't know for sure, but there are references in ancient literature to Felix spending a great deal of time with Simon the Sorcerer. After Simon's conversion was called into question (Acts 8:20), he disappeared from the scene scripturally. But history records much about Simon the Sorcerer, including his becoming a friend of Felix.

Acts 24:22 (b)

. . . and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.

Felix said, "I'll send for Lysias and see what he has to say about this matter." Why? Because Felix must have begun to suspect that Paul had committed no crime—that this was a religious rather than a civil issue.

Acts 24:23

And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.

"Keep him in protective custody," said Felix, "but allow him liberty and visitors." Paul had the opportunity to have his friends come—but as far as we know, none came.

Acts 24:24 (a)

And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess . . .

Daughter of Herod Agrippa (whom worms ate in the amphitheatre at Caesarea), great-granddaughter of Herod the Great (who ordered the slaughter of the infants when Jesus was born), and great niece of the Herod who beheaded John the Baptist—Drusilla didn't have the

greatest heritage, and hers is a tragic story. Tradition has it that she was married to a Syrian prince when a magician, secretly in the employ of Felix, told her she should marry Felix. Enamored with the occult, Drusilla, at the age of nineteen, left her husband to become Felix's third wife.

Acts 24:24 (b)
. . . he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

Paul now stands before Felix and Drusilla.

Acts 24:25 (a)
And as he reasoned . . .

Paul, an intellectual giant of theology, a lover of God, and a lover of people, begins to reason with Felix and Drusilla. Our faith is exceedingly reasonable. The longer I walk with the Lord, and the more I learn about the Word, the more I welcome opportunities to go into high-school classes or college seminars to discuss the faith with any who question it.

Our faith is reasonable in every way—logically, philosophically, and scientifically.

The cover story in *TIME* magazine recently was about a six-thousand-year-old frozen corpse discovered in the crevice of a glacier in the Alps one summer. I chuckled my way through this very interesting article as I read that the scientific world was shocked to find out that the "Ice Man" wasn't bowed over with sloping forehead and thick jaw, as had been hypothesized and accepted as fact for decades—but that he looked just like us. He had lined shoes, sewn clothes, and sophisticated tools centuries before he was "supposed" to have been able to do any of those things.

Prior to this discovery, ancient man was regarded as little more than a glorified ape at best. But the discovery of Ice Man calls all previous suppositions into question. If only these scientists had read their Bibles —they wouldn't have been surprised. Truly the Word is reasonable!

Acts 24:25 (b)

. . . of righteousness . . .

Paul reasoned with Felix and Drusilla concerning the nature of righteousness. Felix and Drusilla were not righteous. Their life was filthy, their history diabolical. They were not liked by the people they ruled and were not trusted by even their own household of slaves, servants, and companions. But Paul must have told them that if any man be in Christ he is a new creature. Old things pass away; all things become new (2 Corinthians 5:17). "Felix, Drusilla, you can have a new beginning. You can become righteous in Christ Jesus," Paul must have said.

When I was saved, not only did Jesus come into me, but, just as wonderful, just as fabulous is the fact that I was hidden in Him (Colossians 3:3). Therefore, when the Father looks at me, He doesn't see my sin. He sees Jesus. When a believer finally understands this concept, how his walk will change. No longer will he think, *God won't listen to me because I'm such an idiot.* No, he'll say, "When God looks at me He doesn't see my sin. He sees His Son."

Acts 24:25 (c)

. . . temperance . . .

Paul reasoned with Felix and Drusilla concerning the need for temperance. We live in a world that knows very little of temperance, self-control, or moderation. That is why our world is emotionally bruised, physically wiped-out, and spiritually dead. Temperance is so good and so necessary. "Let your moderation be known unto all men," wrote Paul (Philippians 4:5). Lead tempered lives and you'll be blessed.

Acts 24:25 (d)

. . . and judgment to come . . .

Finally, Paul reasoned with Felix and Drusilla concerning the nearness of judgment.

> While he was President, Harry Truman was awakened at three-thirty one morning by an energetic young aide. "Mr. President, I'm sorry to

wake you," he said, "but I had to inform you that the Commissioner of Highways just died, and I was wondering if you would be open to my taking his place."

Disgusted by such self-serving audacity, Truman is said to have replied, "Son, it's okay by me if it's okay with the undertaker."

The statistics on death are conclusive: Ten out of ten people die. Yet most people refuse to spend any significant time contemplating the fact that they're dying. Paul reasoned with Felix and Drusilla—reminding them of the nearness of judgment and the reality of eternity.

Acts 24:25 (e)

. . . Felix trembled . . .

The Greek word for "trembled" is the same word used to describe an earthquake. In other words, Felix was literally shaking.

Acts 24:25 (f)

. . . and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

The tactic of the Enemy is always to whisper in the ear of a man or woman who is convicted, "You don't have to decide right now. Think about it a little longer." You'll always know it's the voice of Satan when you hear, "Take your time. There's no hurry. Ssssleep on it."

Acts 24:26

He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.

"You have friends in Jerusalem, Paul," said Felix. "In fact, you have friends all over the world. If they care about you, they'll pay for your release." You see, Felix sent for Paul for one reason: not to engage in spiritual discussion, but to attempt financial manipulation.

Acts 24:27

But after two years, Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

Felix was kicked out of power, called back to Rome, and replaced by Porcius Festus. Why? A riot broke out in Caesarea between the Greeks and the Jews. When the Greeks emerged victorious, Felix vented his frustration with the Jews by ordering the Greeks to go throughout the city bludgeoning Jewish men, raping Jewish women, and plundering Jewish possessions. When Caesar heard about this, he immediately sent for Felix. Thus, Felix lived out the rest of his life in disgrace in Rome.

What happened to Drusilla? Two years after this event, in Europe on a shopping spree when Mount Vesuvius exploded, she was caught in the lava of the volcano and died at the age of twenty-one. Felix and Drusilla both had an opportunity to hear the gospel, but they put off making a decision.

Eighty-two percent of all Christians are saved at the age of nineteen or younger. The lower the age, the higher the percentage of those who make a commitment to Jesus Christ. Why? Because a person who puts off a decision, saying, "I'll think about it; I'll wait until later; I want more information," will find himself falling into a pattern that becomes more and more difficult to break.

He trembles when He says no to the Holy Spirit the first time.
The next time he hears the gospel and says no, he trembles less.
The third time, it's pretty easy to say no.
The fourth time it's a piece of cake.

This happens not only when the Spirit is convicting unbelievers, but also when He convicts Christians. The first time we are tempted to do wrong, we tremble. The second time the temptation comes our way, it still kind of bothers us, but not as much as it did the first time. The third time bothers us a little less. And the fourth time, giving in to temptation doesn't bother us at all.

The conscience must be guarded very carefully because it can become seared very easily (1 Timothy 4:2).

In fact, not only will our conscience become seared, or desensitized, it will become evil (Hebrews 10:22), justifying wrong and whispering to us, "Don't

worry about what you're doing, or the show you're watching. That's simply the way society is. There's nothing wrong with it. It's just life."

Felix and Drusilla went from having a tender conscience—shaken when they felt the convicting work of the Spirit, to having a seared conscience—when they didn't tremble quite so easily, to having an evil conscience—where they were only interested in making a deal monetarily. The result? Their lives were destroyed and they were damned eternally.

You might be saying, "What if I'm doing stuff that used to bother me, but doesn't anymore? What if I have a seared or an evil conscience? Is there any hope for me?"

Yes. The Lord is so faithful. He comes to us over and over again, giving us opportunity to get right with Him. But in Genesis 6:3, God said, "My spirit shall not always strive with man. I'll come to you. I'll speak to you. But I'm not always going to wrestle with you."

PAUL: GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY?

A Topical Study of ACTS 24:14, 15

The apostle Paul was just too hot to handle. Following the swirl of controversy that surrounded him in Jerusalem, Paul was called to defend himself before Felix, the governor. Denying he was guilty of pestilence and sedition, as he was accused (24:5), Paul admitted being guilty of the following three charges:

I am a follower of the Way.

> *But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers.*
>
> Acts 24:14 (a)

Six times in the Book of Acts, believers are referred to as "the Way." Only three times in the New Testament are they called Christians because "Christian" was a term of degradation—like "Jesus Freak" or "Holy Joe." I'm sad that in our day "The Way International" cult has clouded this term, because I think "the Way" is an excellent name. What Jesus taught and the model He gave is "the Way" to go indeed! Only the Way of the Lord leads to our own well-being and welfare, for truly, the Way of the Lord is right.

Early Christians were called the Way not simply because Jesus points out the Way, but because He *is* the Way (John 14:6). That makes Christianity unique. Unlike Alcoholics Anonymous and other twelve-step programs, Christianity does not say, "Go through therapy. Follow these principles. Work hard—and you'll be a better person." No, Christianity is resurrection—not resuscitation. It's not twelve steps—it's one step: Allow Jesus Christ to live His resurrected life in and through you because it is only the living Lord in your heart who can change you powerfully and permanently from within.

I am a believer in the Scriptures.

> *. . . Believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets. . . .*
>
> Acts 24:14 (b)

I bet Paul emphasized the word "all." You see, he believed every picture painted in the law, and every illustration given by the prophets because they all pointed to Jesus Christ. Not so the Jews.

> Paul's Jewish audience would have been unable to explain Isaiah 53, where the prophet declared, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). Nor would they have been able to explain Psalm 22, where the psalmist accurately depicted God's Son crucified on a Cross hundreds of years before crucifixion was even known in the Middle East.

Like Paul, we believe *all* Scripture. The pseudo-intellectual false pastors and teachers who contend that certain passages imply cultural understanding that is no longer relevant today are wrong. God hasn't changed His mind just because we've "progressed" culturally.

Here's the problem, gang. If I adopt the pseudo-intellectual posture that says, "I will decide which parts of the Bible are relevant to my culture and meaningful to my society, which words are inspired and which are no longer applicable," I place myself in a very precarious position because I then become the judge of the Bible rather than allowing the Bible to judge me.

I say to you with absolute certainty and with intellectual integrity that *all* Scripture is inspired. How do I know? One way: Jesus quoted the most controversial Scriptures as being absolutely factual. He talked about Adam and Eve literally. He talked about Sodom and Gomorrah geographically. He talked about Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt physically. He talked about Jonah being swallowed by a great fish in reality.

You see, the question of inspiration does not center around culture or geography, linguistics or history. When you talk to your professor, your neighbor, or your co-worker, the question is singular: Who do you believe Jesus is? He's either Lord, a lunatic who only *thought* He was God, or a liar who knowingly deceived people.

How do we know He's God? "One proof I'll give you," He said. "Destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up" (see John 2:19). And just as He said, three days after He was crucified, He rose again.

In the debate over inspiration, you can go in circles endlessly unless you keep returning the dialogue to the subject of Jesus Christ. Move the question from inspiration to the Resurrection. It's a powerful, irrefutable argument.

I am looking for the Resurrection.

> *And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.*
>
> Acts 24:15

In actuality, there are two resurrections. When Jesus comes back, the world will experience one thousand years of unparalleled peace and prosperity. At the end of that time, the unbeliever will be resurrected and will stand before the Great White Throne.

> *And I saw a great white throne, and with him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God: and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*
>
> Revelation 20:11, 12

There will be those who will say, "I'm okay. You're okay. Why should I go to hell?"—until the books are opened wherein is recorded every deed, every thought, every lie, every attitude. You see, for our own sanity, God has made us in such a way that we don't remember how rotten we've been throughout our lifetime. Oh, we remember the big things—but the day-to-day junk conveniently fades from our conscience over time. When the books are open, however, when people see their lives as they really were, when people are reminded of their sin, they will, for all intents and purposes, condemn themselves to hell.

> A preacher vehemently pounded his pulpit, saying, "Every member of this congregation is going to stand before the Lord. Every member of

this congregation will have to give account of what he's done. Every member of this congregation will be judged. There will be no exceptions."

A man in the front row began to laugh, and the preacher said, "What are you laughing at?"

"I'm not a member of this congregation," the man said.

So, too, you might think, *This doesn't apply to me. I don't believe this stuff.* But that doesn't matter. As a member of the congregation of humanity, you will stand before the Lord, where you will either hear Him say "Depart from Me, I never knew you" (see Matthew 7:23), or "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord" (see Matthew 25:21). The choice is yours.

The second resurrection—the one in which the unbeliever stands before the Lord at the Great White Throne—takes place at the end of the millennium. When does the first resurrection—the resurrection of the believer—take place?

Based on 2 Corinthians 5, I believe the first resurrection takes place over a period of time.

> *For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 5:1–4

"The body I'm in presently," said Paul, "is nothing more than a tabernacle, a tent."

How much time do I spend on the tent in which we camp every summer? Not very much. There are some stakes missing. There's some mildew in the creases. There are some holes in the sides. It's adequate lodging for a week or two—but I don't live there permanently. It's portable. It's temporary. It's flimsy.

So, too, the body you're in is just a tent—and a lot of us are becoming a little mildewy and are missing a few stakes. But when we die, when our tent is

dissolved, buried, returned to dust—Paul said we have a building—literally a mansion—waiting to take its place. This, I believe, is the commentary on what Jesus said in John 14.

> *In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*
>
> John 14:2

Although when most people think of a mansion, they think of white columns in the front, lots of rooms inside, and a pool in the back—I don't think that's what Jesus was talking about. I believe the mansion He spoke of was a new body.

You see, designed to take only fourteen pounds of pressure per square inch, dependent upon a mixture of seventy-nine percent nitrogen and twenty percent oxygen, my body is extremely limited. But there is a body waiting for me designed for total joy and exploration of all the cosmos—no longer limited by the restrictions and flimsiness of this present "tent."

"Wait a minute," you say. "Doesn't 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 say that we will all be resurrected at the same time? How, then, can you speak of a resurrection that takes place over a period of time?"

> I believe Einstein shed light on this through his "theory of relativity," which essentially says, "When an object travels at the speed of light, time ceases to be." Since God is light (1 John 1:5), there is no time in heaven—no past, no future, just an "eternal now."

Therefore, at the moment a person dies, he or she moves into the "eternal now." From his perspective, the Rapture has already occurred. Thus, no one in heaven is saying, "I miss my mom," or, "I can't wait until my husband gets here." While it might be poetic to talk about being greeted by those who have gone before, in actuality, from the heavenly perspective, it's all simultaneous.

From eternity's viewpoint, the first resurrection has already taken place.

If you read in the obituary column tomorrow that Jon Courson died—call the paper and correct that error. I didn't die. I simply moved out of this musty, crusty tent into a much better place. Like Paul, therefore, I stand accused of following the Way, believing in the Scriptures, and looking for the resurrection.

And, like Paul, I gladly plead guilty.



25 "Count it all joy when you enter into various trials," wrote James in the second verse of the first chapter of his Epistle. Truly, Paul was one who had entered "various trials"! His legal ordeal, which had begun on the steps of the Fortress Antonia in Jerusalem, took him to the Sanhedrin and on to Caesarea, where he stood before the Roman Governor, Festus.

Acts 25:1 (a)
Now when Festus was come into the province . . .

When Festus took over from Felix, he was about seventy years of age. History tells us he would rule in this province for two years before dying in office.

Acts 25:1 (b)
. . . after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

Leaving the seacoast city of Caesarea, Festus went to the capital city of Israel to check on the situation and to introduce himself to the citizenry.

Acts 25:2, 3
Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, and desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.

The root of bitterness within Paul's enemies seems to have grown deeper and deeper in the soil of their spirits during his two-year absence. "Nice to meet you, Festus. Glad you're here," they said. "Now do us a favor: bring Paul back here to Jerusalem." Of course, their plan was not for justice. Their plan was to ambush and kill Paul.

Acts 25:4 (a)
But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea . . .

Perhaps sensing this request was not sincere, Festus smelled trouble.

Acts 25:4 (b), 5

. . . and that he himself would depart shortly thither. Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.

"I'm going back to Caesarea," said Festus. "If you have that much against Paul, come with me, and I'll hear your accusations there."

Acts 25:6, 7

And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought. And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.

Paul's enemies traveled sixty miles to argue their case against Paul. But they still couldn't prove their charges.

Acts 25:8 (a)

While he answered for himself . . .

Once again, Paul acted as his own defense.

Acts 25:8 (b), 9

. . . Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all. But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?

Pressured by the Jews to try Paul in Jerusalem, Festus gave in and asked Paul for a change of venue.

Acts 25:10, 11 (a)

Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them.

Disgusted with the legal maneuvering and political manipulation of the entire judicial system, Paul was tired of being a political pawn. "I'm not going back to Jerusalem," he said. "Enough is enough. I have done no wrong."

Acts 25:11 (b)
I appeal unto Caesar.

It was the right of any Roman citizen who felt he was getting an unfair deal judicially to appear before Caesar.

Acts 25:12
Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.

"You want to go to Caesar?" said Festus. "Okay. To Caesar you'll go."

Acts 25:13
And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus.

The new governor is now being paid a courtesy call by King Agrippa and Bernice. This is Agrippa II, son of Agrippa I, great-grandson of Herod, the one who tried desperately to destroy Jesus at the time of His birth. His great-uncle was the one who beheaded John the Baptist. His sister was Felix's wife, Drusilla. And his father, Agrippa I, was the one who ordered the execution of James and imprisoned Peter, hoping to execute him—until the Lord miraculously released him from prison (Acts 12).

Agrippa II was the last of the Herods. With his power greatly diminished, his rule was limited to the northern area of Israel, near the Sea of Galilee. More a figurehead than a potent political player, Agrippa called on Festus in order to

strengthen his weakened political ties. Agrippa came with Bernice. Described in literature as being a ravishing beauty, Bernice was Drusilla's sister—making her the half sister of Agrippa. Because of this, Agrippa and Bernice were never married, but they lived together.

> History tells us Bernice would eventually leave Agrippa for Titus, a Roman general who would later lead his armies to destroy Jerusalem and burn the temple. Following a short stay in Rome, however, Bernice would go back to Agrippa II. Bernice was a shady lady and Agrippa was no angel. Thus, many historians say they deserved each other.

> **Acts 25:14–18**
>
> **And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him. Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed.**

Festus complained to Agrippa that, after hearing Paul's case in order to appease the Jews, he could find nothing wrong with Paul.

> **Acts 25:19–21**
>
> **But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar.**

The reason Festus shared this information with Agrippa was because Festus was in a real jam. Festus knew Caesar would think him incompetent for sending Paul to Rome without valid accusation.

Acts 25:22

Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. Tomorrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.

"Let me hear him," said Agrippa. "I'll find a charge you can write on your report to Caesar."

Acts 25:23

And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.

The "place of hearing" was the amphitheatre on the beach at Caesarea. It would have been packed. People would have been dressed up. Soldiers would have been standing guard. Dignitaries would have been in attendance. You see, it was a real "happening" whenever there was an official hearing in this beautiful amphitheatre overlooking the Mediterranean.

And here was Paul. In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul described his own appearance as being physically weak. Historians verify that he was a short man with bowed legs, a long hooked nose, little hair, and runny eyes. And yet, here this "little man" commanded the attention of the entire Roman provincial capital of Caesarea.

It's amazing what the Lord can do with a little of anything. Consider Bethlehem: a tiny, insignificant town, but the most well-known village in all of history because Jesus was in it. And where Jesus is, things happen in a big way.

Acts 25:24, 25

And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. But when I found that he had

committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.

"I find this man has done nothing worthy of death," said Festus, "but since he has appealed to Augustus, I am required to send him." Octavius, who preceded Julius Caesar, was the first Roman ruler to use the name "Caesar Augustus," or "august one." "Augustus" was a title of strength and authority, so every Caesar who followed Octavius chose to use the title "Augustus." The Augustus spoken of here was Caesar Nero.

Acts 25:26 (a)
Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord.

"My lord" is not a title of honor—but of deity. This is the first time in Scripture we see Caesar deified. Caesar Nero was the first Caesar who claimed to be God.

Acts 25:26 (b), 27
Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.

"Help me to find something to write. Help me get 'A-grippa' this situation," pleaded Festus.



26 Acts 26:1 (a)
Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself.

Wanting to help Festus find some charge to send to Caesar concerning Paul, Agrippa must have been eager to hear Paul's defense.

Acts 26:1 (b)

Then Paul stretched forth the hand . . .

This was a salute, a sign of respect. Paul had the wonderful ability to respect the position of authority, even if the person holding it was unworthy.

Acts 26:1 (c)—3(a)

. . . and answered for himself: I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews . . .

Being half Jew and half Edomite, the Herods had a tremendous fascination with all things Jewish. They studied Judaism. They read Jewish history. They were intrigued by Jewish culture. Paul knew this. "I'm happy to talk to you, King Agrippa," he said, "because I know you understand our culture, our traditions, and our religion." Agrippa did—but when push came to shove, this same Agrippa would, in A.D. 70, join Titus in helping to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. Thus, his interest was intellectual rather than heartfelt.

Acts 26:3 (b)

. . . wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

"This might take a while," said Paul, "but give me some time to explain the situation to you."

Acts 26:4, 5

My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

"The Jews know where I'm coming from," said Paul. "If they would come and testify, they would tell you, Agrippa, I was a Pharisee. The most orthodox of orthodox Jews, the most traditional, the most religious."

Acts 26:6

And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers.

"I stand here because of the hope of the promise made to our fathers," said Paul. Agrippa knew that the promise to which he referred was Messiah. In other words, "The issue is my belief in Jesus as Messiah," contended Paul.

Acts 26:7, 8

Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

"Oh, Agrippa, you who know the stories of the Bible, you who are aware of our history, why should it seem like an amazing thing to you that God could raise the dead?" asked Paul, referring to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The same question could be asked today. People have trouble with miracles because they fail to comprehend the power and the reality of God. You see, the difficulty of a task can only be determined when measured against the agent who attempts to accomplish it.

J. B. Phillips was right in his contention that sometimes our God is indeed too small. If we get hung up on the problems and the challenges before us, it's because we fail to realize the size, strength, and heart of our Father.

The God who made billions of stars in the Milky Way Galaxy and millions of galaxies at least the size of the Milky Way spans the entire universe between His thumb and little finger (Isaiah 40:12). Our Father is big, gang!

Yet He is the same God who made the atom—a miniature planetary system so small it takes one million bunched together to equal the thickness of a single strand of human hair.

Now, do you think the God who made the vastness of the universe and the intricacies of the atom can raise the dead? It all depends on your view of God. Most of us do not doubt the power of God, but we doubt His willingness to intervene in our situations personally.

Why should He care about us? The answer lies in the Cross. "If God did not spare His only Son that we might be saved, shall He not freely give us all things pertaining to life?" asked Paul (see Romans 8:32). He will supply everything that's good for me. How do I know? Because He already gave me the very best when He gave me His Son, Christ Jesus.

Acts 26:9, 10 (a)

I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison . . .

Continuing his testimony, Paul said, "I went around wasting the church, imprisoning believers."

Acts 26:10 (b)

. . . having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

In other words, Paul said, "As a member of the Sanhedrin, I voted against these Christians, these heretics."

Acts 26:11 (a)

And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme . . .

The realization that he forced believers to blaspheme must have haunted Paul all of his days.

Acts 26:11 (b), 12

. . . and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests.

"I was trying to find Christians wherever I could and do them in however I might," continued Paul.

Acts 26:13, 14

At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the goads.

Goads were sticks farmers used to prod their oxen into submission. Therefore, when the Lord said to Paul, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads," He was implying that Paul was a dumb, stubborn ox who could be guided no other way. Stubborn indeed—I'm convinced Paul was under conviction from the time he witnessed the stoning of Stephen, as he saw the vision of an angel on Stephen's face and heard the words, "Father forgive them," from Stephen's lips (see Acts 7).

Acts 26:15–17

And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee.

"I am making you a witness and a minister," the Lord said to Paul.

Acts 26:18, 19

To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.

"The vision God gave me was that I was to open men's eyes from darkness to light, and to turn men's lives from Satan to God in order that they might receive forgiveness of sins and the inheritance of faith." And in Paul's vision, we see ours.

For topical study of Acts 26:16–18 "Heavenly Vision," turn to page **843.**

Acts 26:20

But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

Repentance is changing one's mind. Regeneration is changing one's heart. Redemption is changing one's state—trading the kingdom of darkness and death for the kingdom of light and life. "This was my message," said Paul.

Acts 26:21

For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

Why did the Jews want to kill Paul?
Because he preached repentance.

- Noah didn't stand on the steps of his ark and say, "Something good is about to happen to you."
- Amos was not confronted by priests who threatened to kill him because he was preaching, "I'm okay. You're okay."
- Jeremiah was not cast into the dungeon because he talked about the "power of possibility thinking."
- Daniel was not thrown to the lions for saying, "Smile, God loves you."
- John the Baptist wasn't beheaded for having a "Honk If You Love Jesus" bumper sticker.

The message of Noah and Daniel, Amos and Jeremiah, John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, was singular. The message was: Repent.

The message of repentance is not a popular message because it says people who think they've got it together—don't. People who think they're okay—aren't. People who think they'll make it to heaven on their own—won't.

Acts 26:22

Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.

"Wait a minute," Claudius Lysias could have said. "Help from God? I was the one who was there with my soldiers, risking our necks to save yours, Paul."

"No, it was God," Paul would have insisted because Paul was a man who saw God's hand in everything.

I read about a preacher named Frederic Nolan. Fifty men were chasing him through a hilly area of North Africa. Trapped in a canyon, he saw the mouth of a cave and scooted in. Lying at the back of the shallow cave, the exhausted Nolan knew that within ten minutes he would be discovered and killed. But as he lay there, a spider appeared and began to quickly weave a web over the cave's mouth. Twenty minutes later, when Nolan's persecutors arrived, four or five guys stopped at the opening of the cave, saw the web, and said, "He's not in there."

And Frederic Nolan went on to record something in his journal that I think is wonderful: Where God is, a spider web becomes a wall. But where God isn't, a wall is like a spider web.

Like Nolan, Paul knew it wasn't chance—it was God.

Acts 26:23, 24

That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

"You're crazy, Paul," shouted Festus. "You're talking about seeing a light, having a change of heart, God rescuing you, opening men's eyes, changing men's lives. This can't be."

And there will be those who look at you and say the same thing. "It's not that simple," they'll say. "Jesus can't change a person—without therapy, seminars, and counseling."

Let the scoffers say what they may. But let us stand by what Paul declared to be the heavenly vision. That is, God is capable and desirous to change men, to take them out of the power of Satan, and to place them into His glorious, gracious kingdom.

Acts 26:25, 26 (a)

But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things . . .

Realizing Festus was not tuned in to what he was saying, Paul returned his attention to Agrippa. With Agrippa's knowledge of Scripture, I'm sure Paul thought he would be converted.

Acts 26:26 (b), 27

. . . before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

"Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? Sure you do," said Paul. What a salesman!

Acts 26:28

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

"Paul, could it be that my life of debauchery and immorality could be turned around like yours was—in an instant? You're almost persuading me to become a Christian," said Agrippa.

Acts 26:29

And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

"I wish you would believe," said Paul, "and not you only, but all who hear me."

Acts 26:30

And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them.

Agrippa was deeply touched by what he was hearing. It was ringing true in his heart—and yet he bailed out.

A computer whiz, a Boy Scout, and a minister were flying in a three-passenger plane. The pilot said, "It's not looking good, guys. Our engines are cutting out and we're going down. The problem is, we have only three parachutes—and I'm taking one." Realizing one of them would be left behind, the passengers looked at one another. Immediately, the computer whiz grabbed a chute, calling out, "Sorry, guys, but I've got to take this because I'm the smartest man in the world," as he jumped out the door.

The minister then turned to the Boy Scout and said, "I've had a good life. The Lord is real to me. I know I'm going to heaven. So you go ahead and take the last chute. I'll go down with the plane."

"That won't be necessary," said the Boy Scout. "The smartest man in the world just jumped out with my backpack."

So, too, Agrippa had the opportunity to make it safely into eternity. But he grabbed the wrong bag. He grabbed Bernice. You see, every time Agrippa is mentioned (25:13; 25:23; 26:30), he's always with Bernice. She had a hold on him.

An eagle swooped down and grabbed a rodent in its powerful talons. Pulling it to its chest, he soared higher and higher. Suddenly, however, he no longer looked majestic, but began to flap his wings rapidly before losing altitude and crashing into a rock. Upon investigation, a

naturalist observing the scene discovered that the little rodent had its teeth imbedded in the chest of the mighty eagle. Although the eagle thought he was controlling the rodent, all the while the rodent was actually draining the life from him.

That's what happened to Agrippa, and that's what happens in life. People think, *I'm controlling him, or her, or it,* as they tighten their grip. But in reality, the thing they cling to is the very thing that will drain the life from them. Sin does that to you and me. It's a rat. It'll drain you and keep you from being what God knows you could be.

Acts 26:31, 32

And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.

In other words, Agrippa said, "Festus, you blew it. This guy hasn't done anything wrong at all. If he hadn't appealed to Caesar, he'd be set free." Agrippa saw Paul's trial as a mistake. Paul, however, used it as an opportunity to share the gospel.

So, too, in whatever trial you face, may God give you grace to say, "Happily I stand here today, knowing this is an opportunity for me to share something of my faith and something of His life."

HEAVENLY VISION

A Topical Study of ACTS 26:16–18

When Bill Clinton was first elected president, political pundits weighed in with their theories on why President Bush didn't win the election. Essentially, they offered two reasons. One was the lingering recession. But secondly, and perhaps more importantly, they cited the president's failure to articulate vision. In fact, you might remember that President Bush himself told reporters upon taking office, "I have trouble with the vision thing."

In Proverbs 29:18 we are told that without vision, people perish. Literally, "People run wild," or, as seen in some marginal notes, "people run naked." Thus, vision is necessary not only for every President but for every person—for without it, people run wildly, aimlessly, shamefully.

"Write the vision, Habakkuk," said the Lord, "and make it plain so he that runneth by may be able to read it" (see Habakkuk 2:2). In other words, "Write the vision so clearly that even the person who runs rapidly might be able to understand it"—for without vision, people wander in mediocrity and meander in mundanity.

Nowhere is necessity of vision seen more clearly than in the life of the apostle Paul. He had purpose and meaning because he understood from the moment of his conversion the heavenly vision for his life.

Perhaps you're saying, "Good for Paul. I'm glad he had a vision from heaven. But I have neither seen the Lord physically as Paul did nor heard His voice audibly as Paul did. So how am I supposed to get vision like Paul did? If vision is necessary for a productive, successful life, how am I supposed to receive vision personally?"

I have good news for you. Paul the apostle, the one who had heavenly vision, was also the one who said, "Follow me as I follow Christ" (see 1 Corinthians 11:1). In other words, the vision the Lord gave Paul, recorded in our text, is the vision the Lord intends for you and me as well. Paul's vision is to be our vision.

What Paul Was to Be

But rise and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness . . .

Acts 26:16

When the Lord appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, He said, "You are to be a minister and a witness." The Greek word for minister means "under-rower." It's a word that described the guys in the belly of a large ship who, although they were unseen, unnoticed, and unapplauded, rowed steadily and moved the ship to its ultimate destination.

And Paul's commission is for you as well. You see, Jesus said, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should bring forth much fruit" (see John 15:16). Whoever you are—man, woman, teenager, young person—if you are a believer in Christ, He has ordained you into ministry.

We are not only to be ministers, but secondly, we are to be witnesses. A witness is one who goes into the courtroom and simply shares what he or she has seen. The Lord did not call you to be an attorney to argue the case, or a judge to hand down a verdict. The Lord simply called you to be a witness to tell people what He has done for you personally.

When I don't live up to that calling, my life becomes dull, incredibly ordinary, and meaningless. But when I minister and witness, a funny thing happens. I get back more than I give—which shouldn't be surprising, considering that Jesus said, "The measure that you give out shall be meted back to you" (see Luke 6:38).

What Paul Was to Do

To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God . . .

Acts 26:18

To Open Men's Eyes

Why do people need their eyes opened? Because they have been blinded by sin.

> As Samson laid his head on Delilah's lap, he sinned by sharing with her the secret of his strength. "If you cut my hair," he said, "I'll be like any man." Delilah reached for the scissors and began snipping. When Samson awoke, Scripture says he knew not that the Spirit had departed from him (Judges 16:20). He thought he could take the Philistines on. Instead, they took him down. They placed him in fetters, poked out his eyes, and led him to the granary where, hitched to a grinding stone like a common ox, he went round and round in circles.

That's what sin does. It binds, it blinds, and it makes life a grind. "What's my life about? Why am I here? Why should I get out of bed?" we say as round and round we go.

Sin blinds people. First, it blinds people to their need for Jesus.

> "Do you enjoy being a preacher?" asked the cashier.
>
> "Yes," I answered. "As a matter of fact, I love what I do."
>
> "Well, I was raped two years ago," she said as she started to cry, "and people have tried to get me to church, but church is a crutch."
>
> "You're right," I said. "But it's more than a crutch. Church is an ambulance, an emergency room, a hospital, a surgical team. It's for people who realize they're hurt—either by their own sin or the sin of others. It's for people who say, "I need a Helper. I need a Healer. I need a Savior."
>
> I don't know what she did, but I'm so thankful I was able to share with her the reality that Jesus *is* the Answer.

Second, sin blinds people to the nature of Jesus. It's amazing the misconceptions people have about our Lord. They think He is some kind of Cosmic Killjoy who looks down from heaven, worried that someone, somewhere might be having fun. But nothing could be further from the truth, for

Jesus said, "I have come that you might have *life* and life *abundantly"* (see John 10:10). Jesus came to set people free—not to put a religious trip on them.

How?

To be free, to get a fresh start, "you must be born again" (see John 3:7).

A lady called her husband and said, "Honey, the car isn't working."

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"There's water in the carburetor," she said.

"Water in the carburetor? That's impossible. The cooling system doesn't touch the carburetor. There can't be water in the carburetor."

"Yes," insisted his wife. "There's definitely water in the carburetor."

"Well, I'll come home and take a look," he said. "Where's the car?"

"At the bottom of the pool," she answered.

You might disagree with the divine diagnosis, but the Bible says that although you have been buried in the pool of iniquity and the sea of sin, it is the desire of the Lord's heart to rescue you, to breathe life into you, and to put you on your feet once again.

To Turn Men's Lives

Not only was Paul to open men's eyes, he was to turn men's lives from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the power of God. You see, two kingdoms dwell simultaneously on this earth: the kingdom of light and love, which is the kingdom of God—and the kingdom of darkness and death, which is the kingdom of Satan. *Every* man is in one of these two kingdoms. No one is neutral, for Jesus said, "He who is not for Me is against Me" (see Matthew 12:30). Therefore, if you are not in the kingdom of God, if He is not your Lord and King and Leader—then you are in Satan's kingdom of death and darkness.

Satan loves darkness.

Most crimes are committed at night.

The period in history when people didn't worship God is called the *Dark* Ages.

A continent that has not been exposed to the gospel is called a *dark* continent.

Hell is called "outer *darkness*" (see Matthew 8:12).

Some people think hell is a bunch of guys playing poker and telling dirty jokes. Nothing could be further from the truth. Astronomers tell us about the existence of black holes so dense that nothing escapes their gravitational pull—not even light itself.

> When the guide turns out the lights in the Oregon Caves, there's an absolute absence of light. So dark you can't see your hand in front of your face, it's a darkness that seems to have a substance of its own, a darkness you can actually feel.

Hell is like that. In hell, no one will see a thing—for a day, a month, a year, a century, a millennium, a billion millenniums. Men who choose to live in darkness on earth will spend eternity surrounded by darkness in hell.

That's why Paul said, "My ministry, my job, my vision is to open men's eyes and to turn men's lives from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the power of God."

"Wait," you say. "I may not be a follower of God—but neither am I dominated by Satan. I'm master of my own destiny, captain of my own fate." The Bible says otherwise. According to the Word, people who aren't walking with the Lord are actually opposing or hurting themselves through their lifestyles and attitudes, their activities and habits (2 Timothy 2:25). How are men freed from Satan's grasp? "You shall know the truth and the *truth* shall set you free," said Jesus (see John 8:32).

"What is truth?" Pontius Pilate asked (John 18:38).

"I Am," said Jesus (see John 14:6).

Gang, we have the privilege of opening men's eyes to their need for Jesus and to the nature of Jesus. We get to turn men's lives from the power of darkness and the devil to the power of light and the Lord.

How? Through a principle of physics called the expulsive power of the greater force, which says, for example, that if you want to rid a room of darkness, you don't fight against the darkness by trying to karate chop it, rebuke it, or yell at it. You turn on the light, and light—the greater power—will flood the room, expelling the darkness. Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world" (John 8:12). Therefore, when a man or woman opens up his or her heart to Jesus Christ, the light of the Lord naturally drives out the darkness of Satan. It's glorious!

Men's eyes are opened and their lives are turned by the power of the Spirit —not by programs, principles, or procedures. It is the power of the resurrected Lord that works change in a person. It's God's one-step program: Get saved, let the Spirit direct your life—and you will be absolutely free.

Men's eyes are opened and their lives are turned by the prayers of the saints. You can witness to people until you're blue in the face, but if their eyes are blinded, they won't receive what you say. How is the blindfold removed? Ephesians 6 says the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but spiritual. Prayer is the number one weapon in our arsenal. We can do more than pray—but we can't do anything *until* we pray.

Men's eyes are opened and their lives turned by proclaiming the Scriptures. If someone is complaining, tell them the Bible says to give thanks in everything (1 Thessalonians 5:18). If someone is upset because his candidate didn't win,

say, "The Bible says all things work together for good to them that love God," (see Romans 8:28). Jesus said, "The words which I speak are Spirit and life" (see John 6:63). Share the Word—it's powerful!

> A seminary student asked Charles Spurgeon how to defend Scripture against unbelievers, skeptics, and cynics. The three-hundred-pound preacher laughed aloud and said, "How do you defend the Scriptures? Son, that's like asking how to defend a lion. Just let it out of its cage. It'll defend itself."

How long has it been since you "let the Word out" and shared the Scriptures with an unbeliever? Share the Word—that's where the power is.

Paul's vision was to turn men's eyes and turn men's lives in order that men would experience the forgiveness of sins and the inheritance of faith (Acts 26:18).

Forgiveness of sin is man's greatest need and God's greatest deed. If you've been saved for a while, this concept might have become dulled in your understanding because you live in the realm of forgiveness. But the world doesn't. "Follow me as I follow Christ," Paul says to you today.

Be a minister. Be a sharer. Open men's eyes and turn men's lives in the power of the Spirit, by the praying of the saints, through the proclaiming of the Scriptures.

They will experience forgiveness as they've never known—and you will be fulfilled presently and rewarded eternally.



27 Early in his ministry, the apostle Paul knew that if he could impact Rome with the gospel, it would have ramifications throughout the known world. And at last, here he was—on his way to Rome, traveling all-expenses-paid as a prisoner of the Empire.

> **Acts 27:1**
>
> **And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.**

In command of the soldiers and the prisoners on the ship was a centurion named Julius.

Acts 27:2, 3 (a)

And entering into a ship of Adramytium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. And the next day we touched at Sidon.

Setting sail from Caesarea, the ship made its way north.

Acts 27:3 (b)

And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.

Throughout Scripture, centurions—the backbone of the Roman army—are always seen in a favorable light (Matthew 8; Luke 7; Acts 10). And Julius was no exception. He showed kindness to Paul by granting him liberty for refreshment and fellowship. I find this intriguing, for although Paul could only have known Julius for perhaps a day at the most, there must have been something in Paul's character that gave Julius absolute confidence that he would not try to escape.

Acts 27:4–7

And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone.

These are the various stops Paul and his company made as they worked their way up the coast, eventually crossing the Mediterranean Sea, and on to the island of Crete.

Acts 27:8, 9 (a)

And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea. Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past . . .

"The fast" referred to here was the Day of Atonement, which would have been during the first part of October—a dangerous time to be at sea, with winter storms soon approaching.

Acts 27:9 (b), 10

. . . Paul admonished them, and said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.

Paul spoke to the captain, saying, "This is a bad time to be sailing." Now, although Paul was a tentmaker by trade, a rabbi by profession, and a prisoner by decree, the fact that he had been shipwrecked three times and had spent an entire day and night in the open ocean (2 Corinthians 11:25) qualified him to be able to give advice concerning the dangers of the sea.

Acts 27:11

Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.

The centurion listened first to Paul and then to the owner of the ship, with the rest of the crew no doubt chiming in. "We'll go with the majority," he said. "Let's set sail."

Acts 27:12–14

And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.

At first the wind blew softly, and in a favorable direction. That's always the way it is. When you don't listen to the Word of the Lord, when you go your own way, when you do your own thing, at first you're just blown along softly. But when the fierce winds come—which they always do—you're blown away totally.

Please note four reasons that make this a perfect example of how *not* to know God's will as you sail through life and journey towards heaven:

- The sailors were impatient. Although it was not the season for sailing, these guys wanted to get on with their journey. The Word says, "He that believeth in the Lord must not make haste" (see Isaiah 28:16). Are you impatient? Slow down. When you don't know what to do—don't do anything. When you're not sure which way to go, stay where you are. Wait on the Lord. It's so hard to do, but so important.
- The sailors took a vote. The centurion said, "Okay Paul, I hear what you're saying, but I also hear the owner, the captain, and the crew," and Paul was outvoted. God is not an American, folks, and if we make decisions relating to the kingdom on a democratic basis, we're in a heap of trouble. Ask Moses. If the Israelites had voted during their journey through the wilderness, he would have been ousted the first week. We need to know what the heart of God is—not what the majority says.
- The sailors tested the winds. "The answer is blowing in the wind," may be true for Bob Dylan, but it's not true for you and me as believers. We're not to say, "The way the wind is blowing and circumstances are pointing will determine my course." No, there needs to be a solid inner conviction, a Holy Spirit direction.
- The sailors sought ease. They wanted to get to Phoenix. Why? Phoenix was where all of the sailors wintered. There were lots of restaurants, movie theatres, golf courses. No doubt these guys thought, *Why should we stay here? We're only sixty-eight miles from Phoenix. That's the place to be—we can even pick up a Suns game.* Sometimes we, like these sailors, ask, "Where is it most comfortable? Where is it easiest?" instead of "What does the Lord know will be best for me?"

Acts 27:15–17 (a)

And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat: Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship . . .

Following the stress and strain of the storm, the crew wrapped the hull of the ship with cables and ropes in an attempt to hold it together.

Acts 27:17 (b)

. . . and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven.

They took the sail down to avoid being grounded on a sandbar.

Acts 27:18–20

And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; and the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

All hope was lost. These veteran seamen knew they were going down.

Acts 27:21, 22

But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.

Notice it wasn't until "after long abstinence" that Paul spoke. He waited to say, "You should have listened to me," until he could also say, "Be of good cheer; we're going to make it."

Mom and Dad, this is a good word for you as well. Hold your tongue until, like Paul, you can give your kids words of encouragement, instruction, and practical application along with your words of correction.

Acts 27:23–25

For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.

The centurion believed the master of the ship (verse 11). Paul believed God —and what a difference it made.

Acts 27:26–28

Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island. But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, [present-day Ionia] about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country; and sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.

Perhaps hearing the crashing of waves in the distance, the sailors took a sounding and discovered the water was getting shallower.

Acts 27:29

Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.

Fearing the ship would be dashed on the rocks, the sailors put the lifeboat over the side, ready to take their chances in a small, more navigable boat.

Acts 27:30–32

And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.

Don't jump ship. I know the storms get to be tough, and instincts tell you to bail out, give up, turn back. But Paul's word of admonition to his shipmates is a very important one for you and me as well.



***For topical study of Acts 27:31–32 entitled "Don't Jump Ship!" turn to page* 851.**

Acts 27:33

And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

The crew had been fasting for fourteen days—not because they were seeking God, but because they were sick to their stomachs. Filled with fear, they lost their appetites.

Acts 27:34

Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

As de facto commander, Paul said, "It's time to eat."

Acts 27:35

And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.

Paul had hope in his heart. He believed in God. And he thanked the Lord in the sight of everyone on deck.

Acts 27:36

Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.

I believe one of the best things we can do when people around us are discouraged is break bread with them in Communion. And just like the crew on

this ship, they will experience good cheer.

Acts 27:37–39

And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea. And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

The two hundred seventy-six men on board didn't know where they were—but they could see a creek running into the ocean, which they thought might be a possible point of entry for them.

Acts 27:40–41

And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmovable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

Here they were, close to shore, trying to navigate their ship into the river. But as they did, it fell apart.

Acts 27:42–44

And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

Just as the Lord promised, everyone on board survived the storm. Please note four types of storms that blow into our lives:

Storms of correction. Ask brother Jonah about these. When a storm arose and he was tossed overboard and swallowed by a great fish, it was because he

was rebelling against the Lord (Jonah 1:10). So, too, sometimes when I'm in a place of disobedience or rebellion, the Lord will allow a storm to get me on track again.

Storms of perfection. After Jesus fed the five thousand, He sent His disciples across the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14). Midway through their journey, a storm arose around them for their perfection. You see, Jesus knew it wouldn't be too many months before these same disciples would see another multitude of five thousand—not fed, but saved (Acts 4:4)—followed by another storm—not on the sea, but of persecution within the church (Acts 8:1). Thus, Jesus was training His boys to endure the storms of persecution that inevitably follow the seasons of blessing.

Faith is not a pill we take, folks. It's a muscle we work. Therefore, the Lord will send me into a storm from time to time not for correction, but for perfection because the way I react to storms internally will tell me where I'm at spiritually. Storms provide unique opportunity for me to see where I'm at and to grow in my understanding that the Lord will come through at the right time, saying, "Be of good cheer. We're going to make it."

Storms of protection. Because "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8), God sent a storm to drown out all of the carnality, sin, and iniquity that surrounded him. The storm raged for forty days and nights, but Noah and his family were not only protected in the storm—they were protected by the storm. "Oh no!" we cry. "My TV blew up," or, "My stereo doesn't work. What a storm I'm in." But, as in Noah's case, it might be a storm of protection —protecting us from the carnality and iniquity that surround us continually.

Storms of direction. Knowing there was a group of people on the island of Malta in need of ministry, the Lord said, "Before you go to Rome, Paul, I'm going to allow you to be blown off course because there is something I want you to do for Me—something you never would have thought of on your own, something that wasn't part of your agenda. I have some people to whom I want to minister, so I'll allow a storm to arise, which, although it looks like it's blowing you off course, will put you in the very place I want to use you."

"How come I got canned?"

"Why did she dump me?"

"How come it's not working out?" you ask.

Don't be blown away. Realize that the Lord is changing your direction because there's something He wants to do that will ultimately be a blessing.

Storms of correction and perfection, storms of protection and direction—how can you know which one you might be in?

Talk to the Father.

> *"Why am I in this storm, Lord? Is it correction—or are You perfecting me for what You see is coming my way? Is there a new direction for my life—or are You protecting me from something that would be very damaging?"*

How long has it been since you got away to spend time with the Lord? Clear your schedule, seek Him, and you'll be blown away by His goodness rather than by the storm.

DON'T JUMP SHIP!

A Topical Study of ACTS 27:31, 32

After jumping through legal hoops in Caesarea, Paul was finally sailing toward Rome to plead his case before Caesar. On the way, a storm arose that threatened the lives of the two hundred seventy-six soldiers, sailors, and prisoners on board with Paul. After the crew readied a lifeboat to avoid the inevitable dashing of the ship against the rocks, Paul, the little rabbi who was a tentmaker by trade and a prisoner by decree, said, "Except ye abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved."

I believe Paul's words are the heart of the Lord for us today. There are times—maybe you're in one right now—when the wind is howling, the waves are rising, and you find yourself saying, "I'm out of here. I'm jumping ship. I cannot take this marriage one more day," or—"I can't take my parents one more minute. Adios."

Storms come, and the temptation arises within all of us to bail out when we think we've been tricked or cheated. I share with you the story of a man who truly had reason to feel this way. His name was Jacob; and his story begins in Genesis 29.

Jacob was young, single, footloose, and looking for a wife. Arriving in Pandanaram, he found a group of shepherds milling around a well. Industrious by nature, Jacob couldn't understand this—until he saw a beautiful shepherdess approaching, bringing her flock with her. Immediately, Jacob flexed his muscles, single-handedly removed the stone that covered the well, and gallantly said, "Come and water your flock." She did, he kissed her, and then cried aloud, for she had smitten his heart.

When Jacob discovered that this beautiful maiden was the daughter of his uncle, he went to her father and told him he wanted to marry his daughter.

"Okay," said Laban. "Work for me seven years, and I'll give her to you."

Jacob agreed, and the Bible says it seemed to him but a few days because of the great love he had for her.

The big night finally came. Jacob took his beloved bride—veiled from head to toe according to Jewish tradition—back to his tent where they consummated

the marriage. The next morning, when Jacob opened his eyes, he couldn't believe what he saw. It wasn't Rachel he had married—it was her older sister, Leah—whose name meant "tender-eyed" or "one who makes your eyes hurt." Jacob stormed out of the tent, found Laban, and said, "You tricked me."

"I'm sorry, Jacob," his uncle said, "but we have a tradition that the older daughter must marry before the younger daughter. Therefore, it was necessary that Leah, Rachel's older sister, marry first. But I'll tell you what I'll do. Work seven more years, and I'll throw in Rachel."

Now, if anyone ever had a right to say, "I got tricked. I want out," it was Jacob. "Listen, Leah," he could have said, "I realize we went through the ceremony, but I was tricked. I didn't know who you were. I'm in love with Rachel. She's the one who captured my heart. So I'm out of here."

But that's not what Jacob said. He agreed to Laban's proposal, and thereby ended up with both Leah and Rachel as his wives. Time passed, and after a while, Leah began to have children. Rachel, who had none, said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I die."

Having had three sons with Leah, Jacob knew it wasn't *his* fault and said to her, "Am I in the place of God? I can't do anything about this situation."

"Then take my servant girl, have relations with her, and the kids will count as ours," said Rachel.

And Jacob did just that.

Not to be outdone, Leah—who had stopped bearing children—said, "Here, Jacob, take my servant girl, and the children she bears will count as ours." The end result from these four women were the twelve sons who became, of course, the twelve tribes of Israel.

Interestingly, Rachel, the one who had said, "Give me children or I'll die," did indeed die when she gave birth to Benjamin. Jacob buried this one, about whom he was so passionate, in Canaan.

Years later, Leah died, and Jacob buried her in the Promised Land, at a place called Machpelah.

When, as an old man in Genesis 49, Jacob himself was about to die, he called his sons together, and, after blessing each one, said, "I am going the way of my fathers. When I die, bury me at—" Now, I would have thought he would have said, "Bury me by the love of my life. Bury me by Rachel." But that's not what he said. He said, "Bury me at Machpelah—by Leah."

Why would he say that? Because at the end of his life, Jacob realized Leah was where the blessing was all along. What he thought was an unfair trick was in reality the biggest blessing in his life because from Leah—not Rachel, not Bilhah, not Zilpah—from Leah came Judah. And from the tribe of Judah came the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Jesus was birthed through Leah, the one Jacob thought he had every right to bail out on. And at the end of his life, Jacob said, "Leah was it all along. I want to be buried by her."

Wife, you might look at the man next to you and say, "I was tricked. He's not the man I thought he would be." Husband, you might look at the woman you married and say, "She's not the passion of my life. I didn't know she would turn out this way." But if you jump ship, know this: You will miss the blessing of the birthing of Jesus in a supernatural, incredible, wonderful way because there are no tricks in the life of a child of God.

Employee, you might look at your boss and say, "When I signed that contract, I didn't know he would be such a jerk. I don't care what I signed. I'm going to find a legal loophole. I'm jumping ship." But when you put pen to paper and signed your name, your Father was there. And to the child of God, there are no tricks.

Teenager, you might look at your parents and say, "I was tricked. I must have been switched at birth. God couldn't have chosen *these* people to raise me." But know this: You are not only their child—you are a child of the King. He, in His wisdom, hand-picked them for you. And He makes no mistakes.

Paul said, "If you jump ship, you'll lose your life." And the centurion, knowing how tempting it would be for the sailors to bail out, to jump ship, to give up, ordered the soldiers to cut the lines so there would be no possibility of escape.

I know there are some who are saying, "I haven't jumped ship. I've only lowered a lifeboat over the side. I'll give it three more months, or two more weeks, or one more year."

But if you keep an escape option open in your mind, I guarantee you will end up using it.

Think about divorce—and you will end up divorced.

Think about other men or other women you wish you had because you're feeling tricked by the one you're with—and inevitably, you'll bail out.

Think about changing jobs, even though you gave your word—and you'll miss out on what could have been.

Think about leaving home, even though that's where God has you—and you'll never see His reality.

Get rid of the lifeboats.

Cut the lines.

"It's easy for you to pontificate," you say. "You don't know the storm I'm in. You don't know how vehemently the wind is blowing, how violently the waves are pounding. You just don't understand."

You're right. I don't. But there is One who does.

In 1902 a fire broke out, which flared up rapidly in the home of an elderly woman. Asleep in the upstairs bedroom was her grandson, whom she tried to rescue before she died in the process. Someone outside heard the screams of the five-year-old boy, however, and found a way to climb hand-over-hand up a drainpipe, until he made it to the roof, broke through a window, and pulled the boy out to safety.

This story, which appeared in the St. Louis *Globe Herald,* generated quite a bit of interest in the orphaned boy. During the hearings that followed, a schoolteacher came forward and gave reasons why he felt he should be appointed the boy's guardian. So did a wealthy businessman, a minister, and several other upstanding people in the community. The little boy, however, looked down and never raised his eyes—until a man came through the back doors of the courtroom, walked up to him, and opened his hands. The boy looked at the charred and badly blistered hands of the stranger and jumped into his arms, saying, "This is my dad."

And the judge pounded the gavel and said, "So be it."

So, too, I'm asking you to look at the hands of One who loves you so much He absorbed the heat of hell to pull you out of eternal destruction. I'm asking you to listen to this One who says, "Trust Me. Don't jump ship, or all will be lost."

Precious people, Jesus will come in a way that will blow your mind if you don't jump ship. I don't care what the sailors of society are saying about

breaking commitments, bailing out, and giving up.

Cut the ropes. Let the lifeboat crash in the sea below. Stay on board and, like Jacob, you'll look back and say, "Bury me by Leah. That's where the blessing was all along."



28 Paul was a marked man. His name was known in hell. The sizable storm he had endured was no doubt an attempt of Satan to do him in. "But I thought the storm was ordained by the Lord in order for him to bring the gospel to the island of Malta," you say.

It was. You see, in Greek, there is no linguistic differentiation between the words "trial" and "temptation," which is why some versions of James 1:2 read: "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials," while others read: "Count it all joy when you fall into various temptations." Therefore, the temptation instigated by the Enemy to pull me down or do me in is ultimately the trial allowed, even ordained by the Lord to build me up and strengthen my faith.

This is seen in the life of Job. Before Satan could bring any difficulty to him, or to those around him, he first had to ask permission of God (Job 1:9–12). But the ultimate example of this principle is seen at Calvary. Satan attempted to destroy Jesus Christ, only to discover that the Father allowed Judas Iscariot to betray Him and the Roman soldiers to crucify Him in order to bring about our salvation. Thus, it is the mature man, the wise woman who realizes that whatever is coming down in life is allowed by the Father to do something wonderful in, or to, or through them.

Acts 28:1, 2

And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

The Greeks called anyone who didn't speak Greek a barbarian because they thought the languages of other people sounded like "bar-bar"—gibberish. Far from being "barbarous" however, the Maltese people showed kindness to the drenched soldiers, sailors, and prisoners who had washed up on their shore.

Acts 28:3 (a)

And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire . . .

I like this. Paul could have said, "Hey, I told you a storm would happen. I told you the boat would go down. I told you all would be saved. That makes me the "big kahuna." But that's not what he did. Instead, he saw some guys lighting a fire and said, "I can help warm others," as he started gathering sticks. How do you stop a guy like Paul—always looking for an opportunity to serve, always going for it?

Two frogs fell into a can of cream, or so I heard it told.
The sides of the can were shiny and steep.
The cream was deep and cold.
"Oh, what's the use?" croaked number one.
" 'Tis fate no help's around.
Goodbye my friend, goodbye cruel world."
And weeping still—he drowned.
But frog number two, of sterner stuff, dogpaddled in surprise,
The while he wiped his creamy face and dried his creamy eyes.
"I'll swim awhile at least," he cried, or so I've heard he said,
"It really wouldn't help the world if one more frog were dead."
An hour or two he kicked and swam, not once he stopped to mutter.
But kicked and kicked and swam and kicked—
And hopped out via butter.

Paul was definitely a frog number two kind of individual—always kicking, always finding a way to do something to warm someone else.

Acts 28:3 (b)

. . . there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

Sometimes Satan tries to destroy or discourage us with sizable storms. Other times, he uses sneaky little snakes. While Paul was helping people, the

snake struck. And you can be sure that's when the serpent will strike you. When you are helping others, serving others, loving others—from out of the heat of hell, Satan will strike.

Paul, however, would use this opportunity to share the gospel with these people in a uniquely powerful way. You see, the fallacy of the overemphasis of the faith movement—the mentality that says we should never be smitten by snakes—is that it robs us of opportunities to share the gospel. The Maltese people knew about these snakes. They had watched their families and loved ones succumb to their poison. Now they were about to see how Paul would handle the power, the danger, the pain of their venom.

So, too, the Lord will allow you to go through difficulties. The doctor may say, "It's inoperable." And no matter how you name it and claim it, folks, it may be the Lord's plan for you to navigate that pain and venom in such a way that the barbarians around you, who are also losing their loved ones to cancer, will change their minds about who God is as a result.

Jesus didn't say to Thomas, "Watch this miracle or listen to this sermon." He said, "Touch My wounds."

The world is rarely impacted and drawn to Jesus Christ through the sight of Christians prospering. No, it's through seeing believers suffering and not giving up that the barbarians change their minds. Perhaps the most important ministry you'll ever have is when people see how you react to the pain they go through all of the time. Difficulty is the agent that often allows people an opportunity to see the reality of Jesus Christ most clearly.

Acts 28:4

And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

People are interesting. We always think the worst. When the snake strikes, invariably we start to think, *Oh, my. You must be a bad person or else that snake wouldn't be hanging from your hand.*

Acts 28:5

And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.

Paul shook it off. I like that! It reminds me of my high-school football coach, Al Matucci—five feet two inches tall, five feet six inches wide. In our Thanksgiving Bowl game against Camden High School, Coach Matucci called a sweep around the left end. As right guard, my job was to pull and lead the blocking. Bob Fontaine, our quarterback set us down, gave the count, took the snap, and I pulled. The next thing I remember was Coach Matucci standing over me, saying, "Shake it off, Courson. Shake it off." After he broke smelling salts in my face and I staggered off the field, I discovered that the play Bob called was not a sweep around the left, but a sweep around the right—which explains why Paul Newbauer, our left guard, and I met helmet to helmet right behind center, and were both knocked out. Coach Matucci would have loved Paul! Paul just shook the snake off—right back into the fire.

Acts 28:6

Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

Isn't this human nature? First, the islanders thought Paul was a murderer. Then, just as quickly, they thought he was a god. If you're seeking the adulation of people—good luck! They'll put you down just as quickly as they'll build you up.

Acts 28:7

In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.

How about this for drop-in guests! For three days, two hundred and seventy-six murderers, thieves, extortionists, kidnappers, soldiers, and sailors lodged with Publius and his family.

Sometimes people show up on your doorstep who might appear to be washed-out. But perhaps the Lord has sent them your way to bless you. If you open your heart, home, and life to people in the name of the Lord, He will reward you for your ministry of hospitality—as Publius was about to discover.

Acts 28:8 (a)

And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux . . .

The word Dr. Luke used for fever is *ducent ario,* meaning "many fevers," and from which we get our word "dysentery." Publius' father came down with dysentery, which produced a great fever—a condition still known on the island of Malta today, called, appropriately, Malta Fever.

Acts 28:8 (b)

. . . to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.

God will be a debtor to no man. Open your house, open your heart, and the people who come in will either bring a great blessing to you—as Paul did when he healed Publius' father—or He will use someone else to bring a blessing your way.

Acts 28:9

So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed:

It is interesting to me that, although Paul prayed for everyone on the island and they were healed, he himself remained afflicted with a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7), which most Bible scholars believe was an eye disease, and from which Paul prayed for deliverance three times (2 Corinthians 12:8). Sometimes the greatest work flows through the very areas of our lives with which we ourselves struggle. For example, even though you might have a difficult marriage situation, you might find yourself with an effective ministry in helping other couples.

Why?

Because the very struggles you go through give you a compassion for and a sensitivity toward others in the same situation. Consequently, I think it's a mistake for us to say, "I'm not going to listen to that sister or receive from that brother because they're struggling with the same issues I do."

Beethoven wrote his greatest symphonies when he couldn't hear a note. And Paul healed multitudes when he was in need of healing himself.

Acts 28:10, 11

Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary. And after three months, we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.

With the winter season behind them, the prisoners, sailors, and soldiers departed from the island of Malta on a ship dedicated to Castor and Pollux—twin sons of Zeus, the gods of navigation.

Acts 28:12, 13

And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli:

They finally made it to Italy—within one hundred twenty-five miles from Rome.

Act 28:14 (a)

Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days . . .

Evidently, the captain had business in the city and allowed Paul and Luke to hang out with the brothers there.

Acts 28:14 (b), 15

. . .and so we went toward Rome. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appiforum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.

Hearing Paul was on his way, the brothers in Rome set out to meet him. The Appiforum being forty-three miles from Rome, The Three Taverns thirty-three

—some men traveled farther than others to meet the apostle who had stirred their hearts through his Epistle to the Romans. So, too, people travel different distances in their desire to learn of the Lord. The wise men from the East traveled at least a year and a half to see the Christ child, while the religious leaders in Jerusalem couldn't be bothered to make the five-mile trip to see what was happening in Bethlehem.

Acts 28:16

And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.

Paul was put under house arrest. Under this provision, the guard was changed every six hours. Paul would later write to the Philippian believers, "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household" (Philippians 4:22).

How did men in Caesar's household get saved?

By being chained to Paul!

Acts 28:17 (a)

And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together . . .

The Jews in Rome, observing Paul enter the city surrounded by the parade of believers who had met him at the Appiiforum and The Three Taverns, must have wondered, *Who* is *this guy?*

So, when Paul said, "I want to talk with you"—they came.

Acts 28:17 (b)–20

. . . and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. For this

cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

"I am here on a judicial matter," said Paul. "I have come to clear my name, not to condemn Israel."

Acts 28:21

And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee.

"Don't worry, Paul," said the Jewish leaders in Rome. "We haven't heard anything negative from Jerusalem about you." This is curious to me. I mean, the Jews in Jerusalem were out to kill Paul. Certainly they must have written a scathing report against him, warning the Jews in Rome about his heresy—perhaps even trying to enlist their aid in finally doing away with him completely. Why is it, then, that the Jews in Rome never heard anything? Could it be because their letter was on the ship that went down at Malta?

I have found that when storms strike—when someone says, "I have cancer," "My marriage is failing," or "My son ran away," the accusations of people who would otherwise be snipping at him or finding fault with him sink to the bottom of the sea of forgetfulness.

Acts 28:22, 23 (a)

But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against. And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus . . .

Paul said, "You want to hear about the "sect" of Christianity? Great!" And they set up a meeting wherein, beginning with the law, and going through the prophets, Paul explained the kingdom as it related to Jesus. The Jews were always eager to hear about the kingdom—but Paul's message was singular: He talked about the King.

Acts 28:23 (b)

. . . both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.

I would love to have a tape of that study.

No doubt Paul would have directed their attention to Genesis 22, wherein Abraham was told to take his only son to Mount Moriah and offer him as a sacrifice unto the Lord. On their way up the mountain, Isaac, who was probably thirty-three years old at the time, said to his father, "Here's the wood and there's the fire—but where is the sacrifice?"

And Abraham spoke prophetically when he answered, "God will provide Himself a Lamb"—not, "God will provide for *Himself," but, "God will provide* Himself. He *will be the Lamb."*

Certainly, Paul would have reminded his audience of Exodus 12, wherein each family was instructed to place the blood of a lamb at the top, sides, and threshold of their doors—thereby depicting a cross.

He would have taken them to Leviticus 14, wherein, following the cleansing of leprosy, priests were instructed to take two birds, place one in an earthen vessel, kill it, and sprinkle the blood on the second bird before letting it go free. "Don't you see," Paul must have said, "how this perfectly describes the work of Jesus Christ—how, like the first bird, He came from heaven, was placed in the earthen vessel of a human body, and was killed? Yet, like the second bird, although the bloody marks of death remained upon Him—He rose again."

Paul would have turned their hearts to Psalm 22, where crucifixion was described centuries before it was known in the Middle East and wherein the very words Jesus spoke on the Cross were recorded.

He would have reminded them of Micah 5, which prophesied specifically that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem; and of Daniel 9, which pinpointed the very day of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem,

He would have reviewed Zechariah 11 with them, wherein it was prophesied that Messiah would be betrayed by His friend and sold for thirty pieces of silver, which would be cast on the floor of the temple, scooped up, and used to purchase a potter's field.

From morning until night, Paul showed how the entire Old Testament pictured, pointed to, and prophesied Jesus Christ. What are the chances that the three hundred-plus prophecies given concerning Messiah would be fulfilled by one man? 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000,000,000. Think of it this way:

> Suppose the entire state of California was covered with acorns three feet deep—one of which was painted green. You and a squirrel go up in an airplane, and, as you fly over California, you open the door and shove the squirrel out. After landing safely, he wanders up and down the state—through San Francisco, San Jose, Fresno, Los Angeles, San Diego, Lake Tahoe, Redding, Yreka until he feels hungry and decides to eat an acorn. The chance of him choosing the green acorn would be 1 in 10 to the twenty-third power—the same chance that all of the prophecies concerning Messiah would be fulfilled in one man.

It doesn't make any sense intellectually for a person to deny the irrefutable facts of the Old Testament prophecies, pictures, and portraits that predicted who Jesus would be, how He would be born, how He would live, and how He would die. It takes more faith *not* to believe Jesus Christ is the Messiah than it takes to believe in Jesus Christ as Messiah.

> **Acts 28:24**
> **And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.**

Some believed and some didn't. That's still the way it is—even among Christians. You see, we know our sins are forgiven. We know Jesus is the Messiah, and that we'll soon be with Him in heaven. Yet in the meantime, we might be in hellish situations of depression, defeat, and despair because of unbelief.

> *The Word of God says, "In everything give thanks" (see Ephesians 5:20). Why? Because all things are working together for good (Romans 8:28).*
>
> *"Oh, but you haven't seen the stack of bills on my desk."*

Well, the Word says, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches" (see Philippians 4:19).

"Yeah, but you don't understand the hurt I feel because she dumped me."

Well, the Bible says even if she meant it for evil, God will use it for good (Genesis 50:20).

"But I feel so bad about my son. He's not walking with the Lord."

Well, the Bible says we can be confident that He who began a good work in him will perform it until the day of Christ Jesus—He'll finish what He started (Philippians 1:6).

Some Christians believe what God says and some don't. Those who don't find themselves engulfed in despair, defeat, and discouragement. You see, it's not enough just to know the Scriptures, gang. It's not enough just to hear the Word. It's not enough just to come to Bible study. You and I must *believe.* And "believe" is not a noun—it's a verb.

We can be the happiest, most carefree people in the world if we believe—and act on that belief. You might know the Scriptures backward and forward—but Jesus said, "Happy are you if you *do* them" (see John 13:17).

It's what you *do*—not what you know that matters. And it all begins by saying, "Today I'm going to believe that God is working, and that He is fulfilling what He has promised. You are faithful, Lord; and I will live in that today. I will proclaim Your faithfulness, and I will choose to rejoice in You."

Acts 28:25–27

And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Isaiah the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

“Isaiah spoke rightly of you, gentlemen,” said Paul, “when he said seeing, you wouldn’t see and hearing, you wouldn’t understand.” Through this prophecy, also quoted by Jesus to His countrymen (see Matthew 13:13–15), Isaiah said, “God will blind the eyes of the person who does not want to see Him. He will harden the heart of the one who does not want to believe Him.”

Why?

Because the Good News of the gospel is so potent and powerful that unless God blinded the eyes and hardened the hearts of those who don’t want to believe, they would have no choice but to believe. And since God will not force Himself upon any man, in this way He bows to the choice of the person who wants nothing to do with Him.

That is why resisting the Lord is a very dangerous thing to do, for there will come a time when He will do what He did to Pharaoh: He will harden the heart (Exodus 9:12). He will do what He did to Israel: He will blind the eyes (John 12:40), lest someone be converted against his will.

Acts 28:28

Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

Following the rejection of his message, Paul said, “I’ve talked to you from morning until evening. The proof is powerful, but you don’t want to see it. Therefore, the message will go to the Gentiles.”

Act 28:29–31

And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

For two years, chained to a guard, Paul would teach all who came to him. To know what Paul was thinking during this two-year house arrest, hear his heart in the books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon—all written during this period of captivity.

Now, although this is where Luke, the author of Acts, put down his pen, Paul's story continued. Released from house arrest to stand before Caesar Nero, Paul witnessed powerfully for the Lord. Nero, however, rejected Paul's message and proceeded instead to go on a rampage against Christians. Historical records verify that he lost his mind at the very time he listened to Paul and rejected the gospel.

Released by Caesar because there was no legal case against him, the Book of Romans and the writings of Eusebius tell us Paul preached the gospel in Spain and Europe before he was brought back to Rome under arrest once more. This time, however, it was no longer house arrest. He was thrown into a dungeon.

Knowing death was imminent, Paul wrote these words to his young protigie, Timothy:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day . . .

"Paul *should* get a crown of righteousness," you say. "He went for it totally. But me? No way."

Really? Read on.

. . . And not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

"Hey! Even *I* qualify for that," you can say. After reading the news, don't you long for His coming?

Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me; for Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica, Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me.

Paul had ministered to thousands, yet Luke was the only one who stood by him in his imprisonment.

Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry. And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus. The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.

What were these parchments? The Old Testament. Here, the man who wrote much of the Bible is saying, "I want to study until the day I die." Paul never stopped learning. Saints, God will use a man or woman who—no matter what dungeon they might be in, no matter what time constraints, physical impairments, or emotional pressure they're under—will say, "I want to know more of the heart of God."

Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words. At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

Some left Paul and went back to the world. Others were afraid to stand by him. But the Lord stood with him.

And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus, Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick. Do thy diligence to come before winter.

"Get here quickly," wrote Paul. "I know I'm about to die."

Eubulus greeteth thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brethren. The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.

2 Timothy 4:6–22

Shortly after Paul penned these words, he died—most likely beheaded at the command of Caesar Nero.

You might feel like you're in a damp, dark dungeon. The people you were counting on aren't there—maybe some are even attacking you. Thus, you can relate to something of what Paul wrote to Timothy. Understand this: If you are suffering without succeeding, someone will succeed after you. Paul died virtually alone, perhaps thinking, *Was my entire ministry a failure? Is it all going to fall apart now that I'm in trouble? What's going on?*

But look what happened: We are indebted to Paul as we are to no other brother besides our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, for as we read Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews—it is Paul who clarifies truth so incredibly, who teaches grace so beautifully.

Paul went through hard times, and his life ended on a seemingly difficult note. That is why if you are suffering without succeeding, I cannot promise you that you will succeed before you die. But I can promise you that if you are suffering for the cause of Christ, someone who comes after you will succeed. Ask Paul. Look at the church today—the result of his suffering.

There may be children or grandchildren, friends or neighbors, who, after your departure, will blossom and bloom because of the example you set, the life you lived, the suffering you endured. If, on the other hand, you are succeeding without suffering, know this: Someone suffered who went before you. Perhaps it was a grandmother or grandfather, a mother or father, a brother, sister, child, or friend who wept and prayed you into the kingdom.

Ultimately, however, the One who suffered for and before you was Jesus Christ. For as Paul—the Pharisee-turned-believer, the tent-making rabbi, the champion of grace, the defender of the Finished Work—would write, "He who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we might become rich. He who knew no sin was made sin, that we might be righteous in Him."

Amen.

NOTES

[1]U.S. National Debt Clock, September 25, 2002, http://www.brillig.com/debt_clock.

[2]www.bartleby.com, John Bartlett (1820–1905). Familiar Quotations, 10th ed. 1919.



ROMANS

Background to Romans

The Epistle to the Romans has been called "the Fort Knox of Bible doctrine."

- John Chrysostom had it read to him once a week for eighteen years.
- The heart of John Wesley was "strangely warmed" upon hearing it preached.
- Dr. Donald Barnhouse said the Bible of a believer should automatically open to it.
- Seventy-five percent of Bible teachers today said if they could teach from just one book, it would be this one.

All roads lead to Rome. Thus, Paul would no doubt conclude if all roads lead *to* Rome, all roads must also lead *from* Rome. *If I can get to Rome,* he must have thought, *and share the gospel, it will spread rapidly and reach the entire world.* At this point in time, Rome's ship of state was sailing along quite nicely, but belowdeck, having lost her moral bearing, the empire was already beginning to sink. Aware of this, Paul desired to go to the Imperial City not only to launch the gospel from Rome, but to bless the people in Rome. Although his plan was strategically brilliant, he was unable to get there. But instead of feeling defeated by what he couldn't do, Paul grabbed parchment and pen, and did what he could do.

That's what David did. After becoming king of Israel, David said, "Why should I dwell in this palace, while God lives in a tent?" (see 2 Samuel 7:2). "I want to build God a temple."

"All that's in your heart, do," Nathan replied (see 2 Samuel 7:3).

But that night the Lord said to Nathan in a dream, "You spoke too quickly. David can't build Me a temple. He's a man of war, and the temple must be a place of peace" (see 1 Chronicles 22:8).

So what did David do? Did he pout? No. Did he vegetate? No. He drew plans, gathered materials, and lined up laborers so that when his

son, Solomon, ascended the throne, everything was ready for him to begin construction (1 Chronicles 22:1–5). David wasn't hung up by what he couldn't do. Rather he asked, "What *can* I do?"

Unable to go to Rome, Paul instead penned a letter to the Romans and, because he had never been to Rome, he was able to concentrate solely on life-changing, impacting, revolutionary theology. You see, in his other epistles, Paul addressed the problems and personalities unique to the cities to which he wrote. Not so with the Book of Romans.

Paul did what he could do, and I'm so glad, because, just as all roads lead to Rome, truly, the road to revival leads through the Book of Romans.

In the early days of the church, John Chrysostom—so named because "Chrysostom" means "golden throat"—was an incredible orator. His preaching was so powerful that in the middle of his sermons, the congregation would burst out in applause time and time again. Embarrassed by the applause, one day John gave a sermon on why people shouldn't clap in the middle of his sermons. So persuasive and incredible was the sermon, however, that the congregation responded with a resounding ovation! John Chrysostom began his ministry by reading the Book of Romans and went on to read Romans in its entirety once a week for eighteen years.

Chrysostom was followed by a man named Augustine. As a young man, Augustine despaired greatly because his sin weighed on him heavily. One day, with a copy of the New Testament in hand, he sat under a tree and wept over his own immorality. Just then, a group of children walked by, singing a well-known ditty of the day: "Pick it up and read it through; pick it up and read it through." So Augustine did just that. He picked up the New Testament, and, by divine design, it fell open to these words: "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in reveling and drunkenness, not in immorality and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts" (Romans 13:13, 14). Augustine was blown away. He went back to Romans 1 and was converted by the time he came to the end of the book.

After Augustine, another intellectual giant arrived on the scene—a Catholic monk named Martin Luther. Sitting at his monastic desk, he was attacked by thoughts so ungodly that he picked up an inkwell and threw it against the wall, aiming at what he believed to be an image of the devil. Luther was a broken man. Then the concept of justification by faith as seen in the book of Romans hit him. At last his eyes were opened. His life was changed—and so was the world, as he ushered in the Great Reformation.

John Wesley left England and sailed across the sea as a missionary to the American Indians. After failing miserably, he returned to England, saying, "I went to save the Indians, but who shall save me?" Wesley stumbled into a little church on Addington Street, where he listened to the minister read from Martin Luther's commentary on Romans. "My heart was strangely warmed," he would later write. And John Wesley was saved as he understood at last that the price for his sin was paid and that the work of salvation was complete.

Truly, the road to revival leads through this book. While Chuck Smith was teaching through Romans in a Foursquare Church, realizing he could throw off the yoke of religion, his life was changed. He went on to pastor a little twenty-five-member church called Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, which today numbers in the tens of thousands and is one of the fastest-growing evangelistic movements in the world today. It is not the result of any attempt at organization. It's just revival.

My own life was changed when, as an eighteen-year-old college freshman, I went to Calvary Chapel and heard Chuck teach through Romans. I heard for the first time that I didn't have to pray more, study more, or witness more; that the Lord loved me regardless of what I did because the price was paid completely. The result? I couldn't wait to pray more, study more, and talk to everyone I met about the glorious grace and goodness of God.

The religion of the law thunders, "responsibility!" But relationship with the Lord says, "Just respond. The work is done. The price is paid. And in responding to Me, you'll do more than you would ever do under the pressure of religion."

And this is what we're about to discover once again as we go through this glorious Book together.



ROMANS

1 Romans 1:1 (a)
Paul . . .

Following his conversion, Paul changed his name from Saul to Paul. "Saul" means "requested One"—the man in demand. "Paul," on the other hand, means "little." Commentators are divided as to why Paul changed his name from "requested one" to "little." Some say it was the result of his humility. As Saul, he was a proud Pharisee who looked down on other men. But when he was converted, he was broken. Others say Paul changed his name because of accessibility. About to travel throughout the Roman Empire, Paul jettisoned the Hebrew name of Saul to take on the Roman name of Paul.

Humility or accessibility—which caused Paul to change his name? I suggest it was both. Paul was a great man who lived in humility, which, in turn, gave him accessibility. In this I am reminded of perhaps one of the most humble men of our generation: Billy Graham.

> Billy Graham is absolutely amazing. There he was at the inauguration of President Clinton, praying so simply and beautifully, "Lord, help us to carry out the challenges we've heard."
>
> Now, if I had been asked to pray at the inauguration, I know I would have given a "sermonette" and caused a riot. But not Billy. On *20/20* a couple of weeks before the inauguration, Diane Sawyer said to him, "Tell me, Dr. Graham. What do you consider to be your greatest failure? Was it your association with Nixon? Your involvement with Russia?"
>
> Billy just looked at her and said, "Well, Diane, I consider my whole life pretty much a failure."

He wasn't giving a clever response, for that is what he genuinely feels. Truly, Billy Graham lives in humility. And because of that he has great accessibility to kings, presidents, and leaders all over the world.

Romans 1:1 (b)
. . . a servant of Jesus Christ . . .

The word "servant" is *doulos,* meaning "bondslave." Exodus 21:2 sheds light on what this means: In Israel, a slave was required to serve only six years before he was set free. If, however, at the end of six years, he said, "I like it here. I want to become a bondslave," the master would drive a nail through his right earlobe and place an earring in it, signifying he was a *doulos,* a slave by choice.

It's a wise decision to give yourself fully to the Lord as His bondslave because He takes excellent care of those committed to Him. Their lives are filled with purpose and focus; their hearts with peace and joy.

Perhaps you're saying, "I'm my own man—captain of my destiny, master of my fate. I don't serve anyone." But reality says otherwise. *Everyone* will serve someone. Bob Dylan was right when he sang, "It may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you gotta serve somebody." And Paul chose to serve the Lord in totality.

Romans 1:1 (c)
. . . called to be an apostle . . .

The word "apostle" means "one who is sent out." In the New Testament there are three groups of apostles: God appointed one Apostle—Jesus Christ (Hebrews 3:1). Jesus appointed twelve apostles who traveled with Him. In the Book of Acts, Barnabas, Titus, Andronicus, Junia, and a whole host of others are called apostles appointed by the Holy Spirit.

To this day, the Spirit continues to appoint apostles—missionaries who are "sent out" with the message of the gospel. "What a great calling that is," you say. But you know what? A call to be a carpenter, a science teacher, or a repairman is just as holy and just as important if you're doing what God has opened up for you, and you're doing it for Him. Whether you're a baker, banker, mechanic, or cook, yours is an important calling because of the need for brothers and sisters to serve in all kinds of arenas and locations. Don't think you're missing God's best if you're not a missionary. If the Lord wants you selling insurance or pouring cement, be at peace about it and say, "Lord,

if this is what You have for me, I'll do it for Your glory. I'll be salt and light as I labor here for You."

There's a tendency within us to think everyone should have our calling. There's a tendency to think that if I'm called to be a missionary, everyone should be a missionary; that if I'm called to be a teacher, everyone should be a teacher. Not true. That's not the way it works in the body of Christ. The Lord calls each of us uniquely, individually, personally.

How can you know what your calling is? It's very simple. What's flowing from your life presently? What comes easy to you? What's working out supernaturally for you?

> *Isaac dug a well in order to water his flock. But the inhabitants of the land challenged his right to be there. So he called that well "Esek," or "Contention," moved down the road, dug another well, and struck water once more. A second time, the inhabitants came and said, "This is our territory. Get out of here." So Isaac named the well "Sitnah," or "Hatred," and went down the road a little farther. He dug a third well. This time, no one bothered him—so he called the name of this well "Rehoboth," or "there's room for me" (Genesis 26).*
>
> *I have found life basically follows this pattern. You dig and strike some water. You find refreshment and good things happen. But strife or hatred follows. So you go down the road and dig a second time. Again there are problems. Eventually, however, if you don't give up, you'll find your Reheboth.*

Isaac had the job of watering sheep. He didn't agonize over it. He didn't complain about it. He just tended to what was at hand—and he ended up at Rehoboth. That's the key. Do what's before you. Say, "Lord, here I am. You've allowed me to do this, and I'm going to do it as unto You. And if there's strife or hatred, I'll just move down the road and dig again until I find Reheboth." God has a Reheboth for every one of us. Paul's was apostolic ministry.

Romans 1:1 (d)

. . . separated . . .

When was Paul "separated unto the gospel"? When he was ministering to the Lord—worshiping, praising, and honoring Him in thanksgiving (Acts 13:2). There's a lot of talk about ministering for the Lord, and that's good. But ministering *to* the Lord is even more important.

> And the Levites that are gone away far from me, when Israel went astray, which went astray away from me after their idols; they shall even bear their iniquity. And they shall not come near unto me, to do the office of a priest unto me, nor to come near to any of my holy things, in the most holy place: but they shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed. But I will make them keepers of the charge of the house, for all the service thereof, and for all that shall be done therein. But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall stand before me to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord GOD: They shall enter into my sanctuary, and they shall come near to my table, to minister unto me, and they shall keep my charge.
>
> Ezekiel 44:10, 13–16

This is an extremely important passage that says standing before people, sharing with people, and ministering to people is punishment in comparison to coming before the Lord and ministering to Him. It was as Paul ministered to the *Lord* that he was called to minister to people. But even before the Spirit separated Paul unto the gospel in Acts 13:2, the Son separated him in Acts 9. On his way to Damascus, he was knocked to the ground by a bright light and a voice that said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" But even before the Son separated Paul unto the gospel on the Damascus Road, the Father separated him at the very moment of his birth (Galatians 1:1).

Thus, all the while Paul was persecuting the church, the Father knew what he would be doing eventually. I say this to remind us as parents that our kids have destinies. Therefore, our job is not so much to mold them as it is to unfold them. We have our own expectations, feelings, and desires for our

kids. But in reality, wise is the mother or father who says, "Lord, show me this day what *You* want my son or daughter to do or to be. And help me to flow with what *You* want."

Romans 1:1 (e)
. . . unto the gospel of God.

The Greek word translated "gospel" is *euag gelion,* from which we get our word "evangelist." In the Septuagint, this was the word used when the people of Israel were released from their Babylonian captivity. It meant, "You can go home. You're free. Good news!"

Truly, the gospel is Good News—not just good advice. A lot of preachers, authors, and speakers try to make Christianity a bunch of good advice. Most best-selling Christian books today are full of good advice about child-rearing, financial planning, or marriage counseling. But remove the name of Jesus Christ from most of them, and it won't affect the book at all.

We've got something so much better than good advice, folks. And I would encourage you to be on guard against sermons or authors, churches or organizations that give you good advice. If you can take Jesus Christ out of a sermon without affecting it, you're probably wasting your time listening to it. If you can take Jesus Christ out of a book without affecting it, you're probably wasting your time reading it. Paul wasn't separated unto the good advice of Christian living. He was separated to the Good News of God.

Romans 1:2, 3
(Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh.

Twenty-five years before Paul penned this Epistle, he became a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus when he said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). And for twenty-five years he kept at it. Commitment was really a key to Paul's success in ministry. He left everything to focus on one thing singularly: serving Jesus Christ passionately (Philippians 3:7).

Some people today get excited about ministry or about walking with Jesus—but only in spurts. Why was Paul so dedicated, consecrated, and separated in his service? I suggest it was because he had an encounter not with a theological principle or a philosophical ideal, but with a risen Lord. If you're only a student of theology or ecclesiology, you'll miss the heart of ministry entirely. But if we really understand Jesus is risen and dwelling within us—that we can talk with Him, share our concerns with Him, and fellowship with Him—our lives and ministry will be revolutionary.

I talked to a lighting contractor one afternoon who said, "I'm scheduled to light a New Age bookstore. Although there's some money in it, I don't feel good about it. What should I do?"

"Because you're born again," I said, "the Lord promised He would write His will not on tablets of stone, but upon the tender tablets of your heart (see Jeremiah 31:33). Have you talked it over with Him? Does He want you to stay away from that bookstore because it is dark? Or, does He want you to go in and bring light—not just physically, but spiritually?"

"I don't know," he said.

"Well, that's for you to find out," I continued. "You see, I could give you all kinds of reasons why you should avoid that pagan place. Or, I could give you reasons why you should go in, storm the gates of hell, and be light in that place. I don't know what God wants you to do. Talk to Him."

Suddenly, his face lit up as he saw that it's not a matter of principles or theology. It's a matter of touching "the seed of David," Jesus Christ personally.

Romans 1:4

And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

"I'm separated unto the gospel," Paul declared, "and that gospel concerns Jesus, born of the seed of David, declared to be the Son of God. He's one of

us—and yet He is much greater than us. He became a Man, yet remains the Son of God."

Romans 1:5, 6

By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ.

"We have received grace—unmerited blessing. We have received apostleship—direction for ministry," declared Paul. This was not only theology for him. It was reality.

Romans 1:7 (a)

To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints.

The words "to be" are in italics in the King James Version because they don't appear in the original Greek text. Thus, this verse should read, "You are called saints." Most people have the idea that saints are special people in religious history. But the truth is, there are only two categories of people: saints and pagans. Therefore, if you're a believer—you're a saint.

A little boy attended a church that had beautiful stained-glass windows depicting St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. John. One day, when asked in his Sunday-school class, "What are saints?" he answered, "They're people who the light shines through." Good answer!

Romans 1:7 (b)

Grace to you and peace . . .

In Paul's day, when Greeks greeted each other, they would say, "*Charis,*" which means "grace." When Jews greeted each other, however, they would say, "*Shalom,*" which means "peace." In the salutation of each of his epistles, Paul linked these two words together. He always put them in the same order because man will never experience peace until he understands grace. If you're trying to be holier or more deserving of God's blessings, your Christian life will not be full of peace. But if you understand grace—that

God blesses and gives unconditionally—you'll stop trying to earn His blessings, and you'll have peace.

Romans 1:7 (c)
. . . from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Peace from God has two components. First of all, peace from God implies peace *with* God, which is positional and unconditional because Jesus Christ took upon Himself all of our shortcomings and sins, problems, weakness, and rebelliousness (Romans 5:1). Most of us believe the Lord is disappointed in us because we haven't spent time in the Word, because we don't pray as we should, because we're not doing very much for Him. But here, Paul the apostle says, "There is grace and peace for *all* because Jesus did it all!"

Second, we have the peace *of* God, which is experiential and comes through prayer (Philippians 4:7). Perhaps this is what happened to you today: The kids didn't behave. The job didn't go well. Your husband didn't come through, or your friends let you down. As you felt the burdens begin to come and the tension begin to build, you thought, *I should pray.* But no sooner did you think this than the Enemy was there, saying, "Pray? Now that you have a problem you want to pray? What about devotions, Mr. Prayer Person? You didn't have devotions this morning, did you? And you think you can pray *now?*"

You see, gang, we know we have problems, and we are all too aware of our failures. But we think the Father won't hear us if we haven't talked to Him for a day or three or ten. We think He won't answer us if we haven't been doing what we should do, or going where we should go. In reality, nothing is further from the truth. Look at our Lord, our Friend, Jesus Christ. After He had prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane so intensely that He sweat blood, He looked up, and saw a group of soldiers coming toward Him, led by His disciple, Judas. Jesus looked at Judas and said, "Friend, what seekest thou?" And His heart was revealed in that moment—for Jesus looked at Judas at the moment of betrayal and called Judas "Friend." Judas was at the lowest ebb possible, yet Jesus still said, "Friend, what seekest thou?" (see

Matthew 26:50). This One with whom we walk is so incredibly gracious. He'll respond to you and work with you anytime you call upon Him.

Romans 1:8 (a)
First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ . . .

"I thank *my* God," said Paul.

"My Lord and *my* God," said Thomas, upon seeing the Resurrected Lord (John 20:28).

No wonder Martin Luther said, "Christianity is uniquely the religion of the possessive pronoun."

Romans 1:8 (b)
. . . for you all . . .

Paul didn't say, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for eighty percent of you." He didn't say, "Most of you guys are great, but there's a couple of exceptions." No, under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul said, "I thank God for you *all*."

Romans 1:8 (c)
. . . that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

Although Paul had never met these believers, he had already heard about their faith.

Romans 1:9
For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.

How does one pray without ceasing? The Greek phrase "without ceasing" literally speaks of a tickle in the throat. In other words, to pray without ceasing means to go through the day praying as often and as reflexively as you would cough to suppress a tickle in your throat. As you

drive down Main Street and see someone from church, praying without ceasing means you just shoot up a prayer for them. As you see your neighbors or co-workers, you say, "Father, You see what their need is. Be all You want to be for them." Life becomes an adventure when you pray without ceasing.

Romans 1:10

Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.

By "making request if by any means I might come to you," Paul was giving God a blank check. He was giving God permission to use any means He chose to get him to Rome. How different that is from the way I often pray. I say, "I'm the quarterback, Lord. You be my offensive Lineman. Run interference for me, and, together, we'll make this happen."

Are your prayers direct—or are they directive? That is, are you being honest and open before the Lord in humility, or are you telling Him what to do? The best way to pray is to say, "Lord, You know the needs I have. You've asked me to share them with You. This is my desire, my burden, my concern. Now, Lord, Your will be done by any means You see fit."

"But aren't we supposed to name it and claim it?" you ask.

Ask Hezekiah. . . .

"O Lord, let me live," he prayed. "I know Isaiah said I was supposed to die, but, Lord, let me live. I name it and claim it." In Hebrew, the account reads that he turned his face to the wall and chirped like a bird incessantly, demanding his own way until finally the Lord said, "Okay. Live" (see 2 Kings 20:1–6). When messengers from Babylon came to congratulate him on his recovery, Hezekiah responded by taking them on a tour of the treasures of Israel. And it was this report that led Nebuchadnezzar to subsequently invade Israel. Meanwhile, Hezekiah fathered a son named Manasseh, who would become the worst king in Israel's history.

The Lord did indeed answer Hezekiah's prayer by prolonging his life fifteen years. But those fifteen years were disastrous both to Hezekiah

personally and to the kingdom nationally. How much better it would have been had Hezekiah simply shared his heart with the Father and said, "Not my will, but Thy will be done."

That's how Jesus prayed in the hour of His greatest need (Luke 22:42). Our faith is not to be in our own plans, but in the goodness and wisdom of our Father.

Romans 1:11, 12

For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

"In giving to you, I will benefit as well because our faith will grow mutually," said Paul. That's always the way it is in ministry. Give and you'll get. Share and you'll receive.

Romans 1:13–15

Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

"I'm a debtor to everyone," said Paul—"to the Greek and to the barbarian, to the sophisticated and to the simple, to the businessman and to the biker, to the housewife and to the hippie, to the jock and to the jailbird." Why did Paul feel this way? Because he was amazed at the goodness of God that saved him so radically at the very time he was erring so greatly.

Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel for two reasons. The first is that the gospel revives men's lives. Dead in sin, and without the Lord, men go through the motions of living. But in reality, without any real purpose, they wonder why they exist. Paul was not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation. It is literally the *dunamis*—from which we get our words "dynamic" and "dynamite"—to totally turn people around and give them reason for being.



***For topical study of Romans 1:16 entitled "I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel," turn to page* 872.**

Romans 1:17 (a)
For therein is the righteousness of God revealed . . .

The second reason Paul was not ashamed of the gospel is that it reveals God's love. God's love is seen in the fact that He doesn't just wink at sin and say, "Boys will be boys." After all, who would want to live in a community in which righteousness was not enforced, in which police officers simply said, "People will be people. So let's just close our eyes to robberies and murders"? If that was the policy of the community in which you lived, you would move. God neither winks at sin nor wipes us out because of sin. Rather, He washes away our sin by the blood of His Son

Romans 1:17 (b)
. . . from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Here's where many of us are vulnerable to error. We know salvation is *from* faith because we begin by simply embracing the Good News of the gospel but then we go from faith to works. We think we have to mobilize, organize, and agonize over our spirituality.

"No, " says Paul. "It's *from* faith *to* faith." The just shall live by faith. Faith is not only the starting point of your salvation—it's the staying power of your Christian walk. "Even as you received Christ," Paul would say to the Colossians, "so walk ye in Him" (see Colossians 2:6). "Oh foolish

Galatians," he would write, "are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit are you now made perfect by the flesh?" (see Galatians 3:1–3). The just shall live by faith—faith in the finished work of the Cross, faith in the resurrected presence of Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:18 (a)
For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven . . .

Here, Paul puts in the clutch and changes gears as he paints the canvas black in order that the gem of the Gospel might stand out against the dark backdrop of human depravity. God will not allow people to continue in sin any more than a physician would say to a person with cancer, "Well, I don't want to carve into you or cause you any discomfort, so I won't do anything about it." No, just as a doctor knows there must be surgery, so, too, the wrath of God will deal surgically and powerfully with humanity whenever people fail to embrace Jesus Christ and refuse to allow His blood to remove the cancer of their iniquity.

Romans 1:18 (b)
. . . against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men . . .

Ungodliness is sin against God. Unrighteousness is sin against man. When Moses came down from Sinai, he had two tablets in his hand. I suggest that one tablet contained the first four commandments—all dealing with our relationship to God—and that the second tablet contained the remaining six commandments—all dealing with our relationship to our fellow man.

Romans 1:18 (c)
. . . who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

The word "hold" is very important. Referring to a helmsman steering a boat against the current, it means "to suppress." In other words, the current wants to take the boat a certain way, but, determined to go the opposite way, the helmsman *holds* the rudder in such a way that he might go his way instead of the way of the current. So, too, the wrath of God is revealed against those

who are determined to go their own way regardless of what they know is true. For, as we will see, Romans 1 makes it clear that creation around him testifies of the reality of God to every man, while chapter 2 clearly declares that conscience within him tells every man how he ought to live.

Romans 1:19, 20

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

Creation all around testifies of God's reality. The grandeur of heaven alone has spoken to every tongue, every culture, and every society throughout history (Psalm 19:1–3). Concerning the acceptance of the "Big Bang Theory" by the scientific community, Robert Jastrow, an astrophysicist and director of NASA's Goodard Institute for Space Studies, wrote:

Now we see how the astronomical evidence supports the biblical view of the origin of the world. The essential elements in the astronomical and biblical accounts of Genesis are now the same. Consider the enormity of the problem. Science has proved that the universe exploded into being at a certain given moment. It asks what cause produced this effect. Who or what put the matter and energy into the universe? And science cannot answer this question. For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of his own reason, the story ends now like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance. He is about to conquer the highest peak. He pulls himself over the final rock, and he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been there for centuries.

Walking with a group of admirals one evening who were discussing whether or not God existed, Napoleon is said to have pointed to the heavens and said, "Sirs, if you're going to get rid of God, you must get rid of those." Napoleon was right. The heavens declare the glory, the reality, the substance, the weight of God.

Romans 1:21 (a)

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God . . .

Every man knows there's a God, but men choose to suppress the truth and deny God exists because they don't want to give glory to Him as God. You see, if there is a God, then I am required to submit to Him. But my flesh doesn't want to do that, so I'll suppress the truth I see all around me. I'll say God doesn't exist—even though the heavens and stars scream at me, "Yes He does!"

We can fall into this same error as believers. Knowing God, we can fail to glorify Him as God. How? By insisting on our own way, by saying, "God, I believe in You, and now I'm telling You what I want You to do. You better solve this situation, take care of this problem, grant this request, or heal this sickness. I'm naming it. I'm claiming it."

He's God. We're not. He knows things we can't know and sees things we can't see. Therefore, for me to rub the lamp of faith and expect God to become my genie is, in a sense, blasphemous. Father knows best. Therefore, my part is to talk things over with Him, cast my cares upon Him, and have faith that He will do what's right—even though I might not initially agree or understand.

Romans 1:21 (b)

. . . neither were thankful . . .

Although we know God, we fail to glorify Him as God whenever we stop being thankful for whatever He sends our way.

Romans 1:21 (c), 22

. . . but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.

Anyone who thinks he knows exactly what should happen in his life and precisely how it should take place is a fool.

Romans 1:23 (a)

And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts . . .

What Paul is saying is borne out in anthropology: On every corner of the planet, throughout all of history, every culture has had an innate need to worship. But, suppressing the truth about God, they have substituted gods of their own choosing. The Egyptian said, "If I were God, I would be bright and powerful, causing the crops to grow and blasting people who were out of line." So his god was Ra, the sun god. The Hindu said, "If I were God, I would be gentle and caring." So his god is a cow. The American Indian said, "If I were God, I would soar over the mountains majestically." So his god is an eagle.

Suppression and substitution have been the pattern throughout the history of mankind. And lest you think our society is an exception, what about the Bears and the Seahawks, the Lions and the Falcons? We spray-paint our bodies; we put watermelons on our heads; we stand up and yell; we live and die for our teams. Such is our nature of worship.

Romans 1:23 (b)

. . . and creeping things.

Look at the musicians, the fashion models, the TV shows, movies, and other creeping things our culture elevates, and you will have to conclude that we are as heathen as the pagans to whom Paul was writing.

Romans 1:24

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves.

Because the pagans worshiped animals, they became like animals. Truly, we become like that which we worship. That's why we are to fix our eyes on Jesus. Jesus had such a robust quality about Him, such light emanating from

Him that the common people heard Him gladly and the masses surrounded Him constantly. They left everything to follow Him wholeheartedly because there was substance and reality within Him. With open face, behold His glory—and you will be changed from glory to greater glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Romans 1:25

Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

Herein is the devolution of man. He who suppresses the truth and denies there is a God begins to act like an animal and to worship the creation rather than the Creator. Does that ring a bell in light of what's happening in our culture?

A physician attempting to discover how to heal brains of people who have been traumatized was using anesthetized cats for his research. When the animal rights people heard of this, however, they shut the experiment down. The doctor is frustrated because, although his findings could have saved thousands of lives in a wartime situation, his work was brought to a premature end because our culture says there is no difference between a cat and a man.

Romans 1:26, 27

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

The pit of perversity is evidenced by a culture accepting and glorying in homosexuality.

For topical study of Romans 1:26–27 entitled "The Problem of Perversity," turn to page **877.**

Romans 1:28–32 (a)

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death . . .

After denying God, making their own idols, behaving like animals, and worshiping nature, finally a society is given over to homosexual activity, which is unmistakably the breeding ground for the sins enumerated in this passage.

Romans 1:32 (b)

. . . not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

"Oh, I would never murder anyone. I would never invent an evil thing," we say. But do we enjoy watching the inventions of evil things and murder in movies? "I would never commit adultery," we say, "but I love to watch the soaps." We're guilty! You see, gang, if you are one who enjoys watching murder after murder after decapitation after adulterous affair because you've allowed your carnal appetite to be developed, you are guilty. And death will come to you. I don't mean necessarily you're going to die physically—but watch what will happen to your marriage. Watch how it will cease to be vital and warm. Watch how your kids will grow up and you'll wonder why there's darkness on their faces and posters of despair in their rooms.

“Be ye holy,” the Lord says to us (Leviticus 20:7)—for our choice to live either in holiness or carnality will greatly affect not only us, but also those around us.

I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

A Topical Study of ROMANS 1:16

He had to be one of the gutsiest guys in all of history. This bow-legged, poor-sighted, little Jewish rabbi named Paul was ready to preach the gospel in Rome.

> Rome was the city wherein anti-Semitism had reared its ugly head, resulting in waves of brutal persecution.
>
> Rome was the home of Caesar Nero, the madman who was determined to exterminate Christianity. Nero, the one who dressed thousands of Christians in the skins of lambs and threw them to wolves and lions as he cried, "Where is your Good Shepherd now, little flock?" Nero was the one who dipped Christians in hot wax and lit them as candles in his garden while he shrieked, "How does it feel to be the light of the world now, Christians?"
>
> Rome was the entertainment capital of the world with a moral standard so low it would make Hollywood blush.
>
> Rome was the military mecca where generals and captains paraded pompously on the backs of black stallions.
>
> Rome was where the accepted greeting of the day was, "Caesar is lord."

For a Jewish Christian who claimed no other Lord than One who commanded no army, One who made His triumphal entry on the back of a donkey, One who was pinned to a Cross by Roman soldiers, to preach a message of repentance in Rome, would take guts indeed.

Why could Paul not only declare that he wasn't ashamed of the gospel, but that He was ready to preach it in Rome"? I suggest five reasons. . . .

The Gospel Is Prophetic

> *Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) . . . .*
>
> Romans 1:1, 2

The gospel is not something new and faddish, for it was promised from the very beginning. You see, way back in the Garden of Eden, the gospel was shared. In Genesis 3:15, called the Proto Evangelicum, or "the first sharing of the Good News," the Lord said to the serpent, "There shall be war between you, Satan, and the Seed of woman. You shall bruise His heel, but He shall crush your head." That's the gospel. The singular Seed of woman, virgin-born, is Jesus Christ. On the Cross, He was bruised badly; but on the Cross, He crushed Satan completely.

Truly, the gospel is not new. Look at Genesis 5. . . .

> In the first genealogy ever given, we see Adam, whose name means "man." Adam had a son named Seth, whose name means "appointed." Seth had a son named Enosh, whose name means "subject to death." Enosh had a son named Cainan, whose name means "sorrowful." Cainan had a son named Mahalalel, whose name means "from the presence of God." Mahalalel had a son named Jared, whose name means "One comes down." Jared had a son named Enoch, whose name means "dedicated." Enoch had a son named Methuselah, whose name means "dying He shall send," because the year he died was the year of the Flood. Methuselah had a son named Lamech, whose name means "to the poor being destroyed," and Lamech had a son named Noah, whose name means "comfort."

Together, the names read: Man, appointed subject to death, sorrowful. From the presence of God, One comes down dedicated. Dying, He shall send to the poor being destroyed comfort. It's the gospel.

“We are not preaching something new,” said Paul. “From the very beginning of time, and down through the centuries, three hundred thirty-two specific prophecies were given concerning the One who would come as a Messiah for you and me.”

The Gospel Is Provable

> *And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*
>
> Romans 1:4

"Show us a sign," they said.

"One sign I'll give to you," Jesus answered. "Destroy this body and in three days I will rise again" (see John 2:18, 19).

Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh didn't rise again when he died. Buddha couldn't rise again. Neither could Confucius, Mohammed, or any of the gurus, philosophers, or religious teachers throughout history. Only Jesus rose again. And it's provable. Go to Jerusalem. Check out the tomb.

"Well," you say, "I know you claim the tomb is empty, but how do we know the disciples went to the right tomb on that Easter Sunday morning? Maybe, with clouded minds and tear-filled eyes, unable to see or think straight, they went to the wrong tomb."

Do you really think so? Don't you think those in authority would have checked it out and gone to the tomb themselves?

"It must have been the disciples," you argue. "They must have hidden Jesus' body in order to continue His teachings."

Do you really believe that eleven disciples who were crucified upside down, had their brains beaten out with clubs, were speared in the back, were placed in boiling oil would not only experience persecution themselves, but would stand by while their wives and children were tortured—all for a lie? If you believe that, you have much more faith than I could ever have.

"Well, then," you suggest, "it was the Jews. They took the body and hid it in order to harass the Christians."

Why would they do that? The Jews were trying to disprove Christianity. To do so, they would simply have had to produce Jesus' body.

"It was the Romans," you conclude. "They took the body to tease the Christians."

Really? History shows that Christianity was a major contributor to the fall of the Roman Empire. The body of Jesus would have put an end to

Christianity forever. If the Romans had it, surely, they would have made it known.

> Determined to disprove the Resurrection, a brilliant lawyer went to Jerusalem. He returned six years later, a radical born-again Christian, with the book entitled *Who Moved The Stone?* The book he wrote in defense of his newfound faith.

It doesn't take six years. Anyone who will spend even six hours checking out historical records and thinking through the Resurrection must, if he's intellectually honest, conclude that there's no logical alternative to the fact that something supernatural happened.

The Gospel Is Personal

By whom we have received grace and apostleship . . .

Romans 1:5 (a)

Not "by *what"* but, "by *Whom* we have received grace and apostleship." "I know whom *I* have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him," declared Paul, (see 2 Timothy 1:12). It was Jesus who did a work in Paul—just as it's Jesus who is doing a work in you.

The Gospel Is Powerful

> *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation . . .*
>
> Romans 1:16 (a)

The gospel doesn't talk about the power of God, gang. It *is* the power of God. The gospel pricks the conscience, grabs the mind, warms the heart, and sanctifies the life. The gospel makes perverted men pure, drunken men sober, crooked men straight. The gospel is powerful because it is not good advice. It's G*ood News*.

What is the Good News? That Christ died for our sins, and that He was buried and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3). Jesus is alive, folks. And He will come into your life and do His work through you.

As you witness or share your faith, does the thought ever cross your mind, *What if it doesn't work for this person? What if his life isn't changed?* Listen, precious believer, Jesus proved Himself to you. That's why you're here today. And He will prove Himself to *every* single person who gives Him the opportunity—no matter his addiction, no matter his background.

The gospel alone declares we *were* saved from the penalty of sin (justification), that we *are* saved from the power of sin (sanctification); and that we *will be* saved from the presence of sin (glorification). That's Good News because it's based not upon a program, but upon a Person—the Resurrected Jesus living in my heart, telling me how to live, and giving me the power to do what He tells me to do.

The Gospel Is Preachable

. . . to every one that believeth . . .

Romans 1:16 (b)

To *everyone* who believes. My five-year-old can get it. The college professor can receive it. The man on his deathbed can embrace it.

> When I was teaching at the Ashland Christian Fellowship a number of years ago, between the Ashland service and the Applegate service, I had a break, so one Sunday, I stopped in at the Kingdom Hall outside Ashland. Although I sat in the back row and tried to be unobtrusive, I looked suspicious not only because of my long hair, but because I was neither wearing a suit and tie, nor carrying a briefcase and *Watchtower* magazine.
>
> After the service, an elder approached me and said, "You're new here, aren't you?"
>
> "Yes," I said.
>
> "What do you think?" he continued.
>
> "Well," I answered, "If I only have an hour to live, what must I do to make it into heaven?"
>
> At this point, he called over a few more elders, who began talking to me. But there was no hope given because, if I only had an hour to live, I couldn't become one of the 144,000; I couldn't be trained in Watchtower theology; I couldn't make it to heaven. Then I shared the gospel with them—and was asked to leave.

I'm so thankful I'm a minister of the gospel. I'm so thankful I don't have to tell a person to follow this procedure or that program before he can be saved. No, I get to say, "The Work is done! Just believe."

"Paul," you might say, "the more I understand the simplicity and potency of the gospel, the more I can see why you aren't ashamed. But you also said you're ready to go to Rome. Why Rome, Paul? You're a Christian Jew. You're sure to have problems there."

Indeed he would, for although he was mobbed in Jerusalem and mocked in Athens, he was martyred in Rome. Why was he so eager to go there? The answer is found in verse 14, where he writes: "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians; both to the wise and to the unwise."

The Syrians had laid siege to the region of Samaria. As a result, the Israelites were starving. The situation became so brutal that dove's dung sold for five pieces of silver, and a donkey's head for eighty pieces—a life's savings. As Jehoram walked on the walls of the city one day, a woman said, "O, King, help us. Yesterday my son died, and my neighbor and I ate him. Today her son died, but she won't let me eat him."

Grieved that the people had resorted to cannibalism, Jehoram ripped his clothes and said, "God do so and more unto me if the head of Elisha the prophet remains on him another day." Calling for a messenger, Jehoram said, "Bring Elisha to me."

The messenger did as he was told. But Elisha's message to the king was, "Tell that son of a murderer that tomorrow everyone will have more than enough to eat."

That night, something happened to the Syrians who were surrounding the city. As they cooked their dinner, they heard a strange, rumbling sound. "We're being attacked," they cried. And Scripture records that they stood up and ran as fast as they could to get out of the country, leaving their food, their gold, and their weapons behind.

Unaware of these happenings, four lepers, who lived outside of the city, decided to pay a call on the Syrian camp, hoping for a few scraps of food. "If they kill us, so what?" they reasoned. "We're starving to death anyway." But as they arrived at the Syrian camp, they couldn't believe what they saw. The camp was empty. The fires were still going, the food still simmering. They went from pot to pot, from tent to tent. They ate the food, put on the clothes of the soldiers, and climbed on the chariots. Then, in the middle of their celebration, one of them said, "We do not well. This is a day of good tidings, and we hold it to ourselves. Let's go back to the city and share the good news" (see 2 Kings 7:9).

> And when the people in the city heard there was food available, they stormed the gates and made their way to the camp to find the bounty, just as Elisha had prophesied.

Gang, we are those lepers. Do we go from meeting to meeting, saying, "Whee! We're saved! We're forgiven! We're going to heaven! Isn't this great?" Like the lepers, we do not well this day if we keep the gospel to ourselves, if we go from service to service, from house to house celebrating, but do not share with a city that's starving. Paul knew this. That is why he said, "I'm a debtor to every man. Because of what I've enjoyed—the grace, the mercy, the peace, the forgiveness—I owe everyone. And if you're saved, you have a debt as well—to share what you've discovered in Christ Jesus with a starving community, with a dying society.

How long has it been since you threw your arm around a co-worker, or talked to a neighbor, and said, "You know what? I'm so blessed. The Lord's really been good to me. I'd love to tell you about it"? Could this be the week, could tomorrow be the day in which you, like Paul, say, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel"? If you do, you'll find great joy.

The Lord doesn't need us, gang. He could have communicated through angels. But He chose to use us because He knows there's incredible joy to be had by former starving lepers who point the way to the Bread of Life.

THE PROBLEM OF PERVERSITY

A Topical Study of ROMANS 1:26, 27

Ten years ago, our country was caught up in a heated debate concerning homosexuals in the military. But I believe the controversy entails much more than a political, constitutional, or philosophical question. Rather, I believe the outcome revealed that we can only nominally call ourselves a culture built upon a Judeo-Christian foundation. I watched *Nightline* in wonder at the time as I saw Senator Bob Dole of Kansas ponder aloud whether homosexuality isn't a generational value. The strongest conclusion he came to on this particular evening was that allowing homosexuals in the military would raise some problems with regard to privacy. As the interview came to a close, I thought, "Here's a conservative senator, a traditionalist, a war hero who never once thought to bring up the issue of morality." And that made me sad, for if even the traditionalists are not raising the issue of morality, what hope is there for our country?

Are we still indeed a Judeo-Christian culture? What does the God of Old Testament Judaism and New Testament Christianity have to say concerning the issue of homosexuality? Plenty. In the Old Testament He makes it crystal clear that He is deadly serious concerning His ban on homosexuality (Leviticus 20:13). And here in the New Testament, He declares homosexuality to be the lowest point in the pathway to perversion. When a culture embraces homosexuality, that's the end of the line biblically, for, as seen both in Old Testament law and New Testament theology, the Lord absolutely and unmistakably forbids homosexuality.

Why? Like all sin, homosexuality is not bad because it's forbidden. It's forbidden because it's bad. Most people have the mistaken idea that God arbitrarily set up certain standards and parameters and called anything outside of those boundaries sin. Not true. Sin is not bad because it's forbidden—it's forbidden because it's bad. It's forbidden because it will destroy us corporately and individually. . . .

Homosexuality Damages Psychologically

Perhaps you followed the reports in which doctors declared that the person who is homosexual has a different chemical component flowing through his brain. While I'm not sure that's not true, it has also been reported that there is a question as to whether such chemical changes are the reason for homosexuality, or whether they're the result of homosexuality.

I believe our text hints at the latter. In verse 27, Paul writes, "they receive in themselves that recompense of their error" (verse 27). It could very well be that "the recompense of their error" manifests itself in a chemical that affects the psychology of a person who practices this kind of perversity.

Homosexuality damages people psychologically. It changes who they are and what they could be. Knowing this, God says, "Stay away from it."

Homosexuality Devastates Physiologically

Sixty-five percent of certain Central African nations are now infected with the HIV virus. The death rate is incredible and appalling because of AIDS. But this is neither new in our day nor confined to our time. Recent research indicates that HIV could have indeed been the plague that wiped out civilizations of antiquity. For four hundred years, the Canaanites, whom the Bible calls Sodomites (1 Kings 14), controlled the Promised Land. God gave them four hundred years to change, but, because they wouldn't, God ordered the Israelites to annihilate them (Joshua 9:24). If indeed, as many are now suggesting, the Canaanite culture was reaping the physical repercussions of sodomy, then the Lord was actually merciful in saying to Joshua, "They're dying a slow, painful death. Destroy them, lest they continue on in misery."

Homosexuality Destroys Societally

I wish in the debate, someone would quote not the Christian writer, but the historian, the scholar who wrote *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire.* Gibbons makes the case that in the years before Rome fell, fourteen of the last fifteen emperors were homosexual. Not only were they homosexual, but they appointed homosexual generals and commanders. According to Gibbons, this was a major reason the forces no longer had the will to fight. The army broke down; the Visigoths stormed in; the empire fell. Thus, history verifies that something happens not only physiologically and psychologically, but sociologically to any culture that persists in aberrant behavior.

I'm sure many of you have thought through or read about the above three reasons for why God forbids homosexuality. But there's a fourth reason, which I believe is the most important of all.

Homosexuality Disfigures Theologically

When God created him, Adam was not lacking. But he was lonely. So God put him to sleep, took a rib from his side, and fashioned a woman, a "completer" for him. Although Adam was no longer lonely, he had lost more than his rib in the process. He had lost a certain degree of sensitivity and an orientation toward communication. You can try to get man to be more sensitive and communicative, but good luck. You can take him to seminars or have him read books and cry. But you know what? He's not all there, for there is a certain sensitivity and tenderness absent in man since the Garden of Eden when they were removed from him and given to the woman.

But wait. That was the first Adam. Jesus came on the scene and showed us how it was supposed to be. The perfect blend of the strength of masculinity and the sensitivity of femininity was present in Jesus Christ, the Last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45).

> A carpenter before the days of power tools and Ace Hardware, Jesus exuded such strength that when an angry mob threatened to throw Him over a cliff, it took only a look from Him to part the crowd (Luke 4:29, 30). Yet He exuded such sensitivity that children loved to be around Him (Matthew 19:13–15).
>
> He was masculinity personified as He strode through the temple with eyes flashing and biceps bulging, turning over tables, driving out the moneychangers, and the oxen, with no one daring to stop Him. Yet He was tenderness exemplified when, in the midst of His righteous anger, He stopped to make sure the doves would suffer no harm (John 2:16).
>
> He was the picture of strength as He pulled Peter—the one whom history calls "the Giant"—out of the Sea of Galilee with a one-armed curl (Matthew 14:31). Yet He was the picture of sensitivity in His desire to retreat with His disciples (John 18:2).
>
> He was the essence of masculinity as He rode an donkey into Jerusalem, yet a portrait of tenderness as He wept over Jerusalem.

Jesus Christ is the Bullock of Leviticus 1 and the red Heifer of Numbers 19. Masculinity and femininity come together in Him perfectly.

What does this have to do with homosexuality? Everything. Because of what homosexuality does to a person physiologically and psychologically, it diminishes the strength of the male and the sensitivity of the female. Through homosexuality, men become effeminate and women become masculine. Satan knows this and desires to destroy the image of the Last Adam, Jesus Christ, by destroying role models of what the strength of masculinity and the sensitivity of femininity should be. Thus, we can't see as clearly in our culture as we ought what it means to be a man of strength or a woman of tenderness. The roles are compromised. The image is blurred.

Not only does this androgyny, this blurring of the roles, confuse people about the nature of the Person of Jesus Christ, but it also confuses people about His passion. What is His passion? His passion is His Bride, the church (Ephesians 5:25). You see, homosexuality says, "Love your own kind—a reflection of who you are." Thus, love between men does not properly depict Christ's love for the church. And love between women does not reflect the church's love for Christ. It skews it. It perverts it. It clouds it. Yet most churches today preach tolerance and acceptance of homosexuals and lesbians. Some even ordain them in ministry because most churches today have no passion for the Person of Jesus Christ. They're in love with themselves.

Satan is sneaky, folks. He uses homosexuality to blur our perception of the Person and Passion of Jesus Christ. That is why the Father says homosexuality must not be tolerated.

How does homosexuality affect you and me? Consider the following three premises.

Homosexuality Is Inevitable

Speaking of the end times, Jesus said, "As it was in the days of Lot, so shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke 17:28–30). What was it like in the days of Lot? When the angels came to visit him, the homosexuals did something that, twenty years ago, I couldn't understand: They marched in the streets (Genesis 19:4). *How could this be?* I thought. But that was before Gay Pride Parades. Jesus said an acceptance and a celebration of homosexuality would be a sign of the very end of this age before His coming.

Does the fact that homosexuality is inevitable mean we are to be passive about it?

No.

When Asa, a man who was righteous in the sight of the Lord, brought about revival in the land, one of the first things he did was destroy the Sodomites (1 King 15). Now, in our New Testament day, we are not called to annihilate homosexuals. But we are called to annihilate in our hearts the thinking that homosexuality is acceptable.

You see, as New Testament believers, our fight is never against people, but against principalities and powers (Ephesians 6:12). Thus, we should be waging war in the Spirit through prayer against this perversion that has blinded so much of our country and our leaders. Like Asa, we must refuse to let the sodomite spirit go unchallenged. And our battle must be waged in prayer.

Homosexuality Is Inexcusable

"But I was made that way," is the argument of those who practice homosexuality.

Wait a minute. Every man, every woman has some tendency of sin that must not be accepted. You might be heterosexual and have a desire to attack people. Does that mean we should say, "Well, that's just the way you are. That's your thing and you have to be who you were made to be"? What about the thief or the pornographer? All people are depraved. And because of that, a loving Father set boundaries to regulate behavior.

Like any sin, homosexuality is inexcusable—but it's also changeable. How do I know? Corinth, was the homosexual capital of the Roman Empire, and Paul said to the church there, "such were some of you" (see 1 Corinthians 6:9–11). They had been sanctified, justified, and changed by the reality of Jesus Christ.

Homosexuality Is Indicative

God says the sin of Sodom started with pride, fullness of bread, idleness of time, and a lack of concern for the poor (Ezekiel 17). Pride, too much to eat, too much leisure time, too little compassion for other people ultimately led to experimentation sexually. In Sodom there was too much time for MTV and HBO, too much time to go to movies and cruise the Internet. And because of their prosperity, the people fell into perversity. Paul echoes the same thought here in Romans when he says perversion begins when people who know God don't glorify Him as God nor give thanks to Him for being God.

I was on an airplane one day. Walking down the aisle during the time lunch was being served, I didn't see one person giving thanks for the food. Granted, it's hard to say thanks for airline food, yet Paul says perversion begins when people who know God don't take time to give thanks to Him, worship Him, or glorify Him because they're too busy with their concerns, their hobbies, their worldly pursuits.

Homosexuality is not generational or unique to us culturally. Rather, it's indicative of where we are spiritually. I say this to you not only that we might have insight, but that we might be warned. Don't stop thanking the Lord, precious people. Don't stop giving Him glory. Continue acknowledging Him as the King of your life and the absolute Authority of your home. If you do, you'll do well—and so will your kids and family.



2 In chapter 1, Paul carefully and concisely made it clear that all men are without excuse in their failure to glorify God. The self-righteous Jews would have been quick to agree, indicting the pagan for the very sin of which they themselves were guilty. That is why, after dealing with the unrighteousness of the heathen in chapter 1, Paul deals with the self-righteousness of the hypocrite in chapter 2.

Romans 2:1

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest

thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.

"You who judge the pagan nature and homosexual culture," said Paul, "you who are bitter and angry about someone else's sin are also guilty."

Does this mean my condemnation of another is an indication that I am guilty? Yes. The Greek word *krino,* translated "judge," means to judge to condemnation. In other words, it speaks of judging with a sneer on one's face and a finger angrily pointed at him, or her, or them. That kind of judgment is wrong because, although it might appear in a different form, the same sort of sin is going on within us whenever we judge condemningly.

Now, while we are not to make judgments in condemnation, we are to judge for identification. Jesus said, "By their fruits you'll know them" (see Matthew 7:16), and "Beware of wolves in sheep's clothing" (see Matthew 7:15). For example, if a guy came to take my daughter out and he arrived in a pickup truck with beer cans rolling around in the back, a cigarette dangling from his mouth, and a *Playboy* magazine rolled up in his back pocket, I would be justified to judge for identification and to keep her home. Although there's a fine line between condemnation and identification, we inherently know the difference between identifying something that is wrong and self-righteously condemning someone with hostility.

Romans 2:2

But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things.

"God will judge," said Paul. "And His judgment is according to truth." Folks, we can't know where a man's heart is. Therefore, because all things are naked and open before the Lord (Hebrews 4:13), our job is to love people and to leave the judging to God, who will judge perfectly, according to truth.

Romans 2:3

And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?

The patience of our Father is incredible, but people mistake His patience for impotence, ignorance, or apathy. "He's unable to do anything," they say. Or, "He's too busy to do anything." Or, "He just doesn't have time."

Romans 2:4

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

"Because you've mistaken His goodness and patience for apathy and impotence," writes Paul, "you've failed to see your need for repentance."



***For topical study of Romans 2:4 entitled "The Route to Repentance," turn to page* 885.**

Romans 2:5

But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

If you put a water balloon on a kitchen faucet and turned on the water, the balloon would get bigger and bigger—even though initially it might look like very little was happening. Some people do the same thing with life. They say, "I know I'm pouring sin into my life, but everything's getting bigger and brighter." Then there's a big *Boom!* And everything explodes.

"Be not deceived," Paul would later write. "God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that shall he reap" (see Galatians 6:7). "Watch out," he says. "You're in for problems presently and damnation eternally unless you acknowledge your need for a Savior and give your heart and life to Jesus Christ."

Romans 2:6–11

Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and

honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God.

Is Paul saying here that salvation comes by works? Of course not. But he is saying that judgment will be according to works. That is, all unbelievers will one day stand before God at the Great White Throne, where what they have done will be judged. If they have done total good, giving God all glory in everything they've said, done, or thought, they'll make it to heaven. In other words, to the moralist, to the person who is super pious, Paul is saying, "If you are really good, you'll make it in. If all of your days you've glorified God with all of your heart, and have lived honorably in everything you do, say, and think, you'll inherit eternal life." But guess what. Only one Man has ever lived like that—and it was His blood that was shed for the rest of us.

"This picture doesn't do me justice," said the politician to the photographer.

And the photographer replied, "With a face like yours, you shouldn't be asking for justice, but for mercy!"

So, too, we don't need justice. We need mercy. You see, God made our minds in such a manner that we don't remember the sins we committed even an hour ago. If we remembered all of the wrong thoughts, lousy attitudes, critical spirits, lust, and everything else that goes on in our minds—much less the things we say and do outwardly—we would lose our sanity. So to the self-righteous moralist who says, "I'm a good person," what a shock it will be when the books are opened and the depth of his sin is brought to light. Presently, we sing in this big choir of humanity. There are almost five billion of us on this planet, so if we're a little out of tune, nobody knows. But there's coming a time when man will sing solo. Then we'll find out how off-key we really were.

Romans 2:12

For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.

Not having the law, by what standard will the pagan be judged? Paul will go on to say that his conscience within him and creation around him will indict every man—leaving all men without a case in the courtroom of God's judgment.

Romans 2:13

(For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

I believe one of the great hazards for those who love to study the Scriptures, and who take seriously the privilege of plowing through God's Word, is that we can begin to think that hearing the Word automatically implies doing the Word. It's a very subtle, but a very real danger.

How do you know if you're obeying the Word? If you're grumpy, you're not obeying the Word because Jesus said, "Happy are you if you do these things" (see John 13:17). The word "happy" in Greek means "happy." It means "elated." It speaks of emotion. You will be happy if you're obeying the Word. But if you're just hearing about it, or being analytical of it, you will not be happy. So Paul would say to the self-righteous, to the Hebrew, to the biblical scholar, "It's not what you hear or know, it's what you *do* that will affect you."

In your morning devotions, during Wednesday night study, in a Sunday morning service, or whenever you're in the Word, ask the Lord to give you one thing to do—not just to journal, or to ponder, but one thing through His Word to do by His Spirit. And happy will you be if you do it.

Romans 2:14 (a)

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law . . .

"The Gentiles don't have the Scripture, but they understand right and wrong intuitively," said Paul.

Romans 2:14 (b), 15

. . . these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;).

Men know right from wrong intuitively. In no culture is murder ever allowed. In no culture is adultery ever accepted. "Wait a minute," you protest. "That doesn't square with Anthropology 101. We studied Polynesian cultures where, before the influence of white society, husbands and wives were traded freely, and everyone was happy continually."

> Not true. A couple of years ago, the interpreter for Margaret Mead revealed that the famed anthropologist was sold a huge bill of goods—that the Pago Pago people about whom she wrote would tell jokes about her at night, laughing at all the false information they were feeding her.

Men innately know right from wrong and will be judged according to whether or not they live up to that knowledge.

Romans 2:16

In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

In the Day of Judgment, the heathen will be judged by the conscience he has honored or violated, and the Hebrew will be judged by the Scriptures with which he has been entrusted.

Romans 2:17, 18

Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and approvest the things

that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law.

"We have the law," boasted the Hebrews, "and we know the things that are excellent."

Romans 2:19, 20

And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.

"Just because you have information," Paul is saying, "you can't assume you have justification or are qualified to be a guide for others."

Romans 2:21

Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?

"When did we steal?" the Jews asked God in Malachi.

"In not giving the tithe you've robbed Me," He answered (see Malachi 3:8).

Romans 2:22

Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?

The Book of Hosea declares that the adultery of the Jews was demonstrated in the way they had distanced themselves from God by following after other lovers, other priorities, and other affections.

Romans 2:23, 24

Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.

The hypocrisy of the Pharisees gave the Gentiles cause to blaspheme God. That's always the problem with sin: It gives the skeptic, the cynic, the unbeliever a reason not to become a Christian. You and I are to proclaim not our greatness but God's grace. We set ourselves and others up for a huge fall if we start pointing to anything or anyone other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Romans 2:25–27

For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?

Circumcision was (1) an identification of God's covenant people, an outward sign of what was to be an inward reality; and (2) an illustration of God's dealing with the flesh. In the Old Testament, God defined how the illustration of circumcision was intended to work.

- Exodus 6:12 speaks of the circumcision of the lips.
- Jeremiah 6:10 speaks of the circumcision of the ears.
- Ezekiel 44 speaks of the circumcision of the heart.

God's people were to speak with tenderness, hear with sensitivity, feel with compassion. Circumcision was meant to be a picture externally of the transformation that takes place internally. Yet although the Jews were outwardly circumcised, they were far from where they should have been internally.

As the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land, the Lord said, "Before you can take on Jericho in victory, before you can enter the Promised Land and enjoy the milk and honey, you must circumcise all those who came out of Egypt" (see Joshua 5). They needed to do away with the flesh before they could have victory in

the Spirit. But this principle became lost in the community of the super-religious, for although they boasted of their circumcision physically, their hearts, lips, and ears were hardened to the Lord in reality.

I point this out to you because Paul is making a very important point concerning outward signs and religion. "I've been baptized," people say. "I've gone through Confirmation. I've had Communion." And many people think that, because they've gone through a baptismal ceremony, been christened as an infant, or come to the Lord's table, they will be especially blessed. Not so. Outward expression means nothing if not accompanied by inward experience.

Romans 2:28, 29

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

A derivative of the word "Judah," the word "Jew" means "Praise." Who is the true circumcision, the true Jew, the one worthy of praise in the sight of God? Not those who legalistically and self-righteously try to deal with the flesh—but rather those who, in joy and amazement, worship God in the Spirit. The true Jew rejoices in Christ Jesus, has no confidence in his own flesh, and simply says, "Lord, I know that apart from You I can do nothing."

THE ROUTE TO REPENTANCE

A Topical Study of ROMANS 2:4

They caught her in the very act of adultery and brought her still naked before the Rabbi of Galilee. "Master," they said, "Moses said she should be stoned. What sayest thou?"

What would the Rabbi say? If He said, "Let her go," they would accuse Him of violating the Law of Moses. But if He said, "Stone her," He would no longer be known as the Friend of Sinners. Surely they had Him cornered.

Jesus stooped down as though He heard them not, and with His finger began to write in the dust something that must have hit them like a bolt of lightning. "Let he who is without sin—literally in Greek, the same sin—cast the first stone," He said. What a scene it must have been as, one by one, each man dropped his stone and went his way (John 8:3–9).

What did Jesus write in the dust that day? The Greek word translated "wrote" in John 8:6 is a word that means "to write against." Therefore, I suggest Jesus wrote the names of the woman's accusers, and beside each one, the name of a woman, a place, or a time that would remind them of something they had done or some fantasy they had entertained. In so doing, Jesus showed us very pointedly that we had better not be too quick to throw a rock at someone, for we are guilty of the same sin. Oh, our sin might not manifest itself in the flesh, but Jesus said, "If you've even looked at a woman with lust in your heart you are guilty of adultery. If you're even angry with your brother, you're guilty of murder" (see Matthew 5:22, 28). In other words, we're *all* guilty.

The self-righteous man is just as guilty, if not more so, than the unrighteous individual. In the story of the prodigal son, who was guiltier? Was it the prodigal who spent time in the pigpen and came back repenting, or the elder son who complained and murmured because his father never killed a fatted calf for him? The heathen and the Hebrew alike are without excuse. One might sin in the flesh, the other in the spirit—but both sin.

Because only God sees what's going on internally, only He can judge righteously.

A woman ran through the airport. On her way to the gate, she grabbed a magazine and a little package of cookies. Boarding the plane, she sat in an aisle seat, one seat away from a man in the window seat. A few minutes later, hungry from her race to catch her flight, she opened her bag of cookies and took one. To her astonishment, the man in the window seat also reached into the bag, which was setting in the middle seat, and grabbed a cookie. Utterly amazed at his audacity, she stared at him, reached for a second cookie, and ate it. He looked at her and took another cookie as well. That left only one cookie, which the man took and broke in half, before giving half to her. The lady was dumbfounded. The behavior of her seatmate left her puzzled, angry, and hungry throughout the entire flight. But her greatest surprise came when she opened her purse upon landing—and found her bag of cookies inside.

That's the way it always is! We're so sure we're right—when in reality we don't have all of the facts. In the Day of Judgment, we will be shocked at how wrong we were and how little we knew when the handbags are opened and all things will be judged truthfully.

Watch out, self-righteous person. You are he who perhaps is most vulnerable to despising the goodness of God.

How? I suggest three ways. . . .

We Can Despise the Goodness of God When It Is Extolled by Others

As David brought the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem, he danced before the Lord. Watching him from her window, his wife despised him. "Didn't the king behave himself seemly?" she said mockingly.

"Woman, what I have done, I have done as unto the Lord," David replied. "And I will become even more base in thy sight, for I'll continue to extol Him with all of my might. As for you," he continued, "you will be barren all the days of your life" (see 2 Samuel 6:20–23).

Want to be barren? Want to be spiritually unproductive and impotent? Here's how: Despise the goodness of God when it is extolled by others. Mock it. Make fun of it. Don't participate in it. And I guarantee there will be a barrenness in your soul and a fruitlessness in your life just as there was in Michal's.

We Can Despise the Goodness of God When It Is Extended to Others

This is tricky. This happens very frequently in my own heart. "How can they go on in that sin, Lord?" I ask. "They're not walking with You. They don't even have time for You. They're living contrary to Your plan. Sic 'em, Lord."

David voiced this same sentiment in Psalm 73 when he wrote, "Truly God is good. But as for me, my feet had well nigh slipped when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Their eyes stand out in fatness. They're not in trouble like other men. They have more than they could wish for. Their mouths are filled to the brim. When I thought upon this it was too painful for me."

It's crazy how indignant I am with the sins of others and how indulgent I am with the sin in my own life. The result? I begin to despise the goodness of God when He shows the same goodness and mercy to others that He shows to me.

We Despise the Goodness of God When It Is Exploited Within Ourselves

God's goodness can be exploited. He's forbearing. He's patient. He's incredibly good—so much so that the Anglo-Saxon word for God is literally "the Good One."

> In the days of Genesis, people sinned exceedingly. So God sent Noah to preach to a world that was carnal, sinful, and rebellious. As Noah hammered away on the ark for one hundred twenty years, God waited forbearingly, patiently, all the while providing graciously.
>
> While His people were in Egypt, God gave the Canaanites four hundred years to turn from their sin.
>
> Israel was carried into captivity because of iniquity. But eight hundred years later, God was still working with her, dwelling in her midst in the Person of Jesus Christ.

God is so patient. Yet I despise His goodness whenever I think, *Well, I'm getting away with my sin. Nothing negative is happening to me. So I'll just keep sinning because either God doesn't care about it, or maybe He even approves of it. Maybe I'm an exception.*

Not so. His goodness should lead you not to excuses of rationalization, but to the about-face of repentance.

> In Luke 13, Jesus told a parable so important for us to understand and remember. "Master," the servant said, "the fig tree has not borne fruit for three years. Let's cut it down."
>
> "Don't cut it down," said the master. "Expose the roots, fertilize it, and give it one more year. Yes, it's been absorbing nutrients from the soil and taking space in the garden without producing anything—but I still desire fruit from this tree. Give it one more year."

Some of us are in that place right now. The Lord has been so good to us. He's dug around us. He's fertilized us through His Word. He's tended us in His love. He's provided for us in so many ways—and yet we think, *Sure, I'm*

out of fellowship, but I'm not getting cut down, so I must not be doing that bad.

Rather than exploit God's mercy and goodness, we should be amazed by it, for in our text, Paul said that in hardening our hearts, we store up wrath for ourselves.

> The story is told that in the late 1880s, a bank teller stole a silver dollar every day and hid it in his attic. Knowing how to juggle the books and cover his tracks, this went on for days, weeks, months, years—until one day, after eighteen years, he was lying in his bed and judgment came. The rotting attic finally gave way, causing the coins to fall through the ceiling, crush the embezzler in his own bed, and bury him in his iniquity.

The same thing is happening right now with some of us. We think we're cleverly hiding our little secret. Nobody sees it. Nobody knows about it because we have figured out a way to juggle the books. But at a certain point, we'll place our last silver dollar in the attic—and everything will come down on our heads. The goodness of God makes possible indulgence in the hearts of foolish men, but brings about repentance in the hearts of wise men. If you have been despising the riches of His goodness, be wise and repent. Change direction and, by His grace, walk with God today.



3 You may have seen the results of a report by a group of researchers in England who spent thirty-one years and millions of dollars studying the effects of smoking. Their conclusion? Smoking can kill people. The tobacco industry, however, issued a statement that said the study has yet to be substantiated by their own research.

So, too, Paul makes the point that people innately and intuitively know they are sinners. Not the Surgeon General, but the Great Physician tells us that sin pollutes and affects every man. Yet, like the tobacco industry, we put up smokescreens and say, "Wait a minute. I'm not sure I can be held liable for sin. I'm not sure I can be labeled a sinner." The first two chapters of Romans blow those smokescreens away, for in chapter 1, Paul addresses the

unrighteous heathen. In chapter 2, he deals with the self-righteous hypocrite. And here in chapter 3, he'll speak to the super-righteous Hebrew. "Creation around them condemns the unrighteous," Paul declared in chapter 1. "Conscience within them condemns the self-righteous," he proclaimed in chapter 2. And in chapter 3, we will hear him say that the commandments given to them condemn the super-righteous.

Romans 3:1

What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?

"Wait a minute," the Hebrew would protest. "If we're on the same level as the heathen or the hypocrite, then what's the advantage of circumcision?"

Romans 3:2–4 (a)

Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid.

"Even though you don't understand that the reason the law was given to you was to show you your sin and your need of a Savior," answered Paul, "the fact remains that, because you had the law to guide you, you have been uniquely blessed." In other words, although throughout history the Jews missed the reason for the law, they nonetheless benefited from the results of keeping the law.

When the bubonic plague swept across Europe, killing one of every three people, the Jewish population was left virtually untouched. Why? Because in keeping the law, the Jews were protected from the plague due to the hygienic and dietary regulations contained within the law. So, too, throughout history, the Jews have always done well monetarily. Why? Because the financial principles contained within the law work—regardless of whether those who practice them walk close to the Lord or even believe in Him.

Romans 3:4 (b)

Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar . . .

There are times when people say, "I prayed and nothing happened," or, "I had devotions and it's not working," or, "I go to church and don't receive anything," or, "I'm doing all the things Scripture tells me to, but it's just not happening."

And I have to respond in love, "You're a liar because God promises that if we draw close to Him, He'll draw close to us, (James 4:8). Therefore, somebody's lying—and it's not God."

Feeling a bit dry in my spirit and a bit distanced from the Lord in my heart, I grabbed my Bible one evening and strolled through Jacksonville, Oregon, reading the books of Amos and Joel as I walked. And you know what happened? Even though Amos and Joel are far from lighthearted reading, I found myself smiling. Why? Because the Lord used His Word to minister to my heart in a beautifully satisfying way. Truly the Lord will meet anyone who will take time to open the Word and seek Him.

We're so fortunate, gang. We don't have to answer everyone's questions or solve their problems. But with great confidence we can just tell them that if they seek Him, the Lord *will* draw near to them.

Romans 3:4 (c)

. . . as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

As open as God's invitation to draw nigh to Him is, He knew all along that not everyone would accept it. Therefore, Paul maintains that the unbelief of the Jews actually verifies what God said would happen.

Romans 3:5

But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I

speak as a man).

Anticipating the reasoning of his Jewish audience, Paul poses this question: "If our unbelief validates the foreknowledge of God, then why will we be judged for our unbelief?"

Romans 3:6–8

God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world? For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.

Some believers think that as long as God is glorified, it doesn't matter how He gets glory. So they'll "stretch the story and give God the glory." Paul, however, stands firm against the thinking that says the end justifies the means. In other words, according to Paul, it's never right to do wrong to do right.

Romans 3:9

What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.

Whatever smokescreens have been put up by the heathen or the Hebrew, Romans 1, 2, and 3 blow them away. The heathen are indicted by creation, the hypocrite by conscience, and the Hebrew by the commandments. God has spoken clearly to every generation throughout history—leaving all without excuse.

Romans 3:10–18

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used

deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes.

The Great Physician's diagnosis of the condition of humanity is bleak: All are sinners without exception. This description is not just of the "bad guys"—but of you and me as well. Now, if I forget this divine diagnosis and start to think, *He's a pretty good person,* I'm setting myself up for disappointment and disillusionment. Therefore, instead of being surprised when someone does something bad, I should be amazed when someone does something good because the divine diagnosis is that we are all depraved.

"But what about the guy in the Philippines," you ask, "who flagellates his body and is hung on a Cross every Easter? Yes, his theology might be askew, but surely he is seeking God."

No, he's not. Paul says none seeks after God.

"What about the Tibetan monks who live their entire lives in simplicity and celibacy? Surely they're seeking after God."

No, they're not. The Bible says none seeks after God.

"Then what's the guy in the Philippines seeking?" you ask.

Perhaps he's seeking alleviation from his guilt, perhaps recognition from his peers, perhaps exaltation of his soul. But he's not seeking God.

"What about the monks in Tibet? What are they seeking?"

Perhaps they're seeking peace, perhaps some kind of transcendent emotional experience, perhaps a higher consciousness—but they're not seeking God.

The Bible says none seeks after God, no not one. Every believer was chosen solely by grace, completely because of God's unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor.

Romans 3:19

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made it clear that the keeping of the law lies not in external regulations, but in internal attitudes. Thus, we are all murderers, liars, and adulterers because even though we might not exhibit those behaviors externally, they take place in our hearts inwardly.

Romans 3:20

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

After speaking of our sad situation, Paul introduces the fabulous doctrine of justification. Justification is a legal term that speaks of much more than forgiveness or pardon. Justification means being declared righteous—as though we never sinned at all.

An English gentleman bought a Rolls Royce in England and had it shipped across the English Channel so he could motor through France. In the midst of his tour, however, the Rolls broke down. So the man called the dealer in London and said, "The car I bought is broken."

"We'll take care of it immediately," was the dealer's reply. And, sure enough, within the hour, a team of mechanics flew to France, took the Rolls apart, repaired it, and returned to England.

Following the completion of his tour, the Englishman returned home and waited for what was sure to be a hefty bill for the repair of his car. But it never came. So finally he called the Rolls dealership and said, "I've been back for several months, but I haven't received a bill for your services."

"A bill for what?" asked the voice on the other end.

"A bill for the repairs you did in France on my Rolls."

"Sir," insisted the dealer, "we have no record whatsoever of any repairs being done on any Rolls Royce at any time. Thank you."

That's justification—just as if it never broke down! You see, the Lord doesn't say, "I've been bearing with you and putting up with all of your sin, but I'm such a good God that I'll overlook it." No! Once I have faith in Jesus Christ, God looks at me as being justified—as though I never sinned at all.

Let's suppose my daughter Christy ran up a huge bill at Meier & Frank Department Store and couldn't make the payments. Eventually, Meier & Frank would dispatch a lawyer, who, upon finding Christy, would say, "Miss Courson, pay up immediately, or we'll see you in court."

Now, if Christy responded, "I can't pay. Please forgive me," they would most likely insist that justice be done. Three months later, Christy's court date would arrive. Eager to face their adversary, Meier & Frank's lawyers would arrive at the courthouse early and search for her.

Seeing Christy arrive on the arm of a handsome young man, they would say, "I hope you're ready, Miss Courson. The day of reckoning is here. By the way, who's the man with you?"

"Oh, this is my fiancé, Mr. Meier. His father is the partner of Mr. Frank. You wanted to talk to me about a lawsuit?"

"What lawsuit?" they would say.

You see, suddenly, the situation would change if Christy showed up with Mr. Meier's son. She could never have won the case. Her only way out was to have the case dropped completely. And that's exactly what happens with us. Satan accuses us. Our sin condemns us. The law convicts us—until we enter the courtroom on the arm of our Bridegroom. Then everything changes. Because we are justified, all charges are dropped for lack of evidence. In the following verses, note six characteristics of justification.

Romans 3:21

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.

Justification is apart from the law. If you're trying to relate to the Father on the basis of your own goodness or devotion, your consistency or your Bible study, your do's and don'ts—you'll never be justified. The law cannot justify you. It can only bring you to the realization that you are a sinner in need of a Savior.

Romans 3:22 (a)

Even the righteousness of God which is by faith . . .

Justification is by faith in the Lord. Our justification comes from our being linked not to God generally, but to Jesus Christ personally. James says the demons have a belief in God, but they're not saved. They're not justified. They won't be in heaven (James 2:19). It's not enough for a person to say, "I believe in God and go to church." No, he must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ because the source of justification lies embedded in the Person and work of Jesus.

Romans 3:22 (b)

. . . of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference.

Justification is for all mankind. Whether Jew or Gentile, yuppie or hippie, heathen or Hebrew—there's only one way to enter into salvation: by faith. It's not in what you've done or who you are, but in Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:23

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

Everyone sins. Everyone falls short of the glory of God. You might say, "I'm doing pretty well compared to my neighbor." But you're comparing yourself to the wrong person. The comparison is not between you and your neighbor or between you and your pastor. It's between you and God.

> *Warming up at the Mount Sac Relays during my senior year of college, I remember thinking,* I have a chance at doing pretty well in this meet. *It was one of those days when everything was "clicking": My form was good; the disc was landing well; and from the looks of my opponents' practice throws, I had every reason to feel confident. Then John Van Rienen emerged from the locker room. John Van Rienen was huge—six feet seven inches tall, three hundred-plus pounds, zero-percent body fat. I watched as this world-class athlete*

strode across the field, his arms so long (crucial for a discus thrower), his knuckles seemed to almost rub the ground as he walked. In his first warm-up throw, he didn't even take off his sweats, and he didn't even spin. Yet in his standing throw, he popped the disc past the best marks of all of the rest of us. And the pride I had felt only moments before dissipated with each of his successive throws.

So, too, when the Lord comes on the scene, He sets the standard. It's not how you compare with your neighbor, but how you compare with the glory of the Father that counts. And in His light, we all come up short.

Romans 3:24 (a)
Being justified . . .

Justification is by grace exclusively. What is grace? It is unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor. The riches of God climax in justification. And if that isn't enough, the phrase "being justified" is in the aorist tense, which means it is an action that happens continually. Justification didn't only take place the day we were saved or baptized, for even this very moment we are being justified and declared righteous. So often we feel that, because of our sin, we've forfeited the access and the freedom we once had with God. Not true. Justification is a continual action, a continual declaration of righteousness.

Romans 3:24 (b)
. . . freely . . .

In John 15:25, the Greek word here translated "freely" is translated "without a cause." That's how it should have been translated here as well: "being justified without a cause."

Romans 3:24 (c)
. . . by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

If you're as old as I am, you know what redemption is . . .

Each December, my mom would take boxes and bags full of S&H Green Stamps and Blue Chip Stamps from out of the hall closet. We kids would sit around the table, sponges in hand, wetting down the backs of the stamps and pasting them in little paper books made for such a purpose. Then we would take the filled books to their respective redemption centers where we would trade them in for items printed in the S&H and Blue Chip catalogs. In other words, we would use them to redeem *lamps or bikes or toys.*

To Paul's readers, the concept of redemption was even clearer, for in the center of every Greek city stood the agora—the place of redemption—where buying and selling took place. Specifically, although not exclusively, this was the place were slaves were bought and sold. Thus, the Greek word for the act of redemption is *agorazo.* But *agorazo* is not the word used in this verse.

There's a second word for redemption that the Greek reader of Scripture would readily understand: *exagorazo,* or "the act of purchasing or redeeming never to return." You see, oftentimes, a man would buy a slave, use him for a season of harvesting or cultivating, and then return him to be sold again. *Exagorazo* was the antithesis of this practice, in that it spoke of permanent possession. But *exagorazo* isn't the word used in this verse.

Apolutrosis, the third Greek word for redemption, is the word used in this verse. *Apolutrosis* speaks of a man going into the agora to purchase a slave for the purpose of setting him free totally and completely—never to be a slave again. I love it! Yes, for us redemption is *agorazo*—for we have been purchased by the Lord. Yes, it's *exagorazo*—for we'll never be sold again. But even more than that it's *apolutrosis*—for we were purchased for the purpose of being set free. "I no longer call you servants, but friends," Jesus said (see John 15:15).

Undoubtedly the clearest picture of this glorious concept of redemption is found in the Book of Ruth, where Boaz demonstrates the redemptive work of our greater than Boaz, Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:25

Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.

Justification comes at an incalculable cost. Jesus Christ left heaven to dwell among us and die for us. "I have tremendous difficulty with that," you say. "How could He pay the price for all of our sins when He was only on the Cross for a few hours?"

He wasn't on the Cross only a few hours. The Bible says He was slain before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). Thus, to a mysterious degree, His punishment for our sin individually, and for the sins of the world collectively, was, and is, eternal.

> A doctor was on trial because, although he attempted to abort an eight-and-a-half-month-old baby, the baby survived but lost her arm in the process. Yet, as one journalist pointed out, this is controversial only because the abortion didn't work. Had the doctor been successful, the story never would have surfaced.

Certain things on the news or in our community anger us. But imagine how God feels seeing everything—not only the stories that make the news, but the hidden sins, the tragedies no one cares about. It is impossible for us to begin to comprehend the multiplied millions of sins that have been committed by the people in this sanctuary alone, let alone by the whole world throughout all of history.

What if you were God? What if you saw everything every person is thinking—not just a botched abortion here and there, but everything everyone is thinking and doing? What would you do? Here's what God did: He took the anger He feels and hurled it on His Son, whose blood flowed redemptively in order that we, the hostages of sin, might be set free.

***For topical study of Romans 3:23–25 entitled "Propitiation!" turn to page* 894.**

Romans 3:26

To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Justification solves a divine dilemma. In 1 John 4:8, John declares that God is love. But 1 John 1:5 tells us He is also light. Therefore, although God loves us deeply, He also sees our rebellion clearly. And if He said, "I love them so much I'm going to overlook their sin," He would no longer be light.

> The eyes of the world were recently drawn to England when two ten-year-old boys were arrested for the death of a two-year-old. Now, if, following their trial, the judge said, "I know these boys beat that toddler to death, but I'm going to let them go because I really love these boys," the world would be justifiably outraged and incensed.

Such is God's dilemma. He's love, but also light. The solution? The only solution is justification through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.

> *A seventeen-year-old was arrested for reckless driving in a rural community. As he was brought into court, he was relieved to see that his father was the presiding judge. An hour later, the judge rendered his decision. "Your reckless driving," he said, "has endangered the people of our community. Consequently, justice must be served. You will either pay one thousand dollars or serve one year in jail."*
>
> *"Dad," the boy said. "You know I don't have a penny to my name."*
>
> *"Young man," said his father, "in this court you will address me as Your Honor. I am your judge." And down went the gavel as the boy stood incredulous before the bench.*
>
> *The bailiff approached. He was ready to take the boy to jail when the judge stood up, took off his robe, and left the bench to stand by his son. "Behind the bench," he said, "I am your judge. But here beside you, I stand as your father." And he took a checkbook from his pocket to pay his son's fine.*

That's precisely what the Lord did for us when He left the bench of heaven to come to earth as Jesus of Nazareth—to write the check of redemption, to pay the price of propitiation. It's fabulous. It's perfect. It's beyond comprehension that God would have come up with a plan so beautiful that it confirms both His light and His love without compromising either one.

Now, if the young man in the illustration, following his dad's offer to pay his fine, said, "Get out of here, Dad. Why did you have to pronounce such harsh judgment in the first place? I'd rather take my chances in jail than to accept charity from you," no one would feel sorry for him; no one would shed a tear on his behalf. So, too, no tears will be shed for those who say, "I couldn't care less that God became a Man and was slaughtered on the Cross for my sin. I've got places to go, things to do, a career to pursue," because the price paid on their behalf was offered so lovingly and would have cleansed them so completely.

Romans 3:27

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

In heaven no one will say, "Look what we accomplished by our piety and our devotional life, our depth, our study, and our praise." No, boasting is excluded.

Five hundred law school graduates were taking the bar exam, when one of them had a heart attack and dropped to the floor. One of the young men sitting near him rushed to his assistance and administered CPR for thirty minutes. When the paramedics arrived, the young man who had administered the CPR asked for an additional thirty minutes to complete his test. His request denied, he left the room stunned. The media picked up the story and, as a result, the young man went on the talk show circuit, received job offers and congratulations for being the only one in five hundred to come to the aid of a dying man. Thus, the savior was honored.

The same is true in heaven. All attention presently and eternally is focused on Jesus Christ because He's the Savior. We're only the "save-ees."

Romans 3:28–30

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

There are two groups in religion today: those who emphasize behaving and those who emphasize believing. In actuality, James tells us that the emphasis needs to be on believing, since the way we believe will affect the way we behave.

Romans 3:31

Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

Why does Paul say faith in Jesus Christ establishes the law? Because the purpose of the law, according to Galatians 3:24, is to bring us to Christ. Therefore, belief in Christ accomplishes the very purpose for which the law was given.

The management of a lakeside hotel had a problem. Guests would fish off the balconies of their rooms. With the restaurant located on the bottom floor, many times the fisherman would inadvertently crack the restaurant window with their sinkers as they cast their lines into the lake below. The hotel called in a consultant, and he solved the problem immediately.

"The solution is very simple," he said. "Just remove the 'No Fishing Allowed' signs from every balcony." This done, it no longer occurred to anyone to fish.

Truly, whether it be “No Fishing,” “Keep Off the Grass,” or “Thou Shalt Not Steal”—the law undermines faith and underlines failure by setting a standard we are unable to keep. Does this mean that, because we can’t keep the law, we are free to break it? Stick around, and we’ll see how Paul answers that very question.

PROPITIATION!
A Topical Study of ROMANS 3:23–25

A man in Texas had the urge for a midnight snack. So he rolled out of bed and walked down the hallway toward the kitchen. Passing the nursery, he noticed his three-month-old son's bassinet toppled on the floor. Racing back into the bedroom, he woke his wife to see if she had taken the baby from the bassinet, but his wife was sound asleep and knew nothing of the matter. Panic filled his heart as he ran down the hall, down the stairs, and into the living room, where, much to his horror and shock, he saw his twelve-foot pet python with a large lump in its center. He knew immediately what happened to his baby. In anger and outrage, he went to the back porch, grabbed a splitting maul, chopped up the snake, and ran out of the front door screaming. He was later committed to a mental institution.

This true story haunts me and is helpful to me in understanding a biblical concept often misunderstood by people who wrestle with theology. You see, although people do not have a problem when we talk about the love of God, the wrath and judgment of God are things with which people struggle. Yet if the man in Texas was justified in smashing that snake, how much more is God justified in dealing with snakelike people who have devoured others mindlessly and heartlessly.

> I think of what happened in Somalia. Tens of thousands of babies starved. Why? Because war lords were fighting for territory geographically, jockeying for position politically, and preventing food from reaching kids who were dying needlessly.
>
> I think of what happened in Bosnia Herzegovina—where women were raped and men slaughtered by the thousands, all in the name of ethnic cleansing.
>
> I think of Medford, Oregon, where the school board forbids the distribution of Bibles on school campuses as well as the use of any school buildings to be rented to any church group for any reason. I

think, wonder, and ponder how it can be that a society that distributes condoms refuses to allow the distribution of Scripture.

Why does God allow this insanity? Why does He, who sees not only the tragedy of Bosnia and Somalia, but the utter depravity of even the most seemingly together person, put up with a world so bent on self-destruction?

The answer is very simple: Because God made man in His image, He gave him the ability to choose. And when man chose to listen to the hissing of Satan rather than to the Word of God, he unknowingly handed dominion of the planet over to Satan. That's why Jesus called Satan the prince of this world (John 14:30) and why Paul called him the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). In the Garden of Eden, man turned this planet over to Satan. That's why there are diseases and rape, war, death, and sadness on our planet. It's not a matter of God allowing these things. It's a matter of man giving Satan the authority to cause them.

Meanwhile, God looks down from heaven, and, as He was in Noah's day, is filled with righteous indignation (Genesis 6:5–7). Yet even in Noah's day, man found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8). God looked at Noah, had grace on Noah, and did a work through Noah. So, too, He will again pour out His wrath in the period called the Tribulation.

Until then, however, what's the solution for the very genuine wrath God feels concerning snakelike creatures like you and me? The answer is propitiation. Why such a big word? Because no smaller word would suffice. The Greek word translated "propitiation" is *hilasterion,* which means "to appease the wrath of." We often say, "God hates the sin but loves the sinner." While that is true, it is at best a shallow understanding because the distinction between sin and sinner is not so easily made. You see, I am not only the baby devoured by the python. I am the python. I am a victim of sin, yes—but I am also its perpetrator.

Sin hurts people. It destroys mankind. It's cruel, vicious, and wrong. And my own sin is no less devastating. Thus, God is understandably filled with righteous indignation, which can only be appeased through propitiation.

The people of Israel, having been delivered from Egypt, were on their way to the land promised to them—a land flowing with milk and

honey and wonderful blessings. But en route, they started murmuring and complaining (Numbers 21:5). The sin of complaining led to suffering in verse 6 as the people were bitten by poisonous snakes. Suffering led to sorrow in verse 7. Sorrow led to salvation in verses 8, 9, when those who looked upon the brass serpent were healed. Who was the Brass Serpent? Jesus (John 3:14–16).

Propitiation is God wielding a splitting maul upon the snake, the Brass Serpent, Jesus Christ—instead of upon me. Am I calling Jesus Christ the snake? Yes, because He who knew no sin became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21) in order that the wrath of the Father over the sin of the world would be appeased. Instead of smashing a world that is snakelike and bestial, He turned to His innocent Son and laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.

Jesus understood this. That's why in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed with such intensity, "Father, if possible, don't let Me drink of this cup" (see Matthew 26:39). Socrates took the cup of hemlock and drank it bravely. Was Jesus less than Socrates? No. It wasn't physical death Jesus feared; it was the wrath of His Father that caused Him to break out in a bloody sweat (Luke 22:44). Jesus knew what it meant to be the propitiation, the satisfaction, the appeasement of wrath.

"The Father pouring out His anger upon His innocent Son is a form of child abuse," you say. Wait a minute. What is the name of the Son? Almighty God, Everlasting Father (Isaiah 9:6). You see, God Himself became a Man and absorbed the wrath of His own indignation. The mystery of the Trinity, the mystery of propitiation is that God actually wielded the splitting maul upon Himself.

Hilasterion, or "propitiation"—the word we don't hear much today—is used only five times in the entire New Testament: Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:1–2; 1 John 4:10; and Hebrews 9 are four of them. The Hebrews reference, I believe, is a real key to unlocking this understanding, for in describing the mercy seat, the author of Hebrews uses the word *hilasterion.* The mercy seat, or *hilasterion,* covered the ark of the covenant. The ark of the covenant contained the law. Therefore, through the mercy seat, God says, "I know you've broken the law. I know you deserve to be consumed because of it. But I'm going to put a lid on it through the sacrifice of My Son. *He* is the

helasmos, the mercy seat, the propitiation. It's not something He gives. It's who He is, for He has come between you and the broken law. The wrath that I should vent on you was instead placed upon My Son, who died in your place."

The fifth use of the word "propitiation" is found in Luke 18. If you feel offended that I would liken you to a baby-eating python, if you are repulsed by a God who would became a Man and slaughter Himself to propitiate His righteous indignation, Luke 18:10–14 is the passage for you. It is a brief vignette, concerning the prayers of a Pharisee and a tax collector. Look at verse 13: "God, be merciful to me a sinner." It begins with "God" and ends with "sinner." The middle phrase, "be merciful"—the verb form of *hilasterion*—stands between God and sin. Every one of us is in one of two categories. You're either the self-righteous Pharisee, or you're the tax collector, grateful that Jesus is standing between God and your sin.

What does a correct understanding of the concept of propitiation do?

Propitiation blows my mind. Propitiation adds an entirely different dimension to what Paul calls "so great salvation" (Hebrews 2:3). It's not just the Father saying, "I'm going to settle mankind's problem judicially." No, He deals with it personally.

Propitiation warms my heart. That God would love me so much He would actually become the object of His own wrath touches my heart in a profound way.

Propitiation weakens my knees. Considering the righteous wrath of a powerful God makes me realize that sin is serious. The Bible says the beginning of wisdom is to fear God (Proverbs 1:7). And it goes on to say that to fear God is to hate sin (Proverbs 8:13). The concept of propitiation makes me question my own view of sin. How do I react when I see things on the screen or hear unkind words come from my own mouth? If you're knowingly sinning today in what you're doing, or where you're going, I encourage you to think through propitiation.

Propitiation tickles my toes. Jacob was in a place he called Luz, or "separation." After tricking his brother Esau out of his birthright and blessing, he was in the wilderness running for his life. That night, as he laid his head on a rock and tried to sleep, God revealed Himself to him, pouring out a blessing upon him and giving a promise to him. Jacob woke up and

said, “Surely I am in the presence of God and I knew it not.” And he changed the name of the location from Luz to “Bethel,” or “house of God.” Then, as we read in Genesis 29:1, Jacob “went on his journey.” Translated literally this phrase reads, “Jacob had happy feet.”

“I’m a creep. I’m a crook. I’m a criminal,” he said, “but the Lord met me, has a plan for me, and is going to travel with me. Now I have happy feet.”

So, too, I say, “Oh, Lord, I know I’m a sinner. But because You absorbed the anger that should have been poured out upon me, I leave here today with tickled toes, weakened knees, a warmed heart, and a blown mind!”

May God continue to give us a comprehension of His love through an understanding of propitiation.

In Jesus’ Name.



4 In Romans 3, Paul shared something that must have appeared radical, almost heretical to his readers when he said salvation does not come from keeping rules and regulations, from trying to be “good little boys and girls,” from trying to be mystical or spiritual—but by faith, apart from the deeds of the law. “For what purpose was the law given?” his readers must have wondered.

A Hindu philosopher came forth after a ten-year silence and declared to his followers at an ashram in India that the whole world runs by the Ten Commandments. Now, if even a Hindu made such an observation, how could Paul say salvation comes not through the law or as a result of the law? He could do so because he contended that the sole reason the law was given was to show people that they are depraved and despicable sinners in desperate need of a Savior (3:31). “We’re not voiding the law,” Paul insisted. “We’re fulfilling the very reason for which it was given—to make you see your need of a Savior and to drive you to grace.”

So, after arguing theologically in chapter 3 that justification and salvation come simply by believing, Paul makes his point historically here in chapter 4.

Romans 4:1, 2 (a)

What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory . . .

First, Paul appeals to Abraham, father of the Hebrew family racially.

Romans 4:2 (b), 3

. . . but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Was it when Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees—a place of real sophistication and wealth—that God declared Abraham righteous? No. Was it when Abraham took his son Isaac to Mount Moriah in order to offer him as a sacrifice that God declared him justified? No. God declared Abraham righteous when Abraham simply believed Him (Genesis 15:6). When is a man saved? Not when he follows God's call obediently or even offers himself sacrificially, but when, like Abraham, he simply says, "Lord, I believe You. I believe what You say is true—that I'm righteous in Christ Jesus, that my sins past, present, and future are all forgiven."

To these Jews who knew Scripture well, Paul said, "Think about it. Abraham was not pronounced righteous when he was doing something spiritual or sacrificial. He was pronounced righteous when he simply believed God."

Romans 4:4

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

If Abraham had been pronounced righteous because he left Ur, or because he was willing to sacrifice his son, then he would have been given salvation as a reward. God would have been paying off a debt. But Paul's argument is that it was nothing Abraham did or didn't do—other than believe what God said was true—which justified him. So, too, if you are attempting to work your way into God's favor—either prior or subsequent to your salvation—

then He owes justification to you. Whenever we subconsciously think, *Now, Lord, I prayed a whole bunch today, so I know it's going to be a great day,* the implication is, *Lord, You owe me.* And that nullifies grace. God will not be a debtor to any man. He won't owe us anything.

That is why there will be no boasting in heaven—not only with regard to our salvation, but with regard to any of God's blessings. A lot of times we forget that and think it's because of our great faith or our prevailing prayer, our diligent works or our dedicated devotion that God has blessed our life.

It's a hard thing to say, but it's true: Some of the greatest blessings both in my life and flowing through my life have come when I have not been in prayer, when I have not had strong faith, when I've not been what I should or want to be. God's blessings during those times remind me that *everything* that comes my way is because of grace—unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor. This creates in me a heart that wants to love the Lord and worship Him rather than a tendency to say, "If I've accomplished this with three hours of prayer, I wonder what I could do with six!"

Am I saying we should never pray? If you're praying to earn reward, give it up. But if you're praying because you enjoy the Lord, are amazed at His goodness to you, because you want to participate with Him in what He's doing on the earth, because you love to spend time with Him, or because you're thankful for Him and want to be close to Him—then pray! If you get up at three o'clock tomorrow morning to pray in order to fulfill an obligation, God won't be impressed a whit. But if you get up at three o'clock just to enjoy Him, He'll be blessed. The man, woman, or congregation that truly understands that salvation is all about grace will find themselves praying, worshiping, studying, witnessing—not because they're trying to earn God's blessing, but because they're responding to the One who's already been so good to them.

Romans 4:5 (a)

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly . . .

Who does the Lord justify? Who gets blessed? Not the Pharisee, but the one who realizes he's worthy of nothing.

Romans 4:5 (b)

. . . his faith is counted for righteousness.

It is not the one who has faith in his faith, but the one who has faith in the goodness, the provision, and the loving-kindness of the Lord who is righteous. Such is the one to whom the Father says, "Because you're not trying to earn My favor or earn My blessing, because you're just believing in who I am as the Justifier of the ungodly, I pronounce you righteous."

Romans 4:6 (a)

Even as David . . .

In addition to Abraham, Paul brings out Big Gun Number Two, saying, "The idea that what matters is not the rules and regulations of the law but rather simply believing in God and having confidence in Him is not new. Look at David, founder of the Hebrew royal family . . ."

Romans 4:6 (b)

. . . also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.

The word "blessed" literally means "O how happy." Here in Psalm 32, from which Paul is quoting, David says, "O how happy is the man whom the Lord accounts righteous—apart from works." Happy is the man who sees this. For him, Christianity will not be a burden to carry or a battle to fight in a way that makes him sour, dour, and miserable. No, David says happy is the man who understands that God accounts, imputes, pronounces righteousness apart from works—apart from anything he does or doesn't do.

Romans 4:7

Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

Blessed are those whose iniquities are sent away—like the scapegoat on Yom Kippur, which was sprinkled with blood and then sent out of sight

(Leviticus 16:22).

For topical study of Romans 4:6–7 entitled "Forgiven!" turn to page **903.**

Romans 4:8
Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

Once we receive the work God did redemptively in order that we might be pronounced righteous, He no longer sees us as sinners. For me to utter this would be presumption. But because David said it, it's inspiration. It's interesting to me that in David's early psalms, he talked about how righteous he was, how there was no vanity in his life, and how there was no iniquity on his hands. But then what happened? David stumbled when he walked into sin with Bathsheba. As a result, he discovered he was not as righteous as he thought he was previously—and his later psalms reflect this discovery.

A young couple moved into an upstairs apartment and bought a waterbed. Forgetting to bring a hose, they bought one at the nearest hardware store and hooked it from their sink to their waterbed before going out for about an hour. The surprised couple returned to find their floor had collapsed and fallen onto the apartment below—not because of the weight of the waterbed, but because they had accidentally purchased a sprinkler hose with holes in it.

That's so much like me! I think I've got my act so together—until I find a few holes I wasn't counting on. Maybe you think you've got it all wired, but you watch. Sooner or later, you'll discover that your floor has collapsed, that you're a sinner. That is why David says, "Happy is the man who's not trying to prove his worth or merit God's blessing. Happy is the one whose sins are forgiven." It doesn't matter how long you've walked with the Lord, or how much you know about the Lord. The fact is, the man or woman who is happy is the one who is not working, but simply believing in the goodness and lovingkindness of the Father revealed through the Son on Calvary's Cross.

Romans 4:9, 10 (a)

Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision?

Paul held up Abraham and David as examples of men who had been justified apart from works. "But they were Jews. What about Gentiles?" you might ask. Read on. . . .

Romans 4:10 (b)

Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

To the Jew, circumcision was everything. It proved his Jewishness, his worthiness. "Wait a minute," said Paul. "Abraham was pronounced righteous in Genesis 15 *before* he was circumcised."

Romans 4:11

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.

Paul here is saying Abraham is the father not only of the circumcised Jew, but of the uncircumcised Gentile because Abraham was pronounced righteous before he was circumcised. Circumcision did not confer righteousness. It confirmed righteousness. So, too, you can be baptized a dozen times next summer, but it won't save you if you don't believe in your heart that the work is done, that the price is already paid for your sin. The basis of everything we enjoy is that which God has done for us and on that fact that He views us through the lens of His Son.

So I get baptized because I want to go on record externally, declaring what I know is already true internally. I come to Communion because I want to do outwardly what I'm excited about inwardly. I have devotions not to

earn His favor, but because He has already shown me such favor. It's not responsibility, folks. It's *response.* Why is it so hard for us to understand this? Could it be because our culture says, "There's no free lunch," and "God helps those who help themselves"? Could it be because our flesh says, "Set the alarm earlier. Stay up later. Memorize more. Study harder. And maybe, just maybe, you'll be blessed"?

If I could communicate one thing to you precious people it would be this: Quit trying to give God a reason to bless you. It'll never work because God will be a debtor to no man. Just marvel at His goodness. Enjoy an intimate relationship with Him. And watch what He can pour out on you because you won't be taking the credit.

Romans 4:12

And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

Whether you're Jew or Gentile, if, like Abraham, you just say, "Thank You, Lord," you are part of the family of faith.

Romans 4:13 (a)

For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law . . .

The promise given to Abraham wasn't given because of the law. It was given before the law.

Romans 4:13 (b)–15

. . . but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

Years ago, when the Susan B. Anthony dollar was issued, no one could get rid of them. One bank in Georgia, however, moved record

numbers of the coins. When a Washington bureaucrat traveled to Georgia to determine the reason, he discovered their simple secret was a sign on the window that read: Susan B. Anthony Dollars Available. Limit Two Per Customer. "People kept sneaking back," said bank officials, "hoping to get more than their limit." That's what the law does. It not only undermines faith, but it underlines failure because, unable to keep its standard, we have no recourse but to break it.

Romans 4:16 (a)
Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace . . .

Salvation must be by faith. If it were by works, we would always wonder if we were really saved. We would feel like we had to come forward every service and get baptized every Sunday. We would walk around feeling beat up, cast down, and done in continually. But when we understand that our relationship with the Lord is not based upon anything we do or don't do other than simply believing, salvation becomes something we are not afraid of losing every week.

Salvation: The Father thought it. The Son bought it. The Spirit taught it. The Bible brought it. Satan fought it. But, praise the Lord, by His grace, we got it!

Romans 4:16 (b)
. . . to the end the promise might be sure . . .

Remember the game Chutes and Ladders, and the frustration you felt when, in the first place, you came to the last chute and down you went? If salvation came by trying, striving, religion, or works, our walk would be a perpetual game of Chutes and Ladders. On Monday, we would have devotions and move two rungs up the ladder. On Tuesday, we would go to morning worship and advance five more steps. On Wednesday, we would come to Bible study and climb three rungs higher. On Thursday, we would seek the Lord in the evening and find ourselves only 3 rungs from the top. On

Friday, we would talk with our neighbor about the Lord. But on Saturday, we would get angry and down the chute we would tumble.

Tragically, a lot of people live their spiritual life that way—trying to work their way up the ladder by keeping rules and trying harder, failing to realize that, because it's the result of grace, the promise is sure. The promise is sure to the one who simply believes that God did what He said He did when on the Cross He declared, "It is *finished"* (John 19:30).

Romans 4:16 (c)
. . . to all the seed . . .

The word "all" in Greek means "all." It means you. It means me. In other words, the Father said, "The only way the promise can be sure for Jon Courson is if it's totally by grace, if all he must do is believe in what I did and that I love him. Otherwise, he's not going to make it. He'll climb the ladder for a day or two, but eventually down the chute he'll go."

Romans 4:16 (d)
. . . not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.

Paul returns to Abraham as an illustration of faith. Romans 4 is such a key chapter in this day in which cults abound and receive so much media attention. Like Paul, we must say, "What we embrace and believe is not some new theological fad, but has its roots clear back in the Book of Genesis as seen in the life of Abraham."

I am reminded of what happened on Mount Carmel, when, in order to get Baal's attention, his prophets hooted, hollered, and slashed their bodies (1 Kings 18:28). But nothing happened. Then it was Elijah's turn. After spending all day in a radical frenzy, the prophets of Baal watched as Elijah, the man of faith, simply said, "Father, show us who You are." Fire came down and consumed not only his sacrifice but also the altar and the water that surrounded it. Incredible! Elijah's faith prevailed because it was based upon

something much deeper, richer, and fuller than man's efforts, energy, or emotion.

"Go to the Old Testament," said Paul. "Study Elijah. Take a look at Abraham. And learn a lesson about the beauty, the simplicity, the power of faith."

Romans 4:17 (a)
(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) . . .

Notice the tense of this verse. God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 17:5, saying, "I *have made* thee"—although in reality it hadn't yet happened. God speaks His promise in the past tense, even though from our perspective it hasn't taken place because so certain is His promise, it's as though it has already happened. I like that!

Romans 4:17 (b)
. . . before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead . . .

God "quickens" or "raises" the dead. Was Paul speaking of Abraham's body reproductively, or was he referring to Abraham's belief that God would raise his son Isaac, whom he was willing to sacrifice at Mount Moriah? I don't know. I only know Abraham was a man of faith—whether concerning Isaac's birth, Isaac's resurrection, or both.

Romans 4:17 (c)
. . . and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

God called Abraham a father even before the birth of Isaac because, from His perspective, Abraham was already a father. Read Ecclesiastes 3:15 for a glimpse into the great mystery of God calling things that are not yet as though they already were. The implications are fabulous.

Romans 8:29, 30 tells us that, on the basis of His foreknowledge, God predestined those who would want to know Him. And because they're

predestined, they're called by Him. And when they respond to His call, they're justified—declared righteous—and they're glorified. The implication is staggering. God views us as already glorified. What does this do? It frees me incredibly, knowing the Father sees me not in my cruddy humanity, but in my glorified state. I see myself flailing, faltering, and failing. But the Father sees me as already glorified.

Think of it this way. . . .

> *Picture yourself in New York City, watching the St. Patrick's Day parade. A band marches by, followed by some floats and big balloons. Your buddy, standing a mile down the road has not yet seen the band, the floats, or balloons that pass before you. You're enjoying them presently, and you know he's going to enjoy them eventually when the parade works its way to him.*
>
> *That's the way the time/space continuum works. But suppose on this St. Patrick's Day, you were invited to sit in the Goodyear blimp. Suddenly you would see the whole parade simultaneously. The people down below would be watching the parade go by. But not you. You would see the whole thing in its entirety. That which is yet to be for your buddy, you'd already see. And that which already was for him, would still be in your sight. From your vantage point, it would all be happening in the present.*

That's how it is for the Father. We're marching through the parade of life, trying hard, doing good sometimes, stumbling other times. But He sees our whole life—past, present, future. He sees the whole thing in totality. Thus, He views us as already glorified, as already in the kingdom of heaven. Consequently, we have beautiful freedom today. We can just enjoy the Lord because He has said we are already glorified. We're not a disappointment or an embarrassment to Him. We're already perfect in Him.

Romans 4:18 (a)

Who against hope believed in hope . . .

Even though it looked hopeless physically and logically, Abraham had hope. Biblically, hope is the absolute expectation of coming good. Abraham said, "From God's perspective, His promise has already been fulfilled. So I know with absolute certainty it will happen in me and for me."

Romans 4:18 (b)–22

. . . that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

Abraham was declared righteous not because of something he did for the Lord, or by virtue of the fact he proved himself to the Lord, but because he simply believed in the Lord.

Romans 4:23, 24

Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.

On the basis of Romans 4, if you believe Jesus was raised from the dead, you are exercising the same quality of faith as did Abraham—a hero of faith. So, whatever problem or pressure is upon you at this time, it's nothing in comparison to the incredible faith you have already demonstrated. Once a believer grasps the fact that he's already done the hard stuff—that his belief in the Resurrection sets him apart as a hero of faith—then any other pressure or problem is a piece of cake, minute in comparison to the fact that he has already embraced a concept that the world mocks (Acts 17:32).



For topical study of Romans 4:19–24 entitled "Jumbo-Sized Faith," turn to page **908.**

Romans 4:25

Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

Not only did Jesus die for our sins to redeem us, but He was raised from the dead to justify us and to be an Advocate for us. As our Advocate, our defense attorney, Jesus lives to make intercession for us continually (Hebrews 7:25). Satan, on the other hand, condemns us not only in our hearts day and night, but before the very throne of God (Revelations 12:10), saying, "Look at those people down there. They're hypocritical, weak, and faltering."

But the moment he hisses these accusations, Jesus is literally there, saying, "Depart, Satan. They're washed in My blood and robed in My righteousness."

And the Father says, "Case dismissed for lack of evidence," as He casts our sins into the depths of the sea (see Micah 7:19).

Why did Micah say God cast our sins into the depths of the sea? Because, as a people, the Jews were terrified of the ocean. Therefore, the Lord put their sins in the last place a Jew would have gone looking for them. To our culture, He would say, "I have cast your sin into the bottom of a toxic waste dump. Your sins are not only forgotten by Me, but I'm putting them in a place where there's no danger of anybody looking at, digging up, or talking about them. On the basis of the finished work of Calvary, every sin you've ever committed, are committing, or will commit is forgiven, forgotten, and out of sight." That's forgiveness. That's justification. That's Good News!

FORGIVEN!
A Topical Study of
ROMANS 4:6, 7

I was a California boy when we moved to Oregon in 1977, so some things relating to rural culture caught me off guard initially. The first weekend we were there, we spent some time out at a ranch in the Little Applegate Valley. As we walked the grounds, I saw something that puzzled me, for tied around the neck of the family pet, a big German Shepherd, was a dead chicken. Never having seen anything like that, I asked the reason and was given this explanation: "If any of our ranch dogs attack the chickens, we teach it a lesson by tying the dead chicken around its neck and leaving it there for several days. As the chicken decays, the dog learns to stay away from chickens."

Oregon is bizarre! I thought. In reality, however, such a practice is not unique to Oregon. As you study history, you see certain ancient cultures tying the corpse of a victim to its murderer. And should the accused ever sever the rope, he would be executed immediately. That's what happened in antiquity —and Paul made application spiritually when he wrote, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24), or more literally, "Who shall deliver me from this dead body?"

"Who will free me from the stench of my past—my failings, my sins, my shortcomings—which follow me wherever I go?" asked Paul. You see, although others would look at Paul and see a Pharisee, a rabbi, a "good person," Paul knew he was a sinner. So, too, maybe to others you appear together and wonderful, but like Paul, you know there's a dead body of past failings or present shortcomings tied to you. Even David, whom Paul quotes in the passage before us, a man after God's own heart, was a man who had a dark side and was tied to a dead body.

In David's day, instead of football, basketball, and baseball season, there were only two seasons: peace season during the fall and winter, and war season in the spring and summer. During one such season of war, after ruling

for twenty years, David opted to remain at home rather than join his men in battle. But unbeknownst to him, in so doing he was headed for trouble. That's always the way it is. Whenever we decide to kick back, sit out, or pull away from ministry, from service, from walking with the Lord; whenever we say, "I deserve a break today"—we're headed for disaster.

While his boys waged war, David strolled about his palace. Looking down upon the roofs below, he saw a woman taking a bath. Lusting after her, he sent for her and had relations with her. When she discovered she was pregnant, David knew he was in trouble. After all, what would the people who extolled him so highly and exalted him so readily think of their king if they knew he had taken another man's wife? So David hatched a plan in which he sent Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, into a battle, wherein on a certain signal, all of the soldiers except Uriah were instructed to turn and run.

Thus, David committed first-degree murder when his plan was executed perfectly.

Free to marry Bathsheba, David thought none would be the wiser when the baby was born. From outward appearances, it looked like David would literally get away with murder. But on the inside, something entirely different was taking place within him, as seen by what he wrote in Psalm 32, quoted here by Paul in Romans 4. . . .

> *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the* LORD *imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.*
>
> Psalm 32:1–3

"When I covered up my adultery and murder, it affected me physically," said David. Do your bones ever ache? Do you feel weary? It could be because of unconfessed sin. We do know in this day that there is a definite connection between one's emotional state and his physical health. Therefore, the physical affliction David experienced was no doubt linked to the emotional turmoil with which he struggled.

> *For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me . . .*

Psalm 32:4 (a)

It wasn't for punishment that God's hand pressed upon David. It was for protection. Think about it—if your three-year-old child or grandchild was chasing a ball that rolled into the street, and you saw a car coming, what would you do? You would run after that child, lay your hand on him, and do whatever it took to keep him out of the way of danger. So, too, the Lord sees you and me playing in the street of sin, and His hand comes down on us heavily—not for punishment, but for protection, saying to us as He did to David, "You're going to feel the pressure of My hand until you get out of the path of destruction."

. . . my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.

Psalm 32:4 (b)

Ever feel like there's a drought inside you? Once there was moisture. Once there was a flow of the Spirit; there was living water. But now? There's a drought like the middle of summer. As with David, it may very well be the result of unconfessed sin.

Perhaps eight months passed before Nathan the prophet came to David and said, "Your sin is known" (see 2 Samuel 12:7–9).

Hearing this, David cried to the Lord, "Against thee and thee only have I sinned" (see Psalm 51:4).

"Wait a minute," we say. "What about Uriah? Didn't David sin against him?"

Certainly David sinned in killing Uriah, but his sin against Uriah was infinitesimal in comparison to his sin against God.

You see, contrary to modern psychology, the Bible doesn't give any man or woman a reason to say, "I'm a victim because my mom, dad, or my ex sinned against me." Why not? Because, no matter how bad we have it, every one of us deserves a whole lot more trouble than we get. You're a wretched, rotten, smelly, defiled, iniquitous sinner. So am I. Therefore, we can never say, "We're victims."

Turn away from this pop theology, folks, and listen to what David said under the inspiration of the Spirit: "Father," he said, "the only issue is my

rebellion against You. As for Uriah and Bathsheba, You will minister to them directly. But as for me, my sin is against You only."

> *I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the* LORD *. . .*
>
> Psalm 32:5 (a)

After aching in his bones, and feeling dry in his spirit, after being pressed by the heavy hand of God's conviction, and being confronted by Nathan, David decided to confess.

> *. . . and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.*
>
> Psalm 32:5 (b)

After a season of conviction, David was forgiven at the moment of confession. The implication of this is incredible, for the minute we get to the place of even preparing for confession, the Father says, "It's done."

The Hebrew word for "forgavest" implies immediacy. In other words, God doesn't say to you or me, "Once you make your confession you're on an eight-month probation, and I'll see how sincere you are."

Man says, "Was she, was he, were they sincere? Are they really repentant?" But the Bible knows nothing of that kind of analysis. The Bible says that the moment you make confession, you are completely and totally forgiven. So it is that we join with David saying, *"Blessed* is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!" The word "blessed" literally means "oh, how happy."

David never said, "Oh, how happy is the one who has power." As king of Israel, David had power not only in his own nation but also in the surrounding nations that were in submission to Israel. But he didn't extol power.

David didn't say, "Oh, how happy is the one who has popularity." When David walked through town, women sang songs about him (1 Samuel 18:6, 7). If Gallup, Harris, or CNN had taken polls in David's day, his popularity rating would have been off the charts. But he didn't extol popularity.

David didn't say, "Oh how happy is the one who has prowess." Not only could David jump over walls (Psalm 18:29) and wrestle lions and bears (I Samuel 17:34–36)—he also wrote the hit songs of his day. Yet he didn't extol musical ability or athletic prowess.

David didn't say, "Oh, how happy is the one who has prosperity." David had more gold and silver than he could use in his lifetime. Yet those things meant nothing to him because he was haunted by the sin, which, like a dead corpse, was tied about him.

"Oh, how happy," David said, "is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." I used to think David was being a little redundant when he said, "whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered," but upon further study, I found something that intrigues me. The word "forgiven" literally means "to send away." The word "covered" means "to be sprinkled." There was only one day in which these two acts were practiced together. That was the day we call Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).

On one day each year, around October 10, two goats would be brought before the high priest. Upon one, the scapegoat, the high priest would symbolically lay the sins of the entire nation, then release it into the wilderness. As for the second goat, its throat was slit, and the blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat.

Gang, this has wonderful and practical implications for us even today, for as the scapegoat was sent out of sight into the wilderness, Psalm 103 says our sin is sent away as far as the east is from the west. How far is that? If you took off from Applegate Christian Fellowship in Oregon, you could only go north for thirty-five hundred miles, because once you reached the North Pole, the next step you took, you would be going south. But if you left Applegate and traveled east, you could go east over the Rockies, to the Eastern Seaboard, across the Atlantic Ocean to Britain, into Europe, Eastern Europe, Russia, India, Japan, and back to Oregon—and the compass would still read east. The distance from east to west is infinite. And that's how far your sin—the dead corpse you've been carrying around and dragging behind—is from God.

Not only is our sin out of God's sight, but it's out of His memory (Jeremiah 31:34). Remember—there was a second goat, whose blood,

sprinkled on the mercy seat on the Day of Atonement, covered the law that was inside the ark of the covenant. So, too, the blood of Jesus Christ blots out even the memory in God's mind of the law that you've broken. Whether you've been into pornography, adultery, gossiping, lying, or cheating on your taxes, God says once confession is made, your sin is blotted out. He cannot remember it.

"Happy is the man," said David, "who, upon confession of his sin, finds immediate forgiveness and release." But even though there is release from the penalty of sin, there is repercussion from the consequences of sin. As Nathan said to David, "When this gets around, people will make fun of your God" (see 2 Samuel 12:14). Not only that, there would be repercussion within his own family in the form of incest and rebellion (2 Samuel 13–18).

With this in mind, check out Psalm 84.

> *How amiable are thy tabernacles, O* LORD *of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the* LORD*: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.*
>
> Psalm 84:1, 2

"The only place I really have peace," said David, "is not in my family, not in my country, not in some other nation geographically—but in the sanctuary."

> *Yea, the sparrow hath found an house . . .*
>
> Psalm 84:3 (a)

Sparrows were the most worthless creatures in the land of Israel. The Jews would fry them and eat them as appetizers. Jesus said two sold for a farthing (Matthew 10:29); and, according to Luke, you could get five for two farthings (Luke 12:6). In other words, if you bought four, they'd throw in an extra one for free. "How blessed," David said, "is even the most worthless animal in the whole nation, because even he finds peace in the tabernacle, in the place where the blood covered the mercy seat."

. . . and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God.

Psalm 84:3 (b)

Swallows are known for their restlessness. Because their feet are weak, they can't perch. That's why they're always in the air. Yet even the most restless animal in all of Israel could find a home in the sanctuary.

Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah.

Psalm 84:4

Listen to the heart of David: You can be happy. I can be happy when we simply make confession and realize God's provision in Jesus Christ. Practically, however, that happiness may not be realized or enjoyed in any other place than the sanctuary.

One night, as I was on the church grounds, I noticed a fellow sitting on the grass, who later shared with me some difficult struggles he was walking through. Now, while he could have been taking in a movie, playing golf, or hoisting some cold ones at the local bar, he still would have been forgiven—but he wouldn't have found what he was really longing for. That could only be found in the sanctuary, in the place of separation. There's something that happens uniquely in the sanctuary. If you feel worthless as a sparrow or restless as a swallow, go into the sanctuary, for in God's presence, no one throws your sin before you, no one makes fun of you, and no one condemns you.

It's in God's presence alone that you will experience a serenity that will make you, like David, want to "shout for joy" (Psalm 32:11) as you are reminded of the forgiveness of your sin and the goodness of your God.

JUMBO-SIZED FAITH

A Topical Study of ROMANS 4:19–24

We seem to have a terrible tendency to overcomplicate spirituality. Knowing this, Jesus shared with us that we must become as little children if we want to enter into the kingdom (Matthew 18:3). This doesn't mean we're to be childish in immaturity, but, instead, childlike in simplicity.

In the Book of Romans, Paul was shockingly simple when he wrote that our salvation is based not upon some esoteric understanding or something we should be doing—but that it is a free gift founded not upon behaving, but upon believing; not upon trying, but upon trusting; not upon doing, but upon what Jesus has already done.

Was this some bizarre, new doctrine Paul was preaching, some New Age revelation, some secret understanding? No. In Romans 4, Paul said, "This is not something new—it's the way it was meant to be from the beginning," as he reached all the way back to Abraham for an example of one who was justified by faith.

Look at Romans 4:19–21, and note four elements of Abraham's faith that are vital for you and me.

Abraham Did Not Look at His Limitations

> *And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb.*
>
> Romans 4:19

At the age of eighty-six, Abraham received the promise that he and his wife, Sarah, would have a child. Fourteen years later, at the age of one hundred, Abraham still believed God would honor His Word. Reproductively, his body was dead. Physiologically, Sarah had been barren all the days of her life. But Abraham didn't consider the frailties of his flesh. Instead, he counted on the faithfulness of his God.

You who are wondering why God's promise has not been fulfilled in your own life, take hope and know this: There is almost invariably a time gap between the promise of God and the performance of God. Why? So that the Lord can prepare you for what's coming. Therefore, don't look at your limitations because you will be sure to find all kinds of them.

> When the spies went in to check out the Promised Land, they discovered a land that flowed with milk and honey, and brought back grapes as big as basketballs. "What a fabulous land it must be!" the people said.
>
> "Yes, it is. But there's a problem," said all but two of the spies. "There are giants in the land. And in comparison to them, we are but grasshoppers" (see Numbers 13:33).

Do you feel as if there's a giant facing you—a financial, vocational, relational problem looming large before you? Take your eyes off your limitations and put them on the One who is limitless, for your problems are but grasshoppers compared to the One who spans the universe between His little finger and His thumb (Isaiah 48:13).

Abraham Did Not Lower His Expectations

> *He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith.*
>
> Romans 4:20 (a)

"Abram," the original name given to Abraham, means "Exalted Father." Thus, for the first one hundred years of his life, Abraham must have had his fill of taunts like, "Hey, Exalted Father, how many kids do you have?" But it got worse when, at one hundred years of age, the Lord told Abram he was to change his name to Abraham, or, "Father of *Many* Nations." Yet he didn't stagger. He didn't say, "I refuse to go by that name. Call me Father Wannabe." No, he said, "Call me Father of Many Nations. It's going to happen."

Abraham Gave God Adulation

. . . giving glory to God . . .

Romans 4:20 (b)

Here's a real key to faith: I find that faith comes and fear flees when I give God glory. I can be struggling when I go into the sanctuary, or when I head up to the mountaintop. But when I start worshiping, my faith begins to grow. That is why worship is so important. Not only does it bless the Father—it feeds our faith.

> When Jesus arrived at Jairus' house, mourners met him outside, saying, "Don't bother going in. The girl is dead."
>
> "She's not dead," Jesus said. "She's sleeping"—a reply that caused the mourners to "laugh Him to scorn" (see Luke 8:53). What did Jesus do? Luke 8:54 records that before He healed Jairus' daughter, He dismissed the mockers.

I love this story because it helps me understand a very real principle with regard to faith. You see, whenever the Lord gives you a promise in the Word, there will be those who laugh, saying, "You can't claim that promise. You don't understand it contextually. You don't have the proper background linguistically. You just don't get it theologically." And what are you to do at that point? Do what Jesus did. Get rid of the mockers. How? Do what Abraham did. Start exalting, extolling, and praising the Lord—and the mockers will leave.

Abraham Handed God the Situation

> *And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.*
>
> Romans 4:21

Abraham knew that if God promised, it was up to Him to fulfill His promise. So often I try to figure out how He's going to do it. "Okay, God, how is it going to happen?" I ask. Not Abraham. He was fully persuaded that what God had promised, He would perform.

"Good for Abraham," you say. "I'm glad Paul used him as an illustration of faith, and that we sing songs in Sunday school about his faith. But I'm not Abraham. I falter frequently, stagger easily, and fail constantly."

Wait a minute. Abraham failed, too. When God gave him the promise initially that he would have a son, Sarah's response was "You've got to be kidding, Abe. I'm seventy-six—and barren on top of that! God must have meant for you to have relations with my handmaiden, Hagar, and call the child from that union ours." Abraham agreed—and the Jews in the Middle East are paying the price of his faltering faith to this day.

Why, then, did Paul commend Abraham's faith? Check this out, Bible students: Although the Old Testament tells it like it is, including flaws and failures, the New Testament never once mentions any shortcoming of any Old Testament saint. Why? Because the blood of the Son causes the heart of the Father to forget the sins of the saints.

Therefore, instead of concentrating on Abraham's failures, Paul commends Abraham's faith.

"But Abraham's faith, flawed as it may have been, is monumental compared to mine," you say.

Wait a minute. On the basis of Romans 4:23–25, if you even believe God raised Jesus from the dead, your faith is every bit as incredible as was Abraham's. You see, the world doesn't believe in the Resurrection. When Paul addressed the thinkers and scholars on Mars Hill, they listened to him—until he brought up the Resurrection, at which point they laughed at him (Acts 17:32).

Now, if you're a believer, your faith and salvation are based upon the Resurrection. You didn't see it visually. You haven't touched Jesus physically. You haven't heard His voice audibly—but somehow you believe. And, even though our culture mocks it, science disputes it, people doubt it—because God has graced you with faith to believe what the world doesn't understand—anything else you're struggling with is a piece of cake. It is nothing to believe in victory over whatever giant is before you, whatever pressure is upon you compared to believing in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

> Jumbo was the biggest elephant in captivity. So powerful was he that he could uproot a full-grown tree. Yet when Jumbo traveled with P. T. Barnum's circus, he was secured with nothing more than a twelve-inch stake. Why? Because when he was first captured as a baby, he was unable to pull free from the twelve-inch stake that held him captive. Thus, he grew up accepting the fact that he would never be able to remove the stake. He bought into the lie that he didn't have the strength to pull out the stake.

The same is true of you and me. Nothing remaining will demand more faith than believing that Jesus is God, that He died for our sins, and that He rose again. We're Jumbo. We've already accomplished the incredible. Yet we remain tied to twelve-inch stakes when we've already shown we are capable of uprooting trees.

"How will I make this payment?" "When will I get my house?" "What will I do if I lose my job?" are all twelve-inch stakes compared to the redwood of unbelief we've already uprooted.

> Suppose you ran the Boston Marathon, and a week later, I asked you to jog out to the mailbox a couple hundred yards away to get the mail, and you said, "I can't. I'd like to—but I can't. I'm so out of shape. I just can't run that far."
>
> I would say, "You ran the Boston Marathon—but you can't jog to the mailbox? What's wrong with you?"

And I think that's what the Lord lovingly says to us. "What's wrong with you? You have exercised faith like Abraham, the father of all faith. You've already exercised faith of astounding proportion because you have believed that I died for your sin and rose again. So how can you be worried about the phone bill?"

Gang, you are men and women of magnificent faith, following in the footsteps of Abraham. Now use the faith that caused you to embrace the Resurrection to also believe God is going to take care of your present situation. Give Him the glory. Leave it in His hands. Be free.

You're Jumbo. Go get 'em!



5 Romans 5:1

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

By embracing the simple fact that Jesus died for our sins and rose again, we have peace with God. Why, then, do so many Christians still fight Him?

> It was in 1972 that the last Imperial Japanese soldier was discovered on a South Sea island. Because he was living in complete isolation, he hadn't heard the news that World War II was over. So there he was —still building fortifications, ready to hold off the American invasion of his little atoll.
>
> "What a waste," you say. "He could have been enjoying the Japanese economic boom, but instead he was stuck on an island, fighting malaria—all because he didn't hear that a peace treaty had been signed."

Yet, it's amazing how many of us do the same thing. *I hope the Lord doesn't come down on me for this, or get mad at me for that,* we think. *He must be really upset with me. I better hide here in the jungle.* We don't get it! The war is over! We have peace with God. The sin that separated us from God is forgiven and forgotten because of what Jesus Christ did for us.

Gang, whether you've prayed for three hours today, or you haven't prayed in three months, the war is still over. If you are a believer in what God the Father did for you in sending Jesus Christ to die in your place, you are righteous—justified by faith. We have a tendency to fall back into thinking we have to earn something or prove something to the Father. Not so. We can relax in our relationship with Him, talk to Him freely, and fellowship with Him continually because we have peace with Him eternally.

Romans 5:2 (a)

By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand . . .

We not only have peace *with* God, but access *to* God. Notice the word "stand." Paul didn't say we have access by faith into this grace wherein we sneak in, or hurriedly race through before we get zapped. No, he said we can stand—we can plant ourselves in the presence of God and enjoy Him as long as we want, anytime we wish.

> The story is told that a young boy cried outside Buckingham Palace after a beefeater refused his request to talk to the Queen. Twenty-year-old Prince Charles, observing the scene, approached the boy, took him by the hand, and said, "Come on, son. If you want to talk to the Queen, come with me."
>
> So, too, we can talk to the King continually when we take the hand of the Son.

Romans 5:2 (b)

. . . and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

I can rejoice in the absolute certainty that the glory of God will be made manifest in me. From God's perspective, I am already glorified. But from my perspective, locked in the time/space continuum as I am, I know He is at work, being confident that He who has begun a good work in me shall complete it (Philippians 1:6).

Romans 5:3 (a)

And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also . . .

"Tribulations," or *thlipsis* in Greek, means "crushings"—a word that describes the process of crushing an olive with heavy rocks in order to extract oil. Paul says we glory not only in what we're going to be, or who we are positionally, but also in the tribulations which happen constantly.

Why should we glory in times of crushing tribulations? Because it is during those times that we realize we can do nothing. You see, concerning a bad situation, as long as I can pull it out, I'll try to. If there's any way I can "finesse" a trial, I'll attempt to. My flesh is so present that if I can work anything out on my own, that's what I'll seek to do. But when trials arise wherein I can't do a thing, when the crushing rock is too great for me to bear, when I can't pull it off or work it out, that's true tribulation.

Nowhere was *thlipsis* more clearly illustrated than at Gethsemane, or literally, "the place of the olive press," where Jesus Christ was pressed so heavily that He sweat great drops of blood. Unable to do anything else, He said, "Father, if it be possible, take this cup from Me, but Your will be done. I submit to You completely" (Matthew 26:39–42).

***For topical study of Romans 5:3 entitled "Glorying in Tribulation," turn to page* 915.**

Romans 5:3 (b)

. . . knowing that tribulation worketh patience.

Why are tribulations good? Because pressing and crushing works patience. They make me say, "Okay, Lord, I've tried to pull it out. I've tried to think it through. I've tried to make it happen—but now I just wait on You."

And what does God say? "Good. I've been waiting for you to get to this point for some time. Now you'll see what I can do."

Romans 5:4 (a)

And patience, experience . . .

What does patience work? Experience. Why? Because when you can't pull something off or bring it about, you're patient before the Lord and you experience His love for you in ways you never would have otherwise.

Romans 5:4 (b)
. . . and experience, hope.

What does experience work? Hope. Why? So that the next time a trial comes my way, I can look back to the previous experience and rejoice, knowing God came through for me before.

Romans 5:5
And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Hope being the absolute expectation of coming good, the times in my life of which I am most ashamed are the times that, because I have lost hope, I've done or said things I wish I hadn't. I've embarrassed myself so many times because panic and sweat, anxiety and negativity have overcome me whenever I have lost hope that God was at work, that His timing was right, that He was in control. Why did I lose hope? Because I didn't have experience. Why didn't I have experience? Because I hadn't allowed the crushing times of trial and tribulation to produce patience in me.

So now when the crushing times come, my prayer is to see the divine design and to say, "Okay, Lord. I get it: Tribulation works patience, patience gives me experience, experience gives me hope, and hope makes me not ashamed so I won't say and do things I'll later on regret." It's a beautiful pattern.

Romans 5:6–11
For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But

God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Our atonement is based completely on the work of one Man, at one time, in one event when Jesus Christ died two thousand years ago on Calvary. One Man, at one time in one event paid the price totally. Although we know this theoretically, when it truly clicks, when we really understand it, we can *enjoy* our relationship with the Father and celebrate our salvation.

There are those who, at this point in the discussion, say, "Can a *single* occurrence truly have repercussions two thousand years later for all of humanity? Can one act done by one Man in one place really alter world history?"

In answer to that, I think of another event that altered world history. On August 6, 1945, one man, Harry Truman, ordered the atom bomb dropped over Hiroshima. And the death, the devastation, and the destruction that followed were unparalleled in history. The atom bomb changed the entire course of geo-political events, as every building within 4.7 miles of the epicenter was leveled instantly, as ninety-three thousand people died immediately, as three hundred thousand died eventually from the fall-out.

One event, at one moment, ordered by one man resulted in devastation and destruction beyond comprehension. But that is not the atom bomb Paul was talking about. No, he wrote not of the atom bomb that fell in Hiroshima in 1945, but of the Adam bomb that fell when Adam bombed out in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of history—for when Adam bombed out, the fallout and aftershocks affected all of humanity even to this day.

Romans 5:12 (a)
Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world . . .

In the remainder of chapter 5, Paul draws our attention to four consequences of Adam's sin, the first one addressed here in verse 12:

First, because of Adam's failure, sin entered the world. Adam ushered in sin, which brought with it sorrow, suffering, and sickness. "Thanks a lot, Adam," you say. "It's not fair that we should feel the repercussions of your rebellion." But when Adam represented us in the Garden of Eden, he did better than we would have done. He was our champion. Think of it this way. . . .

> *Suppose we send our country's finest power-lifting team to the World Games. If these guys of immense strength, who have dedicated their lives to lifting weights, go to the Games and get beaten badly by the Russians, which of us would say, "The Russians didn't really win. After all, they didn't beat me*"? That would be absurd. If we send our champions and they are defeated, we all lose because they are our best.

So, too, Adam was the best humanity had to offer. But he got beat in the Garden of Eden. He represented us, and we would have done no better. "I don't know about that," you say.

Well, I dare you to go one week without sinning. Go seven days without thinking a bad thought, without having a rotten attitude, without saying an unkind word, without doing anything wrong. And if you can go one week without sinning, come and talk to me. I want to meet you!

> **Romans 5:12 (b)**
> **. . . and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.**

Second, because of Adam's failure, death entered the world. Death came because of Adam's sin—and death is the dictator to which every man must bow. People can say they think Adam is a myth, or that the Bible is full of baloney. But they cannot deny the fact that people die.

"Give me one more hour, and I will give you everything I own," said the atheistic French philosopher Voltaire to his physician. But if you cannot give me one more hour, then go to hell." The reason he wanted one more hour is reportedly because earlier that morning he had seen Hell in a vision and was terrified by what he saw.

Spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death came because of Adam's sin. Paul didn't say, "The wages of *sins* are death." No, he said, "The wages of *sin* is death," referring to Adam's sin (Romans 6:23). The reason we are dying physically and the reason we would have been damned eternally is because Adam failed. And Adam's sin brought death to all.

Romans 5:13, 14

(For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Never theless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.

Read Old Testament genealogy, and you'll see that, with the exception of Enoch, every man who came on the scene died. Did they die because of their sin, because they broke the law? No. For many of them, there was no law.

If you took your new BMW for a drive on the interstate, at ninety miles per hour, it wouldn't be long before you'd see flashing lights in your rearview mirror. But if you drove the same car ninety miles per hour on the German Autobahn, it would be perfectly acceptable. Why? Because where there is no law, you can't be arrested.

Thus, Paul said, "Because men died even before the law was given, it had to be Adam's sin that caused death to come for everyone."

Romans 5:15

But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.

Not only did Jesus Christ come through *for* us, but He came bringing gifts *to* us. It is the wise man, the intelligent woman who understands that, although Adam caused problems and pain, sin and death—Jesus heaps unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor of God upon us. The first Adam let us down, but the Last Adam—our Hero, our Champion, Jesus Christ—rains grace upon us.

Romans 5:16, 17

And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

Third, because of Adam's failure, condemnation entered the world. Again, you protest that it's illogical that one man's decision should bring this kind of condemnation. But if our president ill-advisedly gave the signal to launch nuclear missiles toward another country, which, in turn, caused their computers to kick into action, sending their missiles toward us—there would be massive destruction, and billions of people would be destroyed because of one man's foolishness—which is exactly what happened when Adam bombed.

Romans 5:18

Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

Adam polluted us. Jesus purifies us.
Adam washed out. Jesus washes us clean.

Romans 5:19

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Finally, because of Adam's failure, sin continually enters the world. Like the babies tragically born addicted to crack/cocaine because of the sin of their mothers, we have been condemned because of Adam's sin and continue sinning as a result. "You're being pretty tough on Adam," you say, "by placing the rap for all of the sin in the world, all of the death of mankind, all of the junk in my own life on him." Perhaps—but that's the very point Paul is making. Why? Because if all of this negativity happened because one man bombed out, how much good can happen because of one Man coming through?

Who is that Man?

The Second Man (1 Corinthians 15:47), the Last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:20, 21

Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Everything wrong with the world today, everything wrong with you, your family, and the people you work with is all due to Adam's failure. Knowing this allows me to see people in an entirely different light. I realize that whether a man is a sly entrepreneur who cheats his way into money he shouldn't have by cutting deals he shouldn't make, or whether he's as obvious and gross in his sin as Charles Manson—I am no less a sinner than he. And it's all because of Adam.

No wonder Jesus could look at the multitudes and have compassion on them—not crusade against them, march to get rid of them, or mobilize to neutralize them. He looked at the multitudes and in every instance He had compassion. You see, when it finally sinks in that by one Man righteousness, justification, and grace came—I stop striving and struggling to prove I'm a notch or two above you, and I stop feeling bad if I'm a notch or two below you. I'm not the issue at all. He is. When I understand this, I stop being a worker and become a worshiper.

Do I find myself trying to earn blessings by intensive prayer or Bible study? Do I try to prove I'm saved by street witnessing, or by ministering in Mexico? If I fall into that trap, my Christian experience will always be one of analyzing, scrutinizing, and condemning myself as well as others. Salvation is not based upon my knowledge, my deep study, or my twenty-four-hour prayer chain. It's based upon one thing only: the grace and goodness of God in sending One Man, the Last Adam—Jesus Christ.

GLORYING IN TRIBULATION

A Topical Study of ROMANS 5:3

The apostle Paul's middle name could well have been "trouble." Wherever he went, whatever he said caused difficulty and controversy. Think you had a tough time this week? Think about Paul. From the time he became a minister of the gospel, he was: put to hard labor, beaten, imprisoned, given thirty-nine lashes five times, stoned, shipwrecked three times, stranded a day and a night in the open ocean, and left for dead. When Paul talked about difficulties, he knew from whence he spoke. Yet he said we are not only to rejoice in coming glory, but in present tribulations. Why? Because tribulation is the catalyst God uses to bring about patience, experience, and hope.

We see this principle in nature.

> The Seventeen-Mile Drive on the Monterey Peninsula is world famous for, among other things, the beautiful cypress trees that abound in that region. Because of their beauty, these cypress trees are photographed, painted, and sculpted by artists from all over the world. The beauty of the cypress tree is due to the wind that blows them constantly. And the wind that produces their outer beauty also develops their inner strength. You see, the root system of the cypress tree sinks proportionately deeper than that of any other tree in the state. This is especially interesting considering the mighty Redwood also makes California its home.

"Lord, I want to be an object of beauty," we say.

"All right," He says—and proceeds to send winds of adversity, not to blow us out, but to make us beautiful; not to sink us, but to strengthen us. The cold winds of adversity, the hot winds of tribulation cause us to sink our root systems deeper in the soil of Scripture, to ground and root us in faith. That's why Paul says we are to rejoice in tribulation.

Tribulation and testing are what God uses to take the dings and dents out of our body—both corporately and individually. God takes us into His body

shop. He starts pounding away, pulling out dents, and doing some grinding. It's not during the party times when strength is developed, when beauty is born. It's when the wind is howling and the sander humming that God is doing His finishing work.

Ask Johann Sebastian Bach. . . .

> This man, who was one of the most prolific composers in history, locked himself in a room day after day, where he put pen to paper and scored the glorious compositions he heard in his mind. Why did he lock himself in the confines of a single room? He had twenty kids. You would lock yourself in a room too if twenty kids were running around your house! Yet from his own times of testing, tribulation, and challenge came beautiful music.

Paul makes the same point, saying, "Don't only rejoice in your peace with God, your access to God, or your hope in God. Rejoice also in your present difficulty because it's working in you something of beauty."

"I know that," you say. "Everyone knows we're to count it all joy when we fall into various trials. I already understand that concept."

Do you? The prophet Jeremiah was a man who knew the Lord, but he struggled with something the Lord had told him prophetically and which he observed personally. That is, the Babylonians would soon march on Jerusalem. When Jeremiah asked why, God told him to do something very interesting. "Arise," He said. "Go down to the potter's house and I will cause you to hear My words" (see Jeremiah 18:2). So Jeremiah went to the potter's house, wherein he observed clay on a potter's wheel.

The most common of all substances, clay typifies you and me. Psalm 103 declares that as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on us. He remembers our frames and knows that we are but dust, earth, and clay. God is not mad *at* us, disappointed *in* us, or tired *of* us. Knowing we're nothing more than lumps of clay, He has chosen to work *on* us. That is why Jeremiah saw not only the clay. He saw the Master Potter as well—pumping the pedal that caused the wheel to turn.

> "The problem with life," said one philosopher, "is that it's so daily." Maybe you can relate to that. If you're in school, it's geometry, history, English, and lunch. Then it's science, study hall, and P.E. You go home, have a Twinkie, watch TV, do homework, go to bed—and get up the next morning to begin the same cycle all over again. If you work, it's the same old people, same old problems, same old struggles every morning. Round and round you go, day after day. That's how the clay felt. And sometimes we become so tired of the routine of our lives that we say, "I'm getting off this wheel."

What, then, does the Master Potter do? Even as Jeremiah observed, he picks us up—lumps of clay that we are—kneads us a bit, and puts us right back on the wheel. All of us are aware of the circuitousness, the sameness of daily life. But it's all part of the plan of the Potter. And if I try to escape, I will only be crushed in the process and end up right back where I started.

> The storm raged. The disciples rowed and complained. Then they saw Jesus walking on the water. "Lord! If that's You, bid me to come," Peter cried—perhaps not so much an act of faith as a plea to get away from the disciples.
>
> "Okay. Come on, Peter," Jesus said (see Matthew 14:29).
>
> Peter got out of the boat and started walking to Jesus. But when he took his eyes off the Lord and focused on the storm, what happened to him is the same thing that happens to us: He began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he cried. So Jesus lifted Peter, the giant fisherman, out of the water with a one-armed curl and put him where? Right back in the boat.

God puts us in fixes to fix us. Therefore, if I try to fix the fix God put me in, He's sure to put me in another fix to fix the fix He wanted to fix in the first place. As a result, slowly but surely, I learn to be content in the boat, to remain on the wheel. Yet no sooner do I accept the confines and routine of my situation than I feel the hand of the Master Potter suddenly and unexpectedly poking me, pinching me, shaping me. And if I'm not careful, I will jump off the wheel once more—this time not because of predictability, but because of

pressure. If I do, I'll find myself facedown on the floor before I feel the hand of my Master Potter picking me up and plopping me on the wheel once again.

This process may go on over and over again—until I finally give up and lie still on the wheel. But when I do, if I catch my reflection in the window, I'll see myself taking shape as the Potter forms me into something useful. *Far out!* I think as the wheel comes to a stop. Then I feel the hands of the Potter under me and I think, *This is great! Now He's going to put me on the top shelf, in a place where everyone can see me.* But instead, He walks right by the top shelf and keeps going until I hear the sound of a door opening. It's the kiln. In I go. The door closes behind me. The temperature rises. And I start sweating.

"What now, Lord?" I cry. "Why am I in this place? What in the world is going on?"

And He answers, "It takes not only pressure points but also fiery trials to produce in you a solidity that will keep you from cracking up or flaking out." This process continues until the Potter takes me out and carries me to His shop.

Now, according to Romans 9:21, the Lord makes some vessels to honor and some to dishonor. This means He makes some people beautiful vases to hold flowers. But others He makes spittoons. "Wait a minute!" I protest. "Let me get this straight. I should rejoice in tribulation because tribulation works patience that produces experience, which produces hope, which makes me unashamed. But what if He's making me a spittoon? The daily-ness of my job, the boringness of my career, the sameness of my school, the pressure financially, relationally, emotionally—when all is said and done, am I going to end up a spittoon? Is *that* what it's all about, Lord?"

But wait. Look again at the Master Potter. In the feet pumping the pedal that causes the wheel to turn so routinely, you will see holes where a nail pierced them for the sake of the clay. Look at the hands putting pressure on the clay. See the holes in each palm, and realize the Master Potter is the Wonderful Counselor, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, your Savior, Jesus Christ. If He loves you so much He was willing to be pinned to the Cross, you can trust that the repetitiveness of your schedule and the pressure in your life are meant to make you into something wonderful.

Not only does He love you that much now—but when you were a sinner, when you were ungodly, when you were an enemy, He was in love with you (Romans 5:8).

> Suppose my wife, Tammy, and I go house shopping and find a house for five thousand dollars. The roof is caving in. The wires are hanging out. The floors are sagging. The foundation is gone. But Tammy loves it anyway, so we buy it. Then, unbeknownst to her, I call fifteen master carpenters and craftsmen and pay them five hundred thousand dollars to replace the roof, rewire, and rework the entire house from top to bottom. When I take Tammy back to the house, she's sure to say, "This is fabulous. I loved it when it was a shack, but now look at it!"

So, too, God loved you when you were a shack. He said, "I see there's no foundation under your life, no covering over your life, no wiring in your life. But I love you just the way you are." And because He was in love with you at your worst, you can be assured that for the rest of your life—especially now that you're beginning to be reworked, rewired, and rebuilt—you'll never have to doubt His love, not even for a moment.

Why am I sharing this? Because I know bunches of us understand with our minds the value of tribulation and trials. But even though we embrace the understanding theologically, we struggle with it internally and we start sniveling. "If God loves me," we murmur, "why isn't He doing this or working out the other?"

> Something big was about to happen. The mother of James and John could sense the excitement in the air. Indeed, in a few hours, the city would be crying, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel who cometh in the name of the Lord!" So it was that Salome came to Jesus and worshiped Him right before His triumphal entry (Matthew 20:20).
>
> Fully aware that she was worshipping Him not out of love, but in order to manipulate Him and get what she wanted, Jesus lovingly looked at her and said, "Woman what do you want?"

"Well, now that You ask, Lord," she answered, "when You come into Your kingdom, can my two boys be on your right hand and on your left?"

Jesus looked at her and answered very cryptically when He said, "Are you able to drink from the cup I'm to drink from and be baptized with the baptism with which I'm about to be baptized?"

Salome must have wondered about such a strange answer to such a simple question. And Jesus probably smiled and said no more. He went into Jerusalem, and you know the story. It wasn't too many days later that the same Salome would stand with three other women on a hill right outside the Holy City. Seeing Jesus pinned to a Cross with two other men, one on His right, one on His left, hanging beside Him on the day He entered His kingdom, the foolishness of her request must have hit her like a ton of bricks.

What I am asking of the Lord right now can be just as dumb. "But, Lord," I cry, "this is a great idea. Bless it, Lord."

And He lovingly says to me, "You don't know what you're asking. You don't see the whole story. I loved you enough to die on the Cross. Therefore, if I'm not doing what you're begging me to do, what you're naming and claiming, trust Me. And like Salome, in retrospect, you'll be thankful I didn't respond to your request and do your bidding."

That's the argument Paul makes. Rejoice in tribulation. Because God fell in love with you and proved His love to you even when you were a sinner, you never have to wonder why the wheel is so dizzying, the pressure so painful, and the kiln so hot. And on the basis not of what you feel emotionally, nor of what you ascribe to theologically, but on His love for you unconditionally, you can trust Him to come through totally.



6 Here, we come to a new section and break new ground in our study through the Epistle to the Romans. Chapters 1 through 5 dealt with justification. In chapters 6 through 8, the emphasis switches from the positional truth of justification to the practical truth of sanctification. To be sanctified means to be set apart. Because we are justified positionally, we

are sanctified practically. That is, we are set apart to be used by the Lord, and to become more like the Lord. Romans 1 through 5 tells us we are dead *in* sin. Chapters 6 through 8 tell us we are dead *to* sin. Chapters 1 through 5 tell us we are free from the penalty of sin. Chapters 6 through 8 tell us we are free from the power of sin.

Thus, we have arrived at one of the most powerful and potent passages ever penned by the apostle Paul. As a lawyer, Paul masterfully and persuasively made his point in the first five chapters that salvation is apart from works. But this causes problems for people who say, "If you preach grace, people will live loosely unless you lay down the law, and tell them what to do and how to think." In chapter 6, Paul will address that issue as he presents his argument to those who insist that grace leads to loose living.

Romans 6:1, 2

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

Paul will make a three-fold argument against grace being a danger. All too often, Christians try to fight sin by preaching, "No, no, no." Paul's method was to teach, "Know, know, know." He said, "Know you have a new identification with Jesus Christ (verses 3–5); know you have liberation through Jesus' Cross (verses 6–15); and know some things about Jesus' cause" (verses 16–23).

Romans 6:3–5

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.

Our identification with Jesus Christ is symbolized by baptism.

An army chaplain reported his amazement at the large number of Desert Storm soldiers who gave their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ, then asked if they could be baptized. To accommodate their requests, a wise pastor used the only "baptismal" available in the middle of the Saudi Arabian desert: a coffin—a potent and perfect symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of which baptism is a picture.

"Know this," Paul said. "When you were baptized, you received a new identification. Dead to your old life, you became publicly linked to Jesus Christ through baptism." Does one have to be baptized to be saved? Ask the thief on the cross, to whom Jesus said, "*Today* you'll be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

There are those who say, "Unless you are baptized in a specific manner, your salvation is invalid." Not true. Anyone can be saved without baptism, for salvation is by faith alone in the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. The role of baptism simply serves as an outward symbol of an inward commitment. On the day Tammy and I were married, I gave her a ring. That ring didn't make us married. But if she had refused it, saying, "No thanks. I'm not into outward symbols of inward commitments," although we would still be married, I would wonder why she didn't want to publicly identify with me.

Chuck Colson tells of an event that took place when Russia was still very much closed to the gospel as a group of Christians meeting secretly in the basement of a home outside Kiev heard a knock on the door. Because they refused to answer the knock, suddenly the door was kicked in, and two armed KGB officers walked into the room. "This meeting is illegal," they thundered. "If anyone wants to deny he's a part of this Christian movement, he can leave right now. If you stay, however, you must be willing to pay the price and suffer the consequences." With terror on their faces, two or three left the meeting, after which time, the KGB officers said, "Anyone else want to join those who left?" No one did. "Keep your hands up," they said to those who remained, "and we'll put our hands up and worship the Lord with you. You see, two weeks ago, we broke into a group like this one and we got saved. But as KGB officers, we know that if

people are not fully committed to Christ, we cannot trust them in our company."

Baptism is a marvelous way of getting Christians out of the spiritual closet. And Paul refers to this by saying, "Know this: when you were baptized, you were identified with Jesus Christ and a new way of living."

Romans 6:6 (a)
Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him . . .

When Jesus died on the Cross two thousand years ago, something incredible happened. My old sin nature was crucified with Him. I'm thankful that my failure to fully understand this concept doesn't prevent me from being forever grateful for it.

Romans 6:6 (b)
. . . that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

Katargeo, the Greek word translated "destroyed" in this verse, means "rendered inactive" or "paralyzed." It doesn't mean "annihilated." Therefore, when your old sin nature screams, "You've got to take that smoke, pour that drink, toy with that fantasy, lose your temper, or gossip"—Paul says that, although he can yell, he is powerless to act, since the Cross paralyzed him from the neck down.

Romans 6:7–9 (a)
For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more . . .

In other words, the work of the Cross was complete.

Romans 6:9 (b)–11

. . . death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The word *logizomai,* or "reckon," is an accounting term. "Add it up," says Paul, "and the answer you'll arrive at will be that you are dead to sin."

Communion has two elements because, in taking the cup, we celebrate the fact that we are free from the penalty of sin. And in taking the body, we appropriate the fact that we are free from the power of sin. Consequently, when I partake of the body in Communion, sometimes I will chew thirty-nine times—even as Jesus received thirty-nine lashes on His back, because it is by His stripes that we are healed (Isaiah 53:5). You see, the shed blood of Jesus provides forgiveness *of* sin. But the breaking of His body provides victory *over* sin. All of this is ours to chew on and appropriate through the simple act of Communion.

Romans 6:12–14

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

Following the radical information that we are free from the power and penalty of sin, and on the heels of Paul's exhortation to simple appropriation of this fact, here is practical application. When you are about to give in to gossip, lose your temper, or fall prey to jealousy, say, "Lord, I understand I no longer have to succumb to this because the old man of sin was crucified. I reckon it to be so and I appropriate it even now."

There you are in the grocery store. A Mounds bar is calling your name. Your old sin nature whispers, "You've got to give in. Dark chocolate, coconut, you've just got to have it. You've got to steal it.

Just think how much you'll enjoy it. You have no power over it. It's just too great a temptation."

But on the basis of Romans 6, before you take the candy bar, you can say, "I yield this hand to You, Lord." And you'll be free.

Gang, if you will pause and, even audibly if necessary, yield to the Lord whatever instrument of your body with which you're struggling, your inclination to sin will decrease dramatically.

There you are, in the car. You're struggling with passion as you take your date home. What do you do? On the basis of Romans 6, say, "Lord, bless these next few moments. Cause us to honor You. We give ourselves totally to You right now." And the mood in the car will change radically.

Precious people, you're free from the power of sin. How? Three ways: through the radical information that the power of sin is broken, through simple appropriation as you reckon this to be true, and through practical application as you give your body to the Lord.



For topical study of Romans 6:1–14, see "The Old Man—Nailed!" below.

Romans 6:15, 16

What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

Why not continue in sin? I'm reminded of the entertainer who, although he was warned that lions could never be completely tamed, treated the lion he used in his act as a pet—until the night the lion jumped on him and killed him. So, too, our adversary goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he

may devour (1 Peter 5:8). "Oh, but I've got this sin under control," we say. "Nice lion, nice lion. It's part of my act; I need it for my job."

Watch out. Paul says, "Know this: the sin with which you're playing around, the sin you think you've got under control, is going to come back and eat you alive."

- "But I only shoplift occasionally."
- "I only look at pornography sporadically."
- "I lie rarely."

Be careful. Paul doesn't say, "No," he says "know." Your pet sin will get you. It will hurt you. It will kill you.

Romans 6:17–20

But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.

"Before you were saved, neither your relationships nor your perspective was right," Paul said. "Therefore, you couldn't enjoy the righteous kind of living God intended for you."

Romans 6:21

What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.

At Southern Oregon College, I talked to a student who said, "It's so hard being a Christian."

“If you think it’s hard being a Christian, imagine how hard it would be to be an unbeliever without hope eternally or peace presently.”

Folks, let’s quit saying, “It’s so hard to be a believer.” We’ve been saved too long if we’ve forgotten the sin, the stench, the junk in our lives before we knew Christ.

Romans 6:22, 23

But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sin brings death. But righteousness—the righteousness of the Lord’s way—brings life abundantly. I’m so thrilled we’re free.

THE OLD MAN—NAILED!

A Topical Study of ROMANS 6:1–14

While at Hometown Buffet many years ago, without asking permission or finishing her dinner, Mary, my kindergartener, scooted away from the table and made her way to the ice cream dispenser. When she returned a few moments later, she brought with her a bowl that had ice cream overflowing and cascading down its sides. So even though Mary had failed to get her father's permission, even though she had failed to finish her dinner, she discovered something very important. That is, even though she was a sinner, if she positioned herself under the spout where the blessing comes out, she would be on the receiving end because the dispenser didn't discriminate against her, saying, "Here comes Mary. She didn't ask permission. She didn't finish her dinner. I'm shutting down."

So, too, the sister or brother who realizes that grace is based solely upon the work Jesus did on the Cross will continually be a recipient of good stuff because they realize it's not based upon who they are or anything they've done. And even if, like Mary, they're sinning, as they position themselves under the spout where God's blessing comes out, His grace keeps flowing. For where sin abounds, grace abounds even more (Romans 5:20).

This brings us to Paul's question in Romans 6:1. That is, if grace abounds when we sin, why not keep sinning? Paul answers this question with two words: "God forbid," or "You're nuts," or "That's crazy!" You see, folks, although Mary carried an abundance of ice cream in her bowl, she also wore a look of panic on her face. "Daddy, look," she said as she drew near. And as I did, I was shocked to see vanilla ice cream pouring out of the machine onto the floor below. The handle was stuck.

Yes, you can sneak away from the table and disobey Daddy and pull the lever, and good stuff will still be given to you—but watch out. There are also inevitable repercussions and problems. You get in sticky situations that cause people to slip.

After David confessed to committing murder in order to cover his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan said to him,

“Thou shalt not die, David. With your confession comes instantaneous and complete forgiveness. But because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme His name, the child born unto you shall surely die” (see 2 Samuel 12:13, 14).

In other words, “You’re forgiven, David. Your sin is forgotten. But know this: There will be inevitable repercussions of your sin. You planted seeds, and even though you’ve made confession, even though you are forgiven, the crop will come in. The enemies of the Lord will put your sin on the cover of *TIME* magazine. They will use your sin to blaspheme and make fun of the Lord. People will slip and stumble because of your sin. And your child will die.”

“Be not deceived,” warned Paul, “whatever a man sows, he’ll surely reap” (see Galatians 6:7). And no one beats the rap.

> Driving through a rural section of Pennsylvania, a man crossed a wooden bridge, where he saw a boy fishing. “Hey, son,” he called out, “are the fish biting?”
>
> “No,” answered the boy. “But the worms sure are.”
>
> The stranger chuckled and kept on driving. About five miles later, he stopped at a gas station and asked if there were any good fishing spots in the vicinity.
>
> “Sure,” answered the attendant. “There’s a great one about five miles back at the bridge you just crossed.”
>
> “Oh, I know all about that one,” answered the traveler. “I saw a kid there and he said the fish weren’t biting, but the worms were.”
>
> The two men chuckled together—until a look of horror came over the gas station attendant’s face. He dropped the hose, ran to his car, and raced down the road toward the bridge. When he got there, he found the little boy on the edge of the riverbank—dead. You see, after his initial chuckle, the attendant suddenly realized that the “worms” the boy was playing with were actually baby rattlesnakes, which are every bit as venomous as their adult counterparts.

So, too, when we see people playing with sins they think are cute or interesting, horror fills our hearts and we say, “They’re going to die.” Oh, not

physically perhaps—but their lives will be filled with sadness and despair. The Bible says there's pleasure in sin for a season, but after that comes destruction (Hebrews 11:25). And that's what Paul's letter to the Romans is all about. Through it, the Father says to you and me, "You're forgiven. I pronounce you just as righteous as My dear Son. But if you fool around with sin, you're going to bring venom and deadly repercussions not only upon yourself, but on those around you."

Therefore, after walking with the Lord for a while, we begin to say, "Father, You're right. Sin stinks. It brings terrible repercussions and I hate it. But what can I do about it? This sin seems to have a grip on me." At that point, there is the temptation to enroll in a twelve-step program in order to get victory over our substance abuse, addiction, or depression. But the Bible knows nothing of a twelve-step program, folks. Romans 6 has a way of cutting through the fuzziness, the dysfunctional excuses, the reasons we cannot have victory. Romans 6 sweeps it all away as God clearly says, "Here is the solution. It's oh, so simple."

Appreciation

> *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*
>
> Romans 6:6

The first step is appreciation. When Jesus Christ was crucified on the Cross two thousand years ago, not only was His blood shed for your salvation, but His body was broken for your liberation. Thus, there are two elements in Communion. His blood brings about forgiveness of our sin, while His broken body provides freedom from our sin. Appreciate the fact, saint, that when Jesus Christ was crucified, your sinful nature was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be destroyed. When Jesus was pinned to the Cross, my old sinful nature was there with Him. When the body of Christ was being broken physically, your body of sin was being broken on that same tree. How can this be? It beats me. Yet although I don't understand it mentally, I've tied in to its reality and have found that by faith it works tremendously.

Whenever God declares a truth, Satan will deny it, saying, "Get real, how can that be?" At that point, I must decide whether to believe what God declares or believe what Satan denies. It's like three men walking on top of a fence.

> The first man is Fact. The second man is Faith. The third man is Feeling. Now, Faith, the man in the middle, will walk straightly and in balance as long as he keeps his eyes on the man in front of him. But if he turns around to check out Feeling, he's going to tumble. Truly, this is where we err so often, for the point we turn around and analyze our emotions or evaluate our experience is the point we start to fall.

Paul says, "Know this: when Jesus was crucified, our old sin nature was crucified with Him that the body of sin might be destroyed." The world translated "destroyed" is *katargeo*. *Katargeo* does not mean "annihilated." It means "rendered inactive, or paralyzed." Our old sin nature is a

quadriplegic. He's paralyzed from the neck down. Thus, all he can do is intimidate us verbally as he whispers, "You have no choice. You gotta give in. You gotta gossip. You gotta overindulge. You gotta take another look. You gotta tell that lie. I've got power over you."

And so we spend years going through psychoanalysis, trying to get victory. But Paul would say, "Victory is not a matter of positive thinking or imaging. Appreciation of what happened on Calvary two thousand years ago is the point where victory begins."

Appropriation

> *Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*
>
> Romans 6:11

The word "reckon" in this verse doesn't mean what it means today—as in, "Well, ah reckon ah'll mosey on down to the barn." No, the word "reckon" as used here in verse 11 is an accounting term. It means "add up the figures and come to an irrefutable conclusion." The figures add up to this: If indeed it's true that your sin nature was crucified with Christ on the Cross, then you no longer are in bondage to it. "Come to a conclusion based upon this fact," said Paul.

> If you were hungry, I might tell you to go to McDonalds. But if you had no money, you'd say, "I can't. I'm bankrupt."
>
> Then I might say, "Yes, you can. I put money in your account. Here is the deposit slip, signed by the teller and stamped with the bank seal."
>
> But if you said, "I don't believe that," your failure to reckon it to be so, to add it up, and to appropriate what I did on your behalf would keep you poor and hungry. But the reason for your poverty and hunger would not be due to my failure to provide for you. It would be due to your failure to believe what I did for you.

The same is true concerning appropriation. Jesus paid the entire penalty for our sin and paralyzed our sin nature. The question is not whether His provision is sufficient. The question is whether or not we reckon it to be true.

Application

> *Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.*
>
> Romans 6:13

After appreciation and appropriation comes application—when I really understand what Jesus did for me as He yielded His body on the Cross. So here I am, walking into the store, and there it is in a shiny wrapper, fifteen percent larger than last year: a Three Musketeers bar—my favorite—with that deep chocolate covering and the light gooey stuff in the center. Immediately, the old man within me says, "You gotta give in. There's fifteen percent more than before. Be reasonable. It's a good buy!"

My stomach begins to growl. My mouth starts to salivate. My old sin nature demands to be satisfied. "You're right," I concede. "I really don't have very much power over this particular temptation." So I buy the candy, take a bite, and am hounded by feelings of guilt. Depression sets in, and I say, "Sign me up for a support group. That's what I need."

Not true! The Word says if we will appreciate, appropriate, and apply, we never have to give in to whatever "Three Musketeers" we're dealing with at any given moment. Never. Folks, it's not a twelve-step program. It's a one step solution called the Cross, for not only did the blood of Jesus cleanse me from the penalty of sin, but His broken body sets me free from the pollution of sin. And when I choose to walk in that fact, I find myself saying, "I will not buy you, Three Musketeers," as I walk down the aisle toward the bananas. Miracle of miracles!

For every New Testament principle, God gives us an Old Testament illustration. And this one is no exception, as seen in the Book of Judges. . . .

The people of Israel were in bondage to the Canaanites. For thirty years, they had been intimidated and dominated, repressed and oppressed. The leader of the Canaanites was a man named Jabin. Jabin turned over control of his empire in that particular region to a man named Sisera. Sisera, then,

represents the old man, our old sin nature. Jabin is a picture of Satan—one whose ultimate desire is to oppress, suppress, and depress you and me.

After thirty years of serving Jabin and Sisera, the people of Israel cried to the Lord. The Lord, in turn, raised up a deliverer—a woman named Deborah. When the time came for the Israelites to engage in battle against the Canaanites, Barak, the Israelite general, said to Deborah, "I won't go unless you go with me."

"Okay," said Deborah, "I'll go with you, but you must realize that credit for the upcoming victory will go to a woman."

Engage in battle they did. With nine hundred chariots at his command, Sisera had a huge advantage. The chariot was equivalent to a Phantom Jet, or an Abrams A-1 tank. And the people of Israel had nothing like that. It looked like the Israelites would be slaughtered. But God intervened miraculously and gave Israel victory. Sisera, however, managed to escape.

Running for his life, off in the distance he saw a tent. In front of the tent was a woman Sisera recognized as Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. The word *eber,* from which we get the word "Hebrew," means "crossing over." Who were the Kenites? They were part of the Canaanites. This means Heber the Kenite left the old Canaanite stuff and said to his wife, "Honey, we're crossing over to a new land." And they traded their old world for a new country.

That's just what you did when you left the old world system and said, "I want to be a part of Your kingdom, Lord. I've had it with the world's corruption, deception, and pollution. I choose to follow You." You set up camp in the new land—and what happened? Guess who suddenly and unexpectedly showed up on your front doorstep? The guy who used to dominate you, the guy who used to have authority over you, the guy who used to intimidate you: Sisera.

"Come in," said Jael to Sisera. Huffing and puffing, Sisera entered Jael's tent and gasped, "Give me a little water to drink."

Folks, that's what the old sin nature always says. "Give me a little something to satisfy me—just one quick look, just one wrong thought, just one more time. I'm thirsty, and if you satisfy me, I won't bug you anymore." But we've discovered lust is like a fire. The more you feed it, the more it demands and the hotter it gets. Try to appease your lust to satisfy Sisera, and

it will never work. He'll demand more and more, and his lusts will burn hotter and hotter within your heart.

Sisera wanted water. What did Jael give him? A bottle of milk. Can you imagine running a great distance on a hot day and being given a bottle of room-temperature, unpasteurized milk? It must have felt like cotton in Sisera's mouth. The Word says, "Like newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, the profound simplicity of the Scriptures" (see 1 Peter 2:2).

It is the foolish man or woman who says, "I already know that passage or that book, so I don't have to study it or meditate upon it," because Sisera needs to be given a continual dose of the milk of the Word.

After asking for water, Sisera made a second request of Jael. "Lie for me," he said (see verse 20). "Cover me up and don't let anyone know I'm here." And that's what our old sin nature says to you and me: "Hide your sin. Cover it up. Don't let anyone know I'm here." So what did Jael do? No longer afraid of the old general, this great lady of faith threw a rug over Sisera, knowing that having chugged a glass of warm milk after running a semi-marathon, he would be dozing off before long. At this point, with hammer in hand, Jael snuck into the tent, drove a tent stake into Sisera's temple, and pinned his head to the ground. Talk about a splitting headache! With spike and hammer, the old man was reckoned dead.

What does the spike speak of? It speaks of the spikes that pierced the hand and feet of our Savior. It speaks of Calvary, where Sisera, the old man in you who gives orders to you and demands to be covered up by you, was paralyzed on the Cross. The hammer? It speaks of the Word (Jeremiah 23:29). This is the key, folks. We're to say, "Wait a minute, Sisera. Wait a minute, Jabin. Wait a minute fleshly tendency. You who are demanding to be satisfied and covered up, I want you to know something. I do not have to give in to you. Even though I don't fully understand it, I appropriate the finished work of the Cross as I see it in Romans 6." And you nail Sisera to the ground.

Precious people, I don't care what struggle you're going through, or what temptation you're wrestling with. It is powerless in light of the Cross. When you finally have enough of Sisera, when you at last have your fill of the venom that has infected you and those around you, when you finally

determine you don't want to be under dominion any longer, you can be free at that moment—no support group needed, no counseling required—if you say, "Lord, You've told me that this old man was paralyzed on the Cross. I believe it. That settles it."

And with the spike of the Cross, and the hammer of the Word, you nail it right there and walk away free.

It's that simple.



7 As we are discovering, the Book of Romans is radical in concept, rich in content, and readable in construct. Truly, the concepts in Romans are indeed radical. But they're not esoteric. They're not difficult to comprehend or hard to understand because of the logical way in which Romans is laid out. It's laid out perfectly, which is not surprising, considering the Author, who always does everything just right (Mark 7:37).

Romans 1 deals with the perversity of sin; Romans 2—3:18 with the pervasiveness of sin; Romans 3:18—5:21 with the penalty of sin. Romans 6 deals a death blow to the power of sin. And this brings us to chapter 7, wherein Paul will deal with the question of preoccupation with sin.

Romans 7:1 (a)
Know ye not, brethren . . .

The brothers Paul is referring to are his Jewish brothers, the people of Israel.

Romans 7:1 (b), 2 (a)
. . . (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth . . .

According to Old Testament law, a husband could divorce his wife, but a wife could never divorce her husband. Paul uses the analogy to say, "You were married to the law, and there's no way you could get away from it."

Romans 7:2 (b), 3

. . . but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then, if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.

If only the law would die, we would be free from its hold on us. But the law is in excellent health (Matthew 5:18). This husband is not about to die.

Romans 7:4 (a)

Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ . . .

This is so wonderful! You have become dead to the law. That's the key. You'll never see a dead body in a courtroom trial because when a person is dead, he's no longer under the authority of the law. So, too, because you died in Christ (Galatians 2:20), you are free from legalism. Thus, there is no reason to be preoccupied with your failings, your lack of prayer, your lack of love, your lack of anything. There is no reason to try to live up to the rules, regulations, and expectations you've put upon yourself. When you realize that you died with Christ positionally on Calvary, you're free from the demands of the law and free instead to just love the Lord.

Romans 7:4 (b)

. . . that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

Because the Christian who finally throws off the yoke of legalism inevitably becomes fruitful, churches grow whenever believers become excited about their relationship with Jesus.



***For topical study of Romans 7:1–4 entitled "Loosed from Legalism," turn to page* 931.**

Romans 7:5, 6

For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

"Newness of spirit" speaks of the New Covenant, of an entirely new way of living (Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 36). "No longer will I give you tables of stone," the Lord declares in the New Covenant, "but I will write My will upon the table of your heart. Every day will be an adventure. Some days I might awaken you at 4:30 A.M. to seek My face and to pray, while other times, I might tell you to sleep in."

That's the way Christianity was meant to be. But what have we done? We have constructed legalistic systems and expectations both personally and corporately.

We were meant to live in a newness of the Spirit, moment by moment obeying, yielding, and asking, "Lord, what next?" Therefore, throw off the yoke of legalism. Walk in the Spirit. Respond to His direction—and I guarantee you will find yourself on the adventure of a lifetime!

Romans 7:7

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

What was Paul lusting after? I suggest the object of Paul's desire was not the sensual type of sin we usually associate with lust. No, I believe Paul was lusting after prestige. He wanted to excel as a scholar—which seems a noble goal. Yet as he studied the law, I believe he saw that the underlying reason for his pursuit was a hunger for prominence.

Romans 7:8–10

But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I

was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.

The more Paul studied the law, the more he realized how far he was from the law.

I can recall a period of time when then four-year-old Peter-John would walk around whistling and snapping his fingers. "What are you doing, Pete?" I asked him one day.

"Practicing my snaps," he said. "I know how to whistle. I'm getting my snaps down. And when I learn how to tie my shoe, all the hard stuff will be done."

As he has since discovered, there's a little more to life than tying shoes and snapping fingers. So, too, Paul thought all he had to do was study the law, but the more he did, the more he realized how far he was from true spirituality.

Romans 7:11–13

For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

Whenever I sense a pharisaical tendency in myself, I know it is indicative that I have not been immersing myself in the Word. You see, if we're truly spending time in the presence of the Lord, we'll find ourselves saying just what Isaiah said. After spending the first five chapters of his book pronouncing woe on peoples and nations, in chapter 6, he saw the Lord and said, "Woe is *me"* for in the presence of the Lord he realized he was no better than those he was indicting.

A life lived in God's presence excludes judgment of others. "I'm lusting; I'm coveting," said Paul. But he didn't realize this until he spent time in the Scriptures and saw that he was a sinner. Now this was all pre-conversion. As evidenced by the use of the past tense, Paul was looking back. But as Chapter 7 unfolds, we see that even after he was saved, he still struggled.

Romans 7:14

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

As outlined in 1 Corinthians 2—3, there are basically three types of people. The natural man is what we all were before we were saved. The spiritual man is the one who is saved and who walks in the Spirit. The carnal man is born again but lives in the energy of his flesh. Therefore, although the carnal man can appear to be saintly and righteous, he is miserable internally because he knows he can't live up to the rules, regulations, and expectations he has placed upon himself. That's where Paul was. Yes, he was converted, but he was miserable in his carnality.

Romans 7:15

For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.

"I want to do what's right," said Paul, "but I end up doing the things I hate." Ever feel that way, dieters?

Romans 7:16, 17

If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

"The problem isn't with the law," said Paul. "The problem is with the sin in *me*."

Romans 7:18 (a)

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing . . .

Whenever I'm disappointed in myself, it's because I'm denying what God said when He said, "Jon, in you dwells no good thing." I still struggle with this. I understand the concept theologically and can quote the verse from memory. But sometimes I think, *There's* some *good in me—isn't there? Am I really this bad, Father?*

Every time I get down on myself, I hear His voice again saying, "Jon, didn't I tell you straight out, didn't I record it in black and white that in your flesh, in you personally, dwells no good thing? Why, then, are you disappointed in yourself?"

Those who have a tendency to despair of life do so because they think there's something good in them that they're failing to utilize. They're not living up to their self-image. Although we want our kids to have high self-esteem, the Scriptures say, "Sorry. In you dwells no good thing." Far from depressing me, I am incredibly free when I finally understand this.

Romans 7:18 (b), 19

. . . for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

"How to perform I find not." Ever feel that way? Can you relate to Paul in his carnal state? I can!

Romans 7:20

Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

Here's how to differentiate between a pig and a prodigal, between an unbeliever and a carnal Christian: Take the pig out of the pigpen, wash him in bubble bath, spray him with cologne, put a ribbon in his hair, a bow on his tail, and watch what happens the first time he sees some mud. The pig will wallow in it with joy. The prodigal, on the other hand, although he might

foolishly find himself in the mud from time to time will not be comfortable there. Eventually, he'll come to his senses and say, "Get me out of here. I hate this stuff"—which is exactly where Paul was.

Romans 7:21–23 (a)

I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind.

In my mind I want to follow the law of God. I want to walk in His ways and keep His commandments. That's truly my determination and my mind-set. But my body rebels. My eyes are prone toward lusting. My ears strain to hear something juicy. My tongue wags so readily to gossip. There's a war going on. How can I get victory?

Romans 7:23 (b), 24 (a)

. . . and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am!

When Paul was a natural man, the law slew him. When he became a believer, he found himself once again under legalism, with a war going on inside of him. The original translation of the last phrase of this verse sums up Paul's state perfectly: "O wretched man—me!"

Romans 7:24 (b)

Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

In Paul's day, the sentence of a man convicted of first-degree murder could be to be tied to the body of his victim. Often, the stench alone would kill the murderer. It is possibly this Roman practice to which Paul is referring when he cries, "Who will free me from the failures, shortcomings, and sinful tendencies I'm forced to drag behind me wherever I go?"

Paul is now ready to lead us into an explosively liberating truth. In verse 18, he said, "How can I get victory?" After struggling a little longer, he realizes it's not "how." It's "*who*." And he's only a verse or two away from the most exciting part of Romans because he's no longer looking for how. He realizes it's *Him. Many Christians are concerned with "how." "Please give us procedures, plans, and programs," they say, not realizing those things only produce perpetual struggle. The flesh always cries, "How?" The Bible always answers, "Him!"*

Romans 7:25

I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

While we may readily agree with Paul that the answer lies not in a program or a procedure—it is harder for us to understand that neither is the answer found in a principle. At this point in my study of Romans, I can say, "Wow! I get it. The penalty for my sin was paid on the Cross. The power of my sin was broken by the Cross. Preoccupation with my sin is eliminated because of the Cross. I'm free! It's a principle I'm going to jot down in my journal, a principle in which I will rejoice."

But wait. Even as I have immersed myself in the Book of Romans, I've been on edge. When my temper has flared, I've been taken aback by the ugliness of my own flesh until the Lord dealt with my heart again, saying, "You *are* free. But you're missing out on what only I can produce as you spend time with Me. Even if you have the principles down and the theology right, without Me, there will be no self-control or peace, love or joy, gentleness or goodness, faith or meekness. Those only come from spending time with *Me."*

One morning, I was kneeling beside my bed in prayer. As I got up to let in some air, my finger got caught between the two windows. Now, although this was just the kind of irritation that had been getting to me, this time I didn't get upset at all. Why? It wasn't because I was reading a book on how not to get mad when your

finger gets stuck in the window. No, it's because I was simply enjoying the Lord's presence.

Who shall deliver me? Not "How shall I be delivered theologically"—but "*Who* shall deliver me personally?" Like Paul, I declare to you experientially and emphatically that Jesus Christ is the key!

LOOSED FROM LEGALISM

A Topical Study of ROMANS 7:1–4

Philosopher, social critic, and writer for *The London Daily Observer,* G. K. Chesterton was addressed by a woman who wrote a letter asking him to write a series of articles explaining what was wrong with the world. The following day, Chesterton penned this classic reply: "Madam, I will tell you what is wrong with the world in two words: I am."

What's wrong with the world? I am. Not a political problem, or an economic situation, the real reason for the problems of the world is you and me personally. And what is responsible for the problems within us? Sin. Sin *in* us causes problems to come pouring out *from* us, which affects the world *around* us. Sin is the problem. Sin is the issue.

In our culture, people don't want to talk about sin. When he was nearing the end of his illustrious career, Dr. Karl Meninger, the brilliant psychiatrist and prolific author, wrote one final book in which he appraised the psychiatric health of the nation. In this book, entitled *Whatever Happened To Sin?* he concluded that the problem with our culture is that we have forgotten the word "sin."

We call people "dysfunctional" or "victims," but Meninger maintained the real issue is just plain sin. Some may extol the power of positive thinking, but the apostle Paul declares it to be no match for the destructiveness of sin. Thus, because Paul tackles the root issue head-on, I find those who propose only positive thinking appalling, but the apostle Paul very appealing.

"The power of sin brings destruction," wrote Paul in Romans 6:20, 21. It's true. Everything I'm ashamed of in my life is always directly linked to sin. Yet the preoccupation with sin only brings depression and exhaustion.

> It's like two guys riding a tandem bike uphill. After what seems like an eternity, they finally reach the top and the guy in front says, "Man, I

didn't think we would ever make it to the top. I thought we'd end up rolling back down."

"Me too," answers the guy in back. "That's why I kept the brakes on the whole time."

The same thing happens to Christians. "I get it," we say. "I see what Paul is saying. I don't want to fall back down the hill. I don't want to roll back into carnality, so I'll put the brakes on. I'll put rules and regulations around myself in order that I might not sin." But the rules and regulations we think will break our fall into sin only lead us to exhaustion and depression as we discover we are unable to keep them.

In Romans 7, Paul deals with this very issue as he likens the relationship between the law and the believer to the relationship between a husband and wife.

Mr. Perfect

You wake up. Lying next to you is your husband, Mr. Perfect. His breath is mint-fresh and not a single hair is out of place. His pajamas are pressed, and even the sheet over him is unruffled. He's perfect, and he's your hubby! "Good morning," he says as he gives you a perfect peck on the cheek. Then, with amazing energy, he bounds out of bed with a smile on his face, goes to his closet, and takes out his perfectly tailored suit with his perfectly white starched shirt, and perfectly matched tie. He dresses himself impeccably, puts his belt around his perfect-sized waist, and goes into the kitchen to make his breakfast. He has no coffee, no sweet rolls, no eggs, and no cholesterol. He has granola with skim milk, and tomato juice to drink. Finished with breakfast, he picks up his bowl, rinses it out, puts it in the dishwasher, and sets the timer. Then he gives you another peck on the cheek, and out the door he goes to work.

He drives perfectly—not one mile over the speed limit, nor one mile under, stopping for pedestrians along the way. At work, he fulfills his tasks to the letter. Then, at 5:00—not 4:59, not 5:01 he finishes cleaning up his spotless desk, walks to his car, and drives home. As you greet him at the door, you're again amazed that you had the good fortune to marry Mr. Perfect. But as he walks into the house, he stops and looks at you rather quizzically. You realize he's looking at your hair because there's a strand out of place. Then he goes into the kitchen, and, being a perfect six feet four inches tall, he notices dust on top of the refrigerator. "How can this be?" he wonders.

Panic begins to fill your heart, and anguish begins to set in until you remember that you fixed a fabulous meal. As he sits down to dinner, you bring out the six-course meal you prepared, the aroma filling the room. But as you uncover the entree, you realize your husband, Mr. Perfect, is staring at the parsley, which, to your dismay, looks a bit wilted. As he reaches for something to drink, your heart sinks as you see a spot on his glass. The evening goes downhill from

there, and you go to bed, thinking, *Yes, I'm married to Mr. Perfect—but he's driving me crazy.*

This goes on until you become filled with so much tension and anxiety that you decide it was a mistake to marry Mr. Perfect. "I want a divorce," you say.

"On what grounds?" asks the judge.

"My husband is perfect," you answer.

"Request denied," declares the judge. "Perfection is not grounds for divorce."

You go your way thinking you can't last a moment longer, when suddenly you remember Romans 7:2, 3, which says that the woman is bound to her husband only so long as he is alive. So the next day, as he's reading the paper, you pour a bottle of arsenic into your husband's celery juice. You wait with anticipation as he takes a sip and two and three. Your anticipation turns to amazement as he asks for seconds—until you remember that he's in perfect health. His kidneys filter out the poison totally.

"Oh no," you say. "I can't divorce him because he's perfect. He won't die because he's perfect. I'm stuck in this bondage forever. And in your despair, you slam the door behind you as you walk out into the rain. You return half an hour later sniffling, sneezing, and coughing; and you know you're coming down with pneumonia. Your lungs start to fill with fluid. Your temperature rises. You get sicker and sicker—and you realize you're dying.

As you let go of your life, you say to yourself, "This is the way out. I'm finally free. Mr. Perfect couldn't be divorced. Mr. Perfect wouldn't die. But I'm dying. And that sets me free to marry another one—Mr. Love—Who's waiting for me in heaven."

On the basis of Jesus' words in Matthew 5:18, like Mr. Perfect, the law will never die. Because of this, the law looms over us continually, ever making us aware of our imperfections and inconsistencies. We can't live with it. We can't divorce it. We can't kill it. "There's only one way out," says Paul in Romans. "And when you discover it, you're free!"

You see, folks, the penalty for sin was paid on the Cross (Romans 1—5). The power of sin was broken by the Cross (Romans 6). The preoccupation with sin is solved through the Cross (Romans 7:4–6). You are no longer married to the rules and regulations of the law. Why? Is the law dead? No. You are (Galatians 2:20).

You've died to Mr. Perfection—and you're linked to Mr. Love. Consequently, you're free from roller-coaster spirituality.

Mr. Love

> In the years when I thought I was still married to Mr. Law, even though I was a Christian, I set up rules and regulations, disciplines and expectations. When I kept them, I would look down on other Christians who didn't, thinking, *What time did* he *get up for devotions this morning?* And I would walk around like a self-righteous prude inside.
>
> But invariably, I couldn't keep my own rules and regulations. I'd sleep late one morning, or two, or three—and then what happened? I plummeted into depression. "Woe is me," I'd say. "I'm such a wretch. I can't go to church. Why should I even read the Bible? I'll just watch TV all day."
>
> Up and down I went until I understood that Paul said, "The rules and standards you set up to prove you're a good little Christian are all irrelevant."

That is why, when people say Christianity is narrow and restrictive, I respond, "You're not reading your Bible. Jesus represented such radical *freedom* that the only way the religious community could contain Him was to kill Him."

"All things are lawful—but all things are not expedient," wrote Paul (see 1 Corinthians 6:12). In other words, "I'm not going to jeopardize this glorious liberty I have, this wonderful freedom I enjoy by becoming enslaved to any substance, habit, or activity. I'm free not to sin, even though all things are lawful to me." Then he went on to say, "All things are lawful for me—but not all things edify" (see 1 Corinthians 10:23). In other words, "Even though I have liberty to do all things, seeing me do certain things might cause someone else to become entangled. So I choose not to do those things which will cause others to stumble."

Forget your regulations, your rules, your external stipulations, saint. You're free in Christ totally and completely. You're married now to Mr. Love. When we understand this, what happens? We no longer live by rules written down on a list, or by commandments etched in stone, but by the Word

written in our hearts (Romans 7:6). If you have rules written down in your journal or Bible, perhaps you're dangerously close to falling into the Old Covenant—into legalism. You may pride yourself when you keep them and turn up your spiritual nose at others who aren't as devoted or as committed as you, but watch out. Exhaustion and depression are inevitable.

"But," you protest, "if we're no longer married to the law, we'll do all kinds of bad stuff."

Not true. Your own experience tells you differently.

> As a sixteen-year-old, washing the family car was one of my Saturday chores. The law was laid down, and I followed it: I squirted some water on our green Buick Skylark, flung a towel over it a couple times, and went on my way. But that all changed when I thought I fell in love with a girl named Stephanie. You see, because Dad gave me permission one weekend to use the Skylark to take Stephanie out to dinner, I washed it, dried it, waxed it, buffed it, shined the chrome, polished the hubcaps, vacuumed the interior, and washed the windows. I transformed the Skylark into a thing of beauty. Why? Because of love—for while the law made me wash the car, love made me do the rest.

So, too, when you really grasp what Jesus Christ did for you and how much He cares about you, it's no longer, "I gotta have devotions,"—but, "I get to talk with You today, Lord." And you end up doing much more than you ever did with your rules, regulations, and tradition-based Christianity. You're free because the Lord whispers in your heart, in the newness of the Spirit day by day, moment by moment.

> "You don't want to be with those kids. They're walking in a way that will be damaging to you."
>
> "Okay, Lord," you say. "Thanks for the tip."
>
> "You don't want to go into that place. There's a bunch of stuff coming down there that's really ugly."
>
> "Okay, thanks, Lord."

Folks, the law says, "Responsibility!" Love says, "Just respond to Me." It's wonderful. From day to day, I never know what lies ahead as the Lord guides me in the newness of the Spirit rather than the oldness of the letter.

"I'm glad my kids aren't here," you say, "because if Junior hears that all things are lawful, that there are no rules and regulations—I'm in real trouble."

This brings up a valid question. What about kids who are unruly, or criminals in our society? Paul says although the law is not made for a righteous man—for a guy who's in love with the Lord, walking close to the Lord, desiring to please the Lord—it is made for the lawless, the disobedient, the ungodly (1 Timothy 1:8–9). Those who don't care about the Lord need the law laid upon them for their own protection. Thus, the law has a two-fold purpose. It keeps the unrighteous from rampant sin and drives the self-righteous to Jesus Christ.

"If the law's sole purpose in the life of a believer is to drive us to Christ, then why even bother reading the Old Testament with all of its ordinances and regulations?"

Because each ordinance, each statute, each Old Testament picture points to Jesus and gives us a clearer picture of Him (Luke 24:27). Consider, for example, the Sabbath. There are those who say things like, "If you don't worship on Saturday, you're violating the law."

Like Paul, our answer can be, "Sabbaths and all of those regulations are simply a shadow of the reality of the Person of Jesus Christ" (see Colossians 2:16, 17). Folks, there are people in "church-ianity," in legalism, who are caught up in the shadows when the reality is Christ. You see, *He* is our Sabbath. *He* is our Rest. *He* is the Reality.

Not only is Jesus the reality of the law, but there is practicality for us in the law. That is why Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man's benefit. It was given to you by the Father in order that you might have a day of rest and relaxation. But you've turned it into a responsibility and an obligation" (Mark 2:27). When you look at the law, listen to the heart of the Father. Don't get caught up in the technicalities. When you read the Old Testament, say, "Lord, show me something about You and something practical for me."

Precious brother, dear sister—my prayer for you today is a very simple one: that God would keep you from the depression and exhaustion that are the

result of a preoccupation with rules and regulations, obligations and stipulations—that you might know what it means to be dead to Mr. Perfect and married to Another who loves you unconditionally and will lead you day by day in joy and liberty.



8 If anyone is wrestling with depression, I have good news for you: You're in the right place, for Romans 8 is the true antidote for depression. You see, when a person is going through depression, it is always in one of three areas. He is either haunted by something in his past, anxious about something in his future, or weighed down by something presently.

Romans 8 is the perfect solution for each of these situations. Verse 1 declares there is no condemnation concerning the past. Verses 38, 39 promise there can be no separation from God's love in the future. And verse 28 states that all things are working together for good in the present. Now, if we believe this, there's no room for depression, and if we'll embrace it, we'll experience an alleviation of the depressed spirit that inflicts us so easily. Perhaps that is why Dr. Donald Barnhouse said that whenever a believer's Bible accidentally falls on the floor, it should automatically open to Romans 8.

Romans 8:1 (a)
There is therefore now no condemnation . . .

To the woman taken in the act of adultery, Jesus said, "Where are thine accusers? Go your way and sin no more" (see John 8:10, 11).

So, too, when, in naked honesty, you say to the Lord, "I know I'm a sinner, but I realize You are my Savior and that what You did on the Cross is sufficient to pay the price for my sin," then you can go your way free.

"Wait a minute," you protest. "Yes, Jesus said, 'Go your way,' but He also said, 'and sin no more.' *That's* the key."

Listen, precious people. I don't believe Jesus' tone with the woman taken in adultery was, "I'll let you off the hook this time, lady. But if it happens again, you'll be in big trouble." No, I believe His tone was, "Go your way a

free woman. By the Word I'm sharing with you, and the love I'm showing to you, I'm giving you liberation from your tendency to indulge your flesh, and freeing you to live in an entirely different lifestyle." And I believe there was a smile on His face, not a finger in her face as He said it.

Romans 8:1 (b)
. . . to them which are in Christ Jesus . . .

We're *in* Christ Jesus, folks. That's the key. The Lord said to Noah, "Rooms shalt thou make in the ark and thou shalt pitch it within and without with pitch" (Genesis 6:14). The word "pitch" is the same word used in the Old Testament for "atonement," so the ark is a perfect picture of our salvation, for when the rain began to fall, the Lord shut Noah and his family *in* (Genesis 7:16).

He didn't say, "I'm going to put eight pegs on the outside of the ark, Noah. You and your family are to hang on for dear life, and as long as you hang on, you'll make it through." No, He said, "I'm going to put you *in*." And the same is true of us. It's not a matter of holding on, hoping that if we can keep from sinning, we'll be okay. No, our Ark is Jesus Christ; and we are *in* Him. Therefore, there is no condemnation. No matter how rough the seas might be or how heavy the rain comes down, we're sealed, safe, and secure.

A friend came by one day with a couple boxes of Häagen-Dazs bars —the dark chocolate-covered ones—my favorites. Now, if you've ever read the ingredients on the side panel of a Häagen-Dazs box, you know they're sinful. And yet that sinfully delicious Häagen-Dazs is now hidden and buried in *me. You no longer see it.*

So, too—you are *in* Christ—with all of your sinful tendencies, calories, and fat grams. Thus, when the Father looks on you, He doesn't see you with all of your failings and shortcomings. No, He sees you robed with the righteousness of Christ Jesus (Isaiah 61:10). He doesn't see you in your sin; He sees you in His Son. Therefore, there's no condemnation whatsoever. Regardless of where you've been or how badly you've failed, regardless of who you are or where you are, there is *no* condemnation.

Romans 8:1 (c)

. . . who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

After realizing that only Jesus could set him free from the demands and the expectations of the law (Romans 7), Paul explodes with this understanding, as we'll see him mention the Spirit *nineteen* times in chapter 8.

Romans 8:2

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

The law of sin and death is comprised of three forces working in conjunction with each other: Satan, the flesh, and the world. Now, in my own energy, I can take on any two. But I'm doomed by the combination of three. You see, if Satan and the world system were alive and well—but if I didn't have a body, sin would have no pull on me. If I had a body and was in the world—but there was no Satan, there would be no problem because, as the prince of this world (John 12:31), it is Satan who activates the world system that plays on my flesh. If I had a body and Satan was present—but there was no world system, Satan could not have access to me, because he would have no way to influence me. It is because I have a body and live in a world controlled by Satan that, without the Lord, I am subject to the law of sin and death.

If you go to the airport, you'll see planes sitting on the runway. They're not going anywhere because the law of gravity is keeping them on the ground. But as soon as their engines are turned on, the law of aerodynamics takes over. Although gravity is still in effect and still pulls on the planes, there's a higher law, a more powerful force at work that allows them to overcome the law of gravity. That's what Paul is saying. We're free from this law of sin and death by possibility thinking? No. By positive mental imaging? No. We're free by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. He lives *in* us, enabling us to fly high and overcome the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:3, 4

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

The weakness of the law lies in the fact that we can't keep it. Folks, you can write, "I'm going to pray three hours every morning" in your journal. You can post, "I will read my Bible three hours every night" on your fridge, But sooner or later, you'll find the weakness lies not in those commitments, but in your own flesh. That's why Paul rejoices that God took care of the matter by sending His own Son—that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled not by us, but in us, as the Spirit guides us spontaneously, leads us daily, corrects us constantly, and frees us practically.

Romans 8:5, 6

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

The question then becomes, "Paul if this is so, if there's no condemnation, if we're free from rules and regulations, then why shouldn't I just continue in my carnal tendencies and fleshly activities?"

"Because," Paul would say, "to be carnally minded is death."

Want to know how to experience the stench of death in your life? Live carnally. What does it mean to live carnally? Jesus associated it with Gentiles who were concerned with nothing more than what they would eat, what they would wear, and where they would go (Matthew 6:31, 32). A carnal person asks, "Where can we eat now? What new hobby can we enjoy? What vacation can we take?"

You see, we think living in the flesh is synonymous with committing blatant sins. But in reality, to live in the flesh simply means to give priority to the things of the material realm. Why is that death? Because man was created in the image of God. Since God is a Trinity—Father, Son and Spirit—He

created man as lesser trinity of spirit, soul, and body. The spirit is the deepest part of you, the "real" you. The soul is your mind and emotions. The body is the thing you live in temporarily. When God created man, there was a beautiful connection between the spirit of man and the Spirit of God as Adam and God walked together in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8). But when Adam gave in to his flesh and ate the forbidden fruit, he allowed his body—the material aspect of his nature—to assume predominance over his spirit, thereby severing his direct communion with God's Spirit.

Romans 8:7, 8

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

With the soul—the mind—lodged between the spirit and the flesh, the question becomes one of what will control my mind. Will it be the spirit, as my spirit is linked to God's Spirit? As the day unfolds, will I be a spiritual man? Or will I be carnal, wondering, *Where am I going to go? How am I going to be entertained? What am I going to eat?* Truly, if my body controls my thoughts, I am carnally minded and cannot please God.

What's life about? wondered Solomon. *It must be about money.* So he gathered so much gold that even silver had no value in his kingdom. Ever notice how it is the wealthy people in our society who oftentimes end up taking drugs? Why is this? Because the ones who hit the top find out money isn't the answer, whereas the rest of us think that if we could just make more money, work harder, or invest more wisely we would be happy. Solomon knew better. He had more money than he knew what to do with, and still wasn't happy—so he thought happiness must lie in women.

He amassed one thousand wives and concubines, but he found they weren't the answer either. "Happiness must be found in intellectual pursuit," he decided. So he became a botanist, a biologist, an ichthyologist. He became so knowledgeable that he penned books by the hundreds. And he became philosophical to such a degree that people traveled from all over the world to hear him share his proverbs. But, after all of this he concluded that

much study wearies the flesh (Ecclesiastes 12:12). The answer must be in partying, he thought. So he imported peacocks and apes from Africa, and made sure wine flowed freely during parties so lavish they would make Hollywood jealous. But it was still empty in his eyes. Deciding the answer to his restlessness must lie in power, he built his empire to be the most powerful empire of his day. Yet he remained empty.

Poor Solomon. Put yourself in his golden sandals. What frustration! All the power he could ever want, more money than he could even count, one thousand of the most beautiful women at his beck and call, endless parties, education, philosophy—he had it all. But here was his dilemma: Nothing satisfied. Whereas the average person thinks, *I'm almost happy. If I can just get a bigger house, or a newer car, I know I'll be happy,* Solomon was stuck. He was at the top. There was no bigger car to buy, no other woman to go after, no higher investment to make. He was at the top and he said, "It's empty."

And here little Paul comes along with his bowed legs, hooked nose, and bald head, saying, "It's real simple. To be carnally minded is death—but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

Brother Solomon finally did figure it out. After approximately twelve years of women, money, power, and philosophy, he said, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man" (see Ecclesiastes 12:13). And from that time on, Solomon was known as "the preacher."

I ask you this question: What has been ruling your soul? Has it been your flesh, or has it been God's Spirit? If you're going to pursue the material and live for your flesh, you'll never be satisfied. But if you live for the Spirit, you'll know life and peace eternally and presently.

Romans 8:9 (a)

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.

The word "dwell" means "to be at home." Is the Spirit of God at home in you? If you're a believer, He's in you—without question. But is He *at home* in your life? Can He just kick back in the easy chair of your heart and say,

"I'm so glad to be in your life; I'm so glad you're Mine"? Or do you take Him to activities, listen to conversations, and involve yourself in that which makes Him uneasy?

In writing about a believer who joined himself to a harlot, Paul said he was joining Christ Himself to the harlot (1 Corinthians 6:15). So, too, I suggest to you that, in these immoral days in which we live, Christians all too often force the Lord into activities of which He wants no part. Would you think about this the next time you turn on TV, listen to gossip, or go to a movie? Praise the Lord, there's no condemnation (Romans 8:1)—but there must be a realization of what's going on.

Romans 8:9 (b)

Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

Although the Spirit may not be comfortable in your life, if you are a Christian, He is still in you. However, if Christ is not in you, you're not saved.

Romans 8:10, 11

And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

How are we to deal with these sinful tendencies, these carnal activities, habits and thoughts? Paul gives us the key: The Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead is in us, and He'll live His life through us.

Romans 8:12, 13

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

“I must mortify the deeds of the body,” some people say. “I’ve got to crucify my flesh”—but it’s impossible to crucify yourself. If you lie down on a cross and pound a nail through your wrist, even if you somehow endure the pain, you’re only half crucified because you can’t pound in the other nail. How do you mortify the deeds of the flesh? There’s only one way: through the Spirit.

> *After capturing the ark of the covenant, the Philistines placed it in the temple of their fish god, Dagon. The next morning, the Philistine priests got up to find Dagon had fallen down before the Ark (1 Samuel 5:3). They stood Dagon up and went their way. The next morning, they came in again, and there was Dagon, facedown on the floor, with his head and hands cut off. Now, at this point, you would think the priests would have said, “Something’s fishy here. This isn’t working.” But, instead, they chose to side with Dagon. They stood him up, patched him together, and said, “The ark’s gotta go.”*

Precious people, the way to gain victory over whatever it is you’re struggling with is not to try to topple Dagon, but to bring in the ark, for the ark represents the presence of God. Whatever your Dagon might be, bring in the Spirit of the Lord. How? Just love the Lord. Get up tomorrow morning and before your feet hit the ground, drop to your knees, and give your life to Him. When He whispers in your heart during your coffee break, “Pull away and talk with Me,” do it. When you’re deciding which dial to press on your radio during lunch, just do what the Spirit tells you to do. Allow the Spirit of God to fill your heart, and you know what will happen? You’ll lose interest in the stuff that dominated and controlled you—not because you wrestled with Dagon, but because you brought in the ark.

That’s why Romans 8 is so thrilling! Too many believers are trying to fight evil habits and tendencies on their own—and it’s exhausting. If you walk into a dark room, you don’t scream, karate chop, give teachings about, or rebuke the darkness. You turn on the light.

Romans 8:14

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Just as the Spirit of God gives you victory over the flesh, the Spirit of God will give you guidance in life. People struggle so hard with finding God's will, yet it's so simple.

When asked how to find the will of God, Augustine simply said, "It's real simple. Love the Lord and do whatever you want." How could he say this? Because if we love the Lord, Psalm 37 says the Spirit will change the desires of our heart to conform to His will.

Romans 8:15, 16

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

The word "Abba" is Aramaic for "Papa." When my youngest son Benjamin says "Dad, what do you want me to do today?" my answer is not, "I'm not going to tell you." Yet that's the way a lot of people see God. They think He gets a kick out of keeping us in the dark as long as possible.

"No," says Paul. "By the spirit of adoption, God is our papa. Therefore, there's no need to fear."

Romans 8:17, 18

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Many years ago, we adopted our cat Gabriel *into* our family. From that point on, he had to be adapted *for* our family. That is, he had to learn not to use Peter's bed for his litter box, not to climb on the curtains, not to claw the

couch. So, too, as adopted sons, the suffering we experience presently is for the purpose of adapting us spiritually and will one day disappear totally in light of the glory we will partake of eternally.

Romans 8:19

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

There are groups who teach that in the end times the "manifested sons of God" will be super-saints who will not have struggles or problems like others, but will exist on a different level than the rest of us. "Join us," say these groups, "and you, too, can be one of the manifested sons of God."

I have a real problem with this interpretation because the Bible never even hints at such heresy. Who, then, are the manifested sons of God? We are (1 John 3:1, 2). The manifestation of the sons of God will take place when Jesus comes back, when we see Him, when we are made like Him, and when, at last we will be the kind of people we've longed to be.

Romans 8:20

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope.

The word "vanity" means "emptiness." Pascal was right when he said there is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man, for here, Paul tells us the creature was made subject to vanity, or emptiness. Man has a hole in his heart—and although we try to fill that hole with materialism, sexual experience, or recreation, nothing can fill the emptiness but God.

I once read a story of a goose who chose a mailbox for a mate after its partner died when it was accidentally run over by a snowmobile. The goose flailed wildly at the letter carrier and nipped at anyone who came to get the mail from the box. It stood by the box night and

day. Finally, the goose itself died, standing guard next to its chosen mate—the mailbox.

A lot of people are looking for something to satisfy them, some relationship to fulfill them. But in the end, we all find that anything short of God is a mailbox.

Romans 8:21, 22

Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

Creation is hurting. Julie Andrews notwithstanding, the hills may be alive with the sound of music—but they're singing in a minor key. Why? Because all creation was cursed when man sinned in the Garden of Eden. Consequently, the more you study nature, along with its beauty, the more you see its cruelty. We enjoy the delicate flower, but shudder at the devastating flood. Earthquakes and tornadoes, thunder and avalanche are as much a part of nature as gentle streams and peaceful meadows. That is why nature groans and waits for the day when the King comes back and for the day when the trees of the field will clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12).

Romans 8:23–25

And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

Not only does nature groan environmentally, but we groan internally. Do you ever wake up in the morning, look in the mirror, and just groan? Our bodies are wearing out, folks. They're not what they once were—but, praise the Lord, they're not what they one day will be.

Romans 8:26, 27

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

I spent some time with a man in his early thirties who was on his deathbed. The body of this young man, once a good athlete and a vibrant father, was racked by cancer. His family asked, "Why doesn't the Lord just take him home? Why the suffering? We prayed for his healing and that didn't happen. What's the Father doing?"

I understood the family saying, "Take him home." But what if, in these final days of our brother's difficulty and suffering, the Father is putting on the final touches of the inner person, shaping and molding what he will be for the next billion years in heaven? Is that what's happening? I don't know, for, like Paul, I know not how to pray. The only thing I do know is that I don't know.

Let us ever remember that while prayer is to be directed to God, it is not to be directing God. Most people, at least for part of their pilgrimage, try to direct the Lord, thinking that's what prayer is about. "Let me explain the situation, Lord. Here's what you need to do," we say with great authority and audacity.

"We know not how to pray," said Paul.

Someone comes to us and says, "Pray I'll get the job." "Pray this project will prosper." Wait a minute. So many things I thought would be wonderful have proven to be detrimental, a distraction, and a curse. Conversely, so many things I thought would be terrible have proven to be a huge blessing.

The same is true nationally. It might be that the Lord wants to close us down. That's a possibility. Maybe the best thing that could happen to our country would be a collapse economically, politically, or militarily—because that's what it might take to heal us spiritually. I don't know. I'm not God. Therefore, I'm not going to give Him direction on what He should or should not do. Instead, I just groan, "Lord, You see what's going on in the nation. You see what's going on with that person. You see what's going on in

our congregation. I don't know how to pray. I don't know what Your will is. But I just give it all to You to work out according to Your perfect and beautiful plan."

Now, if we don't know how to pray, then why pray at all? Understand this: Prayer is not getting my will done in heaven. Prayer is getting God's will done on earth. It's not me giving directions to the Father, but rather me saying, "Father, direct me. I open the door for You to work. I hold up this need for You. I place this situation in Your hand." I do this all through prayer because the Word tells us that God has chosen to work through the vehicle of prayer. And if we do not pray we will limit what He would do, what He could do, what He desires to do (James 4:2).

Therefore, if I don't pray, I will never know if God got His way with Peter-John, this congregation, or our nation. But if I do pray and say, "Lord, here's the situation. I'm not directing You, but I'm just looking to You to have Your will done"—then I can be at peace. Whatever happens, I know I played my part; I opened the door, and since the Father knows best, I can rest. The Spirit groans through me, the Son intercedes for me, and the Father will do what's right concerning me. But if I don't pray, I'll always wonder if things would have been different if I had.

Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

We usually rewrite Romans 8:28 to read: "*Most* things," or "*some* things work together for good." Paul says even though there's groaning and suffering as we're being adapted for heaven, know this: It's *all* working for good."

"We *know* all things work together for good," said Paul. You see, it's not something we have to learn—it's something the Spirit witnesses in our hearts. No matter what's coming down, no matter what's going on—we know innately that all things are working together for good."

Jacob declared just the opposite. Famine was in the land. His wife, Rachel, was dead. He thought his beloved son, Joseph, was dead as well. His oldest son, Simeon, was being held hostage in Egypt. And

the man in charge was saying, "I will give you no more supplies until you bring your youngest son, Benjamin, to Egypt." It was more than Jacob could bear.

"All things are working against me," he said (see Genesis 42:36). But then what happened?

In the succeeding chapter, he did, indeed, send Benjamin to Egypt. Why? I suggest it was because even though he was murmuring, complaining, and doubting, Jacob knew Benjamin would come back, that things would *work out, that everything would be okay. Otherwise, he never would have allowed Benjamin to go.*

So, too, in the times we have, like Jacob, said, "Everything's working against me," even then we knew that wasn't true.

That's why Paul said, "We know"—not "I want you to know," not "I'm going to teach you"—but "We already know that all things are working for good." By the Spirit we know this intuitively, and by our experience, we see how God has worked everything together for good previously. Therefore, we can trust Him to keep working for our good—and for His glory.

***For topical study of Romans 8:28 entitled "It's All for Good," turn to page* 946.**

Romans 8:29, 30 (a)

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called . . .

Suppose you had absolute foreknowledge. For you, playing the lottery wouldn't be gambling because you could pick the winning numbers with absolute certainty. The same is true for God. When He predestined you before the world began, He knew you would make it (Philippians 1:6). Folks, God is not in heaven biting His nails saying, "Boy, I hope that gang

makes it." No, God foreknows, then He predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies. It is tremendous news to me that when God looks at me, He sees a winner.

Now, although He has predestined us, concerning His people, God says, "I'm choosing you. I'm going before you. I'm guaranteeing victory to you, but it's not because of your righteousness, for you are a stiffnecked people" (see Deuteronomy 9:6). In other words, the Lord was saying, "I know what you are. So when you come into the Promised Land and experience victories, watch out that you don't think they're because of your righteousness or spirituality. No, you are a stiffnecked, hard-hearted, uncircumcised people. However, knowing you are but dust (and some are a lot dustier than others!) —I have compassion on you" (see Psalm 103:14).

I know God loves me. He's elected me. Therefore, He's going to see me through and usher me into eternity. At the same time, however, I recognize it's not because of my righteousness or anything I am or have done that causes Him to elect me into the kingdom. Quite the contrary. We are all trophies of His grace. Angels will scratch their heads with their wings and marvel perpetually at the grace and goodness God demonstrated in choosing a guy like me. You see, wanting to illustrate His grace to all of creation through all of the ages to come, the Father chose not righteous people, but sinners and rebels and stiffnecked people like you and me.

"I don't get down on myself," said Paul. "I did that in my Romans 7 days when I was under the law—religion, rules, and regulations. But now I realize I am a trophy of His grace, and that He, by His goodness and because of His bigheartedness, chose people like me in order that all of eternity might marvel at His mercy."

"If a person is indeed predestined, what choice does he have?" you ask. "What about free will?"

> *Picture with me two chess players. One is a master, the world's best. He knows hundreds of opening and closing moves. Having only learned to play a week ago, the other player forgets which way the pawn goes and how the horse hops. These two players are engaged in a match, the master and the novice. Now, the novice has free will. He can move wherever he wants. But, by playing against the master,*

he's going to find that any move he makes is countered brilliantly. In the end, he will find himself boxed into a corner, surrounded by the master's men. Thus, although the novice is exercising his freedom, he really doesn't have a chance.

The same is true, as it relates to our freewill vs. God's election and predestination. Man has free will—but he's boxed in because the Master will inevitably corner those He chooses and bring them into the kingdom.

"That's great," you say, "if you're part of the chosen. What about the person who's not elected?" Jesus said,

> He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.
>
> John 3:18–20

You see, the singular issue concerning predestination is neither intellectual nor theological. It's moral. Through His foreknowledge, God sees the person who wants to continue to walk in darkness—and doesn't choose him. So, too, before the foundation of the world, He saw those who, like you, wanted to walk in light—and chose them.

Romans 8:30 (b)
. . . and whom he called, them he also justified . . .

As we saw in Romans 5, "justified" means "just as if I never sinned."

Romans 8:30 (c)
. . . and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

The word "glorified" is in the aorist tense—meaning it's taking place right now. This is great news! You see, Paul didn't say, "Whom He justified,

them He will glorify." No, he said, "Whom He justified, them He is glorifying right now." Why? Because God—who transcends the time/space continuum, God who is light, God who lives in the eternal now—sees our glorified state as if it has already taken place.

What is the implication for us? Suppose you knew the person sitting next to you was about to inherit fifty billion dollars next week. Not only that, but he would have the heart of a philanthropist as well. Wouldn't you be just a tad bit nicer to him? Understand this: The one you're sitting next to is richer than that. He or she is a joint-heir with Christ (Romans 8:17).

From our vantage point, we all have a long way to go. But from God's perspective, our glorification is a done deal. Therefore, before we pick on one another, it would be wise to stop and look at one another through our Father's eyes.

Romans 8:31 (a)
What shall we then say to these things?

In light of the fact that there's no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, in light of the fact that everything is working out for our good because of Christ, in light of the fact that we are already glorified from God's perspective, Paul finds himself speechless.

> *When Nathan told David that, although he wouldn't be able to build a temple for the Lord, the Lord wanted to establish His royal line through David, David was amazed. "What can I say?" he said (see 2 Samuel 7:18–20)—which was quite a question for David to ask, considering the psalmist had a way with words, and was perhaps more skilled in expression than anyone else in history. Yet here he was, speechless in response to God's kindness to him.*

Do you ever feel that way? The Lord touches you and ministers to you, gives you a verse in your devotional time, or impresses you with a truth as you're driving in your car, or looking at your grandchildren or wife—and you just become overwhelmed at the goodness and mercy of God. I believe

praise often reaches its highest point when we're speechless, blown away by His mercy and grace.

Romans 8:31 (b)
If God be for us, who can be against us?

This verse literally reads, "*Since* God is for us, who can be against us?" We have the tendency to think God is disappointed with us. Not true. God is *for* you. And He's for me. God views His people very highly and loves His people very deeply. Why? Because He already sees the end product. We're already glorified in His eyes.

If God be for us, who would dare to be against us? Only one: Satan. But Satan is no problem because Satan is not God's counterpart. He's only a fallen angel whose equivalent is, perhaps, Michael. God is so far above Satan and so much greater than this world system that any power that comes against you or any problem that creeps up within you is no match for the One who says, "I'm *for* you."

God is *for* you. "That sounds nice," you say. "It might even be true theologically. But you don't know where I've been personally. You don't know how weak I am."

About a week ago I was reading through the Gospel of John once more, and I had to stop and chuckle. You see, the problem for a lot of us is, because we are so familiar with the stories in the gospel, they lose their impact. I mean, think with me. . . .

Two stories appear in John 2, both dealing with Jesus and a table. Around the first table, men have been drinking quite heartily—so much so that there was no wine left at the party. Around the second table, men were in the courtyard of the temple, exchanging money into Jewish currency that they might buy doves, lambs, and cattle to offer to Jehovah.

Jesus turned over the table in one of those vignettes. Which one? If you hadn't heard the story, you would say, "It's obvious. He would be ticked off with the party-ers. He would overturn their table. He would drive them out." But that's not what happened,

because time and again, Jesus did the opposite of what people expected Him to do. And the only reason His actions don't shock us is because we're so familiar with them. You see, if you didn't know the story, you would say, "He dealt with the party-ers. But in reality, He made them more wine but overturned the tables of the outwardly pious moneychangers.

Jesus is radical, folks. He caused the religious people of His day to be continually shocked and scandalized. They didn't know what to do with Him because He loved to be with real people—people who had struggled with life, people who knew they weren't all that great—people just like us.

Romans 8:32 (a)
He that spared not his own Son . . .

The word "spared" is used only one other place in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. When Abraham took his son Isaac to Mount Moriah (today called Golgotha, or Calvary), God said, "Abraham, lay not your hand upon the lad. Neither do anything unto him, for now I know that thou fearest God seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me" (see Genesis 22:12). The word "withheld" is the same word translated "spared" here in Romans.

I suggest to you the reason God could pour out so many blessings on Abraham in so many ways was because Abraham was ready to sacrifice the one thing in his life that mattered most. In so doing, Abraham said, "I'll plunge a knife into my son's chest, even though I don't understand, because I love You, Father, more than I trust my ability to figure out what's going on."

So, too, if the thing that means the most to you—be it your wife, kids, house, car, job, future—doesn't matter at all to you in comparison to your relationship with your Father, God can pour out all kinds of blessings on you because they won't be a distraction for you.

Romans 8:32 (b)
. . . but delivered him up for us all . . .

Here, God is saying, "You can be sure that because I gave you My Son, I'll do what's best for you from this point on." When God gave His Son, He proved His magnanimity, His generosity, and His kindness conclusively. So why question what's going on presently? Anything He shares with us or withholds from us cannot begin to compare with what He's *already* given us in Christ.

Romans 8:32 (c)
. . . how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Embedded in the phrase "all things" is the idea "all good things." In other words, if it's a good thing, He'll give it to you because He already gave you the best in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:33
Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.

There is one who does indeed lay things to the charge of God's elect. Satan, the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10), points his finger at us constantly.

As Joshua, the high priest, stood in the presence of the Lord, his garments became filthy (Zechariah 3:3), because in God's presence, man's spirituality always appears as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Quick to exploit the situation, Satan pointed his finger at Joshua's sin. "Is not this a stick I have plucked out of the fire?" said the Lord as Joshua's garments became dazzling white.

The same is true of us. We were little sticks headed for the fire of damnation. But the Lord plucked us out, robed us in His righteousness, and gave us the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Isaiah 61:3).

"Look at his sin," thunders Satan.

"What sin?" asks God. "All I see is My Son."

There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. Then what were we doing on our knees this morning, confessing sin? Confession is the result of conviction, not condemnation. Conviction is the work of the Spirit. When He convicts me of sin, I say, "Oh, Father, I realize this is wrong. I agree with You. And I thank You that I'm forgiven." Conviction draws me to the Father. Condemnation, on the other hand, drives me from the Father. Condemnation makes me say, "I'm such a wretch. I can't pray and I sure can't go to church."

> *When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, God asked him a simple question. He didn't say, "Where were you? How could you? Why did you?" No, He simply said, "Where* are *you?" (Genesis 3:9).*

And that's still the heart of the Father. His heart is not, "Where have you been?" or "What did you do? but "Where are you right now? Take off those scratchy fig leaves, and let Me clothe you with My righteousness."

> **Romans 8:34**
>
> **Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.**

In Mark 16, we read that when Jesus ascended into heaven, He sat down at the right hand of the Father (16:19). This interests me because when you look at the temple or the tabernacle, you find no place for the priest to sit. There was a table to eat from, a lamp stand to see by, a laver to wash in, an alter to sacrifice on—but there was no place to sit because the work of the Old Testament priest was never done. It went on and on and on.

But when the Great High Priest Jesus Christ died and said, "It is finished" (John 19:30), He meant it. He went to the right hand of the Father and sat down.

When a person is tense and unsure of the outcome, he stands to his feet and paces. Jesus sits. The only record of Him standing in heaven is when He stood to welcome Stephen, the first martyr, home (Acts 7:56).

Romans 8:35–37

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

Paul is saying to you and me, "God is for you. He'll never lay any charge against you. He doesn't come down on you. He'll give you every good thing freely because He already gave you the best in Jesus." The question then becomes, "If this be so, why do we go through tribulation, famine, distress, nakedness, peril, sword?" The answer is because we are like sheep (Psalm 44:11). Sheep are easily picked off, easily put down, easily done in. It seems the Christian community has forgotten that it is comprised of lambs. We gear up, arm ourselves, and come out swinging. But the imagery is all wrong. After all, which NFL football team goes by the Lambs? Which Marine Corps unit would choose the lamb for its mascot?

"If they hated Me, they'll hate you," Jesus said (see John 15:18). But the Good News is that in all these things we are more than conquerors. What does it mean to be more than a conqueror? It means that, instead of flexing our muscles politically or marching in protest socially, we draw people's attention to an entirely different dimension spiritually. We're to influence positively—no question about it. But it's not our passion, our purpose, or our priority to conquer the system.

"Aren't we to be salt and light?" you ask.

"Yes, but salt is meant to be sprinkled. I had some clam chowder last night and asked for some salt. Now, what if the waiter had said, "You want salt? Here you go," and proceeded to unscrew the lid and empty the shaker into my bowl? The chowder would have been ruined. The same is true of light. Do you appreciate it when an oncoming car shines its high-beams in your face? We wonder why the world doesn't listen to us. Could it be because we empty the saltshaker in its soup and shine high beams in its face in our attempt to be salt and light?

We're to be lambs. We're to be salt that's sprinkled to add flavor, create thirst, and bring healing. We're to be light that illuminates, not dominates. And know this: From the world's perspective, we'll never win. If you don't understand this, you'll be frustrated, disillusioned, embittered. We're not conquerors. We're more than conquerors.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were tossed into the fiery furnace. But while they were in it, even Nebuchadnezzar saw Jesus Christ in the fire with them (Daniel 3:25). Do the Nebuchadnezzars of this world look at us and say, "They went into the furnace without a fight, but somehow they're walking around. They're doing fine. We're the ones who are hurting"?

That's what it means to be more than a conqueror.

Romans 8:38, 39

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Although we are "accounted as sheep for the slaughter," in the place of slaughter, we see the Savior and He will never leave us. We will never be separated from His love. Paul is elated by-this—for if God be for us, who can be against us?

IT'S ALL FOR GOOD

A Topical Study of ROMANS 8:28

There are certain things we don't know. For example, we don't know how a honeybee can fly. You see, theoretically, the wings of a honeybee are too short and too light to support him when he is carrying pollen. It's an aerodynamic impossibility for a honeybee to fly when he's loaded with pollen. But guess what. Honeybees fly even when loaded with pollen. Certain things we don't know—things as simple as the flight of a bee.

There are some things we can't know—things like the day or hour of the Rapture (Matthew 25:13), or who will be in heaven (Matthew 13:24–30).

There are several things we *should* know. "Don't be ignorant," admonished Paul, "concerning the second coming (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13), spiritual gifts (see 1 Corinthians 12), and Satan's devices" (see 2 Corinthians 2:11).

And there are some things we truly *do* know . . .

The Promise Given *to* Us

In our text, Paul doesn't say, "You should know that all things work together for good." He doesn't say, "I want you to know all things work together for good." He says, "You already know that all things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purpose."

How do we know this?

"Because this verse is in the Word," you answer. "Therefore, it must be true."

All right. But what about those in Rome to whom Paul was writing? They had never heard of Romans 8:28. How, then, could Paul assume they knew its truth?

The Price Paid *for* Us

Look down a few verses to verse 32: "God spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for you and me." If He loved you enough to send His Son to be slaughtered in your stead to pay the price for your sin, don't you know God will do what's good for you continually? When I begin to doubt the love of God, or wonder if things are really working together for good, all I need to do is look to Calvary and see Jesus there dying for me.

The Peace *Within* Us

God's goodness was known and understood by Old Testament saints long before the Cross of Calvary. How? Because, deep within their hearts, in the midst of tragedy, in the face of difficulty, all those who love God know that all things are truly working together for good.

There is a man in the Old Testament who did this very thing. His name is Jacob, and this part of his story is found in Genesis 42. Jacob had twelve sons. Although he loved them all, number eleven was especially dear to him. His name? Joseph. You recall the story. . . .

Jacob gave Joseph a "coat of many colors," or, more accurately, "a coat with big sleeves." You see, in those days, laborers wore vests without sleeves in order that their arms could be unrestricted. But the bosses—the head honchos—wore coats with sleeves, which served as lunchboxes or briefcases because they kept important documents and/or food in them. Joseph's big sleeves made his brothers so jealous that they threw him into a pit, where they were going to leave him to die—until one of the brothers suggested they could make some money if they sold him as a slave. So sell him they did, after which they smeared blood all over his coat and took it to Jacob, saying, "Bad news, Dad. Joseph was eaten by wild animals."

Meanwhile, through an incredible series of events, Joseph became prime minister of Egypt—second in command only to Pharaoh himself. When famine hit Israel, Jacob called his sons together and said, "I've heard there's a man in Egypt who has food. Go ask him if we can buy some grain." So his sons, ten in number, appeared before the prime minister, whom they didn't recognize.

"Why are you here?" asked Joseph.

"We're here to buy grain, Your Highness."

"I think you're lying," said Joseph. "I think you've come to spy out the land."

"No," insisted his brothers. "We're brothers. In fact, there were twelve of us originally—but one of our brothers is dead, and our youngest brother is at home."

"If that's true," countered Joseph, "go bring your youngest brother to me. That will validate your story. Meanwhile you, Simeon, will stay in prison

until the youngest one is brought back."

The nine went back home, taking the grain with them that Joseph had given them. The famine grew worse, and soon they were out of food once more. "Go back to Egypt," Jacob said.

"We can't go back unless we take Benjamin," said the brothers.

Watch what Jacob said in verse 36: "Me have ye bereaved of my children; Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me," or literally, "all is working against me."

- What does Romans 8 say?

  "All things work for good."

- What is Jacob declaring?

  "Everything is working against me. My son, Simeon, is a hostage. My son Joseph is dead. And my son Benjamin is soon to disappear."

Jacob was completely wrong about what had happened: Joseph wasn't dead. As a matter of fact, he was in perfect health. And Jacob was wrong about what would happen: Benjamin would return, and Simeon would be released.

"Doesn't what Jacob said disprove your premise that everyone who loves God knows innately that everything is working out for good?" you ask.

Even though Jacob said, "Everything is against me," I suggest to you deep down inside, he didn't believe it.

Why?

Read the next chapter. Knowing Jacob, if he really believed Benjamin would die in Egypt, he would not have allowed Benjamin to go. Clever, cunning Jacob would have figured out another way. But his sending Benjamin proves he didn't really believe everything was working out negatively for him.

The story continues. . . .

The brothers return to Egypt and appear before Joseph with Benjamin in tow. "I'm the brother you put in a pit, the one you sold into slavery," announced Joseph. And the brothers fell at his feet in fear. "Don't fear," he

said. “Although you meant evil against me, God meant it for good” (see Genesis 50:20).

Joseph said, “Everything you did to me was part of a plan, so don’t worry.” And he spoke kindly to them and showed great love toward them.

Here’s the question: How do I react to difficulty? Am I like Jacob, saying, “All things are working against me. How can this be happening to me? What good is going to come out of this tragedy”—even though I know in my heart that such is not the case? Or am I like Joseph, saying, “Man may have meant this for evil, but God meant it for good”?

Unfortunately, all too often I choose the sniveling of Jacob rather than the security of Joseph. Why? To elicit sympathy. My flesh is terribly ugly, and one of the things that makes it that way is my desire for you to feel sorry for me. What is it about our flesh that wants people to think we have it harder than anyone else? While that may seem an insignificant quirk, in reality it borders on blasphemy because in getting you to feel sorry for me, I get you to question God’s goodness, provision, and protection in my life. Thus, your pity for me is at God’s expense.

Who am I going to be? Am I going to be self-indulgent and allow God to be cast in a bad light—even though I know in my heart the promise given to me, the price paid for me, the peace available for me? Am I going to deny all of that and say, “I want you to feel sorry for me. Listen to my tragedy”? Or am I going to say, “I will not dishonor this good, gracious, loving God who has been so kind to me, who has been so good to me. Therefore, I will not bring shame to His name in eliciting sympathy from anyone”?

That is called the fear of the Lord. It’s respect. It’s reverence. It’s saying, “Father, I care more about Your reputation than I do about getting sympathy from the congregation. I don’t want them to think questioningly, negatively, or blasphemously of You.”

What is the fear of God? The fear of God means you’re so in love with God that you are afraid of doing anything that would hurt Him. Oh, that we would be those who say, “We fear God. We will not snivel. God is good and we know in our hearts deep within us that all things are working together for good”?

Does this mean we’re not to sympathize with others when they’re going through difficulties?

While the Bible does, indeed, say we are to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15), what does it actually mean? Whenever you want to know what a verse or concept means, look at Jesus Christ who was the Word made flesh.

> "Come quickly, Lord. The one whom thou lovest is sick," pleaded Martha and Mary (John 11:3). Four days later, when Jesus finally arrived, Martha greeted Him, saying, "Where were You?"

Do you ever hear yourself talking like that? Do you ever hear yourself saying, "The bills are stacking up; my marriage is falling apart, my health is breaking down—where's the Lord?"

> After Martha came Mary. "Lord," she cried, "if only You had been here, our brother would not have died." Seeing her weep, Jesus wept. Why? Was it because Lazarus died? No. Jesus knew Lazarus would soon be called back from the dead. He wasn't weeping for Lazarus. He was weeping because Mary didn't get it.

In Luke 19, we read of Jesus weeping again—this time over the city of Jerusalem.

> As the multitude shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord," Jesus wept over the city. Why? Because of the people's failure to understand that He came to give them spiritual salvation, not a political solution.

The third time Jesus spoke of weeping was in Luke 23.

> His back was beaten, His face swollen, and a crown of thorns was smashed into His skull, as He stumbled down the Via Dolorosa up to a hill called Calvary. To the women weeping along the way He said, "Don't weep for Me. Weep for yourselves because you don't understand what lies ahead for this city" (see verses 28, 29).

When I see Jesus weeping, I am amazed because He never weeps for Himself. He only weeps when other people don't understand. Here, then, is the question: Thinking you're being compassionate, are you one who constantly weeps with others? Perhaps what we need in the Christian community during this time of self-centered Christianity are men and women who say, "I fear God. Dear brother, even if you don't understand—precious sister, even if you think this is cold-hearted or lacking compassion, you know that this difficulty or this tragedy will work for good. Stand on that knowledge. Cling to it. I will weep for you if you don't get it. But I'm not going to weep with you as you question God and snivel. He's too good for that. Righteous and true are His judgments (Psalm 19:9). Whatever He does will prove to be excellent. And I will stand on that."

May God give us wisdom. May God give us peace. May God give us understanding. All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose.

I know this to be true. So do you.

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9 After his glorious discourse on the building blocks of our salvation in chapters 1—8, why would Paul veer off in chapters 9—11 to talk about the people of Israel? Some have suggested that Paul's giant intellect was blown out at the end of chapter 8, so in chapter 9, he began to meander intellectually and theologically. "It's good stuff," they say, "but it doesn't fit in with the rest of the book." These commentators miss the point entirely. They don't understand that, far from being an interruption, chapters 9—11 are actually a perfect illustration.

Having established the principles of salvation in chapters 1—8, and before he will discuss the practicality of salvation in chapters 12—16, Paul addresses the problem of salvation in chapters 9—11. You see, Paul ended chapter 8 with the victorious declaration that nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ. At this point, the scholar, the Bible student could say, "But what about the Jews? Are they separated from His love? Are they lost? And if so, what hope do *we* have? If they, who were once God's chosen people, are no longer walking with Him, what chance do we Gentiles have?"

Romans 9—11 is essential to the flow of the rest of the Book of Romans because Paul uses the Jew as an illustration of the faithfulness of God.

- In chapter 9, God's past dealings with Israel show His sovereignty.
- In chapter 10, God's present dealings with Israel show His equity.
- In chapter 11, God's promised dealings with Israel show His integrity.

Romans 9:1–3

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

In Exodus 32, Moses said, "Oh, Lord, even though Your people have turned from You, and have fallen into idolatry and immorality, if You don't forgive them, if You don't continue working with them, blot my name out of Your book of life as well" (see verse 32).

Here in verse 3, it's as if Paul says, "The same heart that beat within Moses is in me, for if possible, I would go to hell and suffer eternally if my kinsmen could be saved."

Where did Paul get such passion, such love for people who were out to do him in? It was cultivated in prayer, as seen in chapter 10, where he says, "Brethren my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is they might be saved" (see verse 1). Truly, when you pray for people, your heart changes toward them as you become concerned about them and involved with them.

***For topical study of Romans 9:1–3 entitled "Loving and Praying," turn to page* 954.**

Romans 9:4 (a)

Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption . . .

After his anguish for the Jewish people seen in verses 1–3, we come to Paul's analysis of the Jewish problem here in verse 4. Consider, first of all, the gifts of God to Israel. They were chosen not because they were more righteous than others, for God called them a stiffnecked and hardhearted people (Deuteronomy 7:6–8). No, He chose them to be trophies of His grace.

We have a tendency to think, *You were wise when You picked me, Lord. You saw my dedication, my determination. Good choice. Truly You're a wise God—proven by the way You chose me and adopted me into Your family.* But that's not what the Bible teaches. It says you were chosen not to the glory of His wisdom, but to the glory of His *grace* in order that throughout the ages, the angels will be perpetually amazed by God's mercy and kindness when they see you in heaven.

Romans 9:4 (b)
. . . and the glory . . .

"Glory" refers to the Hebrew word *chabod*—which means weight, substance, heaviness. The *chabod* was the cloud over the Jews as they traveled through the wilderness by day. The *chabod* was also the pillar of fire that went before them by night. It was the glory that filled the tabernacle as well as the glory that filled the temple. It was the visible, tangible presence of God, the substance people still crave in their hearts. The *chabod* is what every man is looking for when he searches for something weighty, something substantial, something real.

Romans 9:4 (c)
. . . and the covenants, and the giving of the law . . .

The covenants and the law gave the Jews principles that they might do well, excel, and succeed in life.

Romans 9:4 (d)
. . . and the service of God . . .

There's nothing more satisfying than serving God—and Israel was blessed with such a calling.

Romans 9:4 (e), 5 (a)
. . . and the promises; Whose are the fathers . . .

Israel was also blessed with great men—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David.

Romans 9:5 (b)
. . . and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

The best gift of all was that Jesus Christ was born to a Jewish mother, grew up in a Jewish home, went to a Jewish school, sat in a Jewish synagogue, ministered to the Jewish people, and said, "I have come to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (see Matthew 15:24). What an unspeakable gift was given to the Jews.

Romans 9:6 (a)
Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect.

After considering the gifts of God to Israel, Paul goes on to talk about the grace of God upon Israel. Not all Jews rejected God's grace. Some received His Son as their Messiah—which is why Paul said, "It's not as though the Word of God has taken none effect."

Romans 9:6 (b)–8
For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

"Not everyone who claims to be a Jew is a Jew," said Paul, and to illustrate his point, he appealed to Abraham. Abraham had two sons: Isaac, the promised son; and Ishmael, the attempt of his flesh to help God get the job done. How did God view Ishmael? "Abraham, take your son, your only son up to the mount," He said (see Genesis 22:2). In other words, God didn't even acknowledge Abraham had another son.

This comforts me greatly. You see, a lot of us have a lot of Ishmaels running around—things we've done in our flesh, trying to help God. But God doesn't even acknowledge them. When God reminded Abraham, however, that He would give him a promised son, what did Abraham say? "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee" (Genesis 17:18).

Abraham's is my cry far too often. "Lord, bless my fleshly endeavor. I know it was done in my own energy and my stupidity, but bless it anyway, Lord."

But God did not work through Ishmael. So, too, using Abraham as an illustration, Paul says, "Understand that not all who are from Abraham are children of Abraham. Look at Ishmael."

Not all who claim to be Israel are Israel. "Israel" means "governed by God," and not all who claim to be of Israel are governed by God. So, too, not all who claim the name "Christian" are Christians. Go to any college history class, and they'll attack you if you're a believer when they talk about the Crusades, and what "Christians" have done in Northern Ireland and the Middle East. The name is not important. Many name the name, but they're not of the true lineage of Jesus Christ. They're not born again. They're not governed by Him.

So Paul says, "Be careful. Not all who claim to be Israel are of Israel. Those descendants of Abraham through Isaac, and those who descend through the spiritual seed (like you and me) are those who are truly governed by God."

Romans 9:9, 10

For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac.

Not only did Abraham have two sons—Isaac chosen, Ishmael forgotten—but when Isaac had kids, the story continued.

Romans 9:11, 12

(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.

Even as God sovereignly chose Isaac and ignored Ishmael, He sovereignly chose Jacob, the younger of Isaac's sons, and rejected Esau. "Don't you see how good God has been to you?" asks Paul. "You are descendants of Abraham through Isaac and through Jacob—simply because of God's sovereignty."

Romans 9:13, 14

As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

A lot of people have a real problem right here. "How could God choose to love Jacob, and choose to hate Esau before they were even born?" they ask. The answer is simple. It is because God is sovereign. The mystery to me is not that God hated Esau. The mystery to me is that God loved Jacob—and that He loves me, a conniver just like Jacob.

Did God choose correctly? Read your Bible and you'll see that Esau wasn't interested in spiritual things, but attracted to carnal things. Yes, God chose correctly—He always does.

Romans 9:15

For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

When did God say this? After the people of Israel had sinned by dancing around the golden calf, Moses prayed for them, and God said, "I'll pardon them" (see Exodus 33:19). Why? Because of His sovereignty.

Romans 9:16

So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

The election of God is not something to run for, earn, or win. As Paul continues talking about the nation of Israel, he will contrast the sovereign pardon of God on our behalf with His sovereign punishment of Pharaoh.

Romans 9:17

For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.

God has compassion and mercy on Israel, while He has only condemnation and punishment for Pharaoh.

Romans 9:18

Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

In the Exodus account, Scripture records twenty times when Pharaoh's heart was hardened—ten times of which God hardened his heart and ten times of which Pharaoh hardened it himself. Understand, Bible students, that when God hardened Pharaoh's heart, He was only confirming Pharaoh's own decision. So don't feel too bad about Pharaoh, for even though he saw miracles happening and heard God's Word very powerfully presented, he hardened his own heart.

Romans 9:19

Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?

Paul anticipated the next question: "If He chooses some and rejects others; if he raises up Pharaoh only to put him down, what choice does anyone have?"

Romans 9:20–24

Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

A popular phrase in the political climate of the '80s was, "Let Reagan be Reagan." Paul would say, "Let God be God. Let Him do what He wants. Who are you to argue against Him? From one piece of clay, a potter can make a beautiful vase. From another, he can make a trashcan. So, too, the Master Potter can do with you whatever He wants."

Now, I could worry about placing my life in the hands of One who sovereignly decides whether I'll be a vase or a spittoon, a thing of beauty or a trashcan—but only until I see the hands of the Potter as He shapes the clay. For then I see the prints where nails scarred those hands, where He loved me so much He died for me on Calvary. Surely, if He loved me enough to die for me, I can trust Him with my life absolutely, and say to Him, "Do with me whatever You wish."

Romans 9:25, 26

As he saith also in Hosea, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

Here, Paul is referring to Gentiles, to the church. God sovereignly chooses us, just as He sovereignly chose Israel in the past.

Romans 9:27

Isaiah also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved.

A small group of the Jews will be saved. They'll see the light and become part of the church.

Romans 9:28, 29

For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth. And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha.

"If God hadn't saved a seed or a remnant, we would have been wiped out entirely," Paul says concerning the Jews nationally. "But He saved a seed, a remnant, a group that has been preserved both historically and spiritually." Not only that, He brought this seed into the church, along with others who were not His people—Gentiles like you and me.

You see, in God's economy, there are three groups of people: the Jew, the Gentile, and the church. The church is made up of Jews and Gentiles chosen by God to make up a brand-new entity. "Something new is happening," said Paul.

God in His sovereignty gave opportunity for Israel to come to Him. But most of Israel passed up the invitation. Paul says only a seed, only a remnant responded to the message of grace.

Romans 9:30

What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.

Realizing he's a sinner unable to earn his way into the kingdom, the Gentile enters the kingdom solely by faith.

Romans 9:31–33

But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

The Jew, on the other hand, attempted righteousness by the law and failed because the law cannot save man (Galatians 3:24). The law was given to show us we're sinners. Yet to this day, Israel is trying to be saved by her good works. Ask a Jew in Israel today how he's going to make it spiritually, and he'll say, "We will make it by our good deeds."

I've talked to sincere Jews about this, and they blush even as they say those words because they understand that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22). The Jewish people desperately want to rebuild the temple in order that they may offer Old Testament sacrifices again. For until that time, his only option presently is to hope his good works will cover his sins—as he continues to stumble over the very Cornerstone of the temple he is so desperate to build (Ephesians 2:20).

LOVING AND PRAYING

A Topical Study of ROMANS 9:1–3

Did I ever blow it! Flying into Pocatello, Idaho, I found the flight a bit bumpy. The plane was bouncing. My stomach was churning. And, once again, I was ready to toss my cookies. We finally landed, however, and I made it safely to the group in Pocatello with whom I was to share. "Coming into Pocatello International, I understand why they call airport lobbies terminals. I felt my condition was just that—terminal," I cracked in my opening remarks. "Especially if you're flying on Horizon Scareways." The crowd laughed. Then we got into the Word and had a fabulous time together.

The next morning, as I stood at the ticket counter in the Pocatello terminal, the lady facing me looked at my ticket and said, "Oh, you're Jon Courson."

"Yes," I said.

"You were speaking here last night?"

"Yes," I said. "We had a great time. Were you there?"

Her wan smile turned into an icy frown. She looked at me with steely eyes and said, "Absolutely not. All I know is, you called our company Horizon Scareways."

At this point, two other agents joined her and said, "How could you call our company Horizon Scareways?"

"Oh, I was just joking," I answered meekly. "I think your airline is wonderful." But then I felt bad for lying! "Could I please have an aisle seat?" I asked, changing the subject.

"No," was her curt reply.

So I got my ticket, found my seat, and strapped myself in, feeling awful. After a few minutes, I thought, *Wait a minute. Why would they say those things to me—a paying customer? Whatever happened to the philosophy that made America great, the understanding that the customer is always right?* And I found myself getting mad at the way I perceived I was being treated at the ticket counter. So I went from feeling bad to feeling mad. And

as the plane took off, I went from feeling mad to feeling sad, realizing I was becoming defensive, critical, and small. Thus, as the plane got up in the air, the flight was turbulent—not only because of the weather outside, but because of the storm raging within me.

How very different was my reaction to this situation than was the apostle Paul's. You see, as he traveled throughout Europe, sharing the gospel and communicating grace and love, a group of his countrymen awaited him—men of Israel who arrived in every city in order that they might lie about him and either greet him with stones (Acts 14:19), or arrange to have him thrown in prison (Acts 21:27). So serious were Paul's enemies that they took an oath, saying, "We will not eat another meal until Paul is dead" (see Acts 23:12).

Talk about tough traveling! Here I was complaining because I felt my little comment was taken too seriously. But Paul? People were lying about him, throwing rocks at him, grabbing hold of him, determined to do away with him. Paul really had a tough time at the hands of his countrymen. But what was his reaction concerning those who were out to do him in? It blows my mind!

> *I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh . . .*
>
> Romans 9:1–3 (a)

The Holy Spirit testifying to the truth of his words, Paul said, "I would go to hell for these guys if only they could be saved." Would you say that concerning the person who's coming down on you, regarding the person who wants to do you in? It might be a teacher, a parent, a neighbor, a co-worker, or an old girlfriend. It might be someone who's done you wrong, lied about you, hurled insulting stones at you, wanted to grab hold of you, and if possible would annihilate and destroy you. Think about the person who is most difficult for you to deal with. How do you honestly feel about him? Would you go to hell eternally if that person could go to heaven?

Paul's words absolutely amaze me. To the Philippian believers, Paul said, "I'm craving heaven, but for your sakes, it's needful for me to stick around here on earth" (see Philippians 1:20–24). Commendable indeed! But to me how much more powerful is his statement to the very ones who were out to get him when he said not only, "I won't go to heaven," but "I would go to hell for you if it were possible."

How did Paul develop such love for people who wanted only to do him in? And how can we develop the same love? How can we overcome our bitterness and disappointment, our anger and hostility toward people who come against us, disappoint us, or hurt us?

Turn the page to Romans 10, for I believe that is where the answer lies.

> *Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.*
>
> Romans 10:1

The Greek rendering of this verse is: "Brethren, my heart's desire and continual prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved." In other words, "My heart's desire and continual prayer for Israel—the country that misunderstands me, the people who are out to destroy me, the nation which has totally rejected me—is, Lord, save them."

Paul not only proved his love by praying for his countrymen, but his prayer for his countrymen actually produced that kind of love in Paul. This is why Jesus specifically told us we are to pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

You see, here's what happens: Something begins to take place in me when I pray for people—particularly for my enemies. My heart toward them begins to change.

> When he came down from Mount Sinai after meeting with God on behalf of the children of Israel, Moses saw them dancing naked around a golden calf. What was his reaction? He was so mad he threw the tablets he was carrying to the ground. But then he said something hauntingly familiar: "Lord, if You don't forgive these, Your

people, blot my name out of Your book" (see Exodus 32:32). In other words, "If You don't forgive these people, I'll go to hell with them."

How could Moses have that kind of love, particularly when earlier in the chapter, the Lord said, "These are a stiffnecked people you're leading, Moses. Let Me wipe them out and make from you a new nation" (see Exodus 32:10)? I suggest to you had Moses not spent forty days with the Lord prior to this occurrence, he would not have had the heart he did.

So, sitting in the airplane, going through this internal turmoil, the Lord reminded me of Moses and Paul. And as I chewed on this text, thinking these things through, I suddenly realized, I had to pray for those Horizon ladies. So I did. I prayed that they would be blessed, that the Lord would place it in their hearts to forgive me, that their day might go well, that they might somehow be touched by God's grace and love.

Then I prayed for the president of Horizon Airlines. And I prayed for Horizon, that they would be prosperous and blessed—and that they would get better planes. I prayed for the steward in the cabin, and the pilot in the cockpit. As I was en route, I prayed for my fellow passengers. As I sat in the lobby in Boise, I prayed for people who walked by.

And, eventually, something began to happen, for as I prayed, I found my heart being filled with love toward anyone and everyone for whom I took the time to pray. Paul said, "I continually pray for my brethren." That's why he had such a deep love for them and was willing to go to hell on their behalf.

I suggest to you two reasons why you need to pray for people with whom you're having a hard time, for people with whom you don't see eye to eye, for people who bug you . . .

Pray for Your Own Sake

> A man opened a door for a lady in New York City. She stopped, turned to him, and said, "You don't have to open the door for me just because I'm a lady."
>
> He looked at her and said, "I'm not opening the door for you because you're a lady. I'm opening the door because I'm a gentleman."

Good point! You see, when I pray for people who bug me, I realize my praying will not only affect them, but it will affect my own attitude, my own tendency toward cynicism, my own critical spirit, my own bitterness. In other words, prayer will change *me*.

So why should you pray for the person who's bugging you, who's letting you down or trying to do you in? Because it will make you a better person. It will keep you soft and tender. It will make you a loving man, a loving woman. That's why Jesus said, "Don't preach at, argue with, or analyze your enemies. Just pray and bless them."

And if we'll take Jesus seriously, we will find prayer changing us in the process.

Pray for Christ's Sake

Jesus was done in, beaten up by you and me. Isaiah tells us He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him. By His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5). Therefore, when somebody beats up on me and I think it's unfair, I need to remember that I beat up on Jesus. My sin and stupidity were what caused Him to be pinned to the tree. He was beaten up for me.

And what did He do even as He was being beaten up? He prayed, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing" (see Luke 23:34).

Not only was He beaten up by me, He continues to be let down constantly, for I am not doing the things I know I could do. I am not the man I know I should be. And yet what does He do? He who was pinned to the tree rose again and went to heaven, where He lives to ever make intercession—to pray for me (Hebrews 7:25). Now if Jesus—beaten up by me, let down because of me—prays for me, I need to do what He says.

"If you love Me," He says, "keep My commandments" (see John 14:15). And what are His commandments? Simply these: to love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength—and to love the person who's around you, who works beside you, who lives next to you, who bugs you (Matthew 22:37–40).

If we don't have love, we don't have anything (1 Corinthians 13:2). "But, Lord, how can I have love?"

"Very simple," He says. "By spending time with Me and by praying for your enemies."

Pray for others and your own heart will change. You'll find the flight will be a whole lot smoother than if you're justifying your position. Right now the Lord can set you free if you'll just do what Paul did, what Moses did, what Jesus did. Pray. Pray for people continually.

"God forbid," said Samuel, "that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23). Prayer is the proof of love. And love is produced by prayer. Pray—both for your sake and for the sake of the One who continually prays for you.

10 After talking about God's sovereignty in His past dealings with Israel, Paul goes on to speak of God's equity in His present dealing with Israel.

Romans 10:1

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

Truly, God is an equal opportunity Savior, for He still gives Gentiles an invitation to salvation, while giving the Jews the same opportunity. In this chapter, we will see Christ revealed as Savior to all of Israel (verses 2–4), Christ received as Savior by some of Israel (verses 5–15), and Christ rejected as Savior by most of Israel (verses 16–21).

Romans 10:2 (a)

For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God . . .

To this day, the Jews are zealous for God.

Romans 10:2 (b), 3

. . . but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

You can be sincere in your crusading or your critiquing, your sin-sniffing or your faultfinding—but you'll be sincerely wrong. Ask Paul. With great zeal, he persecuted the church, going about to establish his own righteousness (Philippians 3:6). Like the majority of Israel, He was sincere, but he was sincerely wrong.

Romans 10:4

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Concerning the law, Jesus said, "Not one jot or tittle shall pass away until all be fulfilled" (see Matthew 5:18). Yet the law ended when Christ came. Why? Because it was fulfilled in Him.

Romans 10:5

For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.

If you want to keep the law, you must live in the law. In other words, you must keep working.

On the day the law came down from Mount Sinai, three thousand died (Exodus 32:28).

On the day the Spirit descended, three thousand were saved (Acts 2:41).

Legalism in your life, in our churches, or in our communities will always lead to death because no one can fulfill its righteousness. The Spirit in your life, in our churches, in our communities, on the other hand, will always lead to life because of the finished work of the Cross.

Romans 10:6, 7

But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)

There are those who say, "If I go to Mount Shasta and get a solar hut, change my name, and drink herb tree, perhaps I can transcend and go up into the heavens and bring down the Christ consciousness." Others say, "I'll plumb the depths of theology, and if I get deep enough, perhaps I can bring Christ up from the dead and make Him real." Some float on clouds of

philosophy, trying to bring Christ down. Others dig in studiously, trying to bring Christ up. But in reality, Paul says neither is necessary.

Romans 10:8, 9

But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

Jesus is known not through theology, not through philosophy, but through childlike simplicity. That is, you believe in your heart that He is risen, that He died for your sins and is alive. And you make a simple confession with your mouth: "Jesus is my Lord. I'm going on record verbally. I believe in my heart internally that He died for my sins; He's risen; and He's my Lord." You don't have to float off into space or dig deep into thought. The word is near you—even in your mouth. It's so very simple: Just believe and confess.

Romans 10:10

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Why believe in your heart? Why didn't Paul say believe in your mind? I suggest it is because the Lord is after our heart first. "You shall love the Lord with all your heart and mind and strength and soul" (see Mark 12:30). You see, my mind can be swayed very easily. I'm convinced about something—until I get a new set of facts and change my mind. Or I have an opinion one day and then I flip-flop the next.

But if something is in my heart, I don't change my mind about it daily. For example, at one time in your life, a boyfriend or girlfriend may have turned his or her back on you. Yet your heart was still drawn toward him or her because it's difficult to change your heart. Your mind changes easily, constantly, with every new bit of data. But the heart? It doesn't change so easily. It breaks, but it doesn't change. And so the Lord says, "I want you to

believe in Me with your heart—not simply rationally, but emotionally and intimately."

Romans 10:11

For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

I love preaching, teaching, and sharing the gospel. Why? Because it works. I get to see lives changed, families put back together, and people doing better than they were previously. It *works*. So, too, when you share with people, you never have to think, *I hope it takes. I hope it works for him, her, or them.* It will. Whoever submits to Jesus' lordship will not be ashamed. His Word guarantees it.

Romans 10:12

For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

Jesus is Lord *of* all, and He is Lord *for* all. Jew and Gentile can both be rescued, and they can be brought together into His kingdom, the church.

Romans 10:13–15 (a)

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?

I like preaching! I get to bring glad tidings of good things. You do too. You get to share with people over coffee, on your job, or at school, the Good News that the penalty for every sin they have ever committed has been paid.

Romans 10:15 (b)

As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

A lot of people are unnecessarily depressed and discouraged. The reason? They're not sharing the gospel. Thus, they end up self-absorbed and self-focused. Another translation renders this verse, "How lively are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace." If you want to have beautiful feet, lively feet, happy feet, share the glorious Good News of the gospel.

Romans 10:16

But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

Isaiah correctly prophesied that all those who would hear would not believe (Isaiah 53:1).

Romans 10:17–19 (a)

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people . . .

"In the past, I chose you sovereignly," said the Lord to the nation Israel. "Presently, I've made Myself known to you, but you have rejected Me. So I'm going to provoke you by bringing the Gentiles into the family in order that you might see what you missed when you neglected the opportunity to be saved."

Whether you're talking to Jews or Jehovah's Witnesses, provoke them to jealousy by sharing your freedom with them. You see, because the work of the Cross is complete, all that is left for us to do is to respond and enjoy the Lord. So when you talk to the Jehovah's Witness with his black book, knocking on his quota of doors, say, "Hey, I'm just enjoying the Lord today. How about you?" Or say to the Mormon who is pedaling down the street, "I'm so glad we don't have to wear ties or badges and ride bikes." Truly, when you talk about the finished work of the Cross and your liberty in the Lord, it's like putting a glass of cold water before someone who just ran back-to-back marathons.

Romans 10:19 (b)
. . . and by a foolish nation I will anger you.

"A foolish nation"—that's you and me!

Romans 10:20 (a)
But Isaiah is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not . . .

We weren't walking in the covenants. We weren't studying the Torah. We weren't aware of the adoption. We didn't find God. He found us.

Romans 10:20 (b), 21
. . . I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.

"All day long, I have stretched forth My hands," says the Lord to Israel. "I stretched them out for you on the Cross, and to you even now."



11 As evidenced by the number of lottery tickets sold each day, there's a growing fascination in our culture with gambling. The one thing you do not have to gamble on is God's promise to you. The Lord doesn't say to us, "Take a chance. Come unto Me and maybe you'll hit the jackpot." No, He promises you and me that if we come to Him, we will find rest in our souls, peace in our hearts, and purpose for our lives. That's no gamble. That is certainty. And that is why the apostle Paul wrapped up chapter 8 of Romans with the fabulous promise that all things are working together for good to them that love God. Gang, if you love God at all, everything coming down, everything going on is working together for good. That's not hyperbole. It's reality.

If the situation you're going through, the struggles with which you're wrestling, or the pressure surrounding you seem to indicate otherwise, Romans 9—11 is for you, because in this important insert, Paul uses the

nation Israel as an illustration that God is faithful even when His people are fickle. You can go to the bank on that. You can count on Him. No matter what your situation is, no matter what you're going through, God will be faithful to you.

How can I be sure? Look at God's relationship with Israel . . .

In chapter 9, Paul points to God's past dealings with Israel and highlights the sovereignty of God.

In chapter 10, he deals with God's present dealings with Israel, based upon equity. Whether Jew or Gentle, all are invited to be saved.

Here in chapter 11, we come to God's future dealings with Israel, which show His integrity. That is, God made certain promises to the nation of Israel, which He will fulfill. For even though they've blown it badly, God has promised to see Israel through on the basis of His own integrity and faithfulness.

The same is true for us. He who has begun a good work in us shall complete it (Philippians 1:6). That's His promise. And in it I rest.

Romans 11:1 (a)
I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid.

Students of prophecy, this verse should be noted in your Bible, because many people teach that God is finished with Israel. "The church is now the recipient of the blessings that were promised to Israel and forfeited by Israel when she rejected Jesus Christ," they contend.

Why do they teach this? They do so in order to make their case that the church will go through the Tribulation. You see, the post-Tribulation theological viewpoint makes the church synonymous with Israel, since to explain the fact that, although 144,000 Jews are seen in the Tribulation period, the church is never mentioned. Thus, those who embrace a post-Tribulation viewpoint, always teach that God is through with Israel. Yet Romans 11 deals a deathblow to this mentality, as Paul asks, "Has God cast

away His people? God forbid. No way." And then he points to Exhibit B: himself.

Romans 11:1 (b)

For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

"God isn't through with the Israelites. Look at me. *I'm* saved," said Paul. The point Paul makes here is not the fact that he's saved, but the *way* he was saved. Persecuting the church, coming against Christianity, in an audible and tangible encounter with Jesus Christ, Paul's eyes were opened (Acts 9). So, too, at a time when persecution will be coming down on Israel, when Jerusalem will be surrounded and about to be annihilated in the Tribulation period, what will happen? Suddenly, the Lord will appear, and, like Paul, Israel will realize they erred greatly and will turn to Him and be saved (Zechariah 13).

You see, Paul was simply a shadow of what will happen to the entire nation prophetically. Paul points to himself and says, "Is God through with Israel? Consider me and my conversion as an illustration of what will happen eventually."

Romans 11:2 (a)

God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elijah?

"Look not only at my life personally," said Paul, "but check out history. Remember Elijah?"

After his great victory in taking on four hundred prophets of Baal and calling down fire from heaven, Elijah caved in when Jezebel threatened him. Running for his life, he hid in a cave, depressed. "What are you doing here?" asked God (see 1 Kings 19:13).

By the way, what are you doing in the cave of depression today? "Well, all of the Christians in my community are carnal. All of the Christians at my church are shallow. I alone serve God," we say all too often.

"You think you're so spiritual and everyone else is so carnal? Look down in the valley below you. There are seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal," God said to Elijah (see 1 Kings 19:18).

Paul goes on to use Elijah's story. . . .

Romans 11:2 (b), 3

How he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.

How would you like to have Elijah for a pastor? People say, "Give us a man of passion and power. Give us a man who can pray down fire from heaven. Give us Elijah." But look how Elijah prayed. He made intercession to God *against* Israel. Yet even this man to whom James points as an example of one who prevailed in prayer, an example of one who knew how to pray, didn't influence God in this case at all.

Sometimes you may have someone curse you, pray against you, or come down on you. But their curses and prayers don't move God. If God be for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31). Elijah was unable to pray successfully against the people of Israel, for God had made promises to Israel that still needed to be kept. He had a remnant in Israel Elijah didn't know about.

Next time you, like Elijah, pray God will get someone, remember that there are things about him you don't know. There are qualities in her you are just too blind to see. God sees people in a whole different light than we do. Yes, He's aware of their failings and frailties—but He also sees what He's doing, and the work that has already taken place in their lives. We miss it. We judge people by what we think they should be. God looks at them and sees what they would have been without Him.

Romans 11:4, 5

But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

Just as there was a remnant in Elijah's day, so, too, Paul says, there will always be a remnant in Israel. There always has been, presently is, and always will be a believing minority in Israel. And the believing minority in Israel is wonderfully radical for Jesus Christ.

Romans 11:6

And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

The remnant does not refer to Jewish believers who keep the law. No, the remnant is made up of those who are saved by grace. Now, what's true in Israel is true for you and me as well. If we're saved by grace, let us continue to walk in grace alone. If I start mixing works into the equation, saying, "Lord, I anticipate Your blessing on my life or this church or my family because of how hard I'm working," I will be rewarded on that basis. I am convinced that the Lord is looking for people, families, and churches He can bless who will truly say and believe, "It is only by God's grace that we've been blessed. It is not because of our powerful prayer, our diligent devotions, or our endless energy. It's simply, purely, solely grace."

Romans 11:7

What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

Only the elected ones, the believers, have obtained true spirituality. The rest are blinded. Yes, there is a believing minority in Israel today. But there is also a blinded majority. You can show them verses in black and white concerning the prophecies that were fulfilled in Christ. But they'll just look at you and smile pleasantly.

I recall, during our first trips to Israel, thinking, *Our guides are so close to getting saved. Next year, we'll really get them.* But the next year came, and they were still listening and smiling pleasantly. *They're really getting close now,* I thought. *Wait till the next trip.* Then eventually I began to see

the truth of the Bible. "You're right, Lord," I concluded at last. "The majority are blind."

Romans 11:8

(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.

Is it mean-spirited of God to blind people? No, God only blinds those who want to be blind. You see, God's goodness is so completely irresistible that, were He not to blind their eyes, people who didn't want to know Him or walk with Him would have no other choice. Thus, God would violate man's free will. So, in His love and wisdom, God says to humanity, "If you don't want to see Me, you won't." That is why you can witness until you're blue in the face to someone who's not called—only to realize he just doesn't get it.

"Well, then," you say, "we should only witness to the elect." Right! But who are they? I'm not sure—so I just talk to everyone I possibly can. I am slowly learning, however, that I need to invest my energy and time where the harvest is ripe rather than spin my wheels hour after day after month after year with people who are blinded.

Romans 11:9, 10

And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block, and a recompence unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway.

"If you could just see how Jewish people worship on Shabbat—the lighting of the candles, the wearing of the shawls, the ceremonial cleansing—it gives me goose bumps," some say. Perhaps—but it's all a snare because their trust in their tradition and ritual keeps them from coming to Jesus Christ in the only way any man can come: by faith.

Romans 11:11 (a)

I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall?

After pointing out the lost condition of the blinded majority, Paul asks if they've stumbled in such a way that their fall is permanent. Have they been shoved down never to stand up? Have they been snared by their ritualism, caught up in their traditions and ceremonies in a way that will never allow them to stand as a nation?

Romans 11:11 (b)

God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

"Absolutely not," Paul answers. "Rather, their fall opened the doors for God to work among the Gentiles, which, in turn, makes the Jews jealous of the simplicity of our salvation."

I'll never forget Al Matucci. As a sophomore on the Del Mar High School football team, he was my line coach, the one who put us through the dreaded "meat grinder"—a drill in which you move down a line of eight guys by hitting them with your head. I can recall Russ LeBlanc coming up from the freshman squad to play with us. He went through the meat grinder one day, and you should have heard Matucci. He loved the guy. "Courson," he barked, "look at LeBlanc. Look how he's doing the grinder." Matucci yelled at me, got in my face, put his cleats on my helmet, pushed me into the ground and told me how wonderful Russ was. It made me mad. It provoked me to jealousy so much so that only a couple of days ago, when I met a fellow whose last name was LeBlanc, I could feel the blood rush to my head. Matucci knew what he was doing and got more out of me because he provoked me to jealousy.

And that's what the Lord did. He provoked His people to jealousy by blessing the Gentiles. He hasn't written them off; He hasn't cast them away. Quite the contrary, He said, "What can I do to reach My people? I know. I'll bless the Gentiles."

Romans 11:12

Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?

If the world's been blessed because of the Jews stumbling, how much more will the world be blessed when they stand in belief and submission to Jesus Christ. This will happen in the kingdom age when Jesus comes back to rescue the people of Israel in the face of destruction at the end of the Tribulation.

Romans 11:13, 14

For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.

"I'm talking to you Gentiles," Paul says, "not only to explain God's grace to you, but to exploit God's grace through you—that is, to provoke my countrymen, the Jews, to jealousy."

Romans 11:15

For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?

As seen in the original text, the "casting away" spoken of here is temporary—for when the Jews come into the kingdom, there will be life where there once was death.

Romans 11:16 (a)

For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy . . .

The reference here is to Numbers 15, where the Israelites were instructed to bring the firstfruit, the first portion of even their dough, and give it to the Lord, thereby sanctifying the remainder.

I suggest this as an irrevocable, valuable principle for you, for me, and congregationally: Give the firstfruit of your dough, and the whole lump will

be sanctified. The firstfruit is the Lord's. The first tenth is the Lord's. The tithe is the Lord's. If I don't tithe, it's not that I am not giving, but rather that I am stealing from God (Malachi 3:8). Ever wonder why you bring home wages, yet it seems as though you have holes in your pockets? Ever wonder why you're not being blessed or stabilized? Perhaps it is because you have built your own house, but have neglected God's (Haggai 1:9). And I remind those who cry, "Legalism!" that the tithe was instituted *before* the law (Genesis 14:20).

Romans 11:16 (b)
. . . and if the root be holy, so are the branches.

Because the people of Israel understood that the firstfruit would sanctify the whole lump, Paul used the analogy to refer to the nation itself, saying, that because Israel's "firstfruit"—consisting of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—was sanctified, the entire nation would one day be sanctified as well. Does that mean, as some suggest, that every Jew will be saved because they're linked to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? No. Every person must stand before the Lord and give an account of what they did personally with Jesus Christ. But as a nation, because the firstfruit was sanctified, then the whole nation will be blessed in totality. The promises will be fulfilled.

Romans 11:17, 18
And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them par-takest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.

The tree provides three symbols of Israel: (1) The vine speaks of the spiritual privileges of Israel (Isaiah 5; Matthew 21); (2) the fig tree speaks of the national privileges of Israel (Matthew 24); and (3) the olive tree speaks of the religious privileges of Israel (Hosea 14). The vine speaks of Israel up to the time of Jesus Christ. The fig tree speaks of Israel from the crucifixion of Christ to the present. The olive tree speaks of Israel in the millennial

period. As Gentiles, we were grafted into the olive tree. But because we "partake of its fatness" solely by God's grace, we have no room to boast, or look down upon the Jew.

Romans 11:19–22

Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.

"Learn a lesson from the Jew," Paul says to the Gentile. "Realize that, although you were grafted in by God's grace, you can be cut off if you refuse to respond to His grace."

In John 15, Jesus said, "If the branch abides not in Me, it is cut off and cast into the fire and burned." It is a strong warning with which I do not wish to tamper. How we need to understand both the goodness and the severity of God.

Romans 11:23

And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.

God has a plan for Israel. Although they are "cut off" presently, He is in the grafting mode.

Romans 11:24

For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

As Gentiles, we came from a wild tree—yet God put us in the tree of faith. How much more, then, shall the true olive branches be grafted into their own olive tree?

Romans 11:25

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

When will the fullness of the Gentiles come? In Luke 21, Jesus said Jerusalem would be trodden down until the "times of the Gentiles" are fulfilled. In 1967 Jerusalem was recaptured by Israel. Thus, I believe the "times of the Gentiles" were fulfilled in 1967. We are simply in overtime right now, due to God's goodness and patience. If you got saved after 1967, aren't you glad He took us into overtime?

The times of the Gentiles (Luke 21) deals with the recovering of Jerusalem. But the fullness of the Gentiles is a different issue. What is the fullness of the Gentiles? It's when the full number of Gentiles are saved. In other words, there is a Gentile somewhere on the earth who is the last one to be saved. When that person acknowledges Jesus Christ as Savior, the fullness of the Gentiles will be complete, and at that moment, we'll be raptured. So if you're not yet saved—get saved. You could do us all a great favor because you might be the last one!

The Lord will wait until all one hundred are in the flock. He'll leave the ninety-nine and search out the one, and when that last one is brought into the fold, the fullness of the Gentiles concludes and up we go. The times of the Gentiles deals with Jerusalem; the fullness of the Gentiles deals with the last individual coming into the fold and accepting Jesus Christ—which will usher in the Rapture and the completion of the Gentile Age.

Romans 11:26–28

And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away

their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.

Who is "the election"? When people read Matthew 24, they say, "In the Tribulation God calls the elect from every corner of the earth. Therefore, the church must be in the Tribulation." Wrong. Israel is also called the elect (Isaiah 45:4). The election of God deals both with the church and with the nation of Israel. So in Matthew 24, when God says He's going to bring the elect from all corners, it means He's going to gather His people, the Jewish nation together.

Romans 11:29

For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

Why will God gather Israel? Because His calling is sure. He didn't change His mind about Israel. Nor does He change His mind about you. Even if we are faithless, He remains faithful because He cannot deny His nature (2 Timothy 2:13).

***For topical study of Romans 11:29 entitled "God's Unchanging Call," turn to page* 966.**

Romans 11:30, 31

For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

The best thing you can do when you go to Israel is to love Jesus Christ. Worship Him, and let the Jews see your glorious liberty in the way you're free from your sin. Sin is the big problem for the Jews. They light their candles. They keep Shabbat. They cleanse themselves. But they still sin. They know the Bible. They know the Old Testament says that without the

shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin (Leviticus 17:11). But there's no shedding of blood in Israel today because there's no temple. Consequently, it causes a great deal of consternation within the Jew. But our celebrating the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the mercy of God upon us will perhaps provoke them to be part of the remnant at this time.

Romans 11:32, 33 (a)

For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

Here, Paul's theology turns into a doxology, as he just begins to worship. God is so good. Who can figure out His ways? Truly, they are unsearchable.

Romans 11:33 (b), 34 (a)

How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord?

I like what J. B. Phillips said when he said, "If God was small enough to figure out, He wouldn't be big enough to worship."

When I was a freshman at Biola University, about ten of us guys spent almost all of one night in Phil Bishop's room, pondering the question of whether God can make a rock so big He can't lift it? Back and forth we went, wondering and debating by the hour, our faith growing a little bit weaker with each volley. The next Sunday, I went to Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, and Pastor Chuck was talking about unprofitable questions. He stopped and said, "For example, some people ask, "Can God make a rock so big He can't lift it?"

Oh, boy, *I thought.* Here comes the answer.

But, "That's a stupid question," was Chuck's only reply.

It was. You see, there are things we'll never figure out—election vs. free will, sovereignty vs. responsibility. And although we could spend hours

reading and studying, pondering and arguing, some things we'll never reconcile because our brains are too small. Forget trying to figure it all out. Just marvel at the goodness God has shown you!

Romans 11:34 (b)
Or who hath been his counseller?

Who has been His counselor? I have. "Well, Lord," I pray, "don't forget . . ." and, "by the way . . ."—as if I know what's best for this country, or for this church, or for me personally. Sometimes, I'm amazed at the audacity of my prayers. Prayer is coming to God not to get our will done in heaven, but to get heaven's will done on earth. Prayer is saying, "Lord, what do You want to do in my life, in this church, in our family? What do *You* want to do?"

Romans 11:35
Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?

Not only is God greater than our understanding—He's greater than our giving. You can't outgive God in time, money, love, or any other commodity. He'll never "owe you one."

Romans 11:36
For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

And so we close this section, knowing that God has proven Himself to the Jews. He chose them sovereignly, deals with them equitably, and promises He will not give up on them eternally. Generations before ours studied this section of Romans and thought, *We hear what you say, Paul—but where is Israel today?*

We're so blessed because we don't have to say, "Someday, Israel is going to come together." No, we can say, "We've already seen it happen, Lord. Therefore, we know that things are going to come together for us as well. You've promised they would, and we trust in You."

GOD'S UNCHANGING CALL

A Topical Study of
ROMANS 11:29

On a fall day in the Sierra Nevada mountain range, a man was on an afternoon hike several miles from where he parked his vehicle. The temperature dropped precipitously as ominous clouds began to form. Realizing a storm was approaching, the man headed back to where he left his car. But on the way, he was caught in a whiteout. The hours passed as he wandered in circles—unable to see even two feet ahead of him. He felt his energy giving out and a deadly lethargy creeping in, yet he knew that if he listened to his body and sat down to rest, he would never get up again. After wandering around a few more minutes, however, he finally gave in and decided to rest, knowing he would soon die. But as he sat down, he felt something next to him. He brushed away the snow and found the body of someone who, like him, had been caught in the storm. He felt for a pulse, and finding there was still life flowing through the body, he stood up, and with super-human strength hoisted the body to his shoulders and began to walk. After a mere one hundred feet, he came face to door with a cabin.

A cabin was only one hundred feet away from where the hiker was ready to give up. He didn't see it because of the blizzard, but once he attempted to save someone else and started moving, the cabin materialized before him. Inside, there was a fire in the fireplace and a man cooking dinner. Both of the travelers were warmed, fed, and saved.

Perhaps you feel like giving up, as though you want to sit down and die. The key for you is to look for someone who is worse off than you in order that you may give out the gifts God has given you.

"I agree," some may say, "but you don't know where I've been. Certainly, the call to share in ministry is no longer on my life. I've sinned so badly that surely any gifts the Lord may have given me have been taken from me."

The Problem of Sinfulness

Are you more iniquitous than Samson? You know the story. He fell in love with a lady who had honey lips and a poison heart. "Oh, please, Sammy," she said, "tell me the secret of your strength."

"Well, babe, I'll tell you," Samson answered, "if you put bowstrings of raw leather around me, I'd be as weak as any other man."

So when Samson fell asleep on her lap, Delilah tied him up with leather strings and called for the Philistines, then yelled, "Samson! Wake up! The Philistines are here!" Samson stood up, snapped the bowstrings off, and did the Philistines in. When the dust settled, Delilah looked at Samson and said, "You lied to me."

"Forgive me," apologized Samson. "I'll tell you what: Put new green ropes around me, and I'll be like any other individual."

When Samson fell asleep again, Delilah did just that. "Sammy! The Philistines are here again," she said. Just as he did before, Samson woke up, popped the ropes off as if they were threads, and took on the Philistines.

"You lied to me," sobbed Delilah.

"Okay, Okay," said Samson, "If you weave my hair, (watch out, Samson, you're getting a little close now), I'll be like any other man." He fell asleep, and you know the story. He woke up and his hair was woven.

"Samson, the Philistines are upon you," said Delilah. He woke up, did them in, and trashed Delilah's loom.

You gotta wonder about Samson. What's the deal? Could anyone be that dense? Could anyone be that dumb? But Delilah continued to cry day after day, until finally he said, "Okay, I'll tell you the secret of my strength. If you cut my hair, I'll be like any other man." He fell asleep once more and she sheared his hair.

"Samson! The Philistines are here," she cried.

And Judges 16:20 tells what happened next in one of the saddest verses in Scripture: "And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times, before, and shake myself. And he knew not that the Lord was departed from him." Samson took on the Philistines, but this time they did

him in. They blinded him by poking out his eyes, bound him in brass, and made him grind grain round and round like an ox.

The question cannot help but arise: Was Samson really that stupid? I suggest that Samson knew he was going to get a haircut when he told Delilah his secret.

As a Nazarite, Samson was absolutely forbidden to drink wine, touch dead bodies, or cut his hair (Numbers 6). Yet Samson had taken of wine at the Philistine parties and nothing happened (Judges 14:10). He had touched the dead body of a lion in which there was honey, and, again, nothing happened (Judges 14:9). Thus, I suggest to you that what Samson was really thinking was, *Well, I've already drunk wine; I've already touched a dead body. Nothing's going to happen to me if I cut my hair.* Samson thought he was an exception—but he wasn't. And neither are you.

Maybe you haven't yet felt the repercussion of your rebellion, but know this: If you continue down that road, you'll find some real trouble. Today is the day for you to stop trying the mercy and testing the patience of God.

Back to Samson. His hair began to grow (Judges 16:22). And when he was brought into the temple of Dagon, he prayed, "Lord, use me one more time." After requesting his captors to stand him between two supporting pillars, Samson stretched out his arms, pushed, and literally brought the house down—literally. Three thousand people in the balconies crashed to their deaths, and Scripture records he killed more enemies of Israel in his death than he did in his life (Judges 16:30).

Truly, the gifts and callings of God are without repentance. Maybe you feel your experience has been somewhat "hairy." Know this: If, like Samson, you're willing to die to self and say, "Lord, use me. I'm tired of living for myself, focused on myself, concerned about myself. Just use me"—you, too, will bring the house down because the callings and giftings of God are without repentance.

The Problem of Rebelliousness

"I agree that the Lord could use a sinful person like Samson—for then His grace and mercy are seen all the more clearly," you say. "But me? I have already failed in what He has asked of me. How could He ask me again?"

"Go to Nineveh," God said. Instead, Jonah went to Tarshish—the exact opposite direction. En route, a storm arose and, you know the story. He was swallowed by a great fish. Jonah was in a tight spot so dark he couldn't see the hand in front of his face. No doubt entwined with seaweed and sweating from the internal body temperature of the great fish, it is no wonder Jonah felt like he was in hell (Jonah 2).

Maybe you feel that way. Perhaps God called you to do something for Him. He gifted and equipped you to carry out a specific task for the kingdom, but like Jonah, you chose to go in the opposite direction. And now you find yourself saying, "I don't know where I'm going. Nothing's happening. I can't think straight. No wonder the Lord has given up on me."

Listen. The Lord didn't give up on Jonah. All the time Jonah thought he was going nowhere, in the dark, feeling cramped, getting hot—the whale was moving in the right direction. Why? Because the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

And once Jonah said, "I'm sorry," the whale regurgitated him on to the beach. His hair must have been bleached from the gastric juices. His clothes must have been tattered. He must have looked like an albino. But at last he was in Nineveh—right where God wanted him all along. He walked into the city, smelling like the digestive tract of a whale, saying, "Repent. In forty days judgment will come."

The Ninevites saw him, smelled him, and couldn't believe what they heard about him. Yet, Scripture records that the entire city repented. The greatest revival in world history came by way of a man who previously thought he was going nowhere because of his rebellion. So, too, even though you feel like you don't deserve it—God's not through with you because the calling and gifting of God are without repentance. He doesn't take them back.

The Problem of Cowardice

"I don't know Him," swore Peter. Why?

Because a little girl said to him, "I think I recognize you. Aren't you one of His followers?"(see Matthew 26:71).

"I can't continue on in ministry," Peter said. "I know Jesus is alive—but I've been such a coward. I've failed miserably. I'm going back to fishing" (see John 21:3).

So it was, that after fishing all night with his buddies, he heard a voice calling, "Caught anything, children?"

"Nothing," he yelled back.

It's true. When you feel like you've failed so badly that you just have to go back to fishing—back to the old places, back to the old gang, back to the old stuff—you'll always come up empty-handed.

"Put your net on the right side of the boat," called the voice from the shore. And when Peter and the others did, they pulled in such a haul, it almost sank their boat.

"It's the Lord!" they said at last. And when they reached the shore, what did they find? Fish roasting on the fire. You see, the very thing Peter went to sea to find was in the hand of Jesus all along.

"Do you love Me?" He asked Peter three times (John 21:15–17). He didn't say, "Peter, if you love Me, you're on probation. Prove yourself for three more years—and if you do well, we might allow you to hang out with us again." No, He said, "Peter, if you even like Me, then feed My sheep, and tend my lambs. Go back to where you were before you went on this fishing trip. Get going again."

And that's what the Lord says to you who have felt as though you've chickened out in cowardice, to you who have dabbled in sinfulness, to you who have fled in rebelliousness. "Get going again. Feed My flock. Do what you were doing before your excursion into sin. Get back to it once again."

Gang, only the Lord shows that kind of grace. People don't. Churches often won't. But Jesus does. "Follow Me," He says, "because My gifts and callings are without repentance." Get going and you'll find satisfaction in

your heart, fulfillment in your life, and reward for eternity. Don't waste any more time. Your hair is growing. The whale is moving. The fish aren't biting.

So get going!



12 Almost invariably, Paul began his Epistles dealing with the position we have as believers. That is, he addressed doctrine before he dealt with duty. Sad to say, such is not the case all too often in the church today. The result? A legalistic guilt trip that is very foreign to the nature and message of Jesus Christ. When, however, the concepts of doctrine precede the call to duty, we understand that the work is done, that we are righteous in Christ, and that there is nothing more to do to get close to the Lord, or to enjoy the blessing of the Lord. The result? We find ourselves saying, "Far out! Lord, in light of what You did for me, I want to serve You." And that is why, after spending eleven chapters talking about man's ruined condition and God's rich salvation, in chapter 12, Paul begins to encourage us to start serving Him.

Romans 12:1 (a)
I beseech you therefore, brethren . . .

Whenever you come to the word "therefore," stop and ask, what it's there for. It's as if Paul is saying, "In light of the previous eleven chapters, in light of the previous three hundred and fifteen verses, in light of who you are in Christ and what you enjoy because of Christ, I beseech you."

Romans 12:1 (b)
. . . by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Give yourself to Him completely. Why? Because of what He did for you. Truly, it's reasonable to give yourself to the Lord, to say, "I'm laying my life down for You, Lord, because You gave Yourself for me. You have great things awaiting me. And I don't want to miss any of them now or eternally."

Romans 12:2 (a)

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed . . .

Every one of us is in one of two categories: Either we're conformers or transformers. Right now you're either trying to figure out what she's wearing, what he's driving, or how you can fit in and be cool—or, like J. B. Phillips, you're saying, "I don't care what the world is doing. I'm not going to let it squeeze me into its mold."

Are you a thermometer—adjusting to the temperature of the culture, or are you a thermostat—changing the climate of the culture? If you are a conformer, a thermometer, you're in for perpetual frustration because by the time you take the temperature and figure out what's hot, by the time you change your look, or buy the car, or redo your house—the world will have moved on, leaving you out of style. Truly, this is a great mystery to a lot of Christians. They try to make their ministries relatable by analyzing what the world is doing in order to emulate it. But by the time they figure it out and implement it, the world has moved on. That's why Christians are known for being out of style.

What's the key? Don't be a thermometer. Be a thermostat. Don't be a conformer. Be a transformer. Say, "I'm in a whole different place than you are, world. I'm living for eternity. I'm preparing for heaven."

The word translated "transformed" is the word for "metamorphosis." Interestingly, it is used two other times in the New Testament—one to describe what happened to Jesus Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration when He began to shine (Matthew 17:2); and once to describe what happens to us when we see the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18).

How are we transformed? How are we metamorphosed?

Read on.

Romans 12:2 (b)

. . . by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Just as Jesus was metamorphosed, so, too, you can be changed if you keep your mind on Him. How do we keep our minds on Him? By keeping in

the Word. “Lo, I have come in the volume of the book,” Scripture declares concerning Jesus (see Psalm 40:7 and Hebrews 10:7).

You see, I can give my body to Him—that’s a real key. But it’s incomplete in and of itself unless I keep my mind on Him—and that happens through a diligent contemplation of the “volume of the book,” the Word. However, you can read your Bible every morning for devotions; you can study it with us every Wednesday night; you can know the Word backward and forward and not go through a metamorphosis. Indeed, Paul would say that, in and of itself, the letter kills (2 Corinthians 3:6). If you read the Scriptures just to get insights into theology, or practical tips about parenting or relationships, metamorphosis will not take place because transformation occurs only when we study the Word not for the sake of the Word, but in order to touch the Lord.

“In the beginning,” John wrote, “was the Word . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1, 14). It’s the Incarnation—the Word becoming flesh, becoming personable, touchable, and relatable—that will transform you. If you approach the Word strictly from an intellectual, academic, theological perspective, you might gain a point or two, but you’ll not be changed.

At the stereotypical American breakfast table, the husband reads the newspaper. Across from him sits his wife, waiting to talk with him. But the man is interested in the impartation of information, not the intimacy of communication—and I suggest the same thing happens all too often in the devotional life of believers. They read the information in the Word but completely neglect communication with the Word made flesh. I am concerned about the great number of people who have a devotional life that is basically informational. Only in the last couple of generations has this happened, because throughout the vast majority of Christian history, Bible study was neither academic nor theological. It was oral. It was relational as people heard the Word being read. Communication transpired as the Living Word was fleshed out in real life.

Those who say, “Lord, I’m reading Your Word in order to hear Your voice” are those who leave their time of devotion metamorphosed—soaring like a butterflies.

***For topical study of Romans 12:1–2 entitled "God's Will: So Simple!" turn to page* 975.**

Romans 12:3

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

"Be careful," warns Paul. "As you discover and live in the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God, be sober. Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought."

Fifteen years old, and dressed in suit and tie, I headed for the San Jose Rescue Mission, twelve-page sermon on the eschatological significance of Zacchaeus in the sycamore tree in hand. At about page six, I could hear the shuffling of feet, see the nodding of heads, and feel the rumbling of stomachs, for, as I later discovered, only those who listened to the sermon could partake of the meal. By page seven, I knew I was in trouble. On page eight, as I was perspiring and turning red in embarrassment, one gentleman in the back row called out, "Hey, you overgrown tomato—sit down!" I sat down and lost my place before even making it to page nine.

"Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought," warned Paul. If you do, the Lord has ways of bringing you back down to earth! God can use anyone to do His work. If you don't think so, ask Balaam (Numbers 22:28)!

Romans 12:4, 5

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

Brother Hammer was appointed to preside over the Master Tool Convention. Brother Screwdriver objected, saying, "Brother Hammer, you're too noisy to preside over this meeting. You're always driving home your point, always nailing people. I call for your resignation immediately."

Brother Hammer responded, "Well, what about you, Brother Screwdriver? All you ever do is spin around in circles."

"That may be true," said Brother Screwdriver, "but at least I'm not like Brother Plane. His work is so surface, so shallow. What right does he have to even be here?"

"If you're going to kick me out," protested Brother Plane, "what about Brother Ruler? He thinks he's always right, measuring everyone else by his standard."

"Well, if you're going to come down on me," argued Brother Ruler, "what about Brother Pliers? He needs to get a grip!"

"At least I don't rub people the wrong way," said Brother Pliers, staring at Brother Sandpaper.

Just then, the Master Craftsman walked in. And, as He used each tool at the perfect time, He created an object of great beauty.

A lot of times, we look at the gifts of other people and the way God made them, and we think, *She's shallow,* or, *He rubs me the wrong way,* or, *They're too noisy*—until we finally come to the point where we understand that there are many members in the body—each one with a part to play, a function to fulfill.

Romans 12:6 (a)

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us . . .

This is the only time in Scripture where spiritual gifts are spoken of directly. "Wait a minute," you say. "What about 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, and Ephesians 4?"

Look at those passages, and you will see that the word "gifts" is in italics, meaning it was not present in the original Greek. You see, the gifts

listed here in Romans are the motivational gifts, the manifestations of which are listed in 1 Corinthians 12, and the ministries of which are found in Ephesians 4. That is why you will see that the list of gifts here in Romans 12 contains the motivational gift that God, by His grace, has given every believer. As we become open to the Spirit, He adds the manifestations of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12), as well as ministry in the Spirit (Ephesians 4).

Romans 12:6 (b)
. . . whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.

As Paul lists the motivational gifts—the tools in the box of the Master Carpenter—he divides them into two groups: those that expound the Word (verses 6–8a), and those that expand the work (8b). The first motivational gift Paul discusses is prophecy. Prophecy means more than foretelling. It primarily means "forth-telling"—expounding the Word, declaring truth. The Word burns within the heart of those with the gift of prophecy. They know what should be shared and feel a pressing need to speak out.

Romans 12:7 (a)
Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering . . .

Prophecy declares truth. Ministry depicts truth. Jesus modeled this over and over again when He would first teach and then touch. He would teach truth and then touch people as an illustration of what He taught. Ministering simply means serving. I think of Dorcas in Acts 9. When she died, the early church went into an upheaval. Why was she so loved? Because she was a minister in the truest sense of the word. Others declared truth and warmed people's hearts; Dorcas depicted truth by sewing people's garments and warming their bodies.

Romans 12:7 (b)
. . . or he that teacheth, on teaching.

A teacher defines truth. A prophet might share sporadically; but a teacher shares systematically. "You've heard it said of old, you're not to commit adultery. But let Me define what that means," said Jesus (see Matthew 5:27, 28). And people marveled, for He taught with authority.

Romans 12:8 (a)
Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation . . .

Exhortation develops truth. The one with the gift of exhortation is often one who gives a kick in the proverbial seat of the pants. "O, ye of little faith," Jesus said when His disciples were fearful in the storm" (Matthew 8:26).

How I need brothers and sisters who come by me with a word of exhortation. Yes, sometimes they irritate me—but they're needed very definitely!

Romans 12:8 (b)
. . . he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity . . .

Giving expands the work. Giving with simplicity means giving with no strings attached. "I want to know where this money's going," some demand. "I'll only give if it goes here, or for that, or if you agree to do this." Don't give that way. Rather, give with simplicity.

"Simplicity" can also be translated "liberality." Maybe God has blessed you with the gift of giving. If so, exercise it with generosity!

Romans 12:8 (c)
. . . he that ruleth, with diligence . . .

The winner of the "Best Use of Duct Tape" contest used duct tape to patch the wing of the plane he flew from Guatemala to Honduras. There are people in the body like that. They know how to patch things up. They know how to make things fly. They have a feeling for how things should happen. Theirs is the gift of ruling, of governing, of doing all things decently and in order—exemplified beautifully in the life of Jesus and seen practically when

He instructed His disciples to make the multitude sit in groups of fifty in order that He could feed them (Luke 9:14).

Romans 12:8 (d)

. . . he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

If you're expanding the work by giving, do it generously and with simplicity. If you're expanding the work by ruling, do it diligently. If you're expanding the work by showing mercy, do it cheerfully. Those who care for people in the hospital, those who sympathize with those going through a traumatic relational experience, or those who cry with those experiencing the heartbreak of divorce have the gift of mercy. If you wish to study these things further, look at Jesus. See how He ministered mercy; how He ruled diligently; how He gave sacrificially; how He moved in prophecy. Study Jesus, and you'll find the perfect example of how these gifts are to function in His body of believers.

I believe the Lord is looking for an army of sharpshooters who will zero in on their target and say, "This is where I function," as they make the development and exercise of their spiritual gift their priority and passion. How can you know which gift is yours? I believe the answer is amazingly simple: If you suddenly became pastor of Applegate Christian Fellowship, what changes would you make?

If you would grab the microphone and call the fellowship to activism, if you would try to get folks fired up to share the gospel, if you have a burden to speak forth God's Word to a hurting society, chances are yours is the gift of prophecy.

If, on the other hand, you would divide the fellowship into small groups in order that members of the body might serve one another and meet one another's spiritual needs, yours is most likely the gift of ministry.

If, given the opportunity, you would lead the fellowship in a study of Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic, of homiletics and hermeneutics, of eschatology and ecclesiology, yours is probably the gift of teaching.

If your primary concern would be funding worthy causes for needy people, if your energy would be spent organizing bake sales and car washes, yours is the gift of giving.

If your heart would go out to hurting people, if your passion lies in hospice ministry, jail evangelism, or crisis hotlines, yours is the gift of mercy.

If, however, the first thing you would do would be to head for the church office and straighten things out in order that the fellowship would operate more smoothly and effectively, yours is the gift of ruling.

What would you change, what would you do if you were in charge? Your answer will give you a good clue as to what your spiritual gift is. The problem is, I have a tendency to analyze others in light of my gift, wondering why they're not functioning as I do. Great is the day and mature will be the church family who will simply say, "She's different," or, "He's different"—and that's as it should be because they're functioning the way God made them. That's the point Paul is making here. Find your gift, develop it, and let others function in theirs.

Romans 12:9 (a)
Let love be without dissimulation.

Find God's will by giving your life to Him and by keeping your mind on Him. Don't think too highly of yourself. Just flow in the gifting God has given you. And above all, and in all, let love be without dissimulation or hypocrisy.

Romans 12:9 (b)
Abhor that which is evil . . .

The Greek rendering of this verse is: Treat evil as you would treat a cow pie. How many of you say, "My kids might get involved with cow pies, so I'm going to keep some cow pies in my room in order that I can study them. It's my calling as a parent"? That's absurd. Yet it's exactly what people are

saying when they say, “I gotta know what’s happening on the screen or in the magazines. Gotta keep current.”

No you don’t. Treat evil like a cow pie. It’s abhorrent, repulsive, disgusting. Later on, Paul would write, “Concerning evil, you should be simple, or naive” (Romans 16:19).

Romans 12:9 (c)–11

. . . cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.

Twenty years ago, a missionary candidate was summoned to appear before a certain examiner. A veteran missionary himself, the examiner instructed the young man to come to his house at 5:00 A.M. the next Monday morning. So the young man got up at 4:00 and was at the examiner’s house by 4:55. “Wait for me,” the examiner said as he ushered the candidate into his study. Three hours later, the examiner returned and said, “How do you spell baker?”

“B-a-k-e-r,” answered the young man.

“How’s your math?” asked the examiner. “What’s two plus two?”

“Four,” answered the young man.

Satisfied, the examiner said, “I’m going to recommend you for service in our mission.” And the young candidate left the interview perplexed.

That evening, the examiner met with his mission board and said, “I highly recommend this young man for ministry. I tested him on self-denial. He rolled out of bed and showed up at 4:55 A.M. Patience? I made him wait three hours in my study, and he didn’t say a word. Temper? I asked him to spell baker, and he didn’t become agitated. Humility? I asked him what two plus two was and he answered readily. This man will make a great missionary.”

Folks, you never know what tests the Master Examiner is putting before you. We’re interested in credentials, but the Lord is interested in character. “Whatever you do, be fervent,” said Paul. Be fervent for the Lord however

simple your service might be or how insignificant it might seem—for in so doing, you just may be qualifying yourself for even greater service.

Romans 12:12

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.

Verse 12 is a beautiful garden of growth, listing as it does the three sweet peas of praise, patience, and prayer. Plant these seeds in your heart, and you'll do well throughout your walk.

Romans 12:13

Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

What does "hospitality" mean? It means to be a "hospital" for the hurting, lonely people who come your way.

Entertaining says, "I want to impress you with my home, my decorating, my cooking."

Hospitality says, "This house is simply a gift from my Master. I use it however and whenever He desires."

Entertaining needs to impress.

Hospitality aims to serve.

Entertaining puts things before people, saying, "As soon as I get the house clean, I'll start inviting people over."

Hospitality puts people first, saying, "No furniture? No problem. We'll picnic on the floor."

Entertaining subtly declares, "This house is mine—*an expression of* my *personality, and* my *ingenuity."*

Hospitality whispers, "What's mine is yours. Enjoy it anytime."

Truly, hospitality is practical Christianity.

Romans 12:14, 15 (a)

Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice . . .

Sometimes it's harder to rejoice with those who are rejoicing than it is to weep with those who are weeping. "How come she lucked out? How come they got that? Why does he get the big breaks?" we wonder all too often.

Romans 12:15 (b)
. . . and weep with them that weep.

Paul doesn't say, "Preach to those who are weeping." No, he says, "Weep with those who are weeping." Concerning those who are weeping, we don't have to preach at them or speak something profound to them. We just need to weep with them without questioning God's goodness in the process.

Romans 12:16 (a)
Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.

Don't try to climb any social, intellectual, or spiritual ladders.

Romans 12:16 (b)–18
Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Whenever you can, to the degree you possibly can, live peaceably with all men.

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

Vengeance is the Lord's department. Man's responsibility is to love.

Romans 12:20, 21

Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

In Paul's day, when a fire went out in a home, it was difficult to reignite it. Therefore, if someone's fire went out, the women would carry live coals in clay jars upon their heads to share with the person who had no fire. Thus, the implication here was not of burning one's enemy, but of warming him in order to ultimately win him to the kingdom.

GOD'S WILL: SO SIMPLE!

A Topical Study of ROMANS 12:1, 2

I suppose that, as a pastor, the question asked of me more often than any other is: How do I find God's will for my life? This question is based upon the presupposition that God's will is something hidden, lost, or hard to determine. But, gang, nothing could be further from the truth. God's will is not something that has to be found. It isn't lost. It's not hidden. It shouldn't be tough to discern. In our text today, in only two verses, Paul tells you and me exactly what to do to discover God's plan for our life. It's profoundly simple and incredibly wonderful.

The word translated "prove" in Romans 12:2 is a word not of academics, but of intimacy—as in Genesis 4:1, where Scripture records that Adam "knew" Eve. This doesn't mean Adam knew about Eve intellectually. It means he knew her intimately. And this is what Paul is declaring to us. You can know God's will intimately. You can know it not only intellectually but experientially if you do a couple of things . . .

Give Yourself to the Lord

> *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*
>
> Romans 12:1

"Well, that disqualifies me," you say. "My body is anything but holy. Therefore, how can it be acceptable?"

This is where a lot of people get discouraged unnecessarily. They say, "Until my body is holy and acceptable, I really can't offer it as a living sacrifice." But that's because they failed to read the most important word of the verse: "I beseech you, *therefore,* brethren."

In this case, "therefore" is in reference to the first eleven chapters, wherein Paul makes it clear that when you became a Christian, God placed you in His Son, making you at once holy and acceptable in His sight. *Therefore,* the first step to finding God's will is to present your body a living sacrifice to Him.

What does it mean to be a living sacrifice? It means to say, "Lord, I'm Yours. I love You more than anything else I might pursue." The problem, however, with a living sacrifice, unlike a dead one, is that a living sacrifice has a tendency to climb off the altar regularly. I squirm and escape not infrequently. Thus, I need to continually return and say, "Oh, Lord, on this new and beautiful day, I again give You my life. I'm tired of trying to figure out where I should go or what I should be. I've messed up time and time again. I've gone my own way and done my own thing—and it's been disastrous. I give up, Lord. Take my life."

That's the first step to experiencing God's will.

Be Transformed

> *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*
>
> Romans 12:2

The word translated "transformed" is *metamorphoo,* from which we get our word "metamorphosis." *Metamorphoo* also appears in Matthew 17, when it is used to describe the change that took place in the appearance of Jesus as He began to glow on the Mount of Transfiguration. When was Jesus metamorphosed, or transformed? When He spoke to Moses and Elijah about His death (Luke 9:31), when He spoke about laying down His life sacrificially.

How do you become transformed? Become a living sacrifice to the Lord and keep your mind on the Lord. "Don't be conformed to the world's thinking," warns Paul. "Instead, give your mind to God, and you will know His good, acceptable, and perfect will."

"That sounds good," you say. "But how does it work for me practically, in my situation presently?"

When the disciples were wondering what was going on, what was coming down, what was next, Jesus looked at them and said, "Let not your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many mansions. I'm going to prepare a place for you—that where I am, there you may be also. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come and receive you unto Myself. And where I go you know, and the way you know" (John 14:1–4).

Thomas said, "Lord, we don't know where You're going, and we don't know the way" (see John 14:5).

And Jesus said to those confused, distressed, disturbed disciples on the night before His crucifixion "I am the Way. You know the way. It's Me. It's not information I give to you; it's who I'll be for you" (see John 14:6).

If my granddaughter wanted to know the way to her Sunday-school class, I could say, "Listen, go up those stairs; turn left; go down the ramp; turn right; go up the walkway; and after about forty feet, you'll see another set of stairs. Go up the stairs and down the hall to the third door. After you get inside, take a left; go about fifteen more feet —and you're there." Or—I could pick her up, put her on my shoulders and carry her to her class.

What a great day it is when, at last, the light goes on, the bells ring in our spiritual understanding, and we realize that we don't need to get directions or follow instructions from the Lord—we just need to climb on His shoulders and let Him be the Way.

As you let Jesus be the Way, Colossians 3:15 says His peace will rule in your heart. The word translated "rule" is a Greek word that speaks of a sports official, so Christ's peace will act as an umpire in your heart—calling every thought or action "safe" or "out." Not only that, but His will will be written in your heart (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 10:16). No longer will you struggle with or wonder about what you should do. With His will imprinted upon your heart, you can follow your heart's desire and know that it is God's will for you.

- "My heart's desire is to go to Mexico and work in a mission."

  Great! That is God's will for you.
- *"My heart's desire is to go windsurfing."*

  Go for it!
- "My heart's desire is to ask her to marry me."

  Do it!
- *"B-b-but what if it's not God's will?"*

  If it's not God's will, she'll tell you to pack sand, because He said, "I will open doors no man can close, and close doors no man can open (see Revelation 3:7).

"Delight thyself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart," wrote the psalmist (see Psalm 37:4). To "delight thyself in the Lord" simply means to have a good time with Him. Give your body to Him; keep your mind on Him; climb on His shoulders and enjoy the ride. Suddenly, you'll have desires in your heart that will constitute His will for your life.

You see, I am simple enough to believe that if I just delight in Him, He will change my desires to conform to His perfect plan. I just hang on to Him and let Him work within me the desires He sees would be His best will for my life. Look again at Psalm 37. The first words of verses 1–7 spell it out perfectly: *Fret not* (verse 1), *for* (verse 2), *trust* (verse 3), *delight* (verse 4), *commit* (verse 5), *and* (verse 6) *rest* (verse 7).

Stay on the shoulders of the One who said, "I am the Way. It's not a plan I give to you. It's who I am for you. I am God's will. Cling to Me. Give yourself to Me. Keep your mind on Me—and you'll end up right where you're supposed to be vocationally, relationally, in every way. I am the Way. You'll see."



13 After discussing the believer's function in the body of Christ in chapter 12, Paul opens chapter 13 addressing the believer's function in society. What role do we as believers have in the society in which we live? Chapter 13 is devoted to this question, telling us how we, as believers, are to be engaged in our culture.

Scripturally, we see three divinely ordained institutions: the family (Genesis 2), government (Genesis 9), and the church (Acts 2). Those are the only three divinely inspired institutions. There are no others. And here in chapter 13, Paul speaks with specific regard to the second one—namely, government and authority.

Romans 13:1

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

"Paul can't mean those guys in Washington D.C. Certainly we're not to be subject to them. They're just fiddling around," we complain.

Wait a minute. Who was on the throne when Paul wrote this epistle? The best known "fiddler" of history: Caesar Nero. We are told through church history that, after sentencing the apostle Paul to death, Nero went on a rampage, persecuting Christians, burning them in his garden, feeding them to the lions. Caesar Nero was a diabolic, terrible, brutal, evil individual. Yet here, even while Nero was in power, Paul says believers were to be subject to the higher powers, for there is no person in power but that God has ordained him to be there.

You might not respect the person who is in power, but you must realize the Lord has ordained him or her to be there—even if it's a person as brutal as Caesar Nero—or Adolf Hitler.

"Come on," you protest, "God would never ordain Adolf Hitler to come into power."

Really? What does history tell us? The nation of Israel would never have been born had not world sentiment, for a short period of time, been sympathetic toward the Jew because of Hitler's atrocities. As World War II came to a close, newsreels showed the bodies of Jews being bulldozed into ditches, the mounds of glasses, false teeth, and shoes producing horror in the heart of humanity. And so it was, that, although it went right down to the wire, the League of Nations voted in favor of the establishment of the nation of Israel.

Truly, this verse changes my perspective on everything that happens. "Lord," I can say, "You know where we are on the prophetic calendar. You know exactly what time it is. And You're lining up certain events that will fulfill prophecy, usher in Your coming, and establish Your kingdom. I might not like what's happening, yet I realize ultimately that You are in control and that every power in place has been ordained by You. Therefore, I acknowledge that it's all part of Your plan."

That's why I don't lose sleep over the political situation—for while I pray for those in authority over us, and while I want to see salt and light have an effect in this society, I know God says all power is ordained by Him.

As believers, we know that all of society must fall apart. Jesus said it is inevitable (Matthew 24:37). People call such thinking a cop-out. No, it isn't. If I promised you that tomorrow at this time your house would be caught up in a tornado, carried to the Pacific Ocean, and dumped between here and

Hawaii, how many of you would say, “If that’s the case, I better go home and start painting” or, “Wow, I better vacuum,” or “I better finish weeding”? I don’t think any of us would do that. No, we would say, “If that’s the case, forget mowing and painting, there’s people to get out of the house.” And you would have an entirely different set of priorities.

Why, then, is so much energy expended trying to straighten up this country politically if it’s going to get blown away? I challenge you to at least consider where in the New Testament you hear an exhortation or see an example of political mobilization in the church.

If political activism is not the ultimate answer, what should we be about? Getting folks engaged in Jesus and excited about the Lord. We’re to be ministers of reconciliation rather than ministers of confrontation. I’m not asking you to agree with me. I’m saying search the Scriptures. Study the life of Jesus from beginning to end. At a time when there was corruption governmentally, abortions taking place continually, and degradation morally, what was Jesus about?

Read the Epistles. What did Paul encourage us to do? Study Acts. What was the focus of the early Christians? It was not the goal of Jesus, Paul, or the early church to change their world temporally. No, their focus was on the kingdom eternally.

Romans 13:2

Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

Does this verse mean we’re never to disobey those who are in authority over us? No. In Acts 5, the Pharisees forbade Peter to speak any more of Jesus. “We ought to obey God rather than man,” Peter replied. But the issue was spiritual—not political.

So, yes, there is a time when we are not to be subject to those in authority. Yes, wives, there is a time when you are not to be submitted to your husband. Yes, children, there is a time to disobey your parents. When? When they tell you to do something that is directly contrary to the written Word of

God. But make sure that if you follow such a course, you have Scripture in context and rightly divided—not just a feeling—to back you up.

Romans 13:3, 4 (a)

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good.

Just as God established the power, God established the officers who enforce the power. They are ministers of God. Therefore, if you're doing good, you don't need to be afraid.

Driving a tad faster than I should have been, I saw red lights in my rearview mirror. After pulling me over, the officer asked for my license, and said, "Aren't you a minister?"

"Yeah," I said. "And, according to Romans 13, you are too."

So next time you get pulled over, thank that minister—even if, like me, you get a ticket—for, according to Paul, he is truly there for our good.

Romans 13:4 (b)

But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

While law enforcement officers are ministers of God for good for the protection of good men, they are also ministers of God for vengeance against those who do evil. Understand this, folks: The foundation of the institution of government in Genesis 9 is singularly based upon capital punishment.

"That's the law," you might protest. "We're under grace."

Wait a minute. The establishment of government took place *before* the law was given. In Genesis 9:6, God gave one word concerning the way government is to function. That is, it is to function as a deterrent to evil through the implementation of capital punishment. Although that might sound

harsh to you, the fact remains that, after watching mankind live through the evil, debauchery, violence, promiscuity, and wickedness of the days before Noah, God said, "From this time on, I'm going to let mankind share the responsibility to police and govern himself."

But man has failed in this because we have not taken seriously the mandate of the Father when He said, "If a man kills, his life is to be taken." This is the singular governmental injunction He gave. He didn't talk about capitalism vs. socialism, about the Parliamentary system vs. Republicanism. He simply said the one thing He wanted us to know was that there must be the taking of life from those who snuff out the life of another. When this is embraced, understood, and carried out, it has an effect on the entire legal and judicial system of a nation. When it breaks down, frustration and anarchy are imminent.

True government exists for the deterrent of evil through the reality of capital punishment. Once a nation or a society begins to chuck capital punishment, the whole system begins to unravel. Case in point? The U.S.A.

If you are following geopolitical trends, you know Islam is sweeping the world. Look at a country like England, and you will see Islam is growing at a phenomenal rate. Analysts say there is one fundamental reason for this: Tired of crime and lawlessness, people know Islam deals with crime swiftly and with finality. Under Islamic justice, if a man is caught raping a woman, he is castrated immediately. If a person is found shoplifting, he loses his hand. Whoever kills a man dies without appeal. Whether you agree with this is not the issue. The fact is, people around the world are turning to a religion that promises order, structure, and protection because government seems increasingly unable to do so.

Romans 13:5

Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

We are to submit to those in power not only for safety's sake but also for the sake of conscience. It's true: A clean conscience makes a soft pillow.

Romans 13:6 (a)

For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers . . .

It might come as a big surprise to hear that IRS agents are actually ministers of God. "We're not paying our taxes," some say. "We're part of the God, Gun, and Gold movement." Their reason? "Tax money goes to all kinds of ungodly stuff." And money sent to Caesar Nero was going to establish Christian schools and hospitals? Listen, gang, tax money in Paul's day was used for every kind of evil beyond our imagination. Yet Paul said, "Pay your taxes,"—just as Jesus did before him (Matthew 22:21).

Romans 13:6 (b)

. . . attending continually upon this very thing.

And how they do attend continually! The IRS has a conscience fund wherein it receives fifty to one hundred million dollars annually from people who feel bad about cheating on their taxes in years past. One note said, "Dear Sirs, enclosed are one hundred seventy-five dollars that I owed from taxes ten years ago. P.S. If my conscience is still bothering me, I'll send the rest later."

Romans 13:7

Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

"Tribute" speaks of that which was paid annually, comparable to our income tax. "Custom" speaks of that which was paid upon purchases, comparable to a sales tax. Thus, those to whom Paul wrote were perhaps financially stretched in the same way many of us are.

Romans 13:8 (a)

Owe no man any thing . . .

What does it mean to "owe no man anything"? Look at the context. I have a question for those who use this verse to say Christians shouldn't have bank loans. Although I wouldn't argue the point, I do question it because in Matthew 25 and Luke 19, when Jesus was talking about the talents, He said the man who buried them should have put them in the bank to draw interest.

Thus, rather than condemning the banking system, Jesus was condoning it. And, because the entire banking system is built upon loans, I personally disagree with those who propound you should never have a mortgage, car payment, or loan of any sort. I don't think that's what's being said. I think Paul is specifically talking about paying what you owe the government.

Romans 13:8 (b)

. . . but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

Love must be the key because without it, if I'm saying, "Okay, I gotta obey these laws, pay these taxes, and submit to those in authority," I will find myself becoming small and bitter, cynical and cantankerous, confrontational and argumentative. As interesting and entertaining as commentators like Rush Limbaugh are, if you listen to very much of them, you will find your love diminishing. Be careful.

Romans 13:9

For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

All of the laws God has given—six hundred thirteen according to the Rabbis—are summed up in a singular word: love. "Vengeance is mine," saith the Lord (Romans 12:19). "I know what I'm doing. Therefore, let Me be the

Lord while you minister reconciliation, telling people what I've done for them and the glory awaiting them. You love people and leave the judging to Me." In the midst of this dissertation on government, Paul's reminder to love puts everything in perspective.

Romans 13:10, 11 (a)

Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep . . .

"If we allow the people in power presently to remain in their positions, if we don't overthrow the government and take matters into our own hands, society is sure to crumble," some might insist.

Paul answers by saying, "Wake up."

Wake up to what? To political mobilization? No. Read on.

Romans 13:11 (b)

. . . for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

Wake up to the fact that your salvation is nearer than when you first believed. You who are inclined toward theology, make a note of this verse because through it we understand that salvation unfolds progressively. You see, while it is true that the moment we open our hearts to Jesus Christ, our salvation is complete internally, when Jesus comes back, there will be salvation externally. Equity and justice will reign. Complete salvation—individually and corporately, internally and externally—is drawing near.

Romans 13:12 (a)

The night is far spent, the day is at hand . . .

Indeed, the night is far spent. We live in dark days. But we're headed for sunrise—the coming of the risen Son!

Romans 13:12 (b), 13

. . . let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

In light of the fact that the kingdom is coming, what should we do? First, wake up (verse 11). Second, dress up (verse 12). That is, put on the armor not of condemnation, not of judgment, but of light. Third, clean up (verse 13). That is, put away drunkenness, envy, and everything else that pollutes and defiles.

Romans 13:14

But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

Fourth, in light of the coming kingdom, we should grow up. That is, we are not to make any provision to fulfill the lusts of the flesh. If you struggle with alcohol and say, "I'm not going to drink, I'm just going to take the table closest to the bar"—you're making provision for the flesh. You'll get sucked back in. You'll go down. You're only kidding yourself. Make no provision for the flesh—and take hope. The day of His coming is nearer than when you first believed. Soon we'll be out of here!



14 Here, in the final five chapters of the Book of Romans, Professor Paul takes us to class: Applied Christianity 101. Chapter 12 deals primarily with functioning in the body. Chapter 13 deals with functioning in society. As we are about to see, chapter 14 deals with functioning in controversy, particularly controversies within the church family.

You see, even here in Rome, the early church had already engaged in that most favorite of Christian indoor sports: trying to change one another. Truly, there is something within each of us that wants to change those around us. Why is this so? What is it within me that wants others to see everything the way I do, to conform to my opinions and perspectives? I suggest two possibilities. . . .

The first is depravity. Depravity began the moment Lucifer wanted to be like God (Isaiah 14:14). He passed on this desire to Eve by suggesting that if she ate of the forbidden fruit, her eyes would be opened and she would be like God (Genesis 3:5). There's something diabolically depraved within us that still wants to be godlike, which desires to create people in our own image and get them to see things our way.

The second possibility is misery. I want people to see things my way because a lot of times I'm miserable. And if I'm miserable, I want others to be miserable too. So rather than saying, "Let the Lord guide you. Let Him work in you. Let Him give direction to you," I say, "If I can't do a certain thing, I'm going to make sure you can't either." That is why oftentimes you can tell the difficulties a preacher has personally by what he preaches against most vehemently.

Be it depravity, misery, or some other reason entirely, there is unquestionably a tendency in people to want others to conform to their image. Thus, Christians are forever engaged in controversy—which brings us to Romans 14. . . .

Romans 14:1

Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.

The phrase "but not to doubtful disputations" means "without passing judgment on disputable material." In other words, Paul's injunction is to receive those who are weak in the faith. Embrace and enjoy them without passing judgment on the areas in which you don't see eye to eye. Who is the one who is weak in faith? The answer, to me, is shocking. . . .

Romans 14:2, 3 (a)

For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth.

The weak brother, as we are going to see as the chapter unfolds, is the one who seems to be the most morally upright, the one who is most rigid in discipline, the one who appears to have the highest standards of conduct.

In Paul's day, the controversy in the church at Rome centered on meat. Those who didn't eat meat were uptight and upset with those who did because the meat had been sacrificed to idols before being sold in open-air markets at a discount.

"How can you eat meat that has been offered to idols?" asked the vegetarian believers.

"It's a bargain," answered the carnivores.

Perhaps the controversy arose because Jewish legalists were trying to burden Gentile believers with Jewish dietary laws. Whatever the reason, the vegetarians looked down their noses on the meat-eaters. But in reality, the vegetarians were the weaker brothers.

Amazing. The more legalistic and uptight a man is, the weaker he is. It's not those who walk around as though they've been baptized in lemon juice, looking down their noses and reciting a list of do's and don'ts that are the stronger Christians. Quite the opposite. "Receive the weaker brother," Paul says. "Receive the one who is religious, the one who's uptight, the one who's always looking down on others. Don't engage in controversy with him—just understand he's a weaker brother."

Romans 14:3 (b)

. . . for God hath received him.

Do you realize God doesn't care about a lot of things we get upset about, fight over, and debate? The Father's agenda is a whole lot different from ours. Sad to say, the things that shock us most are insignificant when compared to the bigger issues of eternity. We become so engaged in miniscule rules and regulations, political discussions and theological hairsplitting that we miss the big picture entirely. I'm convinced God doesn't care about most of the things we discuss endlessly. He's concerned about people being saved, brought into the kingdom, walking in the Spirit, and growing in grace.

Romans 14:4

Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

I like that! God makes to stand the person I can't understand. The person I want to put down, God Himself holds up. Others may think, *You're not going to make it.* But what they fail to factor in is God's grace and mercy and His faithfulness to see us through.



***For topical study of Romans 14:4 entitled "Judge Not—For You Are Not Judged," turn to page* 985.**

Romans 14:5 (a)

One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike.

This controversy was not only about diets but also about days. There were some who suggested the proper day to worship was on Saturday, the traditional Sabbath. Others said worship should take place on the first day of the week—Resurrection day, Sunday. This debate still rages today, as many Seventh Day Adventists who embrace the older traditions believe that those who worship on Sunday are in danger of losing their salvation.

Romans 14:5 (b)

Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

Let every man be persuaded in his own mind. You might have a conviction or persuasion. Terrific. But you needn't force that conviction on anyone else. Rather, let us see you live it through and work it out. Let us observe the benefits and the fruit. Then we will come and ask you counsel. Let every man be persuaded in his own mind concerning what he should do without laying a burden on anyone else in controversial matters.

The vast majority of the issues that cause division in the body are those that are not clearly spelled out in the Word. They're opinions. They're perspectives. They can be solid and excellent. But we must always be mindful to give our brothers and sisters great latitude and to allow them the freedom to be persuaded in their *own* minds.

Romans 14:6 (a)

He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it.

When Applegate Christian Fellowship used to meet in the Western Auto building, we held one of our Sunday morning services on Friday nights. We found these times to be productive and fruitful. Yet some people were really uptight. "You can't have a Sunday service on a Friday night," they said.

"Why not?"

"Because Friday is not a holy day."

Attempting to honor their opinion, I said, "You don't have to come on Friday night. You just come Sunday morning if that's your conviction."

We need to exercise great latitude, folks.

Romans 14:6 (b)

He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks . . .

"Oh, Lord, thanks," says the stronger brother as he sits down to the filet mignon he bought in the open-air market and sinks his teeth into the slab of beef.

Romans 14:6 (c)

. . . and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

"Thank You, Lord, that I don't have to clog my system with dead cow, that I am not causing the rain forest in Brazil to be depleted, that I have been given the ability to say 'No,' " says the weaker brother as he sits down to a fresh green salad. And Paul says both are right.

Romans 14:7–9

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

This is a key component in the equation of liberty and responsibility. There are those who say, "Jesus was right when He said, 'I have come that you might have life and life abundantly,' " as they eat their beef and live it up in the Lord.

Others say, "Didn't Jesus say if any man come after Him let him deny himself, take up the cross and follow Him?" as they enter a monastery and give everything up for the Lord.

We are so blessed! We can learn from, be enriched by, and rejoice with those who are contemplative in their piety, as well as from those who are carefree in their joviality. What great latitude the Lord has given us and those sitting next to us in our relationship with Him. For whether we live it up *in* the Lord or give it up *for* the Lord, we can glorify Him.

Romans 14:10 (a)

But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother?

In other words, "Why do you write off the brother who doesn't see things the way you do, or who has regulations you don't?"

Romans 14:10 (b), 11

For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

Every Christian will one day stand before the judgment seat of Christ not to be judged for sin, but to be given awards for that which was done for the Lord's glory in obedience to Him (1 Corinthians 3:13–15). But until that day,

we can't know what the motives of men are. That's why Paul says we are not to judge.

Romans 14:12

So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Of whom will you give account? Yourself. That's all. You don't have to give an account for the person in front of you or behind you. Every one of us will give account of ourselves—not of our sins, but of what we did with the possessions the Lord gave us materially, the opportunities He opened for us in ministry, and the gifts He embedded in us spiritually. All of these will pass through the fire—and whatever comes out will be all that matters.

It was after Paul was caught up into heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2) that he said, "From here on out, my one goal is to win the prize" (see Philippians 3:13, 14). Gang, be sure your lives count in light of the big picture eternally, where every one of us will give an account individually.

Romans 14:13

Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

Sprinkled throughout Paul's writings are negative exhortations directly followed by positive applications. . . .

- Let him that stole steal no more: rather let him labour . . . (Ephesians 4:28).
- Let every man put away lying and speak the truth . . . (Ephesians 4:25).
- Flee youthful lusts and follow after righteousness . . . (see 2 Timothy 2:22).
- Be anxious for nothing but in everything give thanks . . . (see Philippians 4:6).

So, too, here Paul says, "Let us not judge any man, but rather judge ourselves." Is your legalism causing others to stumble by making them feel condemned, weighed down, and beaten up? Is your liberty causing others to stumble as they follow you to their own destruction? If we don't judge ourselves, the Lord will judge us—not to condemn us, but to correct us. Yes, He gives us liberty for a while. But He loves us as well as those around us too much to let us travel a dangerous road indefinitely.

Romans 14:14 (a)
I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself . . .

A Pharisee of Pharisees, Paul had been a legalist in the strictest sense of the word. After spending time with Jesus in the desert (Galatians 1:17), however, he emerged, as seen in this verse, a great champion of liberty.

Romans 14:14 (b)
. . . but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

"Personally, I'm persuaded there is nothing unclean of itself," said Paul. "But for those who esteem something to be unclean, then for them it is unclean."

Due to the presence of bikinis and alcohol at Applegate Lake in Oregon, some people question how Applegate Christian Fellowship can have after-church activities there. To those people, I say, "If you have a problem going to Applegate Lake, then to you it's unclean. Don't go. But don't put that trip on anyone else." So, too, while it is unclean for me to smoke cigarettes, there are those who are Christians, who love the Lord, who are born again, who smoke cigarettes. Traditionally, the church has made smoking an issue of salvation, saying, "You can't be saved if you smoke cigarettes." This is nothing new. . . .

Charles Haddon Spurgeon could not understand how Joseph Parker could go to the theatre and watch plays. Parker, on the other hand,

came down on Spurgeon, saying he couldn't understand how Spurgeon could smoke cigars. Both of these men were powerful preachers who were greatly used by the Lord, and yet they had a public fight. Spurgeon finally gave up smoking in his later years when one day he opened the *London Times* and saw a full-page cigar ad under the headline, "The Cigar that Charles Spurgeon Smokes."

People are often shocked and appalled at how someone else could do something other than what they themselves have liberty to do. Trips are laid on people. Fights start. Churches split. Historically, entire denominations have actually been formed in protest of those who had the audacity to wear buttons on their clothes. Just ask the Hole and Eye Baptists.

"Such ought not be," said Paul.

Romans 14:15

But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

You might have the freedom to chomp down a big piece of meat, but don't do it in a way or at a place where the weaker brother, the legalist, the vegetarian will be offended, turned off, or uptight.

In the early days of World War II, German U-boats attacked Allied ships traveling from the East Coast to Europe. To remedy this, they traveled in large convoys. But the convoys could go only as fast as the slowest boat. So the faster boats slowed down to the speed of the slowest boat in order that they all might be protected from attack.

The same holds true in spiritual life. You might be freer and faster and stronger than your brothers and sisters in Christ—but keep in mind with whom you are traveling. We're linked together. Don't do something that will cause a slower boat to be exposed to the underwater attacks of the Enemy, to be torpedoed by Satan. Slow it down. We're in this together.

Romans 14:16, 17 (a)

Let not then your good be evil spoken of: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink . . .

There's something about us that wants to be contrary and confrontational. But that's not what the kingdom is about.

Romans 14:17 (b), 18

. . . but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

You will be acceptable to both God and approved in the eyes of men if you focus not on meat or drink, controversies or confrontations, but on the righteousness, peace, and joy imputed to us and bestowed upon us by the grace and goodness of God through Jesus Christ.

Romans 14:19, 20

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.

Everything is pure, but anything with which you have a personal problem is unclean for you. Therefore, determine where you're at—but don't impose your convictions on others.

Romans 14:21

It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

Stay away from anything that would cause someone in the convoy to stumble. Be careful with the liberty you enjoy.

Romans 14:22

Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

You're a happy man if you're not condemning yourself, if you're not bound up with regulations.

Romans 14:23

And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

If you engage in an activity only to prove a point to yourself or others, you'll bring damnation upon yourself—not eternal damnation, but present depression and destruction.

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity," wrote the psalmist (Psalm 133:1). What does this mean? Augustine summed it up best when he said, "In essentials, there must be unity. In nonessentials, there must be liberty. But in all things, there must be charity."

May God give us wisdom to walk in both liberty and love.

JUDGE NOT—FOR YOU'RE
NOT JUDGED
A Topical Study of
ROMANS 14:4

The story is told of a poor, simple woman who visited an upper class, sophisticated church. . . .

> After attending for some time, she applied for church membership. Her application was rejected. She sent a second one a few months later, which was also returned. After a third and a fourth, she went to the chairman of the membership committee and said, "Why are my applications being rejected?"
>
> "You need to go home and pray," answered the chairman. "And I think the Lord will show you what the real issues are."
>
> A few years later, the chairman saw her scrubbing floors in a hotel lobby and said to her, "You haven't made application for membership lately. In fact, I don't think I've seen you in church at all. Tell me, when I sent you home to pray, did God speak to you?"
>
> "Why, yes," answered the woman, "He did. He told me not to feel bad about being rejected because He tried to join your church for twenty years before He finally gave up."

All too often, there are those in churches who are super-spiritual, who look down their noses on others, who put heavy burdens upon others. They set standards for who will be accepted educationally, financially, or spiritually. And inevitably a sense of exclusivity creeps into the church.

This is nothing new. The same thing was true in Paul's day. You see, when Paul was writing to the brothers and sisters at Rome, there were those who came into the fellowship and who judged others over the issue of diet. They maintained that those who ate certain kinds of meat were not quite up to par spiritually.

Why was the issue of eating meat so controversial? Some suggest it was due to the Essenes in the church at Rome. The Essenes were men who lived in the desert and were very Spartan in their discipline. John the Baptist, many believe, was part of the Essene community before he went into public ministry. Having been converted to Jesus, the Essenes propagated the thinking that people who ate meat weren't spiritually minded.

Others suggest that the issue of meat arose in the church because of Jews converted to Christ in the Church at Rome who were still bound by Levitical traditions of what should and should not be eaten.

I believe, however, the question of meat in the early church was due to the buying and selling of meat in places called "shambles." Shambles were open-air markets that sold the best cuts of meat for the lowest price. The owners of these shambles could keep their prices low because their meat was "second-hand," since it had already been offered to pagan idols. Whatever the reason, Paul was aware of the tendency of some of the brothers and sisters in the Roman church to question the sincerity or spirituality of others within the family.

Perhaps you have gone through a week where you have been judged because of some liberty you have enjoyed. Paul would encourage you who feel judged, you who feel condemned, you who feel looked down on because some seemingly "super-spiritual" saint has come and "tsk-tsk-tsked" in your face or found fault with the liberty you enjoy in Christ. You can have hope, and I can find peace as we listen to what Paul says to those who put down believers who enjoy freedom in Christ.

It's Presumptuous to Judge

> *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he stand eth or falleth.*
>
> Romans 14:4 (a)

A conductor on the train from Basil, Switzerland, to Germany looked out the window and noticed unfamiliar scenery. "Leave immediately!" he said to everyone in the car. "You are all on the wrong train!" The passengers looked at one another quizzically and confused. Questioning the conductor, they learned that it was he who was on the wrong train.

Those who judge others essentially tell everyone else they are on the wrong train. Paul says, "It's Jesus to whom you must answer. It's Jesus to whom you must give account"—not to any man or leader, spiritual person or pastor. "We do not seek to have dominion over you," he said, "but are simply helpers of your joy" (see 2 Corinthians 1:24). You see, if a man is a true spiritual leader, he will not seek to have dominion over you or to lay burdens upon you. Rather, he will seek to come alongside of you and undergird you in order that your joy might be made full.

A woman was seeing a psychiatrist. After several sessions, sensing parenting problems were the root of her difficulty, the psychiatrist asked her which of her three children she loved the most.

"I love them equally," she answered.

"Impossible," said the psychiatrist. "You're deceiving yourself, and it is this self-deception that is keeping you from experiencing liberty. You must be honest, or I will have no other choice than to terminate these counseling sessions. Which of your three kids do you care about the most?"

The woman broke down in tears and said, "You're right. When one of my kids is sick, I love that one the most. When one of my kids is lost in the store when we're shopping, that's the one I love the

most. When one of my kids is bad, that's the one I love the most. The one who's hurting the most at any given point is the one my heart goes out to most fully."

The same is true with our heavenly Father. While others might judge you because you're lost, hurting, or bad—the Father looks upon you compassionately and says, "Those who are hurting and lost are the ones I particularly care about." Jesus Himself told us this in the parable of the Good Shepherd. Ninety-nine sheep were okay. But He left them to go find the one who was lost (Luke 15:3–7). Therefore, don't let anyone come down on you—for even if you are a bit lost, the Lord loves us especially when we need Him most.

It's Humorous to Judge

Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

Romans 14:4 (b)

The Lord will hold up the one we put down. The Lord will make stand the one we can't stand.

As freshmen at Biola University, we had brutal dorm wars during spring semester. I recall walking into the quad of Stewart Hall, only to have the trashcan of water that was balanced on top of the door come crashing down on us. This called for retaliation and set off a series of skirmishes during finals week so brutal, that, fearing for our lives, we barricaded ourselves in our rooms every night. We found a way, however, to penetrate the barricades of Stewart Hall—not by knocking down the doors or bashing in the windows (which we tried to no avail).

We went to McDonald's, downed as many milkshakes as we could and brought the empty cups back to the dorm—where we filled them with a mixture of shaving cream and mud. We then pinched the tops closed and quietly slipped the lips of the cups under the doors of those who needed to learn a lesson. After strategically positioning ourselves outside each door, on the count of three, we stomped on the cups, effectively coating the inside of the rooms with shaving cream and mud. It was great!

That same semester, after my roommate broke his arm jumping out our second-story window, the Resident Assistant, a Bible major, came to me and said, "Jon, you're never going to make it in ministry. Neither will your roommate."

My roommate was Rick Booye, pastor of Trail Fellowship. It's humorous to me because the people who thought we would never make it failed to take into account the great grace, goodness, and faithfulness of God. Looking at

us, they had every reason—and still do—to be dubious, but only if they forget that it is God who holds us up.

So, too, the very people I have judged negatively, those I thought would never make it, I look at years later and see God's grace on their lives and the way the Lord is using them. I marvel at the goodness and bigness and grace of God—and I have to laugh.

If you feel like you've been judged, the Lord says to you, "I'm with you. I'll never leave you. I'll never forsake you. People might come down on you and find fault with you, but I will see you through."

It's Needless to Judge

> *But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.*
>
> Romans 14:10

Every Christian—every brother, every sister, every one of us, those who have been judged, those who are judging—will stand before the judgment seat of Christ where all of our works will be tried by fire (1 Corinthians 3:13). Everything we've done in the name of the Lord will be put through fire. And only that which is gold, silver, and precious stones—only that which was done sincerely—will remain.

This means that there are people who are doing seemingly spiritual things, leading seemingly disciplined lives, doing seemingly wonderful works—but for the wrong reasons. Truly, we do not know what motivates people. Jesus told us some would do their works only to be seen of men (Matthew 6:2). But their true motives will be revealed at the *bema,* or judgment seat of Christ.

Folks, we don't know as much as we think we do. Because the heart is deceitfully and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9), it's hard enough to figure out why I do what I do, much less try to figure out why another does what he does.

> About fifty years ago, a preacher was riding a train, studying for his Sunday sermon. Across the aisle from him, a two-year-old girl was being obnoxiously loud, throwing a temper tantrum, and crying. Finally, in his frustration, the preacher said to the woman with the baby, "Madam, please control your child."
>
> "She's not my child, sir," the woman answered.
>
> "Well, is her mother on board?"
>
> "Yes. She's on board," answered the woman. "She's in the next car, in the cargo department—in a casket."

Feeling totally humiliated, the preacher spent the rest of the journey tending the crying baby as best he could.

So, too, those who judge you don't know the full story. Be patient with them. They don't know what you've gone through. They don't know where you've been. Earthly judgment is based upon limited information, but Paul says the day is coming when judgment will be perfect and righteous.

Past Judgment

As He headed to the Cross, Jesus declared, "Now is the judgment of this world" (John 12:31). In this, He told us something freeing and exciting. That is, all of the sin we have ever done, are doing, or ever will do has been paid fully and completely when He died. The judgment we should have received because of our sin was poured out on Him.

> In the days of the pioneers, brushfires would break out so quickly, that they were impossible to outrun or outride. So the settlers soon learned that the only way they could be protected from such fires was to burn a large circle in their own field upon the first sight of smoke on the horizon. Then they would stand in the burned-out circle so that, having nothing left to burn, the fire would bypass them.

That is exactly where you are today if you know Jesus Christ. You are at the foot of the Cross. You will never be held accountable for any sin you have done or ever will do as long as you embrace the work of the Cross and thank Jesus for doing what He did in your place. The punitive fire of God's wrath and judgment will never touch you. You are absolutely safe in the circle of the Cross of Calvary.

Present Judgment

Having said that, Paul says there is a present judgment that is to be taking place in the heart of every believer (1 Corinthians 11:28). Paul says we ought to judge ourselves. Where? At the Communion table. Why? If you spend time with the Lord confessing your sin, you will save yourself a lot of heartache. What kind of heartache?

> If my son Benjamin had a propensity to stick knives into electric sockets when he was a boy, I would have loved him enough to discipline him—not because I would have been coming down on him, not because I would have been mad at him, not because I would have been trying to be cruel to him, but because I care about him.

So, too, if I continue doing things that are dangerous to me spiritually, the Father will judge me—not in order to punish me, but in order to save me from destruction.

You see, I believe in "bungee theology." That is, the Father hooks a bungee cord of love to us and then gives us all kinds of space. Now, although we can stretch this cord by walking contrary to God's will, we must realize that we *will* come back. If you're a believer, the Lord's love is wrapped around you in such a way that He'll let you go your way to a certain degree. But you *will* come back. The only question is: How hard will you hit?

> I talk to kids every week who stretch the bungee cord and say, "We're cool. We can do what we want"—until they end up crying in my office.
>
> "Didn't you know you were doing something that wasn't right?" I ask. "Didn't you hear God's voice in your heart? Why, then, did you continue?"
>
> "I don't know."
>
> I have never heard anyone say, "I'm sure glad I got drunk," or, "I'm glad I did drugs," or, "I'm glad I stole." Never.
>
> But I've heard story after story of those who have said, "What was I doing?" "What was I thinking?" "Why did this happen?"

“Judge yourself,” said Paul. Come to the Communion table and say, “Lord, search my heart. Show me where my attitudes or activities are amiss,” lest you find yourself splatting against the wall of God’s love.

Future Judgment

Finally, there will be a future judgment. Paul refers to this here in Romans 14 and talks about it further in the Corinthian Epistles. At the *bema,* or judgment seat of Christ, everything you have done will go through a fire of purification. Whatever gold, silver, and precious stones remain will be your reward.

"Big deal," you say. "I'm not into gold. I could care less about silver. Precious stones? They don't mean much to me."

Listen, those things might not be important now. But they will be, for they will determine your capacity to enjoy eternity. They will determine what you do in the next zillion years. While I know that just being in heaven will be glory beyond words, I also know that when Paul came back from being caught up into heaven, his purpose in life was to win the prize (Philippians 3:13, 14). Having seen the reality of heaven, he knew nothing else mattered. Jesus said the same thing when He said, "Seek first the kingdom" (see Matthew 6:33).

"Take my word for it," Paul would say to you and me today: "Your house, your car, your hobbies, trinkets and toys will all burn. They will not matter ultimately. What does matter is the *bema* seat, the judgment seat—where you will stand before Jesus and be rewarded."

Here's the added bonus, folks: If you live for this life, you'll always be miserable because nothing will ever be quite right. It will always be "one more piece of furniture to buy," "one more flower to plant," "one more promotion to get," "one more person to date"—but it will never be quite enough. If you live for heaven, on the other hand, this world is just a bonus. Therefore, you can relax, knowing you will find joy unspeakable in heaven.



15 The advice is sound. We need to take a whole lot more things a whole lot less seriously. Because there is a tendency for Christians to get uptight and to major on the minors, it is essential to remember that the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. And the main thing is Jesus Christ. But somehow, for some reason, we get sidetracked from the main

thing. We find our little cause, pet doctrine, or personal perspective on ministry and think we've got to push this on everyone in the body of Christ. And in so doing, we find ourselves getting caught up in peripheral issues that don't really matter.

As evidenced by Paul's discussion on diets and days in chapter 14, it seems the church in Rome had the same tendency. "These hobby horses ought not be," said Paul as he continues his argument in chapter 15.

Romans 15:1

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

As we saw in chapter 14, it is the weaker brother who is the legalist. This is shocking to me because my tendency would be to think the stronger Christian is the one who has the most dos and don'ts, and, therefore, the most discipline. Not so. It's the weaker brother who moves and lives in legalism and rigidity, who has rules and regulations surrounding him that are not scriptural commands, but are personal opinions or conclusions. There are those who will look down on you because they think you're too loose or too free. But in reality you're to be patient with them because they're the weaker brothers, the weaker sisters.

Two guys in the woods found themselves eye to eye with a grizzly. Stunned, they sat stock still—until one of them began to slowly put on his tennis shoes.

"What are you doing?" said the other guy. "Don't you know you can't outrun a grizzly bear?"

"Yes," said his friend. "But all I've got to do is outrun you!"

That's the way we sometimes think. "I'm free to run in liberty. If you get eaten up, pulled down, or done in that's your problem." Now, while that kind of thinking might work in the woods—it won't in the body, for when one part is injured, the whole body suffers.

If the folks in my fellowship family are not doing well, it will have a direct influence on how I do. Therefore, I must slow down in my liberty and

take into consideration those who are not as strong or as free, those who might stumble over this idea or that practice.

Romans 15:2, 3

Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.

While we are to bear the infirmities of the weak, quoting from Psalm 69:9, Paul makes it clear that Jesus did not allow people to remain entrenched in their own legalism.

While Jesus was healing on the Sabbath Day, the Pharisees began to reproach Him. Did He stop? No. He corrected their misunderstanding and then continued healing (Luke 14:1–4).

On the other hand, there were times when Jesus laid aside His liberty.

"Does your Master pay taxes in the temple?" the Pharisees asked Peter.

"Of course," Peter responded.

But when Peter asked this same question of Jesus, Jesus said, "Do kings charge their own kids taxes? Of course not. But, in order that we don't offend, go fishing—and the first fish you catch will have a coin in his mouth to cover the taxes" (see Matthew 17:24–27).

"I'm confused," you say. "Do I bear my neighbor's infirmity—or do I correct him for edification?"

Just do what the Lord tells you to do at any given moment. Sometimes, He will tell you to bear with those who are weak. Other times, He'll tell you to love them enough to give them a word of correction—even if it means you will suffer reproach. Christianity is not rules, principles, or regulations. It's walking with the Lord moment by moment, saying constantly, "Lord, how do I

deal with this situation? Is it a time for backing away and bearing weakness —or is it a time for loving exhortation and confrontation? What do I do?"

It's as though the Lord gives us broad principles in the Word and then says, "See Me for further instructions. Talk to Me about specific application." If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God who giveth to all men generously (James 1:5).

Romans 15:4 (a)

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning . . .

The Scripture account is filled with men who laid aside their liberty and rights for the sake of their weaker brothers. Abraham (Genesis 13:8, 9), Jonathan (1 Samuel 19:4), David (1 Samuel 24:10), and Moses (Hebrews 11:24) are all examples of men who willingly let go of their rightful possessions or positions. They didn't demand their own way—and they prospered as a result. "Learn from their example," said Paul.

Romans 15:4 (b)

. . . that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

Underline the word "patience." Yes, the Scriptures comfort us—but we have to be patient. "I've claimed a promise for three weeks. Why hasn't it happened?" we say, forgetting that it was after Abraham patiently endured that he obtained the promise (Hebrews 6:15).

Romans 15:5 (a)

Now the God of patience and consolation . . .

Why should you be patient with God? Because He's patient with you. Do you realize how patient God has been with you? Think about it. If you were God, how long would you put up with you?

Romans 15:5 (b)

. . . grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus.

Be likeminded in Christ and because of Christ, letting people have space, as you show them lots of grace.

Romans 15:6, 7

That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

Something happens when we hear the Scriptures and study the Word together. There's a oneness of mind that takes place—even if we differ on certain interpretations or certain applications. That's why you will notice that when a person stops coming to Bible study and worship, slowly but surely, they no longer have one mind and one heart. It's not that they don't love the Lord. It's not that they're not saved. But, as they become isolated, they become vulnerable. "Don't divide. Don't pull away," said Paul. "Be of one mind."

Romans 15:8

Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.

Jesus came as a Minister of the circumcision. He came to the Jew and lived as a Jew in order to share truth with the Jews.

Romans 15:9 (a)

And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy . . .

Jesus came to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. The Jews saw God's truth in Jesus. The Gentiles saw His mercy.

Romans 15:9 (b)

. . . as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.

Jesus is among the Gentiles—you and me. So when we sing, "Father, I adore You," guess who's joining in. Guess who's in the midst of our praise. Jesus is not only the object of our praise—but He's in the midst of our praise, participating with us.

Romans 15:10–12

And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people. And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.

Paul quoted from the Psalms in verse 9, from Deuteronomy in verse 10, and from Isaiah in verse 12. Thus, the three categories of the Jewish Bible—the Psalms, the law, and the prophets—are all represented in this brief section as Paul continues to drive home the fact that Jesus came for the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

"The Gentiles?" the Jew would say. "They're so trite and shallow. They're unschooled in

theology and have such a limited background in biblical history."

"Aha!" Paul would answer. "Guess who's singing in their midst!"

And the Gentile would say, "Those Jews are so bound in legalism and tradition. They're so stuffy."

"Wait a minute," Paul would interject, "Jesus Christ was a Minister of the circumcision."

The implications of this are pretty radical.

There are some churches I walk into and think, This place is dead. The pastor wears robes. The people sit all dressed up like corpses. There's no life whatsoever.

Then I hear the Lord say, "Wait a minute. These people might not be your style, but that doesn't mean they're not My people."

Other places I walk into and say, "Oh, my. These people aren't dead, but they're shallow. Sure, they're exuberant in their praise. But the preaching lacks substance."

Then I hear the Lord say, "Wait a minute. I love these people. I am in the midst of this church."

"You are?" I ask.

"Yes," He answers.

"You mean You're into both the Jews and *Gentiles, both this group* and *that group?"*

"Yes. They love Me, so give them space."

The Lord is so big. Yet we can be so provincial and so narrow. "Well, if they worship in this manner or with that intensity, or with that kind of liturgy, they're wrong," we say. Not necessarily. If they love Jesus Christ and desire to walk with Him, give them space. Don't be critical of them or divided from them. Just rejoice with them.

Romans 15:13

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

What is hope? Hope is the absolute expectation of coming good. Hope is the antidote for divisiveness and defensiveness. And throughout Scripture, hope is most often referred to in conjunction with the coming of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is pointless for us to argue and debate here on earth, for soon we'll be in heaven with Jesus, where all questions will be answered, all divisions will cease.

After spending the first half of chapter 15 talking about unity in the body, we'll see Paul put in the clutch and shift gears to discuss ministry in the

world. Why? Because the two are very closely related. When does unity in the church happen? When people are ministering in the world. Check out a Billy Graham Crusade. It's amazing who's on the platform. Ministers and denominations that normally wouldn't speak to one another are brought together for one purpose: to let folks know that heaven is around the bend and that there's hope in Jesus Christ.

A tourist approached a farmer in Iowa and said, "Don't you think all these fences ruin the beauty of the fields out here?"

"Yep," said the farmer—"until the corn starts growing. When the corn starts growing you don't even see the fences."

When are fences seen in the church? When there's no fruit. That's when the divisions become real and pronounced. But when there's growth and fruit, evangelism and ministry, the fences of factionalism disappear. That is why the more evangelistic a church is, the less divided it becomes.

Romans 15:14, 15

And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God.

"I know you're filled with knowledge and goodness, and that you're able to admonish one another," said Paul. "However, I've written these things to you in order that you might remember these truths."

Peter said the same thing when he wrote, "I would not be negligent to put you in remembrance of these things though ye know them, and are established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12). Haven't you found it incredible that you forget the things you really want to remember, yet remember the things you wish you could forget? It's a mystery to me—and yet partially explained by the fact that Satan reminds us of our failings day and night (Revelation 12:10), while he constantly seeks to pluck away Scripture from our memories (Matthew 13:19).

It's not how much you know, gang. It's how well you know what you know.

Romans 15:16

That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.

D. L. Moody, a shoe salesman captured by Christ, who became one of the most effective soul-winners of all time, purposed in his heart as a young man that he would never let a day go by wherein he didn't talk to at least one person about Jesus Christ. One night it was approaching midnight and, because of the events of the day, he had not shared the gospel with an unbeliever that particular day. So he went out onto the streets of Chicago, found a man, and said, "Sir, are you ready for heaven?"

"Mind your own business," said the startled man.

"This *is* my business," Moody answered.

And it is our business as well. Walking the hills of Jacksonville, Oregon, one day, I found myself in the old Jacksonville cemetery. The tombstones of the early settlers provided an ironic backdrop for the women who were picnicking and the children who were playing hide-and-seek. Observing the scene, I was reminded of the simple calling God has given you and me—to minister the gospel of God. For while the world plays games among the tombstones, eternity is only a heartbeat away.

As Paul told his young protégé, Timothy, "Put the brethren in remembrance of these things. In so doing, you will be accounted as being a faithful minister" (see 1 Timothy 4:6).

Romans 15:17, 18 (a)

I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient . . .

"I won't speak of anything that hasn't been wrought by me," said Paul. In other words, "I'm only going to tell you what I have seen, of what the Lord has done through me by His grace."

Romans 15:18 (b)
. . . by word . . .

How are we to share the gospel with a world that's playing hide-and-seek in the cemetery? By word—by sharing the Scriptures. You may not understand all of the implications doctrinally. You may have trouble defending the Scriptures intellectually. But, like C. H. Spurgeon said when asked how to defend the Bible, "You defend the Bible as you would a roaring lion. You just open the cage and let it out." The Word is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). Just start sharing the Scriptures and watch and see what the Lion of the Tribe of Judah does with the Word He's given to you.

Romans 15:18 (b)
. . . and deed . . .

Spiritual authority and power come when we share the things we ourselves are living out. That's why I share so much about grace. I need it, I've embraced it, and I'm so thankful to God for it. Grace is not a theological concept to me—it's what I need desperately. You see, those truths of which you are personally in need, for which you are personally thankful, in which you are personally growing are the truths that will come alive in a very powerful and profound way as you share them with others.

Romans 15:19 (a)
Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God . . .

Concerning signs and wonders, Jesus said signs shall follow them that believe (Mark 16:17). He said this in the context of evangelism. In other

words, “Get going. And as you’re going, I’ll be flowing through you. I’ll be doing signs and wonders before you.”

Gang, the Holy Spirit is like steam in a locomotive. He’s there to move the engine down the track—not to toot the whistle. Too many people look at the power of the Holy Spirit as a whistle-tooter, as an end in itself—but the Lord says, “You shall receive power when the Holy Ghost comes upon you to be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8). Thus, when people ask why we don’t see more signs and wonders today, I say, “Go to Honduras. Go to Mexico. Go to Russia. Start evangelizing and watch and see what the Lord will do in you and the miracles that will flow through you.”

But even if you never see an external sign, wonder, or miracle, you’re in good company. Jesus said of all of the men who had lived, John the Baptist was the greatest of them all. No man was greater—not Elijah who called down fire from heaven, not Elisha who raised the dead, not Moses who parted the Red Sea. Jesus said, “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist” (Matthew 11:11). And yet John did no miracle (John 10:41). So if you’ve never performed a miracle or even seen a miracle, take heart. You’re in good company.

John did no miracle but “all things John spoke of this Man were true” (see John 10:41). What Man? Jesus Christ. Talking about Jesus is something I can do—and so can you. Yes, I would love to have the powerful, miraculous ministry of Paul. But in the meantime, I’ll try to walk in the footsteps of John the Baptist, pointing others to the Lamb of God.

Romans 15:19 (b)

. . . so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

In his fourteen-hundred-mile parish, Paul preached the gospel. Truly, the simplicity of the gospel is powerful. Don’t be embarrassed about it. Don’t back away from it. Don’t feel like you need to be deeper than Paul was. Paul said, “I travel everywhere, simply preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ.”

Romans 15:20

Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation.

"I'm not going to build upon another man's foundation," said Paul. "I'm not going to dip into aquariums—I'm going to be a fisher of men." To do this, Paul walked fourteen hundred miles.

So, too, we must find areas where no one is meeting a specific need, no one is touching certain folks, no one is reaching a particular group, and ask the Lord if, by His grace, you can reach this group, touch those folks, or meet that need.

Romans 15:21

But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand.

Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15 as his confirmation of Scripture for going to those who have not seen and who have not heard in order that they might see and hear and understand.

Romans 15:22

For which cause also I have been much hindered from coming to you.

Keep in mind when Paul wrote this, he was in Corinth, wanting desperately to go to Rome.

Romans 15:23–29

But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you; whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company. But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily;

and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things. When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain. And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

Perhaps due to persecution or drought, the saints in Jerusalem were undergoing a season of poverty. Gentile believers, realizing their indebtedness to the Jerusalem church for evangelizing their region, collected an offering for the church in Jerusalem. After delivering their gift, Paul planned to go to Spain (verse 24). Did he ever make it? We don't know. Church tradition indicates he did, indeed, go to Spain and then on up into England. But this can't be emphatically verified. I personally believe he did go to Spain. Why? Because right before his death, he wrote, "I have finished my course" (2 Timothy 4:7).

Now, whether or not Paul's plan unfolded the way he hoped, the fact remains that he had a plan. A lot of people go through seasons where they're not doing anything. "What's your plan?" I ask.

"I don't have one," they answer.

"What's your intention?"

"I don't know."

"What do you hope to accomplish in the remaining years of your life?"

"Beats me."

Paul was a man with a plan. I would encourage all of us to seek the Lord and say, "Show me Your plan, Lord, as it relates to my kids, my wife, my employment, my ministry. Lord, I really want to hear from You." Without vision, people perish (Proverbs 29:18). Why is there such a lack of vision today? I believe television is a big part of it. Next time you feel a lack of vision, turn off your television, go for a walk, and ask the Lord for His plan for your life.

Romans 15:30

Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in

your prayers to God for me.

The word translated "strive" is *sunagonizo mai,* from which we get our word "agonize." In other words, Paul was asking for passionate, fervent prayer because he knew danger awaited him in Jerusalem. How did he know this? Because people in every city on his journey warned him, "You're headed for real problems in Jerusalem" (see Acts 20:23; 21:4; 11).

Paul's parish was the Gentile world (verse 18). His power came from the Spirit of God (verse 19). His priority was the gospel (verse 19). His policy was to build on no man's foundation (verse 20). His plan was to go to Rome (verses 22, 23). One thing was left. He needed prayer.

Romans 15:31 (a)

That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea . . .

Paul requested prayer in three specific areas. The first is seen here—that he might be protected from the unbelievers in Jerusalem who were out to do him in.

Romans 15:31 (b)

. . . and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints.

Second, Paul requested prayer that the believers in Jerusalem might accept him.

Romans 15:32, 33

That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Third, Paul requested prayer that he might come with joy to Rome. "Agonize with me in prayer," he said, "that I might be protected from the unbelievers who are out to get me, that I might be accepted by the believers

who are there waiting for me, and that I might come to you with joy and be refreshed mutually."

Was Paul protected? So severe was the stoning he received at the hands of unbelieving Jews that his life was spared only when he was taken into protective custody by Lycinius, a Roman centurion (Acts 21).

Was he accepted by the believers? The believers themselves were the underlying reason for the stoning he received. Furthermore, they never thanked him for the offering he risked his life to deliver to them, nor does Scripture record any of them speaking with him or caring for him during the two years he was in protective custody.

Did he come to Rome with joy? He traveled to Rome as a prisoner of the Roman Empire.

And so we wonder. It looks like the prayers of the Romans weren't answered—or were they?

Was he protected? Yes. He didn't die. Bloodied? You bet—but he didn't die.

Was he accepted by the believers? Oh, not initially—but eventually, for Peter himself instructed the believers to listen to what Paul had to say (2 Peter 3:15).

Did he make it to Rome? While he didn't travel in the way he intended, at least his trip was all-expenses paid!

Gang, like Paul, sometimes we say, "Pray for me. I'm going through this struggle, and here are three things I need to see happen . . . ." And although we pray with fervency, sometimes initially it seems like just the opposite of what we hoped for happens. But wait. I have discovered that usually when I think prayers are not being answered, it's simply because I have not seen the unique and beautiful way God is working.

> I once read an article in the paper about a woman in Alaska who tried to call her sister in Idaho, but she mistakenly dialed a house in Vermont because she dialed Vermont's 802 area code rather than Idaho's 208 area code. The woman in Vermont who answered the call was, at that moment, suffering a severe heart attack. As a result, the woman in Alaska heard only a gasping voice on the other end of the line, saying, "Help me. Help me. Please, God, help me." The woman

in Alaska was able to work with telephone operators and emergency personnel to save the Vermont woman's life.

Sometimes, when I pray, I think all I get are busy signals or wrong numbers. But God is working in ways that, if I'll just hang in there, I'll see His hand—as evidenced in this familiar prayer by a Confederate soldier:

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve,
I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked for health, that I might do greater things,
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.
I asked for riches, that I might be happy,
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men,
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life,
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for,
But everything I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself,
My unspoken prayers were answered.
I am among all men, most richly blessed.

That's the way of the Lord. In the middle of our own civil wars, we may not see God's hand. But on the other side, we'll say, "Lord, I got nothing I asked for—but everything I really wanted." The purpose and the power of prayer are not to get your way for your life, but to get the Lord's blessing on your life. The prayers Paul requested were truly answered in the best possible way, for lives were touched, folks were saved, and we're encouraged here today because people prayed.

16 Paul was not only a soul-winner, but he was a friend-maker as well. And here in chapter 16, we see ample evidence of that fact. The chapter contains a list of thirty-three people to whom Paul is sending his greetings. The first list (verses 1–16) is comprised of those who Paul is greeting. The second list (verses 21–23) is comprised of those who are with Paul in Corinth.

Romans 16:1 (a)
I commend unto you Phebe our sister . . .

Having known her in the city of Corinth, Paul says to those in Rome, "I commend Phebe to you." "Phebe" is another name for "Diana." Evidently, Phebe was named after the goddess Diana—Corinth's most famous deity. If that be so, Phebe was not Jewish but was most likely a heathen Gentile who had been converted to Christ.

Romans 16:1 (b)
. . . which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea:

The word translated "servant" is literally *dia konos,* or "deaconess", which indicates that women were in positions of ministry in the early church. According to the writings of the church fathers, deaconesses visited the sick, helped young women grow in the Lord, and tended the poor. How we need those who have a heart to be servants like Phebe—those who say, "Our call is to tend those who are sick, poor, and young in the Lord."

Romans 16:2 (a)
That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you . . .

"Receive her and assist her," said Paul. "She's coming to you as one who has proven her ministry."

Romans 16:2 (b)
. . . for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.

The word "succourer," or "strengthener," linguistically speaks of what a mother does as she tenderly nourishes her baby through breastfeeding.

Romans 16:3
Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus.

When Paul first came to Corinth, he was introduced to Aquila and his wife, Priscilla—tent-makers, like himself. Evidently, Paul led them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, for when Paul left Corinth for Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla accompanied him as his companions and coworkers. As Paul made his way yet farther north, Aquila and Priscilla remained in Ephesus, where they were influential in the salvation of Apollos, one of the most powerful preachers of the early church (Acts 18:26). As evidenced by this verse, Priscilla and Aquila ended up in Rome. Some have even suggested Paul sent them ahead to set the stage and do some groundwork for his own journey to Rome.

It's interesting to me that in the six times this couple is mentioned, Priscilla's name is seen first four times. Why is this significant? Because in those days, the man's name was always mentioned first. Thus, it is agreed by virtually all commentators that Priscilla seems to be the one who had the more dynamic and powerful ministry. Yes, they traveled together—but it seems as though Aquila, realizing his wife had special and beautiful gifts, facilitated them and was not threatened by them.

Romans 16:4
Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

To what this refers, we don't know—but Paul makes it clear Aquila and Priscilla put their lives on the line for him.

Romans 16:5 (a)
Likewise greet the church that is in their house.

As you travel with Priscilla and Aquila, you see a pattern begin to unfold in their lives. That is, wherever they went, they started a fellowship group in their house. I like that. They not only worked together by day making tents, but they also opened their home at night.

I hope that's true of you and me. I hope the church is meeting in our homes. How? Jesus said, "Wherever two or three are gathered together, I am in their midst" (see Matthew 18:20). Therefore, if you want your families altered, develop what the previous generation called "family altar"—times when your family gets together for a season of worship, prayer, and Bible study.

Be warned, however. Nothing will be more difficult than having family altar. You can go on vacation, go bowling, have pizza, or watch baseball on TV without a hitch. But say the words, "It's time for family devotions"—and you'll be amazed by what happens. Dad will get a headache. Mom will suddenly remember the quiche bubbling over in the oven. Junior will get a phone call. Sis will have to leave. Baby will start crying. The dog will start barking. And the doorbell will ring. The Enemy will do everything possible to keep you as parents from getting your kids together and praying with them.

I know the struggle. I know the battle. I know how difficult it is. But I would suggest to you who desire your family to be strengthened, that, more than "focusing on the family," working legislatively, or sharing in groups about child-rearing, nothing in my opinion is more powerful or more effective than pulling your kids together for family altar. The church can be in your house. It doesn't take a lot of time. You don't have to teach fifteen chapters of Leviticus. Just share a simple story, make a simple application, and pray together.

Romans 16:5 (b)

Salute my wellbeloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.

Epaenetus was Paul's first convert. I've discovered that folks never forget the name of the first person they lead to the Lord because nothing is more exciting than praying with someone, talking to someone, having the opportunity to see someone you care about come to know Jesus.

Romans 16:6

Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us.

The word "labour" is interesting. The same word is used in Luke 5:5 in reference to the fishermen who toiled all night. It embodies the idea of sweating. Thus, Mary bestowed much "sweat" upon them, if you would. That is, she gave of herself in a laboring type of ministry.

This intrigues me because six Marys are mentioned in the New Testament. When you think of Mary, you either think of Mary the mother of Jesus, or Mary of Bethany, who sat at the feet of Jesus while her sister Martha toiled in the kitchen (Luke 10:42). This Mary, however, is a worker. I wonder if this Mary ever thought, *My name is Mary, and all these Marys before me were sensitive, "sitting at the feet" kind of ladies. But I'm a labourer. That's just the way I am.*

I find it's truly a red-letter day in the walk of a believer when he sheds the self-imposed pressures or expectations of what he thinks he should be. Oftentimes, because we admire someone else and want to be like him or her, we put pressure on ourselves to be what we're not. Great is the day when you realize, "Even though my name is Mary, I'm one who likes to roll up my sleeves. So I'm just going to be who I am."

Mary's name is recorded throughout history as one who was noteworthy because she did what she was made to do, regardless of what the other Marys before her did. And her example is a good one.

Romans 16:7

Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

Bible students, this is an important verse because it is a key to understanding the apostolic ministry. There are those who say there are only eleven apostles—twelve if Paul is included in the position vacated by Judas—and that there are no apostles in the church today.

On one hand, I agree with them. On the other hand, I disagree. That is, if they're speaking of apostles that were appointed by Jesus Christ, I agree that

there were only twelve, for such apostles had to have seen Jesus visibly. They had to have a firsthand knowledge of His ministry; and their ministries had to be confirmed with observable signs and wonders that validated their apostolic ministry.

But there are two other categories of apostles, each linked with the other two Persons of the Trinity. The Father sent out one Apostle: Jesus Christ (Hebrews 3:1). The Spirit sent out many apostles—Andronicus, Junia, Titus, Timothy, Barnabas, and a host of others called apostles in Scripture (Acts 13:2). Therefore, in my opinion, the apostolic ministry continues today in those who are sent out by the Spirit, those who feel called in their hearts to go forth. Missionaries could be more accurately called apostles. The problem with the term "apostle" arises only from a misunderstanding of the word.

Romans 16:8–10 (a)

Greet Amplias my beloved in the Lord. Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. Salute Apelles approved in Christ.

How can we be approved in Christ? You're doing it! By studying the Scriptures, you are showing yourself as being approved of God (2 Timothy 2:15).

Romans 16:10 (b)

Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household.

Historians tell us Aristobulus was the grandson of Herod the Great—the one who tried to annihilate Jesus by slaughtering all Jewish males under two years of age. Herod was the one who killed his sons and murdered his wife, butchering anyone who was a threat to his power. Yet here was his grandson, numbered among the household of faith.

Romans 16:11 (a)

Salute Herodion my kinsman.

Following verse 10 as it does, and "Herodion" being a derivative of "Herod," this verse could indicate that Paul himself was related to Herod. If this is true, the implications are intriguing. You who are students of Paul know he was a driven man. Before his conversion, he said, "I was a Pharisee of Pharisees. Concerning the law, I was blameless" (see Philippians 3:6). Vehement in his zeal to stand up for the laws of Judaism, he became enraged when he felt Judaism was threatened by a new group called Christians.

What made him so zealous for righteousness? Could it be that he was embarrassed to be linked to this butcher, this half-Jew/half-Idumean named Herod—the despised, despicable despot who left a bad taste in the mouth of every Jew in Israel? I think it's a very real possibility. And if that be so, I think Paul models for us the way we're to react or respond to family members.

You see, Paul didn't say, "I'm dysfunctional." He didn't say, "I need to join Herodions Anonymous." He didn't say, "I need therapy because I'm related to Herod." No, he took off in the opposite direction, saying, "Herod was a murderer, a blasphemer, a loser. I am going to strive to keep the law and live for God." And even though Paul was initially misdirected in his zeal, God saw his heart and corrected him on the road to Damascus.

I believe in this time in which we live—when everyone is claiming they have problems because of ancestors—we see in Paul a refreshingly wonderful, practical model. "This one thing I do," he said, "forgetting the things which lie behind, I press on toward the high mark of the calling of Christ" (see Philippians 3:13). Everyone has pain in their past. The key is to move on.

Romans 16:11 (b), 12 (a)

Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord. Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord.

Tryphena and Tryphosa are sisters whose names mean "Dainty" and "Delicate." Notice, however, like Mary in verse 6, they laboured in the Lord. Thus, even Dainty and Delicate rolled up their sleeves for the kingdom.

Romans 16:12 (b)

Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord.

Persis being a feminine name, Paul is speaking of yet another woman who put her all into serving the Lord. Compare his use of "the beloved" here in verse 12 with his use of "my beloved" in verses 8 and 9. Stachys and Amplias, the subjects of verses 8 and 9, were males. I believe Paul's use of the possessive pronoun only with men models an important principle of ministry. That is, he was very careful to relate to his brothers in a different way than he did to his sisters. Some might call this legalism or chauvinism. I call it wisdom.

Romans 16:13
Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.

Rufus, it seems, is the same Rufus spoken of in Mark 15:21. Rufus' father was Simon of Cyrene—the one who came up from Africa to Jerusalem to celebrate and observe the Passover proceedings. When he lined up along the Via Dolorosa, the crowd gathered on that Good Friday, he watched the proceedings, no doubt straining his neck and squinting his eyes, trying to get a perspective of what was happening. Suddenly, a Man collapsed before him under the weight of a cross. Instead of forcing Him to carry the burden any further, a soldier on the scene placed the flat head of his spear upon the shoulder of Simon the Cyrene, saying, "You take the Cross."

Simon must have thought, *Oh no. What a catastrophe. I came to celebrate the Passover, and now I'm going to be defiled by associating with this criminal.* But he discovered that the catastrophe was, in fact, a great opportunity because something happened to Simon when he took up the Cross. Could it be that he understood the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6, which says, "The government shall be upon His shoulder"? The government of what? The government of the Cross. As Simon carried the Cross of Christ, he was, in a sense, governed in a way he never would have anticipated or wanted. Yet carry the Cross he did, eventually becoming converted to the One whose Cross he carried. And not only did Simon get saved, but, as can be inferred from this verse, his wife and his sons did as well.

What's the point for you and me? Jesus said, "If any man come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross" (see Matthew 16:24). He didn't say this because He wants us to be miserable or burdened. He didn't say this because He wants to see us squirm or suffer. No, He said it because He came to teach us the very important truth that the way to really have happiness and fulfillment in life is to die to self. The more you live for yourself, the more you focus on yourself, the more you are concerned about yourself, the more discouraged and defeated you'll be. "I came that you might have life and life abundantly," Jesus said (John 10:10) "And the way to have abundant life is to take up your cross."

Romans 16:14

Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them.

These are all Greek names, and, because they're lumped together along with "the brethren with them," it is likely these guys lived together in a commune.

Romans 16:15 (a)

Salute Philologus . . .

What a great name! It comes from "Philos Logos" or "Lover of the Word."

Romans 16:15 (b)–17 (a)

. . . and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them. Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you. Now . . .

After giving a greeting to his friends, Paul gives a warning of foes to avoid.

Romans 16:17 (b), 18 (a)

. . . I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ . . .

Many "Lord Jesus Christs" are being taught—the Lord Jesus of the Mormons, of the Jehovah's Witness, of the Modernist, of the New Ager. But they're not our Lord Jesus.



***For topical study of Romans 16:17–18 entitled "Another Jesus?" turn to page* 1003.**

Romans 16:18 (b)

. . . but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

The word "simple" does not mean "dumb." It means "sincere." What's being said here is that there are sincere people who are being deceived by those who preach another Jesus Christ. Therefore, in your sincerity to want to learn more about the Lord or to be students of the Word, don't allow those who teach a different Jesus to come into your home. Don't engage in discussions with them. Don't spend time arguing with them. Mark them and avoid them. Why? I offer two reasons. . . .

One reason is *protection.* Satan is clever. And many a believer who thought he was strong in theology has succumbed to those who are inspired satanically. The second reason is *prioritization.* Invest your energy in the fields that are already white and ready for harvest (John 4:35), in the lives of those who are already open to the gospel.

Romans 16:19

For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.

"Be wise about spiritual matters but simple, or naive, concerning evil," warned Paul. I believe the trend in ministry today to keep culturally current and socially relevant is contrary to this word of warning.

"But I won't be effective," we say.

That's what Moses thought. . . .

At forty years of age, Moses had enough of Egypt. "I'd rather suffer with God's people who are laboring out in the sun baking bricks than to be in the palaces of Pharaoh enjoying sin, which brings pleasure only for a short season," he said (Hebrews 11:25). So he left the palace, saw a Jew being hassled by an Egyptian taskmaster, and did what he was trained to do in Egypt: He flexed his muscle, clenched his fist, and dealt a deathblow to the taskmaster.

The next day, when he came to hang out with the Jews, they said, "Get out of here. Are you going to kill us too?" (Exodus 2:14). And Moses fled to the desert, where, for the next forty years he unlearned Egypt.

Forty years later, God called him back to Egypt. "They won't believe me," he cried (Exodus 4:1). "Look at me. I don't dress like an Egyptian pharaoh anymore. I don't know the latest songs. I can't tell you the top ten shows. I don't get People *magazine anymore. How am I going to relate to them? They won't listen to me."*

"Oh, yes they will," God answered. "You left Egypt overnight. But it's taken me forty years to get Egypt out of you. Now I can use you."

And how He did!

I want our kids to see the vanity of Egypt, to leave it behind, forget it, and not feel they have to know what's going on. To do so, they have to see that in you, Mom and Dad. They have to see you as those who live with an entirely different mindset than that of the world.

For topical study of Romans 16:19 entitled "Be Simple Concerning Evil," turn to page **1007.**

Romans 16:20

And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.

Remain naive concerning evil and watch how God will stomp Satan under you through the peace you have in your heart, the peace that flows from your lips, the peace seen on your face.

Romans 16:20–22

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen. Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you. I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.

Tertius was Paul's secretary, to whom Paul dictated this Epistle. His name means "Third." The last name in verse 23 is Quartus, whose name means "Fourth." These guys were slaves. In those days, slaves were referred to only by number. Consequently, it's interesting that these two, who were considered unworthy of names, became historically and eternally significant because they were brought into the kingdom.

So, too, you might feel like a number, like no one cares about you, like no one takes notice of you. But the Lord has a plan for you. He's got your number. And as you give yourself to Him and walk with Him, you'll find significance. Ask Tertius and Quartus!

Romans 16:23

Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother.

Those who were with Paul in Corinth send their greetings to those in Rome.

Romans 16:24

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Paul gives his usual closing as he writes, "The grace of the Lord be with you." But wait. There are three more verses. What's going on? At this point, Paul does what he frequently was inclined to do. He grabbed the pen himself and "autographed" this letter with the final three verses.

Romans 16:25 (a)
Now . . .

Here Paul takes the pen and writes himself. He makes mention of this practice in 2 Thessalonians 3:17. We see it was Paul's custom, after closing his dictation, to grab the pen and add a final thought or two before signing the letter. . . .

Romans 16:25 (b)
. . . to him that is of power to stablish you . . .

Not infrequently I have been asked about Applegate Christian Fellowship's follow-up program for the numbers of folks who are saved and baptized each week. "We don't have a follow-up program," I would say. "We have a follow up Person—the One who is able to stabilize, establish, and steady us."

Romans 16:25 (c)
. . . according to my gospel . . .

On the basis of this verse, some say Paul had a unique gospel, different from the one Peter or John preached. But such is not the case.

In John 20, Mary said, "They've taken away my *Lord, and I don't know where they've laid Him."*

*Also in John 20, Thomas said, "*My *Lord and* my *God."*

So, too, Paul says, "*my* gospel" because the gospel had not only impacted him theologically—he claimed it personally.

Romans 16:25 (d)–27

. . . and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.

The word translated, "mystery" is the Greek word *musterion.* It doesn't mean that which can't be figured out, but rather that which was previously hidden.

Musterion is like the car commercials in which the new model is covered with a sheet or canvas. You can see the shape of it, but not the details. The engineer knows what's underneath the canvas. The designer already knows the shape of the car. But the car remains hidden to the rest of us. So, too, the mystery of which Paul spoke was hidden until the right moment. What is the mystery? It begins to unfold in Romans 11:25, where Paul uses the word *musterion* for the first time in regard to the mystery that Gentiles would be brought into the kingdom. "Gentiles in the kingdom?" the Jew would say. "That's a mystery!"

But the mystery continues, for in Ephesians 3:2–6, *musterion* appears again. Not only would the Gentile be brought into the kingdom, but Gentiles would be incorporated into a brand-new entity called the church, the body of Christ. No more would there be a differentiation between Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and freemen (1 Corinthians 12:13). This was revolutionary.

But it is the third appearance of the word *musterion* that touches the heart of the mystery, for it is there Paul writes of the mystery of "Christ in you—the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:25–27). It's not a program given to us, not rules and regulations laid on us, not expectations placed before us, but rather Christ *in* us, the hope of glory.

Folks, it's not religions, not programs, not twelve-stepping, not trying harder, not getting it together, not follow-up materials that are needed. What's needed is Christ living in us. A lot of people think Christianity involves some rules, some regulations, a standard, a code to live by, and some activities to take part in. Nothing could be further from the truth because Jesus did not come to make bad people good, nor to make good people better. He came to make dead men alive by living in them.

The last time *musterion* is found is in 1 Timothy 3:16, where Paul says,

- God was manifest in the flesh when Jesus came as the Babe of Bethlehem;
- He was justified in the Spirit when the Spirit came upon Him at His baptism;
- He was seen of angels when they ministered to Him in the wilderness after He had been tempted for forty days;
- He was preached unto the nations when He healed and ministered not to the Jews only, but to the Gentiles;
- He was believed on in the world when multitudes gathered around Him;
- And He was received unto glory when He rose from the dead.

"Great is this mystery," said Paul, "that Jesus, who was victorious over the Enemy, who never succumbed to any temptation personally, who was justified by the Father as the voice from heaven rang out audibly, and yet is One who can relate to you and me personally. This same Jesus was received up into glory and returned to us through His Spirit."

This means that when my kids are tempted to do something they ought not do, or when I plunge into something I shouldn't, even at the very time of the temptation, sin, or difficulty, we will be exceedingly uncomfortable because Jesus is in us.

Gang, He is faithful to establish you, your kids, your friends, your neighbors, those who have been baptized Sunday after Sunday—anyone who comes to Him. *Great* is the mystery!

Without the mystery of godliness, man is sentenced either to despair as he worries about whether his friends and loved ones will live right—or to legalized religion as he sets up rules and regulations to ensure the people he loves won't stray.

But if we understand the mystery of Christ dying for us, living within us, relating to us, we can be sure we'll make it. So will our children, our neighbors, and all who are recipients of the mystery.

"This is the mystery," said Paul. "Jesus will establish you because He lives in you."

What wonderful comfort.

ANOTHER JESUS?
A Topical Study of
ROMANS 16:17, 18

The sixteenth chapter of the Book of Romans makes obvious the fact that, although Paul had never been to Rome, there were at least thirty-five people there he knew by name.

But there is something else in this chapter that intrigues me. That is, in the middle of his list of friends to greet, Paul inserts a list of foes to avoid. "Mark those who cause division by teaching what is contrary to the doctrine I have shared with you," he said. Notice he doesn't say, "Debate them," "Study them," or even, "Have compassion on them." He says, "Mark and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ."

I was surprised by the results of a poll that showed over 80 percent of the people in our country claim to believe in Jesus Christ? Do 80 percent of Americans really have a saving faith in Jesus Christ? Are 80 percent of your neighbors, co-workers, or acquaintances headed for heaven? I doubt it. You see, even though many talk about Jesus Christ and claim to be interested in Jesus Christ, or they do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ because there are many "Lord Jesus Christs" being talked about today.

There is the Lord Jesus Christ of the modernist. "Jesus was not really born of a virgin," the modernist says. "That's just a piece of Hebrew mythology. He didn't perform miracles, either."

> Consider the feeding of the five thousand. According to the modernist, what really happened was quite simple to explain. That is, as was the custom of the day, people had their lunches in the sleeves of their robes. And when one little boy stepped forward and said, "I'll share," everyone followed his example. Thus, everyone was fed.

Preposterous! Our Lord Jesus Christ is not the Jesus Christ of the modernist.

Nor is He the Jesus Christ of the Jehovah's Witness. The Jesus Christ of the Jehovah's Witness is actually Michael, the archangel. According to Witness theology, Michael came to this earth and became Jesus Christ. His death on the Cross does not apply to the common person, and His resurrection is denied altogether. Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ of the Jehovah's Witness is not our Lord Jesus Christ.

Nor is He the Jesus Christ of the Christian Scientist, who simply holds Him up as a Divine Ideal. The Christian Scientist denies anything negative or evil—including hell. The Scientist holds Jesus as a Master whose primary purpose was to teach us a positive way to think and live. But He's not our Lord Jesus Christ.

Nor is our Lord Jesus Christ the Jesus Christ of the Mormon, who teaches that Jesus Christ was the offspring of Adam, God, and Mary—and that when Jesus appeared in the flesh, He was a polygamist, secretly married to several of the Marys of the Bible, as well as to Martha. The more you study the teachings of Mormonism, the more you realize their Jesus Christ is not our Jesus Christ.

Nor is our Lord Jesus Christ the Jesus Christ of the New Ager, who says, "Christ is everywhere. He's in you; He's in me. He's the Divine Spark who simply needs to be fanned through contemplation and meditation." The Jesus Christ of the New Ager is a crystal Christ. Our Jesus Christ is the Rock of Ages.

Now, while we are to avoid any who teach contrary to our Lord Jesus Christ, we are also to be ready to give an answer to any man who asks the reason for the hope within us (1 Peter 3:15). We should know the Scriptures and be able to give an answer to the New Ager and the Modernist, the Jehovah's Witness, Mormon, and Scientist—but giving an answer doesn't mean endless dialogue and debate.

Too many people, in attempting to straighten out those who teach another Jesus Christ, have found themselves shipwrecked in their own faith. Heed the simple word the Scriptures share concerning those who teach another Jesus Christ: Mark them and avoid them.

If our Lord Jesus Christ is not the Jesus Christ of the New Ager, the modernist, the Jehovah's Witness, the Mormon, or the Christian Scientist, who is He?

Turn back to Romans 1, and see what Paul has to say about who our Lord Jesus Christ is.

The Revealed One

> *(Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) concern ing his Son Jesus Christ our Lord . . .*
>
> Romans 1:2, 3 (a)

Jesus is not some weird guru who showed up on the scene, claiming to have some fresh new revelation. Rather, centuries before He appeared, promises were given concerning Him that we might know for certain that He is the Chosen One, the Messiah, the Savior for all humanity.

- Micah tells us where He would be born (chapter 5).
- Isaiah tells us the way in which He would be born (chapter 7).
- Daniel tells us the very day He would enter the Holy City and present Himself as King (chapter 9).
- Zechariah not only tells us He would be betrayed by a friend and sold for silver, but also that the silver would be cast on the floor of the temple and used to buy a potter's field (chapter 11).
- David tells us the kind of death He would die (Psalm 22).

What is the statistical possibility that these eight prophecies could be fulfilled by any one person? In his excellent work, *Science Speaks,* author Peter Stoner says the probability is $1:10^{\mathbf{27}}$.

But, folks, there were not only eight prophecies given concerning Jesus Christ. There are over *three hundred*—all fulfilled perfectly. Truly, He is the Revealed One.

The Reigning One

. . . which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh . . .

Romans 1:3 (a)

Our Lord Jesus Christ is not only revealed in prophecies of old, but reigns as King of kings, sitting on the throne of David. He is not some wispy consciousness, not some floating spirit. He is 100 percent human.

What does this mean for us practically? It means that, because He was tempted in all points as we are (Hebrews 4:15), He felt every single temptation.

> If you put a great big rutabaga in front of me, I would not be tempted at all. But put a hot fudge sundae in front of me—*that's* temptation!

What does it mean that Jesus was "tempted in all points like as we are"? It means that every temptation mankind experiences was to Him not a rutabaga, but a hot fudge sundae because temptation is not temptation unless it's tempting. This means Jesus can reign over my life as my King because He was tempted by the same sins that tempt me. Whatever sin tempts you, precious people, He understands because it tempted Him too.

Jesus doesn't look down on you. He's not disgusted with you. He's not confused by you. He understands you because this "Seed of David according to the flesh" has been tempted by the same things that tempt you.

The Resurrected One

> *And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*
>
> Romans 1:4

Our Lord Jesus Christ is not only 100 percent man, but He's one hundred percent God as well. "Give us a sign," they said. "Do something to prove Your claim" (see John 2:18).

"One sign I'll give," Jesus replied. "Destroy this body and in three days I'll rise again from the dead" (see John 2:19).

Our Lord Jesus did something that neither Mary Baker Eddy, Joseph Smith, Mohammed, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, or any other so-called spiritual leader has ever done. He rose from the dead. Jesus is alive, gang. He doesn't just tell you how to live or what you should do. He is the Resurrected One. He is God. And He lives inside you. Therefore, because our Lord Jesus is uniquely the Revealed One, the Reigning One, and the Resurrected One, we are to mark those who teach otherwise.

What does it mean to be marked? The Old Testament picture of this New Testament principle is found in Ezekiel 9. . . .

Caught up by the Lord and taken to Jerusalem, Ezekiel was instructed to go throughout the city and mark those who were crying over the sins and abominations of Jerusalem. They were to be marked with the final letter of the Hebrew alphabet—"taw"—which was an X, a cross. "Mark the heads of those who are sighing and weeping over sin, who are saddened by the carnality, rebellion and iniquity in this city," said God, "for those not marked with a cross are to be wiped out and destroyed" (see Ezekiel 9:4–6). And where was the marking to begin? In the sanctuary, in the house of God (Ezekiel 9:6).

The same is true today. I know those who are truly of our Lord Jesus Christ because they carry on them the mark of the Cross. They realize the seriousness of sin and that Jesus paid its price by dying for them. Not only that, they realize He asks them to bear the Cross as well (Matthew 16:24).

Precious people, there are two marks. . . .

> The mark of the Cross is upon those who realize the seriousness and repercussion of sin, upon those who embrace Jesus Christ and take up their Cross daily to follow Him.
>
> The mark of apostasy and heresy is upon those who teach another Christ, an Easy Jesus, a Nice Guy, an Interesting Teacher.

Are you marked with the Cross—or are you a believer in another Jesus Christ, a Cross-less Christ? If you're a believer in another Jesus Christ, you're marked for destruction. But if you're a believer in the Revealed, Reigning, Resurrected One, and an embracer of His Cross, you're marked for heaven.

BE SIMPLE CONCERNING EVIL

A Topical Study of ROMANS 16:19

As Paul the apostle closes this Epistle, he shares with the Romans a very powerful, practical principle. That is, he would have them be wise to that which is good and ignorant concerning evil. You see, Rome, being the capital city of the empire, was the place to be for anyone who was moving up in society. It was the power point politically, the hot spot culturally. Rome was where the movie stars hung out and the musicians lived. It was the happening place—which is why Paul was concerned that the believers there remain naive concerning evil, that they be ignorant concerning what was happening around them culturally.

"Hey," they could have argued, "We've got to keep up with the latest trends and fads."

"No, you don't," Paul would counter. "I want you to be wise and knowledgeable about things that are good. But when it comes to what is evil, you should be the most naive of all people."

In America, where many of the trends of the world are set, I believe we have become very knowledgeable about evil. And I think that's dangerous.

"Oh, but I'm just keeping current," we say. "I'm just monitoring the trends by reading those books, watching those shows, going to those movies."

"I'm concerned about you," said Paul. "Yes, your faith is spoken of throughout the world. But are you naive concerning evil?"

Why shouldn't we follow cultural trends? Why shouldn't we be those who monitor activities, music, or movies so that we might know what's happening?

Take careful note: In the very beginning God warned His people that they were in danger of becoming ensnared by the same gods and influences that damned the Canaanites before them. How? By inquiring after their gods, saying, "How did these nations worship? What were they doing? What was their mind-set and perspective? I need to be informed about it. I need to keep up with it. I need to be tuned in to it" (Deuteronomy 12:29, 30).

“Even though you are in the land,” God said to His people, “even though the Canaanites are wiped out, don’t research their idolatry, for it will ensnare you. You’ll become interested in it. You’ll become intrigued by it. Even though your motives might have been okay initially—watch out. There are powerful forces at work, demonic entities behind those idols, videos, movies, magazines, and books. Stay away.”

In other words, the Word of God in Deuteronomy is the same as it is in Romans: “Be naive concerning evil.” In trying to keep current, too many people in the church have been caught up in the current of carnality, carried down the river and wiped out. Why? Because they failed to heed the warnings so clearly given in the Word.

“The idols of the nations are silver and gold,” the psalmist declared (Psalm 135:15). So, too, in order to sell their CD, movie, or book, the idols on MTV and in Hollywood today will be seductive, immoral, or outrageous. They’ll do whatever it takes to get silver and gold.

The tragedy is that the one who makes the idol becomes like the idol (Psalm 135:18). Truly, what we fix our eyes on is what we become. Fix your eyes on the culture and you will mirror the culture.

The Life of the Holy

David understood this. This man who killed giants, bears, and lions, this one who was a musician, a poet, and the most popular man in the kingdom said, "I will set nothing wicked before my eyes" (see Psalm 101:3). This verse should be attached to every TV in every home of every Christian.

"Oh, but I gotta check it out. I gotta see what's hot."

No, you don't. Evil is a snare. It will erode your soul, zap your spiritual energy, and diminish your hunger for the Word. And slowly, but surely, you'll become like what you are beholding.

Joseph was another who understood the seductiveness of sin. When Potiphar's wife grabbed him and said, "Lie with me," Joseph replied by splitting the scene (Genesis 39:12). What happened to Joseph? He became second only to Pharaoh in the kingdom of Egypt. He ascended to power and prominence because he lived a life of purity.

The same was true of Daniel. "I'll not eat the king's meat and drink," he said. "Pass the broccoli" (Daniel 1:12). What happened to Daniel? He was promoted to the position of satrap—one of the most successful men in all of Babylon.

Knowing the day in which he lived was exceedingly wicked, Job said, "I made a covenant with my eyes. Why then should I think upon a maid?" (Job 31:1)—the inference being, "I'll not look on that which would stimulate lust. I make a covenant right now not to look on the screen, to read the book, or listen to the music that flirts with evil or toys with wickedness."

You can either engage in demonic activities and darkness that will pull you down and do you in—or you can be like David or Daniel, like Joseph or Job, and say, "I will be naive when it comes to things that are dark and evil," and in so doing find the blessing of God upon your life.

Job and David, Joseph and Daniel were men who were blessed, prosperous, and successful because they stood for purity. Sure, they had failings and shortcomings—but their hearts and lives were geared toward integrity.

Contrast these men with another, one who thought he needed to be in the middle of the scene: Herod.

The Life of Herod

Mark 6 tells us Herod was one who lived in luxury, was a lousy leader politically, and was caught up in lascivious activity. He took his brother's wife as his mistress, threw wild parties, and kept up with all that was the latest in Rome. He knew what was happening culturally—but he also knew inside he was wrong. He knew that flirting with the world made him a debauched, depraved loser—despised by the very people he ruled.

John the Baptist came on the scene, wearing camel skin and chewing on grasshoppers, saying, "What you're doing, Herod, is not right" (see Mark 6:18). Although Scripture records that Herod "heard him gladly" (see Mark 6:20), his mistress knew John was a problem, so she demanded he be thrown in prison.

Soon afterward, at one of Herod's notorious parties, the teen-aged daughter of Herod's wife danced before Herod and his guests. Knowing such dancing would cause Herod to crumble, her mother instructed her to ask for the head of John the Baptist in return. Sure enough, following her dance, Herod told the girl that anything up to half of the kingdom could be hers. And, as instructed by her mother, the girl asked for the head of John the Baptist. Although Herod knew John was a good man, he was trapped. Afraid of backing down under the pressure of his peers, Herod gave in.

Not long after John was beheaded, Herod began to hear rumors of a Man teaching and healing in the area. Haunted by his sin, Herod cried, "It's John the Baptist back from the dead." But two years later, as recorded in the twenty-third chapter of Luke, the One who Herod thought was John the Baptist was brought before him to judge. "I've been wanting to see You," said Herod (see Luke 23:8). "Do some miracle for me."

But Jesus answered him not a word—which infuriated Herod. Consequently, Herod began to mock and taunt Jesus, while ordering his men to beat Him. Jesus was crucified, but He rose again. Herod, on the other hand, lived—only to go insane and, as some historians believe, take his own life. Today, Herod is studied as the quintessential picture of a total loser—for although he lived in the holy city of Jerusalem, he got caught up in the Roman scene, in Greek culture, in the latest happening, and drowned in the cesspool of sin.

Precious people, there's a better route for us. It's called purity. "Oh, but we can't be ostriches with our heads in the sand," you might protest. First of all, not one ostrich has ever been known to stick his head in the sand. Secondly, it's not a matter of sticking your head in the sand. It's a matter of keeping your head out of the sewer!

As a young Man, Jesus found favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). Kids, if you want favor in the eyes of men, here's what to do: Live righteously. But if you want to be a dead fish that goes with the flow, just keep up with the latest thing on MTV. Stay tuned. Be cool—and you'll become a nothing. Ask Herod.

The choice is yours and mine today. We can either be like Herod, the quintessential loser, the party-er, the drinker, the movie expert—or we can be like Jesus, who became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, upon whom was the grace of God (Luke 2:40). May God give us modern-day Romans wisdom. I know you have faith in the gospel—and I commend you for that. But, as Paul would say, this one thing I would have of you: Be ignorant concerning evil and wise concerning good.

And so, as we come to the end of Paul's letter to the Romans, my prayer is that the Lord will give you a continual hunger and appetite to devour the meat of His Word.

May He give you the energy to mine its riches.

May He make you strong in theology—not that you might be puffed up with pride, but that, understanding your liberty, you might perpetually praise Him.

May you be free from religion and legalism.

May He bless you immensely.



1 CORINTHIANS

Background to 1 Corinthians

If churches were graded, the church at Corinth would be given a D for divided, defiled, and defamed. But the letter written by Paul to address these problems rates an A+.

Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians can be divided into two parts. Chapters 1—6 deal with concerns Paul had *about* them. Chapters 7—16 deal with answers Paul had *for* them. In these concerns and answers, Paul instructed the Corinthian church—and every subsequent church—regarding effective ministry, true unity, Christian charity, spiritual maturity, and the meaning of liberty. He instructed them regarding Church conduct, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection of the dead. He wrote to them regarding the problem of division and the definition of love.

Although best known for its thirteenth chapter, the whole of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is a glorious Epistle—one I believe you'll find to be exceedingly practical and uniquely helpful.

1 CORINTHIANS

1 Corinthians 1:1 (a)

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God . . .

The words "to be" appear in italics. As is usually the case, when the translators added them to clarify the sentence, they actually clouded it. This verse should actually read: "Paul, called an apostle of Jesus Christ." Apostleship was not an office he was trying to achieve, but rather a definition of who he was—one who was sent out by Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:1 (b)

. . . and Sosthenes our brother.

As Paul wrote this Epistle, a man named Sosthenes was beside him. Perhaps that name rings a bell.

When Paul was in Corinth the first time, he preached the gospel in the synagogues. But when he proclaimed that Jesus is Messiah, the Jews protested so vehemently that Paul shook off his raiment and said, "Your blood be upon your own heads. I'm going to the Gentiles" (see Acts 18:6). When he went to the Gentiles, where did Paul go? Right next door to the house of Justus, also called Gaius. When he started teaching there, many were converted—including Crispus, the leader of the synagogue. As a result, the Jews were "provoked to jealousy" (see Romans 1).

When Gallio, a new deputy, was assigned to the region, the Jews wasted no time presenting their accusations against Paul. Led by a man named Sosthenes, they stormed into Gallio's office, saying, "A man next door to our synagogue is teaching things contrary to the law."

Yet even before Paul could open his mouth in his own defense, Gallio said, "I don't have time to settle religious disputes." And he

drove them out. Angry with the one who pled their case, the Jews beat Sosthenes. Evidently, it was at this point that something happened within him—for shortly thereafter, Sosthenes was converted.

I remind you of this story for a reason. That is, although it was Sosthenes who led the protest against Paul, in our text we see Sosthenes laboring with Paul. The same is still true. People who are most violently opposed to you and your faith are often the very ones who are most convicted by the Spirit, the very ones who are closest to conversion. Just let them take a few more hits from their friends in the world, and, like Sosthenes, they'll come around.

When I share the gospel, the response I least want to hear is, "I'm glad that works for you." On the other hand, when someone responds vehemently or angrily, I know I've got a candidate because he or she is provoked.

1 Corinthians 1:2 (a)
Unto the church of God which is at Corinth . . .

Paul doesn't say, "Unto the church of Corinth." He says, "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth." There is not a church of Corinth. There is not a Church of England. There is only one church: the church of God.

This church of God located at Corinth was in an interesting place. Corinth was a city in south central Greece that was prosperous economically due to its location geographically. You see, Corinth was only four miles from the Aegean Sea, so to avoid sailing around the southern tip of Greece where waters were rough and treacherous, sailors would sail through the channel to Corinth, unload their ships, put them on rollers, and roll them four miles to the Aegean. As a result, Corinth became a very prosperous port. And it was as wicked as it was prosperous. Every night, one thousand temple prostitutes left the temple of Aphrodite, the love goddess, and went through the city recruiting business in the name of worship. As a result, the coffers of the temple were filled.

In addition, Corinth was a philosophical center. Along with Athens, Corinth was a favorite of philosophers. This made for an interesting mix in Corinth—a city engaged in lofty discourse by day and depravity and

debauchery by night. Thus, it is no surprise that it was from Corinth that Paul penned his Epistle to the Romans, wherein he traced the devolution of man (Romans 1).

1 Corinthians 1:2 (b)
. . . to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus . . .

The word "sanctified" literally means "set apart." The Greek word has its roots in the idea of marriage, wherein one is set apart *to* someone and *for* someone. The Hebrew concept of sanctification is seen in the instruments used in the tabernacle and temple that were used exclusively for the offering of sacrifices. Thus, from the very get-go, Paul comes in with a powerful word to the Corinthians as he says to them, "I know the reputation Corinthians have, but you Christians are different. You're set apart for God's service exclusively.

1 Corinthians 1:2 (c)
. . . called to be saints . . .

The words "to be" are in italics. Therefore, for a more correct rendering of this phrase, delete the words "to be." We don't work to be saints. It's not an honor given to a holy few. No, every one of us is who is born again is a saint.

1 Corinthians 1:2 (d)
. . . with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.

These truths apply not only to those in Corinth but also to everyone who calls on the name of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:3
Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Charis," or "Grace," was the typical Greek greeting. "Shalom," or "Peace," was its Hebrew counterpart. Here and in his other epistles, Paul marries these two ideas—always putting grace first because a person cannot have true and lasting peace unless he first understands God's matchless grace.

1 Corinthians 1:4

I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ.

Paul couldn't say, "I thank my God for your righteousness," because the Corinthians weren't very righteous. He couldn't say, "I thank my God for your faith," because they weren't very faithful. Paul could, however, say, "I thank my God for His grace given on your behalf "—because they needed it! Although he realized the seriousness of the situation, I, nonetheless, picture Paul with a smile on his face as he wrote, "When I think about you, I thank God for grace."

1 Corinthians 1:5

That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge.

"Utterance and knowledge" is a reference to the *charisma*—the gifts of the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 1:6, 7

Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:

The grace of God was shown to the church in Corinth in that they lacked no spiritual gift. This tells me something very important: The flow of spiritual gifts either in a man individually or in a congregation corporately is not an indication of spirituality. It's an indication of grace. When someone has a gift of healing, a word of prophecy, or otherwise moves in the

miraculous, our tendency is to assume he must be very holy. The gifts of the Spirit, however, are not dependent upon our attaining a certain level of spirituality. They're simply a matter of our being recipients of grace. This means ministry and spiritual gifts are not based upon how we're doing at all —but solely upon what God wants to do in and through us.

1 Corinthian 1:8

Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"God's been good to you Corinthian Christians," says Paul. "He'll see you through." Why? Read on.

1 Corinthians 1:9

God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

We're going to make it. Why? Not because of anything within ourselves —but because God is faithful. That's why the psalmist says that we are held by His right hand (Psalm 73:23).

When my son, Benjamin, was five years old, if he and I were crossing a busy street on a cold, rainy day, I would say, "Hold my hand, Benjamin. He would put his hand in mine, and we would start across the street. But if he slipped and let go of my hand, would it be curtains for him? No, because, although I said, "Hold my hand, Ben," in reality, I would be holding his. So if he slipped, it would be no problem because no matter what, I would never let go.

So, too, even to these Corinthian Christians who were entangled in a whole host of problems, Paul says, "You're going to make it. Why? Because God is faithful."

1 Corinthians 1:10, 11

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.

When Paul was in Rome, he heard from members of Chloe's house that the church in Corinth was splintering into factions and deep divisions—something he knew he needed to address.

1 Corinthians 1:12

Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.

The church at Corinth was divided into four groups:

- Some said, "We follow Paul, the founder of this fellowship."
- Others said, "Paul's not impressive. We follow Apollos. He is an eloquent orator, a powerful personality, a true intellectual."
- A third group said, "Apollos may be a skilled speaker, but we can't figure out what he says. We follow Peter, the great big fisherman. He speaks practically and simply."
- A fourth group said, "We don't follow any man. We follow Christ."

These same four groups can still be seen today . . .

- "We're going to stay with the pastor who founded this church," some say.
- Others say, "We want someone more eloquent."
- "We want someone more practical," says a third faction.
- "We only need Jesus," says a fourth.

Perhaps it is the last group that is the most proud because their mentality would be that of a private in the U.S. Army who, when asked what division he is with, would answer, "I'm not into companies or divisions. I'm a freelancer. I fight where I want; I come and go as I please. I'm a soldier, but I'm not into the structure of command. It's too restrictive. I only answer to my Commander in Chief, the President of the United States."

There are those who say, "I'm not responsible, accountable, linked to any elder, pastor, or group of brothers. I answer only to Jesus." Although Jesus is indeed our Commander in Chief, and we do answer to Him, He has chosen to work through the structure of the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:13

Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

When the body of Christ is divided, who bleeds?
Jesus.

1 Corinthians 1:14

I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius.

The leader of the synagogue, Crispus, got saved when Paul first went to Corinth (Acts 18:8). Gaius was Paul's host in Rome (Romans 16:23).

1 Corinthians 1:15, 16

Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.

"I didn't baptize any of you except for Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas because I wasn't trying to draw people to myself," said Paul.

1 Corinthians 1:17

For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of

none effect.

Can we say the same thing concerning our family, our community, or our church corporately? What are we to be about? So often we who are teaching or preaching are inundated with the latest trend or the newest doctrine. But attempting to keep up with these fads only causes fatigue in the pastor and frustration in the congregation. Paul never burned out because his goal was simple and singular, never changing, never wavering. "I came to you," he said, "preaching nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

"Come on, be practical," people say. "We need more than just hearing about Jesus Christ crucified. We have problems in our marriage. We have problems with addictions. We have problems with our children. We have problems with guilt. We have problems with doubt." But I suggest that throughout the Epistle, we'll see that the solution to every problem that plagues every person is the same: Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

1 Corinthians 1:18 (a)
For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness . . .

The literal translation would more correctly render this verse: "For the preaching of the Cross is to them that *are perishing* foolishness." When we tell people that Jesus loves them, died in place of them, and offers a new life to them, those who are perishing just don't get it because to deny one's self and take up the Cross seems foolish to them.

1 Corinthians 1:18 (b)
. . . but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

Again, a more literal rendering of this verse would be ". . . but unto us which are *being saved,* it is the power of God." Salvation is, in a sense, progressive. When you opened your heart to Jesus Christ, you were saved from the penalty of sin. Day by day, we're saved from the power of sin. And when Jesus comes to take us to heaven, we'll be saved from the presence of sin. The message of the Cross gives hope when I have failed because Jesus'

blood cleanses me from all sin. It also gives direction to the way I live, for it is only when I deny myself and take up the Cross that I find life (Matthew 10:38, 39).

1 Corinthians 1:19, 20

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

"Where are the debaters, scribes, and thinkers? Where are the psychiatrists and psychologists?" asks Paul. "What have they done for your culture? Hasn't God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"

We can either become depressed over the foolish political and judicial decisions of our leaders—or we can realize they are exactly what God planned to do all along. We won't be upset if we realize that even the foolishness of the world is part of God's plan.

1 Corinthians 1:21

For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

People have their hope restored in the big picture of eternity through that which the world deems foolish: the preaching of the Word. Paul doesn't say that people are saved by the preaching of foolishness. You'll know the difference between the preaching that is the power of God and the preaching of foolishness by one simple rule of thumb: Does what is being said match up with the Scriptures? Is it seen specifically in the life of Jesus? Is it practiced throughout the Book of Acts? Is it taught by Paul in the Epistles? In other words, is it consistent with the entire New Testament?

Every true teaching, doctrine, and practice is seen in the life of Jesus, practiced in the Book of Acts, and taught by Paul in the Epistles. Therefore, if a teacher or preacher suggests something that doesn't match up in all those areas, reject it. Because there is enough in the Word to keep us busy for every

day of our lives, there is no need to supplement it with deviant doctrine or bizarre practices.

1 Corinthians 1:22, 23 (a)

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified . . .

Whether relating to marriage or government, depression or addiction, parenting, finances, or doubt, the Cross is indeed the crux of every matter.

1 Corinthians 1:23 (b)–25

. . . unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

The Jews stumble at the crucified Christ. Why? They were looking for a Messiah to lead them militarily and provide for them economically. Therefore, when Jesus came on the scene and was nailed to a Cross, they discounted Him immediately. Today we see crosses around necks, on bookmarks, or above churches. In Jesus' day, however, this would have been equivalent to wearing a little gold electric chair around one's neck, attaching a mini gas chamber to a bookmark, or hanging a noose atop a church.

The Greeks didn't find the Cross to be humiliating. They found it to be too simple. And the Greek mind-set is still present today in those who think the preaching of the Cross is too simple, that it doesn't deal with the dysfunctional families, drug addictions, and cultural differences of our complex culture. We who have personally experienced its power know otherwise.

1 Corinthians 1:26

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

The same is still true. Look around. How many of you are listed in *Who's Who in America?* The only place most of us would find our names would be in *Who's He?*!

1 Corinthians 1:27, 28

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

God uses weak and foolish things. Why? Read on.

1 Corinthians 1:29

That no flesh should glory in his presence.

The Lord uses weak things in order that only He gets credit. Why? Is He on some huge ego trip? Is He saying, "I don't want anyone else to get any glory because I need to be affirmed?" Obviously not! God uses weak things not because of a lack in His nature, but due to a lack in ours. You see, God knows when He uses someone who is impressive in the eyes of the world, people set themselves up for a huge fall because they look to him rather than to God. Therefore, He says, "I don't want any flesh to glory because all flesh will fail ultimately."

It was not until Uzziah died that Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up (Isaiah 6:1). Who was Uzziah? One of the most powerful, successful, gifted kings in the history of Judah and Israel, Uzziah increased the boundaries of the nation, ushered in economic prosperity, and invented war machinery. Yet although his name was on the lips of all people (2 Chronicles 26:8), it wasn't until he died that Isaiah saw the Lord.

The Lord still allows people to die—not physically—but in the estimation of others in order that our focus can more clearly be upon Him. Therefore, wise is the man and mature the church that realizes that Uzziah's

death is not a reason to quit. Instead, it's a reason to say, "Once again, Lord, I see that You are the only One upon whom I can truly and totally rely."

1 Corinthians 1:30, 31

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Wisdom doesn't come *from* the Lord. Wisdom is *in* the Lord. All the promises of God are *in* Him yea and Amen (2 Corinthians 1:20). Wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption, all that we could ever need or want both now and eternally are wrapped up in Jesus.



1 Corinthians 2:1, 2

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

Paul came to Corinth following what I consider to be a disastrous session in Athens. In Acts 17, we see him going to Mars Hill in the city of Athens—the place where the intelligentsia of the day dialogued with one another in the city known for an on-going stream of philosophical interaction. Referring to the one thousand altars throughout Athens dedicated to various deities, Paul opened his message, saying, "The unknown god to whom you have dedicated an altar is the God of whom I want to speak." And as he delivered a dissertation to the Athenians explaining the true and living God, Paul quoted from their poets, discussed their philosophy, and alluded to their culture. But the success of his sermon was very minimal. Most of those who heard him mocked him. Others said, "Come back later, and we'll hear more." Only a handful believed.

Why? I suggest that a careful reading of Acts 17 shows he never mentioned Jesus Christ crucified. Although he alluded to the Resurrection, he never stated straightforwardly and with simplicity that Jesus had died for their sins and had risen from the dead. Instead, he tried to be philosophical. He tried to be professional. He tried to be relatable. As a result, no church was established in Athens.

So at the next stop—Corinth—Paul changed his mode of operation radically. He forsook flowery speech and talked about Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Many responded and a church was founded. Oh, it's true that the church at Corinth would have problems and need correction—but the fact remains that a great church was started when, in contrast to what he did at Athens, Paul simply preached Jesus and the Cross.



***For topical study of 1 Corinthians 2:2 entitled "Nothing but the Cross," turn to page* 1018.**

1 Corinthians 2:3–8

And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Paul maintained that, had the princes of this world understood the Cross and the Resurrection, they wouldn't have crucified Christ. Does this mean that had Pontius Pilate or Herod, the Pharisees or the Sadducees, the scribes or the lawyers known who Jesus was, they wouldn't have gone through with their plan to destroy Him? No, for many of them did know who He was.

After all, they saw the miracles; they heard the Word. They understood that He was innocent and that they were involved in treachery. They didn't really believe He was a threat to that which was good and righteous—but only to their own little empire, their own power structure.

Who are the princes to whom Paul refers? Because Jesus referred to Satan as the prince of this world (John 12:31), and because Paul would say that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities of spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12), I believe the princes of the world refer to Satan and his demons. I believe Paul is saying that had Satan and his demons known what would happen when Jesus was crucified, they wouldn't have gone that route.

Why? They thought that by crucifying Christ, they would get rid of Him. Therefore, what a shock it must have been when they realized it was His plan all along to pay for man's sins and break the power of sin.

I camp here for a moment to remind you that Satan's plans always backfire.

"We'll kill Him," Satan hissed.

"We'll crucify Him," his demons echoed—only to find out that there was now salvation for people who could never have been saved otherwise, that the doors of heaven were now open to sinners like me.

"We'll stop the Second Coming of Christ," they said. "We'll inspire a German wallpaper hanger to go crazy, rally an entire nation around him, and destroy the Jews in totality"—which he would have done had World War II lasted another six months. But even this plan backfired because Hitler's madness created such sympathy in the world community for the Jews that they were given their own country.

"We'll kill babies one by one," Satan and his demons declare as hundreds of thousands of babies are slaughtered through abortion. But even this plan is backfiring because Scripture tells us clearly that those who die before the age of accountability—before they can mentally make a decision concerning their own destiny—are taken up into heaven (2 Samuel 12:23; 1 Corinthians 7:14). Thus,

multiplied thousands of children who statistically would not have opened their heart to Jesus are being short-circuited into heaven to live eternally.

Am I suggesting we should be pro-abortion? Of course not! I am saying that although Satan is a murderer and a destroyer, that although he never has a good day, that although he never says, "I'll back off and be nice"—his plans ultimately blow up in his face, and that God's purposes—whether in your life personally or throughout history—come to pass perfectly.

1 Corinthians 2:9, 10 (a)

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit . . .

In addition to this being a reference to heaven, I believe Paul is saying even this side of heaven, we as believers see things others don't and know things others can't because the Spirit reveals to us the big picture eternally.

1 Corinthians 2:10 (b), 11

. . . for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

Who knows what God is doing? Only the Spirit of God—the same Spirit given to us (John 14:16). The Spirit of God reveals to His people that which human eyes can't see, that which human ears don't hear.

1 Corinthians 2:12, 13

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words

which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

We see things others don't. We hear things others can't because the Holy Spirit ministers to our spirits concerning spiritual truth. As a result, we look at the world around us entirely differently. For example, the spiritual man says, "No matter what the forecasters are predicting economically, the Scriptures tell me God shall supply all my need, according to His riches" (see Philippians 4:19). So, too, when the news anchors tell us the Middle East is heating up and that conflict is about to erupt once more, I already know what the political pundits can only guess at—that the armies of the world will indeed converge upon the Middle East and that there will be a battle ultimately.

1 Corinthians 2:14

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

The natural man goes to Food 4 Less and buys all-natural salad dressing and naturally grown tomatoes. When a lady pushes her way in front of him in the checkout line, it's only natural that he gets upset. After ringing up his groceries, the checker accidentally gives him too much change. He keeps it, naturally. Then he comes home and does what comes naturally: He eats, drinks, and is somewhat merry—until the emptiness in his soul drives him to look for something else. So he comes to a Bible study. He hears the Word being taught, the Scriptures being discussed, but they are foolishness to him because, as a natural man, he is spiritually blind.

The idea that man is a free moral agent is somewhat of a misconception. Paul told Timothy that men are taken captive by the Enemy against their wills, as they are blinded and bound by Satan (2 Timothy 2:26). That is why when the natural man hears the Word, it's foolishness to him.

Much of our witnessing is ineffective because we fail to pray, "Lord, please remove the blindfold Satan has put on this person's eyes. Otherwise, he won't see the real issues. Please open his ears. Otherwise, He won't hear Your voice."

1 Corinthians 2:15

But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.

Although the spiritual man is able to put everything in perspective, the worldling can't figure him out. The world can't understand why you go to Bible study, why you have devotions, why you spend time in worship. You're a puzzle, an enigma, a dilemma to the unbeliever.

1 Corinthians 2:16

For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

How do we have the mind of Christ? He lives *in* us by His Spirit. He's given His Word *to* us in the Scriptures.

NOTHING BUT THE CROSS

A Topical Study of
1 CORINTHIANS 2:2

"You have not chosen Me," Jesus said, "but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go forth and bear much fruit" (see John 15:16). That makes you an ordained minister every bit as much as I am. Following are eighteen questions you, as a minister, have been or will be asked. I suggest that the answer to each of them is the same. If you try to be philosophical or psychological, clever or creative, you'll get tripped up. But, if like Paul, you determine to talk about nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, you'll do well.

How Do I Know God Loves Me?

> *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*
>
> Romans 5:8

If someone doubts God's love, should he reexamine his childhood hurts to determine if he was rejected by his father and therefore unable to receive God's love? No. The answer is much simpler. When someone says, "I'm not sure God loves me," say, "God proved His love for you in that while you were sinning, rebelling, and couldn't care less about knowing Him, He became a Man, was pinned to a Cross, and died for you specifically. He proved His love for you not when you were going to church, trying hard, being good—but when you were terrible. So don't you know that now that you're starting to get it together a bit, now that you want to be washed by the water of the Word, now that you're wanting to know Him, He loves you all the more?"

The water and blood that flowed when a spear was thrust into Jesus' side as He hung on the Cross was indicative of a broken heart. Thus, He cares about you so dearly and loves you so deeply that even when you were sinning and rebelling, His heart burst for you.

How Do I Know God Will Provide for Me?

> *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*
>
> Romans 8:32

Years ago, my son Peter-John's grandpa gave him a Datsun pickup truck. If Peter-John had discovered that the jack handle was missing, he would have said, "Thanks so much for the truck. It's perfect. But the jack handle isn't there."

The question is, would his grandpa have said, "I can't believe this. I've given you the truck. I've given you the jack. But now you want the jack handle, too? You're asking too much!"? Of course not! If Peter-John's grandpa gave him the truck and the jack, giving him the jack handle would have been no problem.

That's what Paul is saying. If God gave us His Son—the greatest gift He could have given to you and me—then surely He won't withhold any good thing we ask of Him (Psalm 84:11).

According to the Old Testament sacrificial system, each of our sins must be atoned for individually. Therefore, the suffering of Jesus far transcends what took place one Friday afternoon. That is why when we see Him, we shall see Him as a Lamb having just been slain (Revelation 5:6). If He loved you that much, don't you know He's going to help you with the electric bill, the doctor bill, the grocery bill? Those things are mere jack handles in comparison to what He already gave us when He gave us His Son.

Why Aren't Things Working Out for Me?

Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him.

Matthew 20:20

Jesus must have chuckled when He saw the worship she was lavishing upon Him, knowing that she was coming not only to worship Him but also to get something from Him.

"What do you want?" He asked her.

"Well, since You're asking," Salome answered, "when You come into Your kingdom, could my two boys be on Your right hand and on Your left?"

"You don't know what you're asking," Jesus replied. "Are you able to drink of the cup that I shall drink, and to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

No doubt Salome went her way, confused by Jesus' cryptic answer. But a few days later, when she saw Jesus flanked on the Cross by a thief on His left and on His right, her request must have thundered in her memory.

Take those who wonder why things aren't working for them to the Cross. Remind them what happened to Salome when she gave advice to the Lord concerning what He should do. Let them see that the decisions the Lord makes ultimately prove to be the right ones.

How Do I Know God Will Forgive Me?

> *But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs. . . .*
>
> John 19:33

The greatest three words ever spoken in history are not, "It's a boy," or, "Hot and sunny," or even, "I love you," but, "It is finished." On the Cross of Calvary, all sin was paid for completely. So what do we do with people who feel guilty? We take Communion with them and remind them that there is no limitation to the blood of Jesus. "Where sin abounds, grace abounds yet more," declared Paul (Romans 5:20). That is why, when Jesus was nailed to the Cross as the Lamb who came to take away the sin of the world, not a bone of His was broken. In addition to fulfilling prophecy regarding the Passover lamb of Exodus 12, this speaks of forgiveness. You see, because blood is produced in the marrow of the bone, the fact that not a bone of Jesus was broken tells us the supply of blood to wash away sin is endless. No matter how much sin you might have been caught up in, no matter how heavy it was or how recent it has been, because of Calvary, there is no limit to the forgiveness available to you.

How Do I Overcome Addiction?

> *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*
>
> Romans 6:6

In the early Colonial days and into the 1800s, East Coast fisherman found their nets filled with starfish that were a nuisance to them. They took out their frustration by hacking the starfish up and throwing them back into the ocean —little knowing that each piece would grow into a new starfish.

Such is the case with addictions. "I'm going to do this," we declare. "I'm going to hack this up. I'm going to resolve the other." In reality, however, the more we try to deal directly with any given sin, the more we become obsessed by that sin. So what is the solution? Not a twelve-step program, but a one-step program: the Cross.

When Jesus was crucified, not only did His blood cleanse us from our sin, but our old man, our old nature was crucified with Him. Mystically and miraculously—yet very powerfully and practically—our old sinful tendencies were crucified with Christ and destroyed. The original text says they were rendered *katargao,* or paralyzed.

This means that, although our old sinful nature can still say to us, "You must give in. The craving is too strong," it now has neither power nor authority. As decisively as Jael drove the spike through the temple of Sisera (Judges 4:21), we can pound the stake of the Cross through the temple of our sinful nature with the hammer of the Word (Jeremiah 23:29). In so doing, we silence every fleshly taunt and each sinful suggestion the Enemy whispers to us.

How Do I Overcome Depression?

> *And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*
>
> Luke 9:23

The key to overcoming depression is not to pop pills, but to carry the Cross. What is the Cross? Some people say it refers to the allergies they suffer, or to the husband who left them. As hard as those situations might be, they do not fall under the biblical definition of the Cross. The Cross is not something we don't want, don't like, or can't understand. The Cross is something we bear willingly to help someone else redemptively. The Cross is something by which we die to our wishes, our pleasure, our time schedule in order that we might lay down our lives for others.

If we try to protect our life, we lose it. When we let go of our life, we find it (Luke 9:24). Those who take up the Cross by saying, "Who can I help today? With whom can I pray or share? What can I do to get my eyes off myself and die to my situation?" live lives free of depression.

How Do I Overcome Bitterness?

> *And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet . . .*
>
> Exodus 15:25

As the sun beat down on the people of Israel, their mouths were dry, their lips were parched, their skin was peeling. They hadn't had water for three days when someone cried out, "Water ahead!" Three million thirsty people ran for the pool and drank deeply—only to spit it out immediately, for the water was poisonous. "What have you done?" they cried to Moses. "You've lead us to a pool we thought would be refreshing, but instead it's bitter." And they called the name of that place "Marah," or "Bitter."

So what did Moses do? He called upon the Lord, and the Lord showed him a book on psychology. No. He called upon the Lord, and the Lord told the people to sit down before an empty chair and talk to those toward whom they were bitter. No. He called upon the Lord, and the Lord told the people to write a letter and express their anger. No. Those are all man's methods. Endless counseling sessions, playacting, and talking to empty chairs are fine for the world, for they know no other way. But what does the Bible say? Moses called to the Lord, and Scripture says the Lord showed him a tree—a tree that had been there all along—and said, "Cast it into the water." When Moses did, the water became sweet.

So, too, when you feel bitter toward the boyfriend who dumped you, the wife who left you, the boss who fired you, or the business partner who cheated you, the solution is the tree of Calvary. "Look to the Cross," Jesus says. "I died for the very sin about which you're so upset. Are you saying that My atonement is insufficient, that My blood is not enough?" It's impossible to be bitter if you see the Cross, if you understand the price that was paid for the very sin that bothers you so much.

How Can I Love People?

> *After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.*
>
> Mark 8:25

When Jesus touched the eyes of the blind man at Bethsaida, the man opened his eyes and saw Jesus. But when he looked around, he said, "I see men, but they're like trees walking." That's what happened when Jesus encountered each of us who were born, blinded by sin. He touched us and we saw Him. We were converted, born again. But then what happens? Oftentimes, although I see Jesus clearly, the people around look like trees to me. They "stump" me. I want to "cut them down." I want them to "leave." So I subtly start cutting them down through humor, gossip, or innuendo.

What's the solution? The solution is to do what Jesus did to the blind man. It's to lift my eyes higher. It's to look to the Cross—for it is in the light of Calvary that I will see people clearly.

How Can I Have a Better Marriage?

> *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it. . . .*
>
> Ephesians 5:25 (a)

The key to a good marriage is not seminars. The key is Calvary. It's dying, husband, to your dreams, your desires, your wishes—and instead taking into consideration your wife's welfare and well-being. The woman being the glory, or literally the "outshining" of the man, means that she is the reflection of her husband (1 Corinthians 11:7). Therefore, if you're having a hard time with your wife, husband, the problem is yours. Give yourself totally, wholeheartedly, and sacrificially to your wife as Christ did—and watch what happens in your marriage. Serve your wife for a week or a month redemptively, and watch what takes place in your own heart.

How Can I Be a Better Parent?

> *When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.*
>
> John 19:26, 27

The one instance we see family bonding take place in Scripture wasn't in a therapist's office. It was at the foot of the Cross, where Jesus said of John to His mother, "Behold thy son," and where Jesus said to John of Mary, "Behold thy mother." And from that point on, John adopted Mary as his mother, caring for her until she died.

Mom, Dad, foster parent, step parent, grandparent—how long has it been since you had Communion with your kids or grandchildren, since you knelt beside them with the Lord's blood and body in hand? More impacting than any vacation, more important than any talk session will be the times you gather your kids around Calvary. There, a bonding and binding will take place unlike any other the world can even begin to offer.

How Can I Motivate People to Discipleship?

> *And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.*
>
> Matthew 27:32

Crowds mocked and taunted Jesus as He made His way through the city. But because of the beating He had already endured and the loss of blood He had already experienced, His body collapsed under the weight of the Cross beam He carried. At that point, a Roman soldier tapped the shoulder of an African man who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Feeling the cold steel of the spear upon his shoulder, Simon no doubt thought, *Oh no. I came here for a vacation. I came here to celebrate Passover. Now I'm going to carry the cross for a criminal—with all of these people jeering and shouting? I don't want to get involved in this. I'm just a tourist.* But he had no choice. So Simon stepped out, took up the Cross, and carried it to Calvary.

But here's the interesting thing: He who no doubt was reluctant to carry the Cross not only became a believer, but the father of two prominent figures in the structure of the early church (Mark 15:21). This tells me that a person who sees the Cross and carries the Cross will become a disciple of Jesus Christ. There's no other option. Once a thirteen-year-old, an eighteen-year-old, or a forty-two-year-old carries the Cross, he, too, will become a disciple. It's inevitable. Therefore, it's our responsibility to tell people, to share with people, to keep pointing people to the Cross, saying, "Look what Jesus did on your behalf."

> No one would have thought of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea as radical disciples. But something happened to Nicodemus—the one who came to Jesus by night because he didn't want to be openly associated with Him. Something happened to Joseph of Arimathea, who was probably a member of the Sanhedrin: When they saw Jesus crucified on the Cross, their hearts were changed radically—so much

so that, following His crucifixion, they boldly went to Pontius Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus (John 19:38, 39).

This meant they would be ceremonially defiled for Passover. It meant Joseph would lose his standing in the Sanhedrin. It meant Nicodemus would no longer be the master teacher of Israel. But they didn't care. They gave it all up. Why? Because when these fringe disciples, these secret followers, saw the Cross, they had no choice but to become radical in their service for Jesus.

Between two thieves was an appropriate place for Jesus to be crucified. He is, after all, the ultimate thief. He'll steal the heart of anyone who understands what He did on the Cross of Calvary.

How Can I Encourage People to Continue in Discipleship?

> *Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon.*
>
> Exodus 30:9

It was an amazing scene when, following the completion of the tabernacle, the glory of the Lord descended in a bolt of fire from heaven, when the sacrifice on the newly erected altar was consumed in flame, when the people shouted for joy and bowed down in a holy hush. "We want to be part of the action," said Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu. So they lit their censers and began to burn incense—until a second fire bolt came down from heaven and struck them dead. Why were Nadab and Abihu killed? Because the fire the priests were to use was to come only from the altar—which was a picture of the Cross of Calvary, where Jesus would become the burnt Offering, the sacrificial Lamb for you and me.

Like Nadab and Abihu, 80 percent of those in ministry today claim to be affected by "burnout." This ought not be. If I am feeling burned out in serving the Lord, in ministering to the Lord, or in ministering for the Lord, it is because I have lost the vision of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Whether they're discipling adults or teaching Sunday school, whether they're pastoring, evangelizing, or leading worship, those who say, "I want to be a part of what's happening there, or I want to be involved in this because it sounds like a hot place to be or a good thing to do," will burn out when people don't appreciate them in the way they had hoped, when those who once applauded them begin to find fault with them, when people they share the gospel with turn away. The only legitimate reason for serving, the only way to continue on without burning out is to be fired up from the altar, to be ignited by the Cross. Trying to be part of a "happening scene" or trying to reach lost people, trying to make others feel better or trying to find personal fulfillment just won't work because all of that is "strange fire" (Leviticus 10:1). There is only one source of ministry, and that is the Cross of Calvary.

How Can I Be Effective in Evangelism?

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

John 12:32

As I spoke to three hundred junior-highers at a retreat, one of the boys let out a burp, which, of course, caused the rest of the kids to start giggling. My realization that I didn't have a chance to regain their attention was confirmed when a bat flew in and began to swoop around the kids' heads, causing every girl in attendance to scream. After the big burp and the flying bat, I knew I was in trouble!

But it was at that point that the Lord whispered in my heart, "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." So at that moment, once the bat had lodged in the rafters, I changed subjects and segued into talking about the Cross of Christ, the sufferings of Jesus, the price He paid for the sins of everyone in that room. And as I did, the kids dialed in so closely that I can remember to this day the fifty-five kids who responded to the invitation to receive Christ. They came forward not because I was clever or relatable, not because I was socially relevant or culturally correct. They came forward because I preached Jesus Christ. He always draws people to Himself.

"If I am lifted up on the Cross, I will draw *all* men," Jesus declared—be they junior-highers or senior citizens. Regardless of how old a person is, how young he is, from what culture he comes, or where he lives geographically, he doesn't need to be an expert in culture or generational understandings to share the gospel. He simply needs to do one thing. He simply needs to point to Jesus Christ and the Cross, for that is the key to evangelism.

How Can We Find Unity?

> *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*
>
> Ephesians 4:4–6

Whether within one given fellowship or between fellowships, unity is found only at the foot of the Cross. True and lasting unity is never found in eschatological agreement, in one's position concerning speaking in tongues, or in dispensational agreement. Whether one is "high church"—formal and liturgical—or "low church" like us; whether one is conservative and fundamental on the right, or more socially active on the left, the picture formed is that of the Cross. Thus, it's no surprise that doctrinal differences dissipate when believers come together to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Church unity is found at Calvary, so go there frequently. Hang out at the foot of the Cross, and you'll find people coming together miraculously.

How Can I Study the Bible Effectively?

> *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*
>
> Matthew 22:37–40

"Love God and love your neighbor," Jesus said, "for on these two commandments *hang* all the law and the prophets." Then He showed us how this works as He *hung* on the Cross for our sins. Loving God, He prayed, "Father not My will but Thine be done" (see Luke 22:42). Loving man, He prayed, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

We are to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. We are also to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. If we do this, Jesus said we understand the Scripture in its entirety. If I'm loving God and loving people, I've got the whole message down. Look for Jesus Christ and Him crucified throughout the Word, and you will be a Bible student par excellence, for on Him hang *all* the law and the prophets.

How Can I Be an Effective Leader?

> *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*
>
> Isaiah 9:6

What government did the Almighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace bear on His shoulder? The Cross. How should you govern or lead, teach or coach? You have one model: the Cross. The style of government upon Jesus' shoulders was not seeking His own way or manipulating the situation, but rather dying to self to redeem others.

How Can I Get People to Worship with More Intensity?

> *And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation . . .*
>
> Revelation 5:9

How do we get folks to love the Lord and express their heart with a new song? I do not believe it comes through manipulation by worship leaders. Revelation 5 tells us it comes from beholding the slain Lamb of Calvary. The key to seeing a sister or brother, a church or denomination worship with intensity and sincerity is not to teach on worship or exhort to worship, but to let people see Jesus Christ and what He did for them—for then they will have no other recourse but to worship Him in spirit and truth.

How Can I Get People to See the Seriousness of Sin?

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6:23

We who have walked with the Lord for some time know that sin will find us out and do us in, but how do we help others who haven't yet come to that understanding? Take them to the Cross and say, "Look and see what sin does. It was my sin that caused the humiliation, the pain, the bleeding, the broken heart, the spectacle. See what sin did to Jesus on the Cross. And it will do the same to you. Oh, you may chuckle or wink at it now, but sin will eventually break your heart and wipe you out."

The best way for people to learn to hate sin is to go to the Cross and see what their sin did to Jesus.

Whether concerning ministry, theology, or problems practically, I hope you have begun to see that your message, like Paul's, must be singular. You will give right answers and wise counsel; you will see deliverance and freedom and health if, like Paul, you keep your message profoundly simple, focused on Jesus Christ and the Cross of Calvary.



3 1 Corinthians 3:1 (a)
And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal . . .

"I was hoping I could address you as men and women who are spiritual," Paul said to those at Corinth—"but I can't because you're carnal." The Greek word translated "carnal" is *sarkinos* and means "fleshly." Thus, a carnal person is one who is dominated by the inclinations of his flesh.

1 Corinthians 3:1 (b)
. . . even as unto babes . . .

This doesn't mean those at Corinth were new believers, but that they were retarded in their spiritual growth. I love babies. I love their cooing, gurgling, and especially hearing them say, "DaDa," for the first time. Babies are wonderful! But if I go home today and my teenager is gurgling in a playpen, even if he stands up and says, "DaDa," when I walk in, I would know there was a problem. So, too, Paul is talking not to newborn believers, but to those who should have been moving on in maturity and engaged in ministry.

1 Corinthians 3:1 (c)
. . . in Christ.

The fact that Paul refers to the Corinthians as being "in Christ" shows they're saved. But instead of moving on to maturity, they remained spiritually stunted. Why? Because they were mixing the world and the Word. They came to church on Sunday and took in the studies. They clapped their hands in worship and even put money in the offering. But on Monday they were out in the world again. Consequently, they were neither fish nor fowl, miserable because they had too much of the world in them to really enjoy the Lord, yet too much of the Lord in them to really enjoy the world.

1 Corinthians 3:2 (a)
I have fed you with milk, and not with meat . . .

The carnal man can only receive milk. Like a baby, someone has to pamper him and burp him, counsel him and constantly explain things to him. The carnal man does not know what it means to open up the Word, seek the Lord, and walk day by day with Him.

1 Corinthians 3:2 (b)
. . . for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.

Here's a very simple way to evaluate whether you are carnal or not: How is your appetite? Do you crave the meat of the Word, or are you still only

able to digest milk? According to Hebrews 5:10–14, the milk of the Word deals with what Jesus did for us. The meat deals with what Jesus is now doing on behalf of us in heaven presently and the big plan that will unfold eschatologically. The baby Christian only knows, "Jesus loves me, this I know." But as great a truth as that is, he has not gone on to see who Jesus is presently and what's ahead prophetically.

Do you know more about what Jesus is doing today in heaven and on earth through His church than you did last year? If you do, you're progressing and growing. Good for you! But if you don't, then perhaps you might fall into the category of the carnal believer who still has to be fed with milk, who can't get the meat on his own. Is there any hope for you? Of course there is! The Lord would have you simply confess your carnality. And the good news is that, following confession *to* the Lord, there is liberation *from* the Lord. He sets you free. How? Not by positive thinking, not by determining to try harder or do better, but by His Spirit within you.

> Although a pair of shoes used in the movie *The Wizard of Oz* cost only nine dollars to make, they were auctioned for over twelve thousand dollars. Why? Because Judy Garland wore them.

So, too, it's the One who brings value and freedom to us as He works in us both to will and to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

> *You're driving home from church, and the Lord says, "Share with Junior something you learned this morning." At this point, you have a choice. You can either say, "I'm tired. I just want to get home." Or you can say that magical three-letter word that leads to the Spirit-filled life: "Yes."*
>
> *You get home and settle in with the Sunday paper, when you feel an impression, a stirring in your heart saying, "Why don't you pick up the Bible and get a start in 1 Corinthians? Just ten verses."*
>
> *You can either say, "No, I just got home." Or you can say, "Snoopy, you'll have to wait for a few minutes. It's time to get into the meat of the Word."*

You see, spiritual life consists not of your regulations, your rules, or your effort. It simply consists of doing what the Lord tells you to do at any given moment. All you have to do is say, "Yes." It's so incredibly freeing.

> Greek poet, Homer, tells the story of the sailors who were drawn to the island in the Aegean Sea called the Island of Enchantment. Mythical female creatures, called sirens, would sing so beautifully that sailors would be drawn to the rocky island only to smash against the rocks and drown.
>
> Although everyone in Greece knew the danger of the sirens, everyone thought he would be the exception. But no one was—until Jason came up with a plan. After commissioning a ship to take him to the Island of Enchantment, Ulysses ordered the sailors to put wax in their ears so as not to hear a thing. Then he chained himself to the mast of the ship so he would not have the ability to dive in when he heard the sound of the sirens' song. As the ship neared the Island, hearing the sirens' song, Ulysses tried to break out of the chains, but he couldn't. Thus, the boat sailed by. Bruised, battered, and exhausted by his struggle against the chains, Ulysses returned to Greece.
>
> There was another fellow named Odysseus. He also was sailing through the Aegean Sea by way of the Island of Enchantment, but he had a better plan. He took Pan with him as his guest on the ship, a man who played the flute. When they neared the Island of Enchantment, Odysseus ordered Pan to start playing—and so beautifully did Pan play that the sailors didn't even care about the song of the sirens.

Those who bind themselves with the rules and regulations of legalism in order to protect themselves from the sirens' song of the world will have a faith that is bruised and battered, sour and cynical. There's a better way, for the spiritual man hears a different song altogether. Walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). Say "yes" to whatever He tells you to do—even as insignificant as it might appear—and you'll find you're on an adventure that will keep you away from the destructive Island of Enchantment, sailing joyously all the way to Heaven.

1 Corinthians 3:3

For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

In addition to an inability to take in the meat of the Word, carnality manifests itself in envy, strife, and division. Envy always wants something else, which leads to strife—always finding something wrong, which leads to division—always looking for something new. This is what was happening in the church at Corinth as carnal believers fought with and split from one another.

1 Corinthians 3:4, 5

For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?

You'll know you're in a carnal church when there's factions and fighting within the congregation.

1 Corinthians 3:6–8

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.

"Why are you splintering?" Paul would ask the Corinthian Christians. "Apollos and I are in this together. We both have a part to play. We simply plant and water. It's God who works the miracle of germination."

1 Corinthians 3:9 (a)

For we are labourers together with God . . .

If you don't think the Lord uses different kinds of people to do His work, ask Ezra or Nehemiah.

> *Ezra had brought a group of Jewish men out of captivity in Babylon in order to establish a priesthood in Jerusalem. Brokenhearted to discover that they had married heathen women, he plucked out his own beard in sorrow (Ezra 9:3).*
>
> *Years later, Nehemiah also came upon Jews who had married heathen women. But what did Nehemiah do? He pulled out not his own hair—but the hair of the men (Nehemiah 13:25).*

Who was right—Ezra, who in his brokenhearted tenderness and sensitivity plucked out his own beard—or Nehemiah, who plucked out the hair of others? The answer is both were right. God used both, for in both cases the people repented.

Some people are sensitive and tender, and pluck out their own beards. Others are strong and expressive and pluck the beards of others. And because the Lord uses all kinds of different people to accomplish His purposes, I can be who I am and appreciate the brothers or churches that may be a different flavor than I am as we both labor together with God.

1 Corinthians 3:9 (b)
. . . ye are God's husbandry . . .

Perhaps your margin correctly renders the word "husbandry" as "tillage" or "field." Feel like you've been tilled a bit this week? Don't be surprised. You're God's field. The good news is that when fields get plowed, it means something excellent is about to be planted.

> *Although we read in Genesis 1:1 that God created the heavens and the earth, in Genesis 1:2, we read that the earth was "without form and void." What happened? Many Bible scholars, with whom I'm inclined to agree, believe that it was between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 that, after launching a rebellion in heaven, Lucifer was cast to earth. The result was that our planet became "without form and*

void." In Genesis 1:3, we see God re-creating earth as the Spirit moved upon the face of the waters.

So, too, I suggest if you wonder why your life has been overturned and plowed, if you feel that suddenly your world is without form and void—take hope! If He's turned the topsoil of your life, God is getting ready to plant something wonderful. He's in the process of re-creating that which will supersede all that you enjoyed previously.

1 Corinthians 3:9 (c)
. . . ye are God's building.

Here, Paul shifts analogies from agriculture to architecture.

1 Corinthians 3:10, 11
According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

The foundation upon which Paul built was not principles, but a Person—Jesus Christ. "Upon this rock will I build My Church," Jesus said. What rock? The rock of Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ (see Matthew 16:18).

When Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. You're the Hope, the Promise, the One," Jesus had a foundation upon which to build His church.

The true church of Jesus Christ is not built upon, "Let's get together and make something happen politically," or, "Let's launch a moral crusade," or, "Let's be socially responsible." It's based upon Jesus Christ—our Hero, our Savior, our Friend, our coming King.

1 Corinthians 3:12, 13 (a)

Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest . . .

Once one realizes that Jesus is the Christ, everything he does from that point on builds upon that foundation. And the material is either wood, hay, and stubble—or gold, silver, and precious stones.

1 Corinthians 3:13 (b), 14

. . . for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

Every day I live, I build upon the foundational principle that Jesus is the Christ, that He is my Lord. The question is, do I build with gold, silver, and precious stones—or with wood, stubble, and hay? What is the telling difference between these materials? Gold, silver, and precious stones don't burn.

I used to picture the fire of which Paul speaks as a big oven into which are shoved all the prayers we've prayed, Bible studies we've attended, and witnessing we've ever done. But because John speaks of Jesus' eyes as a flame of fire (Revelation 1:14), when we see Him, the look He will give us will warm us as it melts all the junk in our lives that drew attention to ourselves or was done to impress others—leaving only the gold, silver, and precious stones of what we did only in and for *Him.*

1 Corinthians 3:15

If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

Everyone who understands that Jesus is the Foundation of life will be saved. But some shall be saved as by fire. They'll make it into heaven. They'll be warmed when they see Jesus' face, but they'll look around and

say, “Oh no, everything on earth I did vaporized before His eyes, and now I have no crown to cast at His feet.”

Because God shall wipe away every tear (Revelation 7:17), there will be tears in heaven. For what will they be shed? Not for the bigger house we wish we had built, not for the newer car we wish we had purchased, not for the nicer clothes we wish we had worn—but for the opportunities we missed to lay up treasure there.

“Dress me up in my best suit,” said the man who knew he was about to die.

His wife complied.

“Now fill my pockets with gold,” he said, “and sew them closed.”

When he died shortly thereafter, he went to heaven, and was pleased to feel the bulges in his pockets.

“I made it! I did it!” he exclaimed. “Who said you can’t take it with you?! Look at this!” he said to Peter, opening his pockets.

And Peter said, “Why did you bring asphalt up here?”

That which we are so interested in, fighting for, and worried about here on earth is mere asphalt in heaven.

Although the primary reference of verses 13–15 is to the *bema* seat, where we will be rewarded for that which we’ve done on earth, I believe a secondary reference is to the fires the Lord allows to sweep through our lives presently.

“You’re fired,” your boss says to you. And now you get a chance to see how much of your character is gold, silver, and precious stones, and how much is wood, hay, and stubble. In ministry, in relationships, and on the job, fires will break out around you that you might think you have to put out immediately. But I have found that when you sense a wildfire starting, it’s a good idea to be careful before you grab your bucket and shovel and try to put it out in your own energy and by your own wisdom. If you have good people skills, you can meet with people, try to reason with them, and maybe control the fire for a year or two. But more often than not, it will explode eventually with a flame more devastating than the original.

Thus, when fires come, I am slowly but surely learning to let them burn. I don't defend myself. I don't defend my church. I don't try to soothe feelings or calm tension. I let the fire burn. And when the fire is over, I poke around and see if any gold, silver, or precious stones are left with which to rebuild.

To you who are involved with people in your family or in ministry, I suggest letting any given fire burn. And when you see what's left, you'll either know you were building with gold, silver, and precious stones—or with the wood, hay, and stubble of your own self-importance.

1 Corinthians 3:16

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

The Greek word translated "temple" is not the usual word *hieron,* which refers to the whole temple, but rather *naos,* which speaks of the Holy of Holies—the part of the temple wherein dwelt the *shekinah,* the *chabod,* the visible perception of the presence of God.

Because the word "ye" is plural, Paul is saying, "Don't you know that together you are the holy of holies, where the glory, the weight, and the reality of God are enjoyed and perceived?"

Paul develops this analogy further when he tells the Ephesians they "*grow* unto an holy temple in the Lord" (see Ephesians 2:21). The church grows because we are *living* stones—and this presents some interesting challenges. Dead stones fit together nicely. Living, squirming stones, however, tend to rub one another the wrong way. Yet in this we can rejoice, for the Lord knows there are rough edges that need to be knocked off us blockheads.

That is why it is the mature believer who says, "Okay, Lord, I'm not going to try to change my location or situation. Instead, I'm going to stay right here and allow You to do Your work through people who might irritate me in order that I might be more like You."

1 Corinthians 3:17 (a)

If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy . . .

The Greek word translated “destroy” doesn’t mean “damned.” It means “diminished.” Taken in context, Paul is saying he who defiles the church by either overtly or subtly causing division within the church, by coming down on the church, or by pulling away from the church will himself be diminished. His ability to know the Lord, walk with the Lord, and be used by the Lord will decrease perceptibly. Why? Because the Lord is very protective of His church. He is madly, outrageously, head-over-heels in love with His bride.

1 Corinthians 3:17 (b)
. . . for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

What does it mean to be holy? When Moses realized he was in the presence of the Lord, he was told to take off his shoes because the ground he was on was holy ground (Exodus 3:5). As he overlooked the city of Jericho, Joshua had an encounter with the Lord and was also told to take off his shoes (Joshua 5:15). Therefore, since the church is holy, it would seem fitting that we take off our shoes as well.

How?

After walking through mud on their way home from school, our kids take off their shoes before walking into the house so they don’t bring the mud in with them. So, too, when we come together as a body, we are to leave the mud of the world at the door. We’re to leave behind grudges and pride, attitudes that are amiss, and hearts that are quick to judge.

But there’s another reason to remove our shoes. Even if my shoes are clean, I take them off at home because I’m comfortable there. So, too, when we fellowship with the body, we don’t have to keep our guard up or our best foot forward. We can relax in God’s amazing love for us and for one another.

Concerning His priests, God said,

> And it shall come to pass, that when they enter in at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments; and no wool shall come upon them, whiles they minister in the gates of the inner court, and within. They shall have linen bonnets upon their heads, and

shall have linen breeches upon their loins; they shall not gird themselves with any thing that causeth sweat.

Ezekiel 44:17, 18

God's desire is that, rather than causing us to be uptight, upset, or hot under the collar, our service for Him and fellowship with Him cause us to be relaxed, refreshed, and renewed.

1 Corinthians 3:18 (a)
Let no man deceive himself.

With regard to the Corinthian problem of division within the body, Paul will give three strong exhortations. . . .

1 Corinthians 3:18(b)–20
If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.

First, the Corinthians were to stop extolling themselves, thinking they alone had been given insights into deeper spirituality.

When the first three letters blew off of the sign on a Jesus Only church—a denomination which, among other things, holds to the erroneous belief that baptism is not to be in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but in the name of Jesus only—its true nature came to light when its name inadvertently became "Us Only."

1 Corinthians 3:21, 22 (a)
Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come . . .

Second, the Corinthians believers were to stop exalting others.

"Wilt thou be made whole?" Jesus asked the lame man.
"I have no man to help me," he answered" (see John 5:7).

How long will we remain in a lame condition spiritually because we are depending on or exalting men in a way that ought not be?

1 Corinthians 3:22 (b), 23
. . . all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

Third, the Corinthians were to stop excluding their brothers.

Before entering the Promised Land, the Lord instructed His people to be careful that they didn't let their axes fly indiscriminately in the heat of battle, cutting down trees that could later provide fruit for them (Deuteronomy 20:19).

The same is true spiritually. If we're not careful, we will find ourselves chopping down trees that, although they may not be our flavor, are fruitful nonetheless. "Don't pick *at* them;" the Lord would say to us. "Pick *from* them. Become enriched as you listen to them. You're one body, one temple, one church."



4

1 Corinthians 4:1 (a)
Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ . . .

The literal meaning of the Greek word *huperetes,* translated "minister," is "under-oarsman." An under-oarsman was a slave on the lowest deck of the ship who simply followed the cadence of the drummer. What does it mean to be a minister? It doesn't mean to set the course or determine direction, but rather to simply do what the Captain of the ship, Jesus Christ, tells us to do, knowing that *He* will bring us to the right destination.

1 Corinthians 4:1 (b)
. . . and stewards . . .

The word "steward" refers to the slave who knew the location of his master's wealth. As seen in Genesis 39, Joseph was this type of a slave to Potiphar.

1 Corinthians 4:1 (c)
. . . of the mysteries of God.

As faithful stewards in ministry, we're to be able to know the location of the riches of Scripture.

> Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.
>
> Matthew 13:52

Jesus is talking about the ability to relocate the illustrations, types, and stories of the Old Testament to His own life—and later to the entire New Testament.

Read your Bible, dear brother. Don't give up, precious sister.

But I'm reading through Leviticus right now, and I don't understand a thing, you might be thinking.

That's okay. Keep reading because you're feeding your inner man, and in due season, you will understand even the Book of Leviticus to a much greater degree than you do now.

> *With drought ravaging the land, Jehoram, king of Israel, called for Elisha the prophet.*
>
> *"Here's what you are to do," said Elisha. "Dig ditches here in the dry sand."*
>
> *The people did, and the next day, the ditches were filled with water (2 Kings 3).*

So, too, water being a type of the Word (Psalm 119:9; John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26), we're to keep digging ditches—even if it's dry. And eventually, the refreshing springs of Scripture will flow into our hearts.

Why did the Lord write the Bible the way He did? Why didn't He simply write Section I: Marriage. Section II: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Section III: Bible Prophecy. That's the way I would have written it. But the Lord in His infinite wisdom says, "Analogies and stories, pictures and genealogies will be mysteries to the carnal mind. On the other hand, they will be exciting, applicable, and wonderful to any man of any age in any culture who plugs away studying them day after week after month after year after decade."

1 Corinthians 4:2

Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

I'm not required to be successful—only faithful. The most successful minister in the Old Testament was a prophet who caused people to get saved everywhere he went. Not only did the entire crew of the boat in which he traveled get saved, but the entire population of Nineveh—perhaps numbering two million—got saved as well (Jonah 3:5).

Contrast Jonah with another prophet who preached for thirty years without seeing a single conversion. If Jonah were alive today, books would be written about him. Conferences would feature him. Videos would be made of him. Jeremiah? He'd be sitting in the back row of one of Jonah's seminars. But in God's economy, so impacting was Jeremiah that when Jesus came on the scene, no one ever mistook Him for Jonah. They thought He was Jeremiah (Matthew 16:14).

Be faithful, gang. You might not be noticed, applauded, or patted on the back. That's okay. Neither was Jeremiah.

1 Corinthians 4:3, 4

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

"I'm not worried about your judging me," said Paul to the Corinthians. "In fact, I don't even put much stock in my own assessment of myself." Some people are constantly down on themselves—but the Lord isn't. Others have a perfectly clear conscience—when, in reality, all they have is a bad memory. Because the heart is deceitfully and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9), Paul was exceedingly wise to leave judgment to the Lord.

1 Corinthians 4:5 (a)

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come . . .

The only judgment that matters will be at the *bema* seat of Christ, where all of our works will be tried by fire. Therefore, it is neither our place nor our calling to judge others or ourselves.

1 Corinthians 4:5 (b)

. . . who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

This doesn't mean that when the Lord comes back, all the dark stuff we did will be brought to light. No, the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed us so completely that God will "remember no more" our sins and iniquities (Hebrews 10:17). Paul is referring to the things we can only see through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12)—why the Lord is doing certain things and why He isn't doing other things; why some people suffer and others don't; why God answers some requests but denies others. When He comes back, everything that now seems dark to us—seeming contradictions of His character, seeming violations of His nature—will be seen in the light of His unspeakable glory. The result? Everyone will praise God for His wisdom and righteousness in all things (Revelation 19:2).

1 Corinthians 4:6

And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not

to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.

"I've used Apollos and myself as illustrations of those who work together, who labor in the same field, members of the same holy temple, the same building," says Paul. "We're both yours. Don't divide yourselves over us or become puffed up concerning us."

1 Corinthians 4:7

For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

Paul, the theologian par excellence, had a mind sharper and keener than any other. Apollos, polished orator, impressed people with his rhetoric and powerful personality. God made them both. Who makes us different from one another? God. Who gifts us differently and individually? God. So why do we glory in ourselves or in any other person when it's God who made every one of us the way we are? To Him be all glory—for His creativity and sense of humor in making and using people like us!

1 Corinthians 4:8–13

Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.

Lest the Corinthians thought Paul lucky to be so gifted, he said, "You have it easy compared to what we go through daily. We're beaten and defamed. We don't even have a place to hang our hats. We're put down, mocked, and persecuted."

Paul makes a very important point about ministry when he says, "Be careful that you don't think everyone is lucky, gifted, blessed but you." I can't begin to imagine what our brother, Billy Graham, goes through—the temptations, pressures, and subtle maneuvering of the Enemy directed at him. So be content where the Lord has you planted and serve Him boldly in that place.

1 Corinthians 4:14, 15

I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

What does it mean to be a spiritual father? In the lives of those you lead to the Lord or nurture in the Lord, you will see the process unfold whereby they will look to you for a number of years and think you can do no wrong. Then, as they go through spiritual adolescence, they will think you can do no right. And finally, they will come into maturity when they will say, "Right or wrong, you are my spiritual father, and I appreciate you."

1 Corinthians 4:16

Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.

Spiritual fathers—both men and women—how I pray we can say what Paul said when he said, "Follow me. Do what I do."

1 Corinthians 4:17–21

For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church. Now some are puffed up, as though I

would not come to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?

"I'm coming shortly," Paul says. "Will that day be a festival of love, or a day of discipline?"

So, too, Jesus said, "Surely I come quickly" (Revelation 22:20). And when He does, will we hear Him say, "Depart from Me" or, "Well done, good and faithful servant"?



5 In chapter 1, we saw that the Corinthian believers were divided when they should have been united. Here in chapter 5, we'll see them united when they should have been divided.

1 Corinthians 5:1

It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

Even as carnal as the culture of Corinth was, the entire city was abuzz about the member of the Corinthian church who was living in immorality with his stepmother.

The world still loves to see Christians involved in immorality because it eases their conscience and justifies their own loose lifestyle. Knowing this, one of Satan's favorite tactics is to get Christians involved in immorality. He runs the same play over and over again. It's very easy for Satan to bring Christians into temptation in the area of morals by simply nudging agape—the caring, sharing, tenderness, concern, and compassion in which believers are called to walk—into the area of *eros,* or sensual love.

I believe the simple solution of Scripture to this subtle strategy of Satan is for men to disciple, encourage, and pray with other men, and for women to do the same with other women.

"I'm too old to be vulnerable," you say. "After all, I'm fifty. So I can counsel women or hang around the ladies and share with them my pearls of wisdom." Really? How old was David—a man after God's own heart, a man who loved the Lord deeply and was honored by the Lord singularly—when he fell into sin with Bathsheba? Fifty. Let he who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall (1 Corinthians 10:12).

1 Corinthians 5:2

And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.

Rather than being grieved, the Corinthian believers were proud of their open-mindedness, their tolerance, their political correctness in allowing the offending brother to remain in their midst.

1 Corinthians 5:3–5

For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Paul's instruction to the Corinthians was that they were to deliver this man into the hand of Satan—not for damnation, but for restoration, in order that his flesh would be destroyed and his spirit saved. "This is where you should be divided congregationally," Paul said. "Stay away from this man and let him live his life of immorality away from the joy, peace, and covering of the body. And hopefully, he will become so sick of his sin that he'll long for the days when he was in fellowship with you—where there was worship ascending and true love abounding."

As we will see in his second letter to them, the church at Corinth did, indeed, take Paul's advice, and it worked to such a degree that Paul was later able to instruct them to welcome their brother back into their company.

This is an important word for congregations and for parents. We do not serve each other or our children well by allowing them to live in sin. There comes a point when a person needs to be turned over to Satan in order to reap the repercussions of his sin. But lest anyone become too eager to arbitrarily turn others over to Satan in the name of Jesus, Paul gives three specific qualifications for doing so.

First, it's to be done in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The name of Jesus is not some mystical incantation. No, praying, ministering, meeting in the name of Jesus simply means doing so in the nature or character of our Lord.

> *I can't ask for a new car in Jesus' name because I'm not convinced that's what He would ask for in my situation. But I can pray with all confidence, "Father, make me a loving parent in Jesus' name." I can't ask for a multimillion dollar house in Jesus' name because I don't think He would. But, because such is the nature of Jesus, I can ask for compassion and wisdom in His name with absolute assurance that I'll receive an answer.*

Second, turning someone over to Satan can only be done by the instruction of Paul. That is, one must understand the writings of the Word and base his action on nothing short of scriptural, biblical, apostolic authority.

Third, turning someone over to Satan must be done with the power of Jesus. Because any one person or small group of people is vulnerable to seeing things through the lens of bitterness, it must be done in the power of Jesus as seen in the confirmation of the congregation.

1 Corinthians 5:6

Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

Leavening is not easily seen initially, but it becomes very obvious eventually, making it the perfect symbol of evil throughout Scripture.

1 Corinthians 5:7, 8

Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

The day before Passover was called the Day of Preparation, in which the Jews would rid their homes of every trace of leaven in preparation for Passover and the six-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. Paul draws on this well-known understanding as a call for a recommitment to holiness and purity on the part of the Corinthian body.

The picture for us is that we have left Egypt—the world—through the blood of our Passover Lamb shed for us on the Cross. Therefore, let us continue on from that point without leaven—without the secret sins that puff up and spread throughout our fellowships so easily.

1 Corinthians 5:9–11

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

The Greek tense of this passage makes it clear that we are to cut off from our company not the one who has fallen into or struggles with these sins—but the one who knowingly, obstinately, perpetually practices them. Why?

I believe the first reason is to correct the offender. If a tumor is growing in my body, no competent doctor would say, "I'm not going to operate on you because I don't want to be too harsh with you." And yet that is exactly what we say to believers who are mired in sin when we fail to take the sword of the Spirit and show them where they are wrong. If I really care about someone, I'll say, "I'm not going to fellowship with you—not because I'm mad at you or don't love you. On the contrary, I care about you so much that I

cannot allow you to go on as though there's nothing amiss in your life because sooner or later the tumor of sin within you will take a terrible toll on you."

Secondly, we are not to fellowship with insistent, persistent sinners in order to protect the body.

> *When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Martha ran out to Him, saying, "Oh, Lord, if You had been here, our brother would not have died."*
>
> *A few minutes later, Mary uttered the same phrase to Him word for word (John 11:21, 32).*

We begin to think like and talk like those with whom we spend time. We assume the flavor of those around us. Therefore, Paul says we are not to hang around those who are consistently, persistently covetous, drunkards, idolaters, or fornicators.

> **1 Corinthians 5:12, 13**
>
> **For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.**

What about the woman, the stepmother? Why didn't Paul deal with her? Evidently, she wasn't a believer. "We don't judge unbelievers," says Paul. "God will take care of them." I find this interesting because there is a tendency on the part of Christians today to want to judge the world, to change the culture. All too often, we're activists against the world's wickedness, but we fail to judge our own congregation. We march, petition, crusade, vote, and talk about the world's sin as we turn a blind eye to our own. We've got it exactly backward. We're to deal with the Christian community and let God take care of the world's iniquity.



6 Not only did the Corinthian believers have a problem with moral looseness, but they were filing meaningless lawsuits.

1 Corinthians 6:1–4

Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.

According to Revelation 20 and other passages, as we reign and rule with Christ in the millennial kingdom, part of our job will be to govern and judge those who get saved during the Tribulation. You see, although we'll be in a glorified state, Tribulation believers will still have fleshly inclinations. Therefore, we will be involved in the process of enforcing righteousness.

Not only that, but according to the text before us, we will also judge angels. How? It is my personal opinion that we'll say to the angels that rebelled with Lucifer, "How could you have rebelled against the Lord when you were in His presence daily? We were on earth. We didn't see Him visibly. We couldn't touch the things of heaven tangibly—yet we believed. Why didn't you?"

In light of this, Paul says to the church at Corinth, "You who will one day judge the world, you who will one day judge angels, how is it that you rely on the legal system of the world to judge yourselves?" Even the person least esteemed in the church has more wisdom than the most highly esteemed of the world.

1 Corinthians 6:5–7

I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong?

In addition to judging themselves, the Corinthian believers were to absorb the wrongs done to them, to turn the other cheek, to give up the cloak, to go the extra mile (Matthew 5:39–41).

1 Corinthians 6:7, 8

Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren.

Paul told the Corinthians that, rather than going through all the legal hassles to defend themselves judicially, the better way was to trust the Lord to solve the problem.

1 Corinthians 6:9 (a)

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers . . .

In verse 18, Paul will tell the Corinthian believers to flee fornication. Here, he gives them the first reason they should do so: Fornication jeopardizes one's eternal state.

Does this mean anyone who's fallen into fornication or committed adultery is not going to make it into heaven?

No, for the tense used in the original language would have made it clear to anyone reading this letter that Paul was speaking not of those who struggled with, or even failed in these areas, but of those who flagrantly and blatantly continued in them. On the basis of 1 John, some suggest that it's not that those who continue in these sins lose their salvation, but that they were never truly born again in the first place.

All I know is this: Whether a person loses his salvation or was never really saved, either way, he ends up in the same place. I wouldn't want to be in his shoes when he stands before the Lord—for no matter how often he came to church, or how big the Bible he carried, I can't guarantee he will enter into heaven. The Bible makes it painfully clear that those who continue in these sins will not inherit the kingdom.

1 Corinthians 6:9 (b)

. . . nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind.

The Greek word translated "effeminate" speaks of a passive role in homosexual behavior. The term "abusers of themselves with mankind" speaks of an active role. Either role places one's eternal state in jeopardy.

1 Corinthians 6:10, 11

Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Again, the tense in the original language indicates that Paul is saying that those who *habitually* practice these behaviors either were never saved or have greatly jeopardized their salvation.

1 Corinthians 6:12

All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

Because he addresses the numerous problems of morality in the Corinthian congregation, one might think Paul led a restricted life. Nothing could be further from the truth. Here, we see that, because he was not bound by rules and regulations of any kind, he was, in fact, the freest person on the face of the earth. It was for this reason that he refused to be in bondage to any person, activity, or substance that would compromise his liberty.

The ethic we enjoy as believers is the largest ethic in the world today, for *all* things are lawful to you and me. Why would we want to do anything to compromise our glorious freedom?

1 Corinthians 6:13

Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.

The Corinthian culture held the position that the act of physical intimacy was nothing more than the satisfying of one's physical appetite—no different than the need for food. Not so, said Paul. Physical intimacy involves the coming together not only of two bodies, but of two souls—the very essence of one's person, that which belongs to God.

1 Corinthians 6:14–17

And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.

Secondly, fornication not only jeopardizes one's eternal state, but it agonizes our holy King. Paul says, "Don't you understand that you're bringing Jesus into that situation?" The concept is so shocking that Paul doesn't even get into it very much except to say that if you're in an immoral situation, you place Christ in that situation. God forbid.

1 Corinthians 6:18

Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

Thirdly, fornication compromises one's very being. Although the repercussions of every sin are serious, sexual sin is unique in that it's the only sin against oneself. Solomon shed further light on this when he said, "But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul" (Proverbs 6:32).

Because we are made in the image of a triune God, we are comprised of three parts as well: body, soul, and spirit. The body relates to the physical

world. The soul is one's essence, one's personality, and relates to people. The spirit relates to God and will live eternally. Thus, each time one engages in immoral activity, a part of his soul is permanently and irreplaceably forfeited. The tragedy, then, is that the one who continues to live in promiscuity becomes less and less of a person as a piece of his soul is stripped away with each encounter.

1 Corinthians 6:19, 20

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

Whether it was Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. or Roman General Titus in A.D. 70, to destroy the effectiveness of Israel, her enemies burned the temple.

So, too, what does the Enemy do to you? He comes time and time again to burn the temple of your body with lust in order that you might be burned-out and decommissioned from effective service.

> And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.
>
> Revelation 14:3, 4

Used by the Lord, rewarded in eternity, the 144,000 evangelists in the Tribulation say, "We will follow the Lamb wherever He goes." So, too, if you follow Jesus in a life of purity, God will bless you presently. He'll reward you eternally. And you will never, ever regret fleeing fornication.

I have yet to talk to one person who was glad he committed adultery, was happy he was into pornography, was proud that he was caught up with homosexuality. Never. And yet I have talked with a bunch of folks who said,

“I would give anything if I could go back and live differently. I would flee that situation. I would resist that inclination. I would choose to follow the leading of the Lamb, for doing otherwise has destroyed, deceived, and undone me.”

The Bible is profoundly simple when it says, “Flee fornication.” If you do, the Lord will be there to see you through.

> There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.
>
> 1 Corinthians 10:13

“Lie with me,” she said as she grabbed him by the coat. Who would ever know if he did? After all, having been mistreated by his family, he was far from his home country.

But Joseph looked at Potiphar’s wife and said, “How can I sin against the Lord and do this thing?” as he slipped out of his coat and ran for his life (see Genesis 39:7–12).

“Flee fornication,” Paul says to the Corinthians. “Flee youthful lusts,” he says to Timothy, “and run to those who call on the Lord, seek after the Lord, walk with the Lord” (see 2 Timothy 2:22). In other words, run from sin to the saints—and you’ll do well.



7 After addressing his concerns for them, here we come to the second section of Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth, wherein he will give answers to them regarding six specific questions they had asked of him. Chapter 7 deals with marriage; chapters 8—10 with Christian liberty; chapter 11 with church conduct; chapters 12—14 with spiritual gifts; chapter 15 with the resurrection of the dead; and chapter 16 with giving and offering.

The first question the Corinthian church asked Paul concerned marriage and intimacy in marriage. Why? Due to the prevalent heresy of Gnosticism that propounded that anything physical was inherently evil, whatever one did with one’s body became either evil or immaterial. This resulted in two

extreme reactions. One group said, “Since purity in the material realm is impossible, we can do whatever we want with our bodies.” The other group beat and abused their bodies in an attempt to rid themselves of the evil within.

Thus, it is no wonder that, because of cultural confusion, the church had some questions for Paul concerning marriage.

1 Corinthians 7:1, 2

Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

Paul will later explain that certain people have a gift whereby they don’t have the inclination or need for intimacy. However, Paul says for everyone else, marriage is the way to avoid the entire realm of immorality.

1 Corinthians 7:3, 4

Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.

Due to the fact that when two people get married their bodies are no longer their own, the husband is to give his wife the intimacy she desires, and likewise the wife to the husband.

1 Corinthians 7:5

Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

Contrary to the wisdom of the world, which prescribes separation for ailing marriages, the principle of the Word is that, rather than moving out to find oneself, to discover what one wants, or to determine what’s wrong,

husbands and wives are to give themselves to each other because intimacy binds people uniquely.

1 Corinthians 7:6
But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment.

Chapter 7 is a most interesting chapter for many reasons—not the least of which is that throughout his discussion on marriage, we'll see Paul offering his personal opinion quite freely. Paul's example shows us there's a place for us to share our opinions—as long as people understand the difference between our personal persuasion and the Word of God.

1 Corinthians 7:7 (a)
For I would that all men were even as I myself.

Although he was single at this point, there are two strong indications that Paul had been married previously.

As they do to this day, the rabbis taught that God's edict to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28) was a commandment given to all holy or godly men. Therefore, they said whoever didn't marry and have children violated the commandment. And, concerning the law, Paul was blameless (Philippians 3:6).

Secondly, Paul was most likely a member of the Sanhedrin—the Jewish Supreme Court. To be a member of this seventy-member body, one had to be married because the Jews believed that he who was married was more prone to mercy.

What happened to Paul's wife? Some suggest she died. History, however, weighs in on the side of the premise that his wife left him when he converted to Christianity.

1 Corinthians 7:7 (b)
But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.

Jesus referred to the gift of which Paul speaks when He said,

> But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.
>
> Matthew 19:11, 12

Jesus said some are born without a need or desire to be married. Others —for example those who were in charge of a king's harem—were involuntarily made that way. I suspect that Jesus was speaking of those who made themselves eunuchs in the sense that they said, "I am not going to become involved with women in order that I might focus on the kingdom."

1 Corinthians 7:8

I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.

If you are at a place where you can live by yourself, Paul says, "Good for you. I wish all men were like that—living in single-mindedness and in freedom."

1 Corinthians 7:9

But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.

Although Paul enjoyed his single state, he knew it was better for someone to get married than to burn with passion. And such would be the normal pattern for the vast majority.

1 Corinthians 7:10

And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband.

Wives, do not leave your husbands. Period. Marriage is like a violin—it doesn't work without strings. But even when the music stops, the strings are still attached.

1 Corinthians 7:11 (a)

But and if she depart . . .

After saying under no circumstance should a wife leave her husband, why does Paul give instruction to the wife who leaves? Because he's realistic. Although leaving is against the heart of the Lord and the command of God, Paul knew the frailty of the flesh.

1 Corinthians 7:11 (b)

. . . let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.

According to this passage, the wife who leaves her husband has only two options: to remain unmarried or to return to her husband.

1 Corinthians 7:12, 13

But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.

Again, giving his opinion, Paul says a person who gets saved is not to divorce or drive away his unbelieving spouse.

1 Corinthians 7:14

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.

The unbelieving husband or wife is sanctified by the believing spouse. This doesn't mean the unbeliever is saved, but rather that he or she is sanctified, set apart, blessed simply because they're linked to a believer.

Of his firstborn child with Bathsheba who died as a result of his sin, David said, "He cannot be with me, but I will be with him" (see 2 Samuel 12:23)—which tells me the baby was taken into heaven.

1 Corinthians 7:15

But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

Because God has called us to peace, if a man is blatantly mistreating his wife, I don't tell her to tough it out. No, I say, "God has called you to get out."

Having said that, however, we are not to use the argument of peace as an excuse to walk out of a marriage we feel is less than perfect. This is a loophole Christians use all too readily, one that ought to be closed tightly. Short of physical abuse or abject negligence, even if your marriage is tough and full of heartache, my word to you is to stay. If you travel to enough counselors, you'll find one who tells you to leave—but be careful. Far too many marriages break up due to a failure to take into account the *full* counsel of God.

1 Corinthians 7:16, 17

For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches.

You never know what the next year, month, or day holds. Stick with the calling of God for your life, whatever that may be.

1 Corinthians 7:18–20

Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God. Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.

Not only as it relates to your marriage situation, but in every area—be who you are. Paul says, "If you're called as a Jew, then be a believing Jew. If you're called as a Gentile, be a believing Gentile."

1 Corinthians 7:21

Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather.

"If you're a slave, don't try to escape. But if you're set free, go for it," says Paul. Again, he's saying, "Just be yourself, doing all things for God's glory in a spirit of contentment."

1 Corinthians 7:22

For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.

The dynamic of Christianity is that the slave is free in Christ, while the free man is a slave to Him (Romans 1:1).

1 Corinthians 7:23, 24

Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.

After paying forty-one million dollars for Barry Bonds to play a few seasons for them, you can be sure that the San Francisco Giants will take very good care of him. They made sure he had the finest trainers, dietician, and health care available. They made sure he had everything he needed to

stay healthy and happy. Why? Because their investment was significant. But guess what. Forty-one million dollars is nothing compared to the blood of Christ paid for you. Therefore, He's going to see to it that you are tended well, that whatever comes into your life or goes on in your life is according to His plan and for your good.

1 Corinthians 7:25, 26

Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be.

Again offering his opinion, Paul reiterates that the single state allows one to be singularly committed to the kingdom.

1 Corinthians 7:27

Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife.

If you're married, stay married, says Paul. If you're single, don't strive to find a wife.



***For topical study of 1 Corinthians 7:27 entitled "The Right Mate: Finding and Being," turn to page* 1044.**

1 Corinthians 7:28

But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you.

Because they consist of two imperfect people, every marriage has days of struggle and difficulty. Therefore, if yours does, don't think you're alone, off the wall, or out to lunch. Paul says matrimony inevitably brings its own challenges.

1 Corinthians 7:29 (a)

But this I say, brethren, the time is short . . .

"Time is short," Paul says.

"Life is a vapor," James echoes (see James 4:14).

Whether the Lord comes back for us today—or whether we live out full lives, time is rapidly coming to a close because we're getting older and the Lord's coming is nearer. In light of this, Paul identifies three obstacles that could keep us from investing in the things of eternity. . . .

1 Corinthians 7:29 (b)

. . . it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none.

The first potential pitfall is in the area of relationships. There are people who miss out on being engaged in the kingdom because they're caught up in family relationships. There are people called into ministry, missions, or other opportunities to serve the Lord who say, "We can't do it now because we're getting married. But after we're settled, we're going to really go for it for the Lord." So I talk to them a year later, only to hear them say, "We're really excited about serving the Lord, but we have to get our baby out of diapers. Then we're really going for it." But then Junior is in elementary school and they say, "We can't pull him out of school, Boy Scouts, and sports." And what happens? All too often those who focus completely on the family find problems abounding within the family because they weren't true to the calling God placed upon their lives in the first place.

Get outside of yourselves, married couple. Say, "We're engaged in something bigger than ourselves—it's called eternity." Seek first the kingdom, Mom and Dad—and watch everything else fall into place (Matthew 6:33).

1 Corinthians 7:30 (a)

And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not . . .

The second obstacle to keeping eternity's values in view is in the area of emotions. The most widespread disease today is "I" disease—people focused on themselves, analyzing why they're depressed or why they're discouraged. But the more they analyze themselves, the more depressed they become. Paul's remedy is simple: Weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15). In other words, get involved with how others are doing. It's amazing what will happen. The Lord will use you, and you'll be set free if you get your eyes off yourself.

1 Corinthians 7:30 (b), 31

. . . and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.

Finally, Paul names possessions as the third obstacle to seeing the big picture of the kingdom. He who is caught up in his investment portfolio or in the fashion of this world will be too busy, too preoccupied to engage in ministry. Yes, we should be wise stewards—but our possessions should not preoccupy us. Tithing is so important and giving so freeing because every time you put money in the offering, you're giving away a part of your stinginess, shortsightedness, and selfishness.

The Lord isn't saying, "Don't focus on your relationships, your emotions, or your possessions because I want you to be miserable." Quite the opposite. His intention is for you to be free. And the way to freedom is to forget about yourself and seek first the kingdom. This applies to marriage, to emotions, to possessions. When you seek first the kingdom, everything else is added to you—and you're blessed beyond belief. Time is short, gang. Be about the work of eternity. Maintain a walk with the Lord personally. Serve Him however He leads you enthusiastically. And you'll be blessed abundantly.

1 Corinthians 7:32, 33

But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.

If you are married, you will inevitably find yourself caring for your spouse—and that's the way it should be. But it will distract you nonetheless from the freedom you would have enjoyed had you remained in a single state.

1 Corinthians 7:34

There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

The woman who is married has an obligation to please her husband. The single sister, on the other hand, has the opportunity to be about pleasing the Lord singularly.

1 Corinthians 7:35

And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.

There is a woman in Scripture who models this very effectively. Her name is Anna. . . .

> And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.
>
> Luke 2:37, 38

Anna didn't panic about her single state. She didn't lament her situation. Rather, she realized she had an opportunity to serve the Lord without distraction. And what happened? She was given special revelation, for she recognized that which only one other man—a man named Simeon—knew. She knew the Babe in the arms of Mary and Joseph was not an ordinary Child.

How I encourage you who have been widowed or divorced to follow the example of Anna: Look for the Lord. Pray to the Lord. Walk with the Lord. Anna didn't hang out in the temple with God's people because she was miserable there. Rather, I suggest she stayed there year after year because she found in the Lord exactly what her soul was craving. So will you.

1 Corinthians 7:36

But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry.

After talking about the freedom found in the single state, in his day of arranged marriages, Paul goes on to talk to fathers about their unmarried daughters, saying that if their daughters desired to marry, that was acceptable.

1 Corinthians 7:37, 38

Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well. So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better.

On the other hand, Paul says that the father who can guide his daughter into living as a single woman, devoting herself to the Lord, does a good thing.

1 Corinthians 7:39, 40

The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.

Clarifying the questions presented to him, Paul tells the Corinthian believers that a wife is bound to her husband until death separates them.

After that, she is at liberty to marry anyone she wishes as long as he's a believer and the Lord so directs.

Throughout the centuries, people have read 1 Corinthians 7 and come to the conclusion that, because he speaks so highly of the single state, Paul has a problem with marriage. But that is because they fail to take into account Paul's full counsel—for in his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul elevates marriage to a place of utmost glory when he uses it as an illustration for no less a relationship than that of Christ and His church.

> Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.
>
> Ephesians 5:25–27

The way a husband lays down his life for his wife, and the way a wife submits to her husband is a powerful illustration seen on every street in every neighborhood. Bunches of people aren't into going to church. So the Lord brings the church to them through the illustration of marriage wherein people see how much He loves the church and how the church submits to Him. It's an awesome responsibility for all who are married. Unbelievers don't need to see perfection in our marriages—just something remarkably different from what they see in society.

And yet, as seen here in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul says singleness has its own unique beauty, its own important role to play in the body. The single state is not to be looked down upon, dreaded, or merely endured. Those who are called to a single life or who find themselves in a single state fulfill a very real function: to serve the Lord with spontaneity and without distraction. Marriage is a picture, but, in a sense, singleness can be the reality—for it is the single person uniquely who can say, "I am married to You, Lord. You are my Husband, my Love, my best Friend. And I will be devoted to you single-heartedly for as long as You have me in this state."

Whether single or married, widowed or divorced—be content wherever God has you. And whatever your position, make Jesus your passion.

THE RIGHT MATE: FINDING AND BEING

A Topical Study of 1 CORINTHIANS 7:27

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth . . .

Genesis 1:27, 28

Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.

Proverbs 18:22

The church in Corinth was, no doubt, familiar with these Scriptures. And yet they saw their spiritual father, their church founder, the apostle Paul living a life of single devotion to the Lord. And so they asked him, "Should we get married as the Scriptures declare? Or should we follow in your footsteps and serve the Lord in a single state?"

Paul sums up his answer to them by saying,

Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife.

1 Corinthians 7:27

The full understanding of his answers lies in the understanding of the word "seek." The Greek word implies a frantic, obsessive searching—an activity that dominates one's thoughts and fills one's days. With regard to finding a mate, the way of the Lord is very much different than this—seen perhaps most powerfully and practically in His provision of a wife for Adam.

God Saw Adam's Need

Of each thing He created, God said, "It is good"—until He created Adam. Of Adam exclusively, He said, "It is *not* good that man should be alone. He needs help" (see Genesis 2:18). Thus, before Adam even had a clue that he was alone, God saw his need.

God Made Adam Aware of His Need

Recognizing Adam's need, God did something most intriguing. He told Adam to name the animals in the Garden of Eden. So, as they perhaps paraded before him two by two, Adam said, "There's Mr. and Mrs. Rhino, Mr. and Mrs. Giraffe, Mr. and Mrs. Hippo, Mr. and Mrs. Anteater." And somewhere in the process, it must have dawned on him that, while there were two of every animal, there was only one of him.

Maybe, like Adam, you feel like you're missing something. Maybe the desire to be married is increasingly tugging at your heart. The Lord is not surprised. He knew you would have this need before you did.

God Provided for Adam's Need

After the Lord made Adam aware of his need, He didn't say, "Adam, cruise through the jungle and try your luck. There's a singles' bar over there, and a meeting on the other side where singles mingle. Climb the trees, beat the bushes, and see what you can come up with." If that had been God's plan, Adam would most likely have ended up with a gorilla, an ape, or an orangutan—something that vaguely resembled him, but was far from a match for him.

Too many people say, "I want to be married, so I'll climb this tree. I'll beat that bush. I'll find somebody"—and they end up with someone who's somewhat compatible, kind of close, but hardly a perfect match. That's why God didn't tell Adam to beat the bushes—but to take a nap. And that's what He says to you who are single when He says, "Rest in Me." When Adam did this, he woke to find a being so compatible to him, so perfect for him that he described her as "bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23).

Single brother or sister—how will you recognize the perfect match God has for you? I believe within Adam's description of Eve lies the answer. You see, God is a triune Being: Father, Son, and Spirit. Being made in His image, we are, in a sense, a trinity as well—consisting of body, soul, and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23). The body is our material nature that relates to the physical world around us. The soul consists of our mind, emotions, and will—our personality, that which relates to people. The spirit is our true nature—that part of us which relates to God and will live eternally.

When, as a single man or woman, you meet the counterpart for your body, soul and spirit, you'll know he or she is God's choice for you. Physically, there will be a romantic spark, a physical attraction between the two of you. In the area of the soul, you will appreciate the uniqueness of each other's personality. In spirit, you will be moving in the same direction with the same intensity concerning the things of the kingdom.

Too often, however, people settle for a match in only one or two of these three areas . . .

"We're so attracted to each other physically," says the starry-eyed young man. "And spiritually, we both go to church, pray, and study the Scriptures together. But our personalities are quite different. I love hunting and fishing.

She loves the mall. I love football. She can't stand sports. She listens to Bach and Beethoven. I like the Beach Boys and the Beatles. She talks by the hour. I hardly talk at all."

Watch out. While there's romantic and spiritual unity, in the area of the soul, you're on different wave-lengths—and there will be problems. Am I saying that two people must have identical interests in order for their marriage to work? No, for there is truth in the old adage that opposites attract. But there must be genuine appreciation rather than mere toleration of the other's interests.

"We're best friends," boasts the young lady. "We talk by the hour and love hanging out with each other. We also go to church and pray together. But physically? I don't really like him to touch me."

Watch out. You're going to have problems because sooner or later, someone will come into your life who will cause a romantic spark within you. And then there will be trouble.

Others say, "We see fireworks romantically. We have the same flavor in personality. But spiritually? I want to serve the Lord radically, but she only goes to church sporadically."

Watch out. Even though you are both believers, if you're not united in the spiritual realm, you're headed for hard times.

I believe you will recognize your perfect match when, regarding body, soul, and spirit, you can say, "We're romantically attracted, personally connected, and spiritually united in our priorities, zeal, and intensity." If you desire to be married, don't settle for a match in one or even two of these three areas. Instead, go to sleep. Wait on the Lord. And in due season—at just the right time—He'll bring you someone who matches you beautifully on all three levels.

"Great," you say. "Where was this teaching ten years ago? I thought I was supposed to go out and find someone on my own. So I did—and now I'm stuck. What do I do now?"

Understand this: Even if the person you married was #886 on the Lord's list of ideal mates for you—the moment you said, "I do," #886 became #1. You see, even if there was a mistake made initially, no one on the face of the earth will be better for you than the person you're sitting with right now.

Once you get married, your spouse automatically becomes your Adam or your Eve, God's perfect match for you.

"But our marriage is so flat," you say. "The sparkle is no longer there."

I have good news for you! The first public miracle Jesus ever did was that of putting the sparkle back into a watered-down, washed-up marriage ceremony. "Servants," He said, "fill those earthen jars to the brim with water, pour it out, and watch what happens" (see John 2:7, 8). They did, and that which was once water became the wine of joy.

Husband and wife, listen carefully. Paul says that we have the treasure of Christ in earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). Thus, the Lord will miraculously fill your relationship with joy if you will fill your earthen vessel with the Water of the Word and pour it out to your spouse as you share with him or her the things of the Lord; as you study the Scriptures, pray, serve, rejoice, and worship together.

Jesus said, "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give good gifts to His" (see Matthew 7:11). Whether that be providing the single brother or sister with the mate He has for them, or infusing a lifeless marriage with His wine of joy, He will be faithful.

Rest in Him, gang. Spend time waiting on Him. And watch and see what our faithful, creative, matchless God will do.



8 In chapters 8—10, Paul uses a question the Corinthians had asked him about meat to address the larger issue of Christian liberty. Within the city of Corinth were numerous temples dedicated to various idols wherein animals would be sacrificed. A portion of the meat would be consumed on the altar. Another portion would be given to the priest. The remainder of the sacrifice would be sold in markets, called shambles, at reduced rates. It was concerning the meat sold in shambles that the Corinthians questioned Paul.

1 Corinthians 8:1

Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

Before answering the Corinthians' question concerning meat, Paul begins by addressing the foundational issue. At the very outset of his discussion of liberty, Paul makes it clear that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

1 Corinthians 8:2

And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.

"You don't know as much as you think you do," says Paul. I find it interesting that after he will say that idols are nothing here in chapter 8, he'll say there are demons behind them in chapter 10 (10:20).

1 Corinthians 8:3

But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

On one hand, Paul will say, "Because idols are nothing, go ahead and eat meat offered to them." But on the other hand, he'll say, "There are indeed demonic forces behind idols." So what were the Corinthians to do?

I believe the answer is found in Genesis 2. . . .

What was the one tree of which Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat? The tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Yet once they disobeyed God and ate of this tree, they immediately thought they knew good from evil, right from wrong without having to depend on the Father as they had done before. Suddenly, knowing they were naked, they hid from God. The result? Intimacy with the Father was broken.

So, too, if I'm not oh, so careful, even biblical knowledge and theological understanding will make me less of a prayer, less of a lover, less inclined to depend wholly on the Father because I will mistakenly think I can handle any given situation on the basis of my own knowledge or understanding.

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise

lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 9:23, 24

The word "know" speaks of intimacy, as a man knows his wife. There are many people who know about the Lord—but they don't know Him intimately. "Lord, Lord," they will say, "didn't we prophesy in Your name and do signs and wonders for Your kingdom?"

"Depart from Me," He will say. "I never knew you. Yes, you worked for Me. Yes, you knew about Me. But we had no relationship intimately" (see Matthew 7:21–23).

Saints, be students of the Word. Grow in the knowledge of the Lord. Become solid in theology—but as you do, make sure that love has the priority. Make sure your love for God is preeminent. The Word will confirm God's leading and correct your misunderstanding. But it must not be a substitute for walking with Him day by day, or for talking with Him about every situation. It must never take the place of your walking with Him in intimacy and dependency lest it become as the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

1 Corinthians 8:4–6

As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.

"It's no big deal," Paul says, "to eat meat sacrificed to idols, for we know there is only one true God—our Father. We know there is only one true Lord—our Savior, Jesus Christ."

1 Corinthians 8:7 (a)

Howbeit . . .

Although eating meat offered to idols is not a threat to the true God, and although eating meat offered to idols won't affect me personally, I need to be aware that it may indeed affect those around me.

1 Corinthians 8:7 (b)

. . . there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

Our natural tendency is to think that the brother or sister who would be righteously indignant over the eating of meat offered to idols would be the spiritual giant, the one most sensitive to the heart of God. But Paul calls such a one "weak." Paul says, in effect, the person who is bound by rules and regulations isn't mature, but weak—for the more spiritually mature one is, the more free he or she will be.

1 Corinthians 8:8, 9

But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

"We know that the eating of meat makes us neither better nor worse in God's sight," says Paul. "However, our knowledge must be tempered by a higher principle—that of love. We must be aware that there are people who might struggle with seeing us scarf down a top sirloin that was previously offered to a pagan idol. We must be mindful of those who are weak."

Why are people weak or immature in their faith?

I suggest three reasons. . . .

First, some people are immature because they're new Christians who haven't had time to grow in the knowledge of grace or the finished work of Christ. In our culture, we are steeped in thinking that there's no free lunch, that we must work our way up in life, that we must pick ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Therefore, it takes time for those who are new in the faith to grow in the understanding that the way of the kingdom is totally different than

the world's system. Because of the Cross, the Christian race starts at the finish line. We don't fight *for* victory; we fight *from* victory. This is so foreign to the world's thinking that many new Christians are hypersensitive about issues of conscience and the possibility of failing.

A second reason for immaturity is not because someone is a spiritual baby, but because he is a spoiled brat. It is to such a one the author of the Book of Hebrews says, "At a time you should be eating meat, when you should be teaching others, you're still in need of milk, learning simple things (Hebrews 5:12). Some people refuse to grow. They will not come to Bible study; they will not take time to worship the Lord corporately; they will not fellowship with other believers regularly. As a result, they are locked in to a permanent state of immaturity.

A third reason for immaturity is that some people are scared children. Scared children won't go outside because they're afraid they'll get kidnapped, that a bee will sting them, or that a bird will carry them away. So, too, in the spiritual realm, there are those who say, "I can't go there; I can't do that because I'll get wiped out." And their whole life is characterized by the fear that something bad will happen to them. Consequently, they stay locked up in their house of legalism.

Perhaps you see these tendencies in your own life or in the lives of those you're discipling—the baby who hasn't had time to grow, the spoiled brat who refuses to grow, the scared child who is afraid to grow. It is only when a man becomes mature spiritually that he finds himself at liberty.

1 Corinthians 8:10, 11

For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; and through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

More important than the knowledge that I am free to have a burger is the realization that my liberty could adversely affect my weaker brother. You see, I might be able to talk him into participating in an activity that is fine for me. But if he does, he may later feel that his walk has been compromised, or

that his prayers won't be heard. That is why I never talk anyone out of a personal conviction he has—even if his conviction seems legalistic to me. Oh, I'll discuss it with him if he asks my opinion, but I won't encourage him to abandon his convictions simply on the basis of my own freedom.

1 Corinthians 8:12

But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.

Not only can a weak conscience become defiled, but it can become wounded. That is, a weaker brother can be shocked or saddened by observing my liberty. And when we so wound a weaker brother, we sin against Christ. Why? Because Jesus cares about even His weakest children. Yes, they might be spiritual babies, spoiled brats, scared children—but they're all His, nonetheless. And He cares about them so much that He died for them. Therefore, before I say, "I'll do what I want, go where I want, eat what I want," I must realize that if, flaunting my liberty and boasting of my maturity, I knowingly cause my weaker brother to stumble, I sin not only against him but against Christ.

1 Corinthians 8:13

Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

"Here's the bottom line," says Paul. "If meat offends my weaker brother, I will eat no meat. Period."

Is it any wonder the Lord so powerfully used him?



9 After exhorting the Corinthian believers to lay down their liberty in order that others wouldn't stumble, here in chapter 9, Paul uses himself as an example of what it means to do this. . . .

1 Corinthians 9:1–3

Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord. Mine answer to them that do examine me is this.

An apostle is one who was sent out as a spiritual statesman. Paul had been sent to the Corinthians to bring them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and to disciple and develop them as he labored among them.

1 Corinthians 9:4–6

Have we not power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?

In these first six verses, Paul says, "Because we are apostles, we have the right to be supported financially as are James, Jude, Peter, and the other apostles."

1 Corinthians 9:7 (a)

Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges?

"In addition to our apostleship, human logic dictates that we be supported, says Paul. "After all, who goes to war and pays for his own equipment?" Paul is right. Those who enlist in the navy don't have to provide their own ships. Those who join the air force don't have to bring their own planes. No, if you serve in the army or navy, your needs are covered.

1 Corinthians 9:7 (b)

. . . who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?

Not only are military personnel provided for, but the farmer and the shepherd are allowed to eat of the fruit of their own labor.

1 Corinthians 9:8

Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also?

Paul appeals to the law itself as substantiation for his right to financial support.

1 Corinthians 9:9

For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn.

In other words, "The ox who grinds the corn should be able to eat of the corn." Paul will use this Old Testament reference (Deuteronomy 25:4) again in 1 Timothy 5:17 when he tells his young protégé that elders should be counted worthy of double honor.

1 Corinthians 9:9, 10 (a)

Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written . . .

This law is not only for the benefit of oxen. It's an illustration for people.

1 Corinthians 9:10 (b)

. . . that he that ploweth should plow in hope . . .

Hope being the absolute expectation of coming good, the one who plows away in ministry should expect good things to come his way.

1 Corinthians 9:10 (c), 11

. . . and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?

"Carnal things" referring to finances, Paul goes on to give a fourth reason why he had a right to be supported in ministry. . . .

1 Corinthians 9:12

If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.

"It's already your custom to support other ministers," says Paul. "So why would it be unusual to support us?"

1 Corinthians 9:13

Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?

Paul not only referred to Old Testament law, but to the practices of the Old Testament community as he reminds the Corinthian believers that priests partook of a portion of the sacrifices brought to the altar.

1 Corinthians 9:14

Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

"Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves," Jesus said when He sent His disciples out, "for the workman is worthy of his meat" (Matthew 10:9–10). It is to this command Paul refers.

1 Corinthians 9:15

But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.

On the basis of apostolic authority, human logic, Old Testament law, present custom, Old Testament community, and Jesus' command, Paul makes a persuasive and powerful case that he had the right to be supported in ministry. But then he says he would rather die than cause the Corinthian

believers to stumble in this area. You see, in Corinth at this time there were a number of teachers—both Christian and pagan—who were ripping people off financially. Therefore, Paul laid aside his right to be supported in ministry so as not to wound the weak conscience of the Corinthian church.

There are those who use this passage to say that's the way every ministry should be—that pastors or ministers have no right to be supported. But those who do fail to figure 2 Corinthians 11:8 into the equation, wherein Paul says he was able to forfeit his right to be supported by the Corinthian church only because he was receiving support from other churches. In addition, we know from Acts 18:3 that Paul worked with his own hands making tents so as not to be a burden to the believers.

1 Corinthians 9:16

For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!

"I don't glory in the fact that I let go of my right to be supported in order that I might preach to you," says Paul, "for I have no other choice but to preach."

"I'm tired of speaking in the name of the Lord," cried Jeremiah from his dungeon cell. "No one is listening to me. People are mad at me. Some are even trying to kill me. I'm going to speak no more," he said—until he realized that the Word of God was like fire in his bones and he could not keep quiet (Jeremiah 20:9).

That's what happens in ministry, doesn't it? You just can't keep God's Word to yourself!

1 Corinthians 9:17

For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.

“Woe is me if I don’t preach,” says Paul. “If I do it willingly, I’ll have a reward. But even if I do it because I have no other choice, the gospel has been entrusted to me.”

1 Corinthians 9:18

What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.

“I’m not going to charge for the gospel,” Paul declares. “I’m not going to lay a burden on people, play games with people, or present fundraising gimmicks to people.”

1 Corinthians 9:19 (a)

For though I be free from all men . . .

“Because I laid down my rights in order that you wouldn’t stumble, I’m free,” declares Paul.

1 Corinthians 9:19 (b), 20

. . . yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law.

“To the Jews, I don’t flaunt my liberty. Instead, I become like them,” said Paul. And indeed he did. It was for this reason he circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3).

1 Corinthians 9:21, 22

To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

Even as he didn't flaunt his liberty before the Jews, Paul didn't force the law upon the Gentiles. Without compromising his morals or violating his principles, he fit in with the folks to whom he was called to minister—that he might win them to Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:23

And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

Paul gave up his rights in ministry. He blended in with Jews and Gentiles in humility because, rather than be an obstacle that caused people to stumble, Paul chose to be a stone upon which they could step.

1 Corinthians 9:24 (a)

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?

"Here's why I let go of my liberty," declares Paul. "I understand the big picture of eternity." Paul knew heaven was real. Left for dead outside the city of Lystra (Acts 14:19), Paul was caught up into the third heaven. "Whether or not I was in the Spirit or actually transported physically, I don't really know," he said, "but somehow I was there. And what I saw was so amazing that I can't even describe it to you" (see 2 Corinthians 12:2–4). Because he had a "sneak preview of coming attractions," Paul set his sight on winning the prize.

1 Corinthians 9:24 (b)

So run, that ye may obtain.

Lest you think there's no use running a race in which spiritual giants like Paul are sure to lap you time and time again, understand this: We're not competing against any other brother or sister. We're competing against ourselves. In His teaching on the talents and pounds (Matthew 25; Luke 19), Jesus makes this very clear. Is what the Lord entrusted uniquely to you being

developed for His glory? Are you laying down your rights and privileges to see others brought into the kingdom? Such is the nature of the race we run.

1 Corinthians 9:25

And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

Still speaking of sports, Paul changes his metaphor to that of a wrestling match. The reason Paul alludes to sports in this way is because the Isthmus Games—the second most important athletic games in the region—took place in Corinth. Consequently, they knew about running races and wrestling matches. They watched the athletes arrive a year before the games took place to train single-mindedly in order to win the prize—a little laurel wreath to put on one's head.

"Look at what these athletes do to win a simple crown of leaves," Paul says. "The crown for which you race is incorruptible. It will last forever."

"So what?" you say. "If you looked in my closet, you wouldn't find a single crown because I'm not into them."

Really?

Of the five crowns identified in Scripture, the crown to which Paul refers here, is linked to the declaration in Proverbs 11:30 that "he who wins souls is wise"—and to that of Daniel, that "they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever" (see 12:3). To you who are more concerned about seeing people saved than about your own pleasure, ease, or liberty a crown will be given—not merely to wear on your head, but, in light of 1 Corinthians 15:41, 42, that will determine your function and capacity to enjoy eternity.

You see, while everyone in heaven will be completely happy and totally joyful (Psalm 16:11), the crowns we win on earth will have a direct link to our function and our capacity to enjoy eternity.

Benjamin was thrilled. Mrs. Williams, his kindergarten teacher, appointed him Chair Monitor. As Chair Monitor, he got to make sure all the chairs were slid under the desks when the bell rang. He

couldn't have been happier. Now, if I were appointed Chair Monitor, I wouldn't jump up and down and say, "I can't wait to tell my wife, Tammy!" For me, the position of Chair Monitor no longer has an impact because at this point, my capacity, understanding, and involvement with life is bigger than that.

So, too, Jesus told us that in heaven, some will rule over ten cities, others five cities, others one—and some will be Chair Monitors. Understanding this, Paul knew that a crown is not a fashion statement, but rather an indication of what we will be doing for the next zillion years.

What if we, like Paul, really believed this? I guarantee every one of us would be looking for opportunities to be stepped on if it meant that the person for whom we laid down our rights would see something of Jesus or come into a saving knowledge of Him. What you do with your life is so important, gang. Don't bury your talents. Don't waste your time. Don't fritter away your resources and money foolishly. Run to win the prize.

1 Corinthians 9:26, 27 (a)

I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body . . .

This last phrase would be more correctly translated, "I keep my body under." Before you were saved, your body was not "under." Your body was on top. That is, your flesh governed your soul—your mind and emotions. It also governed your spirit—the real you that lives forever. To see how true this is, all you have to do is listen to the conversations that take place at work or on the campus, wherein you'll hear the average person talk only about his body—about his financial concerns and recreational pursuits, his occupational goals and physical needs. But when the natural man gets saved, suddenly everything is different. The flesh no longer dominates him. The spirit is now on top, and suddenly there's peace in his heart and life makes sense.

Because the flesh hates the basement, however, as time goes on, it demands to be on top again. And when it is, the new believer's life is a mess, for to be carnally minded is death (Romans 8:6). So eventually, he gets to the

place where he says, "Lord, forgive me. I've given in to the flesh again." He confesses his sin, turns his life back over to God, and his body is "under" once more.

Does this war have to go on daily, hourly, constantly? Paul says here's the key: "I *keep* my body under. I will not allow my body to determine what I watch, read, listen to, or think about. I will keep my body in the basement."

How can this be accomplished?

Let me suggest to you one very practical way: How long has it been since you've said, "No," to your stomach? How long has it been since you've said, "I'm going to use the hour I would have spent feeding my growling, demanding stomach in order to pull away and pray for my family, for the community, and for myself."

I find it interesting that Jesus didn't say, "*If* you fast, . . ." but, "*When* you fast . . ." (Matthew 6:16). In other words, the assumption is that we will fast. When you regularly say, "No," to your stomach, you'll be amazed how much easier it will be to say, "No," to the other temptations that plague you.

Fasting from food is only one of the many disciplines the Bible teaches. Another is saying, "No," when your body says, "Hit the snooze bar." It's saying, "See, body, you're under. You're not ruling me. I'm out of bed. I'm on my knees. I'm in the Word." It's following the example of Jesus, who rose up a great while before morning to seek His Father.

"I keep my body under," Paul says. "I'm tired of my body ruling me, and the death it brings inevitably. Therefore, my spirit, ruled by God's Spirit, will be that which controls my soul—my will, my personality, my emotions."

1 Corinthians 9:27 (b)

. . . and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Newer translations correctly render the word "castaway" as "disqualified." Thus, Paul is saying, "I let go of my liberty in order that I might win people to Jesus. Why? Because I'm in a race for a prize that will affect who I am and what I do in the ages to come. Therefore, even though I am free to do all things, I can be disqualified if I don't keep my flesh under control, if I cause another to stumble."

You'll never regret knocking fleshly pursuits out of your life, gang. I promise you, you'll never regret the things you let go of that would have tripped others and disqualified you; those things that would have wiped out your spiritual stamina and affected your endurance. Are you as disciplined in your spiritual life today as you were a year ago? Or has your appreciation for the finished work of the Cross and your understanding that your salvation is secure apart from anything you do or don't do skewed your thinking? Yes, you're free, but have you used that liberty in a way that's tripping others and disqualifying yourself?

Use your liberty wisely, precious people. Keep your body under, for to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded brings abundant life and perfect peace.



10 After using himself as an example of what it means to lay down one's liberty sacrificially, here in chapter 10, Paul will use the nation of Israel as an example of those who lost their liberty needlessly.

1 Corinthians 10:1, 2

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

After being released from bondage, God's people were led through the wilderness by a cloud. Why a cloud? With the desert temperature rising, the Lord said, "I'm going to guide you by providing a covering from the sun for you. When the cloud moves, simply move with it."

I love this because as we journey with the Lord, we've got it made in the shade. That's the way He moves, the way He guides. People sweat and struggle and strive to determine the will of God. "Where should I go? What should I do?" they ask—when in reality, their question simply should be, "Where is the shade?"

Oh, the goodness of the Lord. "Keep cool," He says. "Where the cloud goes is where I want you."

1 Corinthians 10:3, 4

And did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

Baptized in the Red Sea, led by the Lord as they stayed in the shade, fed with manna every morning, the nation of Israel drank water from a Rock—Jesus Christ—the perpetual source of refreshment (John 7:37).

1 Corinthians 10:5

But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

"With many of them God was not well pleased" is an understatement of mammoth proportion, for of the three million Jews who left Egypt and were provided for supernaturally, only two entered the Promised Land.

1 Corinthians 10:6

Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

The wandering in the wilderness and warfare in the Promised Land are not simply historical incidents, but they're to be practical illustrations for our personal application. We're to learn lessons from them—one of which is that, even though we are set free, even though we are at liberty, lust will trip us up. The reference is to Numbers 11, where we read that, tiring of manna, the Israelites lusted after meat. Isn't that what lust really is—not being satisfied with what God has given us, wanting something or someone different?

"Oh, sure, manna is supernatural. Sure, it's miraculous—but we want meat to eat," they said.

So God said to Moses, "Give them meat."

"How are we going to do that?" asked Moses. "Do You want me to kill the cattle that we are bringing into the Promised Land—or do You want me to fish the Red Sea?"

Moses made a mistake I often make. He looked at his options and said, "Okay, Lord, which of these two do You want?" He failed to understand that the Lord had an alternative he could never have imagined. God sent so many quail their way that His people ate until they could eat no more. The psalmist sheds further light on this when he says, "God gave them their request, but He sent leanness to their soul" (see Psalm 106:14, 15). That's the way lust is. Never satisfied, it brings leanness to the soul, weakness to the body, emptiness to the spirit.

1 Corinthians 10:7

Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

The reference here is to Exodus 32. Tired of waiting for Moses to return from Mount Sinai, the people pressed Aaron to fashion a golden calf from their jewelry—not to compete against Jehovah, but to be a visible, tangible representation of Him. Many cultures at that time considered the cow to be representative of deity.

Why? The cow is a gentle yet powerful animal that provides milk for its young. But here's the problem with idolatry: If I allow anything or anyone to represent God to me, it will, at best, be only a partial representation of the full nature and character of the Father. You see, if I look at God as only being a cow in the sense of gently providing for His young, I need not fear if I act immorally in His sight.

Yes, God is gentle. Yes He provides graciously—but He is also lionlike in His holiness and purity. Therefore, I err greatly when I ignore this aspect of His nature.

You may not have a Buddha on your mantel or a shrine in your home—but watch out that you don't allow a person, author, ministry, or book to represent God to you. That's idolatry.

1 Corinthians 10:8

Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.

Referring to the Numbers 25 account wherein, after committing fornication with the women of Moab, twenty-three thousand died in one day and one thousand more shortly thereafter, Paul says, "In the glorious life of liberty which you enjoy, make sure your freedom doesn't lead to immorality."

"I can watch that. I can go there," we say of the questionable movie or activity—unaware that immorality kills. It kills our marriages and our families, our witness and our joy.

1 Corinthians 10:9

Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.

"Why did you bring us out here in the wilderness to die?" the Israelites cried to Moses. "We had it made back in Egypt—where there were onions and melons and leeks."

> Even if they did have onions and melons and leeks—an assumption many historians question in light of the fact that such crops were cultivated only in Israel and unknown in Egypt at that time—the cry of the children of Israel is so much like ours when we long for the old gang, the wild parties, the fun times, and fail to remember the loneliness, the emptiness, the guilt; when we long for the melons, onions, and leeks, but fail to remember the laboring, the beatings, the slavery of Egypt.

Don't tempt Christ by saying, "I miss the old days. My job is a drag. Why am I stuck with him?"—for when I complain about my situation, I am directly complaining about Christ, the One who allowed me to be in the situation in the first place.

1 Corinthians 10:10

Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

After being covered by the cloud and provided for by the goodness and graciousness of the Father, as the Israelites were poised to enter the Land of Promise, Moses sent twelve spies to check out the land. And although they returned with reports of its beauty, although they returned with fruit as proof of its productivity, they also returned with reports of Anakim—giants they believed were sure to squish them like bugs should they dare to enter (Numbers 13:26–33).

But there were two spies who had a different perspective. "Don't rebel against the Lord," said Joshua and Caleb. "Don't fear the people of the land, for they are our bread" (see Numbers 14:9). I love that! Caleb said, "These giants are bread for us. We'll eat them up. And as a result, we'll actually be stronger for battle."

Forty years later, it was to an eighty-five-year-old Caleb that Joshua said, "We made it, Caleb. Out of the original three million, it's just you and me. Take any territory you want. It's time to retire." But what does Caleb say?

> Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the LORD spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the LORD will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said.
>
> Joshua 14:12

"Don't give me a beach cabin, give me the mountain where giants live," said Caleb. "Why? Because I'm hungry for some bread."

When you pray the Lord's prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," think Anakim. You see, we complain and murmur, "Why is this trial happening? Why that? Why not the other?" when in reality, the very situations or people about which we murmur are those through which God wants to strengthen us. That which seems so big and so intimidating are Anakim—and it is the wise man or woman who, like Caleb, says "You've let them cross my path, Lord, therefore they must be there to make me stronger."

Can you imagine how different our homes would be if we really believed that the trials that come our way and the giants that loom before us are actually beneficial to us if we would eat them up in faith? "More bills?" we'd say, "Great! Keep them coming. Another rejection notice? All right!"

Most will die murmuring in the wilderness. "If God loves me, why doesn't He . . .?" or "How come this giant is marching toward me?" But there will be those—and I pray I might be one and you might be the other—who will say, "Giants? I smell bread. Pass the butter!"

1 Corinthians 10:11

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

When you pore over the Scriptures, realize the Father provided powerful, pointed, and sometimes even shocking examples to teach us important lessons. "Don't miss them," says Paul. Read your Bible looking for the lessons, for the examples that you might be made wiser. The old adage is true indeed: Experience is the best teacher. It doesn't, however, have to be our experience. Do you realize how good the Lord is to let His people learn those lessons so *we* could gain understanding?

"But what about them?" you ask. "Is it right that they had to suffer and even die so we could be made the wiser?" God is fair. Being an example to us may have been the fulfillment of their highest ministry. And it is possible that they will be hugely important in eternity because they fulfilled their appointed purpose in providing lessons for believers like us to study for centuries.

1 Corinthians 10:12

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

After miraculously delivering them from bondage in Egypt, God's intent was to lead His people directly to the Promised Land. According to verses 6–12, however, lust, idolatry, immorality, and murmuring kept all but Joshua and Caleb from ever reaching the land He had for them.

So, too, the Lord has graciously delivered us from the bondage of sin. It is His intent that we live a Spirit-filled, fruitful life here on earth. But the

same sins that barred the Israelites from the Promised Land will prevent us from living the abundant life He has for us.

1 Corinthians 10:13

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

After twelve verses of caution, Paul gives this glorious word of comfort.



***For topical study of 1 Corinthians 10:13 entitled "Temptation," turn to page* 1058.**

1 Corinthians 10:14

Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.

Flee from any person, any activity, any hobby, or idea that gets in the way of your relationship with the Lord.

1 Corinthians 10:15

I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.

Paul's argument is not one of legalism, but of wisdom.

1 Corinthians 10:16

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

Following his answer regarding sacrifices to idols, Paul changes the subject from physical meat to spiritual meat—the Lord's Supper. The Greek word translated "communion" is *koinonia,* or "oneness."

1 Corinthians 10:17

For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.

The culture to which Paul was speaking understood something we don't. That is, they looked at sharing a meal as being one of the most intimate expressions possible between two people or a group of people. Why? Before the days of silverware, people would eat reclined around a low table, sharing pieces of bread from a common loaf they dipped into a common dish filled with a stewlike sauce. Therefore, because they were eating of the same bread and meat, they believed they were uniquely bonded through the common nutrients they were sharing.

As Christians, when we come to the Lord's table to eat of the same loaf and drink of the same vine, there's a oneness, a *koinonia* between us as well as a oneness between us and Jesus.

1 Corinthians 10:18

Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?

Israel understood the *koinonia* of Communion, for when the Jews offered their peace offerings to the Lord in the tabernacle, and later in the temple, part of the meat sacrificed would rise to the Lord in smoke. They were able to eat of the remainder. Thus, through the peace offering, they were able to commune with God as they shared meat together.

1 Corinthians 10:19, 20

What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.

Deuteronomy 32:17 is one of many Old Testament Scriptures that indicate that when the people of Israel offered sacrifices to idols, they

actually offered them to demons. An idol in and of itself is nothing. But demonic entities can, indeed, be connected to idols.

1 Corinthians 10:21

Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.

In chapter 8, Paul said it was perfectly acceptable to eat meat that had been offered to idols. Here, he's saying one can't eat at both the Lord's table and the table of the demons. Is he contradicting himself? No. You see, it's not the meat, but the meeting that is the problem, for while it was permissible to buy meat in the shambles, it was not permissible to take part in idol worship in the temples.

What does this mean for us today? It means that, although I have liberty to go into certain bars or social scenes to have a Pepsi, if that place has been dedicated to devilish activity, I shouldn't be there. I can't hang out with the demons on Saturday night and come to church Sunday expecting things to be hunky-dory. It just doesn't work that way.

1 Corinthians 10:22

Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?

If I hang around places where the atmosphere is corrupt, I push the Lord to jealousy. Why is He jealous? When you or I get jealous, it's because we feel threatened. The Lord's jealousy, however, is entirely different. He's not jealous of other gods. He's jealous for you and me.

If you saw someone's face on the screen of America's Most Wanted whom you recognized as someone who had asked one of the women of your fellowship out to dinner, you would say, "I saw this guy on TV. He's a mass murderer. Stay away from him."

If she said, "Oh, you're just jealous," it would be because she failed to understand that you were not jealous of him, but jealous for her.

So, too, the Lord is not jealous of pipsqueak demonic entities. They're not a threat to Him. But He's jealous for us. He doesn't want to see us destroyed. Therefore, He'll do whatever is necessary to bring us back to where we need to be.

1 Corinthians 10:23

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

It's not a matter of, "Can I go there; can I do this?" *Everything* is lawful. The question is: Do you want to be hanging out with demons? Do you want to provoke the Lord to jealousy?



***For topical study of 1 Corinthians 10:23 entitled "Give Me Liberty!" turn to page* 1061.**

1 Corinthians 10:24

Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.

You may have the freedom to go to a certain place or to take part in a given activity. Again, the question is: What will your participation do to your brother? Even if it doesn't affect you, will people who see you be made the poorer for it? Will their faith be compromised if they follow in your footsteps?

1 Corinthians 10:25–28 (a)

Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But . . .

"Whether purchased in the shambles or eaten in one's home, meat offered to idols is not a problem because—along with the whole earth—it is the

Lord's," Paul declares. However, there is an exception. . . .

1 Corinthians 10:28 (b)

. . . if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake . . .

If someone makes a point of telling you the meat before you had been sacrificed to idols, he does so for a reason. Therefore, don't partake lest he be made to stumble.

1 Corinthians 10:28 (c)

. . . for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.

Some commentators suggest the repetition of verse 26 is a mistake made by those who copied this letter. I don't think so. In light of the passage preceding it, I believe Paul is underscoring this understanding to say, "If eating a steak would make your brother stumble, there's an entire earth full of food you can choose to replace it."

This is an excellent word for our kids. "There's nothing to do but that," they say of questionable activities. "There's nowhere to go but there," they complain.

"Wait a minute," we as parents can say. "The whole earth is the Lord's. Surely there are other things to do and other places to go where you won't have to compromise your walk with Him."

1 Corinthians 10:29, 30

Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks?

Paul voices the argument of the person who says, "I can thank the Lord for this piece of meat, so why should I pass it up?" He then answers it in the following verse. . . .

1 Corinthians 10:31–33

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

The underlying reason for giving up liberty is an awareness of how it affects the salvation or walk of another. As he brings to a close this important question of Christian liberty, Paul gives three questions to ask ourselves regarding any activity. . . .

- Can I thank the Lord in it? (verse 30)
- Will God be glorified through it? (verse 31)
- Will someone be tripped up by it? (verse 32).

Like a weather vane that changes direction, depending upon which way the wind is blowing, the wise man will adjust his activities to the way the wind of the Spirit is moving.

TEMPTATION
A Topical Study of
1 CORINTHIANS 10:13

"Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall," Paul said to the Corinthian Christians. Then, as he so often does, following this word of caution, Paul issues a word of comfort.

- "Take heed," he says in verse 12.
- "Take hope," he says in verse 13 . . .

An Enlightening Premise

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man . . .

1 Corinthians 10:13 (a)

So often, people say, "I'm embarrassed to share that vulnerability, temptation, or problem because no one else goes through that, no one else thinks thoughts like that, no one else struggles with that." Not so. You'd be shocked if you knew the temptations of the people sitting right next to you.

Temptation in and of itself is not sin. And it's common to *everyone.*

Not only is temptation common to all men, but, more importantly, it is common to the Son of Man, Jesus Christ.

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 4:15

Jesus was tempted in *all* points. No matter what the sin, Jesus does not look with disgust at the person struggling with it and say, "How could you?" He looks at him with compassion and says, "I know what you're going through."

Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

Hebrews 2:17, 18

An Encouraging Promise

> *. . . but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 10:13 (b)

You might be fickle. I know I am frail. But God is faithful, and He will not allow the temptation I face to become too intense, but He will make a way of escape every time. Sometimes I close my eyes and say, "I don't see it,"—but in reality, a way of escape is always there for you and me if we'll choose to see it.

"That's great as far as it relates to theology," you say. "But how does it work out practically? How does it work out in my situation where I'm vulnerable to murmuring about my job, lusting after that Lexus, or prone to immorality?"

Listen, gang, whenever you want to know how some aspect of the Word works out, look to the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, and you'll see it lived out practically. . . .

As He came out of the waters of baptism, Jesus heard a voice from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Immediately after that, Scripture tells us He was driven into the wilderness where He would be tempted by Satan in a profound and significant way.

Those who study such things tell us that the return of the appetite after a fast for a great period of time is the body's way of saying it's on the threshold of death. Therefore, the fact that Jesus was hungry after fasting forty days indicates He was physiologically at the point of death. It was at this point that Satan came to Him, saying, "If thou be the Son of God . . ." In other words, "Didn't Your Father just tell You that You were His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased? If that's so, why are You dying of starvation? Why not command these stones to be made into bread?" he hissed, tempting Jesus to doubt His Father's provision (Matthew 4:3).

Satan will whisper that same temptation into your ear or mine. "Why aren't you satisfied materially, physically, relationally, or vocationally?" he'll say. "I thought you were God's child. I thought you were born again. Why, then, are you still hungry?"

What did Jesus do? Quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, He said, "It is written that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." I believe it was audibly and forcefully that Jesus said, "It is written, Satan, that man is not satiated by material bread, but by the Word of God."

Then the devil took Him into Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and tempted Jesus to doubt His Father's protection. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "cast yourself down. After all, Psalm 91 says He shall give His angels charge over thee, and they shall bear thee up lest thou dash thy foot against a stone" (see Matthew 4:6). In other words, Satan said, "Jump. Take a leap of faith. Are You afraid Your Father won't protect You? Jump—and see how the Father comes through for You."

Satan can quote Scripture—but he purposely left out a very important phrase, for Psalm 91:11 actually says, "He shall give His angels charge over thee, *to keep thee in all thy ways*"—not to do our thing, but to walk in God's way.

So, too, Satan will come to you and me, saying, " "Jump! Start the business. Take a leap of faith. Name it and claim it. Doesn't the Father care about you? Surely, He won't let you hit bottom. Just jump into that relationship. He hasn't directed it—but He won't let you crash, will He?"

How did Jesus answer Satan's temptation to doubt the Father's protection? Quoting Deuteronomy 6:16, He said, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Again, I believe it was audibly and forcefully that Jesus said, "I will not test My Father. If He wants Me to jump, He'll set Me up and tell Me when."

Jesus balanced Psalm 91 with Deuteronomy 6, comparing Scripture with Scripture. All too often, people crash in the name of faith because, on the basis of a single verse, they jump off, hit bottom, and wonder why. That is why it is so essential to be a student of the entire Word—chapter by chapter, verse by verse, steadily and consistently receiving the full counsel of God.

Finally, the devil took Jesus to a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and tempted Him to doubt His Father's promise by saying, "All of this will be Yours if You will fall down and worship me" (see Matthew 4:9).

Truly, the world was Satan's to give. The title deed to planet earth was his. Adam and Eve had handed it to him when they chose to listen to him instead of God in the Garden of Eden.

"It is written," Jesus said, again quoting from Deuteronomy 6:13, "thou shalt fear the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve." And again, I believe it was audibly and forcefully that Jesus said, "I will worship My Father only, singularly, exclusively."

Concerning any temptation we face, what is the way of escape?

First, we are to stay *in* the Word. To overcome temptation, lust, fornication, murmuring—and everything else that can trip you up—stay in the Word. I believe the reason Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6—8 is because it was that passage upon which He was meditating at the moment Satan came to tempt Him. Stay in the Word, gang. It is the Sword of the Spirit with which you can do battle with the Enemy most effectively.

Second, we are to speak out the Word. In His wilderness temptation, Jesus spoke audibly. Satan cannot read your mind. He cannot look into your heart. Therefore, he is beat back by what we *say.*

> *. . . for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*
>
> Hebrews 13:5 (b), 6

"He hath said . . . that we may say," the writer of Hebrews declared. It's not, "He hath said that we may think," or, "He hath said that we may know," or even, "He hath said that we may pray," but, "He hath said that we may *say.*" Therefore, I suggest that speaking the Word at the moment of temptation changes the entire situation. Since the words "It is written" are like the sound of fingernails on a blackboard to Satan, I challenge you to speak them the next time you're tempted. Whatever the challenge might be, speak the Word audibly and watch how it changes the atmosphere radically.

Finally, we are to submit *to* the Word. Both Satan and Jesus knew the Scriptures. Both spoke the Scriptures. But only Jesus *submitted* to the Scriptures. Big difference. Jesus wasn't using the Word like a magic charm or incantation to cause Satan to flee. Rather, He was committing Himself to obey it completely. Jesus did what the Word said, and *that* is where the power is.

For example, maybe you find yourself wanting to gossip about your boss or murmur against your wife. But, knowing the Word says to bless those who persecute and despitefully use you, you choose instead to pray for them. That is what it means to be submitted to the Word. And that is what renders Satan powerless.

Staying in the Word, speaking out the Word, submitting to the Word—if we do these things as Jesus modeled them for us, there will be a wide-open door through which we can escape temptation very easily. Try it. You'll see.

"GIVE ME LIBERTY!"
A Topical Study of
1 CORINTHIANS 10:23

"I'm not really interested in Christianity," some people tell me. "I'm not interested in being born again."

"Why?" I ask.

"Because I'm not into all of the do's and don'ts, the rules and regulations, the restrictions and the limitations you church people are under. I want my liberty," they'll say.

And that's when I really get excited. "Wonderful!" I say, "because liberty is Jesus' specialty."

The world is mixed up. Our culture is a mess. People are mistaken about life, about liberty, about freedom. They don't understand that we become enslaved by the very sins we commit in the name of freedom. That's why Jesus came—to set us free to live life the way it was meant to be lived.

As believers, we are the freest of all people, for what other religion, philosophy, or ethic dares to say, "All things are lawful"?

"Then what is the law for?" you say. "Why should we even study the Old Testament at all?"

Following are three aspects of the law that I believe will help us walk in liberty. . . .

The Purpose of the Law

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

"Here is the purpose of the law," Paul says. "It is to be a schoolmaster to show us we are sinners."

People basically feel they're pretty good. That's why they write books entitled, *I'm OK, You're OK*. It's not until they see God's standards of holiness and righteousness that they change the title from *I'm OK, You're OK* to *God's OK, and We're Not*.

> When I play basketball with five-year-old Benjamin, I'm awesome. I get over half the rebounds; I make over half my lay-ups. When I play against seventeen-year-old Peter-John, however, suddenly I'm not quite as good—and getting worse all the time! But if I were to play Michael Jordan, it would be downright ugly.

You see, if my standard is Benny, I'm pretty good. If my standard is Michael, I'm a basketball basket case. That's why the law was given. "I'm pretty good," people say as they compare themselves to the guy next door. But when the Lord shows us *His* standard of holiness and righteousness, we suddenly realize we're in big trouble.

Once we realize this, once we see clearly our need for salvation, we become dead to the very rules and regulations that drove us to Jesus initially. I know this is so because in Romans 6—8—three of the most important chapters in all of Scripture—Paul tells us that when Jesus died on the Cross, we who are believers died with Him positionally.

> *Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him*

who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

Romans 7:4

Suppose after this service is over, feeling a bit hungry, I go to Ron's Market, stand at the counter with Twinkies in hand, and reach into my pocket, only to find I have no money. So I reach for my pistol, instead, and say, "Give me the Twinkies."

Looking rather shocked, Ron hands me the Twinkies—and I run out of the store, little knowing that Ron has pushed a button under his cash register that calls the County Sheriff. Arriving on the scene, they yell at me to stop. Instead, I fire a shot and hit one in the shoulder. Down he goes. But before I can get another shot off, the Deputy shoots me, and I fall down dead.

Now, even though I broke numerous laws—armed robbery, resisting arrest, assault with a deadly weapon—I wouldn't go to trial. Why? Not because the law changed, but because I'm dead. Dead men don't go to trial.

That's the profound truth of Romans 7. The law is still there, and we've violated every single one of its requirements. But because we died with Christ, we'll never go to trial. Instead, we'll remain at liberty.

The Place for the Law

The purpose of the law is to show us we're sinners. Yet even for unbelievers, the law has a place.

> *But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine . . .*
>
> 1 Timothy 1:8–10

The Lord created man to live in liberty. Yet due to the sin that permeates our society, the law is necessary to protect mankind from perversion that would otherwise run rampant.

Perspective from the Law

As believers, we are dead to the demands of the law. Yet it is our delight and privilege to discover the principles, the reasons the law was given—for in them we gain perspective regarding the nature of our Father and the way He would have us navigate life successfully.

We must gain perspective from the law because if we violate the principles embedded within it, there will be repercussions. Because of the finished work of Calvary, I am forgiven of past, present, and future sins in their entirety. Therefore, the repercussions don't come from the Father but from my own sin.

> *Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the* LORD *thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts.*
>
> Jeremiah 2:19

"It's not Me chasing you down," God says. "It is your own sin that reproves you."

Tell this to your sons and daughters. Remind the new believer that God is not saying, "I'm going to track you down and do you in because you've been bad." No, all things are lawful unto you. But because all things are not expedient, or profitable; because not all things edify, or build up, certain attitudes in and of themselves will tear you down, will do you in, will cause pain and sorrow.

> *And the land be subdued before the* LORD*: then afterward ye shall return, and be guiltless before the* LORD*, and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the* LORD*. But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the* LORD*: and be sure your sin will find you out.*
>
> Numbers 32:22, 23

It is our sin, not God, that finds us out. It is our sin that tracks us down.

But doesn't the Father chasten His children? Yes. Hebrews 12 says there will indeed be chastening and correction. The parable of Luke 15 gives us insight concerning how this takes place. . . .

> "Give me my inheritance, Dad. I want my freedom. I want my liberty. I want to go into the city," said the son.
>
> "Okay," said his father, "if that's what you want."
>
> But as, no doubt, the father knew he would, the son spent his money foolishly. When famine struck, he ended up eating pig slop with the pigs. "What am I doing here?" he finally asked himself. "I'll go back to my father and beg him to allow me to be a slave in his house."
>
> When his father saw him coming from a long way off, he ran out to meet him—not to point a finger at him, but to wrap his arms around him.
>
> That's how the Father chastens.

You see, when God chastens us, He simply allows those things we do that are wrong to bring about their own inevitable repercussions. In the story of the prodigal, the father didn't say, "Uh-oh, my son's headed for problems. I better send him an extra twenty dollars to see him through, or drive to the city and find out what he's up to." No, the father simply sat tight with a loving heart and waited patiently until the backsliding, the stupidity, the stubbornness of the son brought about their own inevitable repercussions.

Yes, all things are lawful for me—but not all things are profitable for me. So what must I do? I must celebrate my liberty. I must study the Word regularly—not as one who is under rules, regulations, and restrictions—but as one who understands that through the Old Testament laws and stories, we learn to navigate life successfully so that we won't have to wander needlessly into the pigpens of the big city.

Precious people, may we be those who understand that because of the Cross of Calvary, we are truly free. And may we be those who immerse ourselves in the Word in order that we might walk wisely in our liberty.

11 1 Corinthians 11:1

Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

If chapters 10 and 11 were divided most logically, this verse would be at the end of chapter 10. After ending his discussion of Christian liberty, Paul simply says, "If you want to know what to do—just follow me." Paul's is a statement I pray we can make increasingly our own when our kids are confused, our neighbors are questioning, or newer Christians are wondering about what they should do. I'm so impressed with the work the Lord did in our brother Paul, work that enabled him to say to an entire city, "Do what I do, and you'll do well."

1 Corinthians 11:2 (a)

Now . . .

In chapter 7, Paul answered the Corinthians' questions about marriage. In chapters 8—10, he addressed their questions concerning liberty. Here in chapter 11, he'll discuss church order with regard to women (verses 2–16) and Communion (verses 17–24).

1 Corinthians 11:2 (b)

. . . I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.

Paul commended the church at Corinth for the fact that they were observing the ordinances he had taught them when he was with them five years earlier.

1 Corinthians 11:3 (a)

But . . .

After commending them, however, Paul goes on to tell the Corinthians that some adjustments were necessary. . . .

1 Corinthians 11:3 (b)

. . . I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man . . .

The place of women in the church is not a question of superiority or inferiority, but is based upon humility and liberty. How do I know? Read on.

1 Corinthians 11:3 (c)
. . . and the head of Christ is God.

Jesus willingly, voluntarily, gladly submitted to the authority of the Father. Does this mean He was inferior to the Father? No. Philippians 2 makes it clear that He *chose* to humble Himself. So, too, the woman who chooses to submit to the authority of her husband does so not out of inferiority, but of humility.

1 Corinthians 11:4
Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.

To this day, Jewish rabbis teach that, because Moses covered his face after he met with God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:33), the wearing of a hat, yarmulke, or prayer shawl is a sign of humility before the Lord. In 2 Corinthians 3, however, Paul says it was to hide the fact that the reflection of God's glory was fading from his countenance that caused Moses to cover his face.

"You're free from this requirement," said Paul. "So come as you are."

1 Corinthians 11:5, 6
But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.

There are those who say women should never share prophecy or pray in the assembly. Paul would disagree. A woman can pray and prophesy, and is encouraged to do so—but she is to have her head covered. Why? An understanding of the culture is helpful here, for in the Corinthian culture, women wore veils to differentiate themselves from the prostitutes whose heads were shaved as a sign of their service to Aphrodite. Thus, a woman who exercised her liberty in Christ by praying or prophesying with her head uncovered caused confusion in the congregation and dishonor to her husband.

1 Corinthians 11:7

For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.

The woman is the glory—or literally, the outshining, the reflection—of the man. Husband, if you think your wife is out to lunch or off the wall, if you're disappointed in her, tired of her, down on her, or mad at her—guess what. She is simply reflecting you.

1 Corinthians 11:8, 9

For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.

Dear married sister, seeing yourself not as your husband's "compete-r," but as his "completer," is where you will find your greatest fulfillment.

1 Corinthians 11:10

For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.

In newer translations, the word "power" is correctly rendered "covering." In the Corinthian culture, covering one's head spoke of modesty. In addition, Paul says it is for the sake of the angels that women were to cover their heads. Why? Angels are hypersensitive about things being done in

order. Why? They saw one-third of their company cast out of heaven after one of them said, "I want to do my own thing. I want to be like God" (see Isaiah 14:14). Therefore, the covering on the head of a woman who is praying or prophesying in the congregation is a sign to the angels that she is not out of order, but that she does so under the authority of her husband.

1 Corinthians 11:11, 12

Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.

From the side of man, woman was made. From the woman, however, man is born. Both are of God. Both are vital to His body.

1 Corinthians 11:13–15

Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.

If a guy combs his hair by the hour, it's not necessarily a sin—it's just dumb. On the other hand, if a woman has long hair, it's a sign of her covering.

1 Corinthians 11:16

But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

In other words, Paul is saying, "If this discussion concerning head covering causes problems or division, it's not worth becoming legalistic."

The key to good theology is to note how many times a particular subject is dealt with in Scripture. As opposed to subjects like the finished work of the Cross and the importance of love, this is the only time the subject of head covering is seen in all of Scripture, and thus should be given proportionate attention.

1 Corinthians 11:17 (a)

Now . . .

Having concluded his discussion of issues related to women in the church, Paul moves on to talk about Communion in the church.

1 Corinthians 11:17 (b)

. . . in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse.

In verse 2, concerning the ordinances in general, Paul had said, "I praise you, brethren . . . ." Here in verse 17, concerning the Lord's Supper specifically, he says, "I praise you not . . . ."

1 Corinthians 11:18, 19

For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

The first problem Paul mentions with regard to Communion is the same problem he addressed at the very outset of his letter: division. Even in celebrating the Lord's Supper, the Corinthian church was splintered into factions.

1 Corinthians 11:20–22

When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.

Catch the scene: Paul had spent eighteen months in the Corinthian community, teaching the Corinthian believers daily. But in the course of the

five years he had been absent from them, something had happened. The agape feast—which Paul had established as a time when believers would share their meals in a common place and where they would partake of the Lord's Supper together—had become nothing more than a drunken party.

I find Paul's assessment extremely interesting, for in many—if not most—churches today, Communion is a very somber, sad experience. I suggest that the reason for this is due to the emphasis placed upon the process of Jesus' death rather than on the purpose for His death. Is this what Jesus intended?

I suggest Jesus' intent for us is not so much that we remember His pain, but that we are amazed at our gain—that because of the finished work of the Cross, we're miraculously, gloriously totally free from the power and penalty of sin.

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

In order that we might remember Him, Jesus didn't ask for a monument to be erected or a holiday to be established. He asked that a meal be enjoyed.

- Spotting Zacchaeus in a tree, Jesus said, "Come down. I'm coming over to eat with you" (see Luke 19:5).
- To the disciples out on the Sea of Galilee, He said, "Come and dine" (see John 21:12).
- "He's a glutton," His enemies said of Him (see Matthew 11:19).
- "He eats with sinners," scoffed His critics (see Luke 7:34).

Get the picture? The Lord is into eating! That's why, describing the coming kingdom, He says through the prophet Isaiah, "Let your soul delight itself in fatness!" (Isaiah 55:2). Therefore, it should not be surprising to us that He would say, "To remember Me, break bread, drink the fruit of the vine, and share a meal together."

1 Corinthians 11:27–30

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

On the basis of this passage, many think they are unworthy to partake of Communion if they are struggling with a certain sin or wrestling with a particular temptation. Yet this reasoning would be equivalent to—

- a doctor saying to a sick person, "Get well, and then come and see me,"
- a loan officer saying to a poor person, "You need a loan? Get some money, and then I can help you"; or,
- a cook saying to someone who is hungry, "Starving? Gain some weight, and I'll give you a meal."

The Lord's table is the very place for the person struggling with sin, wrestling with temptation, or caught up in carnality, for it is there that he can say, "Lord, I desperately need You in my life. I eat of Your body and I drink of Your blood, knowing I am forgiven. Thank You, Lord. I celebrate what You did for me."

"Because you don't value the Lord's Supper," said Paul, "there are people in your midst who are weak, folks who are sick, some who have even died because they haven't understood the potency or the vitality inherent in

Communion." Too often, Communion is nothing more than a meaningless tradition or ritual. Thus, many remain in a state of spiritual weakness because they don't give worth to or value the place of Communion.

Ours is the first generation in history that does not emphasize Communion. One cannot read the Book of Acts or church history without a very real awareness that the Lord's Supper was central to the life of the congregation. Today, however, some go months, even years without Communion because it's not important to them. And because of this failure to give it worth, people are dying physically, emotionally, and spiritually in ways they need not be, failing to discern the power of the broken body, the cleansing of the shed blood.

> Hippopotami have been known to travel two thousand miles in search of a single meal. Hungry and dry, they have traveled virtually across the continent of Africa in search of food.

We go through dry times spiritually, yet we won't come to church to partake of Communion. We won't take twenty minutes to sit down with our family and say, "We need to eat of the Lord's body and drink of His blood together." We get weaker and skinnier and have less heft spiritually whenever we fail to make Communion an essential part of our spiritual life.

> **1 Corinthians 11:31–34**
>
> **For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.**

Paul strongly admonishes the Corinthian church to approach the Lord's Supper in the manner he had taught them when he was in their midst five years previously—that they would neither feel condemned by it, ignore it, nor treat it so lightly that it became nothing more than a drunken party.

"This is what I want you to do in remembering Me," Jesus said. "This is how you honor Me. You need vitality—and it is at My table that I make it available to you most readily."



12 1 Corinthians 12:1 (a)

Now concerning spiritual gifts . . .

In italics, the word "gifts" does not appear in the original Greek manuscripts. Paul actually said, "Now concerning *pneumatikos*"—or "spirituals"—referring to the entire realm of the manifestations of the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:1 (b)

. . . brethren, I would not have you ignorant.

"I would not have you ignorant." Paul voices this same desire concerning Old Testament typology in 1 Corinthians 10, the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4, the tactics of Satan in 2 Corinthians 3, and the future of Israel in Romans 11. The areas about which Paul wanted believers to be knowledgeable are the very ones about which believers throughout history have had the most questions. Thus, his concern was inspired indeed.

1 Corinthians 12:2, 3 (a)

Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed . . .

A rumor circulating in Paul's day said, "If you pray in the Spirit, you can actually unknowingly curse Jesus." And such a rumor is heard to this day. Paul, however, makes it clear that it is impossible for a person praying in the Spirit to say Jesus is accursed.

1 Corinthians 12:3 (b)

. . . and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.

Do you believe that Jesus is Lord, that He died for your sins, that He rose again, that He is God Incarnate? The ability to believe these things comes only one way—through the Holy Ghost who dwells within us. Therefore, if you can truly say Jesus is Lord, you can be assured that the Holy Spirit is residing in you and working through you.

1 Corinthians 12:4

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

Here is where the word "gifts," or *charisma,* appears in the original text. I find it not coincidental that *charisma* is a form of the word *charis,* or "grace"—that which is undeserved and unearned.

1 Corinthians 12:5

And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

Newer translations correctly render the word "administrations" as "ministries."

1 Corinthians 12:6

And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

The Greek word translated "operations" is *en ergema,* from which we get our word "energize."

- In verse 4, we see different gifts, but the same Spirit.
- In verse 5, we see different ministries, but the same Lord Jesus.
- In verse 6, we see different energies, but the same God.

- The gifts are linked to the Spirit.

- The ministries are linked to the Son.
- The operations are linked to the Father.

It is my personal conviction that these three verses unlock the mystery of chapter 12. You see, although the word of wisdom, tongues and interpretation, healings, miracles, and faith are often referred to as the gifts of the Spirit, I believe the gifts of the Spirit are technically found in only one place: Romans 12. That is the only time the word "gifts" is actually used. It is in Romans 12 that we see the gifts of prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, and mercy. I believe every brother and sister has one of the primarily motivational gifts seen in Romans 12. The Lord then opens up a ministry for this gift.

The word "ministry" is used in Ephesians 4, wherein we see five ministries listed: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher.

"But I'm none of those things," you say.

Think with me. Suppose someone with the motivational gift of mercy says to the brother or sister who's going through all kinds of struggles in balancing their checkbook, paying their bills, and working out a budget, "Let me meet with you one day a month. I want to share with you what I have learned in this area." At that point the person with the gift of mercy would be fulfilling the role of pastor as he shepherds people to financial stability.

You see, the ministries are supernaturally natural. When an older lady helps a younger woman learn how to navigate marriage and childrearing based upon insights she's found in the Word, she is actually functioning as a teacher. And although she's not teaching predestination, pneumatology, or eschatology—she's employing the gift of teaching to the very same degree as one who stands behind a pulpit.

Those who exercise their Romans 12 gift (1 Corinthians 12:4) will find a ministry opened to them (1 Corinthians 12:5) either as an apostle—one sent out into some area or situation to share the reality of Jesus Christ; as a prophet—one who shares words of edification, exhortation, and comfort at precisely the right time in exactly the right way; as an evangelist—one who simply shares the Lord wherever he goes; as a pastor—one who comes alongside people to partner with them in their spiritual growth; or as a teacher—one who shares truth with others.

The ministry of the Spirit is supernaturally natural when we get away from the titles and organizations, and simply respond to the Lord's leading.

Gifts are given by the Spirit (Romans 12). Ministries are opened by the Son (Ephesians 4). Everything is energized by the Father (1 Corinthians 12). In addition to my motivational gift and opportunity for ministry, God wants to energize what I'm doing in a supernaturally natural way. This is what Paul will address in the remainder of the chapter before us.

He will talk about the discerning operations—the power to know—which includes the word of knowledge, the word of wisdom, and the discerning of spirits (verses 8, 9). He will talk about the dynamic operations —the power to do. This includes faith, miracles, and gifts of healing (verses 9, 10). And he will talk about the declaring operations—the power to speak. This includes prophecy, tongues and interpretation (verse 10).

1 Corinthians 12:7

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

The word "manifestation" means "to make known." The gifts, ministries, and operations are made known through our lives not so we can write them down in our diaries, but so we can bless others.

1 Corinthians 12:8 (a)

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom . . .

The word of wisdom doesn't come from one's ability to figure out a situation. It is supernaturally given to answer a question or solve a problem.

"Master," they said, bringing with them a woman caught in the act of adultery, "Moses declared she should be stoned. What say Ye?"

If Jesus said, "Stone her," He would no longer be thought of as a Friend of Sinners. On the other hand, if He said, "Let her go," He would be in violation of the very law He came to fulfill. So what did He say?

He spoke a word of wisdom when He said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" (see John 8:7).

Even as it flowed in Jesus Christ, we see the word of wisdom flowing in His body of believers . . .

Should the new Gentile converts be circumcised? Many said, "Yes." But, concerned about this, Paul said, "We're going to Jerusalem and hash this out." And so they went. The early church fathers had a big meeting. They debated back and forth—when suddenly James stood up and shared with them a perspective that settled the dust and answered the question perfectly (Acts 15:13–22).

If you have the gift of ruling, or overseeing, pray that the Lord would give you the operation of the word of wisdom in order that you could express that which is right in the sight of the Lord, and that which others recognize as wisdom.

1 Corinthians 12:8 (b)
. . . to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit.

Because He laid aside all of His power when He came to earth (Philippians 2:7, 8), Jesus was a Man just like you and me—but without sin. So when He moved in the arena of the miraculous and operated in the realm of the supernatural, it was not because He was Jesus. Rather, it was because He was walking with the Father and was empowered by the Spirit—just as we can be.

"Go call your husband," Jesus said to the woman at the well.

"I don't have a husband," she answered.

And I believe He smiled when He said, "You've said well you have no husband. You've had five husbands, and the one you're living with now is not your husband at all" (see John 4:17, 18).

Was this the result of undercover investigative work? Had the disciples been sent out to get the scoop on this lady? No. At that moment, inspired by

the Spirit, Jesus knew what could not have been known apart from revelation. He spoke a word of knowledge. How we need this operation functioning in our homes and in the church today. . . .

"Why have you lied to the Holy Ghost, Ananias? You're deceiving yourself," said Peter (see Acts 5:3, 4).

How did Peter know Ananias was lying?
It was the word of knowledge.

These operations aren't ours to use whenever we wish, but only as the Holy Spirit wills—be that once every ten years, or ten times a day. I believe the word of knowledge most readily manifests itself in the teaching of the Word—whether through those who are teaching third graders in Sunday school or those who are teaching adults in Bible study. When you read through the Word and you hear yourself saying, "I can see how this really works," it's very likely that the word of knowledge is functioning in conjunction with your ministry of teaching.

1 Corinthians 12:9 (a)
To another faith by the same Spirit . . .

"Let no more fruit dwell on thee forever," Jesus said to the fig tree. The next day when His disciples walked by the tree and saw it dried up from the roots, they were amazed.

"Have faith in God," Jesus said (Mark 11:22). Such is the potency of faith.

Every believer has a measure of faith. If he didn't, he wouldn't be saved. There are those, however, who move in the supernatural arena of faith, where, because of an exercise of faith, things happen that wouldn't happen otherwise. . . .

"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk," said Peter and John to the lame man. The people who watched this exercise of faith marveled.

"Why do you marvel at this?" Peter asked. "It is faith in His name that has made this man strong; the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness" (see Acts 3:16).

In other words, Peter said, "It's not our faith, our fasting, our praying, or our holiness. It's by Him. *God gave us the faith at this moment to take this man by the hand and tell him in Jesus' name to stand."*

The operation of faith is the ability to step out in response to the leading of the Spirit and do something you would never have done otherwise.

1 Corinthians 12:9 (b)
. . . to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit.

The word "gifts" is plural. I do not believe that anyone has a singular gift of healing whereby he can line people up and heal them all. I do believe, however, that there are individual gifts of healing distributed through a person or through a group of people.

1 Corinthians 12:10 (a)
To another the working of miracles . . .

When Jesus talked about the miraculous—drinking poisons that would not hurt, handling deadly serpents that would not harm, speaking with new tongues, laying hands on the sick and seeing them recover—it's important to see that these wonderful, miraculous operations and expressions were all in connection with the Great Commission (Mark 16:15).

Therefore, I believe one of the best ways to see the miraculous happen to a greater degree is to be involved in radical evangelism. The miracles of Mark 16 are not intended for us to huddle together in the sanctuary so we can see a miracle. No, it's as we're going into the jungles, into the inner city, throughout the community sharing the Lord that He will confirm our message with miracles.

As you study the Book of Acts, you see the operation of miracles most closely linked with the office of evangelism because the operation of

miracles is primarily for the unbeliever. Why? Because the believer's faith is not increased by seeing miracles. In fact, it's stunted. The Lord dedicated an entire segment of history to prove this point. Read Exodus and Numbers, and you will see God continually performing signs and wonders for His people. The Red Sea parted before them. Manna came down from heaven to them. They were directed by a huge cloud each day and a pillar of fire every night. They were bitten by poisonous snakes and miraculously preserved. The earth opened up and swallowed the rebellious among them. They were a people who witnessed miracle after miracle daily. And yet what was the end of the story? They couldn't enter the Promised Land because of unbelief.

People think if they could just see a miracle or two, their faith would soar. Not so. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). For the believer, the way to grow in faith is not to see the miraculous, but to take in the Scriptures. It is for the *unbeliever* that God will confirm His Word with signs and wonders. That is why it's as we're involved in missions, in evangelism, in service to the unbeliever and the skeptic that the Lord will most often confirm His Word through the arena of the miraculous.

1 Corinthians 12:10 (b)
. . . to another prophecy . . .

The operation of prophecy is not to foretell the future, but to "forth-tell" God's heart. Prophecy consists of words of edification, exhortation, or comfort spoken at the very time they're most needed. Paul will deal with the operation of prophecy in conjunction with tongues and interpretation in chapter 14.

1 Corinthians 12:10 (c)
. . . to another discerning of spirits . . .

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," said Peter.

"Blessed art thou, Simon bar Jonas," Jesus answered. "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven" (see Matthew 16:17). But then, as recorded only a few verses later, in response to the denial of His

Crucifixion, Jesus said to this same Peter, "Get behind me, Satan." At one moment, Jesus discerned the Spirit flowing through Peter. At another moment, He discerned the work of Satan.

Especially as we're involved in pastoring—caring about people, sharing with people, and helping people—we need to discern if what they're saying is coming from the Lord, the influence of demons, or simply the result of their own human wisdom.

> *"Listen to these men. They're speaking about the most High God," a girl said of Paul and the apostolic band. Discerning she was under demonic influence, however, Paul demanded the demon leave her (see Acts 16:18).*

Yes, she was saying the right words, but Paul was given the discernment to sense a demonic spirit behind them.

> **1 Corinthians 12:10 (d)**
>
> **. . . to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues.**

Paul will discuss tongues and interpretation of tongues with the third declaring operation—that of prophecy—in chapter 14.

> **1 Corinthians 12:11**
>
> **But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.**

If we move in the operation of the gifts of healing, if we speak prophetically, or if we see miracles flowing from our ministry, Paul is very careful to say it's because of God's sovereignty rather than according to anything we earn or deserve.

> *"Your money perish with you," said Peter to Simon the sorcerer when asked if he could purchase the gift of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 8:20).*

The ministry and gifts of the Holy Spirit cannot be earned either through spirituality or through money. They're gifts that are given sovereignly.

> *"You rebels, must we fetch water from the rock?" Moses cried as he smote the rock.*
>
> *"Wait a minute, Moses," said God as He barred him from the Promised Land. "It is not you who fetch water, but I who give it" (see Numbers 20:10–12).*

Once we begin to say, "Look what *I'm* doing intellectually, monetarily, musically, or athletically"—once we start taking the credit, we bar ourselves from moving into the Promised Land of blessings the Lord would otherwise have for us.

> **1 Corinthians 12:12**
>
> **For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.**

In chapter 1, Paul had rebuked the Corinthian believers for their carnal divisions. Here in chapter 12, he touches the same subject once again. Only this time he reminds them of a cardinal doctrine as he teaches them that they are the body of Christ. Although each of them had different ministries, operations, and gifts, they were still one entity, one body.

> **1 Corinthians 12:13**
>
> **For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.**

Those who use this verse as proof that all Christians are baptized in the Spirit fail to understand that there are many baptisms seen in Scripture. . . .

• John's baptism is the baptism of repentance (Luke 7:29).

- The baptism of Moses refers to those who followed him through the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10:2).
- Jesus told His disciples they would be baptized with the Holy Ghost (Acts 1:5).
- Paul speaks of being baptized into Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3).

What baptism is being talked about here? It's the Spirit baptizing us into the body of Christ. Jesus baptizes us into the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11). And, as seen here, the Spirit baptizes us into one body.

1 Corinthians 12:14–18

For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

Because we're all part of the body, everyone has a function and a role to play. Because God has placed us where it pleases Him, it's not up to us to try to change our position, but to rest in the place God has us. . . .

If, growing tired of being at the bottom of the body, in a dark, unseen, smelly shoe, my big toe climbed up and planted himself on my kneecap, not only would I look weird, but it would definitely affect the way I walk.

So. too, although our fleshly tendency is to want to be seen, Paul tells us the Lord has planted each of us where we need to be and where we'll function most effectively.

1 Corinthians 12:19–22

And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

The seemingly feeblest members are indeed sometimes the most necessary members. . . .

An above-ground pool was donated to Applegate Christian Fellowship's mission for handicapped orphans in Mexico. But, because it arrived in what seemed to be a million pieces, try as they might, the Mission staff was unable to assemble it. It wasn't more than a few days later, however, that my brother, Jimmy, who runs the mission got a call from a man at Twin Peaks Bible College.

"I just feel like the Lord would have me come and spend some time at the mission," he said. "I can't do much. I'm not a Bible teacher. I'm not a children's worker. I'm not a cook. I'm not a gardener. But I just feel I should come."

"Come on down," said Jimmy. "By the way, what did you do before you were in Bible school?"

"I spent twenty years installing aboveground pools," he said.

Within four hours of his arrival, the kids were swimming.

Without exception, whatever you do, whatever gifts God has embedded in you, whatever the operations flowing through you, whatever the ministries opened to you—you are needed in the body.

1 Corinthians 12:23, 24

And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked:

Which parts of your body do you spend extra time concealing and camouflaging? The parts you want to hide. So, too, in the body of Christ, who gets the extra attention, the spotlight? The uncomely parts. We think just the opposite. We think the spiritual superstars are the ones who get the attention. In reality, however, when we get to heaven, there will be some real shocks. The people who were not seen, not known, not up in front; the people who were worshiping and praying, loving and sharing, cutting firewood or visiting rest homes will be honored in heaven. Conversely, those of us who have been "center stage" on earth will be in the back row somewhere in heaven.

1 Corinthians 12:25

That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

There is no hierarchy in the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:26–28

And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

If you have a headache, do your legs say, "That's tough. We're going hiking anyway"? No. If one part of your body hurts, your whole body rests. If you throw a touchdown pass and win the game, does your left arm get upset because your right arm threw the ball? No, your whole body celebrates. So, too, as believers, we both suffer and celebrate together because we're all members of the same body.

1 Corinthians 12:29, 30

Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak

with tongues? do all interpret?

The answer to all these questions is obviously "No" because there's wonderful, needful diversity in the body.

1 Corinthians 12:31

But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

As important as it is to covet earnestly the best gifts and to be all that we can be in the Lord, something is more essential still, to which Paul will devote the next chapter—perhaps the most beautiful in all of Scripture.

13

Suppose, living centuries ago in Israel, you journey to Jerusalem in order to worship in the temple. . . .

Upon your arrival, you ask the whereabouts of the high priest and are told he's ministering in the holy place—the area in the temple containing the golden candlestick, table of showbread, and the ark of the covenant.

"How do you know he's in there?" you ask.

"Listen carefully," you're told.

As you do, you hear the unmistakable sound of bells ringing inside the holy place. The Book of Exodus tells us that golden bells hung from the hem of the high priest's robe. We know from Alfred Edersheim and other Bible scholars that these bells were made in such a way that they rang in harmony.

When we talk about our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, people sometimes ask how we know He's alive, how we know He's truly in heaven interceding on our behalf. We should be able to say to them, "Listen carefully, and you will hear the harmonious ringing of the bells as He works through His body, the church."

The golden bells in biblical typology are a picture of the manifestations, the gifts of the Spirit. As people see the working of the Holy Spirit through words of wisdom, knowledge, and prophecy; through gifts of healing, faith and miracles; through tongues and interpretation—as they begin to see the reality of the Spirit of Jesus sounding forth through His body, they will know that He is indeed alive.

You see, according to Exodus 39:25, between each of the bells on the high priest's robe was a pomegranate—a fruit uniquely related to the Promised Land. . . .

> *When the spies returned from the Promised Land, they came carrying grapes and pomegranates as a sign of the land's productivity (Numbers 13:23).*
>
> *In the Song of Solomon, the pomegranate speaks of peace and certainty, beauty and romance (4:3; 6:7).*
>
> *Joel refers to the pomegranate in connection with joy (Joel 1:12).*

The New Testament equivalent is the fruit of the Spirit, which is love—defined as joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control.

Without the pomegranate between the bells on the robe of the high priest, there would be nothing but clanging. This was the case in the church at Corinth. Although Paul says they possessed every gift of the Spirit, they lacked the fruit of the Spirit. This led to all kinds of noise, irritation, and confusion.

This is why, between his discussion of the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit in chapters 12 and 14, here in chapter 13, Paul inserts a pomegranate —the fruit of love. . . .

1 Corinthians 13:1 (a)

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels . . .

The word "tongues" may refer to human dialects or to an angelic language not known on earth.

1 Corinthians 13:1 (b)

. . . and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

Without love, whatever I say is just noise. The word "charity" appears here rather than the word "love" because the Greek word *agape* was translated *charitas* in the Latin Vulgate, the first translation of the original Greek manuscripts. John Wycliffe, the man responsible for translating the Latin Vulgate into English, used a similar-sounding English word for *charitas* when he used "charity"—a word that spoke of giving simply for the sake of giving. Unfortunately, in our day, charity has come to be associated with pity. So modern translators have rightly chosen the word "love" rather than the maligned "charity." Yet, even the word "love" is not without its problems.

I love my wife. I love my kids. I love Big Macs. I love walks in the park on summer evenings. We use the word "love" so freely that we diminish its meaning. The Greeks circumvented this problem by using four words for love. . . .

- *Storgi* means affection. Storgi is the kind of love one feels toward his cat or dog.
- *Eros* refers to sexual, physical love.
- *Phileo,* from which we get the name "Philadelphia," speaks of brotherly love. *Phileo* says, "If you're nice to me, I'll be nice to you."

It wasn't until the New Testament apostles introduced the concept of unconditional love that the Greeks added *agape* to their vocabulary. *Agape* is a love that gives simply for the sake of giving, never expecting anything in return. People who don't know the Lord can experience all of the other kinds of love. But for them, *agape* is impossible because it is found only in God. *Agape* is the love of which Paul speaks when he says, "If I don't have love, I'm just making noise even if I speak in tongues fluently."

In the year 1647, during England's Civil War, a deserter in Cromwell's army was captured and brought before him.

"When the curfew bell sounds tonight, you shall be executed," said the general.

But that night, the curfew bell was not heard. Upon investigation, it was discovered that, receiving news of her fiancé's sentence, his betrothed made her way quickly to the camp and hid in the bell tower. As curfew neared, she positioned herself within the bell in such a way that when the rope was pulled, the clapper hit her body rather than the inside of the bell. Seeing the bruised and battered lady standing before him, Cromwell was so deeply touched by her love that the soldier's life was spared.

Jesus Christ climbed not a bell tower, but the hill of Calvary in order that you and I would be spared the execution we so rightfully deserve. Whether the word is charity, love, or *agape,* the love Jesus showed us, the love we are to extend to one another is spelled one way: S-a-c-r-i-f-i-c-e.

1 Corinthians 13:2

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

Jesus said faith only the size of a mustard seed could move mountains (Matthew 17:20). But Paul says even though one has *all* faith—the fullest possible expression of faith—if it is without love, it doesn't amount to a hill of beans.

Paul would tell the Galatians that faith works by love (Galatians 5:6). God can only entrust true faith to the one able to love, for the power of faith would be dangerous in the hands of one who doesn't love (Luke 9:54).

1 Corinthians 13:3

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Even if a person were so zealous that he burned out for Jesus, his zeal would mean nothing without love. Following Paul's admonition to love in verses 1–3 is a definition of love in verses 4–13. . . .

1 Corinthians 13:4 (a)
Charity suffereth long . . .

"Lord, how often should I forgive someone who offends me? Seven times?" Peter asked, perhaps thinking Jesus would be impressed with his growth.

"You're to forgive seven times seventy," Jesus answered (see Matthew 18:22). In other words, "You're to keep forgiving until you lose track of how many times someone has offended you."

Love never says, "I've had enough." It suffers indefinitely.

1 Corinthians 13:4 (b)
. . . and is kind . . .

Love not only suffers long, but it is kind. I believe we would do well to examine well-meaning activism through the lens of *agape*. Is what we're doing in the name of righteousness kind? Love is long-suffering—yet while it's suffering, it doesn't become cynical or bitter. It remains kind.

1 Corinthians 13:4 (c)
. . . charity envieth not . . .

Love never asks why another is exalted or promoted.

1 Corinthians 13:4 (d)
. . . charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.

Love doesn't try to prove itself. It doesn't say, "Watch how loving I can be." Rather, it works behind the scenes.

***For topical study of 1 Corinthians 13:4 entitled "A Deeper Look," turn to page* 1078.**

1 Corinthians 13:5 (a)
Doth not behave itself unseemly . . .

Some people confuse weirdness with love. Some people say, "I'm going to demonstrate my love for Jesus with a megaphone and a sandwich board. Sure, people might think I'm weird, but it's because I'm so radical in my love for God."

Concerning Jesus, Isaiah prophesied and Matthew confirmed that He did not strive or cry in the streets (Isaiah 42:2; Matthew 12:19). In fact, so unrecognizable was Jesus that He had to be identified to the soldiers who came to arrest Him (Luke 22:48).

Sometimes people put pressure on us to cry in the streets, to take a stand. But I look at Jesus and see that He exuded such love, warmth, and integrity that people flocked to Him. Mark tells us the common people heard Him gladly (12:37). It was the religious folks who had problems with Him. I wonder if that hasn't been reversed far too often in our day—to the point where religious people understand us, but common people want nothing to do with us because they think we're bizarre. Because love doesn't behave unseemly, this ought not be.

1 Corinthians 13:5 (b)
. . . seeketh not her own . . .

Love doesn't demand its own way.

1 Corinthians 13:5 (c)
. . . is not easily provoked . . .

Although it is not italicized, the word "easily" does not appear in any of the Greek manuscripts. Thus, love is simply not provoked. *Phileo, eros, storgi* can become irritated, aggravated, provoked. But not *agape.*

1 Corinthians 13:5 (d)
. . . thinketh no evil.

Newer translations render this "is not suspicious." True love trusts. When I think I can't trust him, or that I've got to keep my eye on her, it's because I no longer believe that God is on the throne, able to deal with the situation. All things are naked and open before Him with whom we deal (Hebrews 4:13). In addition, God chastens and corrects those He loves (Hebrews 12:6). Therefore, *agape* love doesn't think evil of people because it has absolute trust in the faithfulness of the Father.

1 Corinthians 13:6 (a)
Rejoiceth not in iniquity . . .

True love does not rejoice when trouble or problems befall another—even if they're a result of his own stupidity or iniquity.

1 Corinthians 13:6 (b)
. . . but rejoiceth in the truth.

Some translators render "truth" as "good." In other words, love says to another, "You're lifted up? You're being honored? Great! I'm delighted for you!" Love rejoices when the other guy does well, when the other guy is blessed.

1 Corinthians 13:7
Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

If you are one who bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things, people will accuse you of being blind to certain situations. But they will be wrong. *Agape* love is not blind. Quite the opposite. Because love sees *more,* it's willing to see less.

What does love see? It sees the price that was paid on the Cross of Calvary for the person or situation that threatens to make us mad or bitter.

The older I get, the more clearly I see the work of the Cross. I see the reality of the Holy Spirit's power to convict people. I see the promise of the Father —that in due season, if they choose not to listen to the Word and respond to the Spirit, their sin will track them down (Numbers 32:23).

Therefore, rather than feeling I have to solve every problem and deal with every situation, I can simply bear with, believe in, and hope the best for people because of the commitment Jesus made to them when He died for them.

How can we exhibit this kind of love? The only way is to let Jesus Christ live it through us, for He is the embodiment of these characteristics. We can't psyche ourselves into this, gang. This kind of love is nothing less than the fruit of the Spirit. But as I walk with the Lord, talk to the Lord, and learn about the Lord, His Spirit produces this character in me ever so slowly, but ever so surely.

"If you abide in Me," Jesus said, "you shall bring forth much fruit" (see John 15:5). What fruit? Love. He told us we're branches, and that He is the Vine. What do branches do? Just hang in there, close to the vine. Therefore, as I stay connected to the Vine by getting to know Him and enjoying Him, the fruit will come of its own.

Fruit comes when you continue doing just what you're doing now—spending time with Him, hanging in there week after week, month after month, year after year. Slowly, but surely, as you stay connected to Jesus, more and more of His *agape* love will seep through you. You watch; you wait; you'll see.

1 Corinthians 13:8

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

Prophecy, tongues, words of knowledge will one day all vanish. Why? In heaven there will be no need for prophecy—words of edification, exhortation, or comfort—because everyone will be perfectly comforted and edified in heaven and will no longer need to be exhorted. Unknown tongues will vanish because everything will be known in heaven. And words of

knowledge will be swallowed up in the perfect knowledge we'll have when we see Jesus (verse 12).

> **1 Corinthians 13:9, 10**
>
> **For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.**

Debate continues over the meaning of "that which is perfect." Some say "that which is perfect" refers to the Bible. They say the canonization of the New Testament negated the need for prophecy, words of knowledge, and words of wisdom, since everything man needed to know could be found in Scripture.

> Yet, I find it interesting that this interpretation—so common in our time—was not suggested by a single commentator until shortly after 1906—the year of the Azusa Street Revival wherein an outpouring of the Holy Spirit took place that spread across the country and ultimately around the world. Those in the body of Christ who were threatened by this revival used this text to say, "Prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will vanish when that which is perfect is come. The Bible is that which is perfect. Therefore, there is no need for these manifestations anymore."

The problem is, not only is this a relatively new interpretation of this passage, but it violates the context. Paul is not talking about the Bible. He's talking about seeing Jesus face-to-face. It will be when Jesus comes again that there will be no need for prophecy, tongues, or interpretation. So it is my strong opinion that "that which is perfect" refers to the perfect One—Jesus Christ.

> **1 Corinthians 13:11, 12 (a)**
>
> **When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly . . .**

Mirrors as we know them did not exist until the mid-1200s. Prior to that time, polished brass or ordinary glass was used to see one's image—albeit only dimly, or "darkly." Thus, Paul says that although we see things spiritually, we don't see them clearly. We still have lots of questions.

1 Corinthians 13:12 (b)
. . . but then face to face . . .

When we see Jesus, we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2). At that point, we will see clearly at last.

1 Corinthians 13:12 (c)
. . . now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

Jesus knows every detail of my life—even to the number of hairs on my head. And when I see Him, I'll know Him in the same way.

1 Corinthians 13:13 (a)
And now abideth faith . . .

Faith looks back. Faith tells me Jesus came. Faith allows me to embrace what Jesus did for me on the Cross. Faith reminds me that my sins are forgiven. Therefore, I don't have to worry about or be haunted by my past.

1 Corinthians 13:13 (b)
. . . hope . . .

Hope looks ahead. Hope tells me Jesus is coming. Hope reminds me I don't have to be upset or uptight about the future.

1 Corinthians 13:13 (c)
. . . charity . . .

Love looks around. Love tells me Jesus is here. Love frees me in the present.

Many believers have a "mattress spirituality." That is, knowing their sins are forgiven, they have no question about their past. Knowing they're going to heaven, they have no question about their future. It's the present that presents problems. Like a mattress, they're firm on both ends, but they sag in the middle.

1 Corinthians 13:13 (d)
. . . these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

As essential as faith and hope are, Paul singles out love as the greatest virtue because it is only through love that we are able to respond to God and to others presently.

You see, the person who lacks faith will not be able to love in the present because he will be paralyzed by the hurts and sins of his past. On the other hand, the person who lacks hope will not be able to love in the present because he will be too worried about his retirement account in the future. Only the person who has put his past behind him through the power of the Cross, only the person who looks forward to the future through the promise of heaven can truly love in the present.

A DEEPER LOOK
A Topical Study of
1 CORINTHIANS 13:4

The description of *agape* seen in 1 Corinthians 13 is glorious indeed. But, to the believer, this passage can be very frustrating as well. You see, in 1 Corinthians 13, we read that love is longsuffering and kind, that it neither envies nor seeks its own, that it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things, that it never fails.

"What a beautiful description of love," we say with one breath, but, "too bad I'm so far from it," with the next.

Today, however, I want you to look at the chapter before us from a slightly different perspective. The apostle John tells us that God is love—literally that God is *agape* (1 John 4:16). Paul tells us that this Fountainhead of *agape,* the Essence of love, God Himself demonstrated His love for us in that while we were yet sinners He died in place of us (Romans 5:8). Seen in this light, 1 Corinthians 13 becomes not only an exhortation to love others, but, more importantly, a description of God's love for us. . . .

Love suffereth long . . .

1 Corinthians 13:4 (a)

God suffers long. He suffers long toward me. Think of Jesus on the Cross. As men cursed Him and spit on Him, what did He do? He suffered long. He said, "Father forgive them. They don't know what they're doing" (see Luke 23:34). My tendency is to think I've blown it so badly that surely God has given up on me. But the Cross shows me otherwise.

. . . and is kind . . .

1 Corinthians 13:4 (b)

If you think God is vengeful, angry, and mean-spirited, you have the wrong image of God. So kind, so gentle, so big-hearted is He that He does more for us than we could ever ask or even think (Ephesians 3:20).

The psalmist tells us that the Lord will withhold no good thing from those that love Him (Psalm 84:11). Therefore, if I'm not getting something for which I'm asking, it's because what I'm asking for would not be good for me. If the timing isn't right, if the request is wrong, He'll withhold it not because He's mean, but because He is love.

. . . love envieth not . . .

1 Corinthians 13:4 (c)

Bound together in the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit are completely self-sufficient and totally happy. God says, "I want to walk with you; I'll never give up on you; I avail Myself to you—but I'm not dependent on you." God's love is mature.

. . . love vaunteth not itself . . .

1 Corinthians 13:4 (d)

God doesn't have to hype Himself. What He says, He does. Who He claims to be, He really is.

. . . is not puffed up.

1 Corinthians 13:4 (e)

God doesn't say, "I'm God and you're dust." No, He came to dwell among us, to walk with us, to die for us. And He's the same today. He's always available to me, always ready to hear my prayers, always ready to share with me truths from His Word.

When I read 1 Corinthians 13 in this light, what does it do?

The apostle John tells us exactly what it does when he literally says, "We love because He first loved us" (see 1 John 4:19). The person who understands that 1 Corinthians 13 is most fundamentally talking about the nature and character of God's love toward him personally will be one who inevitably overflows with love to the people around him.

We looked at only one verse in Paul's perfectly placed pomegranate of love. As you make your way through the rest of the chapter, you will see

God's love for you in every verse. Marvel at it. Bask in it. Then let it overflow from your life to everyone around you.



14 After grazing in the peaceful pasture of chapter 13, we come to the potentially thorny territory of chapter 14 wherein Paul picks up his discussion of the manifestations of the Spirit. . . .

1 Corinthians 14:1 (a)
Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts . . .

Notwithstanding the fact that they were abusing the manifestations of the Spirit, Paul doesn't tell the church at Corinth to dismiss "spirituals." Nor does he tell them to deny them. He tells them to desire them.

If, after seeing a man who weighed four hundred pounds lumber down the street, you decided to give up eating altogether, you wouldn't live very long. Yes, the man you saw may have eaten too much—but the answer to abuse is not non-use. It's proper use.

So, too, the church at Corinth had a heavyweight problem. They had abused the manifestations of the Spirit. They had misunderstood the principles of ministry. But the answer was not to deny the work of the Spirit. The answer was to learn how to use the manifestations properly. Much of what we see today in the church is a reaction against those who have misused the gifts or the manifestations of the Spirit. However, the answer to that which is being abused is not to forsake, but to properly understand. This is what Paul presses for in the chapter at hand.

1 Corinthians 14:1 (b)
. . . but rather that ye may prophesy.

"Desire spiritual manifestations," says Paul—"but especially that you might share the heart of the Lord with the congregation."

1 Corinthians 14:2 (a)

For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God . . .

Perhaps you've been in church services where someone stands up and gives an utterance in tongues, followed by what is supposed to be the interpretation—a word to the congregation. I do not believe such an occurrence is a proper understanding of tongues and interpretation. Paul says a true interpretation of tongues will not be addressed to men, but to God. A true interpretation of tongues gives praise and adoration to the Father—not a message to the congregation. Go through the Book of Acts, and you will see that prophecy consists of words spoken to the congregation, while tongues and interpretation consist of praise to God.

1 Corinthians 14:2 (b)

. . . for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.

In Romans 8, Paul would say there are times that the Spirit prays through us with groanings that cannot be uttered (Romans 8:26). Have you ever been at the place where you simply don't know how to pray and you just start groaning? Many times people will say, "Pray that I'll get this job." Now, I don't know if it is necessarily God's will that they get that particular job. It might be a disaster for them. It might be a distraction to them. They might make more money, but lose their passion for the kingdom in the process. So what do I do? Oftentimes, when I don't know how to pray, I just allow the Spirit to pray through me—sometimes with groanings, sometimes in an unknown language—because the Spirit understands perfectly that which is a mystery to me. And as I let Him pray through me, I know I'm praying according to God's will.

1 Corinthians 14:3 (a)

But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men . . .

The prayer language or the manifestation of tongues is God-ward. Prophecy is directed toward people.

1 Corinthians 14:3 (b)
. . . to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

When someone stands up on a Sunday evening and shares a word of prophecy, it will either be for edification—through which the Lord builds us up, for exhortation—through which He gets us going, or for comfort—through which He wraps His loving arm around us.

1 Corinthians 14:4 (a)
He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself . . .

Our faith is built up when we study the Word (Romans 10:17). Faith is built up through seasons of prayer. Faith is built up through worship and adoration. In Jude 20 and here in 1 Corinthians, we are told faith is built up by praying in tongues. Ever feel torn down, worn out, caving in? Here's a weapon in the arsenal, a tool in the toolbox to pull out at such times. Pray in the Spirit. Utilize your prayer language and watch your faith grow.

1 Corinthians 14:4 (b)
. . . but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.

Although praying in the Spirit builds up my faith, it has no impact on anyone else unless it is accompanied by interpretation. Prophecy, however—speaking forth the heart of the Lord through words of edification, exhortation, or comfort—has a powerful impact on others.

1 Corinthians 14:5 (a)
I would that ye all spake with tongues . . .

"Are all apostles, are all prophets, do all speak with tongues?" asked Paul (see 12:29, 30). The implied answer being no, why, then, would he say here, "I want you all to speak in tongues"?

In chapter 12, Paul is talking about the public expression of tongues, followed by interpretation—and only a few people will move in that particular expression. Here in chapter 14, he's talking about the private, devotional use of tongues, which is available to everyone.

Jesus said one of the signs of those who believe is that they would speak with new tongues (Mark 16:17). He didn't say tongues were a sign of those who are "Pentecostal" or even of those who are baptized in the Spirit, but simply of those who believe.

1 Corinthians 14:5 (b)

. . . but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

When the manifestation of tongues is followed by interpretation, the entire church can be built up through the praise and prayer that are offered. But without interpretation, prophecy is infinitely more valuable to the congregation.

1 Corinthians 14:6, 7

Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine? And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?

"It is through words of doctrine or revelation of prophecy that you will grow," says Paul. "If I come speaking words you can't understand, it would be of no more help to you than listening to someone play random notes on a musical instrument."

1 Corinthians 14:8

For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?

It's amazing what one can do if he knows how to play the bugle. One set of notes will get the troops out of bed. Another set signals day's end. But if the bugler plays unfamiliar notes, the soldiers won't know whether it's time to have breakfast or to charge into battle.

1 Corinthians 14:9

So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.

Again, referring to the congregational setting, Paul says he who speaks words that have no significance to the listener is simply speaking into the air.

1 Corinthians 14:10, 11

There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.

When you're in another country, although the words spoken have significance to the people who live there, they mean nothing to you.

1 Corinthians 14:12

Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

"You're zealous for these spiritual expressions or manifestations. Good for you," Paul says. "But seek after the gift of prophecy—speaking to people by the Spirit in a language all can understand—words simple to embrace, words that edify, comfort, or exhort.

1 Corinthians 14:13

Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.

If you do speak in an unknown tongue in a group setting, pray that you will also be able to give the interpretation of your praise and adoration.

1 Corinthians 14:14

For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.

Although when I pray in the Spirit, I don't understand what I'm praying, my spirit—the deepest part of me, the core of my being—is built up miraculously and beautifully.

1 Corinthians 14:15

What is it, then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

"I will," says Paul. This is where many people have a terrible time with the prayer language, or tongues. They say, "If this is for me and if it will edify my spirit, I'm open to speaking in tongues." They might ask for the laying on of hands. They might be in a position where they are sincerely waiting on the Lord. But nothing happens. "I just want to express my love to the Lord in this unique way, but nothing's happening," they say in frustration —as though they believe that somehow they're going to go into a trance, their eyes will become glazed, they'll quiver and shake, and their tongue will begin moving against their will.

Paul simply says, "I *will* pray in the Spirit. It's a choice I make."

When we teach our kids or new believers to pray, we don't say, "Sit there until something happens. If you're really supposed to pray, you'll pray." No, we set an example for them and give a model to them. Many times, I'll have someone repeat after me, "Dear Jesus, come into my heart . . ." as a simple prayer of salvation. Does the fact that they're echoing my words make their prayer ineffective or insincere? No. They're just learning how to pray, and that's where they're at in their development.

So, too, I suggest that praying in the Spirit is a lot simpler than we make it. It's just saying, "I will pray right now with words I don't understand,

trusting the Lord is inspiring these words and partnering with me in the process." Praying in the Spirit is not a feeling I feel. It's a decision I make. And once I begin to do this, it's so simple.

I'm not on a tongues-speaking kick by any stretch of the imagination. But it's a beautiful expression for me personally to say, "I don't know how to pray with understanding about this. I'm frazzled and fried mentally. So I'm going to pray in the Spirit." As I do, my spirit is edified. The prayer language is available to anyone, to everyone who simply believes.

1 Corinthians 14:16

Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?

"Amen" is one of two words understood by every believer in every culture—the other is "Alleluia." Paul says, "Unless there is interpretation of tongues, how can the congregation say Amen?"

Why should we say Amen? "Amen" literally means "So be it."

When the word was given to those charging exorbitant rates of interest to quit ripping off their fellow Jews, the people said, "Amen!" (see Nehemiah 5:13)

"Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto Him that sits upon the throne," says every creature.

"Amen!" say the four beasts (see Revelation 5:13, 14).

The Corinthian believers were also those who said, "Amen" when prayer ascended. And that is as it should be. Too many of our prayer meetings are lethargic because while someone is praying, others are nodding off. How much better it would be if, when there is praise ascending and prayer being offered, we would be like those in Nehemiah's day, those in heaven, those in the early church who say, "Amen," engaging ourselves in the process of prayer.

Jesus taught about the importance of agreeing together in prayer. One of the most practical ways this can happen is when I simply say, "Amen, Lord.

So be it," to the prayer of my brother.

1 Corinthians 14:17–19

For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.

Lest any at Corinth thought Paul was quenching the Spirit by putting parameters on the public expression of tongues, he reminds them that he spoke in tongues more than any of them. Even so, in the congregational setting, he preferred speaking that which would be understood by all.

1 Corinthians 14:20

Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

"Of malice, be ignorant; but in understanding, be wise," says Paul as he goes on to add understanding to the subject of tongues. . . .

1 Corinthians 14:21, 22

In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.

In Deuteronomy 28, the Lord said, "As My people turn their back on Me and become cold toward Me, they will hear the tongues of other nations when foreigners invade their land." We see the fulfillment of this in Isaiah 28, when, because God's people had grown indifferent toward Him, the Assyrians were allowed to occupy their land. Because of this historical reference, when Paul says tongues are for a sign to them that believe not, it is my strong personal opinion that he is speaking not of unbelievers, but to

believers who, like those in Isaiah's day, have grown indifferent or callused toward the Lord. In other words, he's speaking to those who don't believe in the present power of the Holy Spirit.

For some reason, the issue of tongues seems to be the line in the sand that separates people who, having grown callused, say, "No. God is not working today. He cannot be moving in this manner. Those miracles and expressions were for a different era, a different day."

1 Corinthians 14:23

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?

As valid a sign as the proper expression of tongues may be, the improper use of them in a congregational setting is helpful to no one.

1 Corinthians 14:24

But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all.

Whether prophecy is shared through the teaching of the Word or through individual utterance, even those who have not been exposed to the manifestations of the Spirit gain insight from it.

1 Corinthians 14:25

And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

When God's Word is spoken forth through the power of the Spirit—in the sanctuary, in home groups, among believers in all sorts of contexts—it convinces and convicts through a single message miraculously custom-made for each hearer.

1 Corinthians 14:26

How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, everyone of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

Because Greek manuscripts contain no punctuation, the question is, where does the question mark belong? The context strongly indicates that it actually belongs after the word "interpretation." This would change the meaning of this verse to, "How is it that every one of you is trying to get into the act? When you meet together, there is total confusion."

1 Corinthians 14:27–29

If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.

Paul's solution to the confusion was to allow only two or three to speak in tongues in the congregational setting—and only if accompanied by interpretation. The rest were to think through what was being shared, determining if what they heard was in harmony with the totality of Scripture.

1 Corinthians 14:30

If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.

"As these manifestations of the Spirit are operating in the congregational setting, be careful not to dominate or monopolize the session as you're waiting on the Lord together," says Paul.

1 Corinthians 14:31, 32

For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

Sometimes people will justify odd behavior by saying they were overwhelmed by the Spirit. But here Paul says even while ministering in the Spirit, a man is never out of control.

1 Corinthians 14:33

For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

If a teaching is being given, the Lord is not going to interrupt Himself with some kind of prophetic outburst, for He is not the author of confusion.

1 Corinthians 14:34

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

Following Jewish tradition, when the church at Corinth met together, the men sat on one side, the women on the other. Because *laleo,* the Greek word translated "speak," can mean "chatter" or "interrupt," there are those who say Paul is simply forbidding women from calling out to their husbands on the other side of the church, "Hey, Joe, what did he mean by that?" It could be that this is, indeed, what Paul is referring to. But I don't think so.

You see, once a person decides a particular text is only relevant to the culture in which it was written, where does he stop? He could just as easily conclude that baptism or Communion—topics discussed in this same Corinthian letter—were culturally related and don't have meaning for modern America.

"For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in *all* churches of the saints," Paul said in verse 33. Therefore, to suggest that verse 34 relates only to the Corinthian congregation creates problems contextually.

The verse before us—a principle for all churches in all cultures—does not mean that women are not to participate in the service, for in chapter 11, Paul said that women who pray and prophesy are free to do so as long as they are under the authority of their husbands.

The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. In 1 Timothy, we find a parallel text to the one before us. . . .

> Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.
>
> 1 Timothy 2:11, 12

From this passage, we can see that Paul's injunction that women not speak in church means they are not to teach men. Lest we think Paul chauvinistic, he goes on to give his reason. . . .

> And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.
>
> 1 Timothy 2:14

> Appealing to a woman's innate desire for deeper spirituality, Satan suggested to Eve that eating the forbidden fruit would make her more godly (Genesis 3:5). Thus, in her desire for a more godly character, Eve was tricked. It is this admirable tendency in women that also makes them more susceptible to deception. Therefore, because of women's vulnerability to error, man is to be the teacher of doctrine.

> Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.
>
> 1 Timothy 2:15

Women, your call is to pour your lives into your kids and grandchildren. Should the Lord tarry, if women took this charge seriously, we would see a church in the next generation that would change the world.

> **1 Corinthians 14:35 (a)**
>
> **And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home . . .**

If a woman talks to her pastor or an elder about spiritual questions or matters, her husband is inadvertently left farther and farther in the background. On the other hand, if she asks her husband, he will be motivated to dig into Scripture himself. Even if her husband is not a believer, she is to ask him anyway. There are numerous men at Applegate Christian Fellowship as a result of their curiosity concerning their wives' questions.

1 Corinthians 14:35 (b)

. . . for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

"Barak, if you don't lead your men into battle, the glory of the victory will eventually go to a woman," said Deborah. And indeed it did (Judges 4:9). I believe that when Paul says it's a shame for a woman to speak, it's because her speaking is indicative of a lack of leadership by the men. It's a sad state when, in any group, a woman is the only one who can teach because the men are all too carnal, too weak, or too unwilling. God has and will bless women for filling in—but that is not His ideal.

1 Corinthians 14:36–40

What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant. Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.

There are two parts to this last verse: Things must be done decently and in order—but let all things be done. Our Baptist brothers have the first part down perfectly, while our Pentecostal brothers excel at the last. What I believe the Lord has for Baptists, Pentecostals, and everyone in between is to allow prophecy, tongues, interpretation, gifts of healing, and words of knowledge and wisdom to flow—but in a decent, orderly manner.

The same applies to us individually.

According to those who study such things, the vast majority of people who own running shoes don't run. That's a lot like us. We say we believe that praying in the Spirit is meant for today. We believe in the validity of prophecy. We know the Holy Spirit wants to work wonders in and through us congregationally. We've got the running shoes. Let's step out in the Spirit and run.

Like Paul, let's covet the gifts and then use them in a way that is harmonious, beautiful, and acceptable. The Holy Spirit is pictured as a dove for a reason. He's not portrayed as a hawk coming in for the kill, or a vulture circling over the congregation to pick people to death with prophecies and words of knowledge. The dove is a bird of beauty, gentleness, and peace. And when the gifts and manifestations of the Spirit it represents are operating properly, the effect will likewise be beautiful, gentle, and peaceful.



15

So carnal was the city of Corinth that the term "Corinthian" was synonymous with "party animal." This was due in no small part to the fact that Corinth was the center of the Epicurean philosophy, which said that, because there is no eternity, man should eat, drink, and be merry on earth. Part of this Epicurean mentality had filtered into the church. Specifically, there were those in the church who taught there was no resurrection from the dead. "Be a Christian," they said. "Believe in Jesus Christ. Believe that on the Cross He atoned for the sin of mankind. But don't believe He really rose again."

Paul tackles this issue head-on in chapter 15 as he talks about the reality of the Resurrection in order to counteract the philosophy of the Epicurean.

1 Corinthians 15:1–2

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

"If you do not believe in the Resurrection, your faith is in vain, empty, and useless," contends Paul. "It all hinges on the Resurrection."

1 Corinthians 15:3, 4

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

Here, Paul gives us the two-fold definition of the gospel: that Christ died for our sins, and that He rose again—as was prophesied in Old Testament Scripture.



***For topical study of 1 Corinthians 15:2–4 entitled "Really Believing the Gospel," turn to page* 1091.**

1 Corinthians 15:5, 6

And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

"After Jesus rose again, He appeared to Peter, then to the twelve disciples, then to five hundred others—most of whom are still alive today," Paul said.

1 Corinthians 15:7 (a)

After that, he was seen of James . . .

This refers to the half brother of Jesus who, as seen in Mark 3, initially didn't believe his brother was who He claimed to be. Following Jesus' Resurrection, however, James changed his mind so completely that he went on to become a leader in the early church.

1 Corinthians 15:7 (b), 8

. . . then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

It was in the Arabian desert that Jesus taught Paul how the Old Testament types and pictures all spoke of Him. "Although I came on the scene after the other guys, I saw Jesus, too," said Paul.

1 Corinthians 15:9

For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

"Because I persecuted the church, I'm the least of the apostles," says Paul. Later on, he would say, "I'm less than the least of all the Christians" (see Ephesians 3:8). And finally at the end of his life, he would say, "I'm the chief of sinners" (see 1 Timothy 1:15). The longer Paul lived, the more aware he became of his own sin in light of the beauty and grace of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 15:10 (a)

But by the grace of God I am what I am . . .

"Who shall I say sent me?" Moses asked God when told he was to lead the Israelites out of bondage.

And God said unto Moses, "I AM THAT I AM" (Exodus 3:14).

I suggest that this phrase was ringing in Paul's mind and resonating in his heart when he said, "By the grace of God I am what I am"—for in Exodus 34, God went on to explain just who He is. . . .

> And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.
>
> Exodus 34:6, 7

Because of the injustice that seems to plague our culture, we could have a tendency to think that if God came on the scene today, surely it would be as a God of Justice. Yet while God is indeed just, He chooses instead to identify Himself as being merciful and gracious. What a relief this should be to us. Justice means getting what we deserve. Mercy, on the other hand, means being spared the judgment we rightfully deserve. Grace goes even further than that, for grace means getting blessings we don't deserve.

Yet God didn't stop there. He went on to say that He is longsuffering. The Hebrew word translated "longsuffering" means l-o-n-g suffering. "Why aren't You doing something, God? How can You put up with him?" or, "Why don't You deal with them?" we cry. God bears with the sin we see in others for the same reason He bears with the sin He sees in us: He is longsuffering. That's His nature.

He's abundant in goodness and truth—lavishing blessings upon us, being completely honest and truthful with us.

God alone is the One who is merciful to thousands, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. Even if generation after generation continues to turn their back on Him, He visits each one, bringing conviction for the purpose of conversion.

"What gives me the right, the authority to correct you?" Paul could have asked the Corinthians. "There was a time when I thought I had earned that right. After all, I was born into the tribe of Benjamin, circumcised the eighth day, a Pharisee of Pharisees, zealous for the law, righteous in my behavior. But although I was religious outwardly, I was sinning inwardly. And all of my attempts to earn God's blessing, all of my seeking to manipulate Him to get Him to bless me proved to be a waste (Philippians 3:7). Now I know I'm a sinner. But because God is who He is—because He is merciful and gracious, longsuffering and forgiving—I am who I am: a trophy of His grace."

1 Corinthians 15:10 (b)

. . . and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

When we were new in faith, many of us looked at works—Bible study, prayer, service, tithing—as ways to get God to respond to us. But as we grow in faith, we come to understand that works are the inevitable response to the goodness and grace God has *already* lavished upon us. When I consider that I'm going to heaven, that my sins are forgiven, that God has given me His Word, and that the Holy Spirit lives within me, I have no other choice but to serve Him wholeheartedly.

An understanding of the grace of God results in works. But the works are a response to God rather than a means of getting God to respond to us. The fallacy of "seed faith theology"—in which people are told to give money, offer prayers, or engage in service in order to get something back from God—is that all of those activities are an inevitable response for one who understands what God has *already* done on his or her behalf.

"I labor more abundantly than everyone," Paul says. "Because God has been so good to me, I can't help it." So, too, if you are one who truly embraces and enjoys the grace of God, you will be more engaged in His service than you were a year ago. You just won't be able to stop yourself.

1 Corinthians 15:11

Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.

Paul is referring to those who had seen the resurrected Jesus—himself, Peter, the apostles, James, and five hundred others.

1 Corinthians 15:12–18

Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is

vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.

"Show us a sign that You are who You claim to be," they said.

"One sign I'll show you. Destroy this temple—this body—and in three days I will raise it up" Jesus answered (see John 2:19).

Houdini claimed that on the fiftieth anniversary of his death, he would come back from the dead. So on that date, a group of his followers gathered around his grave in San Francisco, waiting for him to return. They waited and waited and waited. Then they went home.

Jesus uniquely, singularly rose from the dead. Lots of people make all sorts of claims, but our Hero, our Leader, our Lord Jesus Christ delivered. He came through. And had His offering not been acceptable, our Great High Priest would never have emerged from the tomb on Easter Sunday. . . .

As the high priest, dressed in linen, went into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat, the people would wonder and wait. If the high priest was himself defiled, if the high priest was himself polluted by sin, he would be smitten dead in the Holy of Holies. But if he emerged, his linen garments sprinkled with blood, the people would know the offering "took." They would know their sins were forgiven.

What about our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ? Wrapped in linen, He was placed in the tomb. All of heaven wondered. All of history waited. Did the offering take? Was His blood accepted? Because He emerged from the tomb on that glorious Easter Sunday, we know the offering did, indeed, take. We know His blood was accepted. We know that we are forgiven.

Whether you're talking to the skeptic on the campus, at work, or in your neighborhood, the issue is singular: Did Jesus rise from the dead? If He did, He is unique in history. It validates His claim. And it means our sins are forgiven. The entire argument hinges on the single issue of the Resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:19

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, why are we of all men most miserable? Because we have hope that life will get better, that things will be right, that bills will be no more, that tears will cease to flow. On the other hand, if heaven isn't real, the Epicurean is right. There is no tomorrow. There is no hope.

1 Corinthians 15:20

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

In the Levitical calendar, the day following Passover was a day of celebration called the Feast of Firstfruits. During this feast, the Jews waved wheat from their crops toward heaven, signifying their gratitude to the Lord for His provision and the promise of more to come.

When did Christ rise? The day following Passover—on the Feast of Firstfruits. Jesus is the Firstfruit because there's more to come. Who? You and me. Jesus was the first One truly resurrected never to die again—but many more will follow.

1 Corinthians 15:21–23

For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

The resurrection spoken of here is a process that began with the Resurrection of Christ and will conclude when those who are martyred during the Tribulation for their faith in Christ are resurrected.

Revelation 20 goes on to talk about a second resurrection that takes place at the end of the Millennium when all of the unbelievers will stand before the Great White Throne. The first resurrection is the resurrection unto life

because it is made up only of those who are saved. The second resurrection is the resurrection unto death because it is made up only of unbelievers.

1 Corinthians 15:24–26

Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

When at last the kingdom of death is cast into outer darkness, Christ will rule and reign unchallenged. What a day that will be! The last enemy to be destroyed, nevermore to haunt or burden anyone, will not only be physical death, but the death of marriage, the death of joy, the death of peace, the death of everything that brings about hopelessness, heaviness, and sorrow.

1 Corinthians 15:27

For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.

With the exception of God, all things are under the feet of Jesus Christ. Soon, He will take control of that which is twice His—that which was given to Him by the Father and that which was purchased by His own blood on Calvary.

1 Corinthians 15:28

And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

The Son shall remain in submission to the Father not because He is inferior, but because it was a choice He made (Philippians 2:7, 8), the effects of which remain.

1 Corinthians 15:29

Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?

The Mormons use this verse to teach that a person can be baptized in place of relatives who died generations ago. This is why they place such importance upon genealogies. However, unbeknownst to most people, a dark spiritualism is linked to this aspect of Mormonism. What Paul is talking about is actually quite simple. Baptism is a symbol of death, burial, and resurrection. "If Jesus is not risen," he asks, "why would you be baptized?"

1 Corinthians 15:30, 31

And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

"While you are celebrating your Epicurean Christianity, I'm risking my life every day. Why would I do this if there is no resurrection?" asks Paul.

1 Corinthians 15:32

If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die.

Commentators are divided over the identity of the beasts at Ephesus. It could very well be that Paul was cast into the arena at Ephesus where he stood face-to-face with hungry lions, as did countless Christian martyrs. Or, it could be Paul is talking about men who, acting like beasts, wanted to rip into him. Either way, what he endured at Ephesus was all for nothing if, indeed, there was no resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:33

Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

"Your discussions with the Epicureans are making you confused about the simplicity of the gospel," Paul warns the Corinthian believers.

1 Corinthians 15:34, 35

Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame. But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?

This wasn't an honest question, but was instead meant to challenge Paul.

1 Corinthians 15:36–38

Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.

Look at nature. If you put an ugly brown bulb in the ground, what happens? It sends down its roots, cracks in half, and sends up greenery. As the warm sun beats down on the budding plant, a beautiful yellow daffodil appears from what once was an ugly brown bulb. So, too, Paul says the same thing we observe in nature will take place in the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:39, 40 (a)

All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial . . .

Just as we see different bodies now—those of lions, fish, and beasts; those of sun, moon, and stars—our resurrected bodies will be different from those we have now. Because our present bodies are designed for fourteen pounds of pressure per square inch, we can only travel in the air or underwater in pressurized cabins or suits. And because our present bodies are designed to take in a specific mix of air composed of 78 percent oxygen,

21 percent nitrogen, and 1 percent of assorted gases, we remain essentially earthbound.

But our eternal bodies will require neither space suit nor oxygen tank. We're going to be free to explore, soar, and do all kinds of things we can't even dream about doing today as we cruise the cosmos without limitations or restrictions. Right now, we inhabit ugly brown bulbs. But when we see Him, we shall be like Him. Oh, happy day that will be!

1 Corinthians 15:40 (b)–42 (a)

. . . but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead.

If you look at the sky tonight, you'll see stars shining with different intensities. Likewise, there will be different intensities in heaven. Daniel 12 tells us that those who win souls shall shine as the stars forever. In other words, those who are serving the Lord now and making their lives count today will shine brightly throughout eternity. On the other hand, although those who give priority to their own bodies, possessions, interests, hobbies, careers, or agendas, will be in heaven if they believe in Jesus Christ, they will not shine with the same intensity. Make the kingdom the priority and passion of your life, and I promise you, you'll not regret it.

1 Corinthians 15:42 (b)–44 (a)

It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.

The body we put in the ground decays. Paul says that's not the end of the story, for it rises in glory and power.

1 Corinthians 15:44 (b), 45 (a)

There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul . . .

"From dust you came and to dust you will return," God told Adam (see Genesis 3:19). Therefore, it is no wonder that the seventeen elements that compose the dirt under your feet are the same elements of which your body is comprised.

1 Corinthians 15:45 (b)
. . . the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

Adam was made a living soul. The last Adam, Jesus Christ, was made a quickening, or, literally, life-giving spirit. Jesus is the One who gives life.

1 Corinthians 15:46
Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.

We begin as natural men. It is not until we're born again by the life-giving Spirit of the last Adam that we become spiritual beings.

1 Corinthians 15:47 (a)
The first man is of the earth, earthy . . .

According to Psalm 103, the Father understands that we are earthy. Therefore, I am personally persuaded that many of us expect more of ourselves than our Father expects of us. We put pressure upon ourselves, set lofty goals, and make endless promises. But in reality, we're just dusty and earthy. "We have this treasure, Jesus Christ, in earthen vessels," Paul will say in his second letter to the Corinthians (4:7). Jesus is the Treasure. We're just the earthen vessel, the clay pot.

From time to time, many of us try to polish and paint our earthen vessels by trying to put on an act of spirituality. In reality, however, all that does is detract from the beauty of the Treasure inside. That is why, in describing how He wanted to be worshiped, the Lord didn't prescribe an altar made of cut

stones, polished brass, or beaten gold. It was to be made of earth in order that nothing would detract from the sacrifice laid upon it (Exodus 20:24).

Many people don't witness, teach Sunday school, or serve in other ways because they don't feel polished or articulate enough. Little do they realize that they are the ideal candidates for ministry because people will marvel at the Treasure and not at them. Whether it be congregationally or personally, the key to ministry is to get out of the way and let people see the beauty of Jesus, the Treasure within.

1 Corinthians 15:47 (b)–49

. . . the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

Although presently I am free to be who I am—just an earthy, clay pot—I know someday I'll be much more. Someday I'll bear the image of Christ, in a body custom-made for the heavenlies.

1 Corinthians 15:50

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

Our present bodies of flesh and blood cannot move into the kingdom because they're not designed for heaven. That is what death is all about. For the believer, death is simply a way of leaving our earthly tabernacles and moving into our new bodies, exchanging our crusty brown bulbs for creations of beauty.

1 Corinthians 15:51 (a)

Behold, I shew you a mystery.

The Greek word translated "mystery" is *musterion.* Musterion speaks of something that has previously been hidden, but is now known. Following Paul's discussion of the necessity of dying in order that we might move into

the eternal realm, he says there is something new to factor in to the equation. . . .

1 Corinthians 15:51 (b)
We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.

Although everyone will be changed—like caterpillars into butterflies—not everyone will die. How can a person be changed if he doesn't die? Read on.

1 Corinthians 15:52, 53
In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

Here is the first reference to the hope of the Rapture. Paul tells us that, rather than dying, some will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. When the trumpet sounds, as 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 more fully explains, the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven. The dead in Christ shall rise, and then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up to meet with them in the clouds. We'll be changed immediately without going through the death process at all.

1 Corinthians 15:54
So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

Death is swallowed up in victory. Because our hearts tell us this is so, because the Word declares it to be, instead of moaning and mourning over believers who have died, we can truly be happy and elated for them if we understand the big picture of eternity.

1 Corinthians 15:55–57

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

A little girl was having a picnic with her daddy. Deathly allergic to bee stings, she became terrified as a bumblebee buzzed overhead. Seeing the bee, her father caught it and held it in his hand for a few seconds before letting it go. As it buzzed around once more, the little girl cried, "Daddy, Daddy, why did you let the bee go?"

Rather than explain, the father chose to simply open his hand to show his daughter the stinger embedded in his palm.

That's precisely what Jesus did for me when He absorbed the sting of my sin and stupidity.

1 Corinthians 15:58

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

In light of the reality of eternity, in light of the Cross of Calvary, in light of the fact that what we do on this earth will determine our heavenly intensity, Paul says, "Work for the Lord so that your labor will not be in vain." So much of what we do with our time, energy, and money is vain. So much of what we do is going to fall apart, pass away, or break down. But that which we do for the Lord—the worship we give Him, the work we do for Him, the gifts we bring to Him—will not be in vain.

Even if it seems that what you're doing for Him is not making a very big impact, know this: Your labor is not in vain. The Lord does not pay you on commission. He pays you for your labor. He doesn't pay you depending upon how successful you are in service. He pays you by the hour. Just be faithful to do what He has called you to do, and leave the results to Him.

REALLY BELIEVING THE GOSPEL

A Topical Study of
1 CORINTHIANS 15:2–4

"Gospel" is a word we hear frequently. One of the fastest-growing segments of the music market is gospel music. We speak of "old-time" gospel meetings, and of ministers of the gospel. Gospel is a word we use to describe music, meetings, and ministers. But what exactly is the gospel?

The Greek word translated "Gospel" is *euangelion,* and has its origins in the soap merchants of ancient times who would advertise their wares by calling out, "Good news!" upon entering a town. In those days before deodorant or cologne, the arrival of soap was good news indeed!

How fitting, then, that those who went from city to city sharing the Good News that people could be cleansed from the stench of their sin would, like their soap-merchant counterparts, be called evangelists. In the text before us, Paul defines their message: first, that Christ died, and second, that He rose again—both according to Scripture.

> *. . . how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures*
>
> 1 Corinthians 15:3 (b)

That Christ would die for our sins is seen clearly throughout the Old Testament . . .

- Psalm 22 presents a clear and accurate description of the process of crucifixion centuries before crucifixion was first practiced.
- Psalm 69 speaks of the vinegar Jesus would be offered to drink on the Cross.
- Isaiah 50 foretells that Jesus would be spat upon, that His beard would be plucked, that He would be hit in the face.

• Isaiah 52 and 53 describe how Jesus would be beaten for our sins, bruised for our iniquities.

When Paul said Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, no doubt he had these passages in mind.

> *And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 15:4

Like the Crucifixion, the Resurrection is also seen throughout the Old Testament. . . .

> For three days and nights he was in the belly of the great fish. Thinking he had died and was in hell itself, Jonah cried out to the Father, Who "resurrected" him when the whale spit him onto dry land (Jonah 2:10).
>
> In Genesis we find an even more descriptive picture. . . .
>
> "Take thy son, thine only son unto a mountain I shall show thee of and there offer him as a sacrifice unto Me," God said. Abraham carried fire and a knife while Isaac carried the wood. Together, father and son set off toward a mount called Moriah. At the bottom of the mountain, Abraham said to the two servants who accompanied them, "You stay here. My son and I will go up and worship and we will come again unto thee."
>
> When Abraham and Isaac reached the top of the mountain, Isaac said, "Here's the wood. There's the fire. But where's the sacrifice?"
>
> And Abraham looked at his son and said, "God will provide Himself a lamb" (Genesis 22:8). Not, "God will provide for *Himself a lamb," but, "God will provide* Himself *a lamb." He will* be *the Lamb.*
>
> *I don't know if Abraham understood the significance of his statement. I'm not sure Isaac got it at all. But as Abraham was*

ready to plunge a knife through the chest of his only son, God said, "Stop, Abraham. Now I know that you fear God."

The picture is as complete as it can be—for that mountain called Moriah is today called Calvary. The very spot Abraham was ready to offer his son, Isaac, is the spot God did, indeed, offer His only Son, Jesus Christ.

Even as Isaac carried the wood, Jesus carried the Cross. Even as Jesus was crucified between two thieves, Isaac walked with two servants. Even as Abraham was ready to put a knife through his son, a spear pierced the Son of Man. Even as Abraham had fire in his hand, the fiery wrath of God's holy indignation was hurled down upon His Son as He bore my sin and yours.

One of the most powerful portraits of the Resurrection is seen in the law itself. . . .

When a person was cleansed of leprosy, the priest would take two birds, one of which would be killed over running water and placed in an earthen jar. The second bird, along with cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop, would be dipped into the blood of the first bird and then released (Leviticus 14).

Jesus, the One who left the "nest" of heaven to come and dwell among us, confined Himself in an earthen vessel, His earthly body. The running water speaks of the living water He proclaimed Himself to be (John 4:10), as well as the water that gushed forth when a spear was thrust into His side (John 19:34). The wood speaks of the Cross; scarlet of His blood, hyssop of that which was offered Him to drink. As the living bird, sprinkled with the blood of the sacrificial bird, soared back into the sky, the picture of Resurrection was complete.

As seen in our text, the gospel is two-fold: Jesus died for our sin and rose again. We who name the Name of Jesus believe the gospel—especially the first half. We believe Jesus died for our sin. But do we truly believe the second aspect of the gospel? Do you really believe that Jesus Christ is alive,

that right now, by His Spirit, He lives within you, that physically He's in heaven praying for you? If you do, today and every day is Easter Sunday. . . .

> Mary was heartbroken. She went to the tomb that Sunday morning but realized Jesus' body wasn't there.
>
> "What are you seeking?" the "gardener" asked her.
>
> "If you have taken the body of my Lord, tell me where you have laid Him and I will take Him away," she said (see John 20:15).
>
> But when she heard this One whom she supposed to be the gardener speak her name, she threw her arms around Him, recognizing Him to be Jesus.

Was Mary excited because of the validation of the atoning work of Christ on the Cross? Was she elated because the Millennial reign could be instituted eventually? I don't think so. I believe that Mary and the others who were caught up in the wonder of Easter were not thinking about the theological or eschatological ramifications of the Resurrection. No, the reason Mary hugged Jesus and wouldn't let Him go is because her Friend was with her again—and that was all that mattered.

What if we believed this? What if we really believed not only that Jesus died for our sins, but that He has risen again and is here with us today, right now? We wouldn't be saying, "Woe is me. What am I going to do about this situation, about those bills, about that obligation?" No, we'd be saying, "Good News! Jesus is alive! He's here!" He who truly believes the gospel cannot help but be hilariously happy.

> Terrified by reports that the Assyrians were on the move, the Israelites sent emissaries south to set up an alliance with the Egyptians.
>
> *Woe to the rebellious children, saith the* LORD*, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin: That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt! Therefore*

shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion. For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not.

Isaiah 30:1–3, 15

The Lord says the same thing to us today. "In returning to Me, you'll be saved. In quietness and confidence—literally in lingering with Me—shall be your strength."

If Jesus is not risen, we better get counsel from the Egyptians. We better set up an alliance. We better run here and go there and get all the help we can.

If, on the other hand, we truly believe the Good News that Jesus not only died for our sins, but that He rose again, we can cast our care upon Him, talk to Him, linger with Him, hear from Him. Like Mary, we can wrap our arms around Him and say, "Lord, I'm so glad You're here. What would I do without You? You are the ultimate solution to every problem, the source of strength for every weakness, my King, my Deliverer, my Friend."

Do you believe the gospel? Do you really believe the *full* gospel? To the extent you do, happy you'll be. The Lord is risen. He is risen *indeed!*



16 1 Corinthians 16:1–4

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me.

After encouraging the church at Corinth to labor faithfully, Paul gives them a practical opportunity to do so in giving financially. Specifically, Paul

was collecting money to give to the believers in Jerusalem who were feeling the effects of a famine in the region. "In light of this," Paul said to the Corinthians, "when you meet together, bring money proportionate to the Lord's provision for you."

I personally and strongly believe that this proportionate amount is represented by 10 percent—the tithe. The tithe is required throughout Old Testament law. But it also precedes the law, as seen in the account of Abraham giving tithes to Melchizedek—a pre-Incarnate appearance of Christ (Genesis 14:20). In addition, tithing is seen in the New Testament—for although Jesus indicts the Pharisees for neglecting the weightier matters of justice and mercy, He, nonetheless, says they shouldn't leave tithing undone (Matthew 23:23).

> Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.
>
> Malachi 3:8

If I don't tithe, I am robbing God. The tithe isn't a gift I give to God. It is simply a return of what's already His.

> Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.
>
> Malachi 3:10

This is the only place in all of Scripture where God says, "Test Me." He says, "See how you'll be blessed when you quit robbing Me. Bring the tithe into the storehouse. Let it go. Give it up. And watch what happens. See if I don't bless you in ways that will be beyond your ability to even contain it. Be it emotionally, financially, or eternally. I'll bless you so much you'll never regret bringing Me the tithe."

> And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 3:11

Not only will God bless those who tithe, but He will rebuke the devourer —that which eats away at our finances. Do you feel your money gets eaten up? It may be that part of the problem is robbery. That is, your money is being stolen by the devourer.

"I'm not going to pressure you with charts, gimmicks, or fund-raising drives," said Paul. "Just bring your tithe weekly. Then, when I come there will be no need to scramble for your checkbook."

1 Corinthians 16:5–7

Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia. And it may be that I will abide, yea, and winter with you, that ye may bring me on my journey whithersoever I go. For I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit.

Although it was Paul's plan to winter in Corinth before traveling to Jerusalem, he adds a very important phrase when he says, "if the Lord permit."

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart," Proverbs tells us. "And lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths" (3:5, 6). Therefore, wise is the man or woman who says, "This is the way the day is mapped out or the week is supposed to go—but, Lord, You can interrupt it as much as You want whenever You want."

I have found that if I am expecting to be divinely interrupted by this person, that situation, or the unknown event, I go through the day with a smile on my face. But if an unexpected interruption comes on a day when I have written my schedule in stone—watch out! The key? Expect to be bothered, and you'll never be bothered.

1 Corinthians 16:8, 9

But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.

Paul was neither an optimist nor a pessimist. He was a realist. “I’m going to Ephesus,” he said, “where there is a great door opened before me, but also many adversaries waiting to pounce on me.” Paul’s realistic appraisal of the situation is a true sign of maturity.

1 Corinthians 16:10, 11

Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do. Let no man therefore despise him: but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me: for I look for him with the brethren.

Why would Paul have to tell the Corinthians not to despise Timothy? Because Timothy was weak physically (1 Timothy 5:23) and emotionally (2 Timothy 1:7). Yet Paul saw in him a heart for the kingdom. “Don’t let your gifts lie dormant because of your timidity,” he said, “but stir up the gifts within you” (see 2 Timothy 1:6). Timothy lived up to the potential Paul saw in him and went on to become a giant in Church history.

1 Corinthians 16:12

As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time.

Even though Apollos had a fan club in Corinth, Paul was eager for him to come. Paul did not view Apollos as a rival or a competitor—which is further evidence of Paul’s maturity.

1 Corinthians 16:13 (a)

Watch ye . . .

What are we to watch for? For the roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8), who seeks to attack the weakest among us—but also for the Promised Lion of the tribe of Judah, who is coming back for us. Our perspective is balanced to the degree that, as we watch what’s going on around us, we also watch for Jesus’ return for us.

1 Corinthians 16:13 (b)
. . . stand fast in the faith . . .

I look at the massive oak tree and realize it wasn't massive initially. An oak tree is nothing more than just a little nut that refused to give ground. So, too, by God's grace, we don't have to give ground. We can be consistent in our time of worship; we can be committed to the study of the Scripture; we can be faithful in prayer. People who are successful in any endeavor have one thing in common: They're part of the one percent who finish what they begin. Whether regarding career, kids, or the kingdom—most people have great ideas and start well. But they don't finish. They give up. They give ground.

"Father, I have glorified Thee and finished the work Thou gavest me to do," Jesus said (see John 17:4). Finishing the work God gave Him to do wasn't just an idea in His journal or a thought stirring in His mind. It was something Jesus *did.*

Has God called you to teach Sunday school? Do it and stay with it until He leads you in a different direction. Has He called you to have a time of morning worship? Then do so. Has He spoken to you about spending time discipling your kids? Then do it. I believe the Lord wants every one of us to be hugely successful in the things of the kingdom. His burden is easy, His load light. The only question is, will you give ground—or will you stand fast?

1 Corinthians 16:13 (c)
. . . quit you like men . . .

The word "quit" means "act." Linguistically, this is a most powerful exhortation. And Paul was not the first to use it. . . .

> *Hearing a great shout from the camp of the Israelites, the Philistines knew the ark of the covenant had been brought into the camp of Israel. "Woe unto us," they cried. "Who shall deliver us out of the hand of the mighty God of Israel?"*

But when one of them said, "Be strong. Quit yourselves like men and fight," they dried their eyes, engaged in combat, and won the battle (see 1 Samuel 4:5–10).

1 Corinthians 16:13 (d)

. . . be strong.

"Be strong and of good courage," Moses told his protigi, Joshua (see Deuteronomy 31:7; 23).

"All that thou commandest us we will do. Only be strong," the people echoed (see Joshua 1:16, 18).

Our families will follow us, men, if we heed the exhortation of Paul and be strong. Scripture tells us Job made a sacrifice for each of his children daily (Job 1:5). That's strength; that's hard work. I'm not asking you to kill a bull, Dads. But we must sacrifice our energy, our comfort, our ease on behalf of our wives and our children. In the perilous days in which we live, to do anything less is simply not an option.

1 Corinthians 16:14

Let all your things be done with charity.

"Watch out. Stand fast. Grow up. Be strong"—but lest we go out of here chewing nails, Paul comes right back with the most important exhortation of all when he says, "Let everything be done in love." How can we watch out and stand fast and grow up and be strong—and at the same time be loving? We can't. This can only happen as the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, lives His life through us day by day.

1 Corinthians 16:15, 16

I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) that ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth.

It would seem as though the family of Stephanas was among the first of Paul's converts in that region. Of them, Paul says the whole family was addicted to the ministry of the saints. I like that! Every single person will eventually be drawn to and infatuated with a master passion. For the family of Stephanas, this passion was ministry. They must have seen Mom and Dad committed to the congregation at Corinth. They must have watched Mom and Dad opening up their home and hearts, spending time with the saints. They must have been included in the home meetings, in the congregational setting. Traveling with Mom and Dad, these kids were not left behind spiritually. As a result, they got hooked on ministry.

1 Corinthians 16:17–19

I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied. For they have refreshed my spirit and yours: therefore acknowledge ye them that are such. The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

When Paul first went to Corinth, he lodged with fellow tentmakers, Aquila and his wife, Priscilla. Not only did Aquila and Priscilla become believers, but they became so strong in the faith that when Paul went to Ephesus, he left Aquila and Priscilla in charge of the fellowship (Acts 18:18). After ministering in Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla joined Paul in Rome, where a church met in their house (Romans 16:5). Then they returned to Ephesus to help Timothy, who would eventually become the pastor at Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla were a couple who were on the move, flexible, determined to serve the Lord in any way possible—wonderful models for you and me.

1 Corinthians 16:20

All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss.

The church neither can nor should compete with the world in areas of technology or entertainment because the world will "out-glitz" and "out-hype" us every time. Rather, it is the responsibility and privilege of the church to offer junior-highers and collegians, high-schoolers and senior citizens something they'll never get anywhere else: love and truth. Only the church can say, "We'll tell you the truth, and we'll speak it in love. Unlike the world, we're not out to make merchandise of you or to exploit you. In Jesus' name, we're here to love you."

The world is in desperate need of love and truth. Paul had told the Corinthians the truth. And yet he had a deep love for them and encouraged them—even through their doctrinal differences—to love one another.

1 Corinthians 16:21

The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand.

Here, Paul takes the pen out of the hand of the secretary to whom, perhaps due to an eye disease, he had been dictating.

1 Corinthians 16:22

If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.

The word *anathema* simply means "accursed." The word *maranatha* means "Lord, come."

"Whoever doesn't love Jesus, let him be accursed." Is this a word of harshness? I don't think so. I think Paul took pen in hand to plead with the Corinthians, saying, "If you don't love the One who is altogether lovely, the One who died for you, the One who cares about you, the One who gave everything that He might be with you in this life and in the ages to come; if you don't love this One who is all-wise and all-knowing yet all-loving and all-forgiving, then you curse yourself. Maranatha. The Lord is coming. You need to make your decision."

1 Corinthians 16:23, 24

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

There could have been those in Corinth who said, "If you care so much about us, Paul, why did you point out our carnality and rebuke us for our immorality? Why were you so rough on us?"

Yet, under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul simply says, "I do love you."

Because open rebuke is better than secret love (Proverbs 27:5), the rebukes and exhortations that come our way should be embraced as friends. It's much more comfortable for me to ignore a prickly situation or issue. But that's not love. Love says, "I care more about your well-being than about what you think of me. If you think I'm not a nice guy, that's okay, if what I'm saying will provoke you to love and to good works, to think through what you're doing and perhaps repent from the direction you're heading."

Faithful are the wounds of a friend (Proverbs 27:6). But make sure your correction is done in love. . . .

As the disciples sat at the Last Supper, under the table were twenty-four dirty, stinking feet. To remedy the situation, Jesus didn't give a lecture on foot washing. No, He girded Himself with a towel and washed feet Himself (John 13:4, 5).

I have the right and responsibility to give admonition, exhortation, and correction; to openly rebuke and wound if necessary only if I am willing to wash the feet of the people with whom I deal. If I'm not willing to walk with them through their difficulty, stand by them in their trouble, kneel with them in prayer, it would be wiser for me to keep silent.

Paul was one who had the right to correct, admonish, and rebuke the Corinthian Christians because he worked with his hands, put up with their insults, and risked his life to be with them. Thus, it was truly from his heart that Paul said to the church at Corinth, "My love be with you all in Christ Jesus."

What was their reaction?

While some would receive his words with humility and repentance, others would say, "Who does he think he is?"—prompting Paul to compose a

second Epistle—the most personal of any he would write.



2 CORINTHIANS

1 After hearing from Timothy that some of the Corinthian Christians had questioned his authority to write his first letter of correction and exhortation, Paul wrote a second letter to them. This second Epistle would be the most personal of any he would write. Through it, we see the heart of a man committed to the kingdom.

2 Corinthians 1:1

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia.

"By the grace of God, I am what I am," Paul had declared in his first letter to the church at Corinth (15:10). Here in his second letter, to those questioning his apostolic authority, he says, "Not only is it by God's grace, but it is by His will that I am an apostle."

2 Corinthians 1:2

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although many in the Corinthian congregation attacked Paul rather mercilessly, he greets them with grace and peace. In so doing, he sets a wonderful example as one who is a peacemaker even in the midst of difficulty.

David modeled this as well, for no matter how many times Saul threw the javelin at him, he didn't fire back (1 Samuel 18, 19). So, too, I have found that those who walk close to the Lord and are used consistently by Him are those who, even when they have the right, do not fire back. I have also found that I can gauge my own spiritual state by the priority I give to defending my position, motives, or reputation; by how quick I am to throw the javelin back at those who threw it at me.

The truly anointed brother, the truly mature sister does not fire back. That is why we will see Paul explaining certain things to the Corinthian congregation, but not brutally firing at them. It is why he is firm with them, but never loses his heart of love for them.

2 Corinthians 1:3–7

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.

Paul found genuine comfort in God. You will, too. As you go through difficult times, real storms, immense challenges, you will find, even as Paul found, that God is a God of comfort. You will discover that He is the Father of mercy, who will comfort you in order that you can comfort others.

This is such a key passage because it clearly explains to us that the degree we can comfort others is the degree we have been comforted ourselves. It is only when we have experienced God's faithfulness firsthand that we can assure others that God will be faithful to them.



***For topical study of 2 Corinthians 1:4 entitled "Shake It Off!" turn to page* 1100.**

2 Corinthians 1:8

For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.

Demetrius, a silversmith, was angry with Paul. So many people were getting saved in Ephesus that his business was being affected by loss of revenue from the sale of idols. Following his instigation of a riot, soon the entire city was in an uproar (Acts 19:29).

2 Corinthians 1:9 (a)
But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves . . .

The dark days at Ephesus had a purpose: They caused Paul to rely solely on God. Like Paul, the tendency of most of us is to try to solve our problems with our own strength. Therefore, as He did with Paul, the Lord brings us to the end of ourselves from time to time. He brings us to the point where we feel pressed beyond measure, despairing even of life—in order that we will have no other choice but to call upon Him and find in Him greater strength than we could ever find in our own ability.

He was a go-getter from the very beginning. After all, he grabbed his twin brother's heel in a failed attempt to be first-born. Throughout his life, Jacob, or "heel-snatcher," was one who drew from his own cunning and acumen to get ahead. Then, one day, he heard that his brother, from whom he had cheated his birthright and blessing, was headed his way, accompanied by four hundred men.

When an angel appeared to Jacob, he said, "I have no other heel to snatch. I'm at the end of my resources. I won't let you go until you bless me." So they wrestled all night. Jacob ended up with a blessing when his name was changed from Jacob to Israel, from "heel-snatcher" to "governed by God." But he also limped away with a dislocated hip, as though God said, "With every step you take, you will be reminded that when you—who once walked so proudly, who once stood so confidently—came to the end of yourself, it was the best thing that ever happened to you, for in your brokenness and weakness, you'll be stronger and more useful than you could have ever been in your own energy and cleverness."

It's a great day when a man finally comes to the end of himself and realizes, "I don't need to go to another seminar or call another counselor; I don't need to enroll in another program or come up with another creative idea. All I need is You, Lord. I'm going to wrestle with You. I'm going to cling to You. I'm going to depend on You because I need to be governed by You."

2 Corinthians 1:9 (b)
. . . but in God which raiseth the dead.

Maybe your marriage seems dead. Maybe your joy or love or peace or ministry seems dead. Quit trying to figure it out and fight it in your own energy. Instead, seek the Lord. Trust the God who specializes in raising the dead.

2 Corinthians 1:10
Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.

I love this. God has delivered us in the past. He does deliver us in the present. He will deliver us in the future. Think about the things that were bothering you a year ago—how you thought, *It's all over. This is never going to work out. I'm toast.* Then look at where you are today. Unless we really stop and search our memories, most of us don't even remember the things we thought were going to do us in and wipe us out even a few months ago. Why? Because the Lord delivered us. He saw us through. He's faithful. I believe one of the biggest obstacles in our spiritual growth is our tendency to forget how the Lord sees us through all the times we think things could never work out.

"Because God *has* delivered us," Paul says, "He *will* deliver us."

2 Corinthians 1:11 (a)
Ye also helping together by prayer for us . . .

“Your prayers are part of the process God used to deliver us,” Paul told the Corinthian church. And the same thing still happens. Have you ever wrestled with something or been discouraged by something, when suddenly you felt an infusion of peace and life and joy, and you knew someone was praying for you? Paul says, “When we were despairing even of life itself, you helped us by praying for us.”

2 Corinthians 1:11 (b)–13

. . . that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf. For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward. For we write none other things unto you, than what ye read or acknowledge; and I trust ye shall acknowledge even to the end;

The word “sincere” comes from a Latin phrase meaning “without wax”—referring to the wax used to hide the cracks in defective pottery or statuary. “We lived a life of godly sincerity before you,” Paul says. “We weren’t trying to deceive you or hide anything from you.”

2 Corinthians 1:14

As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Paul had a wonderful ability to “know no man after the flesh” (see 2 Corinthians 5:16). So often, we point out one another’s fleshiness. Paul didn’t. He saw people positionally in Christ. He saw what they would be by the work of the Holy Ghost. Oh, he was a shepherd who knew there were wolves and false apostles. But when it came to the believers, he had a bigness of heart that allowed him to view them in the best possible light. This is why he could say even to the Corinthians, “You are our rejoicing, a treasure to us.”

2 Corinthians 1:15–17

And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit; and to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way toward Judaea. When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay?

Although it was Paul's heart and plan to return to Corinth to minister again, he was delayed in his journey—a delay to which his enemies pointed as proof that his word couldn't be trusted.

2 Corinthians 1:18

But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay.

In other words, Paul is saying, "We did not speak to you out of both sides of our mouths."

2 Corinthians 1:19–22

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us. Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

In the old covenant, we read over and over again, "*If* you do this, *then* you will be blessed." But in Christ Jesus it's not a matter of "if and then" but "Yea and Amen!"

***For topical study of 2 Corinthians 1:20 entitled "Yea and Amen!" turn to page* 1104.**

2 Corinthians 1:23

Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.

"It was a good thing that the Lord closed the doors and changed my plans," Paul says, "because had I come as soon as I wanted, I probably would have been too harsh with you."

2 Corinthians 1:24

Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.

Contrary to many churches today who set up pastors as those who have dominion over their flock, the true call of ministry is not to dominate others, but to be helpers of other's joy in humility as we point them to Jesus.

SHAKE IT OFF!
A Topical Study of
2 CORINTHIANS 1:4

He was not speaking theologically or theoretically, for Paul was in a pretty tough spot personally. Sailing across the Mediterranean Sea to Rome, a storm began to beat and batter the boat full of prisoners, of which he was one. Finally, after many days, the 270 soldiers, sailors, and prisoners aboard were all cast into the sea. Some grabbed on to the splintered remains of the ship, some started swimming; but miraculously all made it to the shore of Mileta, present-day Malta. The "barbarians" on the beach, showing these waterlogged newcomers "no little kindness" (Acts 28:2), lit fires to warm them. And Paul, ever looking for an opportunity to serve others, joined in as he gathered sticks to fuel the flames. But lurking in one of the bundles was a deadly viper, which leapt out and bit him. When Paul shook off the snake into the fire, the local Miletans, who had initially thought Paul was cursed to suffer such a fate, now thought him a god.

Paul used the opportunity to share the True and Living God with an audience eager to hear from this one who had been bitten by the same type of snake that doubtless had claimed the lives of many of their family members and friends.

"Make my life count," we plead.

"OK," the Lord says as He allows us to be smitten by the snake of sickness and sorrow. "I will allow this to happen because the 'barbarians'—the natives in your community—are watching to see if there are any answers, any solutions, any hope for them.

A. W. Tozer, spiritual giant of the previous generation, was right when he said, "Before God can use a person greatly, He must allow that person to be hurt deeply." Why? Is it because God is cruel? Does He enjoy seeing us in pain? No. The issue is not cruelty. The issue is ministry. There are two essential, nonnegotiable prerequisites for those who desire to be used by God. . . .

Compassion for People

We may have our theology down pat, but if our hearts are not full of compassion for people, what we say will not be fully received. The old adage is true: People don't care how much we know until they know how much we care. How can I have compassion? By absorbing the bite of the same snake that bites others. There is no other way.

Therefore, God puts us in situations and tribulations, hard places and tough times, in order that we might develop compassion for people who are also experiencing difficulties—in order that we might be able to say, "I *know* what you're going through."

Confidence in God

Many Christians have compassion for people, but it is at the expense of God's reputation. "I really feel for you," they say. "I don't know why this is happening"—the implication being, "Where is God?" On the other hand, one who truly ministers will say, "God is *good.* Here's what He did in my life, and here's what He will do for you. Put your confidence in Him."

Quite frankly, gang, I think we should be more concerned about the reputation of our perfect heavenly Father than about our own ability to be relatable. He has promised to never let us be tempted above that which we are able, and that all things are working together for good. He has promised He will never leave us, and He has told us to rejoice in Him always. Paul does that. Because he had endured beatings in prison, storms at sea, and snakebites on the beach, he had compassion for the problems of others. Because he had experienced God's faithfulness through it all, he never compromised his belief that God is good.

Well, you might be thinking, *if the only way to have compassion for people and confidence in God is to be bitten by a snake or two, then count me out. I'll be an every-other-Sunday believer, but don't ask me to get involved in ministry or service.*

You can choose to be left out if you wish—but you must understand that the snake will still bite you.

Why?

It all has to do with the snake in the Garden of Eden. That is why there is starvation and sickness in the Sudan. That is why there was war in Iraq. And that is why there is pain in your world. "What is God doing?" people cry, when, in fact, it is not God's doing at all.

> Having just encouraged His followers to develop faith, when the evening was come, Jesus said to His disciples, "Let us go over to the other side" (see Mark 4:35). But when a storm arose on the Sea of Galilee, the terrified disciples woke Jesus, who was asleep in the boat. "Peace, be still," or literally, "be muzzled," He said—the same term He employed when speaking to demons.

Thus, the insurance companies have it all wrong. The flood or earthquake that threatens your house is no more an "act of God" than the storm that bullied the disciples. They're acts of Satan, who was given permission by mankind to wreak havoc upon the earth when Adam rebelled in the Garden of Eden. You see, the disciples weren't the only ones on the Sea of Galilee when the storm arose. They were just the ones who had Jesus on board. Consequently, whether you decide to engage in ministry or not, you will still experience the snakebite of sickness and the storm of sorrow because the whole world has been polluted by the fallout of Adam's bomb. In this life, everyone experiences equal difficulty because everyone has been bitten (1 Corinthians 10:13).

> After murmuring yet again, the children of Israel were dying by the thousands from the fiery serpents God sent to bite them. "What do we do now?" cried Moses.
>
> "Make a brass snake on a brass pole," God answered, "and put it in the middle of the camp so that anyone who is bitten can look at the serpent hanging there and be made whole." Many were healed. Others, however, thinking it useless, perished in their stupidity (see Numbers 21).
>
> Centuries passed, and all the while, no doubt, people were wondering what was the deal with the brass serpent. Then came a Rabbi from Galilee who explained it all when He said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (see John 3:14, 15).

So, too, it might take a year or two, or five or ten—or maybe an eternity —until we understand why we were bitten by the snake of sorrow, smitten with the sting of despair. But when we see Him who was made sin for us, it will all make sense. As in Numbers 21, some will refuse to look upon Him, saying instead, "Look at my snake. Can you believe how bad this is? Help me, help me."

But others will follow the example of Paul and will shake the snake of Satan's sting into the fire of God's promise.

Years ago, my son Peter-John accompanied me to a speaking engagement. Our flight landed in Orlando at 11:30 P.M. Although there was supposed to be a rental car ready for us at the airport, evidently our reservation had been mixed up. So we found ourselves on a bus headed to the "vacation center" where surplus cars were stored. Upon arriving there, it was obvious that "vacation center" was just another name for "one-step-above-junkyard." It was midnight by now, and without having any other recourse, we walked into the office to pick up our car. Behind the counter was a tired-looking man. Perhaps expecting us to complain, his countenance changed as I began joking with him and he with me—especially when he learned that I was in the ministry. "I haven't met any Christians like you," he said.

Half an hour later, nearing 1:00 A.M., he said, "I think I've got a car for you. It's a brand-new, fully loaded, convertible Mustang with no miles on it. You guys want it?"

The next day found Peter-John and me cruising to Pensacola with the top down, hearing people say, "Nice car," all day long.

It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. If I had walked into the vacation center saying, "What's the deal? Where's my car? You guys really blew it," would we have had that experience? I wonder.

Turn your miseries into Mustangs, saint. Sure, things go wrong, but whether they are little inconveniences or major heartbreaks, trust in the Lord. Realize they are opportunities to learn compassion for people and to gain confidence in God.

Whether it be a big python or a little garden variety, shake off the snake and see God use you in the lives of the amazed barbarians and rental-car attendants who are watching you.

YEA AND AMEN!
A Topical Study of
2 CORINTHIANS 1:20

Of the over three thousand promises given to us in Scripture—promises that deal with health and happiness, peace and prosperity, family and freedom, finances and security—most of the promises people claim for themselves are based upon the Old Testament formula seen in the Book of Deuteronomy. . . .

> *For if ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the* LORD *your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him; then will the* LORD *drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves.*
>
> Deuteronomy 11:22, 23

So many of the promises we embrace follow the formula that says, "If you diligently keep these commandments, then God will drive your problems from you, do wondrous things for you, and take total care of you."

But therein lies the problem.

Oh, I know that *if* I love the Lord with all my heart, walk in all of His ways, and cleave totally to Him, *then* the Lord will indeed do wondrous things for me and through me, in me and to me. The problem is, do I love the Lord with all of my heart? Do I walk in all of His ways? Do I cleave only to Him? The answer, sadly, is no. Therefore, if I'm not doing the "ifs," I can't expect to receive the "thens."

This shouldn't surprise me, for that was the purpose of the law all along. According to Galatians 3:24, 25, the purpose of the law was to show us that we're not righteous, that we can't earn salvation, that we can't possibly keep the standard of righteousness that would be necessary to qualify us to receive the blessings we so desire. The law—including the Old Testament promises—was given to produce in us the realization that although we wish we could receive the blessings, we can't fulfill the obligations.

But here comes Paul, telling us that, because Jesus has fulfilled all the "ifs" in the Old Testament, the promises are all "Yea and Amen" in Him. Look again at Deuteronomy 11:22 to see how this works. . . .

> For Jesus diligently kept all the commandments that I command you. He loved the Lord His God, He walked in all His ways, He clave unto Him.

Jesus fulfills the "ifs" perfectly.

"I'm thankful that all of the promises were kept by Jesus," you might be saying. "But what about me? Because I've failed so miserably keeping the "ifs," do I have no hope for the "thens"?"

> *For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 1:26–29

By His grace and for His glory, when we opened up our hearts to Jesus, God placed us—weak and foolish that we are—in Christ. And because Christ fulfilled the "ifs," we get the "thens," leaving us nothing to do but say, "Yea and Amen!"

If that sounds too good to be true, think of it this way. . . .

> Suppose I'm in Switzerland and I begin to crave a hamburger, fries, and a shake. The two dollars I have in my pocket will buy just that at Hot and Now Burgers in Medford, Oregon. Therefore, *if* I can get to Medford, *then* I will have a burger, fries, and a shake. So I call the airport and say, "Can you give me directions to Medford?"
>
> "What is your mode of transportation?" the official asks.

"I'm broke," I say. "So I'm going to walk."

"Do you realize there are mountains to climb, rivers to ford, and a little pond called the Atlantic Ocean to cross?" he asks incredulously.

"Yes," I say, "but *if* I can do it, *then* I can have a burger."

"Go west," he says. "And good luck." But then, after a moment, he says, "I'm interested in your plight. It just so happens that Swiss Air Jumbo Jet 747 flight 203 is leaving for Medford in about an hour. I'll reserve a seat in first class for you."

As I board the jet and find my seat, I'm not concerned about directions because I'm in the jumbo jet, and I know the jumbo jet will make it. As we fly, people on the ground won't even know I was poor and foolish enough to think I could walk all the way to Medford for a hamburger. No, they won't even see my foolishness because all they will see is a fabulous jet flying through the sky headed for Medford.

So, too, when we who were foolish and weak became believers, the Lord said, "I have a seat reserved for you. Come in." And, because we are placed in Christ positionally, we cruise to our destination gloriously—not by walking, climbing, swimming, or hiking, but simply by resting in Him.

You'll know if you are living in the Old Covenant if you hear yourself saying, "I prayed for forty-five minutes last Thursday. I read four chapters in Leviticus two months ago. I tithed three years ago. Why aren't I being blessed?" It is a monumental day in the life of any believer who finally sees that in Jesus it's no longer "if and then" but "Yea and Amen!"

Not only is all that we enjoy *because* of Him, but all that we crave is found *in* Him. You see, although we think we need Jesus to give us bread, He says, "I *am* the Bread" (John 6:35). We think we need Him to give us direction, but He says, "I *am* the Way" (John 14:6). We think we need Him to open up a job or a relationship or a ministry for us, but He says, "I *am* the Door (John 10:7). It's Me you're craving. All the promises of God are not something that come *from* Me, but are found *in* Me."

So there I am on the 747, looking forward to my Hot and Now burger. But then something amazing happens. As I'm sitting quite comfortably in the plane, a steward comes by with a thick, juicy steak, a steaming

baked potato, sautied vegetables, crisp salad, flaky croissant, and chocolate mousse. Suddenly, a Hot and Now burger is the furthest thing from my mind. Although I thought the Jumbo Jet was simply a way to get me to Hot and Now, in reality, I'm finding more satisfaction than I ever could have imagined just being on board.

So, too, we say, "Oh, Lord, I need help." But as we talk things over with Him, we find that although we initially thought if He answered our prayer, we'd be happy, we realize it was Him we were craving all along. As a result, little by little, we find ourselves saying, "Whether the relationship develops, the sickness is healed, the job opens—it's all irrelevant compared to what I'm discovering just by spending time with You, Lord."

The price is paid, dear brother, precious sister. You're in the Jet. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the "ifs" so you can fully enjoy the "thens." And, as you do, you'll discover that what you were craving was Him all along.

Yea and Amen!



2 The apostle Paul had no intention of being a burden on the Corinthian congregation. Rather, his desire was to be a blessing to them. That is why chapter 1 ended with him saying, "I don't want to have dominion over you. I seek to be a helper of your joy."

2 Corinthians 2:1, 2

But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness. For if I make you sorry, who is he then that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me?

"When you go to Corinth again, make sure you don't go with a heavy heart," Paul said to himself.

I point this out because sometimes spiritual self-talk is absolutely necessary. I believe the psalmist set the example for us when he said, "Bless the Lord, O my soul. And all that is within me, bless His holy name" (Psalm 103). In other words, "Get it in gear, soul. Wake up and start praising."

In 1 Samuel, we read of an ill-fated military endeavor wherein David and his men left their camp in Ziklag only to return to find their city burned down and their wives and children taken into captivity. As a result, David's men were so angry with him that they wanted to kill him. It was at this point that David could have descended into real depression. Instead, we read that he encouraged himself in the Lord (1 Samuel 30:6).

Do you ever do that? Do you say, "I'm not going to become discouraged. I'm going to talk to myself about what God has done for me, how good He has been to me, how He's seen me through so many times previously"? I encourage you to encourage yourself in the Lord. Talk to your soul. Speak out the Scriptures. Memorize them or read them aloud. And as they go from your mouth into your ear, let them bless your heart.

Encourage yourself in the Lord when you're stuck in traffic, when you're walking down the street, when you're feeling kind of blue. David did. And what happened? His countenance changed. He rallied the troops once again. They went after the marauders and captured everything that was lost. I wonder how much is lost and wasted in our own lives because we fail to follow the example of David and Paul, because we don't encourage ourselves in the Lord.

Knowing they misunderstood his intention in the first Epistle, Paul said, "I'm still determined to come to you with happiness rather than heaviness."

2 Corinthians 2:3

And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is the joy of you all.

"I wrote my first letter to you not to burden you," Paul says, "but to give you the opportunity to work things out, so that we can celebrate together when I come."

The first time my wife, Tammy, went to a pastors wives' conference, I said, "On your flight back home, please call when you get to San

Francisco." Although I wanted to hear her voice, I also wanted to know how much time the kids and I had to get the house in order!

This was Paul's intent in writing to the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 2:4

For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.

"It was not with a finger pointing at you, but with tears in my eyes for you that I wrote to you," said Paul. It's so important that as we mature in the Lord we don't err as the Corinthians did. We must not only read the Word, but listen to the tone in which it was written.



***For topical study of 2 Corinthians 2:4 entitled "A Hearing Aid," turn to page* 1109.**

2 Corinthians 2:5–9

But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not over charge you all. Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.

Concerning the man in their midst who was living in immorality with his mother-in-law, Paul told the church at Corinth to turn him over to Satan in order that his soul might be saved (1 Corinthians 5:5). The Corinthians heeded Paul's word and banned him from their fellowship. Now the problem was that even though he had turned from his sin, the church wouldn't let him

back into their midst. "You took it too far," said Paul. "I told you to deal with the situation, but the prescribed course of action has been overdone."

We must be those who do not flaunt or tolerate immorality. At the same time, we must be those who love and embrace anyone who says, "I want to walk with you and be part of your company."

2 Corinthians 2:10, 11

To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Here, we see Paul's exhortation to be knowledgeable concerning Satan's devices—one of which is not only to get someone to sin, but to make him feel terrible about his sin, and to cause division among believers concerning the issue of his sin. Paul says to the church at Corinth, "Don't let Satan ostracize this one who needs to come back into your midst. And don't let him divide you in the process."

2 Corinthians 2:12, 13

Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia.

An opportunity for great ministry was opened to Paul in Troas. Yet because Titus failed to meet him there with news of how the church at Corinth was doing, Paul left Troas to find Titus. Here, we see an interesting side of Paul not often seen in other places. That is, he left a wide-open door in Troas because he cared about one man, Titus, who was to inform him about an individual church—the church at Corinth.

2 Corinthians 2:14 (a)

Now thanks be unto God . . .

Why was Paul so easily able to praise God even in hard times? Because trials don't make or break a man—they simply reveal the contents of his heart.

When someone cuts you off on the freeway, the way you respond is not a result of his action. Rather, it's an indication of what was already in your heart at that moment. This explains why Paul and Silas could sing in prison (Acts 16:25). They weren't praising God in order that He might set them free, for they had no idea their praise would open their prison door. Paul's praise in prison as well as in this Epistle was simply the overflow of the praise already in his heart.

2 Corinthians 2:14 (b)

. . . which always causeth us to triumph in Christ . . .

The Greek word translated "triumph" is linked to the Roman triumphal march. When a Roman general went into battle and killed five thousand or more of the enemy as he secured new territory for Rome, upon his return, he rode in a chariot, followed by his soldiers marching in all of their glory. Behind the soldiers were the men who had been taken captive. Alongside the procession, priests would walk, swinging their incense pots to create a sweet smell of victory as the entire procession made its way through the main thoroughfare to the Circus Maximus, where, for the entertainment of the crowd, the captives would do battle against wild beasts.

So, too, we are in a victory march as well. General Jesus, our Leader, our King left His empire in heaven, "invaded" this planet, and conquered the enemy on a hill called Calvary. However, five thousand didn't die. Instead, five thousand were saved (Acts 4:4). And the Enemy forces—demons—are not headed to the Circus Maximus, but to the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10).

2 Corinthians 2:14 (c), 15

. . . and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.

Marching behind our King as a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6), the gospel we share and the praise we offer become the incense of victory.

2 Corinthians 2:16 (a)

To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life.

To the enemies of the Cross, our praise and testimony stink. But to those who are headed for heaven, the aroma is wonderful. I say this to let you know in advance that when you go to school or work tomorrow, to those who are destined to live eternally, you will be a sweet savor of Christ. But to those who are destined for hell, you'll stink. Don't take it personally. Just realize that it's a revelation of the fact that they are not yet part of the kingdom.

2 Corinthians 2:16 (b)

And who is sufficient for these things?

Who is sufficient to march behind Jesus, to carry the fragrance of Him, to be used by Him? Paul will answer this question in the next chapter when he says our sufficiency is of God (verse 5).

2 Corinthians 2:17 (a)

For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity . . .

This is crucial for every Sunday-school teacher, preacher, Bible study leader, music minister, or anyone else who deals in any way with the Word. We are not to corrupt the Word with our own agenda or axes to grind.

2 Corinthians 2:17 (b)

. . . but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.

We who teach the Word are to realize that when we speak, we're not speaking theoretically, but that God is very much in attendance (Hebrews

2:12). If we approach family devotions and Bible studies, Sunday-school lessons and sermons as though God is present, our teaching and sharing become acts of worship.

I find that some of my most intense times of worship take place when I'm teaching the Word, for although I'm talking *about* God, in reality, I'm talking *to* Him. I'm saying, "Lord, it's amazing that we can march behind You. It's awesome that You have captured the Enemy by Your authority. It's comforting that You are our victory."

A HEARING AID
A Topical Study of
2 CORINTHIANS 2:4

I have discovered that the more familiar with the Word we become, the more vulnerable we are to being tone-deaf. Oh, we know the Scriptures. We have our theology down pat. We know where to find all the stories, and we can give the references for major points of doctrine. We know the Word—but are we hearing its tone?

This is the question Paul is up against—for although he had written the Corinthians a letter that was admittedly corrective, failing to hear the tone with which he had written it, they felt he was unduly harsh with them. In this, I am reminded of another incident in Scripture in which tone played an important role. . . .

> "Father, glorify Thy name," Jesus said only days before His crucifixion.
>
> Regarding the voice from heaven that answered, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again," some heard thunder, others the voice of an angel (see John 12:28, 29).

This intrigues me. Within a single group of people on the same spot at the same time hearing the same voice, some thought it thundered menacingly, while others thought it spoke angelically.

So, too, we can give a single sermon or Bible study, and some will hear it as thunder, while others will hear it as a message from heaven. It all depends upon what's happening in the heart.

> *And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be*

opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.

Mark 7:32–35

A deaf man who could neither hear nor speak was brought to Jesus, the Great Physician, the Ultimate Hearing Specialist. And as soon as this man's ears were opened, he could speak plainly as well—for the way we hear truly affects the way we speak.

So let me ask you, how is your hearing?

A Hearing Test

> Realizing they were naked, Adam and Eve hid from God. And as they were hiding, they heard a voice in the garden, calling, "Adam, where art thou?" (Genesis 3:9).

You know the words, but what tone do you hear? Do you hear a Cosmic Cop saying, "Where are you? Wait until I get my hands on you!"? That is the way most people hear Genesis 3:9. But they hear it wrong. This is not the voice of an angry God tracking down a rebellious sinner. Rather, it's the cry of a heartbroken father looking for a lost son. God doesn't say, "Where were you?" or "How could you?" He says, "Where *are* you? Look at your situation. Allow Me to cover you" (see Genesis 3:21).

Shortly thereafter, God said to Adam, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Genesis 3:19). If you hear Him saying this in anger or frustration, you're missing the true tone of His voice, for God knew it was work that would keep Adam and the rest of us out of trouble.

The chapter ends with God driving Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden lest they eat of the tree of life and live forever in their fallen, sinful state. Yet many people read this story and see an angry God raining punishment on sinful man. They read the words, but they don't hear the tone.

How do you hear John 8?

> They caught her in the very act of adultery. With stones in hand, they were ready to execute her as prescribed by the Law of Moses.
>
> Jesus defended her, protected her, and then looked at her and said, "Woman, where are thine accusers? Dost no man condemn thee?"
>
> And she looked at Him and said, "No man condemns me, Lord."
>
> Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more" (see John 8:11).

How do you hear this story? Most people hear it as, "Woman, I'm letting you off the hook this time. Go your way. But don't let it happen again." But this perception is wrong on at least two counts. . . .

First, *gune,* the word translated "woman," was a term of deepest possible respect toward a woman. It was the same term Jesus used to address His own mother (John 2:4).

Second, "Sin no more," was not said as a stern word of warning, but rather as a loving word of hope. "Go your way free because now you don't have to sin anymore."

My heart melts when I hear the tone of the Lord's voice—not thundering a warning, but rather delivering an angelic message of comfort for you and me.

"It is finished," He cries (see John 19:30). And the world hears it as the cry of a tragic hero, the end of a sad situation. But wait. The Gospel writers tell us He cried with a loud voice—not the whimper of defeat, but the shout of victory.

"It is finished! The price is paid. The work is done. You are free," He said—a declaration that caused the earth to quake, graves to open, and the veil in the temple to split from top to bottom. The magnitude of His statement was such that had His hands not been nailed to the Cross, I'm convinced they would have been raised in the air in victory. Yet we miss this completely if we don't hear the tone.

How is your hearing? What tone do you hear when you read the Word? Do you hear the thunder of condemnation and damnation—or do you hear the heart of a Father who loves you so much that He gave His Son for you?

A Hearing Aid

James gives us a hearing aid to ensure that we hear the heart of the Lord as we read His Word. . . .

> *But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.*
>
> James 3:14–16

This is the filter through which to view every sermon or Bible study, every commentary or devotional. Whatever causes envy or strife, confusion, bitterness, or anguish is not from heaven.

> *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*
>
> James 3:17

Conversely, you can be sure that whatever is pure and peaceable, gentle and merciful, whatever is approachable and comforting is from the heart of the Father.

In other words, the characteristics James gave describe perfectly the personality and nature of Jesus Christ. Therefore, when you hear a sermon, read a book, or have morning devotions, all you have to ask yourself is, "Does this sound like Jesus—the One who ate with sinners and prostitutes; the One the common people heard gladly—or is it harsh and heavy, condemning and accusatory?" If it's not like Jesus, then what you're thinking, hearing, reading, or saying is not from above.

Jesus is pure and peaceable. Jesus is gentle. Jesus is easy to be approached. To those who want to know Him, He doesn't say, "Jump higher, run farther, try harder," but rather, "I stand at the door of your heart and knock. If you open the door, I'll gladly come in."

Because the only autobiographical statement Jesus ever made was, "I am meek and lowly of heart; My burden is easy and My load light," whatever is a burden to you or a weight upon you is not from Him.

Read the Word in the light of James 3:17. And as you do, you'll see not only words on the page, but you'll hear the heart of the Father.



3 2 Corinthians 3:1–3

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epis tles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

"Do we need letters to validate our ministry?" Paul asks. "Do we need credentials to make you understand that the Lord has called us to this work? No. You are our letters. You who have been born again and are now walking with the Lord are the proof of the ministry to which we've been called." In other words, Paul is saying, "The proof is in the pudding—and you are the pudding. Look and see the work that has taken place in your midst. Look at the fruit."

Fruit is always the name of the game. . . .

Following a failed insurrection against Moses in which two hundred fifty lost their lives, the children of Israel continued to question Moses' authority.

"Let every tribe bring a rod to place in the tabernacle," he said.

The next day, although the rest of the rods remained as they were, the rod of Moses had blossomed—the fruit being the validity of his ministry (Numbers 17).

I suggest it was to this account Jesus referred when, concerning true and false teachers, He said, "You will know them by their fruit" (see Matthew 7:20).

2 Corinthians 3:4, 5

And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;

"We're not boasting in who we are or what we've done," Paul says. "Our sufficiency comes from God by His grace alone."

2 Corinthians 3:6

Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

There were those at Corinth who came into the congregation, saying, "Paul is a lightweight. Sure, he talks about grace—but the real issue is the law. If you really want to prove your spirituality, you'll submit to the Jewish rite of circumcision."

Those who are under the law are miserable because of their own legalism. So what do they do? They seek to make others as miserable as they are, believing that the more miserable one is, the more spiritual he is.

2 Corinthians 3:7–11

But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if

that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.

The law was indeed glorious, as evidenced by the glow on Moses' face when he received it (Exodus 34). "Therefore," asks Paul, "if the law which brings condemnation and death is glorious—how much more glorious will be the ministry of the new covenant, the grace of God?"

2 Corinthians 3:12, 13

Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished.

Here, Paul points out something we would never have known otherwise. You see, we know from Exodus 34 that when Moses came down from the mountain with the law in hand, he covered his glowing face with a veil. One would assume he did this so that people wouldn't be blinded by the brightness of his face. But here Paul says Moses put a veil over his face so that the people of Israel wouldn't see the glow fading.

So, too, we might keep our rules and regulations for a day or two. Yes, we can shine for a while—but the glow fades quickly because we're sinners.

2 Corinthians 3:14–17

But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

The veil over the face of those who live by the Old Covenant blinds their own eyes to the reality and identity of their Messiah, Jesus Christ. That is why you can talk by the hour with Jewish people about the way Jesus perfectly fulfilled Old Testament prophecy—and they still won't see Him as

their Messiah. There's a veil over their eyes. And because this veil is done away in Christ, it is only as they turn to Christ that they are able to see clearly.

2 Corinthians 3:18

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Because there is none righteous, because none seeks after God (Romans 3:11), we are able to see the Lord only by His grace. Because He's lifted the veil from our eyes, we can look into His face. And in so doing, we are changed. We are changed not by a program, a practice, or a procedure. We are changed by a Person. We are changed by looking at Jesus—by spending time with Him, learning about Him, and worshiping Him.

Stay in the Scriptures, gang. Spend time in the Word daily. Come together for Bible study. Sing songs of adoration—for it's in worshiping, in studying, in looking at Him that you'll become like Him.



4

2 Corinthians 4:1, 2

Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

"By God's mercy, we walk in integrity," says Paul. "We're not using deceitful means to do something in the name of ministry." This is where Saul made such a mistake and where David did so well. Saul used the things of God to glorify himself, while David used his life to glorify God.

2 Corinthians 4:3, 4

> **But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.**

"Those who say the gospel we preach is shallow and unworkable in an attempt to ensnare you in legalism are blinded by Satan," says Paul. So, too, when we tell people the good news that their past, present, and future sins are paid for if they'll embrace the free gift of salvation; that in this life they will have a Friend who sticks closer than a brother, a Warrior-King who will give them victory, a Bridegroom who will truly love them; that when they die they will be ushered into heaven where they will live eternally—we wonder why wouldn't *everyone* become a believer?

Paul answers this question when he says the god of this world blinded the eyes of those who don't believe. This happened when Adam and Eve chose to believe the lies of the Serpent rather than to walk in obedience to the Father (Genesis 3). That is why Paul would tell Timothy that the servant of the Lord must "be gentle to all men, apt to teach and patient, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves . . . that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil who were taken captive by him at his will" (2 Timothy 2:24–26).

What does it mean to "oppose oneself "? It means to do that which is contrary to one's good. Thus, the reason we can witness until we're blue in the face and debate endlessly with a friend, coworker, or neighbor only to have them look at us with a blank stare is because they are held hostage, bound up, and blindfolded by Satan. Thus, they are unable to do that which would be to their eternal benefit.

So what should we do? We find the cure for spiritual blindness in a statement Jesus made after healing one who was physically blind. . . .

> Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.
>
> Matthew 12:29

The real issue is that Satan must first be bound before those who are held hostage can be set free. How does this happen? A few chapters later, Jesus said that whatever we bind on earth would be bound from heaven, and whatever we loose on earth would be loosed from heaven (Matthew 16:19). Therefore, before my neighbor, my loved one, my friend who's spiritually bound and blinded can ever see clearly enough to make a choice, Satan, the strong man, must be bound and the blindfold lifted.

How does this happen? The Old Testament picture of this New Testament principle is found in 2 Kings . . .

With the enemy soldiers drawing near to capture him, Elisha prayed . . .

> And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.
>
> 2 Kings 6:18

Was Elisha being vindictive or hateful? No, as we will see, Elisha's prayer was not for the purpose of retaliation, but for their salvation—similar to Hosea's prayer when he asked the Lord to put a hedge of thorns in front of his wife to keep her from pursuing adulterous relationships (Hosea 2:6).

Like Elisha, like Hosea, we must pray that the Lord would bind the steps of those who don't know Him in order that they wouldn't be able to continue in their path of destruction.

> And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria. And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.
>
> 2 Kings 6:19, 20

After binding the Syrians, Elisha loosed them by asking the Lord to open their eyes in order that they might see that he had led them to the king of Israel—the very one they sought. And that's exactly what we need to do.

First, we need to pray that the work of Satan would be bound. Then we need to pray that God's power would be loosed in order that people might see the One they were seeking all along.

The result?

> And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.
>
> 2 Kings 6:23

As changed men, the Syrians no longer attacked the people of God. So, too, the answer concerning the people we care about who don't know Jesus lies in prayer—in binding the work of the Enemy and releasing the power of God; in blinding their eyes to sin, and opening their eyes to the Savior. Without this, we witness in vain. The key is prayer. Oh, we know we should pray. But until we take seriously the necessity of Spirit-filled, intensive, persevering prayer, we'll never be as fruitful in evangelism as we would have had we prayed.

> **2 Corinthians 4:5**
>
> **For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.**

The Greek word translated "servants" is actually "slaves." Thus, Paul says to the Corinthians, "We preach not programs, not principles, not procedures, not ten steps or fifteen ideas—but Jesus Christ singularly. And we're simply your slaves to help you in your understanding of Him."

> **2 Corinthians 4:6**
>
> **For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**

Unlike the light on the face of Moses, the light of the glory of God as seen in the face of Jesus is a light that never fades. How do I know what God is

like? How do I know He's not vengeful and vindictive, angry, and upset? After all, I have certainly given Him plenty of reasons to be. But the face of the One who freed the woman taken in adultery and who, despite her reputation, commended the woman who washed His feet with her tears tells me differently.

- "Show us the Father and it will suffice us," Philip said.
- "He who hath seen Me hath seen the Father," Jesus answered (see John 14:9).

Both the face and the grace of God are revealed in the Person of Jesus.

2 Corinthians 4:7 (a)
But we have this treasure in earthen vessels . . .

In contrast to the beauty and grace of Jesus, Paul was earthy, indeed—as we all are. But this should not be surprising, considering the dust of which we're made (Psalm 103:14).

2 Corinthians 4:7 (b)
. . . that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

Our dustiness and earthiness serve to cause people to be just that much more impressed with the treasure of the beauty of Jesus inside of us.

***For topical study of 2 Corinthians 4:7 entitled "Cracked Pots," turn to page* 1116.**

2 Corinthians 4:8–12
We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made

manifest in our body. For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

It was piano craftsman Theodore Steinway who said that it is the forty thousand pounds of pressure exerted on the two hundred forty-five strings of a piano that creates beautiful harmony. Sometimes, it is only the pressure, the persecution we undergo that causes a song to resonate in the hearts of those with whom we share. Paul knew this. That is why he could say, "Good things are happening even in our tribulation and difficulty, for through our hard times, Jesus shines brighter."

2 Corinthians 4:13–16

We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

Quoting Psalm 116, Paul says, "I speak that which I believe—that the Lord will raise us up, that all things will work out for His glory." This same concept is present in the Book of Hebrews . . .

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

Hebrews 13:5, 6

"He hath said . . . that we may say . . ." To speak out words of faith in the time of difficulty is so important in the life of the believer. If all we talk

about is our frustration, pain, and sadness, we will faint. But if we speak that which He hath said—that He is with us always (Matthew 28:20), that all things work together for good to those who love God (Romans 8:28), that greater is He that is in us than He that is in the world (1 John 4:4)—we will be renewed day by day.

In Hebrews 11, we read that the worlds were framed—as a carpenter frames a house—by the Word of God. So, too, we frame the world in which we live by the words we speak. Speak words of grumpiness, doubt, fear, cynicism—and that's the world you and your family will inhabit. But speak words of faith, hope, and joy even when you're going through hard times—and such will be the characteristics of your world. Paul could have been murmuring and complaining, doubting, whimpering, and crying. But that's not what he chose to do. "Yes, we're going through tough times," he said, "but we have the spirit of faith."

2 Corinthians 4:17, 18

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Paul refers to his afflictions as light. Light? He was stoned, beaten, shipwrecked, thrown out on the open sea, cast into dungeons. "No problem," he says. "Those light afflictions are doing some heavyweight work in us."

Oh, to have the eyesight of Paul—to see whatever it is that we endure presently as light compared to the weight of God's glory.

CRACKED POTS

A Topical Study of
2 CORINTHIANS 4:7

Having initially been brought to an awareness of Jesus by a light that shone so bright it stopped him in his tracks, Paul shines a light on three important understandings for anyone who desires to shine brightly in the dark days that seem ready to engulf our culture. . . .

Light Reflected *from* Us

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world.

John 8:12

Ye are the light of the world.

Matthew 5:14

"I am the light of the world," Jesus said. Then He said to you and me, "You are the light of the world." Was He confused? Are there two lights? No. Think of it this way: Jesus is the Sun, the source of light. We are like the moon. We live in dark times. Yet, as we walk with Jesus, we reflect His light.

The moon is not visible during a lunar eclipse because the earth comes between the sun and the moon. In other words, when the world gets in the way, the "ministry" of the moon can no longer be seen.

How about you and me? We are to be the light of the world. Yet the degree to which we allow the pleasures, pursuits, and passions of the world to creep into our lives will be the degree to which the Light is eclipsed. On the other hand, if we look at Jesus without allowing the world to creep in, His reflection will be clear in our lives. That is why Paul tells us to behold the Lord with an open face—to remove anything in our life that comes between the Son and us. If we do, we'll shine not with the fading light of legalism, but with the glow of the liberty in the Spirit—which never fades.

Light Imparted *to* Us

> *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 4:6, 7

By His Spirit, God places the treasure of His Son into the clay pots of our lives. This is like placing the Hope diamond in a Glad trash bag. After all, it's only logical that if one has a thing of beauty and value, he would have a gold-covered box or something exquisite to contain it. Therefore, it's a mystery, indeed, as to why God would place the treasure of His Son in clay pots like us—until we realize that God does this so that the excellency of the treasure would be that much more brilliant.

Light Shining *Through* Us

> *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 4:8–10

Finally, Paul says that whenever we go through hard times, there is opportunity for the light to shine forth through the breaking of the vessel. . . .

As they charged oppressive taxes and plundered their cities, the Midianites provoked the children of Israel mercilessly—until God called a reluctant Gideon to deliver His people. When Gideon blew the trumpet and called men to march with him into battle against the Midianites, thirty-two thousand men responded.

"There are 145,000 Midianites, and only 32,000 of us. I don't like the odds," said Gideon.

"Neither do I," said God. "There's too many of you." So He instructed Gideon to tell anyone afraid of the battle to go home.

Twenty-two thousand walked way.

"Ten thousand is still too many," God said, and weeded out an additional ninety-seven hundred men who drank face-first from the river rather than keeping an eye out for the enemy. The three hundred remaining men—those who didn't spend unnecessary time doing necessary tasks, those who realized the seriousness of their call and the reality of the enemy—were the men who accompanied Gideon into battle.

Following the strategy given him by God, Gideon gave each man a trumpet and a torch within an earthen vessel. Then he positioned them on the hills surrounding the valley of Jezreel, where the Midianites lay sleeping. On a given signal, they blew their trumpets, broke the clay pots, and shouted, "The sword of the Lord and of

Gideon." Hearing the sound, the men of Midian stumbled out of their tents, saw the lights surrounding them, and no doubt assumed that each torch represented not a single soldier, but an entire division.

"We're surrounded by thousands!" they cried. In their confusion, the Midianites began attacking one another (see Judges 7).

Thus, there was victory in the dark night because the light caused the enemy to be confused and beaten back. But the light could only be seen when the earthen vessels were broken.

This is why Paul could say, "Yes, we are persecuted; yes, we are crushed —but it doesn't bother us because through this, the light of the Lord comes flooding out of us in ways that beat back the darkness and deception of Satan."

As I ponder Paul's words, two things happen.

First, the light goes on within me. I understand that the Lord allows me to go through times of breaking so that those around me might see His reality shining forth from me.

Second, I lighten up as I realize that, because I'm just a clay pot, I don't have to put on an act or come across as a "religious" person. As a result, all glory goes to the power and mercy, the greatness and kindness of God, who placed in me the unspeakable gift, the incredible treasure of His Son.



5 After speaking of his affliction in chapter 4, it is no wonder that Paul's heart turns toward heaven here in chapter 5. . . .

2 Corinthians 5:1 (a)

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved . . .

Paul realized that the body he lived in was just a tent. As a tentmaker, Paul must have appreciated the craftsmanship of a well-made tent. Yet he also knew that tents are meant to be temporary. Thus, he says, "Don't take your physical situation too seriously. Your body is fine to camp out in for a

while, but before long, the tent will begin to sag; a stake or two will be lost along the way; seams will begin to tear."

Our Father is so good to gently remind us every time we look in the mirror that we're rushing toward eternity. Paul was one who truly understood that his body was only a temporary dwelling.

2 Corinthians 5:1 (b)

. . . we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Most people think of heaven as a big Beverly Hills in which everyone has a mansion, and there, on the corner of Glory Lane and Hallelujah Avenue, is theirs. But if the tent, or tabernacle, in the verse before us speaks of our earthly body, the house not made with hands must speak of our resurrected body—a glorious body custom-made for eternity.

2 Corinthians 5:2

For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.

We groan because our tents are showing signs of use, because our bodies are wearing out.

2 Corinthians 5:3, 4

If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

"Nakedness" in this context speaks of disembodiment. Paul is setting straight the misunderstanding that when a person dies, he becomes a disembodied spirit—an idea completely contradictory to Scripture. Buddha was wrong. The goal of man is not to reach Nirvana, the "state of the snuffed-out candle." Rather, it is to inhabit the body prepared for us that will make the one we're living in now a tent by comparison.

2 Corinthians 5:5 (a)

Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God . . .

Because God "doeth all things well" (see Mark 7:37), I promise you that even though we may have questions now about the nature of our resurrected bodies, when we get to heaven, not one person will say, "Boy, I wish I had my old body back."

2 Corinthians 5:5 (b)

. . . who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

The Greek word translated "earnest" is used in reference to an engagement ring. Likewise, we pay "earnest" money toward something we're committed to purchasing. Paul tells us we can be sure that something great is going to happen because God has given us the earnest, the "down payment," the "engagement ring" of His Holy Spirit.

The times you have been overwhelmed by God's artistry as you look at a sunset, when you have been amazed by His grandeur as seen in a starry night, when you have been awed by His power, grace, and goodness as you look at the ocean, your family, or His Word are all "engagement rings"—sneak previews, down payments toward what lies ahead.

2 Corinthians 5:6–8

Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

Although we understand that the Lord is all around us and lives inside of us, we, nonetheless, walk by faith rather than sight.

"And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity?" asks Job, "for now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be" (Job 7:21). On the basis of this single reference, some teach that when a person dies, his soul sleeps in the grave until the Rapture of the church. Yet, because God called Job's statements

"words without knowledge" (Job 38:2), it is faulty theology that is based solely upon Job.

As is seen in the text before us, the moment we are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord. This is an understanding seen most clearly in Jesus' words to the thief on the cross when He said, "*Today* you will be with Me in paradise" (see Luke 23:43).

2 Corinthians 5:9

Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

"In light of eternity, in light of where we're going, in light of the new body awaiting us, we labor," Paul says. And in the remainder of the chapter, he will go on to give three reasons he endured beatings, shipwrecks, and persecution in addition to the lack of appreciation from the very people for whom he laid down his life.

2 Corinthians 5:10

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

The Corinthians would have readily understood Paul's reference to the judgment, or *bema* seat—for that was where athletes were given their rewards. Paul tells us that we all will stand before the reward stand, the judgment seat of Christ, where everything we've done will be judged. In 1 Corinthians 3, he shed further light on this when he said that all of our works —teaching a Sunday-school class or a Bible study, tithing or witnessing— will be judged by fire.

2 Corinthians 5:11

Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

The fear of the Lord motivated Paul in ministry. This was not fear that God would hurt him, but rather that he would hurt God through his sin and stupidity. Having been caught up into the third heaven, Paul knew that one day we will all stand before the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and see Him in His majesty and love. Paul wanted to spare anyone from saying, "Why did I waste my time on that hobby, spend my money on that insignificant trinket, squander my energy so foolishly? Why did I take so lightly that which Jesus did for me on the Cross of Calvary?"

2 Corinthians 5:12, 13

For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart. For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.

Paul is parenthetically saying, "The reason I'm telling you what motivates us in ministry is not to boast, but in order that you might be able to give a defense to those who criticize you for listening to us."

2 Corinthians 5:14, 15

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

Paul's second motivation was the love of Christ—not his love for Christ, but Christ's for him.

A few years ago, a ministry magazine reported that over 80 percent of those involved in full-time ministry experience "ministerial burn-out," which is causing clergymen to leave the ministry at a higher rate than those who are entering the ministry, and which results in the average pastor staying in the pulpit for less than three years.

"The Lord loves me," Paul said. "He died for me. And He rose again that I might live for Him." Thus, it was the love of Christ that kept Paul from burning out and giving up.

2 Corinthians 5:16

Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.

As a member of the Sanhedrin, it is very likely Paul had heard Jesus speak in Jerusalem. Certainly Paul had heard about Jesus and was determined to put an end to His followers—when suddenly he saw the light on the Damascus Road (Acts 9). From that point on, Paul no longer knew Jesus after the flesh, for he saw Him in a different light. As a result, Paul saw all men differently. He didn't see them in their earthly bodies. He saw who they could become in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

"I'm a believer, but I don't feel like a new creation," you say. Check out Genesis 1, where we read that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. But the earth became formless and void when Lucifer was cast out of heaven. So God spoke a re-creation into being (Genesis 1:1–3).

The same is true with humanity. God made us in His image, but we became "without form and void"—wiped out when we chose to submit to Satan. So the Spirit of God began to move upon the face of the water—upon the pages of the Word as we heard it opened to us. "Let there be light," He said—and when at last we saw the light, the recreation process within us was put into motion.

2 Corinthians 5:18–20

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

The third motivating reason for Paul's ministry was the joy of service. "We get to be ambassadors," he says. "We get to share the word of reconciliation, to give out the good news of the gospel." So, too, as ambassadors of the kingdom, we get to tell the girl who works behind the counter at 7–11, the boy who bags our groceries at the grocery store, the guy who picks up our garbage on Wednesday morning, our next-door neighbor, our co-worker, that their sins past, present, and future are truly, totally forgiven.

2 Corinthians 5:21

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

As Jesus hung on the Cross, a spear was thrust into Him, drawing forth water and blood, and opening His side so that we might, positionally, enter in. Jesus opened the way for us through the rending of His own flesh. That is why we can tell anyone and everyone that they, too, can be tucked away in Christ; that when God looks at them, He will see only the righteousness of His Son; that they can have a fresh start as a new creation. What a fabulous truth!

May the fear of the Lord motivate us. May the love of Christ constrain us. May the joy of service thrill us. May we, like Paul, say, "No matter what problems we face or what challenges come our way, it's an unbelievable privilege to be an ambassador of the King."



6

2 Corinthians 6:1 (a)

We then, as workers together with him . . .

As we saw in chapter 5, we are ambassadors for Christ, sharing the Good News of the gospel with everyone we meet. But here's the most delightful part—we are workers not just *for* Him, but *with* Him. He doesn't send us on an assignment, wishing us luck as we leave. No, moment by moment He's with us as we talk to, share with, and love people. And He's with them, too! This gives me a great deal of confidence in ministry.

> *If you were hungry, I could share with you my favorite lunch—a peanut butter and pickle sandwich. But I would not be certain it would minister to you. Maybe you'd like it, but maybe you wouldn't. Thus, it would be with a certain amount of apprehension that I would offer it to you.*

There are a number of things we could offer to people about which we could feel some hesitancy. But when we share Jesus Christ, all hesitancy dissipates—for He is guaranteed. Consequently, to the person who comes to me with a troubled heart, I can say, "Let me pray with you right now because Jesus is truly right here, and He will give you peace. He'll walk with you through this valley. He'll make Himself known to you in the right way at the right time. I *know* this to be so."

I've yet to send a person out to seek the Lord who has come back saying, "It didn't work. I prayed. I read my Bible. I talked to Him. I waited on Him. But it didn't work." That's because the promise of James 4:8 is that if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us—not that He might draw near—but that He *will*.

> **2 Corinthians 6:1 (b), 2**
>
> **. . . beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)**

"As we work with Him," Paul says, "I remind you of the immediacy, the urgency of receiving what the Lord wants to do for you." Truly, now is the time for each of us to be saved—not just born again eternally, but to be saved from that which would hold us back presently.

In Genesis 6:3, God says, "My Spirit will not always strive, or wrestle, with men." Therefore, we know He will not pull on the strings of your heart or whisper in the ear of your spirit indefinitely. If you continually say no to Him, there will come a point when He will let your decision stand—a decision Jesus would later call the blasphemy of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 12:31), the one and only unpardonable sin.

2 Corinthians 6:3
Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.

Because of the importance and urgency of our calling, we cannot allow anything into our lives or ministry that would give people a reason not to respond.

2 Corinthians 6:4 (a)
But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God . . .

People often ask me what school they should attend in order to be approved for ministry. Check out the school in which Paul was enrolled. . . .

2 Corinthians 6:4 (b), 5
. . . in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprison ments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings;

Paul attended a school wherein he was imprisoned, beaten, and starved. He attended the school that required much patience. Who's approved in ministry? The one who goes to the school of patience. So many people launch off in ministry before they're really ready. Their hearts are good, their intentions right—but so were the heart and intentions of Moses. . . .

Second in command in all of Egypt, his heart was moved as he saw the bondage of his Jewish brothers. Wanting to help, when he saw an Egyptian beating a Jewish slave, Moses killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. But when he realized word of his deed was

spreading, he fled for his life and spent forty years watching his father-in-law's sheep before he was ready to lead God's people.

Paul was one who would have been eager to minister immediately. Instead, he was sent to the Arabian desert for three years. And even after that, he ministered not in Jerusalem, but in relative obscurity in places like Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, and Philippi.

2 Corinthians 6:6–8 (a)

By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report . . .

What courses did Paul take in the school of patience and persecution? Homiletics? No. Systematic theology? No. Hermeneutics? No. Greek? No. Hebrew? No. Church growth? No. He enrolled in pureness, intimacy, kindness, longsuffering, and love unfeigned. Wouldn't those be great course requirements in a seminary?

2 Corinthians 6:8 (b), 9

. . . as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed;

Did Paul finish his education with a Master of Theology or a Doctor of Divinity degree? No, he finished being thought a deceiver, as unknown—not received by the intellectuals in Jerusalem. Although Paul may have been unknown in Jerusalem, he was well known in hell. . . .

Going about casting out demons, the sons of Sceva said, "We adjure you in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches, Come out."

"Jesus we know," the demons answered, "and Paul we know. But who are you?" (see Acts 19:15).

The demons understood Paul was a real threat, that he was one who would impact their kingdom of darkness and death and beat it back in the name of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 6:10

As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

Although he faced continual persecution, the tears Paul shed were not for himself, but over the state of others (Acts 20:18, 19). What about us? If two vials were placed before you, one labeled "Tears shed for yourself" and the other "Tears shed for others," how would they compare?

2 Corinthians 6:11, 12

O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels.

In other words, "Our hearts are open to you," said Paul. "Any tension you feel is not the result of anything we feel toward you, but the result of your own emotions." This is an important understanding, for sometimes if I'm with a person I feel is not very open to me, it could be that I'm not open to him.

2 Corinthians 6:13

Now for a recompence in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged.

"Because we are approved ministers—through the school we attended, the courses we took, the degree we were given—accept our ministry to you with largeness of heart," says Paul.

2 Corinthians 6:14 (a)

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers . . .

"I want to be big-hearted and open-minded, so I'm going to marry her or develop a business partnership with him, even though he or she isn't a believer."

"Wait a minute," says Paul. "Don't misunderstand. Be big toward your brothers and sisters in the Lord. But be careful you don't err by being yoked in partnership or relationship with an unbeliever."

> Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
>
> Matthew 11:28–30

The Greek word translated "easy" means "good fit." Because an ill-fitting yoke would cause chafing of the hide or even a dislocation of the animal's shoulder, yokes were custom-designed to ensure a perfect fit. No doubt Jesus knew whereof He spoke in using this analogy, for the Greek word translated "carpenter," used concerning Joseph and, by implication, Jesus, is *tekton,* from which we get our word "technical." The *tekton* was not the framer, but rather the finish carpenter, a master craftsman. Jesus and His father, Joseph, were master craftsmen. Thus, there is historical evidence to support the tradition that the specialty in their carpenter shop was yokes.

"Take My yoke upon you," Jesus says. "It will fit you perfectly, and the load you're pulling will become light as you link with Me." But here's the problem. Many of us are like the Corinthians. We are not yoked to Jesus exclusively. Rather, we find ourselves yoked to unbelievers. "Whether relationally or vocationally, don't yoke with someone who is not linked to Jesus," says Paul. And then he gives four reasons why. . . .

> **2 Corinthians 6:14 (b), 15**
>
> **. . . for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?**

The first reason we are not to be unequally yoked is due to the nature of the believer. "He's so strong in character," she says. "A lot of believers are flaky, but he's so steady and stable. And I know he'll get saved someday. He promised me he would come to church. Sure, he's not a believer yet, but what's the big deal? I see potential. So I'm going to yoke myself with him in marriage."

> Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled. Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together. Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together.
>
> Deuteronomy 22:9–11

Paul reaches back into the Old Testament, pulls out this Scripture, and says to you and me, "Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers." It won't work because the nature of the believer and the unbeliever are so different. Oh, you might be able to get along now, but down the road, you'll experience pain and unnecessary heartache.

"We're not really serious," the Christian guy says of his unbelieving girlfriend. Sure, his intention might not be to marry her initially, but something happens unintentionally, which limits his ability to see clearly. I can't count how many people I have counseled who want out of their marriages because of this very issue. How much pain and heartbreak would be avoided if we took to heart this straightforward, simple command.

> **2 Corinthians 6:16**
>
> **And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**

The second reason we are not to be unequally yoked is because of the effect it has on others. If there's a rotten beam overhead and the church roof collapses during Sunday service, the whole congregation is affected by the state of a single beam. So, too, because we are the temple of God, because

we're linked together as living stones, because we're fit together as a holy habitation, if you're linked with an unbeliever, it will affect the entire body of Christ.

> *As they entered the Promised Land, the walled city of Jericho loomed large before them. "I will give you this city," God declared. "But when I do, make sure you don't take anything from it. You'll be able to spoil other cities, but not Jericho."*
>
> *True to His Word, God did, indeed, give them the city. And the people moved on—except for one man. Seeing a Babylonian garment he just had to have, Achan took it, along with some gold and silver, and hid it in his tent. Unaware of Achan's disobedience, the Israelites went on to battle the little city of Ai—where they were whipped soundly.*
>
> *"How could this be?" Joshua cried to the Lord.*
>
> *"There is sin in the camp," the Lord answered.*
>
> *Achan's sin affected the entire nation. And people died in battle because of his sin. (Joshua 7).*

When we choose to ignore the way of the Lord, to rebel and disobey, it affects our sons, daughters, the church corporately, and the believing community.

> **2 Corinthians 6:17**
>
> **Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,**

The third reason we are not to be unequally yoked is due to the command of the Scriptures.

> Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.
>
> Isaiah 52:11

Does this mean we shouldn't have conversations with sinners? Of course not. Jesus was called a Friend of Sinners (Luke 7:34). But the important thing to note is that wherever Jesus went, He permanently and radically impacted sinners. Therefore, when you walk into places where worldly stuff is going on, if people start turning to God and repenting from their sin, go for it! If you're truly impacting the place you're in—excellent! But if the place is impacting you, causing your own spirit to sag, get out. Pull away. Back off immediately.

"Oh, but I'm mature in the Lord," you say. "So it's okay for me to go into this business venture even though my partners are unbelievers."

Is it really? I refer you to what happened to one of the greatest men of history. . . .

Jehoshaphat was a uniquely blessed man. Revival happened around him; blessings flowed from him; good things came to him. And then, as his life is coming to an end, there's a P.S. in his story. . . .

> And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly: And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish. . . .
>
> 2 Chronicles 20:35, 36 (a)

A godly Jehoshaphat joined with an ungodly Ahaziah in the shipping business. But the venture sunk.

Don't be like Jehoshaphat, saying, "This might not be God's best for me—but I know my ship will come in eventually." A person might become rich financially by joining with an unbeliever, but what does it profit him if he gain the whole world and lose his soul (Mark 8:36)? What good is it if it causes him to be only a shell of what he once was spiritually?

What's your legacy, Dad? At one time, you were about the things of the kingdom. You were a servant, a leader, a worker. But now you're known as a business whiz. How tragic. Don't be yoked with unbelievers in any endeavor that will cause you to sink spiritually.

2 Corinthians 6:18

And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

The fourth reason we are not to be unequally yoked is because of the desire of the Father. "Separate yourself from the unbeliever, and you will be My sons and daughters," He says. Does this mean that if we are unequally yoked in marriage or business, we are not His children? No. We who have opened our hearts to Jesus Christ are children of the Father regardless. But if we are linked to the world, it limits His ability to be a Father to us. Think of it this way. . . .

If I wanted to take my family out to dinner, but my kids were all muddy from playing outside, I'd say, "I want to take you out to dinner. Go wash up."

Now, if they responded by saying, "We don't want to wash. We like this mud," they'd still be my children, but I couldn't take them out for dinner.

So, too, God says to us, "I will be a Father to you, taking you great places, doing wonderful things for you if you're separate and clean. If you're not separate, you're still My child, but I can't do for you what I would have done in and with and through you had you separated yourself from the world."

Let God be the Father He wants to be to you and your family by separating yourself from unclean partnerships and relationships, activities and priorities. As you do, never lose sight of the yoke He carried, when, in the Person of Jesus Christ, He carried the Cross on which He would shed His blood for you.



7 When Paul wrote this letter, he did not write it in chapters. In fact, there were no chapter divisions whatsoever in the Bible until the late 1300s. At that time, someone added chapter divisions in order to help people locate passages more easily. Then in the 1500s, someone divided the chapters into

verses. And for the most part, the job these scholars did is excellent. But every once in a while, one wonders what the reasoning was behind their choices. Second Corinthians 7:1 is one such example . . .

2 Corinthians 7:1 (a)
Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh . . .

Verse 1 of chapter 7 should really be the last verse of chapter 6 because it's a continuation of the promises to which Paul referred in verses 16–18, wherein God promised He would dwell with us and be a Father to us. "Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves," Paul says. What does this mean? The Old Testament picture of this New Testament principle is found in the fifth chapter of 2 Kings. . . .

In the Old Testament, leprosy is a very appropriate picture of sin, for it begins seemingly insignificantly, but spreads insidiously. When Naaman, a prominent Syrian ruler who had contracted this terrible disease, was told by his servant girl that there was a prophet in Israel who could cure him, he sent a message to the king of Israel, who, in turn, sent for Elisha. Expecting Elisha to pronounce some sort of magical incantation over him, Naaman was "wroth" when Elisha told him to wash in the Jordan River seven times. After all, Naaman thought the Jordan nothing more than a muddy creek compared to the rivers of his own country. Thus, Scripture says he "turned and went away in a rage."

But his servants didn't give up so easily. "If Elisha had asked you to do something difficult, you would have done it," they said to Naaman. "Therefore, why not see what happens if you comply with this seemingly simple command?" So Naaman did, indeed, dip himself into the Jordan seven times—the number of completion—and he came out healed and whole.

Likewise, we who are eaten by the leprosy of sin must dip in the water over and over and over again. What water? The psalmist said in Psalm 119

that a young man shall cleanse his way by taking heed according to the Word. Jesus said in John 15 that we are clean through the Word He has spoken unto us. Paul declared in Ephesians 5 that we are washed by the water of the Word of God.

Let the Word of God cleanse you, and an amazing thing will happen. You may never become a scholar of theology, but as you submerge yourself in Scripture, the leprosy that once gnawed on you will begin to be cleansed. To those who are struggling with their flesh and looking for a quick answer, we need to say, "Plunge into Scripture. Plug into Bible study. Keep at it over and over and over again—for it's God's Word that will cleanse you and wash away the sin that hounds you."

2 Corinthians 7:1 (b)
. . . and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

We are to cleanse ourselves not only from the filthiness of the flesh, but also of the spirit. As believers, we are very cognizant of the sins of the flesh —those sins that are done outwardly and that seem to permeate our culture increasingly. Yet how often we fail to even notice the much more dangerous sins of the spirit—like gossiping, fault-finding, laziness, cynicism.

Jesus indicted the Pharisees for being more concerned about their rituals and ceremonial cleansing than about the big issues of justice and mercy (Matthew 23:23). That is why it is imperative that we take to heart what Paul is saying. Our flesh might appear quite presentable, but what about the grudges we keep, the anger that wells up within, the lustful thoughts, and the wrong perspectives we know need to be corrected? Paul says, "Cleanse yourselves from filthiness of both the flesh *and* the spirit. Deal with it *all*."

2 Corinthians 7:2
Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man.

I believe this is where the chapter should more logically begin. "Don't reject us," Paul says. "We have defrauded, cheated, or tricked no one."

2 Corinthians 7:3

I speak not this to condemn you: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with you.

"I'm not down on you," Paul tells the Corinthians. "I don't want to bring condemnation to you. You're in our hearts; we live and die with you."

2 Corinthians 7:4–6 (a)

Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation. For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us . . .

I love this Scripture. If you're going through a hard season in your life, know this: God loves to comfort those who feel cast down. Blessed be the Father of mercy, the God of *all* comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3).

2 Corinthians 7:6 (b)

. . . by the coming of Titus.

When Paul was going through the wringer internally, externally, emotionally, and physically, how did God comfort him? Through Titus. This amazes me. You see, Titus was one of Paul's students, one of his disciples. After sending him to Corinth with his first letter, Paul says it was when Titus returned that he was built up.

I'm afraid my reaction would have been, "Oh, it's just Titus. Lord, why didn't You send me someone famous or deep? Billy Graham perhaps. But Titus? He's just one of my boys. How can he help me?"

I think of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. As He sweat great drops of blood while He prayed with intensity, an angel came and strengthened Him (Luke 22:43). Jesus could have said, "I'm way above the angels." Instead, He received the ministry of the angel. So, too, Paul received encouragement from Titus because he recognized an important principle: Often the Lord

comes to us in the unexpected person at an unexpected time in an unexpected way. . . .

- "We know Him," they said. "He's the carpenter's son" (see Mark 6:3). But they were wrong. He was the Son of God.
- Mary wept at the tomb, mistaking the Lord for a gardener (John 20:15).
- On the road to Emmaus, the travelers thought Jesus was a stranger (Luke 24:18).
- On the Sea of Galilee, His disciples thought Jesus was a ghost (Matthew 14:26).

Don't miss your Titus, gang. It might be your son or daughter. It might be a neighbor or co-worker. It might be someone you would never think had much to offer, but they'll come to you with words of encouragement—if you're wise enough to listen. Many people miss out, waiting for a pastor or a prophet, because they fail to recognize the Lord in the person sitting right next to them.

2 Corinthians 7:7–9

And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more. For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.

"At first, I regretted sending my first letter," Paul says. "But, due to your growth from it, I no longer regret it." Many of us regret things we've said, written, or done. Like Paul's, our heart may have been right, but then we second-guess our actions. The solution? Do your best at any given moment—

be it in teaching, witnessing, or sharing. And then commit it to God and forget about it because God sees your heart.

2 Corinthians 7:10

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

"Godly sorrow leads to salvation," Paul says.

"But weren't the Corinthian believers already saved?" you ask.

Absolutely.

Then what does this mean?

Soteria, the Greek word translated "salvation," means more than simply being born again. When the Scriptures talk about salvation, they speak of the full orb of God's blessing—not only of being born again eternally, but of being saved from bondage and pain presently.

What brings about this kind of salvation?

Paul says the answer is repentance.



For topical study of 2 Corinthians 7:8–10, see "Real Repentance" below.

2 Corinthians 7:11

For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

True repentance doesn't say, "Maybe I'll get to it next year." No, true repentance says, "This is wrong, and I'm going to deal with it now—with finality and certainty, no matter the cost."

2 Corinthians 7:12

Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you.

Any parent knows the easiest thing to do is to ignore the problems he sees in his children. But that's not the right thing. If you love your kids, you deal with issues through dialogue and discipline.

So, too, concerning the issue of immorality in the church, Paul says, "I did this that you might know that we care about you in the sight of God and that we want you to do well."

2 Corinthians 7:13, 14

Therefore we were comforted in your comfort: yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all. For if I have boasted any thing to him of you, I am not ashamed; but as we spake all things to you in truth, even so our boasting, which I made before Titus, is found a truth.

This interests me because the church at Corinth was far from perfect. Yet Paul finds himself boasting about them. Such was the bigness of his heart, the sureness of his faith.

2 Corinthians 7:15, 16

And his inward affection is more abundant toward you, whilst he remembereth the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling ye received him. I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things.

"You received Titus and responded to the Word we shared. Good for you, Corinthians," says Paul to this church so dear to his heart.

REAL REPENTANCE
A Topical Study of
2 CORINTHIANS 7:8–10

From Genesis through Revelation, God's men came on the scene and consistently said, "Here's the key: Repent."

- From the steps of the ark, Noah didn't look out at the crowd and say, "Something good is going to happen to you!" No, he said, "Repent" (Genesis 6).
- It wasn't for saying, "I'm okay, you're okay," that Joel was confronted by the high priest. It was because he said, "Rend your heart. Get right. Repent" (see Joel 2:13).
- Daniel was in the lions' den not because he said, "Inch by inch, anything's a cinch," but because his message was, "You have been weighed in the balance and found lacking" (see Daniel 5:27).
- Jeremiah was in the pit not for preaching, "The me I see is the me I'll be," but for calling a nation to repentance.
- John the Baptist lost his head not because he preached, "Smile, God loves you," but because he told people to turn from wickedness and repent (Matthew 3:2).
- When Jesus Himself came on the scene, the first message He would bring would not be, "God loves you and so do I," but, "Repent, the kingdom of God is among you" (see Mark 1:15).
- In the Book of Revelation, we read that the two witnesses will be killed and left lying in the streets of Jerusalem not because their message is, "God's in His heaven and all's right with the world," but because, dressed in sackcloth, they will call people to repent (Revelation 11).

We need to understand that the key to unlocking the full blessing of salvation is found in repentance.

What is repentance?

It's a word that simply means "to change direction." In other words, if you were going to the left, you go right; if you were going down, you go up. Contrary to popular belief, repentance is not an emotion. It's an action. Most people think repentance means feeling bad. But to repent simply means to change direction—not a quarter turn, but a total about-face.

"Godly sorrow works repentance," Paul says, "but the sorrow of the world leads to death."

> If you go to Pelican Bay penitentiary, you'll see people who are really sorry—sorry they robbed that bank, sorry they murdered that man. But have they repented? Not necessarily, for theirs is primarily the sorrow of the world—sorrow about being caught. That is why the lower house of one state legislature passed a bill forbidding weight-lifting in its penitentiaries. Innately realizing the lack of true repentance, legislators concluded that weight-lifting in jail produces nothing more than super criminals. Praise God, in the hearts of many inmates, there is true repentance—but in the majority of instances, such is not the case.

Paul identifies two kinds of sorrow—worldly sorrow that leads one to be hung up with guilt, and godly sorrow that leads to repentance. I believe these two types of sorrow can best be illustrated by looking at the stories of two men remarkably similar in many ways—both having left everything to follow the Rabbi from Galilee, both having walked with Him for three years. After failing on the same exact day, however, one experienced worldly sorrow that led to death; the other godly sorrow that led to repentance and salvation. . . .

Hung Up by Guilt

Determined to betray the One with whom he had walked daily, to whom he had listened closely, Judas cut a deal in the temple and sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver—the price of a slave. But after placing an identifying kiss on Jesus' cheek, sorrow filled the heart of the man from Carioth—not the godly sorrow that leads to repentance, but the sorrow of the world that would culminate in his death.

> *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself . . .*
>
> Matthew 27:3 (a)

Judas didn't repent to the Lord. He repented in himself, perhaps regretting nothing more than the messiness of the situation. He took the silver to the temple and tried to return it. The priests, however, would have nothing to do with it. So Judas hurled it to the floor of the temple in an act that demanded their participation due to the fact that only the priests were allowed in the temple.

Then, after forcing the priests to deal with the blood money, this one who was hung up by guilt hanged himself on the branch of a tree.

Why?

Old Testament law clearly prescribed that the punishment for one who bore false witness was to be the same punishment unfairly borne by the person about whom he lied (Deuteronomy 19:16–19). Therefore, knowing Jesus was about to be nailed to a tree, Judas, either intentionally or subconsciously, hanged himself on a tree.

Held Up in Glory

At the same time Judas was betraying Jesus, Peter was denying Jesus. In fact, there's a remarkable parallel between Judas and Peter. . . .

- Both were called devils by Jesus.

  Of Judas, Jesus said, "Have not I chosen you twelve and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70)

  And to Peter, He said, "Get thee behind me, Satan," when Peter insisted Jesus would not die (Matthew 16:23).

- Jesus warned both Judas and Peter they would fail.

  "He who dips his bread with Me will deny Me," He said concerning Judas (see Matthew 26:23).

  "Before the cock crows, you'll deny Me thrice," He said to Peter (see Matthew 26:34).

- Both were given opportunity to turn from their sin.

  "Friend, what seekest thou?" Jesus asked Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane, thereby saying that even then He considered Judas a friend (Matthew 26:50).

  And as Peter cursed in the courtyard, Jesus looked at him (Luke 22:61)—*not, I believe, with a look of condemnation, but rather with a look that said, "Peter, I know what you're doing. But remember what I told you. I'm not through with you."*

- Both repented.

  Judas repented in himself (Matthew 27:3).

  Peter wept bitterly (Matthew 26:75)—*not a tear or two, but a deep, heaving cry.*

Yet one man goes down to the bottom of the heap in the history of humanity, better for him if he hadn't ever been born (Matthew 26:24), while the other is elevated to a position of admiration, a pattern for spiritual leadership, an inspiration to you and me.

What's the difference?

Simply this: Judas' repentance was the sorrow of the world that says, "Look at the mess I'm in." Peter, on the other hand, repented to the Lord and changed direction—although not fully immediately.

On Easter Sunday, there was new hope infused in Peter. But his repentance was still incomplete, for although Peter knew Jesus was risen, due to his failure, he felt he could never again be used in ministry. That is why, in John 21, we see him returning to his old occupation as a fisherman. Others went with him and fished all night. In the morning, they saw a Figure standing on the shore.

"Children," He called to them. I like that! He didn't call them sinners, backsliders, or rebels. He called them children. "Have you caught anything?"

"No," they answered—which is not surprising, since any time we return to the old pastimes, the old habits, the old ways, we always end up with nothing.

"Cast your net on the right side" He said. Why the right side? Because whatever Jesus tells us to do is always right.

Over the right side the net went, returning so full it almost sunk the boat.

At last recognizing the One on the bank as the Lord, John identified Him to Peter, who grabbed his coat and swam to shore.

After breakfasting on roasted fish and bread prepared by His hand, Peter didn't hear Jesus say, "I'm disappointed in you. I can't use you. I'm through with you." No, Peter heard Jesus say, "Do you love Me, Peter? Feed My lambs. Feed My sheep. Tend My flock."

And all the while, what did Peter have in his hand as he stood on the shore talking to Jesus? He had a wet, soggy coat, for Scripture says Peter grabbed his coat before swimming to shore (John 21:7). If you were about to go for a swim, would you grab your coat? This perplexes me—until I see Peter's coat as an emblem of repentance.

You see, when Peter heard Jesus say, "Forget fishing. Get back to shepherding. I'm not sending you to fish in the sea. I'm telling you to feed My

lambs," Peter didn't have to say, "Okay, Lord. Just let me get my coat out of the boat." No, Peter had his coat in hand so he would have no reason to ever go back to the boat again.

Godly sorrow works repentance. Repentance means you don't return for your coat. Repentance means you rip her name out of your address book, brother. It means you go to the cupboard and throw away that which you were keeping as a little something to help your next celebration on a special occasion. It means you turn your back on the magazines or movies, people or activities you know compromise your walk.

Godly sorrow works repentance. And repentance brings salvation. Judas went down to hell. Peter went on to greatness. Both repented. One felt bad because of the mess he was in. But the other turned his back on that which held him previously, determined to walk in a totally new direction. Oh, that's not to say Peter's life was easy. In fact, he, too, ended up on a tree—not hung up by guilt, but crucified upside down on a cross for the sake of the One who not only hung on a tree for him, but rose and lived within him, empowering him to live a life of incredible impact and ministry.

Godly sorrow works repentance, which brings salvation never to be regretted. Paul knew this. Peter knew this.

And so can you.



8 I love teaching through the Bible because it forces me to deal with issues I might otherwise conveniently choose to avoid. Chapters 8 and 9 of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians are one such example, for they deal exclusively with the subject of giving. I'm not alone in my tendency to cringe when the subject of giving comes up, for evidently the Corinthian congregation felt the same way. And Paul knew that, although they were excited about spiritual gifts, they needed to be exhorted about the spirit of giving.

You see, on his third missionary journey, as Paul traveled between the churches of Macedonia and Achaia, he took an offering—not for himself, but for the church at Jerusalem, which was going through hard times financially due to a severe famine in the region. Seeing this as an opportunity for a bonding between the Gentile Christians in Greece and the Jewish believers

in Jerusalem, Paul was eager to complete the gift. Yet, although the Corinthian congregation had initially welcomed the opportunity to help their brothers in Jerusalem, after a year had passed, they hadn't raised any money in the endeavor. So it is this issue Paul addresses in chapters 8 and 9. . . .

2 Corinthians 8:1

Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;

Macedonia, located in present-day northern Greece, and Corinth, located in the south, Paul wanted to fill Corinth in on what was happening with the believers to the north of them.

2 Corinthians 8:2, 3

How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves;

The churches to the north of Corinth—Thessalonica, Berea, and particularly Philippi—were going through tough times, too. Yet they shared generously. In this, I am reminded of the account in Mark 12, where, sitting in the courtyard of the temple, Jesus saw a widow drop two mites—equivalent of an eighth of a cent—into the offering. Because Jesus watched *how* the people gave rather than what they gave, He singled out this woman as the one who gave the most. Like this widow, the church at Philippi gave out of their poverty.

> George Washington Carver wisely said, "How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and the strong because someday in life, you will have been all of these." Perhaps that is why poor people generally seem to have a greater ability to identify with those in need, have a greater longing for the coming of the kingdom of God, and, as a result, tend to release their

finances more easily. Indeed, statistics bear out the fact that it is the poorer segment of any given congregation that supports the ministry.

Of the church at Philippi, Paul said, "Although they were in great affliction, they shared out of their poverty." The result? Paul's letter to the Philippians is the most joyous of all his letters. How do we keep from becoming small, harsh, and caught up in our own little materialistic worlds? By giving. Giving is a privilege and a joy—a fact proved conclusively by the Philippians.

2 Corinthians 8:4

Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

Not only did the northern churches give generously, but they also gave consistently. The implication is that, due to their own poverty, Paul was reticent to take their money. But they insisted. Why? Perhaps because of the fellowship that takes place when there is a sharing of finances. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," Jesus said (Matthew 6:21). Therefore, perhaps the Philippians knew that if their treasure went to their brothers in Jerusalem, their hearts would be united to them as well.

The pathway to fellowship is often through the pocketbook because our money is representative of our time and energy. Therefore, when you give a check to a brother, a sister, or a ministry, you're actually giving a part of your life. Thus, the most practical way of laying down your life is to give financially.

2 Corinthians 8:5 (a)

And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord . . .

Thirdly, the northern churches gave by priority. "We were hoping they would give generously, but they gave more than we hoped," said Paul. "It wasn't a matter of giving an offering, for they gave themselves first." The pastor of a congregation who gives themselves to the Lord will never have to

send fundraising letters or collect second offerings. When people have an open heart, they'll invariably have an open hand. Such was the case in Macedonia.

As the offering was being taken during a revival in Africa, a brand-new Christian told the deacon holding the collection plate to put it lower. "Lower, lower, lower," he said—until the offering plate was on the ground. Then he stood up and stepped in. This man understood. This brand-new believer got the picture. He gave himself.

2 Corinthians 8:5 (b)

. . . and unto us by the will of God.

Finally, the northern churches gave obediently. They did what God told them to do. The tithe is God's, but I wonder how many times He hears someone ask Him what He would like to receive above and beyond the tithe.

2 Corinthians 8:6, 7

Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.

"You're known for all of your charismatic expressions," Paul told the Corinthians. "But don't neglect the grace—or gift—of giving" (see Romans 12:6–8).

"Lord," prayed a young man, "I'm going to start a business and of whatever money it makes, I will keep 10 percent and give You 90 percent." Founder of the Quaker Oats Company, he kept his word and died a wealthy man, even though he gave nine cents of every dime to the Lord.

2 Corinthians 8:8

I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.

"I'm not laying the law down on you," Paul says to the Corinthians, "but here is an opportunity to prove the sincerity of your love for Jesus."

2 Corinthians 8:9

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

Born in a borrowed cradle, Jesus preached from a borrowed boat, rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey, ate His Last Supper in a borrowed room, and was buried in a borrowed grave. He who made everything laid it all down and entered into total poverty that I might be rich.

"This is the real issue," says Paul. "Not only did the believers in Macedonia give in their poverty, but to an infinitely greater degree, Jesus gave everything to set us free."

To the person not in love with Jesus, giving is a difficult, painful, arduous, burdensome task. He who loves Jesus, on the other hand, welcomes the opportunity to demonstrate his love.

2 Corinthians 8:10

And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago.

"Being forward" means it was partly the Corinthians' idea in the first place that the offering be taken.

2 Corinthians 8:11

Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have.

"You've expressed the desire to give," Paul says. "Now do it." Herein lies a great danger for us, for one of the great hazards of Bible study is thinking that by writing something in our notes, or agreeing with it in our hearts, we're actually doing whatever it is we're writing down or agreeing with. James likens this to one who looks in a mirror and realizes there should be some changes made, but doesn't do anything about it (James 1:23, 24).

"Happy are ye if ye *do* these things," Jesus said (see John 13:17). If you're basically unhappy, melancholy, depressed, discouraged, or defeated, the reason could very well be that there is something the Lord has told you to do with which you agree theoretically, but which you have failed to work out practically.

> *Her physical condition rendered her ceremonially unclean for twelve years. As a result, her husband would divorce her; the community would shun her; she would not be allowed to worship in the temple. But then the Rabbi from Galilee walked through her city. Thinking if she could even touch the hem of His garment, she might be healed, she did just that—causing Jesus to call her something He never called any other woman. "Daughter," He said, "your faith has made you whole" (see Matthew 9:22). What faith? Just a simple touch.*

Forget the big plans, the high hopes, the visions of grandeur. Just do something now. Open your heart. Share with the person who's struggling financially. Write a letter of encouragement. Pray for the person who's hurting. Do something. Do anything. Just do it. The blessing is not in agreeing —it's in doing.

> **2 Corinthians 8:12**
>
> **For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.**

Don't worry about giving what you don't have. Just do what you can.

> **2 Corinthians 8:13, 14**

For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality:

"I'm not trying to get you to go out on a limb and give more than you have," Paul says. "But even as the northern believers shared generously, so should you because you don't know when the situation will change unexpectedly. You don't know when you will need their help." This is a principle not only of finances but of life. "Give and it shall be given unto you," Jesus said (Luke 6:38). Whether regarding money or mercy, goods or grace—whatever you extend will come back your way.

I wrestle with this in my own life and in the life of our congregation. We've been given so much. Is there equality? Do we say, "We've been so blessed, and now here's what we can do for others who are less fortunate"? Or are we guilty of heaping things upon ourselves with no thought of equality?

2 Corinthians 8:15

As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.

The Israelites were to gather just enough manna to last one day. Those who decided to "stock up" found their supply stinky and full of worms. So, too, the longer we walk with the Lord, the more we discover that those things that used to impress us quickly become wormy and stinky to us. Does this mean we're not to have anything? No. Abraham, the father of faith, was a very wealthy man. But he was completely ready to sacrifice Isaac—his only possession that meant anything to him.

When God is your only passion, He can trust you with anything He wants to send your way. That is why Paul could say, "I've learned both to abound and to be abased" (see Philippians 4:12). It's not wrong for us to have things—but it's wrong for things to have us because God wants us to be free. It's an issue of the heart.

2 Corinthians 8:16, 17

But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you. For indeed he accepted the exhortation; but being more forward, of his own accord he went unto you.

"You're bogged down, Corinthians," says Paul, "but, just as He has in mine, God has put it in the heart of Titus to care about you, to get you back on the right track."

2 Corinthians 8:18

And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches.

A brother whose passion for the gospel was known throughout all of the churches accompanied Titus. Some believe this one was Luke. Regardless of who it was, what a wonderful thing to be said about any man.

2 Corinthians 8:19–21

And not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind: Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us: Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

Regarding the collecting of the offering, it was not one person who handled the money—but rather a group of men. This way, there would be accountability and integrity.

2 Corinthians 8:22–24

And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, upon the great confidence which I have in you. Whether any do inquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellowhelper concerning you: or our brethren be inquired of, they are the

messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ. Wherefore shew ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf.

"Receive this team with love," Paul instructed the Corinthians, "for then they will see our pride in you is well-founded."



9 **2 Corinthians 9:1, 2 (a)**

For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you: For I know the forwardness of your mind . . .

Continuing on with the subject of giving, Paul tactfully says to the Corinthians, "Even though you're not carrying out your commitment, I know your heart is right."

2 Corinthians 9:2 (b)

. . . for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that it was their desire to give that inspired the believers in Macedonia to begin giving.

2 Corinthians 9:3, 4

Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: Lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting.

Hebrews 10:24 says we are to provoke one another to love and good works. Thus, Paul says, "I provoked the believers in Macedonia by telling them how generous you are. Now follow through—don't let us down."

2 Corinthians 9:5

Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness.

The word "covetousness" is better translated "pressure," so Paul is saying, "I'm sending Titus and company ahead of me so that I won't have to pressure you to gather that which you promised to give previously."

2 Corinthians 9:6, 7

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

Here is the key to the entire discussions. If you miss this point, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 will not make sense to you the way they could or should. Paul is telling us that just as there are natural laws in the universe—laws of gravity, inertia, and thermodynamics—there are spiritual laws as well. If you give sparingly, you will reap sparingly; if you give bountifully, you will reap bountifully. That's an absolute law of God as certain as is gravity or any other physical law.

I don't know how electricity works—whether the electrical current travels through the wire or spins around the wire. I don't know how light works—whether it's a wave, a particle, something in between, or something altogether different. I don't know how gravity works—but I utilize them all. And even if I ignore them, my ignorance or denial of them does not alter their effect in the least. In other words, if I jump off a tower, my denying the existence of the law of gravity will not slow my descent one iota. So, too, whether I am aware of it or not, the law of sowing and reaping is as certain as the law of gravity. And so insistent is the Lord upon this principle that it is the only one about which God says, "Test Me."

> Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.
>
> Malachi 3:10

Satan tried to get Jesus to prove God by jumping off the pinnacle of the temple. "It is written, you're not to test the Lord your God," He answered (see Matthew 4:7). Yet with regard to tithing, God makes an exception when He says, "Start tithing and watch and see how I'll bless you in ways that will blow your mind, warm your heart, build your faith, and set you free."



***For topical study of 2 Corinthians 9:7 entitled "Giving Gladly: Why Should I?" turn to page* 1135.**

2 Corinthians 9:8

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

If you invest in the kingdom, God is not going to say, "I wish I could return the favor, but I just can't keep up with your generosity." No, He is able to give back infinitely more than we could ever begin to even think about giving.

2 Corinthians 9:9–11

(As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.

Foolish would be the farmer who, given some seed, said, "This seed is too valuable to bury in the soil where I can't see it." Therefore, Paul says, "It's the Lord who gives the seed, who tends the seed, who causes it to spring forth both for nourishment and for a new supply of seed." This is true of every resource entrusted to Him.

2 Corinthians 9:12

For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God.

"Your giving will not only help the Jerusalem believers practically, but it will help them spiritually. It will cause them to abound in thanksgiving," Paul told the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 9:13, 14

Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; and by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you.

Not only would the Jerusalem believers praise the Lord because of the generosity of the Corinthian believers—but they would pray for the Corinthian believers as well. After all, don't you find yourself automatically praying blessing for those who bless you? Want to get prayed for? Give!

2 Corinthians 9:15

Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.

Due to the immensity of Greek vocabulary and the precision of its tenses, voices, and moods, there has never been a language as exact as Greek. And of all the writers, philosophers, historians, and poets who wrote in koini Greek, none had a command of the language to rival the apostle Paul's. Yet, as he gave the Corinthians the foundational reason why they should be people

who give, when this master of language tried to describe God's gift to us, Paul was speechless—for truly Jesus is too wonderful for words.

GIVING GLADLY: WHY SHOULD I?

A Topical Study of
2 CORINTHIANS 9:7

It is true that we make a living by what we get, but it is equally true that we make a life by what we give. Perhaps it was Paul's knowledge of this principle that enabled him to say with certainty, "God loves a cheerful giver." The Greek word translated "cheerful" is *hilaros,* from which we get the word "hilarious." Thus, according to Paul, giving should not be a pain. It should be a party. It should not be heavy, but happy.

Why would giving produce hilarity, happiness, and joy when everything in our flesh says it should produce just the opposite? Paul gives five reasons why giving does indeed produce hilarity. . . .

God's Promise to Us

> *But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 9:6

After Jesus used Peter's boat to preach from the Sea of Galilee, He said, "Take your boat out, Peter, and throw your nets into the water." Peter did so —and took in a massive haul of fish (see Luke 5:3–6). In other words, because Peter gave Jesus his boat, Jesus returned it full of fish. That's just the way God is. He is a debtor to no man.

> *Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.*
>
> Malachi 3:8, 9

What is the tithe? The word simply means a tenth. That is, the first 10 percent of anything we earn—be it a dollar a week or a million dollars a day —is God's. And according to Malachi 3, failure to release this tithe to Him constitutes robbery. Because of this failure, Malachi told the Jews they were cursed—not cursed in the sense that God is in heaven stirring a cauldron with a broomstick, pronouncing a curse upon them—but cursed because they limited what God could do for them.

> *Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.*
>
> Haggai 1:4–6

"Your wages disappear," says Haggai. Why? Because you have ignored the work of the Lord.

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

Malachi 3:10

Over and over throughout Scripture, we are warned about the folly and presumption of testing God. We're not to test Him—we're to trust Him. Yet here in Malachi we see the single exception when God says, "Test Me. Bring the tithe to My storehouse. Watch and see what I will do."

And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 3:11

The Lord says, "I will protect you from this one who causes your appliances to break down, your car to stall, your finances to crumble." Am I suggesting that the devil is behind every car problem? No. But I am saying that the Enemy has all kinds of plans to keep us in debt, to keep us perpetually in the hole. That is why the Lord says, "Let Me defend you. Let Me see you through miraculously. Test Me. Trust Me to rebuke the devourer, the one who eats at you personally and financially.

And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 3:12

Does this mean if we tithe we'll be rich? No, but we will be blessed. When people look at us, they will sense an absence of tension, a freedom, and a contentment within us due to God's protection of that which He has given us.

Why should we give hilariously? Because of God's promise that He will reward, that He will rebuke, that He will revive.

God's Purpose for Us

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Matthew 6:21

Secondly, we should be hilarious in giving because of God's purpose for us. What is God's purpose for us? To live in heaven eternally. Therefore, because we so easily get stuck in the world's system, God says, "I have a way to get your heart in heaven: Put your treasure there."

Inevitably, people who invest in heaven become increasingly interested in the coming of Christ and the coming of the kingdom. This should not be surprising. If your treasure is in a retirement fund, your heart will be as well. If your treasure is in some material object—a sports car or vacation home—that's where your heart will be. But if your treasure is regularly invested in heaven, you'll find yourself increasingly kingdom-oriented.

As illustrated by Jesus in the parable of the ten talents (Luke 19), when He returns, we will give an account as to whether we invested what He gave us wisely or buried it foolishly. If we have invested wisely, we will be given significant responsibility. Why does money impact our role in eternity? Because we work forty to fifty hours a week, what we do with our money is a direct reflection upon what we do with our lives. That is why those who say, "Lord, You're not getting a tenth. You're not getting a twentieth. You're getting nothing," are actually saying, "You're not getting me."

And the Lord has no choice but to say, "I can't allow you to rule, to enjoy what you otherwise would have in the kingdom."

Oh, how we need to hear this. Jesus is coming, and it will not matter that we got a new car or a bigger house. At that moment, nothing will matter except that we'll see Him face-to-face. This One who loves us so much will say, "What did you do with My tenth? You bought a new CD player, a new mountain bike? That's what you think of Me? I love you, but I can't allow you to have the responsibility you would have had."

God's Premise About Us

> *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*
>
> Luke 6:36–38

Thirdly, we should give hilariously because of God's premise about us. You see, over and over throughout Scripture, God looks at His people and calls them stiffnecked and hard of heart. He doesn't say this hatefully or condemningly, but rather knowingly. "I know what you are," He says. "You're stiff-necked and hard of heart, greedy, and lazy. I want you to be different. I want you to be bigger. I want you to be forgiving, merciful, and compassionate. I want you to relate to people, to care about people, to love people like I do. So give money."

"Wait a minute," you say. "There is no direct correlation between caring about people and giving money."

Really? We might think we're fairly compassionate, sufficiently forgiving, quite merciful. But how do we measure these characteristics? According to Luke 6:35–38, Jesus said we are to measure them by how generous we are financially. Thus, there is, indeed, a direct correlation between what we do with material resources and how we relate to people.

In other words, we will know how we're doing with people by how we handle our money. If we are truly forgiving, merciful, and compassionate, it will show in our checkbook registers. If we claim to love people but are not giving financially, we're fooling ourselves, for Jesus inextricably tied the two together.

Giving is not God's way of raising cash. It's His way of raising kids. Knowing we're stingy and greedy, God wants to free us from these tendencies. Consequently, every time the offering basket comes along, I have

the opportunity to give away part of my smallness and greediness. If I pass up this opportunity, I'm in effect saying, "Keep me a small person, Lord."

God's Process in Us

> *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.*
>
> 1 Timothy 6:17

God is a giver. And He wants us to be like Him. Why? Because He is hilariously happy. You see, God isn't in heaven, saying, "It's hard being God." No, there is hilarity in heaven day and night. Praise is resounding. Joy is unspeakable. There is a holy happiness unparalleled to anything this world has ever seen. Knowing giving is hard for us, God demands it—not because He's mean, but to help us be like Him.

What will this do? The same thing it did for Abraham. . . .

> Following the successful rescue of his nephew Lot, Abraham was met by Melchizedek, the king of Salem, who, with bread and wine in hand, blessed him. Inherently sensing God was in His midst in the person of Melchizedek, Abraham did what any man of God must do—He gave tithes of all he had.
>
> Abraham was also met by the king of Sodom, who said, "Abraham, give me the people you rescued and keep these goods for yourself."
>
> "I will not take even a thread or shoelace from you," Abraham answered, "lest you say you made me rich" (see Genesis 14).

The king of Sodom comes to us constantly through the newspaper, TV, and radio, saying, "You need this. Buy this. Grab this." In essence, the king of Sodom tells us to buy things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't like.

What's the solution? Abraham was able to resist the king of Sodom because he had given to the King of Salem. Had he not given to the King of Salem, I suggest he would have perhaps succumbed to the temptation to take from the king of Sodom.

God's Presence with Us

> *For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 8:9

The final reason we can give with hilarity is because God gave us Jesus. If this were the only reason to give, it would be more than enough.

> When the wise men came to Bethlehem, they brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh, not because Jesus would do a miracle for them, give insight to them, or pronounce blessing upon them. As a two-year-old, He could do none of those things. They gave not to receive, but simply because He is the King.

"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift," Paul declared (2 Corinthians 9:15). After spending two chapters discussing the importance and benefits of giving, for Paul, it all came down to Jesus.

God's promise to us, His purpose for us, His premise about us, His process in us, and His presence with us are each reason enough for us to give with joy. Together, they leave us no other option.

May God give us the grace to be people who give hilariously.



10 In 2 Corinthians chapter 10, we come to the beginning of what many scholars believe is the letter to which Paul referred in 2 Corinthians 2:4 and 7:8. You see, chapters 1—7 of 2 Corinthians constitute Paul's defense of his apostolic authority that had been questioned by some in Corinth. Then, in chapters 8 and 9, he deals with the subject of giving—a section he ended by saying, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."

At this point, it seems as though Paul is closing his letter. He's defended his ministry, he's given the Corinthians an exhortation about giving, and he's made a closing statement. So as you follow the flow of this letter, it seems as

though this should be the end of the Epistle. But it's not. There are four more chapters. And the interesting thing about these final four chapters is that Paul doesn't pull any punches, but instead comes down on the Corinthians rather aggressively. And this is what perplexes scholars and students. Why would he end the letter this way? After all, any preacher, teacher, or pastor knows the time to get in people's faces is not following an exhortation to give.

The answer could possibly lie in the fact that 2 Corinthians 10—13 actually constitutes a different book altogether—the letter that caused Paul such sorrow and anguish (2 Corinthians 2:4; 7:8). If this be the case, 2 Corinthians would be comprised of chapters 10—13, and "3 Corinthians" would be comprised of chapters 1—9. The possibility that at some point 2 and "3" Corinthians were inadvertently combined seems to explain both the missing Epistle and the reason for the heaviness of chapters 10—13.

2 Corinthians 10:1 (a)

Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ . . .

Meekness does not mean weakness, but rather strength under control. Used to describe a powerful stallion so well trained that it yields to the slightest nudge of the rider, the Greek concept of meekness was exhibited nowhere more perfectly than in Jesus. It is this controlled strength that Paul employs as he deals with the church at Corinth.

2 Corinthians 10:1 (b)

. . . who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you.

Paul quotes his detractors, who said about him, "Sure, he can write a strong letter, but in person he's not all that impressive," as they resorted to the age-old tactic of criticizing one's opponent physically if unable to counter his argument logically.

2 Corinthians 10:2

But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.

"I don't want to be harsh," Paul says, "but they who accuse us of being carnal leave me no other choice."

2 Corinthians 10:3

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh.

"Because we're human, of course we walk in the flesh, but the battle we wage for you is spiritual—not dependent upon oratorical skill or physical stature," Paul argues.

2 Corinthians 10:4, 5

(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

As we pull down the strongholds of the Enemy, the battle we wage is spiritual.



1*For topical study of 2 Corinthians 10:3–5 entitled "The Real Battle," turn to page* **141.**

2 Corinthians 10:6

And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

"We'll keep fighting on your behalf until you Corinthians grow into spiritual maturity, for that's our ministry," declares Paul.

2 Corinthians 10:7

Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's.

There were those in Corinth who said, "We are Christ's, but Paul is nothing." To them, Paul maintains that he is Christ's as well.

In 1 Corinthians 4:5, Paul had warned about judging people prematurely, before the day when all things will come to light at the *bema* seat, the award stand of Christ. I often think about this. At the judgment seat of Christ, the beauty, power, and importance of the beautiful, powerful, important people will evaporate. On the other hand, those who, like Paul, although they were unimpressive physically, or unknown socially, cultivated a deep and meaningful walk with Jesus will be beautiful throughout eternity. There are people now who physically, mentally, financially seem to be nothing. But in secrecy they have developed an intimacy with the Lord. Right now, they're proverbial ugly ducklings. They don't fit in; they're not acknowledged. But in that day, they will be beautiful swans. What a day it will be when those people who have been plugging away and seeking God rather than getting the breaks in this world will hear Jesus say to them, "Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter in to the joy of the Lord" (see Matthew 25:21).

2 Corinthians 10:8 (a)

For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority . . .

"Although I don't want to, I'll have to boast here a bit," says Paul.

2 Corinthians 10:8 (b)

. . . which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed.

"We don't seek to have dominion over you, but are helpers of your joy," Paul had said in chapter 1 (see 1:24). "The authority we claim is not to do anything other than to build you up and be helpers of your joy."

2 Corinthians 10:9

That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters.

"I'm going to talk to you firmly and straightforwardly so you won't think I'm bluffing," says Paul.

2 Corinthians 10:10

For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.

Perhaps the word "contemptible" refers to Paul's high-pitched voice. Or perhaps, like Moses, Paul stuttered. Either way, his enemies made fun of his speaking style.

2 Corinthians 10:11, 12

Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also in deed when we are present. For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

There were those who, comparing themselves with one another, put themselves in the top ten and Paul at the bottom of the heap. But, under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul says measuring ourselves against one another is unwise. Why? Measuring yourself against another will do one of two things. It will either puff you up or pull you down. You can always find someone seemingly less spiritual than you. And when you do, you'll be puffed up by pride. You can also find people seemingly more spiritual than you. Yet trying to emulate them leads only to frustration.

2 Corinthians 10:13–16

But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you. For we stretch not ourselves

beyond our measure, as though we reached not unto you: for we are come as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ: Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labours; but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly, To preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand.

"We don't stretch ourselves beyond the parameter that God has placed around us," declared Paul.

As believers, yes, we should be stretched. Yes, we should go for it in faith. But concerning his own ministry, Paul says, "We do not stretch ourselves beyond that which we've been called to do."

Happy is the man and wise the woman who understands what God has given him or her to do and who devotes himself or herself to doing that wholeheartedly without stepping into other areas to which God has not called them. Such was not the case with those who were eager to speak against Paul in Corinth, even as they "piggybacked" on the work he had already done.

2 Corinthians 10:17, 18

But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.

"Our glorying lies simply in doing what we're supposed to do," said Paul. "Our glorying is in the Lord. And that is where your glory should be as well."

THE REAL BATTLE
A Topical Study of
2 CORINTHIANS 10:3–5

On June 6, 1944, General Dwight David Eisenhower made a pivotal decision when he said, "Let's go." At 4 A.M., over 155,000 made their way across the English Channel in the greatest single military invasion in world history. Having been told that only one in three would likely return from the morning excursion, they landed on the beaches of France that were code-named Utah and Sword, Juneau and Gold, and, most famously, Omaha.

As they landed on the shores, the enemy, already entrenched, began to fire round after round on those 155,000 brave soldiers. Ten thousand men lost their lives at Omaha Beach on that bloody, brutal day. Yet the Allied soldiers kept coming—wave after wave after wave—until they took the strongholds, the high towers from which the Nazi soldiers fired. Had the Allies failed, Germany would have dominated Europe, indeed the world militarily. But their success ensured eventual victory.

The greatest military invasion in the history of the world took place on D-Day. But an infinitely greater invasion took place the day God invaded this world in the Person of Jesus Christ. Monumental were the repercussions of the sacrifice and bloodshed on the beaches of Normandy. But they were nothing compared to the results of the sacrifice and blood shed at Calvary.

Satan's plan of nailing Jesus to the Cross backfired totally because the only foothold Satan has on humanity is getting people to succumb to sin and thus turn over the authority of their lives to him. Therefore, because the blood of Jesus paid the price for the sin of all men, Satan's foothold is obliterated. Yet even though the victory has been won, the battle goes on because the Enemy will not give up that which we do not take.

When the Allied invasion succeeded, Hitler and the boys in Berlin knew their days were numbered. They knew they didn't have a chance—but they continued fighting to the bitter end. This explains the reason that although the outcome of the war was determined on June 6, more blood was shed in the

year following the victory at Normandy than at any other time in history.

So, too, Satan knows he doesn't have a chance. He knows that the one grasp he had on man is gone. He knows his time is running out. Yet so deep is his hatred of God that he continues to hang on to the territory he knows is no longer his. And he fights to the bitter end.

"It is finished," Jesus declared from the Cross (John 19:30). The victory is won. Although the war goes on, we do not fight *for* victory. We fight *from* victory. That is why Paul tells us to pull down, root out, take control of the strongholds our adversary has erected in our minds and hearts. Concerning this Enemy, Paul says we are not to be ignorant of his devices. And we aren't.

We know that when we were saved, Jesus took up residence in our lives. Our sin—past, present, and future—was cleansed completely. We were born again. And yet each time I give in to sin, each time I succumb to an attitude or an activity I know is wrong, a brick is added to the high tower of the Enemy from which he can manipulate my thinking. This explains how I can be driving down the road, enjoying the day, when suddenly a thought will come into my mind, or an attitude into my heart that causes me to say, "Where in the world did *that* come from?" It didn't come from the world. It came from hell.

Ephesians 6 tells us that Satan fires fiery darts—a bit of hell—into our minds. Oh, he can't possess our hearts. But there's still a battle going on for the mind. The spirit is secure, but the soul—the mind, emotions, and will—is still up for grabs. In Ephesians 6, Paul tells us more about the warfare we wage.

> *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*
>
> Ephesians 6:12

Any time we are wrestling against flesh and blood—against family members, bosses, employees, neighbors, or friends—we're fighting the wrong battle. Anytime we're upset with people, we are waging the wrong

war. The enemy is not your husband, your teenage daughter, or your boss. The enemy is Satan.

> *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*
>
> 1 Peter 5:8

Peter identifies Satan not as *the* adversary, but as *your* adversary. You might think, *I'm not that important. The devil doesn't care about me.* Wrong. "Your adversary" means you have a personal enemy—Satan—who has a specific plan to manipulate you and rob you of joy, power, and your ability to influence others.

Because there is a war going on, it is imperative that we pull down the high tower, the stronghold of the Enemy—the areas Satan controls, even though you're a Christian, even though your sin is forgiven, even though you're on your way to heaven.

How are they pulled down? What does it mean to cast down the imagination?

For every New Testament principle, there's an Old Testament picture. And concerning the pulling down of strongholds, there are two. The first is seen in Joshua 6. . . .

Proclaim Aloud the Victory

Just as we have been delivered from the world, the people of Israel had been freed from the bondage of Egypt. After wandering for forty years in the wilderness, they were now ready to move and possess their possessions, to take the Land of Promise—a picture of the Spirit-filled life. But what happened? When they crossed the Jordan River, there before them stood the walled city of Jericho—a city that seemed absolutely impregnable. God said to Joshua, "I want you to pull down this stronghold in a way that's going to surprise you—not by catapult, not by dynamite, not by atomic power. I want you and the people to march around the city once a day for six days."

So Joshua and the Israelites—perhaps three million in number—marched around the city once a day. And as they did, no doubt they saw just how strong the walls were and how impossible the situation seemed. On the seventh day, they were to march around Jericho seven times, the seventh of which they were to shout audibly. This didn't make a lot of sense logically. But shout they did. And as they did, something amazing happened. The walls of Jericho that so intimidated them came down.

The principle is essential. If we want to see the strongholds that keep us from experiencing God's blessing and promises brought down, the first thing we must understand is that they will be pulled down by audibly proclaiming victory.

God knows the power of the citadel that threatens you. Therefore, He doesn't ask you to deny its reality. Rather, He asks you to proclaim aloud the victory.

> *Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up: Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong.*
>
> Joel 3:9, 10

Don't talk about your sickness, your weakness, your discouragement, or your despondency. Don't talk about that which perpetuates your problems. Instead, speak out the promises of Scripture. When you were saved, you

confessed with your mouth that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9). The prerequisite for victory is the same as for salvation. . . .

> *For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.*
>
> Deuteronomy 30:11, 14

This passage speaks not only of salvation, but about liberation and blessing. . . .

> *That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee.*
>
> Deuteronomy 30:3

Do you feel scattered, unstable, and as though you're spread too thin? The Lord promises to pull in the reins, to bring us into a "togetherness."

> *And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers.*
>
> Deuteronomy 30:5

Do you feel disenfranchised, that good is not happening to you? God promises to bring you to the land and do good to you. . . .

> *And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers.*
>
> Deuteronomy 30:9

Over and over in this chapter promises are given to help us out, to free us up. The stipulation? Obedience and the proclamation of God's Word.

What has been your conversation the past week, month, or year? Have your words been those of doubt and discouragement, despondency and despair? Have you said, "This is never going to work. That job will never open up. I'll never get well. I'm destined for loneliness and poverty"? As long as that is what is spoken from your lips, Jericho will loom over you menacingly. It's when you finally speak out the promises of Scripture that Jericho will fall before you.

Am I suggesting you "Name It and Claim It"? No. I'm not suggesting we make our own reality. I'm reminding us that if we draw nigh to God through the glorious promises of His Word, He will indeed draw nigh to us (James 4:8).

Plow Away Diligently

Not only are we to proclaim aloud the victory, but we are to plow away diligently.

The Midianites controlled the people of Israel with such a heavy hand that Gideon sifted his wheat in a cave in order to avoid detection. Then God came to him and said, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor" (Judges 6:12). I love this! Here's a guy hiding in a cave, worried that someone might see him—and yet the Lord views him not in his present weakness, but in his potential greatness. That's always the way of the Lord.

"If You're real, God, how come Your people are having such problems?" asked Gideon. "Why aren't we seeing miracles happen?"

"Here's the way to victory," God said. "Take your dad's two oxen and pull down the stronghold, the image, the idol that has been erected in your land, which has been worshiped by your family." So Gideon took ten men and did just that (Judges 6:27).

What does this mean for you and me? It means there comes a time when we have to say, "It might take ten men, ten days, ten years—but I'll plow away. I'll come to church on Wednesdays. I'll go to a Bible study on Tuesdays. I'll attend a prayer meeting on Thursdays. Ten being the number of completion, I'm going to keep on plowing away until the image is pulled down." And as you continue to plow through the Scriptures day after day, book by book, chapter by chapter, line upon line, precept upon precept, something happens. As you plow away, the images, the strongholds begin to topple.

People might say, "You've been going to Bible study for fifteen years. Why do you keep going?" But wise is the man or woman who understands that once he gives up, once she quits plowing, the images will return and take control once again.

I believe that anyone who will proclaim aloud the victory and plow away diligently will see once-formidable strongholds fall.

"I've tried that," you say. "I've tried speaking the Word, even shouting it at times. And I've been plowing through the Scriptures consistently—but nothing seems to be working."

Consider the following. . . .

Sandi Anderson, a lady who runs a relief agency in Zaire grew up a child of missionaries in that region. When she was about eight years old, there was a big celebration in Zaire, commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the Evangelical Christian Missionary Alliance—a ministry God used to save virtually 80 percent of the people in the region.

During the celebration, a very old man stood up and said, "I must speak. I am one hundred three years old. I am the last person who was alive in those days when your missionaries first came to our land. I have knowledge of a situation, the story of which will be lost if I don't share it." Given permission, he continued. "When your missionaries came, they told us how to live. We thought their message was strange. We wanted to know if what they said was true, and we knew the only way to find out was to see how they would die. So we began poisoning them and their children one by one." Indeed, it was true that within the first twelve years, every single one of the original missionaries and their children died mysteriously.

"When the last one died, we held a council meeting and determined that there was something real about your faith, something real about your God—not because the missionaries told us how to live, but because we saw the way they died."

This story is incredible to me—not only because this group of brave missionaries lived out their faith through pain and suffering so powerfully that an entire tribal group was converted—but because of the fact that no one knew about this for one hundred years.

Why is your ordeal continuing? Could it be that people are watching you, that God is allowing you to be an example of a man or woman who keeps plowing away, who keeps proclaiming the victory, even though the situation doesn't change outwardly? Could it be that by your proclaiming and plowing, greater victory than you ever imagined will one day be yours?

I think so.

If you despair, whine, and complain, the Enemy will have a field day with you. But if you say, "Jericho's going down as I proclaim the Word.

Baal's going to bail as I plow through the Scriptures day after day," you will see God not only free you, but impact those watching you.



11 "You have ten thousand instructors, but not many fathers," Paul had told the Corinthians (see 1 Corinthians 4:15). In chapter 11, we see the heart of a father in Paul—his jealousy for the Corinthians in verses 1–4, his generosity toward them in verses 5–11, and his anxiety about them in verses 12–28.

2 Corinthians 11:1, 2

Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

In Paul's day, it was the responsibility of the father to ensure that his daughter was a virgin on her wedding day. If she wasn't, he would be put to shame. Thus, as the spiritual father of the church at Corinth, it was Paul's responsibility to make sure they retained their purity, that they weren't seduced by those who sought to lure them away from the simplicity of the gospel.

2 Corinthians 11:3

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

How was Eve seduced? Not by being offered a sip or a peek or a puff, but by the potential to be more spiritual. So, too, false teachers came into the Corinthian congregation, saying that Paul's teaching was too simple, that there was something deeper they needed to explore and experience.

2 Corinthians 11:4

For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.

Paul picks up the same theme in Galatians 1 when he says, "If an angel comes and preaches another Jesus, another gospel, let him be accursed." If there's a single issue in the New Testament that seems to be fighting ground, it's over the issue of the deity of Jesus.

2 Corinthians 11:5

For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.

The false teachers claimed to be "super apostles." Yet, although Paul would claim to be the least of the apostles and the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), he doesn't say he was less than any of these pseudo-spiritual teachers.

2 Corinthians 11:6

But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been throughly made manifest among you in all things.

"My speech might be a little rough," said Paul, "but not my knowledge."

Asked to quote Psalm 23, the famous Shakespearean actor articulated each and every phrase perfectly. Then the host of the party asked his pastor, who was also in attendance, to quote the same psalm. The pastor lacked the rhythmic cadence, the powerful voice, and the smooth speech. All he had was a tear rolling down his cheek.

"I know the psalm," said the actor. "But this man knows the Shepherd."

Paul knew the Shepherd. Paul knew Jesus. "I might not match up to your favorite speakers or profound teachers," he said. "I might not measure up in speech, but in knowledge I do, for I know Him."

2 Corinthians 11:7

Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely?

The "super apostles" were exceedingly wealthy from the exorbitant speaking fees they charged. Paul, on the other hand, charged nothing. "Is it because I haven't taken money from you that you esteem me so lightly?" he asks.

2 Corinthians 11:8, 9

I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself.

"Others were supporting me in the ministry in order that I wouldn't have to burden you financially," said Paul.

2 Corinthians 11:10

As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia.

"I'm going to keep reminding you that I have not taken a penny from you," said Paul.

2 Corinthians 11:11

Wherefore? because I love you not? God knoweth.

"If Paul really loved us, he would charge us," some were saying.
"God knows I love you," Paul answered.

2 Corinthians 11:12

But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we.

"I'm not going to charge you," said Paul. "And I dare these false teachers to follow my lead."

There have been times in this ministry when we didn't have the money to support the ministers, myself included. And it's really interesting what happens. Some keep serving, teaching, working, doing whatever they're called to do. Others fade away. Jesus called them hirelings (John 10:12, 13). I believe God almost inevitably allows men to be tested in this way, to allow them to see whether what they're doing is merely a job or truly a calling on their life—something they would do whether or not they were financially supported.

Although Paul sometimes had support from Macedonia, we know from the Book of Acts that during this time he would support himself by making tents in order that he could teach the Word at nights or in the afternoon. "I know how to abound and how to be abased," he said (see Philippians 4:12). "I'm just going to keep doing what I've been called to do."

2 Corinthians 11:13, 14

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

We shouldn't be surprised when false teachers seem to live so righteously, when their standards seem to be so moral, when they stress the importance of family and separation from the defilement of the world. We shouldn't be surprised that their TV commercials sound so right and look so warm and fuzzy, nor that their temple in Salt Lake City glows with light—for Paul says Satan himself transforms into an angel of light.

You see, Satan will go either way with people. If people want to be dark and devilish and heavy, he'll meet them there. But if people want to be exemplary and upstanding, he'll meet them there. As an angel of light, he'll

say, “You don’t need to admit you’re a sinner and need a Savior. Just live morally.”

It’s interesting to me that so many who talk about near-death experiences report seeing a warm, bright light beckoning them—the implication being that if we are “good people,” regardless of the route we choose, we’ll all make it to the bright light at the end of the tunnel. But wait. That bright light may not be the Father of Lights. It may be the one who transforms himself to appear as an angel of light. It might be a train barreling down the track in your direction. Because Satan transforms himself into an angel of light, we should be wary about the conclusions of those who write about such experiences.

2 Corinthians 11:15

Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

“What must we do to do the works of God?” they asked.

And Jesus said, “This is the work of God—one thing—that you believe on Him whom the Father hath sent (see John 6:28, 29).

“What must we do to do the works of God?”

“Join our temple and be baptized,” the doorknockers say.

No. The work of God is singular: It’s simply to believe. He who adds anything to believing on Him whom the Father hath sent is on dangerous ground and will be judged according to their human effort—by which they will fail miserably.

2 Corinthians 11:16, 17

I say again, Let no man think me a fool; if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little. That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.

“Because you’re questioning my authority as an apostle, I’m going to have to boast,” Paul says. “But don’t blame the Lord for my boasting.” I like that. All too often, the Lord gets blamed for the erratic behavior of those who

claim to be controlled by Him. It's an embarrassment to the Christian community when people do bizarre things in the name of the Lord. Here, Paul seems to go out of his way to do otherwise.

2 Corinthians 11:18, 19

Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also. For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise.

Here, Paul says, "If you who are so wise value fleshly credentials, I'll give you mine. . . ."

2 Corinthians 11:20, 21 (a)

For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face. I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak.

According to rabbinical tradition, it was the right of the teacher to strike the student who didn't listen to him or agree with him. Consequently, not only were the false teachers laying spiritual and financial burdens on the Corinthians—they were evidently striking some as well. It's a real mystery to me why Christians feel blessed when someone screams at them, tells them they're doing terribly, or burdens them with expectations and pressure.

Of Jesus, Isaiah prophesied that He would neither break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax (42:3). In other words, Jesus is One who uses even the weakest instrument and fans even the faintest flame of any who show an inclination towards Him.

2 Corinthians 11:21 (b), 22 (a)

Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? so am I.

Those who were trying to undo Paul's ministry were evidently Jewish teachers who said, "Grace lacks substance. There's more to it than that. You

need not only to believe in Jesus, but you must embrace Judaism, legalism, ritualism, and regulations."

There's a tendency within us to want to live under legalism and ritualism. That's why Jesus was so radical. He lived as a common Man rather than subscribing to the traditional cleansings and rabbinical rituals. "He's a glutton and a winebibber," said His critics. "Look who He hangs out with. Look how He teaches in such simplicity with those little parables." So, too, the believers in Corinth were being told faith is not that simple.

2 Corinthians 11:22 (b), 23 (a)
Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more . . .

"They talk about being servants of Christ with their Jewish credentials, their rules and rituals—but I am more," declared Paul.

2 Corinthians 11:23 (b)
. . . in labours more abundant . . .

"I support myself with the work of my own hands."

2 Corinthians 11:23 (c)
. . . in stripes above measure . . .

This speaks of beating.

2 Corinthians 11:23 (d)
. . . in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

"I'm at the point of death constantly," Paul declared.

2 Corinthians 11:24
Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

A single beating of thirty-nine lashes was often enough to kill a man. Paul endured such a beating five times.

2 Corinthians 11:25

Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep.

Even at this point in his ministry, Paul had been beaten, imprisoned, stoned, shipwrecked. Thus, I am humbled, indeed, when I consider the price our brother Paul paid to be a minister of the gospel.

2 Corinthians 11:26, 27

In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

"All these things are happening to me," Paul says. "Yet you say I'm weak in comparison to the false teachers in your midst." Then he gives the clincher. . . .

2 Corinthians 11:28

Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

"That which happens to me externally—the stonings and the beatings, the shipwrecks and the muggings—are beside the point. So I get beat all the time, so people throw rocks at me, so they're out to kill me constantly, so I'm hungry a lot, cold at night, in jail wherever I go—those things are nothing compared to the concern I have for the churches," Paul says.

This is not the heart of a spiritual guru or a motivational speaker. This is the heart of a father. Dads, you know something of this. As tough as things can

be externally, financially, or physically—they're nothing compared to the concern you have that your kids do well.

I raise this question to you as I do to myself: What made Paul tick? Would you take thirty-nine lashes five times for the people sitting three rows in front of you—not for the ones you're married to or related to, but for the body of Christ in general?

I believe Paul gives us three reasons he was the man he was. . . .

First, as we'll see in chapter 12, Paul knew the reality of eternity. Heaven wasn't just some foggy, fuzzy "pie in the sky in the sweet bye and bye" idea for Paul. He had seen it personally. Has the Lord ever made heaven real to your heart? Has He ever made hell real to your heart? Have you ever just stopped and looked at a crowd of people, your family, or your classmates and thought, *My aunt, my neighbor, my friend is going to hell unless they receive the free gift of salvation which God has so generously provided for them?*

Knowing the reality of heaven, Paul said, "Let them beat me; let them stone me; let them imprison me; let them make fun of me. I know the reality of eternity. So those things don't bother me."

Second, Paul knew the potency of the gospel. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," he declared in Romans 1. Paul knew that the gospel not only is the power by which people will be ushered into heaven eternally, but through which they will be blessed, helped, and saved presently.

> *When people come forward for salvation on Sunday mornings, do I have confidence that the profundity of the words I share with them will see them through? No way. At that point, my stomach is rumbling. I can't wait for lunch. I'm second-guessing the sermon I just gave. But this I know: Every person who comes will be met by the Lord not because of who I am, but because He is faithful. I know that as sure as I know my name.*

He will in no wise cast out any who come to Him with any degree of sincerity (John 6:37). Such is the potency of the gospel.

Third, Paul knew the mystery of God's mercy. It was the love of Christ that enabled him to absorb the beatings, put up with the prisons, and care

about the people (2 Corinthians 5:14). “I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, an enemy of those who named the name of Christ. But the Lord stopped me in my tracks, knocked me to the ground, and called out to me.” Paul did what he did because he realized how merciful the Lord had been in saving him, in using him.

So, too, I believe that to the degree to which we understand the reality of eternity, the potency of the gospel, and the mystery of God’s mercy is the degree to which, like Paul, we will say, “I’m going for it recklessly, wholeheartedly, whatever the cost might be.”

How does one understand these things? I suggest a simple secret—not easy, but simple. That is, compassion is the result of contemplation. It was as Jesus sat on the hillside and looked at the city that He wept with compassion (Luke 19:41). So, too, it is in our own times of contemplation—when we quietly consider the plight of the people in the car next to us as we drive on the freeway, or the destiny of the person ahead of us in line at the supermarket—that the Lord can begin to work within us a heart of compassion. That is why consistent devotional times are so important. They’re not to earn brownie points with God. He already loves us completely. But if we fail to stop and sit, to think and pray, to listen and worship, our eyes get dry and our hearts become callused.

2 Corinthians 11:29

Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?

“When you’re hurting, I hurt. If someone trips you up in your walk, I’m angry with that person,” Paul said with the heart of a father, the heart of a mature believer.

2 Corinthians 11:30 (a)

If I must needs glory . . .

“If you’re not satisfied by what I’ve gone through on your behalf, the generosity I’ve shown you, the jealousy I have for you—if you’re still asking me to prove my authority,” Paul says, “I will continue . . . .”

2 Corinthians 11:30 (b)

. . . I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.

Paul does not point to a university degree as his authority for ministry. He points to his greatest difficulty, for it proved to be his greatest glory.

2 Corinthians 11:31, 32

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.

We find the story to which Paul alludes in Acts 9. . . .

As he headed toward Damascus in order to persecute Christians, the Lord confronted Paul, and he was converted immediately. Shortly thereafter, God said of him, "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). In other words, God said, "Paul will talk to kings and impact some Jews. But he'll be a minister to Me among the Gentiles."

Yet such a heart did Paul have for the Jews that he said he would be damned for their sake if it meant they would be saved (Romans 9:3). So he headed straight for the synagogues, as if to say, "I can do You a whole lot of good, Lord. I was trained to be a Pharisee. I know how they think." And it made sense logically. Paul seemed to have the gifts, the background, and the testimony to impact the Jews radically. But they didn't buy what he was saying, so he left Damascus and spent three years in the Arabian wilderness being tutored by Jesus Himself (Galatians 1:17). Then he headed once again to the Jews.

He proved to them biblically and persuasively that Jesus is, indeed, the Christ. The result? They wanted to kill him (Acts 9:23). And his heart must have sunk. He went to Jerusalem next. And when he got there, heartsick, let down, wondering what was happening, he joined himself to the disciples. But even they were afraid of him, so he spoke boldly to the Grecians—those

Jews who had adopted Gentile customs—as if to compromise with the Lord. What did they do? They decided to kill him (Acts 9:29).

At this point, the believers sent him out of the country. He went to Tarsus for seven to ten years, where he ministered in obscurity. But the Lord had plans for Paul. Barnabas sought him out, saying, "Let's go minister in the north to the Gentiles."

"Great!" said Paul. When at last he began ministering to those he was supposed to, the world was turned upside down, and the fruit remains to this day.

That is why he said, "I'm going to glory in what was the hardest thing in my life—when I was let down, when things weren't working out, when I was wondering where the Lord was. The greatest glory in my whole life was when the doors I thought would open up were shut tight—because it was then that God had His way."

"Use me, Lord," we cry. "I would make such a great worship leader." Yet as the weeks turn into months and the months into years, we wonder, *What's happening?*

"Don't worry," Paul would say to us. "I look back now and see that the day I was denied the ministry in which I thought I would do so well was the most important turning point in my life outside of my salvation."

If you're let down, understand that time will always prove the Lord to be right. That is why Paul could say, "If I must glory, I glory in the biggest disappointment of my life. Yes, I was heartsick at the time, but now I see the incredible wisdom of God."

12 2 Corinthians 12:1 (a)

It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory.

"I'm embarrassed that I have to glory in anything—even in my difficulties," said Paul.

2 Corinthians 12:1 (b)

I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

The false teachers who were undercutting Paul's ministry said, "He's a lightweight. All he does is teach doctrine. We have visions and revelations."

"All right," said Paul. "If you want to talk about visions and revelations. . . ."

2 Corinthians 12:2 (a)
I knew a man in Christ . . .

So reticent to talk about this was Paul that he doesn't even use his own name.

2 Corinthians 12:2 (b), 3
. . . above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

From the Book of Acts, we know that fourteen years prior to this, Paul had been left for dead after being stoned in the city of Lystra. It seems certain that this is the backdrop for the text before us.

2 Corinthians 12:4 (a)
How that he was caught up into paradise . . .

What is the third heaven? The Bible refers to three heavens: The atmosphere around us is the first. The stars above us constitute the second. And the place where God dwells is the third. This is another proof text that nullifies the theory of "soul sleep"—the theory that says that when a person dies, he remains in a state of nothingness until the resurrection of the dead at the Second Coming of Christ. After being stoned, Paul did not enter a state of nothingness but was taken immediately to paradise—literally "a walled garden"—to heaven.

2 Corinthians 12:4 (b)

. . . and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

It was literally impossible for Paul to describe what he saw and heard in heaven. But I suggest that whatever it was, it was the reason he wanted to immediately go back into the city and start preaching again. *I've had a sneak preview of coming attractions, and I'm ready to go!* he might have thought. *Maybe they'll kill me once more!*

This verse makes me a bit skeptical of those who write books and embark on speaking tours after "dying" on the operating table. Paul didn't even mention this experience for fourteen years—and only then to say he couldn't describe it.

2 Corinthians 12:5, 6

Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.

Do you hear the tension? Do you feel the struggle? "I don't want to talk about some revelation or vision or heavenly experience," says Paul. "Rather, I want you to judge me by the way I lived among you day after day after day."

Human nature says, "Let me share with you my revelation, my vision." Not Paul. He said, "I want you to judge what I'm saying based not on what I experienced mystically, but on how I lived among you practically."

2 Corinthians 12:7

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

Following his heavenly excursion, a messenger of Satan was sent to keep Paul humble. Think about this. What was the singular reason Satan was cast out of heaven? Pride. Yet here God used the very pride of Satan to work humility in Paul.

Directly following a presentation I gave in sixth grade, in which I was able to share the Lord, I got into a fight at lunchtime—the one and only fight of my school career. It wasn't about the gospel. It was over a girl. The guy who drew me into this fight was Doug Gerdwagen. Of all the guys in the school, Doug Gerdwagen was my nemesis. To me, he was an arrogant, cocky bully. But guess who the Lord used to humble me. And guess who the Lord will use in your life—your own Doug Gerdwagen—the very person you think is worse than you.

What was the thorn in the flesh of which Paul speaks? Commentators have suggested it was an eye disease, malaria, an irritating person who followed him around, or physical repercussions of the stoning he endured. We don't know for sure what it was. But this we do know: The word translated "thorn" is the word for "tent stake"—the eighteen-inch-long spikes necessary to anchor Bedouin tents in the fierce desert winds. Thus, Paul's thorn more closely resembled a sword in his side than it did a sliver under his skin.

2 Corinthians 12:8

For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

Whether it was concerning a pain in his body, eyesight that was failing rapidly, or a person causing great difficulty, three times Paul prayed, "Lord, take it away."

2 Corinthians 12:9 (a)

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Like Paul, we ask for help from the Lord. As far as our Father is concerned, however, the purpose of prayer is not that He might give help to us, but that He might give *Himself* to us.

The Father says, "You want Me to take away the pain, to solve the problem, to get you out of the situation—but that's not what you need. You need Me. And the very problem you're seeking to get away from, the very situation you desire to get out of is the very one that is causing you to talk to Me, spend time with Me, and depend on Me. You'll be stronger when you're weak because you'll have no other choice than to draw strength from Me. You'll do better when you're weak because you'll have to rely on Me."

2 Corinthians 12:9 (b)

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

It is the wise woman who says, "Okay, Lord. I'm not going to get out of the marriage because he's a thorn in my flesh."

It is the wise man who says, "I'm not going to try to alleviate that problem the way the world suggests, Lord. Instead, I'll just glory in it—for it's the way You get me close to You. And when I'm close to You, Your strength is made known to me."

2 Corinthians 12:10 (a)

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities . . .

"It's a pleasure, Lord, to have this thorn under my skin that causes me grief," said Paul. What a statement! I want to get there!

2 Corinthians 12:10 (b)

. . . in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

"What power there is in an accepted sorrow," wrote Madame Guyon four hundred years ago. Understand this, dear saint, it is not wrong to pray to the Father when there's a thorn jabbing at you, or to share with

> the Father the desires that are mounting within you. You desire a certain thing to open up, to work out, to be taken away. There's no problem with communicating this to the Father. Whether it's a physical thorn in the flesh—sickness, disease, or bodily difficulty—or whether it's an emotional thorn in the flesh, we are to pray not once, not twice, but without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:16).

However, life is not a playground. It's a battlefield. And the sooner we understand this, the wiser we'll be. This is not heaven. If you're seeking to have heaven here now—no thorns in your flesh, no problems poking you, no disappointments coming to you—your life will be hellish because this is not heaven. When I finally realize that, like Paul, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain, life becomes extremely meaningful and completely enjoyable. We're here for a short season. There will be thorns in our flesh. There will be things poking us and disappointing us. Oh, what power there is, though, in accepted sorrow.

Pray without ceasing until the Lord either takes away the difficulty, brings about healing, develops the relationship, opens the job—until He either does that which you're asking or lets you know, as He did with Paul, that His grace is sufficient for you to bear the pain or the disappointment. Never forget that God is not as interested in your present comfort as He is in your eternal state. Trust Him when He says, "This thorn is necessary to draw you close to Me, that you might give your all in service to Me, that you might depend wholly upon Me." For it is then you will hear from Him the words your soul longs to hear: "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the *joy* of the Lord" (see Matthew 25:21).

Pray. For as you grab the lever of prayer with the hand of faith, one of two things will happen: Blessings, healing, the working of God will come down upon you—or else the lever will yank you up into heaven, where you'll hear your Father say, "Now that I've got your attention, I don't want you healed because it is in your weakness that My strength will flow through you."

Brothers and sisters, pray three times, thirty times, three hundred times until you either get the answer you're asking for or you hear the Father say, "No, and here's why . . ." Don't settle for anything less. If you pray this way,

I believe you'll experience successful prayer 100 percent of the time. Talk to the Father about your thorns, your difficulties, and keep praying until the answer comes your way or until, like Paul, you have understanding and revelation and can say, "That's a closed issue. I don't need to talk about that anymore. I get it, Father. Your grace is sufficient for me."

***For topical study of 2 Corinthians 12:7–10 entitled "Prickly Problems," turn to page* 1155.**

2 Corinthians 12:11

I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.

In 1 Corinthians 4:7, Paul had told the Corinthians that whatever a man has is given to him by the Lord. Therefore, Paul was not superior to the self-described "super apostles" because he was anything special, but because the ministry he had was given to him by the Lord.

2 Corinthians 12:12

Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.

The "superstars" stressed the miraculous. Paul, on the other hand, labored daily, teaching the Word. Although miraculous gifts did, indeed, flow through Paul, he didn't boast about them or focus on them the way others did. Why? Because he knew that miracles don't produce faith. Faith comes only by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

2 Corinthians 12:13

For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong.

"The one thing I didn't do to you that I did in other churches is take money from you because I didn't want to be a burden to you," Paul said.

2 Corinthians 12:14

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

"I'm going to come and see you, but I'm not going to raise an offering for myself," Paul told the Corinthians. "I'm not interested in your money. I'm interested in you. Why? Because I'm a father to you."

2 Corinthians 12:15

And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.

"Others come and smite you in the face, take your money, pounce on you —and yet you respect them," says Paul. "I give my all for you, yet the more I give to you, the less I'm loved by you."

Why is it that the more you give to some people, the less they respect and love you? If someone is haughty and arrogant, sometimes people will be in awe of him. But if someone says, "I'm willing to spend all I have on your behalf," people think he must not be very special.

Don't be depressed, surprised, or discouraged when the more you love people, the less they love you—for this provides you a great opportunity to give simply for the sake of giving in true *agape* love. When you give to someone and he gives back to you, when you're nice to someone and she's nice to you—that's wonderful. But the highest form of giving is when you give and nothing is given back. Your reward will be great in heaven, and your personality will be shaped more closely into the image of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 12:16

But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile.

Paul quotes his critics who claimed that even though he was not charging the Corinthians, he had a plan and was simply setting them up for the big take.

2 Corinthians 12:17–19

Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you? I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps? Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying.

"Titus, a third brother I sent, and I are ministering with the same mentality. We're not tricky. We have no ulterior motive. We just want to be a blessing to you," said Paul.

The world still thinks we as believers have another agenda politically or monetarily. "You claim to just love Jesus," they say, "but what's your real agenda? Is it to take control of the government, or to get rich?" The answer is neither. Like Paul, we just want people to be built up in their faith that they would do well in the Lord.

2 Corinthians 12:20

For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:

"I'm worried that when I come, you'll not like what you see in me, and I'll not like what I see in you because of the correction that will need to take place," Paul told the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 12:21

And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have

not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.

What does "bewailing" mean? It speaks of a death moan, of grieving because of death. "Things are so out of order," said Paul, "that when I come I fear there will be some discipline—even the death of some." In this regard, we think of Ananias and Sapphira whom God had to deal with severely (Acts 5:1–11) and of Elymas, the sorcerer who was smitten with blindness that others might see (Acts 13:8–12). Sometimes some dark and heavy correction comes down when things get out of order the way they did at Corinth.

PRICKLY PROBLEMS

A Topical Study of 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7–10

It's a most prickly problem, a truly thorny issue. We hear about it regularly and struggle with it frequently. That is, why does the pain persist? Why does the problem keep poking me? I've prayed about it, claimed victory over it, and want deliverance from it. But it just seems to always be there, causing consternation and agitation within me. Why does the problem remain?

If you have wrestled with such issues, the text before us is just for you. What was the thorn in Paul's flesh? Some think it was a demon hassling him. Some say it was a person who was harassing him. Others believe it was a physical problem hurting him.

Some suggest Paul suffered from the recurring migraines associated with certain types of malaria. Others surmise Paul had an eye disease due to the fact that the Galatians were willing to give him their own eyes, if that were possible (Galatians 4:15). According to a second-century document, Paul squinted constantly and his eyes ran continually. "You see with what large letters I write to you . . ." Paul writes in Galatians 6:11—perhaps implying that he didn't see very well.

Although we don't know for certain what Paul's thorn in the flesh was, this much we do know: It wasn't a sliver because the Greek word used for "thorn" is the same used for "tent stake." The Bedouins are a nomadic people who, with the exception of the TV antennas sticking out of their tents, live today as they have lived for thousands of years. Since their only concession to modern society is color TV, the "thorn" we read of here in 2 Corinthians would be similar to the eighteen-inch spikes used by the Bedouins to pitch their tents today.

Why did God allow this tent stake, this problem, this pain in Paul's life? Our text gives three reasons. . . .

To Produce Protection

In the verses prior to our text, Paul explained to the Corinthian believers how he had been caught up into heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1–4). Therefore, because he had such an incredible, unspeakable experience, the thorn in his flesh kept him from becoming proud.

> One morning, during a particularly successful season, the wife of a college basketball coach knocked on the bathroom door as he was shaving.
>
> "Honey," she said, "someone from *Sports Illustrated* is on the phone."
>
> "*Sports Illustrated!*" he said as, with lather still on his face, he grabbed a towel and ran down the stairs.
>
> "Sports Illustrated?" he said eagerly, adjusting the phone to his ear.
>
> "Yes," said a cheerful voice on the other end. "For seventy-five cents an issue, you can subscribe to *Sports Illustrated* for a full year!"
>
> And his bubble was burst.

Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). Therefore, to protect us, the Lord sends pains and problems to hedge us in. Through the harlot Gomer as a picture of Israel, and the prophet Hosea as a picture of the everlasting love of God, He says,

> *Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.*
>
> Hosea 2:6, 7

The Lord knows my vulnerabilities. And He knows your weaknesses. Thus, by His grace, the thorns He allows in us are truly His protection for us.

To Propel Prayer

I have found oftentimes when my prayer life becomes lax or lazy, I find myself estranged from my Father. But prickly problems indeed propel me to pray. So, too, as one who prayed night and day (Romans 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 1:3), Paul prayed three times for the thorn in his flesh to be removed.

When you are dealing with an issue, which returns again and again, what should you do? Pray and pray and pray. Pray until you are either healed, delivered, set free—or until the Lord speaks into your heart the reason why the problem will remain. Pray for either a release from the thorn or a revelation concerning the situation. Such is the model of Paul and of Jesus.

Three times in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed, "Father if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44). The thorn of the Cross was not removed, but Jesus received peace when He concluded His prayer, "Thy will be done." Keep praying, saint. The Lord will either remove your thorn, your pain, your struggle—or give you understanding to go along with it.

To Precede Power

It was after Paul prayed three times for deliverance that at last he could say, "Most gladly, therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (see verse 9).

"Let me mow the lawn," begged Benjamin when he was four.

"Okay," I said. So, grabbing hold of the handle to my push mower, Ben pushed and grunted as the veins stuck out on his four-year-old neck.

"Help me, Daddy!" he called.

"Okay, Ben," I said. And with Ben in my arms, I mowed a few strips of the lawn.

When we decided to take a break, it was an excited and elated Benny who ran in the house yelling, "Mommy! Mommy! I mowed the lawn!"

What does God want to do? He wants to empower your life. But it's not until you come to the end of your rope that you can see your need for His strength. That's why the strongest people you will ever meet are those, who at some point in their lives, have absorbed a "thorn in the flesh" and have come to be at peace with it.

Rapport with Me

Whenever I think I am the only one suffering from a particular thorn in my flesh, the judgment hall of Pilate tells me otherwise. You see, it was there that Jesus absorbed not a single thorn in His flesh, but an entire crown of thorns, pressed into His skull (Mark 15:17). Therefore, He can relate to whatever problem I face; whatever battle I fight; whatever sharp, pointed thorn I endure because He has been there, tempted in all points like me—yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Reminder to Me

My tendency is to say, "Only my thorn is heavy." But the crown of thorns on Jesus' brow reminds me that because of Adam's sin, we're *all* cursed with thorns (Genesis 3:18). Therefore, God is not picking on me alone. We're all in this together, for every one of us will bear our own thorn.

Revival Within Me

The crown of thorns preceded the Cross of Calvary, which opened the way to heaven for me—where there will be no more tears, no more pain, no more thorns. This produces revival within my heart and renewed love for the One who absorbed more thorns than I could ever imagine.

Precious sisters, dear brother, don't try to remove the thorn the Lord has given you. Embrace it and see it produce protection in your walk, prayer in your heart, and power in your life—all to the glory of the One who endured the thorns; all to the praise of the One who paid the price.



13 **2 Corinthians 13:1, 2**

This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare:

"I'm coming to you again. Hopefully, you're getting the message. If you're not, I will have to deal with you severely," said Paul.

2 Corinthians 13:3, 4

Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you. For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.

When Jesus was crucified, they thought He was weak, but three days later, He rose again. "So, too," Paul says, "you look at us as weak, but when we come back, you'll see His power flowing through us."

Why is Paul being so stern? Because this is what it took to get these people to understand that they were being duped, sucked in by false teachers.

2 Corinthians 13:5 (a)

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.

"You're criticizing us, finding fault with us," Paul says, "but here's what you should do: Examine yourself. Are you in the faith?" The implication is sobering. There can be those who come to church week after month after year after decade but who are not saved. How do you know if you're in the faith? Read on.

2 Corinthians 13:5 (b)

Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

Is Christ in you? It's not a matter of religion, but of relationship. It's not a question of theology, but of intimacy. It's not knowing about Jesus intellectually, but knowing Him personally.

2 Corinthians 13:6, 7

But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates. Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.

"Look at us and see how Christ lives in us, how He's given guidance to us," says Paul. "And even if you don't buy our ministry, we still hope you'll do what's right."

2 Corinthians 13:8, 9 (a)

For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong . . .

"If we're weak but you're strong, we are glad. If you're doing good, even though we're going through hard times, we rejoice."

2 Corinthians 13:9 (b)

. . . and this also we wish, even your perfection.

The tendency of many of us would be to say, "I hope you get judged." Not Paul. He says, "I hope things will be perfect for you, that you'll walk in maturity, that you'll do excellently." The only way Paul could have had that kind of heart for this kind of people is if he did what he said he did—if he prayed for them continually.

When you want to see someone get wiped out because they've done you wrong, pray God's best blessing upon his life. When you pray for the people who irritate you, your heart changes toward them. Oh, they might be changed in the process as well—but whether or not that happens, you will be changed, for one cannot be angry, hostile, or mad at those for whom he consistently prays. When you pray for people, you find your own heart desiring their perfection. You want their best.

2 Corinthians 13:10

Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.

"I'm writing these things to you that you might make corrections now," said Paul, "so we won't have to come to you and bewail your condition."

2 Corinthians 13:11–14

Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you. Greet one another with an holy kiss. All the saints salute you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.

And so we come to the end of this second Corinthian letter—a beautiful and heartwarming ending to what was sometimes a necessarily brutal and heart-rending Epistle. Paul's closing statement begins with some simple and solid exhortations—"be of good comfort; be of one mind; live in peace."

And then he shares with them the wonderful ramification that if they do these things, the God of love and peace would be with them.

He follows this with an encouragement for warm but godly affection when he tells them to greet one another with a holy kiss, and then gives a message of affirmation to them when he tells them that, rather than being down on them, all the saints salute them.

Finally, he gives them a beautiful and blessed benediction by saying, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all."

No doubt, the hearts of the Corinthians would be encouraged and inspired by these warm words of Paul. Mine is. But there is one phrase that troubles me greatly. And I bet it troubled the Corinthians as well—for in the midst of Paul's beautiful benediction and heartwarming affirmation are words that cause within me a real consternation: Be perfect. Why couldn't Paul have said, "Be happy," or "Be good," or "Be all that you can be"? Why did he have to say, "Be perfect"?

If you have a newer translation, perhaps your Bible renders this phrase, "Be mature." Other paraphrases read, "Grow up." And while these are both close to the meaning, linguistically, the word Paul uses encompasses more than maturity or growth. It means, literally, "Be perfect." We can seek to sidestep it. We can try to get around it, but it means just what it says.

The implications are amazing, for if the Scriptures tell you and me that we are to be perfect, to do what's right, it must mean that in every situation there is right and there is wrong. This should be obvious to us, but there's a point in the history of Israel when the Lord sent the prophet Isaiah to indict the people concerning this very issue.

> Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!
>
> Isaiah 5:20

At this juncture in their history, the people of Israel were confused in their understanding of right and wrong. They were entirely mixed up in their morality. So the prophet Isaiah thunders, "Woe to those in your society who say that light is dark and dark light, who are all mixed up in their morals and ethics." We see the same thing in our own culture.

Even as people argue for traditional family values, we still miss the mark. Why? Because values are subjective. For example, I value my Volkswagen van. But you and I could argue indefinitely about what the value is because of the subjective nature of values. No, the issue is not values. The issue is perfection.

What is perfect? The law of the Lord is perfect (Psalm 19:7). Given to us by God rather than generated within the mind of man, the law of God is nonnegotiable. The law of the Lord is perfect.

"Be ye perfect," Jesus said, "even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). But He had already defined His terms when He said, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you'll not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

There are two ways to go about trying to be perfect. You can steel yourself morally and ethically by placing rules and regulations around yourself. Then you'll be like a man in a bathysphere—those big balls made out of cast iron with walls six inches thick—exploring the deepest trenches of the Pacific Ocean. Yet as you sit cramped and confined within your bathysphere, what will you see? Little fish with extremely thin skin swimming around totally free. How can these fish survive such depths? The answer is simple: The pressure within them is equal to the pressure outside of them.

There are those on the Religious Right who say, "We're going to construct iron plates of rules and regulations around us." But there's a better way. Christ *in* us is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). It's not the law outside of us, but the Lawgiver, the Lover of our Soul, Christ Jesus *in* us who will whisper to us, "Why are you going in there? Why are you watching that? Why are you thinking those thoughts? Let Me show you a better way of thinking, of speaking, of acting, of living."

"I will write My will in your heart," God declared (Jeremiah 31:33). And He does so through His Spirit who dwells within us.

My bathysphere has sprung a leak or two along the way. So has yours. But when Jesus Christ died for our sin, He paid the price for the leaks we've sprung, for every mistake we've made. Thus, it is through Him and Him alone that we can be perfect by being perfectly forgiven.

Amen!



GALATIANS

Background to Galatians

Most likely, the first epistle penned by the apostle Paul was the one addressed to the Galatians, a people of whom Julius Caesar reportedly said, "They are fickle, fond of change, and not to be trusted." Originally from Gaul, or present-day France, the Galatians migrated south, settling into a region in present-day Turkey. Galatia was not a city, but a region.

Paul experienced firsthand the fickle nature of these people when, after he healed a lame man, the Galatians bowed before him and worshiped him as Jupiter. That was in the morning. In the evening, the same people picked up rocks, threw them at Paul, and left him for dead outside the city in response to a whispering campaign instigated by his enemies (Acts 14).

Too tough to die, however, Paul continued teaching the Good News of the gospel of grace—nowhere more clearly set forth than in this letter to the very people who once tried to kill him.

- In chapters 1 and 2, Paul wrote of his personal experience *with* grace.
- Chapters 3 and 4 address Paul's doctrinal instruction *about* grace.
- Chapters 5 and 6 give practical application *of* grace.

It's a fabulous book—Paul's manifesto on the absolute necessity of standing in liberty and his glorious defense of the gospel of grace.

GALATIANS

1

Galatians 1:1

Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;).

Paul always began his Epistles in one of two ways: To the Romans and the Philippians, to Titus and Philemon, he introduced himself as a servant, or prisoner of Christ. To the Corinthians and the Ephesians, to the Colossians and the Galatians, he presented himself as an apostle. Why? Because to those who embraced and welcomed his ministry, he was a servant; but to those who challenged his authority, he was an apostle, a "sent one" of Jesus Christ.

Thus, even the opening verse of this letter underscores the fact that Paul's enemies—those who taught the "three R's of religion": rules, regulations, and rituals—sought to undermine the ministry of grace in the region of Galatia by questioning the authority of Paul.

This still happens today. When someone wants to subvert a ministry, he invariably slanders the minister—especially if he can't argue proficiently against the doctrine. Paul's enemies were no exception. They continually challenged his authority, saying, "He doesn't have the credentials to teach as he does."

So, too, the religionist comes to us, saying, "You believe in Jesus? That's great. So do I. But there's a little more to it than that."

"Really? Then how is man saved?" I ask.

"Well, believe in Jesus Christ and join our church," or, "Believe in Jesus Christ and sell magazines," or, "Believe in Jesus Christ and wear holy underwear."

Whenever you hear the word *and* in conjunction with belief, you know you're talking to a religionist. Jesus said it all boils down to only one thing: Believe on Him whom the Father hath sent (John 5:24). Put your trust in Him. Keep focused on Him. Open your heart to Him, for He alone is the basis of true faith.

The question of authority is most often raised by those who want to keep people under the restraints of religion and legalism. "What authority do you have to do the things you do, to preach the way you preach, or to baptize in the manner you baptize?" they ask.

"Who are you?" the priests and Levites asked John the Baptist. "Are you Elijah?"

"No."

"Are you Messiah?"

"No."

"Well, then, in whose authority do you do these things?" (see John 1:19–25).

After questioning John in chapter 1, the Jews questioned Jesus in chapter 2. Following His cleansing of the temple, they came to Him, saying, "By what authority do You do these things?" (see John 2:18).

The questioning of authority is a strategy often used by religious organizations and ritualistic people. "We alone are the direct descendants of the apostles," they say. "Through the tunnel of history, their apostolic anointing has been passed generation by generation to us."

Not true. Nothing in Scripture indicates that anointing can be passed on by man. Only God can impart authority.

"Then what is the value of being formally ordained?" you ask.

At best, ordination says that the Lord has touched this brother, or that ministry; that His hand is upon it, and His grace flowing through it. Ordination, therefore, is nothing more than a ratification of what the Lord is already doing. That's why Paul said at the outset of this Epistle, "My authority was not given me by men, but by Jesus Christ."

Galatians 1:2, 3 (a)

And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia: Grace be to you and peace . . .

Why did Paul so often link peace with grace (1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1

Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; Philemon 3)? Because man will never know peace until he understands grace.

What is grace? Grace is unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor. The old acrostic still says it best: God's Riches At Christ's Expense—not because of anything you do or have done, but because of who Christ is and what He's done. You don't need to go through rituals. You don't need to live under regulations. You can have peace today if you understand grace because the grace of God brings peace in a profound way.

Galatians 1:3 (b), 4

. . . from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.

"Evil world?" you say. "Don't we sing, 'This Is My Father's World'? If it's God's, then why is it evil?"

God the Father placed this world in the custody of Adam and Eve, our representatives in the Garden of Eden. When they fell, they, in turn, transferred ownership of the world to the one to whom they chose to submit —Satan. That is why when Satan offered Jesus all of the kingdoms of the world in return for worship (Matthew 4:8, 9), Jesus didn't dispute his right to make such an offer. Therefore, when people indict God for the corruption and evil of this world, it belies their ignorance of world history. The reason the world is so messed up and perverted is because, in rejecting God, mankind gave Satan dominion of the world system.

While it is true that God has placed perimeters around Satan, as we move toward the end of the ages, things will become more and more bizarre. People will excuse every sort of aberrant behavior by saying, "It's not my fault. I'm made that way." And evil will run rampant.

"As it was in the days of Noah"—punctuated with sexual aberrations; "as it was in the days of Lot"—permeated with homosexual exaltation—"so it will be in the last days," said Jesus (see Luke 17:26–28).

The Good News is that Jesus Christ died for our sins so that He could deliver us from this present evil world. We're going to heaven, folks. And that day is not very far off.

Galatians 1:5

To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

I'm convinced we are on the verge of witnessing the coming of Jesus Christ. We'll be taken to heaven, where things will be right at last. Then we'll come back to earth, where He will rule and reign with righteousness for one thousand years. No wonder Paul says, "To Him be glory forever and ever"—for He has delivered us from this present evil world and into His glorious kingdom.

Galatians 1:6, 7 (a)

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another . . .

So-called "spiritual men" came on the scene in Galatia, saying, "It's great that you're born-again Christians and that you believe in the gospel. But it's not quite that simple. If you *really* want to be spiritual, you must follow the law—particularly the rite of circumcision. You must show you're serious by inflicting pain upon your body."

Paul said, "I marvel that you guys in Galatia have fallen for this."

Galatians 1:7 (b)

. . . but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

The Greek word translated "trouble" means "seasick." It's the same word used in Matthew 14:26, when, in the midst of a storm, the disciples were troubled when they saw Jesus walking on the water. The word connotes queasiness. This is understandable, since hearing they needed to be circumcised would be troubling news indeed to the Gentile believers.

Galatians 1:8, 9

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be

accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

"Anyone—a preacher, prophet, or even an angel from heaven—who preaches another gospel is to be damned," said Paul.

In 1 Kings 13, a young prophet burst onto the scene, found Jeroboam standing before an altar he had built to worship idols, and said, "Thus saith the Lord, Upon this altar shall the bones of your prophets be burned. And this shall be a sign: this altar will split in half." Upon hearing this, Jeroboam stretched out his hand and ordered the prophet seized. But as he did, his arm became paralyzed. At that moment, the altar did indeed crack and Jeroboam was filled with fear.

"I repent," Jeroboam cried. "Please pray for me." The prophet complied, and Jeroboam's hand was immediately restored. "Come to the palace," said a relieved and grateful Jeroboam, "and I will give you food and clothing."

"I can't," the prophet replied. "God told me very plainly that I was only to deliver the Word, and then return to my people."

On his way home, he was met by an older prophet, who, having heard what had transpired said to him, "I heard about what happened with Jeroboam. Come to my house, have dinner with me, and we'll talk about prophet stuff."

"I can't," said the young prophet. "God told me I'm to go back to my own people."

"Well," the old prophet argued, "I've been a prophet longer than you—and an angel came and told me to tell you you're to come to my house."

Finally, the young prophet gave in and accompanied the older prophet to his house. In the middle of the meal, the old prophet began to cry.

"What's wrong?" asked the young prophet.

"You're going to die," said the old prophet.

"Why?"

"You shouldn't have come here. You should have obeyed God. Why did you listen to me? The word of the Lord to you, young man, is that when you leave here, a lion will devour you."

And, sure enough, as the young man hurried home, a lion attacked and killed him.

If you know the Word but listen instead to a seemingly older or wiser so-called apostle or prophet who says something contrary to the Word, like the young prophet, you will be eaten by the roaring lion that goes about seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).

I camp on this point because in the days in which we live, there are many who will suggest to you practices, customs, and traditions that seem spiritual but aren't scriptural.

> A so-called revival in the Church of England wherein people were laughing like hyenas, roaring like lions, and barking like dogs recently captured the attention of the secular media. My question is: Where is it written in the Word that people are to bark like dogs, roar like lions, or laugh hysterically for hours at a time?

I firmly believe that everything we do in the practice of our faith and in the expression of worship must be seen in the Scriptures.

"Well, that's too restrictive," you say.

No, it isn't. Whenever there is a phenomenon or an expression of the Spirit, if, like Peter on the Day of Pentecost, you can say, "This is that spoken by the Word" (see Acts 2:16), you will have a solid and stable walk. A good rule of thumb concerning any practice or tradition is this: Where do you see it in the life of Jesus? Secondly, does it continue through the Book of Acts? Finally, is it taught by Paul in the Epistles?

There is so much in the life of Jesus, expressed through the Book of Acts, and taught by the apostle Paul that we are not yet experiencing, we have our work cut out for us just doing the things we see in Scripture—let alone exploring avenues that are not there.

"The two sticks in Ezekiel 37 refer to the Gospel and the Book of Mormon," said the angel Moroni. "Put on these glasses, Joseph, and you'll see another gospel, a further revelation."

Not true.

Paul says let the person, prophet, preacher, or angel who says there's another gospel be accursed.

Galatians 1:10

For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

"Religious ritualists might come down on me and call me narrow-minded and simple," said Paul. "I don't care. I must please God rather than men. If I was trying to please these heavy-handed leaders, I could not be the servant of Christ."



***For topical study of Galatians 1:10 entitled "Fearing God or Fearing Man?" turn to page* 1165.**

Galatians 1:11, 12

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In verses 1–11, we saw grace declared in Paul's message. Beginning with verse 12, we see grace depicted in Paul's life as he shares his own story.

Galatians 1:13, 14

For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above

many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

"You know my story," Paul said. "I was into Judaism radically, a Pharisee of Pharisees (Philippians 3:5, 6). In addition, I wasted the church, looking for Christians to bring to trial (Acts 9:1, 2).

Galatians 1:15, 16 (a)

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen . . .

"Even though I was a Jew's Jew," Paul argued, "God had something else in mind for me. From my mother's womb, I was called into the ministry of sharing the Good News of the gospel. Sidetracked for a while, I got involved in religion. God, however, knew all along that I would be an apostle of the gospel of grace."

Galatians 1:16 (b), 17 (a)

. . . immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia . . .

In religious circles today, it's impressive to have a D.D.—a Doctorate of Divinity. Paul had a D.D.—a Doctorate of the Desert. He was in good company: Moses, John the Baptist, and Jesus all spent time in the desert.

Maybe these are dry, difficult days for you. It could be that God wants to reveal Jesus Christ to you in a fresh way. For that to happen, He may do to you what He did to John the apostle when He sent him to Patmos. . . .

At one hundred years of age, John was exiled to Patmos—a rocky, barren, seemingly God forsaken island. It was a tough situation, and, no doubt, John questioned what was going on. "I'm old," he could have said. "I've trusted in the Lord. I'm linked to Him. Why this isolation?"

When he saw Jesus Christ, John started writing. Twenty-two chapters later, the Book of Revelation was complete.

When was revelation given to John?

When he was isolated on an island.

Perhaps you're at a point where you're saying, "Who can I talk to?" or, "What counsel can I receive?"—when the Lord may have you on an island of isolation for a season in order to give you a revelation of Jesus Christ. Don't bemoan your condition. Don't bewail your situation. Worship the Lord. Draw close to Him. Be still—and you will see Him in ways you never would have had you been anywhere else.

Galatians 1:17 (b)–19

. . . and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.

"After three years, I went to Jerusalem to see Peter," said Paul. "I didn't see any of the other apostles, except James, the Lord's brother. Peter greeted me and welcomed me for fifteen days. James did so briefly. The other apostles wanted nothing to do with me."

This is understandable. Seeing Paul spending time with Christians would have been comparable to seeing Adolf Hitler attending synagogue. Paul, being a persecutor of Christians, and a waster of the church, the church didn't quite know what to make of him.

Galatians 1:20–24

Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; and was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me.

In some regions, people wondered about Paul. In others, they glorified God in him.

FEARING GOD OR FEARING MAN?

A Topical Study of GALATIANS 1:10

"The fear of man is a snare," Solomon declared (see Proverbs 29:25). Paul elaborated on this, saying if we fear men, we cannot be the servants of Christ.

Try to fit in with this group on campus, or that group on the job site, try to speak their lingo, laugh at their jokes, be cool like them—it will end in disaster. Ask David. . . .

The Rear of Man Brings Humiliation

Fleeing from Saul, David went to the Philistine city of Gath (1 Samuel 21). Upon his arrival, the servants of Achish, king of Gath, said, "Is not this David? Did not they sing one to another of him, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands?"

Oh no, thought David. *They know who I am.* So, the Word says, "He changed his behavior before them and feigned himself mad in their hands." He scratched on the doors of the gate and let spittle run down his beard. Poor David. The same guy who killed Goliath, the same one noted for courage and valor is now falling prey to the fear of man, acting like an idiot. It's tragic. Although his plan worked, David was humiliated and embarrassed even to this day. Thousands of years later, we're talking about David playing the fool because of the fear of man.

It's amazing to watch teenagers, adults, and even older people act like fools. It's amazing to see people try to fit in because they're afraid of man. It's amazing to see people, who, like David, love God and have seen victories in the Lord in times past, fearing man, look like idiots with spit running down their beards as they try to fit in and be cool.

Truly, the fear of man brings humiliation, for even the Achishes of this world say, "Get this guy out of here" (see 1 Samuel 21:14, 15).

The Fear of Man Brings Devastation

"Saul, you are to go and do battle against the Amalekites," said Samuel (see 1 Samuel 15). "You are to destroy all of the men, women, sheep, and cattle." Saul engaged the Amalekites in battle and was indeed victorious. Upon his return, he saw Samuel off in the distance. "Praise the Lord," he shouted. "I did what you told me to do."

"Then what's that bleating I hear?" asked Samuel.

The people wanted to bring some of the best sheep back to sacrifice to the Lord," answered Saul.

"What about him?" asked Samuel, pointing to the man hiding behind Saul.

"That's Agag, king of the Amalekites. I brought him back as a trophy," said Saul.

"Didn't I tell you that all of the sheep and people were to be killed?" said Samuel. "The Lord requires obedience, not sacrifice. Because you listened to the people rather than to God, you will lose your authority and your monarchy."

Years later, Saul was wounded in battle. With his last breath, he asked his attacker from whence he came.

"I am an Amalekite" was the reply (2 Samuel 1:8).

Saul not only lost his crown, but he lost his life because of the fear of man.

The Fear of Man Brings Disqualification

Moses came down from the mountaintop to find the people of Israel dancing around a golden calf.

"What's going on?" he asked Aaron, the high priest.

"It's not my fault," Aaron said. "The people brought me their golden earrings. I simply threw them into the fire and out came this golden calf" (see Exodus 32:24).

And so it was that Aaron was removed from the kind of ministry he could have had, for it was at this point that God instituted the Levitical priesthood. You see, it was only the Levites who said, "We fear not man, but will stand with the Lord, no matter what others do" (see Exodus 32:26).

Truly, the fear of man brings humiliation, devastation, and disqualification.

"Those things won't happen to me," you say. "I'm a 'No Fear' kind of guy. Look, It even says so on my T-shirt."

Folks, the "No Fear" mentality is a fallacy because at any given moment, we are either living in the fear of man or in the fear of God. The fear of man is a snare (Proverbs 29:25). The fear of the Lord, on the other hand, is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7).

What does it mean to fear the Lord?

It doesn't mean being afraid of Him. It means being afraid of doing anything that would disappoint Him.

> The son of a pastor friend of mine was misbehaving in Sunday school. "God's watching you, William," the teacher said. Little William went home that afternoon and asked his dad if it was true that God was always watching him.
>
> Knowing the reason for his son's question, this wise father said, "Yeah, William. It's true—God's always watching you. He loves you so much He just can't take His eyes off you."

The fear of God says, "Thank You, Father, for Your goodness, Your grace, Your kindness. Oh, Father, I don't want to do anything to grieve You." The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). The word

"beginning" doesn't mean "the starting point." It means "the basis of." In other words, the foundation of wisdom is to fear God, realizing at any moment, in every moment, His eye is upon you.

Not only is the fear of the Lord the beginning of wisdom, but it "prolongeth days" (Proverbs 10:27). When you fear the Lord, your days are long or, literally, "enriched." The fear of the Lord enriches your days and makes prosperous all you do.

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil (Proverbs 8:13). Knowing God's loving gaze is fixed upon you will cause you to steer clear of anything that is corrupt or carnal.

> From the time she was a baby, my daughter Jessie never went anywhere without her blanket. As the day drew near for her to start school, I became increasingly worried. But as we walked out the door together on that first day of kindergarten, I was as shocked as I was relieved to see her without her beloved blanket. "Where's your blanket, Jessie?" I asked somewhat fearfully.
>
> "I'm not going to let the boys see me with a blanket, Daddy," she said. And she never picked up her blanket again.

Truly, when you care about someone, you find yourself behaving differently!

The fear of the Lord is strong confidence and a fountain of life (Proverbs 14:26, 27). If you want to go through life confidently, if you want to experience a continual flow of refreshment, live your life in the fear of the Lord.

Precious people, right now you either fear what family, friends, co-workers, or neighbors think of you—or you are living in the fear of God. If you're living in the fear of man, trying to fit in, like David, people will see you as an idiot. Like Saul, you'll be destroyed. Like Aaron, you'll miss out on what could have been.

But if you're living in the fear of God, your days will be prosperous, your foundation sure, and your life blessed.

May the Lord give us a new desire and a new resolve to say, "We choose today to give no place to the fear of man. We choose, instead, to walk in the

fear of God." According to Paul, only then can we be servants of Christ.



2 In chapter 1, we saw grace declared in Paul's message (1:1–18), and depicted in his life (1:19–24). Here in chapter 2, we will see grace defended in his ministry—both before the church collectively and before Peter personally.

Galatians 2:1 (a)
Then fourteen years after . . .

Following Paul's conversion, he spent approximately three years in the Arabian desert, where he was personally tutored by Jesus Christ. Emerging from the desert, he spent fifteen days in Jerusalem primarily with Peter. He then made his way to Syria, Cilicia, and finally back to his hometown of Tarsus—where he remained for eleven years.

During those eleven years, outside the flow of the story transpiring in the Book of Acts, Paul labored quietly making tents—until suddenly people started getting saved in Antioch. Jews by nationality but Grecian in culture and custom, the new believers had a hard time relating to the traditional Jewish believers who had led them to the Lord. Hearing of the outpouring of the Spirit in Antioch, leaders of the church in Jerusalem dispatched Barnabas to see what was happening.

After surveying the situation, Barnabas believed the solution lay in his old friend with the keen intellect—Paul. So Barnabas tracked Paul down and brought him back to Antioch, back into ministry (Acts 11:19–26).

Galatians 2:1 (b)
. . . I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.

Paul took Titus, a young Gentile protégé, with him to Jerusalem.

Galatians 2:2

And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.

Paul, Barnabas, and Titus told Peter, James, John, and the rest of the church in Jerusalem about their ministry among the Gentiles.

Galatians 2:3

But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

The Jerusalem brothers responded, saying, "Titus, because you're Greek, you need to submit to the regulation that speaks of the cutting away of the flesh, and which shows you're serious about your commitment to God. You need to be circumcised." In other words, "Become a Jew, Titus."

Galatians 2:4

And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage.

The religionists crept in to observe the liberty of Paul, Titus, and Barnabas—not to celebrate it, but to regulate it.

Galatians 2:5

To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

Paul had no time for those whose aim it was to bring people into bondage. I'm so glad Paul held his ground, for had he given in to these Judaizers, how much different Christianity would be today. Had Paul given in to the religionists, we would be required to keep all of the rules, ordinances, and regulations of the Jewish religious system.

Paul understood the vital concept that Jesus Christ came to do something new. You see, before Jesus came, the world was divided into only two groups: Jews and Gentiles. But the blood and water that flowed at Calvary (John 19:34) marked the birth of a new entity that was neither Jew nor Gentile. For just as a bride was created for the first Adam from out of his side (Genesis 2:22), the church, the bride of Christ, was born when the sword pierced the side of the Last Adam. As a result, we are neither Jews nor Gentiles. We are the church.

Galatians 2:6 (a)

But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) . . .

As a freshman at Biola University, I was about to give a Bible study before a group of professors. The night before my presentation, when I finally fell asleep, I dreamed I saw each of my professors, along with Billy Graham and a whole bunch of other Christian leaders, standing hand in hand with me around a huge tree. The interesting thing was this: Every single guy was exactly the same height. When I awoke, I knew immediately that the Lord was reminding me that He truly is no respecter of persons—even of those who "seem to be somewhat" (see Acts 10:34).

Galatians 2:6 (b)

. . . for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me.

"Peter, James, John, and the others didn't tell me anything I didn't already know," said Paul. This is understandable, considering Paul had been tutored personally by Jesus Christ Himself (see 1:16).

Galatians 2:7–10

But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in

Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.

Here is Paul's account of the Acts 15 Jerusalem Council. After listening to Paul, and seeing what the Lord was doing through him, Peter, James, and John said, "We'll continue ministering to the Jews here in Jerusalem. You minister to the Gentiles. Just don't forget the poor." This is humorous to me because where were the poor to which Peter, James, and John were referring? In Jerusalem. In other words, they were saying, "Don't forget us, Paul. Send us some money."

Four men—Peter, Paul, James, and John—were the main players in the drama of the early church.

As I look at Peter, I see he is the apostle of order. He was the one who talked about a spiritual priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices, and being a spiritual house. He's the one who talked about Jesus as the Bishop of our soul. Peter had a distinctly Jewish flavor. Parts of the body of Christ can really relate to Peter. With their bishops and spiritual sacrifices, the liturgical churches come from Peter's line.

Paul, on the other hand, was the apostle of candor. He was an "in-your-face, this-is-the-way-it-is" renegade kind of guy. Where Peter would be the apostle of the liturgical church, Paul would be the apostle of the evangelical church. C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, C. H. Spurgeon would all relate to Paul.

John was the apostle of passion. The one who leaned on the breast of Christ at the Last Supper, the one who was caught up into heaven in the Book of Revelation, John best represents those who are mystical, Pentecostal, and visionary by nature. George Fox, Thomas à Kempis, and Madame Guyon would relate most closely to John.

Finally, there was James. "Pure and undefiled religion is this," the apostle of action said, "visit the fatherless, take care of the widows, and

keep yourself unspotted from the world (see James 1:27). You can talk about your faith until you're blue in the face—let me see your works." James would reflect the ecumenical mentality that says, "We have a responsibility to feed the poor in Rwanda. We need to get involved in Habitat for Humanity. We need to forget our differences, come together, and do something practical for a hurting world." While I don't agree with a lot of the theology of the ecumenical movement, I can and do commend them for much of what they do in caring for people's practical needs.

As I look at the churches in our communities, I can see "Peter" kinds of churches, "Paul" types of fellowships, "James" groups of believers, and "John"-flavored bodies. I can embrace them all because I can see the Lord's wisdom in having different kinds of churches for different kinds of people.

Paul would later write, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12, 13). Both as individuals, and as a corporate church, our salvation is to be worked out, or expressed with a little different flavor than that of other individuals or other churches.

The fact remains, however, that we must not be a "Paul" chapel, a "James" body, a "Peter" fellowship, or a "John" group of believers. We must be a Jesus church. Truly, He must be pre-eminent. No matter how big a church might be numerically, how much incense it might burn sacrificially, how much work it does practically, or how many visions it might see mystically—if it does not lift up Jesus Christ it is a false fellowship.

Galatians 2:11 (a)
But when Peter was come to Antioch . . .

Peter left Jerusalem to travel north to Antioch—Gentile territory.

Galatians 2:11 (b)
. . . I withstood him to the face . . .

Paul didn't go storming down to Jerusalem, saying, "Have a sausage, Peter. I dare you." No, Peter was in Paul's arena, and because Peter was

trying to get the people to whom Paul was ministering to go in a different direction, Paul was justified in pointing out Peter's hypocrisy.

There have been occasions when, as a shepherd, I have had to physically remove those who came in, wanting to take this flock in a direction contrary to the gospel of grace. But I will not go into another church and pronounce judgment or give correction. When Paul was in Peter's face, he was on his own turf—in Antioch, not Jerusalem.

Galatians 2:11 (c)
. . . because he was to be blamed.

This phrase indicates very simply and clearly that traditions claiming either that Peter was the first pope, or that popes are infallible in matters of doctrine and church practice, are mistaken. If Peter was the first pope, he was far from infallible here.

Galatians 2:12 (a)
For before that certain came from James, he did eat . . .

The early church had *agape* feasts wherein believers would gather together and share a meal. Many of them being poor, everyone would pool his resources and contribute to a big potluck dinner.

Galatians 2:12 (b)
. . . with the Gentiles . . .

Jewish tradition held that there was a special connection with whomever one shared a meal. The Jews, therefore, were forbidden to eat with Gentiles. Thus, Peter broke tradition not only in eating the food of Gentiles, but in eating with Gentiles.

Galatians 2:12 (c)
. . . but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

When the men from Jerusalem came, suddenly Peter distanced himself from the Gentile believers.

Galatians 2:13, 14

And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

"You ate right alongside of us, Peter," said Paul. "Therefore, if you, a Jew, are unable to keep the rules and regulations of Judaism, how can you expect Gentiles to keep them? It makes no sense!"

That's what hypocrisy always does: It tries to make other people do what we ourselves can't.

Galatians 2:15, 16

We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

"Peter, why are you advocating the rebirth of religion?" asked Paul. "We Jews couldn't even keep the rules. We know that a man is justified only by faith in Christ—not by works, but simply by believing."

Are you trying to earn God's favor through morning devotions or Wednesday night Bible study attendance, through memorizing verses or witnessing, through not going here or not doing that? It's a big mistake. You are justified by faith and faith alone—not only when you were born again, not only when you were saved ten years ago—but today, right now. God's blessing will be upon the life of any man, woman, teenager, or older person who simply says, "I know I can't earn Your blessing, Lord. However, if You

want to bless me by Your grace through my belief in Your Son, I welcome such blessing."

Dear brother, precious sister—the blessings of God are not based upon what you do or don't do. It's not a matter of saying, "Okay, God, I didn't see that movie. Aren't You proud of me? And because I didn't, here's what I'm expecting You to do for me. . . ."

No. The blessings of God are based solely upon grace. We can receive His blessing only because the sin that separated us from the Father has been washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, if I choose to sin, it's not that God will withhold His blessing in order to punish me. No, the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed me from all sin—past, present, and future (1 John 1:7, 9). If I choose to sin, I destroy myself.

Balak, king of the Moabites, hired Balaam the prophet to curse the people of Israel (Numbers 22). No matter how Balaam tried, however, he could only pronounce blessing upon them. "Let's build another altar, and you can try again," said Balak. So again Balaam opened his mouth—but only blessing came out. After a third altar, a third try, and a third failure, Balak was desperate.

"I can't help it," explained Balaam. "I'm trying to curse them, but they're God's people. Seeing his fee slip through his fingers, however, Balaam came up with a new plan. "I can't curse them," he told Balak, "but they can curse themselves. Here's what you do: Send your women into the Israelite camp and tell them to invite the Israelite men into their tents. Then have them pull out their little idols—their Ashtaroths—and say, "This is the way we worship in this country. Don't you want to worship with us?"

"Good plan," Balak said. So he got his girls and sent them into the camp of Israel. They enticed the guys into their tents and, just as planned, the Moabite women pulled out their idols. Sure enough, the Israelites took the bait—and ended up cursing themselves, resulting in a plague that wiped out twenty-four thousand of them (Numbers 25:9).

The same is true today. God says, "You're justified by the hearing of faith because you believe in the work of My Son." As far as God is concerned, the sin that would bar me from "the spout where the blessings come out" was taken away by the blood of Jesus Christ. I cannot be cursed. But I can curse myself and so can you.

Watch your step, young person. Listen up, forty-five-year-old. "Oh, it's okay to see that film," you say. "It's only got a few scenes that are slightly compromising," or "It's okay to hear that music. There are only a few questionable words." Watch out. You're cursing yourself. We live in a culture where the advice of Balaam is being worked out unlike any other time in human history. Be very careful. You'll get drawn into tents you never thought you would enter and be wiped out in the process.

Galatians 2:17

But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.

"Peter, if we eat with Gentiles, are we then sinners?" asked Paul. "Is Christ a sinner? Of course not! It's not what goes into a man that defiles him, it's what comes out" (see Mark 7:18–23). It's how you live rather than what you eat that matters.

Galatians 2:18

For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

You who are discipling men, you who are ministering to women, you who are teachers, servants, and mature saints—understand this verse. Do not erect another set of rules and regulations. You were saved by grace when you simply came to God as a sinner. Now, you are to remain in the realization that to come to the Lord, you must come just as you are—not because of what you do, or what you promise to be. Do not erect another set of barriers. The veil was rent when Jesus cried, "It is finished" (Matthew 27:50, 51). Don't sew it up again by saying to those to whom you minister, "You have to attend

six meetings a week, listen to Christian radio every afternoon, read eight chapters in the Word every night, vote Republican, and have three hours of morning devotions every day if you want to grow in Christ."

Are morning devotions wrong? Of course not! You don't *have* to have morning devotions—you *get* to! You *get* to start your day talking to God. That's a tremendous privilege—not an obligation. Anyone who doesn't start his day with the Lord is missing so much. Therefore, we don't do it because we *have* to. We do it because we *get* to.

Galatians 2:19

For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

"The law is no longer a factor in my life," said Paul. "I tried to keep it for years, but finally it just did me in."

Galatians 2:20

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

"The law served its purpose when it showed me I couldn't keep it," continued Paul. Now I'm dead to the external rules of the law, but alive to the internal rule of Jesus Christ in my heart."

Galatians 2:21

I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

If you tried to rob a bank, but were shot and killed in the attempt, no one would drag your corpse into the courtroom. Even though you broke the law, you wouldn't go to court. So, too, when Christ died, you died with Him (Romans 7:4). Therefore, you are dead to the rules and regulations of the

law. But if you choose to live again to the law, then, for you, the death of Christ was in vain.

How I thank the Lord that Paul stood his ground and spoke so boldly to Peter. And how I pray that, where there is a Peter tendency within our own hearts, the Lord might use the words of Paul to speak to us. How I pray that we might not frustrate grace or try to add to the work of the Cross. How I pray that we might love the Father all the more because of the great grace He has shown us in His Son.

GOD'S GRACE: ENJOY!

A Topical Study of GALATIANS 2:21

On our way to Family Camp years ago, Benjamin and Mary were munching their way through their cache of junk food in the backseat of the van while my wife, Tammy, and I tried to talk to them about the benefits of eating nutritiously. When it was time for dinner, they wanted to stop at Taco Bell®. Tammy and I opted instead for that well-known haven of health food: Denny's®.

Once inside, we told the kids they could order whatever they wanted. Mary Elizabeth, who was in first grade, immediately ordered waffles with whipped cream and that fake strawberry stuff on top. Benjamin, a kindergartener at the time, ordered spaghetti and meatballs. When their orders arrived, Mary found herself somewhat sickened by sweetness after a few bites. Benny, on the other hand, scarfed down the spaghetti, gobbled up the meatballs, and with eyes as wide as his voice was loud, said, "Wow! These are the *best* meatballs I've ever had! Can I have more?"

We ordered another plate of spaghetti. By this time, Mary was craving something other than waffles. "Benny," she said sweetly, "may I please have just one of your meatballs?"

Benny frowned. "Just one, Benny," pleaded Mary. "What would *Jesus* do?"

With that, Benjamin looked right at Mary and said, "Mary, Jesus would eat nutritiously."

I think we have a meal before us that is both nutritious *and* delicious. I love Paul's Epistle to the Galatians because it deals with the meatiest of subjects: the grace of God. Throughout this book, Paul pleads passionately with the Galatians that they not get entangled with the works of the law—but that they remain in the simplicity of grace.

What is grace? It's unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor. We get the riches of God and blessings from God because of what Christ did for us on Calvary. You see, the one thing that would keep us from being blessed by

God is sin, for sin cuts off the flow of God's blessing upon our lives. But because our sin was washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary, all barriers have been removed.

In our text, we hear Paul saying, "I do not frustrate the grace of God. If God wants to bless me for no reason, if He wants to pour out His goodness upon me and provide salvation for me, if He wants to do that by grace, because of what Christ did, I will accept it gladly!"

> Suppose you want to show someone your appreciation and take him out to dinner. You enjoy your time together immensely. Then the waiter comes with the bill, and your guest grabs it.
>
> "Give me that," you say.
>
> "No," he says. "I'm going to pay."
>
> "No," you insist. "I invited you. I want to do this for you. It's my way of showing appreciation to you."
>
> "No," he says. "I'm paying the bill."
>
> You get into a fight right there. He ends up with the bill and writes a check to pay for it. But when the waiter runs his check through Insta-Check®, the screen flashes "Insufficient Funds." Five minutes later, the cops arrive, slap handcuffs on your friend, and carry him off to prison, where he is later executed for "Insufficient Funds."
>
> You would be frustrated, indeed—not only because your friend was too proud to let you pay the bill, but because he was incapable of paying it in the first place.

That's the message of Galatians 2. God wants to bless you by paying the bill. If you say, "No, I'll pay for it myself," sooner or later, you'll discover that your funds are completely insufficient. By refusing to accept the grace of God, not only will you be poorer presently, but you'll suffer eternally.

The secret I have discovered in the Christian life is the same one Paul will propagate throughout the Book of Galatians. That is, we are to let God bless us without giving Him a reason to do so.

"Well, I've really prayed a lot this week, Lord, so I deserve to be blessed," we say. Or, "I went to church not once but twice this week, Lord, so now I'm expecting You to come through for me."

Listen, if you relate to the Lord in that way—through works, law, rules, and bartering—He will let you. If you say, "Lord, I want what I've earned. Give me what I deserve," He'll give you what you deserve and reward you according to what you've earned—which won't be much.

But if you realize God wants to bless you solely according to His mercy, He will pour out His unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor upon you. Don't frustrate the grace of God. Don't grab the bill. You don't have the funds to cover it anyway. Instead, allow God to bless you, and respond with worship and thanksgiving, affection and appreciation."

In 2 Samuel 9, we find a story that beautifully illustrates this principle . . .

How David Sought Mephibosheth

> *And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake? And there was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he. And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet. And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar. Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar.*
>
> 2 Samuel 9:1–5

Due to his love for Jonathan, David sent for Jonathan's servant, Ziba, and asked how he might show kindness to Jonathan's family. This was a radical gesture, considering that in David's day, when a king came into power, he would annihilate everyone in the previous ruling family lest the descendants make a move to reclaim the throne.

Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, or "Living Shame," was hiding in a place called Lodebar, or "Nothingness." Think about that. How would you like to be "Living Shame" dwelling in a place called "Nothingness"?

As if that weren't bad enough, Mephibosheth was lame.

Why?

Chapter 4 tells us that when David was coming into power, Mephibosheth's nanny picked him up and ran in an attempt to hide him from David. While running, she stumbled and fell, dropping Mephibosheth, who became lame because of the fall.

Do you see the analogy? Mephibosheth is a picture of you and me. We are "Living Shame." We fell in Adam and have been lame ever since. Afraid of the King, we fled from Him as best we could and made our home in "Nothingness." But what did our King do? He said, "I want to bless those

who are living in nothingness and shame, who can't walk or stand because of the fall." And He sent not a servant, but the Holy Spirit Himself to seek us.

What David Showed Mephibosheth

> *Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant! And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.*
>
> 2 Samuel 9:6, 7

Was kindness shown to Mephibosheth because of his togetherness?

No. He was "Living Shame."

Was it because of his steadfast walk?

No. He was lame.

Was it because he was in a place of significance?

No. He was in Lodebar.

David said, "I'm going to bless you, Mephibosheth, because of my love for Jonathan. I know you're 'Living Shame.' I know you're living in 'Nothingness.' I know you had a great fall. I know you're lame. I know you've been running from me. I know you're afraid of me. But I want to show you kindness—unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor nonetheless."

David showed kindness to Mephibosheth for his father's sake.

The Lord shows kindness to us for the sake of His Son.

Where David Seated Mephibosheth

> *Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread alway at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons. And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha. And all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth. So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet.*
>
> 2 Samuel 9:9–13

I love that last phrase, for it means Mephibosheth didn't walk proudly to the table—he hobbled there. You may think, *Now that I'm saved, in order to eat at the King's table, in order to be blessed by the Lord, I've got to get my walk together. I've got to stand strong.* Not true! Like Mephibosheth, all you have to do is hobble!

It was after Peter denied Jesus that Jesus said to him, "Come and dine" (see John 21:12). He says the same thing to us who are hobbling today. "Come and dine," He says. "I'm blessing you not because of what you've done or who you are. I'm blessing you because I love My Son, and I want to perfect you as a bride for Him."

Why Mephibosheth Stayed with David

> *And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace.*
>
> 2 Samuel 19:24

As the story of David unfolds, we see Mephibosheth remaining loyal to David even when others turned away from him. Absalom, one of David's own sons, launched a rebellion against his father, took control of the city of Jerusalem, and drove David out of the city. But Mephibosheth remained loyal to David. Scripture tells us he didn't wash his clothes, he didn't take care of his feet, he didn't trim his beard. So impressed was he with David's kindness, so amazed was he by David's love that, although it placed his life in jeopardy, he refused to acknowledge any other king.

The same is true of us today. We're here because we're so impressed with the goodness of God. Like Mephibosheth, through great times or difficult days, through prosperity or lean seasons, we choose to stay by the One who's been so good to us. Perhaps you're thinking, *Mephibosheth may have hobbled to the king's table—but at least he got to eat of the king's fare. Quite frankly, I don't see anything on my plate at all.* Following are three steps to consider if you find yourself in that spot. . . .

Repent

Are you trying to earn God's favor by your devotion or commitment? Repent. Say, "Father. I've been so foolish. Saved by grace, I've now gone back under the law, with its rules and regulations. I'm through trying to make a deal with You. Instead, I realize every good gift comes from You by grace. So give to me whatever You know is best."

Request

"I'm not trying to earn God's favor," you say, "but still, there are no meatballs on my plate." Well, have you requested? Benjamin got two plates of spaghetti and meatballs because he asked. Have you asked? So many times, we have not simply because we ask not (James 4:2). The Lord doesn't say, "Work, work, work." He says, "Ask. Talk to me. I'm your Abba, your Father. I want to develop communion with you and cultivate a relationship with you. Just talk to Me."

Relax

"I still have a problem," you say. "I have repented and I have asked. But my plate is still empty." Relax. After you repent and request, relax in what the Lord decides to do sovereignly. You see, it just may be you need to go on a diet. Maybe you're asking for root beer floats, cherry pie ' la mode, and chocolate chip cookies—when your loving Father knows you need something entirely different.

"As you come to My table and ask for hot fudge sundaes and chocolate-covered brownies, I know where you're at," He says. "You think they will be so delicious—and they may be for a short season—until you're sitting in the dentist's chair with the drill humming. I see your situation," says a loving Father. "I know you think you know what's best. But trust *Me.* I'm a Father who will give you only what's absolutely best for you. That may mean not having as much as you're asking for financially, or the success you're craving vocationally. You think these are good things, but I know what's ahead. They would wipe out your faith. They would distract you from the kingdom. They would make you poor in heaven. You've asked of Me. Now I'm asking you to trust that what I give you will be the best for you."

Today, we come to the King's table once more. We respond to His blessing with worship, affection, praise, and adoration. We repent from a works mentality. We make our requests. And we relax in whatever our Father sends our way.

Do not frustrate the grace of God, precious people. Don't grab the bill—your funds are insufficient. Just let God bless you for no other reason than because He loves His Son and wants to bless you for His sake.

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3 The apostle Paul was deeply concerned about what was happening in the series of towns and cities known as Galatia. You see, after he had shared the Good News of Jesus Christ with the Galatians, men came in who began to complicate the gospel. "Paul's message is cool," they said, "but not complete. In addition to believing on Jesus Christ, you must show you are serious about Him by keeping rules and regulations."

In this third chapter of Paul's letter to the Galatians, he shifts his focus from his personal experience with grace (chapters 1 and 2) to doctrinal instruction about grace (chapters 3 and 4).

Galatians 3:1

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

"Why do you no longer embrace and enjoy the simplicity of Jesus Christ? Who put this spell on you?" Paul asks the Galatians.

Galatians 3:2

This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

"How did you receive the Spirit when you were born again? Was it by the works of the law—doing this or refraining from that? No. You received the Word simply by faith."

This verse speaks not only of being born again, but also of receiving the fullness, baptism, or "coming upon" of the Spirit to empower one's life.

After Jesus was crucified and had risen again, He appeared to the disciples in the Upper Room and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." As He breathed on them, they indeed received the Spirit (John 20:22).

At that point, the disciples were saved. But then Jesus said, "Go to Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father" (see Acts 1:4). "You shall receive power when the Holy Ghost comes upon you and you shall then be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth" (see Acts 1:8). So they went to Jerusalem and waited. On the tenth day, as they were in the Upper Room, they heard the sound of a mighty rushing wind, and saw cloven tongues of fire hovering over their heads. The Spirit came upon them. They began to praise the Lord in other tongues. They

were energized to boldly proclaim the gospel. And the world has never been the same.

That is what the Lord wants for you and me. When you became a Christian, the Holy Spirit came *in* you. But has the Holy Spirit come *upon* you? I know you have the Holy Spirit—but does the Holy Spirit have you? "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?" Paul asked the people of Ephesus (see Acts 19:2). And I ask you the same question.

In years past, many of us were part of churches or traditions that said, "The way to receive the power of the Spirit is to get rid of all of the sin in your life. Give up your drinking. Sell your TV. Stop smoking. Get it together. Then the Holy Spirit will come upon you to empower and use you." Consequently, many people spent months, years, even decades trying to clean up their acts in order to earn the power of the Holy Spirit.

Others of us waited day after day in what used to be called "tarrying meetings." "We're going to wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon us," we said. "And if we praise loud enough, pray hard enough, and wait long enough, the Lord will give us the Holy Ghost. Then we'll be changed. Then we'll impact people radically."

Both of these methods would be foreign to Paul. How do you receive the Holy Spirit? Neither the indwelling of the Spirit through salvation nor the empowering of the Spirit through baptism come by works of the law. They come by *faith*—just by hearing the Word.

"That's it?" you ask. "You mean I don't have to clean up my act, get it together, or fast thirty days?"

No. We receive the Spirit not by works, but by the hearing of faith. Therefore, by faith I can take that which was provided for me and say, "Thank You, Lord. Even as I sit in this pew, I ask of You and receive from You the power of the Holy Spirit upon my life right now."

"That's too simple," you say.

Talk to Paul. He said, "Don't let anyone complicate this. You receive the Spirit simply by the hearing of faith."

Galatians 3:3

Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

"You began in the Spirit," said Paul, "hearing the Word, and receiving it by faith. So don't let people tell you more is required of you. That's foolishness."

Galatians 3:4

Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain.

"When you began," said Paul, "you were persecuted because of your simple faith in Jesus Christ. People came down on you, laughed at you, and made fun of you. Yet you continued to believe in the simplicity of the gospel. You've gone through the put-downs and persecution. You've already taken some hits and experienced some beatings because of your belief in grace. Don't turn from grace now."

The same is true today. Those who are under bondage to the law and live their lives by trying to earn blessings from God will make fun of those who live by faith and have confidence in grace. They'll mock you. They'll say you're immature. They'll say what you believe is frivolous and trite. Mark it well, saint: If you are an embracer of grace, people will call you shallow.

"Our group is really heavy," they'll say. "We understand what it means to carry the Cross and pay the price. We're the few, the chosen—the spiritual marines." There's an arrogance that permeates those who are trying to earn God's blessings. But when you celebrate what Jesus did on the Cross, you are free from exalting yourself.

Galatians 3:5

He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

To whom does "he that ministereth the Spirit and worketh miracles among you" refer? I believe the reference is to Paul himself. When he entered the region of Galatia, seeing a lame man in the city of Lystra, Paul healed

him. How did he do it? Was it by fasting and praying? Was it by proving to God that he was worthy to be used in a powerful way?

So many books are written, and so many testimonies are given by people who say, "I really began to move in the power of God when I did this, that, or the other."

"Not true," says Paul. "The one who ministers the Spirit, the one who is used by God is not the one who does works, but the one who simply believes."

This solves a huge problem for me. No doubt you've seen all kinds of people being used by the Lord whose lives are far from perfect. I think of one well-known healing evangelist, and I marvel. This man supposedly heard Jesus tell him that unless he was given money to complete a certain project by a certain date, he would die. It made the news, of course. The world chuckled. Christians hid their faces in embarrassment. The more I read about this particular man and his family, the more I found myself saying, "This is bizarre."

Yet, interestingly enough, when I was a little boy suffering from acute asthma, there were times my mom would rush me into the bathroom, turn on the hot water, and fill the room with steam, just so I could breathe. Concerned about the situation, the doctor gave Mom a little vial of kerosene, with the instruction that, should I come to the place where I would die if I couldn't get another breath, she was to pour a drop down my throat. On a number of occasions, close to the point of having to use the kerosene, Mom would hear the very radio evangelist of whom I'm speaking, say, "Place your hand upon the radio as a point of contact. Expect the Lord to heal you. Something good is going to happen to you." As my mom did this, time after time, the Lord intervened. Thus, this evangelist about whose ministry I wonder, this evangelist whose methods I question, had an undeniable impact upon my life.

> If you go back even further, to the days when the healing evangelists criss-crossed the country, drawing huge crowds under big-tops, many thousands of people were truly touched and definitely impacted by one of the biggest faith healers of all: A. A. Allen. A. A. Allen had the biggest meetings and the most powerful impact in the healing

arena—until he died in San Francisco in a cheap motel of cirrhosis of the liver. A servant of God an alcoholic? How could this be?

It is because the miracles wrought and the Spirit given are not by the works of the law, but simply by the hearing of faith. A. A. Allen understood that what he did was centered not upon his great faith in God, but upon God's great faithfulness to him. And once you understand that simple truth, it will affect everything you do in ministry.

For years, I was under the impression that the key to ministry, to being used by God, to seeing folks saved or filled with the Spirit, was my faith. Therefore, the greater my faith, the more God would do. Not true. The key was not my faith in God at all—but His faithfulness to people.

Many years ago at Caveman Park in Grants Pass, Oregon, at the end of my teaching, I gave an invitation to the two hundred high-schoolers in attendance. I just expected kids to respond—not because of the persuasiveness of my message, but because I know the goodness of God. He wants to save people. He cares about every single kid there. It wasn't because of my presentation or preparation that I expected them to respond. No, it was because I knew God was eager to respond to any of those kids who wanted to come to Him.

So, when I said, "Who wants to receive the coming upon of the Spirit right now?" most of them raised their hands.

Uh-oh, you may have thought had you witnessed the scene. *What are you going to do now, Jon? What if you pray and nothing happens? What if they don't speak in tongues? Worse yet, what if they* do?

Folks, it's not my job to be concerned about those things. I just have total confidence in the great faithfulness of God to touch anyone, anytime, anywhere who is hungering and thirsting for righteousness. When this is understood, it is so incredibly freeing. But until it's understood, Satan will whisper in your ear, "You don't have the technique down. You don't know enough verses yet. You haven't prayed hard enough. You haven't worshiped long enough."

Precious people, Satan will paralyze you until you understand that every area of ministry is based not upon your faith, but upon God's faithfulness. If

you believe this, you'll find yourself talking to people and expecting them to respond in some way.

If it's dependent upon me, my knees knock, my forehead breaks out in beads of sweat, my mouth gets dry, my lips become sealed. I am paralyzed by fear because I know I haven't done enough. But once I understand that the One who ministers the Spirit, the One who works miracles doesn't do it by the works of the law, I am free!



***For topical study of Galatians 3:5 entitled "Ministering the Spirit," turn to page* 1185.**

Galatians 3:6

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

Abraham wasn't doing something to impress God. He just believed God, and God declared him righteous. Paul pointed to Abraham—the father of the Jewish nation, the one whose heritage the religionists and Judaizers claimed as their own—as an example of the all-sufficiency of faith.

Galatians 3:7

Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

"Whether you're Jew or Gentile," Paul continued, "if you have faith in God, then you are linked to Abraham, the father of faith."

Galatians 3:8

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

"Because you believe in Me, Abraham, I can do a mighty work through you," said the Lord.

Galatians 3:9, 10

So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

Why is the law a curse? Because if you're going to try to earn God's favor through keeping rules and regulations, you've got to do it *all.*

Suppose you are one of the thousands of refugees who are presently making their way to America via raft. You carefully construct your little boat, using ten boards to make up the hull. Then you set sail. Thirty miles out to sea, one of the boards comes loose and floats away. The water comes flooding in, and you go down—because in that situation, even 90 percent isn't good enough.

The same is true with regard to the Ten Commandments. If you're going to try to earn God's favor through keeping them, you'll have to keep all ten. or else you're lunch for some hungry shark. Jesus gave us an understanding of what this really means when He said, "You've heard it said of old you're not to commit adultery, but I say unto you if you have lust in your heart you're guilty. You've heard it said of old you're not to commit murder, but I say if you've been angry with someone you're guilty" (see Matthew 5). You're cursed if you try to keep the law because unless you keep all of it perfectly, you're sunk.

Galatians 3:11

But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

The words "the just shall live by faith" are first seen in Habakkuk 2:4, when, in response to his complaints concerning the prophesied Babylonian invasion, the Lord told Habakkuk to look to Him rather than at the circumstances.

They are seen again in Romans 1:17, where Paul stresses justification; and in Hebrews 11, where the emphasis is on faith. Here in Galatians, the accent is on *live.* Want to be happy, fruitful, excited, and set free in your Christian life? The *just* shall *live*—really live—by *faith.*

> Martin Luther beat his body, crawled on his knees, and fasted in order to get close to God. But nothing worked. And then one day he read this verse—and he understood that the Christian experience is not "Do, do, do"—it's "DONE!" Jesus did it *all.* Dear saints, get rid of the burden of trying to be spiritual. Get rid of the notion that since you had morning devotions ten times in a row, God owes you a blessing. It doesn't work that way. You are justified by faith *alone.*

"Then I don't have to have morning devotions?" you ask.

No, you don't.

"I can sleep in?"

Yeah, you can.

"I don't have to pray, or study the Word?"

Nope.

You don't *have* to do any of those things. You *get* to. You *get* to check in with God morning by morning, moment by moment. You *get* to spend time late at night or before the sun rises, seeking the face of the Lord. It's not *got* to, it's *get* to. And that makes all the difference in the world, for once you're free from the "got to's," you invariably do more than you ever did before.

James said, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20) because true faith will always bring about lots of works. When you fell in love with your husband or wife, you didn't have to be told to call her; you didn't have to be reminded to hold his hand; you didn't have to be urged to communicate. When you're in love, you long to be in touch—and that's what the Father wants from you and me. "Love Me," He says. And the more I realize that He loves me by His grace and mercy being poured out upon me, the more I have no choice but to love Him in return. So I do more under love than I ever would do under the law.

Think about that first letter your girlfriend wrote you, guys. As you stuck it in your pocket, did you say, "Boy, one of these days I really need to read

this letter. I'll set my alarm fifteen minutes earlier tonight and read it first thing in the morning"? And then as you rolled out of bed half an hour after the alarm went off, did you say, "I really want to read this letter, but I don't have time now. Maybe tonight. No, *Home Improvement* is on. Can't miss that. I'll get to it tomorrow"?

No! It doesn't work that way. When you got that letter, you ripped it open, read it, analyzed it, parsed the verbs, researched it, and read between the lines. You couldn't put it down! The same thing happens when you understand grace and mercy. You say, "You bless me, Lord, when I don't pray. You love me when I'm not lovable. You take care of me when I fail to walk with You. You're faithful to me day after week after year. I want to find out more about You." That's what it means for the just to *live* by faith.

Galatians 3:12

And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

The law says, "You must do it and keep doing it" (see Leviticus 18:5). Faith says, "He did it. It's done" (John 19:30).

Galatians 3:13 (a)

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us . . .

When man sinned, God said to Adam, "From this point on, you will labor for bread, live by the sweat of your brow, and work through thorns and thistles." Then came Jesus, the Last Adam. In the Upper Room, His broken body became our bread. In the Garden of Gethsemane, His sweat mingled with blood. On Calvary, the thorns of the earth were embedded in His brow.

"I've absorbed it all," Jesus said, as He who knew no sin became sin for us, as He Himself became the curse. This is what Paul is driving home. What Jesus did is so incredible, so wonderful, how could we think that through our own efforts we could add anything to His work on our behalf?

Galatians 3:13 (b)

. . . for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.

This verse has obvious application to Jesus Christ as He hung on Calvary's tree. Yet I believe it has application for us as well if we look at it in light of another who hung on a tree. . . .



***For topical study of Galatians 3:13 entitled "Hanging on a Tree," turn to page* 1189.**

Galatians 3:14

That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Jesus paid the price so we could receive the promise of the Spirit—all the power and blessing of the Holy Ghost—not by our works, but by faith in what He accomplished on Calvary.

Galatians 3:15

Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.

"Let me use an example you're familiar with," said Paul. "Once two parties sign their names on a contract, neither can add to it nor take away from it."

Galatians 3:16

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

In the minds of most, "Abraham's seed" is synonymous with "the Jews." Paul contended, however, that the promise was made not to seeds, but to one

seed. And that one Seed is Jesus Christ. The promises of God to bless the world come not through the Jewish nation, but through Jesus; not through any national entity, but through Jesus Christ exclusively to all people, in all places.

Galatians 3:17, 18 (a)

And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise . . .

God made a promise, a covenant, with Abraham that through his Seed, Jesus Christ, everyone who wanted would be blessed. Four hundred and thirty years later, the law was given. But the law could not take away the promise of blessing given to Abraham. In other words, the law does not legally or logically have the power to negate the blessing God gave to Abraham through Christ. And Paul is about to show us that, since we are in Christ, the blessing that comes to us is neither given because we keep the law nor nullified by our failure to keep it. The law is completely irrelevant as it relates to the blessing of God. What a fabulous truth!

Galatians 3:18 (b)

. . . but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

It was when Abraham had no children that God told him his offspring would number as the stars of the sky and as the sand on the seashore. But Scripture records that Abraham believed God anyway. "Okay, Lord," Abraham replied, "I don't know how You're going to do it, but if You want to bless me in that way, it's fine with me."

And God said, "That's the faith that will justify you, Abraham—just believing in Me."

Time passed and again the Lord appeared to Abraham. "I am your shield and your great reward," He said.

"That's great, Lord," answered Abraham, "but I still don't have any kids. The years are going by, and I'm not getting any younger."

"Abraham," said the Lord, "let's cut a covenant."

In Abraham's day, when two parties wanted to seal an agreement, they would cut an animal in half and meet each other in the middle, thereby saying, "We're dead serious about this." So Abraham got a bullock, cut it in half, laid it out, and sat there waiting for God to show up. He waited and waited, wondering where God was. When birds started swarming around the carcass, Abraham shooed them away. Time passed. Abraham's eyes grew heavy. His head started bobbing, then slumping. Finally, he was sound asleep. Sometime later, he awoke, looked at the bullock, and saw it had been barbecued. God had come when Abraham was asleep and had moved all the way through the carcass (Genesis 15:17).

God didn't meet Abraham halfway. He did the whole thing, saying, "Abraham, this promise I'm giving you is not based upon your agreeing with Me and doing your part. No, I'm going to do it *all*. I'll even do it while you're asleep." God still does it all, precious people. Your salvation, the blessings that are poured upon you, the work of the Spirit flowing through you in ministry—it's *all* God.

"Don't I have any part to play?" you ask. Yes. Your part is to shoo away the birds of unbelief that will invariably come and pick at the promises of God's Word. Whatever God said He will do is an accomplished fact. Yet vultures of doubt and buzzards of cynicism will come and say, "God's not going to use you. He's not going to bless you. You haven't been praying enough." Peck, peck, peck.

Your part is to chase away those birds by saying, "Lord, You told me You would supply all my needs according to Your riches. You told me You would never leave me. You told me You're preparing a place in heaven for me. You told me You would give the Holy Ghost to me. Thank You, Lord."

Galatians 3:19 (a)

Wherefore then serveth the law?

If our walk is to be based simply upon believing what God said, receiving His promise, and resting in what He's done, then why was the law

given at all?

Galatians 3:19 (b)

It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made . . .

Because of sin, the law was given until Jesus Christ—the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world—came on the scene.

Galatians 3:19 (c), 20

. . . and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.

On Mount Sinai, the law was given to angels. Angels gave it to Moses; Moses brought it down to the people. In other words, the law was not directly communicated. The promise, on the other hand, was given without mediators or middlemen. It was given to Abraham directly and intimately.

Galatians 3:21

Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

Does the law given to Moses contradict the promise given to Abraham? No. The law doesn't contradict the promise. It simply gives an alternative to the promise. The law offers man a choice. You see, we can either receive a righteous standing before God by simply believing what God says—or we can keep every point of the law. If any legal system could bring a person salvation, it would be the Ten Commandments. The law is absolutely perfect. The only problem with it is this: It can't be kept.

"You've heard it said you're to love your neighbor, but I say, you're to love your enemy," Jesus said in Matthew 5. "Therefore, if you've ever been angry at an enemy, you're guilty. You've heard it said you're not to swear falsely, that you're to commit your oaths to the

Lord. But I say unto you, anything more than a simple yes or no is from the evil one."

If you've ever failed to love your enemy or made a promise and backed it up with anything more than a simple yes or no, you're guilty.

Galatians 3:22

But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

No one can be justified by keeping the law. All the law does is tell us that we're sinners in need of a Savior. That is why it was given. You see, the promise given to Abraham preceded by centuries the law given to Moses. Grace came first.

But man began to think, *I don't need to be a recipient of grace because I'm pretty good. I don't need to embrace this promised Seed, because I'm doing okay.* So they began to write books like, *I'm OK, You're OK* and *Esteeming Yourself Highly.* The Word, however, says there is none righteous, no not one. There is none that seeketh after God (Romans 3:10, 11). There is not one person who can say, "Because of the sincerity of my search and the integrity of my pursuit of truth, I discovered God." No, the Bible says none seeks after God. Zip. Zilch. Zero.

God sought *you.* But in order for you to realize that you needed to be sought, the law was given to all mankind as a mirror, saying, "Take a look. You're a mess. Here's the standard of righteousness. It's beautiful. It's workable. It's profoundly simple—but you can't keep it."

The law serves an incredibly important purpose.

Suppose I said to my friend John, "John, someone from Applegate Christian Fellowship just went to the Jackson County Courthouse and paid twenty-five thousand dollars on your behalf for a violation."

"What are you talking about?" he would say. "What kind of violation?"

"A traffic violation."

"That's ridiculous," he would say. And he wouldn't appreciate the gift given on his behalf, the price paid for his mistake.

On the other hand, if I said, "John, didn't you know there is a new law that protects snails as an endangered species? When you drove through town the other day, you smashed dozens of them and received a fine of twenty-five thousand dollars. But a man in the Fellowship paid your fine,"—John's response would be entirely different. He wouldn't haughtily say, "A twenty-five thousand dollar fine? That's ridiculous." No, in humility and brokenness, he would say, "Who paid for me? Certainly, I am deeply indebted to him."

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" wrote the psalmist (Psalm 19:7). Who is converted? The person who hears and understands the law—for without hearing and comprehending the law, people will not appreciate or receive the Good News.

I believe this is a fundamental mistake we often make in modern-day evangelism. We present the gospel, the Good News that Jesus loves us, died for us, and wants to take us to heaven to be with Him forever—but we don't talk about the law. We talk about the concepts of salvation without saying anything about the consequences of sin.

You're in a 747 jumbo jet headed to Honolulu. Two hours into the flight, the pilot calls for the senior flight attendant and says, "There's a leak in our gas tank. We're not going to make it to Hawaii."

The flight attendant, wiping the sweat off her brow, dabbing the tears from her eyes, smiles as she returns to the cabin, saying, "Greetings, passengers. Could I interest any of you in a parachute? It will make your flight more enjoyable, and in it, I think you'll discover a new measure of peace, joy, and love. Who would like a parachute?" Maybe three or four people raise their hands.

If you are among the three or four taking one, you see the other passengers snickering and pointing at you. Before long, you discover your parachute is tight and uncomfortable. You begin to think, This isn't giving me any joy at all. This is ridiculous. And

after twenty minutes or so, you take it off and say to the stewardess, "You lied to me. You promised I would be comfortable, full of joy, and warmed by love. But all I got were snickers, jeers, and a rash."

Such is what we see happen all too often in present-day evangelism. "I was promised love and joy," new converts complain, "but my friends made fun of me, and I felt restricted." That's why many people who come to Jesus turn away from Him.

Another stewardess in the same situation hears the message from the captain. She enters the cabin, saying, "Stop what you're doing. Put down your reading material. I want your full, undivided attention. The captain has informed me that this plane is losing fuel fast. We're going down. Who wants a parachute?"

Suddenly, people are fighting for parachutes. No one cares if the flight for those remaining minutes is smooth, or if they have enough mobility to play video games. No, everyone is clinging to his parachute, making sure it's secure because everyone knows the plane is going down.

I suggest that oftentimes the reason we are ineffective in long-term evangelism is because we have not been honest enough with people to say, "You are a damned, doomed sinner. You have a hole in your tank. You have broken the law. You're headed for destruction. I could sit here, hold your hand, and talk about warm, fuzzy thoughts—but I love you too much. You need to know the truth, and the truth is this: "The soul that sinneth shall surely die, for the wages of sin is death" (see Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 6:23).

"Wait a minute," you protest. "I thought it was the goodness of God that leads men to repentance" (Romans 2:4).

It is.

"But it sounds to me like you're talking about the severity of God."

I am.

They're both valid. To the broken of heart, share grace. But to the hard of heart, share the law, for the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. Those who understand they're damned and weep because of their sin don't

throw off their salvation when people snicker at them or when something more exciting is presented to them.

I ask this very pertinent question: Have you shared the reality of the law with the unsaved people you care about? Perhaps you've shared your testimony with them—and that's great. But if their heart was hard, they probably said, "I'm glad you've found happiness. I'm glad it works for you. I'm proud of you, honey. It's so good to see your life on a good, solid, moral footing. I'm happy for you, but I don't need that."

Such arrogance can only be penetrated with the presentation of the law. That's why the law was given—to show people the plane they're on is going down and that they're doomed unless they take the gift of salvation, the Promise, the Seed of Abraham—Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:23

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

We were in trouble because we were supposed to keep the commands of the law, but we couldn't do it. We were cut off from the faith that would later be revealed.

Galatians 3:24 (a)

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ . . .

If your Bible is a King James Version, you'll see that the words "to bring us" are in italics. Therefore, since italicized words are not present in the original language, verse 24 should read: "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster until Christ."

Galatians 3:24 (b)

. . . that we might be justified by faith.

Suppose there was conclusive evidence that O. J. Simpson was guilty. If Judge Ito had said, "I forgive you, you're free," O. J. could have gone his

way, and I'm sure he would have been happy. But that's not what justification is. Justification would mean all the evidence against O. J. would be obliterated, that his record would be totally clean. Like O. J., we're all sinners. God, however, looks at believers not as being forgiven—but as though they had never sinned at all. Why? Because God is a Good Guy who says, "Kids will be kids"? No. Because the blood shed on Calvary's Cross was so powerful it blotted out every violation written against us (Colossians 2:14).

Galatians 3:25

But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

The law was a schoolmaster with red pencil in hand, circling our mistakes. But once Christ came into our lives, the law is no longer to be a part of our lives. This is such a radical statement that if God didn't say it, I would be afraid to share it.

Galatians 3:26, 27

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

When you became a believer, you put on Christ. You were placed in Christ. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away (2 Corinthians 5:17). Therefore, when the Father looks at you, He doesn't see you in all of your sin. He sees you in Christ Jesus, robed with His righteousness. That's Good News! So why would you return to rules to try to clean up your act or prove your worthiness? It makes no sense.

Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Each morning, a Jewish man would pray, “I thank You, God, that I was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.” Referring to this same Jewish prayer, Paul says, “In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female. All those barriers are broken down. You’re all one in Christ.” You see, the law sets up walls and separates those who do from those who don’t, those who are keeping their rules from those who have failed in their attempts. But once you put on Christ, all those walls crumble. We’re all sinners saved by grace. God doesn’t hear men more than women, those who are free more than those who are oppressed, Jews more than Gentiles.

Galatians 3:29

And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

If we are in Christ, we are not of Moses, not of the law, not of performance. We are of Abraham, of faith, of promise.

MINISTERING THE SPIRIT

A Topical Study of GALATIANS 3:5

The Galatian believers were bewitched—but not in the way you might think. It wasn't Samantha Stevens wiggling her nose, but a group of men pointing their fingers. "It's nice that you believe in Jesus Christ," they said, "but it's not that simple. In order to be used by the Lord, or to go deeper in the Lord, you need to keep certain rules and regulations. You need to deal with your flesh. You need to be circumcised."

"Who has bewitched you?" cried Paul. "You began in the Spirit. You were saved simply by believing in the Lord, trusting in Him, enjoying what He's done. Why do you now think you're going to be made perfect by the energy of the flesh?" I ask that same question today. When you were saved—the day you opened your heart to Jesus—you didn't come to Him in the energy of your flesh, making promises to Him, pledging to clean up your life, or vowing to get your act together. No, you came as a sinner, saying, "I have nothing to offer, Lord, but if You want to save me, if You want to do a work in Me, I gladly accept it." Why, then, do we think we will be perfected by striving to keep our own rules and regulations?

"He, therefore, that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" Paul asks.

"I would love to minister the Spirit," you might be thinking, "but I'm so afraid I'm not capable of being effective in service. What if someone told me he wanted to know the Lord, or to be empowered by the Spirit? What would I do? What if I laid hands on him, prayed that the power of the Holy Ghost would come upon him, and nothing happened? What if I tried to teach a Bible study, and no one came? What if I witness, yet people just walk away?"

You who long to be used, but are afraid you can't be, understand this point: The one who ministers the Spirit and works miracles is not the one who says, "God can really use me because I've taken care of this sin; I've overcome that problem; I've mastered theology." No, the one who ministers the Spirit and works miracles is one who simply hears in faith. Hears what?

The Word.

- "Go and teach all nations, and lo, I am with you always" (see Matthew 28:19, 20).
- "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me" (Acts 1: 8).
- "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father give the Holy Ghost to them that ask" (see Matthew 7:11).

We have a tendency to say, "I can't teach. I can't witness. I can't pray for the empowering of the Spirit because I don't have the technique down yet. I don't have the necessary insights and the understanding." But in so doing, we're saying, "The ministry of the Spirit, the ministry of miracles, being used by God, and seeing the power of God is dependent upon my knowledge, my togetherness, and my worthiness."

No. No. No. You were saved by faith. You will be used in the same manner—just believing not in who you are and what you know, but in who God is and in what He has promised to do. Therefore, our ministry, our service, our walk with the Lord is not based upon works of great faith, but simply upon our faith in a great God.

When Bartimaeus asked to receive his sight (Mark 10:46–52), Jesus didn't say, "Why do you want to see? Is it so you can behold My beauty? Is it so you can study the Torah? Is it so you can do the work of God? Get your act together, Bartimaeus, and when you have your motives purified, then I'll deal with you." No, He simply said, "Be healed"—no questions asked.

We think we need to analyze our reasons for wanting to be used by the Lord. "I better go through a year of heavy introspection," we say, "before I dare ask the Lord to use me in ministry. I better make sure my motives are pure and my methods are proper before I can help someone else." Not true. If you want to be used by the Lord, just go to Him and say, "Father, use me." Then, when someone comes to you, struggling with a marital problem, physical disease, or emotional depression, you can simply say, "Let me pray for you."

You don't need to put people on a program or teach them a procedure. Simply take them to a Person. Take them to the One who said, "He that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out" (see John 6:37). Jesus didn't say, "I'm not interested in those who don't have their theology down, their lives together, or their motives pure." No. He said, "I will not cast out *anyone* who comes to Me." And that's what makes service such a joy. That's what makes walking with the Lord so delightful.

Precious people, the hearing of faith says, "Lord, You said, 'Come to Me,' so here I am."

"I have a problem with that," you say. "You see, I've come to Him concerning my daughter's situation. I've come to Him about a physical infirmity. I've come to Him about a broken relationship. But nothing happened."

That's because all too often we come to the Lord and give Him instructions or directions instead of just saying, "Lord, here's my situation. You see what's best for me."

I am so thankful that the Lord in His goodness did not answer thousands of my prayers. I was convinced I knew what I needed. I thought I knew what was right for this person or that situation. I was so sure I knew what was best for Applegate Christian Fellowship. I can recall walking around the Grange Hall on Upper Applegate Road, saying, "You told Joshua that the land whereupon he set the sole of his foot would be given him. So, Lord, I'm claiming this building. It's perfect for us. Why, it seats *sixty* easily!" But because the Lord had something entirely different in mind, the deal we were pursuing with the Grange Hall didn't work out. And I'm so glad.

You see, the key in praying for your own situation or for the people with whom you're sharing or ministering is not to give God direction, but simply to say, "Lord, here's the situation. You do what's right."

As I left Germany one day, the plane was packed. It was stuffy and noisy, and all I wanted to do was get home. I sat down next to a guy who, although he was from a Mediterranean country, spoke English. *I need to share with him,* I thought. But, having arrived in Frankfurt only three days earlier, serious jet lag was beginning to set in, and I was not in a real pleasant mood. So when he put his earphones on and tuned in the music, I was thrilled.

"No open door here," I said to myself, relieved. "The guy doesn't have ears to hear, so what's the point in talking?" Consequently, on the entire twelve-hour flight to Chicago, I didn't speak a word to him. He had his earphones on the entire time—and that was fine by me.

But as we landed, I felt in my heart that an opportunity had been missed. So when I got on the plane that would take me from Chicago to San Francisco, I bowed and prayed, "Lord, I feel like I missed an opportunity on the previous flight. Use me on this one in some way." No sooner had I prayed that prayer than one of the stewards came on board, saying, "The thermostat on this aircraft is not functioning properly. You'll have to de-plane and wait for another flight."

When it was time to board again, I said to the steward, "Sir, I've got to preach in Medford, Oregon, tomorrow morning. Will this flight be able to make the connection?"

"No way," he said. "We'll have to find something else for you."

As a result, I found myself all alone in first class. *This is amazing,* I thought. *Here I prayed to be used on the flight headed for San Francisco. And what did He do? He kicked me off the plane and put me here, all by myself.*

Shortly into the four-hour flight, a steward named Ricardo, who had heard of my plight, approached me and said, "So you're going to preach?"

"Yep," I answered. "I'm going to preach tomorrow morning in a place called Applegate."

"What's Applegate?" he asked.

That was the only opening I needed to start sharing with him about what the Lord was doing there by His grace. "It's the greatest thing," I said. "There's a group of people who just love Jesus and who celebrate what He's done."

Then a stewardess, a Jewish lady named Ellie, joined us. So here I was, talking about grace to a Jewish stewardess and a Catholic steward. Before long, the other steward and stewardess assigned to first class joined our group. I'm not exaggerating when I say that from the moment we took off until the time we touched down in Portland, we talked nonstop about the gospel, end times, the finished work of the Cross, evolution, and creation. Did they fully understand and embrace what I shared with them? I don't know. But

each of them asked me to take his or her phone number and address, and to be put on our mailing list.

I share that with you to say this: I prayed specifically to be used on the flight to San Francisco. I felt it was a very noble prayer, a very spiritual thing to do. But I got kicked off the plane and was put in a cabin all by myself. Why? The Lord saw what was ahead in ways I could never have figured out. That's why He says, "Come to Me. And as you talk things over with Me, trust that I'll do things in the right way, at the right time—not because you're naming it and claiming it, not because you're instructing Me as to what you think should happen, but because you're just trusting Me."

So I say to any who are wrestling with troubled marriages, to any who are struggling with physical problems, to any who are emotionally depressed or financially stressed, to any who are worried about a father or mother who's not saved, or a son or daughter who's falling away: The Holy Spirit is given and miracles happen not by the works of the law, but by the hearing of faith—simply by believing that the Lord cares about you and that He'll do the best for you.

Rejoice. You were saved in a simple way, embracing a simple message. You began in the Spirit. Now walk in the Spirit. Depend on the Lord. Have confidence in Him. Come to Him, all you that are heavy-laden. He will energize and empower. He will save and work—not because of who you are, but simply because of your faith in who He is. Your motives may not be pure. He doesn't ask for that. Your methods may not be perfect. That's irrelevant. Just come to Him, and you'll see miracles happen. You'll be escorted to first class, and you'll fly high—marveling at what He does.

HANGING ON A TREE

A Topical Study of GALATIANS 3:13

A sixteen-year-old boy was recently sentenced to thirty years in prison for the stabbing death of a fifteen-year-old girl who shunned him at a party. "From everything this court has seen of you," said the judge, "the bottom line is, you don't have a conscience. Certainly no culture tolerates the kind of behavior in which you have engaged."

Contrary to the judge's statement however, so common is such behavior that stories like this don't even make the front page of the newspaper. After serving only a fraction of their sentences, most criminals repeat their offenses again and again because legislation doesn't deal with the real issue.

What is the real issue?

Old Testament Israel had no penitentiaries, no prisons, no penal system. Why? Because in that culture, crime was dealt with swiftly and severely. Stoning was the most common form of punishment for capital offenses that included cursing or disrespecting one's parents, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, and murder. This was not cruelty on God's part. People knew that breaking God's law resulted in immediate consequences. Therefore, it kept people free from the junk that permeates and pollutes our culture presently.

If a particular sin was committed, the perpetrator wouldn't be stoned. He would be hung on a tree. "My goodness," you say. "If murder merited stoning, what would possibly cause one to be hung on a tree? Child abuse? Mass murder?"

I think you'll find the answer shocking as we look at a story in the Old Testament that shows us from God's perspective what merited death by hanging. . . .

He seemed to have everything going for him. He was the most handsome man in the country, and the Word of God declares that from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet, there was not a single blemish upon him. We are

told that when the barbers cut his hair, the weight of it was two hundred shekels' worth, or five times the weight of the hair of any other man.

Not only was he unbelievably good-looking, but he had a winning personality. Scripture records that, with the men wanting to be like him, and the women swooning over him, he actually stole the hearts of the nation of Israel. In addition, he had prestige. His mom was a princess, and his dad was the king of the most powerful empire of the day. So with his handsome countenance, his engaging personality, his prestige and power, his name seemed to summarize what people thought of him: "The father of peace"—Absalom.

But this one who had everything going for him, this one whose name was synonymous with peace was a man greatly troubled within. You see, Absalom had a sister named Tamar who also possessed unsurpassed beauty —so much so that Scripture tells us her half brother, Amnon became sick with lust toward her.

Cousin Jonadab, noticing Amnon's deteriorating condition, said, "Hey, Amnon, you don't look so well. What's wrong?"

"I'm in love," answered Amnon. I can't eat. I can't sleep. Tamar has captured my heart."

"You're the heir apparent," said Jonadab. "If you want Tamar, just pretend you're seriously ill. Send word to your father saying that you want Tamar to come in and feed you. Then, when she's in your room, have your way with her."

"Sounds great," said Amnon.

Why? Because when lust is ruling someone, he doesn't think straight. Amnon called for Tamar, and, as planned, he pulled her to himself.

"Don't do this," pleaded Tamar. "You'll shame yourself. You'll shame me. You'll bring disaster upon us all."

Amnon was deaf to her cries, however, because lust demands satisfaction. Scripture records that the hatred Amnon felt toward Tamar was exceedingly greater than the love he had for her before he raped her (2 Samuel 13:15).

Girls, here's how to lose your boyfriend: Give in. Once he's through with you, the guy who once said, "I love you," will hate you. That's what makes lust so tragic: Once it gets its way, it turns to hatred. How many people

become involved in a relationship based on lust only to discover that there's no communication, no relationship, only bitterness. How right our Father is to tell us not to give in to the lusts of the flesh (1 Peter 2:11).

So it was that with ashes in her hair and garments shred in mourning, Tamar went to her father.

"What?" the king cried, "Your brother raped you?"

But although he was angry, he did nothing to discipline Amnon. Why? It could be that, as a poet, he lacked the strength to deal with his son. Or, perhaps, like many of us, rather than seeing his children walk in righteousness, he desired to be liked by them. Most likely, however, the king didn't discipline his son because the king's name was David—and he was guilty of satisfying his own lusts with a woman named Bathsheba.

Mom and Dad, when we sin, we lose a great deal of authority. We can't talk to our kids about the dangers of alcohol if we're sipping wine with dinner. We can't deal with the drug problem if we ourselves are dependent upon certain questionable habits or medications. In forfeiting our authority, we lose our credibility.

"My son has blown it," lamented David. "But what can I do? I'm guilty of worse sins than his." So David did nothing. For two years, anger seethed inside Tamar's brother, Absalom, causing him to hate not only his brother Amnon, but his father as well.

Want your kids to hate you, Dad? Here's how: Don't be strong in the family. Don't bring about correction in the home. It interests me that the kids who dislike their moms and dads the most are most often the ones who are the most undisciplined. The parents who try the hardest to be a buddy are often the ones who end up mocked and despised. Be warned, Dad. When you see things wrong in your family and you fail to deal with them, like Absalom, your son will one day despise and mock you in his heart.

After two years, Absalom decided to deal with the situation himself. "Father," he said. "My servants have just finished shearing the sheep at Baal Hezor. We're going to celebrate. Come and join us."

"Oh, Absalom," David said. "I can't get away right now."

"Well, can my brothers—especially Amnon—come?"

Although David should have been somewhat suspicious, he gave his permission, thereby unwittingly enabling Absalom to put his plan into action.

"Bring out the wine," Absalom said as the celebration began.

When everyone was drunk, Absalom raised his hand and gave the sign for his servants to thrust their swords into Amnon, while the rest of David's sons immediately awoke from their stupor and stumbled out to their donkeys to ride for their lives. With word on its way to his father, Absalom knew he needed to flee for his life as well. So he mounted his mule and headed for his mother's hometown of Geshur.

Although David could have easily sent an army to pursue Absalom, he continued to do nothing. For three long years, Absalom remained in Geshur while David's heart pined for his Absalom. Seeing the king eaten up with grief, David's right-hand man, Joab, enlisted the help of a woman who said to David, "I am a widow and I had two grown sons who took care of me—until the day they got in a fight and one killed the other. Now the people in my community are demanding that my living son be put to death. But if that happens, I will have no one to care for me. What should I do?"

"Woman," David said, "truly I say to you that not one hair on his head shall be hurt."

"What about you?" the woman said. "Don't you know that our days are short, and, like water spilt upon the ground, cannot be gathered up again? God is not a respecter of persons." In other words, "Time is short. God forgave you. Forgive your son. Bring him back" (see 2 Samuel 14:13, 14).

Unable to deny the wisdom of her words, David sent Joab to track down Absalom and bring him home. But when Absalom entered the city of Jerusalem, David refused to see him. For two years, Absalom had no communication with his dad whatsoever. Finally, not knowing how else to get his father's attention, Absalom lit the fields of Joab on fire.

Parenthetically, I cannot help but wonder what fires our own kids have to light in order to get our attention.

"Send him in," commanded David at last. And Scripture records that when David saw his son, he kissed him (2 Samuel 14:33). But the plot thickens. After Absalom received the kiss of his father, he left the palace and got a new chariot with fifty men to run before him, announcing his arrival. With his hair blowing in the breeze, and the bass thumping on his stereo, Absalom's daily rides through Jerusalem were impressive, indeed. Thus, it is

no wonder that when he parked his chariot at the gates of the palace, those who were waiting to get an audience with David would bow before him.

"Don't bow to me," Absalom would say. "You're my buddies."

"Us?" they said. "We're nobodies."

No," said Absalom, throwing his arms around as many as he could. "You're my buddies. If I were king, I would take care of whatever it is that's troubling you."

That is how this good-looking, prestigious, rich, seemingly together individual who was a mess inside, stole their hearts. And one by one, the men of Jerusalem began to say, "Absalom, you're our man."

When Absalom felt he had enough support, he went to his father and said, "While I was in exile, I made a vow to God that I would offer Him a sacrifice in Hebron. I need to fulfill that vow." So Absalom headed for Hebron—not to worship the Lord, but to wrest the throne from his father. When the trumpets sounded in Hebron, the prearranged signal was translated throughout Jerusalem: Absalom is taking over.

Upon hearing the news, David prepared to leave Jerusalem. "We'll grab the ark and go with you," said the priests Abiathar and Zadok.

"No," insisted David. "The ark must not leave Jerusalem. God is not on the run. The fault is mine for not dealing with my sons. Stay here in Jerusalem, and be my eyes and ears."

Taking a few of his men with him, David left his ten wives to keep house in the palace as a sign he would be back. Upon his departure, Ittai, the Hittite, said, "Six hundred of our men are traveling with you."

"You're Philistines," said David. "You don't have to come."

"But we do," said Ittai. "Although you were once our conqueror, we now count you our friend. Where you go, we'll go. If you die, we'll die beside you."

"Okay," said David. "Let's go" (see 2 Samuel 15:22). At this point, Hushai, one of David's advisors, approached him and asked to be included in the entourage. But David refused his request on the grounds that he was too old and too valuable. "Stay here, Hushai," David said. "Pretend you're on Absalom's side, and give him bad advice."

As Absalom assumed power, Ahithophel, David's former top advisor, told him to consolidate his power at once. "Take David's ten wives upon the

palace roof where the whole nation can see," he said, "and have relations with them. Meanwhile, I'll take twelve thousand men, track David down, and do him in."

The question arises: Why did Ahithophel defect to Absalom after being loyal to David for so many years? One possible reason was that his granddaughter was a beautiful woman named Bathsheba. His resentment over David's affair with her, along with the subsequent murder of her husband, could have turned to revenge as soon as Absalom came into power.

But Ahithophel's sin had a far worse outcome than did David's. Thousands would be killed in the war that would result from his encouragement of Absalom's rebellion. Watch out, gang—the sin you resent in others may be far less dangerous than the sin of resentment in your own heart.

"Wait," said Hushai, "David's sly. You'll need more than twelve thousand men to get him. Gather an army of hundreds of thousands. Then make your move."

"No, no, no," argued Ahithophel. "Give your dad time, and he'll regroup. You must strike now."

Absalom listened to both advisors. In the end, he sided with Hushai. Hushai's plan worked. David now had time to regroup. He crossed the Jordan River and received word that Absalom would be commanding a massive army from his chariot. David decided to set up his ambush in Ephraim, where Absalom's chariots would have trouble navigating the woods.

With his men in position, David sounded the trumpets, and the battle began. But as Absalom entered the fray, he found himself in unfamiliar territory. Too busy cultivating his image, he had never fought a day in his life. When David's men began springing out from all sides, unable to control his chariot, Absalom abandoned it for a mule. But even the mule was unprepared for battle. As it ran wildly through the woods of Ephraim, Absalom's long, flowing hair became entangled in the branches of a tree.

Absalom's hair got caught; the mule kept going; and Absalom was left hanging by his hair. This is intriguing to me. After all, if you were in battle and your hair got caught, wouldn't you take your sword or knife, cut your hair, and set yourself free? Not Absalom. Either he was so inexperienced in

warfare that he didn't even have a weapon with him, or, he said, "I would rather die than lose my hair." Either way, it's amazing.

Upon hearing of Absalom's predicament, David's general, Joab, found him still hanging by his hair. Straightway, Joab fired three darts into Absalom's chest, putting an end to Absalom's life as well as his attempted coup.

"That's an interesting story," you say. "But what does this have to do with Galatians?"

Everything.

"Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree," wrote Paul.

Who hung on a tree? A mass murderer?

No.

A crazed rapist?

No.

It was a man who was proud, manipulative, and ambitious. That is the man whom God says is especially cursed. That's you. That's me. But wait.

"O, Absalom. O, Absalom, I would die if you could live," cried David.

"O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I will hang on the tree in your place," cried the Son of David, Jesus Christ.

- Absalom rebelled against his father.

  Jesus said, "I do the will of My Father."
- Absalom had beauty.

  Jesus had "no form or comeliness."
- Absalom sounded the trumpet.

  Jesus walked in humility.

They're opposite in every way. Yet they both hung on a tree—Absalom because of his sin, Jesus for mine. The biggest difference between Absalom and Jesus Christ is that only One burst forth from the stone that covered His grave. Only One rose from the dead. Only One says, "Because I hung on the tree, you are forgiven."

Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree. It should have been you. It should have been me. But He who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be forgiven. Consequently, we're saved. We're forgiven. We've been brought back from exile.

I'm Absalom. But because Jesus hung in there on the tree for me, I'm free. And I want you to be, too.



4 Look at a young man in love. No one tells him to write love letters, pick flowers, or go for a walk in the park with his sweetheart. These things just happen when we're in love. That's what the Lord wants for you and me. He wants to set us free and wants us to respond to that freedom in love. Legalism, however, will drain us of our passion for Jesus Christ.

If you are feeling dry or dragged down in your spiritual life, it could well be because you have fallen back into a pattern of legalism. Perhaps you have imposed rules upon your spiritual life—structure, commitments, and vows. Because you can't keep them, however, you inevitably find yourself feeling dragged down, dried up, and wiped out. Such is what was happening to the believers in Galatia. Judaizers came on the scene, saying, "You need to follow rules and regulations. You need to become circumcised. You need to adhere to the Jewish traditions."

Responding with holy indignation, Paul said, "No. Don't let anyone burden you with rules, rituals, or expectations. Stand fast in your liberty. You'll end up serving the Lord more energetically, talking to the Lord more frequently, studying His Word more joyfully, and giving more generously than when you had rules and legalistic trips that you couldn't keep and that only drained you of joy."

The question then becomes, "Why was the law given?" At the end of chapter 3, we saw the law was given to show us that we don't measure up, that we're sinners in need of a Savior. The law is a schoolmaster, said Paul, to bring us to Christ. But after faith is come, we no longer need the schoolmaster, as we exchange a relationship based on the law for a relationship based on love.

Galatians 4:1, 2

Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.

Donald and Marla Trump had a baby. As heir to the Trump fortune, this little Trumpette will one day inherit multiplied millions of dollars. Does this mean when she was five years old she could write checks, use credit cards, and make investments? No. Even though she was an heir, being a child, she was under the restrictions of her parents, nannies, and teachers.

The same is true of God's people. Before they were brought into adult sonship through Jesus Christ, they were kept under a tutor, a schoolmaster—the law. God knew all along He would send His Son to die for His people. He knew they would eventually be brought into a right standing with Him through the blood of Jesus Christ. Thus, the law was only a temporary tutor.

Galatians 4:3

Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

The "elements of the world" refer to the law. Why is the law referred to in this way? Because the basic building block of society must be the law. Any society that ignores the foundational principles of the law will crumble, dissipate, and be destroyed from within. The problem is, the law tells us what to do, but it fails to give us the power to do it.

Galatians 4:4, 5 (a)

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law . . .

In the fullness of time—at just the right time—Jesus Christ came to purchase we who were under the law, we who were trying hard to obey it, but powerless to do so.

Galatians 4:5 (b)

. . . that we might receive the adoption of sons.

The Greek word translated "adoption" is *huiothesia. Huios* meaning "son," and *thesis* meaning "position," *huiothesia* means "taking the position of a son." The Son of God took our position on the Cross of Calvary in order that we might in turn take the position as sons of God.

Adoption is not the means of entry into God's family. As Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3, we enter into God's family only by being born again. Rather, adoption speaks of our privilege and standing *within* God's family. The moment we were born again, we were placed in an adopted state as heirs, as sons of God.

We think of adoption in terms of adopting a little baby. But that's not the biblical concept of adoption. Biblical adoption refers to a full-grown adult. It would be like, before retiring from Ford Motor Company, having no sons, but wanting his name to continue, Henry Ford approached a twenty-four-year-old Harvard graduate and said, "Would you let me adopt you? If you will, you'll have a place on the Board of Directors, a salary of three million dollars a year, a summer house in Hawaii, a winter house in Tahiti, a private jet, and your own yacht."

The moment you were born again, you assumed the position of an adopted son—heir to the riches of the Father. Too often people say, "I really can't be used by the Lord because I've only walked with Him five years," or, "I can't get involved in intercessory prayer because I'm just a new Christian." Wrong. Concerning the privileges and responsibilities of the kingdom, you were adopted as a mature son with as much right to be blessed and used by the Lord as is Billy Graham.

This does not mean, however, that we are equal to Jesus Christ. We are adopted sons, but God so loved the world that He gave His *only begotten* Son. There's a lot of misunderstanding concerning this point within the "faith movement." There are those who say, "Jesus is the Son of God, and you're a son of God. Jesus created all things by His Word, therefore you can create all things by your word. Speak the word of faith. Name it and claim it. Blab it and grab it."

Wrong. The word of faith teachings are totally in error when they say that because God said let there be light, whatever we say will come to pass. It's

not that God *said, "Let there be light," but that God* said, "Let there be light," which caused the light to shine.

If you remember that you are an *adopted* son, you'll be free of heresy and misunderstanding.

Galatians 4:6

And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Because we're adopted sons, we have the Spirit of the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, in our hearts. Therefore, we can call God "Abba," the Hebrew word that means "papa," or "daddy"—and He will respond.

Galatians 4:7

Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Although we're no longer servants but sons, we need to understand that the privilege of prayer, wherein we cry, "Abba, Father," is not given to enable us to give God orders, to say, "Bless this, do that, provide the other." Such is not prayer at all. Prayer is the Spirit of Jesus Christ working in and through us in order to bring us into harmony with the perfect purposes of the Father. Prayer is the Spirit of Jesus in me crying, "Abba"—not for manipulation, but for unification—to become one with His perfect purpose and plan.

Galatians 4:8

Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

"Before you were saved," Paul said, "you served those which were not gods." The same is true today. People who are into the worship of idols wear robes and put on masks. They sprinkle water, burn incense, spin prayer wheels, and light candles—all in an effort to manipulate their gods.

Galatians 4:9–11

But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

"What are you doing?" asked Paul. "You're burning incense. You're sprinkling holy water, lighting candles, fingering beads, and repeating prayers over and over again. You've gone right back into pagan ritualism, but you've been set free from all that stuff."

There's something within us that gravitates towards the law and rituals, legalism, paganism, and all the stuff from which Jesus Christ came to set us free. "Well, I just feel more holy if I can hear the chants or the swishing of robes," you say. That's okay—but you don't need those things. There's a better way: Be totally free in your love relationship with God. Just enjoy the Lord!

Galatians 4:12 (a)

Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are . . .

"I'm not keeping 'kosher' rules. I'm not under Judaistic traditions," said Paul. "You're Gentiles. I live like you do."

Galatians 4:12 (b)–14

. . . ye have not injured me at all. Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

"When I first came to you," said Paul, "you received me and the message which I brought, even though I was suffering from a physical infirmity."

Galatians 4:15

Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.

Here, many commentators believe we are given a clue as to what Paul's infirmity was—perhaps an eye disease that caused his eyes to ooze and always appear runny, similar to perpetual pinkeye. Not only would such an infection be painful for Paul, but it would be painful for others to look at as well. Yet Paul says his infirmity didn't prevent the Galatians from receiving him with such a measure of devotion that they would have given him their own eyes if possible.

Galatians 4:16
Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?

"Are you turning away from me now because I am speaking truthfully by telling you that you're missing the mark by getting involved in legalism again?" asked Paul.

Galatians 4:17 (a)
They zealously affect you, but not well . . .

Legalists appeal to the macho mentality within each of us. "Come join us," they say. "We're really radical. We pay the price. We bear the Cross. We deal with stuff that only a few can deal with."

And we are prone to say, "I want to be one of the few, one of the chosen, one of the elite group that God will use in these last days. So I'll submit to stipulations and regulations in order that I can be among the few, the chosen —the spiritual marines!"

Galatians 4:17 (b)
. . . yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them.

"Legalizers have their own agenda," said Paul. "They want to exclude you from grace in order that by your own works, you can support them."

Galatians 4:18–20

But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.

"I travail in birth for you," said Paul. To another group of believers, he said, "You have ten thousand instructors, but not many fathers" (see 1 Corinthians 4:15). Paul's goal was not merely to dispense theological information, but to see the reality of regeneration. He wanted to see people born again, to see them grow in grace, to see them mature in liberty.

Galatians 4:21–23

Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.

To validate his argument, Paul appealed to Abraham, father of the Jewish race. God said to Abraham, "I'm going to bring you into a new land. I'm going to give you a new name. I'm going to make you great. And from you will come forth a people as innumerable as the stars in the heavens or the sand on the seashore."

Abraham believed God. But when he was eighty-six years old, with the promise yet to be fulfilled, his wife said, "Honey, I realize God spoke to you, but let's be practical. You're eighty-six. I'm seventy-six. This promise isn't going to come to pass the way we thought it would. Therefore, take my slave girl, Hagar, have relations with her, and the child you produce will be the promised seed from which will come the nation God promised you."

When God gives a promise, there is almost invariably a gap of time between the giving of the promise and the fulfillment of the promise. And it is in that gap of time that we get impatient. "Time is running out," we say. "I've got to make something happen."

Abraham agreed to Sarah's plan. The result was the conception and birth of a baby boy named Ishmael. Thirteen years went by. Then God spoke to Abraham again, saying, "I'm still going to give you a child."

"Let Ishmael live," said Abraham. "He'll do."

"No," said God. "Ishmael is not the fulfillment of My promise. He's only your fleshly attempt to help Me."

As I look back over my life, I see that every time I got impatient and tried to help God, the result has always been trouble—Ishmael. Because God is so good, the promise still comes because He's faithful to His Word. But the problem is, I have a bunch of Ishmaels to deal with. You see, to this day, blood is shed daily in the ongoing struggle between the children of Ishmael and the children of Israel. So, too, in my own life, whenever Ishmael is born as a result of my own fleshly efforts, strife, anxiety, and tension are also birthed in my life.

Push God, rush God, help God out—and you'll have an Ishmael on your hands. Abraham was a great man. Yet this friend of God, this father of faith, this incredible saint had a problem that God recorded as a lesson for each of us today: He was impatient.

"Impatient?" you say. "He waited how many years for God to keep His promise?"

It was at least twelve years between the time Abraham was given the promise and the time he went in to Hagar. But it could have been as many as eighteen years. Some of us think, *I've been waiting eighteen days, eighteen weeks, eighteen months. When is God going to fulfill His promise to me?* Abraham waited eighteen *years* before he said, "I better help God." But it was a disaster, nonetheless.

Galatians 4:24

Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.

Evidently, Hagar was born in Sinai, a significant site indeed, as it also speaks of the place where the Law was given.

Galatians 4:25, 26

For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

"Hagar illustrates Jerusalem—or Judaism," said Paul. "But the Jerusalem which is above—the heavenly Jerusalem—is free."

Galatians 4:27

For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.

Paul reminded the Galatians that, according to Isaiah 54:1, the barren one —the Gentiles—would produce more children than the people of promise—the Jews.

Galatians 4:28

Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

We're Isaac, the children of promise. It's a miracle we're here. Ten years ago, would you have thought you would be sitting in church—called out of the kingdom of darkness, into the kingdom of God's glorious light?

Galatians 4:29

But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.

The custom in Abraham's day was to throw a party to celebrate the day one's son was weaned. Thus, it was at Isaac's "weaning party" that Ishmael, his half brother, began to taunt and tease him. That is what the law does to this day: It causes those who live by it to taunt and tease those who don't. "You're shallow. You're carnal. You're weak. You're immature. I'm disciplined. I'm chosen. I'm a spiritual marine," says the legalist to the child of promise.

Galatians 4:30, 31

Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

The cure for the mocking and taunting of the legalizers is to get rid of the law. Cast it out. We are to preach the law to those who are hard of heart. Once a man opens his heart, however, the law has done its job.

The Law Is a Mirror to Show Us Our Sin

A necessity for those who don't know the Lord because it places restrictions on an exceedingly sinful world (1 Timothy 1:8), the law can be a monitor, but it cannot be a mother. It cannot produce the promise.

The Law Is Not to Be Married Again

Just as Hagar never married again after she was cast out, once we open our hearts to Jesus, the law has accomplished its purpose and is never to be embraced again. We are not to say, “I’ve been living in grace for ten years now. I’m going to do a little bit of law from here on out.” No, that which was begun in the Spirit cannot be finished by the flesh (Galatians 3:3).

The Law Was Made Manifest *After* Grace

Sarah was the wife of Abraham before Hagar ever came into the picture. God's intention from the beginning was grace. But man said, "I don't need God's grace. I'm doing okay by myself. I can handle everything by my own ability." The law was given to show man his need. Don't be confused by those who say the law existed for several thousand years before God got tired of it and switched to grace. No, the promise was given to Abraham long before the law was given to Moses.

The Law Materialized in the World

Where did Abraham get Hagar? In Egypt. You recall the story: When there was famine in Canaan, Abraham and Sarah went to Egypt for food. While there, Abraham got entangled in lies and deception. Pharaoh sent him away with riches and servants—one of whom was Hagar.

Whenever someone is legalistic, judgmental, and uptight, I know he got those attitudes not from the Word, but from the world. You see, the more sin we're exposed to, the more sin we're involved in, the more cynical we become. Had Abraham never gone into Egypt, he never would have had Hagar.

If someone is pompous, pious, and full of pride; if someone is legalistic, fault-finding, and sin-sniffing, I know he or she is one who has spent quite a bit of time in Egypt. Conversely, if someone is loving and kind, forgiving and gentle, he or she is one who has spent time in the Promised Land, enjoying the grace and goodness of God.

Legalism doesn't protect us from carnality, folks. It is the result of carnality. To the pure, all things are pure (Titus 1:15). People who are legalistic are those who have been peeking at *Playboy,* going to R-rated movies, or otherwise engaged in Egypt in one way or another. Angry at themselves, they're out to persecute others.

May God give you wisdom as you think and pray through this powerful picture.

LEGALISM: IT'S GOTTA GO!

A Topical Study of GALATIANS 4:21–31

It could and should have been the most glorious, the grandest, the happiest day of Abraham's life. His son was finally weaned—an event that called for a huge celebration. In that day, there were two milestones in the life of every child. . . .

> The first took place eight days after his birth when his parents performed the rite of circumcision. Although this was painful for the parents as well as for the child, because it was part of God's plan for His people at that time, they obeyed out of dedication to Him.
>
> The second milestone was marked not out of dedication, but with delight as the parents gave a feast at the time their child was weaned.

On the day Isaac was weaned, his old man was no doubt proud as punch.

"Aren't you being a bit disrespectful, referring to Isaac's father as his 'old man'?" you ask.

No. It's not a question of respect, but of reality. You see, when we first met Isaac's dad, he was already seventy-five years old. Living in the Mesopotamian town of Ur—the upscale town wherein bathtubs were invented, Abram was most likely very prosperous. Although he was a worshiper of the moon goddess commonly worshiped in that region (Joshua 24:2), God spoke to him, saying, "Get thee out of thy land, and away from thy kindred unto a land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation. And I will bless thee. And I will make thy name great. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee. And in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (see Genesis 12:1–3).

If you're a senior citizen or retired, don't think God is through with you. He's not. You never know when He will whisper in your ear something of new instruction, or of greater ministry—just as He did to Abram.

Abram did, indeed, leave Ur. He traveled northwest to the little town of Haran, where he stayed until his father died. Then he journeyed southwest to

the land to which God was leading him—to Canaan. When he arrived, he looked around, pitched his tent, and built an altar to worship the Lord.

But then something interesting happened. Famine came, and things got tough. "We have to leave this land," Abram said to his wife. "There's plenty to eat in Egypt." So they left the Promised Land and journeyed south to Egypt. Upon their arrival, Abram came to the conclusion that, because of his wife's great beauty, Pharaoh would order him killed in order to add her to his harem. Tell everyone you're my sister," Abram told her. And this beautiful woman submitted to the foolishness of her husband.

Just as Abram feared, Pharaoh's scouts spotted Sarah and notified him she was wanted in Pharaoh's harem. "Fine," said the father of faith. "She's my sister." In return, Abram was given menservants and maidservants, camels, and all kinds of riches. That night, God plagued Pharaoh and his household so intensely that Pharaoh recognized the hand of God. Knowing Abram had tricked him, the next morning, Pharaoh rebuked Abram and sent him and Sarai back to Bethel.

I find it interesting that there is no record of God talking to Abram while he was in Egypt. "Why doesn't God talk to me?" you may be saying today. It could be because you're in Egypt. You're not where you are supposed to be, doing what you were called to do, or being what you were called to be. Don't expect the Lord to speak to you in Egypt. He loves you too much. If He spoke to you while you were in Egypt, you would probably settle down there, and it would be disastrous for you. God shouts loudly through His silence whenever we're in Egypt until we finally say, "Let's go back to Bethel, back to the place of God."

The Lord spoke to Abram a second time, saying, "I am your exceeding great reward and shield" (see Genesis 15:1).

"Lord, You might be my reward, but I still don't have any children," Abram replied.

God said, "Look up at the stars, Abram. So shall your seed be." And, because Abram believed God, God declared him righteous (Galatians 3:6).

The years went on. Finally, at seventy-six years of age, Sarai said to her eighty-six-year-old husband, "I know God said you would be a great nation. I know He showed you the stars in the heavens. But the time has come to get your head out of the clouds and your feet on the ground, Abram. Have

relations with my handmaiden, Hagar. The child will count as ours." Scripture says Abram "hearkened unto the voice of his wife," and the child born was named Ishmael.

Thirteen years later, the Lord came to Abram again, saying, "You're no longer going to be called Abram, or "Exalted Father." From this time on, your name will be Abraham, or "Father of Multitudes."

Great, Abraham must have thought. *I only have one child. It was bad enough being called Exalted Father. But the Father of Multitudes?*

Why did God change Abram's name? Because "h" was the fifth letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Five being the number of grace, in changing Abram's name to Abraham, it was as if God inserted grace into Abraham's life. So, too, when God changed Sarai's name to Sarah, it was as if He bestowed grace upon her. At the age of ninety, she gave birth to a son.

Elated to be parents at last, Abraham and Sarah named their baby Isaac, or, "Laughter." The celebration commemorating his weaning must have been a joyous occasion, indeed—until Ishmael, a teenager at this point, began teasing his little brother.

Observing Ishmael's taunts and jeers, Sarah implored Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael. And Abraham again "hearkened unto the voice of his wife," this time being instructed by God to do so (Genesis 21:12). Scripture records that the thought of casting out his son was "very grievous in his sight." Abraham is the greatest example of faith in the Old Testament simply because he did what God said—even when he didn't understand or couldn't agree.

With a broken heart, Abraham filled water skins for Hagar and Ishmael and sent them to the desert—which brings us, at last, to our text. You see, every New Testament principle has an Old Testament picture. Justification by faith, as outlined here in Galatians, is no exception.

Consider the picture-perfect allegory: Hagar represents the law. Ishmael —Abraham's attempt to "help God out"—represents the flesh. Sarah represents grace.

Legalism will always persecute the person who is living in grace and enjoying the free gift of salvation. Just as Ishmael taunted Isaac, those who are trying to be religious mock those who celebrate liberty in Jesus, calling them shallow, immature, and undisciplined.

You will find this to be true. Not only will those around you mock you, but a voice will well up within you, saying, "Look what you're doing. Real Christians don't do that. You must not be a Christian." In addition to the voices around and within you, Satan himself will condemn you day and night (Revelation 12:10).

Contrary to our natural inclination, the solution to all of these accusations is not to get more religious, try harder, vow more earnestly or work more diligently. No, the solution is to cast out the bondwoman. The solution is to say, "Away, rules and regulations, religion, and tradition. I'm not going to try to deal with or compromise with the bondwoman. I'm going to cast her out."

My mind rebels against that. My heart wonders about that. I am tempted to think, *The best way to help the people I'm shepherding is to set up rules and restrictions, to set up certain standards of spirituality, to draw up pledges for them to sign, commitments for them to make, promises for them to keep.*

But the Book of Galatians says just the opposite. It tells us to get rid of the promises, the pledges, the commitments, and the rules. They're all Ishmaels. They will come back and persecute us because, inevitably and invariably, we'll hedge on our commitments, break our promises, and be unable to keep our rules. Then we'll be down on ourselves, depressed about ourselves, disgusted with ourselves until at last we'll say, "Forget it. Why even bother walking with God? I just can't do it."

Cast out Hagar and Ishmael, on the other hand, and what will happen? You'll cleave only to Sarah—to grace. And when you realize that the work is done, and that the price has been fully paid, you'll exchange the legalistic relationship you once had with God for a loving relationship with Him. If we truly love God, we won't be attracted to the places or activities of those who don't care about Him. You see, the reason I don't go to bars, for example, is not because God says, "Thou Shalt Not Go to Bars." It's because I can't think of anything worse than sitting in a dark room by the hour when I could be tossing the football or riding bikes with my son Ben. Thus, I abstain from bar hopping not because I've promised to—but because I want to.

If you're sitting here today, skeptically saying, "Just as I suspected. Sinners talking about cheap grace," remember that Hagar represents legalism. Where did Abraham get Hagar? In Egypt, in the world. The extent

to which we look down on and find fault with others is indicative of our own Egyptian wanderings. To the pure, all things are pure (Titus 1:5), but the one who is in sin will spot sin in everyone else because Hagar is traveling with him. Therefore, the degree to which I place bonds on others is indicative of my own Egyptian wanderings.

Consequently, when I begin to find fault with everyone else, it would behoove me to say, "Uh-oh, Lord, have I been cruising in Egypt? Have I picked up this legalistic tendency because of my excursion into the world? Has my joy been robbed because I've brought Hagar back with me?"

If that is the case, what must I do? Again, the answer lies in casting out the bondwoman. I must say, "Away, legalism; away cynicism; away, works of the flesh. I choose to cleave to Sarah. I will celebrate grace."

Folks, because legalism and love cannot dwell together in the same tent any more than could Hagar and Sarah, you will either become more rigid and ritualistic, or you'll become more liberated and loving. The two cannot dwell together. One has got to go. Let me recommend that you cast out Hagar, and that you cleave to Sarah—that you let go of legalism, and grab hold of grace.



5 We come to the third and final section of this glorious Epistle written to the Galatians. In chapters 1 and 2, Paul outlined his personal experience with grace. In chapters 3 and 4, he gave doctrinal instruction about grace. And now in chapters 5 and 6, he will demonstrate the practical application of grace.

Galatians 5:1

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Paul borrowed the term "yoke of bondage" from Peter, who, in Acts 15, used it in reference to the rules and regulations of Judaism. You see, years previously, Paul was involved in this same basic controversy. Accused of preaching "cheap grace," he and Barnabas were summoned to appear before

the church leaders in Jerusalem. "Believing in Jesus is terrific," they said, "but it's not enough. To be a good Christian, one must also be a good Jew."

"Wait a minute," protested Peter, "neither our fathers nor we were able to bear the yoke of Judaism. Why should we expect the Gentiles to be able to bear it?"

"Don't let anyone put a yoke of bondage on you," echoed Paul. The yoke Jesus bore on His shoulders as He carried the Cross to Calvary is all-sufficient.

Galatians 5:2

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.

"If you add anything to the Cross in an attempt to obtain a right standing with God, you're not saved. That's how strongly the Father feels about the sufficiency of the finished work of His Son," said Paul.

I know the Mormons are sincere. I see the zeal of the Jehovah's Witnesses. But their doctrines very clearly state that, although the Cross is a good starting point, it is not enough in and of itself to save a man. Therefore, they're lost. The Word says if any man adds anything to the Cross, Christ profits him nothing.

Galatians 5:3, 4

For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

Suppose, while driving through town, you saw a flashing red light in your rearview mirror. You pulled over, and the policeman said, "You were driving fifty-five miles an hour. You broke the law."

If you said, "Oh, come on now, Officer. Lighten up. I never robbed a bank. I never shot a person. I never was involved in drugs. So don't give me this ticket," he would say, "I don't care how many other laws you *haven't* broken, you *did* break this one. You're guilty."

The same is true of the law. If you're seeking justification by keeping the law rather than by accepting grace, breaking the law in even one point means you're guilty—regardless of how many "good things" you've done in other areas.

Galatians 5:5, 6 (a)
For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision . . .

It doesn't matter whether you're circumcised or uncircumcised, whether you worship on Saturday or on Sunday, whether you eat meat or live on birdseed. As far as your relationship with the Father goes, this stuff is irrelevant.

Galatians 5:6 (b)
. . . but faith which worketh by love.

Grace does not produce lazy, hazy Christianity. On the contrary, as James would write, true faith works (James 2:17). Why? Not because it's got to, but because it gets to.

I asked one of the brothers at Applegate Christian Fellowship what he was going to do on his day off. "Oh, I can't wait," he said. "I'm going to my fiancée's house, and I'm going to paint her living room, fix the plumbing in her bathroom, and then do some yard work."

"That's your day *off?*" I said. "Plumbing, painting, and yard work? It's amazing what love does!" Truly, when you're in love with someone, it's not "got to's"—it's "get to's."

We *get* to worship the Lord as a congregation. We *get* to start our day with morning devotions. We *get* to tithe and be free from our own greediness. We *get* to lift our hands. We *get* to share our faith. We don't have to do those things. We *get* to. The reason faith works is not to fulfill a requirement of the law. It was in response to an incredible love.

Galatians 5:7

Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?

Perhaps the reference in your margin says, "Who cut in front of you?" The idea is exactly as it sounds: Paul is referring to an Olympic race, saying, "You were running well, but someone cut into your lane and caused you to stumble."

One of the major showdowns in Olympic history was in the 1500 meters, as Mary Decker Slaney took on archrival Zola Budd from South Africa. Although Slaney held every record on the books, she had not yet won Olympic gold. In the middle of the race, Budd crossed into Slaney's lane, sending Slaney sprawling. The image of the American Olympian watching the rest of the pack run by is etched on our collective memory.

So, too, allowing legalists to cut in front of them and obstruct their freedom in Christ, the Galatians had set themselves up for a fall.

Galatians 5:8

This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you.

When cultists knock on your door, try to sell you their magazine, or lay their esoteric trip on you, on the basis of this verse, say, "Where did you get that idea? You didn't get it from the Bible, did you?"

"Well, not really," they'll say. "It's from *The Pearl of Great Price,*" or, "from our magazine," or, "from a pamphlet."

We who are believers in Jesus Christ, on the other hand, can truly say, "Just read your Bible. It's all you need. You don't need special literature. You don't need something some man has written to reveal the keys of spirituality to you. If you really want to know the truth, just read the Word."

I'm constantly encouraging people to read their Bibles because I know that if they do, they'll be on solid, secure footing. They won't fall prey to some new idea or philosophy.

Galatians 5:9

A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

Shifting his analogy from sports to cooking, Paul relates leaven, the symbol for evil throughout Scripture, to legalism. "Be careful," he said. "Just as leaven hidden in a portion of dough causes all of the dough to rise, if you open the door to even a little legalism, it will surely spread."

The tricky thing about legalism is that it begins with the right motives. Because we care so much about our congregations or our kids, we put legalistic perimeters around them. Although the motive is sincere, it ends in disaster because rules and regulations produce only one of two things: self-glorification, or self-condemnation.

> *"The secret to God's blessing lies in getting up at four o'clock every morning," you might say. Consequently, for two years you roll out of bed every morning at four o'clock on the dot, thinking,* Look at me. I've got it all together. *One morning, however, you ignore the alarm. Self-glorification turns to self-condemnation, as you cry, "Alas. The Lord will not hear my prayer today. For that matter, He probably won't hear any more of my prayers ever."*

You then find yourself on a spiritual roller coaster—up when you succeed and down when you fail.

> *Suppose you're sitting on a 747 Honolulu-bound jumbo jet. Just before takeoff you hear the voice of the captain over the loudspeaker, saying, "We have a small problem here today. Our navigational instrument is one degree off. But what's one degree? Sit back and relax, and we'll be taking off shortly."*
>
> *If I were on that plane, I would say, "Open the door. I'm out of here." One degree might not make a very big difference from Medford, Oregon, to Ashland, but it would cause the plane to miss Hawaii by three hundred miles. We'd all be shark bait!*

Legalism might not make any noticeable difference at first, but over the long haul it will be disastrous.

Galatians 5:10 (a)

I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded . . .

In other words, "I'm confident you're getting my point," said Paul.

Galatians 5:10 (b)

. . . but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be.

Let every Sunday-school worker, every Bible study teacher, and every family devotion leader hear Paul's heart as he says to the Galatians, "Those who are causing you to get entangled in legalism will bear the responsibility for what they're doing." James would echo the same warning. "Let not many of you desire to be teachers," he said, "knowing that you shall receive the greater condemnation" (see James 3:1). Each of us involved in teaching needs to approach our calling soberly and prayerfully. Like Timothy, we need to "study to show ourselves approved unto God, workmen that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Galatians 5:11

And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.

Accused of preaching circumcision, Paul said, "If I am, indeed, preaching circumcision, why is it the legalizers who persecute me? It's not circumcision, but the Cross that offends them."

The same is true today. When we tell people that the work is done and the price paid, it was all taken care of on the Cross, they most likely say, "It's not that simple. You're being naive. There's a lot more to it than that."

The Cross is offensive to the religious person because he wants to get in on the action and contribute to his own salvation or blessing. However, the

finished work of Jesus Christ doesn't allow for that.

Galatians 5:12, 13 (a)
I would they were even cut off which trouble you. For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh . . .

Before we were saved, we were in bondage to our own lusts. There was no alternative. We thought the coolest thing was to find the darkest place and go party. But it wasn't too long before we found out that sin stinks. Sin ruins relationships. Sin kills joy. Sin wipes people out. It destroys families, messes up kids, and results in mental fuzziness and physical illness. Praise God! We're free from that stuff. Therefore, the liberty to which we're called is not liberty *to* sin, but liberty *from* sin.

Galatians 5:13 (b)
. . . but by love serve one another.

"If I'm not going to party anymore," you say, "what *am* I going to do?" Serve one another! "But I'm so bored." Serve one another! Pour yourself into people. Get involved in talking to others who are doomed and damned and struggling. You'll find that talking to them about eternal issues will be more exciting and thrilling than anything you've ever done. Get involved in the things of the kingdom, and you won't miss the old stuff at all.

Galatians 5:14 (a)
For all the law is fulfilled in one word . . .

Get ready. You are about to become an Old Testament scholar, knowing the one word that sums up the entire aw. . . .

Galatians 5:14 (b)
. . . even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Love is the one word that encapsulates the entire law. Not legalism—love.

Galatians 5:15

But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

What if we really believed that every time we put someone down, made a snide remark, or rolled our eyes in response to someone else, sooner or later we would be hurt to the same degree? Scripture says flat out, straight on, and with great clarity that if you bite and devour, take heed—you will be consumed by another. Others will talk about you to the degree you talk about others.

On the other hand, the more grace-oriented you are, the more loving you'll be.

Galatians 5:16

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

In the arena of liberty, the key is not to suppress the flesh. The key is to surrender to the Spirit. Legalism says, "Deal with the flesh through ritual, pain, and agony."

Paul says, "There's a much better way. The solution is not to worry about the flesh, but to walk in the Spirit."

Walking in the Spirit is so exciting. The way the Lord will lead you on any given day, the opportunities that will open before you to do something significant, the insights He'll give to you as you're reading the Scriptures, the joy of just looking at a sunset and realizing you know the Creator of such beauty—will be overwhelming to you. Too many believers miss all of that because, caught up in wrestling with sin, they live in a perpetual "sin-drome."

If I said to you tonight, "Thou shalt not think of a purple elephant,"—suddenly, you would be able to think of nothing else.

But, if I then set before you a huge hot fudge sundae—creamy vanilla ice cream, laced with deep dark fudge, topped with mounds of whipped cream, lightly toasted almonds, and a juicy red cherry—the purple elephant wouldn't enter your mind because you'd be captivated by something much better right before your eyes.

So, too, to overcome preoccupation with sin, walk in the Spirit. Enjoy the Lord. Do what He tells you to do in any given moment, and you'll forget sin. I see this in Moses' life. On two occasions, while in the presence of the Lord on Mount Sinai, we are told he did not eat or drink for forty days and nights (Deuteronomy 9:9; 10:10). What was the reason for his fast? Was he trying to impress God? No. He was just so entranced and enthralled in the presence of God, that he forgot to eat.

How do people overcome the lusts of the flesh? The simplest, most effective way is to walk in the Spirit. Just be enraptured with the goodness of the Lord. Do what He's telling you in your heart—whether it be some practical expression of love, a moment of intercession for someone, an encouraging word to share, or a merciful act to do.

Galatians 5:17

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

If you're trying to overcome the flesh in your own energy, you'll struggle perpetually, regardless of how many resolutions you make on December thirty-first, or how many slogans you paste on your refrigerator. The fact is that you'll never overcome the pull of the flesh on your own. Even though the spirit may indeed be willing, the flesh is too weak (Matthew 26:41). "Down with purple elephants!" you may write upon your mirror. But in reality, whatever your elephant is, whatever your heavyweight fleshly tendency might be, it will never be overcome by your own resolve or religion.

Galatians 5:18

But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

I love this word "but." Gaining victory over the flesh by keeping the law is futile in our own ability, *but* if we're led of the Spirit, we're not under the law theologically or practically. We're free!

Galatians 5:19 (a)
Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness . . .

Uncleanness speaks of impurity of thought or life.

Galatians 5:19 (b)
. . . lasciviousness . . .

Lasciviousness speaks of licentiousness—or, literally, doing things without a license. "Who needs a marriage license if we love each other?" people say.

Galatians 5:20 (a)
Idolatry . . .

Although I'm an athlete, I think one of the biggest idols in our culture is sports. I'm convinced that if we're not careful, we actually teach our kids the idolatry of athletics whenever we say, "You don't have to go to church today. You have a game." Too many believers don't have time to study the Bible or fellowship with other believers due either to their own athletic pursuits or those of their kids. While I encourage you to keep in shape and to cheer for your kids, if you forsake ministry, worship, or the study of the Word to do so, you are guilty of idolatry.

Galatians 5:20 (b)
. . . witchcraft . . .

The Greek word translated "witchcraft" is *pharmakeia. Pharmakeia* refers to drugs. In Paul's day, those who were involved in witchcraft would

brew potions that were, in reality, hallucinogens. Thus, it is no surprise that the drug culture and the world of the occult remain linked together to this day.

Galatians 5:20 (c)
. . . hatred, variance, emulations, wrath . . .

A teenage golfer was killed when he whacked a bench in frustration with his club after a bad shot. The broken shaft pierced his pulmonary vein, and he bled to death.

Don't lose your temper. It will break your heart in one way or another! Most of us can literally feel our blood boil, the hair on the back of our neck begin to stand up, or our veins bulge as wrath manifests itself in our flesh quite literally. When you begin to feel wrath welling up within you, don't smash a club or lash out at someone else. Instead, walk away from the confrontation. It may save your life.

Galatians 5:20 (d)
. . . strife . . .

Closely related to wrath, strife means "being antagonistic."

Galatians 5:20 (e)
. . . seditions, heresies . . .

Why would heresy be a manifestation of the flesh? Because people who propagate heresy do so for one reason: to glorify their flesh. "Look what I have discovered," they say. "I have been studying the Dead Sea Scrolls, and now I alone have insight into the true Jesus." Heresies always arise from someone wanting attention, wanting to build a movement around his flesh.

Galatians 5:21 (a)
Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings . . .

"Revelling" means partying.

Galatians 5:21 (b)

. . . and such like . . .

This list is not exhaustive. Paul says, "Here is only a sample of what the flesh is like."

Galatians 5:21 (c)

. . . of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

"I'm telling you again," Paul says, "that those who are involved in heresy, adultery, strife, envying, drunkenness, and reveling shall not inherit the kingdom." When did Paul say this before? In I Corinthians 6:9; Ephesians 5:5; and Colossians 3:6.

"That's legalism!" you protest.

No. It's not legalism—it's revelation. The works of the flesh in one's life reveal an absence of relationship with the Lord. You see, Paul is not speaking of the person who struggles with these things, or has fallen into these things. He's speaking of the one who perpetually, habitually practices these things arrogantly, stubbornly, and with no desire to be set free from them. People who have a mind-set or a heart attitude that says, "Once saved, always saved. I'm doing this stuff, like it or not," will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Therefore, wise is the man or woman who takes Paul's words at face value and says, "Lord, forgive me and help me. Cause me to be full of Your Spirit lest I miss out on heaven."

Galatians 5:22, 23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

The fruit (not fruits) of the Spirit is love—as defined by joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control.

For topical study of Galatians 5:22–23 entitled "The Fruit of the Spirit," turn to page **1208.**

Galatians 5:24

And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

There are many ways to execute yourself. You can hang yourself, shoot yourself, poison yourself, or jump from the top floor of a ten-story building. But there's one form of execution you cannot do by yourself: crucifixion. If you pounded a nail in one of your hands, how could you do it to the other hand?

What does this mean? Go back to Romans 6, and see what Paul said so powerfully and beautifully when he wrote, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. Likewise, reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ, our Lord" (see Romans 6:6, 11). We don't have to crucify ourselves. Our sin nature already died on the Cross with Jesus. Therefore, the bottle, pills, anger, gossip, or temptation that used to dominate us no longer has control over us if we simply acknowledge that we've already been crucified with Christ. We who are in Christ have already been crucified, said Paul—not "should be," not "better be," but "*have been."* The work is done!

Galatians 5:25

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Walking in the Spirit simply means doing what the Lord tells you to do moment by moment—whether it's making a phone call to someone in need of encouragement, getting away for five minutes to pray, or chopping wood for someone in need. It is also the most impacting, exciting, unpredictable life there is.

For topical study of Galatians 5:25 entitled "Walking in the Spirit," turn to page **1212.**

Galatians 5:26

Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

Those who live in legalism desire vainglory. "Look how many people I witnessed to. Look how many hours I prayed. Look what I don't do," we say whenever legalism creeps into our lives. But the problem with vainglory is this: It's never enough.

Don't get caught up in the cycle of legalism, saint. Don't be one who competes with people. Instead, be one who completes people.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

A Topical Study of GALATIANS 5:22, 23

The beloved Rabbi was on his deathbed. His students had one last question to ask of him: "What is the secret of life?"

Looking into the eyes of the earnest young men, the Rabbi said, "Life is like a river." Then he drifted into a coma that lasted for several months. Through the duration of the Rabbi's silence, his disciples discussed and pondered the puzzling analogy.

Life is like a river? What does that mean? they wondered. A few months later, the Rabbi awoke from his coma. The young men quickly gathered around him once again and said, "Rabbi, we've been considering the last word you gave us. What did you mean when you said life is like a river?"

With furrowed brow, the Rabbi said, "Maybe life is not like a river"—and he died.

What *is* the secret of life? Although we might look to gurus or rabbis, pastors or philosophers, thinkers or movie stars for the answer, the only One who truly explains life *to* us is the One who came to be Life *for* us. . . .

The Secret of Life

> *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*
>
> John 15:16

What is the secret of life?

Bearing fruit.

What is fruit?

Galatians 5 describes it in its simplest form. The fruit of the Spirit is love.

"What about joy and peace, longsuffering and gentleness, goodness, meekness, and self control?" you ask.

When Paul said that the fruit of the Spirit is love, the implication is that joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control all describe what love is.

Fruit doesn't exist for itself. It exists for others. Too often, we want the fruit of the Spirit in our lives so *we* can be satisfied, so *we* can be happy, so *we* can be fulfilled. But that's not the purpose of fruit.

So fruitful was Joseph that his branches hung down into the neighbor's yard (Genesis 49:22)—ready to be picked and stripped.

"Picked and stripped?" you say warily. "I don't know if I like that."

Really? In Song of Solomon 4:16, we read: "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits."

"That's more like it!" you say. "The desire of my heart is to be a garden for my King—just Jesus and me in silence and solitude."

Wait a minute. Read on. What does Jesus do? He brings His friends with Him into our garden (Song of Solomon 5:1). They trample on us and pick from us, until we protest, "Who invited *them?*"

“I did,” answers the Lord. “I’ve produced this fruit in you, not for you, and not even primarily for Me—but for My friends.”

Truly, the secret of life is fruit-bearing—not for our own satisfaction, but in order that others might be nourished from the fruit produced in, through, and often, in spite of us! Focus on yourself, and you’ll be miserable. Be a lover of God and of people. Get your eyes off your problems and pains, your tears and fears. Look for ways to refresh, satisfy, and bless others—and you’ll find the secret of life itself.

The Secret of Fruit-bearing

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

John 15:4

What is the secret of fruit-bearing?

Abiding.

What is abiding?

Abiding simply means "hanging in there."

Suppose I said, "My family loves apples. So to make their favorite fruit a little more accessible I'm going to cut a branch from the apple tree in the backyard, put it in the kitchen, and when spring comes, it will blossom right here—where the apples will be easy to pick."

That would be ridiculous—which is precisely why Jesus said, "Here's the key to bearing fruit: Stay close to Me. If you cut yourself off from Me in any way, at any time, you won't bring forth fruit. If you abide in Me, fruit will come supernaturally, naturally."

Looking at my apple tree, I notice that when the branches abide, when they simply cling to the trunk, blossoms come forth, and fruit is produced. I never see the apple tree struggling, sweating, or red in the face. Yet I do see Christians straining and striving, grunting and groaning because they fail to understand that the secret of fruit-bearing is not to try to figure out how to make fruit. The secret of fruit-bearing is abiding, just hanging in there with the Lord.

Our text gives three identifying marks of one who is abiding:

First, there is production of fruit. "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Second, there is correction from the Father. "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit (John 15:2).

Some say the purging spoken of here means pruning. Others say "to purge" means "to clean" (John 15:3). You see, when a vine was prolific, the

branches would become weighed down with an abundance of fruit. Add a rainy season to the picture, and the result would be muddy grapes. Thus, the vinedresser would wash the branches periodically in order that the fruit would remain pure.

What does it mean to be purged? Does it mean to be pruned—or does it mean to be washed? I think it means both. You see, the Lord will cleanse you as you study the Word corporately on Sundays and Wednesdays, intimately in your quiet times with Him, and practically through small-group study with other believers. And He will prune you through trials and difficulties, dark days and hard times.

God is so in love with you, He is committed to teaching you—one way or the other. Let me suggest that you choose to be washed by the water of the Word rather than trimmed by the trials of the world!

Finally, the third mark of an abiding believer is fruition in prayer. "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). Answered prayers are indicative of an abiding heart. If your prayers are not being answered, it means you're not in harmony with the heart of God.

You'll understand the heart, nature, and character of Jesus if you're abiding in Him. Consequently, your prayers will be in line with His desires.

The Secret of Abiding

> *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.*
>
> John 15:10

What is the secret of abiding?

Obeying—simply doing what the Lord is telling you to do at any given moment.

> "I did all that God told me to do. I wiped out the Amalekites," boasted Saul (see 1 Samuel 15:13).
>
> "Then, who's that guy standing with you?" asked Samuel.
>
> "Him? Oh, he's their king. I brought him back as a trophy, along with a few sheep we're going to sacrifice," Saul answered.
>
> "Oh, Saul," said Samuel. "Don't you know that to obey is better than sacrifice, that disobedience is as the sin of witchcraft?" (see 1 Samuel 15:22, 23).

Gang, whatever we don't deal with in obedience will return to destroy us. Years later, as Saul lay dying in battle on Mount Gilboa, perhaps the last words he heard were those of his attacker saying, "I am an Amalekite" (2 Samuel 1:8).

Obedience is the key to abiding. If we don't obey, an Amalekite will be produced within us that will eventually rise up and destroy us.

The Secret of Obeying

> *Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.*
>
> John 14:23

What is the secret of obeying?

Love.

Jesus didn't say, "If a man love me, he *should* keep my words," or, "he had *better* keep my words." He said, "If a man love Me, He *will* keep My words." It's true. Obedience is no problem if you love someone. Saul had no love for God. That's why obedience was so difficult for him.

The Secret of Loving

> *Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.*
>
> John 15:15

What is the secret of loving?

Knowing.

"I've let you know all that I know," Jesus said. "What I have heard from My Father, I've shared with you."

The old adage "familiarity breeds contempt" is only true regarding contemptible objects. The longer we know people, the greater the chance we'll be disappointed with them. Not so with the Lord. The longer we know Him, the more impressed we are with Him.

The Secret of Knowing

"If the key to loving is knowing, how do I know Him?" You already know the answer. Knowing Him means taking in the Word—just as you're doing right now. I know it would be easier for you to be at the lake, or watching the 49'ers. But the fact that you're studying the Word proves that you already know what it takes to know the Lord.

Walking by a once-productive vineyard that had become covered with thorns, Solomon stopped to see what had brought about its decline. His conclusion? "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands" (see Proverbs 24:30–34).

The same is true for the believer. The longer we walk with the Lord, the greater the temptation to say, "We've been to plenty of church meetings (yawn). Morning devotions? I've done them long enough (zzz). I don't need fellowship anymore" (hands folded in repose).

Then what happens? The walls break down; the thorns creep in; the fruit dries up.

Don't let that happen, saint. The secret of life is to bear fruit. The secret of bearing fruit is to abide in Him. The secret of abiding is obedience. The secret of obedience is love. The secret of love is knowledge. The secret of knowledge is to do just what you're doing right now—studying the Word.

Stay the course, pilgrim. Continue on, branch. You'll see fruit produced in you in a way that will not only bless others, but that will bring great satisfaction to you.

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

A Topical Study of GALATIANS 5:25

It has been rightly said that the problem with life is, it's so daily. A lot of people find their life to be rather mundane, unexciting, predictable. One writer declared that in his situation, life was like a merry-go-round without the merry.

That's not the way life for the believer is meant to be lived. As Paul said, "If—or as is more properly rendered, "*Since* you live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit."

What does it mean to walk in the Spirit?

Walking in the Spirit is the most exciting, interesting, wonderful way to live. It is the direct opposite of routine, drudgery, and predictability. As proof, consider the lives of three men who did indeed walk in the Spirit. . . .

Paul

In Acts 16, setting out on his second missionary journey, Paul, Silas, and Timothy headed for Asia in order to check on the churches planted there during Paul's first missionary journey. In verse 6, however, the Spirit suddenly closed the door, preventing them from accomplishing what they had set out to do. Changing their plans, they headed for Bithynia—but were again forbidden by the Spirit to proceed. So it was that Paul found himself in the seacoast town of Troas (Acts 16:8).

In my mind's eye, I can visualize Paul walking up and down the beach questioning, wrestling, wondering, "What are You doing, Lord?" Suddenly, a vision of a man from Macedonia, saying, "Come and help us," appeared to him. Consequently, although the thought of taking the gospel to Europe had never before occurred to him, Paul and company set sail across the Aegean for Greece.

Upon their arrival, they met with a group of women (verse 13), for there was evidently not a male believer to be found. Paul was expecting to find a Macedonian man. Instead, he found a group of women. That's the way it is when we walk in the Spirit. Doors close unexpectedly. Others open miraculously. But when we go through them, things are rarely how we thought they would be initially.

While the Macedonian man does, indeed, appear as the chapter unfolds, he could hardly have been who Paul thought he would be. Who was the Macedonian man? I believe he was the jailer, who put Paul in stocks before coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus (Acts 16:30–34).

Prison doors opening, churches starting, miracles abounding—that's what it means to walk in the Spirit. Walking in the Spirit means letting the Holy Ghost close doors, open others, and surprise us at every turn.

Peter

In Acts 10, we find Peter waiting for lunch on Simon the tanner's rooftop. Looking out over the Mediterranean Sea, Peter saw a vision of a sheet carrying all sorts of unclean animals previously forbidden for the Jews to eat. In this, the Lord said, "The law, given to drive you to Christ, has done its job. You're free, Peter."

Taken aback by this, Peter went downstairs to find three men at the door —just as the Spirit had promised (Acts 10:19). Accompanying them to the house of Cornelius, Peter preached the Word—and the entire household of Cornelius was radically converted.

Now, I am certain that when Peter first arrived at Simon the tanner's house, the last thing he dreamed he would do was preach to a family of Gentiles. But, like Paul, as Peter walked in the Spirit, he was led to people and places beyond his wildest expectations.

Philip

In Acts 8, we see the entire city of Samaria responding to the ministry of Philip. Demons fled. Souls were saved. Joy filled the entire community. Suddenly, however, the Lord said to Philip, "Leave this revival and go to the desert" (see Acts 8: 26).

And, because he walked in the Spirit, Philip went—most likely not understanding why.

When he reached Gaza, the Spirit prompted him to talk to a certain political leader from Ethiopia. Returning from Jerusalem, he was sitting in his chariot, reading the Book of Isaiah. What did Philip do? Scripture says Philip ran to him (Acts 8:30). After receiving the gospel from Philip, the Ethiopian asked to be baptized immediately—a request to which Philip complied eagerly.

How I want to be more like Philip. When the Lord places an impression on my heart, or puts a thought in my mind, how I want to respond not begrudgingly or reluctantly, but to run!

"Go to the desert," the Spirit said. Philip went, not knowing why—and the single conversation that took place still has ramifications two thousand years later, as the light of the Good News of salvation continues to shine in Africa.

Look at Paul called to Macedonia, Peter going into the house of Cornelius, Philip called to the desert—and you will see that each man walked in the Spirit.

Perhaps you're saying, "I'd like to walk in the Spirit, but I don't have visions of men from Macedonia; I don't see sheets dropping down from heaven. I don't hear a voice telling me to go to Gaza. I agree in theory that life should be exciting and meaningful, impacting and Spirit-led—but how does that happen practically?"

I suggest three ways. . . .

Request

Jesus gave us the first key to walking in the Spirit when He said, "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you" (see Luke 11:9). It's interesting to me that the Greek verbs translated "ask," "seek," and "knock" are in the perfect tense. This means they speak of a continual asking, a continual seeking, a continual knocking. It's not something we do once a week at church, or once a year on a retreat. It's what we do every day, as we say, "Lord, I need Your help. I want to be used by You. Give me sensitivity to Your Spirit."

Relax

If the first step to walking in the Spirit is to request, the second step is to relax. In 1 Samuel 9, we see Saul looking for his father's donkeys. Unable to find the lost livestock, Saul was about to return to his father empty-handed—when he heard about a man of God who could help him. Making his way to the prophet Samuel's house, Saul inquired of him concerning the lost herd. "Set not your mind on the donkeys," said Samuel. "Come to my table. There's a far bigger issue at hand: You are about to be made king of Israel" (see 1 Samuel 9:19, 20).

We're Saul, folks. Bunches of us are searching high and low for our lost donkeys. Desiring to come to our Father with something of substance in our lives, we, nonetheless, wander aimlessly and return empty-handed. We struggle with a job, a house, a career, a relationship. Yet as important as those things might be, they're only donkeys in comparison to the bigger issue, in comparison to the kingdom.

The Lord calls us to significant service, to touch people's lives, to impact our world. He says to us, "Set not your mind on the donkeys. I know right where they are. Instead, come to My table, and fellowship with Me."

Receive

What happened when Saul went to Samuel's table? First, Samuel said, "Stand thou still awhile that I may shew thee the Word of God." Then he anointed Saul king (see 10:1). Lastly, he told Saul where his father's donkeys could be found (10:2).

Do you want to walk in the Spirit? Do what Saul did: Forget the donkeys; set aside your own agenda, and commune with the Lord at His table. Chew on His Word. Stand still in His presence. Receive His anointing.

Then, like Saul, you will be told where to find your lost donkeys. Jesus said, "Seek *first* the kingdom, and all these things shall be added unto you" (see Matthew 6:33). It's just that simple. In the morning hours, during the day, Wednesday night, Sunday evening, Sunday morning—seek first the kingdom of God.

Not only will you be anointed by the Spirit with significant opportunities opening before you, but, like Saul, you'll find what you were looking for all along.



6 Galatians 6:1 (a)

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness . . .

Continuing his exposition on the practical application of grace, Paul says, "If you're spiritual, when someone fails, don't rejoice—restore."

> *Noah lay in his tent, naked. Ham couldn't wait to share this news with his brothers. Shem and Japheth, on the other hand, walked backward into their father's tent, a blanket stretched between them, to cover his nakedness (Genesis 9:21–23).*

Scripture declares that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). Love doesn't talk about sin, doesn't draw attention to sin, and doesn't call a prayer meeting to discuss sin. Love walks in backward and covers sin.

Galatians 6:1 (b)

. . . considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

How much of our day is spent analyzing the faults and shortcomings of others? The answer is a good barometer of where we stand spiritually. The carnal man wants to reveal. The spiritual man wants to restore. Why? Because, while the carnal man is puffed up with a false sense of pride and security, the spiritual man knows how close he himself is to succumbing to temptation.



***For topical study of Galatians 6:1 entitled "Caring for Casualties," turn to page* 1217.**

Galatians 6:2

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

What is the law of Christ? To love God with all your heart, and to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:36–40).

Galatians 6:3

For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

"I'm too important to bear someone else's burdens," some say.

It has been wisely said that to determine how important you are, stick your finger into a bucket of water, pull it out, and see how long it takes to fill the hole. We all have a tendency to think we're irreplaceable—but we're not. Paul doesn't say we deceive ourselves *if* we are nothing. He says we deceive ourselves *because* we are nothing.

Galatians 6:4

But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

In other words, “Don’t try to impress others with your importance. Just do the things God has called you to do regardless of whether anyone notices or appreciates you.”

Galatians 6:5

For every man shall bear his own burden.

“Wait a minute,” you say. “Doesn’t this contradict verse 2?” No. The Word translated “burden” here in verse 5 speaks of a soldier’s pack, while the word “burden” in verse 2 refers to taking a hit in the chest. You see, in this battle we’re in, we’re each supposed to bear our own pack. But when someone has been walloped by the Enemy, we’re supposed to carry his load with him. Consequently, we should not be people who are always trying to get someone else to carry our pack. At the same time, there are moments, events, and days that wallop us. During those times we need brothers and sisters to stand with us.

May God give us wisdom concerning when to buck up and bear our burden, and when to open up and share our burden.

Galatians 6:6

Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.

The Greek word translated “communicate” refers to a physical sharing. In other words, we need to give materially to those who teach us spiritually. How I thank the Lord for this congregation that says, “Because this is the place where our needs are met and where we’re being blessed, we’re going to share in order that the ministry can continue.”

I believe a lot of people are missing out on so much in so many ways because they fail to “communicate unto him that teacheth.” The only time in all of Scripture God tells us to test Him is in regard to giving. “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in mine house, and test me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (see Malachi 3:10).

Galatians 6:7

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

If you're sowing stingily, you'll reap sparingly. If you're sowing generously, you'll reap abundantly.

Galatians 6:8

For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

The law of the harvest is irrevocable and incontestable. If I say, "Lord, forgive me. I shouldn't have gone there, said that, or done the other," He does (see 1 John 1:9)—but the seed I planted in sin will still come to fruition.

"What about grace?" you say.

Grace still abounds. Ask Samson. After being where he shouldn't have been and getting a haircut in the process, as he ground at the wheel, his hair began to grow. When he at last stood in the temple of Dagon and pulled down the supporting pillars, Scripture records that Samson conquered more Philistines in that one moment than he had in his entire lifetime (Judges 16:30). Samson sowed to his flesh and lost everything as a result, for such is the law of the harvest. Yet his hair grew back and his strength was restored for a final pivotal moment of ministry, for such is the grace of God.

Galatians 6:9

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

"I've been sowing good seed, but I'm not seeing much return," you might say. Hang in there, saint. You will reap in due season if you don't give up.

Galatians 6:10

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

Do good to everyone—but especially to your brothers and sisters in God's family.

Galatians 6:11

Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.

"I'm underlining this," said Paul.

Galatians 6:12 (a)

As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised . . .

The Greek word translated "constrain" is a term used in sales. Paul said, "Like salesmen, the legalizers put the hard sell on you to be circumcised."

Galatians 6:12 (b)

. . . only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

"The legalizers sell circumcision because they don't want to suffer persecution," said Paul. The legalists who are trying to put you under rules and regulations are doing so to protect themselves because in so doing, they can look their fellow legalists in the eye and say, "We got those Galatian believers straightened out."

Galatians 6:13

For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

"You'll be notches on their belts," Paul said. "They'll get credit for what they got you to do."

Galatians 6:14

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

"I'm not interested in notches on my belt," said Paul. "The only thing I glory in is Jesus Christ, and His work on the Cross.

Galatians 6:15, 16

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Paul speaks of a new creature in verse 15 and of a new nation in verse 16 —"the Israel of God"—a spiritual Israel of which every believer is a citizen.

Galatians 6:17

From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

"Those who boast of marking their bodies by circumcision and of convincing others to do the same have nothing on me," said Paul. "The marks of circumcision are nothing compared to the marks I bear from stonings, beatings, imprisonment, and shipwreck—all for the cause of Christ."

Galatians 6:18

Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Following a stern word of final warning to the Judaizers who sought to compromise the work of the Cross, Paul ends his letter as he began it—drawing the attention of the Galatians to the glorious grace of God.

CARING FOR CASUALTIES

A Topical Study of GALATIANS 6:1

Indicative of the perilous times in which we live, some stores now carry bulletproof vests—in the School Supplies section. Not only are these perilous days for our world—but for believers as well, for Jesus said, "And because in those days iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (see Matthew 24:12). Therefore, when you see people who were once on fire, once being used in ministry, once plugged in to fellowship, but no longer are—don't be surprised. Scripture declares that such would happen in the last days (2 Timothy 3). Rather than being surprised by the large number of casualties, we should prepare for them.

How?

By realizing that a war is going on, that casualties are inevitable, and that the church is to be a place of refuge. Folks, we must never lose sight of the fact that we are to be a refuge for hurting people—and not only a refuge, but a school as well. "Study to shew yourselves approved unto God," wrote Paul (see 2 Timothy 2:15), "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Not only are we a refuge, and a school—we're also a gym, for we are told to work out our salvation, to exercise it with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). A refuge, a school, a gym—we're also a restaurant, serving the milk and meat of the Word (Hebrews 5:12–14), and a temple, wherein we "offer the sacrifice of praise, giving thanks to His name" (see Hebrews 13:15). One of the most important roles of the church is that of travel agency—making sure that people understand the price that has been paid for their ticket to heaven.

Finally, the church of Jesus Christ is a hospital—which is why I believe it is wrong for people to say, "I can't believe I saw him, or her, or them at church on Sunday. They're really sick." If someone's sick—a hospital is exactly where he *should* be!

Imagine a hospital administrator saying, "Check out our hospital. There are no bad odors in our halls, no stains on our linen, not a bedpan on the premises."

"Wow! This place is immaculate," you'd say. "How do you keep it this way?"

"It's simple," the administrator would answer. "We don't admit anyone who's sick. We want only a sterile environment."

That is a ridiculous scenario, yet exactly the way some would like to see the church. However, if we are to be what the Lord wants us to be, we should rejoice when He sends sick people in our direction.

Imagine, on the other hand, a hospital wherein bedpans are overflowing, dirty needles are stacked up, and all of the bandages and blankets are drenched in blood. "What's going on?" you would say.

If the administrator said, "We're not into cleanliness. We're just into helping people," you would most likely say,

"If you allow dirty needles to be used, and bedpans to overflow; if you never mop the floor or wash the linens, you will actually be doing more harm than good because infection will spread and problems will compound."

So, too, on one hand we need to be cognizant of our calling to welcome all into our midst. On the other hand, we are to make sure we are not being infected by allowing disease to spread throughout our congregation.

I camp on this medical analogy for a reason. Paul uses the same kind of imagery in our text as he writes, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

The Greek word translated "restore" is a medical term meaning to mend or set a broken bone, so we are to be those who keep our eyes and our hearts open to people who are struggling, to the one who, because of a "broken bone," is unable to walk spiritually.

Who is this one?

In the text before us, he is the blundering believer. . . .

The Blundering Believer

Paraptoma, the Greek word translated "fault" in our text, means "to blunder." *Prolambano,* the Greek word translated "overtaken," is a word used to describe how an animal corners his prey. Thus, the picture is that of a brother who has been crippled by his own mistake and is being chased down by the Enemy.

What are we to do with such a one?

According to Galatians 6:1, if we're spiritual, if we're walking with the Lord, if we want to be used by the Lord, we are to reach out to him and restore him, or literally to "set his broken bone" in a spirit of meekness, realizing we could just as easily have been in his situation.

There are those in our churches who have blundered. Perhaps due to their own stupidity or ignorance, they've broken a bone, and now the Enemy has overtaken them. I'm not speaking of one who has plunged wildly into sin—but of one who has been ensnared. Our responsibility to such a person is to come alongside him and walk with him through his difficulty.

> Many years ago, there was a man at Applegate Christian Fellowship who was overtaken in a blunder. Over his head in debt, he was hounded by his creditors. One of his creditors, a member of our church family, said, "I see that you're overtaken, crippled, paralyzed by your financial situation. Therefore, I'm going to meet with you twice a week, and we're going to go through the Scriptures and see everything God's Word has to say about properly managing money—from the procedures given in the law, to the practices Solomon speaks of in Proverbs, to the principles Jesus taught in the gospels. And as we do that, I'm going to help you draw up a budget." Less than a year later, the fellow was virtually out of debt.

That is the kind of thing we need to be about. Our job is not to say, "How could you? Why did you? Why can't you?" Our job is to say, "It's my responsibility and my privilege to walk with you, to restore you, to set the bone once again."

That's what Jesus did. As the disciples sat around the table the night before He would be crucified, arguing about which of them was the greatest, Jesus got up quietly, girded Himself with a towel, and began to wash their feet (John 13). In so doing, Jesus was saying that it's not enough to point out the dirt on someone else's feet. The key is to kneel down and wash them.

It's wrong for me to say, "What she did is unbelievable," or "What he said is out of line," or "What they did is out to lunch," unless I'm willing to do what Jesus did—unless I'm ready to get down on my knees with the water of the Word and wash feet.

While we are to walk with the blundering believer—to wash his feet, and bear his burden until there is healing and restoration—there is another person in our midst who needs to be dealt with in an entirely different manner. . . .

The Bragging Backslider

The man described in 1 Corinthians 5:1–6 was not a blundering believer. He was a bragging backslider who boasted about living in immorality. To the church at Corinth, Paul said, "Although you think you're showing grace to this man by tolerating his behavior and allowing him to continue to fellowship with you, like leaven, his sin will spread through your congregation and bring about terrible repercussions. Therefore, not only for the protection of the body corporately, but for the sinner's restoration personally, you're to turn him over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh," Paul wrote emphatically.

"Excommunicate him. Send him away in order that, after Satan destroys his flesh, his spirit might be saved. Don't allow him to experience the joy and peace of the congregation, the richness of studying the Scriptures, the beauty and holiness of praise. Rather, confine him to the world until, having had his fill of his own sin, he'll see the stupidity of worldly living, and want to come back."

Sadly, there are times when we have to turn a bragging, boasting backslider over to Satan, saying, "We love you. We've talked with you. We've offered ourselves to you. However, because you continue to arrogantly persist in sin that will destroy you and pollute others, you are no longer welcome here."

Jesus taught the same thing in the story of the prodigal son. When the son wanted to go into the world and recklessly spend his father's money, his father let him go. Yet even when famine hit the city, the father didn't wire his son money, or send care packages. Rather, he simply waited for his son to become sick of the world and long for home.

So, too, there are times when the best thing we can do for someone is to let him go, praying that, like the prodigal, he'll eventually "come to himself" (see Luke 15:17), and return home with a different heart. Evidently, that's exactly what happened in the case of the Corinthian man, for in 2 Corinthians 2:6–8, Paul told the church to receive him again.

Turning someone over to Satan is not to be done lightly. Please note three prerequisites outlined in 1 Corinthians 5:4 for this procedure. . . .

It must be done in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, it must be done according to the heart and nature of Jesus Christ. We must ask ourselves, "Is this what Jesus would do in this situation?"

It must be done "when ye are gathered together" as a church—not by a single individual. In Matthew 18, Jesus said if we have a problem with someone we're to go to him personally and see if we can work it out. If the situation can't be resolved in that way, we're to take a brother with us and try again. And if that doesn't work, it is up to the church to deal with it corporately.

It must be done "in my [Paul's] spirit." In other words, we need to ask ourselves, "Is turning this individual over to Satan in accordance with what Paul revealed in Scripture?" For only a clear and direct violation of Scripture warrants such a drastic procedure.

Finally, there's a third person who comes into our fellowships in need of help and healing.

The Beguiled Brother

Described in James 5:19, 20, the beguiled brother is one who has "erred" or literally "wandered from the truth." Beguiled by some cult or heresy, he is no longer on solid ground biblically. "He who restores such a one," says James, "saves him from death"—either the death of his spiritual life, or physical death that could take him home prematurely.

Jesus talked to a beguiled brother in John 3. Nicodemus, being a "master" or spiritual leader of Israel, should have understood that when Jesus spoke to him of new birth, He was alluding to the passage in Ezekiel 37, wherein dry bones were brought to life again through the power of the wind, the *ruach,* the Spirit. Yet because he had erred in his understanding of spiritual things, Nicodemus missed the allusion, prompting Jesus to say, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" (John 3:10). But Jesus didn't give up on Nicodemus. He talked with him further. And Nicodemus eventually became one of Jesus' most faithful followers (John 19:39).

What are we to do with the beguiled brother? Just as Jesus did with Nicodemus, we're to talk with him. We're to share with him the Scriptures and the principles of the Word. Because the Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, it will not return void, but will accomplish the purpose for which it was sent (Hebrews 4:12; Isaiah 55:11). It might take a year or two, five or ten—but the Word *will* work in his heart.

Saints, casualties of the war that is escalating in these last days will come into our midst and travel with us. We need wisdom to determine whether they are backsliding believers with whom we should walk, bragging backsliders from whom we should turn, or beguiled brothers to whom we should talk.

May the Father help us to make the right diagnosis and to use the right prescription in each situation in order that people might be healed and helped, strengthened and set free, for the furtherance of the kingdom, and the glory of the Son.



EPHESIANS

Background to Ephesians

The Book of Ephesians has been commonly, and I believe, correctly called "the Alps of the New Testament," for the reader ascends into the heavenlies in this glorious Epistle—and the view is breathtaking indeed.

The flow of Ephesians follows an order similar to each of Paul's Epistles. It is this order, I believe, that is the solution to the works-oriented, legalistic ministry mentality seen in the lives of believers and churches who emphasize duty prior to an understanding of doctrine. You see, if we simply think through, bask in, and meditate on the doctrine of what Christ has done for us, we find ourselves saying, "I *want* to serve Him." Duty then becomes not a demand but a delight.

For example, Paul's injunction for wives to submit to their husbands is not a problem if husbands and wives understand they're both already seated in heavenly places. But if a woman doesn't understand Ephesians 1—3, she'll chafe under Ephesians 5. Likewise, kids will rebel when Paul tells them to obey their parents because it will sound like a burdensome obligation —unless they grasp where they already are in Christ.

Over the years, I have observed that people read through the first half of Ephesians very quickly in order to get to the practical stuff about husbands and wives, employees and employers, children and parents. But sooner than later, they find chapters 4, 5, and 6 burdensome and legalistic because they haven't spent time in chapters 1, 2, and 3.

To remedy this, we will take our time scaling the mountain of this Epistle and seeing who we are in Christ.

> After buying fanny packs (the kind with a water bottle and a place to put granola bars), walking sticks, and bandanas, my wife, Tammy, and I were ready for our big hike. I drove her up to Mount McLoughlin, just a few miles from Applegate Christian Fellowship, parked in the paved parking lot at the base of the mountain, said, "Come on, hon' "—and we started walking.
>
> If you haven't climbed Mount McLoughlin, it's a great experience. The trail winds up the side of the mountain and is relatively easy. The

view at the top is exhilarating and inspiring, so I couldn't wait to show it to Tammy. So we walked and we walked and we walked. And we walked. And finally, I thought, *You know, we've been walking for almost an hour and a half and we still haven't ascended very high.*

"Are you sure we're going up?" she asked.

"Yeah," I said confidently.

A few minutes later, I stopped and said, "You know, we really aren't gaining much altitude"—only to turn around and see the mountain *behind* us. For an hour and a half, I thought I was climbing a mountain, when in reality I was walking away from it!

So we sat down, ate our granola bars, and went home.

A lot of people set off on similar journeys, saying, "Okay. I'm going to get my family together. My wife is going to submit to me, and I'm going to love her. Our kids are going to be obedient. We're going to be good bosses, or good employees. We're going to nail Ephesians 4, 5, and 6." But they walk and walk and walk—never gaining much elevation because they're going in the wrong direction.

The divine design of Ephesians is first to sit with Christ in the heavenlies (2:6), then to walk worthy of the vocation to which we're called (4:1), and finally to stand fast (6:13). All too often, we reverse the order. We think if we stand fast and hold our ground, then we can start walking, and maybe one day we'll sit in the heavenlies.

In grace-oriented theology, the order is to first sit with Christ in the heavenlies, then to walk with Him responsively, and finally to stand fast in Him securely.

That's why I'm looking forward to this study immensely. . . .

EPHESIANS

1

Ephesians 1:1 (a)
Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God . . .

"Make your calling and election sure," Peter declared (2 Peter 1:10). Paul was one who knew his calling. He was called by the will of God to be an apostle, prepared from the earliest days of his life. Growing up the son of a rabbi, seated at the feet of Gamaliel—the foremost rabbinical scholar of the day—Paul eventually became a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court. And all of his studying, all of his efforts to be righteous in his own energy, all of his attempts to keep the law blamelessly would be preparatory to make him the minister of the gospel of grace. Not only did Paul know his calling—he also knew the Bible. With this knowledge came the absolute frustration of trying to live under the law.

All of Paul's experiences prepared him to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. The same is true for you. God wants to place each one of us in the spot for which He has prepared us from the beginning. God's will is not heavy or difficult. His will fits perfectly with the personality and the experiences He's given you.

God sees where He wants you to serve Him—whether on a construction site, a classroom, or a courtroom; as a butcher, baker, or banker. We often make a mistake in thinking that what we're doing is second best, that if we were really serious about our faith, we'd be in "full-time ministry." Wrong. The Lord stations His men and women ingeniously where He sees they can minister most effectively and where people around them will be impacted eternally.

What has God prepared and trained *you* for? Be content to do what God has called you to do—to serve where He has placed you—for yours is just as holy and high a calling as that of any preacher or apostle.

Ephesians 1:1 (b)
. . . to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.

Paul writes to the saints at Ephesus and to the faithful in Christ Jesus. "That's not me," you say. "I'm no saint."

Yes, you are. We often think of saints in the terms of canonization—the procedure where a group of cardinals or bishops analyze a person's life to determine if it meets the requirement for beatification, or sainthood. But that's not what the word "saint" means. "Saint" simply means "set apart." Thus, because Paul writes to the "set-apart ones," the saved ones—if you're a Christian, this letter is to you.

Ephesians 1:2 (a)
Grace be to you, and peace . . .

Paul's salutation is common throughout his Epistles as he links grace to peace. He always places them in this order because one will never have true peace until he really gets a handle on grace. When it finally sinks in that we are blessed not because of our devotions, not because of our prayer, not because of our studying, but solely because of what Christ did for us, entirely because of grace—then we have peace. Then we can talk to our Father. Then we receive blessing.

Ephesians 1:2 (b)
. . . from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not only do Paul's letters begin with grace and peace, but they also begin and end with "God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ."

The question arises: Why is there no mention of the Holy Spirit? Didn't Paul believe in the Trinity? Of course he did. But in John 16:13, Jesus said when the Holy Spirit came, He wouldn't speak of Himself. Thus, I suggest to you that, as He inspired Paul to write this letter, the Holy Spirit purposely left His name out.

Ephesians 1:3 (a)
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .

Here begins the longest sentence in the Bible, the beginning of the first stanza of the sweet, sweet song of salvation.

- The first stanza, verses 3–6, declares the work of the Father in the past.
- The second stanza, verses 7–12, celebrates the work of the Son in the present.
- The third stanza, verses 13–14, trumpets the work of the Spirit in the future.

Each stanza ends with the refrain: "to the praise of His glory."

Ephesians 1:3 (b)
. . . who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places . . .

"I am so blessed," Paul says from inside a Roman prison. "Oh, maybe not physically, maybe not materially—but spiritually, because the blessings found in Jesus Christ are spiritual blessings." How the church in America needs to understand this. Many church meetings today sound like Amway conventions, with teachings based on Deuteronomy 28 about how to structure finances and how to manipulate the system spiritually in order to be blessed materially.

But those who teach such things fail to understand that all of the Old Testament truths dealing with physical, financial, or military blessings depict New Testament truths that are spiritual, eternal, and heavenly. For example, David desired to break the bones and kick in the teeth of his enemies (Psalm 58:6) and wished that the heads of the Babylonians would be bashed with rocks (Psalm 137:9). Does this mean we're to find our enemies, break their bones, and smash their skulls? No. Paul says all of these things are examples or types, for we'll see in chapter 6 that our wrestling is not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers. It's spiritual wrestling.

All of the Old Testament stories—from Ehud sticking a sword into Eglon in Judges 3, to Jonathan and his armor bearer destroying an entire army in 1

Samuel 14—help us understand how we gain spiritual victory. The Bible will be nothing but confusion and disillusionment for you if you don't understand that all of the Old Testament pictures, stories, and precepts point to the eternal, spiritual life we have in Christ Jesus.

Just as you don't bring bulls and oxen to slaughter, just as you realize the sacrificial system was to paint a picture of the Lamb of God who took away our sin—understand that the same principle carries through the entire Old Testament. We're rich in *heavenly* places. We're blessed with all *spiritual* blessings.

Ephesians 1:3 (c)
. . . in Christ:

"We're blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places," Paul writes jubilantly from his prison cell, "and they're all in Christ"—not from Christ, but *in* Christ.

- "Oh, Lord," we say, "I need some bread."
  "I am *the Bread," Jesus answers* (John 6:35)
- "Show me the way," we cry.
  "I am *the Way," Jesus declares* (John 14:6).
- "Tell me the truth," we pray.
  "I am *the Truth," Jesus proclaims* (John 14:6).

We think we need help in this area, or deliverance from that thing. We think we need satisfaction in a profession, or blessing in a relationship—little knowing that our heart's desire will only be truly fulfilled in Jesus. "Yea, all the promises of God are in Him yea and amen" (see 2 Corinthians 1:20). All the promises of God are fulfilled in *Him,* in Jesus.

One night, with Tammy away at a pastors' wives conference, and the kids tucked in, I grabbed my Bible and had the best time reading Isaiah 54 while walking the streets of Jacksonville. God spoke to me through each phrase as I stopped under the streetlights to read

another verse and marvel how it related to me. I returned home awed at how the Lord walked with me in the evening hour.

Do I tell you this to impress you? No. I say it because you can find the same thing tonight. Turn off the TV. Put down the *Time* magazine. Grab your Bible, go for a walk, and I promise you God will meet you.

"Draw near to Me," He says, "and I will draw near to you" (see James 4:8). Does this apply only to people who seem to have everything together? No. God says, "Draw near to Me—no matter who you are—and I will meet you wherever you are," even, as Paul discovered, in jail.

Ephesians 1:4 (a)
According as he hath chosen us in him . . .

Here, we arrive at the interesting discussion of election. Try to figure out the doctrine of election—that we were chosen in Him, yet we also have a choice—and you may lose your mind. But try to explain away the doctrine of election, and you will surely lose your heart—for as confusing as election may appear to be, the fact that God actually chose us warms and strengthens our hearts.

Ephesians 1:4 (b)
. . . before the foundation of the world . . .

God chose us. When? Before the foundation of the world. D. L. Moody made a statement with which I concur heartily when he said, "I'm so glad God chose me before I was born, because I don't think He would have chosen me after I've lived!"

Ephesians 1:4 (c)
. . . that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

Leviticus 19:2, where we are told that we shall be holy, is made possible by Ephesians 1:4, where we are told we are chosen. You see, wanting a holy

people for Himself, God knew He would have to choose them Himself because, as Romans 3:11 declares, there is none that seeks God.

"Didn't Joshua say, 'Choose you this day whom ye will serve' " (Joshua 24:15)?

Yes.

"But I thought Paul says God chose us."

He does.

How can God choose us but still give us the free will to choose Him? It's as if, when a person decides to choose the Lord, he walks through a door over which is written the words, "Whosoever will, let him come" (see Revelation 22:17). Yet the moment he walks through the door, he looks back and sees the words, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16).

Ephesians 1:5 (a)
Having predestinated us . . .

There is a predetermination concerning salvation. But guess what. God is never seen anywhere at any time in the Bible predestining someone to go to hell. He only predestines people to go to heaven.

> He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.
>
> Revelation 3:5

The implication of this passage is enormous, for it seems to suggest that every man's name is written in the Book of Life—until he makes it clear that he has no interest *in* the Lord, that he doesn't want to walk *with* the Lord, and that he wants to turn his back *on* the Lord. Only then is his name blotted out.

Thus, when the Book of Life is opened at the Great White Throne judgment, when all of the unbelievers are brought before God and discover their names absent from its pages, it's not that their names were never in the book. It's that their names were blotted out because they chose not to accept God's plan of salvation for their lives.

> For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.
>
> Romans 8:29

Before the world was even spoken into existence, God saw the people who would respond to His love. Whom He foreknew, He predestined. He said, "I can see that Mitch is going to respond when I make Myself known to him, when the gospel is shared with him. Therefore, I predestine Mitch to be part of My eternal kingdom."

"Well," you say, "then why was someone who God knew wouldn't respond to Him allowed to live in the first place?"

The answer is that if a person was not allowed to play his life out to the fullest extent, he could protest at the Great White Throne."

> *"I got rid of you early because I could see that you weren't going to respond to Me," God would say.*
>
> *"Oh, but I would have," the unbeliever would protest.*
>
> *"No, you wouldn't," God would say.*
>
> *"Yes, I would have," the unbeliever would insist.*

And there would be a perpetual argument. So even though it is His desire that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9), God lets Joe Schmo live his seventy years to prove that righteous and true are His judgments (Revelation 16:7).

Then why does hell exist?

Jesus gave us the reason. Hell exists for Satan and his demons (Matthew 25:41). It was never God's intent to allow anyone on earth to spend eternity in hell. In fact, the only way anyone can get there is over the dead body of His Son.

Ephesians 1:5 (b)

. . . unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself . . .

Huiothesia, the Greek word translated "adoption," means "taking the place of an adult son." Therefore, the Ephesians would think of adoption not in terms of bringing a baby into a family, but in terms of a slave becoming a joint heir in his master's business. New Testament adoption speaks of a mature cooperation. As we saw in Galatians, spiritual adoption speaks not so much of our entry into the family of God, for we enter into His family by regeneration when we are born again. Spiritual adoption speaks not of how we enter into the family, but of our involvement with the family.

If you're a new Christian, you might be "young" in terms of regeneration. But when you were born again, you were simultaneously adopted (Romans 8:14–17)—making you a mature member of God's family. Therefore, don't let the Enemy whisper in your ear, "You can't do this or go there or be that because you're too young in the faith." No, when you were saved, you also were adopted and made a joint heir with Christ. You're treated as an adult as you partner with the Lord and become involved in significant things for His kingdom.

Ephesians 1:5 (c)–6 (a)

. . . according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace . . .

Here's why God adopted you. Here's why He predestined you. Here's why He chose you. Here's why He's blessed you in Christ in heavenly places: Because it's His good pleasure to the praise of the glory of His grace. Period. Knowing that we are elected, predestined, and adopted, we can have the tendency to think we're pretty special—that God knew what He was doing when He chose us. In reality, however, just as He did with another group of people, God chose us not because of who we are, but *in spite* of who we are. . . .

> The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the LORD thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of

> these nations the LORD doth drive them out from before thee. Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people.
>
> Deuteronomy 7:7; 9:4, 6

Here, God says to the people of Israel, "The blessings you enjoy, the victories you'll see are not because you're a mighty people, for you're small and weak. Nor is it because you're righteous in heart, for you're stiff-necked and stubborn. But I must drive the Canaanites from the land in order that they won't infect others with their sin—and I'm going to use you to do it."

Like Israel, we are called a chosen people. Why are we chosen? According to the verse before us, we are chosen to the praise of the glory of His grace. That is, we are chosen to showcase God's grace. This means that in the ages to come, millions of angels, living creatures, and all of creation will look at you and me who have been chosen, who have been adopted, who have been elevated to be with Christ in heavenly places—and they will say, "Look at the people God chose to be joint heir with His Son. They're just a bunch of ragtag renegades. Truly His grace is unbelievable, unfathomable, incomparable!"

That's why Paul said, "Look around you. There are not many wise, many strong, many noble among you" (see 1 Corinthians 1:26).

When I was in high school, I thought the key to an effective ministry was to get the quarterback and the cheerleader saved, to go for the head honchos, the big guns, the beautiful people. But that's not what Jesus did. He turned the world upside down with the street people, the outcasts, the forgotten folks. In other words, He used people just like us.

Ephesians 1:6 (b)

. . . wherein he hath made us accepted . . .

The literal idea of the word "accepted" is "embraced." I like that! We're caught up in God's embrace. Why? Read on.

Ephesians 1:6 (c)

. . . in the beloved.

We are accepted because we're in the beloved—we're in Christ. It doesn't matter how you feel about yourself. You don't have to take your spiritual temperature hour by hour. You don't have to wonder, *Am I hot? Am I cold? How am I doing?* You won't have to go through the kind of introspection that will inevitably set you up for spiritual depression if you understand the simple principle that you are embraced not because of who you are, but because of where you are. You're in Christ. And once you accept this truth, you will enjoy your relationship with the Father in a new way. You'll throw away your spiritual thermometer; you'll quit analyzing how you're doing; and you'll rejoice that you are simply, totally, wonderfully in Christ.

Ephesians 1:7

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.

Here we come to another high point, another peak in this mountain range of spiritual truth—the glorious doctrine of redemption. Jesus told us that he who commits sin is a slave to sin (John 8:34). Therefore, He came on the scene to buy us, to deliver us, to *redeem* us from the slave market of sin.

Ephesians 1:8, 9

Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.

The Greek word translated "mystery" is *musterion,* or, "that which was previously hidden or obscured." God has forgiven us, chosen us, predestined us, and elevated us—but He's also made known to us, by His grace, the mystery of life. What is this mystery? Read on.

Ephesians 1:10

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.

What is the big picture? What is the mystery? It is that in due time, *everything* in heaven and earth will be gathered together in Christ, around Christ, and for Christ.

When my son Benjamin was seven years old, we went to Pappy's for a pepperoni pizza. "This is the kind of pizza the Ninja Turtles™ *eat," Ben declared. "They like it so much, they even steal it."*

"They do?" I said. "Well, that reminds me of a story. . . ."

And I proceeded to tell Ben the sad story of how Achan stole from Jericho (Joshua 7). When I finished, Benny understood that stealing leads to problems and pain. And suddenly, sitting down over a pizza at Pappy's had meaning, substance, and depth in a way it wouldn't have had the moment not been brought together in Christ as we talked about the things of the Lord.

You've found this to be true. Whether it's talking to your kids or planting flowers in your garden, listening to a co-worker or practicing with a teammate—whenever you're focused on Christ and bringing the moment under the authority of Christ, you're right in the middle of the flow of what God says life is all about.

Isn't God gracious to make His will known to us? After all, He could have said, "There's a mystery to life. Figure it out. Good luck." But He didn't. I'm so thankful I can live wisely and prudently because He's made known to me the mystery that everything is in Christ and for Christ.

Are you full of joy tonight? Are you at peace? Are you content? Do you have rest? If so, you understand the mystery of His will. Are you bitter, angry, frustrated, or upset? Then you don't. On any given day, the extent to which you understand the mystery of His will, that will be the extent to which peace reigns in your heart.

Ephesians 1:11 (a)

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance . . .

We've obtained an inheritance not *from* Christ, but *in* Him.

When Tammy became my wife, she received an inheritance—all that I owned—which was basically a house with a mortgage and a 1972 Volkswagen. But she didn't marry me, as far as I know, for my house and Volkswagen. Those were just added benefits.

So, too, when we get to heaven, yes, we will have all sorts of wonderful experiences and marvelous things that eyes haven't seen and ears haven't heard (1 Corinthians 2:9). But those things will pale in comparison to the inheritance we have in Jesus. When we walk down the aisle, so to speak, in that heavenly marriage scene to stand at the side of our Bridegroom, we will at last experience what it means to be absolutely, incredibly, wonderfully fulfilled because *He* is our inheritance. If you're in a less than satisfactory marriage situation, hang in there because what you're really craving is the Ultimate Bridegroom. . . .

As Nabal sheared his vast flocks in Carmel, David and his band of four hundred men protected him from the bandits to the south. David sent ten of these men to Carmel in order to replenish their provisions. But when the ten men found Nabal and asked for payment for their protection, his response was, "Who is David?"

Upon hearing this, David said to his men, "Strap on your swords, guys. We're going to show Nabal who I am." However, as David and his men were en route to do Nabal in, they were intercepted by Nabal's wife, Abigail, a woman of beautiful countenance and good understanding (1 Samuel 25:3).

"Listen, you guys," she said. "My husband is just living up to his name, which means "fool." He's one brick short of a full load. He's just not all there. You don't want to lower yourself to his level. You don't want his blood on your hands. You're bigger than that. I've been baking all day. Take this bread and wine and have a feast. But don't touch my husband."

"You've spoken wisely," David said. So he and his men ate the bread, drank the wine, and rode back. Time passed—and when Nabal heard that David and his men had almost killed him, he fell over backward, broke his neck, and died (1 Samuel 25:38).

Husbands and wives, maybe if you were in Abigail's sandals, and you heard that David was going to kill your spouse, you would have said, "Oh, well. God's will be done. Who am I to stop David and four hundred men?" But you know what? Had Abigail let events run their course, she would have missed out on being married to David (1 Samuel 25:42).

Let me tell you how to miss out on what you could enjoy in the ages to come in the palace of the Son of David, your Bridegroom, Jesus Christ: Bail out.

"But I don't love him anymore."

"I can't love her anymore."

On your wedding day did you say, "I'll stay with you as long as I love you"? Marriage isn't based primarily on love. It's based on commitment. You said, "For better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness or in health, until death separates us." End of discussion.

Anyone can find reason to walk out. You're an only child. You're afraid of heights. You're allergic to seafood. If you go to enough counselors and read enough books, you'll find a reason you can say, "In my case, I'm justified in walking away from my marriage." But if you do, you're going to miss out. Am I saying you won't go to heaven? No. I am saying, however, that there is an inheritance, a special reward, a crown of life awaiting those who walk in obedience (Revelation 2:10).

The Son of David, Jesus Christ, is impressed by you, who, like Abigail, choose to simply hang in there, knowing that better days are coming. He finds you, like Abigail, to be a person of beautiful countenance and good understanding because you understand the shortness of life and the vastness of eternity.

Ephesians 1:11 (b)

. . . being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

"Who hath counseled the Lord?" asked Isaiah (Isaiah 40:13).
The answer? Most of us.

"Now, Lord," we say, "I don't know if You're seeing this right. I don't know if You understand the severity of my situation. Lord. Did You see what he just did? Did You hear what she just said?"—as if we expect the Lord to say, "No. Thanks for filling Me in! What should I do about it?"

God works everything after the counsel of His *own* will. And although we might be tempted to ask what right the Lord has to do this, Paul asks the much more logical question when he says, "Who are you—a lump of clay—to question the plan of the Father?" (see Romans 9:20)

I'm sure Jeremiah was confused when, after preaching forty years to the people of Judah, no one responded. So it was that at a certain point in his ministry, the Lord said to him, "Jeremiah, take a break. Go to the house of the potter and there you will learn a lesson." When Jeremiah did, indeed, go to the house of the potter, he watched him place a lump of clay upon the wheel and position his foot upon the pedal. As the wheel began to spin round and round, the potter began to put pressure on the clay, skillfully shaping and molding it into something of beauty (Jeremiah 18).

There are times when I feel as though I'm spinning my wheels, going in circles, feeling pressured. "Where are You, Father?" I cry. "Don't You care about me? How could You allow this to happen in my life?" But then the Lord brings me back to the very simple realization that the hands that put pressure on my life, and the foot that spins the wheel have holes in them where nails pierced them as the Master Potter hung on the Cross to die in my place.

That's why Communion is so very important in the life of the believer. All of the questions and confusion I feel as I analyze my situation and question my circumstances are solved immediately when I remember Jesus' unbelievable, undeniable love for me.

Ephesians 1:12

That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

When we Abigails are by the side of our Greater than David, not only will we glory in Him, but He will be glorified throughout the ages to come because of His work in us.

Ephesians 1:13

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.

"Sealing" speaks of ownership and would have been a term very familiar to Paul's readers. It was at Ephesus that crates were sealed with the imprint of merchants' rings before being shipped across the Aegean. "Sealing" speaks of commercial ownership. But "sealing" also speaks of commitment because the modern Greek translation of Paul's *koine* Greek for the word "sealed" conveys the idea of an engagement ring.

The picture is perfect. When you were saved, the Lord put the seal of His Holy Spirit on you, signifying that He would see you through not only your voyage across the Aegean but also your voyage across the storm-tossed ocean of life to bring you safely to His side as His bride.

Ephesians 1:14

Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

If you wanted to buy my VW, I'd hold it for you—if you put down some "earnest" money to show you were serious about it. That's what the Holy Spirit is—a "down payment" to show God will finish that which He has begun in us (Philippians 1:6). Think of the times when you have been most profoundly touched or impacted by the Lord—the times when the Holy Spirit welled up within you, or when you felt enveloped by His presence. Those

are simply earnest money, a down payment, "sneak previews of coming attractions."

Ephesians 1:15 (a)
Wherefore . . .

Whether you're sharing with a neighbor, working with your kids, or dealing with your spouse, I think a real key that is often neglected and overlooked is that which Paul models for us here in Ephesians 1. After talking to the Ephesians about the Lord, he talks to the Lord about the Ephesians. He prays for them. And what a difference that makes. After talking with someone who may be facing a difficulty or a challenge, I have found over and over again that if I don't talk *to* the Lord concerning those to whom I've talked *about* Him, the loop never quite closes and frustration sets in. Even in my own home, after saying a word or two in a difficult circumstance, if I simply slip away and pray—a peace enters the situation that is not the result of my exhortation, but simply because the Lord moved in through a simple prayer of intercession.

Mom and Dad, husband, wife, roommate, or co-worker—would you try this? When you feel tensions rise, slip away, step outside, and don't just count to five. Pray. Because we wrestle against principalities and powers, there are forces at work seeking to cause tension in our homes, in our marriages, at school, or on the job site—and we need to wrestle against them.

Paul lives this. Throughout his ministry, we see him sharing *about* the Lord and then following it up by talking *to* the Lord.

Ephesians 1:15 (b)
. . . I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,

Here, we come to one of two prayers in this Epistle. Two aspects of these inspired prayers of Paul surprise me. First, I am surprised for whom Paul prays. He says, "Because you guys at Ephesus are saints, because you

understand the big picture, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord and your love for God's people, I am motivated to pray for you."

Who do you pray for? I have a tendency to pray for those who are hurting, for those who are going through tragedies and difficulties, for those who are backsliding and failing—and that's fine. But here Paul is saying something very different when he says, "When I heard how *well* you're doing, I was moved to pray for you."

> I think a lot of times we have it a bit backward. We follow the American health program mentality when we should be copying that of the ancient Chinese. That is, in our culture, we don't go to the doctor until we're sick. But in ancient China, people paid a doctor an annual stipend to keep them *well*.

I think we need to learn from Paul and pray for people who are doing well because Satan doesn't use his heavy artillery on the guy who's getting drunk and indulging his flesh. He saves it for those who are walking with the Lord, loving the saints, and believing in Jesus. Many times, we see strong people fall hard. Could it be that perhaps we could have propped them up, been a shield around them, a blessing for them if we had followed the example of Paul and prayed for them while they were doing well?

> **Ephesians 1:16**
>
> **Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.**

Second, notice not only for whom Paul prays, but notice *when* he prays. The Greek idea of "cease not" is the same as "a tickle in the throat." In other words, Paul would be praying throughout the day as naturally and as spontaneously as if he were clearing a tickle in his throat.

> **Ephesians 1:17**
>
> **That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.**

All of us crave wisdom and revelation. Each of us longs for instruction and insight in knowing how we should walk, what we should do, and where we should go. But notice what Paul tells us. It is profoundly simple and simply profound, for he says that the wisdom and revelation you and I so desperately desire is found solely in the knowledge of *Him.* Peter and John found this to be true. The singular explanation for their ability to boldly and intelligently address the multitude was the acknowledgment that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

When people ask, "What should I do? What is God's will in this situation?" the answer is very simple. The wisdom you need, the revelation you seek is found in knowing Jesus. How do we know Jesus? By spending time in the Gospels. You may be working your way through Ezekiel, or chewing on Romans. Make sure, however, that you daily take in something from Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. I believe a real key to understanding God's will for your life is to continually focus on Jesus. There's only one Isaiah, only one Hebrews—but there are four Gospels. Could it be that, in this, God is saying, "I don't want you to miss this. Whatever else you're learning, the key to it all is My Son"?

Just as Jesus said on the Emmaus Road, all Scripture points to Him (Luke 24:27). If you're spending time with Him in the Gospels, the rest of the Word will become clear.

Ephesians 1:18 (a)

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened . . .

Finally, notice *how* Paul prays. We so often pray about the fruit of issues. Paul prays for their root. We pray, "Lord, get Billy off drugs." Paul would pray, "Lord, give Billy wisdom. Let him know You."

So often we want to change behavior patterns through pressure, counseling, or by reasoning. The change, however, doesn't come until a person has revelation, until his eyes are opened. How are a person's eyes opened? Through prayer. Be like Paul. Pray without ceasing for your kids, for your family, and for your friends. Pray that they'll see Jesus.

Ephesians 1:18 (b)

. . . that ye may know what is the hope of his calling . . .

Throughout Scripture, the word "hope" always refers to that which is coming, to that which is ahead. I'm convinced the single greatest problem carnal Christians have is that they don't know the hope of His calling. They don't know the reality of heaven. Consequently, they constantly strive for material things and are continually caught up in carnal pursuits. They're depressed and discouraged because they don't see the big picture of eternity.

If you're not happy, neither will you be with a change of location, salary, or ministry. You'll not be happy until you know the hope of His calling. That's why Jesus said, "Let not your hearts be troubled . . . I go to prepare a place for you" (see John 14:1, 2). The key to overcoming a troubled, perplexed, stressed heart is to focus on the hope of His calling, on what's ahead, on heaven.

"But heaven seems so far away," you say. "For years, I've been hearing Jesus could come at any time. But where is He?"

"Beloved," Peter said, "be not ignorant of this one thing: One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8).

A day is as a thousand years. Maybe you're saying, "Is that ever true! Will this day *ever* end?" If you are in a strained marriage, a single person aware of your loneliness, or if you're physically afflicted, a day can, indeed, seem like a thousand years. "Lord, where are You?" you cry. "I've been talking to You. I have total trust in You. But where *are* You?"

This day is as a thousand years because in your day of difficulty and dilemma, pressure and pain, sadness and sorrow, you have the unique opportunity to share the fellowship of the Lord's suffering, and to pray for others in a way you never would have been able to otherwise. We want to get out of the trial, solve the problem, move on. The Lord, however, says, "Not so fast." I want this day to be as a thousand years for you. The discoveries you'll make, the understanding you will glean, the gifts of praise, and the expression of even frustrated prayer will affect you for the next zillion years. Because My coming is near, and your heavenly account is small, I'm giving you an opportunity to make some huge investments in the few days that remain before you go to heaven."

You for whom this day has seemed as a thousand years—rejoice. Savor each moment. Extract each minute. Take every opportunity in this long, long day you're in to thank the Father for the opportunity to store up treasure that will make you rich for eternity.

Ephesians 1:18 (c)

. . . and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.

As saints, we're God's inheritance, His treasure, His prize.

In Jesus' day, men would bury their treasure in a field for safekeeping. But if a man died before he could tell someone where his treasure was buried, it would be left in the field until someone stumbled upon it. Such is the case in Matthew 13. . . .

One day a man is walking through a field. He trips over something, brushes the dirt from it, and discovers it's a treasure. So what does he do? He does everything he can to buy the field in which the treasure is buried. Because he wants the field? No, because he's after the treasure.

Jesus said that's the way the kingdom is. The field is the world. God the Father gave the world to Adam. But when Adam sinned, he inadvertently handed it over to Satan. That's why there is rape, famine, pollution, corruption, and death on our planet. Jesus came to buy the world back. Why? Because He wants to hang out on the Columbia River? No. He's not interested in the world. He bought the world to get the treasure. He bought the world to get *you.*

Ephesians 1:19, 20

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.

"I just don't know if I can get over my smoking habit," we sigh.

"My temper just seems to control me," we say.

"These lustful thoughts will always be with me," we decide.

In response, Paul wouldn't pray, "Lord, give them power over their sin." He'd pray, "Lord, help them see the power they already have." The dominating power of the resurrected Christ is *already* in us.

Ephesians 1:21
Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.

Principality, power, might, and dominion are all words that describe various categories of demonic entities and angelic beings. Jesus has power over them all, and the same power that caused Him to be resurrected is in you. Whatever you're struggling with, whatever I'm wrestling through is infinitesimal compared to the power it took to raise Christ into heaven and give him dominion over all. Therefore, if I'm in bondage, it's not because I need more power, but because I've failed to utilize that power that is already in me.

- We say, "I'm addicted."
  God says, "You're free."
- We say, "I'm wounded."
  God says, "You're as whole as you need to be."
- We say, "I need counseling. I need drugs. I need a program."
  God says, "You have Me."

"That's nice-sounding theology," you say. "But how does it work out practically?"
Read on.

Ephesians 1:22 (a)
And hath put all things under his feet . . .

All things are under His feet. What things? Dominions, powers, addictions, problems, pornography, profanity, gossip, depression, meanness,

temper, sadness, laziness—whatever it is you can't get over.

"But my problem is so overwhelming," you say.

It couldn't be any more overwhelming than the waves threatening to drown the disciples. Yet even the waves that rolled over their heads were under Jesus' feet, the very waves He walked upon to go to His disciples (Matthew 14:25).

Nothing is over His head. All things are under His feet. Jesus is in absolute control of every situation, be it financial, physical, relational, vocational, or parental. Whatever might seem to be rolling your way, ready to sink your boat and wipe you out is already under His feet—and might be the very path He chooses upon which to walk to you.

Ephesians 1:22 (b), 23

. . . and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

The name of the game is community. We need one another. We need to be with brothers and sisters who pray with us and care about us because the more closely we're linked to the body, the more clearly we'll experience the authority of Jesus' headship. That's just the way it works.

The church is the "fulness of Him which filleth all in all." How can we be full of the Lord? The church is where the headship of Jesus will be enjoyed. You can say, "I can study the Bible on my own." But that's not the heart of the Father any more than if I went home and said, "Okay, kids, grab your plates, and each of you go into your room to have Sunday dinner by yourself." If I did, they would still be getting nutrition. They would survive. But the heart of a true father is to see his kids *together*—interacting, loving, sharing, growing.

Many a time, when I go to church for a meeting, a study, a prayer time, I find I am attached to the body once again. In a very real and practical way, I hear the voice of the Lord anew. I am reminded that the storm that threatens to intimidate me is underneath the feet of the One who is the Head of the body.



In the second chapter of Ephesians, the theme is God's work—God's work 2 *for* us in verses 4–7, God's work *in* us in verses 8–9, God's work *through* us in verse 10, and God's work *among* us in verses 11–22.

Ephesians 2:1
And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.

God's work in us is crucial because of the sin that worked against us. The words "hath he quickened" are in italics because they aren't in the original text. Therefore, Ephesians 2:1 originally read, "And you were dead in trespasses and sins."

Death is separation in three ways—the first is physical death, when the spirit is separated from the body. Although the medical community debates endlessly about what actually constitutes death, the Bible makes it very clear that death occurs the moment the spirit departs.

Second, there is spiritual death—that which is spoken of here in Ephesians 2:1. Maybe you've seen *National Geographic* specials on zombies in Haiti and other islands of the Caribbean. Zombies are people who walk around in an almost corpselike stupor due to voodoo, demons, and drug-induced states. Spiritually, we were like zombies—alive physically, but because we had no sensitivity toward the Lord, we were dead spiritually.

Third, there is eternal death, spoken of in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, referring to those who refuse the life-giving gift of salvation and are cast into outer darkness.

Ephesians 2:2 (a)
Wherein in time past ye walked . . .

The word translated "walked" speaks of meandering, or walking without direction or goal.

Ephesians 2:2 (b)
. . . according to the course of this world . . .

The Greek phrase translated "course of this world" refers to wind. Therefore, the implication is that whichever way the wind was blowing was the way we were going.

Ephesians 2:2 (c)

. . . according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

Who was doing the blowing? Satan. He was the one dictating the styles, trends, and interests that so captivated you and me before we were saved, when we were still dead in our sin.

Ephesians 2:3 (a)

Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind . . .

Completely caught up in our own fleshly inclinations, we were enslaved in a futile attempt to satisfy our flesh.

Ephesians 2:3 (b)

. . . and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

Finally, not only were we dead because of sin, drugged by our sin, and depraved in our sin—as children of wrath, we were doomed by our sin. Why were we children of wrath? Because the wrath of God abides on those who do not receive the gift of salvation (Ephesians 5:6).

Ephesians 2:4 (a)

But God . . .

I find these two words to be perhaps the most important in all of Scripture, for although we were doomed by sin, God broke through anyway.

For topical study of Ephesians 2:4 entitled "But God . . ." turn to page **1236.**

Ephesians 2:4 (b), 5

. . . who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;).

When God broke through, what did He do? First of all, He loved us. God doesn't only love you when you go to church, read your Bible, or try to be spiritual. He loved you at your stinkiest. He loved you when you were dead.

Ephesians 2:6

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Not only were we loved by the Lord, but we were lifted by Him when He raised us up together and made us sit with Him in heavenly places. In John 11, we see Lazarus raised from the dead. In John 12, we see him seated with Christ around the table. The same is true of you and me. We are not only made alive in Christ, but now we can come to His table. We can fellowship with Him, talk to Him, and learn from Him. Soon, we'll be in heaven, sitting at the ultimate banqueting table at the marriage feast of the Lamb. What a day that will be!

Ephesians 2:7

That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

God raised us to sit with Him in heavenly places in order that we might be trophies of His grace, in order that people will look at you and me in the ages to come and say, "The grace of God is unbelievable! Look at how God loves them! Look at what He's done with them! *Amazing!*"

Ephesians 2:8, 9

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

In verses 4–7, we saw God's work *for* us as He brought us back from the dead and raised us to sit with Him in heavenly places. Here in verses 8, 9, we see His work *in* us.

"It might be God's work," you say, "but it's *my* faith."

No. Here, Paul says specifically that even the faith it took to be saved is not of ourselves. Why? Because dead men don't have faith. That is why Paul declares that there is none that seeks after God, no not one (Romans 3:11).

"Then what part did I have in salvation?" you ask.

None. You were elected before the foundation of the world, and the faith you finally exercised to receive Jesus Christ was faith that God Himself put in your heart. That is why Jesus declared, "No man can come unto Me except the Father draws Him" (John 6:44).

The entire orb of salvation is totally due to God's grace. We become worshipers now and eternally because His work in us and for us is truly amazing.

Ephesians 2:10

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

In verse 10, we see God's work through us. . . .

The Greek word translated "workmanship" is *poiema*—from which we get our word "poem." Thus, we are God's poetry.

On my way out to Chiloquin, Oregon, a number of years ago, I stopped by the side of the road at a little craft area where woodcarvings of bears, eagles, and Indians were for sale. I thought they were pretty good—until I learned they were carved without hand tools of any sort, but only with chainsaws. Then I thought they were incredible!

The same is true of you and me. You might think you're not very impressive—but look in the mirror and consider what God had to work with!

There is no shortage of those who say, "You Christians aren't all that great. I see all kinds of inconsistency, hypocrisy, and problems."

Whenever I hear that, I don't defend myself, nor do I defend you. I simply say, "You're right! But you wouldn't believe how bad we used to be! If you knew how we used to be, you would realize that compared to our former state, we're *poetry!*"

Ephesians 2:11, 12

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

Here we see God's work *among* us. "Remember what you used to be," Paul says to the Gentile Christians. "You were at one time without Christ, without hope, without God. You were in trouble. You had no hope for a Messiah. You had no knowledge of God. You had no future."

Ephesians 2:13, 14

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.

"Although at one time, you Gentiles had no God, no Christ, no hope," Paul continues, "He's made you one with the Jews who believe in Him."

Ephesians 2:15–18

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile

both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

What is God doing among us? Two things: He has created a new man (verse 15), and a new body (verse 16). Jews and Gentiles used to feel such animosity toward one another that if a Jew even accidentally brushed against a Gentile in the crowded marketplace, he would have to immediately ceremonially cleanse himself. The Gentile community responded by saying the Jews were the devil incarnate. But what did the Lord do? He took those two groups, Jew and Gentile, and brought them together into a new man, a new body—the church.

Ephesians 2:19–22

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Not only did God create a new body—He is creating a new building, built upon the foundation of the message of the apostles and prophets. That message is Jesus Christ. He is the Chief Cornerstone. But the building is not done. He *has* created a new man. But He *is* creating a new building. Why? Because it's growing.

Peter tells us we are living stones being fit together to build a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5). And as living stones, we are growing ourselves as we expand in our own understanding of God's ways. Inevitably, then, there will be friction between us. Sometimes I can resent that. But I am learning that the Lord puts me with people He specifically has ordained to knock the rough edges off of me.

In 1 Kings 6, we read that as the temple was being constructed, all of the cutting took place away from the temple mount. Consequently, when the rocks arrived on site, there was not the sound of a hammer or a chisel heard.

So, too, there is coming a time when there will not be the sound of a hammer or chisel in our lives. We're going to heaven, where all of the stones —Jew, Gentile, male, female, brother, sister—will fit together perfectly, the chiseling and shaping having been done here in this quarry called earth. So let the hammering take place, dear brother. Don't try to short-circuit the process, precious sister. You're being fit together as living stones for a holy habitation in which God can dwell forever.

BUT GOD . . .
A Topical Study of EPHESIANS 2:4

Asked what I enjoy most about the ministry, I was surprised by my own answer. "What I enjoy most about the ministry are the messes," I said—"just seeing the wonderful things the Lord creates from the muddle and mayhem in which we continually find ourselves."

It's been this way from the very beginning. You see, Genesis 1:1 says that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. In Hebrew, verse 2 goes on to say the earth was "*tohuw va bohuw,*" or, "without form and void." We see this phrase again in Isaiah 45:18, where we read that God created the heaven and earth *not* in vain—*not* "*tohuw va bohuw.*" Now, if Isaiah says God did *not* create the earth "*tohuw va bohuw,*" but Genesis 1 says the earth *was* "*tohuw va bohuw,*" what's going on?

Along with many Bible scholars, I believe an event took place between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, described in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, wherein an archangel named Lucifer launched a rebellion against God and was kicked out of heaven. Along with one-third of the angels who followed him in his rebellion, he came to earth, where he would become "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). So great was the impact when, in a sense, hell hit earth, that Bible scholars believe it caused the earth to tilt on its axis and ushered in the Ice Age.

So it is, that even from the very beginning of time, we see a dismal, dark mess. But Scripture goes on to say that when God said, "Let there be light," what was once without form and void began to become something incredibly wonderful: the amazing earth upon which we live.

Not only does God re-create the world around us but also the world within us. You see, according to Ephesians 2:1, we were all "without form and void," dead. But according to verse 4, just as He did at creation, God moved in and revived us.

Perhaps you feel that the axis of your world has tilted, that you're living in the cold blast of a perpetual Ice Age, or that darkness surrounds and abounds. "Yes, you're a mess," Paul would say to you. Then he would add the two words that made all the difference at the creation of the physical world, and which will make all the difference in your world as well: *But God.*

> Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were traveling, and Abraham was fearful. Why? Sarah was so beautiful, Abraham knew that Abimelech, the king of the region through which they passed, would want to kill him in order to add Sarah to his harem. "Tell him you're my sister," Abraham said. "He'll take you away—but at least I won't die." Sure enough, Abimelech, sent for Sarah (Genesis 20:2).
>
> "*But God* came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, Behold thou art a dead man, for the woman whom thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife" (Genesis 20:3).
>
> Abraham messed up royally. His marriage to Sarah teetered on disaster. *But God* moved in unexpectedly, unpredictably, miraculously, and rescued them both.

People say to me, "My wife just doesn't understand." "My husband is an idiot." "My marriage is a mess." "What do I do?"

I listen to their stories, shrug my shoulders, and say, "I don't have a clue. *But God*—somehow God is going to come through for you. I don't know how. I don't know when. But I know Him. God will break through somehow."

> "Your dad ripped me off," Jacob said to his wives, Leah and Rachel, after being shortchanged by Laban one too many times. "*But God* suffered him not to hurt me" (Genesis 31:7).

"No wonder in-law problems rank third in the struggles of married couples," says the weary couple. "We can't seem to please either of ours. What should we do?"

"I have no idea," I say. "*But God* used Jacob's ordeal with Laban to eventually change Jacob from "Heel Snatcher" to Israel, the one "governed

by God."

> On his deathbed, Jacob was no doubt reminded of his own deceit repeated in the lives of his sons gathered around him. Perhaps realizing that his time to impact them positively was growing short, it was with an air of resignation that he said, "Behold I die." Yet as he uttered the last word of that sentiment, hope reclaimed his heart, for he added, "*but God* shall be with you and bring you again to the land of your fathers" (Genesis 48:21).

"What can I do about my son?" cries the broken-hearted father. "It's as if I don't even exist in his life. Yes, I made mistakes raising him, but what can I do now?"

"I don't know," I say. "*But God* will be with him just as He was with Jacob's sons, to bring him to the land of his fathers—to somehow, some way, bring him back home."

> After being thrown in a pit by his own brothers, he was sold into slavery. Joseph was forsaken by his family and without hope completely. *But God* moved in miraculously and elevated him to the position of prime minister in one of the greatest empires in human history (Genesis 50:20).

"Everyone is against me—even my own family," cries the heartbroken young man. "What do I do?"

I listen to his story and say, "I don't know. *But God* was with Joseph, and God will be with you."

> After killing one thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass, Samson was so thirsty he thought he would die. "But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water out of it; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived" (see Judges 15:19).

"I'm so dry spiritually," she says. "I come to church and I'm dry. I pray and I'm dry. I study the Word and I'm dry. What am I doing wrong?"

"I don't know," I say. "*But God* hears your prayer and will revive you, perhaps, as He did with Samson, in a way you least expect it."

> Although Saul was king of Israel, he knew it was actually David who had the anointing of God. Consequently, Saul sought to take David's life. "*But God* delivered him not into his hand" (1 Samuel 23:14).

What temptation, what sin, what Saul is trying to track you down and do you in? You'll never be able to elude it on your own, *but God* can establish and strengthen you. He can give you victory (1 Peter 5:10).

"Oh, but you don't know the Saul that's chasing me," you say. "It's a very real temptation, an incredibly powerful problem."

Perhaps. "*But God* will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you're able and will provide a way of escape every single time you're tempted" (see 1 Corinthians 10:13).

Precious brother, dear sister, God, who is rich in mercy and full of love, will break through your situation if you'll allow Him. The mess you're in may be real. The struggle ahead may be exhausting, the trial you face may be overwhelming—but the message is yet more powerful: But God, but God, but *God*. . . .



3 Ephesians 3:1

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.

Paul penned this Epistle seemingly as a prisoner of Rome. Yet he gives us a different perspective of his situation when he writes, "Indeed, I'm a prisoner. But I'm a prisoner for a cause." What cause? The incredible revelation, as seen in chapter 2, that Jews and Gentiles are brought together in Jesus Christ into a new entity. "We're in this thing together," said Paul.

Not only was Paul a prisoner for a cause, He was a prisoner of the Christ. "I'm not a prisoner of Nero," he declared. "I'm not a prisoner of the

Roman Empire. I'm a prisoner of Jesus Christ. And He has brought me to this place."

I hate to say it, but I'm glad Paul was in prison—because our Bible is a whole lot richer and the body much more complete as a result. You see, while he was in prison, Paul wrote the letters we value so greatly. In addition, the guards to whom he was chained as a prisoner began getting saved one by one before returning to Caesar's palace as born-again believers. That is why in his letter to the Philippians, Paul says, "The saints in Caesar's palace, your new brothers in Christ, greet you" (see Philippians 4:22).

Happy will be the one who realizes that wherever he is has been ordained by the Lord to bring about good things if he will have eyes to see and patience to wait. Whenever I complain about my circumstances or situation, I am really complaining about my Father, for it is He who sets our course and determines our days.

Paul never lost this perspective. That is why He could say, "I'm a prisoner of Jesus Christ, for it is He who has captivated my heart and brought me to this place."

Ephesians 3:2–6

If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to youward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.

In Scripture, the word "mystery" refers to something that was previously unknown or hidden but is now revealed because the timing is right. The mystery of how Jews and Gentiles are heirs together is based on the dispensation of grace.

As you read through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, it will help you greatly, it will clear a lot of fog and remove a lot of confusion if you

understand that basically God is taking mankind on a march through eight primary dispensations or ways in which He has related to us.

> *There are those who say, "We don't need God. We just need to get the right man in the White House. We don't need a spiritual revival. We just need a political revolution."*
>
> *Others say, "If we could just get rid of all of the toxic waste and pollutants, if we could make our environment better, we would surely live in peace and harmony."*
>
> *Others say, "If only my parents weren't so weird, I would be happy."*
>
> *Others say, "The problem is faith. We're asked to believe something we can't see, can't hear, and can't touch. If we could just see and touch and hear, then we would believe whatever it is we're supposed to believe."*

So what does God do? He says, "Okay, human race, have it your way. I'm going to march you right through these different theories, these different ideas that you think will bring about happiness." And He began with the first dispensation. . . .

The Dispensation of Innocence

The “Dispensation of Innocence” began with the creation of man, lasted until the Fall, and completely obliterates the “Mommie Dearest” syndrome. Adam and Eve were perfectly healthy and had neither human parents nor a dysfunctional family. But what happened? They chose to rebel against God. Thus, the “Dispensation of Innocence” shows mankind that even if he had a perfect family situation, he’s still a sinner who will rebel against God and wander away into his own error. How our generation and culture need to understand that the “Dispensation of Innocence” nullifies the argument that the reason we’re so messed up is because of our parents.

The Dispensation of Conscience

The "Dispensation of Conscience" lasted approximately 1,650 years—from the fall of man to the Flood. "If we could just follow our own conscience and let everyone do his own thing, we could all live in harmony," people say. But look what happened. In the dispensation wherein God said, "Follow your conscience," the world was filled with such violence and sexual aberration that giants were produced on the earth. So perverted was the planet that only one man had an interest in walking righteously and responding to God (Genesis 6:8).

The Dispensation of Government

The "Dispensation of Government" lasted approximately 425 years—from the Flood to the Tower of Babel. During this time, God established the first governmental order, based upon capital punishment (Exodus 21:23, 24). Man decided to add to God's order by undertaking the first governmental building project: the Tower of Babel. Genesis 11 tells us it was constructed with bricks and slime—a fitting description for the venture that ended in disaster.

The Dispensation of Promise

The "Dispensation of Promise" lasted approximately 430 years—from Abraham to the Exodus. "If I just had a promise, I know my life would be successful," man says. "I don't need God—I just need a vision." Abraham received just such a promise, for God told him that his posterity would number as the sand on the seashore and the stars in the heavens, and that he would live in a new land. But what happened? His descendants ended up in Egypt, baking bricks in the blistering desert sun.

The Dispensation of the Law

The "Dispensation of the Law" lasted approximately fifteen hundred years—from the Exodus to the Cross of Calvary. There are those who think if man just had some rules and regulations, he'd be okay. So God gave man the law. There are still those who think that if they could just find the right how-to book, life would make sense. But the law was wonderfully sensible and beautifully practical. The only problem with it is that man can't keep it.

The Dispensation of Grace

The "Dispensation of Grace" is the dispensation in which we live, and of which Paul writes. The "Dispensation of Grace" brings us to the place where we realize neither innocence nor conscience, government nor promise, vision nor rules and regulations will save us. The "Dispensation of Grace" is God saying to us, "I love you. I died for your sin. I rose again. If you confess your need for Me with your mouth and believe on Me in your heart, you'll be saved" (see Romans 10:9).

The Dispensation of the Tribulation

The "Dispensation of the Tribulation," spoken of in Revelation 6–19, is a seven-year period of unbelievable difficulty. People complain about believing in something they can't see or hear. So God says, "Okay. You want to see something? You want to hear something? Here it comes. . . ." Angels will fly across the skies. Hailstones will pelt the planet. Seas will turn to blood. Mountains will disappear. Continents will break apart. The result? The majority of those who experience these cataclysmic changes will cry not to the Rock of Ages to save them, but to the rocks to fall upon them (Revelation 6:16).

The Dispensation of Righteousness

Following the seven-year period of the Tribulation, the Lord comes back to earth, where He will rule and reign in Jerusalem for one thousand years. The lion will lie down by the lamb. There will be no more war. Disease will no longer plague the planet. The environment will be perfect. "If we just didn't have pollution, disease, and crime, we would be happy and content," people say. But what happens at the end of the millennial kingdom? There will be a rebellion against God—which totally disproves B. F. Skinner's theories that a good environment makes good people. For one thousand years, man will live in a perfect environment—yet some will still rebel against God.

An understanding of the dispensations will keep you from being confused by the way God deals differently throughout Scripture—for in the unfolding story of His progressive revelation, God shows that man has no idea how to find success or satisfaction apart from Him.

Ephesians 3:7

Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

Paul was a minister not because of his piety, his spirituality, or his ability. The means of Paul's ministry was singular. It was grace.

Ephesians 3:8 (a)

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given . . .

Paul was aware of the fact that he was ministering not because he deserved to serve, but solely by grace. The closer we get to the Lord, the more we are aware of the sin in our lives that was previously unnoticeable to us. The closer Paul walked to the Lord, the more amazed he was by a God who would use him—the least of the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:9), the least of all saints (Ephesians 3:8), the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15)—to minister the unsearchable riches of His grace.

Ephesians 3:8 (b)

. . . that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Paul didn't talk about philosophy, psychology, or theology. The message of Paul's ministry was Jesus exclusively.

Ephesians 3:9

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.

The method of Paul's ministry was not simply to allow all men to hear about the mystery of the indwelling Christ—but to make them *see* it through the working of God in his own life.

Ephesians 3:10, 11

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul is a minister of the gospel of grace not only that all men might see the mystery of Christ—but that the angels might see as well. According to 1 Peter 1:12, the angels are studying us, intrigued that God would reside in people like *us*.

Ephesians 3:12

In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.

The angels in heaven must be saying, "This motley crew can come marching into Your throne room anytime they want, Father, cast their cares upon You, and get help from You?" The answer is a resounding "Yes!" Because of what Christ did for us on Calvary.

When my daughter Mary Elizabeth was in second grade, she had a best friend named Rachel. One day, I was in my study, and about every five minutes, Rachel would come in and say, "Mary wants to know if we can go to the store."

"Not right now," I'd answer.

"Mary wants to know if we can go to the school," she'd ask, only to receive the same response.

After about the tenth such request, I finally said, "Rachel, if Mary wants to know, have Mary come and ask me."

You see, Mary thought, I'll send Rachel in. That way, if Dad gets mad, it will be at Rachel, and not at me!

Such was the mind-set with the children of Israel. "Moses, you go get the Word from God. Then come down and tell us," they said, afraid of God.

But in this dispensation, in this glorious "Age of Grace," God says, "Come boldly unto Me. I want to hear from you because I care about you and want to do good things for you" (see Hebrews 4:16).

Ephesians 3:13

Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

"Don't lose heart over my troubles," says Paul. "They're for *you.*"

How could that be?

In his tribulation, in his confinement, Paul was a living demonstration of what it means to have Christ living in him, the hope of glory.

A. W. Tozer was right when he said that before God can use a man greatly, He must allow him to be hurt deeply. Why? Because the old adage is true: People don't care how much we know until they know how much we care. And what makes us care in our service to people, our interactions with people? Paul gives the answer in 2 Corinthians 1 when he writes:

> Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.
>
> 2 Corinthians 1:3–5

In other words, the degree of the crushing, the tribulation, the difficulty in which you find yourself will be the degree of consolation you will receive. And consolation comes to us in order that we may in turn comfort others with the comfort we have found in Him.

This passage is so important, gang. God allows us to go through crushing trials even as Paul did in order that we can explore and experience His presence and His comfort—and then share it with others. In our darkest times, we only truly receive from those who have gone through similar difficulties. When the one who has walked the same path we're walking says, "I found consolation in Christ," his words are like water to the desert of our soul because he's not simply telling us a theory—he's telling us what he has experienced personally and practically.

That's why, in talking about his own ministry here in Ephesians 3, Paul says, "Don't faint. Don't lose heart because of our tribulation. It's for you. God meets us and comforts us in the dungeon of difficulty, in the prison of tribulation so that we can comfort *you.*"

Not only does God use tribulation to comfort the saints—He uses it to convince the sinner.

How?

Many unbelievers have been witnessed to hundreds of times by sincere Christians. Yet they remain unmoved because they are unknowingly waiting to see the mystery of Christ in the life of a believer. How will this happen? Here in Ephesians 3, Paul links the answer to his own difficulty.

> *Innumerable as grasshoppers, the Midianites were an intimidating enemy, indeed. Nevertheless, God instructed Gideon to take only three hundred men to do battle against them. After choosing his*

men, Gideon gave each one a trumpet, a jar, and a torch—and led them up into the hills surrounding the valley wherein the Midianites slept. Then, following his lead, Gideon's men blew their trumpets and broke their earthen vessels—each of which contained a lit torch. Hearing the commotion, the Midianites woke up and, seeing the torches—each of which they assumed represented at least a division of soldiers—they grabbed their swords and in their confusion began swinging wildly, destroying one another in the process. Thus, Gideon's men experienced firsthand what happens when light comes pouring forth from a broken vessel (Judges 7).

We have this treasure—the Light of the World, Jesus Christ—in earthen vessels, declares Paul (2 Corinthians 4:7). But how is He seen by the world below? Not when things are comfy and cushy and easy. Not when things are hunky dory. The world is not impressed with that. The Enemy is not beaten back by that. The world wants to see the mystery of Christ in us—not just hear about it. How do they see it? They only see it when the vessel is broken.

They see it, wife, when your husband walks out on you unexpectedly—and yet you keep worshiping the Lord faithfully. They see it, Dad, when the doctor says, "It's malignant"—and yet you remain strong in your faith. When the business goes belly-up, when your teenager breaks your heart, when you get cut from the team, when you don't make the squad people get to see the light in the earthen vessel as the vessel is broken. They get to see Christ in you, the hope of glory. And in seeing this mystery, they are drawn to the Master.

Ephesians 3:14–16

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

"While I'm in prison, I'm praying for you that the Holy Spirit might strengthen you in the inner man," says Paul.

- Do you care about your kids, Mom and Dad? Pray for them.
- Do you care about your church, saint? Pray for us.
- Do you care about your community? Pray that the Holy Spirit will work in the inner man.

So many have knowledge in their heads, but it hasn't dropped eighteen inches into their hearts.

How does that happen?

Through prayer.

Paul says, "I bow my knee—I assume the posture of intensity—and I pray. My prayer is that the knowledge of theology will make its way from your head to your heart."

Ephesians 3:17 (a)

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith . . .

The Greek word translated "dwell" literally means "settle down and be at home." Is Christ at home in your heart? Paul says, "My prayer is that Christ would be comfortable in you. And where He's comfortable, where He's at home, you will be happy and blessed."



For topical study of Ephesians 3:14–17, see "Jesus: At Home in Your Heart" below.

Ephesians 3:17 (b)–19

. . . that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

How can you know something that passes knowledge? How can you be filled with the fullness of God when God cannot even be contained in the universe? I suggest to you the answer lies in this phrase "being rooted and

grounded in love." What is rooted? What is grounded? What is love? The tree of Calvary was rooted. The Cross was grounded. Therefore, the only way I can truly know the love that passes knowledge is by focusing my eyes upon the Cross of Calvary and seeing what is the breadth and the length, the depth and the height of the love of God. . . .

> *I see the breadth of His love as Jesus stretched out His hand on the Cross.*
>
> *To what lengths did He go? Because He was slain before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8), His sufferings are elongated beyond anything we can comprehend.*
>
> *How deep did Jesus go? Listen as He cried out on the Cross, "My God, My God Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He cries out, in the depths of despair, from the depth of hell, paying for our sin.*
>
> *What is the height of His love? Look up and see Him on the Cross, praying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

The only way I can truly know that which passes knowledge is to consider the height, depth, length, and breadth of the Cross—that which was rooted and grounded on a hill called Calvary. I am reminded of this each time I partake of the Lord's table. Do not forsake the Lord's table, dear saint, for it is there you will know that which cannot be known. It is there you will be filled with the fullness of God. It is there you will be rooted and grounded in the mystery of God's love as you consider the Cross.

> **Ephesians 3:20, 21**
>
> **Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.**

"Unto Him be glory in the Church and throughout all the ages." In other words, what begins here will continue on to a greater degree—for heaven will not be that much different than when we experience His glory here on

earth in times of adoration, in times of Communion, in times of meaningful interaction, in times of heartfelt intercession.

I suggest that when a person is truly walking in the Spirit, it may take a little while for him to realize he's in heaven when he finally gets there because he'll just continue worshiping and rejoicing and experiencing the Lord as he did on earth—minus the constraints of time, limited energy, and ever-present flesh. Oh, happy day that will be!

JESUS: AT HOME IN YOUR HEART

A Topical Study of EPHESIANS 3:14–17

Confusion must have filled their hearts. Questions must have flooded their minds, for hadn't Jesus said, "In My Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you" (see John 14:2)? Why, then, a few moments later did He say, "If a man love Me, He will keep My words. My Father will love him and We will come unto him and make our abode with him" (see John 14:23)?

"I'm going to prepare a place for you," Jesus said—"and yet I will come and live in you." We see Paul the apostle using the same imagery in our text when he says his prayer is that Christ will dwell in our hearts by faith. The Greek word translated "dwell" is *katoikeo*. *Oikeo* means "to dwell in a house." *Kat* means "down." Therefore, *katoikeo* means "down home."

The idea is that Jesus would be completely at home in our hearts.

"Behold, I stand at the door of your heart and knock," Jesus said. "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20).

> Holman Hunt's famous painting, depicting Jesus standing at the door of what appears to be an English cottage, hangs in St. Paul's Cathedral in London.
>
> "There's a problem with your painting, Mr. Hunt," a critic is reported to have said upon first viewing his work. "There's no doorknob on the door."
>
> "Ah," Mr. Hunt is said to have replied, "the door handle is only on the inside, for it's up to the one within to respond to the knock of Jesus."

Jesus will not force His way into a heart. He won't barge in where He's not welcome. He's a perfect gentleman who knocks and says, "If you'll respond to Me, I'll come in and dine with you. But the choice is up to you."

Most of us have made that choice. We heard His knock and said, “Come in, Lord. Come into the home of my heart.” And He did.

The Living Room

The first room He saw in the home of my heart was the living room. "Nice room," He said.

"Thanks, Lord. It's one of my favorite spots because it's relatively quiet and secluded."

"I'll meet you here every morning of every day," He said. "Before the day gets going, I'll meet you here in the early morning, and we'll talk about what's ahead. When I walked in Israel, I needed instruction and help daily from My Father. So morning by morning, the Father spoke into My ear, giving me the tongue of the learned that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary (Isaiah 50:4). And now I'll do the same for you."

What followed was great. I would come into the living room, a fire would be crackling in the fireplace, and Jesus would be there, ready to talk with me and listen to me. It was a great way to start the day. As time went on, however, things got busy, or so I thought. Rushing out the door to a meeting, I caught a glimpse of Him, sitting. And I realized I hadn't met with Him for a number of mornings. I stopped in my tracks and walked sheepishly over to where He was sitting, thinking He would lecture me. But He didn't. There was a smile on His face and a sparkle in His eye as He said, "As I was saying . . ." continuing the conversation we had shared the last time we were together. And I understood then, truly, that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). He just continues to make Himself available morning by morning to help me speak wisely and to navigate life successfully.

The Study

As the morning drew to a close, Jesus said, "What is that room over there?"

"Oh, that's my study. Come on in." He followed me in, and I noticed He was looking rather intently at the books on the shelves.

"Look, Lord," I said proudly, "I've got all the latest bestsellers: *Winning Through Intimidation, Watch Out for Number One, I'm OK You're OK, Dressed for Success,* and *Awakening the Giant Within.*

"Do these books work?" He asked.

"Not really," I answered. "That's why I keep collecting more."

"How about a book trade?" He asked.

"Sure, Lord. What do You have in mind?"

You give Me your books, and I'll give you sixty-six books bound in a single volume—one that will make you unashamed as you study to show yourself approved unto Me (2 Timothy 2:15), one that comes with an incredible guarantee that if you meditate upon it day and night, you will navigate life prosperously and successfully" (Joshua 1:8).

He took my books. I took His. And suddenly my study was filled with a Book that would intrigue me for the rest of my life.

The Family Room

"What's that I hear down the hall?" Jesus asked.

"That's my family room," I said, opening the door. My kids stopped their playing and rushed toward Him.

"Back off, you guys," I said, laughing.

"I think I've heard that before," He said, "when some other disciples tried to keep their kids away from Me (see Matthew 19:13). Allow them to come."

So they tackled Him, and He wrestled with my kids on the floor. They had the time of their lives. Then He calmed them down a bit and began telling them stories. I could see my oldest son nod his head in agreement, and a smile on the face of my youngest daughter. Suddenly, a peace enveloped the room that was usually so rambunctious, so disorderly, so chaotic.

"This is amazing, Lord," I said. "You've altered this room radically."

"That's why I asked you, as head of the house, to let me into the family room," He said. "I'll alter your kids, your marriage, your home, if you will build a family altar to Me. You see, more than any other group of people—more than your congregation or your elders or your friends—your wife and your kids are your primary disciples. So bring your family together, and learn of Me. There's nothing more important you can do."

The Recreation Room

Hearing a knock on the door, I opened it to find my buddies. We walked down the hall into the recreation room. "Lord, You wouldn't like it in here," I said. "This group is real rowdy. So I'll meet you in the living room in an hour or so."

The boys and I grabbed our pool cues, turned on the radio, and began doing what we did every Tuesday. But this time, it didn't work. The jokes just weren't as funny, and the conversation suddenly seemed shallow and empty. Even the lyrics of the music bothered me. After half an hour or so, I heard a knock on the door. It was Jesus.

He began to talk with my buddies, and I was absolutely amazed because they all loved Him. Oh, a couple of guys got upset and stormed out. But I learned later they weren't my friends after all. They just wanted to use my pool table.

I learned that Jesus is the Life of the party in the truest sense of the word. I also learned that I'm free to do anything as long as I have Him with me because He changes the atmosphere. Now, if I go into a party and the party changes me, then I must leave. But if the party changes and people start thinking about Jesus as a result of my being there, I am free. And I discovered that Jesus Christ had spoiled me—for I had too much of Him to enjoy the old spots. So I've learned to bring the Lord with me to all of my recreational pursuits, and to watch how He infuses them with His life.

The Dining Room

After working up quite an appetite, I said, "Lord, let's go get something to eat." We went into the dining room and sat down to my usual meal.

"This is what you eat?" the Lord asked.

"Every day," I answered.

"Really? This is the way you satisfy your appetite?" He asked incredulously as He looked at the large glob of cotton candy on my plate.

"This is the way I try to satisfy my cravings," I said. "I must admit, however, that although it looks good, when I take a bite, there's just nothing there. That's why I follow it with a hot fudge sundae. I eat the ice cream and the hot fudge and the whipped cream, and there's something there, all right—but every time I'm done, I feel sick. So I decide never to have another one. Then about five hours later, I think another hot fudge sundae would taste pretty good, so I dish one up again. But although I feel full—I never feel satisfied.

After hearing this, He went into the kitchen and came back a few minutes later with a most interesting meal for me: a little cup full of juice and a little piece of unleavened bread. "This is My body, eat of Me. This is my blood. Drink deeply," He said.

Something happened at my table that evening. It became the Lord's table. And it became incredibly satisfying to commune with Jesus. Feeling satisfied in a way I never had before, I suddenly understood what He meant when He said, "Whoever drinks of the water I shall give shall never thirst again" (see John 4:14).

Brother or sister—if you're thirsting today, it's because you've gone back to the old watering holes. If you're feeling empty and troubled, it's because you've gone back to the old ways. Whoever drinks of the water of the world will thirst over and over again, for it will never be enough. But whoever drinks of the water Jesus gives, will be satiated at last.

The Workshop

"What's behind that door?" the Lord asked.

"That's my workshop. I don't go out there much anymore," I said, opening the door, to find some unfinished wooden planes and cars on the worktable. "I've lost interest in these things," I said, "Besides, I'm not that good at woodworking"

"I'm a Master Carpenter," He said. "I can give you some help on these projects." So He gave me some advice on putting them together.

Then He said, "Now take those toys—the hobby you've been pursuing—and give them away."

So I grabbed my little toys, found some kids at the park, and said, "You guys want some planes and cars?" Their eyes lit up. And suddenly my hobby made sense.

"So *that's* what You meant, Lord, when You told us that in the measure we give out, it will be given back," I said (see Luke 6:38).

People garden, paint, remodel, bowl, and collect things only to get bored and go on to the next hobby. If hobbies, however, were used for someone else, what a difference it would make. You who like to garden—mow someone's lawn for free next Saturday and leave a note on the door saying, "God bless you." You who like to bake—make some cookies and give them to someone in need in Jesus' name. You who like to ride bikes—how about taking a kid who doesn't have a dad on a ride around the lake? In this way, biking, gardening, and baking have meaning because you're in the workshop using the talents and interests God gave you to share with others. Use those talents only for yourself, and you'll be boring and shallow. But give them away, and you'll be blown away with blessing.

What a difference the Lord has made in my heart. The workshop has meaning again. The family room is not so chaotic. The dining room satisfies the appetites and cravings of my heart. The study is rich with wisdom and insight.

But one day, the Lord said to me, "From the day I came in here, I've smelled something foul. It's making Me ill—not because of how it affects Me—but because I know it is poisonous to you and your family. There's a toxic

dump somewhere in this house, and I've determined it's behind that door right down the hall."

"Oh, Lord," I said, "that's just an old closet. I'm going to take care of it sometime. I know it stinks, but You'll grow accustomed to it. Trust me, I've had it for a number of years, and I don't even notice anymore."

"Can I have a look?" He asked.

"No, Lord," I said. "I've given You entry into every room in the house of my heart. But that one closet is mine. I know it stinks, but it's mine. You're welcome to go where You want and do what You wish in every other room—but that closet belongs to me."

With that, He slipped away into the farthest corner of the home. And suddenly, the family room lost its life. The study became tedious. The old songs began to be played in the recreation room. And the dining room table held only cotton candy and hot fudge sundaes. After several days, I said, "Lord, I don't want You stuck off in a corner of the house. I want You to move around freely. I need You in my family room. I need You in my study. I need You in the living room. But I can't deal with that closet, Lord. I don't know what to do."

"All I'm asking," He replied, "is that you agree with Me that it stinks and that it's got to go. I'll do the rest—but you must give me your permission." That's what confession is. Confession simply means to agree. That's why the apostle John says if we confess our sin, He will be faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

I had forgotten how good a house could smell. I was reminded of the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Mary poured ointment on Jesus, and John records that the fragrance filled the whole house (John 12:3). In other words, the whole house smelled like Jesus.

"Lord, You have been such a wonderful influence in the house of my heart," I said. "From now on, it's Your house. I'll be the guest. You be the owner.

Smiling, He said, "I have a better idea. Now that you've given Me your house, let's go to My house. I've been working on it for two thousand years. I can't wait to show you what I've prepared for you."

Once I gave Him control of my home, His work was done. Now He could take me to His home. And that's a whole new story. I can't tell it to you

because eyes have not seen and ears have not heard the things God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9). It's a story beyond description.

That's where we're going, gang. You who, by faith, have allowed Christ to dwell in your hearts, to be at home in your hearts, will soon find yourself at home in the place He's preparing for you. In the meantime, while we await that day, we can experience a bit of heaven in our lives presently as we allow Him to be at home in every room of our hearts. May the Lord help us to give Him the keys to every closet, the title deed to the home in its entirety. May we be those who say, "Come on in, Lord. It's all Yours."



4 Ephesians 4:1 (a)
I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you . . .

The word "therefore" is such a pivotal word in Scripture that whenever you come across it in the Word, it's good to stop and ask what it is there for. In this case, as Paul begins the second half of his letter, launching into the practical aspects of our life in Christ, he refers to the doctrinal foundation he laid in chapters 1—3. In other words, before telling us how we are to walk, he reminds us we must first understand where we sit.

In chapters 1—3, Paul told us we were adopted into God's family, elected before the foundation of the world, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and sealed with the Holy Spirit—all while we were dead in our sin. This is where so many Christians stumble. They try to walk before they sit. Sermons are preached; seminars are given; books are published on how husbands should love their wives and the way wives should submit to their husbands; or the way we should live in purity; or what we should do as a church body—all without acknowledging what God has already done for us, all without factoring in the fact that there's nothing we can do to make God love us any more than He loves us right now.

I have found that most Christians believe they are the initiators in spiritual life, feeling that if they can just pray enough, do enough, and be

enough, God will love them and bless them. So they try to walk worthy—but sooner or later, they fail and throw in the towel.

Our Christian walk is not something we do to try to earn God's favor or merit His love. Rather, it is a response to how He loves us, what He's done for us, and how good He's already been to us. We love Him, the apostle John said, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). He is the Initiator, we the responders. We don't love Him *so* He'll love us. We love Him *because* He first loved us.

Any parent who would try to teach his child to walk before the child learned to sit would be headed for frustration. So, too, if you try to get your kids to walk spiritually before they understand where they are seated in Christ, they'll rebel. But if you remind your kids over and over again what the Lord has done for them and how He loves them—that they are seated with Him in heavenly places, and that there's nothing they can do to make Him love them less—watch and see how they will begin to walk with Him.

Without chapters 1—3, chapters 4—6 lead only to frustration, legalism, and rebellion. That's why Paul uses the word *therefore*. "In light of all you have, in light of all that's been done, in light of all you are in Christ Jesus," he says, "Walk worthy." How? Read on.

Ephesians 4:1 (b)
. . . that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.

In the second half of the letter to the Ephesians, the emphasis is on walking. In addition to its appearance here, the apostle Paul uses the word "walk" four times . . .

- First, he tells us to walk in unity (4:1–16).
- Next, he tells us to walk in purity (4:17—5:18).
- Third, he tells us to walk in harmony (5:19—6:9).
- And finally, he tells us to walk in victory (6:10–24).

Ephesians 4:2 (a)
With all lowliness and meekness . . .

He who is finally free from a works-oriented Christianity will walk with lowliness and meekness. No longer will he think God blesses him because of his dedication, diligence, and devotion; his piety, purity, or prayer. Instead, he'll realize everything he has is because of God's lovingkindness, because of *His* generosity, *His* mercy, *His* goodness.

Ephesians 4:2 (b)
. . . with longsuffering . . .

"Longsuffering" means "exceeding patience." How much more patient we would be if we really understood how incredibly patient God has been with us. After all, would you have put up with yourself if you were God? I, for one, wouldn't be here right now because I would have blasted myself a long time ago! Therefore, in light of what He's done for us, in light of how long He continues to put up with us, we must be those who are patient with others. We must be those who extend mercy lavishly and bestow grace freely.

Ephesians 4:2 (c)–6
. . . forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Because we're all in this together and are all recipients of our Father's grace and kindness, there's no room to say, "We're better than they are," or, "I'm more holy than he is." Rather, there's one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. There's no room for dividing, for splintering, for saying, "We're more spiritual than you." No, we're to walk in unity.

Ephesians 4:7
But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

Although there is unity within the body of Christ, there is also diversity. We are all united in Christ and because of Christ, but there are differences among us due to the different gifts we've been given. In our physical bodies, our hands function differently than our eyes, which function differently than our toes. So, too, in the body of Christ, each part functions in a unique way according to the gift each has been given.

Ephesians 4:8–10

Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

When were these gifts given? Quoting Psalm 68:18, Paul gives the answer. After Christ was crucified, before He ascended into heaven, He first descended to the lower parts of the earth, into Hades, or "the place of the dead." In this, He fulfilled the prophecy of Matthew (12:40), wherein He said, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks a sign, but one sign I will give you. Even as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the center of the earth." In other words, during the three days His body lay in the tomb, before He ascended to heaven, Jesus descended into hell.

According to Jesus' parable in Luke 16, "Abraham's bosom," or "paradise," was where the Old Testament believers—those who were believers in God and who looked forward to the coming Messiah—went after they died. Unable to go directly to heaven because Jesus had not yet died for their sins, they went to Abraham's bosom, paradise, the "good" side of hell (Luke 16:22–31). After Jesus died, He went to Abraham's bosom and led the Old Testament believers into heaven, where they are today.

Not only that, but, according to our text, He gave gifts to men. This is amazing. Three days after He was crucified by us—for we *all* turned our backs on Him, we *all* like sheep have gone astray—our Lord is so magnanimous, so generous, merciful, and kind that He heaped us not with grief nor with guilt, but with gifts.

What gifts? Read on.

Ephesians 4:11 (a)
And he gave some, apostles . . .

The apostolic ministry is a governing ministry and refers to those who are sent out as spiritual statesmen to establish ministries. There are three kinds of apostles: God the Father appointed one Apostle—His Sent One, Jesus Christ. Jesus, in turn, appointed twelve apostles. Thirdly, the Holy Spirit appointed apostles—Andronicus and Junia, Timothy and Titus, Barnabas and Paul, and a host of others. This third type is the type of apostles who are still being appointed to this day.

Ephesians 4:11 (b)
. . . and some, prophets . . .

The prophetic ministry is a guiding ministry and refers to those who speak the Word of the Lord in the Spirit.

Ephesians 4:11 (c)
. . . and some, evangelists . . .

The evangelistic ministry is a gathering ministry and refers to those who bring people to the kingdom.

Ephesians 4:11 (d)
. . . and some, pastors . . .

The pastoral ministry is a guarding ministry and refers to those who protect the flock from the wolves who seek to destroy them.

Ephesians 4:11 (e)
. . . and teachers.

The teaching ministry is a grounding ministry and refers to those who ground God's people in the truths of His Word.

Ephesians 4:12

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

The church of Jesus Christ exists for three reasons:

- To exalt God—which is why we sing praises and offer prayer
- To edify His people—which is why we study the Word
- To evangelize the unsaved—which is why we preach salvation

Contrary to what many think, the church does not exist primarily to evangelize. It exists to build the saints so that they, in turn, will do the work of the ministry. If you come from a church background, the tendency is to think that Christian service happens primarily at church. In reality, however, the most effective ministry happens when you're on the job site, at school, with your buddies, working out, or eating a burger. In the Book of Acts, we see the early church hearing the apostles teach, breaking bread together—and then going out to turn the world upside down.

Ephesians 4:13

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Our goal is to be like Jesus—and Jesus did not spend His life hanging out in the temple. He was out among people, impacting the world.

Ephesians 4:14

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

The goal of the church is one of maturity—to conform to the Person of Jesus Christ. To this end, I challenge anyone talking about any new doctrine or experience to find it in the gospels, the Book of Acts, and the Epistles. Otherwise, it's just a passing breeze that will toss you to and fro in your walk.

Ephesians 4:15

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.

We are drawn to a crackling fire in a fireplace on a cold winter night because it provides both light and warmth. And such is the perfect combination of truth and love. Truth without love is like the light of a fire without warmth. Love without truth is like the heat of a fire without light. Truth without love makes people cold in the light. Love without truth makes people stumble in the dark. Thus, we need both.

Ephesians 4:16

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Each of us has a role to play—for just as the joints of our physical bodies are fashioned in such a way that if we didn't have ligaments and tendons, our movement would be spastic and painful at best—the same is true spiritually. We need one another, gang. The Lord has brought us all together in order that together we may conform to Him.

Ephesians 4:17

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind.

Not only are we to walk in unity, but Paul goes on to say we are to put away vanity, or "empty-headedness," and walk in purity. "Create in me a

clean heart," David prayed because he couldn't create a clean heart in himself. We don't have the power to change our hearts. But we do have the power to change our minds. If I stop justifying that activity or that habit—if I change my mind, God will change my heart. But He won't change my heart until I change my mind.

Ephesians 4:18

Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.

Why are people around us so blind? Romans 1 says it's because, instead of worshiping God, they profess to be wise in themselves (1:22).

Ephesians 4:19

Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

After Dr. Donald Barnhouse, the classic preacher from a generation ago, shared a message about the repercussions of sin, a young man approached him and said, "I sin, but it doesn't seem to matter at all. I'm not haunted by it. I don't get depressed about it. It doesn't bother me a bit."

Dr. Barnhouse looked at him and said, "Tell me, son, what would happen if I dropped an eight-hundred-pound weight on the body of a dead man? Would he feel it? Would he be in pain? Would it bother him?"

"Of course not," said the young man.

"That's the point," said Dr. Barnhouse. "If you don't feel the weight of sin, if it's not heavy upon you, if it's not having an impact on you, it's because you're spiritually dead."

Ephesians 4:20, 21

But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.

The world embraces greediness, uncleanness, and empty-headedness. "But you," said Paul, "have not learned Christ that way." Notice Paul doesn't say, "You haven't learned *about* Christ that way." He says, "You haven't learned Christ that way."

I can learn about Abraham Lincoln. I can read books about him. I can go to Disneyland and "Meet Mr. Lincoln" fifteen times in a row. That's the way some people learn about Jesus. They read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John fifteen times in a row and think they know Him. But in reality, they only know *about* Him.

To learn Christ implies communion and intimacy with Him. How does this happen practically? As you spend time studying John's Gospel, for example, read a verse or two, then say to the Lord, "That convicts me," or, "That confuses me," or, "That reminds me," or, "That blesses me." In so doing, you will be communing *with* Him personally rather than merely learning *about* Him academically. So whether you go for a walk, lock yourself in your bathroom, or drive to a secluded spot—find a place you can talk to the Lord as you read about Him. It will make all the difference in the world, for then you will truly learn Christ.

Ephesians 4:22 (a)

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man . . .

As you learn Christ, you'll find yourself changing your mind about everything. You will be "transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may know what is the good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God" (see Romans 12:2).

Ephesians 4:22 (b), 23

. . . which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind.

I like the phrase "deceitful lusts" because there is no greater deceit than lust. There is no greater deceit than the desire of the flesh to have something or someone. "If I could just indulge myself, I would be so happy," lust says.

"If I could just indulge myself, I would be so satisfied." Wrong. You'll be destroyed.

"Oh, but I just want to pray with her and have fellowship in the Lord with her," he says. "I just want to help her through her problems, or be with her in her time of difficulty." But he knows there's another agenda lurking inside of him. He prays with her, and then finds himself involved with her. It's a deceitful lust, even though it's couched in spirituality, or clothed in ministry.

The old adage is so true. Lust is like a fire. The more you feed it, the more it demands. The hotter it gets, the hotter it burns. "Put it off," Paul says. "Instead, be renewed in the spirit of your mind."

Ephesians 4:24

And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Notice the order here. First you put off the old. Then you're renewed in your mind. In other words, you decide you're no longer going to walk like those who are involved in sin. And as you begin to put on a whole new way of talking, living, and behaving, your new lifestyle eventually becomes who you are. It's not deception. It's a decision. People who are like Christ have made a conscious decision to put on the new man, to put on Christ. As a result, they become what they have chosen to put on.

If I merely sit here and wait for something to happen—for my personality to change, for my heart to feel loving, for my soul to feel kind—I'll wait forever. I've got to make a choice. I must choose to be compassionate. I must choose to love. And as I do, I become compassionate; I become loving.

Ephesians 4:25 (a)

Wherefore putting away lying . . .

"Put on righteousness and put away lying," says Paul. He doesn't say to go to counseling to overcome the dysfunctional tendency of exaggeration or miscommunication. He simply says, "Stop lying. Now."

Ephesians 4:25 (b)

. . . speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

If I place my hand on a hot burner, but my nerves lie to my brain, saying, "It's not hot," I will get burned. So, too, if one part of the body of Christ lies to another, everyone gets hurt.

Ephesians 4:26 (a)
Be ye angry, and sin not . . .

How does one be angry without sinning? As always, Jesus shows the way. When He overturned tables in the temple, He was not angry because His feelings were hurt, or because He felt ignored. He was angry because people were being hindered from worshiping the Father freely.

Ephesians 4:26 (b)
. . . let not the sun go down upon your wrath.

If you go to bed angry, you're in danger. Why? Read on.

Ephesians 4:27 Neither give place to the devil.

Satan can work even while you sleep. If you're angry with your husband or your neighbor when you go to sleep, you give the Enemy the opportunity to plant a root of bitterness within you, and you'll wake up the next day feeling angry (Hebrews 12:15). While there's a place for righteous indignation that leads us to pray about an unfair situation or an injustice, and to seek the Lord for its resolution—there is simply no place for the devil in our lives.

Ephesians 4:28
Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

Stealing from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the first Adam was a thief and was kicked *out* of paradise. To a thief on a cross, the Last

Adam—Jesus Christ—said, "Today you will be with Me *in* paradise" (see Luke 23:43). Jesus makes everything different. Thus, the Lord would say to those who have a tendency to steal—be it time from their employers or money from the government as they pay their taxes—"Start working. Start giving."

Ephesians 4:29

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

Warming himself by the fire outside the house of Caiaphas, Peter denied ever knowing Jesus. But a servant girl knew otherwise because his accent gave him away (Mark 14:70).

You can always tell which kingdom a person is from by his speech. The language of the kingdom of darkness and death is that of complaining and murmuring, fault-finding and cynicism, cursing and corrupt communication. A person living in the kingdom of light and life, on the other hand, speaks graciously and kindly, using words of hope and thanksgiving.

Ephesians 4:30, 31

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.

My bitterness, my anger, my speaking evil of someone or losing my temper with someone grieves the Spirit. Why? It's not that God says, "Anger and evil speaking cause My ears to burn," or, "Bitterness and wrath are offensive to Me." That's not the idea. There's not a curse word God hasn't heard. There is nothing that shocks Him. God is not grieved by how our speech, anger, or malice affects Him, but by how it affects us. He's grieved not because He can't handle our sin, but because it hinders Him from doing His work in, through, and for us.

Ephesians 4:32

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

In sharp contrast to bitterness and malice, kindness and forgiveness delight the heart of our heavenly Father. Kindness and forgiveness delight the hearts of earthly fathers as well. That's why this is one of the first verses I taught my kids!

Forgiveness is not a burden God places upon us, but rather a safeguard for our mental health and emotional stability.

After teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus went on to underscore only one point: Forgiveness (Matthew 6:14, 15). Why? Was He trying to make it rough on them? On the contrary, He was saying, "I want you to be free from the burden of holding a grudge. If you don't choose to forgive, you won't enjoy the intimacy and closeness with the Father you would have otherwise. It's all based on forgiveness."

If there's someone toward whom you're bitter, do yourself a huge favor and forgive him—even as God has forgiven you.

5

In chapter 5, Paul continues his exhortation to walk in purity.

Ephesians 5:1

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.

Again, we see the word "therefore." And what is it there for? It refers to the last verse in the previous chapter, where we are told to forgive one another because God has forgiven us for Christ's sake. In other words, Paul is saying, "It only makes sense to follow the One who has forgiven you."

Ephesians 5:2

And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

A "sweet-smelling savour" refers to Leviticus 1—5, wherein we see the burnt offering, meal offering, and the peace offering—all called sweetsmelling offerings because their aroma was sweet to the Father. So, too, when you choose to follow Jesus' example by sacrificing your rights, by walking in love, the scent is sweet to the Father.

Ephesians 5:3

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints.

According to Proverbs 6:32, he who is involved in fornication or adultery destroys his soul, his inner person. The world doesn't understand this. The world thinks fornication is nothing more than two bodies coming together in a moment of ecstasy. But the Bible says it's actually two souls being joined as one. Thus, a person who engages in fornication or lives in adultery will become only a shell of a person, as layer after layer of his inner person is stripped off with each different encounter. That's the tragedy of sexual sin. The issue is not AIDS, sexually transmitted disease, or unwanted pregnancy. The issue is that of losing part of one's soul.

Ephesians 5:4 (a)

Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient . . .

The filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting here in verse 4 are related to the fornication, uncleanness, and coveting of verse 3. Anyone watching culture knows that what once caused people to blush is now nothing but a joke because our culture has become totally desensitized.

Ephesians 5:4 (b)

. . . but rather giving of thanks.

Instead of talking like the world, just start praising the Lord. Whenever the conversation takes a sinful or suggestive turn, alter its course by bringing the Lord into it, by saying, "Isn't God good? Let me tell you what He did for me today. . . ."

Ephesians 5:5

For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

The Greek word translated "whoremonger" is *pornos,* from which we get our word "pornography." Whore-mongering is embracing a prostituted life. And that can happen on the "900" telephones lines, on the Internet, in the things you read, and in the movies you see.

Paul says your heart tells you and your spirit confirms that if you are a whoremonger—if you are delighted by and caught up in pornography—you are not part of the kingdom. You can come to church every time we meet; you can show up every time the doors are open. But if you are involved in this stuff—if this is your idol, if this is what you're living for—you're not saved.

"You *know* this," says Paul. You don't need a preacher to tell you, or a friend to remind you. In your heart, you already know that if you're a whoremonger, an unclean person, making sexual fulfillment your idol—you do not have an inheritance in the kingdom of God."

Ephesians 5:6

Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.

Concerning uncleanness and pornography, people use vain words when they say to us, "Hey, don't be so uptight." The Gnostics, or, literally, "those with special knowledge" did the same thing in Paul's day. Believing themselves to be especially knowledgeable, the gnostics essentially said, "Matter is evil and only the spirit is pure. Therefore, it doesn't matter what

one does with his body. Man can indulge his flesh because it's only his spirit that matters."

The heresy of Gnosticism rears its ugly head in our day in those who say, "God knows you're a sexual creature and that you need to indulge your flesh. So go ahead."

Don't be deceived. If you've been walking with the Lord, but still succumb to fleshly indulgences, you're on shaky ground. I'm not talking about the struggle a person has with his flesh. I'm talking about a lifestyle of embracing one's flesh. If you cater to your flesh day after week after month after year after decade, you need to take a careful look at your spiritual standing.

Ephesians 5:7–10

Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

"You used to walk in darkness. But now you're proving, or literally learning, what is really acceptable in the sight of the Lord," says Paul.

Gang, if I sit in the theater and watch people indulging their fleshly lusts on the screen, I am a partaker of their activity. I support it financially when I buy the ticket. And I vote for our culture to keep making this kind of movie whenever I fill a seat to watch it. There's a better way. We can pray, "You know I struggle with my flesh, Lord. You know I'm tempted by it. But, Lord, I want nothing to do with it. I've learned through Your Word and by experience that sin stinks. I'm not going to justify it any longer. I'm not going to excuse it anymore. Instead, I choose to walk in the light."

Ephesians 5:11, 12

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.

To “reprove” means “to rebuke.” In other words, when a dirty joke or an unclean phrase is spoken, I am not simply to hold my tongue, but I am to rebuke, correct, and deal with the situation. I am to say, “I know you’re my office-mate, my boss, or my teammate, but I have to share this with you because I want to see you do better. Here’s why this kind of talk is not wise. . . .”

Ephesians 5:13

But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.

Some of the merchandise on the crowded streets of old Jerusalem looks pretty good while in the windowless shops. But I have learned not to buy anything until I first take it outside, until I first examine it in the light because it’s amazing how even junky stuff looks okay in the dim light of those shops. So, too, only the light of the Word and the light of fellowship makes known that which is acceptable, that which is truly good.

Ephesians 5:14

Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

“Wake up!” says Paul. “Look what’s happening in your lives.”

I know of young men who could have turned this world upside down for the Lord. I know of young guys who could have really made a mark for the kingdom. But because they weren’t awake to what the Word of God says concerning filthiness, coarse jesting, uncleanness, fornication, and pornography, they’re ineffective to this day.

Ephesians 5:15

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.

The word “circumspectly” suggests the idea of a circle. “See that you look around,” Paul says. “See that you’re vigilant, not being blindsided, not being tricked.”

Ephesians 5:16

Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

We live in an evil day, a dark time. Redeem it by integrating the Lord into whatever you do. For example, when you jog, don't just think about your aches and pains. Instead, start praying for people who are worse off than you. Thank the Lord for things you see. Pray about things that come to mind. Redeem the time by bringing the Lord into all you do. Anything we do that doesn't have a spiritual texture to it is a waste of time.

Ephesians 5:17

Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

What is God's will? That we would walk in purity. How does that work out practically? Read on.

Ephesians 5:18

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.

Forget the distilled spirits. Drink deeply of the dynamic Spirit of the Holy Ghost.

Ephesians 5:19 (a)

Speaking to yourselves . . .

Talk to yourself. David did. "Bless the Lord, O my soul," he said (Psalm 103). "Come on, soul, start blessing the Lord. Why art thou disquieted? Why are you depressed? Hope thou in God" (see Psalm 43:5).

Ephesians 5:19 (b), 20

. . . in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all

things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When I feel things aren't going very well, I'm tempted to lose heart. When this happens, the only thing to do is to speak to myself in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

No wonder David was discouraged. He and his men returned from fighting the Amalekites only to discover not only that their town had been burned by their enemies, but that their wives and kids had been taken hostage.

"This is your fault, David," said his men. "You took us away from here." And so angry were they that they wanted to kill him.

What did David do? He encouraged himself in the Lord (1 Samuel 30:6). He sang songs. He wrote psalms. He began to praise and worship. As a result, he rallied his men once again and they recovered all that was lost.

Had David remained in his depressed state, not only would he have been rendered ineffective, but the women and children would have remained captive. And so will you until you begin to worship. God's will is that you be free—and nothing will free you from the tyranny of your own situation like worship. You will be profoundly blessed and amazingly productive whenever you give thanks to God for *all* things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:21
Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Walking in harmony in our marriages is based upon the key component of submission. Scripture talks about marriage in such a profoundly simple and simply profound way. You don't need countless books, seminars, or videos dealing with marriage. The Word spells out simply and succinctly how it is to work.

Ephesians 5:22

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

Great is the day, wife, when you realize that ever since the Garden of Eden, males have been missing something. You see, when Adam went to sleep in the Garden, God took a rib from his side, and from it fashioned the woman, the "completer" of the man. Why doesn't your husband communicate more freely? Why doesn't he feel things more deeply? I believe it all stems from the fact that he's missing a rib; he's missing the part that was given to you.

"Well, if he's missing something, yet I still want to communicate, what do I do?" you ask.

In the Garden of Eden, the first Adam lost something. But there's another Adam—the Last Adam, Jesus Christ. So complete is the Last Adam that He is not only portrayed in Scripture as a male bullock (Numbers 15), but as a red heifer, a female cow (Numbers 19). Not only is He the epitome of strength; He is also the very essence of tenderness.

Dear sister, as long as you look to your husband to meet your deepest needs, you'll be frustrated perpetually. You'll put pressure on him to be what he can't be because he's missing something. It is only in Jesus Christ that you will find true fulfillment. In talking to Him, in learning of Him, in walking with Him, you will find the satisfaction your heart is craving. Drink deeply of the Last Adam—the Perfect One, Jesus Christ—for when you tap in to Him and maintain a vital, personal daily devotional life, you won't push your husband to be something he cannot be.

Wives, continue to love the Lord with all your heart and soul, with all your mind and strength—just as you did before you were married. For it is only in Him that you will find the answer to the cry of your heart.

Ephesians 5:23, 24

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.

If you are a Christian wife, you are to submit to your husband even as you would submit to the Lord. Let society say what it may. God's Word has stood the test of time, for whenever a wife chooses to be submitted to her husband, her marriage is on the way to becoming a blessed union, indeed.

Husbands, in turn, must never forget that, as commanded in verse 21, they are to submit to their wives. How does this work out practically? I believe the best way to understand this is to look at the example of the marriage held up in the New Testament as a model marriage—the marriage of Sarah and Abraham.

> *At seventy-six years of age, having received a promise from the Lord that they would have a child, Sarah said, "Listen, Abraham, we're not getting any younger. So let's help the Lord out a bit. Have relations with my handmaid, Hagar, and the child produced will count as ours."*
>
> *Abraham "hearkened unto the voice of his wife" (see Genesis 16:2), and a child named Ishmael was born.*
>
> *Thirteen years later, after the promised child had indeed come and was weaned, Sarah said to Abraham, "Hagar's son and my son cannot live in the same tent. Ishmael must go."*
>
> *"No way," said Abraham.*
>
> *"Hearken unto the voice of your wife," said God (see Genesis 21:12).*

Interestingly, when Sarah told him to have relations with Hagar, Abraham submitted to his wife. But when she told him to deal with Ishmael, he said, "No." In so doing, Abraham hearkened to his wife in something contrary to God's ways, but ignored the voice of his wife when it was actually right in the sight of the Lord.

This means that while I as a husband am held responsible for the direction of my family, I must not be dictatorial in my behavior toward them. There are times when I need to listen to my wife. There are times when I must choose to submit to what she's saying, realizing the Lord can speak through her. Therefore, it is the wise husband who says to his wife, "I want to hear your heart and mind on this matter and match it against the Word of God

because I know I am the one who will ultimately be held responsible." And suddenly, rather than being a justification for me to be dictatorial over my wife, Ephesians 5:22 humbles me before the Lord, realizing *I* am held accountable for the direction of my family.

Ephesians 5:25 (a)
Husbands, love your wives . . .

Again, God's instructions are so clear. Inspired by God's Spirit, Paul simply says, "Husbands, love your wives." How? Read on.

Ephesians 5:25 (b)
. . . even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.

How should you love your wife?
Just as Jesus loves you, just as Jesus loves the Church.
First of all, He loves us sacrificially.

- In the Garden of Eden, the first Adam parted with a bone.
  On the hill of Calvary, the Last Adam poured out His blood.
- At creation, the First Adam gave something of himself.
  On the Cross, the Last Adam gave all of Himself.

This means that if I am to love my wife as Christ loved the Church, I'll love her to the point where I die to my own dreams, my own desires, and my own wishes. In other words, I'll love her to death.

Second, Jesus loves the church unconditionally. Jesus doesn't love us only if we're "good boys and girls," only if we have morning devotions, only if we tithe. He loves us period. And I am to love my wife in the same manner. I'm not to love her only if she makes good meals, laughs at my jokes, or if she pleases me. I'm to love her period. And there isn't a woman on the face of the earth who will have difficulty submitting to a man who loves her in that way. Submission is never a problem when a man loves his wife as Christ loves the church.

Ephesians 5:26, 27

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

As the bride of Christ, what does Jesus do to us? He washes us with the water of the Word. He irons out the wrinkles. He takes away the blemishes. In so doing, Jesus says, "I know My bride isn't perfect. But I'm going to work on her and in her that she might be sanctified, made beautiful, washed by the water of My Word."

If you don't like your wife, brother, it's because you've been a miserable husband. First Corinthians 11:7 tells us the woman is the glory of the man. The word "glory" literally means "reflection." If I look at my wife and don't like what I see, it's because I'm seeing a reflection of my own failure. You who say, "I just don't like my wife"—when was the last time you washed her with the water of the Word? When was the last time you opened the Bible with her? When was the last time you humbled yourself before the Lord and prayed with her?

If I don't like my wife's appearance or attitude or actions, the tendency could be for me to say, "I'll just find someone else." But that won't work either because my next wife, also being a reflection of my own shortcomings, will inevitably seem just as flawed to me.

The first miracle Jesus ever did was at a marriage ceremony. That's where miracles need to happen most often. The wine having run out, Jesus called the servants apart and said, "Take those stone pots. Fill them to the brim with water. Then serve the water to the guests." Sure enough, as the servants began to pour, the water was changed to wine of the highest quality (John 2:10).

So, too, husband, just as Jesus came as the servant of all, you're to be a servant to your wife. If the wine of romance, the wine of happiness, the wine of joy is gone from your marriage, first fill up your own earthen vessel with the water of the Word. Get back into the Word. Reestablish a devotional time.

Study the Scriptures. Join a men's fellowship group. Do whatever it takes to fill up your life with the Word. And once you're filled, take what you're learning and serve your wife the water of the Word. Then watch it be transformed into the wine of joy.

Ephesians 5:28

So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

According to Paul, the best thing you can do for yourself, husband, is to love your wife. Loving your wife is actually better for you than playing racquetball, lifting weights, playing golf, or jogging. Love is a verb. It's an action, not a feeling. It's something you *choose* to do.

Ephesians 5:29, 30

For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

Contrary to what society says, the Bible declares we don't have to be taught to love ourselves. We already do.

Ephesians 5:31

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

For a marriage to be successful, a man must leave those who were closest to him and cleave to his wife. If there's another female he's sharing with, talking with, or ministering to—he's headed for disaster. "Oh, but she's just a coworker. She's just telling me her problems, and I'm winning her to the Lord," he says. No. Jesus said wherever a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also (Matthew 6:21). Therefore, if he puts his treasure in her, if he shares his heart or Scripture or insights with her, his heart will follow inevitably. Then, because no man can serve two masters without hating one (Matthew 6:24), he'll end up hating his wife.

I firmly believe this is one of the biggest dangers to marriages in the church today. It's not the seductress who's a problem. It's the person with whom you're casually sharing and giving counsel. Therefore, if you're a wise man, you'll choose not to talk with women in a deep way about your frustrations or your fears, your doubts or your dreams. You'll cleave only to your wife. And as you do, you'll find romance and love being rekindled again and again. The world says, "If I loved her, I would cleave to her." The Bible says, "Cleave to her, and then you'll love her."

Ephesians 5:32

This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Paul spoke of a mystery far bigger than the mere mechanics of marriage. . . .

It shouldn't be surprising that the place of His first miracle was at a marriage ceremony, for Jesus' entire mission was to proclaim and preach a message of love. Yet because Israel was so steeped in the law—in religion, rules, and regulations—they didn't understand it. Consequently, this Messenger of love received spikes in His hands, a nail in His feet, and was raised up on a Cross to die. When a Roman soldier thrust a spear into His side, blood and water came forth, reminiscent of the water turned into blood-red wine at Cana.

Even as the first Adam was asleep in a garden when his side was opened and his bride was brought forth, so, too, the Last Adam was in a garden tomb "asleep." When He arose, who was the first one He talked to? A woman, Mary. Mary was the beginning of a bride for Jesus. Although she was once a demon-possessed sinner, she was one who loved Jesus to such a degree that she was ready to carry His body alone (John 20:15). So deeply did she love Him that she couldn't let Him go (John 20:17).

How easy it is for me to miss what is our true purpose this week, this day, this moment. The Lord is not asking for our sacrifice, our service, our

study. Hear, O Christian, the Lord your God is one Lord. And thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and might (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5). Love is what He asks for. Love is what we're created for.

We are Eve—fallen like Eve, indeed; seduced like Eve, yes; flawed like Eve, absolutely. But Jesus Christ loves us. And even as Adam knowingly ate of the forbidden fruit in order that he might be with Eve, so the Last Adam knowingly took upon Himself the sin of the world that He might spend eternity with us.

The mystery of marriage is that Jesus wants to be one with you. He wants to communicate with you. He wants to walk in the rain with you. He wants to go to the lake with you. He loves you and wants you to love Him. How? Marriage will teach you, for it's an illustration of what you should be doing with the Lord, and for the Lord, in the Spirit. Don't get sidetracked, gang. Don't fall prey to religion and rules, sacrifice and service. You are the Lord's love. *That's* the mystery of marriage.

Ephesians 5:33

Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

After celebrating her seventy-fifth wedding anniversary, a lady was asked the secret of her marriage. "On my wedding day, I intended to write a list of ten things for which I would forgive my husband," she said. "But I never got around to writing it down. So over the years, whenever he would make me hopping mad, I would just tell myself it was a good thing for him that what he did was on my list!"

Honor your husbands, women. Love your wives, guys. That's the way it works.

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6 Continuing his call for harmony in the home, Paul addresses the children in the Ephesian congregation, knowing they would be in attendance when his Epistle arrived. In other words, Paul didn't see church attendance as an activity only for Mom or Dad. He simply assumed the children would be in church. . . .

Ephesians 6:1 (a)
Children . . .

Teknon, the Greek word translated "children," refers to anyone of any age living under his parent's roof. One could be nineteen, twenty-three, or thirty-two years of age and still fall under the category of *teknon.* Thus, as long as you choose to live with your parents, this is the Word of the Lord for you.

Ephesians 6:1 (b)
. . . obey your parents . . .

The Greek word translated obey is *hupakouo,* which speaks of a soldier about to engage into battle, listening carefully for the orders and instructions of his commanding officer. If he didn't listen carefully, he could be in the wrong place at the wrong time, costing him his life. The scriptural command to obey one's parents doesn't call for a "yeah, yeah, yeah" kind of response. No, it calls for one to obey them as if his life depended on it.

In the fourth quarter, twenty yards from the end zone, six points down, every person in the huddle listens intently to the quarterback, knowing they have to hear the play and get the count lest they cost their team the victory. That is the degree of intensity wrapped up in *hupakouo.*

Ephesians 6:1 (c)
. . . in the Lord: for this is right.

Although children are to listen to their parents as if their life depended on it, they need only embrace what their parents say if it's "in the Lord." That is, if a parent tells a child to do something contrary to the heart and will of God, he is under no obligation to obey. However, if a child forgoes obeying his parents on the grounds that what they ask of him is contrary to the will of God, he better have chapter and verse and theology down pat. Otherwise, the person under the roof of his parents is to submit to them enthusiastically. It's just that simple.

Ephesians 6:2, 3

Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

Why is it right to obey Mom and Dad? Because there's a promise connected with that premise: He that does so will live long on the earth (Exodus 20:12). What does this mean? The rabbis say it means that the days of the one who obeys his parents will be rich—not necessarily long in quantity, but long on quality. This could very well be true, for some of the finest saints in church history died at relatively young ages. Jim Elliot, for example, was perhaps the most impacting missionary of the last fifty years—even though he died at age twenty-three. His days weren't long, but they were rich, indeed.

What if you feel you know more than your parents concerning a certain issue? I am reminded of another who could have felt this way. . . .

Having lost track of Him, Joseph and Mary returned to the temple to find Jesus. "Where have You been?" they asked Him.

"Don't you understand?" He answered. "I must be about My Father's business" (Luke 2:49).

At that point, obviously knowing more than His earthly parents, Jesus could have remained in the temple. Instead, Scripture records that He returned to Nazareth and was subject to His parents. The result? He increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and with man (Luke 2:52).

Jesus submitted to His parents even though He knew more than they did. And because He submitted to them, we read that He grew in favor with God and man. In other words, there was something about Him that attracted people to Him to such a degree that a few years later, fishermen would drop their nets, a tax collector would abandon his table, and multitudes would leave their homes to follow Him.

Ephesians 6:4 (a)

And, ye fathers . . .

Paul doesn't say anything to mothers as it relates to raising children. Why? Because it's natural for a mother to care about her kids, to do whatever she can for her kids. Dads, however, are sometimes a different story. . . .

Ephesians 6:4 (b)
. . . provoke not your children to wrath . . .

What does it mean to provoke your children to wrath? Colossians 3:21 gives the amplification when it says, "Fathers provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." To provoke your kids to wrath means to make them discouraged. How? By loading them down with expectations.

Because men have a dangerous tendency to want to relive their glory days through their kids, they often say, "I played ball, so you'll play ball," or, "I was good at math, so you'll be good at math," or, "I'm gregarious and outgoing, so you'll be gregarious and outgoing." Don't do it, Dad. Wise is the father who understands that his children are not to be molded, but to be unfolded. In other words, you have the privilege, Dad, of observing your child carefully, seeing how God made him—and then unfolding what God has built into him from the moment of conception, all for His glory.

Ephesians 6:4 (c)
. . . but bring them up . . .

The tendency for men is to say, "Earning a living is my job. Raising the kids is my wife's job." Scripture says otherwise. The Word of God says dads are to bring up their children. How? First of all, by being there. . . .

During "Show and Tell," elementary kids were telling what their dads did for a living. "My daddy is the president of his company," one said. "He travels all over the world."

"Well, my daddy is really rich," said another. "We have nice cars and a pool and even an airplane."

"My daddy," said a little boy, "is a professional baseball player."

Kids and teacher alike were impressed with the stories—until a little girl in the back of the room cautiously said, "My daddy is . . . here."

Are you there, Dad? Although we hear lots of talk about "quality time," in many cases, I think it's nothing more than an excuse for not spending enough time with our kids.

Ephesians 6:4 (d)

. . . in the nurture . . .

We see the same word translated "nurture" here in Ephesians in Hebrews 12:6 when the writer says, "Whom the Father loves, He *chastens*—or nurtures, or disciplines." Even as you help your children walk in the path God has laid out for them uniquely, it is your responsibility, Dad, to deal with the sin within them innately.

"In sin did my mother conceive me," the psalmist declared (Psalm 51:5). This means David was born a sinner. The depravity of man is a doctrine that today's educators deny, but which God's Word underscores from cover to cover. Kids are born sinners. Oh, they're talented. After all, they're made in the image of God. There is all kinds of potential packed into their little bodies. But there's also sin, anger, rage, and hostility within them.

One study of juvenile delinquency came to this conclusion: Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and totally self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it: his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toys, his uncle's watch. Deny him these things and he seethes with a rage and aggressiveness that would be murderous were he not so helpless. He's dirty. He has no morals, no knowledge, no developed skills. This means that all children, not just certain children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue on in their self-centered world of infancy, every child would grow to be a criminal, a thief, a

rapist, a killer.

> He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.
>
> Proverbs 13:24

Empty threats produce unresolved guilt without healing or restoration. On the other hand, when I spanked my children, they were dealt with quickly, emotionally, and in a way they understood completely. They cried; I hugged them; they hugged me—and the issue was put behind us totally.

Ephesians 6:4 (e)
. . . and admonition of the Lord.

"Admonition of the Lord" means you talk to your son and daughter constantly about the things of God.

> And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.
>
> Deuteronomy 6:7

Dad, you are to talk to your kids all the time about the Word of God.

"But they won't like me," you say.

You're not parenting to be liked by your children. You're parenting to train them how to live on earth successfully and in heaven eternally.

"But they'll think I'm preaching at them."

You don't have to give your kids a ten-point outline of Leviticus 23. You simply need to use opportunities that arise naturally to help them to grow spiritually.

"But my kids won't let me. They don't open up conversationally."

Then you have the privilege of doing what the most righteous man on the face of the earth did. Scripture says Job got up every morning and offered sacrifice on behalf of his kids. He bloodied his hands; he sweat; he expended

energy in prayer for his children "lest today be the day they forget God or curse Him" (see Job 1:5).

Even if he doesn't have access to his children because of physical or emotional barriers, there's not a dad who can't say, "Even though it's bloody, even though it makes me sweat, I'm going to pray for my kids with intensity and consistency." If your children are still under your roof, even if they don't talk to you, you can slip into their rooms at night while they sleep, kneel at the foot of their beds, lay your hand gently upon them and pray,

> *"Father, please bless what goes on in my son's heart or in my daughter's mind even as they sleep. I pray Your Spirit to come upon them. I pray for wisdom to be understood and embraced by them. I pray that their lives would be pleasing to You. I pray that, even now, Your blood would cover them and that Your angels would stand by them so that the evil one would not be allowed to penetrate, seduce or destroy them."*

No matter what else you may or may not do, Dad—you can and must pray.

> **Ephesians 6:5**
>
> **Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ.**

When Paul penned these words, there were over six million slaves in the Roman Empire. Because they were viewed as less than human, they were treated brutally in most cases. Thus, Paul's words are shocking when he says, "Servants—or slaves—you are not to rebel against your masters, run away from your masters or be angry with your masters. You're to obey your masters."

> *David had a brutal boss. While he played his harp, King Saul tried to pin him to the wall with a spear—not once or twice, but three times. Realizing his services were not wanted, David headed to the caves at En-Gedi. Saul, in turn, gathered an army of three thousand*

to chase him down. When Saul inadvertently took a nap in the very cave in which David was hiding, David's men were overjoyed.

"God has delivered Saul into your hand!" they said. "Now you can chop off his head!"

Instead, David did nothing more than cut off a piece of Saul's garment.

But even then, Scripture says David's heart "smote him" (1 Samuel 24:5).

David shows us that he saw Saul as God's instrument in his life to produce patience, maturity, compassion, and a greater dependence upon God within him.

Here's the question: Have you clipped the garment of your boss? Of your teacher? Of your parents? They are God's instruments, anointed ones in your life to develop depth, character, and maturity in you. Lop off their heads by launching a rebellion or losing your temper, finding fault with, or gossiping about them—and you will forfeit what God wants to do for you and through you.

You might not respect the person in authority over you, but you must respect his position because God has put him in your life. Lop off the skirts of the people in authority over you, and you will stunt, retard, and cripple that which God wants to do for you. But be like David and say, "Forgive me. I will never do that again"—and God will honor you.

Ephesians 6:6, 7

Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.

We are to enthusiastically do what's asked of us. The word "enthusiasm" comes from the Greek phrase *en theos,* or "full of God."

Eugene Ormandy, a conductor of the Philadelphia Philharmonic, dislocated his right shoulder because he conducted with such enthusiasm. We know so little of this kind of service. We don't

separate our shoulders. We barely wrinkle our ties. That's why we don't ascend to the level God would have us enjoy in so many arenas.

David was a man who went above and beyond the call of duty, bounding over walls expending great energy (Psalm 18:29). The men around him developed that same mentality. Hiding out in the cave at Adullam one day, David said, "I would give anything for a drink of water from the well at Bethlehem."

Hours later, as the sun began to set, three of his men—Adino, Eleazar, and Shammah—approached him. Their clothes were tattered, their flesh bruised and bleeding.

"Where did you guys go?" David must have asked.

And in my mind's eye, I can see a tear running down his dusty cheek as they handed him a skin of water, drawn from the well of Bethlehem (2 Samuel 23).

The most precious gift David ever received was from three of his "employees" who had risked their lives to please him. No wonder it was Adino, Eleazar, and Shammah who remained chiefs of his mighty men once he became king.

Who becomes a mighty man on the job, in the church, for the kingdom? The one who hears the heart of his employer. The world says, "Skate by. Leave early. Cover up." God, however, says, "I'm looking for men and women who, with good cheer, enthusiasm, and singleness of heart, respect those in positions over them."

Ephesians 6:8

Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

The enthusiastic work you do for your boss is not primarily for him—it's for the Lord. And what will be your reward?

First, you'll receive rewards in eternity (Matthew 25:23). Even if your boss, coach, or supervisor never notices what you're doing, God does. If you haven't "despised the days of small things" but have been faithful in your

present situation—you will be given responsibility, blessing, and reward eternally (Zechariah 4:10).

> A missionary was sailing home after spending forty years in Africa. On the ship with him was President Teddy Roosevelt, returning from a safari. As the ocean liner pulled into the docks of New York City, thousands of people were on the wharf cheering. Bands were playing. Reporters were waiting. And everyone was saying, "Wow! Teddy Roosevelt killed a rhinoceros and an elephant!"
>
> The missionary turned to his wife and said, "You know, I'm a little bit bitter. After two weeks of big game hunting, Teddy Roosevelt receives a hero's welcome because he killed a rhino and an elephant. Yet we spent forty years in the jungle, laying down our lives to help people, and no one's here to welcome us home."
>
> That night, the Lord spoke to the missionary's heart and simply said, "You're not home yet."

Even if you arrive early, stay late, and work hard at your job as unto the Lord—you still might not climb very high on the corporate ladder because you're not home yet. That day is yet to come.

Second, if you work enthusiastically and wholeheartedly, you will receive benefits presently. If you're thinking about serving the Lord in full-time ministry, it would be wise to remember that throughout Scripture, it was those who were already hard at work whom God called to serve Him.

> *Moses was shepherding his father-in-law's sheep when God called him (Exodus 3:1).*
>
> *When the mantle was passed from Elijah to Elisha, Elisha was plowing a field (1 Kings 19:19).*
>
> *Peter was fishing when Jesus called him (Matthew 4:18).*
>
> *Even Paul was wholeheartedly persecuting Christians when God called him! (Acts 9:1, 2).*

If you're thinking about the ministry eventually, work hard as unto the Lord in whatever He has set before you presently. Too many young men and

women who want to enter the ministry or missionary service sit and wait for something to happen. Certainly that could not be said of Paul. . . .

> *While in Ephesus, Paul taught during the afternoon break from two o'clock to four-thirty every afternoon. The remainder of the time, he worked by the sweat of his brow, making tents. He didn't have to do this. He could have said, "If you guys can't support me, I'm gone." But he didn't. And what happened? His sweatbands—the tangible evidence of Paul's commitment to and love for the people of Ephesus—were used as agents of healing (Acts 19:12).*

Whether you're a banker or carpenter, an electrician or a businessman, when you're working hard, giving your all, going above and beyond the call of duty, your boss will say, "What makes you work so well for me? I pay you minimum wage, yet you're putting forth maximum effort." The name of Jesus will be exalted by even the most hard-hearted employer if you demonstrate the love in your heart through the sweat of your brow.

Not only is there power, but there is also protection in perspiration. . . .

> *It was after the Fall that Adam was told to work by the sweat of his brow—perhaps as a way to keep from further trouble (Genesis 3:19).*

"You don't understand how boring my job is," you say. "How can I possibly wash dishes at Denny's wholeheartedly?" One of the greatest men who ever lived washed pots and pans for a living and went on to write the classic, *Practicing the Presence of God.* As Brother Lawrence washed pots and pans day after day, he worshiped, prayed, and shared truth. Over time, people began to hear about the dish washer who loved God and who glowed with God's glory—and they traveled to see him for themselves.

It is possible that at your job or in your school there is one person who will be impacted by watching you—one co-worker or colleague who will see in you something special, something different. Such was the case with Philip.

Called away from a city-wide revival in Samaria, God told him to go to the desert. There, he found one man—a leader in the Ethiopian government—reading the scroll of Isaiah.

"Do you understand what you're reading?" asked Philip. "Let me explain it to you" (Acts 8:30).

The Ethiopian was saved and baptized. He returned to Africa and ushered in a revival, the effects of which can be seen to this day.

So, too, there might be only one guy who works with you, only one person you will influence. But great will be your reward in heaven if you do it faithfully, enthusiastically, and with singlehearted energy.

Ephesians 6:9

And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

Employers, just as your employees are to serve you, you are to serve them, for God is not a respecter of persons. He's not impressed by titles or positions.

Ephesians 6:10

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

Paul begins this last section with a wonderful exhortation: Be strong in the Lord. This is a particularly good word for us today, for I believe we live in the generation of the "sissification" of the saints—due at least in part, I believe, to the idea that we should be vulnerable, sensitive, transparent, and all of those other '80s and '90s buzz words. A lot of Christians are moaning and groaning about their situation because their lives are centered on—how *they* are doing, how *they* are feeling, how *they* are treated.

Moses had died. The people were now ready to move into the Land of Promise where there was great fruit, into the land that flowed with milk and honey. At that time, however, there were giants in the land. Consequently, there were very real battles ahead of them. So three times in the first chapter of the book which bears his name, Joshua heard God say, "Be strong and of good courage. You're up to bat, Joshua. You cannot afford to become introspective or self-centered because there are three million people looking to you" (see Joshua 1:6, 7, 9). Not only did God exhort Joshua to be strong —but the people did as well. "We will follow you in the way you lead us," they said, "only be strong" (see Joshua 1:18).

So, too, I encourage you to be strong in the Lord because we are being inundated with Christian radio programs and books telling us to be introspective and to seek counseling. I believe this kind of thinking flies directly in the face of Scripture, for the exhortation of the Word is to be strong. God will never ask me to do what He does not enable me to do if I choose to believe Him for it and obey Him in it. How are we to be strong? Read on.

Ephesians 6:11

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

The first step to being strong is to realize that life is not an encounter group. Life is not a bonding meeting. Life is not a playground. Life is a battleground. The reason so many in the church are weak is because they're not armed for battle.

If the men who stormed the beaches of Normandy on D-Day did so dressed in their jammies, something would have been terribly wrong. Yet I believe we live in a day of "jammy Christianity." "Let's put on our jammies and talk about how we feel," we say. "Let's have a slumber party, and we'll all bond." No. Paul tells us to put on our armor, to take advantage of the equipment God has given us to navigate life and negotiate the war that surrounds us. Dear saint, you can stand against the wiles of the devil—the

cunning, clever attacks of Satan—only to the degree that you're protected with the whole armor of God.

Ephesians 6:12 (a)
For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities . . .

Any time I am wrestling against flesh and blood, anytime I'm striving against people, I'm fighting the wrong battle. If you're fighting with your boss or your employees, if you're fighting your parents or your teenagers, you are fighting the wrong battle.

In the way with Israel and Judah, the king of Syria called his captains together and said, "Do not fight against any man great or small, but only against the king" (see 1 Kings 22:31). In other words, "Don't get sidetracked with any of the little guys. Stay focused on your main target and victory will follow."

The same is true with us. We are not to get sidetracked fighting against mere flesh and blood. We're to battle the spiritual entities that cause tension in our marriages, problems with our children, struggles with our parents. These entities are organized into principalities.

For twenty-one days, Daniel fasted and prayed as he set his face to seek God. At the end of that time, an angel appeared to him, saying, "Your prayers have been heard. I'm here to help you and to give you understanding. I would have been here sooner, but I got hung up between here and heaven. The demonic entity overseeing the region of Persia intercepted me, and a battle followed that was so intense that Michael the archangel had to come to set me free (Daniel 10:13).

According to this vignette, we understand that there are principalities—demonic entities over given regions of the world. Certain civilizations and cultures both historically and presently seem to be more oppressive and

darker than others because, evidently, the demonic forces overseeing them are particularly potent.

Ephesians 6:12 (b)
. . . against powers . . .

Whereas "principalities" speak of territories or regions, "powers" speak of the demonic forces that keep people in bondage.

For eighteen years, she was unable to lift herself up. But when Jesus called her to Him and said, "Woman, thou art loosed of this infirmity," He laid His hands on her, and immediately she straightened up (see Luke 13:11).

If we fail to see that there are powers that cause people to be doubled over or bowed down in bondage, we're going to fight the wrong battle. We can take people through hundreds of hours of counseling—but if we don't deal with the real issue of principalities and powers, they'll never be truly set free.

Ephesians 6:12 (c)
. . . against the rulers of the darkness of this world . . .

This speaks of the demonic forces that oversee the leaders in any given society—and provides the only explanation for the darkness that seems to increasingly permeate the world.

Ephesians 6:12 (d)
. . . against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Newer translations render this verse correctly as "against spiritual wickedness in *heavenly* places"—which speaks of the arena of mysticism. People can seem so heavenly as they look into a candle and proclaim they are light. But the New Age rap is nothing other than the age-old lie from the Garden of Eden. "Eat this fruit, Eve," Satan said. "Your eyes will be opened. (You'll experience enlightenment). You'll be like God. (You'll assume

divinity). You'll never die." (You'll be reincarnated). Sound familiar? (see Genesis 3:4, 5)

Ephesians 6:13 (a)
Wherefore . . .

While we need to be sober, we need not be scared because look what we've been given to combat Satan's attacks.

Ephesians 6:13 (b)
. . . take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Regardless of where you live, what school you attend, or who occupies the White House, you can stand. You can be strong because you've been given the perfect defense. Rather than feeling sorry for himself, Paul must have looked carefully at the guard to whom he was chained, using his armor as a vivid analogy.

Ephesians 6:14 (a)
Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth . . .

Loins speak of the personal area of one's life. The private life of a spiritual man is surrounded by truth. He will do well who determines to put away lying.

In the day he should have been in battle, David took off his armor, got involved with Bathsheba, killed her husband, and tried to cover it up. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven," he wrote a year later, "whose sin is covered. For when I kept silent, my bones waxed old. Day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me. My moisture was turned to the drought of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin unto Thee. Mine iniquity I hid not" (see Psalm 32).

In the Christian walk, the safest place to be is on the front lines of the battle. At age fifty, David thought he deserved some rest and relaxation. Big

mistake. He left the front lines, got tangled up in sin, and lived a lie. The only way to stand is to have your loins—the secret part of you—supported by and bound up in truth.

Ephesians 6:14 (b)
. . . and having on the breastplate of righteousness.

Righteousness means doing what's right. A lot of people have sad hearts, hard hearts, broken hearts because they have failed to put on the breastplate of righteousness. There's such a wonderful freedom and liberty that comes from knowing you're not intentionally doing things that aren't right, and that your heart is protected by righteousness.

Does this mean your heart will never feel convicted?

No.

But it does mean your heart will never feel condemned. Our own hearts can condemn us (1 John 3:20). Satan can condemn us (Revelation 12:10). We can, however, recognize the difference between conviction and condemnation because condemnation causes us to run away from God, while conviction draws us toward God. Condemnation says, "What's the use?" and causes us to stop praying, to stop going to church, to stop reading the Word. Conviction, on the other hand, says "You can be forgiven," and draws us back to the Word, back into fellowship, back to the Lord.

Ephesians 6:15
And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

Having my feet shod with the gospel of peace means I don't walk *on* people, but I get to share *with* people. The word "gospel" means "good news." Therefore, as I walk through my day, it is my privilege say to those in my path, "Good news! The Lord loves you. He knows what you're going through. He can set you free."

Ephesians 6:16 (a)
Above all . . .

"Above all" does not mean "most importantly." It literally means "covering all."

Ephesians 6:16 (b)

. . . taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

"Where in the world did that terrible, ugly thought come from?" we sometimes ask ourselves. It didn't come from the world. It's a fiery dart launched from hell. You might be in church, in prayer, or doing something very noble, when—boom—a fiery dart aflame with lust or gossip, cynicism or anger enters your mind. The only protection for this kind of assault is the shield of faith. . . .

When Roman soldiers went into battle, their enemies would not only shoot fiery arrows directly at them, but would launch them into the air above them. So what did the Romans do? The front row would hold their four-foot-by-two-foot shields in front of them side by side to form a protective wall. The remaining soldiers held their shields over their heads—"above all"—forming a roof of protection.

What are you to do when you're being barraged with the fiery darts of lust, cynicism, envy, anger, or gossip? Do what Paul told his young protigie Timothy to do: "Run from them, and follow after faith, righteousness, charity, and peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (see 2 Timothy 2:22). In other words, run from sin and take cover under the shield of faith with your brothers.

Come into the congregation. Come to prayer meeting. Come to Bible study. Corporate worship, study, and prayer form a covering that is not found individually. Many a person has fled a particular lust only to encounter a worse one because he didn't run to the congregation of them who follow after faith and righteousness, love, peace, and purity. When you're hit with fiery darts, gang, get to church. Run as fast as you can to those who will provide a shield of covering for you.

Ephesians 6:17 (a)

And take the helmet of salvation . . .

Paul defines the helmet of salvation as the hope of the coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:8). I'll become greatly distressed as I see the world and culture collapsing around me unless the blessed hope of the coming of Jesus Christ is constantly on my mind. I am thoroughly convinced His coming is very close. So was C. H. Spurgeon. So was Martin Luther. So was Augustine. So was Paul. So was Peter. All were great men who lived their lives anticipating and looking for the coming of Jesus Christ. Put me in their company any day! The great saints of history all lived in the anticipation that Jesus would come shortly. I will live until the day I die looking for and believing in the hope, the blessed hope of Jesus appearing and calling me home. That's the helmet of my salvation.

Ephesians 6:17 (b)
. . . and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Machaira, the Greek word translated "sword," refers not to a big battle sword, but to a small dagger for use in hand-to-hand combat. *Rhema,* the Greek word translated "word," refers not to the Bible, but to an exact spoken word. Therefore, the idea here is that you'll have just the right word for the right person at the right time. As you study and meditate upon the full counsel of the written Word of God—the *rhema* word—the precise word—will come to you the moment you need to do exacting "surgery" regarding any specific situation.

Ephesians 6:18
Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

If you can't engage in hand-to-hand combat, if you can't give an exacting word because your kids have moved away or your neighbor is no longer speaking to you, you can still go to them in prayer. One of the neat things about prayer is that I can visit missionaries all over the world. I can pray

blessing upon them in the Spirit. I can join with what they're doing. I can stand by them by using the long-range artillery of prayer. So, too, even if you're separated by physical or emotional distance, you can speak exacting words to the Lord through prayer on behalf of your family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and fellow students.



For topical study of Ephesians 6:18 entitled "Praying in the Spirit," turn to page 1267.

Ephesians 6:19

And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.

If I were Paul, I'm afraid I would have said, "As for me, pray that the doors of this prison might open so that I could get out of here. I'm tired of the dungeon. I'm tired of being chained to the soldier. I'm tired of my pain." But Paul didn't say that. He simply said, "Pray that I might be bold in sharing the gospel."

Ephesians 6:20

For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

"I'm right where I should be, here in the dungeon," said Paul. "I'm thrilled to be here. After all, I've got a captive audience!" That's what it means to be strong in the Lord.

Ephesians 6:21, 22

But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts.

“Don’t feel sorry for me,” said Paul. “My friend Tychicus will tell you I’m doing well.”

Ephesians 6:23, 24

Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.

The way to be strong is to wear the armor. I know some who almost physically put on the armor of God every morning. “I’m going to be conscious of truth in my inner life today,” they say. “And I’m going to make sure my heart is right. I’m going to tell everyone I meet today something of the Good News of the gospel. And should I be barraged with fiery darts, I’ll run to the protection of the congregation. I’ll be consciously looking for the Lord’s return today. And I’ll carry my Bible with me in order that I might meditate upon it in order to have an exacting word for someone in need.”

While all of that is wonderful for some, I have found that the majority of us are more like my son Benjamin. . . .

When Benjamin was in first grade, he was in such a hurry to get out the door and off to school in the morning, he thought he couldn’t be bothered with getting dressed. His solution—until we told him otherwise—was to go to bed wearing the clothes he would wear the next day.

Maybe, like me, you find it overwhelming to go through the practice of putting on your armor a piece at a time. I suggest you do something a whole lot simpler: Just put on Jesus.

- He is the Truth (John 14:6).
- He is our Breastplate of Righteousness (Romans 13:14).
- He guides our feet in peace (Luke 1:79).
- He is our Shield of Faith (Hebrews 12:2).
- He is the Captain of our Salvation (Hebrews 2:10).

• He is the Word Made Flesh (John 1:14).

It’s all wrapped up in Him.

PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT
A Topical Study of
EPHESIANS 6:18

The fact that the disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray," intrigues me—for there is no record of them ever saying, "Lord, teach us to preach," or, "Teach us to cast out demons," or, "Lord, teach us to work miracles," or, "Teach us to heal people."

Why would they only ask Jesus to teach them to pray? I believe it's because, after observing Him, following Him, and living with Him, they understood that the power behind His preaching, behind His ability to overcome demonic entities, behind the miracles He worked so beautifully, indeed behind everything that happened through Him lay singularly in His prayer life.

They observed Him slip away to pray before the break of day. They knew that whether they were struggling on the Sea of Galilee or sleeping in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was praying with intensity and consistency. Therefore, I suggest His disciples figured out early on that the key to everything Jesus did could be traced to the way He prayed. That is why they came to Him that day, saying, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Most of us understand the principle of the primacy of prayer—that prayer is to be a priority in our lives, and that it is vital to our walk. Yet, for many of us, prayer is little more than an obligation and all too often a burden. We know we should pray. We agree that there's power in prayer. But for many of us, prayer is a chore.

That's not the way prayer was meant to be. I suggest that the reason prayer has become no more than a duty is because we fail to comprehend three words in the text before us: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication *in the Spirit*. . . ."

Following are three applications connected to these all-important words.

A Theological Application

How can we who are sinful approach a holy God? Only through the Son. You see, if, as an Old Testament believer, you wanted to approach Jehovah, you would bring a lamb to the tabernacle, where it would be thoroughly and carefully inspected. Only if the priest found the lamb to be spotless and without blemish could you go into the tabernacle and commune with God.

So, too, we approach the Father not through a little lamb, but through the spotless Lamb of God. I come boldly before the Father, talk things over with the Father, receive help from the Father not because I am flawless, not because I am faultless, but because the Lamb is spotless, because Jesus is perfect.

We come to the Father through the Son by the Spirit—for if the Spirit didn't draw us, we'd never pray at all. "In me dwells no good thing," Paul declares (see Romans 7:18). That includes even the inclination to pray in more than a self-serving, superficial way. To pray in the Spirit means I come to the Father through the Son as the Spirit draws me.

A Pentecostal Application

Secondly, to pray in the Spirit refers ultimately to the Day of Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in the Upper Room, they began to pray in other tongues (Acts 2:4).

What does it mean to pray with other tongues? It means to pray with words, phrases, and—as Romans 8 indicates—with groanings that we have never learned, and that we don't understand intellectually.

> *For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 14:14

What is the benefit of "unfruitful" understanding? Simply this: We are commanded to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17), yet I cannot pray continually with my understanding. When I'm talking on the phone, driving a car, or shooting hoops, my mind is engaged in what I'm doing. But I can always pray in the Spirit—even while I'm preaching this sermon—because rather than using my mind to think about sentence structure and syntax, grammar and vocabulary, it's my heart that's praying.

I'm not on a tongues-speaking kick—but I do understand the validity of praying in the Spirit. There are so many situations about which I simply don't know how to pray intellectually. But I can pray in a prayer language and know I'm praying in perfect harmony with the Spirit. As I do, my own faith is strengthened (1 Corinthians 14:4; Jude 20). Who can pray in the Spirit? Anyone who desires to move in that dynamic, for Paul said, "I would that you all spake in tongues" (see 1 Corinthians 14:5).

A Transcendental Application

To pray in the Spirit carries with it a transcendental application. I'm not referring to the transcendental meditation of the '60s, or to the transcendentalists who gathered at Walden Pond with Thoreau, Emerson, and the boys. The word "transcendent" simply means "above"—a fitting description of praying in the Spirit, for when you engage in that kind of prayer, you transcend the limitations of the physical realm and move into the spiritual realm.

> Warring against the nation of Israel, the king of Syria had cleverly set an ambush on the road he knew the king of Israel would travel. Just as the king of Israel was about to unknowingly walk into it, a messenger approached him, saying, "Proceed no farther! A message has come from the prophet in Dothan. There's an ambush ahead. Turn back."
>
> Infuriated, the king of Syria set a second ambush. Again, as the king of Israel approached, a messenger came to him, saying, "Don't go that way. There's an ambush ahead." The king of Israel changed directions once again, leaving the king of Syria no choice but to try a third ambush—which also failed.
>
> "There's a spy in our midst," said the king of Syria.
>
> "Not so," said one of his advisors. "There is a prophet in the city of Dothan who knows everything you say."
>
> With that, the king of Syria deployed thousands of soldiers to surround the city of Dothan and capture Elisha.
>
> "We're dead!" cried Elisha's servant upon seeing the vast array of Syrian soldiers the next morning.
>
> But Elisha, knowing what it meant to pray in the Spirit, to be transcendent, simply said, "Lord, open his eyes." And when Gehazi's eyes were opened, he saw that surrounding the Syrians were tens of thousands of angels in fiery chariots (2 Kings 6:17).

That's what it means to pray in the Spirit. You get above and beyond your present depressing, discouraging, physical limitations—and you begin to see what's happening in the Spirit even as you pray.

Jesus was in a seemingly impossible situation. His friend, Lazarus, had died. For four days, his body had been buried and was already beginning to decay.

"Roll away the stone," said Jesus. And then He lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. Everyone else thinks the situation is impossible, but I thank Thee for what is about to happen" (see John 11:41, 42).

To pray in the Spirit means to transcend the stench and stink of death and despair. Let us quit our moaning, murmuring, and mourning and follow the example of Jesus, who said, "I see something about to happen, and I thank You, Father."

What would happen if we began to pray that way? Instead of going down a list during morning devotions, saying, "Bless Aunt Jane. Bless my dad. Bless my school teacher. Be with the president," we'd say, "Lord, I now see Your hand of blessing upon my son, and I thank You. I see provision being made for my neighbor. Thank You, Lord. I see Your Spirit speaking to my stubborn husband, or my rebellious daughter, or my hard-hearted boss. Thank You, Father."

The one who prays in the Spirit quits making speeches to God—going down a list of items to get it out of the way—and starts fellowshiping with God. His prayers slow down. His understanding opens up. His heart rejoices.

Perhaps the best example of what it means to pray in the Spirit is found in Luke 2.

Bludgeoned into submission by Rome, Israel was in bad straits. Nonetheless, a man whom tradition says was one hundred thirteen years old, upon whom Scripture says was the Holy Ghost, waited for the Messiah promised in Scripture. Day after week after month after year after decade went by, and still Simeon waited, having received revelation that he wouldn't die until his eyes had beheld Messiah.

Then came the word for which he had waited so long: "Today's the day."

No doubt Simeon shuffled as quickly as he could to the temple, expecting to hear the hoof beats of horses and the sound of soldiers marching as Messiah came with His army to set Israel free. But arriving at the temple, what did he see? Only a sixteen-year-old girl, her carpenter husband, and a baby.

Did Simeon say, "Let me get this straight. I've been hanging around for one hundred thirteen years, waiting for Messiah, anticipating the emancipation of our nation—and all I find is a *baby?* I'm out of here"?

No. He said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:29–32)

When you pray in the Spirit, believing God for a certain event or a specific situation, and the answer comes in an entirely different manner than you expected, you have a Simeon choice to make. You can either forget about praying in the Spirit and about believing God—or you can do what Simeon did. You can bless the Father.

If you choose to pray in the Spirit, I guarantee that your prayer lives will never be the same. While others are mourning and moaning, you'll be rejoicing. Where others are fearful, you'll be faithful. As others are bewildered, you'll be blessed.

May we be those who see the beauty and potency of "always praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit."

In Jesus' Name.



PHILIPPIANS

Background to Philippians

His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely.
Song of Solomon 5:16

What a wonderful description of our Lord, our Hero, Jesus Christ—for not only is He altogether lovely, He is simply All Together. He is at once:

- The Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5)
- And the Lamb of God (John 1:29),

- The One who brings a sword (Matthew 10:34)
- And the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6),

- The Man of Sorrows (Isaiah 53:3)
- And the Fullness of Joy (Psalm 16:11).

Truly, Jesus is the Man of Sorrows in order that He might identify with us, but also the Fullness of Joy that He might be attractive to us. There was something so radiant and full of joy about Jesus that people flocked around Him and listened to Him. Labeled a glutton and a winebibber by His enemies (Matthew 11:19), He was, in the best sense of the word, the Life of the party. "These things have I spoken unto you," He said, "that My joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full" (see John 15:11).

Christianity is to be a joyful religion—a relationship that experiences Jesus in such a way that there is, in fact, joy unspeakable. The idea that true spirituality is to be equated with misery is an idea completely contrary to Scripture, for truly, the nature of Jesus was such that people loved to be around Him. Thus, there should be a contagious joy within us.

Certainly such was the case with Paul, for in the four short chapters of his epistle to the Philippians, the word "joy" or "rejoicing" appears nineteen times—which is especially interesting in light of the fact that Paul penned his

epistle from a Roman prison. Following the legal nightmare spoken of in Acts 21–28, Paul—chained to a guard—was awaiting trial, not knowing whether he would be befriended or beheaded by Caesar. If there was ever one who would be justified in writing a depressing and discouraging letter, it would be Paul. However, Paul took up pen and papyrus to do just the opposite, for Philippians is commonly known as "The Epistle of Joy." And if we grasp the basic message of Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, we, too, will be free to be joyful in Jesus—in spite of our external circumstances.

I am convinced that the joy Paul wrote about, the joy he lived out, was based not in his heart, but in his mind; not on how he felt, but on how he thought. The saying is true: Your attitude does, indeed, affect your altitude. How you think affects how you feel. And this epistle drives that point home: Fifteen times Paul talks about thinking, and ten times about remembering.

One of the most important components in understanding joyful, successful Christianity is this: You cannot change your heart—but you can change your mind. Conversely, God can change your heart, but He won't change your mind. Therefore, if I choose to change the way I think about a given situation, God will change my heart to follow suit. But if I do not choose to change my thoughts, God will not change my heart. That is why the wisest man on the face of the earth literally said, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" (see Proverbs 23:7).

When people say, "I'm so depressed, so discouraged, so distraught," the only workable solution we can offer them is to tell them to change the way they think, for as they do, God will work in their hearts in due season. Even though he was in prison, Paul could rejoice and tell us to do so as well, for he was thinking clearly, singularly, rightly.

The four chapters of Philippians present four states of the mind. . . .

- Chapter 1 deals with a single mind.
- Chapter 2 deals with a submitted mind.
- Chapter 3 deals with a simple mind.
- Chapter 4 deals with a settled mind.

I believe if you take the time to study this epistle through, pray it in, and work it out, like Paul, you will be one who rejoices regardless of the trial facing you, the prison walls around you, or the guard chained to you.

PHILIPPIANS

Philippians 1:1 (a)

Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi . . .

Philippi was a city in present-day Greece.

Philippians 1:1 (b)

. . . with the bishops . . .

"Bishop," "elder," and "pastor" are all interchangeable terms in the New Testament. *Episkopos,* or "bishop," describes the ministry as that of overseeing. *Presbuteros,* or "elder," describes the man as one who is mature. *Poimen,* or "pastor," describes the method as one who feeds the flock.

Philippians 1:1 (c)

. . . and deacons.

Deacons are those who serve in practical ways, as seen in those who served tables in Acts 6.

Philippians 1:2–5

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.

Paul's initial path to Philippi was far from predictable. Perhaps you remember the story. . . .

Beginning his second missionary journey, Paul's plan was to go up into Asia. Stopping in Derbe and in Lystra, two small towns in present-day Turkey, he picked up Timothy—a young brother in the Lord who would

become his protégé—and began to journey towards Asia. But there was a problem. Paul says in Acts 16 that every time they tried to go into Asia, "the Spirit forbade us" (see Acts 16:6). Doors slammed shut in his face. Unable to follow through with his plan, Paul backtracked until finally, at Troas—on the shores of the Aegean Sea—he was stuck.

The psalmist was right when he said, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD" (Psalm 37:23a). Equally true, dear brothers and sisters, is this: The *stops* of a good man are ordered by the Lord as well. The Lord was stopping Paul from going into Asia because He had a different destination for Paul. It would do us well to tell ourselves and remind one another that if things don't work out, come through, or open up in the way we want—the failure for them to do so is in itself a clear answer—that stops are as valid as steps.

> *"Honey, come here," said the mother to her five-year-old daughter as cheerily as she could. Fido the family dog had died, and she didn't know the best way to break the news.*
>
> *"Here, have some milk and cookies," she stalled.*
>
> *Finally, able to put it off no longer, the worried mother said, "Honey, Fido died. And God took him to heaven"—to which her daughter replied, "What does God want a dead dog for?!"*

That's just like us! We wonder what rationale we can give to someone when God doesn't answer the way we believed or prayed He would. Instead, we should forget the rationale; forget the sugar coating. God closed the door because He sees things we don't and knows things we can't.

Paul was in just such a spot. With his back to the sea, he wondered what to do. And then he had a vision in which he saw a Macedonian man saying, "Come over and help us" (Acts 16:9).

"That's it!" Paul must have said. "Here I was trying to go into Asia—but now I see the Lord has an entirely different plan for me. He wants me to go to Europe." So he sailed across the Aegean, and when he got to the other side, I'm sure Paul expected to find the Macedonian man he saw in his vision. Instead, he found a group of ladies gathered by the riverbank to pray. Again,

the Lord's plan was different from Paul's—for it was when Paul shared the gospel with this group of ladies that the Philippian church was born.

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Ten years passed since the day Paul first came across Lydia and the rest of the women praying by the riverbank. And here, in a Roman prison, thinking about what the Lord had done in and through them, Paul's heart is filled with confidence concerning the Philippian church. I believe that if Paul were alive today, he would exhibit the same confidence. Oh, I am aware of those who say, "What's wrong with the church? Why isn't the church on fire?"

But to those who say there needs to be revival, I say, "Don't you see it?" To those who call for radical renewal, I say, "Don't you get it? Look around and see what God is doing. It will blow your mind. It will warm your heart. It will cause you to applaud the Father for His faithfulness and goodness. What He's done for us personally and corporately blows me away totally."

Why is it the tendency among so many Christians to think that the Lord is always asking for more, more, more—that if they pray one hour, they should have prayed two; that if they witnessed to three people this month, they should have witnessed to four? It's my conviction that many, many, many Christians expect more out of themselves than God ever does.

How quick we are to beat up ourselves and other Christians. Yet if we would only open our eyes and see what the Lord is doing in the person sitting right next to us, we'd see a miracle—for the fact that God would mature and develop, build and use people like us is nothing short of miraculous. Like Paul, I thank God upon every remembrance of you. He's doing an awesome work in your lives. He's taking you through deep waters and tough times—and you're coming out the other side stronger than ever.

"Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," Jesus said (see Luke 12:32). He's pleased with you. He's done a great and marvelous work through you. And I'm confident that He who began

a good work in you shall complete it until the day of Christ Jesus—when He comes back to take us all to heaven.

Philippians 1:7 (a)

Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart . . .

If we were honest, to many of the people with whom we're linked, we would have to say, "You're on my nerves." Not Paul. He said, "You're on my heart."

Philippians 1:7 (b)

. . . inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.

Paul is in prison. He could have been pouting. He could have been pining. But, instead, he is "penning"—putting pen to papyrus to write a love letter to the Philippians.

Philippians 1:8

For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

Rather than referring to the heart, Paul's culture referred to the intestines as the seat of deepest emotions. "I long for you greatly," said Paul, "not just superficially, but deep within me."

What gave Paul this kind of love? What caused him to pen this epistle rather than pout about his own situation? I believe it was because Paul utilized his prison time to pray. He cared about the Philippians because he prayed for them.

Who's on your nerves? Who's robbing you of joy? Maybe it's your boss or husband, a coach or teacher, a colleague or neighbor. Pray for them, for as you do, a couple of things will happen: First, because God answers prayer, they'll change. Second, and much more importantly, you'll begin to change. . . .

In Exodus 28, we read that on the ephod, the sacred vestment, the high priest wore a breastplate. And upon the breastplate were gems representing each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Thus, the people of Israel—those who were often stubborn, backslidden, unappreciative, and rebellious—were to be as gems on the heart of the high priest.

But that's only half the story. You see, inscribed on the shoulders of the high priest's ephod were the names of the tribes (Exodus 28:21). In other words, the high priest could not carry the gemstones of the tribes on his heart if the names of the tribes were not on his shoulders. Spiritually, the shoulder speaks of bearing burdens. Thus, as the high priest bore the bur den of intercessory prayer for the people, he would experience a change in his heart toward the people. He would view them not as dirt clods or pieces of coal—but as gems.

Gang, pray for the people who bug you. Pray God's blessing upon them. Pray for God's work to be flowing through them. Pray for good things to happen to them. Hold them up on the shoulders of intercession, and you will find that they will become gems in your heart. You cannot be angry or bitter toward someone for whom you're praying. That's why prayer is so important —not only because others will change, but because we ourselves will not be imprisoned by bitterness.

Philippians 1:9 (a)
And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more . . .

After patting them on the back, Paul says to the Philippians, "My prayer is that your love may abound more and more." Paul's was not a "sloppy *agape*"—where anything and everything was fine with him. No, he says, "I want you to do *better.*" How? Read on.

Philippians 1:9 (b), 10
. . . in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till

the day of Christ . . .

How will our love grow? Not by fault-finding, not by "sin sniffing," but by "excellence approving." That is, we grow by saying, "I can glean from that ministry, book, teacher, parent—from anyone who models any aspect of the nature of Christ, imperfect though they may be."

Philippians 1:11
Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

> When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege.
>
> Deuteronomy 20:19

"In besieging a city," God said, "be careful your axes don't fly indiscriminately, for you will rob yourself of fruit which could have nourished you."

So, too, Paul says, "Although there's a very real war in which you're involved, be very careful that in your battle mentality you don't start chopping this person, that group, or the other ministry. Don't pick on them; pick that which is helpful from them as fruit that can be used for your own growth."

Philippians 1:12
But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.

Just as God used a sling in David's hand, a pitcher in Gideon's hand, and a rod in the hand of Moses, He used chains on Paul's hands. That's not surprising, for chains are what open the door to speak to people who would

not otherwise give us the time of day. You see, it's when a wife hangs in there with her difficult husband; it's when an employee refuses to talk behind his boss's back; it's when a high-schooler willingly submits to his parents that people take note, thereby opening opportunity for the wife, the employee, the high-schooler to share the reason why.

I'm convinced that the troubles, challenges, and problems we face are custom-designed to do one thing: to allow us to draw others *to* Jesus Christ and to encourage them *in* Jesus Christ.

"But my burden is too heavy," you say.

Listen, God will not tempt you above what you are able (1 Corinthians 10:13). God doesn't play favorites—and if He has put you in a certain imprisonment, it's because He has prepared you for it and given you everything you'll need to go through it.

Philippians 1:13

So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places.

"My plan was to go to Rome," Paul said, "but God had a better idea. He brought Rome to me in the form of the soldiers chained to me round the clock. Every six hours, a different one comes on duty—and they're all getting saved! Members of the Praetorian Guard, they return to the palace, where they influence the very heart of the Roman system."

Philippians 1:14

And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

"In addition to the Roman soldiers who are getting saved, now that I'm no longer with you, others in Philippi are filling in and speaking out for the gospel," said Paul.

That's the way it's supposed to be, gang. Whatever your arena of ministry, would to God there would be people who would step up and even take your ministry a notch higher in your absence.

Philippians 1:15 (a)

Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife . . .

"While some are preaching the gospel in my absence, others are exploiting the situation," said Paul, most likely referring to those who were preaching the rules and regulations of legalism.

Philippians 1:15 (b), 16

. . . and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds.

Since the word "contention" means "to canvass politically"—as when a candidate shakes hands in order to win votes—Paul is saying some preach Christ to increase their own influence.

Philippians 1:17, 18

But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

"Even if some are preaching Christ from selfish motives, I rejoice anyway," says Paul, "because Christ is being talked about." What radical thinking!

Philippians 1:19, 20

For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

Christ was magnified through Paul's difficulty. "Why does Christ have to be magnified?" you ask. "Isn't He big enough already?"

Think with me. . . .

Our sun is so big that, if hollowed out, it could hold 1,300,000 earths. The sun, however, is dwarfed by the star Antares, which could hold sixty-four suns. But Antares is a pipsqueak compared to Hercules, which could hold one hundred million Antares. Yet Hercules is a speck compared to Epsilon, the largest known star, which could hold three million Hercules.

These objects are *huge,* folks!

Why then, do they seem so small when we look at them in the night sky?

Because we are so far away.

So we use a telescope to magnify them and bring them closer to us.

People are far away from Jesus. What will make Him clear to them? Seeing Him walk with us and provide for us through the telescope of our difficulties. If this be true—if Christ is magnified in our hard times, the most logical thing for us to do in such times is to do what Paul did: rejoice.

Philippians 1:21
For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

"For me to live is wealth, and to die is to leave it behind for my kids to fight over," some say.

"For me to live is pleasure, and to die is nothingness," others declare.

"For me to live is fame, and to die is to leave my mark," boast others.

There are three pyramids at Gaza, which the Pharaohs spent multiplied millions of dollars and multiplied millions of man-hours to erect in order that no one would forget them. Yet although the pyramids still stand, not one of us can name the men they were supposed to immortalize.

"For me to live is Christ," said Paul. "And to die is even better, for then I'll be with Him." This is the single mind we need, saints, if we're to think properly and live joyfully. Mr. Businessman, Mr. Athlete, anything else is

going to be elusive and unsatisfying. Anything else will leave you on the short end of the stick. The only way to rejoice through life, to be happy about life, to be full of joy in life is to say, "My identity lies solely in Jesus."

Philippians 1:22–26

But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.

"Although I want to go to heaven," says Paul, "I know it's important that I continue here on earth, sharing the gospel with you."

Philippians 1:27

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.

"Whether I am set free and am able to come and see you again, or whether I remain in prison, I want to hear you are standing together in the Lord," says Paul.

Philippians 1:28

And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.

If you are being attacked, it's proof that the Enemy sees you as a worthy target, proof that you're making an impact.

Philippians 1:29

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.

Not only do the Enemy's attacks provide proof of our salvation, but a privilege for us to suffer for Christ. Jesus did so much for us and cares so much about us that the attacks of the Enemy provide rare opportunities in which we can show our allegiance to Him and our affection toward Him.

Philippians 1:30

Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

Thirdly, in addition to providing proof and a privilege, hard times and the Enemy's attacks are part of a process to make us more like Jesus. The Greek word translated "conflict" is *agon,* from which we get our word "agony."

There's no way to be deep in the Lord without going through some difficulties for the Lord. There's just no other way. So Paul says, "Don't be blown away; don't be taken aback; don't fall down because you're going through attacks and difficulties. They're proof that you're on target; they provide a privilege for you to suffer; and they're part of a process you must go through even as you see me go through it."

Even in hard times, even under the Enemy's attack, even throughout difficult days, we're to have a single mind: that to live is Christ, knowing that whatever comes our way will be used by Him for our good and for His glory.



2 In chapter 2, as he talks about Jesus willingly submitting Himself to the plan of His Father, Paul tells us not only are we to have a single mind, but a *submitted* mind. . . .

Philippians 2:1, 2

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,

fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

The Holy Spirit instructed our brother Paul to write these words: "If Christ has been good to you, if He's been there for you, if He's stood by you, fulfill my joy by being likeminded, of one accord"—surely a revelation of the heart of our Lord, the heart of our Father.

When my children were younger, nothing delighted me more than to pull into my driveway and see my teenage son, Peter-John, shooting hoops with his little brother, Benjamin. Even if they hadn't mowed the lawn or picked up the toys, love covers a multitude of sins! So, too, when our heavenly Father sees His children having one mind, being of one accord, loving one another, how it must bless Him.

"Fulfill my joy," Paul says, revealing the heart of our Lord, "by being of one accord." How does this happen? Read on.

Philippians 2:3 (a)
Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory . . .

There at the Pool of Bethesda, when the water was supposedly "stirred" by an angel, the first person in the pool would supposedly be healed. So there he sat month after year after decade—trying to win the competition, trying to win the prize. Suddenly, there stood a Man before him, saying, "Do you want to be healed?"

"I can't," he said. "I have no one to help me into the water."

"Take up your bed," Jesus replied, as though He were saying, "Let's not stick around here in the pool of competition, where people are striving to move up or to get ahead" (see John 5:8).

Let nothing be done through strife. Let nothing be done for vainglory. I'm sorry to say that much of the church has been infected and motivated by competition. It ought not to be. "Be of one mind, of one accord," said Paul.

Not this church against that one, or this group versus the other one. We're all one in Christ."

Philippians 2:3 (b)

. . . but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

This is the key: Let each one of you esteem others as being better than yourself. How does that happen? By simply realizing that every single person around you, that every single person you meet is better than you in some way or at some thing. And once we look into their lives and explore who they are, we must conclude, "It's a privilege to know you. I have no right to look down on you. You're better than me."

My natural, carnal mind doesn't work this way. My carnal mind wants to find fault with the person next to me so I can feel better about myself. But Paul says just the opposite: go around school tomorrow and look at every other student as being better than you—and treat them accordingly.

Gang, as we begin to develop the mind-set that we're privileged to be with everyone around us, the result will be joy. But it can't be done apart from our dependence upon the Lord day by day, moment by moment. It's a challenge, and yet it's something we can choose to do.

Philippians 2:4

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

I believe verse 4 is really the key to verse 3. I will esteem others as better than myself to the degree that I listen to their stories and explore who they are—for if we knew the secret hurts and pains and suffering of even our worst enemy, we would find all of our animosity evaporating. If we looked into people instead of down on people, we would be filled with compassion for people.

Philippians 2:5 (a)

Let this mind be in you . . .

Again, notice over and over again, the emphasis in this epistle is not on how we feel, but on how we think.

Philippians 2:5 (b)
. . . which was also in Christ Jesus.

Now we come to holy ground. The following section of Scripture is one of the most profound, one of the most theologically important sections in all of the New Testament.

Philippians 2:6
Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.

"I and *my* Father are one," Jesus said (John 10:30). "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," He declared (John 14:9). Yet He wasn't claiming something He had no right to claim. It wasn't robbery for Jesus to claim equality with the Father.

Philippians 2:7 (a)
But made himself of no reputation . . .

This phrase in Greek is *kenoo,* or, literally, "he emptied himself." Jesus emptied Himself. Of what? Of His divinity? No. When Jesus came as a Man, He was still divine. Then of what did He empty Himself? He emptied Himself of His divine powers.

The implications of the "doctrine of kenosis" are huge because this means that everything Jesus did—the miracles He ministered, the prayers He prayed, the teachings He gave—were not done in His own power. Jesus healed and prayed and taught through the power of the Holy Spirit as He followed the Father's directives.

Because I didn't know this for probably twenty-plus years, when I read that Jesus walked on water, I thought, Big deal. He's Jesus; *when I read that He overcame temptation, I thought,* Big deal. He's

Jesus; *when I read that He spent the night in prayer, I thought,* Big deal. He's Jesus. *Thus, the miracles and stories of the Gospels were irrelevant to me as far as they related to being an example or model for me.*

I didn't understand *kenosis.* I didn't grasp Philippians 2. I didn't comprehend that when Jesus came to earth, He emptied Himself of His divine abilities—which means everything Jesus did, He did as a man just like me. Before He did anything, Jesus had to be obedient to the Father, to pray, to put Himself on the line, to be empowered by the Spirit—or nothing would happen. That's why He said, "Of my own self, I can do nothing" (see John 5:30)—and neither can you.

When a man who is serious about loving and serving God understands the *kenosis* of Philippians 2, he'll never look at Jesus the same way. He'll see that Jesus' life is truly a model for anyone willing to be directed by the Father and empowered by the Spirit.

Philippians 2:7 (b)

. . . and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.

Kenosis, tucked away in Philippians 2, is a doctrine of gigantic import as it relates to joy. This is the mind that's to be in us—where we empty ourselves of our rights, where we became servants, or, literally, slaves.

How do you know if you're a servant? There's a very simple test: You'll know if you're a servant by how you react when people treat you like one. All of us like to think of ourselves as servants. "I will serve You because I love You . . ." we sing. But when someone treats me like a servant, I get offended.

Slaves are not noticed. Slaves are not thanked. Slaves are not invited to dinner. No one compliments them. No one applauds them. They're expected to do their work and not be seen. And that is the mind that is to be in me.

Why would anyone want to have such a mind? Read on.

Philippians 2:8

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Although Jesus was filled with the Spirit from birth, He was not empowered by the Spirit until, through His baptism, He said, "I am dying to Myself. Your will be done, Father."

Because Old Testament Scriptures teach that every single sin must be atoned for, it is no wonder Jesus had to be slain before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). Jesus did not go to the Cross simply for a few hours one April afternoon in A.D. 32. No, when He submitted Himself to the Father's plan, a price was paid that we cannot understand until we see Him. Then, with tears flowing down our cheeks and noses flattened as we fall on our faces, we'll say, "Truly, Thou art worthy" (see Revelation 4:11).

Philippians 2:9

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.

Peter put it this way: Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, and He will exalt you in due time (1 Peter 5:6). If you exalt yourself and demand your way, you will be abased. But if you humble yourself, you'll be exalted. And Jesus is the Perfect Example. God exalted Him because He humbled Himself by becoming a slave to the point of death for all humanity.

Philippians 2:10, 11

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Romans 10:9 declares that he who believes in his heart and confesses with his mouth that Jesus died for his sins and rose from the dead will be saved. Here we read that every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord. Does this mean that everyone will be saved eventually? No. There's coming a time when everyone will see Jesus and will bow before Him—but it will be too

late. "Lord, Lord," they'll say in that day, only to hear Jesus say, "Depart from Me. I never knew you" (see Matthew 7:23).

But we who have said, "I'm flawed; I've failed; and I have all kinds of problems—but Jesus is my Lord, the Son of God who died for me"—we are saved. Our place in heaven is secure forever.

Philippians 2:12 (a)

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation . . .

In addition to having a mind submitted to the will of the Father, Paul says that another key to joy is to work out your salvation. Notice he doesn't say, "Work *for* your salvation," or, "Work *on* your salvation." He says, "Work *out* your salvation." What does it mean to work out one's salvation? It's like going to the YMCA; it means you exercise it and strengthen it.

Notice also that Paul says we are to work out our *own* salvation . . .

What if Peter had said that day, "Hey, guys, look at me. I'm walking on water. You all should walk on water. Come on, guys. Get it together. Step out. Follow me. You can do it. Test your faith"?

We've all heard sermons along those lines, and I understand the intention, but they're terribly flawed. Peter walked on water not because he had faith. Peter walked on water because Jesus said, "Come." Jesus didn't tell James or John, Andrew or Bartholomew to come. The language is clear that His command was given to Peter singularly (Matthew 14).

Work out your own salvation. What's God working in your heart? What's He calling *you* to do?

In the course of a single evening, I read two outstanding books by two good Christian brothers. One said Christians should move into the city in order to minister to the multitudes. The other said Christians should move out of the city, as did the desert fathers.

Unable to reconcile the two, I was troubled until the Lord spoke to my heart, saying, "Jon, what have I called you *to do? What have I placed on* your *heart? I am the One who cared for the poor, and this brother is showing that side of Me. I'm also the One who moved to a solitary place and communed with the Father, and the other brother is showing that side. Let every brother reflect that which I have made clear to* him*."*

That is why we need each other, gang. God manifests Himself through each of us a little differently.

Philippians 2:12 (b)
. . . with fear and trembling.

"With fear and trembling" means to give some real thought to what you're doing. Work out your salvation soberly and thoughtfully.

Philippians 2:13
For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

It's God who gives us the desires and the ability to do what He wants us to do.

Although he was only seventeen years old when he had a vision of the sun, moon, and stars bowing before him, Joseph knew it spoke of a position of authority he would assume over his brothers. And sure enough, as prime minister of Egypt, his brothers did, indeed, bow before him, asking help from him (Genesis 42:6). Joseph's dream came to pass—but not before he was thrown into a pit and tossed into prison.

Here's where a lot of us err. "I have a vision," we say. "It's in me to be a mother, so why am I not married?" or, "It's in me to be a missionary, so why isn't it happening?" or, "It's in me to work with kids, so why aren't the doors opening?" Understand this, dear brother and precious sister, concerning

another man who had to go through a bunch of stuff before his vision was fulfilled: Scripture says it was not until he *patiently endured* that Abraham obtained the promise (Hebrews 6:15). You might land in a pit or two. You might go through a prison or three—but know this: God will fulfill that which He has placed in your heart if you patiently endure and don't give up.

I'm slowly but surely learning that what I really want, that what I truly desire, is His will. Why? Because I've demanded my will too many times and gotten it—only to be disappointed. Other times, I've watched the Lord work in ways I wasn't anticipating and seen that what came of it was wonderful.

Philippians 2:14
Do all things without murmurings and disputings.

A submitted mind doesn't murmur or make excuses, as the newer translations properly render the word "disputings."

As I tell my kids, "When you get good at making excuses, that's all you'll be good for."

That's why Paul says, "Don't make excuses and defend your positions. Don't murmur."

> *Murmuring was a real problem for the people of Israel. After God opened the Red Sea and crushed Pharaoh's army, the Israelites sang for a few moments, but then they started murmuring because they didn't have water to drink. When God gave them water, they murmured because they didn't have the right kind of food. And they murmured yet again when the land to which they were going seemed intimidating to them (Exodus 15, 16).*

Scripture tells us the Lord hears us even as we murmur in our tents, even when we think no one is listening (Deuteronomy 1:27). "Do all things without murmuring," says Paul. Why? Read on.

Philippians 2:15, 16 (a)

That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life . . .

If you simply choose to say, "I will not murmur or excuse my behavior; I will not defend my position or dispute my situation," you will shine as a light in the world. Try it. Next time you're in line at the grocery store, tempted to murmur, "Can you believe how long these lines are? Can you believe how cold it is? I wish I lived in Hawaii . . ." and you'll fit right in. But, instead, say, "Can you believe how good the Lord is to give us this much food? Can you believe how wonderful a summer we're going to have because of all this rain?"—and without preaching a sermon, without passing out a tract, you'll shine like a light in the darkness.

Philippians 2:16 (b)

. . . that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

Evidently, our brother Paul viewed himself as sort of a coach. He says, "I can't wait to see you guys at the judgment stand getting rewards because of the way you chose to shine like lights in the midst of a people who were always complaining and ungrateful. I coached you and you got the message."

Philippians 2:17, 18

Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.

"If I end up losing my head here in Rome"—which he eventually would —"rejoice with me. I'm happy," said Paul.

The African impala can leap ten feet high when running at full speed. But when you go to a zoo, you'll see impalas kept in areas with only a four-foot fence.

Why?
Because if it can't see where it will land, an impala won't jump.

Here, Paul is jumping at the opportunity to go to heaven. Why? Because he had seen where he would land. Caught up into the heavens, he was given a sneak preview. And what he saw there was too good for him to even articulate (2 Corinthians 12:4). Paul's mind-set was like Christ's—submitted to the will of the Father. Whether he lived or died, it didn't matter to him, for he knew right where he'd land.

Philippians 2:19 (a)
But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you . . .

Jesus is the Ultimate Example of a submitted mind. Paul, too, had a mind submitted to the will of the Father. And here Paul writes of another one who had a submitted mind: his young protégé, Timothy.

Philippians 2:19 (b)
. . . that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state.

"I'm sending Timothy to you," Paul says, "that I might find out how you're doing."

Philippians 2:20
For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state.

Paul had a lot of men around him, but only one like Timothy.

Philippians 2:21–23
For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel. Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me.

Timothy was one who didn't have an agenda of his own, one who said, "I care about the people you care about, Paul. I'm going to serve you as a son would serve his father. And I'll go if you want me to go."

When Henry III, one of the great Bavarian kings, first came into power, he was burdened by the responsibilities and demands of being king. Feeling pressure on all sides, he finally walked away from the throne and went to a monastery.

"I want to contemplate God and worship the Lord," he said upon arrival.

"Understand this, Henry," said the abbot. "The first requirement of a monk is that he be in total submission. A monk's life is not his own. Can you submit yourself to the Lord by trusting me?"

"Yes," said Henry.

"Then go back to the throne. I am instructing you to rule and serve where God planted you."

Henry did, indeed, return to the throne, becoming one of the greatest German kings of history. The inscription on his tombstone gives the reason: Henry III, the king learned to rule by being obedient.

Such a man was Timothy.

Philippians 2:24–27 (a)

But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly. Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death . . .

Epaphroditus was the man the Philippians sent to encourage and to bring financial assistance to Paul. "I'm sending him back your way," said Paul, "because he was concerned that you might be worried about his condition, having heard he had been sick."

What? Epaphroditus was sick when he was with Paul—Paul, the one whose sweatbands were used to bring healing to people; Paul, the one who laid his hands on people and they recovered; Paul, the one who was known for moving in the miraculous? Why didn't Paul heal Epaphroditus immediately?

For the same reason he didn't heal Trophimus (2 Timothy 4:20), or Timothy (1 Timothy 5:23), or even himself (2 Corinthians 12:7).

Ultimately, everyone will be healed, for by Jesus' stripes, we are all healed (Isaiah 53:5). The only question is timing. When they ask for healing, some are healed immediately; others, five years later; others, not until they get to heaven. Healing has nothing to do with a person's spirituality or faith. It has everything to do with God's sovereignty.

Three times Paul prayed for deliverance, only to hear the Lord say, "No, Paul. When you are weak, then My strength is manifested. My grace is sufficient for you" (see 2 Corinthians 12:9). Thus, I encourage those who are afflicted to follow Paul's model, to pray three times, thirty times, or three hundred times—until they receive what they're asking for, or until they have a peace in their heart that says, "This is what the Lord has for me, and I can embrace it."

Philippians 2:27 (b)

. . . but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

God healed Epaphroditus, and Paul was glad.

Philippians 2:28–30

I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.

This is a classic vignette because in it we see Paul making it easy for a homesick Epaphroditus to go home by saying, "When he gets there, honor him." Paul doesn't call Epaphroditus a wimp, a weasel, or the guy who couldn't hack it away from home. No, he calls him his brother, his companion, his fellow soldier. I like Paul's heart.



3 In chapter 1, we saw the single mind. In chapter 2, we saw the submitted mind. Here in chapter 3, we'll see the selfless mind.

Philippians 3:1 (a)
Finally, my brethren . . .

It would seem as though Paul is attempting to wrap things up when he uses the word "finally." In reality, he's only halfway done, for he'll go on for two more chapters—a typical preacher!

Philippians 3:1 (b)
. . . rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.

We are not commanded to rejoice in our circumstances, be they good or bad. No, we're to rejoice in the Lord. My circumstances may be bleak and brutal. But the Lord stands with me in those circumstances, and He will cause something good to come from them ultimately.

Philippians 3:2
Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

The Jews referred to Gentiles as dogs. Yet here Paul is telling the Philippians to beware not of Gentiles, but of those who are of the concision, or, literally, "mutilators"—Jews who would follow behind Paul and say to the Gentiles, "If you're really serious about knowing God, what Paul said is okay as a beginning point, but you need to be circumcised if you want to be truly spiritual."

There are still those today who imply that to be spiritual, one must be miserable; those who say, "If you're truly spiritual, you'll do this and not do that; you'll go here, but not there . . ."

Of them, Paul says, "Beware."

Philippians 3:3

For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

The true circumcision are not those who want to inflict pain. The truly spiritual man is one who worships God in the spirit, rejoices in Christ Jesus, and has no confidence in the flesh. True circumcision is not a mark on the flesh; it's a mark in the heart.



***For topical study of Philippians 3:1–3 entitled "True Spirituality," turn to page* 1287.**

Philippians 3:4

Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more.

"Regarding these dogs who undermine grace and boast of their external spirituality, I'll put my record against theirs any day," declares Paul.

Philippians 3:5 (a)

Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel . . .

"I was born a Jew and circumcised on the eighth day, according to the exact regulation of the law."

Philippians 3:5 (b)

. . . of the tribe of Benjamin . . .

Benjamin being the tribe of Israel's first king (1 Samuel 9:1, 2), and being the one tribe that remained loyal to the house of David when the ten northern tribes revolted under Jeroboam, Paul's lineage was admirable.

Philippians 3:5 (c)
. . . an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee.

The Pharisees, numbering only six thousand, kept the minutest detail of the law and were known for their holiness and piety.

Philippians 3:6 (a)
Concerning zeal, persecuting the church . . .

"So zealous was I about Judaism," says Paul, "that I dragged Christians out of their homes, pulled them out of their churches, and incarcerated them in order that they might be put to death." Perhaps today's equivalent of Paul would be those who shoot abortion doctors in their zeal to protect the unborn, for Paul was ready to do whatever was necessary to protect the law.

Philippians 3:6 (b)
. . . touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Inspired by the Spirit, Paul could truthfully say, "Concerning the ordinances and requirements of the law, I kept them *all*." This doesn't mean Paul was faultless internally, for Romans 7:7 tells us he coveted. But externally, concerning the outward workings of the law, Paul was blameless.

Philippians 3:7
But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

"I let go of my standing as a Pharisee, my external piety, and everything else that looked good on my spiritual résumé—for none of it mattered compared to Christ," says Paul.

Philippians 3:8 (a)

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss . . .

Paul not only says, "I *counted* all things loss," but, "I continue to *count* all things loss."

It's not enough, gang, for you and me to revel in what we once counted as loss. It's not enough to say, "Yeah, fifteen years ago, I was witnessing to people, passing out tracts, knocking on doors, sharing my faith. Yep, back in the days of the revival, that was me." If what I did fifteen years ago, or what I gave up concerning the flesh one month ago doesn't translate into present practice, it's meaningless.

Philippians 3:8 (b)

. . . for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord . . .

Why did Paul count his impeccable religious pedigree as nothing? Because what He found in Jesus was infinitely superior to what he gave up.

Philippians 3:8 (c)

. . . for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.

Jesus told an interesting story in Luke 13 . . .

> He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.
>
> Luke 13:6–9

If you are one who appears outwardly spiritual, yet you lack the fruit of love and joy, peace and longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness for

your Master's pleasure—what are you to do? Let the Vinedresser come to you; let the Holy Spirit dig around your roots and expose sin. Then let Him expel it through the "dunging" process, whereby we realize that glorying in anything we've done, any position we hold, or any credentials we've earned will keep fruit from being produced in our lives.

John the Baptist was right when he said a man cannot receive anything except it be given him from heaven (John 3:27). Whenever we think we've attained anything in our lives because of our dedication, our brilliance, or our good looks, there will be a dearth of fruitfulness in our lives.

Expose our sin, Lord. Expel our self. That way anything You want to do through us will be to Your glory.

Philippians 3:9 (a)
And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law . . .

"I let all my credentials go," said Paul, "for I see them for what they are: dung, fertilizer, pasture patties."

Philippians 3:9 (b)
. . . but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

When you become a Christian, not only did Christ Jesus come into your heart, but you were robed in Him, covered by Him, righteous through Him (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Philippians 3:10 (a)
That I may know him . . .

"In my legalistic, religious days, I knew about God theologically and intellectually," said Paul. "But now I want to know Him intimately." How does that happen? Read on.

Philippians 3:10 (b)

. . . and the power of his resurrection . . .

Jesus is not merely One who lived two thousand years ago, died, and that's the end of the story. He's a power; He's a Person; He's risen. And I will know Him intimately only through the power of His Resurrection.

Philippians 3:10 (c)
. . . and the fellowship of his sufferings . . .

When do you really know the Lord? When you realize He's alive. When do you really understand He's alive? When you go through tough times—the fellowship of suffering. When I'm cruising along on Easy Street, I don't know Jesus the way I often discover Him when I'm going through difficulty and problems, heartache or setbacks, tragedy or pain.

Here, in this book of rejoicing, Paul says, "Don't despise the difficulty, the tragedy, the tough time, the setback, the heartache—for those are the times you will understand that Jesus is truly risen. When the day is dark, the waters deep, the outlook grim—you'll see Jesus."

"Sure, I want to know the Lord," people say. "I just don't want to go through tough times. Of course I want to know His power, but I don't want to deal with the fellowship that comes through suffering."

The only way you can know the Lord intimately is through the power of His Resurrection. And the best way to experience the power of His Resurrection is through hard times.

"How many men did we throw in the fire?" asked Nebuchadnezzar.

"Three, your highness."

"Well, how is that I see four, and the fourth is like the son of God?"

So clearly did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego see Jesus in the fire of suffering that they chose to remain in the fiery furnace with Him rather than to walk free without Him (Daniel 3:26).

Philippians 3:10 (d)
. . . being made conformable unto his death.

We know the Lord by realizing He's with us in times of suffering, and by choosing to say, "Lord, I'll die to my self in order to have fellowship with You. As long as I try to protect myself, I'll not know You in the way I want to. So, Lord, I choose to conform myself to Your death. Do what You want in my life."

When Jesus started talking about the Cross, Peter's response was, "Be it far from Thee, Lord. It's not going to happen" (see Matthew 16:22).

And Peter's is a cry we utter as well. "Not the Cross," we say. "Not death, or bankruptcy, breakups, or leukemia. We want Cadillacs, miraculous healings, and holy laughter—that's our kind of Christianity, Lord."

We're just like Peter. But when, to one degree or another, we experience the fellowship of suffering, we begin to say, "I now choose death in order that I might know Jesus better."

Christians are the only people who can truly choose to rejoice and be happy when things on the outside seem so bleak because we're the only ones who know there will be a fellowship in suffering that will manifest the power of Jesus and His Resurrection, and which will, in turn, allow the intimacy with God that will make us deeply happy and truly blessed.

Philippians 3:11

If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

Paul isn't saying he hopes he goes to heaven when he dies. That's a given. Rather, he's speaking of the resurrection life—to live life here on earth through the power of Jesus' Resurrection.

Philippians 3:12

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

On the Road to Damascus, Paul was on his way to persecute Christians when he was knocked to the ground. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" said a voice from heaven.

"Who art thou, Lord?" asked Paul.

"I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. It's hard for you to kick against the goads, isn't it?"

"Lord, what would You have me to do?" Paul asked (see Acts 9:6).

And at that moment, Paul was apprehended—captivated by Jesus.

"I'm not there yet," said Paul. "I'll know I captured that for which I was captured when He calls me home."

Philippians 3:13–15 (a)

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded . . .

Some people are always looking back. They can't get over what happened to them last year, five years, or twenty years ago. "She hurt me." "He fired me." "That company misused me," they say.

Paul says just the opposite. "This is what I do: I forget that which is behind. And the same mind is to be in you."

The sin we've committed in the past will condemn us to the place of paralysis. And the good stuff we've done by His grace will puff us up to the place of pride. Thus, our only option is to do what Paul did: Forget the past. We must be those who say, "I'm not going to dwell on that. I'm not going to be tripped up by that. I'm not going to glory in that. I'm not going to be confused about that. All of that is behind me. I'm moving on."

Philippians 3:15 (b)

. . . and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

If your mind is dwelling on the past, if you're defeated because of someone else's past, God will bring it to light.

Philippians 3:16

Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

Where we have gone ahead, let's keep going.

Philippians 3:17, 18 (a)

Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping . . .

Here in his Epistle of Joy, we see Paul weeping.
Is he weeping because of the prison in which he was confined?
No.
Is he weeping because of the guards to whom he's chained?
No.
He's not weeping over his brutal situation. He's weeping over potential deception . . .

Philippians 3:18 (b)

. . . that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.

Who were these enemies of the Cross of Christ? We cannot say who they were individually, but we can see how they lived and what they taught contextually, for Paul goes on to tell us something about them.

Philippians 3:19

Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

Concerning the enemies of the Cross of Christ, the end of their lives will prove to be destruction, or, literally, "a waste."

- Their god is their belly—they live for their fleshly appetites.
- They live for their own glory—they live to make a name for themselves.
- And they mind earthly things—they live for that which is temporal.

It is very likely these men were not unlike the prosperity teachers of today—the Name It/Claim It, Health/Wealth boys.

"Deny yourself? No way!" they proclaim. "God wants everyone to be totally healthy and totally wealthy here and now."

> *"What's the key to life?" he said. "Women!" So he gathered one thousand concubines—the most beautiful women in the region—only to discover they weren't the answer.*
>
> *"Partying*—that's *the key," he decided. So he imported baboons and peacocks from Africa to entertain his guests, while he kept the wine flowing freely. But after partying for years, he found it empty.*
>
> *"Power—that's what will satisfy a man," he surmised. So he expanded the boundaries of his empire farther than those of any other nation of antiquity. But even then he felt unsatisfied.*
>
> *He studied philosophy and science—and garnered so much gold that silver was rendered worthless in his kingdom. And yet he declared it all empty.*
>
> *At last he said, "Power, prosperity, fame, partying, women, wine, and education are not the answer. The only key to life is to fear God" (see Ecclesiastes 12:13). But by then, Solomon's most productive years were lost, wasted because his god was his belly; his glorying was in his own name; he minded earthly things.*

Beware of those who try to get you focused on this life, worried about this life, caught up in this life. They're enemies of the Cross, for the Cross says, "Forget about yourself. Look toward eternity. Live for heaven."

Philippians 3:20

For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Newer versions translate the word "conversation" as "lifestyle" or "citizenship." Why? Because a person's citizenship—be he English, French, or Australian—can be readily identified through his conversation, through the way he speaks. The same is true spiritually, for Scripture declares that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). What is your conversation, your lifestyle, your citizenship? It will be revealed in the heat of battle.

After civil war had broken out between the men from Gilead and the men from Ephraim, Jephthah, leader of the Gileadites, ordered his men to seal the passes lest the Ephraimites get away.

"But how will we identify them?" asked his men. "They're our brothers."

"Tell them to say the word "river," or "shibboleth," said Jephthah.

Why?

Because the men from Ephraim could not pronounce the sound of "sh." Thus, instead of "shibboleth," they said "sibboleth"—and were immediately betrayed by their speech (Judges 12).

The same holds true for you and me. In the heat of battle, how do we talk? When the accountant says, "You're bankrupt"; when the doctor says, "It's cancer"; when your boyfriend says, "Goodbye," what do we say? Our speech, our conversation will reveal whether we're men and women who live for the material, the temporal, the earthly—or whether we are those who live for heaven singularly.

Philippians 3:21 (a)

Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body . . .

When we see Jesus, we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2). These vile bodies that are falling apart, which are prone toward sin, which give us problems in so many ways will be changed instantly. Hallelujah!

Philippians 3:21 (b)

. . . according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

Not only will our bodies be changed to be like His, but all things will be subdued, or "put in order." At last! All things will be subdued, reordered, made right.

Several years ago, a popular polling organization took a survey. According to the census, if

Michael Jordan had run for the US Senate in Illinois, he would have won by seventy percent. No one knew what he thought. No one cared where he stood. None of that mattered because, after all, he's Michael Jordan. And we want him to be our leader. Why? Because he can bounce a rubber ball filled with air and jump a few inches higher than the other guys who are also bouncing a rubber ball filled with air. And because he can jump a little higher, he can jump up and drop the rubber ball through a metal hoop.

Wow! Awesome! No wonder we want him to be our leader!

Our culture is topsy-turvy, gang—and the only answer is heaven, for in heaven people will not be abuzz about Michael Jordan—they'll be talking about Pearl Good . . .

Pearl Good cleaned houses to make enough money to be able to travel to wherever Billy Graham would be speaking, get a cheap motel room, and, unbeknownst to him, pray around the clock for the Crusade.

If you want a trading card that will be worth something in eternity, forget Michael Jordan's—get Pearl Good's!

We're all mixed-up, folks. Our society is confused. Our values are wrong. Do I despair over this? No, because everything will be made right in heaven.

- To the person complaining about cultural chaos, heaven is the answer.
- To the person who says life is unfair, heaven is the answer.
- To the Pearl Goods of the earth, heaven is the answer.

Heaven will solve every problem, answer every question, and right every wrong.

We're going to be there soon, gang—and I can't wait!

TRUE SPIRITUALITY

A Topical Study of PHILIPPIANS 3:1–3

A guest in a bed-and-breakfast outside of London, Archbishop Jonathan Kemple heard a woman robustly and repeatedly singing the hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" in the kitchen.

"Your cook must be a very spiritual lady," he said to his host.

His host chuckled a bit and said, "Not really. It must be that we're having hard-boiled eggs for breakfast.

"Oh?" said the Archbishop.

"Yes," continued the host. "If the eggs are soft-boiled, she only sings 'A Mighty Fortress' three times. But hard-boiled eggs require six."

Sometimes we do the same thing. "We're going to sing three songs before the kids are dismissed and then two more songs before the sermon," we say. But that's not what worship in the Spirit is.

The Spiritual Man Worships God in the Spirit

Paul says one of the identifying marks of the spiritual man is that he worships God in the spirit. Oftentimes at worship conferences or in books about worship, discussion ensues concerning how to get people to be more expressive in worship. However, I don't believe this should be the emphasis. I believe that since true worship is the result of affection and commitment to the Lord, no amount of physical gyrations or carnal motivations will make a difference.

> Suppose my wife, Tammy, and I weren't married. If she walked in, and though I had never met her, I went up to her, wrapped my arms around her, and started kissing her passionately—there would be a problem. I would get a slap across the face, and the ushers would come and take me away. The cops would show up, and I would have a jail ministry. Why? Because I would be trying to express affection without commitment. And that would be unacceptable.
>
> Suppose, on the other hand, I look at her and say, "Would you go out to dinner with me?" We go out. And I take her out the next day and the day after that, and we're going out all the time. As we're cultivating a relationship, our commitment grows and deepens. So after taking her out for five months, I reach out and hold her hand for the first time. Is that acceptable? Sure! Because after five months of developing a relationship, such behavior would be acceptable, understandable, appropriate.
>
> We then become more and more committed to each other—until we stand before the preacher, saying, "I'm committed to you for all of my life—for better or worse, for richer or poorer." And then it would be not only acceptable but laudable for us to be totally affectionate and intimate with each other because we would be committed to each other.

Here's the problem: Many times worship leaders try to get people to do things to express affection—but without true commitment, their efforts are little more than outward manipulation. The key to developing ever-

affectionate and demonstrative worship is to take people deeper in their knowledge and commitment to Jesus Christ. Then you can get rid of all of the circus antics and maneuvering because as people are more deeply committed *to* Him, and have a greater knowledge *of* Him, there will be in their spirits a natural affection and display of love *for* Him.

Having said that, I feel I need to say this as well. . . .

When I kissed Tammy as I walked in the door one day, I should have been prepared for my kids' reaction.

"Eeeew! Not here," they said.

That's the way kids often respond when their parents are affectionate because it's distracting to them.

The same can be true in worship. To worship in the Spirit means to be completely intimate and totally affectionate. However, there are places where greater intimacy and affection can be displayed, and there are places where it's distracting to others. Thus, to worship in the Spirit is to say, "Lord, help me to know the right place and the right time to express myself in the right way that would honor You and not distract others."

If I am causing others to say, "Eeew! What's he doing?" I am no longer worshiping in the Spirit, but I am causing my brothers and sisters to be needlessly distracted from the Lord. Worship in the Spirit requires being sensitive to Him.

The Spiritual Man Rejoices in Christ Jesus

My entire Christian experience went through a radical, wonderful adjustment when I found myself freed up to rejoice in Christ Jesus. You see, I went through a season where my joy was somewhat lacking. . . .

> Reading about how Jesus touched the leper (Mark 1:40, 41), I thought, *If I'm to be like Jesus, I must find people who are leprous, people who are being eaten up by sin, people who are falling apart —and touch them.*
>
> But then I turned a few pages and read how Jesus put His fingers in the ears of a man who was deaf and dumb, causing the man to begin to speak (Mark 7:33), and I thought, *If I'm to be like Jesus, I must find dumb people and touch them that they might hear.*
>
> But then I turned a few pages and saw Jesus feeding five thousand hungry men on a slope overlooking the Sea of Galilee (Mark 6:41). *To be like Jesus,* I thought, *I gotta feed the hungry.*
>
> But then I turned a few pages and saw Jesus blessing the little children (Mark 10:14). *If I'm to be like Jesus,* I thought, *I've got to hang out with kids—all kids, every kid—because that's what Jesus did.*
>
> But then I turned a few pages and saw Jesus forgiving the woman taken in the act of adultery (John 8:11). *That's what I'm to do,* I thought. *I must find people who are being picked on and set them free one at a time.*
>
> On and on I went until finally I found myself totally exhausted.

Great is the day when, like John the Baptist, a man says, "I am not the Christ. Behold the Lamb. It's *Him,* not me" (see John 1:20).

It is wonderfully and gloriously liberating to say, "I'm not Jesus."

Then who am I?

> I'm the leper being eaten by my own carnality. And the Lord comes to me every day and says, "I still love you. I'm here to cleanse you."

I'm the dumb one. My ears get clogged listening to the news, philosophy, and ideas of the world. Then Jesus sends a brother or a sister or a book or a radio program—and suddenly I hear Him again.

I'm the adulterer. My affections and priorities wander in all sorts of directions. Yet Jesus comes to me and says, "You've strayed from Me. But I don't condemn you. I'm here to stand by you. Go your way. Sin no more. You're free."

I'm the hungry one. And the Lord comes to me daily and nourishes me as I partake of the Bread of Life.

I'm the child of whom others say, "Don't bother with him," but of whom Jesus says, "Allow him to come to Me."

Gang, once this sinks in, you'll read the Gospels with new eyes. Instead of putting yourself in Jesus' place, you'll put yourself in the sinner's spot, where you belong, saying, "Look what *He* does. Look how good *He* is."

"Is it right to see ourselves in the place of the sinner? Aren't we commanded to be holy, as He is holy?" you ask.

John says that when we see Jesus, we shall be like Him without even trying (1 John 3:2). When I stop trying to *be* like Him and simply *like* Him—simply enjoy spending time with Him—then I become like Him. And I rejoice in Him all the more.

The Spiritual Man Has No Confidence in the Flesh

"I can't believe I did that," said a man who had stumbled badly, a tear falling down his cheek.

"I can," I said to his surprise.

You see, Paul tells us that in our flesh dwells no good thing (Romans 7:18). Therefore, if we're blown away or scandalized by a temptation to which we or someone else succumbs, it only means that we did, indeed, have confidence in our flesh.

When someone stumbles or falls, all a truly spiritual man can say is, "If it wasn't for God's grace, I would be in that same situation."

The truly spiritual man is one who realizes his weakness, but rather than mourning or moaning he says, "If anything good comes through me or from me, it comes from Christ. I'm weak, but He is wonderful. And I rejoice in Him."

True spirituality consists not in do's or don'ts, pain or piety, burdens or bondage. Paul says the spiritual man is one who worships God in the Spirit, rejoices in Christ alone, and has no confidence in his flesh.

And in that I can rejoice gladly and celebrate continually.

4 Philippians 4:1 (a)
Therefore . . .

Whenever you come to the word "therefore" in Scripture, it's wise to stop and ask what it's there for. Here at the outset of chapter 4, Paul refers to the end of chapter 3, wherein he tells us we don't have to be hopeless as we watch our culture crumble, for when Jesus returns He'll put all things in order.

Philippians 4:1 (b)

. . . my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown . . .

As was the case with Paul, the people God brings into the kingdom through our sharing with them or ministering to them will be our joy, our crown. In Daniel 12:3, we read that those who win souls are wise, for they shall shine as the stars forever. I think the shining refers to the glow radiating from the faces of people when, in heaven at last, they see those with whom they shared and for whom they prayed.

Philippians 4:1 (c)
. . . so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.

In light of the fact that the Lord's return is at hand, Paul tells the church at Philippi to stand fast, to stand confidently, to stand firmly in Him.

More and more, I'm convinced that heaven is the whole deal—just realizing that we're soon going to be there, and that we have a single job to do: to grab as many people as we can and say, "Come along with us to heaven."

I think we worry far too much about what we're doing or how we're feeling. We analyze ourselves endlessly. We scrutinize our situations continually. We ponder our circumstances tirelessly. But in reality, the joy, the crown lies in sharing with people who don't know Jesus, in praying for folks who will be cut off from Him unless they open their hearts to Him. I believe the reason Paul could talk so much about joy in this epistle—even while he was in chains—was because he was thinking about the people he knew would be in heaven with him eternally because he had shared with them personally.

Philippians 4:2
I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.

Who were Euodias and Syntyche? I believe their names indicate who they were: "You're Odious" and "Soon Touchy"! Notice, Paul doesn't say,

"Let's find out who's right and who's wrong." He simply says, "The Lord's coming is near, so there's no time for squabbling."

Biblical counseling is amazingly simple. To those enmeshed in interpersonal conflicts, we can be like Paul and say, "Even if you're technically right in any given argument, you're spiritually wrong because the Lord wants you to be forgiving and gracious and merciful."

Philippians 4:3 (a)

And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow . . .

Tradition has it that this yokefellow has been identified as the Philippian jailer Paul led to the Lord, following the miraculous earthquake that set Paul free, but threatened the jailer's life (Acts 16).

Philippians 4:3 (b)

. . . help those women which laboured with me in the gospel . . .

This is in reference to Lydia and the other women who were so instrumental in the birth of the Philippian church.

Philippians 4:3 (c)

. . . with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.

After ministering in various areas, the disciples returned to Jesus excited about what they had seen. "Lord," they said, "even the demons are subject unto us as we share in Your name. It's amazing what's happening!"

But what did Jesus say? He said, "Don't rejoice in what you've seen. Rather, rejoice that your names are written in the Book of Life" (see Luke 10:20).

We should be full of ecstasy and elated continually not because we cast out a demon or saw a healing or were used in ministry. We should be amazed constantly over one thing primarily: the fact that we're saved. Hell is real,

gang. We don't understand it. It's still sort of fuzzy to us. But Jesus knew the reality of hell, even as He knew the reality of heaven. That is why He said to His disciples, "Here's what you should be excited about: Because your name is written in the Book of Life, you're not going to hell. You're going to heaven, where you will live with Me forever."

The knowledge that we're headed for heaven should keep a smile on our faces every day of our lives. Heaven alone should keep praise flowing from our lips perpetually.

- "I don't feel good," we groan.
  Who cares? We're not going to hell!
- "I'm not appreciated at work," we cry.
  Who cares? We're going to heaven!
- "I won the lottery!" we shout.
  So what? That's nothing compared to heaven!

Philippians 4:4
Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

I can't always rejoice in my circumstances, but I can *always* rejoice in the Lord.

Philippians 4:5
Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

The idea here is to avoid extravagance. Because the Lord is here among us, and because He's coming back for us, we don't need to get all caught up in earthly things.

Philippians 4:6 (a)
Be careful for nothing . . .

The idea of "careful" means "full of care or anxiety."

Philippians 4:6 (b)

. . . but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

The way to remain in the place of rejoicing, the way to avoid being caught up in extravagance of any sort is to remain in prayer. In this context, prayer refers to communing with God, while supplication speaks of making specific requests to Him. Both are to be done with a spirit of thanksgiving for the abundance with which the Lord has *already* blessed us both materially and spiritually (Psalm 68:19).

Philippians 4:7

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

The older I get, the more I'm learning that prayer is not a monologue. It's a dialogue. I'm discovering more and more that the real need in my life is not for God to hear from me, but for me to hear from Him. And I find that as I walk, drive, or get on my knees, if I will pray a phrase or two and then just rest and be quiet, the Lord will bring specific scriptures to my mind or will write His will upon my heart concerning how I am to pray.

But if I pray sentence after paragraph after page and then say, "Okay, that wraps it up for prayer time today," I really miss it. Oh, I know that even that kind of prayer has power. Any prayer is better than no prayer. But I suggest that if you learn to pause and listen in prayer, the Lord will show you how to believe on behalf of another, and how to pray specifically concerning any given situation.

***For topical study of Philippians 4:4–7 entitled "The Key to Being Carefree," turn to page* 1294.**

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are

pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Again, the theme of Paul's epistle to the Philippians is that the key to experiencing joy in your heart is to have the right thoughts in your mind. So how are we to think? Here's how: Think on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy.

Even spiritual men and women become discouraged. You can see it in their eyes. And they wonder why. It's because they've been thinking thoughts that are not true and honest and lovely and good and pure. They stared at David Letterman before they went to bed, and they wonder why they wake up grumpy. If you are prone to depression, do not watch late-night TV. You'll wake up with a cynicism about life, a tainted twisted perspective on life. Instead, fill your mind with the goodness of God and the wealth of His Word, and, like Paul, you'll awake with a song in your soul.

Philippians 4:9 (a)

Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do . . .

I like Paul's ministry: It was "Show and Tell." Not only did he tell people what to do, but he showed them by doing it himself.

Philippians 4:9 (b)

. . . and the God of peace shall be with you.

If you think rightly, if you rejoice in the Lord continually, if you think on things that are pure and lovely, the God of peace will be with you as surely as He was with Paul.

Philippians 4:10

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.

This is in reference to the fact that the Philippians had sent Epaphroditus to Paul with a financial gift from them and news about their welfare. But because Paul was always on the move, Epaphroditus had a hard time catching up with him.

Philippians 4:11

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

This is radical, gang. If you want to be a rejoicing, happy person, listen to what Paul is saying: Contentment is learned. Because we are to learn to be content in everything, I do not believe that God uses restlessness or discontentment as a primary means of guidance. Wherever you're working now, you should learn to be content until God makes it very clear to you that He wants to move you or change your situation.



***For topical study of Philippians 4:10–13 entitled "Learning Contentment," turn to page* 1298.**

Philippians 4:12, 13

I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

"The Lord is with me," says Paul, "And I can do everything through Him —including being content in the situation I'm in." Either we believe that, or we don't. Either we'll take advantage of it, or we won't. The choice is ours.

Philippians 4:14, 15

Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church

communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.

All of the other churches Paul started and tended forgot about him. To their commendation, Paul says to the Philippians, "You remembered me. You communicated with me. You stood by me in the ministry."

Philippians 4:16
For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.

"When I was in Thessalonica," continues Paul, "you were the ones who came through for me."

Philippians 4:17
Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

There are a couple of areas I have found to be very, very difficult in the ministry. One is to point out other ministries, or TV evangelists, or teachers who are in error—whose entire ministry is amiss. Yet if a shepherd only feeds the flock, but never warns the flock about wolves, all he is doing is fattening them up for the kill (Acts 20:29–31). So as a pastor, warn I must because I care about the sheep.

A second area that is very difficult for me in ministry is to address the subject of finances because it can appear to be so self-serving. Nevertheless, Paul hits this issue head-on by saying, "It's not that I want a gift. It's that I want you to have fruit."

When the person who gave the Lord's tithe and offerings above and beyond that gets to heaven, I guarantee he's not going to say, "Phooey. I tithed faithfully. If I hadn't tithed, I could have had a new patio set. And if I had only saved that extra hundred dollars from that offering, I could have had a new barbeque." No. For the next zillion years, you'll never regret what you give to the Lord today—the tithes that are His, and the offering beyond that—for they will be fruit to your account.

The old adage is so true: You can't take it with you, but you can send it ahead. And there will be some people in heaven who are incredibly wealthy. They'll have great rewards because they were wise investors on earth. They didn't rob God of the tithe. They didn't keep every penny for themselves.

Read the Book of Ezra. See the listing of the names verse after verse, page after page, recording the exact amounts people gave for the building of the temple. Why would God "waste" so many verses about what people were giving to that project? I believe it's because in it He is saying, "I notice what people give to Me, and record it forever."

Philippians 4:18

But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.

Paul calls the gift the Philippians gave him a sweet-smelling, well-pleasing sacrifice to God. We're all susceptible to believing the lie of the Enemy that we are excused from tithing if we don't agree with the manner in which the church is using our money. Therefore, I encourage you to find a church you can stand by and identify with—then bring your tithes and offerings through it to God.

Philippians 4:19

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

This verse is, indeed, a powerful and comforting promise—but notice to whom it's given. Taken in context, Paul is saying, "Know this, you who are faithful in giving: God will supply all your need."

"Can I borrow your boat?" Jesus asked.

"Sure," said the fishermen.

So Jesus pushed out a little ways into the Sea of Galilee, and, using the water as a natural amplifier, He preached to the multitude gathered on the shore.

"Thanks for letting Me use your boat," He said to the fishermen when He was finished. "Go ahead and take it out now."

They did—and when they cast their nets into the water, the haul was so great it almost sunk their boat (Luke 5:3–6).

If we give, God will supply all of our needs because we just can't outgive Him. High-schooler, college student, start now. Develop a life of tithing—and you'll be just as amazed as were those fishermen by the Lord's provision in your life.

Philippians 4:20–22

Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you. All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household.

The saints in Caesar's household were the guards who, after being chained to Paul, returned to Caesar's palace as believers.

Philippians 4:23

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

And so Paul's epistle ends as it began—with the matchless grace of Jesus.

THE KEY TO BEING CAREFREE

A Topical Study of PHILIPPIANS 4:4–7

A godly man and a good king, Hezekiah loved the Lord and had a deep walk with Him. Nevertheless, he found himself in real difficulty when he heard that Sennacherib and his million-man Assyrian army were marching toward Jerusalem. The inventors of the siege strategy and the battering ram, the Assyrians had been unbeatable in battle, and unparalleled in brutality.

So what does Hezekiah do?

First, he tries to solve his problem financially by attempting to bribe Sennacherib with the gold of the temple. His plan, of course, backfired because the sight of the gold only increased Sennacherib's determination to plunder Jerusalem. (2 Kings 18)

Hezekiah's next plan was to build an alliance with Egypt. "You guys have horses and soldiers and military might at your disposal," he said. "Ally with us because if Sennacherib beats us, you'll be next."

At that moment, Isaiah the prophet comes on the scene and thunders a prophecy in the ears of Hezekiah:

> *Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin: That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt! For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not.*
>
> Isaiah 30:1, 2, 15

In other words, "What God wants from you in this crisis, in this hour of need is to return to Him, to wait on Him, to be quiet before Him."

I wonder if there are good men and women sitting here today who, feeling pressure relationally or vocationally, in ministry or financially, are

saying "Help me!" to this counselor, or "Save me!" to that group—when all along the Lord would say, "First and foremost, come to *Me*."

"Oh, I don't have time to pray," we say. "I'm late for my counseling appointment. I don't have time to seek the Lord. I've got to strip the temple of gold to pay off Sennacherib."

Yet all the while, Paul says we are not to be anxious, not to be full of care about anything. His, however, is not merely a "Don't worry, be happy" maxim, for he goes on to tell us *how*. . . .

> *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*
>
> Philippians 4:6

"Prayer" refers to general communion with God; "supplication" to specific requests. Thus, Paul is saying, "Be anxious about nothing. Pray about everything. Give thanks for anything."

"That's easy for Paul," you say. "His prayers were always answered the way he wanted."

Really? Check out what he said to the Romans . . .

> *Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints; that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed.*
>
> Romans 15:30–32

As he comes to the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul says, "Pray with me—first that I may be delivered from my enemies in Jerusalem; second, that my service may be accepted by the Christians; and finally, that I may come to you at Rome with joy."

But what happened? Paul was captured by his enemies in Jerusalem. His ministry was not readily accepted by the saints. And the only way he made it

to Rome was as a prisoner.

Here's the deal, gang: God can say "Yes" to my prayers, or He can say "No." Either way, it's an answer. How many, many times I have said, "Here's my supplication, Father . . ." only to see that, down the road, what takes place is a whole lot better than what I asked for.

"If your child asks for bread, which of you would give him a stone?" asked Jesus. "Or if he wants a fish, who of you would give him a scorpion?" (see Luke 11:11, 12). Sometimes we think we're asking for salmon, but the Lord recognizes it as a scorpion. Sometimes we cry for bread, but the Lord sees it's a boulder—and He loves us too much to give us something that would hurt us.

So what are we to do? We're to make our request—and then rest in God's peace, a peace that passes our understanding (Philippians 4:7). We say, "Lord, I choose to not wring my hands and try to figure out how I can strip the temple or ally with Egypt. I choose to return to You, to rest in You, to worry about nothing, to pray about everything, and to be thankful for anything You decide to do."

And what happens may just blow your mind. Ask Hezekiah. . . .

"Seek the Lord," Isaiah said. And Hezekiah did just that—even as Sennacherib continued to march. Things looked ominous, when suddenly, hearing of a new war breaking out, Sennacherib diverted his troops to an uprising northeast of Jerusalem. But that didn't keep Sennacherib's general, Rabshakeh, from firing off a letter to Hezekiah that said, "If you think we're through with you, you're sadly mistaken. We will not be stopped from destroying Jerusalem" (see 2 Kings 18).

Ever get a letter like that? Intimidating, threatening, disheartening? "Service will be suspended in five days unless . . ."

This time, however, Hezekiah didn't say, "Oh no! What am I going to do? Who can I call?" No, having heard the Word from Isaiah, Hezekiah took Rabshakeh's letter, went into the temple, opened it before the Lord, and said, "Lord, I'm giving this to You," as he began to worship the One who dwells above all, the One who is greater than all (2 Kings 19).

Here on earth, things seem so big. Our mountains tower 29,028 feet above us, and the depths of the Mariana Trench plunge 36,198 feet

below us. But from space, our planet looks perfectly smooth. In fact, if our earth was shrunk to the size of a bowling ball, a brand-new unused bowling ball would have more grooves and valleys and peaks than would our earth. It's all a matter of perspective.

When, like Hezekiah, you get above the situation, suddenly the problems that loomed so greatly and threatened so menacingly take on entirely different dimensions proportionately, for as the story goes on, Isaiah comes to Hezekiah, saying, "The Lord has spoken that not one person in Jerusalem shall be harmed. In fact, not one arrow shall enter the city."

The Assyrians did, indeed, come. As was their custom, they surrounded the city. All it would have taken to nullify Isaiah's prophecy was one soldier to take one arrow and fire it over the wall. But none did. The Assyrians set up their camp around the city, 185,000 soldiers strong. But that night, an angel of the Lord came and smote the Assyrians before even one man could string his bow. One hundred eighty-five thousand men were wiped out in a way Hezekiah could never have orchestrated or predicted, in a way no counselor could have directed, in a way no book would have addressed.

That's the way of the Lord. So what does He say to you and me today? "Take your cares and turn them into prayer." We all know this—but do we *do* it? Do we leave our anxieties and concerns with the Lord—or even as we read these words, are we wondering who we can get to help us in the problem facing us?

Right now, I ask you to find a scrap of paper and write on it that which concerns you today. It could be a relational stress, a ministry matter, a financial pressure, a family issue.

After you write it down, spread it before the Lord and say,

"Lord here it is. Like Hezekiah, I hear the footsteps and hoof beats of the mighty Assyrians headed my way. But instead of trying to take them on myself or ally with others, I choose to thank You for whatever You want to do in this situation. These are the matters that weigh me down, Lord. Free me of this burden as I lift it up to You."

Do this, saint, and you will experience the peace of God that comes not *from* your understanding, but which *passes* your understanding—a peace that will stop the Assyrians in their tracks, and that will leave you rejoicing in the goodness of your Father.

LEARNING CONTENTMENT

A Topical Study of PHILIPPIANS 4:10–13

On our way to a mission base in Honduras, my brother Jimmy and I arrived at the La Ceiba Airport. After making our way through Customs, we walked into the small lobby, where before us stood an easel with a poster picturing a home for sale, eight miles from the beautiful Roatan Peninsula. Upon closer inspection, we could see that the home sat on its own one-and-a-half-acre island of white-sand beach, ringed with coconut-bearing palm trees, and included a separate caretaker/guest house. The price? One hundred fifty thousand dollars.

Hmm, I started thinking. *A guy could easily cash out here and buy his own island. I wonder what it would be like to own your own island.*

There's something in each of us that desires to live in a different location, have a different vocation, to be in a different situation—something in all of us that longs for change. Advertisers know this and capitalize on it, parading an endless stream of images before us that say, "*This* is where you long to live; *this* is what you want to drive; *this* is how you desire to look," as they pull on the strings of discontent which plague you and me.

Paul the apostle gives us a good piece of advice concerning this dilemma when he says, "The key is to learn to be content no matter what state you're in." For, you see, if we do not learn to be content in life, we will soon develop contempt for life. So Paul says, "Whether I'm abounding or abased, full or hungry—it doesn't really matter to me. Wherever I am, I have learned to be content."

We must learn that as well, for if we don't, we'll be dogged and devoured by discontent. How do I know this? Because of the account in 1 Kings 21. . . .

Jezebel and Ahab

And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria.

1 Kings 21:1

Ahab, king of Israel, had a palace. Next to him lived Naboth. Next to the palace was Naboth's vineyard.

And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. And Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.

1 Kings 21:2, 3

"Give me your vineyard," said Ahab to Naboth.

"Sorry, King, the Lord forbids it," Naboth answered.

Naboth was right. Old Testament law required that inherited properties were to remain in the family (Leviticus 25; Numbers 36).

And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread.

1 Kings 21:4

His command refused, Ahab went to his palace and pouted.

But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread? And he said unto her,

Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard.

1 Kings 21:5, 6

Recounting the incident to Jezebel, Ahab conveniently left out the part where Naboth told him the vineyard was part of an inheritance and therefore couldn't be sold.

And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth. And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people.

1 Kings 21:7–9

Jezebel ordered the city fathers to call a special meeting, making sure Naboth was in attendance.

And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die.

1 Kings 21:10

Jezebel further instructed the men to hire two sons of Belial—or literally, "fools"—to lie and accuse Naboth of blasphemy.

And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial witnessed against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died.

1 Kings 21:13

Falsely accused of blasphemy and treason, Naboth was stoned to death.

Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is stoned, and is dead. And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead. And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

1 Kings 21:14–16

So it was that Ahab apparently got his way—but the plot thickens, for there was a prophet of God on the scene . . .

And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?

1 Kings 21:17–19 (a)

Although Ahab didn't know anything about what Jezebel had done, God held him responsible for Naboth's death because it was his pining over Naboth's vineyard that caused Jezebel to implement her plan in the first place. Ahab couldn't be happy until he had his garden. He didn't know what it meant to be content in the state he was in as king of Israel. He just had to have something else, something more. And it drove his wife into a deadly activity for which he was held equally responsible.

And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.

1 Kings 21:19 (b)

Dogged by discontent, Ahab was going down. But the prophecy didn't stop there. . . .

> *And of Jezebel also spake the Lord, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.*
>
> 1 Kings 21:23

Ahab's blood would be licked by dogs. Jezebel's body would be eaten by dogs. And in chapter 22, we begin to see it happen. . . .

> *And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded. And the battle increased that day: and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot.*
>
> 1 Kings 22:34, 35

Ahab died in battle, his blood forming a puddle in his chariot.

> *So the king died, and was brought to Samaria; and they buried the king in Samaria. And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour; according unto the word of the Lord which he spake.*
>
> 1 Kings 22:37, 38

Just as Elijah had prophesied, as Ahab's chariot was washed, the dogs weren't far behind.

Time passes.

Realizing that a man named Jehu had launched a coup to control Israel and knowing her life might be at risk, Jezebel had a plan. . . .

> *And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window.*
>
> 2 Kings 9:30

When she heard her life was in danger, did Jezebel fall to her knees, did she lift her voice in prayer? No. She painted her face and fixed her hair.

> *And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?*
>
> 2 Kings 9:31

Zimri is one who came into power through a coup only to commit suicide seven days later, so Jezebel is trying to both seduce and intimidate Jehu.

> *And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, Who is on my side? who? And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs. And he said, Throw her down. So they threw her down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode her under foot. And when he was come in, he did eat and drink, and said, Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her: for she is a king's daughter. And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands. Wherefore they came again, and told him. And he said, This is the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel.*
>
> 2 Kings 9:32–36

What happened to Jezebel? Exactly what Elijah said would happen: Her body was devoured by dogs.

When a man or woman has not mastered the principle of learning to be content, he or she will ultimately be devoured by the dog of discontent. You've seen it happen. . . .

> Because she's not happy, the wife walks away from her family. And it's not long before she's splattered emotionally.
>
> Constantly looking for something better, the man changes jobs continually, until he's isolated and frustrated needlessly.

“Okay,” you say. “I can see that if a person lives in a state of discontentment, it will destroy him. But how are we to avoid that?”

Look at Jesus

So in love with me was He, Jesus died on the Cross to save my soul in order that I might be His bride forever. Why He would love me in that way, I don't have the foggiest idea. But He does. And He proved it on the Cross. Therefore, if He loved me that much, I can be confident that He'll put me in the place financially, relationally, geographically that will make me into the man He sees I can be.

I am so concerned about my present comfort. God, however, is concerned about my eternal state. I pant after ministry or material things, fame or satisfaction. God, however, says, "I want you to be full and happy and useful and blessed for the next zillion years. Therefore, I will allow you to go through difficulties and challenges not because I'm being mean, but because I'm doing a deep work in you that you will never regret for all eternity."

> If I invited people to come up after the service so I could slug them in the arm, there wouldn't be many takers. But if I invited people to come up after the service so I could slug them in the arm—after which they would receive a check for ten million dollars, people would be rushing to get in line.

So, too, God is saying, "Yes, you're going to take some hits. Yes, there will be some hurts, some setbacks, some disappointments. But, there's ten zillion dollars, so to speak, around the bend. And I have allowed you to be in the situation you're in because it's preparing you for what's to come. Will you trust Me? Will you not murmur about your condition? Will you not be always looking for some better situation? Will you learn to be content where you are right now?"

> The story is told of a Swiss watch on the wrist of a lady in Zurich. It kept time perfectly and allowed her to keep her appointments punctually. One day, however, the watch said, "I'm doing a pretty good job. But why should I be limited to helping just one lady? I want to serve. I want to minister. A watch like me could help the whole city." So the watch found itself one day high, high above Zurich,

fastened to the tallest building in the city. But no one could see it, for it was lost in the position of elevation.

Wise is the man or woman who says, “Lord, plant me where You see that I am designed to be. Be it on an island in Honduras, or a city in Oregon, place me in the spot wherein I can most glorify You presently, and that will prepare me for eternity. Teach me to be content, Lord.”

And He will. He truly will.



COLOSSIANS

Background to Colossians

C. H. Spurgeon told of an event that took place in the glory days of Rome. During a severe famine in the North African colonies, Nero sent Roman galleons to the stricken area. When the starving people saw the ships on the horizon, they rejoiced greatly, saying, "Caesar has sent the ships! They're on the way! There's hope for us!" And then Spurgeon recounted the tragic end of the story. For when the ships sailed into port, the North Africans discovered they were full of sawdust to lay on the floor of the circuses Rome was exporting to the colonies. The people longed for food and got sawdust. They craved substance but got a circus.

Unlike what was exported from Rome, I'm happy to say that in the Epistle before us, we find a feast for our souls, hearty fare for our pilgrimage.

The Book of Colossians is a polemic epistle. That is, it argues for truth—a much-needed commodity in Colosse, a city invaded by untruths and subjective theology. "Be careful," Paul writes to the Colossian brothers and sisters. "Know the truth. Be grounded in truth." In chapter 1, he discusses the truth about Christ; in chapter 2, the truth about the cults; in chapters 3 and 4, the truth about the Christian in this wonderfully nourishing Epistle to the Colossians.

COLOSSIANS

Colossians 1:1–3

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother, To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.

Although Paul had never been to Colosse, what he heard about the believers there caused his heart to rejoice and to respond by praying continual blessing upon them. I encourage you to do the same thing. When you hear something good about someone, pray for him. My tendency is to pray for people who are hurting or backsliding. While that is needed, indeed, we must also pray for people who are doing well because the Enemy will inevitably launch an attack against them in order to destroy their witness and tear down their testimony. Be like Paul. When you hear or see someone doing well, thank the Lord for him and intercede on his behalf.

Colossians 1:4 (a)

Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus . . .

The church at Colosse was characterized by three qualities—and it is my personal persuasion that these are the three marks of any solid church. The first mark of a mature fellowship is faith. The author of Hebrews tells us that without faith, it is impossible to please God. Therefore, the church that gathers together without believing God is going to do great things will not experience renewal, revival, or blessing.

Colossians 1:4 (b)

. . . and of the love which ye have to all the saints.

The second mark of a strong church is love, for it is love that identifies us as Jesus' disciples (John 13:35).

Colossians 1:5

For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel.

Finally, a solid fellowship will have hope in its heart. The absolute expectation of coming good, hope says, "Sure it's tough down here, but this is the worst it will ever be. The coming of Jesus Christ is nigh. Life is short. We're going to heaven!"

I firmly believe that a church, family, or individual who is focused on faith, love, and hope will be stable, solid, and sure.

Colossians 1:6

Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.

The faith, hope, and love of the Colossian believers led not only to maturity and stability, but to fruitfulness as others were drawn into their midst.

Colossians 1:7, 8

As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

I like Epaphras. He goes around speaking good things. I want to be like Epaphras—talking about how great someone is behind his or her back, for not only does this please the Lord, but it also has an impact on me as well. How? To a very real degree, you are the person I say you are when you're not around. You see, if when you leave church and, on your way home, talk about what an idiot the pastor is, he will become that person to you the next time you meet. Talk negatively about him, and, even if those things are not

totally true, that's what he will become in your sight. On the other hand, if you speak well of a person behind his back, that is the way you will tend to view him. The next time you see him, you will approach him with an entirely different mind-set than if you had come down on him. The power of words is awesome. For that reason, we must be very careful. Gossip about good stuff. That's what Epaphras did.

Colossians 1:9–13

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.

If you desire to be a prayer warrior, carefully consider this prayer. Notice how Paul prays for things we don't even think about. We pray, "Oh, Lord, help him to get over his arthritis," or, "Help her to be happy in her relationship," or, "Help them get the new car." But what does Paul pray? Under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul prays that the Colossians would know the will of God and walk worthy of Him, that they would be fruitful and strengthened with His might, and that they would be patient and full of joy. Those are the important issues. Those are the issues of eternity. So if you want to know how to pray for your kids, grandchildren, parents, or husband —listen to Paul pray.

Colossians 1:14, 15 (a)

In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God . . .

People have had lots of ideas about what God is like. . . .

- The Hindu says, "God must be loving, benevolent, and gentle. Therefore, He must be a cow."
- The American Indian, watching an eagle soar majestically upon the wind currents, said, "God is an eagle."
- The ancient Egyptian saw the awesome power of the sun and says, "God is Ra. God is the sun."

Each culture spoke a partial truth, but all miss the total picture because they're blind. And so was all of humanity. So what did God do? He came and dwelt among us in the Person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, when I want to know what God is like, I don't have to try to figure out His nature on my own. I can study the life of Jesus Christ, for He alone reveals God in totality. He alone is the "image of the invisible God."

Colossians 1:15 (b)
. . . the firstborn of every creature.

"The firstborn of every creature" doesn't mean first in chronology, but rather first in priority. Jehovah's Witnesses and other cults will use this verse to erroneously say that, because Jesus was the firstborn, He was created, and therefore not eternal. But such is not the case, for God refers to Jacob and Ephraim as firstborn (Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9), even though both had older brothers. The Greek word *prototokos,* translated "firstborn," doesn't speak of chronology but of priority.

Colossians 1:16
For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.

This, gang, is the secret of life. Jesus is not the created one; He is the Creator. "This is the day the Lord hath made," we sing. What does that mean? It means this day is made for Him, and the only way it will work is if I live for Him because, in so doing, I will be fulfilling the only reason it was created.

I could say, "I'd like to see the valley tonight. So I'll just rev up my Montero, drive up a mountain, hit the accelerator, and fly over the valley. It'll be great!" But the fact is, my Montero was not made to fly.

So, too, people say, "I'm going to fly high and live for myself." But they crash because they weren't made for any other purpose than to glorify God. *All* things were made by and for the Firstborn, the Preeminent One, Jesus.

Colossians 1:17
And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

An interesting law of science known as Coulomb's Law of Electricity says that like charges repel. You can prove Coulomb's Law by pushing the positive ends of two magnets toward each other and feeling them repel each other. Opposite charges attract; like charges repel. But here's a great mystery: In the nucleus of the atom, protons are packed together that are *all* positive-charged particles.

What keeps these positive-charged protons from repelling like the magnets? What holds them together? Science doesn't know. You can study Quantum Physics and learn lots of hypotheses and theories, yet to this day, it's a mystery to scientists—but not to believers, for Scripture tells us the real answer. It is Jesus Christ who holds all things together. And the day is coming when suddenly He will let go.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

2 Peter 3:10

This was written, of course, before man knew anything about nuclear physics or about things being dissolved instantaneously. But now we know if the "atomic glue" that holds the atom together were to suddenly disappear, everything would dissolve in zillion-degree "fervent heat" accompanied by a "great noise" so powerful and quick it wouldn't even be heard.

> For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.
>
> Isaiah 65:17

Everything will vaporize and evaporate as if it never existed. Not only that, but in heaven, even the memory will be taken away. Think about that next time you're hammering, painting, or fixing your house. Of course, we should be good stewards of the things with which God has blessed us, but we must have the right perspective, always remembering that the things of this earth are temporary.

By Him all things are held together—not just physically, but in my life personally. My emotions, my family, my mental stability are held together by Jesus. By *Him* all things are held together. By *Him* all things consist.

> **Colossians 1:18 (a)**
>
> **And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead . . .**

Others have risen from the dead—among them Lazarus, the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7), and the widow's son in Elisha's day (2 Kings 4). But they all died again. Jesus alone is the Firstborn from the dead because He alone rose never to die again.

> **Colossians 1:18 (b)**
>
> **. . . that in all things he might have the preeminence.**

It is the Father's intent that in all things the Son should have preeminence over each day you begin and every decision you make.

Colossians 1:19

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.

All fullness is in Jesus. Therefore, the closer I am to Jesus, the fuller I will be as a man. Conversely, the further I pull away from Jesus, the emptier I'll feel inside. All of creation centers around Jesus, is held together by Jesus, points to Jesus, and finds its fulfillment in Jesus.

It's all about Jesus.

Some people compartmentalize their Christianity like a Swanson® TV Dinner. They've got their recreation section, their relationship section, their financial section, their hobby section, and their Christian section. So on Sunday they concentrate on church; Monday through Friday on money; evenings on relationships, and Saturday on sports and hobbies.

But ultimately, they find it frustrating and ineffective because God intended our lives to be not TV dinners, but chicken pot pies—all stirred together. In other words, when we're skiing, we're to be praising God for the beauty around us. When we're at work, we're to be praying, "Lord, help me use this as an opportunity to witness." When we're with family, we're to look for opportunities to serve. It's all mixed together.

If you continue to "TV-Dinner" it, you'll be depressed and discouraged. But it won't be because God is punishing you. It will simply be the result of your failure to understand that Jesus holds all things together and that in Him all fullness dwells.

Colossians 1:20, 21

And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.

What does "reconcile" mean? Simply this: If you planned to meet me at McDonald's® precisely at 7:45, it would be imperative that our watches be reconciled, or in agreement. Notice Paul says we are reconciled to God—not He to us. God didn't change His watch. No, *we* were the ones who were messed up and out of sync.

Colossians 1:22, 23 (a)

In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard . . .

Because of Jesus' work on the Cross, we can be presented to God as holy and blameless if we continue on in faith. Therefore, I cannot in good conscience assure someone who walked forward at a crusade twenty years ago or was baptized six summers ago but has not continued in the faith that he will be presented to the Father as being holy and blameless.

Colossians 1:23 (b)

. . . and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven . . .

Paul reminds us that God makes Himself known to *every* creature. Creation around and conscience within the heart of every man are continual messages to people that there is a Creator. God is fair and will judge each man fairly, according to the knowledge given him (Romans 1—2).

Colossians 1:23 (c), 24

. . . whereof I Paul am made a minister; Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church.

Wait a minute, Paul. Are you saying that what Jesus did on the Cross is incomplete, that the reason you suffer is to fill up or complete that which He began on the Cross? It's a tricky verse because it is the basis for the Catholic

doctrine of purgatory that says there must be a continuance of suffering, particularly by those who have not fully embraced the work of the Cross.

Is that what's being said here? No. Paul is saying it is not the completion *of,* but rather conformity *to* Christ's suffering. . . .

> And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side . . .
>
> John 20:26, 27

In heaven, everything is made new, except for one thing: the scarred body of Jesus. Therefore, if we as His body are to be like Him, we must be scarred as well. "Make us like You, Lord," we pray.

And the Lord says, "Okay, but it cannot happen without suffering."

Suffering does some amazing things. . . .

First, suffering draws us closer to Christ.

> *"Take your only son and offer him as a sacrifice to Me," God said to Abraham.*
>
> What?! *Abraham must have thought.* Yahweh, You've been good to me, unlike the pagan gods who demand child sacrifices. But now You're asking me to offer my son?
>
> *Truly it must have been troubling and perplexing, yet Abraham obeyed as he took most likely a thirty-three-year-old Isaac up Mount Moriah to die.*
>
> *Carrying the wood as they climbed, Isaac said, "Here's the wood, and, Dad, you've got the fire. But where's the sacrifice?"*
>
> *"God will provide Himself a Lamb," Abraham replied.*
>
> *Then Abraham took his son, laid him on the wood, raised the knife, and was ready to plunge it into the breast of his son when God said, "Stop. Now I know you love Me" (see Genesis 22).*

Didn't God already know Abraham loved Him? Yes. But Abraham being one of the few men in the Bible called a friend of God, I believe God was saying,

> *"Abraham, My Son will carry His own wood up this same mountain. He will lie on the altar, and I will hurl the same fire you are carrying upon Him. You won't have to go through this, Abraham. But I will. At the moment when you think you're going to have to plunge that knife through Isaac's chest, you're going to feel something I'm not allowing many men in history to feel. You're going to know what it feels like to kill your son."*

Precious people, God will allow suffering in your life in order that you can relate to Him in a deeper way than you ever would otherwise. But if you get thrown by it, you miss the opportunity for the fellowship of His suffering (Philippians 3:10).

> *You can say, "Lord, when I lost the promotion because I was a Christian, I felt a tiny bit of what You must have felt when they said, 'We will not have this man rule over us. Away with Him.' "*
>
> *You can say, "Lord, when my girlfriend broke my heart, I could relate in a small way to how You must feel when people You love turn their back on You time and time again."*

You can be a friend of God in a deeper way if you embrace suffering.

Second, suffering produces assurance in our hearts.

> Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. . . .
>
> John 15:20

> Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.
>
> 2 Timothy 3:12

If you're not suffering, it evidently means you're not living godly. It could even mean you're not a Christian. So when you suffer say, "Thank You, Lord! This is great! I know I'm one of Yours."

Third, suffering promises rewards in heaven.

> For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.
>
> 2 Corinthians 4:17

I promise you, when you get to heaven, you won't say, "I suffered through cancer without murmuring. I accepted it as a way to bring You glory, Father. But now that I'm in heaven, I see it wasn't worth it."

No! When you get to heaven, you're going to say, "My goodness. I made such a big deal about my suffering on earth. But it was nothing compared to this! Even though I murmured, cried, and maybe even cursed, You loved me enough to allow suffering in my life. Thank You, Lord."

Fourth, suffering results in the salvation of others.

> *In Acts 28, Paul writes about a snake that fastened its fangs onto him. The islanders looked at the serpent hanging from his hand and thought,* This guy's a murderer. That's why the snake has bitten him. *But when Paul didn't fall down dead and instead shook the snake off, the barbarians changed their minds, saying, "He's a god."*
>
> *And Paul used the opportunity to say, "I'm not a god—but God in Christ Jesus lives inside me."*

Why does God allow suffering? Because it gives us the opportunity to show skeptical barbarians the reality of faith. When the child is taken to heaven unexpectedly; when the doctor says, "It's malignant," when the boss says, "You're through"—people expect us to fall down dead. But we have the chance to shake it off and embrace the suffering. And if you make that choice, cynics change their minds about Christians because they see the reality of your faith.

Finally, suffering silences Satan.

> Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.
>
> Job 1:20–22

Job lost everything—his health, family, and wealth. Satan took everything but his wife—and even she said, "Curse God and die." But Job wouldn't, and Satan was defeated once again.

> **Colossians 1:25–27**
>
> **Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

The mystery is Christ living in you, not just telling you what to do.

> *I spent countless hours watching the same film loop over and over. I was attending Biola University, where I threw the discus. The film loop was of Jay Silvester's world-record discus throw. My teammates and I watched the way Silvester pivoted his feet. We watched the way he led with his hips. We watched the way he kept his arm behind him until the chest broke through the "glass wall" before it released the platter. Truly, it was a thing of beauty! But although I watched the film thousands of times and although I tried an equal number of times to duplicate what Jay Silvester did, I never came close.*

So, too, a lot of Christians are looking at the film loops. They study the Scriptures by the hour, which is wonderful, but it will ultimately lead to frustration until they understand the mystery. You see, if Jay Silvester could have left the film loop and taken up residence within my body, I would have

pivoted perfectly, landed my feet just right, led with my hip, and tossed the discus for a world record.

"This is the mystery," writes Paul. "This is what I'm coming to share with you. It's not you being like Christ. It's Christ in you, showing you how to pray, what to do, and how to spend your time as He writes His will on your heart" (see Jeremiah 31:33).

It's not imitation. It's impartation. It's Christ *in* us—the hope of glory!



***For topical study of Colossians 1:25–27 entitled "The Mystery of Life," turn to page* 1310.**

Colossians 1:28

Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Perfection in Christ is not based upon anything we can do, but rather upon all He has done. It's not dependent upon our works, but instead upon His work in us.

Colossians 1:29

Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

Mom and Dad, that which you will most effectively communicate to your kids is that which works in you. Sunday-school teacher, youth worker, home group leader—what will ultimately be fruitful in your ministry is that which has personally been worked through and lived out by *you.* So many ministries lack power because they are based on sharing concepts that are true but lack impact because they haven't been worked out in the life of the teacher.

Gang, I'll tell you what to share with your kids, neighbors, Bible study group, or third-grade Sunday-school class: Share what works in *your* life. It's not how much you know; it's how well you know what you know. Has what you're teaching been worked through you? Has it become a part of you?

If you share only what you've heard from others, your teaching will be dry. However, if, like Paul, you share that which "worketh in you mightily," your teaching will be anointed because it will truly be Christ *in* you, ministering the hope of glory.

THE MYSTERY OF LIFE

A Topical Study of COLOSSIANS 1:25–27

When you come across the word "mystery" in your Bible, understand that it doesn't mean something that cannot be known, but rather something now made known that was previously incomprehensible.

> Many years ago I came into the kitchen and kissed my wife, Tammy. Observing the scene, my son Benjamin looked at me and said, "Ooh, Dad. Yuck!" because he can't figure out why any man would want to touch a woman, much less kiss her. So I stooped down, looked him in the eye, and said, "Ben, I know you think it's gross to kiss a girl. But not too many years from now, your perspective is going to change radically!"
>
> Indeed, one day, there was an unveiling, and suddenly Ben woke up and could say, "I get it. I understand. Yeah!"

That's the idea of biblical mystery. It's something that was talked about previously and prophesied historically, but was unable to be understood practically until the veil was lifted spiritually.

Such is the case with the mystery of which Paul writes, of Christ in us, the hope of glory. The Hebrew word for glory is *chabod,* a word signifying "weight" or "heaviness." *Chabod* is that which man has been craving ever since the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve enjoyed the visible, tangible presence of God as He walked with them in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8). It was the glory, the *chabod,* which clothed Adam and Eve before they rebelled against God by eating the forbidden fruit.

The result of their rebellion was much more than physical nakedness. The result was a loss of the substance, the meaning, the heft of life. And so they took fig leaves and sewed them together to try to make up for the loss of the *chabod.* But Adam and Eve's fig leaves were no more effective than what people do today to try to fill their emptiness. People pursue relationships, houses, cars, boats, and trips. But none provide the weight they crave. It's all

cotton candy. It looks good—but when they take a bite, they find nothing but air.

"Here's the hope of glory mankind has been craving since the Garden," Paul says. "Here's the mystery: It's Christ in you." We who have been around Christianity for a while have a tendency to think the idea of Christ in us is no big deal. But in reality, the concept is nothing short of radical.

> *Behold, the days come, saith the* LORD*, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the* LORD*: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the* LORD*, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the* LORD*: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the* LORD*; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*
>
> Jeremiah 31:31–34

This is the New Covenant that was given to the people of Israel way back in the days of Jeremiah. But just like Benny seeing me kiss Tammy, they didn't get it. "We've got the Torah. We've got the law. We've got the Old Testament," they said. "What do you mean there's going to be something new?" So here comes Paul centuries later, explaining that Jesus Christ died for their sins, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sent His Spirit to live inside those who believe. Once a person really understands this mystery, his entire thinking about Christianity changes significantly.

For many years I essentially made the New Testament the new law. My trinity was: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Bible. In effect, I said, "The Old Testament was the Jewish law but the New Testament is our law." Thus, I found myself making new rules based not on the Old Testament, but on the New Testament. And my relationship with the Lord became

legalistic, dry, boring, and predictable. But then the Lord began to bring people into my life and Scriptures to my heart that made me realize that if we merely trade the Old Testament for the New Testament, we remain a people under the law.

The most radical group of Christians who ever lived didn't have the New Testament. The early church never read Matthew, Romans, Colossians, or Revelation. Yet their lives impacted the world more than any other group of believers throughout history. How can this be? The answer is that, although they didn't have the New Testament Scriptures, they grasped New Covenant understanding. Thus, they acted upon the reality that Christ was in them, giving direction and inspiration moment by moment.

> As they go to the temple in Acts 3, Peter and John see a man lame since birth lying by the Gate Beautiful. Suddenly, Peter's eyes fasten on him, and he says, "Silver and gold have we none, but such as we have, we give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." So the man stands up, leaps, and praises God. Peter had perhaps walked by that man dozens of times before, but at this certain moment, Christ in him caused his eyes to "fasten" on the man and begin a conversation with him, thereby setting a miracle in motion.

That's New Covenant. That's the way the Lord wants you and me to walk. He wants to whisper in our ears. He wants our eyes to be fastened. He wants miracles to follow.

"Wait a minute," you say. "If all I need is Christ to direct me, why study the New Testament at all?"

Years after the birth of the church on the Day of Pentecost, letters from Paul began to circulate throughout the church—Colossians, Philippians, Romans, with the Gospels following even later. So, years and decades after early Christians had been turning the world upside down, they read letters from Paul and John, Luke and James and found them to either confirm or correct that which they were already doing.

The New Testament would confirm what the early church was doing—or it would correct them if they were out of line. In other words, the New

Testament was not written as a legal document, but as confirmation or correction of what was already present in the hearts of believers. The present-day church is powerless to the degree we have lost hold of the mystery that every day, Christ will place on our hearts that which we should be doing.

> The storm was raging on the Sea of Galilee. The wind was howling. The waves were cresting. The disciples were fearful. Suddenly, they saw a Figure walking toward them.
>
> "It's a ghost!" they cried.
>
> Then they heard the words, "Be of good cheer. It is I. Be not afraid."
>
> "Lord, if that's You, bid me come," Peter said.
>
> "You come," Jesus literally answered. So Peter stepped out of the boat and began walking to Jesus. He wasn't walking to validate his ministry or to experience a Holy Ghost high. He was simply walking on water in order to get to Jesus. (Matthew 14)

If you've been a Christian very long, you've probably heard sermons based upon this story that say, "Peter took a step of faith. He walked on water. If *you* will leave your boat of comfort and take a step, you too will see great things happen."

And we say, "Okay."

A missionary shares his experience of leaving his comfort zone and "walking on water" to the mission field. "You should go, too," he says.

And we say, "Okay."

A person who prays eight hours a day talks about his step of faith and says, "You, too, should pray eight hours a day."

"Okay," we say. "But I thought I was supposed to be a missionary."

"No," he says. "You're supposed to pray."

Here's the question, gang. Peter walked on water. But what if John had said, "Wow, look at Peter. I'm going to walk on water, too"? What if Nathaniel, James, Thomas, or Andrew had? I suggest to you they would have sunk. Why? Because Jesus' invitation was issued only to Peter.

What does this mean? It means we don't have to let someone else's New Covenant experience put a weight on us. You see, when someone talks about fasting, I can say, "Good for you! I'm glad God told you to fast four days a week. I'm proud of you. But don't put that on me. Pass the burgers, please."

I can love people who have different ministries and perspectives without coming down either on them or on myself. This is what makes the New Covenant so cool. I can do what the Lord is telling *me* in my heart. If my perception is wrong, it will be corrected by Scripture. If it's right, it will be confirmed by Scripture.

If you come from a background like mine, I would encourage you to ask yourself these simple questions: Is my Trinity composed of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Bible? Have I allowed other people to put their trips on me? Am I judging others because they don't see things my way? If your answer is yes, you need to rediscover the key to New Testament Christianity—the New Covenant—the fact that Christ is *in* you, and *He* will direct and guide you. Bible study will then become an adventure as you see how you're doing through the Scriptures. "Am I getting it, Lord? Am I hearing You correctly? All right! Terrific!"

Precious people, my prayer is that God will cause you to be Spirit-led—confirmed or corrected biblically as you follow the Son—for if you grasp this, you will experience exhilaration in your life and liberation in your love as you've never known before.



2 Colossians 2:1, 2

For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laod icea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.

Paul not only writes to the Colossians but agonizes for them. The Greek word translated "conflict" in verse 1 is *agon,* in Greek, from which we get

our word "agony." Thus, Paul was saying, "I agonize for you, that you would be knit together, based on the fact that Jesus Christ is in you."

Colossians 2:3

In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

All wisdom, all knowledge is in—not from—Jesus. Whoever desires wisdom to navigate life successfully must come to the realization that there is nothing more, nothing less, nothing else than Jesus. All treasures of wisdom are in Him.

> The story is told that one day William Randolph Hearst was looking through a book of famous artwork when a painting caught his eye. "I want this painting for my collection," he said to his aides. But after making some inquiries, they reported that they were unable to locate the particular work.
>
> "If you value your jobs," Hearst said, "do whatever it takes to find that treasure, and secure it for me immediately."
>
> Three and a half months later, the aides returned to Hearst. "Did you find the treasure?" he asked.
>
> "Yes," they replied. "After much searching and painstaking research, we found it."
>
> "Did you purchase it?" he asked.
>
> "No."
>
> "Why not?" Hearst asked.
>
> "Because we found it in your warehouse."

So, too, Paul says to the Colossians, "You already have all the wisdom and knowledge you will ever need to get through life successfully. It's all in Christ. When you got Him, you got it all."

Colossians 2:4, 5

And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of

your faith in Christ.

The story is told that in the days of the Roman Empire, a certain wealthy senator became estranged from his son. When he died unexpectedly, his will was opened. "Because my son does not appreciate what I've done, I leave all of my worldly possessions to my loyal slave, Marcellus," the will read. "However, because I am a man of grace, I bequeath to my son one of my possessions of his choosing."

"Sorry," said the testator to the son. "You can only take one of your dad's possessions. Which will it be?"

"I take Marcellus," said the son.

Brilliant! That's the idea. When you take Jesus Christ, you get all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. When you open your heart to Him, you find everything you need. It's all in Him. Why is this understanding so important? Because it is the only way to keep from being sucked into "enticing words," cults, and other dead-end pursuits of pseudo-spirituality. That's what was happening in Colosse. People were coming on the scene, saying, "What Paul is preaching is fine, but there's much more."

"No," Paul says. "Be steadfast in your faith in Christ. All of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him."

Colossians 2:6

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.

Over and over, the Scriptures tell us to walk. We're told to walk in light (Ephesians 5:8), in love (Ephesians 5:2), in wisdom (Colossians 4:5). And here we are told to walk in simplicity.

The banks of certain rivers are lined with a substance called "near quicksand." It's almost quicksand—but not quite. If you keep walking on this near-quicksand, you don't have a problem. But if you stop, you'll start sinking, and you'll eventually get sucked in completely.

So, too, if we don't keep walking in our Christian experience, we'll start sinking. The way to keep walking is not to seek some deeper truth. The way to keep moving is to do so in simplicity, to walk in the same way we received Christ.

Colossians 2:7

Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

The Church is truly an enigma, for we're the only people in the world who get together regularly to acknowledge that we're a bunch of sinners—all the while feeling wonderful about it. Because we recognize we're sinners saved by a wonderful Savior, we leave "abounding with thanksgiving." Every other group tries to convince itself how wonderful its members are, but they leave feeling miserable as they strive for increased sophistication and depth.

"Don't get sucked in to the quicksand of pseudo-sophistication," says Paul. "Walk in the simplicity with which you received Christ in the first place." And to underscore this, he goes on to enumerate four things of which to beware.

Colossians 2:8

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

"Beware of intellectualism—of the philosophy and psychology the world values," warns Paul. "They're vain. They're empty. They don't work."

I am concerned about the increasing number of believers who are wasting their money and time on unbelieving psychologists and psychiatrists when their problems are specifically dealt with in the Bible. Folks, if your car breaks down, I wouldn't tell you to read your Bible. I would tell you to read an automotive manual. If your arm breaks, I wouldn't tell you to read your Bible. I would tell you to go to a doctor or read a medical manual. But for

matters of the heart and soul, I would implore you to read your Bible, for it alone contains the answers you need.

Colossians 2:9–13

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.

This is the key to biblical counseling and ministry. Paul says the issue is forgiveness of sin. What does man need? Forgiveness. It's so simple. We are forgiven because of Christ's work on the Cross. Therefore, we must forgive the person who bothers us, the parent who abused us, or the spouse who left us. We must realize that Jesus died for them, just as He died for us.

Colossians 2:14

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

The sins that have plagued you are written on a list. Santa Claus makes a list and checks it twice in order to find out who's naughty and nice. Our Father, on the other hand, makes a list and checks it once. Then He nails it to the Cross, where the blood of His Son covers it completely. The list of our sins, shortcomings, and stupidity is blotted out in totality by the blood of the Son of God.

Many Christians aren't healthy because they fail to understand this foundational and profoundly simple truth. They know they're forgiven—but they can't believe the one who hurt them is. "You can't ignore the abuse, the trauma, and the anxiety that have been inflicted upon you," they are told. "It

must be dealt with." Wait a minute! It *has* been dealt with by Jesus' blood on the Cross. He hung on the Cross of Calvary dying for the very sin that bugs us in others. Therefore, for us to say, "We must dig it up and talk it through," makes a mockery of what Christ did on Calvary. "It is *finished,*" He cried. It's done. It's paid for. So be forgiven and forgive one another.

Colossians 2:15

And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

When a Roman general conquered an enemy, he would return to Rome in a triumphal procession. The general would ride in the lead chariot, followed by his soldiers. Behind the soldiers walked the conquered men, chained and often naked, to the derisive jeers of the crowds lining the streets. Paul borrows from this image in this verse.

The only toehold or handgrip a demon has on someone is his sin. But if the sin has been washed away by the blood of the Son, the demon has nothing upon which to cling. Once forgiveness is understood and blood is appropriated, the powers of darkness are rendered as powerless as a troop of chained and conquered soldiers. That's why Peter tells us that when Jesus died, He went into the lower parts of the earth and told the demonic spirits they no longer had authority over us (1 Peter 3:19).

If I understand and rejoice in the blood of Christ, demonic powers are nakedly impotent. But the funny thing about demonic powers is that they are squatters. They won't leave until I say, "I'm not going to listen to this depression you're whispering in my ear this morning. I'm not going to buy it because of the blood of Jesus Christ."

That's what is meant by pleading the blood. It's not a phrase you use; it's an understanding you have. Wherever I plead the blood of Christ, Satan doesn't have influence over me. Let this sink in, gang, and you will really be set free.

Colossians 2:16

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days.

Paul's second warning regards legalism. There were those in Colosse saying that the way to be more spiritual was to keep the Sabbath and festivals and to refrain from eating or drinking certain things.

Colossians 2:17

Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

On occasion, people come to our churches and tell us that because we're worshiping on Sunday, we're worshiping the sun, not the Son. "Don't let anyone put those kinds of trips on you," says Paul, "because Sabbath days, festivals, eating and drinking are nothing more than shadows."

If I returned from a trip and Tammy fell to her knees and started kissing and hugging my shadow, I would say, "There's something shady about this, honey. Get up! I'm *the reality. Hug* me!*"*

That's what Paul is saying. These things people are hugging and kissing and founding movements upon are just shadows. The reality is Christ. *He* is the fulfillment of all Old Testament rules, regulations, and ordinances. Once you have the Reality, why kiss the shadows of legalism?

Colossians 2:18

Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.

Third, Paul says to watch out for mysticism. According to this passage, those who claim to be caught up in heavenly visions possess a cultlike mentality as they intrude into things they have not seen, puffed up by their fleshly mind.

Colossians 2:19

And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

Keep your focus on the Head, on Jesus, and beware of phony mysticism. How do you know when you're involved in a mystical group? You'll know when people get together at Bible studies or group sessions and say, "Well, what does this passage mean to you?" the supposition being that whatever the Bible means to you is valid.

The question is not "What does the Bible mean to you?" but "What does the Bible mean?"—period. That's why Paul instructed Timothy to study in order that he might *rightly* divide the Word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). In questions of theology, people often say, "Let's agree to disagree." And we must tell them that the final word is the Living Word, Jesus Christ, for He is the Head.

Colossians 2:20–22

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

Finally, Paul says to watch out for asceticism. A fourth group in Colosse was saying, "Discipline yourself in such a way that you deny your body, your family, your marriage partner. Deny. Deny. Deny. And in so doing, you will be showing true spirituality."

Colossians 2:23

Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

Denial appears to be wise, says Paul, but it's really will worship. What is will worship? It's saying, "Don't you wish you were strong and had will

power like me?" Who else had incredible will power? The one who said, "I *will* ascend into heaven. I *will* sit above the stars. I *will* be like God"—Lucifer himself (see Isaiah 14).

Don't let people put trips on you. "If you're really serious about Christ, you'll eat lima beans," they'll say. Now, if you like lima beans, great. But don't make it a point of spirituality, for it's nothing more than will worship. Those who are focused on their flesh end up becoming obsessed with their flesh.

"Be careful," Paul says. "Intellectualism, legalism, mysticism, and asceticism are all snares that can rob you of your simple, joyful walk in Jesus Christ."

It's in Jesus that we have all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Therefore, keep everything focused on Him.



3 Colossians 3:1, 2

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sit teth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

The only people who are truly happy on earth are those whose hearts are in heaven.

Peter-John came into the kitchen one day whistling and smiling. "Sixteen more days, Dad," he said. Sixteen more days until graduation, and he would be through with high school. He saw the finish line. Consequently, it caused him to go through the last couple weeks of school whistling.

I am thoroughly convinced from watching people and studying the Word that the people who are truly content are those who constantly realize that this world is not where it's at. On the other hand, those who try to find happiness here are perpetually frustrated. The possessions they purchase are never quite what they were supposed to be. The relationships they form are never

as satisfying as they thought they would be. The dreams they pursue are never as fulfilling as they hoped they would be. Nothing is ever quite right until we realize, "Hey, it's not here!"

I believe this is why the Lord constantly tells us in the Word to set our hearts on things above. People are bogged down, with stomachs churning, brows furrowing, and hearts breaking because they are taking life on earth far too seriously. When a person finally understands that heaven is where it's at, he is free to enjoy life. It doesn't matter where he lives, what he does vocationally, what kind of car he drives, bike he rides, or skates he has. All of that is irrelevant because he sees the finish line—he realizes that graduation is only sixteen days away.

Set your heart on things above. It's a central message not only of Paul's, but throughout all of Scripture. Live for heaven and you'll enjoy life. How does that happen? Many ways, but I'll suggest three.

First, we live for heaven through that which we treasure. Jesus said, "Wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21).

> *For one week, I had a crush on Denise Fuller and wanted to take her to our church youth group's Spring Banquet. In order to pay for it, however, I had to sell the one share of American Motors stock I had bought for twelve dollars. Now, I was really into my one share of stock—so much so that, although I was a big Giants fan, before I checked out the box scores to see how Mays, Cepeda, and McCovey were doing each day, I turned to the stock page to check on American Motors' progress. But when this banquet came up, I sold my one share of stock to take Denise Fuller to the banquet. And guess what. Once I sold my share, I never turned to the stock page again. I just lost interest.*

When Jesus tells us to lay up treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:20), it's not God's way of raising money. Knowing that where our treasure is, our heart will follow, it's His way of raising our hearts and minds out of this world and up into heaven. You see, if you invest your treasure in American Motors, that's where your heart will be. If you put your treasure in your house or hobby, your heart will be there as well. Your heart follows your treasure. So

one of the ways we get our hearts on things above is by investing in the kingdom.

Second, we live for heaven through our trials. I am convinced God will send a trial a day your way just to keep you homesick for heaven. If He didn't, we would become bound up in this earth and would miss out eternally on what He has in store for us.

A third way the Lord gets me to set my heart and mind on things above is by transfers—when the people we love precede us into heaven. This process is very important because when you have transferred friends, parents, and spouses into heaven, your heart longs to be there all the more keenly.

Treasures, trials, and transfers are three ways our hearts can be constantly set on things above.

Colossians 3:3

For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

Outside Warsaw, several Jews were hiding in a cemetery from the Nazis who had overrun Poland. Among them were a couple of pregnant women, who eventually gave birth in the cemetery. Thus, in the place of death, life was birthed.

How can we find safety and life in this world? By realizing that we're dead to this world and that a new life is being birthed in us through Christ.

Colossians 3:4

When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

The days are going by rapidly, gang. We are going to see Jesus soon, and when we do, we will say, "This is it! This is what we've been craving and longing for all our lives." That is why I believe we can't talk too much about heaven. And that's why Paul tells us heaven is where our hearts should be. When Christ appears, it's going to be glorious.

Colossians 3:5 (a)

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth . . .

Following Paul's exhortation concerning how we should live for heaven in verses 1–4, in the remainder of the chapter, he turns our attention to how we should live on earth.

Colossians 3:5 (b)–7

. . . fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.

Our culture says, "Live for your earthly desires"—yet covetousness is the cause of wars among nations and in relationships; pornography is a major reason for the breakdown of families and society; and evil desires have caused entire countries to collapse. Read history and you will find this to be so. Living for earthly desires brings death. Putting to death our earthly desires, however, brings life.

Colossians 3:8 (a)

But now ye also put off all these; anger . . .

The Greek word translated "anger" is *orge,* which refers to a slow, simmering emotion. It's a festering, smoldering feeling—and it's got to go.

Colossians 3:8 (b)

. . . wrath . . .

The Greek word translated "wrath" is *thumos,* which means "hot." Wrath is like a volcano. Put it off, says Paul. Stuff a cork in it.

Colossians 3:8 (c)

. . . malice . . .

Malice is finding humor in another's misfortune.

Colossians 3:8 (d)
. . . blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

Defined as "contempt for God or anything sacred," blasphemy is to have no part of our thinking or speaking.

Colossians 3:9
Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.

The idea of lying here is that of bearing false witness. What is a false witness? In Matthew 26, we see the answer. . . .

Two false witnesses came forward and, referring to Jesus, said, "He said that if the temple was destroyed, He would raise it in three days." Did Jesus say that? Yes—but He was talking about the temple of His body. Bearing false witness is giving the right information, but the wrong implication.

Today's society is completely caught up in this. "I technically told the truth." Yes, but did your hearer understand what you were really saying—or did you hide behind rhetoric to conceal the real implications? Scripture tells us that, like blasphemy, anger, and malice, this is something we are to choose to put off. No matter how tempting it is, we are not to use cleverness of speech or intellectual prowess to conceal the truth.

Colossians 3:10–14
And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do

ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

"Put on the new man," says Paul. "Put on mercy, kindness, and humility. Put on meekness, longsuffering, and love." In short, put on Christ.



***For topical study of Colossians 3:9–14 entitled "Being a Put-On," turn to page* 1320.**

Colossians 3:15

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

The word translated "rule" is a Greek word that describes an official at an athletic event, similar to a present-day umpire. People ask, "Should I move? Should I take that job? Should I marry him?" I often answer with a question: "What does your heart tell you? If you're walking with the Lord, the peace of God will be an umpire in your heart, calling Safe! or Out!"

Women, when he asks you to marry him, don't say yes if there isn't a deep sense of peace in your heart. "You just have cold feet," he'll say. But I suggest to you it is much more than that. I suggest it is God working deep within your soul, whispering, "Don't do it." Don't move, gang, without the peace of God umpiring and ruling in your heart.

The flip side is the man who says he has peace about divorcing his wife.

"Really?" I ask. "Why?"

"Well, I've prayed. I've fasted. I've sought God and I have peace."

In response, I'll say, "Jonah had peace, too." God told him to go to Nineveh, but he disobeyed and headed in the opposite direction to Tarsus. And guess what. There was a boat waiting for him because there's always a boat waiting to take you in the opposite direction of God's will—compliments of Satan. Such peace had Jonah about disobeying God that he even slept right through a storm.

Listening to our hearts can't be the only criteria for determining God's will because Jeremiah 17:9 says the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. That's where the Word comes in.

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

The Word is the final authority. When someone says they have peace about something that contradicts the Word, you must look him in the eye and say, "You're headed for a whale of a time. I don't care what ship is ready to take you away, or how peaceful you feel in the hull of the boat. What you're doing is contrary to the Word."

Yes, the peace of God rules in your heart, but it will never contradict the wisdom of God as revealed in His Word.

Colossians 3:17

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

In other words, whatever you do, do everything in the nature and flavor of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:18

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.

"Here's how you're to live on earth, wives," says Paul. "Submit to your husband." But notice Paul says wives are to submit to their *own* husband—not to submit to men generally, but to their own husband specifically. Women, don't let anyone say, "Sister, I need to correct you on this, or deal with you on that," because, unfortunately, there are men who seem to feel it's their calling to go around the church correcting women. They have a "women's ministry," wherein they talk to women about the way to dress, behave, talk or

think—and they are unscriptural in doing so, for Scripture says that wives are to submit to their own husbands exclusively.

Colossians 3:19

Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.

People become bitter whenever expectations are unrealistically high. Husbands, your wife is not going to be God for you. She will not satisfy your deepest longing. Only the Lord will satisfy you. And only the Lord will satisfy her. Truly, if you love the Lord with all your heart, you will have no reason to be bitter with your wife.

Colossians 3:20

Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.

This is written simply enough for any child to understand: Kids, obey your parents in all things. Don't argue with them, but do what they say, for by this is the Lord well pleased.

Colossians 3:21

Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.

Similar to Paul's injunction to put away bitterness toward their wives, Paul warns fathers that unrealistic demands lead to anger and discouragement in the hearts of their children.

Colossians 3:22

Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God.

"What if I don't agree with my company's policy?" you ask. It might not be your flavor, or what you would do as a boss, but you are to obey those in

authority over you unless what they demand is immoral—and then you better have Scripture and wise counsel to back your objection.

Colossians 3:23

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.

The man God uses is a man who knows how to work.

It was when Moses was tending his father-in-law's sheep that God appeared to Him in the burning bush (Exodus 3).

It was when Elisha was plowing that Elijah cast the mantle of ministry upon him (1 Kings 19:19).

It was when Peter and Andrew were casting their nets that Jesus called them to be fishers of men (Matthew 4:19).

It was when Saul was laboring for the high priest on his way to Damascus that Jesus appeared to him and turned his life around (Acts 9).

Many people who want to be missionaries, ministers, or youth pastors are just sitting, "waiting on God." But they will still be sitting at age seventy. The answer is to work. Whatever you're doing, do it heartily unto the Lord—for it is then that God will tap you on the shoulder and give you even more significant tasks.

Colossians 3:24

Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

Watching Mother Teresa care for people with their open sores, stinking bodies, and bleeding wounds, an observer said to her, "I wouldn't do what you do for a million dollars."

"Neither would I," Mother Teresa smiled.

The only motivation big enough for such service is an eternal reward.

Colossians 3:25

But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

If our sins are forgiven because of the finished work of Christ, what does it mean that "he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong"?

In Jeremiah 2:19, God says, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God . . ." thereby declaring that our own sin will one day track us down.

For example, for years, the proponents of premarital sex have used the logic that since "you wouldn't buy a car without test-driving it," if you're going to have a successful marriage, a "test drive" is in order. The problem is, coming together physically before marriage is like taking a test drive in a demolition derby. When the test drive is all over, you're shocked to find the car is beat up and doesn't work right anymore. And no doubt this explains why the most findings indicate that those who live together before they're married have a greater chance of divorce than those who don't.

Sin of any kind carries its own repercussions, and because God is neither a respecter of persons nor of parsons, none of us is exempt.

BEING A PUT-ON

A Topical Study of COLOSSIANS 3:9–14

Shortly before his death, Cary Grant was interviewed on a television biography program. It caught my attention when the reporter asked him if he had always been a suave, sophisticated person. Grant chuckled, and then shared a little bit of his story. . . .

Cary Grant, the quintessential romantic leading man, was born Archibald Leach in 1904 in a rough section of Bristol, England. A ruffian with a cockney accent, he was anything but suave or sophisticated. But in his late teenage years, thinking acting might be the way to make an easy dollar, he went to the local theater and started to pick up some bit parts. And as he acted out these parts, he conjured up the kind of person he wished he was—a person of culture and sophistication, a romantic figure, a ladies' man.

And so convincingly did he portray this image that seventy films later, he was known as "Mr. Sophistication." That's why, when asked if he had always been so suave and sophisticated, Cary Grant chuckled. At the end of the interview, he said, "I played the part so frequently that it became me ultimately. I put on this character so often, that it became who I am."

In Colossians 3, Paul says we are to play a part as well. "Put on the new man," he writes. "Put on kindness and mercy, longsuffering and love"—as an actor puts on a role.

Most Christians say, "Accept me the way I am. I'm grumpy before I have my morning coffee, and that's just the way it's gonna be."

"Put off that old man," counters Paul. "And put on the new."

Oftentimes, people say to us, "You guys at church are a bunch of put-ons." And I have learned to respond, "You're right. We put on Jesus Christ as Romans 13:14 says we are to do. We put on the personality of Jesus to the best of our ability."

"Then you're play-acting," some argue. "You're a put-on, a phony."

But the fact is, every person on the stage of life is acting some part. You might be acting the part of a jock, a surfer, an entrepreneur, or a glamour girl. Everyone chooses a part, and in the end they become the role they choose. The question is, will they like the part they've chosen when the curtain comes down and the play is over.

Ask Cary Grant. The sophisticated star made millions, but how did his life end? After five failed marriages, he battled depression and became an alcoholic. While people were thinking he had everything, his life was empty.

Everyone is deciding who to be in the drama of life. If you're not careful, you'll make the wrong choice and pick the wrong part. Then you'll mess up like Cary Grant—or like me. . . .

I remember it as if it were yesterday. I saw her when I walked into the fellowship hall at church. I had noticed her for several weeks and finally got up the courage to fight through the crowd and introduce myself. But, you see, I realized there was a problem, for she was an older lady. After all, she was eighteen and I was only seventeen. Knowing I would have to approach her with maturity and sophistication, as I walked over to her, I tried to deepen my voice a bit.

"Hello," I said. "I'm Jon Courson."

"I'm Stephanie," she replied.

"Yes, I know. It's nice to officially make your acquaintance, ma'am."

She looked puzzled, but I went on. "Are you by any chance available for dinner this Saturday evening?"

"I guess so," she said.

"Then may I have the pleasure of escorting you to dinner at seven o'clock Saturday night?"

"Okay," she said.

"Delightful," I replied and walked away, proud of how debonair I had been.

Saturday finally came. I got up early to get my 1961 turquoise Ford Falcon ready for my big date. I washed, waxed, and vacuumed it. Then I took a shower, brushed my teeth, put on my one suit, and then called up the most exclusive restaurant on the wharf at Santa Cruz and reserved a table for two by the window, overlooking the ocean. Feeling quite dapper, I knocked on Stephanie's door.

"You look exquisite, Stephanie," I said as she appeared in the doorway. I gave her my arm as we walked out the door to my car. But as I opened the passenger door, it fell right off. So I borrowed a hammer and bolt from Stephanie's dad, jammed the door back on, and drove to Santa Cruz. When we reached the restaurant, the maitre d' seated us at the table I had reserved.

"Order whatever you want, Stephanie," I said—before looking at the menu. Having never eaten there before, as I studied the menu, I was shocked and chagrined to hear Steph order the most expensive item listed: Surf and Turf, $17.95. The problem was, all I had to my name was in my suit coat pocket—a $20 bill.

"I'll have the shrimp cocktail" (you know, those little shrimp things in ketchup that cost about $1.50) I quickly said to the waiter.

"Is that all you want?" asked Steph.

"Yeah," I assured her. "I sort of lost my appetite."

So there we sat—she, enjoying her Surf and Turf and me fishing little pieces of shrimp out of a sea of ketchup.

After dinner, I asked her if she would like to stroll down the wharf.

"Okay," she replied.

So we went outside and began to walk to the end of the pier. By this time, the sun had set on an unusually warm, beautiful, summer evening. And I was really impressed with this girl.

When we came to the end of the pier, Stephanie stopped and leaned against the railing. Wanting to show her I liked her without appearing too forward or tacky, this seemed the perfect opportunity. "I can just sort of put my hand on the railing," I said to myself. "It won't really be around her, and yet it kind of will, and I can leave the interpretation up to her." So I casually leaned over and put my hand

on the railing—right in a big seagull mess. I immediately pulled my hand away to find gooey stuff running down my arm. Not knowing what else to do, I wiped it off on my dapper suit coat—which put an abrupt end to my sophistication.

Whenever we try to put on roles, the question will be: Will it work, or will you end up like me—with a mess on your hands? There is only one role that will ultimately satisfy any man. It is the role of putting on the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 13:14).

What does it mean to put on Christ? In verses 12–14, Paul lists the following characteristics, traits also clearly seen in Jesus: Mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness, and love. Therefore, to put on Christ means to exhibit these same qualities.

I was at Bi-Mart, and I was tired. It had been a long, tough week for me. I had hoped I could just blitz in with one of my kids and be out quickly. But a lady approached me in the aisle with a broken heart and a problem, so I listened, prayed, and spent some time interacting with her. Later, the child who was with me, insightfully asked, "Dad, you're tired. You've been frustrated. Was what you just did with that lady a put-on?"

"Yep," I said. "It was. But not the way you think."

You see, all of true biblical Christianity is, in a sense, a put-on. It's a choice I make to put on Jesus Christ. It's a choice I make to ask, "What would Jesus do if He was tired and a woman came to Him with a problem?"

As He sat by a well, exhausted, a woman who was living with a man and who had already had five husbands approached Him. Jesus began a dialogue with her that resulted not only in her salvation, but in the salvation of many (John 4:29, 30).

To put on Christ means to continually ask, "What would Jesus do in this situation?" And as you choose to put Him on, you will ultimately find yourself becoming the role and the role becoming you. Being grouchy or brusque, impatient or unforgiving because "that's just the way I am" is then

no longer an option because God didn't save us to keep us the way we are. He saved us to change us into the image of His Son (Romans 8:29).

Perhaps more than anyone else, kids are the ones deciding what role they will play. Role models are paraded before them. Advertisers constantly barrage them. Peers tell them, "Be this, go there, wear the other." And it can be terribly confusing. . . .

Six-year-old Benjamin played his first soccer game. The coach of the team asked Ben if he'd join mid-season because his team needed some reinforcement. So there Ben is, playing his first game without ever having practiced. As Tammy watched from the stands, she saw him doing great one minute, and then running to the wrong place the next; doing super again, and then in the worst possible position. After a while, she tuned in to what was going on. You see, the other team's key player was also named Benjamin. And when the opposing coach told his Benjamin to go forward, Benny would go forward. But when his own coach told him to get back, he'd retreat. Not knowing that he was supposed to listen only to *his* coach, he ran in circles, totally confused.

At the first break, Tammy called, "Ben, come here."

"Whew," said an exhausted Ben. "You gotta run a lot in soccer!"

"Listen, honey," Tammy said. "When that other coach talks to Benjamin, he's not talking to you."

"He's not?"

"No. You don't have to listen to him."

"I don't? Great!" he said.

Like Ben, we hear voices from all sides telling us what to do, where to go, and how to act. Like him, we run in circles and become exhausted in the process. And like Tammy, the cloud of witnesses in the stands (Hebrews 12:1) would say to us, "Your role is singular. Put on Christ. As you go through the day ask yourself only what Jesus would do."

You're coming home from church and you're late again. As usual, the pastor has gone overtime, and the traffic is horrendous. As you drive

into town, there's a guy waiting to cross the street to go to the bakery. Car after car passes him with no end in sight. And as you approach him, you have a choice to make, a question to ask: What would Jesus do? If you're convinced Jesus would hit the accelerator, you can proceed like everyone else.

But as I learn of Christ, I am convinced that if Jesus were driving a car through the center of town and a gentleman was waiting to cross the street, He would stop His car and let the man cross. The man would go his way thinking, *Wow! Whoever that was who just came from church is* living *what he's learning!*

The word "Christian" means "little Christ." That is the only role that will satisfy us presently and reward eternally. Put on kindness. Put on longsuffering. Put on mercy. Put on patience. Above all, put on love. But you'll fail miserably if you try to put them on without putting *Him* in.

You can say, "I admire Jesus' kindness and compassion, so I'm going to try to imitate Him." If you have Him in your heart, that's great. Without Him, you don't have a chance. You'll fail over and over again until finally you say, "This doesn't work!" and give up.

In this drama of life, Jesus is the Director in our hearts, saying, "Stop your car and let him cross." Or, "You can't talk to your son that way." Or, "You must not treat your wife unkindly." He's the One who whispers in our hearts and brings Scriptures to our minds, the One who enables us to play His part once we open our hearts to Him.

Other coaches will say, "Be this. Do that. Go there."

But you'll run in circles until you finally say, "The one thing I am is a Christian, and I'm going to play that part all the days of my life."



4 Heaven is the great reversal. Because man looks on the outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7), those who know how to package and promote themselves are the most successful on this earth. But because God looks on the heart, everything will ultimately be judged not on external appearance, but on internal experience. Consequently, a lot of folks we might have brushed aside as weird or ugly on earth are going to be incredibly

honored in heaven. And a lot of "beautiful people" on earth will take a backseat to those who were unnoticed here on earth.

In light of this, Paul opens chapter 4 with an injunction to those in positions of authority. . . .

Colossians 4:1

Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

"Bosses, make sure you're acting justly, lovingly, equitably. Sure, you might be in a place of power and prominence now, but never forget you will one day stand before your Master and give account of what went on through your life and in your heart."

Having said that, let me say this to those who are not masters, but employees. When things are done justly and equitably, sometimes it causes a problem in the hearts of the rank and file. "What's the big idea of him making as much as I do? He doesn't have nearly the education, experience, or work ethic that I have."

Jesus spoke to just such an issue. . . .

A master goes to the marketplace at nine o'clock in the morning and says, "I need some guys to help me bring in my crops. I'll pay one denarius to anyone who works for me." A denarius being the wage of a soldier, it was a good day's pay.

"We'll do it!" said some unemployed men looking for work. "We were wondering how we were going to feed our families today—and now we have the opportunity to make a good wage. We're so blessed!"

The master then goes back to the same marketplace at noon and finds more unemployed men whom he takes to his vineyard to join those he had hired previously. At three o'clock in the afternoon and again at five o'clock, one hour before quitting time, the master returns to the marketplace yet again and brings back more workers.

At the end of the day, he pays the laborers he had hired at five o'clock a denarius—a full day's wage. The first men hired

immediately whis per among themselves, "If he's paying those guys a full day's wage for only an hour's work, can you imagine what he's going to pay us?!"

But their dreams are abruptly cut short as the master pays them a single denarius.

"Unfair!" the nine o'clock group cries.

"Why?" the master asks. "I paid you the exact wage for which you welcomed the opportunity to work. Now, why is it a problem for you that I choose to be kind and treat everyone equally?" (see Matthew 20).

In this account, Jesus points out our tendency to be happy only until we see what someone else gets. The vineyard workers began the day excited and ended the day murmuring because they looked at the other guys. It's a problem with which we all struggle. So what's the key? Don't look around.

You see, once I start looking around, I inevitably get discouraged. I begin to say, "Hey, why is that guy getting the breaks?" or, "Why does that blessing go to him when I've been working harder and longer?" Gang, if you're going to be blue every time someone else is blessed, you really shouldn't be in the field of ministry or blessing.

Colossians 4:2 (a)
Continue in prayer . . .

Want to be a good master in the home or job? The only way I know to do it is to pray. "Father, Your Son taught us to ask You to give us our daily bread. And now, Lord, help me to properly distribute the bread You send."

Colossians 4:2 (b)
. . . and watch in the same with thanksgiving.

Be a thankful person. This applies to everyone—masters and servants, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters.

One morning during an eclipse in the Middle Ages, people woke, expecting day to dawn. When it didn't, they cried. "Oh no! The sun didn't rise today." What was at first sort of a curiosity became a real concern—and they began screaming, wailing, and howling. When the sun did at last appear, the people cheered, clapped, and blessed God for the very sunshine they had previously taken for granted.

How good it would be for us to wake up and say, "Thank You for a new day, Father. I'm alive. The sun is out. There's air to breathe. I'm not a slug."

Personally, I don't think there's anything more abhorrent than grumpy believers. Don't they realize how good God has been to them? They're going to heaven. They have the Word. The Spirit indwells them. Thus, I don't think there's a single excuse for a rational person to be grumpy. Thanksgiving should be flowing from our lips constantly.

Colossians 4:3, 4

Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

This intrigues me. Paul says, "Pray for us—not that we'll get out of here, but that the Word will go forth from here." I think if I were writing this, I would say, "Please pray for me that I'll get out of here. I'm tired of being in prison." Not so Paul. He says, "My desire is that God's Word will go forth from here, that those around me will really see that Christ lives in me." Truly, this is the way to pray.

A few months ago, I saw a billboard that said: Pray. It works. And I thought, *True—but what if it doesn't work?* Most of the time we pray small prayers like, "Get me out of here." And when they don't work, we stop praying instead of learning what prayer really is. Prayer is not to get God to see things our way, but rather to get us to see things His way.

I read the story of an Arkansas woman who was confronted by a burglar who, after ripping the phone out of the wall, ordered her into the closet. After dropping to her knees, she asked the burglar if she

could pray for him. "I want you to know that God loves you and I forgive you," she said. The burglar looked at her and apologized for what he had done. Then he yelled out the door to his partner in a pickup truck, "We gotta unload all this. She's a Christian lady. We can't do this to her!" The woman remained on her knees, and the burglar returned the furniture he had already taken from her home. Then he took the bullets out of his gun, handed her the gun, and walked out the door.

This lady could have prayed, "Get me out of here," but instead she prayed like Paul. "Could I pray for you?" she asked the burglar. *That's* in harmony with the heart of God. How do I know? Because of what Jesus said on the Cross. He didn't say, "Get me out of here," He said, "Father, forgive them. They don't understand what's going on" (see Luke 23:34).

How I want to be more like Paul. I've got so much to learn in this arena —but I see the principle and the rightness of what Paul is modeling here as he prays not to get out of prison, but that he'll have boldness and wisdom in any situation.

Colossians 4:5

Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.

Walk wisely because people are watching you. Time is moving rapidly, so redeem it. Somehow we think we're going to live a long time, but James was right when he said life is a vapor, a puff of steam (4:14). It's going so fast. Make it count. How? Redeem it.

According to those who study such things, the average American will spend six months of his life waiting at red lights. People say, "I just don't have time to pray"—but what if they decided that at every red light they would pray for people in their fellowships, for people in their communities who don't know Jesus, for people in the world who have never heard His Name? What if they decided to keep an open Bible on the seat next to them in order to read a verse or two during every red light? People say they don't have time to read, to pray, to

memorize, to study. Yes they do. And I'm not even talking about getting up at three in the morning. I'm talking about just using the time they're at stoplights. Redeem the time!

Colossians 4:6

Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

Salty speech? Years ago, salty speech connoted swearing. That's not the salty speech Paul is talking about. No, the idea here is of salty French fries. I love salty French fries, but I've got to have a Coke to go with them, because they make me thirsty. So, too, the speech we use should create in people a thirst for the wine of the Spirit in our hearts.

Colossians 4:7

All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord.

Beloved brother, faithful minister, fellowservant—what wonderful qualities Tychicus possessed.

Colossians 4:8

Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts.

Tychicus was sent to Colosse both to report to the believers there how Paul was doing and to bring word back to Paul how they were doing. This should not be surprising, for Paul was not only a soul-winner, but a friend-maker. As you read his letters, you'll find over one hundred people to whom he sends greetings.

Colossians 4:9

With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here.

If you're a student of the Word, you know Onesimus plays a key role in the Book of Philemon. A runaway slave who ended up in prison as a cellmate of Paul, he got saved, was released, and now turns out to be a faithful friend and minister.

Colossians 4:10

Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;).

Remember the story in Acts 13? Setting off on their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas took John Mark, Barnabas' nephew, with them. Then somewhere in the early part of the journey, John Mark went home. At the outset of their second missionary trip, Barnabas said, "I'll get John Mark and we'll be on our way."

"Hold on," Paul said. "John Mark flipped out and failed us last time. He's not coming again."

"Yes he is," said Barnabas, Son of Comfort.

"No way," said Paul. "There's work to do. We can't have this guy tag along with us. He just doesn't have what it takes."

"I'm taking John Mark," said Barnabas.

"Fine," said Paul. "Go your way. I'll take Silas, and we'll go in a different direction." (see Acts 15:36–41)

And they parted company.

Years later, we see that Barnabas' work was successful with John Mark, for here in Colossians, Paul salutes him.

So, too, you who feel like you "missed the mark," that God opened a door for you to do something, but you failed—take heart. I don't care how badly you messed up, He's not through with you.

Talk about failure! He had less than three years of formal education and failed in business in '31. He was defeated for State Legislature in '32 and failed again in business in '34. Finally elected to the State Legislature in '35, he ran for Speaker and lost in a landslide. He was defeated again for Elector in '40, and for Congress in '43. Elected in

’46, he was tossed out of office two years later, defeated in a re-election attempt in ’48. Failing in business once again, he ran for Senate, but was defeated in ’55. He ran for Vice President in ’56, was crushed, and was defeated for Senate another time in ’58. And then in ’60, 1860, Abraham Lincoln won—and went on to become perhaps the greatest political leader in American history.

Could it be that the wit, wisdom, and understanding of human nature he exhibited so powerfully came as a result of the setbacks, failure, and defeat Lincoln had experienced previously?

Don’t despair, precious people. John Mark blew it badly but came through ultimately. So can you.

Colossians 4:11

And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.

Justus, Marcus, Aristarchus, Onesimus were all tremendous blessings to Paul.

Colossians 4:12, 13

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.

Epaphras labored fervently in prayer. The idea here is one of giving birth, going through pain to bring forth prayer. Sometimes that’s what it takes. Do you ever feel like not praying? Am I the only one who begins to pray, but then gets distracted and succumbs to the list of other things to tend to first? Such wasn’t the case with Epaphras. He labored in prayer until there was a breakthrough, a birth of renewal and revival in the hearts and lives of those for whom he prayed.

Colossians 4:14 (a)
Luke, the beloved physician . . .

Why did Paul call Luke the beloved physician if Luke didn't even have enough faith to be a faith healer? Because Paul, the one who saw such powerful healing miracles happen that even the sweat bands and aprons he wore were used as instruments of healing (Acts 19:11, 12), knew the necessity of a physician given intellectual gifts and training to help people physically. And he welcomed Luke's presence on his missionary journey.

"If you have faith, you won't need a doctor. Doesn't Psalm 90 declare that it is appointed for man to live threescore and ten years?" asks the televangelist. "If you die before seventy, it's because there's some sin in your life." If that be so, how does he explain Jesus' death at thirty-three?

Colossians 4:14 (b)
. . . and Demas, greet you.

In the Book of Philemon, which preceded the Book of Colossians by a couple of years, Demas is called a fellow-laborer (verse 24). Approximately six years after this, there's a third mention of Demas, where right before Paul dies, he says, "Demas has forsaken us, having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10). So Demas went from being a fellow-laborer to one who turned his back on the Lord because he loved the world.

How did this happen?

The Christian life is like a steam locomotive. When you're first saved and on fire, you stoke the boiler with the Word. You come to church; you're involved in ministry; and you're moving along in your faith. But there can come a time when you start to think, *Hey, I'm cruising along fine. I don't need to feed the fire so fervently. I don't need to study Scripture so consistently. I don't need to have devotions daily. I don't need to go to church regularly because, look, I'm really moving!* But once the fire stops being fed, the engine starts slowing down imperceptibly. Yes, the train keeps moving down the tracks for a time, and everything appears to be going fine, but little by little the engine goes slower and slower until finally it stops dead in its tracks. You might be able to go weeks, months, even years on the

momentum you gained in the early days—but if you don't continue to feed the fire, eventually you'll stop altogether. And, like Demas, you'll say, "What happened? How did I end up *here?*"

Colossians 4:15

Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house.

"The church which is in his house"—that's a great little phrase. If you have a family, you have a church.

Colossians 4:16

And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

In other words, "Pass this letter on to the church at Laodicea, and they'll pass theirs on to you." We don't have the letter, but it was evidently written by Paul at this time to the Laodiceans.

Colossians 4:17

And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.

"Do what God has told you, Archippus." It is a good word for us as well to do whatever it is God has told us, to keep on with whatever it is He has laid upon our hearts individually and corporately in order to bring it to completion.

Colossians 4:18 (a)

The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds.

This one who, at the beginning of the chapter instructed the Colossians to be thankful and who asked them to pray that he would be able to minister

even in prison, tells them to remember his bonds not as a play for sympathy, but as a basis for his authority.

Colossians 4:18 (b)
Grace be with you. Amen.

Paul opened his epistle with the salutation of grace and now closes it with the benediction of grace. As it began, so it ends because grace is the whole deal.



1 THESSALONIANS

Background to 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Along with Paul's letter to the Galatians, his first letter to the Thessalonians is one of the two oldest of his letters. Written only twenty years after Jesus' Resurrection, it was addressed to the believers in Thessalonica, a mega-city of about two hundred thousand people. Renamed Salonika, the city thrives today.

Following his miraculous deliverance from a Philippian prison (Acts 16), Paul arrived in Thessalonica. There, he started a church, appointed elders, and helped the ministry to take root—all in the space of three weeks (Acts 17:2).

In this, I am reminded of the early days of Applegate Christian Fellowship.

> Our first youth pastor was a California-transplanted hippy who got saved and baptized at our first Bible study at Yale Creek. About two months later, he said, "Jon, I am so thrilled with what God is showing me that I want to teach kids."
>
> Smelling cigarettes on his breath, I said, "If you'll never smoke another cigarette, you can be our youth pastor."
>
> "Okay," he said.
>
> Dave stopped smoking that day and became our youth pastor. He is now pastoring a Four Square Church in Washington.

I look back now and wonder if I was crazy to put a guy on the ministry team who looked like Charles Manson and smoked constantly. Yet Dave was, and continues to be, an example of how the Spirit of the Lord can blow conventionality right out the window. I'm not suggesting we put every three-week-old Christian in a position of leadership. I am saying that in certain times and places, it can happen. Look at Paul. He was in Thessalonica only three weeks before he was driven out. But during that time, he saw people saved, discipled, and ordained for ministry.

Don't ever think you're too young in age or in the faith to be used for the kingdom. If your heart is right, the Lord has a place for you to serve Him.

Curious about how the Thessalonians were doing, and wanting to encourage them concerning the Lord's coming, Paul writes the letters before us, wherein he:

- Remembers the Thessalonians' past in chapters 1—3 as he recalls how he lived among them and shared with them in close communion;
- Refocuses their present in the first part of chapter 4 as he encourages them to love with brotherly affection;
- Reveals their future in the second half of chapter 4 and the first part of chapter 5 as he speaks to them of the Rapture and of heavenly expectation;
- Refines their walk in the last part of chapter 5 through a series of practical exhortations; and
- Reinforces his teaching concerning the Second Coming in 2 Thessalonians.

In these last days, as we study Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, may the Lord refocus our vision of the big picture—the hope of heaven.

1 THESSALONIANS

1

1 Thessalonians 1:1 (a)
Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus . . .

After their miraculous release from a Philippian prison by way of an earthquake, Paul and Silvanus—or Silas—traveled to Thessalonica, where there was "a synagogue of the Jews" (Acts 17:1).

1 Thessalonians 1:1 (b)
. . . unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The church at Thessalonica was comprised of Gentiles who had turned from idols to God, and of Jews who, recognizing their Messiah, believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 1:1 (c)
Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul begins his second epistle the same way he began his first (Galatians 1:3). It is also the way he would begin his subsequent epistles to the Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, and the Colossians. He links grace with peace. Man cannot experience peace until he receives God's grace because true peace is the result of an understanding that our salvation rests on what God has done rather than on what we must do.

1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3
We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.

I believe a mature church will possess the same three characteristics Paul saw in the Thessalonian church.

First, a mature church demonstrates the work of faith.

> *"Master, what must we do to do the* works *of God?" the disciples asked in John 6.*
>
> *"This is the* work *of God," Jesus answered, "that you believe on Him whom the Father has sent."*

When a church says, "We believe in Jesus Christ and marvel at what He did on the Cross," that is the singular work of faith.

Second, a mature church labors in love. This is only logical, because whenever a person begins to comprehend how much the Lord has done for him, he can't help but love others.

> *During his visit to the Boys' Town orphanage in the 1940s, a reporter for* Life *magazine observed a ten-year-old boy carrying a much older boy on his back.*
>
> *"Isn't he heavy?" asked the reporter.*
>
> *"He ain't heavy," replied the younger boy. "He's my brother"—giving rise to the song that would later be written about this true story.*

It's not a burdensome obligation, but a labor of love that says, "God's been so good to me that I can't help but carry someone else."

Third, a mature church patiently hopes for the return of the Lord.

> *The night before Jesus' crucifixion, and after telling His disciples He would be betrayed, Jesus arose from the supper, girded Himself with a towel, and began to wash their feet. Why? Scripture says it was because He knew from whence He came and where He was going (John 13:3).*

Knowing we're going to heaven is a key ingredient of maturity because heaven alone allows us to see the big picture. Only heaven puts everything in

perspective.

1 Thessalonians 1:4
Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

The election of God is not a matter of the Lord casting His vote on our behalf because He sees something that impresses Him. No, God elected us before the foundation of the earth apart from anything we have or haven't done (Ephesians 1:4). I agree with D. L. Moody when he said, "I'm glad the Lord chose me before I was born. I don't think He would have chosen me after I'd done some living!"

1 Thessalonians 1:5 (a)
For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance . . .

"You shall receive power when the Holy Ghost comes upon you to be My witnesses," Jesus promised His disciples in Acts 1:8. Thus, the power to believe in Jesus, love others, and to patiently hope for the Lord's return—as seen in the Thessalonian church—was evidence of their being chosen by Him.

1 Thessalonians 1:5 (b), 6
. . . as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.

How can there be joy in the midst of affliction? When Cascade High School played football against St. Mary's High, the guys were battered—as evidenced by the teeth, hair, and blood left on the field. Yet even though bones were cracked and bodies were bruised, there was great joy at Cascade because of their victory.

The same thing happens spiritually. Sure, we get beat up. Sure, there are trials and tribulations. When we start to see the Lord's presence in the midst

of the problem, we find joy in the big picture; joy in the knowledge that we're headed for heaven.

1 Thessalonians 1:7, 8

So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

Unlike the Pharisees who blew their own horns (Matthew 6:2), the Thessalonians trumpeted the sweet song of salvation to such a degree that everyone in the Greek peninsula heard about their radical faith.

1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10 (a)

For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven . . .

Recounting verse 3, Paul says, "You turned to God from idols, which is the work of faith. You serve the living God, which is the labor of love. You wait for His Son from heaven, which is the patience of hope."

The idea of waiting does not infer apathy. In the Greek language, the word is used to describe what a mother does when she is anticipating the birth of her baby. She readies the nursery and eagerly prepares for his arrival.

So, too, we should say, "Jesus is coming. I must make sure my family and friends are ready."

1 Thessalonians 1:10 (b)

. . . whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

Revelation 6—19 describes a time called the Tribulation, when God pours His wrath on a Christ-rejecting, sinful world. Scorpions are released.

Hundred-pound hailstones come crashing down. Water turns to blood. Islands disappear. There is starvation, plagues, war, and famine. It's a hellish time, causing the people to cry, "Who shall save us from the day of the wrath of the Lamb?" (Revelation 6:16, 17).

Let me highly encourage you to miss that. Become a Christian today. Believe on Him whom the Father has sent, and, like the Thessalonians, you'll find yourself turning from the idols of our present day, laboring under the light burden of love, and waiting for the Son with joyful hope.



2 1 Thessalonians 2:1–2

For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

The contention of which Paul writes was due to the fact that the Jews hired "lewd fellows of the baser sort" to falsely accuse him of fanning the flames of revolution against Caesar (Acts 17:5).

1 Thessalonians 2:3, 4

For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

The fear of God obliterates the fear of man. Because Paul answered to God rather than to man, he was free from the fear of man. God's antidote for young Jeremiah's timidity was to boldly speak the whole truth (Jeremiah 1:7, 8). The same is true today. If you're afraid of your audience and only speak those portions of truth that are easy to hear, you will be confounded in front of them. But if you "fully preach the gospel of Christ," you'll be strengthened (Romans 15:19).

1 Thessalonians 2:5, 6

For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

Whether it be in the business world, the sports world, or the arena of ministry, don't covet someone else's position. Don't say, "I want that cloak; I want that spot; I'll use whatever flattery or treachery it takes." I am reminded of the account in 1 Kings 22.

"Listen, Joe," said King Ahab of Israel to King Jehoshaphat of Judah, "I've got a problem with the Syrians. Let's form an alliance and battle them together."

Jehoshaphat agreed, and upon his arrival at Ramoth Gilead, he found Ahab waiting for him.

According to the Septuagint, Ahab suggested Jehoshaphat wear his royal robes.

Jehoshaphat agreed, and off they went into battle.

Unbeknownst to Jehoshaphat, however, the Syrian army had been instructed to spare everyone save the king of Israel. Consequently, imagine Jehoshaphat's surprise when he found the entire Syrian army heading straight for him, cloaked as he was in his kingly robes.

"Wait a minute! I didn't ask for this," you'll say as the arrows of criticism fly toward you. Oh, but you did when you coveted that position on the team or that space in the office. That's why Paul didn't come to the Thessalonians with flattery and manipulation, but with simplicity and honesty.

1 Thessalonians 2:7, 8

But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing

to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

Paul was like a nursing mother. As he remembers the Thessalonians' past, he doesn't complain about their crying but loves them as deeply as a mother loves her newborn baby.

1 Thessalonians 2:9

For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

Secondly, Paul was like a working brother. He labored to support himself so as not to burden the Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 2:10–12

Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

Finally, Paul was like an encouraging father as he exhorted the believers to walk worthy of God.

Paul is a wonderful model for all who serve the Lord. Oh, that we might be like nursing mothers who aren't angry with the demands and cries of our children, like brothers who are working together and relating to one another, like fathers who are not afraid to speak the truth.

I see the same three traits in the Trinity. The ministry of the Spirit is to comfort, as does a nursing mother (John 14:15–17). The work of the Son is to labor among us, as does a working brother (Hebrews 2:11). The work of the Father is to exhort and challenge His children, as does an encouraging parent (Romans 8:16).

1 Thessalonians 2:13

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

How closely are the written Word and the living Word—Jesus Christ—related? Both are Truth (John 14:6; John 17:17). Both are Light (John 8:12; Psalm 119:105). Both are Bread (John 6:35; Matthew 4:4). People ask why we spend so much time teaching Bible studies. Why do we have retreats where we study Scripture? Why do we get together virtually every night of the week to open the Word? It is because we firmly believe that this is the very Word of God, and that it will radically alter and influence any person who spends time in its pages.



For topical study of 1 Thessalonians 2:13, see "Truly the Word of God" below.

1 Thessalonians 2:14–16

For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

"You are following in the footsteps of the Jewish believers in Judaea who are also persecuted by their countrymen," Paul tells the Thessalonians. He would go on to tell Timothy that *all* who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12).

1 Thessalonians 2:17, 18

But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

We err whenever we underestimate Satan's ability to hinder people from service, fellowship, or worship. Although greater is He that is in us than He that is in the world (1 John 4:4), we have a very real adversary who will do whatever it takes to thwart our ministry.

1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.

"Yes, we've been beaten up in the city," writes Paul. "Yes, we've been chased down by envious Jews. Yes, we're going through real persecution. But it's all worth it because you're getting saved."

The greatest joy in the world comes from seeing someone for whom you've been praying, and to whom you've been witnessing, receive Christ. No wonder Jesus tells us that when one person is saved, all of heaven breaks out in rejoicing (Luke 15:7). Truly, joy and evangelism go hand in hand. Thus, my prayer is that we would never lose sight of the privilege, priority, and pure joy of sharing the Good News with people who don't know Jesus.

TRULY THE WORD OF GOD
A Topical Study of
1 THESSALONIANS 2:13

There are those who say, "I believe that the Bible is inspired and that it contains God's Word," but with them I disagree. The Bible doesn't contain God's Word; the Bible *is* God's Word. Whenever liberal theologians say the Bible contains God's Word, the implication is that it might also contain man's word. If I say, "Part of Scripture is God's Word, but part is man's ideas or myths," I become the ultimate judge, deciding what is God's Word and what are man's thoughts.

If I attribute to God "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus," (Romans 8:1) and "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all," (Philippians 4:23), but I attribute to Paul "Present your bodies a living sacrifice," (Romans 12:1) and "Those who live godly will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12), I judge the Bible rather than allowing the Bible to judge me.

Following, are four reasons I am theologically and academically convinced that every word of Scripture—even the "begats" and the genealogies—is inspired.

Internal Unity

The Bible is comprised of sixty-six books written by an extremely diverse group of forty human authors. We see a king in Solomon, a herdsman in Amos, a tax collector in Matthew, a scholar in Paul, a general in Joshua, a doctor in Luke, a poet in David, a prime minister in Daniel, and a building contractor in Jeremiah.

Not only did these men come from widely diverse backgrounds, but their writings span fifteen hundred years and are comprised of three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek).

Yet there is not a single contradiction from book to book, from author to author. I challenge you to find three men writing textbooks today on any subject who will completely agree. There is incredible unity in the Bible—unlike anything man could produce.

Archaeological Validity

"If My disciples are quiet, even the stones will cry out," Jesus declared (Luke 19:40). Guess what. The stones *are* crying out. What stones? The stones uncovered by the archaeologists' spades.

Julius Wellhousen made a huge impact on theology in the late 1800s when he said that, due to the fact that there were no kings near the Dead Sea at the time, the Bible could not be taken literally. He maintained that the battle between four kings from Mesopotamia and five kings from the Dead Sea region could not have taken place (Genesis 14). Poor Julius. Archaeologists in Egypt unearthed a library filled with tablets that contain a perfect description of the battle in which four Mesopotamian kings did indeed wage war against five kings near the Dead Sea.

Dr. John Gerstang, one of the primary excavators of Jericho, noted that, when an ancient city is excavated, the walls fall inward. The walls of Jericho actually fell outward and covered an unbelievable distance. "It was as though someone from the inside was shoving the walls out," said Gerstang, calling the force an "invisible hand."

According to Nelson Gluick, a brilliant Jewish archaeologist, "It may be categorically stated that no archaeological discovery has ever contradicted a single Bible reference."

Archaeology confirms the biblical account. I "dig" that!

Fulfilled Prophecy

In addition to the Bible, there is another book that contains prophecy. In the Koran, Mohammed says, "Before I die, I will go to Jerusalem." That's like me saying, "Before I die, I will return to Jacksonville." There is a great probability that will happen. Besides that single reference, the Koran does not address prophecy. Neither does any so-called "holy book." In the Old Testament alone, more than two thousand prophecies have come to pass. That's amazing!

Turn with me to Ezekiel. I never tire of this prophecy because it's fulfilled so beautifully and convincingly. It deals with the city of Tyre. Maybe that's why I never "tire" of it.

> *Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus, and break down her towers: I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD: and it shall become a spoil to the nations. And her daughters which are in the field shall be slain by the sword; and they shall know that I am the* LORD.
>
> Ezekiel 26:3–6

In other words, "I'm going to flatten Tyre," said God.

Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Tyre in 586 B.C. However, he didn't "scrape her dust from her," as Ezekiel had prophesied. Two hundred and twenty-five years later, Alexander the Great besieged the city that had been rebuilt. For thirteen years, the people of Tyre didn't give up. When they could hold out no longer, they left out the back door and rebuilt the city on a little island a half mile off the coast. When Alexander finally broke in and found everyone gone, he ordered his men to throw every remaining stone, column, and bit of timber into the sea so that a bridge could be constructed to the island. Although the

original city of Tyre was now "scraped clean," the prophecy was still not fulfilled because now there was a new city of Tyre.

Fast forward to A.D. 1290. When the Crusaders came to free the Holy Land from "Muslim infidels," they moved into the city of Tyre, which was now connected to the mainland. Eight years later, when the Crusaders were driven back to England, the Muslims said, "This city is so defiled that every stone must be thrown into the sea."

If you go to Tyre today, guess what you see. Nothing. It's flat like a rock and has become a place where fishermen park their boats —"like the top of a rock, a place to spread nets."

Because there is a spring in Tyre that produces one hundred thousand gallons of water every six hours, this area should be home to a huge city. It's not, however, because the people in the region think the area is cursed.

"I will make Tyre flat like a rock. The city will never be built again, and it will only be a place for fishing nets to be dried out upon," declared God. That's exactly what happened.

There are 221 prophecies concerning Jesus Christ. Chapter 7 of Isaiah tells us the manner of His birth. Daniel 9 declares the time of His birth. Micah 5 names the town of His birth. In Zechariah 11, we read how He would be sold for thirty pieces of silver, which would be thrown on the floor of the temple, and used to purchase a piece of property that would be used as a potter's field.

What is the statistical probability of these six prophecies being fulfilled? One in 10^{17}. Think of it this way:

Cover the entire state of California three feet deep in nuts and mark one nut with an X. Then go up in a plane with a flying squirrel named Rocky. Fly over the entire state and throw Rocky out at a random spot. Rocky comes down, sees the whole state covered in nuts and chooses one. The chances of him choosing the marked nut is one in 10^{17}.

That's only six prophecies. There are *221* Old Testament prophecies perfectly fulfilled in Jesus.

Jesus' Credibility

"Surely many of the Old Testament stories are nothing more than myths," scoffs the skeptic. Yet Jesus came on the scene and validated even the most controversial accounts when He talked about Lot's wife turning to salt (Luke 17:32), Jonah in the belly of the great fish (Matthew 12:40), and the prophecies of Daniel (Matthew 24:15). As the Son of God, Jesus' treatment of the above renders them true.

"Well, I don't know if He is the Son of God," some say.

"One sign I'll give to you," Jesus said. "Destroy this body and in three days I'll rise again" (John 2:18, 19). Thus, the inspiration question actually is answered by His Resurrection. If Jesus rose from the dead, then He is the Son of God. If He is the Son of God, what He says about even the most controversial Old Testament stories is true.

"Well, how do you know Jesus really rose from the dead?" some ask.

I've been to Jerusalem. I've seen His tomb. It's empty.

"Yeah, but the disciples could have stolen the body to perpetuate the hoax."

Really? They watched their sons and daughters killed, their wives raped, were crucified upside down, stoned with rocks, and sawn in half to perpetuate the hoax? Surely, *one* of them would have cracked. *One* of them would have said, "Wait a minute. This has gone far enough. We stashed His body behind the tree in the garden. You'll find it there." But no one did because the disciples knew they had seen the Resurrected Jesus.

"Okay, it wasn't the disciples. The Pharisees took Jesus' body."

If the Pharisees had stolen the body, they would only have had to produce it to halt the new religious "sect" of Christianity that threatened to undermine their authority.

"Then it was the Romans who took the body."

Really? The Romans were desperate to put Christianity down. They fed Christians to the lions. They dipped them in hot wax and ignited them as human candles. To destroy Christianity, they would only have had to produce the body.

So, who stole the body? It couldn't have been the disciples. It couldn't have been the Jews. It couldn't have been the Romans.

"Well, maybe the disciples just went to the wrong tomb."

Would no one have double-checked?

"Maybe Jesus wasn't really dead. Maybe He just swooned on the Cross.

Maybe the sponge given to Him contained narcotics and He went into a coma."

This school of thought requires that a man beaten beyond recognition, nailed to a tree, and placed in a tomb would have come out of his coma, rolled away a two-ton stone, and taken on one hundred fifty Roman soldiers before walking throughout the city, saying, "I'm risen."

I'm sorry. I don't have enough faith to believe that. Jesus didn't swoon in the tomb. The women didn't go to the wrong gravesite. The disciples, Romans, or Jewish leaders didn't steal the body. No, the only intelligent position one can take is that Jesus rose from the grave just as He said He would.

"I'll rise from the dead. That's one sign I'll give to you that I am who I claim to be," Jesus declared (Matthew 12:39, 40).

Therefore, Jesus is the Son of God—rendering everything He said about Lot, Daniel, and Jonah equally true.

Spiritual Intimacy

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us . . .

1 Thessalonians 2:13 (a)

The word translated "received" is the Greek word *paralambano,* which means "to embrace intellectually."

. . . ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 (b)

The Greek word *dechomai* is also translated "received," and it means "to embrace emotionally."

"Lo, I come to you in the volume of the book," says Jesus (Hebrews 10:7). Consequently, when you take in the Word, you're seeing the nature and person of Jesus. It's more than theology. You're embracing Him personally and emotionally.

- The Word is bread (Matthew 4).
- "I am the Bread of life," declared Jesus (John 6).

- The Word of God is truth (John 17).
- "I am the Truth," declared Jesus (John 14).

When you read the Scriptures, you embrace the Lord because the Word and the Lord are intimately bound.

But the Word just seems to go through me like a sieve, you might be thinking. *I can't even remember what we studied last Wednesday night.*

That's okay. It does the job. It doesn't return void (Isaiah 55:11). I don't remember the last time I had a Quarter Pounder® with cheese, but I know the

proteins, vitamins, and other "nutritious" ingredients for which it is famous did the job and kept me going.

I've studied Genesis before. Why study it again? you might be wondering.

When my wife, Tammy, fixes Chicken Kiev, I don't say, "I ate that two months ago, so I think I'll pass on that tonight." No, I take in the same food again and again because it delights me every time. The same is true of the Word.

"I'm going to keep reminding you of the same truths over and over again," Peter said. "I don't care if you think I'm a creative teacher or not. You need to be established in truth" (2 Peter 1:12).

> *The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the* LORD.
>
> Jeremiah 23:28

Men's visions, ideas, and esoteric experiences are like chaff. They blow away. Not so the Word. It's wheat. It nourishes. It endures. Study the Word, dear people of God. It will produce faith in your life, joy in your heart, and sustenance for your soul.



3 1 Thessalonians 3:1

Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Ath ens alone;

Paul, Silas, and Timothy went to Berea after being driven out of Thessalonica. They taught the Word to the Bereans, who were good students. But the same people who drove Paul out of Thessalonica followed him to Berea, forcing them to leave for Athens.

1 Thessalonians 3:2 (a)

And sent Timotheus, our brother . . .

"We made it to Athens, but we couldn't wait to see how you were doing. We sent our brother Timothy to find out," writes Paul.

1 Thessalonians 3:2 (b)
. . . and minister of God . . .

Timothy was not only a brother, but also a minister. The word "minister" means "servant." As a true minister of God, Timothy's heart was not to be served, but to serve. He was not one who said, "Who cares if there's no room for the ambulance? I've got my clergy sticker, so I can park right in front of the hospital." No, Timothy did not take advantage of his position because he was a *true* minister.

1 Thessalonians 3:2 (c)
. . . and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith.

The word "fellow-laborer" literally means "team player." People headed for ministry must be team players because they are to be linked to the rest of the body in submission and humility.

1 Thessalonians 3:3, 4
That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

"Don't feel bad about our situation," Paul is saying. "Don't be surprised to hear people are chasing us around Greece, throwing rocks at us; trying to destroy us. Appointments with trouble are already on our calendars. We told you this would happen. It's all part of the program."

"Welcome this man," the Lord told Ananias concerning Paul, "for I'm going to show him he must suffer greatly for the sake of the kingdom" (Acts 9:16).

"Blessed be the Father of mercies, the God of comfort," Paul would later write to the Corinthians, "who comforts us in our troubles that we may be able to comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received (2 Corinthians 1:4).

A. W. Tozer was right when he said, "Before God can use a person greatly, He must allow that person to be hurt deeply." This isn't because God is mean, but because He knows we can't comfort others unless we've been comforted ourselves.

Trials not only enable us to comfort others, but they purify our own faith. That's why Peter said, "Don't think it strange concerning the fiery trials that come your way. They are sent to test and purify your faith" (1 Peter 4:12).

What happens when you are in a fiery trial? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego will tell you: Jesus shows up (Daniel 3:25). That's why James tells us to count it all joy when we fall into trials (James 1:2).

"Whoopee! A trial! How wonderful!" Crazy? Not really, because if you have this mind-set in your difficult times, you will see Jesus in a way that will blow your mind, warm your heart, and bless your socks off!

Trials don't make or break us, gang. They simply reveal what's inside. When I'm driving and hit a bump, the tea that splashes out of the mug on my dashboard was there before the bump. The bump doesn't put the tea in. It just shows what was already in the cup. That's what trials do.

"I'm angry because of what he or she did to me." No. The anger was already there. The bump just brought it out. Truly, the only way a man can really know how he's doing is through bumpy, discouraging, heartbreaking times, for they reveal his heart.

1 Thessalonians 3:5–8

For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain. But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you: Therefore, brethren, we were

comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.

"The greatest joy I could possibly have," John wrote, "is to hear that those to whom I ministered are walking in truth" (3 John 4). Paul has the same heart. "Even though we're going through persecutions," he writes, "they're worth it if you're doing well."

1 Thessalonians 3:9

For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God.

Paul went through problems that would make any of ours look like peanuts, yet he did well because he wasn't concerned for himself. "All I care about," he said, "are those with whom I've shared the gospel—my kids in the faith."

1 Thessalonians 3:10 (a)

Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face . . .

Paul took advantage of sleepless nights to pray for these people whom he had only known for three weeks, but with whom his spirit was inextricably linked.

1 Thessalonians 3:10 (b)

. . . and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

As proud as he was of the Thessalonian believers, Paul knew there were still areas in which they needed encouragement and guidance.

1 Thessalonians 3:11, 12

Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and

abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you.

There come points in my walk when I say, "You know, I'm doing pretty good." I get comfortable as apathy begins to creep into my heart. Through Paul, the Spirit says to me, "I want you to increase. I rejoice in what's happening in your life, but may your love for Me grow to an ever-deepening measure."

"Moab has been at ease and settled in his lees. Therefore I will pour him out from vessel to vessel," said the Lord (see Jeremiah 48:11). The reference is to the way wine was made in Jeremiah's day. The winemaker would pick grapes, put them in a vat, and stomp on them to get the juice flowing. Then he would pour the juice into a vessel where the wine sat until the lees, or dregs, settled to the bottom. The winemaker would then pour the wine into another vessel, leaving the dregs behind, where it would sit while more dregs settled. This process was repeated up to six times, until the end result was wine without any dregs—wine that was pure and sparkling.

"I was just getting comfy," we cry, "when my boss said, 'You're through,' " when my girlfriend said, 'Goodbye,' when my coach said, 'On the bench.' "

"Great!" the Lord says. "I want to refine and use you as the wine of my Spirit flows through you. For that to happen, there will be regular seasons where you are poured. Otherwise you'll become cloudy and dull as you settle in your lees. I love you too much for that."

Instead of, "*Poor* me," we must be those who say, "*Pour* me, Father—that I may increase and abound in love."

1 Thessalonians 3:13

To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

"Regardless of the cost, I want you to abound and increase in love," Paul writes, "so that you will be ready for eternity."



4 1 Thessalonians 4:1

Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

The emphasis to this church doing well is: "Do better. Continue on. Mature even more in your faith."

1 Thessalonians 4:2–5

For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

In chapter 4, Paul deals with the issue of love. "Your love is to be not lustful, sensual, or immoral—but pure," he says. Considering how young in the faith the church at Thessalonica was, it is easy to understand why they needed to be reminded not to fall into the immorality of the world that surrounded them.

1 Thessalonians 4:6, 7

That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

Verse 6 does not refer to business practices, but speaks of sexual matters. "I got a piece of her," the world says regarding sexual union. That's exactly right. Whenever sexual intimacy takes place outside of marriage, a piece of one's soul is taken away, simply to fulfill a lustful desire. You see, physical intimacy is not simply two bodies expressing passion. It's the essence, the souls of two people being made one. Consequently, if it's done outside of

marriage, people are defrauded, deceived, and cheated out of what would have otherwise been theirs to enjoy. The repercussions go on and on.

When Absalom launched a coup against his father, David's trusted advisor Ahithophel sided with the rebellious Absalom. *Why? Why?* David must have wondered. *How can it be that Ahithophel—the brains behind all the political machinations in my kingdom—would rebel against me? Why would he side with my rebellious son?*

If you carefully read the genealogies, you'll find a possible answer. Ahithophel was the grandfather of a woman named Bathsheba (2 Samuel 23:34). Because David had defiled his granddaughter, animosity must have simmered inside Ahithophel year after year. Finally, when he saw his opportunity, he sided with Absalom.

"Be sure your sin will find you out," Moses writes (Numbers 32:23). It's not that *God* will find you out. When we accept Jesus as Savior, His blood completely washes us. God doesn't track us down; our sin does. In this case, if you defraud someone sexually, you'll reap a crop of destruction. The consequences might be immediate, or they might come a couple decades down the road. No one gets away with sin. Ask David.

"Aha!" you say. "I knew I was justified in being angry with that guy who defiled my wife," or, "I knew I was right to resent that girl who cheated on my brother. I'm never going to forgive him or her. Ahithophel didn't."

Look what happened to Ahithophel.

He hanged himself (2 Samuel 17:23).

No matter the extent of someone's sin, I must never be the one who commits the greater sin of bitterness. Ahithophel didn't forgive David, and what happened? War ensued. Ahithophel could have advised Absalom differently. His bitterness resulted in a worse tragedy than David's sin with Bathsheba. The war that followed brought about the deaths of twenty thousand (2 Samuel 18:7). Lest I sit here piously and think I have reason to be angry with my boss, spouse, or kids, I must realize the sin of unforgiveness will cause me to get hung up like Ahithophel. It will damage others in the process.

If, on the other hand, you are one who has defrauded someone, if you are one who has sinned, who has blown it—join the club. This church is packed with sinners because every one of us has had a point of failure in our lives.

What are we to do? We're to say, "I failed, Father, but I confess my sin and turn from it. Use the scars of the repercussions I know are sure to follow to draw others to Your grace and forgiveness."

It was the wounds Jesus bore for our sin that convinced Thomas of the reality of His Resurrection (John 20:27, 28). So, too, the scars of our sin can witness to the reality of His grace in our lives.



***For topical study of 1 Thessalonians 4:3–8 entitled "Pure Vessels," turn to page* 1343.**

1 Thessalonians 4:8

He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.

"If you refuse this word," Paul says, "you're not rejecting us, but God."

1 Thessalonians 4:9–11 (a)

But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; And that ye study to be quiet . . .

Most of us have difficulty following the admonition to be quiet.

Winston Churchill told the story of a man who was always chattering.

"Sir Winston," he chirped, "I haven't told you about my grandchildren yet."

"And for that," Churchill answered, "I am deeply grateful."

We can be conversationalists, but we shouldn't be chatty. We should study to be quiet.

1 Thessalonians 4:11 (b), 12

. . . and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

If you're not quiet, chances are you'll be talking about other people's business. What is Paul's solution? Get a job. If you're one who's prone to chatter, get to work. Find something practical to do.

"I don't need to work. I'm financially secure," you might be saying. Great! Volunteer to pull weeds at your church. It's real quiet where the weeds are growing, and you'll be minding your own business!

1 Thessalonians 4:13 (a)

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep . . .

Paul changes gears in this third and final section of his first epistle. After remembering their past and refocusing their present, Paul will reveal the future of the Thessalonians.

We are not to be ignorant concerning spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1). We are not to be ignorant of Satan's plans and strategies (2 Corinthians 2:11). We are not to be ignorant of the mystery that Israel will eventually be saved (Romans 11:25, 26). Here, Paul says we are not to be ignorant concerning the Rapture.

The following would be an especially comforting message to the Thessalonians, who, evidently, were concerned that fellow believers who had died would miss the Rapture.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 (b)

. . . that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

Mario, a father of six, was one of the pastors at a mission base in Honduras. Along with a bunch of other folks from the nearby town, Mario was watching a soccer game a couple of weeks ago. Suddenly, a lightning bolt hit the stands, claiming the lives of eighteen people. Mario was one. Reports came back that although Mario's wife was brokenhearted, she was

full of joy because unbelievers began to open up to the gospel. They saw the hope of her joy and peace in the midst of her sorrow.

Occasionally, I have the opportunity to officiate at funerals where the family and friends are not believers. Such services are emotionally wrenching. When I officiate at services for believers—for those who see the big picture—there is incredible peace along with their sorrow.

1 Thessalonians 4:14

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

In other words, "Believers who have died are presently in heaven." Some falsely teach that when believers die, they remain in the casket until the Rapture. What did Jesus say to the thief on the cross next to Him? He didn't say, "You will sleep for a couple thousand years and then you'll be resurrected." No, He said, "*Today* you'll be with Me in Paradise (Luke 23:43).

The moment someone leaves his body at death, an amazing thing happens. He moves into eternity where there is no time. There's no past, present, or future. It's just all one great big "Now" because eternity transcends time. How do I know this? Albert Einstein hypothesized about heaven without even knowing it. His theory revealed that if one could ever travel at the speed of light, time would cease. Therefore, because God is light, time ceases in His presence. Thus, from the perspective of those in heaven, the Rapture has happened, and we're already with them in heaven.

How can this be? Think of it this way:

Here I am watching the Rose Parade on Colorado Boulevard. You find me watching the parade, and say, "Hey, Jon, good to see you. Listen, did the General Electric float go by?"

"Yeah. It was great," I say.

"Ooh, I missed it. I really wanted to see it," you say.

"Well, you can still see it if you go down Colorado Boulevard," I explain. "In other words, if you go to 'the past' that's already

passed me, what's fresh for you will be something I've already seen."

If you came to me and asked what was coming up in the parade, I would say, "I don't know. You'll have to go to the future, to where the parade begins."

On the other hand, I could say, "Let's just get in the Goodyear blimp, and we'll be able to see the whole parade simultaneously—past, present, and future."

That is the best illustration I know to describe the concept of eternity. You see, we're down here on the curb watching the parade of life, wondering what's coming. From heaven's perspective, like the view from the Goodyear blimp—it's all one big Now. From heaven's perspective, the Rapture has already happened. From our perspective, however, we're still waiting on the curb.

I say this because many of us have dealt with the departure of loved ones. Personally, I do not believe that heaven could be heaven if a husband left his family behind and wondered how they would survive, or if a mother left her kids behind and worried about their well-being. That is why I suggest to you that heaven can only be heaven if we're all there simultaneously.

1 Thessalonians 4:15, 16

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.

There are those who contend that the trump of God mentioned here refers to the seventh trumpet of Revelation, which signals the Rapture (Revelation 11:15). Thus, they reason the church will be present on earth during the Tribulation.

Such is not the case. The trumpets of Revelation 8—11 are blown by angels, whereas the trump of 1 Thessalonians 4 is the trump of *God*—the

trump Paul refers to as "the last trump" (1 Corinthians 15:52). God sounded the first trump when He gathered the Jews at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16). He will sound the last trump before He gathers those who become believers during the Tribulation.

1 Thessalonians 4:17, 18

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

"In this world you will have tribulation," declared Jesus (John 16:33)—from Satan, from the flesh, from the world. The Tribulation of Revelation 6–19 is the time when God pours out His wrath and judgment on a Christ-rejecting, sinful world. Certainly the Father is not saying, "Throughout your life, you'll face tribulation from Satan, the flesh, and the world—and then you'll experience Tribulation from Me." That's just not it. As believers, we will not go through the Tribulation. And that is a comforting word, indeed.



***For topical study of 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 entitled "Reasons for the Rapture," turn to page* 1346.**

PURE VESSELS
A Topical Study of
1 THESSALONIANS 4:3–8

As a pastor, one of the questions I am asked most frequently is, "How can I know God's will?" I'm glad I can answer that question with real certainty: God's will is that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). God's will is that we continually give thanks (1 Thessalonians 5:18). As we see in our text today, God's will is that we possess our vessels in purity.

The word "vessel" means "container" or "pitcher." In the Old Testament, vessels contained wine for a drink offering to the Lord (Numbers 15). In the New Testament, we ourselves are earthen vessels, containing the treasure of Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:7). Paul tells us we are to keep our vessels—our bodies—pure. In Daniel 5, we see what happens when a holy vessel is used in an immoral manner.

> The year was approximately 539 B.C. Belshazzar partied in Babylon as thousands of Medes and Persians besieged the city.
>
> "Hah! I'm not afraid," Belshazzar boasted. "After all, Babylon is surrounded by walls three hundred fifty feet high, eighty-seven feet thick." As the party continued, Belshazzar decided to drink from the holy temple vessels Nebuchadnezzar had taken when he conquered Jerusalem.
>
> In the midst of the revelry, a hand appeared and wrote on the wall, "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin," which meant "You've been weighed in the balance and have been found wanting. Tonight your kingdom will crash down upon you." Sure enough, after damming the Euphrates River, the Medes were able to crawl beneath the wall surrounding Babylon and into the city. Once there, they were able to capture Belshazzar's kingdom right out from under him.

Being baptized 20 years or 6 summers ago with no growth since then indicates a dubious commitment from the very beginning. Struggling, then

failing to keep oneself pure, however, although it compromises ministry, joy, effectiveness, etc, does not jeopardize an already existing relationship with Christ.

How do we possess our vessel? I suggest three ways. . . .

Run to the Congregation

> *But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.*
>
> 2 Timothy 2:20, 21

Through Paul, God says, "You can choose to be a vessel of honor or dishonor. You can choose to be a beautiful vase or a spittoon. The key is to purge yourself from iniquity." How? Read on. . . .

> *Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*
>
> 2 Timothy 2:22

If you find yourself in a situation of temptation, do what Joseph did when Potiphar's wife grabbed him.

"Lie with me," she said. Joseph fled youthful lusts. He ran for his life (Genesis 39:12).

"But Joseph got thrown into prison," you say.

Yes—but then he became prime minister of Egypt, where he was "meet for the Master's use."

> One day, I saw some Canadian geese flying overhead in a perfect "V." Why do geese fly in this formation? The reason is ingenious. You see, while the geese in the back are cruising, they're honking to the geese in the front, saying, "Keep it up in the front. You guys are doing great." Then, when the front boys get tired and drop to the back, the geese in the back work their way toward the front. The geese now in the back honk encouragement to them. For the geese to make it all the way to nice weather, they must encourage one another. They can't leave the flock, or they'll tire out.

If you say, “I’ll flee from temptation, but I don’t really need to be with other Christians,” you’re in for real problems because you’ll never make it alone. Run from temptation to the congregation. Run to the place where there are people who love the Lord and want to walk with Him. Run from sin to the saints.

Receive the Bread of Heaven

Where were the Old Testament vessels of purity found?

They were on the table of shewbread (Leviticus 24:5, 6).

If you're struggling with lust or involved in immorality, go to the New Testament table of showbread—the table of Communion. Confess your sin and say, "Father, I'm struggling with these images. I'm struggling with these passions. I need Your Son to live in me as I eat of His body. As I take this cup, Lord, I thank You that I am forgiven by Your blood."

Perhaps you've been taught that if there is sin in your life, you cannot come to the Communion table. That's like a doctor saying to the emergency room patient, "Come back when you're not bleeding so much." Where else are we to find forgiveness but at the Lord's table?

The word "unworthily" in 1 Corinthians 11:29 doesn't refer to us, for we are never worthy of the privilege of Communion. It refers to the act of Communion. In other words, the one who takes the Cross lightly is the one who takes Communion unworthily. He who comes to the table saying, "Lord, I need You in my life. I confess that I have failed. Thank You for Your forgiveness. I choose to turn away from my sin. Give me Your grace, Lord. Help me this day," places great worth on Communion and will be forgiven completely: strengthened uniquely.

Each time you come to the Lord's table and confess your sin, you will find your struggle becoming a little easier. Watch. You'll see.

Refuse the Bread of Earth

Jesus said hellish temptations "do not come out but by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21). Isaiah said the same thing.

> *Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?*
>
> Isaiah 58:6

Fasting is essential for those struggling with lustful temptations of the flesh. You see, my stomach is constantly saying, "It's burger time, buddy. You can't miss a meal. You can't deny your flesh." When I say, "I'm not giving in to you, stomach," self-denial spills over into other areas of my flesh as well.

Why could Jesus say, "I will not turn these stones into bread; I will not seek exaltation by jumping from the pinnacle of the temple; I will not receive the gift of all the earthly kingdoms?" He had been praying and fasting for forty days (see Matthew 4).

May I challenge you to consider fasting? During the time you would have been eating, pray. Whether you fast for a meal or a day, it is an absolute key to overcoming the flesh.

- Run to the congregation in the moment of temptation.
- Receive the bread of heaven at the table of Communion.
- Refuse the bread of earth through prayer and fasting.

If you do, you will be fulfilling God's will for your life. You will be exceedingly blessed in your marriage, your family, and your ministry.

REASONS FOR THE RAPTURE

A Topical Study of
1 THESSALONIANS 4:15–17

On July 20, 1969, astronaut Neil Armstrong left the Apollo Lunar Command Module and became the first human to set foot on the moon. Perhaps you recall his classic line, "One small step for man; one giant leap for mankind."

Let me tell you something, gang. The leap Armstrong referred to cannot hold a candle to the leap you'll be taking when the Lord comes in the clouds to rapture His church.

"Wait a minute," you say. "I have a problem with this because I don't see the word 'rapture' in the Bible."

That's because you're using the wrong Bible! You see, the New Testament was written in Greek. The phrase in verse 17, translated "caught up," is the Greek word *harpazo,* which means "to be grabbed by the collar and taken up with force." When the New Testament was translated into Latin, translators used the word *raptus* for *harpazo*—from which we get our word "rapture."

What is the purpose of the Rapture? I suggest there are four.

To Take up God's Children

Before World War II, Japan and Germany called their ambassadors away from America and back to their respective home countries. So, too, before the Lord declares war on the sin of our planet, He will take us—His ambassadors—home (2 Corinthians 5:20).

You can't pick up a newspaper or turn on TV without agreeing that the world is in a terrible state and needs to be judged. Before God judges our Christ-rejecting, sinful world, He will take His kids home to heaven.

> If my house was infected with termites and I had to fumigate, even if my kids were being a bit rebellious or difficult, I would still make sure they were out of the house before the tent went up and the gas was pumped in.

If earthly parents are concerned about our children's safety, how much *more* is our heavenly Father concerned about the safety of His children?

To Shake up the Heathen

Not only will the Rapture ensure our safety, it will also bring about salvation. On the day of Pentecost, Peter spoke of the day when the sun shall be darkened, the moon shall turn to blood, and whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2:17–21).

There are family members who have listened to you share Jesus, but don't believe in Him. There are friends who have heard your testimony and say, "That's all well and good—for *you*." There are co-workers with whom you've shared the plan of salvation who seem only to turn a deaf ear. The day is coming when we will be suddenly taken up and all your words will make perfect sense.

"Well, if that's the case," you say, "I'll just wait until you guys disappear. Then I'll know what you said is true, and I'll receive Jesus as my Savior."

If you cannot receive Jesus Christ in this day of grace, what makes you think you will be able to stand for Him in that time of intense persecution? Those who acknowledge Jesus as Lord in the Tribulation will be saved—but they'll lose their heads in the process (Revelation 20:4).

Lifesaving technique dictates that if a drowning person fights against him, a lifeguard must knock him out in order to save him. So, too, the Tribulation is God's knockout punch to the heathen in order to save them.

To Wake up a Nation

In referring to the Tribulation as "*Jacob's* trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7), Jeremiah makes it clear that it has a specific purpose for the nation of Israel. Israel will at last recognize her Messiah during the Tribulation.

> *When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the* LORD *thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; (For the* LORD *thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them.*
>
> Deuteronomy 4:30, 31

How will this come about? Two witnesses will preach in the streets of Jerusalem, which some commentators believe could be Elijah and Moses (Revelation 11). One hundred forty-four thousand Jewish Billy Grahams will preach throughout the world (Revelation 7). Angels will preach in the skies (Revelation 7).

When Jesus returns with ten thousand of His saints, all of Israel will lift up their eyes and say, "Where did You get those wounds?"

"In the house of My friends," He will answer (Zechariah 13:6).

Then the entire nation of Israel shall be saved (Romans 11). What a glorious day that will be!

To Make up the Millennium

At creation, God covered the earth with a blanket of water that filtered out the ultraviolet rays (Psalm 104:6). That is why Adam, Methuselah, and Enos lived nine hundred years or more. It was a perfect, wonderful environment. But when the world became so evil in the days of Noah that God had to flood it by breaking the protective water canopy, man's lifespan dwindled to only seventy to ninety years.

The Tribulation will purge the world of the depravity that permeates our planet to such a degree that even ecology will be restored in the Millennium. That is why the mountains shall break forth into song, and the trees of the field shall clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12); the wolf will lie down with the lamb (Isaiah 11:6); and men will live as long as they did in the days of Genesis (Isaiah 65:20).

> As the funeral procession made its way through the streets of Nain, Jesus had compassion on the bereaved mother. "Do not weep," He told her. Then, although it would have rendered Him ceremonially unclean, Jesus touched the coffin and said to the young man inside, "Arise" (Luke 7:11–15).

Gang, the day is coming when Jesus will say to us, "Arise! Come up here," (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). Up we'll go.

"Oh, but my heart is so hard," you say. "I'm a believer, but my heart is like stone."

It couldn't be harder than the heart of the young man in the coffin—he was dead! That didn't prevent him from rising and speaking at the sound of Jesus' voice. If you're a believer, you will not be left behind. Your heart will be softened; your lips will flow with praise; you will be free.

Maybe your heart is not heavy. Maybe it's broken.

The broken-hearted mother lost her only son. The ultimate "only Son," Jesus Christ, showed compassion to her.

A man recently said to me, "Jon, I'm so sorry you lost your daughter."

I had to say, "You know what? I didn't lose her. I know right where she is. She's in heaven, and I'll see her again."

You who are broken-hearted, be comforted. If you're missing a loved one, like the widow of Nain, rejoice. You will soon be reunited forever.

Jesus is coming, and He will soon call us to be with Him. Comfort one another with these words, gang. Keep talking about His coming. Keep looking for His coming. Whether we're hard or heavy-hearted, His coming is the ultimate answer for every heart.



5

1 Thessalonians 5:1

But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

People often ask why we spend so much time studying prophecy. There are two reasons. First, one-third of the Bible is prophetic, so we will inevitably encounter a great deal of prophecy as we journey through the Word. Second, we study prophecy because the present times and seasons point to the coming of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:2

For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

"Wait a minute," you say. "Doesn't verse 2—which says the Lord's return will come as stealthily as a thief in the night—contradict verse 1, which says the time of His return is predictable?"

Read on.

1 Thessalonians 5:3–6

For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in

darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

It is only the unbelievers who are in the dark concerning the Lord's return. Believers, on the other hand, know what's really happening. Comfort one another, says Paul, with the reminder that the Lord's coming is near. At the same time, realize the dark times and the seasons before the Rapture will become increasingly treacherous.

1 Thessalonians 5:7, 8 (a)

For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith . . .

Where do we get faith? Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). The only way we will be strong in faith is to stay in the Word.

1 Thessalonians 5:8 (b)

. . . and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

If you put on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of hope and salvation, you will constantly live in the hope that the Lord is coming soon.

1 Thessalonians 5:9, 10

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

Paul says, "God has not appointed us to wrath." Why? Is it because we're so cool? Is it because we're so good? No. The wrath that should come down on us was poured out on Jesus Christ when He took our place on the

Cross. Consequently, we are not ordained for the wrath of the Lamb, but for His marvelous, glorious work of salvation.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

As Paul begins to close his first letter to the Thessalonians, he does so with a series of practical exhortations intended to refine their walk.

1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.

We are to think highly of those who are called to instruct, admonish, or challenge us in the Name of the Lord—not because of their personalities, but because of their position; not because of who they are, but because of the invaluable work they do.

1 Thessalonians 5:14

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

The four injunctions Paul gives provide a wonderful picture of true ministry: Clearly warn those whose behavior is out of line with the way of the Lord. Comfort those who have a hard time understanding the will of the Lord. Support those who are weak in the Lord. Show patience to all—even to those who don't know the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 5:15

See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

Don't be evil. Follow that which is good, both to those within the Christian community, and those without.

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

What is God's will? Paul succinctly defines it as praying without ceasing, giving thanks in everything and rejoicing forevermore.

1 Thessalonians 5:19, 20

Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings.

Some scoff at the gift of tongues or words of wisdom. They do so to their own spiritual poverty because those who fail to acknowledge the manifestations of the Spirit actually quench His presence in their own lives.

1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.

If you want to be used by the Lord, you must deal with the issue of appearances. You might be innocent, but if anything you're doing even *appears* evil, it can compromise your usefulness.

1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24, 25–28

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. Brethren, pray for us. Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss. I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

“I pray for you,” writes Paul, “and I know God will see you through because He is faithful.”



2 THESSALONIANS

1 A year after his first letter, Paul penned a second letter to the Thessalonians. This was done in order to clear up the confusion caused by those who preached after he left. They were saying that the persecution launched against the church in Thessalonica was proof that the Tribulation had already begun. Add to them a group who supposedly prophesied in the Spirit, and a forged letter from Paul saying the Tribulation had begun. It is easy to see why the Thessalonians were confused.

2 Thessalonians 1:1–3

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.

In the first verse of his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul had commended their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope. Here, in his second letter, he commends only their faith and love. Why? They had lost their hope because they were no longer living for Jesus' return.

Although of faith, hope, and love the greatest is love (1 Corinthians 13:13)—all three elements are essential because it is faith and hope that allow us to love. How? I'd be too ashamed to love if I were hung up over my past sins. Faith tells me my past failures were totally cleansed by the blood of Jesus. I'd be too afraid to love if I were worried about the future. Hope tells me He's coming again, so there's no need to fear.

2 Thessalonians 1:4

So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye

endure.

Even as Paul wrote his epistles, Christians were being beat up and wiped out. "We're proud of you," says Paul. "You're enduring hard times."

2 Thessalonians 1:5

Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer.

"The fact that you are persecuted and put down is proof that you're a part of the kingdom," declares Paul. He would say the same thing to Timothy by writing, "Yea, all those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

Hmm.

So often I pray to avoid pressure, problems, and persecution. In reality, it is those very things that would have produced Christlike qualities within me. There is really no other way. If you want to be like Jesus, hard times are inevitable.

"I want to shine like a diamond in the kingdom," we say. You know what a diamond is? It's a chunk of worthless coal that has undergone tremendous amounts of pressure over many, many years. So if your heart wants to reflect Jesus, know this: There is no other way that will happen than to go through fiery trials over great lengths of time. This is why Peter talks about our faith being purified by fiery trials (1 Peter 4:12), and why James says, "Count it all joy when you go through these trials" (James 1:2).

Although I know this in theory, I still find myself praying, "Lord, I don't want to deal with this. Lord, I don't want to go through that. Lord, do I have to go *there?* Lord, get me out of here!" In reality, such prayers are unwise because they can actually hinder the work the Lord was doing in me through these trials.

Consequently, I am praying less, "Lord, help me Yourself," and more, "Lord, help Yourself to me. I am tired of directing You. Put me wherever You see I'll be happy and most fruitful. You know best."

2 Thessalonians 1:6

Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you.

I personally believe this verse alludes to more than the tribulation the Thessalonians were experiencing. I believe it speaks of the bigger picture of the Tribulation of Revelation 6—19. Why? The phrase, "It is a *righteous* thing with God," takes me back to Genesis 18.

> Concerning the impending doom of Sodom, Abraham asked God, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25) God did, indeed, pour out His wrath on Sodom. Before He did, He raptured Lot and his family when He sent an angel to grab them by the hand and pull them out of the city.
>
> And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished . . .
>
> 2 Peter 2:6–9

The word translated "out of" is the Greek word *ek*. *Ek* does not mean "to protect them while they are going through it." It means "to be taken out completely." Before God poured out His judgment on Sodom, He "took out" Lot and his family. God will take His children out before He pours out His wrath on a Christ-rejecting, sinful, corrupt world during the Tribulation.

2 Thessalonians 1:7–9

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished

with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

Are you getting picked on because of your faith in Jesus Christ? Relax, Paul says, because there's coming a day when the Lord will return with mighty angels to take vengeance on those who are purposefully, knowingly giving you headaches and heartbreaks because of your faith in Him.

2 Thessalonians 1:10–12

When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Jesus comes, He will be glorified not among His saints—but *in* them.

I venture to guess that none of us bought the latest *Ladies Home Journal* expecting to see our names on the "Ten Most Admired People" list. Nor did we buy the latest edition of *Who's Who in America,* eager to see our names inside. That's because this is not our day. This is the "day of man" (Job 10:5)—"man" referring to fallen humanity. When Jesus returns, He will be glorified and admired in all who believe. This means we'll see Jesus in each other. "Wow, I thought you were a lightweight," we'll say; or, "I thought you were weird"; or, "I thought you were callous, cruel, pompous, or vain. Now look at you! I see *Jesus* in you!"

Oh, to have such a mind-set this side of eternity—to join Paul in "knowing no man after the flesh" (2 Corinthians 5:16), instead seeing Jesus glorified in His saints even now.

2 Thessalonians 2:1

2 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him.

Writing of "our gathering together unto Him," Paul gets to the heart of his second letter as he deals with the Rapture.

2 Thessalonians 2:2 (a)

That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us . . .

Referring to the false teachers that had descended upon the church at Thessalonica following his departure, Paul says, "Don't be troubled by spirit (false prophecies); word (false teaching), or by letter (forged)."

2 Thessalonians 2:2 (b)

. . . as that the day of Christ is at hand.

Although your King James Version translates this phrase "as that the day of Christ is at hand," more recent and correct translations render this verse "the day of the Lord has already come" (NIV). As seen in the first and second chapters of the Book of Joel, the Day of the Lord is when the Lord intervenes in human history and brings about judgment and justice. It will begin with the Tribulation, extend through the Millennium, and culminate with the replacement of this earth by a new creation (Joel 2).

2 Thessalonians 2:3 (a)

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first . . .

The Greek word *apostasia* is translated "falling away." It is also where we get our word "apostasy." There are two equally valid translations of the word *apostasia.* The first translation is "turning one's back on truth." The second is a literal, physical "departure." Consequently, many Bible scholars have argued very passionately that the phrase "falling away" refers to a

departure from earth—the Rapture. Others argue that the phrase simply means turning one's back on truth.

Which translation is correct? I believe it could be either one. The Tribulation will begin after the world continues to turn its back on truth (Matthew 24:12), and it will come after the church physically departs during the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:17, 18).

2 Thessalonians 2:3 (b)

. . . and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.

The word "perdition" means "waste." The phrase "the son of perdition" is used twice in the Bible. Here, it is linked to Antichrist. The other time it is seen in Jesus' High Priestly prayer.

> While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.
>
> John 17:12

Who is this "son of perdition"? Judas Iscariot. The same spirit that filled Judas Iscariot, making him the son of perdition, will also make Antichrist the "son of perdition."

> *When Mary broke her alabaster box and anointed Jesus in an act of worship, Judas said "To what purpose is this waste?" (Matthew 26:8; John 12:4, 5)*

Nothing given to the Lord is ever wasted. The young missionary martyred by the Auca Indians was right when he said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."[1] Jim Elliot understood the big picture. Judas, the son of perdition, did not.

2 Thessalonians 2:4 (a)

Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of

God . . .

"Little children," wrote John, "it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time" (1 John 2:18).

The word "anti" does not only mean "against." It also means "in place of." Thus, the spirit of antichrist can be in the temple of my own body. I'm not talking about demons, but about the mind-set that leads me to say, "I don't need to rely on Christ. I don't need to pray about my kids today. I don't need to pray about how to use my time."

What will be the result? The same things that will follow the physical antichrist: I will experience "famine, wars and rumors of wars" (Matthew 24:4–8). I'll have problems in my marriage, my family, my ministry. The tribulation believers endure is often unnecessary. They could have been "raptured to heaven" by spending time seeking the Lord in the morning. They could have been "caught up in the clouds to meet Him in the air" and thus gained a heavenly perspective on the day before them. Instead, they chose to captain their own ship, plot their own course, and rely on their own wisdom instead of Christ's.

Oh, none of us are "anti-Christ" in the sense that we're against Him. We are, however, vulnerable to the subtle thinking that takes the place of Christ, whereby we make our own decisions and call our own shots. The spirit of Antichrist can pollute any of us. Let's be wise and say, "My temple is dedicated to only One: Jesus Christ. He will reign in my heart. He will rule my life."

2 Thessalonians 2:4 (b)
. . . shewing himself that he is God.

After the "departure" of verse 3, Antichrist will demand to be worshiped as God in the temple in Jerusalem. This is really going to happen, gang. You can go to the Temple Treasury Museum in Jerusalem and see the garments already made for the priests, along with the utensils, tools, candles, mitres, and plans to replicate the ark of the covenant to Levitical standards.

“Wait a minute,” you say. “How can the temple be rebuilt when the Mosque of Omar, the Dome of the Rock, the third most holy site of Islam sits on the very spot where the temple is to be rebuilt? To bulldoze it down would start a holy war of unbelievable proportions, as 850 million Muslims would rise up and crush the three million Jews in Israel.”

> Dr. Asher Kaufman is one of a number of Jewish archaeologists who contend the Dome of the Rock Mosque does not sit on the site of the Holy of Holies as previously believed. The actual Holy of Holies lies beneath a little gazebo-like structure called the Dome of the Tablets and the Dome of the Spirits.

Why would this spot be referred to as the Dome of the Tablets?

The Tablets were there.

What tablets?

The Ten Commandments that were in the ark of the covenant, which sat in the Holy of Holies.

Why would this spot be referred to as the Dome of the Spirits?

The Spirit of God, the shekinah glory, filled the Holy of Holies.

What stands on the temple mount in front of the Dome of the Spirits, the Dome of the Tablets?

Nothing.

“Let me solve this sticky issue, the Palestinian problem, the question of Jerusalem,” Antichrist will say. “Jews, you build your temple on the true site of the temple. We’ll build a wall to separate it from the Muslim Dome of the Rock Mosque.” Ezekiel prophesied this very thing would happen (Ezekiel 42:20). In this way, Antichrist will seemingly solve the problem that has troubled and divided Jerusalem for centuries. The people will say, “He’s wonderful. He’s our hero!”

Then, in the midst of his popularity, Antichrist will walk into the temple and demand to be worshiped, “showing himself that he is God,” and the horrific second half of the seven-year Tribulation will follow.

“Don’t be shaken,” Paul says to the Thessalonians. “You are not in the Tribulation. This is not the Day of the Lord. You did not miss the Rapture because the “son of perdition”—Antichrist—has not yet come.”

2 Thessalonians 2:5

Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

"Don't you remember that I explained these things when I was with you?" Paul asks the Thessalonian believers.

2 Thessalonians 2:6, 7 (a)

And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work . . .

The "mystery of iniquity" refers to Satan's desire to take control of the world through Antichrist.

2 Thessalonians 2:7 (b)

. . . only he who now letteth will let . . .

A "let" in tennis is the term used when a served ball bounces off, or is deflected, by the net. In other words, the net keeps the ball from being a fair serve. So, too, there is a force deflecting Satan's attempt to control the world.

2 Thessalonians 2:7 (c)

. . . until he be taken out of the way.

Who is the force hindering Satan? The Holy Spirit. The only thing keeping any degree of sanity on this planet is the Spirit working in and through the church. When the Rapture takes place, the "net" is removed, and Satan's volleys will no longer be deflected.

2 Thessalonians 2:8 (a)

And then shall that Wicked be revealed . . .

"Wicked" refers to the wicked one, or Antichrist. After the church is raptured, Satan will fill a human vessel who will usher in the new economic

system and world order preceding the Tribulation.

Come on, you may be thinking. *Do you* really *believe a literal, physical character claiming to be divine and godly, but actually filled with Satan, will appear on the scene?*

Yes. Little by little, even the world is unknowingly beginning to accept such a possibility. Through silly "X-Files" propaganda, the world is being prepped to explain away the disappearance of Christians in the Rapture. Through recent scientific advancements such as DNA cloning, the emergence of a "Christ figure" is, in the world's eyes, no longer a preposterous concept.

2 Thessalonians 2:8 (b)

. . . whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

As intimidating as Antichrist may be, when Jesus comes back, His brightness will blast Antichrist into oblivion.

2 Thessalonians 2:9

Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.

May the Lord help us to be cautious so we are not taken in by so-called signs and wonders even in this day. They can indeed be false.

They saw the Red Sea part, and the waters collapse on the armies of Pharaoh. They saw a mountain shake; and heard a voice from heaven. They saw food fall every morning and the earth swallow people. They were led by a fiery pillar at night, and a cloud by day. They saw more signs and wonders than any group of people in history. Yet the children of Israel could not enter into the Promised Land because of their unbelief (Hebrews 3:19).

Signs and wonders do not produce faith. They only produce a craving for more signs and wonders. That's why, centuries later, the Jews were still asking for more (John 6:30).

As we approach the final days, there will be an increase in signs and wonders, along with vulnerability even within the body of Christ to chase after, and to be intrigued by them. Jesus said signs and wonders shall follow those who believe (Mark 16:17). The problem today is that those who believe are following after signs and wonders. There's a big difference. Miracles do not produce faith. Only the Word produces faith (Romans 10:17).



***For topical study of 2 Thessalonians 2:8–10 entitled "Antichrist's Subtle Seduction," turn to page* 1356.**

2 Thessalonians 2:10–12

And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

There are only two prayers a man can pray: Either "*Thy* kingdom come; *Thy* will be done"—or "*my* kingdom come; *my* will be done." He who prays the latter, says, "I am the king of my domain. I want to call the shots in my life." God gives us freedom to pray either prayer. To do so, it is necessary for Him to send "strong delusion," lest he who does not want to believe does so against his will.

Jesus touched on this same principle when He spoke in parables so that blind eyes would not see or deaf ears would not hear (Matthew 13:13). You see, the power of Jesus' words and life was so evident that had He not blinded the eyes and stopped the ears of those who did not want to believe. They would have had no choice but to believe. Thus, they would have followed Him out of coercion rather than out of love.

That's why when we witness to people, we find ourselves saying, "Don't you get it? God is so *good.* Who wouldn't want to be saved? Who wouldn't want to know his sins are forgiven, that he has a Friend closer than a brother,

that he's going to live forever in heaven?"—only to hear people say, "No thanks."

Who wouldn't want to be saved?

Those who are deluded, those who believe a lie.

Even in the Tribulation, God will honor man's choice. He will allow those who don't want to see to remain blind.

2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

From the beginning, God chose the Thessalonian believers. From the beginning, He chose you. That's why you're in the Word even now. You could be at Rockin' Rodeo; you could be watching TV; you could be stuck in a world that is unsatisfying and destructive. The Lord, however, chose you to be saved.

"Wait a minute," you say. "Didn't we just read that God will not override our free will?"

Yes. God's sovereignty and man's free will dwell side by side throughout Scripture. It is only in our finite minds that the two cannot be reconciled. If you ignore God's tug on your heart, it will be because you are not chosen by God. If you choose God today, it will be because He already chose you.

Choose Him now, dear people. Surely it is His grace that has brought you this far.

2 Thessalonians 2:15

Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

Newer translations correctly render the word "traditions" as "ordinances." There are those who say, "Baptism is no longer necessary. The

Lord's table is optional. There's no need to pray the Lord's prayer. Meeting together for Bible study is helpful, but not crucial."

Jesus was baptized in water. So was Peter. So was John. So was D. L. Moody, C. H. Spurgeon, and Billy Graham. I may not have the boldness of D. L. Moody, the fervency of C. H. Spurgeon, or the anointing of Billy Graham, but I can stand exactly where they stood in the waters of baptism.

I can sit where the greatest Christians have sat through the ages, and have the same meal they had as I partake of Communion.

I can't preach like R. A. Torrey or Charles Finney, but I pray exactly as they did when I pray, "Our Father, which art in Heaven. . . ."

I don't have the power of the early church, but I do exactly as they did every time I meet with fellow believers to study the Word (Acts 2:42).

We have a glorious heritage, gang. Paul would say to us, even as he said to the Thessalonians, "Don't minimize traditions. Hold on to them. Your faith will be the richer; your walk will be the surer for it."

2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17

Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

Used six times, "comfort" is the watchword of Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians. The greatest comfort of all is the fact that Jesus could come even today and take us to heaven, where the forces of darkness will be obliterated by the "brightness of His coming."

ANTICHRIST'S SUBTLE SEDUCTION

A Topical Study of 2 THESSALONIANS 2:8–10

I spotted a deal on a billboard too good to pass up: A Big Mac® or Double Quarter Pounder® with Cheese for half price. Taking advantage of this Epicurean delight, I paid for my lunch with a twenty-dollar bill. The girl behind the counter looked at the bill, looked at me, and called for the manager. The manager looked at the bill, looked at me, pulled a yellow marking pen from his shirt pocket, swiped it across the bill, and said, "Okay."

"What was that all about?" I asked.

"We use this pen to check all twenty-dollar bills. If the ink had turned black, we would know this was a bogus bill. You see, we have a huge problem with counterfeiting."

Even today, the stage is set for the ultimate counterfeiter, Antichrist, to come on the scene and implement his new economic order. It will require no credit cards that can be lost, pin numbers that can be forgotten, or bills that can be counterfeited. It will simply be an innocent-looking number on one's forehead or hand (Revelation 14:9).

Counterfeiting is nothing new to Satan. Ever since he first appeared to Eve in the Garden of Eden, he has attempted to counterfeit God's work and His ways. Following are three questions that bring to light his "lying wonders."

Better or Worse?

"Thus saith the Lord," Moses said to Pharaoh. "Let My people go" (Exodus 8:1).

"Who is the Lord?" asked Pharaoh.

"Watch this," said Moses as he threw down his rod and it became a snake.

"We can do that, too," said Pharaoh's magicians as their sticks also became snakes—as if *more* snakes were just what Pharaoh needed.

"All of the waters of Egypt shall be turned to blood," declared Moses.

"We can do that, too," said Pharaoh's magicians—as if *more* blood was what Egypt wanted.

"Thus saith the Lord," declared Moses. "At this time tomorrow the whole land will be filled with frogs."

"We can do that, too," said Pharaoh's magicians—as if *more* frogs were desirable.

Whether through the occult or sleight of hand, Pharaoh's magicians were seemingly able to duplicate snakes, blood, and frogs. In so doing, they only made matters worse.

The same is true today. Satan's "lying wonders" can seem pretty impressive. Any time you or I get caught up in the world's system, when the special effects are turned off, when the smoke clears—all we are ultimately left with is a bunch of snakes and frogs.

Who Gets the Glory?

How are we to differentiate between the miracles of God and Satan's "lying wonders"? It's very simple. Look to see who's getting the glory.

Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men that they might see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Even Pharaoh's magicians had to eventually give glory to God when they admitted His work could not be duplicated (Exodus 8:19).

Nowhere is this principle more clearly seen than in the life of Jesus. Jesus raised the dead, healed the sick, and freed the captive. He went about constantly doing good, and without exception, He gave glory to the Father.

How can you tell whether a sign or wonder is of Christ or the spirit of antichrist—whether it's light, or only darkness camouflaged as light? Just watch who gets the glory, attention, applause, and exaltation. If it's a man, method, or idea—watch out. Satan the counterfeiter is not far behind.

As we head toward the last days, I believe there will be increased occurrences of demonic signs and wonders. Therefore, we must look carefully at any sign or apparent miracle and ask, "Who's getting the glory?"

Is Christ Preeminent?

While I do not believe most of you are vulnerable to Satan's tricks, there is something much more subtle to which we are all vulnerable. These are activities and pursuits that creep in and take the place of Christ in our hearts.

You see, the term "anti-Christ" not only means "against Christ," but "in place of Christ." Thus, the seduction of antichrist can be seen any time we substitute hobbies or relationships, ministries or occupations, pursuits or pleasure for the place only Jesus should hold in our lives.

Dear brother, precious sister: Don't allow anything—no matter how seemingly pure, productive, or profitable—to take the place of Christ in your heart. Don't allow anything—no matter how seemingly mystical, miraculous, or marvelous—to distract you from Jesus.

Expose the counterfeit by asking,

- "Are things getting better or worse?"
- "Who is getting the glory?"
- "Is Jesus still Lord?"

May we walk in wisdom in these last days.
In Jesus' Name.



3 2 Thessalonians 3:1

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you.

As he brings his second Thessalonian letter to a close, Paul says, "Pray for us." Notice that he doesn't say, "Pray for our programs." He doesn't say, "Pray for our projects." He says, "Pray for our preaching."

Last century, God did a mighty work in London through a giant of the faith named Charles Haddon Spurgeon. His sermons are studied to this day. The story is told that one Sunday afternoon, a contingency of ministers came to the massive Metropolitan Tabernacle to observe him. Assuming the stout man at the side of the building wearing bib overalls to be the janitor, they asked, "Sir, would you kindly show us the power plant of this huge structure?"

"Certainly," the man replied, leading them to the basement.

As he opened the door at the end of a hallway, the ministers expected to see a mighty furnace. Instead, they saw over two hundred men on their knees praying for the upcoming evening service.

"Prayer, gentlemen," he said, "is the power plant of the Metropolitan Tabernacle."

The man—Spurgeon himself—knew where the power lay.

2 Thessalonians 3:2

And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.

Secondly, Paul asks that the Thessalonians pray that he would be delivered from "unreasonable"—or, as your margin renders it—"absurd" men. Who were these "absurd men"? Acts 17:5 describes them as "lewd fellows of the baser sort" who tried to get Paul in political hot water by saying he advocated Caesar's overthrow.

Was Paul preaching that there was another King besides Caesar? Certainly. He served the King of kings, Jesus Christ. He also argued that men were to be submitted to those in authority over them (Romans 13:1).

"Thou shalt not bear false witness," God declared in the ninth commandment (Exodus 20:16). These "absurd men" provide a classic example of what it means to bear false witness. You see, telling a lie is not the only way we bear false witness. We bear false witness whenever we simply misrepresent the truth.

How do I know this? There is another incident in the Word where we see false witnesses—at the trial of Jesus Christ.

> Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; but found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.
>
> Matthew 26:59–61

While Jesus had indeed said, "Destroy this temple and in three days, I'll rise again" (John 2:19) He was speaking of the temple of His own body. So, too, Paul preached the Lordship of Christ, but also that we should submit to earthly authority. In both cases, false witnesses gave the right information, but with the wrong implication.

Notice Paul doesn't say he wants to debate the false witnesses. Rather, he simply asks to be delivered from them. Gang, there are those who will twist what you say to their own end. What are you to do? Do what Paul did. Don't complain. Don't explain. Instead, pray that God will take care of them in *His* time, and in *His* way because if you start defending yourself, you'll never stop.

> *A man and his son in need of money decided to sell their donkey at the marketplace. The townspeople shook their heads in disgust that the man would make his son walk while he rode the donkey. After hearing the criticism, the man quickly dismounted, and his son got on in his place. As they walked a little farther, they again heard the townspeople murmur, "How could that son be so disrespectful as to make his father walk while he rides the donkey?"*
>
> *The man then joined his son astride the donkey, only to hear the townspeople down the road say, "How cruel of those two to ride that poor little donkey!" In response, both father and son dismounted the donkey and walked farther, amidst criticism that they were fools for failing to utilize their donkey.*
>
> *At last, in desperation, the father and son picked the donkey up, and carried it the rest of the way.*

Try to defend yourself, and, like the poor man and his son, you'll find yourself carrying a heavy burden. Instead, do what Paul did. Leave your defense to the Lord.

2 Thessalonians 3:3, 4

But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil. And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.

"There are unreasonable, wicked men," says Paul. "But the Lord is faithful. That's how we know you'll do well."

I am often asked about our follow-up program for those we baptize every week. "We give them a Bible and a tape and pray for them," I answer, because, like Paul, I firmly believe that the Lord will establish those who are truly His.

If it's a philosophy or program we're pushing; if it's attendance we're trying to build—then, yes, we need a program. On the other hand, if it's simply Jesus we're preaching, He will, through His body, embrace those who come to Him. And He will tap some of you on the shoulder to allow Him to do just that.

2 Thessalonians 3:5

And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

Newer translations render "the patient waiting for Christ" as "the patience of Christ." I suggest to you that both translations are true, and both are linked together. The only way we can have the patience of Christ is by waiting for Him, knowing we'll soon be with Him. I have observed that the most peaceful, patient, and contented people are those who truly live in the expectation of Jesus' return.

2 Thessalonians 3:6–9

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that

walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.

The word "travail" refers to the pain of childbirth (John 16:21). In other words, Paul is saying it wasn't easy, but he and Silas worked hard to support themselves even as they ministered to the Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians 3:10

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

Before Rush Limbaugh fans agree with this verse too quickly, notice it says, "If any man *would not* work . . ." It does not say, "If any man *cannot* work . . ." The Bible has much to say regarding compassion for those who cannot work, so be very careful before withholding food from someone who appears to be lazy.

2 Thessalonians 3:11

For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.

Whenever a person who should and could be working is not, he will be a busybody. You see, when Adam fell in the Garden of Eden, it was God's mercy and wisdom that said to him, "You need to work" (see Genesis 3:17–19).

Evidently, the "unreasonable and wicked men" of verse 2 did not understand this, for they had enough time on their hands to endlessly discuss Paul's faults.

I once read an article about the shuttle *Discovery.* The article explained that its repaired fuel tank would be escorted to the launch pad by a six-eyed scarecrow. The scarecrow was intended to scare the woodpeckers that drilled 195 holes in the shuttle last month. The launch was delayed for two months due to the danger of ice forming in the holes and damaging the shuttle during liftoff.

The billion-dollar technological peak of man's abilities was grounded by two little woodpeckers. So, too, it only takes a couple busybodies poking where they ought not to damage the work of God.

2 Thessalonians 3:12–14

Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.

The best thing you can do with a busybody is to stay away from him or her—not out of rejection, but for restoration. If gossips and busybodies have no audience, they eventually stop.



For topical study of 2 Thessalonians 3:13, see "Be Not Weary in Well-Doing" below.



***For topical study of 2 Thessalonians 3:13 entitled "Looking at Ministry," turn to page* 1364.**

2 Thessalonians 3:15

Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

The only people who have the right to point out the dirt on another's feet are those who have a towel about their waist, a basin of water in their hands, and are willing to wash them. If I'm not willing to come alongside someone in humility and love, I have no right to point out the dirt I see in him.

2 Thessalonians 3:16, 17

Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all. The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write.

Paul closes, saying, "Here's my own signature. This letter is not forged. It's the real thing. Grace be with you all."

2 Thessalonians 3:18

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

So Paul's letter ends the way it began: with grace.

BE NOT WEARY IN WELL-DOING

A Topical Study of
2 THESSALONIANS 3:13

Sometimes we grow weary in serving, giving, sharing, and ministering. At the end of Paul's teaching concerning the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom, the Holy Spirit inspires Paul to give the Thessalonians a short exhortation with long-term implications.

Why were the Thessalonians not to be weary in well-doing?

I believe Numbers 7 gives us the answer.

It came to pass on the day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle and had anointed it, that the princes of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers, who were princes over the tribes, brought their offerings before the Lord. And he that offered his offering on the first day was Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah. And his offering was:

One silver charger, the weight thereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them were full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering; one spoon of ten shekels of gold, full of incense; one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering; one kid of the goats for a sin offering; and for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year.

On the second day, Nethaneel, the son of Zuar, prince of Issachar, did offer:

One silver charger, the weight whereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering; one spoon of gold of ten shekels, full of incense; one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering; one kid of the goats for a sin offering; and for a sacrifice

of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year.

On the third day, Eliab, the son of Helon, prince of the children of Zebulun, did offer:

One silver charger, the weight whereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering; one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense; one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering; one kid of the goats for a sin offering; and for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year.

On the fourth day, Elizur, the son of Shedeur, prince of the children of Reuben, did offer:

One silver charger of the weight of an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering; one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense; one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering; one kid of the goats for a sin offering; and for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year.

On the fifth day, Shelumiel, the son of Zurishaddai, prince of the children of Simeon, did offer:

One silver charger, the weight whereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering; one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense; one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering; one kid of the goats for a sin offering; and for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year.

On the sixth day, Eliasaph, the son of Deuel, prince of the children of Gad, did offer:

One silver charger of the weight of an hundred and thirty shekels, a silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering; one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense; one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering; one kid of the goats for a sin offering; and for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year.

On the seventh day, Elishama, the son of Ammihud, prince of the children of Ephraim, offered:

One silver charger, the weight whereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering; one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense; one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering; one kid of the goats for a sin offering; and for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year.

On the eighth day, offered Gamaliel, the son of Pedahzur, prince of the children of Manasseh:

One silver charger of the weight of an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering; one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense; one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering; one kid of the goats for a sin offering; and for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year.

On the ninth day, Abidan, son of Gideoni, prince of the children of Benjamin, offered:

One silver charger, the weight whereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering; one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense; one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt

offering; one kid of the goats for a sin offering; and for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year.

On the tenth day, Ahiezer, son of Ammishaddai, prince of the children of Dan, offered:

One silver charger, the weight whereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering; one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense; one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering; one kid of the goats for a sin offering; and for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year.

On the eleventh day Pagiel, the son of Ocran, prince of the children of Asher, offered:

One silver charger, the weight whereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering; one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense; one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering; one kid of the goats for a sin offering; and for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year.

On the twelfth day, Ahira, the son of Enan, prince of the children of Naphtali, offered:

One silver charger, the weight whereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering; one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense; one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering; one kid of the goats for a sin offering; and for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year.

The longest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119. There, the Word is portrayed as a teacher, a comforter, a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path. Extolling the power and beauty of the Scriptures, Psalm 119 is worthy of its length.

In contrast, Numbers 7—the second longest chapter in the Bible—redundant and a waste of time at first reading. The Bible is God's instruction manual for how to live. Why, then, does He seemingly waste paragraph after paragraph recording the gifts brought to the temple? Couldn't the Lord have simply said all of the princes gave exactly the same offering and used the leftover space to talk about things that really matter, things like marriage or child-rearing? Why does He list the offerings one at a time?

The author of Hebrews gives us the answer:

> *For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye had shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*
>
> Hebrews 6:10

In Numbers 7 and similar passages, God is saying, "I delight in individually listing what each one of these men has done for Me. Although it might be boring to you, it delights Me to record for all eternity the gifts each of My children has given Me. It doesn't bother Me a bit to take space in My Word to record what each man gave. To you, it might seem repetitive and redundant. To me, it's delightful and important. I will not forget."

Consequently, dear brothers and sisters, whatever you give in the Name of the Lord will not be forgotten. Others may not see what you've given or the sacrifices you have made in time and energy. The Lord sees. And He who sees in secret will reward you openly (Matthew 6:4).

If you are giving, loving, and sharing without any recognition, the Lord is delightfully and accurately recording your labor of love in eternity. He will not forget any good work you do—even if it is nothing more than giving a child a cup of cold water (Matthew 10:42). Don't be weary in well doing!

I have a problem with this exhortation, you may be thinking, *because I don't care about rewards in Heaven. I'd rather be rewarded now. I'd rather*

use my time and energy for my own recreation and pleasure. I don't care about treasures in Heaven. I want treasures now!

When you see the Lord and He opens the books to determine what rewards He will be able to heap upon you, your heart will leap for joy if He finds your page full of sharing, giving, serving, and teaching. If your page is empty, your heart will break.

"Wait a minute," you say. "I thought there were no tears in heaven."

According to Revelation 7:17, God shall wipe away every tear—which some have suggested to mean that there will be tears in Heaven. If this is the case, I believe those tears will come on the day we stand before our Lord and give an account of all the blessings He heaped upon us, all the abilities He gave to us, all the opportunities He opened before us that we wasted because we grew weary in well-doing.

Think of it this way:

All year long we give financial contributions to this group; we help with that project; we donate to this ministry; we help fill that need—perhaps all the while saying, "Ouch, this hurts." On April fourteenth, it all changes to, "Whew! I'm glad I gave to that one. Oh, boy, I'm glad I shared with this one," as we see how our donations positively impact our tax return.

Right now we might be struggling or growing weary in well-doing. When we get to heaven, however, it's April fourteenth. We'll say, "Wow, Lord, I can't believe the rewards I receive simply because of the little service I did for You. I only wish I would have done more."

Brethren, be not weary in well-doing. Make sure you're investing in eternity with your time, money, abilities, and energy. God remembers, rewards, and delights in everything you do for Him.

LOOKING AT MINISTRY

A Topical Study of
2 THESSALONIANS 3:13; 1 TIMOTHY 1:12

Flying home from Nampa, Idaho, our small plane was affected by the storms scattered all over the western portion of the country. With the hot dog I had gulped at the airport threatening to reappear, I looked out the window and for a fleeting moment wondered, *Why am I doing this?*

Perhaps as you've ministered, witnessed, or shared the gospel with people and found the way bumpy and brutal at times, you've wondered the same thing.

Following are seven reasons to join Paul in thanking Christ Jesus our Lord for allowing us to minister in His Name.

Looking Around

Over the years, I have come to the conclusion that the people I most respect wholeheartedly serve the Lord. There is solidity to people who have walked with the Lord for years, who speak about the Lord experientially, who have studied the Bible thoroughly.

> On their way to the Promised Land, the children of Israel set up camp numerous times on their forty-year pilgrimage. Although the location changed, the layout was always the same: The tabernacle—wherein dwelt the shekinah glory of God—was always set up in the middle of the camp.
>
> Guess who got to camp closest to the tabernacle, closest to the glory. It was those who were involved in service—the Levites (Numbers 2:17).

I have found that to be true even today. Those who are involved in serving the Lord and sharing the Word get to camp closest to the place where His glory is most clearly perceived and enjoyed. There is a richness and depth about them that stand in sharp contrast to the emptiness of the world.

Looking Within

"Give and it shall be given unto you," Jesus said, "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over. For with the same measure that you mete, it will be measured to you again" (see Matthew 7:2). In other words, to the degree you give out, you get back. As I look within, I know this to be true.

The same is true for whatever you do for others. When you do something for someone else—whether it's mowing a lawn, writing a check, or baking a cake—you receive as much joy as the recipient. I'm so thankful the Lord has ordained each of us to ministry (John 15:16), because as I look within, I realize how empty our lives would be if we weren't sharing, serving, or giving to others.

Looking Down

When I look down at the tactics of the Enemy, I'm thankful I'm in ministry.

> *Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; How he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God.*
>
> Deuteronomy 25:17, 18

On their way to the Promised Land, the enemies of the Israelites picked off those who were lagging behind. The same thing is true of you and me.

The most dangerous place to be in your Christian experience is in the back of the pack. That's where the Enemy attacks. Those who say, "Well, I'll make it to church if it's convenient for me," or, "I'll have devotions if I happen to wake up early," are the folks most prone to get picked off.

"Be sober," Peter says. "Be vigilant because your enemy goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (see 1 Peter 5:8). He heads for the easy target—the stragglers.

I'm thankful I'm in ministry because I *have* to be here almost every day of the week. When the Lord saved me, He must have said, "You know, Jon, you're a bit flaky. How will I keep you in church? I know—I'll make you a pastor!"

I think the Lord wants every one of us in ministry so we cannot take the option of missing a week or two, a month or three. If you're locked into a Sunday school class, if you're helping with youth work, if you're parking cars or folding bulletins, it's for your own good! It keeps you at the front and protects you from falling prey to Satan.

Looking Back

I remember my Fourth Grade Sunday school teacher, Ernie Friesen. One afternoon, he stopped by my house for no real reason. He reached into the trunk of his car, pulled out a softball and glove and said, "Let's play catch."

There on Flamingo Drive in Campbell, California, we tossed the ball in front of my house for about half an hour. That's all he did. We just played catch for a while before he said, "Gotta go, Jon. Thanks a lot, buddy!" and drove away. For some reason, that simple game of catch really impacted me.

Years later, after I had finished teaching in a large convention in San Jose, a man came up to me with tears in his eyes and said, "Jon Courson, you don't remember me, but I'm so proud of you."

"Ernie Friesen!" I said. "I'm so grateful for *you!*"

As I look back, I have so many memories of people like Ernie who changed my life as they ministered to me. I look back and thank the Lord for godly parents, faithful Sunday school teachers, on-fire youth pastors, and for guys like Duane Davidson. He was a senior in high school who took me out witnessing with him when I was only a lowly freshman. I realize now it's *my* turn to be a father, to work with kids, to be a pastor.

Looking back, I am so grateful for the opportunity to do for others what so many others did for me.

Looking Ahead

As I look ahead to heaven, I'm thankful I'm in ministry. I can join the twenty-four elders and cast my crown at the feet of the One who alone is worthy of it (Revelation 4:10).

Who gave us our abilities? Who gave you the ability to be a mechanic, to have a sense for business, to play the guitar? Every good and perfect gift comes from above (James 1:17). A man can receive nothing except what's given to him from heaven (John 3:27).

Here's the way it works. God gives us abilities, opens the doors for us to use those abilities for Him, anoints us as we serve Him, empowers us as we minister for Him, blesses the fruit of our labor for Him, and then gives *us* a crown. Amazing!

If, as you were about to deposit your life's savings in the bank, the manager whispered to you, "Don't do it. We're shutting our doors tomorrow and claiming all deposits. You'll never get your money out," would you say, "Oh, well, I'll take my chances"? Of course not! Yet the Master says to us, "Put your treasure in heaven. Don't put it on earth. You'll never get it out" (see Luke 12:33). What do we so often say? "Oh, well, I'll take my chances."

Look ahead and be wise, dear saint. Invest your life in things that are eternal, and you'll never regret it.

Looking Out

"Lift up your eyes," Jesus said. "The fields are white with harvest" (John 4:35). As I look out, I see people all around us who are hurting and ready to receive Jesus.

> I read an account of a party at a civic center pool attended by two hundred lifeguards and their friends. They were celebrating the fact that, for the first time in city history, no one had drowned during the entire season in any of the city's lakes or public pools. It was not until almost everyone had gone home that a man was discovered dead at the bottom of the pool. In the midst of two hundred lifeguards enjoying their success, a man had drowned. No one knew it until the party was over.

So, too, as we come together and celebrate our salvation and God's goodness to us, we must also understand that people around us are drowning in sin, depression, confusion, and discouragement.

As wonderful as it would be to be a doctor who helps people physically, or a philanthropist who helps people financially, there's *nothing* like helping people get saved eternally by sharing the good news of the gospel with them.

Precious people, look and see a neighbor or friend, child or relative who is ready for harvest, ready to receive Jesus.

Looking Up

Finally, I'm glad I'm in the ministry when I look up and see Jesus on the Cross, dying for me. "It's the love of Christ," Paul said, "which constrains me" (2 Corinthians 5:14). Jesus' love is why we share with others, why we endure a turbulent plane ride or two, why we continue on in ministry.

Looking within, looking down, looking around, looking ahead are important. None, however, matches looking up at the Cross. Even if there were no heaven, even if people didn't respond, even if I didn't get to experience God's glory, I would still be in ministry because of the love Christ showed me when He rescued me from present disaster; when He snatched me from eternal darkness; when He saved my soul.

NOTE

[1]Elisabeth Elliot. *Through Gates of Splendor.* Tyndale House Publishers, Illinois, 1986.



1 TIMOTHY

Background to 1 & 2 Timothy

Along with Titus, 1 and 2 Timothy are referred to as the Pastoral Epistles because both Timothy and Titus were pastors. In his letters to them, the apostle Paul gives instruction and encouragement, wisdom and insight concerning the ministry. Anyone desiring to serve the Lord in any capacity would do well to study Paul's Pastoral Epistles carefully and to read them regularly.

In his first epistle to Timothy, Paul will deal with the church and its message in chapter 1, the church and its members in chapters 2 and 3, the church and its minister in chapter 4, the church and its ministry to itself in chapter 5, and the church and its ministry to the world in chapter 6.



1 TIMOTHY

1 Timothy 1:1

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope.

Paul often referred to himself as "an apostle by the will of God" (1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1). In this case, however, he says, "It's not just God's will for me, but His command that I am to be an apostle—one who is sent out, one who shares truth.

The things we have been commanded to do can sometimes become wearying when we find ourselves in situations we weren't anticipating—like prison. After all, it was from a Roman prison cell that Paul wrote to Timothy. And in this, I am reminded of another prisoner. . . .

"Oh, Lord, I cannot speak. I am but a child," Jeremiah protested when called to minister.

"Before you were born, I knew you and ordained you to be a prophet," the Lord replied. "I will put My words on your lips—and you shall go."

So Jeremiah did. And what happened? He eventually ended up in a dungeon.

"Okay, Lord," he said. "Yes, You commanded me. Yes, You anointed me. But people aren't responding. No one is getting saved."

So Jeremiah decided to quit prophesying, to quit sharing—until he realized that the Word of God was like fire in his bones and that he could not keep quiet (Jeremiah 20:9).

Maybe like Jeremiah, or perhaps like Paul, you feel imprisoned and are tempted to throw in the towel and to quit sharing the gospel with people, since none seem to respond. But if you do, the Word of God will burn in your heart as surely as it did in Jeremiah's, and, like Paul, you will realize you have no choice in the matter, for you are under the command of God.

1 Timothy 1:2 (a)

Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith.

Piecing the puzzle together, it seems that during his first missionary journey, Paul stayed in the home of Lois and Eunice, the mother and grandmother of Timothy. And it could very well be that at that time, Paul led a teen aged Timothy into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 1:2 (b)

Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

With few exceptions, Paul begins his letters pronouncing grace and peace upon his readers. But when he writes to Timothy and to Titus—another young man in the faith—he adds the word "mercy." Why? As parents, we know our sons are in need of great mercy! And evidently Paul knew the same thing about Timothy, his son in the faith.

1 Timothy 1:3, 4

As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.

In verses 4 through 19, Paul will address four areas relating to doctrine: the loss of truth, the law of God, the love of Christ, and the life of faith. Here, we see the loss of truth. Leaving Timothy to continue the work in Ephesus while he traveled on to Macedonia, Paul's initial instruction to Timothy was to charge the Ephesian believers not to get caught up in any doctrine other than the simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As we learn the Word and share with others, there is a danger of trying to find something in Scripture no one else has ever seen before. That's what some in Ephesus were doing as they looked into Old Testament genealogies, discussed the stories endlessly, and veered off into all sorts of vain

speculations. In so doing, they missed out on solid teaching. To those who desire to be Bible teachers, I give this piece of advice: Give up trying to be creative and innovative. Instead, stick with the simple, powerful truth of the gospel—and you'll never go wrong.

1 Timothy 1:5

Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.

After talking about the loss of truth, Paul speaks of the law of God—fulfilled simply and fully in love and faith.

1 Timothy 1:6, 7

From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.

"Let not many of you desire to be teachers," James declares, knowing that we who are teachers shall have the greater condemnation (see James 3:1). If God calls you to teach, that's terrific. But it shouldn't be a driving desire in any man or woman because with greater responsibility comes greater potential for condemnation should a teacher swerve from the simplicity of the Word.

1 Timothy 1:8

But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully.

The law definitely has its place—not to lead people off on tangents, but to bring them to Jesus (Galatians 3:24).

1 Timothy 1:9–11

Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that

defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.

The law has one primary purpose: It's a schoolmaster to show us our need for a Savior and to drive us to Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:24). You see, contrary to the popular psychology of the day, I'm *not* okay—and neither are you! We're sinners in need of a Savior. Once, however, we come to that understanding, we are no longer under the demands of the law.

Sometimes people say to me, "Hey, you're laying the law down!"

"You're right!" I answer. "If you were walking righteously, I wouldn't need to. If you were loving the Lord and enjoying Him, there would be no need for the law. But not all are righteous. Not everyone wants to walk in the Spirit. Consequently, I have no other choice but to lay down the law."

As seen in the passage before us, any culture or person involved in sin needs the law for its own welfare—for without it, sin runs unchecked.

1 Timothy 1:12–14

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

Here, Paul speaks of the love of Christ. "I was sincere when I was persecuting Christians, dragging them out of their houses to incarcerate them," said Paul. "I was sincere—but I was sincerely wrong." Paul's admission sobers me greatly because the possibility exists that you and I can do wrong, all the while convinced we're doing right. What if we're wrong? Then God will do to us what He did to Paul: He'll knock us down and set us straight (Acts 9:4).

1 Timothy 1:15

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

The closer Paul drew to the Lord, the more he understood the extent of his sin. But the Good News is that sinners are the very people Jesus came to seek and to save. Ever the Good Shepherd, Jesus specializes in finding the one in the back row, on the fringe, out to lunch, off the wall. This gives me great comfort and real hope. I must accept acceptance courageously. I must accept grace graciously. Jesus Christ came to save guys like me—and to keep saving me daily!



***For topical study of 1 Timothy 1:15 entitled "The Chiefest of Sinners," turn to page* 1372.**

1 Timothy 1:16

Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

"If God saved Paul, He can save *anyone!*" said people of the man who had previously persecuted believers. That's why the Lord saved *you,* by the way—as a pattern, as an example, so that people can look at you and say, "If he's a Christian, I guess anybody can be one! If she can serve the Lord, I guess I can, too."

1 Timothy 1:17

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Reflecting on the grace of God in turning him from a blasphemer into a believer, Paul has no other recourse but to burst forth in praise.

1 Timothy 1:18, 19 (a)

This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; holding faith . . .

Finally, we see the life of faith. Words of prophecy are words of edification and exhortation, instruction and direction (1 Corinthians 14:3). "You heard such words," Paul reminded Timothy. "Now hold on to them, for they are vital in spiritual battle."

1 Timothy 1:19 (b)
. . . and a good conscience . . .

Some say the key to a good conscience is a bad memory. In reality, however, the key to a good conscience is understanding and embracing what Christ did on the Cross of Calvary.

1 Timothy 1:19 (c)
. . . which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck.

The loss of truth, the law of God, the love of Christ, the life of faith are four areas in which Timothy was schooled by Paul at the very outset of Paul's letter to him.

1 Timothy 1:20
Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

We don't know for sure what Hymenaeus and Alexander did, but Paul prayed that the Lord would remove His protective hedge from them, thereby exposing them to the Enemy. Why? His hope was that they would get burned out on their evil ways by getting a taste of the fires of hell. Paul's purpose was not punitive. It was restorative—that Hymenaeus and Alexander might be brought back to wholeness.

THE CHIEF OF SINNERS

A Topical Study of 1 TIMOTHY 1:15

The book, *I'm OK, You're OK,* was written in 1967. Yet, it appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list for two decades. Amazing. After twenty years, the book that is the prototype for the self-esteem movement was still selling like hotcakes.

Yet what does the Bible say? Scriptures declare we are sinners and that all we like sheep have gone astray (Isaiah 53:6), that there is none righteous no not one (Romans 3:10), that there is poison under our lips, blood on our hands, and our feet are swift to walk where they ought not to walk (Proverbs 6:17, 18). In other words, the diagnosis of the One who created us is that we are anything *but* okay!

No one understood this better than Paul. At the outset of his ministry, he declared himself to be the least of the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:9). Later on, he saw himself as less than the least of all saints (Ephesians 3:8). And here in our text, toward the end of his life, what does he say? Not, "I once was the chief of sinners," not, "I used to be the chief of sinners," but, "I *am* the chief of sinners."

Paul went from being the least of the apostles, to the least of all the saints, to the chief of sinners. How can this be? Did Paul become a worse and worse person the longer he walked with God? Did he sin more and more hideously, more and more frequently? No. Paul simply discovered that the closer he drew *to* the Lord, the more intimate he became *with* the Lord, the more he realized how far he was from the holiness *of* the Lord.

> When I play hoops with a first-grader, I am awesome. My hook shots, rebounds, and lay-ups are incredible—when I play against a first-grader. But if I went one on one with Shaquille O'Neal on the same court with the same ball, I would be the "chief of losers"! Why? Not because I had changed, but because my standard of excellence had changed.

If we compare ourselves with neighbors, friends, or even brothers and sisters in the congregation, we don't look too bad. But when we go one on one with Jesus Christ, as we draw closer to Him and spend more time with Him, we can't help but notice a huge difference between ourselves and the One we love.

> "Woe unto you, woe unto you, woe unto you," Isaiah proclaimed to the people of Israel and the surrounding communities (see Isaiah 1—5). But then in chapter 6, we read, "In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord high and lifted up. And I cried Woe is *me!*" In seeing the Lord, Isaiah also saw his own sin.

So, too, the longer I walk with Jesus, the clearer I see my own sin and inconsistencies. And this does several things for me . . .

Amazed by Him

The more I'm aware of my sin, the more I'm amazed by this One who came to save sinners.

> The first time I saw the New York City skyline from an airplane, I wasn't as impressed as I thought I would be. But when I got off the plane, into a car, drove to Wall Street, and looked up, up, up at the buildings surrounding me, I was amazed because the closer I got to the buildings, the bigger they looked.

The same thing happens when I get close to Jesus. I just look at Him and say, "Wow, Lord, I'm amazed that in Your holiness and beauty and purity You would put up with a guy like *me!*"

Thankful for Him

> The story is told of a rooster who arose early every morning of his life to crow. And every morning shortly thereafter, the sun would rise. As the months and years went by, the animals of the barnyard said, "Thank you for bringing the sun up every day. We're not worthy."
>
> But one day, not feeling well, the rooster overslept. Yet the sun came up anyway.
>
> "You fraud!" the animals said to the sleepy rooster. "You weren't even out here today. Yet the sun came up anyway."
>
> Although at first, the rooster was embarrassed and depressed, he was eventually relieved when he realized that, because he didn't bring the sun up, the world didn't depend on him.

So, too, there comes a point in a believer's life when he realizes his Christian walk isn't dependent upon him, but solely upon Jesus. Happy is the day when he truly understands that his relationship with the Father has nothing to do with his attempts at being a spiritual rooster bringing the sun up. Instead, it has everything to do with admitting he would be in the dark were it not for the Son shining upon him all the days of his life.

Such a one joins the choir of those who say, "Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power" (Revelation 19:1). Why "Hallelujah"? Because *halal* speaks of "praise" and *Yahh* speaks of "God." Therefore, it's not "Hallelu-me" or "Hallelu-you" but "Hallelu-*jah*" for it is God alone who saved and continues to save us from our sin, from our stupidity, from ourselves.

In Love with Him

If this Man is truly a prophet, He would know what kind of woman is washing His feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair, thought Simon.

"Simon," said Jesus, "let Me ask you a question: Two men are in debt to a third man. One owes fifty million dollars, the other fifty dollars. If their creditor erases both their debts, which will love him more?"

"The one forgiven millions," Simon answered.

"Right," said Jesus. "The one who is forgiven much loves much. You sit here at this table, robed in your Pharisaical spirituality. Yet this woman, a prostitute, is the one who washed My feet. Clearly, the one forgiven much loves much" (see Luke 7:47).

The person who is unaware of his sin and who thinks he's pretty good has, at best, a limited love for the Lord. But the one who is truly aware of that which goes on in his heart, of that which comes from his lips, and of that which runs through his mind says, "I love You, Lord, because I've been forgiven so much."

Pleasing to Him

The more clearly I see my sin, the more I desire to please Jesus. Paul tells us we are not to be those who grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). When I sin, it grieves the Spirit not because He's mad at me or disappointed in me, but because He knows how sin will hurt me.

When your kids make decisions you know are not wise, you don't turn your back on them—yet you know a painful process lies ahead of them. Such is the heart of our heavenly Father. And this causes me to say, "I want to walk with You, Lord. I want to do what You say because I know Your way is best."

Comfortable Around Him

According to our text, Jesus Christ came to save sinners. This makes me eminently qualified to be found by Him and to hang around Him. In His own mission statement, Jesus said He didn't come to find the self-righteous person, the one who thinks he has it all together. He came specifically for those who realize that they're sinners, that they're full of problems, that they're lost.

Jesus talked at length about the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15) because it is His delight to find that which is lost. Let Him do what He came to do. Let Him do what He wants to do. Let Him find *you.*

> Someone came to me once, brokenhearted about a serious sin in which he had been involved. "I want you to know that because Jesus Christ died on the Cross, because the price has been paid for your sin, you are totally, completely, wonderfully cleansed," I said.
>
> And when I was through with that conversation, the Lord whispered these words in my ear: "You believe that, don't you, Jon?"
>
> "Yes, Lord, I do," I answered.
>
> "Good," He said, "because it's true. But will you accept it for yourself?"

You see, it is far easier for me to tell someone else, "You're forgiven. The price is paid. You're free," than it is to accept it for myself. Yet Paul said, "Jesus came to the world to save sinners. This is a faithful saying and worthy of *all* acceptation." *Everyone* needs to accept it—including the preacher!

Will you embrace that which you share with others? It's not only for you to witness to the unbeliever, or to share with the hurting person. It's worthy of all acceptation. Will you accept it for yourself? So you missed devotions yesterday, for the last three days, or for the last three months. So you've been grumpy. Whatever your sin—be it big or small, subtle or obvious—I have good news for you: Your sin is forgiven!

Allow Jesus to forgive you of much—and then watch and see how *much* you'll love Him.

2 Having discussed doctrine in chapter 1, Paul moves on to discuss devotion in chapter 2. . . .

1 Timothy 2:1

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.

First and foremost, we are to be a people who pray. The words "supplications," "intercessions," and "giving of thanks" refer to the various forms of prayer that we are to offer for all men.

1 Timothy 2:2 (a)

For kings, and for all that are in authority . . .

We are to pray for kings and even for presidents because they are in positions of authority only by the predetermined counsel of God.

No wonder he decreed that all the world should be taxed (Luke 2:1). He was, after all, Caesar Augustus—Caesar, the "august one," Caesar, "the highest." But wait a minute. While Caesar Augustus was breaking campaign promises and raising taxes, what was really going on? Carrying the Messiah in her womb, Mary resided in Nazareth. Yet hundreds of years previously, the prophet Micah had declared that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Therefore, Mary and Joseph set out on the difficult and dangerous journey from Nazareth in the north to Bethlehem in the south not in response to an edict from Caesar, the "august one"—but in obedience to God, the Almighty One.

What if we looked at politics today believing that it is God who is truly on the throne? Wouldn't that be a radical concept for Christians? Yes, we have a responsibility to pray and to make supplications. But we are also to give thanks for all men no matter what side of the political spectrum they

represent, for all rulers are used by God to fulfill prophecy and to accomplish His will ultimately.

1 Timothy 2:2 (b)

. . . that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

I've noticed that those who are radically involved in the Christian political scene are rarely quiet or peaceful. On the contrary, there seems to be an anger about them. And sometimes I wonder if this is really what the Lord intends for us. How much better it would be, in my opinion, if we would do less talking and more praying concerning political matters.

In Jeremiah 29, we see the Lord saying to His people, "You're going to be held captive here in Babylon for seventy years. So go ahead and allow your kids to marry, build houses, plant gardens, and pray for the peace of Babylon. While you're here, make it better if you can. But don't get too rooted, because you're only here for seventy years."

So, too, we are only here in this Babylon called earth for seventy years or so. We're to pray, plant gardens, and leave it in a better condition than we found it—be that environmentally, politically, economically, or sociologically. Therefore, I do think it's important to vote and participate in the system, to be knowledgeable and wise. But in so doing, we must never forget that one day soon, this whole world is going to be folded up (Hebrews 1:12). Therefore, we need not take it too seriously.

1 Timothy 2:3, 4

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

After Paul tells us we should be talking to God about men—praying for people and leaders and politicians—he says we also have the responsibility to talk to men about God and to share with them the truth of the gospel.

1 Timothy 2:5

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

When everything was going wrong and everything was coming down, Job said, "I wish there was a Daysman—an umpire, a mediator—between God and me" (see Job 9:33). And now Paul comes on the scene, using the same terminology, saying, "There is. There's a Mediator, a Bridge between infinite God and finite man because God Himself became a Man in Christ Jesus."

We are to follow the example of Jesus, who was willing to come and be the Daysman, the Mediator, the Savior between a holy God and sinful men. We're not to be fault-finders, political anarchists, people who are angry, or those who are bitter. We're to pray with thanksgiving and supplication and to follow the example of our Savior in the ministry of mediation.

1 Timothy 2:6

Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

Although people repeatedly and flippantly call on God to damn others, nothing could be further from His heart. Because He desires that none should perish (2 Peter 3:9), He gave Himself a ransom for all.

1 Timothy 2:7

Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.

"I truly have been called to share with people and to pray for people," says Paul. And so have you.

1 Timothy 2:8

I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.

Paul doesn't say, "I want men to clench fists and sign petitions." He says, "I want men to lift hands and pray."

I find it interesting that when the Bible talks about prayer, we see men raising their hands, lying prostrate on their faces, lifting up their eyes, and standing. What we never see throughout Scripture concerning prayer is someone folding his hands and closing his eyes. Yet that is precisely how we teach our kids to pray! I know why we do this. All parents do. Closed eyes and folded hands keep kids out of trouble! But now that we are adults, let's realize that there's great liberty in prayer. I often find myself prostrate before the Lord in times of intensity of prayer or worship. I also love to walk as I pray. I would encourage you to explore different postures of prayer—all the while remembering that it's not the position of the body that matters, but the position of the heart.

1 Timothy 2:9, 10

In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.

"Shamefacedness" refers to blushing. Although we live in a culture that no longer blushes, the godly woman is one who is embarrassed by immodesty.

1 Timothy 2:11, 12

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

In the Book of Titus, Paul instructs older women to teach younger women how to walk in practical godliness. However, they are not to teach men in matters of doctrine or theology, but are to learn in silence. You might think this sounds terribly chauvinistic. But Paul goes on to give his reason. . . .

1 Timothy 2:13, 14

For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

"Eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and your eyes will be opened. You'll be like God," Satan promised Eve (see Genesis 3:5). Thus, Eve was deceived not by a desire to do something illicit, but by a desire to be godly.

I firmly believe women have an innate desire to be spiritual. They want to extract all they can from Scripture. They want to know what it really means to worship. They want their eyes to be opened, to know how to be lovers of God. Satan took advantage of this, and the woman was thereby deceived. Therefore, it is men who are to instruct the church in doctrine.

What are the women to do?

Paul goes on. . . .

1 Timothy 2:15

Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

The Greek word *sozo,* or "saved," meaning "the full orb of God's blessing"—that women will be "saved in childbearing"—does not refer only to the fact that they won't die bearing children, but that they will experience the full orb of God's blessing in raising children. Although there are exceptions, although there are women who are uniquely called to separate themselves for service to the Lord, the rule of thumb for the church is that women are to pour themselves into their kids, for there they will find their greatest blessing.

If a woman must work, she should carefully make her job selection in such a way that her job does not in any way pull her emotions or her energy away from her family. You see, Moms, by the time people come to me as a pastor, they've usually been beaten up by life. Moms, on the other hand, have the opportunity to love and shape fresh, new lives that haven't been messed up by the world. This is not a popular position. But look at our culture. We're paying the price for turning away from these very simple and basic premises.

Everyone is trying to figure out why our kids have gone so awry. But God has already told us: Men should lead the church. Women should lead the kids.

So, too, as the bride of Christ, where will I also be saved? Where will I most fully experience God's blessing? In child-bearing. There is no joy like that of seeing someone born again. That's why Jesus said when one sinner comes into the kingdom, there's a party in heaven (Luke 15:10).

Has it been a while since you shared the Lord with someone? If you haven't led someone to Jesus, you're missing out, for all of us will discover that the full orb of salvation is, indeed, found in seeing other folks born again.



3 In chapter 3, the apostle Paul talks to Pastor Timothy about those involved in church leadership. . . .

1 Timothy 3:1 (a)
This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop . . .

Because the words "bishop," "pastor," and "elder" are used interchangeably throughout the New Testament, Paul's instructions concerning bishops apply to anyone who wants to be used by the Lord.

1 Timothy 3:1 (b)
. . . he desireth a good work.

If a man desires to be involved in a greater degree of ministry, he desires a good work—not a good position, not a good salary, not a good retirement plan, but a good *work.* The ministry is not a profession one enters into, saying, "These are my office hours. These are my off hours. My phone number is unlisted." Ministry is a good work indeed—but it's work.

1 Timothy 3:2 (a)
A bishop then must be blameless . . .

If "blameless" meant "flawless," we'd all be disqualified from ministry at Step One! Fortunately, the idea of blamelessness implies a heart that says, "Lord, I know I'm not perfect. But there's nothing in my life I'm clinging to or holding on to which I know is contrary to You."

1 Timothy 3:2 (b)
. . . the husband of one wife . . .

The Greek culture, a powerful influence on society in Paul's day, held that every man should have three women in his life: a mistress for conversation, a concubine for pleasure, and a wife to bear his children. "Tilt!" says Paul. "Those in the ministry must be one-woman men."

There are those who, on the basis of this verse, say that a bishop, pastor, or elder must be married. But the ultimate minister was Jesus of Nazareth. And He was single. Therefore, this verse doesn't mandate marriage. It does, however, mandate complete faithfulness for those who are married.

1 Timothy 3:2 (c)
. . . vigilant . . .

"Watch and pray," Jesus said to His disciples (Matthew 26:41). Sadly, it seems increasingly difficult to motivate men in the ministry to be men of vigilant prayer. This ought not be.

1 Timothy 3:2 (d), 3 (a)
. . . sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine . . .

If you hold the position of elder, bishop, or pastor, you are not to drink anything intoxicating. Ever. Why? "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, to drink wine or princes to drink strong drink lest they forget the law and pervert the judgment" (see Proverbs 31:4, 5). We forget the Word easy enough when we're sober, gang. Therefore, we can't afford to have leaders who are less than sober. I feel very strongly about this because I believe the times are influencing the ministry rather than the other way around.

1 Timothy 3:3 (b)

. . . no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient . . .

A man in Seattle was known for his punctuality. One morning, however, he slept a little too long. Realizing his mistake, he ran out to his car, raced across town, and made it to the dock just in time to see the ferry he usually rode to work pulling away from the pier. Slamming his car into park, he grabbed his briefcase, and jumped over the railing, narrowly landing on the deck of the ferry.

"What a jump!" said the captain. "I've never seen such an effort! But if you would have waited another minute, we would have been at the dock."

Like this man, patience is hard for me. I jump off in one direction and crash down in another—only to discover that had I waited another minute or two, everything would have gone a lot more smoothly.

1 Timothy 3:3 (c)

. . . not a brawler . . .

Those in the ministry are easy targets for people who have an axe to grind because they think if they can pull a minister down, they will feel better about their own sin. Yet although the tendency is to want to strike back, we must follow the example of Jesus Christ who, even on the Cross, said, "Father forgive them. They don't know what they're doing."

1 Timothy 3:3 (d)–5

. . . not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

"Your mother and Your brothers want to see You," they said to Jesus in the midst of His teaching.

"Who is My mother? Who are My brethren?" He answered. "Are not these who hear the Word of God, are not they My mother and My brothers?" (see Matthew 12:48–50)

Jesus' disciples were His family. Conversely, your family members are your disciples. The validation of your ministry will not be the size of your church or the degrees after your name. According to Paul's charge to Timothy, the validity of ministry lies in the family. If a man cannot rule, lead, or direct his home in spiritual matters, then he shouldn't try to oversee the church. Such a stand is not legalism—it's wisdom.

1 Timothy 3:6

Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

Why was the devil—Lucifer—initially condemned? Because of pride (Isaiah 14:12–15). Thus, Paul warns Timothy not to place a novice in a position of leadership because novices tend to think that if anything good happens through them it's because they're a skilled speaker or a clever person. Only someone who has walked with the Lord awhile understands that if anything good happens through him it's not *because* of him, but rather *in spite* of him!

1 Timothy 3:7

Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

I think it's a tragedy when Christians are known as terrible credit risks, and pastors are known as the worst. This doesn't mean good pastors won't have critics. It does mean, however, they won't provide reasons for their critics to find fault with them.

1 Timothy 3:8 (a)

Likewise must the deacons . . .

Deacons are those involved not so much in overseeing, teaching, or pastoring—but in practical service, in tending physical needs like waiting on tables (Acts 6).

1 Timothy 3:8 (b)

. . . be grave, not doubletongued . . .

A deacon with a double tongue is dangerous because anyone involved in spiritual leadership who can't control his tongue will say things that distract people from Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 3:8 (c)

. . . not given to much wine . . .

Because judgment is not as greatly needed in the ministry of a deacon as it is in that of a pastor or elder, wine is not forbidden for a deacon—although in our culture, I personally think the wisest choice is always to stay away from intoxicants.

1 Timothy 3:8 (d)

. . . not greedy of filthy lucre.

If you're involved in the physical needs of the fellowship—whether it be waiting on tables or tending to business matters—you cannot be one who has sticky fingers.

1 Timothy 3:9, 10

Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.

Those who volunteer to help the body in any way they can—be it teaching Sunday school, watering plants, or parking cars—prove themselves as those who are potential deacons or pastors.

1 Timothy 3:11

Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.

Because the words "must their" are in italics and therefore not in the original text, because the phrase translated "even so" is *hosautos* in Greek—a word always used to start a new list, and because the word "wives" is *gune,* which simply means "woman," I believe this verse could refer to deaconesses—women who serve the practical needs of the church.

1 Timothy 3:12, 13

Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

"If you use the office of a deacon well, you purchase boldness," says Paul. He's right—Stephen, the first martyr, was a deacon. And Philip, the first evangelist, was a deacon. These guys were dynamic. They were bold. And they began simply by serving tables (Acts 6).

1 Timothy 3:14, 15

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

In a debate with Dennis Praeger, a believer, atheist Oxford University professor Jonathan Glover, said, "It doesn't really matter whether a person has a belief system that is biblical or godly. The important thing is that they believe in something."

Praeger replied, "Imagine, Professor Glover, that you're in downtown Los Angeles. It's two o'clock in the morning. Your car breaks down. You get out. You hear footsteps. You turn around to see

ten big young men walking toward you. Would it make a difference if you knew they had just come from a Bible study?"

It *does* matter what people believe! And praise be to the Lord that we are a part of the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth.

1 Timothy 3:16 (a)

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness.

At this point, your spirits might be sagging as you think, *Oh, my, as I go through this list, I realize I'm so far off from where I should be.* But then we read of the mystery of godliness. . . .

1 Timothy 3:16 (b)

God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

Every other philosophy and religion tells people how to live and can only say, "Good luck." But great is the mystery that God came, dwelt *among* us, died *for* us, and sent His Spirit to live *within* us.

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

A Topical Study of 1 TIMOTHY 3:1–7, 16

Sometimes life can seem almost overwhelming. Perhaps Timothy felt that way when he received instructions from the apostle Paul concerning those who were qualified to be involved in ministry, for who could ever qualify? Who could say, "I am vigilant in prayer, patient, hospitable, and blameless. And so are my kids. Yes, these qualifications fit me to a T"?

In reality, we say, "Oh, I see the validity of the list before me, but I could never qualify because of the sins and mistakes I carry with me."

> As I arrived at the Medford Airport one morning years ago, to my good fortune, I bumped into my mom and daughter, who were waiting to board a plane to the Mission at Carmen Serdan, Mexico. So we decided to have breakfast together. As we talked, a baggage cart being pulled by a tractor caught Mary's eye.
>
> "I bet our bags are right there on that little cart," my mom said to her.
>
> "Wow!" gasped Mary. "That guy's going to drive all the way to Mexico?!"

That's a lot like me! "My, oh, my," I say, "the journey to godliness is so far, and my baggage is so great. I'll never get there just putt-putt-putting along the road."

But the text before us reminds me that there's a better way than just plodding away through item after item—trying to be blameless, trying to get my house in order, trying not to brawl, trying to fulfill the requirements that would make it an arduous journey at best. Paul calls it the mystery of godliness and talks about it not as it relates to a procedure, a process, or a program. He talks about godliness as it relates to a Person.

Paul could have given us fifteen guidelines to godliness, or twenty hints about holiness. Instead, he just starts talking about Jesus. . . .

> And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh . . .

God became a Man when Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Therefore, concerning an answer to any question I have about the way life should be lived, I don't have to wait for inner revelation or sign up for a seminar to get instruction. All I have to do is look at Emmanuel, God With Us, Jesus. Too many people are looking for a manual on how to raise kids, how to be a better husband, how to live successfully. Forget the manuals. We have Emmanuel.

. . . Justified in the Spirit . . .

Jesus was justified in the Spirit when, following His baptism in the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:16). When He was thus empowered for service, His public ministry began and miracles followed. The same holds true for you. Just as anything you want to know about godliness can be seen in the Person of Jesus Christ, whatever you accomplish in ministry will be done solely through the power of the Holy Spirit.

. . . Seen of Angels . . .

Following His baptism, Jesus was led to the wilderness, where He was tempted by Satan with the same temptations that bug, plague, and hassle you. At the end of forty days, Jesus was victorious and was ministered to by angels (Matthew 4:11). When a bright light shines in your eyes, you instinctively shield your face. Can you imagine the brightness of He who is light? Thus, it is highly possible that angels never saw God before the Incarnation. Only when He became a Man could they look at Him. And so can we.

. . . Preached unto the Gentiles . . .

Jesus marveled at the faith of only two people. Both were Gentiles. . . .

> "You don't even need to come to my house," said the Roman centurion to Jesus. "Just speak the word and my servant will be healed long distance" (see Matthew 8:8).
>
> "Lord, help me," said the Syro-Phoenician woman on behalf of her demon-possessed daughter (see Matthew 15:25).

At a time when Gentiles were considered by Jews to be nothing more than fuel for the fires of hell, Jesus not only talked to Gentiles, but commended them uniquely. So, too, you might feel like the least likely candidate to deserve a word from Jesus. Take heart! He marvels at the faith of people like you!

. . . Believed on in the World . . .

"Truly this was the Son of God," the centurion proclaimed as He saw Jesus on the Cross (Matthew 27:54). Believed on by the centurion who stood below Him and by the thief who hung beside Him, Jesus was further believed on by the hundreds who were eyewitnesses of His resurrection.

. . . Received Up into Glory . . .

Jesus is in heaven where He lives to make intercession for you and me (Hebrews 7:25). In other words, Jesus went to heaven where He's talking to the Father nonstop about *you.*

> "Peter, Satan desires to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you," Jesus said. "Therefore, when you are converted—not *if* you are converted, but *when* you are converted—strengthen the brothers" (see Luke 22:32). In other words, "You're going to make it, Peter, because I'm praying for you."

I have great news for you as well: All those of you who know Jesus are going to make it. You're going to be godly because Jesus is praying for you—and His prayers are always heard and heeded by the Father.

> If we could understand baby talk, we would know what babies fuss about. We might hear one say, "You know I'm just never going to get this walking thing down. All I do is stumble around, fall down, and land on my bottom."
>
> And maybe another says, "I don't think I'll *ever* figure out how to eat with a spoon. . . ."
>
> Yet, as adults, if we could understand them and they us, we'd say, "It's all going to work out, kids. You're going to walk, you'll see. You'll get that spoon thing down. It *will* work!"

And that's what the Lord would say to you. Great is this mystery of godliness. Jesus has walked where you walk. He knows what you're going through, and now He's at the right hand of the Father, praying for you.

Not only does Jesus pray for you, but He lives in you. "It's expedient I go away," He said, "for if I go away, I will send you another Comforter" (see John 14:16). Not only is Jesus praying for us, but by His Spirit, He lives in us.

Your co-workers are telling a dirty joke. An opportunity is before you to cheat on your income tax. Your friends are gossiping and expect you to join in. But there is a voice in your ear saying, "Don't do it. It will hurt you." *That's* the voice of God within you.

The mystery of godliness is so simple. It's not a matter of working hard on the list in 1 Timothy 3. It's a matter of saying, "Lord, whatever You say, that's what I'll do."

Finally, not only is Jesus praying for us and living within us, He's coming to get us. "Let not your heart be troubled," He said, "I go to prepare a place for you" (see John 14:1, 2).

It was time for my mom and daughter to check in for their flight.

"Which one of you is Mary Courson?" asked the attendant.

They both raised their hands.

"Which one of you is Mary *Elizabeth* Courson?" she asked again.

They both raised their hands.

"Which one of you is Mary Elizabeth Courson related to Jon Courson?"

Two hands went up.

When Jesus comes back, all those who opened their hearts to Him will go with Him. Like Mary, compared to another, you might feel your faith is too small or too young—but we're *all* going because we all bear Jesus' Name. It's a *fabulous* hope!

Dear saint, please understand that we don't have to drive our baggage all the way to Mexico—or to heaven. Because Jesus became a Man who walked in our steps, died in our place, and lives in our hearts, we can soar to the heavenlies in Him. And *that* is the great and glorious mystery of godliness.



4 After talking about the church and her message in chapter 1, and the church and her members in chapters 2—3, here in chapter 4, Paul will talk about the church and her ministry. And in so doing, he will exhort young

Timothy to be a good minister in verses 1–6, a godly minister in verses 7–11, and a growing minister in verses 12–16.

1 Timothy 4:1 (a)

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith . . .

The same is true in our times. There are those who falsely teach that it is impossible to depart from the faith. But our text says otherwise. While I do not believe that one can lose his salvation (John 10:29), I do believe one can leave his salvation. That is, if a man is truly intent on turning his back on the Lord and spending eternity in hell, God will not force him to remain in His family.

1 Timothy 4:1 (b)

. . . giving heed to seducing spirits . . .

I believe ours are difficult days in which to be a Christian. Although the early church experienced persecution to such a degree that, by conservative estimates, six million of our brothers and sisters in Christ were martyred by Rome, Satan had a problem because the blood of the saints proved to be the seed of the church. The church grew. So Satan changed strategies. Unable to beat the church, he decided to join it and seduce it into lethargy and sleepiness.

Thus, I suggest to you it is tougher to be a Christian in the days of pleasure and prosperity than in the days of persecution. Persecution necessitates a stand, a declaration, an identification. But in our day, people can come to church on Sunday morning and watch HBO on Sunday evening. And in so doing, they unknowingly fall prey to the seducing spirits that lure them away from the faith.

1 Timothy 4:1 (c), 2

. . . and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

"If you will contribute just a little more money to my television ministry, I guarantee you'll be healed," televangelist Bob Tilton's letters promised the man diagnosed with cancer. The problem was, the letters were sent six months after the man had been buried. Consequently, it was reported that Bob Tilton lost a lawsuit filed by the widow of the deceased.

The only explanation for corruption such as this is the demonic doctrines given to men whose consciences are seared, to men who no longer have any sensitivity to people or to the Lord.

1 Timothy 4:3

Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

Diabolical doctrine results not only in a seared conscience but also in legalism that parades as piety.

1 Timothy 4:4, 5

For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

The Levitical dietary laws are pictures pointing to spiritual truth meant to drive us to Christ. But they are not to be embraced legalistically today. "Let no man judge you in meat or in drink or Sabbath days or new moons," Paul said (see Colossians 2:16). Instead, we are to celebrate our liberty, pray constantly, and give thanks continually."

1 Timothy 4:6 (a)

If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ . . .

Here's how to be a good minister: Stay away from esoteric posturing, dietary discussions, and legalism. Keep the main thing the main thing. And the main thing is Jesus.

1 Timothy 4:6 (b), 7

. . . nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.

In Paul and Timothy's day, people were caught up in Greek and Roman mythology and genealogies—trying to figure out to which god they were linked and from which god they descended. Paul told Timothy to stay away from all such questions and to instead study godliness.

1 Timothy 4:8 (a)

For bodily exercise profiteth little . . .

The Greek culture put tremendous emphasis on the physique. But Paul says, "Timothy, understand this: I'm an older man and I'm telling you that bodily exercise profits little—or, as your margin may read, "a little while."

According to a recent study, for every hour one spends working out, he will live one hour longer. But think about it: The hour he gained was wasted in a hot, sweaty, stinky gym!

There is, indeed, a little profit in bodily exercise. It's a good thing—but not nearly as important as exercising oneself in godliness. If you have to choose between working out and worshiping, opt for worship every time. If you have to choose between Bible study and bodybuilding, always go with Bible study. It's good to jog and to do deep knee bends, presses, and curls. But I wish people would put the same emphasis on jogging their memory of Scripture, bending their knees in prayer, pressing on in the faith, and curling up with a good Book—the Word of God.

1 Timothy 4:8 (b)

. . . but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

A life of godliness is a win/win situation because those who choose to follow such a life will be blessed both presently and throughout eternity.

1 Timothy 4:9, 10 (a)

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation. For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God . . .

Suppose our government suddenly collapsed, and a godless dictator appeared on national TV calling for the immediate arrest of all those allied with and linked to Jesus Christ. Would your neighbors rise up in one accord and identify you as a Jesus Person? Would the people on your campus label you as a Christian? It's a probing question because Paul says reproach is inevitable for those who truly live out their faith.

1 Timothy 4:10 (b)

. . . who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.

The result of godliness is persecution. "But keep in mind, Timothy," writes Paul, "that Jesus is the Savior of all men—even of those who persecute you."

1 Timothy 4:11

These things command and teach.

Timothy was to be a good minister, reminding people of simple truth. He was to be a godly minister, exercising spiritual disciplines. And now we come to the third section, where we see that Timothy was also to be a growing minister. . . .

1 Timothy 4:12

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

What if the spiritual walk of everyone in your fellowship was exactly like yours? What if everyone gave financially to the degree you give every week? What if everyone prayed for missions to the same degree you do? What if everyone in the Christian community witnessed as much as you do? Where would we be?

It's easy to exhort others. Being an example ourselves, however, is much more difficult. . . .

"Son," said the concerned father, "you're not studying the way you could. When Abraham Lincoln was your age, he didn't have computers or electric lights. He walked fifteen miles through the snow to check out books at the library—and then walked fifteen miles home so that he could read them by the light of the fireplace. When he was your age, that's what he did."

"Well," replied the son, "when Abraham Lincoln was your age, he was President of the United States!"

It's easy to want to exhort someone else! But Mom and Dad, if you want to see your kids be more spiritual, you be more spiritual. Pastors, if you want your congregations to be more radical, you be more radical. The key lies in being an example.

***For topical study of 1 Timothy 4:12 entitled "Be Thou an Example," turn to page* 1386.**

1 Timothy 4:13

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

"Make sure you're reading the Word, Timothy. Make sure you're growing in faith." I feel one of the most neglected practices in the church today is the simple reading of the Word both corporately and personally. There's power in the reading of Scripture.

1 Timothy 4:14

Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

Each of us has been given gifts by the Spirit. But here's the problem: We spend far too much time trying to strengthen our weaknesses—only to find that in so doing, we weaken our strengths! Go where you're strong. If you are gifted as a worship leader, then lead worship. If you're gifted with kids, plug into children's ministry. If you're gifted in one-on-one situations, don't try to preach before thousands. Go with your strength, gang. Whatever God has called you to do, go for it with intensity and tenacity.

1 Timothy 4:15

Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.

Find a quiet place at a quiet time where you can meditate with a quiet heart.

Moses spent forty days communing with God. But the congregation grew restless (Exodus 32:1).

"Where's Moses?" they said. "We have Sunday-school committee meetings for him to attend, trustee obligations for him to address, denominational by-laws for him to discuss, retirement plans for him to consider. Where is *he?"*

I appreciate this about Moses' example: He did not come down from the mountain until he had the Word of the Lord in His hand. And because of this, when he did come down, he could say with authority, "Thus saith the Lord. . . ."

1 Timothy 4:16

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

Why do I teach the Bible? Because *I* need to hear it. Every time I teach, I am reminded of the basics over and over again. And how greatly I need to know them!

BE THOU AN EXAMPLE

A Topical Study of
1 TIMOTHY 4:12

I remember it as if it were yesterday. Tom McKee, my youth pastor, came to me, a freshman in high school, and said, "Jon, how would you like to preach this Monday night?"

Honored, flattered, and excited, I said, "Yeah, okay!" And Tom went on to say he would be taking me with him on Monday night to the San Jose Rescue Mission. I had never been to a Rescue Mission before. I didn't really even understand what they were about. I just knew it was an opportunity to preach.

For my preaching debut, I chose the story of Zacchaeus and wrote a fifteen-page manuscript in which I proposed that Zacchaeus represented the people of Israel and the sycamore tree he climbed represented the Gentile nations. I went on to propose that just as Jesus told Zacchaeus He would come to his house, Jesus would draw His people out from the Gentile nations to come and once again have fellowship with Him.

Monday night finally came. Dressed in suit and tie, I stood up to preach to a couple hundred of San Jose's most down and out. Most were homeless, some just drunk—and I realized as I began to teach that they weren't listening to a word I was saying. I didn't find out until later that the rule at the Rescue Mission was that those who wanted to eat had to first attend the service.

So there everyone was. Their stomachs were growling, and their mouths salivating as I went on and on and on, enlightening them concerning the eschatological nuances of Zacchaeus and the sycamore tree. At about page eight, I felt the blush of embarrassment rise to my face and proceed all the way to my red hair. Just then, a guy stood up in the back and yelled, "Sit down, you overgrown tomato!" I sat down on page nine.

It's hard to serve the Lord to any degree when you're young because people have a tendency to look down on you. "Who are you, you overgrown tomato?" they jeer. "Who are you, you high-school junior?" "Who are you, you college freshman?" "Who are you, you twenty-five-year-old?"

Paul takes this tendency to task when he tells Timothy, "Let no man despise thy youth."

Neotes, the Greek word translated "youth," is an interesting one. It was a term used for anyone of military age. In Paul's day, a man was eligible for the draft in the Roman army through the age of forty. So the word "youth" here can refer to anyone up to and through the age of forty. Does this mean Timothy was forty years old when Paul wrote to him? Probably not. Most likely, Timothy was in his late teens or early twenties at this point. Yet even if Timothy had been forty years old, his age would have been problematic for some, for not too many years after Paul had written this letter, writings known as "The Apostolic Canons" circulated throughout the early church, declaring that a man should not be appointed pastor until he was past thirty years of age, at which time he would be past "youthful disorders."

"Don't let anyone put this trip on you, Timothy," countered Paul. "Let no man despise your youth."

So, too, I say to you who are eighteen, sixteen, or fourteen years old —"don't let people say you can't be used in ministry, that you can't be used in the work of the kingdom because you're too young—for now is the very time for you to get going, to get engaged, to get involved." I have noticed that as people get older, they no longer have the courage to step out because their lives become too complicated. All too often, they say, "First I have to take care of this and do that"—but the years slip by and they miss out on so many opportunities.

If the Lord has placed a calling within you, how I encourage you to begin serving and ministering regardless of those who say, "You don't know enough yet."

"There will be those who say you're too young, Timothy," warned Paul. "Don't argue *with* them, but instead, be an example *to* them. Live your life in such a way that they will see there's something deep and rich about you."

Paul then goes on to present six characteristics that would silence those who sought to criticize Timothy. And it should come as no surprise that these six characteristics are seen most clearly in the life of the One who is our ultimate Example—Jesus Christ. The account in Luke 2 is the only one in the Bible that shows us Jesus as a young Man. Yet in the one story we have, we see all six of these characteristics modeled perfectly. . . .

. . . be thou an example of the believers, in word . . .

> *And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.*
>
> Luke 2:46

Teenager, notice that Jesus wasn't preaching to the elders in the temple. He was listening to them and asking questions of them. Let me suggest that if you want to be an example of the believer, your speech is to be based upon your listening to those who are older than you.

"But they don't know as much as I do," you may say.

Don't you think Jesus knew more than those men in the temple? Yet He engaged in meaningful conversation with them for days.

> George Washington was right when he said, "When a younger man and an older man are conversing, the older man must never mention that he is older, but the younger man must never forget it."

You who are younger than forty, be an example of the believer in speech by listening, by asking questions, and by engaging in meaningful conversation —because after He listened to them and asked questions of them, Jesus astonished the learned men in the temple with His understanding (Luke 2:47).

. . . in conversation . . .

> *And it came to pass, that after three days, they found him in the temple . . .*
>
> Luke 2:46 (a)

The Greek word translated "conversation" means "lifestyle," or "conduct." Teenager, if you were suddenly discovered to be missing, would Mom and Dad say, "No doubt he's at church"? In your free time, where do you go? Jesus' lifestyle was centered around the temple, around the things of the kingdom. It wasn't part of His life. It *was* His life.

If, as a fifteen-year-old, you decide that church will have priority over volleyball, football, delivering newspapers, or watching TV—just watch and see how God will bless you as you seek first the kingdom.

. . . in charity . . .

> *And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.*
>
> Luke 2:48–50

Of Joseph, Jesus could have said, "He's not my dad." Instead, He corrected His mother so tenderly that neither she nor Joseph understood what He was saying. Jesus didn't say, "Let Me clarify." He simply spoke the truth, and then He backed off. Mary and Joseph didn't understand—but Jesus didn't press His point.

So, too, while we are not to compromise truth, neither are we to strive, fight, or argue (2 Timothy 2:24).

. . . in spirit . . .

> *. . . wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*
>
> Luke 2:49

As a teenager, Jesus didn't say, "I'll try to be about My Father's business." He didn't say, "I should be about My Father's business." He didn't say, "I want to be about My Father's business." He said, "I *must* be about My Father's business."

As an adult, He would say, "I must go and preach the gospel of the kingdom (see Luke 4:43). I must go through Samaria (see John 4:4). I must be lifted up on the Cross" (see John 3:14).

Young man, young woman, be one who says, "I *must* tithe—no matter how the bills are stacking up. I *must* pray—no matter how busy my day. I *must* serve faithfully. I *must* stay married to my husband. I *must* love my wife." Show me a dad who says, "Family devotions are not optional." Show me a teenager who says, "If the game interferes with church, I'm not going to the game." Show me a man, a woman, a teenager, a married couple like that, and I'll show you people God will use profoundly.

. . . in faith . . .

> *And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them . . .*
>
> Luke 2:51 (a)

Jesus submitted Himself to His mother and stepfather. It took faith to say, "I choose to submit to you. Even though you don't understand what I'm saying, even though you don't fully realize who I am, I choose to submit Myself to you because My Father in heaven has placed Me in this home, and I have faith that He has ordained this to be."

Whether at work or home, in school or in marriage, the key to submission is faith. The key to submission is saying, "Lord, I know that You are on the throne, that you put me in this home, that You placed me in this position."

. . . in purity . . .

> *And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple . . .*
>
> Luke 2:46 (a)

Left alone in the city, Jesus kept Himself pure. Although He was tempted in all points like as we are, although He felt the same temptations and tugs of the flesh we do (Hebrews 4:15), He didn't try to sneak into a movie. He remained in the temple.

In his second letter, Paul will tell Timothy to flee youthful lusts by hanging out with those who love God (2 Timothy 2:22). Seventeen-year-old, twenty-three-year-old, listen: There are "hot spots" all over—places that will burn you out. Run from them and run to those who are gathering together to worship the Lord and to study His Word.

Why should you be an example of the believers? Why should you follow the Example of Jesus? Look at the last verse of Luke 2. . . .

> *And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*
>
> Luke 2:52

If you choose to walk in humility, love, zeal, faith, and purity, you'll increase in wisdom and stature. You'll grow in favor with God and man.

The choice is yours.

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5 In chapter 5, dealing with the church and her ministry to herself, Paul will address three areas: the church family, widows specifically, and leaders practically. . . .

1 Timothy 5:1 (a)

Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father . . .

Paul's word to young Timothy is an important word for all younger men, for, in their zeal, young men have a tendency to feel as if they know all the answers. But in reality, as we go through life with the Lord, we realize we don't know as much as we thought we did. I know I, for one, was a whole lot smarter when I was twenty-two than I am now, twenty-five years later!

1 Timothy 5:1 (b), 2

. . . and the younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.

Within the church family, we're to treat older men with respect, older women with devotion, contemporaries as brothers, and younger women as sisters.

1 Timothy 5:3

Honour widows that are widows indeed.

In Acts 6, we read of division in the early church due to tension arising concerning the care of the Greek and Hebrew widows. Thus, from the very beginning—in the days before Social Security, retirement plans, or life insurance—the church realized her responsibility to care for those who would otherwise have been in financial straits.

1 Timothy 5:4

But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.

If a widow had children, or grandchildren, it was not the church's responsibility to care for her. There were those who were saying, "We don't have to worry about Mom because the church will take care of her."

"No," said Paul. "The first place to show piety is with the older members of your own family who are in need." Thus, one of the characteristics of a "widow indeed" (verse 3) was being one who didn't have children or grandchildren to care for her.

1 Timothy 5:5

Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.

"Widows indeed" were women who gave themselves to constant prayer. I like the order—night and day. When one is suddenly single, sometimes it's hard to sleep. I've been there—but I'll tell you this: Such times provide wonderfully rich opportunities for prayer. When you can't sleep, don't watch TV. Pray. Go to your knees and intercede for those who are hurting. There's

something about the nighttime hours that often cause them to become the matrix of miracles, the womb of wonder. There's something about being in the dark with the Lord that allows you to focus on Him, to do battle against the Enemy, to receive insight from Him in a way unlike at any other time of the day.

1 Timothy 5:6

But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.

If an older woman is living for pleasure in her later years, she's doing nothing more than going through the motions of life.

1 Timothy 5:7, 8

And these things give in charge, that they may be blameless. But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

It's up to you as a child or a grandchild to take care of your parents and grandparents. Don't leave it to the church. I believe this principle applies down the line. Mom, Dad, the church should not be expected to foster your teenager's spirituality or your preschooler's introduction to Jesus. Oh, the church gets to partner with you in seeing Junior taught the things of God—but nothing the church can do is as effective as what children learn from their parents on a daily basis.

1 Timothy 5:9, 10

Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.

A woman at least sixty years of age, who had been a faithful wife and a good mother, who had been given to hospitality and who had refreshed the saints, who had helped those who were hurting, but who had no family to

care for her was a "widow indeed" and therefore qualified to be cared for by the church.

1 Timothy 5:11, 12

But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith.

"Don't let younger women join the community of widows," said Paul, "because when they remarry, they'll condemn themselves, wondering if they should have remained singularly devoted to the Lord and to prayer."

1 Timothy 5:13, 14

And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

Paul instructs Timothy to make sure the women of the church don't give the enemy opportunity to speak negatively in the community about Christians due to the neglect of their own households.

1 Timothy 5:15, 16

For some are already turned aside after Satan. If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.

After dealing with the state of widows in the church, Paul will go on to delineate some standards of leadership for the church. . . .

1 Timothy 5:17

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

In this, we see that the church is to financially support those who labor in the teaching ministry.

1 Timothy 5:18

For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.

Paul supports his previous assertion both with the law that said, "While an ox grinds meal for others to eat, he is to be supported as well" (see Deuteronomy 25:4) and with Jesus' instruction to the disciples He sent out that those to whom they ministered would provide for them (Matthew 10:10).

1 Timothy 5:19

Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.

Do not listen to slander against spiritual leaders unless there are two or three witnesses willing to go on record to discuss the situation. Why does Paul say this? Because the Enemy wants to destroy churches, and he will do that most significantly and successfully by attacking leaders.

The Book of Proverbs says, "Where there is no wood, the fire goes out" (see Proverbs 26:20)—a good principle to grasp not only for the church but also for life in general. As long as you give ear to gossip, you encourage the gossiper to continue in his or her sin. Don't listen to gossip ever—not even if it's couched in a "prayer request"—for it will hurt the church corporately and your own walk personally.

1 Timothy 5:20

Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

On the other hand, if there is legitimate sin, it needs to be rebuked in order that all may learn to be in awe of God.

1 Timothy 5:21, 22

I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.

Paul warns Timothy not to have favorites and not to bestow leadership on anyone too quickly—a charge of which I need to be more mindful. . . .

Years ago, I baptized a young man who had previously dabbled in Rastafarian religion. Articulate and insightful, he had so much going for him that I turned over a Monday night Bible study to him only eight months later. It proved to be a total disaster, however, when I found out that for inspiration before the study, he would get high on marijuana.

As is too often my tendency, I laid hands on someone too quickly. I like to give people an opportunity to serve—but I am learning to listen to Paul when he advised Timothy to go slowly in appointing leaders.

1 Timothy 5:23

Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.

Earlier, in chapter 3, Paul told Timothy an elder was not to be given to wine. Yet here in chapter 5, he's telling Timothy, an elder, to use a little wine —the medicine of the day—for his stomach. I find this intriguing on a number of counts. . . .

As one who moved powerfully in the arena of healing, Paul obviously had prayed for Timothy. Yet Timothy was not healed right then. Does this mean God was unable to heal Timothy or that He didn't hear Paul's prayer? No. God *will* heal everyone who believes in Him (Isaiah 53:5). When? It might be immediately. It might take a year or ten. Or it might not happen until the person goes to heaven.

Prayer doesn't heal. Faith doesn't heal. Medicine doesn't heal. Our own bodies don't heal themselves. *God* heals (Exodus 15:26). And He can use prayer. He can use medicine. He can use faith. He can use our own bodies. Therefore, because God heals, I pray for His direct healing, as well as thanking Him for His gift of medicine—knowing that His method and His timing will be perfect.

1 Timothy 5:24, 25

Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid.

Referring to the fact that Timothy would be open to criticism if he followed Paul's advice and took some wine for his stomach, Paul advised his young protégé to ignore the innuendoes of his critics.

If you are one who will not "take your medicine" because you're living in fear of being misunderstood or if you are one whose entire life is governed by what people think or say, you'll be tripped up in your Christian walk because the fear of man is indeed a snare (Proverbs 29:25).

If, on the other hand, like Jesus, you let go of your reputation (Philippians 2:7) and seek only to please the Father, you'll find an easy yoke upon you and a clear path before you.



6 In chapter 6, Paul addresses the ministry of the church to the world vocationally, materially, and intellectually.

1 Timothy 6:1

Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.

Employees—those who are under the yoke—are to be "good eggs." When the whistle blows, they're not to "scramble." When things get hot,

they're not to get "fried."

I have gotten calls not infrequently from people saying, "I don't even go to your church, but I need an honest plumber or a trustworthy mechanic, and I know I can find one at your church." Be a witness for Jesus Christ by being the best worker, the best athlete, the best student you can be. The world is looking for reasons not to believe in God. Don't give them one.

1 Timothy 6:2

And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partak ers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.

If your boss is a Christian, be careful you don't exploit your relationship by saying, "He'll understand if I don't show up today because I have to pray with my wife," or, "I can't keep my commitment at work because the Spirit is calling me to go to the lake and meditate." Don't be one who takes advantage of a boss who is a brother or sister in the Lord. Instead, take care to esteem them even higher.

1 Timothy 6:3–5

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

"Gain is godliness," said some in Paul's day. "Don't worry about being faithful at work, but rather learn to work the faith. You don't need to work hard. Just Name It and Claim It." Ever hear teaching like that?

1 Timothy 6:6

But godliness with contentment is great gain.

Today's "faith teachers" say "Godliness will bring gain which will make you content."

That's not what Paul said. He said, "Gain lies in godliness with contentment." Why? Because no good thing will God withhold from them that walk uprightly (Psalm 84:11).

"I don't think that's true," you say. "I'm walking with the Lord and I don't have a new car." If that is the case, a new car would not be good for you. God knows that toys and hobbies and bigger houses would be distractions for too many of us. So if things that seem wonderful don't come your way, you can trust that He knows they wouldn't be good for you.

1 Timothy 6:7, 8

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

If you have something to eat and a shirt on your back, be content. This is neither a suggestion nor a principle. It's a command.

In the mountains of Mexico lie two adjacent springs. One sends forth hot water, the other cold.

"Your people must thank Mother Nature for hot and cold water right next to each other," said a travel guide to an Indian as he washed his clothes in the springs.

The Indian wisely answered, "No, we grumble because she didn't supply soap."

God is so good to us, gang. Statistically, the poorest person in this congregation is wealthier than 90 percent of the world's population. Think about that next time you feel inclined to grumble about a lack of soap!

1 Timothy 6:9, 10

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which

while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

The love of money can lead to pointless pursuits and persistent pain because those with money can indulge themselves with possessions and in places they wouldn't otherwise be. God's Word says wanting to be rich, many people get wiped out.

1 Timothy 6:11 (a)
But thou, O man of God . . .

Although we use the phrase "man of God" rather freely, the Bible uses it quite sparingly. Therefore, Timothy must have been something really special.

1 Timothy 6:11 (b), 12
. . . flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

Man of God, keep eternity's values in view. Lay hold on eternal life. Keep focused on the fact that you're going to heaven.

1 Timothy 6:13
I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession.

"Art thou a king?" Pilate asked Jesus.

"You said it, Pilate," answered Jesus. "And if you really desire to hear truth, you too will hear My voice" (see John 18:37).

1 Timothy 6:14–16
That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times

he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

In light of who God is and where we're going, it's ludicrous to think highly of ourselves.

1 Timothy 6:17 (a)

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches . . .

Unlike the game of musical chairs—wherein there's only one chair too few—if the music in the financial world stopped today and every government, corporation, financial institution, and private individual called in their debts, only three out of ten would get a chair. In other words, the entire world economy is built on faith that the music's not going to stop. But when it does—and it will—the world will be shocked to realize how many chairs are missing. Thus, the reason the Bible calls riches uncertain is because they are!

1 Timothy 6:17 (b)

. . . but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.

I could tell you story after story of things I thought I just had to have. So I bought them—only to find that they bought me as I was held captive paying them off and maintaining them. Possession brings problems, indeed. Yet Americans persist in thinking they must own something in order to enjoy it. Not so. A walk on the beach, a picnic by a stream, and a bike ride through the park are all free. Thus, God has given us freely the *best* things to enjoy.

1 Timothy 6:18

That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.

If God blesses you with wealth, become the most generous, magnanimous person you possibly can be, for the funny thing about money is that often the more wealth a person amasses, the more stingy he becomes. I have a sneaking suspicion that God desires to bless us even more in the realm of finances if we would learn to be channels through which His blessing would flow.

How do we learn this? The best way is to do what God says: to tithe. The first tenth of every single penny that comes your way is God's. If God has made you a millionaire, you need to tithe on that million. It's His. If God has given you one dollar per year, then a dime of that is His. Become people who tithe, for with every tithe, you give far more than money. You give away a part of your selfishness.

1 Timothy 6:19

Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

The old adage is true: You can't take it with you. But you can send it ahead through tithing, giving, and sharing. Oh, that we would understand the truth of this!

1 Timothy 6:20, 21

O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee. Amen.

After telling us that professionally, we're to be good workers, and financially, we are to be content and generous, Paul moves to his third and final exhortation concerning the church and her ministry to the world when he says that intellectually, we are to be true to the Word.

If you want to navigate life now and eternally without being embarrassed, study the Scriptures and do what they tell you to do. Without exception, the times of which I'm ashamed are the times I didn't do what the Word said to do. When I violated the Word, when I did my own thing, when I chose to

ignore a command or a principle, my actions always resulted in error and shame.

May the Lord continue to help us walk wisely in these dark and treacherous days. May the Lord give us a heart to continue to study the Word —not academically only, but with a determination to obey it practically.

SCIENCE FICTION

A Topical Study of 1 TIMOTHY 6:20–21

As a sophomore in high school, I listened as Mr. Flanner, my science teacher, gave us reason after reason why evolution is so certain, so factual, so undeniable. This intrigued me because at the beginning of the semester, he had taught us that all of science is built not upon a theory, not upon a hypothesis, but upon a law—the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which says that everything goes from order to disorder, that everything is winding down.

We know this to be so. Every second of every minute, the sun loses 1,200,000 tons of mass. As a result, scientists tell us that eventually the sun will burn out. This means that if we go back fifteen million years—the length of time required by the evolutionary process to bring life as we know it to our planet—the sun would be substantially larger than it is now, causing the average temperature on earth to exceed three hundred degrees—which would kill the very life forms that were supposedly evolving into men.

It just doesn't add up! And scientists are increasingly coming to this conclusion. A best-selling book in England, entitled, *The Facts of Life: Shattering the Myth of Darwinism,* was written by an eminent scientist who doesn't believe in God but who, nonetheless, says there are too many problems with Darwinism to make it a viable theory. Among them are the following. . . .

Dating

Scientists at the Hawaiian Institute of Geophysics collected rocks from a lava flow that had hardened and dated them according to the most sophisticated, scientific systems. According to the most advanced computer models, the sample was said to be three billion years old. The problem, however, was that the scientists at the Hawaiian Institute of Geophysics had actually seen the volcano from which the rocks were taken erupt only two years previously.

Fossils

There are fossilized trees in Indonesia that are forty feet high. Because it has been established that it takes centuries to produce a fossil only one inch thick, it would take countless centuries to fossilize an entire tree. The problem is that the tree couldn't stand that long without breaking down under its own decaying process. Therefore, for the tree to be fossilized to a height of forty feet, it had to be fossilized in a way other than the evolutionist suggests. There had to be an instant cataclysmic event—like, for example, a flood.

Transitional Forms

When Darwin wrote his theory, he stated categorically that paleontology —the study of fossils—would verify the theory of evolution because in them we would see transitional forms linking together two distinct species. The problem is that since Darwin presented his theory, scientists have studied fossils by the ton. And they have yet to find a single transitional form.

One Gallup poll found that only 9 percent of Americans believe man came into being apart from God. Why, then, do scientists continue to propagate the theory of evolution? Why do academicians continue to stand by evolution? Why does our public school system continue to teach evolution when it clearly violates the Second Law of Thermodynamics and other empirical evidence?

The Bible gives us the answer in Romans 1. . . .

> *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.*
>
> Romans 1:20

God's attributes, His power, His creative ingenuity, and His presence are seen in all of creation—from the circulatory systems within us to the stars above us.

> *Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.*
>
> Romans 1:21–23

Even though nature attests to God's reality, man chose to believe a lie and to change the glory of the incorruptible God into man, birds, four-footed

beasts, and creeping things—which, interestingly, is the evolutionary order in reverse.

> *Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.*
>
> Romans 1:24, 25

"Because there is no God; because we came from slime, we can act like slime," says the unbeliever.

And *that's* the issue, gang. The issue is not scientific, academic, or intellectual. The issue is moral. People innately know there is a divine design to the universe. They know it in their hearts. They see it in the sky. It rings true in their souls. But because the so-called intellectuals don't want to be accountable to a Creator, they simply remove God from the picture.

Guns, rape, and profane behavior of every type have replaced chewing gum, un-tucked shirts, and talking in class as the prevalent problems in our high schools. And educators are stymied. "What's wrong with the culture?" they ask. They give lectures and bring in motivational speakers to try to instill values in their students—all the while blind to the obvious fact that if kids are taught they came from animals, they're bound to act like animals. Understanding what they innately know to be true—that they were created by God—would affect the way students would view life, one another, and themselves. But take away that underpinning—and we are currently reaping the result.

And if you are one who says, "I know God created the earth and everything in it," my question to you is this: Do you live as though that were true?

God created you for one reason: To bring Him pleasure (Colossians 1). Therefore, if you please God this week, you will fulfill the very reason for your existence. It is in bringing joy and pleasure to the heart of God through worship, Bible study, family devotions, personal contemplation, prayer,

meditation, and submission that we disarm Darwin, expose evolution, and silence the skeptic.

Mr. Flanner had a Master's Degree, but I, a lowly sophomore, understood the Decree of the Master—and that made all the difference.



2 TIMOTHY

1 2 Timothy 1:1 (a)
Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God . . .

As you may recall, Paul endured two periods of imprisonment. . . .

The Book of Acts closes with Paul under house arrest in Rome. Although he was linked to a guard at all times, he lived in his own quarters and was able to have visitors. After his release from house arrest, Paul embarked on yet another missionary journey, probably into Spain. Upon his return to Rome, he was arrested a second time. This time, however, Paul was put in a dark, damp dungeon. Why? The reason most probably lies with the then-emperor of Rome—Caesar Nero. . . .

> *According to historical evidence, such a megalomaniac was Caesar Nero that he desired to burn Rome in order to rebuild it and become known as the supreme architect of a rebuilt Rome. Thus, the majority of historians believe that Caesar Nero was the one who set the fire that did, indeed, burn the city in A.D. 64. Needing a scapegoat for the fire, Nero chose to blame Christians. "These Christians are always talking about being the light of the world," he said, "but really they're nothing but a bunch of arsonists and cannibals"—referring to Communion. Eventually, Caesar Nero would ride through his palace grounds, shrieking with glee, as he watched Christians lit as human torches.*

Why did Nero descend to such depths of insanity? Historical evidence points to the fact that Nero went insane after he had a discussion with Paul the apostle. Church history indicates that Paul was indeed brought into a discussion with Nero before he was beheaded. Thus, it was at the point that Nero rejected the gospel that he seemingly lost his mind.

Awaiting trial before Caesar Nero, Paul picks up his pen for the last time. . . .

2 Timothy 1:1 (b)

. . . according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.

I love this opening salutation. Knowing he's probably only days away from his death, Paul talks about life. What kind of life? Eternal life. He's ready to pull up stakes and move on. He's not downcast or depressed because he sees the bigger picture—the promise of life.

If you believe in Jesus, I have good news for you: You're never going to die. You're just going to "move" on to heaven. God is so good to allow these tents we inhabit to fall apart through the aging process because, in so doing, He's getting us ready to move into the fabulous home He is preparing for us, and for the new bodies He will give us that are designed for eternity, custom-made for the cosmos.

2 Timothy 1:2 (a)

To Timothy, my dearly beloved son:

As noted in 1 Timothy, it seems Paul led Timothy to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ during his first missionary journey. On his second journey, Paul again encountered Timothy, and this time invited Timothy to travel with him.

I like that! We need to include younger people on the journey we're on, in the ministry to which we're called. Whatever might be your calling, say, "Lord, show me those who I can bring alongside me to travel with me"—and then begin to entrust to them an even greater degree of ministry. I'm so thankful there were people in my life who took chances with me when I was young.

But what if the younger Christians mess up? Sometimes they will, but, as Solomon said, "Although an empty stable stays clean, an empty stable brings no profits" (see Proverbs 14:4). We need to make way for those who are younger because along with the potential for an occasional mess in the stable, there is about them a vitality and an ability to relate sometimes lacking in those of us who are older. Paul took a chance on Timothy—and Timothy profited Paul greatly.

2 Timothy 1:2 (b)

Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

In his usual fashion, Paul uses the traditional Greek greeting of *charis,* or "grace," coupled with the traditional Hebrew greeting of *shalom,* or "peace." But he wisely adds mercy as he thinks of the vulnerabilities of young Timothy.

2 Timothy 1:3

I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.

No doubt unable to sleep well in a dungeon, what did Paul do? Grumble? No. Complain? No. He saw his prison as a place of prayer.

Perhaps you feel imprisoned by past decisions. "I can't believe I married him. The Lord could have used me on the mission field. I could have done great things for the kingdom. But here I am, stuck washing his underwear and socks." What can you do? Do what Paul did. Use the opportunity of folding laundry to pray night and day, for that's the most powerful ministry there is.

If you're stuck in a boring job or difficult relationship, don't try to find a way out. Instead, say, "The dungeon I'm in gives me opportunity to do what I might never have done were I in another place or another ministry: I can pray night and day." Eternity will reward those who, because they are in seeming dungeons on earth, lift themselves and others up in prayer to the very gates of heaven.

Wouldn't you love to have Paul praying for you night and day? But wait. Jesus Christ Himself is at the right hand of the Father, praying for you and me even now (Hebrews 7:25). And unlike me, unlike Paul, He never grows weary in prayer (Psalm 121:3). Oh, to truly believe and firmly embrace the fact that Jesus, our faithful High Priest, is at the right hand of the Father, saying, "Jon needs You desperately. Let's bless him."

2 Timothy 1:4

Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy.

One of the few called a "man of God" in the Bible (1 Timothy 6:11), Timothy was, nonetheless, sickly. He fought timidity. And he cried. Thus, he was not necessarily the kind of guy of whom I would have said, "Here's my man." But although he was sickly and timid, young and emotional, Paul saw in Timothy one who had a desire to serve the Lord with all his heart, one whose priority was the kingdom.

The Lord delights in using the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things to show up the strong because when He uses people like Timothy—people like you and me—He gets all the glory!

2 Timothy 1:5

When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.

In Lois, I am reminded of my own grandmother who, although she "moved" to heaven when I was only three years old, impacted my life so greatly that I still clearly remember her teaching me Bible verses and stories.

2 Timothy 1:6

Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.

"Your heritage is godly, Timothy. Now, stir up the gift within you," says Paul. Why do people let their gifts go dormant? I'm convinced it's because of fear.

- "If I share that word of prophecy—what if people don't understand?"
- "If I give that utterance in tongues—what if there's no interpretation?"
- "If I witness on my campus or at my job—what if people think I'm a Holy Joe?"

- "If I lay hands on that sick person and he's not healed—people will think I'm a failure."

My experience, however, has shown the opposite to be true. For example, in praying for healing, I've seen people healed immediately; I've seen people healed later on down the road; I've seen people get sicker; I've seen people die. But never once in the multiplied hundreds of times that I've prayed for Christians and non-Christians alike have I ever heard someone say, "I'm angry that you prayed for me." People always say, "Thank you," and mean it.

2 Timothy 1:7

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

This is a great verse to teach your kids at a young age. After all, if they have power, love, and a sound mind—they're in pretty good shape!

2 Timothy 1:8, 9

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

Although we know we're saved by grace, why is it that we have a tendency to think we can only be blessed through works? Yes, James says faith without works is dead (James 2:20). However, blessing comes neither from faith *and* works, nor from faith *or* works, but from faith *that* works in response to the grace God has already bestowed upon us.

2 Timothy 1:10 (a)

But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ . . .

Where is the grace of God, the love of God, the goodness of God manifested? In Jesus Christ.

"I don't need to go to church because I just go out into the woods on Sunday and feel really close to God," some say. Or, "I sense God's presence most clearly under the blue sky on a golf course." I don't doubt there is truth in that, for Psalm 19 says the heavens declare the glory of God, and Romans 1 declares that all of creation testifies of the ingenuity, power, and creativity of the Father. The heavens, trees, mountains, and oceans, indeed, speak of God's power and creativity. But not of His love and grace.

> *"I'm going to walk on the beach tonight instead of going to church," a Floridian might say—unaware that the biggest storm in thirty years is rumbling through the beaches of Pensacola. With winds blowing at one hundred nineteen miles per hour, roofs are blowing off houses and people are getting hurt.*

Yes, nature gives witness to the reality of God, but it is a limited witness and can be a confusing message. That's why pagan cultures tried to appease the god of nature with human sacrifices, hoping that they would not be swallowed up in earthquakes or burned up in lava floes.

The only way to understand the grace and goodness of God is not by going hunting on Sunday, but by remembering what Jesus did on Calvary, opening up the Scriptures with your brothers and sisters corporately, and worshiping Him in unity.

2 Timothy 1:10 (b)–12 (a)

. . . who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things . . .

"I'm a preacher," said Paul, "but I'm also a teacher." Preaching and teaching are different ministries. Preaching is proclaiming the Good News of the gospel to a world lost and headed for destruction. Teaching, on the other hand, is grounding believers in the full orb of Scripture.

Concerning marriage, Paul simply said, "In light of the times, let those that are married be as though they're not." In fact, he went on to say, "Let those that weep be as though they wept not; those that buy, be as though they possessed not" (see 1 Corinthians 7:29, 30). Thus, I find it interesting that the three subjects people most want to deal with in the church are marriage, emotions, and money matters—subjects Paul addressed very lightly.

What did Paul emphasize? The same themes Jesus did. He emphasized the huge, overarching themes of the kingdom—eternity, redemption, justification, sanctification, walking in the Spirit, the nature of the Father. Why does he emphasize those things? Because when they are understood, everything else falls into place (Matthew 6:33).

If I didn't teach through the Bible, I would have a tendency to choose certain subjects and ride them indefinitely. But as I teach through the Word, I find subjects are addressed in the right proportion at precisely the right time. If you're in ministry, teach the Bible from cover to cover. Avoid the temptation to talk about the issues people think they want to hear. Be like Paul, a preacher to non-believers, and a teacher of the full orb of Scripture to those who believe.

2 Timothy 1:12 (b)

. . . nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

I know whom I have believed. Circle the word "whom." Underline it. Meditate on it. Paul doesn't say, "I know *what* I believe." He says, "I know *Who* I believe." That's the key. What gets you through the dark, damp, dungeons of life? Not what you believe. It's who you believe.

Many people know what they believe doctrinally. They know what they believe theologically. But they don't know Jesus personally. Others may not be all that familiar with the theology, but they know Jesus intimately—and they're a joy to be around.

"What" will never see you through dark, damp dungeon days. It will only say, "Wait a minute. This doesn't figure in to my theology."

But if you know *Who* you believe, you'll join Paul in saying, "Lord, if You have me here in this dungeon, that's okay with me. After all, when I remember what You did for me on the Cross, how could I not trust You?"

2 Timothy 1:13–15

Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us. This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.

I believe Paul models the principle of specifically identifying false teachers who knowingly and poisonously peddle heresy.

2 Timothy 1:16–18

The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.

In contrast to Phygellus and Hermogenes, Paul writes of Onesiphorus as one who truly cared about him. Interestingly, all of Paul's allusions to Onesiphorus are in the aorist, or past tense, including a reference at the end of this letter (4:19). Therefore, we can conclude that Onesiphorus had died, "moved on" to his heavenly home. In this, we are given interesting insight into Paul's heart for this one to whom he felt uniquely linked at a time when everyone else had abandoned him—a link that transcended the temporary separation that exists between we who are looking forward to the day when we will be in heaven and those who are already there.



2 Timothy 2:1

2 **Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**

"Sickly, emotional, young, timid one, be strong in grace," said Paul to Timothy. I would have said, "Timothy, be strong emotionally. Get it together." Or, "Quit your bellyaching and be strong physically." But that's not what Paul said. He said, "Be strong in *grace.*"

So, too, the Lord wants you who, like Timothy, feel you're a little lacking in personality, somewhat weak emotionally, or less than impressive intellectually to be strong in grace—to expect the Lord to bless you not because of who you are, but in spite of who you are! God is looking for men and women He can bless not because of their prayer, their talent, their piety, or their devotion, but simply because of His grace—for they will be those through whom He is most glorified (1 Corinthians 1:27).

2 Timothy 2:2

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

In our educational system, there are few greater sins than that of plagiarism. "Be innovative, creative, and original," our teachers say—which is fine for schoolwork, but not for ministry. Because there is no such thing as plagiarism in ministry, Paul told Timothy to take the very things he had heard Paul teach and pass them on to others.

2 Timothy 2:3, 4

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

Knowing they would be mowed down by Nazi machine guns, the first soldiers off the landing craft at Omaha Beach charged valiantly.

Those who miraculously made it to shore safely began to climb the cliffs, knowing they were most likely climbing to their deaths. What would cause a man to hit the beach or to climb a cliff, knowing he would be gunned down in the process? Subsequent studies have shown that the heroes of D-Day did so out of respect and appreciation for their commanding officer and fellow soldiers. The concept of fighting for one's country is sometimes too big, too abstract. But risking one's life for the safety of one's commander or for the safety of the soldiers right beside him makes sense.

Paul didn't give Timothy ten theological reasons why he should serve the Lord. Rather, he gave him only one: to please the commanding officer and fellow soldier who had laid down His life for him.

2 Timothy 2:5

And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.

Paul changes his analogy from warfare to athletics when he says, "You're not going to get the gold medal if you break the rules." So, too, we must know and abide by the principles found in the Scriptures.

2 Timothy 2:6

The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits.

In his third analogy, Paul challenges Timothy to be like a farmer—to wait patiently.

I have seen a bunch of churches and people who were on the verge of seeing some wonderful things happen in their ministries give up prematurely. Whether it be in ministry, marriage, witnessing at the job, or on the campus, hang in there. The great need in many cases is just to be patient.

It wasn't too many years ago that we met in a circle of about fifteen chairs for Sunday night service. For many years, Sunday night

attendance at Applegate Christian Fellowship just never seemed to grow numerically. Many were the nights I would come home and wonder if we should just pull the plug on it completely. But I knew in my heart we had to keep on, for it was on Sunday nights that prayer was offered most deeply, where the gifts were expressed most freely, where Communion was served regularly. We did, indeed, keep on—and finally people realized the blessing of meeting together in that kind of atmosphere. So many things that have happened at the fellowship are like that. People who don't know the background see them as overnight suc cesses. But more often than not, there were years and years of just planting, watering, and waiting before any fruit was seen.

"Like a soldier, Timothy, please your commander," said Paul. "Like an athlete, compete lawfully. Like a farmer, be patient—and you will see fruit eventually."

2 Timothy 2:7

Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

In this verse we see a direct link between considering and understanding. "I don't understand the Bible," people say. "I just can't get it."

"Have you ever considered what you're reading?" I ask. "Have you ever slowed down and talked to the Lord about what you're reading? Have you ever waited quietly for Him to inspire your thoughts and touch your heart?"

We know that if we meditate on God's Word, we will have prosperity and good success (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2). But what does the Bible mean by meditation?

The goal of Eastern meditation is to empty oneself of all thoughts until he becomes one with the universe. Biblical meditation is just the opposite. The Hebrew word for "meditation" is linked to what a cow does when it chews its cud. A cow constantly re-chews its food as it sends it to each of its seven stomachs.

That's what we're to do with Scripture. We're to read a passage, stop and consider it, meditate on it, chew on it, think through it, and pray about it. If I just read a chapter or five verses and say, "I don't get it"—I won't! But if I wait on God, if I stop and consider it, if I meditate on it, the Lord has promised to give understanding.

2 Timothy 2:8

Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel.

"Be strong in grace, Timothy," exhorts Paul. "Be like a soldier, an athlete, a farmer. Meditate, slow down, and above all, remember Jesus Christ."

Paul's is a powerful and important exhortation: Don't become so enamored with ministry and so caught up in theology that you forget that Jesus is risen.

How do we remember Jesus? "Do this in remembrance of Me," Jesus said as He served His disciples Communion (Luke 22:19). Come to the Table, saint, and remember both the work Jesus did for you on the Cross and that He is risen and lives in you right now.

2 Timothy 2:9, 10

Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

"Even though I'm in prison, the Word is not bound, for I'm still sharing through the epistles I'm writing," says Paul.

2 Timothy 2:11

It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him:

If we're dying for Jesus, we will also live with Him—not only in heaven, but presently—because for the extent to which we die to ourselves is the extent to which we will experience life abundantly. When I choose to die to my reputation, my rights, my ideas, and my pleasures—when I choose to take up the Cross and die daily as Jesus told me to, I live.

What does it mean to take up the Cross? Fighting the flu is not taking up the Cross. Grieving over the loss of a loved one is not taking up the Cross. Taking up the Cross is something we *choose* to do. Taking up the Cross means choosing to sacrifice something of yourself for the redemption of someone else.

What are you choosing to do for someone else's redemption, for someone else's spiritual growth? What are you choosing to let go of, to give up, to die to? Let go of self, and you'll find life abundant. That's a promise.

2 Timothy 2:12

If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.

"I never knew the man," Peter cursed vehemently (Matthew 26:74). Yet after His Resurrection, Jesus found Peter personally and ministered to him tenderly (John 21:16). Thus, this verse doesn't refer to those who stumble like Peter, but to those who decide repeatedly that they want nothing to do with Jesus.

2 Timothy 2:13 (a)

If we believe not . . .

This is talking not about believing for salvation, but of the times when our faith is faltering, when we're struggling, when we're slipping and sliding.

2 Timothy 2:13 (b)

. . . yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

Imagine that you travel with me halfway across the country to Yellowstone National Park. There we are, standing by the fence waiting for Old Faithful to erupt—as it does approximately every ninety minutes. But after about thirty minutes, you become bored and you see a goose that you follow into the woods. I remain by the fence and see the spectacle of Old Faithful's geyser. You, on the other hand, miss out because you're on a wild goose chase. Finally, you say, "This is dumb. I'm going back and position myself near Old Faithful again."

Now, when Old Faithful sees you coming, it doesn't say, "Well, well, well. Look who's finally decided to show up. There's no way I will erupt for you. You've been on a wild goose chase." No, Old Faithful erupts regularly, faithfully no matter your position.

Paul is saying that God is, in the best sense of the word, like Old Faithful because His blessings are continually flowing. If I go off on a wild goose chase, I won't be blessed—not because the blessings aren't there, but because I've moved away. But once I realize I'm in the woods on some crazy excursion and return to the geyser of the goodness of God's grace, I find that God is faithful still.

For years, I thought God had to be "primed" through praise, prayer, and devotion. And I thought if I could just pump the handle of His blessings hard enough, blessing would start coming my way. But then I realized His grace is there anytime I choose to come back to my senses and return to Him.

God cannot deny Himself, gang. He's not faithful one day and frustrated the next. He's not generous one day but stingy the next. He is continually and completely *faithful*.

2 Timothy 2:14, 15

Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to shew thyself approved unto

God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

We are to understand how the Word is divided and then allow the Word to divide us (Hebrews 4:12).



***For topical study of 2 Timothy 2:15 entitled "Rightly Dividing the Word," turn to page* 1405.**

2 Timothy 2:16

But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

Herein lies a perfect description of American television talk shows!

2 Timothy 2:17, 18

And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.

Hymenaeus and Philetus were saying, "There is no real resurrection. Forget the Rapture. It's all symbolic and not to be taken literally." They claimed to be insightful, but because of their vain discussion of these things, the faith of some was hurt badly.

2 Timothy 2:19

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

Quoting from Numbers 16, Paul says, "Even though there are men causing problems with their erroneous teaching, the Lord will keep those that are truly His."

Numbers 16 is indeed an appropriate parallel. . . .

"Who gave you the right to rule over us?" Korah, Dathan, and Abiram asked Moses.

And Moses wisely responded by saying to the two hundred fifty men with them, "If I were you, I would depart from them. They're causing division. They're a big problem. Stay away."

But Moses' warning went unheeded. So the earth swallowed them all (Numbers 16:32).

If you want to find yourself swallowed up by despair or confusion, hang around those who cause problems. I have yet to see a man or a woman prosper who causes division and problems in a church.

2 Timothy 2:20, 21

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

"Consider the church a great house," said Paul to Timothy. "Within it you will find many containers: Some are beautiful vases, others are garbage cans." In reference to both the passage that precedes this as well as the passage that follows, Paul says, "Separate yourself from those who pollute or cause problems in the body—or you will end up as a garbage can rather than as a beautiful vase."

2 Timothy 2:22 (a)

Flee also youthful lusts . . .

This doesn't mean if you're young, you're to flee lusts. It means regardless of your age, you're to flee youthful lusts. "I can watch HBO because I'm fifty and it doesn't affect me," some say. Or, "I can go in there because I'm not a kid anymore." Those who think this kid themselves. For the lusts that were real when they were younger are real all the days of their lives.

2 Timothy 2:22 (b)

. . . but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

When you're struggling, if you don't flee and run to those who call upon the Lord, you're going to be tempted a second time even more heavily than you were the first time.

2 Timothy 2:23–26

But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

Sometimes the hardest thing to do in ministry is to be gentle with people who "oppose themselves"—with people who continue to be at cross-purposes with their own welfare—not because they hurt us, but because they hurt themselves. Yet Paul says we must be gentle and patient with *all* men—even those who are their own worst enemies.

If you are one who blindly or foolishly opposes yourself, my prayer is that you will see the vanity, the foolishness of doing so. May you choose, instead, like a soldier, to obey your Commander. May you choose, instead, like an athlete, to live according to the principles of Scripture. May you choose, instead, like a husbandman, to not grow weary in well-doing.

In short, may you grow strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD

A Topical Study of
2 TIMOTHY 2:15

Over the years, I have observed that many people who love the Lord Jesus deeply are, nonetheless, embarrassed occasionally when unbelievers raise questions like the following. . . .

> "How could a God of love order the extermination of the Canaanite civilization?"
>
> "How could a God of love mandate the slaughtering of bulls and goats and little lambs and pigeons for sacrifices?"
>
> "Why does the Bible set guidelines for slavery rather than abolishing it altogether?"

On and on, questions come our way that cause some who love the Lord to feel embarrassed about parts of the Bible.

The problem isn't with the Bible. The problem is with our inability to rightly divide it. The Greek word for "divide" means to cut a straight line, to make an incision. In order to rightly divide the Word, we need to understand first of all that the Bible is not simply a book of theology, but rather a drama through which we see the unfolding of God's redemption of mankind. Viewed as a drama, we see seven scenes, or "dispensations," into which all of Scripture is divided. . . .

Scene I
The Dispensation of Innocence

Psychologist B. F. Skinner voiced the belief of many when he said, “If you can change the external environment of a group of people, they will live at peace.” Scripture, however, says otherwise, for when God placed man in the perfect environment in the Garden of Eden, what did man do? He chose to rebel in the one and only way possible. He chose to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that was placed in the Garden as a way for him to choose for or against God’s love.

B. F. Skinner was wrong. Man chose to rebel. Consequently, those who say it’s okay to smoke marijuana because God created it don’t rightly divide the Word, for it was only during the age of innocence that God declared that which He had made to be good. But because the first dispensation came to a close when man fell, the Bible says at that point, all of creation entered into a fallen condition—groaning, aching, and longing for the day of restoration (Romans 8:22)

Scene II
The Dispensation of Conscience

Many think that if everyone simply followed their conscience, the world would be right. So in the period between Adam and Eve's fall in the Garden of Eden and the Flood that covered the earth, God declared "If you do well, you'll be accepted" (see Genesis 4:7). But it didn't work, for the dispensation began with Cain killing Abel and ended with the imagination of man being evil continually (Genesis 6:5).

Scene III
The Dispensation of Government

Mankind still has a tendency to think that if we could only elect good leaders, the problems of the world would be solved. Following the Flood, based upon the right and responsibility of capital punishment given to Noah, mankind was to govern himself.

Yet the "Dispensation of Government" began and ended dismally. No sooner had God given Noah responsibility to govern the world than, unable to govern even himself, Noah ended up drunk in his tent, fathering two peoples who would be problematic to the people of God throughout their history. The end of the dispensation is typified by the Tower of Babel—a government project constructed of mud and slime whose end result was total confusion.

Scene IV
The Dispensation of Promise

"We need a promise, a hope that good is coming," says man. God gave Abraham such a promise when He said He would make of Abraham a great nation (Genesis 12:2). Yet when famine hit, Abraham's descendants lost hope, disobeyed God, and headed for Egypt (Genesis 26:2).

Scene V
The Dispensation of Grace

"You tried a perfect environment. You tried to live by your conscience. You've given human government a whirl. You tried rules and regulations. Now," says God, "try this: For by grace are you saved, not of works. It's a gift of God" (see Ephesians 2:8, 9).

All of the previous dispensations lead to the one we are in right now—grace. We admit that government isn't the answer, that environment won't solve the problem, that our consciences are corrupt and seared. We admit we're sinners in desperate need of a Savior.

But some say, "I don't really know if I can believe in the idea of a free gift of salvation. I want to see some proof." And this leads to the next scene. . . .

Scene VI
The Tribulation

After the church is taken to heaven, God will begin to make himself known powerfully and visibly to those who don't believe on Him, to those who want nothing to do with Him. Hundred-pound hailstones will pelt the earth, and blood will fill valleys two hundred miles long as God employs terrible tragedy in a wake-up call to earth.

Scene VII
The Kingdom Age

At the end of the Tribulation, Jesus Christ will come back to rule and reign in Jerusalem for one thousand years. It seems all would be well at last. But in Revelation 20, we read an amazing thing: After one thousand years of such peace that the lion will lie down by the lamb, after one thousand years of such health that those who are one hundred years of age are considered children, after one thousand years of perfect conditions for humanity, guess what happens? Man rebels against God once again. Not you and me—but many of those who are on the earth in a human state will turn away from Jesus, ushering in the creation of a new heaven and earth.

Truly, there's a flow, a drama that unfolds throughout Scripture, which is not seen by those who simply focus on one section. That's why Paul said to Timothy, "Study." That's why we meet together regularly to study. And in so doing, we are able to say to the Jehovah's Witness, for example, that the 144,000 among which he numbers himself are part of a dispensation yet to come. And we are able to tell the Adventist that keeping the Sabbath in the "Age of Grace" is impossible if for no other reason than the fact that attending church on the Sabbath is in direct violation of the law that prohibits travel beyond one hundred yards.

An understanding of God's unfolding plan of redemption will cause one to read the Scriptures with an awareness of the scope and purpose of any given dispensation. However, one can rightly divide the Word and still miss the point if the Word of God doesn't divide him (Hebrews 4:12). That is, the Word of God must not only lodge in our minds—it must touch our hearts.

How can we know if the Word is touching our hearts? In Revelation 10:10, we read that when John ate of the scroll, signifying the Word, it was sweet to his mouth, but bitter to his belly. So, too, when I study theology—the promise of heaven, the assurance of salvation, the doctrine of justification—I find them oh, so sweet. But I know the Word is truly accomplishing its work within me when, upon further contemplation, I find them bitter as I realize the plight of those around me who don't yet know Jesus. In other words, I know

the Word is having its intended effect when it not only satisfies my spirit, but when it motivates my soul to ministry, to service, to prayer, and to love.

May we be those who, like a skilled surgeon, rightly divide the Word. And may we be those who, like a willing patient, allow the Word to divide us, and to make us more like Jesus.



3 Hours before His death, Jesus told His disciples that the time would soon come when they would be persecuted even to the place of execution. "I'm telling you these things so you won't be offended," He said (John 16:1). The Greek word translated "offended" is *skandalizo,* from which we get our word "scandalize." In other words, not wanting His disciples to be scandalized, Jesus said, "The religious community will come after you. The political authorities will order your execution. But know this: In My Father's house are many mansions. And I'm going to prepare a place for you. Therefore, although in this present age you will experience great difficulty, you will ultimately be blessed incredibly because you're going to heaven" (John 14:1).

Coming to the end of his own life, the apostle Paul picks up this same theme as he warns Timothy of difficult days to come. And what he shares with Timothy has application for you and me specifically. . . .

2 Timothy 3:1

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

Knowing his death was imminent, I believe Paul nonetheless thought the Rapture would happen either in his lifetime or shortly thereafter. So do I. I believe the Rapture will happen in my lifetime.

"Well," you say, "if Paul thought the Rapture would happen in his lifetime, and it didn't—and if men of God throughout the ages have felt as though they were living in the last days and the Rapture would happen in *their* lifetimes, and it didn't—doesn't it seem foolish to think the Rapture will happen in *your* lifetime?"

Not at all. Throughout the history of the church, the greatest men and women of the faith have all lived their lives believing that the Lord's coming

was nigh. And even though the Lord didn't come when they thought He would, looking for His return impacted their lives in such a way that they left their mark on history and will be rewarded greatly in eternity (2 Timothy 4:8). Luther, Calvin, Spurgeon, Finney, Moody, Torrey all felt the Lord's coming was close at hand. Put me in their company any day!

I choose to live my life looking for the Lord's coming. And if I am wrong, even if He doesn't come back for another five hundred years, I would rather go through the days I have left looking for the sudden appearing of Jesus Christ because I know the effect it has upon the life of any man or woman who believes He could come today: One's heart does not get troubled as easily. One is not prone to sin so readily. If you want to live a zealous, exciting, fulfilling, pure Christian life, live it looking for the Lord's coming (1 John 3:3).

2 Timothy 3:2 (a)
For men shall be lovers of their own selves . . .

Of the students in the ten leading industrialized nations, American high-school students scored either ninth or tenth in every academic category. But in the category of self-esteem, they came in first. In other words, our culture is very good at teaching our kids to say, "I'm okay. I'm somebody. I'm proud."

2 Timothy 3:2 (b)
. . . covetous, boasters . . .

The Greek word translated "boasters" is *ala zon,* which speaks of a claim made by a quack promising something but unable to deliver that which was promised.

2 Timothy 3:2 (c)
. . . proud, blasphemers . . .

The idea of blasphemy literally refers to those who use the Lord's name in vain. People say "God" constantly—but seldom with reverence. Even by

people interviewed on news programs, the Lord's name is used in vain constantly.

2 Timothy 3:2 (d), 3 (a)
. . . disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection . . .

I believe nothing identifies us more clearly as those who have fallen into unnatural affection than the sad statistics relating to abortion. We're horrified when we read that the Canaanites placed their babies on the incandescent arms of idols. *How can this be?* we wonder. And yet we burn our babies with saline solutions in the wombs of mothers—a practice even more horrific, a practice that goes against every natural instinct to protect one's offspring.

2 Timothy 3:3 (b)
. . . trucebreakers . . .

The idea here is of people ignoring covenants or contracts.

2 Timothy 3:3 (c)
. . . false accusers, incontinent, fierce . . .

After being confronted by a student upset with an assignment, the teacher of an anger management class lost his temper and hit the student in the face. Now, if even teachers of anger management are hitting people, without the Lord, what hope is there for the rest of our angry world?

2 Timothy 3:3 (d), 4
. . . despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

People love pleasure. But it's a love that leads only to the "Been there, done that, now what?" mentality, as they find they have to continually do

something bigger, better, farther, faster, and higher in order to get the same thrill they once did.

2 Timothy 3:5

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

We're to turn away from those who are without natural affection, from those who despise things that are good, from those who love pleasure more than God, from those who talk about NewAge spirituality but who know nothing of the power of the Holy Spirit and the Resurrected Jesus.

2 Timothy 3:6, 7

For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Those who propagate a form of godliness not based upon the Resurrection creep around neighborhoods looking for people who have time on their hands to whom they can say, "Let us hold a class in your house so we can share our interesting insights and esoteric experiences."

2 Timothy 3:8

Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.

As proof to Pharaoh that God had indeed sent him, Moses threw down his rod and it became a serpent. Jannes and Jambres, magicians in Pharaoh's court, threw down their rods—which also became snakes. When Moses caused all of the water to turn to blood, Jannes and Jambres said, "We can do that, too." And they did. When Moses called for frogs to cover the land, Jannes and Jambres were able to counterfeit that miracle as well (Exodus 7). Here, Paul likens those who live for pleasure, ignore the Lord, and resist truth to these two magicians of the occult in Pharaoh's court.

2 Timothy 3:9

But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was.

What folly was manifest in Jannes' and Jambres' situation? Their counterfeiting Moses' miracles was foolish because all they could do was make matters worse. All they could do was make *more* blood, *more* frogs, *more* snakes. That's the way it always is with Satan's counterfeits because all he ever does is make things worse. Yes, there is power in the occult. Surely demons can counterfeit miracles. And perhaps there are strange things that happen when palms or tarot cards are read. But they will only make things worse, for Satan will never make things better. Ever.

Contract breakers, pleasure seekers, false spiritualists, lovers of self—these indicators of the last days don't discourage me for a couple of reasons . . .

First, bad times are made for good people. That is, when times get tough, good things start happening in our lives. What takes the wrinkles out of the shirt I wear? The heat and pressure of an iron. What turns a lump of coal into a sparkling diamond? Heat and pressure. So, too, I have noticed that the tougher the times—whether it be financially, spiritually, relationally—the more wrinkles are smoothed out, the more the brilliant light of Jesus shines, the more people grow in their walk with God.

Second, good people are made for bad times. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were three kids who refused to bow the knee to Nebuchadnezzar's statue. "Throw us into the fiery furnace," they said. "If God chooses to deliver us, so be it. But if not, that's okay, too" (see Daniel 3:17, 18). When were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego seen in this light? When times were dark.

The darker your campus or your office, the easier it will be for you to shine for Jesus Christ. Perhaps it was tougher in some ways in the fifties when everything was white picket fences, home-cooked meals, and Ike. Perhaps it was tougher in some ways to stand out or stand up because the contrast may not have been as great. On the other hand, in these times when things are so perverse and polluted, we can stand out without even trying!

2 Timothy 3:10, 11

But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me.

"You know me, Timothy," said Paul. "These false teachers are charlatans. They do magic tricks. They talk in riddles. They're impressive for a moment or two, but you know what I've been through on behalf of the gospel. You know what kind of man I am."

What a statement! How I pray that we, like Paul, might be able to say to our kids and to younger men and women, "You know my lifestyle. You know my purpose. You know my faith."

2 Timothy 3:12

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

Here's a promise you're not likely to find in your Precious Promise box! Yet Paul gave this as the reason for what he was going through and the reason he was not surprised or discouraged by it.

2 Timothy 3:13, 14 (a)

But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of . . .

"Continue in what you *have* learned, in what you *have been* assured of." Paul isn't saying, "Learn more; dig deeper." No, he's telling Timothy to stay away from false spirituality and to stick with the basics.

2 Timothy 3:14 (b)

. . . knowing of whom thou hast learned them.

The word translated "whom" being plural, Paul most likely is alluding to Timothy's mother and grandmother as those who, in addition to himself, had spiritually impacted Timothy's life.

I'm always a little skeptical and somewhat suspicious when a person says, "I only learn from this guy," or, "I'm only a follower of that man." Wise is the man or woman who will learn from the many people the Lord places in their lives to reinforce and undergird their faith.

2 Timothy 3:15

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

"Ever since childhood, you've been taught the Word, Timothy. And it is the Word that will make you wise."

2 Timothy 3:16, 17

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

The Greek word translated "all" is an interesting one. It means *all*. There are critics and commentators who say this verse would be rendered, "All Scripture which is by inspiration of God is profitable for doctrine . . ."—the implication being that not all Scripture is inspired. If I adopt this stance, however, I have to decide what's inspired and what isn't. And in so doing, I become the judge of the Bible rather than allowing the Bible to judge me. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by *every* word which proceeds out of the mouth of God" (see Matthew 4:4). Here in Timothy, we see that it is because *all* Scripture is inspired that we can be furnished unto *all* good works.

4 2 Timothy 4:1–4

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

Most pastors evidently thinking that the day of Bible study has long since come and gone, only 3 percent of evangelical, fundamental churches in America have midweek Bible studies. As sad as this is, it should come as no surprise, for Paul told Timothy that in the end times, people would not have a desire for sound doctrine.

2 Timothy 4:5, 6

But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

The Greek word translated "departure" is a great one. It can refer to the taking up of an anchor, the unyoking of an ox, or the folding of a tent. Thus, in using this word, Paul is saying, "I'm ready to take up the anchor and sail into heaven. I've been plowing long enough on earth. It's time to move on!"

2 Timothy 4:7, 8

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

If you are one who says, "I love life. God has been good to me. But I know I'm only a pilgrim because I'm headed for heaven and looking for His

coming,"—you are guaranteed a crown of righteousness, which will determine your ministry in the ages to come.

According to Luke 12, Jesus will actually serve a meal to those who are watching for His coming. What a day that will be!

Oh, but I've blown it so badly. There's no way the Lord would serve me, you might be thinking. Ask Peter about that. After denying the Lord, he went back to his old occupation of fishing. But even when he was out at sea and out to lunch, when he saw Jesus on the beach, he swam to shore, wanting to be with Him. And what did Jesus do? He served Peter a meal (John 21:12)—just as He had promised.

2 Timothy 4:9, 10 (a)

Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me: For Demas hath forsaken me . . .

In his letter to Philemon, Paul referred to Demas as his fellow labourer (Philemon 24). A few years later in his letter to the Colossians, Paul would say, "Demas greets you" (see Colossians 4:14). Having gone from being a fellow labourer to simply one who said, "Hi," here in 2 Timothy, we read that Demas had forsaken Paul altogether.

There exists the very real possibility of slowly drifting away from the Lord even by those who are at one time used by Him. It happened to Demas. Don't let it happen to you. How? Read on.

2 Timothy 4:10 (b)

. . . having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica.

Don't get caught up in the entertainment, the distractions, the baubles, or the frivolity of the world—for such will only distract and pull you away from serving the Lord.

2 Timothy 4:10 (c), 11

Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for

the ministry.

Mark is John Mark—the one who Barnabas wanted to bring on Paul's second missionary journey, but whom Paul refused due to the fact that John Mark had bailed out on their first missionary journey. After having "no small dispute" concerning John Mark (Acts 15), Paul and Barnabas split company. Barnabas, whose name means "son of consolation," continued on, focusing on the rehabilitation of his nephew, John Mark. Paul, on the other hand, focused on the work at hand, replacing Barnabas with Silas.

Who was right—Paul who said, "The work is too important to take a risk on someone who might turn away," or Barnabas who said, "We need to work with anyone who shows even a little potential"?

They both were. There are those who have a vision and passion for the work at large, and there are those who have a heart for each individual. And although these two groups will not always see eye to eye, both are needed. Here, at the end of his life, Paul sends for John Mark, for evidently Barnabas had indeed accomplished a good work in him.

2 Timothy 4:12, 13 (a)

And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus. The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books . . .

"The books," or *biblion,* could very well refer to the Gospels. "Bring me the Gospels," Paul said. "My days are limited here. Final exams are coming up!"

You'll know what a man's passion is by what he does when he doesn't have to do anything. Paul didn't have to do anything. He had no teaching to prepare, no sermon to outline. Yet he said, "Even though the hour is come to hoist up the anchor, to take off the yoke, to fold up the tent, I want to know more about Jesus."

2 Timothy 4:13 (b)

. . . but especially the parchments.

The Greek word translated “especially” meaning “also” and parchments most likely referring to the Old Testament scrolls, Paul was requesting the Old Testament as well as the Gospels.

2 Timothy 4:14

Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works.

All of us will have an Alexander the coppersmith or two in our lives—people who are just out to get us. Notice that of Alexander, Paul did not fret and fume, saying, “Get him, Lord.” Rather, he simply said, “I know the Lord will deal justly with him.”

2 Timothy 4:15, 16

Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words. At my first an swer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.

In accordance with Matthew 5:44, Paul prayed, “Lord, forgive those who didn’t have the courage to stand by me or to stay with me.”

2 Timothy 4:17 (a)

Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me . . .

Forsaken by many, Paul said it was when he was alone that he had an awareness of the Lord’s presence. How often that is the case. It’s when we feel let down by a friend who ignores us, disheartened by an illness that strikes us, or abandoned when a loved ones leaves us that the Lord becomes most real to us.

Over and over again, I have found that when I felt most alone, the Lord became most real. You have found the same to be true, for when there are people around us, we have a tendency to rely on them. But when we’re alone, we find ourselves walking with the Lord in ways we wouldn’t have otherwise.

2 Timothy 4:17 (b)

. . . that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear . . .

Even in prison, Paul continued to preach. How? Through the epistles he wrote and through the conversations he shared with his jailers.

2 Timothy 4:17 (c)

. . . and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

Some believe Paul was placed in the coliseum before he was beheaded, and a miracle took place when, like Daniel, he was delivered from the mouth of the lion. Others believe this reference is to Satan, who walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). But whether Paul was referring to an actual lion or to Satan, the fact is, God came through. God delivered him.

2 Timothy 4:18

And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Some have suggested that Paul thought he was so close to the time of the Rapture that he would be delivered from being beheaded by Nero. Whether or not that be so, Paul knew that one way or the other, he would soon be in the presence of the Lord.

2 Timothy 4:19, 20

Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick.

Concerning Trophimus, Paul didn't say, "Why are you sick? Where's your faith?" No, some were healed when Paul prayed for them; some

weren't. Trophimus was one who wasn't. Those who say God wants everyone healed immediately have not read this verse.

2 Timothy 4:21, 22

Do thy diligence to come before winter. Eubulus greeteth thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brethren. The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.

As we come to the end of Paul's second letter to Timothy, we come as well to the last of Paul's recorded words. His final utterance was, "Timothy, after all is said about the end times in which you'll be living and the challenge of the ministry you're undertaking—everything is summed up in one word: Grace.

And that's the word for us as well.



TITUS

Background to Titus

Written in approximately A.D. 64, between his first and second letters to Timothy, Paul's letter to Titus was written to instruct and encourage this young man as he ministered on the island of Crete. Crete, an island in the Mediterranean 135 miles long and 30 miles wide, is a mountainous island and was quite heavily populated according to the demographics of Paul's day. As we shall see, the inhabitants of Crete were a difficult, problematic people. In fact, it's interesting to note that the Philistines—they who were always hassling the people of Israel—originally came from Crete. Crete was an island steeped in Greek mythology, Zeus having supposedly been born on Crete's own Mount Ida.

Commissioned to preach to a problematic people who were believers in Greek gods, Titus had his work cut out for him.



TITUS

1

Titus 1:1 (a)
Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ . . .

It was after he had been released from his first imprisonment in Rome that Paul most likely traveled to Crete and left Titus there to establish a work on the island.

Titus 1:1 (b)
. . . according to the faith of God's elect . . .

The Greek phrase translated "according to the faith" is better translated "for the furtherance of the faith." Paul is saying, "I just want to see God's people go farther, and do better. I want to see the kingdom expanded and people deepened." Such was Paul's heart.

Titus 1:1 (c)
. . . and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness.

Although the King James Version reads, "truth which is after godliness," the idea here is "truth which produces godliness."

Titus 1:2
In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.

Paul's intent is that people do better and go farther in the glorious hope of eternal life. "And this is eternal life," Jesus prayed in His High Priestly prayer, ". . . that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

We usually think of eternal life as existing someday far away in heaven. But that's only part of it. According to Jesus' prayer, eternal life is to know the Lord here and now in our hearts. Thus, the farther I get from the Lord, the

more hellish things become. But in the days I spend time with the Lord, I experience something of heaven on earth. The closer I walk to the Lord, the more heavenly my days will be.

> *It was after Enoch fathered his son, Methuselah, that Scripture records he began to walk with God (Genesis 5:22). Kids will make one walk with God—especially a kid like Methuselah. Living to the age of 969, he must have been home for five hundred years!*
>
> *"Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). I can almost hear the Lord saying, "You know, Enoch, this walk we've enjoyed together has been so wonderful. You've walked with Me so closely that now we're closer to My house than yours. Come on Home."*

"This is eternal life," Jesus prayed, "that they may know You, Father—not out there geographically, but here and now intimately."

> **Titus 1:3**
>
> **But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour.**

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul talks about the foolishness of preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21). So, too, when people hear that you drive to church to sit in a pew for a couple of hours, they say, "That's foolish." But the preaching of the Word causes our hearts to be happy, our spirits to be warmed. Let the world call it crazy, but to those of us who are a part of the kingdom, there's nothing like it.

> **Titus 1:4 (a)**
>
> **To Titus . . .**

Like Timothy, Titus was one who was probably led to Jesus by the apostle Paul. We know from Galatians 2 that Titus, a Greek, traveled with Paul to the Jerusalem council, wherein it was decided that, because salvation

came by grace through faith alone, circumcision was not a requirement for salvation (Acts 15).

We see Titus again in 2 Corinthians 8, where he is instrumental in the raising of money by the Corinthian church to help those who were hurting in Jerusalem. After that, Paul sent Titus to the island of Crete, and later to the region of Dalmatia, or present-day Bosnia.

When you put Titus' travel log together, you realize he went down to Jerusalem to deal with the controversy over circumcision, then to Corinth, which was a difficult ministry, then to Crete, where there was no shortage of problems, and finally on to Bosnia. It was an arduous program, but Paul had great confidence in Titus, for like Timothy, Paul esteemed him highly.

Titus 1:4 (b)
. . . mine own son after the common faith.

As he did with Timothy, Paul evidently was the one who brought Titus to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Titus 1:4 (c)
Grace, mercy, and peace . . .

To his usual salutation of grace and peace, Paul adds mercy in his letters to Timothy and Titus because they're his sons in the faith—and all fathers know their sons need mercy!

Titus 1:4 (d)
. . . from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.

As in his usual salutations, Paul bestows grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you ever wondered why the Third Person of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit—is not mentioned? In John 16, Jesus taught us that when the Spirit came, He would not speak of Himself. Therefore, as He inspires Paul, the Holy Spirit does not mention Himself in the opening credits because His ministry is not to speak of Himself. The ministry of the Holy Ghost is singular: to point people to Jesus Christ. When

churches, people, or movements are centered on the Holy Spirit, I am suspicious because the ministry of the Spirit is to spotlight Jesus.

Titus 1:5 (a)
For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting . . .

Because Titus was to set the church of Crete in order, we can assume Paul didn't start the church there. Who did? We can't be sure—but this we do know: When the Holy Spirit came upon the believers in the Upper Room, men from Crete are listed among those who heard the gospel in their own tongue (Acts 2:11). Thus, it could very well be that those who heard the message of salvation on the Day of Pentecost got saved and returned to Crete.

At Babel, languages and culture groups were separated (Genesis 11). The great reversal of Babel happened at Pentecost when suddenly different language groups and cultures were brought together through the power of the Holy Spirit. Whatever attempts man makes in the flesh toward unity are doomed to fail. It is only in the Spirit where the effects of Babel are reversed.

Titus 1:5 (b)
. . . and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.

There's no room for political maneuvering in spiritual leadership. "You are to ordain elders," or literally "You are to appoint elders," Paul instructed Titus.

"Choose you out men, Moses, whom you know to be elders and appoint them to be rulers over tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands" (see Exodus 18:21–25). The very first time we see elders in Scripture, they weren't voted into office. They were appointed. In the same way, Paul says to Titus, "You appoint elders as I appointed you."

Titus 1:6 (a)
If any be blameless . . .

This doesn't mean that to be an elder a man must be perfect, or we're all in big trouble! No, the idea here is that an elder must be one who's not pointed at in derision.

Titus 1:6 (b)

. . . the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.

Ministry must be established at home before one can have credibility in the church. I once read an article about the first man to scale Mount Everest without oxygen. He was recovering in a hospital after falling off a wall at his home because he had locked himself out of his house. Here's a guy who conquers every mountain in the world. But where does he fall? At home. There are men who can conquer mountains on the job or with finances, but as far as ministry is concerned, if a man can't keep his balance at home, Scripture says he is disqualified from ministry in the church. That's not a word of condemnation. It's a word of re-prioritization.

Get your home squared away, Dad. Get your kids grounded and walking with the Lord. Whatever you want to do in ministry, you can do with your kids. You can lead them in worship; you can serve them Communion; you can preach as long as you want! True ministry may one day extend beyond your family, but not before it is established within your family.

Now that my kids are grown up and beginning to leave home, I don't regret one moment I spent having devotions with them. I only wish I had done it more. I don't wish I had taken them to more baseball games or more movies. I'm just thankful for the time we logged together talking about the Lord, learning His ways, studying His Word.

Train up your kids, Mom and Dad. Other ministry will come, but that's where it all starts.

Titus 1:7 (a)

For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God . . .

"Steward" simply means "servant." There's a lot of talk about the need for *men of faith.* But an even greater need is for *faithful men* to simply and

consistently direct traffic, change diapers, or put away chairs at their fellowships if that's what the Lord has called them to do.

Titus 1:7 (b)
. . . not selfwilled, not soon angry . . .

As a spiritual man desiring to be used by the Lord to any degree, you can't be one who loses your temper.

Titus 1:7 (c), 8 (a)
. . . not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality . . .

Whereas Paul told Timothy an elder should be hospitable (1 Timothy 3:2), here he tells Titus that an elder must be one who loves hospitality. I suggest the reason we don't love hospitality is because we fall into the "Martha mentality" . . .

"Tell Mary to help me prepare this meal," said Martha to Jesus.

"Martha, you're troubled about many things, but only one thing is needful," Jesus answered.

Most people think the one needful thing Jesus referred to is sitting at His feet as Mary was doing. While that is important, indeed, I believe Jesus was also saying, "You're cooking this big meal, Martha. Pots are boiling, toast is burning, stuff is spilling, but all I wanted was just one simple thing to eat" (see Luke 10:42).

The key to loving hospitality is just being real, not trying to impress people, but simply enjoying one another's company.

Titus 1:8 (b), 9 (a)
. . . a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught . . .

In this, I am reminded of one of David's men—a man named Eleazar.

The Israelites were fleeing from the Philistines. But Eleazar, whose name means "God is my help," grabbed his sword and stood his ground. Samuel's account says his hand "clave unto the sword," and that the Lord brought a great victory (see 2 Samuel 23:9, 10).

May we be those whose hands cleave to the sword of the Word (Hebrews 4:12), who don't let it go, who pack it around with us. A Bible that's falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't. Get in the Word. Stay in the Word, gang. Make it a nonnegotiable priority in your daily life.

Titus 1:9 (b)

. . . that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

"To establish this work on the island of Crete, you must be a man who's in the Word," Paul instructs Titus, "in order for you to deal with the challenges that are sure to come your way."

Titus 1:10

For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision.

"The Judaizers with whom we dealt in Jerusalem are going to come your way, Titus—those who will try to place regulations and burdens upon others," said Paul. "The only way you'll fend them off is by sound doctrine."

Titus 1:11 (a)

Whose mouths must be stopped . . .

The mouths must be stopped of those who preach legalism and who put people in bondage about what day they should or shouldn't worship, how they should dress, what they should or shouldn't eat.

Titus 1:11 (b)

. . . who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.

I often wonder how many ministries would continue if there was no money coming in.

Titus 1:12, 13 (a)

One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true.

A Cretan poet named Epimenides called his own people liars and gluttons, and Paul agreed. Talk about politically incorrect! I like Paul's courage and his honesty, as he was not afraid to go on record saying that the false teachers were in ministry simply for money, and that the Cretans were prone to lies and laziness.

Titus 1:13 (b)

Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.

"If the Cretans behave according to stereotype," Paul says, "rebuke them."

Titus 1:14

Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.

Whether ministering to the Cretans with their laziness or the Jews with their tendency to get wrapped up in fables that distract people from the truth, Paul exhorts Titus to keep focused and centered on the Scriptures.

Titus 1:15

Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and

conscience is defiled.

"I want you to be wise, knowledgeable in the things that are good, but naive in the things which are evil," Paul told the church at Rome (Romans 16:19)—a needed word for our culture as well. Believers should be those who know Scripture like the back of their hands, but are clueless regarding the double entendres and jokes of the world.

Titus 1:16

They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

"Don't judge me," the world says to us. "Didn't Jesus tell you to judge not lest you be judged?" Yes, Jesus did say that (Matthew 7:1). But the Greek text renders the word "judge" as *krino,* which means "judging to condemnation." In the same chapter, Jesus went on to say, "You'll know false teachers and false prophets by their fruit" (see Matthew 7:16).

In other words, we're not to judge others for purposes of *condemnation,* but we are to judge the fruit of others for purposes of *identification.* That is why Paul tells young Pastor Titus to beware of the religionists and mystics whose works prove they don't know God.



2 Titus 2:1

But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.

As he continues to give instruction and encouragement concerning the ministry on the island of Crete, Paul tells Titus to teach sound doctrine. At this point, I would think Paul would go on to define sound doctrine in terms of pneumatology, eschatology, soteriology, and all kinds of other big words. But that's not what he does.

Titus 2:2

That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.

The Lord is not interested in us becoming people who have theories of theology. He wants the understanding of the Word to be translated through our lives into daily practicality. "This is sound doctrine, Titus," he says, "that the older guys are to be sober." That is, they shouldn't be caught up in silliness or frivolity.

Sound doctrine also dictates that older men are to be grave. This doesn't mean they're dour, or that they don't know how to have a good time. It means they don't take life lightly. They live for eternity, and they see the big picture.

Titus 2:3 (a)

The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness . . .

Sound doctrine for older women is that they exhibit holy, whole, together lives.

Titus 2:3 (b)

. . . not false accusers . . .

We see the same word used with regard to Satan as he accuses us day and night (Revelation 12:10). False accusers categorize people, saying, "Isn't that just like her?" or, "He always does that," with the intent of subtly slandering others.

Titus 2:3 (c)

. . . not given to much wine, teachers of good things.

Godly women don't categorize people. Instead, they teach good things like the following . . .

Titus 2:4, 5 (a)

That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands . . .

I am firmly convinced that this is the ideal curriculum for a women's ministry. I know there are lots of women's study groups that study doctrinal issues. While that is fine, I suggest a higher, better way: to teach younger women how to be keepers of their homes and lovers of their kids and husbands.

Titus 2:5 (b)

. . . that the word of God be not blasphemed.

Notebooks full of theological insights are useless if they come at the expense of a well-ordered home and a well-loved family.

Titus 2:6, 7 (a)

Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works . . .

Young men, you are not to simply tell others what they should be doing, but rather you are to be a pattern to others. Just as Moses was to make all things according to pattern regarding the construction of the tabernacle (Exodus 25:9), young men are to pattern their lives after the One who lived, or "tabernacled," among us—Jesus Christ (John 1:14).

Titus 2:7 (b)

. . . in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity.

The word "sincerity" means "without wax," referring to the ancient practice of the sculptors who patched their mistakes with wax—unseen until the noonday sun shone on the sculpture after the unsuspecting customer had taken it home. Thus, sincerity refers to a quality of reality and honesty that doesn't "melt" in the heat of adversity.

Titus 2:8

Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.

Sound doctrine for young men is that they live in such a way that those who are eager to put Christians down will find nothing to hold against *them.*

Titus 2:9 (a)

Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things . . .

In our day, the word "servants" refers to employees.

Titus 2:9 (b), 10 (a)

. . . not answering again; Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity . . .

Christian employees are not to talk back or steal from their employers in either time or money.

Titus 2:10 (b)

. . . that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

By being obedient and serving your employer well, you'll make salvation attractive to the boss who may not yet be a believer.

Titus 2:11, 12

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

Once a person chooses to receive the free gift of salvation, he knows intuitively, innately, and immediately that he is to live righteously. And the next verse tells us how.

Titus 2:13

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

If you really believe Jesus is coming soon, it will affect everything you do.



***For topical study of Titus 2:11–13 entitled "Looking for Our Lord," turn to page* 1420.**

Titus 2:14 (a)

Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people . . .

"Peculiar" doesn't mean "odd." It means "awed." That is, people will be awed by the fact that while everyone else at work is panicking, you're peaceful; while everyone else is gossiping, you're gracious; while everyone else is bitter, you're doing better.

Titus 2:14 (b)–15; 1:16

. . . zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

Telling the truth to his contemporaries as well as those younger and older than him would probably not have been easy for Titus. And it may not always be easy for you. But if you're a boss, a Bible study teacher, a parent, or a coach, there are times when you need to speak the truth, as hard as it may be.

Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt

> speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.
>
> Jeremiah 1:6–8, 10

That's what moms and dads, pastors and grandparents, bosses and coaches have to do sometimes. We're called to pull down in order that we may build up.

> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.
>
> Psalm 51:7, 8

As a shepherd, David understood the meaning of broken bones. You see, when a lamb would stubbornly and rebelliously continue to wander away from the flock, the shepherd would break its legs and place the lamb on his shoulder where it would remain until its bone was healed. When the lamb could again walk, so bonded was he with the shepherd, he would never stray again.

Like sheep, we all go astray (Isaiah 53:6). Therefore, in His love, the Good Shepherd breaks a bone or two and carries me while I whine and cry and wonder what He's doing. But as the days and weeks and months go by, I find myself closer to Him than I had ever been previously, and all I can say is, "Thank You, Lord."

Part of shepherding means breaking a bone or two. Thus, Titus would have to speak words that could cause tears to flow or bones to snap. But he could do so with authority, knowing it was an opportunity for the wounded sheep to one day walk with its Shepherd more intimately.

LOOKING FOR OUR LORD

A Topical Study of TITUS 2:11–13

Jesus spoke of the eye as being the light of the entire body (Matthew 6:22, 23). And Paul tells us that we are to think on whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, virtuous, praiseworthy, and of good report (Philippians 4:8). But because our society no longer believes in the authority of the Bible, our culture continues to crumble—which is exactly what Jesus said would happen.

> *And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.*
>
> Luke 17:26–29

Once we're saved, we need no one to tell us that, like Noah, we are to be those who are different from the times in which we live, that we are to live soberly, righteously, and godly. But here's the question for you and me: How? How can we live soberly, righteously, and godly in a world full of iniquity? According to our text, the answer is that we are to be looking for Jesus constantly.

You never drive so carefully as the day you discover your driver's license has expired. So, too, we will live soberly, righteously, and godly when we understand that because our culture is as it was in the days of Noah and as it was in the days of Lot, time itself is nearly expired, and we must live very carefully.

The apostle John knew this to be true. . . .

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

1 John 3:2, 3

Thinking the Lord could come back today will affect everything I do—how I talk, what I watch, where I go. On the other hand, Jesus taught us that if you sit here today, and even as I'm teaching, you're thinking, *The Lord is not coming back any time soon,* that too will have a very real effect upon your life.

Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 24:44–51

The Greek word translated "evil" is *kakos* and refers to that which was once good but has gone bad—like a piece of fruit, or a musical instrument that was once in tune but is now out of tune. Thus, Jesus is saying the once-good servant became sour, slipped out of tune, because he said, "The Lord delays His coming." And Jesus says the result of such a viewpoint is twofold.

Brutality

And he shall begin to smite his fellowservants . . .

He who doubts the nearness of the Lord's return will gossip about people, be cynical toward people, and will be harsh with people. Whereas if he really thought today could be the day the Lord comes back, he wouldn't scream at people, find fault with people, or be bitter toward people. In short, he wouldn't smite his fellow servants.

Carnality

. . . and to eat and drink with the drunken . . .

He who doubts the Lord's soon return will begin to eat and drink with the drunkards. "It's party time," he'll say. "The Lord isn't coming back for a while—probably not even in my lifetime—so let's party. I'll only go to church if there's nothing else to do. I'll only study the Word if there's nothing on TV."

The servant who was once good and who has now gone bad is not one who denies the coming of Christ. Rather, he's one who simply believes He's not coming soon. In Exodus 32, we see an Old Testament parallel to the evil servant parable. . . .

> *And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.*
>
> Exodus 32:1

The people became *kakos.* They went bad. Why? Because they thought Moses, their leader, delayed his coming. The result? Exactly what Jesus said it would be: Carnality when they danced around a golden calf and brutality when three thousand of them were killed (Exodus 32:28).

The way to live godly, soberly, and righteously is to look for the blessed hope of the coming of Jesus Christ in any given day. But what if He doesn't come that day? You had a great day! You walked righteously, soberly, and godly. Your family was blessed. Your heart was full. God's blessings were celebrated and enjoyed because you lived looking for the blessed hope of His return.

The majority of us fail to look for the Lord's coming today not because we deny its reality nor because we think it will be delayed chronologically, but because we are afraid emotionally. "I see things falling apart, and I know the only solution is for the Lord to come back. Yet when He comes back, I

don't know where I will stand. I love Him. I believe in Him. But I haven't done as much as I wanted to for Him," we say.

If this is how you feel, there is good news for you in Luke 12. . . .

> *Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.*
>
> Luke 12:37

Leaving the kids with a babysitter, my wife, Tammy, and I returned home a few hours later.

"The kids did great," said the babysitter. "But the whole time you were gone, Benjamin sat on the couch and looked out the window, just waiting for you guys to come back."

Upon hearing this, I didn't say to three-year-old Benny, "What's the big idea sitting on the couch looking for my coming?" Nor did I say, "Why weren't you in the backyard raking the leaves and picking up after Sam?" Instead, I just took him in my arms and gave him a great big hug because I knew how much he just wanted to be with me.

The same is true of Jesus. To the one who says, "Life is good, but what I'm really looking for and craving is You, Lord," He won't say, "Why didn't you do more?" According to our text, He'll say, "Let's have lunch."

But I haven't been a very good person, you might be thinking. Join the club. Like me, you may have done things you didn't want to do, said things you shouldn't have said, gone where you shouldn't have gone. But the Lord still has a place for you at His table. How do I know? Because of what I see in the life of Joseph. . . .

One of the clearest pictures of Jesus is seen in the person of Joseph—a man of whom there is no recorded sin, a man who was betrayed by his brothers for twenty pieces of silver, a man whose public "ministry" began at age thirty when he became prime minister of Egypt, a man who took a Gentile bride. As his brothers gathered before him, their hearts must have been filled with fear concerning what they had done to him. Yet what does Joseph say?

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.

Genesis 50:20, 21

When Jesus comes, you will be as blown away and amazed as Joseph's brothers were—amazed by how kind He is to you, by the comfort He shows to you, by the meal He provides for you. But you can experience His love and kindness, His grace and forgiveness even before then by simply watching for His coming every day.

My desire and prayer is for us to be a people who look for the blessed hope—the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The lives of those who do will be ordered and fruitful, righteous and godly. May we learn the lesson of Exodus and listen to the parable of Jesus. May we live our lives looking for His coming, knowing that in doing so, we will be blessed not only in that day, but in this day as well.



3 Titus 3:1

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work.

We are to be a people who live under authority.

Titus 3:2 (a)
To speak evil of no man . . .

I learned this the hard way a few years ago . . .

Walking into the YMCA, I saw a young guy I recognized as Marty, a high-school student from Applegate, dribbling a basketball on the gym floor. As he took a shot from half-court, the ball went up in the air—and missed everything.

"Way to go! Nice shot!" I kidded.

He got the ball, took a hook shot, and missed again.

"Keep it up, buddy. Looking good!" I jeered.

But as I walked closer, I realized it wasn't Marty at all. Some high-school kid was shooting hoops, and here I was just railing on him!

How I wish I had read this verse before I went to the YMCA that day!

Titus 3:2 (b), 3

. . . to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

Paul tells Titus to appoint meek men to the position of elder.

After speaking at a men's retreat one weekend, I was driving to the airport feeling pleased with how well it had seemed to go. "What a blessing," I said to myself. "Maybe I should do more of this type of retreat. I wonder what's ahead for me?"

That thought had no sooner entered my mind than a sign on the roadside caught my eye. In better days, it had read: WORLD'S BIGGEST JERKY AHEAD. Now, however, the "Y" having fallen off, it read: WORLD'S BIGGEST JERK AHEAD.

And all I could say was, "I get the message, Lord!"

Oh, that we would be meek—always keeping in mind what we once were, and what we still have a tendency to be!

Titus 3:4–6

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of

regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Although we still have fleshly tendencies, we have been washed and renewed—not because of our righteousness, but because of what Jesus did on the Cross in our place. And because we're a forgiven people, we are to forgive others.

It's as if Paul is saying, "Yes, Titus, you must speak truth. You must tell your congregation both young and old how to live. However, you must do so with great meekness, remembering that the Lord washed you, renewed you, and saved you not by any works of righteousness you did, but according to Jesus' "abundant mercy."

Titus 3:7

That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This doctrine is so important in relation to what Paul had told Titus to do. "Keep everything in perspective, Titus. Remember what you once were and how you've been washed, renewed, and justified not by your discipline, dedication, or devotion—but solely by God's grace."

Titus 3:8

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

Bible teachers and parents, it's not how much you know that matters. It's how well you know what you know. How do people get to know things well? By hearing them over and over again. That is why we are to affirm constantly and remind continually.

Titus 3:9 (a)

But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies . . .

Mormons spend multiplied millions of dollars and countless man-hours researching genealogies in order that they might baptize for the dead. That is, they believe benefits of baptism can be experienced by those who are already deceased. Cult leader Garner Ted Armstrong tries to prove through genealogies that America constitutes the lost tribes of Israel. It's all foolishness. Stay away from these tangents. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. And the main thing is Jesus.

Titus 3:9 (b)

. . . and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.

People constantly confront me who want to strive about the law, about diet, or about Sabbath days. Maybe you are too. Paul's word to Titus concerning such people is not to dialogue with them, but to avoid them.

Titus 3:10, 11

A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.

"Warn them once, talk to them a second time, but don't continue dialoguing with those who are into heresy." Why? You'll waste your time. You'll spin your wheels. You'll get nowhere. Satan knows your endless talking with someone who's in a cult will prevent you from witnessing to your next-door neighbor. There are those who waste tons of time trying to convert heretics. Don't do it. Paul's instruction is to tell them the truth once. Tell them a second time. Then reject them, knowing they've condemned themselves.

Titus 3:12

When I shall send Artemas unto thee, or Tychicus, be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis: for I have determined there to winter.

Nicopolis was a city on the west side of the Greek islands. “Once help arrives for you, come and meet me in Nicopolis,” said Paul.

Titus 3:13 (a)
Bring Zenas the lawyer . . .

Paul was in jail a lot. No wonder he called for a lawyer!

Titus 3:13 (b)
. . . and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them.

Apollos was a powerful orator, a preacher skilled in rhetoric, and a good man.

Titus 3:14
And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.

“To maintain good works” is better translated “to possess honest trades.” That is, the men with whom Titus was ministering were to be those who had the ability to support themselves by the work of their hands in order that they wouldn’t be a burden financially.

Titus 3:15
All that are with me salute thee. Greet them that love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen.

Thanks to Paul’s letter to Titus, we have just completed Doctrine 101—practical things we need to think through, pray in, and remind one another of. I encourage you to take some time to go through Paul’s lists again. If you’re an older man, read the verses addressed to older men. If you’re an older woman, read the verses written for you. If you’re a young man or woman, read the verses concerning you, and say, “Lord, how am I doing in these areas?” And as you do, begin and end your study as Paul did his letter. Begin

and end it not with determination or discipline, work ethic or will power. Begin and end it with an appreciation of God's undeserved, unearned, unmerited favor poured out upon you.

In other words, begin and end it with grace.



PHILEMON

Background to Philemon

On a trip once, I came across a shop containing correspondence of famous people. There was a handwritten note from Abraham Lincoln written to a lady who had invited him and his wife for dinner. Framed and carefully preserved, it was selling for tens of thousands of dollars. There was also a handwritten note from Harry Truman—a very terse note to someone who had criticized his daughter's piano playing. And there was a note from Sirhan Sirhan, the assassin of Robert Kennedy. Although each of these letters was being sold for a great sum of money, I'm sure that when they were written, their authors had no idea they would be so valuable.

So, too, I'm sure the apostle Paul would be surprised to discover just how valuable this little note he wrote to his friend Philemon has proven to be. It was, after all, a personal letter to a personal friend about a personal problem. Unlike his other letters, written to instruct churches or to exhort pastors, this letter was not intended to be read publicly.

Yet as we read it, we will see why it is included in the canon of Scripture, for not only does it give us unique insight into the heart of Paul, it is also a powerful portrayal of one of the great doctrines of our faith.



PHILEMON

Philemon 1 (a)
Paul, a prisoner . . .

The year is A.D. 62. Paul is under house arrest in Rome. That is, although he's chained to a guard at all times, he can evidently leave his rented room as long as the guard goes with him.

Philemon 1 (b)
. . . of Jesus Christ . . .

Paul usually begins his letters by identifying himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. This time, however, he's a prisoner of Jesus Christ. Would to God that I would be more like Paul—that when I feel chained by circumstances or imprisoned by problems, I would realize I would not be there were it not the Lord allowing me to be there for His purposes. Paul was used powerfully because he had the understanding that wherever he might have been was not due to the politics of man, but to the sovereignty of God.

Philemon 1 (c)
. . . and Timothy our brother . . .

Paul adds Timothy's name because, growing older, he was in the process of preparing people to accept the ministry and authority of his young protégé.

Philemon 1 (d), 2 (a)
. . . unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, and to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier . . .

Apphia, very possibly Philemon's wife, and Archippus their son, Paul is greeting the whole family here.

Philemon 2 (b)

. . . and to the church in thy house.

I like this phrase! People say to me, "I wish I were in the ministry."

And I say, "You can be tonight! Train your kids in the ways of God. Minister to them. Teach them the Word. Pray with them. Serve Communion to them. Build your family. Your house is your church."

"But I'm just a teenager," you say.

Then be nice to your little brother or sister and talk to them about the Lord!

Listen, gang, everyone should be in the ministry because the ministry needed most is right there under your own roof. Philemon's family was one dedicated to the Lord. And evidently, Philemon and Apphia not only ministered to their own family but also opened their house and ministered to others.

I recently visited the Mission at Carmen Serdan—the orphanage for handicapped kids in Mexico—run by my brother Jimmy and his wife, Julie. The work at the Mission is always amazing to me, but this time I was particularly blessed by hearing Jimmy and Julie's kids say their ABC's. As are all of the mission staff kids, Abby, David, and Ellie are home-schooled. And the way Jim and Julie taught them their alphabet was with a verse for each letter . . . A*nd we know all things work together for good . . .* B*elieve on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved . . .* C*asting all your care upon Him for He careth for you . . .* D*e-light thyself in the Lord and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart . . .*

Every one of us can follow the example of Philemon. Every one of us can teach our kids the things of the Lord, and then open our homes to share with others.

Philemon 3–5

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God, making mention of thee always in

my prayers, hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints.

There's lots of talk today about preventive medicine—keeping people healthy rather than merely taking care of them when they're sick. Paul here models not preventive medicine, but preventive ministry, when he says to Philemon, "Hearing that your family is walking with the Lord and that there's a church in your house causes me to pray for you constantly."

We generally only pray for people when we hear they're sick or struggling, going through tough trials, or facing hard times. And pray we must. But in addition to that, I suggest we pray like Paul. I suggest we pray for those who are doing well that they might do even better.

It's when the Enemy sees people doing well that he decides to launch an attack against them. Why? He knows he's lost their souls, but if he can pull them down in depression or discouragement, he knows they'll be unable to impact others whose souls he's not yet lost. Satan doesn't spend his time on the lost. You will never read in the New Testament where Satan himself is warring against an unbeliever. Yes, as the prince of darkness, he blinds the eyes of unbelievers (Ephesians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4), but as far as spiritual attacks, he saves himself totally and exclusively for those who are in Christ, for those who are walking with God. In every instance where you see Satan in the New Testament, you will always see him coming against believers in order to minimize their effectiveness for the kingdom. This makes it all the more important for us to pray for those doing well, for they are sure targets of the Enemy.

Philemon 6

That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

"I thank God for you," says Paul, "and I pray that you'll be even more effective in communicating the faith as people around you see the good things that are happening within you."

Let me ask you this question: Do you think the people at your job, on your campus, or in your neighborhood see in you such joy, peace, and love that

they wish they knew your secret? Such was the case with Philemon.

Philemon 7

For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.

The bowels being the seat of emotion in Greek thought, Paul and others were deeply refreshed by news of Philemon's love.

Philemon 8 (a)

Wherefore . . .

After affirming Philemon, Paul moves on to the reason for his letter . . .

Philemon 8 (b), 9

. . . though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

"Philemon, I've got a problem," Paul says. "I could enjoin you to help me, but instead I entreat you. I could command you, but instead I ask you."

Philemon 10

I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds.

While chained to a Roman guard, Paul encountered a man named Onesimus who was a fugitive in the city of Rome, a runaway slave who had stolen goods from his master. It is possible that Paul somehow bumped into Onesimus in the marketplace and began to dialogue with him. It is also possible that Onesimus was apprehended and chained to the same guard as Paul. We are not exactly sure how the paths of Onesimus and Paul crossed, but cross they did.

Onesimus found there is no freedom in freedom itself, for although he was free from his master, he was still a slave to his own conscience, to his own sin. But Onesimus was to discover that although there is slavery in freedom, there is also freedom in slavery. How? Jesus calls all who are weary and heavy laden to take His yoke upon them, to be chained to Him, so to speak (Matthew 11:28, 29). But He is a good Master, and all do find freedom in "slavery" to Him. That's why Paul said, "I am a bondslave"—a slave by choice (see Romans 1:1). Marriage proves this point, for it is, in a sense, slavery. And it can either be glorious or miserable, depending on with whom you are linked!

The question in this life is not whether or not you're yoked, but to Whom are you yoked? If we are yoked to Jesus, we are yoked to the quintessentially excellent Master, to the One who loves us so much, to the One who's so good *for* us, and so good *to* us.

Realizing that although in chains, Paul was free, and although he was free, he was enslaved to his own sin, Onesimus was led to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ by Paul the apostle.

Philemon 11

Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me.

I can see a twinkle in Paul's eye as he writes this, for he employs a play on words that Philemon was sure to appreciate. You see, "Onesimus" means "profitable." Although he had been a most unprofitable slave to Philemon when he stole from him and ran away, Paul knew the born-again Onesimus would now be highly profitable to Philemon because his friendship and help were already of great value to Paul.

Philemon 12, 13

Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel.

"I would love to keep him," Paul tells Philemon. "If you could be here to help me, I know you would. But Onesimus has already been of great help to me, as well as being a comfort to me."

Philemon 14

But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

"I don't want to do something that would interfere with your relationship with Onesimus," said Paul. "You're his master. He's your slave."

Philemon 15, 16

For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

"Although he didn't know it, perhaps the reason Onesimus ran away was so he could be with you forever in heaven as a brother," Paul tells Philemon.

Philemon 17

If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

"Philemon, if our relationship has meant anything to you, if you count me as a partner, receive Onesimus as you would receive me," Paul writes.

Philemon 18, 19 (a)

If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it . . .

And here is the reason I believe this personal little postcard of Paul's was included in the canon of Scripture: Nowhere is the glorious "Doctrine of Imputation" seen more clearly.

For topical study of Philemon 17, 18, see "Paul the Peacemaker" below.

Philemon 19 (b)

. . . albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.

"I'll pay Onesimus' debt," says Paul, "and I won't even bring up the fact that, as your spiritual mentor, you owe me your very life!"

Philemon 20, 21

Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord. Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.

There are those who can't understand why Paul would send Onesimus back into slavery, but I believe this passage more than hints that Paul knew Philemon would set Onesimus free.

Philemon 22

But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.

Catch the flow here: Having said, "I'm confident you'll do even more than I ask concerning Onesimus," Paul goes on to say, "As soon as I am released from prison, I'm coming to visit you." In other words, Philemon most likely understood that Paul didn't expect Onesimus to still be a slave in Philemon's house when he arrived!

Philemon 23–25

There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

As always, as we come to the end of this personal letter, Paul leaves us in the place of grace.

PAUL THE PEACEMAKER

A Topical Study of PHILEMON 17, 18

Whether it was in a crowded Roman marketplace, or through an armed Roman guard, we can't be sure. But this much we do know: The "aged apostle" and the runaway slave met, resulting in the letter before us. Why was this personal postcard of Paul's included in the canon of Scripture? I suggest the following possible reasons. . . .

Biographical Value

For a man to go to bat for a slave was unheard of in Paul's day. Greek historian, Pliny, recounts an incident concerning a slave who accidentally tipped a dish he was carrying, causing a bit of food to spill on his master's table. His punishment? He was immediately thrown into the courtyard pond stocked with bloodsucking lampreys and was devoured. According to Pliny, this was not unusual treatment because slaves were thought of as less than human. Yet here is Paul saying, "I care deeply about Onesimus."

Most people think of Paul as harsh and austere. His letter written on behalf of a runaway slave clearly says otherwise.

In the little book before us, we also see in Paul a man who not only had a compassionate heart, but one who didn't pull rank. To Philemon he says, "I'm going to talk to you as a brother. I'm praying for you. I have confidence in you. I'm going to give a suggestion to you that you would be wise to consider, but I'm not going to force this upon you."

His letter to Philemon allows us to see in Paul a heart, an attitude, a tactfulness, a grace that helps round out our understanding of our wonderful brother, Paul.

Ethical Value

Onesimus is saved. He's born again. But what does Paul do? He tells him he must go back and pay his debt. Why is this important? Because many people say, "There's no need for restitution, no need for meeting my obligation because I wasn't a Christian when I ran up my credit cards to forty thousand dollars." Or, "I signed that contract before I was born again; therefore, it doesn't matter now." This little book is important because it says a new life does not release one from old debts. Yes, we have a new life in Christ, and He looks at us as being without spot or wrinkle positionally, but we have an obligation to the people around us practically to pay old debts and make things right.

Mom and Dad, please teach your kids that once confession is made, there is immediate and total forgiveness from God, but they still have an obligation to make things right in man's sight. The world looks at Christians, wanting to find a reason not to believe. Let's not give them one. Onesimus shows us that we have an ethical obligation to pay debts—be they financial, relational, or societal.

Theological Value

Under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul told Philemon that perhaps it was part of God's plan for Onesimus to rip him off and run away in order that Onesimus would come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. But notice Paul says, "Perhaps."

Growing up, I would hear testimonies of guys who came to the Lord after years of doing drugs or being involved in gangs. And I erroneously concluded that the only way to be really used by God was to first go through perversity. God may perhaps work that way, but it's not the only way. I am so thankful I was raised in a Christian home. Oh, it might not make for a very exciting testimony, but it shows that God is not limited to any single methodology.

Political Value

Paul doesn't use this situation to kick off an antislavery campaign. He doesn't say, "We'll start the Onesimus Coalition. Get our newsletter, and for only thirty-five dollars a month, you, too, can lead a movement to abolish slavery." No, Paul masterfully and insightfully says, "Philemon, I trust God's work in your life, and I know you'll do even more than I'm suggesting to you," the implication being that Philemon would set Onesimus free of his own accord.

Paul was not trying to legislate morality, but rather he was trusting in the work of the Holy Spirit to transform a man's heart internally. The problem with the Christian political movement is that so often it tries to clean the fish before it catches it; it attempts to change people before saving them.

Paul makes a suggestion here, saying, "Do more than what I say." Centuries go by. The gospel does its work through Wilberforce in England, through Lincoln in America. Hearts are changed. People come to understand that the institution of holding another man down is not right, and the work Paul begins is finally complete. Cultures and communities only truly change when people are born again, when they're changed from within.

Doctrinal Value

As important as the biographical, ethical, theological, and political implications of Paul's Epistle to Philemon are, I believe the doctrinal value inherent in this seemingly insignificant little postcard is the reason we hold in our hands Paul's letter as part of the canon of Scripture. Herein we see the glorious "Doctrine of Imputation," as Paul says to Philemon, "If Onesimus wronged you, if he owes you anything, charge it to my account."

> *Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*
>
> Romans 4:8

To whose account is our sin imputed, or charged?
To the account of the One who was pinned to a Cross in our place.

> *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . .*
>
> Romans 5:1

The incredible fact of justification means God not only forgives our sin but also chooses to forget we're sinners.

> *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God . . .*
>
> Romans 3:23–25

Imputation is based upon justification, which can only come about through propitiation. Propitiation means that the righteous wrath God should hurl on me, the righteous anger He should feel toward you, was absorbed by His Son.

> I remember reading the story of a man who, on his way to the kitchen late at night, noticed the top of the terrarium in which he kept his eight-foot boa constrictor was ajar. As he glanced around the room for the snake, he was suddenly gripped by a horrifying thought. He ran to the nursery, where he found the snake in his son's empty crib. Racing to his garage, he grabbed an ax and began chopping the snake, hoping to pull his baby to safety. But it was too late. No one arrested this dad for killing the boa constrictor. No one called the animal rights people. No, everyone identified with the righteous anger in his heart concerning the fate of his son.

So, too, it is a loving Father who feels a holy indignation, a righteous anger when He sees every one of His children being eaten up by the snake of sin. He is right in taking up the ax and saying, "I can't stand what sin has done. It's swallowed up, ripped off, and ruined people's lives."

Yet as willing participants, we become not only the victims of sin, but propagators of it. So to destroy sin, God would have to destroy mankind. Instead, He comes up with an unbelievable third alternative. He took the ax of His indignation and didn't thrust it in the snake, but buried it in Himself. He who knew no sin became sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). God's understandable, justifiable, righteous anger was released, His justice meted out when He slaughtered Himself to become the propitiation for my sin.

What does this mean? It means that reconciliation is based upon imputation by means of justification through the work of propitiation. Simply said, reconciliation between God and us meant Jesus had to die. Reconciliation always means someone has to die.

Husband, if you're distanced from your wife; Wife, if you're estranged from your husband; Kids, if you feel as though there's a problem between you and your parents, the only way there will be reconciliation is if someone dies. Will you choose to die, Husband? Will you choose to end the war between you and your wife by laying down your point of view, your way of thinking, your anger, bitterness, or hostility?

Will you choose to die, Wife, by laying down your hurts and your fears, your cares and concerns in order to make peace with your husband?

Will you choose to die, Kids, to your own demands and needs and, instead, honor your parents?

At work, on the ball field, in the classroom, at home, the only way there can be reconciliation is if someone dies. The question is, will it be you?

"But he has to pay for what he said about me," or "She has to pay for what she did to me," or "They have to pay for how they hurt me."

"It's already been paid," Jesus says. "As I bled on the Cross of Calvary, I absorbed that sin specifically."

Therefore, all that remains is for us to say, "Thank You, Lord. I'm free."

As I consider this, I wonder who you are.

Some are Onesimus. If you're Onesimus, open your heart anew to the Lord, and do what's right. If you're not paying child support, pay it. If you're cheating your workplace, make restitution. I admire Onesimus because instead of refusing to go back, he returned and made things right. If you're Onesimus tonight, I have good news for you: God can do something wonderful with your life if you'll choose to do what's right.

Some are Philemon. If you're Philemon, you need to say, "I have no right to hold this debt, this unforgiveness, this bitterness toward that person. And even though I might not agree with him or have been hurt badly by her, I am going to see Christ dying for that sin and embrace that person once again."

Others are like Paul, looking for ways to make peace. If you're making peace between people at war with one another, good for you! In humility, you are not pulling rank, not preaching, but simply willing to not only point out the problem but also ready to get your own hands dirty to help pay the price.

Who am I?

I suppose I'm all three. Sometimes, though not often enough, I'm Paul. Other times, needing to make things right, I'm Onesimus. Often, I'm Philemon, needing to forgive. Yet this powerful postcard of Paul ministers to me on all three levels. And I pray it will do the same for you.

May you, like Onesimus, celebrate the freedom of your salvation. May you, like Philemon, embrace others, knowing their sin has been imputed to our Lord's account. And may you, like Paul, be a peacemaker.

In Jesus' Name.



HEBREWS

Background to Hebrews

By way of introduction, I would like you to note three things about this fabulous Book of Hebrews: its author, its audience, its argument. . . .

Author

Debates have raged for almost two thousand years concerning the author of this book. Many scholars believe it has the fingerprints of Dr. Luke all over it. Others insist the eloquence of the Book of Hebrews argues for the orator Apollos, the powerful speaker mentioned in the Book of Acts, and also alluded to in the first Corinthian Epistle. It could be Apollos; it could be Luke. One thing, however, is certain: Whoever penned this epistle had an intense understanding of theology combined with an immense Greek vocabulary. And these two factors point me personally to the apostle Paul. Not only did Paul's brilliant mind give him a greater grasp of the Greek language than any other man throughout history, but his understanding of Old Testament theology was unrivaled as well.

In a greater sense, though, the question of authorship doesn't really matter, for, truly, God is the author of Hebrews ultimately. In reality, the entire Bible is the autobiography of God—all the way from Genesis to Revelation. And when a person writes an autobiography, he doesn't try to prove his authorship or existence. Therefore, those who engage in endless debates trying to prove the existence of God do something that God felt no need to do—for from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, the underlying premise is that God is, and that He Himself wrote His Autobiography, His Word.

Audience

The Book of Hebrews was addressed to Jewish believers who were being pulled back into Judaism. Living in Jerusalem, no doubt each time they heard the trumpets sounding from the courtyard of the temple, reminded of their heritage and history, they found themselves drawn back into the religion and rituals of the Levitical system. Jesus came to establish a *New* Covenant, the *New* Testament. That is why there are very sober warnings throughout the book, saying, "If you go back to the old religion and ritual, you nullify the work Christ did on the Cross for you. Don't complicate your faith. Keep it simple. Keep it focused. Keep it centered on Jesus."

Argument

The argument of the Book of Hebrews is that Jesus Christ is superior to the old way of religion. He is superior in His majesty because, as the Son of God, He is superior to angels, to Moses, to Joshua, and to the entire Levitical system. And He is superior in ministry because, as the Son of Man, He died for us. He relates to us. He works with us.

I think we're going to be blessed greatly in the study of this book because the theme and message is to point out the sufficiency and beauty of Jesus—always a grand endeavor.

HEBREWS

1 Hebrews 1:1 (a)
God . . .

Hebrews opens with the name of its Author—not Apollos, not Luke, not Paul—but God.

Hebrews 1:1 (b), 2 (a)
. . . who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son . . .

God did indeed speak in times past in many ways. . . .

The psalmist writes that the heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19).

Paul makes it clear that not only creation around, but also conscience within every man verifies the existence of God (Romans 1).

Throughout Scripture, angels have attested to the reality of God.

Prophets have spoken clearly and unmistakably of God's verity.

Yet in none of these ways—creation above, conscience within, angels from on high, prophets in our midst—was the message complete. It was not comprehensible. It was difficult to grasp. So God sent His Son, His final Word to humanity. There's nothing more to be said. There's nothing left unsaid. It's all said in Christ.

Well, then, you wonder, *why didn't God just send His Son in the first place? Why did He bother with the lengthy process of sending prophets, of speaking through creation? Why didn't He just send Jesus immediately?*

I suggest our pride is the answer. "Now, Father, You didn't have to send Your Son," we would have said. "We could have figured You out by looking at the stars. Or if You would have just blessed a prophet, we would have gotten Your message from Him. Or surely an angel would have been sufficient."

It's almost as though the Father has to constantly let us play out all of our options before we realize our stupidity, before we say, "We're sinners. We're not capable of figuring things out. Father, we *need* Jesus." You see, had we not gone through the entire process in human history, I believe we would be arguing perpetually. "Oh, Father, You didn't have to become a Man and dwell among us. And You certainly didn't have to die for us. You could have just given us ten rules, and we could have lived by them." That's the tendency of humanity—to feel like we can do it. So God has to allow history to unfold in such a way that we see we are losers, failures, blockheads, idiots—until finally we say, "We're stuck. We need Your Son to dwell among us. We need a Savior to die for us. We *need* Jesus."



***For topical study of Hebrews 1:1, 2 entitled "God Has Spoken," turn to page* 1439.**

Hebrews 1:2 (b)

. . . whom he hath appointed heir of all things . . .

Jesus Is the Inheritor

The Father has willed everything to the Son, and *we* are His inheritance (Ephesians 1:11). This explains the parable Jesus told in Matthew 13 about a man who walked through a field, found a treasure, and bought the field in order to take out the treasure. What is that parable about? It's not about us selling everything to buy the treasure of the gospel. No, for in an earlier parable in the same chapter, Jesus says the field is the world. Jesus bought the world with His own blood. Why? Because He wanted the world? No, because He wanted the treasure. What is the treasure? We are. *We* are His inheritance. Amazing!

Hebrews 1:2 (c)

. . . by whom also he made the worlds.

Jesus Is the Creator

People get confused. They say, "Genesis 1 says that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, but John 1 says that without the Son nothing was made that was made. So who created the earth—the Father or the Son?"

I suggest you think of creation this way: The Father as the Architect (Genesis 1:1), the Son as the Contractor (John 1:1), and the Holy Spirit as the Carpenter (Genesis 1:2). The analogy is far from perfect, but the fact is all three Persons of the Godhead were involved in the creative process. Creation occurred *from* the Father, *by* the Son, *through* the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 1:3 (a)

Who being the brightness of his glory . . .

Jesus Is the Radiator

A reflector is something that bounces light off itself. For example, the moon is a reflector of the glory of the sun. When you see the moon, you're not seeing its own light. You're seeing a reflection of the sun. Not so with Jesus, for He not only reflects the glory of the Father, but He radiates the glory of the Father. That is why there is neither sun nor moon in heaven. Jesus is the Radiator. He's all the light we need.

Hebrews 1:3 (b)
. . . and the express image of his person . . .

Jesus Is the Representer

The literal translation of the term "express image" refers to the method used to imprint coins in biblical times, whereby a piece of metal would be pounded against a stamp of the head of Caesar, making an "express image." Although the stamp and the coin were two separate entities, both bore the same image.

"Show us the Father and it will suffice us," said Philip.

"Don't you understand that he who hath seen me hath seen the Father?" answered Jesus (see John 14:9). In other words, "I'm the express image."

Hebrews 1:3 (c)

. . . and upholding all things by the word of his power . . .

Jesus Is the Sustainer

What holds the atom—the very building block of all matter—together? Nothing other than Jesus Christ and His Word. What's going to hold your marriage together, your parenting, your sanity—what's going to keep your world from falling apart? Only one thing: the Word of His power.



***For topical study of Hebrews 1:3 entitled "Holding Your World Together," turn to page* 1444.**

Hebrews 1:3 (d)

. . . when he had by himself purged our sins . . .

Jesus Is the Purifier

The phrase "by himself" is interesting. It means two things: It means through Himself, that is, with His own body, Jesus purged my sins. But it also means He alone purged my sins. The Hebrew Christians to whom this book is addressed would know that on the Day of Atonement, the high priest alone made sacrifice for the sins of the entire nation. The Levitical high priest expended great energy. Yet that was nothing compared to the energy expended when our High Priest, Jesus Christ, gave His entire life in order to purify me from my sin.

Hebrews 1:3 (e)

. . . sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Jesus Is Our Ruler

What does He do on the right hand of the Majesty on high? Romans 8:34 says He prays for you and me. Thus, His rule over us is based on His intercession on behalf of us.



***For topical study of Hebrews 1:3 entitled "Heaven Ain't That Far Away," turn to page* 1449.**

Meditate on any one of these seven traits of the incomparable Christ and your view of Him will be changed. . . .

> In C. S. Lewis' book *The Chronicles of Narnia,* when Lucy finally sees Aslan the Lion—a picture of the Lion of Judah, Jesus Christ—she cries, "Aslan! Aslan! You've grown so much bigger."
>
> "No, Lucy, *you've* grown so much bigger—and the bigger you grow, the bigger I'll seem to you," replied Aslan.

Gang, the older we get, the smaller our heroes—be they sports figures, Santa Claus, or Disney characters—become. Not so with the Lord. The longer I walk with Him, the more I think on Him, the more I learn of Him, unlike anything else in this world, He just gets bigger in my eyes.

> **Hebrews 1:4**
>
> **Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.**

According to Deuteronomy 33:2, it would seem as though when Moses received the law on Mount Sinai, it was given to him by God through angels—perhaps thousands of angels. Certainly that's what the Jewish people have always believed. Thus, due to their high esteem of the law, the Jews esteemed angels highly as well. Yet here the Book of Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus is superior to the angels.

There are those who will knock on your door and say that Jesus Christ is not ultimately superior to the angels, but that He is one of the angels. . . .

> Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus is the brother of the archangel Michael. But it's absolute heresy—not because we're splitting doctrinal hairs, but because if, like angels, Jesus Christ was created by the Father, it greatly cheapens the sacrifice God made on the Cross of Calvary. If Jesus is not God of very God, then God merely sent an angel to die on the Cross and take the rap for humanity. That's not what happened. Paul would say great is the mystery of godliness that God was manifested in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16). God Himself bore our sin. God Himself died on the Cross.
>
> Mormons also deny Jesus is superior to the angels. Although they don't talk about it very readily, if you press them on the point, they'll admit they believe Jesus is the brother of Lucifer. You see, according to Mormon theology, God called Jesus and Lucifer together and said, "We need to redeem humanity." And the two created beings—Jesus and Lucifer—both gave their suggested plan. The Father went with Jesus' suggestion. Lucifer got ticked, and from that time has been determined to undermine his brother's work.

Gang, turn the cultist to Hebrews 1 and say, "Jesus is not in the same category as any angel—Michael, Lucifer, or the devil. He's superior." A lot of people have the idea that there's a cosmic contest between God and the devil—that they're equals and they're battling it out. Oh, they know eventually God's going to win—but it's going to be tough. Not so! It's not God and Satan battling it out. God is in an entirely different realm. Now, if Satan and Michael, or Satan and Gabriel fought—then you would have an interesting contest. Satan, however, is no match for God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, for they are far superior to any angel.

> **Hebrews 1:5, 6**
>
> **For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth**

in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.

The cultist, the heretic uses this verse as "proof" that because Jesus is "begotten" He's not eternal. In Jeremiah 31:9, however, we find a reference to Ephraim being the firstborn of Joseph. Was Ephraim Joseph's firstborn? No, Manasseh was. Why, then is Ephraim called the firstborn? Because firstborn or first begotten in Scripture does not simply speak of precedence. It can also speak of priority. In this case, even though Ephraim wasn't born first in precedence, he had priority in blessing.

Hebrews 1:7

And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.

Truly, angels are like the wind, like a flame of fire—as seen clearly in the story of Manoah and his wife. After an angel appeared to them, they offered a sacrifice, and the angel went up in a flame of fire like the wind and disappeared (Judges 13).

Hebrews 1:8 (a)

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever . . .

In this verse—quoting Psalm 45:6, 7—God calls Jesus "God." Now, if God refers to Jesus as God, Jesus is God. End of discussion.

Hebrews 1:8 (b)

. . . a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

I like this! Speaking to the Son, God says, "You're on the throne and You rule righteously." How is God going to rule? How is He going to judge the man in Africa who never heard the gospel back in 1426? How is He going to decide what to do? Beats me. All I know is this: Around the throne of the Lamb in heaven, the cry goes up, "Righteous and true are Your judgments,

Lord" (see Revelation 16:7). In other words, "Good for You! Perfect! You haven't compromised integrity. But You show compassion and love perfectly."

Hebrews 1:9

Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

"Because You've loved righteousness and hated iniquity," said the Father to the Son, "You are anointed with the oil of gladness above all others." Did you know that gladness is directly proportional to holiness? Happiness and holiness go hand in hand. That is why crowds flocked to Jesus. Wasn't He the Man of Sorrows (Isaiah 53:3)? Certainly. But there was also a gladness and joy about Him unlike that of any other human being in history. Jesus was immensely attractive to the crowds because holiness and happiness are directly proportional.

Some folks don't see this until they're fifty or sixty years old. And some never see it at all. They think holiness is drudgery. They think if they're righteous they won't be happy, that they'll just have to endure the pain of Christianity. Nothing is further from the truth. To the extent you choose to be holy is the extent to which you will be happy. Conversely, to the extent you compromise holiness is the extent to which you diminish happiness. It's just that simple.

Hebrews 1:10–12

And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.

Still quoting the Old Testament as proof that Jesus is in a different category than the angels, the author makes reference to Psalm 102, wherein, concerning the Son, it is said, "In the beginning, You laid the foundation of

the earth and, even when it's gone, folded up like an old garment, You'll remain." Did you know that the One who sustains all things is someday going to let them all go? Like the Nehru jackets of the seventies, the heavens and earth will one day disappear—but Jesus will remain.

Hebrews 1:13

But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?

Again, quoting Psalm 110, only to Jesus did God say, "Sit on My right hand."

Hebrews 1:14

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

Angels are everywhere these days. There have been best-selling books about angels. There are entire stores devoted to angels. And yet angels are nothing more than servants. Whose servants? Ours, for we are the heirs of salvation. . . .

- In Psalm 91:11 we read of their protective work.
- In Luke 15, we see them rejoicing over saved sinners.
- In Luke 16, we see them carrying people to their eternal state.
- In Acts 5 and 12, we see them delivering Peter and other apostles from prison.

Angels do, indeed, have a ministry, but the ministry is to us. They're not to be exalted or worshiped by us. That is why in Colossians 2, there is a warning concerning the worship of angels. Our focus is to be on Jesus—and on Him singularly.

GOD HAS SPOKEN

A Topical Study of HEBREWS 1:1, 2

Ingmar Bergman, the famous Swedish filmmaker of a generation ago, writes in his autobiography the story behind one of his most critically acclaimed and successful pictures. He tells of how one day, discouraged and depressed, he found himself strolling into a large cathedral. Inside, he saw a stained-glass window depicting the Good Shepherd. "Talk to me. Talk to me," he said to the window. But the cathedral remained silent. Bergman walked out, went back to his room, and began to write the script for a movie called "The Silence"—a film that captured the attention of his day due to its portrayal of despairing, depressed people who hear only silence from God.

Does God really speak—in my situation, in my depression, in my consternation? Like Bergman, most people today say God doesn't speak. But our text shouts out, "Yes, He does!"

How? Four ways.

Creation Around Us

Johannes Kepler, the father of modern astronomy, the man who coined the word "satellite" and wrote the foundational *Planetary Law Of Motion,* said this: "Any astronomer who is undevout is mad." Truly, when you study the heavens, the cosmos, the galaxies, you have no choice but to be impressed with the necessity, the reality of a Creator.

> This ball we're sitting on right now is spinning at the rate of 100,000 mph. As it's spinning, it's moving around the sun at 67,000 mph, while the sun itself is moving at 64,000 mph. And the whole galaxy in which the sun and planets are moving is speeding through space at 450,000 mph. Multiply that, and you come to 1,350,000 mph. No wonder your hair won't stay in place!

While all this is happening, there are multiplied billions of other stars and multiplied millions of other galaxies also moving in all directions. Who keeps the whole thing from colliding? Kepler was right. There has to be an Orderer.

God does, indeed, speak through creation (Psalm 19). Yet the message sometimes seems contradictory, for although the stars overhead are magnificent, down here where we stand, the earth quakes, hurricanes rage, and volcanoes erupt. Yes, nature is beautiful and serene—but it can also be brutal and severe. Why? Because when Adam fell, creation was affected as well (Romans 8:22). Consequently, while it's true that God speaks through creation around us, the message is seemingly inconsistent.

Prophets Among Us

God told the prophet Ezekiel to chop off his hair and burn it in a fire and to lie on his side without moving for one thousand days. Malachi came on the scene not with bizarre actions, but with many questions. Amos came with a straightahead, in-your-face approach. Zechariah had apocalyptic visions and dreams. And God used each of these men to achieve His purpose. Yet if creation's message is inconsistent, the prophet's message is incomprehensible, for even the prophets themselves did not fully understand what they were saying (1 Peter 1:9–12).

You see, on one hand, they talked about the Messiah who would come to rule and reign with a rod of iron. On the other hand, they talked about the same Messiah being despised and rejected. They prophesied of suffering and glory but couldn't put it all together. Thus, their message was often incomprehensible.

Conscience Within Us

The third way God speaks is through the conscience within every man that tells us innately and intuitively that there must be a God (Romans 1). But people suppress this knowledge. Why? Because, according to 1 Peter 4:2, men don't want to acknowledge there is a God lest they are forced to obey Him. And even to those who do listen to their conscience, what they hear can be confusing, as Satan accuses us continually (Revelation 12:10). Thus, our conscience plays tricks on us. We can repress it, it can be seared by our own stubbornness, and Satan can employ it to cause confusion within us.

Consequently, we have a problem. God speaks through creation around us—but the message is seemingly inconsistent. He speaks through prophets among us—but what we hear is at times incomprehensible. He speaks through conscience within us—but the signal is somewhat inconclusive. So what did God do? He solved the problem through Incarnation. The message became the Messenger. And the Messenger was the message. God became one of us.

> I see them coming, marching rather orderly up the steps. The ants are definitely headed this way.
>
> "Slow down," I say. "Back off. Run! I know after third service, the boys will bring the vacuums out, and you'll be sucked up and cast into outer darkness. You'll go into that black bag, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of ant teeth. Turn away! Flee while you can!"
>
> But not a single ant heeds my warning. Why? Because I'm so big they don't even acknowledge my presence.
>
> So I go backstage and start flicking the lights on and off. Thus, the heavens declare to them that someone is masterfully working the controls. But the ants just look up and don't get it.
>
> So I grab a couple of them and say, "You have to speak to your brothers. You have to tell them that a vacuum is on the way and that destruction is imminent. But even these prophet ants don't clearly understand my message.

My next plan is to hope that maybe some of them will come to their senses and their consciences will stir them to see that they belong not in the sanctuary, but outside. Some do, and they say, "You know, guys, we really shouldn't be in here."

"Oh, come on," the others say. "That's old-fashioned."

So I see I have only one option left to bring about their salvation: I need to become one of them. As an ant, I need to go into their midst and say, "Listen, guys. I know where I'm coming from. I know what happens in this sanctuary on Sunday afternoon. I'm the boss. You're going to get sucked up. But if you follow me, I know where the back door is. I'll lead you to salvation."

That is the Incarnation—God becoming Man, the Word becoming flesh.

The Son Sent to Us

The fourth way, the final way, the full way God speaks is in His Son sent to us. God has spoken in His Son. There's nothing more to say.

> When Peter John and I were in Washington D.C. a number of years ago, we saw some original Rembrandts on display in the National Gallery of Art. Now, if, thinking the paintings needed a little more color, we started to spray them with red, green, and orange paint, we would have been arrested immediately.
>
> "What in the world were you doing?" I would no doubt have been asked.
>
> "I was adding a little color, a little sparkle to the masterpieces," I could have answered.
>
> "You're crazy!" I would have been told. "Those are masterpieces, completed works, finished."

So, too, the masterpiece of all that God wanted to say, needed to say, intended to say was said when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God *has* spoken. Therefore, Mormons who say, "Call our 800 number in Salt Lake City for another gospel," Jehovah's Witnesses who say, "We'll send you our magazine that will show you that in 1914 more was added to the gospel message," New-Agers who say, "God speaks through crystals and pyramids," and even Christians who say, "There must be more"—all miss the point completely, for God said, "I have spoken perfectly. I have spoken completely. I have spoken fully in the Person of My Son. All you will ever need to know you'll know by looking at Him, focusing on Him, and learning of Him."

What does this mean?

Understanding God's Word

You'll never be a good Bible teacher until you realize that God speaks in His Son.

> In Genesis 3, after Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God said, "Adam, where art thou?" How is this to be read? Was God like an angry policeman, searching for Adam in order to bust him because of his sin? Such is what a lot of Bible teachers would have us believe. But seen through the Son, this account must be viewed differently, for in another garden, the Garden of Gethsemane, we see Jesus calling His worst enemy "Friend" (Matthew 26:50). Now if Jesus called Judas—a far more despicable character than Adam —"Friend," certainly when God called to Adam in the Garden of Eden, it wasn't as an angry cop, but as a loving Father.

Gang, you will never understand the Old Testament, Paul's epistles, or the Revelation of John if you don't understand the language in which they were written. And the language is "in the Son." This is where Bible teachers and students really miss the boat in many cases. They let the apostle Paul or the prophets interpret Jesus. Wrong. Jesus interprets the law. Jesus interprets Paul. Jesus interprets the Old Testament prophets. If you want the Bible to have a full message and if you want to share it effectively, you've got to understand that it's written in the Son. That's the key to unlocking the whole Bible. Any interpretation of any passage of Scripture that contradicts the nature of the Son as seen in the gospels is amiss. But those who look at everything in the Word through the lens of Jesus will be amazed at how clear the Word becomes.

Understanding God's Ways

Knowing God speaks in His Son affects not only my understanding of His Word but also my understanding of His ways. As I look at Jesus Christ, God's Final Word, I see He had compassion on the lame man. I see Him defending a blind man. And I see Him healing them both. So to those who wonder why cancer, Alzheimer's, or even the flu is besetting them, I say that in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son (Galatians 4:4). And in the fullness of time—at just the right time—He will heal all who come to Him. That "right time" might be today. It might be next month. It might be ten years from now. It might not be until they're in heaven. But all of His children will be healed ultimately.

Therefore, to the one dealing with pain, I say, "I don't know why you're still struggling with that disease or that infirmity, but in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son. And He's going to do it again in your situation. You'll see."

Truly, I understand God's ways if I look at the Son, for I never hear Jesus say, "Your lack of faith is the reason you're not healed." I never hear Jesus say, "Your great sin is the reason for your condition." I never hear Him say many of the things I hear from too many pulpits and preachers who speak a language other than the language of the Son.

Understanding God's Will

God has spoken. Everything you need to know about any financial, vocational, or relational situation has already been addressed. Where? In the Son. The answer to any question is packed into twenty-five or so pages called the Gospel.

Grab Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Study the life of the Son, and you will find God's will for every situation.

"But I just wish God would speak to me," we blubber. "I wish I could hear Him audibly."

In Exodus 19, God did speak audibly. Thunder boomed. A mountain shook. Smoke bellowed. And the people said, "*You* go talk to Him, Moses. Tell us what He's saying, and we'll do it. But if we talk to Him, we'll die!" So two thousand years later, God said, "I'll speak again—not on Mount Sinai, but on Mount Calvary. The people won't die. I will."

Gang, when you come to a crossroads of wondering what God's will is, look at Calvary and be reminded once again that if God loved you enough to die for you, there is no doubt He will do what's best for you.

"Why aren't I hearing from God?" people ask. "I'm going to prayer meetings. I'm reading lots of good books. I'm reading the Bible."

The answer could be they're not listening for Him through the Son.

> Amazed to be standing in the presence of the miracle-worker and the lawgiver on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter said, "Let's build booths for Elijah and Moses—and one for Jesus, too."
>
> But God interrupted Peter and said of Jesus, "This is My beloved Son. Hear ye *Him.*" And when Peter looked around, he "saw no man save Jesus only" (see Matthew 17:8)—for as vital as the law and the prophets might be, they are inconsequential in comparison to the Word made flesh.

Therefore, as you study the Law and the Prophets, the Gospels and the Epistles, look for Jesus in every passage. For truly in these last days, God has spoken. He has spoken in His Son.

HOLDING YOUR WORLD TOGETHER

A Topical Study of HEBREWS 1:3

In the second verse of the first chapter of this glorious letter—written to Jewish believers who were being drawn back into the rules and regulations of Judaism—we read that Jesus is the "heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds." That is, Jesus is not only the Inheritor of all things but also the Creator of all things as well. You see, when God created everything, He did so by divine fiat. What is divine fiat? The word "fiat" simply means "spoken command." Translated literally, for example, "Let there be light" in Hebrew reads, "Light be, light was." Thus, God spoke the worlds into existence via the Word. Who is the Word? Jesus (John 1:1). God spoke the worlds into existence through His Son, by His Son, and for His Son.

> In our text, I find something that intrigues me further, for not only is Jesus the Creator, He's the Sustainer. He holds everything together by the word of His power. When you look at creation, you encounter a major problem because, according to Coulomb's Law of Electricity, the positive-charged protons within the atom—from which all matter is composed—should repel each other. As a fourth-grader, I proved Coulomb's Law of Electricity when I bought two little plastic dogs—one black, one white—in a souvenir shop in San Francisco. Due to the magnets glued to their feet, I could push them around the table and, faced one way, they would chase each other. But if I turned them the other way—that is, if the positive sides of the magnets faced each other, although I could flex my fourth-grade muscles and summon the energy to hold those two little dogs together, if I let go, they would push away from each other.

I have proven Coulomb's Law personally. You have too. Every person in here knows magnets have the tendency to push away from each other. But on a larger scale, if you put a tablespoon full of positive charges on the North Pole, and a tablespoon of positive charges on the South Pole, the repellent

force even at that distance would be so great that it would take thirty thousand tons of pressure on each of those tablespoons to keep them from pushing away from each other.

So, too, it takes a tremendously powerful force to keep the protons in the nucleus of the atom from repelling each other. How powerful? Those who survived Hiroshima or Nagasaki know because the principle of the atom bomb is to upset the nucleus of the atom, thereby releasing a force so powerful that it results in an atomic explosion of unbelievable proportion.

Everything we see is made up of atoms that, in turn, are made up of protons that want to repel each other. Yet something is holding it all together. Baffled by what it is that keeps the positive-charged protons packed together in the nucleus of the atom, scientists have coined a term to describe this mysterious force. They call it "atomic glue." In Colossians 1, we'll see what this atomic glue actually is. . . .

> And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. (Colossians 1:17)

There it is. Jesus creates everything, and He is the atomic glue that holds everything together.

"Thanks, Jon," you may be saying, "but I didn't come for a lecture on the atomic structure, Coulomb's Law, or your fourth-grade science experiment."

Listen, gang, there is no verse of Scripture more practical for you and me than the one before us presently because Jesus not only holds all things together physically by the power of His Word—He holds all things together personally and practically as well. Let me explain. . . .

> During a retreat several years ago, a couple of guys cornered me and said, "Jon, if we had to go through what you went through in this past year, we couldn't have done it. Our worlds would have fallen apart. We would have been blown away."
>
> "I hear you," I said to them. "But you're failing to factor in one key component to the equation: He holds all things together by the

word of His power—not only the world we walk on physically, but the world we walk through emotionally."

Truly, if I didn't have the Word, my life would be scattered, blown away, disorganized, formless, and wiped out. And so would yours. Life is full of difficulties and challenges, tragedies and trials for every one of us. But there's a mysterious force at work that holds us together because all things are held together by the Word of His power. Consequently, our lives will be held together to the degree we are centered and focused on His Word.

The Word of God's power and the power of His Word are perhaps seen nowhere more clearly than in the longest chapter in the Bible: Psalm 119. . . .

Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.

Psalm 119:2

The psalmist declares that blessed, or happy, is the man who keeps the Word. Therefore, if a person is depressed or defeated, it is usually because he is not in the Word.

I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.

Psalm 119:7

"Uprightness of heart" literally means "fervency of heart." Who will praise the Lord fervently? The one who learns His righteous judgments, His Word. "Do we have to sing *another* praise song?" some ask. People who don't like to worship are people who are not in the Word. Get into the Word and you can't help but discover the nature, the character, and the goodness of God, which will, in turn, create in you a heart overflowing with praise.

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Psalm 119:9, 11

The only way for a young man to cleanse his ways is to be in the Word. If your world is falling apart because of sin, temptations, habits, or addictions, there's something better than a nicotine patch or an AA meeting. Get into the Word and let the Word get into you, for therein is power.

I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.

Psalm 119:15

"I don't understand what's happening. What's God doing? Where is He when I call out to Him?" we snivel and whine. People who are not in the Word will not understand His ways. But if you meditate in His precepts, you see a bigger picture framed by the future of eternity and the past of Calvary.

Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.

Psalm 119:24

You can spend fifty dollars an hour on a psychiatrist for psychiatric counsel—or you can spend fifteen dollars on a Bible and get the greatest counsel you'll ever receive.

"But the Bible's so big," people complain. "There's too much to read."

Listen, the Bible can be read aloud from cover to cover in seventy-one hours. That's only twelve-and-a-half minutes a day for one year.

Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.

Psalm 119:27

Here's a verse for those who don't know what to talk about when you get together with other believers, for those of you who are shy. If you're in the Word, you'll always have something to talk about because there's so much within its pages to ponder, to think through, and to share.

Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.

Psalm 119:37

The word translated “vanity” literally means “emptiness.” How can you turn your eyes from emptiness? Read your Bible. If you’re reading your Bible, you won’t be watching junk on the screen because the two just don’t mix.

So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word.

Psalm 119:42

You can answer those who accuse, question, or argue with you if you trust in the Word.

I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.

Psalm 119:46

I can talk about the Word boldly to a king, to my boss, or to anyone else because it makes so much sense. It’s pragmatic. It’s practical. It’s powerful. It’s unassailable.

My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes.

Psalm 119:48

Who are those people who so expressively lift their hands to the Lord? They are those who have seen the goodness and grace of God. They are those who have been in the Word.

Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.

Psalm 119:54

Is there a funeral dirge in your heart today? This verse says the Word of God-will put a song in your heart as an accompaniment to your earthly pilgrimage.

It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

Psalm 119:71

It's good for me to be afflicted, writes the psalmist, because it is then that I get back into the Word. When times are easy, we usually don't take the time to search God's mind or to hear His heart. It's in affliction, difficulty, or problems that we tend to open the Scriptures much more.

They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word.

Psalm 119:74

What's the key to popularity? It doesn't lie in any man-made program or theory. The Scriptures declare those who hope in the Word make people glad because they have something substantial to say. Whatever the conversation, their perspective is based on a biblical foundation. Thus, their insights are rich and solid.

For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.

Psalm 119:89

Fads come and go. Politicians are here today and gone in November. But the Word remains unchangeable, immutable. This Book is not going out of print, gang. It will never be out of style. It will never need revision. It's settled. You can build your life upon it with confidence. It will bless you. It will keep your life together. The Word is settled forever and ever.

Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.

Psalm 119:92

Without the Word, we would perish in the afflictions of life. Nothing would make sense.

Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.

Psalm 119:104

The best way to identify a cultist is not to study the cult, but to be in the Word because then when a cultist knocks on your door or tries to sell you his magazine, you'll know what he's saying doesn't ring true.

Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.

Psalm 119:114

Lord, You're my safety and my security because of the Scripture You've given to me.

The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.

Psalm 119:130

The word "simple" literally means "stupid." We qualify, gang! The Word gives understanding to the simple or stupid, unlearned or uneducated. Thus, you are wiser and smarter than any professor on any university campus who doesn't believe in the Word and doesn't walk according to the light of the Word.

Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.

Psalm 119:136

Do you want compassion for those who are lost? The psalmist found himself weeping for those who were without the Word.

Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.

Psalm 119:165

Why shall no one offend those who are in the Word? Because students of the Word see things from an entirely different perspective. They realize it's

not people, but spiritual forces that are the problem (Ephesians 6:12). They know that even if people throw rocks at them, the Lord has allowed it in order to produce humility within them.

> *Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD: give me understanding according to thy word.*
>
> Psalm 119:69

Prayer makes sense when it's enveloped in the Word. Prayer and the Word go hand in hand.

> *My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.*
>
> Psalm 119:171

I am so very thankful the Lord has given us this Word. Without it, our lives would be frazzled. Without it, we would be blown apart emotionally. Without it, we would be lost.

Precious people, Jesus is the Sustainer not only of the physical world, but of your soul. Keep reading your Bible. Keep studying the Scriptures. Your life will be held together to the extent that you are in the Word—for truly all things are upheld by the Word of His power.

HEAVEN AIN'T THAT FAR AWAY

A Topical Study of HEBREWS 1:3

The central message of the Book of Hebrews is "Consider Jesus." In the first half of Hebrews 1:2, consider why He came. That is, He is God's final word. Then, in the second half of verse 2 and on into verse 3, we see who He is through seven characteristics of the incomparable Christ.

In the text before us, the author continues to consider Jesus. . . .

Where He Is

. . . when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high . . .

Hebrews 1:3 (b)

If you were in the sandals of the Hebrew Christians to whom this book was written, this statement would be shocking, even scandalous. Why? Because the priests in the tabernacle and the temple never sat down. If you went into either place, you would see the brass altar, the laver, the table of showbread, the altar of incense, the golden candlestick, the ark of the covenant—but not a single chair because the work of a priest was never done. You see, the sacrifices made by the priests could never take away sin. That's why they had to be offered again and again. Yet this Man, Jesus, the High Priest, sits down.

Why?

Because when He cried, "It is finished," on the Cross, it meant the work was done. Thus, when He went to heaven, He sat down—not out of exhaustion, nor out of frustration, but out of complete and total relaxation, knowing the price had been paid for all of our sins—past, present and future.

What He's Doing

> *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*
>
> Hebrews 7:25

What's our Great High Priest doing? He's talking to the Father about your situation. Think with me about the intercessory ministry of Jesus. . . .

Only hours away from His crucifixion, looking at Peter, Jesus said, "Simon, Satan has desired to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you. And when you get through this trial, strengthen the brothers" (see Luke 22:31, 32). In other words, "Satan desires to rip you apart, to wipe you out, to do you in. But I have prayed for you and when you get through—and you *will* get through—help others." In Philippians 1:6, the promise is given to us that He who has begun a good work in us will continue to perform it until the end. It's a done deal. Jesus is not pacing. He's sitting in heaven, talking over your situation with the Father with complete confidence that He will see you through ultimately, completely and totally. That's His ministry. . . .

> There I am at what used to be Candlestick Park. The Niners are playing the Cowboys. It's a close game. The battle has been brutal. The score has seesawed back and forth. With time running out in the fourth quarter, the Niners are trailing by six. There's sixty yards to go to score. Steve Young calls the play, sets the team down, takes the snap, drops back. Deep, deep goes Jerry Rice, and running alongside him step for step is Neon Deion Sanders. Rice runs a perfect post pattern. He breaks away—but Sanders catches up. The ball is in the air. It's a beautiful pass. Both men go up for it; both have their hands on it. They come down, and it looks like Jerry Rice has it—but what's this? We can't believe what we're seeing as a little red flag comes out of the hip pocket of the referee. We stand to our feet in anxiety. Who's it against? The referee makes the call against Sanders! The Niners win!

Later on that evening, my wife, Tammy, and I watch highlights of the game on CNN. I see Steve Young's pass. I see Sanders and Rice both go for it. I see Rice come down. I see the flag drop—yet I am totally at rest.

Why?

Because I know the outcome.

So does our Lord. He knows how it's all going to come out. He promises to see us through. He will complete that which He's begun. That's why He can say, "*When* you make it through, strengthen others."

Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father—but He's not always seated. . . .

When Stephen began preaching about the reality of Jesus Christ, the crowd became so incensed that people began throwing rocks at him. And as the stones begin to strike him, Stephen said, "I see heaven opening and the Son of God standing" (Acts 7:56).

I would have thought it would have been just the opposite. I would have thought Jesus would stand as we go through life. Then, when we finally get to heaven, He would say, "Whew. You made it. I can sit down now."

But, as is true in all areas of spiritual life, Jesus does just the opposite of what I would do. He's sitting down when we're going through life because He's sure we're going to make it. But when we get to heaven, He stands up to welcome us, saying, "Enter into My joy!"

Here's the challenge for me: I tend to think, *Well, somewhere way up there beyond the blue, the Lord is sitting at the right hand of the Father, thinking about me, interceding for me.* But I suggest to you that nothing could be further from the truth. Think with me. . . .

Scientists have been telling us for a number of years that atoms are composed primarily of space. In fact, if I were to squeeze out all the space between the nucleus of the atoms and the electrons within your own body, you would be reduced to the size of a speck of dust. That's why scientists say it is theoretically very possible that there could be

> an entirely different material world in this place right now that we can't see or hear. In other words, a tree could be growing through the roof of the sanctuary right now if the space of its atoms coincided with the solid part of the atoms of everything we see. Theoretically, then, due to the fact that if a single atom here in Jacksonville was enlarged to the size of a basketball, its electron, proportionately, would be in Philadelphia—there would be ample space for people, trains, planes, even armies to pass through our midst unnoticed.

What does this have to do with the ministry of Jesus, with Him praying for me, with Him being seated at God's right hand? Everything. You see, Jesus said something radical when He said that the kingdom of God is among you (Luke 17:21).

The word translated "among" is *entos* in Greek—a word referring to location. Thus, Jesus said the kingdom of God is not out there beyond the blue. It's among you right here, right now.

"But, Jon," you protest, "haven't you always taught that when the Rapture comes, Jesus will come in the clouds?"

Yes, but I suggest we're looking at clouds in the wrong way. Hebrews 12:1 says we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. Who are these witnesses? Hebrews 11 identifies them as Abraham, Moses, Samson, Gideon, Jephthah—the heroes of faith. So perhaps when Jesus comes, it won't be in a nimbus or a cumulus cloud. It will be, as Jude says, with ten thousand saints, in a cloud of witnesses. Where are these witnesses right now? They're not "out there." They're right here. Ask Gehazi. . . .

> "Master, we're in trouble," he cried. "The Syrians are surrounding our city."
>
> His master, a man of miracles named Elisha, prayed the Lord would open Gehazi's eyes. When He did, Gehazi said, "Whoa! There are angels everywhere—and they're surrounding the Syrians" (see 2 Kings 6).
>
> You see, angels were there all along. It's just that Gehazi was allowed to see a different dimension.

"Things like that only happen in the Old Testament," you say.

Turn, then, to 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul says, "When you come together in worship meetings where gifts are flowing, where the body is interacting, be careful about certain issues because angels are present in the midst of the congregation."

Why don't we see them?

Because they're in a different dimension. The cloud of witnesses, heroes of faith, loved ones who have gone ahead of us are not way out there. They're surrounding us. Could it be, then, that when we die or go to be with the Lord in the event called the Rapture, we don't go somewhere way out there? Could it be that we simply step into the next dimension?

Ask Peter, James, and John. Jesus gave them a sneak preview of the coming dimension when, on the Mount of Transfiguration, they suddenly saw Elijah and Moses in their midst. Like Gehazi before them, they were allowed to see into a different dimension and thereby made aware of the fact that Elijah and Moses were present, although unseen previously.

If this is true, if heaven's just stepping into a different dimension and it's right here—what does this mean to me? It means when I pray to my faithful friend, my High Priest, Jesus Christ, I'm not saying, "Hello-lo-lo. Can You hear me way up there-ere-ere?" No, the Lord is not somewhere way beyond the blue. He is with us always (Matthew 28:20). The kingdom of heaven is among us. The great cloud of witnesses are presently around us. Ministering spirits are in the midst of us. Jesus Himself is in the midst of the congregation. And all of a sudden I realize that heaven isn't that far away—not only because we'll be there soon chronologically, but also because the kingdom surrounds us presently.

I don't see it because, like Paul, I see through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12). And, like Gehazi, I can't see what's going on. But I understand there is a dimension of the kingdom round about me, and I know with certainty that the Lord is seated at the right hand of the Father, at rest, praying for me.

And He's praying for you, too.

2 I was amazed. The Christmas season was in full swing, and it was only November. At first I thought I would just "bah, humbug" it for a week or two more. But it doesn't work that way. There's a flow that kicks in, and, like it or not, one finds himself being caught up and carried away in the momentum of Christmas tradition because traditions have real power.

And that's the dilemma here in the Book of Hebrews. You see, the people to whom it is addressed were Christians who had come from a Jewish heritage. Yes, they had been converted to Christianity, but because they had grown up in Judaism, whenever they heard the trumpets sounding from the temple, whenever they smelled the incense, whenever they heard the swishing of the priests' robes, memories and tradition tugged on their minds and hearts.

Taking up where he left off in chapter 1, Paul continues his discussion of angels, whom the Hebrews traditionally held in high regard.

Hebrews 2:1, 2

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward.

In other words, if you broke the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai by the hand of angels, there would be serious repercussions.



***For topical study of Hebrews 2:1 entitled "The Danger of Drifting," turn to page* 1456.**

Hebrews 2:3 (a)

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation . . .

How can we escape the severe consequences of breaking the law if we refuse the salvation offered to us by Jesus Christ—He who is greater than any angel?

Hebrews 2:3 (b), 4 (a)

. . . which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness . . .

God also bore witness to those who came after Jesus—to Peter and James, to John and Andrew—as they spread the Good News of the gospel into further regions.

Hebrews 2:4 (b)

. . . both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles . . .

Signs and wonders confirmed the Word that was shared evangelistically. I believe this is the way it needs to be, the way it's supposed to be, the way it still can be. "Why aren't we seeing greater expression of signs and wonders?" people ask.

I believe the answer is found in Mark 16, where Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel, and these signs shall follow: In My Name you shall cast out demons, speak with new tongues, and heal the sick." About whom is Jesus talking? Not those who get together in the back hills of Kentucky to handle snakes, those who pass around a cup of poison, or those who say, "It's Miracle Monday. Let's all see signs and wonders."

Dealing with poisons, overcoming snakebites, casting out demons, healing sickness are all linked to people who are on the mission field, people who are involved in ministry, people who are risking their lives and taking a stand.

How do I know this is the correct application? Because when I read the Book of Acts, I see the apostles out on the front lines—not in meetings surrounded by Christians where it was safe. As they were out in the streets, the Lord would bless them with miracles, signs, and wonders to confirm His Word in their missionary endeavors.

So, too, if you put yourself in a place of vulnerability for ministry, you'll see God work with you. Personally, I am a bit appalled by those who say, "Signs and wonders are going to happen at our Signs and Wonders

Convention. Pay a hundred dollars. Come and get your notebook, hear our speakers, and then we'll all start shaking."

I don't buy it because I don't see that anywhere in the Word. God will work with you. He'll be a protection to you, and great things will happen around you—but not necessarily in the safety of the sanctuary or in the confines of a convention.

Hebrews 2:4 (c)

. . . and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?

A teaching presently making the rounds today says God will give you any gift you claim—that you can have any gift you wish to use in a given situation. But that's not what the text says. That's not what Paul teaches. Rather, the Holy Spirit gives gifts according to His will as He wishes.

Hebrews 2:5

For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.

Which of the angels is going to be in charge of the world? None. First Corinthians 6:3 says you and I will judge the angels. Therefore, they are not to be exalted in the way today's society exalts them.

Hebrews 2:6

But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?

In Psalm 8, from which Paul quotes, David says, "When I consider the sun, thy moon, thy stars and the works of thy fingers, what is man that thou art mindful of him?" Perhaps out in a field on a clear evening, watching his sheep as a young man, David looked up, saw a canopy of stars, and said, "When I see all of this, who am I that You would visit a guy like me?"

Hebrews 2:7, 8 (a)

Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.

God has not only put the works of His fingers—the sun, moon, and stars—but the works of His hands in subjection to man. In other words, man was given an awesome cosmic responsibility. But what happened? Crowned with glory, given fabulous responsibility and endless opportunity in the Garden of Eden, man blew it and lost it all. Thus, the world of which man was put in charge was turned over to the one who tricked him.

Why is there war? Why is there rape? Why is there disease? Because, in a very real sense, Satan is presently in charge of this world. While Jesus is coming back to take that which He purchased with His own blood, Satan is presently exercising squatter's rights. He's causing hell on earth. Don't blame the Father. Man blew it. We turned this world over to the Enemy. Yet we continue to watch his junk, listen to his music, think the way he would have us think—and then wonder why we walk in darkness.

Hebrews 2:8 (b), 9 (a)

For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus . . .

The first Adam blew it, and all of us followed in his footsteps. Then came the Last Adam—Jesus. What do we see with Jesus? "Wind be muzzled," He said. And the wind stopped. "Waves be still," He said. And the sea was glassy (Mark 4:39). "Beasts, be at rest," He said. And they lay down next to Him (Mark 1:13). If you want to see how the earth was supposed to be, look at Jesus and you'll see Man living in harmony with the Father, exercising authority over nature.

Hebrews 2:9 (b)

. . . who was made a little lower than the angels . . .

Anything you want to know about the way man was created to be, you can find in studying the life of Jesus.

Hebrews 2:9 (c)

. . . for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

The reference here is to the position of cupbearer. You see, in Old Testament days, whenever a king was given something to drink, his cupbearer took the first sip. That way, if the winemaker had it in for his royal boss, the cupbearer would drop dead instead of the king.

Jesus is our Cupbearer—which is why He prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless not My will, but Thy will be done" (see Matthew 26:39). He tasted death so that we might live.

Hebrews 2:10

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

A cartoon in the newspaper depicted President Clinton bidding farewell to U.S. troops leaving for Bosnia. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do," he calls. The next frame is of one soldier saying, "We already are."

Our Lord doesn't simply say, "Good luck down there. Don't do anything I wouldn't do." No, He says, "I've marched down the same road you're marching. I've fought the same battle you're now fighting." That's what it means to be made perfect through suffering. Jesus was always perfect, but the fact that He suffered like us makes Him the perfect captain for us.

Hebrews 2:11

For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren . . .

We can be one with Jesus not because of anything we have achieved but because He chooses to identify with us.

Hebrews 2:12

Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.

When we come together to worship—be it for an hour on Friday night, a couple of hours on Sunday evening, or for a song or two before a Bible Study on Tuesday—Jesus is not only the object *of* our worship. He is also a participant *in* our worship—singing praise to the Father right alongside us. Amazing!

Hebrews 2:13–15

And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me. Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

As our Captain, Jesus relates to us. As our Brother, Jesus sings praise with us. As our Savior Jesus died for us—that we might be delivered from the deathly fear that haunted us.

You see, life is like reading a murder mystery. All through their journey of life, people know they're going to get murdered—maybe not in the physical sense, but they know the relationship is going to die, that they'll be fired, or that the cancer will return. Thus, there is an understandable fear that haunts everyone.

Jesus came to set us free from the fear of death. "Let Me put you out of your misery," He says. "Die."

"What?"

"Die. If any man come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, for this is the way to be free" (see Matthew 16:24, 25).

And, as always, He's right. If you don't believe me, go to a funeral home, and sneak around the viewing rooms. Whisper into the ears of the corpses, "You're going to get killed. The relationship isn't going to work out. The finances aren't going to come through. You're not going to get the promotion"—and you'll find it won't bother them a bit because they're already dead.

Hebrews 2:16 (a)

For verily he took not on him the nature of angels . . .

Listen carefully, Jehovah's Witnesses. Jesus did not take on the nature of angels. He is not Michael. And dear Mormon, He is not the brother of Lucifer.

Hebrews 2:16 (b), 17 (a)

. . . but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren . . .

Jesus chose to be like *us.* Incredible!

Hebrews 2:17 (b)

. . . that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

He became like us that He might be a merciful Priest. "I know what you're going through," He says. "I was just like you. I never sinned—but I understand your struggle."

Hebrews 2:18

For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

What does it mean that He Himself suffered being tempted? Could Jesus really be tempted?

If you put a hot fudge sundae in front of me, it would draw me, entice me, intrigue me. It would be a real *temptation. And I would suffer with that. On the other hand, if you took me to a sewage treatment plant and told me to stand there all day and look at it, I would also suffer—not because I would be tempted to dive in, but because I would be sickened by what was in front of me.*

In this admittedly simplistic analogy, you have the argument that has raged for a couple thousand years. Was it the seeming sweetness of sin that caused Jesus to suffer being tempted, or was He tempted to just walk away from the stench of sin altogether? While there is good argument on both sides, in a later study, I'll weigh in with my opinion. . . .

THE DANGER OF DRIFTING

A Topical Study of HEBREWS 2:1

"Quick!—throw out the anchor!" my brother Dave yelled to my sister as the boat motor coughed its last breath. She did. But with no rope attached, it sunk to the bottom of the Colorado River as the three of us drifted ever closer to Hoover Dam. Although we made it safely to shore, and although I was only thirteen years old at the time, I'll never forget the feeling of drifting down the river, wondering what would happen.

It's important to have an anchor connected to the boat if you're on the Colorado River—or the Wellington River. Perhaps you have never heard of the Wellington, but I guarantee you've heard of the river into which it flows: the Niagara. Posted at the point where the Wellington empties into the Niagara, is this sign: DO YOU HAVE AN ANCHOR? DO YOU KNOW HOW TO USE IT?

Do you have an anchor, and do you know how to use it? That's the subject of our text, as the writer of the Book of Hebrews employs a nautical nuance in the first verse of the second chapter. In the first phrase of the verse, the word translated "earnest heed" is the Greek word *prosecho,* which means to anchor, or to moor a ship or a boat. Notice, too, the last word of the verse. If you have a newer translation, it probably renders it properly, for the Greek word is *pararrhueo,* or "drift." Thus, the writer here is saying we ought to carefully anchor ourselves to the things we have heard lest at any time we find ourselves drifting.

Cognizant of this concept, there were three symbols used by the early church: One was a fish, symbolic of the acronym for Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior. Another was a boat because the disciples were fishermen before Jesus called them to be fishers of men. But the most common symbol was an anchor. In early Christian drawings and literature, the anchor is seen more than the fish or boat.

And the anchor, although not popular as a symbol to us today, is still a concept vital for us. You see, most of us are not in danger of plunging into the sea of carnality. This week, next month, or in the upcoming year, most of us

are not going to be tempted to become murderers or drug addicts. So, too, the writer of this Book was talking to a group of people who were not only Christians, but Hebrews with a religious tradition and heritage. And he says, "The danger is not plunging into the ocean of perversity, but rather drifting away almost imperceptibly."

Like the Hebrews, we have heard the Word. We believe the Word—and yet perhaps the anchor that was once firmly set in the rock of Scripture is no longer tethered to our boat in the way it once was. Why? It could be because of busyness. Or it could be because of a problem with carnality. But let me suggest to you what I think is the primary reason people like you and me who love the Lord, who've been in church, who have a spiritual heritage and tradition drift: familiarity.

"I already know the Scriptures," we say. "I've led a Bible Study," or, "I've gone to Bible College," or, "I listen to Christian radio. I've heard the Word."

> *I used to live about thirty minutes from the magic kingdom of Disneyland. When we lived near Disneyland, I went there a lot. The first time I went, it was magical. The second time, it was intriguing. The third time, it was exciting. And the fourth time was wonderful. The fifth time was fine. And the sixth was okay. But after the tenth, twenty-fifth, and thirty-ninth time, I finally said, "I've been on the submarine ride a lot. I know every twist and turn of the Matterhorn; I could give you the jungle cruise spiel verbatim." Now, at that point, if someone asked me if I liked the magic kingdom, I would say, "Sure. Go. It's great." But if he asked me if I would come along, I'd say, "No thanks—but you should go!"*

The same is true in the arena of Bible study or any other area of spirituality. "You should go there," we say. "You should plug in," we insist. But when asked if we're going to come, we say, "Well, I've been down the Main Street of Matthew a bunch of times already. I've strolled through the Tomorrowland of Revelation on numerous occasions. I don't need to go. I'm familiar with the story. But you should go. You should plug in. Me? I'm all for it, but . . ."

Familiarity—that's the problem.

There you are, shoveling coal into the boiler, chucking wood into the fire, making sure the train of which you are the engineer reaches its destination—until you say to yourself, "We're cruising fine. We're making good time. Why should I keep shoveling this coal and splitting this wood for the fire?" So you stop. And guess what happens? The train goes just fine. "This is great," you say. "I don't need to keep feeding the fire. We're cruising!" But unbeknownst to you and imperceptible to your family and friends in the passenger cars behind you, the train is slowing down at such a slow rate that no one realizes what's happening.

Finally, ten miles down the track, the train slows to a stop.

"What's going on?" your family and friends holler.

"The train stopped," you reply.

"Why?" they ask.

And if you're honest, you'd have to say, "The problem isn't the present location—it's what I stopped doing twelve miles back when I stopped feeding the fire, thinking I could just cruise."

"Jon, our marriage has blown up. She walked out on me. How did this happen?"

It didn't start happening today or yesterday. It started way back when you stopped feeding the fire, when you thought you could cruise on the momentum of previous history. You thought you didn't need to pray. You thought you didn't need Bible study. Church became something you did occasionally on Sunday if there was nothing else to do.

And now your train is at a standstill—or, worse, your boat is drifting dangerously toward Hoover Dam.

Jonah found himself in a similar situation as he drifted along in the middle of the ocean in the belly of a whale. Why was he drifting? Familiarity. You see, according to Jonah 4:2, the reason Jonah headed to Tarshish in the first place was because he knew God would save the Ninevites. And he wanted no part of it. "I knew You were like

this," Jonah said. "That's why I chose to go to sleep in the hold of the boat and drift toward Tarshish in the opposite direction."

"I know that preacher," we say. "He's going to talk about the importance of loving God, tithing, or prayer. That's why I'm going fishing. That's why I'm going to drift down the Rogue River on Sunday. *You* should go to church," you tell others. "*You* should go to that Bible Study. It will be good for you. Me? I'm going to drift for salmon on Sunday because I already know all that stuff anyway."

What's the solution?

Back to Disneyland.

After I had been forty times or so, a friend of mine said, "Let's take our wives out to dinner at Disneyland."

"I'm kind of busy," I said. "But you go. It's a great place. You'll love it."

"No," he said. "You don't get it. My dad has connections with Walt Disney. I'm inviting you to dinner in Walt's private dining room above Main Street."

So we went, and sure enough, after climbing a flight of stairs to the upper level of Main Street, we were ushered into a beautiful teakwood dining room. As we found our places at the table, I noticed a waiter standing discreetly behind each couple. And as the meal progressed, every time we took even a sip of water or a pat of butter, these waiters replaced whatever was taken so that there was never anything half-full. I've never been in any place like it before or since.

Now, if my friend had said to me, "Come back next week. Walt's going to be here, too," I would have accepted his invitation gladly. I would talk to Walt, and he would tell me the inside story about Mickey and Minnie and give me the history of Disneyland. And if Walt invited me back a second time —to get my opinion on future projects—I would jump at the chance because I wouldn't merely be cruising through the magic kingdom. I would be talking to the king!

The same is true in spiritual life. Whenever we've seen the sights of Genesis or strolled the streets of Matthew, we can say, "I don't need to go to Bible study. I know the stories; I've heard the applications." And, not taking

earnest heed unto the Word, we can drift our way to the falls, wondering how we got there.

Or—we can say, "I know the Scriptures; I've heard the sermons; I've sung these songs over and over. But I get to talk to the King as the message unfolds; I get to ask for forgiveness as I am convicted; I get to give thanks for grace and mercy as I am instructed." That's what makes devotions come alive. That's what makes church services meaningful. That's what makes us come to this place year after year. Not ritual—but *relationship;* not cruising through the kingdom, but talking to the *King*.

This is what Jonah should have done. When the Lord first told him to go to Ninevah, he should have said, "I hear Your Word, Lord. I know Your nature. But here's my problem: I don't want to go to the Ninevites. I can't stand what they say about You and what they've done to Your people." Had Jonah done this, the Lord could have worked with him right then, sparing him a swim in the sea, the loss of his hair, the fragrance of the inside of a whale.

So, too, any man or woman who comes to their private devotions or corporate worship with the single intent of talking to the King will never find time spent with Him a discipline, an obligation, or a burden. It will be the delight of their lives.

If you're forty years of age or older, watch out. Most likely, you do, indeed, know the Word. Main Street, Tomorrowland, Adventureland are extremely familiar to you. Thus, you are particularly vulnerable not to partying, but to drifting.

There are two types of people at Bible studies: those who give earnest heed, drop the anchor, and say, "I'm engaged in this service; I'm a part of this song; I'm embracing this message"—and those who sit and drift. Precious people, none of us can afford to drift. God wouldn't say, "Be careful. Sink your anchor into My Word," if we didn't need to heed it.

Niagara lies dead ahead, gang. Be certain you have an anchor.

And make sure you know how to use it.



3 In his first two chapters, the writer of the Book of Hebrews argues that, although for a season Jesus was made lower than the angels in order to

relate to us and die for us, in reality, He is greater than any angel. Yet there would be those who would have said, "Well, maybe Jesus is greater than angels, but He can't be greater than the great lawgiver, Moses."

Consequently, chapter 3 addresses this question. . . .

Hebrews 3:1, 2

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.

The word "house" means either "a place to live" or "a people." In 2 Samuel 7, David prayed, "I want to build You a house, a temple."

"No, David," God replied through the prophet Nathan. "You can't build Me a house because you're a man of war. But I'm going to build *you* a house, a family from which will come Messiah." Thus, we see in the Scriptures "house" used both ways. Here we read Moses was faithful in his house—that is, to the people to whom he ministered.

***For topical study of Hebrews 3:1, 2 entitled "It's Not About You!" turn to page* 1462.**

Hebrews 3:3–6 (a)

For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; But Christ as a son over his own house . . .

Truly, Moses was without peer as a servant in the house. But the Son is the Builder of the house and therefore deserves more honor than Moses.

Hebrews 3:6 (b)

. . . whose house are we . . .

Where does the Lord choose to dwell?
In us. Amazing.

Hebrews 3:6 (c)
. . . if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

In other words, we are His house *if* we hold on to the confidence of the hope of the gospel. But if we return to traditionalism, rules, regulations, or our own efforts at spirituality, there's no guarantee.

Hebrews 3:7–11
Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.)

Quoting Psalm 95:7–11, a key passage in Scripture, the writer alludes to the account found in Numbers 13. . . .

The spies returned from the Land of Promise, saying, "It's a fabulous land—a land flowing with milk and honey. But there's a huge problem. There are giants there and we look like grasshoppers to them."

"Oh no," the people said. "We're toast."

And although Joshua and Caleb said, "If God is with us, it won't be a problem," the ten other spies convinced the congregation they couldn't simply believe that God would give them the Land.

"Because you don't believe the simple word I gave you," God said, "you're not going in."

And the longest death march in world history ensued as the Israelites wandered around for thirty-eight years until an entire generation died—including Moses.

Hebrews 3:12–16 (a)

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; while it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke. . . .

Watch out, warns the writer of Hebrews, that you don't make the mistake your fathers made at Kadesh Barnea when they looked to their inadequacy rather than at God's inerrancy.

Hebrews 3:16 (b)

. . . howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses.

How were the children of Israel delivered from Egypt? By blood and water—the blood that they applied to the doorposts before Passover and the water of the Red Sea which drowned the chariots pursuing them.

So, too, we are delivered from "Egypt"—from damnation and destruction—by the blood and water that flowed from Jesus' side on the Cross of Calvary. Yet, like the children of Israel, although they are delivered from Egypt, too many Christians spend their whole lives wandering between Egypt and the land of abundance. Year after year, they trudge through life, thinking, *Well, this is as good as it can get until I die and go to the Promised Land of heaven.*

That's not what God intended for us, gang. He intended to take us out of Egypt, through the wilderness quickly, and into the Promised Land of the Spirit-filled, abundant life. You see, the Promised Land in Bible typology is not a picture of heaven. It's a picture of life in the Spirit. How do I know? Because while there are neither giants nor battles in heaven, the Spirit-filled life is filled with many a giant to wrestle and many a battle to wage.

Only Joshua and Caleb realized that giants, battles, wars notwithstanding, God would, indeed, give them the Promised Land. And thus, they did not provoke God.

Hebrews 3:17–19

But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

To whom did God say, "You shall not enter into the rest, the Promised Land, the abundance of milk and honey"? I would have thought it would have been to those who worshiped idols or to those who didn't have morning devotions. I would have thought it would have been to immoral men or to those who didn't offer sacrifices. Yet, in reality, the only thing that kept the children of Israel from the Promised Land was their lack of faith.

This is critically important theology, for the singular sin that kept them from blessing was simply thinking God's promise was just too good to be true. Precious people, you can live the abundant, Spirit-filled, successful, exciting, thrilling Christian life if, instead of thinking that God can't bless you because you haven't been to Bible study, because you've been yelling at your husband, or because you haven't had morning devotions regularly, you say, "I'm a spiritual grasshopper, Lord. But if You want to bring me into this great land of blessing, I'll gladly go in!"

The sin of Hebrews 3 is singular. It's not fornication, as destructive as that sin may be. It's not idolatry, as sad as that sin is. Rather, it's simply not believing how good God is.

When he came home from Bible School, my son Peter-John shared with me how passionate he and his friends were about seeing their generation brought into the kingdom. "So I get up early in the morning and pray and spend time in the Word. I do so well for about three or four days," he said. "But then I get tired. I sleep in. I miss my devotional time. And I don't go to prayer meeting." With tears running down his cheeks, this football-playing son of mine said, "Dad, I want to do so well. But I'm not."

"Peter," I said, "when you learn the lesson that took me years and years to understand, you'll be on your way. And that lesson is simply this: Blessing, anointing, ministry, fruitfulness, and victory are not about you. It's not about the work you do for the Lord; it's about the work He did for you. It's not about your prayer to the Lord; it's about His intercession for you. It's not about your faith in the Lord; it's about His being faithful when you falter. It's all about Him *being the hero, the prayer warrior, the victor, the friend, the faithful One."*

The key not only to ministry but to every area of spirituality is found in John 10. . . .

Of John the Baptist, Jesus said, "This is the greatest man who ever lived." Yet Scripture also records John did no mighty miracles (John 10:41). So what made John the greatest man who ever lived? One thing: He didn't preach on power in prayer. He didn't propagate victory through discipline. He simply said, "Behold the Lamb. Check Him out. Follow Him."

Happy is the day when a woman grasps the fact that spiritual life has nothing to do with her and everything to do with God. Happy the day when a man finally realizes all he has to say is, "I don't know why You put up with a grasshopper like me, but, Lord, if You want to allow me to be in ministry, if You want to give me a family, if You want to bless me in countless ways—that's okay with me!"

Don’t let anyone sell you a bill of goods, saying, “The reason I’m so successful is because I pray night and day. And the reason you will never be part of the chosen few is because you don’t.”

Any man or woman can leave here tonight to be used mightily and blessed exceedingly beyond anything they could ask or even think if they would just learn to say, “I believe You, Lord.”

Contrary to many sermons, the deceitfulness of sin is one thing. It’s saying, “I’ve got to do more. I’ve got to be bigger, stronger, better in my spiritual walk so that I can battle the giants ahead of me.” God says that’s the very sin that will keep you out.

Dear saint, it’s all about God’s work for you, not your work for Him. Fix your eyes on Jesus. Be blown away by Him. Behold the Lamb!

IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU!

A Topical Study of HEBREWS 3:1, 2

The longer I walk with the Lord, the more at rest I am in the Lord. But rather than lead me into a lethargic kind of apathy, the rest of which I speak causes me to step out in victory and to walk with my Father confidently. To this end, I want to share a truth with you that is simple, but I believe profoundly so.

Keep in mind that the Book of Hebrews was written to Christians who had come out of a Hebrew, or Jewish, culture. They were believers in Christ; they were converted to Christ; they recognized Jesus as Messiah—but as the years went on, these Hebrew Christians were being drawn back to Judaism. After all, there in Jerusalem they could see the temple. They could hear the trumpets. They could smell the incense. And the pull of tradition, nostalgia, and memories is a strong one.

"Don't go back," writes the author of this book. "Even though it's tempting, even though traditions have a powerful pull, keep the foundation of your faith basic. Keep it focused. Keep it simple. It's Jesus—nothing more, nothing less, nothing else." That is why he says in chapter 3, "Consider the Apostle of our profession." The word "apostle" meaning "sent one," upon reading this, the mind of the Jewish reader would immediately race to the Apostle of Israel, the one sent to deliver them from the bondage of Egypt. . . .

> After baking bricks in the blistering Egyptian sun for four hundred years, the people of Israel finally came to their wits' end and cried to the Lord to send a deliverer. Therefore, sent *by* the Lord on a mission *for* the Lord, Moses was an apostle in the truest sense of the word.
>
> "Thus saith the Lord, Let My people go," he declared to Pharaoh. And you know the story. This apostle, this leader, Moses, led a congregation of perhaps three million Jews to the Land of Promise.

Notice they are told to consider not only the apostle, but the High Priest of their profession. Upon reading this, the Jewish mind would think of the

first high priest, Moses' older brother, Aaron. So beginning in chapter 5, the author reminds his audience that not only did Moses fail to enter the Promised Land but also that Aaron failed to enter in as well. . . .

In Numbers 20, the children of Israel were once again murmuring against Moses and Aaron, saying,

> *Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the* LORD*! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the* LORD *into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the* LORD *appeared unto them. And the* LORD *spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the rod from before the* LORD*, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the* LORD *spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.*
>
> Numbers 20:3 (b), 4, 6–12

With this passage in mind, if you came from a Jewish background and are told to consider the Apostle and High Priest of your confession, the implication might trouble you because you would say, "Uh-oh. I know our national history. We were given a fine apostle and a wonderful high priest, two of the best of men. But we drove them crazy. I wonder, therefore, if I will do the same thing to this great Apostle and High Priest, Jesus Christ."

The fact is, one need not be a Jew to feel this way. I've been a Christian for almost fifty years, and as I watch my life unfold year after year, as I hear myself murmuring, as I see my lousy attitudes, as I succumb to sin and carnality, my tendency is to say, "At fifty years old in the faith, I should be a lot further along than I am. No doubt I'm frustrating my Great High Priest and Apostle Jesus Christ much more than the children of Israel frustrated Moses and Aaron. Any day now, He's bound to say, 'Jon, how long will it take for you to get it right? I'm out of here.' " But such is not the case, for look at our text. . . .

> *Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.*
>
> Hebrews 3:2

To whom is our High Priest faithful? Not to you, not to me, not to your congregation. He is faithful to the One who appointed Him. He is faithful to the Father.

The overwhelming majority of Christians think that God the Father was holy and awesome and powerful. But He was understandably angry. So Jesus shed His blood on the Cross, went to heaven, and said, "Take it easy, Father. Here's My blood. It's okay now."

Truly, the basic understanding of most people is that, because God was frustrated with mankind, Jesus came on the scene to calm Him down. But such is not true biblical theology. Jesus came to earth not primarily for you or me. He came to do the will of His Father. And it was the Father's will to save you.

Biblical Christianity is not about us, gang. It's not about our prayer. It's not about our devotion. It's not about whether we're good or bad, obedient or disobedient. It's not about how much we pray or how little we pray. It's not about where we go or don't go, what we do or don't do. It's about Jesus' faithfulness to His Father. And our failures only make His ministry to the Father that much more impressive.

"If that's true," you say, "if my relationship with God is not about my prayer life, my worship, my anointing, my ministry, then how do I fit in at all?

Am I just a pawn, just a piece of the puzzle in this demonstration of the faithfulness of the Son to the Father?"

For the answer, turn to John 17. . . .

> *I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.*
>
> John 17:23

What if we believed this? What if we really believed that the Father loves us as much as He loves His own Son? We would pray with confidence. We wouldn't have to prove anything to Him or to ourselves. We would be at peace.

The repercussions? We would pray more. We would study the Word more. We would worship more—not to earn spiritual brownie points, but just to enjoy our Father.

Our Apostle and High Priest, Jesus Christ, will not fail—no matter how many times we do—because His ministry is to the Father. And the Father will never frustrate Him.



4

Hebrews 4:1

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

What should we be afraid of? Simply of limiting the Holy One of Israel due to unbelief (Psalm 78:41). Israel did not believe God would lead them into the Promised Land and give them victory over the giants that roamed therein. "Fear *that,*" warns the author of Hebrews. "Be afraid of being one who doesn't believe God is good and that He has provided rest in His Son."

Hebrews 4:2

For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith

in them that heard it.

The word "gospel" meaning "good news," the good news for the children of Israel was that there was a land flowing with milk and honey. Yes, there were obstacles. But God promised them victory if they simply believed.

"Oh, but we're only grasshoppers," they said. And the grasshopper mentality still paralyzes us today. "I'm not a man of this," we say, or, "I'm not doing that. I can't receive God's blessing on my life because I'm blowing it here, or I must be bugging God there."

No. According to our text, it was not their shortcomings that kept the children of Israel from entering the Land of Promise. It was their failure to mix God's promises with faith. What will keep you from enjoying the best blessings in your family or in your ministry? Simply not believing what God says. Maybe you have the Promise Box on your breakfast table or *The Jesus Person Pocket Promise Book* in your back pocket. You know God said He would provide for all of your needs (Philippians 4:19), that all things are working together for good (Romans 8:28) and that He is with you even unto the end of the world (Matthew 28:20). But these promises will not do you any good until you stop saying, "What's the catch? This can't be true for me. I'm nothing but a grasshopper." What does it mean to mix the gospel with faith? The answer is seen in Acts 12. . . .

> *When Herod put Peter in prison, Scripture records that the church got together and prayed fervently. God sent an angel to Peter as he slept between two guards.*
>
> *"Arise," said the angel. And the chains fell off Peter's wrists and legs. So Peter got up and followed the angel into the city—even though Scripture tells us he thought it was nothing more than a vision. Walking through the streets of the city, however, he realized it was no dream.*

Now, had Peter not stood up and stepped out, had he not started moving, but instead said, "This is a neat thought, an interesting insight," had he not mixed the angel's command with faith—even though the chains were off and the door was opened, he would have remained in jail.

What about us? God gives a promise to us, and we say, "It's a vision. It sheds some esoteric light on theology. But it can't really mean I can step out. So I'll just stay in my prison, wait for my execution, and be comforted with this thought." No! Get up! Step out! Go for it! And you might discover it's reality. Listen, folks, the Word being mixed with faith means we stand up and start moving. . . .

You pray for your teenage son, "Lord, revive him. Bless him. Help him." Get up and expect him to do well. Start treating him like he is *doing well. And you'll find the promise is true. But if you stay in your cell, theorizing and saying, "I need to study deeper on this matter," you'll never enter the Land of Promise regarding your situation.*

How much faith does it take? Look at the believers in Acts 12. . . .

Knock. Knock. Knock. "It's Peter."

"No, it can't be Peter. Lord, we pray that You would free Peter."

Knock. Knock. Knock. "It's Peter."

"No, it can't be Peter. Lord, we pray You would free Peter. . . ."

How much faith did they have? About a mustard seed's worth. But Jesus said that's all it takes to move a mountain. I'm convinced that if you have only enough faith to pray, that's enough to start things happening, to start doors opening. It doesn't take much. The promises, the blessings, the good things of God happen when you take the Word and mix it with faith.

Hebrews 4:3 (a)

For we which have believed do enter into rest . . .

"Wait!" the Jew would protest. "We already have rest. On the Sabbath, we rest one day in seven." But the rest talked about here is something much bigger than a one-day vacation or a one-day Sabbath. . . .

Hebrews 4:3 (b)–6

. . . as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, and God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief.

Although there was a Sabbath day established in the first creation week, here—thousands of years later—God says, "It remaineth that some must enter in," as though it were a future event. Therefore, this speaks not of creation but of Canaan. . . .

Hebrews 4:7, 8 (a)

Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus . . .

The Greek form of "Jesus" being *Yeshua,* or Joshua—the word "Jesus" in this text refers not to Jesus Christ, but to Joshua—the one who led the children of Israel into the physical Promised Land.

Hebrews 4:8 (b), 9

. . . had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

Although Joshua led the people into the Promised Land, God still promised a rest to come *after* they were in the Land of Promise. Thus, there's a promise given of rest, real rest. It is not the Sabbath day. It is not the Promised Land. It is not creation rest. It is not Canaan rest. It is Christ's rest.

Hebrews 4:10

For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

The rest spoken of is the rest that occurs when you give up trying to earn salvation or blessing—when you realize it's not through your works, by your energy, because of your righteousness, or due to your prayer life. True rest occurs when you realize your salvation is not dependent upon anything you do but rather upon who Jesus is, and what He's done.

Hebrews 4:11 (a)
Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest . . .

What does it mean to labor to enter into rest? It means just to rest in God and relate to Him. It's like riding a bike. When you begin learning, you wobble around and maybe skin your knees a time or two. But then once you get it, riding a bike is the easiest, most relaxing thing in the world. The same thing is true with spiritual rest. Initially, we wobble all over the road, saying, "What about?" and, "How come?" and, "That can't be . . ." as we try to figure it out. But when we finally learn the Christian walk is not about us, but about Jesus—not about what we must do, but about what He's already done —we start to cruise.

Hebrews 4:11 (b)
. . . lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

If we don't enter into His rest, like the children of Israel, we will wander year after year in the wilderness of dryness and drought, never blessed because we're trying to work our salvation out in our own energy, never at peace because we just can't believe God is as good as He promises to be.

Hebrews 4:12
For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

I always thought the Word was quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword because it would bring to light and deal with my failures. Not true. Look at the context of the verse. The Word pierces the heart as it recounts stories of people who were robbed because they just didn't believe how good God is. It's all about *Him.*

Hebrews 4:13

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Not only does God's Word pierce, but His eyes pierce as well. Yes, the Lord sees my inadequacies, my unbelief. But look at the next verse. . . .

Hebrews 4:14, 15

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

I have a tendency to doubt, to fear, and to focus on my inadequacy rather than God's sufficiency. But I have a Great High Priest who understands. How does He know how I'm feeling? Our text says He was tempted as we are. And I suggest a temptation that would cause Him to be a compassionate High Priest, a temptation that would cause Jesus to empathize with me would have to be a genuine temptation for Him. . . .

If a trusted congregant pulled out an Uzi machine gun from under the pew and began spraying bullets everywhere, leaving 458 people wounded, I would not go to the jail the next day and say, "I understand what you're going through, Friend. I have the same feelings."

No, I would be mad at him, disappointed in him, wouldn't want anything to do with him. However, if the congregant reached under

the pew and pulled out not an Uzi machine gun but a hot fudge sundae and started eating it, when the service was over, I would say, "I understand, my friend."

So, too, I suggest that for Jesus to be the compassionate, faithful High Priest the Book of Hebrews tells us He is, the temptations He endured had to be genuine temptations for Him. For Him to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities and to understand what we're going through, He had to be where we've been. Therefore, even though the Word pierces me when I see stories of unbelief and I realize the same kind of unbelief resides in me, I have a High Priest who says, "I understand. I've been tempted in all points—even the points of unbelief with which you struggle."

And what does that make me do? Read on.

Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

The Greek word translated "may" does not mean "might." It means "will." Thus, this is not an invitation to "Come boldly and we'll see how you're doing." No, it's to "Come boldly and you *will* obtain mercy and find grace." The definition of mercy is "not getting what you deserve." The definition of grace, on the other hand, is "getting what you don't deserve." What do we deserve? We deserve to have a trusted friend take an Uzi and start splattering every one of us. That's what we deserve—and worse. But grace is God saying, "Hot fudge sundaes for everyone!"

When you come to the throne boldly—not tentatively, not reluctantly, but boldly because the price has been paid and the work done—you find mercy and grace.

When?

Whenever you have need.



Hebrews 5:1

5 For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things per taining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.

The Jewish reader would have been very familiar with the concept, if not the Person, of the high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ, believing as he did, that one could relate to God only through a priest.

Hebrews 5:2–4

Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

The high priest had compassion on people because he himself knew his own failings and shortcomings. He was aware of his own struggles. If you've had struggles and setbacks, failures and hurts, pains and problems, know this: Once you turn those things over to the Lord, you will have compassion on people you wouldn't have had otherwise. In the service of the Lord—be it as a Bible study teacher, deacon, children's worker, pastor, or missionary—we're not the doctors. There's only one great Physician, only one Healer—Jesus Christ. As a pastor, then, who am I? I'm just a guy who has been in the hospital for a lot of years. And because I know where the bathroom is, where the cafeteria is, where the gift shop is, who the orderlies are, I can help others find their way around the hospital.

People get mixed up about this when they begin to think, *That missionary, singer, Bible teacher, or pastor is the answer.* No. They're walking around in the same blue gowns that tie in the back that you are. I'm still getting patched up myself. I'm still getting operated on regularly. I'm still terminal—but I've found a *great* Doctor. Such *is* the essence of true ministry.

Hebrews 5:5–8

So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.

When Jesus was about to be taken away in order to be tried before Pontius Pilate and ultimately crucified on Golgotha, He cried strong tears and sweat drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane.

In this, I find two points of which we are to be very cognizant. . . .

First, in His most intensive moment of prayer, Jesus shows us the purpose of prayer is not to get God to do what we want. It's to get us in harmony with what *He* wants. Not our will, but *His* be done.

Now, here's the amazing thing. When I get in harmony with what God wants, guess what I find. I find ultimately it's what I truly wanted all along. Oh, there might be a Cross to endure. There might be blood and pain and suffering for a season. But on the other side of the Cross, there is joy (Hebrews 12:2). Prayer is to get me in harmony with the Father. If you don't get this lesson down, prayer will always be a mystery to you and a problem for you. And you will ultimately stop praying as a result.

"I prayed for that and nothing happened." "I prayed for the other, but it didn't work out." Wait a minute. If you gave the matter to God, God will do what's best. Prayer is not to get God to do my bidding. Prayer is for me to get in line with Him. Although it's a struggle, it's in prayer when I finally find myself getting to the place where I say, "Okay, Father, *Your* will be done."

Second, it was God who sent Jesus to die for us. Most people have the view that God the Father is angry with man. That's not it. God so loved the world—loved *you*—that He sent His Son (John 3:16).

"The Father sent His Son to pay the price?" you say. "I'm not sure it's really loving for the Father to send someone else to accomplish His purpose of redemption."

Wait a minute. “His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father” (see Isaiah 9:6). To whom does this refer? To Jesus. Great is the mystery, declared Paul, that God Himself became a Man (1 Timothy 3:16).

Hebrews 5:9

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.

Always perfect in Person, Jesus became perfectly suited and prepared through the things He suffered to be called our Friend and our faithful High Priest.

Hebrews 5:10, 11 (a)

Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek. Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered . . .

“There are so many things I would like to teach you,” the writer laments, “but you don’t hear as you once did because you’re back into swishing robes, blaring trumpets, and religion once again. I want to dive into the fantastic implications of the Melchizedekian ministry, but I can’t because you’re not ready.”

Hebrews 5:11 (b)

. . . seeing ye are dull of hearing.

The term translated “dull of hearing” is the word for “ignorant” in Greek. But the ignorance spoken of is not due to never hearing. Rather, the ignorance spoken of is the result of ignoring. In other words, when truth was shared, the response was, “Big deal. I don’t care what you say. I have my own perspective.”

There are those who say, “I’m just not getting anything out of Bible study. I go to church, but nothing registers with me. I read the Bible, but it just seems like ink on paper.” Why? It could very well be because they are those who are dull of hearing. That is, God spoke to them a week, a month, or a

year ago concerning something they were to do. But they ignored it. Why, then, would God keep speaking to them if they refused to do those things He already made clear to them?

It is a loving Father who says, "Jon, I'm going to make it real simple. When you do step one, I'll take you to step two. When you do what I ask, when you incorporate what I show you—then I'll take you farther down the road. But I'm not going to keep on heaping instruction and insight upon you if you're only going to ignore what I've already told you."

Dear saint, what is the last thing God told you to do?

Have you done it?

Hebrews 5:12, 13

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

I'm sorry to say that in many churches, sermons cannot be longer than twenty-five minutes. And during those twenty-five minutes, the preacher better have lots of stories and jokes because people choke on meat. But once you start studying Scripture seriously, you start gaining strength, your spiritual muscles start bulging, and you hunger for more than pablum week after week.

Hebrews 5:14

But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

I had a big chunk of prime rib one night on the Rogue River in Oregon. When I finished it, I thought I would never have prime rib again. But you know, a day later I was ready for another piece! So, too, you might leave a Bible study, saying, "That was sure a long study,"—but if you're walking,

exercising, growing in the Lord, you'll be back for more on Sunday, saying, "Serve it up again. I'm hungry!"



6 I'm convinced Hebrews 6 is one of Satan's favorite passages, for he has used this passage to cause dismay, despondency, and depression in more Christians than perhaps any other single passage in the Bible. Make no mistake about it—the devil is a Bible scholar. . . .

> TIME *magazine may have thought they were on the cutting edge of society with their "Is the Bible Fact or Fiction?" cover one week, but in reality, they fell prey to the oldest trick in the book. After all, way back in the Garden of Eden Satan did the same thing when he said to Eve, "Did God really say . . .?"*
>
> *In Matthew 4, he quoted Psalm 91:12, saying to Jesus, "Is it not written that the Father shall give His angels charge over thee lest You dash Your foot against a rock?" Yes, he quoted Scripture—but he conveniently left out the part that says, "to keep thee in all thy ways"—for God's ways don't include jumping from the temple.*

Satan still uses these tactics today. As he did with Eve, he'll either question or contradict the Word. As he did with Jesus, he'll quote it and omit part of it. Hebrews 6 is one of those passages a lot of believers read and say, "Uh-oh. I'm in a heap of trouble," because Satan is all over it, saying, "You've fallen away. You've lost your salvation. There's no hope for restoration."

While Hebrews 6 is, indeed, meant as a warning, the question is: Does it apply to you and me? Let's see. . . .

> **Hebrews 6:1–3**
>
> **Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of**

resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit.

Here the author lists six basic foundational principles every believer should understand:

- Repentance—both from sin and from trying to earn salvation through works
- Faith
- Baptism—both water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit
- Laying on of hands—finding your spiritual gift and being empowered for service
- Resurrection—including end-times teaching, the Rapture of the Church, and the millennium
- Eternal judgment

If you're a teacher, these are six areas you should be teaching new believers. And if you are a new believer, I encourage you to explore these very important principles of our faith.

After addressing these foundational principles, the author moves on to the section so often misinterpreted. . . .

Hebrews 6:4–6

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

"If you ignore these foundational truths and return to your old ways, it is impossible to renew you to repentance," writes the author of Hebrews. And that's why this Scripture is so troubling.

I often become involved in conversations where someone says to me, "I'm lost," or, "I've committed the unpardonable sin," or, "It's hopeless."

"Why?" I ask.

"Because, after I went back to the old scene, I heard a sermon on Hebrews 6 that said it's impossible for me to return to salvation. I'm doomed."

There are those who say Hebrews 6 is talking about people who were never saved—about people who just sort of dabbled in Christianity. They came to church occasionally on Sundays. They had devotions if they weren't too busy. But they weren't really plugged in. They were on the periphery—dabbling in Christianity, dabbling in mysticism, dabbling in materialism, dabbling here and there. Yes, they tasted of the heavenly gift and of the Word, but they never really sank their teeth into it, never digested it. Consequently, certain Bible teachers maintain that Hebrews 6 does not even apply to a born-again believer.

I have difficulty with this argument because in a previous chapter, we read how Jesus Christ tasted death for all men (2:9). Does that mean Jesus merely dabbled in securing our salvation, that He didn't pay the full price? No. When Scripture says Christ tasted death for all men, it means He took the poison; He died in our place; He who knew no sin became sin for us. Thus, I believe those who use the word "taste" lightly in reference to Hebrews 6 have problems in their position.

A second group says that, based on the word "if" in verse 6, Hebrews 6 presents nothing more than a hypothetical situation. In other words, *if* there was someone who really experienced the Holy Spirit and tasted of the good Word of God, and *if* it were possible that they would fall away, then they would re-crucify Christ and put Him to open shame. But I find such an argument stretching the language to an illogical conclusion.

I believe Hebrews 6 is not about an unbeliever who was never really saved. Nor is it presenting a hypothetical situation. I believe it speaks of those who leave the simplicity of Jesus Christ. So when a person says, "Oh, Jon, I went back into the party scene for three years," or, "back into that religious trip and depended upon my own efforts and my own goodness," on the basis of this passage, I have to say to him, "It's impossible to renew your salvation—but there is a story you must remember. . . ."

He had everything going for him. Rich, young, and powerful, he was one of People *magazine's "Twenty-Five Most Intriguing People." In a moment of desperation, however, he came to Jesus and said, "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

Jesus listed several of the commandments, of which the young man said, "I've kept them all."

"Right," Jesus said. "Now go sell your goods and you'll be free to follow Me."

"I can't," said the rich young ruler as he walked away.

"I tell you the truth," Jesus said sorrowfully, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom."

"Then who can be saved?" asked His disciples, who were under the impression from generations of rabbinical teaching that riches were a sign of God's blessing. "If a rich man can't be saved, who can be?"

And Jesus said, "With man it is impossible, but"—and here is the glorious but*—"with God all things are possible" (see Mark 10:27).*

You've walked away, sister? You've walked away, brother? It is impossible in your own energy, in your own strength, by your own efforts to renew yourself again to repentance. But guess what? Even now God is doing a miracle. He's brought you into this understanding. He's made you see the stupidity of what you've been doing. And He has done the impossible. He has brought you back once again. But understand that if it weren't for His miraculous power and matchless mercy, it would be impossible for you to return to Him.

A glorious truth—yet a sobering one as well, for Scripture indicates it is possible to wander away once too often. Like the rich young ruler, there can come a day when you just can't return. The job's too demanding; the movie's too enticing; the guy's too handsome. There can come a day when a person can wander away to the point where his heart becomes hardened.

You cannot lose your salvation—but you can leave it because God won't force eternal life on anyone. What can separate us from the love of God?

Neither height nor depth nor principalities nor power nor things present nor things to come. No outside force can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38, 39). Only you can. And that's the warning of this passage.

Hebrews 6:7, 8

For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

Just as rain falls on both briars and fruit-bearing plants, the glorious news of salvation would have been refreshing and renewing to those who understood that salvation is based solely and completely on the finished work of the Cross. But to those who insisted on returning to a works-based relationship with God, the same Word would be damning.

Hebrews 6:9

But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.

This is how I feel about you. I'm persuaded of better things because you're interested in salvation. How do I know? Because you're here; because you worship; because you pray; because you want to take in the Word.

Hebrews 6:10

For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Faith without works is dead (James 2:26). It's not faith *and* works. It's not faith *or* works. It's faith *that* works. True faith works. When you're

madly in love with someone, you do things you would never have done otherwise. True faith works because true love works.

The idea in this verse is intriguing. God will not forget the works we've long since forgotten. Conversely, I don't believe there will be a lot of rewards for the works we haven't forgotten. "Look at the guys on the street corner," Jesus said. "They want to be acknowledged. They want to be applauded. But I say unto you, they have already had their reward" (see Matthew 6:5).

Jesus wasn't being spiteful—just truthful. Therefore, minister secretly whenever you can. Bless people in a way they don't even know from whence it came, and you will have reward in heaven.

Hebrews 6:11, 12

And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Keep ministering. Keep believing that the promises of God work for you, in you, and through you.

Hebrews 6:13–15

For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

In addition to the swishing of priestly robes and the sounding of temple trumpets, there was another reason the Hebrews were being drawn back to religiosity. The early church lived in anticipation of the return of Jesus. But weeks, months, and years passed. And Jesus had not come back. "The temple we can see," the Hebrews must have said. "The incense we can smell. Jesus left us with His promise—but *where is He?*" Consequently, many grew weary, wondering if they could trust the promise of His coming.

Throughout Scripture, there is inevitably a gap of time between the giving of a promise and the performance of the promise. Abraham "patiently endured." How long? Twenty-five years. In your case, maybe the same will be true because in the period of waiting, in the gap between the giving of the promise and the performance is when God does His best work.



***For topical study of Hebrews 6:15 entitled "Waiting for His Working," turn to page* 1473.**

Hebrews 6:16, 17

For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath.

Today, when people swear to strengthen their credibility, they swear by something greater than themselves. They don't say, "I swear by my guinea pig," but rather, "I swear on a stack of Bibles."

"Let your yes be yes, and your no be no," Jesus taught in reference to the hypocrisy of this mentality (see Matthew 5:37). And yet—realizing man is slow to believe and prone to suspicion, here God takes an oath to verify His promise. He meets us on our level.

Hebrews 6:18

That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.

Determined to show you and me that He will keep His promise as we're waiting impatiently, God takes an oath. And thus there are two proofs that His promise will come to pass (Psalm 110): His Word that He cannot lie and His oath that He need not take, but does for our sake.

Hebrews 6:19 (a)

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast . . .

In the catacombs of Rome, where Christians hid in times of persecution, one symbol can be seen more than any other: the anchor. No matter what storms come our way, we are anchored in the Word of God, in the promises He made. We have this sure hope that He will do what He says. So don't go back to temple worship, entreats the author. Don't go back to heathen practices, to partying, to wherever else you came from. Be anchored in the immutable, unchangeable, sure, and steadfast Word of God.

Hebrews 6:19 (b)
. . . and which entereth into that within the veil.

The writer goes on to say that our Anchor, our Hope, entered the veil—a reference that his Jewish audience would have readily understood . . .

The temple veil that separated the people from the shekinah glory of God measured sixty by thirty feet, was ten inches thick, and was so heavy it took one hundred priests to move it. Although the priests could minister on the side of the veil where the table of showbread, the altar, and the incense were, only the high priest on the Day of Atonement could go behind the veil to the ark of the covenant and the glory of God. But when Jesus paid the price for our sin, and cried, "It is finished," the veil was rent from top to bottom, thereby declaring, "Open House! Any day, any one, come on in!"

We're steeped in this knowledge. But if you can put yourself in the mind-set of the Hebrew, you'll see this would have been a radical understanding.

Hebrews 6:20 (a)
Whither the forerunner is for us entered . . .

It's the big high-school game. Between the goalposts, the cheerleaders have stretched a paper banner that says something clever like, "Win!" And

what happens? The forerunner—the first guy out on the field—breaks through the banner, and the rest of the team follows behind him.

Jesus is our Forerunner. He's the first one through the veil. And the whole team—you and I—get to come charging in behind Him.

Hebrews 6:20 (b)

. . . even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

"Wait a minute," the Jew would say. "You're saying Jesus broke through the veil and leads the way for the rest of us? Tilt. Problem. Only the high priest could go behind the veil—only those of the tribe of Levi could be priests—and only direct descendants of the first high priest, Aaron, could be high priest. If Jesus is from the tribe of Judah, how could He be the Forerunner into the Holy of Holies if He wasn't even a Levite?"

To answer this objection, the writer reaches back two thousand years and pulls out the story of Melchizedek. Who is Melchizedek? He's quite an important figure, for according to Hebrews 5:10, one's understanding of Melchizedek is an indication of how well versed one is in Bible doctrine. You see, a chapter and a half earlier, the writer said he wanted to explain the Melchizedekian ministry but couldn't because the Hebrews weren't ready to take it in. But here and on into the next chapter, he raises the subject of Melchizedek anyway. It's as though he couldn't resist.

WAITING FOR HIS WORKING

A Topical Study of HEBREWS 6:15

After anticipating this day for months, Paul and Penny stand before the pastor promising they'll be faithful and true in sickness and in health, in riches or rags, until death separates them. But five years later, Paul comes home and says, "I'm out of here, Penny. You no longer meet my needs. You no longer captivate my heart." And he walks away from the promises he made, leaving his wife and family behind.

The Bible you hold in your hands is packed full of promises—more than three thousand in number. Many of you have promise boxes sitting on your kitchen table or promise books stuffed in your back pocket. But today, there are those in our midst who would say, "My heart is broken because I don't think the Lord has kept His promise to me. I claimed the promise. I prayed it in. I wrote it on a three-by-five card and stuck it on my mirror. But nothing happened."

Maybe, like Penny, you're in that place today. If so, this is a highly important text for you to consider. If you're not, certainly you're living near or linked to those who wonder why things don't work as Scripture promises.

In verse 12, we are exhorted to follow those who went before us and obtained the promise by faith. The author of Hebrews uses one man specifically as an illustration—Abraham, the father of faith. After Abraham patiently endured, he obtained the promise. What promise? You know the story. . . .

> Abraham was seventy-five years old when, in Genesis 12, he was told to leave his home and father to go to a new land where God would give him offspring as the stars overhead. This must have blown Abraham's mind, for he and his wife, Sarah, had no children at that time. Off he goes on his journey, this father of faith, and sure enough, God gave him a son from whom an entire nation was born. But it didn't happen immediately. In fact, it took twenty-five years.

And in this there is a hugely important spiritual principle that needs to be part of your life. That is, there is very often a gap of time between the promise and the performance of the promise. In Abraham's case, the gap of time was twenty-five years. We read that after Abraham patiently endured, he obtained the promise. I love the New Testament because it is so wonderfully gracious in that it never once mentions the sins or failings of the Old Testament saints. And that's the way God looks at you and me under the New Covenant. "Your sins and iniquities will I remember no more," He says, (see Hebrews 8:12).

If you only read the New Testament account of Abraham, you wouldn't know the rest of the story. For while it is true that Abraham patiently endured and obtained the promise, it is also true that when he was in his mid-eighties, Sarah said, "I know God promised you we would produce a nation. But let's be reasonable. Ten years have come and gone since we heard from Him—and nothing's happened. I'm long past the age of child-bearing, so have relations with my handmaid, and the child produced will count as ours." Abraham agreed to Sarah's suggestion, and a baby named Ishmael was the result. Ishmael was not the promised child—but rather an attempt by Abraham and Sarah to try to help God fulfill His promise. And as is always the case whenever we try to help God out, Ishmael only made matters worse, for Ishmael became the father of the Arab nation. The promised son, Isaac, would come through Sarah thirteen years after Ishmael was born.

"This raises an interesting question," you say. "What kind of father would give a promise to his kids and then wait twenty-five years to fulfill it? Why does God make us wait?" Following are three reasons why God our Father tells us to patiently endure. . . .

To Produce Endurance

Jeremiah was getting a bit weary of the ministry to which God called him. *When are You going to come through, Lord?* he wondered. And God answered him by saying,

> *If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?*
>
> Jeremiah 12:5

In other words, "You may think it's tough now, Jeremiah, but I know what's ahead. There are some real difficulties coming your way, some tremendous challenges heading in your direction."

Jesus made it clear that it rains on the just and the unjust alike (Matthew 5:45). Because of the fallen condition of the world in which we live, death, disease, poverty, tragedy, and heartache abound. Consequently, God says, "Due to the repercussions of the fall of this planet, due to the repercussions of the depravity of the race, storms are coming."

"Change the weather," we say.

"No," says God. "I am going to change *you*—through the trials you're going through right now, through the promises you're claiming but have not yet seen come to fruition."

If someone had told me twenty years ago the things that would come down in my life, I would have said, "I can't deal with that. I won't be a part of that. No way." But my Father has been so good, so faithful to prepare me all along the way through difficulties and challenges. Yes, there were promises—but yet there were gaps between the promise and performance that tested my faith—not because God was cruel to me, but because He cared about me. "I'm training you for what I see is coming down the path," He said. "It's all part of the plan, Son."

To Perfect Blessing

"I'm going to do exceeding abundantly above all you could ask or even think," the Lord says (see Ephesians 3:20)—"but it's going to take time."

> Due to his allergies, when Peter-John was a baby, he required a special formula. On one of the very rare occasions I, rather than my first wife Terry, was up at night with him, he started crying as I impatiently heated his bottle. I can remember saying, "Calm down, buddy. It's coming. You won't want it cold."
>
> But you know what? He continued to howl because he couldn't understand what I was saying. And the Lord whispered in my ear that night, "Jon, that's you. I'm cooking something up; I'm getting something ready. But you're crying, "Where is it?" because you don't understand the language of faith."

And that's all of us. "Wah, wah," we cry. "It's been twenty-five days or two years or fifteen years. Where's the promise?" And all along, the Father is saying, "I'm getting it ready. I'm going to do something better than you could even imagine. But it's going to take some time."

> Zacharias and Elizabeth were well beyond the years of bearing children. No doubt they had stopped asking for children decades ago. But God heard their prayers and knew He wanted not only to give them a baby, but to give them the greatest prophet who had ever lived, one who would prepare the hearts of Israel for the coming of His Son (Luke 1:16).

The same is true for you and me today. God says, "I want to do things beyond anything you could dream or imagine. So hang on, folks, the bottle's getting warm."

I have discovered that the longer God takes to fulfill a promise in my life, oftentimes the better it will be.

"I want a man who loves God passionately," she says. "Doesn't God say to delight in Him and He'll give us the desire of our hearts? Well, I'm praying for a man who loves God, who's six feet four inches tall with dark hair, a big smile, a good business head, who loves to talk about the Lord, who cares about people, who is a good athlete with a great sense of humor, who's sensitive and considerate, and who has eyes only for me. That's what I want."

So the Lord begins shaping and developing her to make her the woman who would be attractive to such a man.

But what happens?

"I've waited two months," she says as she heads off to Rockin' Rodeo to scope out the situation. And then she wonders why she ends up with Tex.

After Abraham patiently endured, he obtained the promise. We know the inside story. He wasn't patiently enduring perfectly. But he learned his lesson, and the promise eventually came his way.

To Prepare Us

The language of eternity is faith. When the Lord has us ruling and reigning at His side, under His command, doing His bidding—whatever that means in the ages to come—He's going to need men and women like you who are not second-guessing, not doubting, not faltering. Jesus taught about the faithful in this life who will be rulers over five and ten cities in the kingdom (Luke 19). In other words, Jesus is saying there is a destiny far beyond what any of us know or can imagine awaiting us in the next zillion years to come.

And the language that must be fluently spoken by us if we are going to be ambassadors for Him in the realms and regions beyond is the language of faith.

> She was the best teacher I ever had. We walked into our sophomore Spanish class and Señorita Thomas greeted us that first day, saying, "Listen, carefully. These are the last words of English you're going to hear this entire year in this class." And that was it. From then on, everything she spoke was Spanish. It was miserable initially. But it forced us to think in a way we never would have had we been able to fall back on English.

And that's what the Father's doing. "Kids," He says, "the only way you'll be prepared for what's coming is if I force you to learn the language of faith now because that's the language you'll be speaking for the next billion years to come."

If I were God, you know what I'd do? Once a year, I'd go to every church and appear with a great display of power and fire and smoke. That would probably get everyone by for a year or so. But God knows such a thing would actually undo what He desires to do—for the growth of faith would be retarded. We would depend on what we could see physically or hear audibly—and consequently, we would not be fluent in the language of eternity.

All the promises will come about in due season. In the meantime, precious people, realize God's heating the bottle. Understand that He's forcing you to develop a whole new way of thinking and living.

And remember, Scripture says it was after he *patiently endured* that Abraham obtained the promise.



7 Maybe you remember June 27, 1976, when the world was stunned as El Al Air, Israel's national airline, was boarded by hijackers who took the plane and its one hundred thirteen passengers into Idi Amin's Uganda. And maybe you recall that after Israeli soldiers loaded themselves into three C-3 cargo planes, landed at Entebbe, snuck into the airport, and rescued one hundred ten of the one hundred thirteen hostages, it was considered to be the greatest covert military operation in history.

But there was a greater one. In Genesis 14, Chedorlaomer, Tidal, and a couple other kings invaded the area around Sodom and Gomorrah, conquering five city-states in the process. Four kings whipped five and carried away hosts of hostages and all kinds of goods. One who happened to be swept up in Chedorlaomer's attack was a man named Lot, Abraham's nephew. So Abraham trained his three hundred eighteen servants to rescue Lot—three hundred eighteen vs. the combined armies of four kings. Yet Scripture records that not only did Abraham's men rescue every single person—they also reclaimed all of the material goods. In so doing, Abraham made the raid at Entebbe look like child's play. On his way back home, Abraham was met by a mysterious person named Melchizedek. . . .

Hebrews 7:1 (a)
For this Melchizedek, king of Salem . . .

Melchizedek was king of "Salem"—or Jerusalem. Jerusalem is called the city of the Great King. Thus, Melchizedek was King of the Great King.

Hebrews 7:1 (b)
. . . priest of the most high God . . .

Melchizedek was also priest of the Most High God. "How could that be?" the Jew would ask, since Jewish law forbids any one man to be both

king and priest. . . .

> *There was a man in 2 Chronicles 26 who tried it—a good man named Uzziah. After being blessed by God, after ushering in revival, after expanding the borders of Israel, he said, "I'm going into the temple to burn incense unto the Lord." Now, a man could be a king and a prophet—like David. Or a priest and a prophet—like Aaron. But he could not be a king and a priest.*
>
> *"I don't think that applies to me," Uzziah said as he went into the temple, only to be smitten immediately with leprosy.*

God does not want the priesthood involved in politics. I look at good men who have been eaten up trying to mix ministry and politics. Jerry Falwell has gone on record saying, "I regret the years I spent activating people politically when I was called to preach the gospel in simplicity." I've heard Billy Graham in an interview say that his mistake that stands out most clearly was his close involvement with the Nixon Administration.

It is a dangerous thing to mix politics and preaching. It will eat you up. Ask Uzziah. But Melchizedek is an entirely different case. He's the priest of the Most High, and he's also the King of Salem.

> **Hebrews 7:1 (c), 2 (a)**
>
> **. . . who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all . . .**

Who is Melchizedek? According to this passage, he doesn't have a father or a mother; he doesn't have a beginning or an end. He is like the Son of God, abiding a priest continually. Thus, I personally believe Melchizedek of Genesis 14 is none other than Jesus Christ—a Christophany, an appearance of Jesus in the Old Testament before He appeared as Jesus of Nazareth.

Others say, "No, this idea of not having a father or mother simply means that there's no genealogical record of his parents." I don't argue that point,

but I take this literally, for, in addition to his unique genealogy, I see Abraham bowing before Melchizedek and giving tithes to him.

Hebrews 7:2 (b), 3

. . . first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.

There's only One who truly can be called King of Peace—that is the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. And there's only One whose name shall be called the Lord our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6)—Jesus Christ.

Note that He is first called the King of Righteousness before He is called the King of Salem, or Peace, because there cannot be peace until there is rightness. You cannot have peace by compromise—only by consecration. You cannot have peace by working deals with your enemy, for there is no peace with the wicked (Isaiah 48:22). One must have righteousness before one can have true peace—be it internally or internationally.

Hebrews 7:4

Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils.

"I don't believe in tithing," people say, "because it's part of the law." No, Abraham was on the scene well before the law was given—and yet he intuitively knew that the tithe of all he had that day belonged to Melchizedek. Tithing precedes the law, is talked about in the law, and was in effect after the law as seen by Jesus' words when He said, "Don't be like the Pharisees who tithe their mint and cumin and all their spices, but ignore the weightier matters of justice and righteousness and mercy" (see Matthew 23:23).

I recently read that to figure out your financial needs, the rule of thumb is to add ten percent to your income. In the tithe, God is essentially saying, "Add up all your income and give Me ten percent"—which, according to the financial rule of thumb doesn't make sense. But I suggest this is precisely the

reason the only time God ever says to test Him is when He says, "Bring Me the tithe and see if I will not bless you so much that you'll need added barns to contain the blessings that will come your way" (see Malachi 3:10).

Hebrews 7:5–10

And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better. And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedek met him.

Not only did Abraham pay tithes to Melchizedek, but, Abraham being the father of the nation of Israel, the entire Levitical priesthood did as well—further proof that Melchizedek was, indeed, worthy of great honor.

Hebrews 7:11

If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be called after the order of Aaron?

After Abraham bowed and worshiped him, nothing is heard of Melchizedek for another thousand years—until Psalm 110, where we read a priest would come not from Aaron and the Levites but from the order of Melchizedek (verse 4).

Hebrews 7:12

For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.

If there's now a new priesthood on the scene greater than Aaron and the Levites, then there must be a change of the law as well, reasons the author of Hebrews. In other words, the rules of the entire game are changing.

Hebrews 7:13–17

For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchizedek there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

Neither Melchizedek nor Jesus was of the tribe of Levi. Yet the Father, talking to the Son in Psalm 110, identified Jesus as a Priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:18, 19 (a)

For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the law made nothing perfect . . .

The only thing the law makes perfect is the understanding that no one can keep it. Therefore, Aaron and the Levites were part of a system unable to make you, me, or anyone perfect.

Hebrews 7:19 (b)

. . . but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.

The better Hope, the Anchor who makes us perfect is Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 7:20, 21 (a)

And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: (For those priests were made without an oath . . .

In the Levitical system, there was no swearing-in ceremony. One became a priest by being born into the tribe of Levi and a high priest by being born into the direct line of Aaron.

Hebrews 7:21 (b)

. . . but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek:)

Unlike the Levitical priesthood, Jesus had a "swearing-in ceremony," recorded in Psalm 110, as the Father "swears in" the Son after the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:22, 23

By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death.

Because every priest died, the Levitical priesthood was constantly changing.

Hebrews 7:24

But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.

According to the Talmud, there were eighteen high priests before the destruction of the first temple and three hundred-plus before the destruction of the second. In the Levitical system, there was a bunch of priests. In the Melchizedekian order, there was only One.

Hebrews 7:25 (a)

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him . . .

The implication in the Greek language is that He is able to save continually.

Hebrews 7:25 (b)
. . . seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

When most people think of intercession, here's what they picture: I sinned again. And Jesus, my Intercessor pleads my case before the Father.

"Okay, I hear Your presentation, Son," the Father says. "So because You are the Intercessor, the charges against Jon are dropped."

But wait. That's not what happens. In chapter 1, we saw that after He purged our sins, Jesus went to the right hand of the throne of God and sat down. Therefore, although Romans 8 declares He's at the right hand of the Father making intercession, He's doing so not with His words, but with His wounds.

Both Johnnie Cochran and Marcia Clark stood when they made their cases in the O. J. Simpson trial because they were trying to persuade a jury. Neither side felt their case was secure enough to sit. On the other hand, if you walked into the home of another football legend, Jim Plunkett, and heard him say, "I was a great quarterback," there would be no discussion, no debate, no argument. The Heismann trophy on his mantel would be absolute evidence of the fact that Jim Plunkett was a great football player.

So, too, Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, and the wounds in His hands and feet, the scars on His brow, the hole in His side settle the issue. Jesus isn't talking the Father into being merciful to me. He's not asking the Father to be lenient with me. His scars alone are sufficient. That's why when Thomas finally saw Jesus, Jesus didn't say to him, "Let's talk doctrine. He said, "Touch My wounds" (see John 20:27).

Hebrews 7:26–28 (a)

For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity . . .

The author makes a case saying the Levitical priesthood was flawed. The Levites had infirmities physically, problems spiritually, and they kicked the bucket eventually.

Hebrews 7:28 (b)

. . . but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.

The fact that the Aaronic priesthood was flawed does not diminish the fact that in chapter 5, when the author discussed the priesthood of Aaron, he listed three characteristics that point to Jesus. . . .

First, He's chosen from among men.

For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins . . .

Hebrews 5:1 (a)

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

Hebrews 2:17

Second, He offered sacrifice for sins.

And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.

Hebrews 5:3

> Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.
>
> Hebrews 7:27

Third, He attained the position through lineage.

> And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.
>
> Hebrews 5:4

> So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.
>
> Hebrews 5:5

Thus, Jesus completely fulfills the picture and the type of Aaron's priesthood. But He is represented more fully in the Melchizedekian order.

Why is this important?

Because every one of you is relating to Jesus in one of those two ways. . . .

Many people relate to Jesus only as the fulfillment of the Aaronic priesthood. And what they see is this: a Man who became like us, who laid down His life for us, who did not choose that position for Himself but only sought to glorify the Father and to obtain our salvation through His sacrifice for us. And for them, that's as far as it goes. They do not understand that Jesus is not only the fulfillment of the Aaronic priesthood, but that He is Melchizedek. Melchizedek's ministry is not to obtain salvation. It is to maintain salvation. That is why Jesus ever lives to make intercession (Hebrews 7:25).

The Melchizedekian order is a ministry of maintaining my salvation based upon His wounds—and it's a done deal. That means that as I drive home tonight, and I have something I need to pray about or a promise I wish I could claim, I don't have to say, "I can't claim this promise because I haven't prayed with the kind of intensity I should," or, "I can't pray now because I haven't read my Bible in three months." No, I can simply say, "Jesus

continues to save me because His ministry is intercession based upon what He once offered, upon the wounds He now has. There's no discussion about my worthiness. I am free. I am completely and totally free."

Aaron's line was always busy working, always pleading, always sacrificing. In the Melchizedekian order, however, there's nothing more to be said, nothing more to do. It was done once and for evermore when our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, offered Himself as a sacrifice on the Cross of Calvary.



8

Hebrews 8:1 (a)
Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum:

Chapter 8 begins with a summary of the previous seven chapters . . .

Hebrews 8:1 (b)
We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

What Jesus did for me on the Cross of Calvary opened the way for me to fellowship with the Father regardless of whether I have morning devotions, regardless of whether I made it to church last Sunday, regardless of whether I've been tithing or worshiping. Those are not the issues. Yes, it benefits me greatly to cultivate my walk with the Lord through prayer and worship, through tithing and devotions. But my relationship with the Father is not based on any of these things. It's based on the High Priestly work of Jesus Christ.

So, if you have need in any way, you can come boldly before the Father —even if you haven't prayed in the past ten years. You can come boldly before Him because of one thing and one thing only: the High Priestly work of Jesus Christ and what He accomplished on Calvary. Nothing must be added to that; indeed, nothing can be added to that.

Hebrews 8:2–4

A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law.

In other words, Jesus was of a higher priesthood than the Levitical priesthood. He was of the order of Melchizedek, a superior priesthood.

Hebrews 8:5

Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.

"Moses," God said, "be sure you make the tabernacle precisely according to the pattern I give you because the pattern of the earthly tabernacle is a shadow of the true tabernacle which is in heaven."

Hebrews 8:6, 7

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

After the 49'ers win the Super Bowl, their owner is not going to fire the offensive and defensive coordinators. No, once you win the championship, you stay with the team. But there will be a whole lot of defensive and offensive coordinators of other teams canned in January because they didn't do well enough, because they didn't win the championship, because their record was not satisfactory.

So, too, the author of Hebrews says, "If the first covenant—the law—was a winner, there would be no talk of a second covenant, a New Covenant.

But because the Old Testament itself speaks of a New Covenant, it can only mean the first one wasn't sufficient."

Hebrews 8:8 (a)
For finding fault with them, he saith . . .

Here begins the prophecy of Jeremiah 31—the same one repeated in Ezekiel 36—the prophecy of the New Covenant, the new agreement, the New Testament.

Hebrews 8:8 (b), 9
Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

The Old Covenant said, "Do this and live" (see Deuteronomy 4:1), and, by implication, "if you don't, you're dead." The Old Covenant was based upon your success, my obedience, our keeping the rules and regulations. And therein lies the problem, for, like the house of Israel, we are unable to keep the law, the Old Covenant.

Hebrews 8:10
For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.

Jeremiah 31 is pivotal to understanding Christianity in the truest sense because it is there God declares that, rather than writing His will on tablets of stone as He did with the Old Covenant, He would write the New Covenant on the tablets of our hearts. No longer external, His will would be internal. In other words, grace would put into us everything God wants out of us. . . .

Go to the YMCA today, and you'll find it full of people who made New Year's Resolutions to get in shape. Go back in June or July, however, and you'll find it far less crowded because although people want to, although they mean to, they're unable to live up to their resolutions.

So, too, you can read the Scriptures and say, "I want to do that. That's how I want to be"—but inevitably you'll find your flesh incapable. So God says, "I'm going to do something new. I'm going to write My will in your heart. I'm going to put My thoughts in your mind. I'm going to put My Spirit in your spirit."

Hebrews 8:11

And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

One day, someone said, "Jon, I haven't been in church lately."

"I know," I said.

"Well, why didn't you come and tell me to get back to church?" he asked.

"That's not my job," I answered. "The New Covenant says you already know what you should have been doing because the Lord wrote His will on your heart."

Gang, we don't need anyone to put rules on us or regulations around us because the Lord lives in us. And that's the great thing about Christianity. When you're walking with the Lord, when you're living in the New Covenant, you don't have resolutions and regulations, stipulations and obligations. Those are the way of the law.

Instead, you just do what the Lord is writing on your heart, telling you in your mind, whispering in your ear moment by moment. . . .

"Talk to that guy over there," or,

"Go to the Mission," or,

"Make her some chocolate chip cookies. . . ."

And all you have to do is say, "Okay. Far out!"—and do it. That's what it means to be a born-again New Covenant, Spirit-led Christian, for whatever God wants from you, by His grace, He will work within you (Philippians 2:13).

Our brothers and sisters in the first-century church were the most radical Christians in all of history. They sold all of their possessions. They spread throughout the world. They lived for the kingdom. But you know what? They didn't get together and study Hebrews, because Hebrews wasn't yet written. They didn't study the theological implications of Romans because Romans wasn't written. They didn't scrutinize the teachings of Jesus as recorded in John's Gospel because John's Gospel wasn't written.

They didn't have the written New Testament—but they did understand the reality of the New Covenant. They obeyed what the Lord was writing in their hearts. And as a result, they turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). Then, when the New Testament was written and began to circulate through the church, it was a confirmation of what they were already doing because it was the same Lord who had been writing His will for them upon their hearts.

Today, sad to say, many don't understand the New Covenant. Our Trinity is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Bible. We've lost touch with how the Holy Spirit speaks to us moment by moment because we've replaced His voice with the written Word. Many churches and organizations study the Bible and are right in their theology—but they're dead right because theirs is knowledge for knowledge's sake. The New Testament was never intended to be an esoteric, intellectual, theological trip for people who like to fill notebooks, answer questions, and work on workbooks. That was never the intent of the New Testament writer. What was the intent? To provide a way believers could be confirmed or corrected in what they were already living out as a result of obeying the still, small voice of the Spirit.

The person who's really used by the Lord is one who simply says, "You're going to tell me moment by moment what I should do, and, Lord, I will just say, 'Yes,' to whatever You say." A whole lot of people have made the New Testament writings the new law. Like Pharisees searching for jots, tittles, and interesting insights, they fail to see that the Word was simply written to nudge them along in their walk and to confirm the voice of the Lord in their heart.

Hebrews 8:12, 13

For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

What makes me want to know God and walk with Him? Why do I start my day wanting to touch base with the Lord and be in the Word? Why am I here tonight? One reason: God's mercy. I am such a jerk. I have failed so miserably. I have missed the mark so greatly. I have been so inconsistent and stubborn. I've been such a sinner. And yet God keeps blessing me; He keeps putting up with me; He keeps allowing me to know Him.

I look at my life, my family, this church, the nation, the world—and I say, "Lord Your mercy is incredible. How good You've been to me. I don't pray the way I could or should. I don't know as much as I should know at this point in my walk with You. I don't serve You with the kind of faithfulness You're worthy of. But, Lord, You just keep blessing. You keep showing mercy. You keep forgiving—and I have no other choice but to want to know You more."



9

Hebrews 9:1, 2 (a)

Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made . . .

The Lord instructed Moses to establish a place of meeting between Him and the people, wherein a courtyard one hundred fifty feet long and seventy-five feet wide was to be cordoned off with white linen. I'm sure when Moses heard these dimensions, he thought, *Wait a minute. There are three million of us. We'll never fit in such a small place.*

But it's almost as if the Father was saying, "That will be sufficient because, at any given time, there won't be that many who will want to spend time with Me."

Hebrews 9:2 (b)

. . . the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary.

Beyond the courtyard was the sanctuary, or tabernacle. It looked just like the tents the people lived in as they wandered through the wilderness, and was covered with badger skins. Forty-five feet long, fifteen feet high, and fifteen feet wide, it was divided into two compartments. The first compartment was thirty feet long and was called the Holy Place. In this Holy Place stood the table of showbread to the right, upon which twelve loaves of bread sat. To the left, was the golden candlestick, comprised of seven oil lamps. Straight ahead was the altar of incense, wherein incense would be offered to the Lord. And behind the altar of incense hung a massive veil, held up by four golden columns that rested in silver sockets—a beautiful picture in itself, silver being the metal of redemption.

Hebrews 9:3–5

And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly.

Behind the veil was the ark of the covenant—a three-foot-by-two-foot box containing the Ten Commandments, Moses' rod, and a pot of manna. Covering the ark was a lid called the mercy seat. And above the mercy seat were two golden angels whose wings met and whose eyes looked down upon the mercy seat.

I draw your attention to verse 4, where mention is made of a golden censer, or altar of incense. According to Exodus, this altar of incense was in front of the veil. But here in verse 4, the author puts it behind the veil, in the same room as the ark of the covenant. Is the Bible contradicting itself?

No, I suggest that somehow the altar of incense was moved. Somewhere along the way, someone put the altar where it wasn't supposed to be. Yet

God still worked—which is a great relief to me because in my heart, at my house, in this church, things get messed up. Furniture gets out of place—but God can handle it.

So, too, I'm amazed at how God has worked through the Church. Some churches are led by men in pointy hats, scarlet robes, backward collars—and I wonder how God could work through guys dressed like that. Other churches have pastors who wear sweatshirts, Birkenstocks, and sit on stools. How could God work through them? Some churches have big programs. Other churches have none. It's amazing to me that all of us haven't so messed it up that no one can find the Lord. Yet somehow God breaks through and works through us all to draw people to Himself. Amazing!

Hebrews 9:6

Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God.

As he prepares for ministry, the young Levite goes into the courtyard and sees his dad offering sacrifices. Finally allowed to minister himself, he goes into the Holy Place, where every morning and evening he would trim the wicks, refill the oil in the lamps, and replace the incense on the altar of incense. Once a week, he would replace the twelve loaves upon the table of showbread.

Hebrews 9:7 (a)

But into the second went the high priest alone once every year . . .

Once a year on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, it would be the high priest's privilege to go alone into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat and catch a glimpse of the Shekinah glory of God.

In Jesus' day, here's what would transpire: The week before Yom Kippur, the high priest would never leave the temple ground, for every day of that week, he would rehearse what he would do on the Day of Atonement. When that day finally came, arrayed in his high priestly robes, he would sacrifice a bull on the brass altar in the courtyard as a dedicatory offering. That done, he would take off his high priestly garments and put on his linen

garments—long underwear, really, covered by a tunic and sash. Then he would sacrifice another bull as a sin offering for himself. At this point, two goats would be chosen by lot and a red scarlet cord would be tied around one, signifying it was the sacrificial goat. The other goat—the scapegoat—would be carried into the wilderness. Why two goats? Because our sins are not only forgiven—they are forgotten, carried away as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12).

The priest would then take the coals from the outside altar with two handfuls of incense into the Holy Place. And as he put them on the altar of incense, a cloud would fill the room. Returning to the brass altar, he would carry the blood that had drained from the bull back into the Holy Place, and this time he would go through the veil into the Holy of Holies, where he would sprinkle the blood seven times on the ground and seven times on the mercy seat. After that, he would sacrifice the sacrificial goat and take its blood back into the Holy of Holies, where he would sprinkle it again seven times on the ground and seven times on the mercy seat. Finally, after sacrificing the bull and going into the Holy of Holies, and after sacrificing the goat and going into the Holy of Holies, he would come back out and place his hand upon the living goat, saying, "Bear and be gone." In other words, "Bear the sin and take it away."

Then, at last, the priest would stand before the people. With both hands, he would pronounce, "Forgiven," and the people would begin to hoop and holler and celebrate because if the priest was not purified properly, if he went into the Holy Place presumptuously, his resulting death would signify that they weren't forgiven. So the people always waited to see if the high priest would make it out of the Holy of Holies. *Are we forgiven?* they wondered. *Did the sacrifices work? Is God pleased? Are we okay?*

Don't you see what happened concerning our High Priest? The whole world was watching—without even knowing for what they were watching. And our Great High Priest, wrapped in white linen, emerged from the Holy of Holies on Easter Sunday. The tomb was the Holy of Holies? Certainly, for when the disciples peeked in that morning, they saw a bench sprinkled with blood—His blood where His body had lain. And we are told by the Gospel writer that on either end of the bench sat an angel. Thus the picture of a blood-sprinkled mercy seat was complete. When Jesus emerged from the

tomb on the third day, it was a declaration of forgiveness—not just for a year, but for eternity.

Therefore, because of the Resurrection, we are confident that our sin—whatever it is, whatever it was, whatever it will be—is forgiven, forgotten, no longer an issue. The Resurrection is crucial because if Jesus had not come back from the dead, we would never know if the offering took. And we had no other Priest to send in.

"Show us the Father and it will suffice us," said Philip (see John 14:8). And he was right, for the *chabod,* the glory of God as seen in the Holy of Holies, is what the heart of every man craves.

Here's the question: Where are you in your walk with the Lord?

Maybe you're in the courtyard, saying, "I'm saved. The sacrifice was made for me. Praise the Lord, I'm forgiven!" Many of you are in that place, and that's terrific—but there's more. . . .

Move out of the courtyard and into the Holy Place, where you can serve—where you're trimming the lamps, that is, letting your light shine for others; where you're changing the showbread, that is, feeding others; where you're involved in offering incense, that is, praying for others. The outer courtyard is the place of salvation. The Holy Place is the place of service. Most of us in this room have realized and celebrated our salvation and are now engaged in service. But there's a deeper, better place. It's called the Holy of Holies—it's being in the presence of the Lord.

"Tell Mary to come and help me, Lord," cried Martha.

"Oh, Martha, Mary has chosen the better part—sitting in My presence," answered Jesus (see Luke 10:40–42).

"What a waste," complained Judas as Mary anointed Jesus' head with costly perfume. "That money could have been used to feed the poor."

"On the contrary," said Jesus. "What she has done will be spoken of throughout the world for all time" (see Matthew 26:13).

Gang, the highest, deepest, richest place to be is sitting in the presence of the Lord. I believe there may come a day when we as Christians finally understand that it's not what we're doing for Him in the Holy Place, but

being with Him in the Holy of Holies that matters. There is nothing that more closely approximates heaven than being in the presence of the Lord.

"But there's a problem," you might be saying. "When I go into the Holy of Holies, when I spend time in the presence of the Lord, my sin is ever before me. I see huge splotches on the garments I thought were fairly white."

You're in good company, for when did Isaiah cry, "Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips"? When he was in the presence of the Lord (see Isaiah 6). But the good news is this: An awareness of sin ushers in repentance. "Lord, I'm not what I thought I was, and I'm not who I want to be." You know, I never have those thoughts when I'm playing racquetball. So if I fill my life with enough activity, I never have to deal with the splotches. People immerse themselves in hobbies, recreation, or even ministry because if they stay busy enough, they can walk around feeling pretty clean.

It's only when I come with you and sit before the Lord or have a quiet time in the morning hour that I say, "I'm dirty." And conscious repentance results in unconscious holiness. For although we leave the Holy of Holies feeling as though we're not worthy, as though we're inadequate, as though we're inconsistent—others see in us a holiness of which we are not even aware.

When Moses descended from Mount Sinai after receiving the Ten Commandments, although he didn't realize it, his face glowed (Exodus 34:29). Likewise, there are young men, older women, middle age guys in this room tonight who will choose to go deeper in the Lord, saying, "I'm not going to be satisfied in the courtyard celebrating salvation. And I'm not even going to be satisfied trimming wicks, changing bread, and offering incense. I'm going to be one who goes into the Holy of Holies."

If you make that decision, God's greatness, grace, and glory will cause you to repent and say, "I'm nothing."

But people around you will say, "Man, you're glowing. Share with us. Help us."

Truly, a man who has been in the presence of God will, like Isaiah, say, "Woe is me." But he'll be used. He'll be blessed. He'll glow because conscious repentance leads to unconscious holiness.

Hebrews 9:7 (b)

. . . not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people.

The word translated "errors" literally means "ignorance." Thus, the blood only covered sins done in ignorance, or unintentionally. You see, the only sins forgiven in the old economy were sins in which one was caught up without knowing what he was doing. That is why, after taking Bathsheba and then killing her husband, David cried, "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering" (Psalm 51:16). In other words, "There's no sacrifice, no burnt offering I can give for my sin because my sin was intentional. I knew what I was doing."

But then, looking beyond the sacrificial system and prophetically to the Cross, David goes on to say, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart . . . thou wilt not despise" (Psalm 51:17). "Sacrifices won't work," he said, "not for *my* sins. But, Lord, You know I'm sorry. I'm broken within. So somehow, some way, someday You'll make a way that I will be forgiven."

Hebrews 9:8–10

The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.

The problem with the Old Testament priesthood was that it provided limited access and limited effectiveness. It was limited in access because only one man (the high priest) could enter into the presence of God only one day (the Day of Atonement) each year. It was limited in effectiveness because the high priest was himself a sinner.

Hebrews 9:11, 12

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

Once again, keep in mind this epistle was written to Hebrew Christians who were being drawn back to the sacrificial system. And here again, the author is saying, "Don't go back. Why would you want to return to rules and regulations when the work of salvation has been completed by Jesus Christ, the only perfect Lamb of God?"

When a Jewish person went to the temple to worship, he would bring a lamb to offer on the altar. After careful examination by the priest, if the lamb was found to be without spot or blemish, the worshiper could worship confidently. You see, the priest never inspected the person—only the lamb. Satan will try to whisper in your ear, "You're blemished. You've dropped the ball. You haven't been a woman of prayer. You haven't been a man of integrity. You can't worship. You can't talk to the Father. You can't be blessed."

But he's wrong. At the temple, the priests didn't inspect the worshiper. They inspected the lamb. The same is true of you and me. "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," declared John the Baptist—which is why three days before His crucifixion, Jesus Himself was scrutinized as the scribes and Pharisees, Sadducees, and Greeks questioned His theology, His morality, and His integrity (Matthew 22). Pilate's declaration that he found no fault in Jesus meant He passed even their inspection perfectly.

Therefore, we can come to the Father confidently and talk to Him freely based not upon our righteousness, but solely on the perfection of the Lamb.

Hebrews 9:13, 14

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal

Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

The reference to the ashes of a heifer is found in Numbers 19, wherein we read that when a person came into contact with a corpse, ashes of a heifer were to be sprinkled in water and poured over him to ceremonially cleanse his flesh in order that he could continue in tabernacle or temple worship. The author asks how much better is the blood of Christ—which doesn't only deal with the external, but with the internal as well.

Suppose, late to an appointment, I speed through Medford, Oregon, at 85 mph. Glancing in the rearview mirror, I see red lights flashing and realize I've been caught breaking the law.

"Sorry, Officer," I apologize to the policeman who pulls me over. "I didn't know I was going that fast."

Nonetheless, he writes me a five thousand dollar ticket. As he hands it to me, it drops in the gutter, but he picks it up, shakes it off, and says, "I'll see you in court."

When my trial date arrives, the judge looks at my ticket and says, "This is a citation for something, but I can't make out what it's for because it's covered with mud. Therefore, I guess you're free to go."

So I go my way—not because my offense was taken away, but because it was covered.

In a similar way, the blood of bulls and goats would cover sin—not remove it, but cover it.

Now suppose the ticket hadn't fallen in the mud. The judge would read the ticket and say, "Okay, Pastor Courson, you were going eighty-five through Medford. That will be five thousand dollars."

Then I would be in a heap of trouble because I certainly don't have five thousand dollars. But imagine just then my brother Jimmy walks in, whips out his hefty wallet, and pays my fine without even

denting his billfold. Then I would be free because the price of my offense was not just covered by mud, but truly paid.

The soul that sinneth shall surely die (Ezekiel 18:20). Although ashes of heifers and blood of goats and bulls could cover sin, they could not pay for it because payment required the death of a man. Jesus came on the scene and died for me. Yes, I've sinned. Indeed, I've blown it. But I'm free—not because of some technicality but because God Himself became a Man and died in my place.

So what does the Enemy do? Revelation 12:10 says he accuses us day and night. "You blew it. You didn't do that. You should've done this. You dropped the ball again." But when you really understand the idea of God becoming a Man and dying in your place, you don't go around with the baggage of a guilty conscience because when Satan reminds you of your shortcomings, your past failings, or your present weaknesses, you can say, "That's only half the story, Satan. I'm a worse sinner than you even know. But your reminding me of these things only makes me all the more amazed by what Jesus did on my behalf."

Hebrews 9:15–17

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.

Jesus is the Mediator, the Executor of the will. But He's also the Testator. In other words, He's got to die before the will kicks in. On earth, this would be a dilemma. . . .

Suppose eighty years from now, my mom goes to heaven and the family meets to read her will. "Look what I get," says Jimmy. "I get the electric grill!"

*"Wait a minute," I say, "*I *get the electric grill"—and an argument ensues. All the while, Mom is up in heaven. She knows what she meant. Jimmy's right. He did get something electric. But it's not the electric grill. It's the electric* bill. *Because she's in heaven, however, she can't do anything about it.*

In Jesus, such a problem doesn't exist. You see, Jesus being the Fulfillment of the Old Testament law, when He died, the new will, the New Covenant came into effect. And when He rose again, He became the Executor of the New Testament, who, by the Holy Spirit, lives in our hearts and tells us how it is to work out in our lives. Fabulous! He not only is the Testator who *gives* us the New Covenant—but He is the Mediator who *guides* us in the New Covenant.

Hebrews 9:18–22 (a)

Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood . . .

Referring to Exodus 24, when the Old Covenant came into effect, when the tabernacle was erected and the priesthood established, everything was sprinkled with blood Why? Read on.

Hebrews 9:22 (b)

. . . and without shedding of blood is no remission.

Someone once said to me, "That book in your hands is full of blood and war, sin, greed, and lust. And they call it *Holy* Bible?"

"Yes," I said. "It is full of sin and death. But it also tells the truth about the solution for all of those terrible situations. It's blood. Why blood?

Because how else could God so clearly illustrate to humanity the severity of sin? What else could He do? How else could He proclaim to our culture that sin is serious? You don't wink at it. You don't make jokes about it. You don't pay five bucks to see it on the screen."

Why is God so deadly serious about sin? It's not because He's prudish and can't handle violence or sex. It's because He knows what sin does. Sin kills. It kills happiness, joy, health, and life. It kills kids, families, societies, and cultures. That's why the only way there can be forgiveness is by the shedding of blood. There's no such thing as Forgiveness Lite. Forgiveness only comes through blood.

Hebrews 9:23

It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

The earthly tabernacle is a pattern of the heavenly tabernacle, so if the earthly tabernacle was purified with blood, then the heavenly tabernacle must be purified with a much better sacrifice than the blood of bulls and goats.

Hebrews 9:24

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

I believe personally that between the time Jesus died on the Cross and the time He rose again, He sprinkled His blood in the heavenlies. Why would heaven need purifying? For one, Satan's been there and still has access to heaven (Job 1:6). Not only that, but we're there—seated with Christ (Ephesians 2:6). Thus, the blood of Jesus Christ is necessary to purify and sanctify heaven.

Hebrews 9:25, 26

Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; for

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

There are those who teach that there's a continual sacrifice taking place, that the perpetual suffering of Christ goes on each time the mass is celebrated and the Eucharist served. No, the Scripture says clearly Christ offered His Body *once.*

Hebrews 9:27

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.

Man dies *once.*

After she had been dead one thousand years, Jesus declared the Queen of Sheba would rise up in judgment (Matthew 12:42). He didn't say, "The Queen of Sheba would rise up in judgment if she was still around—but now she's Elizabeth Taylor or Shirley MacLaine or someone else."

When Elijah and Moses appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus didn't say to Peter, James and John, "Meet Rajneesh. He used to be Moses." No, he was still Moses.

Take those who say the Bible doesn't teach against reincarnation to this passage—and wallop 'em!

Hebrews 9:28

So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

Jesus is not coming back to bear our sin. That was done once, and once is enough. No, He's not coming back bearing a Cross. He's coming back wearing a crown.

10 Hebrews 10:1–4

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very im age of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

You make your way to the tabernacle, bringing your little lamb with you. Watching the blood flow as it is offered as a sacrifice, you're reminded once again that you're still a sinner, still a sinner year after year after year. When Jesus came on the scene, however, what did He say? "Do this in remembrance of *Me*." In other words, He didn't say, "Remember your sin." He said, "Remember your Savior" (see Luke 22:19).

The same is still true today. I have a tendency to keep returning to my own little sacrificial system, asking myself, "How long did I pray today?" or, "How many chapters have I read this year?" But, due to our inability to keep our own rules, rituals, and regulations, our promises and pledges only continually remind us that we're failures. That is why Jesus said, "I don't want you to remember your sin by continual sacrifice. I want you to remember your salvation by continual celebration."

The price has been paid. The blood has been shed. The work is done. Jesus left us with Communion, not that we would say, "Oh, we're such sinners," but that we would say, "Oh, what a Savior!"

"But doesn't 1 Corinthians 11 say that if we eat or drink unworthily, we're eating to our damnation?" you ask.

Yes. But what is meant there is if you don't give worth to the work that was done, you're going to keep damning yourself. If, however, you say, "I remember again, Lord, that You paid the price completely"—then Communion becomes what it was meant to be: a celebration of the finished work of the Cross of Calvary.

Hebrews 10:5 (a)

Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not . . .

From my own study, I am convinced that verses 4–6 are a record of the conversation that very likely took place on Christmas Eve between the Father and Son.

Hebrews 10:5 (b), 6

. . . but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

Even as Adam became a living soul when life was breathed into him (Genesis 2:7), so, too, life entered the Last Adam, the Babe of Bethlehem. And He said to His Father, "You have prepared a body because You have no pleasure in sacrifices."

Hebrews 10:7, 8

Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law.

If the Father has no pleasure in sacrifices, why did He establish the system in the first place? Simply put, the bulls and rams, goats and lambs were a promissory note. . . .

The one-dollar bill in your pocket would be a worthless piece of paper if not for the government in Washington D.C. putting its weight behind it, guaranteeing its value. Suppose, however, you opened your great-grandmother's trunk and found stacks of thousand-dollar bills. Upon closer inspection, you see upon them the image of Jefferson Davis. Now, although an antique dealer might buy them from you, the bills wouldn't be worth nearly their

original value because the Confederate government no longer exists.

The same is true of the sacrificial system. At one time, it had some weight because it represented the blood of the coming sacrificial Lamb of God. But once the new government, the New Testament, the New Covenant took effect, the sacrifices of the Old Covenant became confederate money—as worthless as any sacrifice you're presently making to try to earn God's blessing or to get Him to listen to you.

God has pleasure in only one Sacrifice. And once you see this, once it really sinks into your heart, you are free because you are in a position to receive blessing from the Father based solely upon *His* provision.

Hebrews 10:9, 10

Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The first sacrificial system is gone—replaced by the New Covenant.

Hebrews 10:11

And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

If you feel like you're in a rut, doing the same things every day to try to impress God, you're under the old system. And like the priests of old, your work is never done.

Hebrews 10:12

But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.

Jesus isn't standing or pacing, running or fretting. He's totally at rest concerning you.

Hebrews 10:13, 14

From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

That's you. He has perfected you forever because the work of salvation is complete.

Hebrews 10:15–20 (a)

Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way . . .

Because the veil was rent, we can come into the Holy of Holies. In the Holy of Holies stood the ark of the covenant. And in the ark of the covenant are the Ten Commandments that we've broken, Aaron's rod that budded as a sign to a people who chafed under God's leadership, and a pot of manna given to a people who grumbled about God's provision. In other words, the ark held reminders of failure. But guess what. Covering the ark—hiding the broken commandments, the rod of rebellion, the manna of unthankfulness—was the mercy seat. No wonder Jesus said, "Go your way and learn of this that you might learn mercy" (see Matthew 9:13). The one course of education prescribed by Jesus is mercy because it is at the mercy seat that God meets us.

Hebrews 10:20 (b)

. . . which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.

We have a High Priest interceding for us not with words on His lips, but through the wounds of His flesh.

Hebrews 10:21, 22

And having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us draw near with a true heart—not a pure heart, or a clean heart, but a *true* heart, saying, "I know I'm a sinner. But I also know what Jesus did is sufficient." So I come boldly to Him, even if I haven't prayed in ten minutes, ten days, or ten years. Once I come with a *true* heart, the effectiveness of the sacrifice of Calvary takes effect.

Hebrews 10:23 (a)

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful . . .

Jesus is our faithful High Priest. To whom is He faithful? He is faithful to His Father (Hebrews 3:1, 2). Could we exhaust His patience? Possibly. Could the Father exhaust His patience? Impossible.

Hebrews 10:23 (b)

. . . that promised;).

Jesus is faithful to His Father to do what? To keep those who had been committed to Him (John 17:12).

Hebrews 10:24, 25

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Encourage one another as the day of the coming of the Lord draws near.

Hebrews 10:26–29 (a)

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God . . .

Like Hebrews 6, this next section has caused terror in the hearts of many. But in actuality, as we shall see, it's a wonderful warning.



***For topical study of Hebrews 10:26–31 entitled "A Wonderful Warning," turn to page* 1491.**

Hebrews 10:29 (b)

. . . and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an un holy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

The Spirit of grace refers to the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 12:10). "Doing despite to the Spirit of grace" means returning to the sacrificial system of offering bulls or goats or anything else to try to make things right with the Lord.

Hebrews 10:30, 31

For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The warning isn't that if you sin or struggle with sin, there's no hope for you. No, the sin of backsliding here in Hebrews 10 is not going back into sin, but rather turning your back on the Provision *for* sin. If I say, "Jesus didn't really pay the price sufficiently, so I've got to contribute my own effort," I mock the broken Body and fail to give worth to the shed blood. That's the warning here.

So what does this mean? It means I'm free. It means I know there's nothing else I can do or must do or should do. It's all been done, and I rest in that fact.

Hebrews 10:32–34

But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

Part of the reason the Hebrews were returning to the sacrificial system was because, in so doing, they were no longer alienated from the community. "Why go back to the old way?" Paul asks. "They've already called you Jesus freaks. You've already been beaten up. So why, after suffering so much, would you return to the system from which this punishment came? The best is still ahead. Keep your hope in heaven."

Hebrews 10:35–37

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

Don't worry about fitting in with the old gang. Keep going. Keep living for heaven.

A certain sheik in Saudi Arabia wanted to give his stockbroker a gift above and beyond her commission. "I can't take anything from you," she protested. But finally after much badgering and pressure, she relented, saying, "I'm kind of getting into golf. If you want to get me a couple clubs, that would be fine."

The sheik came back a few months later, saying, "I got you five golf clubs—but only four of them have pools and tennis courts. I hope that's okay."

That which the Lord has in store for you and me makes the gift of any sheik look like a golf tee in comparison. So be patient, gang. Eyes have not seen, nor ears heard the wonderful things He's preparing for those who love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Hebrews 10:38, 39

Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

"Perdition" means "waste"—a perfect word choice for the frustratingly pointless existence under the law of self-help and self-effort.

A WONDERFUL WARNING

A Topical Study of HEBREWS 10:26–31

A sign posted near a convent reads:

ABSOLUTELY NO TRESPASSING
VIOLATORS WILL BE PROSECUTED
TO THE FULL EXTENT OF THE LAW

—Sisters of Mercy

—and the passage before us hits many people the same way. I mean, here we've been reading of our faithful and merciful High Priest, Jesus Christ, who was touched with the same feelings with which we wrestle, and tempted by the same things that tempt us. We've been reading that we can come boldly unto His throne of grace and that the veil has been rent, giving us access to the very Holy of Holies of the goodness and grace of God. And then we come to chapter 10, where we read that if we sin willfully, there's no more sacrifice for sins; that if we sin, we trample under foot the Son of God; that it's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Thus, this passage seems, upon first reading, to be somewhat contradictory to the entire spirit of the rest of the epistle. But it's not.

You see, warnings can affect people two ways: They can either be intimidating or they can be inviting.

> Go to Makaha on the island of Hawaii, and you'll find a sign reading: WARNING: HEAVY SURF! Now, if you're a parent and you brought your little kids to the beach, this sign would be intimidating. But if you're a surfer and you brought your surfboard, this sign would be inviting.

Intimidation

Throughout church history, Satan has used the passage before us to intimidate the hearts of people like you and me. Indeed, Satan has and will use the Word for his purposes. . . .

> "Did God really say you can't eat of every tree of the garden?" he asked Eve, implying God's command was of questionable motive (see Genesis 3).
>
> "Jump off the temple," he taunted Jesus (see Matthew 4). "Isn't it written that God will take care of You?" he said, misquoting Psalm 91.

Truly, Satan has misused the Word to cause confusion and consternation in the lives of those who love the Lord.

But wait a minute. The Epistle to the Hebrews was written to Jewish believers who were being pulled back to temple worship and the sacrificial system. Therefore, the warning is this: If you return to the temple to offer sacrifices for your sins, you are missing the point totally because the price was paid completely when Jesus died in your place. There are no more sacrifices that can be, need be, or should be offered. The Way is open. The Work is complete. Going to confession, getting rebaptized, making a promise, or signing a pledge will not make you right with God.

None of these sacrifices will do any more than the sacrifice of bulls, rams, or goats. You can't add to what Jesus did on the Cross by promise keeping, confessing, working, or giving. Don't fall into that mind-set, for if you do, you tread on what the Lord has already done.

Thus, contrary to many well-intentioned sermons, the warning in Hebrews 10 is not so much in reference to backsliding as it is to back-turning —turning one's back on what Jesus did on our behalf. Certainly, this is what the writer intended, for every one of us fails. Every one of us is increasingly aware of our shortcomings the closer we get to the Lord. Every one of us joins Paul in saying, "I am the chief of sinners" (see 1 Timothy 1:15).

Jesus died not only for our sins—but for the sins of the whole world. How dare we, then, say that what He did on the Cross is insufficient or

inadequate? How dare we trample the body of Christ? If you want to see the anger of the Father, say that what Jesus did at Calvary is inadequate without your additional efforts.

The author is right. It *is* a terrible thing to fall into the nail-pierced hands of the living God if we fall into them with any sacrifice of our own, suggesting that His was not enough.

Invitation

We're surfers, gang. The warning of Hebrews 10 is not intimidating. It's inviting! It's great news!

"You mean Your warning, Father, is to not go back to self-efforts or religious activities to try to earn Your favor? You mean I'm free to just remember what *You've* done, and to *celebrate* my salvation? Wonderful!"

The warning here in chapter 10 does not cause me to be intimidated, folks. Rather, it invites me to keep my walk simple, and to *enjoy* my salvation. There is no more sacrifice for sins. Jesus has done it all. Surf 's up —so boldly enter in!



11 In writing his epistles, Paul's typical method at the outset was to address issues of doctrine and to follow with exhortations to duty. He would talk about position—who we are in Christ—before he would deal with practice—how we should live and behave. And such is the case in this epistle to the Hebrews. The first ten chapters have been concerned with doctrine, position, and what Christ has done for us. In the remaining three chapters, the author will make practical application. In fact, in each of the three remaining chapters, he will address one of the three great virtues . . .

- In chapter 11, we read about the walk of faith.
- In chapter 12, we are reminded of the wisdom of hope.
- In chapter 13, we see the way of love.

It's not that the author of this letter is suddenly saying, "Okay, now we're done with doctrine, so let's switch gears and talk about something practical." No it all flows together. Keep in mind the Epistle to the Hebrews was written to keep Jewish believers from being sucked back into religious traditions. That's why chapter 11 is so essential to the discussion of the first ten chapters. "I know it's tempting to go back to that which you can see with your eyes, smell with your nose, and touch with your hands. But don't do it,"

the author pleads, "for now you are called to something entirely different. You are called to walk by faith."

Hebrews 11:1
Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

The phrase "things not seen" is literally "things not *yet* seen." Faith is the substance of what you know is coming your way, even though it is not *yet* seen. Faith isn't wishful thinking. No, based upon the Word of God, faith says, "Whether I see it presently, understand it intellectually, or experience it immediately, I *know* what God says He'll do, He *will* do."

Hebrews 11:2
For by it the elders obtained a good report.

While faith may sound somewhat impractical, in reality, every single one of us exercises faith constantly.

Upon entering church on Sunday, you exercised great faith that the architect and the engineer knew what they were doing. If you didn't have faith, you'd be hiding under the pew. But even then, you'd be trusting the pew maker—that he knew how to design a pew to support not only your weight, but the weight of all of the people on it. That's faith, folks!

If you drive your car sixty-five miles per hour, you do so trusting the engineers who drew the plans and the workers on the assembly line are men of responsibility and integrity, that the system will work, that when you hit the brake, the car will stop.

It's an amazing thing, this world of faith in which we live. But the irony is that, although we have faith in the boys at Ford and in the maker of the pew; when it comes to God, we get a little iffy and a little shaky. This ought not be. Even though we don't know how it works or when it will come to pass,

we're to be those who, like the elders in our text, have faith that God's will shall be worked out ultimately—and that it will be good.

On the other hand, a lot of teachers in the "positive confession" or "hyper-Pentecostal" movement are in great error when they suggest that faith is a force you use to get your will done; that if you learn how to use the force by spoken word, by positive confession—like rubbing a genie's lamp—you can control your destiny. That is faith in faith—and it is foolishness.

Faith is in the Father. Faith says, "I trust You, Lord, in whatever You choose to do in this situation."

Hebrews 11:3 (a)

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God . . .

If you believe God spoke the worlds into existence, you lead the parade of those who obtain a good report.

Hebrews 11:3 (b)

. . . so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

The author of this epistle was two thousand years ahead of his time because we now know that everything that exists materially is made of atoms that cannot be seen.

"Not so," you argue, "because now we have electron microscopes and can see all kinds of things previously invisible."

Yes, but when you break down the atom, you enter into the area of energy —which is not material at all. So guess what. The further you get into science, the more you realize everything is made out of that which cannot be seen. Everything is made out of energy. Consequently, the man of faith was thousands of years ahead of the man of science.

Hebrews 11:4

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God

testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

Not only was Cain's sacrifice of vegetables unacceptable because rather than pointing to the Lamb of God, it spoke of his own effort—it was unacceptable because, unlike Abel, Cain did not offer his sacrifice by faith. This realization would stab the Jewish heart because the Jews took great pride in their ceremonies, traditions, and attempts at spirituality.

Hebrews 11:5 (a)

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him . . .

Those who believe the church will go through the Tribulation—the period of time when God pours out His wrath on a Christ-rejecting world—use Noah as their proof. "Although judgment fell with the rain," they say, "Noah and his family were protected in the ark—just as the church will be protected in the Tribulation."

Not so. Noah is a picture of the Jewish people going through the Tribulation, for truly, they will go through it (Revelation 7) and be saved in it. The church, on the other hand, is pictured by Enoch, who, a few verses before the story of Noah, was "translated"—or raptured—*before* the rain came down, *before* judgment took place.

Hebrews 11:5 (b)

. . . for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

"What must we do to do the works of God?" they asked Jesus.

"This is the work of God," He answered, "that you believe on Him whom the Father hath sent," answered Jesus (see John 6:29).

How do you please the Father?

You believe on the Son.

Hebrews 11:6

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Here are two keys to faith. The first is to believe that God is.

"Who do I say You are?" Moses asked God.
"I AM THAT I AM," God answered (see Exodus 3:14).

In other words, God said, "I am whatever you need." Are you lonely tonight? God is the friend who's closer than a brother. Are you confused about what to do? He is the door. Are you feeling like you're walking in a haze? He's the Good Shepherd. Faith hopes for the unseen because it believes God is.

Secondly, faith believes God is the One who will meet the needs deep within my heart. There are those who believe God is—but they don't really seek Him. Why must we diligently seek God? Why isn't it enough just to believe He is whatever we have need of? Because God knows if we diligently seek Him, the very things about which we seek Him will fade in importance as we realize it's Him we want all along.

I believe most of us have no problem with the first of these two keys to faith. We believe God is. But because we don't believe He rewards those who seek Him, we seek Him haphazardly or halfheartedly if at all.

I long for the day when retreat centers are full of people saying, "Lord, we seek Your blessing and Your direction, Your leading and Your provision because we understand You reward those who diligently seek You."

"I don't have time," you might be saying. Not true. We have time to golf, time to see the Blazers play, time to water ski, fix the plumbing, and go to the dentist. Every single one of us without exception has time. We do what we want and make time for what is of value to us.

Throughout history, the common denominator in the lives of those who have been blessed is that they have all been those who realize God enjoys

our company. And when we seek Him, we're rewarded—not because we're trying to earn brownie points—but just because hanging out with the Lord opens the door to fabulous blessing from Him.

Hebrews 11:7

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

Twenty years before his first child was born, Noah planned the construction of the ark with rooms for his sons and his sons' wives. In other words, by faith, he said, "My sons and their wives are going to be saved. And I'm providing a place for their salvation."

Every parent should have this verse underlined and by faith say, "With the hammer of intercession in one hand and the nail of instruction in the other, I believe You will use my meager labor, Lord, to save my family."

Hebrews 11:8

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

Abraham didn't know where he was going—he just started moving. Most of us in his position would say, "Father, I know You're calling me to leave Ur, and I'll be happy to go as soon as You give me a map of Mesopotamia."

But the Lord doesn't work that way in the arena of faith. "Start moving one step at a time," He says. "I'll direct you, but I will not give you directions for Step 2 until you first take Step 1. A step of faith is the prerequisite for a man or woman to be used by God. He's looking for those who will come to the Jordan and get their feet wet (Joshua 3:15). My tendency, however, is to say,

"Here I am, Lord. Right near the edge, just like You told me to be. Now, Lord, this ark is important cargo. You don't want to see it get

dropped into the river and carried downstream, do You? That's not practical. So in order to help You protect Your good Name, whenever you part the water, I'll be thrilled to go across. Here I am, Your man of faith, ready to serve You on the spot."

But without faith, it's impossible to please God. "Why?" you ask. "Why does God take me to the edge of the Jordan, tell me to put my foot in, and risk my looking like a fool or the ark floating down the river? I don't get it."

Guess what. You will—because faith is the lingua franca of eternity. God's not saying, "I'm going to put you to the test for the fun of it. Let's see if you step in or not." The Father has no joy in seeing His kids agonize at the edge of the Jordan. "If this causes you agony," He says, "it's because you yet need to become a man of faith. After all, it's who you are in the arena of faith that will affect how I will use you in the next billion years to come."

You see, gang, if you take eternity out of the equation, the whole life of faith seems like a bad joke. But once you understand that life on earth is to train and stretch, develop and mature you for heaven and the ages to come, you start looking at everything differently. "Okay, Father," you'll say, "this is a stretch for me. It's uncomfortable. It's not easy. But because You told me to be like Abraham, even if I don't know where I'm going, I trust You."

Hebrews 11:9, 10

By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Why did Abraham embark on such a venture, such a journey? Because he was looking for a city that had foundations, whose builder and maker was God—all the while knowing that what he was looking for would never be found anywhere on the face of this earth.

Why is this so important? Because when I moved from San Jose to Applegate, for example, if I had been looking for a city on earth to satisfy me, I would have been paralyzed by fear. I would have said, "What if I get there and discover Applegate's not it?" But since the longing of my heart was for a

city without foundations, I already knew Applegate wouldn't be it!

- "What if I go there, and it doesn't work out?" you ask.

  Don't worry—it's not going to work out!
- "What if I marry her, and she doesn't fully satisfy me?" you ask yourself.

  Don't worry—she won't!
- "What if I take that job and it's not what I hoped?" you speculate.

  Don't worry—it won't be!

You'll never be a man or woman of faith if you're looking for fulfillment here. No matter your ministry, your geographic location, your job, or who you marry—you'll not find it here. Like Abraham, don't look for a city that has foundations on earth. Look for eternity, and you'll experience heaven in your heart, and you'll be blessed in your soul wherever you are.

Had Abraham looked for a city on earth, he would have been stuck in Ur forever. But at some point, God by His grace allowed Abraham to understand that everything on earth is in preparation for heaven. If you don't see Abraham as a model of faith, you'll be perpetually paralyzed and completely frustrated. You must understand that God only leads you one step at a time. He doesn't tell you what lies around the bend. And even when you get around the bend, you must understand it's not going to be what you were hoping for because what you really crave is heaven.

In spiritual life, the Lord will take you as far as you want to go—and not one step further. If you choose to take one baby step and stop, God will still love you because His love for you is not based on anything you do or don't do. But if you choose to walk by faith from Ur of the Chaldees all the way to the land flowing with milk and honey, He'll be with you every step of the way.

People wonder why some folks are so spiritual, why others seem particularly blessed, why others are mightily used. It's not that God is playing favorites. It's just that those who seem to have a special relationship with God are simply those who chose to keep going. Whether it's in expression of praise, gifts of the Spirit, or aspects of ministry—however far

you want to go in spiritual life, God will never say to you, "You're going a little too far. You're getting a little too spiritual." Never.

Hebrews 11:11, 12

Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

When the Lord and two angels came to Abraham's tent and told him his wife would conceive, what did the wife of the father of faith do? She laughed (Genesis 18:12). This encourages me a whole bunch because Sarah's faith was not real strong. Yet Jesus taught that if we have just a tiny bit of faith—the size of a grain of mustard—mountains of barrenness could be removed and miracles could take place (Matthew 17:20).

Sarah's story encourages me greatly because sometimes I sense a promise from the Lord being written on my heart, or I read a promise in the Word and I kind of chuckle in disbelief. So did Sarah. Yet the Lord honored the seed of faith within her, and a child whose name means "laughter" was born to her (Genesis 21:5, 6).

Hebrews 11:13 (a)

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them . . .

Although Abraham never saw his offspring number more than the stars in the heavens, in Isaac he saw the beginning of the fulfillment of this promise.

Hebrews 11:13 (b)

. . . and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Abraham was one who was characterized by two objects: a tent and an altar. He was a wanderer and a worshiper, a pilgrim and a priest. So, too, as I look around this world, I feel like I fit in less and less. Like Abraham, we are strangers because it's strange around here. And, like him, we realize what we're looking for and craving is not to be found here.

Hebrews 11:14–16

For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

If Abraham had been thinking about the stuff he left behind in Ur, he might have gone back. But those things weren't what he looked for or lived for. He looked for, lived for, longed for a *better* country.

Hebrews 11:17

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son.

Since Abraham had two sons, why is Isaac referred to as his only begotten son? For the same reason God referred to Isaac as Abraham's only son in Genesis 22 as they climbed Mount Moriah: God didn't acknowledge Ishmael.

This is great news for us, gang, because every one of us has a bunch of Ishmaels—a bunch of reminders of our flesh—running around. But God doesn't even acknowledge them. Our sins and iniquities He remembers no more (Hebrews 8:12).

Hebrews 11:18, 19

Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

How many people had been resurrected from the dead in Abraham's day? Zero. Therefore, in saying to the servants who waited for him at the base of Mount Moriah, "You stay here while I and the lad go up to the mountain and worship, and *we* will return again unto thee," Abraham's faith was great, indeed (see Genesis 22:5).

Hebrews 11:20, 21

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.

As we see Isaac and Jacob bless their sons and grandchildren, please note three components of biblical blessing. . . .

First, we see tender affection. A blessing was pronounced while laying a hand upon the child's head.

> After investigating the lives of four hundred women who had given birth four or more times outside of marriage, a college professor discovered one common denominator among them. This common denominator was not income, education, race, or religion. The common denominator was that in their childhoods, each lacked being embraced properly and lovingly by a father or grandfather. How important it is, Dad, to consistently, tenderly, lovingly embrace your kids.

Second, we see present affirmation. Biblical blessings always contained fitting words of description. One child would be likened to a fruitful vine overflowing its walls. Another would be likened to a lion crouching in strength. And through these meaningful words, children gained access into how their parents saw them.

Finally, we see future direction. Kids still need this today. . . .

> *In Orthodox Jewish homes, you might hear the parents say, "Meet my son, Jacob, the lawyer," or, "Meet my daughter, Sarah, the*

doctor,"—regardless of the fact that Jacob's eight and Sarah only five.

We have the privilege of saying, "You know, son, it wouldn't surprise me if God uses you in days to come to teach the Bible." Or, "You have a spirit of adventure about you. It wouldn't surprise me if you end up being a missionary." I believe it is imperative for parents and grandparents to dispense blessing constantly. Yes, it takes faith—especially when there's not a whole lot to bless in your kids. But without faith, it's impossible to please God—so bless your kids in faith!

Hebrews 11:22

By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

Even though he himself died in Egypt, Joseph *knew* his people would make it back to the Promised Land. By faith, he *knew* good things would happen not only for his family but also for the entire nation.

Hebrews 11:23

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

I suggest it was through the eyes of faith that Jochebed and Amram said of their son, Moses, "This child is going to be special" (see Exodus 2:2). So, too, Mom and Dad, if you think your child will never amount to much, that he'll always struggle or that she's not quite up to par—that's simply a lack of faith because faith is the substance of things not *yet* seen. If you see your kid as a problem child, this will be understood within his soul, and it will greatly hinder what God can do in and through his life. Such was not the case with Amram and Jochebed. Knowing Moses was special, they went to great lengths to make sure his life was spared.

Hebrews 11:24 (a)

By faith Moses . . .

Not only was he the lawgiver, the deliverer, and the historian of the nation of Israel, Moses was also the meekest man on the face of the earth (Numbers 12:3). No wonder, then, that the Jewish people to whom this book is written esteemed Moses higher than the angels. In the following five verses, please note seven characteristics of this remarkable man of faith . . .

Hebrews 11:24 (b)

. . . when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

Moses chose humility.

In the original text, the article "the" is absent, rendering it, "he refused to be called son of Pharaoh's daughter." Why is this important? Because "Son of Pharaoh," a title like "Queen of England" or "Duke of York," carried with it the understanding that the bearer was next in line to the throne.

"I'm not interested," said Moses, "in the prestige or the power, the prominence or the prosperity."

Hebrews 11:25

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

Moses chose to suffer.

There *is* pleasure in sin for a season—but with every kick comes a kickback that causes great heartache and confusion. You can either give in to your flesh now and have a lifetime of pain—or you can say no to your flesh, say no to that guy, say no to that thing and experience a little pain now, but a lifetime of pleasure later. That's the choice.

Having been in the ministry over twenty years, I have never once heard anyone say, "I'm sure glad about the sins I committed in college," or, "I'm so grateful for my adulterous experience." I have, however, talked to literally hundreds who have said, "I wish I could go back and do it over. I wouldn't give in. I wouldn't succumb. I would choose differently."

Hebrews 11:26

Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.

Moses invested in things eternal.

Did you see the miracle that took place when the offering was taken at church on Sunday? Baskets were passed, and, contrary to human nature, people put money *in* rather than grabbing money *out*. "The tithe is mine," says the Lord (Malachi 3:8). And those who obey, like Moses, discover riches greater than the treasure of Egypt.

Hebrews 11:27 (a)

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king . . .

Moses walked out with the world's wrath.

Because Moses grew up in the palace, Pharaoh and his court were actually Moses' colleagues. The people with whom we are the most familiar are often the people before whom it is hardest to take a stand. Not so with Moses.

Hebrews 11:27 (b)

. . . for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

Moses developed spiritual eyesight.

"I don't believe in blind faith," the skeptic says. And I agree! Our faith is not blind, folks. On the contrary, we see *more* than the unbeliever sees, for, like Moses, we see the invisible.

Hebrews 11:28

Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

Moses kept Passover.

The Greek word translated "kept" denotes continual action. In other words, Moses "kept on keeping" Passover. Why? To keep the death angel away.

Because Christ is our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7), Paul would write, "For this cause many are sick and weak and dying, not giving worth to the Lord's table" (see 1 Corinthians 11:29, 30). Why does Applegate Christian Fellowship serve Communion every morning at 6:30 A.M.? And why do people come? For the same reason Moses kept on keeping Passover: To keep away the death angel who would creep into our families spiritually and into our hearts personally.

Hebrews 11:29

By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.

Moses kept the ordinance of baptism.

Not only did Moses keep the ordinance of Passover, but he kept the ordinance of baptism. You see, according to 1 Corinthians 10:2, the parting of the Red Sea was a picture of baptism. The same waters that parted for the Israelites buried the Egyptians. So, too, by entering the waters of baptism, we say, "Bury the Egypt in me, Lord. Drown out the old, the flesh, the world. I'm headed for a new land and a new way of living."

Hebrews 11:30

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.

To claim the Promised Land, God's strategy for His people was fairly simple: Drive a wedge through the middle, dividing the north from the south. There was only one problem, however. To do this, they had to take Jericho—a city that seemed absolutely impenetrable because of the thick double walls surrounding it. Certainly as the Israelites marched around the walls once a day for six days, the people in Jericho must have looked down on them and laughed. "*That's* their army?" they must have scoffed. "*That's* their strategy?" On the seventh day, however, the heretofore-impenetrable walls came down.

And the walls came down not brick by brick but by faith.

"There's a wall between my eighteen-year-old daughter and me," cries the brokenhearted mother. "We've gone to counseling. We've followed the workbooks. We've tried all the techniques. Yet, although a brick or two might get chipped away, within a month there are three more in their place."

"The walls between me and my son are keeping me out of the Promised Land of what I know a Christian family should be," says the weary father. "I tried to reason with him, but there's a wall between us."

Perhaps you are looking at a wall in your own family that seems impenetrable, a wall that appears as though it will never come down. The key isn't counseling, dialoguing, or role-playing. The key is faith.

"But I've been marching around, working on, going through this situation for a long time," you say.

Great—because the longer the wall has been up between you and your husband, you and your father, or you and your daughter—the more you know it can't be brought down by your own effort. Walls come down when God moves in. But until God moves in, you'll just chip away, and frustration will fill your heart. Have faith in *God,* for when you finally realize that human skill or ability is insufficient, when you finally say, "Lord, if anything's going to happen, it's going to be because of *You*"—that's when the wall will fall.

Oh, it might take a week or a month, a year or a decade. But by faith in God, the wall *will* come down. How? In a way you would never have guessed, planned, or predicted. The older I get, the less impressed I am with people's abilities to solve problems and the more amazed I am at God's faithfulness if we'll just believe Him. If you think that's a cop-out, join the jeerers of Jericho. But if you want to see a miracle, march with the Lord, and see what *He'll* do.

Hebrews 11:31

By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

Here, alongside the names of Moses and Joshua, we find a seemingly unlikely member of the Hall of Faith. But I find Rahab's inclusion particularly pertinent to the culture in which we live . . .



***For topical study of Hebrews 11:32–35 entitled "Rahab: Holy or Hypocrite?" turn to page* 1500.**

Hebrews 11:32–35 (a)

And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again . . .

The dead were raised. The fire was quenched. The lions' mouths were stopped. There was victory, power, and deliverance—all because of faith. But watch out because so-called "faith teachers" will quote this verse saying, "You too can see your dead raised, your sick healed, your bank accounts swell." The problem is, they conveniently don't finish the passage, for it goes on. . . .

Hebrews 11:35 (b)–38

. . . and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

In verses 33–35, faith gave people victory over their circumstances. But in verses 35–38, faith gave others victory *in* their circumstances. The latter were those who, because they saw the big picture of eternity, left a lasting impression on the world.

Hebrews 11:39
And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.

The promise referred to, of course, is the central promise of the Book of Hebrews, the promise of the New Covenant, the promise of salvation by faith.

Hebrews 11:40 (a)
God having provided some better thing for us . . .

"Oh, to have seen the lions' mouths stopped, the parting of the Red Sea, or fire falling from heaven," we say. But in reality, we have experienced something far greater than any of these miracles. The Lord lives in our hearts. He walks with us every moment of every day. He gives direction to us whenever we take time to stop and listen. Although we take all of these things for granted, any one of them would have astounded the Old Testament saints.

Hebrews 11:40 (b)
. . . that they without us should not be made perfect.

The heroes of faith who preceded us didn't experience the perfection or the maturity we enjoy in the New Covenant. How do you receive this New Covenant? By faith, saying, "Lord, I, too, am looking for a better country. And by faith, I'll see greater things than even these heroes and heroines did because, although they saw awesome events externally, I've experienced Your miraculous grace internally, the promise of Your kingdom ultimately, and the promise of Your presence eternally."

RAHAB: HOLY OR HYPOCRITE?

A Topical Study of HEBREWS 11:31

One of the best-known chapters in the entire Bible, Hebrews 11 is known as God's Hall of Faith. I find this Hall of Faith amazing—as much for who's not in it as who is. I mean, think who's missing: Elijah and Elisha, Jehoshaphat and Jeremiah. I would have thought they would have been shoo-ins! But, instead, we find Sarah and Samson, Jacob and Jephthah . . . and Rahab.

Interestingly, Rahab and Sarah—the only two women in the seventeen-member Hall of Faith—are both linked to Abraham. Sarah was his helpmate. But, according to James 2, Rahab was his soulmate, for she, like Abraham, had faith that showed itself not just theoretically, but practically.

As we look at Rahab, I want you to see her in two ways: both as a picture of the believer, and as a problem for the believer.

A Picture of the Believer

After wandering in the wilderness for forty years, the children of Israel were ready to claim the Promised Land. Their first obstacle was Jericho—a double-walled city that seemed impregnable. So Joshua sent spies into Jericho, who ended up lodging in the house of a harlot named Rahab. After hearing of the king's intent to capture them, Rahab hatched a plan to protect the spies. Why? "I know the Lord, Yahweh, hath given you the land," she said. "We have heard what you did to the two kings of the Amorites. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts did melt. For the Lord, your God, He is God in heaven, and He is God in earth" (see Joshua 2:9–11).

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word (Romans 10:17). Thus, even though Rahab neither saw the Red Sea part nor the Amorite kings get wiped out, she heard the Word and she believed. Way back in the Book of Exodus, after the Red Sea parted miraculously, Moses was so thrilled he wrote this song:

> *Who is like unto thee, O* LORD*, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them. Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation. The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them . . .*
>
> Exodus 15:11–16

And that's exactly what happened to Rahab. Not only did Rahab hear the Word *about* God, she believed *in* God, and risked her life to serve Him. That is why in the next scene, we see her hiding the spies among the flax on her roof. Perhaps the mention of flax rings a bell, for it is also used in the classic Proverbs 31 description of the virtuous woman. Now if *virtuous* women worked with flax, what was Rahab doing with it on her roof? I suggest that

after hearing about God, she who was previously a prostitute had given up her former occupation. She heard *about* God. She believed *in* God. And she was changed *by* God.

"We'll take care of you and your family," said the spies. "Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee."

"According unto your words, so be it," answered Rahab (see Joshua 2:18–21).

When at last Joshua led the people of Israel to march around Jericho and the walls came down, one part of the wall remained: the portion that held a scarlet thread—the scarlet thread of redemption, whereby Rahab's house was saved. Truly, Rahab is a beautiful example of the believer, for hers was a saving faith indeed—not only for her but also for her family.

But think with me about another aspect of Rahab—for while she's a picture of faith, she also poses a problem. . . .

A Problem for the Believer

Rahab presents a problem for the believer because instead of just trusting in the Lord by saying to the soldiers concerning the spies, "Kill me if you wish, but my lips are sealed," she said, "They're not here. They went that-a-way." In other words, she intentionally, purposefully told a whopper of a lie.

> En route to Seattle one weekend, I had an intriguing conversation with a well-known author. After interviewing a number of Christian leaders, he came to the conclusion that they're all hypocrites.
>
> *Oh no,* I thought. *Not the age-old hypocrite argument again.*
>
> "You know, it's interesting," I said. "Even though he's repented of wrong theology and foolish financial decisions, you'd call Jim Bakker a hypocrite—yet you'd never say that of Hugh Hefner. Why? Because Mr. Hefner doesn't have any standards to violate."

Gang, if anyone knows you're a believer, sooner or later they'll see you struggle in some area or fail at some point and call you a hypocrite. "Watch me," you need to say, "and you'll see me fail. I'm not what I should be, but I praise God I'm not what I used to be, and not what I would be if I had no standards whatsoever."

You see, the higher your standards, the more vulnerable you'll be to what the world calls hypocrisy. The problem is, the world's definition of hypocrisy is totally amiss. Who did Jesus identify as hypocrites? Not Rahab, who, in spite of her newfound belief in God lied openly. Not Jim Bakker, whose excesses caused heartache and tragedy. Jesus labeled only one group as hypocrites: Those determined to keep others from the kingdom (Matthew 23) fall into that category. Rahab does not.

What did God do with Rahab? "Let the critic, the cynic, the skeptic point out her failings, shortcomings, and flaws," He would say. "But she is one of only seventeen I have chosen to be in My Hall of Faith."

That's the kind of God we serve. The world finds flaws. Our God finds faith. I know this because when He became a Man in Jesus Christ, He found another loose woman, called her *gune*—a term of respect—and said, "Go call your husband."

"I don't have a husband," she answered.

He didn't call her a liar. He said, "Thou hast spoken well. You don't have a husband. You've had five. And the one you're living with now is not your husband" (see John 4:16–18).

Only Jesus has the ability to extract the precious from the vile (Jeremiah 15:19). The world does just the opposite. The world sniffs out the vile in the precious. The world is quick to point to the failures, shortcomings and inconsistencies in the lives of believers. Why? Because the world is determined to keep people out of the kingdom of God.

Thus, by Jesus' definition, it is the world rather than the believer that is hypocritical. Please remember this, gang, the next time the label of hypocrite is bandied about. It is not the breaking of one's standards that defines one as a hypocrite but rather the breaking of God's heart by those whose goal is to keep people from Him.

May we learn the lesson of Rahab. And may we all celebrate the grace and mercy of the One who looks past our flaws to find our faith.



12 In chapter 11, looking at the men and women who tapped into the blessing of God by believing God is who He claims to be and that He does what He says He will do, we saw the walk of faith. Here in chapter 12, we'll see the wisdom of hope. And in chapter 13, we'll see the way of love. . . .

Hebrews 12:1 (a)

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses . . .

We are in a race, folks, observed and cheered on by a cloud of witnesses. Who are these spectators? They are the ones spoken of in chapter 11, the heroes of faith. . . .

Shortly before He was to die outside Jerusalem on a hill called Calvary, Elijah and Moses appeared with Jesus on Mount Hermon (Matthew 17). They had come, if you would, to cheer Him on.

So, too, it is my firm conviction that right now, you and I are being cheered on by those in heaven. Furthermore, I believe the clouds spoken of in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, in which we will be caught up during the Rapture, are not of the cumulus or nimbus variety. Rather, they're clouds of those who have gone before us. Therefore, next time you feel you're being "wailed on," think of Jonah. He's up there cheering you on. Next time you feel like you're in a fiery trial, look for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in the stands. Next time you feel like you're up against a giant of a problem, remember David, the giant-slayer, and take heart.

Hebrews 12:1 (b)
. . . let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us . . .

"Weight" is not necessarily sin—it's just stuff.

A woman dreamed the Rapture was taking place. But much to her consternation, while everyone else was zooming up, it was a struggle for her to get even twenty feet off the ground. Looking down, she saw the problem. Around her ankle was a rope, the end of which was tied to all her furniture. When she awoke, she realized the Lord was telling her she was tied down by all her possessions.

Hebrews 12:1 (c)
. . . and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

The race before us is not a sprint. It's a marathon. We're in it for the long haul, gang.

Hebrews 12:2 (a)
Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith . . .

For an example of One who ran the race with patience, look to Jesus.

Hebrews 12:2 (b)

. . . who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The course Jesus ran wasn't easy, but He knew on the other side of the finish line, joy awaited Him. I believe the Father gave His Son a sneak preview of this joy even as He hung on the Cross. You see, when one of the two thieves who hung on either side of Jesus said, "Remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (see Luke 23:42) it was as if the Father gave His Son a taste of the joy that would be His when an entire world would have the opportunity to follow the thief 's example.

Hebrews 12:3

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

Consider Jesus, who endured the opposition of sinners. He was drenched in their spittle, pelted with their curses, beaten with their fists, and crowned with their thorns.

Hebrews 12:4

Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

We sweat at times because of things we go through. But we have never sweat like Jesus did, for in the Garden of Gethsemane, knowing the Cross awaiting Him and the challenge before Him, Jesus prayed with such intensity that the capillaries in His forehead burst, causing blood to flow down His face. Had He so chosen, He could have backed out at this point. Instead, He prayed, "Not My will, but Thine be done." Therefore, because He wrestled with His own ability to choose, perhaps the pain of Gethsemane was, in some ways, even greater than the pain of the Cross.

Hebrews 12:5–9

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the

Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

Quoting Proverbs 3:11, 12, the author seems to change metaphors from running a race to disciplining children. But in reality, the best coaches are like dads. Yes, they get in the faces of their athletes from time to time—but it's because they want them to succeed, to excel, and to finish the race set before them.

"Wait a minute," you protest. "If the first eleven chapters of Hebrews are true, how can it be that here in chapter 12, all of a sudden we're talking about a Father who scourges His son? If it is true that He doesn't remember our sins and iniquities (8:12), and if it is true that we are completely sanctified through our High Priest, Jesus Christ (10:10), then how can God punish us for sin He doesn't remember or doesn't see?"

I submit two points for your consideration in this very important matter of the chastening hand of God. . . .

First, God's chastening is never punitive. It's corrective.

People would often travel great distances to worship in the temple. Upon their arrival, a priest would most likely meet them at the door, saying, "I'm sorry, but that ox you're bringing as a sacrifice has a problem—a little splotch under his left ear. But this is your lucky day. We just happen to have on hand preapproved oxen you can buy." Or worshipers would bring money to place in the offering, only to hear the priest say, "I'm sorry, but that money is not temple currency. You're in luck, however, because one of our moneychangers will be happy to take your money and give you temple currency—for a price, of course." Thus, the priests were becoming millionaires by ripping off people who had come to worship the Father.

In John 2, Jesus went into the temple, and finding pollution and corruption within, with scourge in hand, He overthrew tables, chased out livestock, and drove out moneychangers. So, too, we being the temple of the Holy Ghost (1 Corinthians 6:19), Jesus has every right and reason to come into our lives and throw out anything and everything that would hinder ours or anyone else's access to Him. His goal isn't punitive. It's corrective. His goal is to get rid of the stinky cattle, bleating sheep, and rip-off moneychangers who pollute our temples.

Second, God's chastening is never confrontational. It's consequential.

If you're a Christian, God does not confront you in a disciplinary manner for the sins that you have done or ever will do. Your sin is forgiven—past, present, and future. However, in Numbers 32:23, we read: "Be sure your sin will find you out." Notice it's not God finding us out—it's our sin. God is not sniffing around, searching for our failings and shortcomings so that He can have reason to punish us. No, the sin itself will track us down and deal with us in every single instance.

"Be not deceived," Paul says, "whatever a man sows, that will he reap" (see Galatians 6:7).

How many sins have repercussions?

Every single one.

How do I know? Check out Jeremiah 2. . . .

When the people of Israel were getting involved with all kinds of sin, God said, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee. . . ." (Jeremiah 2:19).

Did you catch that? *Thine own* wickedness shall correct thee. *Thy* backslidings shall reprove thee. It's not God, gang. It's the consequences of our own sin that bring their own tragic repercussions.

After slaying his brother, it seemed as though Cain got away with murder. After all, God even marked him for his own protection. Nonetheless, Cain was a fugitive all the days of his life, shunned and ostracized by the community that had once embraced him, because sin brings about its own repercussions.

Fearing for his own life, Abraham told Pharaoh his wife, Sarah, was his sister. Pharaoh in turn added Sarah to his harem. When

Pharaoh released Sarah untouched, adding all kinds of servants, livestock, and possessions to pay for his error—it seemed as though Abraham got away with his lie. But among the servants given him by Pharaoh was a woman named Hagar, who would eventually bear the son who would shatter Abraham's family.

Although David was forgiven his sin of murdering Uriah following his adultery with Bathsheba, blood and tragedy flowed in David's family from that point on.

Sin stinks. God forgives it and doesn't even remember it. But the sin itself searches us out and has terrible repercussions.

After a game of hoops at the YMCA, you stop off for some drinks with the guys. On your way home, you plow into a wall. Your sin of drunkenness is forgiven and forgotten. But that doesn't change the fact that you're crippled for the rest of your life.

Truly, the work of forgiveness is finished. But the sin itself will be the scourging.

"Give me my inheritance," said the foolish son to his good father before heading to a far country where he spent freely on wine and women. He thought he was getting away with it—until the money ran out and he found himself living in a pigpen (Luke 15). The father didn't put him in the pigpen. The father didn't send the police after him. The father just let it play out, knowing his son's own sin would correct him.

As believers, every sin we commit is forgiven. But even as believers, every sin we commit brings repercussion. Ask David or Moses, Abraham or Cain. So what do we do with the scars from our sin? The same thing Jesus did. After He was scarred in the process of absorbing our sin, He said to Thomas, "You who are cynical and skeptical, touch My wounds." And, in seeing the scars sin caused in Jesus, Thomas was rescued from his own sin and unbelief (see John 20:27, 28).

You may have blown a marriage. You may have lost your health. You may have bottomed out financially. Who knows what it might be that has scarred you permanently. I wish I could tell you your scar will go way. It won't. But if you say, "Lord, I give these scars that were brought on because of my sin to You to use," He will.

Hebrews 12:10 (a)

For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure . . .

The idea here is that our earthly fathers corrected us lest we be an embarrassment to them.

Hebrews 12:10 (b)

. . . but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

Everything God does in correcting us is not because we are an embarrassment to Him, but because He wants the best for us. And the best for us is that we drink deeply of His holiness, His wholeness.

Hebrews 12:11

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

No child says, "Oh, boy, I'm being disciplined!" No, it's grievous. Nevertheless, the fruit, the result of discipline is sweet indeed.

Hebrews 12:12, 13

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

This is great! The exhortation here is, "You've been disciplined. You've been injured and sidelined by your sin. But you've been healed by your Father. Now wipe away your tears and get back into the race, where you'll be able to run better than before."

Hebrews 12:14

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

The word "follow," which can also be translated "pursue," gives further insight into the race we run. All athletes pursue something—be it health, wealth, or fame. Ours is a far more glorious prize, for ours is a pursuit of peace.

Hebrews 12:15

Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

A more proper rendering of this text would be: "Looking diligently lest any man fail *because* of the grace of God." Follow the flow here, gang, because it's intriguing. We're in a race, surrounded by witnesses cheering us on. We're to keep our eyes on Jesus, who is our example of how to run. We're to lay aside the stuff that slows us down. We're to realize the Father so loves us and wants us to win that, when necessary, He will discipline us. And we are to be careful of bitterness. Why? Because after we've been disciplined, we're vulnerable to bitterness toward those who enjoy God's grace.

"How come he's getting away with that? Why is she being blessed? They haven't been to church in three years, while I haven't missed a service in ten! How come I'm getting busted and they're not?" In this way, if we're not careful, the grace of God in the lives of others can actually produce the root of bitterness within us. Jesus knew this would happen. . . .

In need of laborers, the owner of the vineyard went to the town square early in the morning and hired some workers. Still needing more help, he returned at noon to hire more. At three o'clock in the afternoon he did the same thing, and again at five o'clock. At the end of the day, he paid the last hired a full day's wage. If those guys got that much*" thought the men hired first,* just think what we'll get! *But when they were paid the same full day's wage, they became bitter.*

"Didn't we agree on this?" asked the owner.

"Well, yeah," said the disgruntled laborers. "But what about those guys? They only worked one hour."

"Why are you upset because someone else was the recipient of grace and mercy?" asked the owner (see Matthew 20).

Truly, the tendency for us, like the prodigal son's older brother of another parable, is to murmur and complain when grace and mercy are lavished on those whom we deem undeserving. And it ought not be—for the root of bitterness is far more deadly than it appears. . . .

Hebrews 12:16

Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

Following the flow, Esau is cited as the biblical example of the fruit of the root of bitterness. Why did Esau sell his birthright—that which would have given him leadership spiritually and a double portion financially? Could it be because Esau was bitter over the fact that before he was born, God had said, "The elder, Esau, shall serve the younger, Jacob" (see Genesis 25:23)?

"It's not fair," Esau must have thought. And as a result, he sold his birthright for a bowl of beans. Consequently, Esau became a fornicator—a profane man.

"The first shall be last, and the last first," Jesus would say centuries later (see Matthew 19:30). Therefore, could it be that Esau had the potential to be

even greater than Jacob in the eternal economy if he had accepted his role and embraced his lot? Perhaps. But he became bitter.

And that's just what happens today. People say, "Why should I live godly if those guys are getting blessed anyway? Why not just live a life of compromise?" And like Esau, their lives become a mess because of bitterness.

Hebrews 12:17

For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

This intrigues me, for this man who was initially a party animal, who initially tossed away his birthright without a second thought, later wept over the lack of his father's blessing. Truly, whether a man is spiritual or carnal, whether he is perceptive of the things of God or whether he walks away from God, every single son and daughter craves the blessing of their father.

Now think with me: Just as blessing could not be given because Esau was not interested in the birthright, so, too, we cannot despise our birthright if we expect to receive the blessing of our heavenly Father. "I want that blessing," people say as they read of the righteous never begging for bread (Psalm 37:25), of the Lord delivering those that fear Him (Psalm 34:7), or of the Lord upholding those who fall (Psalm 37:24).

But if they despise the birthright, if they don't see the need to be born again, the blessings will not be bestowed. The Book of Hebrews was written for those who desperately desired blessing but were unable to receive it because they wanted to earn it through rules and religion instead of relationship.

Hebrews 12:18–21

For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which

was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

The law is awesome. Like the mount from which it was given, it quakes and shakes and is laden with power and possibility. But no one can keep it. And therein lies the problem, for all the blessings connected to it are impossible to touch or to receive.

Hebrews 12:22–24 (a)

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant . . .

Like Esau, you can try to gain the blessings of God with tears, by futilely trying to keep the law given on Mount Sinai—or you can go to Mount Zion, the heavenly mountain, the city of the Living God, and enter in to the New Covenant.

Hebrews 12:24 (b)

. . . and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

When Cain killed Abel, God said, "Abel's blood cries out to me" (see Genesis 4:10). What did Abel's blood cry? Justice. Judgment. Revenge. Jesus' blood also cries out—not justice, but mercy; not judgment, but forgiveness; not revenge, but grace. Thus, the blood of Jesus Christ, the New Covenant, makes the birthright *and* the blessing available to me.

Hebrews 12:25–27

See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we

escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

"In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord," wrote Isaiah (6:1). Under the reign of Uzziah—one of the greatest kings in the history of Judah—wealth flowed throughout the Jewish empire, and the borders of the nation were not only protected but expanded. So powerful was he, it was said that his name was on the lips of everyone from Babylon in the north to Egypt in the south. But when did Isaiah see the Lord? In the year Uzziah *died.*

So, too, in each of our lives there are Uzziahs: good things, wonderful things—but things in which we trust and upon which we depend instead of trusting in and depending upon God. And because He loves us and wants the best for us, our Father says, "As good as Uzziah might be, he's not Me. As secure as you might feel because of his weaponry, it's not nearly as secure as you would be if you were looking to and leaning on Me."

Because we are so prone to put our trust in things that are not trustworthy, God shakes our world as surely as He shook Mount Sinai in order to knock away anything we are trusting in and living for. Gang, He loves you enough to say, "If year after year I let you trust in that, lean on him, or live for her, you will be a spiritual midget. I don't want that for you. You don't want that either. So, I've got to shake it to remove it, that you might again lean on Me, look to Me, and walk with Me—for then you'll be blessed, strengthened, and ready for eternity."

Hebrews 12:28 (a)

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved . . .

I like this! Even though it takes some shaking to get us there, we eventually receive a kingdom that is stable and solid.

Hebrews 12:28 (b)

. . . let us have grace . . .

The author of this letter addressed to Jewish believers who had a tendency to lean on their traditions, their priests, and their sacrifices never misses an opportunity to draw their attention back to the finished work of the Cross, to the New Covenant, to *grace.*

Hebrews 12:28 (c), 29
. . . whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.

Serve Him with reverence and godly fear, for our God is indeed a consuming fire who will consume anything which distracts you from your relationship and dependency upon Him. If you are at a place where you're experiencing the fire of God, fear not, for if allowed to burn, the warmth and brightness of His love will, indeed, burn away all that is unfruitful and distracting in your walk with Him.

13 In chapter 11, we saw the walk of faith and in chapter 12, the wisdom of hope. Here in chapter 13, we'll see the way of love. Notice seven characteristics of this most important virtue. . . .

Hebrews 13:1
Let brotherly love continue.

Love flows among the saints.

The implication linguistically is that this love is not something you have to work at, pump up, or rally around. It's already there.

A man gave the following account. . . .

I was walking across the Golden Gate Bridge when I saw a man about to jump off. I tried to dissuade him from committing suicide and told him simply that God loved him. I noticed a tear came to his eye. "Are you a Christian?" I asked.

"Yes," he said.

"Me too! What a small world. Protestant or Catholic?"

"Protestant."

"Me too! What denomination?"

"Baptist."

"Me too!" I said. "Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?"

"Northern Baptist."

"Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?"

"Northern Conservative Baptist."

"Amazing!" I said, "Call Ripley. This is incredible! Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist or Northern Conservative Reformed Baptist?"

"Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist."

"Remarkable! Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes Region or Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Eastern Region?"

"Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes Region."

"This is a miracle!" I said. "Are you Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1879 or are you Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?"

"Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912."

"Die, you heretic," I said—and pushed him over the rail.

Rather than dividing the body of Christ with labels and factions, we are to let brotherly love flow to the person sitting next to us, to our Baptist brothers, to our Episcopalian sisters, to the entire scope of Christianity.

Hebrews 13:2

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Love shows itself to strangers.

When the angels approached Abraham as he sat in front of his tent, he realized there was something supernatural about them (Genesis 18:2). There are those who take this verse to mean they should pick up every hitchhiker they see in the event he might be an angel. But such is probably not the case. As I read the Word, I am aware that when angels do appear, there's a sense within the hearts of those showing hospitality that they are entertaining someone unique.

Hebrews 13:3

Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

Love cares about suffering.

Love not only flows among the saints and shows itself to strangers but also cares about those in bonds, and those hurting physically.

Hebrews 13:4 (a)

Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled. . . .

Love clings to one's spouse.

Perhaps to counter the teaching of the Essenes, who abstained from marriage, as well as that of the gnostics, who discredited it, the author defends the divine design of marriage.

Hebrews 13:4 (b)

. . . but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

The Book of Proverbs makes it plain that if you give yourself outside of marriage, you will experience a destruction of your soul due to the fact that when two people come together physically, it is not only the melding of two bodies, but of two souls (Proverbs 6:32).

Hebrews 13:5, 6

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

Love brings satisfaction.

We can practice the admonition of verse 5 to be content because of the promise in verse 6 that Jesus will never leave us. You see, the degree to which I realize the Lord is with me, the degree to which I enjoy His fellowship intimately is the degree to which I will be content continually.

When you're newly married—living on beans and decorating with bookshelves made of bricks and boards—you have very little materially. But you don't even notice it because you're in love, and love brings true contentment and satisfaction. So, too, if I'm in love with the Lord, I will not covet. I will be content with whatever I have simply because He is with me.

Hebrews 13:7

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.

Love is seen in submission.

"How can I get my kids to respect the authority I have been given over them?" The answer is to base your words with your kids upon Scripture. Tell them not only what to do, but *why*—based upon the stories of the Old Testament, the parables of Jesus, the teachings of Paul. If I only tell my kids what to do and never why, they will ultimately rebel against what they will perceive as legalism. But if what I'm saying is based upon and illustrated by the Word, submission is not nearly the problem it would be otherwise.

It's amazing what God will bring to your memory as you're talking with your kids during devotions or over dinner. After all, didn't Jesus promise the Holy Spirit would bring all things to our remembrance? (John 14:26) Nothing, however, can be brought to your remembrance that was never stored in your memory. Read the Word, dear Mom and Dad—and teach it to your kids.

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

Love's source is Jesus.

The fact that love flows among the saints and shows itself to strangers; that it cares about suffering and cleaves to one's spouse; that it brings satisfaction and is seen in submission is all based upon the singular presupposition that Jesus is the source and that He'll never change.

Hebrews 13:9 (a)

Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.

On the Cross, Jesus didn't say, "To be continued." He said, "It is *finished*." Sacrifices, self-effort, works of the flesh, or anything else that diminishes this is a strange doctrine.

Hebrews 13:9 (b)

For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

The author enjoins his readers to stay away from doctrines based upon rules and rituals, meats and sacrifices and, instead, keep their walk with the Lord based on grace. "But we miss the texture and tradition of the temple," some might have protested. "How can we truly worship without incense or an altar?" Read on.

Hebrews 13:10, 11

We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp.

"Oh, but we do have an altar," maintains the author. "It's just outside the camp" . . .

Hebrews 13:12

Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

Leviticus 14, 16, and Exodus 29 are three Old Testament passages that speak of sacrifices on the Day of Atonement for the cleansing of leprosy and for the consecration of the priesthood that were offered outside the city.

So, too, Jesus left the temple, left the city, left all the traditions and regulations, all of the priestly robes and fragrant incense, all of the rituals with which people are enamored to be taken "without the gate" to a hill called Calvary.

Hebrews 13:13

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

"Get out of the camp," admonishes the author. "Leave the city. Leave religion. Leave traditionalism. Leave rules, rituals, incense, and candles. Leave it all." Contrary to the present fascination with icons and old pictures of Jesus and the disciples, the call of the entire New Testament is to walk by faith and *not* by sight.

Hebrews 13:14

For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

Like Abraham who searched for a city whose Builder and Maker is God, we don't have a city here. Thus, we have no reason not to follow Jesus outside the city, outside the restrictions of religion all the way to Calvary.

Hebrews 13:15

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

"I don't feel like praising the Lord," some say, "because the traffic bugs me," or, "because the dishes are getting to me." Gang, those are the *best*

times to praise Him—for then it's a sacrifice of praise as you worship the Lord in spite of your own fleshly inclinations.

I talked to a young man at church who said, "I don't know what's wrong. For several days I haven't felt close to the Lord."

"That's nothing," I said. "I've gone months *feeling distant from Him."*

"You have?" he asked incredulously.

"Yep."

"Doesn't that freak you out?"

"It used to," I answered—"until I understood that the Scriptures have much to say about ministering in season and out of season."

You see, in my Christian walk, I find myself going through seasons. There's springtime—when, with new understandings and fresh growth, I sense the Lord's presence in my heart. Springtime leads to summertime—those warm, wonderful days when the new growth bears fruit from which people glean. Summertime leads to fall—when the winds blow and shake the leaves off my tree. Fall leads to winter—when the fall winds give way to a cold, wintry, silence. I used to freak out in wintertime. Then I learned that if I am going to be a man who walks by faith and not by sight, I must not constantly monitor my feelings because feelings are fickle. The Lord allows you and me to go through regular seasons of wintertime, asking us, "Are you going to walk by the state of your emotions—or by the promises of My Word?"

This has allowed me the privilege of being a minister of the gospel regardless of any tragedy or heartache in my own life. Truly, if I hadn't learned the lessons of the winter season, I wouldn't be where I am right now. But the good news is this: Winter doesn't last forever. It gives way to spring.

During worship, some are elated, caught up in an overwhelming sense of the Lord's presence. And that's good. Others say, "I'm here. But I don't feel anything. However, I'm still going to lift my hands and my voice in a sacrifice of praise to the One who has done so much for me in the past, to the

One whose touch I know I will feel again in the future." And that, in some ways, is even better.

Hebrews 13:16

But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Not only is the expression of our love to the Lord sometimes a sacrifice, but the communication of encouragement can be a sacrifice as well. Have you ever witnessed the miracle of one of your kids thanking another of your kids? Doesn't it just blow your mind? Truly, few things are more delightful. So, too, don't forget to write that note of thanks to your sister in the Lord or to speak that word of encouragement to your brother in the Lord, because thereby our heavenly Father is well pleased.

Hebrews 13:17–19

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

There are leaders and mentors, pastors and teachers watching over us. And each must give an account before the Lord concerning their ministry to us.

Hebrews 13:20, 21

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The blood of Jesus has the ability to make us complete and whole. Truly, there is *power* in the blood.



For topical study of Hebrews 13:20, 21, see "There Is Power in the Blood" below.

Hebrews 13:22

And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words.

The fact that the author calls his thirteen-chapter letter only "a few words" long makes him a man after my own heart!

Hebrews 13:23–25

Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you. Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you. Grace be with you all. Amen.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit," Jesus said, "for theirs is the kingdom" (Matthew 5:3). Who are the poor in spirit? People like you and me who realize that blessing can't be based on our devotion or diligence, sincerity, or spirituality due to the fact that we have none. It's *gotta* be grace because we're sinners. Our motives are mixed. Our flesh gets in the way. The kingdom belongs to the poor in spirit because they don't try to earn it. They just marvel at God's goodness in opening the Way.

So it is that I echo the author of this wonderful epistle and say, Grace be with you *all!*

Amen.

THERE IS POWER IN THE BLOOD

A Topical Study of HEBREWS 13:20, 21

Driving Santa Cruz's Highway 9 on my way home from a men's retreat, my mind was flooded with memories of numerous family camping trips to Big Basin—a beautiful state park situated in the midst of the Santa Cruz mountains in California. As my thoughts traveled back to those family vacations, I pictured all six of us climbing into our VW Bug—with luggage and our German Shepherd, Sam, in tow. And I could hear my mom praying, as she did before every trip, asking the Lord to bless our time together, pleading the blood to cover our car as we drove.

Sadly, the phrase "pleading the blood" is out of fashion in our day. And we are the poorer for it. But in the text before us, we see the power of the blood that can make us "perfect in every good work."

The phrase translated "make you perfect" is *katartizo,* a Greek word used in reference to the setting of a broken bone, to the mending of a fishing net, to the readying of a ship for a journey, and to the equipping of an army for battle.

Thus, it is through the blood that the broken bones of our bodies, our relationships, and our fellowship are set right. It is through the blood that the holes are mended in the nets of our vocation and finances. It is through the blood that we journey on toward heaven. It is through the blood that we battle against the Enemy. Physically, relationally, vocationally, spiritually, and eternally we are made perfect not by studying, counseling, or seminars. We're made perfect by one thing only: the blood of the everlasting covenant.

The blood has been supplied. The question is, is it being applied? "Sure, I'd like my family to do well, my home to be blessed," you say. "But how does it happen?"

The Blood Supplied

Leviticus 14 presents wonderful instruction concerning the blood as seen in the law of the leper. You see, throughout the Bible, leprosy served as an illustration of sin. Like sin, leprosy manifested itself insignificantly at first—just a little spot under the skin. But it went on to spread so insidiously that the afflicted one would be cast out of the community. According to Leviticus 14, anyone healed of leprosy was to be brought before a priest outside the camp. If the priest found him healed, indeed, the former leper was instructed to bring two sparrows, cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop. One of the birds was then killed in an earthen vessel. The other bird, along with the cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop, was dipped in the blood of the slain bird. Finally, the blood was also sprinkled seven times on the healed leper.

The picture of redemption is absolutely perfect. Like the leper of Leviticus 14, we come to our great High Priest, Jesus Christ and follow Him "outside the camp." Like the leper, the sacrifice our Savior made on our behalf consisted of the cedar wood of the Cross, the offering of His own Life, the scarlet of His blood, and the hyssop upon which He was offered drink (John 19:29). The earthenware vessel wherein the sparrow was killed speaks of humanity, while the released bird soaring to heaven speaks of deity. The blood sprinkled seven times speaks as much of completion as it does of the seven places from whence Jesus bled. . . .

- from His forehead in the Garden of Gethsemane,
- from His back due to the flagellum,
- from His brow due to the crown of thorns,
- from His face as His beard was plucked,
- from His hands nailed to the Cross,
- from His feet nailed to the Cross,
- from His side due to the soldier's spear.

Seven times Jesus' blood flowed, providing complete forgiveness for my sin, complete healing of my leprosy, and complete victory over the Enemy. . .

.

In Revelation 12, we see a battle waged in heaven between the archangel Michael and the dragon, or Satan. Michael wins. The dragon is eventually cast out of Heaven. How? By the blood of the Lamb and the word of testimony which says,

> *And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.*
>
> Revelation 12:10

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven," Jesus prayed (Matthew 6:10). How do we overcome the dragon, our accuser, the devil? The same way it's done in heaven: Through the blood of the Lamb.

The way to overcome the Enemy in your children, your marriage, and your home, as seen in Revelation 12, Leviticus 14, and here in Hebrews 13, is not by counseling, not by attending workshops, and not by establishing support groups. The Enemy is overcome by the blood—for nothing else is powerful enough.

You see, in the Garden of Eden, in giving Adam dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:26), God, in effect, handed Adam the title deed to the planet. Adam, in turn, transferred ownership to Satan when he knowingly bought into Satan's lie. That's why Jesus calls Satan the prince of this world (John 12:31). That's why there are wars, famine, and heartache. That's why there is murder, disease, and death. These things are not God's fault. They are the consequence of man's rebellion.

But God had a plan. "I'm going to buy back the world by sending My Son, the sparrow, the Lamb, to die and pay the price for the sin of Adam and all humanity," He said. So He did. Pinned to the Cross, Jesus' blood was shed as payment for our sin. Truly, the world has been purchased back by the blood of the Son on Calvary. Therefore, Satan's days are numbered, and He will be dealt with in due season. Presently, however, he's exercising squatter's rights in this world—and possibly in your home.

Suppose while I'm at church, someone moves into my house. Finding this guy sitting in my living room, I dejectedly head to the market, get a shopping cart, and start walking the streets.

"What are you doing, Jon?" you would ask me.

"I'm homeless," I would say. "I went to church, and somebody moved into my house. I'm defeated. I'm discouraged."

"Let me get this straight," you'd say. "Someone moved into the house you bought—and you just let him have it?"

"Yeah," I would answer. "I don't know what else to do."

"Do you have a title deed to the house?" you'd ask.

"Yes."

"Well, go get the authorities. Show them the title deed, and move back into your house. It's yours."

The same thing happens spiritually. Satan has no authority, no right, no hold on you. All he can do is claim squatter's rights and say, "This depression will never lift. This addiction will never leave. Your daughter's going to blow it. Your son's going to rebel. Divorce is inevitable." And what do we do? We get our shopping carts and wander the streets in despair.

Satan the squatter takes up residence by falsely accusing us in three areas. Of our past sin, he accuses us day and night, saying, "You've fallen in this area so many times. You'll never make it." But the way we overcome past sin is by the blood.

"Wait a minute, Satan," we must say, "I may have failed a billion times, but the blood of the Lamb is absolutely inexhaustible. You might accuse me night and day, but the blood of Jesus Christ covers me completely, for where sin abounds grace abounds even more (Romans 5:20).

Concerning our present struggles, Satan cannot grasp, grip, or dominate any area to which the blood has been applied. I can choose to give in if I wish; I can succumb if I want. But in reality, the Enemy has no authority whatsoever because of the cleansing power of the blood.

Regarding future salvation, I think of Noah, who, in construction of the ark, provided a place of salvation for his sons and their wives twenty years before his sons were even born. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved—and thy house," declared Paul (Acts 16:31). Am I suggesting

salvation is inherited? No, everyone must make his own decision. But, like Noah, I can provide a place in which Satan will not be able to seduce my son or my daughter into walking away from the Lord if I apply the blood to my house.

How?

I suggest three ways. . . .

The Blood Applied

First, the blood is to be applied to our homes corporately.

After being held in bondage for four hundred years, the children of Israel prayed to the Lord and He raised up a deliverer named Moses.

"Thus saith the Lord," he announced. "Let My people go."

But reluctant to do so, Pharaoh subjected the nation of Egypt to a series of plagues—the last of which was the death of every firstborn son whose house was not marked with blood.

How were the houses to be marked? Each household was to kill a lamb, dip the brushlike hyssop plant into the blood and mark the top, sides, and threshold of the door—thereby forming a picture of a cross. Houses so marked were "passed over" by the death angel (Exodus 12:22, 23).

Why was the blood applied to the doorway? Because in that culture, the doorway was the most prominent part of the home. Entrances and exits were always made through the front door. Thus, the picture of a Cross was ever before them.

So, too, all who enter and leave our homes should be cognizant of a redemptive environment within—a place where the death angel is noticeably absent from the conversation and decor, from what we watch on TV and listen to on the radio.

Second, the blood is to be applied to our bodies individually.

In Leviticus 14:10–18, we see the remaining sequence of the law of the leper. That is, on the eighth day, a trespass offering was made in which some of the blood of the lamb slain was applied to the tip of the right ear, right thumb, and right big toe of the one who had been healed of leprosy. In other words, the blood was applied to the man's hearing, to his activity, and to his direction. Oil was then applied to those same three places.

"I want power to hear properly, to work effectively, to walk uprightly," we say. Oil being symbolic of the Spirit, the power of the Spirit can flow only where the blood has first been applied. Thus, there are those who long

for the empowering of the Spirit without realizing that they first need the cleansing of the blood.

The blood has been supplied. The question is, will I apply it?

Will I go into my son Benjamin's room as he's sleeping, kneel beside his bed, lay my hand upon him, and plead the blood over him? It's powerful. It's potent. And you can do it, Dad and Mom. Teenager, you can kneel by your bed, lift your hands to heaven, and say, "Lord, thank You that the blood cleanses me from past failings, that it thwarts the attack of the Enemy, and that it secures my salvation."

Finally, the blood is applied in Communion practically.

"This is My blood shed for you," Jesus said. "Do this in remembrance of Me" (see Luke 22:19). Every morning in the sanctuary at Applegate Christian Fellowship, people can come, bow the knee, and plead the blood over themselves and their families at the Lord's table. It's available. It's supplied. But will it be applied? That's the only question.

Plead the blood, precious people—and as you do, realize pleading the blood of the Lamb is not a magical incantation. It's not "Open Sesame," or "Abracadabra." It's not a phrase or a mantra. It's understanding that the victory has already been won, that the price has been paid, that the work of the Cross is complete.

Put your shopping cart away, saint, and reclaim your house.

In Jesus' Name.



JAMES

Background to James

The author of the book before us is not James the brother of John, but James, the son of Joseph and Mary; James, the half brother of Jesus. Growing up in the same household with Him, no doubt Jesus' brothers had a hard time getting a handle on Him. This much we know from the Gospel account: Jesus' brothers didn't believe on Him until after His Resurrection—an event that was, even for them, irrefutable and undeniable. In fact, James was so convinced that his Brother was the Son of God that he went on to become a leader in the early church—as evidenced by the account in Acts 15, wherein we see him leading the council in Jerusalem.

As seen in their writings, the Jerusalem believers—James, Peter, and, to a lesser degree, John—tended to behave a bit more strictly than did Paul, Barnabas, and the Antioch believers who were primarily students and scholars of grace. Both groups were—and still are—very definitely needed in the body. It's sort of like a trampoline—pressure from both sides is needed if the trampoline is to stay taut. So, too, with discipline and grace—both are essential.

As we read, we'll see James make reference to the Old Testament forty-five times in this relatively short book, for not only was he related to the Living Word, but he was a man greatly given to the written Word.

JAMES

1

James 1:1 (a)
James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ . . .

James certainly doesn't begin his epistle the way I would have. If I were James, I'm afraid I would have identified myself not as James, a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, but as James the *brother* of the Lord Jesus Christ! James, however, was a man who, although he was very straightforward, as we shall see, was also known as a man of tremendous humility. He doesn't pull rank; he doesn't drop names; he simply considers himself a servant.

James 1:1 (b)
. . . to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

"The twelve tribes" is a reference to the Jewish people scattered throughout the world, who had come to a knowledge of the true Messiah and had become believers in Jesus.

James 1:2
My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.

Newer translations render this verse "Count it all joy when ye fall into various *trials*." Why? Because the Greek word for both "trial" and "temptation" is the same. You see, what God will send or allow as a trial to strengthen our faith, Satan will seek to exploit to get us to sin. Conversely, what Satan throws our way as a temptation, God allows to be a trial. Satan wants to use the event to tear us down and wipe us out; God wants to use the same event to show us how faithful He is and how real He can be.

Think of it this way: If Jerry, a master woodworker, invited me to sit in a chair he had made, I wouldn't do so wondering if it would hold me up, but rather I'd marvel at how well it was crafted. If, on the other hand, a prankster invited me to sit in a chair, I would be

leery, knowing it would probably either be pulled out from under me, or collapse underneath me. So, too, the chair that Satan seeks to pull out from under us is the very one God uses to show just how strong He can be.

In the Book of Job, we see Satan trying to wipe Job out by afflicting him physically, causing him to lose his family, and ruining him financially. But God was proving something else. God was showing how faithful He would be. As a result, all of history would marvel in studying how, in the midst of what Satan meant for evil, God used it for good as He sustained Job all the way through and rewarded him ultimately.

When a trial comes your way, Satan will be there the same day to try to get you to do what Mrs. Job suggested her husband do—to curse God and die (Job 2:9). But God will be there as well, waiting to show you His strength in seeing you through.

James 1:3, 4

Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

Like the Jewish believers who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, we're to count it joy when we go through trials and face temptations. Why? Because seeing God's faithfulness manifested in the situation, we'll be made entire and complete; we'll become mature. Maturity only comes through testing. Faith is made pure only when fiery trials burn away the dross.

James 1:5–8

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

If you lack wisdom, ask God in faith, and He will give it to you.



***For topical study of James 1:5–7 entitled "How to Know What to Do," turn to page* 1520.**

James 1:9–11

Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

The Jewish Christians to whom James is writing would be well aware of an enemy that posed a threat to the people of God throughout their history. Led by giants like Goliath, the Philistines hassled the Jews continually. In our day, we don't fear Philistines, but it seems that finances bring us into as many trials and testing points. I don't know of a man or a woman who either at some point or regularly doesn't deal with a financial trial, wondering how to make ends meet. Whether individually, or as a church family corporately, finances have proven to be the Philistine that stomps and threatens us continually.

Knowing this, James reminds us that regardless of our financial situation on earth, we're exalted, elevated above the world system because we're part of a kingdom whose streets are paved with gold. Thus, whether we're worried about poverty or weighed down with riches, we can be absolutely free if we keep a heavenly perspective.

James 1:12

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Trials result not only in spiritual maturity but also in crowns eternally. Granted, you may not think crowns are a big deal now—but I guarantee you will in heaven, for your crown will determine whether you'll rule over ten cities, five cities, or no cities in heaven (Luke 19:11–27).

When you face trials and temptations, if you stay close to the Lord, you will hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant," (see Matthew 25:21) and you will receive the crown of life specifically reserved for those who don't walk away from Him in trials or temptations.

James 1:13

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.

Regarding the entire arena of trials and temptations, understand this: God will allow a trial; Satan will come with a temptation. The trial may be financial; the temptation may be cocaine to escape the pressure. It's not God who brings the cocaine your way. It's not God who tempts you with pornography. No, God simply allows the trial to come. It's Satan who brings the temptation.

Never, ever be mistaken on this point. The trial of our faith is to prove the faithfulness of God. It is never a temptation or an enticement to sin. Therefore, if you're half-drunk in a bar, the guy offering you free drugs is not God's way of saying, "I'm going to prove how faithful I am by sending this guy your way." No! That's a temptation you brought on yourself by placing yourself in that situation in the first place.

James 1:14, 15

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

Sin always brings forth death. Every time. Sin will kill relationships. It will destroy happiness. It will ruin health. When you want to tell kids how serious sin is and what sin does, the best thing you can do is take them to the Cross of Calvary and say, "Look at this wonderful, perfect, loving Person

and see Him on the Cross in agony and pain and blood. It was when Jesus became sin for us that He died, for sin *always* brings death."

James 1:16

Do not err, my beloved brethren.

"Don't make a mistake about this," James says. Sin always results in death and tragedy. Paul would put it this way: Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap (see Galatians 6:7).

James 1:17 (a)

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights . . .

The good gifts, the perfect things, and the cool stuff that come your way are solely because of God's grace and kindness and benevolence. You might be a gifted musician, an intelligent person, a hard worker. Those are gifts from God, by grace, that have nothing to do with your earning them. Therefore, there's no room for us to take credit for anything we are able to perform or achieve. Everything that is wonderful in your life is because of God's grace to you.

James 1:17 (b), 18

. . . with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Not only is God good in the gifts He gives, but in who He is. In Him there is no variableness or shadow of turning. That is, He's not moody. He doesn't have bad days. He's not generous with me one day, but grouchy the next—as I can so often be.

We're variable. We go up and down. God doesn't. He can be nothing but good. He doesn't react to me according to how I'm doing with Him. He is faithful when I am faithless (2 Timothy 2:13). He is good when I am grumpy. He doesn't change. He's locked into His nature.

That's why I love the Lord so much. He's solid as a Rock. And I can just enjoy Him without worrying about Him being ticked with me or tired of me. He gives nothing but good gifts, for He is a good God.

James 1:19

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

In talking to the believers dispersed throughout the Roman Empire, undergoing unbelievable persecution, James says, "Don't forget that God is good. And what's happening in you is going to work for good ultimately. Therefore, don't be cynical; don't be quick to complain about your situation. Instead, stop speaking and start listening—and you'll hear God's voice in your trial."

James 1:20

For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

I hope you have this verse underlined—at least mentally—for being ticked-off and hot under the collar doesn't accomplish anything that proves to be right. Ever.

James 1:21 (a)

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness . . .

Referring to the Word of God, "Let every man be swift to hear," James instructed us in verse nineteen.

"But I can't hear God's Word to me," we say.

Perhaps you can't hear the Word of God for you because your ears are clogged up with "filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness"—plain old sin. If I'm filling my ears with the music and the scenes, gossip, and junk of the world, I can't hear properly. I need to get rid of that stuff before I can really be tuned in to God's frequency.

James 1:21 (b)

. . . and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

Perhaps I can't hear the Word of the Lord because my mind is made up. James tells us we are to receive the Word with meekness, the implication being, "Lord, I'm in this trial or temptation or difficulty, and I need direction from You. I need Your Word to direct me, or I'm not going to do well. Therefore, I come to You not with my own agenda or plan, but meekly. Whatever You say, that's what I'll do."

Many people don't hear from the Lord when they read the Word of God because they lack a spirit of meekness before Him.

James 1:22–25

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

Third, perhaps we can't hear from the Lord because we are mixed up. You see, so many times our tendency is to think that just because we're reading the Word, we're obeying it—at least that's the way it is with me. A lot of times I'll hear a sermon or read a book and I'll say, "Right on. I agree with that." But I deceive myself if, having seen what needs to be taken care of in the mirror of the Word, I then don't do it. One of the great dangers for us who love the Word is to falsely assume that simply agreeing that we should pray means we're praying; or knowing we should worship makes us worshipers.

James clearly warns us not to think that seeing our reflection properly means we're doers of the Word automatically. If the Lord shows you in the Word that you need to praise Him, don't say, "Good point"—but start

praising Him right then! If the Lord shows you in the Word that you need to get right with a brother, don't say, "Someday"—do it right then. Be a *doer* of the Word.

With ears clogged up, mind made up, or all mixed up, we won't hear from the Lord. But reading the Word with meekness and then obeying it is the best hearing aid there is.

James 1:26

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

There's a teaching currently making the rounds that says, "Be honest with God. Tell Him what you really feel. Tell Him you're ticked off." I shudder at such teaching. Oh, it might be popular psychologically, but it's not right biblically. A truly religious man, a deep man, does not pop off and throw temper tantrums at God. God is God, and we're not. God is good, and we're not. If there are problems in our lives, He's not wrong. We are.

James 1:27

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

This verse is Applegate Christian Fellowship's mission statement for its ministry to handicapped orphans in Mexico. I pray it is a practical mission statement for our own lives as well—for James cuts to the bottom line here when he says that rather than being a matter of compromise and verbosity, true religion is a matter of purity and humility.

HOW TO KNOW WHAT TO DO

A Topical Study of JAMES 1:5–7

His father, who had been deeply loved and mightily used would be sorely missed. One of the greatest men in all of history, his father was a man who, in addition to being able to leap over walls physically, was so gifted musically that he not only composed songs, but he invented the instruments to play them. So courageous of heart was he that when he was but a teenager, he conquered a giant in battle, making him so popular that women sang songs about him in the streets. This one's father, of course, was David.

And now that David had passed from the scene, Solomon would step up and try to fill his father's shoes—a seemingly impossible task. After learning of his father's death, Scripture tells us that Solomon headed for Gibeon, for in Gibeon was a tabernacle, a place to meet God. That night, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream, saying, "Whatever you ask of Me, I'll do for you" (see 2 Chronicles 1:7).

"Lord," said Solomon, "I ask of You wisdom. I need to know how to go out and come in amongst these, Your people."

By God's grace, this young man, who had tremendous responsibility suddenly placed upon him and very difficult obligations looming before him, was given the wisdom to ask for wisdom.

So pleased was God with Solomon's request that He said, "I will not only grant you wisdom greater than any other man—but I will give to you more wealth and fame than any other person has ever enjoyed, victory over your enemies, and length of days" (see 2 Chronicles 1:11, 12). In other words, by asking for wisdom, Solomon got everything else thrown in.

Personified as a woman, wisdom says this:

> *I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me. Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver. I lead in the way of righteousness, in*

the midst of the paths of judgment: That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.

Proverbs 8:17–21

Wisdom cries out to simple men—dumb, unsophisticated, naive, common people like you and me, saying, "If you walk with me, I will cause you to have riches and success in all that you do" (see Proverbs 8:5).

How do we get wisdom? The text before us says if any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men generously. What does it mean to ask of Him?

In Solomon's day, in Old Testament times, if someone needed wisdom, for example concerning who to marry, where to move, what job to take, he would go to Jerusalem where he would find the high priest. As part of his vesture, the high priest wore a pouchlike breastplate upon which were twelve gems, each representing one of the tribes of Israel. It seems that these gems were instrumental in the dispensing of wisdom. You see, according to Exodus 28:30, if one had need of wisdom or direction personally, or if the people had need corporately, the high priest would consult the Urim and the Thummim. Although we can't say dogmatically what the Urim and the Thummim were, we do know what the words mean: "urim" means "light"; "thummim" means "perfection"—perfect light to give direction.

How did they work?

It would seem as though the stones on the breastplate of the high priest that were linked to the Urim and the Thummim would light up in such a way that, using the letter of the tribe each represented, an answer would be spelled out. The problem was that, with only the high priest having the Urim and the Thummim, anyone having a question would have to travel all the way to Jerusalem and make an appointment with him to get an answer. Getting wisdom was not an easy thing to do!

There's an infinitely better way for you and me to get light and perfection, for Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world" (John 8:12); and Paul said in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3). Thus, Jesus fulfills the Urim and Thummim perfectly. We go to the One who is Light personified, who is Wisdom incarnate, and say, "Lord, what should I do in this situation?"

How does He answer? I suggest three ways. . . .

Through His People

It was God's people—the twelve tribes of Israel—who symbolically flashed the message on the breastplate of the high priest. So, too, Scripture says God's people are jewels in His crown (Zechariah 9:16). You may not feel like a gem; you may not think the person sitting next to you is of very much value—but on the heart of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, we are just that.

> *Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellers there is safety.*
>
> Proverbs 11:14

Where there is no counsel, people fall—or literally, stumble—in the dark. But as I talk with my brothers, as I share with God's people, the light shines through them in the counsel they give to me.

Through His Word

> *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.*
>
> Psalm 119:105, 130

I can't tell you how many times when, wondering what I should do or which way I should go, I'll hear someone share from the Word on the radio, and it speaks directly to my situation. Or I'll open the Scriptures, a commentary, or a devotional book and find the Word of God giving perfect light to me.

Upon Our Hearts

> *But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the* LORD*, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.*
>
> Jeremiah 31:33

Paul picks up this same idea when he says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart" (Colossians 3:15). The word translated "rule" is an interesting one. A term linked to sports, it was used with regard to officiating or umpiring. In other words, the peace of Christ will call "Safe!" or "Out!" in your heart, giving you light and direction.

I find that these three avenues work together very harmoniously: Through God's people there is safety. In God's Word there is light. Upon my heart, He'll write His will. So I can know whether I should make that move or take that job by simply asking the Lord, knowing He'll make His will known to me through His people, in the Word, or upon my heart if I ask in faith.

What does it mean to ask in faith?

> *The integrity of the upright shall guide them . . .*
>
> Proverbs 11:3

The Hebrew word translated "integrity" is *tummah*—from the same word as *thummim.* In other words, direction and integrity are linked together. What does the word "integrity" mean? It means "integrated" or "single." Thus, the single-minded man of integrity says, "Father, I'm not asking for wisdom out of curiosity. I'm committed to doing what You tell me."

Anyone who's not sure if he's really going to follow through is double-minded and should not expect to receive direction from the Lord. But to the man who asks in integrity, the man who is single in purpose and heart, God will give wisdom generously.

"But what if I misinterpret His will on my heart, through His people, or in the Word?" you ask.

I believe the answer lies in Genesis 20—where we see the first mention of integrity in the Bible.

> Eager to become acquainted with the newest acquisition to his harem, Abimelech looked forward to meeting Sarah—until God appeared to him in a dream, saying, "The woman you've taken is another man's wife."
>
> "In the integrity of my heart I have done this," Abimelech answered.
>
> "Yea, I know thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart, for I also withheld thee from sinning against Me. Therefore I allowed thee not to touch her," the Lord replied.

What's being said here is wonderful, for God is saying, "Abimelech, you made a mistake. But your heart was right, so I protected you in the decision you made."

This means that when I ask God to give me wisdom, He gives me direction through His people, in His Word, and upon my heart. But even if I don't hear correctly and make a wrong decision, if my heart is right, the Lord will protect me and correct me just as He did Abimelech.

So many people never move out because of the paralysis of analysis. That is, they're always analyzing a situation to determine what they should do. The Genesis 20 account frees us from this, for if our hearts are right, we can move ahead, knowing that He will protect us even if we're moving in the wrong direction.

Dear saint, as you pray today, I encourage you to do what you know, and you'll know what to do. You know that you should be in fellowship Sunday morning, studying the Word with your brothers and sisters. I don't know what I'm to do tomorrow. I don't know what's ahead for me next month or next year. I simply know what I'm supposed to do today. So I do what I know today, and when tomorrow comes, I'll know what to do then. You will too.

If you lack wisdom, ask of God. And if you do that in faith, you'll be doing what you know. Then through His people, through His Word, and through His will upon your heart, you'll know what to do as you walk in the Light of the Perfect One, Jesus Christ.

2 James 2:1–4

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

If you knew that in ten minutes you would have a half-hour meeting with Donald Trump, would you comb your hair, brush your teeth, think about what you would say? What if you knew that in ten minutes you would meet with a homeless man? Would you expend the same kind of energy?

This is what James is getting at. We're all vulnerable; we're all guilty of treating people differently, depending on how we view them outwardly. But almost without exception, the irony is that the people we try to impress the most are those who care about us the least—while the people who really would be open to receiving from us are those for whom we think we don't have time.

On the high-school campus, so often the goal is to see the quarterback or the head cheerleader saved. The real key, however, is to go for the kid who sits in the back of the cafeteria all alone, for he's the one who is most often the one ready to listen. The same holds true where you work. We tend to get all excited about the people we highly esteem financially or professionally, economically or intellectually. But it's the poor people who will be most responsive to the gospel and most welcoming of us. Because we so often waste our time trying to impress people who are impressed with themselves, we need to change our perspective.

That is what James is championing. "Why is it," he asks, "that when someone comes into your congregation who is dressed in fine clothes, who has a name, or who is esteemed highly, you give him the best seat in the house?" Oh, how we need to be aware of our own fleshly tendencies.

James 2:5–9

Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

It would seem as though whenever certain wealthy people who weren't part of the body made a guest appearance at church, they were ushered to the front and given the best seats. James, however, was not impressed.

James 2:10, 11

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

James goes on to say it's not only how we view others externally, but how we think about ourselves internally that matters. "Don't you realize," he asks, "that because the law is a single unit, if you say you've never committed adultery, yet you've murdered someone, you're guilty of adultery, too?"

It's like the space shuttle. The space shuttle is designed to go up into the heavenlies. But if any one part of it is not functioning properly or is flawed in any way, it won't lift off. So, too, you may not have killed anyone or committed adultery. But if you've lied, your shuttle is grounded.

James 2:12, 13

So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

Luke 6:38 is a verse often used in relation to the giving of tithes and offerings. But from the context, we know that when Jesus said, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye measure it shall be measured to you again," He was speaking not of money but of mercy.

In other words, if you are merciful to others, if you are forgiving toward others, if you are kind and compassionate with others, then when you need mercy and grace and kindness—and you will—it will be given to you. But if you have been harsh and judgmental, if you have been faultfinding and sin-sniffing, when you need mercy from others, there will be none for you.

James 2:14–26

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Arguing that faith without works is dead, the Book of James so incensed Martin Luther that the reformer called it "a veritable straw Epistle that should be thrown into the Rhine River." Yet James proves that faith without works is dead by pointing to the example of Abraham. It's not that Abraham was saved by taking Isaac up the mountain to sacrifice him in obedience to God. No, James says the work that saved Abraham took place years before that when he simply believed in God (verse 23).

When was Abraham declared righteous? As James quotes Genesis 15:6, we understand that Abraham was declared righteous when he simply believed God would do what He said He would do when He told Abraham He would make his descendants more numerable than the sand on the seashore. Interestingly, Paul would also point to Abraham as proof that man is justified by faith apart from works (Romans 4:3).

James and Paul are in full agreement because they both maintain that the moment Abraham simply believed God was the moment God imputed righteousness unto him.

It is not faith *and* works that saves a man. It is not faith *or* works. It is faith *that* works. All Abraham was doing on Mount Moriah was showing the reality of what had taken place in his life years earlier when he simply believed God.

If your faith is real, it will show itself. How? By obeying the Word of God and following the leading of the Lord, even though you may not understand where it will lead. At the time, Abraham could not have understood the significance of what he had done on Mount Moriah. But this side of Calvary, we see it was a perfect picture of what God the Father would do in sending His Son to that same mountain to die for the sins of the world.

You know you're truly born again when you find yourself obeying God. We're not saved by obedience. But our obedience proves we're saved, for true faith works.

3

In chapter 2, James stressed that mere words are not the issue. The proof of one's salvation is seen in works. Yet here in chapter 3, we'll see him plunge into a discussion about the tongue. Why? I suggest the reason

is that, although it is true that it is our works and not our words that validate and verify our salvation, this does not mean words are not important in our spiritual life . . .

James 3:1, 2 (a)
My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all.

James begins his discussion by saying, "Don't be eager to be a teacher because teachers can receive greater condemnation." Because it is inevitable that sooner or later we offend people with the words we say, the more a person says, the greater his chances of offending someone. Jeremiah certainly found this to be true. . . .

When the people of Israel didn't like what Jeremiah was saying, they threw him into a prison—at which time Jeremiah decided he would speak no more. But there's a problem with those who are called to teach. As Jeremiah discovered, the Word of God burned in his heart, and he could not keep quiet (Jeremiah 20:9).

If, like Jeremiah, you are called to teach the Word, you will be unable to keep quiet, even though it might mean you're tossed into a storm of controversy or a dungeon of condemnation.

I wish I could say that all of the problems teachers encounter are due to the powerful messages we bring and the conviction they cause in the hearts of people. But that's not the whole story—not by a long shot! You see, greater condemnation comes to teachers because in the multitude of words there lacketh not sin (Proverbs 10:19). We who are always speaking inevitably say things we wish we hadn't said or in a way we wish we hadn't said them.

Thus, condemnation comes not only from other people, but from within our own hearts when we realize our inadequacy to communicate the Word properly.

"Be careful," says James. "Don't be too eager to be a teacher, knowing that you'll receive greater condemnation from within and without than if you sat quietly in a pew, taking it all in."

The longer I walk with the Lord, the more I see that the key to life is to learn to be content where God has placed you (Philippians 4:11). If you're called to teach, that's great! If you're called to listen, that's wonderful! In either place, contentment is the key.

James 3:2 (b)

If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

Whoever does not offend in word is a mature person whether he is a teacher or not, for he who controls his tongue controls his life.

James 3:3–6

Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

Just as surely as an insignificant-looking rudder controls an entire ship, or a little piece of metal controls a powerful horse, so the tongue, weighing a mere twenty ounces, can either bring direction or destruction—for truly the power of life and death is in the tongue (Proverbs 18:21).

What can we do to keep our tongues from being ignited by the fires of hell?

In Acts 2 we read of another tongue of fire, one which led to worshiping and witnessing. Therefore, I suggest that the more time we spend praying in tongues, the less time we'll spend preying on others with our tongues.

Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.

Proverbs 26:20

When you hear gossip, pray silently in the Spirit to keep your tongue busy lest you join in the hellish discussion. If I listen to gossip, to putdowns, I am actually an accomplice in that fire ignited by hell. But if I refuse to listen and pray instead, the water of the Spirit douses the fire of hell, and the conversation dies.

James 3:7, 8

For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

Here's the problem: In our own energy, we cannot tame our tongues. We need the Lord.

James 3:9, 10 (a)

Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing . . .

"Cursing" implies any words that bring hurt to someone.

James 3:10–12 (b)

My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

"We live in a pleasant area," said the men of Jericho to the newly anointed prophet. "But our crops are dying because our water is poisoned."

So what did Elisha do? He poured salt into the water, and the water became sweet once again (2 Kings 2:21).

Salt was to be poured into polluted water? Yes, because Paul tells us our speech is always to be seasoned with salt, that is grace (Colossians 4:6). What does this mean? It means that in any given moment I can bring healing to an otherwise poisonous situation by speaking grace. If I keep talking about how gracious God has been to me, and how gracious He'll be toward others, the polluted puddles of put-downs and pettiness will become pools of purity and praise.

I want this in my life so badly I can taste it. Oh, I'm far from what I should be—but I see the wisdom of James, for I've known people who have refused to listen to gossip and who have, instead, learned to speak graciously. There is a beauty about their lives and refreshment from their lives I so desire. If you want to be the man or woman God uses, join me in praying that we will be those who add the salt of grace to everything we say.

James 3:13, 14

Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

Come to terms with the fact that if your words are bitter, it's because your heart is bitter. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). Bitter words come from a bitter heart.

James 3:15–18

This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

I have this verse underlined because it is a grid through which I can run any conversation, teaching, or any word of instruction. If there is envy and strife, tension and confusion in what I hear, then I know it's from hell. But if

there is purity and peace, righteousness and mercy in what I hear, I embrace it as being from the Lord.

May God give us wisdom, and may our words as well as our actions reflect His goodness, His gentleness, His grace.



4

James is not interested in how great we talk. He's interested in how straight we walk. After establishing this firmly in chapters 1 and 2, we saw him back up somewhat in chapter 3 to say that although what we say does not eclipse what we do—our words still make an impact.

"Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks," Jesus declared (Matthew 12:34). So here, in chapter 4, we'll see James deal with the issue of the heart.

James 4:1, 2

From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

The reason we put down other people, gossip about other people, fight with other people is because we want something from other people. It can be as stupid as thinking, *Talking about that guy will make me look better to this guy.* Yet the only way to get what our heart really craves is not to prey on others, but to pray to the Father.

James 4:3

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

"I do pray," you may say. "But I don't get what I ask for."

That's because you're asking amiss. Prayer is not giving orders. It's reporting for duty. And once a person finally understands that prayer is not man saying, "Bless the business; bring in the money; solve the problem," and God saying, "Aye, aye, Captain," his prayer life will be revolutionized.

Prayer is saying, "Father what do *You* want to do in my life? I want You to do what You see is best for me because I get mixed up so easily."

> *I walked into his room during his nap to find one-year-old Peter-John lying on his back, eagerly reaching for an object dangling just inches above his head. Living in a rustic cabin in the woods at that time, we were sometimes surprised by the visitors we would have. And this particular afternoon was no exception, for I was surprised indeed to see the object for which Peter was so intently reaching was a black widow spider.*

We're just like Peter-John. We lie on our beds or kneel beside them and, through prayer, grab for things we think would be so wonderful, failing to realize they are nothing but black widows. Therefore, every bit as exciting to me as prayers God does answer are those He doesn't answer because I know I'll see that what I thought was so intriguing and tantalizing will prove to be poisonous and deadly. Oh, may we learn not to give orders or grab spiders, but to do what Jesus did in the Garden: to submit to whatever the Father has for us.

> **James 4:4**
>
> **Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.**

Because the Father looks at the world system and sees corruption and danger, pollution and problems—if we continue to reach for the trinkets of the world, we'll be at odds with God.

> **James 4:5**
>
> **Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?**

"Lusteth to envy" means "guards jealously." In other words, the Spirit of God that dwells within us wants the very best for us. When we talk about grieving the Holy Spirit, we must understand the Spirit is grieved not

because we've hurt Him, but because—seeing what's ahead for us if we continue on the path we're on—He hurts for us.

If you're a dad, you can understand this. . . .

> *Your sixteen-year-old daughter can't stop talking about him. So finally a week or two later, he shows up on his Harley in black leathers, a marijuana joint hanging out of his mouth, a swastika tattooed on his arm, a patch over his eye, a flask of whiskey in his pocket, a Playboy bunny on his shirt, saying, "I like your daughter."*
>
> *Although your daughter says, "Isn't he dreamy?" you know he's nothing but a nightmare—and that she'll be hurt badly if she gets on his Harley and goes down the road of life with him.*

That's how the Holy Spirit feels when He sees us getting on the back of some Harley we think is dreamy. He's not mad *at* us, not disappointed *in* us, not hurt *by* us, but jealous *for* us as a dad is for his daughter.

James 4:6 (a)
But he giveth more grace.

Even when I'm asking for the wrong things—grabbing for spiders or dreaming of Harleys—God gives more grace to resist the temptation and/or to recover from the situation because where sin abounds, grace abounds more (Romans 5:20).

James 4:6 (b)
Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

Although God has grace to give to us to resist the temptation or to recover from the situation, there's no room for pride. Who is the proud person? Barometers predict storms by measuring air pressure. Prayer-ometers indicate pride by measuring prayer pressure.

If I don't pray in a given day, it is the ultimate indication of pride because it is the proud person who says, "I don't need to pray about it. I can handle it." Oh, I may not be cocky like Dennis Rodman or Mike Tyson, but if I'm not praying, I'm every bit as proud as they are because prayerlessness is the truest indicator of pride.

James 4:7

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

How many of you have ever had a hard time getting to Bible study, but somehow got there? I commend you because had you succumbed to those pressures, you would have faced them again and again. You see, gang, because Satan isn't omniscient, because he can't read your mind or see into your heart, he's dependent solely upon trial and error to see what works. Therefore, if he sees that a headache will keep you from worship and Bible study, guess what will happen. You'll have headaches perpetually. If he sees that your kids acting up causes you to pull back, stay home, and not be where you should be, he'll have found the key to slowing down your walk.

I am convinced that many people experience unnecessary hell in their homes or trials in their lives because they don't understand this verse. They don't realize that if they resist the devil, he will indeed flee.

Behind the cyclone fence of a house I used to jog by regularly was a little mousy dog. Every time I ran by, this little yapper would start at one corner of the yard and snap and bark at me the entire length of the fence. He's crazy! *I used to think—until it hit me one day that the only reason he was running alongside me barking noisily was because he thought he was winning. He thought he was chasing me away. So he did this over and over again because he thought it was working.*

Satan is the same way. The Bible says that when we see him, we'll say, "Is this little yapper the one who troubled the whole earth?" (see Isaiah 14:16).

How can we stop him? By resisting him.

One day, I just stopped and roared at the yappy little dog. He put his tail between his legs, rolled over on his back, and started shaking. At that point, the front door opened, and a lady peeked out, saying, "Pastor Jon?"!

Resist the devil and he will flee from you—just as surely as did that little mouse of a dog!

James 4:8 (a)
Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.

One of my favorite verses in all of the Bible: Draw nigh to God, and He might draw nigh to you. No. Draw nigh to God, and He will sometimes draw nigh to you. No. Draw nigh to God, and He *will* draw nigh to you. That's a promise! Don't let anyone cast aspersions on God's goodness or nature by saying, "I tried to get close to the Lord, but He is just so far from me." The Bible says He will draw nigh—always.

People say to me, "I've tried, but I can't seem to connect with God."

"I don't believe you," I lovingly answer, "because God's Word says He will always draw near to us if we draw near to Him. And I have found this promise to be true, for, without fail, every time I have been serious about seeking God, He has made Himself known to me through a Scripture, in my heart, or through the body of Christ."

Sometimes, gang, we need to lovingly say to those who whine about feeling far from God, even though they claim they have tried to draw near to Him, "You're deceiving yourself, or you're trying to deceive me because God's Word says that if you take the time and expend the energy to draw near to Him, He *will* draw near to you."

James 4:8 (b)–10
Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be

turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. When? When you're serious about seeking Him. The idea is to be serious about it, to turn off the TV, to take some time and make an effort. Why? Not because God is saying, "Only when you mourn and are afflicted will I speak to you." That's not it at all. The purpose of mourning and cleansing is not so that God will speak—but to get me tuned in to the right frequency so I can hear Him already speaking. Think of it this way. . . .

Right now, Channel 10 is broadcasting all sorts of words and images. But we aren't tuned in to the frequency. To get the picture, we'd have to take some time, bring in a TV, and put up the antenna. Would we do that to impress Channel 10 to send pictures our way? No. They're already doing that constantly. We'd have to bring in a TV and put up an antenna simply to get us in the position to receive what's already being broadcast from Channel 10 continually.

If people don't read this passage right, they begin to say, "If we afflict ourselves like the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, if we slash our bodies and dance in a frenzy, God will speak" (see 1 Kings 18). That's not the heart of the Father. That's the heart of a false god. The purpose of washing your hands and humbling your heart implies quitting your normal activities and taking some time to get tuned in to the proper frequency. Go to the park. Get away. Do whatever it takes to change your setting and say, "Lord, I've been tuned in to work. I've been dialed in to parenting. I've been positioned to pursue my hobbies. But now I'm taking time to hear from You because I know You're broadcasting twenty-four hours a day, and I want to hear what You say."

James 4:11

Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

What law is James talking about? The law of love. Galatians 5:14 says, "All the law is summed up in this one word: love." Jesus said, "Upon loving God and loving our neighbor hang all the law and the prophets" (see Matthew 22:40). So here James is saying, "Don't speak evil of any brother or sister. If you do that, you're not obedient to the law of love."

James 4:12

There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

One of the greatest days in my own Christian walk was the day the Lord whispered a very simple truth into my heart that changed my entire approach to ministry and to life. He said, "Jon, you love 'em, and I'll judge 'em." You see, before that, I had it the other way around. I thought it was the Lord's job to love people and my job to judge them. I can't tell you how freeing it was to discover that I had it backward!

James 4:13–15

Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

There are people who have tremendous confidence in what they're going to do because they think they have their future all worked out. But in reality, of a group this size, statistics indicate that two of us will not be here next year. Life is a vapor. It goes oh, so quickly.

James 4:16

But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

Putting my hope in my plans, projections, or portfolio instead of in the Lord is not only foolish. James tells us it's evil.

James 4:17

Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

There are those who say, "I'm going to do this. I'm going to retire there. I've got my future all worked out." But when asked if they're going to church on Sunday or if they'll have devotions tomorrow, they say, "If the Lord wills." Do you see the irony?

"I'm going skiing next week, or on vacation in July," we say. But regarding church tomorrow night, we say, "We'll see what God has in store." We have it backward! We should be saying, "I may go skiing next week if God wills. Or, I may take a vacation in July if that's what the Lord has for me. But as for going to church on Sunday? I'll be there absolutely!"

That's why James says, "If you know what's right, but hide behind the excuse of waiting for God's leading before doing it, it's sin."



5 Continuing where he left off in chapter 2, here in chapter 5, James attempts to do what his half Brother had done when He cleansed the temple, as he cleans house concerning wealthy people who had no real relationship with the Lord, but who simply liked to be seen in the midst of the believers. . . .

James 5:1–3

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

Because the language in verse seven makes it clear that he is addressing the true believer, James' harsh words here in verse three are not directed to true brothers, but to those who were only playing church. They are directed to those who thought they would be saved in the last day because of their

wealth. They are directed to those who were using their money to be esteemed highly in the church.

James 5:4–6

Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.

"You've made your money because you paid poor wages. You've made your fortunes at the expense of others," says James. "But know this: The Lord is hearing the cries of those you have exploited."

James 5:7, 8

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

Shifting gears and addressing the true believer, James says, "Yes there will be injustice, rip-offs, and unfairness, but keep this in mind: The Lord is coming. He sees what's going on, and *He* will settle the score."

James 5:9

Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.

Salvation is not going to come through union participation or a Christian coalition organization. Salvation is going to come when Jesus Christ comes back. Stick to the big picture. Live for the kingdom. Be looking for His coming.

James 5:10, 11

Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

Job was a wealthy man. Then he lost everything. But if you read the last chapter of the book that bears his name, you see that he ended up with twice as much as he had before his difficulties began. Even his family was replenished. Why? Because he was patient. Yes, he had periods where he doubted and questioned God. But he's an example of a man who endured difficulty and of one who was rewarded greatly. So, too, we are to wait patiently for the Lord's return.

James 5:12

But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

I know of a man who was so determined to learn this lesson that once a week for over forty years, he took one day to fast from talking.

Truly, the Bible tells us that in the multitude of words there lacketh not sin (Proverbs 10:19). The more I talk, the more trouble I can get in. So James very practically says we are to keep our speech as simple and straightforward as possible.

James 5:13 (a)

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray.

What if we really believed this? What if we said, "I'm not going to speak so much or so quickly. I'm not going to hold a grudge against people even if I feel they're afflicting me. Instead, I'm going to pray"? What a simple, workable, radical idea James presents to us.

This is hard for me because I want to mix it up verbally with those who afflict me and give them a piece of my mind. But I'm wrong every time I do because our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers (Ephesians 6:12).

There's no way we can continue to justify our tendency to fault folks or to war against them with words when James clearly tells us that the only solution to oppression is to look for the Lord's coming. In the meantime, when we're afflicted, we're to watch our words. Let them be yea, nay, and by all means—pray.

James 5:13 (b)

Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

There are psalms for every occasion. That's what's so great about the one hundred fifty psalms in the center of our Bibles. For every occasion, for any situation, there is a psalm for us to sing.

James 5:14 (a)

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him . . .

The affliction of verse thirteen is a mental, spiritual, or emotional affliction. The responsibility of the afflicted person is to pray. But the responsibility of the person who is sick physically is to call for the elders of the church.

"I was sick and none of the elders came to pray for me," you say.

Did you call for them?

James says it is the responsibility, the privilege, the opportunity, the command, for the sick person to humble himself and to call for the elders. Notice the word "elders" is plural. When the sick are being prayed for, it is always to be by a group of men corporately rather than one man individually. Why? There are few things more potentially dangerous than for a person to be used in the ministry of healing because what begins as a simple desire to be used by the Lord can so easily end up in book-signings and a speaking

tour. To keep this tendency in check, James says when someone is sick, a group of men is to pray so that no one man will get the credit.

James 5:14 (b)
. . . anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

What does it mean to anoint with oil? In Scripture, we see oil used symbolically, when, as an illustration of the anointing of the Holy Spirit, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with oil before they assumed their positions of authority. We also see oil used medicinally, as in the story of the Good Samaritan who put oil on the wounds of the man left for dead (Luke 10:34).

I suggest that the anointing of oil spoken of by James refers to both the symbolic and the medicinal realms. It speaks of a person saying, "I'm looking to the Lord for healing. I'm submitted to His will being done in my life; I believe in His power and presence—and I'm going to use His gift of medicine as well." There are two streams of healing: prayer and medicine. But it's the same God who works through both streams. Medicine does not heal. Prayer does not heal. God heals.

James 5:15 (a)
And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up . . .

What is the prayer of faith? It is not prayer offered due to working up feelings emotionally or hyping a congregation into a frenzy, but as a result of responding to the Lord personally.

No doubt Peter and John had passed him hundreds of times as he sat by the Gate Beautiful outside of the temple, begging for money. But one day as they walked by him, something unique happened within them that caused them to stop, look at him, and say, "Silver and gold have we none, but such as we have give we you. In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk" (see Acts 3:6). In the moment of

the miraculous, Peter and John experienced faith unlike at any other time they had walked by this man previously.

So, too, there will come times when you're praying for your friends, family, or yourself when you'll suddenly sense God at work in a unique way, and you'll know a miracle is about to take place.

But what if you don't experience this kind of faith? Pray anyway.

I've prayed for perhaps thousands of sick people over the years. A few were healed immediately. Others continued in their sickness. Many weren't healed until they got to heaven. Yet even if it doesn't bring about the full healing we anticipate, something wonderful always happens whenever a group of people talk to the Father.

It's good for a person going through physical suffering to call for the elders of the church to pray for healing—and to continue seeking healing until he is healed. Or until, like Paul, he is at peace, knowing that God's will is being worked out in his condition, and that even in weakness, God is made strong (2 Corinthians 12:9).

James 5:15 (b)

. . . and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

Sometimes, sin brings sickness. How do I know this? Because after He healed the lame man in John five, Jesus said, "Be careful that you don't sin lest a worse thing happen to you" (see John 5:14), implying that his paralysis was the result of a previous sin. So, too, when the four guys lowered their paralyzed buddy through a roof in the home wherein Jesus was teaching, Jesus linked the man's paralysis to sin (Mark 2:5–11).

Does this mean sin is always the reason for sickness?

No. When asked whether it was his own or his parents' sin that made a man blind, Jesus answered that neither his or his parents' sin was the reason (John 9:3). While sickness can indeed be a repercussion of a sin or a lifestyle, this doesn't mean that every sickness is the result of an individual's sin.

James 5:16 (a)

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.

Many of us have an obsession with confession. That is, we think that if there is any unconfessed sin in our lives, God will not hear our prayer. But I have good news for us today, for to us who understand that Jesus died for our sins past, present and future, regarding His work on the Cross, He doesn't say, "To be continued if you confess." No, He says, "It is *finished*."



***For topical study of James 5:16 entitled "True Confession," turn to page* 1534.**

James 5:16 (b)–18

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

"Well, that knocks me out," you say, "because I'm not Elijah; I'm not a righteous man, and I'm not an effectual, fervent pray-er."

You might be surprised. . . .



***For topical study of James 5:16 entitled "Effective Prayer," turn to page* 1536.**

James 5:19, 20 (a)

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death . . .

The Greek word translated "err" is *planao,* from which we get our word "planet." It literally means "heavenly wanderer" and in this context refers to one who is headed for heaven ultimately, but is wandering presently. Those who "err from the truth" may, indeed, be born again. They may, indeed, have a relationship with the Lord. But it's distant because it lacks the connection that was there previously.

What causes a person to become *planao,* to become spiritually spaced-out?

Because at the heart of every problem lies a problem of the heart, I believe a person stops traveling with the body of Christ when a problem in his heart causes him to be uncomfortable in the presence of God's people. Such was the case with Demas. "Demas has forsaken us," said Paul. Why? Because "he has loved this world" (see 2 Timothy 4:10).

If you asked Demas about his absence, he might have been able to justify it doctrinally, saying, "I'm having a problem with Paul's doctrine of justification. I find it to be too grace-oriented. So now I'm just seeking God and getting instruction on my own."

Just as he did with Demas, Satan wants to see us disconnected, out in space, cut off. But James says that if we convert such a one, if we get him to turn back and get involved once again, we have actually saved him from death.

What kind of death?

First, we have saved him from physical death (1 John 5:16). There is a sin, in which, if a man or woman continues to persist, God will take him or her home prematurely. If a person is rebelling against the Lord and walking farther and farther away from Him, such a one is in danger of being blown out into outer darkness. So God in His mercy may say, "It's time to take this person to heaven." While this obviously doesn't mean that anyone who dies before the age of ninety is out of fellowship, the Word does, indeed, declare that there is sin that will cause a person's life to end sooner than it would have had he continued walking in fellowship.

"Why should we try to convert such a one if he's headed to heaven anyway?" you ask.

The answer is that, although he will make it to heaven, he will enter in as though by fire, bankrupt spiritually, lacking the rewards that will affect his

ability to enjoy heaven eternally (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Second, if we convert a brother who errs, who has wandered away, we save his soul from spiritual death. Because the wages of sin is always death, as you watch people who aren't plugged in, who aren't walking with the Lord as closely as they once did, you see death in their lives—the death of joy, the death of purpose, the death of peace. Their eyes become dull. Their faces become drawn. They start looking sad as they trade vitality for mortality.

Third, saving an erring brother from death could mean saving him from eternal death. The reason the debate has gone on for centuries concerning whether a Christian can go so far that he ends up forfeiting his salvation is because Scripture can be used to argue both sides. If this issue were cut and dried, a lot of people would drift farther and farther out in space. But because it is not, we have to realize that one's eternal destiny is at stake.

James 5:20 (b)
. . . and shall hide a multitude of sins.

The interesting thing about this phrase is that, linguistically, one can't be sure if it's the sins of the sinners that are covered, or those of the person who converts him. Commentators are divided on this question, yet all I know is this: Every time I talk to someone who has wandered away, every time I see the unhappiness and emptiness of his life, I find myself turning, repenting, and hating sin all over again. Conversely, like the shepherd who found the one sheep that was lost, when I am able to return to the fold someone who was lost and wandering, I experience an explosion of joy within my own heart.

How are we to convert those who err, those who wander away?

First, we're to be men and women of prayer—we're to talk to God about people. Second, we're to be men and women who share—we're to talk to people about God.

After engaging in a real estate deal that resulted in the death of an innocent man, Ahab, king of Israel, was confronted by Elijah the prophet. "Because of what you've done, because the dogs have licked the blood of the man you killed, the dogs will lick your blood

and the blood of all of your children," Elijah declared. "If they die in the city, the dogs will lick their blood. If they die in the fields, the birds will peck their flesh. You crossed the line, Ahab. You went too far. And your family's going down as a result" (see 1 Kings 21:19).

The account in 1 Kings goes on to say that after Ahab heard Elijah, he rent his clothes, wore sackcloth, and walked softly, stooped over, broken. Because Ahab humbled himself, God instructed Elijah to tell him that his family wouldn't be annihilated.

So here's the wickedest man in the history of the nation Israel, and what does God do? Because Elijah talked to him, he repented and God was able to show him mercy.

Talk to the Lord about people. Then talk to people—even if they're Ahab-like—about the Lord. Your own sin will be covered in the process—and you will save from death the soul of the one with whom you share. It's a tall order to be involved in the restoration of a sinner who was once part of the kingdom. It's also a great privilege.

The Epistle of James ends in a most unusual, but not very surprising manner. Most New Testament Epistles end with a closing benediction. Not James. There is no closing benediction. There is no doctrinal conclusion. There is not even a prayer of intercession. In fact, in closing his book simply with a practical and pointed exhortation, it's as though James is saying, "I've given to you the Word of the Lord. Now go do it."

TRUE CONFESSION
A Topical Study of
JAMES 5:16

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

I think many of us coming from church backgrounds have a misconception of the idea of confession. I know I did. For many years, I believed that if there was any unconfessed sin in my life, God would not hear my prayers. Consequently, I went through decades gripped by the "paralysis of analysis." I knelt at my bed or by my desk trying to confess everything I did or thought that day or that week, wondering all the while if there was anything I left out, any unconfessed sin that would keep me from being heard by my Father in heaven—or, worse yet, which would prevent me from being forgiven by Him.

If, like me, you were ever under that impression, I have good news for you today: According to the context, 1 John 1:9 is not talking about you, but about those who don't even acknowledge that they're sinners. You see, in John's day, a school of thought called Gnosticism propounded that because the material realm is not eternal, it doesn't matter what a man does with his flesh. He can eat, drink, and be merry because only the spiritual is eternal.

This is the issue John was dealing with when he said, "If you say you have no sin, you deceive yourselves and the truth is not in you. But if you confess your sin—if you admit that you're a sinner—God will be faithful and just to forgive your sin and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness." In other words, "You cannot be forgiven, you cannot be born again, you cannot be saved until you admit you're a sinner in need of a Savior."

I don't think many of us are involved in the gnostic heresy. We know we've sinned; we know we've blown it; we know at least one time somewhere we dropped the ball and messed up. And once we acknowledge this, our sin is forgiven—for on the Cross, Jesus didn't say, "To be continued if you continue to confess." No, He said, "It is *finished*" (John 19:30).

This means that we can stand confidently in the presence of God—not because of who we are, but because of what He did for us on the Cross of Calvary.

"Okay, then," you say, "if that's true, then how do you explain the text before us: 'Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed' "?

Confession is not for the purpose of restoration to our Savior. Confession is for liberation from our sin. We don't have to worry about being restored to the Lord once we believe in Him because He paid for every sin we've ever done, are doing, or ever will do. The veil is rent. The way is open. The invitation is given to us to come boldly to the throne of grace to find mercy and help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). It's a done deal. Thus, the purpose of confession is not for God's sake. It's for ours. It's not for restoration, but for liberation—to set us free.

Consider four ways confession liberates us from sin. . . .

Confession Promotes Prayer

Confession promotes prayer. How? Confession produces compassion, and compassion produces intercession. Human nature is such that most of us don't pray very intensely for people we think are doing well. But because our hearts go out to those we think are hurting or struggling, we find ourselves praying on their behalf. Therefore, if you want people to pray for you, one of the most practical things you can do is confess your faults to someone or to a small group of people. Then watch how they'll pray for you.

Confession Provides Protection

Confession provides protection from potential hostility. The Enemy seeks to cause whatever I'm struggling with, whatever you're wrestling with to be exposed. That's his method of operation. He sucks us into sin, then publicizes our sin to bring consternation, embarrassment, and division.

> As Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, Luke records that the other eleven disciples stood with him (Acts 2:14). Keep in mind, it had only been a month or so since Peter had denied even knowing Jesus. Thus, by standing with him, the other disciples were in effect saying, "We know Peter's history. Yet we continue to stand by him. So pipe down, you who would be hostile and critical of him."
>
> That's what confession does. It disarms the Enemy.

Confession Prohibits Pride

> In the interest of accountability, three ministers gathered to confess their faults to one another.
>
> "I'm sad to say this," said the first minister, "but I've been struggling with whiskey. I just keep hitting the bottle after every service and every evening."
>
> The second minister said, "I must confess quite frankly that I've been struggling with women."
>
> The third minister said, "I confess I have a problem with gossip, and if you'll excuse me, I've got to make some phone calls. . . ."

People say, "If I confess my faults to another, what will happen if they leak out?"

You know what will happen? Your pride will be destroyed, and that's the best thing that could happen! Although we're so careful to cultivate a certain image, the Lord has ways of making sure it never lasts because pride leads to destruction and a haughty spirit to a fall (Proverbs 16:18). Ask Lucifer. It was when pride filled his heart that he was cast out of heaven (Isaiah 14:12–15).

Confession prohibits pride, and in so doing, it breaks our otherwise tragic fall.

Confession Produces Praise

The church of Jesus Christ is the only place I know where people come together and admit they're a bunch of losers who have problems. Go to the Elks Club or Rotary or the GOP fundraisers, and you're not going to see a group of people saying, "We're idiots. We failed again. We dropped the ball." It just doesn't happen that way! In every other organization, people get together to say, "Aren't we great?" But we, the church, come together to say, "Isn't God gracious? That He would use people like us with all our faults and failings is nothing short of amazing!"

Sin will lose its grip if you take seriously this command, this invitation to confess and pray for one another. Whatever you do, know this: You are forgiven and you can experience liberation if you confess your faults one to another.

I love the Lord. I love the theology of being forgiven. I love the practicality of confession. I'm so glad I'm saved. And I'm glad you are too.

EFFECTIVE PRAYER

A Topical Study of JAMES 5:16–18

All of us know there is power in prayer. Most of us understand that our priority is to be prayer. After all, we know that although the disciples observed Jesus raising the dead, healing the sick, feeding the multitudes, preaching the Word, walking on water, and casting out demons, they asked Him to teach them how to do only one thing. They asked Him to do the one thing they understood to be foundational to everything else He did. They asked Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1).

We, too, understand that there is power in prayer, that our priority is to be prayer—yet most of us have a problem with prayer because simple exhortations like the one before us become subtle intimidations to us.

In our text, I suggest the problem lies in three words. . . .

Effectual

James tells us very clearly that it is *effectual* prayer that avails much—and uses a man named Elijah as an example of effectual prayer. . . .

The first time we meet Elijah, he's storming into King Ahab's court, saying, "It's not going to rain but according to my word." Scripture records that the clouds, indeed, went away and no rain fell on Israel for three and a half years (1 Kings 17:1).

How could Elijah speak with such boldness? James tells us something we wouldn't know from reading the Old Testament account when he tells us Elijah prayed earnestly.

What does it mean to pray earnestly? The Greek word translated "prayer" is *deesis,* which means "to bow down." The Greek word translated "earnestly" is *proseuche,* which means "to pray." This means Elijah could speak to Ahab with certainty and could pray effectively because he was bowed down, submitted to the Scriptures.

You see, Deuteronomy 11:16, 17—a text Elijah would surely have known—says this:

> Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; and then the LORD's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you.

Aware of this promise, Elijah could say to Ahab, "Because of what you have done in this land by introducing Baal worship, it's not going to rain."

Time passed, and in a confrontation with Elijah, the prophets of Baal found themselves on Mount Carmel praying hour after hour for their god to send fire as they danced and screamed and slashed their bodies. Finally, Elijah said, "You've been going all day, boys. Your god has baal-ed out. Now it's my turn."

> *And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of*

> *Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O* LORD*, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the* LORD *God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.*
>
> 1 Kings 18:36, 37

And, after praying this prayer that takes about seven seconds to utter, fire came down.

"Do not be like the heathen who think they are heard because of their much speaking," Jesus said (Matthew 6:7)—and then gave us for a model a prayer sixty-five words long that takes less than fifteen seconds to say slowly. We think we have to impress God with lengthy prayers and fancy words. Jesus says, "No, that's the way of the prophets of Baal, the way of the heathen. Just talk to Me simply."

Elijah knew the Word, was submitted to the Word, and prayed according to the Word. So, too, we must understand that to pray effectively is to combine prayer with reading the Word. You will never again snooze through a service or doze off during devotions if you are praying while you're listening. That is, when a point comes to you that you know is convicting you, talk to the Lord about it *right then.*

> For years, I didn't know this. I thought the right way to fellowship with God was to read a chapter or two in the Word and then pray. But that is as silly as if I called Tammy and said, "We've got to talk," and then I proceeded to talk for ten minutes straight—talk, talk, talk, talk, talk—before saying, "Now you talk"—at which point she'd talk, talk, talk, talk to me.

That's the way I thought I was supposed to communicate with the Lord. "Okay, Father, I know You speak to me through Your Word, so I'll listen, listen, listen, listen. Done. Now it's my turn. Pray, pray, pray, pray, pray."

I'm not saying you can't do it that way, but there's a much better way. That is, as you are reading the Word, a phrase or two will strike you, and you pause right then to talk it over with the Father. You pray about it *right then.*

Then you read a verse or two or three more until something else stirs your thinking or strikes your heart. You pause, then talk to the Lord again. With tens of thousands of precepts, principles, and promises in this book, I guarantee you'll never have a boring devotional time if you pause, then talk to the Lord again. With tens of thousands of precepts, principles, and promises in this book, I guarantee you'll never have a boring devotional time if you pray with open Bible and talk to the Father about what you read.

So, too, if you go to church on a Sunday morning or Wednesday evening and say, "Every time a point hits me, confuses me, or stirs me, I am going to pray about it right then." Bible studies will never, ever again be drowsy for you because it's just impossible to talk to the Father as you're taking in the Word and find yourself bored and slumbering.

"If you abide in Me—stay close to Me—and My words abide in you," Jesus declared, "you shall ask whatever you will and it shall be done" (see John 15:7). "If My Word is stirring in you and you're staying close to Me, you'll be able to ask whatever you want as you pray biblically, and it will happen. You'll see."

To pray effectually is to pray biblically.

Fervent

James tells us that it is not only effectual prayer that avails much, but *fervent* prayer. And, again, Elijah is our model. . . .

After calling down fire with a prayer that took only five or six seconds to utter, and after telling Ahab it was going to rain, Scripture records that there, on the top of Mount Carmel, Elijah placed his head between his knees and prayed for rain.

"Any clouds coming?" he asked his servant.

"There's not a cloud in sight. It's clear and sunny," his servant answered.

So Elijah put his head between his knees again and prayed some more.

"Any clouds yet?" he asked.

"It's as clear as a bell," his servant answered.

So Elijah put his head between his knees and prayed a third time.

"Any clouds yet?"

"Nothing."

Elijah did this a fourth time, a fifth time, a sixth time. But when he popped up the seventh time, his servant said, "There's a little tiny cloud the size of a man's fist on the horizon."

"Great!" said Elijah. "Batten down the hatches! A storm's coming!"

And indeed it did (1 Kings 18:45).

If you lived in Bible times, you would know that to give birth, a woman would place her head between her knees. That's exactly what Elijah was doing. Prior to this, we saw him standing serenely and praying expectantly. Now we see him praying with fervency, with his head between his knees.

"But I thought we didn't have to go through contortions when we pray," you say. "I thought prayer was to be simple."

It is.

Then what's Elijah doing?

There come times, gang, when in prayer I will go to the Father and I will pray like Elijah in the first example. I'll pray simply, casually, and comfortably. But the fire doesn't come down or the heavens don't open up, and I wonder why. I have learned that during such seasons, the Father is

saying, “Pray fervently. Come back a second time and a third time, an eighth time and a twelfth time. Why? Because I know what’s ahead.”

You see, as the story unfolds, on the heels of his incredible victory on Mount Carmel, we will see Elijah fall into such depression and despondency that he will despair even of life itself (1 Kings 19:4). Knowing this, God says to Elijah, “What you need, Elijah, is not for Me to respond immediately, but to come into My presence repeatedly. I know what’s coming—and you need to log in time with Me.”

So, too, sometimes I pray, “Father, Your Word promises this . . .” and boom! It happens immediately. Other times, God says to me, “You think you need that relationship resolved or that ministry opened, or that financial matter worked out. But I see where you’re going to be tomorrow. I see that what you’re really craving is not what you’re asking. You’re craving Me. So come back three times, seven times, twenty-seven times, forty-two times and spend time with Me.”

And you know what I have discovered, dear precious people? In coming back over and over with my head between my knees, so to speak, laboring and wondering, I find that what I was so concerned about fades from importance, for I find in Him everything my heart desires.

What was birthed by Elijah that day on the mountain wasn’t a rain cloud. It was a relationship. That’s what it means to pray fervently—not to get God’s attention, but to birth a deeper relationship with Him.

Righteous

James tells us it is not only effectual and fervent prayers that avail much, but effectual and fervent prayers prayed by a *righteous* man. Again, Elijah is our example. . . .

James calls Elijah a man of like passions—a man with the same vulnerabilities we have. That explains why, after calling down fire from heaven, and hacking up four hundred fifty prophets of Baal single-handedly, frightened by the words of a woman, Elijah ran seventy miles like a chicken with his head cut off only to end up in a cave depressed, discouraged, and defeated.

Here's a guy who's just like me. One minute he's up on the mountain; the next minute he's in a cave. One minute, he's victorious over Baal; the next minute, he's done in by despair. Yet James refers to Elijah as a righteous man. Why? Because in the New Testament particularly, righteousness is not dependent upon the way we behave. It is dependent upon what we believe.

How do I know this?

In Romans 4, Paul reaches back through the tunnel of time and grabs a name for our consideration: Abraham. Simply because Abraham believed God would do what He said He would, that God is who He declared Himself to be, Abraham was declared righteous (Romans 4:3).

Do you believe God? Do you believe the foundational fact of faith—that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the Cross for your sin and after three days rose again? Do you believe He is your Savior? If so, you are righteous.

"Oh, but you don't know where I was last year," you say.

Second Corinthians 5:17 says that if any man be in Christ—and you are—he is a new creation. Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new. Therefore, regardless of where you've been or what you've done, you're a new creation in Christ. You're righteous.

"Yes, but I have sinned greatly even after becoming a new creation, a believer."

Paul goes on to say, "And He made Him who knew no sin to be sin that we might be the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus" (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). That means God put our sin—past, present, and the stuff we haven't

even done yet—on the Son. Therefore, if you are a believer, you are surrounded by Christ, covered with Christ, and washed by the blood of Christ. And you can't get any more righteous than that.

The effectual, fervent prayers of a righteous man availeth much. "Effectual," "fervent," and "righteous" are words that, unless understood biblically, can intimidate us and keep us from praying consistently. But once we understand their meaning, all that remains is to understand the word "much"—for "much" is what God has done and wants to continue to do in our lives as we walk with Him and wait on Him in effectual, fervent prayer.

Amen.



1 PETER

Background to 1 & 2 Peter

In the year A.D. 63 or 64, Peter wrote 1 Peter. As obvious as that may sound, in 1947, a school of thought developed that declared it would have been impossible for a fisherman like Peter to employ the complex sentence structure and sophisticated vocabulary found in the letter before us.

Yet 1947 was hardly the first year in which Peter's credentials were called into question. Luke records that after hearing Peter speak, the learned men of the day wondered how he was able to speak with such clarity and authority—until they realized he had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

I like that! Hanging out with Jesus will make a smart man out of anyone! Peter had listened to, eaten with, and traveled alongside Jesus for three years. The result was obvious.

So, too, as we spend time hanging out with one who hung out with Jesus, my prayer is that we will take on His characteristics just as noticeably, as readily, as wonderfully as did the fisherman-turned-scholar: the apostle Peter.



1 PETER

1

1 Peter 1:1 (a)
Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ . . .

Peter and Paul were two apostles who had a major impact on the early church. In fact, when you read the New Testament, you see Peter's name two hundred ten times and Paul's one hundred sixty-two times—while all of the other apostles combined are mentioned only one hundred fourteen times.

However, there is a third man who figures prominently in the early church. That man is John. As you look at these three—Peter, Paul, and John—you must conclude that Peter is the "apostle of hope." More than anyone else, Peter stresses hope as the answer to persecution and difficulty. Paul is the "apostle of faith," as he articulates more clearly than any other writer the doctrine of justification by faith. John is known both through his person and writing as the "apostle of love." Faith, hope, and love are personified in Paul, Peter, and John—all apostles of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:1 (b)
. . . to the strangers . . .

The idea of "stranger" referring to one who is displaced, Peter could be addressing the Jewish Christians who were dispersed—as well as speaking to any Christian feeling displaced or lost.

This side of heaven, we're part of an empire in which we don't fit, part of a system with which we can't agree. This is why Peter's words are as needful for us now as they were for the early church.

1 Peter 1:1 (c)
. . . scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

Nine or ten months after Peter wrote his letter, the persecution against Christians that had been simmering for quite some time came to a full boil.

On July 19, A.D. 64, Caesar Nero set fire to the Imperial City of Rome. You see, determined to stamp his image upon a new Rome, Caesar hired arsonists to destroy the old one. Maybe you remember stories of Caesar fiddling while Rome burned. While that may not have happened literally, Caesar was fiddling around very definitely! The ensuing devastation gave him justification to rebuild structures like the Circus Maximus. Seating over one hundred thousand people, the existing Circus Maximus wasn't big enough for Nero. So he had it burned along with most of the city and rebuilt it to give three hundred thousand spectators the opportunity to witness sporting events, gladiatorial bouts, and, eventually, Christians being thrown to lions.

Due to the immediate suspicion that he had a part in the fire, Nero knew he had to quickly find a scapegoat. He conveniently found one in the Christian community. "It's not I who burned the city," he said. "It's these who speak of the unquenchable flames of hell." Coupled with the absurd misconception that, due to their observance of Communion, Christians were cannibalistic, and combined with the fact that because Christians stressed love and purity, they were a threat to the rampant perversity of the day, the populace was eager to blame Christianity for their crumbling families and charred capital city.

Consequently, only months after Peter's Epistle was penned, persecution would come that would result in the annihilation of six million Christians as they were lit as candles or fed to lions. So Peter addresses this issue as he writes to people who would be understandably vulnerable to confusion and depression as they questioned the reason for their relentless persecution.

1 Peter 1:2 (a)
Elect . . .

Here in verse 2, Peter will refer to the Trinity at the very outset of his letter to remind his readers that they are a chosen community.

1 Peter 1:2 (b)
. . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father . . .

Because God elected us before the world began, He sees us as already glorified. People look at us and they say, "Glorified? *Them?!*" The Father, however, knows better. . . .

> *Suppose you suddenly found yourself tumbling down a time tunnel, where you end up in the year 1992. There you are. The Gulf War has just ended. The country is celebrating victory. And with a 91 percent approval rating, George Bush is a shoo-in to be reelected president. If you find a bookie, and against unbelievably high odds, you place a bet that a governor from Arkansas will beat him in the upcoming election, you would walk away a rich man because you would have foreknowledge. Therefore, you would have put your money down not as a gamble, but with certainty because you would have known the outcome.*

The same is true with the Father. He sees the end from the beginning. He understands what no other person can comprehend. He knows we are going to make it. As bad a bet as we might seem to ourselves or to others, as steep as the odds against us may be, He calls us already glorified. Therefore, we can approach Him boldly. We can enjoy Him intimately. We can ask of Him expectantly because we have been elected eternally.

1 Peter 1:2 (c)
. . . through sanctification of the Spirit . . .

For me, the sanctification of the Spirit took place not before the foundation of the world, but on a summer evening in 1957, when, in a little church called Calvary Temple, Pastor Kermit Jeffries was preaching about hell. Almost four years old, I wasn't coloring or sleeping on my mom's lap as I usually did in church, but was listening intently. I knew I needed to receive Jesus personally if I didn't want to fry in hell eternally. When Pastor Jeffries gave an invitation, I was the first one down the aisle. That was the hour of my sanctification, my being set apart, my salvation.

1 Peter 1:2 (d)

. . . unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

As far as the Son is concerned, I was saved when, two thousand years ago on a hill called Calvary, He shed His blood to cleanse me. Like the thief hanging next to Him, a way was made for me to be with Him in paradise that very day (Luke 23:43).

1 Peter 1:2 (e)
Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

The usual Pauline greeting is "Grace and peace." Peter seems to borrow this phrase of Paul's, and then makes it his own.

1 Peter 1:3, 4 (a)
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away . . .

To these who are feeling discouraged, displaced, depressed, or in danger, Peter addresses the issue right away, saying, "We have a living hope based upon the resurrection of our Lord and Savior."

Unlike living hope, human hope tends to get weaker and dimmer, and finally dies altogether the farther one goes down the road of life.

I was an awesome pitcher. As I stood in the street and pitched a tennis ball against my garage door, you wouldn't believe my split finger fastball, my curve, my sinker. I knew even Hank Aaron would strike out if he ever faced me at the plate. Oh, I might go to the full count, but I would always come through—every single time. In my imagination, I pitched perfect game after perfect game as a nine-year-old. But it finally hit me about two years ago that, in reality, I'll never pitch for the San Francisco Giants. Even if I practice

really *hard, I now know it's just not going to happen. My hope that once shone so brightly is now gone altogether.*

The same is true for all of us. As we go down the road of life, we check off more and more things we thought we would one day do or be. Regarding spiritual life, however, the opposite is true. The farther down the road we walk with Jesus, the more we realize our hope doesn't lie on this earth, but in heaven. We don't need to be a people who wrestle with midlife crises because our hope is not to make the San Francisco Giants or to make ten million bucks. Our hope is in heaven. And heaven's getting closer every day.

1 Peter 1:4 (b)
. . . reserved in heaven for you.

"Even if there is an inheritance reserved for me in heaven, it won't do me any good if I never get there," you say. "What if I don't make it?" Read on.

1 Peter 1:5 (a)
Who are kept by the power of God . . .

We are kept by the power of God. It's not us holding on to Him. It's Him holding on to us.

"Hold on to Daddy's hand," I would say to my kids as we crossed the street. And they would. But if, out of forgetfulness or fatigue, they loosened their grip, it wouldn't matter because, although they thought they were holding my hand, in reality, I was holding theirs —and I would never let go.

So, too, we think we're holding on to the Lord, but in reality, He's holding on to us. We're kept by *His* power.

1 Peter 1:5 (b)
. . . through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

A young man who was being hazed by a college fraternity was taken to a secluded spot where he was told to hold on to a knot at the end of a greased rope as his fraternity brothers lowered him into a dark well. Thinking they would pull him up after a few minutes, he was terrified to see them tie their end of the rope to the bar across the top of the well, leaving him suspended in midair.

This can't be! he thought as he called for help. But none came.

As he approached the fifteen-minute mark, his arms aching unbelievably, and his shoulders feeling as though they were on fire, he started to cry.

Finally, after about twenty-five tortuous minutes, able to hang on no longer, he let go—and fell two inches—just as his fraternity brothers had calculated.

Isn't that just like us? "Where are You, God? I don't know if I'm going to make it," we cry. We fret, blubber, and scream until we finally let go. And guess what we find. We discover that our Solid Rock, Jesus Christ, was there all along.

A bunch of us have burning shoulders and aching arms for absolutely no reason. We're trying to hang on through our own efforts, by our own spirituality. We get disgusted with ourselves and worried we're not going to make it. If we would just let go of the rope and rest in what Jesus did on the Cross of Calvary, we would realize it's not our puny efforts that will see us through, but the power of God.

This is what Peter is telling the believers who, no doubt, were wondering if, when the temperature rose and persecution came down, they would be able to hang in there.

"I want you to know something," Peter said. "You have an inheritance waiting for you that can't be taken from you. You are kept by the power of God, and He is committed to seeing you through. All that remains for you to do is believe."

1 Peter 1:6

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.

In using the word "heaviness"—the same word used to describe what Jesus felt in the Garden of Gethsemane when He sweat great drops of blood (Luke 22:44)—Peter isn't minimizing the reality of what his readers were fearing or feeling. "I know what you're going through is heavy," he says. "But it's only for a season. Rejoice greatly because you're going to heaven."

Think of it this way:

You go to the United Airlines counter at the airport, and the ticket agent says, "Your flight to San Francisco is on time. There's been some turbulence, but we absolutely guarantee that you'll get there. Our plane is in great shape. Our pilot is fully qualified. You might experience a bump or two, but you're going to get there just fine."

"Hang on to my ticket," you say as you make your way to a different ticket counter.

"Are there any seats available for the flight to San Francisco?" you ask.

"You bet," says the agent. "And we guarantee you'll have a smooth ride. No bumps, no jolts, no airsickness. Guaranteed smooth sailing all the way. It's the landing we're not so sure about. You see, our landing gear is not working quite right, and we seem to have a problem with occasionally landing nose-first. Also, the brakes haven't been serviced recently. But we guarantee the flight will be smooth—even if the landing is a little iffy."

If you have to choose between a smooth flight with a crash landing, or a bumpy flight with a safe landing, you'll no doubt opt for the bumpy flight.

There are those who say, "I don't want trials. I don't want to go against the world's system. I don't want to deal with all of those church disciplines you talk about. I just want smooth sailing." They are fools, for although they might escape a bump or two presently, they're ultimately headed for a fiery crash landing. On the other hand, those of us who presently deal with a bump or two along the way, will make a safe landing in heaven.

That's what Peter will emphasize over and over throughout his epistle as he sets our sights on the big picture, on heaven.

Jesus said it best: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

1 Peter 1:7 (a)
That the trial of your faith . . .

When they go through hard times or difficult days, people sometimes say, "I don't see anything good coming out of this trial." Does the Bible say, "We see all things work together for good to those who love God"? No. It says, "We *know* all things work together for good" (see Romans 8:28). We may not see things working together for good this month or this year or even in our lifetime. The Bible doesn't say we see it. The Bible says we know it. That's what Peter is reminding the believers to whom he is writing.

1 Peter 1:7 (b)
. . . being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

"I know you're going through exceedingly difficult days, with even tougher times coming your direction," says Peter, "but you can choose to rejoice. Why? Because trials strengthen faith."

In likening faith to gold tried by fire, Peter reaches back to a statement made by a man who knew uniquely what it meant to go through trials and difficulties.

> But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.
>
> Job 23:10

In Bible times, when a man wanted to make something of fine gold, he would subject the ore to such intense heat that all of the impurities would be burned out. The goldsmith would know that the work was done when he could see the reflection of his own face in the liquefied gold.

The same thing is true with us. The Lord says, "I've got big plans for you, huge plans. I've got plans not for this life only, but for eternity. Therefore, I may need to turn up the heat a bit to work out the impurities. But My hand is on the thermostat. I know exactly what I'm doing. Although at the present moment, it might not be easy, you'll thank Me for the next billion years to come because what I'm after is to see the reflection of My face in your life."

Why?

God doesn't want to see His reflection in our lives because He's on some sort of an ego trip, but because He knows that although we may not realize it, what we really want is to be like Him. There are things in our lives that keep that from happening, so the way He deals with them is to turn up the heat a bit in order that we'll come out of the fire stronger in faith and more like the Lord.

> . . . but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.
>
> Romans 5:3–5

When you finally understand this, you'll rejoice in difficulty rather than rebel because you'll see it as a purifying process that will work wonderful things into your life. Tribulation works patience. When you're going through difficulty, there's not a lot you can do other than wait for the master goldsmith to finish the process. Patience, in turn works experience as we learn that God truly knows what He's doing. Experience works hope—the absolute expectation of coming good.

> **1 Peter 1:8**
>
> **Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.**

Not only do trials strengthen our faith *in* the Lord, but they deepen our love *for* the Lord. Although those to whom Peter was writing had never seen

Jesus physically, such was not the case with Peter. Peter had not only seen Jesus daily in His humanity, but he had actually seen a sneak preview of His deity. Yet Peter's joy was not unspeakable on the Mount of Transfiguration, for he merely said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here" (Matthew 17:4). Therefore, I suggest that even though Peter had beheld Jesus physically, those to whom Peter was writing would experience an even deeper love and keener perspective due to the trials they faced.

Certainly Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego found this to be true.

> *Inside a furnace seven times hotter than it had ever been heated, these guys were in a fiery trial indeed. Yet because a "fourth Man"—the Son of God—was in the fire with them, they didn't come out of the furnace until they were commanded to do so (Daniel 3:26).*

A lot of us are getting to the place where we say, "Lord, keep me in the fire continually if that's what it takes for me to see You more clearly."

"Your joy is unspeakable," Peter says, "because you've seen Jesus in ways that far transcend seeing Him physically—even when He was transfigured in glory."

> **1 Peter 1:9–11**
>
> **Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.**

"What you're experiencing," Peter says, "is something by which the prophets were intrigued, interested in, but couldn't get a handle on." You see, the prophets wrote about things they just couldn't figure out, for they saw the glory of Psalm 2. However, they also saw the suffering of Isaiah 53. They saw the triumph on the Mount of Olives, where the returning Messiah will stand; but they also saw the blood on Mount Calvary upon which Messiah

died. *How can it be,* they must have wondered, *that He will be despised, rejected, and smitten; suffering, yet also ruling and reigning? This doesn't make sense.*

They saw Mount Calvary. They saw the Mount of Olives. But what they didn't see was the valley between the two—a valley of about two thousand years. They didn't understand that they were writing of two comings—that Messiah would come as a suffering Savior before returning as a conquering King.

Some today might say, "I hear all of the promises, but I don't see any glory." That's because there's a valley between them that might last a week, a month, a decade, a lifetime. But God's plan is being unfolded nonetheless, for glory always follows suffering. Always.

1 Peter 1:12

Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

The phrase translated "look into" is the same phrase used to describe what Peter did when he peered into the tomb on Easter Sunday (Luke 24:12). Just as the disciples wondered about the meaning of the empty tomb, angels stoop down and look at you and me in wonder. "What does this mean," they ask, "that God has chosen *these* people to be His family? Is that the best He could do?!"

1 Peter 1:13

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Because we understand those things that were only a mystery to the prophets and angels, we're to think soberly. What does it mean to "gird up the loins of your mind"? In Bible days, men would wear ankle-length robes.

But if they wanted to move quickly or freely, they would loop the bottom of their robes over their belts. Thus, Peter is saying, "Don't walk around with long robes or long faces. Pull up the mental garments that are tripping you up. Change your way of thinking concerning your situation."

It's such an important principle. You cannot change your heart, but you can change your mind. God can change your heart. He won't change your mind, but if you choose to change your mind, God will change your heart.

1 Peter 1:14–16

As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

When people go through difficulty, there is a tendency for them to drift into carnality. "Oh, what's the use," they say. "Let's just watch a video."

As we face trials and difficulties, Peter tells us we're to gird up the loins of our minds, to think soberly, and hope to the end. Whatever we do, we're not to return to our old fleshly inclinations, for God says we're to be holy, to be whole. In other words, we're not to tear ourselves apart or wear ourselves down with sin and sloth, laziness and iniquity. Instead, we're to choose in the midst of our difficulty to think rightly.

1 Peter 1:17

And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.

Keep the context in mind. Peter says to a group of people going through really tough times, "In the midst of this difficulty you can either experience unspeakable joy, or you can feel sorry for yourself and drift back into carnality. If you return to carnality, know the repercussions are going to be heartbreaking. Therefore, pass the time in fear—not fear of the Father, but fear of the repercussions of your sin."

1 Peter 1:18, 19 (a)

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ . . .

"If you have a tendency to return to your carnal lifestyle, I want you to remember that you were purchased with the blood of Christ," Peter says.

Why did it take the blood of Christ to purchase us?

The wages of sin is always death. Look carefully at the blood pulsing from the veins of Jesus Christ. See the thorns smashed into His skull. Listen to the crowd around Him mocking and cursing Him. Understand that is what sin does. The only way we, our kids, or our friends and neighbors will understand the result of sin is to look at the Cross.

1 Peter 1:19 (b), 20

. . . as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.

In the infamous work *The Passover Plot,* it is suggested that the disciples drugged Jesus on the Cross, which caused Him to swoon until He "came to" in the tomb, appearing to come back to life. While visiting a college campus, I noticed that this book is still being sold and is required reading for a certain course on religion.

I, too, believe in the Passover plot—that it was plotted before the foundation of the world. Jesus Christ would be sent to die as a Passover Lamb for my sin. In looking on Him as a Lamb slain, I see not only His grace and mercy, but a graphic picture of what sin does.

1 Peter 1:21, 22

Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through

the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.

"They're going to persecute you," Jesus told Peter. "They're going to stretch out your arms and take you where you don't want to go," He said, speaking of the manner of his death (see John 21:18, 19).

"What about this man?" Peter asked as he pointed to John.

"What is that to thee?" Jesus answered. "Follow thou Me."

When pressure rises, when persecution comes down, when things are tough, like Peter, we say, "How come he's not going through it?" or, "How come she's got it made in the shade?" If we're not careful in the time of difficulty, we can raise questions about one another and even experience a certain degree of animosity. Perhaps because he himself felt this, Peter said the solution is to love one another fervently—and then goes on to give us four reasons why we should.

1 Peter 1:23–25

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

The first reason we are to love one another fervently is because we are children in the same family, born not of man but by the explosive power of the Word of God.

THE EXPLOSIVE POWER
OF THE WORD
A Topical Study of
1 PETER 1:24

I was waiting to buy a book that had been on the bestseller list for about six months, but I thought the list price of $29.95 was a bit high. While in San Francisco, I saw it on the bargain table—for $1.88. That's the way it always is. The bestsellers of today will be on the bargain table six months from now. Watch and see!

I find it interesting that the fastest-growing category of books deals with the human growth, or human potential movement (we used to call them self-help books). These are books that help people be better, like Tony Robbins' *Awakening the Giant Within,* or John Gray's *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus,* or Steven Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.* One that quickly climbed the charts was *The High Fat Diet,* in which the author maintains that our country is headed for serious health problems unless we get back to hot fudge sundaes and cherry pie. I can't wait to get that book!

Diet books, relationship books, and leadership books will all end up on the bargain table eventually and ultimately fade into oblivion for one simple reason: They don't work.

> One hundred years ago, the best-selling book in our country was a book on phrenology. It said one could discover his personality strengths and weaknesses, and also predict his future by feeling the lumps on the top of his head. Phrenologists were serious people who would feel the lumps on people's skulls and tell them how to get "ahead." It sounds crazy now, but one hundred years ago, phrenology swept the nation.

Solomon was right when he ended Ecclesiastes saying, "Of the making of many books there is no end" (Ecclesiastes 12:12). Our text goes on to say that although men's ideas and philosophies spring up like grass and bud like

flowers, as time passes, they fade away into oblivion and are ultimately forgotten. Perhaps no one epitomizes this truth better than Voltaire, the famous French infidel of the eighteenth century.

> Voltaire was seemingly a deep thinker, a persuasive orator, a well-known figure. He called his rival, Sir Isaac Newton, a "doddering fool" because of Newton's contention that there would come a day when men would travel around the world. Newton knew this because, as a believer, he had read in the Book of Daniel that men would go "to and fro"—an idiom for global travel.
>
> "For men to travel globally, they would have to travel at speeds in excess of sixty miles per hour," scoffed Voltaire. "Any thinking man knows speed that high would cause one's heart to stop beating."
>
> That isn't the only time Voltaire proved to be wrong. On his deathbed in 1778, he declared that within one hundred years of his death, the Bible would only be found in museums and in the archives of libraries. How fitting, then, that Voltaire's house was purchased by the European Bible Society to produce thousands of Bibles annually —even to this day.

Voltaire passed away like the grass, like a flower. The Word of God endures forever. Why? It is unique among all books in that it's the only book that is living.

> *For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*
>
> Hebrews 4:12

The Word of God is living, folks. It's not just alive metaphorically, but it is living in reality. Every book of the Bible, all 66; every chapter, all 1,118; every verse, all 774,746; every word, all 3,500,034 are inspired.

"Man shall not live by bread alone," Jesus declared," but by every word which proceeds out of the mouth of God" (see Matthew 4:4). Every part of

the Word is living. None can be ignored. All must be embraced.

Every word is inspired—not just poetically or theologically—but physically.

How do I know? Look at our text. . . .

> *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*
>
> 1 Peter 1:23

The phrase "incorruptible seed" is a Greek term that speaks of sperm. This should not be surprising, for by definition, any living thing has the capability to reproduce itself. The Word of God is no exception, for by it we are born again.

"The words which I speak are spirit and life," Jesus declared (see John 6:63).

> "Master, we know that You must be from God, for no man can do the works You do unless God be with him," Nicodemus said to Jesus one night.
>
> "Verily, I say unto you, you must be born again," Jesus said.
>
> Perhaps scratching his head, Nicodemus said, "How can this be? How can a man enter into his mother's womb a second time? What do You mean?"
>
> "That which is born of flesh is flesh," Jesus said, "but that which is born of spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I say you must be born again. The wind bloweth where it wants, and you hear the sound, but no man knows from whence it comes and no man knows where it goes" (see John 3:1–8).

A teacher of Israel, Nicodemus should have understood the reference. Born again, wind blowing? His mind should have raced immediately to Ezekiel 37, a passage familiar to every rabbi and teacher in Israel. . . .

> One day, the spirit of the Lord took Ezekiel to a valley full of dry, dead bones and told him to preach to the bones. As Ezekiel began to

preach the Word, something amazing began to happen. The bones started to move. Before long, they had joined together like a great army, yet zombielike because they were without life.

"Prophesy to the wind," the Lord said to Ezekiel.

So Ezekiel prophesied unto the wind even as he had done to the bones, and the wind—the *ruwach*—the spirit moved into them and the bones came to life.

If Nicodemus had made the connection between this story and what Jesus was telling him that night, he would have understood that to be born again means to be made alive by the Spirit and the Word, just as the bones became alive when Ezekiel preached the Spirit and the Word.

Perhaps, like me, you have known for years that when the seed of the Word and the Spirit of God penetrate our being, we "dry bones" come to life. I want you to see that the same dynamic that caused us to be born again can continually impact us in any arena where there are dry bones in our lives.

"Our marriage is as dry as a bone," you might be saying. Or, "I respect him immensely, but my dad is spiritually as dry as a bone." Or, "My seventh-grade daughter is not walking with the Lord as closely as she could be."

I have great news for you. The Word of God has the unique ability to impact and change your teenage son or daughter, your grandchildren, your mother, your co-worker, your friend, your husband, your neighbor.

How?

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Isaiah 55:10, 11

God is saying, "Just as rain coming down causes growth to take place on a barren hillside, so My Word will accomplish the purpose I sent it to do."

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

Deuteronomy 6:4–7

When you're driving in your car; when you're having breakfast together; when you tuck your kids into bed, don't talk to them about your ideas on dating or your philosophy on politics. Talk to them about Scripture. Share Bible verses with them over and over again.

You see, the verse itself has power. It is the incorruptible seed that has the power to produce spiritual life: in your husband who seems to be a dry bag of bones; in your wife who seems to be unresponsive to spiritual things. The power is in the Word itself. It is a seed that will not return void but will permanently impact and powerfully affect anyone who hears it.

If we really believed this, folks, we would be sharing Bible verses constantly—as we drive, as we have a meal, as we go on vacation, in the office, on the ball field, in the neighborhood. There would be a steady stream not of our thoughts, but of the living Word of God. Now, we may not see its effect immediately, but, according to Isaiah 55:11, it will take root and blossom ultimately.

I challenge you today, Mom, Dad, Friend, Teenager, Grandfather, Neighbor—to take a verse—any verse—and plant it in the ear of your granddaughter. Use it in your conversation as you talk on the phone. Say it in passing to the guy at the gas station. The impact will be huge because God honors His Word even above His name.

"That may be true," you sigh. "but you must understand. It's not just that I am surrounded by dry bones; I myself am dry."

If you feel this way, turn to 2 Kings 13. . . .

During an invasion in Israel, a Moabite soldier died. Midway in the process of burying him, his fellow soldiers caught sight of their

enemies headed right at them. To save time, they tossed their dead buddy into a grave that was already occupied by the body of the prophet Elisha. When the corpse hit the bones of Elisha, it immediately came back to life—revived, resurrected, born again!

This story never ceases to amaze me. It tells me that if our lives have been permeated with the Word of God, even when we go through dry days or dark nights, life will come from us as the Word of God flows through us to those around us.

It's not how we're doing or how we're feeling that matters. Whether we feel high or dry is irrelevant. It's the power of the Word that works.

Therefore, your assignment this week is to share a verse with your son, daughter, schoolmate, or co-worker.

"I don't know any verses," you say.

Come to Bible study and learn one! Learn one verse a week and then plant it in the heart of someone else to bring life to them. Speak Scripture, gang, and watch what happens.



2 **1 Peter 2:1–3**

Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Peter closed the first chapter of his epistle by saying we should love one another fervently because we're members of the same family. Just as we were all conceived *by* the incorruptible Word of God, as newborn babes, we're to continue *in* the Word of God.

If you're a parent, you know how newborn babes crave milk. In the middle of the night, they want milk. When you're trying to study, they want milk. Every few hours they want milk. Peter says we're to be the same way. He doesn't say *if* we're newborn babes, or *when* we're newborn babes, but

rather we're to continue all the days of our lives *as* newborn babes, craving the sincere milk of the Word.

If we are all in the Word together, the result will be unity. If you don't believe me, take a look around. This group of people would never get together for any other reason except the Word. We have different interests, political inclinations, ideas, philosophies, and backgrounds. However, as we study the Word, we are knit together in unity.

That is why we are to lay aside the slow-burning anger of malice, the trickery of guile, and the divisiveness of hypocrisy, envy, and evil speaking. The degree to which those attributes exist in our lives will be the degree to which our hunger for the Word will be diminished.

> *No matter how good the meal my wife, Tammy, prepares for me, if I stop off at McDonald's on the way home and score a couple of Quarter Pounders with large fries—and super-size the whole deal —when I get home, I won't be interested in what she's made.*

When people stop reading or studying the Word, it's because they're eating the junk food of the world. That's why Peter says, "First lay aside the junk and then you will desire the milk of the Word."

> **1 Peter 2:4, 5 (a)**
>
> **To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones . . .**

Peter says not only are we children in the same family, but we are stones in the same building. Several years ago, there was a mini controversy at Applegate Christian Fellowship for a few days relating to whether young men should be allowed to wear hats in church. While I understand the concern for respect, the issue wasn't that guys were wearing hats in church. The issue was that the church was wearing hats. The building isn't the church —the body is! We are the living stones.

People like to be on the church grounds at Applegate Christian Fellowship. They enjoy the amphitheater, the sanctuary, the mountaintop. I like to be there, too. Why? It's not because the grounds are anything special.

It's because the fragrance of the church is left behind. These buildings are nothing more than buildings. But because the church is here worshiping and praying, studying and fellowshiping with the Lord, the environment is filled with the fragrance of Jesus.

1 Peter 2:5 (b)
. . . are built up a spiritual house . . .

That we are living stones who are being built up, or fit together, as a spiritual house brings to mind a most interesting Scripture. . . .

> And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.
>
> 1 Kings 6:7

When Solomon's temple was being constructed, all of the chiseling, hammering, cutting, and chipping was done underneath the old city of Jerusalem. When the stones were taken to the temple mount, they could be fit together in silence.

We're living stones being fit together for an eternal temple in heaven. This life is the quarry, which explains why we always feel like we're being chipped and chiseled. "Why am I next to this blockhead?" you ask, or, "Why are they part of the family?" You know why? As *living* stones, we constantly rub against one another, knocking rough edges off one another in the process. You see, God puts us right next to the very people He knows will smooth us down so He can build us up into a temple for His glory.

The problem is, I try to get away from the blockhead I'm rubbing against. But because God puts us in fixes to fix us, He puts us with people and in situations He knows will shape us most effectively. So if I try to fix the fix God put me in, He will be faithful to put me in another fix to fix the fix He wanted to fix in the first place! If we don't learn this, we'll go from fix to fix until finally we say, "Okay, Lord. I'm not going to try to fix this, or wiggle out of that, but I'm going to embrace and accept where You have me because I know You're doing a work on me, shaping me for eternity."

1 Peter 2:5 (c)–8

. . . an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

According to tradition, during the construction of Solomon's temple, work went smoothly until the builders were unable to locate the cornerstone. Word was sent to send the missing stone up to the temple mount.

"We sent that stone a long time ago," the quarriers replied.

The builders were confused until one of them remembered a perfectly cut stone that was tossed over the gully into the Kidron Valley because no one knew what to do with it.

The rejected cornerstone is a biblical allusion that shows up again and again throughout Scripture (Isaiah 28:16–18; Psalm 118:22; Acts 4:11).

"It was a mistake to marry him," she cries.

"I can't figure her out," he sighs.

"This is unworkable. Let's quit," they say.

The same thing happened to Jesus. . . .

"How can this carpenter, this peasant, be the Messiah?" they scoffed. "He leads no army. He has no credentials. Let's get rid of Him," they said.

Instead of saying, "Dump them," you and I must be those who look at people and situations and say, "I bet this is the Cornerstone working in my life. Jesus is using this situation in some way I can't figure out. It doesn't fit in with my thinking. It doesn't work according to my calculation or design—but somehow, even as He was rejected, this could very well be a key to what He is doing in my life."

1 Peter 2:9 (a)

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood . . .

Not only are we children in the same family and stones in the same building, but we are priests in the same temple. . . .



***For topical study of 1 Peter 2:9 entitled "The Power of Sacrifice," turn to page* 1555.**

1 Peter 2:9 (b), 10

. . . an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

As children of the same family, stones in the same building, priests in the same temple, we are also citizens of the same nation. People look at us and say, "What a peculiar group you are." Any nation that would heavily fine a person for destroying an eagle's egg, yet actually encourage the destruction of a human embryo is peculiar indeed. Therefore, I'm *glad* they look at us as being strange!

1 Peter 2:11 (a)

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts . . .

As a body, we are to do three things in light of our unity. First, we are to live in purity. Having talked about trials and persecution from without, Peter seems to shift gears here and address the potential danger from within. "I beseech you," he says. "I beg you. I plead with you. Hear the cry of my heart: Abstain from fleshly lusts that war against your soul."

In times of difficulty, people sometimes say, "Why should I refrain? Why should I abstain? I just can't take it anymore."

Peter answers, "Even as things get tough, whatever you do, don't give in to your fleshly lusts. Be careful. You're vulnerable." Perhaps better than

anyone else, Peter knew what he was talking about, for he was one who succumbed to his fleshly lusts when things got tough.

> *"Watch and pray," Jesus told him specifically, "lest you enter into temptation" (Matthew 26:41).*
>
> *Peter listened to his flesh, saying, "This Passion Week has been pretty intense. You need a break. Kick back. Relax."*
>
> *So he did.*
>
> *A few hours later, standing by the fire not of persecution, but of temptation, Peter ended up denying Jesus three times. Shaken in his soul, he wept bitterly (Luke 22:62).*

Peter knows what he's talking about when he says to the early believers, to you, and to me, "I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims. Abstain from the lust of this world." Notice Peter doesn't say, "Refrain temporarily," or, "Know when to say when," or, "Be sure you have a designated driver." No, he simply says, "Abstain completely."

> **1 Peter 2:11 (b), 12**
>
> **. . . which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.**

The Greek word translated "war" is *strateuo mai,* from which we get our word "strategy." The Enemy has a strategy to war against your soul—your personality, your emotions, your will, your volition. The strategy of Satan is simply to say, "Abstinence is too old-fashioned, too legalistic, too unrealistic, too harsh. Just know when to say when. Be wise in what you're doing."

You see, gang, Satan won't come blasting into your life with a drug dealer in tow. No, his strategy is much more subtle. He simply wants you to compromise a little here and a little there, until there is nothing left of your purity. The problem with lust is not that it hurts God or others. The problem with lust is that it wars against *us.* It tears us down as it wears us down.

1 Peter 2:13–20

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the pun ishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

We are to walk in purity and humility. At the time of Peter's writing, a majority of Rome's population were slaves. They were treated as less than human. Peter instructs them to not only honor the king, but to submit to their masters. How, then, can we have the audacity to snivel about our president or whine about our bosses when our brothers and sisters served cruel masters and honored a demented king whose main objective was to annihilate them?

Lord, forgive us.

1 Peter 2:21–25

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose

stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

We are to walk in purity, humility, and we are to walk in conformity to the Lamb. Facing persecution, the early believers were not left on their own without a model to follow, for "Christ also suffered for us, leaving an example, that we should follow in his steps."

When my son Peter-John was about three years old, we were playing in the snow, and I said, "Come on, PJ, follow in my footprints if you can." He couldn't. My stride was too big.

To be frank, folks, I look at a verse like this and read that when He was being wrongly, cruelly, terribly treated, Jesus didn't answer back. I am to follow His steps. Yet I know I can't do this because I want to fight back; I want to let my opinion be known; I want to make sure I'm heard. Here's the good news: Jesus not only is our example; He is our enabler. He is not only the Lamb He is the Shepherd of our souls.

Peter-John did indeed follow in my steps that day—as I lifted him into the air and back down again and again so that he could put his feet in each one. He followed in my footsteps not only because I gave him steps to follow, but because I also enabled him to do so by lifting him up.

That's what our Lord does. He's the One who hoists me up and allows me, if I'll let Him, to follow in His footsteps.

And He'll do the same for you.

THE POWER OF SACRIFICE

A Topical Study of 1 PETER 2:9

As I read page after page of Richard Scarry's *What Does Daddy Do?* to then three-year-old Peter John, he discovered that some daddies are bakers; some are carpenters. Some are policemen, others firemen. When we finished the book, I said, "Peter, do you know what your daddy does?"

Peter thought for a minute and said, "You're a screecher!"

"No," I said.

"A creature?" he tried again.

"No, Peter," I laughed. "I'm a preacher."

There's nothing I'd rather be, for there is nothing as fulfilling as being in ministry. As a minister, I get to see people's eternal destiny changed. I get to share the Good News of what Jesus did on the Cross of Calvary with people who are not sure where they will spend eternity. I get to see marriages turn around and families discover a foundation upon which they can build successfully. There's nothing I would rather do than be in the ministry.

Guess what. Our text tells us you are in the ministry every bit as much as I am—for we are *all* chosen to be a royal priesthood.

"Wait a minute," you say. "How can I be in the ministry? I've never been ordained."

Really? Didn't Jesus say, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and *ordained* you that you should go and bring forth much fruit" (see John 15:16)?

"Well," you say, "if I'm an ordained minister, where's my office?"

If you work at a bank, your office is in a bank. If you work at Wal-Mart, it's at Wal-Mart. If you go to school, your office is your campus. You see, the Lord ingeniously has positioned his pastors in places "professional pastors" like me could never go.

When we understand this, it changes everything because we see ourselves not as a banker, a student, or a truck driver, but as a minister of the gospel who has been subversively placed in a given arena to make an impact

for the kingdom. Truly, we are a royal priesthood, ordained and assigned by no less than the King of kings.

What is a priesthood? In the Old Testament, the priesthood consisted of a specific group of men who would stand before God on behalf of the people, and before the people on behalf of God. In New Testament times, the entire church is a priesthood.

"If that's the case," you say, "it was the job of the Old Testament priests to offer sacrifices to the Lord. How does that apply to us?"

Consider the following five sacrifices we, the New Testament priesthood, are instructed to offer. . . .

The Sacrifice of Self

> *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*
>
> Romans 12:1

The first sacrifice we offer as New Testament priests is that of ourselves. Because living sacrifices tend to wiggle off the altar, we must continually lay our lives down. Thus, daily, even hourly, we pray,

> "Today, Father, I give my eyes to You. May I look at people the way You do. I give My lips to You. May I speak words that are in harmony with Your heart. I give my hands to You. May they reach out in love. I give my feet to You. Please guard and guide my steps. I give my body to You, Lord, a living sacrifice."

The Sacrifice of Souls

> *That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.*
>
> Romans 15:16

When you witness at Wal-Mart, the bank or around your neighborhood, when you speak in such a way that people can see you're a Christian—be it as you give a word of testimony, or as you turn the conversation in some way to the goodness and grace of God—you are offering a well-pleasing sacrifice to the Father.

The Sacrifice of Stuff

> *But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice accept able, well-pleasing to God.*
>
> Philippians 4:18

As in Old Testament days when the aroma of barbequed bulls and lambs was well-pleasing to the Father, the material stuff we share is delightful to His senses as well. Why? He knows our tendency to buy things we can't afford with money we don't have in order to impress people we don't like. Therefore, He says, "I want you to give—not because I need the money, but because you need to be released from the bondage of materialism."

When you give to the Lord, gang, you're not just supporting a ministry, but you are giving away a bit of your selfishness and greediness. Doing so is pleasing in God's sight.

The Sacrifice of Song

> *By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.*
>
> Hebrews 13:15

The Father is delighted when His children come together to praise Him. This is not surprising. Gifts of thanksgiving and love and praise delight the heart of any father.

> Tammy and I were sitting in the backyard. "Mommy! Mommy!" we heard our then six-year-old call at the top of her lungs.
>
> "Mary," said Tammy, "if you want to talk, you're going to have to come back here."
>
> The next thing we heard was an odd noise working its way through the house. Wearing her rollerblades, Mary then appeared in the backyard. At this point, I was all ready to lecture her about why she shouldn't have been yelling in the first place, much less wearing her rollerblades in the house, when suddenly she took from behind her back a beautiful hand-picked bouquet. You know what? I forgot all about my lecture.

You, too, might feel like you've messed up. But when you come before the Father with a bouquet of praise, saying, "Lord, I know I left rollerblade tracks behind me, but I love You," His heart is touched.

Maybe singing praise songs isn't your thing. If you choose to lift hands, or bow the knee, or sing anyway, you're sacrificing your own comfort, shyness, image or feeling of inadequacy. Then it becomes a true sacrifice of praise.

As is the case with the sacrifice of our stuff, God doesn't need to be praised. We need to praise. God doesn't need affirming. He doesn't suffer from low self-esteem. He's not saying, "Am I really the Holy and Anointed One? Am I really sweeter than honey? Thanks for reminding Me because I was questioning that this morning." No! That's not it! God knows who He is,

and He also knows we need to acknowledge who He is in order that *we* might be reminded.

The Sacrifice of Service

> *But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*
>
> Hebrews 13:16

When you write a thank-you note to someone, when you tell a brother you see the Lord in him, or when you affirm a sister in her faith, you offer the sacrifice of service. When you mow someone's lawn or bake someone cookies, you're doing good and offering a sacrifice which is well-pleasing to God.

"Okay," you might be saying, "I understand I'm in the priesthood, and I understand the sacrifices I am supposed to offer. To be honest, however, the idea of sacrifice just doesn't appeal to me."

Sacrifice may not appeal to you, but I'll bet success does. Sacrifice secures success because sacrifice releases power, and great sacrifice releases great power. This is one of those pivotal, essential, and foundational understandings for success in spiritual life. The reason God is calling you and me to be a priesthood that offers sacrifices is because He knows that sacrifice secures success. Sacrifice releases power, and great sacrifice releases great power.

For a story which illustrates this point, turn to 2 Kings 3. . . .

> The nations of Judah and Israel had allied with the nation of Edom for one reason: to engage the murderous Moabites in battle. On their march across the blistering, burning desert, they ran out of water. In trouble, they called for a prophet. Elisha was dispatched and told them in the name of the Lord to do something rather odd. He told them to dig ditches. So they dug the ditches—even though it seemed impractical, illogical, and a waste of their rapidly diminishing energy.
>
> The next morning, the ditches were miraculously filled with water, and they were saved. The miracle continued. Not only was their thirst quenched, but when the rising sun shone on the water, it appeared as blood to the Moabites.

> "The three nations have taken up arms against one another!" the Moabites said. "Their alliance has crumbled. They've killed one another!"
>
> Thinking all they had to do was march in and pick up the spoils, the Moabites were sorely surprised to discover that the Edomites and Jews weren't dead at all. Proving to be no match for their combined forces, the Moabites fled before them. But Israel pursued them to their city.
>
> Surrounded by the Israelites, and sensing he and his people were doomed, indeed, the king of Moab did something unbelievable when he offered his eldest son as a burnt offering upon the wall of his city. When the men of Israel saw the prince hanging from the wall, they returned to their own land.

The king of Moab saved his people through a great sacrifice. He sacrificed his son, and in humiliation, the son hung for all to see. I'm sure you understand the analogy. We were about to be wiped out because of our own sin. Yet the Father stepped in and sacrificed His Son, hanging Him on a tree in humiliation, pain, and suffering to die for you and me. The Enemy that was about to chase us down and damn us eternally can no longer fight against such a sacrifice.

Sacrifice releases power. Great sacrifice releases great power. The greatest sacrifice ever offered was when God gave His Son. The greatest power ever released is that which secures our salvation. May God help you and me to understand that sacrifice is not something that is simply to cause us pain or agony. The sacrifice God calls us to is to set us free in order that we might be successful and powerful in life and ministry.

If you want little success or little power, give little sacrifices. But if you want great success and great power, say, "I'm going to praise the Lord even if it means getting less sleep." Or, "Instead of gossiping in the lunchroom at work, I'm going to slip away to a quiet spot and thank the Lord for His goodness to me." Or, "I'm going to share the Lord with kids at school." Or, "I'm going to give to someone in need."

The Father will breathe deeply of such sweet-smelling sacrifice to Him —as you take your place in the royal priesthood.

3 We should not be surprised that in the middle of his epistle in which the word "suffering" appears sixteen times, Peter addresses the subject of marriage. In days of difficulty, marriages will either grow stronger or collapse under the strain. Thus, it is fitting that Peter would address the issue of marriage within the overarching theme of the believer and suffering.

Why is it that in our day—when there are countless seminars and books, tapes and videos available concerning marriage—we're seeing even Christian marriages unraveling to an unparalleled degree?

Perhaps part of the answer lies in the same reason the Bible keeps its teaching on marriage very simple. The real issue is not knowing what to do —it's doing what we know. You see, many people believe that if people had more information on how to be better wives or husbands, everything would be fine. Yet it only takes a few minutes to study everything Jesus said concerning marriage.

I find Peter's instructions to be succinct, simple, and wonderfully workable.

1 Peter 3:1, 2

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.

As a pastor, I have found that, when a man gets saved, his wife and his kids follow him in faith. Such was the case in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10), as well as in the family of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16). When a woman is saved first, however, I have found she tends to come alone. This is partly due to a phony sense of male superiority that says, "If she found it first, how right can it be?" Or, "This church stuff doesn't fit in with the macho image I've cultivated so carefully."

Consequently, Peter is saying to wives, "Even if your husbands aren't saved, don't preach at them. Don't put tracts in their lunchbox when you send them off to work. Don't turn on the Christian radio station when you go to bed. You are to win your husbands simply by submitting to them."

1 Peter 3:3, 4 (a)

Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible . . .

The Greek word translated "adorn" is *kosmos,* which means "ordered universe," and from which we get our word "cosmetic," so here Peter is speaking of an order not of the outward appearance, but an order in the inner person. "Don't make clothes, jewelry, or the way you fix your hair the center of your universe or your top priority," says Peter. If you do, you're missing God's best for you.

1 Peter 3:4 (b)

. . . even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

Derived from the idea of a powerful horse brought into submission, the Greek word translated "meek" is *praus,* which means "strength under control." Thus, a meek person is one who is centered, grounded, one who knows what he or she is about, who has a godly perspective on life. It is no wonder, then, that to the Lord, a meek and quiet spirit is never out of style.

I believe heaven will prove to be the great reversal. That is, many of those who appear on the cover of *People* magazine today will, in eternity, be shriveled, insignificant, or absent altogether—while many of those on earth who are today thought of as unattractive, unimportant, and insignificant will be beautiful in heaven because of their inner person. For the next billion years, no one will care about your hair or biceps, your wardrobe or your tan. All that will matter is whether you cultivated a meek and quiet spirit.

1 Peter 3:5, 6

For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.

Not only are wives to be attractive inside, they are to stand by their husbands' side. The example used here is an interesting one, for Peter reaches back to the Old Testament and singles out Sarah as the model of a submitted woman.

Catch the scene:

> *Sitting in front of his tent, Abraham saw three men headed his way. As they drew nearer, he realized they were unique—and indeed they were, for they were two angels and the Lord. Running out to greet them, he fell at their feet, saying, "Come to my tent and be refreshed."*
>
> *Over dinner, the Lord said to Abraham, "Sarah will bear a son"—a reiteration of the promise given to him years before (see Genesis 12:2).*
>
> *Hearing this, Scripture says Sarah laughed within herself (Genesis 18:12).*

The story is pertinent because in reaching back to this particular event, Peter is saying that Sarah called Abraham "lord" at the very point she was having a hard time believing his vision. How needed is the submissive spirit of Sarah today. The wife who hears the vision, the dream, the call of her husband, is tempted to say, "No way. You're too old. You're untrained. You're not qualified enough. You're not smart enough. You're not skilled enough. Forget it!"

> *A dear friend of mine loved the Word and felt called to start a ministry. "That's impractical," said his wife. "Get your head out of the clouds and your feet back on the ground. This is just not going to happen." He let go of the vision. Today they're divorced, and their kids are heartbroken.*

How much better it would have been had this wife taken Peter's simple, practical word and said, "Here's my perspective, honey, but whatever the Lord leads you to do, I'll travel with you." How much better it would have

been if, like Sarah, in the moment of her own doubting, she chose to honor her husband, even though his vision didn't make sense to her.

"I would be happy to believe in my husband's vision," you say. "But let me tell you, my husband's no Abraham!"

For that, you can be glad—for you recall the story. . . .

> *To escape famine in the land, Abraham headed to Egypt. He took Sarah with him. Once there, Abraham instructed Sarah to tell people they were brother and sister, knowing Pharaoh would kill him in order to add Sarah to his harem. This amazes me until I remember that, although Abraham is indeed a giant of the faith, he is still a man with flaws and weaknesses.*
>
> *"Take these camels, goods, and servants," said Pharaoh to Abraham. "Your sister is one pretty lady." So Abraham became a wealthy man. What about Sarah? Even though Abraham had let her down, God didn't. He protected her when He plagued the house of Pharaoh, rendering Pharaoh unable to touch her (see Genesis 12:17).*

Even though Abraham was going in the wrong direction, God protected Sarah and enriched the family as a result of her obedience. As for Abraham, he suffered the consequences of his sin. His heart was later broken when he had to let go of the son born to him through his union with one of the servants given him by Pharaoh (Genesis 16:3, 4).

When I lead my family in the wrong direction, God deals with me directly. Because Tammy travels with me, God protects her and enriches our family through her submission. As you study Abraham's life, you see that a key component to his greatness was having Sarah for his wife—one who traveled with him, one who trusted in God, one who called him lord.

Wives, don't strive with your husbands. If he has a dream, if there's something on his heart, if he senses a calling stirring within him—even if it doesn't make sense to you, even if you might be worried about the financial repercussions, don't get in his way. Travel with him. If you don't, he will become quenched spiritually, your family will be fractured unnecessarily,

and years will be tragically lost. Be like Sarah—even if you have to stifle a chuckle or two—and watch the Lord bless abundantly.

1 Peter 3:7 (a)
Likewise, ye husbands. . . .

Of his seven verses dealing with marriage, Peter spends six of them addressing women. I think there's a reason for that.

If you went to a pet store to buy a pet turkey, you would pick up a cage, food, water bowl, and a booklet, wherein you would find lengthy instructions on how to care for your pet. The turkey, on the other hand, wouldn't need a book telling him how to live with you because the smarter one gets the instructions.

I think you see the analogy! Women are given a greater amount of instruction because their challenge to live with men can be much more difficult! Peter makes it as simple as he can for husbands when he tells them they are to do three things. . . .

1 Peter 3:7 (b)
. . . dwell with them according to knowledge . . .

As a husband, I am to know my wife deeply, profoundly, in the way she deserves to be known. How does this happen? I believe the answer can be seen in the way our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, relates to His bride.

At the outset of His public ministry, Jesus called Philip to follow Him. So impressed was Phillip with Jesus that he told his friend Nathanael he had found the Messiah.

"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

So Nathanael did.

"Behold, an Israelite in whom is no guile," said Jesus of Nathanael.

"How do you know me?" asked Nathanael.

"Before you came to meet Me, when you were sitting under the fig tree, I saw you," Jesus said.

"Truly You must be the Master," Nathanael said.

"Stick around, Nathanael," said Jesus, "for you will see angels descending and ascending from heaven."

And Nathanael followed Jesus from that moment on (see John 1:43–51; 21:2).

Rabbinical literature indicates that studying was often done under a fig tree, the national symbol of Israel. Thus, Nathanael was studying when Jesus saw him. I suggest he was reading the account in Genesis 28. Jacob, a man whose name meant "guile," was in a place he thought was forsaken by God. Yet in his sleep, Jacob saw a ladder come down from heaven with angels ascending and descending upon it. Thus, it could be that when Jesus referred to him as an Israelite in whom there was no guile, no "Jacob"—and then went on to refer to Himself as the Ladder upon which the angels ascend and descend, Nathanael might have thought, *That's the story I was just reading a few moments ago!* (see John 1:43–51)

Jesus, the Bridegroom, knew His bride, Nathanael, because Nathanael was studying the Word. The best way for you to have knowledge of your wife, husband, is to spend time with her in the Word.

1 Peter 3:7 (c)

. . . giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel . . .

Not only are we to have knowledge of our wives, but we are to honor them as weaker vessels. The idea of her being the weaker vessel does not mean she is intellectually, morally, or spiritually inferior. On the contrary, her weakness stems from her innate desire for spirituality. In the Garden of Eden, it was Eve Satan seduced—not to party, but to be more spiritual. Eve was the weaker vessel in the sense that she was more vulnerable to Satan's suggestion that she eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in order to be more like God (Genesis 3:5).

This helps me understand that my wife will innately have a desire for the Lord that will perhaps transcend my own. Thus, I can be blessed by her relationship with Him. On the other hand, she will also be more vulnerable to some of Satan's subtle seductions. So we need each other.

After the Fall, the situation worsened due to the curse which said that although the desire of the woman would be for the man, it would be the lot of the man to work hard for a living (Genesis 3:16–19). That is why husbands hear their wives saying, "I just want to be with you," and why wives hear their husbands saying, "I just want to provide for you." It's the curse that affects every marriage to one degree or another.

1 Peter 3:7 (d)

. . . and as being heirs together of the grace of life . . .

Not only are husbands to have knowledge of and give honor to their wives, they are to be enriched by their wives. Suppose you inherited ten thousand dollars, but your wife inherited ten million dollars. Would you choose to have a joint checking account? Would you choose to be joint heirs? I think so!

Husband, you can enjoy the *charis,* the grace, the "beauty of life" if you see your wife as being rich in the things of God.

"Oh, but I don't need my wife spiritually," you might be thinking. "I'm a mighty man of God."

So was Moses.

> *God had called Moses to set His people free. Yet after hearing the Word of the Lord, he found himself pinned down by Lord's strength. Intuitively realizing what was happening, his wife, Zipporah, grabbed a sharp rock and circumcised their son. The Lord then released Moses to go on to become the leader of the nation of Israel (Exodus 4:25).*

You see, God had told Moses that the eldest sons of the Egyptians would die. Moses had a problem in that his own son was not circumcised according to the covenant of God. Zipporah knew this. Oh, others might have been in

awe of Moses. Others might have been impressed with Moses. Others had certainly been led by Moses. Zipporah knew that God would not continue to use Moses if he failed to tend to his own son.

So often, it's the wife who will say, "Others might think you're Mr. Wonderful, but because I want to see you become what I know God has called you to be; because I want you to be the leader of our family; because I want our sons and daughters to do well, this is what needs to happen. . . ."

Husband, God put your wife in your life to enrich you. Listen to her. Honor her. Know her. My wife has a huge part to play in my life and ministry. She's a joint heir. I will enjoy the *charis,* grace, the "beauty of life" to the degree that I know, honor and listen to her.

1 Peter 3:7 (e)

. . . that your prayers be not hindered.

Husband, more than success in ministry, more than professional accolades, more than material wealth, God wants you to experience the joy of seeing your wife as a joint heir with Christ. He wants you to see your kids grow up serving Him wholeheartedly. To that end, as He did with Moses, He'll stop you if your priorities are amiss. If you notice a dryness in your walk or a brass ceiling that causes your prayers to bounce back to you, could it be that something is wrong at home? The Father loves us too much to let us go about our business for Him if things aren't right with our families. If our faith doesn't work at home, it doesn't work anywhere.

1 Peter 3:8–10 (a)

Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil . . .

After talking about marriage and "love life," Peter talks about loving life. Even in the midst of the persecution where believers were being crucified

upside down, Peter encourages his readers to love life.

It is when the hard times come that we need to watch our tongues. It's very easy to begin complaining, "Why me? Why this? Why now?" Peter tells us that if we want to love life and see good days, we are to refrain our tongue from evil—literally to keep from complaining.

1 Peter 3:10 (b)
. . . and his lips that they speak no guile.

While speaking evil implies speaking against God, "speaking guile" means manipulating situations to make it easier on oneself. This happens most easily when times get tough, as we begin to twist the truth, saying things that put us in a better light. We manipulate the situation to our own advantage.

1 Peter 3:11 (a)
Let him eschew evil, and do good . . .

In other words, "Turn your back on evil and, instead, do good." This is the idea that we are to do good for others. When hard times come, it's easy to think that it's not our fault. Peter tells us that if we want to love life and see good days, we must not let our guard down. This isn't meant to put a legalistic burden *upon* us, but rather to be a wise and loving guide *for* us.

1 Peter 3:11 (b), 12
. . . let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

Peter continues quoting another who experienced brutal days.

> What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto

their cry. The face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

Psalm 34:12–16

With Saul out to kill him, David found himself seeking refuge in the Philistine city of Gath. When he realized that he was recognized as the one who had slain Goliath, David knew he was again in danger. In order to make it out of Gath alive, he clawed at the gates of the city, ranting and raving like a lunatic as he feigned insanity. When the king heard there was a crazy man within his gates, David was allowed to go his way. (1 Samuel 21:10–15)

Psalm 34 was written while David was running for his life. Yet he says, "I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth, for I have tasted and seen in the midst of this difficulty that the Lord is good."

Who will love life and see good days? Society says it's the one who can make his life problem-free, who insulates himself from difficulty, who escapes adversity. David says just the opposite. He says it's when you're wondering how the next bill will be paid, or if the marriage will work out that the Lord makes Himself most real to you. He says it's when you're trapped in Gath that suddenly you see God.

If we really embraced what Peter is saying, what David is declaring, and what James' injunction to "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials" (see James 1:2), we would not try to make our life easier. Instead, we would be those who say, "It's in the day of difficulty, in the years that are hard for me that I'm going to have the opportunity to taste and see that the Lord is good."

We all know people who are insulated from problems, who don't have challenges, who succeeded in making their lives as easy as they possibly could. Yet the easier it gets for them, the less joy there is within them.

Peter says something absolutely shocking—at least to the ears of our culture: "In the midst of suffering, difficulty, and challenges, don't seek to fix the problem. Don't make it easier. Instead, choose to do good and seek peace. Don't murmur; don't complain. You'll find that you love life because God will meet you in the midst of your difficulty."

1 Peter 3:13

And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

To the early church, Peter says, "If you choose to do good in hard times, who can really harm you? Oh, people might hurt you, but they can't harm you. They might tie you to a tree and ignite you. They might throw you to lions that devour you. But they can't harm you because you'll end up in heaven."

Those who live for heaven have an entirely different perspective on life because they're able to take a lot more things a lot less seriously. If you're living for earth, for an easy life, you'll be miserable. If you seek first the kingdom of God, if you live for heaven, you'll find that, although people may hurt you, no one can harm you.

1 Peter 3:14 (a)

But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye . . .

"Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My name's sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (see Matthew 5:11, 12).

Echoing Jesus, Peter says, "Be happy in suffering, in difficulty, in persecution." Why? Suffering, difficulty, heartache, and tragedy set our sights on heaven.

Although I long to go oh, so much further, I'm not sure that had I not been given the privilege of going through some heartaches and tragedies, I would be where I am presently. And the same is true for you. The aching back, the kids that break your heart, the career advancement that didn't work out—are all necessary to sever the cords that bind us to this earth.

1 Peter 3:14 (b), 15 (a)

. . . and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts . . .

After quoting David and Jesus, Peter quotes Isaiah.

With the dreaded Assyrians headed their way, the kings of Syria and Israel asked Ahaz, the king of Judah to join them. However, being warned through Isaiah by the Lord not to, Ahaz refused. This put him in a position in which Assyria, Syria, and Israel were now all against him.

> For the LORD spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid.
>
> Isaiah 8:11, 12

"Do not be afraid of confederacies," Isaiah said. In other words, "Focus on the Lord."

Peter was talking to a group of people who were, indeed, the object of a conspiracy, as the Roman Empire conspired against Christians. Yet because he knew the Word, Peter was able to draw on Old Testament illustrations to encourage them in their situation.

> **1 Peter 3:15 (b)**
>
> **. . . and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.**

The idea here is not primarily to defend a theological position. Rather, it is to give a very simple explanation for your hope. This is another good thing about hard times: they give us an opportunity to shine brightly in what would otherwise be darkness.

***For topical study of 1 Peter 3:14–15 entitled "The Reason for Hope," turn to page* 1567.**

> **1 Peter 3:16, 17**
>
> **Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your**

good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

Why is it important to have a good conscience? Without one, we will not speak boldly when people ask about the hope within us.

If you stagger out of a tavern, get in your car, and hit fifteen cars on your way down the street, when the policeman pulls you over and the newspaper puts your picture on the front page the next day, how bold a witness would you be?

The Bible speaks specifically about our conscience.

In Titus 1:15, we are warned about the danger of a defiled conscience. The word "defiled" speaks of the way an unwashed window gets dirtier and dirtier, making things appear darker and darker. It's an excellent illustration, for if I expose my mind to sin, my conscience becomes dirtier and dirtier, allowing less and less light to break through. Bible study becomes increasingly difficult, and my heart feels heavy and dark.

In 1 Timothy 4:2, we read of a seared conscience—one no longer sensitive to that which once troubled it.

Hebrews 10:22 speaks of an evil or a poisoned conscience within those who twist Scripture not only to justify their own sin, but to draw other people in as well.

Because it sounded like a woman's voice, the owner of a Lincoln Town Car deluxe edition called the computer-generated voice that notified him of any problems "the little lady." One day, as he was driving, the little lady said, "You're running low on fuel. You're running low on fuel."

No way, thought the man. *I have almost half a tank left.*

Every thirty seconds, the voice said, "Stop for gas. Stop for gas. Stop for gas."

Frustrated, he stopped his car, reached under the dashboard, and ripped out the wiring. When he drove a little farther, however, his car sputtered

before stopping altogether—for, indeed he was out of gas. The little lady wasn't wrong. It was his gas gauge that was broken.

Man was created with a voice inside of him that says, "You're running low on fuel," or, "Stay away from there," or, "Watch out for that." Those with a seared or evil conscience say, "No problem," as they begin ripping away the wires of their conscience until they no longer can hear the voice within.

1 Peter 3:18

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.

A good conscience is not dependent upon what we do or don't do, but upon what Jesus did. I can truly have a good conscience if I understand that the sins, shortcomings, and failings that are part of my history were completely paid for by Christ. No one knew this better than Peter.

Cursing vehemently, he swore he didn't know Him, as he stood in the courtyard of Caiaphas—for just as Jesus said he would, Peter denied Christ. Aware of his failing, he wept bitterly (Luke 22:62).

Peter went on from there to become a man who was mighty in ministry, a man who was totally restored because he understood that Jesus Christ died for his sins of betrayal, rebellion, and blasphemy.

The same evening Peter openly denied Jesus, another disciple secretly betrayed Him. . . .

After selling Him out for thirty pieces of silver, Judas' conscience bothered him greatly. "I have betrayed innocent blood," he said as he threw the money on the floor of the temple, wanting to reverse the deal. But realizing that the priests would not allow him a way out, Judas hung himself (see Matthew 27:5).

Both men failed Jesus in the same evening. One went to hell, the other went on to great things. What was the difference? They each chose a tree.

Judas chose a tree from which to hang himself. Peter chose a tree upon which to look. Truly, there is great power in seeing the Cross.

"I'm so poisoned," you say.

So were the Israelites. . . .

> *By the tens of thousands, they were bitten by snakes that sent poison coursing through their veins. The cure? God told Moses to put a brass serpent upon a brass pole in the middle of the camp—and whoever would look upon it would be healed (Numbers 21:8). Those who took this to be trivial and simplistic died in the desert. Those who simply lifted up their eyes and looked upon the serpent were completely healed. This served as a sneak preview of what would happen when the Son of God became a serpent, became sin, and hung on the Cross in our place (2 Corinthians 5:21).*

So, too, there are people who say, "Guilt will not dissipate simply by looking to the Cross. What's needed is years of analysis followed by years of counseling." Peter says otherwise. Because he looked to the One hanging on the tree—even though he had been bitten by his own sin—Peter was forgiven immediately and went on to great ministry.

> **1 Peter 3:19, 20**
>
> **By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.**

"I believe Christ died for my sin," you may say, "but why am I always thinking about my failure? Why am I always aware of my sin and rebellion?"

You have an adversary who perches on your shoulder and whispers in your ear, "You're a sinner. You failed here. You dropped the ball there. You're going to need lots and lots of psychological work to have any hope of recovery because you're a rotten loser" (see Revelation 12:10). Satan, the accuser of the brethren, is not omnipresent. He cannot be everywhere at once. But he can dispatch demons. Therefore, Jesus not only died for our sins, but

after He died, He "preached unto the spirits in prison." That is, He went to hell.

> *We know from the account in Luke 16 that before Jesus rose from the dead, hell was divided into two compartments: Paradise was where the Old Testament saints waited for the work of the Cross. That is why Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "This day you'll be with Me in paradise" (see Luke 23:43). Those who didn't believe on the Lord were on the other side of hell—a place of torment.*

In our text, we read that Jesus preached to the spirits who were disobedient in the day of Noah. Who were these spirits? Genesis 6 tells us they were particularly disobedient and diabolical. The most wicked of all demons, they actually had relations with women, from which a race of giants was produced. It was to these spirits that Jesus preached. Why? They were the "big guns," the most terrible, the ones that will be released during the Tribulation, where they will cause unparalleled pain and problems for people on the earth.

What did Jesus say to them? He said, "Your authority to keep a grip on Jon Courson has been broken. The blood I shed washed away every sin he has done, is doing, or ever will do. The perfect provision I have made now absolutely, completely frees him from your authority."

You see, it is only through sin that Satan's demons have authority in our lives. When we sin, we essentially rebel against God and open ourselves to the devil and his demons. They can do whatever they want because the sin in our lives gives them a handle upon which to hold. However, the blood of Jesus is so powerful that it eradicates the sin, thereby obliterating the handle.

Without that handle, what can Satan and his henchmen do? All they can do is lie to you and me, saying, "There's no hope for you. You've blown it too badly. You've gone too far. You're through."

Is your conscience bothering you? Peter says, "Look to the Cross." If you still feel condemned, realize it's a lie from the Enemy telling you that you're not forgiven, that you're unworthy, that you can't be used, that you've gone too far, that you've been too bad. Realize that Jesus told the very worst of the demons that they no longer have power over you.

1 Peter 3:21, 22 (a)

The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God . . .

The Cross provides forgiveness. The demons have been put on notice. If you still are struggling with your conscience, the solution is found in the same place it was in Noah's day, when the Flood washed away the memory of the sinful world. Just as the Flood drowned out the world and washed away the problem, when a person is baptized, the world's pull is reduced, washed away, drowned out due to the realization of what Christ did on the Cross and the proclamation He made to the demons in hell.

1 Peter 3:22 (b)

. . . angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

"Angels and authorities and powers" refer to demons. They cannot rebel against Jesus. They cannot contradict Jesus. They must submit to Jesus because they were rendered ineffective by Jesus.

THE REASON FOR HOPE

A Topical Study of
1 PETER 3:14, 15

Astronomers tell us that at this moment there are 1,096 stars visible to the naked eye. Yet in the morning, you can't see even one of them because the brightness of the sun obscures the beauty of the stars. It is only when darkness falls that the stars become visible.

The people to whom Peter was writing were living in troubled times, in dark days. Persecution against them had already begun and would only intensify in the days to come as six million of them would be fed to lions, nailed to crosses, ignited as human torches, or boiled in oil. But Peter knew that just as in the heavens above, the darker the sky became around the Christians, the greater light shining from them would be.

Although we don't experience physical persecution in our own country, none can deny that the culture is growing darker and darker all around us. In light of this, what does Peter tell us to do?

Be happy. Personal difficulties, hard times, and suffering allow one the opportunity to give an answer for his hope. Be it cultural or personal difficulty, you can shine more brightly when people look at you—even as they looked at those to whom Peter was writing who seemed to be living in a hopeless situation—and ask, "How can you have such hope?"

You must be ready to give an answer—not primarily concerning the theological position you hold, but rather concerning the spiritual hope you have—for people are hopeless in four ways.

Essentially Empty

Augustine was right when he said, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee, O Lord."

Pascal put it this way: There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man that cannot be satisfied by anything but God.

Paul said it best when he said God created us subject to emptiness (Romans 8:20).

> Suppose you go to the Ford dealership today and see the new Ford Explorers all lined up, gleaming in the sun. You can open the door of one, take your seat behind the wheel, shift the gears, and pump the brake. But you won't go anywhere because there's a hole in the car that must be filled. It's called the ignition. Is the Ford dealership mean to put those cars out on the lot with holes in them? No. They simply want a relationship with you. The hole in the car keeps you from cruising away because they want you to come into their showroom and to sit across the table from them as they draw up papers for you to sign.

God created every single human being in such a way that his life won't work until the hole in it is filled with Jesus. God is good. There's nothing about Him that's capricious. Because He created a hole within the heart of every person you go to school with, every person you work with, every person you live near—they're all essentially empty, curious about the reason for the hope within you.

Desperately Lonely

Not only are people essentially empty, but adults, teenagers, and even children are desperately lonely. They are seeking a solution for their loneliness in some earthly relationship, not knowing it will only be solved by discovering the greatest Friend anyone can have—a Friend who sticks closer than a brother, a Friend who will never leave them—Jesus Christ.

On the mountaintop one morning, talking things over with the Lord, I was reminded how fabulous it is to have a Friend who's always there. This realization keeps me from clinging to others, from being a burden to others, from taking advantage of others. It's a relationship for which the world longs, even though they don't know it.

Painfully Guilty

In addition to being essentially empty and desperately lonely, every person is painfully guilty. No matter how we try to deny it, every one of us knows we've dropped the ball; we've hurt people; we've messed up. Every single person you talk to is aware that he has failed, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no not one (Romans 3:10, 23). We can be righteous not by trying to be good little boys or girls—but only by realizing we're sinners and that Jesus took our place when He died.

Filled with Anxiety

Finally, every person on this planet is filled with anxiety. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus came to deliver those subject to bondage of the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15). The fear of death holds every single person in bondage all the days of his life.

I'm so glad I'm a Christian. I'm so glad you're saved. I'm so thankful we know that to be absent in the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). I'm so grateful we don't have to be fearful about our own situation, or angry when a loved one is taken from us because we know that what Jesus said is true. "Let not your heart be troubled," He said. "You believe in God. Believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there you may be also" (see John 14:1–3).

When days grow darker, when depravity intensifies, when persecution comes, when people want to hear the reason for your hope, you can simply tell them, "The reason I have hope in my heart is because of Jesus Christ. He's the key to the emptiness that was inside me. I no longer am haunted by my past mistakes because they've been washed away by His blood at Calvary. I have a Friend I can talk to continually. And I know I'll live with Him eternally."

You see, it all gets down to Jesus.

> When asked who had healed him, the once-blind man answered, "A Man named Jesus."
>
> "How did this happen?" asked the Pharisees some time later.
>
> "He's a Prophet," the man explained.
>
> "Do you believe in the Son of God?" Jesus asked him even later.
>
> "I believe, Lord," came the reply (see John 9:38).

Notice the progression. To the man born blind, Jesus was first a man, then a prophet, and finally Lord.

When questioned about the event, his parents, fearing excommunication, said of their son, "He's of age. Ask him."

So when pressed for the reason Jesus healed him on the Sabbath day, the man simply and powerfully said, "I can't answer your questions. I can't give you a full explanation. All I know is this: Once I was blind, but now I see" (see John 9:25).

That's the hope Peter says we must share. You may not be able to answer another's questions theologically, but when difficulties come your way, you can say, "Here's my story: I was blind once. I was empty. I was lonely. I was guilty. I had anxiety just like you. But now I see. Jesus came into my life, and He's completely changed me. I can't explain it. I can't defend it intellectually, but I can share with you something you cannot refute. Jesus saved me. Therefore, even though I'm not what I should be, I'm not what I used to be."

When times are hard, when catastrophe comes, when setbacks arise, be ready. They will give you opportunity to shine brightly. May God give us boldness and wisdom to see that the reason for the hope within us lies solely in the One who opens our eyes to see Him, even in the darkest day of difficulty.



4 Having told us how to have a clear conscience in chapter 3, here in chapter 4, Peter tells us how to think clearly in days of difficulty,

1 Peter 4:1 (a)

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind . . .

"Tough times are coming," says Peter. "Therefore, arm yourselves with clear thinking." He goes on to give us seven benefits of suffering. . . .

1 Peter 4:1 (b)–3

. . . for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the

lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.

When you go through tough times, realize, first, that suffering loosens sin's grip on us. That is, when you go through suffering, you no longer give in to the lusts of the flesh; you no longer succumb to sin with the same ease, the same vulnerability you experienced previously. Why? Perhaps the story of a man in the Rogue Valley provides the best answer. . . .

> Known as the life of the party, he played on the local softball team and would often supply the keg. When his three-year-old daughter was killed by a drunk driver, he lost his heart for partying. He was no longer interested in the keggers after the softball games. He found himself despising the places to which he was once attracted when he saw the reality of what drunkenness and partying did to his own family.

That's what suffering does. That's what trials do. The ugliness of sin is seen when it begins to touch your own life. That is why Peter says, "If you've suffered in the flesh—either due to your own sin or sin by the hands of others—you see the result of sin and realize that rather than being something to wink or chuckle at, sin stinks."

1 Peter 4:4

Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.

Not only do you look at life more soberly, but, secondly, suffering causes others to see you differently. Tragedy, persecution, and difficulty make you a marked man. Because of what you've gone through, you no longer can spend your life in trivial pursuits.

1 Peter 4:5

Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.

Those who choose to continue in sin will one day stand before the Lord. Peter is not saying this out of condemnation, but rather out of compassion, for he realizes they're in grave danger.

1 Peter 4:6

For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

In addition to loosening sin's grip on us and causing others to look at us differently, suffering places us in good company—the company of the martyred. Some cults use this verse to say, "When a person dies, they'll have a second opportunity to accept the gospel." However, taken in context, it's clear Peter is talking about those who suffered to the point of death and are now living in heaven.

"Blessed are you when men revile, persecute, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My name's sake," Jesus said. "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. So did they unto the prophets who were before you" (see Matthew 5:11, 12). In other words, when you're suffering, being put down, or mocked because of your belief in Christ, rejoice because you're in the company of the prophets—of Jeremiah and Isaiah, Ezekiel and Hosea.

"Yea, all those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," Paul told Timothy (see 2 Timothy 3:12). In other parts of the world, such persecution results in death. In our present culture, it results in ostracism or rejection. One way or another, those who live godly lives suffer persecution sooner or later. When it happens, we're to rejoice because, according to Peter, we're in the company of the martyrs. According to Paul, we're in the company of the godly. And according to Jesus, we're in the company of the prophets—good company, indeed!

1 Peter 4:7

But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

Fourth, suffering keeps us focused on eternity. It's when you're going through tough times, difficult days, seasons of suffering, pressures and persecution that you long for heaven. The good times, the nice things, and the easier days have a tendency to shift our focus off of eternity. It's when the tough times come—when the body hurts, the heart breaks, or the wallet is empty that we say, "I don't belong here. I'm longing for heaven."

1 Peter 4:8–11

And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Fifth, suffering frees us to participate in ministry. With persecution heightening, no doubt Peter's readers had already begun to scatter. Some would leave everything to hide in catacombs. Others would open their homes to those fleeing persecution. All would be called to love one another fervently, especially in those dark days of difficulty. So much of my time is absorbed with "stuff." When my material, emotional, or relational "stuff" is taken away, I find I am free to share with and care for others in ways I never had previously.

1 Peter 4:12

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.

"Why me?" we ask when fiery trials come upon us. The real question is, "Why not?" If suffering loosens sin's grip on us and causes others to see us differently, if it places us in good company, keeps us focused on eternity, and frees us to participate in ministry—why *wouldn't* we embrace it as a necessary part of our growth?

1 Peter 4:13, 14

But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

Sixth, suffering allows us to experience glory. Jesus gave us a wonderful illustration concerning suffering when He reminded us that after a woman endures pain and suffering to give birth, she forgets about the agony when her baby is born because the suffering is transformed into glory. The same baby who causes pain brings joy.

The heartache, setback, or difficulty that is causing you pain and agony will be the very thing that will ultimately bring joy. That which is breaking your heart right now will soon be the delight of your soul—watch and see!



***For topical study of 1 Peter 4:12–14 entitled "Suffering into Glory," turn to page* 1572.**

1 Peter 4:15

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

I find it interesting that Peter places busybodies and murderers in the same category.

1 Peter 4:16 (a)

Yet if any man suffer as a Christian . . .

The word "Christian" only appears three times in the Bible: twice in the Book of Acts (11:26; 26:28) and once here. Meaning "little Christ," it was initially a put-down. The early church, however, said, "That's okay. We'll wear with pride what the world intends as derision." Believers have claimed it ever since.

1 Peter 4:16 (b)

. . . let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

If we're suffering, our attitude should be "Thank You, Lord, that I'm found worthy to suffer. I'm in good company. You're freeing me from the sins that used to strangle me. My vision is refocused on eternity."

1 Peter 4:17 (a)

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God . . .

Writing this epistle from Rome, Peter is accurately discerning the situation. As he watches the bizarre behavior of Nero and reads the winds of change, he knows that the judgment that has begun will continue. The judgment he speaks of is not from God, for the judgment we deserve was poured out on Christ. Rather, it is Satan who wars against the church.

1 Peter 4:17 (b)

. . . and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

If you think times are tough now, wait until God moves upon a Christ-rejecting world during the Tribulation described in Revelation 6—19. Yes, it's hard being a Christian—but it's a whole lot harder being a pagan. The pagan will endure unbelievable difficulty only to end up in hell.

Life is hard. That's just the way it is. It's hard for everyone. You're not being picked on. I'm not being singled out. It's just life. Even though it's hard, and even though we have problems, we have access to the problem-solver, Jesus Christ. We can cast our care upon Him.

1 Peter 4:18

And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

"I tell you the truth," Jesus said, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom. But with God all things are possible" (see Matthew 19:24–26). Because the rich were considered to be especially blessed, the idea is not that the rich can't be saved. The idea is that any man getting saved is impossible. It is only with God that all things are possible. Only God can squeeze sinners like us through the eye of a needle (Matthew 19:24).

1 Peter 4:19

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

Finally, suffering reminds us to faithfully commit our soul unto our Creator. Of all the titles for God, Peter could have employed in this section dealing with suffering, he says, "When you suffer, commit your soul to your Creator."

Why Creator?

God is the Creator of everything, including the situation in which you're suffering. Nothing can happen that God doesn't allow. He's the Creator of the person to whom you're married, the person with whom you work, and the neighbor by whom you live. He's the Creator of *every* situation.

After tossing and turning concerning a certain aspect of ministry, I slipped out of bed, thinking, How am I going to deal with this? *As I stepped outside, I immediately felt the unmistakable, all too familiar sensation of cold ooze flowing through my toes. Yes, I had stepped squarely on a giant slug. Although I immediately recoiled, the slug stuck to the bottom of my foot so firmly that I had to shake it off—causing it to hit the side of my house. As I watched it slide down the wall, I suddenly realized that, although God could have*

made me a slug, He, instead, created me in His own image. Because He's my Creator, because He made the situations and the challenges around me, I must trust Him with them all.

Dear, precious people, may we be those who slowly but surely learn to embrace suffering. May we begin to understand that it truly loosens sin's grip on us personally, causes others to see us differently, places us in good company, keeps us focused on eternity, frees us to participate in ministry, allows us to experience glory, and reminds us to commit our souls unto our Creator faithfully.

SUFFERING INTO GLORY

A Topical Study of 1 PETER 4:12–14

Suffering and glory are the twin truths woven into the fabric of Peter's first epistle. This should not be surprising, since suffering and glory truly walk hand in hand. Whether or not they realize it, everyone craves glory. The biblical definition of "glory" is seen in the Hebrew word *chabod,* which means "weighty" or "substantial." Glory is a top sirloin steak as opposed to cotton candy—something one can sink his teeth into as opposed to something composed simply of sugar and air.

Man was originally clothed with this glory—the weight of the reality of God. When Adam sinned, the *chabod* departed, leaving him empty and exposed (Genesis 3:7). Yet according to our text, the day is coming when our suffering will be translated into glory for all eternity.

> *But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.*
>
> 1 Peter 4:13

"But that's in the sweet by-and-by," you say. "What about *now?*"
Look at the next verse.

> *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.*
>
> 1 Peter 4:14

Peter declares that the presence of suffering brings glory. I want you to see this because it's radical—completely contrary to everything our flesh tells us.

"If I didn't have to suffer and go through trials, life would be glorious," we say. Not true. Check out *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* and see if those people are experiencing glory, substance, or joy. The world insists that

the absence of suffering brings glory. The Word says the presence of suffering brings glory.

In our fallen, depraved condition, we are unable to differentiate between what is truly good and bad. What we think is good and wonderful is often bad and brutal. What we think is suffering and pain is actually that which brings happiness, joy, and glory.

> Suppose I had said to my son Benjamin when he was young, "Benny, you must keep your room immaculate because each day I'm going to give you an eight-inch-by-twelve-inch piece of paper to take care of."
>
> "Oh," he would probably have said. "Why is Dad giving me this hard job? Oh, pain, agony and suffering!"—until the day in college he decides to look more closely at the stack of paper I've given him and discovers that each one represents one hundred shares of preferred IBM stock. He's now a billionaire.

Turn to John 16, where we see Jesus give an infinitely better illustration of suffering being transformed into glory. . . .

> *A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.*
>
> John 16:21

When someone tells you she's pregnant, do you say, "Oh no! That's going to be awful! You're going to start gaining weight and stretching in unbelievable ways. You'll have to go to the hospital, where you'll sweat and strain. Oh, I'm so sorry you're pregnant"? Of course not! We look at childbearing as a great privilege and a real joy because we know that the same baby who brings pain for a short time brings joy for a lifetime.

Peter echoes Jesus in saying that the very thing that causes discomfort—be it a marriage, job, illness, or finances—is precisely that which will bring glory and unspeakable joy.

What if we really believed this? If we truly understood what Jesus taught and what Peter reiterated, we would look at each obstacle and

disappointment as a "preferred stock certificate" that will one day be transformed into great wealth. Whether it takes nine months or nine years, I have God's word that the very thing causing me pain will be that which brings substance and joy.

Jesus modeled this for us perfectly. You see, He knows what He's talking about when it comes to joy.

> *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*
>
> Hebrews 12:2

Jesus endured the Cross because He knew it was the Cross that would bring joy. In the pain of the Cross, a baby was birthed. . . .

> To hasten death, the legs of one being crucified were broken. No longer able to displace the weight of his body from his wrists and draw air into his lungs, the victim would die by suffocation. When the soldiers came to Jesus, however, there was no need to break His legs, for He had already released His spirit. Instead, a soldier pierced His side. As a result of this seemingly capricious act, blood and water—the fluids of birth—flowed from His side.
>
> Compare this with the account of Genesis 2. . . .
>
> After causing a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, God opened his side and removed a rib, with which he formed a bride for Adam.

You see, just as Adam's bride came from his side, a bride came from the blood that flowed from the side of the Last Adam—Jesus Christ.

- Who is this bride?

  You and me (Ephesians 5:25–27).

For the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the Cross.

• What joy?

The joy of birth.

Jesus knew that the pain and suffering He endured on the Cross would be transformed into joy. Likewise, the struggle you face today—emotional or financial, spiritual or physical—has the potential to birth something wonderful in your life.

"Count it all *joy* when ye fall into temptation, into trials, into suffering," James wrote (see 1:2). May we be those who do just that.

May we be those who celebrate even the difficulties that come our way, knowing they are the materials from which the Lord will fashion joy.

May we realize suffering and glory are two sides of the same coin. And, preferred stock that they are, may we invest wisely and spend freely.

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5 Peter understood that fiery trials would begin at the house of God (4:17). He also knew that the house of God had better be in order. That is why here in chapter 5, he ends his letter talking about the leaders and structure of the church.

1 Peter 5:1 (a)

The elders which are among you I exhort . . .

The words "elder," "bishop," and "pastor" are used interchangeably in the New Testament.

Presbuteros, *the Greek word translated "elder," describes the man as—one who is to have some maturity, experience, and history with God.*

Episkopos, *the Greek word translated "bishop," describes the ministry—not as over-lording or overburdening, but as overseeing.*

Poimen, *the Greek word translated "pastor," describes the method—as that of feeding the flock of God.*

The following words directed toward elders also apply to every one of you who is involved in caring for or overseeing your family or others.

1 Peter 5:1 (b)
. . . who am also an elder . . .

Notice, Peter doesn't identify himself as the first pope. Rather, he says, "I'm an elder just like you."

1 Peter 5:1 (c)
. . . and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.

"I'm one of you," says Peter, "but I've also had a little more history with Jesus than you. I saw His sufferings and His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration" (see Matthew 17).

1 Peter 5:2 (a)
Feed the flock of God . . .

Although he knew tough times were coming, Peter says, "Don't neglect your singular responsibility to feed the flock of God." We don't need to be plugged in to a lot of activities or Christian recreation. What we need is the Word of God.

1 Peter 5:2 (b)
. . . which is among you, taking the oversight thereof . . .

Although Peter was one with the people, he was responsible to oversee them. Such is the tension for any leader—as a pastor, a parent, or a youth leader. Sometimes it can be extremely difficult. If I am simply overseeing but am not among the people to whom I'm ministering, I will become aloof and

untouchable. If, on the other hand, I'm just one of the gang, shooting pool and joking around every night, I probably won't have the authority to oversee as I'm told to do.

What is Peter's solution?

We'll see it in verse 3.

1 Peter 5:2 (c)

. . . not by constraint, but willingly . . .

You shouldn't have to be prodded to pastor, to parent, or to work with the fourth-graders in Sunday school. In other words, your motivation should not stem from someone relentlessly badgering you, but from the internal call of God. There are two inherent dangers in the ministry. The first is laziness, when people do the very least they possibly can. There's no room in the ministry for laziness because, to a large degree, the well-being of the flock depends upon the care of those in positions of authority.

1 Peter 5:2 (d)

. . . not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.

The second inherent danger in ministry is that of covetousness.

1 Peter 5:3 (a)

Neither as being lords over God's heritage . . .

As pastor, I'm not the Reverend Right Most Holy Bishop. Rather, I'm just one of the sheep. Why am I up front? If the church were likened to a hospital, I am up front simply because I've been a patient a little longer than most of you in the Hospital of God's Grace and Goodness. Thus, I know where the cafeteria is and where the restrooms are. I know which orderlies to watch out for, and which doctors have big needles. We're all in this thing together. We're *all* sheep. Therefore, no one in the body of Christ can lord it over anyone else.

1 Peter 5:3 (b)

. . . but being ensamples to the flock.

Here is the solution to verse 2. In parenting, pastoring, or anything else concerning working with people, the bottom line is this: Be an example. That's how you can be among people and oversee them, as well. Whether raising my kids or serving at Calvary Chapel, I am not to be a lord. I'm to be an example.

There's a big difference between dictatorship and leadership. Dictatorship says, "Go." Leadership says, "Let's go." Whether parenting or pastoring, the true leader is involved in whatever he's teaching or helping others to do. Paul put it this way to his young protégé, Timothy: "Be thou an example of the believer" (see 1 Timothy 4:12). In other words, be a man of prayer, a man of compassion, a man who worships. Let people see this first in you.

Let me ask you this question: If everyone at Calvary Chapel was exactly like you, what kind of church would we have? If everyone prayed for the body of Christ as much as you do, how much prayer would we have? If everyone tithed exactly like you, how much would we be able to invest for the kingdom? If everyone came to morning worship as much as you, how many would come? If everyone helped in Sunday school to the degree you do, would the church be bigger, stronger, and healthier? Or would we be meeting in the park at Picnic Table Number Three? It's a very important question because that which each of us does or doesn't do affects the rest of us very definitely.

1 Peter 5:4

And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

If you're an example—if you're feeding people and caring for them—the day is coming when all of those things that were unnoticed will be greatly rewarded. A time is coming when all of the things I have done are going to be tested by fire. I will stand before the Lord, realizing I could have given more generously and served more freely.

The crowns of which Peter speaks are not just to parade around in. No, they are to cast at Jesus' feet in gratitude and adoration—as well as determining our function in eternity. If you're tired of where you're at now, be one who says, "I might not be where I wanted to be on earth, but I'm praying, giving, worshiping and serving as if the chief shepherd is coming. My efforts will be known to Him, and I will be fulfilled in ways I never was on earth."

1 Peter 5:5 (a)

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility . . .

Peter reminds us we are called to humility. Humility means that even if the elder over me—be it Mom and Dad, or the spiritual brothers overseeing my ministry—makes the wrong decision, I must be the right person. This applies to marriage, parenting, church, the job site—anywhere people are. Our responsibility is not to make sure that those in authority over us make the right decision. Our responsibility is to make sure we're the right people.

Why? Read on.

1 Peter 5:5 (b), 6

. . . for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

Those who are humble will be exalted. Immediately? No. They will be exalted in due time, at the perfect time.

1 Peter 5:7

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

The Greek word *epirrhihipto,* translated "casting," is interesting because it means to roll something that will most likely roll back upon you. Have you found that after casting your care on the Lord, you feel okay for a day or two, but then the burden rolls right back on you? If so, know that's the way of the

Lord. Why? He wants us to stay in close touch with Him, and if we cast our care upon Him never to feel the pressure, the anxiety, the tension, the worry again, we would not be people who pray.

You see, the Father wants to do something bigger than merely taking our burdens from us. He wants to develop a relationship with us. Thus, the burdens and struggles that repeatedly roll upon us cause us to become linked to Him in continual prayer. That's infinitely more important than the solution to the burden for which we were praying in the first place. So cast your care upon Him—and keep doing it over and over and over again, knowing how deeply He cares for you.

1 Peter 5:8, 9

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

Even as you cast your care upon God, know the Enemy is out to destroy you.



***For topical study of 1 Peter 5:8–9 entitled "Running to the Roar," turn to page* 1578.**

1 Peter 5:10, 11

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

As both a pastor and a parent, I go through the previous nine verses and realize how greatly I have failed and how far short I fall of this standard. That's why I believe verse ten is the key to this whole section. You see, the Christian life is all about grace. No one knew this better than Peter.

In verse 1 Peter declared himself a witness of the sufferings of Christ. Yet when we read the Gospel account, we see that Peter was not present when Christ was led away to be tried by Caiaphas. He was following far off in the shadows. When Christ was on the Cross, he viewed His suffering from a distance, if at all, for of all the disciples, only John was at the foot of the Cross (John 19:26).

Peter also says he was a partaker of glory. He fails to mention, however, that he was reprimanded by God for placing Jesus on the same plane as Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5).

In verse 2, Peter says pastors are to feed the flock of God. Yet when he initially heard these words, Peter wasn't waiting for the empowering of the Spirit with God's people as he was supposed to be. Instead, he was fishing on the Sea of Galilee (John 21:3).

Peter also tells pastors not to be lazy. When Jesus asked Peter to pray with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, what did Peter do? He fell asleep (Mark 14:37).

In verse 3, Peter tells us we are not to be lords over God's heritage. We are to be an example. Yet in the garden, what did Peter do? Far from being an example, he took out a sword and chopped off the ear of Malchus (Mark 14:47).

"Submit yourself unto the elder," Peter says in verse 5. When Jesus said He had to suffer many things in Jerusalem, Peter rebuked Jesus, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord" (see Matthew 16:22). Submission? Hardly.

Peter went on to say we are to be clothed with humility. Yet as he sat in the Upper Room with the other disciples, it was not Peter but Jesus who humbled Himself to wash feet (John 13:3, 4).

In verse 7, Peter tells us we are to cast our care upon God. It is an interesting choice of words, for when Jesus told Peter to cast *his net on the other side of the boat, Peter was fishing for fish rather than fishing for men as he had been called to do (Matthew 4:19; John 21:6).*

In verses 8, 9, Peter tells us to be sober and vigilant in light of our adversary. Yet when Jesus warned him that Satan desired to sift

him like wheat, what did Peter say? "Not me, Lord. I am ready to go to prison with You. These other guys might fail you, but You can count on me." Hours later, seduced by Satan, Peter denied Jesus three times (Matthew 26:69–74).

Peter failed at every point. But here's the good news—he was used mightily even after all his failings, because he understood that which he shares with us in verse 10: It's not impeccability that is necessary. It's "teachability." I have failed. You have failed. Yet if, like Peter, we learn lessons from our failures, we can speak with authority. We can say to others, "I've been there. I've done that. I've made mistakes. You don't have to."

If as a dad or mom, a Sunday-school teacher, elder, or leader at work, you are aware of your shortcomings, if you're not careful, you will think they disqualify you from sharing with others. Take hope from Peter. He failed at every point. Yet when he learned his lesson, he didn't fall again. It's God's grace that will establish, settle, and strengthen you as long as you learn the lessons God has for you.

1 Peter 5:12, 13

By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand. The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son.

No doubt Marcus is John Mark, who, after failing in a previous missionary endeavor (Acts 13:13), was later encouraged by Barnabas and went on to be useful to both Peter and Paul (2 Timothy 4:11).

1 Peter 5:14

Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen.

To a people going through persecution, Peter ends his letter not with a promise of ease, but with a benediction of peace, knowing that harder times were ahead.

RUNNING TO THE ROAR

A Topical Study of
1 PETER 5:8, 9

Of all the disciples, the most relatable—at least to me—is Simon Peter, the fisherman from Galilee. How right Jesus was when, seeing Peter sleeping in the Garden of Gethsemane, He said, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (see Matthew 26:41). I think that's why we readily identify with Peter.

> "Follow Me," Jesus said when He first called Peter. Peter dropped his nets on the spot. Three years later, after being with Jesus daily, we see Peter still following—but now from afar (see Matthew 26:58).
>
> "If it's You, Lord, beckon me to come," Peter cried in the midst of the storm. When Jesus did, Peter miraculously walked on water—until he took his eyes off the Lord and began to sink (see Matthew 14:30).
>
> "Thou art the Christos, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God," Peter declared. Five verses later, Peter opposes Jesus to such a degree that Jesus calls him Satan (see Matthew 16:23).

That's why I can relate to Peter. "Follow Me," Jesus said, but Peter followed from a distance. "Walk on water," Jesus said. Peter sank. "You are the Christ," Peter said boldly, but he argued with Jesus anyway.

Peter had such great moments, followed by such deep defeats. His heart was willing, but his flesh was weak.

It shouldn't surprise us that Peter went through those kinds of times. After all, Jesus had told him directly, "Satan desires to sift you like wheat, to grind you up, to wipe you out. I have prayed for you, Peter, and when you are converted—not if but *when* you make it through—strengthen the brethren" (see Luke 22:32). Guess what. In our text, Peter's doing just that, for we're sitting here almost two thousand years later, listening to Peter telling us to be sober and vigilant because our adversary, the devil, goes about as a roaring lion.

Peter would say to us, “I’ve been there. I desired to walk with, be used by, and be faithful to the Lord. He was right when He told me Satan was trying to sift me like wheat. Our adversary is real.”

“Why does Satan want to pick on me?” you ask. Many theories have been presented concerning what motivates our adversary. Among them is the hostage theory that says that Satan seeks to gather as many people as possible into his kingdom of death and darkness in order to use them as a bargaining chip with the Father at the end of time, saying, “These people are in my domain. I will let them go if You let me go.” Although there are some obscure references to this in the Word, I don’t personally believe this to be true.

Why does Satan bother with us? I think he simply does it because of his perverse nature. I think he’s doing just what we do in our own perversity.

> There you are—standing by the edge of the pool—when out of the corner of your eye, you see a group of guys headed your way. By the look on their faces, you know what they’re about to do. Because you’re perverse and depraved, what do you do? You do just what I do. You say, “If I’m going in, you’re going too,” as you grab as many arms and legs as you can.

Because Satan is innately perverse, I believe he’s grabbing as many people as he can to pull into the lake of fire with him.

“I’ve already given my heart to Jesus,” you say, “so why would Satan pick on me when he knows he’s already lost me?”

Although he can’t take you to hell, he can make you feel so discouraged, so defeated in your own walk that you won’t be able to effectively impact others for the kingdom.

Peter was firmly in the camp of the Lord, yet Satan came against him just as Jesus said he would. Peter, however, made it through. And you can, too.

How?

Peter gives a singular answer when he tells us we are not to run, but to resist; we are not to fear, but to resist; we are not to give in, but to resist. James says the same thing when he says, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (4:7). Inspired by the same Spirit, James and Peter are in agreement concerning the strategy of dealing with Satan.

Because we have the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, the breastplate of righteousness, our loins girded with truth, and the gospel of peace for shoes, there is only one part of our anatomy vulnerable to the Enemy: our backs (Ephesians 6:13–17).

Why?

It's never the strategy of the Lord to run from the Enemy. Rather, we are equipped to resist and even attack with such power that not even the gates of hell can withstand the onslaught (Matthew 16:18).

We have an Enemy who wants to take us down, wipe us out, make us miserable, and nullify our effectiveness. Peter calls this one a roaring lion.

> The roaring lion, known in Bible times and even to this day, is the king of the pride of lions—not because he is the most powerful lion in the family, but because of what he once was. You see, the roaring lion is the oldest lion in the pride. His teeth are worn. His feet are slow. He's not as quick as he once was, nor as powerful as he used to be. Therefore, his assignment is to hide in the grass until an unsuspecting impala or deer comes walking through. Then he is to stand up and roar. Hearing this, the deer or impala runs away from the roar of the lion—right to the place where all of the young, virile lions are waiting. In so doing, he runs to his death.
>
> If you could give counsel to the impala or the deer in the savannahs of Africa, you'd say, "If you walk through a grassy area and hear a roar, whatever you do, don't run. Don't be afraid. Just go toward the roar. Resist, resist, resist. Don't run."

The devil is a roaring lion. He had his teeth kicked out at Calvary. Yet he can still roar. "YOU'RE GOING TO FAIL," he roars, and we run right into failure. "YOU'RE GOING TO GIVE IN," he roars, and we do just that. So how are we to withstand his roars?

The Old Testament picture of what it means to resist rather than run is found in 2 Samuel.

And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man, of Kabzeel, who had done many acts . . .

2 Samuel 23:20 (a)

Benaiah, whose name literally means "built by God," was one of David's mighty men who stood by and traveled with him.

. . . he slew two lionlike men of Moab . . .

2 Samuel 23:20 (b)

Benaiah took on a couple of strong, bushy-bearded or long-haired men of Moab.

. . . he went down also and slew a lion . . .

2 Samuel 23:20 (c)

After doing battle with lionlike men, Benaiah was ready to take on the lion itself. I find it to be true oh, so often, that the temptations, difficulties or challenges that come my way in any given day are simply to prepare me for the battles coming eventually.

. . . in the midst of a pit in time of snow.

2 Samuel 23:20 (d)

Maybe you've felt cold in your spirit recently. What did Benaiah do at such a time? He went on the offensive and went into the pit itself to deal with the lion directly. Even in the snowy times, on a cold day, he attacked the Enemy.

And he slew an Egyptian, a goodly man . . .

2 Samuel 23:21 (a)

Being an Egyptian meant this man was a type of the world. Being a "goodly man" meant that he was a big guy.

. . . and the Egyptian had a spear in his hand; but he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear.

2 Samuel 23:21 (b)

After being prepared by battling the lionlike men and the lion in the pit, Benaiah now takes on a big chunk of the world and kills him with his own spear. In this brief vignette, I begin to understand what it means to resist the devil. I begin to realize that the skirmishes I'm going through presently are preparatory for what is headed my way in the snowy day. I realize my call is to go into the pit itself, to storm the gates of hell and do battle with the Enemy.

"I try to battle the Enemy," you say, "but I lose every time. I have such a terrible time with my thought life. I'm driving down the street, worshiping the Lord when suddenly a lady gets out of her car and walks down the street. My mind strays, leaving me wondering where in the world those thoughts come from."

Those thoughts don't come from the world. They are fiery darts shot in your direction from hell itself in an attempt by the Enemy to discourage, depress, and defeat you.

Someone else says, "What can I do? It seems like whenever I'm with the girls and I just want to talk about the Lord, the conversation centers on gossip. I try not to get caught up in it, but it just seems to take control of the moment and I succumb."

Simply telling people not to think about lust or gossip is about as effective as telling you not to think about a pink elephant. The harder you try not to think about something, the more you will! Telling people to put depression, gossip, lust, or whatever else they struggle with out of their minds will only lead to frustration because it can't be done.

What are we to do?

Follow the Benaiah model. Resist Satan by going into the pit itself, by taking the weapon of the Egyptian and turning it against him.

How?

You're driving down the road and your mind is playing games with you. Here's what to do: Go on the offensive. Say to the Enemy, "I'm going to run

right in your direction. Go ahead and fire that arrow at me as much as you want. Put those thoughts in my mind. Play those games. I want you to know, however, that every time you fire one of those arrows into my mind, I'm not going to come down on myself or try to talk myself out of thinking about a pink elephant. I'm simply going to take that same arrow and turn it against you. I'm going to pray for fifteen people I know who also struggle with this difficulty. Take that."

What happens?

The Enemy begins to see that every time he fires one of his arrows at you, he inadvertently causes you to pray for others. Since prayer binds Satan, he suddenly realizes his plan is backfiring and he flees.

"I'm so depressed," you say. What do you do? Grab the weapon of the Enemy and turn it against him. Go into the pit and say, "You can depress me as much as you wish, but every time you do, Satan, I am going to stop what I'm doing, and, by faith, give thanks to God for all the good things He's done for me. I'm going to worship Him."

Now, because Satan used to be the worship leader in heaven before being demoted to a snake in the dust, the sound of worship is like fingernails on a chalkboard in his ears. So he flees.

"I just can't quit gossiping," you say. You can if you go on the offensive and say ten good things about the person whose name has come up in the conversation. Seeing that tempting you to tear people down only results in you building them up will send Satan running every time.

To resist the devil doesn't mean you try to ignore the reality of the temptation. It means you take the very weapon fired against you and turn it against Satan through intercession, worship, or praise. Do that and Satan will flee from you. He'll leave you alone—at least for a season.

How do I know?

That's what Jesus did. When the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness to be tempted by the Enemy, Satan came to Him, trying to get Him to doubt the character, the provision, and the plan of the Father. What did Jesus do? Did He run? No, He gave Satan a Bible study each time the lion came His way (Matthew 4:4–10).

I don't know what your area of vulnerability is. I don't know where the roaring lion yells at you. This I do know: Whatever your area of weakness,

don’t run from it. Be Benaiah. Take the offensive. Resist.

Peter was a man who dealt with the Enemy. Now he comes with this word to strengthen you and me. Run toward the roar and watch the toothless old lion flee.



2 PETER

1

2 Peter 1:1 (a)
Simon . . .

As we read the Gospel accounts, we see Peter talking when he should have been listening (Matthew 16:21, 22), sleeping when he should have been praying (Mark 14:37), stepping out when he should have held back (John 18:10), and holding back when he should have stepped out (John 13:8).

That's why Peter is such a favorite of mine—I see his characteristics and tendencies in my own walk and history. Maybe you see them in yours as well. But here's the great news, the amazing truth, the glorious fact: Even with all of his failures and denials, even with all of his setbacks and stumbles, Simon made it through.

Why? Because he was such a great guy?

No. Simon made it through because Jesus prayed for him (Luke 22:32). And guess what. The same thing is true of you and me. We're all people who want to do right, but who invariably mess up. We're all people whose spirits are willing, but whose flesh is unbelievably weak. Yet even right now, Jesus knows the temptation we're facing, the fears we're feeling, the questions that are churning. He knows them all, and He's praying for us (Hebrews 7:25)—not because we're worthy, but because He's faithful.

2 Peter 1:1 (b)
. . . Peter . . .

When Jesus first called Peter, He said, "You are Simon, but you shall be Petros, Peter, Rock," as if to say, "You're shifting sand now, but I know what I'm going to do with you, and I know what will be accomplished in you."

When was Simon's name officially changed to Peter? It happened in Caesarea Philippi. . . .

"Whom do men say that I am?" Jesus asked His disciples.

"Some say You're Elijah; some say You're John the Baptist; some say You're Jeremiah; some say You're the promised prophet of Deuteronomy 18," they answered.

"Yes, but who do you *say that I am?" He asked His boys.*

It was Peter who said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

"Blessed are you, Simon," Jesus said, "for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father which is in heaven. Thou art Peter. Upon the rock of your confession, I will build My church. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (see Matthew 16:18).

Peter discovered his identity. Peter was changed from shifting sand to rock when he understood who Jesus was. And the same is still true today. I know men fifty years old who are still trying to figure out their identities. Confused about who they are, they try to drive the newest car, marry the youngest wife, and line up the easiest job. But they remain unhappy and unstable because it's only when a man, woman, or teenager finally realizes who Jesus Christ is that life begins to make sense. It's only when we understand that God doesn't exist for us, but that all things were made by and for the One who died for us (Colossians 1:16) that we see who we are in Him.

Show me a teenager who realizes that Jesus does not exist to give him a girlfriend, but that he exists to please Jesus Christ; show me a mom who understands that her purpose is to please Christ even more than pleasing her family; show me a businessman climbing the ladder vocationally who knows his job simply gives him opportunity to please Christ in the workplace—and I'll show you a teenager, a mom, a businessman who knows their true identity.

Please note with me one other element of Peter's introduction. In his first epistle, he referred to himself simply as Peter. In this, his second epistle, coming to the very last days of his life, he refers to himself as *Simon* Peter.

Samuel Chadwick, powerful preacher of generations past, was known as the "Preacher of Passion." This was due to the fact that at some point in every sermon, tears would fill his eyes. His writings reveal

the reason why week, after week, year after year he felt such compassion for people. He recounts how every Saturday night, after his sermon was prepared, he would go into his study, close the door behind him, and reflect on what a sinner he had been before he met Christ and how good God was to save him. Remembering the pit from which he had been rescued caused him to break down in gratitude. Then, looking out at his congregation the next morning, realizing many of them were in the same place he had been, he wept for them.

For we who have been saved for over ten years, the danger lies in forgetting the emptiness, the shattered relationships, the broken promises, the valleys that defined our days before the Lord saved us. What was good for Samuel Chadwick and Simon Peter is good for you and me as well—as we reflect on who and where we would be if it wasn't for Jesus in our lives.

2 Peter 1:1 (c)
. . . a servant . . .

The Greek word translated "servant" is *doulos,* or bondservant. After six years of service, slaves were set free. But if a slave wanted to remain in his master's service, an earring would be placed in his ear, signifying that he was a slave by choice.

Such is what Peter was. Why?

Because although the *doulos* was committed to serve his master for life, the master was equally committed to provide for the slave. Now, if you know Jesus at all, it makes all the sense in the world that Peter would want to be a servant of His because who would care for him, who would provide for him better than Jesus?

2 Peter 1:1 (d)
. . . and an apostle of Jesus Christ . . .

"Apostle" means "sent out one." Of the hundreds of disciples, or "disciplined ones," who followed Him, Jesus chose twelve apostles to bring

into His inner circle, and then to send out into ministry. Peter was one of those twelve.

2 Peter 1:1 (e)

. . . to them that have obtained like precious faith . . .

I find it intriguing that throughout his writing, Peter uses the word "precious." In his first epistle, he wrote of precious blood (1:19). Here in verse 1 of his second epistle, he speaks of precious faith. In verse 4, he'll talk about precious promises. In chapter 2, he'll speak of the precious stone. Although it's not a word we would expect to find in the vocabulary of a big fisherman, "precious" is a perfect choice because it literally means "beyond calculation." And truly, the faith, blood, and promises of our Lord are of incalculable worth.

2 Peter 1:1 (f)

. . . with us . . .

Peter isn't saying, "I'm flying First Class because I'm an apostle, but the rest of you are in Coach." No, he says, "You have the same precious faith I do. It's common to us all."

2 Peter 1:1 (g)

. . . through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Greek phrase translated "of God and our Savior Jesus Christ" is literally "of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ." This means Peter is calling Jesus—with whom he lived and walked for three years—God.

2 Peter 1:2

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.

The more knowledge you have of Jesus Christ, the greater understanding you'll have that our God is truly a God of grace.

> At the outset of his ministry, Billy Graham was referred to as "God's Machine Gun." But as he went on in his knowledge of the Lord, he found himself becoming more and more oriented toward grace—so much so that many Christians today scratch their heads and wonder how he can be open to so many. "*That* denomination can't be Christian," they scoff. Or, "Surely, *those* people can't be saved." But Billy has a way of being incredibly embracive without compromising. And in his own writings, he explains that as he grows older in the Lord, he's more and more amazed by the grace of the Lord.

The older you grow in the Lord, the more grace-oriented you'll be as you realize the Christian life is all about Jesus and the undeserved, unearned favor He lavishes upon us so freely due to the finished work of Calvary. The result? Unmistakable, undeniable, unshakable peace. Grace and peace walk hand in hand.

> **2 Peter 1:3 (a)**
> **According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness . . .**

Notice that Peter is not telling us that everything we have need of pertaining to life and godliness *will be* given to us. No, he says everything we need to live an abundant, fulfilled life—and everything we need to live like Christ—has *already been* given to us.

This is radical because many of us don't have this understanding. We think we're still pursuing some key and if we can find it, then we'll be able to unlock the secret of life. We're looking for the combination on the padlock of godliness. But Peter says something wonderful when he says God has already given us all things—not most things, not a bunch of things—but *all* things that pertain to life and godliness.

> *When my son Benjamin was born, although he wasn't all that he will be one day, everything he needed was already packed into his*

little body. His job, then, was not to find additional body parts to add to himself. His job was simply to grow.

"That's obvious," you say. But a whole bunch of Christians do what I did for some years in my walk—they read, search, look for what's missing in their faith, instead of simply taking God's Word at face value, which says His divine power has given us everything we need for godliness and all we need for abundant life. This understanding can save us a bunch of time and a lot of money. For instead of searching bookstores and infomercials to find the seven secrets of effective people, or the way to "awaken the giant within," we can simply grow in the knowledge that we've already been given everything we need to live abundantly and godly.

How do we grow? Read on.

2 Peter 1:3 (b)

. . . through the knowledge of him that hath called us . . .

We grow as we get to know the Lord Jesus through prayer, through the Word, through worship morning by morning, day by day, evening by evening. For the better we know Him, the better we understand how all things that pertain to life and godliness can function within us.

2 Peter 1:3 (c)

. . . to glory and virtue.

The Hebrew word translated "glory" is *chabod,* meaning "weight" or "heaviness." The opposite of a cotton candy-type froth, He who calls us has called us to a substantial, meaningful life.

2 Peter 1:4 (a)

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises . . .

"She shows great promise," the teacher says of the child prodigy.

"He shows so much promise," the press says of the NFL rookie.

The question is—will they live up to it?

The same is true of us, for in addition to giving us everything we need to live godly, God also makes amazing promises available to you and me. The question is: Are we living up to them?

2 Peter 1:4 (b)
. . . that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature . . .

We partake of the divine nature through the promises He's given to us and through the knowledge of Him who gave Himself for us.

2 Peter 1:4 (c)
. . . having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

The craziness of the world can be traced directly to lust. Whether regarding money, sex, esteem, or approval, lust simply says, "I've got to have more." And it is from such a mind-set that we have been delivered.

2 Peter 1:5 (a)
And beside this . . .

"Beside this" could be translated "in light of this." In other words, in light of the fact that we have everything we need to enjoy life fully and to live godly; in light of the fact that we have been given hundreds of promises so graciously; in light of the fact that we are free of the grasp of lust, we are to be those who add to their faith diligently. . . .

2 Peter 1:5 (b)
. . . giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue . . .

"You have faith," says Peter. "Now go for virtue, or moral excellence." This means that the darkness of our culture as portrayed on the screen or in print, in song lyrics or in the questionable jokes around the water cooler has no place in our lives.

2 Peter 1:5 (c)
. . . and to virtue knowledge.

Why are we to add virtue before knowledge? I believe it's because if my mind is cluttered with pornography and violence, I won't be able to extract knowledge about life from the Word because I've filled my spirit with the junk food of the world. Moral excellence is that which makes room for us to take in the Word and gain knowledge of the Lord.

2 Peter 1:6 (a)
And to knowledge temperance . . .

Why is temperance, or self-control, to be added to knowledge? Because as I gain knowledge, if I'm not very, very careful, I will begin to say, "Now that I have knowledge about this, I can handle it."

A dear pastor friend of mine who had been mightily used by the Lord began to say, "My studies have convinced me that Jesus drank alcohol." And he went on to develop an extensive argument for why Christians should be able to drink. This led him and his wife to wine-tasting events, which led to nightclubs, which led to dancing with other people, which led to divorce. In the name of knowledge, this dear brother sacrificed temperance—and lost his family and ministry as a result.

Peter warns us that as we add knowledge, we must be sure we don't get caught up in a pharisaical pseudo-intellectualism that makes us feel that, because we're a cut above others, we can indulge ourselves in ways that will destroy us.

2 Peter 1:6 (b)
. . . and to temperance patience . . .

Although I'm temperate, disciplined, self-controlled, if I'm not careful, I can become impatient with those who aren't. Therefore, I must add patience

to my temperance.

2 Peter 1:6 (c)
. . . and to patience godliness.

Yes, I must be patient—but not to the point where I no longer stand for righteousness and godliness.

2 Peter 1:7 (a)
And to brotherly kindness . . .

Brotherly kindness keeps godliness from being harsh, for brotherly kindness dictates that we be as magnanimous as we possibly can to as many as we possibly can.

2 Peter 1:7 (b)
. . . charity.

Because John tells us that love is the proof that we have passed from death to life (1 John 3:14), it is easy to see why He places charity, agape, perfect love at the top of the list.

2 Peter 1:8
For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you feel barren or unfruitful spiritually, if you're going through a dry season in your walk, the Holy Spirit inspired Peter to tell you to start working on these things. Start being kind to people. Start adding temperance to your life. Be patient with folks. Go for moral excellence. The degree to which you add these qualities to your life will be the degree to which you will be fruitful and productive in your knowledge of the Lord.

"Abide in Me," Jesus said, "and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, neither can ye except ye abide in Me"

(John 15:4). It is as we abide in the only One whose nature contains all of these traits, the only One who lived them out daily, that we will be able to incorporate them into our own lives.

2 Peter 1:9

But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

The idea of purging, or pruning, takes us back to the abiding, the fruitfulness of John 15.

2 Peter 1:10

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.

"I'm worried I'm going to lose my salvation," some say. Not if you do these things. "I'm worried I'll stumble," some say. Not if you do these things. According to Peter, if you do these things, your calling, your election is sure and you'll not fail.

2 Peter 1:11

For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

If you do these things, you'll not only be fruitful in this life, but you will be rewarded eternally. I find it amazing and wonderful that Peter doesn't give us a fifteen-volume set of books on how to be fruitful. Rather, he gives us two verses. If I don't pursue knowledge, I may fall. If I don't add virtue, I may fall. If I don't seek after godliness, I may fall. But if I do these things I will never fall—and I will be rewarded eternally on top of that.

2 Peter 1:12, 13

Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be

established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance.

Very likely in prison even as he writes this letter, Peter knows he's about to die. And he uses whatever life he has left to say, "I know you know this stuff. But I will not be negligent to put you in remembrance of it until you are established in it."

If you are a Sunday-school teacher, parent, elder, or anyone else who wants to be used in service, this is a huge point, for the key to ministry is putting people in remembrance of things they already know. You see, because our minds have been affected by sin, we forget the things we should remember and remember the things we should forget. Therefore, your job as a dad, my job as a pastor is to say the same things over and over and over until those in our charge are established in them.

It's not how much you know that counts, gang. It's how *well* you know what you know. What matters is how *well* you understand the basic truths, and how deep they sink into the soil of your soul.

2 Peter 1:14

Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.

Peter knew his death was imminent. But rather than producing panic, this knowledge produced peace.

***For topical study of 2 Peter 1:14 entitled "Peter's Perfect Peace," turn to page* 1590.**

2 Peter 1:15

Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.

The Greek word translated "decease," is *exodos*. I like that! Just as the children of Israel left Egypt for the Promised Land, Peter knew he'd soon leave earth for the ultimate Promised Land: heaven. But before he does, he reminds us of three important truths concerning the Word. First, he reminds us that men die, but the Word lives.

2 Peter 1:16

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

"We're not following fables and myths, super heroes and zodiac signs, fads or theories," says Peter, "for we were actual eyewitnesses of the majesty of Jesus Christ."

2 Peter 1:17, 18

For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.

The event to which Peter refers is the Transfiguration—when Jesus' deity shone through His humanity. Wouldn't it be radical to hear a voice from heaven and to see the Lord glowing, talking with Elijah and Moses? Yet Peter, who had experienced all of this, says there's something even better. . . .

2 Peter 1:19 (a)

We have also a more sure word of prophecy . . .

If someone offered you the choice of either being on Mount Hermon with Jesus, seeing Moses and Elijah, hearing a voice from heaven—or having the Old Testament, most of us would choose to see the Lord glowing, to see Moses and Elijah, to hear a voice from heaven. But Peter would choose otherwise. Why? Because experiences fade, but the Word endures.

The problem with experiences is that all they produce is a craving to see more. How do I know? Because the people who saw more experiences than any other were the children of Israel. They saw God part the Red Sea miraculously. They were fed from heaven daily. They saw miracles constantly. Yet why couldn't they enter into the Promised Land? Because of unbelief (Hebrews 3:19).

Having been around for a while, I would rather hear a great Bible study and be fed from the Scriptures than see a bunch of experiences unfolding. There was a time when this was not true in my life. But the longer I walk with the Lord, the more I realize that experiences fade—even the valid ones, even the wondrous ones. Only the Word endures.

2 Peter 1:19 (b)

. . . whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.

Finally, the world gets darker, but the Word shines *brighter.* The Greek word translated "dark" is literally "murky." "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path," the psalmist declared (119:105). The darker or murkier the world gets—or the darker or murkier your situation becomes in your marriage, your family, at school, or on the job—the brighter the Word will shine and be more precious to you than ever.

2 Peter 1:20

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

"Make sure you understand that no prophecy is of private interpretation," Peter warns. That is, there is no such thing as a private interpretation of Scripture that someone can sell you "for only $29.95." I love hearing teachings and reading commentaries because it's wonderful to see how, regarding basic truths of the faith, godly men always line up in agreement.

Not only is interpretation never given to individuals exclusively, but Scriptures are linked together perfectly. That is, doctrine or theology cannot

be built upon an isolated Scripture, but only upon the full counsel of God.

> *I would be sadly mistaken if I said, "Folks, I've just been reading Daniel and now I understand how to pray. We are to pray three times a day—morning, noon, and night. We are to face Jerusalem. And we are to pray with our windows open." Now, if I read a little further, I'd see Jesus specifically telling us to pray in a closet so that we wouldn't be seen of men (Matthew 6:6). And Paul instructed us not to pray three times a day, but unceasingly (1 Thessalonians 5:17).*

No Scripture stands by itself in isolation. That is why, at Calvary Chapel, we are absolutely committed to going through the Bible cover to cover. In your own devotional life, I would encourage you to do the same.

> **2 Peter 1:21**
>
> **For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.**

The Word is inspired, indeed. One thousand years before Jesus Christ came, men of old were moved by the Holy Ghost to post prophetic signposts that would point to Him as Messiah. . . .

> *David prophesied that Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced (Psalm 22:16).*
>
> *Isaiah prophesied that Messiah would not open His mouth to defend Himself when tried on false charges (53:7), and that although He initially would be destined for burial with the wicked, He would ultimately be buried in the tomb of a rich man (53:9).*
>
> *Micah prophesied that Messiah would be born in the town of Bethlehem (5:2).*
>
> *Zechariah prophesied that He would ride into the Holy City on the back of a donkey (9:9), that He would be betrayed by a friend for thirty pieces of silver (11:12), and that the silver would be used to buy a potter's field (11:13).*

Malachi prophesied that He would have a forerunner announcing His coming (3:1).

What is the chance that those eight prophecies would be fulfilled in the life of one individual? The "Law of Compound Probabilities" tells us the chance is 1 in 10^{28}. In other words . . .

You cover the entire state of Texas two feet deep in silver dollars, one of which has a red mark on it, and tell your friend to walk through the entire state—through the Panhandle down to the Gulf, through Dallas, Houston, and Corpus Christi, from north to south, east to west—and choose one silver dollar. The statistical probability that he will choose the one with the red mark is 1 in 10^{28}.

But there are not three prophecies given in the Old Testament concerning Messiah. There are *three hundred!* And the probability of one individual perfectly fulfilling all three hundred is beyond the ability to illustrate.

No other so-called holy book dares to deal with prophecy. Only this book we hold in our hands has the boldness, the courage to deal with future events.

That is why, although men die, the Word lives.

That is why, although experiences fade, the Word endures.

That is why, although the world gets darker, the Word shines brighter.

How I thank God for the Scriptures. I'm *so* glad we have this Book.

PETER'S PERFECT PEACE

A Topical Study of 2 PETER 1:14

An old man, Peter said, "I'm about to die." Although this is the first time Peter makes such a statement, it wasn't the first time he could have had reason. You recall the story. . . .

Eager to gain favor with the Jewish community, Herod killed James, the brother of John. And when he saw this pleased the Jews, he imprisoned Peter as well. Scripture tells us that on the night before his execution, Peter slept between two soldiers (Acts 12:6). Peter's heart should have been filled with fear. Instead, his eyes were heavy with sleep. Why? Some suggest it was because Peter was one who fell asleep easily and often. . . .

> One of only three men who accompanied Jesus to the Mount of Transfiguration, you'd think Peter would be curious about what would transpire. In reality, however, such was not the case, for Luke tells us that when Moses and Elijah appeared, and when Jesus started shining, Peter was sleeping (Luke 9:32).
>
> It was to Peter and James and John that Jesus said, "My soul is troubled. Come to the Garden and pray with Me." But after having gone a short distance from them, when Jesus returned to His boys, He found them sleeping.
>
> "Could you not watch and pray but one hour with Me?" He said before returning to His place of prayer.
>
> Jesus came back a second time to find His disciples asleep again.
>
> And, after a third time, He finally said, "Sleep on" (see Mark 14:37–41).

Why was Peter sleeping in prison? Perhaps it was because he was a sound sleeper. But I don't think that's the reason. I don't think anyone sleeps the night before his execution.

Others propose Peter could sleep because prayer had been made. That could be the case, for evidently having seen what had happened to James, Luke tells us the church prayed without ceasing for Peter (Acts 12:5).

Yet, I think there's a more profound and practical explanation for why Peter was sawing logs the night before he was ordered to die. I suggest Peter could sleep because he knew that, although he was indeed chained to Roman guards, he could not be executed at that time. How did he know? I believe the answer is found in John 21. . . .

After dying on the Cross and rising from the dead, Jesus sought out the one who had thrice denied Him. "I'll stand for You, Lord," Peter had declared. "I'll never turn my back on You. You can count on me." After failing miserably, thinking he had no choice but to return to his former occupation, Peter was fishing when Jesus came to him. Realizing it was the Lord calling him, Peter quickly swam to shore—where Jesus would re-commission him for service (see John 21:15–17).

Then, after re-commissioning him, Jesus went on to tell him,

> *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.*
>
> John 21:18

Jesus spoke of crucifixion—the very way Peter did, in fact, die, upside down on a cross outside of Rome. So because Peter had heard Jesus say, "When you're old, you're going to die in this manner," chained between two guards as a young man, Peter knew it wasn't his time to die.

Whether you feel like you're on a merry-go-round at work, or like you're being driven crazy by your parents or kids; whether you're not finding what you thought you would find in that relationship, or whether your bills are threatening to bury you, you can be at total peace if you want to be.

How? By doing the same thing Peter did—by simply believing the promise Jesus gives to you even as Peter believed the promise Jesus had spoken to him. What promise? Take your pick. . . .

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:19

Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

Psalm 37:4

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28

I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

Hebrews 13:5

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

1 Peter 5:7

God makes promise after promise to you and me throughout His Word. Therefore, in any given situation, we can either become hostile and tense—or, like Peter, we can sleep like a baby, saying, "I don't know how this is going to work out. I don't see a solution. But God has said that He would provide for me, give guidance to me, and would always be right beside me. And He is all I need."

"Wait a minute," you say. "The promise given to Peter was that he would eventually be crucified. What kind of a promise is that?"

To Peter, it must have been a wonderful promise. You see, Peter was a great big fisherman who had said to Jesus, "I'll stand with You. I'll stay by You. No matter what happens, You can count on me"—only to fail miserably and deny Him completely. So when Jesus told him he would be crucified, Peter's heart must have been warmed, knowing that he would at last be able to lay down his life for his Lord—something he had wanted to do all along.

"Yea, all those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," we read (see 2 Timothy 3:12). What kind of a promise is that? We wonder. But knowing we want to be a people who truly do come through and stand

strong, the Lord says, "You who live godly will have the opportunity to suffer persecution in some form or another. And as you do, I'm going to come through for you."

Know this, precious people—if you're upset by the prison of a situation in which you find yourself, you can either remain in a state of confusion, or you can sleep like Peter in peace. I suggest you choose peace—for whatever you're going through, there's a promise in Scripture just waiting for you to embrace it.



2 Although Peter was a fisherman by occupation, Jesus commissioned him to be a shepherd by vocation when He said, "Feed My sheep; tend My flock; tend My lambs (see John 21:15–17). And as a shepherd, Peter knew his responsibility was twofold: to feed the flock, even as Paul instructed the Ephesian elders to do in Acts 20:28; and, secondly, to warn the flock as Paul instructed two verses later in Acts 20:30—for if a shepherd feeds the flock without warning it, he is only fattening it for the kill.

So here in chapter 2, as we come to the heart of Peter's last epistle, we will see him issue a heartfelt word of warning to those he cares about so deeply. . . .

2 Peter 2:1

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

Just as there were false prophets amidst the "holy men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (see 1:21), Peter knew that, following his "exodus," false teachers would move in who would seek to destroy the work of God.

2 Peter 2:2 (a)

And many shall follow their pernicious ways . . .

"Pernicious" means "lascivious" or "loose." False teachers are loose with the truth, loose with their morals.

2 Peter 2:2 (b)

. . . by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

Peter prophesied that, due to their loose lifestyles, false teachers would give a black eye to the Christian community, making it fodder for jokes on late-night television.

2 Peter 2:3 (a)

And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you . . .

What motivates these false leaders, these false teachers? Making merchandise of God's people, their desire is not to feed the flock, but to fleece the flock.

2 Peter 2:3 (b)

. . . whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

Throughout history, there has been no shortage of gimmicks to make money in the name of spirituality. For example, certain ministries sell "holy water" from the Jordan River for a donation of twenty-five dollars. But if you go to Israel, you'll see the same little vial selling for one dollar. This tendency so grieved Jesus that it caused Him to overturn tables in the temple rather than allow His Father's house to remain a den of thieves (Matthew 21:12, 13).

2 Peter 2:4

For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.

"Wait a minute," you say. "I know some of these preachers get a little carried away with their merchandising, but they're really angels at heart."

"I don't care if he, she, or they appear angelic," Peter counters. "The fact is, God didn't spare even angels who sin."

2 Peter 2:5

And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.

Not only were angels cast down, but the world was washed up when, seeing a world polluted beyond redemption, God flooded it to put it out of its misery.

2 Peter 2:6

And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly.

Whether it be in a worship leader like Lucifer, or a prosperous community like Sodom, God does not look lightly on falsity. The wheels of His judgment may turn slowly—but they grind thoroughly.

"Look at history," Peter says. "See what happens to angels, to people, to communities who manipulate, exploit, and play games spiritually."

2 Peter 2:7, 8

And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds).

When Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees for the land to which God called him, he took his nephew with him. But as they traveled, problems arose when their flocks increased to the point that tension arose between the herdsmen over water rights and pastureland.

"The world is watching us," Abraham said. "It's not good that our men are fighting. Therefore, choose where you want to settle. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

We are told in Genesis 13, that Lot lifted up his eyes and, seeing grassy green hills, he said, "That's where I want to take my flock." And so it was that Lot chose to settle in the green hills surrounding Sodom and Gomorrah—a great place for cattle, but a lousy place for kids; a great place economically, but a dangerous place for his family; a great place materially, but a dark place spiritually. Lot lifted up his eyes—but he didn't lift them high enough. Whenever you're considering a move, if you lift your eyes only high enough to analyze the situation economically, you might end up on the hills of Sodom and Gomorrah that will destroy your family eventually. Look higher. Ask God who gives wisdom to all men generously (James 1:5).

After looking toward Sodom, in Genesis 14 we see Lot living in Sodom. "It's closer to the schools and to soccer practice," he may have said. "We can save gas money." So they moved to Sodom—where the situation worsened, for in chapter 19, we see Lot sitting in the gate as a leader of Sodom. Following God's judgment of Sodom, Lot ended up in a cave outside the city, where, after being seduced by his two daughters, he fathered Moab and Ammon—two nations who would be perpetual enemies of the children of Israel.

In light of this sad, sordid story, I would think Lot was at best a marginal believer. But Scripture says otherwise, for Peter calls him a righteous man who was vexed, grieved, bothered by the pollution and sin surrounding him. This tells me a couple of things. . . .

First, we don't know what's going on in the heart of a man. We may think, *That guy's in Sodom. She's in sin.* But because we don't know what's going on deep within them, we mustn't judge them.

"The heart is deceitful," Jeremiah tells us, "and desperately wicked above all things. Who can know it?" (see Jeremiah 17:9). That's why the psalmist would say, "Search my heart, Lord, and see if there be any wicked

way in me" (see Psalm 139:23). We don't even have the ability to know our own hearts, much less the hearts of others.

Second, Peter's account of Lot reminds me that the sins of believers are never mentioned once in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, we see, for example, Abraham lying about his wife in order to protect his own skin, Lot's foolish mistake in moving his family to Sodom, David's murder of Uriah and adultery with Bathsheba. But in the New Testament there is no record of a believer's sin.

Why?

Because under the New Covenant, the work of the Cross renders sin forgiven and forgotten (Hebrews 10:17). The Good News of the gospel is that if you are born again, you are justified—just as if you never sinned. Christianity is not based on good ideas or good views. It's Good *News.* And I like that—a Lot!

2 Peter 2:9

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.

I believe this passage to be one of the most powerful proofs that believers will not go through the Tribulation—that period in history described in Revelation 6—19 when God will pour out His wrath upon a Christ-rejecting, sinful world.

Peter's words refer to a story we know well. . . .

"Abraham, we have come to judge Sodom," said the Lord.

Knowing his nephew, Lot, was living in the midst of Sodom with his family, Abraham said, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do righteously? Will You destroy the righteous with the wicked? If there are fifty righteous men in the city, will You spare the city?"

"I'll spare the city for fifty righteous men," the Lord answered.

"On second thought," said Abraham, "if there are forty-five righteous men living in Sodom, will You spare the city?"

"I'll spare it for forty-five," said the Lord.

"Thirty?" ventured Abraham.

"Okay," said the Lord.

"What if there are twenty righteous men living in Sodom?"

"I'll spare Sodom if there are twenty righteous men within," said the Lord.

"I hate to ask this," Abraham finally said, "but will You spare it for only ten?"

"Yes," said the Lord.

At that point, Abraham stopped negotiating. After all, Lot, his wife, two daughters, and two sons-in-law lived in Sodom. Surely they had influenced at least four others.

However, as it turned out, Lot, his wife, and his two daughters were the only ones who escaped destruction, as the angels literally pulled them out of the city (Genesis 19:16).

The Lord does, indeed, know how to deliver the godly out of temptation, out of judgment, out of destruction. And, just as He did Lot and his family, He will deliver believers before He pours out His wrath in the Tribulation. Before the Tribulation breaks forth, He will snatch us up, take us out, call us home in the event called the Rapture, described in 1 Thessalonians 4.

2 Peter 2:10

But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government.

The idea of "despising government" does not speak politically, but spiritually. That is, those who despise government are those who refuse to believe in the unseen spiritual realm.

2 Peter 2:10

Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.

Again, the idea of dignitaries speaks not of human dignitaries, but of the demonic hierarchy seen in Ephesians 6.

2 Peter 2:11

Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord.

In the Book of Jude, we read that after Moses died, Satan wanted his body (Jude 9). Knowing Scripture as he does, perhaps this was because Satan is aware of the fact that Moses will most likely be one of the two witnesses spoken of in the Tribulation period (Revelation 11:3)—and he wanted to prevent this from happening. Be that as it may, as Michael the archangel protected the body of Moses, Jude tells us he did not dare bring railing accusation against Satan, but rather called upon the Lord to rebuke him (Jude 9).

As they rant and rave against the devil, I have seen some evangelists talk to and about Satan in ways Michael dared not speak. Peter and Jude say this ought not to be. Why? If you've played football you know the answer. . . .

As a football team, the last thing you want to do is mock your upcoming opponent in an interview because the opposing coach will gladly clip the article and put it on his team's locker room bulletin board, knowing your comments will fire up his team better than he himself could. "They call us wimps and losers? We'll see about that. . . ."

So, too, anyone who tries to incite believers to action by mocking Satan and his demons is making a big mistake. Wise is the man who, like Michael, puts the Lord between himself and the Enemy.

2 Peter 2:12, 13 (a)

But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; and shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time.

The riot spoken of here is not one of throwing rocks or bottle rockets against government buildings. No, it speaks of false teachers who flaunt their sinful lifestyles in the name of liberty.

2 Peter 2:13 (b)–16

Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet.

Hearing what the three million Israelites who were headed his way had done to Kings Sihon and Og, a worried King Balak sent for a prophet named Balaam to curse them.

"The king wants to see you," said Balak's emissaries to Balaam.

So Balaam asked God if he should go. When God said, "No," Balaam said to the emissaries, "Sorry, guys. God says I can't go."

Hearing this, Balak sent more powerful men to Balaam's house.

Again, Balaam prayed. "The Lord said I can't go. In fact, even if you gave me a houseful of gold, I couldn't go with you (hint, hint, hint)."

After returning to Balak, they appeared a third time to Balaam —this time with a houseful of gold. At this point, Balaam prayed again. And this time, God said, "If you're going to keep pressing the point and wanting your way, go—but don't say anything I don't tell you to say." So Balaam got on his donkey and set off to see Balak.

On his way, God intervened three times, sending an angel to stand in Balaam's path. But only his donkey saw the angel, causing Balaam to become so angry that the donkey had to finally speak in self-defense.

Balaam finally reached Balak and, although God didn't allow him to pronounce a curse on the people of Israel, Balaam was instrumental in their bringing a curse upon themselves (Numbers 22—24).

In reaching back to this Old Testament account, Peter says the same greed that motivated Balaam motivates false teachers.

2 Peter 2:17–19

These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

The liberty promised by false teachers is like the Judas tree of the Middle East. . . .

The Judas tree has a beautiful red flower that attracts bees by the millions. But the nectar inside contains an opiate that is deadly to them—as evidenced by the piles of dead bees at the base of every Judas tree.

Peter's clear warning is extremely appropriate for us today because in the last days more and more will teach from their own imaginations, following their own agendas. And if you think Peter's warning doesn't apply to you, perhaps you are in the gravest danger because you will eventually buy into some new idea or practice that, although it's not seen in the life of Christ, throughout the Book of Acts, or taught in the Epistles, will seem so spiritual, so logical. Oh, it may not be the current fad of "holy barking" or "holy laughter." It may be something much more intellectual, much more subtle, but no less dangerous.

2 Peter 2:20–22 (a)

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again . . .

Peter likens false teachers to dogs and defines such dogs as those who said, "It's not enough to simply believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. You must also be circumcised as Old Testament law prescribes. Christianity should be painful. Misery proves spirituality" (see Philippians 3:2). So important is this issue that Paul will write an entire book—the Book of Galatians—dealing with it.

Why do people become legalistic? I believe it's because they themselves are miserable. They've given up certain things and therefore say, "If I'm in pain, you should be, too. If I'm under the law, you should be as well. If I can't go there, I'm going to make sure you can't either."

But if you watch a legalistic preacher, a legalistic parent, a legalistic person, you'll see the truth of Peter's analogy, for, although they bark and yap at others, they eventually return to those tendencies or activities against which they preach most vehemently.

2 Peter 2:22 (b)

. . . and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

In addition to the dogs of legalism, we're to beware of the hogs of hedonism. To be hedonistic is to live for pleasure.

You can give a pig a bath, blow-dry her hair, put a bow on her tail and blush on her face. But, although she'll look fine for a short time, she will eventually make her way back to that which pleases her—mud.

So, too, any teacher or religion that encourages people to wallow in sin is piglike in nature. And wise is the one who is able not only to identify those tendencies in false teachers, but is aware of them within himself.



3 As we have seen, Peter knew his days were numbered. And from this final chapter of his last epistle, it would also seem as though he knew that following his departure, men would prey on the church with false teaching that would stem from a denial of the Second Coming of Christ and of the Rapture of the church—for in verses 1–9, Peter addresses the subject of the Lord and His delay; and in verses 10–18, he writes of the Lord and His Day.

2 Peter 3:1

This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.

Reminiscent of his commitment to "put you always in remembrance of these things" (see 1:12), Peter says, "I'm writing to you to stir up your minds, to bring to your remembrance that which I've already taught you."

2 Peter 3:2

That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour.

Because he places his writings alongside those of the holy prophets, Peter is evidently aware of the inspiration of the Spirit flowing through him as surely as it had flowed through Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

2 Peter 3:3 (a)

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers . . .

"Things are going on just as they always have," says the skeptic. "We've heard the prophecy update tapes. We've read *The Late Great Planet Earth.* But where is this Second Coming everyone keeps talking about?"—little knowing that his very scoffing fulfills Bible prophecy.

2 Peter 3:3 (b), 4

. . . walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

The root of skepticism and cynicism lies in a desire to follow one's flesh and fulfill one's lust. A denial of the return of Jesus allows people to live however they want because it removes accountability to the God who made them and who will return for them.

2 Peter 3:5, 6

For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.

There was another time in human history when men scoffed. Day after day, decade upon decade, as Noah constructed a prophetic illustration of gigantic proportion, the laughter of his friends and neighbors accompanied the sounds of his saw and hammer. But eventually, the collapse of the water canopy that surrounded the earth in days of antiquity caused rain to fall, resulting in a world-wide flood—as evidenced to this day not only by geological data, but by its appearance in the written or oral history of virtually every culture.

2 Peter 3:7

But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

Just as the world was destroyed in the days of Noah, Peter says it will be destroyed again—not by water, but by fire. Let the cartoonists draw their caricatures of prophets of doom. Let the world make its jokes. But you can go to the bank on the fact that just as the world was flooded with water in days of old, it will one day be burned with fire.

2 Peter 3:8

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

After addressing the ridicule of the lost concerning the Lord and His delay in verses 1–7, Peter goes on to speak about the restraint of the Lord in verses 8–9—an understanding based upon the fact that the Lord completely transcends time. . . .



***For topical study of 2 Peter 3:8 entitled "Daylight Saving Time," turn to page* 1601.**

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

As far as I understand prophecy, Jesus could have come back in 1967, following Israel's Six Day War, when Jerusalem was at last united. Why didn't He? If you are among those who didn't get saved until after 1967, He delayed His coming for *you.* Although we want the Lord to come back so desperately, we must never forget what this would mean to those who don't yet know Him.

2 Peter 3:10 (a)

But the day of the Lord . . .

After discussing the Lord's delay, Peter goes on to talk about the Lord's Day.

For prophecy to make sense to you, there are four days you need to know:

The Day of Man began in the Garden of Eden when God gave man the privilege, the opportunity to steward this planet (Genesis 2:15). But when Adam and Eve chose to listen to Satan rather than to obey God, the Day of Man became a total, unmitigated disaster characterized by famine and starvation, disease, war, and death.

The next day on the calendar is the Day of Christ—which will begin when Jesus appears in the clouds to meet His bride in the air and take us to heaven for a seven-year honeymoon with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

The third day is the Day of the Lord when, beginning with the Tribulation, God will intervene in human affairs (Joel 2; Revelation 6). Extending through the period of time called the millennium, the Day of the Lord starts dark, but gets brighter and brighter—just as the Jewish day begins at sundown and works its way to dawn. I like that!

The fourth day, seen here in verse 12, is the Day of God, which begins after the millennium, when, because heaven and earth have been polluted by the presence of Satan, the present heaven and earth are done away with, replaced by a new heaven and earth.

2 Peter 3:10 (b)
. . . will come as a thief in the night . . .

Because it is the Day of the Lord rather than the Day of Christ that will come as a thief in the night, the scoffer, the unbeliever will be caught off guard—but not the believer who is watching for His coming (I Thessalonians 5:4).

2 Peter 3:10 (c)
. . . in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise . . .

The Greek word translated "great noise" is *rhoizedon,* which speaks of a great roar and the wind of a fire.

2 Peter 3:10 (d)

. . . and the elements shall melt with fervent heat . . .

The Greek word translated "element," is *stoicheion* and refers to the letters of the alphabet—alpha, beta, gamma, delta, etc. If a great noise, wind of fire, and melting of gamma rays sound familiar, it's because these are all terms associated with nuclear radiation.

2 Peter 3:10 (e)

. . . the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

On December 2, 1942, this scripture suddenly had new meaning for many who were reading with understanding—for on that cold winter day on the University of Chicago's Stagg Field, Robert Oppenheimer, Enrico Ferme, and Albert Einstein tested their theory that if Uranium 235 was bombarded with neutrons, energy would be released. And indeed it was.

Moving the experiment to a desert in New Mexico, on July 16, 1945, engineers were shocked when the ten-inch rail metal used to drop the first nuclear device was immediately vaporized, shooting debris seven miles into the air and eighteen hundred feet in every direction. With heat so intense that the surrounding sand was turned into glass, it was clear something ominous was taking place. The Nuclear Age was born.

Finally, in August of the same year, the A-bomb was dropped over the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Many who read these verses said, "Impossible! Elements can't melt. The whole earth can't be burned up." But in the events of 1945, they were suddenly silenced.

While the Day of the Lord will indeed usher in the destruction spoken of here, I believe Peter's reference is to something even more devastating.

What could possibly be more devastating than nuclear warfare? Concerning Jesus Christ, Colossians 1 tells us that all things were made and are held together by Him. Now, because Coulomb's "Law of Electricity" says that like charges repel, what keeps the positive-charged protons in every atom from pushing apart? With no better explanation, scientists call it "atomic glue." We, however, know that by *Him* all things hold together, that *He* upholds all things with the Word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). But there will come a day when He lets go—and with one gigantic boom everything will be wiped out, obliterated, done away with in the Day of the Lord.

2 Peter 3:11

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.

If everything we strive for materially will explode eventually, what should be our priority?

Rabbi Chaim Herzog, a prominent scholar and lover of the Torah lives in the old section of Jerusalem in a small apartment containing only a chair, desk, and bed.

"Rabbi, is *this* your house?" asked a lady from New York who had come to visit him.

"Yes," replied the Rabbi.

"Well, where is your furniture?"

The Rabbi looked at this wealthy American lady and said, "Where's *your* furniture?"

"I didn't bring my furniture," she said. "I'm just traveling."

"Ah," the Rabbi smiled, "so am I."

The message of Scripture from cover to cover is that we're pilgrims and sojourners on this earth. Yes, God can bless us with cars and houses—but we're not to make them high priorities because they're just going to burn,

dissipate, and dissolve. “Keep your eyes on the big picture,” says Peter. “Look for the coming Day of God.”

> **2 Peter 3:12**
>
> **Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?**

The flavor of the Greek text is that we don’t look for the Day of God passively, but that we actually have the ability to speed it along.

“I thought God was sovereign,” you say.

He is, but in Scripture we see a sovereign God affected and impacted by His people and their cooperation. . . .

> *Before entering the Promised Land, the children of Israel sent twelve spies to check it out. And because they chose to retreat in fear rather than advance in faith, they were destined to wander in the wilderness for forty years (Numbers 13).*

The children of Israel actually slowed down God’s timetable by forty years.

> *“Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed,” Jonah declared. But the people repented, and God chose not to destroy the city (see Jonah 3).*

Yes, God is sovereign. Yes, God is in control. But He factors in to His sovereign plan the attitudes and cooperation of man. Knowing this, Peter says we can hasten His return.

Are you tired of death and disease and depression? Have you had your fill of sadness and sickness and sin? If so, there are two ways you can hurry the day when righteousness will rule the earth.

First, the Day of God is hastened by our prayer. In teaching us to pray, Jesus taught us to ask that His kingdom come (Matthew 6:10). This is precisely what one who heard Him teach that prayer did. At the end of the

Book of Revelation, Jesus said, "Behold, I come quickly"—to which John responded in prayer, "Even so, Lord, come quickly." The same is still true. Prayer influences the timing of God—including the coming of the kingdom.

Second, the Day of God is hastened as we share. According to Acts 2:47, the Lord adds daily to the church such as should be saved. Thus, there is someone who is the last one to be added to the church to complete the bride of Christ. And when that last one gets saved, the body of Christ will be complete, and we'll go up.

Consequently, as we witness, share, and invite people to be a part of the family and make a decision for Jesus Christ—we actually bring closer the day of His return. But the benefits of hastening the day are not limited to future times. Rather, this kind of living and thinking has benefits now, as it produces within us three important qualities. . . .

> *Purity. First John 3:3 tells us that he who looks for Jesus' coming purifies himself. It's amazing how careful a person drives when he looks in his wallet and realizes his license has expired. So, too, it's amazing how purity will characterize the life of one who believes this could be the day, this could be the hour of Christ's return.*
>
> *Peace. The one who looks for the Lord's coming takes a whole lot more things a whole lot less seriously. In other words, the one who looks for the Lord's coming is not uptight about the scratch in his car, the bruise to his ego, or the slight at the office because he sees the bigger picture of eternity.*
>
> *Purpose. The life of the one who looks for the Lord's coming, who is involved in the work of the kingdom, is neither boring, predictable, nor routine. If you feel that your life is simply going in circles, it could be because you've lost sight of your purpose.*

Hasten the day, gang, by your prayer and as you share. Live for eternity, and you'll find unparalleled purity, purpose, and peace.

> **2 Peter 3:13**
>
> **Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.**

Taken from Isaiah 65:17, the Hebrew word translated "create" is *bara* and refers to the act of creating something from nothing. The new heavens and new earth are not a remodeled or renovated version of the present. No, they're brand new.

***For topical study of 2 Peter 3:13 entitled "Flight to Heaven," turn to page* 1604.**

2 Peter 3:14

Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

We know Jesus is coming back, but there are many who don't have a peace about His coming because they know they are not spotless and blameless. Understand, dear saint, that in Luke 12:37 we hear Jesus saying, "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching." Therefore, if you are simply watching for His coming, if you are tired of this world system's sin and corruption and want to see the Lord rule and reign at last—it is you the Lord calls blessed.

Many years ago when we went to see the Oakland A's play, upon entering the stadium, Ben, seven, and Mary, eight, were given free wristbands with their names and seat numbers on them. As we made our way into the stands, we turned around to see Mary wasn't with us. We looked and looked for her until—after about ten minutes—one of the ushers brought her to the seat number printed on her wristband.

When we were reunited, did we yell at her?

No.

Did we come down on her?

No.

Did we say, "Mary, you are spotted and full of blame. Depart, Mary. Away with you!"

No.

For although she had wandered off, although she had become mixed up, all she really wanted was to be with Mommy and Daddy. So with tears in her eyes, we embraced her, sat her down between us, and bought her some popcorn, a hotdog, and a some cotton candy.

So, too, if your heart is like Mary's, if you simply say, "Yes, I wandered away, but what I really want is to be with You, Father"—don't you know He is going to embrace you as tightly as we embraced Mary?

"Wait a minute," you say. "The text says not only are we to look for Him, but we are to be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless."

That's true. And the only way we can be found *of* Him in peace without spot and blameless is to be found *in* Him. The great news of the gospel is that the moment you became a Christian, you were positioned in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Consequently, when the Father looks at you, He doesn't see you. He sees the spotless and blameless One, Jesus Christ.

And no one embodied the reality of this truth better than Peter . . .

When Jesus called to Peter fishing on the Sea of Galilee in direct violation of the command He had given him to remain in Jerusalem, Peter couldn't swim to shore fast enough. And when he got there, did Jesus lecture Peter, berate Peter, humiliate Peter? No. He served Peter (John 21:12, 13).

Will Jesus be mad at you when He comes? Not if, like Peter, you're saying, "Lord, even though I'm out to lunch, drifting out to sea, fishing where I ought not be, I still want to be with You."

2 Peter 3:15, 16 (a)

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking

in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood . . .

Peter and Paul had an interesting relationship. In Galatians 2, we read that Paul rebuked Peter for his failure to fellowship with Gentiles when fellow Jews were present. Here, Peter tells us that Paul's writings are hard to understand. With different callings and different methods—Peter called to primarily minister to Jewish believers, Paul to Gentiles—Peter and Paul illustrate what is to take place in and through the body of Christ as we find both unity and diversity in Him.

2 Peter 3:16 (b)

. . . which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest . . .

"Wrest" means "to torture" or "to distort." Those who twisted Paul's words were his enemies, the legalists, who accused Paul of telling people to sin in order that grace might abound (Romans 6:1).

2 Peter 3:16 (c)

. . . as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

There are those who contend that it was not until centuries later that the church recognized Peter's, James', or Paul's writings to be inspired. But such is not the case, for in placing Paul's writings on the same plane as "the other Scriptures," Peter knew they were equally inspired.

2 Peter 3:17

Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.

While it is true that belief affects behavior, it is equally true that behavior affects belief. For example, the more you study evolution, the more you become aware of its scientific absurdity. But people continue to buy into it

because believing they are nothing more than animals allows them to justify their own animal behavior.

Peter says, "I know you know the truth. But be careful because if you choose to live in carnality, you will eventually change your theology to justify your sin."

2 Peter 3:18

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

Peter closes not by saying, "Grow in devotion," or, "Grow in zeal," or "Grow in holiness." He closes by saying, "Grow in grace" because grace is not the starting point. Grace is the only point.



***For topical study of 2 Peter 3:18 entitled "Grow in Grace," turn to page* 1606.**

DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME

A Topical Study of
2 PETER 3:8

Twelve to fifteen years ago, those who study such things predicted that by the year 2000, due to the technological advances that would so lighten our workloads that they would usher us in to a veritable Age of Leisure, most Americans would work only three days a week. In reality, however, the inventions that were supposed to make our lives easier have had just the opposite effect. But if you are one who is growing increasingly weary of the whir of the fax machine, the beep of the pager, the ring of the cell phone, I have good news for you today because the passage before us contains not only prophetic implications, but practical application for you and me. . . .

Practical Application

> *But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years . . .*
>
> 2 Peter 3:8 (a)

"We're in trouble," said the Gibeonites to Joshua. "We're about to be wiped out by the five Amorite kings who are besieging our city."

Therefore, keeping his end of the treaty he had made with them, as recorded in Joshua 9, Joshua and his troops rescued the Gibeonites. And as the Amorites fled in retreat, the Israelites were poised to finish them off—when the sun began to set. So with time running out and the job still undone, Joshua commanded the sun to stand still. And Scripture records that the sun did, indeed, stand still until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies (Joshua 10:13).

"Ha!" scoffs the cynic. "Everyone knows it is the earth that rotates around the sun—not vice versa. The Bible is wrong once again."

But I remind such a one that even the most brilliant scientists of our day speak of sunrises and sunsets, employing the same universal concept to paint a picture.

What does this have to do with us practically? Understand this: Although in fighting the Amorites Joshua was doing something that would not be easy for him to do, because he was obedient to the Lord, he was able to get the job done. So, too, there are things the Lord might have us do this week that aren't easy—about which we might find ourselves saying, "I don't want to call her," or, "I don't want to be kind to my neighbor," or, "I don't want to do that or go there." So, instead, we'll go our own way, follow our own agenda, and what will happen? We'll run out of time to do the things we mistakenly thought we were supposed to do rather than those things the Lord had directed us to do.

On the other hand, if, like Joshua, we speak to the Son and are obedient to Him, we find we have time to accomplish that which He would have us do. This is the greatest piece of time management advice there is. Do what the Lord is telling you to do. Don't put it off. Don't say, "Later." Don't say,

"Sometime." Do what He's showing you to do *now*—and you will find the sun standing still. You'll find you have plenty of energy, plenty of opportunity because, having given God your day, you can't outgive Him.

When we walk with the Lord, something happens. When we give a day to the Lord, something happens. When we're obedient to the Lord something happens. Our days seems to expand. If you say, "Even though my flesh doesn't want to, even though I think I'm too busy, whatever You say, Lord, I'll do"—you will find your day elongated.

Prophetic Implication

. . . and a thousand years as one day.

2 Peter 3:8 (b)

"Surely I come quickly," Jesus said (see Revelation 22:20), to which the cynics and scoffers reply, "*Quickly?* It's been two thousand years!" But in the Lord's economy—one thousand years being a day—He's only been gone two days. And He's coming back on the third. . . .

> *Come, and let us return unto the* LORD*: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.* Hosea 6:1, 2

Two thousand years ago, Israel was destroyed as a nation when, under General Titus, the Romans decimated the city of Jerusalem, burned the temple, and scattered the people. But after two days—or two thousand years—a miracle took place when, inconceivable by human design but prophesied throughout the Old Testament, Israel was revived as a nation in 1948.

Many Bible scholars concur with Archbishop Usher's conclusion that, according to Old Testament genealogy, Adam came on the scene four thousand years before Christ. If that is true, this is most intriguing, because in Bible numerology we see a consistent pattern. . . .

> After six days of struggle, strain, and sweat there was to be a seventh day of rest (Exodus 20:9–10).
>
> After six years of tilling the ground and planting crops, the seventh year was to be a sabbatical in which the land was to rest for a year (Leviticus 25).
>
> After serving as a slave for six years, a man was to be set free (Deuteronomy 15).

For six thousand years, or six days, we've been sweating and struggling and straining. We're headed for the seventh day, the seventh millennium—one thousand years of rest, peace, and prosperity when Jesus comes back to establish His kingdom in the city of Jerusalem.

I am personally persuaded that the typology of the Old Testament, as it points to the prophecies of the kingdom, places us on the verge of the seventh day. We've gone through six days of struggle and strain, six years of slavery to sin and the flesh. And now it's time for the seventh day.

Then why are we still here? We're in overtime.

Personal Invitation

> *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*
>
> 2 Peter 3:9

Not only did the sun stand still, but it actually disappeared as Jesus hung on the Cross to pay for the sins of humanity (Mark 15:33). Fulfilling Old Testament typology, He bore each of our sins specifically because He loves us passionately. Therefore, He delays His coming for us in order to give everyone abundant opportunity to come to Him. But He will not delay forever. The third day is soon to dawn—beginning with the seven-year period known as the Tribulation—when God will pour out His wrath on a Christ-rejecting, sinful world. The Tribulation, described in Revelation 6—19, will be a time of unparalleled destruction and difficulty. But the good news is that many who are doubting, skeptical, lukewarm toward the gospel will see God's reality and will be saved in that day.

"I'll just wait until then to make my decision," you say.

You can. But here's the question: If, because of what your friends will think, or your colleagues will say, it's too difficult for you to make a decision for Jesus today in this time of peace and safety, what makes you think you'll suddenly have the courage to refuse the mark of the beast—to turn your back on any ability to buy food, gas, electricity or oil to keep warm—in the day of Tribulation? What makes you think you'll be able to stand against an entire new world order, face unbelievable pressure and imminent death then if you're worried about what others will say today?

Precious people, *now* is the accepted time; *today* is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). Therefore, may the Lord give understanding of His working and of His ways to you who seem to have more to do than time to do it, to you who increasingly long for Jesus' return, to you who have yet to come to Him. And may you daily find your place in the Son.

FLIGHT TO HEAVEN

A Topical Study of 2 PETER 3:13

If heaven is real, then that is all that really matters; but if heaven is not real, then nothing really matters at all. It's all about heaven. That's not just my conclusion. Inspired by the Spirit, Paul said, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (see 1 Corinthians 15:19).

The passage before us deals with heaven, even as the events one week dealt with heaven. . . .

I had decided to teach on the subject of the shortness of life to the one hundred or so in attendance at Applegate Christian Fellowship's Family Camp on Washington's beautiful San Juan Islands. So we joined the children of Israel on their camping journey as we looked at Exodus 12—17. . . .

Following their release from Egypt, the first place the Lord directed the children of Israel to stop was Succoth, or "Tent Town"—a place that would have reminded them not to take this life too seriously because they were only passing through.

It was at stop number two, Etham, which means "sea bound," that God told them He would lead them with a cloud by day and a fire by night.

Stop number three found them camped between Mount Pi-hahiroth and Migdol with their backs to the Red Sea. It was there that God said, "You might complain and wonder, question and murmur, but I will put you in whatever box you need to be in to let other people see My reality and My power" (see Exodus 14:3).

After crossing the Red Sea, the children of Israel stopped at Marah, or "Bitter," where, after drinking bitter water, they were instructed by God to throw a tree into the water—whereby it became sweet. The tree in Scripture being a picture of the Cross of Calvary, this account leads me to say, "Although the situation I'm in might seem bitter presently, I know the Lord will make it sweet eventually."

Stop number five was at Elam, where seventy palm trees and twelve wells provided an oasis for no other reason than simply to bless the children

of Israel.

Stop number six led from the place of blessing to the "Wilderness of Sin," from which we get the word "Sinai." With nothing to eat, the children of Israel murmured and complained, until the Word—the manna—came down and fed their souls. This is a potent reminder that even when we journey through the wilderness, it's the Word, the Word, the Word that feeds our souls.

At stop number seven, Rephidim, a war broke out between the Israelites and the Amalekites. As Moses went to the mountain and held up his hands in prayer, Joshua and the Israelite solders were victorious. But when his hands became heavy, the Amalekites would gain the advantage. So, standing on either side of Moses, Aaron and Hur held up his hands, and the Israelites prevailed.

"Life is short," I said, concluding my teaching that Friday morning. "We're just passing through. We don't belong here. We're going to heaven. And we need one another to hold up our hands along the way."

Five minutes later, we heard the news that in the early morning hours, Kelly—a wonderful brother whose smile lit up any room he entered—had taken off in his plane in order to get home before the predicted clouds rolled in. And twenty-year-old Ryan—an incredibly gifted young man—felt compelled to accompany him. But for reasons we don't understand, the plane exploded mid-flight.

So there we sat—Kelly's widow and Ryan's parents—on the bench where I had only moments earlier concluded our time together in the Word.

Suddenly, all of the studies I had shared concerning life being short, the mystery of the Red Sea for God's sovereign purposes and plan, the clouds and the pillar of fire, experiences that could produce bitterness if we allowed them to, and hands that hang down unless propped up in intercession, were no longer theoretical.

Driving home through the night with Ryan's parents, I thought, *Lord, what do I say this morning in Applegate's amphitheatre to a group of people who are hurting?*

But as I opened the text, the answer was in front of me, for I realized that in the fire and explosion of the previous night, Kelly and Ryan had simply taken an early flight to heaven.

Heaven. Peter tells us we are to look forward to heaven. Yet the Bible doesn't really say much about it. I suggest a couple of reasons for this. . . .

The strongest instinct in man is survival. But the beauty of heaven can overcome and overpower even that strongest of instincts. Therefore, I believe Christians would be committing suicide to get there if heaven were understood clearly.

I believe the second reason the Bible doesn't speak very much about heaven is because it's impossible for us to comprehend the fifth dimension (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Suppose I gave you a blank piece of paper with a dot on it. How long would it hold your attention? Maybe a second. A dot is boring because it's one-dimensional. But suppose I make it two-dimensional. Suppose I add a series of circles and lines so that it resembles the face of a man. That would be a little more interesting, but you'd still be bored with that after a short time. But what if I made it three-dimensional, not just a dot or a picture, but a statue—a Michelangelo statue of David. Although that would definitely be more intriguing, you would eventually tire of it. But how much more interesting than three dimensions is the fourth one—time and space. If you could actually talk to Michelangelo, your interaction with him would be infinitely more interesting than any picture or statue could be.

But there's a fifth dimension—a dimension we have not seen, cannot hear, and do not understand. It's called eternity, and it's going to make this life look like a dot on a piece of paper.

Paul was given a sneak preview of coming attractions. And it was after he was given a glimpse of heaven that he declared, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (see Philippians 1:21, emphasis mine). This one, who had perhaps the greatest command of language in history, was left speechless in his attempt to describe what he had seen there (2 Corinthians 12:4).

Therefore, on the basis of the Word of God, I promise you that Kelly and Ryan are not saying, "Is this it?" No, they're saying, "This is it!" They're not saying, "Why?" They're saying, "Wow! Truly, this is the place of righteousness—for this is the right way, the right moment, and the right place for us to be."

GROW IN GRACE

A Topical Study of 2 PETER 3:18

This article in the paper caught my attention. . . .

"Author Hyason Has Bummer of a Summer"

> This hasn't been the best of summers for Carl Hyason, the most acclaimed novelist from South Florida since John D. McDonald invented the place thirty years ago. First, there were critical slams and sparse audiences for a much-hyped film of one of his novels. Then Warner Books printed 530,000 paperbacks of his latest crowd-pleaser, *Stormy Weather,* and left out the epilogue. Many of these copies have been sold over the past month. Hardly anyone has complained that this well-received comic novel about a major hurricane hitting Florida was lacking a certain something, according to the publisher. But Hyason pointed out in a phone interview from his Florida Keys home, "How could they complain if they didn't know the epilogue was supposed to be there in the first place?"

Hyason's frustration is understandable in light of how much consideration authors give to a closing chapter, a final sentence, a last word.

As an author, Peter was no exception. And what does this physical and spiritual giant of a man say in the final words he ever penned? He says, "Grow."

"Good admonition, Peter," I would say. "Good closing. Tell the people to grow in holiness, to grow in discipline, to grow in theological knowledge, to grow in zeal."

But that's not what Peter says. He says, "Grow in *grace*."

Why? Because such is the heart of the Holy Spirit.

Paul said something similar when, in his own last words to the church, he said, "Grace be with you" (2 Timothy 4:22).

In fact, the last words of the entire Bible being, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all" (Revelation 22:21), whether in Peter's epistles, Paul's letters, or the Bible in its entirety—the final word is grace.

What is grace?

Grace is unmerited favor, undeserved kindness, unearned blessing. Grace is God giving to us not because of what we do, but in spite of what we've done.

> *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*
>
> Ephesians 2:8, 9

> *As it is written, "There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that under standeth, there is none that seeketh after God."*
>
> Romans 3:10, 11

> *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*
>
> John 1:12, 13

Grace is ours not because we earned it, not because we willed it, not because we were born into it, but because God chose to be kind to us for no reason whatsoever. Too many people think that after they're saved by grace, it's up to them to earn God's blessings. But the heart of Peter, as seen here at the end of his epistle, says otherwise.

Why?

Perhaps it is because of the grace he himself received . . .

> "Lord, though all others forsake you, I never will," he declared, cocksure of himself.
>
> "Before the cock crows twice, you'll deny me three times," Jesus answered (Mark 14:72).
>
> "I'm going to Jerusalem, where I will be crucified," Jesus said.

"Not so," argued Peter.

"Get thee behind me, Satan," Jesus replied (see Matthew 16:23).

"Bid me come unto Thee on the water," said Peter to Jesus in the storm.

"Come," said Jesus.

"Lord, save me," said Peter when he began to sink (see Matthew 14:28–30).

"I'm going fishing," Peter said in direct opposition to the Lord's command to stay in Jerusalem (see John 21:3).

"Feed My sheep," Jesus said nonetheless (see John 21:17).

During the three and a half years he lived and walked with Jesus, Peter was a recipient of repeated, continual, abundant grace. And as a result, he tells us to grow in grace.

How?

Peter gave us the answer in chapter 2 of his first epistle when he said, "Desire the sincere milk of the Word that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). The writer to the Hebrews tells us that milk, unlike meat, deals with the first principles of salvation (Hebrews 5:12). Thus, the implication is that although our knowledge of the Word and of the Lord is to expand, we are not to leave the basics of our salvation; we are not to forget what Jesus did on the Cross; we are not to forsake the table of Communion, where we are reminded over and over and over again that Jesus died for us. We grow by remembering what Christ did for us continually. We grow by partaking of grace daily.

In 2 Kings, we see an Old Testament picture of the New Testament principle of grace. . . .

When he came into power as the nineteenth king of Judah, Jehoiachin was eighteen years old. Although his name meant "The Lord Will Establish," Jehoiachin did exceedingly evil in the eyes of the Lord—so much so that the prophet Jeremiah thundered this curse upon him: "Coniah (another name for Jehoiachin) shall have no descendants sit upon the throne forever and ever" (see Jeremiah 22:24–30).

> In the third month of Jehoiachin's reign, Nebuchadnezzar marched on Judah, captured Jehoiachin, and threw him into a Babylonian prison, where he remained for thirty-six years—until Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by a man named Evil-Merodach, whose name means "Rebellion Is Foolish." And Scripture records that Evil-Merodach spoke *graciously* to Jehoiachin. "I'm going to replace your prison stripes with royal robes," he said. "You will sit with me in the palace, dine with me at my table, and receive money from my hand" (see 2 Kings 25:29–30).
>
> And that's where the story, as well as the Book of 2 Kings ends.

What caused Evil-Merodach to speak graciously, to robe Jehoiachin royally, to provide food for him daily? Some scholars suggest it was because he himself had been a prisoner. Others surmise that he acted graciously because of his belief in the God of Daniel, who was also on the scene at the same time. I, however, believe the fact that the Bible is silent concerning the reason for Evil-Merodach's kindness is because there wasn't a reason. It was pure grace.

You see, we are Jehoiachin. Over and over, we turn our backs upon our good, gracious Lord and end up imprisoned by the very things we thought were so cool. But God in His matchless grace comes to us, provides for us, and welcomes us into His presence.

Why does the Lord speak kindly to us? Why would He robe us with His righteousness? Why will He lift us up and allow us to rule and reign with Him? There is no other reason than grace. We were foolish in rebellion, yet He establishes us in grace.

And all that remains is for us to say, "Thank You, Lord, for being so kind to me. Thank You for providing so graciously. Thank You for Your promises to me. To You be the glory."

The Christian life is all about grace, grace, amazing grace. Therefore, may the grace of our Lord be with *you.*

Amen.



1 JOHN

Background to 1 John

First John is a very powerful epistle, written by a very old apostle. Along with the rest of Jesus' disciples—with the exception of Judas—John was sentenced to a martyr's death. But unlike the other disciples, even after being placed in a cauldron of boiling oil and banished to the seemingly God-forsaken island of Patmos, John lived a full life—so full, in fact, that he was probably one hundred years old when he penned the epistle before us.

Some commentators, with whom I am inclined to agree, maintain that 3 John is actually the last book to be written of all sixty-six books in the Bible.

According to historians, at one hundred years of age, John was taken from church to church throughout the region of Asia Minor, or present-day Turkey. Upon hearing news of his arrival, people would gather full of anticipation. After all, John was the last surviving member of the band of twelve men hand-picked by Jesus. Surely he would have indelible memories to share with them and incredible insights to encourage them. Yet time after time, in place after place, John would stand to his feet, look out at the assembled congregation, and simply utter one sentence: "Little children, love one another."

This should come as no surprise, for truly John was known as the "apostle of love," referring to himself throughout his Gospel account as "the disciple Jesus loved" (see 13:23). Was this because John saw himself as the one Jesus loved above the others? No, I suggest it was because he was amazed that Jesus would love one like him.

"Lord, let's call down fire from heaven and blast them," John had said after the people of a certain region in Samaria failed to respond to the ministry of Jesus and the disciples (Luke 9:54). The one-time son of Boanerges—or thunder—John was evidently a highly flammable hothead (Mark 3:17). But something happened to him, for as he spent time with Jesus, he became like Jesus.

And that same thing is happening to you and me. Slowly but surely, as we hang out with the Lord, we begin to become more and more like the Lord.

John's first epistle divides itself into three main sections as he discusses the light of God in chapters 1 and 2, the love of God in chapters 3 and 4, and

the life of God in chapter 5.

Not only does John's first and longest epistle divide itself into three sections, but John gives four reasons why it should be read. . . .

First, John tells us his first epistle was written that our joy might be full (1:4). Joy is different from happiness. Happiness deals with one's mind and emotions in the realm of the soul. Joy, on the other hand, resides in the spirit —the part of us that will live forever, the essence of our being. Based upon outward circumstances, happiness comes and goes. Independent of circumstances, joy can be constant.

The old acrostic is true. . . .

> J stands for Jesus. Because Jesus is the Fountainhead of joy, He is to have first place in our lives.
>
> O stands for others. As we have all discovered, the way to be miserable is to focus on ourselves, cater to ourselves, analyze ourselves, and worry about ourselves. The way to find joy is to lay down our lives for the sake of others.
>
> Y stands for you—last in the equation. When you're not thinking about yourself, talking about yourself, or burdening others with your situation, but rather saying, "What can I do today to die to myself and help others along the way?"—joy will reign in your spirit.

We will see John exhorting us to walk with Jesus and to care for others, knowing this is the secret of joy.

Second, John wrote his Epistle in order that we sin not (2:1). Are you struggling with sin? Are you battling a specific habit, problem, or addiction? Get into the Word, for David declared he hid the Word in his heart in order that he might not sin against God (Psalm 119:11).

> "How shall a young man cleanse his way?" David asked.
>
> "By having his pastor pray for him?
>
> No.
>
> By going to a Christian counseling clinic?
>
> No.

By taking heed unto the Word (Psalm 119:9).

If you don't feel a need to come to Bible study or engage in morning devotions, it could be because you're filling your soul with the junk food of carnal entertainment or frivolous activities. But if you say, "Lord, today I choose to give my life to You once more and dig into Your Word," victory over sin will be yours.

The third reason John wrote his first epistle was as a warning about false teachers who would seek to seduce us (2:26). "I have meditated in Thy precepts," David declared. "Therefore I hate every false way" (see Psalm 119:104). How do you deal with those who try to trip you up in your faith? Stay in the Scriptures, and that which is false just won't ring true. It's sad to see wonderful folks who have been pulled away into false doctrines and cultic activities because they didn't know the Scriptures, because they didn't learn the Word.

The fourth and final reason John gives for writing his epistle is that we might believe on the name of the Son of God and that we might know we have eternal life (5:13). People often say, "I just don't know if I'm saved." The solution to their struggle is to stay in the Word, to let it soak into their spirit. If they do, they will have fullness of joy. They will be set free from sin. They will be kept from false teaching. And they'll know they have eternal life.

May the Lord bless us in this season as we look into this potent and practical section of Scripture penned by the one-time Son of Thunder, the apostle whom Jesus loved.



1 JOHN

1 John 1:1–3

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Claiming to possess super intellects, to be true thinkers, they were known as gnostics—or "the knowledgeable ones." And these "knowledgeable ones," these "enlightened ones" maintained that even if His followers claimed Jesus was God, they were embarrassingly naive to think He had a body physically, for anyone with any intelligence understood that anything in the material realm was inherently evil.

Why did they make this claim?

By arguing that everything material is evil, the gnostics absolved themselves of any responsibility for the activity of their bodies. In other words, their logic allowed them to position themselves as deep thinkers while behaving themselves as party animals.

"It is impossible that God actually became a Man," the gnostics declared. "Jesus was an emanation of God, but not God Incarnate." And such thinking is the common denominator of all cults to this day.

Here at the outset of his epistle, John says, "Wait a minute. Jesus wasn't a phantom, an emanation, or a vision. We walked, hung out, and lived with Him. And we want you to have the same kind of fellowship with Him."

How can this happen?

The same way it did for two men on their way to the town of Emmaus. . . .

"Why are you so sad?" asked the Stranger walking with them.

"Don't you know what's happened?" they replied, not realizing it was the Lord. And they went on to recount to Him how Jesus had died on the Cross just a few days before.

Then, beginning with Moses and working His way through the Old Testament, Jesus opened the Word to them, explaining how it all pointed to Him.

Upon reaching their destination, yet wanting to hear more, the two men invited Jesus to dine with them. And it was when they saw Jesus break bread that their eyes were opened to recognize Jesus in their midst (Luke 24).

Two things took place on the Road to Emmaus: Jesus opened the Word to the disciples, and the eyes of the disciples were opened to Jesus. Haven't you experienced the same thing? "Lo, I come in the volume of the book," Jesus says (see Psalm 40:7). And truly this book causes us to have an awareness of the nearness of the Lord. When I don't get into the Word, I miss Him. Oh, He's still here, but, like the men on the Road to Emmaus, I don't recognize Him as readily or see Him as clearly.

Secondly, we see Jesus in the breaking of the bread at the table of Communion. "Take eat. This is My body broken for you," He said (see 1 Corinthians 11:24). That's why Communion is so very, very important. It's not just a little cracker-and-juice-monthly ritual. It is infinitely more than that, for it is at the table that we are given the unspeakable privilege of seeing Jesus clearly once again.

I John 1:4

And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

John says that the reason to touch the Lord at the table of Communion and see Him in the pages of the Word is in order that we might be full of joy. Elton Trueblood, classic preacher from a generation past, put it this way: "The Christian is joyful not because he is blind to injustice and suffering, but because he is convinced that these, in the light of Divine Sovereignty, are

never ultimate. The humor of the Christian is not a way of denying the tears but rather a way of affirming something that is deeper than tears."

We're full of joy not because we're trite or frivolous, but because there's a deeper reality than the temporary separation from a loved one, the problem with the car, or the bankruptcy of the business. None of those things need rob us of joy because we know there's a much bigger picture.



***For topical study of 1 John 1:4 entitled "The Wine of Joy," turn to page* 1614.**

1 John 1:5

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

People who are depressed in their spiritual lives because they think being a Christian is so hard, don't match up with true biblical Christianity because John says there's no dark side to God; there's nothing negative about Him; there's not a mean bone in His body. Therefore, a sour, dour, dark, and discouraged Christian is an oxymoron, a contradiction of terms.

"Wait a minute," you say. "Wasn't Jesus the Man of Sorrows?" (see Isaiah 53:3).

Yes. Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). He wept at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35). When Jesus wept, however, it was always for others.

"What about when He wept in the Garden of Gethsemane?" you ask.

The night before He would go to the Cross, Jesus sweat blood because He was terrified not by the pain of the Cross, the spittle that would run down His face, or the flagellum that would rip into His back. Jesus was almost literally scared to death by the thought of being temporarily separated from His Father when He would be made sin on our behalf.

"What if I can't pay the bills?" we ask. "What if the car doesn't work?" "What if I lose a loved one?" These are the things that frighten us. But separation from the Father? We don't even give it a second thought. God have mercy on us. We're terrified of all the wrong things.

1 John 1:6

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.

We cannot say, "I'm close to the Lord and I'm miserable. I'm walking with Jesus; I'm at the table; I'm in the Word—and am I ever depressed." We're kidding ourselves if we say we have fellowship with Jesus but walk around in darkness.

1 John 1:7 (a)

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another . . .

One of the ways we know we have fellowship with the Lord is that we have fellowship with other people. That is, if we're truly in the light, our hearts will be full of joy. Therefore, we won't gossip about, find fault with, or put down others.

1 John 1:7 (b)

. . . and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

The Greek word translated "cleanseth" clearly speaks of a continual cleansing.

If we're continually cleansed, shall we continue to sin? "God forbid," says Paul (Romans 6:2) because even though we are cleansed from the penalty of sin, the repercussions of sin remain. Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap (Galatians 6:7). And there are no exceptions to this rule.

"Be sure your sin will find you out," Numbers 32:23 declares—not "sometimes it will find you out," not "perhaps it will find you out," but "it *will* find you out," bringing with it terrible, painful, and sometimes lifelong repercussions.

1 John 1:8

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Who was saying they had no sin? The gnostics. "It's not me sinning," they said. "It's just my body."

So, too, there are people today who say, "There are no absolutes. What's wrong for you isn't wrong for me. I may not be perfect, but I'm not a sinner."

John, however, says any person at any time in any culture who says, "I'm not a sinner," is deceiving himself. He just doesn't get it.

1 John 1:9, 10

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

For a number of years in my own walk, this passage kept me in bondage. You see, somewhere along the line, I picked up the idea that if there was one unconfessed sin in my life, God would not hear my prayers. As a result, I would spend time at night on my knees by my bed trying to remember if there was any sin I hadn't confessed that would keep me out of fellowship. I knew I could be forgiven; I knew I could talk to the Father—but only if I first confessed my sin.

The problem with this kind of thinking is that it adds to what Christ did on the Cross. And in so doing, it is heresy. How are we saved? How do we walk with God? How are we allowed to enter heaven?

Cults answer, "Believe on Jesus Christ, *and* . . ."

"Believe on Jesus Christ and follow this teaching . . ." or, "Believe on Jesus Christ and knock on doors . . ." or, "Believe on Jesus Christ and wear holy underwear . . ."

And I suggest that "Believe on Jesus Christ and make sure you confess every sin" falls into this category. When Jesus died on the Cross, He didn't say, "To be completed." He said, "It is *finished.* The price is paid. The veil is rent. The way is open."

Am I suggesting we are no longer to confess our sin? Not at all. Confession of sin is a needful practice because in constantly confessing our sin to the Lord, we allow the Holy Spirit to readjust our thinking and set us

free. Do I confess sin? Constantly—not to earn forgiveness, but because I want to be free. And each time I confess my sin, I find myself celebrating, saying, "Thank You, Lord. As I talk with You about this sin, I'm even more amazed by Your finished work on the Cross of Calvary."

THE WINE OF JOY

A Topical Study of
1 JOHN 1:4

Having spent three years in the physical company of Jesus, no doubt John had countless memories of time spent with Him. After all, it was John who said that even the world itself could not contain the books that could be written about Him (John 21:25). Therefore, I wonder if, in writing about joy, John's mind went back to an unforgettable day in Galilee, an account of which he was the only Gospel writer to record. . . .

The Production of Wine

> *And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the mar riage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.*
>
> John 2:1–10

What was the reason for this miracle? Wine being the symbol of joy throughout the Bible, I suggest Jesus chose to do His first miracle behind the scenes, out of sight of most people, simply to add joy to a marriage ceremony.

Now, if I were the Lord, I would have chosen as my first miracle to resurrect someone from the dead, cleanse someone from leprosy, or cast out a demon—something spectacular or necessary. But Jesus chose to do His first miracle in a way that says very clearly to you and me, "I want people to be full of joy. Whether it's a marriage that's watered down or a life that's washed up, I want to bring in one hundred eighty gallons of sparkling, bubbling joy—better than anything you've ever tasted before, better than anything the world can offer. I want to do something to bring you joy—joy in your parenting, joy in your profession, joy in your hearts."

Whenever people are with Jesus, close to Jesus, learning about Jesus, joy abounds. “If that be true,” you say, “how do you explain what I’m going through this week? How can you explain what I’ve experienced this month? If 1 John was written in order that our joy might be full, if Jesus declared He wants us to be filled with joy, why has the last week, month, or year been anything but joyful for me?”

For the answer, turn to the Book of Jeremiah. . . .

The Purification of Wine

Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed.

Jeremiah 48:11

In Old Testament times, wine was made by pouring the juice of crushed grapes into a large vessel and allowing it to sit until the lees—the dregs, the impurities—settled to the bottom. At just the right time, the winemaker would pour the wine into another vessel, leaving the dregs behind. This process would be repeated sometimes twelve to fifteen times.

Why?

If the wine wasn't poured from vessel to vessel, it would begin to take on the bitter taste of the lees. So in order to make wine that was pleasing to the taste, smell, and sight, the winemaker would pour the wine again and again until there were no dregs left.

When I begin to understand that this is God's process for purifying people as well as wine, my life makes a lot more sense. You see, the Lord says, "I want to flood you and fill you with the wine of the Holy Ghost. This means that not only will I provide the wine of My joy in your life—but that I will purify it as well."

Thus, when everything is relaxed and peaceful and wonderful, when I get settled, lethargic, and comfortable, the winemaker will stir up my life as He overturns my vessel. "Poor me!" I cry. "How could You do this? Why is this happening?"

The Lord knows that what I truly desire is to be filled with the sparkling, bubbly, pure wine of joy, a wine that is pleasing to Him, a wine that is contagious for others. He also knows that stagnation and comfort will circumvent the purification process because when I get comfortable, all too often, I stop seeking God; I don't go to church; I don't read the Word. And as I am cut off from the One who is the source of joy, my life gets shallower, narrower, and smaller. And I become bitter as a result.

So the Lord says, "Because I love you too much to leave you in the dregs and let your life become a drag, I'm going to overturn it regularly."

And finally, after being poured from vessel to vessel to vessel each time I get comfortable, instead of, "Poor me," I hear myself saying, "Pour me, Lord. Pour me," as I begin to learn that it is a process that produces in me a joy unspeakable and full of glory. It is a process that matures, deepens, and purifies me; a process that keeps me from becoming polluted and defiled by the dregs of my own complacency.

> My teenagers, Ben and Mary, are very different—Mary is as feminine as Ben is tough. But there's one exception. At the Santa Cruz boardwalk and Great America years ago, I was reminded of this exception once again. You see, my daughter Mary always loved scary rides—the ones that spin and drop, the ones from which everyone exits with a green hue to their faces. On the other hand, my tough guy, Ben, was terrified by the Pirates of the Caribbean—not by the pirates, but by the little dip at the beginning of the ride. So here was Mary spinning around on all these huge rides—while Ben rode the kiddy cars.
>
> Mary knew something that Ben didn't understand. Ben was convinced that scary rides were deathtraps. Mary, on the other hand, had total confidence that whoever engineered them did so in such a way that they would be thrilling, unpredictable, and exciting—but safe. Mary knew the rides were designed to provide a thrill—but not to kill.

Why, when they go through the twists and turns and "pourings" of life, do some people say, "Whoopee!" while others say, "Woe is me"? I believe it all has to do with trust. Regardless of the dips and turns in the career, the family, the sports field, or the classroom, one person says, "Although my stomach's a bit queasy, I trust that God knows what He's doing perfectly."

The other person—even though he may know God's in control theoretically—says, "This is it. It's all over. I'm doomed. I'm going to crash."

Why?

Because of his basic fear that God cannot be trusted in the pouring process, that His timing is wrong, that His pouring is too severe. What's the solution? I suggest it's found in the Book of Exodus. . . .

> With the Egyptians barreling down upon them, they would have stoned Moses had God not parted the Red Sea. And when they had crossed over to the other side, Miriam grabbed a tambourine and led the children of Israel in a song of praise. "Our Lord has done gloriously. Horse and rider He has thrown into the sea."
>
> As fitting as their praise was, how much better it would have been had the Israelites grabbed the tambourine *before* the water parted, saying, "We trust You wholeheartedly, Lord. We're going to celebrate, sing, and dance right now—*before* we understand how You're going to come through" (see Exodus 15:20, 21).

There are those of us who shake the tambourine when the Red Sea parts—but not until. Others of us are learning to sing praise *before* the Red Sea parts, to say, "Lord, I trust You."

Precious people, we can trust God to purify the wine within us because of the cup of wine on the table of Communion. You see, in saying, "This is My blood shed for you," Jesus is saying, "I'm deadly serious about My commitment to you. I'm totally and completely in love with you. I only want the best for you. And I prove it absolutely with the wine of My blood before you."

It's impossible for anyone to go to the table of Communion in sincerity and contemplation without coming away, saying, "Lord, I don't understand all the whys, but I trust You. The blood You shed for me, Your body broken on behalf of me proves absolutely to me that you're in love with me and will only do what's best in me."

Allow the Lord to have His way in your life. The pouring process He puts you through, the seemingly wild ride He takes you on won't cause you to crash. Oh, it might be a bit interesting from time to time—but rather than wiping you out, it will fill you up with the wine of great, great joy.

2

1 John 2:1

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.

At nearly one hundred years of age, John has the right to address us as "little children"—as well as to speak with authority concerning the sin that threatens to wipe us out and do us in.

1 John 2:1 (a)

And if any man sin . . .

"I write to you that you sin not," John said. But knowing personally the frailty of humanity, he continued, "but if you sin . . ."

1 John 2:1 (b)

. . . we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

If we sin, we're not written off the list or kicked out of the family, for we have an advocate, a defense attorney in Jesus Christ.

1 John 2:2 (a)

And he is the propitiation for our sins . . .

The tactic of our defense attorney is not to manipulate the evidence for us or to make excuses for our sin. No, our advocate bases His entire case upon the fact that He is the propitiation for our sins. That is, He took upon Himself the righteous indignation of the Father that should have been hurled on us.

Think of it this way. . . .

While driving eighty miles an hour through downtown Medford, Oregon, I'm pulled over by an officer of the law and taken into a courtroom. But although I walk in with knees knocking and forehead perspiring, I am greatly relieved to discover that the presiding judge is my dad. That is why there is a smile on my face

even after the evidence against me is presented. After all, the judge is my dad—and he knows boys will be boys.

Imagine my surprise, then, when I hear his voice thunder, "Guilty. The fine is five thousand dollars or five years in jail."

"How can this be?" I cry. "You're my dad."

"Sir," he answers, "in this courtroom I am your judge. And justice must be done."

So I open my wallet to pay the fine, but all I find is a crumpled dollar bill and some change. And just as the bailiff is about to slap cuffs on my wrists and haul me to jail, the judge stands up, deliberately takes off his robe, and leaves the bench to stand beside me and to pay my fine. Thus, justice is served because the price for the sin of speeding was paid—not by me but by my father who paid a debt I was completely unable to pay.

And that's exactly what happened when Jesus Christ became the propitiation, the payment for my sin.

1 John 2:2 (b)

. . . and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Jesus not only paid the price for my sin, but for the sins of the whole world. "All manner of sin is forgiven all men, He said, except for one: the blasphemy of the Spirit" (see Matthew 12:31). The one sin that will separate man from God presently and that will damn him eternally is the repeated refusal to listen to the Spirit speaking to one's heart, saying, "You need a Savior. Jesus paid the price for your sin. Accept His free gift of salvation."

1 John 2:3, 4

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

After talking about enjoying communion *with* God in the first section of his epistle, in verses 3–11, John goes on to talk about obeying the

commandments *of* God. The second appearance of the word "know" in this passage is the Greek word *ginosko,* which speaks of intimacy. Thus, we know we are walking in intimacy with God if we keep His commandments.

1 John 2:5

But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

We have the privilege of saying, "Lord, even though I struggle and fall, I see the beauty of holiness and the rightness of Your ways—and I desire with all of my heart to do what You say." If that is your heart, you are in Him.

1 John 2:6

He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

Is it a burdensome obligation to keep His commandments and to walk as He walked? Read on.

1 John 2:7

Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

"I'm not laying legalism on you," says John. "I'm not giving new rules to you. That which I'm telling you to do you've heard all along from the very beginning."

1 John 2:8

Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.

Having said, "I write no new commandment to you," in verse 7, the word "new" John uses in verse 8 doesn't refer to something that hasn't been heard before, but rather to something that is fresh. In other words, although it's an old commandment, it's neither stale nor archaic. The old commandment is as fresh as the day it was given.

1 John 2:9–11

He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

The new commandment of which John speaks is the greatest commandment of all. The new commandment is to love.

"What is the greatest commandment?" the young lawyer asked the Master.

And Jesus said, "How do you read it?"

"Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength," the lawyer answered.

"That's it," Jesus said. "And the second is like unto it: Love thy neighbor as thyself" (see Matthew 22:36–39).

The fresh word for you and me is that we are to love, for if we say we're walking with the Lord and are close to the Lord but have hatred in our hearts toward our brother, then something is not right. It's a wonderful thing to be able to say, "To the best of my knowledge, I'm not bitter toward anyone, mad at anyone, or angry with anyone because I know what a sinner *I* am. I know how much *I've* failed. I know how gracious God has been to *me*." When that's our heart, we know things are right.

1 John 2:12–14

I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

Although there are four stages in our physical life (childhood, youth, adulthood, and, "My, you're looking wonderful"), John tells us there are three stages of spiritual life: little children, young men, and mature fathers.

Two things are characteristic of the little child: He realizes his sins are forgiven (verse 12), and he knows the Father (verse 13). While this is an excellent starting point, the child must go on to become a young man.

The young man in the faith not only knows the Father and knows his sins are forgiven, but he has overcome the wicked one (verse 13). How? By the Word of God (verse 14). In His wilderness temptation, it wasn't the Word quoted three times by Jesus that defeated the Enemy. It was His submission to it. . . .

- When Jesus said, "It is written that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God," His implication was, "therefore I will not turn stones to bread, but will live by God's Word" (see Matthew 4:4).
- When Jesus said, "It is written that thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," His implication was, "therefore I will not jump off this pinnacle and tempt My Father to save me" (see Matthew 4:7).
- When Jesus said, "It is written that thou shalt worship the Lord thy God," His implication was, "therefore, I won't bow down to you, but will worship My Father exclusively" (see Matthew 4:10).

Believers who think power lies in merely quoting Scripture are mistaken. It's not the quoting of the verse, but rather submission to the Father that overcomes the Enemy. The wicked one flees when he hears a man or woman say, "I don't care what my fleshly tendencies are, here's what God's Word says—and with His help and by His grace, His Word is what I choose to follow."

The third category of spiritual life is that of fathers, or mature ones. Like little children, fathers know their sins are forgiven and understand the nature of their Father. Like young men, they overcome the wicked one by being submitted to the Word. And as a result, they have a simple, singular passion: To know Him that is from the beginning (verse 13)—to know Jesus (John 1:1).

As you walk with Jesus, spiritual life gets simpler and simpler because the longer you walk with Him, the fewer principles there are. I used to have notebooks full of principles concerning success in ministry, theology, and family. But the more time that passes, the more I say, "Jesus, You're my life—not ministry, not theology, not success as a family, but just *You*. I love being with You; I love talking with You; I just love *You*."

That's when you know you're reaching the state of spiritual fatherhood. And the interesting thing about fathers is that there's reproduction. In the office, on the campus, around the neighborhood, others sense the Lord in you and are inspired to follow in your footsteps.

Children, young men, spiritual fathers—John commends them all.

1 John 2:15 (a)

Love not the world . . .

The Greek use of the word "world" is clear: It doesn't refer to people, but rather to the philosophy and mentality of the world system.

1 John 2:15 (b), 16

. . . neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

If the San Francisco 49'ers approached their game next week with only three plays in their playbook—a sweep around the left, a run up the middle, and a screen pass to the right—and the opposing team knew they had only three plays, I guarantee they wouldn't win.

From the beginning of time, Satan has had only three plays: the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. . . .

> *In Genesis 3:6, we read that Eve saw that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was good for food (the lust of the flesh), pleasant to the eyes (the lust of the eyes), and would make one wise (the pride of life).*
>
> *In Matthew 4, we read that Satan tried to tempt Jesus to turn stones into bread (the lust of the flesh), to look at the kingdoms that could be His (the lust of the eyes), and to prove Himself to the people by jumping from a pinnacle (the pride of life).*

To this day, every temptation, every attack from the Enemy and every worldly seduction falls into one of these three categories because Satan has no other plays. Therefore, to counter the lust of the flesh, do what Paul did when he said, "I don't allow my body to have mastery over me" (see 1 Corinthians 9:27). To counter the lust of the eyes, do what David did when he said, "I will set no wicked thing before my eyes" (see Psalm 101:3). To counter the pride of life, do what Jesus did when He humbled Himself and made Himself of no reputation (Philippians 2:7).

1 John 2:17

And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

All that is in the world is based upon the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. But it's all going to pass away.

1 John 2:18 (a)

Little children, it is the last time . . .

In the beginning of the chapter, John talked about the light of God. Here in the second half of chapter 2, he gives us a warning about the darkness of the Enemy. . . .

1 John 2:18 (b)

. . . and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

Literally translate, "against Christ" or "in place of Christ," the term "antichrist" carries with it a three-fold meaning. . . .

- First, Antichrist is a person (Revelation 13; 16; 19). A world leader will come on the scene who will be so cunning, so clever, and so charismatic that he will actually take the place of Christ in the minds of many people.
- Second, there is such a thing as the spirit of antichrist (1 John 4:3). The spirit of antichrist has pervaded human history. For example, as the atrocities of Hitler and Stalin continue to come to light, the only explanation for their murderous insanity is the spirit of antichrist attempting to destroy God's people, and, in Stalin's own words, to become "the new Christ."
- The third meaning of the term "antichrist" is seen here in our text in reference to teachers who, in denying Jesus' deity, make Him out to be less than He declared Himself to be when He claimed to be God Himself (John 10:30).

1 John 2:19

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

John tells us we can recognize those who have been seduced by the spirit of antichrist as those who say, "Forget the church. I'm not interested in the body of Christ. I can experience Christ on my own." Linked to no one,

accountable to no one, they not only depart from the fellowship, but, as seen in verses 20–25, they deny the faith. . . .

1 John 2:20

But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

The Greek word translated "know" is *eido,* which means "to know intuitively," so John is saying, "Because you have an anointing from God, there are certain things you know—not because you have mentally figured them out, but because you intuitively know they're wrong." That which false teachers propagate falls into this category because their words simply don't ring true in our hearts.

1 John 2:21–23

I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.

To deny the Father and the Son means to make a differentiation in their elevation. Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, and all other cults have their roots in gnostic heresy because all of them diminish the Son.

"Jesus is great," they say.
"Is He God?" I ask.
"He is great and by Him you must be saved," they say.
"Is He God?" I ask.
"He's the first begotten, the Son of God," they say.
"Is He God?" I ask.
"Well . . ."

"Why does John get so uptight about cultists who diminish the Son?" you ask. "Mormons love the Lord. They always talk about Jesus. What's the big deal?"

I answer this way. . . .

> *You're in my house when suddenly a man comes up my walkway, kicks down the door, and rolls a live grenade in your direction. As you sit glued to your seat, paralyzed with fear, I spring into action. I run down the hall, grab my nine-year-old son, Ben, and—just as the grenade is about to go off—I throw him on the grenade, saving you in the process.*

Such is the damnable and erroneous picture the cultist paints concerning the Father. They say Jesus was not God, not equal to the Father, but rather a created being God the Father sent to take the blow while He watched. You see, unless I understand that Jesus is Himself the Wonderful Counselor, the Everlasting Father (Isaiah 9:6)—unless I understand that Jesus is who He claimed to be when He said I and the Father are one (John 10:30), unless I take Paul's words at face value when he said that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:18–19), my perception of the Fatherhood of God and the sacrifice of the Son will be terribly skewed.

"Great is the mystery that God became a man," Paul told Timothy (see 1 Timothy 3:16). This is infinitely more than a doctrinal discussion, for if you do not say that Jesus is God, then you make God a very cruel, awful Person who created a Son to take the hit because He was unwilling to do so Himself. If, on the other hand, Jesus is indeed God, then God Himself absorbed the blow, took the hit, and was pinned to the Cross personally. No wonder those who teach anything else are damned.

> **1 John 2:24, 25**
>
> **Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.**

The mystery of God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself is the key to eternal life.

1 John 2:26

These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

False teachers not only depart from the fellowship and deny the faith, but they also try to deceive the family in their attempt to cloud people's understanding of the true nature of the Son.

1 John 2:27

But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

John is saying, "If you listen to the Holy Spirit, you'll recognize false teaching as foolishness."

I've heard people use this verse to say, "If we need not that any man teach us, we don't need to come to Bible study." However, because God gave teachers to the church (Ephesians 4:11), because Paul himself taught daily in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9), and because the early church devoted herself to teaching (Acts 2:42), we know John is not denying the necessity of true teaching. Rather, he is denying the validity of false teaching.

1 John 2:28, 29

And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

Those who have made Jesus less than He is will be ashamed at His coming when they find themselves face to face with His deity.

3 After telling us how to experience the light of God in chapters 1 and 2, we begin a new section here in chapter 3 as John calls us to experience the love of God—love that is pure (verses 1–9), love that is practical (verses 10–24), and love that is perfect (chapter 4).

1 John 3:1

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

In his Gospel, John tells us that as many as received Jesus were given power, or authority, to become the sons of God (1:12). Here, he picks up on the same theme.

Paul further develops this idea of sonship when he writes of the "doctrine of adoption" in his epistles to the Ephesians and Romans. Seen in light of our position as sons of God, the Greek word for adoption is interesting indeed. *Huiothesia* comes from *huios,* or "son," and *thesis,* or "position." Thus, Jesus Christ took our position on the Cross in order that we might take the position of the Son in heaven. He who was rich became poor for our sakes that we might enjoy the riches of God (2 Corinthians 8:9).

The story is true, I'm told, of the brothers who wanted to play Little League. As they signed up, the registrar was puzzled when, according to their papers, he noticed they were six months apart.

"You're brothers?" he asked.

"Yep," they answered.

"But you're only six months apart," the puzzled official countered.

"Well, one of us was adopted," said one of the boys.

"Which one?" asked the registrar.

"We ask our dad all the time," said the boys, "but he says he can't remember."

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

John 17:23

I studied this verse a year ago, and have been in somewhat of a daze ever since, for the word "as" means "to the same degree." In other words, Jesus says that the Father loves me, His adopted son, to the same degree that He loves Jesus, His only begotten Son. Amazing!

1 John 3:2

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

We don't always act like sons of God or look like sons of God, but John says when He shall appear, we shall be like Him. Do I like that? Yes, because I like Him! After all, Jesus Christ is the Man everyone desires to be like . . .

So gentle was He that little children flocked to Him (Matthew 19:14).

Yet so commanding was He that a single look from Him parted the angry crowd intending to do Him in (Luke 4:29, 30).

So authoritative was He that fierce storms would be quieted by His word (Mark 4:39).

Yet so tender was He that He stilled the storm of criticism that swirled around the adulterous woman (John 8:11).

So embracive was He that sinners called Him friend (Matthew 11:19).

Yet so righteous was He that His blood could wash away the sin of the entire world (1 John 2:2).

Jesus is, indeed, the Perfect Man. He's everything every one of us innately wants to be.

The more you read the Gospels carefully and thoughtfully, prayerfully and contemplatively, the more you will develop a profound appreciation of the personality, character, integrity, wisdom, and strength of Jesus. When I didn't know as much about Jesus as I know now, I wasn't as impressed with Him as I am today. And this is amazing because in every other case, the better you know people, the more disillusioned you become as you begin to see their cracks and flaws.

Not so with Jesus. The longer you walk with Him and the more you learn about Him, the more you will be impressed by Him, and the more you will long to see Him. Even though now we only see Him through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12), I like what I see!

1 John 3:3

And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

Every man who has the hope of seeing Jesus, everyone who looks for His coming walks with a greater degree of purity than with which he would otherwise walk. Living in the constant awareness that the Lord's coming is at hand has a definite effect on the way one lives.

Whether you subscribe to a Pre-Tribulation, Mid-Tribulation, or Post-Tribulation Rapture, when you read Jesus' words concerning the end times, you cannot come to any other conclusion than to say He wants us living each and every day looking for His coming.

"I've been hearing you talk about the soon coming of Jesus for twenty years now," you say. "Before that, I heard Billy Graham talk about it. And isn't it true that one hundred years ago D. L. Moody also believed Jesus would come shortly? C. H. Spurgeon said the same thing one hundred and fifty years ago. And it *still* hasn't happened."

That's okay. Even if the Lord doesn't come back in my lifetime, put me in the company of men throughout history who have lived their lives expecting the soon coming of Christ. Put me in the company of St. Francis of Assisi and Thomas ' Kempis, Spurgeon and Moody, Torrey and Finney. I would much rather be with those men throughout the ages—including the first-century

church—who were living the true expectancy of the coming of Christ than to be in the company of those who say, "It can't be today."

1 John 3:4

Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

The Greek word translated "committeth" is in the present perfect tense that speaks of continual action. Thus, this verse does not refer to one who falters in sin, struggles with sin, or falls because of a struggle with a certain sin. It refers to one who blatantly, habitually, and continually practices sin.

I used to watch my son Benny in the backyard with his baseball bat, practicing his swing over and over again. So, too, there are those who practice sin in order to get good at it.

1 John 3:5, 6

And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

In verses 5–8, and in verse 4 of chapter 4, John will give us three reasons why Jesus came. As seen here in verse 5, the first reason was to take away our sin.

1 John 3:7, 8 (a)

Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning.

We need to remind those who claim to be believers yet habitually, continually practice sin that, in the life of a true believer, the Lord came to take *away* sin."

1 John 3:8 (b)

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

Here we see the second reason Jesus came: to destroy the works of the devil. In taking away our sin, Jesus paid the price for sin. In destroying the works of the devil, He destroyed the power of sin. That is, He destroyed the power of the Enemy to entangle us in those things that compromise our ability to impact the world for the kingdom.

1 John 3:9 (a)
Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin . . .

Because Jesus came to take away sin and to destroy the works of the devil, he who is truly born again doesn't practice sin.

1 John 3:9 (b)
. . . for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

The seed spoken of here in verse 9 could either refer to the life of Christ within the life of the believer (John 1:13) or to the Word of God (1 Peter 1:23). Which is it? I believe it's both. When the Spirit of Christ comes into a man and when the Word of God stirs within him, he cannot continue sinning indefinitely. Oh, he might struggle with sin. He might even be ensnared at times by sin. But he's not comfortable in sin. That's why a Christian involved in sin is the most miserable person in the world. He has too much of the Lord to enjoy sin, and too much sin to enjoy the Lord. The seed—be it the Person of Christ, the Word of God, or both—does not allow a person to habitually, continually practice sin.

1 John 3:10
In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

In the lives of those who are born again, there is not only the absence of something negative but also the presence of something positive. That is, there is not only an absence of habitual, constant sin, but there is the presence of love.

1 John 3:11, 12 (a)

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one an other. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother.

John points to Cain as a picture of one who could not claim to be a believer.

1 John 3:12 (b)

And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

The Book of Hebrews tells us Abel's sacrifice was offered to God in faith. Cain's, on the other hand, was the work of his hands, the fruit of his own energy, and was therefore rejected. This produced a bitterness and jealousy so deep within Cain that it caused him to kill his brother.

The more successful a person is, the more vulnerable he, like Cain, is to jealousy or envy and the more likely he is to make a snide remark about the one of whom he's jealous. Oh, it might be just a word or two, a wink or a chuckle, a nod or a smile. But when I engage in such activity concerning a brother, I know in my heart what I'm doing. I'm murdering him.

1 John 3:13

Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

Even though you're called to love all people—especially the brothers and sisters in the Christian community—don't expect to be loved in return.

1 John 3:14

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

"I'm not sure I'm a Christian," someone says. John says one of the primary ways a person knows he's born again is if he loves his sisters and brothers in the Lord. If you find yourself caring about your brothers and sisters in Christ and wanting to stand up for them, you can be sure something unusual has taken place in your heart because such feelings are contrary to human nature.

1 John 3:15

Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

Jesus said, "You've heard it said of old that you're not to commit murder, but I say unto you if you're angry with your brother, you're guilty of murder" (see Matthew 5:21, 22). If I'm angry with someone, I am guilty of murder. Why? Because I will be killing him with my comments and cynicism (Proverbs 18:21).

The message of 1 John is that we are to *love.* An on-fire group of young believers in Germany end each of their petitions to the Lord with, "No matter the cost." I like that. Ask the Lord to make you a lover of people—no matter the cost.

1 John 3:16

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

There is no reconciliation apart from death. For us to be reconciled to God, someone had to die—and it wouldn't be us. God initiated the process of reconciliation by laying down His own life.

So, too, the only way there will ever be reconciliation between you and the person with whom you are at odds with or toward whom you feel tension is if someone dies. Either you will lay down your life and quit proving your point—or the other person will be the bigger person and choose to do so. If

there's someone with whom you want to be reconciled—be it a parent, child, spouse, or ex-spouse—the only way it can happen is through death. Somebody's gotta die.

1 John 3:17, 18

But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

It's very easy to talk about love and even easy to wax poetic about it. But John says, "Don't talk about it, kids—just do it."

1 John 3:19, 20

And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

If your heart is attacking you, don't worry. God is greater than your heart, for He knows more about who you are than your heart ever could. . . .



***For topical study of 1 John 3:20 entitled "Heart Attacks," turn to page* 1626.**

1 John 3:21, 22

Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

We have confidence with God because we do things that are pleasing in His sight. What things are pleasing in His sight? To the Jews, it was the six hundred thirteen commandments—three hundred sixty-five that are negative, two hundred forty-eight that are positive—they are found in the Old

Testament law. But six hundred thirteen being quite a heavy load, David reduced the number to twelve. . . .

> LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.
>
> Psalm 15

And if a dozen is too many, Micah reduced the number to three when he said,

> He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?
>
> Micah 6:8

Yet if three is too hard, Jesus reduced the number to two when He said,

> Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.
>
> Matthew 22:37–40

How do we have an assured heart, a free heart? By loving the Lord and His people—not in word and tongue, but in deed and truth (3:18).

When I don't live up to my own expectations, I tend to say, "I'm such a loser, why should I even bother to ask the Lord for anything?" But when my heart is not condemning me, I find I have a beautiful freedom with the Lord.

From His perspective, it's there all the time. But I only recognize it when I am free from the heart attacks of condemnation.

1 John 3:23

And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

"Master," they said, "what must we do to do the *works* of God?"

Jesus answered, "This is the singular *work* of God: That you believe on Him whom the Father hath sent" (see John 6:28, 29).

1 John 3:24

And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

We know Jesus lives in us when the fruit of His work in and through our lives is the fruit of the Spirit, or love (Galatians 5:22).

HEART ATTACKS
A Topical Study of
1 JOHN 3:20

How glorious it is to be free from condemnation. It happened to me one morning when I looked on the front page of the paper and saw this headline: "Chocolate Good In Fight Against Bad Cholesterol." The article went on to say that, according to researchers, while chocolate may be the despair of dieters, it also contains certain chemicals that help lower the risk of heart disease. No more condemnation!

But how much more glorious it is to be free from condemnation spiritually, for when our heart is free from condemnation, we have confidence toward God and effectiveness in prayer. This doesn't mean we dictate to or demand from God. However, when there's not a lot of junk in the way of our relationship with Him, we find the desires of our heart coming closer and closer in line with His will for our lives. Consequently, when we pray for the desires of our heart, we're praying for that which is God's will because it was God who put the desires in our heart in the first place.

If, on the other hand, you don't have confidence with God because your heart condemns you, John has good news for you as well. "God is greater than our heart," he says, "and He knows all things."

What does God know?

He knows a lot. . . .

> *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the* LORD *pitieth them that fear him.*
>
> Psalm 103:13

When my heart reminds me that I'm not doing what I could be and that I'm not as loving as I should be, God reminds me that He knows I'm only made of dust.

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

2 Timothy 2:19

Immediately after a mother penguin lays her egg, she heads out to sea for a three-month eating binge, leaving Dad on the ice floe to stand on the egg and keep it warm until she returns. Then it's Dad's turn to take to sea and grab a bite to eat. By the time he returns, the egg has hatched. Yet, although there are millions of penguins on the ice floe dressed exactly alike, and although he has never even seen his offspring, he'll go directly to his own baby.

So, too, God says, "I know those who are Mine."

If you've ever been in a public place in a time of confusion and commotion, you've seen parents act the same way as they immediately, instinctively, intuitively gather their kids around them. They don't say, "Peter, you've been good, so I'm going to find you. Christy, you're on your own." No, when there's danger, disaster, or difficulty, a parent gathers every one of his kids around him. He gathers them *all*. Even though your heart may condemn you, God knows you are His, and He will gather you as well.

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

John 2:23–25

Jesus was in Jerusalem at Passover and many believed in His name when they saw the miracles He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them because He knew they wouldn't be able to keep their commitment to Him. Although they were impressed with His miracles, although they were blown away by His presence and power, knowing they didn't understand what was asked of them, He didn't hold them to their commitment.

O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.

Psalm 139:1–6

The Lord knows my ups and downs, my failings, vulnerabilities, and shortcomings. He knows all about me. And He knows everything about you, for He put you together. He knows how you are, what you are, who you are.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

Jeremiah 29:11

When did God say this? When His people were headed into captivity. For seventy years, the Jewish people would go through difficult days and tough times in Babylon. Yet the Lord said, "I know what I'm doing. It might look brutal and bleak to you—but it's all to bring you to a glorious end."

And the same is true for you and me.

When our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts. He knows all things. He knows we are made of dust, that we make promises we can't keep, and that we are bound to fall and fail. Yet He also knows that we are His and that He has a glorious plan for our lives.

The One who knows us best loves us most.

What a miracle!



4 Having written about pure love in chapter 3, verses 1–9, and practical love in verses 10–24, here in chapter 4, John will write of perfect love. . . .

1 John 4:1

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Perfect, mature love requires discernment. Perfect love requires that we test the spirits in order that we don't fall prey to those who would seek to lure us away from the simplicity of the gospel. How do we test the spirits? Read on.

1 John 4:2, 3

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

If a teaching, suggestion, or thought is of the spirit of God, it will affirm both the deity and the humanity of Christ.

The question in the early church never concerned the deity of Christ. The debate was over His humanity. Church councils would convene in the second century and argue vehemently over this issue because gnostic thought had penetrated the church. Two thousand years later, however, it is the deity of Christ that is continually called into question. John says the Spirit of God attests to both the humanity and deity of Christ. Such is the test by which we recognize Him.

1 John 4:4

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

The walls of the submarines that descend two miles into the Mariana Trench of the Pacific Ocean are constructed of thick steel plates to withstand the tremendous pressure placed upon them. But the pictures taken from such heavily protected submarines reveal fish swimming two miles below the surface of the water with scales no thicker than

that of any other fish. How can this be? The answer is simple: The pressure on the inside of those fish is equal to the pressure of the water around them.

That's the beauty of Christianity. Some people erect massive walls to insulate themselves from the attacks of the Enemy—only to find themselves filled with the frustration of isolation. The key is not to put up massive walls to protect you from the Enemy—but to realize the One inside you is greater than whatever pressure threatens to attack you. When we understand that He that is in us is greater than any temptation, problem, trauma, or difficulty that could come against us, we can move through life freely.

1 John 4:5, 6 (a)

They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us.

Inspired by the Spirit, John declares those who truly know God know the Word. Those who don't know God don't listen to the Word.

1 John 4:6 (b)

Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

In this simple section, John has told us all we need to know to identify the cultist. That is, if a person draws people closer to God, if he embraces both the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, if he encourages folks to read the Scriptures, he is of the Spirit. On the other hand, if he diminishes either the deity or humanity of Christ, if he makes people feel distant from God, or if he makes light of the Word, he is in error.

1 John 4:7, 8

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

As John puts the clutch in and changes gears a bit, he tells us that even though we are to test the spirits, we must not become cynical. Although we are to be able to identify heresy and pseudo-spirituality, we must also be those who love, for God is love.

Earlier, John told us God is light (1 John 1:5). Moses tells us He is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 9:3). Taken together, these descriptions of God paint a powerful portrait—for fire can either be very lovely or it can be terrifying. It all depends on one's relationship with the fire. Fire in the fireplace is light and love. But outside of the fireplace, raging through one's house, fire is terrifying.

So, too, he who embraces what God did for him on the Cross of Calvary will be one who basks in His love, one who glows in His light. On the other hand, he who doesn't accept God's free gift of salvation will feel the heat of His wrath because the sin of unbelief abides on him (John 3:36).

1 John 4:9, 10

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Scripture declares that no man seeks God (Romans 3:11). He seeks us. And He pulls us into His kingdom by the provision He made for us on Calvary. *He* does the whole thing.

I don't know what happens to us. Why is it that, when we get saved, we accept grace so easily—but then after we walk with the Lord for a season, we begin to think we can add to grace? "Even as you have received Christ, so walk ye in Him" Paul declares in Colossians 2:6.

"Herein is love," John says—"not that we loved God, not that we had devotions, not that we were involved in missions—but that God loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

1 John 4:11

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

If God so loved us—and keeps on loving us—then we have no other recourse but to forgive people who have knowingly or unknowingly offended us. If you're having a hard time forgiving someone, ask the Lord to give you a glimpse of your own sin, a peek at how much He has forgiven you.

1 John 4:12, 13

No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

How do you know if you're really walking with the Lord and dwelling in the Lord? Because you have His Spirit. How do you know if you have His Spirit? The fruit of the Spirit being love, I know I am walking close to the Lord to the degree that I am loving people.

1 John 4:14, 15

And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

We must confess that Jesus came in the flesh to be the Savior of the world. And we must confess that He is the Son of God. These are the two components that will keep us free of heresy.

1 John 4:16, 17

And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

God is love. Therefore, if we are His, if we are abiding in Him, we will, like Him, love others.

1 John 4:18

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

Perfect love casts out fear. How so? If I understand that God really, truly loves me, I can have absolute confidence that whatever happens at any given moment is the best for me. Regardless of what the doctor may say, what the IRS may declare, or who wins the election—when you are sure of God's love for you, you don't have fear.

The answer to anxiety and fear is not to face your fears or to figure out your phobias. The answer to fear is to become saturated in God's love because His perfect love casts out fear. Grumpiness and cynicism, doubt and despair wash over me whenever I take my mind off God's perfect love—so undeniably demonstrated at Calvary.

1 John 4:19–21

We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

Forgiveness doesn't have to do with feelings. Forgiveness is a decision we make. If we decide to forgive, feelings will follow in due season. Who can choose to forgive? Only one who's living in love. Who is living in love? The one who realizes that, although he's a sinner and a failure, because God has been so good to him, he has no reasonable option but to love his brother.

5 In chapters 1 and 2, John wrote of walking in God's light. In chapters 3 and 4, he discussed living in God's love. Here, in the final section of his epistle, he talks about experiencing God's life. . . .

1 John 5:1

Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

Everyone who loves the Father will also love the Son. It is the spirit of antichrist that says, "I love God, but the Son is on a different level."

1 John 5:2

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

Because God is love, the closer I get to the Lord, the more His love will rub off on me and the more I will love His children. Those who think they don't need fellowship with the body or those who call Christians hypocrites are not truly close to the Father because John says he who loves God loves His kids.

1 John 5:3

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

God's commandment to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves is neither hard to discern nor, by the power of His Spirit, hard to follow.

1 John 5:4, 5

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

How do we overcome the seductions, temptations, and attractions of the world? Not by a program, but through a Person. "In the world you will have tribulation," Jesus said, "but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

I was often asked what Applegate Christian Fellowship's follow-up program was for all of the people who are baptized there Sunday after Sunday. My answer was that Jesus Christ—the One who overcame the world, the One who dealt with every temptation successfully, the One who stared down the Enemy—lives in every one of them and in Him lies victory.

1 John 5:6

This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood.

Keep in mind that throughout his entire epistle, John is doing battle with gnostics who taught that because the material realm is evil, if Christ was, indeed, who He claimed to be, He couldn't really have had a material body.

1 John 5:6, 7

And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

Perhaps this verse is footnoted in your Bible as not being in the original manuscript. In this way, one of the most powerful statements of the Trinity takes its place with other passages whose validity is questioned in many good translations. Among them are John 8—the story of the woman taken in adultery—Mark 16:15, and Romans 8:1.

But remember, we not only have copies of the original texts—we also have sermons of church fathers that are older than the oldest texts we have. And guess what. The messages of the early church preachers refer to John 8, Mark 16, Romans 8, and 1 John 5:7. So whatever texts they had in their hands contained the very passages that newer translations question. If these texts were not so pivotal, I wouldn't think so much about the controversy. But I see something more than coincidental in attacking such powerful passages.

1 John 5:8

And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

Just as the Father, the Word, and the Spirit bear witness in heaven, the Spirit, the water, and the blood bear witness on earth. . . .

- First, the Spirit bears witness that Jesus Christ is in us. Paul put it this way: His Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God (Romans 8:16). No matter how many people argue with me or point out my faults accusingly, I *know* I'm a child of God because His Spirit bears witness with my spirit.
- Second, water bears witness that Jesus Christ is in us. When Satan says, "You're not saved," think back to the day you went into the water of baptism and came out looking like a drowned rat. What would make you do that? The Spirit drew you—and the water is a confirmation or reminder to you.
- Third, the blood bears witness that Jesus Christ is in us. I come to the table of Communion, and as I drink of the cup, I absorb and embrace, commemorate and celebrate the work of Christ on my behalf.

The Spirit inside you, the baptism you went through, and the blood shed for you work together as one proof that you truly are a Christian.

1 John 5:9

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

"This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," said God of Jesus (Matthew 3:17). If we believe the information given to us by mere people, how can we not believe the statements made by God?

1 John 5:10, 11

He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Sorry, Islam. Sorry Watchtower Society. Sorry Salt Lake City. The fact of the matter is this: Life is in the *Son*.

1 John 5:12

He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

In his Gospel, John added a phrase to this verse for greater emphasis when he wrote, "But the wrath of God will abide on him" (see 3:36).

1 John 5:13–15

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

"I'm going to pull your hair, Mary," Benjamin would threaten.

"Benny," I would say, "I didn't hear what I thought I heard, did I?"

So, too, if we ask for things or situations that are not God's will, He's good enough and kind enough and loving enough to say, "I didn't hear that, did I?" We ask for the dumbest things! Think back to that for which you prayed passionately when you were eighteen, twenty-four, or sixty years old. So good is God to you and me that He says, "I'm not going to hear prayers that are not My will—not because I'm mean, but because I want the best for you."

On the other hand, if we ask anything according to His will, God hears us. . . .

"Lord, help me to love people," we say.

"I hear you," He answers.

"Help me to forgive people I feel have wronged me," we pray.

"I hear your prayer," He replies.

John tells you and me that if we ask anything according to His will, God hears us. And if He hears us, we have confidence that He will give us that for which we ask. So if your prayers are crashing before they make it to heaven, do some investigation as to why. . . .

> If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.
>
> Psalm 66:18

If I'm living in rebellion and sin, my prayers will not be answered. Why? Because God is mad at me? No, it's because it's a sign that I'm involved in some sin that, if not dealt with, will wipe me out. Thus, God's failure to answer my prayer is not punishment but protection.

> Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.
>
> 1 Peter 3:7

Because God wants husbands and wives to walk in unity and love, if a husband is not honoring or loving his wife, his prayers will be hindered as an incentive for him to make things right.

> Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.
>
> Matthew 5:23, 24

When you come to the altar—to the place of worship and petition—and there the Holy Spirit taps you on the shoulder, saying, "This person is deeply and greatly offended with you," you need to make things right with him before you continue in prayer.

> If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.
>
> John 15:7

If we're not in the Word, we can't pray in harmony with the heart of Jesus because we won't know what His will is. Consequently, our prayers won't be heard.

Is there a sin you're harboring? Are there problems in your marriage? Is there a relationship that needs to be repaired? Are you neglecting the Word? These are the issues that will hinder our prayers.

1 John 5:16

If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

"If you see a brother sinning, pray for him that the Lord will convict him and that he will choose to do what is right," says John. "But if he is sinning unto death, do not pray for him." The sin unto death is the rejection of Jesus Christ—the blasphemy of the Spirit (Matthew 12:31).

"My spirit will not always strive with man," God declared (Genesis 6:3). Thus, there comes a point in time when a man says, "No," to the prompting of the Spirit so many times that he cannot be born again. If a man has done this, we are not to pray for him.

How can we know if someone has come to that point?

We can't. Therefore, we're to keep praying.

Before Jeffrey Dahmer died in prison, he had a true, born-again experience and shared the gospel with every prisoner he could. When I read his story, I thought, *Wait a minute. This guy kills people, cuts up their bodies, puts them in his freezer, and has them for lunch. Then he goes to prison, hears the gospel, gets saved—and now everything's okay?* Yes. As shocking as that seems, the power of the Cross of Calvary, the matchless mercy of the Master, the unfathomable potency of the blood makes such a miracle possible. And although at first it seems disquieting and troubling, in reality it gives me great hope because I know if the Lord can save Jeffrey

Dahmer, He can save me.

1 John 5:17, 18 (a)

All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not . . .

That is, whoever is born of God does not practice sin, does not work on getting better at sinning.

1 John 5:18 (b)

. . . but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself . . .

The original Greek text makes it clear that the word "he" refers to Jesus, and the word "himself" is actually "him." Thus, Jesus—who is begotten of God—keeps him. Keeps who? You and me (Jude 24).

1 John 5:18 (c)

. . . and that wicked one toucheth him not.

I love this! Jesus keeps me, and the wicked one cannot do anything to me. Demon possession in a Christian is impossible because we're kept by Jesus —and greater is He in us than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4).

1 John 5:19

And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

This is truth—but it isn't despair. Things will not be right until Jesus Christ comes back to rule and reign. Until then, it's pointless to pin our hopes to anything but that fact.

1 John 5:20, 21

And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God,

and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

John ends his epistle with a word of warning that, while it at first seems out of sync with the rest of the book, is, in fact, most appropriate. You see, taken in context, the idols of which John writes are not movie stars or sports heroes, fancy homes or opulent lifestyles. No, the idols to which he alludes throughout his entire epistle are those who embrace and propagate the spirit of Gnosticism.

Gnosticism can be seen in anyone who worships his own concept of Christ, in anyone who idolizes his own intellectual theology about God. And it will always manifest itself in a pulling away from the body of Christ. The end result of the subtlety of such idolatry can be seen in a story found in Judges 17—18 of a man named Micah. . . .

Using her life savings, Micah's mom bought two idols for her son—a "graven image," which was very possibly a silver calf like the golden calf of Exodus 32, and a "molten image," which was possibly a poor replica of the ark of the covenant, containing a copy of the Ten Commandments. After constructing a shrine for his idols, Micah made an ephod—an article of clothing worn by priests. And after fashioning terraphim—family gods—he consecrated one of his sons to be his priest. Although this sounds strange to us, Micah was emblematic of a problem in the entire nation of Israel, a nation wherein "everyone did right in his own eyes" (see Judges 21:25).

When a Levite passed through his region, Micah jumped at the opportunity to add a bona fide priest to his designer religion and employed the Levite. At this point, Micah had a religion with four attractive elements:

Practical convenience. With his shrine conveniently located in his backyard, Micah had no journey to make, no traffic to fight.

Family involvement. His mom having financed the whole enterprise and his son being the priest, Micah could have "family time" even as he worshiped.

Biblical components. With his ephod, miniature ark, copy of the Ten Commandments, and a replica of the idol the first high priest had made, Micah incorporated biblical components into his

backyard religion as seamlessly as those who think a recitation of the Lord's Prayer at family gatherings or the display of a nativity scene at Christmas is an alternative to fellowship with the body of Christ.

Cultural tolerance. Mixing terraphim with the ark of the covenant made Micah inclusive and politically correct.

But Micah's custom-made religion toppled around him when the men of Dan ripped off his idols and lured away his priest. And, as a result, Micah's do-it-yourself belief system that had nobly included practical convenience, family involvement, biblical components, and cultural tolerance was, in the end, tragically impotent.

"Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together," warns the writer of Hebrews (see Hebrews 10:25). We are to worship as a family corporately. If we don't, when trouble strikes and when disaster comes, we'll run to our custom religion, but it will not save us no matter how loudly we cry. Any who have been through difficulties and tragedies know that blessing and strength come from being part of the body, submitting to the principles and precepts of the Lord, and continuing in the ordinances faithfully.

In Shiloh—only a few miles away from Micah's house—stood the tabernacle containing the true ark of the covenant, the true Word of God, the true priesthood. While Micah dabbled in deception and idolized imitations, reality was right up the road.

May such never be said of us. May we continue to be those who exchange the subtlety of idolatry for the surety of Shiloh as we renew our commitment to be a people whose God is the Lord.



2 JOHN

Background to 2 & 3 John

Because they were written as personal correspondence rather than as doctrinal statements or historical records, John's second and third epistles afford us the opportunity to eavesdrop on the early church, to read mail addressed to the group who "turned the world upside down" (see Acts 17:6). And in so doing, we see that the old adage is indeed true: Wherever there are people, there are problems. So it is that in 2 and 3 John, John deals with people problems in the early church. In 2 John, He deals with them generically; in 3 John, he deals with them specifically.

There are times when we must speak the truth generally and let the Holy Spirit make application specifically. But there are also times when, like John, we must speak the truth to people individually and personally.

The lessons seen in John's last two epistles have great application to us congregationally, as families, and as individuals.



JOHN

2 John 1 (a)
The elder . . .

John refers to himself as "the elder" because in addition to being the last surviving apostle, at the time he wrote this letter, he was most likely close to one hundred years old. That's the great thing about ministry. A thirty-three-year-old player in the NFL is considered an old man. But in the things of God, a man that age is just beginning. Because our lives become richer and deeper the longer we walk with the Lord, there is no disqualification for age.

2 John 1 (b)

. . . unto the elect lady and her children . . .

There is debate about whether the "elect lady" to whom John wrote was a literal lady, an acquaintance of John's—or a church, the church being the elect as well as the bride of Christ.

Why didn't John identify the elect lady? If, indeed, she was an individual, I believe it is very likely John kept her identity hidden in order to spare her from the persecution aimed at believers when this letter was written. John commends the elect lady in verses 1–4, commands her in verses 5–6, cautions her in verses 7–11, and, lastly, comforts her in verses 12, 13.

2 John 1 (c)–3

. . . whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth; for the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever. Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

Although John talks about love more than any other writer in Scripture, he also emphasizes truth more than any other writer—using the word "truth"

twenty times in his Gospel, nine times in 1 John, five times in these opening verses of 2 John, and five more times in 3 John.

I find it interesting that it was the "apostle of love" whom the Lord tapped on the shoulder to also be the one who stressed truth, because when you talk about love, it's very easy to get mushy, to become sentimental, to begin to say, "I'll just love that person rather than be honest with him." Such is not the case with John. And his example is a needful one in a day when the economy has eclipsed integrity as our nation's top priority, in an age where what is true for one person may or may not be true for another, in a culture that embraces Pilate's question, "What is truth?" (John 18:38), rather than Jesus' declaration, "I am the truth" (John 14:6).

While I don't want to be one who causes people to batten down the hatches whenever they see me coming, neither do I want to let the church or my kids walk in ways I know will be destructive. Our relationships with our kids, our spouses, and our sisters and brothers in the Lord cannot survive without truth. That's why Paul says we are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15)—for both are vital.

2 John 4

I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.

Mom and Dad, make sure you model absolute integrity to your kids. Never let them see you compromise truth even in little, seemingly insignificant ways—for such actions will plant seeds in their hearts that will take root, causing them to be people who do not walk in integrity or deal with others honestly.

***For topical study of 2 John 4 entitled "Children Walking in Truth," turn to page* 1637.**

2 John 5, 6

And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the

beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

After commending her for walking in truth, John reminds the elect lady of the command to love. Truth and love are an unbeatable team, a winning combination, a dynamic duo. Truth without love makes a person harsh. But love without truth makes a person dangerous because he will allow cancers to grow and problems to take root in his life, in his family, on the job, or in the church.

"I commend you for walking in truth," said John, "and I command you not to forget love." And then he issues a word of caution. . . .

2 John 7, 8

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

The Greek word translated "come" being a present participle, newer translations are correct in rendering verse 7: "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess that Jesus Christ is not coming in the flesh."

"Watch out," John says, "for people who say or imply that Jesus isn't coming in the flesh, who tell you not to get too serious about prophecy and not to look for Jesus to return physically." Who says this? Jehovah's Witnesses, for one. They say Jesus came—but not in the flesh. He came secretly in the Spirit and revealed Himself only to the Watchtower Society. According to the passage before us, this puts Jehovah's Witnesses in the camp of the Enemy.

2 John 9–11

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and

bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

This is a strong word. We are not to get involved with people who don't believe in the literal, physical return of Jesus. We are not to say, "God bless you," to such people, or to invite them into our homes. Those who reject Jesus Christ, those who are not looking for Jesus Christ, those who have diminished the Person of Jesus Christ are to be shunned.

It's a good thing these strong words come from the pen of John—for if Paul had written them, this severe warning could simply be attributed to his forceful personality. But the fact that this warning comes from the "apostle of love" makes it all the more imperative.

2 John 12, 13

Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full. The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.

Finally, after commending, commanding, and cautioning, John comforts. "I'd like to deal with many more things," he says, "but I'll do it face-to-face rather than with pen and paper." Why would this be a comfort? Because keeping a balance between truth and love often raises more questions than it answers. So John simply says, "Do those things you understand, and I'll explain the rest when I come."

We have a tendency to get tripped up by that which we don't understand. For example, we wonder what will God do with those who are seemingly sincerely tricked by the cults or isolated in regions of the world where they never hear the gospel.

In answer to such questions, the Lord says to you and me through the apostle John, "Hold on. I'm coming soon. Everything will make sense when you see Me face-to-face."

In the meantime, we are to do what we understand. We are to stay away from those who propagate heresy and we are to preach Christ to people with

a sense of urgency. We must do what the Word says and let God do what He wants to do rather than say, "I don't have to witness to him. I don't have to share with my neighbor. They'll probably make it to heaven, anyway. My kids are probably saved; I don't want to bother them."

In John's second letter, I hear an urgent heart. The "apostle of love" is one who draws a very real dividing line in the sand between Christ and antichrist, light and darkness, truth and heresy. "Stay away from heretics," he writes, "Walk in truth. And don't forget love."

CHILDREN WALKING IN TRUTH

A Topical Study of
2 JOHN 4

I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth . . .

2 John 4 (a)

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

3 John 4

At this point in my life, at the ripe old age of forty-three, I have concluded that John is right: There is no deeper delight, no greater joy than seeing my children walk in truth. Whether you're a parent or involved in discipling someone, please take note of these five scriptures that tell us how to see our kids walk in truth. . . .

Walking Together with Them

> *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.*
>
> Deuteronomy 6:4–7

I know you're busy, Mom and Dad. I know there are innumerable demands on your time. But they need not prevent you from talking to your kids as you drive them to soccer practice, take them grocery shopping, or head out for a family vacation.

> When John was caught up into heaven, an elder approached him and said, "Who are these arrayed in white robes?"
>
> "I don't know," answered John.
>
> The elder then went on to explain they were those who had come out of the Great Tribulation and had washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14).

The interesting thing about this dialogue is that it was not initiated by John, but by the elder. So, too, as moms, dads, mentors, or disciplers—like the elder in heaven, we have both the opportunity and responsibility of initiating meaningful discussion with our kids—for if we wait for them to ask us about the danger of pornography or the question of predestination, we'll wait forever. We must be the ones who get the ball rolling.

"They'll think I'm crazy," you say.

And so they may. But they won't think you're boring. If you are one who initiates discussion by telling them what you're learning—not preaching at them, but sharing with them the things you're learning—you'll be surprised by their eagerness to listen.

Walking Ahead of Them

> *And there was yet a battle in Gath, where was a man of great stature, that had on every hand six fingers, and on every foot six toes, four and twenty in number; and he also was born to the giant. And when he defied Israel, Jona than the son of Shimea the brother of David slew him.*
>
> 2 Samuel 21:20, 21

Because David killed a giant named Goliath, those who followed him killed giants as well—even though they were too young to have seen him kill Goliath.

So, too, when David confessed his acts of murder and adultery, he was forgiven completely. But murder and immorality would crop up in the lives of his children (2 Samuel 13).

Thus, the principle is clear: Whether or not our kids or those we disciple see what we do, they will inevitably become like us as they follow us in ways we don't think they even know about. If, Mom, you are a woman of prayer, your children will pray. Dad, if you're doing battle with the giants of selfishness and darkness, your kids will too. Whether we know it or not, who we are and how we walk even when we think no one is watching will directly affect those we're parenting, mentoring, and discipling.

Walking Honestly Before Them

> *Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.*
>
> Genesis 32:32

About to face the brother he had tricked out of his birthright and blessing, Jacob feared for his life. So it was that when the angel appeared to him, he was desperate for a genuine blessing. After wrestling with the angel all night, it was when Jacob's hip was dislocated that the angel said, "No longer are you Jacob—or Tricky One. Now you shall be Israel—Governed by God."

Limping into the camp where he had stationed his family, Jacob explained to them what had happened to him. And so impressed were his children by hearing of what had transpired in the life of their father that to this day they honor that event.

Gang, when a dad, a mom, a teacher, or a mentor says, "Let me tell you about what I went through. Here's the difficulty I encountered. Here's what I learned the hard way. I limp to this day; I can never walk as quickly as I once did; but I'm changed,"—those who follow in his or her footsteps will be changed themselves. Walk honestly before your kids, and they will not be disappointed in you, but will thank you and honor you. Walk honestly and you will not only earn the respect of those who follow you, but you will keep them from making the same mistakes that plagued you.

Walking Away from Them

> *And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the* LORD *in Shiloh: and the child was young.*
>
> 1 Samuel 1:24

"Lord, if You give me a child, I will give him to You," Hannah prayed.

"That's what I was waiting for," said the Lord, "because I want to bless you with a special child"—which He did in Samuel.

True to her promise, after Samuel was weaned, Hannah took her son to the tabernacle at Shiloh—and left him in the care of Eli, the priest. How could she do this? She realized her son was the Lord's and her hovering over him would only diminish or restrict what God wanted to do in and through his life.

There are times when a parent who wants to see his kids walk in truth must walk away from them in order to allow God to do what He wants to do in and through them. As prone as we are to hover and smother, we must let God be God in the lives of those who follow in our steps.

> Seeing a cocoon swaying from the limb of a tree, you decide to help the butterfly by carefully cutting a slit in the cocoon. Yet although your cut allows the butterfly to escape with ease, it inevitably kills him because it's in the very struggle to escape the cocoon that the butterfly gains the strength and ability to use his wings.

Thus, it was the wise father who, hearing his son was eating pig slop in the city, didn't go and rescue him, but rather let the process play out. And when it did, his son came to his senses and returned home a new man (Luke 15).

There are many times when we must walk away from our kids not in apathy or anger, but in the realization that they are the Lord's and that He must be given a free hand to work in their lives.

Walking Closely Behind Them

> *And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.*
>
> Job 1:5

Knowing that on feast days his sons would be tempted, Job offered a sacrifice every day on their behalf. In so doing, he was saying, "I want to walk behind my sons to make sure they're covered."

So, too, I know my kids are vulnerable to sin—because they're just like me. What can I do? I can cover them daily in prayer.

What would happen if we got up every morning and truly sacrificed in prayer—not just "Bless my kids, Amen"—but talked to and waited on the Father on behalf of each one of them? We can cover their vulnerable spots, the places we know they are likely to be attacked. We can walk behind them protectively and prayerfully if we are willing to take the time and expend the same energy Job did.

As we walk together, with, ahead of, away from, honestly before, and close behind our kids and those whom we disciple, as is the case in every area of spiritual life, we have the example to follow of One who walked in each and all of these ways. . . .

Jesus walked with the otherwise-saddened disciples on the road to Emmaus and opened the Scriptures to them, explaining all things concerning Himself (Luke 24:27).

Jesus walked ahead of John's disciples in such a way that caused the Baptist to proclaim, "Behold the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36)

Jesus walked honestly before the skeptic, not saying, "Listen to My sermon," or, "Watch My miracle," but, "Touch My wounds" (see John 20:27).

Jesus walked away from His disciples when He sent them out to preach about the kingdom (Matthew 10). And while they were gone, what did He

do? He preached in their hometowns (Matthew 11:1). Had they not gone, Jesus wouldn't have moved in. So, too, do what the Lord tells you to do and watch and see how He moves into your city, how He touches and teaches your family.

Jesus walked behind His disciples as He prayed for them constantly—not only as they toiled in the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:23), but even as they slept in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 17).

Jesus shows us what it means to walk with people, to walk ahead of people, to walk honestly before people, to walk away from people, and to walk prayerfully behind people. He does that with me. He's done that with you. Now let's do the same thing for those we're discipling and parenting.

If you do, because God doesn't violate the free will of any of His children, there is no guarantee that your kids will be godly—but it increases the odds radically. And this is the promise you can bank on: Even if they do go through seasons or years or even decades of rebellion, the Bible says, "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Do what you're supposed to do, Mom and Dad—and even if your child rebels initially, he'll come around ultimately as he remembers the training, the example, the teaching, and the prayer you lived out before him. Do these things and, like John, your joy will be great when you see your children walk in truth.



3 JOHN

3 John 1

The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

In this final epistle in which John deals with specific problems in the church, he'll refer to three personalities. The first is an encourager named Gaius, seen in verses 1–8. The second is an egotist named Diotrephes, seen in verses 9–11. The third is an example named Demetrius, seen in verse 12.

3 John 2

Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

"Name It And Claim It" teachers love to camp on this verse. The prosperity teachers refer to it, saying, "God wants everyone to be healthy and to prosper financially." But in so doing, they fail to understand that John is not propounding a principle, but offering a prayer.

Because I want my kids to be blessed, because I want you to be blessed, I pray this prayer as well. But I also understand that God's ways are not my ways, and sometimes it is only through brokenness and pain that blessing and ministry are born.

Some of us preach sermons. Others *are* sermons as they continually deal with pain and loss. Therefore, it is a damnable heresy for anyone to imply that those who are sick lack faith or that those who are poor are second-rate believers.

3 John 3–7

For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the

brethren, and to strangers; which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.

In the days before Motel 6, Gaius would not only house itinerant preachers, apostles, and prophets, but he would provide for them financially so that, as they journeyed, they wouldn't have to take anything from the Gentiles. So, too, for us to walk in truth and love means we assist people on their journey toward heaven by reminding them of the faithfulness of God and the nearness of heaven.

It is our privilege and our responsibility to say to people, "God will do what He promised. He will never leave you. He will see you through here on earth." And it is also our privilege and responsibility to direct their eyes to heaven. After all, it was by immediately directing their hearts to heaven that Jesus could calm the disciples' troubled hearts on earth (John 14:1–2). If one takes heaven out of the equation, he's left with desperate, disturbed, depressed people. Heaven in the equation changes everything.

3 John 8

We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.

Whereas previously John had said, "Don't let deceivers into your house" (see 2 John 10), here he says, "Don't become so skeptical that you keep everyone out."

3 John 9

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.

In his quest to be the big shot, Diotrephes not only spoke malicious words against John, but he excommunicated from the church anyone connected with John.

3 John 10 (a)

Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth . . .

"Open rebuke is better than secret love," Solomon declared (Proverbs 27:5). True love cares enough to confront, to speak the truth, and to deal with issues that would otherwise cause decay or destruction. Such was the love within the heart of John.

3 John 10 (b), 11

. . . prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

The meaning of the Greek word translated "prating" refers to bubbles underwater that burst when they reach the surface. Diotrephes was one who stirred up bubbling accusations against John that were without substance but which caused undercurrents of turmoil.

3 John 12

Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true.

Although John doesn't record what he did specifically, Demetrius goes down in history for all eternity as being one who was a good example of what it means to be a believer. Oh, how glorious to be remembered as one who was an example of how to walk through difficult days, of how to live by faith, of how to embrace grace.



For topical study of 3 John 9–12, see "Dealing with Diotrephes" below.

3 John 13, 14

I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.

John 21:25

Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink . . .

2 John 12 (a)

I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee.

3 John 13

I find it more than coincidental that John closes three of his four books, saying, in essence, "There's so much more to say." Because love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things, it should be no surprise that the "apostle of love" would have a heart too full for mere paper to contain.

DEALING WITH DIOTREPHES

A Topical Study of 3 JOHN 9–12

He was a man who had so much going for him that he stood figuratively as well as literally head and shoulders above the rest. Not only was Saul handsome physically, but his heart was full of such humility that he had to be coaxed out of hiding to present himself before the people of Israel as their king (1 Samuel 10:22). And in addition to possessing an attractive appearance and a humble heart, he was empowered by the Spirit to such a degree that he began to prophesy (1 Samuel 10:10).

So here was this good-looking, tall, humble, spiritual, anointed man who seemed to have it all. But he was a man who would fall brutally because, like Diotrephes, he grew to love preeminence and was determined to remain in power.

We see this tendency beginning to surface soon after he ascended the throne. . . .

Engaged in a protracted battle with the Philistines, Saul led one thousand men, while his son, Jonathan, led another thousand. Although it was Jonathan's men who overcame the Philistines, Scripture says it was Saul who blew the trumpet, Saul who claimed the victory (1 Samuel 13:3, 4).

In a subsequent skirmish, Saul was instructed not to engage in battle until after Samuel offered a sacrifice to the Lord. So Saul waited. But when Samuel didn't show up, Saul decided to offer the sacrifice himself. And because of that, when Samuel did at last arrive, he looked at Saul and said, "Because you have taken matters into your own hands and haven't been obedient to the Lord, you have forfeited your right to rule the nation" (see 1 Samuel 13:13).

Still later, we see how Saul was told by Samuel to wage war against the Amalekites and to take no hostages, to leave no survivors. So Saul went off into battle and won the battle. Upon his return, Saul encountered Samuel.

"How did it go, Saul?" asked the prophet.

"I have obeyed the Lord," answered Saul.

"Then what's the bleating I hear?" asked Samuel.

"Well, I did save a couple of sheep to sacrifice to the Lord," said Saul.

"And who's that?" asked Samuel, pointing to the man standing beside Saul.

"Oh, that's Agag, king of the Amalekites," said Saul. "I saved him as a trophy."

So once again, Samuel told Saul, "You have been a man who does what you want to do, who does not take into consideration what God says. Consequently, you have no authority in God's sight" (see 1 Samuel 15:26). Yet although Saul realized he had been rejected, he remained determined to hang on to power regardless of the fact that God's anointing had been given to another—a young man named David.

When, in a depressed state, Saul threw a javelin at David. David, a champion, an athlete, one who bounded over walls (Psalm 18:29), could have chucked it right back at Saul. Instead, he did a very wise thing: He ducked.

And even when Saul's determination to kill him intensified, David refused to retaliate. . . .

Running from Saul in the Dead Sea region of En Gedi, David's men were jubilant when Saul unknowingly took refuge in the very cave in which they were hiding.

"Here's your chance!" they said to David. "Lop off his head and claim the throne that is rightfully yours."

So, as Saul lay sleeping, David did, indeed, unsheathe his sword—but only to cut off a piece of Saul's skirt as proof to Saul that he could have taken his life. Yet even this seemingly minor gesture weighed heavily on David.

"I shouldn't have even touched the Lord's anointed," he said (see 1 Samuel 24:5, 6).

Why did David say this? Because he recognized Saul as the instrument God had allowed in his life to prepare him for becoming king. He realized he was not to grab the reins of power, or strive for preeminence. In short, he was not to be like the one who sought his life.

Saul's life was a tragedy. Humble, spiritual, charismatic, and anointed, he had everything going for him. But, like Diotrephes, he loved preeminence. His refusal to place himself in a position of submission cost him his life, for

he was killed by an Amalekite (2 Samuel 1:6–8)—the very people God had told him to destroy (1 Samuel 15:3).

What about you? Are you a Saul or a David? Are you a Diotrephes or a John? Like Saul, is your intent to control? Like Diotrephes, do you seek preeminence? Or, like David, do you choose to submit to God? Like John, is love your aim?

If you're a David, you'll not be one who throws spears—even when spears are thrown at you. It's always the troubled individual who finds fault and fires away. David ducked. He didn't fire back. And therein lies great wisdom.

Are you one who subtly puts down other people, hoping that by doing so you'll elevate yourself? It might work for a while—as it did for Saul and Diotrephes. But ultimately your words will come crashing down around you. "Be not deceived," Paul says. "God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (see Galatians 6:7).

Regardless of how long you have walked with the Lord or how close you are to the Lord, every one of us has to deal with our flesh. Thus, although part of me wants to be humble, although part of me does not want to manipulate or strive, find fault, or gossip, another part of me has a tendency to listen to prating words or malicious talk, to revel in the fact that someone else has fallen short or is not doing well.

Even Paul would say, "What I want to do, I don't do. And what I don't want to do, I end up doing. Oh, wretched man that I am" (see Romans 7:15–24).

So what are we to do?

Think of it this way. . . .

Inside each of us are two dogs—the black dog of our sin nature and the white dog of our new nature in Christ. The more I try to manipulate situations and seek preeminence, the bigger the black dog will grow, and the smaller the white dog will become. Such is what happened to Saul. Rather than repenting or praying, he fed his flesh. On the other hand, I can choose to feed the white dog and starve the black dog. I can choose to worship the Lord and live in obedience to His Word. I can choose to submit to fellow believers and to walk in humility. And if I do, the black dog becomes as small as a

Chihuahua, while the white dog grows as big as a St. Bernard. It all depends on which dog I feed.

If I walk in the flesh, like Saul, I'll be done in by the very things I should have destroyed. And like Diotrephes, I'll be known as one who strives for preeminence. But if I walk in the Spirit, like David, I'll be exalted in due time. And like John, my life will be characterized by love.



JUDE

Background to Jude

The story is told of a preacher who, after getting ready for services one Sunday morning, emerged from the bathroom with a large bandage on his face.

"What happened to you?" asked his wife.

"I cut myself shaving while concentrating on my sermon," he said.

"Honey," she replied, "you should have been concentrating on your shaving while cutting your sermon!"

Such is the challenge with the Book of Jude, for while there are only six hundred thirteen words and twenty-five verses within the single chapter in the short book before us, there are eight illustrations from the Old Testament —each one containing fascinating implications and practical applications.

Thus, it is, indeed, tempting for me to spend a long time in this wonderful epistle. And yet, I would like us to look at Jude in one sitting—no doubt the way it was intended to be read—in order that we might gain a feel for the Book of Jude in its totality and grasp its message personally.

So let's begin.

JUDE

Jude 1, 2

Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called: Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.

Jude was the brother of James, and both Jude and James were half brothers of Jesus (Mark 6:3). James was a leader in the early church, as seen in Acts 15, concerning the argument as to whether or not Gentiles converted to Christianity were required to undergo the rite of circumcision. The question was debated until James stood, and quoting the prophet Amos (9:11–12), said Gentiles did not need to become Jews first and did not need to be circumcised in order to become Christians because God has His called ones even among the heathen.

Perhaps the reason James grasped this kind of grace so firmly is that, although he had grown up in the same household as Jesus, initially he did not believe His Brother was the Son of God (John 7:5).

What changed James' and Jude's minds? What turned them from skeptics to leaders of the faith? Nothing short of the Resurrection, for it is after that event that we see them numbered with the disciples in the Upper Room (Acts 1:14).

Sometimes we think that by being nice—mowing our neighbor's lawn, baking him cookies, or smiling when he drives by—we will convert him. Not true. There was no lovelier person than Jesus Christ. Yet, His brothers did not believe on Him until the Cross and the Resurrection. That is why it is imperative to preach Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23). You can wave to your neighbor for twenty years, and wave him right into hell. Or you can take the time at some point to say, "You know what? Jesus Christ died for your sins and rose from the dead, and you must believe on Him."

Jude 3

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

It seems Jude's original intent was to write about our "common salvation." That is, his was to be a letter celebrating the grace and goodness of God. But it took a different turn when an issue arose that he felt pressed to address.

Jude 4

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

False teachers had crept into the early church, seeking to rob and rip off God's people, seeking to pervert their understanding and keep them from enjoying God's blessing.

Jude 5 (a)

I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this. . . .

The foundational theme of this wonderful epistle, as found in verse 21, is an exhortation to keep ourselves in the love of God. Underline this phrase because it is the hinge upon which the Book of Jude swings. Jude's heart is, "Yes, there are heretics and deceivers, but you, beloved, keep yourselves in the love of God."

Keeping yourself in the love of God does not mean earning God's love by being a "good little boy or girl." God's love is unconditional—so much so that in Romans 5:8, Paul declares that God demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. When did God demonstrate His love for you and me? Not when we were trying to be good Christians, but when we were pagans, heathens, and rebels. When you

couldn't have cared less about Him, God looked at you and said, "I love you deeply."

Never buy into the thinking that you earn God's love by being good. Many Christians look at God as being like Santa: He's making a list, checking it twice, and He's going to find out who's naughty and who's nice. If you've been good, you'll get gifts; if not, you'll be lucky to get a lump of coal.

But nothing could be further from the nature of our Father. Making a list? Checking it twice? Paul tells us the list of our failings was blotted out by the blood of Christ (Colossians 2:14). The list of my sins was pinned to the Cross of Calvary and cleansed so thoroughly by the blood of the Lamb that the writing became completely illegible. God's love for us is not based upon anything we do or don't do, for His love is unconditional.

What, then, does it mean to keep yourself in the love of God? It simply means to keep yourself in the place where you can receive His blessings. In other words, God is constantly showering us with blessings, love, and grace. He's not saying, "Hmm, you've been bad today, so I'm turning off the spigot." No, God's blessings are always coming down (Lamentations 3:23).

"Then why aren't I being blessed?" you ask. The answer is easy: You're not under the spout where the blessings come out. You have wandered away. God didn't close the spigot—because even when we are faithless, He is faithful still (2 Timothy 2:13). God doesn't monitor the flow of blessings depending on how we're doing. No, the spigot is on full blast all the time. Therefore, the only thing we have to do is to make sure we're in the place where we enjoy God's blessings—that we're standing under the spout where the blessings come out.

Am I suggesting it is possible for a person to remove himself from the place of God's blessings? Yes. And Jude gives us three examples of those who did.

Jude 5 (b)

. . . how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.

First, Jude brings to remembrance the people delivered by God. You know the story. In bondage for four hundred years, the Israelites cried out to

the Lord. The Lord raised up Moses as a deliverer and worked powerfully through him. After He smote Egypt with ten plagues, the Israelites were finally released. They made it to the edge of the Red Sea, where God not only parted the water but also unleashed the very same water on their enemies.

Then what happened? They came to the border of Kadesh Barnea and sent twelve spies to scope out the land. "Wow!" said the spies upon their return. "It's beautiful. It's prolific, productive, and perfect! There's only one problem: Tens of thousands of Anakim, giants—Shaquille O'Neals—occupy the land. We're nothing but grasshoppers in their sight, and we're sure to be squished."

Joshua and Caleb, two of the twelve spies, countered, saying, "Hey, we might be grasshoppers in their sight, but they're grasshoppers in God's sight. Therefore, they pose no problem. They'll be bread for us. We can eat them up!" (see Numbers 14:9)

But the people chose to listen to the other ten spies instead of to Joshua and Caleb—a choice that led God to say, "Okay, because you don't believe what I intended to do for you, you're going to have to wander in the wilderness until a new generation is raised up" (see Numbers 14:22, 23).

Thus, because God's people, who were delivered by Him, did not keep themselves in the assurance of His love and provision, they ended up dying in the desert.

Jude 6

And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

Second, not only can those delivered by God fail to keep themselves in the love of God, but so can those who are worshipers of God. Lucifer was the leader of all the worshipers of heaven. The one the Bible calls the "Anointed Cherub" (Ezekiel 28:14) had a voice like a pipe organ and hands like tambourines. He wasn't just a worship leader, he was a full on orchestra until the day he said, "I will be like God," and launched a rebellion in which one third of the angels followed him.

Amazing. Here, the worshipers of God in heaven became demons in hell because they did not keep themselves in the love of God.

> **Jude 7–10**
>
> **Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.**

Third, Jude says, "Not only can you be delivered by God and be a worshiper of God, but you can receive blessing from God and still fail to keep yourself in His love." You see, at one time, Sodom and Gomorrah were cities uniquely blessed by God. In the agrarian economy of the day, the place to be was Sodom or Gomorrah.

> *We read in Genesis 13 that after leaving Egypt, Abraham and Lot had so much livestock between them that the land could no longer support them. "We're going to have to separate," Abraham said to Lot. "Wherever you want to go, I'll go in the opposite direction." So, after checking out the situation, Lot found the best pasture land, the ideal place to raise livestock, the perfect place to get rich: the plain of Jordan, wherein lay Sodom and Gomorrah.*

At one time, Sodom and Gomorrah were truly blessed by God. Yet, what happened? They turned their backs on the Lord and were eventually destroyed. This is very sobering to me because it says,

- So you've been saved—so were they who wandered in the wilderness.
- So you've been a worshiper—so were they who are now in hell as demons.
- So you've been blessed—so were they who were destroyed by their own depravity.

Gang, it is possible to experience deliverance by God, to partake in worship to God, to receive blessing from God, and still not keep yourself in the love of God.

How can this happen? After giving us three examples, Jude goes on to provide three explanations.

Jude 11 (a)

Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain . . .

The first explanation for why people no longer experience the love of God in their lives is that they've gone the way of Cain. The way of Cain is anger. Cain was angry with his brother, Abel, because God blessed Abel, but He didn't bless Cain. *It's not fair,* Cain must have thought. *We both offered sacrifices to God. Abel brought a lamb, and I brought the fruit of my labor from the garden, but God blessed my brother's and not mine* (see Genesis 4:4, 5). And such anger took root in Cain's heart that he killed his brother.

If you're angry with your spouse, bitter toward your boss, unforgiving of your brother, you have gone the way of Cain. Watch out for anger, gang. It'll pull you away from the place where you just enjoy God's love. It will draw you away from the spout where the blessings come out.

Jude 11 (b)

. . . and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward . . .

Jude draws our attention not only to the anger of Cain but also to the greed of Balaam. You know Balaam's story. The children of Israel, all three million of them, were on their way to the Promised Land. "Whoa," said

Balak, king of the Moabites. “There’s a horde of people coming our way, and unless we do something, we’re going to get trampled.”

Knowing of a prophet in the area named Balaam, Balak sent messengers asking him to curse the approaching Israelites. “Wait here,” Balaam said to the messengers, “I must talk to God about this.” Even before Balaam asked, the Lord told him not to curse the Israelites (Numbers 22:9–12). So the messengers returned to Balak with word of Balaam’s refusal to join them. Balak, in turn, sent some VIPs to Balaam.

They arrived in their Mercedes and their flashy clothes, saying, “Come with us, and you’ll be blessed.”

“Listen, guys,” said Balaam, “even if you offered me a house full of silver and gold (hint, hint), I wouldn’t go with you.”

So once again, the messengers returned empty-handed. And yet, a third time they appeared before Balaam, this time offering him a portion of wealth and honor. A third time, Balaam said he would seek the Lord. But this time, God gave him permission to go, so off Balaam went. En route, however, an angel appeared to his donkey, causing the donkey to crash into a wall, smashing Balaam’s foot in the process. “You dumb donkey. You crushed my foot,” Balaam cried as he beat his donkey.

“Why are you beating me?” asked the donkey. “Haven’t I been a good donkey all these years? I’ve never given you any problems. Don’t you see there’s an angel standing right here, preventing me from taking you where you ought not go?”

Yet even a talking donkey could not deter Balaam, so he continued on, until at last he reached the mountain overlooking the Israelite camp. Opening his mouth to curse them, all that came out was blessing. “Hey!” said Balak, “I hired you to curse them, not to bless them! Maybe we should change locations.” So they built another altar in a different location. Once more, Balaam stood to curse. And once more, all that came from his lips were words of blessing.

The error of Balaam lay in the fact that he didn’t understand God’s grace. Balaam thought that because His people were rebellious and evil, God would surely want to destroy them. Consequently, knowing that even though he could not curse the Israelites, the Israelites could bring a curse upon themselves, Balaam told Balak to have the Moabite women parade

themselves in front of the Jewish men. And during the romantic interludes that were sure to follow, the Moabite women would be able to introduce the Jewish men to their idols.

Balaam was right. In the Book of Numbers, we read "the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods." The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and twenty-four thousand died as a result (Numbers 25:1–9).

Why did Balaam, who spoke some of the most beautiful prophecies in all of the Old Testament about the coming of Messiah, end up a heretic and a loser? Because he did not keep himself in God's love. Why didn't he keep himself in God's love? Greed. What is greed? Never being satisfied, never being thankful, always wanting just a little more. Watch out, precious people. Greed will remove you from the spout where the blessings come out.

Jude 11 (c)
. . . and perished in the gainsaying of Korah.

Korah's sin was envy. We find his story in Numbers 16: "Moses, who made you the big enchilada? I have just as much right to determine direction for this nation as you do." So saying, Korah led a rebellion that resulted in the deaths of nearly fifteen thousand of God's people. Beware of envy—of wanting someone else's position.

Joseph's brothers were jealous. Joseph had a coat of many colors, or literally, a coat of "big sleeves." In Joseph's day, working men wore sleeveless coats, like vests, in order that their arms would be free to labor. But the bosses, the supervisors, the head honchos wore coats with big sleeves in which they could keep money and supplies—sort of like briefcases.

Sometimes we look at someone else's big sleeves and say, "Boy, that guy's got it made." But Joseph's big sleeves were hardly an asset. You see, envious of Joseph's position, his brothers sold him as a slave to a group headed for Egypt. There, Joseph was eventually promoted to the position of head slave. No doubt some of his fellow prisoners looked at him and said, "Boy, I wish I had the coat of a head slave"—little knowing that even this coat would get him in

trouble as he shed it to flee Mrs. Potiphar's advances (Genesis 39:12).

Just rest in the place God has you, gang. He'll put you right where you should be. This doesn't mean we shouldn't want to be all that the Lord would have us be. But there comes a point when we're no longer saying, "Lord, I want to develop the talents and abilities you've given me to the fullest degree," but rather, "I've got to do whatever it takes to gain that guy's position. I've got to be the guy with the big sleeves."

What happened to Korah? The ground opened up and sucked him in (Numbers 16:31–33). Here's an easy way to find yourself in the pit: Be envious of another's position. You don't know what you're headed for; you don't see what you're getting into; and before you know it, your world will come crashing down upon you.

I wouldn't have chosen anger, greed, and envy as the three reasons people move away from God's blessings. I would have listed cocaine, pornography, and larceny. Why? Because those things are not my problem. You see, we tend to think the sins that will take a man away from the spout where God's blessings come out are the biggies we don't do. Not true. God has an entirely different way of looking at things. And in His Word, He says through Jude to me and to you, "These are three specific areas that will keep you from enjoying and experiencing My love."

Jude 12 (a)

These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear . . .

The "certain men who crept in unnoticed" (verse 4) were those who, like Korah, Cain, and Balaam, endangered God's people, seeking to woo them away from the simplicity of God's grace. Jude calls them "spots." They're like hidden rocks, he says. They join in your fellowship, in your potluck dinners, in your celebration of the grace and goodness of God—but with a hidden agenda. Like hidden rocks, they blend in presently, but they will cause you to crash eventually. And then he goes on to use even stronger metaphors to describe these false teachers.

Jude 12 (b)

. . . clouds they are without water, carried about of winds . . .

They're waterless clouds. That is, they *seem* to say all sorts of wonderful things, but their teaching leads only to dry, discouraging days.

Jude 12 (c)

. . . trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.

Because they're dead trees, they bear no fruit.

Jude 13 (a)

Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame . . .

They're wild waves. They have lots of motion, but erratic, meaningless, and wasted energy.

Jude 13 (b)

. . . wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

Finally, Jude likens the false teachers to wandering—or shooting—stars. Even in our little valley, I have seen people come on the scene with all sorts of fantastic promises, all kinds of interesting doctrines, shining brightly for a month or two or three. Then when hard times came, or things didn't work out, like shooting stars, they fizzled, faded, and moved on to the next unsuspecting community.

Jude 14–16

And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners

have spoken against him. These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.

The same problems Jude is addressing affect the body of Christ today. False teachers, "mouthing great swelling words," continue to peddle their phony doctrines to anyone who will listen. If you've been walking with the Lord very long, you know that as soon as one strange wind of doctrine blows through, another is sure to follow.

Jude 17–19

But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

Happy is the man or woman who understands that the gospel message is profoundly simple and simply profound. It's Jesus—nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.

After giving us three examples of people who walked away from God's love and three explanations of why they did so, Jude now gives us three exhortations to keep ourselves in the love of God.

Jude 20 (a)

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith . . .

The first way to keep yourself in the place where you're being drenched in the love of God is to build up your faith. How are we built up in faith? The Bible tells us very simply that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). That's it. To keep yourself in the love of God means that you continue to be a student of the Word. You build up your faith by taking in God's Word, by daily making the practice of spending time in

Scripture a priority, by assembling with other believers to study the Word corporately (Hebrews 10:25).

Jude 20 (b)
. . . praying in the Holy Ghost.

What does it mean to pray in the Holy Ghost? It means allowing the Holy Spirit to inspire your prayers, saying, "Lord, I don't want to come to You with my ideas and my agenda because I don't know what these things might lead to if You grant them to me. So I come to You, Lord, asking for Your Spirit to inspire me to pray. Guide my conversation, Lord. Help me to pray biblically, to be guided by Your Spirit even as I talk with You right now."

To pray in the Spirit means the Spirit is inspiring prayer. To pray in the Spirit also sometimes means just groaning. "Oh, Lord, I don't know what to do about this. I don't know how to handle that." Ever just groan? Paul did, for in Romans 8 he writes that the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered (verse 26). Praying in the Spirit says, "Lord, I can't even articulate my situation without You."

Second, praying in the Spirit means praying in tongues. Speaking specifically of praying in tongues, Paul says, "I will pray with the Spirit and I will pray with understanding also. I'm going to allow this miraculous, mysterious process of the Spirit praying through me with words I do not understand intellectually and have not learned academically" (see 1 Corinthians 14:15).

I encourage those of you who have exercised this particular manifestation to continue to develop it. Your mind will rebel against it. Your mind will ask, "Why do it? What good is it?" But Paul says, "I would that you all spoke with tongues" (see 1 Corinthians 14:5). That is why I am personally strongly persuaded that if you read 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 carefully, you will conclude that, while placing severe restrictions around the public utterance of tongues, Paul encourages the private, devotional use of the prayer language.

Being led *by* the Spirit, groaning *in* the Spirit, using a prayer language *from* the Spirit are all aspects of what it means to pray in the Holy Ghost.

Jude 21

Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Finally, we are to keep ourselves in the love of God by looking for the coming of Jesus. How it affects my priorities, how it changes my perspective, how it alters my emotions when I say, "Lord, today I'm going to look for Your coming." Today might be the day, dear saints. What a difference it makes when we remember this.

Stay in the Word. Pray in the Spirit. Look for Jesus' coming—three things you can do to keep yourself under the spout where the blessings come out. They're practical, workable, doable—and, interestingly, we see in them faith, love, and hope: Faith, by being in the Word (Romans 10:17); love, by praying in the Spirit whose fruit is love (Galatians 5:22); and hope, by looking for the blessed hope of our Lord's return (Titus 2:13).

"All you guys at Calvary Chapel ever talk about is being in the Word, looking for His coming, and praying," some charge.

"Right. Exactly. You got it!" I say—for that's exactly what Jude tells us to do in order to keep ourselves in God's love.

Jude 22, 23 (a)

And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire . . .

What about those who have been affected by false teachers, who are caught up in wrong doctrine? What are we to do with them? Jude gives two approaches. To some, show compassion. Be very gentle with them as you patiently wait for them to see the light. Others, however, you have to grab by the nape of the neck and yank them out of the destructive stuff with which they're involved.

The Great Awakening in America was ushered in by a man who spoke in a monotone voice, and who had such bad eyesight that he could only occasionally squint at his congregation from above the manuscript he held inches from his face. He preached a sermon

many of you have studied in literature class entitled, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" in which he likened mankind to a spider dangling over a fire with only one thread separating it from damnation. And when he was finished, people began to weep under the conviction of the Spirit.

Some people you can minister to with compassion, stressing the goodness of God, for doesn't Paul say in Romans 2:4 that it's the goodness of God that leads men to repentance? Others, however, you have to grab by the collar, and like Jonathan Edwards, dangle them over hell.

Jude 23 (b)

. . . hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

In the Old Testament, whenever a man was cleansed from leprosy—a picture of sin—his garments were to be burned (Leviticus 13:52). Jude uses this as an analogy to say, "When you're dealing with folks who are caught up in perversity, make sure you yourself are not affected." In other words, "Save the man, but burn the garment."

Jude 24, 25

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

Finally, after all of his warning, Jude leaves us in a place of rest, saying *God* is the One who will keep us from falling.

God's love is unconditional, never turned off, never diminished. The only question is: Will you plant yourself in the place where you can be drenched with it?

Jude tells us exactly how to do that as he exhorts us to stay in the Word, pray in the Spirit, and look for our Lord's coming. "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them," Jesus said (see John 13:17).

I love the simplicity of the Word! May the Lord build your faith as you study it. May He fill you with love as you pray in the Spirit. May He give you hope as you look for His coming.

Amen!

GOD IS ABLE
A Topical Study of
JUDE 24

I love the Scriptures. And I especially enjoy those passages that deal with God's ability. Such is the text before us today. Indeed, the Word is full of passages that talk about God's ability—His "able-ness."

> *If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.*
>
> Daniel 3:17

You know the story. King Nebuchadnezzar ordered his subjects to bow down to the golden image he had constructed. All complied—except three young Jewish men named Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.

Threatened with death in a fiery furnace stoked seven times hotter than normal for their insubordination, they answered, "No matter how hot that furnace may be, God is able to deliver us."

> *And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.*
>
> Matthew 3:9

To the Pharisees and Sadducees, John the Baptist said, "Being a Jew is nothing special. God is able, if He so chooses, to raise up stones and make them Jewish children." What does this have to do with us today? Maybe your teenage son or daughter is falling into the "stoner" scene. Take heart! God is able to take "stoners" and make them children of faith. God is able!

> *He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had prom ised, he was able also to perform.*

Romans 4:20, 21

Even though he was one hundred years old and still childless, Abraham was strong in faith, knowing God was yet completely able to keep His promise. God is able!

> *Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 9:7, 8

The Greek word translated "cheerfully" actually means "hilarious," joyful abandon. In other words, God loves those who give to Him with hilarious, joyful abandon. And He is able to bless and grace them in every area—including seeing them through their financial obligations.

> *Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*
>
> Ephesians 3:20, 21

God is able to do more than we can ask or even imagine. Truly, God is able!

> *For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*
>
> 2 Timothy 1:12

It's not so much knowing what you believe as knowing in *Whom* you believe. "I know Who I believe," said Paul. "I can count on Him." So can we. He's able to keep that which we've committed to Him—be it our lives,

our spouses, our businesses, our children, and our grandchildren. God is able!

> *For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.*
>
> Hebrews 2:18

God is able to see you through times of temptation. He knows what you're feeling. He suffered too. Yet, He can see you through because He came through without sin. He is able!

> *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*
>
> Hebrews 7:25

A generation ago, baseball player-turned-evangelist, Billy Sunday, preached from this text, saying, "God can save to the guttermost." Maybe you feel like you're in the gutter today. Take heart. God can save you. He can save me. He is able!

> *Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling . . .*
>
> Jude 24

Here, in our text, we read that God is able to keep us from falling. Kids, your parents can't keep you from falling. Wives, your husbands can't keep you from falling. Husbands, your wives can't keep you from falling. Precious people, the church can't keep you from falling. And I certainly can't keep you from falling. After all, I couldn't even keep my own brother from falling.

I was about six years old when, on a family camping trip to Big Basin State Park, I was shocked to hear my brother Dave say, "Jonny, tomorrow, bright and early, I'm taking you fishing." This was highly unusual because Dave, being six years my senior, didn't normally do that kind of stuff with me. Well, that night, I got my tackle box out and my worms all ready to go. I could hardly wait!

The next morning, with tackle boxes and lunches in hand, I asked Dave where we were going.

"I know a secret place," Dave said.

Dave always knew about secret places. He had a tree house, or so he told me, in the backyard, which had seven bedrooms, a den, a pool, and a television. When I was little, I would gaze up at Dave's tree house. "It's awesome up here," he would call to me down below. But whenever I would grab even the first rung of the rope ladder, it would be raptured without me. So I'm not sure to this day if it did have seven bedrooms. All I know is that Dave always knew about secret places and special stuff.

After walking a mile or so, we came to a spot on the trail, which the winter rains had washed out. "We better go back, Dave," I said.

"No, we don't have to go back," he said.

"Well, how are we going to get around this big hole?" I asked.

"Simple," he said. "It's only about nine feet. You hold my pole, my lunch bag, and my tackle box, and I'll jump across. When I make it, I'll reach over and pull you across."

So I held his stuff, and he reared back and took off like Carl Lewis into the air. Although he made it across the gap beautifully, when he reached the other side, the ground beneath his feet gave way—and I watched him tumble about sixty feet down the cliff head over heels until he hit a stump.

"Are you okay?" I called.

"Ohhhhhhh," he moaned. "Go get Mom."

Like a flash of lightning, I immediately bolted back toward camp. But after about one hundred yards, I stopped dead in my tracks. "I bet he's tricking me. I'm going to run all the way back to camp, and when I bring Mom back, he'll be standing there, saying, 'Where did you go, Jon?' " So I returned to the ledge, and looked down. There was Dave—still wrapped around a tree with his leg sticking up behind him. Just to make sure he wasn't faking, however, I picked up a small rock and pitched it at him.

"Ohhhh," he groaned as it hit him.

"Hmmm," I said. "Maybe he really is hurt, but I don't know for sure." So I grabbed a bigger rock, and threw it down the cliff.

"Ohhhh," he groaned. "Get Mom."

Still dubious, I took a boulder and rolled it down toward him. Direct hit —and he still didn't get up.

"Okay. He's definitely hurt," I said. So I headed toward camp once again, told my mom what happened, and a rescue team was sent to extract him.

I could not keep my brother from falling. None of us can. No matter who we might be, the fact is, we cannot keep others from falling. But there is good news for you, good news for me. The Bible tells us, "Now unto Him who *is* able to keep us from falling be glory."

"Wait a minute," you say. "If God is able to keep us from falling, then why did I fall last week, last year, or five years ago? If He is able to keep me from falling, why didn't He?"

Based on Jude 24, I believe it is impossible for Christians to fall.

"But I'm a Christian, and I fell into sin," you say.

No you didn't. You walked into sin one step at a time. And God was there every step of the way, warning you to turn, providing a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13).

"I can handle this," we say. "I can go to that party. I can take in that movie. I can talk to that lady. I'm not going to have a problem. Not me." In the Book of 2 Kings, we see what happens so often, so tragically, so needlessly as a result.

> *In the second year of Joash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel reigned Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah.*
>
> 2 Kings 14:1

In 2 Kings 14, we meet a man named Amaziah, king of Judah.

> *And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like David his father.*
>
> 2 Kings 14:3

Although Amaziah did that which was good, he didn't have a heart for the Lord like David did.

Howbeit the high places were not taken away: as yet the people did sacrifice and burnt incense on the high places.

2 Kings 14:4

The high places being mountaintops where idols were worshiped, idolatry was allowed under Amaziah's reign.

He slew of Edom in the valley of salt ten thousand, and took Selah by war . . .

2 Kings 14:7

This guy who did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but didn't have a tender heart for the Lord as David did, experienced an impressive victory over the Edomites.

Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us look one another in the face.

2 Kings 14:8

"To look one another in the face" means to have a face-to-face confrontation. Feeling invincible, Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash, king of Israel, saying, "Come on, let's mix it up."

And Jehoash the king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle.

2 Kings 14:9

Jehoash answered Amaziah, saying, "Amaziah, you're a little thistle. I'm a big tree. What do you want to mix it up with me for? You're going to get crushed."

Thou hast indeed smitten Edom, and thine heart hath lifted thee up: glory of this, and tarry at home: for why shouldest thou meddle to thy hurt, that thou shouldest fall, even thou, and Judah with thee?

2 Kings 14:10

"Why are you doing this?" asks Jehoash. "Celebrate your victory over the Edomites, but don't get over your head in dealing with me. You're headed for trouble."

But Amaziah would not hear. Therefore Jehoash king of Israel went up; and he and Amaziah king of Judah looked one another in the face at Beth-shemesh, which belongeth to Judah.

2 Kings 14:11

Amaziah was warned directly, but he wouldn't listen. So he engaged in battle with Jehoash. And guess what happened?

And Judah was put to the worse before Israel; and they fled every man to their tents.

2 Kings 14:12

Judah got stomped, just as Jehoash had predicted. Amaziah didn't fall into defeat. Having been warned directly, having been spoken to plainly, he *walked* into defeat.

"I can do that," we say. "I can go there. I'm strong. She won't affect me. That group won't taint me. I just gave myself to the Lord. I've had great victory. I'm okay." And, like Amaziah, we "meddle to our own hurt."

Please note three things that happened to Judah as a result of Amaziah's stroll into sin.

And Jehoash king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash the son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh, and came to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim unto the corner gate, four hundred cubits.

2 Kings 14:13

First, defenses were broken. When you meddle where you ought not meddle, the first thing that happens is that defenses are broken down. Before, when we flirted with that kind of activity, that kind of language, that kind of visual presentation, we were offended and uncomfortable with them. But when we say, "I'm strong. I can take that in. I can go there. It's not going to hurt me"—the first thing that happens is our walls are broken down.

> It's the proverbial story of the frog in the kettle: Put a frog in a kettle of boiling water, and he will jump out immediately. But put him in a kettle of cool water and slowly heat it up, and he'll die in the boiling water, never noticing it becoming hotter and hotter.

So, too, if we get involved in battles we should stay away from, if we go to places we know better than to go, saying, "It's no big deal," we won't even notice our defenses disappearing.

> *And he took all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the* LORD*, and in the treasures of the king's house . . .*
>
> 2 Kings 14:14

Second, treasure was lost. After Jehoash tore down the walls of Judah, he took precious treasure. So, too, when our defenses are down, we become susceptible and vulnerable. Treasure is lost, never to be returned. Precious people, whenever we sin, certain precious treasures are lost permanently. Oh, we can be forgiven totally, but treasure is lost—be it innocence, health, perspective, holiness—never to be returned this side of eternity.

> *. . . And hostages, and returned to Samaria.*
>
> 2 Kings 14:14

Finally, hostages were taken. When walls are broken down because I'm no longer sensitive to sin as I once was, not only is treasure lost, but hostages are taken, as I find myself prisoner to the very sin I thought was no problem. It has been rightly said that the chains of sin are too light to be felt until they are too strong to be broken.

If I wrapped some thread once around your wrists and said, "Get out of that," you would have no problem doing so. But if I kept wrapping that same thread around your wrists over and over again, the same thread you could snap so easily before would eventually bind your wrists totally.

"I can go there. It won't affect me," a kid says.

"I just drink socially," an adult says.

"Don't be so legalistic," we all say.

But before we know it, we're wrapped up, held hostage.

That is why I suggest to you that no one falls into sin, for every step of the way, God is saying, "Don't go in. Don't do that. Turn away. Get out of there."

But we say, "I'm strong. I can handle it. No problem," as we walk into sin one tragic step at a time.

Maybe you're saying, "I've done just that. I knew when I started what I was doing could cause a problem, but I thought I was strong enough. I thought I could handle it. And now, just like Amaziah, walls are broken, treasure's taken, and I'm held hostage. What hope is there for me?"

Back to Jude . . .

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy . . .

Jude 24

The first part of the verse deals with our temporal situation. But here's the good news: The second part of the verse deals with our eternal position.

You see, God is, indeed, able to keep us from falling—but if we do fall, He is still able to present us faultless before the presence of His glory.

This means, when I get to heaven, the Lord is going to say, "Father, here's Jon, and he is faultless. He is spotless."

And I'm going to say, "*Amazing!*" because I know that I've sinned, that I've meddled where I ought not to have meddled. I know walls have been broken and treasure has been lost. I know what it feels like to be held in bondage. We all do. But the fact is, when we get to heaven, He will call us faultless.

Why?

Back to Big Basin . . .

After the park rangers lifted Dave from the pit, I had to accompany my mom to the infirmary where he was recovering from the injuries to his leg and from all of the mysterious bruises on his back. *He's going to kill me,* I thought as I walked in and weakly asked him how he was. But to my great astonishment, Dave just smiled. Why? Because he didn't remember a thing. A mild concussion had wiped away all memory of my brutality!

Dear saint, the good news for you and me is that God has, if you would, chosen to have a concussion, causing Him to say, "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 10:17). That is why, when Jesus died on the Cross, He declared, "It is finished. You are forgiven. Your sin is forgotten."

God is able to keep me from falling. I can choose to meddle where I ought not meddle, and I can walk into sin one step at a time. If I do, walls will be broken, treasure will be lost, and I will be held hostage.

But even then, there is still good news for me. For He is not only able to keep us from falling, but in the light of Calvary and because of the blood He shed for you and me, He is able to present us faultless with exceeding joy.

"Oh, but I've been such a terrible sinner," you say.

That just makes Him present you with more joy. How so? Which fish does the fisherman choose to mount on his wall—the little four-inch minnow, or the great big fifty-pound salmon he hauled in? He saves the big fish, the one that struggled, the one that took the most effort to reel in.

So, too, if you'll respond to God and allow Him to reel you in, you'll be a great big trophy of His grace because where sin abounds, grace abounds even *more* (Romans 5:20).

Precious people, God is able to keep you from falling. But even if you do fall, as we all have, the day is coming when you will hear Him say, "I see you as faultless. I don't remember any failure, any sin. The concussion of the Cross has wiped out all memory."

And there will be exceeding joy. God is able. What a *glorious* promise.



REVELATION

Background to Revelation

The year was A.D. 95. Domitian had just ascended to the throne of Rome. Like his predecessor, Caesar Nero, Domitian was an egomaniac, claiming deity and demanding the worship of his subjects. Refusing to worship this madman, a second wave of persecution is launched against the Christians, including the disciple "whom Jesus loved"—John. Following a failed attempt to boil him alive, Domitian banished John to the rocky, barren, seemingly God-forsaken island of Patmos. And it is here on Patmos that John was given the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

That's the way it always is. Truly, the things I know about the Lord weren't learned in Bible school, a teaching tape, or a Bible commentary. The things I know about the Lord were learned on my own "Patmoses," my own tribulations, my own difficulties. And the same is true for you. When you are given a medical report that doesn't look good, when divorce papers are sent your way, your business goes belly-up, when the relationship doesn't work out, when the child runs away—you will have a choice on that seemingly forgotten and forsaken island whether to launch out in spiritual rebellion, or whether to await fresh revelation.

> "Why? Why would You do this, Father?" Abraham must have wondered as he climbed Mount Moriah with his son, Isaac.
>
> Ready to plunge a knife through his only son's chest in obedience to the Lord's command, Abraham stopped abruptly when the Lord said, "Stop, Abraham. I know you love Me. See that ram over there? Put it on the altar in place of Isaac for I am Jehovah-Jireh: The Lord who sees and provides" (see Genesis 22:14).

A quality of God never known before was revealed to Abraham. When? When he was about to lose his son, but chose to obey anyway.

> "I'm sure I'm forgotten," Jacob must have thought as he grabbed a rock for a pillow and laid his head down in Luz. "Certainly God's turned his back on me. After all, I've ripped off my brother all my

life." That night, however, after the Lord appeared to him in a vision, Jacob awoke, saying, "Wow! Truly God is in this place, and I knew it not" (see Genesis 28:16).

Luz became "Bethel" or "House of God" when God appeared to Jacob with fresh revelation at the very point he felt most alone.

"The people have been without water for three days and are about to kill me," cried Moses to the Lord.

"See that tree over there, Moses?" the Lord answered. "Chop it down, throw it into the water, and that which was bitter will become sweet because I am Jehovah-rappah—the God who healeth thee" (see Exodus 15:23–27).

When did this revelation come? When Moses was about to lose his life at the hands of an angry mob.

Read your Bible, and you will discover that every time someone had fresh vision, new understanding, clear revelation of the Lord, it was received when, like John, they were on Patmos. Precious saint, the tribulation you may be going through even now is for one purpose: to bring you a fuller revelation of Jesus.

As we embark on our journey through this Book of Revelation, we are truly about to be blessed, for of the sixty-six individual books that make up the Bible in its entirety, this book alone has a unique promise attached to it. Look at verse 3 of chapter 1: "Blessed is he that readeth (that's me) and they that hear (that's you) the words of this prophecy and keep those things which are written therein." This book alone promises anyone who reads it or even hears it receives a blessing.

I have found this to be true personally. In my study of the Word, Revelation always brings a blessing in a unique way to me. And I've also seen it to be true congregationally. "Do yourself and your people a favor," I tell young pastors. "If you want your congregation to be blessed and your own heart to be touched, teach Revelation."

I find it ironic that pastors are reticent to teach the Book of Revelation and that believers are hesitant to read it because they think it is hard to

understand. Nothing could be further from the truth, for not only does this book have a blessing attached to it—it also comes with its own outline in chapter 1, verse 19 where Jesus tells John to "write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter."

Thus, the flow of the book is as follows:

- Section I (chapter 1) presents Him whom John has seen—the Lord's Person.
- Section II (chapters 2—3) addresses the things that are—the Lord's people.
- Section III (chapters 4—22) details the things yet to come—the Lord's program.

Chapter 1 is the revelation of the glorified Christ. In chapters 2 and 3, we see the entire scope of church history. In chapters 4 and 5, we see the church taken up to heaven. In chapters 6 through 19, we see the Tribulation. In chapter 20, we see the Millennium. In chapters 21 and 22, we see the new heaven and the new earth.

As you read through this book, always bear in mind that it was given not because believers were trying to figure out the nuances of eschatology, but because they were watching their brothers and sisters dying as a result of inconceivable persecution. "Where is the Lord?" they must have cried. "We believe in Him. We've given our lives to Him, but what's happening?" They needed a revelation of Jesus Christ to see that Jesus Christ is in control, that He is on the throne. Thus, this message coming from John would give great comfort to their hearts.

The overarching theme of this book is that Jesus Christ is on the throne and is in control. Things are going according to plan, and He's coming back.

> In the 1300s Richard I left England to do battle in the Middle East. While he was gone, his brother, Prince John, took over the reins of power. So evil was John that men like Robin Hood rose up as a result of his corrupt rule. But the day came when finally Richard—the Lionhearted—finished his crusade and worked his way back up into

Europe and toward England. When word traveled through the land that Richard was returning, Prince John erected a series of castles and defenses to keep his brother from regaining control. But as Richard and his men arrived on the shores of England, they mowed down the lines of defense and took control of the castles as easily as a hot knife goes through butter. And in each village and hamlet on his way back to power, church bells pealed, and people shouted, "The king is coming! The lion has returned!"

Such is the message of the Book of Revelation. The King is in control. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah has prevailed. Jesus is on His way.

OUTLINE

Many people are afraid of the Book of Revelation because they think it's a difficult book to comprehend. Not so. The word "revelation" means just the opposite: the revealing, the unveiling.

The Book of Revelation is very simple—particularly because it's the only Book with its own divine outline, found in chapter 1 verse 19, where Jesus told John to "write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter."

If you follow this divine outline, the Book unfolds very easily. . . .

I. The things which thou hast seen—chapter 1

The reality of the Resurrected Jesus

II. The things which are—chapters 2—3

Jesus gives seven messages to seven churches, wherein lies the chronological flow of church history from the beginning of the early church to the present.

III. The things which shall be hereafter . . .

Chapters 4—5
The church is raptured and taken to heaven for a seven-year "honeymoon" with the Lord.
Chapters 6—19
The Tribulation occurs on earth as God pours out His wrath on a Christ-rejecting, sinful world.
Chapter 19
At the end of chapter 19, the Lord comes back to Jerusalem with His church to establish His kingdom.
Chapter 20
The Millennium—a thousand-year period of peace and prosperity—follows as the Lord rules and reigns from Jerusalem. At the end of the Millennium, Satan is loosed. A final rebellion ensues before Satan is put away permanently.
Chapters 21—22

A new heaven and a new earth are created wherein we will live oh, so *happily* ever after.



REVELATION

1 Revelation 1:1 (a)
The Revelation of Jesus Christ . . .

As you open the Book of Revelation, perhaps the title in your Bible reads: The Revelation of St. John the Divine. You must understand that the title, chapter, and verse delineation in the Bible were not in the original text, and are, therefore, not inspired. This is the revelation not of John, but of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 1:1 (b)
. . . which God gave unto him . . .

The pronoun "him" in this verse refers back to Jesus Christ. This whole Book—the revelation of how the Lord is ruling and reigning, of how all things are going according to plan—was given to Jesus. "I don't know the time of the coming of the kingdom," said Jesus. "Only My Father has the full plan" (see Mark 13:32)—which raises a very intriguing question: Did Jesus know everything?

In Luke 2:52, we read that Jesus grew in stature and wisdom. In other words, He went through life learning. That is why His baptism is so significant, for it was then that His Father's voice thundered from heaven, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." It was then, at thirty years of age, that Jesus fully realized He had come to die.

Revelation 1:1 (c)
. . . to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass . . .

The Father gave revelation to the Son. The Son gave revelation to John. And John gave revelation to us that we might understand the things that must shortly come to pass. "*Shortly* come to pass?" you say. "This book is over two thousand years old!" The Greek word translated "shortly" is *en tachei,*

meaning "must come to pass with rapidity." It's the same Greek word from which we get the word "tachometer"—the instrument used to determine the speed of an engine. Thus, the Lord is telling us in this verse that when end-time events begin to happen, they'll increase their rpms and happen with greater rapidity.

Heading south from Medford, Oregon on I-5 toward San Diego, I don't see a single sign that says San Diego until I get past Chico, where I see only one. Then I don't see another one until I get to San Jose. But as I go farther south, the signs start appearing a little more frequently, until I get to Ventura. Suddenly, the signs appear every fifty miles. When I get past LA, the signs appear with even greater rapidity until I finally see the sign reading, "Welcome to San Diego."

That's the idea here, folks. Things begin slowly. One sign appears. Then, maybe one hundred years pass before another sign is seen. But one day, all of a sudden, the tachometer will show the engine revving up and sign upon sign will be seen.

Revelation 1:1 (d)
. . . and he sent and signified it by his angel . . .

The word "signified" means "written with signs"—which explains why people read the Book of Revelation and say, "It seems to be written in code." Why was it written this way? I suggest three reasons:

First, the Book of Revelation was written with signs to provide protection. At the time John wrote this letter, there was a tremendous wave of persecution afflicting the church. Consequently, this letter was written in such a way that, although it would make no sense to the enemies of the church, those who knew Scripture would find it relatively easy to understand.

Second, the Book of Revelation was written with signs to convey information. Language changes with time. Read your King James Bible, written in 1611, and the changes in language that have taken place since it

was written are obvious. Pictures and symbols, on the other hand, are timeless and thus convey more clearly the thoughts and intent of the writer.

Finally, the Book of Revelation was written with signs in order to arouse emotions. It's one thing to say, "There's a world political leader coming." It's something else to say, "The Beast is coming." It's one thing to refer to a commercial system. It's something else to call it Babylon the Whore. It's one thing to say "Christians," and another to say, "the bride of Christ." It's one thing to talk about authority and something else to talk about the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. These images are powerful, vivid, indelible.

Revelation 1:1 (e)
. . . unto his servant John.

John, the "disciple whom Jesus loved," was used by the Lord to author five books. The Gospel of John was written that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31). First, 2, and 3 John were written that we might know we have eternal life (1 John 5:13). Thus, John wrote his Gospel that we might believe, his epistles that we might be sure, and the Book of Revelation that we might be ready.

Revelation 1:2
Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

Revelation was entrusted to John because he bore record of the testimony of Jesus and of all the things he saw. People who say, "I don't seem to be growing in the Lord," must understand that when it comes to revelation, information, or inspiration, the Lord has a very definite prerequisite: Are we going to personally receive it in our heart and freely release it to others?

After visiting with Abraham, the Lord said to His angels, "I'm going to tell Abraham what is going to come down in Sodom because I know he will not only receive but share it" (see Genesis 18:17, 19).

Jesus put it this way: Take heed how you hear—for the one who has shall be given more (Mark 4:24, 25). In other words, if you come to Bible study or your morning devotions saying, "Entertain me," or, "I'm curious about

prophecy," you won't receive. But if you are hearing, studying, learning, praying, and reading for the purpose of embracing what you receive and sharing it with others, the Lord will give you continual revelation.

Revelation 1:3 (a)
Blessed is he that readeth . . .

The Greek word translated "readeth" literally means "to read out loud." I often encourage people to read their Bibles out loud. Why? Because I find if I don't read my Bible aloud, I have a tendency to read only the passages I've highlighted—which are usually promises like: "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He'll give you the desires of your heart." "My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches." "All things work together for good to those who love God." What I don't have underlined are verses like, "All those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." "Blessed are you when men shall revile you, persecute you, and speak all manner of evil against you." Sometimes we need to study the passages *not* underlined in our Bibles. And the way this can be done practically is by reading aloud.

Revelation 1:3 (b)
. . . and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

I find that hearing the Word spoken audibly has a powerful impact on my heart. That is why I also encourage people to pray out loud. It's not for God's sake—but to keep *us* focused and engaged.

Revelation 1:4 (a)
John to the seven churches . . .

Why are there seven churches? Because seven is the biblical number of completion.

Revelation 1:4 (b)
. . . which are in Asia.

Asia does not refer to Korea, Japan, or Viet Nam. It refers to present-day Turkey. Why was this letter written to the church in Turkey rather than to the church at Jerusalem, or Rome, Colosse, or Antioch? After all, it seems those would have been much more appropriate choices. Why was this letter written to seven churches in Turkey? Because no other churches could have so perfectly painted the picture they portray.

Revelation 1:4 (c)
Grace be unto you, and peace . . .

"Grace and peace be unto you," is not the equivalent of "Yo, dude." It has a depth of meaning. You see, "grace," or *charis,* was a Greek greeting. *Shalom,* or "peace," was a Hebrew greeting. The combination of the two is powerful because man can't have peace until he understands the favor God has given to him in and through the grace of Christ Jesus.

Revelation 1:4 (d), 5 (a)
. . . from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness . . .

Here we see the Trinity. . . .

"Him which is, and was, and is to come" is God the Father.

"What's Your name?" asked Moses of God in Exodus 3.

"I Am that I Am," God answered—the Tetragrammaton that became so sacred to the Jews that they would only write the consonants: YHWH.

The seven Spirits refer to the seven-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit as seen in Isaiah 11:2.

Jesus Christ is indeed the faithful Witness.

"Show us the Father," Philip said, "and it will suffice us."

"Don't you know that he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father?" answered Jesus (John 14:9).

Revelation 1:5 (b)
. . . and the first begotten of the dead . . .

"Aha!" the cultist says. "Jesus is begotten. Therefore, He didn't always exist." Wrong. We refer to Laura Bush as the First Lady. Does this mean she's the first lady who ever lived? No. "First Lady" refers to her position. So, too, in Jeremiah 31:9 God calls Ephraim His firstborn. Was Ephraim the firstborn? No. Although he was the younger brother, however, Ephraim had prominence. Thus, "first begotten" in Scripture speaks not of precedence—but of preeminence.

Revelation 1:5 (c)
. . . and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.

I'm so thankful the Lord doesn't just whitewash our sins, but rather, through the shedding of His own blood, washes us white.

Revelation 1:6 (a)
And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father . . .

In the Millennium, we'll rule and reign on the earth as kings and priests (Revelation 5:10).

Revelation 1:6 (b)–7
. . . to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

When the final battle in the Valley of Megiddo is being fought, when the nations of the world come against the Jews to annihilate Israel, suddenly

when it looks so bleak, the Lord will come back. And the Jews will say, "Where did You get those wounds?"

"In the house of My friends," He'll answer (Zechariah 13:6).

And all the people shall wail, "We fought against Him. We didn't believe in Him. And now He's here."

Revelation 1:8 (a)

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending . . .

In the original text, it is plainly seen that, under the inspiration of the Spirit, John writes out the word "Alpha"—the first letter of the Greek alphabet. But when it comes to Omega, he uses only the letter. Why? I suggest it is because the Lord is the beginning and the end without end. In other words, Omega is never written out fully because the Lord never ends. We'll spend eternity exploring His nature.

Revelation 1:8 (b)

. . . saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

Ask a Jehovah's Witness or Mormon the identity of the speaker in this verse, and he'll say it's Jehovah, or God the Father.

Turn him to Isaiah 41:4, which reads: "Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the Lord, the first, and with the last: I am he," and ask of whom it speaks.

"Jehovah," he'll say.

Then turn him to Isaiah 44:6, which reads: "Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God," and ask of whom it speaks.

"Jehovah," he'll say.

Then turn him to Isaiah 48:12, which reads: "Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last," and ask of whom it speaks.

"Jehovah," he'll say.

Then turn him to Revelation 21:6, 7, which reads: “And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things: and I will be his God, and he shall be my son,” and ask him who it is who cries out “It Is Finished,” and who says He will give the water of the fountain of life freely?”

“Jehovah,” he’ll say—even though it was Jesus who cried out on the Cross, “It is Finished,” and who said, “If any man thirst, let him come to Me” (John 7:37).

Then turn him to Revelation 22:12, 13, which reads: “And behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last,” and ask of whom it speaks

“Jehovah,” he’ll say—even though verse 16 identifies the Speaker of verses 12, 13 as Jesus.

And now he has a problem, for the reference in Revelation clearly being to Jesus, either there are two firsts and two lasts, two alphas and two omegas, two beginnings and two endings—or else Jesus and the Father are one.

Revelation 1:9 (a)

I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation . . .

Keep in mind that John is writing as pastor of the seven churches under his care, as a pastor of people who are being tortured, persecuted, and slaughtered. That is why he identifies himself as their brother and companion in difficulty. Still today, the effective pastor, parent, or mentor is one who realizes we’re all in this together—that we’re all brothers and sisters, companions and fellow-pilgrims.

Revelation 1:9 (b)

. . . and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

John was not only a pastor but also a theologian. Banished to Patmos, the Word put him where he was. But the Word also made him who he was. John is a giant of Christendom because he was a man of the Word.

Revelation 1:10 (a)
I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day . . .

Not only a pastor and a theologian, John was a poet. Under the inspiration of the Spirit, John painted pictures to impact the emotions of a people going through tough times and tremendous difficulties. John wanted his people to have more than dead doctrine. He wanted them to feel the reality of the Lord's coming burning in their hearts and illuminating their imaginations.

I say this because if you don't read this book as poetry—if you read it only intellectually or academically—you'll miss a key component. You've got to keep reminding yourself that the people to whom John was writing were watching their kids die, their wives being dragged off, their husbands disappear. The people to whom John was writing weren't saying, "What can we learn about the latest rap on the mark of the beast?" No, they were saying, "What's going on? Why aren't things working out? Is there hope?"

"Yes!" answers John, the poet. "I want you to feel the drama, see the picture, taste the reality—for then your heart will be stirred, your faith strengthened."

Revelation 1:10 (b), 11 (a)
. . . and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last . . .

Why is this repeated? After all, John said the same thing just two verses earlier. I suggest it is because most people don't struggle with the Alpha or the Omega. They know God looked at creation and declared it good. And they know in the end, in heaven, things will be good. But where people have a hard time is in the middle. They question and struggle with the things going on presently. "Why is this happening? Why didn't God do this? Where was God when that happened?" they cry.

So what does a pastor, a theologian, a poet do? He whispers in people's ears over and over again that God is in control, that God is on the throne, that the same God who did the good work in the beginning is here in the middle and will come through in the end.

And that's what we must do. We must whisper over and over in the ears of our teenagers, our friends, our neighbors, "God is here, and He's going to see you through."

Revelation 1:11 (b)

. . . and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

As we will see in chapters 2 and 3, these seven churches speak of the seven epochs of the church age. Each church speaks of a period in church history chronologically and consecutively.

Revelation 1:12 (a)

And I turned to see the voice that spake with me.

When John heard a voice behind him, he turned to see what it meant. And in this, I am reminded of others who "turned to see the voice that spake with them."

When an angel appeared to them, telling them to go to Bethlehem, the shepherds could have said, "Forget it. It's the middle of the night. Why go to Bethlehem now?" But they didn't. They went. And they ended up rejoicing (see Luke 2).

When they saw a star they'd never seen before, the wise men could have been reticent to embark on the nearly two-year journey. But they got on their camels, set out across the desert—and ended up worshiping the King of kings (see Matthew 2).

When an angel appeared to him, saying, "Your betrothed has conceived miraculously, the young carpenter from Nazareth could

have said, "The engagement's off." But, like the shepherds and the wise men, Joseph responded to the revelation given to him, thereby becoming an integral part of the earthly life of the Son of God (see Matthew 1:24).

After the Spirit told an old prophet that he would see the Messiah, no doubt Simeon was waiting to hear the rumble of chariot wheels and the footsteps of soldiers escorting the King of the Jews to the temple. Instead, he heard the cry of a baby in the arms of a sixteen-year-old girl. And he beheld the Savior (Luke 2:26–28).

There was one group, however, who did not "turn to see" and thus missed the Incarnation. . . .

When the wise men arrived in Jerusalem and asked, "Where is Messiah to be born?" the Bible scholars were quick to answer, "Bethlehem." You see, they knew Bible prophecy like the backs of their hands. They knew the obscure verses in Micah 5 that foretold the place of His birth; the portions of Daniel 9 that foretold the time of His birth; the passages in Isaiah that prophesied He would be born of a virgin and sojourn in Egypt. They were the Bible students, the Wednesday nighters, the pastors, the elders, the note-takers. These were people who, if we're not careful, we could be.

They knew the Word—and yet they never made the five-mile walk from Jerusalem to Bethlehem in pursuit of a personal, real encounter with God. And, gang, we are vulnerable to the same mentality. We can read the Book of Revelation academically. We can search for clues of typology. We can draw parallels to current events internationally—all the while missing the revelation of Jesus personally. Not so John. When he heard a voice, he didn't say, "I know the Bible. After all, I wrote a good part of it." No, he turned to see—and saw Jesus in the process.

Finally, I am reminded of One who lived His life "turning to see." "What I see the Father do, that I do," declared Jesus in John 5:19—nothing more,

nothing less, nothing else.

Wouldn't it be radical for us to base all of our analyses, judgments, and evaluations solely on what we see of the Father?

"The judgment I make is right because I judge on the basis of what I hear from the Father," Jesus said (see John 5:30).

What if we did the same? What if, before I gave my two cents' worth about a person, I chose instead to withhold evaluation or judgment until I talked to the Father? May we be a people who love the Lord and are led by the Spirit in a fuller, fresher measure—"turning to see" and obeying what He tells us to do.

Revelation 1:12 (b)
And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks.

The seven golden candlesticks refer to the golden lamp stand of Exodus 25, which, with three lamps on each side of a main stem, speak both of John 15, where Jesus said, "I am the Vine and you are the branches," and of John 8 where He declared Himself to be the Light of the world. As seen in Matthew 5, we are to let our light shine as well—which can only happen as we stay connected to the Stem of the candlestick, the true Vine, Jesus Christ.

Notice also the candlestick is made of gold, which speaks of divinity. But it was not molten gold, it was one piece of beaten gold because Jesus was beaten that we might be included with Him in the lamp stand.

Revelation 1:13 (a)
And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man . . .

Perhaps it was because it spoke of His ability to relate to people that the term "Son of man" was the term Jesus used most often to speak of Himself. The term also has prophetic implication, for in Daniel 7:13, we read of the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven.

Revelation 1:13 (b)
. . . clothed with a garment down to the foot . . .

The Son of Man is clothed to His feet—which speaks of the priesthood (Exodus 28:42). His entire body is covered. Who is the body of Christ? We are. We're covered with the robe of His righteousness (Isaiah 61:10).

Revelation 1:13 (c)
. . . and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

In Old Testament times, priests would normally wear girdles, or beltlike sashes, around their waists. But in this case we see the girdle around the chest—which would speak of the One who's in the midst of His church. You see, when Jesus was on earth, He wept for Lazarus, and for a lost world. But now there's a sash binding His heart. There's no weeping because He is in control. He's on the throne. Everything is going according to plan.

Revelation 1:14 (a)
His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow . . .

I've seen frightening pictures based on this chapter, depicting a white-haired Jesus with eyes blazing and a sword protruding from His mouth. But that's not the picture John was painting. John's poetry must be seen in conjunction with scriptures given previously. What does "white as snow" bring to mind? Isaiah 1:18, where we read, ". . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. . . ." Thus, white hair represents the forgiveness and mercy that permeate Jesus' mind. "I know where you've been," He says. "But you are cleansed. You are forgiven. You are white. That's the way I see you."

Revelation 1:14 (b)
. . . and his eyes were as a flame of fire.

Fire can be frightening, but in a fireplace, there's nothing more inviting or comforting. I suggest we see both aspects in the eyes of Jesus. . . .

When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, He's going to look at all of our works. The wood, hay, and stubble—all of our

fleshly, futile efforts—will ignite under His gaze of fire, leaving only the gold, silver, and precious stones—that which He did through and in spite of us. Then, with eyes of warmth and love, He will look at us and say, "Well done!"

To me, this is a tremendous relief because I know I have a whole lot of wood, a huge pile of hay, and all sorts of stubble. But in that day, it will all disappear under His gaze.

Revelation 1:15 (a)
And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace . . .

The mention of furnace would bring to the minds of the persecuted believers to whom John was writing the story of three others who endured the fire of persecution. But guess who was in the fire with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Jesus was (Daniel 3:25). His feet are burned because He's been through the same furnaces we have.

Revelation 1:15 (b)
. . . and his voice as the sound of many waters.

"I don't hear the Lord," we sometimes say. Yet if we listen carefully, we'll hear a little creek on the radio, or a small stream in our devotions. We'll hear a river through a conversation with a friend. We'll hear a brook as we observe nature. And suddenly these little creeks and rivers and brooks and streams flow together until finally, at the end of the day, we say, "Hey, I *have* heard You, Lord."

Revelation 1:16 (a)
And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword . . .

Again, don't miss the poetry here. It's not as though Jesus opens His mouth to smile and a big sword emerges. Rather, the sword symbolizes the Word He speaks—full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

Revelation 1:16 (b)

. . . and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

Reminiscent of the blessing in Numbers 6, the allusion here is to graciousness and peace.

Revelation 1:17 (a)

And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.

Some use this Scripture as biblical justification for being slain in the Spirit. But I want you to notice John did not fall backward. He fell at Jesus' feet. There's only one place in the Bible where people fell backward: the Garden of Gethsemane, when two words—I AM—knocked the feet out from under the soldiers sent to arrest Jesus (John 18:6).

Revelation 1:17 (b)–18 (a)

And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen . . .

Notice the order: John heard. He saw. He fell. Then he was touched, revived, and commissioned into ministry to write "the things which he had seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter."

John turned to see what he heard and found it led to a deeper understanding and renewed appreciation of Jesus Christ. And that, gang, is what this book before us is all about. Revelation is not given primarily to give us information about Bible prophecy, but to bring to us a revelation of Jesus Christ personally.

Revelation 1:18 (b)

. . . and have the keys of hell and of death.

The keys of hell and death are not to lock people up but to set people free. "I can get you out of your damnable, hellish situation if you'll let Me," Jesus says. "I can save you from hell eternally if you'll receive Me. My

desire is to set you free" (see Luke 4:18). The Lord holds the keys to that which is imprisoning you, gang. Let this One with the eyes of a warm fire set you free.

Revelation 1:19, 20

Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

Angelos, the word translated "angel," also means "messenger" and is referring to the pastors, the leaders of the seven churches. Why are they likened to stars? Because according to Daniel 12, those who turn many to righteousness will shine as stars forever. Truly, once you start sharing your faith, once you start reflecting the goodness and grace of God, there will be a radiance about you that will draw others to your Savior. Try it and see!



2 We come now to the second section of the Book of Revelation, which deals with "the things which are" (Revelation 1:19). As he addresses the seven churches of which he was an overseer, John paints a portrait of church history in its entirety. The seven messages that follow have a four-fold application. . . .

First, they are to be applied locally. The cities of the seven churches are given in the order of an ancient Roman postal circuit. Thus, they could be easily circulated among the churches addressed.

Second, they apply ecclesiastically. Anyone who cares about the church or is involved with the church needs to study these letters because every problem, difficulty, and challenge facing the church is addressed in these seven letters.

Third, they apply personally. These letters apply to us individually. How do I know? Because each letter ends with "Let he that hath an ear, hear what

the Spirit saith." Thus, this applies to anyone who has an ear. If you have two ears, it's a double directive!

Fourth, the letters apply prophetically. For us today, most of the events are history because we're approaching the end of the church age. But for John, at the beginning of the church age, the events of which he wrote had not yet transpired.

In addition to a four-fold application, there is also a four-element pattern seen in each letter. . . .

First, there is positive affirmation, where Jesus finds something to affirm in the churches. Second, there is corrective exhortation. Third, there is an eternal motivation. And finally, there is partial revelation—as each of the churches reveals something of the nature of Christ. You see, the only way we're going to see the complete picture is to embrace the church in totality. That's what is so important about the body of Christ. As I look at the body, each person exhibits a unique aspect of Jesus Christ. It takes the whole body to truly magnify the Lord. That's why the psalmist said, "O magnify the Lord with me" (see Psalm 34:3).

May we be those who embrace other believers and other churches because they each reveal something of Him.

Revelation 2:1 (a)
Unto the angel . . .

Meaning "messenger," it is most likely that the word *angelous* used here speaks of a pastor, or leader.

Revelation 2:1 (b)
. . . of the church of Ephesus . . .

The church of Ephesus speaks of the period of church history from A.D. 33 to A.D. 100. By A.D. 97—the year John recorded this book—the church was already a mess. The Book of Acts presents the model of the way the church was supposed to function. But Acts only covers a span of thirty years. By the time John penned Revelation a mere sixty years later, the purity of the church had been compromised to such a degree that they were in a position to

hear the Lord say, "Unless you repent, I'll not stay in your midst" (see verse 5).

Those caught up in some of the so-called revivals of today say, "We can't explain from the Bible what is happening in our church, but in earlier days, we read of people barking or shaking . . ." as they turn not to the Scriptures but to church history for justification of aberrant behavior.

Let it be noted, precious people, that we can't appeal to church history for practices of doctrine because the church has had problems from the very outset. I don't ever defend church history. But I do defend the church as seen in the Book of Acts. Appeal only to the Bible, gang, because that's where you find safety and sanity. You're always on solid ground if you stick with Scripture.

Revelation 2:1 (c)

. . . write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand . . .

Who are the seven stars? The leaders of the seven churches.

Revelation 2:1 (d)

. . . who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.

Where is Jesus walking? In the midst of the church. You will meet Christians who say, "Well, I'm not into church." That's too bad, because Jesus is. "Yeah, but the churches around here are really hurting," they'll say. So were these. And yet Jesus was in their midst.

Revelation 2:2, 3

I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

Here, Jesus gives His affirmation. He says, "First of all, I affirm you for staying with the task. That is, you've worked hard. You haven't fainted. Secondly, you've stood with the truth. You've rooted out the deceivers who have come into your midst."

On occasion, people will say to us as Christians, "Don't judge me. Didn't Jesus say to judge not lest ye be judged?"

And I tell them He did. But I also remind them that fifteen verses later, He said, "Beware of false prophets who will come into your midst as wolves in sheep's clothing. By their fruit you shall know them" (see Matthew 7:15, 16).

So what is Jesus saying? In Matthew 7:1, He says we're not to judge for condemnation. In verse 15, however, we are instructed to judge for identification. If we only teach the Word, but don't warn the flock about liars and deceivers, then we simply fatten people up for the kill. Part of the job of parenting and pastoring, part of the responsibility of any believer is to warn of false doctrine and false teachers.

Revelation 2:4

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

The corrective exhortation concerns the fact that, although they labored faithfully and showed discernment theologically, they had left their first love.

Notice He doesn't say they *lost* their first love. He says they *left* it. . . .

While chopping trees for the expansion of their facility, the axe head of one of Elisha's students flew into the Jordan River. Ever feel like the cutting edge is gone from your ministry, like the power is absent from your life? Since wood is biblically symbolic of the flesh, this guy with the wooden handle still in his grasp could have said, "I can still make noise banging trees with the handle. Maybe no one will notice that nothing's happening in the way of effective ministry." But he didn't. Instead, he did what Jesus tells you and me and those at Ephesus to do: he cried, "Master, it's not there anymore. The cutting edge is gone."

"Take me to the place you had it last," said Elisha. And the young man took Elisha to the edge of the river where he had last seen the axe head. Elisha ripped off a limb from a nearby tree, put it in the river, and miraculously, the axe head floated to the top.

"There it is, son," said Elisha. "Now reach in and grab it" (see 2 Kings 6:1–7).

It's a perfect picture of what Jesus is about to say to those at Ephesus and to those of us who have left our first love. . . .

Revelation 2:5 (a)
Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen . . .

Remember how it felt to have the cutting edge, when you were passionate, when your walk was vibrant. Remember how it used to be when you had it last.

Revelation 2:5 (b)
. . . and repent . . .

"Repent" simply means "change direction."

Revelation 2:5 (c)
. . . and do the first works. . . .

What were you doing when you were on fire for the Lord?
"I was going to church."
Go again!
"I was getting up early for morning devotions."
Do it again!
"I sang praise to the Lord as I drove down the street."
Sing again!

Remember how it used to be when you were amazed by the Lord's goodness—do again what you were doing then, and you will see the cutting edge return. The injunction of Jesus is simple: Remember, repent, and return.

Revelation 2:5 (d)

. . . or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

You may have lots of programs and lots of activities. You may even have doctrinal purity. But Jesus will not stay in a church where there is not true love because without love, nothing else matters (1 Corinthians 13:2).

Revelation 2:6

But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

"Nicos" meaning "conquest" and "laity" meaning "people of the church," the Nicolaitans were evidently those who came on the scene, saying, "I will tell you who to marry, where to live, and what to do because I am your spiritual leader."

But what did Paul say? He said, "We do not seek to have dominion over you, but we are helpers of your joy" (see 2 Corinthians 1:24).

Sometimes people say, "Jon, I want you to know I'm submitted to you." While I hear their heart, I say, "Don't submit to me. I've got a tough enough time trying to figure out what *I* should do! I'd love to share with you from the Word and pray for you each day. But it's Jesus alone to whom you must submit."

Revelation 2:7

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

What did the Ephesians lack? Love. What would they get if they changed their ways? The fruit of the tree of life, the fruit of the Spirit: love. Thus, the eternal motivation for the Ephesian church perfectly answered their greatest need.

Revelation 2:8, 9 (a)

And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) . . .

The church in Smyrna represents the period in church history from A.D. 100 to A.D. 312. The word "smyrna" comes from myrrh—a fragrance released only when crushed.

At His birth, Jesus was presented with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold was for kings, frankincense for priests. But myrrh was a burial spice. Jesus is a King, yes. He is a Priest, indeed. But He's also the Prophet who said, "Destroy this body and in three days, I will rise again" (see John 2:19).

On the Cross, Jesus was presented with myrrh when a soldier offered it to Him to deaden His pain. Let Jesus' refusal of the myrrh offered to Him on the Cross be an example to us in a culture that says, "Depressed? Take an antidepressant. Feel pain? Try this drug." May we be those who, when the process of crushing takes place, let the Cross do its job.

Myrrh was offered to Jesus a third time—when the women came Easter Sunday to put burial spices on His body. But He wasn't there. He had risen.

So, too, when Jesus returns in His Second Coming, Isaiah writes "all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the Lord" (see 60:6). The people of Sheba will bring gold for the King; frankincense for the Priest. But they won't bring myrrh because when Jesus comes back, He's not coming to die. He's coming to rule and reign.

Revelation 2:9 (b)

. . . and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

In Smyrna, as in other places, Jews would sometimes take the heat of persecution off themselves by inciting the Romans against the Christians. They would present Communion in a wrong light by accusing believers of drinking blood and eating broken bodies. Thus, in God's economy they were no more His people in reality than were the Christians who, in the Name of Christ, slaughtered Jews by hundreds of thousands during the Crusades.

The pastor of the church at Smyrna was a man named Polycarp, the last man personally discipled by John. At eighty-six years of age, amidst one of the numerous waves of persecution, Polycarp was ordered to burn incense at the altar of Caesar. "How can I deny Him who has been faithful to me these six and eighty years?" he asked. Consequently, he was sentenced to burn at the stake. When the fire failed to come near him, however, a frustrated guard pierced Polycarp's shoulder with his sword—inadvertently drawing blood, which put out the flame.

At times, the only substance powerful enough to extinguish the fire of persecution was the blood of the saints.

Revelation 2:10 (a)

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days . . .

In the years A.D. 100 through A.D. 313, there were ten Roman emperors who correspond to the ten days spoken of here. They launched such massive attacks against the believers that between five and seven million Christians were killed during their rule.

Revelation 2:10 (b)

. . . be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Notice that for this group, Jesus doesn't have a corrective exhortation. Perhaps this is because by enduring persecution, they remained pure. But notice also that Jesus makes no promise to lighten their affliction. On the contrary, He says, "Go through the pain and crushing. Be faithful unto death."

Revelation 2:11

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

What is the second death? At the end of the Millennium, the unbeliever will be resurrected to stand before the Lord at the Great White Throne Judgment. There, his failure to believe on the Lord and his refusal to accept God's payment for his sins will condemn him to outer darkness (Revelation 20:6). But for those who, like the church at Smyrna, stay true, the second death will have no effect.

Revelation 2:12 (a)
And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write:

The Greek prefix *per,* seen in words like "pervert," means opposition. The suffix *gamos,* seen in words like "monogamy" or "bigamy," means "marriage." *Pergamos,* then, means "objectionable marriage"—a fitting description of the next phase of church history. . . .

> The year was A.D. 312. The last of the ten Roman emperors who had persecuted the church was dead, ushering in a power play for the reins of the empire. To this end, one young hopeful prepared to engage in a huge battle. According to legend, he saw a cross in the heavens and heard a voice saying, "In this sign conquer." And as a result, young Constantine fell to his knees and became a born-again believer.
>
> According to history, however, what really happened was that, substantially outnumbered, Constantine noticed that Christians were not enlisting in anyone's army. Realizing that if he converted to Christianity, he would have access to a potential infusion of new troops, he became a Christian. And the Christians responded by siding with him.
>
> But it would turn out to be an unmitigated disaster. As a result of Constantine's Edict of Toleration, which forbade persecution of Christians, Christianity became the official religion of Rome. In fact, soon all Roman babies would be legally required to be baptized into the Christian faith. Yes, the Christians were in power, but, understanding the political expediency of concession, Constantine

compromised with the pagan priests and traditions that permeated Rome.

"I feel your pain," he said. "Let's find common ground. Let's meet halfway." So a marriage took place that was perhaps most clearly illustrated by the coin issued shortly thereafter. Christian symbols were stamped on one side of the coin and pagan symbols on the other. From A.D. 313 to A.D. 600, church and state worked together as a political power—and as a result the church began a downward spiral from which she has yet to recover, as we shall see.

Revelation 2:12 (b), 13 (a)

These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is . . .

According to Greek mythology, Pergamos was the birthplace of Zeus. "Satan's seat" is in reference to the one hundred-fifty-foot-high structure dedicated to Zeus in the middle of the city of Pergamos.

Revelation 2:13 (b)

. . . and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

The historian Tertullian tells us that, because Antipas, a physician in the city of Pergamos, wouldn't renounce his faith, he was fried to death.

Revelation 2:14

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

You remember the story of Balaam. Asked by Moabite King Balak to pronounce a curse on the people of Israel, God forbade the prophet Balaam to go. But Balaam went anyway, and after a short discussion with a donkey, he wound up on a mountain overlooking the encamped Israelites upon whom he was to issue a curse. After three failed attempts, realizing he couldn't curse them, Balaam resorted to an alternate plan. "If your women seduce the Israelite men," he said to Balak, "they can introduce idol worship to them through which Israel will thereby bring a curse upon herself" (see Numbers 22).

What, then, is the doctrine of Balaam? It is Pergamos: objectionable marriage with the world.

Revelation 2:15

So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

Not only had the church in Pergamos embraced the marriage of church and state, but they embraced the Nicolaitans—the priests, pontiffs, and people who think they are infallible.

Revelation 2:16

Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

How do you know who's who or what's what in a world so prone to the Pergamos tendency? Stick with the Word—with that which divides sin's mind-set from that which is right eternally (Hebrews 4:12).

Revelation 2:17 (a)

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh . . .

Since the Pergamos mind-set was a mixture of political power and religious mystery, it is interesting to note the three things the Lord promised to those who overcome this tendency. . . .

Revelation 2:17 (b)

. . . will I give to eat of the hidden manna . . .

A young man in a hotel on the corner of Chicago's 5th and Broadway prayed, "Lord, I'm not going to leave this room until you empower me." Four days later, the Holy Spirit came upon him and D. L. Moody was empowered in such a way that he said, "Lord, if You don't back off, I'm going to die of ecstasy."

Revelation 2:17 (c)

. . . and will give him a white stone . . .

The secret ballot of John's day was a stone. A black stone was "no"; a white stone "yes." We still refer to this practice when we say someone was "blackballed." Thus, Jesus was saying, "If you turn away from paganism, compromise, and the Pergamos mentality, I'll give you a white stone, which means you're not guilty; you're righteous; you're free."

Revelation 2:17 (d)

. . . and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

"If you're looking for mystery," says the Lord, "don't look to worldly traditions. Look to Me, and I will give you hidden manna, a white stone, and a secret, pet name."

Watch out for the Pergamos mentality, gang. It's tempting to seek political change—to make our voice heard, to get our candidates in, to make our agenda happen. But history proves that strange things happen when church and politics get in bed together. If we think the key is to engage ourselves in political activism in the Name of Jesus Christ, we are in danger of committing the same historic error. Watch out. Keep your focus on the kingdom. Keep your passion for Jesus. Keep true to the Word, and God will bless you with the manna of salvation, the white stone of acquittal and approval, a new name of special affection.

On the island of Patmos, the Lord told John to write seven letters that were to be delivered to seven churches in Asia Minor. But evidently these churches did not receive or respond to the messages, for if you look at Asia Minor, or present-day Turkey, you see one of the most spiritually dark regions in the world. May the Lord help us and be merciful to us that we don't simply take in these messages without personally embracing them.

We now come to the fourth period—a period of time that begins in A.D. 600 and goes to the present. The following four churches—Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea—all represent churches on the earth today. How do we know this? Because it is to these churches that Jesus talks about His coming and about the Tribulation.

Revelation 2:18 (a)

And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

In Thyatira, we see a church emerge in the year A.D. 600, which will exert major influence on Martin Luther and the Reformers through A.D. 1500. This church still exists presently.

Revelation 2:18 (b)

These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.

This is the only time in the entire Book of Revelation that Jesus identifies Himself as the Son of God rather than as the Son of Man. He chooses this reference because fire and brass speak of judgment.

Revelation 2:19

I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

Although Jesus is about to give a heavy word of judgment to the church at Thyatira, He first finds six areas in which to commend them.

Revelation 2:20

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

Based on the account in Acts 16, wherein we read that Paul encountered a group of women worshiping by a riverside, it is very possible that the church at Thyatira was founded by a woman. However, in addition to being founded by a woman, the church at Thyatira was floundering because of a woman. A woman who called herself a prophetess had persuaded people to eat food sacrificed to idols. Her influence upon the church was reminiscent of one of the most ungodly women in Israel's history. . . .

Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, was given to King Ahab of Israel, in marriage. Since Ethbaal was the high priest of Ashtaroth—goddess of sensuality and fertility—Jezebel's background adversely influenced God's people. For example, finding Ahab weeping one day, Jezebel asked the reason. "Our power is growing and our influence is increasing," answered Ahab. "But a man named Naboth won't sell me his property."

"If you're the king, you should have it," answered Jezebel. "Leave it to me." So saying, she hired some men to falsely accuse Naboth of cursing God. And, following an inquisition and mock trial, Naboth was put to death (1 Kings 21).

Thus, Ahab and Jezebel inherited the land in a power play and an inquisition—a microcosm of the grander scale we will see as the story of church history unfolds.

Revelation 2:21

And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

Keep in mind that fornication does not refer exclusively to physical relationships. It can refer, as it often does in the Old Testament, to a spiritual

relationship with idolatry. This New Testament woman, following in the footsteps of her predecessor of old, was encouraging idolatry in the church at Thyatira.

Revelation 2:22

Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

If the Jezebel spirit, prone to idolatry, is not rejected and turned from, this church—representing not only a local congregation but an epoch in church history—will go into the Tribulation period.

Revelation 2:23

And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

Not only Thyatira, but her offspring will also go through judgment and death as well.

Revelation 2:24

But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.

The "depths of Satan" speaks of the esoteric mystery of the false, cultic Babylonian religion. "We alone know the mysteries, the deep things," said the Babylonian priests. But those who didn't buy their line were exempt from God's judgment.

Revelation 2:25

But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

"Till I come" is the first promise of Jesus' return found in these letters to the seven churches. That's how we know this church goes on to Jesus'

Second Coming.

Revelation 2:26, 27

And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

"Those in Thyatira," says Jesus, "who have not bought into the seductive teachings of Jezebel will be given nations to rule." What was Jezebel's goal? Ahab and Jezebel united in marriage to increase their power by merging countries and joining religions. The result? As seen in the story of Naboth's vineyard, they wielded power and gobbled up land.

"If you're not a part of the Jezebel mentality, you will rule and reign with Me," Jesus says. "But if you try to do it in the spirit of Jezebel—through inquisition and manipulation—you'll be cast into a bed with other harlots in the great Tribulation."

Revelation 2:28

And I will give him the morning star.

The Old Testament image of Jesus is as the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2). Here in the New Testament, He's seen as the Morning Star.

Revelation 2:29

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

I believe the church at Thyatira refers to the Catholic Church because "Thyatira" speaks of "continual sacrifice." You see, the Catholic Church traditionally, historically, and presently embraces the idea that in Communion, the elements are transformed into the literal, physical body of Christ in a process called transubstantiation. Thus, Catholic priests ensure that during the Mass, all of the wine is drunk and all of the bread eaten because they believe the elements are the actual body

of Christ and, therefore, cannot be poured down the drain or thrown out. They think that the continual sacrifice of Christ is what really brings grace, or salvation—which is in direct contrast to what Jesus declared from the Cross when He cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30). The price is paid. The work is *done.*

During the Inquisition Period from A.D. 600–A.D. 1500, the Catholic Church amassed great amounts of wealth through political power plays. Consequently, the Catholic Church is extremely wealthy due to their land holdings and banking system. Please hear my heart, folks, I'm not Catholic-bashing. This is history. For nine hundred years, vast amounts of money, property, and treasures were accumulated by keeping people in spiritual darkness. . . .

For example, if you were going to a party on Saturday evening, you could buy an indulgence from a priest, and thus be "pre-forgiven" of any ensuing sin. During this time, the "doctrine of purgatory" was also developed, which stated one could speed up the process of the purging of a deceased loved one's soul by buying candles and lighting them on his behalf.

And even as Naboth was killed, so were tens of millions of believers—including Hugh Latimer and John Hus, followers of John Wycliffe. What did Wycliffe want to do? He said it wasn't right that one had to go through a priest to get his sins forgiven. He said purgatory and the selling of indulgences were an abomination. He said the Mass being held in Latin—a language people couldn't understand—was nothing of what Jesus was about. As the fire that would burn them at the stake was lit, John Hus turned to Hugh Latimer and said, "Today they are igniting a candle that will never go out."

Presently there are excellent Catholic churches and wonderful Catholic pastors. There are those who have not bought into the deception of Jezebel. There are substantial segments of the Catholic Church who love Jesus Christ and are not into the hocus-pocus imagery and idolatry that keep people away from knowing the Lord personally.

On the other hand, much of the Catholic Church still has the Thyatira mentality—just as much of the Protestant Church is deader than a doornail, as we'll see in the next chapter.

What does this have to do with us? I think a whole lot because the error of Thyatira is possible today. We can also have idols. We can look to a church, a person, a program and say, "I'm going to put all my hope in that structure, or those guys"—no longer just loving the Lord, staying close to the Lord, getting our cues and directions from the Lord, but leaning on idols and structures and people.

Likewise, there can be those who imply that the common people can't understand the Bible because they have not attended seminary and therefore cannot grasp the intricacies of theology. Not true. While Greek and Hebrew can, indeed, help give illumination, the Book we hold in our hands was written for you and me, for the man and woman on the street. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't know God's will or His heart, His ways or His Word.

We must make sure we say no to idolatry, to systems of religion, to spiritual hierarchies. May God give us wisdom. May God help us to keep the focus on Jesus. May God give us the grace to keep it simple.

REVELATION IN THE CONGREGATION

A Topical Study of REVELATION 2—3

Rugged individualism is highly esteemed by our culture, but not by God. . . .

> Of all God created, the only thing He declared "not good" was the fact that Adam was alone (Genesis 2:18).
>
> When God called Abraham, His promise was not to make him a great man, but to make of him a great nation (Genesis 12:2).
>
> Jesus taught us to pray, "*Our* Father . . ." (Matthew 6:9).
>
> "Bear one another's burdens" Paul would write (see Galatians 6:2).
>
> "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together," the writer of Hebrews would echo (see Hebrews 10:25).

The Christian walk is all about togetherness, community. It's all about being a holy nation, a corporate entity because God is not into spiritual Lone Rangers.

Jesus Is Seen in and Through the Church

At the outset of this Book, John was not instructed to lock away in his private journal a record of that which he would see. On the contrary, he was to circulate it throughout the churches to whom he ministered. In other words, the vision is for the church in its entirety. Each part of the church has a certain revelation. And we don't see the whole picture unless we're in the congregation.

This troubles me. You see, my natural inclination is to go from chapter 1 to chapter 4. Why? The mysteries of the Lord revealed in chapter 1 intrigue me endlessly. And the glories of heaven revealed in chapter 4 delight me deeply. But I can't go from chapter 1 to 4 without going through chapters 2 and 3—which deal with the church, with people.

> One day, I was reading about a lady who grew tired of ugly architecture, off-key singing, silly sermonizing, and hypocritical Christians dozing. She stopped going to church for thirty years. As I was reading, my dog Sam plopped himself outside my door. I invited him in, where he curled up at my feet, but after five or six minutes, he started scratching. Fleas. I immediately opened the door and cast him into outer darkness.

Listen, folks, problems come with people as sure as fleas come with dogs. But sibling rivalries, difficulties, pressures, and tensions are all part of the process of raising children into mature adults. And that's what the Father is doing. The lady who stopped attending church came to the realization in her mid-fifties that she had huge gaps in her understanding of God's nature that would have been filled had she remained in church.

Jesus Speaks to and Through the Church

Notice each of the seven letters in chapters 3 and 4 ends with the phrase: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says"—not to the mystic, the poet, or the isolated brother, but—"to the *churches*." Therefore, if you want to hear from the Lord, walk with the Lord, and know more about the Lord, you've got to put up with the fleas—people like me and the ones sitting next to you.

Although Jesus said, "If your right hand offends you, cut it off; if your eye offends you, pluck it out" (see Matthew 5:29), He didn't say, "If your ear offends you, cut it off." You can do without your hand. You can do without your eye. But you can't do without your ear because faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17).

We have eyelids to shut out the world around us but not "earlids." God designed us so that we're always in a state of hearing. I can be asleep, but if someone comes into my house, it is my ears that open my eyes. This is also true in spiritual life. That's why the ear is so essential.

There's no better place to hear the Word of the Lord than the church. Why? Because as we go through the Word together, we receive positive affirmation, corrective exhortation, eternal motivation—as clearly seen in each of the seven letters.

If you work with people—as a mom or dad, schoolteacher or employer—these are the three vital elements of your job. Because no one is all bad, there is something to affirm in everyone. Because no one is all good, there is something to correct in everyone. And because we all get weary, there is the need of motivation for everyone.

A married couple wants to throw in the towel and call it quits. Saying, "Hang in there, and your marriage will get better," doesn't work, because maybe it won't. A teenager wants to compromise his walk. Saying, "Just wait, and you'll outgrow that desire," doesn't work, because maybe he won't. A young woman struggles with sickness. Saying, "Don't give up, you'll get better," doesn't work, because maybe she won't.

That's why the singular motivation Jesus used was heaven. "Stay the course. Keep the faith because of heaven," He said to those in Pergamos, in

Thyatira, in Laodicea. "There's a tree of life up there, a crown for you, a new name."

As a dad, if I'm only helping my kids get through their teenage years, I'm a failure. If I'm only helping them be successful adults, I'm missing the point. If I'm only making sure they're set up for retirement, I've shirked my responsibility. What does it matter if our sons and daughters navigate life successfully—if they have a bank account, a retirement plan, or win an award—but are paupers in heaven eternally?

On the other hand, making the team or making money will shrink in importance if we're constantly talking to people about the bigger, overarching principle of eternity. Life is truly a vapor, gang. Heaven is where it's at. And it's in and through the church that we are reminded of this daily.

Affirmation, exhortation, motivation—nowhere else are these components so powerfully and beautifully balanced as, fleas notwithstanding, in the church.



3 Looking at church history, we now come to the Reformation. The age of Medieval Catholicism became so dark that when Sergius III became Pope (A.D. 904–A.D. 967), he ushered in what history calls the Rule of Harlots, during which time his mistress publicly accompanied him to the papal palace. Sergius' grandson, John X, continued this legacy until he was actually killed in his bedroom while committing adultery. Next came Benedict IX, who assumed the position of pope at twelve years of age through the practice of simony—selling positions within the church to the highest bidder. Benedict IX was so corrupt that the citizens of Rome drove him out of the city, replacing him with Clement III, who was appointed by Henry III. Clement III was not a Roman because, in the words of Henry III: "I appoint no one from Rome because no priest can be found in this city who is free from the pollution of fornication and simony."

Times were dark, diabolical, and depressing—which caused some stirring to take place in the hearts of good Catholic people. In 1330, a giant of the faith named John Wycliffe was born in England. An Oxford scholar and Catholic priest, he began to write about the need to get away from papal edicts and back to the Bible. He began to publicly question doctrines such as

transubstantiation and continual sacrifice so much so that he was excommunicated by the powers in Rome. Although he himself was safe at Oxford, his disciples—men like John Hus and Hugh Latimer—were burned at the stake. But their deaths caused a spark of Reformation that would burn throughout England.

A glorious move took place, culminating in the year 1483 in Eiselben, Saxon Germany, when a coal miner and his wife gave birth to a baby boy they named Martin. "This boy is not to follow me into the mineshafts," said Martin's father. So Martin enrolled in the university to study law. While walking on campus one day, a thunderstorm arose unlike anything he had ever seen. Petrified, Martin cried out to St. Anne, the patron saint of coal miners, "If you save me from this lightning, I will become a monk." Spared, and true to his word, Martin Luther enrolled in seminary.

After two years, he earned his Doctorate, but the more he studied theology, the more he knew he could never be righteous enough to earn God's favor. To this end, he regularly beat himself, slept outside in freezing temperatures, and fasted for long periods. Still not experiencing the reality of God in his life, he decided to journey to Rome for an audience with the pope. On his way to Rome, however, he contracted a dangerous fever. While recovering in an Alpine monastery, one of the monks, sensing Luther's struggle, told him to read the Book of Habakkuk.

Why Habakkuk? Habakkuk was also one who wrestled with issues. Luther took his advice and when he came to the fourth verse of the second chapter, "The just shall live by faith"—he finally understood.

"That's it!" he cried. "If I'm going to be just, it's not because of what I do or who I am, but by faith in what God's done and who He is." However, upon arriving in Rome, with his heart full of excitement, Luther was shocked by the abuses and hypocrisy he found there.

Returning to Germany, he realized he had to take a stand. So in 1517, he nailed a parchment containing ninety-five theses challenging the pope to the university door in Wittenburg. Three and a half years later, Rome answered, "Retract or die." After burning this response, Luther was summoned to Rome. In 1521, the Diet of Worms was convened, at which the Church realized, that due to his popularity, they had a problem in Luther. "We're giving you a second opportunity to recant," they said—to which Martin

Luther gave his classic reply: "Here I stand. I can do no other, so help me God."

Luther's stand gave rise to the birth of the Jesuits—an order dedicated to enforcing papal power no matter the cost. Meanwhile, the Reformation swept across Europe. Luther in Germany, Zwingli in Switzerland, Knox in Scotland all called for a return to the Bible—which strengthened the determination of the Jesuits to stand by the pope and stem the tide of what they perceived to be heresy. . . .

> *Of the four million people living in Bohemia in 1600, 80 percent were "Protest-ants"—sympathizers of the Reformation. Two years later, the population of Bohemia numbered a mere eight hundred thousand. Austria and Hungary were also early hotbeds of the Reformation.*

Today, when we think of these countries, we think Catholic. Why? Because the worst bloodshed in history took place in the wake of the Reformation—even worse than the persecution of Christians under the Roman emperors and the holocaust of Nazi Germany under Hitler. This upheaval and bloodshed was so far-reaching that the seeds of the events in Bosnia and Northern Ireland today have their roots in those terrible, brutal times.

And understanding this context of the Reformation is vital to understanding the meaning of the text before us. . . .

Revelation 3:1 (a)
And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write:

Meaning "remnant," Sardis is a fitting name. Built on a one thousand-foot bluff, Sardis was an extremely wealthy city that seemed invincible—until the year 549 B.C. when Cyrus, conqueror of the city of Babylon, also conquered Sardis. Sardis was conquered again three hundred years later, a fact to which Jesus will allude. . . .

Revelation 3:1 (b)

These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars . . .

As you read this section, you will notice that all of the references about Christ in chapter 1 are repeated again in chapters 2 and 3. We saw in verse 4 of chapter 1 that the "seven Spirits of God" refers to the seven-fold nature of the Holy Spirit as seen in Isaiah 11:2. Why would this description be repeated in conjunction with Sardis? Because, while most traditional mainline Protestants like Lutherans, Presbyterians, Wesleyans, Methodists, and Congregationalists champion everything from homosexuality to environmental issues—they are wary of the ministry of the Spirit.

Revelation 3:1 (c)

. . . I know thy works, that thou hast a name . . .

The word translated "name" is *onoma* in Greek, from which we get our word "denomination."

You can go out tonight and behold the beauty of the North Star. In reality, however, you don't know if it's there. Thirty-three light years away, it could have blown up thirty-two years ago, and we wouldn't know it until next year.

So, too, there are those who proudly say, "Look at this group, or that denomination." And the Lord says, "You're depending on reputation, on history, on what it used to be. You're resting in tradition, not relationship."

Revelation 3:1 (d)

. . . that thou livest, and art dead.

Although Jesus had much to correct in Thyatira, He commended them in verse 19 for their works and charity, service, faith, and patience. But here at Sardis, He simply says, "You're dead."

Revelation 3:2 (a)

Be watchful . . .

Why should Sardis be watchful? Because their city fell when they weren't watching. So, too, spiritually, they were saying, "We're on solid ground. No one's going to knock us down."

"You guys in Sardis should know better than that," Jesus says. "Your own history should tell you the results of being haughty and arrogant, of resting in a false sense of security."

Revelation 3:2 (b), 3

. . . and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.

What was received initially? The Bible—from Wycliffe, Calvin, Knox, Luther. "Remember how it was received initially," Jesus is pleading. "And repent for how far you've come from that foundation."

> Tragically, the Jesus Project—the group of theologians who concluded that "It is more blessed to give than to receive" is the only verifiable phrase uttered by Jesus—is comprised of mainline Protestants. And their sin is greater in God's economy than the abuses of the Roman Church with her bloodshed and immorality because they have bought into liberal theology. What's worse, they are undermining people's beliefs by muddying even the clearest statements of Christ.

Revelation 3:3

If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

Jesus says, "If you don't get back to basics, I'm going to come to you as a thief."

This is where mainline denominationalism increasingly finds itself. Proponents of such do not believe in a Rapture, or even a Millennium. They

teach that the promises of the kingdom, the sayings of Isaiah, the teachings of Revelation are simply allegorical. "Don't look for the Rapture," they say, "and don't look for a real kingdom established on earth." Thus, they will be totally caught off guard by Jesus' return.

Revelation 3:4, 5 (a)

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment . . .

In other words, those in Sardis—or in this epoch of church history that began in A.D. 1500 and goes on until the kingdom comes—who have stayed true to the Word will be overcomers.

Revelation 3:5 (b)

. . . and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

When someone comes to me broken-hearted about his sin, I take him to John 10:28, wherein Jesus says we are eternally secure in His hand, to Romans 8:38, 39 where we read that nothing can separate us from the love of God, and to 2 Timothy 1:12, where we are reminded that He is able to *keep* that which is committed to Him.

But when someone comes to me and says, "I don't care what you think. I'm going to do this anyway. It's none of your business," I take him to a different set of Scriptures—to 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Galatians 5:19–21; Ephesians 5:3–5; and here to Revelation 3:5—because if there's no repentance month after year after decade, his salvation is not on very solid ground.

Revelation 3:6

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Every generation needs its own Reformation, its own renewal, its own revival. It's not enough for a generation to hear about how it was in their parents' day. The Jesus Movement of the '60s was wonderful—but the days to come are going to be grander still because God's heart is to go from glory to greater glory whenever we get out of the way and don't fall prey to the Sardis Syndrome.

Revelation 3:7 (a)
And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

In this next phase of church history, we see a stirring in the dead denominationalism that had strayed from the simplicity of the gospel.

> Two books sat in the London shop of a young cobbler: a well-worn Bible and Captain Cook's journal. As the days went by, the cobbler found himself losing interest in working on the soles of shoes, and caring more about the souls of people in far regions. So deep was the passion that stirred within him that on May 31, 1793, he walked into the little Protestant church he attended and said, "Could I please share?" Allowed to speak a word, he read Isaiah 54:2, 3. "We must lengthen the cords; we must strengthen the stakes," he preached passionately. "We must include others who have never heard. I want to go. Send me to India."
>
> His request stunned his congregation. After all, it had been one thousand years since anyone had launched a foreign missionary endeavor. But their surprise didn't stop Carey's congregation from sending him to India. In his first ten years, he became fluent in twelve languages. One of his works, the Bible he translated in Sanskrit, is still used to this day.

William Carey goes down in history as the father of the modern missionary movement—as suddenly the church awoke from her lethargy. Carey set the example that one doesn't have to be skilled, gifted, or special to be used in the kingdom. God is simply looking for men who are willing to go.

The church at Philadelphia speaks of this age of church history beginning in the 1800s, for it was through men like Carey in India and Hudson Taylor in China, D. L. Moody in America and C. H. Spurgeon in London that evangelism was taking place and missionaries were being sent out.

The letter to Philadelphia is one of only two letters of the seven in which Jesus has nothing critical to say. Why? Perhaps it is because the Philadelphians were involved in evangelism. They were loving the lost—and love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

There are three Greek words for love. *Eros* is erotic or sensual love. *Phileo* is brotherly love. *Agape* is God's love. The city of Philadelphia was founded in 189 B.C. by a man named Eumanes II. When he died, he was succeeded by his younger brother, Attalus II, who named buildings after his older brother, minted coins bearing his brother's image, and talked about his brother constantly. Consequently, the people of the town began to call this place Philo-delphia, or the city of brotherly love.

Nothing is coincidental in the Scriptures. I believe it is true that every book of the Bible is inspired. And every chapter of every book is inspired. And every verse of every chapter is inspired. And every word of every verse is inspired. And every letter of every word is inspired. In fact, I agree with the Rabbis that every space between every word is inspired! Thus, it is no surprise that Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love is the center of evangelism.

Revelation 3:7 (b)

These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David . . .

In chapter 1, we read that Jesus holds the keys of hell and death (1:18). To this missionary church, He says He holds an additional key: the key of David—which takes one back to the key of David spoken of in Isaiah 22, wherein we read of a man named Shebna, who was the treasurer in the kingdom of Judah during the reign of Hezekiah. After Shebna used temple money to purchase a sepulcher and chariots for himself, Isaiah came on the scene and said, "What are you doing? You had opportunity, but you abused it." So the key to the treasury was taken from off Shebna's shoulder, where

the key was traditionally worn, and given to a godly man who wore it wisely. Isaiah went on to speak of this one who used the keys properly as being "fastened like a nail," or steadfast and dependable. Of course, we think of another who was fastened—not *like* a nail, but *with* a nail. We think of another who perfectly carried the key of the government upon His shoulder (Isaiah 9:6). We think of Jesus.

Revelation 3:7 (c)–8 (a)
. . . he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it . . .

Jesus is the One who opened the doors for William Carey in India, Hudson Taylor in China, for us in the United States, in Mexico, in Honduras, in Vanuatu. But He also shuts doors that can't be opened. If a man continually says, "No," to the Lord, there will come a time when he will be unable to say, "Yes"—at which point he's locked in to his eternal decision and destruction.

Revelation 3:8 (b)
. . . for thou hast a little strength . . .

There are those who teach that in the last days there will be a major manifestation of the sons of God; that miracles will happen, wherein every sick person is healed and glorious things will occur. But I believe that's hype and hyperbole. Yes, there are some good things happening. But it's the time of little strength. Jesus does not say this condemningly. He merely says that's the way it is during the age of Philadelphia. Thus, it's not an indictment, but rather an honest assessment of the "last days" church at Philadelphia.

Revelation 3:8 (c)
. . . and hast kept my word . . .

Besides having little strength, the "last days" church at Philadelphia is a church that has returned to the Word, has a desire for the Word and studies

the Scriptures constantly.

Revelation 3:8 (d)
. . . and hast not denied my name.

The idea here is "You have not denied My deity. You recognize I am who I claim to be—not just an interesting teacher, not just a model of how to live successfully, of how to have prosperity, or of how to be happy. I am the Christ."

Revelation 3:9
Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

In this end-times church there is a synagogue of Satan—those who say they are Jews but aren't. Who are these people? In John's day, the reference would have been to the Jews who persecuted believers. Jesus said previously and reiterates here, "They're not true Jews, any more than Christians who persecute Jews are true Christians." In our day, I believe the reference is to the growing number of people in the Christian community who say, "Because God is through with the Jew, *we* are Israel."

In *The Road to the Holocaust,* Hal Lindsey proves that the deaths of six million Jews did not begin with the Third Reich. They began one hundred years earlier, when Bible teachers began to teach that God is through with the Jew. Anti-Semitism is always the mark of a people who fail to read their Bibles, for in Romans 9—11 God declares He is not through with Israel.

There are three categories of people in the Bible: Jews, Gentiles, and the church. Who makes up the church? Former Jews and former Gentiles. This is important to understand because we need to realize that the reason for the Tribulation is the fact that God is not through with Israel.

The Rapture is when Jesus comes to get us—but the Second Coming is when Jesus comes back to rescue Israel. May God help us to never lose our understanding of Israel's importance.

Revelation 3:10 (a)
Because thou hast kept the word of my patience . . .

What is the word of His patience? In 2 Thessalonians 3:5, we are told that God is establishing us in the patience of waiting for Jesus Christ. I point this out because the church at Philadelphia is the church interested in Bible prophecy. Although in the first two centuries, the topics of Jesus' Second Coming and the Rapture of the church were central themes of preaching and writing, Bible prophecy was lost as an interest in the church until the 1800s because people said, "It's impossible for a nation to come back from the dead. "It's unthinkable that the Jewish people could have a national identity again. It's gotta be an allegory. Why would the Middle East be the focal point of a battle? Who cares about the Middle East?" We now understand why that region of the world is so strategic: oil. Economically, militarily, politically, the attention of the whole world is constantly focused on the Middle East.

Revelation 3:10 (b)
. . . I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation . . .

The Greek word translated "from" is *ek,* which means "out of." In other words, Jesus says, "You at Philadelphia, you of little strength, you've kept My Word and you haven't denied My Name. You've gone through the open door, and you've been patiently awaiting My coming. Because of this, I will take you out of the time period of temptation yet to come."

Revelation 3:10 (c)
. . . which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

I believe the church is the group of people who will be taken out of the hour of temptation that shall come upon all the world. This is not simply

local persecution in Philadelphia, but a time of difficulty that encompasses the entire globe. And there's only one event that fits this description: the Tribulation.

***For topical study of Revelation 3:10 entitled "The Rapture Controversy," turn to page* 1687.**

Revelation 3:11 (a)
Behold, I come quickly . . .

Tachu, the Greek word translated "quickly," actually means "suddenly." Thus, the Lord could come at any moment. Only we who believe in a pre-Tribulation Rapture can say, "It could be today." Mid- and post-Tribulationists, on the other hand, have no recourse but to say, "The Lord can't come back today because the Tribulation hasn't begun yet."

But we say, "It could be today." And such is the throbbing heartbeat of Bible prophecy.

Revelation 3:11 (b)
. . . hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

This is intriguing. "I'm coming suddenly," Jesus says, "so hold fast in order that you don't lose your crown."

"Crown?" you say. "I don't have one yet. What does this mean?"

I believe the answer is found in 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20, where Paul identifies the crown as people—people with whom we've shared, people for whom you've prayed. "Stay with them," says Jesus. "Keep praying for them. Don't give up on them."

Revelation 3:12 (a)
Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out . . .

"Hold fast to your crown, look for My coming, and you will be planted firmly as a pillar in My kingdom," says Jesus.

Revelation 3:12 (b)
. . . and I will write upon him the name of my God . . .

The best part about making the team was that I got to wear the jacket. You see, the Hornets were the #1 Pop Warner football team in the nation five years out of six. So the word "Hornets" emblazoned across the jacket I wore every day to fifth grade made me feel like I had arrived—regardless of the fact that the year I played as third-string quarterback our record was two wins, seven losses. Even though I was terrible and our team stunk, I still got to wear the jacket.

So, too, the Lord says, "I'm going to put the name of My Father on your jacket. His will be the Name you wear for eternity."

Revelation 3:12 (c)
. . . and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God . . .

You're not only going to have the glory of God emblazoned upon you, but you're going to have the government of God given to you. The New Jerusalem is going to make any city on this planet look insignificant. And we will be residents therein.

Revelation 3:12 (d)
. . . and I will write upon him my new name.

Proverbs 25:2 says it is the glory of God to conceal or to hide His name, but the honor of kings to search it out. Because we are a nation of kings and priests (Revelation 1:6), we will be those who search out His name. It's as if the Lord is saying, "There are aspects of who I am of which you have no idea on this earth, for it will take eternity for you to perceive and enjoy the aspects of My being. It's My glory to conceal a thing. It's your privilege to search it out."

When we get to heaven, we're truly going to be the bride of Christ. I pity our poor brides, guys, because as time goes on, it must be disappointing, disheartening, disillusioning, and depressing to them to see our flaws become ever more evident. Not so with God. Unlike any relationship on earth, this one will only produce greater and greater ecstasy, greater and greater delight as we explore the nooks and crannies of His nature for all eternity.

Revelation 3:13

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Brotherly love, evangelism, holding fast are all characteristics of this church at Philadelphia—which is perhaps best typified by Francis of Assisi when he said, "Witness wherever you go, and if absolutely necessary, use words." Truly, evangelism is directly connected to love.

Revelation 3:14 (a)

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write:

Six miles south of Philadelphia, the city of Laodicea was the banking center of the region. Consequently, it had ample money to spend on entertainment—as evidenced by the thirty thousand-seat amphitheatre whose ruins still stand.

In addition, Laodicea was known throughout history as being very tricky politically because the city was built in a way that it could not defend itself militarily—a very unusual trait for an ancient city. The only way Laodicea could survive was by making compromises with her enemies.

Finally, even as Aristotle noted, Laodicea was known for the eye salve manufactured there, highly valued in the ancient world. All of these factors figure in to what Jesus will say to this group.

Take note that the address is not to the church *at* Laodicea, but to the church *of* the Laodiceans. The Greek word *laos,* from which we get our word "laity," means "people." *Diece* means "decision" or "rule." Thus, the church of the Laodiceans was directed by the people rather than guided by the Lord.

The Laodicean mentality remains. I'm amazed at the influential churches whose services regularly include interviews with celebrities who are not living godly lives, who have not taken a stand for Jesus Christ, who have little more than positive stories to share—churches where people rule; wherein "Smile, be happy," has replaced the message of repentance.

Revelation 3:14 (b)
These things saith the Amen . . .

Why does Jesus refer to Himself as "the Amen"? "Amen" meaning "so be it," Jesus identifies Himself to this group so prone to compromise, saying, "There is certainty. It's Me."

Revelation 3:14 (c)
. . . the faithful and true witness . . .

The Greek word translated "witness" is *mar-tus,* from which we get our word "martyr." What is a witness? One who lives so much like Jesus Christ and is so in love with Jesus Christ that he ends up being crucified even as Jesus Christ was crucified. The Bible puts it this way: Yea, all those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12).

"Don't talk about suffering," the Laodicean would say. "We just want to be positive and happy." You'll never hear a message about suffering, persecution, or martyrdom in a Laodicean church. They don't want to think about those things. The truth, however, is that if we're living godly, we're going to get nailed. No question.

Revelation 3:14 (d)
. . . the beginning of the creation of God.

Cultists often use this verse to say that Jesus is created and therefore not coequal with the Father. But the Greek word translated "beginning" is *arche,* which actually means "the origin." You see, God the Father created all things through the Son (Colossians 1:16) by the power of the Spirit (Genesis 1:2). In the last days, the question is, and will continue to be, "Who is the

Creator?" Evolution being part of the end-time deception, it is no surprise that in the church of the Laodiceans there will be questions concerning creation.

Revelation 3:15, 16

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

In Laodicea's sister city of Hieropolis were hot springs—from which the present-day Turkish government is trying to extract geo-thermal power. To take advantage of this, an aqueduct was constructed that carried the hot water from Hieropolis through Laodicea and on to Colossae. In theory, it was a good idea. But in reality, by the time the water reached Laodicea, it was lukewarm. Thus, as lukewarm water flowed through their city, the Laodiceans would know hot water was useful, cold water was refreshing, but lukewarm water was not good for much.

The Lord says the same thing about His people. "If you're hot, I can use you. If you're cold, I can deal with you. But if you're lukewarm, you'll neither be hot enough to use nor cold enough to correct."

Revelation 3:17

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

To this Laodicean church, which wasn't talking about the reality of sin, the need for repentance, or the Cross of Christ; which didn't speak of witnessing, standing, and living for eternity, Jesus said, "You think you're rich—but you're impoverished. You think you're doing well, but you're miserable."

Revelation 3:18 (a)

I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich . . .

In Bible days, smelters would take the gold brought in from the mines and heat it by fire until it liquefied. After stirring it until the impurities were burned out, they would know the process was complete when the smelter could look into the pot of liquid gold and see the reflection of his own face. Because Jesus is the Master Smelter, He uses heat as well. So, to these people who were impure, carnal, vacillating, and lukewarm, He says, "Get into the fire. Get into the battle. Engage yourself like you once did in ministry."

> Before the Battle of Trafalgar, knowing this particular battle would determine the fate of Europe, Lord Nelson assembled his men and said, "In the event you cannot see or read the signals in the heat of battle, know this: No captain in this fleet can do wrong if he places his ship alongside that of an enemy."

I like that! "Captains, if you can't read my signals, and you don't know what to do, the answer is very simple: Engage in battle the first enemy you can find." So, too, when you feel yourself becoming complacent, get involved in service, in sharing, in ministry. Determine in your heart to engage yourself once more in the fire of ministry—not because God wants to watch you burn, but because He wants to warm your heart and get you going again.

Revelation 3:18 (b)

. . . and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear . . .

The Laodiceans were not only to get back into the race, but also to get back to grace. Throughout Scripture, white raiment speaks of the robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10) given to those who are in Christ. The Laodiceans were known for a unique kind of wool taken from black sheep, yet the Lord says to them, "You might be fashion plates with your black garments, but you need garments of *white*—righteous garments, the covering of My grace."

Revelation 3:18 (c)

. . . and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

The same Jesus who says, "Anoint your eyes with eye salve," is the One who put mud in the blind man's eyes in John 9. The way of the Great Physician is to allow irritation to produce illumination. "You're seeing everything in a carnal way," He says, "and you need to humble yourself before Me and deal with the mud."

"Ouch," we say. "That mud hurts." But in reality, there must be an awareness of the problems in our hearts and the trouble in our souls before we can see.

"Search me, O God," cried David, "and see if there be any wicked way in me" (see Psalm 139:23, 24). Listen, if you're feeling Laodicean, if you feel lukewarm, you need to ask the Great Physician to search you, for that will be the eye salve that will allow you to see clearly. How long has it been, dear saint, since you've been on your face before the Lord saying, "Search me concerning the words on my lips, the bitterness in my heart, and the thoughts on my mind"?

Truly, confession precedes vision as surely as irritation precedes illumination.

Revelation 3:19

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

If you feel miserable and blind, wretched and troubled, the Lord would say to you, "Terrific. This just proves to you conclusively how much I love you." A coach will always be the harshest on those in whom he sees the most promise. If he sees you as a benchwarmer, he'll never criticize you. But if you have potential, he'll have a great deal to say to you.



***For topical study of Revelation 3:20 entitled "Jesus at the Door," turn to page* 1691.**

Revelation 3:20 (a)

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him . . .

While this verse has been used as a powerful illustration of the invitation for personal salvation, Jesus is primarily speaking to the church. Tragically, some people go to church all their lives but never hear a message on repentance, on the fact that there is sin, or that there is a hell. To such a church, Jesus says, "I love you and care about you. That's why I give this invitation to you."

Revelation 3:20 (b)
. . . and will sup with him, and he with me.

In every account of Christ's post-resurrection appearances He's eating. I like that! That's where we really find the answer to our Laodicean condition —at His table. As Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes 3, there's a season for everything—a time to weep and a time to rejoice. The Lord's table has a unique way of bringing us into the full orb of just such diverse emotional reactions and responses because we leave saying, "I'm sobered by my sin, yet elated by the fact that it's washed away."

Revelation 3:21
To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

"Open your heart to Me," Jesus would say, "and I'll open heaven to you."

Revelation 3:22
He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

It's one thing to have Jesus as a Model or a Mascot. That's what they were doing at Laodicea. They were "good Christians." But Jesus is not to be

a Model or a Mascot. He is to be our Master. That's what He was asking of that congregation. And that's what He's asking of you and me.

May this church not be a place that is popular—full of people who have good mottoes and good intentions. May it be a place where we realize that, although we're sinners who have failed miserably, God has provided Jesus Christ, and He will come in to our hearts to rule and reign within if we simply open the door.

THE RAPTURE CONTROVERSY

A Topical Study of REVELATION 3:10

The Book of Acts tells us the Berean believers were more noble than their neighbors in Thessalonica because the Bereans searched the Scriptures to validate what Paul taught them (17:11). So, too, I want our church family to be able to say, "Here's *why* we believe what we do." To this end, I would like to submit to you thirteen reasons why I believe the church will be raptured before the Tribulation.

"Well, I have friends who say the church will go through the Tribulation. Why get all concerned about this issue?" you might say. My answer is because I believe one's view on Bible prophecy and the timing of the Rapture will affect the way one lives out his faith. Why does the debate continue concerning the timing of this event? I believe it is due to misunderstanding in three areas:

The Elect

> *For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.*
>
> Matthew 24:21, 22

On the basis of this verse, people say "Aha! Here we see the elect in the Tribulation"—failing to realize that the term "elect" refers to three groups of people: Christians (Colossians 3:12), Israel (Isaiah 45:4), and those who will be saved in the Tribulation (Matthew 24:21, 22).

To which of the elect does Jesus refer in Matthew 24:21? I believe the answer lies in the verse preceding it. . . .

> *But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day.*
>
> Matthew 24:20

Even to this day, transportation in Israel is shut down on the Sabbath. Since the Sabbath means nothing to Gentile nations, the application to Israel is clear.

The Trumpets

> *In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 15:52

On the basis of this verse, people say, "Aha! According to Revelation 11, the seventh, or last trump signaling the Rapture, will take place midway through the Tribulation." But wait a minute. The seventh trumpet of Revelation 11 is sounded by angels, whereas 1 Thessalonians 4:16 makes it clear that the last trump is sounded by God.

In Exodus 19, God sounded the first trump when the Jews were gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai to hear the law. The last trump will sound when the church is gathered to meet the Lord in the air and taken to heaven. Thus, the Jews hear the first trump; the church hears the last. The following thirteen reasons are why I believe this trump of God will sound before the Tribulation. . . .

1. The doctrine is to be a comforting one (1 Thessalonians 4:18). The belief that the Rapture happens after or in the middle of the Tribulation is anything but comforting because it means believers must endure unbelievable agony before they are taken to heaven.

2. The Tribulation is the outpouring of the wrath of the Lamb—and God has not appointed us to wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9–11). The wrath that should have been hurled at you and poured out on me was absorbed by our Hero, our Lord, our Savior on the Cross of Calvary.

3. Rapture before the Tribulation is illustrated in Genesis 19, where we see angels delivering Lot and his family before the destruction of Sodom. How do I know this is a picture of the Rapture? Because in reference to this, Peter writes, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (2 Peter 2:9). The word translated "temptations" is the same word translated "tribulation."

4. Rapture before the Tribulation is illustrated in Enoch, who was taken to heaven prior to the Flood (Genesis 5:24). "Wrong analogy," some protest.

"The correct picture is Noah who went through the tribulation of the Flood." But wait a minute. Noah is not a picture of the church, but of Israel, who will indeed go through the Tribulation—and will at last come to Jesus as a result.

5. Rapture before the Tribulation is illustrated in Daniel 3. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar, they were thrown into a fiery furnace. But where was their friend Daniel? Either he did, indeed, bow to Nebuchadnezzar—which is completely contrary to the rest of the book—or, his omission is in itself a picture of the Rapture. Bible scholars believe that, very likely, he was away on official business as an emissary. All we know with certainty, however, is that he was taken out of the scene.

6. Jesus told us to pray that we would be raptured before the Tribulation. In speaking of the Tribulation in His Olivet Discourse, Jesus said, "Watch and pray always that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things" (see Luke 21:36). How are we accounted worthy? One way: We are worthy because of what Jesus did for us on the Cross of Calvary.

7. Pre-Tribulation Rapture makes sense historically and scripturally. In accordance with Jewish custom, when a man came of age to marry, he would add a room on to his father's house for himself and his bride. When the addition was complete, and when the father gave the go-ahead, a trumpet would sound, and the bridegroom would go to meet his bride. Following the wedding ceremony, the bridegroom would take his bride to his father's house, where they would be tucked away for seven days in the newly completed "bridal suite." At the end of seven days, the bridegroom would come out with his bride and introduce her to the community.

That's exactly what's going to happen with us. Jesus, our Bridegroom, is preparing a place for us in heaven, His Father's house (John 14:2). At the appointed time known only by the Father, a trumpet will sound and Jesus will meet us, His bride, in the air to escort us up to the "Bridal Suite" He has prepared for us. We will remain with Him in heaven for seven years before we are presented to the world, where we will rule and reign with Him.

8. Pre-Tribulation Rapture follows the outline of the Book of Revelation. If you don't embrace a Pre-Tribulation view, your understanding of Revelation becomes as twisted as a pretzel because you've got to put chapters 4 and 5 after chapter 11, if you hold to a Mid-Tribulation stance;

after chapter 19 if you take a Post-Tribulation point of view. Only a Pre-Tribulation placement of the Rapture allows for a consistent flow of the Book of Revelation.

9. Pre-Tribulation Rapture allows for the conditional aspect of the Tribulation. To the church at Thyatira, Jesus said, "If you don't repent, you will experience Tribulation" (see Revelation 2:22). If the Rapture won't occur until after the Tribulation, what would be the reason for this warning of Jesus?

"Well, didn't Jesus say in this world we would have tribulation?" you ask.

Yes, but the crushing the believer goes through in the world is from Satan. The Tribulation of chapters 6—19, on the other hand, is from God as He pours out His wrath on a Christ-rejecting world. Folks, God will not allow anyone to get hit from both sides. If we experience tribulation in the world because of our faith, we will not experience the Tribulation of those who have none.

10. Pre-Tribulation Rapture allows for the unknown time of the Lord's return. According to Daniel's prophecy, three and a half biblical years (a Biblical year being three hundred sixty days) from the day Antichrist enters the temple and demands worship midway through the Tribulation, the Lord will return. Consequently, if believers were on earth during the Tribulation, they would be able to predict the exact time of the Second Coming—three and a half biblical years, or forty-two months, or one thousand two hundred sixty days after Antichrist enters the temple. The problem is, 1 Thessalonians 5:2 and Matthew 24:36 make it clear that no one knows the hour of His coming. Therefore, it follows that believers must be absent at this time.

11. The Tribulation is unnecessary for the church. Referred to as the time of Jacob's trouble, the Tribulation targets Israel, for through it she will be awakened and at last see Jesus as the Messiah (Deuteronomy 4:29, 30). The promises God made to Abraham and to the Jewish people have not been forgotten, gang. God will work with Israel in the days of the Tribulation. He will make Himself known to them—and they shall indeed be saved.

12. Pre-Tribulation Rapture squares with the prophecy of Daniel. At the end of Daniel 9, Daniel was given the timetable for all of Jewish history in units of *heptads,* or weeks. It is clear from this all-important passage of

Scripture that the sixty-nine weeks of Daniel refer to the time between the commandment to rebuild the temple, given in 445 B.C. by Artaxerxes, and the coming of Messiah, fulfilled perfectly on Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. But Daniel was also told, "Seventy weeks are determined upon Israel." To what does the seventieth week of Daniel refer? To the Tribulation. You see, the seventy weeks of Daniel refer to Israel. The church was not present for the first sixty-nine weeks. And the seventieth week doesn't begin until after the church is raptured. In other words, if the church was not present in the first sixty-nine weeks, why would she be present in the last week? She won't. She'll be in heaven.

Those are twelve reasons I believe the Rapture will occur before the Tribulation. But the most important one is the following:

A Pre-Tribulation Rapture viewpoint makes one seek first the kingdom. "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (Matthew 24:45, 46). Who is the one who will have authority and purpose in eternity? He who is watching for Jesus' coming. But this is impossible for those who believe the Tribulation precedes the Rapture because they must first watch for Antichrist, then the rebuilding of the temple, and finally the Abomination of Desolation when Antichrist demands to be worshiped as God.

Two factors kept the early church on fire: the empowering of the Holy Ghost and the belief that Jesus would return during their lifetime. "But He didn't come back in their day," you say. And you're right—but do you think those early believers are in heaven now, saying, "We didn't get bogged down in materialism or trivial pursuits. We sought the Lord. We witnessed fervently. We lived for the kingdom. If only we knew He wasn't coming, we could have played more racquetball"? No! They're ecstatic that they chose to do what Jesus says to do in every generation—to watch, to be ready, to live for His coming.

Whether or not you believe in a pre-Tribulation Rapture will not affect where you'll ultimately end up. If you're a believer, you'll be in heaven no matter what position you hold. But your viewpoint concerning the Rapture very definitely affects how you live your life this side of eternity. If you do not believe in a pre-Tribulation Rapture, you cannot look for Jesus Christ

because, according to your eschatological viewpoint, Antichrist must appear first. Therefore, you find yourself scanning the news, checking out current events, watching the global scene for Antichrist rather than for Jesus. And this puts believers in a "survivalist" mentality. "We're going through the Tribulation," they say. "We better get ready." Is this what Jesus meant? Does He want us storing gold and guns? Or does He want us living every day in hopeful anticipation that today could be the day we go to heaven?

"I want you looking for Jesus every day," John said, "because he who has the hope of the imminent, sudden appearing of Christ and the Rapture of the church purifies himself" (see 1 John 3:3). That is why I believe your view on the Rapture is of utmost importance. Live in constant expectancy of Jesus' return, gang. Be watching and be ready.

JESUS AT THE DOOR
A Topical Study of
REVELATION 3:20

No doubt you've seen the classic picture by Holman Hunt of Jesus knocking on a door. Now hanging in St. Paul's Cathedral in London, upon its first unveiling, it is said that a certain critic said, "You've made a mistake, Mr. Hunt. There's no handle on the door."

"That was intentional," the artist is said to have replied. "The door opens only from the inside."

If this story is true, Holman Hunt was right, for it's up to you and me to let the Lord into our lives. He won't kick the door down. He won't force His way into our hearts.

Yet although we use this verse as a call to individual salvation, it was actually written to a self-satisfied congregation.

Is Jesus talking to people meeting in His Name who are supposed to be Christians? Yes. And is He saying He's on the outside and wants to come in? Yep.

Well, how does one get to the point where the Lord is on the outside? How does a church get to the place where it thinks it's doing fine but is spiritually bankrupt? If it happened at Laodicea, can it happen to us?

Because Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture, turn with me to the Song of Solomon for the answer. The story is of a king, a bridegroom in love with his new bride. After experiencing intimacy with her, the next morning finds him outside her door. . . .

> *My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come*

away. O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.

Song of Solomon 2:10–15

"Come away with me," says the bridegroom. "The rain has stopped. The birds are singing. I want to hear your voice. I long to see your countenance. Watch out for the little foxes—the subtle little temptations that could hinder our love."

After hearing his invitation and warning, the bride responds. . . .

My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.

Song of Solomon 2:16, 17

Here is the bridegroom outside the door, saying, "Honey, come on. It's a glorious morning. I want to take you to new heights, to hear wonderful songs, to be on guard against the little foxes."

And what does his bride say?

"It's too early. You go play on the hills, and I'll catch up with you later."

Doctrinal Drowsiness

> *By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.*
>
> Song of Solomon 3:1, 2

What happened here is something that can happen to us corporately or to you and me individually. It's the danger of doctrinal drowsiness that says, "Lord, I know You're calling me to come away this morning and seek You. But I'm yours and You're mine. I'm robed in Your righteousness, and my name is written in Your book (yawn), so I'll meet with you a little later . . . zzz . . . ."

As the day progresses, however, and the trials arise, we cry, "Lord, Lord! Where are You?" Like this bride, how often we say, "I don't feel the Lord anymore. My day is empty. My night is dark. Where is He?" The answer is, when He called to us we chose to say, "I don't need to go to Bible study. I don't need devotions this morning. I don't need to expend the energy because I'm His and He's mine."

As the story unfolds, we see that as the bride seeks her bridegroom she does, indeed, find him. But it takes energy. So, too, Jeremiah 29 says, "You shall seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all of your heart." There's no room for laziness in our relationship with the Lord.

"But I'm saved," you say.

Yes, you are.

"The Lord is mine and I am His."

That's true, too.

"And I can just be at peace and rest in the finished work of the Cross."

Absolutely.

But watch out for a dangerous doctrinal drowsiness that keeps you from responding when the Lord pulls on the strings of your heart during your lunch hour, saying,

"Come away, My beloved. There are some mountains I want to show you, some songs I want to share with you."

You see, the Lord comes to us constantly, saying, "Drop what you're doing and take five minutes and talk to Me," or, "Take ten minutes and worship Me," or, "Take fifteen minutes to pour out your heart to Me."

"The Spirit is like the wind," said Jesus. "No man knows from whence it comes or where it goes" (see John 3:8). Hang gliders understand this. When they get a report that the thermals are perfect, they don't say, "I can't go today, but maybe tomorrow I can fit it in"—because there's no guarantee the winds will blow the same way tomorrow. Avid hang gliders move when the wind is blowing. So do surfers. When the swells are five feet, they don't say, "Thanks for the invitation. I can't go this week, but next week I'll be there"—because there's no guarantee what they'll find the following week.

The same is true in spiritual life. When the thermal of the Spirit, when the wave of the Holy Ghost is rolling in, I must respond immediately. "But that's irresponsible," you say. "What about obligations or family responsibilities?"

Let me tell you something: The Holy Spirit knows about those. He's not going to say, "Oh, I forgot. You have that meeting," or, "Forgive me, I didn't know about your business obligation or your family commitment."

No, the Holy Spirit knows our schedules. Thus, it's not the conflicts that are the problem. It's the times we think we deserve to watch CNN for an hour, to watch a 49'ers game, or to read *Newsweek*—for those are the times the Lord calls us to come away.

Spiritual Self-Centeredness

> *I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.*
>
> Song of Solomon 5:2

"Foxes have holes, birds have nests, but the Son of Man hath nowhere to lay His head" (see Matthew 8:20). The hair of the King of kings was full of dew because He came to enter the dark night of human sin. Yet how does the bride respond to her bridegroom?

> *I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.*
>
> Song of Solomon 5:3–6

"I am perfumed," the bride says. "My feet are washed. Why should I defile myself opening the door for you?"

Follow the analogy, gang. Jesus came to seek and save those who were lost. Without a home, His locks are full of dew. His hands are soiled from touching humanity. He gave everything. He bled. He died. He who knew no sin became sin for us. If we're not careful, however, like the bride, we can say, "I don't want to soil my hands. I just want to be mystical. I want to stand in the midst of the candlesticks with incense wafting over my head."

"That's not where I'm at," says our Bridegroom. "My head is wet because I came to impact the world. Forget your clean hands and feet. There is practical ministry to do. There are people to touch."

There's a tragic self-centeredness to which the bride is vulnerable—especially after she's been a bride for a while. It's not about how *we're* doing. It's about how willing we are to dirty our feet, open the door, and give to others.

This account is interesting because I wouldn't have chosen doctrinal drowsiness and spiritual self-centeredness to characterize those who don't open the door to Jesus. If I were writing the Bible, I would have said, "That which will separate you from intimacy with Jesus is a specific sin, or a particular problem." But Jesus says it is our failure to respond to the prompting of His Spirit and our being enamored with our own holiness that separate us from Him.

I also find it extremely interesting that the bride located her bridegroom by giving a detailed description of him to her friends (5:10–16). In other words, she realized where to find him not when she sat in her room with her clean hands and feet, but when she ran out into the city and said, "Let me tell you about this one whom my soul loves." The same thing happens to me. I'll be wondering where the Lord is and why I'm not sensing His presence, when suddenly there's someone for me to tell about Him. And sure enough, as I talk about Him, I experience intimacy with Him.

Dear sisters, precious brothers—the key to intimacy in your Christian walk, the source of enough spiritual energy to skip on the mountains of fellowship, and share with your neighbors in Jerusalem is to say, "YES," when the Bridegroom knocks at your door.

The waves are perfect. Get out of bed, grab your board, and open the door!



4 In chapter 4, we begin the third and final section of the Book of Revelation, as John writes of "the things which shall be hereafter" (see Revelation 1:19).

Revelation 4:1 (a)

After this . . .

The Greek words here are *meta tauta.* It's the same phrase used in the divine outline, where John was instructed to write of the things which he had seen, the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter (1:19). After what? After chapters 2 and 3—after church history. I find it interesting that in the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation, the word "church" appears nineteen times. From chapter 4 on, however, it never appears. Why? Because in chapter 4, the church is taken off the scene and into heaven.

Revelation 4:1 (b)
. . . I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven . . .

I like this! In verse 20 of chapter 3, we saw Jesus knocking at the door. Anyone who opens the door of his heart to the Lord will have the door of heaven opened to him.

Revelation 4:1 (c)
. . . and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet . . .

This trumpet sound draws my mind back to 1 Thessalonians. . . .

> For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.
>
> 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18

Obviously this is speaking of the Rapture—when the Lord appears in the clouds to take us, His bride, to heaven.

Revelation 4:1 (d)
Come up hither . . .

When I hear the Lord saying, "Come up here"—I'm going—and so are you! This is a phrase I can't wait to hear!

Revelation 4:1 (e)
. . . and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.

Meta tauta—hereafter. Why do you suppose this phrase is used twice in this verse? I suggest it is because the Lord doesn't want us to miss it. After these things, after church history—when the last person gets saved; when the last one is added to the kingdom; when the bride of Christ is complete—we're going up!

Revelation 4:2 (a)
And immediately I was in the spirit . . .

I'm really looking forward to being in the spirit, to being immediately changed. How many of you today found yourself thinking a fleshly thought, reacting in a fleshly way, or doing something in the flesh? We all struggle with this constantly. We all fail continually. But there's coming a day when we will no longer struggle with the flesh because when we see Him, we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2). I'm *really* looking forward to that.

Revelation 4:2 (b)
. . . and, behold, a throne was set in heaven . . .

The first thing that captures John's eye is a throne set, or literally "planted" in heaven. I suggest this was a vital concept for Pastor John to pass on to his flock in the midst of terrible persecution. "I saw a throne *set,*" said John.

Just as the altars whereupon the children of Israel worshiped Baal or Ashtaroth in Old Testament times were portable—able to be moved from one "high place" or grove to another—the high places and altars of today's pagan deities are constantly in flux. If you're worshiping at the altar of materialism, you get the house or buy the car and worship there for a week or two, a year

or ten—but then it doesn't work anymore. You have to have a newer house or better car. So you move.

Or, if you're worshiping at the altar of sensuality, you worship there for a while—until that altar doesn't work anymore and you have to find someone else. If you worship at the altar of intellectualism and immerse yourself in the study of this philosophy or that concept, a month or a year later, you're bored with it.

That's why we live in a culture that says, "Been there, done that, now what?" Not so with the Lord. I've been walking with Him for forty years, and I'm not at all bored. My relationship with Him just gets better and more interesting, more challenging and more intriguing because His throne is *set.*

Revelation 4:2 (c)
. . . and one sat on the throne.

John likens the One on the throne to precious stones. . . .

Revelation 4:3 (a)
And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper . . .

The jasper stone was a clear stone—probably a diamond—and speaks of light. Because God is light (1 John 1:5), He's not in the dark about your disappointing marriage, your distressing physical affliction, or your depressing financial situation.

"Then why doesn't He do anything about it?" you ask.

He has. . . .

Revelation 4:3 (b)
. . . and a sardine stone . . .

The sardine stone was most likely a ruby, which of course, is red. Truly, the ruby-red blood of Christ flowed from His veins as the nails pierced His hands, as the crown of thorns was clubbed into His skull, as the spear sliced into His side. And through it all, He would declare, "There's nothing more I

could ever do or say to prove to you I am in love with you" (see Romans 5:8).

Therefore, when people get angry with God or arrogantly put God on trial, be one who says, "I understand what you're saying, but you're wrong because God proved His love for you. What else could He possibly do to show you He's in love with you and wants the best for you? He laid everything on the line and was slaughtered in your place with you on His mind and on His heart."

In Exodus 28, we read that the high priest wore a breastplate upon which were twelve stones—one for each tribe. The first of the twelve sons of Jacob was Reuben. Reuben's name means "behold" or "see, a son." His stone was the sardine stone. The last of the twelve sons was Benjamin, whose name means "son of my right hand." Benjamin's stone was a jasper. Thus, this One on the throne is, "Behold, the Son of My right hand." It's Jesus.

Revelation 4:3 (c)

. . . and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

The throne of God is not surrounded by danger signs or warning lights. It's surrounded by a rainbow emblematic of grace (Genesis 9:16). That is why we are not instructed to come boldly unto the throne of service, intense worship, or clean living. We are invited to come boldly unto the throne of *grace* (Hebrews 4:16).

I am totally convinced that grace is not the beginning thing—it's the whole thing. God is looking for people to bless who won't take credit by saying, "It's my praying or witnessing, my disciplined spirituality or intense study," but rather, "It's only grace that has brought me thus far." You see, grace is the only thing that truly allows the Lord to get all the glory. That's why His is a throne of grace. *Amazing* grace.

Revelation 4:4

And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

Because the Old Testament priesthood was divided into twenty-four groups (1 Chronicles 24), and because the church is called a kingdom of priests (Revelation 1:6), some suggest that the twenty-four elders speak of the church, with their white garments symbolizing the righteousness given to us in Christ.

In my opinion, however, the twenty-four elders refer to the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles because on each of the twelve gates into the New Jerusalem is the name of one of the patriarchs; and on each of the foundations is the name of an apostle (Revelation 21). If this is the case, the twenty-four elders would symbolize God's people in entirety—the patriarchs representing the Old Testament believers, the apostles representing the New Testament believers.

While we cannot be dogmatic regarding the identity of the twenty-four elders, we can be certain of their ministry, for as the Book of Revelation progresses, we'll see what these elders do in heaven. They don't have board meetings. They don't run programs. They don't pursue higher office. What do they do? Here we see them sitting in God's presence. In the next chapter, they seek out John, saying, "Weep not. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah has prevailed." Later, we see an elder ask John questions to spark spiritual discussion and to provide information and enlightenment. We'll also see the elders singing a new song.

So, too, if we want to be elders, ministers, or servants here on earth, we must be those who sit in God's presence, those who seek out people who are hurting and point them to the Lord. We must be those who share truth; and those who sing a new song of something God is doing today, in this hour.

Revelation 4:5 (a)

And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices . . .

When you see lightning and hear thunder, you know a storm is coming. Keep in mind that John is addressing people going through terrible times and dark days. "Why doesn't God do something?" they must have wondered.

"You can't hear it yet," John would answer, "but a storm is coming—through which God will pour out justice upon the earth."

Revelation 4:5 (b)

. . . and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

In reference to Isaiah 11:2, this speaks of the seven-fold nature of God's Spirit.

Revelation 4:6 (a)

And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal . . .

When you get to heaven, the throne will catch your eye, the One on the throne will warm your heart, and the crystal sea before the throne will bring you peace. If you haven't done so lately, I encourage you to take time to sit in the presence of the Lord. Think on Him, talk to Him—and you will find the troubled waters of your heart and soul become like glass. Why is it we would sooner run out and try to make things right than sit before the Lord? We try to solve this and take care of that—only to find ourselves troubled and upset, fatigued and frustrated. Don't wait until you get to heaven physically to experience the glassy sea of peace. Make time daily to take a trip to heaven in your spirit, to sit in the throne room. The opportunity is yours for the taking.

Revelation 4:6 (b)

. . . and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

The Greek word translated "beasts" actually means "creatures." These living creatures are described in greater detail in Ezekiel 1 and 10, where we are told they are cherubim. Cherubim are first seen in the Garden of Eden. After driving Adam and Eve out of the Garden after they had sinned, God employed cherubim with flaming sword to keep Adam and Eve from eating of the tree of life and living forever in their fallen condition (Genesis 3:24).

In the Book of Exodus, cherubim are seen again on the mercy seat—a fitting place for them to be, as we shall see. . . .

Revelation 4:7

And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.

Since the early days of church history, Iranius and others recognized that the four faces of these cherubim correspond with the four Gospels: Matthew presents Jesus as King, typified by a lion. Mark presents Him as a Servant, the ox representing servitude. Luke presents Jesus in His Humanity, seen in the face of a man. And John presents Jesus as the Son of God, pictured by the eagle who not only soars higher than any other creature, but is the only animal able to look directly into the sun, even as only the Son of God beholds the glory of the Father.

But there's something else about these four faces that intrigues me. That is, in chapters 1 and 2 of the Book of Numbers, God declares that His people were to camp in a certain order as they traveled through the wilderness.

He told the Levites to surround the tabernacle on the north, south, east, and west sides. Why? Those serving the Lord—whether in their neighborhood, on their campus, or in their church always end up camping closest to where God's glory is. That's the beauty of serving the Lord: You get to camp out closest to His glory because when you're serving Him, sharing your faith, praying for others, teaching Sunday school you experience most fully the *chabod*—the glory of God. That's why God lets us serve Him. He doesn't need us. Rather, He allows us the privilege to serve because in so doing we draw closest to Him.

Numbers 2 goes on to say that on each of the four sides were to be three tribes. Judah, Issachar, and Zebulon, numbering 186,400, were to camp on the east side and were known as the Camp of Judah. What is the symbol, the ensign of Judah? The Lion. Why were they on the east side? Because when Jesus comes back, roaring with authority, He's going to come from the East.

Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, numbering 108,100, were to camp on the west side, and were known as the Camp of Ephraim. Their symbol was

an ox.

Reuben, Simeon, and Gad, numbering 151,400, were to camp on the south side and were known as the Camp of Reuben, whose symbol was a man.

Dan, Naphtali, and Asher, numbering 157,600, were to camp on the north side and were known as the Camp of Dan, signified by an eagle.

With the largest number of people camped on the east, the smallest number on the west, and an almost identical number of people on the north and south sides of the tabernacle, the configuration is that of a Cross—which is as applicable practically as it is significant spiritually. . . .

> *Fearing the approaching Israelites, Balak, king of Moab, hired a prophet named Balaam to curse them.*
>
> No problem, *Balaam must have thought.* These people have been idolatrous and rebellious, ungrateful and immoral. Surely God will curse them.
>
> *But Balaam erred greatly in thinking God was angry with His people, for when he attempted to utter a curse over them, all that came out of his mouth was a blessing (Numbers 23—24). Why? Because as he looked over the camp of Israel from the high places of Baal, what did Balaam see?*
>
> *A Cross.*

So, too, we think we deserve to be cursed because we rebel, murmur, and complain. We think we deserve to be cursed because we don't do what we should and, instead, do what we shouldn't. But God looks upon us and sees us in light of the Cross. Therefore, all He desires to do is bless us.

Revelation 4:8 (a)

And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him . . .

How bizarre! you must be thinking. *Creatures with four faces and six wings.* Listen—what seems bizarre to us living in our little corner of time and space will make perfect sense when we get to heaven.

Revelation 4:8 (b)

. . . and they were full of eyes within . . .

Oftentimes, the more insight one has or the more vision one has been given, the more one says, "I thought marriage would be it—but it isn't." Or, "I thought this person would change—but he didn't." Or, "I thought my ministry would blossom—but it hasn't." Truly, the more you see, the more you know, the more disillusioned or disappointed you can become. Not so the cherubim. Even though they are full of eyes, they find someone completely worthy of their gaze.

Revelation 4:8 (c)

. . . and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

Why do the cherubim say, "Holy, Holy, Holy"? Because God is Triune—Father, Son, and Spirit. The word "holy" means "whole"—not eroded by sin, not falling apart at the seams, not hypocritical or flawed in any way. And it is this holiness, this wholeness, which causes the cherubim to fall down in worship. Then, rising to go their way, they see Him again and bow again in ecstasy and awe. And on and on it goes perpetually—not because the cherubim are some kind of wind-up angels programmed to do this, but because they are totally overwhelmed by the beauty of holiness (Psalm 29:2).

Truly, there is nothing as lovely as holiness in a man or woman, in a church or family—for, without even being able to identify it, people are attracted to it. Oh, they might be enamored or seduced by evil or darkness for a season—but when judgment comes, people hate it. Holiness, on the other hand, never becomes disillusioning or disappointing. The more holy a person, family, or congregation is—the more satisfying they are.

Full of vision and insight, the cherubim understand this. And that's why they can't take their eyes off this One who is holy.

Revelation 4:9, 10 (a)

And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and

twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne . . .

As the cherubim worship, the twenty-four elders join in, casting their crowns before the throne. The Bible speaks of five crowns available to you and me. . . .

The crown of righteousness is given to those who love His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). A person who lives in constant expectation of Jesus' return is going to live righteously (1 John 3:3) because one of the most purifying truths in all of the Bible is the fact that Jesus could come back at any moment.

The crown of life is given to those who love Him (James 1:12). If you love the Lord, you're going to hang out with the Lord; and if you hang out with the Lord, you're going to have life abundantly. The degree to which you spend time with the Lord is the degree to which you'll have abundant life.

The crown of glory is given for servanthood (1 Peter 5:4). One experiences the glory, the weight, and the reality of God to the extent that one serves Him.

The soul-winners crown is given to those who share their faith (1 Thessalonians 2:19).

The martyr's crown is for those who lay down their lives (Revelation 2:10). It is my opinion that this refers not only to those who die a martyr's death, but also to those who lay down their lives in obedience to what they know is right. Sure, it might seem easier to leave him, to walk out on the marriage, to do your own thing, but I believe those who say, "I'm going to die to self and do what the Lord would have me do even if it kills me," will receive a crown because they chose to lay down their lives rather than give in to their own fleshly inclinations.

Well, I'm not into crowns, you might be thinking. *As long as I'm in heaven, I'll be happy.* But think of it this way. . . .

You're drafted into the army. As you're getting your hair buzzed, the President of the United States, your Commander in Chief walks in and says, "I have something for you," handing you a hat covered with gold braid and five stars.

"Thanks," you say, "but I'm not into hats. I'll just take one of the khaki caps like everyone else has."

"You don't understand," he would say. "The five stars on this hat open incredible doors. You don't stay in the barracks—you have the great big mansion on the hillside. You have a staff to iron your uniforms, feed you the finest food, and give you whatever you need. It all comes with the hat."

Bunches of Christians don't get this. The purpose of crowns is not to make a fashion statement. They're highly significant. And this life is the only chance we have to get them. There is no other opportunity for the next thousand, ten thousand, one hundred million years. Therefore, what I'm doing now with my time, money, or energy will directly determine whether I am in the General's mansion or on kitchen duty for all eternity. No wonder Paul tells us to run the race so that we may win the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24).

Revelation 4:10 (b), 11 (a)

. . . saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power . . .

Because it is the Lord who gives us the ability to witness, to love Him, to lay down our life in ministry, when we get to heaven, we'll say, "*You* are worthy, Lord. Anything good in my life wasn't accomplished by my own energy or power. It was all *You*."

Revelation 4:11 (b)

. . . for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

Why is worship so important?

First, worship is the program in heaven. If you want heaven in your heart or home tonight, if you feel as if you're trapped in a hellish situation at work or in a terrible situation in a relationship, you can bring heaven into it by worshiping.

Second, worship is the purpose of creation. You see, everything exists for one reason: to please God. Therefore, to the extent you please Him is the extent to which you will experience fulfillment in the deepest part of your soul.

How do we worship? The word itself tells us. *Proskuneo* in Greek means "to turn and kiss." Thus, true worship is any sincere expression intended for the Lord's pleasure. Worship is the program in heaven, the purpose of creation on earth. May His will be done in our lives, as it is in heaven.



5 In chapters 1 through 3 of the Book of Revelation, John sets the stage as he takes pen in hand to record what is about to transpire. In chapter 4, the curtain rises, as he describes the throne room of the King.

And in chapter 5, the drama begins. . . .

Revelation 5:1

And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.

The "book" John sees is actually a scroll. If similar to other scrolls in John's day, it was made of eight-by-ten-inch sheets of papyrus, which were connected horizontally and wound around a wooden handle. Epistles the size of Jude, Philemon, and II and III John would all be written on one single piece of papyrus. The Book of Revelation, on the other hand, would require a scroll fifteen feet long. Due to the coarse back of the papyrus, the three-inch-wide columns of writing were penned on only the smooth side. Here, however, we see a scroll written on *both* sides and sealed with seven seals, which can be perplexing until one studies Jewish history—wherein are found numerous examples of a certain kind of document with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals: a title deed to a piece of property.

> Initially, a title deed would be written only on the smooth side and sealed with a single seal (Jeremiah 32:6–29). But if the owner became unable to meet his financial obligations, he would have to relinquish his title deed—upon the backside of which would be written his debts and upon which would be placed seven seals. If at any time during the ensuing seven years he could pay off his debts, the seals would be broken and the title deed returned.

All of this explains what is in the hand of the One who sits on the throne here in chapter 5: It's the title deed to planet earth. The title deed to this planet was originally given to Adam in the Garden of Eden when God told him to subdue the earth (Genesis 1:28). But Adam forfeited his right to ownership when he ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You see, although Eve was tricked into eating the forbidden fruit, Adam's was an overt, calculated act of rebellion, which is why the Bible speaks of Adam's sin as that which transferred to Satan the title deed of our planet (Romans 5:14). This explains why Paul called Satan the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4) and why Jesus referred to him as the prince of this world (John 12:31).

Therefore, when people say, "Well, if God is so good, why are there wars, cancer, floods, AIDS, depression, rape, and injustice?"—they're blaming the wrong person. The planet God gave man was absolutely perfect. *Man* is to blame for turning the planet over to Satan. And he is the reason the people to whom John was writing were watching their brothers and sisters incarcerated or fed to the lions, crucified, or dipped in hot wax. This book was written not only to deal with prophecy, but primarily to deal with the questions with which John's flock wrestled—and the questions with which Christians have wrestled ever since.

> **Revelation 5:2**
>
> **And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?**

In other words, "Who is able to meet the requirements, to pay off the debt?" Notice he does not say, "Who is *willing?*" Alexander the Great was

willing. Genghis Khan was willing. Charlemagne was willing. Napoleon was willing. Hitler was willing. There have been lots of people who have said, "I want to be in power. Give me a crack at it. Let me see what I can do." But the angel doesn't ask, "Who is willing?" The angel asks, "Who is *worthy?*"

Revelation 5:3

And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.

When no one comes forward to reclaim earth's title deed, something happens that probably never happened before in heaven throughout all eternity past: tears begin to flow.

Revelation 5:4

And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

The Greek word translated "wept much" actually means "sobbed convulsively." John is overcome with grief when he realizes the earth would remain in Satan's grasp forever. And I understand. I look at Benjamin and Mary, and think, *What's it going to be like for them if things continue on the way they have for the past forty years?* If I didn't have this book and know this story, I would be distraught, indeed.

Revelation 5:5 (a)

And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah . . .

The "Lion of the tribe of Judah" takes us back to Genesis 49, where Jacob calls his twelve sons together to pronounce a blessing upon them. As he comes to Judah, Jacob likens him to a lion's whelp, and then says that power and authority would be his until the coming of Messiah . . .

> The year is A.D. 12. In the springtime, the Romans issue a decree declaring that the Jewish people would no longer be able to carry out capital punishment. The rabbis' response to the decree was immediate because they believed capital punishment was the cornerstone of government as defined in the Noahic Covenant. When they were denied this fundamental right of government, and thereby rendered powerless as a nation, the rabbis rushed into the streets of Jerusalem, rending their clothes and smiting their breasts.
>
> In fact, we are told the whole city was filled with the wailing of rabbis who understood that something terrible was happening. The scepter had departed. The authority was gone. Yet Messiah had not come—or so they thought. For on that very day, guess who was sitting in the temple in Jerusalem as a twelve-year-old confounding the scribes and thinkers of the day: The Lion of the Tribe of Judah—Jesus Christ.

So, too, how often we throw dirt in the air and wail and moan, ripping our clothes and crying, "Where are You, Lord?"—when He's right in our midst, working everything out perfectly.

Revelation 5:5 (b)

. . . the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

Jesus was born of the house and lineage of David, but because He preceded David by all eternity, He's the Root *of* David, as well as a Branch *from* David. "I understand why you're weeping, John," said the angel. "But this won't go on forever. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David has prevailed."

At this point, John turns around, expecting, no doubt, to see a massive figure, a roaring lion. . . .

Revelation 5:6 (a)

And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb . . .

The Greek word translated "Lamb" is in the diminutive form—meaning a pet lamb.

Revelation 5:6 (b)
. . . as it had been slain . . .

According to Isaiah 52, Jesus' visage is marred more than that of any other man. Marred more than a man in a train wreck, a plane crash, Hiroshima? Yes. You see, it's not only that Jesus' beard was plucked out, His back beaten, His side pierced, and His wrists nailed. It's the psychological and spiritual stress He experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane that caused the blood vessels in His face to burst. Jesus experienced marring and scarring in ways we'll never understand until we see Him.

But here is the interesting thing: The terror that would mar Him psychologically and physiologically was due neither to the physical suffering He would endure nor to the blood He would shed. The one thing that terrorized our Hero was that He knew He would, for a time, lose contact with His Father as He who knew no sin became sin for us.

We shudder at the thought of hearing our boss say, "You're through," or of our girlfriend saying, "Goodbye." But if someone were to say, "You're going to lose fellowship with the Father for a day," we wouldn't care. Why is it that we are nonchalant about that which terrified Jesus—and we are fearful about that which He said, "Let not your hearts be troubled"?

Jesus was close to His Father, drew His life from His Father, was in love with His Father. That's why He bled from His face at the thought of being out of fellowship with His Father for even a short period of time. That's why He asked that this particular cup be taken from Him. That's why He was marred more than any other man in history. Truly, when we see Jesus, we'll be awed, amazed, and broken by what He did to get us to heaven.

Revelation 5:6 (c)
. . . having seven horns . . .

This speaks of perfect power.

Revelation 5:6 (d)

. . . and seven eyes . . .

This speaks of perfect insight.

Revelation 5:6 (e)

. . . which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

This doesn't mean the Lamb literally had seven eyes. Rather, this speaks of the fullness of God's Spirit.

Revelation 5:7

And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.

The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, the Lamb slain is the only One worthy to pay the price for the bankruptcy of mankind.

Revelation 5:8 (a)

And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps . . .

Since the harps of John's day were ten-stringed, the number brings to mind the Ten Commandments, the law.

"I'm not under the law," some boast.

To them, I say, "Tell me, which part of the law don't you like? The fact that God says we're to love Him and to be kind and considerate to people? That we're to walk in purity so that we might have peace? Exactly with which part do you have such a hard time? Do you really want to live like a pig in the name of being free from legalism?"

In Deuteronomy 23, God gave His people a peculiar set of instructions. "When you have to use the restroom," He said, "go

outside the camp, dig a hole, and bury it." Although this is common sense to us, it was unheard of to the people of that day.

Well, what kind of legalism is this? *they must have wondered.* We're under grace, aren't we, Moses?

Now obviously, bacteria, germs, and diseases would be passed on from person to person if they just continued to do what everyone else was doing. Yet God never gave the reason. He simply said, "I'm in the camp. And this is what I desire."

So, too, you may say, "Drinking's okay," or, "Everyone's going to those shows," or, "Everyone's downloading this . . ." It's not legalism that tells you otherwise. It's the music of heaven being played on the ten-stringed harp. The harp is emblematic of the beauty of a man or woman who says, "The law of the Lord is wisdom—even if I don't initially understand it."

Revelation 5:8 (b)

. . . and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

An angel appeared to Zacharias, saying, "Your prayer is heard. Your wife, Elisabeth, is going to conceive" (see Luke 1:13).

What do you mean? Zacharias must have thought. *I haven't prayed that prayer in decades*—which shows us even the prayers we forget about are still in God's "Active" box. Therefore, I'm convinced that many of the blessings in our lives are answers to prayers we prayed years previously. According to our text, our prayers are kept in vials, or bowls. How full is yours?

Revelation 5:9, 10

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

Who is the only group of people who can say, "Out of every kindred and tongue, nation and people, we have been redeemed by the blood"? Only the church—which means the church is in heaven in chapter 5 before the Tribulation begins in chapter 6.

Revelation 5:11, 12

And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

When does true worship take place? When a worship leader is giving an exhortation? No. When someone is trying to manipulate the heavenly scene to praise? No. It happens when those in heaven see the slain Lamb. So, too, who are vibrant worshipers today? Not those who are manipulated by a worship leader or pastor, but those who understand that Jesus really died for them. Anyone who truly sees the slain Lamb cannot help but worship.

Revelation 5:13 (a)

And every creature which is in heaven . . .

Will there be dogs and cats and pets in heaven? I don't know. However, this I do know: Jesus comes back to earth riding a horse (Revelation 19).

Revelation 5:13 (b), 14 (a)

. . . and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen.

"Amen" simply means "Yes." In 2 Corinthians 1:20, Paul writes that the promises of God are in Christ Yea and Amen, for Jesus *is* the Amen

(Revelation 3:14).

Revelation 5:14 (b)
And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

Because the Lamb slain has taken control of the Book—the scroll, the title deed to earth—worship abounds.



In chapter 6, we continue in the third and final section of the divine outline given in chapter 1 verse 19, when John was instructed to write the things that he had seen, the things that are, and the things that shall be hereafter.

Revelation 6:1
And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.

Chapters 6 through 19 describe the seven-year period of the Tribulation —result of the rebellion and sin of mankind.

Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, when he led thee by the way? Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee . . .

Jeremiah 2:17–19 (a)

To the people of Jeremiah's day, to those who rebelled against the Lord and found themselves threatened by external enemies and internal problems, the Lord said, "It's not that I will punish you. Rather, it will be your own sin that will come back to bite you."

So, too, the world has declared corporately, "We will not allow this Man to rule us (John 18:40). We want to do our own thing. We want to call our

own shots. We want to live our own life."

And in response, God says, "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (see Galatians 6:7).

Our sin will track us down, gang. Which sins? Every sin—every white lie, every questionable late night TV show, every bit of fudging on our income tax. Yes, if we have confessed them, they have all been forgiven and forgotten. But whatever sin in which a man indulges will track him down like a hound dog until it eventually catches up with and bites into him. There is no exception.

I don't know how old a man has to get or how much he has to go through before he finally realizes God's Word is right. "Be *sure* your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). There is no exception. None.

Chapter 6 is the account of mankind's sin coming back to bite him—for although Jesus is reclaiming the title deed to earth, sin still brings repercussions, still exacts a price.

Revelation 6:2 (a)

And I saw, and behold a white horse . . .

In chapter 19, we will see a Man on a white horse, who is clearly the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. But we know by the company he keeps that the man on the white horse here in chapter 6 is not Jesus. . . .

Revelation 6:2 (b)

. . . and he that sat on him had a bow . . .

The word "bow" tends to conjure up an image of a bow and arrow. But I'm not sure that's correct. The first time a bow is mentioned in the Bible, it refers to a rainbow—the token of God's promise that He would not destroy the world with a flood (Genesis 9:13). Now think with me: Right after the church is raptured, Daniel says a man will come, making a covenant with Israel—a seven-year peace treaty. And the whole world will say, "Hooray! At last someone has solved the problem of Jerusalem. There's peace between the Israeli and the Palestinian, between the Arab and the Jew." Thus, this bow could be the same type God displayed to Noah—a rainbow.

Revelation 6:2 (c)

. . . and a crown was given unto him . . .

The Greek word translated "crown" is *stephanos.* A diadem is a permanent crown. A *stephanos,* on the other hand, is a wreath made of olive branches that only lasts a short while.

Revelation 6:2 (d)

. . . and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

How will this one riding a white horse, carrying a bow, and wearing a crown of olive branches conquer? As a peacemaker (Daniel 8:23–25). Isn't this exactly what Jesus prophesied when He proclaimed, "I come in My Father's name, and you receive me not. But another will come in his own name, and him you shall receive" (see John 5:43)?

- How did Jesus come?

  Meekly riding on a donkey.
- What did the world say?

  "We will not have this Man rule over us."
- So who will the world get instead?

  Antichrist.

And look who Antichrist brings with him. . . .

Revelation 6:3, 4

And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

The red horse following the white horse of Antichrist is war. Anyone who thinks there can be true political solutions to the world's problems is

sadly mistaken. Politics is solely about gaining and maintaining power. "From whence come wars and fightings?" James asks. "Come they not even from your own lusts?"—from wanting power, wanting property (see James 4:1, 2).

Truly, any man who thinks he can bring about peace politically, or any church that looks to the government for a solution to our country's problems will be disappointed. Power always brings war. And war is always disguised to look acceptable.

I think of the recent Gulf War. It was covered in patriotism and heroism, with the waving of the flag, the singing of the song, the colorful parade. The ugliness and hellishness of war is so heavily disguised that people begin to think war is acceptable, justifiable, okay—but it's not. Jesus refused to be pulled into politics when the multitude wanted to make Him king (John 6:15). And when Peter unsheathed the sword to fight a "righteous war," He said, "Put it away. That's not My way" (Matthew 26:52).

Revelation 6:5 (a)

And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse . . .

As we shall see, the black horse symbolizes famine—with reference to an imbalance in nature as well as physical famine. We're out of balance, gang. People work at machines that pollute the air to purchase machines that travel at lethal speeds over blacktop so they can come home to sit before high-priced boxes that flicker images telling them what to buy. Then they get up the next morning to repeat the process—all the while living in a state of spiritual famine.

Revelation 6:5 (b), 6 (a)

. . . and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny . . .

"A measure of wheat for a penny" means that the time of the Tribulation will be so economically oppressive that the masses will exist on rations. A

full day's wage will only buy a little wheat or barley because of Antichrist's system that is based on the mark of the beast.

Revelation 6:6 (b)

. . . and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

Biblically, oil and wine symbolize luxury. You see, the wealthy of the world somehow continue to get wealthier even in times of war and famine.

> Alfred Nobel, of the Peace Prize fame, made his fortune manufacturing explosives. When his father, also named Alfred, died, an obituary mistaking father for son stated that "he was a rich industrialist who made his fortune in war."
>
> "*This* is my legacy?" asked a horrified Nobel. And from that day on, he set apart a substantial sum of money to fund prizes for peace and science, medicine and literature.

Nobel is the rare exception, for the famine that follows war never seems to affect the oil and wine of the wealthy.

Revelation 6:7, 8 (a)

And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse . . .

Chloros, the Greek word translated "pale," is the same word from which we get the word "chlorine"—or bleached—and "chlorophyll"—or green. In other words, this horse is really ugly.

Revelation 6:8 (b)

. . . and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

The phrase translated "beasts of the earth" is *therion* in Greek. *Therion* does not mean gigantic or monstrous. It means something frightful of any size —even, I suggest, microscopic, as are the HIV and e-coli viruses.

Each of the three preceding horsemen appeared in disguise. Deception appeared as a peacemaker on a white horse; war as patriotism on a red horse; famine as luxury on a black horse. And this fourth horseman is no exception, for what does it say about a culture like ours whose number one industry is health care?

"We're so advanced!" we think.

No, we're sick!

Revelation 6:9–11

And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

Things are going badly. The bow of the horseman on the white horse is broken. Blood flows. Famine follows. Disease and sickness run rampant. So who does the world blame? The believers who come to Christ during the Tribulation. This is not new. In the days of the Black Plague, one of every four people died. The one group of people spared was the Jews. Today, we know it is because they were simply following the biblical principles of hygiene. But their contemporaries, convinced the Jews were the reason for the plague, persecuted them.

The same will be true in the Tribulation. Amid sickness and blood, economic disharmony and war—believers will be martyred. And this is where the Lord seems to intervene.

Revelation 6:12, 13

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

There's a cataclysmic, catastrophic shaking going on. Why? Some suggest this describes a nuclear winter—the result of a nuclear exchange in which the sun would be darkened, the stars would fall, and the tectonic plates would shift. But I suggest the shaking and quaking is the result of God Himself getting involved when He sees His kids being attacked.

Revelation 6:14

And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

Isaiah 42:5 says that God stretched out the heavens. Isaiah 34:4 says the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll. Skeptics laughed at this for years—until now. Recent findings not only verify that the universe is indeed expanding, but quantum physics and the findings of the Hubbell spacecraft verify that the universe is indeed curved, or scroll-like in shape.

Revelation 6:15, 16 (a)

And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne . . .

Refusing to call on the Rock of Ages, men have no other choice but to cry to the rocks of the earth.

Revelation 6:16 (b)

. . . and from the wrath of the Lamb.

There are those who say the wrath of the Lamb, the real Tribulation, does not happen until midway into this seven-year period. They believe the church is raptured immediately before Antichrist enters the temple, demanding to be worshiped as God. Adherents to this view, called the Mid-Tribulation or Pre-Wrath Rapture, would do well to read Revelation 6 more carefully, because verse 16 makes it clear that the wrath of the Lamb occurs at the beginning of the Tribulation, not halfway through.

"Pray you may be found worthy to escape all of these things," Jesus taught in His Olivet Discourse—not "that you may be found worthy to escape halfway through" (see Luke 21:36).

How is one found worthy?

Simply by being in Christ (Jude 24).

Revelation 6:17

For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

Who can stand? We can. Because God has not appointed us unto wrath, but unto salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:9), we'll be standing in heaven. But we're not the only ones standing. In chapter 7, we'll see three other groups who stand in the day of the wrath of the Lamb. . . .



7

Revelation 7:1 (a)
And after these things I saw four angels standing . . .

Who can stand in the Tribulation? We can because we'll be in heaven. But there are two other groups who will also stand—one of which is comprised of four angels.

Revelation 7:1 (b)

. . . on the four corners of the earth . . .

"Aha!" you say, "The Bible can't be taken literally because everyone knows the earth is round. How, then, can it have four corners?" Tell that to the Pentagon. The U.S. Marines ran an advertising campaign a few years back that said "Our Marines are stationed on the four corners of the earth." Thus, it's a figure of speech we still use today.

Revelation 7:1 (c)

. . . holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.

In Bible typology, wind speaks of the judgment of God (Jeremiah 49:36; 51:1, 16). The seals have been opened—and suddenly it is eerily quiet.

Revelation 7:2 (a)

And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God . . .

The idea of sealing refers to the process whereby a builder would seal with wax the lumber he chose before it was shipped across the Aegean Sea. Arriving at the port nearest him, the builder would carry away whichever trees had his seal upon them.

So, too, the Master Carpenter, Jesus Christ, has chosen us to be the material of His eternal temple. Therefore, He has sealed us with His Spirit (Ephesians 4:30).

Revelation 7:2 (b)–4

. . . and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.

One hundred forty-four thousand will be marked by God as His servants during the Tribulation. And guess what. In chapter 14, verse 1, we see every

single one of them surviving the Tribulation to stand with the Lord. Who *is* this second group who will stand in the Tribulation?

> Many groups claim to be the 144,000. Jehovah Witnesses are one, even though they had to change their stance a bit when their group grew to number more than 144,000. Historical Mormonism also claimed to be the 144,000. Ellen G. White and the Seventh Day Adventists claim to be the 144,000. Garner Ted Armstrong and his Worldwide Church of God claim to be the 144,000.

Why would such groups *want* to be these 144,000, considering that during the Tribulation, the world will be falling apart around them?

Because in so doing, they conveniently write the Jews out of prophecy.

You see, throughout history, Christians and cult members alike have attempted to take Israel out of the eschatological equation. Doctrines such as "Replacement Theology," "Reconstruction-ism," and "Kingdom Now" propound that all of God's promises to Israel were passed on to the church because the Jews rejected Jesus. This is anything but a new idea. . . .

> Following Constantine's conversion in A.D. 312, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. At this point, Christian teachers, thinkers, and theologians said, "Uh-oh. We've been teaching the kingdoms of this world are going to fall—but now we've got a Christian in power in the person of Constantine."
>
> So, Origen, a heavyweight Bible teacher and philosopher of the day said, "I think we've been reading the Scriptures wrong. All of the promises given to Israel are simply allegories and illustrations." And as a result, the power and potency, the effectiveness and impact of the church decreased steadily.
>
> Origen left the scene and was followed by Augustine, who was such a gifted proponent of the case for the allegorizing of the Old Testament, that even in some of today's King James Bibles, headings of the sections that speak of blessings upon Israel read "Blessings to the Church," while sections that speak of curses upon Israel read "Cursing Upon Israel" (Micah 6—7).

Augustine was eventually followed by Martin Luther. And Luther, although a giant of the faith, was terribly wrong on one issue: He hated the Jews. That's why many Protestant pastors supported Hitler well into his regime.

God is not through with His people. His promises to them are firmly rooted in the five covenants He made with them—four of which are unconditional. . . .

In the Abrahamic Covenant, God promised to bless Abraham regardless of what Abraham did or didn't do (Genesis 12:1–3).

In the Palestinian Covenant, God gave three hundred thousand square miles of land—from the Euphrates River to the Nile—to the Jews, even though at the height of their rule under Solomon, they only possessed thirty thousand square miles (Genesis 13:14).

In the Mosaic Covenant, otherwise known as the Law, God promised to bless Israel if they followed His commandments (Deuteronomy 28). Of the five covenants, only the Mosaic Covenant is conditional.

In the Davidic Covenant, God promised that an eternal King would come from David's lineage—fulfilled, of course, in Jesus (2 Samuel 7).

In the New Covenant, God promised to give Israel a new heart upon which He would write His will (Jeremiah 31:31–33).

God is *not* through with the Jew. Because the promises He made to them were *un*conditional, they cannot be forfeited.

"But Israel failed," you say.

So do I.

"But Israel was fickle," you protest.

So are you.

"But Israel faltered," you whisper.

So do we.

That's why in Romans 9—11, God says, "Look at Israel. I have not turned My back on them—and I'll not turn My back on you."

Revelation 7:5–8 (a)

Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nepthalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand.

Listed by tribe, the 144,000 refer to 144,000 Jews who will preach throughout the world during the Tribulation.

Revelation 7:8 (b)

Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, step in and take the place of Joseph. But if Joseph is replaced by two in this list and yet the number of tribes remains twelve, a tribe must be missing. The missing tribe is Dan.

Why? The Rabbis have consistently interpreted the ominous word in Genesis 49:17 to mean that a false Messiah, or Antichrist, will come from the tribe of Dan. That could indeed be true. But Dan's exclusion may also be the result of something else. You see, God specifically says in Deuteronomy 29 that any tribe involved in idolatry would be separated from the remaining tribes of Israel. This is exactly what happened to Dan. When they came into the Promised Land, the people of Dan were given coastal territory. But they weren't happy. They soon migrated north in search of new land, finally settling above the Sea of Galilee in close proximity to the pagans. Because of their geographic location, Dan fell into idolatry.

Consequently, just as Deuteronomy 29:21 prophesied, Dan was blotted out as a tribe. But when the Lord comes back and establishes His kingdom in Israel, guess who is the first tribe given their allotment. Dan (Ezekiel 48:1–3). Such is the incredible grace, mercy, and forgiveness of our God.

Revelation 7:9–11

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,

This company causes the angels to hold a heavenly hallelujah hoe-down, giving worship and adulation, praise and glory. . . .

Revelation 7:12

Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

What would cause these angels, elders, and living creatures to burst forth in such ecstasy? The company described in verse 9. Who are they? Read on.

Revelation 7:13

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

I find it intriguing that one of the elders answered—even though no one was asking. That's exactly what an elder, a mature brother or sister, is supposed to do: answer even though no one's asking. If you go to work or school, saying, "Lord, use me. Bring me someone today who will ask me about the meaning of life—it's possible that will happen, but more than likely you'll wait a long time for that to occur. An elder is one who doesn't wait for someone to ask. Just as this elder did, he initiates spiritual discussion.

Revelation 7:14 (a)

And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest.

In chapters 4 and 5, John recognized the church. Yet he doesn't recognize this multitude before the throne. Therefore, they cannot be the church.

Revelation 7:14 (b)–17

And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Who is this company? First of all, keep in mind the angels are thrilled to see them arrive in heaven. Jesus said that when one lost person is found, all of heaven breaks out in a fabulous chorus of praise (Luke 15:7,10). Therefore, these are people who were lost, but who have come to believe in Jesus during the Tribulation. Be faithful in sharing, precious people—even if you're not presently seeing people respond. Keep proclaiming the Word because the greatest revival in world history will take place *after* the Rapture.

As we read through the book, we'll see angels flying across the sky, and two witnesses preaching in Jerusalem. Then suddenly, a "great multitude which no man could number" will turn to the Lord. But their repentance could very well cost them their lives, as Antichrist declares war on those who refuse his mark.

"I'll wait to get saved until I see the Tribulation really happen," some say. "So what if I'm martyred in the process? It will be worth it."

I answer, "You must understand that people saved during the Tribulation are not the church, and therefore are in an entirely different position than the church. . . .

- This company stands before the throne (verse 9).
- The bride of Christ sits *on* the throne (Revelation 3:21).

• This company serves the Lord (verse 15).

• The bride of Christ is served *by* the Lord (Luke 12:37).

Precious people, *today* is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). Don't wait until you see everything happen with your physical eyes. Be a man or woman of faith, and come, be part of the bride of Christ.



8 **Revelation 8:1**

And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

As the prayers of the saints, mixed with the incense of Christ's intercession rise to the ears of the Father, God silences everything in heaven to zero in on the prayers being offered to Him.



***For topical study of Revelation 8:1 entitled "The Hush of Heaven," turn to page* 1710.**

Revelation 8:2–4

And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.

"Make everything according to pattern," God told Moses concerning the tabernacle (Exodus 25:9). It was imperative Moses followed God's plan because the tabernacle was an earthly shadow of heavenly reality . . .

- Just as heaven has a door, so did the tabernacle.
- As heaven has a sea, the tabernacle had a brass laver, or "molten sea."
- As heaven has a lampstand, the tabernacle had a candlestick.
- As heaven has an altar of incense, so did the tabernacle.
- And as heaven has a throne of grace, the tabernacle had a seat of mercy.

Revelation 8:5

And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

We see the impact and power of answered prayer as the prayers of the saints are hurled back to earth.

Revelation 8:6, 7

And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

It is very possible that these trumpet judgments that include flowing blood, pelting hail, and consuming fire describe what would happen in a nuclear holocaust. Keep in mind, history verifies that weapon systems have never been developed that have not been used. Therefore, it would be an aberration of history if all of the countries that presently have nuclear weapons—including Russia, France, England, Israel, India, China, the U.S., and a host of others—failed to use them.

I am not saying this passage can only refer to a nuclear holocaust. However, the fact remains that upon the detonation of a nuclear warhead, two

hundred fifty-mph winds of fire follow. In addition, aboveground nuclear tests on the island of Bikini caused the surrounding water to shoot thousands of feet into the air, where it froze and returned as hailstones big enough to destroy the equipment intended to monitor it.

Revelation 8:8 (a)

And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea . . .

"As it were" is the operative phrase. Therefore, the text does not refer to a literal mountain, but to something that looked like a mountain. Again, it could be the mushrooming of a nuclear cloud.

Revelation 8:8 (b), 9

. . . and the third part of the sea became blood; and the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.

Water covers three-fourths of the earth, one-third being the Atlantic Ocean. Interestingly, one-third of the ships afloat today are in the Atlantic region. Thus, this passage may refer to one specific site where the firing of weapons causes ecological catastrophe.

"Come on," some say. "These judgments are allegories. You can't take them literally." In response, I challenge them to compare the trumpet judgments with the plagues that befell Egypt (Exodus 7—12). Were those plagues allegorical or literal? Ask Pharaoh.

Revelation 8:10

And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters;

Aboveground nuclear testing has been banned largely due to the discovery of radioactive Strodium 90 in fresh-water supplies

surrounding the areas of detonation.

Revelation 8:11 (a)
And the name of the star is called Wormwood . . .

Perhaps coincidentally, perhaps not—the Russian word for "wormwood" is "cherynobyl."

Revelation 8:11 (b)
. . . and the third part of the waters became wormwood . . .

"Wormwood" alludes to prophecy. But I believe it also speaks of Jesus, who became a worm as He became sin for you and me (Psalm 22:6).

Revelation 8:11 (c)
. . . and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

After the Israelites traveled through the wilderness for three days without water, it is no wonder they dove into the first pool of water they encountered. But discovering it bitter, they called it "Mara" or "bitter." To remedy the situation, the Lord directed Moses to cast a nearby tree into the water—whereupon the water became sweet. It is interesting that in the Exodus 15 account it is a tree that makes the water sweet. The tree is always a picture of the Cross. When you add the Cross to the bitter water in your life, the result will be sweetness. In this passage, however, just the opposite transpires because those who reject Christ's work on the Cross will drink the bitter water of the Tribulation.

Revelation 8:12
And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.

When Mount St. Helens erupted, the dust that shot into the air made the sky hazy for weeks. Can you imagine what would happen if nuclear warheads were being detonated all over the world? If a nuclear exchange took place in the summertime, scientists tell us the high temperature on the west coast of the United States would be fifteen degrees. Obviously, crops would not grow, and starvation would result. Thus, when Scripture talks about a thirty-three percent reduction in the light of sun, moon, and stars, it could be speaking of what scientists ominously term "nuclear winter."

Revelation 8:13

And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabiters of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!

In other words, the angel is saying, "The worst is yet to come because the last three trumpets are worse than the first four."

As we will see in chapter 9, the next three trumpets to blast judgment upon the earth are much more devastating than the first four. The first four trumpets dealt with the arena of the natural. The last three deal with the supernatural—specifically demonic activity.

THE HUSH OF HEAVEN
A Topical Study of REVELATION 8:1

The apostle John is writing to a group of people who are picked on, put down, beat up, and persecuted as they are fed to lions, crucified upside down, and ignited as candles by the hand of the Roman Empire. As you read the Book of Revelation, keep this backdrop in mind. The temptation is to view this book only in the context of current events and eschatology. Although current application is important, we must listen to John's heartfelt words to his readers in A.D. 96—people who had no prestige, power, or prominence—people who perhaps wondered if they even had a prayer.

"Yes! You do!" John would say resoundingly. "These winds of persecution do not have to blow you away because you *do* have a prayer."

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day . . .

Revelation 1:10 (a)

"I was *on* the island of Patmos due to persecution," writes John, "but I was *in* the Spirit. *Ginomai en pneuma* in Greek translates literally "I *came* to be in the Spirit." Not, "I was sitting in a pew, when I suddenly found myself in the Spirit"—but "I *came to be* in the Spirit. I actively pressed in."

How did John press in?

He prayed.

The entire Book of Revelation is a mixture of vision and prayer. And here in chapter 8, John deals with this issue in a most powerful, picturesque, practical way as he reminded his persecuted people to pray.

According to church historians, the distinctive feature of early Christian prayer is the certainty of being heard. In other words, when the early church prayed, they believed God was actually listening.

And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

Revelation 8:1

Commentator after commentator will tell you the silence in heaven of Revelation 8:1 is a mystery. But I suggest to you our text indicates that as the prayers of the saints ascend before Him, it's as though God says, "Hush." To the living creatures who cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy," He says, "Hush"; to the twenty-four elders who praise Him continually, He says, "Hush"; to the thousands of angels who serve Him perpetually, He says, "Hush"—rendering heaven completely, totally silent.

It's as though God says, "At this moment in time, nothing else has My attention like this prayer being offered to Me. I don't want to miss a single word."

Because our days are filled with a cacophony of noise, we don't hear each other very well. We talk, but we don't listen. We converse, but we don't understand. There is, however, one exception: Two people who are totally in love can sit in a crowded, noisy restaurant and converse as though there's no one else around. And that's the idea here. "I am passionately in love with the child speaking to Me," says God, "and I don't want to miss a word he's saying." So, like a laser, fixing His full attention on the person offering even the simplest of prayers, God listens.

People spend thousands of dollars on psychiatrists, or months waiting for a pastoral appointment—yet God gives His undivided, complete, total attention to the prayers of anyone going through tribulation or trouble. The key is simply to pray.

> *And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.*
>
> Revelation 8:3

The prayer that causes silence throughout heaven is mixed with much incense. Throughout Scripture, incense speaks of intercession. Hebrews 7:25 says that Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest, ever lives to make intercession for the saints. In other words, the incense of Jesus' intercession on our behalf

sweetens our prayers. You see, my prayers stink because they're tainted by my flesh. I ask for something I think is good, but Jesus, knowing my request would have disastrous results says, "Father, this is how Jon is praying, but what he really means is . . ."

Knowing our hearts, Jesus perfumes our clumsy and faulty prayers through His intercessory ministry.

> *And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.*
>
> Revelation 8:5

The angel takes the censer of prayer, perfumed with intercession, and casts, or literally "hurls" it back to earth. As the answer reenters earth's atmosphere, the whole world is shaken with incalculable effect. These guys being beat up and persecuted are told through this prophecy that their prayers are heard, and that, in due season, the answer will shake their world.

> *And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.*
>
> Revelation 8:6

What was the answer? It was music to the ears of the persecuted, for when these first-century believers studied the Bible, they studied the Old Testament. And when they did, they read of trumpets. . . .

> The blast of seven trumpets preceded the collapse of the seemingly impregnable walls of Jericho (Joshua 6).
>
> The alarm of two trumpets reminded the children of Israel that the Lord their God would bring them victory (Numbers 10:9).
>
> The sound of the trumpet signaled the year of Jubilee—in which all debts were canceled, all slaves set free (Leviticus 25:9).

Thus, the answer to their prayers was truly music to the ears of John's congregation, for the sound of the trumpet promised victory, liberation, and

the collapse of a city stronger even than Rome.

"Interesting study," you may say, "but I've been saved for a while, and I know differently. Oh, I'm not saying God doesn't listen to prayer generally—just that He doesn't hear My prayer specifically. My marriage was on the rocks," or, "My daughter had cancer," or, "My business was going bankrupt, so I prayed and prayed and prayed—and nothing happened. You talk about blaring trumpets, about a fireball of an answer hurled from heaven. That's fine theoretically, but it doesn't play that way for me personally."

If you feel this way, you're not alone. . . .

> *There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.*
>
> Luke 1:5–7

Because barrenness was considered a curse, Zacharias and Elisabeth were considered sinful in the eyes of their community. Although God deemed them righteous, others believed there was a defect in their piety. This being the case, perhaps Zacharias and Elisabeth lived their lives brokenhearted, wondering what was wrong.

> *And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.*
>
> Luke 1:11–13

"*What* prayer?" Zacharias must have asked. "Prayer for a son? I stopped praying for a son thirty years ago!"

Do you understand the implication? This verse tells us that God remembers even the prayers we forget. "Give us a son," prayed Elisabeth and Zacharias. But they heard nothing day after week after month after year because God wanted to give them more than just a son. His plan was to give them the herald for His own Son (Matthew 11:11).

Slowly, I begin to understand that my prayers remain in the Lord's "To Do" box, even though I may have given up hope long ago. Mixed with the sweet incense of Christ's intercession, they simmer on the altar until God answers them in a way I would never have dared dream (Ephesians 3:20).

Thus, the delay in answered prayer is not due to God's procrastination, but to His desire to exceed even our wildest imagination.

"Shhh," says God. "My child is praying." And at the right time—maybe that day, maybe next week, maybe ten years down the road, maybe half a century later—the answer will quake his world.

Every time you pray, dear saint, you have your Father's full attention. And one day, trumpets will sound; walls will fall; debts will be canceled; victory will abound.

May God help us to be people who pray.



9 Revelation 9:1 (a)

And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth . . .

In the original Greek text, the word "fall" is in the past tense. Thus, newer translations properly render this verse, "I saw a star which had fallen to the earth"—an event that has already taken place. Who is this star? Lucifer, or Satan, who also bears the name "Shining One."

There was Another who also saw Satan fall from heaven. . . .

"Master," said the excited disciples, returning from their first missionary venture, "even the demons are subject to us as we minister in Your Name."

"I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning," answered Jesus. In other words, "You guys are so excited about the power you're experiencing in ministry, but be careful: I saw Satan fall from heaven because he got wrapped up in the power he possessed as heaven's worship leader. No longer a servant, he wanted heaven to serve him. Therefore, do not rejoice in what you are doing or what you have seen happen in your service for Me. Rejoice instead in the fact that your names are written in the Book of Life—that you're saved by the goodness and generosity of God" (see Luke 10:20).

The sober warning to anyone in ministry is to make sure that seeing demons flee or lives changed doesn't become your passion. Rejoice, instead, in what God has done for you in rescuing you from the fires of hell.

Revelation 9:1 (b)
. . . and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.

When Lucifer fell from heaven, Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, and Revelation 12 tell us one-third of the angels went with him and became demons. The worst of these demons—those who "left their first estate" (Jude 6) and had the audacity to have relations with women, producing the "nephilim," or giants, seen in Genesis and Numbers—God cast into the *abussos,* or bottomless pit. But now watch what happens as the plot thickens. . . .

Revelation 9:2 (a)
And he opened the bottomless pit . . .

Can you imagine what will happen when the worst demons presently chained are suddenly released? If every prison in our nation was opened and all the inmates immediately released, it would be Romper Room compared to what will happen when these demons are free.

Revelation 9:2 (b)
. . . and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason

of the smoke of the pit.

If you were transported to seventeenth-century London, you would find yourself enveloped in the smoke of cannons and fires burning day and night. You would soon learn that the intelligentsia of the day had identified fresh air as the cause behind the epidemic claiming one out of four lives. You alone would know the culprit was not fresh air, but rather the fleas on the rats that carried the Bubonic Plague. However, were you to target fleas as the problem, you would be laughed to scorn.

So, too, educated people today scoff at the very idea of demons. "You don't really believe in demons, do you?" they chide. "We now know that demons are only another name for fears, phobias, and psychological imbalances." Gang, they were blowing smoke in 1666, and they're blowing smoke today. The Bible says demons are at work presently causing people to experience depression, emotional distress, and relational trauma. Inspired by the Spirit of God, Paul said we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the very real entities of principalities and powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12).

Revelation 9:3, 4

And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

As we have seen, the sounding of the trumpets would have been especially significant to John's congregation—bringing to mind the victory of Jericho, the freedom of the Year of Jubilee, the call to worship from the temple in Jerusalem. In fact, some of John's readers would have been on the scene when Jesus Himself talked about the angel who would blow his trumpet to gather the elect (Matthew 24). Jerusalem, Jericho, Jubilee, Jesus —all these images would stir the hearts of John's flock as he told them of the

trumpets which would sound. But there's another image that would enter their minds as well: Joel. . . .

Revelation 9:5, 6

And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

Due to these scorpionlike locusts, men will try to take their own lives.



***For topical study of Revelation 9:6 entitled "Euthanasia," turn to page* 1717.**

Revelation 9:7–10

And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.

Even this description of bizarre and horrific demons would remind John's congregation of God's promise. You see, in Joel 2, we find a parallel passage to Revelation 9. . . .

Historically, the prophecy of Joel 2 was fulfilled in Joel's day when Israel was besieged with locusts.

Symbolically, the prophecy was fulfilled in 722 B.C. when the Assyrians marched south and carried the ten northern tribes into captivity.

Prophetically, the locusts speak of the demons that will be released from the abussos in Revelation 9.

But nestled among the dire warnings of this terrible invasion is a wonderful promise. . . .

> And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpiller, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.
>
> Joel 2:25, 26

Gang, whenever we obey Scripture—when we listen to the trumpet, repent, and seek the Lord with sincerity—the Lord not only forgives us but makes up to us what was lost. Amazing! I would have thought it would be enough for God to forgive us. But He says, "No, I'm going to do more than that. I will restore to you what the locusts ate."

You might be fifty, sixty, or seventy years old, and you might be saying, "There's a big chunk of my life eaten away by grasshoppers." Good news for you: Whenever you choose to humble yourself and call out to the Lord, He'll make up for lost time.

> **Revelation 9:11**
>
> **And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.**

Both names mean "destroyer." No matter what your language or culture, the devil always does the same thing: He's an equal opportunity destroyer. He destroys everyone.

Revelation 9:12–14 (a)

One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter. And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels . . .

According to Joel 2, the priests were to lead the people in repentance. We see the same thing happen in heaven. Who is the Priest at the altar of intercession here in Revelation 9? Who speaks to the sixth angel as He orchestrates the judgment of the Tribulation? It's none other than Jesus Christ. You see, God desperately desires to see people who have rejected salvation wake up. Therefore, He will do whatever it takes in their families, financial situations, health, or marriages to get them on their knees where they can finally call out to Him. The question is, what kind of locusts will God have to allow in our lives to wake us from our lethargy, to wake us from our apathy? Whatever it takes, He loves us enough to let it happen.

Revelation 9:14 (b)

. . . which are bound in the great river Euphrates.

The Euphrates was part of the original boundary of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:14). It also marked the east boundary of the Promised Land God deeded to Abraham (Genesis 15:18).

Revelation 9:15

And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.

When the demons that reside in the Euphrates are loosed, they will kill one-third of humanity. Added to the number of those already killed, 50 percent of humanity will be dead. How will this take place? Read on.

Revelation 9:16–19

And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt.

What *is* this army? John's readers must have thought, *Oh, no, the armies of Rome will march once again*—as indeed they would. Yet read carefully, there is reason to agree with many commentators who say this is John's attempt to describe guns and tanks, troop personnel carriers, and missile launchers—a description of what we know today as modern weaponry.

But because this army is set in motion by the four fallen angels of verse 15, it's comprised of much more than military generals or political coalitions. From his heavenly vantage, John sees that the demonic realm directly affects nations.

The demons are stinging. The armies are marching. Jesus is interceding. What's the response of the people? Read on.

Revelation 9:20

And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk.

"Well," you say, "this can't apply to us today. We don't have idols of brass, metal, or gold." But have you looked in your garage lately?

Revelation 9:21 (a)

Neither repented they of their murders . . .

As bills to stop funding for human cloning fly through the House and Senate even as abortion runs rampant, we launch into frontiers that frighten not only the Christian community, but those in the political arena as well.

Revelation 9:21 (b)
. . . nor of their sorceries . . .

The word translated "sorceries" is *pharma keus* in Greek, from which we get our word "pharmacy." And now we begin to see the access point into an individual, a people, a generation, a nation. When a person smokes marijuana, drinks alcohol, uses cocaine, it's a spiritual issue. Why did hippies in the '60s shout, "I am Jesus Christ!" as they dropped acid? Because drugs and mysticism are related. The world thinks drugs tamper only with the mind, but they're about much more than that. They affect the soul.

Revelation 9:21 (c)
. . . nor of their fornication . . .

This is why many of your friends and coworkers are going through their own tribulation right now. "Oh, but I haven't hurt anyone," they say. Wrong. There is a demonic component to pornography, to fornication, to adultery that puts a hook into one's soul.

Revelation 9:21 (d)
. . . nor of their thefts.

It's tax time, folks. "Oh, well, everyone steals," we say. Maybe that's why so many folks are experiencing tribulation today. Is giving Satan access to your world worth twenty dollars?

"I'm confused," you say. "I thought you taught demons cannot possess believers." They can't. You'll never see a demon possess a believer in Scripture because He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4). For a believer, there's no such thing as demon possession. But there is such a thing as demon oppression. Your life and family will be

oppressed continually if you allow demons entry points through drugs or alcohol, pornography or thievery.

The Jews returned to Israel following their Babylonian captivity and rebuilt the temple under Ezra's leadership. As the temple was a picture of the spirit, and the Land representative of the body, physically, and spiritually the Jews were okay. But the walls—emblematic of the soul, the place where decisions are made—were in ruins.

And we've all been there. Our spirit is born again. Our body is functioning. But our soul is constantly attacked by the Enemy. Perhaps it's lust; maybe it's just lousy attitudes. We know we're saved; we know we're going to heaven, but our soul—the seat of government in our life—is vulnerable to attack. And that's where Nehemiah comes in.

You see, Ezra built the temple. But the repair of the walls—the soul—was left to Nehemiah. This one whose name means "comforter" rode around the city for three days, saying nothing to anyone. A picture of the Holy Spirit, Nehemiah looked around and saw destruction. Then he began speaking. And the people had a choice to make. They could either listen to what Nehemiah was saying about their broken-down condition, or they could say, "Beat it, Comforter. We'll put up with the attacks of the enemy."

The people wisely heeded Nehemiah's cry, and Scripture says they "had a mind to work" (Nehemiah 4:6). They got busy and rebuilt the walls that were destroyed. It wasn't easy. There were attacks from within as when Judah, the strongest tribe said, "Let's give up." And there were attacks from without, as they were taunted, harassed, and harangued. But Nehemiah set the example—as the Holy Spirit always will—and kept on working. The people responded and the wall was rebuilt.

Tonight, the Holy Spirit may be speaking to you, saying, "You're being stung badly. You need to repent." If you listen to His voice, He will begin to rebuild and restore the walls of your soul.

EUTHANASIA
A Topical Study of
REVELATION 9:6

For a few years, Jack Kevorkian, also known as "Dr. Death," seemed to show up on the news every few weeks. Up to this point, he has helped at least forty people take their lives. Although he paints himself as a man of compassion, his paintings on canvas, with titles like "Coma" and "Nausea," depict the macabre. His view that the organs of those who die should be auctioned to the highest bidder for use as transplants resulted in the loss of his medical license. And his statement that, "Jesus would have died a much more dignified death in the back of my van than on that Cross," sends chills down the spine. Of the forty-plus suicides he has assisted, autopsies show twenty-four were of people without terminal illness, three without any illness at all.

Jack Kevorkian has asked a question that the second highest court in the land has answered with this judgment: Assisted suicide is not only legal, but Americans have a Constitutional right to seek help in the taking of their lives. Oregon passed a referendum legalizing assisted suicide. No doubt, voters were swept up in the argument that people have a right to die with dignity.

In fact, proponents of assisted suicide point to passages like the one before us and say our God is mean-spirited. Why else would He allow people to be tormented, stung by demon-scorpions, unable to put an end to their pain?

Is it true? As seen here in chapter 9 of Revelation, is God mean? And are we as believers hard-hearted and calloused because we do not agree with the three out of four Americans who maintain that a person has the right to determine the time of his death? Our text says God does not want people taken out of their tribulation so readily. Why? In every single case where suicide is seen in the Word, it is linked to spiritual collapse—Judas Iscariot being the clearest example. But even assisted suicide is seen as a spiritual collapse. . . .

Wounded in battle on Mount Gilboah, King Saul lay on the ground. "Kill me," he said to an Amalekite passing by. The Amalekite did so and then rushed to tell David the news, thinking David would be thrilled that he could now ascend the throne.

But David looked at this man and cried, "How could you touch the Lord's anointed?"—the implication being that he had interfered with God's plan. And David ordered him executed on the spot (see 2 Samuel 1:14, 15).

Why was David upset? Why is it wrong to assist in suicide? I suggest five reasons. . . .

First, God has established the day of death (Job 14:5).

"It's *my* body," people say. "I have a right to do whatever I want." Tilt. Wrong. Not true. Our bodies have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). Asked who determines right from wrong in the area of assisted suicide, Jack Kevorkian answered, "*I* know what is right." Yet Proverbs 14:12 says there is a way that seems right to a man, but the end is death.

Second, pressure is put on the elderly to stop burdening society.

In Holland, where assisted suicide is legal, once a man sees white in his hair, he begins to feel selfish for continuing to live—even though, due to his wisdom and experience, his greatest contributions may be ahead of him.

Third, selfish motives arise.

In a news story years ago, a medical doctor was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. His wife suggested he take his life. But wrangling between mother and son over custody of the man resulted in the discovery of a large estate at stake.

Fourth, irreversible mistakes will be made once suicide is condoned.

Shortly after the fall that broke his spinal cord, actor Christopher Reeve fought off the temptation to seek assisted suicide. In years since, such

advances have been made in spinal cord restoration, it is no longer inconceivable that he will walk again.

Finally, assisted suicide dries up resources.

Only two hospices exist in Holland today, and medical technology is at the lowest point it has ever been, compared to the rest of the European community. Why? The money once spent on saving lives is now spent extinguishing them.

But none of these reasons address this foundational error of euthanasia: Although man is concerned about his present comfort, God is concerned about his eternal state. Never forget this. You see, if these people of Revelation 9 had the "right to die," they would not have seen the angel fly across the sky preaching salvation. They would not have heard the 144,000 call for repentance. They would not have seen the two witnesses—most likely Moses and Elijah—doing miracles in the streets of Jerusalem. It won't be God's meanness that will keep them from killing themselves. It will be His mercy.

The world says, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die. And if you can't eat drink and be merry, then die today." But this is fallacious because we don't die tomorrow. We move into eternity.

It's the loss of a loved one, the struggle with cancer, the dealing with depression, the aging of the body that causes people to say, "I had better develop a relationship with God, or I'm not going to make it through this tribulation." In so doing, they are strengthened and deepened. The people you admire most, the people who impact you the greatest are undoubtedly those who have gone through "the fellowship of suffering" (Philippians 3:10).

> Strolling through the forest, you spy a cocoon hanging from a tree. Upon closer examination, you see it move. "Bobby Butterfly is trying to get out," you say. "He's struggling. He must be hurting. Poor Bobby." And so, in the name of compassion, you take out your Swiss Army knife and clip the bottom of the cocoon, whereupon Bobby Butterfly falls to the ground. You're so proud. After all, you saved

him from the struggle and pain of breaking out of his cocoon. But look at him. He's dead—because the wings of a butterfly are strengthened only through struggle.

"I'm just trying to put her out of her misery," someone might say. But there's a struggle going on in that person's soul that will cause her to fly eternally. How dare we interfere.

"But he seems to know so little." Ah, but you cannot see what God is doing in his soul, in the deepest recess of his being. How dare we claim to know.

I am not arguing that we should sustain life when the time to die arrives. But to assume that we have the right to shorten a life span is biblically and morally wrong.

Life isn't easy, gang. There are sad times. There are struggles. But don't short-circuit them because those times will make you rich in heaven. It's all about eternity, precious people. Don't lose sight of that. There are bigger issues than comfort and ease and freedom from pain. Be wise in these last days.



10 In contrast to chapter 9, which was dark and dismal, chapter 10 is bright and uplifting as we see what follows the demons' release from the bottomless pit. . . .

Revelation 10:1 (a)

And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven . . .

After the darkness comes light as an awesome angel, an ambassador from heaven, descends.

Revelation 10:1 (b)–3

. . . clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, and cried with a loud voice,

as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices.

Many good Bible teachers believe this angel is Jesus Himself because the angel's description is very similar to the description of Jesus in chapter 1. In addition, "angel," or *aggelos* in Greek, means "messenger"—a term that could theoretically apply to Jesus. But I have a problem with this view because the appearance of Jesus on the earth at this time would interrupt the flow of the book. I suggest this is an angel of importance who, like Moses in Exodus 34, takes on characteristics of the Lord because he is in the presence of the Lord. This encourages me because the same thing is true for us. If we spend time with the Lord, we begin to sound like Him, look like Him, and act like Him a little more each day.

Revelation 10:4

And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.

Seven thunderous voices roar in response to the angel. What did they utter? We don't know.



***For topical study of Revelation 10:4 entitled "The Blessing of Not Knowing," turn to page* 1722.**

Revelation 10:5, 6

And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer.

The Greek word translated "time" is *chronos* and means either "time" or "delay." Delay is what is meant here. "Thy kingdom come," we pray. "But where are You, Lord?"

"I'm on the way, but I have chosen to delay," He says.

Why? I believe Peter gives us the reason: The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, but is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Truly, the Lord is longsuffering, waiting for people to receive Him, to hear the Good News, to be part of the kingdom. But there's coming a time when there will be no more delay.

Revelation 10:7

But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.

Because John's readers were seeing family members killed, friends beat up, terrible things take place, he writes, "There's coming a time when all of the questions you have and all of the pain you're experiencing will be alleviated."

Revelation 10:8, 9 (a)

And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up . . .

The angel's command to eat the book may sound odd to us, but it shouldn't. We often talk about people who "devour" books. The only difference is, John does so literally.

Revelation 10:9 (b), 10

. . . and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel's hand,

and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.

Like the book the angel gave John, the Word is sweeter than honey (Psalm 19:10; 119:103). But if the sweet Word we take in through devotions or Bible study doesn't create a sour taste, something's wrong. You see, the fact that we're saved is sweet indeed—but the fact that people we love are going to hell is bitter.

It was only after Ezekiel ate the book that was sweet to his mouth but bitter to his belly that he was able to share boldly with those of whom he had previously been afraid (Ezekiel 3:3, 14). The bitterness in his belly motivated Ezekiel to share truth.

Revelation 10:11

And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.

The idea of "must" here is not a command, but a statement of what will inevitably happen when one takes in the Word. How do you know you've really heard the Word? When you have compassion for the sinner and conviction of your own sin.

"Then why go to Bible study?" you ask. "Who wants a bitter belly? I want sweetness." And I understand this. . . .

I'm watching CNN on TV when a commercial for Compassion International suddenly appears: Sally Struthers showing starving kids in Africa or Southeast Asia.

"Oh no," I say to myself. "I don't want to deal with this now." Click. Sally disappears. So do the kids.

That's what people do with church and devotions and witnessing. "I don't want to go anymore," they say. "It makes my belly hurt." Click, Wednesday night Bible study, gone. Click, Thursday morning worship, gone. Click, devotions gone. "I don't want to deal with this sin, these attitudes, that cynicism. Just give me the sweet stuff."

But you know what happens to those people? Their lives begin to unravel because staying in the Word is the only way to experience prosperity and success (Joshua 1:8). Yes, it will trouble you. No doubt it may upset you. But as time goes on, you will begin to see that your life is centered and grounded, fruitful and prosperous because the Word always does its work.

My prayer is that we will be those who, like John, devour and digest Scripture—the bitter portions as well as the sweet—in order that we, like John, would impact our world for the kingdom.

THE BLESSING OF NOT KNOWING

A Topical Study of REVELATION 10:4

Although the purpose of Revelation is to reveal, we find a concealing in our text as John is forbidden to record the response of the seven thunderous voices to the roaring of the angel in verse 3. Why was John not allowed to record it? After careful study, I have come to the conclusion that I don't have a clue.

Not so Ellen G. White, founder of the Seventh Day Adventist movement. She has much to say about what these voices uttered. So do the Mormons and many other cults who have built entire doctrines upon this mysterious section of Revelation 10.

But Scripture makes it clear that the message of the seven thunderous voices was to be hidden—which raises a very interesting question: Why is it even mentioned? It's like someone saying, "I know something, but I'm not going to tell you." Is the Lord just teasing us here?

No. I suggest to you it's a very simple but significant reminder placed in the middle of the book that there are some things we simply are not going to know.

When I was younger, I thought I had to solve every problem, unknot every difficult situation. I was burdened by my need for answers. However, as I get older, I have discovered a real blessing in *not* knowing. "The secret things belong to Me," declares the Lord (see Deuteronomy 29:29). Why would He want to keep things away from you? Why would He want to keep me in the dark about certain issues?

Not Knowing Keeps Us Humble

When I think I have all the answers in any area, I become puffed up, self-sufficient. Conversely, not knowing the answers, not having the solutions, produces within me a humility that ultimately makes me very happy because it takes all the pressure off. Even as the psalmist said, "Lord, I do not look into things too great for me, but like a weaned child, I just put my trust in You" (see Psalm 131:1, 2), I say, "I don't get this, Lord. So I'll just trust You."

> In the wee hours of the morning, a dozen of us freshman guys at Biola were discussing theology in my dorm room. Dave Hong brought up the question, "Can God make a rock so big He can't lift it?"—which I pondered throughout my classes the next day.
>
> It sounds funny, but it really threw me. I thought, *Oh no! Maybe God can't do everything. Maybe He can't make a rock so big He can't lift it. What does this do to my theology?*
>
> When Sunday finally arrived, we piled into my roommate's Mustang and drove to church in Costa Mesa where, late, we slipped into the back pew. Pastor Chuck was teaching on Deuteronomy 29:29. "You know," he said, "the apostle Paul tells us we are to avoid foolish and ignorant questions like: Can God make a rock so big He can't lift it—because such questions are just dumb."
>
> Suddenly I realized I no longer needed an answer.

Not Knowing Keeps Us Useful

> The son of ex-slaves, George Washington Carver had a keen intellect that afforded him a college education. After graduating from Simpson College right before the turn of the century, Carver was invited to remain at his alma mater as a science professor. Perhaps feeling overwhelmed by the prospect of this new responsibility, he prayed, "Lord, show me something of the mysteries of the universe." But there was no response.
>
> "Maybe I'm asking for something a little too big for me," he thought. "Lord, show me the mysteries of our earth," he prayed. But again, there was no response. "Lord, show me something about our bodies," he then prayed—to no avail. Finally, he prayed, "Lord, show me something about a peanut." And he writes that he experienced a strange sense of God's presence.
>
> So George Washington Carver began to study the peanut, which, up to that time was thought to be a fairly useless commodity. In the ensuing years, he discovered three hundred uses for the lowly peanut: soap, shoeshine, ink, and, of course, peanut butter, for which I am very thankful—and thus began diversification of the crippled economy of the South.

Sometimes I am asked how I know what I do about the Bible. And the answer is very simple: I don't know anything else. If you come to my house, you'll never see me working on my transmission. Is this because I'm so spiritual? No, it's because I tried it once. I took the engine of my 1960 Ford Falcon apart, put it back together, and it never ran again. "Why don't I have the skills other guys have?" I used to ask myself. "How cool it would be to be able to build a house or fix a car!" Yet, the Lord has shown me that because I'm to be focused on the one thing He wants me to be about, I won't be able to do a whole bunch of other stuff.

It's a peanut thing. I know what my calling is, and I can focus on that singularly. So can you. Whatever He's placed in your hand, whatever He's

called you to do—the gifts, the skills, the interests He's given you—that's what you should be about for His glory.

Not Knowing Keeps Us Stable

Over the years, I have seen in my own life and in the lives of others a vulnerability to instability when life gets difficult, a tendency to ask, "Why, God? How come, Lord? What's going on here?"

Yet, knowing we would invariably argue with Him if He answered our questions, the Lord chooses to give us a peace that *passes* our understanding (Philippians 4:7).

You won't find a single verse in Scripture that promises we'll understand. Therefore, happy is the day when a man says with Paul, "I only know in part" (see 1 Corinthians 13:12).

> The sixteen-year-old daughter of G. Campbell Morgan, one of my heroes of the last generation, lay on her deathbed. As he prayed, the Lord gave him the Scripture about Jairus. "Come quickly," said Jairus to Jesus, "my daughter is sick even to the point of death."
>
> "I will come," Jesus said. But on the way, another need arose, and He was delayed in reaching the house of Jairus. When He finally arrived, messengers said, "Don't bother to come in, Master. She's dead." But Jesus took the hand of Jairus' daughter, said, "Daughter arise," and she was healed (see Mark 5:41).
>
> G. Campbell Morgan embraced the promise and knew his daughter would also be healed. Three days later, she died. "Wait a minute, Lord," he cried, "You gave me this Scripture: Daughter, arise."
>
> And the Lord gently whispered, "That's exactly what happened. I took her hand, said, 'Daughter arise,'—and took her to heaven."

After observing and enduring tragedies and difficulties as we all have, I have concluded this: If you think you have to know why things happen or don't happen, you'll go up and down like a roller coaster. "How come she left me?" "Why didn't the business work out?" "Why didn't the college accept me?"

But when you reach the place of saying, "I don't know why; I don't know how; but I know who"—your roller coaster ride will even out.

"Trust Me," thunders a voice from Calvary in the midst of the unsettling earthquake and the mysteriously dark sky. "I'm laying down everything for you. I'm dying in place of you. I love you. If I gave everything for you, you can trust Me in the situation you're going through."

I might not know what or how or why—but I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded He'll do what's best for me (2 Timothy 1:12).

"We know all things work together for good," said Paul (see Romans 8:28). He didn't say, "We *see* all things work together for good," because we might not see that happen this side of eternity. But when we get to heaven, we'll say, "Thank You, Lord, for Your goodness and grace in allowing that trial. I thought it was a tragedy. But now I see that righteous and true are Your judgments, O Lord."

I stopped asking "Why?" a long time ago. I don't even think about it. I just know God loves me. And I know He loves you. I like what Jesus told Peter when He washed Peter's feet: "What I do now you understand not, but you shall hereafter" (see John 13:7). In other words, "What I'm doing now, you don't understand. But you will . . . down the road."

Such is the Word of the Lord for many of us today.

11 We are at the halfway point of the Tribulation, and this is quite an incredible section.

Revelation 11:1 (a)

And there was given me a reed like unto a rod . . .

A measuring instrument in John's day, a "reed like unto a rod" would probably be approximately ten feet high.

Revelation 11:1 (b)

. . . and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.

Midway into the Tribulation, John is told to measure the temple, which presupposes there is, indeed, a functioning temple at this point.

Throughout Scripture the temple plays a key role. . . .

> Solomon built the first temple on Jerusalem's Mount Moriah in 1050 B.C. More than four hundred years later, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and decimated the temple in 586 B.C.
>
> About seventy years after Babylon's first invasion of Israel, Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple in 536 B.C.
>
> A "third" temple was built in 20 B.C. However, not all scholars deem this the third temple because it was simply an expansion of the old. Wanting to obtain the favor of the Jewish people, King Herod enlarged and expanded the temple—a project that took decades to complete. Jesus referred to this temple when He said, "There shall not be left one stone standing" (see Matthew 24:2).
>
> Forty years after Jesus' resurrection, His prophecy came to pass. While sacking the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, a Roman soldier disobeyed the orders of General Titus and threw a torch into the temple. The ensuing fire was so hot that it caused the gold to melt and run down the temple walls into the cracks of the hundred-ton stones. The soldiers pulled down every stone from the walls to extract the gold—fulfilling Jesus' prophecy to the letter.

But there is a fourth temple, yet to be built. In the Institute of Temple Treasures in Jerusalem, you can see preparations for this fourth temple being made even now. Sixty percent of all instruments needed for temple worship, according to Old Testament regulations, are completed. And two yeshivas, or schools, are training young men with the last name of Cohen—Cohen meaning "priest"—to sacrifice animals in the temple tradition.

Why? Because the Orthodox Jewish community understands that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). And since they do not believe Jesus is the Messiah who died for their sins, they realize they must make sacrifices for the forgiveness of their sins. Does this mean we will see the temple rebuilt before the Rapture? Not

necessarily, for there's a rather large obstacle in the way: A mosque known as the Dome of the Rock. . . .

Revelation 11:2 (a)
But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not . . .

In the late 600s, a man named Omar built a mosque on the thirty-five-acre platform over the rock believed to be the site of the Holy of Holies. This renders a temple rebuilding on this site impossible because the Muslims would immediately invade Israel if anything happened to the mosque.

But twenty years ago, after spending sixteen years studying the temple mount area, a physicist and archaeologist at Hebrew University named Dr. Asher Kaufman came to some remarkable conclusions. In his landmark article in the March/April 1983 issue of *Biblical Archaeological Review,* Dr. Kaufman declares that while the Mosque of Omar has been assumed to sit on the Holy of Holies site, the true location is actually one hundred meters north.

What is one hundred meters north of the Dome of the Rock? A small gazebo-like structure, below which is the only other place the original bedrock of the temple is exposed. As opposed to the jagged rock in the Dome of the Rock, however, the stone one hundred meters to the north is flat—providing a much more likely setting for the ark of the covenant within the Holy of Holies.

Not only more logical, this site seems more historical. You see, according to the Mishna—the highly esteemed book of Jewish oral traditions—when the priest stood in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he could look through the veil, through the door, and see the Eastern Gate directly before him.

The results of a secret excavation in 1970 confirmed that the original Eastern Gate is directly below the present Eastern Gate. This makes Kaufman's assertion even more intriguing. For if you stand one

hundred meters north of the Dome of the Rock, the Eastern Gate is in plain view.

In addition, when the Muslims built the gazebo-like structure in A.D. 680, they gave it two names: The Dome of the Spirit, and the Dome of the Tablets. Thus, even Islam recognized this site as the spot where the tablets (the Ten Commandments within the ark of the covenant) and the Spirit (the *shekinah, chabod,* glory of God over the ark of the covenant) had been.

So, according to Kaufman and most scholars, the temple could be rebuilt and the Dome of the Rock would remain standing. But the Dome of the Rock would be in the outer courtyard of the temple—which brings us to the rest of verse 2. . . .

Revelation 11:2 (b)

. . . for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

During the Six-Day War of 1967, the Israelis launched a preemptive strike against the Arabs and recaptured the city of Jerusalem. General Moshe Dayan could have easily booted the Muslims off the temple mount at this point, saying, "You lost. Too bad." But he didn't. In a gesture he himself never fully explained, he let them retain control of the thirty-five-acre parcel. Thus, the outer court of the temple remains "given to the Gentiles" to this day.

Revelation 11:3

And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

Why are there two witnesses? Because "in the mouth of two witnesses every word shall be established" (2 Corinthians 13:1). Thus . . .

- Two spies of the twelve commissioned were correct (Numbers 13).
- Joshua sent in two spies to scope out the land (Joshua 2:1).

- There were two angels in the tomb on Easter morning (John 20:12).
- Jesus sent out His witnesses two by two (Mark 6:7).

Revelation 11:4

These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.

The two witnesses are likened to the two olive trees in Zechariah 4 that provide a perpetual supply of oil and are emblematic of the Spirit's anointing in ministry (Zechariah 4:3–6).

Revelation 11:5, 6 (a)

And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy . . .

Who are these men hinted at in Zechariah 4, clothed in sackcloth in Revelation 11, with power to bring about drought and scorch anyone who hassles them?

- Elijah called down fire from heaven that destroyed one hundred soldiers (2 Kings 1).
- Elijah prayed, and the heavens yielded no rain for three and a half years (James 5:17).
- Elijah never died, but instead rode to heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:11).
- The Old Testament ends promising Elijah's return (Malachi 4:5).

Thus, I believe Elijah is one of the two witnesses, who, anointed with the oil of the Holy Ghost, will shine as brightly as candlesticks in the midst of the Tribulation.

Revelation 11:6 (b)

. . . and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.

While some have suggested Enoch or Zerubbabel as the second witness, I believe it is Moses.

At Moses' command, Egypt was plagued with darkness, frogs, and death; at his command, the water of the Nile turned to blood (Exodus 7—12).

Moses, representing the law, appeared with Elijah, representing the prophets, on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17).

Satan and Michael the archangel argue over the body of Moses (Jude 9)—very likely in order to prevent his resurrection as the second witness.

Revelation 11:7, 8

And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

Jerusalem, the only city God calls His own, the city over which Jesus wept compassionately, is now likened to Egypt and Sodom because she has rejected Christ.

Revelation 11:9

And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves.

For hundreds of years, commentators did not understand how the whole world could see this event. Then enter CNN, *20/20,* and Tom Brokaw. I have a piece of advice for Brokaw and the boys: When this story breaks, leave your camera crews in place because it's not over yet. . . .

Revelation 11:10

And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.

The only time people rejoice in the Tribulation is over the death of the two witnesses. "Hey, the guys who made us feel uncomfortable, who talked to us about stuff we didn't want to hear are dead! Leave them in the gutter, and let's celebrate!"

If you've been beaten down or left out, rejoice. You're in good company.

Revelation 11:11, 12

And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.

These witnesses are examples of what you can be in the last days in which we live. You're to share the gospel with people. Yes, you'll be beat up emotionally and verbally, ostracized, left out, not invited to the party. But you know what will happen? Three and a half days later, you'll rise. There will be a spring in your step and joy in your heart as you find yourself soaring emotionally. Truly, gang, there is nothing, nothing, nothing like sharing your faith. Even if you're put down, beat up, left out, you'll find yourself revived.

If you feel your relationship with the Lord is stagnant or tedious—witness. I guarantee, like the two witnesses in Revelation 11, you'll be caught up into heavenly places. Witnessing is the single most important way I have found to see my own faith revived and renewed.

Jesus didn't tell us to preach the gospel because He wants us to be miserable. On the contrary, He said, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (see Luke 6:38).

Revelation 11:13 (a)

And the same hour was there a great earthquake . . .

Not only is the world shaken up emotionally by the resurrection of the two witnesses but it is shaken physically in a great earthquake.

Revelation 11:13 (b)

. . . and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand . . .

The notes in the margins of newer translations correctly render this phrase "seven thousand men of names." If this earthquake, originating in the fault of the Rift Valley that runs through Israel to North Africa, claims the lives of seven thousand notables, it must also take the lives of multiplied thousands of unknowns in Jerusalem.

Revelation 11:13 (c)–15 (a)

. . . and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly. And the seventh angel sounded . . .

Here is the last of the seven trumpets, sounded not by God—as those who espouse a mid-Tribulation Rapture view suggest—but by an angel.

Revelation 11:15 (b)–17

. . . and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.

"See," say those who believe in a mid-Tribulation Rapture, "the seventh trumpet sounds and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our

Lord." But they don't take into account the fact that the verb translated "are become" is in the aorist active indicative tense, which means the kingdoms of this world *are becoming* the kingdoms of our Lord. It is what is referred to as a proleptic statement. That is, it is an event so certain that it is spoken of as if it has already taken place.

> *In Isaiah 53:5, we read, "He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities." Of whom is this speaking? Jesus. Had this already happened when Isaiah penned these words? No. But Isaiah wrote it in the past tense because it was as certain as if it had already happened.*
>
> *In Romans 8:17, we read that we* were *glorified because one day, we, indeed, will be.*

How do you speak? Those who are spiritually dyslexic say, "I can't make sense of what's going on. Everything's backward. Why even worship? What's the point of praying?" On the other hand, those who are proleptic say, "Even in the middle of my tribulation, the midst of my difficulty, the center of my pain, I know God is on the throne and He is good."

> *A baby girl was born thirty-one days prematurely to Matt and Cyndy McCollum, missionaries in Honduras. Little Maria Nicole stopped breathing and began to turn blue. Since the tiny airport at La Ceiba was closed, it was doubtful whether she would survive. But I was so blessed talking with Matt's dad, Jerry, the next morning because before he even knew the outcome, he said, "Certain members of Cyndy's family who aren't interested in the things of God are now praying and seeking Him about this situation. And the health care official in Honduras has rededicated her life to Christ watching Matt and Cyndy go through this trial. Great things are happening."*

Jerry could have said, "My kids are serving God, and *this* is what He does?" Instead, he was proleptic.

It was after they made it through the Red Sea on dry ground that Miriam led the multitude—who moments before had wanted to kill Moses—in worship (Exodus 15:20). While praise is always fitting, how much better if they had praised God before *the Red Sea parted?*

The kingdoms of this world *are become* the kingdoms of our Lord. Such is the language of heaven. If you want heaven in your heart or home, speak proleptically as you praise God prolifically.

Revelation 11:18 (a)
And the nations were angry . . .

As the earth quakes, are people repentant? No, they're angry.

Revelation 11:18 (b)
. . . and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.

Those who destroy—or, literally, "corrupt or pollute" the earth will be destroyed, while those who serve God will be rewarded.

Revelation 11:19 (a)
And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament . . .

Sometimes I am asked if the "ark of his testament," or the ark of the covenant, will be found. I don't think so because Jeremiah 3:16 says in the last days the ark will not be mentioned—probably because no one remembers it. But as the temple is merely a shadow of the reality in heaven, the true ark will be seen in heaven.

Revelation 11:19 (b)

. . . and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

The "great hail" in the last verse of chapter 11 sets the stage for the parade of great beings and events John is about to witness in chapter 12. . . .



12 Chapter 12 is a great chapter, for we find a great wonder in verse 1, a great dragon in verse 3, a great wrath in verse 12, a great eagle in verse 14. In it, we also find great help, for it is here we find great insight about our Enemy.

Revelation 12:1, 2

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

Who is this woman? Throughout history, there have been a number of suggestions. . . .

Many believe this is the Virgin Mary. But I disagree because if this was Mary, she wouldn't experience birth pains in heaven—a skewed image on many counts.

Others believe this is Mary Baker Eddy, and Christian Science is the birthed child.

Others believe it's the church. But again, this interpretation paints a twisted picture of the church giving birth to the One who will rule and reign. The church doesn't give birth to Jesus. Jesus gives birth to the church. How so? It was the rib taken from Adam's side that birthed Eve. So, too, as He hung on the Cross, it was the blood and water flowing from the side of the Last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45) that birthed the church.

I believe the only contextual and theological solution to the question of the identity of this woman in Revelation 12 is Israel.

Contextually, while the church is the bride of Christ, Isaiah and Hosea identify Israel as the wife of Jehovah.

Theologically, the answer to questions regarding any particular issue can most often be found by looking to its first mention in Scripture. Employing this principle of first mention, we first see sun, moon, and stars in a dream that pertains directly to Israel (Genesis 37).

And it is Israel who births the One who will rule with righteousness, for Jesus was born of the tribe of Judah.

Revelation 12:3 (a)

And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon. . . .

Throughout the remainder of Revelation, the dragon refers to Satan, as it does elsewhere in Scripture (Isaiah 27:1; 51:9).

Revelation 12:3 (b)

. . . having seven heads . . .

The seven heads refer to the city from which Antichrist will reign—the city referred to throughout history as the City of Seven Hills: Rome.

Revelation 12:3 (c)

. . . and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

While the seven heads refer to a geographical place, the ten horns refer to Satan's political base. The horns, like the ten toes of Daniel 2, typify the ten-nation confederation that will emerge from the old Roman Empire.

Revelation 12:4 (a)

And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth . . .

Lucifer was chief of all created beings in heaven. When he launched a rebellion against God, one third of the "stars"—a biblical term that refers to angels—were cast out of heaven with him.

Revelation 12:4 (b)

. . . and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.

Satan's attempt to annihilate Israel is an overriding theme throughout both biblical and secular history. Whether it be through Cain or Pharaoh, Haman, Herod, or Hitler, Satan has been so relentless in his drive to destroy God's people that at one point, only one son of the house of David was left alive.

Why have the Jews been perpetually persecuted? The only explanation must be the one we see here in Revelation 12: The dragon is determined to devour the child of the woman. You see, if there is no Jerusalem, if there is no Israel, if there are no Jewish people, how could Jesus fulfill the prophecies of His return to rule and reign His people in Jerusalem? Consequently, the plan of the dragon is to keep Messiah from returning to Israel by annihilating the Jews. If you don't grasp this, you'll never have a satisfactory answer for the mystery of anti-Semitism.

Revelation 12:5

And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.

This One who will rule all nations, who ascended into heaven, is, of course, Jesus.

Revelation 12:6

And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two

hundred and threescore days.

As we shall see, when Antichrist enters the temple and demands to be worshiped, the great Tribulation Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24 begins. And 1,260 days, or 3.5 biblical years, of unparalleled hostility will break loose against the Jews. That is why Jesus told the Jews to flee to the wilderness when they see this day dawn (Matthew 24:15). Isaiah tells us exactly where this wilderness is:

> Send ye the lamb to the ruler of the land from Sela to the wilderness, unto the mount of the daughter of Zion. For it shall be, that, as a wandering bird cast out of the nest, so the daughters of Moab shall be at the fords of Ar-non. Take counsel, execute judgment; make thy shadow as the night in the midst of the noonday; hide the outcasts; bewray not him that wandereth. Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab; be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler: for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land.
>
> Isaiah 16:1–4

As your margin might say, "Sela" means "Rock" or "Petra." Petra is truly an amazing city. Located in Moab, or present-day Jordan, this city carved of stone has stood for centuries, preserved largely because the sole entrance is a passageway only twelve feet wide.

Revelation 12:7, 8

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

"Wait a minute," you say. "I thought Satan was already cast out of heaven." He was, but as seen in Job 1, he still has access to heaven.

Revelation 12:9

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

The word "devil" means "accuser" or "slanderer." "Satan" means "adversary" or "one who lies in wait."

Revelation 12:10

And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

When rewards are given to believers at the judgment seat of Christ, Satan —the accuser of the brethren—says, "What? *Him? Her?!* Why are *they* getting rewards?"

And what happens in heaven occurs every day on earth as Satan whispers in your ear, "You're not worthy to be blessed. You're not good enough to be used." Please understand the difference between condemnation—which is from Satan, and conviction—which is from the Holy Spirit. The condemning work of Satan always pushes you away from God. The conviction of the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, always draws you closer to God. The condemnation of Satan is always about self, about never measuring up, about hopelessness. The conviction of the Spirit is always about forgiveness, about going on, about God's glory and grace.

Revelation 12:11, 12

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabiters of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

Satan is overcome in heaven. He can be overcome on earth the same way. . . .



***For topical study of Revelation 12:11 entitled "Overcoming the Enemy," turn to page* 1732.**

Revelation 12:13

And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.

Unable to accuse the believers in heaven, Satan makes his last attempt to thwart fulfillment of the prophetic plan as he spews his anger upon God's people.

Revelation 12:14

And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

What are these two wings? The eagle being the symbol of America, some suggest this could be a reference to United States military power. Could it be America, the only country who has consistently stood by Israel since her return to the Land in 1940?

Could it be the firepower of the sixth fleet stationed off the Mediterranean Sea? Could it be that the United States will airlift the people of Israel to Petra?

I don't know. I don't think so. But somehow the Lord will take His people to the place He has prepared for them in the wilderness. Although we can't be certain of the identity of the two wings of the eagle, this much we do know: God has used this terminology before. . . .

> Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.

Exodus 19:4

> For the LORD's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.
>
> Deuteronomy 32:9–12

After choosing a site on a rocky cliff sometimes thousands of feet above the ground, a mother eagle constructs her nest. For protection, she arranges sharp sticks along the perimeter. But inside, the nest is soft and comfortable for the eggs. So, when Ernie Eaglet pops out of his shell, he finds his accommodations quite to his liking. "Wow! What a view!"

And with Mama Eagle dropping breakfast, lunch, dinner, and an after-dinner mint into his beak every day, he's a happy eaglet indeed—until his girth increases and he begins to bump into the sharp sticks Mama purposefully placed around the nest. Suddenly, the once-cozy abode becomes a little uncomfortable.

The same goes for us. When what was once so cozy—that group you were in, those people you were linked to, the job you had—gets a little irritating, you may have a tendency to grumble. But you must realize God does this intentionally because He will not allow you to perpetually nest in a place of fatness and flightlessness.

Then, just when Ernie thinks he can't stand one more poke, Mama Eagle comes and, with her powerful wings, bumps the nest—sending Ernie tumbling out. Flapping his little wings frantically yet futilely, he falls hundreds of feet and is about to crash when Mama Eagle scoops him up on her wings and takes him back to the nest. "Whew! What was *that* about?" Ernie wonders.

And for a couple of days, he's happy again, being served breakfast, brunch, lunch, and dinner. But then the pesky sticks begin to bother him again, and after a couple of days—bump goes the nest and out he falls. Once more,

right when he thinks his life is over, there's Mom bearing him on her wings, returning him to the nest. Now Ernie's really wondering. "Every time I get comfortable, every time I settle back in, Mama comes and turns my nest over. What kind of parent is she, anyway?" Yet the process is repeated five or six times, until one day—Ernie soars. And as he does, he understands that the pokes, the overturned nest, the perilous plummeting were all about spurring him to do what he never would have done on his own. They were all about teaching him to fly.

Precious saint, if you've been flapping or squawking or crying, this word is for you: God says, "I found you in a wasteland. You are the apple of My eye. I've got nothing but the best in My heart for you. You're not going to crash. I'll always be there to catch you. But I'm going to continue working with you that you might fly."

As a result, I am slowly learning not to be quite so squawky, quite so angry, quite so fearful—but to remember the plan of the Father to bear me on eagles wings. The pokey sticks are preparatory for the overturning of the nest. And the overturned nest is absolutely essential to teach me to fly.

Revelation 12:15

And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.

Satan, through Antichrist, spews his hostility and anger upon the Jewish people, chasing them like a flood. How many Jews will survive? According to Zechariah 13:9, two out of three will die. But the end result will be that one-third of Israel will finally acknowledge the Lord and will enter the kingdom, the Millennium, the thousand years of peace.

Revelation 12:16, 17

And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

In the Book of Numbers, we find another account of the earth ingesting someone. After rebelling against Moses, the ground "clave as-sunder" under the feet of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, swallowing not only them, but their possessions and allies (Numbers 16).

"That may be," you may say, "but the text before us is not the account of a few men, tents, and camels being swallowed. This is about an entire *army* complete with bombers and missiles, troop carriers and helicopters. How could this be?"

Look at recent history. . . .

> When diplomacy failed to bring about the release of Americans held hostage in Iran in the 1980s, we decided to unleash our military prowess. After months of planning, we sent our most advanced technology and our finest fighting men to Iran. However, as they approached the Iranian Embassy, a sandstorm broke loose so severe that it shut the mission down—and, in so doing, eventually contributed to the demise of the Carter Administration.

The Middle East is a tricky place, folks. The earth could easily swallow an army through a sandstorm or a multiplicity of other events. However it transpires, this much is sure: The army of Antichrist will be thwarted in its attempt to decimate the Jews.

OVERCOMING THE ENEMY

A Topical Study of
REVELATION 12:11

. . . for we are not ignorant of his devices.

2 Corinthians 1:10

Because far too many believers are ignorant of who our foe is and the way he works, we're going to join the apostle John as he looks at our enemy. . . .

Past History

Before our enemy was called the devil, his name was Lucifer, or "Shining Star." But he developed an "I" problem. . . .

> *For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.*
>
> Isaiah 14:13

According to the Book of Ezekiel, which describes Lucifer as the power behind the king of Tyre, Lucifer was not only a worship leader in heaven, but he was unparalleled in beauty and uniquely anointed. . . .

> *Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.*
>
> Ezekiel 28:12–15

Lucifer wasn't merely a good musician; he was a musical instrument—with tambourines for hands and a pipe organ for a voice. And there he was, year after decade after millennia leading all of heaven in worship—until the day he began to wonder why all of the praise was going to someone else.

Those who serve the Lord must keep this in mind, for that same tendency can creep in anytime we think, *Here I am doing this, but no one seems to*

appreciate what I'm doing; no one acknowledges what I've done. Be careful. That's the iniquity of Lucifer.

Lucifer was cast out of heaven and became Satan, or "Adversary"; the Devil, or "Accuser." And to this day, like fingernails on a blackboard, praise and worship drive him crazy because they remind him of what he once was, but will never be again.

> King Jehoshaphat was surrounded by the Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites—just as you may have been surrounded by depression, discouragement, and defeat.
>
> After the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, a man named Jahaziel stood up and said, "Don't fear, Jehoshaphat. The battle is not yours but the Lord's. There is no need to fight. Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord." So, instead of soldiers, Jehoshaphat sent the choir into battle, and as they began to sing, the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites, became so confused that they began to fight among themselves—leaving the Israelites the victors (2 Chronicles 20).

There is *power* in praise!

Future Hostility

Following the loss of his position in heaven, Satan will spew his anger upon God's people on earth in the Tribulation as he continues to accuse the believers in heaven.

"What's he doing in heaven?" you say. "I thought he was cast out." He was. But as we read in Job 1, he still has access to heaven. Consequently, in the middle of the Tribulation, Michael the archangel wages war against Satan in heaven. It is possible that Michael, whose name means "Who is like God?" took the place of this one who claimed, "I will be like God." Be that as it may, Michael and the angels prevail over Satan and his demons.

In his anger, Satan continues his campaign against the church as he "accuses the brethren day and night" (see Revelation 12:10). Of what does he accuse the believers? Of not deserving the rewards they are given. You see, here in the middle of the Tribulation, believers stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Called the *bema* because that was the term used for the place where rewards were given for athletic events, the judgment seat of Christ is not where we will be judged for our sin because our sin was completely forgiven—past, present, and future—through the finished work of the Cross. Rather, the judgment seat of Christ is the place where rewards are given—crowns that will determine our position, our ministry in eternity.

And who's on the sidelines, hooting and hollering, "What?! You're giving *Mike* a reward? I know him. I've been watching him for years. He's done this and that and he failed to do the other. Why is *he* getting a crown?" Satan will not only do this in the middle of the Tribulation, but he will appear in your present situation. . . .

Present Strategy

As he does in heaven, Satan will try to keep you from being used and blessed by accusing you night and day, saying, "You're not worthy to be in ministry. You're not good enough to have your family blessed. You're not spiritual enough to have your prayers answered."

But he can be overcome on earth the same way he's overcome in heaven: by the blood of the Lamb, the word of testimony, the dying to self.

The Blood of the Lamb

It was the blood applied to the door in the shape of a Cross that spared the firstborn as the death angel flew over Egypt (Exodus 12). So, too, God will bless your home, marriage, family not on the basis of how much you've prayed or how good you've been, but on your understanding of the potency and the sufficiency of the blood of Calvary.

First John 2:1 says if any man sin, he has an advocate, a defense lawyer in the person of Jesus Christ. Satan is the prosecuting attorney, accusing and condemning us endlessly. Jesus, however, is our defense attorney, our advocate. And what would our defense attorney have us do? He would have us agree with our adversary—a truly brilliant strategy. The word "Satan" means "adversary." And what did Jesus tell us to do with our adversary?

Agree with him (Matthew 5:25).

When Satan condemns you, don't fight him. Don't say, "I didn't really mean it" or, "I'm not that bad," or, "I can't help it." Say, "You're right. In fact, I'm a lot worse than you even know because, since you're not omniscient, Satan, you can't see the deceitful and desperately wicked state of my heart (Jeremiah 17:9). But the blood of my defense attorney has cleansed me from my sin—past, present, and future. Therefore, it's not about anything I do or don't do. It's all about what *He's* done on my behalf. It's all about the blood."

The Word of Their Testimony

What is my testimony? What has the Lord done for me? As He did with David, He rescued me from a horrible pit, brought me out of miry clay, and set my feet upon the Rock (Psalm 40).

Every cult, every false religious system has man reaching up to God. Whether it be through knocking on doors, selling Watchtower magazines, or being baptized in holy underwear—all religions say, "I can make it to heaven's gate by my own efforts, my own wisdom."

Only the Christian says, "I didn't seek after God (see Romans 3:11). *He* reached down to me."

The accuser of the brethren is silenced when the blood is applied and the testimony of grace is shared. If you are still trying to impress God with anything you do or don't do, the Enemy will beat you every time. It's when you come to a place where you say, "The word of my testimony is simply grace—amazing grace."

Dying to Self

Many Christians aren't blessed because they constantly monitor their own spiritual condition. "Am I spiritually fit enough for God to bless me? Is my spiritual temperature high enough for God to use me on the job or with my kids?" Yet Jesus taught us to deny ourselves (Matthew 16:24), which is why Paul didn't judge even himself (1 Corinthians 4:3). Here's the key: Forget yourself and let God bless you for no reason. Let Him use you regardless of what you think or how you feel. And in so doing, you'll overcome the Enemy.

In Isaiah 7, we see this all come together. . . .

"Ask a sign of God," said Isaiah to wicked King Ahaz.

"I will not ask a sign. I don't want to tempt God," Ahaz answered.

Although Ahaz's response sounds pious, the real reason behind his refusal was that he was looking to the Assyrians for help. Thus, Isaiah responded, "Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?" (see Isaiah 7:13).

It's not our asking that wearies God, gang. It's our refusal to ask.

That's why in the original language, Jesus' words in Matthew 7:7 are, "Keep asking and it shall be given you; keep seeking and you shall find; keep knocking and it shall be opened unto you."

Perhaps you're saying, "I'm not going to ask God for that job, for that healing in my marriage, for that miracle."

And it sounds so pious, so selfless—but in reality, it's the result of listening to the accuser of the brethren saying, "You're a failure. God can't work in your life until you study harder, pray longer, do better."

Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Im manuel.

Isaiah 7:14

God gave Ahaz the greatest sign of all in spite of the fact that Ahaz refused to even ask.

Truly, God draws grace from a bottomless well. "Come boldly to My throne," He says, "for there you will find grace to help. When? Every time you have need" (see Hebrews 4:16).

There is no measure of what God can do in the lives of those who overcome the Enemy as they love not their own lives but instead rejoice in the blood of the Lamb and cling to His amazing grace.

May we be those people.



13 Twenty-nine years before Christ came as the Babe of Bethlehem, the worship of Caesar had been instituted throughout the Roman Empire. Initially, the Caesars viewed this as little more than a way to stir up feelings of patriotism within the people of the empire. But at the end of the first century, Caesar Nero actually believed his press clippings and truly believed he was God in the flesh. Thus, beginning with his reign, every subject within the Roman Empire was required to go to one of the pagan temples, stand before a priest, and confess on a yearly basis that Caesar was Lord.

For most, it was merely an annoyance. Not so for the believers. They wouldn't play the game. As a result, most historians believe that the number of Christians killed in the ten waves of persecution that followed exceeded six million. Consequently, what John writes about here is not only for us in these last days in terms of prophecy and eschatology—but for the hearts of his flock, who themselves were face-to-face with the beast of Roman persecution.

You see, John the prophet is also John the pastor—sharing his heart with any and all facing hard times. . . .

Revelation 13:1 (a)

And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast . . .

The beast John sees is Antichrist. "Antichrist" literally meaning "in place of Christ," John would go on to write that there are many antichrists—not *the* Antichrist, but anything that takes one's focus off Jesus (1 John 2:18). Here in Revelation 13, however, the reference is to *the* Antichrist.

Revelation 13:1 (b)
. . . rise up out of the sea . . .

"The sea" in Bible typology always referring to Gentile nations as opposed to "the land" referring to Israel, the mention of the sea here indicates that Antichrist will not come from Israel. In fact, chapter 17 goes on to say that the beast will come from the ten Gentile nations that stem from the old Roman Empire and that make up the last world empire. But this doesn't necessarily mean Antichrist will be a Gentile, for he could be a European Jew.

Revelation 13:1 (c)
. . . having seven heads . . .

Revelation 17 identifies the seven heads as the seven mountains of Rome. Thus, Antichrist's government will initially be based in the city of Rome.

Revelation 13:1 (d)
. . . and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns . . .

There are ten crowns on only seven heads because, according to Daniel 2 and 7, when Antichrist comes to power, he will initially grab the reigns of three nations from the ten-nation confederation. As you study history, you catch glimpses of men who wanted to revive the glory of Rome. But it won't happen until Antichrist comes, for he alone will be able to reignite the fire of the Roman Empire.

Revelation 13:1 (e)
. . . and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.

The beast has blasphemy upon his heads because he has rebellion on his mind. The image of a seven-headed, ten-horned beast is meant to be monstrous and hideous, for such is the nature of the one who is rebellious, who is blasphemous, who is—as we shall see—the devil incarnate.

Revelation 13:2

And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.

The four successive empires that would rule during the time Israel was a nation are described as a glorious statue in Daniel 2. Such is man's perspective. God's perspective, however, is seen in Daniel 7 through a series of monstrous beasts—the same beasts described here, although in inverse order: the leopard symbolizing Alexander the Great's ability to pounce; the bear symbolizing the Medes and the Persians, the lion symbolizing Babylon. Why is the order inversed in Daniel? Because Daniel is looking ahead, while John is looking back.

Revelation 13:3

And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast.

At this point in the Tribulation, Antichrist is mortally wounded. According to Zechariah 11:17, there will be an assassination attempt on Antichrist that will evidently cause his eye to be poked out and his right arm to be paralyzed. Because the Greek text can either be rendered "wounded to death" or "wounded to the appearance of death," there are those who believe Antichrist will only appear to be dead as a result of this wound. My opinion, however, is that he truly will die and descend to hell (Revelation 17:8).

Revelation 13:4

And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?

At the point this popular, powerful figure—who captures the affection and imagination of the entire world with all of his grand ideas and peace

programs—ascends from hell, he truly is the incarnation of Satan. Just as Jesus Christ comes from heaven and is God, it would seem as though Antichrist will truly be the incarnation of the dragon, of Satan. Put yourself in the shoes of those who will see this great leader come back to life after being assassinated, and you will understand why they will give Satan what he has desired ever since he was cast out of heaven before the fall: worship.

Revelation 13:5 (a)

And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies . . .

Antichrist is on a roll. He's on *Larry King, Oprah, World News Tonight* declaring that he truly is deity.

Revelation 13:5 (b)

. . . and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.

How long is forty-two months? Three and a half years, 1,260 days, or "a time, times and a half time." All of these phrases pop up throughout Revelation and describe the last half of the Tribulation—the Great Tribulation. And now begins the hellish last half of Antichrist's seven-year reign. . . .

Revelation 13:6, 7 (a)

And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints . . .

Some people believe that the church must be on earth during the Tribulation in order for Antichrist to "make war with the saints." But they fail to understand that there are three groups of people in the Bible referred to as saints: Simply meaning "separated one," throughout the Old Testament the word "saints" refers to Israel. In the New Testament it refers to the

church. And after the church is raptured, it refers to those who are saved in the Tribulation.

Revelation 13:7 (b)
. . . and to overcome them . . .

"I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," Jesus said (Matthew 16:18). The church will not be overcome. Therefore, this passage cannot refer to the church.

Revelation 13:7 (c), 8 (a)
. . . and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him . . .

"Dwell" meaning "to be at home with," and earth referring to the world system, those who are comfortable with the worldly scene will end up worshiping Antichrist.

Revelation 13:8 (b)
. . . whose names are not written in the book of life . . .

The book of life includes the names of those who get saved during the Tribulation.

Revelation 13:8 (c)
. . . of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

The book of life belongs to the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world—or from *before* the foundation of the world, as the newer translations render this verse. Too many people have far too small a view of what Christ did in dying for the sin of humanity—including me.

Growing up, I was under the distinct impression that Jesus died on the Cross and remained there for six hours, paying the price for my sin. While that is true, it's not the full picture. You see, the Old Testament makes unmistakably clear the fact that every sin needs to be dealt with individually.

That is why Old Testament believers were required to lay their hands on the animals they sacrificed and confess their sins specifically (Leviticus 1:4). Yes, there was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement for the nation, but every individual was still required by the law to make sacrifice for his personal transgressions in the trespass offering. Multiply all of the sins of those in your church—add to that the sins of all of the people in our country, all of the folks who have lived throughout history—and the amount of sin staggers the imagination.

That is why I believe that when the Word speaks of Christ being slain before the foundation of the world, only heaven will allow us to understand that He was slaughtered and slain in a way we cannot understand in the time/space continuum in which we live. Consequently, when we see Him, we will worship Him with an intensity and an explosion of praise never before experienced because we will at last see Him as a Lamb having been slain—newly slain. "I thought He was on the Cross for a few hours one Friday," we'll say. "I had no idea what *my* sin cost Him."

Revelation 13:9, 10 (a)

If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword.

What is John saying? I can hear his heart, can't you? He's saying to those in his day, just as he would say to me and you today who are in tribulation or difficulties, "The one putting you in prison, unsheathing the sword, marching you into the coliseum is himself going down."

Revelation 13:10 (b)

Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

Do you realize how blessed we are because we know the end of the story? You may be in a difficult marriage, persecuted on the job, fighting illness, undergoing severe pressures financially, or weary of your flesh that rears its ugly head constantly. But we know one day it will all be solved. That's what John told his people. And that's what the Spirit would say to us.

We who have been saved awhile take this for granted. But what if this was the first time you understood that everything that plagues you presently will be gone in a heartbeat; that you're going to heaven, where everything will be wonderful forever and ever?

"If any man has an ear, let him hear. Listen up," says Pastor John. "I don't care if you miss everything else, get this: The forces against you are soon going to be done away with: The beast, persecution, problems, will undo themselves."

That's why I need to read the Book of Revelation over and over again. It's not about deciphering the mark of the Beast. It's not written to help us figure out who the false prophet or Antichrist is. It's written to give us hope and to bring us back constantly to the fact that life is short and we'll be in heaven soon.

The person who doesn't understand the Book of Revelation will go through life in his own personal tribulation. The person who grabs hold of Revelation, on the other hand, will live in a state of anticipation and celebration. Every single one of us will either go through this week in tribulation or celebration.

Life is short. The Lord is in control. We're going to heaven. That's what this book is about.

Revelation 13:11 (a)
And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth . . .

When Jesus ascended to heaven, He promised to send the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity (John 14:16). The other beast named here—the false prophet, as we shall see—is to Antichrist what the Holy Spirit is to Jesus.

Revelation 13:11 (b)
. . . and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.

Minus the horns or crowns of Antichrist, the false prophet comes across like a lamb. He seems to be so humble and gentle. Whereas Antichrist is the

political leader, the false prophet is the religious leader who will unify the world religion as the public relations man for Antichrist.

Revelation 13:12

And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

Who's the first beast? Antichrist. The ministry of the Spirit is to put the focus on Jesus. The ministry of the false prophet is to put the focus on Antichrist. The parallel is exact.

Revelation 13:13, 14

And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.

Although this false prophet will appear to be as gentle as a lamb, he'll also have the ability to call fire down from heaven. This should be a practical word of warning to you and me. You see, there are those who come on the scene appearing to be so spiritual and so "on fire." But Pastor John the Revelator would have us be aware of the very real ability of Satan to transform himself into an angel of light and to perform all kinds of miracles.

Gang, whenever someone comes on the scene pointing to some movement, man, mantra, or method, saying, "This is the hot thing"—I would encourage you to run in the opposite direction. When a person or group is more excited about what's happening in Canada or Korea than they are about the character, work, or Person of Jesus—stay away. You can always spot a counterfeit. Like the false prophet, a counterfeit calls attention to "Antichrist," to something "in place of Christ."

Revelation 13:15

And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

What is this statue evidently erected in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem? Computer chips are presently based on sand, on silicon. But the new computer chips will be based on living matter, on protein. When these protein-based computer chips finally get perfected, the computing power will immediately increase fifty thousand times. So it could be that this image is a sophisticated automaton. Or it could be an image that is powered demonically. Whatever it is, it will appear to have life.

Revelation 13:16, 17

And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord." This is the "shema" of Deuteronomy 6:4 that is so essential to Jewish belief that it is placed in phylacteries and worn on the head and arms of Orthodox Jews to this day.

I find it interesting that even as Satan, Antichrist, and the false prophet counterfeit the Trinity, so their mark worn on the head and arm counterfeits the command of God in Deuteronomy 6:4–8.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

Deuteronomy 6:4–8

I am reminded of Pharaoh's magicians who could do no more than mimic the miracles God did through Moses. Because God is the only Creator, Satan is left to do no more than copy.

Revelation 13:18

Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

Throughout the Old Testament when God gave dietary regulations and health procedures to His people, He never explained His reasons. He simply said, "I am the Lord" (Leviticus 11:44). In the ensuing centuries, as scientific and medical knowledge caught up, man slowly understood the wisdom behind God's commands. So, too, the reason God's command in Leviticus 19:28 not to mark our bodies becomes ever clearer in light of the demand of Antichrist to receive his mark in one's body.

"Trust Me," says the Lord. "I love you passionately and want nothing but the best for you eternally." Truly, here is wisdom.

THE BEAST WHO WAS MARKED

A Topical Study of REVELATION 13:16–18

John wrote this Book of Revelation while on an isolated island, wearing clothing that looked more like a towel than what we wear today, during a period in history when the highest form of technology was a mule, and when the world's economy was based on bartering. Therefore, what makes this passage so absolutely intriguing is that John describes precisely that which is upon us economically and culturally.

For centuries, this passage confused Bible scholars. While they knew it was true, exactly how it would happen was beyond their wildest imaginations. But for us, this is no big deal, for we are accustomed to buying and selling numerically.

> The banking industry has been pushing hard for a cashless society for many decades. Why? Every check costs a bank between thirty-five and sixty cents to process. Electronic transactions, on the other hand, cost one cent. Banks have a very real interest in seeing us move toward an electronic funds transfer system. So do small business owners, due to the multimillion-dollar price they pay for employees who steal from the till.
>
> Not only are banks and businesses eager to see a cashless society, but the IRS is as well. The government loses what is estimated to be one trillion dollars a year in the "underground" economy—the system whereby employees are paid in cash in order to avoid the paper trail that would require them to pay taxes.

Technology for a cashless society has been around for decades. The only reason we have not seen it implemented until recently is not due to a lack of technology, but rather to a phobia with technology. Because people my age and older are somewhat techno-phobic, we have been reluctant to embrace technology. But that's changing. Why? It is partially due to the fact that the

older generation is dying. You see, the kids who have grown up with Nintendo are not intimidated by technology in the least.

Even more than this, our culture has changed in such a way that even we who are older are feeling a need to move into a cashless society. Consider the reasons why. . . .

> Crime. So many people are being ripped off after withdrawing money from Automated Teller Machines, that cities like Berkeley, California, are passing ordinances making it illegal to stand within one hundred fifty feet of an ATM unless making a transaction.
>
> Drugs. Drug lords don't write checks. The entire drug culture is based on the exchange of cash, rendering a record of such transactions nonexistent. Consequently, the most effective way to curb drug traffic would be to get rid of all cash.
>
> Taxes. On television one week was a story on the various ways the wealthy in our society legally avoid paying one penny on their vast amounts of income—one of which is to deal solely with cash. Because the taxes of commoners like you and me go up radically as a result, people are demanding something be done to restore equity in our tax system. How can this happen? One of the easiest ways is to get rid of cash.

Enter the debit card. VISA alone has issued one million combination credit/debit cards worldwide to people using numbers to buy and sell, just as John prophesied. But it gets even more amazing. There is a MARC card. MARC stands for Multitechnology Automated Reader Card. It's given to Armed Forces personnel. In addition to accessing economic transactions a la a VISA card, the MARC card contains a computer chip with the medical and personal history of the holder, giving him clearance for all sorts of weapons and other technology.

But more than that, his location can be pinpointed anywhere in the world in a matter of seconds. The practicality of this in times of war is understandable—but so are the problems. Because like a VISA card, a MARC card can be easily lost or stolen, the solution to this problem has been biometrics—where clearance to a secured area is obtained by the

scanning of one's palm. But due to even the most undetectable interference (like hand cream) biometrics has not proven to be as practical as originally hoped. Such is the reason for the introduction of an ATM that would identify customers simply by reading the iris of their eyes. However, even these can run into problems due to something as simple as a contact lens.

The only solution seems to be what John prophesied two thousand years ago when he wrote that Antichrist will require everyone to receive a mark in his right hand or forehead. Certainly we're not far from this. A recent newspaper article I read addressed the fact that we are approaching the time when the key to all transactions will be a computer chip imbedded in the hand. Already, horses in St. Louis are required to have such a chip under their manes for identification purposes. Cats in San Francisco carry such chips containing their vaccination records and identification so that if lost, their owners can be notified. There is even a proposal to use such technology on convicted felons in Southern California.

Although horses in St. Louis, cats in San Francisco, and felons in Orange County might seem a world away, one's children don't. With the growing threat of kidnappings, parents will be much more likely to welcome such technology.

There's only one problem: John tells us the mark of the beast will seal the fate, will doom the one who accepts it. You see, with the acceptance of his number, one pledges total allegiance to Antichrist. That is why the Lord warns people—not only in the Word, but with two prophets in Jerusalem, 144,000 Jewish Billy Grahams spanning the globe, and an angel flying across the sky, saying, "Don't take the mark." But most will. Most will say, "It makes too much sense not to."

> *Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.*
>
> Revelation 13:18

Knowledge is one thing, but wisdom is another. Knowledge is information. Wisdom is application. Theories abound as to what the number

666 refers. Some believe it refers to a type of UPC code. Others suggest that because in both Greek and Hebrew, letters are used as numbers, the letters in Antichrist's name add up to 666. But I don't believe this is the primary point John is making.

The best commentary on the Bible being the Bible, when you want to know what a verse or phrase means, look to the Bible for the interpretation. And in Genesis 4, we find the account of someone else who was marked with "the number of man."

> *And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the* LORD.
>
> Genesis 4:1

The Scofield Bible correctly renders this verse: "I have gotten a man, even Jehovah, the Lord." Why would Eve say this? Because after she and Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, God promised that her seed would crush the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15). Consequently, when Cain was born, she believed him to be the one who would free mankind from the power of Satan. It wasn't long until she realized Cain was not the deliverer, as evidenced by the name she gave her second son: Abel, or literally, "hopeless." You know the story. After his self-sufficient sacrifice was rejected by God, Cain killed Abel. As a result, Cain was banished to the wilderness, with a mark to protect him.

Follow this with me. Abel is thought to be hopeless, unimportant, nothing. Cain was thought to be the Promised One. But Cain proves to be antichrist, that is, "in place of Christ"—while Abel is a picture of Christ. . . .

- Abel was a shepherd (Genesis 4:2).
- Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11).
- Abel brought a lamb to sacrifice to God (Genesis 4:4).
- Jesus offered Himself as the Lamb of God (John 1:29).
- Abel was hated by his brother (Genesis 4:5).
- Jesus came to His own and His own received Him not (John 1:11).
- Abel was slain by his brother (Genesis 4:8).

• Jesus was crucified by His brethren (John 19:6).

• The blood of Abel cried out to God (Genesis 4:10).

• The blood of Jesus speaks of better things (Hebrews 12:24).

• Abel submitted to the directive of the Father (Hebrews 11:4).

• Jesus always does the things that please the Father (John 8:29).

What does this have to do with you?

Everything.

"Understand," said John, "the number of the beast is the number of man: 666." Throughout Scripture, six is the number of the flesh. The fleshly Cain mentality can rise up in you and me. How? By saying,

> "The sweat I pour out, the good I do, the things I accomplish are going to be more impressive to God than just killing a bloody lamb. Through my energy, my initiative, my efforts I will impress God."
>
> Some today say, "I'm a Rotarian; I'm a Republican; I attend PTA; I coach Little League. I'm putting together a pretty good basket of fruit. I don't need this bloody stuff: Christianity, Bible study, Communion. I can do something much more intellectually creative, much more beautiful. I can do it. I can pull it off."

But the Bible says,

> "*All* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). And because you're marked with your own efforts, you're marked for damnation. You've fallen short. You need a Savior, a Sacrifice to die in your place."

Even believers can be caught up in the spirit of 666 when they say,

> "I don't need to pray. I can figure out my career on my own. I'm reading books. I'm attending seminars. I know what's best for my kids, my family, my future."

We're either of the spirit of Cain, saying, "I'm a hard worker. I'm a creative thinker. I'm a good guy"—or of Abel who's humble, broken, and dependent upon God.

Here's the good news. God has one simple thing to say to you who are struggling in marriage, in parenting, in relationships, in school:

> "Talk to Me. Spend time with Me. Humble yourself before Me. Seek My face. Wait and see what I'll do in your life. Fight the tendency to be Cain, and watch how I'll bless you."

May God keep you from the number of man, the mark of Cain, the mark of the beast. May this be a time in your life when you are recommitted to dependency and brokenness before the Lord. Herein is wisdom, gang: Seek first the kingdom, and everything else will fall into place (Matthew 6:33).



14 Revelation 14:1

And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

In chapter 7, we read of twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes of Israel who will go throughout the world preaching the gospel. Although they will be targets of Antichrist's persecution, here in the middle of the Tribulation, we see not 143,999 witnesses, but 144,000. In other words, they all make it through.

Revelation 14:2, 3

And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

Why could no one else sing the song of the 144,000? Because they alone went through testing and Tribulation—yet maintained their integrity. Thus, they alone could sing of what they were able to observe the Father do on their behalf in the time of Tribulation. Every one of us goes through times of tribulation. God's intention is that they might produce in us "as it were, a new song"—a symphony.

> *There they were—in a damp, dark dungeon—without even a crust of bread to eat or the ACLU to plead their case. Yet what were they doing? They were singing. At midnight—in the darkest hour—Paul and Silas sang. They weren't singing to try to get God to do something. They sang simply because the Lord was with them (Acts 16:25).*

"Well, that hasn't been my experience," you might be saying. "My marriage," or "my job," or "my health is a dungeon to me, and I'm not happy."

Precious brother, dear sister—God's intent is to give you a new song. But there's one thing that will stand in the way: sympathy. You see, I can either go through challenges and hard times with a symphony in my heart because the Lord has promised not only to strengthen me in them (Isaiah 41:10), but to walk with me through them (Matthew 28:20)—or I can choose to get sympathy from people. If I choose to tap into sympathy, it will always be at God's expense because the underlying though unspoken implication is that what is happening in my life is out of God's control.

God is totally, absolutely, completely faithful to meet us in every trial, in every difficulty. Don't let His plan get short-circuited by those who say, "I feel sorry for you." Instead, say, "God is good. Sure, what I'm dealing with right now is a challenge. But I am discovering the Father is exactly who He claimed to be—a God who comforts me completely."

It's tempting to let people feel sorry for us, but we mustn't, because it puts God in a bad light. Don't settle for sympathy, gang. Go for the symphony.

Revelation 14:4, 5

These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.

These 144,000 are blessed. They speak with authority They have the Lord on their minds constantly. They have a song in their heart personally. They see the Lamb's directives very clearly. It's all built and based on the fact that they are virgins—people of purity.



***For topical study of Revelation 14:4, 5 entitled "Purity Pays," turn to page* 1748.**

Revelation 14:6 (a)

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth . . .

The 144,000 have been the infantry. Now here comes the air support: angels. I believe angels have been itching to get into the fray, to preach. Why? Because they've been going to school for a long time to get ready for this ministry. Peter says that the angels are studying, earnestly looking into the things of salvation (1 Peter 1:12).

Paul goes on to say that when we meet together, we need to be sensitive to the angels in our midst (1 Corinthians 11:10). I truly believe angels are studying right along with us. Studying what? The Scriptures? No. They already know Scripture. They're studying us. Why? They're trying to figure out this thing called grace. Having never fallen into sin, how are they to learn about grace? By watching us. *How could God use Jon? Why would He put up with Linda? How could Kent be part of His chosen priesthood?* they wonder. But the time is coming when their schooling will be over, and they'll be released in the Tribulation to preach the everlasting gospel.

Revelation 14:6 (b)

. . . and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

Jesus declared that the end of the world as we know it will come after the gospel of the kingdom is preached to the entire world. Consequently, you will hear people say, "We've got to get out there and preach to every nation so the Lord can come to rapture the church." Not true. The Lord can rapture the church today, even though there are people groups who have not heard the gospel directly because the angels will preach the gospel to every nation, every tongue, every kindred, every people.

Revelation 14:7

Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

"Worship the One who made everything you see," the angel will declare —putting a conclusive end to the evolution/creation debate.

Revelation 14:8

And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

Two Babylons are spoken of in Revelation: religious Babylon and commercial Babylon—the false religious system and the oppressive economic system. The second angel declares both are powerless.

Revelation 14:9, 10 (a)

And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation . . .

The third angel says, "Don't take the mark of the beast." But the world, by and large, will buy into Antichrist's diabolical plan.

Revelation 14:10 (b), 11

. . . and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

Those who suggest either that hell is not a literal place or that it won't last for eternity haven't read the Bible. In fact, Jesus taught more on the subject of hell than on the subject of heaven. That is why this angel cries with a loud voice, warning people to reject the mark of the Beast. There's lots of talk about angels these days as cute, cuddly creatures. But when you read this passage, you realize they are creatures who plead passionately, proclaim loudly, and preach vehemently because hell is real. It's not a game. I think of the twentieth chapter of Isaiah, where a most amazing thing happens. . . .

Although the Assyrians were headed in their direction, the people of Israel didn't take the threat seriously. Oh, come on, *they thought.* Certainly we won't be wiped out by the Assyrians.

So God said to Isaiah—the eloquent orator, the educated, articulate prophet—"The stakes are high. But the people aren't listening. So I want you to take off your sandals, take off your clothes, and walk naked throughout this region for three years."

Now, whether this was three years continually or three years sporadically, Bible scholars disagree. But the fact remains that stately Isaiah did, in fact, obey. Why was he told to do this? Because the people had grown so calloused to the prophets' words, they weren't heeding the message. So God used this bold move to get their attention and to illustrate the fact that, as captives of the Assyrians, the Israelites would be led naked across the desert into captivity.

Like Isaiah, we, too, live in crucial times, gang. You have relatives. I have friends. We have coworkers who are going to hell because, like the Israelites, they have become calloused to the threat of hell. But the stakes are too high for us just to say, "Well, whatever." No, we must share the naked truth with them—not baring our bodies, but baring our souls.

"But they'll laugh at me," you say.

What do you think they did to Isaiah?

Here in Revelation, the angels preach with a loud voice, "Don't take the mark. You'll be tormented forever." People are in tribulation even today. Share the everlasting gospel with them, and, like the angels, you'll soar in the heavenlies. I guarantee it!

Revelation 14:12

Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

"Be patient" is the word given to those who become Christians during the Tribulation—to those who respond to the evangelism of the 144,000, the message of the angels, the powerful testimony of the two witnesses in Jerusalem.

Revelation 14:13

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

The voice saying, "Blessed are those who die after they become believers during the Tribulation, because they will have rest from the hell on earth surrounding them," would be unnecessary if the church is to go through the first part of the Tribulation, as some believe. If that were the case, the word would not be, "Blessed are you if you die," but, "Blessed are you who hang on because the Rapture is about to occur."

For topical study of Revelation 14:13 entitled "Rest in Peace," turn to page **1752.**

Revelation 14:14 (a)

And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown . . .

Clouds are significant throughout Scripture because they represent the visible presence of God. . . .

- When the law was first given, a cloud covered the mountain (Exodus 19:16).
- When the law was given a second time, a cloud again appeared (Exodus 34:5).
- Upon its completion, a cloud covered the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34).
- Whenever the Israelites were to break camp on their journey to the Promised Land, a cloud led the way (Numbers 9:17).
- When the temple was dedicated, a cloud filled the holy of holies (1 Kings 8:10).

What a tragic sight it must have been for the Jews to see the glory of God leave the temple, the city of Jerusalem, the land of Israel because of their sin (Ezekiel 9:3).

But wait. God is never through with Israel. The cloud reappears in Israel when Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5) and again when He ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9).

Revelation 14:14 (b)–16

. . . and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.

According to this passage, it would seem that there comes a point in the Tribulation when salvation is no longer possible. The 144,000 have been called to heaven. The angels have made their proclamation. And now there will be a separation between those who become Christians in the Tribulation and those who don't.

So, too, in your own tribulation you need to understand there comes a time when your own heart—even as a believer—can become hardened. The Bible speaks of a root of bitterness that can take hold in the soil of a man's soul (Hebrews 12:15). I've seen believers go through tribulation, and rather than allow the Lord's work of grace to take place in their hearts, they choose, instead, to be bitter and unforgiving. Don't let that happen. Don't be unforgiving. Don't be cynical. Don't be bitter. Don't play that game because if you let bitterness and unforgiveness continue, there will come a point in your own tribulation when it will become an irreversible part of who you are.

Revelation 14:17, 18

And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.

Referring to the parable of the wheat and tares in Matthew 13, the previous passage spoke of a harvest of grain. The second harvest here in verse 18 speaks of a harvest of grapes.

Revelation 14:19, 20 (a)

And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city . . .

At this point, the harvest of separation has begun; the end of the world is at hand. "The city" in Scripture always referring to Jerusalem, it is fitting that

the grapes are pressed "without the city," for it was "without the city" that the True Vine, Jesus Christ, was pressed to the Cross for our sin (John 19:17).

Revelation 14:20 (b)

. . . and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.

The blood resulting from the second—and last—harvest will flow from the valley of Armageddon down Jordan's Rift Valley past Jerusalem one hundred eighty miles to the city of Bozrah. . . .

> Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?
>
> Isaiah 63:1, 2

Who is this One?

None other than Jesus Christ.

And now I begin to understand that I have two options: I will either drown in the horrific bloodbath of Armageddon, or I will bathe in the gracious Blood of the Lamb. Truly, the greatest bloodshed in all of history took place not in a world war, but when Jesus died on the Cross in order to wash us in His blood.

PURITY PAYS
A Topical Study of
REVELATION 14:4, 5

Over the years, I have noticed that when people go through trials and tribulations, one of two things inevitably happens. Either their faith ignites and burns bright, or their faith is quenched and burns out. We see this same principle in Scripture. . . .

> Standing near the fire, he couldn't believe what was happening. He had left his business, his family, everything to follow the Rabbi from Galilee. And now, after three years, the One he was looking to, believing in, depending on was being carried off to be crucified. When asked if he was a disciple of this One, Peter swore, "I don't even know Him"—as the flame of his faith turned to embers (Matthew 26:74).
>
> "If you don't bow down to my idol, you'll be cast into a fiery furnace," declared the king.
>
> "So be it," answered three Jewish young men. "God is able to deliver us. And even if He doesn't deliver us, we will not bow to your idol." So it was that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were thrown in the fiery furnace where—rather than burning out, their faith burned bright as they walked through their trial unharmed (Daniel 3).

Burning out or burning bright, which will it be? Here in Revelation, Pastor John's desire is that the faith of those in the seven churches under his care would burn hot amidst the persecution that threatened to extinguish it.

You see, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, John's flock was commanded to annually declare the lordship of Caesar. Failure to do so resulted in a loss of their livelihoods economically—or the loss of their very lives physically as they were burned as candles or fed to lions by the thousands. Because some of his congregants would be tempted to give in and burn out under such pressure, Pastor John was given a vision of 144,000

whose faith would not falter even in the overwhelming persecution of the great Tribulation.

We first met these 144,000 in chapter 7—twelve thousand evangelists from each of the twelve tribes of Israel who fan out throughout the globe sharing the gospel. Here in chapter 14, we find all 144,000 standing with the Lord on Mount Zion. In other words, they made it through the Tribulation without collapsing, without caving in, without giving up.

How? I believe the answer is crucial for us because Jesus said in the world we all will have tribulation (John 16:33). When the job we count on doesn't open up, when the marriage we long for doesn't pan out, when the kids we wait for don't turn around, when the money we hope for doesn't come in—we will be tempted to think that, because the Lord didn't seem to do what He said He would do, we're justified in downing a couple cold ones at Mutt's, logging on to a pornographic website, or dating an unbeliever. It's in the time of tribulation that the pressure is greatest to bow before the idol and say, "It's okay if I get my mind off my problems for a while because I'm in Christ. I'm forgiven."

"Wait," says Pastor John to his congregation, "there are 144,000 who will not get sucked into compromise, 144,000 who won't defile themselves. Therefore, you can make it as well."

So can we. We're living in dark days. The temptations are intense. It would be so easy to let down and give in. But in our text, John gives us six reasons why we shouldn't. . . .

The Lord on Our Mind

> *And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.*
>
> Revelation 14:1

Choose to walk in purity, and the Lord will be on your mind constantly. As a result, you will have peace of mind continually. Why? Because God will keep the one whose mind is stayed on Him in perfect peace (Isaiah 26:3). That is why Paul says, "I would have you be wise concerning that which is good but simple concerning that which is evil" (Romans 16:19). The word he uses for "simple" is literally "stupid." In other words, "When everyone else is laughing at the off-color joke, you be the one who doesn't get it."

> A number of Christmases ago, I was given a footstool with a wonderful hand-painted bear on it. Unfortunately, it was the same Christmas that then-three-year-old Peter John received his first tool set—which was why Christmas afternoon found an unattended Peter John with hammer in hand and eight nails in the bear stool. Knowing he had done wrong, he said, "Pray for me, Daddy," as I walked into the room.
>
> "Okay, Peter," I said. "Lord, thank You that You forgive our mistakes."
>
> And Peter felt a lot better. As I pulled the nails out of the bear, Peter grew more relieved with each one. But the problem was, that although the nails were gone, the holes remained. I still have that footstool. It's a wonderful reminder to Peter John—and to me!

Yes, you can log on to the Internet. You can tune into HBO. You can go to the tavern and then say, "Father, forgive me. I did that in a moment of depression." And you'll be forgiven right then. Your sin will be forgotten by the Father—but not by you because, although the nails will be gone, the holes

will remain. That is why David, a man who knew something about looking where he shouldn't have, and doing something he shouldn't have, says in Psalm 101:3, "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes."

Authority in Our Voice

> *And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps.*
>
> Revelation 14:2

The voices of the 144,000 were like thunder—earth-shaking and impacting. Truly, the voice of a grandparent, a parent, or a high-schooler living in purity is like thunder because authority and integrity are linked together inextricably. You cannot separate the two. If you think, *My kids will never know; my grandchildren will never hear; the guys at work don't have a clue what I do late at night,* you underestimate the discerning ability of the human spirit. Even if people don't know your story, they can sense in your voice, see in your face, discern in their hearts whether or not you are a person of integrity. That is why the voices of the 144,000 are likened to thunder.

A Song on Our Lips

> *And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.*
>
> Revelation 14:3

A new song in Scripture always implies a song of rejoicing or happiness. It may come as a shock to you if you're new in the things of the Lord that God is a happy God. It's true. The reason people left everything to follow Jesus, the reason they traveled great distances to see Him and even went days without food to listen to Him was because there was something about Him so joyful, so happy, so abundant.

Concerning Jesus, Hebrews 1:9 declares, "Because thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity thou art anointed with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." In other words, "The happiest Man in history was the One who hated sin." In that, I understand happiness in life is directly proportional to holiness in life.

Happy is the people whose God is the Lord (Psalm 144:15). The holier we choose to be, the happier we will be because happiness and holiness travel together.

The Lamb in Our Sight

> *These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.*
>
> Revelation 14:4

Wherever the Lamb goes, the 144,000 follow.

The sun is so big its interior could hold 1,300,000 earths. Yet I can block the entire sun out of my sight with only my thumb.

The same is true concerning God. He'll never leave or forsake us, but the "thumb" of our sin blocks Him from our sight. The 144,000 follow the Lamb easily because their purity allows them to see Him clearly.

Sweetness in Our Mouth

> *And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.*
>
> Revelation 14:5

In Ephesians 5:3, 4, Paul makes an interesting point when he says, "Let not fornication, uncleanness, or covetousness be named among you; neither filthiness, foolish talking, nor coarse jesting." The first list is like the engine of a train—the second like the cars that follow.

The Bible always links purity with speech because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). Thus, when a person is always telling coarse jokes, or involved with foolish jesting, it means that he or she is partaking of immorality in some way. The words are merely the cars that follow the engine. That is why the mouths of the 144,000 were filled with sweetness.

Fruit for Our God

> *These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.*
>
> Revelation 14:4

John's admonition to those in the first century is as vital to us as it will be to those in the Tribulation: Choose holiness—for the result of holiness is that the Lord will be on your mind, authority will be in your voice, a song of happiness will be on your lips, Jesus will be in your sight, and sweetness will be in your mouth. But above all, holiness in your life will produce fruit for your God.

You might not care about being happy, about being blessed, about having direction for your life personally, or speaking with authority presently. But perhaps you really do care about what God thinks of you eternally. And of the 144,000 who walk in purity, He says, "They've made a tough choice, and I regard them as the finest fruit."

And even if you have failed—as we all have—if you are one of His, God still finds you faultless.

Where?

Before the throne (verse 5).

Why?

Because the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all our failings (1 John 1:7).

So it is that God says, "Not only are you faultless before the throne, but I will keep you from falling on earth" (see Jude 24). You're faultless positionally, but I can keep you from falling practically if you'll allow Me."

Choose holiness, gang. You'll never regret it. Choose holiness, for if you do, you will be happy presently and blessed eternally.

REST IN PEACE
A Topical Study of REVELATION 14:13

I read an article about an intern in San Francisco who carries a cell phone, a laptop computer, and a handheld computer organizer to stay on top of his daily schedule. He even wears a pager under his wetsuit while surfing. No wonder psychologists are seeing more and more cases of stress and fatigue caused by a syndrome that has come to be known as "information overload." After all, a single weekday edition of the *New York Times* contains more information than the average person in the seventeenth century would have encountered in his entire lifetime.

That's why I love what Jesus said when He said,

> *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*
>
> Matthew 11:28, 29

It is interesting to me that Jesus doesn't promise rest from a difficult relationship, rest from the pressure of a job, or rest from the expectation of a college professor. He promises rest in one's soul. Fellow fatigued Christian —as we learn of Him, we find that the commands and demands, frustrations and expectations, the whirling and swirling of information all around us is actually redemptive. That is, it can serve a purpose.

> Due to a previous commitment, my wife, Tammy, and I weren't able to see our son Benny's Little League game one Friday. "How did it go, Ben?" we eagerly asked upon our return.
>
> "Well," he answered, "before I got up to bat the first time, I went to the end of the dugout and I got on my knees and prayed."
>
> "That's great!" I said. "You probably parked it over the fence, huh?"

"No," he said as a huge grin spread across his face. "I struck out. But I got to *pitch* the next inning!"

How often we pray, "Lord, change my husband," or, "Lord, help my boss see the talent latent within me," or, "Lord, let me get an 'A.' " Like Benjamin, we pray with faith and fervency—only to strike out. But there's a next inning, folks—a big inning, a new, big inning, a new beginning. It's called heaven.

And because Jesus is preparing a place for us there (John 14:2), it is necessary that He prepare us for the place. But here's the problem: We keep getting sidetracked. God desires us to focus on the big inning, the big picture of eternity—but we remain glued to home plate—continually intrigued, interested, tempted by the things of earth. I'm not talking about sin necessarily; but about getting stuck in the world's trappings and priorities. To counter this, the Lord instructed His people to put a ribbon of blue on the borders of their garments, since blue in Scripture is the color of heaven (Numbers 15:38). But over the years, people became so accustomed to seeing blue, they didn't notice it any more than you would notice someone coming in here wearing a pair of Levi 501s.

So how does God choose to free us from the pull of the world? Our text tells us. . . .

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

Who is the Lord speaking to here?

To those who become believers during the Tribulation.

With the wrath of God toward a Christ-rejecting, sinful world being poured out all around them, these Tribulation saints are weary beyond anything we can imagine. And what do they hear in heaven? "Happy are you who die in the Lord." Why? "Because, at last, you will rest from your labor."

Fellow baby boomers, the older generation understood this in ways we don't, as evidenced by the inscription seen on so many headstones in generations past: Rest In Peace. Perhaps it was the hardship of their lives that made them so much more aware of the true rest awaiting them in heaven than are we with our cars and computers and compactors.

Our text helps me begin to understand that the gravitational pull of the world—to get me to trivialize my life, to waste my time, to throw away the limited days given me on earth to prepare for heaven—is weakened through my own personal struggles and trials, fatigue and disappointments, heartaches and tribulation. And unlike a blue ribbon that's easily forgotten or becomes an item of superstition, the weight of weariness or worry, sadness or stress causes me to say, "I'm *really* looking forward to heaven."

Why do I go through this struggle year after year? you wonder. The reason is that it's absolutely necessary—to get you uncoupled from the world, to set you free from the pull of the temporal, to get you to long for heaven.

If the people to whom our text was initially written were living on an island in Hawaii, being waited on hand and foot under swaying palm trees and setting sun with no money problems, no physical pain, no marital stress, no child-rearing difficulties, they would probably say, "My butler should be here any minute with my filet mignon, so could You hold off Your return for a little while longer, Lord?"

Hard times will never come to an end, gang, because God knows they're the only way we'll long for heaven and thus fix our eyes on eternity. Jesus didn't talk about heaven while sitting on the beach, overlooking the ocean, sipping a Coke. He talked about heaven in the same passage in which He told His disciples one of them would betray Him, one of them would deny Him, and He Himself would die (John 13—14).

We don't sense the bleakness the disciples must have felt because we know the whole story. They didn't. They thought their whole lives were coming to an end. After all, they had left *everything* to follow this Rabbi.

"Blessed are they," Jesus would say, "who see the bigger picture, the scope of eternity, the kingdom of heaven—for they will have rest not from their problems, but in their soul. Precious brother, dear sister, you can get on your knees every night and pray, "God, solve this problem," or, "Take away

that pain," or, "Get me out of this situation"—but it could be that those are the very things God is using to make you a man or woman who lives for heaven.

You might pray passionately and strike out on three pitches—but never lose sight of the new, big inning just ahead.

Batter up!



15 Revelation 15:1 (a)

And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues . . .

Chapter 15 unfolds in the period of time known as the Tribulation—the seven-year period following the Rapture of the church. In chapter 15, we'll begin to see God pour out His wrath on the world that rejected His payment for their sin—an understanding vital to the events that follow, for it is only a clear understanding of Revelation 15 that keeps us from thinking God unfair in chapters 16 through 19.

Revelation 15:1 (b)

. . . for in them is filled up the wrath of God.

In Revelation 15, God says, "I have been patient with human rebellion and depravity—and now the bowls are full." In Genesis 15:13–16, God says to Abraham, "You're going to be the father of a nation that will sojourn in another country for four hundred years. Your people will be afflicted and enslaved because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." In other words, while Israel was held captive in Egypt for four hundred years, God was giving the Canaanites an opportunity to repent and turn to Him. Tragically, however, they didn't.

"Destroy the Amorites," God commanded Joshua upon the Israelites' entry into Canaan (see Deuteronomy 20:17). This only seems extremely unfair and brutal when one fails to take into

account the fact that God waited four hundred years *for these same Amorites to turn from the horrific perversion and cruelty that defined their culture and destroyed their souls.*

Four hundred years is a long time. For twice as long as our nation has existed, while Israel was held captive in Egypt, God waited for the Amorites to turn from their bizarre, evil practices. But they didn't. So finally, when the iniquity of the Amorites was full, God said, "Enough is enough. Destroy them." Did He do so because He is cruel? No. The Amorites were already doomed, damned, lost, gone, toast, curtains, dust. They were so sick that in ordering their annihilation, God was simply putting them out of their misery.

I camp on this point because people who read the Bible casually or hear a story in a Sunday sermon occasionally can think God is cruel. We must explain to them how patient God is—but that we must not mistake His patience for apathy, impotence, or approval of sin. For while the wheels of God's judgment turn slowly, they do, indeed, grind thoroughly.

Revelation 15:2 (a)
And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire . . .

In addition to seeing the seven angels about to pour out the fullness of God's wrath, John sees a sea of glass. Because the tabernacle was a shadow of the reality of heaven (Hebrews 8—9), I believe the sea of glass is actually a glassy sea of literal water, of which the laver in the temple was a picture (Exodus 30:18).

Revelation 15:2 (b)
. . . and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

It is intriguing to me that those who lose their lives in the Tribulation because they choose to listen to the message of the 144,000 and believe God rather than take the mark of the Beast or bow before the image are seen not around, but *on* the sea of glass.

Why does this intrigue me? Because it reminds me of another tribulation. . . .

> *Out on the sea with the wind blowing and the waves rolling, the disciples were understandably terrified. Seeing the Lord walking toward them, Peter cried, "Lord, if that's really You, bid me come."*
>
> *Jesus said, "Come," and Peter did just that (Matthew 14:28).*

So, too, in our text, these guys are walking on water. On earth they didn't. Having been persecuted and destroyed by Antichrist, on earth they would have been seen as losers. Not so in heaven. In heaven, they're water-walkers.

If you don't factor in heaven, none of biblical Christianity works. Without heaven, folks, you're going to go down the wrong path in your experience of spiritual life. You've got to factor heaven into every single equation. If you get nothing else out of the Book of Revelation, my prayer would be that you would first of all see Jesus Christ on the throne in control, and, secondly, that you'd understand it's all about *heaven.*

Revelation 15:3 (a)
And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God . . .

The song of Moses, recorded in Exodus 15, is the first song in the Bible. With their backs to the Red Sea, three million Jews looked up to see Pharaoh's army barreling down on them. "Moses, you've led us into a trap!" they cried because not one of them knew that God was about to do something totally unexpected, unpredictable, unprecedented. So it was not until after God intervened, after the Red Sea parted, after the children of Israel crossed safely to the other side that they sang, "The Lord has triumphed gloriously."

Revelation 15:3 (b)
. . . and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.

- The song of Moses was sung near the Red Sea.
- The song of the Lamb is sung near the glassy sea.
- The song of Moses dealt with rescue.
- The song of the Lamb deals with Rapture.
- The song of Moses was sung by those brought out of Egypt.
- The song of the Lamb is sung by those brought into heaven.

Revelation 15:4

Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.

"All nations shall come and worship before thee," sing the overcomers in Revelation 15, fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy. . . .

> And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. Zechariah 14:16

When the Lord comes back, the Feast of Tabernacles—the week-long celebration, wherein throughout history the Jews commemorated how God brought them through the wilderness—will be reinstated. Instead of commemorating how the Lord brought His people through the wilderness, however, it will celebrate how He brought His people through the world.

Everyone will be invited, but not everyone will come . .

> And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.
>
> Zechariah 14:17

Those who don't come will experience drought, limited fruit, restricted harvest.

The Lord says the same thing to you and me today, "Come and dine. Worship Me."

And we say, "Well, I'm kind of busy."

We don't *have* to come, gang. But I'll tell you this: When I don't come, I get real dry because God is into corporate worship. Those of you who say, "But I've heard Revelation already," or, "Why should I hear the Book of Acts being taught again? I studied it a year ago," consider this. . . .

> *I talked with a precious couple from Missouri who said, "When your daughter, Jessie, went to heaven, we ordered the videotape of her memorial service. After watching it, we decided to hang on to it because we knew someone would need to see it. Almost a year to the day after Jessie went to heaven, our son was killed in an automobile accident. We pulled out the video, and you know what? It was for us."*
>
> *It had only been a year since their son went to heaven, yet they shared with me maturely, wisely, deeply because, you see, although they had heard about heaven many times before, now they truly had the bigger picture of heaven burned into their hearts.*

Saying, "We don't need to go to Bible study because we've heard that before and have been there already," is really foolish because we don't know what lies right around the bend. . . .

> *King Asa was wise. During the ten years of peace and prosperity under his reign, he built up the walls of his kingdom. He put bars on the gates. He raised up 280,000 men from Judah and gave them shields and spears. He raised up another 200,000 men of Benjamin and armed them as well. Why? Because knowing there would be a battle ahead, he used the time of peace and prosperity not to kick back, but to build up (2 Chronicles 14).*

This world isn't a playground, dear saints. It's a battlefield. And wise is the one who, over the weeks and months and decades, says, "I'm going to build the walls of my faith. I'm going to fortify the city. I'm going to get the

shields and weapons ready because I know sooner or later there will come trials and difficulties through which the Enemy desires to make my faith collapse. I need to be forewarned that I might be forearmed, prepared that I may be preserved."

Revelation 15:5, 6 (a)

And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened: And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen . . .

As the period of the Tribulation begins here in chapter 15, we see the angels dressed in spotless white linen—like a surgical team, if you would.

Revelation 15:6 (b)

. . . and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.

The girdles of gold across their breasts symbolize the heart of gold within. That is, the judgment they are about to administer to the earth stems not from cruelty but from love.

Revelation 15:7, 8

And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.

Knowing that sin bites, burns, brutalizes, and butchers His children (Romans 6:23), God sends His surgical team of angels with vials of the bitter medicine of judgment in their hands in order to deal with the sin that destroys humanity.

In a parallel passage, we see David dealing with the repercussions of his own sin following his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, and the subsequent murder of her husband, Uriah. . . .

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

Psalm 51:7, 8

When a lamb repeatedly jeopardized his own safety by continually wandering away from the flock, the shepherd would break its leg. Then, throughout the healing process, the shepherd would carry the heretofore straying lamb on his shoulder, during which time something amazing transpired in the lamb. You see, when after five or six weeks, his bone could again support his weight, the lamb remained close to the shepherd, never to wander again—not because he feared another broken bone, but because he had become attached to the shepherd. So it is as a shepherd that David cries, "Lord, I know that the bones which Thou hast broken shall rejoice again."

Precious people, if we wander away and continue in sin, the Good Shepherd will do what He did with David and what David did with his own sheep: He'll break the bone of our self-sufficiency in order to force us to draw close to Him in ways we never would have otherwise.

But lest you think the vials of judgment about to be poured out in the Tribulation are still unfair, take another look at our Shepherd, and you'll realize that the Good Shepherd is also the Lamb of God who suffered not a broken bone, but a broken body and a broken heart as He died for our sin.

16 Revelation 16:1

And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.

The world is not well, folks. It's suffering from the cancer of carnality, the plague of perversion, the sickness of sin. Therefore, in the period of the Tribulation, the Father will deal with the sin that permeates and pollutes our world. Now, you can either undergo the brutal and bloody radical surgery of the Tribulation—or you can undergo open-heart surgery in this day of grace

by opening your heart to Jesus Christ. You see, sin *must* be judged one way or another. I highly recommend bypassing the Tribulation and letting the Lord do surgery on your heart today!

Revelation 16:2

And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.

The first strong medicine poured out upon the earth results in "grievous sores" upon those who take the mark of the Beast. Initially, taking the mark of the Beast would seem to be so logical, so technologically sophisticated, so wise. I mean, why deal with credit cards that can be stolen, checks that can be forged, or cash that can be lost when you can enter into a brand-new economic order where you can buy and sell with simply a number?

"Don't take the mark of the Beast!" the angels will cry as they fly across the sky. "Don't take his number," the 144,000 Jewish evangelists will preach on the streets. But most will not heed the message. And their refusal to do so will bring about its own pain.

That's always the way it is with sin. "The reason you have so many problems and pains and difficulties is because of your own sin. It's not Me punishing you," says God. "It's the result of your own backsliding" (see Jeremiah 2:19).

Revelation 16:3

And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea.

An abnormal multiplication of plankton causes not only a depletion of the oxygen supply in the surrounding water, but ushers in a phenomenon known as "red tide"—wherein the phosphorous in the plankton causes the water to turn red as blood. It could be that this is

a "red tide" taken to the extreme. I don't know. But whatever it is, it will be absolutely horrible.

Revelation 16:4

And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood.

As hard as it is to imagine, every creek, lake, and river will turn to blood. Every faucet, every hose, every drinking fountain will run blood instead of water. If you think that's a bit extreme, read on.

Revelation 16:5, 6

And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.

Through the centuries, people have questioned how He who is supposed to be love can be so judgmental, so brutal, so bloody. Yet here in verse 5, we hear the angel say that the very turning of the water to blood is an act of righteousness.

Why?

Think with me. . . .

As Jesus hung on the Cross, praying forgiveness upon those who nailed Him there, water and blood flowed from His side (John 19:34). Medically indicative of a broken heart, the water and blood meant nothing to the crowd at Golgotha who cursed Him, spat upon Him, and turned their backs on Him. Thus, here in Revelation, the water is turned to blood physically because mankind rejected the blood that flowed with water redemptively.

Revelation 16:7

And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.

The phrase "another out of" does not appear in the original Greek text. Thus, newer translations correctly render this verse: "And I heard the altar say, even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments." Now, whether this voice be figurative or literal, I cannot say. But this much is sure: The voice that cries, "True and righteous are thy judgments, O Lord," originates at the altar.

In our own times of trial and tribulation, there can be a tendency within us to question the fairness of the Father. But the altar, the place of sacrifice, the Cross speaks just the opposite. If you don't see this, you'll go through life one day blessing the Lord in the amphitheater and the next day cursing Him because of your troubles at work. God demonstrated His love for you in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). Therefore, it is through the lens of God's love as demonstrated on the altar of Calvary that I must look at every trial I face and every hard time I endure.

"What shall we say then? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (see Romans 8:32) Because God loved me enough to hang on the Cross in my place, to pay for my sin, to die for me, I know everything He does in my life —whether or not I understand it at the time—is *right*.

Complaining about my job, boss, paycheck, kids, singleness, or employees only means I am not listening to the cry of the altar, that I have forgotten Calvary. Allow the Cross to "altar" your view, precious people, as you look at everything in the light of Calvary.

Revelation 16:8

And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.

This could be referring to a supernova—the stage directly preceding the death of a star, wherein the star becomes intensely hot. Be that as it may, because men turned their backs on the Son, they will experience the burning of the sun.

Revelation 16:9

And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.

The judgments poured out upon the earth in rapid succession result in blistered bodies, stinking seas, blood-red rivers, and a scorching sun. Yet man chooses through it all to blaspheme rather than repent. This is vital to understand because it answers the charges of those who say, "If God is a God of love, wouldn't one thousand, ten thousand, or even one million years be sufficient punishment for mans' sin and rebellion? Be reasonable. What kind of God would allow someone to burn in hell *forever?*"

In Matthew 25:41, Jesus speaks of everlasting fire and in Mark 9:43–45 of hell as being a place where the fire is not quenched. Hell is eternal. Why? Because men are eternally unrepentant. As we see in our text, no matter how hot the sun becomes or how red the rivers run, man refuses to repent.

"Oh, but I repented," you say. Yes—but it was only by God's grace because there is none righteous (Romans 3:10). That is why you and I must be forever grateful that the Lord, by His grace, initiated His work of salvation in us.

Revelation 16:10 (a)

And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness . . .

The seat of Antichrist's government is Babylon—the city constructed on the same site as the tower of Babel. "We don't need God. We'll build a tower, study the stars, and let our horoscopes run our lives," declared Nimrod and his fellow inhabitants of Babel.

Revelation 16:10 (b)

. . . and they gnawed their tongues for pain.

At the tower of Babel, men's tongues were affected in that they no longer spoke the same language. In the city of Babylon, men's tongues will again be affected when they are gnawed as a result of pain.

Revelation 16:11

And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.

Even though they can barely speak due to the pain that overwhelms them, men still find it in their hearts to blaspheme God.

Revelation 16:12 (a)

And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates . . .

Referred to twenty-five times in Scripture, the Euphrates River is highly significant. The Euphrates formed the northernmost boundary of the land promised to Abraham in Genesis 15, the Nile forming the southern boundary. Although the land promised to the Jews comprised a substantial chunk of real estate, only during Solomon's reign would the Jews actually possess even a measurable percentage of this vast region.

Revelation 16:12 (b)

. . . and the water thereof was dried up . . .

Because the Euphrates is eighteen hundred miles long, an average of thirty feet deep, and three to twelve hundred feet wide, people used to scoff at this Scripture. "How could such a massive river dry up?" they chuckled. But in 1994, the site manager of the Ataturk Dam, located at the headwaters of the Euphrates, was quoted in *The Atlantic* as saying, "It is true that we can stop the flow of water into Syria and Iraq for up to eight months in order to regulate their political behavior."

Revelation 16:12 (c)

. . . that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.

The phrase translated "kings of the east" is literally "kings of the rising sun" in the original text. The "land of the rising sun" traditionally and

historically referring to both Japan and China, the pieces of the puzzle of prophecy begin to fall into place—for the technology of Japan and the sheer manpower of China could easily produce the two-hundred-million-man army prophesied in Revelation 9:14–16.

> Why would China want to go to war? China has a problem: One and one-half billion people—that is, one of every four people on earth—will live in China. To address this situation, the Chinese government imposed a fifteen-year prison sentence on couples with more than a single child. As a result, due to the massive abortion of baby girls, sending their boys to war could be seen differently.

> **Revelation 16:13, 14**
>
> **And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.**

As the Tribulation nears its end, three froglike demons croak, "GotoMegiddo, GotoMegiddo," in the ears of world leaders. It's a demonically induced suggestion because Satan is actually orchestrating the entire scenario.

> **Revelation 16:15**
>
> **Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.**

Because of the admonition given to us in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–4, we know what's ahead. We're looking for the Rapture. But these left behind, having been in darkness, receive this word of encouragement in verse 15: "Take hope. Even though the armies are marching, I'm on My way. My coming is not only imminent—it's immediate."

Revelation 16:16

And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.

Located sixty miles north of Jerusalem, the Jezreel Valley has been filled with warfare. When Gideon and three hundred men overcame the Midianites, it was at the valley below a little hill called Megiddo. When Samson took on the Philistines, one of the key battles was at Megiddo. King Josiah was killed at Megiddo. Deborah and Barak defeated Sisera at Megiddo.

> The Turks, Muslims, Syrians, Egyptians, and the Europeans have all waged war in this valley. In his disastrous excursion into Egypt, Napoleon passed through the Jezreel Valley. "If ever there is a place on earth where the last war must be fought," he declared, "it is here."

The armies of the world will indeed gather at Armageddon. And Antichrist, the false prophet, and Satan himself will meet them there.

Why?

First, to devour Israel. The ultimate anti-Semite is Satan. If He can destroy Israel, Bible prophecy will fail, for how can Jesus return to rule and reign from Israel if Israel ceases to be?

Second, to destroy believers. Having wiped out the nation Israel, Satan would then wipe out all who oppose him.

Finally, to determine who will rule. Satan knows he will ultimately encounter God at Megiddo. Daniel 11:40–45 outlines the actual strategy that will be used in this final battle: While Antichrist is headquartered at Babylon, the king of the south—Egypt and the northern African nations—will launch an insurrection against him. At the same time, the king of the north—Russia—will come south in order to assist the Egyptians and the northern African nations in their rebellion against Antichrist. But the Russians will fool the king of the south, continue on into Egypt, and carry off the treasures of Egypt.

So we see Egypt coming north, Russia coming south, Antichrist coming from the east—and they all converge in Megiddo.

Revelation 16:17

And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.

Two mountains come to mind. . . .

Both deal with the wrath of God as He pours out His wrath on men at Megiddo and upon His Son at Calvary.

Both deal with the rebellion of man as they blaspheme God at Megiddo and His Son at Calvary.

Both are bloodbaths as blood flows to the horses' manes at Megiddo and from the Son's veins at Calvary.

Both are completions, as "It is done," cries a voice from heaven at Mount Megiddo while "It is finished," cries a voice from Mount Calvary.

Will you endure the final wrath of the Father at Megiddo—or will you embrace the finished work of the Son on Calvary? The choice is yours.

Revelation 16:18–20

And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

The armies gather. The earth shakes. The blood flows in this event in which the topographical changes described in this passage are consistent with the effects of nuclear warfare.

Revelation 16:21 (a)

And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent . . .

One of the surprising results of the 1950s nuclear testing on the Bikini Islands were the hailstones that formed when the surrounding water shot so high into the atmosphere that it froze before returning to earth. The bombs detonated at Nagasaki and Hiroshima are BB guns in comparison to the power of the bombs presently in the arsenals of numerous nations, so one talent—or one-hundred-pound—hailstones are certainly possible.

Revelation 16:21 (b)

. . . and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.

What was the Old Testament punishment for blasphemy? Stoning (Leviticus 24:16). What's happening here? Stoning by hundred-pound hailstones.

17 A few days ago, during one of my rare stops at McDonalds, I engaged in a delightful conversation with a couple in the next booth. We talked for twenty minutes about prophecy and world events before the lady asked me the question I dread hearing: "What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a teacher," I said.

"Oh?" she said. "What do you teach?"

"I'm a Bible teacher," I said, somewhat reluctantly.

Driving back from McDonalds®, I wondered why, although I love to share the gospel, I am so hesitant to admit I'm a pastor. Then it hit me: I'm just not a "religious" guy.

Jesus came on the scene, saying, "The truth shall set you free" (see John 8:32). But the very word "religion" means "to bind." Here in our text, we see the subject of religion addressed very clearly. . . .

Revelation 17:1 (a)

And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore . . .

At this point in the Book of Revelation, although the church is in heaven, the structures, systems, and stuff of religion—referred to here as the great harlot—remain intact on earth.

Revelation 17:1 (b), 2

. . . that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

Note the universal power of the false religious system as the harlot consorts with the political leaders of "many waters," or many nations.

Revelation 17:3

So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

Note the unique position of the false religious system as the harlot is seen riding the Beast, or Antichrist. At this point, all true believers—be they Baptists or Catholics, Episcopalians or Pentecostals—are in heaven. This leaves only the trappings of religion atop the Beast.

Revelation 17:4 (a)

And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls . . .

Note the unlimited prosperity of the false religious system as seen in the purple robes and precious jewels with which the harlot is attired.

Revelation 17:4 (b)

. . . having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.

Note the unholy passion of the false religious system as seen in the golden cup in the hand of the harlot, full of the fruits of her fornication.

Revelation 17:5

And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

The Bible could rightly be called The Tale of Two Cities, for from cover to cover, two cities pop up over and over again: One is Jerusalem, the city of God. The other is Babylon, the city of rebellion.

Mentioned more than three hundred times in Scripture, Babylon was founded on the plain of Shinar near the Euphrates River by Nimrod, a man whose name literally means "we will rebel." Babylon was centered around the tower of Babel—a ziggurat used for the practice of astrology.

Revelation 17:6 (a)

And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus . . .

Note the unsettling persecution perpetrated by the false religious system. Bear in mind that John wrote the Book of Revelation in the midst of ten waves of persecution that would ultimately claim the lives of six million believers.

Revelation 17:6 (b), 7

. . . and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration. And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.

Initially, we saw the woman riding the Beast (verse 3). Here, we see the Beast carrying the woman—a small, but I believe, important change of terminology as Antichrist employs the false religious system to serve his own agenda.

Revelation 17:8

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

John gives a seemingly enigmatic description of the beast carrying the woman when he writes of the "beast that was seen and is not, and yet is." But then he goes on to give further illumination. . . .

Revelation 17:9

And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.

Only one city in history is known as "The City of Seven Mountains": Rome.

Revelation 17:10 (a)

And there are seven kings . . .

At the time John wrote this, there had been seven Roman emperors: Julius Caesar, Caesar Augustus, Tiberias, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, and Domitian.

Revelation 17:10 (b)

. . . five are fallen . . .

Of the original emperors, the lives of five were cut short. Julius Caesar was assassinated. Tiberias was poisoned. Caligula was stabbed. Claudius

was smothered. And Nero committed suicide.

Revelation 17:10 (c)
. . . and one is . . .

When John penned this book, Domitian was on the throne.

Revelation 17:10 (d)
. . . and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.

This is a reference to Antichrist.

Revelation 17:11
And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.

The Beast yet to come is "of the seven." In other words, Antichrist is one of the original seven emperors. Consider with me Caesar Nero—the sixth of the original Roman emperors. . . .

It was to Caesar Nero that Paul appealed (Acts 25:11). History verifies that it was after meeting with Paul that Caesar Nero went on a rampage that resulted in the martyrdom of tens of thousands of believers. This coupled with the fact that the Hebrew numeric value of the letters of his name equal 666, I personally believe Caesar Nero will one day reappear as Antichrist. Oh, he'll not come wearing a toga, playing a fiddle, saying, "I'm back." Rather, the perverted spirit of Caesar Nero that caused massive bloodshed under his reign will reappear in Antichrist.

Revelation 17:12, 13
And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.

Daniel 7 tells us that the ten horns of the beast signify the ten nations of the revived Roman Empire. Since the Rapture has happened at this point, Antichrist and this ten-nation federation will be of one mind.

Revelation 17:14 (a)
These shall make war with the Lamb . . .

The bottom line, the only goal, the one objective of Antichrist is to destroy Jesus.

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

Because Jesus is the Lord of lords and the King of kings, Antichrist will be unsuccessful in his attempted coup.

Revelation 17:15, 16
And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.

Once the Beast has used the false religious system to gain power, he will then turn against her. So, too, we will be disgraced, denuded, and devoured by any sin we attempt to control rather than confess. Oh, perhaps, like the harlot, we can ride the sin for a season, arrayed in the pearls, precious stones, and purple robes of confidence—but eventually, like the harlot, we will be burned and eaten up by the very sin we thought we controlled. I believe the language in this verse is purposely horrific because, truly, the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

Revelation 17:17

For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.

According to His own will, God will use the Beast to destroy the false religious system.

Revelation 17:18

And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.

This chapter has dealt with all of so-called Christendom being united by the power and potency of Rome. But one must not equate Rome with Catholicism. There are wonderful brothers and sisters in the Catholic Church, just as there are wonderful brothers and sisters in the Baptist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Methodist, and Orthodox church. But after these brothers and sisters are raptured, the remaining power and prestige of the church in Rome will be manipulated by Antichrist. And although the Roman Church will think she's in control, she'll inevitably suffer the same fate as that of her own Pope Pius. . . .

In 1804, Napoleon summoned Pope Pius VII to leave Rome and to come to Paris in order to crown him emperor of France. Knowing the one who crowns the emperor will always have a voice of power with the emperor, Pius showed up with crown in hand. But just as he was about to place the crown on Napoleon's brow, Napoleon grabbed it from Pope Pius and crowned himself. Horrified, Pius immediately understood the implication: Napoleon had wrested all power from Rome.

And the day is coming when Antichrist will do the same.



18 Revelation 18:1 (a)

And after these things . . .

After what things? After the destruction of Babylon (Revelation 17:15). What is left of the one-world religious system will join with Antichrist and the ten-nation confederation of Europe. Playing right into his hands, the religious system will initially work with Antichrist and the European Union —the revived Roman Empire.

The religious system based in Rome will appear to control the European coalition of the revived Roman Empire—but only for a certain season, for these kings will ultimately turn against Rome and, after using her to gain control of the reigns of world power, will trash her. That's why Babylon is called a harlot in chapter 17. She's used, abused, and thrown away.

Revelation 18:1 (b), 2 (a)

. . . I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen . . .

Why do we see Babylon again in chapter 18 after seeing her destroyed in chapter 17? Because chapter 17 deals with the false religious system Babylon represents, while chapter 18 deals with the literal city of Babylon. Chapter 17 deals with religious Babylon. Chapter 18 deals with political and economic Babylon.

This explains the seeming discrepancy between 17:16, which reads: ". . . and the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore . . ." and 18:9, which reads: ". . . and the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her . . ." You see, although the kings of the earth hate the religious system, they love and embrace the economic system of Babylon.

Revelation 18:2 (b)

. . . and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

As also seen in Jeremiah 51, the utter destruction of Babylon is reiterated in the Book of Isaiah . . .

> And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged .
>
> Isaiah 13:19–22

Although destroyed by Alexander the Great in 330 B.C., there have always been small communities of inhabitants in Babylon. Isaiah, however, prophesied that not even shepherds and their flocks would hang out there, that it would simply be a place for weird birds and wild animals. Thus, Isaiah's prophecy concerns a future destruction, which will come to further light as Revelation 18 unfolds. . . .

> **Revelation 18:3**
>
> **For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.**

Here we see interaction and commercial intercourse with Babylon. And because every nation has interaction with Babylon, every nation is affected by Babylon. *All* nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

> **Revelation 18:4**

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

The voice from heaven speaks to those who become believers during the Tribulation. The church is already in heaven, but the Lord will still save souls—so many that in the Tribulation there will be a large number of people who finally understand the gospel message and are converted to Christ. To them, this clarion call comes from heaven, saying, "Stay away from Babylon."

Revelation 18:5

For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.

The goal of the builders of the Tower of Babylon's birthplace was to "build a tower whose top may reach unto heaven" (Genesis 11:4). In reality, the only thing that reached to heaven was their iniquity.

Revelation 18:6

Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.

In other words, Babylon is about to receive twice the wrath and destruction ever perpetrated by her.

Revelation 18:7 (a)

How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow . . .

She who has had interaction with all nations and with whom all nations have been involved in fornication now says, "I'm a queen, not a widow. I'm neither impoverished nor in need of anything."

Revelation 18:7 (b)

. . . and shall see no sorrow.

This doesn't mean Babylon will not experience sorrow—but that she refuses to see it. Consumed with a "let them eat cake" mentality, Babylon is so absorbed in her own delicacies, her own materialism, her own economy that she does not see the sorrow of people even within her own boundaries.

Revelation 18:8

Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.

"You claim to be a queen and you see no sorrow. But I look at you differently," declares God. "You're going to be judged thoroughly."

Revelation 18:9, 10 (a)

And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city . . .

Not wanting to be tormented with the same torment with which Babylon is tormented, the kings of the earth will lament and mourn—but "standing afar off"—at a safe distance.

Revelation 18:10 (b)

. . . for in one hour is thy judgment come.

The utter destruction of a city like Babylon taking place in one hour would most likely be the result of a nuclear exchange—the fallout of which would help explain why the kings of the earth "stand afar off."

Revelation 18:11

And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more.

No one is saying, "Oh, those poor people in Babylon." No, they're saying, "Oh no, the world economy is wiped out." And as the results of the destruction of Babylon are described, it feels as if we're on a floor-by-floor tour of a huge department store like Saks Fifth Avenue or Bloomingdale's. . . .

Revelation 18:12 (a)

The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls . . .

First floor: Jewelry

Revelation 18:12 (b)

. . . and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet . . .

Second Floor: Clothing

Revelation 18:12 (c)

. . . and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble.

Third Floor: Home Furnishings

Revelation 18:13 (a)

And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense . . .

Fourth Floor: Cosmetics

Revelation 18:13 (b)

. . . and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep . . .

Fifth Floor: Food Court

Revelation 18:13 (c)
. . . and horses, and chariots . . .

Sixth Floor: Automotive

Revelation 18:13 (d)
. . . and slaves, and souls of men.

The word "slaves" literally meaning "bodies," this is the basement—the Adult Bookstore.

Please note not one of the aforementioned deals with life's necessities. They're all luxuries. Babylon specializes in materialism gone mad.

Revelation 18:14–17 (a)
And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought.

Babylon is the city that drives world economy, so everyone who exported from or imported to her is saying, "Oh no! How will we buy and sell now?"

***For topical study of Revelation 18:17 entitled "It's All Going to Burn," turn to page* 1768.**

Revelation 18:17 (b)–20
And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, And cried when they

saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city! And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate. Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.

The peoples' response to the destruction of Babylon is to weep and wail. But heaven's response is to rejoice.

Revelation 18:21–23 (a)

And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; and the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee . . .

The entire life of the city comes to a complete, abrupt halt in the aftermath of what is most likely a nuclear exchange. To John, the destruction in a single hour of the economic capital of the world would have been unimaginable. To our culture, having seen even the infancy of nuclear warfare demonstrated at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, this is completely possible.

Revelation 18:23 (b)

. . . for thy merchants were the great men of the earth . . .

Who, where, what is this city of Babylon? The first clue is that her merchants were the great, or wealthiest, men on earth.

Our government's historic and continued support and subsidy of the tobacco industry is an example of the "get rich at all costs" mentality that will do anything for a dollar—even if it means hiring Joe Camel

to sell cigarettes to our own children.

Revelation 18:23 (c)
. . . for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.

The word translated "sorceries" being *pharmakeia,* or "drugs," the second clue concerning Babylon's identity is that this city has caught the entire world in her web of drug traffic.

> The evidence is conclusive that due to the availability of money and to the demand of a culture that sinks so low as to glorify heroin addiction on its fashion models, the country that drives the drug industry today is unquestionably the United States.

Revelation 18:24
And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.

The third clue concerning Babylon's identity is that: The blood of the saints is on Babylon's head.

> Since 1900, an average of 250,000 born-again believers have been martyred every year. This issue is presently before our own Congress as the Christian community is saying the U.S. must take a stand—particularly as it relates to the nation of China, where the highest percentage of this type of persecution has taken place. But our country refuses to do this, instead granting China Most Favored Nation status in order that her 2.5 billion people can buy our cars and computers.

Am I suggesting the Babylon of Revelation 18 is actually America?

There are those who think so.

Turn to the Book of Isaiah, written by another prophet who foretold the destruction of Babylon (21:9). . . .

Woe to the land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia.

Isaiah 18:1

"Beyond the rivers of Ethiopia is a term to describe an unknown region —certainly what America would have been to Isaiah. In addition, some suggest the "shadowing with wings" reference is to the eagle, our country's insignia.

That sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters . . .

Isaiah 18:2 (a)

Isaiah's point of reference being the Middle East, her ambassadors could only have reached America by crossing the sea.

. . . saying, Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto . . .

Isaiah 18:2 (b)

The original Hebrew meaning of this passage is: "Go ye swift messengers to a nation, wide and polished, to a people awesome from their beginning."

. . . a nation meted out and trodden down . . .

Isaiah 18:2 (c)

Some suggest this is a precise description of our own history in light of our "manifest destiny" to claim our land from coast to coast, from "sea to shining sea," regardless of the indigenous people groups in the way.

. . . whose land the rivers have spoiled!

Isaiah 18:2 (d)

Some suggest this refers to the pollution of our rivers.

In his description of Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah writes of "the mingled people" in the midst of a land "that dwellest upon many waters" (see Jeremiah 50:37; 51:13). Inhabited by a mono-ethnic people and situated on only the Euphrates River, Jeremiah's reference does not describe historic Babylon. America, on the other hand, is a melting pot of people and surrounded by oceans and rivers—not to mention the Great Lakes that alone contain one-quarter of the world's fresh water.

Add to this the fact that Babylon will "mount up to heaven, and fortify the height of her strength" (see Jeremiah 51:53) in a seeming reference to a space program, the case made by those who believe the Babylon of Revelation 18 is actually America—New York City, in particular—is a strong one.

Do I agree with this?

I don't know.

> You see, it could very well be that present-day Babylon will become the center of world commerce during the Tribulation. Once surrounded by walls wide enough that six chariots could race atop them and containing hanging gardens so magnificent that they were one of the seven wonders of the world, after its destruction in 330 B.C. by Alexander the Great, Babylon was a rather unimportant place for many centuries—until Saddam Hussein came to power. Fifteen years ago, he commissioned a team of brilliant Japanese architects to mastermind the rebuilding of the once-awesome city. Today, the palace of Nebuchadnezzar, the gate of Ishtar, and the royal paveway are complete. The wall is near completion.

Why is Hussein investing hundreds of millions of dollars on this building project? Partly as a nod to the past, an homage to his hero, Nebuchadnezzar—the last king of Babylon able to control Israel; partly as an understanding of the present, as a way to compete for the much-needed tourist dollar; and partly as a hope for the future—the first part of a plan to establish Babylon as the center of the Arab world.

> So it could well be that after Rome is devoured in the Tribulation (Revelation 17:14), Antichrist will choose to move his base of operation to Babylon in Iraq. Interestingly, in the first Gulf War, due to its archaeological, historical, and cultural significance, orders were issued by the Gulf War Coalition that under no circumstances was Babylon to be touched. Thus, the possibility certainly exists that Babylon was preserved not only for her archaeological, historical, and cultural significance—but, unknowingly, for her prophetic significance.

Whether the Babylon of Revelation 18 is actually present-day Babylon or present-day America, the fact remains that although a revived Roman Empire, a restored Russia, a Chinese-Asian coalition, and Israel are all clearly seen in the end times—America is strangely absent. While this could be due to the fact that she truly is devastated in the nuclear exchange described in Revelation 18, it could also be due to the fact that the percentage of Christians in our nation—be they strong or weak or vacillating—is so high that America is disabled as a result of the void they leave after the Rapture. You see, if I were to go to Hawaii tomorrow, my whole body would go—even if my arm was broken, my back was sore, my knee was bruised. The same is true of the Rapture. The *entire* body of Christ will go—comprised of any who simply believe that Jesus died for their sins and rose again, of all who embrace His gift of salvation.

While we will have to wait for a definitive answer to the question of Babylon's identity in the last days, however, our brother James has a particular word for us this day. . . .

> Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.
>
> James 5:1–3

In other words, our garages full of stuff we can't get rid of because we're sure that someday we'll actually use that electric toothbrush and our closets

full of clothes we can't give away because we're also sure that someday we'll lose those twenty pounds and wear them again, witness against us.

> Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.
>
> James 5:4

The cries from the people you've cheated by cutting corners, from the employees you've tricked, from the system you've "beat" all enter the ears of the Lord.

> Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.
>
> James 5:5, 6

In taking care of your own business and pleasure, you've forgotten everyone else.

> Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.
>
> James 5:7–9

Don't cheat one another. Instead, be as generous as you can, realizing the nearness of the Lord's return.

Truly, James is "another voice from heaven, saying, Come out from Babylon, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (see Revelation 18:4).

It's a convicting word for me—one I need to hear, one I need to heed.

IT'S ALL GOING TO BURN
A Topical Study of
REVELATION 18:17

I am about to give you, free of charge, the best investment advice you will ever receive.

Look with me at Luke 12. . . .

> *And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.*
>
> Luke 12:13

Jewish tradition contained a brilliant way of dividing an inheritance. If there were two brothers, it was the responsibility of the eldest to divide the inheritance in two, and the privilege of the youngest to have first choice. This way everything was fair.

In this case, however, something went wrong, and the inheritance was not correctly divided.

> *And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?*
>
> Luke 12:14

"That's not what I'm about," answered Jesus, knowing that the real problem wasn't financial, technical, or legal. It was spiritual. The issue was not a matter of money. The issue was a matter of the heart because both brothers were covetous.

"I have heard confessions of every sin imaginable," wrote Francis of Assisi, "but I have never heard a man confess the sin of covetousness."

Scripture, however, records such a confession by one who was otherwise "blameless concerning the law." In Romans 7, the apostle Paul says the sin that damned him was covetousness.

What is covetousness?

Wanting more of that of which you already have enough.

Whether with regard to power or pleasure, clothes or cars, houses or hobbies, covetousness is any attitude that says, "Just a little more, and I'll be happy." Knowing this, Jesus said,

> *Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*
>
> Luke 12:15

It has been rightly said that small men seek to get a little more, while great men seek to be a little more.

"I can't promise you a yacht or a big house or a Rolex or a Rolls Royce as Johnny Green could," said the young man to his girlfriend. "But I can promise you all my love."

"I love you too," answered his girlfriend, "but tell me more about Johnny Green. . . ."

Life is not about possessions; so Jesus continued on with a parable to drive this point home. . . .

> *The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*
>
> Luke 12:16–21

A story was told of Dietrich Reinhold, a man known throughout his community to be very wealthy. One night he went to sleep in his huge mansion, only to wake up a couple hours later in a cold sweat, frightened by a dream in which an angel appeared to him, saying, "At midnight, the richest man in the valley shall die."

That's me, thought Reinhold, and he sent a servant to quickly fetch the doctor.

The doctor came hastily, listened to Dietrich's story, and sat with him until the clock struck twelve. When the last bell sounded, just as Dietrich was breathing a huge sigh of relief, he heard a pounding on his door. He opened it to find one of his servants.

"Master! Master Reinhold! Hans has just died!"

And suddenly Dietrich Reinhold understood that Hans, the servant who was known throughout the region as one who loved the Lord, was the richest man in the village.

Dear friend, in one hour—and the hour could be very soon—your entire empire, however big or small it might be, could burn. That is why Jesus said we are fools if we're rich on earth but paupers in heaven.

One hundred years ago, a sailor shipwrecked in the South Seas found himself washed to the shore of a small island. The natives took one look at his white skin and made him their god. "This is my lucky day!" thought the sailor. But after six months of being treated like a king and learning the customs of the people, he was shocked to discover that each god served for one year, only to be sacrificed at the end of the year to the next god.

So seeing a bigger picture than living the life of luxury for the next six months, what did this guy do? He set his subjects to work on building a boat. When it was completed five and a half months later, he got on it and sailed away.

What would happen if we said, "Since Babylon is all going to burn, why don't I do something radical and spend the six months I have left to prepare for eternity? I'll use whatever I have on this earth for God's glory by giving it away or sharing it with others"? If that were truly our mind-set, we'd gladly lend our little brother our new CD player or our friend our new car. You see, the problem doesn't lie with material possessions. The problem only arises when we grasp them too tightly or when they keep us from fellowshiping with our Lord or loving our neighbor.

This is a hard message to give to young people because they think they can wait to get radical until they're older. But if you're in your fifties, like me, or older, you know that wrinkles and gray hair are constant reminders that life is short.

But all too often what do we do? We buy hair dye and cactus root extract from Arizona that promises to give us an extra ten minutes of life.

> *And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.*
>
> Luke 12:22, 23

Don't make styles or health food your focus to the point that when people see you coming, they know you're going to try to get them caught up in the latest fad.

> *Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.*
>
> Luke 12:24–31

"Consider the ravens. . . ." This passage doesn't mean you don't have to do anything because God will take care of you. Even the birds know better than that. No, they do what they can to provide for themselves, but they don't develop ulcers in the process.

> *Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

Luke 12:32

What is the kingdom? Paul defines it not as meat or drink, but as righteousness, peace, and joy (Romans 14:17). Righteousness, peace, and joy —these are what God promises us if we seek first the kingdom.

> *Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*
>
> Luke 12:33, 34

How do we disentangle our hearts from the things of Babylon and focus on the things of heaven? By putting our treasure there, by giving stuff away, by helping people out, by doing whatever we can to be as generous as we can possibly be. We set our hearts on heaven not by building bigger barns, but by becoming bigger people in light of eternity.

As opposed to the current health and wealth teaching that propounds that godliness with great gain makes for contentment, Paul wrote to Timothy,

> *But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.*
>
> 1 Timothy 6:6–9

A Confederate spy during the Civil War, Rose O'Neal Greenhow received two thousand dollars in gold as payment for her memoirs and boarded a ship home with the gold sewn into the hem of her dress and petticoats. Sailing on the blockade-runner Condor, she reached the mouth of the Cape Fear River just outside Wilmington, North Carolina, when a Union ship gave chase, forcing the Condor aground. Rose, fearing capture and reimprisonment, persuaded the captain to send her and two companions

ashore in a lifeboat; but in stormy seas, the small vessel overturned. The ship sank, and so did Rosie.[1]

Paul's right—gold can drown men. So what's the solution?

The one Paul gave to Timothy. . . .

Charge them that are rich in this world . . .

1 Timothy 6:17 (a)

I believe this verse applies to every single one of us in some respect. Why? Because having a roof over our heads, food on the table, and even a single car in our garage makes us rich, indeed, compared to the rest of the world.

. . . that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.

1 Timothy 6:17 (b)

Don't trust in your money; don't live for it, but rather trust God who gives us all things to enjoy and live for Him.

That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.

1 Timothy 6:18

The word translated "communicate" literally means "be sociable." In other words, open up your home, heart, and possessions. Give them away; let them go; be as generous as you can possibly be with everyone the Lord sends your way on any given day. The key to enjoying that which God has given us is employing it for His glory.

I join Paul in promising you that when you get to heaven, whatever you did on earth in response to God guiding you to—support a ministry, give to a homeless person on the street, or share a meal with someone in need—will not cause you to say, "Phooey. I could have built a bigger barn. Why did I give so much away?"

You'll never say that!

Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

1 Timothy 6:19

Gang, even if the Rapture doesn't happen in our lifetime (which I am convinced it will), the riches you have generously dispensed on earth in obedience to the Spirit will make you rich in heaven because you've been obedient to the Spirit of God.

Lay up for yourselves a good foundation.

How?

By letting go; by sharing with people; and by obeying the Lord.

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

Revelation 19:7



19 Here's the question: Would you rather *have* dinner or *be* dinner—for that, ultimately, is the issue raised here in chapter 19 in the account of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in heaven, and the feast of the fowls at Armageddon. One is glorious and beautiful, the other bloody and brutal. Reservations are now being taken. You will be at one or the other. I highly recommend the first. . . .

Revelation 19:1 (a)

And after these things . . .

Chapter 19 takes place after the destruction of Babylon—the political and commercial epicenter of the world.

Revelation 19:1 (b)

. . . I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation . . .

The world says there's an alternative to salvation. They call it optimism. "There's a great big beautiful tomorrow," they sing. "Inch by inch, anything's a cinch," they say. "If it's to be, it's up to me," they declare—not realizing that nothing short of salvation will truly alter the tribulation that threatens them daily.

Revelation 19:1 (c), 2

. . . and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

The people on earth wail following the destruction of Babylon. But heaven rejoices. Why? Because, although the natural tendency of people is to say, "Wasn't that a bit brutal, Lord? Did You really have to drop hundred-pound hailstones? Wouldn't thirty-pounders have done the job? What are You doing, Lord? Why do You allow such difficulty, tragedy, pain?" chapter 19 shows us there is no such questioning in heaven. It's not because there's a "No Questioning Allowed" sign in heaven—but because in heaven, the full picture becomes clear. And that which seemed to be so terrible, painful, and unnecessary on earth will seem brilliant, perfect, and righteous from the vantage of heaven.

The same is true regarding trials in our lives presently. Why doesn't the Lord just show us the whole story now? Because He is teaching you and me to walk by faith and not by sight. Why? Because He knows that developing faith in you and me is absolutely necessary in light of what we will be doing throughout eternity.

Revelation 19:3, 4

And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.

"Amen" means "so be it." "Alleluia" means "praise the Lord." Interestingly, "Amen" and "Alleluia" are the only universally known words. That is, they are understood in every language, by every culture. The elders —or mature ones—are those who say, "So be it. Praise the Lord."

Revelation 19:5, 6

And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Handel's inspired and glorious Hallelujah Chorus draws from this text.

Revelation 19:7

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

It's not a list of things to do that prepares us for the Marriage Feast. It's an embracing of what the Lamb has done.



***For topical study of Revelation 19:7 entitled "The Wedding Feast," turn to page* 1777.**

Revelation 19:8

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

In the Book of Isaiah, we see what "the righteousness of saints" is. . . .

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered

me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

Isaiah 61:10

It's not *my* righteousness that saves me, for Isaiah goes on to say that my righteousness is as filthy rags (64:6). No, it's the robe of righteousness the Lord places around me that affords me entrance to the Marriage Feast of the Lamb.

Revelation 19:9, 10 (a)

And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell at his feet to worship him.

At this point, John is so blown away by seeing the bride, that he falls at the feet of the angelic messenger.

Revelation 19:10 (b)

And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

"Don't worship me. I'm just a fellow servant," the angel declares. Throughout the Gospels we see people worshiping Jesus. . . .

Peter fell down and worshiped Him, saying, "Depart from me. I'm a sinful man" (see Luke 5:8).

Thomas said, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

Yet Jesus never says, "Don't worship Me. I'm just an angel." Therefore, the contention of the Mormon or Jehovah's Witness that Jesus is nothing more than an angel is completely erroneous. Jesus receives worship because He is more than an angel. He is God Incarnate.

Revelation 19:11 (a)
And I saw heaven opened . . .

It is only in the Book of Revelation that we see the door of heaven open. In chapter 4, verse 1, the door is opened for the entrance of the raptured church. Here in chapter 19, the door is opened for the exit of the church seven years later when she returns to earth with Jesus at His Second Coming.

Revelation 19:11 (b), 12 (a)
. . . and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire . . .

Based on 1 Corinthians 3:12, 13, I used to think there would be a great big oven in heaven, a kiln of some sort into which all my works would be shoveled. The wood, hay, and stubble would burn while the gold, silver, and precious stones would remain. But in light of our text, I no longer expect an oven. Instead, I expect Jesus will just look at me, and everything in my life that is worthless will ignite and disappear. I've got cords of wood, bales of hay, truckloads of stubble—and I'm so thankful that with one look from my Lord, they will all go up in smoke.

"Take your only son to Mount Moriah," God commanded Abraham (see Genesis 22:2). God didn't even acknowledge Ishmael as Abraham's son because, while Isaac was the product of God's faithfulness, Ishmael was a product of Abraham's flesh. I love this because most of us have a bunch of Ishmaels running around—things we've done in our flesh, trying to help God. But God doesn't even acknowledge them. Glorious, indeed, will be the day when He'll look at me with His eyes of fire, warming my heart and melting the junk.

Revelation 19:12 (b)
. . . and on his head were many crowns . . .

Perhaps the "many crowns" in this passage signify all of the denominations within the church who crown Jesus Lord. After all, the

leaders of some churches wear big hats and sprinkle water on people. The leaders of other churches wear fancy suits and slicked-back hair. The leaders of other churches wear baseball hats and Birkenstocks. But guess what. God has His people in the congregations of every one of them as He breaks through the barriers that divide them and makes Himself known.

Revelation 19:12 (c)
. . . and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

Name speaks of nature. Thus, this verse suggests that, due to the fact that there's a part of Him that is not understood by any but Himself, we will be amazed when we see Jesus because none of us knows Him presently the way we will know Him eventually. The neat thing is that we will spend eternity exploring the nuances of His nature, astounded by His beauty, awed by His holiness, amazed at His love that we only see "through a glass darkly" this side of heaven (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Revelation 19:13
And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

It's His blood that cleanses me from my impurity and washes me from my stupidity. I am pure not because of my efforts, but because Jesus died for me.

Revelation 19:14
And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

The door in heaven is open and, clothed in white linen, here we come with the Lord—not to fight, but rather to observe Him secure the victory.

Revelation 19:15
And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and

he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

I've seen artists render this scene with a literal sword protruding from the mouth of the Lord. I don't believe such is the proper view. I believe the "sharp sword" that comes forth from His mouth is simply the Word He speaks—sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12).

Revelation 19:16–18

And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.

Here is Dinner Number Two. If you don't want to take part of the Marriage Feast of the Lamb, you'll be part of this horrendous "supper of the great God."

Revelation 19:19

And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.

The armies of the world gather in the plain of Jezreel, the valley in northern Israel called the Valley of Megiddo—the place we know as Armageddon. Two hundred million men have come from the East; Antichrist is storming into Jerusalem to secure his power base. According to Daniel 11, the South, which would include the Pan African nations and the Arab states banded together, also head toward Israel, to which the Northern armies come from Europe. They all converge to fight one another. But as the battle begins, everyone looks up and sees One whose eyes are like fire, crowned with

many crowns, riding a white horse, leading an innumerable army. And suddenly, all of the weapons of all earth's armies are turned upon this One—which was Satan's intention all along.

> **Revelation 19:20, 21**
>
> **And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.**

Reading this chapter, I realized if it were up to me, I would have spent more time on Jesus' Second Coming. I mean, we have been building up to this moment for a long time. Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18 all were about tribulation. You've read through studies on seven seals followed by seven trumpets followed by seven vials. You've studied plagues, pests, and problems; suffering, scorching, and sorrow; heartache, earthquakes, and death. And finally we come to the culmination of the Tribulation—the glorious Second Coming—only to have it wrapped up in one short chapter. If I were writing this, I would have reversed it. I would have described the Tribulation in one chapter, and the second coming in thirteen.

Why didn't John do this?

> Because, although the Book of Revelation does, indeed, deal with the mark of the Beast, the Common Market, and everything else that relates to current events—we must never forget it was written by a real-life pastor named John who ministered to the people of seven real churches who were being fed to lions, dipped in hot wax, sawn in half lengthwise, and crucified upside down. By conservative estimates, six million would die before the persecution ended. In light of this, through seal after trumpet after vial, Pastor John assures his congregation that life is brutal, painful, and bloody. Why? Because

when Adam and Eve fell, the whole world fell with them.

> For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.
>
> Romans 8:22

We look at the mountains in awe and are enraptured by the beauty of a wooded stream. Nature, on the other hand, groans, knowing what it was before the Fall. That is why when the King comes back the mountains will break forth into song, and the trees of the field shall clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12).

It used to be that man would walk with God in the cool of the day, talking to Him without having to break through, press in, or hold on. Everything was right. Then came the Fall, and nothing was ever right again. There is a solution, however. It's called salvation. And nowhere is salvation more clearly framed than at the table of Communion.

I believe Pastor John was warning his people that even in the midst of their own tribulation, if they ate of the marriage feast as seen in the first half of chapter 19, they would be able to navigate the Armageddon of the second half. David said the same thing when he said, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies" (Psalm 23:5).

So, too, even though you may be surrounded by disappointments, pain, and the presence of enemies—there's a table set before you that will restore your soul and allow you to face tribulation without being shot down or wiped out. Many Christians are unable to navigate tribulation well because, although they have knowledge of the Word, they lack the intimacy with the Lord that takes place at the Communion table.

While the techniques of teaching and ways of worship have changed, one thing has remained constant for all believers throughout church history: communion. Century after century, the church has understood that the Eucharist is vital for survival. Presently, however, we come dangerously close to substituting Bible study for the Lord's table.

The solution to catastrophe is not optimism. It's salvation. And the way to salvation is not through intellectual understanding. The way to salvation is

through spiritual intimacy, illustrated most clearly when we eat and drink of Jesus—the most intimate kind of worship possible.

Whether you partake of the Lord's table with your family at home or at the church, don't ignore Communion, dear saint. Being one with Jesus is that which will see you through any Armageddon that lies right around the bend.

In due season, our Lord will, indeed, come again, and there will be no more battle whatsoever. In the meantime, He prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives, and we will dwell in the house of the Lord *forever*.

THE WEDDING FEAST

A Topical Study of REVELATION 19:7

This being June, we find ourselves well into another wedding season. But no wedding can hold a candle to the wedding in the passage before us. Following the description of the Tribulation in Revelation chapters 6—19, we come to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

"Wait a minute," you say, "if the Book of Revelation does, indeed, flow in chronological order, since the church is raptured in chapter 4 to begin her seven-year honeymoon with the Lord, why does the marriage feast not take place until chapter 19?"

The answer lies in an understanding of the Jewish marriage tradition, which comprised three stages. . . .

The Engagement

Historically, Jewish children would often be engaged by the age of two or three—sometimes before they were even born. That is, families that shared the same values and social standing would say, "If you have a daughter and I have a son, let's agree right now that they will marry each other." You see, the Jewish people looked at marriage as far too important to be left up to the decision-making skills of young adults. So it was up to the father specifically to arrange with other fathers to whom his son or daughter would be engaged.

Scripture does record a few cases when men chose their own brides. But each of these marriages ended in heartache or disaster. . . .

> Against his father's wishes, Esau married an Ishmaelite (Genesis 28:8, 9).
>
> Jacob fell in love with Rachel at first sight, but ended up working for her for seven years before unknowingly marrying her sister (Genesis 29).
>
> Samson "loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah" (Judges 16:4).

Since the result of a man choosing his own wife without the directive of his father often resulted in tragedy or difficulty, it became the norm for the father to select his child's spouse.

Betrothal

The engagement led to the betrothal—usually between the ages of twelve and fifteen for a young lady. At this point, bride and groom would perhaps meet for the first time, as the father of the groom would negotiate the bride price. The price would be based upon three variables.

First, it would be predicated upon the father's wealth. If the father of the groom was a rich man, he would pay a high price so as not to look like a cheapskate.

Second, the price would be determined by the bride's worth. If she was attractive or otherwise gifted, her bride price would be higher.

Thirdly, the price was based upon the groom's work. That is, in some cases it was up to the groom to pay the price. . . .

> Because Jacob chose his own bride, he paid for her himself with seven years' labor (Genesis 29:18).
>
> "He who marries my daughter must conquer the enemy city of Kirjathsepher," declared Caleb. Othniel took the challenge and won (see Joshua 15:16, 17).
>
> A Gentile named Shechem who fell in love with Jacob's daughter, Dinah, was informed her price would be the circumcision of himself and all of the men in his city as a sign of identification with the Jews (Genesis 34:15, 16).

A portion of the bride price would go to the bride to use as security in the event she was widowed or divorced. This explains why Rachel and Leah accused their uncle, Laban, of "devouring their money" (see Genesis 31:15).

The remainder of the bride price went to the bride's father in compensation for the fact that, unlike a son, his daughter wouldn't be able to carry on his name, help defend him, or take over the family business.

After at least a portion of the bride price was laid upon the table, a contract would be signed to further validate the agreement. Then, the prospective bride and groom would sip from a single cup of wine, at which point they were legally betrothed.

For the following year, the couple would not drink of the vine nor live together. The bride would begin to wear a veil, signifying that she was "taken." She would also begin to prepare her wedding dress, sometimes from material provided by the groom (Ezekiel 16:10).

Meanwhile, the groom would begin construction on what is called in Hebrew "a little mansion"—a room built onto his father's house. When the father decided the preparations were complete, his son, wearing a crown, would be sent off to his wedding (Song of Solomon 3:11).

Wedding

Although the bride didn't know the exact day of her wedding, she knew it would most likely be in autumn to allow for the completion of harvest, and that it would most likely be on a Wednesday. Wednesday was the day couples got married because Thursday was the day the courts were opened. If it was discovered on her wedding day that the bride was not a virgin, she could easily be divorced the next day.

As the preparation of her "little mansion" neared completion, the bride would begin to gather her friends to await the arrival of her groom.

On the day of his wedding, the groom and his friends—particularly his best man—would walk through the streets with trumpets blaring, taking the most circuitous route to the bride's house. Already attired in her wedding dress, when the bride heard the sounding of the trumpet, she would arise and receive a blessing from her father. Then she would run out the door to be met by the groom in the streets.

Together, they would make their way to the four-postered canopy under which they would be married. The ceremony itself consisted not of vows, which were Roman and Greek in tradition, but simply a reading of the contract that had been drawn up a year before, along with a blessing.

The procession would then continue on to the "little mansion," where the best man would stand outside the door while the marriage was consummated. Why would he stand outside the door? To wait for word from the groom that the bride was a virgin—as evidenced by a blood-spotted bed-sheet. If the bride was, indeed, a virgin, the wedding celebration would continue for seven days. If not, the guests would go home, and the bride would face either divorce or death by stoning.

Although seven days spent in an addition to one's father's house while friends and family partied just outside the door may not sound like the ideal honeymoon to us, but in the Jewish culture, being waited on for a week was glorious. You see, this would be the only time in their entire lives when the bride and groom would do no labor. Remember, there were no vacations in those days—no holiday cruises, no jets, no Maui. The one and only time people were able to kick back was during their marriage week. During this week, the bride would never be seen. The groom, on the other hand, would

occasionally come out and greet the guests before bringing back food and gifts to his bride.

After seven days, the groom would present his bride to his family, friends, and community—at which time the marriage feast would begin.

Looking again at this process, it becomes a picture-perfect analogy of our Bridegroom's relationship with us. . . .

Just as the Jewish father chose whom his child would marry, it's mind-boggling to realize that our heavenly Father elected us to be the bride for His Son (1 Peter 1:2). As proof of this intent, He paid the bride price, based first upon His wealth. How rich is God? Neither all the gold in the world nor all of the galaxies in the universe would begin to reflect His wealth. Instead, the "bride price" God paid for us was something of which He had only one: His Son (John 3:16).

Second, the price had to be according to the bride's worth.

The story is told of an Arabian man who had one daughter so plain he doubted anyone would ever want to marry her. One day, however, he received word that a man from a distant village was so taken with her that he was coming to see him with bride price in hand. Prepared to take whatever he was offered, imagine the father's surprise when the visitor offered him six cows for his daughter's hand.

Six cows! thought the father in amazement. "The highest price ever paid in this village has been three cows!"

So it was that the father gave his daughter's hand in marriage.

Two years later, the daughter and her husband returned to her home village, where everyone was startled by her exquisite beauty.

"How is she so beautiful?" they wondered.

The answer was simple: Because her husband saw her as worth six cows, a six-cow beauty is what she became.

That's how God views me. I don't understand it, but I rejoice in the fact that God looks at me and says, "I am in love with you so passionately that I'll give everything to bring you into the kingdom in order that you might live with Me forever and ever throughout eternity." To this end, God gave not six cows or even six galaxies—He gave Himself.

Third, the bride price was determined by the groom's work. Jesus outdid Jacob five-fold when He labored on earth as a Man for thirty-three years.

And He not only conquered a city, as did Othniel, but He conquered the whole world when He thrust Himself into the very heart of hell to pay the price for my sin (Ephesians 4:9). Finally, when God became Man to identify with us in the Incarnation, it was an infinitely greater step than Shechem took to identify with the Jews, for Jesus was not only afflicted momentarily, but was slain before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8).

The bride price paid, just as a contract was signed and a cup of wine shared by the bride and groom in a Jewish betrothal, we hold in our hands the "contract" of the Word of God, along with Jesus' promise that He would not drink of the cup again until He did so with us in the kingdom (Matthew 26:29). And as a bride wore a veil that, although it obscured her vision, signified her relationship with the groom, so at present we see through a glass darkly, but shall one day see our Bridegroom clearly (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Like the Jewish bride whose wedding dress was made from material provided by her groom, we are invited to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14) and robe ourselves in His righteousness (Isaiah 61:10).

Like the groom who added a "little mansion" to his father's house, Jesus went to His Father's house to prepare a place for us (John 14:2). Then, at the time appointed by the Father, the Son, wearing many crowns (Revelation 19:12), will come for us, His bride (Mark 13:32). Like the Jewish bride, we don't know the day or hour of His return, but like her, we know the season (1 Thessalonians 5:1). We understand the place of Israel, the problems in Jerusalem, the coming together of the European Union. We understand from Bible prophecy that the Lord's coming is near, even at the very door (Mark 13:29). Thus, like the Jewish bride, we ready ourselves for the day we will hear the trumpet and the shout (1 Thessalonians 4:16), before we are caught up to meet the Lord, not on earth, but in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

In the context of a Jewish wedding, John's position as "friend of the bridegroom" (John 3:29) and his message of repentance in preparation for the coming Bridegroom (Matthew 3:3) becomes clear.

"Therein lies the problem," you say. "If the marriage is to be validated on my purity, I deserve only divorce or stoning because I sin miserably; I mess up constantly; I fail continually."

Good News! The validation of our relationship with our Bridegroom doesn't depend on our sinlessness, but on His. It is the vesture dipped in *His* blood (Revelation 19:13) that allows us to be presented to Him without spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:27).

You mean we don't have to clean up our act, do this, or accomplish that? No, Jesus said blessed are those who are simply watching for His coming (Revelation 16:15), blessed are those who realize the price has been paid, the work done.

Precious people, that's what true Christianity consists of, marveling at the love of the Father and of the Son for me and for you.

We then are afforded a glorious honeymoon with Him—not for seven days, but for seven years as He serves us, His bride, in heaven (Luke 12:37). At the end of seven years, we come back to earth with Him in the Second Coming (Revelation 19:14) where, at the marriage feast of the Lamb, we are presented as His bride forever and ever.

And that is why we see the marriage feast in Revelation 19 rather than in chapter 4. The analogy is perfect.

Dear friend, if you have said, "Lord, I know I have sinned and failed, but I believe You love me and that You paid the price for me," Rejoice! Be glad! Celebrate! In the Lord's sight, you are a six-cow woman, a beautiful, glorious bride.



20

The Lord has come back. The final, climactic battle of Armageddon is over. The Millennial kingdom has begun. . . .

Revelation 20:1, 2

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.

Satan is bound not by the Lord, not by a host of angels, not even by Michael the archangel—but by a single, unnamed angel. We often imagine a

huge cosmic struggle going on constantly between God and Satan. Oh, we know God will win ultimately—but for now, we assume it's touch and go.

Not true. Satan is not the evil counterpart of God. God is God. There is none like Him, none who can even begin to challenge Him (Deuteronomy 4:39). Satan, previously known as the archangel Lucifer, has always been a created being. Thus, if there is a counterpart to Satan, it would be an archangel like Michael or Gabriel—but not God.

That is why when we see Satan from a heavenly perspective, we will say, "Is *this* the one who troubled the whole world?" (Isaiah 14:16) Holding a chain in his other hand, it only takes one hand of a single angel to detain Satan.



***For topical study of Revelation 20:1, 2 entitled "Binding Satan," turn to page* 1785.**

Revelation 20:3 (a)
And cast him into the bottomless pit . . .

The bottomless pit, or *abussos* into which Satan is tossed is the place wherein the worst demons are presently incarcerated—a place so horrific that the demons of Matthew 8 begged to be cast into a herd of swine rather than be sent there.

Revelation 20:3 (b)
. . . and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more . . .

What did Satan try to do to Jesus? He tried to seal Him in a tomb (Matthew 27:66). But Jesus didn't stay there. Now the tables are turned.

Revelation 20:3 (c)
. . . till the thousand years should be fulfilled . . .

Satan will be in the *abussos* for one thousand years. This explains how the wolf can lie down by the lamb, how the lion and bullock shall graze together, how snakes shall eat only dust—how peace will reign (Isaiah 65:25). It explains how every man will abide under his own vine (Micah 4:4), how no one will have to work for anyone else (Isaiah 65:23)—how prosperity will abound. The Millennium will be a fantastic time of unparalleled peace and total prosperity because Satan will not be on the scene.

Revelation 20:3 (d)
. . . and after that he must be loosed a little season.

Rather than being cast into outer darkness, or *Gehenna,* Satan is held in the *abussos,* the bottomless pit, for one thousand years because God will still have a job for him to do—as we will see in verse 7. . . .

Revelation 20:4 (a)
And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them . . .

The "sheep" of Matthew 25 are the remaining one-third of the nation of Israel who don't die in the Tribulation, along with those who stand by her during the Tribulation. When Jesus returns at His Second Coming, this remnant of Israel will ask Him, "Where did You get those wounds?"

"In the house of My friends," He will answer, (Zechariah 13:6). And at this moment, Israel will at last acknowledge Him as her Messiah—and all of the remaining house of Israel will be saved (Zechariah 13:9).

These are they whom we, the bride of Christ, will judge (Luke 19:15–19). You see, even though those living in the Millennium won't be influenced by Satan, they still will have their human nature to deal with. So when they think of ripping off a Butterfinger, we will be those who enforce Christ's righteousness. That is, before the guy can even develop the plan to steal the Butterfinger, we'll say, "Don't even think about it." It will be an enforced righteousness that governs the Millennial kingdom and that allows a glorious time of peace on earth.

"I don't like this idea of ruling or of judging," you might be saying. But let me tell you something: Jesus would not have taught us to be seizing opportunities to use our time and treasure wisely here on earth if He thought we wouldn't like the reward for doing so. And Paul would not have told us to run so that we might win the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24) if the prize was not something to be greatly desired.

Revelation 20:4 (b), 5

. . . and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

The first resurrection is not a single point in time. Rather, the first resurrection begins with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as the firstfruits (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23). It continues on to include those who believe in Jesus but died before the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:14), believers who are alive at the time of the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:17), those who are martyred in the Tribulation for their refusal to take the mark of the beast (Revelation 20:4), and the Old Testament saints who believed in Yahweh but did not have opportunity to be a part of the church because they died before Jesus came.

Thus, the first resurrection speaks of all those who are included in the grand plan of salvation.

Revelation 20:6 (a)

Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection . . .

Gang, even if nothing else in your life goes right, you are so blessed because you are part of the first resurrection. You are going to heaven.

Revelation 20:6 (b)

. . . on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

The first death is physical. The second death is eternal. Yes, we will die physically unless the Lord raptures us first. But the second death is for those who are damned eternally. Glory be to God, over us this second death has no power.

Revelation 20:7, 8 (a)

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth . . .

Who will Satan try to deceive? Those born in the Millennium—those living in enforced righteousness and peace because there's no other choice, those who never had an opportunity to decide whether or not they would follow the Lord. You and I have made such a choice. We have "chosen to be chosen." We have "selected to be elected." Here, those born during the Millennium are also given this choice.

I am blown away by the fact that somehow Satan will be able to persuade a great number of people to rebel against the One who will have done nothing but good for them and who will have given them a perfect environment wherein plenty, prosperity, peace, and perfection prevail. But I am only blown away until I stop to realize how good the Lord has been to me; how He gave His life for me; how He provides for me, walks with me, blesses me—and how often I turn my back on Him, fail to learn of Him, refuse to talk to Him.

And then I understand how Satan will be able to get a number of those living in the Millennium to echo the cry of Jerusalem: "We will not have this Man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14).

Why will the Lord allow this to happen? Because God is love, and love requires a choice.

If my wife, Tammy, agreed to marry me simply because I was the only man on earth or only because I held a gun to her head—our relationship wouldn't be based on love, but on the absence of any other choice.

So, too, God lets Satan loose for a short season in order to give people a choice.

Revelation 20:8 (b)

. . . Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

At this point, Russia already having been destroyed on the hills of Israel (Ezekiel 38—39), I believe the usage of "Gog and Magog" in this passage is similar to our usage of "Waterloo." Because Napoleon was defeated by Wellington in the Battle of Waterloo, the term "Waterloo" has come to signify a decisive battle or turning point. So, too, I believe the reference to Gog and Magog in this passage speaks of a cataclysmic, monumental battle in which Satan attempts a final rebellion.

Revelation 20:9 (a)

And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city . . .

The rebellious group led by Satan encircles the city of Jerusalem in a futile attempt to wrest power from the One who reigns within.

Revelation 20:9, 10 (a)

And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are . . .

Satan's purpose in God's plan having been accomplished, he is cast into the lake of fire to join the Beast and the false prophet.

Revelation 20:10 (b)
. . . and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

The cartoons are wrong, and Hollywood is terribly mistaken in portraying hell as a hot place where people play poker and talk to one another amidst flickering flames and an occasional jab by Satan's pitchfork. You see, in addition to being called a lake of fire, hell is called a place of outer darkness (Matthew 8:12). Consequently, the torment in a place so dark even the flames of the lake of fire don't shed any light is exceeded only by the inner torment people feel throughout eternity as they recall the sermons they heard and the invitations to salvation they ignored.

Jesus said specifically that hell was not created for people, but for the devil and demons (Matthew 25:41). Peter said God is not willing that *any* should perish (2 Peter 3:9). Yet, God, being Light, if man says, "I don't want God," he will be consigned to darkness. God, being health, if man says, "I don't want God," he will be relinquished to a place of pain. God, being a Father, if man says, "I don't want God," he will spend eternity in isolation.

God, on the other hand, says, "I would rather die than live without you." And He did just that when He died on the Cross in order that, forgiven of our sins, we might live with Him forever.

Revelation 20:11, 12 (a)
And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God . . .

Will believers stand before God at this White Throne Judgment?

No.

If you're a Christian, this judgment doesn't apply to you, for you were judged when Christ was on another throne—not a white one, but a wooden

one; when He wore a crown not of gold, but of thorns as He died to cleanse you from every sin you ever have or ever will commit.

Revelation 20:12 (b), 13

. . . and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

If you're a Christian, your name is written in the Book of Life. The names of those who said, "I didn't buy into that Christian stuff they were always trying to cram down my throat," or, "I needed my space," or, "I had to explore various aspects of spirituality," aren't.

"But I lived a pretty good life," they'll protest.

Yet the books wherein are recorded the reasons for everything they ever did will prove otherwise. . . .

"I was an outstanding member of Rotary."

Yes—but the books indicate it was to make some business contacts.

"Oh, but I gave blood."

Perhaps—but the books indicate you were paid twenty-five dollars in return.

"But I saved the whales, marched for peace, built homes for the homeless."

All well and good—but you did so to hear the applause of men.

You see, God made us in such a way that we are spared from remembering the sins we have committed. He let us remember enough sin to make us aware of our need for salvation—but not every motive, every word of gossip, every cutting comment, every angry feeling. When the books are opened, the utter weight of all one's sin will come to light. God sends no one to hell. By the time Volume 167 of one's sins is opened, it's as if he will cry,

"Depart from me for I am a sinful man," and will send himself to the lake of fire.

That's why I am so glad I'm saved. The Bible says the "handwriting of ordinances that was against us"—all of our mistakes, sins, and failures—were blotted out by the blood of Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:14). In other words, the pages and pages containing my sin are all illegible because they're covered with the red blood of Jesus.

Revelation 20:14, 15

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Maybe you're saying, "What will happen at the end of the world is all very interesting, but the bottom line is that I'm a believer, and I know I'm going to heaven. I'm far more concerned about the problems facing me right now."

So was John. The Book of Revelation was written specifically to a group of people facing far greater problems than you'll ever face. And the message it contains is as vital for us as it was to them: It's not over yet. Satan and death itself will be cast into the lake of fire. They lose. And all who embrace what Jesus did on the Cross when He plunged into hell on their behalf—all whose names are written in the Book of Life—win.

BINDING SATAN
A Topical Study of REVELATION 20:1, 2

Said one third-grader to another:

"Do you *really* think there is a devil?"

"No," answered his friend. "The devil's just like Santa Claus. He's really your dad."

Lots of people think of the devil as an "anti-Santa." Whereas Santa stands for kindness and good cheer, Satan stands for evil—but, like Santa, he's not a real person.

Jesus would disagree, for He identifies Satan as the prince of this world (John 12:31). So would the apostle Paul, calling him the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). The terminology employed by both Jesus and Paul indicates that not only is Satan very real, but that he is actually the reason for some of what happens in the world today. You see, when famine, war, earthquake, or ecological disasters erupt, people are prone to say, "Why did God do this?" But the Bible indicates very clearly that they are the acts not of God, but of "the prince of this world." Thus, Satan is very real.

He is, however, not very powerful. In the passage before us, we see a single angel binding him. And since we are to rule over angels, this gives us definite authority over Satan. Maybe there's a hellish quality in your marriage or family, on the job site or in your emotions—a persistent, painful problem over which you think you have no control.

"There's nothing I can do about this," you sigh. "I just have to live with this pull toward pornography, the depression that plagues me night and day, or the problem in my marriage that won't go away until I get to heaven."

Not true! Our text suggests otherwise.

> *And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee,*

> *That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*
>
> Matthew 16:16–18

That the gates of hell "shall not prevail" doesn't mean that the gates of hell will dog us all our days on earth until we eventually outrun them and barely make it to heaven. Folks, when was the last time you were walking down a street and you were attacked by a gate? Gates are inanimate objects. Thus, in Matthew 16, Jesus is not talking about the inability of the gates of hell to track you down, but about their inability to keep you out.

In other words, we can storm territory that seems to be controlled by hell. In Matthew 12, Jesus further illuminates this matter by saying,

> *Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.*
>
> Matthew 12:29

Breaking into a house to steal a TV does no good unless you first tie up whoever's inside. So, too, Satan being the "strong man," if you're going to take that which is in his control presently, you'll first have to bind him.

"I'm just not getting the goods," you say. "I go to church; I sing; I pray—but it seems as if I'm getting nowhere." Jesus said unless the strong man is bound, we're unable to get the goods. Has the strong man been bound in your life, in your family, in your emotions?

How is the strong man bound?

The Example of Elisha

In 2 Kings 6, we find the New Testament principle for this Old Testament picture. . . .

> Led by their king, Ben-Hadad, Syria did battle with Israel. "Ben-Hadad" meaning "shouter," he is a fitting picture of Satan, the one who shouts accusations at the brethren day and night (Revelation 12:10).
>
> "I'm going to ambush God's people," declared Ben-Hadad, much the same way Satan taunts us. Knowing this, Elisha warned the king of Israel of the ambush, and Ben-Hadad was thwarted in his attempt to destroy Israel.
>
> After this happened two more times, Ben-Hadad was determined to root out the traitor from his ranks. When it was told him that an Israelite prophet named Elisha was the reason for his failed attempts, Ben-Hadad deployed troops to the city of Dothan—either to destroy or employ Elisha. When Gehazi, Elisha's servant, awoke to find the city encompassed by the enemy, he was understandably fearful. Maybe you know the feeling when Satan seemingly does the same to you.
>
> "Don't worry," said Elisha, "for they that are with us are more than they that are with them."
>
> *What?* Gehazi must have thought. *It's just you and me, Elisha—and you're old. This* isn't *a good situation.*
>
> No doubt knowing the same thing David knew when he wrote, "The Lord encamps his angel around them who fear him" (Psalm 34:7), Elisha prayed that the Lord would open Gehazi's eyes. The Lord did—and Gehazi saw that the Syrians were themselves surrounded with horses and chariots of fire.
>
> Unaware that they were surrounded, the Syrians moved toward Elisha. As they did, Elisha prayed they would be blinded. Then, in their blinded state, they heard Elisha say, "This isn't where you want to be. I will bring you to the man whom you seek." Who were they seeking? Before Elisha blew the whistle on their ambushes, the

original intent of the Syrians was victory over Israel. Thus, they were seeking Israel's king.

When the Lord opened the eyes of the blinded Syrian army, they couldn't believe that Elisha had, indeed, led them into Samaria—the city of the king of Israel. Seeing his enemy delivered into his hand, the king of Israel said, "shall I smite them?"

"No," answered Elisha and ordered, instead, that a meal be set before them.

When they had eaten and drunk, the Syrian army was set free—and they never bothered the king of Israel again (2 Kings 6:8–23).

Gang, that's how Satan is bound. Elisha didn't pace the floor, shake his fist, and say, "In the name of Jesus, I bind you, Ben-Hadad."

No, Elisha bound Satan in an entirely different way when he fed rather than fought his enemies.

The Pen of Paul

Paul summed up Elisha's methodology when he wrote—

> *Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.*
>
> Romans 12:20

In Bible days, before the advent of matches or propane, if the fire went out in their homes, rather than reigniting it with flint and spark, women would get live coals from their neighbors that they could carry back in earthen pots on their heads in order to rekindle their own fire. Thus, "heaping coals on his head" is a display of generosity and kindness.

> *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*
>
> Romans 12:21

Overcoming evil, binding Satan is not a phrase we say—it's a deed we do.

The Joy of Jesus

Directly preceding His discourse on binding the strong man, Jesus gave opportunity to see the practicality of this premise. . . .

> *Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.*
>
> Matthew 12:22

Jesus didn't grill the demonized man about unconfessed sin or lack of faith. He didn't accuse the demonized man of being into ouija boards, crystals, or drugs. He didn't march around the demonized man shouting, "I bind you, Satan." What did Jesus do? He did good to the demonized man. He healed him.

Jesus models aggressive goodness, for that's how Satan is bound.

And we must do the same.

Bring candy to the boss who's stingy. Make dinner for the wife who's cranky. Buy a shirt for the husband who's moody. The Enemy is bound whenever we do good things, kind things, generous things. The Enemy is bound when we stop criticizing, backbiting, and judging. The Enemy is bound when we start praying, giving, blessing.

May each of us have ears to hear what the Spirit would say to us today.



21 It is true that the church is to be a hospital where people who are hurting can come and be healed through the body of the Great Physician, Jesus Christ (Matthew 9:12). It is also true that the church is to be a school where we can study to show ourselves approved unto God (2 Timothy 2:15). It is also true that the church is to be a gymnasium wherein we work out our own salvation (Philippians 2:12) and exercise unto godliness (1 Timothy 4:7). But perhaps most importantly the church is to be a travel agency, booking people on an eternal excursion to heaven.

Revelation 21 and 22 constitute a travel brochure for just such a journey. . . .

Revelation 21:1 (a)
And I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . .

Due to the pollution and destruction of our planet, we understand the need for a new earth. But what is the reason for a new heaven? According to Job 15:15, the heavens are not clean in God's sight. Why? Because Satan's presence has polluted them (Revelation 12:10).

Revelation 21:1 (b)
. . . for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away . . .

Some teachers and commentators declare that rather than passing away, the present heaven and earth will simply be refurbished. Due to Isaiah's account of this event, however, I don't believe that's the case. . . .

> For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.
>
> Isaiah 65:17

The word translated "create" is the Hebrew word *bara*—the same word used in Genesis 1:1, which means "to create from nothing." The fact that God creates from nothing continues to be a stumbling block to the evolutionist. . . .

> Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.
>
> 2 Peter 3:3, 4

Because evolution is based on a closed environment, it excludes the possibility of divine intervention. Thus, the evolutionist and scoffer is usually the same person. And the denominations who question biblical prophecy are usually the same ones who question the creation account

because they don't understand that just as God was active in the creative process, so He will be in the prophetic context.

> For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.
>
> 2 Peter 3:5, 6

Peter goes on to say that those who scoff at the biblical accounts of the beginning and the end of time are willingly ignorant of the fact that the first earth was destroyed by water, and the second will be destroyed by fire. We know the first earth was flooded in the days of Noah. But what about the fire that will destroy the second earth? Peter continues. . . .

> But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.
>
> 2 Peter 3:7

The word translated "reserved" means "stored." That is, fire—or energy—is stored in the world.

> But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved . . .
>
> 2 Peter 3:10, 11 (a)

Albert Einstein, Robert Oppenheimer, and others ushered us into the atomic age. Therefore, unlike previous generations, we understand what happens when an atom is split. Consequently, when Jesus lets go His hold of the atom, it should be no surprise to us that the explosion caused will be followed by a "fervent heat" so great that everything will dissolve.

Following this mass atomic destruction, God will create from nothing (*bara*) yet another heaven and another earth—which is how Isaiah could write,

> For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.
>
> Isaiah 65:17

—and why Paul would write of the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2). You see, while it has often been suggested that the first heaven is the atmosphere where birds fly, the second is where the stars shine, and the third is where God's presence is—I believe the term "third heaven" refers to the new heaven God will create after the second one is dissolved.

Revelation 21:1 (c)
. . . and there was no more sea.

This speaks of a new creation. . . .



***For topical study of Revelation 21:1 entitled "What?! No Beach?" turn to page* 1793.**

Revelation 21:2
And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Here is the new capitol of the new creation.

Revelation 21:3
And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

This speaks of a new communion. Presently, as we partake of the bread and drink of the cup at the Lord's table, we long to have close communion with Him. But Paul was right when he said we only see through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12). In the New Jerusalem, however, we'll at last see the visible glory of God. It won't be fuzzy any longer. My vision of the Lord won't be different from yours, for we'll all be in His presence.

Revelation 21:4

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain . . .

"Being with the Lord in a new heaven and new earth sounds wonderful," you might say. "But if my daughter or dad or husband or son isn't there, won't I weep eternally?" No, because when God creates the new heaven and earth, "the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (Isaiah 65:17). That is, when we get to heaven we will not have memory of those who aren't there.

Revelation 21:4 (b), 5 (a)

. . . for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.

There may be believers about whom you presently say, "I don't want to spend eternity with *her,*" or "I don't want to see *him* in the mansion next door to mine forever and ever"—but when we get to heaven we will find ourselves blown away by the very people who bugged us. The former things are passed away. There will be a glorious transformation of every believer, for when we see Jesus we shall *all* be like Him (1 John 3:2). The things that irritate you now about your spouse or neighbor will be eradicated in heaven. That is why Paul said, "I know no man after the flesh" (see 2 Corinthians 5:16). The flesh will be absent from heaven.

Revelation 21:5 (b)

And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

Why would John be told to write that these things are true and faithful? Because what he's writing sounds too good to be true!

Revelation 21:6
And he said unto me, It is done.

"It is done," is the statement of a carpenter who has completed his work. Two thousand years ago, our Master Carpenter said, "I go to prepare a place for you." Here in verse 6, He doesn't say, "The place I prepared is a fixer-upper," or, "It's a good starter home," or, "It's got charm." He says, "It is *done.*"

How many of us have bought our dream house only to say a little while later, "If we knock out a wall there, add another bathroom here, take out this counter, and reshape the patio, this place will be a lot better"? Such will not be the case in heaven. Not one person will say, "This is great—but it could use a skylight or two. . . ." No, we'll say, "This was designed perfectly for me. It's *exactly* what I've been craving but could never articulate. It's *done.*"

Revelation 21:6
I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

There are three elements essential to any community. Here we see the first: resources. The water in the city of the new Jerusalem flows freely.

Revelation 21:7 (a)
He that overcometh shall inherit all things . . .

Second, we see responsibility. The inheritance here is that of a father who's sharing the family business with his son. Thus, the inheritance spoken of incorporates not only acquisition but also administration. That is, in eternity, there will not only be stuff to acquire but also things to do. In Luke 19, Jesus says if we're faithful in our responsibilities here on earth, we'll be given cities to rule over in the ages to come eternally.

I'm not really into ruling, you might be thinking.

Listen, the things you really wish you could do here but can't will, I believe, be your area of rule, your responsibility in heaven. Some of you are master mechanics and find total satisfaction in tearing down and rebuilding an engine. Others are authors, artists, or athletes who never seem to have enough time to do what you love because of your responsibilities here on earth. I believe those are the very areas with which you will be involved eternally—or else why would God have given you those desires and gifts in the first place?

Those of you who feel life has passed you by without your ever being able to do what you really loved—take heart! I believe the time is coming when you will be ruling in heaven in the very arena that intrigues you here on earth.

Revelation 21:7 (b)
. . . and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

In addition to resources and responsibility, there will be a relationship in heaven unlike anything we've known on earth. In John 3:16, we read that God gave us His Son. In Luke 11:13, we read He gives us His Spirit. Here in Revelation 21:7, He gives us *Himself.*

Revelation 21:8
But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Vastly more comforting than the fact that murderers and sorcerers and liars won't be in heaven is the fact that I will be. You see, all of these tendencies are inherent within me, but they will be burned up, not allowed in my eternal destination. There's coming a time when I will truly be set free from the flesh of which I grow ever wearier as I grow older. Heaven will be a safe place because the flesh within me will be cast away. And for that I am so grateful.

Revelation 21:9, 10

And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

The New Jerusalem descends from heaven. But the language implies it doesn't land on earth. Rather, it hovers above the earth, suspended between heaven and earth.

Revelation 21:11

Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

Due to its description as being clear as crystal, most scholars believe the jasper of verse 11 is actually a diamond. A diamond would be a fitting description of the city wherein dwells the church—not because as the bride of Christ we deserve diamonds, but because, like diamonds we are simply chunks of worthless coal made brilliant by heat and pressure (1 Peter 4:12, 13).

Revelation 21:12, 13

And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.

Regardless of what you've heard, there's not one mention of Peter at the gates of heaven. Instead, there are the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. As Gentiles, we were lost without the covenants, without any understanding of Yahweh before we were grafted into the olive tree of the faith (Romans

11:17). Thus, the names of the twelve tribes remind us that we are indebted to the people of Israel as we are to no other people.

Revelation 21:14 (a)
And the wall of the city had twelve foundations . . .

Because Abraham looked for a city with foundations (Hebrews 11:10), because he understood that what he longed for would not be found on earth, he lived his whole life in a tent. Like Abraham, we will be truly free when we understand that what we really crave is not a better car or a bigger house, but rather the city with not one foundation but twelve: the New Jerusalem, heaven.

Revelation 21:14 (b)
. . . and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The names of the twelve apostles remind us that although we were originally granted access to an understanding of God through the gate of our Jewish heritage, our faith is founded on the message committed to the apostles: the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 21:15, 16
And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.

The New Jerusalem is a fifteen-hundred-mile cube with twelve foundations or levels. This means it's three billion square miles in size. The present population of earth is 5.3 billion people. With 90 percent of the people who have ever lived in history alive today, if even three billion people are in heaven, there will be enough room for each person to have one square mile. It's huge!

Revelation 21:17, 18 (a)

And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper . . .

Two hundred sixteen feet is a high wall—but not in comparison to a city fifteen hundred miles high. At times, due to a misunderstanding or breakdown in communication, you might feel like there's a wall between you and someone else. You won't in heaven. The wall around the New Jerusalem speaks of safety and security, but not of secrecy.

Revelation 21:18 (b)

. . . and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.

The city is brilliant like a diamond but also like transparent gold.

Revelation 21:19, 20

And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.

In Old Testament times, if one had a question regarding what he should do, he would go to the high priest, who would, in turn, seek God through the Urim and the Thumim, or literally, "lights and perfections" (see Numbers 27:2; Nehemiah 7:65).

Most Orthodox rabbis teach that the twelve stones that represented the twelve tribes of Israel on the breastplate of the high priest would light up in such a way that direction would be given. Some have suggested it was through the lighting of the twelve stones that the desired answer would be given, perhaps through the letter associated with the tribal name each stone represented.

A fundamental element of this Old Testament practice—the stones of which, I believe, are seen in the foundations of the walls in the New Jerusalem—is equally valid today. That is, you'll know God's will for your life if you hang out with God's people. Believers are vulnerable when they are no longer in fellowship with other "tribes," when they try to figure things out on their own independently from of the rest of the body. Satan's plan is always the same: to isolate believers. Therefore, the safest place to be is surrounded by the "walls" of God's people.

Revelation 21:21 (a)

And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl . . .

The pearl represents God's people. How do I know? In Matthew 13, Jesus told the story of a man who sold everything to purchase a pearl. That's just what Jesus did. He gave everything He had—even His very life—to purchase us. This makes us the pearl—a fitting description, since a pearl is nothing more than an irritating grain of sand or a tiny parasite coated by the lustrous nacre of an oyster. We're irritating indeed, parasitic beyond question. But God robes us and covers us and thereby makes us trophies in order that all of creation throughout eternity might marvel at His grace.

Revelation 21:21 (b)

. . . and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

So highly valued is gold on earth that throughout history, man has lived by the golden rule: He who has gold rules. Such is not the case in heaven, where gold is used as casually as asphalt. Gang, whatever you value most on earth will be as commonplace as asphalt in comparison to the glory of the New Jerusalem.

Revelation 21:22

And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

Have you ever been at a camp or a worship service or a Bible study where you sensed God's presence so powerfully that you didn't want to leave? That's the way heaven will be all of the time. That's why there's no need for a temple.

Revelation 21:23, 24 (a)

And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it . . .

In the Millennium of chapter 20, the moon will be as bright as the sun is presently, and the sun will be seven times brighter than it is now (Isaiah 30:26). But in the New Jerusalem, there will be no need for the sun or moon at all because the glory and brilliance of the Lord will illuminate the entire city.

Revelation 21:24 (b), 25

. . . and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.

As freshmen at Biola University, we were excited to go to Disneyland® one fall evening. Cruising into the parking lot at 5:59 P.M., we were disappointed to learn that the gates of the Magic Kingdom™ closed at 6:00. This is not true of the gates of the true kingdom. They never close.

Revelation 21:26, 27

And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

As chapter 21 draws to a close, I hear Pastor John, by the inspiration of the Spirit, saying to his flock in the midst of tribulation and persecution, "The

key to victory, the antidote to despondency is one thing: heaven."

> Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.
>
> John 14:1, 2

Saint, if you take your focus off eternity and get caught up in the present world, like Peter on the water, you'll sink into the ocean of depression. But the extent to which you set your heart on things above is the extent to which you will be free from defeat and discouragement.

May we be a heavenly minded people as we book ourselves and as many others as we can on the flight to the New Jerusalem.

WHAT?! NO BEACH?

A Topical Study of REVELATION 21:1

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

Revelation 21:1

Quite frankly, our text is a bit disconcerting, even somewhat disappointing to me—a brand-new city, but no more sea? If I were creating the new heaven and the new earth, I would have said, "There shall be no more cities and lots and lots of oceans, beaches, sand, and surf!" After all, cities aren't spoken of very favorably, even in Scripture. . . .

- The first city in the Bible was founded by a brother-hating Cain (Genesis 4:17).
- The second city in the Bible was built by a God-defying Nimrod (Genesis 10:9).
- The holy city of Jerusalem was filled with a prophet-killing people (Matthew 23:37).

Truly, cities are not valued in Scripture. The same is true today. When we think of cities, we think of pollution, perversion, and problems. So why does the new heaven and the new earth consist of a city—with no beach?

In the sixties, it seemed to me as though everyone in the whole country was singing "Let's Go Surfin' " along with the Beach Boys. As a sophomore at Del Mar High School, about fifty miles north of Santa Cruz, "surf city," California, I dressed the part along with everyone else in my school: huarache sandals with tire tread bottoms, powder blue Levi's with a block of surf wax in one pocket and a copy of *Surfer Magazine* in the other, either a red or blue and white wide-striped T-shirt, and hair parted in the middle. Walking down the hall, a "thumbs up" sign meant we had just caught the surf

report on KLIV—1260 on the AM radio dial—and Pleasure Point was breaking big.

One day in May, all decked out in my huaraches, powder blue Levi's, etc., on my way to fifth period Spanish class, I ran into Lindsay, Chuck, and Bob going the opposite direction. "Hey, Jon," they said. "We heard it's monster stuff at Steamer Lane. We saw the Turtle in the parking lot. Let's go!"

Now, the "Turtle" to which they referred was the shortened name for the "Turquoise Turtle," my 1961 Ford Falcon—so named partly because of its color and partly because it went 0–60 mph in 2.5 hours.

"I can't go, guys," I said. "I've got a Spanish test."

"Come on, Jon," they begged. "You're the only one of us with a car."

Feeling the pressure mounting, I relented. After grabbing my lunch out of my locker, I headed out to the car with Lindsay, Chuck, and Bob—a feeling of dread beginning to wash over me. With Lindsay riding "shotgun" and Bob and Chuck in the back, I swung by their houses to get their boards. No need to get mine. My 9'6" O'Neill was always on the rack on top of my car.

Wending our way over Highway 17, Lindsay looked at me and said, "You don't look so good. You must be carsick." Little did he know it wasn't the curves in the road causing me to sweat. It was the fact that although I was a charter subscriber to *Surfer,* had a great board, and knew how to dress, unbeknownst to anyone else, I had never surfed before.

When we arrived at the Henry Cowell State Park parking lot, from which point we'd hike down to the beach and paddle out, Lindsay, Chuck, and Bob grabbed their boards. "Listen, guys," I said. "I'm not feeling so good. I'll just have my lunch and join you later."

"Okay," they called over their shoulders as they ran toward the trail.

Opening my lunch, I was happy to see that my mom had packed two peanut butter, mayonnaise, and pickle sandwiches—my favorite—along with about ten homemade chocolate chip cookies, an apple, and a carton of milk. After finishing the last cookie, I knew I could stall no longer. So I trekked on down to the beach and saw Lindsay, Chuck, and Bob all doing great. Bob came in. "Come on, Jon," he said, "it's excellent out there!"

I walked down to the water's edge, reached into the back pocket of my jams, took out my wax, and began to wax my board. Seeing Bob was looking at me rather quizzically, I realized I was waxing the wrong side. You see, I

thought you were supposed to wax the bottom of the board so you could cut through the water. But I came to find out that you wax the top of the board for traction. "I'm just trying something new," I said, attempting to cover my blunder.

"Come on, Jon. Quit fooling around. Let's go," Bob said as he knee-paddled out. I followed at a safe distance—hoping he wouldn't turn around and see me paddling on my belly. (Knee-paddling takes practice and coordination. I had neither.) Finally, after I had sat on my board for about half an hour, Lindsay called, "Take this one, Jon." I looked back, and sure enough, there was a beautiful swell coming right in my direction that appeared to be forty-to-fifty feet high. At that point, I had no other choice but to lie down and paddle for all I was worth. Then a miracle happened. I actually got to my feet and stood on my board—for about a second and a half. But being too close to the nose, I "pearled." That is, the nose of the board went underwater, causing the rest of the board to become a catapult that launched me into the air. I landed in front of the wave that proceeded to break right on top of me.

After tossing and turning underwater for what felt like forever, I finally figured out which way was up, shot toward the surface of the water for a desperately needed gasp of air, inadvertently sucking in a huge piece of kelp in the process. Grabbing my board as it floated by, there I was—clinging to my board for dear life, with seaweed hanging out of my mouth. It was at this point that the peanut butter and pickle sandwiches began to work their way up. Suddenly, with Lindsay, Chuck, and Bob looking on in utter disbelief, I barfed on my board.

Needless to say, the entire area cleared out immediately. Although I did learn to surf later on, I was set free that day from the image I was so desperately trying to cultivate.

As this incident came to mind, I was reminded that, along with the beautiful waves, salt air, and cool breeze of the beach scene, there's also a preponderance of phoniness and jealousy, of taunting and flaunting. All kinds of things take place at the beach that we feel pressured to fit into. The same is true of the football field, basketball court, or even the business office.

Therefore, I suggest to you that one of the grand and glorious things the Lord says through our text is, "In the new heaven and earth, I'm going to liberate you from all of the things you think appear to be so cool on the

outside but which hide a dark side underneath." You who are trapped in the business gig, the materialistic stuff, the sports scene—the Lord calls you to something bigger, something grander, something better. In the new heaven and the new earth, the sea shall be replaced by a city.

"A city?" you say. "That's exactly where I wouldn't want to be!" Listen, those to whom John addressed the Book of Revelation were those who lived in cities. Thus, John is telling them, "Heaven doesn't eliminate your situation. It transforms it."

Gang, heaven is not "other." It's "more." Therefore, if you want heaven in your home, in your life, or in your city—it will come not by elimination, but by transformation. If any man be in Christ, he is—not "will be"—a new creation. Old things are passed away. Behold all things are become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

To experience eternal, abundant life this side of heaven, see yourself as a new creation rather than as a businessman; a child of God rather than as a sports star; a follower of Jesus rather than as a supermom; a fisher of men rather than as an image-conscious surfer. If you do, you'll find yourself free from having to know the language, dress the part, or fit the image.

Find your identity in Jesus, fellow city-dweller, and you won't miss the beach at all. I guarantee it!

22 Revelation 22:1

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, pro ceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

According to Zechariah 14, as Jesus comes back to earth, He will set foot upon the Mount of Olives—which will usher in a radical topographical change in Israel. The Mount of Olives will split in two from north to south, causing a river to flow to both the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. The infusion of fresh water into the Dead Sea will, in turn, cause it to come back to life to such a degree that a fishing industry will thrive in the region (Ezekiel 47).

It is fascinating to me that Ezekiel's account provides not only prophetic information, but practical application. . . .

As Ezekiel was given this vision, a man appeared to him, saying, "Step into the river." Ezekiel did, and the water was up to his ankles. "Come out," said the man and took Ezekiel downriver one thousand cubits or so, where Ezekiel was told to go into the river once more. This time the water was up to his knees. "Come out," said the man and took Ezekiel one thousand cubits farther downriver, where he told Ezekiel to go into the river yet again. This time the water was up to Ezekiel's waist. When he was told a fourth time to go into the river, the water was over his head, and Ezekiel was caught up in its flow.

Dear saint, the Lord won't force us to go any deeper in Him than we choose—but He will take us as deep as we wish. . . .

Some get their feet wet up to their ankles. They are standing on the promises, born again, saved.

Others, wanting to go deeper, go up to their knees—that speaks of prayer. "I want to do more than get my feet wet, Lord," they say. "I want to be part of what You are doing. Use me in prayer." And they get involved in intercessory ministry—praying in the Spirit.

Others, wanting to go deeper still, wade in to their waists—signifying reproduction. Not only are they standing on the promises, or up to their knees in intercessory ministry, they are adding to the kingdom by witnessing to their family, friends, and neighbors.

But there comes a point where some are just over their heads, saying, "Lord, I'm going to just let go. Have Your way in my life. I'm giving it to You without reservation. I don't know where this will take me, but I'm Yours totally. Do what You want to do in and through me for Your glory."

Maybe right now you're in the doldrums in your walk. If so, I encourage you to launch out into the deeper waters of faith. Oh, maybe your kayak will get overturned in the rapids a few times and maybe you won't know exactly where you'll land. But I guarantee you won't regret it. I'm so glad that the water of life flows right through heaven because it means that the Lord's

Spirit is on the move even there and that we can continue going deeper and deeper in Him throughout eternity.

Revelation 22:2 (a)

In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month . . .

Is this good news or what? People ask, "Are we going to eat in heaven?" My answer is, "I am!"

"Have you any meat?" asked the resurrected Jesus of His disciples. When they gave Him a piece of fish and some honey, and saw Him eat it, they knew He was not a phantom (Luke 24:37–43).

Following His Resurrection, Jesus ate. Therefore, I believe we'll be eating the fruits of this amazing evergreen, twelve-fruit-bearing tree in heaven.



***For topical study of Revelation 22:2 entitled "The Tree of Life," turn to page* 1799.**

Revelation 22:2 (b)

. . . and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

"Wait a minute," you say, "if the leaves are for healing, does that mean there will be sickness in heaven?"

No. The Greek word translated "healing" is literally *therapeia,* from which we get our word "therapy." It doesn't mean healing from sickness, but rather a maintaining of health. In fact, the original language also implies exhilaration and invigoration.

Do you ever get tired of being tired? I do. What a grand day it will be when we are in heaven, shooting the rapids of the river of life, eating of the fruit of the Spirit, revived eternally by the leaves of the Tree of Life.

Revelation 22:3 (a)

And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it . . .

The fallout of Adam's bomb in the Garden of Eden is felt to this day as a result of the curse that followed (Genesis 3:17–19). In heaven, however, the curse is gone, replaced by the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Revelation 22:3 (b)

. . . and his servants shall serve him.

The interests and inclinations that the Lord built into each of us will at last be fully utilized in heaven, where, free from time limitations or financial obligations, we'll use them to serve the Lord. Ours will not be the service of one who drags into work at the last moment, dreading the day ahead. No, ours will be the service of one who says, "Oh, boy! This is what I always wanted to do!"

Revelation 22:4 (a)

And they shall see his face . . .

What will happen when we see His face? Like David, we shall at last be truly satisfied (Psalm 17:15) because when we see Him, we'll be like Him (1 John 3:2).

Revelation 22:4 (b)

. . . and his name shall be in their foreheads.

I'll see the Lord's name on all of you—but not on myself because no one can see his own forehead. That's the way it should be here on earth as well. "I know no man after the flesh," said Paul (see 2 Corinthians 5:16). In other words, he chose to see past the fleshly tendencies of others and, instead, saw others positioned in Christ. What do I do? All too often, just the opposite. Far too frequently, I see myself as forgiven and robed in God's righteousness but others as a disgrace to the body of Christ.

Revelation 22:5

And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

There will be no need for the sun because warmth and illumination will come from the Son.

Revelation 22:6 (a)

And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true . . .

The glorious garden city, the time when things are right at last, the pure river that flows, the fruit-bearing trees—they're not too good to be true. They are true!

Revelation 22:6 (b)

. . . and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.

"*Shortly?* This was written two thousand years ago!" you might say to yourself.

"Things which must shortly be" doesn't mean these things would transpire in John's day. Rather, it means once the end-time events begin, they will rev up like an engine and increase in speed.

In New York City, you can stand on the street for a relatively long period of time hailing a taxi as cab after cab passes you by. But once one stops and you get in—hold on, because once you're in, you're on your way!

Folks, we've seen Israel become a nation again. We're in the taxi. Hold on! We're on our way!

Revelation 22:7

Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.

To us, a period of two thousand years doesn't seem "quickly," but since to the Lord, one thousand years is as a day (2 Peter 3:8), according to His timetable, He's only been gone two days.

Revelation 22:8, 9

And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.

I find it interesting that the same thing happened just a couple pages earlier in chapter 19. After he fell down and worshiped an angel, the angel said to John, "See thou do it not." So how could John worship an angel *again?* The same way we make the same mistakes and commit the same sins over and over and over again. But the good news is that the Lord taught us to forgive so many times that we lose count (Matthew 18:22). And if He taught us to forgive to that degree, how much more will He!

"Oh, Lord, I blew it again," I cry.

"Again?" He says. "What are you talking about? I don't remember you blowing it before" (see Hebrews 8:12).

If someone suddenly charged up the platform steps and punched me in the nose while I was preaching, that I could forgive that person is within the realm of possibility. But I would never, ever forget it. I don't have that capability. Only God can say, "I'll not only forgive you, but I won't remember your sin."

You see, so precious, so powerful is the blood of Jesus to the Father, that it obliterates every trace and memory of sin. I love that! It's what gives me

such boldness to come before the throne of grace so that I may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

Revelation 22:10

And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.

There are preachers, professors, authors, commentators, and sincere brothers and sisters who say, "Don't read Revelation. It's too complicated. There are too many interpretations. Seal it up." But here is a direct command from heaven: "Don't shut it."

People think Revelation is a hard book to understand. But if you follow the divine outline given in chapter 1, verse 19, it becomes crystal clear. . . .

• Chapter 1	Jesus resurrected
• Chapters 2—3	Church History
• Chapters 4—5	The Rapture
• Chapters 6—19	The Tribulation
• Chapter 20	The Millennium
• Chapters 21—22	The new heaven and new earth

This book is to be kept open. And the same holds true for us. When you're done reading it, don't say, "Well, that about wraps up the Book of Revelation for the next fourteen years. . . ." Because this book has a unique blessing attached to it that says, "Blessed are they that hear these words of this prophecy" (see Revelation 1:3), if we seal it up, or put it aside, we will be the poorer for it.

Revelation 22:11

He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

If you choose to be unjust after reading this prophecy, be unjust still. If you choose to be filthy after reading this prophecy, be filthy still. In other words, if you cannot be convinced of the truth of the Word by the revelation of Jesus Christ and the fulfilling of Bible prophecy, what could possibly convince you? After reading this book, you have no other logical option, no other rational recourse than to say, "Jesus is Lord, and I'm going to live for His kingdom."

Revelation 22:12–14

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

"What must we do to do the works of God?" the multitude asked Jesus.

"You're asking about works," Jesus answered, "but this is the singular work: That you believe on Him whom the Father hath sent" (see John 6:28, 29).

People make following the Lord so complicated. "You gotta do this," they say, "and keep away from that. Wear these clothes and don't eat those foods." But that's not what Scripture teaches. . . .

Nine simple words is all it took for a death-row thief to enter the kingdom: "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (see Luke 23:42, 43).

But it's even simpler than that. Peter expressed the same thing in only three words: "Lord, save me" (Matthew 14:30).

But it's even simpler than that. Paul says only one word is necessary to assure an eternity in heaven: "Lord" (Romans 10:9).

Revelation 22:15

For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

The word “dogs” refers to legalists (Philippians 3:2). The Greek word translated “sorcerers” is literally “drug-takers.”

Revelation 22:16

I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

Jesus says, “I am both root and offspring of David. David comes from Me, and I from Him.” How can this be? As the babe of Bethlehem, Jesus was the offspring of David; but as the Christ of eternity, He existed before David.

Revelation 22:17

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

The invitation to come is given to a world that is lost and dying, doomed and damned. It is the Spirit who woos people to Jesus; but we, as the bride, have the privilege of issuing the invitation.

Throughout Scripture, “Come” has always been the invitation . . .

- “*Come* now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord . . .” (Isaiah 1:18).
- “Ho everyone that thirsteth, *come* ye to the waters . . .” (Isaiah 55:1).
- “*Come* unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden . . .” (Matthew 11:28).
- “Suffer the little children to *come* unto Me . . .” (Mark 10:14).
- “*Come* and see . . .” (John 1:39).

Revelation 22:18

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.

If you're tempted to add to this book, you might want to review "the plagues that are written" in chapters 6 through 19.

Revelation 22:19–21

And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

The last phrase in the Old Testament is, "Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:6). That's the law. "God is upset. You should be doing more. What's wrong with you?"

But the New Testament ends this way: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." *Grace* is the final word of the New Testament.

Seek first the kingdom, gang. Set your heart on things above. His coming is nigh.

And I can't wait!

THE TREE OF LIFE

A Topical Study of
REVELATION 22:2

It could rightly be said that the Bible is an account of three trees. . . .

The Tree of Life

The Tree of Life was seen at the beginning of human history.
It will be seen again at the end of human history.
It was originally planted in the Garden of Eden.
It will be transplanted into the gardenlike city of the New Jerusalem.

Man chose not to eat of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden.
Man will eat freely of the Tree of Life in the New Jerusalem.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

Also introduced in the opening chapters of Genesis, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was the one tree of which Adam and Eve were not to partake. When they disobeyed and ate of the forbidden tree, death and damnation were the result.

The question arises as to why God would place a forbidden tree in the Garden in the first place. I suggest the following reasons. . . .

Choice. Because God is love, He wants a loving relationship with humanity. But true love always demands a choice. Therefore, God said to Adam and Eve, "Because I want to live with you in a love relationship, I will provide you the opportunity to reject Me, to turn your back on Me. Eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil will be a sign to you and to Me that you don't want to maintain a loving relationship with Me." Simply put, without the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, there would be no choice. And without choice love is questionable.

Dependence. Before they ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Eve knew only good, because any time they had a question, they went directly to God for the answer. This is the way God created them —not because He wanted to cripple man, but because He wanted to bless man. Yet when man ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, he knew good and evil apart from God. He no longer realized he needed a moment-by-moment reliance on the Father. Thus, he became independent—cut off from all the resources and blessings of his Creator.

The same thing happens to us. Even we who love the Lord are vulnerable to saying, "I don't need to be in close communication with the Lord because I've walked with Him for years. I know my Bible; I understand theology; I have experience."

Such was recently the case with me. Feeling I had already heard the word of the Lord regarding an upcoming decision, I was already moving in a certain direction when the Lord stopped me dead in my tracks with the account found in Genesis 22. . . .

> *Surely you're not that kind of God,* Abraham must have thought when he was told to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. But knowing

he had heard the word of the Lord, Abraham did, indeed, lay Isaac on the altar and take knife in hand, ready to plunge it into his son's chest.

Suddenly, "The angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven and said, Lay *not* thine hand upon the lad . . ." (see 22:11, 12).

Perhaps, like me, a number of you have heard the word of the Lord clearly in a Bible study or prayer meeting, through corporate worship, or private devotions. You wrote it in your journal and are now moving in a certain direction in obedience to His word to you. But you must realize that what the Lord wants from you is *constant* communion with Him. You see, if Abraham hadn't heeded the second word of the Lord—if he had stubbornly sacrificed his son in obedience to the first word of the Lord—he would have made a bloody mess and a very grave mistake.

"Got the word. I'm on my way," we so often say, failing to realize it might change the very next day. How many unnecessary grave mistakes I've made that could have been avoided had I said, "Lord it's not enough to act on what You spoke to me three days ago. I must hear from you constantly."

"But what if I've already made a grave mistake?" you ask.

Go to the third tree. . . .

The Tree of Calvary

The Tree of Calvary covers my mistakes, washes away my arrogance, and cleanses my sin. You see, after offering the sacrifice of His own body for the bloody messes I have made, Jesus arose from the grave to obliterate the grave mistakes I have made.

The word of the Lord for us today is this, precious people: On the path to heaven, we must keep current with the Lord. We can't rely on what we heard yesterday, last week, or a year ago. If you're not receiving what the Spirit says to you *today,* like Abraham, you could end up making a big mistake.

Turn away from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—from what you think you know—and begin to feast on the Tree of Life by saying,

- "Before I make my plans for the afternoon, what's *Your* agenda, Lord?"
- "Lord, how do *You* want me to parent my five-year-old son today?"
- "Lord, what do *You* want me to do about the situation at work this morning?"

Let us who love the Bible be those who seek the Lord intimately even as we take in knowledge intellectually. Because of the Tree of Calvary, when we get to heaven, we won't see the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil —only the Tree of Life, from which we will partake freely, enjoying the fruit that will keep us in perfect health and total harmony with our King, our Savior, our Lord Jesus.

But you don't have to wait until then, saint. Heaven can be in your heart today if you'll choose to eat daily from the tree of *His* direction.

NOTES

[1]Source: “Historical Times Encyclopedia of the Civil War” edited by Patricia L. Faust. New York Harper & Row, New York, 1986.